

FROM A LIGHT IN THE WINDOW, TO A WELCOME ON THE MAT

Following months of planning the inaugural annual holiday from the Golden Shamrock Club in Nottingham took place from the 1st to the 6th of October. The event centered on a visit to meet the President of Ireland at her residence, Áras an Uachtaráin, which I instigated by writing to the President over a year ago. The Presidents staff negotiated with me some dates in order that our visit would coincide with the President being in residence. From the website of the President I could see that she has a very busy schedule both at home in Ireland and abroad. Anyway, the date of Monday October 2nd was settled and then the committee of the Golden Shamrock Club began the preparations. It was decided to extend the visit in order to see the sights of Co. Dublin and Co. Wicklow and we decided to stay halfway the beautiful coastal town of Bray. A regular member of the Golden Shamrock Club John Doherty and founder of the Silverdale Coach Company was very helpful to us in negotiating our accommodation at the Royal Hotel in Bray and we traveled in style in one of the luxury Silverdale coaches.

So on Sunday Oct 1st bright and early John and his driver Ron picked up the 50 people outside of the Nottingham Irish Centre and we headed off for Holyhead , 'across the sea to Ireland !, to Dublin and our 1st night in the Royal Hotel in Bray. Monday morning we had a detailed tour of the centre of Dublin and our guide was Mary from Tourism Ireland. Following lunch the Silverdale coach took us through the vast Phoenix Park, we stopped briefly at the high cross which commemorates the visit to Ireland of Pope John Paul 11 and then meandered up the winding driveway to Áras an Uachtaráin. Since the presidency of Mary Robinson (now working for the United Nations) to have a light in one of the front windows of the house as a recognition and sign of welcome to the Irish Diaspora throughout the world. On October 2nd we were offered the 'welcome on the mat'. **(Photo: Light in the Window)** We were greeted by the President's house guard, Irish Army officers Lorraine and John. Following light refreshments the group was led into the State Room. Even on this day the President's schedule was busy and in between opening Coláiste Chilliain, Dundalk and welcoming a Polish Parliamentary delegation; President Mary Mc Aleese took time to personally welcome every member of our group to Aras an Uachtaráin .The

President said a brief few words of welcome and I replied on behalf of the group and presented a framed coat of arms of the city of Nottingham - in Nottingham lace. John St. John (Nottingham Irish Piper) played 'The Wearing of the Green', then the President posed with the group for a photo. **(Group with President)**

Lorraine and John then led the group on a tour of the house, gave a brief history and explained the story behind the various furniture and paintings. Their delivery was full of anecdotes and very interesting.

Photo: Army Officers Lorraine and John)

On Tuesday morning we returned to Dublin to do some shopping and continue to visit the city. We met at 3pm for a guided tour of the Leinster House, where we sat in on both the Dáil and Seanad. This was a particular highlight for one of our members, 85 year old, Bridgeen King. Derry born Bridgeen finally made a life long aspiration to visit Dáil Eireann. Her uncle Joseph O'Doherty, also from Derry was a member of the 1st Dáil and a founder member of Fianna Fáil. Bridgeen had the previous day told An Uachtaráin Mary Mc Aleese of her pride in uncle Joe and the many trips she made from Derry as a young girl with her family to visit him in Dublin. Officials at Dáil Eireann were also interested to hear of Bridgeen's family connection with the early stages of the evolving State. Bridgeen brought with her a treasured family photo and a list of all the 1st Dáil members written in her uncle Joe's own handwriting. Irish democracy has come a long way, for we were in the Dáil while the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was fighting for his political survival because of his attendance at the 'Manchester Gig' **(Photo Bridgeen King and Gerry Molumby outside the Dáil)** The visit to Dáil Eireann for the group was facilitated by Kathleen Redmond from Senator Mooney's office and some members also met with Noel Treacy (TD) from the office of An Taoiseach.

The Royal Hotel had evening entertainment or we had our own sing-song when we gathered together after dinner.

On Wednesday we visited the historic and beautiful county of Co. Wicklow. We were accompanied by local writer and broadcaster Mattie Lennon, his knowledge and enthusiasm for his native county was apparent and he pointed out to us places and detail that we

would otherwise have missed out on. We had an accompanied tour around Wicklow Goal, this museum was very interactive with the 'actors' bringing the personal stories very much to 'life', and we learned much of the history of 1798 and of the Irish prisoners who founded the United Irishmen in. I highly recommend a return visit.

We also visited the beautiful town of Avoca, its weaver shops and of course the location of the BBC TV series 'Ballykissangel', and a drink in Fitzgerald's Pub. **(Fitzgerald's Pub!)** Following lunch in the Glendalough Hotel, we went around the site of the 11th century St. Kevin's Church. I 'managed' to join in with an American choir who sang 'Amazing Grace' in the stone roofed St. Kevin's Church - thankfully on this occasion they did not bring the house down **!.(Photo: John Hayes, Paddy Griffin and Seán Crosbie)**

Thursday was our day off to revisit Dublin or take the sea air in Bray, or fall asleep in the hotel 'Che Koo See'!!

Friday was our return journey in the very capable hands of our driver Ron who accompanied us throughout the week and is obviously a very seasoned and professional driver and guide.

Overall, the holiday was a great success with members already trying to decide is it going to be the Giant's Causeway or the Ring of Kerry next year, or the West of Ireland or the lakes of the river Shannon etc!

Gerry Molumby
(Secretary)
Golden Shamrock Club