

### **Pupils in Templemore help to launch Tree Week 2009 with County Mayor.**

St. Joseph's Primary School in Templemore helped Mayor Dr. Joe Hennessy to launch National Tree Week 2009 (March 1<sup>st</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup>) this week. In conjunction with the launch, North Tipperary County Council announced they will be distributing free trees to schools, Tidy Towns and Community groups throughout the County.

A Tree Walk will take place in Birdhill on Sunday the 8<sup>th</sup> of March in the afternoon and all are welcome to join in on this walk which will be guided by Siobhan Geraghty the Heritage Officer with North Tipperary County Council. Ground may be rough under foot and those interested in participating are advised to wear suitable shoes and clothing. The event may be rescheduled if there are extreme weather conditions.

"The aim of National Tree Week is to raise awareness about trees and encourage local communities to plant trees in their locality to encourage growth and biodiversity" commented Áine Mc Carthy, Environmental Awareness Officer with North Tipperary County Council. "Trees are an essential part of our environment and by doing something as simple as planting a tree; everyone can play their part in helping the environment."

Now in its 25<sup>th</sup> year, National Tree Week is organised by the Tree Council of Ireland and Local Authorities, with the sponsorship of Coillte and O2. This year the Tree Council have chosen the theme of "Our Trees – Our Culture" and here is some background on this.

Although Ireland experienced a decline in tree cover for more than a millennium the memory of our ancient forests is still there. When we look at our history, our literature and poetry, our music and art we find trees and what they represent to us embedded into our identity and expression.

Trees have always been part of the world's mythology and Ireland has its own symbols and legends. To the ancient Irish and into recent history certain trees, for example, oak and hazel were associated with knowledge and others, the ash and rowan with protection. Fairy trees and raths can evoke respect to this day.

Have you ever wondered why people say 'touch wood' to ward off bad luck? The Celts touched trees as they believed it warded off evil spirits. Our Celtic ancestors worshiped trees, they had sacred groves and single trees, these sacred trees have survived today at Holy wells.

The earliest form of writing in Ireland was Ogham, a tree alphabet, which can be found carved on standing stones. This had twenty letters, each corresponding to one of our native species. The protection of trees also formed a core part of our ancient legal system, the Brehon Laws.

Our sense of place finds expression in our place names, which today identify towns, villages and town lands, many of which come from trees and woods. We are all familiar with Kildare

(Church of the Oak) and of course Co. Derry itself. In fact of the 62,000 place names on the island of Ireland 1,200 are associated with oak. Co. Mayo is 'the plain of the yew trees'. Co. Roscommon is the 'St. Comáin's Wood' and Co. Monaghan the 'place of the thicket'. Original names and translated derivatives can be found on all our signposts, maps and almanacs. Indeed they can still be a source of cultural dispute.

Another imprint made by trees on our cultural identity is the use of trees for surnames. Names in Irish such as Cullen or Cullinane come from Cuillen – holly, Darragh or Mc Darragh from Dair (oak), Quill from Coill (wood) as well as Irish names in the English language, Ashe and, Woods.

Trees feature in our poetry in both languages. Cill Cais is the most often quoted poem in both in Irish and English:

*'Cad a dhéanfaimid feasta gan adhmaid? Tá deireadh na gcoillte ar lár'*  
*'What will we do for timber; the last of the woods are gone'.*

Yeats praises the hazel wood and Kavanagh the beech tree. Trees also have a place in the works of our major prose writers and playwrights, for example George Moore, Flan O'Brien, Brian Friel and James Joyce, the latter personalising virtually all species known here in his description in Ulysses of the marriage of the Chief Ranger of the Irish National Foresters to Miss Fir Conifer.

Our traditional, popular and classical music pieces often have trees as a motif, for example Percy French's ever popular Gortnamona and compositions by Joan Trimble such as the Green Bough.

Wood features in our historical and contemporary architecture art and craftwork. Ancient homes and fortifications were wood based and although little of the original remains today, excellent reconstruction brings these features back to life. Tree planting for aesthetic reasons and to create formal landscapes resulted in the great 18th Century Estates. The engravers and pleine air (open air) artists of the 18th and 19th Centuries saw in trees and woods a focus for dramatic landscapes and studies in light and shade. Today, trees are the focus of numerous works of photography, painting and print. There has been an explosion of wood sculpture and craft and wood use in structural building and finishing has greatly increased.

The ash is of course inextricably linked with our National Sport - Hurling and is annually celebrated in the All Ireland finals. Up to 500,000 hurleys are used each year and the ash is one of our most prized trees. Hurley making is one of the last of our cottage industries.

Tree in cities, gardens, parks and woodlands make our increasingly urban life more bearable and they feature in all major developments. Tree Week 2009 will invite you to focus on the harmony and pleasure that trees and wood bring to our life experience and contribute to creative projects in whatever way you can.

If your community group or school would like to plant one or more trees, please contact Jimmy Cahalan at 087 673 6241 from March 2<sup>nd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> of March only. All trees must be collected from the Water Tower in Nenagh during working hours, 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m., Monday to Friday. The number of trees available is limited and will be distributed on a first come first served basis. Planting advice will be available on request when you are collecting your trees.

This Tree Week, why not get involved in a local community tree planting, plant a tree yourself in your own garden or do some clearance and maintenance work on old trees that have been neglected. For further information, please contact the Council's Environment Section on (067) 44786 or visit [www.treecouncil.ie](http://www.treecouncil.ie)

Ends

Áine Mc Carthy

Environmental Awareness

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