

Anne Coughlan, d.2016

Anne was a native of County Offaly. She grew up on the family farm at Geashill, ten miles from Tullamore.

Educated at the Sacred Heart School(Tullamore) and University College Dublin, she began her library career with Laois County Library service in the 1960s. She always acknowledged the influence of Paddy White, who was Laois County Librarian at that time, on her approach to the profession of librarianship. Her rigorous and effective management of the library service in Offaly owed much to his example. After obtaining her Diploma in Librarianship (1972), she was appointed as County Librarian at Tullamore in her home county of Offaly. She succeeded Paddy Daly who had held the post for many years. Anne held the post of County Librarian from 1973 - 2008 (the first 3 years being in an Acting capacity). Ann also held an FLAI.



Anne was one of a number of young women appointed as County Librarians in the 1970s-Kathleen Browne, Helen Kilcline and Hanna O'Sullivan.

She set about developing the service throughout the county. Her first priority was to establish the Library Headquarters and Main Branch Library at O'Connor Square in modern accommodation. This she achieved in quite a short space of time. She embarked on a programme of upgrading the network of Branch Libraries throughout the county. Starting with Daingean and extending to Edenderry, Banagher, Ferbane and Clara. All were bright, modern, purpose built buildings. Within ten years most of the infrastructure for the library service in the county was in place. Most of it happened during the recessionary period of the 1980s, but because the County Council had adopted the library development plan and with the approval of An Chomhairle Leabharlanna the necessary rolling funding and staffing was forthcoming. The one exception was Birr library. The belated completion of the Birr library project after 2000 was an exceptional heritage development that encompassed the best design with careful restoration of a nineteenth century convent building. The discovery of long forgotten Pugin style roof beams during the renovation now look down upon the main reading room adding to the sense of sensitive development.

The Schools Service to primary schools in the county was one of her most passionate objectives. In spite of funding difficulties, the service was maintained and developed and was never allowed to suffer any major curtailment.

Another service dear to her heart was the development of the Local Studies Department at Tullamore Headquarters. She was a pioneer in seeking out and protecting local archives. A photographic collection was built up and modern facilities were provided for researchers.

Anne embraced the provision of exhibitions in libraries around the county, from the National Library of Ireland, The National Museum and elsewhere.

Above all Anne Coughlan believed that the role of the Library Service was to serve the wider community and be a vital part

of it. She worked closely with her local authority colleagues to ensure that support and funding became available for worthwhile projects. She prepared her budgets meticulously and always kept control of expenditure. She also worked with her colleagues in the wider library world and was a diligent and regular attendee at County Librarian Section meetings and conferences of the LAI.

She dedicated her working life to the Library Service in Offaly and Ireland. Coming from a sporting family (her brother Larry played football for Offaly and won an all-Ireland medal when Offaly beat Kerry (1972)), Anne was a keen follower of sport. She had a lifelong interest in tennis and was a talented player. She was an active member of Tullamore Golf Club. She travelled widely, including to France and Russia.

Anne Coughlan left a legacy of clear achievement in County Offaly and beyond. Four members of her staff went on to become County Librarians in their own right; a lasting testament to her inspirational style.

Brendan Martin (Wicklow) and Tom King (formerly Carlow).

Additional information was provided by Deirdre Ellis-King and Norma McDermott