

English was also supported because people wanted to read and write it

Ballingeary: The first of the Irish summer colleges

By Tim Sheehan

THE continuing survival of the Irish language is nothing short of a miracle when one looks at the obstacles it has overcome in the past 150 years. Yet, very little has been written about those obstacles, and the names of the champions in those encounters are not known.

Everyone is familiar with Dr Douglas Hyde, but there were others equally dedicated to the cause. One of the most was Kerry born Diarmuid Ó Foghluda, who used the pen name Feargus Finnbeheil.

The battle for the survival of the Irish language began in the North of Ireland, in the Glens of Antrim. Eoin MacNeill was born into a bi-lingual family in a district where Irish was used in conversation. Eoin's father, Archibald, was native Irish and his mother Rosetta MacAuley, was of Norse/Gaelic stock, originally from the Western Islands of Scotland. At that time there was a movement known as the Gaelic Union which attracted the attention of young MacNeill, but only less than a dozen of its leaders were Irish speakers.

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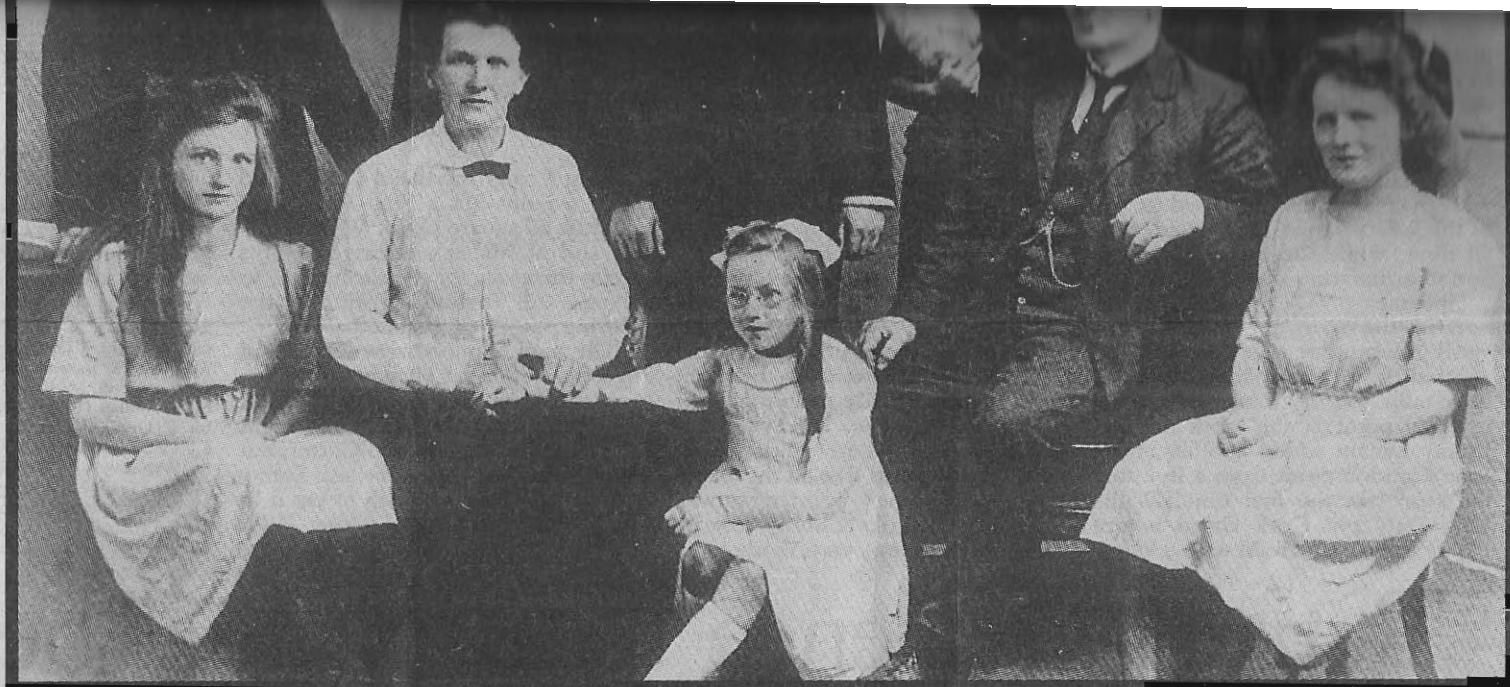
In July of the following year an interested group of literary men met at a Martin Kelly's home in Lower Sackville Street, for the sole purpose of safeguarding Irish as the spoken language of the country. The offshoot of the meeting was the formation of the Gaelic League, mastheaded Conradh na Gaelige. Eoin MacNeill was appointed secretary and Douglas Hyde was one of the others present.

Prior to the formation of the Gaelic League, a boy, the eldest of a family of nine was born in the townland of Gurtnahula, Keel, Castlemaine, Co Kerry, who was destined to be one of the most prominent in the revival of Irish. He was christened Diarmuid, son of Tadhg Darby Ó Foghluda and Catherine Fitzgerald.

Motivation for the use of English was supported by parents fascinated to see their offspring reading and writing in English. Many of them had imbibed the advice given earlier by Daniel O'Connell to acquire English for negotiating purposes with landlords and their agents, and for other transactions with officialdom.

Consequently, people began to see that the language in which they and their forefathers were brought up was insular and backward. They wanted the outlook changed for their children's opportunities.

Foghluda received his early education in Fybbough, one of four national schools in the parish of Castlemaine. All subjects, with the exception of rudimentary Latin and Greek, were taught in English. Being an above average scholar, he was offered a monitorship in another school in the parish on finishing in Fybbough. Realising that the British Government paid police and civil servants a higher rate of pay, he sat for and passed an exam for the Civil Service and was at first posted to Belfast to the Customs and Excise Department, before being transferred



Diarmuid Ó Foghluda, second from right, sitting, with his family. He was the first headmaster at Ballingearry Irish summer college.

to England, Waterford, and Galway, and back again to Belfast.

At that time the Gaelic League had attracted the interest and goodwill of influential and titled Northern Protestants who wished to establish a language identity separate from English, Scotch and Manx. They saw possibilities in embracing the ideals of the Gaelic League.

ÓFOGHLUDA was known as Dermot Foley in the Civil Service, as he could not use the Irish form of his name. In Belfast, where he lived with his wife and two young sons, the language in the home was Irish, the only language his two sons, Tadhg and Sean, knew until they started school.

Acknowledging the mood of acceptance for the Irish language, Ó Foghluda threw himself head over heels into the revival movement, giving nightly lessons in rented rooms in the city, and writing profusely under the pen name, Feargus Finnbheil, which popularised his name throughout the country.

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professions, principally teaching. Thus the idea of summer colleges, to be held during the holidays. Several districts throughout the country were considered and eventually, Iveleary, one of the old 23 baronies of Cork was selected on the grounds that this old bastion of Gaeldom was an ideal location for the venture.

A meeting of the top personalities in the Gaelic League took place under the chairmanship of Rev Fr Hurley PP. Those in attendance included: Rev Fr Augustine OSFC, Rev Fr O'Driscoll CC, Tadhg O'Scananail, Liam De Roiste, and a person named N Murphy. Correspondence was read from Sean Ó Caoimh, P O' Daly, Rev Fr Murphy, Enniscorthy, Co Wexford; Rev Dean Keller and Pat O'Shea, NT. Applications for the Principalship of this first venture in Irish summer colleges were received from Rev Dr Daly, Tomás Breatnach, and

Diarmuid Ó Foghluda. On the proposition of Rev Fr Augustine, Diarmuid Ó Foghluda was unanimously appointed first headmaster of the first of the Irish summer colleges, located in Ballingearry in 1904 at a salary of £20 for the month of July, a post he filled with distinction in the ensuing years, before accepting a similar post in Ring, Co Waterford. His work in Ballingearry was supervising and correcting the essays and other writing of students who wished to become national teachers.

During that period of his life, Dermot Foley left Belfast on transfer to Limerick where he lived the rest of his life in active promotion of the Irish language. He continued to write almost up to his death in 1934 when the ablest and most dedicated of the revivalist movement passed away, leaving to posterity a treasured legacy hoped for in the minds of those who gave birth to the Gaelic League in 1893.

Ballingearry Irish summer college has flourished continuously since its initial opening in 1904, attracting a full quota of students annually from several parts of the country. The Irish taught there is that of An tAthair Peadar Ó Laoghaire, Canon Maol, Feargus Finnbhéal, Grúaghach and Tobair, Padraig Ó Duninnín, Seandún and other fluent and idiomatic writers of Irish.