

Music Teachers Sharon Kelly and Colette Keaveney, receive tuition from Harp Teacher Steph West



**Funded Through the Irish Government Emigrant Support Programme**

## London Comhaltas Harp School

**London Comhaltas Harp School** Early in November I got my first chance to see the training of our London Harp teachers underway. Two well established and experienced music teachers, Sharon Kelly and Colette Keaveney are currently receiving training from Harpist Steph West, on a weekly basis. Sharon and Colette have large active classes in North and West London, with strong links to local schools. They

are now in possession of the new Harps we have purchased as part of this project. Any Comhaltas members from any branch or class, in the London region, interested in learning the harp, should contact Sharon or Colette to find out about the availability of tuition. You can also contact me for more details.

**NAF Club Silsoe, Bedfordshire** On the 3rd of November I visited the

NAF Club, in the George Hotel, Silsoe Bedfordshire. The N.A.F. stands for Not, A, Folk club. The story goes that the original name was to be the NAFF, as in Military circles, but it was felt that it might be a little embarrassing explaining the second 'F'. I had been invited by Club organiser Ned Lawton following his visit to the Pipers club end of term concert in St.Albans back in July. He asked me to bring as many of the piper's club as I

could muster, which turned out to be me and Rainbow Skinner-Coleman. Ned is learning piping from Luton based piper James O'Grady and we were delighted when James turned up and joined us for our set. The club is held in a smallish function room and was packed to the rafters. Most of the Audience had never heard Uilleann Pipes before. Rainbow's Dad Andy, also gave a song as part of our set. We were well received and the club made a generous donation to the piper's club. We are planning some fund raising this year to assist in club members visiting a few piping related events as a club this year. Feel free to contact me if you are interested in learning more about this. Thanks to James O'Grady for his continued support and inspiration.

**Cambridge AGM** On the 4th of November I attended the Cambridge branch AGM in the Rathmore club. Its always a pleasure to visit the branch and I am always made to feel very welcome. I had an opportunity to address the meeting and spoke a little of the Management teams new Meitheal development objectives, and fielded questions on Development. A large crowd attended the good humored and lively

meeting, and we learned a little of the many activities the branch have planned for Christmas and the coming months. The meeting was followed by a session that featured members of the branch



class and Alan McLeod and Adam Brown.

**Irish Embassy reception** The following afternoon, I had the honor of attending a reception at the Irish Embassy, held for organisations that received funding from the Irish Government's Emigrant support program. The reception was addressed by The Irish Ambassador Bobby McDonagh and The Irish Government's Minister for foreign affairs, Michael Martin TD. He told us that more than 135 organisations in Britain have benefitted from grants totalling £7,643,084, in

2009. He went on to say, "This brings Irish Government support for our community in Britain over the past six years to some £40 Million. The fact that we made this level of funding available in

2009, in the context of an extremely difficult budgetary situation, is a clear indication of the Government's ongoing and enduring commitment to the Irish in Britain. The vast majority of this funding in 2009, as in previous years, has been directed at the most vulnerable members of the Irish community, particularly the elderly. While the funding provided over recent years has had a very positive impact on the ground, I am determined to ensure that those Irish in Britain who continue to live with significant levels of poverty,

isolation, loneliness and addiction, remain the focus of our work". Mr Martin TD was accompanied by the Honorable Mr David Cooney, who left his role as Irish Ambassador to London, to take up a foreign affairs post in Dublin earlier this year. Mr Cooney is a passionate Irish music enthusiast and was a great supporter of Comhaltas whilst Ambassador. It was nice to catch up with him and a lot of colleagues, friends and acquaintances that I have made whilst in my role as development worker. Seamus Brogan also represented our organisation on the day.

**Development Management team meeting in Manchester**

On the 8th of November I travelled to Manchester to attend a meeting of the development management, or Meitheal team. The meeting was arranged to follow up on progress, we as a development team have made on the various projects and tasks we had been set by the team during our appraisal meeting back in September. I have been set the specific tasks of collating a portfolio data base of potential funders and funding bodies, developing the very successful Culra initiative and looking into gaining

accreditation for the SCT traditional Irish music exam syllabus in Britain. There are also other tasks that the development workers are working on together and these include creating a document that sets out the Meitheal aims for how the organisation will develop over the next few years, reintroduce and develop local branch and class Fleadhanna. Develop the regional Fleadhanna into a bigger festival event. A lot of county and regional Fleadhanna in Ireland are now week long events and often include an educational content linked to schools, concerts, workshops and Ceili's. The team would like branches and regions to start thinking about how they might develop their own Fleadh. The details of this initiative are contained in a letter prepared by Northern region

regional AGM. If you would like to know more about any of the above details, please contact your branch secretary, regional secretary, Patrick or myself.

**Fund raising evening for the Irish Chaplaincy In Britain**

On the 19th of November I attended a fundraising evening for Irish Chaplaincy in Britain. Comhaltas administrator John Myers and myself, represented the organisation along with West London branch committee member Mary Farrell. We played as a large congregation gathered in the McNamara Hall at the Camden centre, for a Mass to start the evening. We also played during the Mass and Mary led the Hymns and played the Guitar. A meeting was held after Mass and that was followed by a Ceili.



development worker Patrick Morrisson, and were read out at your

*Irish Chaplaincy in Britain  
Director Philomena Cullen,  
Addresses the congregation*

### **Luton session**

Luton's Leagrave branch held a session on the 20th of November, in St. Joseph's social club. It was lead by music teacher and Banjo player, Annette Hannigan and Flautist Bernie Ballentine. The session was supported by members of the South Luton branch, and it was lovely to see some old faces, share a tune and also see so many very capable young musicians enjoying the session. Peter McAlinden also turned up towards the end of the evening and lead a few sets on the whistle. They are planning a session for January and more events in the new year, details of which I'll let you have soon.

**Midland AGM** The Midland region held their annual general meeting in St. Patrick's Irish Club, Leamington-spa, on Sunday 22nd November. I travelled up with ex-Comhaltas president Jim Teevan and Luton



***Delegates and Committee members at the Midland regional AGM***



***The Midland Region Committee, back L-R Larry O'Hanlon, Sean McDonagh. Front L-R Out-going treasurer Christine Murphy, Natalie Ruane, Carmel Burke and Jill Cafferkey***

Comhaltas stalwart, Dennis Whelen. We formed part of a fairly large contingent from Luton that included current regional Chair Sean McDonagh. The meeting was preceded by a lovely home made soup and buffet lunch. It was a lively meeting with a lot of good ideas . It was particularly nice for me to meet with representatives from the branches I work with in the region. Namely Bedford, Cambridge and the two Luton branches.

Sean McDonagh was re-elected as Chair and the other committee members are Jill Cafferky - Vice Chair, Natalie Ruane - Secretary, Carmel Burke - minutes secretary, Peter Quinlan, new chair of the Liecester branch - Treasurer, Marian Brown from the Cambridge branch has taken the role of regional PRO, Erin Brown - Youth officer and the Auditors are Larry O'Hanlon from Luton and John McManus from Bedford. The role of funding coordinator was created under a new initiative, by regional chair Sean McDonagh, and this was taken up by Donal Murphy. It is hoped that Donal will share information amongst branches where possible local funders and funding pots have been identified. He will also work closely with the development team.

**London regional AGM** Monday the 23rd November was the date for London and Southern regional AGM, which was held in the Camden Irish centre. All of the branches in the region were represented, with the exception of Slough which appears to be faltering since the departure of their Chair person. Please contact me if you are interested in helping or

supporting the branch. It was another lively meeting where amongst other things, we discussed Patrick Morrisson's plans for development letter to regional secretaries ,on behalf of the Meitheal team, the annual convention and provincial AGM to be held in the Holiday Inn, Elstree for the second consecutive year on 13th and 14th February 2010, and the regional Fleadh. A date of the 17th of April 2010 has been set for a regional fundraising concert to be held in the Harringey Irish Centre. Thomas Beaumont of the West London branch has taken over from Marian Brogan as Secretary and Orlaith McAuliffe from East London has taken over as regional PRO from Ivan Anderson. The committee and delegates thanked Ivan and Marian for all of the hard work they have done for the region over the years.

**North London Branch workshops and Fleadh Weekend** On Saturday 27th November North London branch staged a day of instrumental workshops at the Harringey Irish centre, Pretoria Road. The workshops available were, Fiddle -Theresa Connelly, Flute - Coleman Connelly, Button Box - Maureen Linane, Banjo - Mick O'Connor, Drums and Bodhran - Aidan Burke, singing and Whistle - Carmel Gunning and Harp - Michelle Cressida. I was pleased to see one of the Attendees of the Harp workshop using one of the harps provided by the region, made available through funding from the Irish Government.



One aspect of the day that I particularly liked was when the organisers encouraged all the musicians to come together after each session, to share a tune and perform what they had learnt.

A lot of hard work and preparation by music Teacher Elaine Walsh and members of the North London committee went in to making this a highly successful event. I know they would like to join me in thanking the Irish Government Emigrant support program, for providing funding that helped to make the day possible.

The following day the North London branch held a junior Fleadh, also in the Harringey centre. This was also a well attended and successful event, given the terrible weather, localised flooding and road closures. It was especially encouraging to see the large number of young groups and bands performing. This is to the credit of music teachers Sharon Kelly, Eilish Byrne-Whelehan and Colette Keaveney, who put a lot of hard work and effort in to preparing these talented young musicians. There were also a lot of individual performers that had been taught by Karen Ryan and Kathy Walton, Sam Sloan, Brendan Mulkere and Cherry D'Lacey. Many people had

travelled for the event, and I had the pleasure of adjudicating a young piper from Cambridge.



***Coleman Connelly's Flute workshop***



***Mick O'Connor***



*Aidan Burke's  
Bodhran workshop*



*Michelle Cressida  
Harp Workshop*



*Carmel Gunning's  
Whistle workshop,  
Carmel also taught  
singing*



*Eilish Byrne-  
Whelehan's Feith an  
Cheoil music school,  
under 18 Group that  
performed as part of  
the North London  
Junior Fleadh*



*Sharon Kelly's West  
London Music group*