The French Letter

THE PERCY FRENCH FESTIVAL 2016

CASTLECOOTE HOUSE
6TH–8TH JULY
The centenary of the 1916 Rising is a timely opportunity for a national self-examination. It comes after a troubled time for the nation when we have seen our confidence in some of our most important institutions severely eroded because of a proliferation of scandals. The Church, the financial system, and our politics have all been found badly wanting and today many people experience an ethical crisis. To compound the problem as a nation we often seem to be suffering from a poverty of leadership in the response to the many difficult and challenging questions before us.

Against this background this seminar will consider some of the important ethical questions facing us today.

Tickets available now, €40
The Percy French Festival has taken place annually since 2009 at Castlecoote House, the home of the festival founder, Kevin Finnerty, whose father was a founder member of the Percy French festivals of 1957 and 1958.

The Percy French Festival 2016 acknowledges the major support of Duffy’s SuperValu, Ballaghaderreen; Excel Industries, Dublin; Fáilte Ireland; The GAA; and Roscommon County Council.

A full list of our many supporters can be seen at www.percyfrench.ie.

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The French Letter
THE PERCY FRENCH FESTIVAL 2016

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NEARBY ACCOMMODATION INSIDE BACK COVER

OFFICIAL LAUNCH Friday, 1st July, 7.30 pm
Elphin Community Centre, Newline Road
Elphin, Co. Roscommon

The Percy French Festival registered address Castlecoote House, Castlecoote, Co. Roscommon

Brochure created, compiled and edited by Kevin Finnerty © 2016
The French Letter

The definite article in this year’s title presupposes a specific letter, yet we know Percy French wrote more than one letter, his most famous being of course *The Mountains of Mourne* and *The Emigrant’s Letter*.\(^1\) French frequently corresponded by letter on his many trips and journeys, both home and abroad, to family and friends, a great number of whom were sent pictograms that included the envelopes that encased the correspondence.

The French Letter is of course a double entendre, an irreverent yet innocent play on the title, using the poet’s surname. Who better to joke, exploit the pun or embroil the controversy, in a bid to find an angle to address current failings in society, other than French himself? Indeed he might well be wondering what took this writer so long!

The traditional understanding of the French letter as ‘a form of birth control device’ might, however, be too narrow a topic around which to revolve a festival, despite the hang-ups associated with it and its place in our social history. The close proximity between England and Ireland would highlight one of the many stark differences that exist in regulation between the two jurisdictions, one example being the sale of contraceptives.

It made the headlines across the world when in 1971, veteran journalist Nell McCafferty and The Irish Women’s Liberation Movement took what became known as ‘the contraceptive train’ to Belfast, in order to highlight the anomaly as contraceptives were then illegal to purchase in the Republic of Ireland. Eight years later, the then Minister for Health, Charles Haughey, finally acted on the outrage and provided, as he said, ‘an Irish solution to an Irish problem’ when he introduced, in the Health (Family Planning) Act, a provision for the sale of contraceptives.\(^2\)

The play on the poet’s surname also invites us to look at such issues as the loss of the wonderful art of letter writing in today’s technological world; the place of the letter in our social history; their emotive value, from the ritual involved in the opening and sending of letters to the anticipated excitement of their arrival, especially from the dearly beloved afar. A corollary of which is, ‘did correspondence from America have a greater impact on our lives than correspondence from Europe?’ (Were there any French letters, letters from France, especially when we consider the role Europe plays in our lives today?). We also hope to look both at the letter(s) of Saul the Tent Maker from Tarsus,\(^3\) who wrote eight epistles outlining the soteriology of Jesus’ life and death and of course at sex and society in modern Ireland.

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\(^1\) *The Mountains of Mourne* takes the form of a letter written by an Irish labourer working in London to his beloved in Ireland.

\(^2\) Irish Statute Book: Health (Family Planning) Act, 1979 (Section 4).
‘Vocabulary is the science of what words mean.’ Grammar is the logic of structuring vocabulary in a meaningful manner. If our vocabulary is limited so too is our thinking, ‘since we use words with which to think and communicate.’ Vocabulary therefore becomes empowering: the richer our vocabulary the greater our capacity for understanding both ourselves and our fellow man. Vocabulary and grammar are interdependent ‘since we need words to be grammatical with’ and we need grammar to make the best sense of combining words.

If we do not make the correct use of words, that is if we do not apply grammar correctly to our vocabulary then both our thinking and communicating are compromised. ‘Ordered language is ordered thinking,’ our school master once bellowed. Thereupon, vocabulary and grammar are the basic tools that predicate our thinking and communicating, and the communicating in its collective form, orally or otherwise, is technically known as rhetoric.

Grammar, rhetoric and logic were the principal fields of study of the Classicists and would also be regarded as the most important of the disciplines in Western education, right up until the end of the 19th century. Grammar finally lost out as the last of these great arts of discourse and writing when it was dropped from the school syllabus in the early 1970s. Its loss however, is not just to be viewed in the context of our literary heritage or culture or as a contributing factor to the demise of the wonderful art of letter writing; it could very well be argued the latter is more due to the mass uptake of mobile phones, emails, texts and probably downright laziness when you consider it’s a text you’ll get next Christmas instead of the traditional card.
The dropping of the teaching or the practising of grammar, in schools and the workplace, needs to be reviewed; particularly in the context of today’s technological world where much of our language and information is now being received and where much of that world is encountered in a virtual way; further there is also the important consideration of creativity and style.

In the preface to his excellent little book Gwynne’s Grammar, N. M. Gwynne contends, ‘there is a child-centred notion today that ridiculously argues that teaching the child the basics of how to do something destroys a child’s creativity.’ Common sense and thousands of years of tradition, he continues, ‘tell us, on the contrary, that the techniques of any activity from composing poems to playing tennis, must be carefully learnt as a science—often very painstakingly—before the budding practitioners are in a position to develop the individual style that will set his or hers apart from everyone else.’ The same applies in learning how to write, he asserts and states ‘that a command of grammar and how to apply it, is indispensable to make one’s writing crystal-clear, attractive, enjoyable, persuasive or compelling or any or all of those.

Lynne Truss, in her book Eats, Shoots and Leaves, argues that ‘the explosion in universal written communication caused by the personal computer, the internet and mobile phones has made everyone a writer with the result all of the conventions involved in the printed word are overturned.’ Truss compares the linear development involved in bringing a book to its finished state with that of the posting of something on the internet.

‘Books are always edited, typeset and proof-read with their syntactic structure in order before they reach us, consequently we appreciate their literary authority. Electronic media on the other

8. ibid, p. 7.
9. ibid, p. X.
11. ibid, p. 180.
hand; she continues, ‘are intrinsically ephemeral, are open to perpetual revision, and work quite strenuously against any sort of historical perception.’ Truss despairs to see punctuation disregarded by people who don’t know the difference between who’s and whose and its and it’s and protests ‘if books no longer become the main vehicle of language and information, then our fate is in the hands of the barbarians.’

From the moment we are born we are thrust into a social world of language; language being defined as ‘a formal system of signs governed by grammatical rules of combination to communicate meaning’. It should follow then that we at least be familiar with the rules governing our language, especially when ‘it is the grammatical structure of a language that guides its philosophical content’. A loose understanding of the guidelines results in a somewhat detached approach to our language and consequently reality. It is only through language we can make sense of our reality the ‘starting point of which has to be grammar’ and it is through language the boundaries of our own worlds are extended. If we combine a language that is lacking grammatically with the programmed language of a computer, which may be syntactically correct but semantically colourless, insofar as it is lacking the depth, essence or thrust of the communication; the world referred becomes removed from the reality, and the language somewhat empty.

It is entirely understandable then when N. M. Gwynne argues ‘our happiness and consequently the very well-being of society, depends in part on good grammar.’ In a step-by-step account he demonstrates how grammar, as a form of logic, if not correctly employed, leads to chaos. ‘If we do not use words rightly’, he argues, ‘we shall not think rightly, if we do not think rightly, we cannot reliably decide rightly, because good decisions depend on accurate thinking. Therefore if we do not decide rightly, we shall make a mess of our lives, and consequently other people’s lives to the extent that we have an influence on other people.’ Gwynne here is not just referring to the major decisions in our lives but to all decisions and it is on this note he introduces the reader to the significance, usefulness and relevance of good grammar, and to the serious consequences of its absence in our world today.

Yet, when Percy French writes ‘But tis lonely–lonely livin’ whin the childher is away’, words we know that were imparted by a mother who on seeing French sitting very alone capturing the drama and beauty of a bereft landscape, recounts to him her bankrupt world after her only two children had emigrated, are we not at once grateful to the ingenuity of the uncorrecting hand in such an instance? Are we not ourselves left bereft, divested of vocabulary and grammar when we read or hear these lines?

Kevin Finnerty

12. ibid, p. 182.
13. Dr Patricia McCarthy, lecture in The School of Psychotherapy, St. Vincent’s University Hospital Dublin, October 2011.
16. ibid, p 5. Black argues ‘If grammar is to teach us anything of philosophical importance, it must be treated with more respect...’

‘In seeking ontological conclusions from linguistic premises our starting point must be grammar.’
17. N. M. Gwynne, op cit, p. 7.
18. ibid, p. 5.
Roscommon County Council is once again delighted to be associated with the Percy French Festival. This annual event has established itself as one of the primary occasions in the County and continues to develop and extend its reach to wide audiences both nationally and internationally.

The Library Services are committed to fostering an appreciation of the rich history, culture, literary, arts and heritage in the County. Through its collaboration with Castlecoote House, the contribution and legacy of the much loved and cherished figure of Percy French are remembered.

The festival provides a forum for discussion and debate on social issues, and this year’s focus on the social implications of writing, language, vocabulary and grammar has a natural connection with the Public Library’s work.

The festival launch returns this year to French’s ancestral landscape of Tusk and Elphin, those ‘haunts of ancient peace’, where Percy French was born and received his early education at Bishop Hudson Grammar School, Elphin.

The Percy French Festival is participating in the Roscommon Ireland 2016 programme of historical reflection and cultural expression and further details are available on the Library link of www.roscommoncoco.ie

Richie Farrell
COUNTY LIBRARIAN & ROSCOMMON IRELAND 2016 COORDINATOR

FESTIVAL TALK AT ROSCOMMON COUNTY LIBRARY
French’s Contribution to the Irish Literary Revival
Dr Brendan McEvoy
Thursday, 7th July, at 8.00 PM
Something Freud got right—reluctantly, but he did get it right is that as far as psychoanalysis is concerned—the arts are always streets ahead. The Canadian writer Carole Shields has a short story called *Dressing up for the Carnival* which I think absolutely captures one facet of what Jacques Lacan was talking about when he focussed on the importance of what he calls the Mirror stage in the formation of the ‘I’. This story is not really a story at all but a series of eleven vignettes, all different but all enacting something of the same process. I would like to read one of them as a shortcut into Lacan’s ideas.

‘All over town people are putting on their costumes. Tamara has flung open her closet door; just to see her standing there is to feel a squeeze of the heart. She loves her clothes. She knows her clothes. Here favourite moment of the day is this moment, standing at the closet door, still a little dizzy from her long night of tumbled sleep, biting her lip, thinking hard, moving the busy hangers along the rod, about to make up her mind.

Yes! The yellow cotton skirt with the big patch pockets and the hand detail around the hem. How fortunate to own such a skirt. And the white blouse. What a blouse! Those sleeves, that neckline with its buttoned flap, the fullness of the yoke that reminds her of the Morris dances she and her boyfriend Bruce saw at the Exhibition last year.

Next she adds her new straw belt; perfect. A string of yellow beads. Earrings of course. Her bone sandals. And bare legs. Why not?

She never checks the weather before she dresses; her clothes are the weather, as powerful in their sunniness as the strong muzzy early morning sunlight pouring into the narrow street by the bus stop, warming the combed crown of her hair and fuelling her with imagination. She taps a sandalled foot lightly on the pavement, waiting for the number 4 bus. No longer just Tamara, clerk receptionist for the Youth Employment Bureau, but a woman dressed in yellow. A Passionate Vibrant Woman About To Begin Her Day. Her Life.’

Each of Shield’s vignettes is about an image, an image which amplifies, which gives being and vibrancy to what had been inert existence. Something happens which gives each character access to an illusory identity, but it is precisely this illusion which permits them to be their most shining alive and potent self. It is this double aspect of how the image works that Lacan picked up on when he began to think about the Mirror stage in the 1930s. This of course is just one facet of a much wider topic.

How do you get to know that you are you? Can that knowledge be disrupted or even radically menaced? A young woman in Cork recently told how at the age of seven she looked into the mirror and saw a monster looking back; a terrifying inscription of the untellable fact that someone in her immediate vicinity had just begun to sexually abuse her. Like many important questions, such as Newton’s ‘why do apples fall?, everyday living discourages such queries, eliding the truth and poignancy of the Beckettian self-description as ‘a stranger in my own midst’. Anomalies, such as that experienced by the young woman mentioned, are important in that they vault us back to the unexamined question of how the image of self gets to be installed in the first place and what fuels its particular intensity.

Lacan, basing himself on a number of contemporary studies, describes an event which takes place somewhere between six and eighteen months for the baby: the moment when she recognizes her own image in the mirror. More than many other mammals, the human child is born neurologically incomplete; premature in that it will remain helpless for much longer.
than say a foal or a calf which can be on its feet within 24 hours. What Lacan suggests is that this long experience of powerlessness impacts on and lends a specific coloration to the child’s realization that what she is looking at is herself. Initially the baby has no real sense of what is and what is not herself. Limbs flail around; she hits herself and cries angrily. She is assailed by tummy aches and gut pains, and traces of this original experience of not knowing where all this is coming from remains in our phraseology when we speak of ‘an attack’ of pain, or an attack of anxiety. Only very gradually does the baby begin to get a sense of her own body as a whole rather than in momentary flickering and fragmentary recognitions. Lacan was neither the first nor the only observer to note how frequently the mirror recognition is greeted with clear pleasure. Usually the child is held up and therefore sees herself upright, in a position somewhat in advance of her actual capacities. Ordinarily too, she is being designated by an adoring adult, the one holding her up to the mirror and saying something like ‘who is that beautifull little girl/boy?: Observers in general agree that this is never an neutral, unremarkable event. The child turns her head to look at the holding adult then back to the mirror and is usually, though not always, both interested and delighted.

It would be foolish to speak of the Mirror stage without noting that it is always somewhat artificial and false to isolate one moment of experience from the simultaneous jumble in which we live. This is probably even more true for babies. In terms of identification the baby must have reached a certain stage of development before recognition can happen and will already be aware of, and focussed on, other small children as similar to herself. The actual mirror offers a specific instance of ‘This is me’ and for Lacan this decisive moment is marked by the leap from insufficiency to anticipation. What I see is indeed me but a me that is a more impressive presence than what I feel myself to be. A whole unified person and not just the hotchpotch of disparate, vaguely intrusive, sensations which beset me. The need for this sense of a unitary self is sedimented in phrases such as ‘I have to get myself together,’ or ‘she is not a very together person.’ Also because the mirror-event often happens before the baby can stand alone what she sees is an upright person, already like the people she lives with. The mirror image is then at once reassurance and alienation, more of an arrow in flight than an arrived-at destination, caught between lived- inadequacy and the promise of potency.

For psychoanalysis this is an interesting concept since it installs an unbridgeable gap at the heart of being. At the point where I say ‘I’, I am caught between being and seeming, a dilemma easily screened by everyday usage but unflinchingly laid bare in all of Beckett’s work. ‘I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me’, The Unnameable announces on the very first page. Caught between being and seeing oneself being, paradoxically creates at once a sense of alienation and a desired reference point for the permanence of identity, tilting us, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau remarked, towards investing all of our being in our appearing.

However, when Lacan describes the initial mirror stage as this leap from insufficiency to anticipation he is looking at one facet only, and bypassing a whole series of happenings which will determine how this stage is lived. In particular he is bypassing the question of parental desire. We are all seen long before we begin to see ourselves and this first seeing will crucially inflect the second. So what do the parents see? All their dreams come true? The longed for girl after six boys? The hated face of the rapist or the feared face of a grandparent? The living child who carries the sorrow of a previous lost child? Salvador Dali has written illuminatingly of the shadow of his older dead brother, also Salvador, always perceptible in his parents’ gaze, making it impossible for him to see himself as himself and eventually impelling him to find an art form reflecting this double image. Anyone working or indeed living with anorexic people will know that it is the look which
creates the image. The degree to which this look is pre-prepared slips below the radar of everyday perception but shows up in a chance encounter—when I catch sight of my reflection in a shop window rather than when I look into a mirror the sudden small shock of dismay is instructive—who is that dreadful ould wan? In T. S. Eliot’s phrase we prepare ‘a face to meet the faces that you meet’ and this includes our own. Also, since Lacan focuses on the very early relation to the mirror image he does not reference its pacifying aspect, the reassurance of seeing the expected image, again unnoticed in everyday living but starkly highlighted in the disquiet of encountering one’s suddenly bald head in chemotherapy. Our look precedes our seeing and so the anorexic will have already inserted a reflected obesity in place of the shrivelled real body.

So this process can function in reverse. The hate-filled look is alarmingly common, creating a self-image which unceasingly disables and extinguishes that living spark which one can see catching fire in each of Carole Shield’s vignettes. Almost 30 years before Lacan wrote about the Mirror stage, Freud wrote of the near impossibility of inhabiting an identity colored by dislike or a sense of self-betrayal, of being confronted in an ongoing way with a too obvious departure from this kind of idealized illusion about oneself. What is it like for a collective identity if very many people live shorn of this dimension? A question raised by the tidal wave of revelations about the domestic and institutional abuse of children in Ireland in recent years. This covert violence over several decades has resulted in a largely invisible weave of men and women, parents, aunts, uncles whose years of living in situations of humiliated, enforced consent cannot but impact on the texture of life in Ireland today, provoking questions about our national mirror image.

The paper goes on to suggest an analogy between the extraordinary renewal of Ireland’s image during the lifetime of Percy French and Lacan’s theorization of the mirror stage. The achievement of Yeats, Hyde and their generation bodies forth something of this leap from lived inadequacy to the promise of potency. Percy French’s work is on the margins of this movement but his talent, charm and wit allowed him to appropriate facets of an older mirror image held up by the English, to reconfigure them, and to infuse them with such delight that they can be and are reclaimed as our own.

The work of Samuel Beckett is to be situated at the opposite end of the spectrum from that of French. Lacan’s Mirror stage suggests that believing in oneself is never entirely unproblematic but for the Beckettian character this entire project is riven with unbelief ‘I seem to speak, it is not I, about me, it is not about me’. For this speaker every assumption of identity involves perfidy. Ultimately however to inhabit the fiction of the mirror image is not simply an alienation, it is a condition of being, since the assumption of the ego with its successive layers of identification is what situates us in space and time offers a point of entry into the human family. Not to be able to do so leaves one prey to the clamour of inner voices as well as to invasion from powerful outer ones and most usually results in paranoid anxiety. Beckett’s formidable achievement is to have made accessible the unmirrored space of what he calls ‘nameless images and imageless names’ ordinarily accessible only at the farthest reaches of human suffering. Here at the Percy French festival we are in a much more genial, light-filled space, but because there are darknesses which remain dark, mirror images which paralyze or reflect absence, as well as those which empower or tranquilize, Beckett makes it clear that it is one of the signatures of our humanity to acknowledge these impossibilities along with the helplessness to which they can consign us.

Olga Cox Cameron
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THE PERCY FRENCH FESTIVAL 2016

WEDNESDAY

JULY 6TH

10.00 AM  TALK • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Brian Griffin
Percy French: A Portrait of the Artist as a Cycling Journalist

10.45 AM  TEA / COFFEE

11.15 AM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Jane Maxwell, Curator of Manuscripts Library TCD
‘Dear Giddy Brat’, The letters of Edward Synge, Bishop of Elphin, to his daughter Alicia, 1746–52

12.10 PM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Eugene McGee
From French, and other letters, to Twitter. Have Irish people lost the great arts of talking, writing, and personal communication?

2.30 PM  AFTERNOON RECITAL
Michael Banaghan & The Castlecoote Ramblers
A Very French Seisiún

3.15 PM  GARDENS OPEN

We are delighted to announce that the international jury at The European Festivals Association has granted the European Finest Festivals and Events Award, EFFE, to The Percy French Festival.

The jury examined applications from festivals in over 40 countries seeking to merit the EFFE label by meeting exacting criteria for artistic commitment, community involvement, originality of thought, and national and international outlook. In Ireland, north and south, there are over 500 festivals, of which only 16 hold this award, just two in the west of Ireland: The Percy French Festival and The Westport Festival.

See page 15 for more information.
Here is how we can help you:

FIND delightful properties to visit throughout the island of Ireland.

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Pictured: Killruddery House & Gardens, Southern Cross, Bray, Co. Wicklow
THURSDAY

10.00 AM  ILLUSTRATED LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Maureen Beary Ryan
Art and Letter Writing

10.45 AM  TEA / COFFEE

11.10 AM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Karina Melvin
The Irish & Sex: once backward, now forward. But should we really be upside-down?

12.10 PM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
The Sean Freyne Memorial Lecture
Dr Kieran O’Mahony
St Paul among the Philosophers: from Seneca to Giorgio Agamben

2.30 PM  AFTERNOON RECITAL
Peader MacMahon and Friends
The Legacy of Percy French

3.15 PM  GARDENS OPEN

FESTIVAL DAY TICKET: €40
Three Lectures, Afternoon Recital, Tea/Coffee

WHOLE FESTIVAL: €110
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THE PERCY FRENCH FESTIVAL 2016

FRIDAY

JULY 8TH

10.00 AM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Dr Teresa O’Donnell
Sisters of the Revolutionaries:
Margaret and Mary Brigid Pearse

10.45 AM  TEA / COFFEE

11.10 AM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Alan Tongue
The Love Letters of Percy French

12.10 PM  LECTURE • QUESTIONS & ANSWERS
Dr Anne Byrne
McBreen’s Heifer? Single Women in Story and Society

2.30 PM  AFTERNOON RECITAL
The Mulligan Sisters
Musical Melodies

3.15 PM  GARDENS OPEN

EFFE, Festivals for Europe, is an international festival platform connecting festivals with a deep commitment to the arts, their communities and to Europe. It was initiated by The European Finest Festivals Association, an umbrella organisation for festivals across Europe and beyond. One of the oldest cultural networks in Europe, it was founded in Geneva in 1952 as a joint initiative of the eminent conductor Igor Markevitch and philosopher Denis de Rougemont. Today, based in Brussels, it embraces music, dance, theatre and multi-disciplinary festivals from 40 countries.
Eugene McGee is a native of Colmcille parish in Longford. With a BA and HDip in Ed from UCD he seemed destined to follow his siblings into teaching. But sanity was thrown aside when he began dabbling in journalism. In the early 1970s he became the main writer on GAA affairs with the now defunct Sunday Press when it was the largest paper in Ireland with a circulation of over half a million. He later worked with the Sunday Tribune when Vincent Browne was editor before joining Irish Independent where he has been writing his Monday column for over 25 years. Despite being a failure at playing football he had success as coach and manager winning seven Sigerson Cups with UCD, two All-Ireland club championships, three Dublin championships, and as manager of the Offaly team winning three Leinster titles and in 1982 a famous All-Ireland victory beating Kerry who were seeking an historic five-in-a-row All-Irelands. He was Manager of the Ireland Compromise Rules team versus Australia in 1987 and 2000. Eugene was managing editor of The Longford Leader from 1983 to 2004. He is a regular columnist on sport and current affairs on TV and radio. His books include Classic Football Matches (1993); a history of St. Mel’s of Longford: 1865–1990 (1996); and The GAA in my time (2014).

Kieran O’Mahony is an Augustinian priest and biblical scholar. He is the Academic Coordinator of Biblical Studies in the Archdiocese of Dublin and is currently one of two ecumenical canons at St Patrick’s Cathedral, Dublin. Previously he was Associate Professor and Head of Department at the Milltown Institute of Theology and Philosophy. He lives and works in Orlagh, the Augustinian pastoral centre close to Dublin city. Kieran’s professional training included philosophy, systematic theology, education, and biblical studies in Dublin, Rome, and Jerusalem. As a biblical scholar, his interest is in classical rhetoric and the letters of St Paul with a strong emphasis on a contextual reading and the popular philosophies of the time. His interests also include both the archaeology of the Bible lands (chiefly Israel, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Turkey, and Greece) and the cultural background essential for reconstructing the resonances of writings from the distant past. His publications include the books: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9: a Sounding in Pauline Persuasion (2000); What the Bible Says about the Stranger (2007) and Do we still need St Paul? (2009) Kieran is regularly invited to take part in academic and pastoral conferences. When not at work, his family and friends, cooking, the Camino de Santiago, cycling, and classical music help keep him reasonably sane.
Jane Maxwell (a native of Co Offaly though living in Co Laois) is a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin. Trained as an archivist she joined the staff of the College Library where she is Principal Curator in the Manuscripts & Archives Research Library. Her specialist area is the Library’s collection of Samuel Beckett manuscripts. Her essay on these appears in *The Old Library Trinity College Dublin 1712–2012*, edited by W. E. Vaughan which was published to mark the tercentenary of the Old Library. In 2006 she curated a major exhibition, in the Long Room of the Old Library, commemorating the centenary of Beckett’s birth. In 2011, for the tercentenary of Trinity’s School of Physic, Jane curated a large and successful exhibition on medicine. Currently Jane is undertaking a PhD on the history of women, specifically looking at the personal letter as a unique source for insight into women’s private lives in the late 18th and early-19th centuries. Her article on Dorothea Herbert, an 18th-century Tipperary woman, was published in *The Bulletin of John Rylands Library of Manchester*, in 2014. Jane frequently writes posts for the *manuscriptsattrinity* blog.

Dr McEvoy studied at Trinity College, Dublin and at the University of Oxford. From an early age he took an interest in the art of letter writing which continues to this day. His own letters have been broadcast on radio winning many prizes and he was a prizewinner in the National Adult Letter Writing Competition. His essay on the *History of Letter Writing* was accepted by the Department of Literature at Kellogg College, Oxford. He believes that letters should be cherished for their intimacy. His lecture will cover the many forms of letters (and how they serve as inspiration for authors, painters, and artists) and their range from the eloquent epistles of the ancient world of Cicero and Horace, the Christian writings of Saints Paul and Jerome, through to the birth of the letter theme in Dutch paintings. Many authors have confessed that if they could have excelled in any kind of writing they would have chosen letter writing. Dr McEvoy has held senior positions in Arthur Guinness, Bord Bainne, Bord Fáilte, and Bord Iascaigh Mhara. He specialised in International Trade and Export Development lecturing at University College, Dublin; University College, Cork; Dublin Institute of Technology; the Irish Management Institute; and abroad. He was Director of Maritime Studies at the National College of Ireland.
Brian is a senior Lecturer in History at Bath Spa University, where he has taught since 1995. His main research interest is the social history of nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland, particularly crime, policing and sport, as well as the history of Meath, his native county. He has published numerous journal articles on various aspects of Irish life in the 1800–1914 period, as well as three books: *The Bulkies: Police and Crime in Belfast, 1800–1865* (1997), *Sources for the Study of Crime in Ireland, 1801–1921* (2005), and *Cycling in Victorian Ireland* (2006). He happily chanced upon Percy French’s cycling journalism while researching his last book.

Karina is a psychologist and psychoanalyst in private practice at her clinic, Sandymount Psychotherapy, in Dublin. She lectures in Freudian and Lacanian Psychoanalytic Theory at St. Vincent’s University Hospital and has published and presented on the subject of sexuality and logic. A lifelong student, Karina also holds a BA in Art and Politics; a BSc in Psychology; an MA in Addiction Studies; and an MSc in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy. Her first love is theatre and prior to training as a psychoanalyst she completed an MA in Drama and Music from the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. She spent some years as a tutor with the Gaiety School of Acting. A passionate cook and vegetable grower, Karina recently launched a new venture, Artful Eating, to help educate people about the psychology of lasting weight loss.
Maureen Beary Ryan is an art historian. Since 1998, she has been Director of the Friends of the National Gallery of Ireland for which she has run lectures, concerts and cultural trips in Ireland and abroad. She holds a BA Honours Degree in History of Art and Italian Language and Literature from University College Dublin. In 1994, she was awarded an MA for her thesis on the Jesuit Church of St. Francis Xavier, Upper Gardiner Street, Dublin. Maureen has been involved in art research in Naples, Rome and Venice and has lectured at the National Gallery and throughout Ireland. With the backdrop of the successful Love Letters exhibition at the National Gallery of Ireland, 2003, Maureen will be examining how an increase in Dutch literacy in the 17th century led to letters evolving into a personal form of communication and how letters increased in sensibility in the 18th century and how by the 19th century they had become essential in maintaining personal relationships across the globe. Her talk will be illustrated with some of the fascinating images of those times when even the Post Office’s activities became a subject of art.

An internationally recognised conductor, Alan has a longstanding involvement with Percy French. He rescued and catalogued the memorabilia that comprise the Percy French Collection in Bangor Castle. He created and produced The Percy French Society Concert Party that featured theatrical sketches, songs and verse and travelled all over Ireland. His direction of Brendan O’Dowda’s stage show The World of Percy French (1978) restored French’s poetry and parodies to public performance and he presented an embracing picture of Percy French and his many talents in his TV documentary Percy French Remembered. His book A Picture of Percy French (Greystone Press, 1990) gives a year by year account of French’s life and work and showed his paintings in print for the first time. His newest book, The Love Letters of Percy French (Lilliput Press, 2015), adds to our knowledge of this remarkable man. Alan has conducted British music around the world. His summer school for string players and conductors, from Ireland north and south and eastern Europe, ran for several years, featuring the Annaghmakerrig Sinfonia in a mix of Baroque, Irish contemporary and Irish traditional music. Having rediscovered the doctoral exercise by Ralf Vaughan Williams, he edited, conducted, recorded it as A Cambridge Mass.
Anne Byrne is a sociologist with an interest in narrative, biography, art and visuality. She has published on women in Irish society; feminist research methodologies and pedagogies; gender; identity; inequality; singleness; stigma; rural development; and the historiography of anthropological research in rural Ireland in the 1930s. Interested in women’s lives, subjectivities and identities, her current research concerns women’s letters, diaries, autobiographies and stories in 20th century Ireland. An example of her publishing work in that area can be found in ‘A Passion for Books: The early letters of Nancy Nolan to Leonard Woolf (1943–1944)’ in *Virginia Woolf Miscellany*, No 86, Fall 2014/Winter 2015, pp32–34, Southern Connecticut State University, USA. Publications on sex and society in modern Ireland include ‘Single Women in Story and Society’ in Inglis, T. (ed), *Are the Irish Different?*, 2014, Manchester University Press, UK. Anne is Vice-President of the Sociological Association of Ireland and she is Head of School of Political Science and Sociology at NUI Galway.

Peader MacMahon is a native of Limerick. He has lived in Bellingham, Washington, since 1990 where he performs and records old-time Irish and American folk. He sings and performs historic songs, connecting with his audience through the telling of their stories and his own, regionally and internationally. His latest project is *The Legacy of Percy French* is with friends: *Bruce Alan Shaw* who plays five-string banjo and mandolin. He has toured and recorded extensively in the USA, notably with Korby Lenker and The Barbed Wire Cutters. *Richard Scholtz*, a highly respected folk singer and master of the autoharp, has been the administrator and teacher at The Northwest Guitar Workshop in Washington State since 1975. A professor of music at Western Washington University, he has recorded eight CDs and toured in Japan, China, Canada and the USA. *Aaron Harmonson* plays the upright Bass. He has toured with the Canadian Celtic band The Clumsy Lovers and has had residencies in Hong Kong playing jazz bass.
The three Mulligan sisters have been singing together since they were three years old. They studied in the London College of Music; Royal Irish Academy of Music; Trinity College, Dublin; St Patrick’s College, Maynooth; St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra; and Marino College, Dublin. Their vocal coaches have included Soo Bee Lee, Irene Sanford, and repetiteur Jeannie Reddin. They have toured extensively throughout Europe and New York and are currently giving a series of concerts nationwide of songs from musical theatre, sacred arias, and classical and operatic pieces.

Margaret is a Primary School teacher in St Joseph’s NS, Co. Longford; Mary is a Primary School teacher in St Patrick’s NS, Ballinamuck, Co. Longford; and Aideen is Primary School Principal in St Colmcille’s NS, Aughnacliffe, Co. Longford.

Since 2002 The Castlecoote Ramblers have performed every Tuesday night at PJ’s Bar Castlecoote in ‘The Session’, feasibly the longest running in Ireland today. Seven Ramblers appear above but others join in from time to time for ballads, rock, country, bluegrass, and folk.

*Back row, from the left:* John Hannan, from Manchester but now settled in Roscommon, brings a wealth of experience to the group and sings some old favourites. Tom Coakley has lived in Roscommon for many years. He plays mandolin, bouzouki, dobra, and guitar, and he sings too. Aidan Treacy is the ace trumpet player. Sean Kilgarriff, a local man and session founder, is an accomplished tin whistle player and sometimes picks a banjo. Sean Kelly, ‘Sean T’, percussionist and occasional singer has played throughout Ireland and the UK. *In front:* Guitarist Joachim Dunne has always lived in Castlecoote. He plays guitar and takes lead vocals. He is a founder member who has kept the ‘the session’ going ever since. Jane Toibin, sings with the Ramblers and the South Roscommon Singers. And not in this photo but regularly on stage, Fred Mulryan, who plays a very tasty guitar, seems to know every record from the 50s and 60s and be able to sing them at will without a songbook.
The story of the life and work of one of Ireland's most multi-talented artists of the 19th and 20th centuries, depicting a gentler time (before air travel or television) when a comic genius generated laughter and happiness wherever he went.

The readings are from Percy French's own amusing and informative recollections that were originally published by French's sister, Emily De Burgh Daly, in 1922.

A taste of French's music is performed by acclaimed harpist Teresa O'Donnell who also sings 'The Mountains of Mourne', one of French's most famous songs.
Castleacre is delighted to support the Percy French Festival

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GALLERIES & EXHIBITIONS
Cavan County Museum holds a variety of permanent exhibitions including a Percy French Gallery, the Clogh Oughter Castle exhibition, a GAA Exhibition, Farnham Gallery and the Folk Life Gallery with a recreation of an old-style thatched house and kitchen.

PREHISTORY
The museum is home to two of Ireland’s most famous pieces of Celtic and Pagan art—the Killycluggan Stone and the Ralaghan figure. The Boat Room houses a 25 ft long Lough Errill log boat that is over 1,000 years old.

THE TRENCH EXPERIENCE
The Museum has the largest outdoor replica First World War trench open to the public in Ireland and the UK. This remarkable installation is enhanced with sound and visual effects creating a realistic experience of life in the trenches. Built to the specifications of the Irish Guards and used by the Royal Irish Fusiliers at the Battle of the Somme 1916. It is over 350 m long (built with over 6,000 sand bags) and includes front line, communication and support trenches.

FACILITIES
The Museum, housed in a beautiful Georgian building, offers visitors audio-visual displays, interactives, craft and coffee shops. There is good Disabled Access and the building is suitable for wheelchair users.

Outside there are picnic areas, extensive gardens, a children’s playground, and coach and car parks. The tea rooms can accommodate up to 40 people at a time. Guided tours are available.

Cavan County Museum
VIRGINIA ROAD, BALLYJAMESDUFF, CO. CAVAN
TELEPHONE 049-8544070 EMAIL cmuseum@eircom.net
OPENING HOURS Tuesday to Saturday, 10am–5 pm and Sundays, June, July, August: 2–6 pm. CLOSED Mondays

www.cavanmuseum.ie
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Whyte’s have a reputation for finding and auctioning fine examples of Ireland’s favourite watercolour painter, and are the holders of the world record, at €44,000, for an example of his work. The latter was a large work in its original Belfast pokerwork frame, originally in the Earl of Iavegh (Guinness) collection. Whyte’s are especially careful to check the authenticity of all Percy French pictures consigned and give a guarantee on all works sold.

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