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# President remembers a poet's postcards

## Limerick poet Desmond O'Grady is honoured by plaque unveiling in the White House Bar by President Higgins

ALAN OWENS

IT was in the White House Bar on O'Connell Street some 60 years ago that a fledgling poet gave his first reading.

Desmond O'Grady, who would go on to become one of the "senior figures of Irish cultural life," as Seamus Heaney described him, was also a staunch supporter of the long running White House poetry nights, resurrected by Barney Sheehan over a decade ago.

Fitting then that President Michael D Higgins, a friend of the Limerick poet who died last year on the eve of his 79th birthday, would accept an invitation to visit the city pub and unveil a plaque to O'Grady, in front of a large collection of his family, friends and fellow poets.

President Higgins recalled "getting postcards from him from different places". An emigrant poet who left Limerick in 1961, Mr O'Grady worked as a teacher and writer in Rome, Paris and Cairo.

"There was a number of us that he would send these cards to, and Limerick has every reason to be very proud and it is a pleasure to be here," said President Higgins on his way into the event this Tuesday.

The event was organised by the Limerick Writers' Centre as a tribute to the Limerick poet whom, in his speech, President Higgins said was "great, warm and wonderful" and had a "flair for life".

"Desmond O'Grady's commitment to poetry and to the arts in general, and his contribution to the cultural dimension of Irish society, was immense," he said.

"His legacy is a great and enduring one and he will be remembered as a gifted poet, an intuitive translator and of course as a generous friend to Ireland's artistic community through his active role in the founding of Aosdána.

> **"His legacy is a great and enduring one, he was a gifted poet"**
>
> **Michael D Higgins**
> President of Ireland

"He remained loyal to the county of his birth, and indeed to the White House Pub where he gave his first reading sixty years ago. "I know he was an enthusiastic patron of the weekly readings which have been held here for over ten years and was, indeed, the first guest at the White House poetry night in 2003."

Unveiling the plaque, the President added: "It is uplifting to know that, just as he did not forget Limerick, Limerick has not forgotten him."

Speaking to the crowd, Desmond's son Leonardo said it was a "great honour" to see the plaque unveiled.

"I have to say that Desmond, while being international, has always been definitively a Limerick man."

Three students from UL read poems in Italian, Arabic and Greek - as well as English - to mark O'Grady's prowess as a translator of literary works, while Dominic Taylor of the Writers' Centre said the plaque would add to Limerick's growing literary trail.

"Desmond has often been considered an outsider in Irish poetry, he left at a very young age in 1961 and he had been forgotten about to a certain extent," he said.

"We felt that, if we didn't do something immediately when he departed us, that it would never have been done and he would have been totally forgotten."

Legacy: President Michael D Higgins in the White House with Dominic Taylor of the Limerick Writers' Centre where a plaque was unveiled to the poet Desmond O'Grady. Picture: Dermot Lynch

# €437k in fire service charges not paid

DAVID HURLEY

MORE than €430,000 in fire service call-out charges was owed in Limerick at the end of last year, figures published this week show.

According to the figures, the Limerick Fire and Rescue service, received a total of €849,598.98 during 2014.

However, as of December 31, last a further €437,720.95 in call-out charges had not been paid to the local authority.

The unpaid charges equate to just over a third (34%) of the total charges levied by the Limerick Fire and Rescue service, which is under the remit of Limerick City and County Council.

According to the Irish Times, a total of €4.6 million in unpaid

Limerick Fire and Rescue service was owed €437,720.95 at the end of 2014

Council ranking worst in terms of collecting call-out charges.

A spokesperson for Limerick City and County Council confirmed the figures but added that in many cases the call-out charges are paid

"Many claims are currently being processed by insurance companies so this always takes a bit of time to finalise," said the spokesperson.

The Limerick Fire and Rescue service has confirmed its call-out charges range from €300 for attending a chimney fire to €1,100 per hour for attending commercial fires.

An hourly charge of €550 is applied in the case of domestic house fires - irrespective of how many fire brigades and personnel are deployed.

While it is open to any one of the country's local authorities to pursue the non-payment of call-out charges through the courts, such actions are unusual.

Since last year, Limerick City and County Council has operated

officer, Michael Ryan.

Limerick Fire and Rescue service responds to around 1,600 incidents across the city and county annually.

In addition to attending fires, the most frequent call-outs relate to road traffic accidents, water pumping, incidents of flooding, river rescues, hazardous substances in transit, incidents of lock-out, and false alarms

There are 60 full-time firefighters based at Limerick Fire station on Mulgrave Street and 72 retained firefighters, who each live within two miles of fire stations at Abbeyfeale, Cappamore, Foynes, Kilmallock, Newcastle West and Rathkeale.

A spokesperson for Limerick City and County Council said details of call-outs are not broken down into

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