THE RAMBLINGS
OF A CHAIRMAN

The purpose of a Chairman’s report is to bring members up to date with their organisation. My problem is that the contents of this newsletter, like those that went before, beautifully present the activities of the branch, both past and future. So I struggle to write, and am distracted by snowy landscape overlooking the Sugarloaf!

We have been discussing the age profile of our membership. The answer is so simple. We have to continue to ensure that our members stay young, fit and healthy. Judging by the obvious good health of the large attendance at the recent lecture given by Matthew Jebb, we are succeeding very well. So many enthusiastic members were entranced by the story of Praeger and his work in cataloguing Irish plants, while holding down an onerous (or not so onerous) job as librarian of the National Library.

Eileen Collins must again be congratulated in assembling such a wonderful collection of speakers.

The social programme, spearheaded by Norman Campion and Sinéad Finegan looks impressive, and I am sure will be well attended. Fernhill, Rathfarnham Castle and Clonmacnoise, with a boat trip, all sound exciting.

I was hoping to expand on my thoughts of symmetry in biology, both plant and animal. The stimulation came from watching the snow covered trees waving in the wind. The beautiful symmetry of the branches, and the relationship between height and width, with a ratio which is found also in the animal kingdom. The arterial system in animals, the ductular system of the kidney and breast, are examples of symmetry. When symmetry goes wrong, as in cancer, the asymmetrical expansion has dire consequences. I will expand, if allowed, and if I can find the article in the Lancet which introduced me to biological symmetry. So far, no success.

Professor Gerald Tomkin, Chairman, speaking at the Golden Bull in December

The Hellfire Club proposals have entertained the planning committee for some time. The idea of putting a new building on the protected mountainside would seem at best ill-conceived – certainly unnecessary – and will only encourage an increase in motor traffic, at a time when
exercise and carbon footprints are to be promoted.

We have many remarkable members in our branch. It was with delight that I, and many others, went to a book launch in the RDS. The Irish Sketches of Florence Vere O’Brien, edited and prefaced by David and Veronica Rowe, was the book in question. The sketches, so beautifully presented, with a text that brings the history of the period alive, and adds so much more to the series of sketches.

We have a very vibrant association. It would be so good to hear of the many interesting things so many of our members get up to. Our newsletter welcomes members’ news. In conclusion, the committee and sub-committees work so hard to make sure that we have a happy, healthy branch. I thank them both on my behalf and on behalf of our enthusiastic members.

Gerald Tomkin

Keeping an Eye on SANDYFORD HOUSE

There are two places in Sandyford Village with the name “Sandyford House”. One is the well-known bar and restaurant; the other is the tall blue house which stands forlorn in neglected grounds beside St Mary’s Church and Presbytery. The house is reputed to have been the country residence of Major Henry Sirr, Dublin’s Town Major (chief of police) who (in)famously arrested both Lord Edward Fitzgerald in 1798, and Robert Emmet in 1803.

The house dates from the late 18th century and is a Protected Structure under the DLR County Development Plan. There was a planning application in June 2017 to build 14 dwelling units on the lands, and to extend, refurbish and repair Sandyford House as a private dwelling. The application was refused by the County Council in August because of a flood risk, and also because of issues relating to proximity of two proposed houses to the adjoining properties in Coolkill. And the layout of the development. The reasons for refusal did not relate to the proposed works on the house itself. The Council’s decision was not appealed.

PRAEGER’S PLANT RECORDING IN IRELAND

An Taisce’s 2018 lecture series commenced last month with an erudite and entertaining talk by Dr. Matthew Jebb, Director of the National Botanic Gardens, very well attended by members of the South County Dublin Association, and visitors. While many people present will have been familiar with the work of Dr Robert Lloyd Praeger and his important book, The Way That I Went, (published in 1937, with subsequent reprints) not all may have known of his connection with An Taisce. Following a public meeting in September 1946, organised by six existing organisations, and supported by many eminent people, An Taisce, the National Trust for Ireland, was formally set up in 1948, to be governed by an elected Council. A member of this first Council, Robert Lloyd Praeger, was subsequently elected as An Taisce’s first President. His address on Our National Trust, broadcast by Radio Eireann in October 1948, covered a wide range of subjects which are as relevant to environmental matters today as they were then.

Valerie Bond
The documents accompanying the planning application had said: "The overall development on the entire site is however necessary in order to fund the costly restoration works proposed in what would be a major conservation gain for the Sandyford area and South Dublin". The Council’s Conservation Officer is on record in the following terms: “Overall, we are supportive of the proposed development and particularly welcome the restoration and repair of Sandyford House, which is a building of considerable architectural merit that contributes greatly to the built heritage and character of the village. Together with St. Mary’s Church, parochial house and presbytery it collectively forms the centre piece of the village.”

One can see from the road that, although the ground and first floors of the house are boarded up, the glass is broken in windows on the second floor, and slates on the roof have been disturbed. There is concern that the house appears to be in need of works to prevent it from becoming endangered. Our Association of An Taisce has drawn the Council’s attention to the condition of this Protected Structure. In the meantime, a request has been made for exemption from the requirement to provide social and affordable housing if the development was only for refurbishment of the Protected Structure and construction of one single storey house beside it, to replace existing remnants on the site. This request has been granted. We are waiting to see whether it will lead to further steps towards restoration of Sandyford House.

Andrew Parkes

GREEN SCHOOLS
FLAG RAISING CEREMONY
at Kilternan C of I School

The Church of Ireland school’s Green Flag Committee in Kilternan, consisting only of pupils, has achieved five flags to date, for various projects, involving recycling, bio-diversity, water conservation, etc., and is well on its way to getting another flag this year.

Unfortunately its flags were destroyed in a winter gale, so, as well as saying thank you for all the hard work, our Association presented the school with a new set, at a flag raising ceremony last

March 15th. Norman Campion represented An Taisce.

The Green School Flags at Kilternan

There are now 3,200 Green Schools in Ireland – over 90% of all schools. Indeed, a few years ago Pat Oliver and her team were invited to address a UN conference, in New York, on how we organised our Green Schools and Blue Flags schemes. Pat founded them in Ireland 20 years ago, and you will find them in many countries, now including China. They are co-ordinated from Denmark.

Many of the original Green School pupils are now at university, and some now operate Green Flag schemes in college.

The An Taisce Education Unit employs nearly 60 people now, spread throughout the country, managing and operating various projects, including Walking to School, Blue Flag bathing beach quality, and National Spring Clean programmes.

Norman Campion

THE GOLDEN BALL
in December

Music is a moral law,
It gives, to the universe,
Wings to the mind,
Flight to the imagination,
A charm to sadness,
Gaiety and life to everything.
It is the essence of order, and leads to
All that is good, just and beautiful.

Plato.
Plato knew what he was talking about, and the proof was in the listening experienced by those who enjoyed our Christmas music event last December, in the Golden Ball’s comfortable lounge.

The Golden Ball staff did us proud, with very tasty mince pies and mulled wine. Sinead Finegan on violin, accompanied by Freddie Walsh, classical guitarist, gave a beautiful selection of seasonal pieces.

Andrew Parkes became a raconteur for the afternoon, with tales including one about the late Biddy White Lennon’s Christmas gift of a turkey – which happened to be a live one, and which was still walking around the following Easter.

Norman Campion

How to Reduce Our PLASTIC WASTE

You may have heard recent radio advertisements about the new recycling list – what we can and can’t put into our green bins. These new rules should also give us pause for thought when it comes to the amount of waste we produce, full stop. The impact discarded plastics have on our environment is very much in the media spotlight at the moment. David Attenborough’s popular “Blue Planet” series highlighted the plight of ocean-dwelling creatures, who are faced with an ever-increasing deluge of plastics. But from the high seas, to local Tidy Towns and native wildlife protection, it’s a topic that has impacts everywhere.

How can we reduce our reliance on wasteful products? Much of the packaging on our supermarket shelves is superfluous, so shopping more consciously is a great help – choosing loose fruit and veg (those plastic veg nets can’t be recycled anyway!), bringing a cloth bag for bread, or taking along our own container to the butcher or fishmonger, all adds up. There is a growing movement, both here and abroad, called “Zero Waste”, which involves such simple steps as these, and many others, like investing in a reusable water bottle or coffee cup. In fact, many cafes offer discounts to those bringing their own reusable cups. Contrary to popular belief, the disposable coffee cups so frequently used cannot actually be recycled. Most importantly, supermarkets respond to consumer demand: if we query why a bunch of bananas needs to be sold in a plastic bag, or whether a single mango really needs individual wrapping, then retailers will begin to take notice. So the next time you make a purchase, ask yourself of the packaging is really necessary – and don’t forget to bring along your canvas shopping bags!

Sinéad Finegan

FOR YOUR DIARY

Tuesday April 17th, 8 p.m. in The Goat, Goatstown: Illustrated talk on The Fitzwilliams of Merrion, by Mr Des Smyth, Chair of Mount Merrion Historical Society.

Sunday April 22nd, 3 - 5 p.m. Spring Music in Rathfarnham Castle. (See below)

Saturday May 5th, 3 – 5 p.m. Rhododendron Viewing at Fernhill.
Tuesday May 15th, 8 p.m. in The Goat, Goatstown: Climate Change, a talk by Fr. Sean McDonagh, President of An Taisce.

Sunday August 26th (provisional date): Chairman’s tea party in Coillan Darraig Lodge, Kilmacanogue.

Saturday September 15th, 8.30 a.m. to 7.30 p.m boarding the bus at the C of I Church in Kilternan: River Shannon Cruise to Clonmacnoise. (See below).

In addition to the excellent series of lectures organised by Eileen Collins, we have some interesting events arranged for you. The Spring Music in Rathfarnham Castle on 22nd April, organised by Sinead Finegan, gives us the opportunity to revisit one of the area’s outstanding houses in its magnificent parkland, as well as having some delightful food for the soul, by the choir. (See below)

It’s rhododendron time in Fernhill in May, so do come and enjoy the flowers with us, and see them at their peak flowering time. They come in a variety of heights and shapes and colours, some with large trumpets, some with alluring scents.

The Fernhill Garden visit is by kind invitation of Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council. It is on Saturday 5th May at 3 p.m. Entrance for cars is through the main gate. Voluntary contributions will be welcomed.

The Chairman’s tea party is provisionally dated for August 26th, and it will be in his new home in Kilmacanogue. We thank him for his kind invitation.

SPRING CONCERT AT RATHFARNHAM CASTLE

Join us for an afternoon of delightful music in the beautiful surroundings of the ballroom of Rathfarnham Castle at 3 p.m., Sunday April 22nd. Music, both old and new, will be presented by the talented choir, the Mellow Tonics, conducted by composer Norah Walsh, and by the classical guitar duo of Freddy Walsh and James McDonald. This will be a unique afternoon of music performed in a wonderful setting, so please join us for music and light refreshments. There is a car park next door to the castle, and the venue is also served by the 16, 17 and 15b bus routes. Charge, payable at the door, is €15 per adult, and €5 per child.

FOLLOWING IN THE VIKINGS’ FOOTSTEPS

On Saturday 15th September we will be sailing downstream from Athlone on the Shannon, on a Viking replica ship, to explore one of Ireland’s great early monasteries, established in a.d.544. But on this occasion we will not do what the Vikings did – for they plundered the monastery eight times between a.d. 722 and 1163. We are talking about Clonmacnoise, of course, with its three high crosses, two round towers, eight churches, and much more. Others may have burnt it down: we will be on our best behaviour! (See herein below for some of its history).

They say the best approach is by boat, which we plan to do.

To refresh the inner person we will have lunch in Shannonbridge’s well-preserved early 19th century fort, built to secure the Connacht bridge head.

Following the time at the monastery we will visit the Bora Wetlands – well worth experiencing, particularly as An Taisce takes a special interest in Ireland’s wetlands, owning and protecting a number of them.

Put the date in your diary, and book early – all for a modest €65.

Norman Campion
The Irish Sketches of Florence Vere O’Brien
(Edited by David Rowe; Introduced by Veronica Rowe)

Florence Vere O’Brien, Veronica’s grandmother, was born an Arnold, grand-daughter of Dr. Arnold of Rugby. On the death of her parents she was adopted by her aunt, whose husband, W.E. Forster, became Chief Secretary in Ireland for two years, and it was at that time that Florence met, and subsequently married Robin O’Brien, a member of the Inchiquin family of Clare.

Florence was an artist of considerable merit, and left sketch books containing over 1,000 images. Many of them of her experiences in Switzerland, Italy and France when she was a young woman. She also kept a well-written journal throughout her life. This book matches the sketches of Irish interest with related passages from her journals, and is introduced by a brief summary of her life. She is now chiefly remembered for her work in setting up the Limerick Lace School, and the Clare Embroidery Class. Examples of her designs are on view in the Ennis and Limerick Museums.

CLONMACNOISE
(Copied from data on mobile)

In a quiet, water’d land, a land of roses, Stands St. Kieran’s city fair; And the warriors of Erin In their famous generations Slumber there. T. W. Rolleston (Translated)

Situated in County Offaly, Clonmacnoise was founded in 544 AD by St. Ciaran, a young man from Rathcroghan, County Roscommon. St. Ciaran was one of the Twelve Apostles, who studied under St. Finian at the famous Clonard Abbey. Until the 9th century the monastery had close associations with the kings of Connacht. The strategic location of the monastery helped it become a major centre of religion, learning, craftsmanship and trade by the 9th century, and Ireland, visited by scholars from all over Europe. From the 9th until the 11th century it was allied with the kings of Meath. Many of the high kings of Tara and Connacht were buried here.

Shortly after his arrival with seven companions – at the point where the major east-west land route through the bogs of central Ireland, along the Eske Riada, an esker left by the receding glaciers of the last ice age crossed the River Shannon – St. Ciaran met Diarmuid Uí Cerbaill, who helped him build the first church on the site. Diarmuid was to be the first Christian crowned High King of Ireland. The church was a small wooden structure, and the first of many small churches to be clustered on the site. There remain seven churches (9th to 13th century), (locally the site is called “Seven Churches”), and the largest collection of early Christian grave slabs in Western Europe. In September 549, not yet thirty-three years of age, Ciaran died of a plague, and was reportedly buried under the original wooden church, now the site of the 9th-century stone oratory. Many famous manuscripts were written here, including the Book of Dun Cow, written in the 12th century.

Blossoming from a small monastic settlement into Ireland’s original university, and possibly first city, it buzzed with religious, literary and artistic activity and drew patronage from kings.

Attacks on the monastery.
Many treasures were stolen from the monastery. In its 1400 years of being an important monastic centre the monastery was attacked 8 times by the Vikings, 27 times by other

Clonmacnoise High Crosses
Amongst the many remains at the site there are two complete High Crosses, plus the shaft of another. The most famous, the Cross of the Scriptures, also known as King Flann’s Cross, is the centrepiece of the new interpretative centre.

It is available from Hodges Figgis in Dawson Street, and from Hannas in Rathmines, and costs €25 a copy.

REMINDER
Is your subscription to An Taisce up to date?