

Now We're Talking Podcast

Nerve Centre has just released the new series of the 'Now We're Talking' Podcast. The new series focuses on the life and work of Sam Hanna Bell.

Over the summer a group of volunteers led by freelance radio producer, Alan Meban, created three episodes examining the life and legacy of one half of the 'Now We're Talking' project. This series complements the first series which focused on Michael J. Murphy, which was released earlier this year. All episodes are available to listen to [here](#).



Alan and volunteers recording an episode.

The podcast series has provided an opportunity for volunteers to learn how podcasts are made whilst also exploring the archival collections of both Michael J. Murphy and Sam Hanna Bell stored in PRONI. People connected to the two men were also interviewed as part of the podcast which brought the archives to life. Phil and Ed Bell, Sam Hanna Bell's grandsons, were interviewed for the podcasts about their grandfather. Similarly, Kevin Murphy of Cuimhneamh, who was a friend of Michael J. Murphy spoke to the podcast group about his old friend and his stories.

By connecting the archives with living people, the podcasts have shown how these collections live on beyond the lives of Sam Hanna Bell and Michael J. Murphy. They are more than just a box of papers; they have a deep meaning for the living relatives and friends of the creators.



The podcast group in the studio.

The podcasts also incorporate recordings of both Bell and Murphy speaking, adding another layer of connection. Hearing their voices and their reflections on their work emphasizes the value of the 'Now We're Talking' project. The funding and support for this project has allowed us to bridge the generations since Bell and Murphy were active and bring their work to new audiences.



Volunteers viewing documents in PRONI

As distinguished broadcasters in their own day, it is certain that Murphy and Bell would approve of the podcast format and would have been great innovators in this medium as well. Certainly, Sam Hanna Bell would have appreciated the democratisation of media that exists today. He was one of the earliest proponents of removing the barriers for ordinary working-class people to be represented on radio and television. He was working within the constraints of a more restricted time, but he managed to get these voices on air through programmes like *Country Window* and *It's A Brave Step*. The podcast series continues in this vein allowing the voices of the volunteers to be front and centre.

The inclusion of people connected to the collections like Kevin Murphy or Phil and Ed has drawn out stories that do not appear in the archives. For example, Kevin gives us a clue as to how Michael J. produced so much writing. Kevin was great friends with Murphy's son and the two used to come home together from dances late at night to Murphy's house. Michael J. would be awake when they got home and typing away at his typewriter most of the night.



Photograph of Sam Hanna Bell in a pub c. 1950s courtesy of BBC NI.

Phil and Ed along with academic Dr Connal Parr mentioned a story of how Bell nearly lost the script for one of his best-known features, *The Return Room* written by W. R. Rodgers. When the script was completed, the pair had embarked on a gargantuan pub crawl likely beginning in the legendary 'The Elbow Room' near Broadcasting House. By the end of the marathon session, they could not find the only copy of the script. Luckily an observant bus conductor had returned the BBC headed script to Broadcasting House after finding it on his bus!

These stories do not immediately reveal themselves when examining the archival collections alone. It is so valuable to engage with people linked to the collections and draw out the human stories contained within. Vittoria Cafolla of Nerve Centre perfectly sums up the experience of making the podcast:

"It was such a special thing to not only be able to examine some of Michael J. Murphy's and Sam Hanna Bell's archives, but also to talk to people who knew them. I think I can safely say that for

everyone participating on the course, that speaking to both Kevin Murphy and Sam Hanna Bell's grandsons, allowed us to understand and bring the men to life in a way that might not have been possible otherwise."

A special thanks to Nerve Centre for facilitating the podcast series, Alan Meban for recording, producing and editing each episode, and to all of the volunteers and guests who appeared in the podcast or worked behind the scenes. Thanks as always to Cuimhneamh local history group based in Tí Chulainn Mullaghbane, BBC NI, Northern Ireland Screen, and the National Folklore Collection, UCD. This was all made possible with the support of the Archives Revealed Consortium Grant in association with the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Pilgrim Trust, The Wolfson Foundation and The National Archives.

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