

**RATHMICHAEL HISTORICAL  
RECORD**

**1994**

Editor: Joan Delany  
Assisted by Rob Goodbody

**Rathmichael Historical Record, 1994**  
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## SECRETARY'S REPORT, 1994

The Rathmichael Historical Society has had a busy and varied year and this started as usual with our AGM followed by a showing of some members' slides. In February we had two short talks, one from Denis O'Sullivan who spoke about Wentworth Erck, an amateur astronomer who lived in Shankill in the nineteenth century, and the other talk by John Lennon who told us of the Stoney family, after whom Stoney Road in Dundrum is named. These were followed in March by a talk entitled *On the Borders of the Pale* by myself, describing the history of the Kilgobbin, Stepside and Sandyford area. Our final meeting of the 1993-94 winter season was by Niall Gregory, who told us about Irish log boats.

The Summer season opened a little late as our May outing to Trim had to be cancelled. Instead our first outing was in June when we visited Rathfarnham Castle and were shown around by the Office of Public Works architect for the restoration, Alistair Lindsay. We had visited the castle in 1985 just before the Jesuit order moved out and it was appropriate that we should visit it again just before it was opened to the public following restoration works. In July our outing was to Trim and this included Bective Abbey, Newtown Trim and Trim itself. Trim Castle was closed due to renovations and because it was in use as the set of the film *Brave Heart*, though this in itself was an interesting sight. We had no outing in August as the Summer School was in full swing. Details of our summer courses will be presented to you in the report from the Courses Sub-committee..

In September our outing was within Dublin city in our traditional way, when we visited some of the inner city churches, including St Michan's, the Augustinian church in John's Lane and St Audoen's. Later in September our annual weekend outing visited the area around Birr, organised, as usual, by Damian and Edie MacGarry and this went off most successfully.

Our winter season began again in October when Dr Kenneth Ferguson gave us a most stimulating lecture with the self-explanatory title *From Puck's Castle to the Martello Tower : Some thoughts on the military topography of south County Dublin*. This was followed in November by another military topic, when Pdraig Laffan told us of the building of the Military Road from Rathfarnham through the Wicklow mountains. Finally, in December, we had two short talks. Jim Scannell told us of a fire at Ballybrack in 1904 and I explained how the first Ordnance Survey maps in Dublin date from 1843 and not 1837 as commonly thought.

This was a year in which no exhibitions took place that involved the Society. However, I have been appointed to the committee of the Dublin Local History Network which has organised three exhibitions to date in which this Society has taken part and there will be a fourth next June. I also have represented the Society at the Barony of Rathdown Association which is run under the auspices of the Federation of Local History Societies and which brings together the organisers of the various societies in the south-east Dublin and north-east Wicklow area.

This year saw the reappearance of the *Rathmichael Historical Record* following a period of dormancy. We are grateful to Joan Delany, our Editor, who has ensured that the first two volumes of the backlog have appeared, covering the years 1985-86 and 1993. Work on other volumes is progressing and it is hoped that 1987-88 and 1994 will appear soon.

While on the subject of the *Record*, we were sorry to have lost one of our members of long standing, Con Maxwell, who died last March. Con was a member of the committee in the early years, he represented the Society at meetings of the Shankill Community Association in the late 1970's and was an early editor of the *Rathmichael Historical Record* who tried hard to persuade the magazine back out of its dormancy right up to the time of his death. Con was a habitual attender at our meetings and outings and usually had pertinent

questions to ask of our speakers. Our sympathies go to Daphne and their family.

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Finally, I would like to announce that I am standing down from the position of Secretary after a term of nine years. During this time my other commitments both inside the Society and outside, have increased enormously and I am having to rethink my involvements. I intend to remain heavily involved with the Society, while cutting down slightly on my workload. Thank you all for your help and encouragement during my term as secretary.

Rob Goodbody

### Wednesday 12th January 1994

#### **18th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

Thirty members were present at our Annual General Meeting this year. The meeting heard reports from the Acting Treasurer, Alan Merry, the Secretary, Rob Goodbody and from Joan Delany on behalf of the Courses Subcommittee. There were three motions, two of which were put forward by the Committee, one seeking a rise in the subscription rate, the other making an amendment to the Rules of the Society in order to allow the Committee to appoint a new officer if one of the offices of the Society should fall vacant during the year. The third motion was put by Con Maxwell and sought the handing over of outstanding unpublished material relating to the *Rathmichael Historical Record* to the Secretary for publication. All three motions were passed.

The following were elected to the Committee for the coming year.

<b>President:</b>	Gerard Slevin
<b>Secretary:</b>	Rob Goodbody
<b>Treasurer:</b>	Kay Merry
<b>Editor:</b>	Joan Delany

#### **Committee:1.**

- Gillian Bird
- 2. Máire Nic an Airchinnigh
- 3. Dickie Pilkington
- 4. Alan Merry

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The meeting concluded with a showing of slides by members of the Society. Josephine Leydon showed a fascinating selection of slides from her visit to Syria, illustrating the archaeology and architecture of that country. Howell Evans showed some slides of some of the Society's outings during the year and of the launch of our Secretary's book last December.

### Wednesday 2nd February 1994

#### **1. STONEY: MAN AND ROAD John Lennon**

"Do you know that the man who discovered and named 'The Electron' is buried in Dundrum? So asked my son Conor after he had been to an exhibition commemorating the centenary of the discovery. The answer was that I didn't and it posed other questions, such as "Who was he?"; "How did he end up in Dundrum?" and "Why was Drummartin Avenue renamed?" George Johnstone Stoney was his name. Born near Clareen, Co. Offaly, in 1826 into a well-landed family, he was the eldest of four children. His younger brother Bindon Blood Stoney was involved in the development of Dublin port and Stoney Road in the city is named after him. Their father died when they were in their teens and their land had to be sold so the family moved to Dublin where the two boys went to Trinity College.

In 1863 George married his cousin Margaret Stoney, whose brother Richard was a curate of Taney in 1866-8. While in Dundrum, Richard married Kate Atkinson of Gortmore and when her father Richard died in 1871 it is reasonable to assume that George and Margaret came to

the funeral and attended the interment in St. Nahi's. Margaret may have commented favourably on the location, but, for whatever reason, when she died the following year she was interred in the adjoining plot to be accompanied by George when he died in 1911. His mother and younger sister also rest there.

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Dundrum expanded considerably in the 1850's and 1860's. In 1865 a new road appeared between Upper Kilmacud Road and Taney Road, east of Christ Church, named Drummartin Avenue. It is now called Stoney Road but from 1880 to 1960 it has been listed in Thom's as Drummartin Avenue with just three houses - Altamont, Belmont and Monte Vista. It is not listed in the 1962/3 Directory, the three houses being under Upper Kilmacud Road, and from 1965 it is Stoney Road. Mrs Ellerker has been living on the road for fifty years and she believes that the name change resulted from an argument between her husband, Dr. Henry and Mrs Mulvey, a trader in Dundrum and a formidable County Councillor, who decided to give him a more mundane address. It would be nice to think the road was named after George and one wonders what is in the Council archives.

### Wednesday 2nd February 1994

#### **2. WENTWORTH ERCK: A RATHMICHAEL ASTRONOMER Professor Denis O'Sullivan**

Wentworth Erck was born in Dublin in 1827. He was the son of John Caillard Erck, an ecclesiastical commissioner for Ireland. He studied law at Trinity College, Dublin, and was called to the Bar in 1850. He took up residence at Sherrington, Shankill, Co. Dublin around 1870, although there are references to him being associated with Rathmichael Parish as early as 1864 when he was present at the consecration of Rathmichael Church. He was a member of the vestry there in 1870 and treasurer in 1877. Wentworth Erck was, at various times in his life, a magistrate and a poor law guardian and owned land in Co. Wicklow.

On one occasion he was invited to stand for parliament (by the Conservatives), but declined. Overall, he was remembered locally as a contented and fair minded land owner and country gentleman, but, by the time of his death at the age of 63, his name had spread further afield and he had become one of Ireland's best known astronomers.

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Shortly after his arrival at Sherrington he constructed an observatory close to his house. His decision was probably connected with the fact that he had recently acquired a seven inch lens made by the famous Alvan Clark and was determined to put it to use as soon as possible. From then until his death in 1890, the astronomical observations made at Sherrington were, as in the case of many Victorian 'amateurs', quite remarkable in view of the limited facilities available. Between 1873 and 1887 he published the results of his observations in the *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society*, the *Scientific Proceedings of the RDS*, the *Observatory* and *Nature*. Some of the early publications described the construction of the observatory at Sherrington and the development of various types of apparatus for use in his work.

Much of his early work was devoted to observations of the sun and he left a very comprehensive record of the appearance of its surface for almost twenty years. These included descriptions and positions of solar spots. Even when he travelled abroad he carried with him a small telescope and portable equatorial mounting which enabled him to continue observations without interruption. His interest in double stars resulted in almost two thousand measurements on binary systems.

My own interest in Wentworth Erck started some years ago when, as a member of the Irish team responsible for an experiment on the Soviet mission to Mars, I was informed of his Martian investigations by Dr. Elliott of Dunsink Observatory, who directed me to the source of much of the material relating to Erck's life used in this talk.

The two moons of Mars were discovered by Asaph Hall at the Washington Observatory on the 11th and 17th of August 1877. He

named them Phobos and Deimos who may have been the sons of Ares, the Greek god of war. The observations were made during a close approach of the Earth and Mars, an event which takes place every fifteen to seventeen years. Two weeks later, Erck, peering up at the planet from his home in Shankill, also observed the outer moon, quite independently of Hall's discovery. He had a report of his historic

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observations published in *Nature* on September 13th 1877. *Nature* commented that "so far as we know these are the first observations of a satellite of Mars in these islands and it is singular that they have been made with an instrument constructed by the same optician as the great Washington telescope with which the satellites were discovered". When the two Soviet spacecraft carrying many international payloads set off for Mars in 1988, Wentworth Erck would, no doubt, have been happy to know that the Irish instrument SLED eventually collected valuable data on the Martian environment while in orbit around the planet.

While his observations on the moon of Mars assured him a place in the history of astronomy, he also distinguished himself a few years later when he was the first to notice the motion of Jupiter's red spot with respect to the planet's surface. He also became known as a recorder of the appearance of comets and had several papers published on the subject. On December 18th 1886 he wrote a note to *Nature* describing Barnard's Comet, which from Rathmichael "appeared as bright as a second magnitude star".

Erck was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in 1855. He died at his residence, Sherrington, on January 15th 1890. Unfortunately, the house no longer exists. It was destroyed in the seventies and no trace of the observatory remains. The most recent survivor of the family at Sherrington, Caroline Erck, a niece of Wentworth, is still well remembered in Shankill. She died in 1958 at the age of ninety seven. During the first half of this century she and her sister Mary were well known and respected in the village and spent much of their time assisting the local people. Even when she was in her nineties Caroline tutored the children of a family employed by the estate and I know that at least one of them became a physicist later in life. Perhaps Wentworth's influence is still at work in Rathmichael!

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**Wednesday 2nd March 1994**

**ON THE BORDERS OF THE PALE**

**Rob Goodbody**

This lecture, from the book of the same name, told us the history of the area around Kilgobbin, Stepside and Sandyford, an area which is rapidly changing as the suburbs encroach on the remaining green fields. The speaker took a look at the district in order to record the surviving remnants of the history of the area before it is changed forever. Taking us from the Neolithic and Bronze Age as marked by monuments in the locality and a range of artefacts found locally, we were brought through to the Early Christian period when there were church sites here at Balally, Jamestown and Kilgobbin. Kilgobbin church, in particular, has a long history a vital part of which has come to light in recent years through the diligence of our members Paddy Healy and Dickie Pilkington.

The medieval period has left its mark on the area and there were three tower houses locally, one at Balally which has disappeared, another at Murphystown of which a fragment survives and the third at Kilgobbin, of which more than half remains. The reporting by local people of the presence of a pale ditch at Balally in the 1970's brought Paddy Healy to investigate this feature and inspired our speaker to look further afield. To date a number of fragments have emerged, the most spectacular of which is a 500 metre stretch of the ditch discovered at Ballyogan.

Finally, we were shown something of the more modern period, including a town at Kilgobbin which disappeared early in the 18th century, two houses dating from the late 17th century, the villages of Sandyford and Stepside which owe their origins to the 18th century, and a number of local houses from the 18th and 19th centuries.

**Wednesday 6th April 1994**

**LOGBOATS FROM IRISH RIVERS AND LAKES**

**Niall Gregory**

Numerous logboats have been found over the years in Irish inland waters. Logboats, sometimes known as dugout canoes, are made from the hollowed-out trunk of a single tree, but can be surprisingly sophisticated. Examples have appeared from Irish rivers, with a concentration in two rivers in particular, eight from the Breedogue in Co. Clare and nine from the Foyle in Tyrone. Lakes are another source of logboats, though more tend to be found in small lakes or lakes which have relatively small expanses of water, seemingly because these lakes do not tend to have waves of sufficient size to affect the stability of a logboat.

Often logboats have features which tell a great deal about the way in which they were used. For example, where they show evidence for oars they may well have been used as ferries. Some fifty Irish logboats are known to have been rowing boats and 42 of these were found in rivers. In other cases evidence may be found that shows that the boat was sailed, but little would survive in the design and construction of a boat to show that it was either paddled or punted.

The earliest surviving Irish logboat has been dated to 2,740 BC, while there is evidence that they continued in use until the early 18th century. More than four hundred finds of logboats have been recorded in Ireland and our speaker has managed to examine no less than 44 of these. As a result he was able to deliver a most stimulating and informative lecture which was amply illustrated with slides and overhead transparencies.

**Saturday 25th June 1994**

**VISIT TO RATHFARNHAM CASTLE**

**Alistair Lindsay**, Senior Architect, Office of Public Works

This society visited Rathfarnham Castle in August 1985 and it is unusual for us to be revisiting places after a mere nine years. However, circumstances have changed radically in that time. The Jesuits were then still in occupation and the future of the castle was uncertain. The castle was subsequently sold to a developer before being acquired by the Office of Public Works on behalf of the State in 1987. It had been designated a National Monument in 1986.

At the time of its acquisition by the State Rathfarnham Castle was suffering from no less than seven outbreaks of dry rot as well as death-watch beetle (an unusual complaint in Ireland). Extensive works have been carried out to conserve the building and it is intended that it be opened to the public before long. In the meantime, we were lucky to be allowed to see the project in progress and even luckier in that our guide was an architect who has been intimately involved in the restoration works.

Mr Lindsay started the tour with a summary of the history of Rathfarnham Castle from the time of the Norman invasion to the present day. The castle itself has existed for only half of that time, but it had predecessors on or near its site. In this history, he managed to be comprehensive and yet succinct, while also throwing in numerous anecdotes to bring the whole story to life.

Essentially, Rathfarnham Castle is a late 16th century building with extensive interior works from the later 18th century. The date of the building is uncertain and may be about 1585, but 1593 is a more likely date. It is a square building with projecting corner towers which are slightly off square to improve sight lines for firing on attackers. Some features of this building remain, but internally it is the 18th century that predominates. These are the results of the intervention of various architects, notably Sir William Chambers and James 'Athenian' Stuart.

On our tour of the building we saw the splendour of the interiors and the various discoveries which had been made as a result of the extensive works carried out. Mr Lindsay was able to point out the features that distinguish the works of Stuart and Chambers such as the Apollo ceiling that is similar to the one in Chambers's Marino Casino and the coved ceilings which were a particular favourite of Stuart's. Discoveries included the examination of the Rococo ceiling in the dining room which has shown that the projection of the design into the bay is a later addition so that the main ceiling predates the construction of the bay. Various locations for fireplaces have been identified and there are theories that the immensely thick central spine wall may have originally been two walls with a corridor in between.

There is still a great deal of work to be done at Rathfarnham and it is thought that some of this may be done after the building has been opened to the public to give an impression of how the work is carried out. The massive crowds that attended the open day a few years ago show the tremendous interest in the building and it is hoped that this may indicate an interest in the actual restoration work as well as the finished product. With workers as enthusiastic as our guide involved in the project it is bound to prove to be a great attraction.



**Monday 4th to Friday 8th July 1994**

**ARCHAEOLOGY AND ART**

The course in Archaeology and Art was held in the first week of July and was attended by 19 students. The composition of this course tends to change totally from year to year due to the number of students who return each year. This year the speakers included Rob Goodbody with an introduction to Archaeology and Art, Joan Delany on Viking Art, John Bradley on Medieval Art, Clare Mullins on Palaeodemographic studies in Archaeology and Seamus Caulfield on Céide Fields. The second half of the week was taken up with visits and this started with Rob Goodbody leading a trip to the old Rathmichael Church, followed by a whole day's trip to the Meath area to visit Fourknocks, the Boyne Valley, Monasterboice and Mellifont. The final day was spent in Dublin city, taking in a lecture and tour of the National Gallery and a guided tour of Newman House. Perhaps the highlight of the week was Dr Caulfield's talk which was supposed to have been two hours long but kept going for a full three hours while he managed to keep the audience spellbound to the end!

**Sunday 23rd July 1994**

**OUTING TO BECTIVE AND TRIM**

For our July outing we went to Meath to have a look at some monuments in the Trim area. We called first of all at Bective Abbey, one of the early Cistercian foundations. While the abbey dates from 1150 AD very little survives from that period and many of the structures we saw date from the 15th century. We then called at Newtown Trim, stopping firstly at the remains of the hospital of St John the Baptist. The extensive ruins here are well looked after and occupy a picturesque site alongside the river, but we found it all

marred by the smell from a nearby sewage plant! At the other side of the

bridge is the ruined parish church dating from the 13th century, the most notable feature of which is the double effigy tomb of Sir Luke Dillon and his wife. We were puzzled by the extraordinary amount and range of pins on the tomb and it was not until later we discovered that there is a local tradition which attributes healing powers to this monument.

Close to the parish church is the former cathedral which was the seat of the Bishop of Meath from the late 12th century. The surviving remains of this building are very impressive for its size and it is extraordinary to think how much larger it was originally. Associated with it is the Augustinian foundation which was responsible for serving the cathedral and this occupies an unusually sloping site above the river.

Within sight of Newtown Trim is Trim Castle and we finished our outing here, though we were aware that the castle was not open to visitors this summer due to extensive conservation works. In fact, the castle was also being used as a film set for a picture called *Brave Heart* which is set in Scotland in the 13th century. The film company had built extensive mock buildings, including a village street, alongside the castle and the castle itself had been modified to return it to a 13th century appearance. This was most instructive as it included timber hoardings at the top of the walls rather than the crenellations that were added to castles at a later period.

**20th RATHMICHAEL SUMMER SCHOOL, 1994**

The 20th Rathmichael Summer School took place in the middle of August and included some dramatic changes in the established routine. Firstly, the decision was taken not to run an archaeological excavation this year. The excavation at Drimnagh Castle had come to a natural

end and it was felt that the enormous effort and not inconsiderable cost of running an excavation was getting beyond the energies of our

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organising team. As an experiment it was decided to run a Field Course for a single week based on teaching the practical aspects of archaeology without excavating and this was attended by 19 students. Outside help came from Ragnall Ó Floinn of the National Museum talking about artefacts and Leo Swan on *Landscapes from the Air*. The course was based at Rathmichael School but took every available opportunity to visit archaeological sites including a visit to John Bradley's excavation of a crannóg at Moynagh Lough near Nobber.

During the evenings in the same week as the Field Course our traditional series of evening lectures in archaeology took place. This year we had lectures from Tadhg O'Keeffe on his excavations at Omev Island where he was rescuing the archaeological material from an Early Christian site that was being destroyed by erosion. Professor Etienne Rynne spoke on Ireland from St Patrick to the Reformation, in which he showed how Celtic influence continued through that period. Professor George Eogan brought us up to date with his recent discoveries at the major site at Knowth and the following day the Field Course group visited Knowth to see for themselves. On the Thursday night Con Manning used archaeological and architectural detective work to piece together the history of the cathedral at Clonmacnoise and on Friday Heather King told us of her excavations at the new graveyard at Clonmacnoise where she has been discovering evidence for the settlement alongside the monastery.

The Summer School has finished in recent years with a barbeque, but this year we felt that the weather was too unkind at the end of August. Instead, we wound the week to a close with a wine and cheese reception which was a pleasant end to the season as well as bringing in a small amount to help the funding of the Summer School.

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### Monday 8th August 1994

#### **EXCAVATIONS AT OMEV ISLAND**

##### **DR TADGH O'KEEFFE**

Omev Island lies off the coast of Connemara and is a semi-island, being accessible at low tide. For many years human remains were being eroded from a sand cliff on the island, but the site was only drawn to archaeological attention in 1990. As a result Dr O'Keeffe carried out a survey of the site with Dr Muiris Ó Súilleabháin and this included a small excavation which concluded that the site contained material of medieval date.

Early in 1991 a major storm eroded no less than four metres of the cliff and showed that the site was in need of rescue excavation as it was likely to disappear within a very short period. As a result Dr O'Keeffe returned to the site in 1992 to carry out a season of excavation. A group of houses appeared early on that had been marked on the first edition Ordnance Survey map and had been entirely buried since then. Under these houses human burials were found, suggesting that the builders of the houses were unaware of the background history of the site as it is very unlikely that they would knowingly build on a burial ground. Under the houses was found a *leacht*, which is a monument often found on early Christian sites and which is a form of memorial to the saint who is associated with the site. On top of this *leacht* were quartz stones placed by pilgrims. This feature was constructed in mortared masonry showing that it was not of early date and it is thought to date from the 14th or 15th century. It probably commemorated St Feichin who was associated with Omev Island and who died in the mid 7th century.

Around the *leacht* were large numbers of human burials and surrounding the burial site was found a 12th century enclosing wall. As work progressed downwards an earlier *leacht* was found beneath

the medieval one, and this was constructed in dry stone walling much more in the way of traditional early Christian examples. Associated with this

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was found another cemetery, from an earlier period, and which had a surrounding wall. As a result, a second season of excavation became necessary and was carried out over a ten week period in 1993. The remains found here have been tentatively assigned to about the 7th century, around the time of St Feichin, and seem to encompass a period at the time of the introduction of Christianity to the island as many of the children buried here were found to have grave goods buried with them in the pre-Christian manner.

Beneath this early burial ground were found cultivation marks in the sand, apparently dating from the Iron Age, and along with these a round house built of stone appeared, seemingly of similar date. Beneath the round house were found the remains of huts which have been carbon dated to around 1600 to 1700 BC, placing them in the early Bronze Age.

This was a rescue excavation resulting from the coastal erosion and no indication existed at the outset that the site would be so complicated nor that it would span such a wide period. In all, some 7 metres in depth were excavated, representing a deeper archaeological deposit than found elsewhere in Ireland outside urban sites. The site has now been lost to erosion but details of it have been recorded for posterity by Dr O'Keefe and his team.

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**Tuesday 9th August 1994**

## **IRELAND FROM St PATRICK TO THE REFORMATION**

**Professor Etienne Rynne**

The title of this lecture suggested an ambitious attempt to put more than a thousand years of history into just over an hour. In fact, we were treated to a delightful demonstration of how the Celtic culture of Ireland survived beyond the introduction of Christianity right up to the time of Queen Elizabeth I in the 16th century. This is unique in Europe as Celtic cultures in Britain, France, Spain and elsewhere disappeared before the time of Christ. The cause is simple - the Romans destroyed Celtic culture elsewhere, but they never came to conquer Ireland.

Professor Rynne went on to demonstrate various ways in which the Celtic culture was manifested. First and foremost there was the Celtic ability to adapt innovations to their own purposes and styles rather than copying them directly. Thus it was that those who brought Christianity did not replace the old pagan practices, but altered them to reflect Christian values. Pagan stone monuments were Christianised by the addition of crosses or other Christian art and assembly places were turned into religious sites. Many pagan practices survived as supposedly Christian, such as the veneration of holy wells and the use of cursing stones. No other country in Europe has as many holy wells and the association of springs, wells and other water with holy sites is a Celtic tradition. At the same time, the secular practices carried on unaltered even when they involved pagan rituals such as those which took place at the inauguration of kings at Magh Adhair and Tara.

The nature of dwelling places also continued unchanged. The Celtic use of ring forts and crannógs remained until a very late date and Barker's map of Donegal in 1605 includes an illustration of a rath still

occupied, with thatched houses within the circle. It also shows a crannóg not only in occupation, but with the smoke of gunfire issuing in the thick of battle with the forces of the Crown. For this reason, it is impossible to date ring forts and crannógs without excavation, given the extremely long period over which they were in use.

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The style of Celtic ornament also continued. The basic element of Celtic design was the spiral and this occurred as a major element of the art of monuments such as the high crosses at Ahenny. Interlaced tracery was a later introduction and was adapted and refined by the Irish craftsmen to develop it into a distinctive Irish style. The Celts also liked to fill spaces with ornament and this is seen most effectively in many facets of Irish art such as the Tara Brooch, the Ardagh Chalice, high crosses and manuscripts such as the books of Durrow and Kells. This applied also to architecture and after the Romanesque style was introduced with Cormac's Chapel at Cashel the decorative forms were modified to Celtic tastes while the architecture itself was ignored. Thus Irish Romanesque buildings tend to have elements such as the stylised porch at Clonfert, where the functional aspects of the porch are abandoned in favour of a purely decorative feature that offers no shelter. This also exhibits elements of the earlier Celtic architecture in the way that the doorway narrows towards the top and in the presence of antae on the building, albeit decorated in Romanesque style.

The arrival of the monastic orders in the mid 12th century and the Normans a few years later started to affect the Celtic culture but the effect was still relatively small. The end really came only at the beginning of the 17th century when Elizabethan strength made major inroads into the Irish traditions and organisation. Thereafter many of the Celtic traditions fell into disuse until the 19th century when the Gaelic revival attempted to bring them back to prominence.

Professor Rynne summed up his lecture by saying that one of the most important events in the history of Ireland was an event that never happened - the Romans never came!

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### Wednesday 10th August 1994

#### **RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT KNOWTH Professor George Eogan**

Our speaker has addressed the Summer School before on the subject of his excavations at Knowth, and this time he brought us up to date on more recent discoveries. This concentrated less on the tombs than on the early settlement of the site. The area would have been too heavily wooded for mesolithic peoples and so the earliest inhabitants appeared in the early Western Neolithic, between 4000 and 3500 BC. These people are represented at Knowth by the remains of two small rectangular wooden houses with stone foundations, similar to those found at Lough Gur. A little later than this came a new phase when an enclosure of about 90m diameter was constructed and a different type of pottery is found associated with this. It was in this period that the passage tombs were built and the burials in them date from about 3000 BC.

Between 3000 and 2500 BC there was a considerable amount of house building and these were built in an area which was not protected by banks, ditches or pallisades. There seems to have been an extensive settlement at Knowth at this period and these occupiers kept cattle and grew wheat to the extent that the ground was now cleared of trees.

From about 2500 BC there seems to have been an influx of a new population with a different culture. They built more elaborate structures and left extensive evidence for ritual practices. Nearer to 2000 BC came the occupation by people with the beaker culture. A great deal of evidence for these people at Knowth is domestic, including pottery and flints, but no structures have yet emerged. The

one burial from this stage that has been found was a cremation inserted into the passage tomb. Following the beaker period there is a gap in the activity found at Knowth before reoccupation appears again in the later Iron Age.

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### **Thursday 11th August 1994**

#### **THE CATHEDRAL AT CLONMACNOISE**

##### **Con Manning**

It is often the case that surprisingly little is known about what are considered to be our best known monuments. When our speaker was writing a new guide book to Clonmacnoise he came to realise that there were various enigmas about the cathedral which deserved new thought. The west door is off centre, the ratio of length to width is unusually large, there is a stump of an old wall visible at the south-west corner and an archaeological excavation in the 1950's found the base of an unexplained wall just outside the cathedral on the south side.

Our speaker suggested that the first phase in the building of the church dates from about 909 AD. The second phase is late Romanesque, at which time the doorway was inserted, the north wall was raised, probably to lower the pitch of the roof, and a sacristy was added. The third phase seems to have been carried out at the end of the 13th century and to have resulted from structural defects. At this time the entire south wall seems to have been demolished and rebuilt some 2 metres from its original position, thereby narrowing the church and causing all of the enigmas mentioned above. In the 15th century a fourth phase took place in which living accommodation was inserted on a vaulted floor above the east end, while the sacristy was raised to two storey.

Finally, in the 17th century, around the time of the Federation of Kilkenny, the cathedral was restored. Cardinal Rinuccini visited the building at that time and held a service in it and it seems to have had

work done on it at that time. The cathedral fell into disuse soon after this.

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### **Friday 12th August 1994**

#### **EXCAVATIONS AT CLONMACNOISE**

##### **Heather King**

The graveyard at Clonmacnoise is being extended into an area which is known to have archaeological material and in advance of this our speaker has been carrying out a rescue excavation. Surprisingly little is known about the residential parts of the settlement at Clonmacnoise and a great deal of the evidence must have been destroyed in the past by burials.

Clonmacnoise is located alongside an esker which must have been a major route leading to a crossing point on the Shannon but despite this no evidence for prehistoric settlement has yet emerged. The monastery dates from 747 when St. Ciaran arrived, just seven months before his death. In later centuries there are references which give us some idea of the extent of the settlement, there being 105 houses there in the 12th century, while 47 houses were burned in a raid in 1205.

Discoveries on the excavation have included a stone foundation of a circular house, a cobbled area, two corn kilns and various pits and post holes. Wood and leather objects would not have survived here but bone, antler and iron are reasonably preserved and have included combs, pins, knives and so forth. During the 11th century there was a thriving metal workshop here and finds from this period have included crucibles, mould fragments and an ingot. There is also possible evidence for glass making.

The discoveries here have revealed important information in relation to the occupation of this early Christian site, an aspect which is frequently overlooked when we think of the great ecclesiastical sites in Ireland.

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### **3rd September 1994**

#### **OUTING TO SOME DUBLIN CHURCHES**

**Led by Joan Delany**

Considering that this outing started at 10.30 a.m. on Saturday there was a very good turnout with over twenty members present. At St. Michan's Church we were welcomed and offered cups of tea. A very efficient and humorous guide showed all the important and interesting features of this famous church such as the actual two manual key board on which Handel had supposedly played, and the wood carvings of instruments over the organ. This was the first stone church to be built north of the Liffey. It dates from 1685 and was restored in 1828. The magnesium salts in the limestone of the vaults absorb moisture from the air and results in a very dry atmosphere. These vaults are famous for their mummified remains.

Our next stop was at John's Lane Church - or, more correctly, the Church of Saints Augustine and John. Here, in the porch, Joan Delany discussed the neo-Gothic building by Edward Welby Pugin and George Ashlin, but as 11 o'clock Mass had just finished and people were still praying within, it was difficult to have a good look at the interesting features.

Rain poured down as we went to St. Audoen's, where we found that it would not be open until 2 p.m., though the old, unroofed part can be seen from the modern Catholic church. Some of our group decided to stay in town for lunch and to return at 2 o'clock.

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### **24th-25th September 1994**

#### **ANNUAL WEEKEND OUTING: BIRR AREA**

**Led by Damian MacGarry**

Meeting at Kilbeggan, we went to the Blackwater Bog visitors' centre where we watched half of the video before going on to the little platform of the "Clonmacnoise and West Offaly Railway". The new carriage (green and yellow) is towed by a tractor. The 3 ft. gauge tracks are those used by Bord na Móna for transport instead of roads over the bog. There was only one other passenger. The guide, a very pleasant young girl, with a good sense of humour, told us how the peat was processed and stored and taken to the E.S.B. generating station - at one point she told us that it was two miles away, and it certainly did not appear to be that far away, and this happens when there is nothing to compare the scale. The tour route was circular, because the land in the middle was not boggy and on it there was a farm run by one solitary man. Half way round we got out and the driver gave a demonstration of turf cutting.

Some of the group used the picnic tables at the centre - the weather being fine but dull, most stayed in the cars. No one had a camera except Alison Andrews who had a camcorder, which she used there. We hope to see the results some time.

Next, we went to Shannonbridge, with its amazing Napoleonic fortifications. From there we went to Clonmacnoise. The Cross of the Scriptures, the South Cross and the remains of the North Cross have

been removed indoors to the centre, where it is much easier to see them with indoor lighting. Replicas have been erected outside - Helen Roe would have been pleased with this. Members scattered and a few went to the Nuns' Church which I had not seen for a number of years.

After checking in at the Brosna Lodge Hotel, which was very comfortable, we went to look at the fortifications. These are even more impressive than Shannonbridge and include a Martello tower and battery.

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On Sunday we went to Lorrha where we were lucky to find that the service had just ended and a couple of parishioners stayed on and talked about the church and its stained glass windows. In the churchyard are the remains of the bases of two high crosses. There are also the Dominican Friary and St. Rodan's Augustinian Abbey here. The Catholic church has been beautifully renovated, with very fine wooden furniture and crucifix. Behind the altar is the tabernacle and five panels which are enlarged replicas of the Shrine of the Stowe Missal which was written at Lorrha.

The visit ended in the delightful grounds and gardens of Birr Castle.

### **Wednesday 5th October 1994**

#### **FROM PUCK'S CASTLE TO THE MARTELLO TOWERS: SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MILITARY TOPOGRAPHY OF SOUTH COUNTY DUBLIN**

**Dr Kenneth Ferguson**

The title of this lecture was almost long enough to present on its own, but the content of the lecture itself was well worth experiencing.

Starting with the tower houses of the south east Co. Dublin area, Dr. Ferguson considered them from a new point of view, choosing to examine the linguistic background. Drawing parallels between particular meanings of the words *Pale*, *Pile*, and *Peel* he suggested a common root for wooden fences, Scottish tower houses, large houses and the Pale. This was based on the entries in a large number of dictionaries and the background meanings attributed in them. We then looked at the tower houses, sometimes called Pale Castles, of the district, concentrating on their potential for guarding their hinterlands.

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Progressing a little further in time, we were given a viewpoint on the Pale itself that brought a fresh approach for those who are familiar with the maps of the line of the pale running close to the coast from Merrion to Dalkey. More recent research has shown that rather than two areas (Pale and lands held by the Irish), there were, in fact, three. These were the Pale or Maghery in which the king's writ ran, the land controlled by the Irish, in which it didn't, and the Marches, which were borderlands under partial control of the king's representatives. Rather than a single boundary marked by a pale ditch, there would have been two, one each side of the Marches and, sure enough, sections of this are now being identified.

The emphasis changed over the years so that by the late eighteenth century the fortifications in this area were less against attack from within the country than to prevent invasion from outside. The military camp at Lehaunstown was far enough away from the coast to avoid naval bombardment, but a few years later there came the military successors to the tower houses - the Martello towers which dot our coast.

This was a most fascinating and stimulating lecture bringing a new outlook to so many of the aspects of the district which we take for granted, and bringing us to think more deeply about what the actual words mean - such as Fassaroe, just over the border into Wicklow - which comes from the words Fásach Ruadh- a red wasteland, it being beyond the pale!

**Wednesday 2nd November 1994**

**THE BUILDING OF THE MILITARY ROAD**

**Padraig Laffan**

The Military Road runs from Rathfarnham to Aghavannagh through some of the most bleak and uninhabited parts of Ireland and it was built following the 1798 Rebellion and Emmet's rising of 1803 in order to tame the mountain areas and make them less of a haven for rebels. Padraig Laffan has known this area for many years and has walked the most far-flung areas of the mountains and this was quite clear in his talk which revealed a tremendous knowledge. A great deal of research was also in evidence as he showed us places where the rebels had travelled, lived or fought.

Starting with the natural processes that had formed the mountains and their inhospitable covering of bog, our speaker led us through the medieval period when Red Hugh O'Donnell and his companions made their way from Dublin Castle towards Glenmalure. The battles of the later medieval period and the eighteenth century were part of the government attempts to bring order to this wilderness, but they did not succeed until Lord Powerscourt and other landowners petitioned the government to build a new road into the heart of the district.

From an initial survey by Captain Taylor to the final completion of the road, the work was carried out by military personnel. This is evident in the no-nonsense bridges which occur all along the road, showing more

strength and practicality than architecture, but emerging with their own form of beauty. Along the way six barracks were planned, the first at Glencree, the last at Leitrim in the Glen of Imaal. That at Aghavannagh is now a Youth Hostel, Glencree is a reconciliation centre but others were less lucky. Leitrim Barracks has all but gone and Drumgoff, in Glenmalure, is in a sorry state.

Giving us a great deal of information about the district in general as we went along, this lecture was a tremendous exploration of the Wicklow area, and was illustrated by a great collection of slides.

**Wednesday 7th December 1994**

**1. A 1904 FIRE IN BALLYBRACK**

**James Scannell**

At the beginning of February 1904 a fire broke out in a barn owned by Michael Reilly of Ballybrack. The blaze was tackled by the constabulary from the barracks at Wyattville Road until the arrival of the Killiney Fire Brigade. They were later assisted by the Dalkey fire brigade as they attempted to save some 200 tons of corn, a large quantity of hay and some milling machinery. Using the handpumps, buckets and hoses which were the standard equipment of fire-fighters of the day, the firemen managed to extinguish the fire and save the hay and some of the machinery. Unfortunately, the rest of the machinery and the corn were destroyed by fire or water damage.

Our speaker managed to dovetail this incident with information about the system of local government at the time and how its fire services were organised. The local authority in Ballybrack in 1904 was the Killiney and Ballybrack Urban District Council which had been established as a township in 1866 and became an urban district in 1899. This council existed until the formation of Dun Laoghaire Borough in 1930.

**Wednesday 7th December 1994**



## 2. THE 1st EDITION ORDNANCE SURVEY - 1837 OR 1843?

### **Rob Goodbody**

The first edition Ordnance Survey maps of the Dublin area are commonly referred to as the 1837 edition and our speaker sought to explain firstly how this is not correct and secondly why the difference matters. The Dublin editions of the Ordnance Survey were surveyed in 1837 and prepared for printing but were held up and not published until 1843. It is important to note that the maps were brought up to date before publication and so the information depicted is of the later date.

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This talk was illustrated with a number of extracts from the unpublished 1837 map of the Dun Laoghaire area (sheet 23) coupled with the same section from the 1843 map. This showed how corrections had been made to the plate before printing, but also, more importantly, how very extensive changes to the buildings, streets, railways and even the coastline were made before publication. The most obvious example on the published map which ought to alert historians to its later date is the Atmospheric Railway which opened in 1844 but the construction of which was sufficiently advanced in 1843 to allow it to be shown. If this map were really of an 1837 date that railway could not have appeared.

## **COURSES SUB COMMITTEE 1994**

The Committee of the Society reappointed its Courses sub-committee to serve for 1994 and, as with last year, the subcommittee organised the course in *Archaeology and Art in Ireland* at the beginning of July and the *Rathmichael Summer School* in August.

The personnel on the subcommittee included last year's members, namely Rosemary Beckett, Joan Delany, Kay Merry, Rob Goodbody

and Sylvia Desmond, though Sylvia was unable to attend many meetings due to work commitments. To this list was added Máire Nic an Airchinnigh. The activities of this sub committee are listed under the *Archaeology and Art* course and the *20th Rathmichael Summer School* in July and August respectively.

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## **OBITUARY**

### **Con Maxwell**

*That you may grow out of the fullness of the stature of Christ*

I always think of Con on a cold winter's night arriving for a vestry meeting in the old school. He wore a sort of woollen visor which enveloped his whole head except for a narrow slit which revealed those kindly, quizzical, amused eyes. He would divest himself of coats, mufflers, gloves and all other forms of protection against inclement weather. Then we could settle down as a Vestry around the old pot-bellied stove - and proceed to the work of the evening. Con was always wise, gentle, amusing and full of arcane knowledge and wisdom and always prepared for a laugh.

He was the expert in the middle of amateurs where any question of a practical nature arose. But he presented his knowledge with such humour and self-deprecation that one forgot that he was indeed an expert in a vast range of engineering and other related questions.

Con was always ready to help and he derived great amusement from the completely fumbling endeavours of the totally impractical like myself.

He lived right up at the hill at Ballycorus, beside old Rathmichael Church and he knew and loved every stone of the place. It was his sanctuary and the approach road was nearly impassable. I always felt like a primitive missionary as I carried my bicycle over the last hundred yards. His fortress was safe from invasion except from those on foot and from those whose cars were so far gone that no worse could happen to them.

I met Con on the first Sunday I took a service in Rathmichael and quite by accident I met him the next day, Monday, in Merrion Square, where his office in the E.S.B. was. He recognised me, came across the road, and we had a long conversation which ended in his saying "I hope you'll be able to stay with us". And, of course, I did. Who could resist Con's openness, integrity, friendliness and sheer translucent Christianity. Con

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did not have to say anything to impress those he met with his Christian love and faith - it was transparent and utterly genuine, in Con you got what you saw.

To meet Con in Rathmichael House with all he loved around him, Daphne, Daphne (Junior), Hilary and Patrick, one would think that his whole life had been spent there, but it hadn't. He had worked in Scotland, studied in London, been an engineer in the oil industry in the Middle East, where he suffered illness and had to return to Ireland at the beginning of the war. And then he was an engineer with the E.S.B. for more than thirty years. He enjoyed the fellowship of those with whom he worked and he had some time for his many interests; photography; botany; his many conservation interests - the Rathmichael Historical Society, the Civic Group to save Georgian Houses, the Field Naturalists' Club; and always the Rathmichael Vestry with all its odd requirements. He gave himself generously to all these. He particularly loved flowers - orchids, roses and he was an expert photographer of flowers.

He was a man of informed faith. He was a deep and well-informed thinker, matters of Christian faith occupied his thoughts and his critical and philosophical mind and his wide interest in and knowledge of science. But this was not a coldly intellectual faith - he discovered the meaning of faith in love and service.

This church congregation which knew and loved him for more than 45 years will miss him; and will remember him with affection and thanksgiving - expresses to-day its love, support and admiration for his beloved family, Daphne, his wife, Daphne and Hilary, his daughters, Patrick, his son, his grandsons, Luke, Fergus and Robin, and Chris.

*'A good man has been amongst us'.*

*My he rest in joy and peace.*

[The address of The Most Reverend Dr. D. A. R. Caird, Archbishop of Dublin, 16th March 1994]

*See also the Secretary's Report.*

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## MISCELLANEOUS

### **GRAFTON STREET BUSKERS**

**Howell Evans**

Following the 1991 "Dublin City of Culture" with its art exhibitions and the "Russian Gold" at the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, one wondered what remained of all the effort and the millions spent by the City fathers. We were glad to see an end to the many derelict sites and abandoned buildings and awful hoardings.

The St. Stephen's Green end of Grafton Street still retains a glimpse of the Victorian era with its variety of Brougham, gig and landau ready to take one around the city squares reasonably.

However, summertime is the season when one can meet and savour the variety of the Grafton Street buskers. Go on a Sunday afternoon if you want to photograph them. Their skills and music will surprise you. There are the individual performers on flute and violin playing the classics, or the jazz and blues musicians on sax and trumpet. Should you get bored with the single musician there will be a group of three or more with electric guitars to entertain.

While waiting here it is easy to have a portrait made in oils or carbon, and then nearby will be the one-man band, or a tightrope walker. You can try your own talent on the street if you wish, and get your fiddle case filled with coins, and if you succeed you can be booked for a gig on the lounge bar circuit.

**Based on a slide presentation given to the Society at the AGM in January 1993**