

Curating Cork: 75 years of CPM  
Teen Workbook



**CURATING CORK:** *75 Years of CPM*

# The Importance of History

In a constantly changing society it is important to remember our past and the lessons learned from it, this makes museums the perfect time capsules.

Cork Public Museum has its origins in the large International Exhibitions in 1902 and 1903 with participants from many countries. These worldwide connections were reflected in the collections of the first museum that opened in Cork in Fitzgerald's Park in 1910. Unfortunately, the museum was short-lived due to its financial struggles. However, it is quite impressive that it managed to open and survive during national and global historical events such as the 1916 Rising, the Great War and the War of Independence, which saw the declaration of the free state in 1922. Following political instability in Cork the museum closed in 1924.

Interestingly, it was during another crisis, the Second World War, that the museum was refounded. In 1942, an exhibition was held in the Cork Examiner offices in Patrick's Street which explored the continuous struggle for Irish independence between 1789-1921. The huge success of the event showed the need for a museum, to pass on history, lessons, and material heritage for younger generations. Cork Public Museum finally opened in 1945, towards the end of the Second World War. The reopening of the museum would have seemed like a light at the end of a tunnel after years of horrific conflict across the globe.

## **Exercise 1:**

Can you name a historic event that took place between 1789-1921 that the Patrick Street exhibition may have covered?

What do you think the effects of Covid-19 are on cultural institutions such as the Cork Public Museum?

## The Committee



Following the successful exhibition on the Irish struggle for independence in 1942, a museum committee was formed between Cork Corporation, Cork City Council, and University College Cork. The committee set out to create a public educational institution, allowing the citizens of Cork to share and learn about their heritage. The participation of women was essential to the success of the committee and demonstrated the emerging role of women in cultural, academic and political life in Ireland. The committee's female members included Jane Dowdall, Helen Ryan and Sheila Murphy who contributed greatly to making Cork Public Museum become a reality. Ethna Bryne-Costigan and Bridget G. MacCarthy contributed their academic expertise with both committee members providing an invaluable link with University College Cork.

### Exercise 2:

What aspects of modern female life do you think should be represented within a museum? In groups, discuss how you would approach this.

Discuss a title for your exhibition.

Write 50 words each on your chosen object, discussing its significance. Put thought into this as it can be difficult to narrow down significance into such a short text.

Include a photograph or drawing of each object.

Compile your text and images on an A2 piece of paper.

Present your work to the class.

## Michael J. O’Kelly



Michael J. O’Kelly, also known as “the father of new archaeology” in Ireland, was a curator of Cork Public Museum between 1944 –63. As an archaeologist, O’ Kelly was responsible for excavating, dating and interpreting objects from sites of historical interest to gain knowledge about societies of the past. There are many challenging tasks he would take to find the significance of an object he excavated.

**Exercise 3:** Presume you are an archaeologist in the future, and you are examining a pen (biro), you found through excavation.

Write a description of your pen’s physical make up.

Describe its form, fabric and function.

Dimensions: With your ruler, measure its length and diameter.

Material : What type of material does it have externally and internally?

What is its function? Sometimes this is not obvious, based on its form, what do you think its function is? Explain why.

How was it made?

Does this pen have an inscription or decoration perhaps?

Does it show evidence of where it was made?

Taking into consideration the different methods of analysing your own pen, talk to a group of classmates and discuss the differences between the varieties of pens in the classroom. What could these differences mean?

What do you think an archaeologist from the future would be able to say about the individual students in your class from studying their pens?

Are pens dateable?

Does your pen tell us anything about the place it was found in?

Describe what a pen can reveal about society.

Does your pen have aesthetic value? (Scoilnet 2012, pp. 120-122)

### Séamus Ó Coigligh



Séamus Ó Coigligh was the third curator of Cork Public Museum between 1965 and 1981. Ó Coigligh was a fascinating person. What was so unique about him was that he found it easy to learn any language he found interesting. Not only could he read all modern European languages but also a number of older languages, like Aramaic and Hebrew. Ó Coigligh was also a reporter for the Irish Times, writing about a number of topics, including Russian affairs. He was interested in world politics, and maintained the Irish political focus within the museum.

**Exercise 4:** On the right side you will see some words in different languages. Identify the language and draw a line from the words on the left to their translation on the right.

Museum

Public

Collections

Curator

Books

Newspaper

Languages

Conservateur

Libros

Музей

Tidning

Öffentlichkeit

Lingue

Samlinger

## Aodh Ó Tuama



Aodh Ó Tuama was the fourth curator of Cork Public Museum between 1981 to 1992. Prior to this, Ó Tuama was an assistant curator to Ó Coigligh, so Ó Tuama knew his way around the museum. Ó Tuama was interested in objects that were of significance in local history and culture of Cork. He also curated a number of exhibitions that explored these factors in greater detail, such as the *Cork 800* celebration exhibition. Ó Tuama then went on to run the museum with the aid of assistant curator Mary Fitzgerald for the next 11 years while collecting objects essential for the museum and its current collections.

**Exercise 5:** Can you think of any places in Cork that have a cultural significance? The Cork Opera House, for example.

What might you think of when asked to describe ‘Irish Culture’? This can be food, music, art, language or objects!

## Stella Cherry



Stella Cherry was the first female curator of Cork Public Museum, between 1992—2016. At the time of Stella’s arrival, the museum was still heavily focused on the general history of Cork. Stella realised that some communities were lacking in representation, with one such example being the Traveller community. The successful exhibition of *Toraig an Tobar* went on display in 2005, exploring the culture and lifestyle of Irish Travellers. In Ireland and abroad, the Travelling community has been historically underrepresented, racially abused and marginalised, an issue which unfortunately persists to this day. Thanks to Cherry’s dedication, this culturally rich community now has a place in CPM.

**Exercise 6:** Ask an older relative about the crafts, trades and traditions and culture they remember as part of Traveller life when they were your age.

Discuss the diversity of Traveller culture in class. What do you know about the culture?

Do you know any words or phrases in the Cant language?

### Dan Breen



Dan Breen is the current curator of Cork Public Museum, he took over in 2016 from the previous curator, Stella Cherry. Breen had worked in the museum with Cherry before, and he has since expanded on the projects Cherry introduced into the museum, such as the inclusion of the Traveller community exhibition. Breen spent his early years working in the museum looking after its large collections of objects. He was able to identify groups whose stories had been forgotten, like the Jewish community of Cork and the LGBTQ+ community. He decided to include these groups by collecting their many meaningful objects and stories. Breen continues to improve the museum and its collections, creating a place where everyone can feel welcomed and learn about Cork's history and culture.

**Exercise 7:** Other than the communities mentioned above, can you think of any other communities that might not be as well represented in Irish museums today?

If so, what objects could represent that community?

Discuss the importance of communities.

Why is it important for museums to include members of the public and share their stories?

## Curating Cork: Wordsearch

C A V B R E E N B C N D L I Q K I U  
 O O Y I K O Q F I Q H P A A F A I M  
 T V L H F Q C O F S D E N L C Y T X  
 F Z I L R G L O S N Y T R Z T E Y S  
 F P O K E L L Y I P V N A R L O J O  
 M Y Y W D C M H T G R E A B Y V N T  
 U G U N D K T N D U L E S G L H E U  
 S Y L A W F Y I O V C I Y S O E F A  
 E C U R A T O R O H X C G F E G V M  
 U M P C O R K E F N J T K H S L U A  
 M O G G B N A C O M M I T T E E C E  
 I G F M W D H P Y F I N I A L M W C

Find the following words in the puzzle. Words are hidden across, down and diagonally.

Breen	Finial	O'Tuama	O'Kelly
Cherry	Gun	Synagogue	Osprey
Collection	Lace	Table	Curator
Committee	Museum	UCC	Dalton
Cork	O'Coighligh	Vessel	

## References

Scoilnet (2012) *Our Archaeological Footprint*. Available from: [https://www.scoilnet.ie/fileadmin/user\\_upload/T2U4L1.pdf](https://www.scoilnet.ie/fileadmin/user_upload/T2U4L1.pdf) , pp. 120-122. Original text which includes ball point pen exercise comes from scoilnet.ie and has been altered for the purpose of this educational document. Licence for use : <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/ie/>