

## Wednesday 7 September

Lots of wind from the north and west overnight, but remaining dry (for a while, anyway!). Moved a little way north and inland to the small town of Ardfert. Here there are a complex of churches linked to the cult of St Brendan, “The Navigator”, and dedicated to his name. An account of his voyages was written in about 1050, and the surviving text – *Navigatio Brendani* – appears to describe voyages to Wales, the Orkneys, Iceland and – conceivably – the east coast of the North American continent. The last possibility has been successfully recreated by modern adventurers.



The Ardfert complex is dominated by the ruins of a large cathedral, built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century on the site of the monastery built by Brendan in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The three tall and slender Gothic windows in the building’s east face are strikingly beautiful. A late Gothic chapel stands nearby, and all are surrounded by gravestones (but few of identifiable ancient origins).

We had lunch in this busy little town, then returned to Fenit, a slightly smaller settlement with a long pier, referred to as a viaduct, leading out to a small walled port, fishing harbour and marina. We settled in the car park at the town end of the pier and were surrounded during the late afternoon by dozens of intrepid Irish coming to walk dogs and children, and swim in the wide (at low tide) and long beach – despite the unrelenting wind and lack of sun through threatening clouds.

We had lunch in this busy little



We were facing south; around the headland and facing west is a longer beach, the Banna Strand. This is where Roger Casement landed in 1916 from a German U-boat, bringing in rifles intended for the Easter Rising. He was arrested immediately he came ashore.

Still dry by 6:00 pm, but a long white – becoming black – cloud lay right along the Dingle Peninsula, across Dingle Bay, just as it did the day before. But about 6:30 the wind switched to the south and rapidly built up to gale force, blowing straight across the bay to us. We stayed put, having no better option, and watched to our amazement the scores of locals going down to the beach for a swim, many in wet suits but by no means all.



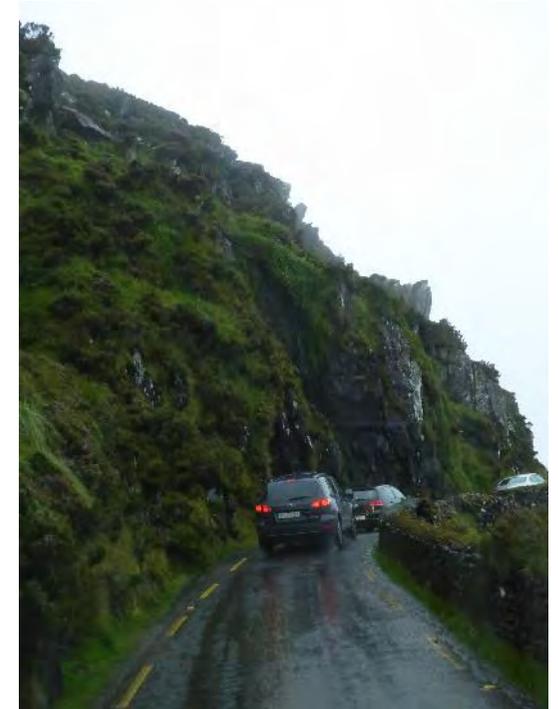
## Thursday 8 September

Another very windy night, with the van being buffeted and rocked by the gale. Not much better by dawn, but we set off as planned for a tour of the Dingle peninsula. Cut around the end of Tralee Bay without going into the town of that name, and started heading west out into the peninsula through quiet sheep-covered countryside. Wide valleys were bordered by hills of unknown height because the tops were shrouded by cloud. Some shallow-looking lakes lay at the bases of the valleys.

Started getting a lot rockier along the roadside as we started to climb and cross the mountains that form the spine of the peninsula, but we could not see much higher than the road because of the low cloud. The road got steeper as we approached the Connor Pass, as with some trepidation we drove past large signs warning us of narrow roads and that if we were more than 1.8 metres wide (about what we are) we should “Turn Back Now!”. As we neared the top of the pass the road was indeed very steep and narrow, being carved into the side of the mountain, and we – like many others – had sometimes to reverse into the small passing places in the face of oncoming traffic.



Fortunately there was not that much traffic, as it was not a good touring day, with no views to speak of because we were well above cloud base at the top of the pass. The going was easier down the southern side, and as the worst of the clouds cleared we came to the town of Dingle. We drove straight through, as the only possible car park (one without a height barrier, in other words) was packed. We would be returning this way, so we pressed on with our clockwise circuit of the outer end of the peninsula.



There were some good views down to the left over Dingle Bay, and from our first stop. This was at a group of what in tourist-speak are called “beehive huts”, corbel-built dwellings of a conical beehive shape. The group, a kind of ring fort with its surrounding wall, is known as a cashel, or *cathair*. The dwellings would have been inhabited from ancient times up to about 1200 AD. In one of them we could see the entrance to a *souterraine*, or underground hideaway.

More dramatic cliffside scenery, then, until we came to Dunmore Head, the western-most tip of mainland Europe, where a crucifixion statuary scene marks the bend in the road at the apex. Over the sea to the west from the headland we could see the Blasket Islands, from where the inhabitants – who lived in a

wholly traditional manner – moved to the mainland in 1953. Further round the loop we came inland for a bit; the very green fields were laced with dry stone walls, some squared off and some wandering around the landscape in an apparently random but highly picturesque manner.

In Ballyferriter (*Baile an Fheirtearaigh*) there was an excellent little museum, featuring some of the historical and cultural features of the region. In particular there was a good explanation of the Ogham Stones and their inscriptions. These are standing stones that date initially from the period between the end of the Stone Age and the arrival of Christianity in Ireland, around the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. Their use continued until the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and their greatest



density is on the Dingle Peninsula. Their great interest is in their engravings, sets of parallel lines and notches, which can be translated into a Roman alphabet. They were probably mostly used as grave stones, as they record names of people and their forebears. Many other functions have also been suggested.

Another display recorded how the Dingle Peninsula in Kerry County was badly affected by the Great Hunger or Great Famine,

the famine times following the potato blights of 1845 to 1850, and about which we had become increasingly interested, as some earlier comments show. There were some moving contemporary accounts among the exhibits, and a picture of the workhouse at Dingle: this building still stands on the hillside above the town and is clearly visible from it. It is not referred to, however, in any of the Dingle town tourist literature.



By way of comment, the workhouses of the time were almost obscenely irrelevant to the needs of the poor. They could only possibly cater for about 1 per cent of them, whereas a Commission on the Poor had previously estimated that the need was more than 25 times as much. It was laid down by the British government that life inside the workhouses be made as unpleasant as possible and the work be as irksome as possible so as to encourage paupers to quit the workhouse. The diet was monotonous, families were split up and segregated. The guiding philosophy of the Poor Law was the belief that poverty was the fault of the individual and that people should be discouraged from entering the workhouse, not encouraged to do so. The Treasury's architect of the government's approach to management of the famine, Sir Charles Trevelyan, wrote that: *"Every system of poor relief must contain a penal and repulsive element in order to prevent its leading to the disorganisation of society."* The government's strategy for Ireland was based on a blueprint for depopulation drawn up by Trevelyan. As was (and still is) said, "God sent the blight but the British sent the famine". Whig policy was directed at getting the peasants off the land, and if it took mass death to achieve that objective, so be it.

The 1845-52 famine in fact struck the western counties harder than in the south west. Statistically, in terms of population, Mayo, Sligo, Roscommon and Galway were the worst hit, at about double the rate of the south-west counties. For the traveller, there are more descriptions and exhibitions of the famine times in the south-west and south, but this probably reflects the number of potentially interested tourists.



A little further round the road loop stands another corbelled structure, the Gallarus Oratory, a tiny dry-stone church. It was built between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries and is the best preserved early Christian church in Ireland. From there it was an easy run down through green farmland and back to Dingle, where by this time there was plenty of room in the harbourside car park.

It had been raining or drizzling off and on all day, and this continued as we took a walk round this very attractive small town, with multi-coloured shop fronts, pubs and restaurants. We came across a little church with a notice that there was to be a folk music concert in the evening. We returned to that, and much enjoyed a concert of Irish music, not all of it ancient or traditional, but all in the

Irish style. Some songs were soulful laments, and other tunes typical Irish reels, with much tapping of feet. Great fun, and we bought a CD of songs by the group's lovely young singer.



## Saturday 10 September

A peaceful night except for people coming back to their cars after their evening out, and a dry start to the day with a little sun by 10:30. Basic stock-up at the nearby SuperValu supermarket. Dingle really is an attractive little town, with multi-coloured houses and terraced shops and a busy fishing harbour by today's standards. One large French fishing boat was undergoing some repairs on a stem that had been quite badly damaged, including a rip in the steel of the upper port bow – clearly from a collision of some kind, and most probably with a wharf in a gale.



Only averagely miserable weather as we headed off east along the southern side of the Dingle peninsula, with the first stop for a view being at the weird, narrow peninsula jutting south from the village of Inch, reaching nearly the whole way across Dingle Bay and enclosing the bay's inner reaches as the shallow Castlemaine Harbour. The recent gales have heaped up the Atlantic swells, and they crash on the long west-facing beach of the Inch peninsula as a high surf, very popular this day with scores of surfers out there.

Having rounded the east end of Dingle Bay we set off along the north side of the next peninsula,

Iveragh, and the famous Ring of Kerry loop road. At the "Kerry Bog Village" and farm there is an excellent collection of reconstructed 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century cottages, ranging from a simple one-room labourer's dwelling to the comparatively luxurious house of a thatcher, a man of demand in villages of the period. There were also the ruins of two original dry-stone cottages, one of which is described as having been the home of Bridget O'Shea. Bridget was a widow who was evicted and sent to a workhouse, separated from her five children. Outside the other ruined cottage is a copy of a typical notice of eviction, declaring that another widow tenant must "deliver up" the premises by 1 May 1849.

As noted, we already knew from other literature much of what happened during the "Great Hunger" of 1845 to 1852 that devastated Ireland: the repeated failure of the potato crops on which the peasantry almost completely depended; the deliberate export of other crops out of Ireland under deliberate British policy; the eviction programme implemented by the British government in order to encourage broad-scale and more "efficient" farming, and undertaken by landlords who could not extort rates from tenants who had neither crops nor money; the building of workhouses that were hardly better than concentration camps; and the resulting decimation of the Irish populace from starvation and emigration.

The upbeat tourist literature is essentially silent on these horrors, except for the occasional famine porn drawing of emaciated children, although to be fair the several small museums and exhibitions are





more forthcoming. Nevertheless, a plaque on display at this exhibition was the first we had seen in Ireland that summarised the events of the time so baldly.

At the bog village were also explanations on origins and use of peat, and the lands on which it forms, the bogs. Bogs, turf and peat go together with the potato and the Catholic Church in Ireland; between them, the Irish have been kept fed and warm over the centuries.

The two main factors contribute to the existence of bog land are high rainfall – a factor that is becoming very familiar to us on this trip – and high acidity. The latter helps to preserve the “bog bodies” that are still being found, centuries old. The farm also houses two friendly but huge Irish Wolfhounds of the above-average age of 11. In the fields were several Kerry bog ponies, native to Ireland, which were used for bringing turf from the bog and other farming tasks. They are described as smaller and easier to keep than horses, and faster and more athletic than donkeys!

By this time we were fully realising that many, if not most, of the local people were speaking Irish to each other. There are several areas in the country, such as here in Kerry, where Irish is the main spoken language. The language is now a compulsory subject in Irish schools, and there are Irish-spoken television and radio channels.

We continued west, with the sea and little harbours and beaches to our right, and green-brown, rounded hills to our left. Off the north-west corner of the peninsula lies the island of Valencia, although we did not take the little car ferry across but continued round the peninsula’s western end, still on the Ring of Kerry. The scenery became rockier, and there were some lovely views across to inshore and offshore islands



including the Skelligs, where once there was a monastic settlement that is now a UN World Heritage site.

By this time we had started looking for a place for the night, and were pleased to see a small notice for a motorhome park at the village of Sneem, *An Snaidhm*, a strange name, but most of them are, here. There was indeed an excellent aire down by the River Sneem, just before it drains into the sea. We paid the required €10 at the Dan Murphy’s Bar across the road, and had a Guinness along with several cyclists out on a charity ride. Every other pub here seems to carry the “Murphy” name!

We settled in a pitch by the river side, in a little sunshine after a generally overcast and light showery day.



### Sunday 11 September

A peaceful night but becoming blustery by morning and a full southerly gale (again!) during the day. Walked into the village got the paper and some lunch rolls, but otherwise sat tight for the rest of day. The Sunday Times here, as is the weekday Times, is an Irish version that concentrates on Irish news. It can't resist the Irish fascination with puns: in the paper, an Irish lawyer suing Volkswagen has cases "under the bonnet"; parliamentarians ask Apple "to talk core issues"; another MP's teeth are "molar opposites". A tourist pamphlet refers in relation to our village here as "Full Sneem Ahead", and a little story on nuns making lace is headed "So far, sew good". I am now obsessed with finding puns in all Irish stories.

In the afternoon we did move over to a more sheltered spot out of the worst of the wind, and plugged into the electric, for the first time this trip. Annoyingly, we have lost the internet, with our iPad mobile data SIM refusing to connect with the Irish phone system after doing so reliably until we got to Dingle. Took the iPad up to the pub for its Wi-Fi and a Guinness, and booked in for another night. Raining. Forecast terrible.

### Monday 12 September

Ferocious night, with very heavy rain and continuing gale-force winds. The picturesque cascade under the bridge behind us and the river were flowing high and fast by the morning.

Walked up to the village for the paper and a bread roll during a lull. The grassy town square is surrounded by flowery bushes and flags, but all were looking very bedraggled this morning. The colourful houses all around the square brightened things up a bit. Lots of tourists were taking pictures of the waterfall.

Stayed aboard most of the day, as the skies cleared for a while before it started drizzling again late afternoon. The mobile data internet came in again, so we hope it was a weekend tech problem only.



### Tuesday 13 September

Finally, after a cool night a dry morning and a good forecast. So, watered and cleaned up, a quick shop at the small supermarket, then off east along the southern side of the Iveragh peninsula. At Kenmare, we cut north for a return trip up to the Killarney National Park. Scenery generally what we are getting used to, with smooth green

foothills grading up to grey-brown hilltops. Through the 263-metre Molls Gap at the top of an easy pass, then down the other side towards the collection of lakes that are a feature of the park. The best views are from a lookout known as Ladies View, supposedly because Queen Victoria's ladies in waiting liked it.

Before getting to Killarney we turned and retraced our steps, down through Kenmare and through a tunnel at the top of a pass in the hills that form the spine of the Beara peninsula; and thus into County Cork.



A pleasant run down into Glengarriff, at the head of a cove at the eastern end of Bantry Bay, where we anchored in August 1985 in *Cera*, a few days after our arrival at Castletownbere. The cove was (and still is) a lovely anchorage, surrounded by bushy slopes and including lots of little islands. Norma and I still remember her happily rowing the dinghy around the bay, and being pursued by inquisitive seals. The seals are still there, according to a Serbian ex-soldier who has settled in Glengarriff and married an Irish girl, and who is running a dog kennelling and training business on his father-in-law's land on the waterside of the picturesque bay.

Then on to Castletownbere, at the seaward end of Bantry Bay. We well remember arriving at this Customs port after our three-week passage from Bermuda, which had been a very tough sail across the north Atlantic with several unwelcome experiences. Having dropped anchor in the middle of the small bay, we hugged each other on the foredeck, celebrating that we had safely made it. A shout came from a neighbouring French yacht: "where have you come from?" "From Bermuda", we replied, and were

welcomed by cheers from their boat.

In 1796 a French fleet approached Bantry Bay carrying Wolfe Tone and a supporting force, coming to the aid of the United Irishmen and their fight for independence – but foul weather outside the bay decimated the fleet and only a few made the entry. We knew how they felt.

The next day, in accordance with normal procedure, we reported to the Customs office in order to be cleared into the country, only to be told that the officers were on strike and would we please drop our yellow quarantine flag and consider ourselves cleared! We immediately came to like Ireland, as we have come to do again now.

When we were there all those years ago, Castletownbere was a simple fishing village, but it has been transformed into a busy fishing port, with several large ocean-ranging trawlers on the substantial wharves. After a look round, we decided on staying in that part of the harbourside car park where the smaller fishing boats were lying, which had plenty of space and was surprisingly quiet at the time.

### **Wednesday 14 September**

Rather to our surprise it was a very peaceful night. But the weather had changed again, and it was overcast and cool.



When we were here in the boat we anchored in a small bay just to the west of Castletown, and came across the fabulous ruins of what appeared to be a fortified mansion in a beautiful position. So we set off to see if the ruins were still there. Off the main road we drove along some private-looking lanes which had been indicated to “the castle”. A run-down explanatory plaque described the history of the Puxley family and Dunboy Castle. The family had moved to Berehaven in about 1730, and John Puxley took over the estates on which the house now stands. It was John Puxley who developed the copper mines around Allihies in the Beara peninsula, and after his death his brother Henry took over the properties and built the gothic mansion. The various branches of the family lived there in 1921, when – as we had seen in 1985 – it was largely burnt down and the estate was auctioned off.



When we finally came across the mansion this time, it became clear that what had been ruins had been reconstructed and the mansion in the process of restoration. However, it was also clear that the building was not occupied, adjacent to it were blocks of new townhouses also unoccupied, and the whole development was surrounded by a wire fence. So, we concluded, this was a developer’s enterprise that had fallen on hard times.

The original estate included the ruins of O’Sullivan Beare’s Dunboy castle, right by the sea, which was destroyed by cannon fire during the siege of Dunboy in 1602. We wandered round these old ruins, and did our best to piece together some of the history of this place – never an easy thing to do in Ireland!

We then set off round the rest of the Beara peninsula, including the area of the old copper mines around the village of Allihies, where the hillsides were strewn with warnings about the danger of falling down mine shafts. Ruins of a mine works building stood on the skyline, its chimney still upright, and in the cliff face by the sea blue streaks in the rocks showed the remaining presence of copper. As in many parts of rural Ireland, many of the old stone cottages have been brought back to life and now shine with whitewash, bright pinpricks dotted widely throughout the green stony valleys.



We enjoyed our drive round the Beara peninsula very much. At its outer, western end, it was truly wild, a jumbled mass of rocks, heather and scrub, with none but the occasional remains of a stone hut left as evidence of human habitation. Sheep wandered freely over the hillsides and sometimes the roads. Steep cliffs overlooked wild and rocky little coves. As with all the south-west Irish peninsulas, Beara has a substantial mountainous spine down its centre, and crossing this spine by the Healy Pass was an experience similar to the Alps, with a Stelvio-like succession of hairpin bends winding up and down the hills.

We retraced our path back to Glengarriff and turned south down to Bantry, at the head of the bay. Bantry is a busy tourist town, and we did not dwell there but continued to our stop for the night on the southern side of the peninsula that has the south-west extremity of Ireland, Mizen Head, at its end – along with a lot more rocks. Our stop was a parking place by an ancient monument, an altar wedge tomb built around 2,000 to 3,000 BC, and one of a dozen on the Mizen peninsula. Human remains dated to about 2,000 BC have been found there. Following the introduction of Christianity its ritual use ceased, but interestingly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century it was used as an altar for mass by Catholic priests who were forbidden to use their churches at the time of the Protestant ascendancy.



As dusk fell, we could see on the horizon the regular flash of the Fastnet lighthouse, way out to sea on its rocky islet.

### Thursday 15 September

A very misty, damp start to the day, but it cleared to one of the nicest days we have had the whole time in Ireland. We drove east again, back along the south side of the peninsula (a recurrent theme!), across the top of Roaringwater Bay with its hundreds of small islands, and to Skibbereen.

During the time of the Great Famine, Skibbereen was the centre of one of the worst-affected areas in Ireland. A mass famine grave on the outskirts of the little town holds the remains of eight to twelve thousand victims. In the town's Heritage Centre there is an outstanding

museum, describing those times through displays, videos and personal accounts. It was the best of its kind we had visited.



The potato, it was explained, was an ideal food. It would grow on a variety of soils, easy to cultivate with only a spade, and easy to store. It was also possible to live almost only on potatoes, with only some occasional milk or fish. Potatoes were the only cheap crop that could support the peasantry as the sole source of food. Highly calorific but low in fat, potatoes are packed with essential vitamins and minerals – what we might call a “superfood” in today's jargon. A man would eat 6-7 kg of potatoes a day, his wife 5 kg, and the children 2.5 kg each. A man, his wife and six kids would get through 25 kg a day, a small sack full. Scurvy was unknown until during the blight the peasants were supplied with imported maize, or “Indian corn”, which was far less nutritious.

The blight with which the famine began was caused by a fungus that reached Europe from America in 1844. It extended widely through western and central Europe and southern Scandinavia. It was first detected in Ireland in September 1845, and more than a third of the crop was lost. The blight struck again and again each year, just as

hope had arisen when the new crop was harvested and seemed healthy, which added to the heartbreak and terror. Famine and severe food shortages had occurred several times over the years in Ireland, well before the Great Famine.



Famine was one thing, poverty was another, although the two were obviously connected. During the whole famine period there was plenty of food in Ireland; it was just that the poor could not afford to buy it, and they were reluctant fishermen. They never *bought* potatoes; food was grown or gathered, not purchased. The land system didn't help. Before the Great Famine, most landlords rented their land to middlemen, who in turn rented it to tenants, smallholders and labourers. As the population grew, the sizes of the holdings decreased and became less efficient. The obvious result was that the ability of the tenants to pay their rents became lower all the time.





Outside the heritage centre was another stone building, used for other purposes now but what was once the site of the soup kitchen. During the early stage of the famine when it was thought it could be sufficiently addressed by the supply of soup, these kitchens were the only source of nourishment for some. In the museum was an example of the kind of huge pot in which meat, grain and vegetables were boiled. By 1847 three million people in Ireland were living on this alone, including about half the population of Skibbereen.

From Skibbereen we drove down to the coast at the port of Baltimore, in a picturesque location looking over to Sherkin Island and several other smaller islets. In *Cera* we spent time here, anchored memorably for a while off Sherkin, where we met up with a local couple of American origin whom we encountered while admiring their garden over the fence. We spent a night and more time later with them and many of their local friends. We were introduced by them to a lady who had been one of the early American female stunt flyers and who showed us her

own flying licence, signed by Orville Wright no less.

Baltimore is now not the cosy place it was then, and we pressed on further east to the town of Kinsale. This was yet another of the inlets we entered in 1985, and we anchored off the port town – where there is now a huge marina hanging off the waterfront. We had fond memories of the place, and it is still very pleasant to walk around. Popular with tourists, as ever with Americans and Germans, there are lots of little winding streets lined with colourful houses, cafes and shops. The number of bookshops was enough to remind us of Hay-on-Wye.

Approaching Kinsale from the sea we well remember that we were overlooked, from the right side, by the formidable Charles Fort, named after Charles II. Its prominently strategic position made it important for trade and the defence of a port in the far south of Ireland which had an easy, deep-water entry. Its construction began in 1678, and its design and layout were closely based on the principles established by the French military architect

Vauban. It was vulnerable from the land, however, and in 1690 was taken by the forces of William of Orange. We walked for some time round its bastions and walls, and through the ruins of the large barracks and associated buildings. Its preservation is remarkable now, and it is one of the best examples of these star-shaped forts in Europe.

We had parked in a good position off the





road outside the fort, overlooking the Kinsale inlet and over to the town. Under a rising full moon (a Harvest Moon, at this time of the year) and the promise of better weather, we stayed on for the night.

### Friday 16 September

The first stop of the day was to Crosshaven, near the entrance to large harbours of Cobh and Cork. This was our final port of call in Ireland in 1985, and we sailed from here to Falmouth as fast as we could, racing to get there before being caught by an oncoming storm (which battered the Fastnet yacht race that year). Crosshaven was a good safe anchorage for us in the river near the Royal Cork Yacht Club, the oldest yacht club in the world. But now, the river is crowded with moorings, and visitors no doubt have little choice but to pull in to one of the many marinas that line the river banks.

We drove on up towards Cork, and crossed via a small ferry to the island and town of Cobh. This is where the big ships come, and on the wharf for cruise liners lay one of the immense variety, looking top heavy with layers and layers of identical balconies and windows. The passengers appeared mainly to be American, as is the case for many of the groups we came across. They are as interested in the Irish backgrounds of many of them as we are.

Our visit here was to the Heritage Centre right by the ship's berth, at the old railway station. This was again very well done and presented. Between 1848 and 1950 some 2.5 million adults and children left Ireland from here in Cobh, for settlement in North America, Australia, Argentina and a few other countries. In the famine years of 1846 to 1850 mass emigration was seen by the British government as part of the solution to the "Irish problem", a phrase now with dark overtones. These people, and others such as convicts sentenced to transportation to Australia, had no choice but to sail in the notorious "coffin ships" in which many died as a result of cramped and unsanitary conditions and their poor condition from the outset. Later, Cobh saw the sailing of the early steamers and the great ocean liners. Prominent among these, of course, was the Titanic, which sailed from Cobh on her fatal first and last ocean crossing in 1912.



Another shipping tragedy in the offing was just off nearby Kinsale, where the liner Lusitania, on her final approach to Cobh, was torpedoed with great loss of life by a German U-boat in 1915, an event which helped to bring the USA into World War I.

Off then further east through the ancient town of Youghal, with its very crowded streets and weird clock tower, which was part of the old town walls and under which we drove through its arch. Thence to Waterford, where we settled in a big car park which seemed quiet and safe enough.

But early in the evening we heard the sound of drums, and then bagpipes; and saw that a small pipe band was tuning up having just arrived in the car park! This was followed by a tap on the door, and a friendly man asking



whether we'd be interested in going to a performance of "Grease", because he had tickets to give away. Why not, we thought, and we walked into town closely followed by the marching pipe band, which then formed up and performed as a group adjacent to the smart-looking Waterford Crystal Centre.

We asked a lady what was going on, and she explained that this was the annual "cultural night" in Waterford, where all museums and many cultural events were free or nearly so. It's pretty rare for us to actually coincide with such events; they are usually "last week" or in a few days to come.

We saw Grease from the front row of the dress circle, but round at the side so only half the stage was clearly visible without leaning forward. Still, it was quite an experience for us, as this kind of teeny-bopper musical is normally outside our comfort zone. The performance was in the Theatre Royal, a 19<sup>th</sup> century space of classical configuration.

While we enjoyed the experience we pulled out at the interval and went to the museum of medieval times in Waterford right next door. We also heard a few bars of a brass band outside a church, just before they gave up for the night.

Waterford looked like a really nice place, and we enjoyed our short time there.

### Saturday 17 September



Again, a peaceful night in a car park. An exhibit we had come to see in Waterford was a replica of an emigrant ship, the 171-ft three-masted square-rigged "Dunbrody". This was an excellent reproduction, with well replicated accommodation and living arrangements – although probably looking a good deal better than they were for the famine ships. The ship was in fact very similar to, and only about 10 feet shorter than, the *Orient* that carried Michael's Belfast emigrant great-grandfather out to Australia in 1863.



When we arrived we were offered a tour that was presented as essentially obligatory – but this turned out to be along with a large group of Americans on tour, just one of the many that were following each other through. We bargained ourselves out of all that and were allowed to go around the ship by ourselves, having explained that we did already know a lot about the subject and did not need simplistic lectures. The attendants were good about it, as the Irish are, and we enjoyed the visit.



This was followed by a cross-country run on fast roads to the port of Rosslare, from where we were aiming to take the ferry to Wales. At the terminal we booked passage on Irish Ferries for 8:45 am the following morning, at €279, about what we expected. The car park was fine, seemed quiet, and we decided to stay the night.

## To Wales and back to England

### Sunday 18 September

Up early for ferry, breakfast in the waiting line. The ferry and the passage were fine, smooth crossing with little wind, arrived at Pembroke Dock in five hours. The final approach to the dock, up the end of the long Milford Haven estuary, was impressive and required careful ship-handling because the ferry had to be turned completely around to come in stern-to, while surrounded by drying mud banks. It would have been even more impressive in a gale, but recovery tugs were stationed in the approach and at the docks.

After disembarking, we parked close by, overlooking the dry harbour, and followed the Singapore GP on the iPad. We then had an easy drive, bypassing Carmarthen and down to Burry Port, in the inner reaches of Carmarthen Bay approaching Llanelli on the River Lougher. We were here a few years ago, and enjoyed the location, where we could join a few other motorhomes on the shoreline overlooking the bay.



Burry Port was opened in 1832, required for the export of coal from the nearby valleys. With access facilitated by Brunel's South Wales railway, local industries grew up including copper and lead works, and latterly a power station. All gone now, and the whole area is now part of the Millennium Coastal Park.

Most of the harbour dries out at low tide, although in the old days there were lock gates to the inner parts. Also dry at low tide is a vast expanse of sand outside the harbour. It was spring equinoctial tides, with a tidal range of over 7 metres.

We established ourselves at the end of the long stretch of rough sandy roadway, near a launching ramp, about where we were last time. Very pleasant weather latterly, with some sun. A very popular area for dog walkers.

### Monday 19 September

A quiet night, except for the previous evening's slap on the side of the van by some giggling kids, which is scary when it (occasionally) happens. Walked into the village among other things to try to change our Northern Irish (sterling) banknotes into English cash – no, can't be done without a local bank account. Did a little local shopping at the Co-op.



Afternoon walk at low tide some way out on to the sand. Locals were launching their boats way out at the edge of deep-enough water, and were going after cockles – a good time for cockling, we were told.

Cool and mostly dry, but overcast all day. Forecast not too bad.



### **Tuesday 20 September**

Cross-country run to Hay-on-Wye for stopover. Pulling into large car park we were surprised to see a large collection of caravans, vans and motorhomes taking up a lot of space down near the bottom of the parking place, the best place to be (level). Soon confirmed that it was a tribe of travellers, probably fruit-picking, but they seemed peaceful and relatively quiet and certainly tried to keep their place very clean. All the vehicles looked quite posh, including a newish Mercedes sedan.

### **Wednesday 21 September**

Peaceful night, and then a long ramble through Hay. Stopped in many of the book shops, but only one or two purchases – expensive compared to charity shops. A very pleasant town.

After lunch, up to Peter Wright's place north of Presteigne, with not too much trouble with narrow roads. Arrived about 4:00, then pleasant afternoon and evening discussing the state of the world and the FIA with Peter. Spent the night in the van.

### **Thursday 22 September**

Peter left early, so we couldn't get into the house to pick up the glasses that I had left on the sideboard. Arranged to pick them up on Saturday afternoon.

Drove down to Katie's home, arriving afternoon, good reunion and telling of travellers' tales.

### **Friday 23 September**

Drove into Hereford to change Northern Irish banknotes into English sterling, using Katie's access to a Lloyds bank account. Visited Oxfam charity shop specialising in books, and made some good purchases. We hope! Back for lunch and quiet afternoon. Staying dry, although cool, and Norma caught up with a big load of washing.

### **Saturday 24 September**

Out to lunch with Katie at the Riverside Inn at Aymestrey, east of Presteigne. Really very good meal at an attractive pub in a lovely location. After that, over to the hillside off-grid home of Peter Wright and Dorothy McGuire, to pick up the glasses I left there after dinner a few nights ago. They took us round their very smart new rental cottage, very impressive and also off grid of course.

### **Sunday 25 September**

Left Katie about 10:30 and drove down to the farm – generally fine conditions with scattered showers. All well there.

### **Monday 26 September**

Very cold overnight – definitely time to be flying home! Showers on and off all day, packing a few belongings for the flight.

The van mileage was a total of 67,748; meaning that we travelled 2,202 miles, or 3,523 kilometres this trip.

This was a relatively short tour by our standards. We did not travel so far because we had more or less decided that this would be the last such Eurotour and we would simply sell the van on its completion. But even before we left Australia we had come to the view that we were not yet ready to step away from our mobile holiday home, in which we could enjoy summer after summer in some of the most beautiful and interesting parts of the world. So we tucked the van away in its locked-up barn for yet another winter.

Although shorter than usual, this trip had some special treats. Our time in Edinburgh, taking in so much of the Festival, was truly unforgettable – talk about total immersion! In Ireland we found a lovely country, shrugging off its mostly tragic history, largely setting aside the evils that have been done to its people, and, like nations in Eastern Europe that we have explored, confidently facing a future that it now shapes for itself. The worldwide Irish diaspora, of which Michael's forebears were a tiny part, can be proud of what the country they left has become.

