

MEN'S SHEDS WEEKLY NEWS

PROMOTING THE WELLBEING OF MEN ACROSS IRELAND



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London calling

This week, we take a short hop across the Irish Sea to London's Irish shed

For generations, London has exerted a magnetic pull drawing hundreds of thousands of migrants across the Irish Sea. Whether through dire necessity or in search of better prospects, generations of Irish migrants have made the short journey, with many laying down permanent roots.

Some estimates place the Irish-born population of London at 2.2% of the total, with hundreds of thousands more claiming Irish ancestry. The London Irish community remains one of the most visible and numerous groupings in a city that boasts as much ethnic diversity as any on earth.

Channels of cultural exchange run in both directions across the Irish Sea, and London's Irish population retains a strong and vibrant link with its homeland. It's perhaps not surprising that the Men's Sheds phenomenon, flourishing so well in Ireland, should also take root among the London diaspora.

Great Britain does, of course, boast hundreds of existing sheds, under the capable stewardship of the UK Men's Sheds Association. Fittingly, Great Britain's first shed founded by and for its Irish community draws inspiration from both sides of the Irish Sea.

John Delahunty of Innisfree Housing Association takes up the story: "Innisfree Housing Association was set up in the mid-1980s by Irish community activists, to provide advice and support to Irish people who were having difficulty accessing housing.

"We currently provide 550 homes, and, while our tenants are much more diverse now, we still keep that connection with Ireland. We're part-funded through the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, and probably two-thirds



TOP: Irish Ambassador Dan Mulhall launches the shed. **ABOVE:** Members and supporters of Innisfree Men's Shed with a shed project.

of our tenants are Irish or of Irish extraction."

A visit to Camden Town Men's Shed in the autumn of 2016 planted seeds of inspiration. Among others, John credits O'Donovan Waste, Irish in Britain and the London Irish Construction Network with supporting the embryonic shed.

The shed itself is located in Harlesden, in the north-western borough of Brent. "Rather than search for a premises, we set one up at the top end of a carpark near our sheltered accommodation in Harlesden," he explains.

For now, the shed consists of a site cabin donated by O'Donovan Waste, though it's due for a major upgrade soon. "Irish contractors did a huge amount of repair and maintenance, and installed a ramp, so it's accessible to everyone," says John.

The shed was formally launched in

July 2017, with then-Irish Ambassador Dan Mulhall doing the honours, in his last official function before taking up Ireland's ambassadorship to the USA.

"We haven't rushed, we're letting it grow quite organically. We wanted to be sure it worked. We've had so much goodwill. One lady donated her late husband's tools because she couldn't throw them out. She wanted to see them used. We're trying to get out in the open, to make the shed visible in the community. At the moment we're building willow structures to hold climbing flowers, and I'm determined to get basket-weaving into the shed," he says.

Originally from the North East of England, John's Irish-born parents met on Tyneside. "As a second-generation Irishman, it's been an exploration of who I am. Until I was surrounded by Irish people, many of whom would have come over in the 1950s and 1960s, I didn't realise that so many of the patterns of speech I picked up from my mother were Irish," John muses.

In time, John is hoping to welcome members of all communities in the famously diverse borough of Brent to the shed, but Ireland will always have a special place in its heart. **CL**

Men's shed members who find themselves in London are invited to visit Innisfree Men's Shed, located at Clochar Court, Crownhill Road, Harlesden, NW 10. Read more here: <http://www.innisfree.org.uk>.

SHED OF THE WEEK

LONGFORD TOWN MEN'S SHED



Longford Town Men's Shed was in the pipeline for two and a half years before eventually opening its doors in October 2016. "Martin Shannon and I had come up with the idea long before we set up. It took us a long time to find a premises," says Enda Dooley, the current chair.

"We opened the shed as myself, and others just like me, felt we had a lot of free time on our hands, so we decided why not do something with it?"

"We are heavily involved in the community and have undertaken jobs such as making flower beds, helping with the local memorial garden and restoring bins badly in need of a tidy up," explains Enda.

"The lads have even helped out on the local golf club, not by playing golf but by restoring tee boards and other jobs that needed to be done. At least now we can golf in peace!" he laughs.

The shed has even been given the use of a section in a polytunnel, by a local youth organisation. Here the men sow flowers as well as various vegetables, which are grown and eaten by the members.

Going forward, the men hope to undertake more woodwork-based jobs, such as building bird and bat boxes, and maybe even benches for the local community. "We are very busy at the moment with other jobs, but going forward we hope to do more carpentry-based activities," says Enda.

"The lads all get on great here. It's lovely to come and chat once a week and talk about all things sport, politics and whatever is going on in our lives.

"All the lads in the shed are retired, and they all come from different backgrounds from teachers to carpenters and everything in between," says Enda.

The shed is open every Tuesday from 10am to 12am and is located at the rear of the Post Office in, Main Street, Longford.

All new members and anyone interested in joining are asked to call Enda on 087 327 2672.