Proceedings, 1973

1973 could well be described as an historical year for the Thomond Archaeological Society for it was the first time in the history of the Society that members elected a lady President. It was also the year in which the Society decided on a special insignia which the President would wear at all of the Society’s meetings and at functions where the Society should be represented. It is agreed by all that the Sub-Committee responsible for selecting the insignia could hardly have found a more suitable item upon which to base its design than the Gleninsheen Collar, a prehistoric ornament which has historical associations for the Society—see Report of the Presidential Insignia Sub-Committee, appended.

During the year we had a total of five lectures and eight outings, all of which were well attended. In January Mr. Patrick F. Wallace, of the National Museum of Ireland delivered a lecture entitled “Public Transport in North Munster before the Railways,” a paper which was then in preparation for the 1972 number of our Journal (vol. XV, pp. 34-58). In February we had Professor M. J. O’Kelly, of University College, Cork, who gave us a fascinating lecture on “Newgrange: its newest discoveries.” The Annual General Meeting was held in March, and after the meeting we had a most interesting and unusual documentary film on “The Wreck of the Girona,” lent to us by courtesy of the Ulster Museum; it dealt with the many finds recovered from one of the Armada galleons wrecked off the Antrim coast. In April a lecture on “The Irish Harp” was delivered to the Society by the Revd. Mr. Christopher Warren, who illustrated his talk with a number of pieces which he played on a replica made by himself of the so-called Brian Boru Harp.

On the 6th of May Mr. Martin A. Timoney organised an outing for junior members, taking them to visit the various ancient sites in the Lough Gur region. On the following Sunday, the 13th of May, was held the first of the general outings—to Newbridge, the small hillfort at Lisbane, Shanid, and Mount Trenchard, at which sites the speakers were Mr. Patrick F. Wallace and Mrs. Mary Geary.

On the 28th of May the Society held its last pre-Summer lecture of the year when the Knight of Glin talked on “A Social History of the Irish Interior from 1660 to 1800.”

Early in June an evening outing was held to Castleconnell where Canon James Penefather and Mr. Quaid spoke at Lord Clare’s House, the De Burgo Castle, the Spa, and the Island. The major outing of the year was on the 17th of June. The intention was to visit the monastery at Annaghdown, on the east shore of Lough Corrib, and then to embark on a passenger cruiser to visit the ancient monastic site on Inchagoill. Due to the break-down of the cruiser, however, plans were altered on the spot, and having visited Annaghdown the members continued by bus around the lake, visiting the ruins of the Augustinian Abbey at Cong and, on arrival back in Galway, visiting the newly-founded Galway City Museum. Mr. Etienne Rynne was the guide throughout.

On the 19th of July the Society visited the excavations being carried out at the ringfort at Sluggary, Raheen, almost within the Limerick City boundaries, which were being conducted by Dr. Elizabeth Shee, of University College, Cork. On the 29th July the Society visited the special Viking Exhibition in the National Museum. Mr. Breandán Ó Ríordáin, who has been excavating old Dublin for many
years, showed us around the exhibition and later around his excavations at Christchurch Place.

Due to atrocious weather on the evening of the 22nd August, an outing to tour King’s Island, Limerick City, had to be abandoned. Instead, our guide, Mr. Plunket O’Callaghan, talked about and showed slides of various historical landmarks and sites in Limerick.

The last two outings were held in September. The first was to East Clare where Revd. Martin Ryan and Mr. Martin Timoney spoke at the following sites: a Wedge-Grave at Monageera, the site of a Tower House at Drummeen, near Broadford (see Journal for 1972, pp. 13-16), St. Cronan’s Church at Tuamgraney, a Tower-House at Liosomin, and the Tower House which is being restored as a museum at Cragganowen. The second September outing was to Killarney where Revd. M. Manning and Comdt. J. Maguire showed us around Muckross House and Gardens, Muckross Abbey, Ross Castle, and the Romanesque church and round tower at Aghadoe.

The first of the Winter series of lectures was held in November when Dr. Caoimhin Ó Danachair spoke bewitchingly on “Everyday Magic.” The year’s activities were brought to a most satisfactory close on the 6th of December with a most enjoyable Social Evening. The occasion was to mark the investiture of our President with the new Presidential insignia, and a large number of members attended.

Christopher Lynch
(Hon. Secretary)

REPORT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL INSIGNIA SUB-COMMITTEE

A Sub-committee was formed in 1973 to implement the motion passed at the Annual General Meeting held earlier that year that the Society should have an insignia to be worn by the President at meetings and when representing the Society. The members of the Sub-committee were Dr. Sarah O’Malley, President, Very Rev. James Culhane (former President 1970-1973) Captain Frank Parker, Hon. Treasurer, Mrs. Mary Geary, Vice-President, Mrs. Marie Condon and Mr. Brian Geary.

The Sub-Committee sought ideas as to the form of the insignia and a suggestion by Mr. John Hunt, Vice-President, that it be based on the Gleninsheen Collar was enthusiastically adopted. The Gleninsheen Collar had been brought to public notice by the late Dermot Gleeson, later to be President of the Society and for many years Honorary Editor of the Society’s Journal, it was an object of a type associated particularly with the Thomond area, it was pre-eminent of its type, and it clearly would provide the basis for a suitable and attractive design. Several artists were approached for designs and estimates, and eventually Mr. Peter Donovan, Silversmith, Kilkenny, was commissioned to carry out his own design for a silver gilt medallion in the form of the Gleninsheen Collar, to be worn on a ribbon around the neck.

The Sub-Committee were very pleased with the work as executed, and decided that the President should be formally invested with the insignia at a function which was duly held in the Ark Tavern, Limerick, on the 6th of December 1973. Many members of the Society assisted in running the function, and it was a very pleasant social occasion, with supper and dancing. Before the investiture, Captain Parker recounted
the story of the finding of the Collar and the insignia was then blessed by the Reverend T. R. Shorten (Committee Member) and by the Very Reverend James Culhane. Mr. A. B. Killeen (President 1956-1964) invested Dr. O'Malley with the insignia, and in her reply the President traced the history of the Society and its predecessors through the Presidents since 1909. A profit was made on the function which defrayed the major part of the cost of the insignia (the balance having been provided by several generous donations) and which left a small sum in hands.

The Sub-Committee also considered incorporating in the insignia the names of the Presidents since 1909, with provision for the names of future Presidents to be added. After considering various suggestions they reluctantly concluded that any elaborate chain would detract from the appearance of the insignia and that some other form of commemorating former Presidents should be sought.

MARY GEARY
(Hon. Secretary, Presidential Insignia
Sub-Committee)

Proceedings, 1974

We appear to have broken all records with regard to the number of lectures and outings held this year. All were a great success and were well attended, a sign that our Society is thriving.

To open the year's events we had The Hon. Desmond Guinness to lecture on "Irish Houses and Castles", a lecture which was delivered to a huge audience in the East Room of Plassy House. In February, Mr. Thomas Fanning, Assistant Inspector of National Monuments, lectured to us on his excavations at Reask, an ancient church-site on the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry. This lecture was such a success that members felt that an outing to the area should be arranged during the Summer (see below). In March, Mr. Ted Bonner delivered a lecture on "The Tomb of Tutankhamun", a fascinating subject into which Mr. Bonner had clearly put a lot of thought and time. The Annual General Meeting was held on the 2nd of April, and was followed by two short films entitled "Prehistoric Man in Europe" and "The Viking Ships of Roskilde".

In April, Mr. Etienne Rynne, Lecturer in Celtic Archaeology, University College, Galway, lectured to us on "The Art of the Gaelic Revival during the 19th and 20th Centuries". Dealing with the revival of art in the ‘Celtic’ manner, he included the Limerick Mayoral Chair as a significant late 19th century example, and the work of our member Mrs. Maureen Collins-Ryan, who was present at the lecture, as being of importance for the present century.

Our first outing of the year was held on the 12th of May when we visited sites in the Cashel and Clonmel areas; Col. F. J. Watson, Revd. P. Conlon, O.F.M., Dr. Elizabeth Shee and Mrs. Rossiter spoke at the various sites. An evening outing was
held on the 30th of May when Mr. Martin Timoney conducted members around the huge triple-ramparted hillfort of Mooghanlough and Revd. Martin Ryan spoke at Magh Adhair, inauguration place of the Princes of Thomond. On the 19th of June our President, Dr. Sarah O'Malley, led an outing to Blarney Castle and the Cork City excavations, where Prof. M. J. O'Kelly and Mr. Dermot Twobig spoke. Shortly afterwards, on the 18th of June, Mr. Thomas Pierce, a Vice-President of the Society, conducted members on a tour of Killbreedy, Hollypark and Curraghchase, all in the general Adare district.

The Summer of 1974 will, I am sure, go down on record as being a disaster weatherwise, but despite this, and despite several failures in previous years due to bad weather, we were extremely fortunate in being blessed with a really beautiful day for the outing to Inis Cathaigh (Scattery Island) on the 28th of July. Mr. Etienne Rynne guided us around the ancient monastic site on the island, after which the two buses crossed the Shannon on the Killimer-Tarbert Ferry and proceeded to Askeaton where he showed us around the old Franciscan Friary. Thanks to our member Mr. P. J. Dundon, we were then shown the beam dated 1479 which may have come from the Great Hall of Desmond's Castle [see Journal, 14 (1971), 75-76], and also a medieval wooden statue of the Madonna and Child which has been preserved for generations in the Casey household at nearby Tubrid.

On the 5th of September we fulfilled the intentions expressed earlier in the year and visited sites west of Dingle, including Reask, Gallarus Oratory, Kilmalkedar, and beehive cells near Slea Head. Mr. Thomas Fanning was the guide throughout.

The first of the Autumn-Winter series of lectures was in October when Father Patrick, O.F.M., delivered a lecture on “Medieval Franciscan Architecture”. In November, Dr. Maurice Craig came to lecture us on “Historic Characteristics of Irish Towns”; and the year ended with a most interesting lecture by Mr. David N. Johnston, Inspector of National Monuments, entitled “Clonuskert Abbey — its architectural conservation”.

Christopher Lynch
(Hon. Secretary)
Obituaries


The death occurred on 17 December 1973 of Father John Ryan, S.J., who succeeded his teacher Eóin Mac Neill as Professor of Early (including Medieval) Irish History at University College, Dublin, in 1942, and retired from the chair in 1964. Born on 19 February 1894 near Castleconnell, county Limerick, Father Ryan was educated at the Crescent College, Limerick. After entering the Jesuit Order he graduated from University College, Dublin, in Celtic Studies in 1917, and was awarded the Travelling Studentship of the National University in 1918, and the degree of M.A. in 1919. He then spent several years studying philosophy and theology at Louvain, Valkenburg and Burgos, and from 1921 to 1923 was a pupil of the great Celtiist, Rudolf Thurneysen, at Bonn.

Ordained in 1926, Father Ryan taught for some years at Clongowes Wood College, and published two text-books: Ireland from the Earliest Times to A.D. 800 (Dublin [1927]) and Ireland from A.D. 800 to A.D. 1600 (Dublin [1929]). In 1931 he was appointed Lecturer in Early Irish History at University College, Dublin, and the same year saw the publication of his magnum opus, which won him the degree of D.Litt., Irish Monasticism: origins and early development (Dublin and Cork, 1931; second edition Shannon, 1971). In 1940 he edited the Festschrift presented to his predecessor, the well-known volume Féilsgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill which contains so many articles of lasting importance by leading Celtic scholars, including his own study of the abbatial succession at Clonmacnois. Father Ryan was elected a member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1933, and from 1945 to 1949 was President of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.

Father Ryan was President of the Thomond Archaeological Society from 1942 to 1944, a Committee Member from 1945 to 1958, and Vice-President from 1959 until his death; he was made an Honorary Life Member of the Society in 1965. His contributions to the Society's Journal were few but rank among the most valuable of his scholarly publications. In volumes ii and iii (1940-41 and 1942-43) he published 'The O'Briens in Munster after Clontarf,' and in volume iii he also published 'The Dalcaisians'; the former contained an important discussion of the Synod of Ráth Bressail (vol. iii, pp. 29-38). More recently he contributed a study of Brian Bóruma to the book published in memory of his friend Monsignor Michael Moloney, North Munster Studies, ed. Rynne (Limerick, 1967).

Father Ryan's first love was ecclesiastical history in the widest sense, yet when his duties made him concentrate his attentions on early Ireland he devoted much energy to the elucidation of secular affairs, the evidence for which was scattered and obscure. The articles above-mentioned, together with 'The Battle of Clontarf' and 'The Historical Content of the Catharrem Ceallachdín Chaisil' (J. Roy. Soc. Antig. Ireland, lxviii, 1938, and lxxi, 1941)—which examine in characteristically lively fashion the credentials of twelfth-century propaganda texts—and his more recent O'Donnell Lecture Toirdelbach Ó Conchubhair (Dublin, 1966) form the most detailed narrative yet available of the political history of the Middle Irish period.
Like his predecessor, Eóin Mac Néill, Father Ryan was essentially a countryman, and there can be little doubt that his intimate knowledge of living tradition enabled him to view the personages of early Irish history as real men moving in familiar surroundings. This vivid realisation of traditional learning informed all his writings, both scholarly and popular, and infused merriment and life into the lectures through which he imparted to his students a wealth of detailed information unavailable in any secondary source. His personal conservatism both in religion and scholarship made him at times uncritical, but he never lacked humour, humanity or common sense, and unlike some of his more scientific confrères, never forgot that history is concerned primarily with human beings rather than scholarly abstractions. He had an enormous fund of genealogical knowledge, and his reverence for *seanchas* in all its senses was based on an unrivalled acquaintance with it.

Although in failing health since his retirement, and suffering in his last years from increasing blindness, Father Ryan continued to revise his writings and to publish: in 1972 his contribution ‘The Monastic Institute’ appeared as fascicule ii of the first volume of *A History of Irish Catholicism*, edited by Monsignor P. J. Corish, while at the time of his death he had just completed a continuation of his work on the abbots of Clonmacnoise. His gifts as a conversationalist and raconteur remained unimpaired, and he was always happy to give of his learning to younger scholars.

FRANCIS JOHN BYRNE

The Society also tenders its sympathies to the relatives of the following members deceased during the two years:

MISS GRENE BARRY, Sandville, Grange, Kilnallock, Co. Limerick.
VERY REVD. JAMES CANON BLUETT, P.P., Kilmeedy, Co. Limerick.
GERARD KENNEDY, Treaty Terrace, Limerick.
MOST REVD. HENRY MURPHY, Bishop of Limerick.
PATRICK NOONAN, Roc Greine, Farranshone, Limerick.
ART O’DONNELL, 28 Steele’s Terrace, Ennis.
MRS. DEIRDRE STOKES, Richill, Lisnagry, Co. Limerick.

May they rest in peace.
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