



written by Austin Dunphy

## Memories of a Much-Admired Friend

Reading through many of the contributions to the Haughey website, brings forcibly to mind the enormity of Charles J. Haughey's contribution to so many aspects of Irish life. His rise through the ranks of politics from city councillor in the Dublin Corporation to TD and on through various ministries to Taoiseach was achieved by hard work, dedication and determination, and which, over many years resulted in the introduction of some of the most enlightened legislation since the founding of the State. These covered such diverse areas as the creation of the NTMA and the IFSC, to making Irish territorial waters a protected zone for whales and dolphins (as far as I am aware the only country in the world to do so) to the re-opening



of the Shannon - Erne Waterway which brought the north and south of Ireland a little closer together, at least physically. Capital punishment was removed from our penal code while he served as Minister for Justice, and on to simple human matters like the introduction of free travel and television for the elderly. He once told me that on his appointment as Minister for Justice he was being conducted through Mountjoy Prison which included a visit to the execution chamber. He told the Governor who was conducting him around, "while I am Minister this will never be used".

His impact on the natural world, on the environment, and on archaeology have been well covered by David Cabot and George Eogan, two of my former colleagues on the National Heritage Council, and need little further comment by me, but it was to further encourage interest and to help in the implementation of a policy of the conservation of our natural and man-made heritage that CJ decided to establish The National Heritage Council and to endow it with a modest budget to part fund worthy projects, and which, during its seven years of life, did some good work and set the scene for the present Heritage Council.

When it was announced that it was proposed to establish a Heritage Council, the Taoiseach's office was besieged with requests from many good, long established and sound conservation bodies each requesting that they should be represented on this

new Council. CJ realised that these, quite naturally, would be lobbying groups, each pushing their own particular agenda, and might well end up as a sort of a "heritage battleground". He had other ideas, his view was that the Council should be a free, independent body, beholden to nobody, representing no one and capable of judging each of the projects submitted to it on its merits. He arranged for the Council to be part of the Department of the Taoiseach and therefore independent of all other departments and, consequently, not subject to political interference from any quarter. He, personally, never interfered in the decisions of the Council. I remember once telling him that the Council had approved a grant for the restoration of the small mediaeval baptistery in the grounds of St. Doulough's Church in Kinsealy, not far from his home Abbeville, and one of his favourite buildings (he had the Nathaniel Hone's painting of it in his Taoiseach's office). He just said, "I had hoped you would do that", but he never asked for it or interfered in any way.

The fourteen members he had very carefully chosen as Council Members covered all aspects of our heritage from natural to man-made, and most of them were renowned specialists in their respective fields and served under the able and very relaxed chairmanship of his old friend, (and later mine), the late Lord Killanin. This was a brilliant choice, (typical of CJ), a highly respected, non-political, figure of world renown. He was elected President of the International Olympic Committee, and served from 1972 to 1980 (he was the first and, so far only Irishman to hold this most prestigious post). Sadly, the beginning of the presidency was marred by the dreadful massacre of eleven Israeli athletes by eight Palestinian terrorists during the 1972 summer Olympics in Munich, a world-shattering event which plunged him into international politics and international rivalry. Lord Killanin enjoyed the respect of all of the members of the Council, many of whom were international figures in their own right.

Members of the Council included two professors of archaeology, an architectural historian, a professor of marine biology, two wild life photographers and nature conservators of international recognition, a well-known journalist, a member of An Bord Pleanála, an architect and an Irish language scholar and many others, all giving their time free. This, in itself, was a tribute to CJ, it is doubtful if any other Taoiseach could have persuaded so many eminent people to give their time and services free for over seven years. All of the Council members were conscious of, and appreciative of, his great commitment to conservation. The staff allocated to the Council was minimal, consisting of a secretary and two assistants. No highly paid "advisors" were involved.

During the seven years of the National Heritage Council's existence, it was able to assist, encourage and help, to a greater or lesser extent, the protection of some large, important projects, and some smaller vernacular structures, country churches of the main Christian denominations, important houses and other worthwhile projects, but, perhaps even more important, the Council helped, not just with money, some small local initiatives by local groups who only needed encouragement and guidance, but little financial help. The National Heritage Council acted on behalf of the

Government on a few important occasions. One such occasion was accepting into State ownership arguably the most important 18th century country house in Ireland, Castletown, Co. Kildare, and, if I am not mistaken, also Doneraile Court and Fota House, both in Co. Cork.

CJ's contribution to my own speciality, historic architecture, was also considerable. What other Taoiseach would have had the courage to convert the redundant former Royal College of Science into the splendid Government Buildings we have today? During its design and construction, and especially during its furnishing and decoration, he was very much involved, insisting on the use of Irish materials (especially Irish timber, which he particularly loved) and employing Irish artists and craftsmen, whenever possible. The result is, to a very large extent, his creation.

During our National Heritage Council days, one of our objectives was to find new uses for old buildings. The theory was that there is little point in restoring large old buildings if a suitable use cannot be found for them. During the 1960's, I, while a civil service architect, worked on the restoration of the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, (the earliest classical building in Ireland, dating from the later 17th century). During that time one of our worries was what would happen to it when our restoration work was completed, what use could be found for such a building on the outskirts of the city. CJ, with his joint love of architecture and all forms of art, found the perfect answer, as the seat of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. To his great credit, he, like de Valera before him, retained the Royal title in the name. He had a good sense of history! Similarly, when the old Royal Barracks (later Collins Barracks) became surplus to military requirements, it was converted to an extension of the National Museum. Two brilliant new uses for important historic buildings.

He took great pride in the early history of Ireland. I remember him flying the French President Mitterrand by helicopter over the 5,000 year old passage tombs of Newgrange and Knowth and explaining that these monuments were a thousand years older than the Pyramids of Egypt, and pointing out the astronomical sophistication of the builders of Newgrange in being able to line up the Winter Solstice sun with the tomb passage so that the sun's beam strikes the designated spot on the decorative stone at the end of the long central passage. He continued the flight on to the recently discovered Céide Fields, also dating back to 3,000 BC, showing one of the earliest examples of land division.

Charles Haughey was a leader of exceptional ability, he worked hard and expected those who worked with him and for him to do the same, he did not suffer fools gladly and, I heard, first hand, from some who incurred his wrath, that he could, on occasion, be pretty rough. However, in most cases, he led and inspired rather than drove. He had an open mind and was always prepared to listen to people he respected and trusted who were encouraged to put forward ideas, which he would study carefully and either reject as inappropriate, or in some cases give enthusiastic support. The highly successful IFSC and the NTMA are the results of his cultivation of seeds planted in his mind.

Not being a political animal or a member of any political party, I was not involved in any of these great projects, I was simply a friend and admirer. I was fascinated by his attention to the minutest detail of a project in which he involved himself. When Ireland hosted the Presidency of Europe, he supervised every detail of the various functions the state was arranging to entertain the visiting heads of state and government, down to the china menu holders! Nothing was too small for his attention.

There is no doubt that the quotation from Othello CJ used in his retiring speech was most appropriate, "I have done the state some service, they know it, enough of that". I could add another quotation, this one from a fellow architect, Sir Christopher Wren, when asked about his work, he said simply, "Look around you".