

Ellen Hutchins Festival Annual Report 2023

9th February 2023

A celebration was held at the Ellen Hutchins Building, HQ of the Environmental Research Institute (ERI) of UCC, to mark the anniversary of Ellen's death, 9th February, now appropriately positioned between the St Brigid's Day bank holiday and the International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11th February). Extracts from *Seaweed & Sealing Wax 2* were performed with Karen Minihan reading from Ellen's letters and Finola Finlay providing structure and notes. The podcast version of *Seaweed & Sealing Wax 2* was launched. Dr Astrid Wingler spoke about telling the story of women in science.

Open House at the Ellen Hutchins Building

On Saturday 11th February there was an Open House session for families and adults at the Ellen Hutchins Building with a display of archives, letter writing and hand lenses to use to see the miniature world of mosses.

Talk to Beara Historical Society

Also in February, Madeline Hutchins gave a talk to the Beara Historical Society on Ellen, entitled 'From the Letters of Ellen Hutchins (1785-1815) Botanist of Bantry Bay'. It incorporated recordings of Karen Minihan reading extracts from Ellen's letters to her brothers and to botanists. The talk was well attended and well received.

West Cork Literary Festival

In July, *Seaweed & Sealing Wax 3*, the performance / talk on botanists' letters, was part of the West Cork Literary Festival. It played to a sell out audience in the wonderfully plant-decorated space at Future Forests, Kealkill and was a resounding success. Karen Minihan read the letters, with Finola Finlay as MC providing structure and explanatory notes. The piece featured Oonagh Hurley talking about her research and development for her painting of Ellen and Marianne Lee, author of the historical novel, *A Quiet Tide*, speaking about what drew her to Ellen's story and reading from the novel. This, the third and final piece in the *Seaweed & Sealing Wax* series, had funding from a Cork County Council arts grant.

Plant Detectives

A County Cork Heritage Grant and ERI/UCC funding enabled the Festival to develop a new initiative, a Plant Detectives Trail for families, run in Future Forests plant centre, Kealkill in the Ellen Hutchins Festival. It was well received and can be used again in future years.

Ellen Hutchins Festival

August saw the 9th Ellen Hutchins Festival in the Bantry Bay area during Heritage Week. There were 26 events over 9 days, with a great mix of established and new ones. Jane Sheehan spoke about Maude Delap on a boat trip in Glengarriff Harbour and Dr Ronan Hennessy (UCC) led a geology walk. Two sessions were run by Dave Wall of the National Biodiversity Data Centre on Explore Your Shore. Phoebe O'Brien of the Great Irish Grasslands projects led a walking talk as did Dr Astrid Wingler (UCC). Dr Daniel Buckley gave a talk on the Gearagh Alluvial Woodland.

An expanded programme of art and crafts activities was run in collaboration with local organisations. Pacie Grews ran workshops making macrame objects from marine waste in the lovely space at the Garden of Reimagination run by Two Green Shoots (Glengarriff), and Sonia Caldwell of Kilcoe Studios (Ballydehob) gave a fascinating talk on Our Plant Fibres.

The children's nature art sessions at Bantry House this year were held under the Festival's parachute shelter and gazebo sited on the terrace lawns overlooking Bantry Bay. The children's sessions with the wildlife rangers in Glengarriff Woods were extended to include story telling and clay woodland sprite activities with Arran Towers.

Connections with the Past was a living history event to tie in with the Heritage Week 2023 theme and involved historical re-enactor Carrie O'Flynn, local resident and historian Angela O'Donovan and Ellen researcher and relative, Madeline Hutchins, in conversation about everyday things in the past remembered and the past researched.

The second and final performance of Seaweed & Sealing Wax 3 took place on Ellen's home turf at Ballylickey, this year in the Ouvane Falls Hotel. It featured Gráinne Lyons talking about her chapter about Ellen in her book, *Wild Atlantic Women*. We incorporated the world premiere of a short film by Wombat Media about wildflowers on Long Island. Cork County Councillor Patrick Gerard Murphy attended and spoke enthusiastically about the Festival.

Loan from Trinity College Dublin

The Herbarium of the Botany Department of Trinity College Dublin agreed a loan of three sheets of Ellen's seaweed specimens for display in the Ellen Hutchins Archives Cabinet in Bantry Library during the Festival and then in the Cabinet in the Ellen Hutchins Building at the ERI at UCC.

Culture Night

The ERI of UCC and the Festival ran an Open House session in the Ellen Hutchins Building for Culture Night in Cork in September. The event was aimed at adults and families. There were art activities using leaves and microscope work with cabbages etc. Frances Gallagher showed people how to make seaweed specimens and Carrie O'Flynn ran a workshop on letter writing, folding and sealing in the style of the early 1800s. The seaweed specimens from Trinity were on display in the Archives Cabinet whose semi-permanent home is in the Ellen Hutchins Reading Room there.

Wider Connections and Publications including Ellen

The Festival was delighted to see (and be involved in) other organisations' and individuals' celebration of Ellen. Shevaun Doherty's painting of one of Ellen's seaweed specimens in the herbarium at Trinity College Dublin was bought by the Crawford Art Gallery for the National Art Collection and featured in their 2023 exhibition, *Behind the Scenes*.

Author, Gráinne Lyons, had been given help by Madeline on her chapter on Ellen in her debut book, *Wild Atlantic Women, Walking Ireland's west coast*, which was published in May.

The major publication, *Drawn from Nature – the flowering of Irish botanical art* by Patricia Butler includes a substantial piece on Ellen Hutchins with high quality illustrations.

The Festival provided support to Moondance in their filming of Shevaun Doherty telling Ellen's story for the RTÉ series on the Irish Coastal Atlas to be aired in 2024.

The Festival and Clare Heardman were the subject of a Heritage Council film about funding.

The Festival made a major funding application to the Creative Climate Action programme entitled Magnificent Moss. This was in collaboration with the ERI and involved County Cork artists, but it did not achieve the funding. In parallel, discussions were had with Cork County Council staff members about possible plans for street furniture and mossy features in Bantry.

New Finds and Ellen's Letters

A number of new finds increased the Ellen Hutchins archives, including a botany book (by D.C. Willdenow) and one on natural history, both with Ellen's name and a date written in them. These were celebrated in an article by Madeline Hutchins for the Irish Heritage News published on New Year's Day 2024. <https://irishheritagenews.ie/new-finds-add-to-the-story-of-irelands-first-female-botanist-ellen-hutchins/>

Work on transcribing Ellen's letters continued and the correspondence between Ellen and Dawson Turner in 1813 was made available on the website. Plans are in place for completing transcription of all the Hutchins / Turner correspondence by the end of 2024.

Funders

The Festival is grateful to the following for funding given this year: Cork County Council for an arts grant and a heritage grant; ERI / UCC; and Bantry Credit Union.

Madeline Hutchins

An organiser of the Ellen Hutchins Festival

9th February 2024