Obituaries

SIR HENRY BUTLER BLACKALL, Q.C., LL.D. (1889-1981)

Sir Henry Blackall, who died aged 92, in Cyprus on the 1st of November last year, is best known to us as an authority on North Munster family history and as Vice-President of the Irish Genealogical Research Society. His articles in various antiquarian journals on the Butler, Galweys and other families are valuable, that on “The Butlers of County Clare” which appears over three numbers of our Journal being of special interest. He has left little published work written before he retired in 1951 except an article in the Irish Genealogist (April 1941) which indicates the background of the Blackall family before they came to Ireland in the seventeenth century. A few years ago he kindly gave me his record of his researches thereon and that is now available to readers at the Manuscripts Department of the National Library (MacLysaght Collection, pp. 3470-3480). The family settled in the Limerick area and have been prominent there since. He himself, though he never returned to live permanently in Ireland, kept up a close connection with Co. Limerick and Dublin by his frequent visits. He had made his home in Cyprus, the country in which he held the position of Chief Justice—the last of the long list of his legal appointments in the British Commonwealth—and where he had married a Cypriot lady.

Go ndéanaidh Dia trócaire ar a anam.

E. MACLYSAGHT


“Whip it out like lightning!” Not an instruction to a surgeon operating on an appendix, to a dentist pulling a degenerate molar, or to someone with a fish on the end of the line, but the first words I ever recall the late Professor O’Kelly speak to me, a still wet-behind-the-ears student of Archaeology who was busy with a trowel in an effort to discover the size and depth of one of Tara’s post-holes! In that imperative phrase, Michael J. O’Kelly (as he signed and was known officially) or Brian (as he signed and was known to his friends) made my acquaintance and, in so speaking, revealed his great experience, and also his impatience with all pussy-footing around a job which could and should be carried out expeditiously. Taking the trowel from my hand, with a few bold scrapes he quickly and expertly emptied the post-hole, thus giving me and my fellow-students an object-lesson in how it should be done. What an introduction to the man, an introduction which, in hindsight, revealed more than the post-hole! It revealed an archaeologist of vast expertise who knew his own mind, who valued experience and common sense over text-book knowledge, and who had a clear perspective of the real merits and potential of archaeological excavation—“there is no slower, more wasteful and expensive way of

---

He also published “The Butler Archbishops of Cashel” in the Journal, 7:3(1956), 31.
In 1977, although complaining of “loss of memory from old age (88)”, he wrote offering a pedigree of the O’Mulvihills to the Journal but, regrettably, it never materialised.
obtaining a little knowledge, often of very doubtful value, than by excavation,” he used to quote or paraphrase someone. The episode also revealed the humorous, if sometimes brusque, way in which the teacher in him worked: by example and deed as well as by word, a man who demonstrated by practice what he preached.

Although many inevitably seem to regard Professor O’Kelly as a Corkman, he was not, though his love for the place was great; he was a North Munsterman, and he never forgot it. Born and reared in Abbeyfeale, West Limerick, his secondary education was at Rockwell College, Co. Tipperary, and his formative years were thus clearly spent in North Munster before he left in 1934 to study engineering in University College, Cork. Engineering did not appeal to him though the training and contacts he made through his year studying the subject helped him greatly later on, as did the training he received as a student of architecture, the subject to which he had changed. Indeed, it is perhaps significant that his first publication (while still a student!) should be on “Old House Types near Lough Gur, Co. Limerick”, written in conjunction with the late Professor Seán P. Ó Riordáin, his mentor and predecessor in the Chair of Archaeology at University College, Cork, whose enthusiasm had enticed him away from architecture into archaeology just as Brian’s own enthusiasm was later to inspire his own students.

Professor O’Kelly’s Limerick and Tipperary background, together with his work assisting Ó Riordáin in the revolutionary, for the time, excavations at Lough Gur, led him to carry out his first piece of major research, for his Master’s degree, on a North Munster topic, and to publish it—as ever, promptly—in our Journal.2 Indeed, that publication, “A Survey of the Antiquities in the Barony of Small County”, was one of the major articles which helped put our Journal firmly in the forefront of Irish archaeological publications of the time. A member of our Society, he maintained an active interest in its activities, lecturing to it frequently and guiding several of its outings throughout the years even though his contributions to the Journal were few and never again approached his first in importance—our Cork ‘rival’ and other national and international publications naturally getting first claim on his later researches. His ever-helpful North Munster interest and support were also revealed when for several years in the initial stages he either chaired or lectured at the now internationally known annual ‘Ennis Conference’, thus helping to get it safely off the ground.

Several times during the last couple of decades Professor O’Kelly’s name was mooted in connection with the presidency of our Society, but every time he was sounded out on the matter he turned it down on the grounds that as he was living in Cork he would be too far from Limerick to attend even a small percentage of the lectures, outings and very necessary Committee Meetings. He accepted however, a Vice-Presidency in 1977, which post he held for the rest of his life.

Professor Michael J. O’Kelly will always be remembered nationally and internationally for his excavations at Newgrange and elsewhere, his brilliant detailed examinations of...

---


His other publications in the Journal were:

“A Court Cairn at Shanballyedmond, Co. Tipperary: a Preliminary Notice”—8(1958-61), 34-35,

and


He also contributed a paper on “Knockea, Co. Limerick” to North Munster Studies, Essays in Commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney (edited by E. Rynne), which was published by the Society in 1967.
early Irish metalwork, and his experiments with cooking in fulachta fiadh and, less dramatically, with iron-smelting, but Brian O'Kelly will be recalled with nostalgia by our members whenever we visit Beal Boru, the megaliths near Rearcross, or pass through Ballyneety, halfway between Limerick and Lough Gur, where he always had a welcome for us at his excavation of nearby Knockea, the Mullach Cae of the tenth century *Bethú Phádraig* (*The Tripartite Life of Patrick*). Perhaps above all, Brian will be mentally pictured by us as he stands in the centre of Grange Stone Circle recounting the many fascinating stories associated with his work there as Seán P.'s assistant, a recounting which would be followed shortly afterwards by his bounding energetically up and over Knockadoon, eagerly leading us from one prehistoric house-site to the next.

Brian was a *gelehrter* with the human touch, an extremely hard-working scholar who enjoyed a drink (between himself and myself we introduced more than half the archaeologists of Britain to the joys of ‘Paddy’), a song (his rendering of the ‘Derry Air’—in Irish—was internationally acclaimed), and the ‘crack’ (his presence at any social gathering was always a bonus). His passing, on the 14th of October, 1982, deprived us all of a valued friend, and Ireland of its senior and most important archaeologist—by example he showed us: even as he died his last publication was going through the press. What other archaeologist can claim that he left no excavation or major piece of research unpublished? *An mbeidh a leithéid aris ann?* For the sake of archaeology in Ireland, let us hope so!

*I measg aingil Dé go raibh a anam.*

**ETIENNE RYNNE**
PROCEEDINGS, 1982

Nine committee meetings were held during the year. Apart from the usual business of the Committee—lectures, outings, etc.—the following received the attention of the Committee: the proposed road through the King’s Island, especially the revised plan which appeared late in the year, the 18th century Market House in Kilfinane, the Potato Market at Merchant’s Quay, Limerick, and the necessity for a good map of Limerick City. The Society continued to be represented at meetings of the Limerick Image Project, and was elected to the Committee of the Federation of Local History Societies which Mr. Liam Irwin attended on behalf of this Society. Three of the Society’s Committee members were elected to the committee of the newly formed Friends of Limerick Museum—Mr. Larry Walsh, Dr. P. F. Doran and Mr. Liam Irwin. The Society, during the year, purchased a new slide-projector and screen.

The following is a list of the nine lectures and twelve outings which were held during the year:

LECTURES

19th January: “The 12th Century High Crosses of Ireland”. Dr. Peter Harbison, An Bord Fáilte; Member.

3rd February: “The Archaeology of the Isle of Man”. Professor Etienne Rynne, University College, Galway; Hon. Editor.

24th February: “Limerick’s Architecture from the 12th to the 20th Century”. Miss Charlotte Murphy, Limerick; Member.


25th March: “The Megalithic Art of Western Europe”. Dr. Elizabeth Shee-Twohig, University College, Cork; Member.

23rd April: “Ireland in the Works of Gerald Griffin”. Dr. Thomas Dunne, University College, Cork; Member.

18th October: “Dublin’s Viking Age Houses in the Irish and North European Context”. Mr. Patrick F. Wallace, National Museum of Ireland, and Director, Wood Quay Excavations 1977-81; Member.

10th November: “Brian Boru”. Mr. Liam Irwin, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick; Member.


OUTINGS

25th April—County Galway: Kiltiernan—monastic site; Ardrahan—Norman castle, earthwork, and remains of Round Tower; Drumharsna—tower house; Ballynaislaig Fort—ringfort and souterrains; The Doon—large trivallate ringfort; Moneen East—ringfort and complex barrow; Isert Kelly—tower house and barn; Killeeneen—Raftery’s Grave.

Organisers: Mr. Tom Fanning, Member, and Mr. P. Lysaght, Outings Organiser.

Speaker: Mr. Tom Fanning, Dept. of Archaeology, U.C.G., Member.

9th May—Kilfinane—trivallate mound and market house; Cush—conjoined ringforts and tumuli.

Organiser and speaker: Mr. Liam Irwin, Member.
14th/16th May—Ballina/Sligo: Céide and Belderg Bogs—prehistoric fields; Dún Briste promontory fort; Carrowmore—passage-tomb cemetery; Culleenamore—oyster midden; Drumcliffe Cemetery—excavations, Round Tower, High Cross; Creevykeel court-cairn.

Organiser: Mr. P. Lysaght, Outings Organiser.
Speakers: Dr. Seamus Caulfield, U.C.D., Member; Dr. Patrick Heraughty, Mrs. Joyce Enright, and Mr. Martin Timoney, Member.

6th June—County Kilkenny: Cahir Castle; Gurteen Le Poer House; Carrick-on-Suir Castle; Belline House; Fiddown—Ponsonby Mausoleum; Castletown Cox House.
Speakers: Mr. and Mrs. John Shelley, Very Revd. Canon Hazelton, The Baron and Baroness de Breffny.

20th June—Rathkeale: Augustinian Priory, Courthouse, the ‘Chinaman’, Roman Catholic Church; the Church of Ireland Parish Church.
Organiser and speaker: Mr. Liam Irwin, Member.

4th July—Dromin Athlacca: Maidstone Castle: Dromin hillforts; Rathcannon Fort and Castle.
Organiser and speaker: An tUas. Mainchín Seoighe, Member.

29th July—Limerick City: East and West Watergate areas.
Organiser and speaker: Mr. Kevin Hannan, Member.

12th August—Mungret: Churches; Carrigogunnell Castle.
Organiser and speaker: Mr. Larry Walsh, Curator, Limerick Museum, Member.

26th August—Clonkeen Romanesque Church; Abington Cemetery.
Organiser and speaker: Mr. Kevin Hannan, Member.

12th September—Shanid: Castle and motte-and-bailey; Old Abbey: Mainisternagalliahduff Abbey.
Organiser and speaker: Mr. Tom Pierce, Vice-President.

26th September—Knappogue Castle, Co. Clare.
Organiser: Mr. Cian O’Carroll, Member.
Speaker: Mrs. Mark Andrews.

3rd October—North-Kerry: Ardsfort Cathedral; Abbeydorney—Kyrie Eleison Cistercian Abbey; Old-Court House.
Organisers: Mr. Tom Pierce, Vice-President and Mr. P. Lysaght, Outings Organiser.
Speakers: Rev. Kieran O’Shea, Dr. Bryan McMahon, and Mr. Tom Pierce, Vice-President.

REV. JOHN D. LEONARD
Hon. Secretary