

PRESS RELEASE

NO EMBARGO

Where are Galway's Golden Miles?

Cllr. Peter Roche, Cathaoirleach Galway County Council and Ms. Delia, CEO, Colahan, Galway Rural Development presented the *Golden Mile of Galway Awards 2015* and launched the *Golden Mile 2016 Calendar* in the Claregalway Hotel, Claregalway last night, Thursday 17th December. Over 200 people attended the launch.

This year nine groups and organisations entered the competition. They came from all parts of the county, ranging from Aughrim to Ballymoe and Inis Oírr to Craughwell.

Cllr. Peter Roche, Cathaoirleach Galway County Council said 'It is heartening to see the enormous voluntary effort, energy and hard work that the local communities and schools have put into this competition. One of the great elements of this project is that all age groups have been involved in various aspects of the work of presenting the Golden Mile for the competition. It is also wonderful to see that the *Méitheal* is still alive and truly working in County Galway'.

Michael Burke, Galway Rural Development gave a presentation and photographic show of all of the miles that took part in this year's competition.

Ms. Delia Colahan, CEO, Galway Rural Development said 'The 2016 Golden Mile Calendar once again celebrates the commitment and energy of people living in small communities in Co. Galway; it also highlights their continuing strong links with the land and with each other. Roads in rural Galway have their own distinct personalities and stories and should be cherished, valued and preserved. I hope that as you look through this Calendar and enjoy this year's "Golden Miles" you might give some thought to a mile that is golden in your locality and consider entering in the future'.

The Golden Mile of Galway Competition is organised by Galway County Council, Galway Rural Development, Forum Connemara, Meitheal Forbarta na Gaeltachta, Comhdhail Oileáin na hEireann and Galway County Heritage Forum with the support of the farming organisations. The calendar is available from either Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Galway County Council, Prospect Hill, Galway phone 091 509198 or e-mail mmannion@galwaycoco.ie or Frank Keane, Galway Rural Development, Mellows Campus, Athenry phone 091 844335 or e-mail fkeane@grd.ie

Award winners:

Golden Mile 2015: Awards

Overall Winner: Lisheenahelita Golden Mile Group, Glenamaddy

Community Effort, Litter Management & Road Safety (Tony Dervan, RIP Award): Ballymanagh Golden Mile Group, Craughwell

Natural Heritage: Cappataggle Heritage Group, Cappataggle

Built Heritage: Burren Lowlands Group, Gort

Best School Award: Scoil Chaomháin, Inis Óirr

The members of the Judging Panel were:

John Costello, Engineer, Galway County Council;
Dr. Christy Cunniffe, Archaeologist and Heritage Specialist;
Zena Hctor, Heritage & Environmental Consultant.

The Awards were designed and produced by the following artists and crafts people:

Mr. Lewis Goodman: Commemorative Stones for the Overall Golden Mile Award

Mr. Ronnie Graham: Perpetual Trophy

Ms. Sabine Springer: Natural Heritage Prints as the awards for the various categories.

Golden Miles 2015

Aughrim – Cloonameragaun to Moclair's Cross Golden Mile

Aughrim Development Company Limited submitted the Golden Mile from Cloonameragaun to Moclair's Cross into the 2015 competition. A medieval church and graveyard are to be found at the beginning of the mile. Further up the road is St Catherine's Hall, which was built originally as a school in 1893. Moving towards the junction, the bungalow to the right of the bridge leading to the presbytery was the site of the RIC barracks and the old pound was located directly opposite in what is now St Catherine's school grounds. The area is also known as Luttrell's Pass as Cols Henry Luttrell and Dominic Sheldon were posted here with a force of Jacobite horsemen to guard the north pass leading into Aughrim during the Battle of Aughrim in 1691.

As you travel on you come to a modern piece of architecture which is the bridge over the M6 motorway. Walking along the road the grassy margin holds a variety of wildflowers such as Rose Bay Willow Herb, Wild Cranes Bill,

while mature Oak and Scots Pine trees can be seen in the fields. The hedges are a mix of Hawthorn, Hazel, Alder and a few Hollies. Further on the road is an old sheep dipping pond, the site of a Wesleyan school and a mature plantation which is home to an array of native Irish birds. Moclair's Cross marks the end of the Aughrim Golden mile 2015.

Ballymoe – Lisnageeragh Golden Mile

Ballymoe Area Development entered the Lisnageeragh Golden Mile into the competition with the help of the Rural Social Scheme. The mile starts in the townland of Curries where you can park your car. It is a very pleasant peaceful walk. There are great panoramic views across surrounding landscape. Mature Ash, Spruce and Beech trees line the route. Earthen roadside banks flank the road, home to diverse shade loving species of ferns, herb Robert, wild carrot and furze. Small drains run beneath the banks playing host to species such as Willow Herb, Water Mint and Meadowsweet. Large fields of rushy pasture lead the eye to dispersed dwellings in the distance. Birch, Hawthorn, Blackthorn and Willows create low understorey hedges. The ruins of Castle gates brings you to a small cluster of Birch at Tobinstown which has been planted in memory of over 20 families who once lived there; nothing now remains of their dwellings only a great view. Large mature Horse chestnut trees bring us to the end of the mile.

Cappataggle – Doonaree & Eastwell Golden Mile

Cappataggle Heritage Group selected the townlands of Doonaree and Eastwell as the Cappataggle Golden Mile for 2015 on the L74381. It is truly a hidden gem that is particularly rich in history and folklore, notable plant species including majestic deciduous trees, habitats and spectacular views over the landscape including views of Ballydonnellan Castle, Tynagh mines, the Devil's Bit mountains in Tipperary, Redmount Hill and a stand of Beech trees called 'The Seven Sisters' in Eyrecourt, Frenchman's Hill and the Slieve Aughty mountains. Along its meandering route Evergreen Oaks, stone walls, hedges, earthen banks and a 'Haw-Haw' can be seen. The mile has a wealth of features and there are plenty of turns along the road that reveal a surprise whenever you round a bend! The Byrnes homestead and horse stables are at the beginning of the mile. Further along the mile is the private burial ground of the Usher family and 'The Glade' which is a small haggard. As you progress along the mile you will find the remains of Eastwell House and farmyard complex; once the seat of the Usher Family. The most intact farm building was known locally as the 'hospital' and was used by recuperating jockeys. Directly opposite the ruins of the house is the site of the 'Lawn and Tennis Court' field. Further on the road you will see the 'Long Acre', locally forged gates, the site of a limekiln, the gate lodge, an old well and the mile finishes down the bog road.

Craughwell - Ballymanagh Golden Mile

Ballymanagh Golden Mile Group entered the Ballymanagh Golden Mile into the competition. The mile begins at the entrance to Ballymanagh House with its milk stand and fascinating stone wall. In addition to this you can see a mass path stile, standing stone and water pump as you walk along the mile. Further along the road you will encounter St. Killian's Church (a Chapel of

Ease) and Ballymanagh School (built in 1872 and now provides for the educational needs of 152 children) and a second mass path stile as well as a dipping pond, a five bar blacksmith's gate and a limekiln. Venturing on you will pass another fascinating wall, a wonderful double entrance gate, another milk stand and a grotto. Killogilleen medieval church and cemetery is now coming into view. The cemetery is surrounded by earthworks and a souterrain. To the west you will see another dipping pond, an inverted bench mark on the bridge and the magnificent cast iron gates of Carheen House (built in 1820). If you look closely you will see many fine examples of dressed stone and a large number of haggard stones in the walls all along the mile. You will also see magnificent Beech, Holly, Lime, Chestnut, Oak, Walnut, Elm, Ash and Sycamore trees, as well as Blackthorn, Whitethorn and Elder accompanied by a variety of wildflowers all along the mile. The remains of Cregg Castle and the Slieve Aughty mountains can be seen in the distance at the end of this mile.

Glenamaddy - Lisheenaheilta, Boyounagh

The Lisheenaheilta Golden Mile was entered into the competition by Lisheen Golden Mile Group. The mile commences at Boyounagh bridge and ends at Log an Aifrinn. In the 1670s the townland was in the ownership of the Protestant Archbishop of Tuam and in 1855 the townland was owned by Edgar Robert Bredin of Rereat, near Coothill, Co. Cavan. 'The round woodeen', a bivallate ringfort in Gannon's field is particularly rare. The lios, from which Lisheenaheilta derives its name, was located in Martin Joe Mannion's field. There are a number of other ringforts or remains of ringforts to be found along the mile. Lisheenaheilta was a clachan village in layout in 1841 the townland had a population of 386 people living in 82 houses. There was also another clachan settlement in Ballinagrally. Many skilled craftspeople lived in the townland in the past such as Michael Burke and William Comer who were weavers as well as two carpenters, namely Tom Hughes and Michael Mannion and a blacksmith called Pat Joyce. Johnny 'Tuppenny' Joyce followed on later at his forge near *Cruchán an Oireachtais*. In the past there was a corn kiln and corn mill on Kevin Concagh's road, a flax mill near Reillys and there were three shops in the ownership of Martin Mannion, Walter Finnegan and Martin Comer. Stonemasons of note in the area were Pat Ganley, Tom Joyce and William Ward. Lisheen school was built in 1893. Close to the 'Round Woodeen' on the banks of the Buí Abhainn lies the blessed well. It was historically a place of pilgrimage and prayer, in particular on Good Friday. Finally we arrive at *Log an Aifrinn* which is a Penal Mass site. It is located in a naturally occurring depression called *Cruchán an Oireachtais*. There are many stories associated with the site one of which is that a priest was murdered at the site and his ghost is said to haunt the area.

Gort – The Yeat's Mile: Ballylee

The Yeats Golden mile was entered into the competition by The Burren Lowlands Group. The first feature you will encounter on this mile is Ballylee mill. This mill is probably seventeenth or early eighteenth century in date. It was operated by the Rowland family in the past and in the 1990s FÁS restored the corn mill, the miller's house and the weir wall. Next you will see Ballylee castle; it is first recorded in the Composition of Connacht 1585 but is

probably much older than that. The castle was sold to Robert Gregory in 1783 by the De Burgos and in 1917 it was bought by the poet WB Yeats in 1917 for the give-away price of £35! Yeats named it 'Thoor Ballylee'. The castle was Yeat's tower, his inspiration and his retreat. Next you will see the cottage, which dates to c1870. It was built by Patrick Spelman. The Spelman family lived there until 1915 when they relocated to Castletown. It is now part of the Thoor Ballylee Visitor's Centre.

As you proceed along the road you can see a turlough in the distance, along by the river. This area is known locally as 'the callows'. The home of the Hynes family can be found further on as well as a breen which is now completely overgrown and closed in. It led to the house of a local beauty named Mary Hynes of Ballylee who was eulogized by the poet Raftery in the poem *An Pabhsae Gleigeal*. Tobar Sleamhnán can be seen further on. It is said to have a cure for sore eyes. Other sites of interest on the mile are the Fahy family farmhouse, Newtown forts and Ballyaneen lios.

Kilbeacanty- Kilbeacanty Village to Ballyturn Cross

Kilbeacanty Village to Ballyturn Cross Golden Mile was entered into the competition by Kilbeacanty Community Rural Development. The group was aided by workers from *Solas*, the local GAA Club and the Fishing Club in undertaking works and presenting their mile for the competition. The mile begins at the car-park where there is a wonderful old pump with marvellous stone steps leading up to the pump. On the mile you will pass Kilbeacanty National School which was founded in 1893 and they produced a commemorative centenary publication on the school in 1993. As you walk along the mile you will see Saint Feichin's Roman Catholic Church. It is a freestanding cruciform church, built in 1839 and retains many attractive features such as the decorative hood mouldings and the imposing bell tower. Next you will see McCarthy's Bar and Lounge which has developed from a small country pub to one of the best known music venues in the country, with many of the country's leading traditional folk and country and western musicians having performed here. There are some wonderful bird and bat boxes to be seen in the car park of the pub as well as an amazing mural on the side of the old phone box. Just beside the pub car-park you will see Kilbeacanty GAA Grounds. The club in 129 years in existence and in 2010 it produced a publication entitled 'From Peggy's Meadow to Pairc Muire'. There are many nice vernacular houses to be seen on the mile as well as some locally forged gates. The mile ends at Ballyturn Cross and memorial which is the site of the Ballyturn ambush which took place on 15 May 1921 in which District Inspect Blake, Mrs Blake, Capt Cornwallis and Lt McCreery died on that day.

Inis Meáin, Árainn - Míle na hAoiseanna

The entry for Míle Órga Inis Meáin came from Inis Meáin National School. Six pupils worked on the project, with the teachers. The mile starts at the Cimín graveyard. The name Reilig an Chimín means The Prisoners' Graveyard. The graveyard is beside Trá Leictreach. Trá Leictreach used to be called Trá na Fola, or the beach of blood, because of a battle fought during the late sixteenth century. The executed Spanish prisoners taken in the battle are said to be buried in Reilig an Chimín.

The special pasture around Reilig an Chimín is called Machaire Mara. From there you follow the road to the new cemetery. A rare plant called bleachtphiseán (purple milk-vetch) grows beside the new cemetery. Other plants to be found on the roadside include the bird's foot trefoil, rattle, greater knapweed, lady's bedstraw, fairy flax, yarrow, kidney vetch, and rusty back. From there you go to the Crom Léic and Cill Cheannaigh. It is believed to have been built in the 7th or 8th century. It served as the island's cemetery until about 1940. Walk past Geata na Naomh (the Saint's Gate). It is under the cliff behind Cill Cheannaigh. Two gate pillars are still standing. You head up the hill to Dún Fearbhaigh. This fort is in Baile an Mhúir. You pass Dún Fearbhaigh by Róidín an Dúin. These little roads or boreens are all over the Aran Islands to help the farmers go to their patches of farmland.

Inis Oírr Golden Mile, Aran Islands

The Entry for Golden Mile 2015 came from Scoil Chaomháin agus Comhar Caomháin Teo. The mile starts at Cnoc Raighne, an old cairn from the Bronze Age. We pass the all weather field, the football field and the playground (with sandy ground). When you go past the parks you will see two walls built during Féile na gCloch (Stone Festival). On the left is a turlough, and Teampall Phóil, site of an old cemetery. Before you reach a temple you come across a Megalithic Site called An Suíochán. You pass the handball ally, and go on to Poll na gCaorach - a green flag beach. The mile ends at the large lake, which palaeontologists claim to date back to 10,000BC.

END

For further details please contact:

Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Galway County Council phone 087 9088387
email mmannion@galwaycoco.ie

Or

Frank Keane, Galway Rural Development phone 091 844335 or email
fkeane@grd.ie