



Billy Vincent, Monaco, October 2006

Billy A TRIBUTE TO
AWB VINCENT

23 June 2007

EDITED BY MAURICE HAYES



THE IRELAND FUNDS

*In appreciation of his support and friendship
and with love and affection, this book, in tribute to Billy Vincent,
has been paid for by the staff of The Ireland Funds*

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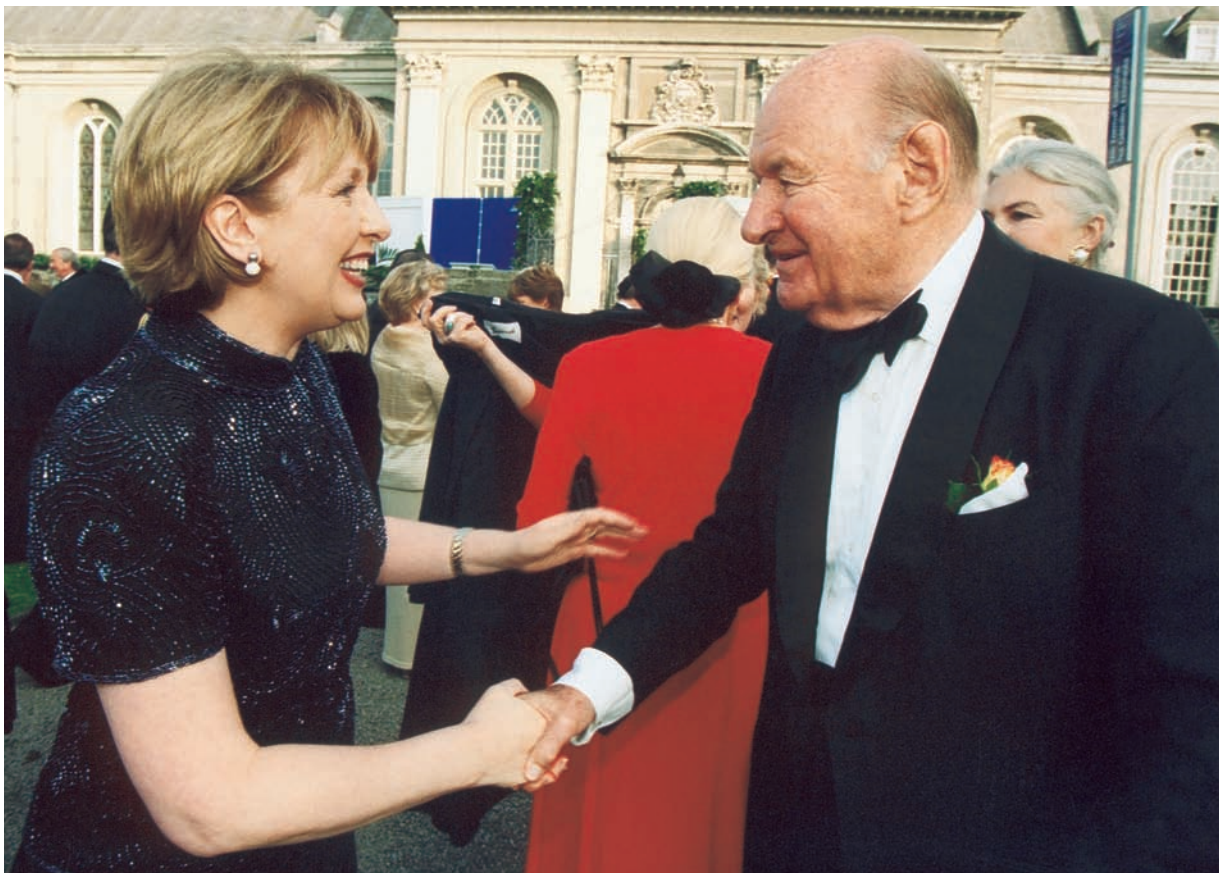
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President Mary McAleese with Billy at The Ireland Funds' Conference, Dublin, June 2002

MARY McALEESE

President of Ireland

Message from President Mary McAleese

It gives me great pleasure to express my warmest regards to Arthur William Bourn Vincent as he is acclaimed by so many friends and admirers from Ireland, Europe and the United States.

The links across the ocean between Ireland and the USA have never been stronger, and there is no one who better embodies those deep bonds of friendship and co-operation, in so many spheres of life, than the great Billy Vincent.

But that is only to scratch the surface. Billy's education in Britain, and his valiant service during the Second World War, give him a matchless place from which to understand and empathise with the achievement of peace in Northern Ireland, and the creation of a new relationship of friendship and co-operation between Britain and Ireland, brought about by the Good Friday Agreement.

Billy's devotion to Ireland is not a recent development, but is rooted in the benevolence and philanthropic heritage of his parents and grandparents, as the people of Kerry can well testify. Since 1972, when he became a Director of the American Irish Foundation, and through a sequence of responsibilities too many to name—which would have swamped a lesser person—Billy has been a prime mover in almost every area of philanthropy on the island of Ireland.

Billy's work for the Ireland Fund of Monaco as founder, and as President until 2005; his central role in the establishment of the Ireland Funds of France and

Germany; and his stature as Commander of the Order of Saint Charles which was conferred on him by the Prince of Monaco, make Billy as good an European as they come. The many academic honours he has received are an acknowledgment of Billy's recognition of the importance of education, and of his immense work in furthering education.

As an entrepreneur, Billy displayed outstanding leadership, which he brought to all the enterprises he did so much to build up; his exceptional ability to give drive and direction to an organisation played a significant role in the foundation and consolidation of the Ireland Funds in both America and in Europe. The American Ireland Fund, and, very significantly, the Ireland Fund of Monaco, have provided an important focus on support for peace, culture and charity across Ireland. Their contribution to Ireland in these fields, through their members and supporters, is greatly valued. I am profoundly grateful for their assistance to date and I look forward to a further deepening and strengthening of this bond in the years ahead. I am keenly aware of the extent to which Billy Vincent's hand was on the tiller of both organisations. He has made a great contribution and a real difference to the lives of so many ordinary people in Ireland, North and South.

As a member of the Irish community in the USA, Billy provided leadership in many areas of society and was a source of support and inspiration to all of us on the island of Ireland. In fact, with his American, British and European backgrounds, Billy Vincent can be said to be the perfect Irishman, truly part of the global Irish family, and we are all very proud of him.

As Ireland has started to come into its own, so too the American Ireland Fund has gone from strength to strength. This compendium of recollections acknowledges the tremendous contributions of a great man, Billy Vincent, and celebrates his dedication and generosity, which have enabled the American Ireland Fund to make such a difference. The ongoing work of the Funds is immensely valuable as we consolidate the gains that have been made in building peace and reconciliation and in unleashing the full creativity of the Irish people. We know that Billy, and the many people he has inspired with his vision of a better Ireland, will stay the course and continue their commitment to make us the best that we can be.

ALBERT II

Sovereign Prince of Monaco

Tribute by His Serene Highness Prince Albert II

It is my great pleasure to express my gratitude to AWB Vincent who has done so much to enhance relations between Ireland and the Principality. He founded the Ireland Fund of Monaco which created a Literary Prize and a Humanitarian Award in the name of my Mother—Princess Grace. In addition to setting-up an annual Writer and Academic in Residence program at the Princess Grace Irish Library, thus enhancing its prestige and excellence, he also created equestrian exchanges between Ireland and Monaco. His generosity, graciousness and humanity are examples to all. It is for these qualities that he was made Commander of the Order of Saint Charles in 2004, by my late Father, Prince Rainier.

I am delighted to add my appreciation of this distinguished Irishman and friend of Monaco.

LORETTA BRENNAN GLUCKSMAN

Chairman, The American Ireland Fund

Foreword

This slim volume is an offering from the fellowship of the Ireland Funds across the world, given in affection and respect to our dear and much-beloved Billy Vincent, in recognition of his contribution over more than three decades to the advancement of peace, culture and charity in Ireland, his critical contribution to the growth and success of the Funds, his boundless generosity, his willingness to engage in all our activities, his wit, his wisdom and his boundless energy in the twin causes of philanthropy and Ireland.

We also recognise the young soldier, the successful businessman, the guardian of a noble heritage in Ireland and the United States, who could rub shoulders with the great and never lose the common touch.

Above all, we recognise and salute, and thank God for the one and only Billy.

To this end a representative group of his friends from all walks in life, from within the Funds and more widely, have responded to contribute their impressions of an unforgettable man.

I am grateful to those who have done so, so stylishly, in some cases so simply, but in all cases with affection and admiration.

Maurice Hayes graciously took on the task of pulling the pieces together and arranging them for publication and for that, and for so much more, we are grateful.



Senator Maurice Hayes, Senator Paul Coughlan, An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD with Billy, Dublin, March 2005

SENATOR MAURICE HAYES

Board Director, The Ireland Funds

Editorial Note

It would be pompous to describe what I had to do with this book as editing. For one thing, the material simply poured in; for another, the contributors were each presenting a very personal impression of a very singular man. It would have been an abuse of power, as well as a significant distortion of the overall picture, to try to press them all into a common mould or a single simple stereotype.

My work, therefore, was confined to minor pruning to ensure a reasonable balance between the offerings, and to avoid duplication through the repetition of sometimes second-hand anecdotes.

What has resulted is a unique, multi-faceted image of Billy Vincent, built up from a series of individual snapshots, each presenting a view of the man, his persona and activities, at different stages of his life, from those who knew him as a friend, a family man, a brave soldier, a successful entrepreneur and businessman, as a guardian of his heritage, as a child of the Big House, as a world traveller, as a philanthropist, a person interested in people for their own sakes, a citizen of the world, and as a great human being.

There are parts of the story that could only be told by Billy himself, particularly relating to his early childhood and youth. For these I have drawn on tapes of conversations with him in Monaco and Dublin in 2004, and which, as

Billy on Billy, form the core of the book. These have been edited, only lightly, in order to preserve the authentic voice, to convey the enormous range of his interests, his inquiring and retentive mind, his prodigious memory and powers of recall, his sharp and shrewd judgements on men and matters, his knowledge of affairs, his honesty, his humanity, his deep compassion and his general good humour. I hope I have preserved most of the flavour of what were enthralling conversations, ranging from childhood memories to the great sweep of wartime strategy and the ebb and flow of battle. I hope too that readers can still catch the characteristic bark—and the chuckle that invariably follows it.

I wish to thank all those who contributed for their co-operation, Kieran McLoughlin for driving the process, Nicki Lynch for tirelessly sourcing material and collating drafts, Mark Loughran for an elegantly chaste design, and all those who provided photographs or illustrations.

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The Ireland Funds would like to thank those who submitted contributions to this tribute and for those who gave their kind permission to reproduce photographs in this book.

Her Grace, Sacha Duchess of Abercorn
Kingsley Aikins
His Serene Highness Prince Albert II
Antoine Banet Rivet
Loretta Brennan Glucksman
Lord Alex Burgh
Maurice Coffey
Bill Cullen
Charles U Daly
Maryon Davies Lewis
Michael Fitzgerald
Virginia Gallico
Senator Maurice Hayes
Seamus Heaney
Tom Jordan
Sir John Leslie
Reverend Brian Loughheed

Management and Staff at
Muckcross House
President Mary McAleese
Professor David McConnell
Virginia, Madam McGillicuddy
Macinnes Photography
Kieran McLoughlin
Aengus McMahon
Anne and Bill McNally
Seng Merrill
Professor Eunan O'Halpin
Sir Anthony O'Reilly
Dan Rooney
Lieutenant Colonel (Retired)
Mark RH Scott
Victoria & Albert Museum, London



SIR ANTHONY O'REILLY

Worldwide Chairman, The Ireland Funds

The Goodest Curmudgeon that Ever Was

Billy Vincent is a curmudgeon but even when he is growling at you, he is so loveable and amusing that you simply bask in his commentary.

To me, to Dan Rooney and to all of those involved in bringing The Ireland Fund together with The American Irish Foundation on St Patrick's Day in 1987, our memories go back to that almost unique Irish situation in which two Irish organisations became one—this contrary to the normal Celtic situation, where one Irish organisation becomes two...or three...or four. In the delicate negotiations that surrounded the formation of the new entity, it was the particular trust of Billy Vincent and Dan Rooney that made it all possible.

Billy has had a twinkle in his eye for all of his 88 years, and his life story would make an excellent film. In his childhood, the calendar of the year included the annual trip from San Francisco by train across America, the boat to Ireland, the summers in Kerry at Muckross House, which he later gave to the nation, and his days at Cambridge. Most important of all is the event which uniquely marks men of his generation—those that fought in World War II.

Billy fought for the Inniskilling Fusiliers in that most difficult theatre of operations, the Italian Campaign. He received so many bullet wounds that, late at night, he is said to rattle. In the History of the Inniskilling Fusiliers, there is a telling paragraph about Captain Vincent. An aide to the commanding general at

*Facing page, Billy with
Sir Anthony O'Reilly,
The Ireland Funds'
Conference, June 2006*

the Front Line was commenting on the heavy German fire incoming from well dug-in German forces ahead of them. On the right, there is a brigade of Italian mortar men sending in sporadic fire. The news seems universally bleak until the aide brightens up and says ‘However, sir, I have one piece of good news for you. Tonight at the Mess Dinner, Captain Vincent is in charge of the wine.’

The battles in Italy at Monte Cassino and Anzio and Salerno and right to the very end against Kesselring were to prove the most expensive in lives lost in World War II on the Western Front.

When they talk about democracy and courage and all that you think is right in an increasingly disjointed world, people should reflect on the life of someone like Billy Vincent.

This gave him particular authority to talk about and to comment on Northern Ireland and the achievements of The Ireland Funds there. He has contributed in a very significant way to the events that have brought our two tribes together.

Twenty years ago, he had to speak at Hillsborough in front of the Governor General and the major ministerial officers of Northern Ireland. I have never forgotten his opening words: ‘I regret to say that I do not think anything has changed up here in the last 25 years.’ It was so splendidly accurate, and yet everyone laughed heartily.

My eldest daughter, Susan—as I always say, ‘my favourite child’ to the dismay of her brothers and sisters—makes an biennial trip to Monte Carlo to speak for Billy and to Billy at the Ireland Fund of Monaco ball that is held there. It is a trip she looks forward to with anticipation that seems to combine everything that The Ireland Fund is about—fun, a cause, interesting people, a glamorous setting and a sense of purpose out of which only good can come.

Thank you, Billy Vincent, for being the goodest curmudgeon that ever was.

“When they talk about democracy and courage and all that you think is right in an increasingly disjointed world, people should reflect on the life of someone like Billy Vincent.”

LORETTA BRENNAN GLUCKSMAN

Chairman, The American Ireland Fund

An Extraordinary Friend

In the summer of 1997, Lew and I were on one of our favorite rambles around Ireland—in Kerry. Billy and Elisabeth were in their magical cottage overlooking the lakes and invited us to visit. Billy had extended another invitation, one not easily given or received, to tour Muckcross with him. On the appointed morning, we met in Killarney town. Billy emerged from an enormous Rolls Royce, in scale roughly akin to a Sherman tank, and in his usual preemptory style told us to follow him. We were in our Toyota Camry and were a bit challenged but managed to stay close. We arrived at the entrance to Muckcross House to find the road closed. Billy jumped out of the Rolls, shouting to some unseen person to open it immediately. When no one appeared, he jumped back into his tank, told us to wait and dashed off, literally in a cloud of dust. After some time he reappeared, again jumped out of his tank, advanced upon the offending barriers with key in hand and, with just a slight flourish, unlocked them.

Then began a most mesmerizing experience. Billy guided us through his childhood home with a generosity of spirit and humour that is too rare. He talked of the minutiae of family life, his memories of his nurses and the activities of the nursery, his parents and the feeling (quite accepted as normal) of isolation from them, the warmth and identity he felt for the surrounding community and, in



Loretta Brennan Glucksman with Billy, The Ireland Fund of Monaco Biennial Celebration, October 2006

general, his feeling for being rooted in this place. Both Lew and I felt it was the most intimate and generous gift we had ever received.

Perhaps to break the spell, Billy then insisted on taking us on a tour of the surrounding grounds. We three piled into the Rolls and set off on a most maniacal ride. The car was wider than the pathways by a good bit and Billy drove the way he lived, by sheer will and enthusiasm. Nothing would stand in his way nor did it for very long. We caromed up one hill and down another, frightening pony traps and terrified walkers at every turn (ordinary motor cars are, you see, prohibited). All the while, Billy was blithely pointing out favorite locales and wonderful stories, while the car fairly guided itself in careening from one tree to the next. We came to a halt back at the house, suffused with gratitude for being alive and for the privilege of having this extraordinary friend.

HER GRACE, SACHA DUCHESS OF ABERCORN

*Founder of the Pushkin Prizes. Recipient of The Ireland Fund
of Monaco Princess Grace Humanitarian Award, 2006*

Billy Vincent and Monuments to the Soul's Magnificence

‘ Billy learned the
lesson this way: You
can transform poverty
into prosperity by
generous and creative
intervention at the
right moment. ’

Three symbolic events took place in 1919, the year Billy Vincent was born. The League of Nations, which tried to prevent war forever afterwards, was founded. Billy was born the year after the First World War ended and, in the aftermath of that scar left on our planet, he has worked for peace all his life. The second event was the splitting of the atom by Professor Ernest Rutherford in Manchester. This experiment finally proved that atoms were not the indivisible particles that everybody thought. You can crack any nut if you keep at it. Rutherford also realised the dream of his predecessors, the alchemists, transmuting the atoms of one element into another. Billy learned the lesson this way: You can transform poverty into prosperity by generous and creative intervention at the right moment. The third event was the first non-stop flight across the Atlantic by Alcock and Brown. In a Vickers Vimy biplane, British aviators Captain John Alcock and Arthur Whitten Brown flew from America to Europe and landed in a bog on the Irish coast at Clifden.

You can, of course, see how these three events heralded the arrival of Billy to our planet and gave us a hint about the long life of practical peacemaking, of atom-splitting alchemy, and of perpetual transatlantic crossings which helped to transform treacherous boglands into flowering herbaceous borders. Such was his flightpath. Of course, the hit song for that year 1919 was *Don't dilly-dally on the way*.

Billy Vincent has fulfilled all such predictions; in fact, he has outflown them all. He has promoted peace, prosperity and creativity all his life. He split the atom of jingoistic nationalism from his birth. His father was Irish and his mother American. He has visited or lived in most countries of the world. His wife, Elisabeth, whom he married in 1952, is French and an artist in her own right.

I first met him some years ago when he decided to come to Northern Ireland to find out for himself the viability of funding various enterprises. He had heard of the Pushkin Prize, as it then was, but he felt he needed to know about it 'first-hand'. He won us all over to his side from the first moment of meeting—his charm, his style, his wry wit, his curiosity, his incredible energy, are all legendary.

He has always had a great affinity with the North. When he left Cambridge University at the start of World War II, he enlisted as a Guardsman in the Irish Guards, and later was commissioned in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. Since then, he has done a great deal to help build bridges North–South. Today, as we benefit from a miraculous peace possibility in Ireland, a promise of unparalleled prosperity, and an unleashing of panoplies of creativity, we enter the dream world imagined by Billy and others when, on St Patrick's Day 1987, The Ireland Funds and the American Irish Foundation merged at a White House ceremony to form The American Ireland Fund and to become the world's largest private organisation funding constructive change in Ireland, both in Northern Ireland and in the Republic. Today they can all look back on their work and be proud.



William Butler Yeats

This story of Billy and so many monuments of the soul's magnificence would not be complete without the crowning symbolic anecdote. There was once upon a time a little boy in Ireland who lived in a beautiful house in Kerry. His father and grandfather eventually gave this house to the people of Ireland in 1933. It is now the Bourn Vincent Memorial Park. The estate gardens are known internationally, and the lakes and woodland are a botanical Mecca. One day, while the family were still living at Muckcross House, a famous poet and established magus came to visit and stayed the night in a room just below the room where the little boy was sleeping. By mistake, the little boy left the tap on in his bath and the water overflowed into the poet's room below. The poet awoke from the deluge and wrote one of the most evocative poems of the 20th century, '*Sailing to Byzantium*.' That poet was William Butler Yeats and the little boy was, of course, Arthur William Bourn Vincent who, since then, has constantly allowed the overflow of his generosity to speed us to the marble dancing-floors of our own particular Byzantium.

LORD ALEX BURGH

Grand Nephew to AWB Vincent

Uncle Billy

Billy Vincent. Where does one start?

When Billy receives our tribute, I know that he will grumble ‘What did you do that for?’ But no apologies Bill, this is as much for the benefit of your friends and family as it is for you.

I count myself fortunate to have known Billy all my life. He is my father’s mother’s brother and therefore my great uncle and my children’s great, great uncle. ‘Great’ is a word that fits perfectly. AWB is a great man in so many ways and to so many people. But then we all know that.

To my late father he was an immensely important anchor, especially in his early years. To the next generation, myself, Patrick, Rebecca and Nadja, he has always been someone who we can look to for counsel and advice. I sought such counsel when I was thinking about what to do post university. His advice was clear and logical. I, of course, completely ignored it, which with hindsight was not the most sensible decision to have taken.

When we were young, Billy, through our holidays in Kerry, introduced me and my brother Patrick to our Irish roots. This, I am pleased to say, included Guinness, racing, gambling, superb food, the ‘craic’ and lashings of humour. It was in Kerry (and later confirmed in San Francisco, Paris, the Bahamas, London, Las Vegas, Santa Fe, Lisbon and Monaco) that I discovered Billy’s great

sense of fun and what a damned good time you could have in his company. But I also discovered his sense of fair play, care for others and charity.

In a word, Bill loves life. And in return, Bill is loved by all who meet him. With his background and privileges he could have kept himself aloof and detached, but that's not Billy's way (nor is it the Irish way, as I have happily discovered over the years). His world knows no social class or national division. He is the finest example I know of what can best be described as a 'man of the world'.

Billy's childhood was divided between the family estates in California and Kerry, when the only way of getting from A to B was by train and transatlantic liner. He was educated in England and spent a gap year in Germany as Hitler and the Brown Shirts were exerting their iron grip. This was followed by Magdalene College, Cambridge, though his degree was cut short by the war. Billy then joined the Inniskilling Royal Fusiliers, with whom he saw action in the bloody Italian campaign, where he was wounded. After the war, a successful business career ensued—in helicopters, oil, chocolate, newspapers and, of course, philanthropy through The Ireland Funds. Billy has been awarded a Fellowship at Magdalene College, where he established The Parnell Chair; honorary degrees at various universities and, more recently, he was honoured at Trinity College Dublin for his support for Irish genetic research.

Others are better placed to elaborate on Billy's full and varied life, but some anecdotes the late Sir David Cole MC, Billy's friend and fellow Inniskilling officer, included in his gripping memoir, *Rough Road to Rome* describe some of the facets of Billy's character we love so much.

I can still see him, when we were on leave together in Tehran, emerging from the most prestigious night-club there, with a flower pot under each arm, to talk his way successfully in French into the waiting car of a bemedalled Persian General.

“In a word, Bill loves life. And in return, Bill is loved by all who meet him.”

A story I love and that shows how stubborn Billy can be is given by Sir David when *shortly after our arrival in Vibo Valentia, Monty (General Montgomery) set up his Advanced HQ there. The first of us to become aware of this was Willy Vincent, who had just parked his anti-tank guns in a particularly comfortable field whence an officious staff officer sought to eject him on the basis that the field was required for the Eighth Army advanced HQ. Willy, on the principle of 'finders keepers', stood his ground. Monty himself then chanced to appear and ruled that since Willy had been there first, he should stay. 'We' said Monty 'will find another field.'*

Bill is fun, funny and a joy to be with. He is a great man and a great uncle. We love him and life is richer for me, my family and thousands of others, thanks to this unique individual. Perhaps we should raise our glasses to my great grandparents, Arthur and Maude Vincent, who were the original designers.



Billy during a visit to Fettercairn Youth Project in 2002, one of the recipients of Ireland Funds' funding

DAN ROONEY

Co-Founder and Director, The American Ireland Fund

A Giant of a Man

‘Killarney is his home, and we feel the closeness of Billy’s charm when we return to Killarney.’

Billy Vincent has the qualities to which the Ireland Fund aspires as a special organisation caring for people—all people—of Ireland. When we merged the Ireland Fund with the American Irish Foundation, Billy kept the standards in place without compromise. There were a few disagreements, but we continually overcame major problems because Billy was there, willing to make sound, reasonable judgments. He has maintained that strength throughout and generated great enthusiasm for the Funds.

Killarney is his home, and we feel the closeness of Billy’s charm when we return to Killarney.

Good luck, Billy Vincent. You are a giant of a man!

God bless you.

Dan Rooney



His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco decorating AWB Vincent, Founder and President of The Ireland Fund of Monaco, as Commander of the Order of Saint Charles, Palais Princier Monaco, November 2004

MICHAEL FITZGERALD

President, The Ireland Fund of Monaco

Ageless Billy

Only someone with great self determination and commitment—or someone missing very big dollops of grey matter—would think to move to Monaco in their retirement years, decide to establish The Ireland Fund of Monaco (IFM) *and* think that it might be a success.

Well, Billy was such a man. He did form the IFM and it has certainly been a success. As to his mental condition at that time, having seen Billy in action, and having succeeded him as President of the IFM, I can unequivocally testify—I think—that he is not missing a single particle of grey matter.

At first blush, Monaco does not spring to mind as the obvious place for an Ireland Fund, particularly when put in the context of the other major capital cities boasting that prefix or suffix. It did not take Billy long to find the attributes of Monaco which made us as Irish as the River Shannon.

I had been in Monaco for a number of years, happily maintaining a very low profile—sufficiently low that the IFM did not know of my existence. Mr Vincent was told by a mutual friend of the presence in Monaco of an Irishman he had never met. Within moments of that indiscretion, my telephone rang. ‘Hello...can you have lunch? What about today?’ My oblivion was shattered forever and I was thrust into the twilight zone of the IFM.

Billy had assembled a formidable team as directors of the IFM. These included Virginia Gallico and Joe Bernstein. This group were in a league of their own. Firstly, and very importantly, the average age of the board was over 80. There was very little they would not take on, and even less they could not do. Moreover, even if they thought they could not do something, Billy would tell them they could...and it got done. He truly led from the top. Importantly, we had fun. We met often, and every meeting turned into a lunch. Dinners followed, the wine flowed, the laughs kept coming and inevitably, the Fitzgeralds were the first to leave at about 1.00 am. The rest might carry on until...who knows when.

Billy and his gang are very important to the IFM and to any who have the pleasure of dealing with them. Here are a group of people whose personal histories were actively intertwined with some of the extraordinary events and personalities of the last eight decades. Needless to say, the stories which emanated from Billy and this stamina-fuelled group were truly-jaw dropping. I love these stories and to hear them first-hand from such wonderful people is a great privilege. And something else: no matter how awful any event may have been—and obviously there were some—there was, in the telling, always humour.

No tribute to Billy would be complete without a Billy story. Recalling such stories is easy. Reporting them is somewhat more difficult. The problem is that—thankfully—neither he nor any of the gang fall into the politically correct category. So just one for the road. Very recently, Billy and Virginia turned up at my office for an IFM catch-up. Whilst we discussing the Princess Grace Irish Library (PGIL), Virginia produced a leaflet on an upcoming PGIL lecture to be given by the keeper of Marsh's Library (one of The Ireland Fund's early beneficiaries and a project very special to Billy) spectacularly entitled 'Simony, Sacrilege and Perjury.' 'What's simony?' I asked. Virginia shot to a bookcase for the dictionary. Billy sat looking straight ahead. 'It's buggery isn't it?' Billy asked with his slight grin.

Moreover, even if they thought they could not do something, Billy would tell them they could...and it got done.

MAURICE COFFEY

Retired Chairman, Muckross Rowing Club

Muckross Billy

“ Billy Vincent holds a special place in the fabric of Muckross through his support for the development of key infrastructural projects. ”

Billy Vincent holds a special place in the fabric of Muckross through his support for the development of key infrastructural projects. Billy has empowered the *can do* confidence of the voluntary groups in our area. It is vital for the young and the not-so-young to have accessible community facilities and Billy’s ongoing support has been instrumental in their provision. I have been involved in organisations over the years and have had the opportunity to work with Billy on a number of such undertakings.

Billy’s grandfather, William Bowers Bourn, bought Muckross House and its demesne of 11,000 acres in 1910 as a wedding present for his daughter, Maud, and her husband Arthur Rose Vincent. Billy has regaled me with stories of his childhood in Muckross and of visits to the workers’ cottages with his mother, who had a particular interest in the welfare of the estate families. Stories of the Vincent family generosity are well remembered even today (gifts of new clothing, haunches of venison, free milk and rent-free houses), as was their pride in encouraging the upkeep of Muckross and its surrounds.

Throughout his early teenage years, young Billy built up friendships with the Doody, Mulligan, Kenny, Cronin, Coffey, O’Shea, Lyne and Cremin families that he maintains up to this very day.



Muckross House, Killarney, Co. Kerry

My grandfather, John O'Connor, was a mason on the estate and lived in a cottage near the gates to Muckross House. My mother, my siblings and myself were all born in the cottage, which, following my father's death in 1978, lay idle. In 1992, the Muckross Community Association, under the Chairmanship of Jerry O'Grady, sought a suitable base for the voluntary and community groups working in the Muckross area. Following discussions with the Office of Public Works, which then managed the Killarney National Park, a lease was agreed for the cottage to enable its renovation and redevelopment into a community centre. The Community Association is entirely voluntary and the cost of the required works was significant. Considering the connection of the cottage to the Vincent family, it was decided to approach Billy, who was most helpful. Once he had satisfied himself that the Association had the wherewithal to complete the project, he promised the essential financial assistance to see the project through.

The application for assistance toward the development of a community centre had resonance with a request to Billy's father in 1912. At that time, a committee was set up from his father's estate employees. They sent a letter to Arthur Rose Vincent (my grandfather being one of the signatories) petitioning him to build a Community Club. The reasons put forward, *inter alia*, included:

there are seventy men and boys who have nothing to do during the long winter evenings except wandering the roads and worse still frequenting the public house in the village where their habits and morals are not improved but are in great danger of getting worse

Some of the reasons for requiring a centre in 1994 had not greatly altered in the intervening years! The local community, through a direct debit system and the initiation of a local lottery, began to gather the necessary finance to get the project started. Various government work schemes ensured the project's continuance, slowly at first! However, Billy, through the AWB Vincent Fund and The Ireland Funds, met the shortfall and enabled the centre to be finished to the highest standards. One Ireland Funds' donation of note came from my cousin Margaret Hayhurst, whose mother Cathy (my Aunt) was born in and emigrated from this very cottage in the early years of the last century.

On the 24th of June 1994, Billy laid the foundation stone for the new building, which is memorialised on a plaque on the centre's wall. On this occasion, he was accompanied by Dr Maurice Hayes, whose presence initiated a twinning of Muckross with Loughinisland in County Down, a rural community very similar to our own. In July 1995, the Muckross Community Centre was officially opened by the then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson. This community centre development has proven a huge fillip to the community. It now hosts a daily pre-school, traditional set dancing classes, rowing club gym training, martial arts classes and a host of occasional events and meetings.

The Killarney Regatta has been held each summer since the early 1800s. The regatta provides an anchor point for Billy's annual return to Killarney, as the Muckross Rowing Club was originally made up of estate workers, both as a sporting and social outlet. Billy, always sporting the yellow of the Muckross Rowing Club (the club colour was silver and grey until 1924 when Maud requested the change to her favourite daffodil yellow!), recounts anecdotes of being rowed in the Royal Barge to view the proceedings, bringing such dignitaries as Count John McCormack and WB Yeats.

In 1924, Arthur Rose Vincent invested in a new racing boat that was named *Elizabeth Rose* after Billy's sister. This boat was extensively refurbished and rededicated to Elizabeth Rose Vincent by the rowing club and re-launched by Billy in June 2005. Danny Cronin, the Club's President attended both the original launch in 1924 and re-launch of this boat eighty-one years later. This boat was the rowing club's primary race boat until 1988, when Billy replicated his father's generous act by purchasing a new Killarney six for Muckross Rowing Club.

Buoyed by the financial support of Billy Vincent, the rowing club won its first national title in 1996 and now holds 24 titles on the National Roll of Honour. Twenty-one women and nine men have rowed internationally and two members currently represent Ireland at the World Senior and Olympic levels.

On July 7th 2001 our new boathouse, comprising of boat bays for thirty racing boats and changing and washroom facilities, was opened by John O'Donoghue, TD, the then Minister for Justice.

The building projects at the community centre and the boathouse have served to bring the entire Muckross community together. The old Irish phrase

‘Ni neart go chur le cheile’ (there is no strength unless you pull together) has certainly proven true here. The history of these projects is the bones of my association with Billy. The flesh lies in the friendship he has maintained with four generations of my and many other families in the Muckross area. This friendship is sprinkled with the memory of countless regatta night parties, informal visits to Billy’s house and formal occasions at Muckross House.

What remains is an awareness of the great honour and privilege it is to know and work with this man of understated charm, intelligence and wit, Billy Vincent.



Kingsley Aikins with Billy during The Ireland Funds' Conference, June 1999

KINGSLEY AIKINS

CEO, *The American Ireland Fund*

President and CEO, *The Worldwide Ireland Funds*

Billy and The Ireland Funds

‘Quite simply
his thoughtful
generosity has
changed lives
and offered
opportunity to
thousands.’

Growing up in Ireland, there always seemed to be a *Reader's Digest* in our house. A bit like wire coat-hangers, they were never on their own but always hung around in groups. The one article that always got read in the *Reader's Digest* was entitled ‘My Most Unforgettable Character’, and that’s what I always think of when I think of Billy Vincent. To say he is one of a kind is a bit of an understatement. He is unique, and they certainly broke the mould after he was born: there don’t seem to be the same sort of characters anymore.

One thing for sure is that to understand the history and DNA of The Ireland Funds, one has only to track Billy’s involvement, firstly with the American Irish Foundation, then The Ireland Funds and then The American Ireland Fund. Billy was, and is, always terrifically loyal to those early pioneers, paying tribute to the likes of Kevin Mallen, John Brogan, John Cosgrove, Tom Jordan, Barry Carroll, Connie Ryan, Judy Hayes and many others. He has seen the Funds go through many phases in many places and has supported the organisation not just in the US and also France, Germany and, more recently, Monte Carlo, where The Ireland Fund of Monaco puts on a spectacular weekend every two years. The recent wonderful gift by Michael Fitzgerald would not have happened were it not for Billy’s initiative and foresight in setting up the Fund. Then there are the myriad

projects from the Irish Chair in Magdalene College in Oxford, to Trinity College to Marsh's Library, to the Royal Inniskillings, to the Pushkin Prizes and to a whole raft of projects in his beloved Kerry. Quite simply his thoughtful generosity has changed lives and offered opportunity to thousands. He is truly the poster child for the phrase 'help grow the tree under whose shade you will not sit'.



*AWB Vincent presents citation of appreciation to Kevin Mallen,
former American Ireland Foundation President*

REVEREND BRIAN LOUGHEED

Rector, Killarney Parish

The Hospitable Man

“I have always enjoyed his company and his hospitality and there is no doubt in my mind as to where his affections lie—Muckross.”

When I came to Killarney in 1979 I heard a lot about ‘Muckross House’ and ‘Billy Vincent’, and I knew absolutely nothing about either. In those days, Billy owned a house with quite a view, outside Killarney, and I began to meet him at various parties in his house or in Muckross House, once his home, for his annual dinner. I was very privileged to be asked to such occasions and I met some of the great and the good, locals and some internationally known persons. They were always hugely enjoyable occasions. Billy’s affection for Muckross Rowing Club is well known in Killarney, and I blessed a number of boats given by Billy to the club over my 25 years as Rector. They were all very happy occasions, though there was one year when the bottle of champagne refused to break: the ground was so wet that the post absorbed the shock. There were a few evenings, too, when midges decided that having 40 or so people to feast on was an opportunity too good to be missed. However some alcohol liberally applied—internally of course—after a boat was launched took care of their bites. I heard many times about his other home, ‘Filoli’ in California, and he mentioned several times that he hoped that I would see it sometime. He was able to arrange for me to visit it when I went to visit my son in Australia via San Francisco. It rained! I was glad that I saw the famous ballroom with paintings of Muckross on the walls, and I managed to walk up the hill to see the family graves.



Billy was a great supporter of Killarney parish long before I arrived on the scene and the parish is very grateful for that support over many years. Billy was always good at mimicking what people had said or were likely to say. There is one story that he told me that involved a ‘ghost’ or ‘angel’ or at least a friendly spirit. It happened in the grounds of the Dunloe Castle Hotel, but I will let him tell that story himself. I have always enjoyed his company and his hospitality and there is no doubt in my mind as to where his affections lie—Muckross.

Muckross House

MARYON DAVIES LEWIS

Director, The American Ireland Fund

My Tribute to AWB Vincent

‘You have given me
a valuable part of
my life and a sense
of self-worth.’

Billy, you introduced me to the Irish of my inheritance almost thirty years ago. The trips, so intimate throughout the country—entering the diplomatic world in Dublin, joining a ‘mixed bag’ of individuals. Given a say in the grants, so important then, all our literary winners!

The most memorable trip for me was Derry—Seamus, Brian, John and Pat Hume with Paddy Doherty—what a treasured memory. Belfast being housed with a ‘knee-capper’, visiting Flax Trust, that determined pastor (priest?) and the nuns hiding in the hills!

You have given me a valuable part of my life and a sense of self-worth.
Sorry to miss your dinner—but I have had great times in Kerry.

Love you,
Maryon



Billy with John Hume during The Ireland Funds' Conference, Derry, June 2001

ANTOINE BANET-RIVET

Grandson of AWB Vincent

Memories of Billy

It was going to be easy. But as it turned out, it wasn't. With so many memories, so many stories, so many shared moments of life, the words would just flow out and fill no end of pages. But that was the problem: there were too many.

What popped first to my mind were some of the anecdotes you would tell us, my brothers, Matthieu and Adrien, and myself. We were young at the time and in our budding brains the facts got irremediably mixed with a lot of our own imagination. And, even today, there's no way I can set apart the truth from juvenile exaggeration.

One of our favourites was the stories of the time you had bought shares in an island (was it in the Caribbean?), but the tourists did not come, only the sharks.

Or the pig farm in some remote part of Australia which didn't even exist and had no pig. I also recall the chocolate factory in Mexico where, to smooth tension between workers and foremen, the management decided to organise a soccer tournament. It all went very well—until an angry player pulled a gun and shot the referee.

Of course, there have been many successful business stories as well. Many more, in fact, than the rest—everyone knows about Hiller. But these didn't seem

to produce as many amusing, or sometimes tragic, anecdotes. I will credit your unparalleled sense of humour for that.

Then there were the war stories. The ones you sometimes told us—and all the others I imagined looking at the pictures that hung in Dromkerry. Most of them had been taken in the desert and the men were wearing shorts. Some had no shirts on. And I remember thinking as a six- or seven-year-old that a war where people fought dressed as beach holidaymakers wasn't that scary after all.

I want to mention one particular moment linked to the war but which took place many years later. It was in 1991. Matthieu and I had come over to visit you and Elisabeth in California for Christmas. One day, you took us out for lunch at the Burlingame Country Club. At the end of the meal, you led us to a room with—as I recall—tall windows and a large fireplace. 'This is where I stood when we heard on the radio that England had declared war on Germany.'

The war is also at the origin of one the strangest and most amazing anecdotes you ever told us. Again, it was a few years later, in Dunloe Castle, County Kerry, Ireland. Night had fallen over the exotic gardens surrounding the dark ruins of the thirteenth-century fortress. Elisabeth, Fleur and yourself (there were one or two other guests as well) were having a post-dinner promenade among the extraordinary plants that grow nowhere but there in Ireland. A man walks up to you in a light Prince of Wales jacket: 'Are you looking for Monty?' 'Monty who?' you asked back. 'Monty Flaherty'—'But I thought he was killed in the War!'—'No, he wasn't. If you go through that gate, you will find him.' Intrigued, your small party walks through the gate, only to run into Monty and his wife! Warm greetings follow. You then want to thank this smart-looking stranger who had led you to a long-lost friend, but there is no sign of him! Not in the gardens, not in the hotel, where no-one recalls ever seeing him. Monty and his wife didn't know him. This is how the Ghost of Dunloe Castle legend came about.

Ireland, the place where it all happened. The time we spent there with you and Elisabeth, each year for nearly 15 years, has shaped our personalities, our behaviour, and, as you read above, our imaginations, too. It seems to me we have grown around this place, which will always inspire everything we do.

Particularly the big parties you and Elisabeth would host each summer. There are a few countries like Ireland where social barriers don't seem to stand in

From Muckross to
Monaco, from
Munich to Monte
Cassino, a few
thousands words
cannot tell it all.

Billy

A TRIBUTE TO AWB VINCENT

anybody's way. And even less so in Dromkerry. Guests from all horizons would gather there in a completely informal atmosphere. Nothing mattered but the pleasure of being together, and that was even before drinks were served.

A lot more could be written. I know it will hurt your modesty, but your life is of a kind that is not lived anymore. From Muckcross to Monaco, from Munich to Monte Cassino, a few thousands words cannot tell it all.

Besides, no one has the full story, but you.

I hope you will tell it one day.



Billy on Billy

Excerpts from conversations with
MAURICE HAYES 2004

Who We Were—Who We Are

My father Arthur Rose Vincent was an Irishman, or an Anglo Irishman you can call him if you want—he always called himself an Irishman but you can call him Anglo-Irish if you want because he came from the class that was Anglo-Irish. He was born in India where his father was commanding the Third Huzzars and he left there by the time he was three or four and he never went back to India.

The family base was in Summerhill in Clonlara Co. Clare, which is just outside Limerick on the banks of the Shannon. That place doesn't exist anymore. It's still called Summerhill but it's really just stables that have been turned into a house. All those houses along there were all destroyed at one time or another since World War II.

His family came to Limerick around 1685/1690 or something as far as I can work out and one of them, John Vincent, was elected Mayor of Limerick in the

*Facing page,
Arthur Rose Vincent*

late 1600s. There were six of them Mayors of Limerick over the next one hundred and fifteen years so they were not exactly gentry but they considered themselves gentry, anyway. They had Summerhill, which had a certain amount of land, but it is not a large place run by landlords or anything like that. It had a farm and they had a lot of servants, many of whom were extremely loyal, and today they remember the Vincents living there.

My father adored that place and he adored Castleconnell, which is right across the river, for the rest of his life. His hip was damaged in a football match when he was about eleven and it was set wrongly so he had one leg longer than the other and had to wear special boots for the rest of his life.

The Vincents were inclined to send their sons into the army, the British army, and his brother went in, but he couldn't go in with his leg so he went to Trinity College to study law. He passed his law degree there. He went to the Kings Inns and then he was sent out on the Munster Circuit and he got to know a lot of people in Munster that way. But he decided he couldn't make much money that way, because the pickings for barristers were pretty slim. So he joined the Foreign Office in England, it was all one country at that time. And he was appointed to the judicial service of the Foreign Office. He was sent to Kosuma in Kenya or Uganda in 1903.

From there he was sent to Mombassa and Zanzibar and then eventually to Siam after about a year or so, and China, Shanghai. He became a judge of course. And he was sent to Zanzibar in 1908 or 9 I think.

Now in 1906 when he was in China he was sent on leave back to England or Ireland and he decided to go through the United States because his brother, who had been on the Japanese staff in the Russo-Japanese War and had been the right-hand man of General Sir Ian Hamilton, had been to California and there had been introduced to a group of Irishmen by the name of Tobin and one of their sisters a Mrs Clarke. My uncle gave my father a letter of introduction to Mrs Clarke. He visited her in San Francisco and she asked 'What are you doing next?' And he said 'Well I am going to Europe on such and such a ship.' 'Oh' she said 'some very good friends of mine are going on that ship too.' 'Who are they?' 'The William Bourns. They have a nice daughter.'

So my father got on the ship and got to know the Bourns and the daughter, my mother of course. Then the courtship went on. I am not quite sure how, as none of these people left any letters.

In 1909/1910 my father decided to marry and he resigned from the judicial office in the Foreign Office because my American grandfather, who was quite a dominating character, said he wasn't going to marry any daughter of his off to someone in Zanzibar. Which was very narrow minded of him really, they would have been out of there in a year or so and moved on to somewhere more pleasant. So he resigned and was married in California in 1910 and then they went off to Ireland.

My grandparents went with them because they wanted to see Ireland—they'd never been there and my grandfather was very keen on buying a place there because he thought he should have a country place—why not Ireland instead of England, because his son in law was Irish, so he bought Ardilaun or Muckcross in 1910.

He made money in gold and water. He was a wealthy man by then. Gold in 1899 from the Empire Mine, which became the largest goldmine in California. He developed it himself really—it was functioning since 1854 but it was not really a big bonanza until he started deeper rock. He turned it into the largest goldmine in California. It is now a State Park. We sold it as a mining company; they still own the mining rights they could go back to mine if they wanted to.

When the war came in father was upset because couldn't go in to the army because of his leg so he volunteered as an ambulance driver with the French army. Then he was appointed High Sheriff of Kerry in 1916 or 15 and he had to go back there for a bit. Then he got a job with the British Foreign Office and he was sent to Chicago as the British representative in Chicago as part of the consulate. That was the beginning of 1917 I think. He spent almost two years—until the end of the war—in Chicago. He loved Chicago, never cared particularly about California, and he made great friends with actor Samuel Ensell, who was in Chicago in those days. My father had been born in the East End of London, and had been spotted by Edison and spent the rest of his life putting cheap electricity throughout the Mid West.

Billy the Boy

I was born in London where my family had hired a house for me to be born in because it was more fashionable to be born in London than Kerry—my sister had been born in London too. The funny thing is when the Second World War came along and my father had a second wife and they were living in England he brought her back to Kerry to have her children.

After that we went to live in Muckcross in 1919 or 1920, I can't remember which, and then in 1921 my grandfather in California had a stroke and he was incapacitated. My grandmother was a real worrier and so everybody had to go back from Muckcross to California. Mother, father, sister, myself and my Great Aunt Ida who was my grandfather's sister visiting from California, Aunt Rosemary, who was the youngest of my father's stepsister's marriage. Well, we all went off to California. In 1922 there came the Civil War in Ireland. My father stayed in the US, but he could only stay six months in the United States because according to US migration he was a white native of India and there were no Indians allowed in the US. A thing that rankled him forever.

There was no trouble in Muckcross during the Civil War. The only thing that happened was the hay barn burned down but that was a squabble between two local people. The Killarney estates, Kenmare and Muckcross, neither were damaged at all in any of the troubles. The two estates of Kenmare was obviously because they were Catholics but in our case I think because we were good landlords, they weren't bothered and because there was good American money coming in the whole time.

So then, my mother and my sister went to Europe and my father was there part of the time but not all of the time because my grandfather put him as a Director of the Empire Mine, and an investment company, which was the owner of the Empire Mine and also on the Board of the Spring Valley water company, which supplied all the water to San Francisco. So, he was kept busy there, but he didn't like being a second fish in somebody else's pond.

I remember things, starting in 1922 when I was about not quite three, I can remember things then. I remember being christened for instance. I was never christened before because there had been wars and this and that. So I was christened then. I can just remember that. I didn't know what was going on. I was



Filoli Gardens, California

walking you see. My godparents were Samuel Ensell from Chicago, two major generals, Generals Sir Claude Champion de Crespigny, an old pal of my father's from school and my godmothers were Mrs Whitelaw Reed and Mrs FR Childs from New York. Mrs Whitelaw Reed came from California and she married Whitelaw Reed who owned the *New York Tribune* and was ambassador in France and ambassador at St James in London, a very well-known man and great friends with my grandparents.

Then in 1923, March, my grandfather was getting a bit better, he'd had another stroke in 1922, but in 1923 we went to Paris first, to see how things were going in the Civil War in Ireland and then we went across to Ireland. We spent about six months there in Muckcross. I can remember bits of that but otherwise I don't remember it really well. Then we went back to California and this time my mother didn't like the living in Filoli because it was too far away from her friends so she rented a place for us and my father in Burlingame, the nearest town. We used to go every Sunday to Filoli. My grandmother sent her Rolls Royce for us. I have hated a Rolls Royce ever since then because it was a curly road, and made me sick.

I remember when we first went to Ireland in 1923 the train was running from Dublin to Mallow. There was no train to Kerry, it had been blown up. So we had to go in an old car and stop at every river because the bridges had been blown up and we'd have to wade across. I thought it was a very exciting place!

In 1924 we were back in California again, because my grandfather was getting worse again. We stayed until March 1925 when we returned to Muckcross. At this time we were so used to going across the continent. It used to take around two weeks to get from California to Kerry. I loved the train from San Francisco to Chicago, we always had to change trains, get out of the train and change trains in Chicago the way the railways were built. But I loved the trains overland. I loved the train, I loved the countryside we went through, I loved the whole thing. It remained with me for years. I loved those trains. They were very good you know in those days, there was a black porter. They were marvellous, marvellous. They really changed your bed and everything. And then in the dining room there was good food, they were all charming and I suppose they liked kids you see. Then we used to stop and get out, when there was a big stop in Omaha, Nebraska. You

could get up and walk up and down when the train was stopped. I remember all this very, very well. Of course it was the second or third time I had done it.

Then in 1925 we stayed in Muckross and I got to know everyone there. We had Danny Dwyer, the fellow who used to drive the cars for us. Then there was John O'Shea, my father's personal servant, who went everywhere with us. He's the second man I remember in my life after my father. He was from Muckross. His father lived there and was a boatman, and John was an extreme republican and he became a leading member of the IRA. My father when he was in the Senate had to get rid of him because he'd be painting 'Up the IRA' and so on, on the walls in Muckross. I never discussed politics with John but I knew him well until he died in 1986 and I was devoted to him. He was a great fellow and he educated himself very well, going all around the world first-class—he could talk about anything to anybody. I was devoted to him, and so was my father and they came back together later on.

I had a nurse who was Norwegian. My mother had her in San Francisco and she used to come with us all over Europe, Hannah was her name, Hannah Johnson. She was a Norwegian and she was, well my sisters used to say—'Where is the ugly duchess?' or something. Because my sister had governesses—she was four and a half years older than me and she had governesses—she was a bit more advanced than I was. I eventually got into the governess when Hannah left us.

There was one I didn't like at all—Miss Christie—she was half French, half English. She was in California too, and came back to Muckross. She tried to teach me to read in 1925 in the school in Muckross. She left soon after that and then Miss Lady came in 1925. She was a pleasanter woman than Miss Christie and she continued to teach me to read and I read my first book in August or September 1926—*Alice in Wonderland*—and after that I read all sorts.

There used to be all sorts of people coming to Muckross. Californians, friends from England, friends from France coming to stay during the summer and my father would have shooting parties in the winter—the shooting was very good in Muckross. They used to shoot woodcock.

WB Yeats came twice to Muckross, once in 1925 and once in 1926. I best remember him coming in 1925. In 1926 he was a guest when there were other people staying too. When he was there, Shane Leslie was there, and his wife, they



The Bourn-Vincent family at Muckross with many of their principal employees, c. 1916

didn't get on at all. They were always arguing—jealous I suppose about each other's work, I don't know. Then Yeats I remember, I used to watch him out in the garden, where he would be talking, tapping the trees and talking to himself, and I said to my father 'That poet man's a bit crazy, he is talking to the trees!' But he was a charming fellow and I remember one day, my father liked to fish at Lewis corner and went off in this car, a Buick convertible with a rumble seater, a dickie, and the nurse and I were in the rumble seat and Yeats and my father were in the front and we went off to this lake to fish. I don't think that Yeats was very keen on fishing but he liked scenery you see, so he sat on a stone, and then we went back again in the car. Going back again Yeats and I sat in the rumble seat and my father and the nurse sat in the front. She had gone to get into the rumble seat again but Yeats said 'No, No, No, you're the lady and you must sit in front in the comfortable seat.'

I must now tell you about Grass Valley because Grass Valley is where the Empire Mine is. My grandfather had built a cottage there—that's what we called it—people call it Bourn Mansion now. It was a smaller house than Filoli or Muckross. I loved that place. We would go every summer for about two or three months. The mine was running the whole time. The noise from the mine was really overpowering. It went thump, thump, thump. The stamp mill was going, and made the garden in the house impossible. It was a very nice house, very fine but it wasn't very good to live in because it got very hot in the summer. When you would sleep you would be pouring with sweat inside the house. We used to sleep in beds in the garden. I can hear the mine thumping now and occasionally it would stop—there would be some failure in the stamp mill—and everyone would look around—'What's hapened?' I got to know the miners there.

I got fascinated with the American Civil War and read endless books on it. Then we went back to Europe in March 1928. This time my father was already over there because he had only been able to stay for six months in California and he met us in London. My sister was not very well so mother decided to take her to Paris and my father would take me to Muckross, so we went to Muckross together. My mother and sister went to Paris where my sister had her appendix out. After a couple of months there joined us and that was the last year we were all together in Muckross. Later that year, we were all in Cannes for Christmas again and we got back from Paris and my grandmother, who was a great worrier

as I said before, sent us a message saying my grandfather was very ill and the Empire Mine needs you. So we packed up and got into the last cabin and there were terrible storms and we had to spend the evening on the platform in Cherbourg because the ship couldn't get in—there was a real mix-up. But we got on the ship and one day went by and then the next day my mother collapsed. She'd caught pneumonia. She was put in the ship's hospital. She was terribly ill and we had the most terrible crossing. We were about one and a half days late getting into New York. It was a terrible storm all the way. She was taken off to quarantine. They would take you off on a special boat to hospital. We were staying with Mrs Reed who was my godmother who had a mansion in the middle of New York which was later purchased by the Catholic Archbishop. It is now a hotel where that woman Helmsley said no rich people pay taxes.

My sister had taken charge of us as a family. Apart from myself there was a maid from Muckross and a French maid to look after my mother. She was only fourteen and she had to take care of us. She got on the telegraph with my father in Muckross and said to him 'You must come over mother is very, very ill.' So he got the *Mauretania* which was a very fast ship and he arrived there about five or six days after we arrived in New York. And two days after that my mother died in New York. Then we set off across the continent with her body, on the train.

I was nine. And we set off across the continent in a private car which was attached to the back of a railway express. They used to have trains going over there by express, which was the fast mail and official things. We were attached onto the back of that in a private car. My mother was in a coffin and there was a nurse change even though she was already dead, poor thing.

Then along came my father, and John O'Shea, my sister and myself—that's five isn't it—and my grandmother's nephew, Horace Moody, came from New York to represent the Moody part of the family. Another fellow got on in Ogden. So we arrived in the Bay at Belmont because in those days the stain stopped in Oakland and you had to get the boat across to San Francisco or you went around the bay to San Jose. She was laid to rest in Filoli and the following day there was the funeral. She was buried in Filoli on a hill, which was excavated and then became the graveyard for them. She would have been around 40 when she died. She was born in 1886, so she would have been around 43.

Bill at School

Then I was sent to school for the first time to get me out of the way, while all the fuss was going on about my mother dying. I was sent to Mrs Shinn's school in San Mateo and that was where all our friends' children went so I wasn't lonely, I knew then all and I spent from February to June there in that school. I made great friends with some of the boys. I think my best friends there were Howard Park and Binn. After that I hardly saw them again, Howard was killed in the war in the South Pacific and Binn I lost touch with after the war. He sort of just disappeared. So then we were back to the San Francisco circuit of acquaintances and so on, and I had a good time in 1929 in Filoli. I made friends with all the gardeners, and all the servants and so forth. I knew all of them very intimately. I really adored them. I had a wonderful time in Filoli when we were there and we stayed there.

We went back to Europe in the beginning of October and my father didn't know what to do with me, but my Aunt Claire, another one of his step-sisters who had come out when my mother died, and another one of her sisters who lived in Limerick, Mrs Cleave, had her son in school near Rugby—Dunchurch—so my father decided to send me there, although he had never seen the place and didn't know anything about it. We arrived in London and I was equipped with all the English clothes that I would need to go to school and we went off in a car to find this place. We had lunch in Rugby and I was horrified by the food—I thought 'Good Lord, this is awful!' I'd never really been in England, you see, so I was plonked down in Dunchurch with Mr Cook, the Headmaster who had been my uncle's Brigade Major in the war. I felt very strange, but thank goodness Terence was there, my cousin. He was six months younger than me but he was very friendly. I knew him slightly from Muckross and he really introduced me to Mr Cook's school. I was pretty miserable when I was first there, but after a while I got settled in and I really enjoyed my time there. But it only lasted just over a year because when I was going home for holidays at the end of December 1930, my father met me in London and I felt ill. I had awful pains in my legs so I had to go to hospital. They put me to bed in the hotel and got the doctors in. They didn't tell me what was the matter with me but there was a nurse in the hospital and my father rented a house in London in Onslow Square for my sister, from a Mrs Burkhard who was to bring her out.

First of all they sent me to the Isle of Wight to get better. But the doctors they drove me mad. They were awful. One said I needed a treacle enema every day. I had a treacle enema every day. It nearly killed me. Thick black treacle. I've never heard of anything so ridiculous. I don't know how my father ever let these fellows do it but he did. So, I was in bed most of the time, and then I got a wheelchair and went to Shanklin Bay.

It wasn't a pleasant time, but we went on to Muckross again and there I got a bit better, and then I'd get ill again and then that went on and on. That year I had a tutor. An English tutor came over to teach me. He taught me quite a lot actually and that year went by and then the next year started and my father thought that he had better take me to Italy because the weather was better there. We stopped to see the doctors in London but my father finally decided to fire them all because they were talking about all sorts of things. They were hopeless people, Harley Street specialists. Absolutely hopeless. So we went back to Dublin and there we were introduced by our doctor from Killarney, Dr O'Sullivan, to Dr Moore, who was a small little man, but very efficient, very sharp. I was put under his care and he really cured me. I had both my tonsils out and after two or three months and so on, he did this, that and the other. Of course since I had been in Muckross, I had an Irish nurse, so I got better and better. Then my grandfather and father decided to give Muckross to the nation so we couldn't live there anymore. So, we were out on the road.

My father was worrying about where to send me to school, because I was supposed to go to Eton but I was too old for Eton, and my health was a problem. He discovered Bryanston, which was just starting in those days, around the third year it was going. I was sent there and I thought it was quite amusing, because you could wear shirts and shorts and then in the winter you would put on a pullover. I didn't like it at first because I wasn't really friendly with all those English boys, but then I got to like it a bit better. Anyway I settled in there again. The extra-ordinary thing about Bryanston was that I learned a hell of a lot there. They had a new system of education there, they don't teach you in classes, you're on your own. You'd have a class and then you'd be put on your own to do what you wanted to do, like a university, you see. I thought that system was pretty good. The only problem was half of them were communists and socialists. But

that was a good education in itself. My father didn't realise that when he sent me. The head master was a very good fellow, so I eventually settled in there. I didn't like it for the first year but after that I made friends and got along all right. Then I discovered, or they discovered for me or someone discovered for me what I suppose was my talent—acting. I used to act in all the plays there. I was considered quite good. I played in *Murder in the Cathedral* and around eight or nine other plays. The production was supposed to be so good that they took it to Cheltenham to the festival. We played there and I enjoyed that tremendously.

In the beginning of 1936 my father said to me 'Now you have passed all your exams for university, you are a year too young to go there, so do you want to stay at Bryanston or would you sooner go to Germany?' I said 'I want to go to Germany.' Every day in the paper Hitler was doing something. I wanted to find out all about it, you see.

My father was appointed to the Senate by William Cosgrave. That happened in 1931. Somebody died, I can't remember what his name was. A Senator—Kenny or something—and he had to appoint a replacement so he appointed my father. My father was there as an independent. Then in November that year there was an election, so my father had to be re-elected. There were, I think, eight independents in the Dáil and you were looking for nine votes so he got the independents in the Dáil together. They were a funny crowd. One was Jasper Wolfe from West Cork who was a solicitor. My father had known him when he was on the Munster Circuit, and he approached him first and then he approached Alfie Byrne, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, who was another independent and the other one he approached was Major Myles from Donegal, and the three of them got all eight independents to vote for my father. The others were James Craig, from Dublin, his son or grandson had been dealing with Muckross for the last thirty years, and then there was Mr Coburn from Louth and Mr Goode from Dublin South and the two from Trinity, Professor Smith and Professor Dalton.

The following year, 1932, was when he had to give up Muckross because he was very busy with all these things and he got involved in forming Fine Gael. He was great friends with Frank McDermott. I used to see him until a bit before he died in Paris, I liked him very much. They were great friends you see, and he was always trying to get him into that Centre Party with Dillon. Eventually they

decided to form Fine Gael and then of course McDermott resigned. He fell out because of the Blueshirts and also over the League of Nations. He thought de Valera was right supporting the League of Nations over Italy so he resigned from Fine Gael.

My father decided when he left Ireland to live in Monaco. Except from going to Ireland during the war he had given up living in Ireland but he had to spend five or six years living there after the war started. He kept a villa in Monaco. He signed a lease for three years in 1937 and the lease was up on the 1 May 1940, so he had to go out on the 1 May and Lord Beaverbrook took it on 1 May. An amazing thing to do, and my father said to me ‘My goodness, what did he do that for?’ But he kept it for years, and Churchill used to come there afterwards. A lovely place but it’s kind of been ruined now.

Billy on Hitler

Well my father decided I should go to Germany so I said ‘Where?’ and he said ‘Munich’, and I said ‘Fine. That should be an exciting city, yes, very nice, nice people, young people and so on.’ And then he said ‘We had better find a decent place for you to stay.’ There was a lady in Monte Carlo, Mrs Myles who was American by nationality but she was actually Hungarian. She was born in Hungary, and she knew everybody in Munich and she said ‘Don’t worry, I’ll find you a place to stay’. We went off to Munich in a car for her to introduce us to all these people, and the people she introduced us to were the Baron and Baroness Von Shantofsky, who were Poles. He was a Polish painter and was very well known in the United States, the Netherlands and Germany and all over Europe. He painted all the royal houses of Europe and for a lot of people in England too, always portraits. So we went to meet them and they lived in a house in a suburb of Munich. He had a studio there in the house and they were not poor but they were always straining for money all the time. He was a little man but a very good painter. The wife was a German Baroness, she was *enormously* fat, an *enormous* woman—I was with them for seven or eight months and I only saw her go out of the house twice.

We went to Munich and my father decided that the Shantofskys were suitable people for me to stay with but then there was the question of who was

'Billy Vincent was an intelligent and good-humoured man of the world, with a broad European education and estates in Killarney, who could handle the CO better than most of us. He was also excellent company and I still see him, when we were on leave together in Teheran, emerging from the most prestigious night-club there, with a flower-pot under each arm, to talk his way successfully in French into the waiting car of a bemedalled Persian general.'

Extract from *Rough Road to Rome* by Sir David Cole



Willy Vincent (left), Sam Irving and Sir David Cole in the town of Isernia in November 1943

going to teach me. They said that they would find someone to teach me in the university or somewhere. They had found Dr Raeger, who was a German about twenty-nine years of age, a professor in the university. He spoke perfect English of course, perfect French, perfect Italian and Hungarian I suppose, and he was very bright, very agreeable. I used to go to him every afternoon at two o'clock and stay until six. Then at seven he would send me to the Shantofskys again on the tram. He was a vehement Nazi. He was a member of the party and had all sorts of jobs besides what he did at the university. He worked in the university all morning and then he worked for them, I don't know, at night I suppose. He had all sorts of contacts there and he knew them all and he said to me 'Would you like to learn something about the Nazi Party?' So I said 'Yes' and he took me to all these places. He took me to the Arbeitsfront, you know all these people with spades, and he had a cousin who was in the SA who took me around. He was not very enthusiastic about the SA himself, but anyway he used to take me around. the SA to see what they were doing.

Their great bogey man was Ed Stoller. He had been a minister in that communist government in Bavaria in 1919 and had got wounded afterwards. Of course they had him there as the most evil man who ever was but I was surprised of course because when I was at Bryanston some of the masters thought he was great because they were communists! So it was very confused, the whole thing, and I said at one stage 'Ed Stoller is very well regarded in England'. 'Oh, I can't believe it, I can't believe it', he said!

I used to have the most awful rows with Dr Raeger all over the Church; I wasn't a Catholic you see, but I said 'You're so far off, you're attacking all these priests', and they were attacking all these priests in the press and everything. And he said 'Oh, that's so out of date. You live with that crazy family'—because they went on saying 'Oh if only we had our dear King back, if only we had our Kaiser back' and so on. Then I'd go to Dr Raeger and he'd say 'How can you live with those people?' So I had both sides. I enjoyed myself enormously and I made some friends there, all dead now.

The Shantofsky's had two daughters. They were twenty-four and I was only seventeen, but their mother and father wanted them to get married you see, so they had this flock of young Luftwaffe officers coming in all the time either to see

them or to make court with them, and I got to know them all. They were an interesting crowd of people because the two Goering boys—Hermann’s nephews, one was called Arnie and I can’t remember the other’s name I didn’t know him that well, but I knew Arnie Goering very well. They were nice, and they used to say ‘Oh Uncle Hermann, isn’t he ridiculous—he wears all these uniforms!’ and so forth. But they were fond of him. They were very, very friendly with the Imperial Crown Prince, Little Willie, who fought at Verdun, was Commander in Chief at Verdun. They were very friendly with him, and we used to go there every time he was in Munich, I must have seen him eight or ten times. One time he gave a dinner party for us all in the Regent Hotel. There was lots of bowing and scraping ‘Oh, your Imperial Highness’. They used to do that in those days. He was an amusing chap, he was full of little witticisms and jokes and things like that and I was looking at him in awe when I first met him, but you could talk to him very easily. He was a very pleasant fellow as far as I could see anyway. But he had living with him in Berlin Lord Jellicoe at that time, the same thing as I was doing, you see. He had him living there, I didn’t know him then, I met him afterwards. He asked me if I knew him but I didn’t know him then. The Admiral had written to him and said ‘Would you find a place for my son?’

I could see what was coming. But I always hoped that they would find some way to peace. I realised there was no hope when he scrapped the Munich Agreement and went into Czechoslovakia. I always hoped before... because a lot of what they wanted was right, you know, what they wanted was right. I mean, it was ridiculous they wanted to take Austria, it’s all the Common Market anyway now. Then there was all those Sudeten Germans, well good God, they were all Germans, why should they devote themselves to Czechoslovakia? So I could see there were a lot of things in the Versailles Treaty that were very unjust, you know definitely. I had to write an essay on that in Cambridge—it was the main cause of the Second World War.

I could see what was going to happen, but I always prayed that they would find some other way out, because I had made friends with a lot of these Germans, they were decent fellows.

I saw Hitler twice. There was a place in Munich called the Carlton Tea Room and whenever he was passing through Munich to get to Berchtesgaden he would

stop off to get tea or coffee and people would go in there to look at him, the same as I did. They would just go in and take a table to look at him. He was having coffee with somebody else and talking away. I watched him a couple of times in those great parades they used to have—and they'd stomp out, and listen to the speeches. He was an amazing man because, you know, he was a tremendous orator; he would start off very peaceably, talking like this and gradually he would talk himself up to an extreme, and working a voice up with him until he was shouting and bringing the crowd up with him. They'd all be shouting and yelling. It was amazing.

Then there was the anti-Semitism. Everywhere there was the anti-Semitism. 'Jews not wanted here', 'No Jews allowed in here'. You couldn't go into any of the decent restaurants in downtown Munich. Signs up everywhere. You see, the only people who were vehemently anti-Nazi who spoke to me about it was the fellow who was the lawyer of the Shantofskys who was an educated man, a good fellow, and a doctor who came to see me.

Everyone was a Nazi because they were getting everything. The place, before I had got there, was an absolutely destitute state. Unemployment was terrifying and he got rid of all that—in whatever way, but he did—building roads and whatever. And there was no answer to it. Democracy had no answer to it. What did they say, they had no answer. And the other leaders didn't stand up. If they wanted to they should have spoken up. If they wanted to play the hard-line they should have gone in when he went into the Rhineland, but they didn't, and then they went to Austria saying the same. Same thing in Czechoslovakia, and then finally Chamberlain decided they can't go into Poland!

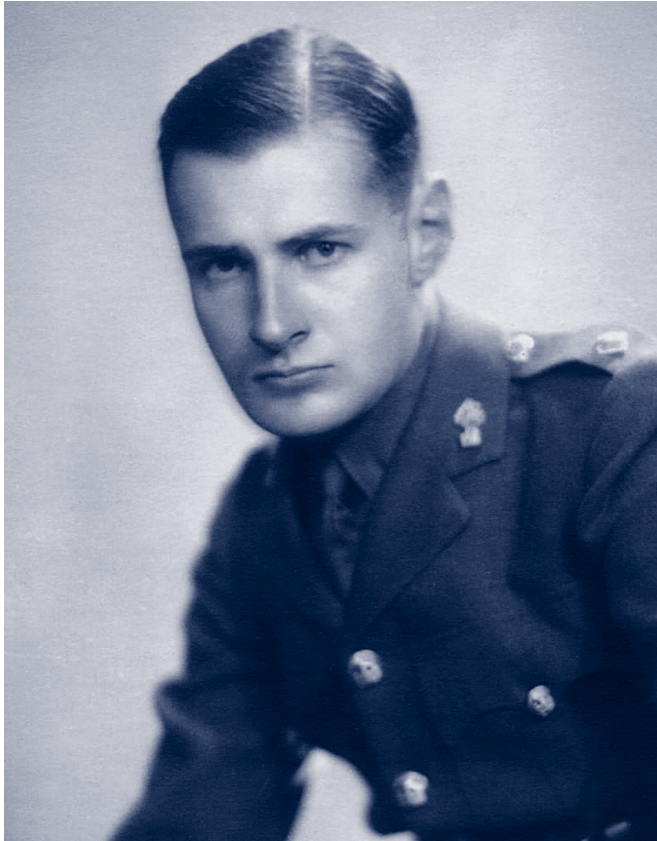
I was in Munich about a month before Chamberlain came. I went back to Germany to visit the Shanofskys and Raeger and everyone I knew there and I left to go to the South of France at around 8 or 10 August, I think, so I was there when they were all rushing off to Munich. It was a very interesting time, but I was fascinated by the whole thing. You couldn't help being swayed by it, because what they said was true to a large extent.

And of course the Spanish Civil War was going on at that point, and all the bookshops had maps marked with 'Franco's here' and they'd all be cheering because Franco was moving ahead. I didn't know whether to cheer for Franco or

not because two of the masters at Bryanston who were communists had been in the International Brigade and had both been killed, so I was a bit divided. I'd hoped until the end that they would find some kind of solution, but after the outbreak of the war, I couldn't see how the British thought they could win the war. I knew the only way that they could win was if they brought the Americans in, because I had seen America and I knew it, and the Russians. In fact, I remember I was sitting in Northern Ireland in the north of Derry on manoeuvres on the twentieth-whatever of June when Hitler invaded Russia, and we turned on the news on the wireless and I thought 'My God, there's a chance now we'll win the war', because I didn't see any chance before.

When I went to the United States that year I went by myself for the first time, my grandfather had died the year before you see. And grandmother died the year before, before him. He outlived everybody. Everybody thought he was going to die for years and years but didn't. So my father said now you must get a friend of yours from Bryanston to go to America with you. Well I had awful difficulty choosing friends, one because I had a very good friend there but he was a Welshman and he was, well I just couldn't see him with my parents, you know. I couldn't see him going around for dinners and so forth in Monte Carlo or in America. So I said I can't ask him, so I asked another fellow who had played with me in *Murder in the Cathedral*, a very funny fellow, he's dead now, but he came with me and he was a good choice. But Bryanston was a funny place, because the boys weren't like they all are at Eton, wealthy and upper crust, they were usually the reverse. Many of them were Quakers and—well Fred Sanger won two Nobel Prizes, he's a chemistry genius in Cambridge, he was in the same class as me, he was a Quaker of course. His brother I was very friendly with, he died last year, Leo Sanger. They didn't go to war, they were conscientious objectors. Then there were several communists... what was the name of that man who was the head of the communist party? Wood? His two sons were there, I was very friendly with them but they were absolutely out and out communists. And there was one fascist man there too.

So I went to America with my friend, I had to go there you see because my father and my grandfather didn't get on very well in the end, and the way he had left his money was everything in trust to me and my sister. So I had to get to know the trustees, that's what I went out there for and get myself known a bit in California.



Billy Vincent in uniform

'Shortly after our arrival at Vibo Valentia, Monty set up his Advanced HQ there. The first of us to become aware of this was Willy Vincent, who had just parked his anti-tank guns in a particularly comfortable field whence an officious staff officer sought to eject him on the basis that the field was required for Eighth Army Advanced HQ. Willy, on the principle of 'finders keepers', stood his ground. Monty himself then chanced to appear and ruled that since Willy had been there first, he should stay. 'We,' said Monty, 'will find another field.' It was a ruling to endear any army commander to any infantryman, and a striking illustration of how our generals had changed since the Great War. How willing would Field-Marshal Haig have been to look for another château, let alone another field?'

Extract from *Rough Road to Rome*
by Sir David Cole

My father didn't know where to send me; he'd never been to Cambridge. My grandfather had been there, so he had cabled him and said 'I'm sending Billy to Cambridge, what college should I send him to?' And the reply came back 'Delighted he is going to Cambridge send him to any college except the one I went to which is Downing.' He didn't like Downing College.

Magadlene was a very conservative college, you know. I think out of sixty-five or so freshmen who came in the year I did, around forty of them had been to Eton, because the man who was the Master was from Eton and he favoured Etonians greatly. I felt a bit lonely when I went there first but then I got to know some people. I had two very good friends, one was Lloyd Roberts who became a top surgeon in London, he's dead eighteen years now, and Freddie Barnardo, he was a son of Dr Barnardo. He was very nice. This fellow had been a doctor in the Indian civil service and he was a great friend of Willingdon who was the Viceroy there, he was his sort of mentor. He wrote a book about it in California, about his life. Those were my two best friends, and there were many others of course. Freddie Barnardo was killed in El Alamein. There's hardly anyone I knew in Magdalene who is still alive, and every time I pick up a paper someone else is gone.

Bill at War

In the war I joined the Guards. My father knew Beatty, General Beatty who was related to the Kenmares, whose wife was a Kenmare. From there you could go into the Brigade Squad if you wanted which was a squad, just a regular squad in the guards but it comprised of people who might become officers. So it was from all the regiments in the Brigade of Guards. So I went into there and then I went to Sandhurst. That was the least distinguished part of my career in the army because I was unwell and I caught mumps. Then they ordered me out immediately and I had a terrible, terrible time. It was a dreadful winter. Then we were given a week's leave and I went to France where my father was and there I got worse. They kept me an extra week and they sent me back. That didn't go down very well with my company commander. It was ghastly. My time there was not distinguished. So I was not accepted in the Irish Guards.

I was sent to Inniskillings, which my uncle Mr Bartley had been advising me to go in to because he had been with them in Iraq. He was the army commander

in Iraq. So I went into the Inniskillings. Now, I really didn't know anything about it. Knew they were an Orange regiment full of Orangemen and I was absolutely terrified. I went over to Northern Ireland, never been in Northern Ireland before, and my father was a Senator down South and a nationalist you know. So I was absolutely terrified as I went up there. It was a lovely day. I got off the train in Omagh. The depot was in Omagh. They had just put in a new camp to take in all the people that were going to England—drafts. I found the officer's mess and there were five or six officers there all dressed in white shirts and flannels or something or other and they said 'Oh get out of that uniform'. It was a Saturday I think, and then somebody said 'Would you like to play tennis?' and I went and played tennis. Everybody was so friendly that I didn't know what happened to all these frightful Orangemen. So I stayed there for six and a half years.

I stayed in Omagh for about six months and then I was sent to the 2nd Battalion, which had been in Dunkirk and Scotland. It was now just outside Liverpool and we went there. We had these enormous warehouses full of cotton and the Germans were dropping incendiary bombs, so we were rushing around with spades and buckets and so forth trying to put out fires. That went on for I would say a couple of months. I arrived just before Christmas of that year and stayed until the New Year. We were part of the 5th Division which was the regular division that had been in Dunkirk. They got themselves reorganised, sort of anyway. Then we were shifted from there, the whole division was shifted from Liverpool over to Northern Ireland again. We went to Armagh first for about two weeks and then to Dungannon where we remained for the next eight or nine months. That was quite an eye-opener for me. One half of Dungannon was Catholic and the other half was Protestant and they hardly spoke. Our battalion had their headquarters in what used to be Lord Ranfurly's old house there.

We had two companies in the Protestant part of town and two companies in the Catholic part of town. The company I was with was D-company and we were in the Catholic part of town. Then the CO said 'Now you will have your own mess because we can't have one mess for all these people.' We said 'Can we set up the officers' mess in McAleers' Hotel?'

Kitty McAleer was the proprietor. She was quite a character. She had a brother who would have been quite IRA at the time. He stayed there for a couple



Kitty McAleer (left) with a staff member

of months and then he went to Pomeroy where there were more IRA than in Dungannon. It was an amazing place, McAleers' Hotel, because there was a bar at the back you see where everybody used to come and drink, and then they also had an undertaking business and they also had the auction business. We used to say they would drink you to death then bury you and then sell off all your goods!

I became friendly particularly with Kitty McAleer. She was a great lady. She ordered us around like we were just children. It was a great time. Later on I got a horse and I kept it there. Then just down from us was the real Catholic part of town. The fellow there was an MP, Joe Stewart. He had a pub down there that was supposed to be out of bounds. We were not allowed to go there and when I used to go down there I used to drink in the pub anyway. I made friends with lots of people there in Dungannon, great people, but not very much with the Protestants you see because the Protestants didn't like associating with us because we were in the Catholic part of town. They used to ask you know, doctors and lawyers and things like that, they used to ask the officers in the Protestant part of town, they would ask them to parties. Never asked a single one of us. I suppose guilty by association! But I really enjoyed my time in Dungannon. It was an eye-opener for me.

We were there almost a year I think, then February it would be '41 or '42, I went to Wokingham, which is just near London. There we were given embarkation leave and we were equipped with all sorts of things, weapons and this that and the other. Then we left from there and we got the train and we were taken to Glasgow and we went straight on to the dock to the ship. We got on and I thought we would never get off. But I was very fortunate because most of the officers there were six in a cabin. It was bit packed. We had the whole brigade on and there was the Brigadier of course, with the aircraft carriers and all sorts. I had a room with a Catholic padre Fr Power. In our regiment there was a Presbyterian padre and a Church of England padre as well. And the Brigadier said there was four cabins under the bridge, which is pretty luxurious, so the Church of England and the Presbyterian padre were given one room, or one cabin. Then Fr Power was in another cabin so he said to Fr Power 'Now you can select what officer you

want to share with.' So he selected me, thinking I was Roman Catholic. But I think he always thought he was going to convert me. The funny thing was he used to go out on the deck early in the morning and say mass, you see, to the soldiers. He had a man who used to come in and get his wine or whatever and take it and put it out. We used to get a bottle of whiskey you see as a ration in those days. When the Americans really got going in the war that was done away with, but in those days we were British and we got a ration so I had a bottle of whiskey and used to put it in the place against the washstand. He had his wine on the other side. One day he came in and he said 'Oh my God, I have committed a deadly sin, it's terrible, terrible' and fell down on his knees and he was praying and praying and he said 'Oh you are nothing but a heathen, you don't understand this.' So I said 'What is going on?' He said 'Oh damn Mahon he took your whiskey instead of my wine and I gave them all a drop of whiskey.' I said 'What did you do with my whiskey?' He said 'Don't ever tell a soul, don't tell a soul!' It was very funny.

We were going to Singapore. We sailed around the ocean for days and weeks and we got to Sierra Leone. We were not allowed off the ship there. Then we didn't know where we were going. Singapore fell in the meantime. So then we got going again and we got to Cape Town. We sat in Cape Town on the ship. Again we were not allowed off. We had been on the ship for five or six weeks! We got off in Durban and we were there about five days and then we were told to get back on the ship. When we got back on the ship they said 'Now you must get your guns down in the hold.' We had to get them out of these little shells and they said 'You are going to invade Madagascar.'

So we set off to invade Madagascar and we were going in the ship's lifeboats. We didn't have any landing craft then in those days. I was the intelligence officer so I was sent in, in a little boat first and the rest of them came in, in the lifeboats. The lifeboats had never been in the water and they all sank when they were going in. Fortunately it was shallow and they could walk in. But God knows it would have been chaotic if we had ever been torpedoed with these lifeboats which were absolutely no good at all.

So we got in there. It was very, very hot, lovely weather, it was very, very hot. We stayed there about a day on the beach and I think we moved in and there were other troops who had gone in and they were fighting in the trenches. We were

supposed to be a reserve brigade or something. We had to walk everywhere, night march though the heat, it was terribly hot. And we got to... Diego Suarez was the name of the town. It was a naval base. We got in there and then the Free French gave up. We took them. They gave up and we were settled down in a place south of Diego Suarez in a sort of colonial farm, French people running it. They were just settlers, I suppose. We stayed there for about two or three weeks. We used to go out on patrols. It was amazing because you would go into these woods, jungles you know, and the smell of vanilla would overpower you. It grows wild there. And it would overpower, the smell of vanilla, absolutely overpowering. I will never forget it, it was incredible. Then we would find a village that would have one Arab in charge of the village and everybody else was like a slave to them. We stayed there for about three weeks I think, but we had no precautions against malaria at all, nothing. We were just like a crowd of dudes from England.

After that we went back on the ship which was waiting in the harbour for us. The rest of the convoy had gone off. We were told we had to go. We were going of course accross the Indian Ocean to Bombay and we were going unescorted because they were all gone. We got onto the ship again, and we set off and on the way over there about twenty on the boat died of malaria which they caught in Madagascar you see.

I will never forget arriving in Bombay. I got up about four or five in the morning to see us coming into Bombay and looking at Bombay I fell in love with it. It's a marvellous place. I really adore it and I loved our time in India. Most of the officers hated it. They hated it. Then we were met by the hospital trains with all these people with malaria you see. I didn't have it. Then we went to Ahmadnagar which was up in the hills, Bombay is down below and this was way up in the plains above Poona. Poona is up there too, about a hundred miles on, a military place.

We knew we were going to Burma when I was told I was going on a jungle warfare course. I was sent with people from the other regiments for a day and we were sent to Sagar which was a pretty place at that time in Central Provinces. Then the monsoon was on, it was pouring with rain all the time. There we settled into our course on jungle warfare, which really was a course in explosives. We had to crawl on our bellies and blow up a railroad or blow up this and that and we

had to do this from beneath. We had to judge how much explosives we needed and so on, a lot of it was mathematical. We used to do classes. We used to get up at about five in the morning and we would go out, in the pouring rain and we would blow up this and that, with all sorts of explosives. We got to use them and got to know them. I used to see it afterwards, years later, they would say ‘Oh there is a new explosive’ but we used to have it then. I really had a marvellous time, blowing up this and that.

We would come back to our house and go into a classroom and produce theories, to see how much explosives you needed for this or that or the other. Then after lunch, we would go out again and then we would come back all soaking wet and then we would prepare for dinner. Then you had to get dressed. We had a sort of service uniform, we didn’t have any blues or anything like that but some people there did have, in the Indian army and so on. You went into this dinner and you had a place, and your bearer stood behind you. He served you your food. My bearer was a very, very good character. Then the general would come in and toast the King and do all this sort of business. I really saw then what the army in India did; it was really an eye opener. I really liked the Indians; I loved my time there.

Then we went back down and then I had to train a lot of people in this explosives thing. Then we were sent up the Ranchi, it was just west of Calcutta. There we were stationed. We were told we were going to Burma, but we were only there about five days when a whole lot of trucks came along. ‘Get in these trucks you are going back to Bombay.’ And the whole division moved back to Bombay and right through Bombay to the docks and into another ship.

And off we went. Where are we going? We didn’t know. The next day we were told we were going up the Persian Gulf to Basra. We went to Basra. We went down towards Kuwait, terribly hot. It was the end of August, it was terribly hot. I have never been so hot in all my life. We really couldn’t do anything except lie in the tents. Then we went up to Baghdad, we went on a train. We got out at Baghdad into trucks again and we went from there to Persia and we were stationed just outside Kermanshah. A desolate sort of place, holy places there. Then we were told that we had to have anti-tank guns. We had no anti-tank guns. We had no anti-tank guns but the war had been going on down in the desert and was still going on down there.

The CO sent for me and said, 'Now I want you to be king of the anti-tank company. You must go with about twelve NCOs and you must go to an anti-tank regiment there. There they will train you in anti-tank weapons and you will come back here and you will get some anti-tank guns and you will have your own company.' So we went off and we started with the 2nd anti-tank regiment for about a month and we learnt all about anti-tank weapons. The guns we had were two pounders. No good at all. The anti-tank regiment had those too. Then I came back and we trained the others in anti-tank guns. Then we were moved out of Kermanshah. We were outside there, outside the town about 15 or 20 miles in the Great Salt Desert, it's called the Great Salt Desert. And God we thought we can't stay here. It was getting very cold, very very cold. It was high up you see. Then suddenly somebody discovered all this stuff we were sitting on was salt so we would dig a hole, we would wet it and it would become plaster. So we got out and put the tent on the top and then to get warm we could get a primus stove which you could buy anywhere there and paraffin you could get anywhere you know, it was all over the place. We sat there for the winter and we had these stoves going in these little huddles under the ground and we sat out the winter there. It was terribly cold. We got the rations, and then we went here and there and away.

I went up to Tehran a couple of times on leave for three days. We would see the Russians there. The Russians we met there were very nice, the officers were very decent people. Most of them had already been wounded you see in Russia and they were sent down to Persia. They were decent fellows. You could see they were disciplined and so on. Then it came down to February '43 and of course they had won the battle of Stalingrad. You see in the summer before, the Germans had reached Groznyj, which is what they are fighting about now. It's a great oil producing place. And that is why the Germans wanted it. The British I suppose were fearful that they were going to get through so they moved the 10th Indian army out of India into Persia with the Russians. That is why we went there. Anyway we were moved down to Baghdad in the rainy season. My God it was an awful drive, sliding around in the mud. Then we came across to the west into Jordan and into Syria and then we came to a place 20 or 30 miles outside Damascus. There we had our neighbours, the Circassians, they were Russians you see because this was going on in those days against the Tsars in the last century



Blanche Herbert in the Boudoir, 1865

where the people in Circassia were fighting the Russians. They all emigrated down to Syria and the French turned them into cavalry. They had a lot of horses. They were our neighbours out there. They were decent fellows. We stayed there for a while, then I was sent down to Egypt on a course.

We were getting six-pounders, which were much better guns. And nobody knew anything about them so I was sent down to Cairo, the first time I had been in Cairo. I had a great time there and learned about the six-pounders. Then I came back and by that time they had moved down into the Lebanon. They were in Tripoli which is north Lebanon. They were doing mountain warfare training. Because it had all been in deserts you see. So they had a good four weeks of mountain warfare training. It was a marvellous country, lovely country. Lebanon was great, I liked it very much, a marvellous place. We used to go into Beirut to have a look around there.

Then I was sent to the 10th army division in the desert, up in the north of Syria. They were doing manoeuvres with the Turks. We went up as observers. That was quite interesting. Anita Leslie, she was around all the time. When I went into Damascus to the hotel to get a cup of coffee or something she was sitting there with Lord Lansdowne. It was the last time I saw him. Then we went back to Lebanon and we moved to another place which was near Syria again. At this time we were moved down to the Suez Canal and Port Said where we were going to go somewhere. There were a couple of big boats there, cruise boats. We were put on them and we had to get off them into landing craft, all this business. Then we were sent to a troop ship. We didn't know where we were going. Then we discovered when we had set sail, we were going to Sicily. We landed in Sicily in June or July 1943.

We landed near Syracuse. Syracuse became Alexander's headquarters. The funny thing was when we were on that ship they used to show us movies in the evening and the movie they showed us when we first got it was the Boys from Sicily. We were right there. Of course the first thing we had to do was gather our guns which had been on different ships, you see, and get ourselves sorted out. We were trying to do that and then we got into this town and the liaison officer came along and he said to one of our officers—'You can drive down there and your battalion, the marching body will join you there.' But of course this was nonsense because this

town was in the hands of the Italians. We got up there and a fellow went down on this carrier, weren't gone very far and they started shelling us and one of my soldiers who was with me, was badly wounded. One of my guns was knocked out, we were just sitting on the road. There was false information given to us but anyway we got over there and we got our guns and we started off. We were advancing and we got to a place called Lemon Bridge which had been taken by airborne forces on the day of the invasion. There had been a big battle there. Animals, there were dead bodies everywhere, it was horrible. We were told we had to advance across the plain and that we did. Then we ran into the biggest battle we had.

The battalion ran into stiff opposition at Lemon Bridge, the bridge across the river and they had very heavy casualties there. I think that three or four rifle company commanders were either killed or wounded. I had lost one service man and the other one was killed near Lemon Bridge. I got injured myself. We had an extraordinary Commanding Officer. He was called Joseph O'Brien Twohig. He was a fiery fellow, he joined us when we were in the Persia and he really put the battalion into shape. He was an extraordinary fellow. 'Führer' everybody called him. He wouldn't take no for an answer and he was very dynamic and so on. But anyway he ran into this thing at Lemon Bridge and he also lost a lot of his officers and men there.

Eventually the Germans gave up and we moved forward. We were then switched around to another place, to Sferro Station and that was a real hell-hole. We got shelled all the time. It lasted for about five days and then we moved on again. We landed on about the 10th of July and I suppose we finished our campaign in Sicily about a month later. Then we were in a farm with a decent farmer, which was a pretty good place. There we re-equipped and we got replacements for all the people who had been killed and wounded. Then we got into the landing craft and we invaded the 'Toe of Italy' as it was known then. There were two divisions landing there, one was ours and the other was Canadian. Montgomery said we would be supported by tremendous artillery. My God the artillery was so tremendous, it was overpowering. The smoke screen they put down meant you couldn't see a thing.

I had met Montgomery already a couple of times and I met him more later on, but in our landing craft I was the fellow in charge of the troops and we didn't

know where we were going. There was this awful smoke everywhere and we ran right into the wall of the place and we got off and we didn't know where we were. It was really chaotic. And then we sorted ourselves out. We were landing among the Canadians and the Canadians were among us and it was a very chaotic couple of hours. Thank God there was nobody opposing us that day, it would have been awful. Then they had, it was marvellous, they had to go up this mountain. Of course I couldn't take my guns so I was at the bottom with all the guns until the mules arrived, they had mules then. Then a couple of planes came over and dropped bombs and the mules scattered all over the place, God! It's funny looking back at it but it wasn't at the time.

Then we gradually went up the coast but it was terrible, you see the Germans blew every bridge. The engineers did a tremendous job. But people in Palermo couldn't understand why we couldn't advance up the coast more quickly, but you couldn't, you see. You could with one car but you couldn't with a whole load of guns and everything else. We got up there eventually and then I got ill.

I was evacuated because I had something wrong with my ear. I was put on a ship, a hospital ship that was going to Algiers. I went on the hospital ship for about two days and they cured me. I was cured then but all these people were there with jaundice. I caught it there. The American troops had got it, and our officers got it, but the troops never got it. I don't know why. They called it the officers' disease—maybe because we got a little whiskey in our ration.

When we got into Algiers we had one idea: to get back to Italy. I didn't want to stay in Algiers. And we, the three of us of our brigade who were there, managed to get an American colonel to put us on a plane for Sicily. By that time I had gone up to yellow, so the medical captain put me into a hospital in Palermo which was American. I stayed there for about four weeks until I was cured of it. Eventually I got back to my battalion. The American colonel had given me a thing to say I was needed there so I got on a plane and got back to my comrades. I found the rear echelon of my battalion who were very pleased to see me.

We got to Naples and then we were moved around to the Sangro which was right on the extreme east of Italy. There we spent Christmas in Casoli. We were with the partisans you see. They were good chaps. We were with the Eighth Army then, and we were moved right around to the other coast to the Fifth Army.

Clarke was a general of the Fifth Army. McCreery was in charge of the corps. Anyway the river there was called the Garigliano. The river comes to the Ausente Valley, and then is joined by the Rapido and then it becomes the Garigliano and goes down to the sea. This is really the first Battle of Monte Cassino that we started off... We had a lot of casualties. I was wounded there, but not while crossing the river, when we got into our boats. Our company was able to reach their objective and C company on our right reached their objective. There were only four companies in the whole damn army corps that reached their objectives. We were like a sore thumb. The Germans had marked where they thought we were likely to cross and they just showered it with shells and sank many of the boats... I was wounded the next morning. There was a counter attack, you see they counter attack. And we were driven off. We joined C company which was on our right. We were there that night and then the next morning we were calling for defensive fire all the time. We were just sitting ducks. There were four officers, of whom I was one, and we were all having a pow-wow, lighting our cigarettes. We couldn't do that in the dark you see, and it was just getting light and one of our batteries was firing short and the shells landed right on top of us. I was wounded in the leg...

I was evacuated then, I was really badly wounded, then. The next few months were spent in hospital. We all had a horror of getting back to Algiers where we would be put into a camp which was a general sort of a place then you wouldn't know where you would be sent to. There would be no respect for your battalion or anything. But you see you become so attached to a battalion. I suppose I had been with the officers for three years. So it was like home. Then of course they realise you would do anything to get back. So our Commanding Officer sent a truck for me before I should really have gone out of the hospital because my leg was still bandaged. There were about four of us who had been wounded who wanted to be in the battalion so he kept us there and I went to the local aid station to get my leg dressed every other day. It was like being at home.

I stayed there I suppose for about two months in 1944. Then we had to rejoin the people in Anzio. By this time you could get to Anzio for about three or four days and then we went up to Rome. We were out on the coast from Anzio, the British were on the left. We got into Ostia and then we were left to go into Rome. Went in there by jeep. Of course we had our Irish caps, our caubeens, which I had

had made by an Italian tailor out of Italian uniforms. There we met a doctor who said 'Are you people Irish?' So we would say 'Yes'. He said 'You know my mother is Irish.' That was extraordinary, an Italian. He said 'Would you like to meet her? She would love to see you.' It was the Marconis. He had a sister, you know.

I met Delia Murphy, the wife of the Irish Ambassador to the Vatican. Kiernan, I think he was. I didn't meet him the first time but when I was wounded again, you see I went back down to the Irish College and there were various nurses who were Irish looking after us. They used to go over to the Irish College to talk to the priests in the evenings. Then one of them said to one of the priests 'Oh where do you come from?' and he said 'Killarney.' 'Oh,' she said 'We have an officer from Killarney'. 'Who's that?' he said. 'Oh my God' he said 'I know the name.' He knew my name you see. And so he came over to see me, it was Fr Quinlan. We became very friendly. He died about two years ago. We kept in touch for years. I was very fond of him. He said, 'Oh I must tell Monsignor O'Flaherty.'

Monsignor O Flaherty, Hugh's uncle, he came down to the hospital to see me. He had a car you see, nobody had a car in those days, and he used to take me around. He really showed me Rome from the bottom. He knew every place in Rome and he showed me round. There was no traffic you see except some army vehicles, you know, armour. I couldn't walk very well. So he took me around in his car, all around Rome. We went everywhere; he was really marvellous to me. I was there about six weeks I suppose and he would always come round at least twice a week and take me out. He was a great fellow, he was amazing, all those people he saved. He introduced me to all the Irish priests, I can't remember who they all were but there was one, a Franciscan monastery there which is allied or something or other with the monastery in Killarney. And full of Irish Fathers there. And there was one Fr Quinn who was in charge and this young Franciscan took me in and introduced me to him. I thought he was rather rude, he said to the young priest 'Now you go away'. Then he came to me and he said 'Would you like a drop of whiskey?' There was a picture behind his desk which he moved aside and there was a little safe and he brought out a bottle of Irish whiskey.

Then I went back again. The CO had changed by then but this business of getting his officers back still persisted and he sent a truck down for me. The second time I was wounded was just before Bologna. It was incredible I was

wounded there, I was placed where you get all the rations and ammunitions and send them up by mule to the rest and I was there and I was waiting for the meal change to come back. We were just standing there and a couple of shells fell and I said 'Those are getting fairly near.' And then another one fell and I said 'God that is getting very near, we better go back into the shelter.' And one hit me in the back and knocked me down. It was a big piece of metal. I was pretty well spent you see. It knocked me out. Then I went back to Rome and spent time there in hospital. Then I went back again and by this time I was wounded twice, I was put in charge of the water company, which was a bit less onerous. I was in charge of that till I left the army.

We were going into all these towns, the Germans were giving up and so on. Then we eventually got into Austria and there we stayed for three years. We went to Vienna for the first winter and it was terribly cold... We had a second colonel who was the father of David McConnell. And I had good friends there. We used to go down to the local town at night to the night clubs.

There was one lady who took a shine to me, a Russian officer... She had a row of medal ribbons. I couldn't talk to her except in German you see and she knew a little German. She was always grinning. I don't know what the matter was with her, it was quite amusing. Then she wanted me to go in and inspect her company, so I agreed to do that. I was inspecting these poor soldiers and she sees something the matter with one officer and she takes her stick and whacks him on the face. She was quite ferocious.

You see we met the Russians all the time. Sometimes you would find them really great troops and other times they were awful. When we first met them in Austria, the first ones we met were there only a couple of days. They were armoured troops. They were really first class. Then they would go, and then these absolute hordes of people from all over Asia would come in. They were absolutely dreadful. No discipline or anything, they were just wild.

Billy at Work

When I came out of the army I went to California. I was wondering what I would do, you see I had things to do at my grandfather's estate but it wasn't full time. So I was looking for something to do. This friend of mine was working with Hiller,



the helicopter people, and he said ‘You know we have stacks of correspondence from all over the world, nobody ever answers it. Would you come down and look through it?’ So I came down and I started looking through it. It was fascinating, people writing from all over the world and nobody ever answering them. And so I eventually stayed there for fourteen years. I really went there by chance. It was amazing. I loved it there. I introduced helicopters to people from all over the world.

We were just starting making them you see. First we had to get the thing certified. That took about a year and then we got it certified and we could build them. We built them and delivered them in ’49 and the first one we sold was in France. We had a great man here, Commander Borris. He was Jewish/French. He was in the Free French Forces from the very beginning. He was a great aviator and so forth, a really tremendous chap, brilliant.

Billy on the Funds

The first I heard about the American Irish Foundation was in 1964 when the Irish Consul in San Francisco asked about twelve people of Irish descent to a dinner honouring Frank Aiken, who was the Foreign Minister, and everyone went in black tie. He was looking for money for The American Irish Foundation which was started by de Valera and Kennedy. After that, I never heard another word. Then about nine or ten years later Kevin Mallen, he was one of those who started this thing; he called me and said ‘I would like to see you.’ I went down to see him in his office and he said ‘You have just been elected to The American Irish Foundation.’ I said ‘I never heard anything about it since I came to Ireland. It must be dead and gone.’ ‘Oh yes’ he said ‘it’s just been revived. Jack Mulcahy has come on board and it’s just been revived. The first thing he wants you to do is go to Ireland as a guest of Mr Mulcahy. He has taken a 747 and he will take you on a tour of Ireland.’

I came on this trip and we came to see Mulcahy and went to his house in Limerick. He was buying up everything at the time. There must have been two hundred and fifty or so for the 747 was full. There were various other people came and joined us on the way. There was Considine, who was the great columnist for Hearst newspapers in Chicago. There was also Oscar Hammer, who was the head of Occidental Petroleum, and there was Alice Faye, who used to be my idol when I was about eighteen years old.

We went to Dublin to Trinity College where they were producing a new history of Ireland which Mulcahy had contributed to, but which he thought was far too pro-British. We were asked to Áras an Uachtaráin by President de Valera, who was very courteous and pleasant. I didn't have much chance to talk to him, though I did sit beside him for five minutes and we talked about Muckross and my father, whom he knew, and was very anti de Valera as he blamed him entirely and felt him responsible for the Civil War. He was very soft-spoken. He was very old then. It was quite an event for me anyhow.

I became a Director. So was Mulcahy. John Cosgrove was President at the time. Mallen was Treasurer and a couple of years later they elected me President.

At the instigation of Tom Jordan we started the Literary Award with \$5,000 that first year. It went to Austin Clarke. His wife said 'For God's sake, don't give him all that money at once or he'll go off to Monte Carlo or somewhere and spend it all. You have to give it to him in little bits.' So we gave it to him in monthly instalments. That was done for several years. The next man was Seamus Heaney, then a relatively unknown poet. After Seamus came John Banville, followed by Dervla Murphy. One of the conditions of the prize was that they should reside in Ireland for the year they got it. She accepted the prize, but said 'I do all my writing overseas'. So she decided to buy a bicycle and ride around in Ireland. She went round the whole of Northern Ireland talking to ordinary people, Protestants, Catholics and everyone. She wrote a book called *A Place Apart*. It's a first-class book. It was really a most touching book.

Then they said to me when I was there, that there was a young fellow from Ireland called Tony O'Reilly who started a thing similar to ours and they wanted me to go to see him. I said I would. I had an awful time trying to get to him, I didn't know Tony O'Reilly. I only knew him as a great rugby player. He was already very prominent. I had an awful time trying to get to see him. We made a date and then there was a snowstorm and he couldn't leave Pittsburgh and anyway after about six months Sean Donlon, who had just been made ambassador in Washington, and Walter Curley got us together.

We went to a dinner at Cote Basque in New York which was Tony's favourite restaurant at the time. Tony was accompanied by Chuck Daly. It was obvious to me that O'Reilly wasn't interested in merging at all. But he said 'Now why don't



President John F Kennedy and President Eamon de Valera launch The American Irish Foundation 1963

you and Walter come to my office tomorrow morning,’ so I thought there was a glimmer of hope—Walter Curley was on our Board. And so we went down. He suggested that as a start we would put two directors on their board and they put two directors on our board and then we will take a look at it. So I thought it was a good idea and I said ‘Well I will have to take it to my board, the board of directors, to get their approval.’

So we fixed a date for a board meeting at the Union Club in New York. Tony was at a hotel round the corner waiting for our answer. To my horror they didn’t buy it. They didn’t buy it at all. And so I was left high and dry. I just said to Walter ‘What on earth are we going to do now?’ He said ‘I will go and see Tony and will say that we would have to wait.’

The ones that were against it were Mulcahy, a very distinguished old gentleman from Boston, Joe Gannon, and the Ambassador in Dublin, Moore, he was against it. Why he was against it I don’t know. Our Board were preponderantly old gentlemen and they thought they were losing control. They saw younger people coming along and they didn’t like it.

We were not able to do anything so we went on our way for about six or seven years and we had the West, they had begun to grow more in the East and Middle West and they had also become more active so anyway we finally did it. John Brogan became President and I said ‘You know we’ll have to do something about the merger with these fellows. It’s ridiculous. We have the same aims, and we’re going after the same millionaires. It’s a nonsense.’ He was determined and he got together with Dan Rooney. Dan Rooney really did it.

Brian Burns who was the lawyer sorted it out. When he but puts his mind to something he really does it. He had those two things sorted out legally, my God, so quick we didn’t know what was happening. They couldn’t agree on a name at first because we wanted The American Irish Foundation to be included in the title. So finally both sides compromised and it was agreed jointly we would be known as The American Ireland Fund. This kept the initials AIF as well as the term Ireland Fund so both could feel they had made a good compromise. They agreed on the logo afterwards at a meeting in Ashford, and we still have it today.

Then we were all in the garden of the Irish Embassy in Washington. Various people made speeches declaring they were going to merge the two bodies. We

shook hands with Ronald Regan to seal the agreement. But as it was, it was a lot of people didn't like it but it has worked well. It has gone all over the place mainly through Tony O'Reilly. It's is a big, big thing now from the shaky start. We've come a long way, done some good, don't you think? We have tremendous power in so far as we are this extraordinary network. The more we can gather people together, the more points of contact we can have around the world, the greater we become, the more benefit to Ireland.

I am proud of what we have done to make Ireland a better and more peaceful place. I think what has been achieved in the last fifteen years has been remarkable, and I hope we have been a part of that, to make that possible. I lived the first part of my life in Ireland and I love the country, I love the people. It all gives me great pleasure. I just think of Kerry and the beauty of it all. And all the people round Muckross. They were the people I grew up with. I just love them. I never met a crowd of people like them anywhere else in the world. I am a Kerryman to the core.



ANNE AND BILL McNALLY

Directors, The American Ireland Fund

One of the Nicest Guys

It is as simple as that. Since the day Anne and I met him (around the time of the American Irish Foundation merger with The Ireland Fund in 1987) he has always extended himself in every way to everyone with whom he came in contact. His generosity of spirit was infectious, and was focused on all around him, both the great and the not-so-great.

We both remember when he hosted the entire American Ireland Fund Board at his home the last time the Annual Conference was held in Kerry. He extended himself to each and every guest, truly making his hilltop home their home for the evening, and trying to make County Kerry their home for the Season!

I remember the time of an Annual Conference in Belfast when he stayed behind from Hillsborough Castle in order to reconnect with his World War II Batman at the Culloden Hotel in Holywood.

We remember his profound reminiscences of his childhood at Muckross House, and his stories of his physical condition at the time and how it impacted his early years.

And I recall one afternoon a few years later, when I drove from Dublin to Muckross for a reception to acknowledge American Ireland Fund support in funding a local community assistance program at a farmhouse across from Muckross. The program was to be named after Billy, or the Vincent family, I can't

*Facing page,
Filoli House, California*

recall. I will never forget the absolute love and affection that all of the older locals, the former workers in Muckcross, had for ‘Master Billy’, the young child who had been raised in the incredible estate across the way.

Both Anne and I recall some great stays in San Francisco at the Clift Hotel, which Billy had invested in at the time. (Regardless of his stake in the venture, you always felt like Billy was the sole owner of these undertakings. This impression, or possibly misimpression, was only reinforced by the warmth of the staff and management’s reaction to Billy when he was present.)

We remember a trip to Filoli, with John Brogan and Mosse Hvide, to view the other great house that Billy’s forebears once owned and that is now a public treasure enjoyed by all. I recall his courtliness in ensuring that one of our guests would not have to miss out on the gardens just because of a recent leg injury.

I remember the trip to Munich with Billy when we launched the Ireland Fund of Germany. Many of the principal guests were, in fact, Germans, who as young women had been courted by Billy, or vice versa, just before the outbreak of World War II. Now, in the late 1980s, as widows, they regaled in their old friendships and were quickly converted to Irish Patrons, with a zeal for modern Ireland and its needs.

I remember the first Annual Dinner of the newly formed Ireland Fund of France at the home of the Irish Ambassador, Tadhg O’Sullivan. Billy’s presence and his easy manorial style helped establish the importance of the evening, and of our organisation, at a time when the French had no particular reason to get involved in the affairs or needs of the Irish.

And then there was the time at the Ascot Races, where Billy looked as at home as the Queen herself.

Most of all, both Anne and I recall the many, many times when Billy’s real contribution was one of counselling moderation and respect for others as the Ireland Funds, in their various iterations around the World, wrestled with the formative issues confronting any philanthropic group with a million ideas for doing good and the resources for accomplishing only a portion of their goals. Billy was, and still is, a force for mutual respect and considerateness, at all times insisting that all views be heard and that everyone, including those whose programme ideas are not to prevail, do not feel diminished by the process. In

“...Billy is the
embodiment of the
principal of
noblesse oblige.”

many ways, Billy is the embodiment of the principal of *noblesse oblige*. Almost instinctively (because it never looks hard to him) he manages to be both benevolent and respectful to those around him. In doing so, he is never patronising. He never said it, but you know that he understands that his wealth and good fortune in life have bestowed upon him an opportunity to use his prestige and resources to lead others in the right direction—and to give them a hand in the bargain.

He is truly the best of the best. We love him.



May 1974, Meeting of the Board of The American Irish Foundation, seated Irish Ambassador John Molloy, Kevin Mallen, Edward McDermott, standing Tom Jordan, Charles Lucey, Joseph Gannon, Bill Vincent (treasurer)

TOM JORDAN

*Retired Executive Secretary, The American Irish Foundation
Associate Director, The American Ireland Fund*

Renaissance Kerryman

Having drinks at the Vincent house in San Francisco or at Dromkerry in Killarney was always a most enjoyable adventure. There would always be a guest or two: one might encounter a member of a branch of the extensive Bourn Vincent family tree, the kin of a retainer from the great houses of Filoli or Muckcross, someone with ties to the fabled Empire Mine in Grass Valley, from Bill's education days in England or perhaps a comrade from the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.

Bill's friendships are diverse and know no national or class lines. He draws them from his childhood experiences in Killarney and California, from early schooling at Bryanston in England and before World War II at the University of Munich (where he learned to speak German). However, the war took a terrible toll on the friends and classmates he made at Cambridge.

He left Cambridge University at the start of the war, enlisting as a Guardsman in the Irish Guards. Later, he was commissioned in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers and served some six war years in India, Persia, Iraq and in Italy, where he was wounded twice. While convalescing in Rome, he became a close friend of the famous Scarlet Pimpernel of the Vatican, Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty, later known as the Irish Oskar Schindler. The Monsignor, also a Kerry man, managed to get word to the Vincent family in Ireland that Bill was alive in Rome.

On another occasion, Bill cheated death when a projectile went through the spokes of his motorcycle wheel and did not explode.

After the war, in 1947, he returned to California where he managed the family affairs and was reunited with a legion of friends there. Then he developed a new group of global friends as the international representative for Hiller Aircraft, a fledgling maker of helicopters on the San Francisco Peninsula. The firm needed someone who was multilingual and had strong associations in the Middle East and Europe. Bill was a perfect fit. In his new pursuit, he became friends with potentates and national leaders who were interested in this new flying machine. He kept those friends and his talk was often about sultans and news of foreign affairs not found in US media.

Friends were also made in other business ventures—a chocolate factory in Mexico, an oil strike in Indonesia, a venture capital company in the Cayman Islands—each adding to the number who enjoyed his company and respected him for his wisdom and integrity.

All who know Bill are aware of his abiding devotion to Ireland and its people. From his childhood at Muckross he was deeply aware of the needs of the nation and the privation it had suffered.

In 1963 Presidents Kennedy and de Valera called for the creation of the American Irish Foundation. By 1971, the American Irish Foundation had almost failed in this mission, but its small board rededicated itself to the cause. One of the first to join in this effort was Bill Vincent, who assisted the foundation by helping it to gain credibility on both sides of the ocean and by throwing his grand parties in San Francisco and Killarney, which provided social glue to strengthen the foundation.

In 1983 he became Chairman of the foundation and actively led the board in its negotiations to merge with The Ireland Fund. He had complete faith in the leadership of the Fund and was impressed by its achievements. He believed it best for Ireland if the two organisations would combine their efforts.

After that successful merger in 1986, Bill became Vice Chairman of The American Ireland Fund and his participation since has been invaluable as a Board Member. After he became a resident of Monaco in 1998, he called upon old friends and new to form the Ireland Fund of Monaco. It has not only raised

‘ Fortunately for
Ireland and many
noble causes, his
life is studded
with enduring
achievements to
benefit others. ’

significant funds, but every two years the Fund's celebration in Monte Carlo is a world class, not-to-be-missed event.

The Bourns in America always seemed to be involved in undertakings to improve the lives of citizens in the young state of California; the Vincent family was known for its deep concern for the welfare of the Irish people.

Arthur Vincent, Bill's father, served in the Senate of the Irish Free State, having been appointed by WT Cosgrave, President of the Executive Council of the State, and was subsequently elected to that body. In 1933, the Bourn Vincent family gave Muckross—the grand house in Killarney and Bill's childhood home—and its 11,000 acres to Ireland as a National Park. It was the first National Park in the country.

In the United States, Filoli, the Bourn manor house on the San Francisco Peninsula (seen in movies and TV dramas) is now owned by the National Trust. The Empire Mine, developed by Bill's great grandfather, which was one of the richest gold mines in the state, is a California State park. Greystones, the majestic stone building in St Helena, California, was built by the Bourns to serve the local and now internationally famous vintners. It still serves the people of the area as a culinary institute.

With such a heritage, Bill Vincent did not have to devote himself to good causes—he could have rested on the accomplishments and philanthropy of his family. Fortunately for Ireland and many noble causes, his life is studded with enduring achievements to benefit others.

His friendship is treasured by those who have had an opportunity to know him. Loretta Brennan Glucksman, Chairman of The American Ireland Fund, aptly paraphrased a memorable line from Henry V—'a little touch of Harry in the night'—to say that everyone would be fortunate to have 'a little touch of Billy in their lives'. No one who knows him would disagree.

CHARLES U DALY

Board Director, The American Ireland Fund

The Merger

Long, long ago when Tony O'Reilly asked me to participate in developing the merger of the two Ireland Funds, I learned that a certain AWB Vincent was to be a negotiator on the other side.

In preparation for our first meeting, I checked his biography and learned that during the World War II, he had served in the same regiment in which my Uncle Charles had fought and died during the First World War. When we met and I mentioned that coincidence, he responded:

'Ah, yes, after I was wounded for the second or third time I said to myself: Billy, these English generals (or did he say bastards?) may be misusing these Irish regiments!'

Well Billy, since that day we've passed a lot of water under life's bridges. Doing so in the pleasure of your company I have enjoyed producing every last drop.



Loretta Brennan Glucksman with Joan Hayes and Billy, at The Ireland Fund of Monaco Biennial Celebrations, October 2006

VIRGINIA GALLICO

Vice-President, Ireland Fund of Monaco

Trustee, Princess Grace Irish Library

Billy and The Ireland Fund of Monaco

‘Although this remarkable Irish philanthropist is a quiet man, he is strong in his convictions.’

It is indeed a brave person who dares say ‘No’ to Mr AWB Vincent. Unfortunately for me, I was not such a person when approached by Billy in the late 1990s. He was then in the throes of creating The Ireland Fund of Monaco. He thought I might be able to help. I fought and lost. He had thrown his line and hooked his struggling fish. The Fund was formed and Billy’s unstinting generosity began. As his never-ending and benevolent ideas flourished, so I became more and more involved.

In the last ten years, he has been the instigator in funding a Writer and an Academic in Residence, each for one month, in Spring and Autumn, at the Princess Grace Irish Library. He has donated many important Irish books, often signed, for the library shelves and is a frequent guest, friend and supporter at the monthly lectures.

He has never failed to be on hand when distinguished visitors—His Serene Highness Prince Albert II of Monaco, Her Royal Highness the Princess of Hanover, the Duchess of Abercorn, Dr Mary McAleese, Dr Garrett Fitzgerald, Ambassador Pádraic MacKernan, Ambassador Anne Anderson and so many more—come to the Library.

Billy created two major honours: a Literary Prize to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the death of Princess Grace, which was first awarded to Colum

McCann in 2002, and the bi-annual Humanitarian Award, which was given to Bill Cullen in 2004 and to the Duchess of Abercorn in 2006. All these distinctions were presented by Prince Albert II of Monaco.

Under Billy's presidency, The Ireland Fund of Monaco has sponsored the Irish Army riding team to participate in the Monte Carlo international showjumping event, financed two young Monégasque riders to perfect their horsemanship in Ireland, and organised bi-annual gala weekends in the Principality of Monaco.

In her capacity as President of the Fondation, Princess Grace, The Princess of Hanover has thrice accepted cheques from The Ireland Fund of Monaco which were presented by Billy—on behalf of the Fund—to finance various library projects.

Before Billy handed over the Presidency of The Ireland Fund of Monaco to Michael Fitzgerald and became President Emeritus, the late Prince Rainier III made him Commander of the Order of Saint Charles—an honour so very well deserved.

Although this remarkable Irish philanthropist is a quiet man, he is strong in his convictions. A completely selfless man who thinks only of others and without whom the tenth Ireland Fund would not exist.

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired)

MARK RH SCOTT

Vice-Chairman of Trustees, The Inniskilling Museum

Captain Vincent of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

In St Stephen's Green, Dublin, the day before my wedding in 1961, my father, Colonel Bobby Scott, suddenly stopped and said 'Willy Vincent!' They had last met in Rome in 1944 as members of the redoubtable 2nd Inniskillings, (in which Bill was known by the Tyrone abbreviation 'Willy').

We had a good lunch, of which I remember little, and he came to the wedding in County Kilkenny the next day.

Forty years later, now a retired Inniskilling myself, I was put in charge of developing the Inniskillings Museum in Enniskillen Castle. Bill, as Founder and Vice-President of the Ireland Funds, became not only the most generous of benefactors of the museum, but also a wonderful mine of information about his former comrades.

The Inniskillings landed in Sicily in 1943 and fought their way through Italy until the war ended. I will quote from the many references to Bill in the book *Rough Road to Rome*, by Sir David Cole, Bill's friend and brother officer. Bill started as anti-tank platoon commander, the most dangerous of all infantry jobs, but was also the Battalion's German interrogator, in which role 'he could put on a scowl and a bit of a bark for the occasion'.

Here is David's description of him: 'Willy was an intelligent and good-humoured man of the world, with a broad European education and estates in

Killarney, who could handle the CO better than most of us. He was also excellent company.’ Elsewhere, David refers to him as ‘the ever-resourceful Willy Vincent’. The CO referred to was the fiery and highly decorated Colonel Pat O’Brien-Twohig from Cork—Bill told me that the young officers called him ‘The Führer’.

The Inniskillings’ most savage battle was the crossing of the Garigliano, at which Bill was second-in-command of B Company. After crossing the river and minefields under fire, the Inniskillings took their objectives in the first breaching of the Gustav Line before fighting off massive German counter-attacks. Bill was wounded, and 43 of his comrades killed.

While recuperating, he put up a memorial to them, which stood there for many years, but latterly became neglected. We brought it back to the museum, and on his first visit he was visibly moved to see it again. ‘I knew every one of those men’ he said.

Bill was then and is now a ‘people person’. Recently, when we lost touch with John Duane of Galway, another of Bill’s brother officers, we wrote to Bill, who found him in a nursing home.

People matter to him, and we all benefit from his thoughtful and caring interest.

Renewing contact with Bill has been one of the highlights of our museum project. His values are what we all aspire to: reconciliation in Ireland; sense of duty; practical involvement in good causes; hard work; maintaining and enjoying friendship and family; old-fashioned chivalry.

Bill Vincent has the best form of leadership: he makes us want to live up to him. He is a living example of the Inniskilling traditions which have inspired us all, and we are proud to have worn the same badge.

“ Bill Vincent has
the best form of
leadership: he
makes us want to
live up to him. ”

BILL CULLEN

CEO, Glencullen

Recipient of The Princess Grace Humanitarian Award, 2004

The Magic of Muckross

‘...Billy Vincent
was nurtured in
an ambience of
generosity that
became part of
his psyche.’

It was in the late fifties that I first visited Killarney. Six inner-city Dublin teenagers hitchhiked off for the August holiday fortnight. We pitched our little two-man tents in the Flesk Caravan Park on the Muckross Road. Strategically located just a few minutes walk from the Gleneagles Hotel, which was the focus of our visit because the weekend entertainment was Dickie Rock and the Miami Showband. We had a ball dancing with the local girls while the band did all the Elvis Presley rock numbers.

On the Sunday morning I left the lads sleeping off their hangovers and walked along the lake pathway until I came to the famous Muckross House. I took the tour of this magnificent Manor and read the history of the house. Built in 1843 by the Herbert Family and visited in 1861 by Queen Victoria. Bought in 1899 by the Guinness family who sold it 1910 to the Bourn family of California, who gave it as a wedding present to their daughter Maud on her marriage to Arthur Vincent. It was here in Muckross House that Billy Vincent was born in 1919 and lived for 13 years. Billy's mother died of pneumonia in New York in 1929, after which the house and its estate were donated to the Irish Nation in 1932. What a magnificent act of philanthropy. It shows how our good friend Billy Vincent was nurtured in an ambience of generosity that became part of his psyche.



The estate included the Lakes of Killarney, the mountains, and 11,000 acres of forests and land. Some of the estate workers took the opportunity to buy their small holdings. One of them was Jack Lynch, the deer-keeper who lived in the Muckross Hunting Lodge on Mangerton Mountain. Muckross House is now a tourist attraction as well as a wonderful local amenity for the people of Kerry. Arthur Vincent and the family moved back to California where they lived in a newly built replica of Muckross House called Filoli (from the family motto—Fight, Love, Live).

That's the wonderful fairy story I read about that sunny summer morning almost 50 years ago. I spent hours walking the gardens filled with exotic plants and flowers, which thrived in the heat of the Gulf Stream that caresses the Kingdom of Kerry. I walked up Mangerton Mountain and listened to the thunderous roar of Torc Waterfall. I was enveloped in an aura of peace and tranquillity. My first experience of the magic of Muckross.

*His Serene Highness
Prince Albert II of Monaco
with Billy, Jackie Lavin, and
Bill Cullen after presentation of
the Princess Grace Humanitarian
Award, October 2004*

I walked back down the road to the tent and came across the Muckross Hotel, which had a tea garden at the front door where the maids served tea in their white bibs and bonnets. It was just like the film *Pride and Prejudice* I'd seen the week before. I daringly sat down at an empty table and ordered afternoon tea. Served with a dazzling smile by a gorgeous Kerry girl I gorged on scones with cream and hot raspberry sauce. Followed by a huge slice of glorious apple pie. Tea served through a strainer would you believe, and I focused on carefully handling the delicate crockery. Nearly passed out when I got the bill for five shillings and sixpence. But this was my first experience of what five-star service meant. I looked around at all the posh customers and was excited by just being there. Found out that the hotel was opened in 1795 as the Herbert Arms Hotel, originally owned by the Muckross Estate. On that day my dreams of being a wealthy achiever were polished with fresh determination.

That was the beginning of my love affair with Killarney. I hitchhiked down from Dublin as often as possible, eventually driving and staying for holiday weekends in the Europe Hotel and, in 1990, buying both the Muckross Hotel and the Muckross Hunting Lodge, which has been our spiritual home has been for the past 15 years.

Of course we met Billy Vincent and fell under the spell of his unique personality. One of our hotel suites is named 'The Bourn-Vincent' Suite in honour of his family and the wonderful contribution they made to our Irish heritage. Billy joins us every year at the Muckross Rowing Regatta and a few other events that are close to his heart. We are donors of his great initiative, The Ireland Funds, which has raised hundreds of millions of dollars for Irish projects.

It's fair to say that Billy Vincent keeps a low profile here in his native country but he is loved and revered in Killarney, where he continues to personally support local projects. A man who doesn't just give financial support, he makes himself available on his visits and gives his precious time to motivate the youngsters and rekindle the warm relationships with old friends. We look forward very much to his next visit in June and even now can see the impish smile on his face and the mischievous glint in his eye. A mentor to many; an icon to those of us who are privileged to know him well!



Billy

DAVID McCONNELL

Professor of Genetics

Smurfit Institute of Genetics, Trinity College Dublin

Billy and the Genes

My father served with Billy Vincent in the Inniskilling Fusiliers in the Eighth Army in Italy and Austria. Captain ‘Sam’ McConnell introduced me to Major ‘Willy’ Vincent in the Horseshoe Bar of the Shelbourne Hotel in 1966. He invited Janet and me to look him up when we arrived at the California Institute of Technology, where I was to study for the next 4 years. This was the beginning of a wonderful friendship for Janet and myself. Billy and Elisabeth invited us to dinner in Beverley Hills, followed by a club on Sunset Strip, the first of many splendid meetings in California and Ireland. I remember the views from the fine home on Broadway in San Francisco, with strong vibrant paintings by Elisabeth: Billy walking on Fisherman’s Wharf in the spring of 1979, holding an ice cream in one hand and my son Andreas in the other; entertaining guests at Muckross House each summer and reviving the ancient order of the Knights of Innisfallen; at his 80th birthday opening a ‘secret’ drawer in the great oak sideboard in the dining room at Muckross, which he had remembered from childhood; parties at his new house near Beaufort, Killarney, with photographs of the Inniskillings, including my father, hanging in the bathroom; Janet and I on our own visiting Filoli, his grandparents’ wonderful home and estate south of San Francisco, with the great tapestry showing Billy, his sister and their dog on the terrace at Muckross; being

his guests on a number of occasions at Ireland Fund dinners. Billy is one the best companions and crosses generations with ease.

Ten years after our first meeting, when Billy was the President of the American Irish Foundation, he made a personal gift to support collaborations between the Department of Genetics (now the Smurfit Institute of Genetics) and university laboratories in the United States. With his approval, it was decided that his gifts would be used to send our best third-year undergraduate students to the United States for a few months in the summer to learn how to carry out research at the forefront of genetics.

In the 30 years since, about 150 undergraduate students have received AWB Vincent Scholarships allowing them to spend 2–3 months in a top US university. Recipients have studied at Caltech, Harvard, Utah, Washington University at St Louis, San Diego, Davis, Berkeley, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Columbia and many other great universities. For all of them it has been one of the great experiences of their lives. In their early twenties, these Irish students have discovered US university life and what it is like to be immersed in research at the leading edge of genetics. Many have told me that it was this summer research internship that inspired them to spend their lives as geneticists. The result is remarkable: many now hold professorships in universities in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe, several in the United States, and at least one in Australia. We are now into the second generation, with new AWB Vincent Scholars working in US laboratories run by graduates who were themselves AWB Vincent Scholars.

It is abundantly clear that the success of Trinity geneticists, now spread all over the world, owes a very great deal to Billy. Our students learned that they could compete with the best, gaining confidence that they, too, could go on to do great science. In 2006, we discovered that Trinity was ranked 7th among the universities of the world in the field of genetics. It is no accident that four members of staff, Ken Wolfe, Jane Farrar, Kevin Mitchell and Aoife McLysaght, held AWB Vincent Scholarships.

“...the success of
Trinity geneticists,
now spread all
over the world,
owes a very great
deal to Billy.”

SIR JOHN LESLIE

A long standing family friend

Billy as I Know Him

I first met AWB Vincent when staying at Muckcross in 1932. My sister Anita was with me. He was aged about twelve and was in a wheelchair, as he was recovering from a serious illness. It was a large house party. His sister Rose Vincent, who later became Lady Burgh, was there. She later became the grandmother of the present Lord Burgh. She wore a wonderful gold evening dress. His father, Arthur Vincent, engaged Mrs Burkhardt to run the house, as Bill's mother Maud had died recently.

Years later, we met again at Magdalene College, Cambridge. He had beautiful rooms over the porter's lodge facing Magdalene Street. He had a painting by Jack Yeats of local people in the evening light hanging on the wall. Sometimes he used to row up the river Cam to Granchester.

When war broke out, he joined the Irish Guards. He found the new training for officers very tough, as they had to work up through the ranks. Once on a route march we passed his group marching the opposite directions, so we shook hands and had a laugh.

After the war he returned to San Francisco and, when I visited that city, he kindly put me up in the magnificent Pacific Union Club on Nob Hill near his apartment. His sister Rose, now married to Peter Melvill Gardner, was also there.

When I lived in Rome he came there for a visit with his wife, Elisabeth. I was able to return a little hospitality by giving them a luncheon at the Cicolo dilla Caccia, the Hunt Club of Rome, in the vast 16th century Palazzo Borghese.

After I returned to Glaslough in 1994, he invited my nephew, Tarka Leslie-King, and myself to stay at his house near Killarney. The new owners of Muckcross invited him to give a dinner party and how well I remembered the dining room with its massive oak furniture. Then he asked the administrator to drive us to Muckcross Abbey and all around the estate. Everything seemed unchanged since my visit in 1932.

A few years ago, he came to stay at Glaslough. Later, my neice, Samantha Leslie, and I were invited by him to Monte Carlo for the festivities for The American Ireland Fund. This was a great success of splendid luncheons, dinners and balls.

A few years ago on a visit here Bill and a group of friends tried to establish a huge centre for Boy Scouts at nearby Castle Saunderson. It had belonged to our mutual friend, Sandy Saunderson, who had lived in Los Angeles with his wife Barbara Van Allen. Both Sandy and Barbara had just died and were cremated. Their ashes were brought back and, after a service in the family chapel, were placed in the family vault among all the coffins. I noted many little coffins of children.

Sadly, the funds for their great Scout centre never materialised and the project has been delayed.

In San Francisco I remember Bill ran the great helicopter factory at San Matteo.

We have always remained great friends in a changing world.

Jack—aged 90!

PS My mother and father also stayed with Arthur and Maud Vincent. WB Yeats was there and while they were walking around the gardens, he stopped in front of a tree, raised his arms and recited a poem.

“ We have always
remained great
friends in a
changing world. ”

KIERAN McLOUGHLIN

President, The American Ireland Fund

A First-class Chap

Some years ago I brought Billy to my parents' home in South County Dublin. Billy was very curious to learn all about them. My father, replying to Billy's question about his career, told him that he was a Director of Fyffes, the fruit distribution company. Billy responded by saying that Fyffes 'was a sterling company. We commandeered their boats during the war and that's how I got to Iraq'. That remark highlighted the extraordinary life of Billy Vincent.

I have had the privilege of knowing Billy for over ten years through his support of The Ireland Funds in the US, Germany, France and, particularly, his founding of The Ireland Fund of Monaco. I have come to know a man whose personality is so large that it embraces seeming contradictions.

Billy is a great traditionalist. For instance, to express his gratitude to my parents, he sent a wonderfully formal letter, which opened with the salutation 'Dear Mr and Mrs McLoughlin', declaring them to be 'first-class people'. Billy changes for lunch and again for dinner, never appearing in anything other than an immaculate dark suit. On one occasion, I sought his advice on how to respond to the invitation of a Countess to lunch. He told me I should go to her home with a red rose and my card. The next day, if the rose was accepted, I could call on her.



He is also a great modernist. His instincts are progressive and he has a huge interest in helping the young. Through the AWB Vincent Literary Prize and The Ireland Fund of Monaco's Writers in Residence programme, he has nurtured some of Ireland's most vibrant and challenging new talent.

It has to be said, however, that his grasp on modern technology can be a little tenuous. On one occasion, he was describing how the Fund was supporting the Princess Grace Irish Library in uploading the work of hundreds of Irish scholars to the web. He described the process as 'electrocuting the books'!

Billy is, of course, a man of great pedigree and status. From his childhood he has mixed with princes, presidents, artists and the very wealthy. Those with titles

*Prince Mario-Max
Schaumburg-Lippe,
The Duke of Abercorn,
Kieran McLoughlin and Billy
at The Ireland Fund of Monaco
Biennial Celebration,
October 2006*

“The sheer breadth
of his experiences
have moulded his
extraordinary
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given him his
colour and glorious
unpredictability.”

are no strangers to Billy. Yet there is not an ounce of snobbery in the man. Quite the contrary, he treats everyone he meets as an equal. I recall when he was organising the first Ireland Fund of Monaco Celebration, he invited the son of one of the former gardeners at Muckcross to be his guest. The young man, who was far from wealthy, wrote back to say that he could not attend but enclosed a donation of perhaps one or two hundred euro. At that time, Billy was receiving very generous gifts from very rich supporters of tens of thousands of euro each. But this particular donation affected him deeply to the point that his eyes welled up and he was almost in tears with gratitude.

This incident highlights how sensitive Billy can be, which, on occasions however, is not immediately obvious. If Billy is annoyed or has his patience tried he, to say the least, can be unambiguous in his response. Billy's directness is legendary. But, then again, that is just another seeming contradiction in the man: the curmudgeon with a heart of gold.

Finally, Billy is both a great internationalist but also a Kerry man. He has worked and lived across the globe and has more friends and contacts in more cities than most people could visit in a lifetime. Yet his heart is always in Kerry and with its people. He speaks of their wit, warmth and wisdom. He has told me that Kerry is home. Every summer when Billy visits, it's like a worldwide wanderer returning for nourishment.

Billy has secured so many achievements as a solidier, a businessman and as a philanthropist. In each role, he has acted with decency, courage, vision and great, great generosity. He has done it all with style, humour and compassion.

The sheer breadth of his experiences have moulded his extraordinary character and have given him his colour and glorious unpredictability.

For me it is a privilege and utter joy to know him. He has given so much without ever beginning to consider the cost. He is unique, remarkable and universally adored. To use a Billyism, he is a 'sterling and first-class chap'.



Mike Corboy and Billy at The Ireland Funds' Annual Conference, June 2006

VIRGINIA, MADAM MCGILLYCUDDY

Friend of Billy Vincent

Billy Vincent—Thank You

On reading what I have written I notice that the word ‘impossible’ crops up several times. Perhaps that is one of Billy’s many achievements. Through The Ireland Fund and in many other ways as well, the word ‘impossible’ has become virtually extinct. He has turned the impossible for so many people into the possible.

But it would be ‘impossible’ for me to reflect on Billy’s generosity and support without first looking back to Kerry in the early 1980s, meeting Billy and Elisabeth and, of course, discovering Billy’s irrepressible sense of fun and humour.

Richard, my husband, adored Billy and Elisabeth. Their two families must have known each other for as long as Billy’s family had been at Muckross. And I learnt long before I met Billy that Richard also looked up to and admired him. I suppose therefore that I was expecting a rather serious individual; a great dispenser of wisdom and good advice. Instead I was delighted to discover (along with the dispenser of wisdom and good advice of course) someone with an irreverent sense of the ridiculous and who not only enjoys a good party, but whose presence always guarantees that party’s success. Along with that oh so immaculate dress sense and totally irresistible charm.

One lunch party we held at the Reeks is typical. Billy and Elisabeth, immaculately dressed; the weather, not so typically, permitting the dining room table and

chairs to be put out on the lawn. Probably the usual summer lunch in Kerry: wild salmon. Wine cooling in an enormous ice filled ‘gold’ cup won by Richard’s grandfather. Elisabeth’s three grandsons, rather younger then, playing croquet in the background as we had coffee. Magical. Sadly the photographs are too faded to reproduce.

I’m ashamed to say that it wasn’t until we arrived in France, and Billy began to invite us to the gala evenings in Paris organised by the Ireland Fund of France, that the penny began to drop and I learnt to respect Billy as well as to appreciate his role in the setting up of The Ireland Fund and the work it supports. All this before Ireland had started to feel the effects of the Celtic Tiger.

But it was when Richard and I returned to Ireland in 1996, that I, like so many others, had cause to be really grateful to Billy when I became involved with a charity that is long on commitment and hard work but short on funding. Richard suggested that I talk to Billy. Thanks to Billy and The Ireland Fund, the gulf between commitment, hard work and funding became less impossible to deal with. Not, in the history of The Ireland Fund, an unusual story but rather typical of where a relatively small but generous amount of money can make a big difference to peoples’ lives.

But where it all comes together for me is Monaco. Those of us who have been privileged to be invited to join Billy at weekends held every two years by the Ireland Fund of Monaco have been able to appreciate first-hand how he combines the serious business of fundraising and honouring individuals with fun. Impossible to visit Monaco as Billy’s guest for The Ireland Fund weekend and not enjoy yourself! (Serenaded lunches up mountains. Dinners in the famous wine cellars of the Hotel de Paris.) Impossible to be there at one of these weekends and not learn more about individuals whose lives have in some way contributed to the welfare of the island of Ireland. Through, for example, the peace process, culture and charities. Impossible then not to return home to Ireland invigorated, though in dire need of a serious detox. And a little more ready to confront the ever-present but not impossible challenges facing Ireland.

Thank you, Billy. It is a huge privilege and enormous fun to have got to know you and Elisabeth through Richard.

“ Thanks to Billy and
The Ireland Fund,
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deal with. ”

EUNAN O'HALPIN

*Professor of Contemporary Irish History and Director of the Centre
for Contemporary Irish History at Trinity College Dublin*

Soldier Billy

Billy's father, Arthur Rose Vincent (1876–1956), a Trinity man, developed a decent practice at the Irish Bar before deciding quite suddenly to give it up and to join the Foreign Office Judicial Service. En route to Uganda in July 1903, he wrote from the Deutsche Ost-Afrika-Linie's *Bundesrath* to explain to his soldier brother Berkeley that 'what to you must seem a sudden step' had been 'in my mind for a considerable period of time'. With a misplaced sense of fatalism which consumes each generation of Irish lawyers, he believed that 'the outlook for the Irish Bar is very bad in the future'. The forthcoming Wyndham Land Act 'will do us an infinity of harm', but, characteristically in a Vincent, he placed wider Irish interests above the likely erosion of his practice: this 'most revolutionary act' is 'a good one of which I approve'.

AR Vincent also noted something which no one interested in this country's history should forget, that 'Ireland is becoming every day a more democratic country. The change has been going on' since the Land Act of 1881, 'but the Local Government Act' of 1898 'gave it a great fillip'. Very few men of his background possessed either the foresight or the generosity to welcome the development of democratic politics which made some form of Irish self-rule inevitable. During the worst days of the Irish War of Independence, AR Vincent displayed moral and physical courage and energy in pressing the British government towards

compromise. This, and his family's reputation in Kerry as good landlords and employers, meant that their home and lands at Muckcross were not targeted during the civil war.

AR Vincent served in the *Seanad* (Senate) of the new state from 1931 to 1934. Billy's childhood was an unusual one. He was born in London, and raised in Kerry and in California. With one home in California and another in Kerry, and various relatives in between, it often involved epic travel, across the United States, across the Atlantic, and between Britain and Ireland. By the time he had overcome recurrent illness, Billy was too old for Eton, and was sent instead to the newly established and innovative Bryanston School in Dorset, an institution he came to enjoy. During a gap year in Germany in 1938, as Europe quaked and the war loomed, Billy twice observed the instigator of that catastrophe, Adolf Hitler, taking refreshment in the quaintly titled 'Carlton Tea Room' in Munich.

Billy then went up to Cambridge. He chose Magdalene, the college of Charles Stuart Parnell, simply because, always respectful of his elders, he heeded the words of his grandfather to go 'anywhere but Downing (his own Cambridge college, which has remained mysteriously unfashionable)'. When war came, Billy unhesitatingly did the straightforward thing by joining the army as soon as he could and going to fight, abandoning the convivial courtyards of Magdalene, a college built on good fellowship, good sport and good dining, for the altogether more basic and dangerous life of an infantry officer. But Magdalene has remained a part of his life. Through his own generosity and his adroit lobbying of the Irish government, in the early 1990s he secured the endowment of the Parnell Fellowship in Magdalene as an enduring memorial to the greatest Irish political figure of the nineteenth century.

Billy joined the Inniskillings, the regiment once commanded by his uncle, General Sir Berkeley Vincent (1871–1963). Berkeley Vincent had had a distinguished career: a military observer during the Russo–Japanese war of 1904–05, he effectively 'ghosted' General Sir Ian Hamilton's best-selling account of it. He was one of the most highly rated divisional commanders in France in the last year of the Great War. He ended his service as officer commanding British troops in Iraq from 1922 to 1924, then as now under unwelcome occupation.

Billy's military service was marked by the combination of drive, endurance and pragmatism familiar to everyone who knows him. As new soldiers often

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discover, real action can take a fair while to arrive: Billy's first experience of army life was an unexceptional period of training, training and training, much of it in Northern Ireland. All that changed, however, when the regiment was shipped off to places unknown. The Inniskillings had originally been intended for the defence of Singapore and the Malayan peninsula but, fortunately for Billy, the Japanese got there first. Instead, he and his colleagues found themselves committed to an improvised and hazardous operation, the invasion of the Vichy French island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean in May 1942. At this stage of the war, few purpose-built landing craft were available, and so Billy and his comrades disembarked by small boat. The initial landings were not opposed, but in places the Vichy forces fought stubbornly for months.

The Inniskillings were then shipped to India, where for a time they trained for jungle warfare, and from there moved through Iraq to Persia, which was under Anglo-Soviet occupation. There they wintered in the mountains. Billy recalls mainly the endless chain of lorries moving war *matériel* up to the Soviet border. Another perhaps less hardy Inniskilling has written of 'the freezing temperatures...30 below outside and it was never above freezing inside...we never really got warm'. Always willing to distinguish between individuals and political systems, Billy got along fine with the Russians he met. This willingness to distinguish between people and political systems has always characterised him.

After Persia, the Inniskillings were sent to take part in the bitterly contested invasion of Sicily. This was Billy's first wartime encounter with the formidable German army. He also bumped into the equally formidable General Montgomery, on whose allotted site for his command caravan Billy had camped his men. As befits a soldier's general, Montgomery was quite happy to go off to find another field. Billy's war continued with the long drawn-out slog up through Italy against exceptionally well-organised German forces. In the course of these campaigns he acquired wounds which he regards as too unimportant to describe, seeing them in the context of all those of his comrades who died or were left shattered by warfare.

When peace came Billy left the army. So far from looking to his family for support, he built his own career as a businessman from scratch. His work brought him across the world, dealing with states and peoples of all manner and condition in the Americas, the Far East, and Europe. In every country in which he has

worked Billy made his own judgments and his own friends. He particularly enjoyed doing business in Yugoslavia, the leader of which, Tito, he met and admired for his formidable war record, his determination to maintain his country's independence from east and west alike, and his ability to hold together in peace and a degree of freedom a multi-ethnic society scarred by wartime divisions. In the light of the horrors unleashed in the Balkans in the 1990s, Tito's achievement appears ever more remarkable and Billy's judgment ever more sound.

In retirement Billy has brought to the cause of Irish peace the skills, insights and determination which his upbringing, and his experience of war, of peace and of business across the globe have given him. Others are better placed to comment on his development of The Ireland Funds, and their impact on the evolution of peace in Northern Ireland. What we should realise is that those achievements, the result of hard work, steely determination, and an ability to get other people moving and to see things through, are only part of his contribution to Irish life. That is measured as much in his quiet commemoration of his fallen comrades of the Inniskillings as in his many public achievements and benefactions.

SENATOR MAURICE HAYES

Board Director, The Ireland Funds

Billy, our Icon

“He is the complete embodiment of the values underpinning what is now an unfashionable appellation—an officer and a gentleman.”

I love Billy Vincent for his crusty exterior, his warmth and compassion, his complete lack of side and the cranky directness with which he pricks pomposity and exposes humbug in others, his total lack of political correctness, his wit and wisdom, his quiet sense of humour, his interest in people, his knowledge of affairs, and, most of all, just for being Billy Vincent.

I first met Billy when The Ireland Funds came to visit Belfast in the mid-1980s, when I was still a civil servant. A Junior Minister in the Northern Ireland Office delivered a rather bland and unctuous speech on the state of affairs (which were quite dire at the time) after a dinner at Hillsborough Castle. Billy, in reply, could hardly contain himself:

‘I’ve been coming here all these years, and we’ve been giving you all this money and I don’t see a damn bit of difference. What on earth have you all been do-oo-ing?’

There, I thought, sitting as I was among the ranks of Tuscany, there is a man worth getting to know better. And so it had proved over the years, and all the time getting more interesting and more rewarding.

The thing you notice most about Billy is his interest in people, and for their own sake, not for social standing or importance. He remembers everybody who was ever kind to him: the doctor who looked after him in a childhood illness, the



gardener at Muckcross, his teachers at school, his hosts in Germany before the war, his comrades in the Army.

I remember once driving him from Derry to Downpatrick, and, arising out of the conversation, detouring to visit Dungannon where he had been stationed nearly sixty years earlier. He was able to identify every house on the Square, then McAleer's Hotel, where he was billeted, and Joe Stewart's pub, out of bounds to officers, where he drank with the locals.

*1978 Literary Award,
Paul Smith (Recipient),
William Shannon,
The Knight of Glin,
Billy Vincent*

I remember, too, a taxi ride in Sydney, Australia. The driver, a taciturn Levantine, was reluctant to be drawn on his origins. Having established, with difficulty, that he was from the Lebanon, Billy asked ‘Where in the Lebanon?’ Silence. Then Billy mentioned the name of a town. A startled driver gasped ‘That’s my village’ ‘I occupied it in 1941,’ Billy said, ‘nice people. They used to stab my chaps. Understandable, I suppose. They were after their women’.

Travelling with Billy was like having a speaking version of the Almanach Gotha as he identifies the rich and famous (and sometimes the infamous) and the minor royalty and ex-royalty of Europe. But he can remember too the boatmen at Muckross and the maids at Filoli, his army driver, his batman, the small people whom he loved and respected as much as the more famous.

There are very few people who would have the bottle, and the complete lack of self-consciousness, to declare, when presenting a literary award to a poet characterised by the obscurity of his work, that he hadn’t read the stuff and wouldn’t understand it if he had. But that was Billy.

Once we gave a grant to a young traveller, a promising amateur boxer, to help him train for the Olympic Games. Billy asked me who he was, what did he do?

‘He’s a traveller, Billy, an itinerant if you like—you know—a nomadic life-style’

‘You mean he’s a tinker? And you are proposing to give a tinker money—to fight!’

Billy’s interest in, and love of humanity is all-embracing. He is interested in people for their own sakes. His compassion is boundless. Beneath that crusty exterior, he is a real old softie. His reticence on the matter conceals a war record in which he was wounded four times. He is the complete embodiment of the values underpinning what is now an unfashionable appellation—an officer and a gentleman.

He embodies for me the values that lie at the heart of The Ireland Funds: compassion, real charity, honesty and integrity, concern for others, a sense of justice and fair play, and abhorrence of violence and concern for the victim, and a love of Ireland and his Irish heritage.

He is our icon.

Lieutenant Colonel (Retired)

MARK RH SCOTT

Vice-Chairman of Trustees, The Inniskilling Museum

Biography of Arthur William Bourn Vincent

The son of an Irish father, Arthur Rose Vincent, a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland, and an American mother, Maud Bourn of San Francisco, Mr Vincent's boyhood home was Muckcross House on the Lakes of Killarney. However because his parents were called every two years or so to California by his grandparents Mr and Mrs William Bowers Bourn, he also became very familiar with their home Filoli and the Empire Mine in Grass Valley, California, as well as his mother's house in Pebble Beach, 'Asilo de L'Estrella'.

His father and grandfather gave Muckcross to the people of Ireland in 1933. This is now known as the Bourn Vincent Memorial Park. The estate gardens are known internationally, and the lakes and woodland are a botanical Mecca for students and tourists. This is now incorporated into the Killarney National Park.

From 1933 to 1936 he was educated at Bryanston School in England. Before World War II, he spent one year at the University of Munich and then went to Magdalene College, Cambridge, from where he obtained both BA and MA degrees.

Mr Vincent left Cambridge University at the start of World War II, enlisted as a Guardsman in the Irish Guards, and later was commissioned in the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. He served in India, Persia and Iraq, the Middle East and Italy and was wounded twice in that theatre.

Early in 1947 he returned to California and, at the end of 1947, he joined Hiller Aircraft Corporation (then United Helicopters). He soon became a Director and, in 1949, was appointed Vice-President in charge of sales. In that capacity he was responsible for pioneering the sale and use of helicopters in many countries, including Egypt, Pakistan, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, as well as many European and Latin American countries.

After leaving Hiller Aircraft Corporation in 1962, Mr Vincent became an investor in oil exploration and was a partner of Carver-Dodge Oil Company in Denver, Colorado, who had very successful discoveries of oil, first in Indonesia and later in Alberta, Canada.

In 1983 he was appointed Chairman of the Board of Inishtech Capital Fund Limited, an Irish Venture Capital Company formed in the Cayman Islands, to invest in the United States of America. After a successful merger of the company he relinquished the Chairmanship in January 1989.

In 1990 he was appointed a Director of Independent Newspapers. In 1999, on attaining 80 years of age, he resigned from the Board of Directors.

In 1972 he became a Director of the American Irish Foundation, and in 1974 became its treasurer. He then became President of the Foundation in 1977 and relinquished that position in 1983 to become Chairman of the Board, a position he retained until the merger of the American Irish Foundation with The Ireland Funds in 1987 when he assumed the position of Vice-Chairman of The American Ireland Fund. In 1998 he initiated and formed The Ireland Fund of Monaco of which he was President until 2005 when he retired from the Presidency.

In 1983, Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland conferred upon him a degree of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) *Honoris Causa*.

In March 1996 he was made an Honorary Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. In 1990 in conjunction with Andrew Mulligan he initiated and established the Parnell Fellowship for Irish Studies at Magdalene College, Cambridge.

In November 2004 he was made a Commander of the Order of Saint Charles by the Prince of Monaco.

In July 2005, the University of Ulster conferred upon him a degree of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.) *Honoris Causa*.

Mr Vincent is a member of the Pacific Union Club, San Francisco; the Burlingame Country Club; The American Society of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St John of Jerusalem; The Society of California Pioneers; White's Club, London; The Travellers, Paris; The Kildare Street and University Club, Dublin; Yacht Club de Monaco and is a life member of the Killarney Golf and Fishing Club, County Kerry, Ireland.



WB Yeats

His Kerry retreat was magnificent in its own way. Muckross House was a great Victorian 'Tudorbethan' pile built by the Herbert family in a ravishing location on the lakes of Killarney, with a lushly planted park that reminded WBY of Santa Barbara. (He probably did not know that his father, at the outset of his artistic career, had stayed there sixty-odd years before and painted several of the Herberts.) The owner was now an Irishman, Arthur Vincent, who had married an American heiress: they seem to have been acquaintances rather than friends of WBY, but he needed a refuge. The Kerry weather was brilliantly hot, the company distractingly smart (Shane Leslie and his wife, and mondaine young women 'got up as sheer Mont-Martre to shock the county'). The Vincents' young son remembered WBY's visit all his life, and not only because he let his nursery bath overflow to deluge the poet in the Queen's Bedroom below. He was astonished to find his parents' visitor walking wildly among the Kerry oaks in the park, and reported, 'That fellow's mad: he's talking to the trees.'

Extract from *WB Yeats: A Life II The Arch-Poet* by RF Foster