

The Legend of Kingsley Porter and Glenveagh Castle

By Lucy Costigan

On the evening of July 8th 1933, Lucy Porter was helped out of the small boat that had brought her from Inishbofin Island to Magheraroarty by literary friend and mystic, AE (George Russell). Lucy was pale but otherwise composed. AE had been waiting for hours with the Porters' chauffeur, wondering why Kingsley and Lucy were so late for their rendezvous. AE could not have known that Kingsley's wife of twenty-one years had just experienced one of the greatest ordeals that any human being could ever encounter: an eight-hour search through the rocks and shrubs that covered Inishbofin, desperately trying to find some sign of the husband she had adored as companion, confidant and fellow researcher since the first days of their courtship.

Arthur Kingsley Porter was born in Connecticut in 1883, the youngest son of Timothy Hopkins Porter, a wealthy banker. As the 1890s decade dawned, a series of tragedies of catastrophic proportions destroyed the family, involving sudden death, sexual scandal and multiple litigations. When his father died in 1901, Kingsley, aged 18, inherited a fortune. It was during a tour of Normandy that he experienced a mystical conversion that led to his study of Romanesque architecture. Thus began a highly successful career as scholar, author and lecturer at Yale, and later at Harvard.

When Kingsley met Lucy Bryant Wallace in 1911, he was immediately smitten by her intelligence, her ease in social situations and her fascination with art and architecture. The pair married on June 1st 1912. Their honeymoon was long and adventurous, taking in the Adirondacks region of New York State, as well as Northern Italy. While Kingsley authored his celebrated books on architecture and taught at Yale during the winter, autumn and spring terms, he resumed his travels with Lucy every summer, researching medieval architecture. During the final months of the First World War the Porters courageously accepted the appointment from the French Government, to help assess damage to churches and monuments in war-ravaged districts. Lucy Porter kept a diary throughout their travels. Their poignant letters, written when separated during the final weeks of the war in November 1918, display a passionate love and timeless devotion. After the war the Porters continued their travels in France, Italy and Spain. In the fall of 1921 Kingsley Porter took up his position in the faculty of Fine Arts at Harvard. The Porters bought a colonial mansion called 'Elmwood', in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Here they entertained illustrious friends and colleagues from Harvard's elite circle. Although Porter greatly admired the university's ethos, Harvard, under the direction of President Lowell, was in fact carrying out secret courts with the aim of rooting out dissidents.

In 1923 Porter's desire for further wandering returned and he took a leave of absence from Harvard to teach at the Sorbonne in



Glenveagh, courtesy of Glenveagh Library, Harvard University. Paris. Porter's international reputation as a researcher and scholar continued to flourish, despite the controversy and caustic criticism that he received for his original theories on the development of Romanesque architecture. He received



Harvard University. original theories on the development of Romanesque architecture. He received many international awards and accolades. In the late 1920s, the Porters possessed every asset that most mortals can only dream of. They spent their summers researching in exotic locations, including Italy, Greece and Egypt. While visiting Ireland, they discovered Glenveagh Castle, set amid the spectacular Donegal lakes and mountains and immediately bought the entire estate. While in Ireland the Porters began researching High Crosses at Clonmacnoise, Monasterboice, Moone, Castledermot, Glendalough and Kells. In 1928, at the height of his success, Porter developed bouts of depression. The truth about the secret inner world of Kingsley Porter finally emerged when the Porters visited an eminent British psychoanalyst. The doctor proposed a singular 'cure' that threw the Porters' world into a mael-

strom. Initially, the 'prescription' gave Kingsley a new lease of life and his health began to flourish while Lucy struggled to deal with bouts of deep loneliness and pain. The late 1920s were full of looming fears for the Porters: fear of scandal, of blackmail and of social alienation. The Porters' need for a refuge became a priority. Porter spent the summers and autumn in Glenveagh while returning to teach in Harvard each winter.

On July 7th the Porters spent the night on Inishbofin Island where they had built a fisherman's hut. The following morning Porter went out for a walk while Lucy stayed behind in their stone hut. A storm developed later in the day and Lucy became anxious when there was still no sign of her husband. Along with two local boatmen, Lucy searched for her Kingsley well into the evening. Local fishermen also came out to help. As darkness fell Lucy was rowed from the island. Arthur Kingsley Porter had disappeared without trace. Lucy's boat was met on the Donegal coast by her dear friend, George Russell. "Kingsley will not return tonight", Lucy said. "Kingsley will never return".

Two months later an inquest into the death of Arthur Kingsley Porter was held. It was the first inquest in Ireland to take place without a body. The coroner's verdict recorded death by misadventure. Lucy's composure following Kingsley's disappearance and her certainty that he would never return can only be explained if in-

deed she was expecting either his death or his departure. For years after Porter's disappearance sightings of him continued: on the Quay at Marseilles, in Silos, and in a Buddhist temple in India.

The mystery and legend surrounding Porter's disappearance continued unabated. Reports in national and international newspapers stated that Porter had gone out alone in a boat before the storm. It was widely known that he was a strong swimmer and a lover of adventure, so was it likely that he had been drowned by misadventure? Rumours of a hidden affair also began to surface and there was local talk that foul play may have been involved. There were others who believed that some dark secret led the enigmatic professor to jump from the rocks on that fateful morning. But the prevailing view was that Kingsley Porter's great wealth allowed him to cast off his old life and to take off alone, to pursue new adventures abroad. The truth about the secret inner world of Arthur Kingsley Porter has only recently been revealed. Even if his adoring wife, Lucy, knew anything further of the fate of Arthur Kingsley Porter then she carried the secret to her grave.

Glenveagh Mystery: The Life, Work and Disappearance of Arthur Kingsley Porter by Lucy Costigan will be published by Merrion, imprint of the Irish Academic Press, in October 2012. For further information about book visit www.arthurskingsleyporter.com

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