

## PILGRIMS COMPLETE THE WALK OF THE BRONZE SHOES

Three Liverpool-based walkers have completed a pilgrimage to transport a pair of bronze shoes, from Strokestown (Co. Roscommon, Ireland) to Liverpool. John Maguire (*ArtsGroupie CIC*), Greg Quiry and Emma Smith (*Liverpool Irish Festival*) have completed the entire journey in nine-days. They walked alongside the Irish Ambassador to Canada Dr Eamonn McKee and Caroilin Callery, daughter of the [Strokestown Park and Museum](#) and [The National Famine Way](#) founder, Jim Callery. The shoes mark a reconnection between Ireland's famine emigrants and the *Liverpool Irish Famine Trail*. As custodian of the Trail, the *Liverpool Irish Festival* shares and preserves the Trail sites and their stories for future generations.

At the height of An Gorta Mór (The Great Hunger), 1,490 men, women and children set out from Strokestown (Co. Roscommon, Ireland) bound for Canada, herded by bailiffs. The walk would see half of them perish, evicted from their original homes, destroyed before their eyes. This route is now [The National Famine Way](#). The *National Famine Way* is a collaboration between *Waterways Ireland*, the *Irish Heritage Trust* and the county councils along the route.

177-years on individuals from [The National Famine Way](#), [Strokestown Park and Museum](#) and Liverpool's *Irish Famine Trail* have completed the 165km evictee route, as well as a walk from Liverpool's Clarence Dock to the Irish Famine Memorial at [St Luke's \(Bombed Out\) Church](#). In 9-days, walkers walked over 200km, the longest day being 38.7km and almost 46,000 steps!

The campaign has raised some vital funds to support the *Liverpool Irish Festival's* ongoing conservation, digitisation and upgrades to the [Liverpool Irish Famine Trail](#). There's still time to donate: <https://www.justgiving.com/page/bronze-shoes-liverpool>

The bronze shoes have been trail markers for Ireland's *National Famine Ways* since its inception. Now, those in Ireland will be linked to bronze shoes in Canada and in Liverpool, forming a new international trail known as the *Global Irish Famine Way*. Cast from an original 1800s pair found at the Strokestown Estate, 15-pairs have made their way to Canadian sites in Grosse Île, St John's Newfoundland, Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Niagara, Saint John Partridge Island, Hamilton among others. Work in Liverpool is ongoing to find the shoes a permanent home. In the meantime, like their Irish Famine counterparts, they will find temporary accommodation in the region.

### THE ROUTE

Beginning in Strokestown (19 May) the shoes were walked to Dublin via [EPIC](#) (25 May). At *EPIC* a ceremony awarded all the walkers for their efforts. Whilst in Dublin, the shoes were passed through a portal to colleagues in New York ([read more here](#)). The following day, the Liverpool group sailed to Holyhead (26 May); to take the shoes by road to Seacombe (Birkenhead) and ferry to the Mersey Port (27 May). The group walked the shoes to Clarence Dock Gates and on to [St Luke's \(Bombed Out\) Church](#). (27 May). Clarence Dock is where 1.3m Irish Famine poor were brought in to Liverpool during An Gorta Mór. The shoes will be kept by the Festival and shown in an exhibition in October.

The Clarence-Dock-to-St-Luke's walk will be repeated, with the public, on Sun 27 Oct 2024 ahead of an official Irish Famine Memorial event. Martin Fraser, Irish Ambassador to the United Kingdom, and Sarah Mangan, Irish Consul General to the North of England, will join the public walk on 27 Oct 2024, which will see the shoes taken once more from the docks to the memorial.

### WHAT THE FUNDS SUPPORT

The walk's key purpose is to connect Strokestown, Liverpool and Canada. Having people from all three countries walk together is a unique event. The Liverpool participants are using the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to raise

money to maintain the legacy and history of the *Liverpool Irish Famine Trail* for future generations. Funds raised will contribute to:

- forging the bronze shoes creating a tangible heritage reference. These will connect Strokestown, Liverpool and 8+ sites in Canada via the ***Global Irish Famine Way***, which is still growing its international links. This pair will eventually find a permanent home in Liverpool, just as the original migrants did
- maintaining the existing trail and its heritage, whilst exploring and researching new sites of relevance. As custodians of the Trail, the Festival team are in the process of refreshing the memorial monument and plaques, which have served as a poignant marker since 1998
- developing technology to enable visitors – local and remote – to explore and understand the importance and relevance of the Irish Famine story to our city and its communities.

Want to donate? Please visit:  <https://www.justgiving.com/page/bronze-shoes-liverpool>

***Liverpool Irish Festival*** Artistic Director and CEO, Emma Smith says:


“The walk has been a powerful reminder that famine is not inevitable. The treatment of the 1,490 in the run up to and during 1847 is a blot on the names of all those involved, for they were left with nothing. Famine is not just about food; it’s about how people are subjugated, held in poverty and have all agency removed. For a long time, not even their names were known, deemed as ‘surplus population’. The work ***Strokestown Park*** is doing to retell their story and understand the political mechanics, which allowed over half of their number to perish, is critical. History cannot be learned from if its stories are forgotten. It’s reminded us that migrancy is not a new concept. Liverpool is a city built by migrants, throughout its history. Playing host to migrants is an important part of our humanity and the societies we build. We must remember this in the face of the ongoing international wars, reminding ourselves that displaced people are often the poorest of the poor.

“All those that walked this week did so with great empathy and compassion. It was a tough journey and we’re all incredibly proud to have followed in the footsteps of the 1,490”.

– ENDS –

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**About the *Liverpool Irish Famine Trail*** –  <http://www.livepoolirishfaminetrail.com>

The *Liverpool Irish Famine Trail* was originally researched and built by ***Liverpool's Great Hunger Commemoration Committee*** in the late 1990s. The Festival has taken over custodianship of the existing sites, developed a living archive of research and is building digital technologies to share the Trail. Users can walk specific routes and access relevant information online in multiple creative ways. For example,  **watch *Liverpool Irish Festival's* commissioned film: *Our Home/Ár Bhaile*** © Ella Dalton and Thomas Jones.

The Trail's research is led by a voluntary *History Research Group*, who are tasked with researching the Trail sites; collating information on the impact of the Irish Famine and the affects An Gorta Mór had on the region.

The group's led by John Maguire, founder and Director of  ***ArtsGroupie CIC***, who completed the Strokestown walk. The work is funded by  ***The National Lottery Heritage Fund***.

### **About *Liverpool Irish Festival***

Founded in 2003, the Festival brings Liverpool and Ireland closer together, using arts and culture. As the most diverse celebration of Irish culture in the UK, it's a ten-day festival of music and song; visual arts; performance arts; culture, history and identity sharing. Visit  [liverpoolirishfestival.com](http://liverpoolirishfestival.com). Follow @LivIrishFest and #LIF2024 on social channels:  ***Instagram***,  ***Facebook*** and  ***Twitter***. #BronzeShoeWalk #IrishAmbassadorsWalk #LiverpoolIrishFamineTrail #IrishFamine

### **Contact details**

For additional images, information and interviews please contact Emma Smith:

 [emma@liverpoolirishfestival.com](mailto:emma@liverpoolirishfestival.com) or call +44 (0) 7804 286 145