

# STEPPING STONES

The Newsletter of the South Lough Neagh Area

Autumn 2011

## South Lough Neagh Wetlands – a heritage



**A**cross and around this globe on which we all live and share our existence wetland region, whether large or small, have now become recognised as regions of importance. While each may be unique to its

own area, each is under attack from the forces of man on the one hand and, to a greater degree, the forces of world climate change on the other hand. World wetlands are a diminishing feature and in efforts to not

only protect existing territories the world wetlands organisations, through the medium of the RAMSAR Conference, are currently fighting an ongoing battle to actually save many endangered wetland areas around the globe.

### What is Ramsar?

Ramsar takes its name from the first International World Wetlands Conference held in the town of Ramsar in Iran in 1971. From the original 17 initial signatory nations at the first conference that number has now grown to 160 (inclusive of the UK and the ROI). The total list of protected worldwide wetlands now numbers 1,888. Of these, 21 are in Northern Ireland and Lough Neagh, inclusive of the South Lough Neagh Area Wetlands, is one of the important areas on the list.

### What are the aims of Ramsar?

The Ramsar Conference

aims "to promote the conservation and wise use of all wetland resources through local, regional, and national actions, and by intensifying co-operation among all users and stakeholders.

### Why are we listed?

Our area is listed because -

1. We have on our doorstep the largest freshwater lake in the UK
2. The lake is fringed by beds of species-rich damp grasslands
3. Pockets of cut over bog support unique plants and fauna
4. Over 40 rare local vascular plants have been identified
5. The Lough and lough-



shore is home to a range of rare invertebrates  
6. The area supports large colonies of water birds, both local and migratory  
7. The loughshore region supports 12 species of dragonfly also a number of rare beetles, 7 rare moths

and 2 rare butterflies.  
8. The lough itself supports the unique fish population, the pollan  
9. The area supports in quality a wide diversification of special fauna  
10. It is important for tourism and recreation



# An area to be proud of

**As an area of unique freshwater ecology the South Lough Neagh basin can be termed without doubt as an area of which we can all be justifiably proud.**



**L**ough Neagh, situated in the centre of Northern Ireland, is the largest freshwater lake in the British Isles. It covers an area of some 380 square kilometres, being 30.5 km long and 12.1 km wide. For its size the lake is very shallow having a mean depth of only 9 metres, being only 35 metres at its deepest point. It is this shallowness that adds to its uniqueness in its support of diverse wildlife species and fauna. The basis of this support, and fish stocks in particular, lies largely from the Lough being the nurse bed for abundant annual summer hatches of pollen fly, or better known as simply the Lough fly.

Here on the southern shore, the ecology is added to by the feed waters of the Rivers Bann and Blackwa-

ter they in themselves being important channels for migratory fish stocks with the river banks being a recognised habitat refuge for fauna and wildlife.

This southern loughshore basin is also blessed by having a number of 'man assisted' places of environment interest. To the west we have Peatlands Park, managed by The Environment Services Agency for N.I. Here, ready access pathways are provided for access onto wide tracts of spent bog and fenland. By way of plank boardwalks and supported paths, visitors can explore this ancient moorland having also access to Derriadd Lough with its rich reed-beds and quiet retreats.

Maghera Park provides facilities to explore the loughshore, and with

its slipways and boat moorings on the local canal, there is ready and safe access on to the lough itself for boating enthusiasts.

A little further long at Bannfoot where the river Bann enters the Lough, wildlife abounds.

Under the control of Craigavon Borough Council the excellent facilities at Oxford Island by the Kinnego Embankment provide birdwatchers with very accessible hides and unrestricted viewing points.

For the more adventurous, going further east, the satellite Portmore Lough is an area rich in habitat and a haven for waterbirds. Areas of unimproved wet grassland across the basin as a whole serve to add to its distinctive importance as a world Ramsar site.





# The Bard of the Boglands



So often writing about nature, Teggart depicted among other things the "Yellow Bloom" He also collected the sights and sounds and even the smells of the area in such poems as, "When the Skylark Soars and Sings; The Montiagh Moss; The Wee Mosscheeper; Up The Ramper; Our Bogland Home; Turf Smoke," and so many more.

**M**oses Teggart was known as the Bard of the Boglands. Born in the crowded townland of Ballinary Birches on the shores of Lough Neagh in 1853, the son of a simple cotter tenant farmer with apparent little prospects in life, Moses Teggart successfully applied himself to learning and academia so as to leave an indelible mark through his distinctive writings in both prose and poetry.

Following his primary education at his local Cloncore National School he obtained a place through matriculation at the New Model School in Belfast from where, after two strenuous years he became qualified as a National School teacher.

Following the opportunities of his chosen profession he was able to work in, and travel to many places in Ireland, and furthered his experiences in both Scotland and England. He eventually joined the Civil Service in Scotland in the mid 1870s, but returned home to Ballinary in 1888 to join the then fast flowing emigration trail to the United States where he took up work in the town of Springfield, Massachusetts. In reality, it was at this period in his life - 1890/1909 - that he flourished as a poet, having a wide range of his works published weekly in both the Springfield and Portadown newspapers of the day.

His prose and poetry, written in something of a Burns idiom, are not only time capsules of a time gone by, but have left us, as it were pen painted pictures of rural life, exemplifying the natural ambience of the loughshore and all its closeness to nature. Not only was Teggart an incurable romantic, he was a born naturalist. From his well-known poem The Bell of Ballinary through to such contributions as The Daisies on the Brea, he excelled in descriptive phrase.

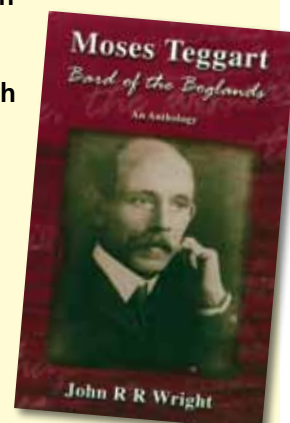
Thanks to the tireless work of Dr John Wright, a complete volume of Teggart prose and poetry has been published as an anthology. Dr Wright not only collected over 300 of Teggart's known works, but has put together a gripping account of Teggart's colourful life including an account of his sad death in 1909 when he died on board the SS Carthaginian on his way back to the USA, following what was to be his last visit home to Ireland. He was buried at sea on 19th Feb 1909. His poetry remains his sole memorial. The last poem he ever wrote was composed a few days prior to his final departure and it would seem that he had some premonition that his sands of time were running out. It was entitled 'A Farewell'. Though brief, it serves as a fitting epitaph.

*Farewell, ye cold black bogs and moors!*

*Goodbye, ye gold bloomed whins!  
Ye teach me how the love endures,  
That in friendship fond begins.  
Goodbye ye little redbreasts all  
That sing so sweet at dawn,  
At dusk I hear your pensive call,  
And shall when I am gone.*

*Farewell ye kindly people all  
In bogland and in town,  
Your friendship I esteem and shall  
Till I this head lay down.  
In that last sleep o'er which the dawn  
Of heaven some morn will rise,  
When I, fond hope! Though some  
time gone,  
Shall join you in the skies.*

**Copies of the book MOSES TEGGART - THE BARD OF THE BOGLANDS can be purchased via the office of South Lough Neagh Regeneration. Telephone no 028 38 852 550. Price £10, its 400 pages in hardback and colour is an offer not to be missed.**



# STEPPING ON THE



Members of the South Lough Neagh Historical Society enjoy a field trip day out to the Newgrange Iron Age historical site of Irish Kings.

## Migration studies

**M**igration and Immigration have always been highly debated features in Irish cultural life. To get to know more about this topic, the Society engaged Dr Patrick Fitzgerald the well-know historian and TV broadcaster, to conduct a series of lectures with follow-up visits to the Centre for Migration Studies. These have proven both very popular and beneficial with all who have taken part. Not only did the regular members become involved but several new visitors from the local ethnic migrant community were made welcome.



Outside Mittens Cottage.

**S**ince 2004 The South Lough Neagh Historical Society, based in the Community Hall at Maghery, has grown from strength to strength. Not only as an active historical society but as an example of good community relations at work, it is held very much in local high regard.

Not only do the members meet monthly to benefit from the informed talks given by noted historical academics covering a wide range of subjects ranging from local historical topics to those of wider national Irish history, but the outdoor field trips and excursions have become very much oversubscribed calendar events.

Recent field trips have included visits to The National Bog Museum at Corlea



The old Cross, Clones - Several visits to Clones have been made by the Society members.

in Co. Longford; trips to The Boyne Valley Site and to Drogheda; to the cathedral and walls at Derry; to the O'Neill Grinnian, the ancient seat of the O'Neill's of Ulster in Inishowen; and to The Centre for Migration Studies and the Ulster/American Folk Park at Omagh. Many local exploratory walks and field study trips have been undertaken, including a visit to O'Connor's Stronghold on Derrywarragh and to Coney Island. Several walks across the old Verner Churchill Estate and visits to the old early Celtic-Christian burial ground in Mullankille have proven popular. A tour of The Argory grounds and house, the seat of the late MacGeough-Bonds, as well as several evening fireside meetings in such



# ESTONES OF TIME



## Useful Community Contacts

### Youth Group Contacts:

**Sarsfields Youth Club**  
Leanne McCusker  
T: 02838 340071

**Wolftones Youth Club**  
Liz Hoy/Lisa Tighe  
T: 07842 699861

**Aghagallon Youth Club**  
Catherine Shipman  
T: 07889 016604

**John Mitchell Youth Club**  
Aiden Mulholland  
T: 07591 969812

**Birches Youth Club**  
John Richie  
T: 07872 067411

**Maghery Youth Club**  
Siobhan Hoey  
T: 07944 092601

**Milltown Youth Club**  
Alan McElmurry  
T: 07548 650687

**Scotch Street Youth Club**  
Alan McCann  
T: 07548 65087

**Vinecash Youth Club**  
Gordon Woolsey  
T: 07599 806050

### Senior Citizen Clubs

**Derrytrasna Senior Citizen Group**  
Meet every Wednesday in Sarsfields Community Centre  
Contact: Eileen McAlinden  
T: 028 3834 0556

**Aghagallon Senior Citizen Group**  
Meet every Tuesday in Cranagh Hall  
Contact: Eilish McGrath  
T: 028 9265 1926

**Diamond Senior Citizen Group**  
Meet every Tuesday in Maghery Community Hall  
Contact: Anne Fox T: 028 3885 1113

**The Birches Day Care and Cosy Club** - Meet every Tuesday in The Birches Cosy Club Centre  
Contact: Edith Stevenson  
T: 028 3885 2041



The group enjoy a Moses Teggart poetry walking tour.

places as John Pat Mackel's traditional loughshore cottage in Columcille and a recent visit to the site of the Battle of the Diamond and to Dan Winter's cottage have been undertaken.

Joining up with likeminded historical societies as in Aughnacloy and in Clones has resulted in a number of successful ventures. In January last, the members truly enjoyed the entertainment and hospitality of a Burns Night supper as hosted by the Clones Society. Without doubt a full itinerary is being operated, providing notable opportunities for cross-community involvement.

**The South Lough Neagh Historical Society meets on the first Monday of each month at 8pm in the Community Hall, Maghery. Membership is unrestricted, being open to anyone wishing to come along. New season commences on Monday 5th September when the new programme will be announced.**





# Summer in the Lough Shore

A highly successful south loughshore summer enhancement scheme was held during July and August which was attended by hundreds of local children.

A range of sporting and cultural activities held the imagination for some of the young people while others enjoyed workshops in cookery, jewellery making and arts and crafts.

The children also attended day trips to Newcastle, Craigavon Watersports Centre and Murlough Bay Beach. While some of the older children got to spend a three-day residential at Shannagh More Outdoor Education Centre.

None of these events would have taken place without the voluntary help of the rural youth leaders and senior member volunteers from Wolfe

Tones Youth Club, Derrymacash, Sarsfields Youth Club, Milltown Youth Club, Birches Youth Club, Maghery Youth Club, Scotch Street Youth Club and SELB Craigavon Youth Initiative personnel.

■ The schemes were partly funded by SOAR – the Rural Development Fund, SELB, and South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association.



Seniors testing the ice





Leaders trying out the bouncy castle



Young people enjoying the wide range of activities available



# Up-and-coming events

**S**outh Lough Neagh Regeneration Association is hosting a free event for Rural Women - Good Relations and Civic Leadership Training incorporating an image consultation that advises on styles, colours and accessories, and a personal

development session.

**Venue:** *Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, Lurgan.*

One morning per week over four weeks, starting Thursday 22nd September 2011.

Refreshments provided.

Course is free and contribution towards childminding costs can be claimed via a signed worksheet.

■ **Please contact Mary or Bernie on 028 3885 2550 or email: [slnra@btconnect.com](mailto:slnra@btconnect.com) to book a place.**

## Youth Leadership Programme

### Autumn 2011

**T**his programme is for 16-25 year olds who have demonstrated leadership potential in their community and are interested in exploring and developing their own leadership potential.

#### 2011 November/December: Two day residential

An interactive, multi-phase activity based on leadership development programme. To build young people's skills, confidence and sense of self and to work alongside young people to give back/demonstrate their leadership to the community. NOCN Level 2 Accredited.

■ **Please contact Mary or Bernie on 028 3885 2550 or email: [slnra@btconnect.com](mailto:slnra@btconnect.com) to book a place.**



**T**he Boat Factory is a new play written by award-winning local actor and presenter Dan Gordon, and based on his personal experience of growing up around the east Belfast shipyard. Performed by Dan Gordon and Michael Condron, it explores our shipbuilding heritage in a poignant and human tale of comradeship, pride, loyalty, kindness, beauty, skill, craftsmanship, nobility and above all heart.

■ **Tuesday 1st November 2011, tickets £5 each and can be obtained by contacting South Lough Neagh Regeneration Association on 028 3885 2550 or email: [slnra@btconnect.com](mailto:slnra@btconnect.com). Places are limited so please book early.**

**S**outh Lough Neagh Historical Society is hosting a two-day exhibition - 'The 1848 Rebellion' Young Ireland Revisited - The love story of John Mitchel and Jenny Verner in Maghera and District Hall on Friday 11th and Saturday 12th November from 10.00am - 10.00pm each day.

A real-life adventure story - the story of John and Jenny Mitchel is epic. It is the story of the 19th century politics in both Ireland and United States. It is the story of a life long fidelity, played out on three continents and against a

background of war and rebellion.

John and Jenny were a most handsome couple who acted out their lives in the landscapes of Ireland, Tasmania (Van Diemen's Land), California, New York, Tennessee, Virginia and Paris. Their story involves radical Presbyterianism, the Orange Order, the Famine, exile in Van Diemen's Land, the American Civil War, the Fenians and Home Rule; but mostly it is gripping love story.

Jenny followed John into exile and had real experiences similar to the

fictional Scarlett O'Hara! John died in Newry without his Jenny.

Besides the exhibition there will be illustrated lectures with live music (classical pianist and singers), a presentation on Verner's Estate and a historical discussion of the significance of the Young Irelanders. Entrance is free.

■ **For further details, please contact South Lough Neagh Historical Society on T: 028 3885 2550 or email: [slnra@btconnect.com](mailto:slnra@btconnect.com)**



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