

# Past, Present and Potential at the Museum of Childhood Ireland/Músaem Óige na hÉireann

By Lorraine McEvoy



Museum of Childhood  
Ireland / Músaem Óige na  
hÉireann

In this episode, I speak to Majella McAllister (founder, head of Youth Voices Team) and Professor Mary O’Dowd (head of History Team) about the Museum of Childhood Ireland (MOCI, <https://museumofchildhood.ie>), “Ireland’s first Island-wide / diaspora / global, social history Museum of Childhood.” The ultimate aim of the voluntary group behind the Museum is to establish a physical, interactive and community driven museum, which seeks to be research based, critically engaged and more than simply a repository of nostalgia. They aim to provide both a museum and a platform; connecting the history of childhood with the experiences of children today. As they pursue the establishment of a physical museum, the team have worked on numerous traveling exhibits, community initiatives and projects such as the “Children’s Voices Project 2020/21: Together, Le Chéile” which sought to provide an outlet for children, in addition to creating an archive of children’s responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this episode, we talk about topics ranging from the origins of the Museum to the range of its voluntary teams and initiatives, definitions of Irish childhood and how we can respectfully include the full range of childhood experiences. The Museum has a very active social media presence, and you can find them on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and Twitter (@museumofci).

## About the Museum: In their Own Words

“Over the last three decades, the varied history of children and childhood in Ireland has come to the fore of our collective cultural consciousness in ways that are too frequently dark and deeply disturbing. We are in many important ways still coming to terms with the legacy of

the outdated belief that “children should be seen and not heard.” At the Museum of Childhood Ireland (hereinafter called MOCI), we believe that *all* children should be seen and heard. Our primary objective in establishing the MOCI is so that the museum can take the lead in creating a new vision for the way in which children are cherished and respected in Irish society. Within the museum, children themselves are central to driving change.

MOCI is breaking new ground by reimagining what it means to be a “Museum of Childhood.” At present, there are museums of childhood which tend to focus on toys and nostalgia. There are also children’s museums that offer various activities based on educational and scientific principles, and there are social history museums that address some aspects of childhood from a historical perspective. However, the MOCI adopts a wide-angle approach to childhood that is both island-wide and international in scope. Because there is no singular narrative that captures childhood experiences in Ireland, we want to present an inclusive and holistic view of historical and contemporary childhood that will inspire critical reflection and stimulate important and timely conversations about childhood in all its complex forms.”

### **Majella McAllister**

Museum founder, Project Manager, and Youth/Child Voice lead at the Museum of Childhood Ireland, Majella’s background is in Education (English and History), Project Management, Innovation and Social Entrepreneurship. She recently completed further postgraduate studies at UCD. With extensive experience in Leadership, Event Management, Projects, and Exhibitions, she has also developed social media for the MOCI to over 33,000 followers, and built the museum’s core permanent collection of material objects of childhood culture. In 2020 her child mental health initiative, ‘Project 2020 Together, Le Chéile,’ an online worldwide platform for the voice of children during the Covid-19 pandemic, was launched with physical exhibitions in Ireland, USA, Italy, and Nepal. The project was shortlisted to the final six for an international award alongside leading international museums: the Glucksman, the Glazer, the Warhol, the Rijksmuseum and the National Gallery of Singapore. In 2021 she developed the ongoing ‘Our Town, Our Future’ online and in-person programme to integrate child and youth voices into the Heritage Council’s CTCHC Programme, aligning with Government TCF policy. In 2022, together with Achill Island Tourism, she launched the MOCI’s Ireland / Diaspora project ‘Robert Henri and the Children of Achill Island 1913-28’. During 2021-22, she also developed for the MOCI, at the Innovation Academy UCD, a unique multifarious eco / sustainability initiative, ‘Kyle Na No’ uniting children, people within the Direct Provision system and Irish organic farmers. In founding the museum of childhood Ireland, Majella recognises that the team she has brought together is a team of extraordinarily special, dedicated people, all working together to ensure the success of a Museum of Childhood Ireland that adopts a wide-angle approach to childhood, both island-wide and international in scope. As there is no singular narrative that captures childhood experiences in Ireland, the MOCI presents an inclusive and holistic view of historical and contemporary childhood to inspire participation, critical reflection and stimulate important and timely conversations about childhood in all its complex forms. The MOCI challenges the

outdated belief that “children should be seen and not heard.” *All* children should be seen and heard.

## **Mary O’Dowd**

Professor Mary O'Dowd, Emeritus Professor of History at Queen's University Belfast, leads the History Team at the Museum of Childhood Ireland. Her research interests have focussed on gender and social history in early modern Ireland. She was a founding member of the Women's History Association of Ireland and served as president of the International Federation for Research in Women's History, 2000-2005. In 2010 she was elected an honorary member of the Federation's Board in recognition of her work for the Federation. Professor O'Dowd has served on a number of public committees including the Irish Manuscripts Commission and the Board of the National Museum of Ireland. She is a Member of the Royal Irish Academy and was elected to the office of Secretary of the Academy in March 2021. Professor O'Dowd's most recent book is *Marriage in Ireland, 1660-1925* published by Cambridge University Press in 2020 and co-authored with Maria Luddy. Her current research project is a history of old age in Ireland.

## **The Museum Teams and their Recent Projects**

To find out more about the Museum of Childhood Ireland, their project teams and all of the work they do, you can visit their website and very active social media pages.

**Website:** <https://museumofchildhood.ie>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/MuseumOfChildhoodIreland/>

**Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/museumofchildhoodireland/>

**Twitter:** @museumofci

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/company/museum-of-childhood-ireland/>

**Youtube:** <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx8bymLYkYRJ0tqCNxCx5cg>

## **Recent Work at the Museum of Childhood Ireland**

The team at the Museum of Childhood Ireland are always busy putting together new exhibitions and initiatives, here a just a few that may be of interest to listeners of this podcast:

- Dr Matthew Fogarty of the Education Team organised a panel on “Writing Irish Institutions” with Jacinta Daly, Melatu Uche Okorie, and Emilie Pine. You can watch it here: <https://museumofchildhood.ie/writing-irish-institutions-jacinta-daly-melatu-uche-okorie-and-emilie-pine/>
- The History Team’s Award Winning Heritage Week videos on Irish childhood from medieval times to the eighteenth century is available to watch it here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCx8bymLYkYRJ0tqCNxCx5cg>

- Here is a link to some of the great work going on at the Youth & Child Voices Team: <https://museumofchildhood.ie/youth-voices/>
- For more on the Children's Voices Project 2020 & 2021 Together, Le Chéile, see: <https://museumofchildhood.ie/project2020/>

### **Also Referenced in the Episode**

On the death of Ann Lovett and her son in Longford (please be aware that this story may be distressing to some):

- <https://www.rte.ie/archives/2014/0131/501367-tragic-death-of-ann-lovett-1984/>
- <https://soundcloud.com/infocusindependent/the-tragic-death-of-ann-lovett>

On the Hicks & Sons Dollhouse:

- <https://www.independent.ie/life/home-garden/hello-dolly-homes-in-minature-detail-38279841.html>

You can read James Kelly's article, "*Chimney Sweeps, Climbing Boys and Child Employment in Ireland, 1775–1875*" *Irish Economic and Social History* (2020), which is available in open access at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0332489320910013>

For more on the Crollly Doll Exhibition: <https://museumofchildhood.ie/crollly-dolls/>

You can find out more about Lorraine's research at: <https://museumofchildhood.ie/lorraine-mcevoy/> and <https://www.tcd.ie/trinitylongroomhub/research/fellows/2020-21grad-fellows/Lorraine-McEvoy.php>