

Obituary

VERY REVD. MARTIN CANON RYAN (1911-1988)

"He was an unusual priest and a man of great culture and kindness (Ita FitzGibbon, letter dated 11th May 1988). "One of the most popular priests ever to come to the Midlands...[epitomising]"the idea of the 'peoples' priest...his good taste and intelligence was reflected in everything he achieved...A builder of churches and schools...a priest who appreciated the arts and music...a historian of great merit" (Bud Burke, Obituary in the *Tribune*, Birr, 14th May 1988). "If he had put on paper all the lectures he gave, we would have nice memories" (Peggy Wilde, letter dated 22nd August 1988).

The above are merely a selection of some of the comments made about Father Ryan (as Canon Ryan was affectionately known all his life, being too much a man of the 'common touch' to feel comfortable when dignified with the title of Canon by his many friends). One could easily enlarge upon or add to them, but it is unnecessary. Everyone knew him as a friendly, generous and kindly person, a Gaelic scholar and also as someone who would be readily recognised as an antiquarian, in the most complimentary meaning of the term—in fact, at the time of his death he was Vice-President for Munster of The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, the senior learned society of its type in Ireland.

An all-round man who loved not only the history and archaeology of the past but also his country, the Irish language, the game of hurling, his native county and also the counties in which he served as a priest, someone who loved people but who loved no less his sacred ministry. He also appreciated games, architecture, art, music, discussion, a good story or joke, and, of course, bonhomie! He also loved his dogs, particularly 'Twinkle', "his lovely poodle who used to get into near hysterics when he temporarily lost his master" (Ita FitzGibbon, *epistola cit.*).

Born in Silvermines in 1911, the youngest of a large family, he was educated in the local National School, St. Flannan's College, Ennis, and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, where he was ordained on the 20th of June 1937. He was first appointed curate in Ruan, Co. Clare, but in 1941 was moved to Kinitty, Co. Offaly, to Birr in 1946 and to Corofin, Co. Clare, in 1959. In 1967 he returned to Ruan, but this time as Parish Priest. In July 1971 he was transferred to Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, before finally returning in 1976 to his native soil, to the parish of Lorrha and Dorrha, where he celebrated the Golden Jubilee of his ordination eleven years later and where he was buried only a short year afterwards.

We will all remember Canon Ryan, the priest with the heavy black-framed glasses, the dog and the hat, for many things, some undoubtedly remembering him for very different events in his colourful life than others. Many will remember him for the churches he renovated or built—he was particularly proud of the Church of Our Lady Queen of Ireland which he built in 1984 at Rathcabbin, near Lorrha, Co. Tipperary, but many other churches in Clare (e.g. Dysert O'Dea and Sixmilebridge) and Tipperary (e.g. Redwood and Lorrha) owe much to his initiative and endeavours: his enterprise in raising money for community water schemes and renovating churches earned him the title everywhere of "The Bingo Priest".

Canon Ryan's energy was enormous. He used it unsparingly in many fields, including the encouragement of his favourite sport, hurling, and, of relevance to our Society, in matters historical and archaeological. His interest in these matters was of long standing, but he was not really actively involved in them until in 1965 he learned of the Society's forthcoming publication of *North Munster Studies*—he not only ordered several copies

himself but persuaded many of his clerical colleagues to order copies also. Soon he had joined our Society and, some years afterwards, played a major part in founding the Clare Archaeological and Historical Society. Well and truly bitten by the bug, he also helped found the County Tipperary Historical Society in 1987, the year before he died. His interest in archaeology took him abroad too: to Wales and England with our Society, to Cornwall and Malta with the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, to conferences in Glasgow and the Isle of Man with the Prehistoric Society, and even to Lherghydoo in the Isle of Man to assist at the excavation of a Bronze Age cemetery-mound.

Canon Ryan also loved exploring whatever area he found himself in, and as a result he reported many archaeological sites to the relevant authorities. He published a note (see list below) on some of these, the first *fulachta fiadh* or ancient cooking-places reported from west of the Shannon, a discovery of which he was rightly proud—he recognised the sites because of a book he bought in 1966 on its publication, *The Young Field Archaeologist's Guide* by John X. W. P. Corcoran [reviewed in this *Journal*, 10:1(1966), 85], and which sites he showed myself and Dr. Corcoran on one memorable afternoon in September 1967.

Canon Ryan's contributions to our Society were many. A Committee Member for some years (1973-76), he also conducted and/or spoke at several of our outings. Although a scholar of no mean achievement, his publications with us were relatively few, only five in all*. However, the numerous more popular but nonetheless valuable and fascinating articles which he published regularly for some years in the *Nenagh Guardian* should not be forgotten, articles which brought all aspects of our past, notably folklore and folk-customs, to the notice of the general public, particularly to the people of his native county. A good illustration of this urge to communicate his knowledge to all interested persons and to record the now almost forgotten customs of previous generations is the following short note which I made in May 1971, and which I recently came across carefully filed away among the papers of the late Dr. A. T. Lucas:

Very Revd. Martin Ryan, P.P., Sixmilebridge, Co. Clare, told me recently that his father, in the Silvermines area, Co. Tipperary, used to cure calves which got "the blean" (pronounced 'blayne') by "cutting the worm's knot" over the calf in question. This was a special type of 'knot' which opened when both ends of the string were pulled, and it was cut with a knife. Father Ryan saw his father do this—and it worked!

A man of the people, a genuine Irishman and a lovely priest, Canon Ryan was everyone's friend—his generous hospitality, whether to individuals in his home or to learned Societies visiting Lorrha, was widely renowned, his conversation quickly turning into learned, worthwhile discussion, and his help, as often volunteered as requested, was ever to be relied upon and never was withheld. *B'fhéidir go mbeidh a leithéid arís ann, agus tá súil againn uile go mbeidh, ach. . . .*

I measc a dhaone féin agus a cháirde uile go raibh a anam dílis.

ETIENNE RYNNE

*1. "Fulachta Fiadha near Killinaboy, Co. Clare"—10:2(1967), 218-219.

2. "The Franciscan Houses of Thomond in 1616"—10:2(1967), 112-115.

3. Review of *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland*, by Lady Wilde—14(1971), 78.

4. Review of *Old Friaries of Ennis and Quin*, by Fr. P. Mary—11(1968), 91-92.

5. Review of *Portumna Priory*, by Michael MacMahon—20(1978), 88.

PROCEEDINGS, 1988

The preparation of an index for the journal continued during the year under the direction of Mr. Bill McInerney and Miss Carol Gleeon, B.A., of FÁS. The Society was involved in the campaign to preserve St. John's Church in Cratloe which had a satisfactory outcome. We established a formal link with the Shannon Historical and Archaeological Society and had a joint outing to commemorate the Spanish Armada. We produced new membership application forms with the kind sponsorship of Canada Life Assurance Co. Our social evening was held on Shrove Tuesday in the Limerick Boat Club, and it was agreed that we should henceforth have an annual party around this time.

LECTURES

- 19th January: "The Bodyke Evictions". John S. Kelly, Scariff, Co. Clare.
4th March: "Dr. E. A. MacLysaght (1887-1986)". Charles Lysaght, Dublin.
15th March: "Limerick, a historic city: Its Development". Jim Barrett, Limerick City Architect.
12th April: "Excavations at Aughinish Island". Eamon P. Kelly, National Museum of Ireland, *Member*.
21st October: "Europe's First Fields—Early Farming in Mayo". Seamus Caulfield, Department of Archaeology, University College, Dublin, *Member*.
10th November: "The Banshee". Patricia Lysaght, Department of Irish Folklore, University College, Dublin.
6th December: "Research Excavations of a Ringfort—perspectives and implications". M. A. Monk, Department of Archaeology, University College, Cork, *Member*.

OUTINGS

- 15th May (full day)—North Tipperary: Houses—Laughton, Busherstown, Cangort, Cangort Park, Sopwell, Cloughjordan. Methodist chapel and Church of Ireland church at Cloughjordan. *Organiser*: Tony Browne, *Member*.
Speakers: Tony Browne, Nancy Murphy, David Rudd, Mrs. Ross, Mr. Ramsden, Mr. R. Williams, John Armitage.
29th May (half day)—Limerick: Houses—Southill House, Rathurd Castle, Ballyclough House, Roxboro, Friarstown House, Brooklands.
Organiser and Speaker, Tony Browne, *Member*.
12th June (half day)—Rathkeale: Abbey House, Curraheen House, Enniscouch, Cloughnabarold, Riddlestown Park, Augustinian Abbey.
Organiser: Frank Johnson, *Member*.
Speakers: Frank Johnson, Tony Browne, The Knight of Glin.
1st-3rd July (weekend)—Roscommon: Donamon Castle, Castlestrange, Strokestown House, Strokestown Heritage Centre, Rathcroghan, Roscommon Abbey and Castle, Ballintubber Castle, Clonalis House.
Organiser: Paddy Lysaght, *Member*.
Guide: Michael Holland.
13th July (evening)—Limerick City: St. John's Graveyard.
Organiser and Speaker: Kevin Hannan, *Member*.

24th July (half day)—Dysert O'Dea Castle Archaeology Centre.

Organiser: Anne O'Brien, *Member*.

Speaker: Risteárd Ua Cróinín, *Member*.

14th August (half day)—Brittas/Abington: Barrington's Bridge, Abington graveyard, Brittas castle.

Organiser and Speaker: Kevin Hannan, *Member*.

24th August (evening)—Limerick City: Sacred vessels in St. Mary's Cathedral and St. John's Cathedral.

Organiser: Cian O'Carroll, *Member*.

Speakers: Cian O'Carroll, Dean Sirr,

11th September (half day)—Cashel: Church of Ireland Cathedral, Chapter House-G.P.A. Bolton Library, Town Walls, Medieval Effigies, St. John Baptist church, Cashel Palace, Dominican Friary, Rock of Cashel.

Organiser and Speaker: Liam Irwin, *Member*.

25th September (full day)—Spanish Armada Commemoration, in association with the Shannon Society. Miltown Malbay area.

Organiser: Christopher Lynch, *President*.

Speakers: John O'Brien, Sean Spellissy, Pat Costello.

2nd October (full day)—Fota Island: Fota House, Arboretum, Wildlife Park, Cobh Cathedral, architecture of town.

Organiser and Speaker: Liam Irwin, *Member*.

LIAM IRWIN

(Hon. Secretary)

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1988

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