

An Dochtúir Mainchín Seoighe: An appreciation

THE death on Monday last at the Mid-Western Regional Hospital of Mainchín Seoighe has meant the loss of one of Ireland's foremost Gaelic scholars.

Limerick city and county have produced many of Ireland's most distinguished writers and academics in the field of Celtic Studies; many of them happily still with us. Of these Mainchín was an acknowledged doyen.

Indeed it was for his prodigious

work in this field that he was awarded an honorary doctorate, D Litt Cert, by NUI Galway in 1990.

He wrote a weekly column, Odds and Ends, for nearly 60 years for the Limerick Leader. He wrote on every aspect of our Gaelic heritage, including language, music, literature, placenames etc and was the author of 10 books, two of them "as Gaeilge" and all but one of which dealt with Limerick topics.

In addition, he was co-author in

2002 with this writer and artist Barbara Hartigan of another book on Limerick city and county titled: Limerick's Glory.

He was first encouraged to write by one of his mentors, Aodh De Blaíán the celebrated columnist of The Irish Press, under the pen name Roddy the Rover.

Another great influence on his life was Sean Ó Ceathaigh, the Gaelic scholar and árd mháistir of Colaiste Uí Chomhraidhe, the Irish college in

Carrigaholt, County Clare, to which Mainchín won a scholarship as a 17 year-old in 1937. He later became a trustee of the college and was cathaoirleach of its Coiste Bainistíochta from 1997 to 2005.

As well as writing and teaching Irish, however, he was also active in setting up organisations such as the annual Joyce Brothers School in Kilfinane and the De Valera Museum in Bruree and the Féile na nGael Festival which he founded with another

outstanding Limerick Gaeilgeoir and author Séamus Ó Cinnéide.

He worked for Limerick County Council from 1941 until 1985 and was in today's parlance their very effective public relations officer.

His major sphere of influence, however, was his weekly column, Odds and Ends, in the Limerick Leader which was a huge resource for those with an interest in Irish culture; an influence which extended over three generations.

He was above all, a gentle, gracious, helpful, teacher and mentor, always generous with his knowledge to those of use who sought it.

Our deepest sympathy and prayers go to his wife, Prionséas, and his sisters, Mary and Nellie.

Cinnnte, ní fheicfimid a leithéad arís ann: Ar dheis-lámh Dé go raibh a anam usual, dílish, séimh, cneasta.

—Proinnsias De Priondargást

Slán Mainchín: gentleman and scholar

By DEIRDRE McGRATH

THE term, a gentleman and a scholar best sums up the traits of historian, writer and lecturer Dr Mainchín Seoighe (Mannix Joyce) who died this week aged 85 years.

Dr Seoighe, Tankardstown, Kilmallock, died in the Mid-Western Regional Hospital fol-

lowing a short illness and is survived by his wife Prionséas.

Dr Seoighe was deeply interested in history, the Irish language, folklore, politics and travel, all of which are reflected in his writings.

He wrote several books in Irish and English and wrote an estimated 3,000 columns for the Limerick Leader from 1944 until recent times.

was a founder member and chairman of Féile na Máighe, Scoil na Seoigheach (The Joyce Brothers School) and the De Valera Museum in Bruree.

In 2003, a room at the De Valera Museum in Bruree Heritage Centre was renamed the Mainchín Seoighe room in honour of the historian and author.

The dedication ceremony was performed by

lover of Ireland.

He spoke of the depth and variety of Dr Seoighe's work and said that Cois Maighe na gCaor was a masterpiece.

Dr Seoighe also worked full time as information officer for most of his 44 years with Limerick County Council and retired in 1985.

The current director of services in the Council's housing department, Jimmy Feane,

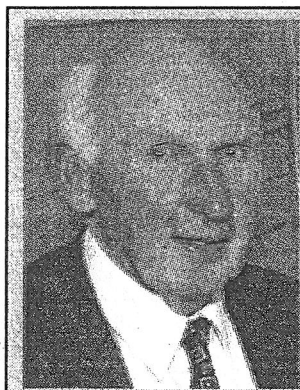
nane Education Centre worked with Dr Seoighe during the organising of the Joyce Brothers School.

"He was one of the most modest, unassuming persons one could hope to meet. He was secretary of the Joyce Brothers School for two decades and was organising secretary of the weekends," said Mr Crosby.

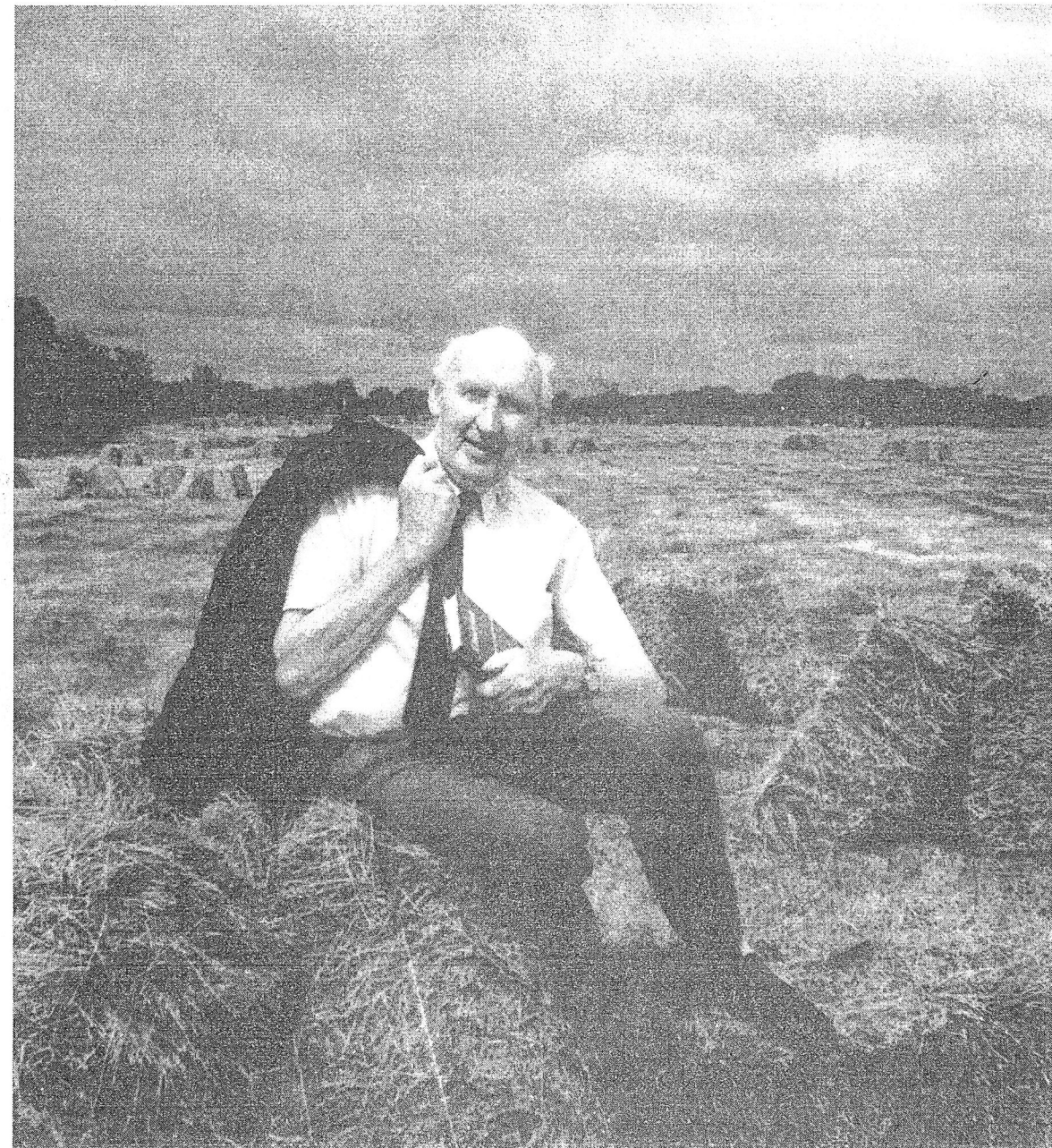
Cllr Jim Houlihan said Dr Seoighe was an

absolute gentleman and never imposed his views on anyone and promoted the Irish language in a way that it should be promoted.

"The manner in which he dealt with people was the key to his success. He was always very helpful to students who were looking for information relating to local history. His many books are a tribute to his energy and his contribu-



**Dr Manichín
Seoighe
1921-2006**



**Portrait of the
historian: Dr
Mainchín Seoighe**

the Limerick Leader from 1944 until recent times.

The column, Odds and Ends, was the longest running of its type in the country.

He was accorded an honorary doctorate of letters by the National University of Ireland in 1990. That conferring, at NUI Galway, also saw another Limerick man and close friend of Dr Seoighe's, Ciarán Mac Mathúna, similarly honoured.

In 2001, he was presented with the national Gradam an Phiarsaigh for his scholarly achievements, including the publication of 12 books, two in Irish, and his Irish and English

in honour of the historian and author.

The dedication ceremony was performed by Dr Patrick F Wallace, director of the National Museum.

The ceremony was organised by Bruree / Rockhill Development Association, who wanted to honour Dr Seoighe's contribution to the research, recording and publication of the history of Bruree and Rockhill and of County Limerick.

Speaking during that ceremony, Dr Wallace said the people of County Limerick owed a huge debt of gratitude to Dr Seoighe.

He described Mr Seoighe as a thoroughly Gaelic scholar and a

worked closely with Sean Bourke, CEO of County Limerick VEC and his staff over the years.

Ann Kelly, who works in education services at County Limerick VEC, said that Dr Seoighe was held in the highest esteem and their deepest sympathy went to Mrs Seoighe.

She said that Dr Seoighe was deeply involved with the VEC when organising the Joyce Brothers School.

"He was a gentleman to the fingertips and he will be greatly missed. He had a great knowledge and insight into history and the Irish language," said Ms Kelly.

Donal Crosby of Kilfi-

mation relating to local history. His many books are a tribute to his energy and his contribution to Irish and History. He will be sadly missed," said Cllr Houlihan.

Cllr John Gallahue said Dr Seoighe was a fantastic character and a great lover of the Irish language and his books and columns were sought after by many.

"He was one of nature's gentlemen and it was always lovely to call to his house, you were guaranteed of a lovely welcome from Mainchín and his wife, Prionseás," said Cllr Gallahue.

Dr Seoighe is also survived his sisters, Mary and Nelly.

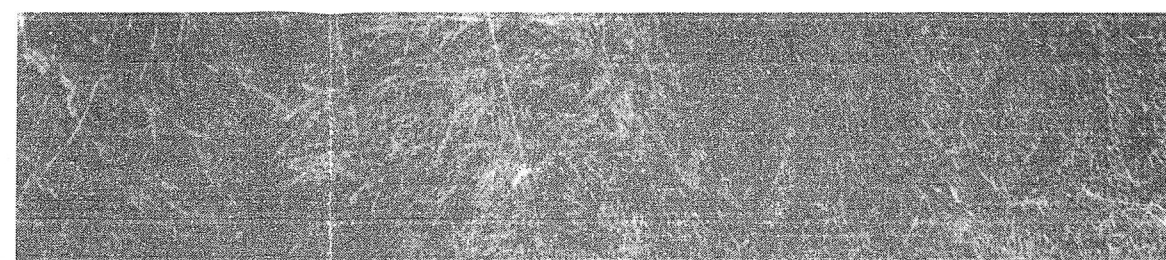


Photo: MICHAEL MARTIN

Liam in tribute to a 'modest man'

LIAM Irwin, Head of History, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, and President of the Thomond Archaeological Society, paid tribute this Wednesday to Dr Seoighe.

"I have known him since I started out as a student of history in the 1970s. He was also a longtime member of the Thomond Archaeological Society.

"He did a lot of outings and trips for the society and he and Prionseás came on outings. They were very loyal and a great help to the society," he said.

Mr Irwin paid tribute to Dr Seoighe's writings, particularly his last book, Bruree and Corcomohide.

"It is almost a distillation of his life's work. He is very much associated with Bruree and

Kilmallock, but he had a tremendous interest in West Limerick.

"He used expert archival material and brought all his expert qualities as a local historian to it, such as a local knowledge, a lifetime of talking to local people and topography and an understanding of a place that so-called academics don't have access to.

"He was wonderfully generous with his own work and was very open to sharing information and looking up his own notes for people.

"He was great to come to local halls and spread his knowledge to groups such as the ICA. He was a very modest man and it was great that NUI, Galway honoured him," said Mr Irwin.

The flame that lit interest in history was sparked in school

DR MAINCHÍN Seoighe's future as a historian and scholar was first sparked at school.

"I 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 a great promoter of local history," said Dr Seoighe, who then spent a year in Kilfinane Vocational School before continuing his education in

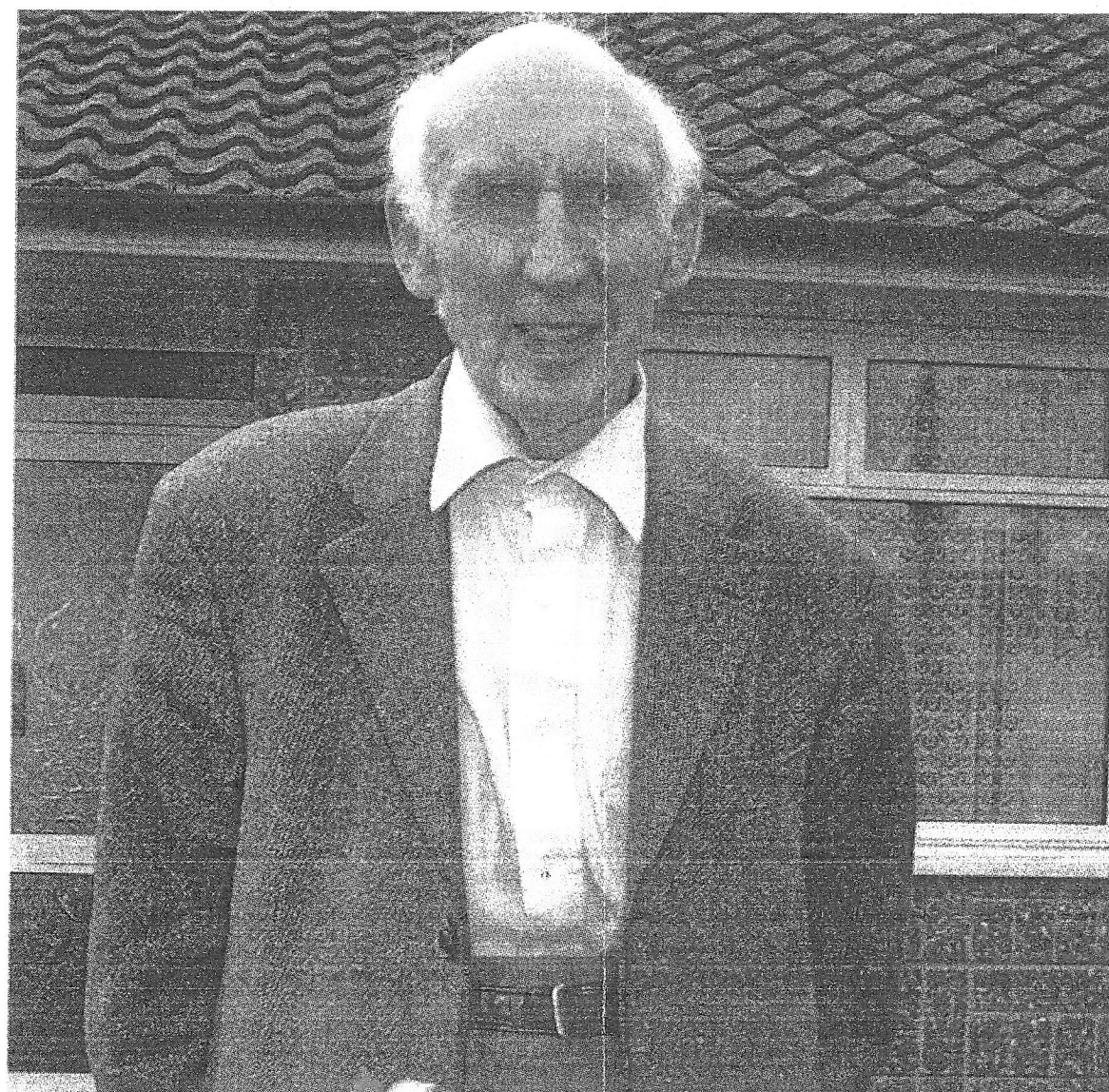
of people from all backgrounds and all walks of life. When I started there was still some people working there who were there at the Council's beginning in 1889," he remembered fondly.

In all his time working with the County Council, Dr Seoighe always travelled to work by bus.

"I used to cycle into Bruree and then get the bus from there into Limerick. Petrol was very scarce during the Second

"Generally I would begin my day by buying and reading all the newspapers to see if there was anything relevant to the County Council. I might have to write letters to newspapers or answer queries about the County Council from the public," he said.

Dr Seoighe and the County Council were obviously ahead of their time as his duties sound very similar to those of a modern press officer or



Dr Mainchín Seoighe: I always enjoyed writing essays in school and I had bits and pieces published (LL)

competitions and I entered one and won. He gave me great encouragement and we began writing to each other. I even went up to his home in Blackrock in Dundalk to visit for a week. MJ McManus, the literary editor of The Irish Press was also a big influence."

Dr Seoighe's 57-year relationship with the Limerick Leader began after a chance meeting with former editor Con Cregan.

"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 Mangaíre Sugach (The Merry Peddler), so I used it as a pen name," said Dr Seoighe.

To his surprise the article was published so he submitted another and that was published. Dr Seoighe revealed his true identity and the rest as they say is history. It is estimated that he wrote over 3,000 columns for the Limerick Leader and some were so popular that they were repeated.

Which newspapers does he read?

"Well the Irish Press until it folded and because my wife is from Kanturk we get the Irish Examiner and sometimes the Irish Independent. I also read Foinse and the Irish Catholic on a Sunday."

He admires John Waters from The Irish Times, Dan Buckley from

the Irish Examiner and Gene Kerrigan from the Sunday Independent.

His met his wife Prionseás, who is a former primary school teacher, while attending evening classes in Irish in Bruree.

I mentioned at the start that Eamon de Valera and Dr Seoighe were two of Bruree's famous sons and the indeed the duo were friends.

Dr Seoighe's mother and Eamon de Valera were contemporaries and when he was in Bruree he would often call to her home to see her. Through this Dr Seoighe and Eamon de Valera became acquainted.

Was the perception of Dev being an austere men fair I enquired? "At close quarters he was very relaxed and he was very good to tell a story. He wasn't as severe as people think."

Severe is never a word a that could be associated with Dr Seoighe instead the phrase "One of god's gentle creature" sums up the man who will be missed by many.

The works of Dr Seoighe are Maríodh Sean South, 1964; Cois Maighe na gCaor, 1965; A Local History of Bruree; Dromin / Athlaca; 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.



ALONG with Eamon de Valera, Dr Mainchín Seoighe is one of Bruree's most famous sons. The respected author and columnist told **DONAL O'REGAN** about his fascinating life in his last recorded interview in August 2005

Charleville CBS.

At the age of 17, Dr Seoighe won a scholarship to Carrigaholt in Clare, it broadened his horizons and gave him his first taste of travel.

"Up to that time I had only been in two counties—Limerick and Charleville in Cork. It was a beautiful day and it was the first time I saw the sea," said Dr Seoighe.

Dr Seoighe in later life travelled to over 30 countries so that first bus trip to Clare sowed the travelling seed.

After completing school, Dr Seoighe began his one and only job with Limerick County Council.

"I started on February 17, 1941, and I retired on August 18, 1985. It was a lovely place to work, there was a cross section

World War so sometimes I had to cycle to work."

I balked at the idea of cycling well over 20 miles to work but Dr Seoighe smiled and said: "Shur' that was nothing."

"I could often look out my office window onto O'Connell street and I wouldn't see a single car, petrol was that scarce", said Dr Seoighe.

Dr Seoighe began his career with the County Council in the rates department. "I used to send out notices to people who hadn't paid their rates and sometimes I collected them as well so I wasn't the most popular fellow in the world," he joked.

Dr Seoighe was then promoted to information officer, a job he remained in for the rest of his 44-year career.

public relations officer.

A part of the job that Dr Seoighe particularly enjoyed was preparing the annual report.

"As well as all the usual facts and figures, I would try and be a bit creative and invite people to submit articles on topic of interest," said Dr Seoighe.

You would imagine that writing books and columns in your spare time would be enough for anybody but not so for Dr Seoighe.

At various stages in his life he was chairman of Kilmallock Historical Society, a member of the Placenames Commission, Honorary curator of the De Valera museum, secretary of the Joyce Brothers School in Kilfinane, part of the Bruree / Rockhill Development

association and he often thought Irish at night classes in Bruree and surrounding areas.

If that wasn't enough Dr Seoighe was renowned for going out

of his way to help students with school and college work.

As a young journalist myself I was interested to hear how Dr Seoighe began his career.

"I always enjoyed writing essays in school and I had bits and pieces published. I was a big fan of Roddy the Rover, aka Aodhan de Blacáin, who was a daily columnist for

The Irish Press. I don't think his work was ever equalled, he was a great linguist and had a wealth of knowledge on all topics.

"He used to often run