

## Editorial, 1988

I know, I know, I know—yes, I did promise to get this *Journal* out far sooner, and yes, the delay is mostly my fault: I beat my breast, reciting meanwhile *mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*, and plead forgiveness. Of course there are reasons for the lateness in its production, quite apart from a terrible tendency to procrastinate, to keep putting off until the day after tomorrow what should be done today, and also, perhaps, a sometimes overindulgence in perfectionism. One of the other reasons for its late appearance is that the promised second article on the Shannon Scheme, that dealing with important archaeological aspects resulting from the Scheme, did not materialise as planned. Paul Duffy, its author, informs me that it was written but that all the numerous necessary footnotes were not entirely checked or obtained when “the Lordly Shannon decided to take its revenge”. Mr. Duffy had the manuscript text with him, in his briefcase, while on his way to Dublin to work on it when he stopped on the quayside at Bannagher to carry out a minor engineering job there with a colleague—the colleague placed Mr. Duffy’s briefcase on the boot of his car and shortly afterwards clumsily knocked it off and into the river, there to sink out of sight in deep mud. That’s his story anyway, but it did mean, unfortunately, that a revised version could not be produced on time. We are fortunate that this second article in the series can be produced later, quite independently of what was to be the third article, that on the social and economic aspects of the Scheme.

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1988 was the fourth centenary of the ill-fated Spanish Armada, and naturally we considered having an article on its Clare associations. I approached Dr. John de Courcy Ireland with a request for such an article, but he replied that not only was he up to his ears writing numerous articles on the Armada but had just finished “an enormous long Armada article for *Dál gCais*”, and that he feared another one “would be a plagiarism”. A pity, but maybe by now we have all had enough of the Armada? It was an event of which we cannot be all that proud, though through no fault of our own.

Of perhaps more real local interest was the announcement in August that several million pounds were about to be put into work renovating King John’s Castle, Limerick. The twenty-two houses built within its walls in 1935 are to be demolished to make way for a medieval style tavern/restaurant and tourist craft outlets, what the Minister in question, Michael Noonan, referred to as “an innovative and imaginative heritage precinct spread over 13 acres within the medieval area” of Limerick City. It sounds a great idea, one which should benefit not only Limerick City but also North Munster generally, both touristically and academically—for archaeological excavations in the Castle grounds are planned, which undoubtedly will help enlarge our knowledge of the City’s medieval origins and perhaps, with a bit of luck even uncover some evidence of Viking settlement. We congratulate the State on its intentions and look forward to seeing the work progress satisfactorily, hopefully to be finished in time for the 300th anniversary of the 1691 Siege of Limerick.

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While we are all anxious to save and conserve our castles, abbeys, Big Houses and other fine stone-built monuments illustrative of our past, we often tend to forget that that past also included many less superficially impressive, less spectacular, less élitist and aristocratic buildings too, those of “the plain people of Ireland”, to quote Myles na Gopaleen’s well-



worn descriptive phrase. Thatched houses (no, NOT cottages) provide perfect examples of such architecture. Though once typical of the Irish countryside and used worldwide on Paul Henry type posters advertising holidays in Ireland, they are fast disappearing everywhere and a great number of the wide variety of differing types have already gone forever. The urban thatched house is now all but a memory and those that survive are often travesties of the originals. With the disappearance of the thatched houses sprinkled around the countryside not only will travelling Irish roads lose much of its appeal and interest, but we will have lost an important and significant part of our heritage. True, we and our tourist friends can always visit a Heritage Park such as at Bunratty or at Ferrycarrig, Co. Wexford, in order to see such houses, but that will never be the same—like seeing animals in the zoo, it is a useful, entertaining and educative exercise but it is not the real thing.

But how does one go about preserving our more common, everyday heritage? It can be expensive and certainly troublesome to live in a mud-walled, or even stone-walled, house that has to be thatched and rethatched every so often. And there is not much use telling the dweller therein that it is a beautiful house and must be preserved as it is for the benefit of everyone, especially posterity. "Posterity be damned" will be the reply, and justifiably so. No, if we all want to enjoy an Irish countryside dotted with little thatched whitewashed houses with blue turf-smoke curling gently from unusual chimneys and with small colourful wooden-framed windows, then we will have to contribute financially towards it. If the State can finance the upkeep of the Rock of Cashel, of Cahir Castle, of Ardfert Abbey, of Quin Friary, and other suchlike monuments, then it should also be prepared to contribute towards the upkeep, the rethatching, etc., etc., of the humbler, much more traditional buildings of the ordinary people.

Members of our Society, however, should never forget that recording the vestiges of our past is often as relevant and important as studying them. In this, by far the easiest, quickest and most useful method of recording is by photography. One does not have to be an expert archaeologist to thus record an ancient rath or cashel, or an engineer to record an interesting bridge, or an architect or folklife expert to record a thatched house. One example is given here (see frontispiece) to show how a five-minute stop one day resulted in a record of a marvellous farmhouse-cum-byre near Ennis shortly before it was pulled down and replaced by a modern box-like structure. My big regret now is that I did not measure it or record its no doubt interesting interior!

May we, therefore, appeal to our members to photograph thatched houses as well as old lime-kilns, shop-fronts, old stone walls, gateways, farm-carts, pumps, etc., etc. All that is required to make such recording valuable and useful is a note on the back of the photograph giving place and date. Such photographs are more than mere nostalgia, they are often significant historical records of our heritage.

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