

French Visit in honour of St. Fiacre

August 20th to 26th 1970

MAUREEN HEGARTY

FOR many months before the arrival of the French party preparations went ahead under the patronage of Most Rev. Peter Birch, Bishop of Ossory, who was assisted by a sub-committee of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society of Mr. E. W. Hughes, President, Mrs. Margaret Phelan, Mrs. B. Grattan-Bellew, Mrs. M. Stopford, Miss Dorcas Birthistle, Mr. Richard De Loughry and Miss Maureen Hegarty who acted as secretary. Then on Thursday, August 20th Mrs. Phelan, Miss Hegarty and Fr. Tim O'Connor who acted as interpreter during the visit met the group at Cork airport, and after a brief delay set off for Kilkenny, stopping en route at Cahir House Hotel for tea. At Peace In Christ where the visitors stayed during the six days, Dr. Birch met them, gave them a hospital welcome and made them feel completely at home. This first day ended with a Civic Reception in City Hall presided over by the Mayor, Miss Margaret Tynan, and attended by members of the Corporation.

FRIDAY, 21st

In the morning there was the visit to St. Kieran's College to meet the President, Very Rev. John Canon Holohan, and members of the staff. This was followed by a visit to St. Canice's Cathedral, where Dean Caird spoke the address of welcome and later gave a sherry reception in the Deanery. Mrs. Phelan spoke briefly on the history of the Church.

Lunch at the Newpark was followed by a drive to Mount Juliet to see the Stud and gardens, a visit arranged by kind permission of Major Victor McCalmont. Then on to the Bro. Rice Memorial at Callan to see antiquity in the museum and modernity in the chapel. On Friday evening there was a reception in Rothe House given by the Archaeological Society, and a lecture on "Irish Saints Abroad" by the Rev. Tomás Ó Fiaich, Vice-President of Maynooth, and presided over by Dr. Birch, the vote of thanks being spoken by M. J. M. Desbordes.

SATURDAY, 22nd

The whole party travelled to Dunmore East for lunch

at the Ocean Hotel, stopping at Reginald's Tower for a quick glance. Tramore greeted the visitors with brilliant sunshine and all got back in good time for Mrs. Maire de Paor's illustrated talk on "Irish Monasticism at Home," held in the Social Service Centre. This was chaired by Dean Caird and M. J. M. Desbordes again replied for the visitors.

SUNDAY, 23rd

At 11 a.m. Mass was con-celebrated in St. Mary's Cathedral by the Bishops of Meaux and Ossory and the six visiting priests. The homily was preached by Dr. Birch. After lunch in the Club House all attention was focussed on Kilferra for the chief celebrations in honour of St. Fiacre. Mass was celebrated by Very Rev. Andrew Walsh, Adm. St. Patrick's. The lessons were read in French, Irish and English. The sermon in Irish was preached by Rev. Donal O'Kelly, St Kieran's College, and in French and English by Rev. Anthony Bell, C.C. Monseigneur Menager spoke in English, so giving great pleasure to the large congregation.

Mass over, the dancing and singing started, the dancers from Freshford under Desmond MacCheane doing beautiful exhibitions. To end the afternoon Mr. and Mrs. Barry Whelan served a delicious tea at Sheestown.

The last event of the memorable day was a concert in Kilcreene Lodge, home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Smithwick. The artistes were Mr. and Mrs. George Vaughan who sang, Miss Patsy MacCarthy who played her harp and sang, Miss Elaine Gowan who played the piano, and Miss Claire Larkin and Misses Anne and Mary Doheny who danced jigs, reels and hornpipes and whose beautiful costumes entranced the French ladies.

MONDAY, 24th

Monday morning saw the group at leisure, some shopping and some on short expeditions of their own choosing. At noon all met at the Design Centre to see the Workshops and to be entertained to lunch by Mr. William Walshe and Mr. King. After a visit to the Black Abbey where Rev. Francis MacNamara, O.P. did the honours, a visit to Jerpoint where Maureen Hegarty gave a brief talk, a visit to Graiguenamanagh Abbey under the aegis of E. W. Hughes, the party arrived at Ullard where Mass was celebrated and the sermon preached by the parish priest, Very Rev. Fr. Gavin. Monseigneur Ménager again addressed the congregation, and Mrs. Grattan Bellew speaking in French welcomed the pilgrims

to the tiny historic church. Afterwards there was the truly hospitable tea served by the Ullard committee, with Mr. Tim Ryan as Chairman who welcomed all and entertained the party with his splendid recitation of the Ballad of St. Fiacre. M. Duhamel, Mrs. Kilbride and Mr. Joe O'Carroll also contributed to the entertainment.

TUESDAY, 25th

Tuesday saw the bus set off before 8.30 a.m. for a trip to Dublin that included a visit to Trinity College for a glance at the Book of Kells, to the National Museum to be shown its treasures by Dr. Joseph Raftery, lunch at the National Gallery restaurant, followed by a tour of the Gallery with Mr. Gilmartin. Afterwards there was the visit to Aras An Uachtaráin to meet the President of Ireland, Eamon Uasal de Valera who spoke so informedly of St. Fiacre and who showed hospitality worthy of the Saint by serving a magnificent tea. A visit to the home of the French Chargé d'affaires and Madame Reuillard gave the visitors an opportunity to meet some of their compatriots in Dublin. The bus then turned for home, with a stop at Kilkea Castle for dinner and farewells.

WEDNESDAY, 26th

The departure from Peace in Christ was very early as the plane left Cork at 10 a.m. for Paris.

The French party :

Mgr. Jacques Ménager, évêque de Meaux,

M. J. M. Desbordes, Directeur-adjoint des Antiquités

Historiques de la Région Parisienne,

Madame Desbordes

M. Michael Duhamel, Vicaire Général,

M. Espinasse, Secrétaire Général l'Evêché,

M. le chanoine Dailly, doyen du chapitre cathédrale,

M. Simon, Archiprêtre de la cathédrale de Meaux,

M. Van Landeghem, curé de St. Fiacre

Fr. Jean Baptiste Molin, F.M.C.

Monsieur d'Auvergne, représentant le marie de Meaux,

Madame Roger Plin, Secrétaire général du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique

Monsieur Jean Gueguiner, Directeur des Archives Départementales de Seine-et-Marne,

Madame Gueguiner

Madame Paulette Cavailler, Directeur des Archives Départementales de l'Essone

Monsieur Cavailler

Monsieur Lerou

Madame Lerou, professeurs au Lycée de Meaux, specialistes de l'icônographie de S. Fiacre,
 Monsieur Guy Benuet, trésorier de la Société Française de Numismatique,
 Monsieur Jacques Sirat, membre de la Commission d'Antiquités et objets d'arts du Val d'Oise,
 Monsieur Milville, représentant let jardiniers de la region de Meaux
 Monsieur Christian Bartillat, marie d'Epepilly

Sincere thanks are due to the Army who rendered military honours, to the Civil Defence who did the stewarding at Kilferá, to the Red Cross personnel who attended, and to the drivers of cars who never missed an appointment in a very complicated schedule. Very special thanks are due to the Rev. A. Walsh Adm., and parishioners of St. Patrick's who helped in the preparations at Kilferá; to St. Patrick's Brass Band who played a welcome at the entrance to the shrine, and above all to the dedicated friends of St. Fiacre who around 1930 established the shrine which was the focal point of the celebrations. These included the Kennys, Tallents, Byrnes and Mahers of Warrington and Sheestown, the Mullins and Millea families of The Still, the Lawlesses of Kilferá, the Hugheses of Wallslough, the Madigans and Thompsons of Fir House. These devotees of St. Fiacre worked under the inspiration and guidance of Fr. Ambrose Coleman, O.P., Black Abbey, a Dominican in the best tradition of a great Order that has for so long served Kilkenny faithfully. The architect of the shrine was Dr. Richard Bowen, County Surveyor of Sheestown House.



TOMBSTONE INSCRIPTIONS

Records of all the tombstone inscriptions in the graveyards of Freshford, Maddoxtown and Old St. Patrick's have been made by Mrs. Buggy. This valuable addition to county and city records can be seen at Rothe House. The Society is grateful to Mrs. Buggy for her labours.