Obituaries


Seán Marrinan was one of a group of highly talented primary teachers from Kilkee who graduated from St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, in the mid 1950s. After his marriage in 1960 to Ann Ryan, a native of Limerick, Seán settled in Limerick and in 1969 became Principal of Roxborough National School, Ballysheedy.

Seán retained a deep love for his native Kilkee and for the little fishing village of Coosheen, from which his father had moved into the town. He also took Limerick to heart, and his historical writings reflect this dual interest in Kilkee and Limerick, the latter interest being clearly evidenced in his regular contributions to our Journal.* He was also a great collector—and his interest in coins and tokens is reflected in the fine article written shortly before his death and published in this issue. His collection of postcards of Kilkee interest, built up over many years, is unlikely to be surpassed.

Seán's untimely death came as a great shock to his family and friends. He was buried in wind-swept Farrhy graveyard overlooking the Atlantic, not far from Coosheen. Ar dheas Dé go raibh a anam.

IGNATIUS MURPHY


MÁIRE MAC NEILL, B.A., D.Litt. (1904-1987)

The death of folklorist Máire MacNeill on May 15, 1987, was a special loss for Clare and North Munster scholarship. One thinks first of her as the author of The Festival of Lughnasa (1962, 1983), the magisterial study of the Celtic Harvest festival which described the popular festivals celebrated into our own time, which produced evidence of past practices, and—most significantly—which discovered Celtic myths concealed in the legends and customs associated with the festival. The study is both a model for the way folklore can illuminate Irish experience as well as a revelation of the richness of the archival resources gathered by the Irish Folklore Commission (now the Department of Irish Folklore, U.C.D.) where Máire MacNeill worked from 1935-1949. She would have disapproved of any comparison between her father Eoin MacNeill and herself, but it can be said that she did for Irish folklore scholarship what he did for Irish historical scholarship.

While Lughnasa is well-known, readers may be less familiar with Dr. MacNeill's studies of Clare folklore, work that began when she retired to Corofin in 1967 with her husband, Harvard librarian and poet, John L. Sweeney. She contributed "Poll na Seantaninne and Poll Tigh Liabáin" to Hereditas, the festschrift for her old friend and colleague Séamus Delargy. The essay examined the place names and origin legends of sites associated with
Liban, an Irish sea woman. One such site, a cove on the southern shore of Inchiquin Lough, gave its name to the home the Sweeney’s built there overlooking the Burren.

Another tribute to Delargy, “‘Seamus Delargy and North Clare’”, was published in a special commemorative issue of Dal gCais (1982), which described Delargy’s collecting expeditions to Tuath Clae, the ancient name for the district between Burren and the Cliffs of Moher, and Delargy’s two remarkable informants, Seán Ó Cartúin of Luogh and Stiofán Ó Healaíloire of Ballycullane.

Máire Mac Neill devoted the last ten years of her life to a study of Máire O’Brien or Máire Rua, the most famous woman in Clare folklore. Leamanach lay close by; neighbours had legends of her wickedness, so as Máire Mac Neill’s interest deepened in Clare lore, the figure of Máire Rua became its focus. In 1977, she gave a talk “Máire Rua: Folklore and Fact” to the Merriman Summer School whose theme that year was the O’Brien family, and she presented further research on the subject in a paper the following year to the Thomond Archaeological Society. Drawing on John Ainsworth’s edition of The Inchiquin Manuscripts, other unpublished O’Brien papers, seventeenth century history, Irish language and literature, genealogy, cartography and art history, she separated Máire Rua from the myth and legend that has surrounded her to create a sympathetic portrayal of a woman who acted with spirit and courage to protect her sons’ lands during the turbulent seventeenth century. Máire Rua. Lady of Leamanacht will be published by Dr. Mac Neill’s friends Hugh and the Honourable Grania O’Brien Weir, herself a descendant of Máire Rua, at their Ballinakella Press in Spring, 1990.

Máire Mac Neill’s last work brought together her interests in Lughnasa sites and in Clare tradition. During a visit to the Sinnsearlann in Corofin she was delighted to discover a copy of a resolution prohibiting the custom of naked men riding horseback on the strand at Kilkee. She had recognised the custom as one associated with Lughnasa and had described it in The Festival of Lughnasa. This short essay, “Ritual Horse-Bathing at Harvest Time”, was published posthumously in the 1988 volume of Béaloideas. The volume also carries an appreciation of her life and work by Professor of Folklore, Bo Almqvist. A fellowship established in Máire Mac Neill’s memory at the Department of Irish Folklore in University College, Dublin, will help train future generations of Irish folklorists. It honours her generosity and kindness to young scholars: her encouragement, her careful and sympathetic reading of manuscripts, her practical advice.

Her special interest in young people, in part, informed her generous bequest of fourteen pictures and drawings to the National Gallery of Ireland. The Bequest which included paintings by Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris and Jack B. Yeats was a major addition to the Gallery’s collection of modern works and they could not have been otherwise acquired. How pleased she would have been to have seen, as I noticed recently when passing through the Gallery, a group of students sitting in a circle of winter sunlight raptly sketching Picasso’s “Still-life with a Mandolin” while their teacher described the artist’s technique.

Dr. Mac Neill’s attachment to North Munster is represented in three of the Bequest pictures. Recognising its value as social history, particularly to local history, the Sweeney’s purchased James Worsdale’s “The Limerick Hell Fire Club” when it was in danger of being sold abroad. It is a “conversation piece” picture of fifteen Limerick rakes, one of whom is a woman and eight of whom are named, all of whom are grouped around a table dominated by a punch bowl. There are two pictures by Barrie Cooke, himself introduced to North Clare by Jack Sweeney, which document the painter’s years living and painting in the Burren. One of the “Two Fowlers”, the painting of Clare sportsmen, was the brother of Pauline Macnamara and Bridie Kearney, members of the Poulivan household. Finally, there is Cooke’s recognisable but not representational “Portrait of Máire Mac Neill
Sweeney" where the sitter leans forward from the Burren. A sightless figure, gentle, attentive, Cooke's merging of person and place is a visual metaphor for Máire Mac Neill's own scholarship, work that imposed an intelligent sensibility on the Irish landscape.

MAUREEN MURPHY
Hofstra University
Hempsted, New York

The Society also tenders its sympathies to the relatives of the following members who died during the year:

MISS PEGGY ARTHURE, 36 Stenson Park, Farranshone, Limerick.
CAPTAIN MICHAEL MADDEN, South Circular Road, Limerick.
MR. JAMES O'CARROLL, Sandcastle Road, Castletroy, Limerick.

May they rest in peace.
PROCEEDINGS, 1987

Mr. Christopher Lynch replaced Captain Frank Parker as President at the A.G.M. held on the 3rd of February. A special function was held on February 26th at the Ark Tavern, Corbally, to mark Captain Parker's retirement, and at the end of the year the eightieth birthday of Canon James Culhane was celebrated with a visit to him by Mary Geary and some of the Committee when an appropriate presentation was made.

There were ten committee meetings held during the year, at which a wide variety of issues were discussed and acted on. The threat to St. John's Church at Cratloe was a major concern and the Committee, while conscious of the sensitive nature of the issue, worked to ensure the preservation of the historical integrity of the building. Newcastle, at Castletray, was also under threat during the year and Kevin Hannan played a major role in its protection. The Society also lent its support to the campaign for Fota Island, near Cork. Arising from a concern regarding planning permission for a house at Lough Gur, it was decided to appoint a person with special responsibility for monitoring planning applications. Tony Browne agreed to undertake this task. Christopher Lynch sat on the Committee for the restoration of Kilmurry church at Castletray while Larry Walsh and Kevin Hannan continued to represent the Society on the Limerick Civic Trust. Anne O'Brien was our Liaison Officer with the Federation of Local History Societies. A project to index the Journal, beginning with the most recent decade, was initiated through the kind offices of AnCO.

LECTURES

20th January: “Limerick Stained Glass”. Charlotte Murphy, Member.
3rd March: “The Urban Archaeology of Limerick and Clare”. John Bradley, Member.
7th April: “The Iron Age in Ireland”. Barry Raftery.
24th April: “Fulachta Fiadh: a re-consideration”. Diarmuid Ó Drisceoil, Member.
1st May: “The Antiquities of Egypt”. Liam Irwin, Hon. Secretary.
17th November: “The O’Dea Mitre and Crozier”. Larry Walsh, Member.

OUTINGS

17th May—Slieve Bloom area. (Halfday).
Organiser: Paddy Lysaght, Vice-President.
Speaker: John Fechan.

Organiser: Tony Browne, Member.
Speakers: Tony Browne, Member, The Countess of Harrington, Col. John S. Phelan, Member, and Eamon Howard.

12th-14th June—Dingle area. (Weekend).
Organiser: Paddy Lysaght, Vice-President.
Guide: Tom Fanning, Member.
28th June—Dromoland. (Halfday).
Organiser: Cian O'Carroll, Member.

12th July—Newcastle West. (Halfday).
Organiser: John Cussen, Member.
Speakers: Sean Kelly, Member, John McAuliffe, Damien Patterson and John Cussen, Member.

29th July—Limerick City, Irishtown. (Evening).
Organiser and Speaker: Kevin Hannan, Member.

16th August—Tuamgraney, Williamstadt House, Mountshannon, Whitegate. (Halfday).
Organiser: Anne O'Brien, Member.
Speakers: John S. Kelly, Hugh Weir and Anne O'Brien, Member.

26th August—Limerick City, St. John's Cathedral, St. John's Church, St. John's Square. (Evening).
Organiser and Speaker: Charlotte Murphy, Member.

13th September—Waterford City (Architecture), Castletown Cox. (Full Day).
Speakers: David Shehan and Baron Brian de Breffny.

27th September—Foynes, Mount Trenchard, Grave of Mary Spring Rice. (Halfday).
Organiser: Captain Frank Parker, Vice-President.
Speakers: Sister Stephanie and Captain F. Parker, Vice-President.

Liam Irwin
Hon. Secretary.
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