

Now We're Talking at Docs Ireland



As part of the promotion of the ‘Now We’re Talking’ project BBC NI approached the Docs Ireland festival to present some films about Michael J. Murphy and Sam Hanna Bell. Docs Ireland is a documentary film festival held mostly in Belfast in June every year since 2019. It is a sister festival of the Belfast Film Festival that showcases non-fiction films from Ireland and around the world.

Rónán Breathnach-Cashell, Senior Curator with BBC Northern Ireland, who has been a key member of the steering group for ‘Now We’re Talking’, provided a digitally restored 1981 episode of *Ulster in Focus* titled *The Last Druid* featuring Michael J. Murphy. Reflecting on this Rónán said:

“Inspired by the work of PRONI on the Michael J. Murphy collection, the original 16mm film print of *Ulster in Focus: The Last Druid* was specially chosen to be scanned and digitally restored by the BBC Archive team in London. A beautiful high-definition copy of this wonderful film could now be seen for the first time.”

Rónán also selected Radio Ulster interview with Sam Hanna Bell and Seamus McKee from 1983 for the event.

The Last Druid film was ready to go and perfect for the film festival, but we faced the challenge of making a 30-minute radio interview interesting to watch. Our PRONI colleague, Eva Shiels, stepped up to this challenge with the help of Ulster University student, Matthew McCann.



Eva and Matthew capturing footage of PRONI documents for the visualisation of the Sam Hanna Bell interview.

Eva and Matthew were able to combine archival material from both the Sam Hanna Bell and Michael J. Murphy papers at PRONI, the National Folklore Collection and the BBC NI archive. Eva edited all these elements into a visualisation to illustrate the wonderful interview with Sam Hanna Bell where he talks about his time with the BBC and his writing.

We also took the opportunity to highlight the short VR film, *The Shocking Truth*, made by pupils of Dromintee Primary School with Nerve as part of the 'Now We're Talking' project. This film was based on Murphy's own writing and made by pupils of the school he attended over 100 years ago.

Two events were arranged to show the three films, the first was in PRONI on Thursday 18th June and the second in Tí Chulainn, Mullaghbane, Co. Armagh on Saturday 20th June.

PRONI Event

The screening in PRONI on 18th June was well attended and we were joined by Kevin Murphy of Cuimhneamh who introduced *The Last Druid*. Kevin was able to provide some great context for the film, telling us stories about some of the people featured in the film.



Fergus Hanna Bell addressing the audience at the PRONI Docs Ireland event.

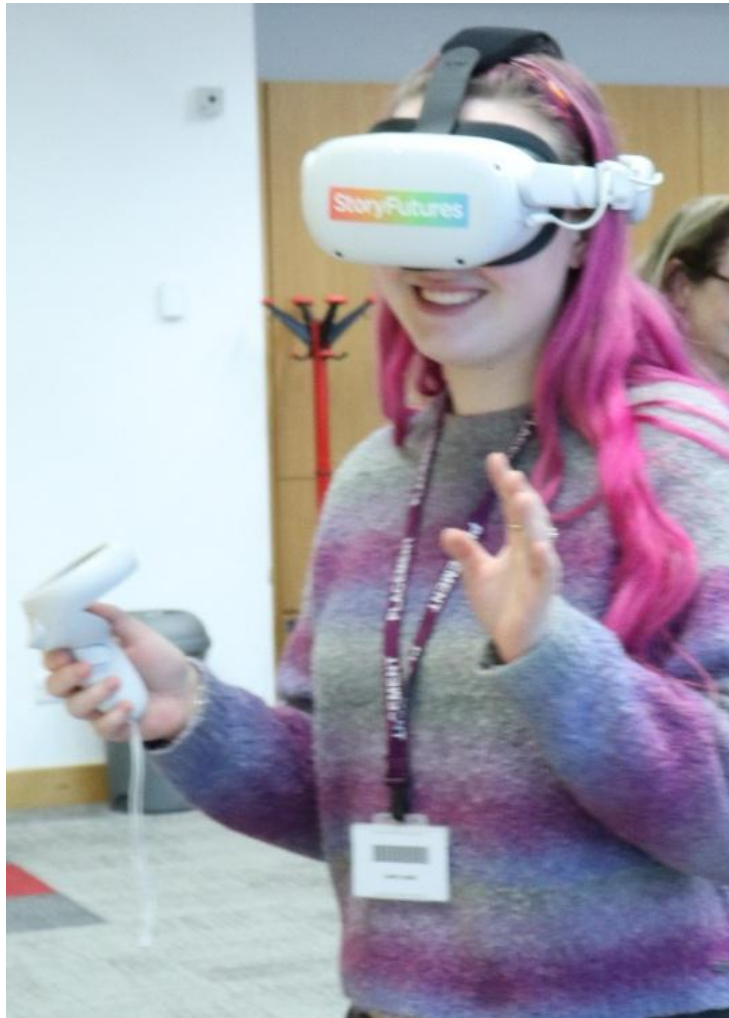
Fergus Hanna Bell, son of Sam Hanna Bell, also attended. Fergus read a piece of prose written by his father for the radio feature 'This is Northern Ireland'. This was an excellent accompaniment to the radio interview highlighting the power of Bell's writing.

Rónán introduced the radio interview saying: "Sam Hanna Bell's 1983 interview with Radio Ulster presenter Seamus McKee is an inspiring listen. For this event, we felt that including some element of visualisation alongside the radio recording would further bring the piece to life for the audience."



*Vittoria Cafolla introducing *The Shocking Truth*.*

The Shocking Truth was introduced by Vittoria Cafolla from Nerve Centre. She brought some VR headsets with her for the event so attendees could view the film as it should be viewed after it was shown on the screen. Vittoria highlighted the value of reconnecting the children of Dromintee with the work of Michael J. Murphy as many had never heard of him. The project certainly drew out their creativity, and they produced a strikingly spooky film.



Experiencing The Shocking Truth in VR.

After the screening of the three films attendees were invited to view a selection of documents from both collections in the PRONI reading room. Some documents mentioned in the pieces were on display bringing them to life for the audience.

Tí Chulainn Event

On Saturday 20th June, a second event was held in Tí Chulainn, Mullaghbane, Co. Armagh. This event followed the same schedule as the screening in PRONI. It coincided with a writer's retreat being hosted by the Nerve Centre in Tí Chulainn as part of the 'Now We're Talking' project which took place over the same weekend.



*Kevin Murphy speaking before *The Last Druid* screening in Tí Chulainn.*

The screening in Mullaghbane was a great opportunity for members of the community to revisit *The Last Druid*. The film is set in the surrounding area and includes many people still remembered today. The event was also an opportunity to highlight Sam Hanna Bell in a place he may not be as well known. The showcase of *The Shocking Truth* again was special as there were many in the audience with connections to Dromintee Primary School and many of those involved were recognised by the audience. All films were received well and there was plenty of discussion afterwards about the value of highlighting these two men and their work.

Between both events approximately 100 hundred people attended which was a brilliant turn out. Many thanks to Stuart Sloane allowing us to showcase the 'Now We're Talking' project in the Docs Ireland festival. Thanks to Cuimhneamh for being such hospitable

hosts in Tí Chulainn. Thanks to Rónán who came up with the idea for this and to Eva and Matthew for putting together the spectacular visuals for the Sam Hanna Bell interview. As ever, this project has been made possible by an Archives Revealed consortium grant with the support of the Nerve Centre, Cuimhneamh, The National Folklore Collection, BBC NI and Northern Ireland Screen.

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