

Centre to commemorate 100th anniversary of the tragedy



Keeping a watchful eye at the commemoration of Wigan's Maypole Mining Disaster at Hennigan's Heritage Centre in Killasser.

Freddie Neighbour travelled from Kent to commemorate the memory of her grandfather, Thomas Groarke, Lisliaghna, Killasser, who perished in the Maypole Mining Disaster.



Teresa Connell, Cloonmore, Claremorris, in the company of Wigan's mayor, Cllr Rita Winkworth; Mayo Co Council Cathaoirleach, Cllr Joe Mellett; Ireland West Airport CEO, Joe Kennedy, and Tom Hennigan, proudly displays the portrait of her then 18-year-old uncle, John Kirby, who, with many Mayo natives, tragically lost his life in Wigan's Maypole Mining Disaster in 1908. The tragedy was commemorated at a special ceremony, organised by the Mayo Emigrant Liaison Committee, in Hennigan's Heritage Museum in Killasser.

Pictures: Henry Wills, Western People



The Mayor of Wigan, Cllr Roma Winkworth, pictured on her arrival at Hennigan's Heritage Centre in Killasser for the Maypole Mining Disaster commemoration. Also included are Senator John Carthy, Ireland West Airport chairman Joe Kennedy, Tom Hennigan and his wife Catherine, Mayo Co Council Cathaoirleach, Cllr Joe Mellett, Kevin Bourke, Mayo Emigrant Liaison Group, and Wigan Lady Mayoress, Cllr Gail Guy.

Maypole Mining Disaster: Monument unveiled in Killasser Heritage



Awaiting the commemoration ceremony of the Maypole Mining Disaster in Killasser.



Maurice Cullen, guide from Arigna Mines, attended the Maypole commemoration in Killasser.



Smiling faces at the Maypole Commemoration in Killasser.

Mayo recalls tragic mining disaster

Mayo's monument to the 75 miners who lost their lives 100 years ago in the Maypole Mining Disaster, was unveiled last Thursday. The Maypole Room, located at Hennigan's Heritage Centre in Killasser, is a fitting dedication to those who lost their lives and those left behind.

BY SANDRA COFFEY

KILGARRIF native James McGrath was one of the 13 Mayo men who died in the Maypole Mining Disaster 100 years ago. He left behind a widow and eight young children.

On hearing of his death, his wife went to Wigan to get his body.

Sadly, not many of the bodies could be identified due to the massive explosion which engulfed the mines that day in August 1908. Frantically looking for her husband, she was told that no more bodies could be taken out of the mines. She suffered a nervous breakdown and was sent to the lunatic asylum in Liverpool. Her eight children, living in Kilgarrif, had to be cared for by other family members and neighbours.

This is just one of the stories that has emerged about the families left behind after this tragedy.

This story is now depicted on a mural in the Maypole Room at Hennigan's Heritage Centre in Killasser. The Maypole Room was first unveiled last Thursday afternoon as part of a commemorative event to remember the lives of 75 men (13 from Mayo) who lost their lives in the mining tragedy.

Tom Hennigan of Hennigan's Heritage Centre explained the significance of the mural to those present, who included Mayor of Wigan Rona Winkworth, chairman of Ireland West Airport Knock, Joe Kennedy and chairman of Mayo County County, Joe Mellett.

A large contingent also travelled from Wigan to attend the commemoration.

Mr Hennigan said: "This room was once a classroom. You will see that we have kept the old seating and used it to display the many artefacts and stories about the mining disaster. I wanted to commemorate the lives of those lost and I feel this mural serves as a reminder of how deep this tragedy was felt in Mayo. Each candle lit in this room is for every man and boy who lost their life that day."

The room was then blessed. A minute's silence was observed in their memory and a plaque was unveiled in the room.

Speaking at the reception, Cathaoirleach Joe Mellett spoke of how important it is to maintain connections with Mayo's emigrants.

He said: "The scale of this tragedy was unprecedented. It left behind instant widows and large extended families. Mining was a dangerous job but many had no alternative. They needed employment and there was nothing for them in Ireland. Families back in Mayo depended on the weekly postal order coming in the post.

"When the scale of the tragedy came to light, it is no wonder that it was called the 'Widow Maker'."

He went on to pay tribute to Tom Hennigan and his wife Catherine and family for putting together a fitting memorial, and to the Mayo Emigrant Liaison Committee for starting up the association in 1999 and for organising the event.

Tributes were also paid to Joe Kennedy of Ireland West Airport Knock who gave the committee the financial start they needed nine years ago.



Mayor of Wigan, Cllr Rona Winkworth, and Mayo Co Council Cathaoirleach Joe Mellett, listen attentively as Tom Hennigan recalls the Ireland of 1908 during the centenary commemoration of the Maypole Mining Disaster, held in Tom's heritage museum in Killasser. Also included in background is Killasser historian, Galway University's Bernie O'Hara.



The Mayor of Wigan, Cllr Rona Winkworth, flanked by Ireland West Airport chairman Joe Kennedy and Cathaoirleach Joe Mellett, jointly cut the tape to officially open Hennigan's Heritage Centre's schoolroom, dedicated to the victims of the 1908 Maypole Mining Disaster.