

Midwife research project launched at Portiuncula

THE launch of 'An Bhean Ghlúine' ebook and project took place at Portiuncula University Hospital as part of National Heritage Week. The project, which was featured in detail in *The Tuam Herald* recently, was funded by the Heritage Council and Galway County Council.

'An Bhean Ghlúine' or woman of the knee (midwife, handywoman) was researched and developed by Emma Laffey, a volunteer with the Skehana and District Heritage Group and a health-care assistant in Portiuncula Maternity Unit.

Emma Laffey said, "I was inspired by my lived experience and seeing first-hand the work, compassion, empathy and medical intervention

required for modern maternity services to keep both mother and baby safe and well.

"My project introduces the amazing work and lives of our local community midwives during the 20th century through photographs, stories, recorded interviews and film.

These remarkable women supported our local women through one of the biggest life-changing events for any woman, from being pregnant to giving birth.

"Although a birth is generally a very happy occasion, it can also be tainted by poverty, sickness, miscarriage, mental health issues, life-changing disabilities and even death.

"All the project material is available on the Skehana



AT the launch of the project were Bernie Doherty, Galway Community Archaeologist, Sean Conneely Chairperson Skehana Heritage Group and Emma Laffey Project author and co-ordinator. PHOTO: GERRY STRONGE

& District Heritage website including an ebook with the midwives' stories and photographs; a short film about the life of Mary Kate Jennings, who was a district midwife serving the Ballinasloe area in the 1940/50s; some voice recordings from local people and families chatting about

their experience with their local midwife, including Kathleen Ward who talks about the traveller community and traditions around pregnancy and birth.

Deirdre Naughton, Director of Midwifery, at Portiuncula said, "Emma's project will contribute significantly to the

wealth of existing knowledge regarding the role of the midwife through the ages and I am very proud of her work.

It is fascinating to see how the role of the midwife has evolved; the ancient art and science of midwifery that always has had quality and safety as its central tenant."