Waterford's Transported Convict Women, A Herstory
Project Updates (November 2026)

This update is an opportunity to reflect on another eventful and fruitful year for the group. Our outreach and impact are increasingly visible while our work continues to be guided by an unwavering commitment to remembering the women who were transported from Waterford to Australia and ensuring that their stories are preserved, shared, and better understood by future generations.

What makes this project so special is that it continues to bring together a remarkable range of people, bonnet makers, descendants, researchers, community groups, libraries, museums, educational institutions and supporters from Ireland, Australia and beyond. This collective effort has allowed us to reach audiences far beyond Waterford while remaining firmly rooted in the local herstories that inspired the project.

Kieran Cronin, Chairperson

Tides of Remembrance: Stitching Bonnets for Waterford's Transported Women Workshop

One of the highlights of the year was the delivery of the *Tides of Remembrance: Stitching Bonnets for Waterford's Transported Women* workshop funded as part of the SETU Sustainability in the Arts Festival 2026.

The project invited Honours students from Georgia Southern University to explore the experiences of transported women through creativity, research, and remembrance. Participants created commemorative bonnets inspired by the lives of Waterford women who were transported to Australia, while also reflecting on themes of migration, resilience, identity, and belonging.

The workshop demonstrated how historical storytelling can continue to engage new generations and showed the value of collaboration between community groups and educational institutions.

Digital Repository of Ireland

One of our most significant achievements has been the continued development of our collection with the **Digital Repository of Ireland (DRI)**.

To date, **269 bonnets**, together with their supporting research, have been photographed by professional photographers and uploaded to the DRI as part of the *Roses from the Heart* digital collection.

This represents a major step forward in safeguarding the material and research associated with these Waterford women. Their stories are now digitally preserved and accessible to researchers, communities and future generations.

Roses from the Heart Digital Collection Link: https://repository.dri.ie/catalog/tq582j90q

Beyond the Walls – TU Dublin, Grangegorman

Another very exciting development is our involvement in the ***Beyond the Walls*** exhibition at the **TU Dublin Academic Hub & Library, Grangegorman**.

The exhibition includes **35 Waterford bonnets**, alongside historical research and the stories of the women they commemorate.

Grangegorman has a long and complex history as a place of care and confinement, encompassing a workhouse, asylum and prison. *Beyond the Walls* explores this history through archive material, artefacts, photographs, artwork and poetry.

It is particularly meaningful for us to see the stories of Waterford's transported women included within this wider historical landscape.

The exhibition officially opened on **Tuesday, 22nd September at 6.30pm** at the TU Dublin Academic Hub & Library, Grangegorman.

A Special Moment at Grangegorman



We were also delighted to see the project receive recognition during the official opening of the new TU Dublin Academic Hub & Library.

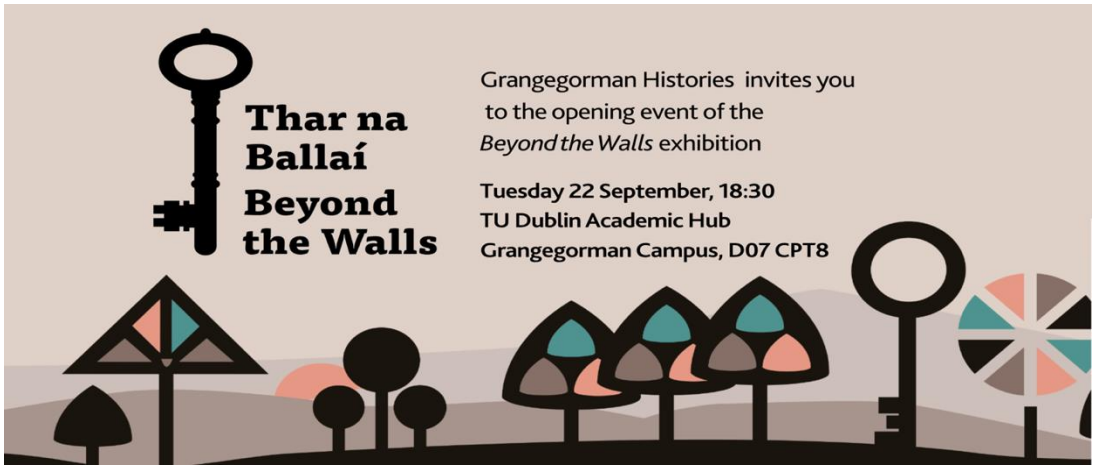
On **Friday, 11th September 2026, An Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD** officially opened the new facility at TU Dublin's Grangegorman Campus. During the visit, he took time to view our bonnet exhibition as part of *Beyond the Walls*.



An Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD was pictured with **James Lawless TD, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science**; **Katherine Martin, Project Manager, Grangegorman Histories** and **Philip Cohen, Chair of Grangegorman Histories**.

In his remarks, the Taoiseach spoke about the remarkable history of Grangegorman and the importance of ensuring that, as the site looks towards the future, its past is not forgotten. He specifically highlighted the restoration of North House and the *Beyond the Walls* exhibition as important ways of keeping that heritage alive.

It was a very special moment for our project to have the stories of the transported women highlighted on such an important occasion. We are truly grateful to **TU Dublin and everyone involved in the *Beyond the Walls* exhibition** for providing an opportunity for these women's stories to reach a much wider audience.





Roses from the Heart Bonnets at the Beyond the Walls Exhibition



TU Dublin Academic Hub & Library

Ireland and Australia

We have also been fortunate to participate in a number of events strengthening the connection between the stories of the transported women and the continuing relationship between Ireland and Australia. These have included our involvement at the **Australian Ambassador's Residence at Abbey Lea in Killiney**, where the opening of the **Garden of Irish Roses (Gairdín Rósanna na hÉireann)** provided a particularly poignant connection to the women whose stories we commemorate. The garden was officially opened by **Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.**





Garden tribute to 'Irish roses' sent to Australia

Clodagh Finn

The contrast could not have been more striking. The Irish women transported to Australia in the 18th and 19th centuries left this country as convicts but now they have been honoured among the many "Irish roses" who helped to build that country.

All of the Irish women who left Ireland for Australia — including the convicts and those sent on assisted emigration schemes — were commemorated at the unveiling of the Irish Roses Garden at Abbey Lea in Killiney, the Australian ambassador's residence in Dublin.

Ambassador Chantelle Taylor explained: "The garden [designed by horticulturist Olga Muzychuk] is a living tribute to the young Irish girls who left these shores and journeyed to Australia in search, and in hope, of a new future.

"Many endured profound hardship and uncertainty. Yet through extraordinary courage, resilience, and determination, they built lives and communities across Australia."



The Irish Roses Garden, commemorating the Irish women sent to Australia, was unveiled at the Australian ambassador's residence.

It was striking, too, to see these women recalled by Sam Mostyn, the governor-general of Australia, who unveiled the dedication plaque during the first event of her visit to Ireland to mark the 80th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

"The 'Irish roses' brought with them a rich heritage to join in the building of a nation of peace, prosperity, safety, and freedom," she said.

Those women formed an important part in the story of Australia, and they and their descendants — the one in 10 Australians who claim Irish heritage — enriched the country beyond measure, she said.

While the women's descendants are now found in every aspect of Australian life, from the public service and judiciary to the arts, music, and sport, the women's lives were often marked by hardship and loss.

Many never returned to Ireland again, such as Mary Walsh, a married mother of three who was sentenced to seven years and transported to Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) with her infant daughter in 1840 for "aiding the theft of cloth", a charge she always denied.

Her daughter later died in Hobart and she never again saw the husband or two sons she left behind in Clonmel, Co Tipperary.

Her life is commemorated with a bonnet made by Margaret Richards as part of Waterford's Transported Convict Women, A Herstory, alongside a biographical note prepared by Ann Fitzgerald.

It was one of several bonnets on display at Abbey Lea but they represent only a small portion of the Waterford bonnet collection, a community project designed to commemorate some of the 25,566 women convicted and transported from Ireland and Britain to Australia between 1788 and 1853.

Ms Mostyn and Ms Richards stood in front of the display to acknowledge a woman who could so easily have fallen through the cracks of history.

"I think we must always be asking ourselves, who's been left out of history?" said Ms Mostyn.

"Women are typically left out of history, often our stories are overlooked, our contributions are overlooked," she added, highlighting the significant and enduring contribution made by Irish women who were treated so poorly when they first arrived.

The bonnet project, created by conceptual artist Christina Henri in Tasmania more than 20 years ago, is intended to make a visible connection to the thousands of women sent as convicts to Van Diemen's Land by recreating the bonnets they once wore.

She called it the 'Roses from the Heart Memorial Project', a commemorative name that must have been unimaginable to the women who often suffered anti-Irish sentiment, prejudice, and vitriol in the colonial press.

Now, more than two centuries on, those women have a garden dedicated to them, which was unveiled in a ceremony also attended by Lord Mayor of Dublin Daryl Barron, Emer Higgins, the minister of state at the Department of Children, Disability, and Equality, and others.

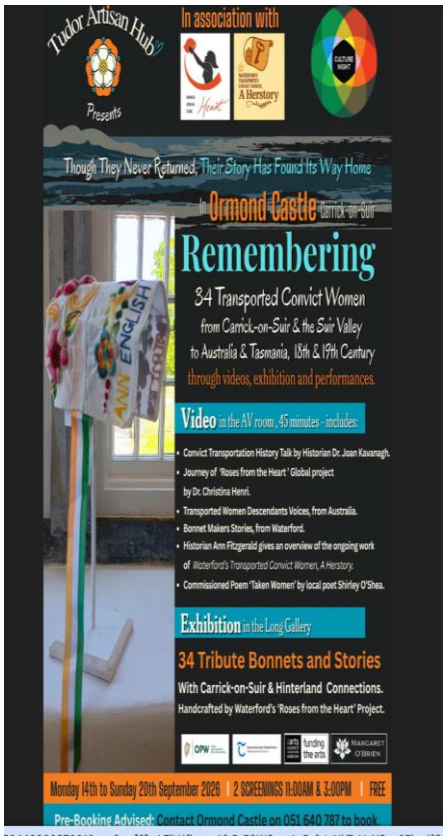
Irish Examiner 28th Sept 2026

We have also been invited to participate in the Waterford Walls community mural project**, celebrating 80 years of diplomatic relations between Australia and Ireland.**

The street artwork, located on the exterior of **Walsh Park GAA Stadium in Waterford**, provides another wonderful opportunity for the story of the transported women to become part of contemporary Waterford and its cultural landscape.



Carrick-on-Suir – Culture Night 2026



On **Friday, 18th September**, we participated in a special event in the Long Gallery at **Ormond Castle, Carrick-on-Suir**, as part of Culture Night 2026. ***Though They Never Returned, Their Story Has Found Its Way Home*** tells the stories of **34 women with connections to Carrick-on-Suir and the wider Suir Valley** who were transported to Australia.

Through spoken word, music, slow art and community participation, the evening brought these women's stories back into the community from which their journeys began. At the heart of the event were **34 tribute bonnets**, together with the research and stories preserved by *Waterford's Transported Convict Women, A Herstory*, alongside an artistic response created here in Carrick-on-Suir.

We feel that this kind of community engagement is an important part of preserving local history. These women left Waterford more than 150 years ago, but their stories are now finding their way home.



Bonnet display in the Long Gallery at Ormond Castle, Carrick-on-Suir



Writers from Margaret O'Brien's Writing Changes Lives community including Mary McGrath, Ethel Power, Jillian Wheaton, Jacqueline Delahunty Wall, Maura Barrett, Rosa Wheaton.

Royal Irish Academy Exhibition



Curated in collaboration with Grangegorman Histories and the Royal Irish Academy, the Waterford's Transported Convict Women online exhibition was launched at the Royal Irish Academy on 2nd June, 2026 and is freely available through the Royal Irish Academy website: https://www.ria.ie/research-programmes/grangegorman-histories/waterfords-transported-convict-women/

Scan here:

A major milestone for the group this year was the launch of the online exhibition *Waterford's Transported Convict Women* at the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin on 2nd June. The event was attended by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Cllr Ray McAdam and the Australian Ambassador to Ireland HE Chantelle Taylor.

The exhibition provided a national platform to share the stories of Waterford women who experienced transportation and highlighted the considerable research undertaken by members of the group including Eleanor Murphy, Ann Fitzgerald and Aisling Gordon over many years. Seeing this work presented through such a respected institution was a proud moment and recognition of the dedication shown by so many bonnet makers, researchers and contributors. I believe that the website will be a flagship for the project into the future and create greater awareness of the work which we do.

Finally, We would also like to acknowledge the support and collaboration of our many partners, including the Digital Repository of Ireland, South East Technological University, TU Dublin, Grangegorman Histories, Georgia Southern University, the Australian Embassy, and the wider heritage community.

While our group remains an independent community initiative, we greatly value the opportunities that these partnerships provide and the role they play in helping us bring the stories of Waterford's transported women to new audiences.

As we look to the future, we remain guided by a simple but important objective: to ensure that the women who left Waterford under the most difficult circumstances are no longer forgotten. Through research, creativity, education and remembrance, we continue to return their herstories to the historical record and to the communities from which they came.

Looking Ahead

In the spring a group of us are also planning a visit to the **Rose Garden at Abbey Lea, the Australian Ambassador's Residence in Killiney**, followed later that day by a visit to the *Beyond the Walls* exhibition at Grangegorman.

It promises to be a meaningful day, connecting the story of the bonnets, which originated in Australia, with the lives and stories of the women here in Ireland.

There is still a great deal of work ahead of us, but we feel that the project has reached an important stage.

What began as a small voluntary initiative has developed into a significant programme of **historical research, digital preservation, exhibitions and community engagement**, with an increasingly wide network of people and organisations helping to bring these stories to the public.

We are particularly conscious of the importance of working with historians, libraries, heritage organisations and local communities to ensure that the research we are undertaking contributes to the wider understanding and preservation of Waterford's history.

Our hope is that, together, we can ensure that the women who left Waterford so many years ago are no longer forgotten, and that their stories become a lasting part of the historical record.

Contact details:
For further information please contact convictwomen@outlook.com