

# An Account of the Hobbs' Trip

## Editor's note:

The following is the first in a series of reports written by Dr. and Mrs. Hobbs recounting their experiences abroad this past month. We are a little late in putting this news in print because of Fall Break and not having published last week. We look forward to welcoming the president and Lois Ann back on campus!

## First Installment

Lois Ann and I have now completed eighteen days of our European trip which will ultimately take us to Ireland, Scotland, Denmark, Sweden, Roumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, Yugoslavia and Italy. In a weak moment we agreed to write letters to the *Guilfordian* telling some of our adventures. They will be personal accounts and are not intended to be definitive about any of the areas visited. Compared to ourselves there are others on the Guilford faculty much more expert in each of the areas we have visited or will be visiting.

Our program in each country we visit is to rent a small car; this frees us from dependence upon tour groups and busses, paid guides and too much of a focus upon the more accessible metropolitan areas. One of our dominant impressions of Ireland is its super abundance of stones. It seems to us that, positively and negatively, these have played a large part in Irish life! This will be the focus of this first letter.

Friends in Greensboro had recommended that Southwest Ireland is by far the most beautiful part as well as the part most representative of old Ireland. This is the area which the purest Gaelic is spoken on an everyday basis. Correspondingly the accent is most strong and difficult to understand. This trip circled the county of Kerry, and covered what is called the "Ring of Kerry." We started at Limerick and traversed four peninsulas which stick out like boney fingers to the southwest of Ireland. Following this we went northeast to Cork, Waterford, and through the Wicklow mountains just south of Dublin into Dublin itself for two days. In all we spent seven days in Ireland, hardly enough time to be able to make sound generalizations about the country or its people!

Throughout this trip we

were continually impressed with the prominent place which stone has played in the Irish way of life. It would appear that stone has at once been their curse and their blessing. Particularly in the west, stones cover the landscape, large and small, in great profusion, and these have to be removed if agriculture is to be pursued. So the stones have been collected and one sees walls going up and over mountains in a checkered pattern forming grazing fields for sheep and cattle. Almost all of the buildings, except for the most recent, are also constructed of stone. This easily available material has also dictated an architectural style which is repeated over and over again in all areas of Ireland, even in the eastern areas which are somewhat less rocky.

One area which was of particular interest to us was in the west and between Tralee Bay and Dingle Bay. This peninsula contains the westernmost point in the entire British Isles, and, interestingly enough, was the first land which Charles Lindberg reached on the first airplane crossing of the Atlantic ocean. We have supposed that this finding the peninsula was the result of good planning, rather than just good luck!

In driving out upon this peninsula we went first to the town of Dingle, a fine old stone-built town, though most of the buildings are plastered and painted gay colors, making the city, I would suppose, an artist's delight, much as some of those on the French Riviera.

The houses and farms thinned out as we went further out on the peninsula, and the feeling of isolation of the area became more and more pronounced. We got an idea of what it must have been like in Ireland in earlier days to families wholly dependent upon farming with the thin soil and rock-encumbered land. The houses burned peat and were comfortable looking, though one sensed that each family's income must be very low. The people seemed bright and happy, but let us know that they were not as entranced by the beautiful area they lived in as we were!

Before we reached Sley Head, the end of the peninsula, we passed a number of farmhouses advertising views of prehistoric homes. We were skeptical but

also anxious and stopped at one of these places. The area was itself very remote and mountainous, barren of trees, and with large boulders on the hillside. There were also large stacks of rocks which made possible some cleared grazing



areas. The houses clearly prehistoric, though whether built and occupied by monks in the 7th century (as claimed) is not clear. They were circular with domed roofs, the shape of Eskimo igloos, and were built of stone entirely without mortar. Each had a floor space approximately 12' in diameter, and each was usually connected by a stone tunnel with a second such structure. The stonework itself was superb. Though the stones had not been shaped by the builders, each fitted snugly with the edges slanting up in an even line to arch over at the top. I have at times taken pride in my own ability to lay "dry" stone walls, but I recognized myself here as a mere beginner.

Later on we saw a larger building, called Gallarus Oratory, which used a similar style of building. The base of this building, however, formed a rectangle, with an inner floor area of approximately 10' x 14'. At the base each wall must have been six feet thick, laid entirely without mortar. Even so the building is tight and completely sheds water. The outside walls slope upward to form a perfect "bell shaped curve." This building was clearly an early Christian chapel. It was prior to the gothic or even the Norman period, as indicated by the fact that the roof arch simply slanted inward, finally to be joined by stones across the top, rather than being held up by self-supporting arches. Inside there was a profound and moving silence, and it was not

hard to conceive this building as a most effective chapel. Clearly its origin goes well back into the Dark Ages, and is of immense architectural value.

Another dimension of the Irish love-affair with stone is to be found in its magnificent castles, churches and abbeys. Most of the latter were wrecked by Oliver Cromwell in his crusade to break the power of the Catholic Church. Most of these ancient stone buildings are in various stages of ruin, though some efforts have been made to at least stabilize these so that visitors can comprehend how the building was. It takes a great effort of the imagination to fit the various fragmentary walls and pits together to get a sense of the whole. It is also a great fund to do so.

We visited Bunratty, Ross, Blarney, Frege Dysart, Killarney Castle

Often these were perched on great out-croppings of stone which made access more difficult. Each of these was a residence, sometimes a royal one, but also an example of military architecture. It was a great fund to speculate on the military advantages of one castle over another and to explore the maze of passages and stairs leading, it seemed, in all directions. The various protective devices are both

varied and interesting and give us a very important insight into the perilous and sometimes savage nature of that period.

One of the more interesting abbey ruins was at Glendolough, not far south of Dublin. There was a very extensive teaching facility there with a thousand or more students in residence, and it dates back to the 6th century. The oldest remain there was a church. The bottom stones were huge squared blocks, but the upper parts were of ordinary stone, some of them being fragments of older cut stones. What happened to the church was clear; it had been destroyed and rebuilt. The Vikings were often in this area during the dark ages, demanding ransoms on the threat of destruction. Apparently in this case they did not get the ransom. History seemed to come alive as we saw the evidence written in the stones.

Ireland will for us always be remembered as a nation whose way of life was at first threatened by its abundance of stone formations, and then blessed by them when through immense human effort these stones were put to work for man, providing his shelters, his fences, and a closeness to nature which is an inspiring part of the Irish character.

La Cucaracha  
Hernando's Hideaway  
The Lonely Bull

The Spanish Club  
will meet on Monday,  
Nov. 3 at 7:30  
in Founders 203.

The group will  
sing Spanish songs.  
All interested  
students are encouraged  
to attend.