

IF I WERE A BLACK BIRD



Exhibition begins: I'd Whistle and Sing 

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NATIONAL
LIBRARY
OF IRELAND

1897 1924

Dublin Mayo Galway

TJ Kierman was born in Dublin in 1897 and Delia Murphy in Ardara, Co Mayo, in 1902. Delia's parents were Jack Murphy and Anna Agnes Murphy (née Fleming). Jack Murphy was a Mapoman who had been successful as a gold and silver prospector in the Klondike, Canada, and Leadville, Colorado, during the 1890s. He and his wife returned to Ireland and soon after Delia's birth he bought **Mount Jennings House**, Hollymount, Co Mayo where she spent her childhood.

Delia was a lively child, who always liked to sing. When very young she befriended local traveller children and learned some of their songs. She attended the local national school, and subsequently went on a boarder to **PROVISIONAL CONVENT, TOWN AND DOMINICAN CONVENT, COLES STREET, DUBLIN**. In 1919 she began to study commerce at **UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, GRAFTON**, and graduated with a BA in 1923.

During her last year at college she met TJ Kierman, a tax inspector in Galway. He had been a pupil of **ST MARY'S COLLEGE, BATHNINERY**, and was a graduate of **UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN**. They married in 1924.

1 **Green-Clay-Kerridge**
Jack Murphy, Delia Murphy (left) and TJ Kierman in the Emerald Gold Rush in 1898. He was married to a Canadian, Charlotte, who he married in 1898 with a divorce. There he met Anna Fleming. The married and returned to Ireland in 1901. A year later Delia was born.

2 **Mount Jennings House, Hollymount, Cleonsilla, Co Mayo**
Two years after Delia's birth in 1902, Jack Murphy bought Mount Jennings House, a substantial Georgian house on a large farm, from Charles Young. Delia's childhood was spent in this house, which remained in the Murphy family until the 1990s. It was later demolished.

3 **St. Mary's, Cleonsilla, Co Mayo**
at the top of the century (European photo)

4 **Cumshingaun National School, Hollymount, Cleonsilla, Co Mayo, 1908**
Delia is seated in the front row, 2nd from the right. Her younger brother Dublin is third from the right. Just now she was a pupil at Cumshingaun school from 1906 to 1911. She had to take a mile or two of hill walking to reach the school each day. Delia later reported:

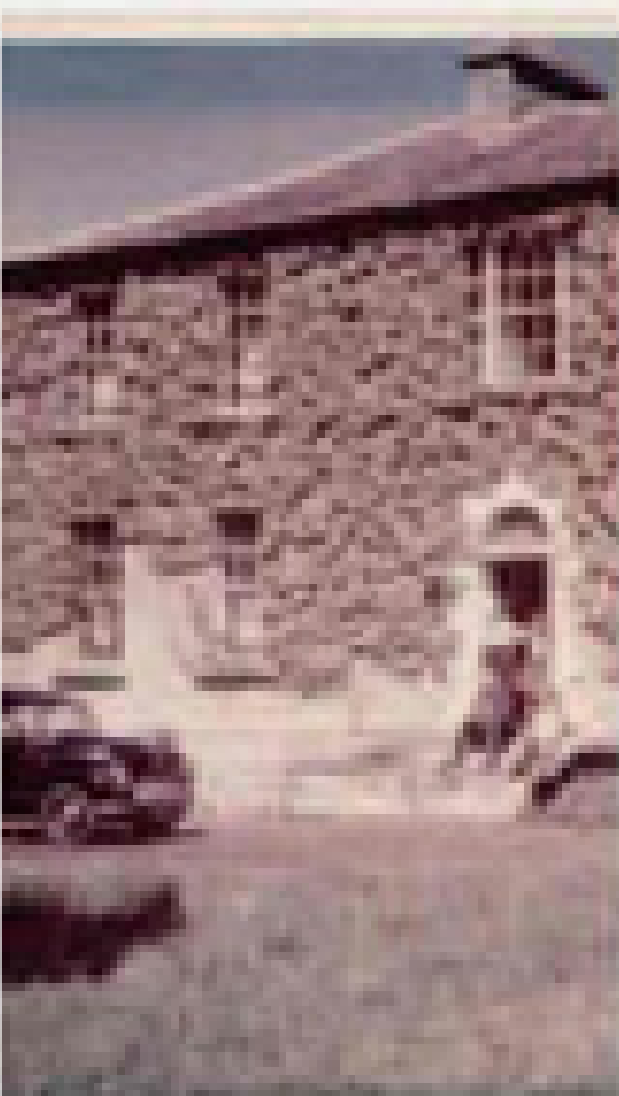
5 **Teacher at Cumshingaun, 1910 photo (TJ Kierman Delia Delia Centre for Irish Politics, UCD)**

6 **Delia playing the organ in 1910 photo (European Photo, Delia Delia Centre for Irish Politics, UCD)**

7 **The smaller Delia's house (1907-10) one of the greatest Irish stone houses (Delia Delia Centre for Irish Politics, UCD)**

Further Notes on Major J.A.B.L.

An evening in 1982, TJ Kierman was invited to a day Thomas Kierman, who was a member of the teaching community, was invited to speak at Cumshingaun House on Jack Murphy's farm. Thomas played the organ and sang and Delia had to sit in the front row and listen to the beautiful playing. It is possible that some songs in her repertoire were originally learned from Thomas Murphy and his family.

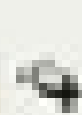


8 **Dominican Convent, Dublin Street, 1919 (Delia Delia Centre, UCD)**
Delia attended the Provisional Convent, Town, Co Galway, and from 1917 to 1919 was a pupil at Dominican Convent, Dublin Street, Dublin, a school with a strong academic and musical reputation. She was in the choir but her specific musical education was not highly regarded in Dublin Street, which caused the Kierman sisters, Margaret and Delia, coming to your people later. Delia became friendly with Margaret Burke Sheridan.

9 **Thomas J Kierman**
Thomas J Kierman was born in Dublin in 1897. He attended St. Mary's College, Bathninery and University College Dublin. In 1916, a few weeks before the Easter Rising, he joined the Gaelic League as a clerk. He advanced rapidly and in 1921, ten months after the suppression of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in January 1922, was appointed Inspector of Taxes in Galway City. A gifted student, he was at this point working on a doctoral thesis on economics. In 1923 his first book, *British War Finance and the Commonwealth* had been published in London, and in 1924 a *Study on National Finance* was published by the Talbot Press in Dublin - the first of several books on a variety of subjects by him.

10 **Department of Finance, Delia, Martha and Thomas J Kierman, Galway, 1920**
Delia and Thomas became engaged in 1920 and were married in Dublin, at the chapel of University College, St. Stephen's Green.

11 **University College, Galway, c. 1916, Linnich-Linnich**
Delia was a student at University College Galway, Annagh-Quinn College and was National University of Ireland Galway between 1917 and 1923. She graduated as a Bachelor of Commerce in 1923, one of a class of eight.



1924-1945

London Dublin Rome

Thomas J Kerrigan was appointed secretary to the Irish High Commissioner in London on 22 April 1924. He and Delia lived in Stoveham in London for ten years, from 1925-35. During this period their four children were born. Thomas worked on his PhD and was awarded a doctorate by **UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON** in 1940. He was instrumental in setting up the **NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND CLUB** in 1928, a dining club for graduates of **NU** which became an important focal point for Irish social and cultural events in London.

As well as working in the home, Delia assisted her husband in his social duties. She sang at diplomatic gatherings and clubs' parties and became friendly with many Irish celebrities, including John McCormack.

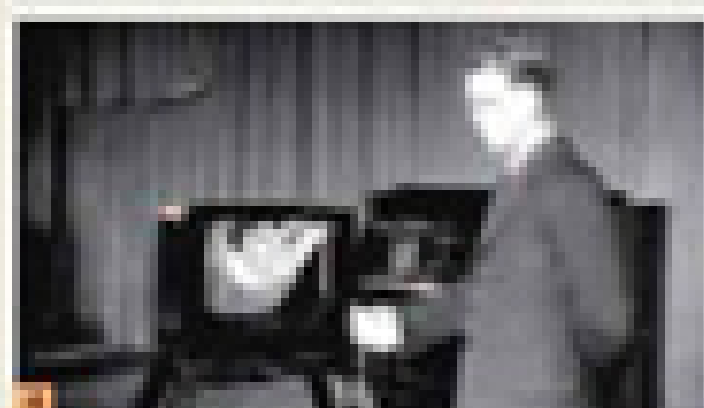
In 1935 the family returned to Ireland and lived in a rented house at 32 Elgin Road, Ballsbridge. Thomas was appointed Director of Broadcasting at **RADIO IRELAND**. Delia made her first record with **NU**, who were setting up a studio in Waterford, in 1935. During the following six years, Delia sang frequently on **RADIO IRELAND**. She also performed on the stage all over the country and made several records for **NU**. During this period Delia became established as a singer and her fame expanded rapidly.

On 14th October 1941, however, it was announced that Thomas J Kerrigan was to be appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to the **VATICAN**. Delia, who was at the peak of her career as a singer, had to abandon it in order to take up the role of hostess at the Irish Embassy at the Vatican.

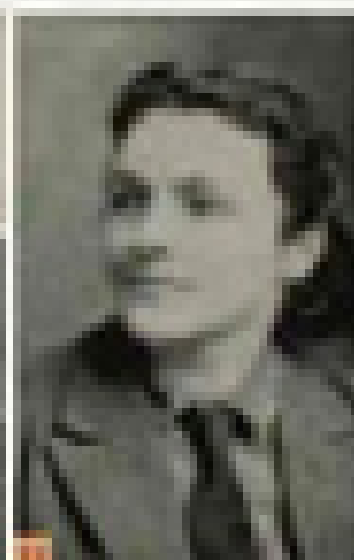
The posting lasted until the end of the War in 1945. The Kerrigans were a popular diplomatic family and their Thursday 'at home' at the legation at San Martino della Battaglia were extremely popular. Delia was renowned as a charming and generous hostess. Those who stayed the legation during the dark days of the War report that her kindness gave them hope and comfort.

During their stay in Rome the Kerrigans met, among others, Mussolini, Roosevelt, and Pope Pius XII, whose biography T.J. Kerrigan wrote. Delia became friendly with Edda Mussolini, Mussolini's daughter. She was also friendly with Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, who helped thousands of Allied Prisoners of War to escape from Italy. Delia Murphy, and Bláthnaise, her daughter, were occasional active members of Monsignor O'Flaherty's underground network. After the War, the British government wished to decorate Delia in recognition of her bravery but she decided not to accept the decoration.

Dr Kerrigan's appointment to the Vatican ended in 1945.



- 1 Delia and T.J. and siblings John Bláthnaise (1922). During their ten years in London, four children were born to Delia and Thomas: Bláthnaise (1922), Ailish Phionnuala (1926), Colin (1930) and Cathleen (1935).
- 2 Delia, T.J., Bláthnaise and Ailish, c. 1930
- 3 Queen John McCormack. Delia met John McCormack at a party at the NU Club in London, and according to her own account sang a version of the famous traditional song 'The Shan' for him. T.J. Kerrigan had been one of those who founded the NU Club, among other well-known people who attended the club were W.E. Blyth, Lady Gregory, Liam O'Flaherty and John O'Leary.
- 4 Radio Éireann. Radio Éireann was established in 1926. In 1937 T.J. Kerrigan was recruited from London and asked to take up the position of Director of Broadcasting, a post which he held until 1940. During this period Delia was a regular contributor to programmes such as 'The Irishman's Club' music show and 'In other spoken programmes'. The photograph shows Seamus Heaney, the first Radio Éireann presenter in a recording studio, probably located in Denmark Street, 110A Denmark Street, where the radio station was first housed.
- 5 Delia, Bláthnaise, John Bláthnaise, Ailish and Colin, 1930. In 1937, Laila Stern, of NU, heard Delia singing at a meeting of 1936, the women's association. He was impressed and invited Delia to a recording session. She set up a studio at the NU studio at 110A, then in 1938, in White Wind, London, probably in 1938. Here Delia made her first records. The records had a dozen songs, including 'I'm a Whiffler', 'The Irishman's Club' and 'The Spinning Wheel'. They were an instant success.
- 6 **NU** Club, c. 1930
- 7 **NU** Club, c. 1930
- 8 **Radio Éireann**, c. 1930
- 9 Delia and T.J. and siblings John Bláthnaise (1922). During their ten years in London, four children were born to Delia and Thomas: Bláthnaise (1922), Ailish Phionnuala (1926), Colin (1930) and Cathleen (1935).
- 10 The *Irishman's Club* (1936), which the Kerrigan family spent in Dublin, was one of the most productive of radio careers: she made many records, published dozens of songs, performed on the radio and stage, and part in a film, and also began to write fiction in 1939. *The Linnets*, (1940) published her short story, 'Western Journey'.
- 11 The *Irishman's Club* (1936), which the Kerrigan family spent in Dublin, was one of the most productive of radio careers: she made many records, published dozens of songs, performed on the radio and stage, and part in a film, and also began to write fiction in 1939. *The Linnets*, (1940) published her short story, 'Western Journey'.
- 12 Delia, Bláthnaise (1922) and Ailish (1926). Delia Murphy was a household name in Ireland. Bláthnaise, a soprano of a long-running popular radio show on Radio Éireann, and music publisher, published many songs sung or written by Delia during the period. There is some confusion about the authorship of some of the songs attributed to Delia: many were her versions of traditional songs or songs written by others. Some, however, were undoubtedly her own.
- 13 Delia, Cathleen, and her unpublished manuscript in the garden of St. Peter's Augustinian, Thomas's home. The Kerrigan were frequent visitors to the Augustinian house, the prior of which was Father Tom Kearney. Father Kearney was one of those who, like Delia, helped people on the run from the Nazis.
- 14 Queen John McCormack. T.J. Kerrigan was appointed Irish ambassador to the Vatican in 1941. The family moved to Rome and had their last year (1941) - a time which often gets put on hold in the first phase of Delia's singing career. In June 1942 they had a private audience with Pope Pius XII, whom T.J. came to attend and whose biography he wrote. The photograph shows Delia, Delia, Cathleen, Monsignor Thomas Bern, Colin, Thomas and Blia, with her twin Grand.



1946-1950

Australia

On 1 March, 1946, T.J. Kiernan was appointed Irish envoy to Australia, he was the first Irish ambassador to that country. For the following eight years he represented Ireland in Australia. In addition, he was the only Irish diplomatic representative in the whole of Asia.

On 14 September, 1946, after a long sea voyage, the Kiernan family arrived in Perth. They moved on to the capital Canberra, where they lived in a hotel for almost two years until a residence for the ambassador was built.

As in the Vatican, the Kiernan couple proved popular and Delia's warm personality and skill as a hostess were much appreciated.

During his period of office T.J. often accompanied by Delia, travelled all over Australia meeting Irish groups in every major town and city. Delia sometimes sang at these meetings, but her formal career as a singer was still on hold.

In 1950 Delia returned to Ireland where she stayed for some years, concentrating once again, for the last time, on her own career. Dr Kiernan was appointed to a second term as Irish ambassador to Australia and remained in Canberra until 1954, during which time he wrote an important history of the Irish in Australia, *THE IRISH (1842) IN AUSTRALIA* (Dublin, 1954).

1 Delia, T.J. Kiernan and colleagues, in the garden of 75 number's house in Ballsbridge, Dublin, c. 1946.

2 Delia, T.J. Kiernan and colleagues c. 1946, during office in Australia.

3 *Self-ambassadorial residence, Canberra.* In 1947 the Kiernan family moved from their hotel accommodation into a second property close to The Lodge, the Prime Minister's residence. Here they remained for a while. Delia was famous for having her own, a famous Australian style of party not embraced in the embassy circles and her arrival.

4 *Irish Ambassadors, Chancery and residence's, Canberra, Canberra.* A purpose-built Irish embassy and residence were opened in Canberra in 1954 and ambassadorial residence in 1955. They are situated on 20 Wilson Street, Jervisville, Canberra. Previous Irish diplomatic representation were housed in a series of rental properties in Canberra.

5 *James De Valera in Australia.* In June 1948, James De Valera and Frank Aiken paid an official visit to Australia.

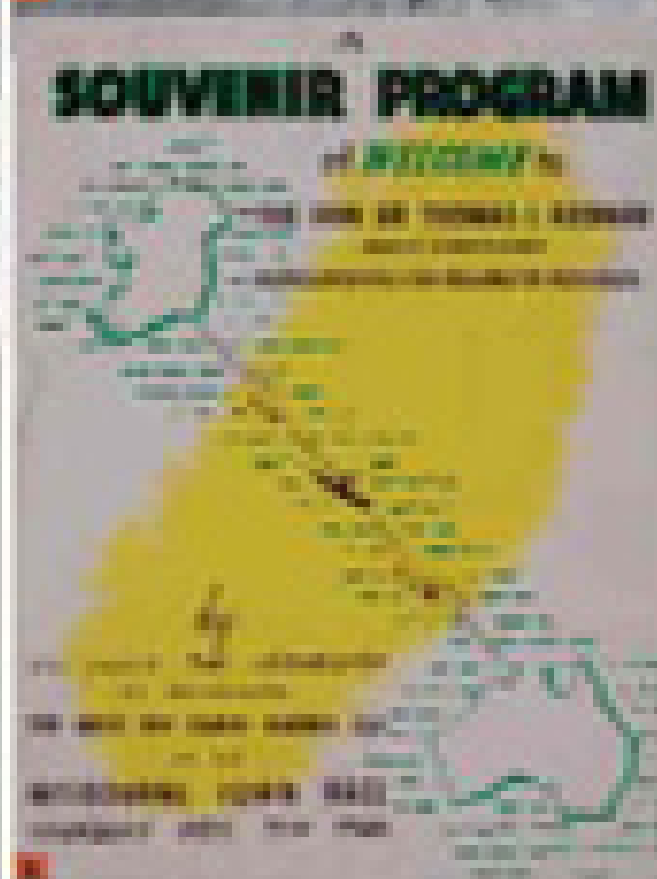
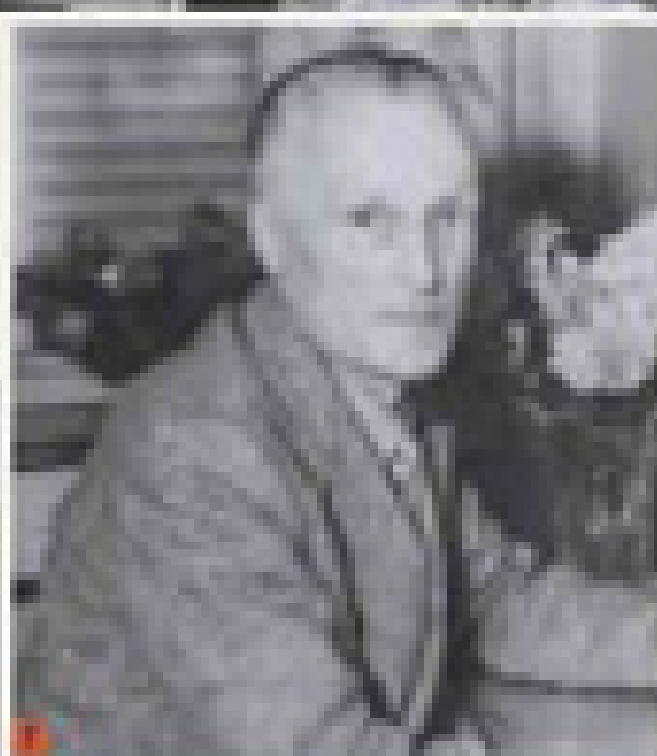
6 *Delia and James De Valera.* Delia serving afternoon tea in the kitchen at a reception in Canberra, 1948.

7 *T.J. Kiernan at his desk in the Irish embassy in Canberra.*

8 *Programme commemorating valentia occupation based by an Embassy Dinner, Canberra, as a mark of Mallesonia at Mallesonia Town Hall, 27 November, 1949. T.J. delivered a speech detailing Irish contributions to England and Ireland and Delia sang to numerous applause providing a 'lunar' headline in a Melbourne newspaper 'The Minister's Wife leads the show'.*

9 *Delia singing.* Although Delia did not pursue her singing career in Australia, she often sang at parties and other engagements.

10 *Delia at St. Patrick's College, Canberra.* where her own work was already being collected. It is photographed in the school's very noble collection, 1948.



1950-1954

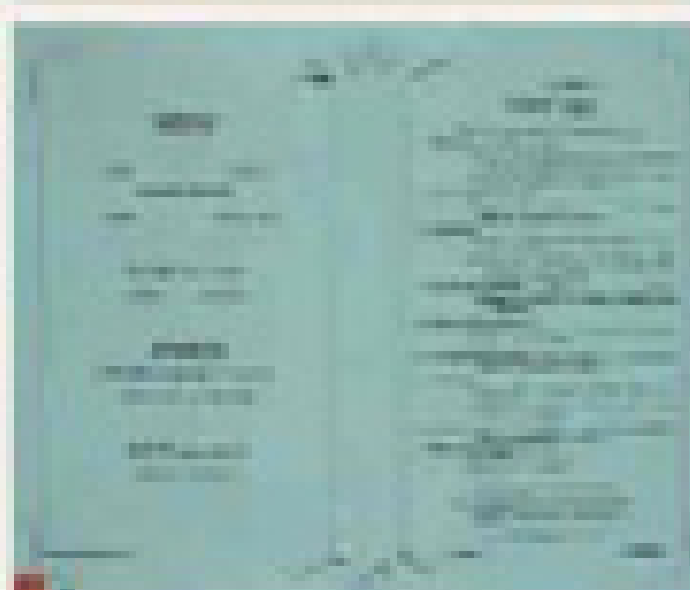
Australia (continued)

In 1950 Delia Thomas and their daughter Orlaith returned to Ireland. When her husband went back to Australia for a second term, which lasted until 1954, Delia stayed at home. She concentrated on her own career and for the next four years sang at venues all over Ireland and Great Britain, and made many records.

Meanwhile, T.J. Kiernan sought to raise the profile of the Irish transported to Australia, and to emphasise the Australian role in the quest for Irish independence. He wrote: 'The story of the ships that came to Australia laden with convicts is part of the pride of Irish history. Sydney and Hobart and Fremantle mean 1790 and 1848 and 1867. It is for that that Sydney has its 1790

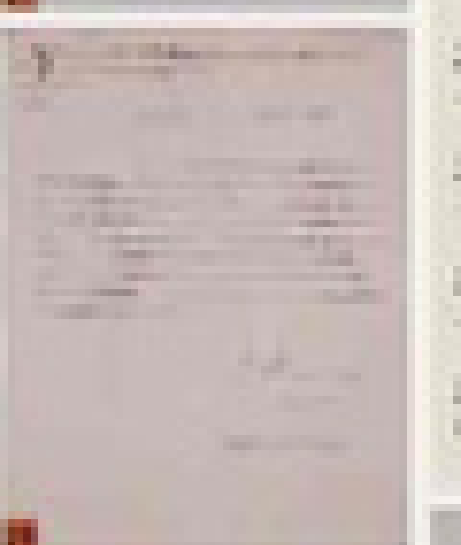
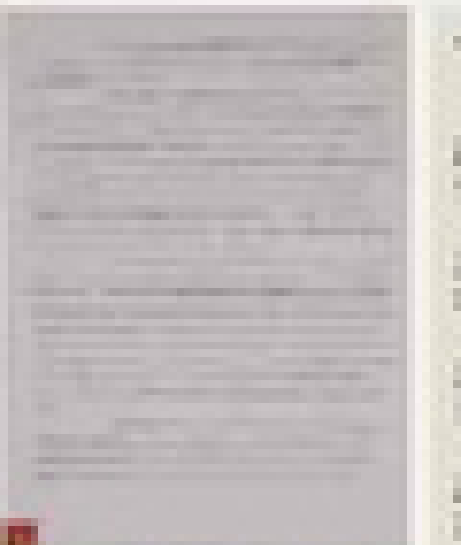
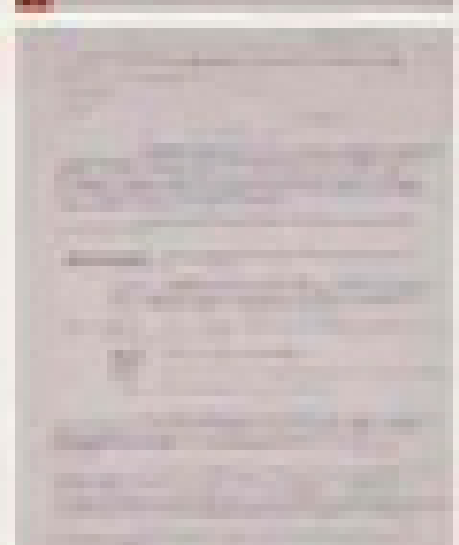
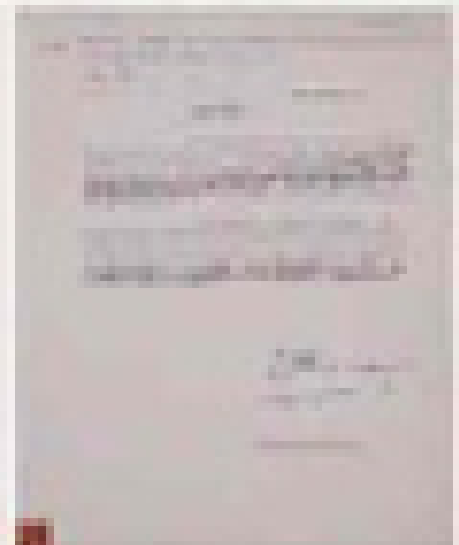
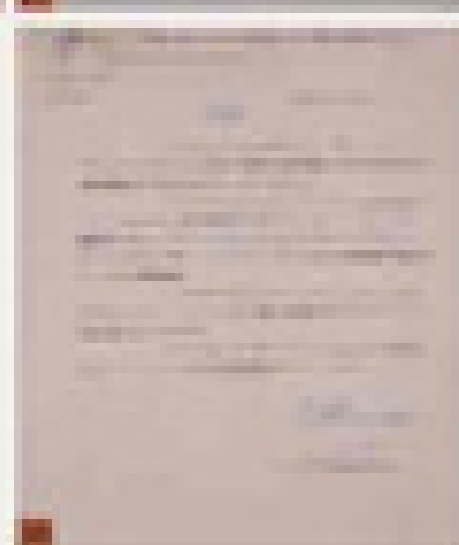
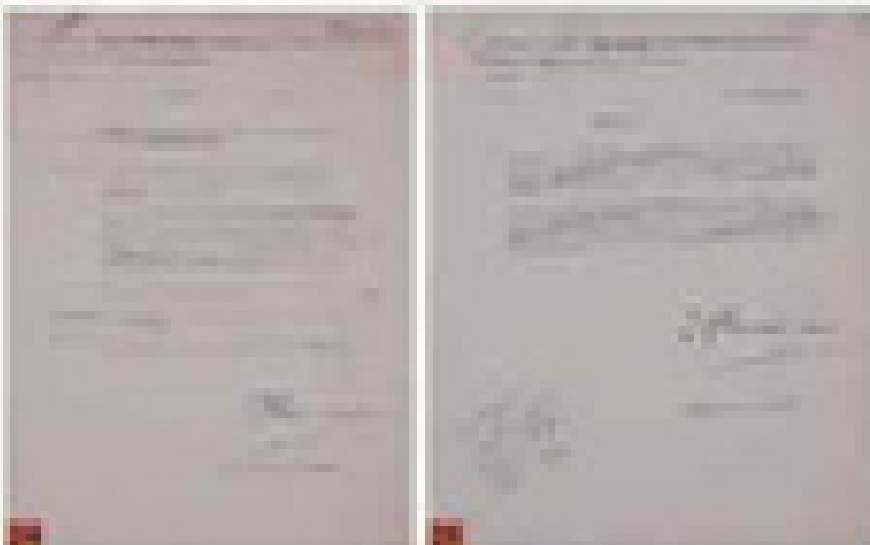
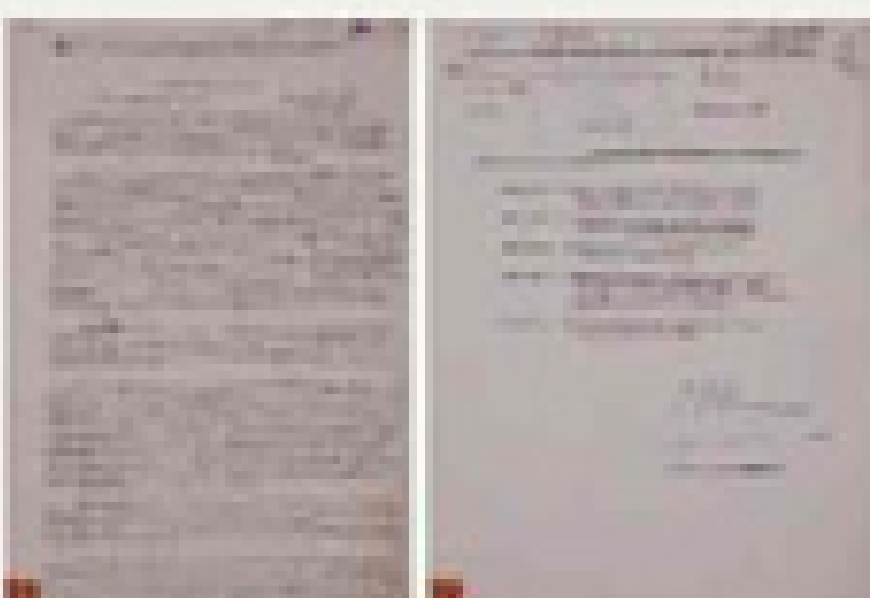
memorial monument, on which I unveiled in April 1947 the names of the executed leaders of 1916.'

T.J. Kiernan has been described as a 'successful image-maker' who 'sought to inform Australia on all aspects of Irish affairs, but particularly scholarship and the arts. To this end he lectured widely on Irish culture and history, presented Irish books to public libraries and made significant original contributions himself to the study of the history of the Irish in Australia.'



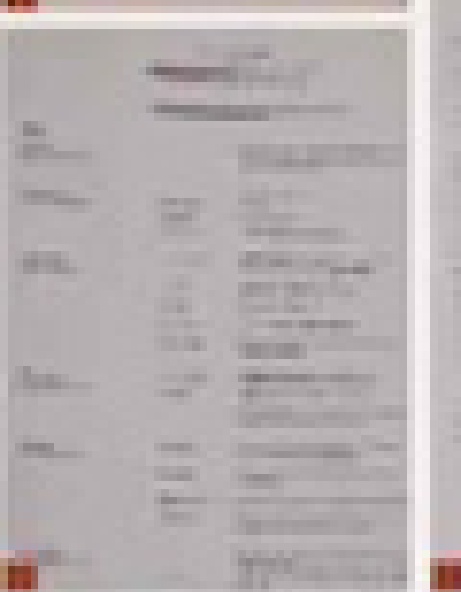
1951 Social Encounters
The Kiernan memorial reports and also included all our records, covering of the major sites as well as many smaller towns. The selection of concert programmes, dance music and other ephemera indicates the taste of those social circles.

1952 Music, Records & Concerts
T.J. Kiernan was renowned as a diligent and conscientious ambassador for music. He made numerous reports and minutes to the Department of External Affairs in Dublin, relating in detail every aspect of concert affairs in Australia and also in 1952.



IRISH AMBASSADORS TO AUSTRALIA

| | |
|--|--|
| Dr. E.J. Lagan, Ambassador September 1950 - December 1950 | Mr. John O'Meara, Ambassador 29 January 1951 - 16 December 1951 |
| Mr. Leo MacLennan, Chargeur December 1950 - December 1951 | Mr. Joe Gould, Ambassador 28 November 1951 - February 1952 |
| Mr. William B. Kelly, Chargeur March 1951 - December 1951 | Mr. Leo MacLennan, Ambassador 29 February 1952 - 22 August 1952 |
| Mr. Leo MacLennan, Chargeur January 1952 - October 1952 | Mr. Martin Kelly, Ambassador 21 September 1952 - 22 July 1953 |
| Mr. Leo MacLennan, Ambassador 23 May 1953 - 16 October 1953 | Mr. Richard O'Connell, Ambassador 24 July 1953 - 7 August 1953 |
| Mr. Leo MacLennan, Ambassador 23 August 1953 - 11 March 1954 | Mr. Leo MacLennan, Ambassador 1 September 1953 - 1 September 1954 |
| Mr. Thomas Kelly, Ambassador 28 April 1954 - 11 May 1954 | Thomas O'Connell 1 October 1954 to date |
| Mr. Leo MacLennan, Ambassador 21 July 1954 - 26 December 1954 | |



Exhibition continues: 1955-1964

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1955 1964

Germany Canada USA Ireland

In 1955 T.J. Kiernan was appointed Irish Ambassador to Germany and Delia accompanied him to Bonn. He was appointed Ambassador to Canada in 1957 and his last posting was to the United States of America in 1960. Delia resumed her role as diplomatic hostess and there was little time for her singing career. Her last recording, **THE QUEEN OF CONNEMARA**, was made in New York in 1961.

T.J. Kiernan developed a close friendship with the President of the United States of America, J.F. Kennedy. He was deeply involved in the organisation of President Kennedy's state visit to Ireland in 1963. After his retirement in 1964 he helped establish the Ireland America Foundation. He died in Ireland in 1967.

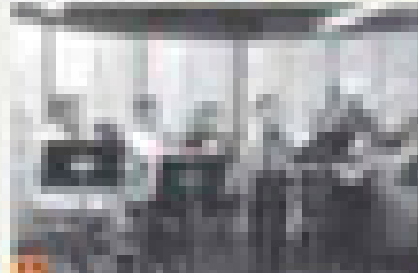
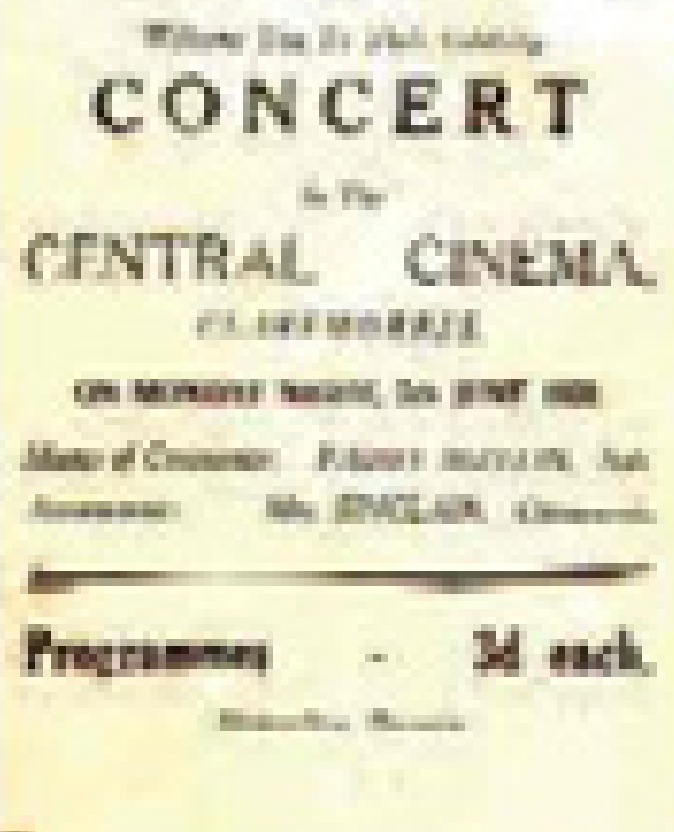
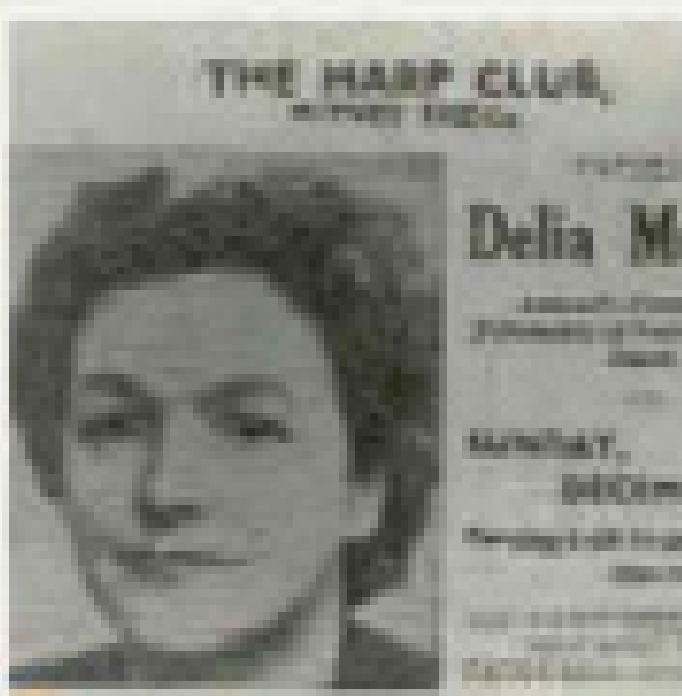
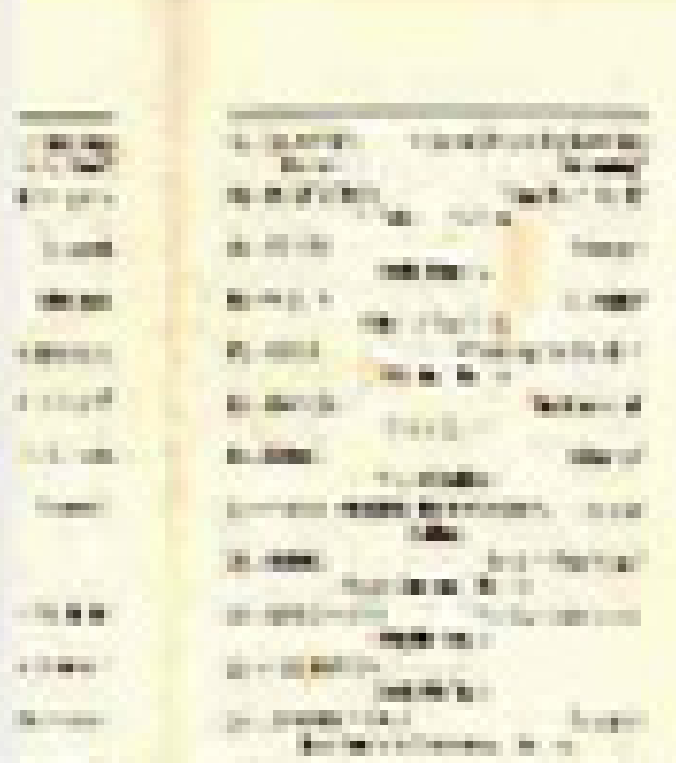
Delia lived on a farm in Ontario, Canada until 1969 when she returned to Ireland to **LEAGHOGH COTTAGE** in the Strawberry Beds, Dublin.

Early in 1971 she was interviewed by Gay Byrne on the popular Irish television programme, **THE LATE LATE SHOW**. This was the first time that a mass Irish audience had the opportunity to see her. It was also the last time. A month later, in February 1971, she died unexpectedly.

T.J. Kiernan and Delia Murphy had an abiding love of Ireland. During their diplomatic postings they offered a fresh vision of Ireland to the world. Delia, through her music and T.J. in his writing, lecturing and diplomacy, devoted their lives to the promotion of Ireland and Irish culture abroad. They can be counted among those who shaped the international image of modern Ireland.

- 1 On 7 June 1962 Delia performed in a gala fund raising concert in her home town, Clonsilla, Co. Mon. This was the start of her second flowering as a singer and performer.
- 2 Expenses for the St. Colman's concert, 1956.
- 3 Delia advertising a performance in Palmer.
- 4 Delia, born in Japan, Ontario, Canada.
- 5 Delia at a St. Patrick's Day reception at the Irish Embassy in Gillingham, Bonn, 1956.
- 6 During the period 1959-63, Delia spent considerable time in Ireland and visited various areas.
- 7 T.J. Kiernan with President Kennedy when he received his guests of honor during his visit to Ireland. The picture was prepared and signed by the Chief Herald, Sir Gerard Moran, of the National Library of Ireland.
- 8 T.J. Kiernan signs the Student Book of the Week (1961), also in the photograph are Brian Black (Irish Embassy) and W. Gerald Harman (US Trade Secretary of 1961).
- 9 President John F. Kennedy is greeted by Delia at O'Connell Street, Dublin, during his state visit in July 1963. Delia Kiernan was heavily involved in organizing this visit.

- 10 John F. Kennedy meets his guests Mrs. Miley West in Georgetown, Co. Wick, in June 1963.
- 11 A recording session for a radio programme broadcast by RTÉ, 1960.
- 12 Delia with John O'Hara and Joe O'Donnell produced a documentary on the life of Delia Murphy, *The Ballad of Delia Murphy*, which was broadcast on RTÉ.
- 13 Delia singing with The Children in Ireland. In a television programme made by RTÉ, May 1968. The Children was a group which included John and Jane O'Hara, Alan Carter, Sam McLoe, Sean Thomas. Sam Thomas, who hosted the RTÉ programme, is also in the photograph.



WELL SO NOW TO CONCLUDE I GIVE THANKS

☞ Acknowledgements

This exhibition was devised by the
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Léabharlann Náisiúnta na hÉireann,
2007*

*Ceiliúradh leithéas leis na h-éireann
agús éiríonn sí in áiteanna in saibhir
comharsa, eile, agús éiríonn sí in áite
in saibhir go fóill fóill.*

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individuals:

Ambasad na hÉireann san Astráil
The Embassy of Ireland in Australia
The National Museum of Australia
The National Museum of Australia
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
The National Archives of Ireland
Cumann Éireannach Éireann
The Irish Folklore Collection, UCD
Tánaie Cheol Dúchais Éireann
The Irish Traditional Music Archive
Cultúr Éireann
Culture Ireland

Clann Uí Chláirín
The Keenan family
Caról Keenan agus an tOllamh
Carol Keenan
Colum Keenan
Colum Keenan
Conner Cullen
Conner Cullen
Leo Cullen
Leo Cullen
Deirdre agus Desmond Currick
Deirdre and Joyce O'Hara
Colm Gonn, Bríd Dooley, RTE
Colm Gonn, Bríd Dooley, RTE
Ardán Iníon, Mary Mackey,
Liz McEvoy, Kate O'Sullivan
An Chomhairle Náisiúnta
Nicholas Condon, Tóiseach Cheol
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