

# Obituaries

ROBERT J. CUSSEN, LL.D. (1903 - 1992)

When Dr. Robert Cussen, "Bertie" to his many friends, died at the age of 88 on the 24th February, 1992, our Society was deprived of one of its longest serving and most respected members. His enthusiasm and work for the Society was reflected in his regular attendance at committee meetings, outings and lectures. It was, however, his thoughtful advice, always helpful and discreet, that was perhaps his greatest contribution. His work behind the scenes, while unobtrusive, was equally valuable.

Surprisingly, he contributed but little to our *Journal* - one review article and three book reviews<sup>1</sup>. He did, however, contribute a well-researched article for a book of essays in commemoration of Msgr. Michael Moloney, entitled: "Caleb Powell, High Sheriff of County Limerick, 1858, sums up his Grand Jury"<sup>2</sup>. He was a conversationalist rather than an author. Yes; it would be an exaggeration to state that he was an Irish Doctor Johnson who never had the benefit of a Boswell by his side, but there is more than a grain of truth in the comparison.

Those privileged to have known him will agree that there was something almost magnetic about his personality; you hung on to his words which came to him "trippingly on the tongue". He also had the gift of riveting one's attention on whatever was being discussed by the introduction of a quotation, as apt as it was unexpected. A pity that the conversations - or should it be discussions? - between him and the 'Pope' O'Mahony, who often found shelter by his fireside, were not taped; what fascinating listening they would make today.

He was a committee member of the society for sixteen years, Vice-president from 1965 to 1975 and again, as a Vice-President for life, from 1980 to 1992, and we were honoured with his Presidency for the years 1976 to 1979.<sup>3</sup>

Born in Newcastle West in 1903, he attended the local primary school before entering Blackrock College, Dublin, where he distinguished himself academically and also in rugby, captaining the school's senior team in 1920. On entering Trinity College, Dublin, his prowess in rugby soon found him on the College team. He and his brother Denis played on the College Bateman and Leinster cup-winning team of 1925-1926, and he captained Trinity in 1926 - 1927. This latter University year was really a red-lettered one for him: he not only captained the College rugby team, but became Irish long jump champion in 1926 and 1927, and he got an LL.D. (Doctor of Laws) from Trinity in 1926 as well.

He met his future wife, Kitsy McCartan from Newcastle, Co. Down, when they were both students in Trinity and they were married in 1929. When he returned to Newcastle West, to the legal practice founded by his father, he captained the Newcastle West rugby team that won the Garryowen Cup in 1928. In that year also, he played for Bohemians and Munster. With his rugby days behind him he became a founder member of the local golf club and was its captain in 1947.

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<sup>1</sup>"The *Lartigue*: a review article", 10:2 (1967), 213-217.

Review of *Murroe and Boher, The History of an Irish Country Parish*, by Dom. Mark Tierney - 10:1 (1966), 94-95.

Review of *Hedge Schools of Ireland*, by P.J. Dowling - 11(1968), 92.

Review of *Franciscan Limerick*, by Fr. B. Egan - 14(1971), 83.

<sup>2</sup> Pages 401-425 in *North Munster Studies: Essays in Commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney* (edited by E. Rynne), which was published by this Society in 1967.

<sup>3</sup> For some comments on his Presidency see the Editorial in this *Journal* vol. XXI (1979).

Incidentally it is of interest to record that his brother Denis, who besides being an Irish rugby International in the 1920s set an Irish record for the 100 yards at Croke Park in 1928 which still stands (9.8 seconds on grass). He also competed in the Amsterdam Olympic games in the same year.

There were many facets to Bertie's lively, enquiring mind. To be in his company was to be stimulated by his enthusiasms, especially for local history, tradition, genealogy and literature. He was ever generous with his store of knowledge, freely devoting time and energy to the many queries heaped upon him by friends who appreciated his ability for digging up the past.

I especially remember him for his great love of books. He had the bug; he was, it must be admitted, a bibliomaniac, happiest when surrounded by a rickety pile of ancient tomes, or rummaging in a second-hand bookshop hoping to find some elusive treasure there. I can see him now, sitting by his fireside, reminiscing perhaps on "some old forgotten, far-off things", suddenly getting up and reaching amongst his shelves for a book, fondling it carefully, and from it plucking this or that fascinating detail apposite to whatever was being discussed. That was Bertie at his best. It was indeed fitting that his library was the subject of a delightful half-hour radio programme in 1980.

I know that it is a well-worn cliché, but it is no less true to say that "*Ní bheidh a leithéid arís ann.*"

PADDY LYSAGHT

The Society also tenders its sympathies to the relatives of MRS. MARY FEELY of Glenogra Cottage, Fedamore, Co. Limerick, a member who died in 1991 but was inadvertently omitted from mention in last year's Journal, and to the relatives of the following members who died in 1992:

CAPTAIN FRANK PARKER, "Asgard", North Circular Road, Limerick.

See Editorial for 1986 in vol. XXVIII of this *Journal* for comments on his years as our Hon. Treasurer (1965 - '84) and as our President (1984 - '86).

MR. WILLIAM LYSAGHT, "Cushowen", Mill Road, Corbally, Limerick.

MR. MICHAEL O'DWYER, Shanakyle, Parteen, Co. Clare.

**May they rest in peace.**



# PROCEEDINGS, 1992

Another satisfying year, during which we held seven lectures and nine outings, three of which were full-day, four half-day and two evening excursions.

Our lectures ranged widely, from Limerick to Corsica and indirectly taking in Holland too when fine art, not for the first time, was the theme of our February lecture. New ground seemed to be broken when one of the lectures was given in two parts, separated one from the other by nine months, but not so: our former President, the late Dr. Robert Cussen, delivered a two-part lecture - with a full year's gap (February 1979 to February 1980) between the two parts!

Our outings, too, ranged far and wide throughout Ireland, including visits to Dublin and as far south as Kinsale. However, perhaps one of the more interesting ones was that to the Burren, incorporating not only visits to archaeological monuments such as the double-armed cross on the gable of the church at Killanaboy [for which see our *Journal*, 18(1976), 3-12] but also a visit to the site being prepared for a proposed Heritage Centre at Mullaghmore, plump in the centre of the Burren. That our touring coaches could not get close to the actual site only meant a walk for our members, but the fact that, despite much backing and forwarding by the skilled drivers, they were unable to turn the coaches meant an extra twenty-two miles driving on poor enough narrow roads to reach our destination. As a result we were late for a communal dinner that evening, which did not encourage our members to support that whole controversial project - all hoped that the matter will be satisfactorily settled without further acrimony soon.

## LECTURES

17th January – "Thomas Spring Rice, M.P. (Part I)" Charlotte Murphy, *Member*.

7th February – "Collecting Dutch Art – Dutch Paintings in Ireland". This lecture by Pat McKenna, *Member*, was delivered after the A.G.M.

20th March – "Sites and Monuments Record for County Limerick". Seán Kirwan, U.C.C.

10th April – "Water, Wind and Animal Power in Ireland". Paul Duffy, *Member*.

19th October – "Thomas Spring Rice, M.P. (Part II)" Charlotte Murphy, *Member*.

6th November – "Napoleon – The Image of the Emperor." Louis Masterson.

30th November – "The Earls of Desmond". Peter Dundon, *Member*.

## OUTINGS

10th May (full day) - The Burren, Co. Clare.

*Organiser:* Paddy Lysaght, *Vice-President*

*Speakers:* Professor Etienne Rynne, *Member*, & Liam Lysaght.

31st May (half day) - Cahir Castle and Swiss Cottage, Co. Tipperary.

*Organiser:* Paddy Lysaght, *Vice-President*.

17th June (evening) - Newmarket-on-Fergus, Co. Clare.

*Organiser and Speaker:* John O'Brien, *Member*.

28th June (full day) – Kinsale. Co. Cork.

*Organiser:* Marie Condon, *Member*.

*Speaker:* Eugene Gillen.

12th July (half day) - Doon, Co. Limerick.

*Organiser and Speaker:* Bill McInerney, *Member*.

22nd July (evening) – Limerick City.

*Organiser and Speaker:* Kevin Hannan, *Vice-President*.

16th August (half day) - Doneraile, Co. Cork.

*Organiser:* Ann Yeoman, *Hon. Sec.*

*Speakers:* Members of the Doneraile Historical Society.

13th September (half day) - Kildysart, Co. Clare (in association with the Shannon Society).

*Organiser and Speaker:* Seán Spellissy, *Member*.

27th September (full day) - Dublin, to visit Newman House and Dublin Castle.

*Organiser:* Tony Browne, *Member*.

*Speakers:* Official guides to the house and castle.