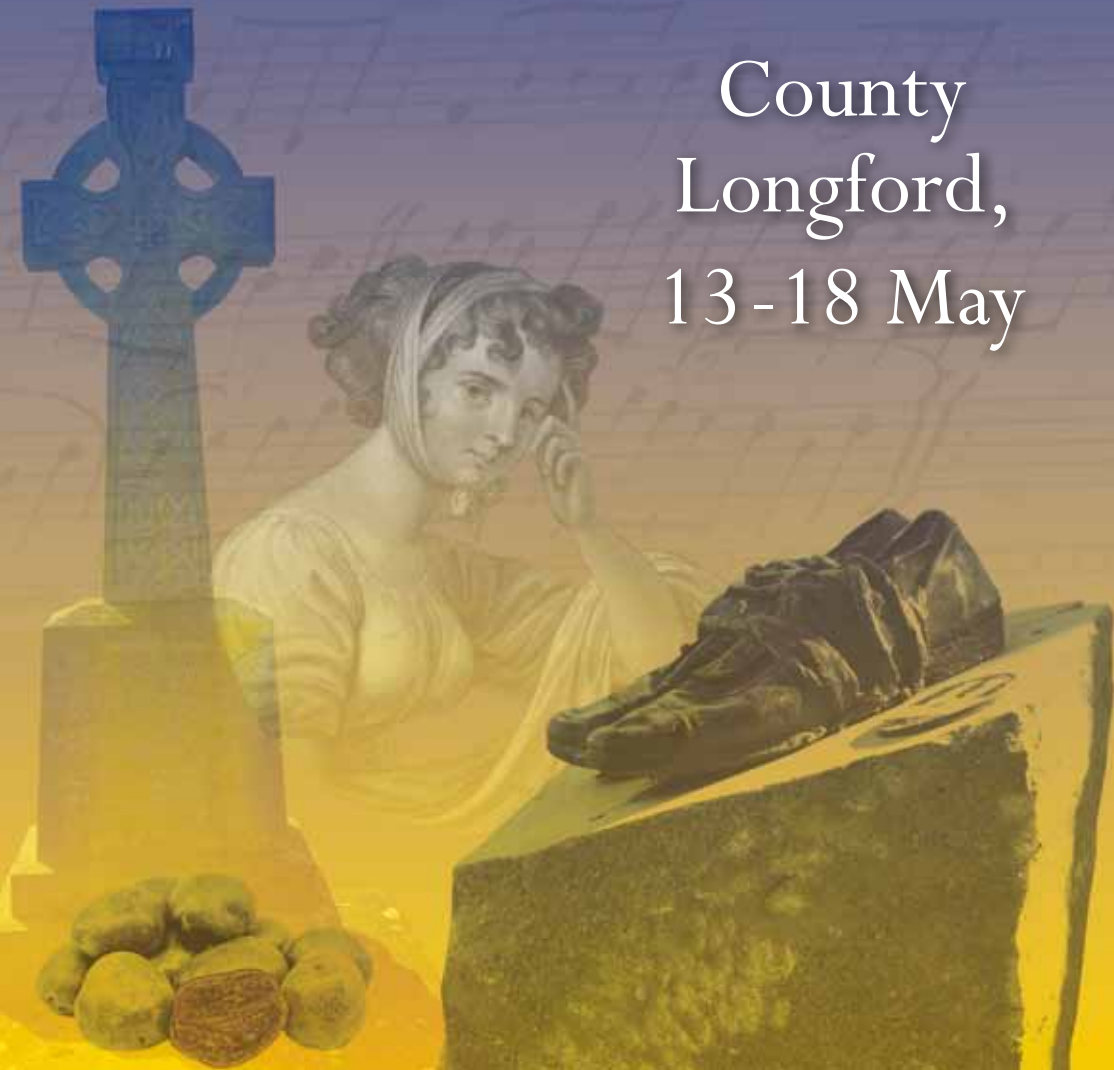


# National Famine Commemoration 2024

## *Programme of Events*

County  
Longford,  
13-18 May





# Foreword

Is mór an onóir do Chomhairle Chontae an Longfoirt Cuimhneachán Náisiúnta an Ghorta Mhóir a eascú i Meathas Troim Dé Domhnaigh an 19 Bealtaine. Tugann an ócáid deis dúinn machnamh a dhéanamh ar cheann de na heachtraí is uafasaí dár stair go háitiúil agus go náisiúnta. Díreofar ar roinnt gnéithe áitiúla den Ghorta Mór sa chlár imeachtaí seo.

Longford County Council is delighted to facilitate the National Famine Commemoration in Edgeworthstown on Sunday, 19 May. We thank the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media for approving our application to hold the commemoration in Longford. The location is very fitting, due to Maria Edgeworth's extraordinary work in relieving suffering in her home area during the Famine. What makes her efforts all the more poignant is that she was then nearing the end of her life. Maria was one of several brilliant members of the Edgeworth family who left their mark in disciplines including engineering, science, education and economics. Edgeworthstown and Longford can be very proud of them.

The programme of events that leads up to the state commemoration is county-wide and varied. It will enable people to explore how the Great Famine affected Longford. The Famine was a national catastrophe which profoundly changed Irish society. Between 1841 and 1851, the population of County Longford fell by 29%. Such a dramatic decrease was due to a combination of death and emigration, and we can only imagine the sense of devastation felt by those who were left behind.

We thank all who are involved in delivering this programme and we hope that it will be informative and enjoyable for all participants and attendees. We are very grateful to the community in Edgeworthstown who are working with us to ensure that the national ceremony is a success.

*Colm Murray*  
Cathaoirleach,  
Longford County Council

*Paddy Mahon*  
Chief Executive,  
Longford County Council

**MONDAY, 13 MAY:**  
**The Yard Hub, Abbeyshrule, 7.30pm**

## **TALK: THE HERITAGE POTATO AND THE LOSS OF OLD VARIETIES**

■ **MARIA FLYNN**



The potato is a nutritious food that is a staple in many parts of the world. It has been part of the Irish diet for centuries. While the date and exact circumstances of its arrival are unclear, it probably came here in the late 16th century. The most widely used variety before and during the famine was the Lumper.

Maria Flynn and her husband David run Ballymakenny Farm, near Drogheda, Co. Louth. They produce speciality potatoes including Pink Fir Apple, Red Emily and Violetta. Pink Fir Apple potatoes date back to the famine, while Violetta developed from a parent variety that itself goes back to that period. Maria's talk will show that there are many varieties and colours of a vegetable that we all take for granted!



**TUESDAY, 14 MAY:**  
Edgeworthstown Community Library, 7.30pm

## LECTURE: MARIA EDGEWORTH'S SOCIAL CONSCIENCE: TEMPERANCE AND FAMINE RELIEF

■ **DR LUCY COGAN**

Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849), novelist and educationalist, spent much of the end of her life working hard to alleviate distress in the Edgeworthstown area. She wrote several appeals for funding, including to contacts in the USA and to the Society of Friends (the Quakers), which ran a major relief programme in Ireland. Through her efforts, she raised significant funds. In 1848, Maria wrote her last book, a novel for children entitled *Orlandino*, which was sold to raise money for famine relief.



*Maria Edgeworth as a young woman*  
(*The Edgeworth Papers, Longford County Library and Archives*)

Dr Lucy Cogan is an Assistant Professor in the School of Literature, Drama and Film in UCD. Her interests include drinking studies, medical humanities and Irish women's writing. She is the Principal Investigator of the Wellcome Trust funded career development project, 'Drinking Cultures: The Cultural Reception of Medical Developments Related to Alcohol in Ireland 1700-1900', which will run 2023-2028.

**WEDNESDAY, 15 MAY:**  
**The Ninety-Eight Hall, Ballinamuck, 7.30pm**

## LECTURE AND PERFORMANCE: THE FIDDLE TRADITION OF THOMAS ‘BLIND’ KIERNAN

■ **DR CONOR WARD**



*A page from the Kiernan Manuscript (Courtesy of Dr Conor Ward)*

Thomas ‘Blind’ Kiernan (c. 1807-87) was a fiddle master from Drumlish, Co. Longford. He was both a renowned performer and teacher in south Leitrim and Longford. He performed in taverns, at cross-roads dances and at ballroom dances held by local landlords. Arguably, Kiernan’s greatest legacy is a fiddle tradition he developed, which continues to flourish. Fr John Quinn PP, Gortletteragh, Co. Leitrim, has a collection of fiddle music of national importance, including an original manuscript used by Kiernan, dating from 1844-46.

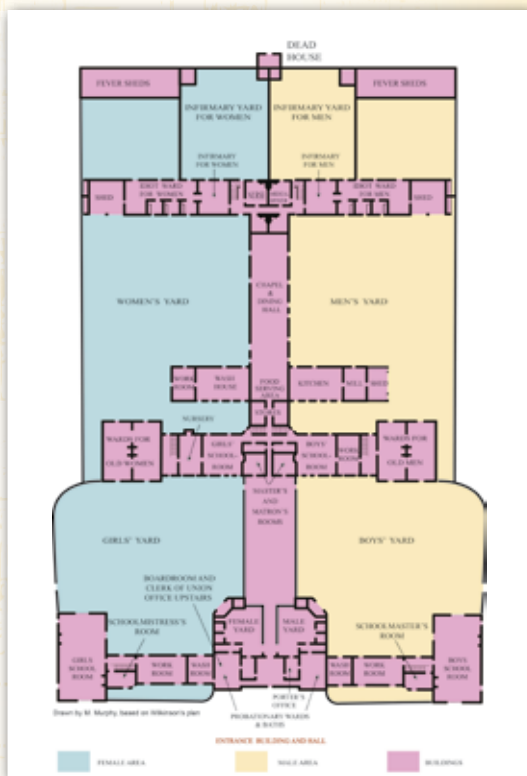
Dr Conor Ward is a native of Annaduff, Co. Leitrim. He is a chartered accountant and an accomplished fiddle player and teacher. In 2018, he completed a PhD in Dundalk Institute of Technology on the fiddle tradition initiated by Thomas Kiernan and developed by his pupils. Dr Ward is a founding member of Cumann Ceoil Chonmhaicne, which preserves and passes on Kiernan’s tradition.

**THURSDAY, 16 MAY:**  
**Granard Community Library, 8pm**

## LECTURE: REFLECTIONS ON GRANARD WORKHOUSE

### ■ SR MAEVE BRADY RSM

The workhouse in Granard, which stood close to Cnoc Mhuire Secondary School, was one of two in Longford during the famine. It opened in 1842, with capacity for 600 people, and the poor law union it served included bordering areas of Cavan and Westmeath. Like all workhouses, it was swamped during the famine: in February 1847, there were 747 inmates and even higher numbers in the following year. After the famine, the workhouse continued to house poor and infirm people. It closed in 1921 as part of the formal winding-down of the poor law system.



*General plan of a workhouse  
(Reproduced courtesy of the editors,  
Atlas of the Great Irish Famine)*

Sr Maeve Brady is a Sister of Mercy, living in her native Granard. After teaching in Cnoc Mhuire, she founded and ran the Rath Mhuire Community Resource Centre in the town, and its companion Dolmen Resource Centre in Aughnaccliffe. Sr Maeve was centrally involved in the County Longford Decade of Centenaries Programme.

**FRIDAY, 17 MAY:**  
**St Joseph's Care Centre, Longford, 7pm**

## **GUIDED VISIT: THE FAMINE CEMETERY (ASSEMBLE AT THE PADRAIC COLUM MEMORIAL)**

### **■ MARTIN MORRIS**

Longford Workhouse occupied the site of St Joseph's Care Centre. Built to accommodate 1000 people, it opened its doors in 1842. The workhouse served a poor law union that covered most of the county and parts of neighbouring Leitrim and Roscommon. During the famine, the board of guardians (which ran the workhouse), had to acquire additional premises, including at Market Square, on Great Water Street and in Mullagh, outside the town. The cemetery opened in 1844 and continued to be used after the workhouse became the County Home in 1921. Sadly, there are no records of those buried there.



*Cross in the Famine Cemetery,  
St Joseph's Care Centre, Longford*

Martin Morris is the County Archivist with Longford County Council and the PRO of County Longford Historical Society.



# CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES THROUGHOUT THE WEEK

## MONDAY, 13 MAY - TUESDAY, 14 MAY:

### Children's Storytelling

Award-winning storyteller, author and dramatist Órla McGovern will hold storytelling sessions for local schools in Ballymahon Library on Monday, 13 May and Longford Library on Tuesday, 14 May.

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## TUESDAY, 14 MAY - THURSDAY, 16 MAY:

### Potato Stencilling Workshops

Children are invited to join well-known local artist Anna Wiercioch to learn stencilling using potatoes at the following venues:

Granard Library (043-668 6164) on Tuesday, 14 May from 3:30 - 5pm

Longford Library (043-334 0727) on Wednesday, 15 May from 4:00 - 5:30pm

Lanesborough Library (043-332 1291) on Thursday, 16 May from 4 - 5:30pm

Booking essential.

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## Primary Schools' Exhibition on the Great Famine

### MONDAY, 13 MAY TO FRIDAY, 17 MAY:

#### Edgeworthstown Community Library

Children in St John's NS, Edgeworthstown, and Scoil Bhríde, Glen, worked with their teachers to produce projects about the Great Famine which will be on display throughout the week.

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## SATURDAY, 18 MAY:

### Art Workshop with Members of the Ukrainian Community

Edgeworthstown Library, 10.30am - 1.30pm

Learn some traditional Ukrainian arts and crafts in a session open to adults and children.

Booking essential.

# MARIA EDGEWORTH AND FAMINE RELIEF

There is an extraordinary story in the National Schools' Folklore Collection (1937-39) from Edgeworthstown Boys' NS, which describes some of Maria Edgeworth's work for famine relief. It came from Biddy Macken, Pound Street, Edgeworthstown, who had worked as a servant with the Edgeworth family during the famine. Richard Hyland NT recorded the story from her c. 1912.



'I was a 'made girl' the years of the 'Black Praties' and I helping in the parlour of the Big House - and glad I was able to be there during those awful times.

*Courtesy of the Maria Edgeworth  
Centre, Edgeworthstown*

There were far more people around then than now. More cows were kept and more of the land tilled then than now. The first year was not too bad but less potatoes were sown the second on account of the scarcity of seed. The land was wet and the harvest came bad and at Christmas when the farmers went to put 'rushes' of the top of the pits they found the whole pit a rotten heap. At this time much wheat was grown but most of them sold it as the price was very good.'

'I was often sitting under the tree at the 'gate' (this tree stood where the present 'Porter store' stands) when I have finished my work and I saw hundreds of poor starved people toddling feebly down the street and going 'up' the Dublin road.' Maria Edgeworth the great writer was then old and feeble but her heart went out to the poor and afflicted in the locality - all of whom were tenants on the Edgeworth estate.

'Many a day,' said Biddy, 'I went around with her from house to house in this town and far outside it carrying a big basket filled to the brim, with food. No house was passed by Maria without calling. Not only food was given but turf and warm clothing purchased in the town.'

She was badly able to walk then and had a short 'cruben' stick to keep her along. The 'favor' was in a lot of houses but Maria did not mind. When she visited the poor she was always cheerful and had a way of 'making them laugh.' She was short of breath often when we were going up that hill (Pound St) and often she had to sit down weary and tired in the 'parlour' when she got home.

Many a time she remarked to me, 'It is great to be young Biddy'.

I well remember one November evening to be called by Maria 'to attend a wandering creature' that fell in a 'weakness' in the 'clover' (name of a local field). We (meaning Maria and herself) went to the beggar man - a long thin worn fellow. We got him 'lodgings' at the backs of the gardens - (this place is still shown) and I was sent with them 'with things' from the 'big House'. He remained around for a few days and then went away and we heard no more of him.'

*Reproduced courtesy of the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin.*





# MONDAY, 20 - FRIDAY, 25 MAY:

## Walk along the National Famine Way

The National Famine Way commemorates the walk of 1,490 people from Strokestown, Co. Roscommon, to Dublin in 1847, mostly along the route of the Royal Canal. They were emigrating to Canada as part of a scheme organised by their landlord, Major Denis Mahon, who owned the Strokestown Estate. Bronze shoes mark important locations along the way and there are six in Longford.

This year's walk will be accompanied by bronze shoes that are destined for installation in Liverpool, which was on the route of the Strokestown party. The second day of the walk,

Tuesday, 21 May - will cover 30km from Clondra to Abbeyshrule. Walkers will set off at 9:30am and arrive at their destination by 5pm.



Enchanted Croí Theatre, Strokestown, in collaboration with the National Famine Way, will deliver a project called 'Pass The Shoes 24'. It will provide educational theatre workshops to primary schools based on the National Famine Way. The schools will also be invited to participate in a section of the walk along the National Famine Way. Schools participating in the County Longford leg include Scoil Mhuire, Clondra, Tashinny NS and St. Sinneach's NS, Colehill. This project, which is video documented, will move from county to county and content devised from the workshops will be used in making an art video. The walk will arrive in Dublin on 25 May and the video will be presented at an arrival ceremony at the Epic Emigration Museum.



# A Poor Scholar of the 'Forties

## ■ PADRAIC COLUM

My eyelids red and heavy are  
With bending o'er the smold'ring peat.

I know the Aeneid now by heart,  
My Virgil read in cold and heat,  
In loneliness and hunger smart.  
And I know Homer, too, I ween,  
As Munster poets know Ossian.

And I must walk this road that winds  
'Twixt bog and bog, while east there lies  
A city with its men and books;  
With treasures open to the wise,  
Heart-words from equals, comrade-looks;  
Down here they have but tale and song,  
They talk Repeal the whole night long.

"You teach Greek verbs and Latin nouns,"  
The dreamer of Young Ireland said,  
"You do not hear the muffled call,  
The sword being forged, the far-off tread  
Of hosts to meet as Gael and Gall -  
What good to us your wisdom-store,  
Your Latin verse, your Grecian lore?"

And what to me is Gael or Gall?  
Less than the Latin or the Greek -  
I teach these by the dim rush-light  
In smoky cabins night and week.  
But what avail my teaching slight?  
Years hence, in rustic speech, a phrase,  
As in wild earth a Grecian vase!

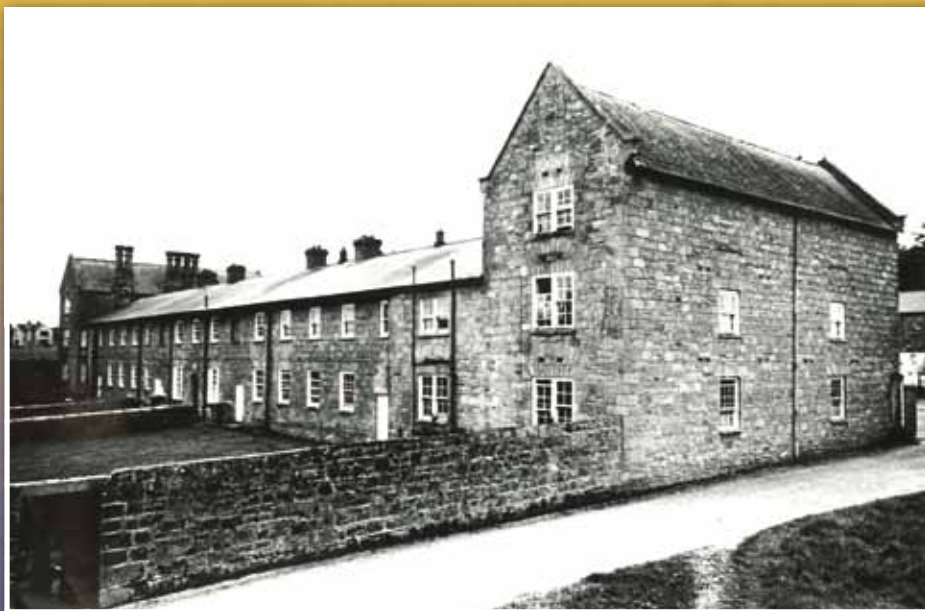


*Padraic Colum (1881-1972) was one of Longford's great writers. He spent his early childhood in Longford Workhouse where his father, Patrick, was serving as master. Those formative years inspired some of his work and he certainly met many survivors of the Great Famine. In this poem he evokes a travelling teacher of the famine period.*









Longford Workhouse, opened in 1842; photograph taken c. 1960  
*(Longford County Library and Archives)*