

Thomas MacDonagh in Kilkenny

Mary Kienealy

THOMAS MacDONAGH was born in Cloughjordan, County Tipperary on February 1st, 1878. He spent two vital years of his short life in Kilkenny where he was employed as a teacher in St. Kieran's College, therefore it is appropriate that the centenary of his birth should be remembered here. Here he first joined the Gaelic League and developed an enthusiasm for the Irish language. Here his "baptism in nationality" as he himself described it occurred.

Daonscoil Osraí held a Seminar with lectures on the life and writings of Thomas MacDonagh delivered by Pádraig Ó'Snodaigh, Pádraig Bairead, Pádraig MacSuibne and selections from his poetry were read by Blaithín Ní Bhrí. In conjunction with this an exhibition was staged in Rothe House Museum comprising photographs and other mementoes of MacDonagh and his family, examples of his letters and some of his published works. Many of the exhibits were supplied by Mr. Pádraig McSweeney of Archer's Avenue, Kilkenny, whose father had been a close friend of MacDonagh and carried on an extensive correspondence with him. Other items were presented to Rothe House by his son, Donagh MacDonagh, who had officially opened the house in 1966 and by other donors.

While in Kilkenny he also formed a friendship with Dominick Hackett, a member of the well-known Kilkenny family of writers and corresponded with him freely when Hackett emigrated to America. These letters formed the basis of the principal biography of the poet.

The Exhibition in Rothe House Museum included the following items:—

- A portrait of Thomas MacDonagh drawn by Dorothy Mackey;
- Photograph of Rev. Father Bibby with Barbara and Donagh MacDonagh, children of Thomas MacDonagh;
- The Opening of Rothe House by Donagh MacDonagh in 1966 (photo).

Books :

"Literature in Ireland" his major literary work published posthumously in 1916;

- “Through the Ivory Gate.” His first published book of poems published while he was in Kilkenny in 1902. Two copies exhibited, one presented to Mrs. O’Meara and one to Mrs. McSweeney;
- Collected Works of Thomas MacDonagh with an Introduction by James Stephens, published 1916. This copy presented by Muriel MacDonagh to Mrs. O’Meara at Christmas 1916;
- An Macaom 1908-9. Written by the masters and pupils of St. Enda’s School. Edited by P. H. Pearse, Headmaster. Thomas MacDonagh, Assistant Headmaster. Lent by P. McSweeney;
- Play — “When the Dawn is Come,” produced at the Abbey Theatre in 1908;
- Original letter from Thomas MacDonagh to Pádraig MacSweeney dated August 15th, 1905. Lent by P. McSweeney;
- Thomas MacDonagh’s Walking Stick recovered from a prison warder after his execution;
- Photocopy of Elegy for Thomas MacDonagh by Francis Ledwidge and letter from Lord Dunsany, sending the original to Donagh MacDonagh.

The poems of Thomas MacDonagh may be seen in Rothe House Library, also collected Works of P. H. Pearse and Life of Pádraig Pearse by Le Roux, translated by Desmond Ryan, also Poems of Joseph Mary Plunkett.



PUBLICATIONS :

Old Kilkenny Review £1.25. Back no’s 1975 £1. All others 75p. Also available — Kilkenny, its Architecture and History — K. M. Lanigan and Gerald Tyler £5.99. Rothe House. Kilkenny Castle — K. M. Lanigan. Graiguenamanagh. High Crosses, Helen Roe. Thomastown, W. J. Pilsworth. St. Mary’s Cathedral, M. M. Phelan. James Stephens, Richard de Loughrey. Butler Family History, Hubert Butler. Journal of Butler Society. Churchyard Sculpture, Ada Leask. Transactions of Ossory Archaeological Society — 50p.

Greeting Card and envelope 13p; Rothe House Post Cards 10p; Slides £1; Maps £1.25 and £1.