

The 1996 O Dea Clan Gathering

by Risteard Ua Croinin

The third international O Dea Clan Gathering was held on the weekend July 12-15, 1996 at the O Dea ancestral home of Dysert O Dea Castle and, the West County Hotel, Ennis, Co Clare. Over 300 people, the biggest turnout ever, came from as far away as America, Australia, New Zealand and Britain to meet with their infolk.

Clare TD (member of parliament) Tony Killeen, performed the opening ceremony on the Friday night when words of congratulations were expressed by Frankie Neylon, Chairman of Ennis Urban District Council, John Madden, Chairman of the Clare Tourism Council, John Quinlivan of Shannon Development and Ray Murphy of Ennis Tourism. The hereditary clan chieftain, John B O Day of Wisconsin Rapids, USA proposed a vote of thanks to the speakers and he was presented with a specially commissioned piece of crystal glass by Ennis UDC Chairman, Frankie Neylon for the work he had done for the O Deas world wide since he purchased the old castle in 1970.

The presentation was followed by a lecture on the history of the O Dea Clan from 960 AD to the present day by the organiser of the weekend, Risteard Ua Croinin who has written extensively on the O Deas and their place in Irish history.

Friday night's entertainment was provided by the Deirdre O'Brien Vaughan, School of Music from Newmarket on Fergus.

Saturday morning began with an early start to visit Dysert O Dea's castle and field monuments under the tutorship of Risteard Ua Croinin. For many clan members this was the first time they had visited their ancestral home. Their enthusiasm for walking in the footsteps of our O Dea ancestors was not dampened by the persistent rain that was prevalent throughout the visit. An added bonus was a guided tour of the archaeological dig on a late medieval house inside the castle bawn which was conducted by CLA archaeologist Blair Gibson. Blair, Risteard and a number of volunteers have worked on the site since the summer of 1995. Finds have included pieces of bone, earthenware, pottery and glass. Significant finds include an unusual set of bone beads which came from a lower level of the dig and may have been a rosary. A stone axe head from the Neolithic period was also discovered at the site. The latter confirms that the Dysert O Dea area was occupied as far back as 3,500 years ago. An interim report on the dig is due shortly. Proceedings for the morning were concluded with a smoked salmon and Irish coffee reception at the castle.

The afternoon was an informal affair with clan members gathering at O Dea's Bar, O Connell Street, Ennis. Danny O Dea of Illinois an accomplished ballad singer and song writer was master of ceremonies at this venue.

Workshops in genealogy and family historical research were given by Prof. Ed O Day of Carbondale, Illinois on Saturday night. Master of ceremonies for the weekend, James O Dea of Montarf, Dublin, gave an illustrated lecture on the Battle of Dysert O Dea.

This was followed by the election of Bill O Day of Wisconsin as Tanaiste (chieftain elect). Bill is the eldest son of John B O Day who retired from the office of chieftain in favour of Michael O

Dea who was elected Tanaiste in 1993. Michael who is a nephew of the famous Irish comedian Jimmy O Dea, stated in his inaugural speech that his wish during his three year term of office would be to see the old banquet hall of Dysert O Dea Castle fully restored before the next gathering in 1999.

Saturday night's entertainment included a display of step dancing by the Maureen O'Brien School of Irish Dancing. Music was provided by local musicians from Dysert and Ennis organised by Frank Custy. Kate O Dea aged 11 and from Dublin, an Irish dancing champion also gave a solo dancing exhibition which delighted the audience.

An unusual turn of events occurred when Eddie Friel, international singing star and Eurovision Song Contest winner happened to be in the bar of the West County and agreed to join the O Deas and delighted all present with a rendition of classical piano playing and singing that lasted well into the early hours.

Sunday morning saw many members of the clan assemble for the celebrated Mass at St. Flannan's College. Chief celebrant, Dom Bernard O Dea of Glenstal Abbey was assisted in offering the Mass by three other O Dea priests, Fr "Tot" O Dea of Arizona, originally from Waverly, Newmarket on Fergus, Fr Donal O Dea, a Colomaban father ministering in the Philippines, a native of Quin and Fr Frank O Dea of Australia. Dom Bernard had many inspiring thoughts in his homily and spoke of how we should be challenged by the needs of the less well off in our society. As an example, he mentioned Dorothy Day, a woman from a wealthy New York background. Dorothy left her wealthy lifestyle behind to look after and live among the poor and helpless in that city. Our deceased members and families were remembered in a special way during the celebration.

After Mass, the clan assembled on the steps of St. Flannan's College for a group photograph. A copy is included in this newsletter. The O Deas then adjourned to the West County Hotel where the different branches of the family displayed their family trees and endeavoured to establish the missing links! There were some notable successes and we look forward to hearing of these in future issues of the *O Dea Clan Chronicle*.

Sean Spellissy and Sonia Schorman of the Shannon Archaeological Society took a large group of visitors to the historical sites of the Burren on Sunday afternoon. This outing in wonderful sunshine, a respite from what had been a weekend of rain, was a highlight for many. A number of clan members also visited the Cliffs of Moher.

Bunratty Castle was the venue for the clan banquet on Sunday night. The castle was totally booked out by the O Deas and their guests. New clan chieftain, Michael O Dea and his wife, Ann, presided over what proved to be a memorable evening. Entertainment in the form of music and song was provided by the Bunratty singers. The type of food on the menu and how it was eaten was similar to that of medieval times. (*It was finger lickin' good! ED*) Dick Cronin was confined to the castle dungeon for a period during the banquet on a trumped up charge of conspiring to poison our chieftain. Through the pleading of all present, our host, Chieftain Michael O Dea, quickly agreed to Dick's release, much to the delight of his

wife Helen. Two bottles of Windowrie wine were presented to the chieftain by Michael O Dea of Sydney. The wine was from his brother David's vineyard in Australia. (See article in this edition. ED.) Michael was last in Bunratty in 1964 when he and his wife Marianne were on honeymoon in Ireland.

O Dea clan affairs were discussed at the Dysert O Dea Clan Association's triennial general meeting which was held in the morning of July 15 in the West County Hotel. New clan chieftain, Michael O Dea and all clan members present acknowledged the unique contribution of Chieftain John B O Day, his wife, Anola, to every aspect of the clan's affairs during his terms of office. Jack and Anola were wished many years of health and happiness. The association now has a world wide network and officers were elected to represent the O Deas in three of the five continents. James O Dea of Clontarf was thanked by the chieftain for his great work in writing and editing the six issues of the clan newsletter *The O Dea Clan Chronicle*, since his election as editor in 1993. Assistant editors, Damien O Dea and Paul T O Day as well as their world wide representatives were also thanked for their contributions to the O Dea clan.

A feature of the meeting was a suggestion box wherein clan members put forward their suggestions for the future role of the association. (A list of these are included in this issue ED.)

James O Dea was re-elected as chairman and editor of the clan newsletter. Damien O Dea was re-elected treasurer and membership secretary. A number of changes were made in the appointment of new clan correspondents. Stephen O Dea was elected as assistant editor of the newsletter, with Paul T O Day of Washington DC re-elected as US assistant editor.

On behalf of the clan, a presentation was made to Dick and Helen Ua Croinin who have organised the last three clan gatherings. It was accepted by all that the 1996 gathering was the biggest and best to date. A vote of thanks was also expressed by Michael O Dea, chieftain to the management and staff of the West County Hotel for their courteous, friendly and professional service throughout the weekend.

The gathering finished on Monday afternoon with the triennial clan golf outing to the Ennis Golf Club. The competition was won by Tom O Dea of Shannon. The ladies prize was won for the second time by Jeanette Van de Motter of Ohio. Her husband, Charles was the 1993 tournament winner. James O Dea, Tanaiste and Michael and Ann O Dea were the tournament organisers. Prizes were sponsored by the O Day family of Wisconsin Rapids, Michael O Dea chieftain, and James O Dea, Ennis. The President of the Ennis Golf Club, Mr Barry Stack and the course staff did much to make this another wonderful day's golfing.

The next O Dea Clan Gathering will be held in July 1999.

Greatest Discovery of the Weekend

Frank O Dea of Brown's Plain Parish, Brisbane, Australia arrived late for registration on the opening night of the clan gathering. Fr Frank introduced himself to James O Dea the new chairman and said that he was searching for his Co Clare relatives. In the past, four of his grand uncles had left their tiny small farm in Clare and walked all the way to Cobh, whence they emigrated to Australia. There had not been

any contact with his Irish relatives since his grand uncles had left Ireland. Fr Frank was ushered over to a group in the centre of the conference hall and was introduced to them by the chairman. Shortly afterwards, Fr Frank explained why he had come to the clan gathering and then proceeded to tell the story of his grand uncles. When he had finished his story the lady beside Fr Frank threw her arms around him and simply said, "Frank, you are our long lost cousin. Welcome home!"

Stories such as these are what make the O Dea Clan Gathering all so worthwhile. We look forward to reading Fr Frank's version of his remarkable story in a future edition of the *Chronicle*.

Greatest Achievement of the Weekend

James F O Day of Pittsburgh is a first cousin once removed of Chairman James A O Dea of Clontarf. The two cousins first met in the summer of 1970 when James A, then a lowly student went to work for three months at the Cleveland Trust Bank and stayed with James F, his wife, Mary and their seven young children in Cleveland, Ohio. The two James' had an instant rapport with each other and a great bond of friendship and loyalty has built-up between them and their families since that time. Indeed, it was James F who first inculcated in his young Irish cousin an awareness of family history, the need to record it and to perpetuate it for the use of the wider family diaspora.

The hospitality and kindness shown him by his American cousins was never forgotten either. For twenty six years James A pleaded with James F and Mary to visit Ireland so that he could repay the courtesy that was shown him in Cleveland. It took 26 years to have that request fulfilled.

James F arrived at Shannon on July 10, 1996 for his first visit to Ireland. Unfortunately, his wife Mary was unable to accompany him as she had to stay at home to look after daughter Nancy who was about to give birth to twins.* The two cousins took the opportunity to visit the people and places that they had often spoken of or corresponded about over the years. There were a number of emotional moments when the two visited the graves of their relatives in Kildysert and Labasheeda cemeteries and visited with Mrs Anna O Dea who now resides at the former home of James F's father at Main Street, Kildysert. Thence to Ballyartney House the original home of his cousin, the late Maureen O Dea Lillis with whom he had first corresponded over fifty years before and to the home of Maureen's husband, Willie Lillis who lives in Labasheeda. The two O Dea's trip concluded with calls to the homes of Tom and Peggy Lillis as well as to that of their cousin Frank and Phil O Dea both of whose homes have beautiful vistas overlooking the Shannon Estuary.

James F was impressed with the green, luscious and prosperous Clare countryside despite the fact that people drive on the wrong side of the road! He surmised that downtown Ennis was as busy as Time Square and that Ireland was a booming country definitely on the up and up. The hospitality and welcome that was shown to him by his Irish relatives and his kinsmen and kinswomen at the clan gathering is something that he shall always treasure. He looks forward to a return visit next time with Mary and a number of his family.

(Let's hope it won't take him another 26 years!!! ED.)