

25th October 2024

Crafting the Future at the 3rd International Économusée Conference Uniting Artisans & Stakeholders in the Causeway Coast & Glens Area.

This week over 50 renowned artisans gathered together in Ballycastle for the 3rd International Reunion of the Économusée network. The artisans came from Canada, Norway, The Faroe Islands, and both parts of Ireland.

Previous reunions had been held in Quebec City in Canada and Bergen in Norway. Ballycastle was chosen as the venue for the 3rd gathering as it is central to the greatest local concentration of Économusée workshops anywhere.

The Économusée network was established in Quebec over 30 years ago. Its purpose is to help artisans learn from each other, to demonstrate their skills and to promote their businesses by adding a tourism element. Visitors can watch artisans at work in situ and participate in workshops.

Carl Éric Guertin, Executive Director of the Économusée Network Society commented, "We are delighted to bring together our members from four countries for this 3rd International Conference of the ÉCONOMUSÉE® Network Society in Northern Ireland. After a long period without in-person meetings, with the last international gathering held in 2017, this conference offers a unique opportunity to strengthen our ties, share our experiences, and build strong business collaborations for the future. The cultural and artisanal diversity that defines us is our strength, and it is through collaboration that we will continue to promote and preserve this expertise for future generations."

Graham Thompson, Director of Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust commented, "It is wonderful to see so many skilled artisans coming here to share their own experiences and learn from our own very skilled operators. The artisans have had the chance to meet with or visit all our 11 workshops as well as experience much of our local culture.

We hope that this visit can act as a springboard to increase knowledge about this important network, here in the Causeway Coast and Glens and further afield. We also hope that this can act as a catalyst to expand the network here in the coming years supporting more of our skilled operators and building on an important element of our tourist offer."

Over the 4-day visit the Artisans experienced a walking tour in Belfast, visited the Giant's Causeway and Dark Hedges and enjoyed performances by The Causeway Shantymen and Storyteller Janice Weatherspoon.

They met with and visited every member of the network in Northern Ireland: Audrey Kyle Watercolours and Gobbins Crafts on Island Magee; Steensons Jewellers in Glenarm; Hot Milk Forge in Martinstown; Ursa Minor, Broughgammon Farm and the North Coast Smokehouse around Ballycastle, Fidela Coffee Roasters in Coleraine; The Chocolate Manor and Brighter Gold in the Binevenagh area and The Creamery Can, Glarryford.

The Économusée Network was established in Quebec in 1992. It started in Northern Ireland in 2011. The Network operates across Canada, centred on Quebec, and has reached Greenland, The Faroes, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, both parts of Ireland and Haiti. The network is managed in Northern Ireland by Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust and currently receives limited support towards these activities from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. Previously support was also provided by Tourism NI and Mid and East Antrim Borough Councils.

The current network consists of (Mid and East Antrim), Audrey Kyle Art, Islandmagee, Gobbins Crafts, Islandmagee, Steensons Jewellers, Glenarm, Hot Milk Forge, Martinstown, The Creamery Can, Glarryford. (Causeway Coast and Glens) Ursa Minor, Ballycastle, Broughgammon Farm, Ballycastle, North Coast Smokehouse, Ballycastle, Fidela Coffee Roasters, Coleraine, The Chocolate Manor, Castlerock, Brighter Gold, Limavady

The four-day conference commenced with a scenic tour along the breathtaking Causeway Coastal Route, featuring visits to Économusée workshops. The first stop was Gobbins Crafts Économusée in Islandmagee, where artisan jeweller Heather McFadden provided inspiring insights into her jewellery-making. Participants then visited Audrey Kyle Art Économusée studio, where she explained how the breathtaking landscape, natural heritage, and wildlife influence her work.

At the first of the nine Glens of Antrim a stop at Steenson's Jewellers Économusée in the picturesque coastal village of Glenarm, where Brona Steenson showcased her diverse jewellery collections and discussed the studio's role in the acclaimed television series Game of Thrones®. Local blacksmith Eamonn Higgins of Hot Milk Forge Économusée, welcomed delegates to his workshop in Martinstown, captivating the group with a live blacksmithing demonstration, all senses inspired!

A locally sourced supper served at Ursa Minor Bakehouse Économusée in Ballycastle welcomed each guest, showcasing tradition meets innovation on one plate. Hosts Dara and Ciara O'hArtghaile highlighted the region's rich culinary offerings and shared insights into the sourdough and baking experiences available at the newly opened Ursa Minor Bakery School.

Day two, delegates were joined by Ruairidh Morrison of North Coast Smokehouse Économusée, who presented the story behind their locally produced smoked salmon, dulse, and smoked salt and pepper, complemented by a delicious tasting. Next, Fidela Coffee Roastery Économusée in Coleraine, champions of direct source to cup. Delegates enjoyed a roastery tour, a coffee-tasting session, and hands-on training in coffee cupping techniques.

Each delegate participated in a chocolate truffle-making workshop at The Chocolate Manor Économusée with chocolatier Geri Martin in Castlerock. They learned about Sir Hans Sloane's, a NI native who introduced drinking chocolate. Brighter Gold Rapeseed Oil Économusée in Limavady, was the final tour stop where artisan Leona Kane shared the fascinating story of the Brighter Hoard discovered in 1896, which inspired her to create the award-winning Brighter Gold Rapeseed Oil.

Much to their surprise, delegates were welcomed by an energetic performance by The Causeway Shantymen at The Marine Hotel in Ballycastle. The Conference dinner, was attended by distinguished guests, including the Mayor of Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Councillor Ciaran McQuillan, along with representatives from Tourism NI, the National Lottery Heritage Fund, CCGHT Board members, National Trust, and Enterprise Causeway. Following the speeches just like all memorable evenings, it ended with storytelling connected to our land, sea, and people by Janice Witherspoon.

On the final day of the conference, delegates engaged in an Artisan meeting that offered opportunities for networking and discussions on collaborations, challenges, and strategies to further the Économusée initiative both regionally and internationally. The day's workshop visits began at Broughgammon Farm Économusée, where Charlie and Becky Cole shared insights into their sustainable farming practices, the workings of their farm, and their on-site butchery, where they teach others the art of butchery and wild game handling. No visit to Northern Ireland would be complete without a stop at the Giant's Causeway World Heritage Site, which was followed by a late

lunch at the Creamery Can Économusée. There, Hugh and Alyson Reid warmly welcomed delegates with delicious homemade treats and samples of their handmade ice cream.

The Économusée concept was developed in Québec and is defined as 'working museum'. The Économusée project provides a network for artisans to develop and combine culture, craft and tourism.

Photo Captions of Guests



Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council, Deputy Mayor Tanya Stirling at the 3rd International Économusée Conference hosted by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust with board members of the Heritage Trust, CEO Graham Thompson, Robert Wilson, Chair Julie Taylor, Cll Bill Kennedy, Dep Mayor Tanya Stirling, Ald Richard Stewart, Vice Chair George George UFU and Patrick McKeever at the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle.



From the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust Chair Julie Taylor and CEO Graham Thompson (2nd from right), with Carl-Éric Guertin Gen Manager Économusée and Stella Byrne of the National Lottery Heritage Fund at the 3rd International Économusée Conference hosted by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust at the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle.



From Norway are Astrid Finneide and Per Gunnar Hettervik with Maureen Miller from Canada at the 3rd International Économusée Conference hosted by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust at the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle



The Shanty Men before their performance at the 3rd International Économusée Conference hosted by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust at the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle.



Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Deputy Mayor Tanya Stirling with Carl-Éric Guertin Gen Manager Économusée and Julie Taylor Chair of the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust at the 3rd International Économusée Conference hosted by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust at the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle.



Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust staff and members of the Économusée Network in N.I front L-R local Artisans Becky & Charlie Cole of Broughgammon, Leona Kane of Brighter Gold, Geri Martin of the Chocolate Manor with Brona Steenson of Steensons Jewellers back row L-R from the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust Tiérna Mullan, Graham Thompson and Carole O'Kane at the 3rd International Économusée Conference hosted by the Causeway Coast & Glens Heritage Trust at the Marine Hotel, Ballycastle.