

THE DOCK ARTS CENTRE

FLYING THE FLAG FOR THE ARTS IN LEITRIM SINCE 2005

Paul Cunningham

NOW ONE OF Ireland's most vibrant Arts Centres The Dock on St George's Terrace in Carrick on Shannon was built in 1824 to house the Carrick-on-Shannon Courthouse, one of a large number of County Court buildings constructed in Ireland in the early part of the nineteenth century. It was designed by William Farrell in the classical style that was popular at the time, as the centre for administration of justice and local government in the county. Though the exact date of its construction is unknown, Piggotts Directory of the 12th. August, 1824 refers to 'a handsome Courthouse built upwards of two years ago' adjacent to the county jail.

The Courthouse at Carrick-on-Shannon also housed the Grand Jury, which administered local government in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. From 1898 to 1994 it housed the chamber and offices of Leitrim County Council. The building continued to house the local authority and the courts during the twentieth century.



However, like many similar buildings little maintenance works were carried out and over time the fabric of the building deteriorated seriously, leading to local debate in the 1980's and early 1990's about the future of the building. The courts service in particular was very dissatisfied with the poor facilities and decaying condition of the building fabric. Demolition of the building was even raised as a possible option. Thankfully that option was not taken!

The courts service and the local authority vacated the building in 1994 and it remained vacant until refurbished as "The Dock" Arts Centre which opened to the public on the 20th August, 2005.

Supported by Leitrim County Council as part of its arts service, The Dock was officially opened by Minister for The Arts, Sport and Tourism John O' Donoghue on Thursday 14th September 2005 as Leitrim's first integrated centre for the arts.

The inaugural exhibitions during September 2005 featured the work of artists Mike Bunn, Karl Burke, Mark Garry, Nick Miller, Hazel Walker, Derval Symes and Alice Lyons. The first performance in the newly opened building was a production of Chapter Two by Beeznee Theatre Company on Wednesday 24th August.

As The Dock Arts Centre in Carrick on Shannon enters its 11th year in existence we take a look back at the centre's history and the reasons why it has become and continues to be a flagship of Leitrim County Council and one of the cornerstones of the region's arts infrastructure.

Since its development in 2005, The Dock has earned a substantial national reputation for developing and presenting high quality arts activities, exhibitions and performances. As such it is emblematic of the image of Leitrim as a progressive, creative



and exciting location to live and work.

The Dock has continuously delivered a programme of excellent quality, range and diversity. The varied programme has included music acts like Michelle Shocked, Peggy Seeger, Paul Brady, Pierre Bensusan and Tim McGoldrick, award winning writers Paul Durcan, Dermot Bolger and Paul Muldoon and notable theatre and dance productions including Fishamble's productions of *Silent and Forgotten*, *At The Black Pigs Dyke* by Vincent Woods, Donal O Kelly's multi award winning *Catalpa* alongside international contemporary dance with performances such *Sensual Africa* in 2011, *Steptext Dance* in 2013 and *Rian-Unplugged* in 2014.

More recently The Dock has hosted events such as the inaugural and very successful *Iron Mountain Literature Festival* as well as many other festival events and seminars including the annual *John McGahern Seminar*, the *Carrick Water Music Festival* and *Phaseone Electronic Music and Arts Festival*. The Dock has also co produced a number of productions that have received critical acclaim and toured nationally and internationally. *The Pipes The Pipes*, a stunning audio visual show devised by Donal Dineen and co-produced by The Dock with Siobhan O'Malley is one such event. Another notable production was *Sokalo Atlantic Rhythms* which showcased traditional Irish and Canadian step dancing and music traditions to both Irish and Canadian audiences.

The Dock's visual arts programme has presented exhibitions by a



wide range of artists including Barbara Falkowska *Weaving The Sky* (2014) Maud Cotter, Dorothy Cross, John Gibbons, Paul Gregg, Fergus Martin, Kathy Prendergast (2008), David Michalek (2009), Grace Weir (2010) and Hollis Frampton (2012) and most recently a stunning joint exhibition by father and son artists John and Gary Coyle.

These events have attracted audiences from all over Leitrim, surrounding counties and from Dublin to Mayo and Clare to Belfast. Regular bespoke theatre performances, music shows, workshops and film screenings have encouraged families, school, youth and active age groups from Leitrim, Roscommon, Sligo and Longford to become regular visitors. Specific initiatives for teenagers included IMRO Songwriting workshop, summer camps in new music technology, animation and video editing alongside regular sessions for youth theatre members have all contributed to the rich cultural tapestry that The Dock has woven since opening in 2005.

As 2017 beckons The Dock will continue to bring the very best of music, theatre, visual art and dance to the people of Leitrim and beyond. If you would like to find out more about what The Dock has to offer you please visit the centre's website at www.thedock.ie or drop in for a coffee and a look around. Access to the galleries is free and you can browse through the programme of events to see if anything takes your fancy. The building is open Monday to Saturday from 10 to 5.30pm and the welcome is always warm.