

by Tony Canavan

■ The private notebook of Bram Stoker has been discovered in an attic on the Isle of Wight, offering clues to the origins of his most famous work, *Dracula*. The notebook was found by the author's great-grandson, Noel Dobbs. He sent a facsimile of the book to Stoker's great-grandnephew Dacre Stoker, an author himself, who has deciphered his ancestor's 'terrible' handwriting with the help of Dr Elizabeth Miller of the Transylvanian Society of Dracula. *The Lost Journal*, complete with annotations, is now lined up for publication by Robson Press next year, marking the centenary of Bram Stoker's death in 1912.

■ Who knew there was another 'dead zoo'? It seems that Dublin is not the only place with a natural history museum full of stuffed creatures. NUI Galway has its own museum, which has recently published an updated catalogue. Among its collection is a cuckoo known for its pungent odour, an Azara's 'false fox' and 100 glass representations of marine mammals by the famous father and son team of Leopold and Rudolf Blaschka of Dresden. Significantly, four of the museum's items actually belonged to Charles Darwin and had been collected by him during his famous voyage on the *Beagle*. The collection is open to the public free of charge. See galwayscience.ie for details.

■ 'Mummy, please come home!' is the plea of Egyptian authorities after the discovery of a mummy in University College Cork. The university's Boole Library has a number of Egyptian artefacts but no record of how the mummy and its wooden casket came into its possession. More mysteriously, for a long time it was hidden under floorboards in the pathology department. The body dates from around 300 BC and is that of a middle-aged, well-off man who appears to have died from natural causes. Egypt wants it back to put into the new Great Egyptian Museum at Giza, which was designed by Dublin architects Heneghan Peng and is due to open in 2013. UCC say they'll talk about giving the mummy back.

■ Next year the Olympics come to London, providing the chance for us to look into our own Olympic heritage. (There's a special issue of *HI* in the pipeline for July/August 2012.) Louth County Museum, Dundalk, is currently researching a major exhibition highlighting the involvement of Irish athletes and officials in the Olympics from 1896 to the present day. The exhibition will open in summer 2012 and run for several months. Curator Brian Walsh is looking for assistance from the public in putting it together. He would welcome anecdotes and oral testimonies, along with items and memorabilia pertaining to Irish involvement in the Olympics in any way. If you think you can help, contact Brian or his colleague Anita Barrett at 042-9327056 or olympics@dundalkmuseum.ie.

MANY LIVES, ONE CONNECTION

The screenshot shows the website ainm.ie with the following content:

- Navigation: [ainm.ie](#), [logainm.ie](#), [focal.ie](#), [FIONTAR](#)
- Search:
- Language: [eolas faoin suíomh seo](#), [about this Web site](#)
- Menu: [LIOSTA AIBITREACH](#), [CUÁRDACH](#), [AMLÍNE](#), [TEAMAÍ](#)
- Section: **Fáilte** (Welcome)
- Text: Tá cuntas sa bhunachar seo ar 1,693 beatha. Is daoine iad uile a raibh baint acu le saol na Gaeilge ó 1560 go dtí ár linn féin. Tá inneachar an tsuimh seo bunaithe ar an tsraith *Beathaisnéis le Diarmuid Breathnach agus Máire Ní Mhurchú*.
- Image: A stack of books representing the *Beathaisnéis* series.
- Section: **BEATHA NA SEACHTAINE** (Seventh Century Lives)
- Section: **NIC GEARAILT, Brighid (c. 1589-1682)**
- Text: Tá cuntas ar an bhfíle seo agus an dán a deirtear a chum sí, 'A Mhacainmh dheallbhas an dán', in *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing IV, 2002* sa chaibidil 'Courts and Coteries II' in eagar ag Máirín Ní Dhomhacháda. Ba iníon le hÉinrí an 12ú Iarla Chill Dara agus leis an mBántarna Frances Howard, arbh é Iarla Nottingham a hathair. Nuair a d'éag a hathair i 1597 chuaigh sí chun cónaíthe i dtéach a seanmháthar, Mabel Mhic Gearailt, i Maigh Nuad. Tamall i ndiaidh 1603 pósadh Brighid ar Ruairí Ó Domhnaill, Iarla Thír Chonaill, agus rugadh mac, Aodh, dóibh i...
- Section: **LIOSTA AIBITREACH** (Alphabetical List)
- Section: **CUÁRDACH** (Timeline)
- Text: Scriobh focal amháin nó breis agus gheobhaidh tú liosta alt a dtagann na focail sin chun cinn iontu.
- Logos: DCU, TM, An Binn Soluis, Oifireachta agus Gaolta Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht
- Footer: © Bunsonraí na mbeathaisnéis: Cló Iar-Chonnacht (2011) · © An cóiríú leictreonaic seo: Fiontar (2011) · Teagmháil: ainm@dou.ie Foirm aiseolas | Cartlann scéalta nuacht

Mairéad Nic Lochlainn details a newly available Irish-language biographies website—www.ainm.ie—at Fiontar, DCU.

The contents of www.ainm.ie are based on the nine-volume series *Beathaisnéis* by Diarmuid Breathnach and Máire Ní Mhurchú (1986–2007). It is a valuable research tool comprising almost 1,700 biographies dating from 1560 to the present day. Each of the featured lives has made a unique contribution to the Irish language over the last five centuries. The people featured hail from every corner of Ireland (and in some cases from much further afield), and some were active in a wide field of endeavours. While the Irish language forms the common thread, the entire narrative is multi-faceted and will be of great interest to historians, local communities, the families of the people featured, Irish-language academics and the Irish diaspora.

The metadata on the website facilitate searching and browsing on a scale not possible in print. The enhanced features available include alphabetical listing of biographies; cross-referencing; full-text search of keywords and phrases; and a timeline. Selected themes are tagged in the biographies (place-names, works, organisations, references to Conradh na Gaeilge, educational institutions) and the site also includes a featured 'biography of the week' and an interview with the authors. The two

biographies on the right, abridged and translated versions of the entries on ainm.ie, give a flavour of the entries.

Did you know?

There are 1.3 million words in the original printed work, the *Beathaisnéis* series.

- 118 of the subjects featured lived to the age of 90.
- ainm.ie contains the biographies of 1,536 men and 157 women.
- *An Claidheamh Soluis** is the most frequently cited Irish-language publication. Blackrock College* is the most frequently mentioned school.
- Trinity College, Dublin,* is the most frequently mentioned university.
- Maynooth* is the most frequently mentioned town.
- Dublin* is the most frequently mentioned county and city.
- Short lives: James Cogan (1874–98); William Haliday (1788–1812).
- Long lives: Colm de Bhailís (1796–1906); Bríd Uí Dhíreáin (1894–2003).
- Ó Súilleabháin is the most common surname (36 subjects) among those featured on ainm.ie.

*These statistics are based on current records. Work on tagging the database is ongoing. HI

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Mairéad Ní Ghráda (1896–1971)

Playwright from Knockadangan, Co. Clare. She won a university scholarship and was awarded a BA (in Irish, French and English) and an MA in Irish in UCD. While there she was a member of Cumann na mBan and Conradh na Gaeilge. She was jailed at one point for selling republican flags on Grafton Street. She later worked as a teacher, as *timire* (Conradh na Gaeilge organiser) and as secretary to Ernest Blythe in the Dáil and during the Civil War. From 1926 onwards she spent nine years working for 2RN (Radio Éireann), compiling programmes for women and children. She was the first female announcer in Ireland and Britain, and perhaps in Europe. She later returned to teaching and her first play, *An Uacht*, was written for the students to whom she was teaching Irish at the time but ended up being produced by Micheál Mac Liammóir in the Gate Theatre. The following are some of her plays: *Giolla an tSolais* (1945), *Lá buí Bealtaine* (1953), *Úil glas Oíche Shamhna* (1955), *Súgán sneachta* (1959), *Stailc Ocráis* (1960), *Mac Uí Rudaí* (1961), *An Triail* (1964) and *Breithiúnas* (1968). *An Triail* brought her most fame; it was first performed in An Damer on 22 September 1964 and was later broadcast on television on 21 October 1964. Tomás Mac Anna, the producer, described *An Triail* as an achievement comparable to Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*.



Pádraig Ó Fágáin (1922–2011)

Writer/historian from Farrancallin, Co. Westmeath. He achieved 257 marks in history in the Intermediate Certificate, i.e. full marks plus seven extra for doing the exam through the medium of Irish! He left school without sitting the Leaving Certificate. He wrote plays, short stories, poems and books in Irish, for example *Bíonn an fhírinne searbh* (1982) and *Fíon an ghrá agus drámaí eile* (1983). His book *Éigse na hIarmhí* (1985) deals with the works of poets in Westmeath, including their translations. It also deals with the decline of the Irish language in the county, a topic that had not previously received much consideration. His historical works include *Divided loyalties: the question of an oath for Irish Catholics in the eighteenth century* (1977), *The second city: a portrait of Dublin 1700–1760* (1986) and *A Georgian celebration: Irish poets of the eighteenth century* (1989). He wrote two biographies, *Dublin's turbulent priest: Cornelius Nary 1658–1738* (1991) and *An Irish bishop in penal times: the chequered career of Sylvester Lloyd OFM, 1680–1747* (1993). He was awarded an honorary doctorate by the National University of Ireland in 2000. Despite this, he felt that he was never given his due as a historian:

'... the reality is that, as far as academia in the round is concerned (I know there are exceptions), I do not rate at all, or very little, as a historian. There appears to be a great stigma attached (by the academics, of course) to those historians who come in by the back door, as it were ...'

■ Another Irish university has been in the news for helping to identify a lost Velázquez masterpiece. Put up for auction as the work of a nineteenth-century British artist, sharp-eyed auctioneers at Bonham's thought it looked too good. They sent it to Velázquez expert Dr Peter Cherry at Trinity College, Dublin. After careful examination, he concluded that the portrait was the work not of Mathew Shepperson but of the great Spanish master. By Shepperson it was valued at around €600, but as an original Velázquez it is worth a tiny bit more... like €3 million more. So check those paintings hanging up at home. They may be worth more than you think!

■ A chilling insight into victims of the Great Famine has been revealed by the discovery of 970 skeletons in a forgotten burial site in the old workhouse in Kilkenny during excavations for a shopping centre in 2005. Since then they have been studied by Jonny Geber, an osteoarchaeologist. The study has revealed the range of people buried there, the types of diseases of which they died and their underlying health before the famine struck. The majority (56%) were children. An unexpected revelation was that most of the victims had scurvy and that this contributed to their deaths. Until now scurvy was not considered a major factor compared to typhus or tuberculosis.

■ Have you people no shame? Bad enough that statues and cables are stolen for the metal in them, but unscrupulous thieves have stolen a relic of the True Cross from Holycross Abbey, Thurles, Co. Tipperary. Masked men broke into the abbey and stole two crosses, both about 30cm in height and dating from the Middle Ages; one is silver with two dark stones and the other is made of bronze. The relic was donated in 1233 by Queen Isabella of Angoulême, the widow of King John of England. The thieves used an angle grinder, hammer and screwdriver to cut through the steel door of the cabinet where the precious relics were on display. We can only hope that they were stolen for a collector (in which case they might be recovered) rather than for their scrap value.

■ They've clocked up a lot of mileage in 100 years but that is how long one of Ireland's biggest motor vehicle businesses has been going. Belfast-based Hurst Motors was founded in 1911 and now has thirteen outlets across the island, employing 800 staff. To mark the occasion they have produced an official history, which charts the company from its obscure beginnings to being one of the country's most successful businesses. The book comes with a six-month warranty and free service for the first year.