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A JOURNAL FOR THE
CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

Paul Clayton-Lea

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October 2022

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Before his death aged 64 on November 22, 1963, the writer C.S. Lewis expressed a concern to his secretary Walter Hooper that sales of his books would most likely decline or even vanish shortly after his passing. Almost 60 years and 200 million copies later Lewis’s fears have proved groundless. In many ways, thanks to his faithful secretary Hooper, Lewis’s works of Christian apologetics and English Literature as well as his less well-known science fiction have never gone out of print while the classical children’s stories about Narnia and Aslan keep him permanently in the public eye. Attention has also inevitably turned towards his personal life even to the extent of a successful stage play *Shadowlands* (1993) by William Nicholson, transferred very successfully to the silver screen by Richard Attenborough, about his marriage late in life to the dying American poet and writer Joy Gresham.

Lewis’s main concern before he died was for the welfare of his alcoholic brother Warren who had lived with him for most of his life and who would likely face an uncertain future following his brother’s demise. Thanks to the perennial popularity of his sibling’s writings however Warren was well taken care of financially until his death ten years after his famous brother.

A COMPLEX RELATIONSHIP

While Lewis had been supported financially by his Belfast solicitor father Albert throughout his young adult life when studying at Oxford, he nonetheless experienced a degree of poverty that had left its mark upon him. The poverty arose from a situation and relationship that he kept hidden from his father for several years. He was living with an older woman, Mrs. Janie Moore who had

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spent the early part of her life in Co. Louth where her father, Rev. William James Askins had been Rector of the parish of Dunleer for over 25 years. Janie's marriage had broken down – she ever afterwards referred to her husband as 'The Beast' and she was left with few resources to bring up their two children, Paddy and Maureen. Paddy and Lewis were thrown together at Oxford in 1917 as they awaited deployment during the First World War and became firm friends. Lewis's mother Flora had died when he was just nine years old, and Mrs. Moore took Lewis under the family wing in a way that made him feel very much at home. The two teenage soldiers promised one another that in the event of either's death the survivor would care for the remaining parent. The lot was to fall on Lewis for 34 years following Paddy's death on the battlefield in 1918. When he made his home permanently with Janie and 12-year-old Maureen, they found it difficult to make ends meet. His only published diary *All My Road Before Me (1922-27)* describes a relatively happy, though sometimes chaotic, home and academic life. This was frequently punctuated by financial problems that led to Lewis deceiving his father about the extent of his relationship with Janie in order to help alleviate the situation. Albert knew Mrs. Moore but didn't realise his son was sharing a home with her. The deception practiced on his father haunted Lewis, this rigorously moral man, for the rest of his life. Lewis' diary reveals that they moved house frequently to save money but the diary gives no indication of any relationship beyond that of protectiveness and emotional support between Janie and Lewis. She had mothered him after his return from the war wounded by shrapnel and nursed him during bouts of ill health later. In ways he seems an obvious substitute for her own lost son. Lewis in turn provided whatever financial resources he could lay his hands on, mostly from his father but sometimes through private tuition. Although she saw her social position through her Co. Louth antecedents as somewhat elevated Janie too assisted by taking on sewing work. Lewis also undertook most of the daily household cleaning tasks including looking after the series of stray cats and dogs that Janie was wont to adopt. In reading the diary however it needs to be remembered that Lewis only maintained it at Janie's behest and read sections of it aloud to her regularly. He also gave it to his brother Warren to read when Warren returned from his regular travels so that he could catch up on his brother's doings in his absence! It was never going to be an intimate account of his innermost feelings. Even the closest of his many good friends admitted that Lewis avoided any real form of emotional sharing of himself. His earliest biographers were content to accept Lewis's regular designation of Janie to his friends and correspondents as 'mother' but later writers have

inevitably speculated with thin evidence on the complexity of the relationship between the 19-year-old Lewis and 43-year-old Janie. In his own biography *Surprised by Joy* (1955) Lewis hinted at an early romance in his life but insisted on drawing a veil over any details.

THE 'WEE' COUNTY CONNECTIONS

Janie's roots in Co. Louth were later to entwine the lives of both Lewis brothers – for very different reasons - to the extent that both of them came to know the 'Wee' county as well, if not better, than their native Belfast and Co. Down. In his memoir the late northern politician David Bleakly (1925-2017) a student of Lewis from Strandtown in Belfast where the writer was born recorded; '*Jack (C.S.Lewis) felt as much at home in Annagassan in Co. Louth as he did in Belfast.*' Even more significantly and certainly from the point of view of readers of Lewis's classic children's series 'The Chronicles of Narnia', the landscape of Ireland and in particular the Cooley mountains and Carlingford Lough merging with south Co. Down were pinpointed by Lewis as the setting in his imagination for the mythical land of Narnia. The place that he most enjoyed viewing 'Narnia' from was the verandah of the Golden Arrow cottage comprised of three disused railway carriages which occupied an isolated coastal field in Salterstown, near Annagassan in Co. Louth. This was the setting he described in letters to friends as '*a place of unearthly beauty,*' filled with the stories of faeries and ghosts from his Irish nurse Lizzie Endicott that he had been captivated with as a small boy. His brother Warren took more enjoyment from the spirits on offer at the Glydeside Inn, the 200-year-old pub in Annagassan on the shores of Dundalk Bay. Today the O'Reilly family who have owned the pub for generations still maintain the 'snug' where local memory recalls the two brothers would sit, smoking and drinking on long summer evenings before beginning a three mile walk at low tide back to their rooms at the Golden Arrow.

The Golden Arrow also belonged to a Louth woman, Vera Henry, who was Janie Moore's goddaughter. Vera, whose niece Eileen Filgate is now in her 92nd year and who vividly remembers staying in Oxford with the brothers and her aunt, acted as cook and housekeeper for the brothers and Mrs. Moore in Oxford when they were finally able to own a large house with its own private woods and lake from 1930 onwards. During summertime when Lewis could finally holiday in the country he claimed as a refuge and called '*that delectable land*' Vera too would return home to Co. Louth from Oxford and, with the help of two maids, work

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hard maintaining the Golden Arrow and its guests. Despite many offers from his legion of fans Lewis rarely travelled anywhere but to Ireland on summer holidays and Co. Louth was always part of the itinerary. Only after his marriage in 1956 to Joy Gresham did he finally fulfil her wish and bring his dying wife to Greece. But he had brought her to Ireland and to Annagassan and to visit his 'Narnia' location twice before that happened.

DROGHEDA AND THE MEDICAL MISSIONARIES OF MARY

Another reason for maintaining the constant link with Co. Louth, which outlasted the deaths of Janie in 1951 and Vera in 1953, was the frequent alcoholic debilitation of Warren. He almost drank himself to death in Annagassan when on his own little holiday at the Golden Arrow in 1947. Thanks to the ministrations of Mother Mary Martin (1892-1975) and her Medical Missionaries of Mary at their training hospital in Drogheda Warren recovered. When Lewis dashed from Oxford to his brother's hospital bedside in Drogheda he wrote to his friends that Warren was being cared for '*by the most charming nuns.*' Mother Mary's charms enticed Lewis sufficiently to write an essay on the Christian response to sickness and death for the Medical Missionaries of Mary Magazine to mark their 10th anniversary. This marked the beginning of a relationship with the Medical Missionaries which was to endure for the rest of their lives.

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF LEWIS

In recent years the Annagassan Historical Society organized a C.S.Lewis 3 mile walk from the church in Dunany, Co. Louth, where the Lewis brothers worshipped when staying at the Golden Arrow, to the now near empty site on the seashore where the railway carriages stood until the 1970s. As our small group made its way down lanes and through fields there were occasional pauses for children to read passages from '*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe.*' A tree was planted with the owners permission at the rectory in Dunany where Janie Moore was reared. The afternoon concluded with tea and biscuits at the site of the Golden Arrow looking across Dundalk Bay at the blue mountains which inspired C.S. Lewis in his writing of the Narnian books between 1949 and 1953.

The walk on that autumn afternoon caused me to reflect upon the fact that little mention is made of Lewis and his Co. Louth and Irish influences in any of his biographies. When I came to realise that, during my childhood years, the creator of Narnia had passed

my own home front door each day on his way to visit his brother in hospital, I felt it was time to record whatever memories still remained of those who remembered them at that time.

I was more than fortunate to meet and get to know Eileen Filgate, who now lives in Lisrenny, Tallanstown, Co. Louth, for whom Lewis had written a poem on the occasion of her Confirmation and which she generously gave me permission to publish. Similarly a retired undertaker from Drogheda, Paddy Townley who as a young man had worked for the Medical Missionaries of Mary as a hospital porter and had been charged with looking out for Warren when he attempted to visit some of the local taverns. Paddy could vividly recall his time with 'the Major' as Warren was known. The Medical Missionaries Archives also revealed previously unpublished letters from the brothers to Mother Mary and some paragraphs from the original essay about their work, which Lewis had written for Mother Mary, and which they graciously gave me permission to use. The Marion E. Wade Center in Illinois, USA holds the unpublished diaries of Warren Lewis which run to a million and a half words. They kindly discovered for me, and gave permission to use, the relevant sections relating to the brothers time in Drogheda and the Golden Arrow in the 1940s and '50 as well as photographs from the period. The result has been a new publication *C. S. Lewis and the 'Wee' County* which is now available from Veritas shops or directly from the author.

In November 1994 St. Pope John Paul II requested a visit from Walter Hooper to discuss Lewis. The Pope had admired Lewis' writing and was believed to have ensured it was translated into Polish. At the end of their meeting he said to Hooper. 'C.S. Lewis knew what his apostolate was – and he did it!'

The date of Lewis's death, 22 November, is commemorated in the Church of England, the US Episcopalian Church and other Anglican churches but, surprisingly perhaps, not yet in the Church of Ireland into which he was born. The coming anniversary year might be an appropriate point at which to rectify the omission of Ireland's most effective modern evangelist.