

Magnetic North

By Joe Lynch




John and Kathleen Durcan relaxing at the function in Kees Hotel.

Welcome to the first journey through Magnetic North in 2008; the days lengthen, the birds are singing and that first touch of spring is in the air. Christmas doesn't feel too long ago; well allow me bring you back in time, just far enough to have a quick look at the celebrations that took place here over the Christmas season.

I feel confident in saying that this part of the country has led the way in bringing the different strata of the Garda support Associations together in organising the Christmas function for retired and serving members in the Donegal Division. The history of this amalgamation goes back many years now to a time when there wasn't any formally organised parties for former and serving members; then the three Associations, the IPA, AGSI and GRA came together to form a committee under the banner of the Combined Garda Associations. They were joined on the committee by representatives of the retired members. That committee then took on the responsibility of organising the fundraising and all other

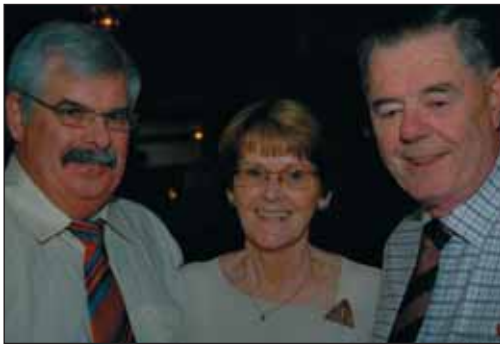
aspects of getting a Christmas function up and running.

All the associations involved contributed generously from the very beginning. Financial support was sought from the various social and sports clubs and none were found wanting. That system of operation and funding continues to this day. Over the years different elements were introduced including the presentation of Long Service Medals to qualifying serving members. This year we had the privilege of having the presentation of the Liddy Medal and Citation take place at a function held in Kees' Hotel, Stranorlar just before Christmas. The evening started off with Mass at St Mary's Church, Stranorlar. As we gathered together the rain lashed down. If ever there was a night when the comfort of home was hard to leave, this was it. We needn't have feared for those who have turned out year after year to support this function are a hardy bunch and it would take more than buckets of rain to keep them away.

As up to one hundred people joined Fr. Michael McKeever from the parish of Glendowan who prayed for the intentions of retired and serving members of An Garda Síochána and for all deceased colleagues. Fr McKeever grew up in a Garda environment; his father, Dan, served in Killybegs, where Dan and his wife Sadie raised their family, his brother Ronan serves in the Traffic Corps in Letterkenny.



Regional Chairman Joe Storey presents Thomas Heidtmann with IPA Ireland plaque attended by Joe Lynch.



Serving member Eamon Doherty, Dunfanaghy meets retired Divisional Officer Sean Ginty and his wife Mona.



GSRMSA Chairman John Durcan presents Richard Crowley with the Liddy Medal at a Donegal Division function in Kees Hotel.



Liddy Medal recipient Richard Crowley with his family at the function in Kees Hotel Stranorlar.

The reception area in Kees' hotel was filled and the buzz of conversation increased in intensity as colleagues and friends greeted each other. The sweet aroma of mulled wine filled the room and people stood around the open log fire. Before long a beautiful four course meal was served. On a large screen in the function room, a photo display began and photographs taken at our Christmas functions over the course of the last three years were shown. David Kelly was MC and following introductions he called on Superintendent James Gallagher to address the function on behalf of Chief Superintendent McGinn. Superintendent Vincent O'Brien and his wife Patricia also attended the function. When the speeches were completed it was time to call upon the special guest of the night Richard Crowley to come forward and there was rapturous applause as he made his way to the rostrum where he was greeted by the Chairman of the Garda Síochána Retired Members Association (GSRMSA), John Durcan and Gerry Lovett, General Secretary of the GSRMSA. John Durcan who also serves on the Combined Garda Association Committee here in Donegal presented the Liddy Medal to Richard while Gerry Lovett read the accompanying Citation. Richard Crowley then addressed to crowd. The band struck up for a great night's entertainment and the floor filled to capacity for fox trots, waltzes and for that battle that has never ended, the Siege of Ennis. Soon it was time for the mega draw with a 26in LCD television, DVD recorder and other goodies on offer. There was great applause when Joe Joyce from Dungloe stepped forward with the first winning ticket to claim the 26in LCD TV. They say that when your luck is in, your luck is in, for when the next ticket was drawn, his daughter claimed the second prize of the DVD recorder. What are the chances of that, with up to fifteen hundred individual tickets, in strips of five, sold on the night? The incredible thing is this; we had given serious consideration to the keeping of the TV and DVD together as a special 1st prize but decided that by having them as separate prizes it would spread the opportunity of winning. Sometimes, random happenings such as these can put the best of us in our place.

The Combined Garda Associations Committee would like to thank all retired and serving members who supported this annual event. Special thanks to Gerry Lovett and his wife Ann who travelled from Dublin to be with us and to all the Associations and to District and Divisional Social/Sports Clubs for the financial support. Once again, Kees' Hotel, Stranorlar was a fantastic venue where the welcome was especially warm, the food delicious and service excellent. Our thanks to Bridget and her staff.

BERLIN

Christmas Markets

An IPA Regional Tour

My grandfather, God rest him, had a saying – “Too far East is West”. That thought came to my mind recently on the streets of Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie with forty IPA friends; this is the spot where the former East has indeed become West. To tell you the whole story of this adventure and of how it all started out would fill the magazine, I don't want to do that so I will give you an abridged version, which I hope will give you the full flavour of our adventure

In 2006 a young German traffic police officer, Dietmar Kaske, serving in the Traffic Section in the town of Frankfurt Oder close to the Polish Border applied to take part in the IPA German/Irish Internship Programme. Dietmar had been an occasional visitor to the Donegal area before that and had led an IPA group to visit Letterkenny where they were welcomed by the then Divisional Officer, Chief Supt. Noel White. Dietmar's placement was with the Letterkenny Traffic Corps and it was another great success story for IPA Ireland and IPA Germany.

Dietmar didn't forget us when he returned to Germany and soon an invitation came asking that we organise a group visit to his area. At the first Colmcille Regional meeting of 2007 the committee took the



Former Int. President and his wife Ann seen here with Joe Lynch and his wife Ann, attended the IPA function for the Irish group in Berlin

decision to make Berlin the destination for the 2007 Regional Trip. Preparations were soon underway; printed notices and word of mouth advertising the trip were soon on their way throughout the Region and further a field. Our initial plans for a small group soon became obsolete as one after another the completed booking forms were returned. By April the number stood at forty one and included four members of National Executive Committee, five members of Regional Committee, with serving and retired IPA members of An Garda Síochána representing ranks from Garda to Superintendent.

It was time now to call on the expertise of the IPA Office staff at Iona Drive and soon a package of flights and accommodation were booked for us at a price which just couldn't be matched anywhere; a package deal which saved every person €85, leaving a net cost for flight and hotel accommodation (B&B) of €300 per person sharing, so well done to Joan, Noleen and Noel for their dedicated service. Over the months that followed, the finer points of the arrangements for the visit were put in place with our IPA colleagues in Berlin. While most of the

groundwork in Germany was undertaken by Dietmar in conjunction with local Branch President Thomas Heidtmann and Hans-Joachim Tilgner, I was delighted that former International President Jürgen Klos, with whom I had worked on the International Internal Commission, became involved and assisted with the plans for our visit.

December seemed so far away when we discussed the trip at that first Regional meeting, but before we knew it, the departure date was within sight. In the cold dark hours of a December morning our party of forty one boarded the private chartered bus in Letterkenny for the journey to Dublin airport. The 11.40am flight was delayed for about 30 minutes but this was made up on the flight time and as soon as we had cleared the luggage belt in Schoenefeld airport, Dietmar and his IPA colleague, Thomas Heidtmann, President of Berlin North East Branch awaited us. We boarded the chartered bus for our journey to the Park Inn hotel at



Saturday Morning's climb to the top of the TV Tower in Berlin rewarded me with this great view over our hotel and into the horizon



Group members take up their pre-booked places in Maximillians Restaurant

Alexanderplatz, a premier hotel in one of the major squares of Berlin, situated just East of where the Berlin Wall formerly stood. Dusk was setting in as we crossed the River Spree. Our hotel was a magnificent 37 story building; it is only overlooked by the lofty TV tower which stands just a block away. The view of the city of Berlin, seen from the platform of the TV tower at 268.2 metres, has to be experienced to be appreciated.

Hotel lobby, 7pm - Hans-Joachim Tilgner, whom I had met several times in Gimborn Castle over the years, arrived to greet us and to show us this part of the city. As we walk along Karl-Liebknecht-Strasse and onto Unter den Linden, in the direction of the Brandenburg Gate, the street is a cascade of light pouring from the illuminated lime trees that line the entire street. The cool night air carries with it the fragrant aroma of the steaming hot gluhwein, roasted nuts of every description, char-grilled pork sausages and sweet smelling pastry, all of which are being cooked, served and sampled by the throngs of people who crowd the nearby Christmas markets. With everyone in our group feeling peckish, we were soon on our way again, this time to a lovely restaurant called Maximillians.

On a fifteen minutes walk we observed a mouth watering view of a gleaming new Buggatti Veyron 16.4 as it stood side by side with a magnificent new Bentley Continental GT in a showroom window on a corner of the street. I have to tell you, this was window shopping with a difference, where a mega bucks win would be the only way of ever fulfilling the dream. But what a dream!!!! In any case, the beauty and quality of those motors was equally matched by the quality and level

of service received in the nearby Maximillians restaurant where everyone enjoyed first class hospitality on their first night in central Berlin. A ten minute journey on the underground brought us back to the Park Inn Hotel where a nightcap in the plush bar brought the night to a fitting end.

Friday after a varied breakfast, we boarded the coach for our tour of the city led by local IPA member Ingomar Dorner and his wife Friederike of IPA Potsdam. We stopped at Checkpoint Charlie and at the Brandenburg Gate where there was time for a photo or two; we viewed the Reichstag and followed the line of the wall that once stretched for 184 kilometres, creating a physical barrier in this lovely city. As we journeyed through Berlin we paid a brief visit to the Olympic Stadium erected for the 1936 Olympic Games. We were now on our way to Potsdam and as we travelled through this beautiful, wooded area of Berlin, passing through Charlottensburg on our way, we saw the run down remains of the former military establishment of the Russian army.

Potsdam is full of interesting buildings and sights, the full story eloquently outlined to us by a local IPA member who gave us a guided tour. It was here that we again joined Dietmar, wife Anja and his young daughter Jennifer and local IPA members as we enjoyed a relaxed and unhurried lunch. The one hour walking tour that followed brought us back to another fine Christmas market where we had time to sample the delights on offer before boarding the coach for return to our hotel. Before long we were once again on the streets of Berlin sussing out the many restaurants that line the Karl-Marx-Allee



Berlin Group Tour photo taken under the shadow of the Brandenburg Gate



Michael & Joe take up position at Checkpoint Charlie

and the surrounding streets. Before the night ended everyone had found a place that suited their taste and the night was rounded off for some by walking what seemed a marathon before finding a large Shamrock hanging over a tavern door. The long walk there and back was just another one of the many adventures that make for great memories. Saturday was the day to flex the plastic and rumour has it that some damage was done to the flexible friend, maybe enough to make it the inflexible enemy when the next bill drops through the letterbox.

Our time in Berlin was nearing its end and great store had been placed in the special IPA function organised by our IPA colleagues. The gathering in the "Restaurant Louis" in Richardplatz 5, was some



Joe McNulty steps back in time and into a photograph at Checkpoint Charlie

distance from our hotel reached by the underground; we duly met our colleagues at the last stop and joined them for the ten minute walk to the restaurant. As we entered, I saw a familiar face in the crowd and was warmly greeted by former International President Jurgen Klos and his lovely wife Anna; we were soon talking of our time in Spandau in 2001 and the international meeting. This restaurant specialises in a dish called "Schnitzel" and serves many varieties. As our group, now numbering fifty seven, sat down we enjoyed fine beer and wine as our orders were taken. For those who didn't fancy the Schnitzel there was a fine meal of goose to be had.

As for the Schnitzel, the huge portions served had a few struggling to clear their plates. Have you ever thought how bizarre it is that no matter how full you may be with the main course, room always becomes available for the desert? Well the rule applied here and an impressive ice cream sundae finished off a great meal. A few more beers and it was time to return; we all arrived together at our destination. A short sojourn in the hotel bar wrapped up another great day in Berlin. A brisk walk on Sunday morning brought anyone who wished to a lovely little church not too far from the hotel. Then after breakfast our



Group members get their first taste of Berlin's Christmas Markets



Irish members give Checkpoint the Once Over and think of their own experiences at Border Checkpoints

coach arrived to bring us along the East Side Gallery for a last opportunity of getting photographic evidence of our visit to the Berlin Wall. Next stop, the airport and an uneventful Aer Lingus flight back to Dublin.

It was a privilege for me to have the honour of leading our Regional group tour to Berlin. I take this opportunity of thanking every one who took part in this event. Our Region is fortunate to have the support of so many active members willing to take part in activities such as this, which brings out the truly international flavour of our Association. I know I speak for all when I say, we'd do it all again, and most likely we will, God willing, but it looks like Vienna City for the Christmas markets 2008.