

*Cumann Gaelach na Ginéimhe*  
**Geneva Irish Association**

Association Irlandaise de Genève

**Nuachtlitir / Newsletter**

August-September 2004



**GIA Committee Members**

Finola Keating  
(President)  
Tel: 022-7369955

Brian Wall  
(Vice-President)  
Tel: 079-2518005

Brian Elliott  
(Treasurer)  
Tel: 022-3451635

Dee Windsor  
(Secretary)  
Tel: 022-7398454

Lorraine Maire  
(Committee Member)  
Tel: 022-7364336

Donal O'Neill  
(Committee Member)  
Tel: 079-6322585

Brian Cahalane  
(Committee Member)

*C'mon ye Boys in Green — 8 September!* 

It is with great delight that we can tell you all that the Swiss Football Association has very kindly allocated **50** tickets to the GIA for the upcoming world cup qualifier between Ireland and Switzerland. The match will take place in Basel on Wednesday, 8 September 2004.


**Fully paid-up GIA members** interested in obtaining tickets will be given top priority. You can secure your tickets by calling 022-7398454 or email ([geneva.irish@ireland.com](mailto:geneva.irish@ireland.com)).

But you had better be quick! Tickets are being sold on a "first come, first served" basis and cost CHF 40 each which **must** be paid for in advance by 1 September. The lucky few to get one will have to make their own transport arrangements to and from Basel (a suggestion here would be to "car pool").

The GIA takes this opportunity to wish Brian Kerr and all the lads on the Republic of Ireland squad the best of luck!

**Quick Reminder of Upcoming Events:**

- **Ireland vs. Switzerland**  
Basel, 8 September
- **Golf Outing**  
St. Jean de Gonville golf club, 19 September
- **Christmas Ceili**  
Salle Communal Cologny, 4 December  
(*watch this space for further update*)
- **Irish Night**  
Venue and date to be determined (*watch this space for further update*)

*Golf Outing — 19 September* 

This year's GIA Golf Outing will take place at the St. Jean de Gonville golf club (tel: +33 450 564 092) on Sunday, 19 September.

The club itself boasts 18 holes, 4797m<sup>2</sup>, par 66, 20-bay driving range, including 6 covered.

Prices are as follows:

**GIA fully paid-up Members:**

Euro 50 (golf and lunch)

**Non-Members:**

Euro 60 (golf and lunch)

For those who are interested in attending **lunch only**, the price is Euro 25 per person (Members and non-Members).

Please note that places are limited. Reservations for lunch and golf must be made in advance by contacting either 022 7843493 or 022 7574866.

NB: Please note that it is most important that you bring exact money **in Euros** on the day.



## *Bloomsday — 16 June*

The GIA celebrated the 100th anniversary of Bloomsday this year at the ICRC with a fantastic turn out of members. Vice-President, Brian Wall, welcomed everyone to the celebration and it wasn't too long before we were feasting on the delicious Irish stew that Chef (Jacques Wiesner) had expertly prepared. Several readings from Joyce were performed much to the delight and entertainment of those present. In this respect, many thanks goes to Lem Baquet (the Judge), Sarah Browne (Ulysses), Paul Conneally (Grace), and Michael O'Callaghan (Joyce in Geneva). Brian Tisdall took us back in time to 16 June 1904 by reading for us the front page of "The Dublin Evening Telegraph." When lunch was over, Jacques and his lovely wife were presented with a bouquet of flowers in appreciation of all the preparation and hard work they had put into making the day the success that it was. Finally, congratulations to Paul Conneally, who won the Bloomsday competition featured in our last newsletter. The Joycean work from which the quote was taken was "*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*".



## *Annual Summer Bar-B-Q — 11 July*

Once again the Annual Summer Barbeque was held at the Parc du Jonc, Grand-Sacconex. A good turn out of members and non-members made the day a great success. The weather was in our favour - not too hot but dry at least!

The football match took place enthusiastically against Bosnia this year. The Bosnians entered into the spirit of things and took the cup, i.e. the bottle of bubbly. The tug o' war was fought bravely and the egg and spoon race enjoyed by many. The day was finished off with a sing-song with guitar players Brian Wall and Finola Keating. Many thanks to Albert Zanartu who manned the fires throughout and to Donal O'Neill who provided a grand array of cool drinks presented on a bed of ice!

## *Pierce o'Mahony of Kerry—An Irishman in Bulgaria*

*(piece submitted to the GIA Newsletter by Ita Marguet)*

Stories about the Irish diaspora abound as do many of the legendary and heroic deeds and legacy left by Ireland's men and women whether at home or abroad. The tale of 'The O'Mahony of Kerry', Ireland's forgotten link with Bulgaria, has been revived in a recent ceremony when we learn from the press that a public square in the capital Sofia was named after him. It is unclear what took Pierce O'Mahony (1850-1930) to Bulgaria in the early years of the last century but he is remembered for establishing St. Patrick's Orphanage for boys in Sofia in 1904 that closed in 1915. There is a street Piers O'Mahoni in Sofia, Bulgaria.

### **The book, the man and the orphanage**

Maria Spassova and Seamus Shortall are collaborators of the book *Pierce O'Mahony - an Irishman in Bulgaria*. Shortall relates while on a skiing trip in Bulgaria that Bulgarian friends asked what he knew about 'The O'Mahoni', the great Irish benefactor of Bulgaria at the turn of the century. He had never heard of the man and suggested he may be British or Irish-American. Some time later, to prepare the book he was asked to research in Ireland. Within minutes at the National Archives, he found an entry in the probate register under "*Pierce Charles de Lacy O'Mahony, The O'Mahony of Kerry*". Subsequent research was made possible through the National Library and the personal papers of the many people whose lives he touched.

Born in 1850 to a wealthy, landowner barrister in Kilmorna in County Kerry, Pierce O'Mahony inherited the liberal views of his grandfather, who was Daniel O'Connell's solicitor and also a great love of botany. His first public office was an Assistant Land Commissioner. In 1886 he was elected MP for North Meath as a member of Parnell's Irish Party. He supported Charles Stewart Parnell (1846-1891) during 'The Split' and paid for this in 1892, losing his seat to Michael Davitt (1846-1906), agrarian radical, journalist who was to become 'father of the Land League'

It was in December 1903 that Pierce and his second wife, Alice Jane, went to Bulgaria with the intention of setting up an orphanage for the refugee orphans of the Saint Ilynden's Day uprising against the Turks that took place on 2 August of that year. It

lasted for three months, left 5,000 dead and 30,000 refugees in Bulgaria. There are pictures from a Bulgarian newspaper article in 1903 describing Pierce and Alice's arrival in Bulgaria on a humanitarian mission. O'Mahony seemed to have carefully planned the exercise as he first visited the head of the Bulgarian Orthodox church in Constantinople to gain support and then shortly afterwards issued a statute for the orphanage, in Bulgarian and French, setting out the way in which it would be run and appointing leading social, political and religious figures in Bulgaria to run it. He personally visited the distressed parts of Bulgaria to select the candidates who would be housed and educated in the orphanage. In 1905 the Bulgarian, Boris Mandushev, wrote a book describing the expedition.

The orphanage was opened on 30 March 1904. Ferdinand I of Bulgaria, that had once been a great empire, was represented by his secretary, Dubrovitch, who brought a proclamation of support. From representations made by Pierce to Ferdinand, it is clear that he took a direct interest in the welfare of the boys and indeed, for many years afterwards, the orphans adopted the name 'Mahoni' to honour him. At least four of the brightest orphans were brought to Ireland to further their education. One completed agriculture at Albert College in Dublin; his descendants have a farm in Wicklow. Another did medicine in Trinity and had a very successful career around the world before returning to Bulgaria to live out his last days. In 1987, this orphan, Atanas Blagoev Filipov, was quoted in a Bulgarian newspaper as saying of O'Mahony: *'We considered him as our father'*.

### **Ireland and Bulgaria**

In 1907, the Irish Crown Jewels disappeared from the Genealogical Office in Dublin Castle. Pierce's half-brother, Sir Arthur Vicars, was Ulster King at Arms and in charge of the jewels. The jewels were never recovered and Vicars was accused of negligence. Pierce defended him by writing to the government and arguing that Vicars had never been paid to protect the jewels.

(Cont.)

In 1911, Pierce sponsored a botanical expedition, which included Charles Frederick Ball, Assistant Keeper of the Royal Botanical Gardens in Glasnevin. An account of this was published in the journal of the Royal Horticultural Society.

It is not clear when Pierce decided to finish his activities in Bulgaria. From a letter amongst John Redmond's papers in the National Manuscripts collection, it is thought that he took a specific number of orphans, 30, in 1904 and pledged to educate them so, to quote him, 'they might be a credit to their country'. In 1915 he received the 'Order of Civil Merit' from his friend, Ferdinand I, Czar of Bulgaria, then a member of the Axis Powers. Shortly thereafter it is said he had a strong disagreement with Ferdinand concerning Bulgaria's siding with Germany in the Great War and returned to Ireland.

On his return, Pierce worked with John Redmond to recruit soldiers to fight for the Allied Powers. Correspondence dated 24 July 1915 from Grangecon, Co. Wicklow, on Ireland and Recruiting appeared in the Freeman's Journal of 31 July 1915 as a Letter from The O'Mahony. It starts ... **Lord Kitchener has told us he requires more men and still more men. We Irish Nationalists realise that liberty, civilisation, nationality, and everything which we Irishmen hold dear are at stake in this war. We are to do our utmost under the leadership of Mr. John Redmond to support the Empire in this hour of trial...** A recruiting postcard dated 1915 shows a slim and neatly bearded O'Mahony in light beige uniform. At the bottom is written...Our new born liberty, the friendship and trust of the British democracy, our homes, our families, all of which we Irishmen hold dear are at stake in the issue of this war. It is the privilege of young men to risk their lives that Ireland may live, and that the freedom of small Nations may be won, protected and secured. A side note adds that ironically "the reference to the winning of freedom of small nations...did not include our own small nation."

In 1920 he was awarded the Commander of Order of British Empire (CBE) for his work in recruitment but he declined to accept it in protest at British policy.

Even though he was no longer in Bulgaria, Pierce retained affection for the country. In 1915 he published a series of letters concerning super-power policy in the Balkans, many of the borders and states mentioned being still relevant today. After the war he argued that Bulgaria should be spared reparations. In the context of the troubled Balkans, there is an informative brief historical outline of Bulgaria (1908 Declaration of Bulgaria's Independence) that modified the harmful clauses of the Treaty of Berlin (1878)

As second last of 'The O'Mahony of Kerry', Pierce O'Mahony resided at Grangecon Demesne, Co. Wicklow. He is said to have given up smoking as it stained his beard and that he used to have pipers pipe him into the Catholic Church at Grangecon. Shortly before he died there is a photograph of him wearing a hat and some special clothing. He is sporting a thick, long white beard and is accompanied by a large hirsute dog that may be a wolfhound. In his seventies he spent much time cultivating exotic plants at his farm in Coolbalintaggert in Wicklow and having converted from Church of Ireland to Bulgarian Orthodox, died a Roman Catholic in October, 1930.

### **Acknowledgements**

Acknowledgements are given for all sources and material used in the preparation of this article, particularly those of Seamus Shortall and the O Mahony Society. The book, *Pierce O'Mahony, an Irishman in Bulgaria*, is published by Acsior Networking Systems of Bulgaria. At the 2002 O Mahony Society gathering, Seamus Shortall presented the first copy of the book to the Taoiseach of the Society, Dermot Mahony.

### **READERS CORNER**

**If you would like to contribute  
articles or news to our Newsletter, please feel free to do so by contacting us at:  
[geneva.irish@ireland.com](mailto:geneva.irish@ireland.com)**