

A GLANCE AT THE IRISH LANGUAGE MOVEMENT IN CO. KILDARE

THE STORY of the Irish language revival movement in Co. Kildare, as in most (if not all) other places is one of "thuas seal, thios seal". There have been periods of great enthusiasm followed by others of deep apathy; however, throughout the years there have always been people who worked quietly but persistently for the language, who were not victims of complacency in the glaring lights of popular enthusiasm, nor of discouragement in the dark shadows of apathy.

One of the bright periods was at the turn of the century when, within a few years of the founding of the Gaelic League in 1893, the county could boast of twenty branches, and the growth was continuous. To judge by press reports at the time, the movement — and the nationalist ethos in general — had very distinct popular support.

The 'Leinster Leader', both in its news columns and leading articles, was to the forefront in giving support and encouragement to the revival of the language and in calling for the cultural, economic and social changes necessary to give the Irish people that sense of identity which they had lost in the replacement of their native language by English.

That loss of identity was graphically, if unintentionally, illustrated by an old man from rural Ireland in 1902, when, to J. M. Synge, he said: "Now all this country is gone lonesome and bewildered, and there's no man knows what ails it!"

"Irish Ireland"

A distinguished contributor to the 'Leader' from 1905 to 1914 was the late Brian O'Higgins ("Brian na Banban"), famous for his popular Christmas cards and for his many poems, in Irish and English, patriotic and religious. His weekly column, "Irish Ireland", was bilingual and, it would appear, widely read, particularly by young people. The following is an extract from his column on 6th January, 1906:-

Vanity is a rather common failing and I must confess to my share of it. But, I think that share has greatly increased since Christmas, and all owing to the shaver of Gaelic greetings sent me by the warm-hearted buachailli and cailini of Cill-Dara. Early in the week before Christmas they began to arrive, and every morning until the great day itself, and even after it (for some cards arrived too late) I found pleasure untold in reading the kindly-worded wishes and greetings which I knew, full well, came direct from the hearts of the young Gaels of Kildare. My only regret is that I cannot award a prize to each one of them, because all of them were good; while the knowledge of Irish displayed in some of them, and the beautiful penmanship, came as a glad surprise to me. I must congratulate the Gaelic teachers who are spreading the language throughout Kildare in such a thorough fashion, and their pupils also on the progress they have made in such a short time. The task of awarding the prize was no easy one, but after long and careful consideration I decided that it should go to: Seosaimhin Nic Aodhagáin, 3 Gleann na Gréine, Nás na Rí, whose greeting was really splendid. Will she kindly let me know which of the volumes mentioned in the

announcement of the competition she would prefer? Very close to her came Peig Ní Dhálaigh, Cill-Dara, who sent her greeting in good Irish verse and who, if she continues as at present, will one day be a great poetess. To her I am sending a special prize and I believe that she fully deserves it. I am delighted beyond measure over this competition because of the insight it has afforded me into the working of the Gaelic League in Kildare. I am deeply grateful to all those who have taken part in it, and from my heart I send them thanks and greetings.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh, a chárde mo chroidhe, agus go dtuga Dia togha gach sonais dibh 'san aith-bhlíadhain.

The Gaelic League influence in the county continued into the 1920's, but, towards the end of that decade, there was a noticeable

decline in enthusiasm, and this continued into the 'thirties and 'forties. At the end of World War II, widespread apathy prevailed throughout the county.

There were, of course, small groups here and there which kept the spark alight: feiseanna, lectures, debates, etc., were organised from time to time. An energetic and devoted committee still continues to organise the very successful Féile Drámaíochta for schools, held annually in Kildare. But popular enthusiasm was conspicuous by its absence.

However, the Gaelic League annual collection, wherever held, was reasonably well supported and showed that, while many people were not prepared for active involvement, nevertheless, they were not, by and large, antagonistic and could be counted on for support if given the right (to them) incentive and good leadership.

Naas provides an admirable example of this. In the 1950's Gaelic League activities were almost non-existent. Some members of the defunct branch continued to meet, however, and with a few other language

enthusiasts (who were not attached to any organisation) formed a branch of An Club Leabhar. They organised lectures, debates and social functions in Devoy Barracks (some Army personnel were also involved).

Out of this organisation grew Glór na nGael, which made a big impact on the town in the 1960's, winning the first prize in its category in the National Competition. All sections of the community were involved, and unstinted support was given by clergy of all denominations in the area, nuns and Christian Brothers. The Glór na nGael committee organised lectures, céilithe, debates, summer courses and a school (all Irish) for young children. Out of the latter was born Scoil Chrónain in Rathcoole, which at present caters for about 50 pupils who are receiving full-time education through Irish.

Meanwhile, however, the familiar pattern is once again emerging in Naas and throughout the county. Very little activity is apparent. The Gaelic League register shows only three branches in Co. Kildare — Naas, Kilcock and Kildare. Of these, it would



Brian O'Higgins, who contributed a bilingual column "Irish Ireland" to the 'Leinster Leader' for a number of years early in the century.

appear that only the town of Kildare has an active group. Is mór idir inné agus inniu!

"Now all this country is gone lonesome and bewildered and there's no man knows what ails it!" One wonders.

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— From our 1882 files

GAELIC LEAGUE BRANCHES IN CO. KILDARE 1901-1918

Branch	President	Treasurer	Secretary	Founded
Naas	Rev. T. Gorry	Pádraig Ó hIcedha	Máire Ní Raghallaigh	March 6, 1901
Maynooth	An tAth. A. O Broin	S. U. Caomhánach	Domhnall Ó Buachalla	March 17, 1901
Sallins	An tAth. P. Maguidher	Eamonn Ó Broin	Eamonn Ó Ceallaigh	1906 (?)
Celbridge	V. Rev. J. J. Maguire, P.P.	Eamonn Ó Broin	Eamonn Ó Ceallaigh	March 11, 1907
Kill	An tAth. D. Ó Ruairc	Inghean Ní Bhaoighill	Seosamh Stynes	March 16, 1904
Allen	An tAth. S. Mac a'tSaoir	Miss K. Healy	Miss M. McGuirke	June 12, 1904
Newbridge College	An tAth. P. Pabhall	Seán Ó Dubhshlainge	Seoirse Mac Niocaill	April 5, 1901
Newbridge	—	—	L. Rowan, M.D.	Nov. 17, 1901
Ballymore Eustace	P. Wolfe	Thomas Grace, D.C.	Miss M. K. MacGuire	Oct. 4, 1903
Kildare	Rev. P. Campion, P.P.	Joseph Cosgrave	A. Fitzpatrick	July 2, 1904
Sceirí, Ath hi	An tAth. D. Ó Ceallacháin	P. Dunny	Inghean Ní Icedha	June 1, 1906
Gearr-Eisgir, Moyvalley	An tAth. A. Ó Duinn	William Ó Raghallaigh	Padraig Mac Colla	Feb. 10, 1907
Maon Cholúim Chille, Co. Cill Dara	An tAth. S. Ó Riain	U. De Burca	Eamonn Mac Cába	Feb. 24, 1907
Ballytore	Seaghán Ó Ceallaigh	Eamonn Ó Ceallaigh	Liam Ó Conchubhair	Jan. 30, 1907
Prosperous	An tAth. M. Mac Gairidh	Labhrás O'Néill	Tomás Ó Muimhneacháin	Jan. 5, 1912
Ballyshannon	An tAth. Ó Fionnalláin	Seán Ó Dunlaing	A. T. Hendy	Jan. 5, 1912
Athy	An tAth. D. Ó Ceallacháin	Tomás Céitinn	P. J. Ginnane	Nov. 23, 1913
Athgarvan	Eamonn Ó Modhráin	Mícheál Mac Gabhann	Mícheál Mac Gabhann	Feb. 2, 1917
Barrowhouse	Máire Bean Mhic Shiúbhlaigh, O.S.	Maoilsheachlainn Ó Ceallaigh	Róisín Uí Loinsigh	Nov. 15, 1917
Grangebeg	Liam Ó hIfeárnáin	Aodh Ó Ceallaigh	Criostóir Ó Treasaigh	July 14, 1918