

Our Derry and Donnelly Day

July 15, 1985

This was Monday - the day we were to drive north, see Londonderry and visit Father Philip Donnelly in Limavady. It went well.

Hugh Breslin and son Aidan and daughter Orla, await us at Lifford where Maevie had let them off as she drove to work at the hospital. They bring a basket of picnic food and drink. We head northeasterly on route A5 after passing through Strabane and Ballymagorry with Hugh in front with Pat, as "navigator". Pat hears a good bit of Irish history: how two sons of Nial of the Nine Hostages, Connell and Owen gave their names to Tyrconnell and Tyrone. I smile inwardly at Hughes Gaelic gloss of "Tyr" - pronouncing it more like "cheer" - cheerconnell, Cherowan - "Tyr" meaning land of.

Shortly after noon we see the first glimpses of Derry. The River Foyle has been on our left. Hugh points out St. Columba's College and we cross the Foyle to climb a slight rise up to the campus of Magee College - now part of the University of Ulster - an "amalgamation" having been achieved about 1963, bringing together the colleges at Coleraine and Jordanstown. By the time we get to Magee Hugh has explained some history prior to 1922 whereby with clever gerry-mandering a Catholic majority found themselves the minority, and how the Donegal part of Londonderry became part of Northern Ireland - as the "liberties" portion of Derry city.

We get to visit the main building of Magee, its great hall and library. This is where Hugh has been doing graduate studies, and is now affiliated as a teacher of off-campus courses:

By 1 PM we are having our picnic lunch on the "boot" of our Ford Orion (the trunk top) - in a parking lot in Limavady, a town about 18 miles east of Derry on Route A 2. Lough Foyle is scarcely three miles west of us.

At 2 PM - on schedule we enter St. Mary's rectory for our hour's visit with Fr. Phillip Donnelly, former pastor at Castledergis - who, about six years ago, directed me to Hugh Breslin. Donnelly turns out to be a soft-spoken, white-haired priest, - you sensed at once the scholar, the gentleman, the man of action; the room itself tells much about the man; its decor, paintings, furniture, accessories. He serves us coffee and before we leave has given me two copies of parish histories he has written. (One, I had asked to buy.) He comments on Pat's youth for being a principal. Upon leaving we visit his church nearby. He comes to the car to speak to Aidan & Orla who had chosen to remain there.) After leaving, I learn of Hugh's sentiment about Donnelly's having closed St. Patrick's at Castledergis and built the new St. Eugene's.

It is 3:30 PM when we find ourselves passing a prison at Magilligan's Point, near the Foyle, where prisoners from the Strabane area are housed. We take a short walk but the rain sends us back to the car and we move on to see the Temple of the Winds or the Mussenden Temple built in 1780, by the eccentric Earl Hervey, Protestant Bishop of Derry; it was once admired by guests attending social gatherings at Downfall Castle nearby; impressive now even delapidated.

We are back in Strabane by 5:15 PM; a light rain still falling. Enter a rather messy but friendly gift shop. Pat buys Aidan a sketch pad & crayons. Hugh asks the proprietress that we be shown John Dunlop's printing shop in the back yard - Dunlop - emigrated to America and was the printer of our Constitution; it was this shop where he apprenticed as a lad.

We are in the Fir Trees Lodge by 5:30 and loaned a private conference room for Pat & me; we phone Mary at Elizabeth and set to talk to both; feeling much relieved to hear them. Elizabeth asks if I got

to "see that woman", meaning Mary
Corry, which shows how interested
she really is in my personal venture.
(We set a mutually-agreed time and
day for our next phone call.)

After selecting our dinners on the
menu, we have a drink in the bar
lounge, and are finally called to the
diningroom, it is quite fancy. We
are just seated when Orla comes
dashing back, having gotten quite wet
in the rain. There is only one other
table occupied during the meal. The
waiter is "young handsome lad" (newly
married, Orla seems to know.) The rain
pours down outside as we eat.

By 8 PM we are back at the Breslin
home listening to Orla play the piano;
she does quite well. Maeve had not
returned when we left at 9 PM. (No
Eddie Boyle appears at Jacksons this
evening. We talk briefly with Michael Jackson
and his little one