

A scenic landscape photograph of a lake, forest, and mountains in Ireland. The foreground is a calm lake with dark, rippling water. The middle ground is a dense forest of green trees and shrubs. In the background, there are rolling green mountains under a cloudy sky. The text "17 DAYS IN MAY" and "IRELAND 2011" is overlaid in white serif font in the upper left. The text "Patrick and Louise Krohn" is overlaid in white serif font in the lower left.

17 DAYS IN MAY IRELAND 2011

Patrick and Louise Krohn

17 Days in May:
Ireland 2011

This book, the third in our series of travel chronicles, describes a self-driving holiday in Ireland in May 2011.

Ireland is a country of amazing landscapes, fascinating archeological treasures and lively cities and towns. Over the course of our seventeen-day visit, we sampled them all. This book was produced to help us remember all of what we saw and experienced during that cold, wet but wonderful May in 2011.

South Slokan, B.C.
September 2011

17 DAYS IN MAY IRELAND 2011

PATRICK AND LOUISE KROHN

Distribution

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	I
THE EAST COAST - DUBLIN TO WATERFORD	2
THE SOUTH COAST - WATERFORD TO BANTRY	16
THE WEST COAST - KERRY TO DONEGAL	36
DONEGAL AND NORTHERN IRELAND	70



The Ha'penny Bridge over the Liffey

INTRODUCTION

This all started when my friend Pauline and I were talking about possibilities for another trip together. I said what about a self-driving tour and Pauline said that she'd like to see Ireland, but did not think that she or her husband John, her husband, would want to drive. Since Patrick, my husband, always felt more comfortable when in sole charge of the driving, I thought this might just work out! And so we started planning.

We found a web site that offered to organize self-driving Irish tours. After checking a few sites, we decided to go with Authentic Ireland, as they seem to have the best selection of hotels and were affiliated with a number of reputable travel organizations. We did not regret it. They planned a really good itinerary for us. The travel guide they provided, "*Ireland Step-by-Step*" from the "Insight Guides" series, had a list of 16 tours, that covered the entire island, ranging from a couple of hours to full days. Our hotels were located in strategic places along the coast, allowing us to follow, more or less, all the suggested tours in the guide. This saved us a lot of planning.

Although it was a lot of driving—we covered over 2500 km during our 17 days in Ireland—we felt that we had seen most of "what every tourist ought to see in Ireland" at the end of it and were quite happy with the tour.



THE EAST COAST - DUBLIN TO WATERFORD

7 May, 2011 - Saturday

We travelled from London to Dublin by train and ferry. It was rather a long day, although quite leisurely and comfortable. It rained the whole day and we really did not see much of the scenery. There was a very long walk from the ferry terminal to the ferry itself. Patrick, whose hip had deteriorated quite a lot during the weeks leading to our trip, found it quite hard even with the help of the walking stick.

We got to our hotel in Dublin, the Davenport Hotel on Merrion Square, around 6:15 p.m. and met up with John and Pauline a short while later. We had a very unmemorable dinner at a pub across the street.



Molly Malone sculpture, near Dublin city centre



Bank of Ireland building, Dublin



Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin



Trinity College, Dublin

Trinity College

Trinity College Dublin is regarded as Ireland's most distinguished university. It has an academic tradition spanning many centuries.

It was founded by Elizabeth I in 1592 in an attempt to stop students going to the continent and getting revolutionary ideas or being influenced by the Pope in Rome. For centuries, the college was the centre of Protestant religion and Catholics couldn't join unless they accepted the Protestant faith. Catholics also had to get special permission from the bishop to attend the college or else face the possibility

of excommunication. These restrictions were not completely lifted until 1970 and the fact that 70% of the students today are Catholic shows the turn around that has occurred in the last 30 years.

Most of the buildings on the grounds of Trinity College, which covers 40 acres, date from the 18th and 19th century. The West Front, which faces College Green, was built between 1755 and 1759 and has the interesting feature of having the same design facing outside and inside. Another interesting place is the Examination Hall. It is home to a magnificent

organ, saved from a 18th century ship and also a chandelier from the old House of Parliament (now the Bank of Ireland).

The college chapel has stucco ceiling and fine woodwork. The chapel and the theatre were both designed by William Chambers in the late 18th century. The Campanile or bell tower erected in 1853 dominates the square.

Source: <http://www.myguideireland.com/trinity-college>

8 May, 2011 - Sunday

Finally, we were in Ireland!

For our first day of sightseeing, John, Pauline and I met in the morning to go to Trinity College to join a Historical Walking Tour of Dublin. Patrick was out for the day, meeting an old friend. Our tour was led by a very personable history graduate of Trinity College. Six or seven mini lectures were given along the way, which meant standing for long period of times listening to the lectures, with short walks between each stop. I found the information very interesting at the time but did not remember much of it afterwards.

After the tour, we went to McDonald for lunch in search of free wireless Internet access. Pauline could not connect with her iPad, and I had left my iPhone at the hotel, so it was all for nought! In fact, we had not had access since we left Vancouver, and I was getting withdrawal pains!!!

We had a brief shopping trip down Grafton Street before going back to the hotel around 4:00 p.m.

In the evening, we met Patrick's friend Dede and her partner Ger for dinner. The meal was pretty good and so was the company, so we had quite an enjoyable evening.

Our three-day stay in Dublin was at the Davenport Hotel, a really nice, comfortable and friendly old-style hotel right downtown, just a few minutes away from Trinity College.



Along the Liffey

9 May, 2011 - Monday

In the morning, Patrick and I went to Trinity College while John and Pauline went shopping. We had a tour of the old library to see the Book of Kells and an exhibition on the practice of medicine from 1711.

We met John and Pauline in the Town Centre. Patrick then left on his own to take some photographs and the three of us kept on walking to the Guinness Storehouse. En route, we got absolutely soaked when the sky suddenly burst and a torrential rain came down. My supposedly "water resistant" jacket was anything but!

We had another pub dinner which was not particularly nice!



A pint at the Guinness Storehouse

The Book of Kells

The Book of Kells is one of the masterpieces of Western art and a symbol of Irish nationalism. Where it was written is controversial. Some scholars suggest Iona, the island monastery founded by St. Columba. It is thought to have been the work of several individual scribes over many years, likely before A.D. 806. The manuscript was held at Kells until 1661 when it was moved to Dublin where it remains as the chief treasure of Trinity College Library.

The Book of Kells is a copy of the four Gospels in Latin. It is known for the extraordinary array of pictures, interlaced shapes and ornamental details. A 13th century scholar, Giraldus Cambrensis, writes of the Book of Kells "... you might believe it was the work of an angel rather than a human being".

After so many centuries, the Book of Kells is extremely fragile and few people are allowed access. Fine Arts Facsimile Publishers in Switzerland spent 10 years producing a limited edition which is practically indistinguishable from the original, duplicating even the worm holes in the pages. In 1990 a group of Irish-Canadians purchased this facsimile edition and donated it to the UBC Library, where it is currently in the Irving K. Barber Learning Centre.

Source: <http://www.library.ubc.ca/spcoll/kells.html>



A page from the Book of Kells



Buses lined up in downtown Dublin



Prelude
John M. Synge

Still south I went and west and south again,
Through Wicklow from the morning til the night,
And far from cities and the sites of men,
Lived with the sunshine and the moon delight.

I knew the stars, the flowers, and the birds,
The grey and wintry sides of many glens,
And did but half remember human words,
In converse with the mountains, moors and fens.

10 May, 2011 - Tuesday

First order of the day was to pick up the car. Patrick and John went to the car rental agency while Pauline and I waited at the hotel with the luggage. It seemed to take them a long time, but they finally turned up with a beautiful BMW, the excuse being that it had a bigger trunk than the Toyota we had reserved. Hmmmm...

Our first stop was at Powerscourt House to visit the gardens. They were very beautiful, somewhat reminiscent of the Butchart Gardens.

The drive from Dublin took us through the beautiful Wicklow Mountains. It was lovely scenery, with very little traffic and lots of photo ops. The road was very narrow and winding and the weather continuously changing from sunshine to showers.

The rest of the drive was uneventful, with our GPS navigating us through the quickest route. We arrived at Waterford just before 4:00 p.m. Our hotel, Waterford Castle, was on an island that could only be accessed by a very old and verrrrrry slow ferry. The castle was quite beautiful and our rooms even more so. The bathroom was huge, with an old claw foot tub and a beautifully decorated antique toilet.

Best of all was the food. We had our first really good meal since leaving home: a three-course dinner consisting of a terrine, a sirloin steak as tender as any fillet I've ever had and a most delicious bread pudding. The presentation was so beautiful that we wanted to take pictures of the food, but did not have our camera...



Intrepid travelers roughing it in, on the road and at dinner (at the Waterford Castle)



Powerscourt House and Gardens

A one-mile-long avenue lined by over 2,000 beech trees lead to the Palladian house and its 47 acres of gardens, echoing the magnificence of the whole estate.

The house was gutted by fire in 1974 but recently has been reborn as an exceptional tourist destination. An exhibition brings to life the rich history of the estate, while the double height Georgian ballroom has been restored and hosts weddings and corporate events. The house is now home to the best of Irish design in gifts, clothes, and furniture in the Avoca Stores and the Interiors Gallery.

The gardens at Powerscourt were laid out in two main periods. When the house was rebuilt in the decade after 1731, the surrounding grounds were also remodelled. The design reflected the desire to create a garden which was part of the wider landscape. To the north formal tree plantations framed the vista from the house, while a walled garden, fish pond, cascades, grottos and terraces lay to the south. Walks winding through the wooded grounds and a fine tree-lined avenue were created. A century later, the 6th Viscount Powerscourt instructed his architect, Daniel Robertson, to draw up new schemes for the gardens.

Robertson was one of the leading proponents of

Italianate garden design which was influenced by the terraces and formal features of Italian Renaissance villas and perfected in gardens in France and Germany. Robertson designed the terrace nearest the house. He is said to have suffered from gout and directed operations from a wheelbarrow, fortified by a bottle of sherry. When the sherry was finished, work ceased for the day!

The death of the 6th Viscount in 1844 meant that alterations to the gardens ceased until his son resumed the work in the late 1850s. Using a combination of Robertson's designs and the plans of the other landscape experts, the terraces were completed, enormous numbers and varieties of trees were planted and the ground adorned with an amazing collection of statuary, ironwork and other decorative items. By the time of his death in 1904, the 7th Viscount had transformed the Estate. Further generations of the Wingfields maintained the grounds, adding the Japanese Gardens and the Pepper Pot Tower and continuing to plant specimen trees. In 1961, the Estate passed to the Slazenger family, under whose aegis the Gardens received much more care and attention.

(Source: <http://www.powerscourt.ie/powerscourt-gardens>)



Powerscourt House and Gardens



Powerscourt House viewed from the pond

THE SOUTH COAST - WATERFORD TO BANTRY

11 May, 2011 - Wednesday

After breakfast, we headed to the Waterford Crystal Visitor Centre. We could not find it. Our GPS took us to an empty factory and the Guide Book did not have an exact address, so we gave up and went on to the next suggested tour in our Guide Book. That route took us from Waterford to Carrick-on-Suir and Clonmel to the Rock of Cashel.

During a guided tour of the site, the architecture was explained in some details. We visited the Hall of the Choral, saw the round tower and the ruins of the Gothic cathedral. The rounded arches of the chapel of Cormac shows its romanesque style, while the pointed arches of the cathedral built 100 years later shows its Gothic influence.

After our tour of the Rock of Cashel, we had a very nondescript lunch and continued on our way to the Vee Gap, a very picturesque mountain pass across the Knockmealdown Mountains. We saw sheep roaming freely and had a great view of the Tipperary plains below. The site where we stopped to admire the views had a stone statue of Our Lady of the Knock.

We then drove to Kinsale to our next hotel, the Old Presbytery.

Again today, the weather alternated between sunny and cloudy periods, with a few heavy showers in between. Unfortunately, it seemed that the showers came only when we were out of the car!



Waterford Castle

The Rock of Cashel

Legend associates the Rock of Cashel with St. Patrick, but the name comes from Caiseal, meaning “stone fort,” and the hill was originally the residence of the kings of Munster. Excavations have revealed some evidence of burials and church buildings from the 9th or 10th century, but it was in the early 12th century that the Rock began to be developed into a major Christian center.

In 1101, Muirchertach O Briain, king of Munster, gave the Rock of Cashel to the Church. A round tower, which still stands today, was erected shortly after this. A decade later, Cashel became the seat of an archbishop, only the second one in Ireland, the other being in Armagh. Cormac’s Chapel, a magnificent little Romanesque church that still survives today, was consecrated in 1134, probably for Benedictine monks. The town of Cashel at the foot of the rock was founded by the archbishop sometime before 1218 and a Dominican priory was established in 1243. The present cathedral was erected in the 13th century as well. The frescoes in Cormac’s Chapel, which are the oldest Romanesque wall paintings in Ireland, were covered with whitewash at the Reformation (16th century) and remained hidden until the 1980s.

Source: <http://www.sacred-destinations.com/ireland/rock-of-cashel>







Old cemetery on the grounds of Mount Cashel



Statue of Our Lady of the Knock, looking over the plains below the Mickledown Mountains



The Vee Gap

The Vee Gap is a scenic mountain pass across the Knockmealdown Mountains. The road curves around a peat-covered mountain, past a black corrie lake, to a height of 653 m. There is a lovely view across the flat plain of Tipperary to Cahir at the foot of the Galtee Mountains. Looking over the plain is a statue of Our Lady of the Knock, commemorating an apparition by the Virgin Mary to 2 ladies from the village of Knock in 1879. The vegetation is mainly grass and heather and large woolly sheep roam freely.

Source: Ireland Step-by-Step, p. 51



Desmond Castle

Desmond Castle was built as a custom house by the Earl of Desmond in AD 1500. Desmond Castle has had a colourful history, ranging from Spanish occupation in 1601, to its use as a prison for captured American sailors during the American War of Independence. It was known locally as ‘The French Prison’, after a tragic fire in which 54 prisoners, mainly French seamen, died in 1747. The castle was also used as a borough jail from 1791 to the onset of the Great Famine when it was used as an auxiliary workhouse tending to the starving populace. The well-constructed building, founded on rock, consists of a keep with storehouses to the rear. It is a fine example of a town castle with domestic offices on the first and second floors. A variety of window forms, beneath the Irish stepped battlements, add interest to the main facade. (Source: <http://www.cork-guide.ie/attractions/desmond.htm>)

12 May, 2011 - Thursday

Today was a day of rest from driving. We spent our time walking around Kinsale, a very pretty sea side town, if a bit too touristic.

Kinsale is 29 km south of Cork, overlooking the estuary of the Bandon River. The town centre is a maze of very narrow streets and colourful (from bright purple to deep orange to sunshiny yellow!) Georgian buildings. Kinsale is best know for the battle of Kinsale (1601) in which Protestant English armies defeated combined Irish and Spanish Catholic armies. This battle is considered pivotal in the history of Ireland.

We visited a couple of historic sites: Desmond Castle aka French Prison in the morning, and Charles Fort in the afternoon. We ended our day sipping a drink on the patio of our B&B before heading out to dinner at 6:00 p.m.

For dinner that night, we went to a café that Pauline and John had heard about, called Fishy Fishy, where we had a delicious meal.

Our guest house was most comfortable, even though I had difficulty getting to bed because it was too high for my short legs!

The Battle of Kinsale

The battle of Kinsale is a major event in Irish history.

The tale began when two patriotic forces, in the names of Hugh O'Neill and Red Hugh O'Donnell, united to drive the British invaders out of their land in 1601. O'Neill and O'Donnell together built and trained an Army, and it wasn't before long they found a powerful ally in the King of Spain, Phillip III. King Phillip was more than keen to help the Irish for two main reasons. Firstly, he wanted revenge for the famous defeat of his Spanish Armada in 1588 and secondly, Phillip saw Ireland as a terrific foundation from which he could invade England. With this in mind, Phillip agreed to send a large army to help them defeat the British. In December 1601, King Phillip eventually sent his army of 4,800 men to Kinsale, forcing O'Neill and O'Donnell, who were located in Donegal, to march 250 miles across Ireland to meet with them.

The Spanish army used the walled town of Kinsale as a garrison. However, they were soon surrounded by the English army. The Spanish commander was an experienced soldier and he fought fiercely, while awaiting the arrival of his Irish allies.

But the Irish Army were ill-equipped, badly trained for open-field fighting and were no match against the more experienced and heavily armed of English Army. When the combat actually started, the battle lasted only an hour, 1200 Irish soldiers were lost while the English only lost 20 men.

Afterwards, O'Donnell fled to Spain where he lived comfortably until he died a few months later, said to have been poisoned by a spy named Blake.

Hugh O' Neill Surrendered to the English in 1603 and later returned to Ulster, where Lord Mountjoy treated him relatively well; however, most of his lands and authority were non-existent. Later, in 1607, O'Neill went to Spain with a number of family members and supporters.

Sources: <http://www.yourirish.com/battle-of-kinsale> and <http://www.odriscolls.me.uk/battle%20of%20kinsale.htm>



Kinsale harbour



Charles Fort, Kinsale

Charles Fort is built on the site of an earlier stronghold known as Ringcurran Castle, which featured prominently during the Siege of Kinsale in 1601. The fort is named after Charles II; it was built in the 1670s and 1680s to a star fortification design - a layout specifically designed to resist attack by cannon.

The in-land bastions of the fort however are overlooked by higher ground, a fact which was of critical importance when the fort was besieged by John Churchill, 1st Duke of Marlborough in 1690 during the Williamite War in Ireland. Repairs were made following the siege and the fort remained in use as a British Army barracks for several hundred years afterwards. The fort was relinquished by British forces following the Anglo-Irish Treaty, but it fell out of use after being burned by the retreating anti-Treaty forces during the Irish Civil War in 1922. The complex was named a National Monument of Ireland in 1971 and has been partly restored.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fort_\(Ireland\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Fort_(Ireland))



Charles Fort, Kinsale



Kinsale viewed from the harbour

Kinsale, Co. Cork

Kinsale (Irish: Cionn tSáile) is located some 25 km south of Cork City. It sits at the mouth of the River Bandon and has a population of 2,257 which increases substantially during the summer months when the tourist season is at its peak and when the boating fraternity arrive in large numbers. Kinsale is a popular holiday resort for Irish and foreign tour-

ists. It is known for its many gourmet restaurants and leisure activities.

Kinsale has several art galleries and a noted school of English. It is compact with a quaint air of antiquity in the narrow intersecting streets. There is a large yachting marina close to the town centre which attracts sailing enthusiasts. The town is noted for

its eating establishments, and holds a “Gourmet Festival” annually. Prominent buildings include St. Multose’s church (Church of Ireland), St. John the Baptist (Catholic), the Market House and the French Prison (or Desmond Castle).

Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinsale>



Drombeg Stone Circle

This lovely recumbent stone circle is locally known as the Druid's Altar, and is located on the edge of a rocky terrace with fine views to the sea about a mile away. The word Drombeg means 'the small ridge'.

Of the original 17 pillars of smooth-sided local sandstone, only 13 remain. To the left of the north-east entrance is a portal stone 2.2 m high; its opposite is the 1.9 m long recumbent which has two egg-shaped cup-marks (one with a ring around it). The circle stones have been shaped to slope upwards to the recumbent itself. The midpoint of this stone was set in line with the winter solstice sunset viewed in a conspicuous notch in the distant hills. Excavations in 1957 and 1958 revealed cremated bones in a deliberately broken pot wrapped with thick cloth and buried near the centre of the circle along with 80 other smashed sherds, four bits of a shale and a collection of sweepings from a pyre.

About 40 m to the west of the circle, are the remains of two stone-built prehistoric huts joined by a common doorway. The smaller has a cooking place that was still in use in the 5th century AD. This prehistoric kitchen had a flagged trough in which water was boiled by dropping red-hot stones into it. Recent tests confirmed that using this method, 70 or more gallons of water could be boiled for almost three hours. (Source: <http://www.stonepages.com/ireland/drombeg.html>)



13 May, 2011 - Friday

Today we drove from Kinsale to Kenmare, along the south coast, west of Cork. On the way, we stopped to see the Bantry House and Garden. At one point, we missed a turn to follow the main road. Our GPS “re-calculated” the route and sent us over a very narrow, winding and steep mountain road.... which seemed to go on forever! It was quite the drive, with the car at times sitting atop a hill, a great chasm to the left, granite rocks on the right, and no idea of what was in front of us until the car advanced a foot or so, and the road below became visible! At some point, we saw a big iron cross fifty feet or so from the side of the road; we learned it was called the “Priest’s Leap”.

We had a very nice reception at the Shelburne Lodge. Our hostess served us tea and cake upon our arrival. Upon her recommendation, we went to Packie’s Restaurant for dinner. I had a very tender, if not overly big, rack of lamb. I enjoyed it... as long as I did not think of the lovely little lambs we had seen on the road that day!



Bantry House, West Cork



View on Bantry Bay from the Bantry House garden



The Priest's Leap Road

THE WEST COAST - KERRY TO DONEGAL



Ring of Kerry

14 May, 2011 - Saturday

We drove the famous Ring of Kerry. Maybe it's just hard to live up to the hype, or maybe we're just blasé because B. C., Canada is so beautiful but, whatever the reason, we were disappointed. The scenery is certainly quite nice, it just did not live up to our expectations.

We arrived in Dingle at about 3:00 in the afternoon, checked in to our hotel (Castlewood House, a very nice and modern guest house) then drove back into town for a walk around the town centre and the harbour. There was a very strong and cold wind and the sky looked rather menacing, so we did not stay very long.

On the recommendation of our hosts, we went to dinner at a restaurant next door, owned by our host's brother. Excellent food but... we are beginning to become a bit weary of the cost of these dinners. We seem to spend about \$80 per night and in most cases, that is only for a main course and a glass of wine each. I don't know if it is because we are staying at touristy towns - and we don't have a choice now as all our hotels have been reserved and prepaid - or if it is simply that the cost of living in Ireland is just really high, but it is beginning to get to us!







Dingle harbour



Dingle harbour

On reflection, our stay at the Castlewood House was probably our best accommodation on the tour so far. Our hosts, Brian and Helen, were excellent. Helen really went out of her way to make sure we had everything we needed, even anticipating questions we did not know we wanted to ask! Brian, the chef, served the best breakfast we had had on the trip.



15 May, 2011

Another grey and rainy day... Hoping that the weather will improve later on, we delayed our drive along the Dingle Peninsula until 11:00 a.m.

The GPS map did not recognise the very small villages we wanted to travel through, so we just used the map and hoped for the best! The weather did not improve: it was cold and very windy. The scenery was quite incredible and we all agreed that it was on the whole better than the Ring of Kerry.

We had an interesting visit at the Irish Famine Cottages, where you could see some original stone cottages where peasants lived during the Irish Famine. This area of Ireland, being poor and isolated suffered particularly hard during the famine. A great number of people died or, if they were able to do so, just left. Many were trying to get to North America. The conditions aboard the ships were horrendous: if people did not die on the way, they arrived very weak and very sick. At one time, as many as 40 “coffin ships” were anchored at Grosse Ile, near Quebec City, which was being used as a quarantine area. Because there was not enough space on the island, those who were not sick were confined on the ships with those who were ill.

In the evening, we went for dinner in Dingle. We looked for something more reasonable than what we had been having earlier. We ended up at the Dingle Bay Hotel, where the meal was indeed cheaper, but the food definitely in keeping with the price!



Inside the Irish Famine Cottages



Another scene inside the Irish Famine Cottages



The Connemara Cradle Song

On wings of the wind o'er the dark rolling deep
Angels are coming to watch over thy sleep
Angels are coming to watch over thee
So list to the wind coming over the sea

Hear the wind blow, love, hear the wind blow
Hang your head o'er and hear the wind blow
Hear the wind blow, love, hear the wind blow
Hang your head o'er, love, and hear the wind blow

The currachs are sailing way out on the blue
Chasing the herring of silvery hue
Silver the herring and silver the sea
Soon they'll be silver for my love and me

Hear the wind blow, love, hear the wind blow
Hang your head o'er and hear the wind blow
Hear the wind blow, love, hear the wind blow
Hang your head o'er, love, and hear the wind blow







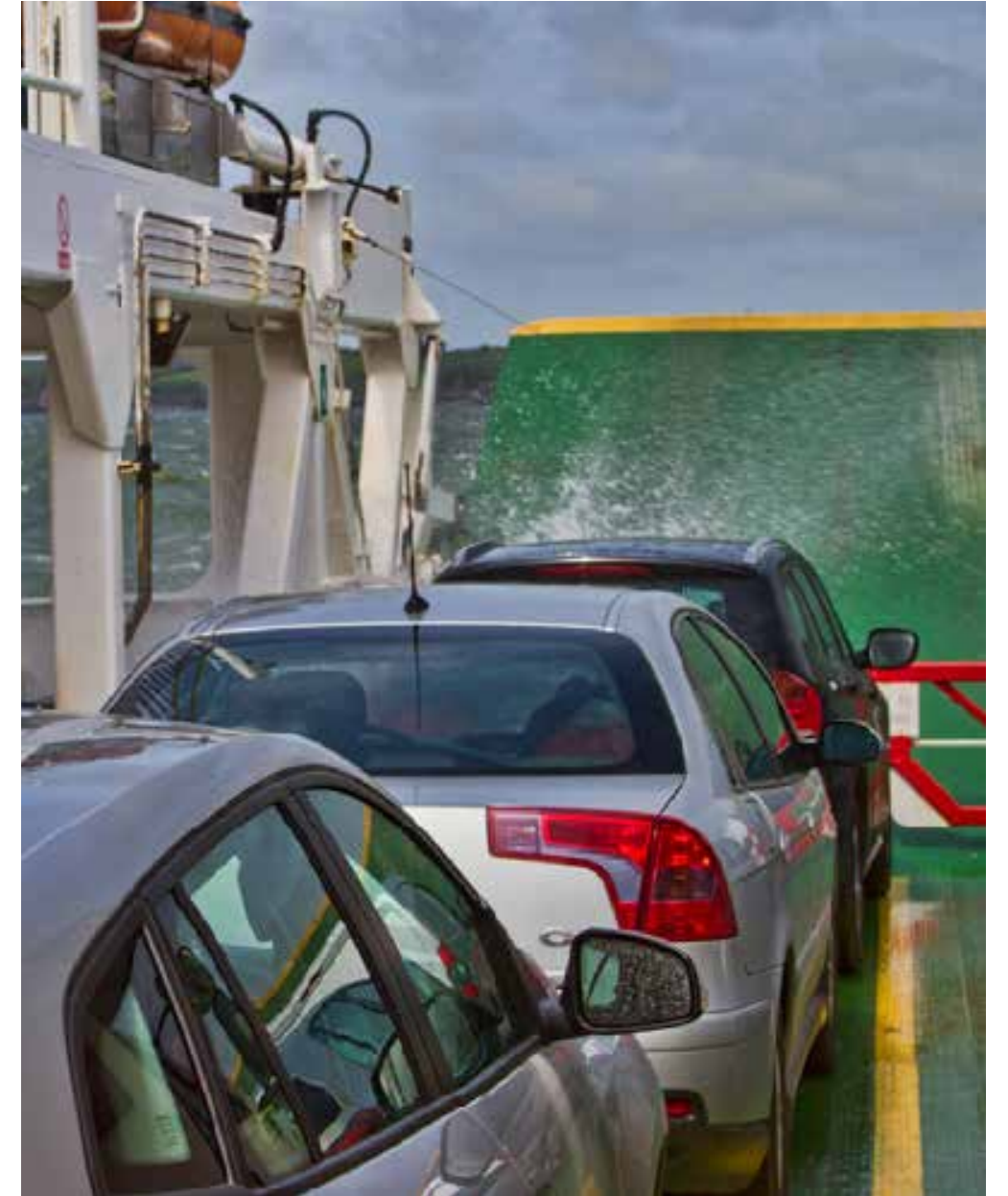
16 May, 2011 - Monday

The weather that morning was showing signs of improving. The wind had died down a bit and there were patches of blue sky. The first part of the trip to Doolin was straight driving, as we were trying to get to Tarbert to catch the ferry to Killimer, across the Shannon River.

We then made our way to the Cliffs of Moher. They were a disappointment, partly due to the weather which was overcast with a very strong wind.

Our hotel that night, the Tir Gan House, was definitely a step down from the previous ones. Our bathroom gave out a very strong smell of mildew. We had to keep the fan on all night and the door closed in order to be able to sleep!

In the evening, we went for a pub dinner; we were pleasantly surprised with the live music, so we stayed on for a second pint of beer and some good ole Irish folk songs.







Dunguaire Castle

Dunguaire Castle was built by the Hynes clan in 1520, a family who may have been associated with the area since 662, when the site is believed to have been the royal palace of Guaire Aidhne, the legendary king of Connacht. It sits atop a rocky outcrop on the picturesque shores of Galway Bay. The

Castle was transferred in the 17th century to Oliver Martin, father of Richard Martin Fitz Oliver. It remained in his family until it was purchased in the early 20th century by the surgeon and poet Oliver St. John Gogarty. Gogarty began restoring the castle and established it as the meeting place for the lead-

ing figures of the Celtic Revival, such as W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Lady Augusta Gregory and John Millington Synge. It was acquired for her residence, in 1954, by Christobel Lady Amphil, who completed the restoration. Source: <http://kinvara.galway-ireland.ie/dunguaire-castle.htm>)



View from the top of Dunguaire Castle

Ashford Castle

The castle was built in 1228 by the Anglo-Norman de Burgo family following their defeat of the O’Connors, the Royal House of Connacht. The principal legacy of the native O’Connors is to be seen at the gates of the estate in the form of the Romanesque Augustinian Abbey of Cong. It is in this abbey that Ireland’s last High King Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair died and from which came the greatest relic of his Court, the Cross of Cong, created to hold a piece of the True Cross and now in the National Museum of Ireland.

After more than three and a half centuries under the de Burgos, whose surname became Burke or Bourke, Ashford passed into the hands of a new master, Sir Richard Bingham, Lord President of Connaught. Bingham added a fortified enclave within its precincts. In 1715, the estate of Ashford was established by the Browne Family (Baron Oranmore), and a lodge in the style of a 17th century French chateau was added to the medieval splendour of the castle.

The Estate was purchased in 1852 by Sir Benjamin Lee Guinness, who extended the estate to 26,000 acres (110 square km), built new roads, planted thousands of trees and added two large Victorian style extensions. On his death in 1868, the estate passed to his son Lord Ardilaun, an avid gardener who oversaw the development of massive woodlands and rebuilt the entire west wing of the castle. He

also subsidized the operation of several steamboats, the most notable of which was the Lady Eglinton, which plied between the villages of the Upper Lough Corrib region and Galway City, thus opening the area to increased commerce.

The Castle passed to Ardilaun’s nephew Ernest Guinness, who sold it to Noel Huggard in 1939. He opened the estate as a hotel, which became renowned for the provision of its country pursuits, such as angling and shooting.

In 1951, the film director John Ford came to the west of Ireland to film what would become a movie classic The Quiet Man starring John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara. The grounds of Ashford Castle as well as nearby Cong formed the backdrop for much of the action in the film.

In 1970, Ashford Castle was bought by John Mulcahy, who oversaw its complete restoration and expansion, doubling its size with the addition of a new wing in the early 1970s, building a golf course and developing the grounds and gardens. In 1985, a group of Irish American investors, which included Chuck Feeney, purchased Ashford. The Castle was sold by these investors for €50 million in 2007, and is now in the possession of the Galway-based property investor Gerry Barrett and his family.

In its time, the castle has played host to many notable guests, including: John Lennon, George

Harrison, King George V of the United Kingdom, his consort Queen Mary, Oscar Wilde (whose father, Sir William Wilde, had an estate adjacent to Ashford, where the writer spent much of his childhood), PGA Golfer Mindy Miller, U.S. President Ronald Reagan, H.R.H. Prince Edward, Earl of Wessex, U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy, John Wayne, Brad Pitt, Pierce Brosnan, H.S.H. The Prince Rainier III of Monaco and his consort, H.S.H. The Princess Grace.

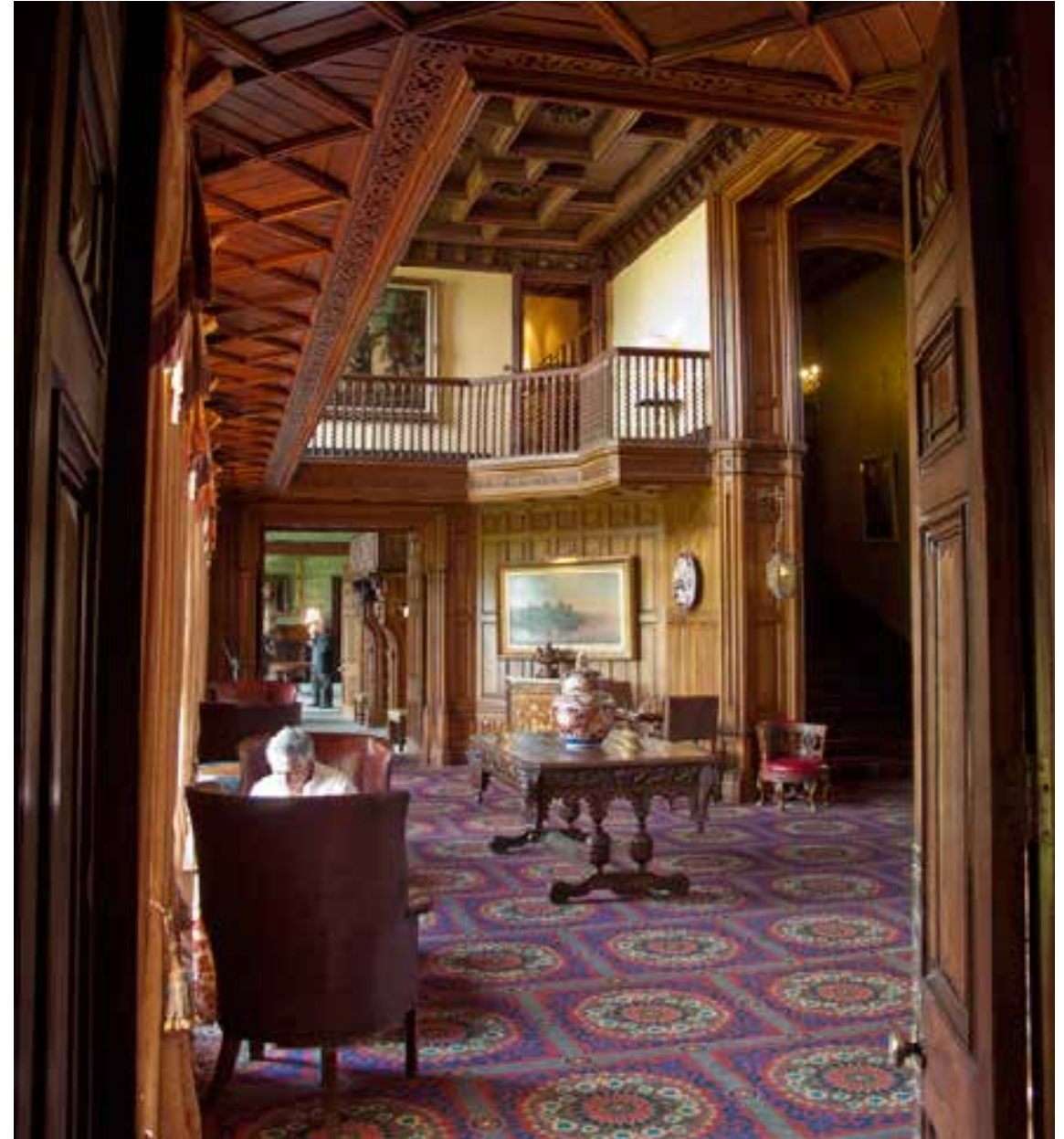
Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashford_Castle



View of Ashford Castle from Lough Corrib



Painting found at Ashford Castle





Beautiful flowering shrubs could be seen along the side of roads and pathways. Pink and white rhododendrons and azaleas were growing side by side with yellow gorse and white flowering crabapples.



How wonderful to look out of one's window in the morning and admire the tower from one's very own castle! Or to take an early morning walk to these lovely, tranquil spots on the grounds of Ashford Castle.



This horse decided to take a look at the world beyond his enclosed pasture.. but soon found out that highways, speeding cars and wandering horses don't mix very well!



The beautiful Kylemore Abbey

17 May, 2011 - Tuesday

The next morning, we took a leisurely drive towards Cong and the Ashford Castle. First, we drove through the Burren. Our guide book mentioned that the whole area should be covered with wildflowers which are “at their best in May.” Perhaps because April had been unseasonably warm that year and the flowers bloomed early, we hardly saw any flowers.

We stopped by to view the Poul nabrone Dolmen, “a structure over 3 metres high and the Burren’s finest portal tomb, dating back to 2500 BC” and went on to see the Dunguaire Castle, dating to 1520 and fully restored.

But nothing had prepared us for the view that greeted us as we approached the entrance to our hotel for that night, the Ashford Castle. It was simply magnificent!

Kylemore Abbey

It is said that when Henry Mitchell and his bride Margaret Vaughan visited Connemara while on their honeymoon in 1850, they were so charmed by the area that Henry returned and purchased the 15,000 acre estate as a romantic gift for his bride. He then set about to create one of Ireland’s most iconic castles. The Henrys had 9 children. Tragically, Margaret died while holidaying in Egypt in 1874 at the age of 45. She was buried at Kylemore and her husband built the beautiful Neo-Gothic church on the grounds of the estate as a memorial chapel to her memory.

In 1903, the castle was sold to the Duke of Manchester and his American heiress wife Helena Zimmerman. But the Duke’s gambling soon led to financial difficulties and the castle changed hands again in 1920 when it was acquired by a Community of Nuns of the Order of St Benedict. The same order still occupy the castle today but, sadly, the highly respected school they ran for many years closed in 2010.

Source: Kylemore Abbey guide.

18 May, 2011 - Wednesday

We were booked for 2 nights at the Ashford Castle. At first, because the grounds were so beautiful and our rooms so comfortable, we had planned to just spend the day exploring the grounds and enjoying the amenities of the hotel. But we did not want to miss seeing Conemara, so we thought we would go sight-seeing in the morning and be back at the hotel by noon....

But trips that seem a couple of hours on the map have a habit of taking a lot longer! We left the hotel at 9:30 a.m. and did not return until 4:00 p.m. It was a pretty drive, but nothing spectacular. The highlight of the tour was the Kylemore Abbey.

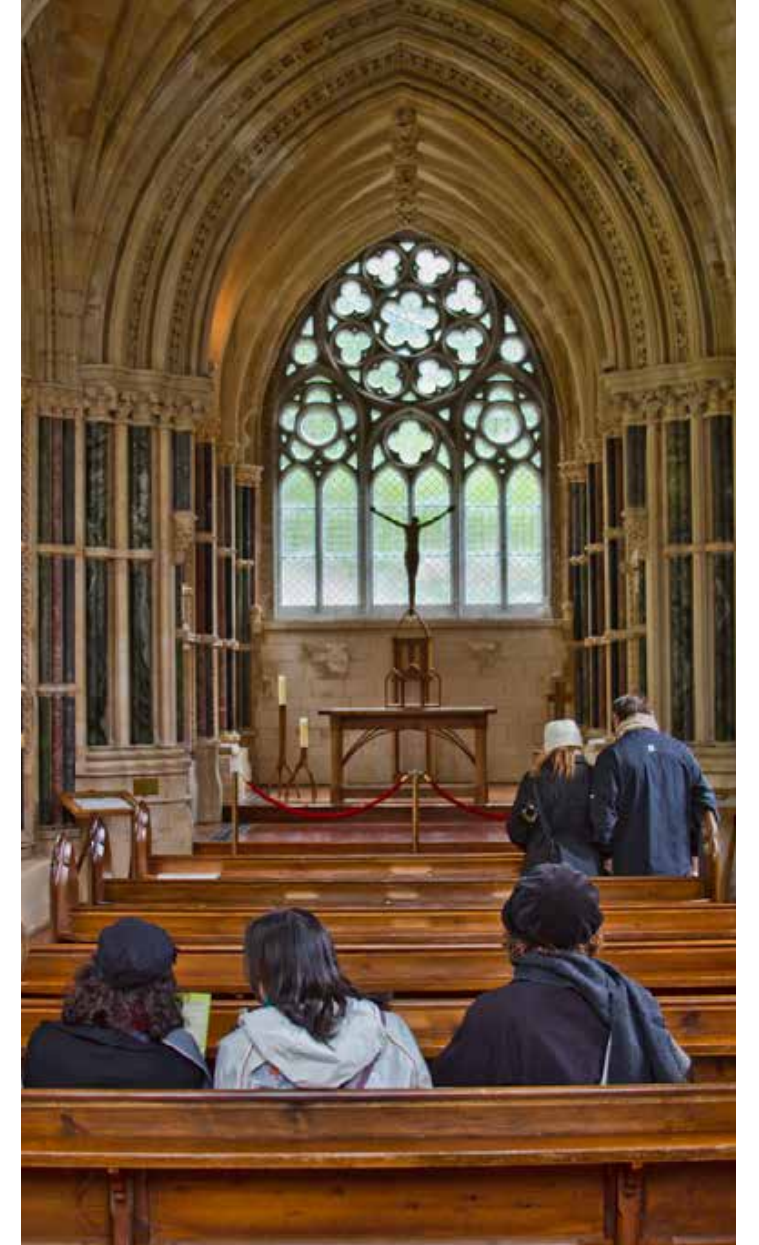
We had dinner at the hotel both nights, using the one restaurant on the premises that offered “casual dining”.



The neo-Gothic chapel on the grounds of Kylemore Abbey



Top: window in the Kylemore chapel. Bottom: founder of the Abbey



Inside the Kylemore Abbey chapel

DONEGAL AND NORTHERN IRELAND



The seaside village of Strandhill



This curious sign was displayed in the pretty seaside village of Strandhill. I have to report that we did not see this moose, or indeed any other moose during the entire trip. Perhaps these animals hide during the summer and re-surface in the winter months? We shall never know!

19 May, 2011 - Thursday

The drive from Cong to Donegal appeared quite long, so we had planned on driving by the most direct route until Sligo, and then do the last part of the route at a more leisurely pace by following one of the tour in our guide book. We stopped by the seaside town of Strandhill, where we had really good capuccinos, probably the best on the trip thus far. The rest of that tour was not particularly interesting.

We stayed at the Lough Eske Castle hotel that night and the following night. An interesting hotel! It seems to be a large modern complex built around a castle-like manor probably dating from the 19th century. Our rooms were wonderful, very spacious, comfortable and with state-of-the-art bathrooms.... grand enough to warrant taking photographs that might inspire our own master bathroom renos sometime in the future!

Dinner was something else! At 6:30 p.m., we were the first to arrive in the dining room. In fact, only 4-5 other tables were occupied the whole evening. Things started well enough. We were presented with 2 menus, a three-course set menu for € 39 and an a-la-carte menu. We all chose the

set menu. Our first courses were all quite good, but our main course (we all chose sirloin steaks) was quite tough. When the waiter asked how the food was, John and I both said that our steaks were tasty but a bit on the tough side. Well! First the waiter apologized and asked if we wanted something else (no!), then the restaurant manager came and apologized and finally the chef came and apologized! Then the waiter who, by that time, had gone in our estimation from “really nice and friendly” to “a bit over the top” to “obsequious”, came and told us that the chef was going to do something really special for us (he brought us an additional dessert which we really did not want!). By then, we just wanted to get out of there: we had to ask for our bill three times and it still took 20 minutes to get it! By that time, Pauline and Patrick had gone back to their room, and John and I were left to deal with the bill. The last straw was the total cost. With only one beer and a glass of wine added to our meal, our bill came to € 97 or \$128.

Having learned our lesson, the next day we stopped by a supermarket, bought some bread, cheese, ham and fruit and ate supper in our room, all for € 8. Compared to the € 97 we paid the night before, it was great value for the money!



Sculpture on the grounds of Eske Castle



Eske Lough Castle Hotel



Sculpture on the grounds of Eske Castle

While our room at the Eske Castle was most comfortable and spacious, the Management attempted to restrict the consumption of alcoholic beverages on the premises to alcohol purchased at the hotel, at exorbitant prices. That is not unusual, except that, in this case, the policy even applied to drinks in our own room! I confess we broke the rule without any remorse!



Another sculpture on the grounds of Eske Castle

20 May, 2011 - Friday

In the morning, we went to see the Slieve League Cliffs on the coast north of Donegal. While the cliffs themselves were not particularly exciting, the drive from Donegal was very picturesque, particularly as we finally saw the sun that day! Even if it was mixed with heavy showers and even hail in between the sunny periods, it was still more sun than we had seen since setting foot in Ireland.



Slieve League Cliffs

The Giant's Causeway

The area consists of an estimated 40,000 hexagonal basalt columns, which were formed during a volcano eruption 60 million years ago. Strangely, the Causeway is thought to have lain undiscovered by the outside world until a visit in 1692 from the Bishop Of Derry (Londonderry) who alerted authorities in Dublin. The legend of Finn McCool explains how the causeway came to be formed.

Finn McCool, an Irish Giant, lived on an Antrim headland and one day, when going about his daily business, a Scottish Giant named Fingal began to shout insults and hurl abuse from across the channel. In anger, Finn lifted a clod of earth and threw it at the giant as a challenge; the earth landed in the sea.

Fingal retaliated with a rock thrown back at Finn and shouted that Finn was lucky that he wasn't a strong swimmer or he would have made sure he could never fight again. Finn was enraged and began lifting huge clumps of earth from the shore, throwing them so as to make a pathway for the Scottish giant to come and face him. However, by the time he finished making the crossing, he had not slept for a week and so instead devised a cunning plan to fool the Scot.

Finn disguised himself as a baby in a cot and when his adversary came to face him, Finn's wife told the Giant that Finn was away but showed him his son sleeping in the cradle. The Scottish giant became apprehensive, for if the son was so huge, what size would the father be? In his haste to escape Fingal sped back along the causeway Finn had built, tearing it up as he went. He is said to have fled to a cave on Staffa which is to this day named 'Fingal's Cave'. Other versions of the legend include Finn throwing a huge piece of earth which then became the Isle Of Man and the hole which it left behind became Lough Neagh.

Source: <http://thenorthernirelandguide.co.uk/giants-causeway-and-legend-finn-mccool>



Giant's Causeway

21 May, 2011 - Saturday

Our drive that day took us from Donegal to Belfast. At first, we thought that we would drive straight through, because it looked like a very long drive. But having checked distance and driving time on the GPS, we decided to make a detour to the North Coast and go and see the Giant's Causeway.

We left early, about 8:30 a.m. and arrived at the Causeway at about 11:00 a.m. After parking the car, we went to look at the path from the parking lot to the Causeway, and were horrified by what we saw. It seemed to be miles away. That was bad enough given Patrick's hip problems, but the weather was particularly nasty that day, with rain, heavy at times, and a wind so strong that I sometimes felt the need to stand still to avoid being pushed.

On our way to the Causeway, we made a small detour to go and visit the ruins of Dunluce Castle. There was not much to see, particularly given the rain and cold. The visit was made quite memorable, however, when we return to the parking lot, and found that someone had made a big dent in the side of our rental car. For sure, this was going to cost us our €200 deposit. It sure dampened our spirits for the rest of the day!





Giant's Causeway



Ruins of Dunluce Castle



View from Dunluce Castle

22 May, 2011 - Sunday

We stayed at the Merchant's Hotel in Belfast for our last 2 nights. The rooms were in a new wing, very large and comfortable, if a bit gaudy, with its "art deco-inspired" mirrors and gilt everywhere. The restaurant was in the older part of the building and was truly magnificent!

We managed to do some last minute shopping and some sight seeing.

23 May, 2011 - Monday

We spent most of that day on a leisurely drive from Belfast to Dublin to begin our journey home.

We were very pleasantly surprised when we returned our rental car. The woman from the agency who checked out our car took a cursory look around, signed the papers and sent us on our way. She either did not see the big dent on the passenger side, or did not care about it! ,

John and Pauline spent their last night at a hotel near the Dublin airport. Patrick and I flew to London on the 23rd and stayed at Heathrow for our flight home the next day.



Belfast city centre



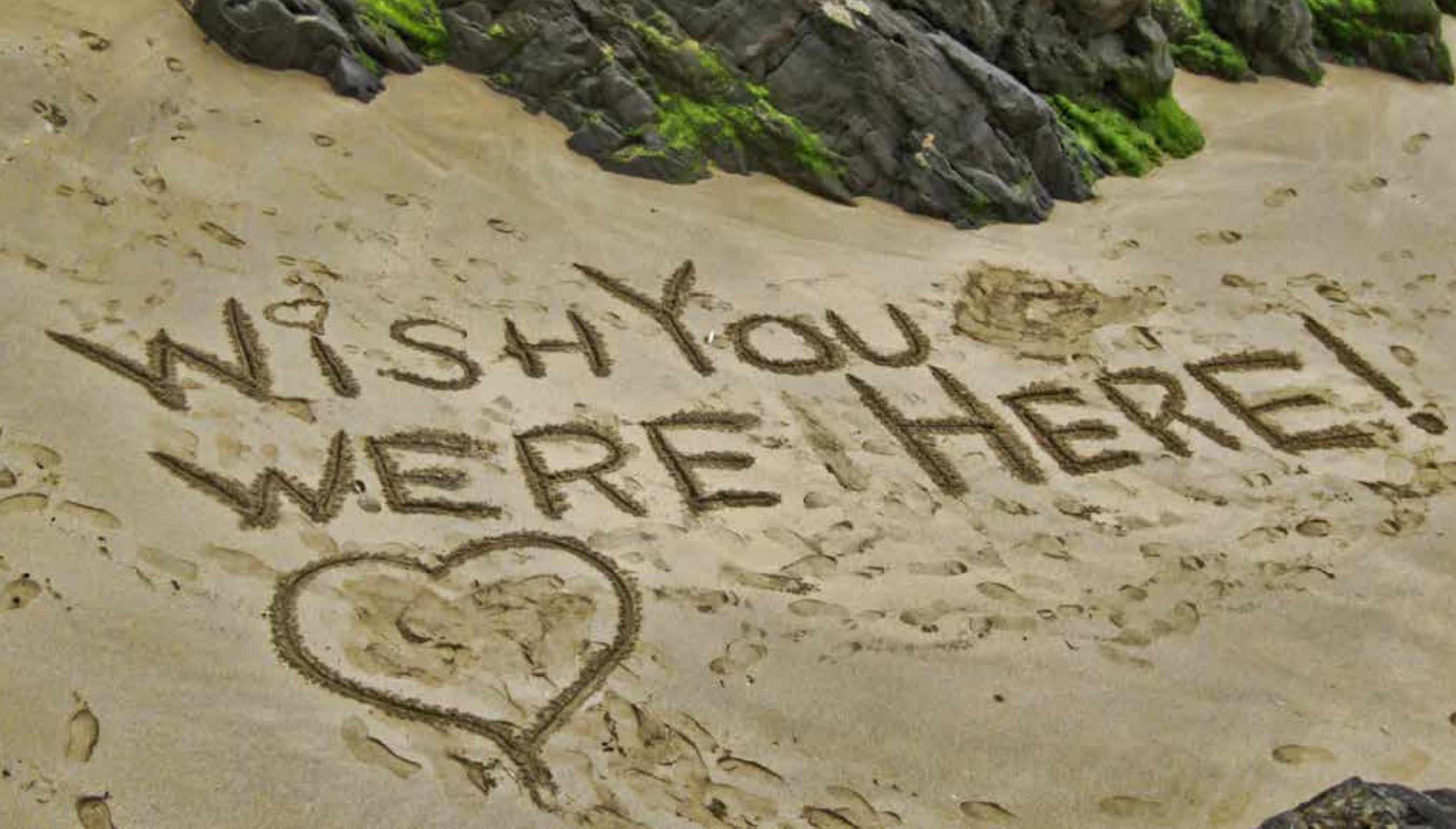
Tall ship leaving Belfast harbour



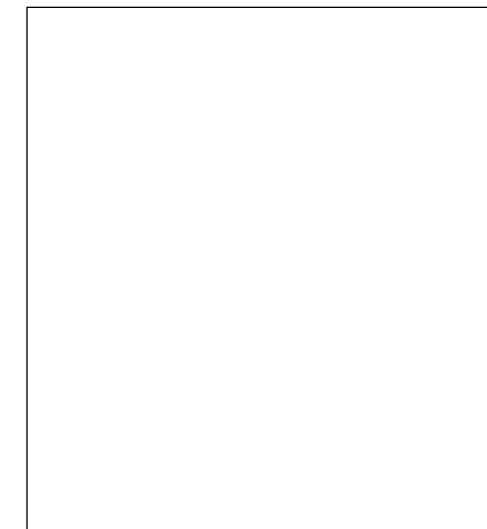
Belfast city centre



Restaurant at the Merchant's Hotel, Belfast



AND SO WE
SAY GOOD BYE
TO IRELAND!



Patrick and Louise Krohn

2011

