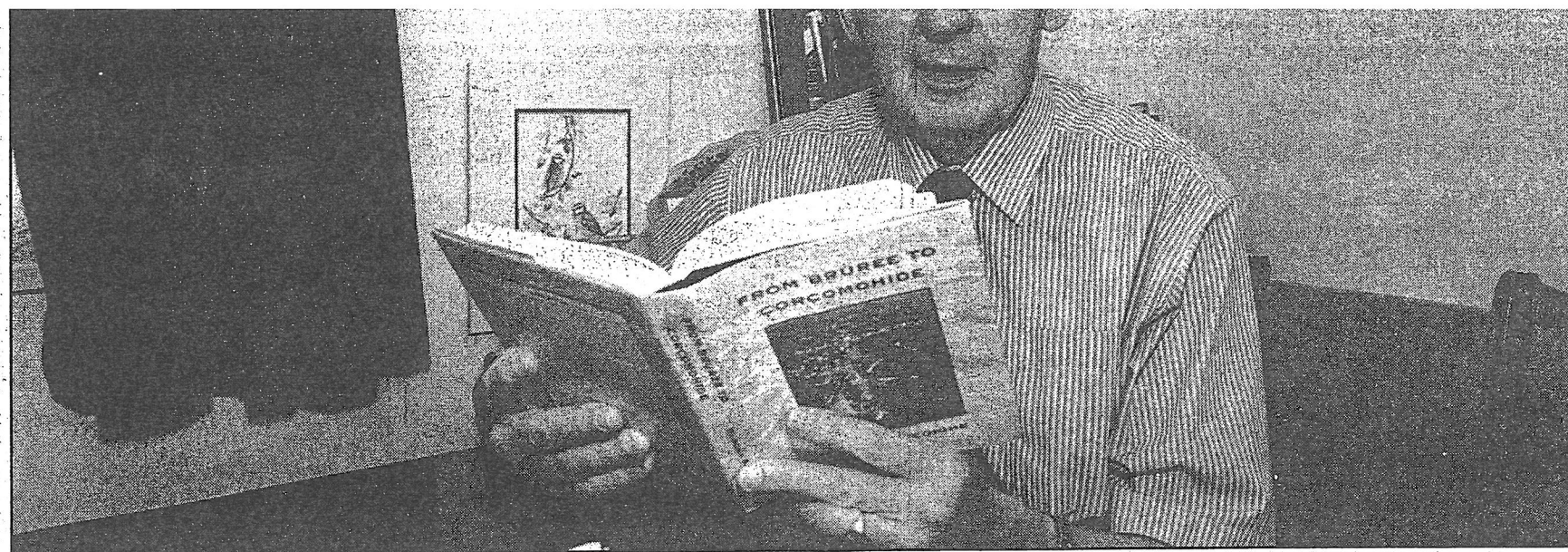


last thing he said to her shortly before he died was: 'God has been very good to us Nora, he gave us a long life and I hope we meet in heaven.' They were both about 90 years old at this stage



A keeper of Limerick's past

PROLIFIC author, Dr Mainchín Seoighe (Mannix Joyce) has immortalised his own corner of County Limerick in print over the last 60 years. A native of Tankardstown, Kilmallock, where his family has lived for six generations, Dr Seoighe has written 10 books in English and Irish, has been a columnist with the Limerick Leader since 1944, making his column one longest running of its type in the country.

Dr Seoighe's scholarly works have earned him many accolades—he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the National University of Ireland in 1990, he is a member of the Placenames Commission and he holds the position of organising secretary of Scoil na Seoigheach—the Joyce Brothers School and is honorary curator of the De Valera Museum in Bruree. Dr Seoighe worked as information officer with Limerick County Council until his retirement in 1984.

Although his address is the Kilmallock parish, Dr Seoighe and his parents Nora and John and sisters Mary (Herlihy) and Nellie (Buckley) lived closer to the village of Bruree and was an acquaintance of Eamon de Valera.

It was in Bruree that the embers of what was to be Dr Seoighe's lifelong love of the Irish language and local history were first ignited.

"I went to Bruree primary school where we had a teacher called Donncha Horgan who was very keen on Irish. He was a native of the parish and he had taken part in the War of Independence. He was also great promoter of local history," said Dr Seoighe, who then spent a year in Kilfinane Vocational School before continuing his education in Charleville CBS.

"There was a great atmosphere in

Kilfinane. There were just 40 boys and girls there and four teachers. It was very informal. In Charleville, I had a great Irish teacher called Br McDunphy, who was reputed to have been the best teacher of Irish and Latin in the order. He introduced us to Chesterton, Belloc, F Thompson and Irish author Michael O Griofa," said Dr Seoighe.

Other influences came from Waterfordman Deaglán Suipéal, who taught evening classes in Irish at Bruree.

"He was a beautiful traditional Irish singer and musician. He used to walk home with us and visit people's houses and with him I first began to look upon Irish as more than a mere school subject," he said.

At the age of 17, Dr Seoighe won a scholarship to Carrigaholt, where he got his first glimpse of the sea. "Up to that time I had only been in two counties—Limerick and Charleville, County Cork. The day I left for Carrigaholt by bus to Limerick was the day on which voting took place for the 1937 Constitution and there was a general election on the same day. "I saw Clare for the first time. There was no Shannon Airport and Bunratty Castle was just a ruin on the side of the road. It was a beautiful day and it was the first time I saw the sea. It was an amazing immensity."

Yet again, Dr Seoighe met another person who was to greatly influence him, headmaster of the college, Seán O Ceallaigh, father of Bishop Fiachra O Ceallaigh, auxiliary Bishop in Dublin. Dr Seoighe has maintained links with the school ever since and is now chairman of the organising committee of Carrigaholt Irish College.

In 1941 Dr Seoighe began working

in the rates office of Limerick County Council and served in various sections before aptly becoming information officer.

Dr Seoighe began his writing career early on, he enjoyed writing essays for school and had pieces published in Our Boys, Inniu, the Cappucian Annual and would frequently write to The Irish Press's Roddy the Rover, aka Aodhan de Blacám who encouraged the County Limerick man to keep on writing. But Dr Seoighe never succumbed to the lure of becoming a full-time writer.

"I preferred it as a sideline, I think the pressure might have been a bit too much for me. I felt more secure in my job with Limerick County Council," he said. A chance meeting with Con Cregan, former editor of the Limerick Leader started Dr Seoighe's 57-year link with the newspaper. And it was a sense of modesty, which still prevails to this day which led to Dr Seoighe's pen name An Mangaire Sógach (The Merry Peddler).

"I remember Con Cregan as being a very nice man. He asked me to submit an article to the paper, but I was shy about putting my name to it. I was in a play at the time and there was a character in it called Mangaire Sógach, so I used it as a pen name," said Dr Seoighe.

To his surprise the article was published and he submitted a second one which was also appeared in the paper. At this stage he revealed his identity and An Mangaire Sógach was invited to continue writing for the paper and has written an estimated 3,000 columns for the Limerick Leader since December 1944.

Dr Seoighe loves to travel and one of his more popular series of columns were

based on his experiences all over Europe. In his column he has covered 30 countries including Russia, Morocco, the Holy Land, Spain, Italy and Greece.

He took his first trip in 1950 on an Irish speaking pilgrimage to Rome.

Some of Dr Seoighe's most memorable experiences abroad include touching the rock of Calvary, seeing Pope John XXIII and visiting the Pitt and Uffizi art galleries in Florence and the castle of Simancas where Red Hugh O'Donnell died.

"Sailing through the Corinth canal in Greece as dawn was breaking was magical. As was looking down from the top of the steps of the Basilica on the great square at Fatima where tens of thousands of people were waving handkerchiefs in salutation of the statue of Our Lady of Fatima which was being taken in a procession.

It was terribly moving. The handkerchiefs were like white birds fluttering," said Dr Seoighe.

He also has fond memories of fellow Bruree man Eamon de Valera, who often visited Dr Seoighe's mother and school friend Nora Seoighe, nee Deady.

Dr Seoighe feels that revisionist historians, including Tim Pat Coogan's book, have been unfair to de Valera.

"Some fault him for being too Catholic. He was a man of his time and that was the prevailing feeling in the country then and it was taken for granted. It is unfair to judge a man out of his own time. He made an impression on the League of Nations and made a stand when Italy invaded Ethiopia," said Dr Seoighe.

He said De Valera's expression of condolence at the German embassy following Hitler's death was as a result of the his fierce compliance with protocol.

"He wouldn't for a minute agree with Hitler's policies but he was a stickler for protocol," said Dr Seoighe, who added that de Valera's 1937 Constitution has served the country very well. "Some alterations had to be made but as a whole, it has been good for the country, he steered the country through a very trying time during World War II," said Dr Seoighe.

"I saw him at close quarters and I got a different picture of him from the austere man people thought he was. What I saw of him was charming and he had a great sense of humour, was very good to tell a story against himself, and he had a great memory," said Dr Seoighe, who spent a day travelling all over county Limerick and into Charleville with President de Valera. "It was a misty morning when we started out and he said to me: 'cuir ort do chóta.' He had his personal secretary Marie O'Kelly with him and aide-de-camp Col Sean Brennan.

"He told the driver where to go and would stop at certain places, we had our lunch in Cronin's Hotel, Charleville. He visited a number of houses, tapped on the door and the woman of the house came out to see the President standing on her doorstep!" said Dr Seoighe.

The party visited de Valera's old home where his cousin Elizabeth Maher nee Coll and her husband, Henry Maher, waited on them.

"He called to one old neighbour and he said to me: 'I got a very cool reception—it must be politics or something'," said Dr Seoighe, who was instrumental in introducing de Valera to Charleville man Donncha O Dualing, who had just embarked on his broadcasting career and secured a major scoop when he became the first reporter to interview de Valera for radio in a famous series entitled

The Boy from Bruree. "My mother would address de Valera as Eddie and the last thing he said to her shortly before he died was: 'God has been very good to us Nora, he gave us a long life and I hope we meet in heaven.' They were both about 90 years old at this stage. My mother was six months younger than de Valera," said Dr Seoighe.

Dr Seoighe is as busy as ever there is never a dull moment with the many events and functions he is invited to attend with his wife Prionseas, a former primary school teacher whom he met while attending evening classes in Irish in Bruree. A native of Kanturk, Mrs Seoighe shares her husband's interests and is a member of Kilmallock choir and a musician in her own right. Dr Seoighe said he would like to write something autobiographical next if he can find the time and there is also a demand for him to produce some of his best columns in book form.

"I collect a lot of information that is not generally known and I feel it is only right to pass it and share it with others. I hope copies of the books will survive and people can see how life was lived in former times," said Dr Seoighe, who has certainly done that and much more.

The works of Dr Seoighe; Mariódh Sean South, 1964 (selected by the Irish Book Club and forwarded to 2,000 members), Cois Maighe na gCaor, 1965 (selected by the Irish Books Club), A Local History of Bruree, Dromin/Athlaccá, The Story of Kilmallock, A Portrait of Limerick, The Joyce Brothers of Glenosheen, County Limerick-It's People and Places, The Irish Quotation Book, Staker Wallis and Bruree and Corcomohide.