

Herald Living



Beauty & fashion goals for 2014
Beautiful U
Pages 42 & 43



Seasonal snaps from the past
Living
Pages 34 & 35

More hidden gems revealed by Golden Mile



A TRANQUIL river scene on the Milltown Golden Mile.

PHOTO: MICHAEL BURKE



By David Burke

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THE hidden gems of Co Galway, places known only to the people who live there and their friends, are slowly being acknowledged and their beauty marked in the Golden Mile project. For the past ten years communities all over the county have been looking at their laneways and back roads and appreciating the often fascinating little corners of nature, of history and of folklore that can be found along them. Now you will find Golden Miles from Headford to Portumna and from Knockma near Tuam to deepest Connemara. A fresh crop of Golden Miles was harvested last week when County Mayor Liam Carroll and Tom Madden, Chairperson, Galway Rural Development, presented the Golden Mile of Galway Awards and launched the Golden Mile 2014 Calendar in the Claregalway Hotel. The intense interest stimulated by this project was reflected in the more than 200 people who attended the launch, representing seven groups

and organisations which entered the competition. They came from all parts of the county, from Aughrim, Maree (Oranmore), Milltown, Clostoken (Loughrea), Williamstown, Newbridge and Camus in Connemara. While the overall Golden Mile award went to Camus, the award for Community Effort and Litter Management went to the Corrolough Golden Mile Committee, Williamstown. Walkers on this mile are welcomed and directed by a series of hand painted signs on slate and shale rocks. The walk is known locally as Nuala na Midóige walk. Large earthen banks line the road on either side and these are home to a variety of grasses, yarrow, ladies bedstraw, plantain, vetches, strawberries, brambles, mint, black knapweed, horsetails, honey suckle, daisy, furze and brambles. Shortly after you begin the walk you are treated to a view over Corralough, a small lake which contains a crannog. Willow trees dot the landscape, while clumps of meadowsweet, saw



THREE curious donkeys on the Newbridge Golden Mile.

PHOTO: MICHAEL BURKE



GRD Chairman Tom Madden and Mayor Liam Carroll launching the Golden Mile of Galway 2014 Calendar.

PICTURE: HANY MARZOUK

sedge, willowherb and thistles are scattered through the grasses. This is perfect wetland habitat for birds and flocks of ducks, geese and swans are regularly spotted. The walk goes on through a lovely rural landscape, where every field and house is named and history runs deep. Cllr Carroll said "It is great to see the creativity, energy and commitment of the various groups and schools throughout the county who have entered their miles into this competition. They have invested their time in various ways to make their mile attractive and provide information about the treasures of built, natural and cultural heritage that can be found along the mile. The Mayor's remarks apply particularly to Milltown, where the walk is part of the great voluntary efforts that have been made over the

years to enhance the village and its surroundings. Starting at the west of the townland of Cloonaghgarve, this Golden Mile borders the townland of Russelstown. Most local people simply call the townland Cloonagh, Milltown to distinguish it from Cloonagh, Dunmore. Moving along the Golden mile you will see a traditional wrought iron gate. Further along the mile a children's burial ground can be found as well as the site of the blacksmith's forge. From a natural heritage perspective the first section of this mile is lined by grassed over earthen banks and grass verges. Blackthorns line the banks and a variety of grasses, black knapweed, brambles, buttercups and vetches inhabit the grassy verge. As the mile progresses the land becomes

progressively wetter as it dips down to the river. The Sinking River winds its way under Cloonagh Bridge and provides good fishing. The mile turns right at the bridge and climbs uphill, where the road is enclosed by willow, sycamore, blackthorn, hawthorn and elder trees. Nettles, dock, wild carrot and horsetails line the grassy verge. On the last section of the mile a dry stone wall forms the road boundary and lichens and mosses make their home here. At the end of the mile there is a view across the surrounding countryside to the distant hills and a small freshwater drain runs out from the bog with water mint and duckweed slowing its flow. The Newbridge Golden Mile is at Creeveroe, and begins at Michael and Carmel Cunningham's house. There is a very interesting old iron gate at Cunningham's. Mamie Kelly house is also to be found on the road. Mamie is a gifted quilter and storyteller and is renowned for her St. Brigid's crosses which hang in nearly every house in Newbridge. The local pump beside Mamie's house is another feature of the built heritage of the mile. The route is lined with hedgerows which display a good diversity of tree, shrub and ground layer species. Among these are holly, ash, willows, blackthorn, hawthorn, gorse, ivy, ferns, bramble, guelder rose and willow herb. Beyond the road boundaries the landscape is divided into fields lined by stone walls, hedgerows and mature treelines. A well developed nature trail can

also be found just off the mile and offers the walker another beautiful and tranquil walk where you can be at one with nature. Other Golden Miles, which space does not allow us to describe here, include Aughrim, which skirts the famous battle site, Maree, a lovely coastal walk along a sheltered section of Galway Bay, Clostoken, just off the main Loughrea to Galway road (not the motorway) and Camus, in a beautiful but often overlooked part of Connemara. Launching the 2014 Golden Mile Calendar, Tom Madden, GRD Chairperson, said "When times are hard and the future is uncertain, people take stock and look to see how they can support each other individually and in groups. The Golden Mile Competition gives communities an opportunity to work together for the benefit of their area and in doing so bring back pride in their own place." All the photographs are by Michael Burke, Galway Rural Development, and they give an excellent overview of the low-key beauty that is to be found everywhere in our environment, if we only have the patience to look. The calendar, for which numbers are of course limited, 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, Atherry phone 091 844335 or e-mail fkeane@grd.ie.



THE Corralough Golden Mile starts here.

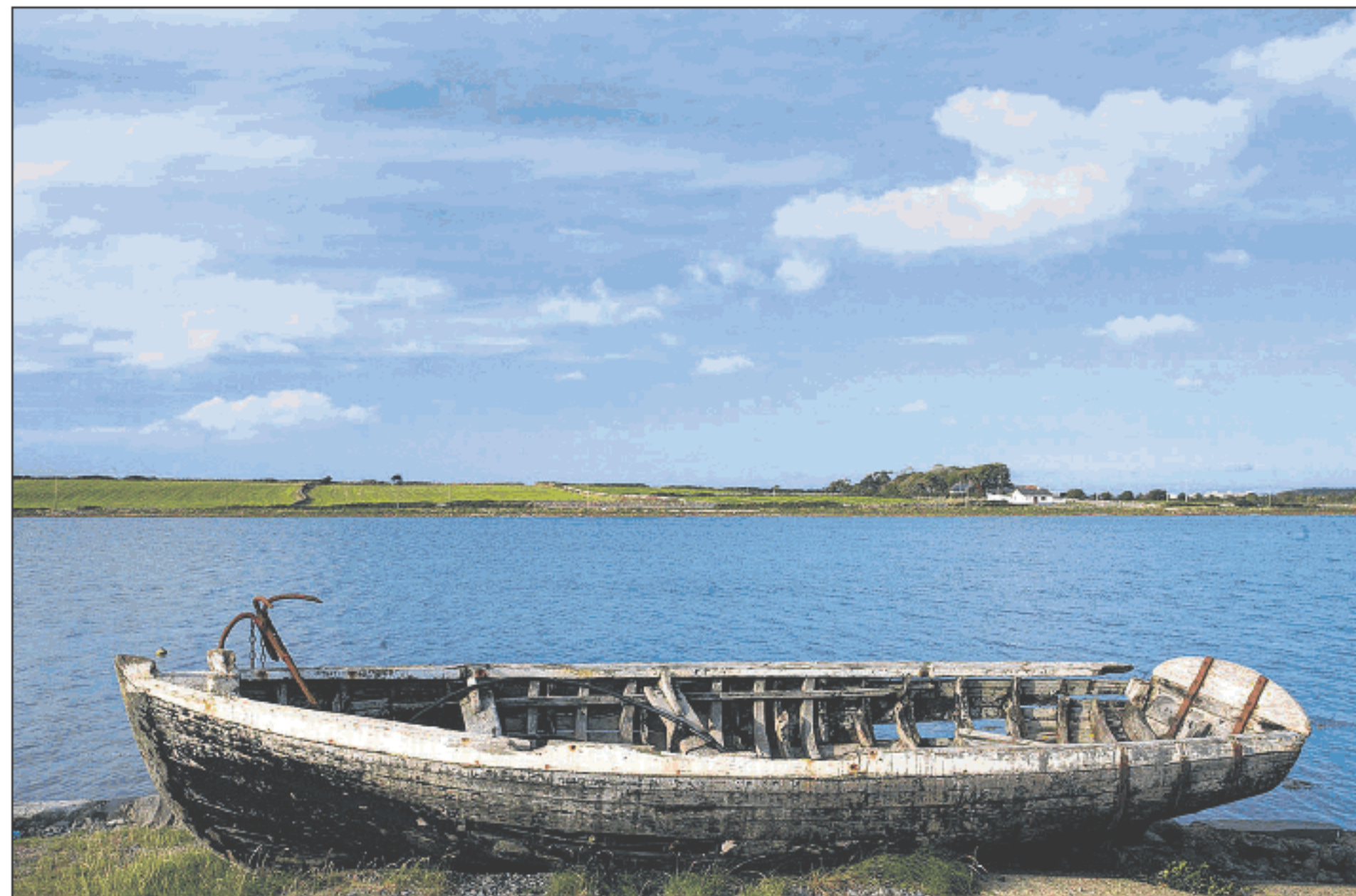
PHOTO: MICHAEL BURKE

It is great to see the creativity, energy and committment of the various groups



THE winners of the Best Community effort and Litter Management Mile were Corralough Golden Mile Committee, Williamstown: (back) Noel Finnegan, Kitty Madden, Connie Smyth, Michael Jennings, Ann Coyne, Jane Mooney, Noreen Comer, Steven Pilgrim and James Coyne; (front) Chairman of GRD Tom Madden, Kayleigh Mooney, County Mayor Liam Carroll and Lynda Collier.

PHOTO: HANY MARZOUK



AN old boat on the Maree Mile.

PHOTO: MICHAEL BURKE