



Tipperary Museum  
of Hidden History

## Lecture Series

# Beyond Belief



Comhairle Contae Thiobraid Árann  
Tipperary County Council



TIPPERARY  
museum  
OF HIDDEN  
HISTORY

[www.hiddenhistory.ie](http://www.hiddenhistory.ie)

**Beliefs, customs and traditions or more simply the ways of life and rituals practiced by our ancestors may appear old fashioned, curious, or even superstitious to us. Many such customs are decreasing in popularity or have disappeared from contemporary life altogether.**

But have you ever thought about why such beliefs may have come about – were they rooted in practical experiences, in scientific or medical thinking of the day or were they religious beliefs adapted over time?

Our 21st Century education and immediate access to information make it difficult for us to understand many of these customs and how such events could have popular support but, in a society where such practices and traditions were just a way of life passed down from one generation to the next they did not appear strange. Honouring these traditions was a way to honour family, locality and heritage.

This series will look at some of the common beliefs in areas such as health, death and burial, folklore and religion.

**Front Cover illustration by Colin Bolger**

*“Set beneath a full moon, this piece evokes the timeless connection between life, death, and renewal in Irish mythology. The solitary hawthorn tree, the spectral fairy mound, and the barren earth reflect our ancestors’ reverence for the otherworld. A timeless place of endings, beginnings, and the unseen magical forces that live in our shared consciousness. It invites us to look deeper into the cycles of death and rebirth that echo through our shared heritage.” Colin Bolger*

# Lecture Calendar

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## 2025

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LECTURE

01

Speaker: Dr Gillian O' Brien

*The Irishman's house is his coffin':  
Death and Burial in Ireland*



SATURDAY

OCT 4

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Speaker: Dr Kelly Fitzgerald

*The Otherworld in Irish  
vernacular and folk tradition*

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Speaker: Dr Rosari Kingston

*The Wheel of the Year and Health*

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LECTURE

02

Speaker: Michael Fortune

*'Remembering the Dead'*



SATURDAY

NOV 1

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LECTURE

03

Speaker: Dr Jenny Butler

*Between Worlds: The Otherworld and  
Magic in the Case of Bridget Cleary*



SATURDAY

DEC 6

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## 2026

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LECTURE

04

Speaker: Dr Barry O' Reilly

*The vernacular house - nerve  
centre of Irish tradition*



SATURDAY

JAN 10

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LECTURE

05

Speaker: Dr Louise Nugent

*Pilgrimage in Medieval and  
Modern Tipperary*



SATURDAY

FEB 7

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LECTURE

06

Speaker: Dr Ann O'Dowd

*Some objects are beyond  
belief - the potency of objects  
for curing and protecting*



SATURDAY

MAR 7

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Image courtesy of Dr. Gillian O'Brien

## *The Irishman's house is his coffin': Death and Burial in Ireland*



Sat 4th Oct 2025. 10-4pm  
TUS Campus, Thurles

Speaker: **Dr Gillian O'Brien**

**Synopsis:** This talk will explore the Irish obsession with death, funerals and the afterlife. Elements of tradition, folk belief, mystery and superstition will be weaved around stories ranging from grave robbing, American wakes, political funerals, cemeteries, wakes and funeral sandwiches. The talk will examine death and burial in Ireland from Newgrange to recent times and it will also consider how death has been represented in art, music, fiction and poetry to see if James Joyce was correct when he stated: 'The Irishman's house is his coffin'.

**Biography:** Gillian O'Brien is Professor of Public History at Liverpool John Moores University with a particular interest in how complex or controversial history is communicated to a wide audience. She is a board member of the Irish Museums Association and has played a key role in the development of a number of heritage sites in Ireland. She is currently a project lead on 'Convents and Cultural Heritage', and on 'Sharing Lands: Reconciliation, Recognition and Reciprocity', funded by the AHRC. She has published extensively on Dark Tourism, most notably *The Darkness Echoing. Exploring Ireland's Places of Famine, Death and Rebellion* (Penguin, 2020) and recently published *'Ships, Sugar and Slavery: Catholics, Provisioning, and Eighteenth-Century Cork' in Eighteenth-Century Ireland.*



Image courtesy of Dr. Kelly Fitzgerald

## *The Otherworld in Irish vernacular and folk tradition*



Sat 4th Oct 2025. 10-4pm  
TUS Campus, Thurles

Speaker: **Dr Kelly Fitzgerald**

**Synopsis:** Traditions around the supernatural and otherworld have long been a focus of folklore studies in Ireland. When such beliefs are examined in a more holistic sense, taking into account their connection to everyday life, it allows for a deeper and more cohesive understanding of their functions. Such beliefs are rooted in psychological needs and are related to human feelings and emotions. The imagery of these traditions provides drama, poetics and the human imagination at its most wonderful. Creative interpretations of the world around us abound in the shared narratives of the Irish landscape.

**Biography:** Kelly Fitzgerald is Head of the School of Irish, Celtic Studies and Folklore in UCD and subject head of Irish Folklore & Ethnology. She is a Past President of the Royal Society of Antiquaries Ireland and Chairperson of ANU Productions. She has written on the intellectual history and development of Irish folkloristics. She sits on the editorial board of *Béalóideas, The Journal of the Folklore Society of Ireland*. Recently she directed the collecting of oral histories in the development phase of Dublin's Tenement Museum. She is currently overseeing the collecting of a number of oral history initiatives in social housing communities in Dublin.



Image courtesy of Dr. Rosari Kingston

## *The Wheel of the Year and Health*



Sat 4th Oct 2025. 10-4pm  
TUS Campus, Thurles

Speaker: **Dr Rosari Kingston**

**Synopsis:** There is a natural interplay between the Irish cyclical calendar and healing. This lecture will explore how each six-week period throughout the year shaped both spiritual and therapeutic practices among communities. The wheel of the year informed the selection and application of medicinal plants, the ritual use of sacred wells, and the organization of communal healing events. These activities are rooted in a holistic approach to health that integrates physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health as well as an enduring relationship between landscape, culture and well-being.

**Biography:** Rosari Kingston is a medical herbalist based in West Cork. She holds an MSc in herbal medicine from the University of Wales and a PhD in Folklore from University College Cork. She serves as an adjunct lecturer in UCC teaching courses on the Irish healing tradition for the Department of Folklore and Ethnology. Her research focuses on the integration of traditional knowledge and modern science in therapeutic practices. A contributor to the *American Herbal Pharmacopoeia*, Dr. Kingston has authored peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, and has explored the history of Irish vernacular medicine in her monograph, *Ireland's Hidden Medicine* (Aeon, 2021).

## LECTURE

## 02



Image courtesy of Michael Fortune

*‘Remembering the Dead’*

Sat 1st Nov 2025  
Council Chamber, Clonmel

Speaker: **Michael Fortune**

**Synopsis:** This talk will focus on the superstitions, beliefs and practices surrounding death in Ireland. November is a month associated with the dead and remembering in Ireland, and this talk will range from death customs and funeral practices to signs and omens. This talk will be relaxed and informal and during the hour Michael will share content he recorded, heard and experienced over his life. In 2024 he worked with the Museum of Hidden History in Clonmel and conducted a collection of interviews with Funeral Directors in relation to death customs and practices from Co. Tipperary and some of these findings will feature in the presentation.

**Biography:** Michael Fortune is an artist, film maker, educator, collector of folklore and song from County Wexford. Since the 1990's he has been collecting stories and accounts of traditions and times gone by in day care centres, halls, schools and homes all over Ireland. He shares these stories on his popular [www.folklore.ie](http://www.folklore.ie) site to massive audiences. He has contributed to features in newspapers, television and radio. Annually he publishes a calendar on traditional Irish dressers.

## LECTURE

## 03



Image courtesy of Dr Jenny Butler

*Between Worlds: The Otherworld and Magic in the Case of Bridget Cleary*

Sat 6th Dec 2025  
Council Chamber, Clonmel

Speaker: **Dr Jenny Butler**

**Synopsis:** On 15th March 1895, 26-year-old Bridget Cleary was burned, most likely burned alive. While in her nightdress, her husband, Michael, threw lamp oil over her in the presence of relatives and neighbours gathered at their home in Ballyvadlea, a townland outside the village of Cloneen in County Tipperary. In the trial records, Michael Cleary and others involved claimed that they believed there was a changeling, a fairy creature, in Bridget's place and that they were attempting to get the real Bridget back. This talk explores the folklore of the otherworld and magic as relevant to this case as well as examining the sociocultural reality and political dynamics at play in late-nineteenth century Ireland.

**Biography:** Dr Jenny Butler is a Lecturer in University College Cork's Study of Religions Department and a Principal Investigator of UCC's Environmental Research Institute (ERI). She is the President of the Irish Society for the Academic Study of Religions (ISASR). Her research interests are at the nexus of the study of religion and folklore, including otherworld traditions, mythology, pilgrimage, sacred landscapes, and ritual studies.

## LECTURE

## 04



Image courtesy of Dr Barry O'Reilly

*The vernacular house - nerve centre of Irish tradition*

Sat 10th Jan 2026  
Council Chamber, Clonmel

Speaker: **Dr Barry O'Reilly**

**Synopsis:** Our vernacular (traditional) houses embody an immense volume of folk lore, custom and belief. While providing shelter, they were also a portal between the human and supernatural worlds. Protecting the 'luck' of the family, their homestead, animals and crops, meant never-ending vigilance, especially at key turning points of the traditional year. Our vernacular houses also embrace the community and its values and connect us with the deep past and with other cultures. This talk will focus strongly on the kitchen as the 'nerve centre' of traditional family life, and on the supreme importance of the hearth.

**Biography:** Barry O'Reilly managed the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage surveys of north and south Tipperary. He has an MA (in vernacular architecture) and a Masters of Urban and Building Conservation from University College Dublin and a PhD from Oxford Brookes University in the UK. He has lectured and guided walking tours many times on the architecture of County Tipperary. He lives near Fethard.





Image courtesy of Dr Louise Nugent

## *Pilgrimage in Medieval and Modern Tipperary*



Sat 7th February 2026  
Council Chamber, Clonmel

Speaker: **Dr Louise Nugent**

**Synopsis:** Pilgrimage played a central role in the devotional lives of medieval people. Despite the reformation and penal laws, pilgrimage has endured in Ireland and today takes on many forms from tourism and spiritual based pilgrimages to the more traditional Catholic devotions at holy wells and churches. This paper will explore pilgrimage in County Tipperary from Medieval to modern time with a strong focus on holy wells within the county.

**Biography:** Louise Nugent is an archaeologist, researcher and blogger specialising in the archaeology and material culture of medieval and modern pilgrimage in Ireland. She has published widely on this topic and is the author of the book *Journeys of Faith: Stories of Pilgrimage from Medieval Ireland* and the blog *Pilgrimage in Medieval Ireland*.



Image courtesy of Dr Ann O'Dowd

## *Some objects are beyond belief - the potency of objects for curing and protecting*



Sat 7th March 2026  
Council Chamber, Clonmel

Speaker: **Dr Ann O'Dowd**

**Biography:** Anne O' Dowd worked as a curator in the National Museum inventorying the collection of Irish Folklife, taking care of the collection, adding many thousands of objects to it, keeping the dream of a Folklife Museum in Ireland alive for years and selecting the site of Turlough Park in Mayo for the long-awaited Museum. During those years she published a Master's thesis – *Meitheal*, 1981, a PhD, *Spalpeens and tattie hokers*, 1990 – in addition to writing a host of articles on Irish folklife and tradition. After retirement from the Museum she published *Straw, hay and rushes in Irish folk tradition* in 2015. Anne is currently preparing a volume on cloaks and petticoats.

**Synopsis:** In many areas of my research I have come across the belief in the curative and protective powers of objects – water, clay, iron, stones, - are the more obvious and well-known, but what about the efficacy of wisps of straw, the magical power of rushes, the protection afforded the family by a cow's afterbirth and the potency of the colour red etc. If objects could protect they could also do damage. The colour green for clothes was considered 'unlucky' in many parts of Ireland, and if a child's nails were cut with a scissors before she was one year old she might become a thief. And much more...



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### **Lectures Time:**

10.30am

### **Lectures Booking:**

Admission is €10 (cash only)

Booking in advance

Email to [museum@tipperarycoco.ie](mailto:museum@tipperarycoco.ie)

Tel: 052 6165252 or on the door

### **Lectures Venue:**

The Council Chamber

County Hall

Emmet Street

Clonmel, Co Tipperary

E91 N512



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