

# Lough Gur Tour Impressed Visiting Archaeologist

## Old Limerick family

Not every family of Irish ancestry living abroad has such a well-documented tree as that of the O'Connors of Sydney, New South Wales. Mrs. Thea O'Connor, making her first visit to Limerick this month in the course of a world tour, told me something of her ancestry that, for precision and detail, any family at home or abroad might envy.

In 1839 her great grandfather, Stephen O'Halloran of Limerick, married and took his bride with him to Australia. There they settled on the land as farmers in New South Wales and raised a family of twelve.

Stephen was a man of meticulous habits and he kept a diary which has attracted the interest of present-day historians. In addition to family history, it carries information of value to social and local historians. Mrs. O'Connor is a daughter of James O'Halloran, and came



Mrs. Thea O'Connor

to Ireland via Malaysia, Greece, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, Germany, Holland and England. She will return to Australia via Montreal.

She is on her first visit to Ireland, but she told me: "I felt quite at home when I arrived here." All through the years her family have kept in close touch with this country, and they have a particular interest in Irish songs.

## Family

During her stay in Limerick she was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Carey, Greenfields. Mr. Carey's wife (the former Miss Joan O'Halloran) is a member of the Limerick branch of the family.

Mrs. O'Connor's brother, Mr. Stephen O'Halloran, who is an architect in Waga Waga, visited Limerick about four years ago.

Mrs. O'Connor has two sons and two daughters: Patrick is with a computer company in Montreal, and Grahame, who is at present teaching in England, will later move to Canada in the course of his professional work; both daughters are married: Frances Mary (Pearce) is a lecturer at Adelaide University, and Sheila (Péguin) is teaching in Adelaide.

LAST Wednesday's escorted tour of Lough Gur, sponsored by the local festival committee and conducted by Seamus O Cinneide, has met with such favourable reaction by visitors and locals that it may well mark the beginning of a new upsurge of interest in this historic locality. One of the visiting group, Mr. Michael M. Rix, M.A., of the Extramural Department, University of Birmingham, described the tour as one of the most memorable experiences of his life.

For Mr. Rix the outing marked a very happy coincidence. Though born and brought up in Oxford, he has a lively interest in Ireland, and his wife has family ties here as her grandparents were from Roscommon. He has made a number of visits to places of archaeological importance in Ireland, and one of his wife's treasured possessions is Mary Carbery's novel, "The Farm by Lough Gur." He was delighted, therefore, that the Festival Committee's tour of Lough Gur coincided with his visit to Limerick. And so he took a bus to Holycross in the hope—which was fulfilled—that he would meet with a lift back to Limerick.

On the map, Holycross is marked as a sizeable village, but Mr. Rix found to his surprise that, apart from the Lough Bar, that there was scarcely a building in sight. Inside the bar he found "a lot of people talking very knowledgeably of the architecture of Ireland."

He had seen a television programme on Lough Gur and told me that, to the world of scholarship in archaeology, the area is very important.

## Grange

Joining the motorcade to the great stone circle at Grange, his first experience of archaeology in the Lough Gur area was a very memorable one, indeed.

"In stone circles in England like Stonehenge you feel you have trespassed on a ruined fragment," he told me; "here in the Grange circle you feel you are in a complete building with a ritual tradition, and stepping down into it and surrounded by the great bank with enormous stones you get a feeling of having come to a place that is holy to the people who built it."

He added "I know nothing comparable to it in England or Wales or Scotland; the visit was to me something very memorable indeed."

But this is not the only circle in the area: the presence of others gave the impression that "here you are not just in the presence of another architectural monument but a group of monuments."

It was like a cathedral with a set of churches around it, making it a site of great significance.

Then there were the field patterns and the wedge-shaped tomb, "a burial cairn that by any standards has one impressed with a sense of awe at the scale on which this early people organised their labour force to build a memorial to one of their number, which 4,000 years later still stands more impressively than many Royal monuments only a few centuries old."

## Carrig Aille

And, at the Carrig Aille ring forts, "the view from the top with the last of the fading light supplemented by a half-moon, and the Lough itself shimmering below, and a description of as many monu-

ments again as we had seen but had no time to get to, gave a final sense of the varied riches of the area."

Showing me a little book, "The National Monuments of Ireland," published by Bord Fáilte Éireann, Mr. Rix remarked that it devoted more space to the Lough Gur area than to any other of the half-dozen special areas it described.

It carries three pages of text, a catalogue of 28 sites, a map on which the sites are marked and a panoramic view of the region itself, indicating that the Tourist Board realises that here is one of the most important archaeological areas in the Republic. All the more pity then that they can quote no publication to which visitors may refer, or no guide book to the area as may be had for places like Monasterboice, Glendalough, the Boyne Valley, Aran Islands, Clonmacnoise and so on.

Mr. Rix adds: "One hopes that Mr. O Cinneide's promise that future festivals will be greeted by better signposting and more detailed information will mean that Lough Gur will become the place of pilgrimage it so richly deserves to be."

## Mr. Rix

Mr. Rix attended St. Paul's School, London, and later went to the University to study history, in which he had a particular interest in the earliest periods. He had ambitions to become an archaeologist and work in a museum and with that in mind excavated Maiden Castle under Mortimer Whelan. He was studying archaeology at Oxford when the war intervened. After six years of army service he was appointed to the Department at Birmingham University to which he still belongs—the Extramural Department for lectures to mature students around the whole of the West Midlands.

Many of these lectures were on archaeology and the class of students organised coach tours to such places as Hadrian's Wall and Stonehenge.

So frequent were Mr. Rix's references to Irish monuments that in 1949 they did the most ambitious trip of all—a week's exploration which included visits to the Boyne Valley, Glendalough, Galway and the Aran Islands, "where the visit to Dun Aengus was for all of us a most impressive archaeological experience."

Since then, other tasks have taken over from prehistoric archaeology in his career but not in his interest.

In 1955 he invented the term "industrial archaeology" to deal with the study of the neglected monuments of the industrial revolution in which Great Britain is uniquely rich. This has now become an academic subject with a number of universities in Britain having Departments devoted to it.

But whenever he gets a holiday he returns to his first love, which is prehistoric archaeology. By a complete chance this week he found himself in Limerick and discovered from the Tourist Office that the Lough Gur Festival was on and that there was to be a visit to the sites.

And the result? "I regard my evening going around under the guidance of Seamus O Cinneide with about eighty other enthusiasts as one of the most memorable experiences of my life."

## With C. & E. at Shannon

Dungarvan man, Liam Waters, who is a member of the Customs and Excise staff at Shannon Airport, takes a keen interest in sport and music. About four years ago he played county minor hurling and football with Waterford for a season, and, opting later for soccer, fielded for a local junior side, Shelbourne, and won a few medals in the Shannon Airport inter-firm league.

In music his hobby is collecting and singing ballads, of which he has an extensive repertoire. His favourite group is the Dubliners, and his wide range takes in American blues and interpretations by Joan Baez. Liam is son of William John (Monsie) Waters and Mrs. Waters, Murphy Place, Abbey-side, and was educated at the local national school and Dungarvan C.B.S. He studied medical technology at Kevin Street, Dublin, and later joined the Customs and Excise service. He served in Dublin, Rosslare, Cobh, Castle-



Liam Waters

blaney and again in Dublin before coming to Shannon where he is now permanently stationed.

Liam's mother is a teacher in Abbeyside Girls' School. His sister, Triona, completed her Leaving Certificate studies this year.

## A Limerick



Mr. John O'Connor and his wife Joan, who were on the Irish Development Association in

## Community Centre at fills useful re

Some of the many useful functions of the Irish Community Centre in Birmingham were outlined this week by Mr. John O'Connor, chairman of the Birmingham branch of the Festival of Kerry who was on a visit to Limerick.

The Centre is run by a limited company, the Irish Development Association, and has enjoyed remarkable success since its opening on May 15, 1967. The fact that, after only two years in operation, it is on a reasonably sound financial basis is a tribute to the efficiency of management.

## Facilities

The Centre caters for people from all 32 Counties of Ireland and already plans are on hand for extensions to its premises at High Street, Derindon, on the main Coventry Road. In addition to the usual facilities, there is a dance hall, bar and lounge, and a games room will be opened shortly.

The fostering of the arts, drama and Irish culture are included in its aims.

Some 600 people can be accommodated in the Centre and a function is held there each night of the week. The pro-

The Association's charter flight to New York, arranged in October at a very reasonable figure, is already booked and those who would like to go in next year's flight are advised to book now. "I plan to pick up passengers who have booked from here."

Mr. O'Connor told me that "Birmingham Mail" has been of wonderful assistance to the Irish Development Association in providing an Irish column every Saturday night for the past two years.

Mr. O'Connor, who is 27 years in Birmingham, has taken over the Davis Co. Alcester, Warwick, but is an active worker with the association. His wife is a former Miss Joan Hayes, Kilsallock, and she was with him on his recent visit to Limerick. The golden wedding anniversary of her parents, Mr. John Francis and Mrs. Catherine Hayes, two years ago was the occasion of the first complete family reunion in years.

The Chairman of the Irish Development Association, Mr. Gerald Moran, is Birmingham's first Irish parent and v