



ACHILL Connacht rugby coach Pat Larm presenting a signed Mayo jersey to Justin Barrett at a fundraising raffle. **Page 11**

Memories of Achill exhibition a big success

Bog oak sculptures a timeless piece of Achill

EDWIN MCGREAL
edwinmcgreal@mayonews.ie



An exhibition entitled 'Memories' which concluded in Achill on Sunday last was a huge success and organisers are hoping to re-run the exhibition next August.

The exhibition opened in Patten's Bar, Derreens on Thursday night, March 16, closed on Sunday and was in demand every day of its duration.

It featured three distinct collections, all with a strong Achill theme.

There was a series of photographs of Achill landscape and its people taken in 1974 by Dutch photographer Conn Mönnich during a trip to Achill; a series of pencil drawings from the early 1980s by another Dutch national, Petie Buchel, who is based in Polranny, Achill and a collection of Achill bog oak, sculpted by local man Liam Kelly.

The bog oak is upwards of 4,000 years old so each part of the exhibition had a historical reference point, hence the name Memories.

Conn Mönnich was present at the launch, returning to Achill 43 years on from his original visit, together with Petie Buchel and Liam Kelly.

Mönnich came to Achill in 1974 as part of a



▲ EXHIBITION Pictured at the launch of their joint exhibition 'Memories' in Patten's Bar, Derreens, Achill recently were, from left: Conn Mönnich, Petie Buchel and Liam Kelly. Pic: Jake Scott

holiday along the west coast of Ireland. He captured some wonderful shots of the island and its people and, after his retirement, he went through his negatives and has brought these pictures back to life.

It's the first time these pictures were on show. Mönnich's photographs showed Achill landscapes with noticeable differences in the roads and houses from 43 years ago. The portrait photographs he took captured a different age too.

Certainly, the picture of seven young men on the island showcases a different kind of cool. Young men Eoin Masterson, Tommy Scanlon, Gerard Duggan, Tommy Masterson, Martin Masterson, Tomás McLoughlin and Michael Carney are each looking very hip in their own unique way.

Petie Buchel's distinctive drawings vividly capture Achill in the early 1980s. One of the most interesting is that of the Amethyst in Keel, when it was still open. Closed for years,

the building is now being reconstructed for a new pub in the village.

Liam Kelly's sculptures are very eye-catching pieces of work and he told *The Mayo News* how his interest in the area came about purely by chance over 20 years ago.

After 25 years working in the hotel and catering sector in England, he was back home in Achill working on the bog in Maum when he spotted something which caught his attention.

"There was a guy in the bog beside me and a fella came along and took bog wood from him and put it in the boot and gave your man £20. I said to him after: 'Did your man actually pay you for that?' He told me the customer was going to go home, polish it and put it in his garden. I said anyone could do that. He said £50 says you couldn't. I won the bet! That's how it started.

"I did a piece, there was no real difficulty except for the finish. I had done bits in terms of polishing old furniture and I found beeswax worked best for the bog oak. Sometimes I use liquid wax," he said.

His first exhibition took place in the Minuan Bar in Keel over the Christmas and New Year of 1995/96. He had low expectations, assuming Achill people would not be hugely interested in bog oak as they were so familiar with it.

"I ended up selling all I had. I came to the conclusion that if I could sell it to locals, I could sell it to anyone," Kelly said.

The next big step was being asked to do a sculpture for former Irish President Mary Robinson and Kelly is now doing the sculptures full-time and has exhibited in a series of galleries.

He has had the Achill bog oak carbon dated by Queens University, Belfast who confirmed it is, on average, 4,000 years old. Kelly only uses Achill bog oak for his work.

BALLINROBE

Sponsors are pictured at the launch of Ballinrobe Smarter Travel 5k and 10k Walk/Run **Page 20**



KILLAWALLA

The Walshs enjoying a community function held to honour retiring postmaster Michael Walsh **Page 19**

