

## Research Files and Plays Blog

The Now We're Talking project is rolling on as planned with the team finalising the cataloguing and digitisation of the research files and moving on to the next section of the archive, Michael J. Murphy's plays.

### Digitisation of Research Files

The hard work of Avril and Garreth has meant the team is on track to meet its targets for digitised material for this stage of the project. Avril has been busy, with the help of student Sam, preparing research files for digitisation by giving them reference numbers and arranging the pages into order. This has meant that Garreth in our reprographics team has been able to work consistently and smoothly on the digitisation of the research files.



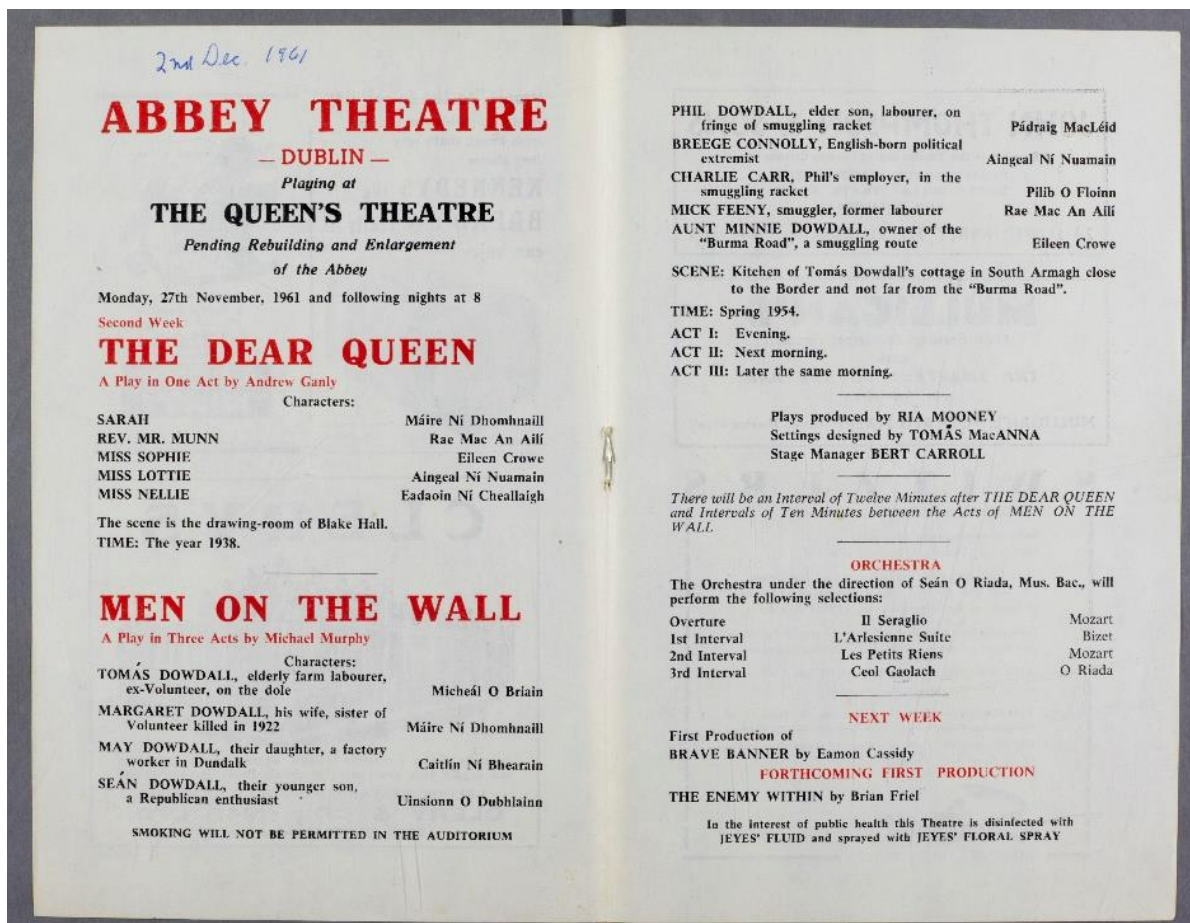
*Sam numbering a research file*

The first batch of 26 research files will be available to view on the PRONI eCatalogue along with the idioms and expressions and some of Murphy's notebooks too. These files will also be made available to view in Tí Chulainn, Mullaghbane Co. Armagh, with the help of the Cuimhneamh project team.

## Plays

As well as being a prolific collector of folklore Michael J. Murphy was a gifted creative writer. Therefore, the next step in the project is to catalogue Murphy's plays. He drew on his life experience in rural Ireland and his extensive knowledge of folklore to create rich stories set mostly in South Armagh. His inspiration for the language used in the plays can be found in the idioms and expressions in this collection.

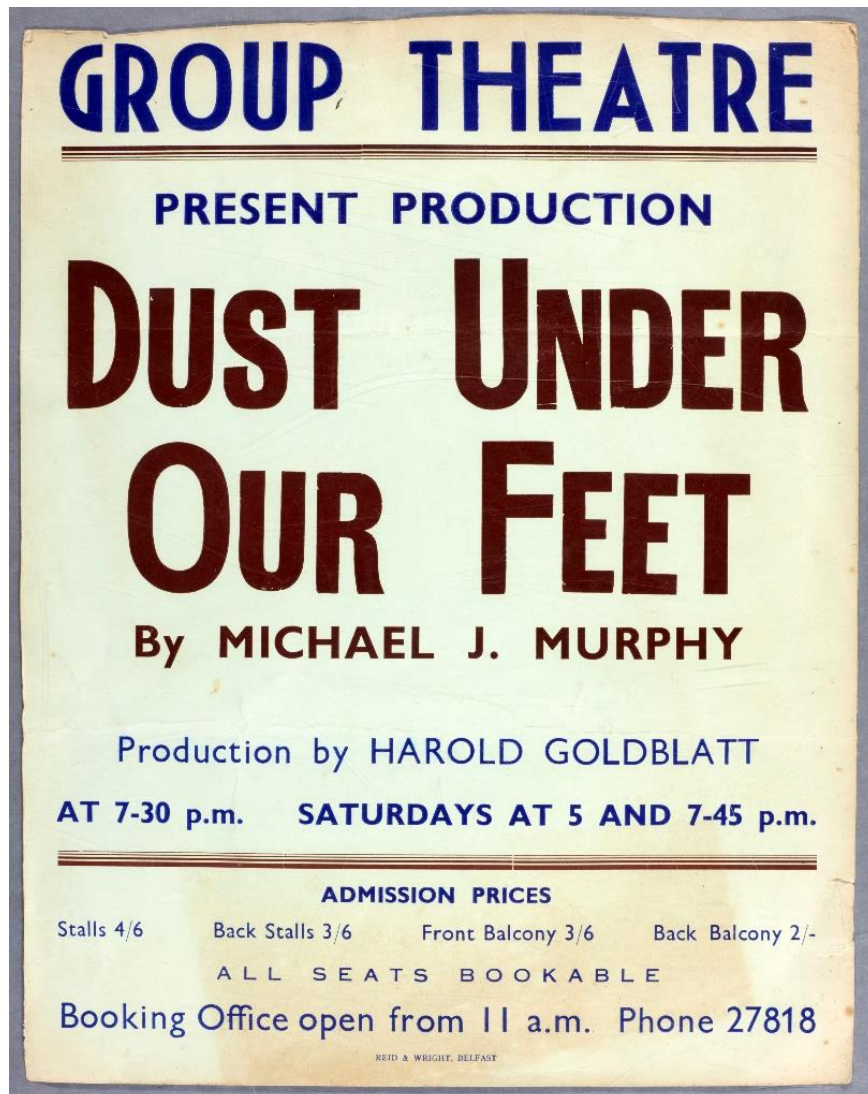
A link can also be seen between the research files and the subject matter of his plays. Like all good writers, Murphy attempted to reflect the society he lived in through his plays. *Dust Under Our Feet* produced by The Group Theatre and the Abbey Theatre in 1953 and 1956 deals with the issue of unplanned pregnancy, a scandalous topic at the time and one that we are still managing the effects of today. *Men on the Wall* produced by the Abbey Theatre in 1961 dealt with the problem of smuggling, an issue particularly resonant for a native of South Armagh. Murphy kept the material he used to research these topics among his research files. Even included amongst the correspondence and loose pages held with the scripts are more newspaper cuttings containing articles relevant to the topics of his plays.



Theatre programme for The Abbey Theatre production of *Men on the Wall* (December 1961)

Murphy began writing plays as a young man and consistently sent his script to theatres for consideration. The earliest of these is his play *The Holding Place* (D4642/7/9/1)

which was sent to The Abbey Theatre in 1939. This play was not produced but he did receive some encouraging feedback from F. R. Higgins. This was a trend that continued throughout his career. We can see much constructive feedback from correspondents such as Harold Goldblatt of The Group Theatre and Ernest Blythe of The Abbey. Murphy took the feedback and rejection in his stride and reworked on his plays. As mentioned previously, *Dust Under Our Feet* (D4642/7/3) and *Men on the Wall* (D4642/7/6) were both produced but after much rewriting and editing. This is reflected in the catalogue with 12 drafts of each play being included in the collection.



Poster for The Ulster Group Theatre production of *Dust Under Our Feet*, July 1953

This part of the collection shows Murphy's dedication to the craft of writing and reflects the often difficult process an artist goes through to produce their work. It has also been good to reflect on another aspect of Murphy's career and see the true passion he had for writing.

Murphy's plays and associated correspondence will be available to order onsite in PRONI later this year. Many thanks to the Archives Revealed consortium grant for making this possible.