

## Leitrim based film maker Johnny Gogan directs Homeland

TG4 broadcast the new documentary *Homeland* about Leitrim in late September. The film, directed and produced by Leitrim based film-maker Johnny Gogan dealt with the role of emigration and the more recent phenomenon of immigration in forming the character of the County.

With a pre-famine population of 160,000 County Leitrim saw its population fall to 25,000 in recent memory, only recording its first increase in the past decade. *Homeland* interviewed those Leitrim people who left but decided to come back to make their homes in the County. It also tapped into the phenomenon of immigration and those people from other countries and other parts of Ireland who decided to make the county home.

Returned emigrants Mary and Paddy King of Aughasheelin featured in an RTE documentary in 1967 about living conditions in the area at the time; Micheal Gallagher returned with his wife Mary from New York to take a central part in a land-mark constitutional challenge which ended the unjust system of land rates, the so-called Poor Law Valuation; The Duffys, a first generation Croydon family couldn't resist the draw of the



Nuria Roldos & Johnny Gogan



Mary Turner



Seán Ó Súilleabháin



Pete Kern & Nuria Roldos



home-place in Garvagh Glebe near Drumkeeran.

Leitrim's leading gaeilgeoir and the County's inspirational Librarian Seán Ó Súilleabháin traced the main signposts in the story of Leitrim's population decline and regeneration. He commented on the phenomenon that often saw Leitrim people "foresaking the back lanes" only to be replaced by German and English immigrants attracted to rural seclusion: people such as Mike Harris and Jo Lewis who sold their thriving restaurant in London to build a straw-bale house in Edergole, Dromahair or Hans and Gaby Wieland who set up a successful cheesemaking business near Cliffoney or Pete Kern who set up the equally successful Rainbow Candles.

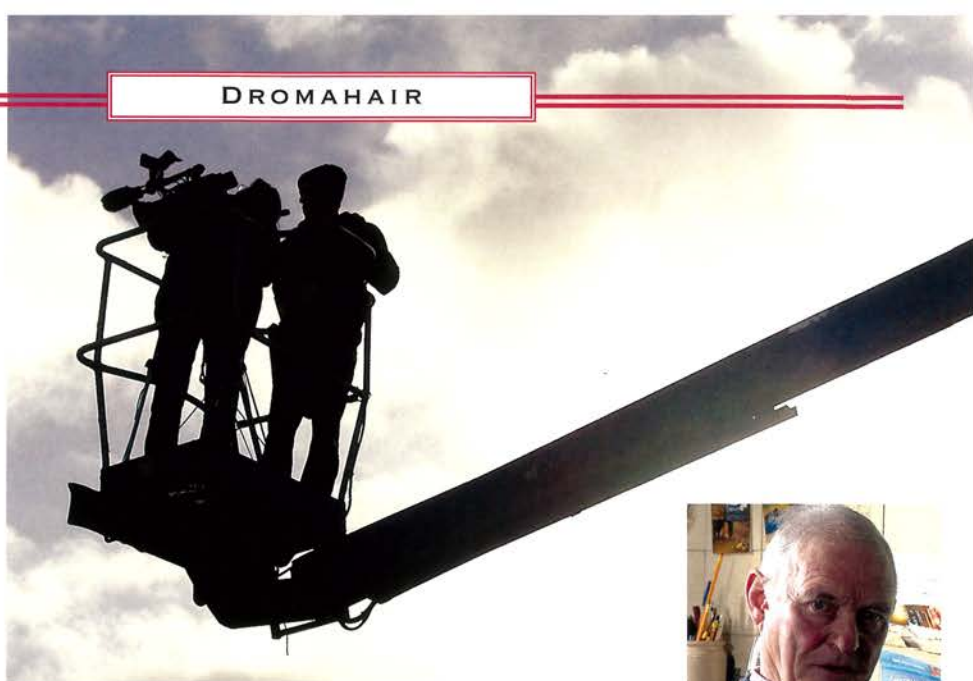
The 50-minute film featured a

more recent wave of internal migrants drawn to Leitrim by the increasing visibility of the County on the national stage, post 1994, people escaping the erstwhile Celtic Tiger. Like the ÓDonnchú-ÓConláin family whose daughter Anna took a hand in Leitrim Women's GAA seizing the All-Ireland Intermediate title in 2007 or Rossa ÓSnodaigh of Kila who set up Gaelscoil Cluainín in 2006. The film provided the opportunity for Rossa to explore the cultural diversity of his 32 house estate in Manorhamilton.

Concluding the film is the story of Carrick-on-Shannon's established Kurdish Community now numbering some sixty-five people who fled the harsh surroundings of a transit camp on the Iraq-Jordan border in 2006. Their story echoed with the famine story of many of Leitrim's earliest migrants.

For film-maker Johnny Gogan, himself a blow-in from the Big Smoke making *Homeland* proved a particularly rewarding project as it was "an opportunity to once again celebrate our unique landscape and to work close to home" with locally based collaborators including editor Patrick O'Rourke, composer Pádraig Meehan, researcher Jim King and Cavan based camerawoman Nuria Roldos.

*Homeland* was co-financed by County Leitrim PEACE III Partnership and TG4 and will be re-broadcast by TG4 in 2012.



Crane & Sky. Right: Michael Gallagher



Jim, Mary & Paddy King. Right: Anna Conlon



Crew in Ballinamore Below: Mike Harris & Jo Lewis

