

Athea's dream is coming true

By **NORMA PRENDIVILLE**

THE dream of a folk theatre in Athea is

beginning to become more of a reality as the Cairde Duchais project prepares to celebrate its first anniversary. Already, the project

has chalked up a number of successes, and in 12 months has produced an impressive record of work. All of this work - particularly that of collecting,

recording and preserving the music, songs, history and folklore of Athea and the surrounding area - can stand on its own.

But the work has added importance when viewed as a strand within the overall aim of establishing Athea as an important source and centre for cultural heritage.

And long-term, of course, this is what the Cairde Duchais project is about.

But the project is also about creating job opportunities and providing training for openings in the field of traditional entertainment.

"We gave everybody on the course a grounding in music - helping them to learn to read music and to play an instrument," project director, Domhnall de Barra, explained to the Limerick Leader.

Some of the 17-strong band of FAS-funded workers took naturally to the musical training. Some were already gifted musicians who are now in a better position to be able to teach others and thereby improve their employment prospects.

In all cases, the training was an important part of the strategy of building up expertise in traditional entertainment.

But the project has also recognised that there are a number of dimensions to providing high-quality, traditional entertainment.

For this reason, a lot of attention has been paid to different aspects of stage craft - such as lighting, costumes and props.

And project participants have had the opportunity to put these new insights to work in a very concrete way through a number of productions - a youth concert, a one-act play and programme of music and dance

Nativity play with a group of fourth class children.

But one of the most successful undertakings has been the compilation of a very comprehensive digest of local songs and poems.

"Some 95 per cent of these would have been composed by people who lived in the area," said Domhnall, pointing out that there were "more songs and more poetry written in this area" than virtually any other comparable locality in Ireland.

Emigration is a very strong theme running through the songs in particular.

"This place was practically empty back in the 40s and 50s," said Domhnall. "Every house here in this parish knew what emigration meant. Consequently most of the songs would have been composed by people who had either gone away and were looking back nostalgically or else they were laments for those who had gone."

Many of the songs and poems, however, date back well beyond this century.

"It is important we keep them" said Domhnall. "If we don't get them now while people are still alive who remember them then within the next 20 years, they will disappear altogether."

"Our intention is to produce a book of these songs and also a tape," he explained.

While he admits that many of the poems are not great as poetry, their overall value is great as they "talk and deal with things as they happen - everyday things - and as such they are pages of history."

The project has also involved itself in important work on local history and folklore. A history file of



Patricia Healy, left, Noreen O'Connell, Kay Liston and Josephine Griffin at work in the workshop in Athea. (LL)

recorded, drawing on local documents and accounts as well as the National Museum and newspaper files. And the plan is to develop this into a book.

But, warns Domhnall, this will not be the usual, local history book. Rather it will take one family through four generations, and from both a male and a female perspective, it will tell their story and its links with local events and national and international events as well as bringing in myths and festivals.

A folklore register has also been established. The project workers spent long hours with the older people in the parish recording their memories of growing up, growing to school, of work patterns and of customs and rituals in the early decades of the century.

"We have gone out to as many as the old generation as we could," said Domhnall.

Now the project has been given the go-ahead for another 12 months at least, and Domhnall has a clear view of how he sees the plan unfolding.

"We want to put together a package for schools, bringing in different elements and traditions," he said.

A family tree coming for



Harry Riordan, Mick Kelly and Donal Dwyer. (LL)

also planned - building on knowledge gleaned through cataloguing all the marked graves in Athea, A b b e y f e a l e, Templeglantine, Ardagh, Glin, Moyvane and Duagh. As a follow-up to that work too, the project hopes to build up information on

are now without headstones.

They also hope to develop further the idea of travelling shows - with different groupings providing high-quality entertainment at different locations throughout West Limerick.

It is an ambitious sched-

achieved given the enthusiasm and commitment of the project's backers.

"But," points out a grateful Domhnall de Barra, "it would not have been possible without the help of FAS, particularly that of Pat Cotter and Joan Collins, who were behind us all the



Marion Kennedy and Joe Stapleton at work. (LL)

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Father and son fined

MICHAEL Duggan, Kilmastulla, Birdhill, was fined £180, when he pleaded guilty at Bruff court to driving without insurance on December 7 last. He also had his license endorsed.

Una Power, solicitor for Mr Duggan, said that her client's father, William Duggan, who owned the car, had assumed that his son was insured to drive.

William Duggan was fined £300, with his licence endorsed, for permitting his son to drive without insur-