



THE 17TH PERCY FRENCH FESTIVAL 2025

The Quest for Authenticity

CASTLECOOTE HOUSE

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23RD | 24TH | 25TH | JULY 2025

≈€5≈

Front cover

The front cover* embodies the themes of the last two festivals, *Does the Soul have a future?* and *Our Great Disconnect*. Here we see a lonely figure etched into the landscape of a typical rural Irish setting, drawn by the blue light on the horizon, representing the world of smart technology and pcs. The man is on an existential journey in pursuit of the authentic or real, his back turned (or he's walking away) from the only life-giving source available—water. His agitated state encounters only a desolate landscape.

Head bowed in determination to plough on, the desolate landscape representing his state of mind, it seems serenity and tranquillity has and is eluding him. Brow-beaten steadfastly over time where the language, expressions, utterances and images of a society he grew up in, have 'changed utterly' and has now become vacuous, empty, impolite and meaningless. A once carefree land of time, friendliness, welcomes, jocularly and prayer, and even though it has enriched itself beyond measure, has become fraught with unease and anxiety resulting in discord and short-temperedness almost everywhere.

Language and utterances that in themselves have very low vibrational levels, as distinct from the sensitive, imaginative, poetic and musical language of the thoughtful, attentive and reflective person, where consideration and prayer has resonance. We are human, of both matter and energy where our emotions and thoughts exist on different vibrational levels, fear and anger being linked to a much lower vibrational level than positivity and higher states of consciousness and where like attracts like, the man goes down to the river.

As in Psalm 23, the front cover too reflects its central tenet: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, He leads me beside still waters, He restores my soul, surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever'.

Maybe all we need to restore order amidst chaos is a simple prayer and if we all began to pray again the vibrational level across our society would increase exponentially and Time would return to and for us all.

Kevin Finnerty

*The image was used in the poster for the Abbey Theatre's 1989 production of Eugene Mc Cabe's *King of the Castle*.

THE 17TH PERCY FRENCH FESTIVAL 2025

Honorary President of the Festival, the President of Ireland, Michael D Higgins
Informed Social & Cultural Discussion of Ireland Today

The Quest for Authenticity

23RD | 24TH | 25TH | JULY 2025

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Please be seated 15 minutes before the first talk each day

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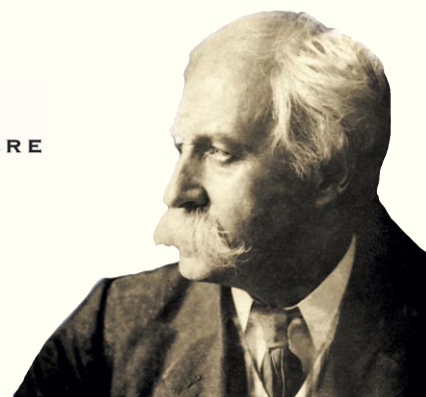
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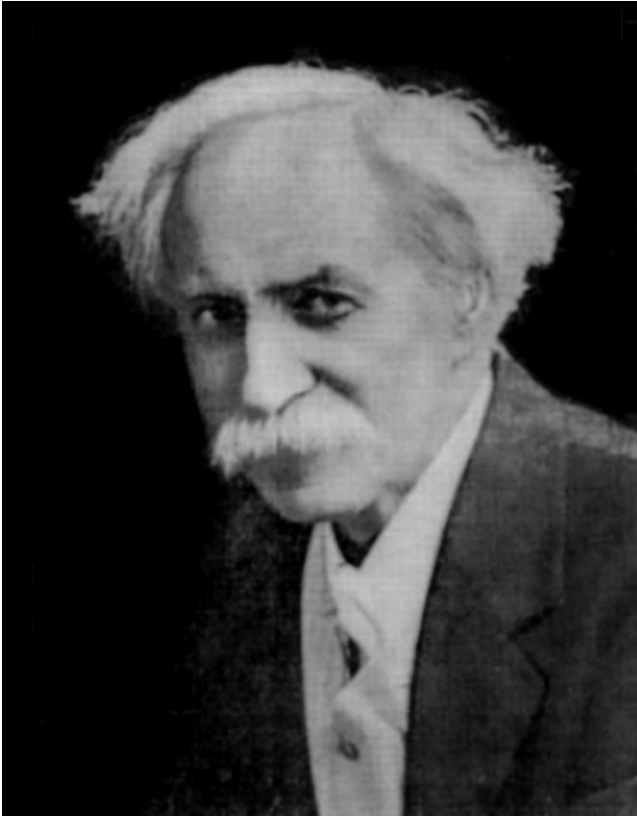
The Percy French Festival, registered address as above
Brochure created, compiled, and edited by Kevin Finnerty ©2025.

Since 2009 The Percy French Festival has taken place annually
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.



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Percy French

A Brief Biography

Childhood and Early Adulthood

William Percy French, (Illus. 1) songwriter, singer, musician, humourist, and artist, was born on 1st May 1854 at Cloonyquin House, Co. Roscommon. He was the second son and the third child of the nine children born to Christopher French (1821–1897), a landlord, and Susan Emma French (née Percy), (1827–1914), the daughter of the Reverend William Alexander Percy (1796–1869), rector of Kiltogher Church of Ireland parish in Co. Leitrim and his wife, Elizabeth Percy (née Lloyd) (c.1800–1847).¹ French's childhood was an idyllic one in many ways: Cloonyquin House was a marvellous place in which to play hide-and-seek and also a game which the boisterous Percy and his siblings called 'The Lion Hunt', and in his quieter moments Percy loved drawing, carving wooden figures with a penknife, and playing with tin soldiers. His father's library was also a favourite haunt, where he spent 'many a splendid hour [...] following the fortunes of Nicholas Nickleby, or fighting Malay pirates and mediæval robbers with Charles Reade. He also participated in such outdoor pursuits as cricket, fishing and horse-riding at Cloonyquin.² It is likely that the good relations which prevailed between Christopher French and his tenants contributed to the harmonious atmosphere that prevailed at Cloonyquin when Percy was growing up there.³ Percy's father was known as 'Christopher the Good' due to his generous hospitality in hosting annual dinners for his tenants,⁴ and in September 1879, during the severe agricultural depression in the West of Ireland which was a catalyst for the Land War, the *Roscommon Herald* stated that Christopher French's name was 'the synonym of good landlordism' and lauded his decision to lower rents on his estate by 20 per cent.⁵

Percy was first taught at home by tutors and governesses, but when he was ten years old the French family moved to Derbyshire to further the children's education.⁶ Percy first attended for two years at the Reverend John Barton's (1816–1875) school at Kirk Langley,

Illustration 1. Frontispiece of Emily de Burgh Daly (ed), *Prose, Poems and Parodies of Percy French*, Dublin: Talbot Press, 1929.

Notes

- ¹ *Belfast News-Letter*, 6th April 1847; *Cork Constitution*, 3rd March 1869; *Leinster Reporter*, 15th May 1897; *Daily Express*, 31st December 1914; Emily de Burgh Daly (ed), *Chronicles and Poems of Percy French* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1922), p.1.
- ² de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.4; 6; 12; 15–16; 19; 39–42.
- ³ de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.43.
- ⁴ *Roscommon Herald*, 15th December 1860, 14th June 1862.
In June 1868 he gave a party to 260 of the schoolchildren living on his estate. The *Roscommon Herald* commented on 13th June: 'All remarked on the clean and healthy appearance of the children, and with such a prospect of a rising generation there need be little apprehension of a decrease of the population on the Cloonyquinn [sic] estate—but, did every landlord take the same interest Mr French does in the prosperity of their tenants, the country generally would present a different appearance to what it does.'
- ⁵ *Roscommon Herald*, 20th September 1879.
- ⁶ de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.6; 23.
- ⁷ *Derbyshire Advertiser and Journal*, 25th June 1875; *Lakes Herald*, 10th December 1909.
- ⁸ de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.25.
- ⁹ *Ulster Gazette*, 19th March 1881; de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.44.
- ¹⁰ Berrie O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender: Percy French 1854–1920* (Dublin: Lilliput, Press, 2016), p.35.
- ¹¹ de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.28–29; Ettie French, Willie (Holywood: Percy French Society, 1994), pp.25–26.
- ¹² de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.60; O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, pp. 42–43.
- ¹³ O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, pp.42–43; Stefanie P. Jones, 'Price, James', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/price-james-a7499>
- ¹⁴ de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.30–33.

before boarding from 1867 to 1871 at Windermere College, which was run by the mathematician George Hale Puckle (1825–1909).⁷ Puckle had published what French called a book on *Conic Sections and kindred spoil sports* but this did not particularly impress the young Irish pupil: French later commented that ‘I never got to know what Conic Sections were, but in my second term I was champion fives player of the lower school.’⁸ Windermere College was followed by a year at a ‘grinding’ institution—Foyle College, in Derry, which was run by a relative of the French family, Reverend William Percy Robinson, DD. (1845–1881)—in order to prepare for entrance to Trinity College Dublin.⁹ French’s father was keen that Percy should become an engineer by profession, which meant he first had to earn a BA before progressing to an engineering degree.¹⁰ This proved to be an unexpectedly lengthy process, as Percy was much more interested in Trinity’s social life than he was in studying, as shown by the enthusiasm with which he attended musical theatres, entertained at parties and ‘smokers’ (smoking concerts) despite his aversion to smoking, played the banjo and piano, took up the fashionable sport of tennis and indulged his passion for painting watercolours, an interest he retained for the rest of his life.¹¹ (Illus. 2) In 1877 he showed an early glimpse of his song-writing talent when he composed the humorous song, *Abdallah Bulbul Ameer*, a pirated copy of which soon became a popular ditty throughout the English-speaking world. This episode also demonstrated French’s frequent carelessness in his financial affairs, as he neglected to take out copyright on the song and therefore did not benefit financially from its success.¹²

The Cavan Years

Graduating with a BA in 1876 and a B.Eng. in 1881, French was employed as a temporary teacher of art at Foyle College before beginning an engineering apprenticeship with James Price (1831–1895) of the Midland Great Western Railway.¹³ French and a fellow apprentice, Charles Manners (1857–1935) (real name Southcote Mansergh), the future famous opera singer and opera company manager, spent much of their working hours rehearsing duets together. They also earned 28 shillings by performing

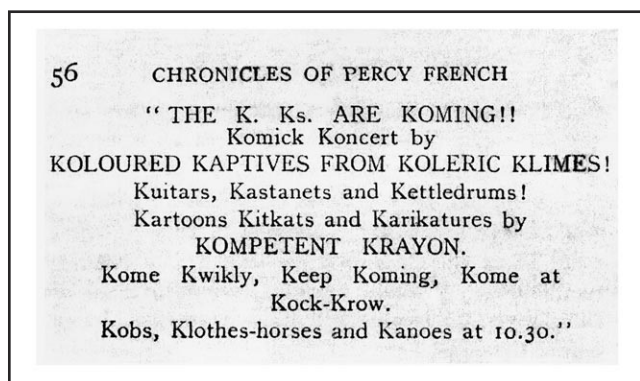


Illus 2.

Above: Percy French painting a landscape with a shaving brush. *The Sketch*, 10th January 1906.

Below: Percy French painting at Cloonyquinn. Percy French Collection, North Down Museum.





Illus 3. Advertisement for a performance by the Kinnypottle Komicks. Emily de Burgh Daly (ed), *Chronicles and Poems of Percy French*. Dublin: Talbot Press, 1922, p.56.

Notes

- 15 Lawrence William White and Desmond McCabe, 'French, (William) Percy', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, <https://www.dib.ie/biography/french-william-percy-a3371>
- 16 French marked his appointment with the Board of Works by composing a song for the family magazine which he, his siblings, their Richardson cousins and their friends, the Godley brothers, sons of Reverend James Godley (1821–1910), rector of Carrigallen, produced for their entertainment. Originally titled *The Tulska Morning Howl*, the magazine later became known as *The Trombone of Truth*. The lyrics of the original version—*The Effusion of William Inspector of Drains*—are published in James N. Healy, *Percy French and His Songs* (Dublin and Cork: Mercier Press, 1966), pp 16–19. A shorter version with altered lyrics—*Song of William, Inspector of Drains*—may be found in de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.59–60.
- 17 *Cavan Weekly News*, 14th March 1884; 24th October 1884; 25th December 1885; 7th October 1887; 28th October 1887.
- 18 *Cavan Weekly News*, 14th March 1884; 3rd April 1885.
- 19 *Cavan Weekly News*, 13th November 1885.
- 20 An admirer wrote of French's performance that 'the selection which he gave from his far-famed songs, the sweetness of his tuneful tenor voice, and the verve and brilliance of his singing, formed a musical gem in a very faultless setting. He also most kindly accompanied the various singers on the banjo with refined taste': *Cavan Weekly News*, 14th March 1884.
- 21 *Cavan Weekly News*, 20th April 1886; 2nd July 1886; 20th August 1886; French, *Willie*, p.32; O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, p.55.
- 22 French, *Willie*, p.32; Anglo-Celt, 24th April 1937.
- 23 French, *Willie*, p.36.
- 24 *Sligo Champion*, 7th February 1885; 14th February 1885; de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.55–56. A poster featuring the Kinnypottle Komicks is reproduced in O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, p.50.
- 26 de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.56–57.
- 27 Healy, *Percy French*, pp.22–22; 164.
- 28 A copy of the letter announcing his redundancy, dated 28th July 1888, is reproduced in Alan Tongue, *A Picture of Percy French* (Antrim: Greystone Books, 1990), p.12.
- 29 *The Jarvey*, 4th October 1890; 11th October 1890; *Evening Telegraph*, 7th May 1892.
- 25 de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.50.
- 27 Healy, *Percy French*, pp. 22–22, 164.
- 28 A copy of the letter announcing his redundancy, dated 28th July 1888, is reproduced in Alan Tongue, *A Picture of Percy French* (Antrim: Greystone Books, 1990), p.12.

'negro melodies' at Punchestown races on one occasion.¹⁴ French considered emigrating to Manitoba, but instead in 1883 took up a post with the Board of Works, working as an inspector of loans to farmers in Co. Cavan: this job chiefly entailed inspecting sites relating to improvements to agricultural properties.¹⁵ His work as a self-styled 'inspector of drains' continued until he was made redundant in September 1888.¹⁶

French was an active participant in the social life of Cavan's Church of Ireland community, taking part in various fund-raising concerts to help paint and restore Belturbet church and to restore and replace its organ;¹⁷ to repair the organ in Cavan's Church of Ireland building and to raise money for the parish sustentation fund;¹⁸ and to liquidate the debt of Cavan Protestant Hall.¹⁹ French, a lifelong teetotaler, also entertained members of the Killoughter branch of the Church of Ireland Temperance Society at a soirée in the local schoolhouse in March 1884.²⁰ Much of his time in Cavan was spent in playing tennis at country houses during the summers (including winning several prizes at the county tournaments). French combined his engineering skills with his love of tennis in the laying of tennis courts at the rear of the Protestant Hall in Cavan, for which he had many tons of sand transported from Bundoran.²¹ In the winters he engaged in tobogganing, fencing and playing hockey; according to his solicitor friend, William Henry Halpin of Ford Lodge (1862–1937), he was 'good at them all'.²² He also began a lifetime passion for painting landscapes, and one year after his appointment to Cavan he exhibited watercolours in Dublin.²³ His fondness for musical entertainments also continued, particularly as evidenced by his playing the banjo with the Kinnypottle Komicks, a Christy Minstrel group named after the river which flows through Cavan town.²⁴ (Illus. 3) Cycling was another of French's pursuits when he lived in Cavan. He cycled partly for economic reasons, as his riding a bicycle when visiting farms as part of his job meant that the thrifty French was able to save the nine pence mileage allowance which the Board of Works granted to its officials.²⁵ French and his friend, John William Weekes, a member of the Kinnypottle Komicks and fellow Board of Works employee, found that they could visit more farms when riding bicycles than if they travelled by car, thereby freeing up more time for playing tennis.²⁶ French's halcyon days

in Cavan inspired some of his finest paintings, as well as two of his best-known songs: *Phil the Fluther's Ball*, published in 1889 'although it had probably been sung at many a party and concert before that', and the nostalgic *Come Back, Paddy Reilly, to Ballyjamesduff*, written in 1912.²⁷

The Jarvey years

After he lost his job with the Board of Works, due to a marked decrease in the number of loans applied for by farmers in Cavan,²⁸ French went to Dublin to visit Richard James Mecredy (1861–1924), editor of the *Irish Cyclist*, (Illus. 4) to which newspaper French had previously contributed some humorous prose and verse. He asked for a job on the *Irish Cyclist* and was surprised to instead be offered the position of editor of a new comic newspaper which Mecredy was about to launch, *The Jarvey*. French edited this newspaper from January 1889 to December 1890. (Illus. 5) *The Jarvey* occasionally contained some sharp social commentary, but its contents mostly consisted of comic observations on the social world of fashionable Irish society, a kind of Irish version of *Punch*. French produced a prodigious and varied amount of material for *The Jarvey*: limericks; comical short stories, including parodies of the works of popular novelists such as Walter Scott, Rudyard Kipling, Victor Hugo, Charles Dickens, and H. Rider Haggard; humorous verse and songs, including material that parodied the work of well-known authors such as Thomas Moore, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Alfred Tennyson, and Edgar Allen Poe; and whimsical observations on Irish life. Many of the cartoons in the newspaper were drawn by French's friend Richard Caulfeild Orpen (1863–1938), (Illus. 6) with whom he had already collaborated on several comical treatments of tennis in Dublin, including *Fitzwilliam Square, a Lawn Tennis Lay* (1885), *The Tennis Worshippers*, a lawn tennis special supplement of the *Irish Cyclist and Athlete* (1887) and *Racquetry Rhymes* (1888). Despite the best efforts of French and his small team of permanent staff and occasional contributors, *The Jarvey* was not a financial success. French later claimed that the newspaper failed for a number of reasons, including its title, which French felt was 'not a good one'. Indeed, in October 1890 he floated the idea of changing the title, but his was rejected by the readers and the publication continued as *The Jarvey*. French also felt that Dublin shopkeepers were hostile to a local comic newspaper and much



Illus 4. R.J. Mecredy, *Health's Highway* (Dublin: Mecredy, Percy & Co., 1909), frontispiece.

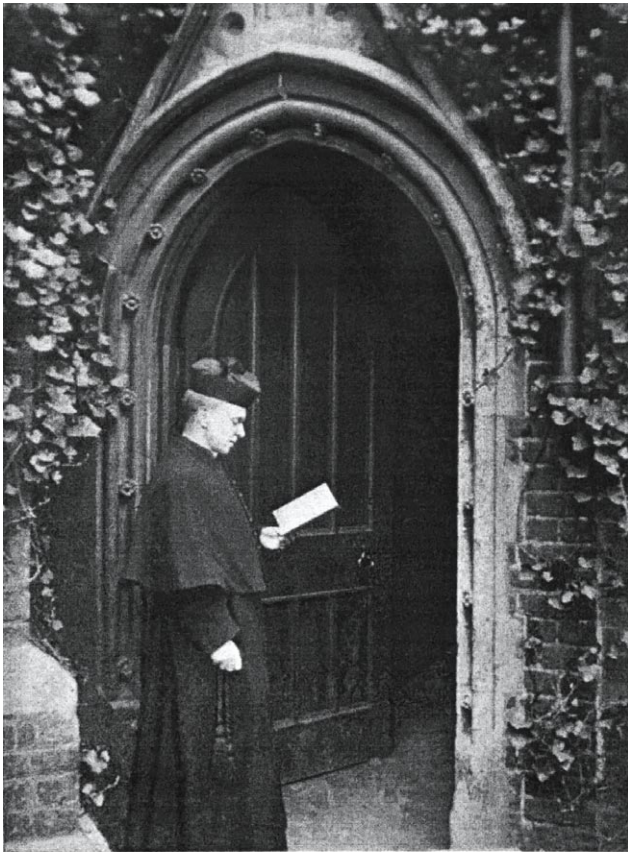


Illus 5. Percy French at the editor's desk of *The Jarvey*. Detail from drawing by Ettie French. *The Jarvey*, 27th December 1890.



"Oh, Miss Mary, won't you put me out of my misery?"
 "All right; you stay here till I get a gun."

Illus 6. One of Richard Caulfeild Orpen's drawings in *The Jarvey*. *The Jarvey*, 18th October 1890.



Frontispiece.
W. A. H. Collisson

Illus 7. A photograph of Houston Collisson. Frontispiece of William Alexander Houston Collisson, *Dr Collisson in and on Ireland*, London: Robert Sutton, 1908.

Notes

- 29 *The Jarvey*, 4th October 1890; 11th October 1890; *Evening Telegraph*, 7th May 1892.
- 30 *Ulster Examiner*, 11th April 1871; *Cavan Weekly News*, 23rd February 1883; *Illustrated London News*, 3rd March 1883; *Irish Society*, 5 July 1890; *Banbridge Chronicle*, 3rd December 1932.
- 31 O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, pp.74–75.
- 32 Contemporary newspapers state that Ettie died of meningitis, but some modern sources say that septicaemia was the cause of her death: *Daily Express*, 1st July 1891; *Newry Telegraph*, 2nd July 1891; *Cavan Weekly News*, 17th July 1891; White and McCabe, 'French, (William) Percy', *Dictionary of Irish Biography*; Tongue, *Picture*, p.19; O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, p.81.
- 33 *Oxford Chronicle and Reading Gazette*, 1st January 1870; *Banbury Advertiser*, 1st February 1894; Alan Tongue, *The Love Letters of Percy French and More Besides ...* (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2015), p.142.
- 34 French, *Willie*, p.57; O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, p.95.
- 35 French, *Willie*, p.59.
- 36 *Folkestone Express*, 21st September 1912; de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.157; *Hastings and St Leonards Observer*, 7th February 1931; O'Neill, *Tones that are Tender*, pp.134–136.

preferred to offer London publications to their customers. Another obstacle was the fact that the best Irish comic talent had been 'absorbed' by London and New York publishers.²⁹

Percy French in the 1890s

On 28th June 1890, French married Ethel ('Ettie') Kathleen Armytage-Moore (1871–1891) of Arnmore House, Drumelis, Co. Cavan, the second daughter of William Armytage-Moore (1805–1883), manager of the Annesley estate at Castlewellan, Co. Down, and his wife Mary Elizabeth Lockwood (née Metcalfe) (1845–1932).³⁰ Ettie, a talented artist, contributed many drawings to *The Jarvey* and also conducted its society column, 'Chit Chatters', in 1890. For a brief period the newlyweds ran a shop, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, at 31 Little Denmark Street in Dublin, whose main output was engravings, sketches and paintings in oils and in watercolours produced by Percy.³¹ Ettie died in Dublin of meningitis or septicaemia on 29th June 1891, after giving birth to a daughter, Ethel Florence Cecilia, on 5th June; her baby died on 5th July 1891 at Cloonyquin.³² A grief-stricken French threw himself into a hectic work schedule, contributing comic sketches, poetry and drawings on a regular basis to the *Irish Cyclist*, of which newspaper's staff he became a permanent member. Earlier in 1891 French had collaborated with the musician, and future clergyman in the Church of England, Dr William Alexander Houston Collisson (1865–1920) (Illus. 7) in producing *The Knight of the Road*, a comic opera which was well received by Dublin audiences. Their friendship and working partnership continued in the years after Ettie's death, resulting in the production of several comic plays which they performed in Dublin and Irish provincial towns. French achieved national fame in Ireland in the 1890s with his versatile entertainments in countless Irish towns and villages, performances that included humorous songs, poems and anecdotes, slide shows, and quickly executed 'smoke drawings' on china plates. He also fell in love again, marrying for the second time on 24th January 1894. His bride was Helen ('Lennie') May Cunningham Sheldon (1868–1956), the daughter of Jonathan Sheldon (1841–1919) a mill-owner, of Burmington House, Shipston-on-Stour, Warwickshire and his wife, Mary Clementina Sheldon (née Tribe)

(1847– 1869).³³ Percy and Lennie had three daughters: Ethel ('Ettie') Gwendoline (1894–1993), Mollie Helen (1896– 1956), and Joan Phyllis (1903– 1996). In 1899 French gave his first solo performance in London, to considerable critical acclaim. Two of the leading concert agencies, Ashton's and the Lecture Agency, told him that if he would transfer to London they could provide him with enough work to make the move worthwhile, and his agent, Gerald Christie, persuaded him to make a career move to the British capital. It was on the agencies' advice that French dropped his first name altogether for stage purposes: known as 'Willie' to his friends and family, he now became the stage performer Percy French. In January 1900 he and his family took up permanent residence in London.³⁴

The London years before the Great War

French enjoyed further artistic success after emigrating to England, helped considerably by the fact that gave a 'Recital' before King Edward VII and the Prince and Princess of Wales in January 1902.³⁵ In Britain, a hectic round of performances in such venues as society drawing rooms, concert halls, working men's institutes and village halls occupied his working hours outside of the summer months; he preferred touring in Ireland each summer, especially in various seaside towns in August of each year. French's tours also took him further afield than Britain or Ireland. In 1910 he and Houston Collisson were engaged by the Irish-American impresario J.C. Duff (1857– 1928) to undertake a tour to Canada, the USA, Bermuda, the West Indies, and Panama, (Illus. 8) while early in 1914 French went on a six-week tour in Switzerland to raise funds for the Church of England Waifs and Strays Society, a charity for which Houston Collisson and Thomas Brandreth Gibbs of Folkestone (1842–1931), the tour organiser, worked assiduously.³⁶

The War Years

French's tour of Irish seaside towns in August 1914 coincided with the outbreak of the First World War. During the war he continued with a demanding schedule of performances, many of which were fund-raisers for the British Red Cross or military hospitals. (Illus. 9) He also frequently helped to raise troops' morale by his performances in the United Kingdom and Belgium



Illus 8. Percy French and Houston Collisson departing on their transatlantic tour in 1910. Emily de Burgh Daly (ed), *Chronicles and Poems of Percy French*, Dublin: Talbot Press, 1922, facing p.104.

— A GRAND —

VARIETY - ENTERTAINMENT

(Organised by Mrs. E. U. Grimshaw),
in aid of the
**Soldiers Comforts Fund and Wicklow
Hospital Supplies Depot,**
WILL BE HELD IN THE
ASSEMBLY HALL, WICKLOW,
ON
Monday, February 5th, 1917.

The following, amongst others, have kindly
promised to assist in the Programme:—Mr.
Percy French, Miss Helen Weldon, Miss Silvia
Hamilton, Miss Gladys Haskins, Mrs. Frank
Kennedy.

Doors open at 7.30 ; commence at 8 p.m.

Admission — Front Seats (numbered and
reserved), 2s. ; Second Seats, 1s ; Back Seats,
6d (limited).

Illus 9. An advertisement for a wartime entertainment featuring Percy French. *The Wicklow News-Letter*, 27th January 1917.



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and France. Two of the anti-German songs that French wrote during the war—*Am Tag (To the Day)* and *All By the Baltic Sea*—were unusual in their harsh comments on contemporary individuals or events. (Illus. 10) French's health deteriorated after he tried to board a train at Blackrock in 1916 and was dragged along the platform.³⁷ Although most Irish people eventually turned against the seemingly interminable war, French's support for various war-related charities persisted until the conflict's end. This was not surprising, given his family's participation in the war effort: his youngest sibling, Christopher St George French (1872–1940), served as a lieutenant in the 7th (City of London) Battalion of the London Regiment and as a captain in the Royal Irish Fusiliers during the war;³⁸ Ettie, his eldest daughter, served as a driver in the Women's Legion in St Albans;³⁹ and his beloved nephew, Lieutenant Arthur Charles de Burgh Daly, was killed on 9th September 1916 at Ginchy while serving in the Royal Dublin Fusiliers. He was only 19 years old at the time of his death.⁴⁰ (Illus. 11). French also found time to give his support to causes that had nothing to do with the war, such as *The Grand Concert* he put on in Dublin's Molesworth Hall in February 1918 to aid the Church League for Women's Suffrage.⁴¹

After the War

French's support for war charities did not end when the conflict finished, as he staged several performances to aid wounded British servicemen in 1919. The final role that he played was that of the elderly schoolmaster, Matthew Kavanagh, in the comedy *The Letter from the Front*, in Glasgow's Palette Club on 16th January 1920. Just over a week later, on 24th January 1920, French died, broken down in health and suffering from pneumonia, in the Formby home of his cousin, Canon John ('Johnny') Brooke Richardson (1857–1928).⁴² He was buried in St Luke's Church of England cemetery in Formby in Lancashire (now Merseyside), England.

Brian Griffin April 2025



Illus 10. An advertisement for Percy French's *Am Tag*, marking the end of the First World War. *Evening Herald*, 13th November 1918.



Illus 11. Percy French's nephew, Lieutenant Arthur Charles de Burgh Daly, Royal Dublin Fusiliers. *Irish Independent*, 22nd September 1916.

Notes

- 37 de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, pp.185–186.
- 38 *London Gazette*, 14th April 1915.
- 39 French, *Willie*, pp.98–99.
- 40 *Irish Independent*, 22nd September 1916; de Burgh Daly, *Chronicles*, p.54. His entry on the Commonwealth and War Graves Commission website states that he was a member of the 5th Battalion and was attached to the 9th Battalion when he died.
- 41 *Church League for Women's Suffrage*, 1st February 1918.
- 42 He remained in good spirits until the end. Ettie French records that Canon Richardson's elderly mother, Percy's favourite aunt, was also confined to bed in her son's house and that she and Percy 'exchanged comic notes with each other from their respective bedsides': French, *Willie*, p.83.

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WEDNESDAY



- 9:40 am **Cllr Liam Callaghan** Cathaoirleach of Roscommon Co Council
Introduction and Welcome
- 10:00 am **Dr Brian Griffin**
Percy French and the Great War
- 10:30 am Q & A
- 10:45 am **Dr Caitriona Clear**
Percy French as philosopher and chronicler of everyday life
- 11:15 am Q & A
- 11:30 am Tea/Coffee
- 12:00 pm **Dr Patrick Maume**
Political Satire Verse/Performance in the late C19th/early C20th
- 12:30 pm Q & A
- 12:45 pm **Dr Maeve O’Riordan**
**Ideas of self and the ‘surplus woman’:
single women of the Big House**
- 1:15 pm Q&A
- 1:30 pm Lunch
- 3:00 pm First Keynote Address
Eddie Hobbs
Freedom or Total Control?
- 4:00 pm Gardens Open

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The HHI aims to promote and foster the immediate and long-term future of Irish privately owned historic properties. For further information on our members and activities please see www.ihh.ie





JULY 24TH

THURSDAY

- 10:00 am **Dr Eve Watson**
The extraordinary realm of meaning and affirmation that comes from direct human interaction
- 10:30 am Q&A
- 10:45 am **Laoise de Brún BL**
Ireland, a century on, our culture in crisis; have we segued from one theocracy to the next, one master to another, on the journey to find our authentic selves?
- 11:15 am Q&A
- 11:30 am Tea/Coffee
- 12:00 pm **Michael Hardiman**
Authenticity: the antidote to postmodern nihilism
- 12:30 pm Q&A
- 12:45 pm **Una B Agnew**
Authenticity: learning not to care
- 1:15 pm Q&A
- 1:30 pm Lunch
- 3:00 pm **Dr Stephen J Costello**
Meaning and the drama of authentic human existence
- 3:30 pm Q&A
- 3:45 pm Afternoon Recital
Malachy Tuohy
Percy French in view
- 4:30 pm Gardens Open



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JULY 25TH

FRIDAY



Anthony Waldron
1961–2025

- The Anthony Waldron Memorial Lecture
- 10:00 am **Michael Harding**
My Dark Rosaleen—Myth and authenticity in Irish history
- 10:30 am Q & A
- 10:45 am **Stephen Collins**
Why the Centre has held in Ireland
- 11:15 am Q & A
- 11:30 am Tea/Coffee
- Second Keynote Address
- 12:00 pm **Senator Dr Tom Clonan**
Existential action in the pursuit of authenticity
- 12:30 pm Q & A
- 12:45 pm **John McGuirk**
Ireland, immigration and cultural changes and challenges
- 1:15 pm Q & A
- 1:30 pm Lunch
- 3:00 pm Afternoon Recital
Col Ceathair
The Authentic Oscar Wilde and Percy French
- 4:00 pm Gardens Open

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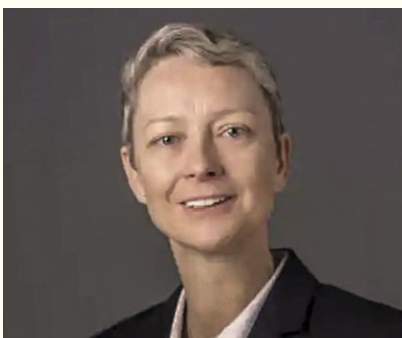
EDDIE HOBBS

Eddie is probably best known for co-writing and presenting RTE's 2005 blockbuster *Rip Off Republic*, a hard-hitting polemic that closely examined how Ireland is run. He also presented RTE's award-winning personal finance series *Show Me The Money*, entertainment programme *30 Things to do with your SSIA*, *The Consumer Show*, and *My Civil War*. He has written four best-selling books on personal finance and investments and edited *Own Our Oil*, an anthology of articles from 15 contributors. His latest book is *Breaking the Silence on the Return of Totalitarianism*. He is a regular contributor to national debates on radio and TV programmes on matters relating to economic management, competition, natural resources, and personal finance. He is patron of The Jack & Jill's Children Foundation. He has been awarded honorary membership of both Trinity Philosophical Society and UCD Law Society for his contributions to public life. He is married with four children and lives in County Kildare.



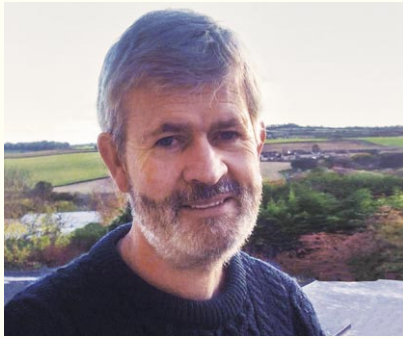
SENATOR DR TOM CLONAN

Tom is an Independent Senator elected to Seanad Éireann, Dublin University, Trinity College Dublin Panel. He is an academic, writer, and journalist, and as an independent security analyst he provides defence and intelligence analysis for international broadcasters. As an Army Officer (Captain) Tom has direct experience of armed conflict in Ireland, the Middle East, and former Yugoslavia. One of Ireland's foremost whistleblowers, his PhD revealed shocking levels of sexual violence within Ireland's armed forces. He provides consultancy on gender-based discrimination and violence. Tom is one of Ireland's leading public advocates for citizens with disabilities. He is a parent of four children and is carer for his son Eoghan who suffers from a rare neuromuscular disease. He has been Chairman and Board Member of Dogs for the Disabled (Ireland). He is Chairman of the Board of dance theatre company, Junk Ensemble. He is author of two books, *Blood, Sweat and Tears* (Liberties Press, 2012) and *Whistleblower, Soldier, Spy* (Liberties Press, 2013).



DR EVE WATSON

Eve is involved in psychoanalytic practice, training, education, and research. She is a co-director of a busy Dublin city centre psychotherapy practice, and has published over 40 essays on psychoanalysis, sexuality, film, culture, and literature. Her co-edited books are: *Freud's Principal Case Studies Revisited: Freudian-Lacanian Psychoanalysts Reconsider the Legacy* (2025, Routledge); *Critical Essays on the Drive: Lacanian Theory and Practice* (2024, Routledge); *Clinical Encounters in Sexuality* (2017, Punctum); and there is a collection on James Joyce's writing forthcoming in 2026. In 2022 was the Erik Erikson Scholar-in-Residence at the Austen Riggs Centre in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, and is currently the academic director of the Freud Lacan institute (FLI) in Dublin. She will be the Burns Scholar in Irish Studies at Boston College in late 2025.



DR BRIAN GRIFFIN

Brian is an adjunct associate professor in the history department at Maynooth University, specialising in the social history of nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland. He has a particular interest in the history of the Royal Irish Constabulary and Dublin Metropolitan Police, crime, and sport (especially cycling). Recent publications include articles on Percy French's war-related entertainments during the Great War, the bicycle in the Irish Revolution, Jack B. Yeat's *Punch* cartoons during the Great War, and freak shows in 19th century Ireland. Work in progress includes articles on bicycle advertisements in the Second World War and street football in Ireland from the 1870s to the 1970s. His latest book is *Crime and the Criminal Classes in Ireland, 1870–1920*, (Cork University Press, 2024)



PROF. UNA B. AGNEW

Úna was born in Co Louth close to the Border. She is a St Louis Sister, Professor Emerita of Milltown Institute, Dublin, Spirituality Dept. In 2004 she was a founder member of AISGA, (All-Ireland Spiritual Guidance Association), and has, since 2006, been a member of Spiritual Directors in Europe. Her research interests include spirituality of the stages of life and the intersection between literature and spirituality. Her special emphasis has been on the work of the poet Patrick Kavanagh. Author of *The Mystical Imagination of Patrick Kavanagh* (Columba Press, 1998) and relaunched by Veritas, Dublin in 2019. Her *Love's Doorway to Life: An Alternative Biography of Patrick Kavanagh*, with her brother Art, was published as a triple CD in 2017 (Eist, Audio Productions, Dublin),



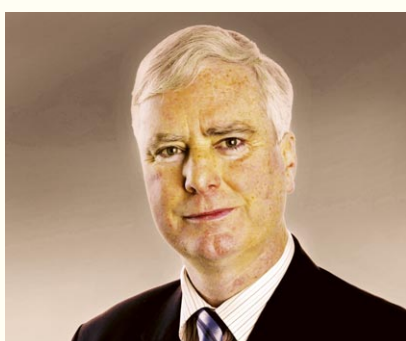
JOHN MCGUIRK

John is the Editor of Gript, Ireland's fastest growing media platform, which he co-founded in 2019. A writer, media commentator, and one-time activist with many years of experience, he is well-known for having worked on several high profile referendum campaigns in Ireland, most prominently the Lisbon referenda of 2008 and 2009, and the abortion referendum of 2018. He is a regular commentator on Irish broadcast media. He lives in County Tipperary with his wife, Orla, and their cocker spaniel, Izzy.



LAOISE de BRÚN

Laoise grew up on a farm in Co. Carlow. After studying law at TCD she worked in London making TV documentaries for Channel 4 and the BBC and has worked as a producer and reporter for ITV. For her MA thesis on the reporting of the Troubles she interviewed ex-combatants, journalists and politicians including the late Martin McGuinness. She was called to the Bar in 2022. She founded *The Countess* in 2019, an organisation that has gained prominence over its advocacy on the 2015 Gender Recognition Act. Her campaign 'These Words Belong To Us' stopped the government removing the word 'woman' from maternity legislation. She led a grassroots campaign that delivered the historic defeat of the Referendums on the family and Care. She campaigned successfully against the hate speech element of the hate crime bill and the indoctrination of children into gender ideology in the classroom.



STEPHEN COLLINS

Stephen is a political columnist with the *Irish Times* and was previously political editor of the newspaper for a decade. He was educated at Oatlands College, Stillorgan, and later at UCD where he graduated with an MA in Politics. He started as a journalist with the Irish Press group and was political correspondent of the *Sunday Press* and later the *Sunday Tribune* before moving to the *Irish Times*. He has written a number of books about Irish political history, including *The Power Game: Ireland Under Fianna Fail*, (2002); *Breaking the Mould: How the PDs changed Irish Politics* (2006); and *Saving the State: Fine Gael from Collins to Varadkar* (2020). His most recent book is *Ireland's Call: How Brexit Got Done*.



DR STEPHEN J COSTELLO

Stephen is a prominent, philosopher and psychoanalyst. He is the founder of the Viktor Frankl Institute of Ireland and a certified Enneagram coach. He is the author of 16 books. He was educated in St Gerard's School, Castleknock College, University College Dublin (where he read philosophy and Spanish language and literature) and Trinity College Dublin (where he trained in psychoanalysis). He has addressed two parliaments: the Stormont Assembly on human rights and the European Parliament in Brussels on meaning and mental health. Dr Costello has over 30 years' experience, giving lectures, talks, seminars, and workshops to individuals and companies in Ireland, the UK, the USA, Austria, and Switzerland (at the C.G. Jung Institute). His recent publications include *Dynamics of Discernment* (Pickwick Publications, 2022), *Ignatian Mysticism* (James Clarke, 2024), and *The Alchemy of Addiction* (Routledge, 2024).



DR MICHAEL HARDIMAN

Michael holds a PhD in philosophy from NUI Galway. A native of Athlone where he was born into a business. He attended University in Galway, and postgraduate training in Counselling Psychology at University College Cork. He has written several books in the genre of psychology/personal development and was elected Fellow of the Irish Institute of Training and Development. For several years he served on the national executive of the Irish Association of Addiction Counselling. In addition to his work in the field of Psychology he has more recently engaged with formal training in political philosophy receiving both Master's and Doctorate degrees in this field. His recent book *The Path to Mass Evil: Hannah Arendt and Totalitarianism Today*, (2023, Routledge, New York) is currently available within the academy worldwide and his new book, *Misled? How Ideology Captures Your Mind*, is now available to general readership. Michael lives in Galway where he works as a psychologist and educator with a private counselling practice. He also presents seminars and workshops nationwide to family centres and to adult education services.



DR CAITRÍONA CLEAR

Catríona lectured in History at Galway University for 35 years. She has written books on nuns, social history, women's magazines, and women's household work. She has just completed a concise history of Ireland for Cambridge University Press, and is now embarking on a biography of Alice Curtayne. She has known and loved Percy French songs all her life.



DR PATRICK MAUME

Patrick is a long-standing member of the Dictionary of Irish Biography editorial team (joined 2003), and has contributed more than 500 entries, including many on significant political, literary, and religious figures of the 20th century, with particular reference to Northern Ireland. He is a graduate of University College Cork (BA in English and history; MA in history) and Queen's University Belfast (PhD in politics, postgraduate Cert in Higher Education Teaching). He has taught history and politics at University College Dublin and at QUB (where he held three research fellowships (1993–4; 1995–8; and 1998–2001)). Has published numerous articles and book chapters on 19th and 20th-century Irish history. He has written two biographies: one of Daniel Corkery, the Irish politician, writer and academic, the other of D. P. Moran, (the Irish journalist, activist and cultural-political theorist).



DR MAEVE O'RIORDAN

Maeve is lecturer in Women's and Cultural History at University College Cork. She is author of *Women of the Irish Country House, 1860–1914* (Liverpool University Press, 2018) and several other pieces on elite women in Ireland. She is currently exploring the experiences of single women. Maeve previously worked at the Higher Education Authority and the Irish Research Council. She won Irish Research Council funding for her PhD (UCC, 2014) and for her postdoctoral fellowship at the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates at Maynooth University. She is an elected fellow of the Royal Historical Society.



MICHAEL HARDING

Michael was born 1953. He is the author of two novels, *Priest* and *The Trouble with Sarah Gullion*, and numerous theatre works including: *Strawboys*; *Una Pooka*; *Misogynist*; *Hubert Murray's Widow*; *Sour Grapes*; and *Amazing Grace* (all with the Abbey Theatre), and over ten plays for other companies. He has been awarded the Stewart Parker Award for Theatre, The Bank of Ireland RTÉ award for excellence in the arts and The Hennessy Award for short stories. He has been Writer in Association with The National Theatre in 1993 and he was short-listed for the Irish Times/Aer Lingus Literature Award in 1989. In 2000 he was Writer Fellow at Trinity College Dublin and he was nominated for the Jane Snow Award for Theatre writing in 2003. He has also explored connections between theatre and performance art. He was nominated for Best Male Performer, at the Dublin Theatre Fringe Festival, 2002, and he was the overall winner of Best Male Performer Award at Dublin Fringe Festival 2003. His eight books of memoirs, chronicles of ordinary life in Ireland, which have been number one best sellers, and recipients of numerous awards. He continues to perform in theatre, film, and one-man shows based on his writings. His most recent memoir, *I loved him from the day he died*, was published in 2024. He is a member of Aosdána.



PAUL HEALY

Paul grew up in Rooskey, Co. Roscommon. Having previously worked for the *Longford Leader* and *Longford News*, he spent 16 years as Editor of the *Roscommon Champion*, before launching the *Roscommon People* with his wife, Fiona, in 2007, and is its Managing Editor. For many years he edited the *Roscommon Association Yearbook*. He is author of five books to date, on subjects ranging from sport to politics to social history. He is an occasional contributor to *Phoenix* magazine.



MALACHY TUOHY

Malachy is the lead singer and songwriter with acclaimed Irish band *The Riptide Movement*, known for their dynamic live shows and heartfelt songwriting. With a career spanning over two decades, the band has released a string of critically acclaimed albums, toured internationally, and continue as a driving force in Irish music. Amidst a packed schedule, and fresh from performing at Glastonbury, Malachy will play a rare solo performance at the Percy French Festival. This intimate set offers a stripped-back glimpse into his soulful songwriting. Blending folk, roots, and raw emotion, Malachy's solo work reveals a quieter, more personal side of one of Ireland's most compelling voices.



CIARA LAWLESS

Ciara, who hails from Roscommon, is a mature song-writer with a powerful voice. She delves into themes of reconnecting with the inner-child, healing, and self-discovery. With a successful run on the festival circuit she has honed her stage presence (with hints of Kate Bush and Florence and The Machine). Ciara began her music journey with lessons at a young age and later trained at the Academy of Music in Tullamore and competed in national and international competitions. Following three singles her debut album, *Paint My Soul*, was released on Human Angel Records April in 2024.



COL CEATHAIR

Maria Henderson, 16, plays trombone, harpsichord, and piano. She has won first prizes at the Feis Ceoil, Arklow Music Festival, and Feis Maitiú and is the 2025 *Foróige's Got Talent* national champion. She is a member of the Dublin Youth Orchestra, Blanchardstown Brass Band, and TU Dublin Concert Band, and enjoys playing a wide repertoire that includes classical, popular, and jazz music. **Cecilia Henderson**, 14, is a singer, organist, and harpist. With the Piccolo Lasso choir, she performed at the National Concert Hall, Dublin, Westminster Cathedral, London, and San Gaetano, Florence. She has won first prizes at the Leinster Fleadh, Feis Ceoil and Arklow Music Festival. She also studies speech and drama and voices Kiva on the popular animated series *Kiva Can Do* on RTEjr and Nick Jr. **Isabella Henderson**, 10, loves to sing many types of music, including traditional Irish, popular and classical. She won the U12 Liltin competition at Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann in 2024 and has won prizes for singing and poetry recitation at Feis Maitiú, Feis Ceoil, and the Kilcoole Music Festival. She also plays bodhrán and drums. **Kevin Finnerty Jnr**, 14, is currently attending St Vincent's Castleknock College as a second-year student. He is a member of St Vincent's Castleknock College choir and in 2021, won Feis Ceoil Gold Medal for singing. Kevin has won numerous first prizes for singing and poetry recitation at Kilcoole Music Festival and Feis Maitiu. He is a former member of the Piccolo Lasso choir, and has performed at the National Concert Hall. Kevin plays guitar, harp, piano, and drums.

Oh, Mary, this London's
a wonderful sight. With
people here working by
day and by night. They
don't see pictures,
nor hearly see
what's
There's
gangs
of them
digging
for gold in
the streets.
We find when
we find them
that a gold
mine will be
found in a
hole in the
ground. But for
all that I found
no gold in
the ground.
There's
a
gold mine
in the
ground.



There's beautiful girls here,
oh, never you mind.
With beautiful shapes
nature never
designed.
And lovely
complex
ions
all
near
and
near. But
O'laughlin
remembered with
regard in the corner
That if in the corner
you find a
gold mine
in the
ground.
The gold mine
all over every
your life. So I'll wait
for the gold mine that's
in the
ground.

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Tribute to councillor

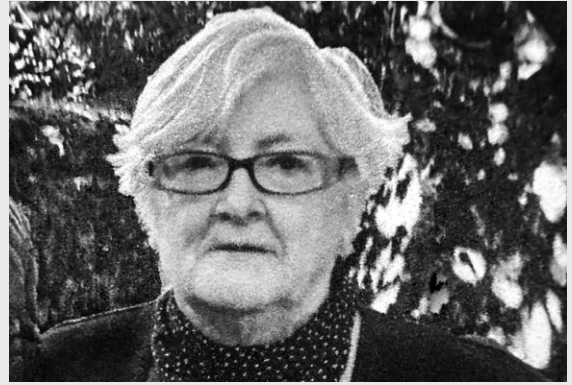
Anthony Waldron

The death of Councillor Anthony Waldron, 9th February 2025, festival committee member, is a very great loss to his siblings, friends, GAA community and to larger society as a whole. Tony was always very pleasant, agreeable, mannerly and a great communicator. He never imposed himself upon you, though he was steadfast and ardent in his tireless efforts for togetherness and unity in community and parish.

Tony represented the local, he knew the importance of locality, the importance of amenities in that locality to hold it together and he worked hard to bring the local(s) and the issues therein to the forefront of all his efforts. If the retaining, the reviving or the founding of something meant unity for that particular local community or part thereof, then Tony was at the helm. And it's very, very sad now to lose that tireless gospel in our midst today. Especially as these values, he espoused—the other, family, community—are being subsumed today for a focus on the self-first, resulting in isolation and its devastating loneliness.

Tony moved quietly, almost apologetically, never with exultation and the sudden death of a dear friend confronts us with questions such as should we have kept in touch more often, was it our busyness, or lack of contact that leaves us feeling so bereft and lost after their untimely passing.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam.



Tribute to a Lifelong supporter

Sile O Connor

Mary Cecilia Dominica O'Connor, Sile, as she was commonly known, was a great supporter and enthusiast of the Percy French Festival since its inception. Her keen intellect and insights into issues both local and national often provided a formidable thrust to the direction and theme the festival would take in a given year.

She had a lifelong passion and love for the customs and learning of rural Ireland and as a result dedicated most of her life to preserving these treasures. She also had a great appreciation for art, particularly, but not exclusively, for Irish art.

She was devoutly religious and would be correctly described as holy. She had a great fondness for St Brigid and for Knock as peculiarly Irish traditions. She particularly enjoyed the outdoor sites like shrines and wells, and faith was something that was very real in her.

Sile is sadly missed, especially her lateral thinking, big heart, good humour, and sense of devilment all the time.



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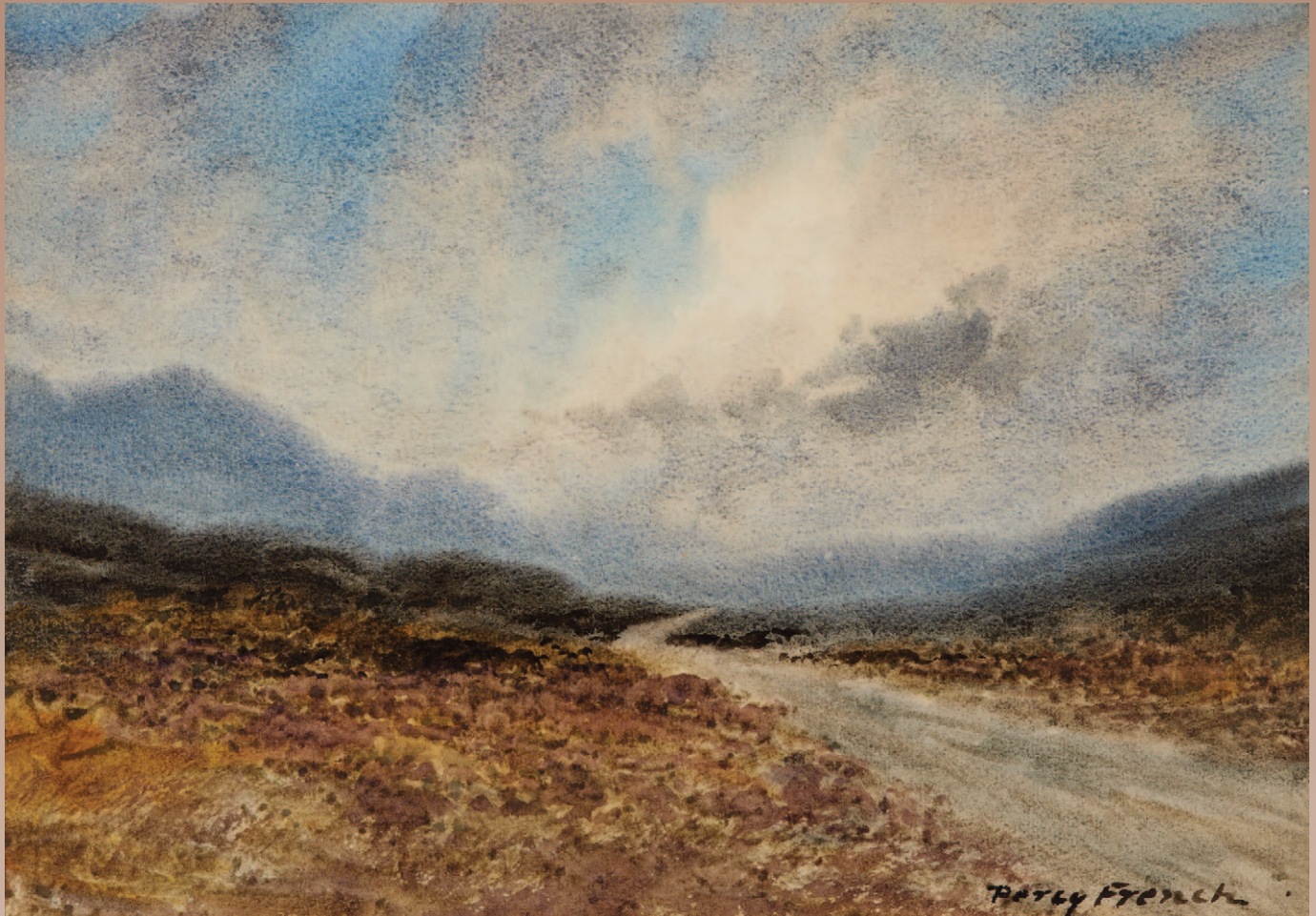


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