

9 May, 2005

I'm back again F/friends--

After a very busy tour of the north of Ireland, I'm back in the south. Took a short break in Drogheda, being an ordinary tourist. Now I'm in Bray--not a place Job visited, but very close to Dublin and its libraries, and also having easy access by public transport to places that Job did visit, such as Wicklow. So on to "Following Job, Part V"

Scott Journal , Part V

April 17, Sunday--A spot of agitation now occupies all the local papers--shall Croke Park (a local athletic venue) be kept "pure" and host only true Irish sports like hurling (which nobody but the Irish understands) and Gaelic football? or shall it be opened to host such alien games as (shock! gasp!) soccer and rugby. The governing board voted--purity lost.

Meeting for Worship at Eustace Street--known to Job as Sycamore Alley (see March 13 of Part IV). Had travel minute read and endorsed. Pleasant conversation with clerk and one of the appointed elders of the Meeting--yes, they still have elders and were surprised that NEYM had abandoned the practice.

April 18, Monday--more utterly foul weather--cold, rainy. In a rain free moment, looked for a bench by the river to eat lunch--by the time I got there, it was raining and hailing all over it. Settled for inspecting nearby Famine Memorial--stark and dramatic--more so in the rain. While people died over here, the English Parliament was busy thwarting efforts to send help--didn't want people to get dependent on the government. No comment.

In the Dublin branch library that specializes in local history, found a journal with long descriptions of Job's visit, plus very extensive materials on what Ireland was like at the time--English essentially saw conquered Irish as children who just didn't understand what was good for them (many in government, and some--though not all--of the British landlords, were genuinely bewildered by local response to their policy and action). And when eighteenth century children were disobedient, you thrashed them, which--in theory--caused them to recognize their naughtiness and hence to reform. No more comment on that, either.

Useful here to remember that Job lived through the American Revolution, and knew what happened when people became frustrated and angry at injustice.

April 21, Thursday--totally frustrating morning trying to find a better way to get to the Archives in a reasonable time without spending a fortune on taxis. Failed. Then had great insight--this is not good use of my time! Back to the Pearse St. Branch Library, where all the good local stuff is.

But mutter, mutter, grumble. I was truly annoyed. I'm sure Friends had the very best of intentions in moving to such an inaccessible place, and of course they weren't doing it just to thwart me. Yet now they are a part of the way the newly prosperous Dublin is developing--gas guzzling, car dependent, urban sprawl. British Friends were wise to make most of their Meeting record books available to general researchers via

the County Public Records offices all over the country--either on microfilm or in their original paper and leather--these PRO's have received such records with enthusiasm, because it makes a treasure trove of genealogical and historical information available to the general public. Then specialized assistance is made available through the Archivists in Lisburn and London. NEYM has done the same through the RI Historical Society (and me). There's an interesting question raised by all this--what are records for? And who are they for?

But had another fruitful day at the public library. Then midweek evening worship at Eustace St.--almost entirely different group of people. Very silent in worship, very involved with people they knew both before and after Meeting, not very open to visitors. The Secret Society of Friends?

April 22, Friday--Morning at the History and Archaeology Museum--fascinating place. Discovered a medieval reliquary box (I forget whose relics they were supposed to be) with a lid decorated with images of saints, including St. Bridget--holding a bishop's crozier--Ha! Confirms that as late as the 13th or 14th century, the Irish still accepted (even though they weren't supposed to) the story that Bridget had been consecrated a bishop in the Celtic Catholic church. (Rome didn't like that idea, so they said it never happened--though they were perfectly happy to accept far more impossible tales as real events.)

April 23, Saturday--in Lisburn, a few miles from Belfast, in the north. Staying with the Northern Ireland Archivist and her husband--retired teachers and history enthusiasts who had read Scott's Journal in preparation for my arrival (!!).

A whirl of activity today--the Camerons plunged into the Meeting House tour with gusto, driving me to MH's I could never have reached by public transport--or even found. First to Hillsborough House--not normally open to the public on this day, because it's a beautiful 18th century mansion belonging to the government--sort of the equivalent of the White House of NI--here they have fancy dinners, sign treaties, the queen bestows knighthoods, etc. An obliging officer let us in and gave us a private tour--because Quakers retain a right of access to the burial ground where the Meeting House once stood, and where Scott visited. The MH was built on land leased to Friends by Lord Hill, Marquis of Downshire at the time, subsequent Lord Hills continued friendly and generous relationships with Friends;

On to Rathfriland Meeting House, built in a delightful village perched right on top of a very high hill. MH now sadly in decay--but Job "had a good meeting there....I was considerably enlarged in testimony." Perhaps he was inspired by the spectacular view. An intelligent developer has purchased the land and is building some very attractive housing--and would like to turn the old MH into a community or daycare center.

April 24, Sunday--Worship at Lisburn--modern MH, not the one Scott knew. Then to Moyallon, which Scott did know. Very graceful building, still in use--with an expandable space: wood panels at the back fold up and hook to the ceiling, turning the vestibule into extra meeting space for Quarterly Meetings and such like. Burial ground has two parts--

large area for the hoi-polloi and smaller area for the Quaker gentry who gave the land. (Guess you don't elder rich folks who provide you with an elegant MH. Quaker equality meets reality.)

On to Megaberry MH--building Scott knew is sadly derelict; windows boarded up, roof over the entryway caved in. Burial ground still in use and kept mowed, but accessible (to us) only by climbing a 4 foot high barred gate, or negotiating a barbed wire fence surrounded by nettles. Settled for peering over the barbed wire.

"Tea" (i.e., a light supper) at the Camerons with Ross and Robina Chapman--Ross one of the leading Northern Ireland Quaker historians; knows more than I do about Job. He arrived with a pile of books and articles for me to read--informs me that Job played an unwitting part in serious theological controversies arising among Irish Friends in early 1800's--and of course, being dead at the time, he couldn't complain if he was misunderstood.

April 26, Tuesday--Public records office all day yesterday. Found Friends of the 1790's madly disowning hundreds of people for "marrying one not of our society." No wonder they were in decline at the time.

Today a real treat--tour of the countryside with Ross Chapman. Spectacular day--when the sun shines in Ireland, you willingly take back all the nasty things you ever said about the weather. The sun is brighter, the air clearer, the earth more impossibly green than it ever is at home--all of which are, of course, because it rains all the rest of the time.

Cootehill--where Scott observed a riot, sparked by a young recruit's sudden decision he didn't want to be in the British army after all. Local peasantry, no fans of the army themselves, aided and abetted his attempt to escape; it all deteriorated into a brawl which spread over the upward sloping and unusually wide main street. Scott would have had a front row seat from the MH door at the bottom of the hill. A Church of Ireland has now replaced the old MH, but the burial ground remains, in a spectacular location--the highest point in town, site of an ancient rath--a fortified farm or "hill fort," possibly pre-Christian or very early Christian. Later inhabitants sometimes called such places Dane-forts (believing they were built by Vikings, who frequently and ferociously marauded in Ireland) or fairy-forts. The burial ground was inside the earthen dike, up so high that chimneys of surrounding houses are below eye level. Making a statement? If so, what?

Grange-Near-Charlemont--here Scott attended several Meetings, including a Quarterly Meeting where "Truth reigned over all." Old MH was later remodeled to serve as the Women's Meeting Room, and a new MH built next to it in 1818. Both still in use.

Richhill--also still an active meeting--my favorite of this trip, and Ross's home meeting. Meeting House was brand new when Scott was here (worship was "dull and painful.") As at Hillsborough, land was given by a local lord who liked having Quaker neighbors--they were quiet, didn't cause trouble, and took care of their own poor. Another hill top town, with the lord's "castle" (actually a mansion gussied up with a few turrets, clearly incapable of defending anything) perched on the highest point, with the Meeting House a little way below. Outside--plain to the point of starkness. Inside,

meeting room painted white, very light and airy, graceful proportions and a Shaker-like simplicity. Ross said when he was a little boy in the 1930's, men and women still sat separately, though he and the smaller boys had to stay with their mothers, while his older brother got to sit with the men. At the back of the Meeting room is an ancient and battered bench, brought from an older MH, and said to have been sat upon by George Fox.

Then back to "tea" at Ross's home in Newry. No sooner had we finished than the rain, which had kindly held off all day, burst out and drenched everything around, leaving us cheerful and dry around the sitting room fire.

April 28, Thursday--Yesterday investigated strong room of Lisburn Northern Ireland Archives--Muriel's domain. Nothing much new except useful map, showing locations of Meetings in Ireland in 1794.

Today to Lurgan--where Quakerism in Ireland began in 1654 with the arrival of William Edmondson, ex-soldier in Cromwell's army, claiming his land in Ireland as compensation, newly converted to Quakerism. MH Scott visited is gone, but after an incredibly elegant morning coffee (whipped cream to float on top, fresh apple tart!--hostess a retired caterer), had a tour of the present Lurgan MH--same site as the ancient one, but this one brand new.

Lurgan in Scott's time was a major center of the linen industry (as were Lisburn and several other cities in the area). Many Quakers farmers were suppliers to the trade; others became extremely wealthy in the manufacturing and processing end. May explain concern of Scott and others that Quakers were becoming too involved in the world, drifting towards Anglicanism, and spiritually dull--all the while thinking themselves as more spiritually advanced than others. Does any of this sound like modern Friends?

Afternoon in Craigavon Museum Historical Library--and hit the jackpot!. Found journal of Sarah Lynes Grubb, a notable minister of the late eighteenth and early 18th century. She first "appeared in the ministry" at 15, when she was serving as nanny to the children of another Quaker family. She was 19 when Scott visited her Meeting near Mountmellick (in the south), heard her preach, and encouraged her ministry, telling her to 'stay close to her gift,' but warning her of the temptations facing those who became more successful in ministry than they had expected. Imagine the impact of such an encounter with the man who at that particular time had become one of the most well known travelling ministers in Ireland.

April 29, Friday--AM, fast trip up to Quaker Cottage, where I spent the glorious summer of 1988. Old stone farmhouse and surrounding outbuildings now remodeled out of all recognition. Wonderful old kitchen, where I sat learning to play the bodhran, now gone--but have to admit, everything back then--much as I loved it--was picturesque but terribly make-do, damp, and inadequate. Now much improved and expanded, with help of local government grants. But the surrounding mountainside is still incredibly gorgeous, dotted with old hill farms, cows, sheep, great fields of unbelievably green grass, blooming gorse, and views over the whole city all the way down the river to the Mountains of

Mourne in the distance--and now it's all protected land and can't be built on. A hundred thousand blessings on whoever put that regulation through.

And the former army base just below and down the valley is gone--replaced by some sort of industrial park. When conflict gives way to business--peace really does seem possible here.