

# COURTS Service News

NUACHT NA SEIRBHÍSE CÚIRTEANNA



COURTS SERVICE  
*An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna*

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COURTS SERVICE AT 10  
REVIEW OF 2008

FAREWELL MESSAGE  
FROM THE C.E.O.

TRINITY COLLEGE  
AFRICAN PROGRAMME

HOW TO SAVE MONEY  
AT CHRISTMAS

VISITORS TO THE  
COURTS SERVICE





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# Welcome

Welcome to the December edition of the *Courts Service News*. We have some nostalgia for you this time as we look back, not only on 2008 on pages 18-21 but over 10 years of the Courts Service, pages 24-26. Can you believe that we're into our tenth year? We publish a farewell from CEO PJ Fitzpatrick who has been at the helm since the beginning and a message from the Chief Justice who reminds us of the contribution of the CEO to our new organisation.

Our look back at 2008 shows the continued improvement of the service to court users through building and ICT developments together with operational changes such as sittings of the High Court outside of Dublin. This mirrors the review of our first 10 years which reflects on a decade of huge reform: structural, legal and administrative. It is clear from the CEO's message and the reviews that none of this progress could have come about without the commitment, enthusiasm and participation of staff all around the country.

We said good-bye to some stalwarts of the District Court this year. You can read the tributes paid to them by colleagues on pages 32-34. We also made lots of new friends as you will see from 'Through the Lens' and in the outreach programme article on page 16.

We bring news of some recent publications most particularly *Family Law Matters* which continues to shed light on cases before the family law courts. Looking forward to 2009, Gerry Curran offers some suggestions on how to beat the recession and have fun at the same time. But as it's still 2008 we keep with the nostalgia theme with our Christmas quiz on page 39 and some book ideas on pages 36 and 37.

The Courts Service News team thanks all who contributed to the magazine during the year. We are grateful to those who contacted us with ideas, views and suggestions and especially those who wrote articles and features for us. Without our contributors it would be a smaller and much less interesting publication.

We wish all our readers a peaceful Christmas and good health and happiness in 2009.

*Fiona Farrell*

Fiona Farrell



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## Message from the Chief Justice



**A**s the year ends and at the approach to the Christmas period it is traditional that I express on my own behalf and on behalf of the Board our thanks to all the personnel of the Courts Service for the work they have undertaken and the commitment which they have given during the year. I would not wish the fact that it is a tradition to do so to in any way take from the genuine sense of appreciation and gratitude which the Board has for the contribution which the personnel in all courts and throughout the country have made to sustaining the successes already achieved by the Courts Service since its inception and the progress which has been made during the year. The Courts Service has achieved a high standing and indeed prestige among public service bodies and the public generally for its successes. That could not have been done without the degree of professionalism and commitment from its personnel in each successive year. That is why it is appropriate that I should express at this time the thanks and appreciation of the Board.

Our thanks must also be extended to all those agencies and professional bodies, and their members, who have co-operated with and contributed to the work of the Courts Service during the past year.

I wish all a very happy and peaceful Christmas.

In alluding above to the successes of the Courts Service and its development to the present day as a body which has greatly enhanced the support available to the judiciary and the services which it gives to court users, lay and professional, I cannot do so without referring to the pivotal and key role which our Chief Executive, Mr. PJ Fitzpatrick, has played throughout the years of its existence.

At the end of this month Mr. Fitzpatrick will complete the term of his second contract as Chief Executive Officer and will pass the baton to his successor, yet to be appointed at the time of writing. There is no space in this brief message to do justice to the contribution which Mr. Fitzpatrick has made to both the formation and development of the Courts Service. Suffice it to say for present purposes that it was his wisdom and expertise which has brought the Courts Service to the position it is in today – an outstanding example of excellence in public administration. The many new court buildings, those which have been superbly restored as well as continuing projects, along with the vast range of new and improved services provided, bear testimony to that.

It remains for me, not only on my own behalf and on behalf of the Board, but I am sure on behalf of all the personnel of the Courts Service to wish him well in his future endeavours and to express our thanks and appreciation to him for the decade of unprecedented and sustained progress for which he was responsible.

*John L. Murray*  
Chief Justice of Ireland

## A Farewell Message from the Chief Executive Officer



I shall shortly be leaving the Courts Service after 10 very enjoyable and rewarding years. As the first Chief Executive I was given an opportunity to establish a new organisation – an opportunity that few people get. For that I thank the selection committee of the Transitional Board. I appreciate the enormous trust and confidence placed in me, particularly given that judges had made an historic decision to participate as members of the Board and on committees of the Board.

This judicial support together with the cooperation of staff all around the country inspired and encouraged me and combined to make the Courts Service what it is today.

The Courts Service, while a new organisation, had staff with a wealth and depth of experience and a dedication to public service, integrity and outstanding talent that provided the foundation on which we have continued to build. I extend my sincere thanks to all the staff past and present. Without interested, dedicated and motivated staff no organisation can survive and prosper.

The response of the staff to so much change which for many had to be very difficult was second to none. Their openness and willingness to embrace change never ceased to amaze me. Their

involvement and support for the new organisation, after a few early and understandably difficult months when we were establishing a unified organisation, made my job so much easier.

That there has not been an industrial relations dispute or a split vote at Board level in the past decade is a testament to the commitment of everyone to our change programme.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Chief Justice and Chairperson of our Board, the Hon. Mr. Justice John L. Murray for his tremendous support and advice at all times. He and his predecessors together with the members of the Board over the past ten years have provided me with much valued guidance and support.

I thank the Presidents and their predecessors and each and every judge past and present from all of our courts for the support and assistance given to me. I especially thank the many judges and staff who have worked on our Board, committees, and project groups.

As the chair of the Working Group which recommended the establishment of the Service and as a former chair of the Board, I especially thank the Hon. Mrs. Justice Denham who, in addition to her work as a judge of the Supreme Court, invested vast amounts of effort, time and wisdom in the developing Courts Service.

The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has at all times been very supportive. I thank the Minister, his predecessors and the Secretaries Generals and their staff.

To the groups who represent people who use the courts on a regular basis, I also owe a great deal of gratitude – they include the Bar Council, the Law Society,

the Prosecution Service, the Office of the Attorney General, the Gardai, the Prison Service, the Probation Service and organisations representing victims. I cannot think of anything we sought to do that we were obstructed or prevented from doing. Of course there had to be consultation, communication, persuasion and negotiation but at the end of the day we were able to do what we planned. And very often as a result of that communication and consultation our plans were carried out with enhanced arrangements.

The support of the Chairman and staff of the Office of Public Works was instrumental in enabling us deliver on our Capital Building Programme. The cooperation with the OPW has been a wonderful example of public service partnership with the results of our combined efforts evident for the present and future generations all around the country.

I thank everybody most sincerely for the fantastic assistance, support and encouragement that made my job easier over the past ten years. I take great memories with me and leave with a great sense of personal achievement and satisfaction. I have no doubt the Courts Service will continue to prosper and develop under the guidance of the Chief Justice and the members of the Board. To my successor, I wish as much success and enjoyment as I have had. Needless to say I will continue to follow the progress of the Service with great interest.

Finally I would like to wish you and your families a very happy and peaceful Christmas and everything you wish for yourself in 2009.

**P.J. Fitzpatrick**  
Chief Executive Officer



## INCREASE IN NUMBER OF DISTRICT COURT JUDGES

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform in accordance with section 39 of the (Courts Supplemental Provisions) Act, 1961 (No. 39 of 1961), as amended by section 38 of the Court and Court Officers Act, 1995 signed an Order on 21 October 2008 to increase the number of judges of the District Court to be assigned permanently to the Dublin Metropolitan District from eighteen to twenty one.

## Monaghan Civil and Family Law Sitzings

As and from the 28th of November, 2008 the Monaghan Civil and Family Law sittings will be transferred to the Courthouse in Clones until the refurbishment of Monaghan Courthouse

is complete. (2nd Friday of each month except the vacation periods) Please note the transfer of sittings to Clones refer only to the Civil and Family Law lists.

S.I. No. 461 of 2008 District Court (Districts) Order 2008  
S.I. No. 462 of 2008 District Court Districts and Areas (Amendment) Order 2008  
S.I. No. 469 of 2008 District Court (Child Care) Rules 2008  
S.I. No. 498 of 2008 District Court (Bench Warrants) Rules 2008  
Details can be found on our website [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie).

## Shedding more light on family law

Further reports on proceedings in the family law courts are available in the latest edition of the Courts Service publication '*Family Law Matters*'. This edition concludes the second year of the pilot project to report on family law cases around the country:

To date *Family Law Matters* has included reports on a wide range and variety of matters from many parts of the country. Reports in the latest edition are from Dublin, Cork and the Northern, Midland, Eastern and South-Eastern Circuits. The welfare of children continues to be central to many of the reports with issues concerning guardianship, custody and access featuring again and again.

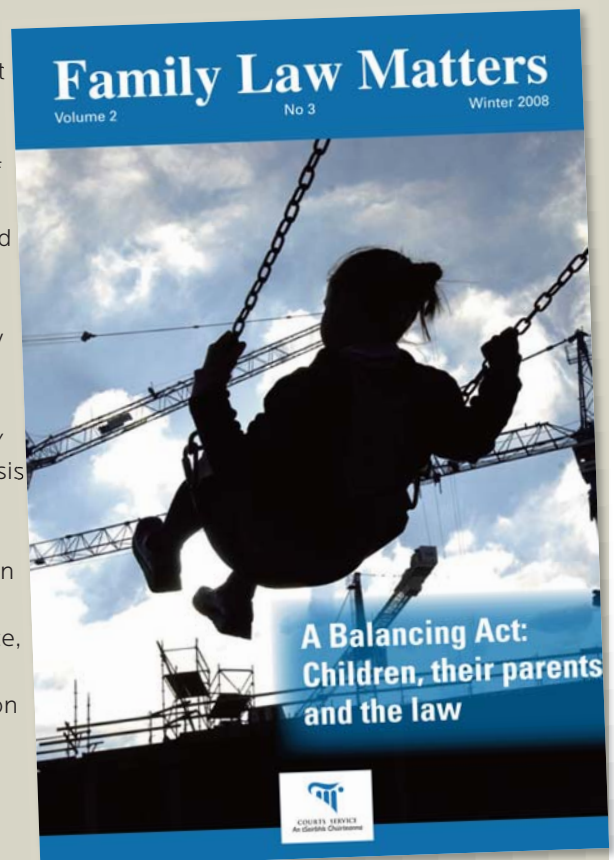
The Hague Convention and the subject of so called 'child abduction' is also featured. The Convention which has been adopted by 84 countries, is primarily concerned with securing the return of children wrongfully removed from or wrongfully retained, out of their country of habitual residence, back to that country. In many convention cases the 'abductor' is not a stranger but is often the custodial parent or guardian of the child. The article examines how the Irish courts meet the challenge of dealing with these difficult cases expeditiously.

Child care cases in the District Court are discussed with Finbarr O'Leary of

the Children Act Advisory Board (CAAB). In the recent Budget it was announced that the Board is to be subsumed into the Office of the Minister for Health and Children. Reporting on child care cases was a matter being considered by the CAAB as part of its statutory remit prior to this announcement.

Those who consult *Family Law Matters* on a regular basis or who use it to access information on particular topics will be interested in an index of topics (custody, access, maintenance, divorce, judicial separation etc.) covered since the first edition in Spring 2007.

*Family Law Matters* is available from the Courts Service Information Office. Contact [familylawmatters@courts.ie](mailto:familylawmatters@courts.ie). Telephone: 01 8886457 or 8886460 or visit [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie).



# The High Court outside Dublin – an expanding business



The High Court, until recent times, only sat outside Dublin for personal injuries actions and to hear appeals from the Circuit Court. In recent months courthouses in many counties have witnessed the arrival of High Court judges and registrars to deal with other categories of litigation previously only heard in Dublin. This is good news for parties and witnesses who can now attend local courthouses rather than travel to the Four Courts. High Court Principal Registrar, **Kevin O'Neill** tells us more:

**T**he lack of availability of courtrooms in Dublin has meant that all non jury cases are now being heard outside the capital. Depending upon the estimated duration of the cases they have either been sent as a part of a list of cases to be heard over a two week period by two judges or, in the case of longer cases, to a courthouse within a commutable distance of Dublin. So far in 2008, there have been 670 non jury cases and 54 chancery cases listed outside Dublin together with in excess of 100 lengthy motions. In addition, during the current legal term for the first time judicial review and asylum cases have been heard outside Dublin, in Dundalk and Cork respectively.

So what has this meant for court waiting times? The primary benefit is in the non jury list which had a waiting time of three years in December 2007. This now stands at an average of three months. The current position is that cases can avail of hearing dates in the following legal term. At recent lists to fix

'So far in 2008, there have been 670 non jury cases and 54 chancery cases listed outside Dublin'

dates, all cases which were ready to be heard received hearing dates. It has also meant that there is additional capacity for hearing cases in Dublin which has resulted in reductions in the judicial review list for example. This now provides a greater degree of certainty in relation to hearing dates and leaves the High Court well placed to deal with the challenges facing the courts system in current times.

These results have been achieved as a result of close co-operation between High Court judges and Courts Service staff. The commitment of High Court Registrars in organising and executing

this initiative has been fantastic. Long hours were spent in administering this programme of work and a great degree of flexibility and imagination was employed.

Cases have been heard this year in Trim, Dundalk, Tullamore, Castlebar, Galway, Limerick, Nenagh, Cork and Tralee. The courthouse in Baltinglass has been regularly used for single, longer cases with Ardee, Naas, Bruff, Newcastlewest, Ennis, Fermoy and Cavan also providing facilities to the High Court. The assistance provided by the County Registrars associated with these venues, every Courts Service Regional Manager, as well as Chief Clerks and their staff is greatly appreciated. This whole process has also been a fantastic example of organisational teamwork and joined up thinking within the Courts Service.

*Practitioners may apply at the Non Jury and Chancery Lists to fix dates held at the end of each term to be included at particular venues, details of which appear on [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie).*

# How are we doing?

## The results of our Customer Service survey



As part of the preparation of its second Customer Service Action Plan, the Courts Service decided to check how it is performing against the targets in the first plan. Director of Operations for the Supreme & High Court, **Nuala McLoughlin** arranged a quick snap-shot type survey of visitors to court offices, court user groups, members of Bar Associations and, with the permission of the judiciary, people who were serving on juries, and last but not least, Courts Service staff. She had good reason to be pleased with the results:

**T**o offer visitors to court offices the opportunity to rate the service they receive we asked office managers to leave a supply of printed forms available to allow anyone calling to an office to score our service from 1 to 5 with 5 being "outstanding" and 1 being "unsatisfactory". We got 97 responses to this questionnaire, the majority of which scored us at 4 or 5 to indicate that court offices are easily accessible, opening hours meet users' needs, staff are knowledgeable and courteous, information /service is provided in a timely manner, there is sufficient information for court users on the website and in leaflet form and court facilities meet users' needs. Most respondents indicated that there were enough forms on the website but a sizeable group indicated that they would like more, so this will be reviewed as we go into 2009.

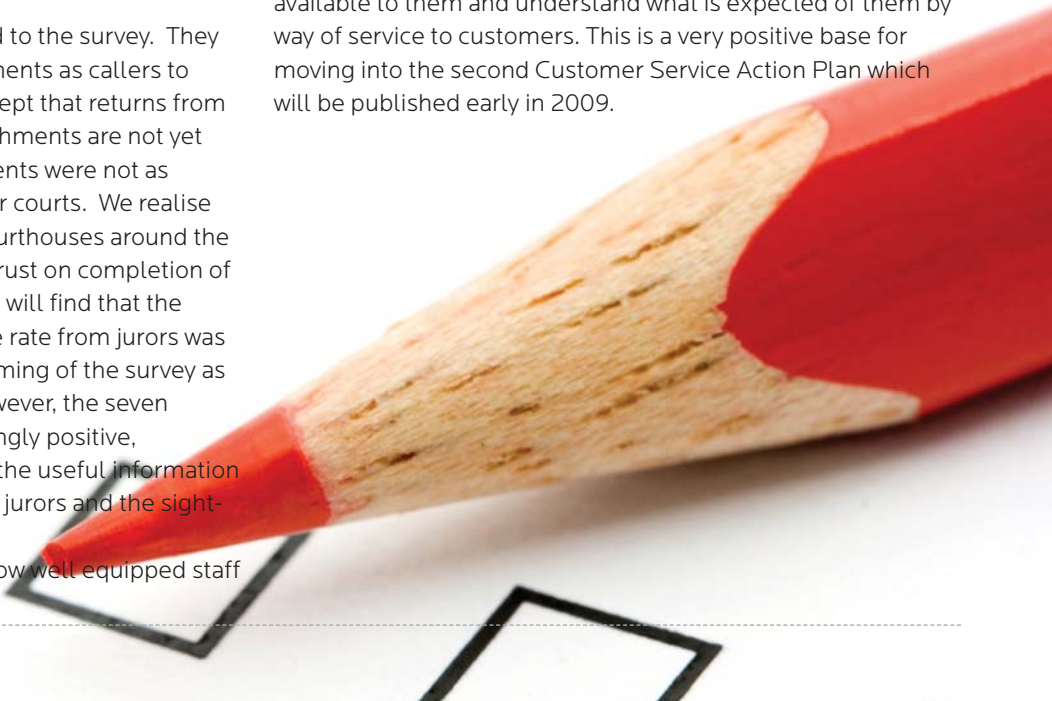
Twenty six user groups returned questionnaires indicating that, on the whole, the groups met users' expectations, meetings are held at times and intervals that suit users, that users are consulted on initiatives, innovations and service delivery, and that the Courts Service takes account of issues raised at user groups.

Seventeen Bar Associations responded to the survey. They were asked to rate us on the same statements as callers to offices, and the response was similar except that returns from those parts of the country where refurbishments are not yet completed indicated that these respondents were not as satisfied as others with the facilities in our courts. We realise that the work we have already done in courthouses around the country has raised expectations and we trust on completion of the remaining works, all Bar Associations will find that the facilities meet their needs. The response rate from jurors was relatively low, which may be due to the timing of the survey as the legal year is at its busiest in July. However, the seven responses we received were overwhelmingly positive, especially in regard to staff helpfulness, the useful information for jurors on the website, the facilities for jurors and the sight-lines and acoustics in court rooms.

We were particularly keen to find out how well equipped staff

feel when it comes to delivering good service to customers. Do they believe they have the experience and training they require? Can they access the job guides and training manuals that have been compiled? Do they know about the legal diary, the information about offices, court rules and fees that we have on the website so they can encourage practitioners and the public to get information on a self-service basis? Do they know that the Courts Service has a Customer Service Action Plan, a Customer Charter and a complaints procedure? Is the local office's charter on display to the public?

To get answers to these questions, we asked staff to assess themselves from 5 (being "fully agree") to 1 (being "strongly disagree") across all these areas. Questionnaires were distributed via email with a request that all replies would be returned by the end of July. We had two pleasant surprises: one was a response rate of 20%, which is high for this type of survey, and the second was the very high level of agreement in the responses with the statements, which indicates that our staff have confidence in their training and the resources available to them and understand what is expected of them by way of service to customers. This is a very positive base for moving into the second Customer Service Action Plan which will be published early in 2009.





# Customer Service – meeting court users

The Courts Service Customer Service Action Plan commits to holding structured meetings with our main customers. Throughout the country, Courts Service managers convene these meetings across all jurisdictional levels. In this article Director of Operations for the Supreme & High Court, **Nuala McLoughlin**, gives an insight into some of the meetings that took place in Dublin since the start of the legal year.

**T**he matters discussed at each of these meetings are specific to the offices that host them, and of keen interest to the customers of those offices, especially those in daily contact with the staff.

We have been holding these meetings now for almost five years, and I would like to take this opportunity to record the gratitude of the Courts Service to all our customers who attend these meetings and give so freely of their time in order to help us to keep them informed about developments in our offices and receive their suggestions and complaints. I should also like to thank my colleagues in all offices who represent the Courts Service at these meetings and use them to improve the service to all customers.

The Offices of the Examiner of the High Court and the Official Assignee are two of the specialised offices of the High Court. Their customers include members of the legal and the accounting professions (acting for both creditors and debtors), and the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement. The October meeting heard about proposals for reducing the time

practitioners are required to spend in the Examiner's Office and the review in the Official Assignee's office of old bankruptcy cases in which the Official Assignee holds funds. The meeting also discussed changes in the practice of the Property Registration Authority, electronic registers, the rollout of Digital Audio Recording (DAR) in courtrooms, filing of court documents in Examiners' cases, the foreign insolvency register and winding up orders relating to more than one company in a group structure.

The Dublin Circuit Court Family Law Office, and the Registrar of the High Court Family Law List also met in October with representatives of their customers from the Law Society, the DSBA and the Bar Council. The meeting discussed the new case progression

These meetings have been enormously valuable in allowing us to improve our understanding of the needs of our customers.

system for family law cases in the Circuit Court, the increasing pressure on space in court rooms, and we agreed a plan, put forward by the Bar Council representative, to improve the facilities in the Phoenix House consultation rooms. Following a discussion on the commencement of DAR in the High Court family law courts, a demonstration of the system was arranged, and has since been held using a moot court, to allow practitioners to see it in action.

Customers of the Supreme Court Office and the Central Office include representatives from the Law Society and DSBA, law agencies and the Chief State Solicitor's Office. At the October meeting we discussed waiting times for various lists and appeals, improvements we have made to the Legal Diary on the website, publication of court lists, asylum and judicial review hearings outside Dublin. In relation to the public Central Office, we discussed the service at the counter, the drop-in facility for notices, the new arrangements for collecting copy orders, plans for the introduction of postal filing, marking default judgments and the new information booklet for practitioners on judgments and execution orders which is now available on the website.

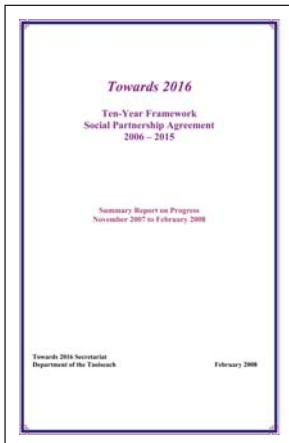
These meetings have been enormously valuable in allowing us to improve our understanding of the needs of our customers, and to build a good working relationship with them. They provide a good sounding board for testing proposed initiatives and changes in offices, and allow us to take account of proposals from customers in improving our processes and agreeing performance targets. This exchange of ideas is a process which gives the Courts Service a very high return on the investment we make in it.



*Nuala McLoughlin, Director of Supreme and High Court Operations addressing a customer forum meeting*

# REVIEW AND REORGANISATION OF DISTRICT COURT OFFICES

In its action plans under 'Sustaining Progress' and 'Towards 2016' the Courts Service committed to a review of its offices and structure. We are pleased to report on the progress of this review by bringing news of the completion of a review of District Court offices. **Gerry Curran** reports:



The context for this review was essentially the reduction in the need for court users to attend court offices. The work of offices is undergoing a change brought about by new technology and the various methods that practitioners and the public now use to interact with the offices. These include accessing the Legal Diary online and via mobile handheld technology, receiving court lists via e-mail, making payments and receiving summonses electronically, accessing court forms online and using the *Small Claims Online* system.

It is worth noting that the vast majority of towns and villages in Ireland have never had a District Court office. This includes many which are also venues for actual court sittings. These towns and their citizens have not been disadvantaged by this historic absence of court offices and are even less so due to remote access to the services and information sought from such offices. Only 44 towns had District Court Offices – 170 venues are used for court hearings.

## Family Friendly Work Practices

In considering how best to provide services regard was taken of the difficulties experienced by offices, with only two or three staff, in providing a continuous quality service. In such small offices problems can be encountered in covering annual holidays and sick leave. Similarly it is very difficult in small offices to implement all the family friendly policies which the Government and social partners have agreed such as flexi time, job sharing, part-time work and term time. Under the review, full consideration was taken of how users of local offices can be facilitated locally.

## Agreement

Following this review and negotiations the Courts Service has agreed with the trade unions and staff that there be a restructuring of Listowel, Thurles, Tuam and Fermoy District Court Offices.

The office in Thurles will now be relocated to Nenagh and Tuam business will be transferred to Castlebar and Galway.

Both of these relocations will be expedited this year. The offices in Listowel, Thurles, Tuam and Fermoy will remain open to the public for a number of days each week to facilitate users who wish to attend. Details of such opening hours for each office will be published locally in due course.

In the medium term the Fermoy office will be transferred into Mallow, and Listowel into Tralee and Limerick.

The Courts Service will monitor any effect these moves are having on court users and make arrangements as necessary.

## Reducing the need to attend at court offices

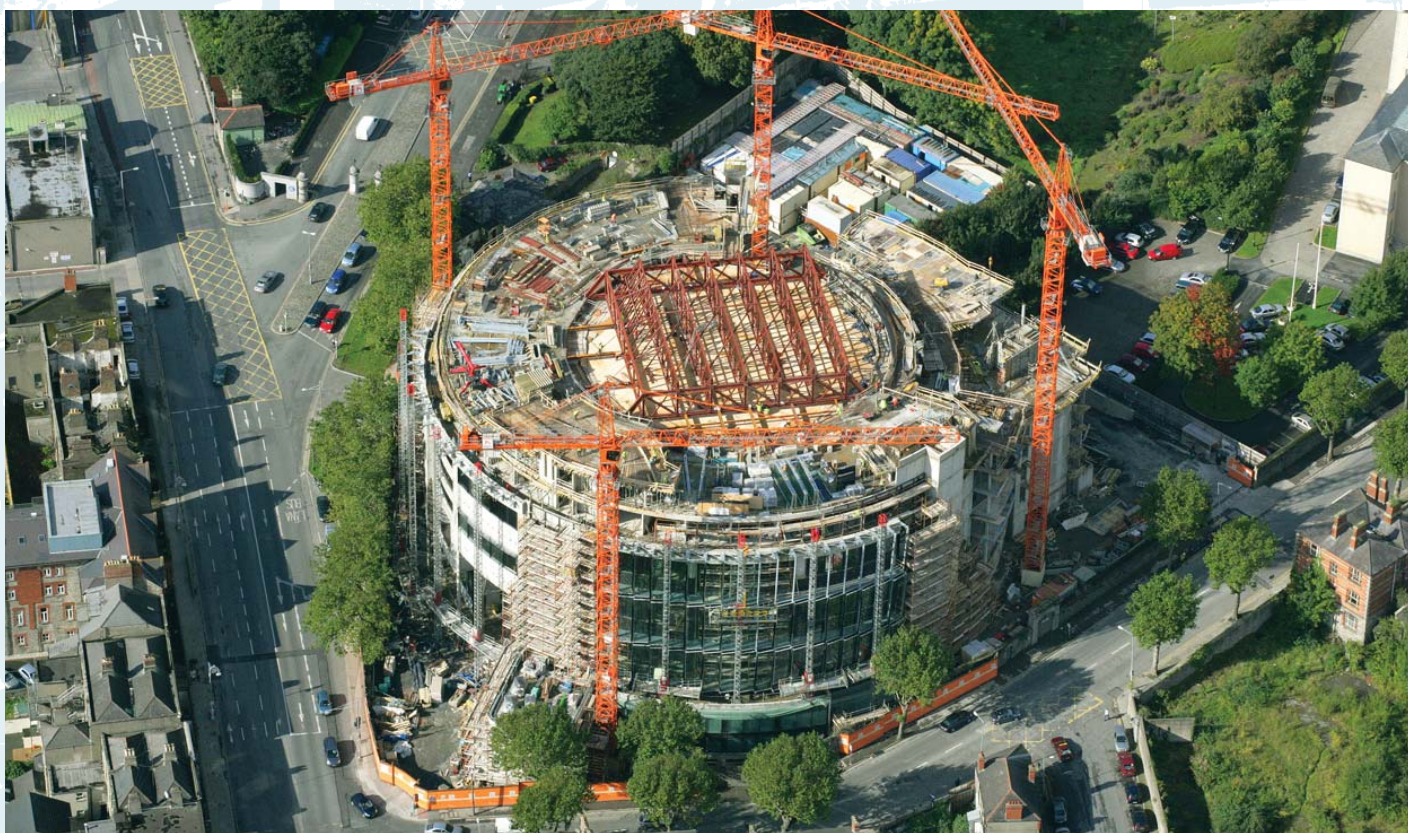
- *Small Claims Online* has led to the majority of small claims now being filed electronically by the consumer/citizen
- Family law payments can be paid electronically and certain summonses are issued electronically
- Increased development and use of systems to allow the payment of fines online via credit cards
- Many court lists are available online to citizens and all court users, as are dozens of court forms along with a host of other information on the thousands of pages contained on [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie)
- Capability for the electronic filing of civil court case documents in the near future being developed



# The sky's the limit for new Criminal Courts Complex

We've been following the development of the new Criminal Courts Complex since the contract was signed in April 2007. From the digging of the foundation to the construction of the walls we've brought you photos of this impressive structure as it grows month on month. These latest photos give amazing aerial views of the recently installed roof and show just what an impact this building will have on the Dublin skyline. It's been a very productive year for the CCC and all is set for more of the same in 2009.

Project Manager John Mahon tells us that the delivery of the project is currently ahead of schedule. He thanks the staff in the various criminal court offices who have participated in the delivery process to date. "It will be a very interesting, challenging year ahead for all of us", he says.



Photos courtesy of P.J. Hegarty & Sons



# Great year for Courts Accounting System

**I**t's been a busy and rewarding year for all those involved in the Courts Accounting Project. Twenty seven District Court offices now use the Courts Accounting System (CAS) with this number growing from just eight offices at the start of the year. All these offices are supported by the Courts Accounts Office (CAO) which now manages over 16,000 financial transactions per month including issuing over 11,000 payments to creditors.

The new services introduced by the project have really taken off during the year. Electronic Fund Transfer which only became available last year now accounts for over 70% of all payments being made to family law and other creditors. Over €1 million of fines were paid via the internet in 2008 saving our customers over five thousand visits to District Court offices. This was made possible with the launch of *Online Fine Payment*, which allows people pay fines online via [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie) at the start of year.

"These successes were only made possible by the effort of staff in the District Court offices and in the CAO", says Shay Keary, CAS Project Manager. "It's through their



*Sean Quigley, Director of Finance with then Taoiseach Mr Bertie Ahern T.D.*

endeavours that the Project has achieved, so successfully, it's objectives of improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the financial operations undertaken in District Court offices".

This sterling work has been recognised twice during the year when the Project received a Taoiseach's Public Service Excellence award in April and, more

recently, a merit award at the Inside Government Award ceremony in October.

And for the future? "In 2009, we expect to complete the District Court phases of the Project and we look forward to working with our colleagues in the remaining non CAS District Court offices to achieve this", says Shay.

## Courts Accounting System a hit in Trim

**S**taff in Trim District Court are enjoying the benefits of their new courts accounting system since it went live in July last.

Joint Chief Clerks, Audrey Cadden and Noeleen Halpin have overseen a work programme that involved entering historical data onto the new system over a period of several months. "The staff in Trim were ready to use the new system when it went live thanks to the training provided for

us in the weeks before the system went into operation", says Audrey. "We were glad of the support from the CAS support desk who were very "hands on" during the first few days after go live", she says. "This was of enormous benefit and instilled confidence in the use of the system for staff". This support has continued since with the support desk readily available via email or phone to deal with any difficulties.

And what difference has the new

system made to life in Trim District Court office? "It has made a significant impact on the accounts work within the office, eliminating the need to issue manual receipts and cheques for fines, fees, maintenance, bails and costs", says Audrey. Does this mean lots of time to put the feet up? "Not at all", Audrey is quick to point out. "The extra time available has already been utilised in the daily operations of an extremely busy District Court office!"

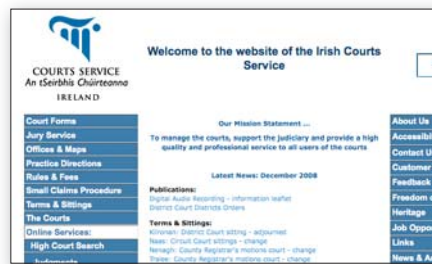


## The Courts Service website – tons of information at your fingertips

Where would you go to check Rules of Court? Or find out how much stamp duty is payable on a particular document? Or get a copy of a recent court judgment? Or find a practice direction? Or get the telephone number of a court office? Or find out what particular offices deal with? The Courts Service website – [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie) – is the one stop answer to all these questions and many, many more.

Comprising thousands of pages the site contains information for legal professionals, lay litigants and the general public alike. Legal professionals will be interested in sections on terms and sittings, offices and maps, practice directions, judgments, legal diary and a variety of court forms. Drill down into any of these sections for a wide range and variety of information on a host of topics. For example, 'terms and sittings' reveals details of where the courts are sitting all around the country and when; 'offices and maps' not only gives contact and location details but explains the business of each office and in many instances provides much back up information.

With access available around the clock, practitioners can read



judgments, find cases in the legal diary, search for details of High Courts cases and read current notices affecting court business around the country.

More general users can find out about the Courts Service – read about the Board, view the organisational structure and find contact details for all support offices.

Those interested to do business with the courts online can make a small claim using a dedicated system, *Small Claims Online*, and can pay a fine via a recently launched service, *Online Fine Payment*. This removes the need to attend a court office and allows users interact with the courts at any time, from anywhere.

A section dedicated to those summoned for jury service provides information from the time the summons is received to the conclusion of a trial and everything in between. Courts offices regularly post notices to

alert potential jurors of the need to attend or not attend at court. This avoids unnecessary journeys and saves time and reduces inconvenience for many people.

Students can learn about the history of the courts, find out how the courts work, arrange to visit the Four Courts and access information about 'Let's Look at the Law', a special educational resource pack with a manual and DVD. Those who value our court buildings as an important part of our heritage can access a range of information about many splendid facilities all around the country.

Much consideration has been given to making the site as accessible as possible. The site is presented in English and Irish. Information is also available in French, Spanish and two forms of Chinese (traditional and simplified) and will soon be available in Russian and Polish. Those with reading or sight difficulties can access a range of information in audio format including small claims, probate and the workings of the Drug Treatment Court.

But don't take our word for it. Visit [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie) and find out for yourself just how much you can access and learn about the courts in Ireland.



Staff of Trim District Court pictured left to right - Audrey Cadden, Lorraine Fagan, Mary Moran, Margaret Mc Grath, Anne Murray, Mary Farnan

# The African Programme: a lesson from Trinity College



After a recent visit by members of the Ugandan judiciary to the Four Courts, **Prof William Binchy** of Trinity College's School of Law spoke to *Courts Service News* about the ongoing work of the university's African Workshop

The Law School in Trinity continues to develop connections with the judiciary and legal academics in African countries. With members of the Irish judiciary, members of the Law School have visited the Constitutional Court of South Africa, the South African Law Reform Commission, the Law Society of South Africa, the courts of Botswana, Kenya, Swaziland and Tanzania, the University of Botswana, and many more.

Prof. Binchy says that the school's African Programme is currently undertaking a project with the help of Irish Aid to collate significant judgments in the Human Rights area. Significant progress has been made in collecting these judgments in Botswana, Uganda, Tanzania and Lesotho in particular. The aim of the project is to provide an online access point to important rulings,

under various headings, such as freedom of assembly and fair trial rights. In the past the output of the law reporting societies had been "occasionally fitful" at different times in each country's history – in times of governmental transition, for example. Importantly the project allows the collective memory of such judgments to be retained and passed on.

In the past, the media has highlighted some of the more extreme problems encountered in administering justice in African countries. In the scenario of a coup, for example, judges have been presented with edicts from the new regime which prohibits courts from investigating the legality of the coup.

Prof. Binchy explained some common difficulties experienced in African countries in relation to the administration of justice. As one

would imagine, they vary from country to country. Delays caused by a lack of resources are one such difficulty. He cites an example seeing well-appointed courthouses in urban centres and subsequently travelling a short distance to rural and often poorer areas where the court may have a shortage of even basic facilities.

For over a decade the Law School has organised an Annual Workshop for Chief Justices and senior judiciary of African countries. The Workshop takes place in August every year. It has been attended by Chief Justices and other senior judges from over fourteen countries. Those who have attended include Chief Justices of Botswana, Lesotho, The Gambia, Ghana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Swaziland, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

## A RESOURCE FOR AFRICAN JUDGMENTS

The Southern African Legal Information Institute (SAFLII) collects and publishes legal materials from Southern and Eastern Africa for free online access. This project aims to scan, proofread and upload Supreme Court of Appeal decisions for South Africa dating from 1910. In the first phase of this project, 83,000 pages - roughly 3,000 decisions - dating from 1983 have been scanned.

The current collection includes superior court judgments

from Botswana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Recent additions include a full consolidated collection of Uganda legislation and Lesotho case law. Currently in preparation: Lesotho, Zambia, Namibia and Uganda judgments, as well as Uganda subsidiary legislation. <http://www.saflii.org/>



## YOUNG PEOPLE RARELY UNDERSTAND MEANING OF BAIL – STUDY

Over a third of professionals consulted in a new study have said that young people ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ understood what it means for them to be remanded on bail.

‘Young People on Remand’ is based on 30 interviews with young people, aged 13-19 years, in the Children Detention School system or St. Patrick’s Institution, 19 interviews with parents and professionals, 218 case observations at the Dublin Children Court and a consultation survey with 120 professionals.

“The study found that the most common outcome (80 per cent) of the remand hearings observed at the Dublin Children Court was a decision to remand a young person on bail. Over one-third (39 per cent) of the 120 professionals consulted, noted that young people ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ understood what it meant to be on bail and only a small minority (four per cent) thought that young people ‘always’ understood,” says its author Mairead Seymour.

‘This study clearly identifies a core group of young people who are deeply entrenched in the youth justice system and are likely to benefit from bail support and alternatives to remand programmes in order to reduce their risk of future detention. With the exception of one case, all of the 30 young people interviewed had been on bail in the previous two years and all of them had broken the conditions of bail,” she added.

The study notes the need for a broad range of social, educational, health and welfare services to target factors related to offending behaviour and to address barriers to bail compliance. Young people, parents and professionals described difficulties in the provision of psychological and mental health services due to delays in accessing services and/or limited resources.

Read the report at:

<http://www.omc.gov.ie/viewdoc.asp?CatID=13>

## Roll out of Digital Audio Recording continues



In the October issue of *Courts Service News* we reported on progress with the roll out of digital audio recording. Project Manager, Darach Green now tells us that the new system is live in ten courts in the Four Courts and in Tullamore, Trim, Roscommon, Bray, Athlone, Cavan and Washington Street, Cork. By the end of the year Donegal Town and Portlaoise will also have the new system.

All remaining Circuit Criminal Courts will have digital audio recording installed early in the New Year in time for the first criminal sittings of 2009.

### DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDING LIVE

County	Courthouse	Court room	Jurisdiction
Dublin	Four Courts	25	Circuit
Dublin	Four Courts	15	Circuit
Dublin	Four Courts	23	Circuit
Dublin	Four Courts	29	Circuit
Dublin	Four Courts	24	Circuit
Dublin	Four Courts	16	Central
Dublin	Four Courts	3	Central
Dublin	Four Courts	21	High Court Family Law
Dublin	Four Courts	2	Central
Dublin	Four Courts	19	High Court Family Law
Meath	Trim	1	Circuit
Offaly	Tullamore	1	Circuit
Roscommon	Roscommon	1	Circuit
Cork	Washington St.	1	Circuit
Cavan	Cavan	1	Circuit
Athlone	Athlone	1	Circuit
Wicklow	Bray	1	Circuit

Digital audio recording (DAR) provides for the recording of court proceedings which can be stored on a computer. The computer file can be subsequently retrieved for the preparation of transcripts and played back within the courtroom, judge’s office or remote location. It can also be copied to a CD or similar media.

## Reaching out to Ballymun Law students

Teresa Brophy of the District Court Custody Office and Eoin Manning of the District Court Family Law Office in Dublin hosted groups from Ballymun Community Law Centre recently. The visits were part of the Courts Service Outreach Programme which encourages links between community groups and the courts



*Pictured on the steps of the Bridewell Courthouse, Back row left to right. Des Brophy, Jude McHugh, Valerie Nolan, Joyce Duffy. Front row left to right. Teresa Brophy, Patricia Martin, Christine Beresford, Claire Harrington.*



*Judge Furlong, at the back, with the family law students from BCLC*

The first group were participating in a course aimed at giving them an understanding and general overview of criminal law in Ireland. The course runs from September to November and covers all aspects of criminal law. It is aimed at information providers, advocates and project officers in the general community and in particular those involved with youth development. Their visit to the Custody Courts included an introduction to the operation of the Criminal District Courts in Dublin and an opportunity to sit in on cases being heard in the courts on the morning of their visit.

The second group are focussing on family law. During their visit to Dolphin House, they met Judge Gerard Furlong of the District Court who outlined the variety in the cases which come before family law judges. He explained how decisions made in the family law courts are intended to move things forward for all parties. Where children are involved, their welfare is paramount. The group had lots of questions for the judge and appreciated the time he took to answer them all. Eoin Manning answered many other questions around the processes and

proceedings in family law courts with Fiona Farrell of the Information Office providing an outline of the work of the various offices based in Phoenix House.

Feedback to the visits was very positive. Both groups commented that it was a great opportunity. "The information and experience will be very useful for us in our studies and in our work with community groups", one participant offered.

To discuss the Courts Service Outreach Programme in more detail, contact John Quirke at 01-8886463 (email: [johnquirke@courts.ie](mailto:johnquirke@courts.ie))

## FOUR COURTS HELP TO OPTIMISE POWER AT WORK

As we reported in the July issue of *Courts Service News* the Four Courts was one of the State buildings chosen to participate in a pilot scheme to reduce CO2 emissions from buildings by 15% through increasing levels of energy awareness and efficiency. The scheme, called 'Optimising Power at Work', is run by the Office of Public Works. It aims to help people look at the way in which they use energy in the workplace and to identify ways to reduce their use of energy without impacting on their comfort or safety. As part of the scheme a competition was held for staff in the participating buildings to come up with the best energy saving idea.

The winning idea for the Four Courts came from Wayne Font of the Circuit Civil Office. Wayne's idea was 'for computers to automatically shut down after 1 hour and for lights to have an automatic shut off timer of 6pm but if needed staff can override'.



*Frank Lyons of the Courts Service Buildings Unit presented Wayne with his prize on behalf of the Office of Public Works*



## Interagency cooperation: the Department of Defence come to court

Our former Midland Regional Manager, Ann Price, was quick to spot an opportunity for some interagency cooperation on her recent move to the legislation branch of the Department of Defence. In a joint initiative with her new Department's training unit staff visited several court offices recently to find out more about what goes on relative to their functions.

"Our programme of engagement with the Courts Service began with a presentation by Noel A. Doherty of the Courts Service Directorate of Reform and Development on the Court Rules Committees", Ann Duffy of the Training and Development Unit of the Department of Defence tells us. "This provided staff with very useful information about court rules and how they operate".

Staff also sat in on a Courts Martial Appeal hearing in the Supreme Court with presentations on the operation of this specialised court provided by Supreme Court Registrar, Maeve Kane and Court of Criminal Appeal Registrar, Geraldine Manners. "Part of the role of the legislation branch is to work closely with their military colleagues to modernise and simplify Defence Forces regulations. Visits to the Circuit Court and the District Court are

also being planned to help staff gain an understanding of the civilian courts. This will assist them to understand court processes and broaden their view in the context of their involvement in the Department's legislative reform programme".

The work with the Courts Service is part of a wider Department of Defence initiative which has seen interaction with other agencies including the Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the Chief State Solicitor, the National Treasury Management Agency and the Injuries Board.

"We have been very fortunate to have such co-operation from other government departments and agencies", Ann Duffy explains. "This

joint initiative has resulted in several objectives being met namely a network of contacts has been established, there's been a sharing of knowledge and significant benefits have been achieved by all. There was a tremendous amount of goodwill and a willingness to share resources with all parties concerned. In the changing economic environment we find ourselves in, it's important to remember the wealth of experience and knowledge that is available throughout the public service".

"We are especially grateful to the Courts Service, for their continuous help and support in arranging the training, in particular Elisha D'Arcy, and look forward to working with them in the future".



*Maeve Kane and Elisha D'Arcy with staff of the Department of Defence on their recent visit to the Four Courts*

Around the world

## European prize for UK Online Small Claims

A system offering litigants a quick, simple and free mediation for small claims scooped the top prize in a recent EU competition organised as part of the European Day of Civil Justice. The 'Crystal Scales of Justice' prize for innovative court practice was awarded to Her Majesty's Courts Service (United Kingdom).

The competition organised by the Council of Europe and

the European Commission attracted entries from across the EU. Commendations were given to the 'Barreau de Paris' (France) for its Bus 'Barreau de Paris Solidarité', to the Court of Milan (Italy) for its computerised civil lawsuits office and to the Ministry of Justice (Turkey) and its National Judiciary Informatics System.

For more information visit: [www.coe.int/cepej](http://www.coe.int/cepej)



# 2008

## YEAR IN REVIEW

It was a year of change and progress for the Courts Service. Public access to the courts and to the services of the courts have expanded in spaces both physical and virtual through the provision of improved court facilities and customer-focussed projects that bring convenience to the public's dealings with court offices. **Luke O'Neill** looks back on the events of the last twelve months.

**2**008 was a year of firsts as the High Court sat in new venues around the country, digital audio records of court proceedings were taken and the public were able to pay fines online eliminating the need to visit court offices. There were 'last times' too as the historic Kilmainham courthouse closed its doors and we said goodbye to

colleagues who moved on or retired.

### Buildings

On the buildings front, the Capital Building programme further improved the stock of Irish courthouses. The landmark Criminal Courts Complex at the edge of Phoenix Park rose higher

each month. Recently roofed, it remains ahead of schedule for a 2010 opening.

Improved family law facilities were unveiled at Dolphin House in Dublin back in February. A prime city-centre site since the end of the nineteenth-century, Dolphin House now serves as a dedicated family law facility. The refurbishment brought a number of



changes aimed at maintaining the dignity and privacy of family law proceedings such as: five new enlarged courtrooms; separate areas for family law applications/enquiries and payments, and an information screen showing daily case listings and status.

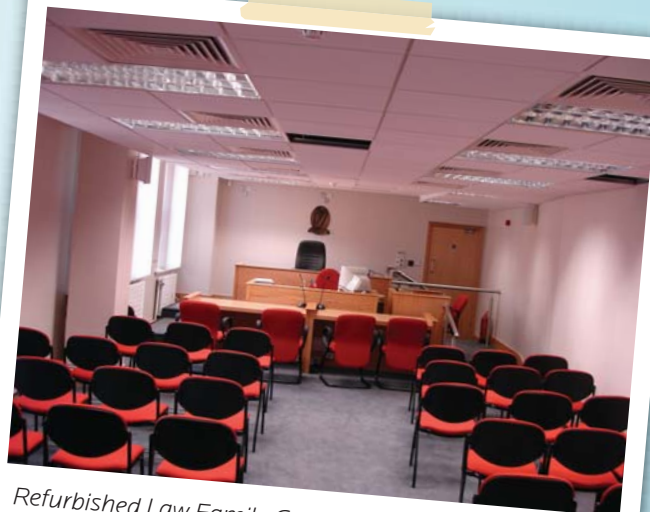
June saw the opening of a new courthouse in Ardee in a €4.7m Civic Centre, with offices for Louth County Council and the Office of Public Works. The architecturally dynamic building was designed using sustainable materials and technologies. The provision of a new courthouse at the Mid-Louth Civic Services Centre has since allowed the High Court to sit there.

A major new courthouse was opened in Blanchardstown in July, by Finance Minister Mr. Brian Lenihan T.D. The west Dublin suburbs now have full-time local access to full court facilities as not only the court but court offices are now based in the town centre area. This has allowed small claims, fines and family law matters to be dealt with locally. The Children Court also sits here. The District Court deals with cases arising in the Dublin West area including Blanchardstown, Clonsilla, Mulhuddart, Carpenterstown, and Castleknock.

Opening the courthouse, the Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan T.D said: "Blanchardstown now has a population bigger than some counties. It is appropriate that it should have court facilities of this calibre. Providing these services here will represent a significant convenience for the local community."

### Reorganising District Court districts

The work to reorganise the District Court districts continued this year, as Phase Two began. Phase One



*Refurbished Law Family Court - Dolphin House*

marked the first full review of the court venues, sittings and workloads since 1961. Phase Two involves Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Galway, Clare, Roscommon, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois and Tipperary and is set to be complete by next month.

The demographic and social changes which have occurred in these counties in the past 47 years brought about corresponding increased workloads to the District Courts but have also improved transport and communications links. In carrying out this review it was necessary to look at each district individually and assess venues and their annual caseloads.

Demographic, social and infrastructural changes were also factors in deciding the future shape of the districts: increased commercial activity, increased access to transport and an improved network of roads are other issues which influence all who provide public services. In the past number of years many improvements have been made to assist those using the courts, most noticeably in the area of buildings, where our estate has been greatly refurbished with world class facilities now on offer across the country.

Regional offices have worked with judges, staff and court users to introduce these changes with the

same efficiency and ease which saw such a success upon their introduction in Phase One.

### Better ICT systems

Well-designed and professionally delivered ICT programmes brought court services into the homes of citizens: *Small Claims Online* and *Online Fine Payment* have made it easier for the public, eliminating the need to visit court offices in person.

The CAS system – which allows court users to pay fines, bail and family law maintenance among others – has widened customer choice giving more payment options, quality and timeliness of service.

Traditionally fines were paid by cheque or cash to the office where the fine was imposed. As more and more people changed from cheque book to cash, laser and credit cards, the payment of a fine became awkward and often necessitated a trip to the office to pay in cash. The Courts Service has more than 40 District Court offices located around the country. An important function performed by these offices is the management and processing of over 700,000 financial transactions per annum, with a value of some €80 million.

Historically these transactions have been processed and accounted

for using stand alone manual accounting systems in each office. These systems were labour intensive and inefficient. They were also a barrier to complying with eGovernment initiatives. Every 5% improvement in the collection rate for fines brings in €1.75 million. The savings in work-hours will be over €1 million annually. Uptake of this system in areas where it was piloted has been very high with 70% of people opting for electronic transfer of family law payments.

*Small Claims Online*, became available nationwide earlier this year. Its success is evident in the numbers with 46% of small claim applicants using the internet to pay small claims fees online.

With the small claims and fines systems bringing tangible benefits to customers, the Service sought to hear the public's thoughts on our work and how we can improve. The Fourth Courts Service Central Customer Forum was held earlier this year. Attendees were told of the Customer Service Action Plan, preparations for the Strategic Plan and of a new system to expedite the issue of High Court orders.

The latest technology made its way right into the courtroom. State-of-the-art video conferencing systems were introduced this year as Damovo was awarded a contract following an EU-wide tender process. Following a thorough review process, all participating courthouses were provided with a range of highly collaborative and intuitive video communications tools. Each courthouse now has two 46" screens for the jury and public to view, with individual touch-screen monitors for the judge, registrar, defence and prosecution.

Video conferencing systems have been placed in dedicated witness rooms so that vulnerable witnesses can participate in court proceedings

Well-designed and professionally delivered ICT programmes brought court services into the homes of citizens



*Newly refurbished courtroom in Fermoy Courthouse*

by giving their evidence from outside the courtroom. The judge can now control all evidence and witness statements by simply pointing on his monitor.

In addition, live court proceedings can be instigated between courtrooms in Ireland and a number of countries worldwide. 'Evidence racks' have also been provided in designated courtrooms, which include built-in PCs, laptop connections, and play-back facilities for a full range of VHS, DVD and online video services. These enable gardaí and solicitors to quickly and effectively show video evidence such as CCTV footage, without the need to bring their own equipment. The roll-out of systems was completed in over twenty courts including Dublin, Bray, Cork, Limerick, Castlebar and Tullamore.

The first of the new digital audio recording (DAR) systems went live in Circuit Criminal Courts 15, 23, 25 and 29 in the Four Courts during the first two weeks of October. The first to receive the new systems were the Central Criminal Court, the Special Criminal Court, the High Court Family Law Court and Circuit Courts where criminal business is conducted. Following a successful pilot between April and July, the sound systems in 12 of the courts in the Four Courts were upgraded in preparation for the installation of DAR. The court record is now being taken in these courts using digital



*Members of the Judiciary, Minister Dermot Ahern, invited guests and Courts Service staff at the official opening of Ardee Courthouse*



audio recordings supplemented by annotation-notes.

Similar work is now being carried out in regional court venues. DAR went live in Court 24 in the Four Courts, Trim, Roscommon, Bray and Washington St. Cork at the end of October, while one of the Central Criminal Court courtrooms and the High Court Family Law Court went live in November. In 2009 it is planned to implement DAR in all the remaining courts in the Four Courts, Phoenix House and Bow Street.

### More information for the public

The Courts Service's obligation to provide information on the courts was further satisfied as *Let's Look at the Law* was made available to schools everywhere. The teaching pack with lesson plans and accompanying DVD provides a thorough introduction to the administration of justice in Ireland. The project received much positive feedback from students involved in an early

pilot. One student said: "I really enjoyed today's class because everybody got involved in the trial and really got into it. The cross-examining was very good and made me really nervous because any slip up could end the trial."

The Service continued to mark the opening of new and refurbished courthouses with brochures for official openings – this year brochures were published for Blanchardstown and Ardee courthouses.

### Awards for Courts Service projects

Two Courts Service projects received much appreciated recognition when they won awards this year. The Courts Accounting Project won a *Public Service Excellence* award and an *Inside Government Innovation* award for its modernisation of courts accounting techniques and the introduction of ICT systems for court

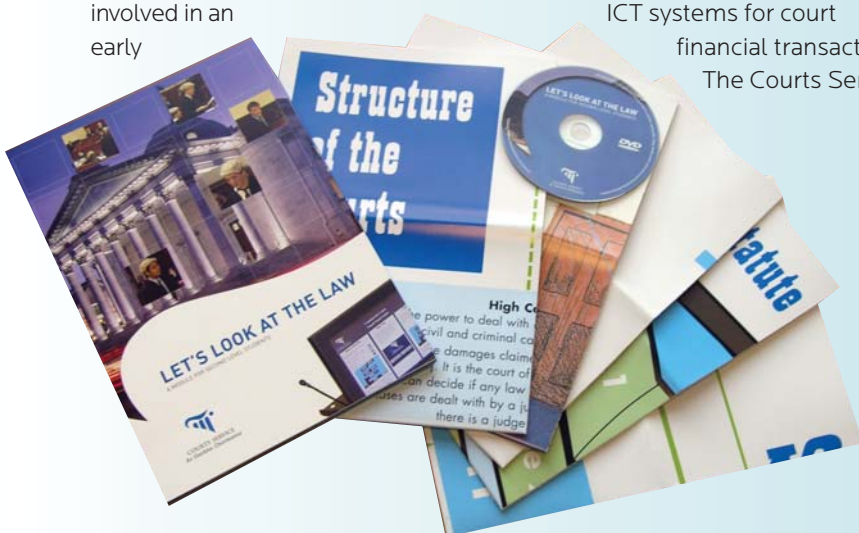
financial transactions.  
The Courts Service



website won in the *Best State Body* category of the eGovernment awards earlier in the year. Our site was recognised as the state body that succeeded in harnessing ICT to deliver better services, information and efficiencies to its target audience (both internal and external). These awards recognised the significant contribution they have made to eGovernment services.

### Changes around the corner

The next 12 months will see the Courts Service enter a turning point in its history. A new CEO will come on board, the preparations to move criminal operations into the Criminal Courts Complex will step up a gear and the Service will be constantly challenged to couple great service with improved efficiencies in light of economic uncertainty which is set to last the whole of 2009.



## THE FIRST TIME/THE LAST TIME

- The High Court sat outside the capital, in Ardee, Fermoy and Nenagh among others
- Northern Irish court proceedings were heard in the State for the first time, as the civil action taken by the families of the Omagh bomb victims sat in the Four Courts to hear Garda evidence
- Kilmainham District had its last sitting in July. The Courthouse, which had operated since 1820 was no longer suitable for the many needs of court users. Business from the court has been transferred into city centre locations and to the new Blanchardstown Courthouse facilities.

# Changes to the Courts Service Board

**B**rian Leonard of Castlebar District Court is the new staff member on the Courts Service Board. He replaces Kevin Fidgeon of Dublin Circuit Court who held the position for the last three years.

There are a number of other changes to the membership of the Board. Mrs. Justice Susan Denham, Judge Patrick Moran and Judge Flannan Brennan have been replaced by Mr. Justice Nicholas Kearns, Judge Michael White and Judge Gerard Haughton respectively.

Mr. Justice Kevin Feeney replaces Mr. Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill as the elected judge of the High Court. Mr. Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill remains on the board as the Chief Justice's nominee replacing Mr. Justice John Quirke. The Law Society's nominee is Mr. Gerard Doherty who follows in the footsteps of Mr. Owen Binchy. The court users' representative Ms. Olive Braiden has been replaced by Ms. Mary Southwell and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has nominated Mr. Liam Berney to replace Ms. Esther Lynch.

The other members are unchanged.

## MEMBERSHIP OF THE COURTS SERVICE BOARD - FROM 9TH NOVEMBER 2008

1.	<b>Chief Justice</b>	Mr. Justice John L. Murray
2.	<b>Judge of the Supreme Court</b>	Mr. Justice Nicholas Kearns
3.	<b>President of the High Court (or Nominee)</b>	Mr. Justice Richard Johnson
4.	<b>Judge of the High Court</b>	Mr. Justice Kevin Feeney
5.	<b>President of the Circuit Court (or Nominee)</b>	Mr. Justice Matthew Deery
6.	<b>Judge of the Circuit Court</b>	Judge Michael White
7.	<b>President of the District Court (or Nominee)</b>	Judge Miriam Malone
8.	<b>Judge of the District Court</b>	Judge Gerard Haughton
9.	<b>Chief Justice's Nominee (Judge with Special Expertise)</b>	Mr. Justice Iarfhlaith O'Neill
10.	<b>CEO</b>	Mr. P.J. Fitzpatrick
11.	<b>Chairman of the Bar Council (or Nominee)</b>	Mr. Eoghan Fitzsimons
12.	<b>President of the Law Society of Ireland (or Nominee)</b>	Mr. Gerard Doherty
13.	<b>Representative of Courts Service Staff</b>	Mr. Brian Leonard
14.	<b>Officer of the Minister</b>	Mr. Noel Waters
15.	<b>Representative of Court Users</b>	Ms. Mary Southwell
16.	<b>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</b>	Mr. Liam Berney
17.	<b>Representative of Business and Commerce</b>	Mr. Liam Farrell

## SETTING THE SCENE FOR IMPROVED communication between Gardaí and courts

District Court Chief Clerks gathered recently to hear about the imminent implementation of the Criminal Justice Interoperability Pilot Project (CJIPP). The CJIPP system provides for the electronic exchange of data between An Garda Síochána's (AGS) Pulse system and the Courts Service's Criminal Case Tracking System. This data exchange includes

- Electronic receipt of all summons applications from AGS
- Electronic notification of court hearing dates and outcomes to AGS, adjustments to court outcomes and bail details and updates
- Warrant details for all warrants for execution by AGS including bench warrants, committal warrants and fines warrants.

This system which went live in November will allow for

greater efficiencies for both the courts and An Garda Síochána.

The Clerks were attending a conference in Mullingar which included an outline of the grim realities of the budgetary position for the remainder of this year and more importantly for 2009 from Director of Finance, Sean Quigley. Sean also presented the key features of the Courts Service's Strategic Plan for 2009 to 2011. Other presentations were made by Noel A. Doherty of the Reform and Development Directorate who outlined recent developments in relation to District Court Rules and the Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2008 and Olive Caulfield and Emer D'Arcy who spoke about staffing and HR matters.

The event was coordinated by Circuit & District Court Operations with support from the Training Unit.



# Staff learn a few more than 'cúpla focal'



Courts Service staff are keen to learn and improve their Irish if numbers signing up for Irish classes are any indication. As part of a scheme prepared under the Official Language Act the Service is 'committed to a policy of improving Irish language proficiency in its staff, particularly those who work in public offices and deal with the external customer, through a programme of voluntary training and encouragement.'

*Gaeleagras*, under the aegis of the Department of Finance, has been providing Irish language classes to the Civil Service for many years. In 2008 the Courts Service Training Centre arranged for *Gaeleagras* to provide teachers at Phoenix House avoiding the need for staff to trek across the city to Lansdowne House where classes are usually held. Such was the popularity of classes on site that the Training Centre had to engage the services of a second provider – *Gaelcultúr* – to meet the

demand. *Gaelcultúr* work with a number of public bodies as well as the Civil Service and tailor their classes to match the needs of individual departments.

Following a short assessment either written (*Gaeleagras*) or oral (*Gaelcultúr*) students are grouped with those at a similar level of competence. The emphasis in the classes is to get the students communicating in Irish by working in groups or pairs and actively taking part in classroom discussions. The big advantage to staff being in classes together is that it raises their awareness of who else in their office/building is learning Irish and maximises the opportunities for practicing between classes.

Outside of Dublin staff attended Irish language classes with *Gaeleagras* in provincial locations such as Tullamore, Waterford and Galway. Staff of the Carlow office, under the guidance of Ray Keyes, arranged for a local teacher to come

to the office one evening a week to help the staff brush up on their language skills.

Teacher Eoin O'Beaglaoich has been impressed with the enthusiasm of the students in his middle level class. "We've had a great turnout", he says pointing out that in many other after hours classes people sign up and then either don't turn up or stop coming after a week or two. "We try and generate a fun atmosphere and encourage people to learn without pressure or embarrassment. It's only two hours a week but that's OK. It's good to come and practice even if you don't practice in between classes. It's all about keeping the language going and the interest alive".

To find out more about Irish language classes visit [www.finance.gov.ie/gaeleagras](http://www.finance.gov.ie/gaeleagras) or [www.gaelchultur.com](http://www.gaelchultur.com).

## A JUROR'S STORY

In July 2008 we published an article wherein a juror described his experience. The article was focused on matters other than those which took place during the trial and was

written so as not to identify the parties or anybody involved in the trial. It was published by way of feedback to the Courts Service of how the juror experienced the call to jury service and

how it was organised.

We now accept that it is inappropriate to publish articles from jurors and assure readers that such an article will not be repeated.

Given the vast improvement in the Irish courts system, it's sometimes hard to believe that the Courts Service is still a relatively new body. We look back on a transformational decade



Minister John O'Donoghue with Chief Justice Liam Hamilton on Establishment Day 9 November 1999



Mrs Justice Susan Denham, Chair of the Working Group on a Courts Commission

# THE COURTS SERVICE AT TEN

**I**t is ten years since the Courts Service Act, 1998 provided for a new and independent body known as the Courts Service. In 1999 that body was established. Its challenges were substantial and had been laid down in a series of detailed reports by the Working Group on a Courts Commission led by Mrs. Justice Susan Denham.

The Irish courts system had remained largely unaltered since its inception in 1924, resulting in long delays in determining cases, an overworking of staff and a poor organisational structure. The seriousness of this situation was

clearly explained by the Working Group in providing its reasoning for the establishment of the new body.

"The main service which is provided by the courts system is the means to which the public obtain justice. An inefficient service impedes justice."

Large numbers of court offices operated apart from one another. Modern management techniques were not in use and there was little strategic planning, meaning the ingenuity and hard work of staff was oftentimes what bridged the gap in a fragmented and remote system.

The great strengths were an attitude of hard work and of going the extra mile in the courts. Court staff routinely worked extra hours to complete particularly heavy lists, as remains the case today. The connections staff maintained with local legal communities and the relationship of trust and good service that built up over time no doubt contributed to the goodwill the Courts Service enjoyed as a fledgling organisation.

In an important recommendation the Working Group on a Courts Commission said that it would be

## A DECADE OF CHANGE

- Introduction of modern management structures/systems/techniques
- Implementation of major Information Technology Programme
- Reform of procedures, rules, legislation
- Major building programme including PPPs
- Family Law Court development (including reporting)
- Financial and fund management
- Devolution of functions to local managers
- Unified staff structure and range of HRM reform initiatives





*Limerick derelict site before...*

appropriate for judges to work alongside others on the Board and its committees. Had this not happened much of the success achieved since would have been simply impossible. Understandably there was a concern about this, given the constitutional enshrinement of the separation of powers. After careful deliberation the Working Group concluded that as the functions of the new Service were concerned with the management and administration of the courts rather than the administration of justice itself it would not be inappropriate for judges to work with others on the Board.

It was in this challenging backdrop that P.J. Fitzpatrick – who steps down shortly – was appointed as the Courts Service's first CEO. He was quick to initiate a programme of change, conducting a management style that placed great emphasis on consultation, partnership and a

healthy but clearly defined working relationship with the judiciary. What would have comforted him on his arrival was a significant asset at his immediate disposal: staff with many years, sometimes decades, of institutional wisdom. Some of these people would soon take on administrative and management roles for the first time. Indeed, since then new management approaches have moved the organisation closer to what the Working Group had set out as a key value in its fourth report, that is, "a unified Courts Service in all structures".

### **Improving the building stock**

Initially, physical infrastructure was the most manifest sign of the court system's problems. The Working Group noted for example that many of the State's courthouses were in "ruinous condition". In the period since that stark but true appraisal was made, 50 courthouses have been newly built or refurbished and over a

hundred have been upgraded. Crucially, modernisation of courthouses has allowed justice to be administered in dignified venues.

### **Developing ICT systems**

ICT systems were rapidly improved. The infrastructure to support business technology was installed nationwide and a core set of applications were implemented to support the business needs. Within a year, all offices nationwide had been cabled for information technology. Local and wide area networks had been installed and made available to all staff and judges linking 50 sites nationwide into a single corporate network. A welcome contrast from 1999 when there were virtually no computers in court offices.

### **Managing court funds**

Perilously, court funds were managed in an office by office basis. In late 2001 the Service commenced restructuring the way court funds are invested. This culminated in the establishment of a number of customised funds in



*...and after*

- (performance management, training selection, job competencies, change management programme, employee involvement, culture)
- Judicial and administrative case management (Commercial Court, Competition Court, Family Law, Registrars, etc.).

- Information for the public
- eGovernment – websites, Small Claims Online, court lists (Legal Diary) on line, judgments on line, High Court Search online, Online Fine Payment.



Ardee Courthouse

September 2003. Since then most court funds have been invested to the new arrangements including District and Circuit Court assets as well as High Court funds.

An Investment Committee was established in 2002 to oversee the implementation of the arrangements approved by the Board for the management and investment of court funds. The membership of the Committee comprises representatives of the judiciary, court officers with responsibility for court funds and an independent external representative.

### Consulting with users

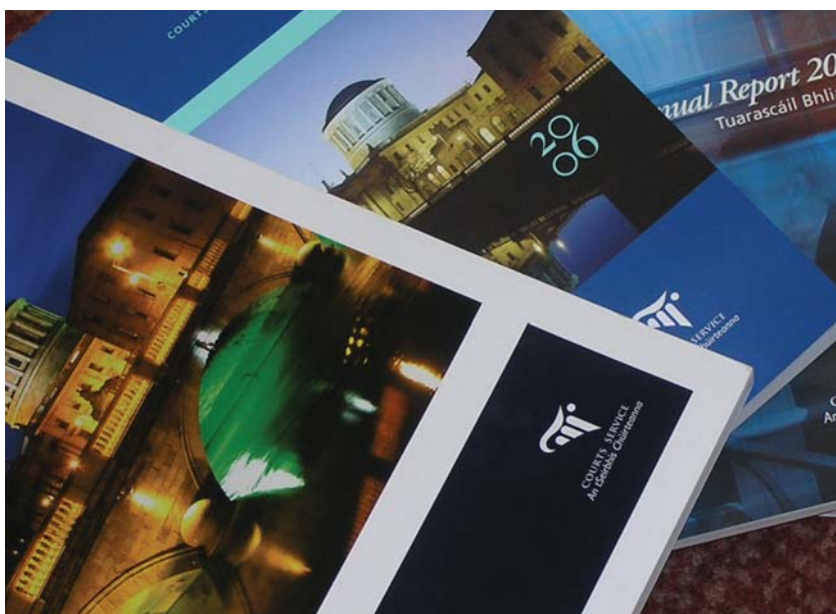
At each step, wider consultation has been undertaken. Court user groups were established. These groups – representative of organisations and others who use the courts or court offices – help to ensure that the views and suggestions of those intimately involved in the courts system are taken into consideration in the development and operation of policy and initiatives. They also provide a useful forum for the exchange of ideas and help in making users aware of each others

needs and concerns. You can read about meetings held this year on page 9.

### Providing information

Furthermore, information has been made widely available. Our Annual Reports contain more detailed statistics and analysis on court operations each year. A number of information booklets on topics as varied as appearing as a witness, who is who in the courtroom and what to do when called for jury duty have been published. The Courts Service website delivers a wide range and variety of information including daily court lists and judgments and provides access to a selection of online services including *Small Claims Online* and *Online Fine Payment*.

“The issue of change and development of court management is on the agenda in many countries today because of the growth in the volume and complexity of litigation worldwide.” These were the words of the Working Group on a Court Commission in 1999, commenting on the completion of the work it had begun three years earlier – they remain as relevant as ever.





## CONFERENCE CALL FOR COURTS SERVICES



**T**he Northern Ireland Court Service hosted colleagues from the Irish Courts Service, Her Majesty's Court Service (England & Wales) and the Scottish Court Service together with representatives of the courts of Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man for the 'Courts Conference 2008' held in Belfast recently.

Organised around sessions titled

'Governance and Accountability', 'Business Improvement' and 'Doing More With Less' delegates shared their experiences of a range of matters including policy development, reform and working in the current financial climate. Among those who gave presentations were CEO PJ Fitzpatrick and Directors Nuala McLoughlin and Sean Quigley.

Delegates paid tribute to the wonderful organisation by Sandra Moore and her team and confirmed the value of these annual conferences. "They afford us a wonderful opportunity to forge alliances and learn from each other", said CEO PJ Fitzpatrick who was participating in his last conference.

Once again there was a large turnout for the annual Mass held for deceased staff and members of the judiciary and for deceased relatives of staff and of the judiciary organised by the Courts Service in conjunction with the Property Registration Authority of Ireland



*L-R Michael Sullivan and Brenda Sullivan, Phyllis Curtin and Pat Curtin*



*Current and retired staff from the Property Registration Authority of Ireland enjoying the get together. Pictured from left to right: Richard Sherlock, Frank Fitzgerald, Brid Hennelly, Nancy Duffy, Eileen Keenan, Pat O'Brien, Mary McNamee and Brendan Fitzgerald.*

# HOW TO SAVE MONEY SIMPLY



With thoughts of the credit crunch, and economy downsizing, and stagnant markets and fiscal this that and the other, **Gerry Curran** has some simple ways to keep a few shillings in the pocket and forget about the despair, or the fiscal gloating it replaced

**S**ince shopping has changed from a strawl for necessities in our parent's time to the greatest leisure activity in the western world, we all seem to 'need' things that in the past were simply called treats or luxuries. Do we need four or more winter coats, which are only used for a couple of months each year and worn from the home or office to the car each day?

## Transport

It really does pay to shop for car and travel insurance. Three or four phone calls to compare quotes for car insurance can and regularly does bring up differences. Even if you're with your insurer years, or have a broker, or have group insurance through a trade union or association, money can still be saved by those four calls.

VHI and other health insurers provide year long travel insurance for around €50 and covers any number of trips. This is a big saving on the price of taking individual policies for each trip abroad.

## Home and Grocery Shopping

There is no need to go back to the muckraking of the 'Good Life' or the rag and bone clutter of 'Steptoe and Son' to save money. There are many ways to avoid unnecessary cost and re-use items without the sniff of poverty and that best forgotten bed-sit returning to haunt your life.

- Long grain rice top brand is almost three times the price of supermarket own brand and four times the no frills brand
- Top brand tea can be 40-50% more expensive than own brand and more than three times the no frills brand
- Make an extra portion when you cook and freeze for another evening when you're strapped for time and tempted to buy a takeaway
- Use leftovers in a similar manner or bring lunch in the next day
- Make your own sandwich and bring fruit for lunch and other tea breaks
- Check 'use or best by date' sections in supermarkets for great bargains. Note that 'use by' indicates perishable items likely to go off quickly. 'Best before' indicates a suggested date for use rather than a health warning
- Re-use sandwich bags, freezer bags and the paper and plastic bags from the greengrocer
- Have a 'use it up week' by planning menus around what must be used soon and what's in the dry cupboards
- Use [www.cookingbynumbers.com](http://www.cookingbynumbers.com) - type in ingredients you have available and it comes up with recipes
- Never shop on an empty stomach (proven to add to what you put in your trolley)
- Use the contents of used teabags on plants in the garden.

## Family and Health

Generic versions of branded remedies are often up to 80% cheaper than their posh cousins.

## Holidays

Have a 'staycation'. Don't travel or even leave home but plan your holiday as normal and cut out the cost of travel and accommodation!

- Change the message on phones to 'we're on holiday - talk to you in a fortnight'
- Wash iron and hang two weeks holiday clothing or weather appropriate stuff
- Check out what's on and do something different every day as you would do on holiday
- Don't go to any of the places you normally go to
- Don't mix with friends or family unless they're with you on 'holiday'
- Don't listen to or buy local news
- Go to places you don't normally go to
- Go to free or small fee entry museums or galleries and if it's not raining remember the countryside is free and it's full of beaches and mountains
- If you have kids pitch a tent in the back garden and tell them it's a camping holiday - or if its lashing sit on the floor of the garage or hallway and have a picnic.

Imagination may be silly but it's fun and inexpensive! Enjoy!





**HAZARDS** – Carrying heaving computer, Overflowing waste bin, Overloaded plugs, Poor posture, Throwing a pen, Sun glare, Hot liquid spillage, Handbag in walkway, Storage at height, Standing on chair, Reading while walking, Fire door held open, Use of chemicals, Tear in toner cartridge packaging, Paper on floor, Open drawers and Stress

## Supporting European Health and Safety Week

'Risk Assessment' is the current theme for European Week for Safety and Health at Work. This is the process of evaluating risks to workers' safety and health from workplace hazards. To raise awareness of risks in the workplace, Courts Service Health & Safety Coordinator, Eva Font organised a quiz asking staff to identify 8 risks out of a possible 15 in a cartoon sketch (see above) which depicted potential risks in an office location. She received over 100 entries with John Harding from the Central Office in the Four Courts picked as the lucky winner.

### Risks in the cartoon sketch are:

1. Woman reading book whilst walking through office and not looking where she is going
2. Fire Door held open by two boxes
3. Girl standing on chair whilst stacking items (Storage at height)
4. Girl carrying tray of hot beverages through office area
5. Hot liquid spillage on floor
6. Man carrying computer hardware showing obvious signs of strain
7. Handbag left beside desk area (trip hazard)
8. Man stocking toner in press and has toner leaking from end of refill (he is also hidden behind press door could be hit by door or trip passer by)
9. Man throwing pen to work colleague
10. Man has feet on desk whilst sitting in a swivel chair
11. Lady at computer with no blinds on windows the sun is causing problems with her seeing her computer screen (eye strain etc)
12. Use of adaptor under desk which is overloaded (also the wires are not properly covered in)
13. Man obviously stressed at his desk
14. Untidy desk and drawer left open (bump into drawer, there is also some of his paperwork on the floor which could cause someone to slip)
15. Overflowing bin under desk beside overloaded sockets



*Eva Font, Health and safety coordinator presenting John Harding with his prize*

# Judge Derek McVeigh

**N**ews of the death of Judge Derek McVeigh at the age of 62 was received with great sadness everywhere not least in his native Donegal and in his adopted South Westmeath.

A native of Church Lane, Letterkenny, Derek was educated at St. Eunan's College and later at UCD (BCL 1968) and the Incorporated Law Society of Ireland. Following his apprenticeship with the late Tom Furlong he qualified as a solicitor in Easter 1970.

Derek joined the firm of Fair & Murtagh, Athlone in 1972 and became a partner in 1975. He quickly built up a substantial practice in all courts and earned early and lasting reputé as a personal injuries litigation expert



Derek was a man of essential decency who saw good in everyone be he a scoundrel, a colleague or a customer in his court.

acting extensively on behalf of both plaintiffs and defendants. He was concerned in many substantial cases not least of which was settled for IRE3.7M in 1995. That remained a record sum of damages in this jurisdiction until recently.

Derek was appointed as a judge of the District Court in April 2005 and sat throughout the country where he was welcomed everywhere as a fair and compassionate judge. He was diligent, interested and knowledgeable of the law, always anxious to learn and keep abreast of statute and decisions. But more than that, Derek was a man of essential decency who saw good in everyone be he a scoundrel, a colleague or a customer in his court. He cared deeply about his fellow

man and his capacity to concern himself with the well being of others did not mitigate upon his appointment to the Bench.

Derek was a keen sportsman. He would happily remind you that he played minor football for his beloved Donegal and throughout his life he was active in many sporting organisations. He was an accomplished golfer, being a member of both Athlone G.C. and Glasheen Golf and Country Club of which he was a member's trustee. He was active in underage football and rugby and many aspects of Buccaneers RFC. He is a founder member and the current years President of the Midland Bar Golf Society. He was energetically involved in many civic and

community organisations who benefited greatly from both his time and advice.

Above all else Derek was a family man. With his beloved wife Frances (Jackson) and their sons Joseph, Conor, Paul and Stephen, Derek maintained one of the happiest homes anywhere to be found. He fostered in his sons his own love of sport and his own sense of integrity and decency and enjoyed their many achievements as much as they did his.

His wife, sons and sister Stephanie together with a vast number of friends, mourn their loss yet give thanks for being able to share in the life of a truly good man.

*Raymond Groarke*



## Mr. John Cooke has been appointed a judge of the High Court

Mr. Justice Cooke was called to the Bar in 1966 and admitted also to the Bars of England & Wales, Northern Ireland and New South Wales. He practised as a barrister between 1966 and 1996 being admitted to the Inner Bar in Ireland (Senior Counsel) in 1980 and New South Wales in 1991. The new judge served as President of the Council of the Bars and Law Societies of the European

Community (CCBE) between 1985 and 1986. He is a Bencher of the Honorable Society of Kings Inns, Dublin and an Honorary Bencher of Lincoln's Inn, London.

Prior to his appointment Mr. Justice Cooke served as a judge at the European Court of First Instance which is made up of at least one judge from each Member State of the European Union.

## New Judge of the District Court

Mr. Dermot Dempsey has been appointed a judge of the District Court.

Judge Dempsey is a solicitor. Prior to his recent appointment he had his own practice in Athboy, Co. Meath. He has extensive experience in all courts, particularly in the areas of conveyancing, litigation, criminal cases and family law.

The new judge holds a BCL from UCD Belfield and was enrolled as a solicitor in 1979.



## Law Society elects new President



John D. Shaw was recently elected President of the Law Society of Ireland. He follows in the footsteps of his father and grandfather who both previously held this office. John is a partner at the law firm J.A. Shaw & Co. Solicitors, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath. He will

serve a one-year term as president of the 12,000-strong solicitors' profession until November 2009.

John was educated in CBS Mullingar primary school and Clongowes Wood College, Co. Kildare. He graduated with a BCL law degree from University College Dublin (UCD). Apprenticed to his father Tom, he qualified as a solicitor at Blackhall Place, Dublin, in 1989 and has practised in J.A. Shaw & Co. since then. John became a member of the Council of the Law Society of Ireland in 1992. He is currently a member of the Property Registration Authority (formerly the Land Registry).

## Staff appointments



**Geraldine Hurley** has been appointed Chief Operations Officer for the new Criminal Courts Complex. She leaves the post of Official Assignee in Bankruptcy having worked in that office since February 2007. She served as Personnel Officer for the previous 2 years.



**Chris Lehane** has been appointed Official Assignee in Bankruptcy. He moves from the Probate Office where he has been Assistant Probate Officer in recent years. Chris has also served as Midland Regional Manager.



**John Glennon** has been appointed Assistant Probate Officer.

## Judge Oliver McGuinness Retires

On Thursday 6th November, Judge Oliver McGuinness sat at Sligo District Court for the last time. The respect in which Judge McGuinness was held was reflected in the numbers who packed the courtroom that morning. Paul Deering of the *Sligo Champion* was in court that morning as he had been each Thursday throughout Judge McGuinness' fourteen years in District Court Area No 2. He recorded the many tributes that were paid to Judge McGuinness from the whole spectrum of the professions involved in court business.

Judge Miriam Malone led the tributes and acknowledged the encouragement and sound advice she had received from Judge McGuinness over the years. Judge John O'Hagan reflected on the tremendous addition Judge McGuinness has been to the judiciary. County Registrar Kieran Mc Dermott noted that the judge had always conducted his court in a firm but a fair manner. Senior Counsel John Finlay expressed appreciation for the many chances Judge Mc Guinness afforded

defendants. Mr. Finlay first came to know Judge Mc Guinness when he (Judge McGuinness) was practicing as a solicitor in Carrick-on-Shannon. He praised him as a formidable opponent but one who always made himself available to the more junior members of the Bar who were starting out. Inspector Gerry Connolly echoed this sentiment when he spoke of how Judge McGuinness had always been patient with young Gardaí and solicitors just entering the profession.

State Solicitor Hugh Sheridan of the DPP's office and Helena Morrison of the Probation and Welfare Service both thanked Judge Mc Guinness on behalf of their respective organisations and the people they represented. Judge Mc Guinness was variously described as a good listener, courteous and diligent, patient and compassionate.

Three local organisations contacted Sligo courthouse to wish Judge Mc Guinness well and thank him for his use of the Court Poor Box which had greatly benefited them.

Bill Cashell, District Court Clerk,

praised Judge Mc Guinness for his generosity with his time particularly the time he devoted to students from local schools who came to visit the court. He would meet the class before court and chat to them afterwards and answer their questions. Bill thanked the judge for sitting at short notice without complaint and giving up free days to clear court lists and said how lucky they had been in Sligo to have had Judge McGuinness assigned to them.



*Judge Oliver McGuinness receives a presentation on the occasion of his retirement*

## Pat Looney says goodbye to Wexford

With his great work ethic it's no wonder that Pat Looney was joined by so many well-wishers to celebrate his retirement from the Courts Service in Wexford.

His career spanned forty-four and half years, starting as a member of An Garda Síochána and continuing as Chief Clerk in both Athlone and Wexford District Courts.

Judge Gerry Furlong thanked Pat for his help commenting, as did all the speakers, on his well of knowledge which was invaluable over the years. Judge Jim O'Sullivan, himself retired, travelled from Limerick and spoke touchingly of time he spent working with Pat in earlier times finishing with "Patrick's Prayer".

On behalf of the Gardaí, Chief Supt. John Roche wished Pat all the best for his retirement, remarking that as a former member himself he understood how the force worked and

*"If you can  
make life easy  
for someone,  
why make it  
difficult?"*

was able to use this to the advantage of both organisations.

Margaret O'Neill, Circuit & District Court Operations, spoke of Pat's renowned friendliness and Kerry brogue which, coupled with his knowledge of statutes and procedures made him a valued member of the Courts Service

Pat's staff from Wexford District Court, represented on the night by Philomena Sinnott, told all present how Pat would do

everything in his power to help those who needed it and if he himself didn't have an answer he'd find a man who did. In response Pat thanked the all female staff and said that going into the office was like having Hallowe'en every day of the year! Finishing the speech he added that without the support of your family you can do no job and all present raised their glasses to Pat and his family wishing them the best for the future.



# Huge turnout as Michael McEvoy retires

The curtain finally came down on the career of Michael McEvoy after over 42 years in the Public Service; 20 of those as Chief Clerk of Mallow District Court.

Michael began his career in Cork with An Garda Síochána and served the public over the years in places as diverse as Wexford, Youghal, Clonakilty and Donegal. During his time in the examiner's branch of the Department of Justice he was well known around the country as an exceptional auditor: brilliant at balancing accounts and with a deep knowledge of the District Court. In 1988 Michael moved to Mallow as Chief Clerk.

In his tribute, Paul Cosgrave, registrar, told of how much the staff would miss Michael's company, his ability to react to delicate and complex situations and most of all his support and friendship. During his last days in court glowing tributes were also



*Michael McEvoy (front row, seated) celebrates his retirement with colleagues*

paid to Michael by Judge Michael Pattwell, Frank Nyhan, State Solicitor and Inspector Senan Ryan on behalf of the Gardaí. Eamonn Kiely, Regional Manager, led the tributes on behalf of the Courts Service. A photograph of Mick was taken as he posed on the judge's chair surrounded by Judge Pattwell

and the staff of the Mallow Office. A framed copy of this momentous photo was presented to him at his retirement function which took place on 7th November. On the night the venue was packed with colleagues, past and present, friends, representatives of the judiciary, the Gardaí and the legal profession. All were there to reminisce, thank, and bid farewell to a man they are all going to miss.

While making a presentation to Michael on behalf of his colleagues and friends, Paul told him "Mick you've been an exceptional boss and friend to all the staff in the Mallow Office". On behalf of the staff of the Mallow Office and his many friends and colleagues Paul wished Michael and his wife Mary the very best of health and enjoyment in the many years ahead. "I hope your boat always keeps sailing into that golden sunset."

## Ned Monahan retires from Ennis Courthouse

The Clare Champion was at Ennis Courthouse recently to photograph Service Officer, Ned Monahan, and to record the tributes paid to him by the County Registrar, Patrick Wallace and District Court Clerk, Josephine Tone as he retired. Both expressed how much Ned's skill in dealing with people, his wry sense of humour and his capacity for calm would be missed.

After a career as a cook on merchant navy liners and working in the family bakery for 14 years Ned spent time in Libya and Saudi Arabia working as a chef. In 2000 he took up the post as service officer in Ennis. He describes this post as the least stressful and most enjoyable of his working career. Dealing with people was Ned's favourite aspect of his job. From putting families and jury panels at

ease to interacting with the judges, solicitors and staff Ned enjoyed it all.

We wish him well in his

retirement dividing his time between his family and the lakes and rivers of Co. Clare, armed with a camera and a fishing rod.



*Ned Monahan as he ponders the next stage of his career*

# A CORK GREAT RETIRES

Colleagues, friends and judiciary gathered at Cork District Court to say farewell to Finbarr Bracken, Chief Clerk, Cork District Court. Judges Uinsin MacGruairc, Constantine O'Leary and David Riordan paid tribute to Finbarr's great experience and knowledge of all aspects of District Court practice and procedure and thanked him for his great helpfulness and courtesy to themselves over the years. Frank Buttimer on behalf of the legal practitioners and Inspector Colm O'Sullivan of the Garda Síochána also spoke of Finbarr's great co-operation with their members to ensure a smooth running of the District Courts in Cork. .

In a first for Cork District Court, Finbarr was invited to speak from the judge's bench while the judges sat in the registrar's position. Finbarr spoke of his great attachment to the District Court and remembered with affection all the great characters he had met during his tenure. He thanked all he worked with over the years and all who had sent their best wishes.

At a staff function at the Market Bar, Eamon Kiely, Southern Regional Manager, on behalf of the Courts Service, Bertie Donovan on behalf of the staff and Patrick Mullins on behalf of the Southern Law Association spoke and Finbarr



*Finbarr Bracken (front row centre) with colleagues*

was presented with mementos to remind him of his time in the District Court. Finbarr's wife Jane was presented with flowers by Siobhan Sheil, Cork District Court. A very enjoyable function ensued and Finbarr, in his own inimitable style gave his time honoured rendition of Percy French's 'The West Clare Railway' (Are ya right there Michael, are ya right).

Finbarr started his career in the District Court at Wexford followed by stints in Mallow, Donegal Town and Clonakilty and finally back to the Real Capital where he became Chief Clerk of Cork District Court in 1990 at the Courthouse in Washington Street. In 1994 the District Court moved to its present location in Anglesea St. and to mark the event Finbarr published a book

'A Farewell to Washington Street' which had numerous humorous contributions from the judiciary, court staff, solicitors and other court users.

A staunch "rebel", Finbarr always has a keen interest in all things 'Cork' and has an extensive knowledge of local history. However he is not averse to crossing the county bounds into the Kingdom where he has a 'Tigín' in Ballinskelligs and where he and Jane are members of Waterville Golf Club. He is a proficient golfer and with plenty of time to spare so no doubt handicaps will drop.

We wish Finbarr a long and healthy retirement and to himself, Jane and family every happiness for the future.

## Large turnout as Ann Price leaves



There was a large turnout in Tullamore Court Hotel recently as colleagues bid farewell to Midland Regional Manager, Ann Price who left the Courts Service after 18 years to take up a position with the Department of Defence. Tributes were paid by Brendan McDonald on behalf of the Regional Managers, Audrey Cadden on behalf of the District Court, Verona

Lambe, County Registrar, on behalf of the Circuit Court and Bridie Murtagh on behalf of the Midland Regional Office.

For her part Ann thanked all the staff she worked with in her 18 years in various areas of the Courts Service and promised to keep in touch. We wish Ann well in her new position.



## Route 66 Challenge

Pictured on Santa Monica Pier, Los Angeles on the 8th October 2008 after completing the Route 66 motorcycle challenge in aid of Temple Street Children's Hospital, Dublin are L-R: Tom Browne, Chief Clerk, District Court, Fermoy, Shay Kirk, Principal Officer, Estates and Buildings, Phoenix House, Dublin and Fintan Murphy, County Registrar, Mayo.

Route 66 begins at the intersection of Adams Street and

Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago and runs for 2,448 miles through the States of Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California and ends at Santa Monica Pier, Los Angeles.

Seventy two motorcycle riders took part in the challenge over a period of eight days and raised in excess of three quarters of a million Euro for this very worthy cause.



## Courts Service Golfing Society

Paddy Maher won the final outing of the current year - John Coyle's Captain's Prize in Turvey Golf Club (Donabate) in September. The full list of prize winners is:

Captain's Prize	Paddy Maher	39 points
	Declan Power	34 points (back 9)
	Matt Cahill	34 points
	Jack Purcell	32 points (back 9)
Class 1	Noel Chambers	32 points
	Pat Fitzgerald	32 points
	Brendan Ryan	31 points
	Michael Bolton	29 points
Class 2	Moling Ryan	31 points (back 9)
	Frank Lyons	31 Points (back 9)
	Diarmuid	
	MacDiarmada	31 points
Class 3	Ciaran Caverly	32 points
	John O'Neill	31 points
	Jim Aherne	27 points

The Society is open to serving or retired staff of the Courts Service. There are approximately 4 outings a year; venues are not confined to the Dublin area. Members are of all standards so whether you only play a few times a year or are of Padraig Harrington calibre you will be welcome.

Details of next years outings will be featured in a future issue of Courts Service News. If you would like to join the Society contact Declan Power in the Dublin Circuit Family Law Office on 8886765 or by e-mail at [declanppower@courts.ie](mailto:declanppower@courts.ie).



COURTS SERVICE  
An tSeirbhís Chúirteanna

# COURTS Service News

NUAHT NA SEIRBHÍSE CÚIRTEANNA

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# give a book this CHRISTMAS

There's never any shortage of books available as the Christmas present buying season approaches. But what to buy? With so little time and so much choice, our book reviewers, **Gerry Curran** and **Noel A. Doherty**, have some interesting suggestions. Treat someone to a great read or better still, treat yourself this festive season.

## Creating Ireland

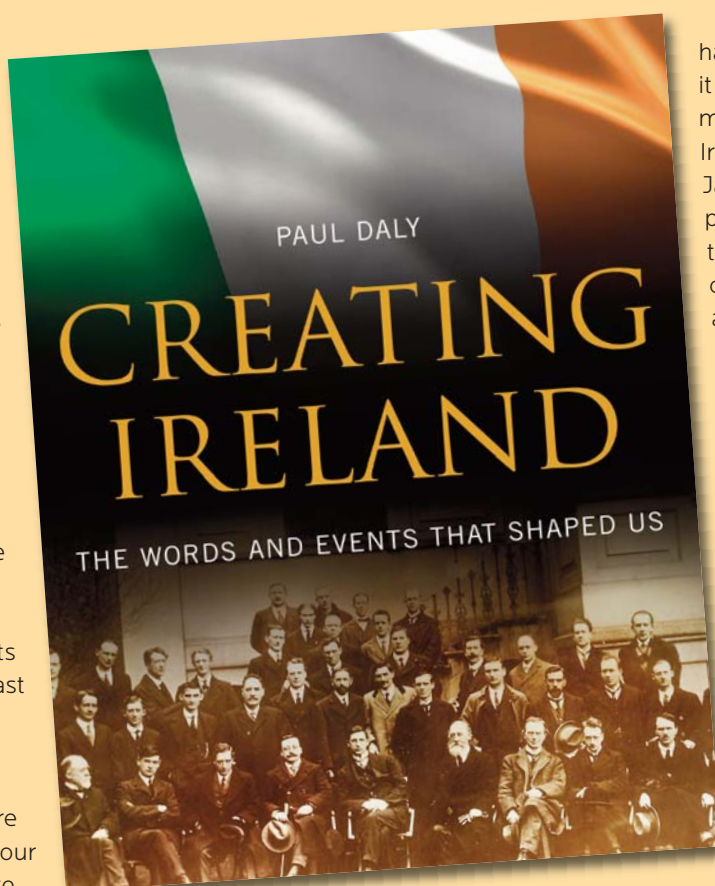
(Hachette Books Ireland, €26.99)

A new book just waiting to lie under your Christmas Tree or lounge on any self respecting coffee table is *Creating Ireland* by Paul Daly. This attractive tome takes a look at Irish history through ninety years of Dáil Éireann and reproduces the words and events that shaped the nation.

It is more than an attractive hardback, in that it provides, history, chronology, news, commentary, speech excerpts and pictorial records of the last ninety years of our parliamentary and national democracy.

*Creating Ireland* is a treasure trove of vignettes relating to our development as a nation state while it very cleverly provides a timeline of major world and local events each year through the use of notes in the margins of each page.

Although this book is in-depth enough to be a reference book for any student of history, politics or parliamentary systems, Paul Daly has succeeded in making it readable and interesting enough to dip in and out of over a period of time. It should also be stored on a nearby shelf to settle any score over who said what, and when, and about



whom, in the Dáil.

The book recalls that when the first shots of the War of Independence rang out, those given power in the 1918 general election turned their backs on Westminster and established the assembly of Ireland - Dáil Éireann.

Since it first gathered almost ninety years ago on 21 January 1919, the Dáil has been at the heart of Irish life, shaping the growing nation and providing the backdrop for many of the major debates that

have defined Irish society and what it means to be Irish. From the month-long debate on the Anglo-Irish Treaty that concluded in January 1922, which created the party system we know today, through debates on neutrality, censorship, Northern Ireland, abortion and divorce - to the radical social and economic developments of recent years, what happens within the Dáil chamber reflects who we are, who we think we are, and who we could or should be.

*Creating Ireland* is a fascinating exploration of Ireland through its politicians and its people - reflecting its changing position from fledgling nation to stalwart of Europe.

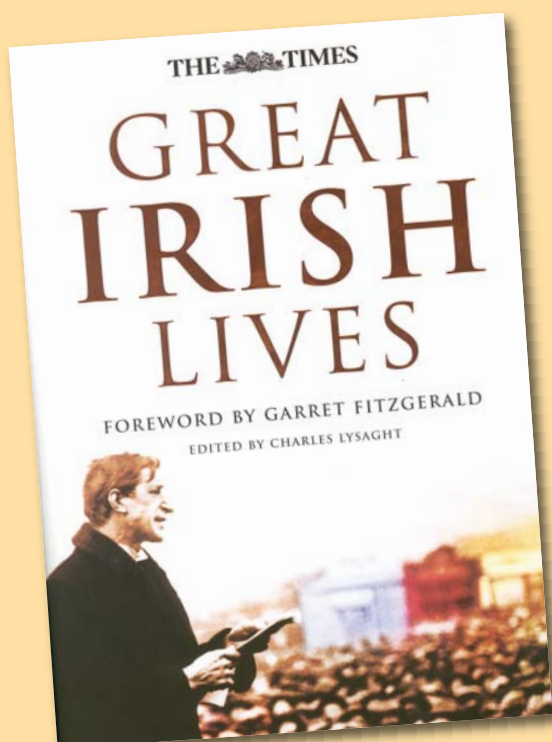
Gerry Curran

## Great Irish Lives

(ed. Charles Lysaght; Times Books, £12.99)

This is a very interesting, not to mention entertaining, collection of almost one hundred obituaries spanning almost two centuries, chosen from the archives of *The London Times*. Beginning with the parliamentarian Henry Grattan (died 1820) and concluding with the obituary of journalist and broadcaster Nuala O'Faolain who





died only last May, the lives chosen cover a broad range of activities including politics, the arts, science, journalism, academia and sport.

In his introduction to the volume, editor Charles Lysaght states that in making his choices, he attempts to strike a balance between the significance of the subject and the quality of the obituary. Included therefore are such well known personages as Daniel O'Connell, Charles Stewart Parnell, Eamon de Valera, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce. The volume, however, also contains pieces on less well known or less well remembered figures including the controversial Archbishop of Dublin, Cardinal Paul Cullen, writers Maria Edgeworth and Kate O'Brien, the Times war correspondent William Howard Russell, and the opera singer Margaret Burke Sheridan, while some of the modern figures included are John B. Keane, Maureen Potter, Dermot Morgan and George Best.

From the legal profession the volume contains the obituaries of former judge of the Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Brian Walsh and John A. Costello, Senior Counsel and former Taoiseach.

Noel A. Doherty

## A Fine Statement; An Irish Poets' Anthology

(ed. John McDonagh; Poolbeg Press, €22.99)

This is a beautifully bound and presented volume of Irish poetry. Twenty Irish poets were asked to select their five favourite poems from their own work for inclusion in the anthology and to provide a short introduction to explain their choices.

The poets featured are Eavan Boland, Pat Boran, Ciaran Carson, Theo Dorgan, Paul Durcan, Peter Fallon, Kerry Hardie, Seamus Heaney, Rita Ann Higgins, Brendan Kennelly, Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Medbh McGuckian, Paula Meehan, John Montague, Sinead Morrissey, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Bernard O'Donoghue, Cathal O'Searchaigh and Michael O'Siadhail.

In relation to the poems in the Irish language, these are translated into English either by the poet in question or a fellow poet. The volume also contains an interesting discourse by the editor, Dr. John McDonagh, in which he discusses

the chosen poems and their themes.

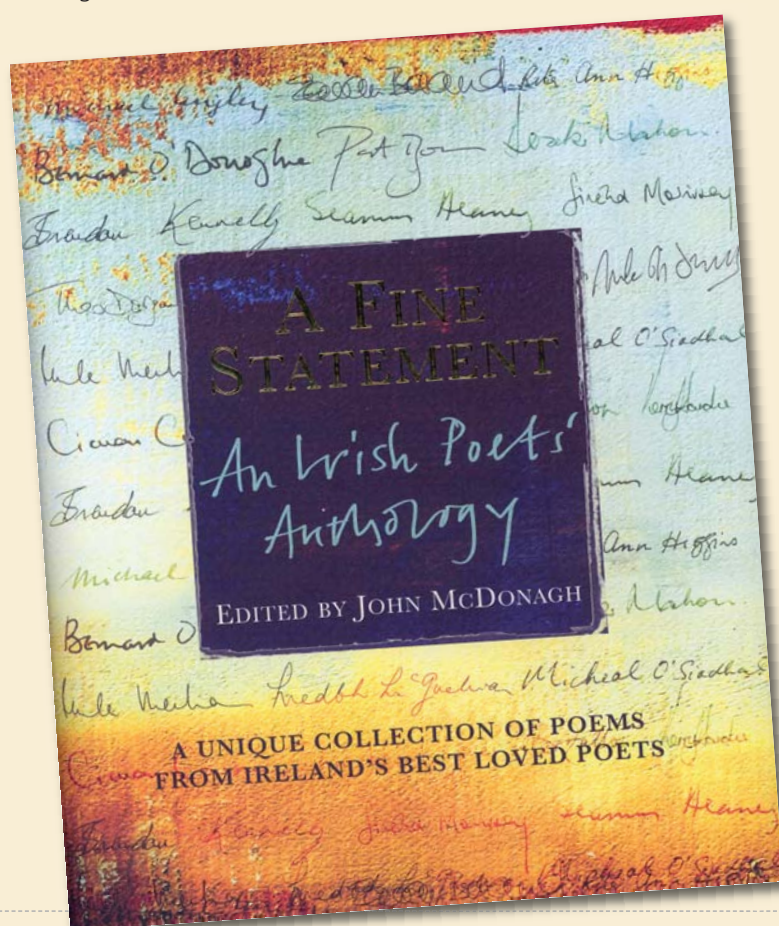
### Crime Fiction

Meanwhile, for those suffering withdrawal symptoms following the retirement of D.I. Rebus, all is not lost. If you want a dour, difficult detective who has a troubled relationship with his ex wife (she hates him) and a less than wonderful relationship with his children, look no further than Detective Erlunder, the central character in a series of excellent crime novels, and the creation of Icelandic writer Arnaldur Indridason.

Set in Reykjavik, there are at least three novels available in translation. *Tainted Blood* (filmed and released earlier this year under the title *Jar City*), *Silence of the Grave* and *Voices*. All are available in paper back and published by Vintage.

And finally, remember the words of that great philosopher Groucho Marx "outside of a dog, a book is a man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read".

Noel A. Doherty



# Out of the Office with..... George Hanlon

## What's your passion?

Stand-up comedy

## When did you first get interested in comedy?

I've always been interested in comedy and for a long time had wanted to give stand-up a go but surprisingly I never had the nerve to try out my own material and instead spent my time writing sketches and spoof articles for a local publication.

## When did you start doing stand up?

In May 2007 my very good friend and fellow comedian Keith Anderson asked me if I would perform a short set at The Neptune Comedy Club. I agreed and the following day tried to back out but Keith was having none of it so in June 2007 I made my comedy debut.

## Where do you perform?

18 months down the line I'm still performing regularly on the Dublin scene as well as in Louth, Westmeath, Cork, Galway, Kildare, Meath and Kilkenny. I'm the regular

host of 'Tap Me Up Comedy Club', based in The Tap Pub on North King Street Dublin 7 every Thursday night along with American comedian Eric Shantz.

## What do you most enjoy about it?

I love the buzz of being on stage, interacting with a live audience, and that an original three word idea can turn into a 20 minute set. As much as I love writing material there is no comparison between performing my own material and reading it in the local newsletter.

## Have you met any famous comedians (apart from yourself)?

I've been very fortunate to share a stage with the likes of Damian Clark and Andrew Stanley, of 'I Dare Ya' fame, Paddy Courtney from TG4s 'Paddywhackery' and even the great Ardal O'Hanlon. I've also gigged with some of the comedians who will be huge in 2009 including Robbie Bonham and Eric Lawlor (you heard it here first)

## Your most memorable gig?

My debut at the Kilkenny Cat



Laughs Festival in 2008, the 24 hour comedy gig for 'People in Need' at the Tivoli Theatre in Dublin and my first M.C. slot at 'Tap Me Up'.

## What are your plans?

I hope to go to the Cat Laughs Festival in 2009 and make my debut at the prestigious Edinburgh Fringe Festival. I also hope to take in new county venues and reach out to new audiences. I'll continue writing and most of all I hope it continues to be as much fun as it has been to date.

For further details check out [www.myspace.com/geoshow](http://www.myspace.com/geoshow) and [www.myspace.com/tapmeupcomedy](http://www.myspace.com/tapmeupcomedy)

George Hanlon works in the Circuit Court

## Mulled Wine Recipe:

### Ingredients

75 cl bottle red wine  
300 ml (1/2 pint) water  
300 ml (1/2 pint) orange juice  
3 tbs caster sugar  
1 Mulled Wine Spice sachet  
150 ml (1/4 pint) brandy  
1 orange, sliced  
1 apple, sliced

### Preparation

- 1 Place the wine, water, orange juice, sugar and Mulled Wine Spice Sachet in a large saucepan.
- 2 Heat to just below boiling point and hold this temperature for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
- 3 Remove the sachet. Stir in the brandy and fruit.

### Preparation and Cooking Time:

15 Serves: 6-8

## Mince Pie Recipe:

### Ingredients

#### Pastry:

225 g (8 oz) plain flour  
175 g (6 oz) butter  
75 g (3 oz) caster sugar  
1 medium egg, separated  
Cold water for mixing

#### Filling:

225 g (8 oz) mincemeat  
1 tsp Mixed Spice

### Preparation

1 Pre-heat the oven to 200°C, 400°F, Gas Mark 6.

2 Sieve the flour into a bowl. Rub in the butter until the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs. Add 50g (2oz) of the sugar, the egg yolk and enough cold water to

form a dough. Roll out the dough to a thickness of 0.5cm (1/4"). Cut out enough 6.5cm (2 1/2") rounds to line 20 greased patty tins. Cut 20 smaller rounds for lids.

3 Mix together the mincemeat and Mixed Spice. Fill each pastry case with mincemeat. Dampen the edges of the lids with water and place them on top of the mincemeat. Seal the edges. Pierce the centre with a sharp knife. Brush the lids with beaten egg white and sprinkle with the remaining sugar.

4 Bake the pies in the oven for 10-15 minutes. Serve warm with whipped cream or brandy butter. The pies may be frozen for up to 6 months. Thaw at room temperature.

### Preparation and Cooking Time:

30 Serves: 20



# Christmas Quiz

Christmas can be a pretty hectic time of the year, lots of cleaning to be done: cleaning out the chimney, cleaning out the turkey and the worst of all .....cleaning out the bank account – it's just non-stop! This quiz is our present to you, providing you with a legitimate excuse to park yourself on your favourite armchair and watch the TV when all the madness has passed. While you tuck in to the repeats of turkey sandwiches, watch for repeats of great programmes and movies which may help with the answers to the quiz.

1. Name the first feature length Disney cartoon shown in 1937
2. Link the following comedy characters with their TV series
  - Hyacinth
  - Rodney
  - Marina
3. What was unusual about the guns in the 1976 film Bugsy Malone?
4. What is Boycie's Christian name?
5. Name the song that won an Oscar for The Wizard of Oz
6. Name the actor from the TV show Dallas who starred in Seven Brides for Seven Brothers.
7. Name Angelina Jolie's father who was cast as her on-screen father in Lara Croft: Tomb Raider
8. Name the character played by Christopher Lee in Man with the Golden Gun
9. The popular series MASH was set in the Korean War – what did the abbreviation stand for?
10. Name the product from the following TV advertising slogans
  - And all because the lady loves
  - For men who don't have to try too hard
  - Bet you can't eat three

Please send your answers to Fiona Farrell, Information Office, 6th Floor, Phoenix House, Smithfield, Dublin 7 or email [courtsservicenews@courts.ie](mailto:courtsservicenews@courts.ie)

## The answers to the October Quiz:

1. Always On My Mind – Willie Nelson/Elvis Presley
2. Poison Arrow – ABC
3. Dancing Queen – ABBA
4. Take it Easy – The Eagles
5. Living Thing – The Beautiful South/ELO
6. Search for a Hero – Heather Small/M People
7. If you tolerate this your child will be next – Manic Street Preachers
8. Mercy – Duffy

Many thanks to all who entered and congratulations to Miriam Stack of the Southern Regional Office who is the winner of the October Quiz. Miriam will be presented with her prize in the coming weeks.



Alice White the winner of the July Quiz being presented with her prize by John Quinke, Courts service Information Office.





Students from St Raphael's secondary school, Stillorgan and Loreto College, Swords during their visit to the Four Courts

# Through the lens



Congratulations to Elaine Jones, Waterford Circuit Court on her marriage to Finbarr Harold



Members of the Canadian judiciary during a presentation from the Reform and Development Directorate



The first batch of new entrants to the Courts service in 2008, back row, Myles Reidy, Mary Gill, Brenda Casey, Marie Coady. Front Row, Andrejs Rudaks, Bernadette Hobbs, Lillian Meade, Ann-Marie Dwyer



Darach Green, ICT Directorate - a face in the crowd at Drogheda United's champions league game