

GSI LECTURE PROGRAMME 2011

Welcome...

The Director of the GSI Lecture Programme, **Séamus Moriarty, FGSI**, arranges twelve lectures each year on a range of topics relating to genealogical or historical research. Lectures are held on the 2nd Tuesday of each month at the Dún Laoghaire College of Further Education, Cumberland Street, Dún Laoghaire, Co. Dublin and the current lecture programme is shown on the Home Page.

Last year, once again, the lectures were of exceptional quality and of great interest to our members and visitors. Each month a précis of the previous month's lecture is published in the Society's monthly newsletter '*Ireland's Genealogical Gazette*' – back copies available via the button in the right hand panel on the Home Page.

To give you a flavour of the range of subjects covered in the GSI Lecture Programme, copies of the short précis published for each of the lectures in 2011 is shown below.

For further information on the GSI Lecture Programme, please contact Séamus Moriarty, FGSI on [email address]

11 January 2011

***'Irish Gathering – Recording your Family History in real time Global Web Environment'* by Joe Whelan**

On **Tuesday January 11th** members and visitors heard about a wonderful on-line resource for Irish genealogy. This lecture by **Joe Whelan** differed from others dealing with websites containing particular sources such as newspaper archives or census returns. The title of Mr. Whelan's lecture - '*Irish Gathering – Recording your Family History in real time Global Web Environment*' gave little indication of the innovative nature of this on-line resource. The website is designed to allow the individual to build their family histories on-line and to share the information with others across the globe. It is especially aimed at reenergizing the Clans Movement to encourage people sharing a surname to get involved in organizing events to bring these 'clanspersons' together both on-line and in their places of origin. It also acts as a portal for Irish genealogy by directing the visitor to other sites or resources to assist them in their quest for information of ancestors or on family connections in Ireland. The concept for the website is taken from the ancient gathering of the clans and Mr. Whelan hopes that over the next six months to have 100,000 Irish Clan members signed-up. So checkout www.irishgathering.ie

8 February 2011

***'RIC and Related Police Forces'* by Garda Jim Herlihy, FGSI**

On **Tuesday 8th February** members and visitors heard a lively and fascinating lecture by **Garda Jim Herlihy, FGSI** on the *'RIC and Related Police Forces'*. Garda Herlihy is a renowned expert on the history of policing in Ireland having published several authoritative works on the subject. These include 'The Royal Irish Constabulary: A Short History and Genealogical Guide with a select list of medal awards and casualties' (1997); 'The Royal Irish Constabulary: a complete alphabetical list of officers and men, 1816-1922' (1999); 'The Dublin Metropolitan Police: a complete alphabetical list of officers and men, 1836-1925' (2001); 'The Dublin Metropolitan Police: A Short History and Genealogical Guide with notes on medal awards and casualties, and lists of members connected with the London Metropolitan Police, the Irish Revenue Police, the (Royal) Irish Constabulary and the British Army' (2001) and 'The Royal Irish Constabulary Officers: A Biographical and Genealogical Guide, 1816-1922' (2005). All of the above were published by Ireland's leading academic publisher, Four Courts Press. Clearly with such a wealth of information already published on the subject, Garda Herlihy's lecture was both wide ranging and, where appropriate, detailed in a manner suited for genealogy. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation Garda Herlihy traced the development of policing in Ireland and the role of the policeman in the turbulent years of the 19th and early 20th centuries. During this time the politics of rebellion and civil disobedience in the cause of independence and land reform took its toll on the police. The musical talents of the various police bands were also mentioned by Garda Herlihy who advised the meeting of a special anniversary concert to be held in May at the National Concert Hall in Dublin. Garda Herlihy had some medals awarded to the RIC which he showed around. An excellent lecture!!

8 March 2011

***'Researching the Irish Revolution'* by Dáithí Ó Corráin, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.**

On **Tuesday 8th March** members heard a very interesting lecture on the topic of *'Researching the Irish Revolution'* by Dr. **Dáithí Ó Corráin** of St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. By way of clarification for our readers the 'Irish Revolution' is the period from the 1916 Rising to the conclusion of the Civil War in 1923. The human cost of Irish political violence was traumatic with in excess of 2,500 fatalities to the Truce of July 1921 alone. Dr Ó Corráin focused in particular on the array of historical sources for the period and their strengths and weaknesses. The most challenging period for the historian or genealogist is the 1916 Rebellion. Much of the information is incomplete given that the outbreak was unexpected, of short duration and occurred during the Great War. Burial registers, eye witness accounts, the register of the Commonwealth Graves Commission and the newly digitised 1911 census are the most fruitful research avenues. In the historiography of the period, civilian fatalities have generally been ignored or underemphasised. Tracing their circumstances is not easy, though the local press often yields rich personal and funeral details. Dr Ó Corráin drew attention to two often overlooked sources. Military courts of inquiry which superseded coroners' inquests from August 1920 are held in UK national archives in London. Compensation awards at quarter session hearings are an

accurate source of person information in terms of martial status, occupation, dependents and circumstances of death. Under the *Criminal Injuries Act (1919)* state servants and others murdered, maimed or maliciously injured by unlawful organisations were entitled to monetary compensation. While the life details of British officers are recorded in the Army List, tracing servicemen is more difficult. In 2005 regimental enlistment or attestation books were saved from destruction and returned to regimental archives and museums. They are a fascinating source providing age, place of origin, next of kin, service number and so forth. Regimental journals, newspapers and histories, private diaries, rolls of honour, collections of letters and reminiscences, sound recordings as well as digests of service and war diaries are all valuable military sources. Regular soldiers describing their experience in Ireland often grumbled about that old Irish reliable the unreliable weather! Those interested in policemen are indebted to the pioneering work of Jim Herlihy, FGSI. On the Republican side there is an abundance of material from roadside memorials to well known chronicles such as Dan Breen's *'My fight for Irish Freedom'*. But many volunteers did not write memoirs. To this end, the Bureau of Military History collected oral testimony from participants between 1947 and 1959 in the form of witness statements. While they may be weak at times on dates they provide a fascinating insight to IRA activities at a local level. They are available for consultation from the Irish Military Archives. As we approach 2016, much attention will be focused on the military service pension applications. When they become available for public consultation, historians will be able to build an even more nuanced and informed picture of the dynamics of the Irish Revolution. A very lively Q+A session followed this very informative lecture.

12 April 2011

***'The 1641 Depositions as an aid to the genealogist'* by Dr. Elaine Murphy and Dr. Mark Sweetnan, Trinity College Dublin**

On Tuesday 12th April 2011, **Dr. Elaine Murphy** and **Dr. Mark Sweetnan** delivered a fascinating lecture on the *'The 1641 Depositions as an aid to the genealogist'*. This project transcribed and digitised the 1641 Depositions in which Protestant men and women of all classes told of their experiences following the outbreak of the rebellion by the Catholic Irish in October 1641. Located in Trinity College Dublin they comprise 3,400 depositions, examinations and associated materials collected by government-appointed commissioners in the wake of the 1641 Rebellion. The approximately 19,000 pages of witness testimonies constitute the chief evidence for the sharply contested allegation that the rebellion began with a general massacre of protestant settlers. As a result, this material has been central to a protracted and bitter historical dispute. Propagandists, politicians and historians have all exploited the depositions at different times, and the controversy surrounding them has never been satisfactorily resolved. In fact, the 1641 'massacres', like King William's victory at the Boyne (1690), and the battle of the Somme (1916), have played a key role in creating and sustaining a collective Protestant/British identity in the province of Ulster. Using both a PowerPoint presentation and direct access to the website, the lecturers pointed out that this body of material is unparalleled elsewhere in early modern Europe. It provides a unique source of information for the causes and events surrounding the 1641 rebellion and for the social, economic, cultural, religious, and political history of seventeenth-century Ireland, England and Scotland. In addition, the depositions vividly document various colonial and 'civilizing' processes, including

the spread of Protestantism in the north of Ireland and the introduction of lowland agricultural and commercial practices, together with the native response to these developments. The website allows users access to all images and transcripts, with search options allowing free text search, while the database is certainly of interest to the general public, both for historical and genealogical purposes. A very lively question and answer session followed. For further info. see: <http://1641.tcd.ie/>

10 May 2011

***'Tracing Ancestry through DNA'* by Dr. Gianpiero Cavalleri, RCSI**

On **Tuesday 10th May** members heard a wonderful lecture on *'Tracing Ancestry through DNA'* by **Dr. Gianpiero Cavalleri** of **EthnoAncestry Ltd.** The company, formed by population geneticists in 2004, is at the cutting edge of genetic research through development of new markers, identification of new genetic signatures and by providing authoritative interpretation of deep ancestry. Dr. Cavalleri gave a brief outline of his background, interests and current projects. He is a Senior Scientist of Italian parentage but born and raised in Co. Galway, Ireland. He is a population geneticist who trained with Prof Dan Bradley at Trinity College, Dublin before going on to work at Stanford with Prof Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Dr Peter Underhill. He completed a PhD at University College London under Prof David Goldstein studying the genetics of epilepsy predisposition and treatment. Dr. Cavalleri is currently researching the genetics and pharmacogenetics of epilepsy at the Royal College of Surgeons, Dublin, Ireland. Dr. Cavalleri also introduced his audience to the work of his colleague, Dr. James F. Wilson, Managing Director of EthnoAncestry Ltd., who is also a population geneticist whose list of publications and credits are familiar to all those interested in genetic genealogy and population genetics. His studies led to the identification of the first genetic signatures of Norse Viking ancestry in Great Britain and Ireland. He also discovered the 'Atlantic Modal Haplotype', which revealed genetic continuity in Britain from the Palaeolithic to the present. This work led on to the excellent TV documentaries *'Blood of the Vikings'* and later *'The Blood of the Irish'* and quite recently, *'The Blood of the Travellers'*. Dr. Wilson is developing new markers to tease apart European origins and is collecting an unrivalled resource of ten thousand samples with which to understand Scottish and British history. He is a native of Orkney, who also has Shetland roots; and is an avid genealogist. Before providing some examples of his research and its relationship with genealogical research, Dr. Cavalleri explained the various terms used by geneticists as follows. DNA is the complex chemical in which the instructions to build and run our bodies are written – this genetic code is the 'blueprint' for life. It is also the means of transmitting this information to the next generation. The code is written in four letters, A, C, G or T. We each carry a enormous number of DNA letters (3000 billion) which we have inherited from our ancestors—the archive of our ancestry. Other terms such as Markers, Y Chromosome, YSNPs, YSTRs, Haplotype and Haplogroup were also explained as he demonstrated the methods used to explore our 'deep ancestry' through our DNA. Dr. Cavalleri drew on the work of Dan Bradley and Brian McEvoy of Trinity College to show the link between groups with the same surname and to plot its distribution over the centuries. He also plotted the various population movements into Europe and within Europe and onward to Great Britain and Ireland. There was an excellent Q&A session following this fascinating lecture. For further information checkout the website of EthnoAncestry at www.ethnoancestry.com

14 June 2011

***'Irish Online Sources'* by Mary Beglan, MAPGI**

On Tuesday 14th June 2011 the ever popular **Mary Beglan**, MAPGI, was back for a second lecture on the topic of *'Irish Online Sources'*. Once again, Mary's lively delivery and wealth of knowledge was wonderfully received by a packed venue with standing room only. The online sources covered by Mary included: **National Library of Ireland** www.nli.ie and especially the Library's *Sources: A National Library of Ireland database for Irish research*—containing over 180,000 catalogue records for Irish manuscripts, articles in Irish periodicals etc—see: <http://sources.nli.ie> This online catalogue also includes 34,000 photographic images. **National Archives of Ireland** www.nationalarchives.ie where there is no on-line catalogue but the website includes extensive information on the records held. This also includes the 1901 and 1911 census records on www.census.nationalarchives.ie **Public Records of Northern Ireland** www.proni.gov.uk where an online catalogue is available with the following indexes: *Geographical Index, Prominent Persons Index, Presbyterian Church Index* and *Church of Ireland Index*. In addition five major database are available including: Ulster Covenant, Freeholder's Records, Street Directories, Will Calendars and Name Search. **Irish Archives Resource** www.iar.ie which contains information about archival collections open for research in Ireland and a list of contributing repositories. **Dublin Heritage** www.dublinheritage.ie which includes Dublin City Electoral Lists and an online Dublin Graveyards Directory for the greater Dublin area. **Glasnevin Cemeteries Group** www.glasnevintrust.ie which has an online database for Glasnevin Cemetery & Crematorium, Dardistown Cemetery, Newlands Cross Cemetery & Crematorium and Palmerstown Cemetery. Glasnevin records date from 1826. Initial search is free. Charges apply for other information. Then again going north of the border, **Belfast City Council** www.belfastcity.gov.uk/burialrecords/ which has a free online search for Belfast City Cemetery, records from 1869 (including Jewish, Public and Glenalina extension sections), Roselawn Cemetery—records from 1954 and Dundonald Cemetery—records from 1905. **Irish Genealogy**—the government sponsored site www.irishgenealogy.ie includes records for Carlow (CoI), Cork & Ross (RC), Dublin City (CoI, Presbyterian & RC) and Kerry (CoI & RC). With more records added this month. During her lecture Mary provided examples of the information available on each website. Other websites discussed were: **Irish Newspaper Archives** www.irishnewsarchive.ie **Irish Times Archives** www.irishtimes.com/archive Pay-per-view sites like the newly launched **www.findmypast.ie** and **Origins Network** www.originsnetwork.com and the free sites like **Ask About Ireland** www.askaboutireland.ie and **Family Search LDS** www.familysearch.org which includes indexes for Irish Civil Registration to 1958. **Guinness Archives** www.guinness-storehouse.com which includes personnel records. **Irish Ancestors** on www.irishtimes.com/ancestor - free & pay-per-view. And then finally, **Cyndi's List** - www.cyndislist.com

12 July 2011

***'Dublin Fire Fighters and the 1941 Belfast Blitz'* by James Scannell**

Renowned local historian **James Scannell** was the guest speaker for the July 12th lecture on the topic of *'Dublin Fire Fighters and the 1941 Belfast Blitz'* which focussed the April 1941 Easter Tuesday blitz on Belfast by the Luftwaffe (German

Air Force) and the assistance rendered by fire fighters from Dublin, Dún Laoghaire, Drogheda and Dundalk fire brigades who volunteered to assist in fire fighting operations the day immediately after this. James began by covering the general situation in 1941 which saw Belfast unprepared for the possibility of air raids with a low priority to air defence allocated to it by the authorities in London, coupled with a misplaced belief by the Northern Ireland government that the city was beyond range of the Luftwaffe when in fact it was since the German occupation of northern France in June 1940. A six-bomber air raid on the city in early April 1941 showed the error of this complacency and the subsequent hurried scramble to improve the city's air defences and civil defence organisation which was under strength and deficient in equipment, was too late, as this minor air raid which resulted in 32 deaths and property damage, showed the Germans that the city was undefended and easy to attack. James then progressed to the night of Tuesday 15 April 1941 when a force of Luftwaffe bombers operating from bases in the Low Countries and northern France headed for Belfast, with the first wave arriving over the city around 22.30hrs. German pathfinders mistook Belfast Water Works as the aiming point instead of Belfast Docks with the result that many bombs from the following waves of aircraft fell on residential areas rather than the Docks. Over the next few hours over 203 tons of bombs of the high explosive and aerial air burst blast type were dropped, some of which were fitted with delayed action timers, in addition to thousands of incendiaries, which triggered numerous fires which began burning out of control and to overwhelm the Belfast fire fighters on the ground. As the situation raged out of control, James outlined the steps which resulted in a request being made by the Belfast to Dublin City Manager John Hernon for fire fighting assistance, one readily approved by Taoiseach Eamon de Valera, which untimely saw fire engines from the Dublin, Dún Laoghaire, Drogheda and Dundalk fire brigades on their way to Belfast within hours where they spent the next day engaged in fire fighting operations until nightfall when they returned to Dublin. Central to this part of the presentation were the recollections of several Dublin Fire Brigade fire fighters and the detailed recollection of Paddy White of Dún Laoghaire Fire Brigade interviewed by James some years ago. James concluded his presentation with the Blitz recollections of some Belfast people who lived through this ordeal of fire and blasts. Officially 745 people were killed, including some entire families, in this raid but it is believed that the actual death toll was nearer 1000. Following the lecture there was a very lively question and answer session with many members sharing their memories or those of their relatives of the German bombing of Belfast and parts of Dublin, which was a neutral city. The full lecture text will be published in the next issue of the Society's Journal.

9 August 2011

***'Dublin's own Titanic: The sinking of the 'Tayleur' off Lambay in 1854'* by Declan Heffernan**

On Tuesday 9th August members were treated to a fine piece of maritime history in a lecture by **Declan Heffernan** on *'Dublin's own Titanic: The sinking of the 'Tayleur' off Lambay in 1854'*. This is the fascinating and yet, harrowing story of a ship that left Liverpool on January 19th 1854 on her maiden voyage bound for Melbourne in Australia. The ship's complement of 652 passengers and crew included only 37 trained seamen amongst the 71 assigned to the vessel. The crew was by all accounts a motley bunch, many not speaking English and others just working their passage to Australia. Designed by William Rennie of Liverpool the *'Tayleur'* was the largest

merchant ship afloat – 230ft in length with a 40ft beam and displacing 1750 tons. She could carry around 4000 tons of cargo below three decks and was launched by her owners Charles Moore & Co. in Warrington on the River Mersey on October 4th 1853. The vessel was named for Charles Tayleur, founder of the Vulcan Engineering Works in Warrington. Chartered by the White Star Line and under Captain Noble she left Liverpool on January 19th 1854 and sailed out along the Welsh coast with the intention of going so far westward before turning south through the Irish Sea and out to the Atlantic Ocean around the Cape of Good Hope and onwards to Melbourne in Australia. But things went wrong almost from the start, not only with a barely trained crew, but the ship's compasses didn't work properly due to the iron hull and, instead of heading south through the Irish Sea, the 'Tayleur' headed due west for Ireland. The weather played a significant part in its fate as she sailed out in a fog and then in a storm directly towards the rocky coasts of Lambay Island off County Dublin. Within 48 hours of leaving Liverpool disaster struck, the rudder was undersized for the vessel and control of the rigging was hampered by ropes which were not properly stretched and became slack and useless in controlling the sails. The vessel ran aground on the east coast of the island and attempts to lower the lifeboats were hampered by the seas and the rocks. The high seas moved the vessel to deeper water where she eventually sank in around 18m of water. The loss of life was horrific as out of the complement of 652 passengers and crew, 380 people drowned including all but three of the 100 women on board. Survivors faced a gruelingly hard climb up a 24m high cliff to safety. When the alarm was finally raised and word reached Dublin, the City of Dublin Steam Packet Company steamer 'Prince' was dispatched to pick up survivors. Many of the bodies recovered were either buried on Lambay or in the graveyard on the nearby north Dublin coastline. An inquiry into the tragedy absolved the Captain for negligence and blamed the ship's owners for failing to test and to adjust the ship's compasses. However, a Board of Trade inquiry found that the Captain failed to take soundings which would have been the standard practice in such circumstances of low visibility. Declan Heffernan's knowledge of this vessel was greatly enhanced by the fact that he has dived on the wreck several times and indeed, his enthusiasm for the subject was certainly infectious as he gave a most fascinating account of this little known maritime tragedy of 157 years ago.

13 September 2011

***'Unbounded Charity and Unfortunate Females: Lady Arbella Denny and the early years of the Leeson Street Magdalen Asylum'* by Rosemary Raughter**

On Tuesday 13th Sept. 2011, **Rosemary Raughter** delivered an excellent lecture with the intriguing title *'Unbounded Charity and Unfortunate Females: Lady Arbella Denny and the early years of the Leeson Street Magdalen Asylum'* In her research, academic publications and lectures, Rosemary Raughter, has opened up the fascinating and largely untold stories of women and, sometimes religious women, in Irish history. This particular historical narrative is often forgotten or shamefully treated as mere footnotes in our published histories. The women at the heart of this lecture, Lady Arbella Denny, was significantly important in her day to have been elected as a honorary member of the Royal Dublin Society for her charitable works. It is worth remembering that the RDS at the time was a staunchly male preserve. Rosemary Raughter has also brought to the fore Denny's association with the Dublin Foundling Hospital writing "In the decades following the establishment of the Dublin

Foundling Hospital, a succession of parliamentary committees reported unacceptably high mortality rates, abuse and neglect of the children in the institution, and corruption in its management. An exception to the almost universal disregard of such reports was Denny's intervention in the Hospital's affairs, an initiative which she justified by the argument that "the wants of young children the negligence of nurses, and the general management of such an institution" fell decisively within the conventional female "sphere of observation". For twenty years, beginning in 1758, Denny supervised the day-to-day running of the institution and introduced a range of reforms which according to a contemporary "put a stop to barbarity and murder and saved the life of thousands". But it was Denny's role in another institution that Rosemary Raughter outlined in her lecture. The Leeson Street Magdalen Asylum, founded in 1767 by Lady Arbella Denny, was the first institution of its kind in Ireland. Its surviving records are an invaluable source of information on rescue work and women's philanthropic action at this period. Her work at Leeson Street was, it seems, highly valued in society as it was very conspicuously supported by the prestigious Philharmonic Catch Club in the 1760s when they performed 'in aid of the asylum for penitent prostitutes'. Rosemary Raughter's paper, delivered at this meeting, utilized those records to recreate the history of the charity during its first years. Her research focused particularly on the registers of the Asylum, which offer a unique insight into the experience of the inmates themselves, and into the lives of poor women generally in eighteenth-century Dublin. Rosemary Raughter also assessed Denny's various achievements, the factors which may have motivated and her claim to be considered a pioneer, both in the field of child care and in the creation of a public role for women. A fascinating lecture which was greatly appreciated by all in attendance.

11 October 2011

***'Court and Prison Records'* by Brian O'Donovan**

On Tuesday 11th October 2011, **Brian Donovan**, Director of Findmypast.ie, delivered a lecture on one of the greatest untapped sources '*Court and Prison Records*'. The original Prison Registers, held at the National Archives, cover all types of custodial institutions, from bridewells, to county prisons, to sanatoriums for alcoholics. They contain over 3.5 million entries, spread over 130,000 pages, with most records giving comprehensive details of the prisoner, including: name, address, place of birth, occupation, religion, education, age, physical description, name and address of next of kin, crime committed, sentence, dates of committal and release/decease. The registers offer a real insight into 18th-19th century Ireland. They present evidence of a society of rebellion and social confrontation, where rioting and assault of police officers were everyday occurrences, and of widespread poverty and destitution, with the theft of everything from handkerchiefs to turnips. The reasons for incarceration cover all types of crime but unsurprisingly the most common offence was drunkenness, which accounted for over 30% of all crimes reported and over 25% of incarcerations. The top five offences recorded in the registers are: 1. Drunkenness - 25%. 2. Theft - 16%. 3. Assault - 12%. 4. Vagrancy - 8% and 5. Rioting - 4%. The nature of these crimes was significantly different from those in England. Figures show that the rate of conviction for drunkenness and tax evasion was three times greater, and the rate of both destruction of property and prostitution were twice that of England. The Irish population averaged 4.08 million in the period 1790-1924 and with over 3.5 million names listed in the prison records, it is clear to see how almost every family in Ireland was affected somehow. Officially launched at the RDS, Brian

Donovan said “these records provide an invaluable resource for anyone tracing their Irish ancestors, as during the period covered almost every household in Ireland had a convict in their family. These records provide such a wealth of information that they are sure to shock and surprise almost anyone looking for the missing links in their Irish family tree.” (Source: www.findmypast.ie)

8 November 2011

‘Barack Obama’s Benn and Donovan Ancestors’ by Fiona Fitzsimons

On Tuesday 8th November 2011, members were treated to a fascinating lecture by **Fiona Fitzsimons**, Director, General Manager and Research Director with the very successful genealogical research company, Eneclann. Fiona’s lecture was based on her extensive research into President Barack Obama’s Irish ancestry. Although, many may be aware of President Obama’s Kearney ancestors from the Co. Offaly village of Monegall, few are aware of his Benn and Donovan ancestors and thus, Fiona centred her lecture on this lesser-known lineage. Researching Obama’s ancestry with Eneclann colleague, Helen Moss, they built on the earlier research of the American genealogist, Megan Smolenyak. Ms. Smolenyak proved that the then Senator Barack Obama of Illinois had Irish ancestry which could be traced back to a Fulmoth Kearney, born circa 1829 to parents Joseph Kearney, shoemaker, and his wife Phoebe (née Donovan), of Monegall in King’s County, now Co. Offaly. On completion of the Kearney side, the Eneclann team turned its attention to the Benn and Donovan ancestry. The very unusual forename Fulmoth, Fiona discovered, was to appear in both the Benn and the Donovan lines which indicated a close connection between the families in the 18th century. Fulmoth Kearney’s mother, Phoebe Donovan, born circa 1800, was the daughter of Mary Benn (1768-1860) and Fulmoth Donovan who died in 1844. Fiona pointed out that Mary’s own father (Fulmoth Kearney’s grandfather) was Fulmoth Benn who died in 1777. The etymology of this unusual forename is still uncertain and although a number of theories have been published, any agreement on its meaning and origin appears elusive at this stage. Fiona outlined the outcomes of her interviews with the living relatives of Barack Obama who are still farmers with deep ancestral roots along the Offaly / Tipperary border and in the villages of Monegall and Shinrone. These are the President’s closest Irish cousins through their link with Phoebe Kearney (née Donovan). For further information on this research see the Eneclann website www.eneclann.ie or Fiona’s wonderful article in *‘Irish Roots Magazine’* - Second Quarter 2011.

13 December 2011

‘The National Library: Recent Developments and Future Plans’ by Katherine McSharry

On Tuesday 13th December 2011 **Katherine McSharry**, Head of Services at the National Library, spoke to the Society on *‘The National Library: Recent Developments and Future Plans’*. She outlined developments in the NLI’s on-line services, focusing firstly on enhancements to viewing photographs. The NLI has digitised and made over 35,000 of its historic photographs freely available, but until now only at a low resolution. This has meant that the photographs have not been as useful as they might, with key details – signs on walls and in shops, clothing and faces for example – still difficult or impossible to make out. From early in 2012, however, a

new zoom feature developed by the NLI will allow researchers everywhere to view the tiniest details in all of these images. An example of how valuable this will be was demonstrated by zooming in to see how clearly the details of gravestone inscriptions could be read. Ms McSharry also demonstrated a feature in the NLI's catalogue, which provides a link from catalogue records to the full text version available from online sources, such as Google Books and the Internet Archive. She then went on to show some NLI images now available on the online image site Flickr, pointing out that the Library is increasingly active with social media. In addition to these online developments, the NLI will be offering new services onsite in 2012, including the re-opening of the National Photographic Archive reading room, the availability of Wifi, and user training sessions on online resources such as newspapers. New kinds of activity are also underway, with pilot projects in collecting websites (for the General and Presidential elections) having been undertaken in 2011. Alongside this, of particular interest to genealogists is a survey being carried out on the NLI's landed estate papers in association with NUI Maynooth, and digitisation work on the Roman Catholic parish registers. The parish register project will give the NLI digitised images of the registers, not transcriptions of the content, which is a far more labour intensive process. However, they do plan to make the digitised images available to researchers on the NLI premises later in 2012 as an interim step. Ms McSharry concluded by discussing the possibilities of collaboration between the National Library of Ireland and researchers, outlining the benefits which could be gained by "crowdsourcing" - drawing on expertise outside the library to provide valuable information and assistance in the NLI's work.