OBITUARIES

VERY REV. JAMES CANON CULHANE, P.P., V.F.
(1907-1991)

It was with sadness that the Thomond Archaeological Society learned of the death on the 6th of April 1991 of James Canon Culhane, former President of the Society.

Born in Drumcollogher in 1907, he studied at St. Munchin's College and at Maynooth where he was ordained priest in 1932.

His years as curate in St. Patrick's parish, in Adare, in Kilmallock and later as parish priest in Our Lady of Lourdes, Limerick, in Munagret, in St. Paul's, Dooradoyle and in Bruff were remarkable for his unselfish commitment to helping all in need. His constant visitations to the homes of his parishioners gave them access to the storehouse of his wisdom and to his unerring efforts on their behalf to relieve their anxieties and solve their problems. As Vicar Forane and a member of the Cathedral Chapter, and as Canon Penitentiary of the Diocese, he made a substantial contribution to the affairs of the Diocese of Limerick.

Visitors to his house would regularly find him sitting at his fireside amid a profusion of antiquarian books, some open, some book-marked with parochial publications or letters, for side by side with his dedication to his priestly duties went his interest in archaeology and his love for history.

Throughout his long service to the Thomond Archaeological Society his contribution was outstanding. As Committee Member (1945-1959), Vice-President (1959-1969 & 1973-1991) and President (1970-1972) he gave generously of his scholarship. Always on good terms with his fellow-men, he had a simplicity of demeanour which made him available to all. Arrogance was not in his nature, but with a quiet smile and an endearing charm he would offer astute and valuable comment. His approach was gentle and as he steered the Society through periods of change and growth, he showed a shrewd discernment for the truly important aspects of history and archaeology.

Counting among his close friends the late Monsignor Michael Moloney and the late John Hunt, he shared their interests and was among the first to fully appreciate the magnitude of John Hunt's contribution to antiquity. Like the late Monsignor Moloney, he took a deep interest in the preservation and security of the O'Dea Mitre and Crozier for which he had a special regard. His scholarship received recognition in his appointment to the National Monuments Advisory Council where he served conscientiously from 1970 until it lapsed in 1974.

While conducting the Society on summer outings to Early Christian or Mediaeval sites, his wide and accurate knowledge of history, his appreciation of architectural features and his understanding of archaeological excavation were apparent. He consistently emphasised what was truly worthwhile and had a sensitive awareness of the atmosphere of prayer and peace to be found in the ruins of Early Christian churches and monastic sites.

Sincerest of friends, wisest of counsellors, man of integrity, spirituality, scholarship and charm, he will be remembered by the Society's members and by a great host of people in both the city and county of Limerick with love and gratitude.

MARY GEARY

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SÉAN O'DRISCOLL (1915 - 1991)

The O'Driscoll surname is a shorter variant of Ó hEidirsceoill, meaning the interpreter, a word that could certainly be applied to the late Séan O'Driscoll, architect, artist, genealogist, historian and raconteur. Séan was born in New York on 27th May 1915, shortly after his parents had moved there from Georgia. He was second-generation Irish, with grandparents from Cork and Idaho, and led an adventurous life before coming to Ireland. He served in the United States Air Force during World War II, engineered the defection of Theodore Wilhelm Schmidt from behind the Iron Curtain in 1945, served as Brigadier-General Charles Linbergh's Aide in 1954 and later worked with John Wheeler, the man who was co-discoverer of Uranium 235 (with Niels Bohr) and first found "Black Holes" in space.

Séan intended to buy the former O'Driscoll castle of Dunashad, in Baltimore, County Cork, but fell in love with Castle Matrix when Eoin "Pope" O'Mahony brought him there. In 1962 he settled in the castle which he believed was erected on the site of a Pagan Celtic sanctuary dedicated to the Matres, the famous Celtic triple mother-goddess. He repaired and renovated Castle Matrix, turning it into an authentic show place, one housing an excellent library of books mainly in two languages, English and French, and containing a unique collection of Medieval, and older, weaponry. In 1970 he opened the castle as the "Irish International Art Centre" and it is now an ideal base in which to research the history of art and costume throughout the ages. I met Séan when I was writing Limerick The Rich Land in 1988. In the spring of 1991 I encountered him in Kenny's of High Street, Galway, but did not realise that that would be our last meeting. He told me that he was suffering from cancer and he died about six months later, on the 4th September 1991. He is survived by his British-Canadian widow, Liz, to whom he was married on the 9th December 1981, and their young son Kieran Forrest O'Driscoll.

Séan could not have a finer memorial than the castle on which he lavished so much time and attention, nor could he find two more devoted custodians than Liz and Kieran, two people who will extend his vision into the twenty-first century. A member for many years of our society, we will all miss him and visits to his own little stronghold.

Seán Speliissy

The Society also tenders its sympathies to the relatives of the following members who died during 1991:

MRS. MAURA CRONIN, 6 Riverside Park, Shannon Banks, Limerick.

MRS. CATHERINE ELLIOTT, 4 Sarsfield Road, South Circular Road, Limerick.

MR. JOHN O'NEILL, Moyle, Sandyford Road, Dundrum, Co. Dublin.

MISS PATRICIA SHEEHY, 2 Weston Villas, Rosbrien, Limerick.

MR. JAMES WALLACE, 69 Stoneyhurst, Dooradoyle, Limerick.

May they rest in peace.
PROCEEDINGS, 1991

A full and rewarding year - eight lectures, an instructive and enjoyable weekend at Bellinter House, Co. Meath, three full-day, three half-day, and three evening outings, plus a memorable social evening in Jury's Hotel, Limerick, with songs (some of our members vocal talents were a revelation!) and dancing. An unusual event was the launching of Anne Chamber's book, Eleanor, Countess of Desmond, prior to her interesting lecture on the same lady.

LECTURES

18th January - "Emain Macha - Navan Fort". Dr. Jim Mallory, Department of Archaeology, Queen's University, Belfast.

1st February - "The Changing Face of Limerick". Nostalgic photos of Old Limerick, with commentary by George Spillane, Member.

22nd March - "As Wicked a Woman - Eleanor, Countess of Desmond", Anne Chambers, historical biographer.

3rd April - "William III and Ireland". Wouter Troost, Gouda, Netherlands.

12th April - "The Early Irish: The Written Evidence". Professor Fergus Kelly, School of Celtic Studies, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

18th October - "The Treaty of Limerick Reconsidered", Liam Irwin, Member

15th November - "John Henry Newman - Limerick Connections".
   Dr. Michael Culhane, Member.


OUTINGS

5th May (full day) - Killarney House, Muckross Abbey and Muckross House.
   Organiser and Speaker: Tony Browne, Member.

22nd May (evening) - Sixmilebridge: The Village and Rahahine.
   Organiser and Speaker: John O'Brien, Member.

14th-16th June (weekend) - Bellinter House, Co. Meath. A fine mixture of prehistory, medieval history and literature. Included a lecture on "Francis Ledwidge, who fought in another man's war" by Professor Etienne Rynne, University College, Galway and visits to Tara, Francis Ledwidge Cottage and Museum, Slane Castle, Monasterboice, Duleek, Kells, Athboy and Devlin.
   Organiser: Paddy Lysaght, Vice-President.
   Guide and Speaker: Professor Etienne Rynne, Member.

26th June (evenings) - Sieges of 1690-91 - River Crossings.
   Organiser and Speaker: Kevin Hannan. Member.

7th July (half day) - Askeaton: The Castle, the Hellfire Club and the Augustinian Friary:
   Organiser: Frank Johnson, Member.
   Speaker: Peter Dundon, Member.
24th July (evening) – Lough Gur, Co. Limerick
Organiser and Speaker: Michael Quinlan.

4th August (half day) – Knockfierna, Co. Limerick.
Organiser: Pat O'Donovan, Member.

25th August (full day) – Tullamore: Charleville Castle, Durrow Abbey and St. Catherine's Church
Organiser: Tony Browne, Member.

8th September (half day) – Killone and Clare Abbey.
Organiser and Speaker: Christopher Lynch, President.

29th September (full day) – Clonmel: An historical ramble through the town.
Organisers: Elsie O'Connell and Paddy Lysaght, Members.
Speaker: Mrs. Rossiter, Clonmel.