IN ORDER to obtain, if possible, some verification of the stories which I heard concerning the Cave of Dunmore, I visited it with a friend some time in September, 1945. We traversed the main and side halls and the small bottom hall to the left of the Fairies' floor. We also entered the part which I later found was known by the name of the Town Hall or Tholsel. Not being equipped with proper lights or suitable clothes we ventured only as far as the stalaform called the Market Cross.

Seeing that little could be attempted in a serious way without local guidance and help I made some local enquiries and I was very fortunate indeed in obtaining a lot of reliable and valuable information from the family of Mr. Kieran Brennan, Corbetstown, and the family of Mr. Patrick Mulhall, Mothel.

Mr. John Brennan and his brother, Patrick, kindly consented to act as guides, and on Sunday, November 4th, 1945, we made a general tour of all the main sections of the Cave. We made rough measurements of the various sections. We surveyed the main hall, the portion of the Cave that is the straight in continuance of the outside slope, to the Fairies' floor. This well-known part of the Cave is a remarkable smooth, level, earthy spot about five yards across, among a surrounding mass of loose stones. We then entered the side hall, the large section of the cave to the left inside the entrance. It is from this side hall that one gains access to the two other large branches of the Cave.

Our next objective was the Town Hall, the large branch of the Cave extending southwards, partly over and along the lower part of the main hall, and on getting to the further portions of it, I discovered that the story of seeing light through a hole was true, for, from two openings, one can look down directly on the Fairies' floor. The Faries' floor is about 50-55 feet below the lower opening and 70 feet below the upper one. So often have friends and visitors which I since took to the Cave referred to these openings as windows that I feel nothing else can be done but call them the upper and lower windows of the Town Hall. These are situated just beyond the magnificent stalaform the Market Cross. One of the most
persistent stories about the Cave is the one which states it ends under the Town Hall in Kilkenny. Here we have the explanation of that widely held belief, the Cave ends under the Town Hall, but the Town Hall is in the Cave itself. Here we have an example of the need for respecting and carefully investigating local tradition.

On returning to the side hall from the Town Hall we proceeded to the opening leading to the other large section of the Cave. This is approached through a sort of short passage ending in a climb of about 8 feet—"the steps." As soon as the climb is made a very large and spacious apartment appears. On traversing this for some distance we encountered a large mass of rocks over which we had to climb. Beyond the mass of rocks—fallen apparently from the roof—there is a sharp and rather slippery descent through a rather narrow portion, in the narrowest portion of which is a curious camel-shaped stalagmite. After passing this the Cave enlarges again and at the lowest part of the floor on the right-hand side is the well. Just beyond the well is the rabbit burrow, and I noted there were five rabbit holes in the sandy "cliff" face. After passing the rabbit burrow the Cave roof and floor get within about 3 feet of each other and gradually come closer until finally one can only proceed by crawling quite flat. This portion of the Cave can be seen to end by the roof and floor coming together.

On coming back to the well I took the temperature of the water and when using a pocket lamp to read the thermometer it happened to shine on a whitish object in a small rock ledge on the floor. This I found to be a tooth and there were other teeth and small bones with it.

It was the finding of this tooth and other bones that aroused my curiosity and interest. From anything I had heard or read of the Cave up to that time I understood that earlier investigators had removed all bones, etc. I decided to make a general examination of the Cave, and in order to do so I made a considerable number of visits during recent months. From the beginning I found large quantities of bones, mostly rather small and broken pieces. All these I forwarded to the Dublin Museum where Mr. Stelfox very kindly made rough preliminary examinations of them. Of the bones found in the region of the well and rabbit burrow, practically all were human. These from the floor of the large chamber between the rabbit burrow and the entrance and were partly human and partly animal, mostly pig and sheep (or possibly goat).

Bones from the Town Hall were also of a mixed kind: human, pig, sheep and cattle. A large proportion of the bones are those of very young children, but there are a lot of adult bones, too, including three or four skulls.

In the main and side halls—these are open to the outside world—the variety of bones is large. There are practically no human bones found here so far, but those of dog, sheep, fox, badger,
THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVE OF DUNMORE. IT IS 38½ FEET WIDE AND 20 FEET HIGH.
rabbit, hare, jackdaw and wild goose were identified. In passing, I may mention that Mr. Stelfox thinks it is possible the dog bones may be wolf bones; as no specimens of the Irish Wolf were kept, it is not at present possible to distinguish between the bones of a wolf and those of a large dog. So far over 2,000 pieces of bone have been found and marked. As well as bones, a bronze ring-pin and two small bobbin shaped pieces of wood were found. At the Museum I learned that Mr. N. Dunnington, a member of the British Speleological Society had made a complete survey of the Cave. I got in touch with Mr. Dunnington and he very kindly supplied me with a copy of his report together with a beautifully detailed map showing the Cave in plan and section. From him I learned he had discovered a new part of the Cave when surveying it in 1941.

This new section, which is entered by a tight crawl under the left-hand "wall" of the large apartment as one proceeds towards the rabbit burrow and well, has been very aptly named the Crystal Hall. There lime in crystalline form has been deposited on sides, roof and floor, giving it a fairy-land appearance. I would like to mention here that no one should attempt to make the descent to this hall without guidance and accompanied by a reliable friend, and under no circumstances should any attempt be made to move any of the rocks or stones on the way down as this could cause a general collapse.

A curious feature of this crystal hall is the rise and fall of water in it. This is at present being investigated by Mr. John Brennan. As in other parts of the Cave, I found bones here too—human. I also noted very small animal bones, those of a young rabbit.

Recently two frogs and a water spider were seen here, indicating some connection with the outer world, but the water cannot be flowing in direct from any outside stream or well, as it is astonishingly clear and calm and does not appear to be influenced by outside rainfall. One or two bats were noticed flying around.

A rather curious feature is a current of air which blows steadily at one place at the upper end of the narrow passage leading to the crystal hall.

Many writers have referred to the amount of information and details of names, etc., obtained from the resident of the locality. Whatever may have been the case in the past, there is now very little local tradition existing, even among those old enough to remember the periods during which some of the writings were penned. There may, however, be many stories and tales connected with the Cave of which I have not heard. All such information I shall be very pleased to have.
It is to the literature dealing with the Cave we must turn for most of our information. At the moment I will not delay you with any extended extracts, but deal with it in as short a summary as possible. Later when I have detailed reports of the bones found, and other investigations completed, I hope to offer the Society a more comprehensive paper. To Mrs. Lyons of the Parade, Kilkenny, I offer my thanks for leaving her library at my disposal for this side of my investigations.

The earliest reference to Derc Ferna, the ancient name of the Cave of Dunmore and stated to mean the cave or eye of the alders, appears in the Annals of the Four Masters, where it is stated that in the year 928, Godfrey, with the foreigners (Danes) of Ath-cliath demolished and plundered Derc Ferna.

In an ancient M.S. in Trinity College called "Irish Triads," Derc Ferna is mentioned as one of the three "dark places" in Ireland.

In the "Book of Leinster" appears Broccan's Poem dealing with the exploits of Aithbel, who is described as "a jewel of a woman." She is said to have killed the luchthigern (or "lord of the mice") a fierce animal supposed to have lived in Derc Ferna, at the door of that Cave.

From these references we come to more modern times. Dr. Thomas Molyneux visited the Cave on Monday, November 21st, 1709, and his paper from which quaint extracts have been copied by subsequent writers, gave the clearest description of the Cave that was penned until recent times. The name Town Hall or Tholsel given to a part of the Cave is clearly stated by him. "... we ..., came to a large apartment, which the guide would call ye Tholsel ..."

How those who made extracts from the paper overlooked this I cannot understand. It is this writer who first refers to the rabbit burrow. "... and here was a burrow of rabbits, as appeared by the holes and dung." After ending his description of the Cave he says "... having viewed the coal, and put up several pieces of petrifactions, we mounted to return home." Tighe in his "Survey of Kilkenny, 1800," also mentions "... in or near this Cave, some clay coloured by carbon and called black chalk, has been taken up." So far I cannot trace, or hear of, any coal or coal-like substance around the Cave.

The Cave is referred to by many other writers in the 17 and 18 hundreds. Dr. Arthur Wynne Foot, M.D., visited the Cave on September 10th, 1869, and his paper published in the Journal of the Royal Hist. and Arch. Society of Ireland, January, 1870, summarised nearly all the previous literature dealing with the Cave. He gave a minute description of the bones found by him near the well, the only place in which he noted bones.
In February, 1875, Dr. Hardman read a paper on new bone deposits found by him in the Town Hall portion of the Cave. He adds a general description of the Cave.

R. Lloyd Praeger wrote a long article in the “Irish Naturalist” for October-November, 1918. He deals with a visit paid by himself and others to the Cave, “a good many years ago in 1901 . . .” (December, 1901). They explored the Cave; mentions attempting to map it, and in the article gave long extracts from earlier writings. He gave the large apartment in the northern section of the Cave a specific name, but as I have a peculiar feeling it may be yet possible to trace an older name I have avoided using it in this discourse. The fact that it contains two stalactites named “the Altar” and “the Organ” suggests it may have been called “the Cathedral.”

As mentioned earlier, I do not intend at present to draw any conclusions until further investigations are completed. I may say, however, at this stage that I do not agree with some, at least, of the opinions of earlier writers.

As Mr. N. Dunnington’s excellent report on his survey made in 1841, has not been published, I refrain from making any extracts from it until it can be published in detail.

And now let me give you some facts and figures.

First of all, the Cave is not in Dunmore at all, but in Mothel. The surrounding land belongs to Mr. White.

This Cave is the result of natural forces, and no part of it has been hollowed out by human agency. It is probably the result of water dissolving and eroding the limestone rock over periods of at least hundreds of thousands of years. The large crater, at the bottom of which is the entrance to the Cave, was caused by the falling in of a large underground chamber. The distance from the lip of the crater to the entrance is about 30 yards, and it is about 80 yards from the entrance to the end wall beyond the Fairies’ floor. From the entrance to the opening into the Town Hall is about 56 yards and a further 47 yards brings us to the farthest point in the Town Hall. The entrance is 38½ feet wide and 20 feet high.

From the entrance it is 42 yards across to the side hall to the opening into the large northern apartment, and the distance from that opening to the extreme end beyond the rabbit burrow is 110 yards, and it is 76 yards to the well. The length of the passage leading down to the Crystal Hall is about 50 feet. The overall length of the Cave is about 220 yards.

The temperature inside the Cave is about 8½ or 9 degrees C (46 degrees F.) and remains almost constant.

Wireless reception tested on a portable receiver showed that on the long waves reception was as good in the Cave as on the surface. The powerful medium wave stations came in practically as loud as on the surface, but there appeared to be a falling off in the volume of the weaker stations.
At one place in the Town Hall can be seen the result of blasting operations. I would be very pleased to hear if any story relating to this is known locally. Dr. Hardman when writing in 1875, mentions that a stalagmite nearly as large as the Market Cross was removed from the Town Hall by a local landowner. In this case, too, any local information would be appreciated.

In conclusion, I would make a special appeal to all who visit this lovely natural curiosity, not to injure or interfere with its interior. In particular do not scrape or mark the inside with initials, names or dates, and leave anything unusual where it is and draw some competent person’s attention to the matter. Do not break off or injure in any way the stalacmites. The Cave of Dunmore is part of our natural and national heritage. Let us guard it well.

Since the above paper was read further deposits of bones were found in various portions of the Cave, and another ring-pin (of iron) was found in the Town Hall.

Mr. John Brennan’s observations on the water levels showed that during the period checked, the water was at its lowest—8 ½ feet—in the Crystal Hall on 11th August, 1946, and at its highest—51 feet—on 27th April, 1947.

Water first appeared in the bottom of the Main Hall early in January, 1947, and continued to rise and fall in unison with the water in the Crystal Hall. It rose to its highest point—22 feet—on 27th April, 1947. If the levels are later proved to be uniform, it would indicate that the bottom of the Crystal Hall is 29 feet lower than the lowest part of the Main Hall.

The talk by Rev. Fr. Clohosey on “Old St. Mary’s” was published in “St. Mary’s Centenary Souvenir,” that by Mr. H. Butler on “The Kilkenny Theatre” in Dublin Magazine, December, 1946.