



Art and Creativity in the Bantry Area





above: Thomas Davis
photo: Public Domain

below: view from the Beicín
photo: Google Maps

Famous visitors

Bantry has been noted for its creativity, and its impact on the development of people's own particular form of creativity. We have records of many people who came to stay a while in Bantry over the years, to hone their own creativity, whether in the literary fields or artistic or creative manner. Records remaining from the one-time Lannins Hotel tell us that Thomas Davis, a noted poet and patriot, stayed at Lannins on the Square. His favourite spot for writing his poetry, while staying in Bantry, was out on The Béicín. He obviously very much appreciated the natural beauty of Bantry Bay, and it is said he compared Bantry Bay to the Bay of Naples.

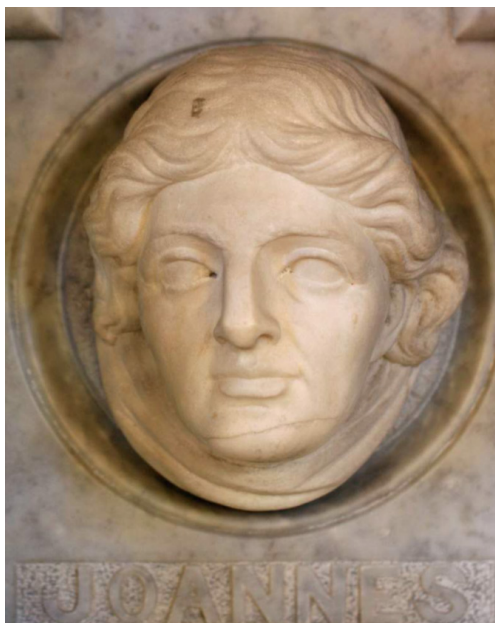
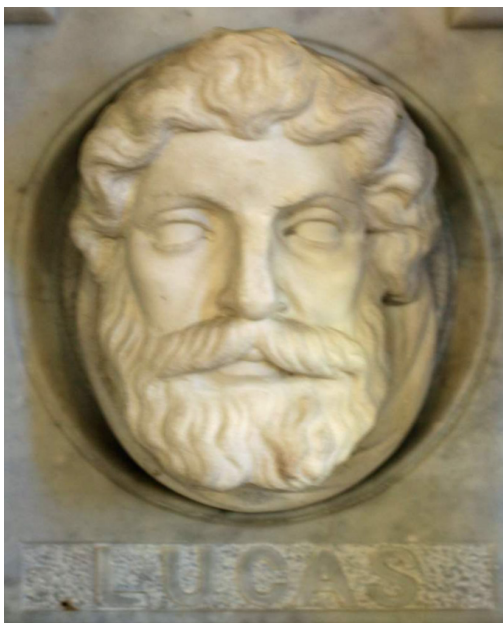
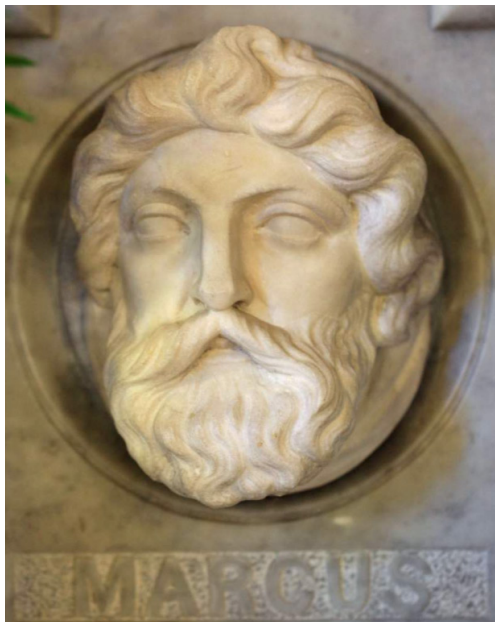
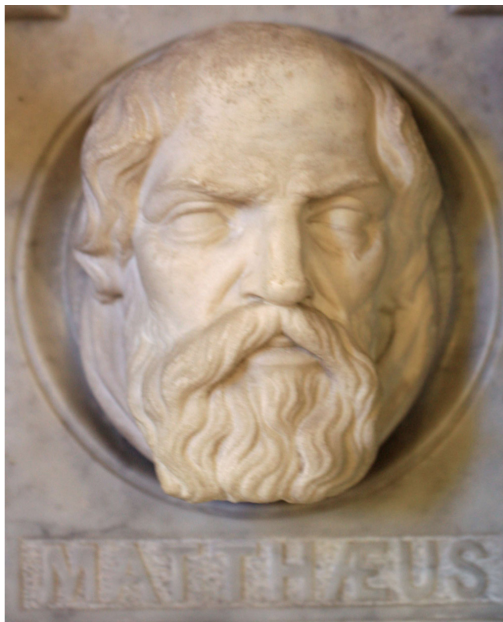
Another famous visitor known for his creative genius was Corkman, Denny Lane (1818-1895). Noted especially for his poem Carrigdhoun, he was also a prominent Young Irelander, and may have written poetry while in Bantry. Glengarriff, beside the shores of Bantry Bay was another popular spot for creativity, and that is dealt with further down in this article.

Encouraging talent

In reading history, especially biographies of some well-known people, we learn that they were taught drawing, or some other form of art, while at school. Ellen Hutchins (born 1785) of Ballylickey, who attended school in Dublin, and Seamus Murphy (born 1907) had Daniel Corkery as his teacher in school in Cork city, both got some basic training in art at school. Both profiled, in separate sections, elsewhere, in this project, went on to achieve great heights in their respective fields of art and creativity. Another artist with local links is Sir William Orpen who is also featured elsewhere in this project.

Bantry area can also boast of creativity, in many forms, being taught to school children. We see Derrycreeha National School, which won awards in 1994 for their creativity. The Pushkin Prizes Trust recognised the huge contribution to promotion of the arts in Derrycreeha N.S. Their principal teacher, Jennie McCarthy, was awarded the National Educator's Individual Award, while the school itself was runner-up in the Best Overall category.





St. Finbarr's Church

Many works of art, some carved, some sculpted, painted or stained glass, were commissioned or donated to the Bantry area. If we take a look inside St Finbarr's Church in Bantry, we find the carved Calvary Scene. This piece of artwork was designed in Munich, Germany, and was presented in 1912 by Count Blake (and others) of Kilcolgan, Co Galway, to Convent of Mercy, Bantry, founded in 1860. The sisters were engaged in works of education, nursing and visitation.

In 2009 it was presented to St Finbarr's Church by the Sisters of Mercy.

St Finbarr's has a wealth of creativity in its furnishings:-

The Way of The Cross, consisting of fourteen Stations, each set within their mahogany frames, is particularly of note.

On the main altar we see at either side of the Tabernacle carved images of the four Gospel Writers. We understand this altar was designed specially for Bantry Parish Church.



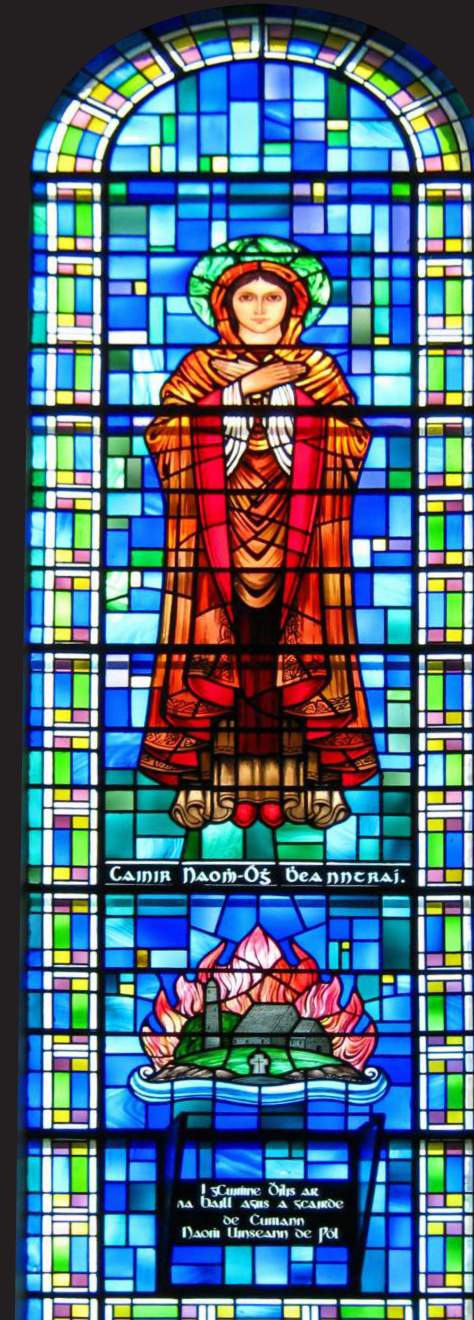
opposite: The Four Gospel writers
above: Calvary Scene
photos: Seamus Larkin

There are some fifteen stained glass windows in this building, provided at different times. Of those recently installed in the nave in c.1967, we have an image of local St Cainir (Cannera) of Reendesert (Rinn Dísirt) Ballylickey with inscription “Cainir Naomh-Ógh bheanntraí”

And, one more example bears an image of St Finbarr with inscription “Barra Naofa na Laoi agus Chorcaí” Details of both respective donors are also given in our native tongue.

The parish of Bantry, and its parish church, are dedicated to St Finbarr. Legend has it that St Finbarr travelled from Drimoleague through the area now known by Catholic Church as the Parish of Bantry, on via Kealkill (Caorcuill) to Guagán, later named Gougane Barra after St Finbarr’s hermitage which he apparently set up there. Finbarr subsequently travelled on, following the course of the River Lee, and, according to legend, he was Bishop of Cork and abbot of a monastery in what is now Cork city. He died 25th September 623.

opposite: St Canir and St Finbarr
photos: Seamus Larkin





Theobald Wolfe Tone by Jeanne Rynhart

Creativity in downtown Bantry

The town square in Bantry had its name changed by Bantry Town Commissioners from Egerton Square to Wolfe Tone Square in April 1899

However, it was about a century later that a sculpture of Theobald Wolfe Tone was finally provided thereon. This creation was sculpted by locally-based Jeanne Rynhart, who has several images to her credit, including the iconic Molly Malone in Dublin, the Annie Moore statue in Cobh and on Ellis Island, New York, among others and the local Francis O'Neill monument in Tralibawn, featured elsewhere in this project. Her busts of Oscar Wilde and Jonathan Swift are in the Dublin Writers' Museum and a Rynhart bust of James Joyce is in New York City Library

Also on Bantry town square stands the sculpture of St Brendan in his boat, born in Co Kerry in the 5th century and died in Co Galway in 578, he is reputed to have travelled to Hebrides, Wales and Brittany.

This sculpture was a gift to the people of Bantry from Gulf Oil in 1969 when they provided an oil transshipment depot on Whiddy Island in Bantry Bay.

Created by Sculptor Imogen Stuart, the statue is made from beaten and brazed copper depicting St. Brendan arms outstretched in a welcome pose, and a seated companion in a small boat at sea.

Bantry House

Bantry House has been the scene of much creativity, and is noted for its collections of tapestries and fine art. Richard, Second Earl of Bantry was a keen collector, and he brought back many works of art as well as quantities of rare plants from his trips abroad for display in his house and garden. He also did many sketches relating to his garden, and also the local area. Some are included in *Wild Gardens The Lost Demesnes of Bantry Bay*, a garden history book by Nigel Everett published in 2000.



St Brendan by Imogen Stuart

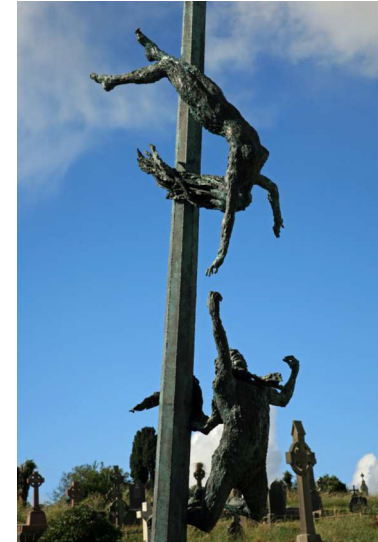


Seal and its Pup by Victor Daly
photo: Seamus Larkin

Heading westwards out of Bantry town, attention is quickly drawn to the Seaside Garden at the Black Rock, once the scene of sad emigrations from the Bantry area. Here all eyes are now on Bantry's newest sculpture of a Seal and its Pup beautifully carved from Irish Blue Limestone by locally based Sculptor Victor Daly.

Just over the road from this is the "Spirit of Love" monument, (*An Spiorad Geanúil*). Sculptor: Paddy Campbell. The inscription reads:

This sculpture expresses the compassion of the people of Bantry, and Ireland, for men, women and children of all races and creeds who lost their lives in the bay.



The two figures convey love, loss, anguish, forgiveness, peace, reaching, letting go...

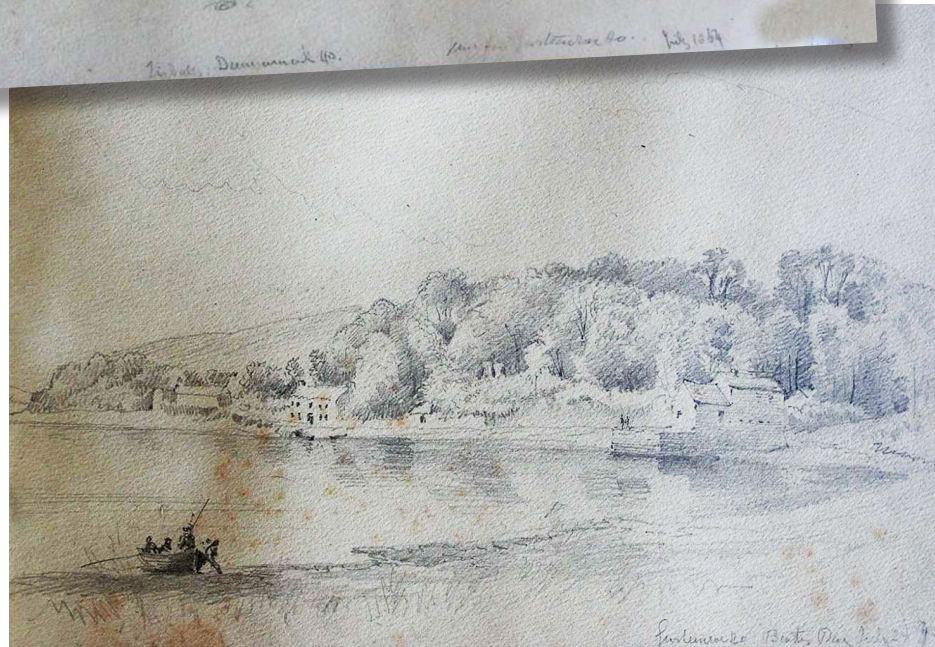
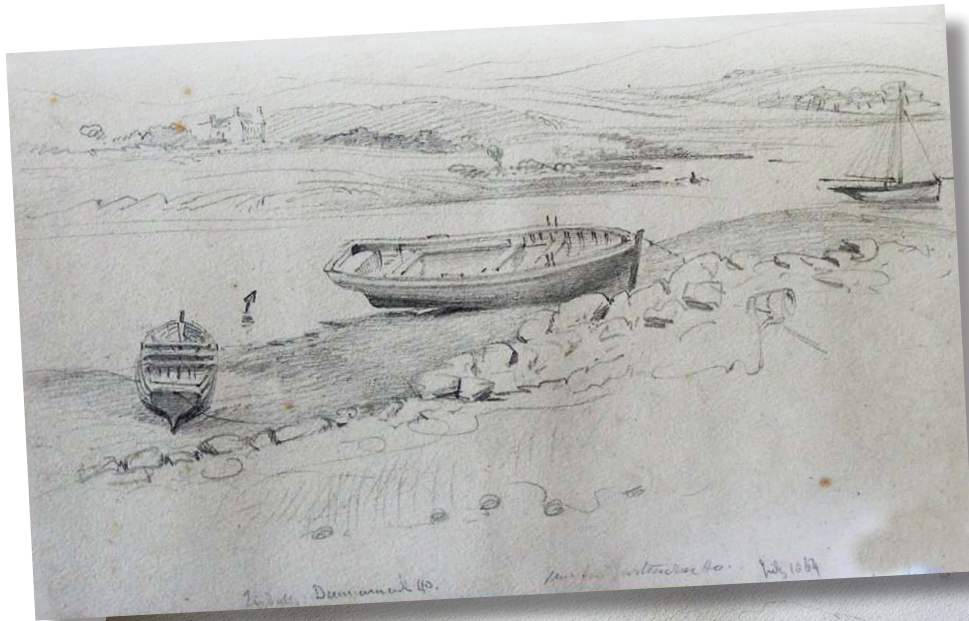
The following verse by Donal Fitzgerald is also included:

Peace kind reader, do not cry
Nor pass not, pass not quickly by
Surely we shall meet again
No more to part, no more to die.
Saviour of the mighty sea
Let us find repose in thee.

Nearby is the Abbey burial ground, once the site of a Franciscan Abbey, razed to the ground during our troubled history. A few carved stones that remained from the Abbey building were collected and built into an altar table in centre of the cemetery .

The Abbey cemetery also has a Celtic Cross Memorial to commemorate the tragedy of The Great Famine in Bantry. This monument has been the scene of pilgrimage in the past.

top: Spirit of Love by Paddy Campbell.
centre: Altar table at cemetery
bottom: Famine Cross in Abbey cemetery
Photos: Seamus Larkin



Sheeps Head Peninsula

Moving on out the Sheeps Head Peninsula, there is a fine white marble sculpture of the Pieta atop Seefin Mountain, with views of Bantry Bay to the north, and Dunmanus Bay.

Bantry in 1846

George Victor Du Noyer MRIA (1817-1869) included Bantry in his travels around Ireland. He was an Irish painter, geologist and antiquary of Huguenot descent. As an artist, his favourite medium was watercolour but several sketches by him also survive. Here we have two of his images - Donemara House and Gurteenroe House, which includes the nearby Salhouse.



Pieta
Photo: Eilish Larkin

The written word

As well as images of creativity in Bantry town, the spirit of creativity is evidenced in its people, who, for example, were saluted for their creativity and endeavour in a full page report in Cork Examiner dated 4th August 1950, with heading -

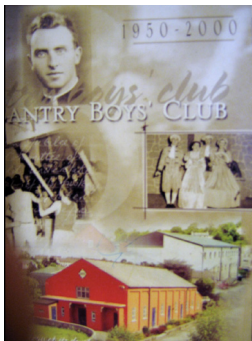
Bantry Shows The Way In Self-Help

“Salute to Bantry and its people, irrespective of class. Salute to its spirit which has resulted in an achievement that has set a headline to the entire country. For the story of the Bantry Boys Club is one whose chapters should be read and studied in every city, rural town and village, for the moral that it so obviously points.

It is a factual record of perseverance in the face of almost insurmountable difficulties which would have dampened the enthusiasm of others than these sturdy Bantry people...”

This newspaper feature relates to the enormous voluntary effort in Bantry that resulted in the building of, and completion of, the town’s community hall – Bantry Boys Club.

Jennie McCarthy in her book of the same name, published in the year 2000, had painstakingly researched the records and consulted widely to amass such an impressive collection of sporting, cultural and creativity events, activities, photographs etc relating to this

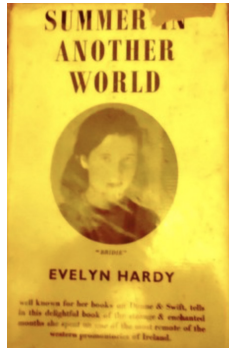


cover of Bantry Boys Club
by Jennie McCarthy

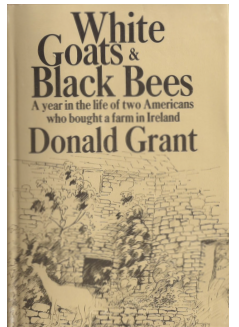
fine venue that was integral to everyday living in Bantry for all ages, as Bantry celebrated the 50th Anniversary of the founding of this “mecca” in town centre of Bantry.

Several books and memoirs have been written about Bantry and surrounding countryside going back to *The Natural History of Ireland* by Philip O Sullivan Beare (1590-1660), which was, more recently, translated and edited by Denis C O’Sullivan of UCC. Michael Carroll produced a number, with considerable local history. Dr Denis Cotter compiled a number of books, telling much about cultural and social life of Bantry area.

In more recent times, *I Remember* by John O’Shea, published in 2007, gives insight into life in Bantry from the 1920’s to 1940’s. Bantry Historical Society has made its own contribution with Journals and a 1916-’21 commemoration. An outsider’s view of life in these quarters can be enjoyed from *White Goats & Black Bees* by Donald Grant, or a somewhat earlier version of Bantry/Sheeps Head social life may be gleaned from *Summer in Another World* by Evelyn Hardy, published in 1950. Local Studies section and Reference sections of Libraries contain further books and publications of interest.



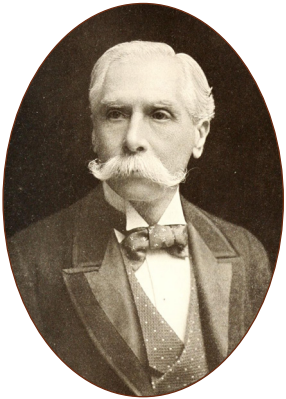
cover of Summer in Another World
by Evelyn Hardy



cover of White Goats
& Black Bees
by Donald Grant

On the Glengarriff side of Bantry Bay

Bantry, Glengarriff and the Beara Peninsula have been the source of investigation, inspiration and creativity for many authors and artists over the centuries. In 1894, The Victorian Poet Laureate Alfred Austin said of Glengarriff ‘I scarcely know how any one who goes there, ever leaves it. It is a haven of absolute beauty and perfect rest.’ And he wasn’t the only famous person to fall in love with Glengarriff, Bantry and its neighbourhood. From a German Prince to an American missionary with a case-full of Irish Language Bibles; from a Jacobite soldier, who landed in Bantry on 2nd May 1689, to the Duke of Wellington, all have penned their impressions of the area.



Alfred Austin
photo: public domain

In their anthology ‘The Grand Tour of Beara’ Penelope Durrell and Cornelius Kelly bring together extracts from the writings of 51 visitors to the area. And their publication also includes a bibliography of a further 72 publications about Beara! The sister volume, ‘The Grand Tour of Cork’ compiled by Cornelius Kelly, also contains more than a sprinkling of extracts from other authors on the Bantry and Beara area.

Anthony Trollope, Wilfred Scawen Blunt, (close acquaintance of Lady Gregory), Virginia Woolf, Sean O’Faolain all stayed in one of the three hotels, (The Eccles, Roche’s Royal Hotel and The Glengarriff Castle), prominent in Glengarriff in its heyday, and wrote about the area.

The Reverend Caesar Otway’s *Sketches of Ireland* (1827) was high in its praise of Glengarriff Castle. Further distinction of praise for this demesne followed soon afterwards from two visitors of distinction, Prince Puckler-Muskau and the well-known poet, William Wordsworth.

In 1850, William Makepeace Thackeray (1811 – 1863) the famous writer and journalist stayed at the Eccles Hotel and described it as a pretty Inn. Although the weather was misty and wet during his stay, this did not spoil his appreciation of the place although he does chronicle in some detail the boorish behaviour of three of his own fellow countrymen who stopped for drinks at the Inn!



above: Eccles Hotel
photo: public domain

below: William Makepeace Thackeray
photo: public domain



George Bernard Shaw
photo: public domain



cover of St Joan, published by
Constable & Co., Ltd. , 1924
photo: Wikipedia

George Bernard Shaw (1856 – 1950) stayed in the Eccles Hotel in 1923 and is reputed to have written extensively during his time there. During his stay, he had visited Garinish Island as a guest of Violet Bryce, owner of the island. Violet and her daughter, Margaret, had been supporters of the Suffragette movement and Margaret, dressed as Joan of Arc, had been at the head of the Suffragette march in London in 1911, prior to the Coronation of George V. The suggestion is that George Bernard Shaw wrote his play 'St Joan' while staying at the Eccles. Could it be that the idea for the play was stimulated by Margaret's appearance on that march? When queried on whether he had written St Joan while staying in Glengariff, Shaw wrote:-

'During that year, (1923), I was at Glengariff from 18 th July to the 15 th August and at Parknasilla from 15 th August to 18 th September, working at the play all the time... But the play was neither begun nor finished in Eire. A good deal of it was written in rapidly moving trains Between King's Cross and Hatfield.'

William Makepeace Thackeray had written 'There is a country, the magnificence of which no pen can give an idea. I would like to bring a train of painters to Glengariff to make, if they could ... a set of pictures of the place.' I have not yet found any specific works of art of famous artists relating to Glengariff. Many authors including Thackeray and Mr and Mrs Hall were their own illustrators, including etchings in their writings.

Another author, the American Travel Writer, Harold Speakman, visited Mrs Bryce on Garinish Island in 1924. He records that George Russell, the poet and painter, also known as Æ, appeared to have been a regular visitor to Garinish and to have stayed in the Casita, which Violet Bryce referred to as the 'batchelor's quarters'.

The year 1923 seems to have been a particularly busy one for guests. That year, the artists Letitia Hamilton and George Russell (Æ) both visited. They left behind paintings that they drew during their time in the area. Hamilton captured the nearby mountains on canvas in a landscape painting entitled Hungry Hill and she also painted many



scenes in the village of Glengarriff. The subject of AE's painting is similar to Hamilton's, but he has included the Sugarloaf and other nearby hills in his picture. His technique is also slightly different to hers in that his painting is much more detailed and far less abstract. These wonderful paintings can now be seen in the Bryce house, on Garinish Island, which was tastefully restored by the Office of Public Works in recent years.

Perhaps the greatest aspect of 'Creativity' with regard to Glengarriff is the Garden of Garinish Island (Illnacullin) itself. This was created by Mr and Mrs Bryce after they bought the island in 1910. Annan Bryce was convinced that with its sheltered situation and the warming oceanic influence of the Gulf Stream, a wide range of oriental and southern hemisphere plants would flourish in the mild, almost subtropical, climate of Glengarriff. Keenly interested in horticulture and architecture, Annan Bryce planned to build a mansion and lay out an extensive garden on the island and he commissioned the eminent English architect, Harold Peto, to design these.

View from inside "Casita" or Italian tea house facing west over sunken Italian garden and Medici House or temple (so called after the famous Medici family) of bath sandstone and marble columns so placed to frame Sugarloaf (the Caha mountains) behind. Photo: Mike O'Toole Reproduced with kind permission of OPW



Harold Peto was an advocate of the Italian style of architecture and garden design although the wild Robinsonian style of gardening dominated his epoch. However, Peto believed that more formal styles could co-exist with the Robinsonian style and ought not to be neglected. The result of the creative partnership between Bryce and Peto is a formal Italianate garden, with it by numerous architectural features, set in a Robinsonian wild garden.

Innacullin is renowned for its richness of plant form and colour, changing continuously with the seasons. The vivid colours of Rhododendrons and Azaleas reach their peak during May and June, whilst the hundreds of cultivars of climbing plants, herbaceous perennials and choice shrubs dominate the midsummer period from June to August. Autumn colour, particularly on the magnificent heather bank, is rich during the usually mild autumn months of September and October.



Opposite: The Italian garden showing the reflective pool with a statue of Mercury in the centre.

Top: The Lion of St. Mark the Evangelist in the courtyard on the rear wall of the house

Bottom: The borders within the Italian garden containing Begonias Fuchsia and the trunk of New Zealand Teatree,

Photos: Mike O'Toole Reproduced with kind permission of OPW.

In recent times, creativity continues in Glengarriff. The Ewe Experience is often described as 'Ireland's Eden', The Ewe is an innovative series of gardens along a one km trail combining nature, art, science, narrative and humour. An artist's home, it has evolved slowly over 25 years into an interactive open-air natural- history museum. Another creation is the Bamboo Park, a unique exotic garden with thirty different species of bamboo surrounded by palms and other tropical plants.

Today, The Glengarriff Arts Group of amateur artists continue the creativity of the area and hold an annual exhibition and sale of their works. The Glengarriff Theatre group aim to stage an adult play, a youth play and the Christmas pantomime, which melds the adults, the youth group and 100+ children into an annual production of song, dance and traditional storyline.

Glengarriff also holds an annual music festival, the Jim Dowling Uilleann Pipe and Trad Festival, which focuses on uilleann piping .

Opposite: one of the installations to be seen in the Ewe Gardens
Photo: www.theewe.com





Cork
County Council
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí



Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022

Front cover image: St Finbarr, stained glass window
from St Finbarr's Church. Photo credit: Seamus Larkin