



Order has been restored in the walled garden at Mount Trenchard, Foynes.

Pictures: Michael Cowhey

# New life for old garden at Mount Trenchard

Historic and atmospheric garden now open for morning visits

**Norma Prendiville**

TWO years ago, it was a wilderness. Briars thrived and trees grew out through long-decayed glass-houses and the order and plenty that once abounded there were just a memory.

Abandoned and forgotten, the walled garden at Mount Trenchard, outside Foynes, was a secret garden indeed, but not one that anyone wanted to enter.

But owner Frieda Carmody had a hope for this place with its high

walls and underground stream, its heritage apple trees and overgrown paths. It was a place, in her mind, with a rich past – and she, somehow, believed in its future.

This week, that future arrived and the garden opened for its first visitors.

Looking about the ordered space that now has the pared-down look of a new garden, garden designer Maighread Hourihane recalls the chaos that first greeted her. “You could only go through it with a machete,” she says wonderingly.

The garden had once provided the estate of the Spring-Rices with bounty – but almost nothing remained of that, just a few rough outlines of beds. Even the walls had fallen in in several places.

The painstaking work of clearing the garden began about two years ago. It was slow work, repairing and rebuilding walls and uncovering the bare bones of this once-thriving garden. And though it appeared that little had survived, careful excavation threw up some real gems – the root cellar, an original furnace and piping system for the

glass-houses.

Of the plants, and planting schemes, almost nothing remained. However, Maighread says with evident satisfaction, they did manage to salvage many though not all of the heritage apple trees. Sadly, no old gardening notebooks or plans were found to guide the restoration. As Maighread explains: “The house is steeped in history but there was nothing about the garden.”

It was, in a very real sense, a blank canvas. But one which Frieda Carmody was determined to fill with her concept of a physic garden.

The physic garden, she explains, is one which is both beautiful and useful, one in which all the plants are associated with homeopathy, with old remedies and with healing. It was a popular idea in the distant past, she adds, but few such gardens remain now.

In the new outline at Mount Trenchard, the garden is divided into planting areas that correspond with different parts of the human body. There are plants associated with the central nervous system,

the gastro-intestinal system, the cardiovascular system.

And everything, Frieda stresses, is organic.

“It is a work in progress,” she makes the point again and again. There is a famous physic garden in Chelsea, she explains and her hope is that the garden in Mt Trenchard will develop and will attract herbalists as well as garden enthusiasts. But it will also be a place where even the casual visitor can learn about the health-giving and restorative powers of various plants.

And most of the plants are common ones – feverfew, marjoram, tarragon, coriander, rue, fennel. In time, Frieda explains, explanations for all of them will be given in both Irish and English.

The garden has yet to come into its own. There is a kind of rawness about it still, despite the old trees and old walls. But it has atmosphere. It is a calm and lovely space. And what is both inevitable and best of all it will grow into itself. For the next few months, you can visit there any morning from 10am to 1pm. And group tours can be organised.



Garden designer Maighread Hourihane

## newsinbrief

### Limerick aid day in Tipp

HUNDREDS of school children from Limerick will this Thursday attend aid organisation Bóthar's annual Open Day.

The event will be held at Roscrea Livestock Mart and will be attended by children drawn from schools in the locality as well as from as far afield as Limerick, Dublin and Clare. The children will get a real insight into the aid organisation's work and many of the animals it places with poverty stricken families across the world.

Among those attending will be children from St. Munchin's CBS, Shelbourne Road, Limerick; Cloverfield NS, Dromkeen; Limerick Project School, O'Connell Avenue and Castleconnell NS.

### Methadone HSE stats

MORE people are on methadone in the Limerick area than any other region outside Dublin/Mid-Leinster, new HSE figures have confirmed.

A total of 276 were prescribed the opiate substitute in 2011. The figures show that 78 were women and 43 were inmates of Limerick Prison.

Four teenagers took courses in methadone last year, the stats revealed.

**Exercise in futility**

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