



*“Doors of Hope”*



P.O. Box 101529, Pittsburgh, PA 15237

July 2024

## Remembering Joe Drotter

By: *Ciaran Cahill*

Although we knew Joe was unwell his passing came as a big shock.

His former headmaster at Austin Prep, Dr James Hickey, said “If you want to understand the meaning of Veritas (Truth), Unitas (Unity), Caritas (Charity) you need look no further than Joe Drotter.”



It is true to say that Joe’s early Augustinian education had a lasting impact on his life and work none more so than in Ireland.

Joe made it his business to revisit Derry regularly to take part in the anniversary march and catch up with old friends he made over the years. He also kept his connection with Cork where he volunteered with an organisation called ‘Between’. For over 30 years Between delivered programmes to promote human relations and reconciliation with and between communities in the North of Ireland.

The Between House in Spurhill, Togher, Cork welcomed children and families from all over Ireland and provided respite from the worst of the troubles. Joe gave of his time during the summer months to assist in the everyday running of the camp and no doubt contributed financially to keep the project running.

**Continued pg. 2**

### **Tell us what you think!**

Our July newsletter will feature some articles that are not directly related to our work, but we felt our readers may find them interesting. The primary purpose of our newsletter is, and will continue to be, to show our donors the impact of their generosity. However, we would like to begin sharing articles and information about Irish history and culture along with our regular content.

Please feel free to email us with your thoughts and opinions. We welcome your feedback!

## Remembering Joe Drotter, from page 1

Joe was a regular visitor to the Springhill Community House on his trips to Ireland calling in for a cuppa and chat with Fr Des. Joe kept in contact with Fr Des via letter, email and telephone discussing and solving the problems of the world.

Joe loved everything Irish and the three core principles of Truth, Unity and Charity were at the heart of everything he did.

Joe's truth, unity and charity wasn't confined to Ireland.

While on a trip to Vietnam in 2003 Joe became aware of the devastating effects of Agent Orange, a chemical used by the US military. Although its use stopped in the 1970s, the dioxin contaminant continues to have harmful effects on the Vietnamese people causing deformities, cancer, and serious health issues.

Joe decided that he needed to do something to help, he bought and converted a factory into the Tam Binh Centre a school for 20 physically disabled children. He became an Emergency Medical Technician so that he could give basic medical care. Joe wanted to educate and train the children, many of whom were deaf, so that they would become productive members of society, helping them reach their full potential.

At the entrance to the school are two signs one with the name of the school "Tam Binh Centre" and the other "Tír na nÓg". Joe explained, "Tam Binh Center is the name of the school meaning peace of mind, but I consider the building to be Tír na nÓg from Irish mythology, - the Land of the Young, the Land of Eternal Youth. An island in the Atlantic where one never grows old and lives forever. Symbolically, these children will stay young "forever" - never to become adults and assume the burdens and responsibilities we all carry. And the Trinity knot is an ancient Celtic symbol, with several interpretations. One of which is very Buddhist-like, of birth-life-death and rebirth - as the knot itself is a continuous, never-ending loop. Another school of thought sees the trinity knot as a more metaphysical concept where the three corners represent Mind, Body and Spirit - hopefully, what the children will develop for themselves at Tam Binh Center." The school is going from strength to strength and hopes to build on its capacity to work with 75 children.

Joe continued to keep a close eye on events in Ireland with his regular visits until his last in 2022. Joe was diagnosed with cancer. It was clear that this was his final farewell trip, and he used it to do a whistle stop tour from Dublin to Belfast and Derry to Westmeath visiting and saying goodbye to his many friends across Ireland.

Joe was a true friend who was guided by the principles that life is to search for the ultimate truth, not alone, but among friends with love at the heart of every act and respect for each other. Always aware of the virtues of honesty, integrity, and compassion as fundamental to the way of life.

Veritas, Unitas and Caritas at its best.

Slan go Foill mo chara.

## **Consider a Legacy Gift to Conway Mill Trust in Your Will and/or Encourage Contributions in Your Memory**

Many of us are in the autumn of our years, a time to evaluate what we want to leave behind in terms of memories, cherished objects, and financial assets after our time on earth is finished. In addition to bequests to loved ones, some of us find it meaningful to leave a portion of our estates to a cause or organization that reflected our values.

In the past Conway Mill Trust has received gifts from people who left a specified bequest in their wills. Most recently, Joe Drotter remembered Conway Mill Trust with a sizeable bequest that will positively impact many lives.

These thoughtful and generous posthumous donations have enabled Conway Mill Trust to continue supporting the organizations that are part of our network such as the Conway Education Centre, Springhill Community House, Museum of Free Derry, Altram, Irish Republican Museum, Dove House, and other initiatives, some of which were founded through the support and vision of the late Father Des Wilson.

Many of these organizations depend on donations to keep their doors open as the funding from the Northern Ireland government is not always certain and sometimes sparse given government budget cuts. Their financial needs continue to increase as utilities and other costs soar with inflation. This is why we ask that you consider a gift in your will to Conway Mill Trust, which is a nonprofit operated by volunteers with minimal overhead. All donations and bequests go directly to the organization that you specify.

If you have not created a will, now is the time to do so (none of us are getting any younger). If you already have a will, it is fairly simple to add language that specifies how much you would like to give to Conway Mill Trust. As mentioned above, you can indicate which organization you would like to gift, or you can just leave it to Conway Mill Trust which will distribute the bequest to all the organizations we support. Consult your attorney about inserting this wording into your will and notify loved ones about your decision. Knowing that a portion of your estate will sustain organizations that you believe in can offer peace of mind.

For those of you who are not in a position to leave money in your will to Conway Mill Trust, please consider informing loved ones that you would like people to contribute in your memory to Conway Mill Trust after you have passed. This is a practice that is becoming more popular at funerals and memorial gatherings as a way to honor the legacy of the deceased in lieu of floral arrangements. These contributions can make a vital difference in continuing the valuable work of Conway Education Centre, Springhill Community House, Museum of Free Derry, Altram, Irish Republican Museum, Dove House, Drumcree Community Centre, and Still Imprisoned Project.

Conway Mill Trust has 501(c)3 status; so, contributions are tax deductible. Our number is 22-2823443.

## Visiting Belfast - Make a Stop at the James Connolly Visitor Centre

By: Lorraine Starsky, Conway Mill Trust Trustee

Best known for his role in the 1916 Easter Rising, **James Connolly** was a leading trade unionist, working class political activist and Republican and an iconic figure in Irish history. His fascinating story is told in this £1 million interactive visitor centre, opened in 2019 by Irish President Michael D. Higgins and is funded largely by American labor unions. This award-winning modern centre is located only yards from where James Connolly lived on the Falls Road.

The bilingual exhibition—in Irish and English—tells the story of Connolly from his birth in Edinburgh in 1868 to his execution in Dublin for his part in the Easter Rising in 1916. Connolly was born in humble circumstances and experienced poverty firsthand most of his life. Despite being forced to leave school at a very early age, he had a lifelong unquenchable thirst for knowledge and learning about the world. Despite his lack of formal education, he went on to master the skill of writing and wrote enduring works about historical and political matters.

Connolly worked as a laborer, docker, engineer, and salesman, and subsequently joined Jim Larkin in leading the 1913 strike that led to the historic Dublin lockout. The Centre includes a huge map that charts Connolly's journeys, which involved traveling by train to Colorado and New Mexico to address U.S. workers.

In the ground-floor exhibition, excerpts from Connolly's letters and his quotations are brought to life through an audio library of poetry, music, and an interview with his daughter. Visitors hear stories about the Citizens Army that he founded to protect workers, his influence on the text of the Easter Proclamation, his leadership in the Rising, his resulting court-martial and death sentence. A display cabinet contains his pistol and the knocker from the GPO in Dublin, the headquarters of the Easter rising.

**The James Connolly Visitor Centre** includes a café/tearoom and an extensive library of books, some written by Connolly and others about him and his times. The Centre has received extremely favorable reviews from Trip Advisor, Discover Northern Ireland, Fodor's Travel Guide to name a few. My husband and I visited the Centre in 2019 shortly after it opened, and we found it to be extremely inspiring and informative. If you find Irish history captivating, this is a must-see experience.

Áras Uí Chonghaile/The James Connolly Visitor Centre  
374, 376 Falls Rd, Belfast BT12 6DG  
Phone 028-9099--1005  
On Facebook and X/twitter



ÁRAS UÍ CHONGHAILE  
JAMES CONNOLLY  
VISITOR CENTRE  
*James Connolly*

## **Sport, Culture and Identity: Revival of the Aonach Tailteann, 1924-1932**

The modern Olympic games will open in Paris this summer, a return, after 100 years, to the venue of the 1924 Summer Olympics. The 1924 games were notable as the first at which an Irish team competed, as the International Olympic Committee had admitted Ireland in 1922.

A month or so after the Paris Olympics of 1924, another ancient sporting and cultural event was revived in Dublin: the Aonach Tailteann (Tailte's Festival). Prior to 1924, the most recent Aonach Tailteann had taken place in 1169 in the reign of Rory O'Connor, the last High King of Ireland before the Norman invasion. The festival, in honor of Queen Tailte, who died circa 1600 B.C., had been initiated by her foster son, Lug Lamfhota, and was held near her burial place in County Meath.

The nobles of ancient Ireland would be summoned to the festival, which began on August 1, by the High King. Anach Tailteann had three essential purposes: 1) to honor the dead; 2) to promulgate and announce new laws; and 3) to provide sport and entertainment for the people. The festival opened with a religious ceremony, conducted by the Chief Druid and featured a recounting of Queen Tailte's heritage and her accomplishments.

The High King would then declare a period of truce, in which all quarrels and disputes must cease for the duration of the festival. The High King would then announce any new laws, after which the games would begin. The festival featured athletic events, but also featured exhibitions of literature, dance, poetry, music and even a matchmaking event. The festival was, in its essence, a declaration and celebration of Irish sovereignty, identity and culture.

The modern revival of the festival, in that respect, was a natural extension of the cultural revival of the late 19th Century that saw the creation of the GAA (1884), the Gaelic League (1893), the Abbey Theater (1904) and other expressions of Irish identity that surrounded the events of 1916, the rise of Sinn Fein and the creation of modern Ireland. With the hardships of the Irish War of Independence and the tragic and bitter Civil War behind them, the Free State Government gave its support (but not significant funding) to the Anach Tailteann revival movement, which had begun in the 1880s, with support from Michael Davitt and Maurice Davin.

The GAA offered Croke Park, gratis, as the primary site for the games. Teams (all participants had to be of Irish descent) came from the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Scotland, England, Wales and South Africa, including some athletes just returned from the Paris Olympics. W.B. Yeats gave the opening address, and the U.S. team, in the end, walked away with the most winners, followed by Ireland. Included with the ancient Irish games were modern sports and, the most well-attended events, motorcycle, and airplane racing. The festival was a limited success and was repeated in 1928 and again in 1932. Identified

**Continued pg. 6**

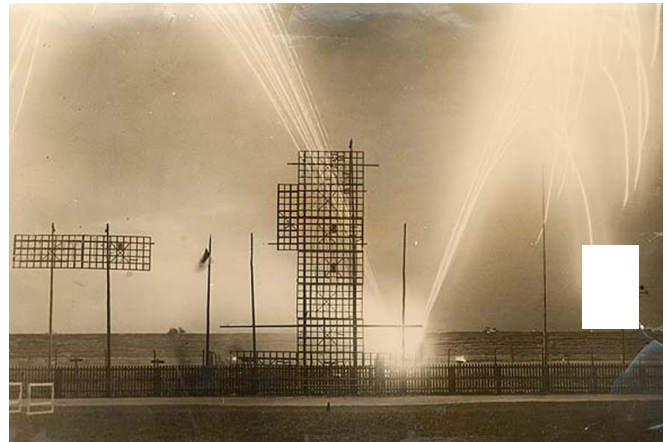


## Aonach Tailteann, from pg.5

as an initiative of the initial Free State government, the festival was only minimally supported financially by De Valera's Fianna Fail government, which was committed to austerity and expressed Ireland's national identity in other ways and was not continued after 1932.



**Captains of the Irish and American hurling teams shaking hands**



**Fireworks at the first Games, 15 August 1924**

### **Contemporary Coverage of the 1924 Aonach Tailteann**

*From the Catholic Columbian, Columbus, Ohio, March 1924*

Whatever criticisms may be levelled at the Irish, nobody has ever accused them of being dull. Gay-hearted even in the midst of trouble, they are blessed with a buoyancy which sustains them through political convulsions and economic depression; and so, it is not the least bit surprising to find them on the morrow of a fierce domestic war concentrating with good will on a National festival of athletics. That they will play, as they fought, with vigor and intensity, no one can doubt; and one can hope that the lingering bitterness of the battle ground will disappear in the friendly rivalry of the arena.

The great annual gathering was an important feature of the life of ancient Ireland for seventeen centuries, and even maintained in degenerate existence for hundreds of years after the English invasion. It was deeply embedded in the history, folklore and common tradition of the people. The revival of the festival on a national scale has always been an object of Irish Patriotism. The glories of the golden age are never forgotten by the mass of Irish people...in point of antiquity, duration and splendor, the Games of ancient Eireann can claim equality with the games of the Olympiad.



# CONWAY EDUCATION CENTRE



## **They did it! Congratulations!!**

The girls from the Conway Mill Education Centre Homework Club presented their creative idea of upcycling clothes: 'Threads of Empowerment' to the public at the Belfast City Council Bank of Creative Ideas event on Sunday 2 June to compete for project funding of £2,000. And their hard work paid off!

Threads of Empowerment was in the top 5 of most voted-for projects and won their funding! Many thanks to all of you who voted for the project and congratulations to the girls of our Homework Club and the Homework Club staff team who worked incredibly hard on this project.

## ***Go raibh maith agat!***

We are always thankful for the generosity of our donors. Once a year we like to formally acknowledge those who make our work possible. It is only because of you that we can continue providing help where it is needed. Thank you 2023 donors!

Msgr. Charles Owen Rice Div. 1  
St. Brendan AOH Division 1  
St. Patrick AOH Division 4  
Barbara J. Bogdan  
Margaret A. Bond  
Cecilia and Michael Byrne  
Sean Cahill  
Sheila P. Caulfield  
Kathleen M. Cole  
Ned and Cherry L. Delaney  
Neil F. Doherty  
David and Virginia Doughton  
Francis E. Durkan  
Daniel J. Engler  
Michael and Timothy Foley  
Sandra J. Haas  
John B. Haltigan  
Herbert W. Hennings  
John P. Holland AOH Division  
Kathleen Holmes

William L. and Madelyn J. Keller  
Michael & Kathleen M. Keenan  
Mary E. Madden  
Mary T. Mannion  
Stephen M. McCabe Esq.  
Rosemarie McColgan  
Thomas J. and Roberta M. McGrory  
Edward J. McManus  
Seamus P. and Eileen K. Metress  
Roberta A. Nagle and Richard Murphy  
Michael Francis O'Brien  
Hugh B. and Diane M. O'Donnell  
Seán O'Murray  
Robert G. and Rita M. Parry  
Mary A. Quinn  
Elizabeth A. Ramsey  
Dorothy Redmond  
Kathleen M. Regan  
Bernadette Skuse  
Andrew A. Somers