

The Society's annual excursion

The Society's annual four-day excursion took place between 16 – 19 May. This year the Society selected Donegal and the northwest staying at the Great Northern Hotel in Bundoran which was the base for the duration. The journey was undertaken by coach supplied by Kanes Travel, and, en route, many of the country's interesting historical and archaeological sites were the subject of debate and exchanges of information. In the planning of the excursion every effort was made not to overload the participants with information and it is hoped that this report will refresh the memories of those who participated while at the same time be of interest to our members who could not join us this year.

Day one

Lough Rynn

The first event of the excursion was to visit the beautiful restored Lough Rynn House Hotel where the group was greeted by the friendly staff led by Catherine Brady. This was followed by the serving of delicious tea, coffee, scones and pastries in Baronial Room. This was followed by a conducted tour of the magnificent House and grounds, once the home of the Clements family, which has strong connections with the County Kildare Archaeological Society. The Clements family association with Lough Rynn began in 1750 when they purchased the lands from the Crofton family and in 1795 the family was rewarded with title Earl of Leitrim. While many changes ensued, the association with the Clements family continued until 1969 by which stage much of the estate had been reduced by Land Commission sales. The Crofton family had acquired the lands under the widespread Plantation measures of Irish lands in the early 1600s by the victorious English authorities. In the case of Lough Rynn, the lands were confiscated from the Mac Ragnail/O'Rourke clans who had built a stone castle on the shores of Lough Rynn in the twelfth century, the ruin of which still remains. The House, as it is at present, owes much to inheritors of the estate following the murder of the third earl in 1878. Under the guidance of Sir Thomas Drew, the two-story house was re-modelled into the imposing structure it is today, including the baronial hall with ornate fireplace, plaster works, solid oak panelling and glazing bearing the



family emblem. By the end of the 1900s the House and gardens had suffered from disrepair and vacancy over long periods, however, the take-over in 2005 by the Hanly Group and the restoration works which they carried out has saved this property from dereliction and made it into a magnificent place to stay and visit.

(Photograph by Oliver Murphy)

Lissadell

Lissadell House and Gardens, was once the home of the Gore-Booth family and childhood home of Constance Markievicz, but is now the home of Constance Cassidy and her husband Edward Walsh and family. Constance and Edward have very strong Kildare connections and the Society appreciates their support in the planning of this visit. Following lunch in the Tea Rooms at the Coach House, the group viewed the current exhibitions on display; centenary of the 1916 Rising, Countess Markievicz, Eva Gore-Booth and Waterloo before proceeding for the hour long tour of the House. The walk from the Coach House to the House provides a tremendous perspective of Lissadell House itself within its panoramic setting which was designed by the architect Francis Goodwin. The tour was conducted by a most enthusiastic guide, Leo Leyden, who hails from the locality and whose family have had a long association with Lissadell. He led the party via the porte cochere at the side of the House into the hallway, then through the various rooms of the House (with the exception of the rooms used by the family), all the time outlining its history, including the activities, pursuits, successes and failure of the Gore-Booth family over time, as he moved along. Great credit is due to the new owners for their wonderful collection of appropriate art on display. The visit to the House concluded with a visit downstairs to the kitchen, servants quarters, nursery etc. The group then exited from the House via the former servants entrance and proceeded for a visit to the Walled Alpine Garden and experienced the majestic scenery of Lissadell's hinterland. After a number of hours it was time to leave Lissadell which, like Lough Rynn, has been rescued from dereliction by Constance and Edward and their endeavours has saved Lissadell for future generations by sensitive restoration works, some of which are still in progress.

After check in at the Great Northern Hotel in Bundoran, day one concluded with a magnificent dinner in the hotel restaurant.

Day two

Enniskillen

After an early breakfast the group departed for Enniskillen passing through the historic town of Ballyshannon and entering County Fermanagh at Belleek the route to Enniskillen then passed along the south side of Lower Lough Erne. At the Round O Jetty the group was met and welcomed by Stephen Nixon of Erne Tours where a planned cruise, together with a visit to Devenish island, was to begin. Enniskillen or Inis Ceithleann is the county town of Fermanagh and up to the beginning of the 1600s the area was controlled by the Maguire clan. During the cruise of the river, Stephen outlined the various landmarks and historical aspects of the town such as; Enniskillen Castle, Portora Royal School and then through the sluice gates which controls the water level from Upper Lough Erne to Lower Lough Erne en route to Devenish Island.

Devenish

On arrival at the island jetty the group were in awe of the view of this most spectacular monastic site with a wealth of historic monuments. Devenish island is 'L' shaped consisting of approximately 70 acres and has been a centre of Christian worship for over 1,000 years. This period coincided with the birth of monasticism during the sixth century when St Molaise established a monastery on the island. There were different periods of development on the island which included it being a centre of learning, ransacking by the Vikings and burning in the middle of the twelfth century from feuding families. The small visitors centre on the island gives a concise outline of the many features which are placed in their historical and archaeological context. In brief the objects of note for any visitor are:

- a. Teampull Mór or lower church, the Priory Church of the Culdees or Companions of God dating to the early part of the thirteenth century which became the parish church of Devenish. The southern chapel was added as a mausoleum for the Maguires whose arms appear near the entrance in the outer eastern wall.
- b. St Molaise's House which is a small twelfth century oratory (19 x 11 feet) apparently severely damaged by quarrying for building stones leading to a serious collapse in the early nineteenth century. Its decorated angle pilaster stones are Romanesque designed to match the adjoining Round Tower.
- c. Round Tower constructed of carefully dressed stones is a superb example standing over 80 feet high with a round headed door approximately 9 feet above ground. At the pointed cap is a decorated ring with four enigmatic heads. This Tower has been fortunate to have been repaired twice in the nineteenth century and has recently been re-pointed.
- d. The Augustinian Abbey of St Mary's which is located further up the island is twelfth century but the Latin inscription at the base of the spiral staircase recording reconstruction in 1449 suggests that most of the structure that remains today is of that latter period. The tower is believed to have been added in the sixteenth century. Above the door in the north wall there is a beautiful carving of a bird pecking at vine leaves.
- e. The High Cross. This is to be found in the upper graveyard south of St Mary's and depicting the Crucifixion on its east face. It is a most unusual cross and beautifully decorated believed to be of fifteenth century origin.



The High Cross with the Round Tower in the background.
(Photograph Anne O'Byrne)

Stephen had many other interesting stories to tell of Devenish as the group departed this most interesting island surrounded by a beautiful skyline of low mountain peaks stretching out to the Bluestack Mountains and the coast of Donegal. He also pointed out more recent historical events involving World War II, outlining the flight paths nearby which were used by the Allied aeroplanes on their way from the local air base to protect Atlantic shipping by means of an agreed route over a small portion of neutral Donegal. On the return cruise the group was served a most delightful early lunch of gourmet sandwiches prepared by Stephen's wife Valentina served with tea and coffee. This was to supplement the beautiful home-made soup also made by Valentina on the outward cruise. Before departure at the Round O jetty, the president of the Society, Hugh Crawford thanked Stephen and indeed all involved in Erne Tour for their hospitality in making the occasion of the Society's visit to Devenish so memorable. He also thanked Stephen for his help and advice over the last year in the organising of the Society's visit to Enniskillen and presented him with some Society Journals and a DVD of the publication dating back to its formation in 1891.

The group and coach was then (arrested) met and welcomed by Brian Haire of the PSNI and escorted to their centre at Queen's Street in Enniskillen. The centre was formerly the police training depot and before that a military barracks connected with the Enniskillen Dragoons. The barracks dates back to the Napoleonic era when the threat of an invasion sparked off a programme of barrack construction in Ireland. Ironically, much of the original buildings and barrack wall is credited to French prisoners of war many of whom were being held in Ireland at that time. Following a quick dispersal of the introduction formalities the group was then brought first on a walk-about of the complex followed by a visit to the museum and memorial room. There were many questions, answers and exchanges with Brian's good humour and wit making it a visit to remember of friendship and gratitude. The President presented some Journals and a DVD to Brian and his colleagues for their library as a token of appreciation for their welcome and to give an indication of the proceedings of the County Kildare Archaeological Society since its formation over 125 years ago. Afterwards, Brian kindly escorted the coach to St Macartin's cathedral.

Church visits

The cathedral was constructed originally as St Anne's parish church and overlooks the town of Enniskillen. It was raised to cathedral status in 1923 being re-dedicated as St Macartin's and became the second Church of Ireland cathedral in the Diocese of Clogher. Its tower and spire is 150 feet high with the tower housing a peal of ten bells. The tower carries the date 1637 and a representation of the Lamb and Flag over the main entrance, however, the main building was rebuilt in the 1840s. In 1970, part of the nave was adapted to create a chapel in honour of the two regiments raised in the town; the Enniskillen Fusiliers and the Enniskillen Dragoons. A beautiful stained glass window has been installed to commemorate all those who served in World War I from both regiments. The group then crossed the street to visit St Michael's catholic church built in 1870s replacing an earlier church built on the same site in

1803. The ornately adorned church is an example of French gothic revival designed by the architect, John O'Neill. The church has been described as one of the most beautiful devotional parish churches in the country based on the splendour of the structure with outstanding features such as the stained glass windows by Mayor and the paintings by Russell and Healy. The church is frequently criticised for its opulence and being far removed from true worship, a view that did not go amiss with some members of the group, as did the Kildare connection, with the window in the sanctuary portraying St Bridget. Nevertheless, St Michael's and St Macartin's have in recent times earned their place in history with the visit in 2012 of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip. Following a service of thanksgiving in St Macartin's, the Queen then crossed the road to St Michael's, and in a special gesture of goodwill, made her first visit to a catholic church in any part of Ireland. While not on the itinerary, but not overlooked by the group was the striking building next door to St Michael's, the Enniskillen's Methodist church. Designed by the architect, W. J. Barre and built in 1860s, the building has a fine Palladian façade fronted by Corinthian pillars and ornate plaster.

Castle

The group made its way on foot via the towns historic pathway, known as Peg O' The Bull en route to Enniskillen Castle. The original building was once the medieval stronghold of the Maguires, the Gaelic rulers of Fermanagh, until the Flight of the Earls in 1607. Built on the banks of the picturesque river Erne, it has in addition to the medieval Keep, an eighteenth and nineteenth array of barrack buildings, an earlier Watergate and distinctive twin turrets. Within the castle complex, in addition to the military or fusiliers and dragoon museum there is the County museum and café where tea and scones were served before moving on to view the museum displays. The Inniskillings museum is housed with an array of artefacts telling the story of the two regiments from their formation up to modern times. In the County museum there is a wonderful display of exhibits on local history, natural history, archaeology, decorative arts and folklore, together with a small but significant fine art collection including oil paintings. Many members of the group shared their time between both repositories.



Enniskillen Castle
(Photograph Anne O'Byrne)

Day three

Donegal town

The first visit was to Donegal Castle where the group was welcomed by the youthful Donegal historian, Sean Browne, our guide for the duration of the visit to the castle. Sean began by explaining that the original structure was the principal residence of the ruling O'Donnell clan of Tir Chonaill from 1200 to 1601. However, it is believed that the Vikings may have used the site in the ninth and tenth century, hence the gaelic name; *Dún na nGall*, meaning 'fort of the foreigners' from which the county had later taken its name. Sean went on to place the castle in the context of the history of the area from the medieval period and before and then through the centuries to its marvellous restoration works by the Office of Public Works in recent years. The site consists of a Tower House with its connection with Red Hugh O'Donnell, which was later modified in the early seventeenth century by Sir Basil Brooke, an English soldier awarded for his services in the Nine Year War with a substantial grant of land including the Castle and the Franciscan Friary nearby. Attached to the Tower House is the Manor House built in 1623 with an elaborate sculptured portal at the second level. The Gothic and Romanesque doorways at ground level are believed to have been constructed using stones taken from the Franciscan Friary. Sean referred specifically to Strip Stairway designed in such a way to trip an enemy swordsman and to provide advantage to right-handed O'Donnell defenders. In the Banqueting Room the important features included the diamond-shaped decoration under the lintel of the Jacobean doorway and the fern-leaf decoration on the arch. However, the most notable feature is the highly elaborate sculptured fireplace regarded as one of the finest of its kind in the country. It includes on the top right the Brooke coat of arms matched on the left with his wife's Anne Leicester's fleur-de-lis from her father's coat of arms.



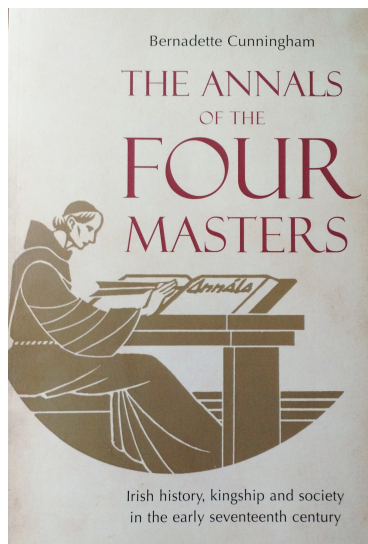
Across the fireplace there is a row of roses symbolising the English crown. Near the base on each side is the Scottish thistle being the emblem of King James VI of Scotland who had become the monarch of England on the death of his cousin Queen Elizabeth I. The Brooke family were awarded further lands under the Cromwellian settlements including the Colebrooke Estate in County Fermanagh, now the seat of their descendant, Lord Brookeborough. Donegal Castle was abandoned in the eighteenth century and allowed to fall into ruin before being taken over by the office of Public Works in 1898. In relation to the restoration works in the Castle Sean pointed out that the timber used is Irish oak sourced from Counties Galway and Fermanagh and the assembly techniques used echoed the practice of the period.

(Photograph by Hugh Crawford)

Before departure the president on behalf of the group thanked Sean for his welcome, wonderful presentation, the huge tranche of information given and his help in the planning of the visit to the area not to mention the additional information to be added in the Society's report of the excursion.

The Franciscans

On leaving the Castle, the group was joined by local historian Keith Corcoran who began with pointing out the significance of the Diamond, designed by Captain Basil Brook who had also built the Jacobean style extension at the Castle. The Diamond has in recent years become a central pedestrianised plaza in which an Obelisk has been erected to commemorate those who compiled and wrote the Annals of the Four Masters, one of the most important historical writings on Ireland. Following the Flight of the Earls in 1607, the partly restored Friary was again ransacked and had to be abandoned, with the friars forced to seek refuge wherever accommodation was safe and available. Some found refuge in the Irish Franciscan College in



Louvain and this college became the centre of exile for many Donegal Franciscans, nobles and poets. However, a number remained and one of those was Mícheál Ó Cléirigh. Ó Cléirigh was to etch his name forever in his compilation of the history of Ireland from the biblical flood down to its completion in the 1630s. In this work, Ó Cléirigh was assisted by Cú Choigcríche Ó Cléirigh, Fearfeasa Ó Maoil Chonaire and Cú Choigcríche Ó Duibhgeannáin, all trained historians from Gaelic learned families and their work became known as the Annals of the Four Masters, frequently, just referred to as the 'Annals' and closely associated with this part of Donegal. To understand their work, one needs to read Bernadette Cunningham's; *The Annals of the Four Masters*.

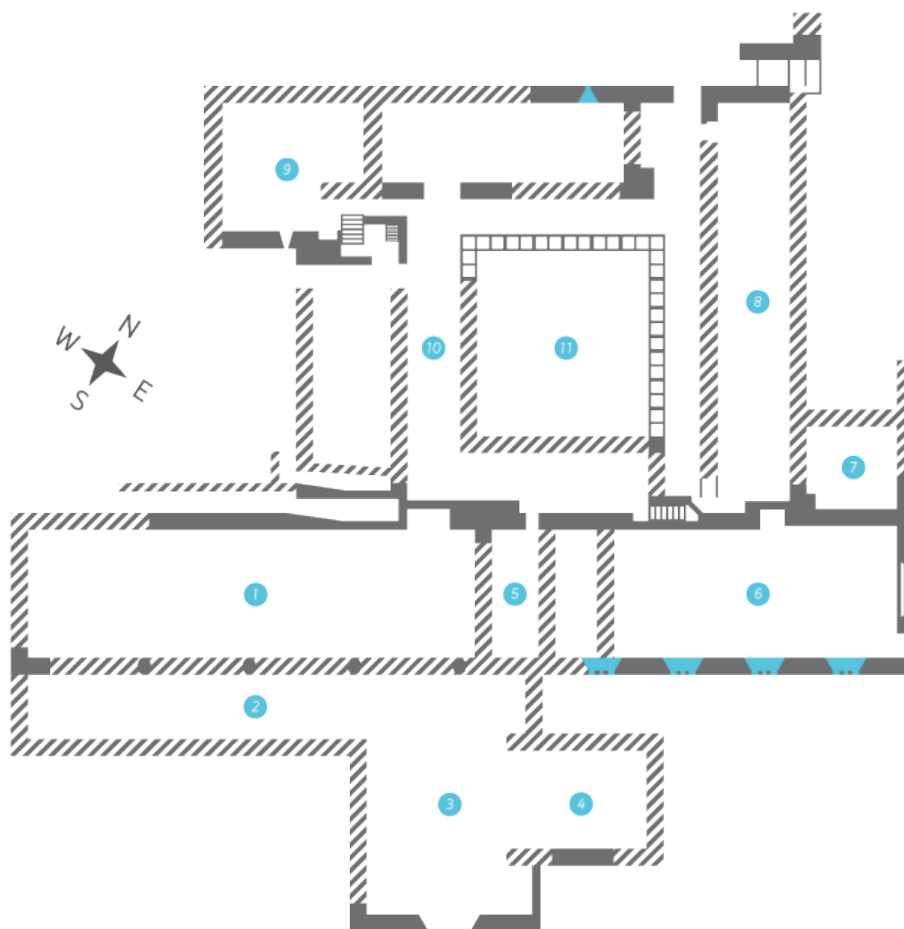
Near the harbour Keith pointed out a large anchor which is said to have belonged to the frigate Romaine, which was part of a French squadron that sailed from Brest in 1798, which Kildare man, Wolfe Tone, had organised. Following an unsuccessful engagement with English navy off the Donegal coast, the Romaine, with two sister ships, which had anchored in Donegal Bay, on learning of Humbert's surrender and observing English militia on shore, the Captain decided to cut the Romaine's connection with its anchor and sailed to France leaving the Romaine's anchor behind.



(Photograph by Anne O'Byrne)

A visit to the ruined Abbey as it is known locally, or more correctly, the Franciscan Friary, followed. The site is located on the waterfront looking out on to the picturesque Donegal Bay. This prominent position at the entrance of the harbour in the merchant town denotes its importance and as Seán had pointed out earlier only a short distance from the O'Donnell castle, revealing its connection between the friars and their lords. It is reputed that a subterranean tunnel was discovered in the nineteenth century that ran between the friary and the castle. The friary was founded in 1474 by Red Hugh O'Donnell, the then chief of Tír Conaill together with his family. A bronze statue to commemorate Red Hugh (not to be confused with the second Red Hugh of the Nine Years War fame) which stands on the pier was pointed out by Keith en route. This friary became one of the most influential Franciscan houses in Ireland until it was badly damaged in 1601 by an explosion during the Nine Years War between Elizabeth I and the chiefs of Tír Conaill and Tyrone. During the visit, because of health and safety requirements, viewing of the remaining fragments of the church and the cloister arcade that remain, was limited. However, thanks to Dr Keith Smith of the Discovery Programme, the centre for Irish Archaeological Research, the County Kildare Archaeological Society has been allowed to use information from its Monastic Ireland project. Therefore, its site map and legend will fill the gap in information.

Site Plan



Legend

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Nave / Lay brothers' choir. | 4. Chapel. | 8. Dormitory. |
| 2. Aisle. | 5. Tower crossing. | 9. Kitchen. |
| 3. Transept. | 6. Choir. | 10. Cloister alley. |
| | 7. Sacristy. | 11. Cloister Gart |

The site map outlines what remains of the ruins and highlights the devastation caused by the friary hostilities of the period including the explosion in 1601 together with the removal of the building materials by Sir Basil Brooke in the rebuilding of Donegal castle.

Having thanked Keith Corcoran for his contribution to the visit to Donegal, he presented him with copies of the Society's Journal together with a DVD of past Journals. In return Keith presented the President with a copy of his recent publication of his local area. The group then made its way to Magees of Donegal in the Diamond where a gourmet lunch was served in the café followed by a demonstration of tweed making not to mention a welcome browse in one of Ireland's leading clothing stores. Afterwards, with the entire afternoon free, the group

members busied themselves either in the Four Masters Book shop, drinking coffee in the sunshine or generally relaxing.

On return to the Great Northern Hotel for the last evening of the stay many availed of the opportunity to walk around the adjoining Roguey along the Cliff of Aughross and view the Atlantic waves, the fairy bridges and the wishing chair. There is also the puffing hole in the rocks that ejects water during stormy seas and Tullan Strand with Finner camp in the background. Others found time to relax in the hotel's swimming pool, sauna and steam room or the Jacuzzi.



Group Photograph at the Franciscan Friary
(Photograph by Oliver Murphy)

Day four

Ballyshannon

The final day of the excursion, during checkout, many expressed the wish that they could stay longer to enjoy the comforts they had experience over their stay at the Great Northern Hotel. Before departure, the President on behalf of the Society and the group, thanked the management and the entire staff of the hotel for their wonderful hospitality throughout the stay and for the wonderful cuisine served at dinner each evening, and the hearty breakfasts.

The day began with a visit to the Cathaleen's Fall hydroelectric power plant where the group was welcomed by Brian Drummond and after the formalities of health and safety procedures a tour of the plant followed. It is only in recent years that visits have become possible and that historians have got interested in what was one of the few major projects undertaken by the new Irish State which required cross-border co-operation between both governments. It

was a remarkable project and the story of the construction works alone, is a wonderful example of social history. This project was a landmark in North-South relations long before it became a buzzword. The works began in 1946 and the first electricity was produced in November 1951 with the plant opened by the late Sean Lemass in October 1952. With almost half of the catchment outside of the Irish Free State, delicate negotiation took place with the Northern Ireland authorities and luckily the then premier Sir Basil Brooke (a descendent from the Donegal castle family mentioned earlier) saw the advantages and so the project proceeded. It was not without controversy as it involved the removal of the historical Assaroe, the seven arched bridge over the Erne at Ballyshannon, Camlin castle and a number of country Houses including Cliff House, once the home of William Conolly, the builder of Castletown House. During the tour Brian explained how the generation of electricity has developed over the plant's history and explained the social and economic impact the plant has had on the local area and the problems that had to be overcome such as the fish passes etc. In addition he explained the difficulties faced in the construction, such as the lack of machinery so freely available today and the dangers faced by the workmen including serious injuries and fatalities. He spoke of the workers coming from all over the country, many of them with limited means of travel had walked for great distances and were glad to find employment at home. For anyone interested in this important state asset, the full story is excellently captured in a publication by Dessie Doyle and Brian in a book titled; *The Erne Hydroelectric Scheme*.

Legend suggests that the name, Cathaleen's Fall, derives from the site where a beautiful lady fell from her horse while making her way to meet her lover. Brian and his colleague Joe Drummond gave an overview of the local history of the area and Brian, an archaeology graduate, was pleased to part with some useful information on some of the local archaeological discoveries. Mention was also made of Innis Saimer, the little island in the middle of the Erne estuary just off the quay, where it is claimed that some of the first people to inhabit Ireland landed around 2,700 BC, thereby, linking Ballyshannon with the Neolithic period. The President thanked both men for the wonderful tour and presented copies of the Society's Journal and DVD as a token of appreciation from the group.

Celebratory lunch

The celebratory lunch held in conjunction with these excursion was held by special request in the Coach Lane Restaurant in Sligo. This was a return visit, having previously celebrated there in 2013 and, as expected, the Donaghy family and staff excelled again with a wonderful lunch and hospitality.

King House

The final event of the excursion on the homeward journey was a visit to King House in Boyle and it did not disappoint. On arrival the group received a warm welcome. A tour of the house and museum followed providing the group with an opportunity to see the unique architectural elements throughout the house. In the refurbishment, provision has been made

to provide the visitor with an insight of the techniques used in the construction of the house. Built in 1730, as the seat of the wealthy King family, they occupied it until moving to Rockingham at Lough Key, built in 1810. After the Kings had moved the house became a military barracks and the recruiting depot for the Connaught Rangers. After the Irish civil war the barracks passed to the new Irish army for a number of years and later became a merchants store before falling into disrepair. In the late 1980s King House was saved from demolition by Roscommon County Council and later beautifully restored to its former Georgian splendour. It now houses the museum of the Connaught Rangers and various exhibitions including the Mary McAleese collection which is a collection of state gifts from her time as President of Ireland.

After an extensive tour of King House it was time to bring the excursion to an end. The President on his own behalf and his fellow organisers, Siobhán and Bernadette thanked all who had participated in the excursion for their wonderful cooperation and friendship throughout which again made the four days not alone enlightening but also entertaining and enjoyable. Des Donagh, speaking on behalf of the, 'ordinary members', as he put it, expressed their sincere gratitude for the wonderful four days and wished every success for the future endeavours of the Society.