

OLD IRELAND IN COLOUR

John Breslin & Sarah-Anne Buckley
with Hangar't and LimeLight

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Foreword

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank our supporters and sponsors, the Festival Interceltique de Lorient 2023 (and especially Angélique Meih, Maiwenn Gaudin and Yann Kersual), Culture Ireland / Cultúr Éireann, and the Galway-Lorient Twinning Committee.

We would also like to sincerely thank the Honorary French Consul in Ireland for Connacht and Donegal, Catherine Gagneux, for all her support in making this exhibition happen, for translating the titles and captions, and more generally, for her voluntary work in making more and more connections between our region, Brittany, and France.

Thank you to Yves Quentel and the creative team at Hangar't for this most interesting collaboration. It has been so inspiring to see your interpretations of these photographs, as well as the incredible outputs from the workshops with the artists at LimeLight Creative Arts in Oranmore, County Galway.

We also must thank all of the libraries, archives and museums whose photographic collections form the basis for our work. Thank you for sharing these amazing photographic historical artefacts with the world (and for this exhibition in particular: the National Library of Ireland, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, the University of Galway Library Archives, the Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, the London School of Economics Library, Wikimedia Commons and the Breslin Archive).

Thanks also to Snap Galway for their excellent work in printing the exhibition photographs, and to the Kenny Gallery for their help with all the packing and dealing with delivery.

About the colourisation process

We have used some existing deep learning systems and manual colourisation techniques, but also some new ones, in a hybrid computer-human methodology to produce what we believe is a better set of photographic colourisations. We put extensive and painstaking work into researching everything, and, taking the deep learning colourised image as a base layer (from colourisation systems such as DeOldify, ColorizeImages, Palette and Photoshop), we carry out extensive manual colourisation of the researched items in Photoshop:

- eyes/hair colours from any available records (newspaper accounts, biographies, paintings, travel records such as people going through Ellis Island, passport and naturalisation applications from the USA, personal details provided by relatives, etc.);
- clothes and types of clothes that someone or some group wore (using any available records such as newspaper accounts, interviews, and general sources on clothing in different eras such as *Dress in Ireland* by Mairéad Dunlevy);
- uniforms (consulting with war uniform specialists in Ireland and the UK and published secondary work);
- traditions (e.g., folklore and stories around colours used, dyes and sources of these dyes, paintings or sketches captured of various styles, historical and museum-held artefacts and clothing from various regions);
- searching for copies of old advertisements, brands, products, posters, signs, and paintings in the background;
- material culture research;
- and much, much more.

This process can take hours in Photoshop (for a simple image), days, and sometimes even weeks. We ensure that we are as accurate as possible from a historical perspective.

1 Paisley shawl

October 1863, Shinrone, County Offaly [the Breslin Archive](#)

This is an image of a Miss Jinney/Jane Burton whose brother was recorded as 'Bob Burton'. She died in 1865 aged eight-three years old and would have been eighty-one when this photograph was taken. Her brother Robert 'Bob' Burton died in 1875 aged eight-six years. Both of their ages at death would have been significantly higher than the average age of life expectancy.

2 Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa (1831-1915)

c. November 1866, Mountjoy Prison, Dublin [NYPL](#)

O'Donovan Rossa was born in Reenascreena, Co. Cork and was greatly affected by seeing his father die on a famine road in 1847. Subsequently, his mother and the remaining members of the family emigrated to the US. In 1856 he co-founded the Phoenix National and Literary Society in Skibbereen, which later amalgamated with the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB). In 1865, he was arrested, tried on a charge of conspiracy, and given a life sentence. While imprisoned, he suffered greatly at the hands of his jailers. After an inquiry into the treatment of Fenian prisoners, he was given an amnesty in 1871, emigrated to the US and became involved in nationalist/republican circles there. (*See also the interpretative painting.*)

3 Gap girl Bridget Sweeney

and

4 Gap girl Mary Burke

c. 1860-1883, Gap of Dunloe, County Kerry [NLI](#)

These images are part of the Stereo Pairs Collection in the National Library of Ireland. The collection consisted of negatives acquired by William Lawrence. These images were created by Dublin photographers James Simonton and Frederick Holland Mares, and include a series of seven portraits of girls from the Gap of Dunloe. These images depict Bridget Sweeney and Mary Burke who were selling refreshments to visitors to the Gap. Both girls are wearing red petticoats, with petticoats made of drugget, a coarse woollen cloth outside them.

5 You've got mail

27 August 1886, Eyre Square, Galway City [NLI](#)

A Royal Mail 979 Day Car, or a Bianconi mail car, near Webb's Hotel (now the Imperial Hotel) and Black's Royal Hotel in Eyre Square. Black's Royal Hotel was a noted Galway landmark. An advertisement published in 1879 announced that it was 'established 70 years', that it was 'patronised by nobility and gentry', and that it offered guests 'free omnibuses to and from trains and steamers'.

6 The O'Halloran sisters

June 1887, Bodyke, County Clare [NLI](#)

This image depicts the O'Halloran sisters – Annie, Honoria, and Sarah – with a fourth unidentified girl. The sisters were living with their parents and their brothers, Patrick and Frank, as tenants of Colonel John O'Callaghan during the Land War. They became one of the families to participate in the Bodyke rent boycotts, and in June 1887 they resisted eviction from the land their family had lived and worked on for generations. O'Callaghan had been charging £31, which the court ordered be reduced to £22 10s, a sum the family maintained was still unfair. In his account of the resistance, Frank describes how his sisters threw cans of scalding water to ward off bailiffs, and Honoria even managed to grab the 'sword-bayonet' of one of the policemen who was trying to come through a window.

7 Gweedore

c. 1880-1900, County Donegal [NLI](#)

An image of locals grouped and posing for the photographer. Traditional dress, thatched cottages, and children all barefoot. Very few smiling for the camera. Gweedore was the scene of several notable evictions in this period recorded in the House of Commons.

8 Three children at the stile

c. 1890s, County Waterford [the Breslin Archive](#)

In the nineteenth century, children were dressed in a very similar manner to their parents. Breeching was very important for boys and there were regional variations in the colours. Tomás Ó Criomhthain, for example, exchanged a grey frieze petticoat made by his mother for grey breeches made by his father. Striped red or blue petticoats were often worn under skirts or gowns, and strong red was popular, but also indigo, shades of blue, green, brown, or grey. Full-skirted red petticoats were usually worn by older women, shorter petticoats by younger women.

9 The congested districts board

1892, Connemara, County Galway [NLI](#)

The Congested Districts Board for Ireland was established in 1891 by AJ Balfour, the Chief Secretary for Ireland, to alleviate poverty and congested living conditions in the west and parts of the northwest of Ireland. The board was dissolved in the Irish Free State in 1923. In this image, most of the boys are wearing skirts, as they were easier to make than trousers, and they all have similar haircuts. In 1892, education was made compulsory for six- to fourteen-year-olds, although the legislation had several loopholes.

10 Cill Éinne holy well station and young islanders

c. 1893-1895, Inis Mór, Aran Islands, Galway [University of Galway Archives](#)

In this photograph, a stone pillar inscribed with a cross is visible beside a group of children. Photographer Robert John Welch's caption identifies this as Killeany Holy Well and he refers to the children as "young natives". The village of Cill Éinne was named after the fifth century monastery. Dabhach Éinne is the holy well near the monastic village below Teampall Bheanáin.

11 ‘The young firbolgs’

c. 1893-1895, Inis Mór, Aran Islands, Galway [University of Galway Archives](#)

A large group of children, both boys and girls, mostly facing the camera of Welch. They are standing in front of a cottage whose partially white-washed gable is visible. Many of the girls are wearing white pinafores, while some of the boys are wearing traditional Aran knitted clothing. Welch's use of the word 'Firbolgs' in the caption recalls a troupe of antiquarianism and its efforts to determine the islands' prehistory.

12 Add and subtract

c. 1890s, Mount Sion School, Waterford [NLI](#)

This image shows boys sitting around an adding machine and most likely studying bookkeeping. The school was initially founded in 1803, and the earliest records indicate that the site belonged to the Knights Templar from 1250 to 1540. In 1803, the land was leased to Edmund Rice, the Catholic missionary and educationalist. Rice had started his first school in New Street in 1802. In 1889, a decision was made to provide a Paying School for well-to-do children. It started in the Mount Sion Monastery in 1890 and then moved to its new building at Waterpark in 1912.

13 Loading at the harbour

c. 1890s, Dunmore East, County Waterford [the Breslin Archive](#)

In 1814, Dunmore East was chosen by the Post Office to be the Irish terminal of a new Mail Packet route from Milford Haven. After the construction of a new pier and lighthouse, designed by the Scottish engineer Alexander Nimmo, the quiet fishing village became a bustling port. In 1824, RH Ryland, in his history of the county and city of Waterford, described it as 'formally a place of resort for fishermen, but now a delightful and fashionable watering place... Most of the cottages are built of clay and are thatched with straw, and generally let during the summer season from one to three guineas a week.'

14 HMS Howe

1898, Cobh (then Queenstown), County Cork [the Breslin Archive](#)

The HMS Howe was an Admiral-class ironclad battleship built for the Royal Navy during the 1880s. It had been grounded and refloated in 1892. It became a guardship in Ireland in 1896 and stayed there until 1901. The port of Queenstown was the point of departure for many Irish emigrants to the United States from the late nineteenth century through to 1911.

15 Paddy's market

c. 1890-1900, Cork City [NLI](#)

The first municipal corn market was constructed in 1719 overlooking a square that was located on a filled-in portion of a channel (est. c. 1695) of the River Lee. Unfortunately, the name of this square is not recorded, but it was located on what is now Corn Market Street. Over the centuries, the square grew to be the traditional central market area of the city, known locally at this time as Paddy's Market. It would have been thronged with dealers and customers, purchasing anything from a needle to an anchor. Several stalls still operate here today.

16 Fishing shoot

c. 1900, Ardara, County Donegal NLI

Men, women and children fishing for commercial purposes in Ardara. The name Ard a' Rátha means 'high hill of the fort', a nod to the earthen ringfort on the hill to the northeast. In this image we can see the type of baskets used to collect fish, as well as the traditional dress of the area. Ardara had a longstanding association with tweed and knitwear – from the 1870s this became a cottage industry that produced homespun and hand-dyed woollen and tweed garments. Today it is one of five designated heritage towns in Donegal and is still known for its salmon and trout fishing.

17 Digging peat

c. 1880-1930, Location unknown Library of Congress

Man and woman digging for peat in Ireland. There is evidence that the use of turf for heating in Ireland can be traced to over a thousand years previous. By the seventeenth century, turf was widely used and by the late eighteenth century it was the main fuel in Ireland. In the late nineteenth century, the emphasis on peatlands changed to encouraging their development for fuel and improving the quality of turf. In the 1930s, the Irish Free State Government formed the Turf Development Board for these purposes which later became Bord na Móna.

18 Jovial in the marketplace

c. 1900, Spanish Arch, Galway City the Breslin Archive

This image from the Breslin Archive shows a busy town scene – with fish hawkers from the Claddagh, children and even a local policeman. It appears as if the woman to the left is singing or reciting something. The Spanish Arch, an extension of the twelfth-century Norman town wall and visible in the background to the right, was built in 1584 as a measure to protect the city's quays and the 'Fish Market'.

19 Erin's sons and daughters

1903, Ballidian, County Monaghan Library of Congress

Girls playing 'Green grow the rushes, O' while boys do gymnastic exercises and the teacher watches, during recess, outside of Ballidian National School. Stereographs, or stereoviews, date back to the late nineteenth century, where two separate photographs were taken by cameras in slightly different positions but pointing at the same objects. A special viewer (basically a set of spectacles mounted on a stick, with a holder for the stereograph photo card at the end) allowed one to view the scene with a sort of 3D effect.

20 The Claddagh catch

c. 1905, Spanish Arch, Galway City NLI

Pictured here are Nonnie, or Nannie, O'Donnell, Mary Rodgers, Kitty Conneely and Mrs Gill, all from the Claddagh, Galway City. The women are wearing the Galway shawl, which was a heavy-weight shawl that became popular at the end of the nineteenth century. At the time in which this photograph was taken, the famous Claddagh fishing industry was in decline following the onset of modern trawlers.

21 'The Irish women demand the vote'

c. 1907-1914, Location unknown LSE Library

A girl holding a basket containing a 'Votes for Women' newspaper and placard. It was taken in a photographic studio and is part of a campaign of pro-suffrage publicity. (See also the interpretative painting.)

22 Belfast city hall

c. 1910, Belfast City NLI

Belfast City Hall sits on the site of the previous White Linen Hall and was designed by Sir Alfred Brumwell Thomas. It opened on 1 August 1906 and cost £369,000 to construct. It features towers at each of the four corners, with a lantern-crowned 173 foot green copper dome in the centre. FW Pomeroy, helped by local carver J Edgar Winter, created the pediment sculpture, which shows Hibernia with, among others, symbolic figures highlighting Belfast's trade and industry. The roof above the Banqueting Hall was destroyed during the Belfast Blitz on the night of 4/5 May 1941 and had to be rebuilt.

23 RMS Titanic leaving Belfast

2 April 1912, Belfast Lough Wikimedia Commons

Built by the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast, The RMS Titanic left Belfast on 2 April and sank on 15 April 1912, with the loss of over 1,500 lives. About 110 victims and 54 survivors were from the island of Ireland. Robert Welch was one of the official photographers for Harland and Wolff.

24 Rally against home rule

c. 1911-1913, Belfast Library of Congress

Sir Edward Carson addresses 50,000 men from unionist clubs and Orange Lodges at a huge demonstration organised by James Craig. Carson told the men to be prepared, on the morning Home Rule passed, 'to become responsible for the government of the Protestant Province of Ulster'. Home Rule was the demand that the governance of Ireland be returned from Westminster to a domestic parliament in Ireland. In 1912 the Irish Parliamentary Party introduced the Third Home Rule Bill in the House of Commons. It passed in 1914, despite unionist opposition, only to be suspended on the outbreak of the First World War.

25 Glencolumbkille

c. 1914, County Donegal PRONI

The history of Glencolumbkille (Glencolumbkille) spans 5,000 years, with evidence of Stone Age settlers still apparent in the Court Cairns. In 1729, the Church of the Spaniard in Faugher (Cill an Spáinnigh) was built after a shipwrecked Spanish sailor being given the Last Rites by the local priest gave him some gold coins and asked him to build a church. There are still examples of surviving thatched cottages which were built of local stone and whitewashed. Particular to this area was the rounded roof – the thatch was held down by a network of ropes placed over it and fastened beneath the eaves and on the gables.

26 Suffrage and socialism

1914, Liberty Hall, Dublin City [NLI](#)

This photograph depicts members of the Irish Women Workers' Union (IWWU) outside Liberty Hall in early 1914. The union had been formed in September 1911 as a women's section of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU). Delia Larkin, sister of Jim Larkin, is pictured front and centre, holding a placard that refers to the women who went on strike during the Lockout in 1913 and were imprisoned. Delia played the leading role until a falling out with the ITGWU in 1915. In 1918, the IWWU was registered as an independent trade union.

27 A man of endurance

February 1915, Antarctica [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Taken during Tom Crean's third and final Antarctic adventure, aboard the *Endurance*, where he was second officer on Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition. After the *Endurance* was slowly crushed by the pack ice and sank, Crean and the ship's company spent nearly five months drifting on the ice before taking the ship's lifeboats to Elephant Island. Crean, originally from the farming area of Gortacurrane, near the village of Annascaul, Co. Kerry, was one of the most famous Irish seamen and explorers. His previous expeditions were on the *Discovery* and *Terra Nova*. (*See also the interpretative painting.*)

28 Funeral of O'Donovan Rossa

1 August 1915, Glasnevin Cemetery [NLI](#)

The funeral of Cork Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa was one of the largest and most significant in modern Irish history. All seven signatories of the Proclamation were listed as members of the committee that organised transfer of his body from Staten Island to Dublin. It would be the first of a number of very large 'political' funerals, which included those of Thomas Ashe, Kevin Barry, Tomás MacCurtain, Terence MacSwiney and Michael Collins.

29 Child labourer

17 June 1916, Massachusetts, USA [Library of Congress](#)

A child labourer, James Donovan, whose ancestors were Irish and whose testimony was recorded for the National Child Labor Committee (NCLC). James was an Irish sweeper in Fall River Iron Works. He said he was 17 years old at the time of this photograph. Lewis Hine (1874–1940) was an investigative photographer for the NCLC and his photographs helped change child labour laws in the USA. (*See also the interpretative painting.*)

30 The Countess

1917, County Waterford [NLI](#)

Countess Markievicz, born Constance Georgine Gore Booth, was a nationalist, suffragist and socialist republican who took part in the Easter Rising and would go on to become the first female MP. Pictured here with her dog Poppet and Fianna Éireann officers Thomas McDonald (left) and Theo Fitzgerald (right). Thanks to the Murphy family – the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Theo Fitzgerald – for their help with Theo's eye colour.

31 Bleeding statues

22 August 1920, County Tipperary [NLI](#)

During the War of Independence local people in Templemore believed a miracle had stopped the complete destruction of the town during British Army reprisals. After he had received information from the local Catholic clergy that IRA Volunteers had engineered statues that would bleed at specific times, Michael Collins sent a courier to Tipperary to acquire one of the statues. According to an eyewitness, Collins, ‘... took hold of the statue and banged it off the side of the desk, and of course out fell the works of the alarm clock. “I knew it”, he says. So that was the end of the bleeding statue.’

32 Muriel Murphy MacSwiney (1892-1982)

14 November 1922, USA [Library of Congress](#)

Muriel Murphy was born in 1892 in Cork City to a wealthy Catholic family – the owners of Cork Distillery and Brewery. In 1915 she met her future husband Terence MacSwiney, who would go on to become the Lord Mayor of Cork. On 25 October 1920, Terence, while Mayor, died after 74 days on hunger strike. Afterwards, Muriel travelled to the USA to promote the republican cause and became the first woman to receive the Freedom of New York City. This photo was taken during the Irish Civil War in 1922, as she demonstrated in support of her sister-in-law Mary MacSwiney’s hunger strike.

33 Kilkenny hurler

c. 1923, County Kilkenny [NLI](#)

A member of the winning 1922 All-Ireland Kilkenny hurling team. Hurling (iománaíocht in Gaelic) is an outdoor team game of ancient Irish origin. The objective of the game is for players to use an ash wood stick called a hurley to hit a small ball called a sliotar between the opponent’s goalposts, either over the crossbar for one point or under the crossbar into a net guarded by a goalkeeper for three points.

34 Eucharistic congress

28 June 1932, Waterford [NLI](#)

The Quinn family pictured outside their home which was elaborately decorated for the 1932 eucharistic congress. While the main events were held in Dublin, there were expressions of piety across the country.

35 Bullock at Aran

31 May 1939, Inis Oírr, Aran Islands, County Galway [NLI](#)

From left to right in the photograph are (holding the animal) Tomás Ó Conghaile (Peter Mhéiní), Padraic Ó Conghaile (Paitsín Mhéiní), unknown, Michael Póil, and (in the currach) unknown, possibly Padraic Ó Gríofa (Mhacanaí), Peter Ó Conghaile (Mhéiní), John Francis Keane, and Seosamh Ó Coistealbha (Joe Tom Beag). These names were given to us by Ann Mhaidhcí whose grandfather is in the currach. Between 1921 and 1958, the Dublin-built Dun Aengus carried passengers, livestock and freight between Galway and the Aran islands. On Inis Mór she was able to dock, but at the other two islands she had to offload into currachs.

36 Singing by the fireplace

1952, Inis Mór, Aran Islands, County Galway [University of Galway Archives](#)

George Pickow captures Pat Pheaidí Ó hlarnáin (1903–1989) from Cill Mhuirbhígh singing a song while his neighbour Neain Mhaidhc Mhóir Uí Iarnáin sits in the fireplace of the *Man of Aran* cottage (from the documentary film). Deirdre Ní Chonghaile from the Aran Songs project explains that the choice of location was deliberate, as the thatched cottage had a skylight that enabled visiting photographers to photograph indoor scenes.

37 Sublichs

May 1954, Loughrea, County Galway [NLI](#)

Members of the Sheridan and O'Brien families from the Irish Travelling community. Sublichs is the Cant term for boys. Mincéirí (or Irish Travellers) have experienced discrimination in Ireland, particularly since the 1960s, after the implementation of recommendations made by the Commission on Itinerancy (1963). It recommended assimilation of Travellers by settling them in fixed dwellings, which was pursued through the effective criminalisation of nomadism. The health of Irish Travellers is significantly poorer than that of the general population in Ireland. In 2017, Irish Travellers were recognised as a distinct ethnic group. (*See also the interpretative painting.*)

38 Off to the horse fair

July 1954, Buttevant, County Cork [NLI](#)

The Cahirmee horse fair, thought to have its origins in prehistoric times, was originally held at the Fair Field of Cahirmee, three miles east of the town, but in 1921 it was transferred into the town. It is still held in July. Irish Travellers were ardent supporters of the fair, and crowds gathered to buy and sell horses, meet family and friends, and have weddings. There was also a famous 'parade of caravans' competition where highly polished and decorated barrel-top caravans were paraded through town. The woman to the front left of the photo was identified by her granddaughter as Elizabeth 'Lizzie' Furey Hanafin. She was 17 at the time and was the niece of late artist Ted Furey.

39 Driver Joe

19 December 1959, Monaghan [NLI](#)

This image shows 'Driver Joe' beside his train at Monaghan Railway Station. The railway to Monaghan closed on 31 December 1959 and this was the last passenger train to use it. It officially closed to passengers in 1957, but periodic specials, such as GAA trains, continued to operate. Monaghan railway station was part of the Ulster Railway designed by Sir John Macneill. (*See also the interpretative painting.*)

40 Waiting for Beckett

c. 1964, France [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Samuel Barclay Beckett, born in Foxrock in 1906, was an Irish novelist, playwright, short story writer, theatre director, poet and literary translator. He lived in Paris for most of his adult life and worked with the Resistance during the Second World War. In the 1950s he wrote his most famous work, *Waiting for Godot*. In 1969 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. He died in December 1989. (*See also the interpretative painting.*)



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Old Ireland in Colour

Old Ireland in Colour is a series of non-fiction history books written by Irish academics John Breslin and Sarah-Anne Buckley. The books consist of colourisations of black-and-white historical photographs by Breslin along with historical context and captions written by Buckley. The first book was Ireland's bestselling book during Christmas 2020 and winner of the Best Irish-Published Book Award 2020. A sequel, Old Ireland in Colour 2, was published in September 2021, and Old Ireland in Colour 3 is to be published in October 2023. The books can be bought/ordered via the Old Ireland in Colour website at www.oldirelandincolour.com

Hangar't + LimeLight

Nizon is a rural town located a quarter of a league from Pont-Aven, the 'city of painters'. It was here that a certain Paul Gauguin wore his shoes out, cleaned his paint brushes, and got inspiration for his Yellow and Green Christ paintings. It is unsurprising, therefore, that a century later some iconoclast painters from the Hangar't collective would paint pink cows, red wheat fields, blue tractors, yellow menhirs, purple (or even green) skies, and multicolour Breton headdresses. Following in Andy Warhol's Pop Art footsteps, these rural painters from Nizon had the nerve to claim their '15 minutes of fame' by having an exhibition of their paintings in New York! Initiated in 1992 by Yves Quentel along with a group of local farmers, the adventure still goes on more than 30 years later.

LimeLight is a Brothers of Charity creative arts programme that fosters creativity, independence and wellbeing for people with intellectual disabilities through performing and visual arts plus outreach programmes. A diverse team of dynamic professional artists and educators with years of experience empower the individual to strive to reach their preferred outcomes. LimeLight is based in Oranmore, County Galway.

In May 2022, some of the Hangar't team travelled to Galway in Ireland, invited by French honorary consul Catherine Gagneux, where they ran a week-long workshop with five young artists from LimeLight Creative Arts in Oranmore. Each artist learned new art skills while developing friendships and learning about their community. By the end, 12 paintings were created based on photographs from Old Ireland in Colour. These paintings are being showcased in Lorient as part of this exhibition at the Festival Interceltique, which this year has an Irish theme.

