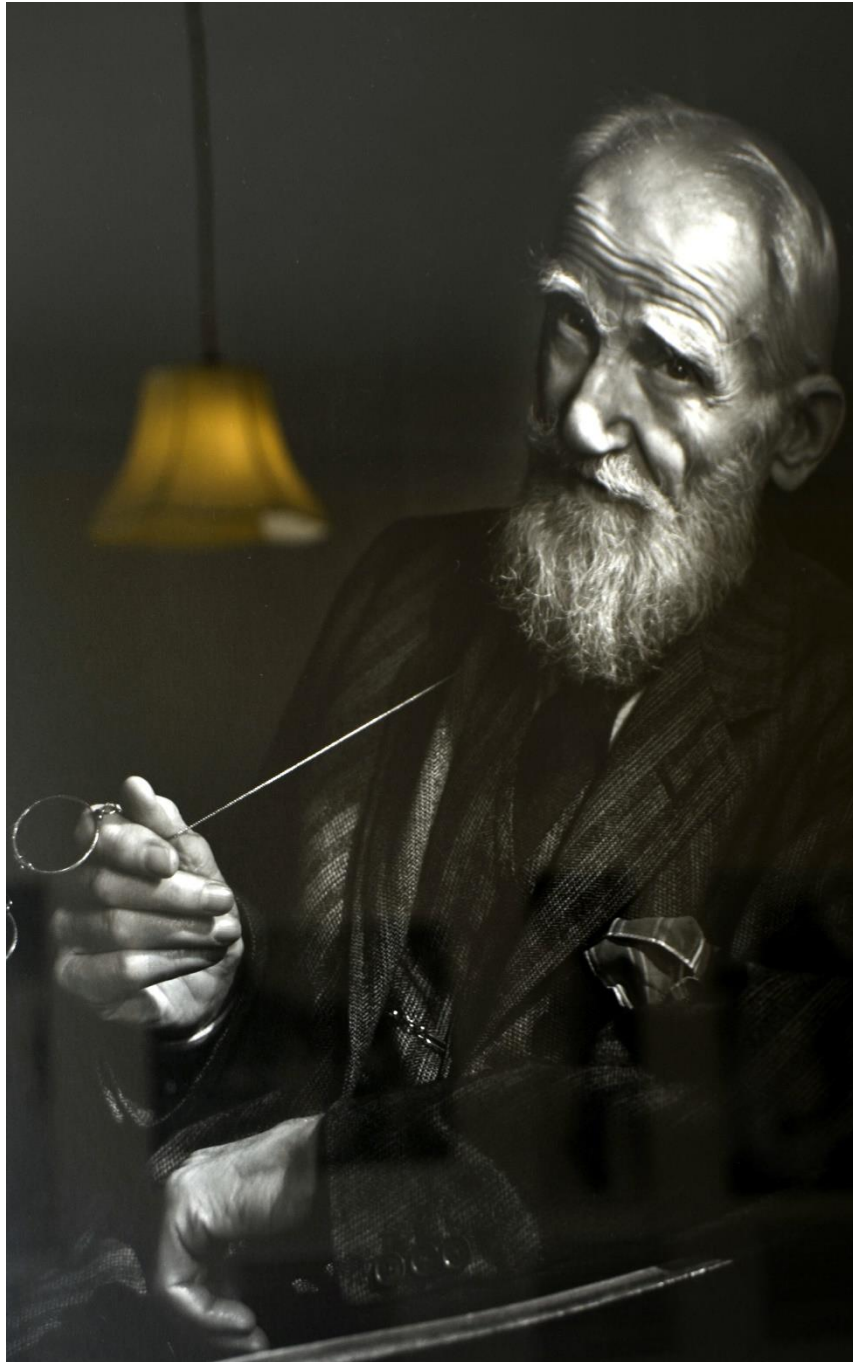


At home with George Bernard Shaw

Gerry Molumby October 2016



~ seven years before his death he left his home to the National Trust~

PICTURE: The ceiling light of the dining room is reflected in this classic pose of GB Shaw, he and the house live on. Gerry Molumby Photographer.

At home with George Bernard Shaw

There is something beautiful about autumnal light with its long shades and sharpness and they were in abundance when I visited Shaw's Corner, the home of one of Ireland's four Nobel Laureates and his home for forty four years.



The Edwardian House was originally built as the New Rectory for Ayot St Lawrence a small village and civil parish in Hertfordshire. As I crossed the border into Herefordshire from London I was reminded of the line from My Fair Lady, a musical version of George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play Pygmalion; 'In Hertford, Hereford and

Hampshire hurricanes hardly ever happen'. And before all you astute readers of the Irish World write to the letters page I know that the quote was not in the original Pygmalion, neither was the 'Rain in Spain' linebut he did write ;

"HIGGINS. The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls: in short, behaving as if were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another."



That sharpness is why his Nobel Citation awarded in 1925 reads "for his work which is marked by both idealism and humanity, its stimulating satire often being infused with a singular poetic beauty". It is important to remember that he received his Oscar for writing the screenplay for the film *Pygmalion* 1938. During his lifetime he refused to allow his masterpiece to be given the musical treatment; one of the guides told me that Shaw told all the 'attempters' "A *Pygmalion* operetta is quite out of the question ... *Pygmalion* is my most steady source of income: it saved me from ruin during the war, and still brings in a substantial penny every week." . The Oscar and Nobel Citation are on view at the house .

Born in Synge Street in July 26th 1856, and if John Millington Synge found his material in the West of Ireland Shaw found his right in the heart of England's London. This proud Irishman was a superstar playwright and tart-tongued literary personality of the early 20th century. He first gained fame as a music critic under the pen name but by then had already begun writing essays, political pamphlets, books and (eventually) plays. Among his most famous plays along with *Pygmalion* were *Arms and the Man* (1894), *Major Barbara* (1905), *Saint Joan* (1923), For all these successes, Shaw is still better known for his famously large ego and sometimes prickly personality, what a great legacy to leave !. He was a vegetarian and teetotaler, a radical socialist and social reformer, and a noted caustic wit who remained active until his death at age ninety-four.



Back to his house, it was built in 1902, and designed very much in the Arts and Crafts style with stained glass windows and hearts cut into the banisters. The house is full of the dramatist's literary and personal possessions, including his Oscar and Nobel Prize. The large round garden has an orchard and I recommend the free apples, flower meadow, rose dell, herbaceous beds and Shaw's revolving Writing Hut; which can be still be turned to follow the sun around the garden.



The house was for some reason never used as a rectory and in 1906 The Shaw's started to rent the house, fully furnished, from the Church of England. In 1920 The Shaw's achieved their wish and bought the house for £6,332. In 1923 the garden was greatly extended as the Shaws bought an extra strip of land to the west and south. In 1944, after Charlotte died and six years before his death George Bernard Shaw handed the property over to the National Trust. Shaw had a fall and the resulting hip fracture meant that he had to be cared for in bed in the downstairs dining room, where he died on November 2nd 1950. Since St. Patrick's Day 1951 the house has been open to the public.

