

## CASTLECOOTE HOUSE

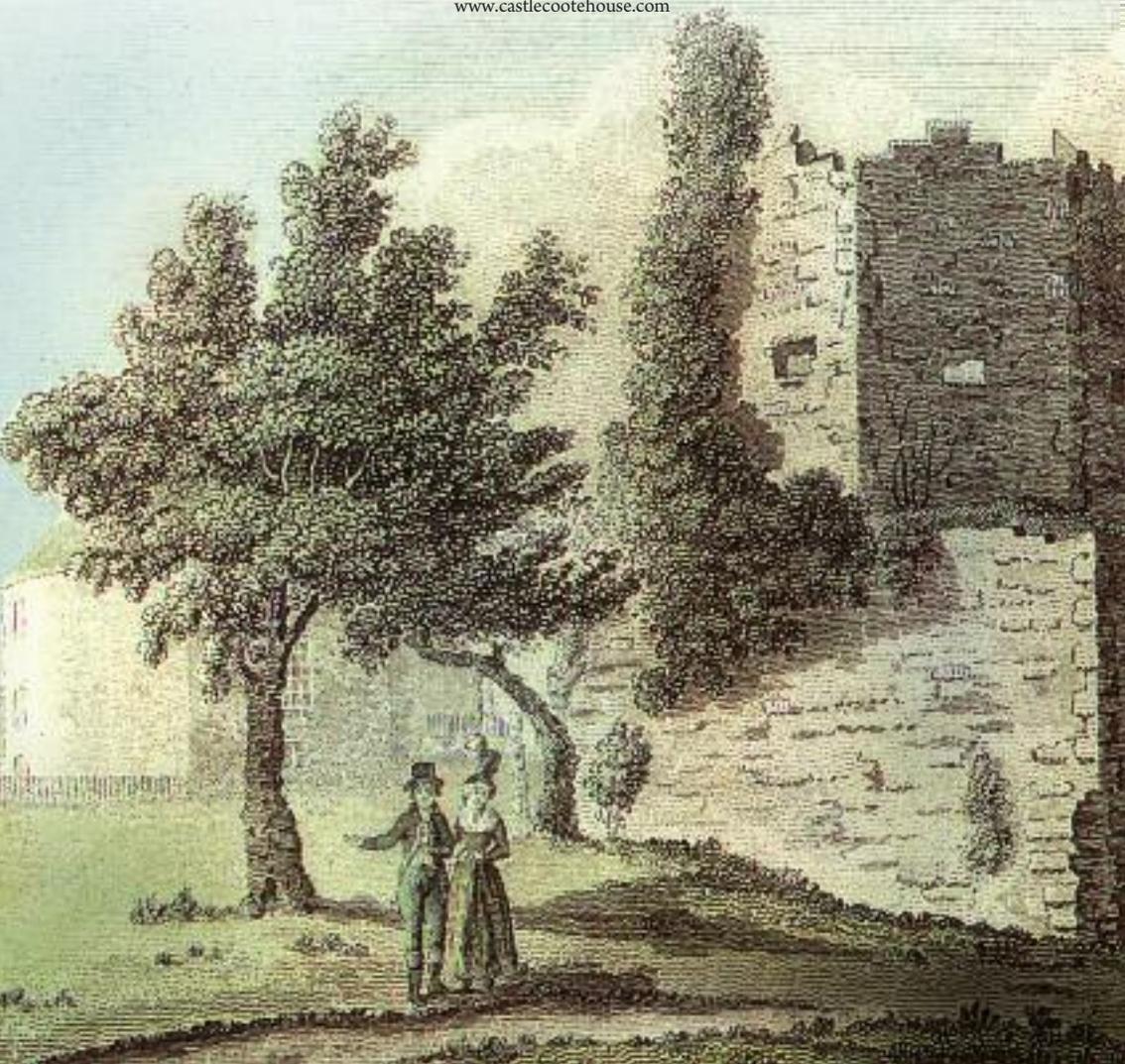
is situated in the picturesque fishing village of Castlecoote  
8 kms from Roscommon Town and a two hour drive from Dublin.  
From Roscommon: take the R366 for four miles to the village of Castlecoote.  
Cross the bridge, bear right at Castlecoote Stores,  
the gates are directly ahead.

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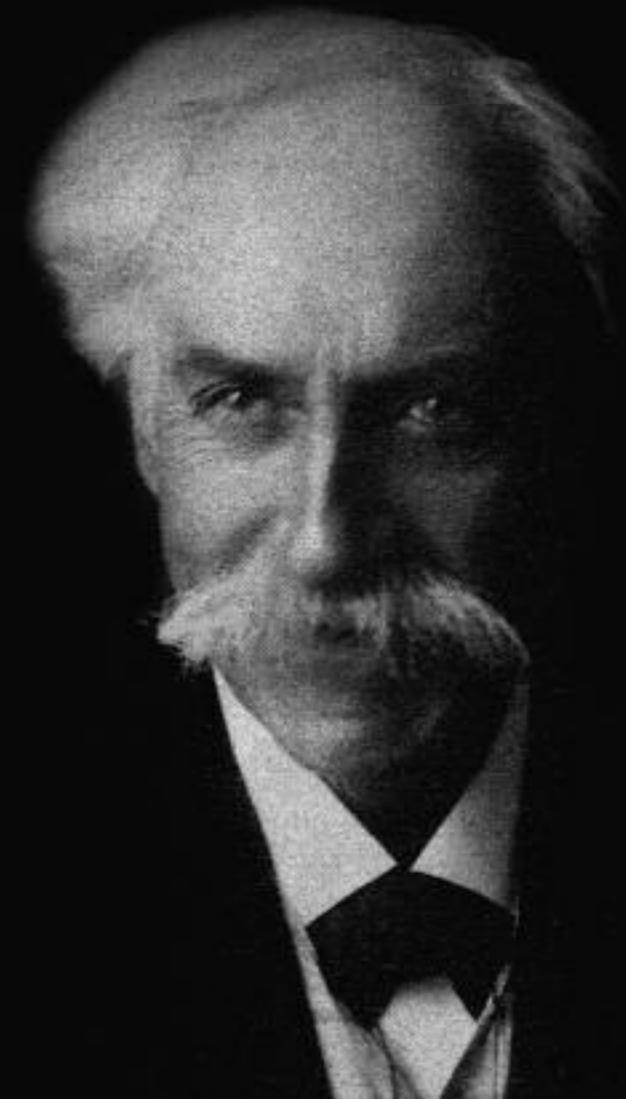
THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL

# PERCY FRENCH

SUMMER SCHOOL AT CASTLECOOTE HOUSE  
AND EVENTS AT ROSCOMMON LIBRARY

14<sup>TH</sup> – 21<sup>ST</sup> JULY, 2010

*When Erin Wakes*



The Percy French Summer School gratefully acknowledges  
the support of the following for the Summer School 2010

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*Proceeds arising from the Percy French Summer School  
will be used in the establishment of a permanent Percy  
French Room in Roscommon. This brochure has been  
funded by Roscommon County Library Services.*

*Special thanks to the Percy French Society in North Down,  
in particular Berrie O'Neill and Harry Tedford for their  
encouraging support for the school, and to Ian Wilson,  
North Down Museum, for archival photos.*

[www.percyfrench.ie](http://www.percyfrench.ie)

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THE SECOND  
INTERNATIONAL

# Percy French Summer School Castlecoote House



14th to 21st July, 2010

CASTLECOOTE HOUSE  
CASTLECOOTE, CO. ROSCOMMON  
Telephone: +353 90 66 63794 • [info@castlecootehouse.com](mailto:info@castlecootehouse.com)  
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## Foreword by the Honorary President of the Percy French Summer School

When I was a youngster I admired the songs of Percy French that were most familiar to County Clare. *Sweet Marie* was the most important one I think because the Parish had a certain connection with horses. If you might call it the farmers horse, this was the time when breeding horses was democratic and before breeding had become monopolised by a very narrow number of people. Spencilhill was just up the road and in a way 'Hold your holt, Sweet Marie', and so forth captured the melodic rhythm of the movement of the horse and also I remember very distinctly *Slattery's mountain foot*, or as Percy French had it 'Slattry's Mounted Fut', which was much more popular than the more structured *Clare Dragoons* which had made its way into the school syllabus.

The interpretation of the songs is significant to understanding the extent to which Percy French recorded the language. He recorded it as he heard it. When you read James Healy's book\* and you look at the notes, for example, to *Whistlin' Phil McHugh*, Healy highlights the notion of all of the underlying languages e.g. fluthering and sluthering and so forth. That is very important in itself because of another project during the same time which was entirely different. It is useful to contrast the difference in this project to the relationship between Percy French and what he did and achieved, as distinct from the project that was taking place in Coole with Yeats and Lady Gregory.

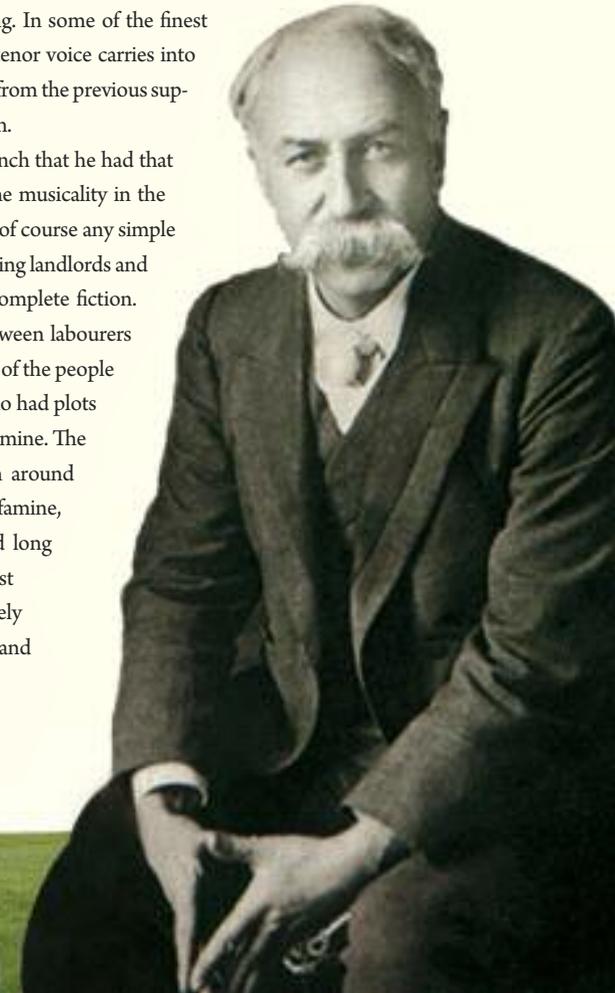
Yeats for instance is wishing and seeking to create a kind of noble heritage for the peasantry. It is more complicated for Lady Gregory who was aware of some of the Irish translation but the language becomes if you like straightened to suit the ideological purpose. It is therefore of the utmost significance that Percy French decided to leave the language as he heard it. That is also of course a tribute to the people with whom he mixed in his cycling trips be it for the painting, the inspection of drains and so forth. That's very important because his ear remains open to these sounds.

It is important for a number of reasons, to listen closely to the run on the lines in *Beautiful Miss Brady's and their private ass and cart* you find that there is a musicality in the fall of the language. Percy French was born in 1854 and it is interesting what happened in Ireland in that period and in the decades before he was born. That century was very significant in the terms of the loss of the language and it is credible to suggest that the music was surviving through the new words and through the new language. Music, if you like, expressed a form of culture that had been driven down through the new language which is English. What happens in many cases

is that one language does not neatly replace the other. The Irish liked English and particularly long words, which they used to capture the language and in doing so they were inventing something entirely new.

It is splendid that a school has been inaugurated and these are very valuable themes that I think should be taken up into the future, themes such as the connection between music and words and between words and literature. Synge also allows his ear to work in relation to what he is hearing in language and it is certainly true of O'Casey particularly if you look at the original text of O'Casey plays where the language of the people is coming from the tenements. It is universal in the local and yet it is actual and it has a truth and it is incredibly important, not accidental that in O'Casey's work he occasionally bursts into song. In some of the finest work of Tom Murphy his own fine tenor voice carries into the plays so again it is a kind of music from the previous suppressed culture that is coming through.

It is a great tribute to Percy French that he had that intelligence to be able to relate to the musicality in the language around him. There was not of course any simple division in Ireland between land holding landlords and landless tenants. This was and is a complete fiction. There were as many distinctions between labourers who had nothing at all, who are most of the people that died in the famine, and those who had plots of land and were able to survive the famine. The poor law of course which comes in around French's time, he was born after the famine, but of course clearances had started long before the famine and the famine is just a development of it, but it completely eliminates the agricultural labourers and those who were without a plot.



\*James N. Healy, *The Songs of Percy French*, Ossian Publications, 1996

Consolidation was in fact in progress before the famine and property ownership became a new reality which the song *The beautiful Miss Brady's in their private ass and cart* tells us. Another example is *McBreen*, who had two daughters decides to settle the barter in terms of heifers. Now when you look upon that and ask what is Percy French writing about here? In the 1870's he is writing about the circumstances that will create the land war (1879—1882). An interesting side to this is the fact that not only had agricultural labourers been cleared away but people had begun to own property so survivors now consolidated themselves. People have gone to America—*The Emigrant's Letter*—had taken his pen in my hand and so forth and remittances have started coming back. The remittances will build and clear the debts of the shop keepers, they will build churches, buy stock and so forth. So Percy French is writing about a property class on the land who as he says will have their own private ass and cart. He also has written a number of songs about motoring cars so you could say in a way he saw what was beneath the layers of pretension.

In this period as well I think Percy French had a kind of a mocking look at a new group that was arriving between 1896 and 1905 after significant changes through the Land Acts. That is why you get references to heifers and geese and so forth. I make all of this to say that French is writing not out of a bogus fictional classless society or that idealist version of the peasantry that Yeats had. He is writing out of the mixture of the whole thing and that is to his great credit. This could be explained by his Bohemian existence as there isn't any evidence that he ever drank excessively or smoked. There is this great freedom of the spirit in the image of him carrying his easel with him and his use of his years in Trinity College which would have been far more useful to someone with a business acumen. So when he emerges from Trinity after eight years, he has written *Abdul Abulbul Ameer* which is quite wonderful and his use of long words in this comic ballad, which occur again and again shows a degree of sobriety as well as an escape into a deterioration of the whole thing. This also shows his quality as a performer. He had this mixture of talents, and future schools should look at this in relation to the extraordinary contribution of one person who was all these different things—poet, singer, troubadour, musician, painter, essayist, writer and so on. His beautiful watercolours, one I remember in particular when I saw it first, is the view of New York from the Hudson. These watercolours, with the light breaking through the sky are of empty landscapes, landscapes that aren't peopled, a landscape that is constantly renewing itself are wonderful. Some people I think wrote wrongly of the fact that many of them looked the same but of course that is a very uninformed view as the changes in the light are important. He is one of the first great celebrators of the light and people have acknowledged that as the most significant aspect of his paintings. The paintings are very, very extraordinary beautiful. I think last time one went for sale at Whyte's it was for €44,000.

I think in wishing this school well into the future, that one should bring, what Richard Sinnott calls 'the hidden injuries of class' to the fore. There is this incredible need to draw if you like all of those forgotten people of history in to the text of our consciousness.

While the Gaelic league was started in 1893, I think Percy French was wise not to get trapped in the later prejudices, which have continued through its easy period. The contest that is in the song *Abdul Abulbul Ameer*, and the atmosphere of the song *Sweet Marie* when you take the verbs that are used and the language that is used, there is something going on which you might call an irony which is polite and indeed Percy can write from the two sides. In a way what he is saying that humour, life, humanity and the eclipse of people can take a language that was a foreign language and put it to their own circumstance and twist it and turn it, tear it to pieces and make something new. We can see the irony in his piece in the song about *Jim Wheelahan's Automobile*.

There were at least 15 gradations of society, from the point of survival up to and including people with land. So the suggestion that you only had two classes that we were all the one people and we all shared the famine is absolute nonsense and always was. In an *Irish Mother*, which is a very fine piece, French shows how he understood these divisions and it is written entirely from the point of view of the family left behind, similar to Wordsworth's poem *Michael*. Percy French has an advanced sensibility in relation to the sense of loss that is involved in emigration. This is particularly highlighted in relation to the song *The Emigrant's Letter* – 'they will be cutting the corn in Criosle today'. Again he picks up all the name places in his songs, which at this point had been changed, however French could identify and pick what was left of the resonance and musicality of the original name.

But there is no doubt whatsoever that Roscommon can be really proud of somebody that had an advanced sensibility, who was deeply human, qualified in different ways, cycled all over the country and who never gave into any exclusion. I think that he would like in many ways that we would keep our sense of humour and see the irony of our existence, but also its positive humanity and remember as well that we not only belong to one small place but to a big world as illustrated in his paintings of Ireland, Canada, United States, Hudson River, The West Indies and Switzerland. I think there is something very beautiful in all of this and that is why I am so pleased the Percy French Summer School takes place in this wonderful setting, especially as it is in his native Roscommon. It's a great celebration and I hope as we go on later that we will think of him as we hear the songs and we will not be afraid to laugh at our pretensions exposed and for all those reasons it is a great pleasure to declare the school open.

**Michael D. Higgins**

# The Percy French Summer School at Castlecoote House, 2010

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## W E D N E S D A Y • 1 4 T H J U L Y

- 10.00 am Illustrated talk: *Religious Sites and Heritage in County Roscommon*  
William Gaquin
- 11.15 am Tea/Coffee
- 11.30 am Lecture *Type of Beauty: The Story of Kathleen Newton, researching and writing historical fiction*  
Patricia O'Reilly
- 12.00 pm Lecture: *The art of the memoir*  
Brian Leyden
- 1.00 pm Gardens open

## T H U R S D A Y • 1 5 T H J U L Y

- 10.00 am Lecture: *The songwriter as a social historian: Percy French and Irish everyday life in the latter part of the 19th Century*  
Dr Caitriona Clear
- 11.15 am Tea/Coffee
- 11.30 am Lecture: *Finding our future in our past? The enduring inspiration of Percy French*  
Dr John Scally
- 12.30 pm Gardens open
- 1.15 pm Lunchtime concert: *The French Parody. Poems, monologues and recitations*  
Brian Munn & Teresa O'Donnell

## A D M I S S I O N

For ticket availability and purchase  
please contact Castlecoote House  
Castlecoote House, Castlecoote, Co. Roscommon  
Telephone: 090 6663794  
info@percyfrench.ie

Individual daytime events: €7 (€5 concession)  
Evening concerts: €20  
Special rate: €100 for all events over the four days

## F R I D A Y • 1 6 T H J U L Y

- 10.00 am Illustrated talk: *Percy French's Paintings*  
Phyllis Arnold
- 11.15 am Tea/Coffee
- 11.30 am Lecture: *Thomas Moore and Percy French*  
Dr Mary O'Donnell
- 1.15 pm Lunchtime Recital: *Music of The Bards*  
Mary O'Donnell (harp)
- 2.00 pm Gardens open
- 7.30 pm Address by Michael D. Higgins (Honorary President)
- 8.00 pm *An Evening of Wit and French Polish*  
Ann O'Dea (piano & harp), Siobhan Doyle (soprano), Jimmy Dixon (baritone)  
Concert in association with Roscommon Percy French Society

## S A T U R D A Y • 1 7 T H J U L Y

- 10.00 am Lecture: *Above the Briar Line*  
Brian Leyden
- 10.50 am Tea/Coffee
- 11.15 am Lecture: *Percy French Words and Music*  
Bernard MacLaverty
- 12.15 pm Lecture: *Experiences and perspectives from my journey with Percy French*  
Berrie O'Neill (The Percy French Society, North Down)
- 1.15 pm Gardens open
- 8.00 pm *Moore and French The Entertainers: A Celestial Meeting of the Minds and Music of Thomas Moore and Percy French*  
Bryan Hoey (tenor), Philip Byrne (baritone), Pauline Cooper (piano)

## S U N D A Y • 1 8 T H J U L Y

- 12.30 pm *Commemorative Service*  
Fr. Francis Beirne (Chairman of Percy French Society, Roscommon)
- 1.00 pm Tea/Coffee
- 2.00 pm Gardens open



**Roscommon County Council: Library Services** provides for the cultural, education, recreation, information and learning needs of people of all ages throughout the county and continues to develop its profile.

A comprehensive calendar of events is coordinated and organised each year to promote and raise awareness of library activities. The programme reflects the wide ranging involvement, collaborations and participation of the Library Services in both local and national projects to enhance its cultural role

This year, we are delighted to be involved again with The Percy French Summer School at Castlecoote House as we see this as another avenue for the service to support and engage with other historical, heritage, tourism, community and projects that bring benefits to all involved.

The County Library has been developing collection material in relation to Percy French and has recently acquired one of French's paintings, which will be part of the planned exhibition this year. The Library Services will also be developing further educational and learning opportunities in hosting a number of themed art, poetry and music workshops for children as part of the Library Services Summer Events Programme, running in parallel with the Summer School. Online content in relation to Percy French is also currently being developed for the Library website as an aid for study and research of Percy French.

**Richie Farrell**  
County Librarian

# Roscommon County Library & Roscommon Arts Centre Percy French events 2010

TUESDAY 13TH JULY – SATURDAY 24TH JULY

**County Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon**

9.00 am – 6.00 pm

*French Miscellany*

An exhibition of Percy French items (daily but closed Sundays)

WEDNESDAY • 14TH JULY

**County Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon**

8.00 pm

*Opening Address*

Richie Farrell

*Percy French in Ireland 1957 to Today*

Illustrated talk by Liam Byrne

9.00 pm

*A Medley of Percy French Songs*

Roscommon Drama Group

THURSDAY • 15TH JULY

**County Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon**

2.30 – 4.30 pm

*A Child for Life*

Art, poetry, music for children, 6 – 10 years

FRIDAY • 16TH JULY

**Ballaghaderreen Library**

2.30 – 4.30 pm

*A Child for Life*

Art, poetry, music for children, 6 – 10 years

TUESDAY • 20TH JULY

**Boyle Library**

2.30 – 4.30 pm

*A Child for Life*

Art, poetry, music for children, 6 – 10 years

**County Library, Abbey Street, Roscommon**

*Vernacular Architecture of County Roscommon*

7.00 – 9.00 pm

Talk by Barry O'Reilly, National Inventory of Architectural Heritage Section, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government

WEDNESDAY • 21ST JULY

**Roscommon Arts Centre, Circular Road, Roscommon**

8.00 pm

*Performance: Songs of Percy French*

Toni Walsh (soprano), Teresa O'Donnell (harp)



## Michael D Higgins

Michael D Higgins is a former Minister for Arts, Culture, and the Gaeltacht (1993–97).

He played a significant part in the establishment of the Gaelic language TV channel *TnaG* as well as *Raidió na Gaeltachta*, has supported Galway Arts, Galway Arts Festival, and also many sports developments.

He was first elected to the Dáil in 1981 and has been a deputy from 1987 to the present. He was a senator for the NUI constituency from 1982–87 and was a Taoiseach's nominee to the Seanad between 1973–77.

Michael is the Labour Party President and Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs, and is currently a sitting deputy for Galway West.



## Berrie O'Neill

Berrie O'Neill is a founder member and past chairman of the Percy French Society founded in North Down in 1983. Later, after retirement from a career in banking he became editor of the society's newsletter, named *The Jarvey* in memory of the comic journal edited by Percy French in the years 1888–90. He was also stage manager of the Percy French Concert Party which played in theatres all over Ireland between 1992 and 2008.

He is chairman of the trustees of the Percy French Collection in the North Down Museum in Bangor. The collection has an exceptional archive of Percy French watercolours and memorabilia.



## John Scally

John Scally, born in 1962, is a native of Curraghboy, Co. Roscommon. He is Beresford Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History in the School of Religion and Theology in Trinity College, Dublin. His works include: *A Layman Reflects in the Sunday Gospels*; *Whose Death is it Anyway? Euthanasia and the Right to Die*; *To Speed on Angels' Wings: The History of the Sisters of Saint John of God*; *Ethics in Crisis?* He is currently writing a book on medical ethics and articles on Celtic spirituality.

He lives in Dublin and suffers from A.S.S. – Addicted to Sport Syndrome. His sports books include: *Load of Balls: Football's Funny Side*; *GAA: An Oral History*; *The Best of the West: GAA Greats of Connacht*; *Odd-shaped Balls: Mischief-makers, Miscreants and Mad-hatters of Rugby*, and biographies of Tony Ward, Ger Loughnane, and former legendary Roscommon footballer Dermot Earley.

He has devised, presented, scripted and produced documentaries and series for Radio One and RTÉ Television.



## Brian Leyden

Brian Leyden lives in County Sligo. He is the author of the best selling memoir *The Home Place*, the novel *Death and Plenty* and the short story collection *Departures*.

His work for RTÉ Radio 1 includes the documentaries *No Meadows in Manhattan*, *Even the Walls Were Sweatin'* and *The Closing of the Gaiety Cinema in Carrick-on-Shannon*. He has edited the Irish literary journal *Force 10* and has contributed to the *John McGahern Yearbook, Vol.1* (2008), *The Quiet Quarter – Ten Years of Great Irish Writing* (2009) and *The Curious Mind* (2009). He has read at The Green Ink Festival, London; *Ireland and its Diaspora*, Writers & Musicians Tour of Germany; The Dublin Writers Festival; The Flat Lake Festival; and the Newport Festival, Rhode Island. In 2009 he was awarded a Norman Mailer's Writers Colony scholarship to Provincetown, Cape Cod.

He is currently the writer in residence with Sligo Library Services. His libretto for the short opera *Humpty Dumpty* by Ian Wilson premiered at the Lancaster International Concert Series at Lancaster University, England in March 2010.



## Bryan Hoey

Bryan Hoey is one of Ireland's most versatile singers, equally at home in grand opera, operetta, and musicals. His formidable repertoire includes *Die Fledermaus*, *Gypsy Baron*, *Student Prince*, *My Fair Lady*, *L'Elisir D'amore*, *Maritana*, *Lily of Killarney*, *Bohemian Girl* and the major roles in Gilbert and Sullivan. In 2007 he sang Normano in *Lucia Di Lamemor* with Anna Livia Opera and the Drawing Room Opera Company (Dublin).

Bryan has sung as principal tenor with Opera Theatre Company and many societies including: Musical Arts Opera Company, Island Opera (Isle of Man) and Wexford Opera Festival. In oratorio he has sung with many of the leading choral societies and choirs and his concert work includes the RTÉ Symphony and Concert Orchestras. He has featured on the Late Late Show; The Likes of Mike; Live at 3; Overture and Music of the Nation. Recent performances include Rossini's *Stabat Mater* and Mozart's *Requiem* and *Coronation Mass*. He has been awarded the John McCormack Medal for service to music by the Bank of Ireland and the Vocal Heritage Society of Ireland in 1998.



## Toni Walsh

Toni Walsh is an award-winning soprano. Since 1997 she has worked as assistant lecturer in the Department of Vocal, Operatic and Dramatic Studies at the DIT Conservatory of Music and Drama.

Her operatic roles include Annina in Verdi's *La Traviata* and Inez in *Il Trovatore*, and the Mother in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. She has appeared in the NCH Summer Opera Series playing leading roles in *Operatic Scenes*, including Dorabella in Mozart's *Così fan tutti*, and Rosie McCann in A. J. Potter's modern opera *The Wedding*. She has toured with Opera Theatre Company in their revival tour of *Love Potion* based on Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*. Her oratorio work includes Brahms' *Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah* and *Judas Maccabaeus*; Hayden's *Stabat Mater* and *Little Organ Mass*; Mozart's *Requiem*, *Vespers* and *Great Mass in C minor*; and Vivaldi's *Gloria*.

She has given solo recitals and concerts throughout Ireland including the Bank of Ireland Arts Centre, the National Concert Hall and the Hugh Lane Gallery.



## Mary O'Donnell

Mary O'Donnell began her harp studies with the late Sr. Eugene McCabe at Mount Sackville School in Dublin and later with Fiona Norwood, Sebastien Lipman, and masterclasses with the renowned harpist and teacher Edward Witsenberg. She graduated from Trinity College Dublin with an honours degree in Music in 1996. She also completed an ARIAM in Irish harp and LTCL in Concert harp performance. Mary holds a Higher Diploma in Education (TCD), a Masters in Musicology from University College Dublin, and a Ph.D from the University of Limerick.

She has been a consistent winner at the Feis Ceoil, gaining prizes in Irish harp, Concert harp, singing and composition. She has toured Europe, USA, Africa and Asia and appeared on RTÉ, BBC, CNN, and NBC. She has toured extensively in Europe, North America, Africa and Asia. She lectured in Ethnomusicology at the VEC (2000-05) and the University of Limerick and now examines with the Royal Irish Academy of Music, and lectures at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.



## Siobhán Doyle

Siobhán Doyle has won numerous awards for her singing in Feis Ceoil and Feis Maithiu including the Gold Medal for Soprano Solo, The Operatic Cup, Thomas Moore Cup, The Fitzgerald Trophy for Operatic Singing (three successive years) and the title Singer of the Year. She studied under Sr Mary Agnes Cecilia, St Mary's College, Arklow, and with Dr Veronica Dunne at the College of Music.

Siobhán has appeared in over 40 musicals and operettas, among them Anna in *The Merry Widow*, Margot in *The Desert Song*, Saffi in *The Gipsy Baron*, Rosalinda in *Der Fledermaus*, Nancy in *Oliver*, and Julie in *Showboat*. She has played principal boy in pantomime at the Olympia Theatre and The Gaiety Theatre, and she is a familiar face at the National Concert Hall. She has also appeared as an actress on many plays including *Juno and The Paycock* and *The Playboy of the Western World*. She has performed in *The Percy French Story* throughout the country.



## Philip Byrne

Philip Byrne has enormous experience on the stage and in radio and television.

His work ranges from grand opera to oratorio, from musical comedy to cabaret. He is a three-time prize-winner at the Waterford International Festival of Light Opera.

In *Freeny*, an adaptation of Percy French's *The Country Girl* at the Cork Opera House, Philip played the title role and he has portrayed Percy French in many productions of *The Golden Years* and Thomas Moore in *Go Where Glory Waits There*.

He has played the lead in more than forty different musicals and in all Ireland's major theatres and the National Concert Hall as well as numerous professional engagements in the USA.



## Phyllis Arnold

Born in Belfast, Phyllis Arnold has been a professional artist and antiques dealer from the late 1960's. She has exhibited annually in London since the late 70's and in Frankfurt, Paris, and the Smithsonian Institute, New York.

She specialises in portrait painting and sculpture and was commissioned by Coalport Porcelain to paint a portrait of Queen Elizabeth in silhouette for her Majesty's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

A founder member and first chairperson of the Percy French Society in Bangor County Down, she has been a trustee of the Society's collection of Percy French memorabilia since its formation. Through her antique dealing she has handled many Percy French's paintings for clients here and overseas. She has recently completed a limited edition life-size bronze bust of Percy French. She is a past President of the Ulster Society of Women Artists and a diploma member of the Royal Society of Miniature Painters, Sculptors & Gravers and a winner of their prestigious Memorial Gold Bowl.



## Brian Munn

Brian Munn has been an actor and broadcaster since the age of twelve, when he played his first role in a BBC Drama production. He has worked in all areas of the business from stage actor to television game show host, from Radio Drama Producer with RTÉ, to film actor.

In films, he has been husband to Helen Mirren in *Cal*, flirted with the star of *Misery*, Cathy Bates, in *P. S. I Love You*, and even had to beat up Tom Cruise in *Far and Away*. Over the past thirty-five years Brian has been the voice-over on Irish radio and TV commercials for an extraordinary range of products and services—you might not know the face but you will more than likely know the voice!

However, his greatest professional joy is in reciting poetry. He presented a series of poetry programmes for *Lyric FM*.



## Bernard MacLaverty

Bernard MacLaverty, born in Belfast 1942, moved to Scotland in 1975. He has been writer in residence at the University of Aberdeen and guest writer at the University of Augsburg and at Iowa State University. For three years he was visiting writer at John Moore's University, Liverpool. He is currently visiting Professor at the University of Strathclyde. He is a member of Aosdana.

His novels are: *Lamb* (1980), *Cal* (1983), *Grace Notes* (1997), and *The Anatomy School* (2001). *Lamb* and *Cal* were major films for which he wrote the screenplays. *Grace Notes* won the 1997 Saltire Society Scottish Book of the Year Award and was shortlisted for many other prizes including the Booker Prize for Fiction and the Whitbread Novel Award. His collections of short stories are *Secrets* (1977), *A Time to Dance* (1982), *The Great Profundo* (1987), *Walking the Dog & Other Stories* (1994), and *Matters of Life & Death* (2006). In 2003, he wrote and directed *Bye-Child*, a short film after a poem by Seamus Heaney; it was nominated for a BAFTA and won Best First Director Award.

## What happened to Cloonyquinn House?



Cloonyquinn House was the birthplace of Percy French. The last French to live there was Harry French, or Major French as everyone called him, a son of Arthur French and a nephew of Percy.

In the late 1950's Harry French put the house and land up for sale. A Mayo man, John Derrig, bought the property. He owned hotels in England and in Claremorris and had the intention of turning Cloonyquinn House into one much to the delight of Mr. French. Unfortunately Mr. Derrig died suddenly and the property went up for sale. The Irish Land Commission acquired the property in 1960 and sold it to a Mr. Stratford

who was in the demolition and salvage trade. The house was stripped: lead taken off the roof, internal doors and windows removed, and anything that could be salvaged was sold at auction. Roscommon County Council paid a local man, Marty Keogh, £3 6s 8d to demolish the house in 1964. The stones were used to make a road through a neighbouring farm at Carnakit. However, the house's front porch had been built with the finest cut stone and this was purchased by Mr. Cornelius McDermott Drumboylan and used at the Cathedral in Sligo. In 1965 the land was divided among local farmers.

Taken from *Frenchs of Cloonyquinn*, Michael Stroker and 'William Percy French 1854-1920' Fr. Austin McKeon, P.P., Tulsk, Killina National School—Memories of Our School Days, 2004. Noel Flanagan, research.

Above: Cloonyquinn, 1957. (Photograph courtesy of the Percy French Society in North Down.)

## A reflection on Percy French's birthplace

Cloonyquin House was of course Percy French's home, and we in the Percy French Society look upon it with some sentiment. Regret is often expressed that the house was demolished rather than being available nowadays to be a heritage centre, akin maybe to Haworth Rectory in Yorkshire the home of the Brontë family. Some of us however might also feel that the house in question was less than impressive as the 'big house' as usually associated with the 'landed gentry', the part of Irish society to which the French family are said to have belonged. (Percy French maintained that the more apt description was the 'stranded gentry'!)

It is interesting to note a brief reference in the memoir *Willie* written by Percy French's daughter, Ettie ('Willie' being the name by which her father was known within his family). She writes: . . . *the house behind Willie's was built and the trees planted by Arthur French who owned the estate from 1729 to 1789. Arthur lived in London, but was born and brought up in the original Cloonyquin House referred to locally as 'The Castle'. It lay at the foot of the rise on which the demesne stood. When Arthur visited the property he found the house burned down, so he had to stay in the shooting lodge at the top of the rise. It had a beautiful view covering most of the Cloonyquin estate, and it may have been this view partly which led him to build a new house at the rise. Arthur's main aim was to amalgamate the two buildings into one more capable of housing the average household and guests who, in those days, came with their families, so he clamped a typical eigh-*

*teenth century square brick house to the old stone shooting lodge, thus creating the first of the architectural anomalies that characterised the house.*

Cloonyquin, it seems, eventually passed to William French, a great nephew of Arthur and the grand-father of (William) Percy French. William built 'a Regency frill' across the front, thus adding further to the mixture of architectural periods. Most importantly, one of the new rooms contained his library that ultimately provided inspiration for the imagination of his grandson, Percy French.

The designation 'castle' by which the original Cloonyquin was apparently known would probably have derived from the concept of Norman power and influence as expressed in tower houses and such 'real' and magnificent castles as in Kilkenny and Carrickfergus. Manor or 'big houses' built much later than the Norman conquest sometimes took on board the 'castle' appellation.

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*. . . and looking back on those peaceful days it seems to me that nowhere in the world were there more pleasant meadows, more mysterious underwoods, or lovlier flowers than at old Cloonyquin!*

Percy French (in *Chronicles and Poems* edited by his sister Mrs. De Burgh Daly)

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**Berrie O'Neill**

Founder member and past Chairman of the Percy French Society in North Down

# The Percy French Bridge

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For the first time in over 400 years, a bridge will be built across the River Suck at Bridge-town Road, Fuerty, linking it to Castlecoote House Estate, creating a new entrance to the magnificent historic property of Castlecoote House home of The Percy French Summer School.



The design approach is taken from a 19th century-type single span bridge, appropriate both for its simplicity of design and clearance of the river and river bank thus minimising construction impact. The proposed new bridge has handrails and balustrading which are constructed in lightweight steel and this element of design gives a lightness and transparency to the bridge structure when viewed from the river banks. The transparent nature provides an architectural quality similar to decorative bridges used in historic demesnes in the 18th and 19th century, e.g. Carton House, Co. Kildare.

The proposal constitutes the reinstatement of an obsolete entrance to the estate and will improve both the access to the house and visitor experience of it, particularly with the increased flow of traffic brought about by The Percy French Summer School.

The remnants of the medieval bridge are part of the wonderful landscaped gardens running down to the river including three medieval lookout towers, ice house and moat.

The bridge is to be named The Percy French Bridge, in celebration and in honour of the poet's life and if patrons wish to support the project it begins as little as €50 to buy a block. For further information contact [info@percyfrench.ie](mailto:info@percyfrench.ie)

# A message from County Roscommon Percy French Society

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The County Roscommon Percy French Society, formed in 1993 to further perpetuate the memory of the late Percy French within his native county and in the wider community, enthusiastically welcomes the establishment of the Percy French Summer School. It is another important milestone in promoting the literary legacy of a philosophical genius whose life has inspired centuries of fans in the artistic world of music, art and literature.

The inaugural summer school in 2009 was an outstanding success and we eagerly look forward to the second summer school in 2010 which, no doubt, will continue to explore new insights to the literary and artistic abilities of Percy French. The school is endeavouring to provide new possibilities for commemorating, interpreting and celebrating one of Ireland's greatest troubadours and we heartily welcome this new and innovative initiative.

We congratulate our committee member, Kevin Finnerty and his team for initiating this exciting project and we warmly and highly commend it to the numerous people who cherish and appreciate the multi-talented life of Percy French. Our society applauds any activity that will generate interest in the life of Percy French as well as engage people in productive and creative discussion. We wish the summer school of 2010 every success and highly commend people from near and far to participate in this year's exciting programme of events.

**Fr Francis Beirne**

Chairperson, County Roscommon Percy French Society

## PERCY FRENCH SUMMER SCHOOL

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| HONORARY PRESIDENT | Michael D Higgins TD      |
| ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  | Brian Munn                |
| MUSICAL DIRECTOR   | Teresa O'Donnell Finnerty |
| EDUCATION          | Richie Farrell            |
| RESEARCH           | Noel Flanagan             |
| FOUNDER            | Kevin Finnerty            |



Festival Box Office 1957

From left: Jim Dalton, Michael Flanagan, Michael Finnerty, Miko Toolan (Photo courtesy of Noel Flanagan)

## COUNTY ROSCOMMON PERCY FRENCH SOCIETY

Fr. Francis Beirne (Chairperson), Mary Coyle (Secretary), Sean Beirne, Michael J Croghan, John Fallon, Kevin Finnerty, Noel Flanagan, Tom Lynch, Gerry Mahon, Michael Mulry, Eugene Murphy, Elsie Owens

## NEARBY ACCOMMODATION

**THE ABBEY HOTEL** Galway Road, Roscommon, Co. Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 26240

*Percy French Summer School Package*

- Thursday–Sunday: €149 pps  
Two nights bed & breakfast with one evening meal (subject to availability)
- Sunday–Wednesday: €125 pps  
Two nights bed & breakfast with one evening meal (subject to availability)

### GLEESONS TOWNHOUSE AND RESTAURANT

Market Square, Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 26954 [info@gleesonstownhouse.com](mailto:info@gleesonstownhouse.com) [www.gleesonstownhouse.com](http://www.gleesonstownhouse.com)

*Percy French Summer School Package*

- Two nights bed & breakfast, dinner one night  
€175 pps including transfers\* / €145 pps excluding transport
  - Three nights bed & breakfast, dinner two nights  
€295 including transfers\* / €225 excluding transfers
  - Four nights bed & breakfast, dinner three nights  
€395 including transfers\* / €295 excluding transfers
- Three and four night stays receive a €50 voucher for Gleeson's Artisan Food & Wine Shop (Bridgestone Country Shop of the Year!)

\*Transfers are to and from Gleeson's Townhouse and Castlecoote House

**CUISLE HOLIDAY CENTRE** Donamon, Co. Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 62277

*Percy French Summer School Package*

- Bed & full Irish breakfast: €55.00 pps per night
  - Dinner, bed & full Irish breakfast: €78.00 pps per night
- Single room supplement: €30.00 per night  
Bus transfer to and from Knock Airport: €20.00 each way per person

**CLONALIS HOUSE** Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. T: +353 90 49 620014

### JACKSONS RESTAURANT & GUESTHOUSE

Market Square, Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 34140 [info@jacksons.ie](mailto:info@jacksons.ie) [www.jacksons.ie](http://www.jacksons.ie)

**CLOONLISS LODGE** Mount Talbot, Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 22387 / 087 9435774

Four star self-catering accommodation

### BED & BREAKFAST

**DONEELA HOUSE** Gallowstown, Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 27135

**NONI'S** Castlecoote Village. T: +353 90 66 63367

**ROSS HOUSE** Quarry View, Roscommon. T: +353 90 66 28891