

Mayo Heritage

Newsletter



Vol. IV Issue 29
16th July 2023

YouTube

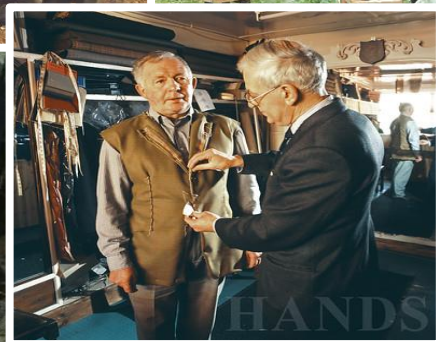


The
North Mayo
Heritage
Centre

Who remembers the series

HANDS

Broadcast throughout the 1970s and 1980s?



Some of the industries
and artisans featured on
the series HANDS
([flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com/photos/northmayoheritage/))

Are you interested in
TRACING YOUR MAYO ROOTS?

If you are interested in professional help to research your family history or are curious about your ancestry, why not contact us?

Tel: 096 31809 Email: northmayo@gmail.com or visit northmayogenealogy.com

Tel: 096 31809 www.northmayogenealogy.com Email: northmayo@gmail.com Email: nmhmanager@gmail.com

HANDS – the series

There were the potters from Co. Wexford, who could trace their family trade back to 1659. There were the candle makers of Dublin, and a hurl maker in Kilkenny, Raymie Dowling. There was John Surlis, who perfected the craft of the Leitrim Chair, and there was the everyday life of the Dublin bookbinder.

These were all crafts of innate skill, passed through generations. And they all featured in the TV series Hands, which ran on RTÉ from 1978 until 1989.

Hands was produced by David and Sally Shaw Smith. According to the website hands.ie, which preserves the archive of the shows, David and Sally were ‘imbued by a sense of urgency ... and... travelled the length and breadth of Ireland during the 1970s and ’80s, capturing on film the final years of traditional rural and urban life. These intimate portraits are as much about the life of the individuals as the crafts they practised. The films capture the essence of Irish heritage, creating a unique archive of life in Ireland at the end of the 20th century’.



Sally and David Shaw Smith
(from historicalballinrobe.com)

The breadth of the material they covered in the series Hands has provided a valuable archive of trades and crafts, many of which are either extinct or have now become more mechanised.

With Hands, we see the bookbinder applying gold leaf to add the finishing touches to the work. Picking it up by hand will damage it, so he rubs a piece of paper through his hair and then uses the paper to lift the gold leaf, magnet like from the table.

We see John Surlis fashion the attractive Leitrim Chair from old tea chests. We even see the craft of lace making in different parts of the country; with ‘fine examples of needlepoint, tatting, sprigging and pillow or bobbin lace, with their attractive glass and bead bobbin endings’. Lace making was once a thriving activity in parts of Co. Mayo.

We meet the pottery operation founded by two brothers named Kerley from Cornwall, England, who settled in the Carley’s Bridge area of Co. Wexford because it was known to be rich in marl clay.

The series was narrated by some legendary figures from those days of television and radio: Benedict Kiely, Ray MacAnally, Seamus Ó Catháin, and of course, for the many programmes about Dublin city, Éamonn Mac Thomáis.



David Shaw-Smith
1939 - 2021

Some of the backing music was supplied by the likes of Paddy Glackin and Matt Mulloy. For years, the original films themselves were stored in tea chests in the couple’s home in Creagh, near Ballinrobe. In March of 2013, archivists packed up the 1,800 film cans and brought them to the RTÉ archives.

Like all such archival work, Hands has now developed into a double treat for those interested in this bygone era.

The backdrop to the films is now between 40 and 50 years old, and the countryside, town and cityscapes which are the backdrop to the craftspeople themselves has also been captured forever. David Shaw Smith passed away in January 2021 following a long illness.

References:

Hands.ie
<https://cowhousestudios.com/carleys-bridge-pottery/>
 Cummins, Steve (5 April 2012). "RTÉ Revisits 'Hands' Series, GMarsh Begin Production". The Irish Film & Television Network.
 McGrath, P. 2021. 'Acclaimed filmmaker David Shaw-Smith dies following long illness' published on rte.ie

DID YOU KNOW ...

In Good Hands (produced and directed by Gillian Marsh Productions) is a six part series in which David Shaw Smith revisited the businesses and artisans he filmed in the original series to see how they have weathered over the years.

"Not only those who recall the wonderful texture of the film series Hands but all those with an interest in Irish culture and history will have been deeply saddened on hearing of the death of David Shaw-Smith.. As a nation, we owe him a debt of gratitude for his work documenting the arts and crafts traditions across our island, as immortalised in the documentaries in his 'Hands' series. His loss will be felt most acutely by his family, to whom I convey my deepest condolences and can share in the deep appreciation that exists for the unique legacy on Irish life and film that he has left us"

Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland

**KILKENNY’S BRIAN CODY
FEATURED IN HANDS
DOCUMENTARY**



Kilkenny captain Brian Cody (pictured left) raises the Liam McCarthy cup after his team won the 1982 All-Ireland hurling Final over Cork.

Cody had used a hurl made by Raymie Dowling during the final, and he was featured in the Hands documentary, visiting Raymie’s workshop to collect his hurls for the big day.

(Image from Joe.ie)