

Butler Arms Hotel

Virginia Woolf
~ Bulletin ~

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*Upper wrapper: Butler Arms Hotel, Waterville, Co. Kerry
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Photograph by Anne Byrne*

Photograph on rear wrapper and wrappers designed by Stephen Barkway

REMNANTS OF MR AND MRS WOOLF'S VISIT TO IRELAND IN 1934

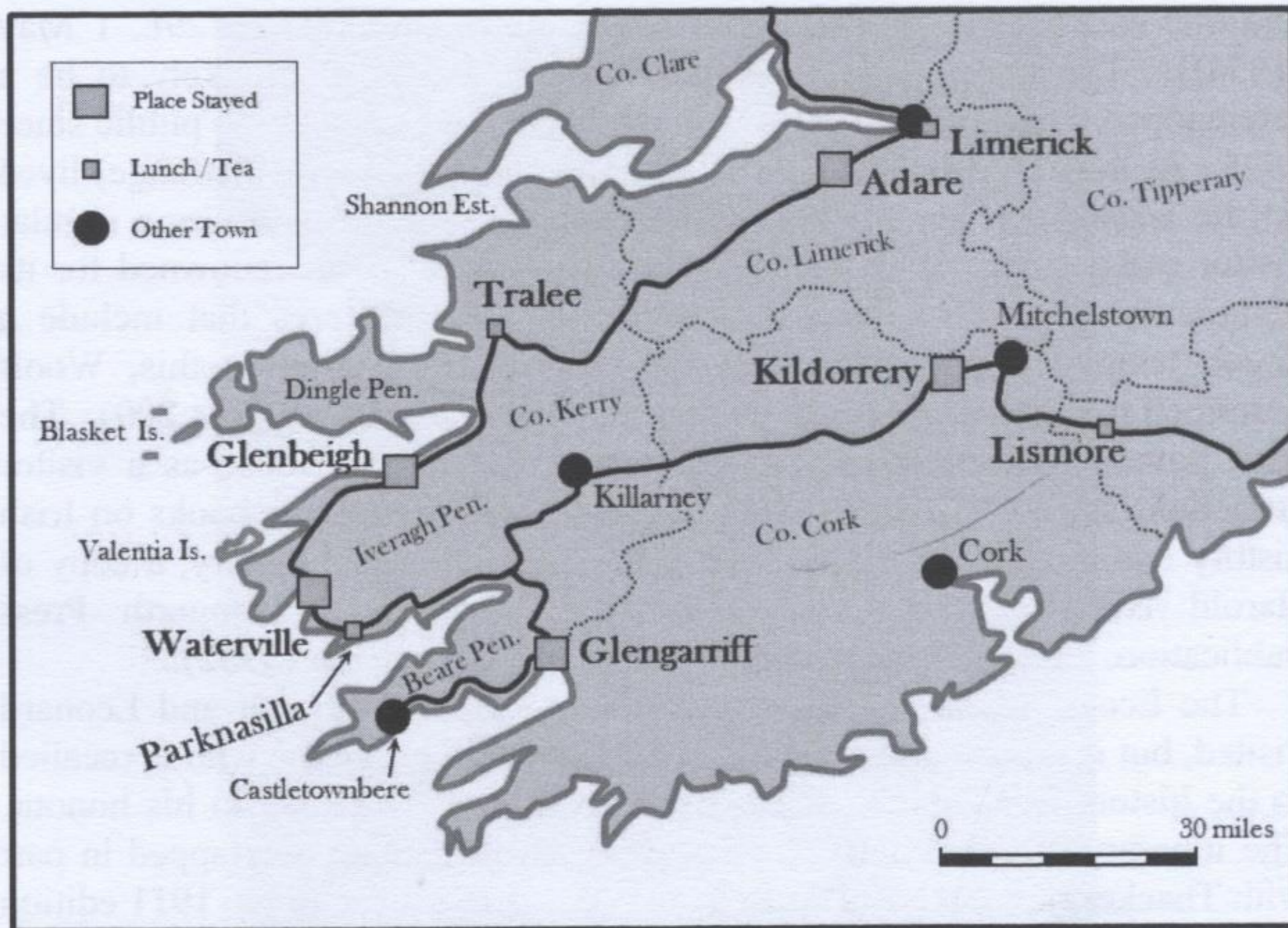
*Anne Byrne and Paul Gosling*¹

While revisiting the hotels in which Leonard and Virginia stayed on their ten-day tour (28 April to 7 May 1934) of the Irish Free State, we were curious to discover whether remnants of their visit could be found. Of the hotels visited by the Woolfs, the Eccles in Glengarriff, the Butler Arms in Waterville, the Parknasilla near Sneem, the Glenbeigh in Glenbeigh, the Dunraven Arms in Adare and the Great Southern Hotel in Galway all still operate as hotels today.² All are located along the south and west coast, currently branded as the Wild Atlantic Way. In Dublin, the Woolfs stayed in the Russell on St Stephen's Green in the city centre and then dined at the Salthill Hotel at Kingstown (Dún Laoghaire) close to the ferry for Holyhead. The Russell, the 'epitome of elegant hospitality', closed in the 1970s and was later demolished (Oram; S. Clarke 42). A fire in 1972 secured the fate of the Salthill Hotel in Dún Laoghaire.

Drawing on Leonard's notes in his pocket diary for 1934 and Virginia's Irish diary, we followed the Woolfs' Irish itinerary along the south and west coast in March 2018 (SxMs-13/2/R/A/28 and D4 209–18). This short article describes remnants of the Irish tour as found in the hotels at Glengarriff, Waterville and Glenbeigh.

¹Written by Anne Byrne, this article is based on joint research by her and Paul Gosling for a book on the Woolfs' Irish tour.

²The Great Southern Hotel has been renamed the Meyrick, and the Glenbeigh is now known as the Old Glenbeigh Hotel. The Meyrick is named after an English general, Thomas Meyrick, whose mission was to restore order to the 'disturbed state of Ireland' in May 1798 ('General Meyrick' 87). Galway is northwest of Limerick, off the map opposite.



The Woolfs' 1934 tour of the southwest of Ireland. Map by Paul Gosling.

Eccles Hotel, Glengarriff, Co. Cork

The setting, age, architecture and design of the Eccles Hotel is similar to that of the Fishguard Bay Hotel in Goodwick, England, where the Woolfs stayed the night before their sea-crossing to Ireland. Set against a wooded background, both enjoy a sea view, a long verandah with distinctive balconies and railings of Victorian-style metalwork.³ Virginia wrote her first diary entry of this trip in Glengarriff: 'This is the 30th of April, Monday, so I think, foreign travel not leading to thought' (*D4* 209). She recalled those she met and talked with while 'sitting on the verandah after lunch'. Her fellow guests included a German lawyer and 'an invalid, who reminds me of Nelly Cecil', with whom she talked about finding a house in Limerick (*D4* 210).⁴ Elizabeth Bowen had recommended Glengarriff to the Woolfs. Virginia wrote to her from the Eccles Hotel: 'Here we are, because it was too beautiful to move. In fact, your island is too seductive, and we have already been asking about houses, whether one can get them easily,—

³See Stephen Barkway's photograph of the exterior of the Fishguard Bay Hotel on the upper wrapper of the *Virginia Woolf Bulletin*, No. 41 (September 2012), and Stuart N. Clarke's illustrated article, 'Virginia Woolf's Visit to Dublin in 1934', in the same issue.

⁴Lady Eleanor Cecil was an old friend of Virginia's and a literary critic.

and one can: so expect us as your neighbours in future' (L5 298, 1 May [1934]). The 'island' could refer to Ireland, but is more likely to be a reference to Garinish Island (Garnish or Illnacullin), open to the public since 1925. At the time of the Woolf's visit, Mrs Bryce (Violet L'Estrange) lived on the island with her son Roland.⁵ George Bernard Shaw was a regular visitor and a friend of Violet's. Garinish was and still is renowned for its luxuriant and tropical gardens with architectural features that include a Greek temple and Italian gardens.⁶ Perhaps responding to this, Woolf described Ireland as 'a mixture of Greece, Italy & Cornwall' (D4 209). The Irish government manages Garinish Island and Bryce House as a visitor attraction (see 'Glengarriff'). Bryce House library contains books on Irish history and politics, international relations, British social history, a copy of Harold Nicolson's *Diplomacy* (1939), as well as a Hogarth Press publication, Laurens Van der Post's *Venture to the Interior* (1952).

The Eccles Hotel reception staff are aware that Virginia and Leonard visited, but it is her relative, William Makepeace Thackeray, who is recalled in the history of the hotel; the 'Thackeray Room' is named in his honour. The itinerary of the Woolfs' tour of the Irish Free State overlapped in part with Thackeray's 1842 tour of Ireland.⁷ The frontispiece to the 1911 edition of his *Irish Sketch Book* has a drawing of the Glengarriff Hotel. He stopped there to dry his rain-sodden clothes and recorded his impressions:

The inn is very pretty: some thorn-trees stand before it, where many bare-legged people were lolling in spite of the weather. A beautiful bay stretches out before the house, the full tide washing the thorn-trees; mountains rise on either side of the little bay, and there is an island, with a castle in it, in the midst, near which a yacht was moored. (Thackeray 138)

Another room is named after the poet William Butler Yeats. The history of the hotel also records Shaw's visits, but of Virginia and Leonard all that remains is a prompted recollection.

⁵Violet L'Estrange, an early champion of women's rights, was arrested in 1920 for speaking against British anti-Republican reprisals. Violet and the sisters Constance (later Markievicz) and Eva Gore-Booth were cousins and shared holidays in Glengarriff. Yeats's poem, 'In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz', memorialises the sisters in youth and old age (Yeats 141-2).

⁶John Annan Bryce (MP for Inverness Burghs) purchased the island from the War Office in 1910; with horticulturist and landscape architect Harold Peto, they created the sub-tropical gardens for which the island is renowned.

⁷The Woolfs and Thackeray visited Waterford, Cork, Bantry, ~~Killarney, Tralee~~, Limerick, Galway and Dublin.

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The verandah at the Eccles Hotel, Glengarriff, Co. Cork. Photograph by Anne Byrne.

Butler Arms Hotel, Waterville, Co. Kerry

On Tuesday 1 May 1934, the Woolfs travelled over the mountains to Kenmare and along the edge of the Iveragh Peninsula to Parknasilla (where they had lunch), Sneem, Caherdaniel, and on to the Butler Arms Hotel in Waterville, overlooking Ballinskelligs Bay. In his notebook, Leonard recorded it as a journey of sixty miles. Martin and Mary Huggard had purchased the hotel in 1916 and were the proprietors who welcomed the Woolfs. Famous guests such as Walt Disney, Charlie Chaplin and J. P. Morgan are profiled in the history of the hotel. The current generation of the Huggard family, Paula and Louise, are aware that Leonard and Virginia stayed overnight. The entry, 'Mr and Mrs Woolf London', can clearly be seen in the carefully preserved register for May 1934. Leonard signed the register for both of them. 'Mr and Mrs Rowland Ballinacurra' is on the same page. At Waterville the Woolfs met and conversed at some length

with the Rowlands. Their address in Middleton is recorded at the back of Leonard's notebook. Of this meeting, Virginia wrote about 'an extremely interesting encounter at the windy hotel with Ireland—that is Mr & Mrs Rowlands; he is a giant, very shapely, small head, obliterated features; she small, abrupt, vivacious' (D4 211). The Rowlands established that Virginia and Leonard were 'their sort' and talked at length about the attractions of living in Ireland: "'That's the way we live—no nonsense about us—not like the English people. Now I'll give you my name, & I'll write to my friend & she'll tell you of a house—& I hope you'll live in Ireland. We want people like ourselves'" (D4 212). In *The Years* (1937), the character of Patrick is considered to be based on Mr Rowland (Snaith 213).

The Woolfs learned of the death of George Duckworth (Virginia's half-brother) while they were staying in Waterville. Virginia wrote to Vanessa that they had read his death notice in the first English newspaper they had come across, *The Times* of 28 April 1934 (L5 299, [3] May [1934]). She wrote in her diary, 'this is all happening far off. Here I sit on my bed in the windy seaside hotel, & wait for dinner with this usual sense of time shifting & life becoming unreal, so soon to vanish while the world will go on millions upon millions of years' (D4 211).

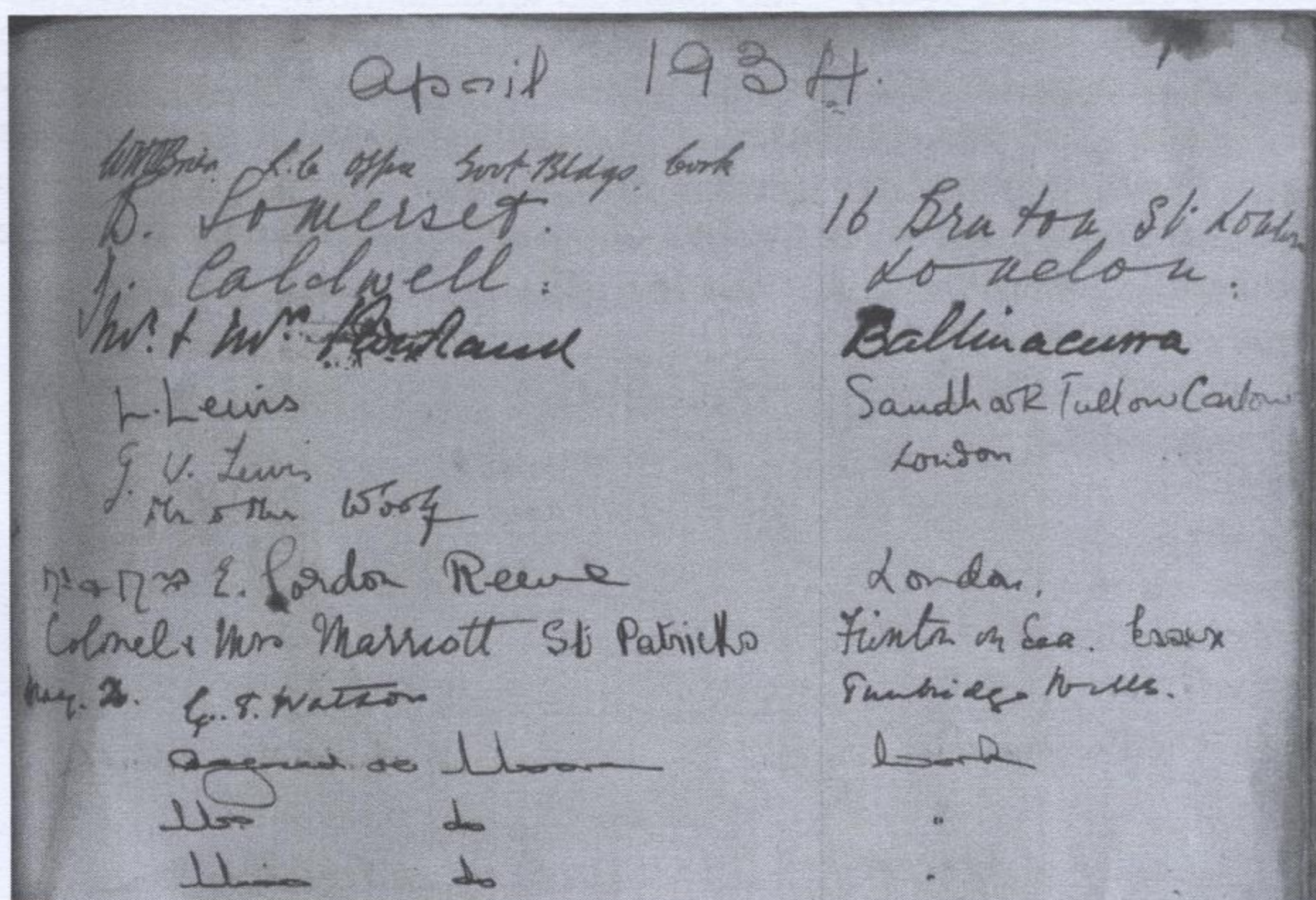
Having been puzzled and intrigued by the distinctive annotations in Woolf's Irish diary, I learned about the hotel register with the Woolf signatures from colleagues in Galway, Dr Tadhg Foley and Dr Rosaleen O'Neill. The editors of the diary demonstrate exemplary local and cultural knowledge of obscure references and lesser-known people that would have been a serious challenge to identify almost fifty years after the Woolfs' visit. Therein are eighteen annotations, each of which contains impressive information and expansive historical detail with which to read Virginia's observations. For example, 'the old man of 90 in his cabin' near Bowen's Court is identified as Patsy Hennessy, who lived by St Geoffrey's Well (D4 210 fn. 9).⁸ How did the editors gather such information long after Patsy Hennessy departed this earth? I found the answer in the acknowledgement by Anne Olivier Bell to Dr Tadhg Foley, the Irish-based 'Foreign Correspondent' (D4 xii). Early in 1981, Tadhg and Rosaleen set out in a Renault 4 to retrace the route of the Woolfs' visit to provide the annotations to the Irish diary. They must have been the first to venture on such an expedition. A sense of adventure and pleasure in following the clues left by Virginia permeated their account to me of 'hunting the Woolfs', as they made their enquiries and talked with people in bars and hotels.⁹ What was remarkable is that almost fifty years later, local people could remember and

⁸The well at Kildorrery is known locally as St Gregory's Well (A. Clarke).

⁹Interview with Tadhg Foley and Rosaleen O'Neill, Galway, 21 February 2018.

identify those mentioned in Virginia's account. For example, it was well known that the O'Sullivan brothers were caretakers for the Bryce family of Garinish Island. Mrs O'Brien, the housekeeper at Bowen's Court, remembered the Woolfs' visit; she told Tadhg and Rosaleen that Mrs Bowen always introduced the staff to her visitors. The manager of the Butler Arms Hotel had promised to send on a copy of the relevant page of the visitors' book to Tadhg; a copy with the Woolfs' names duly arrived by post. On our recent visit to the Butler Arms Hotel, Paula and Louise Huggard located the 1934 register, and a photograph of the relevant page is included here.

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The Woolfs' entry in Leonard's writing (7th from the top), Butler Arms Hotel register 1934. Photograph by Paul Gosling.

The Glenbeigh Hotel, Glenbeigh, Co. Kerry

On Wednesday 2 May, the Woolfs drove to Tralee to collect their letters before motoring back to Glenbeigh on Dingle Bay, with the great shape of the Blasket Islands on the western horizon. Staying for four nights and five days in the southwest, the Woolfs' sojourn here was longer than elsewhere. In this landscape, Woolf felt 'a sense that life is receding' (D4 209). She wrote to Vanessa: 'here we are a great deal further and wilder than if in Italy or Greece. We only see Irish papers, now and then; there are no towns, only an occasional small fishing village'. The Woolfs were where they wanted to be, 'in the wilds of Kerry' (L5 299, [3] May [1934]). The Woolfs met with

the proprietress, Mrs Ida Fitzgerald, an exemplar of the 'perfection of Irish conversation'. Mrs Fitzgerald's 'genius for talk' was much enjoyed by Woolf, though she was frustrated by any attempt to capture the indulgent words: 'I can give no notion of the flowing, yet formed sentences, the richness & ease of the language; the lay out, dexterity & adroitness of the arrangement' (D4 212-13). Woolf obtained 'a receipt for a perfect Onion soup' from Mrs Fitzgerald (L5 299, [3] May [1934]). This warming soup most likely contained a dash of whiskey or stout, with onions and potatoes in a beef or vegetable broth. Mrs Fitzgerald was remembered in 1981, according to Foley and O'Neill's annotation, and the present proprietor, Mary Keary, recalled that Mrs Fitzgerald had inherited the hotel from her brother, Captain O'Shea.¹⁰ The family came from an hotel and business background, and had established a local golf club and a mineral water enterprise in Cahirciveen. Another interesting morsel emerges: Virginia Woolf is said to have sat by the light of a window in the residents' lounge, writing.



Interior of the Old Glenbeigh Hotel, Glenbeigh, Co. Kerry. Photograph by Anne Byrne.

¹⁰Interview with Mary Keary, Glenbeigh Hotel, 5 April 2018.

Concluding remarks

Leonard's planning for the Irish tour began as early as Tuesday 3 April 1934. His notebook entry reads 'Work. Drove Brighton AA re Irish trip. Back via Lewes'; the total mileage of the 18hp Lanchester motor car, 10,645, is logged. The Brighton Automobile Association would have provided Leonard with information and regulations about motoring in the Irish Free State, the location of AA offices, maps and hotel guides, as well as advice on Irish road signage, speed limits, insurance, customs, boat and cargo transport information for the motor car.¹¹ The *AA Handbook* provided information on AA garages and appointed hotels in Ireland. The four-star classification for garages and hotels is explained with variations in the latter according to 'comfort and luxury', but underscored by the principle of 'value for money' (AA 116, 122). Continental breakfasts were supplied, and in smaller hotels 'special AA toilet cabinets' with 'clean small towels and brushes for members' use' were provided. Access to these cabinets was 'only by means of the AA key supplied for the roadside telephone boxes' (AA 117). Towards the end of their holiday, Virginia wrote from the Star Hotel in Worcester that 'we are very tired of hotels & glad this is our last night, though the comfort is extreme' (D4 218).

Remnants of the Woolfs' Irish tour, as artefact or story, remain owing to the continuity of hotel ownership in families, particularly in the case of Waterville and Glenbeigh. The hotels retain the old-style comfort of railway hotels of past eras. In the face of inclement Irish weather, mist, rain and wind, 'great roasting fire[s]' continue to blaze in the halls, dining rooms and residents' lounges (D4 212).

¹¹The *AA Handbook* for 1933–34 carries the following notice: 'Motor Law. Irish Free State. The alphabetical explanation of the motor laws in the Irish Free State has been deleted from this edition of the Handbook. At the time of going to press, the laws were being recast. When the new laws are passed, a special digest will be prepared for issue to members upon request' (AA 59).

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