

Kennys Through The Decades

Kennys Bookshop was established in High St, Galway in 1940 by Des & Maureen Kenny. Five of their six children and three of their grandchildren now work in the family business. In total, the company employs nearly twenty people. Web folklore has it that Kennys Bookshop was the second bookshop in the world to have its own website. Only a sci-fi shop in San Francisco beat them to it and they closed many years ago. As pioneers of bookselling online, Kennys have continually redeveloped their site over the years to keep up-to-date on the changing trends and needs of our customers. Kennys has a renowned stock of books on Irish history, culture, literature and language, as well as a comprehensive selection of non-Irish material that covers all aspects of the human experience. The new website, launched in the Summer of 2010, stocks over 5,000,000 pre-release, new, secondhand, out of print and rare books.

Des Kenny Senior at Kennys Stall at the Galway Agricultural Show in the 1940's 1940's Kennys Bookshop opened in 1940. Desmond was a Galwegian, the son of journalist Thomas Kenny who had founded the "The Connacht Tribune" in 1909. Maureen, a native of Mohill, Co. Leitrim won a scholarship to attend University College Galway (UCG) where she studied Commerce. On her first day in UCG she met Desmond, who was studying Arts. And "That," as Desmond was often heard saying "was that." The couple married on graduating.

In 1940, they rented two rooms on High St. They set up a bookshop in one room and lived in the other at the back. They had to be very innovative and adventurous in order to make a living:

- They started a lending library
- Desmond went on the road selling books to County Libraries
- They had a stall at the Galway Agricultural Show
- Kennys had their first ever "Book Sale," a concept which was very novel at the time
- In 1944 they published Walter Macken's "Oidhroacht na Mara" - a literary landmark
- They sold signed limited editions of contemporary prints
- They placed display cases in hotels and factories in many different parts of Ireland
- They moved to a family home in Salthill and were thus able to expand the bookshop.

1950's In order to develop the business, Des and Maureen turned their attention to Irish Crafts and Art. There were few shops selling craft products such as rugs, sweaters, baskets, ceramics and even leprechauns at the time! Artists began to arrive with paintings and sculpture. For example, Kenneth Webb first showed his paintings here in 1953.

Exhibitions held in the tiny art space included a contemporary French painting exhibition, "Interpretations of Dante's Divine Comedy" an exhibition by 43 living Irish artists sponsored by the Italian Cultural Institute, press photographs entitled "Germany 10 Years After The War", a solo exhibition by Charles Lamb and one by Mabel Young which was opened by her husband Paul Henry. They hosted the first Caltex Children's Art Exhibition, and subsequently a number of one-man shows by its first winner Michael Anthony Little.

The first Book Catalogue (100 copies) was printed in 1959, the beginnings of the development of an export market.

1960's Shop Exterior 1960's The business continued to expand in the sixties. Desmond started going to the UK where he began to buy extensively. In the Summer of 1960, Des and Maureen converted the living room of their home in Salthill into a craft shop for the Summer.

In 1965 Kennys opened an antique shop in Cross St., just down the street from the Bookshop. While Desmond was busy buying libraries, he also purchased many valuable antiques which he sold in the new shop. In 1966 Kennys published their first Irish language book-catalogue.

From the start, Art had always played a very important role in the Kenny Bookshop. Exhibitions were hung among the books and, more often than not, on top of the books! In 1968 it was decided that the art deserved an exhibition area of its own. Once again, Maureen and Desmond looked to their own home for the expansion of the business. They converted their own living room into an art gallery and provided the West of Ireland with its first Art Gallery, opening their home to art lovers from all around the world.

The first exhibition was by artist Sean Keating and the gallery has hosted several hundred since. 1970's During the 1970's, the family started drifting into the business. All, with the exception of Jane, who went on to study psychology and is now a teacher in Galway, found their niche within the business.

In 1973, Kennys opened the Seán Desmond Gallery in New York and, in 1974 the Book Bindery opened in Salthill. Gerry Kenny had completed a bookbinding apprenticeship in Dublin and then set up on his own adding a very valuable dimension to the business. The bookbindery produces an extensive range of products from thesis binding to hand crafted, fine-tooled leather bindings.

Among the exhibitions held in Salthill during the seventies were Rose, a Jack B. Yeats centenary show, an international women's exhibition, and solo shows by George Campbell, Arthur Armstrong and John Behan. 1980's In 1980, the Taibhsín - a small experimental theatre - came on the market and Kennys managed to purchase it. Shortly afterwards they bought the High Street premises. This turned out to be a large medieval building with carved stone fireplaces. In 1984, the Kenny Gallery moved back to the city centre to Middle Street.

Export began to take on a new meaning with frequent sales trips to the US. The United States Library of Congress appointed Kennys as their Irish suppliers. This started a trend and the bookshop now supplies some three hundred libraries throughout North America.

Among the artists introduced to Galway via exhibitions in the eighties were Gertrude Degenhardt, John Coll, Peter Fitzgerald, Joseph Quilty, Susan Webb and Mick Flaherty. 1990's

Members of the Kenny Family L-R Monica Rigney, Tom Kenny, Karen Golden, Conor Kenny, Maureen Kenny, Jane Hogan, Gerry Kenny and Des Kenny. Kennys first computer, an Atari 286, was purchased in 1990. Their first website was launched in 1994, only the second bookshop in the world to do so. Customers now have the option of being sent their weekly or monthly mailing lists by e-mail. At this time there were approximately 40,000 books on Kennys on-line catalogues and orders arrive daily from all over the world. The website is also used to promote the art exhibitions held regularly in Kennys. Another export opportunity identified by Kennys was Japan, a country we visited for the first time in 1995. In 1994, Karen (the first of the third generation of Kennys to join the business) opened "An Dámhlann", a contemporary art gallery in Spiddal. In 1995, she began a framing service as well as the wholesale supply service of antiquarian maps and prints.

The 1990's were also years of celebration:

- 1990 - Kennys celebrated 50 years in business with a major exhibition of portraits of 101 Irish writers by contemporary artists entitled "Faces in a Bookshop". The exhibition was opened by President Hillery.
- 1990 - Desmond & Maureen were presented with a special commemorative piece of Royal Tara China by the Galway Chamber of Commerce & Industry. This was the first presentation of its kind by the Chamber.
- 1991 - Bord Fáilte presented Kennys with the Ambassador Award.
- 1992 - The RTE programme, Cursaí, produced a film documentary on Kennys.
- 1993 - A new bookstore for second-hand books was opened on Merchants Road in the city centre.
- 1996 - The Bookshop & Art Gallery closed for some time to facilitate major renovations.
- 1998 - In April '98, the extended Kenny family celebrated Maureen Kenny's 80th birthday with a big family party. "Mother of all the Kennys", an article about Maureen Kenny, was published in The Irish Times.
- 1999 - In September, Kennys opened a dedicated Export Centre in Liosbaun, Galway. The Export Centre was established to develop the growing Collection Development and Library Services market. 2000's
- 2000 - In January, Kennys opened an office in Tokyo.
- 2000 - In May, Mrs. Kenny was conferred with an Honorary Doctorate of Law from National Council for Education Awards
- 2000 - Kennys were the winner of the DHL Exporter Of The Year award.

"Kennys Book Export Company was awarded title of DHL Exporter of the year because it was one of Ireland's true exporting pioneers." Peter Lomax - Managing Director DHL Worldwide Express

- 2003 - Kennys begin cataloguing their stock using OCLC records. To date, we have 350,000 books catalogued to US Library of Congress standards and on sale, viewable at www.bookshop.kennys.ie
- 2004 - Kennys introduce a shopping cart to their website. Customers can now shop online for new or out-of-print books and original art.
- 2005 - St. Patrick's Day - Kennys launch Kennys Irish Bookshop, a new site dedicated solely to our online bookstore, with a particular focus on books of Irish interest.
- 2005 - Arts Week - Kennys launch The Kenny Gallery, a new site dedicated solely to our art gallery.
- 2005 - In September - Kennys announce moving their High Street Bookshop completely online and unveil plans to relocate the Art Gallery
- 2005 - The announcement generated considerable reaction from customers and the general public alike. Apollo Gallery in Dublin posted the following Kennys Bookshop To Close its Doors and Move Online on their website
- 2006 - January 14th is the end of an era as Kennys close their High Street Bookshop and move online. Rosita Boland's article in the Irish Times Magazine - The Next Chapter says it all
- 2006 - March - The entire High Street/Middle Street building is transformed into the largest commercial Art Gallery in Ireland.

- 2008 - Maureen Kenny passed away peacefully on March 25th. There were many tributes to her 65 years behind the counter in Kennys....

- RTE - Michael D Higgins TD speaks on the News at One
- The Irish Times - Maureen Kenny Obituary
- The Irish Times - Writers and artists at Kennys' bookshop founder's funeral
- The Sunday Independent - Maureen Kenny - Pioneering owner of Bookshop that became a must-see for Galway visitors
- The Galway Advertiser - Sowing seeds for 1,000 artists
- The Galway Advertiser - Remembering Mrs Kenny
- The Galway Advertiser - Maureen Kenny - the doyenne of Galway booksellers passes away
- The Connacht Tribune - Passing of Maureen Kenny.
- 2008 - July - Kennys open new Bookshop in Liosbán.
- 2009 - January - The Kenny Gallery relocates to Liosbán Retail Park. 2010's
- 2010 - January - Kennys celebrate 70 years in 2010. View all events.

- The Sunday Business Post - Kenny's Celebrate 70 Years
- Galway Advertiser - Kenny's - Seventy Years A Growing
- Galway City Tribune - Art Cements Mother and Daughter Relationship
- Galway Advertiser - Kenny's Celebrate 70 Years in 2010
- Galway Advertiser - Major Irish authors to take part in Kenny's birthday celebrations
- Le Télégramme - L'Irlande touchée au coeur