

THE HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL IN IRELAND

The Society was introduced to Ireland by Rev. Dr. Bartholomew Woodlock (then President of All Hallows College in Dublin), later Rector of the catholic University in succession to Cardinal Newman, following at the White Cross Rooms in Charles Street West in the vicinity of the Four Courts in the Parish of St. Michan. Dr. Woodlock presided at this meeting on the 14th December 1844, when under his inspiration and guidance the Conference of St. Michan was established.

The Conference chose a layman, Redmond Peter O' Carroll, as its first President. Dr. Woodlock then vacated the Chair but he co-operated zealously afterwards in the work of this first Conference and later when the Superior Council of Ireland was formed in 1845 he became its first Spiritual Director. He held this position for 34 years until 1879 when he left Dublin on his appointment as Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise.

As Spiritual Director he assisted in the extension of the Society throughout Ireland and participated actively in its propagation. His biographer tells us that Dr. Woodlock, to whom we owe the foundation of our Society in Ireland, never lost an opportunity of inculcating its true spirit by his words and example.

In 1879, when it was learned that he had been appointed to the Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise and that his connection with the Superior Council must thus come to an end, many members of the Society in Dublin determined to offer him a token to their deep veneration and affection in recognition of all the work he had done. They resolved to present him with certain items of the insignia of the high office to which he had been called a souvenir of their long and happy connection together.

The idea of the presentation was worked on quietly and unostentatiously, but at an early stage the Bishop-Designate became aware of it by accident. He immediately begged those who were associated with the idea to abandon it, reminding them that it was entirely repugnant to the true spirit and best traditions of their Society which so clearly taught all those who enrolled themselves within its ranks that it neither commands nor bestows temporal rewards; that members must only look for Heavenly recognition as the reward of their labours for the poor.

Dr. Woodlock's example in this and in other respects regarding the Society has been a guiding light to the behaviour of our members down the years. There were 19 members in the first Conference and those six were lawyers and three were doctors. The President of the Conference, Redmond Peter O' Carroll, became the first President of the Superior Council of Ireland. Another member, James O' Farrell, who succeeded him in this office was one of the original members. Also included were John O' Connell, M.P. the favourite son of the Liberator who for many years was practically head of the Repeal Movement in Ireland and another member was John O' Hagan, activist in the Young Ireland Party.

Father Stephen Farrell who was at the time curate in the parish of St. Michan, and who afterwards became a member of the Society of Jesus, had as Dr. Woodlock tells us a very large share in the work of the Conference. Up to now we have concentrated on the first step in the history of the Society in Ireland but what followed in Dublin and throughout the country is of interest. The Conference of St. Michan's was aggregated in 1845, as also were the Conference of St. Mary Pro-Cathedral, St Nicholas of Myra, SS. Mary and Peter, Rathmines and St. Peter, Phibsborough, all in Dublin.

The Society was extended to Cork and Waterford in 1846, while Limerick had two conferences in 1847. This year also witnessed the founding of the Society of Clonmel, Dungravan, New Ross, and Kilrush (Co. Clare), which was the first small town in Ireland to have a conference. The year 1848 saw the Society established in Kilkenny, while the first Conference in Ulster was founded in Enniskillen.

The Society was extended to the West in 1849 by the formation of a Conference in Galway. In the following year Belfast, Newry and Drogheda had their Conferences, Carlow and Dundalk in 1852 while Derry followed in 1858 together with Portlaoise and Skerries, Co. Dublin. It is of interest to note that the first Secretary of the Conference at Newry was a young solicitor named Charles Russell, who afterwards became the first Catholic to hold this high position since the Reformation.

The years immediately following the establishment of the Society here were the dreadful years of the Famine when our country must have suffered more perhaps than at any time in her long and sorrowful history. In February 1847 when the Famine was at its height there were only ten Conferences in Ireland, and on these, in common with other relief organisations, was thrown the task of relieving those who suffered and died in such large numbers during this awful time.

The reports furnished by the Conferences during this period give a harrowing picture of the conditions of the poor, but it is some consolation to know that the earliest brothers of our Society in Ireland laboured incessantly and were enabled to do quite an amount of work in their own localities for the relief of the suffering. The Conference at Nimes was the first branch established outside Paris. Ozanam on returning to Lyons in 1836 after five pleasant years at the University established a Conference there. During the next 5/6 years the Society spread rapidly throughout France.

By 1842 it had reached Rome, introduced there by Ozanam's close friend the painter Louis Janmot. The Society continued to spread overseas in the following order, England (1844), Scotland and Belgium (1845), Germany, Greece, Holland and Turkey (1846), Switzerland (1847) Austria and Spain (1850). The first Conference in the new world was in the U.S.A (1846), Mexico (1846), and Canada (1847). The Society was quickly becoming an International Society and by 1860 (27 years after its foundation) the Society comprised 2500 branches or Conferences with 50,000 members. In spite of money difficulties the Society made steady progress and the decade 1850 to 1860 was eventful.

The year 1852 saw the first publication of THE BULLETIN and we owe this new development to our energetic brothers in Belfast. Although the Society had been established in Belfast only two years earlier the brothers there thought a monthly publication which would chronicle the activities of the Conferences at home and various countries throughout the world would supply useful information to new Conferences and be a source of encouragement to those on the way to development. It had been suggested sometime earlier that the Irish Society should translate into English the Bulletin published in Paris and publish it in Ireland for distribution to the Society generally. This did not happen. But when the Irish Bulletin had become firmly established it contained large extracts from the Paris Bulletin, which was really the mouthpiece of the Council-General, and so the edicts or pronouncements from Paris were conveyed to the members in the English-speaking world.

This practice continued for over 100 years. The Council-General now distributes its own official Bulletin - VINCENPAUL - directly to all Superior or similar placed

Councils. As many countries now publish their own Bulletin or Newsletter the Irish 'Bulletin' has lost some of its value to overseas readers. Nevertheless when some years ago it was suggested that the Irish Bulletin had served its purpose and should be discontinued it was members and some Spiritual Directors from distant lands who pleaded for its retention.

The Irish Bulletin has been reorganised on a professional basis and boasts of a circulation of over 11,000 Copies Per issue. A most important event took place in 1856 when Monsieur Adolph Baudon the third President General (1847-1833) decided to visit Ireland. He did so in order to strengthen the ties, which bound the Irish Conferences with the Council-General (or parent Society) in Paris. These ties went back almost to the inception of the Society in Ireland – to the time of Frederic Ozanam who it should not be forgotten in the dark days of 1847 almost single handed collected FF50.000 for transmission to the infant Society in Ireland to help the relief of the Famine victims.

When in the following year (1848) France had her difficulties it was Ireland's turn (to help): being mindful of Paris and its trials we asked the Council-General to accept the balance of FF55.000 for her wounded and unemployed workmen. Ozanam was full of admiration for the offer and insisted that it should be accepted. At the General-Meeting of the Society in Paris that Autumn at which Ozanam presided he said 'it was a new example of that fraternity of Charity which knows no distinction of nationality in the sight of God. But to return to Monsieur Baudon's visit. The President-General arrived in Ireland at a weekend and met the members of the Superior Council of Ireland. He then proceeded to make a whirlwind tour of the country visiting Cork, Limerick and Belfast and then back to Dublin within a week. Considering travel facilities in those days this was a tremendous achievement.

While the President-General was on his tour the Council of Ireland summoned by telegram the Presidents of all the Conferences and Councils then in the country to meet Monsieur Baudon in All Hallows College in Dublin in June 1856. From the records it seems this meeting was an outstanding success. The President-General was enabled to give those responsible for the Society in Ireland wise advice and direction as to how the Society should operate here. Apparently he found it necessary to remind the brothers that a re-union of members of the Society should not take a form of a public meeting – that 'frequent bursts of applause' and 'hearty votes of thanks' were not to be recommended, but a simpler and more modest mode of procedure was more in keeping with the spirit and traditions of the Society.

But the President-General was deeply impressed by what he heard and by the spirit of the members. In his Concluding address Monsieur Baudon suggested that this gathering of Presidents should become an annual event in the calendar of the Society in Ireland. This suggestion was adopted and so began 'the annual meeting of Presidents of Councils and Conferences with the Superior Council of Ireland'. This meeting was held annually for well over a hundred years with only four exceptions – 1916, 1921, 1932 and 1945; and there was a very good reason for not holding the meeting in those years, but another gathering of Vincentians was held in place of the usual meeting, i.e. a reception meeting in 1932 during the Eucharistic Congress, and the meeting in connection with the Centenary of the Society in Ireland in 1945.

In the end it became difficult to cater for the number of Presidents wishing to attend (600/700) and as the cost of organising the meeting was continually rising it was felt that the Society could use its money more effectively in catering for the needs of our

less fortunate brethren. In the end, as so often happens, a most suitable compromise was found. 'The meeting of Presidents' as so many long standing members knew it would now be held every 3 or 4 years. In the intervening years meetings would be held on a Regional basis thus maintaining the original idea of Monsieur Baudon 'that members meeting together would deepen their Vincentian friendship' and to have an opportunity to exchange their experiences and plan for the future. Following the visit of Monsieur Baudon, 31 new Conferences were established in the next three years. It would be some years before the Society in Ireland would again welcome a President-General although the connections with Paris remained very cordial.

The writer can remember the visit of President-General Henri de Verges (1924-1943) during the Eucharistic Congress in 1932 when a general meeting of Irish members was held in the round room at a Mansion House in Dublin.

At the reception that followed each member was presented to Monsieur de Verges by the President of the Council of Ireland (Sir Joseph Glynn).

The visit of Professor Pierre Chouard (1955-1968) in 1963 was the most memorable occasion. The meeting he addressed in what was then the Intercontinental (now Jurys Hotel) was attended by over 1,000 members. The President-General reiterated his famous 'The President-General reiterated his famous 'Call to Arms' speech made in Paris in 1960 when he put before the Society an imaginative 'Programme of Renewal' based on consideration of:

An invitation to deepen our Spiritual lives
Extension and Training.
Youth
Adaption and co-operation.

The address was most impressive and brought an immediate and enthusiastic response. Then I witnessed something I never saw before at a Society meeting – as the President-General concluded his most stimulating address he received a standing ovation. Subsequently and at more frequent intervals, we had visits from President-Generals: Henri Jacob (1973), Joseph Rouast (1981), Amin de Tarazzi (1983 and 1986). In the year 1856 also was founded the Society's Orphanage, which up to the time of its closure in 1969 was the oldest and most important of the Society's 'Social Works' in Ireland.

The Orphanage was first established in Kilmainham to provide for 21 boys. The need for increased provision for Orphan boys came apparent and in 1860 a very fine building was erected in Glasnevin. Eventually the school was placed under the supervision of the Irish Christian Brothers. For over 100 years this school provided a first-class Education for the boys fortunate to find places there. But times were changing. The introduction of the Free Education Scheme in 1967, the new Children's Allowance and for some 15 years the gradual provision of Secondary level education most medium-size meant that widows could afford to keep their boys at home and educate them locally. The number of boys seeking admission to St. Vincent's Orphanage/School began to fall rapidly and the school was eventually closed in 1969.

When this 'Special Work' was eventually wound up the proceeds from the sale of property was devoted to meet more pressing needs, after provision had been made to complete the education of the remaining boarders. These new needs were the provision were Sheltered housing for elderly people, the development of Holiday Homes for the

elderly who would otherwise never have a holiday. It was a case of 'changing one good work for a better'. In the year of 1879 and 1880 Ireland appeared to be threatened by another famine and the Society was faced with immense difficulties in its work for the relief of the poor.

A national committee was formed to meet the emergency and eventually was in possession of half a million pounds. The Society was better prepared than in 1847. Once again France and other countries came to our assistance. The Superior Council of Ireland decided to husband its resources until the Public Relief funds were exhausted and they were then able to render considerable assistance without making a special appeal. It is stated elsewhere that 'over £5,000 was allocated to 61 Conferences in the poorest districts'.

The Society was now well under way to becoming a National Charitable Society and by 1904 there were 183 branches or Conferences in the entire country. However it must be admitted that from 1880 onwards to the end of the century the Society in Ireland appeared 'to mark time' the necessity to increase its membership and extend its activities does not appear to have commended itself to our brothers. Without being critical it looked as if they were satisfied to keep the organisation alive.

One reason for this is, as we read in a report, that membership of the Society was practically confined to older members and younger men, when they presented themselves for membership, were not welcome. In another report we read 'that even more serious was the fact that the material side of our work completely overshadowed the Spiritual side' and later 'the Society's work in Ireland had been so reduced that for a period the Superior Council did not publish any annual report of its activities'. In the Society in Ireland at the end of the 19th century was at a low ebb we must not be critical of our predecessors.

They lived in a completely different environment to that which we enjoy and the work in which they were engaged was neither fashionable nor popular. They took criticism from their own people, possibly because the objects of the Society were misunderstood. Yet they had a fair amount to show after 55 years activity – 3036 active members and 62 'aspirant' members (i.e. those under 18 years of age) in 180 Conferences of which 25 were in the Dublin area. Towards the end of the first decade of the new Century an extraordinary, beneficial and indeed a very necessary change took place in the fortunes of the Society.

A supervisor from this period has recorded his impression, and we quote: 'Those of us who participated in the transformation that then took place that then took place or what might justly be described as the Society's renaissance in Ireland can recall that at the commencement of the century the Society was comparatively unknown'. As the brother quoted above went on to explain 'the Society was unknown to that portion of our Catholic people that it was most needful that it should be known namely, the youth of both Town and Country'.

Prior to 1900 there was not a single Collage or School Conference, nor a Junior Conference, in Ireland, but this situation was about to change. The first Youth Conference was established in Blackrock College, Dublin in 1903 under the title of the Conference of the Holy Ghost. It drew its membership from senior students who lived in 'the Castle'. This building was used as a teaching college to Royal University degree until the Foundation of the National University in Ireland in 1908. The Honorary Secretary of this Conference was a young man named Eamon de Valera. Some 60 years

later when Mr. de Valera was the President of Ireland accompanied by Secretary-General (Henri Jacob) on the occasion of the International S.V.P Youth Conference held in Gormanstown.

Before coming to Ireland Professor Chouard expressed a wish to meet President de Valera, and a meeting was arranged. After the usual formalities the President of the Council of Ireland said to Professor Chouard 'May I remind the President-General that you are now speaking to a President of the first Youth Conference in Ireland'. At that stage President de Valera, intervened and said 'Oh no Brother President, I was the first Secretary of the Conference, but they never made me President'.

As the years passed Conferences were established in Schools and Colleges first in the Dublin area, and later in the larger centres of population throughout the country. Now over 80 years later about 1,000 of our membership of 10,000 is composed of young people in the 18 to 25 years age group. Naturally members like to work in Conference of their own age group but many young people are members of Conference catering for all ages. They make their own particular contribution to the work of the Society, they are happy working in Youth Clubs, with children at Sunshine House and elsewhere, visiting elderly people and decorating their homes etc.

During the first quarter of the 20th century there was a great influx of young men into our ranks. These young men were possessed of both energy and enthusiasm. They had a most beneficial effect of the activities and fortunes of the Society. They were mostly civil servants. There was a fair representation from the commercial sector, with quite a number from the professions.

Up to the year of 1911 the President of the Superior Council of Ireland was also President of the Particular Council of Dublin because the Superior Council was situated in Dublin. In 1911 it was decided to make a change, the Council of Dublin should have its own President. The person chosen was Matthew Redmond Lalor a member for some years of the Superior Council, and this proved to be a very wise decision. It is not customary for us to praise our departed brethren but Brother Lalor appears to be a most extraordinary man by any standards.

I quote now from an article by a colleague and close friend written sometime after Brother Lalor's death in 1937 'During his term of office nearly all the improvements which took place were first considered and discussed at his home in Blackrock which was an open house to all Vincentians. Brother Lalor was not perhaps the originator of many of the new ideas but he had great openness of mind and was always susceptible to the thoughts and hopes of younger men.

They in their turn were incited to greater efforts as they witnessed the noble example of self-sacrifice, which he gave them devoting every spare minuet and hour in these years to the interest of his beloved Society. It is indeed no exaggeration to say that Matt Lalor simply lived for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul and that he held such goods as God had given him as a Trustee for the Poor'.

I would say that various influences contributed to bring about the very desirable changes that now took place. To commence: - The work of Visitation was carried out more conscientiously. As a result members became acutely aware of other needs which led to the foundation of the Night Shelter for men in Back Lane, the Catholic Seamen's Institute, the Labour-yard at Vicar Street, various Secretariats for giving advice to poor persons, the Visitation of Hospitals, the Dublin Union, and Lodging Houses, Penny

Banks were set up to encourage people to save but these have long since been wound-up and our clients encouraged to place their savings in the Post Office Savings Bank. About this time Visitations of prisons was undertaken for the first time.

It may be thought by many that working with the Itinerants of Travelling people is something new. This is not so. The writer remembers the Gypsy Visitation Committee over 50 years ago, which did much work for these good people. Our Boys Club catered for the needs of a younger generation. As already recorded the first quarter of the present Century witnessed many changes in our Society, increased membership, a vast extension in the number of Conferences, leading to more improved services for those we tried to help. Now fifty years later (1960s) we were to witness another 'Wind of change' that affected our Society not alone in Ireland but worldwide.

The Council-General felt the time had come to examine our practices and procedures. The consensus of opinion was that our 'Rule', which was really the experience of our early brothers committed to paper, written down in 1835 by Francois Lallier under the direction of Professor Emmanuel Bailly (the first President-General) needed revision. There was minor editions in 1839, 1850 and 1856, but the Society held firmly to this Rule without changing a single word for over a century.

However since the end of World War 2 (in 1945) the Society had spread into many distant lands in Africa and Asia and amongst people and cultures where it was unknown 50 years previously. This situation, while welcome, caused many problems and the Council-General set up a committee drawn from many countries to examine the 'old Rule'. By 1967 this committee had produced an experimental 'NEW RULE' with a very fine declaration and commentary. This experiment would run for five years (1968 – 1973). At the end of that time the Council-General would gather together the comments of the Society from all over the world, examine them minutely, and from this careful search would emerge a 'Rule' simplified and harmonised. As the introduction to this 'New Rule' points out 'Words may change, but the spirit remains'.

The 'New Rule' was eventually approved by a Plenary Meeting of the Council-General held in Dublin from the 8th to 13th September 1973. There were many of the older members who regretted the disappearance of the 'Old Rule' with its many fine commentaries. It was agreed that some alternations were necessary, for example Article 1 and other related Articles, but it was felt that in re-writing 'the Rule' much had been lost. However, the changes were accepted in the Spirit of the Society carried on as heretofore giving their time, their energy and their money as generously as always. It is well to record here the other changes that took place in those years.

The duration of office was settled. It has many advantages but too frequent changes in office of Conferences and councils may weaken the continuity of effort that is so important.

The change in distributing assistance from the issue of Vouchers if that met the need in a more practical way.

The entrance of women to the Society in 1962 should not have caused any alarm. For years the Society worked closely with the Ladies Association of Charity, founded by St. Vincent de Paul in 1617. It was his first foundation. Where the Association did not exist there were ladies in Honorary members of Auxiliary members who organised Wardrobes at local level, and who were also most active in fund raising schemes at Conferences and Council level. Finally there was a female Society of St. Vincent de

Paul whose members lived and worked exactly the same Rule as the Male Society with headquarters in Bologna, Italy since 1856. This Society spread rapidly in Italy, France, Spain and Portugal and even to Canada, but it was never established in Ireland. The Male and Female Societies were merged in 1963.

Following the President-General's appeal in 1960 when he put before the Society his imaginative programme of Renewal based on consideration of –

An invitation to deepen our Spiritual lives.

Extension of the Society and Training of new members.

Giving place to Youth in our Councils.

The need to adapt ourselves and our methods to meet new forms of poverty and to co-operate with other bodies working in the same field.

Added to this list was the President-General's injunction to members to be prepared to take risk in their efforts to alleviate suffering. It is true to say that members responded with their usual generosity.

At this time people had become more keenly aware of the needs of their less fortunate brethren; that spite of apparent prosperity there were many people living alone 'very lonely', that housing conditions still left a lot to be desired. The Society's new survey entitled 'Old and Alone in Ireland' carried out between 1976 and 1978 was revealing in information it gathered. It was hoped that the findings of this survey would help to improve the quality of the services provided by our members to elderly people living alone.

Due to the improved medical science people were living longer. They lived longer, but often in great loneliness and if resident in isolated districts they lived in fear of being attacked. This prompted the Society to provide 'Sheltered Housing' accommodation to elderly people living in such circumstances. Now there are some 15 such schemes dotted about the country. As a result of this examination it was also brought home to our members that there were thousands of people who never had a holiday. This led to the establishment of Holiday Centres where people can enjoy a week's holiday – either in the countryside or at the seaside, away from the routine of everyday living.

As a result of this new work the Society provided over 10,000 holidays of a weeks duration last year to people who otherwise would not have had a holiday or in some cases to people who never had a holiday in their lives. Arising out of this new approach to meeting people's needs most of our old 'Wardrobes' have been turned into 'shops' and here clients are offered a great variety of goods of a higher quality at most reasonable prices.

Again, families using the shops make their own selection and only buy when satisfied with the merchandise offered. In recent years the Society has developed a programme of Home Management Courses to assist families with household problems. The course is designed to teach basic domestic skills, managing on a tight budget, indeed more efficient manning of the home. At the same time the course aims to helping participants to build up self-confidence and develop their listening and communication skills. So our approach to modern forms of poverty continues, members endeavouring all the time to adopt their methods to meet the new situations that arise. In the present financial recession many families have found themselves in very serious due to no fault of their own making.

As a result of the financial recession referred to in the article of the "Bulletin" the Special Cases Committee of the Council of Ireland have met many families in difficulties, who in happier days were generous subscribers to the funds of the Society and who never thought they would need to call on us for advice or assistance. That the Society was in a position to help and perhaps prevent a tragedy (i.e. the forced sale of the family home, or a similar misfortune) has been well worth the time and extra effort on the part of our members involved.

It is to be expected when a series of articles such as these appear in the "Bulletin", members minds are stirred, particularly Honorary Secretaries, who send us accounts of usual experiences in their Conferences. It is worth recording as the Society seldom, if ever, the correspondence with a former Prime Minister of Great Britain. The following extract from the quarterly report 1st July to 30th September, 1925 from the Conference concerned will suffice to explain.

"During the quarter the Conference gave assistance in the case of a woman, not a Catholic, who had applied originally for assistance to Mr. David Lloyd George and whose application was forwarded by him to the Council of Ireland. The woman greatly appreciated the assistance given by the Conference and it is interesting to record that Mr. Lloyd George in recognition of the action taken sent a donation to the Council.

One of the most interesting responses by the Programme of Renewal initiated by President-General Chouard in 1960 was the interpretation given to his appeal for "Extension" and "Training". This was taken to mean extension of the Society not alone in Ireland but in Countries overseas where up to then it was almost unknown. This led to the "linking" or "twinning" programme whereby Conferences and Councils in the developed countries would come to the assistance of the Society in countries on the way to development. The Irish Society was "linked" with 15 countries in Africa where Irish Missionaries (Nuns and Priests) had laboured for many years.

When the first four Irish Conferences were "linked" or "twinned" with their African counterparts in March 1961 there were less than 40 Conferences of the Society in this large area of Africa converted by the 15 countries apportioned to Ireland, that the Society took root in many places. At one time over 100 Conferences were "linked". It was to be expected that the Society would not develop at the same pace in each country, but at one period the number of African conferences had grown to 400. Today some of the 15 countries have their own Superior or National Council; in other areas it has been difficult to maintain enthusiasm. To sum up the position, the "Twinning" or "Linking" programme is a union of prayer, correspondence and aid, an expression of charity within the Society on a worldwide basis.

It has never been the practice of the Society to indulge in self-glorification, but rather to work quietly and unobtrusively, and to be of service to those in need irrespective of creed, class, colour or race. However in recording the history of the Society one may mention occasions with Municipal and National authority to help alleviate suffering. In the early days of the State (the 1920's) before our Social Welfare system was established the Society was invited to join the Government Commission and make suggestions for the better administration of relief schemes and many of the and many of the submitted proposals were adopted.

At the time some records had been destroyed and the Society was again invited to visit and locate families perhaps in need of assistance. The postal strike in 1979 is another

example of the Society being invited to help in a national emergency. Again the Society decided to step into the breach and members paid the pensions for thirteen weeks (1st March to 31st May) in the course of which the Society handed over £12m. This was a difficult decision to make, but it really meant if the Society did not accept this task who would pay the pensions? How would the Pensioners live? The Society certainly did not have the resources to meet such a demand.

More recently, in the Spring 1987 the Society co-operated with other associations working in the same field, as it always had done, in the distribution of the surplus food from the European Economic Community.

This is a major operation and while it greatly disrupted the normal work of the Conferences, the members undertook the task with their usual equanimity because it helped some of our less fortunate brethren. In bringing this series of articles to a close the writer would like to make it clear that he is not a historian, so perhaps a more fitting title would have been "some notes from an elderly member's Diary".

If in the future, say in December 1994 when the Society will have been established 150 years in Ireland, the Council should invite a professional historian to write the history of the Society here, these articles and the member's Diary, may help the person who undertakes this task to delve more deeply into our records. Then time taken in putting these notes together will have been a labour of love.