

Press Release



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St Molaise Shrine – A New Year Treat for Fermanagh County Museum

As everyone looks forward to a New Year and bright future, Fermanagh County Museum announces that a little piece of Fermanagh's past will find a permanent home in the County.

A 19th century copy of the St Molaise book shrine from Devenish Island, the Soiscel Molaise has been purchased by Fermanagh County Museum at a London auction and will be placed on display for everyone to enjoy. The original Soiscel Molaise, which is in the National Museum of Ireland would have contained a holy book, perhaps the Gospels.

Lord Belmore noticed it in a recent auction catalogue and lost no time in letting the Museum know that this precious piece of Fermanagh's heritage had come on to the market. Sarah McHugh, Manager of Museum Services, contacted the Association of Friends of the Museum and Fermanagh District Council and funds were raised to ensure that the item could be bought. The Association of Friends agreed to provide up to £800 – and Fermanagh District Council agreed to match that amount.

Lord Belmore, who attended the auction at Bonhams in London on behalf of the Museum said:

“You can never be sure how much an item like the Soiscel Molaise will sell for at a public auction. It always depends on who attends or is telephoning in with a higher bid. The best laid plans can fail if another collector with more funds gets involved. Shortly before the auction began, Sir Bob Geldof walked in to the room and my heart sank a little as I suspected he might be interested in the 19th century copy of the Soiscel Molaise. When the auction began, I was very relieved to see that his interest lay elsewhere and not on this prime piece of Fermanagh’s heritage. It is an amazing copy of the book shrine and I am delighted that it has come to its rightful home in Fermanagh.”

Ian Bailey, Chairperson of the Association of the Friends of Fermanagh County Museum said:

“The Association of Friends was set up to provide support to our local Museum and we are so pleased that our funds can be used to purchase important artefacts of Fermanagh. This copy of the St Molaise Book Shrine is a key part of the heritage of Devenish Island and we are proud to have played a part in protecting it for the future.”

Sarah McHugh, Manager of Museum Services said:

“It has been a lovely New Year’s present for the Museum to have obtained this artefact. Often museums have difficulty obtaining funds to purchase artefacts like this, especially at such short notice. Both the Association of Friends and Fermanagh District Council reacted very quickly to provide support for this purchase and I am very grateful to them. Having a supporter like Lord Belmore, who is one of the Museum’s patrons, helps the Museum in doing its job of safeguarding the history of Fermanagh as a source of enjoyment, education and culture for all.”

For more information telephone 028 6632 5000 from NI or 048 6632 5000 from ROI.

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