

Dr Mainchin Seoighe

Nollaig O Gadhra
on a scholar and
champion of
everything good
about Limerick

THE death of Dr Mainchin Seoighe (Mannix Joyce) last week has deprived Co Limerick, and indeed Ireland, of one of its most distinguished men of letters and one of the finest community workers the nation had in the 20th Century.

Born in 1920 in Tankerstown, between Kilmallock

and Bruree on the edge of the Golden Vale — his father a distant relative of James Joyce's people from Glenoisin — he was christened after Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne (a native of Charleville, across the Cork border).

Mannix adopted the Irish version of his name at an early age as part of his lifelong commitment to the Irish Ireland philosophy, which he practised and preached throughout his long life. He was a lifelong worker for Conradh na Gaellge, and his commitment was not superficial. Nor was it confined to his work in Limerick County Council, where he

worked for almost half a century, ending his career as public relations officer, a labour of love that owed little to American-style "have a nice day" courses.

Mainchin laboured well beyond the call of duty, acting as a one-man ambassador for everything that was good, positive and enlightening about Limerick and the wider Shannon/north Munster community, but never neglecting the value, the glory and the rich bilingual cultural heritage of his native Cois Maighe area.

Mainchin was a lifelong community activist in his own area, specialising in local his-

tory and lore and writing a regular column in the *Limerick Leader* under the pen name An Mangaire Sugach, the same as that used by Andreas Mac Craith, one of the most prominent members of the 18th-Century Bardic School, in Croom, which formed one of the central examples of what Daniel Corkery was to term "The Hidden Ireland" in his classic study.

But it was left to Mainchin to spell out the details and the contextual and geographic reality of this Irish-speaking and literary tradition in mid-Co Limerick in his book *Cois Maighe na gCaor*, which

was a Club Leabhar selection in the mid-Sixties.

Previously, Dr Seoighe had written a life of his friend Sean Sabhat at a time when publishing in Irish was controversial — in this case because the author and publishers Sairseal agus Dill had insisted on including various poems and tributes to the IRA man. An Club Leabhar distributed a censored edition but it would be entirely wrong to attribute any political motive to an author who simply wanted to outline the full story.

Apart from his deep Catholic faith and commitment to Irish Ireland, Mainchin

Seoighe had no real party politics, as befitted a dedicated public servant, a scholar and a gentleman. But he did have views and expressed them clearly, as in his book on Staker Wallace and the cruel events of 1798 in south Limerick, and his books on the history of Kilmallock and Drummin/Attlaca parish which he helped to win the All-Ireland Glór na nGael award.

His greatest achievement was perhaps to help save and restore the old two-teacher schoolhouse in Bruree, which was attended by Eamon de Valera in the 1880s when he came back from New York to

be reared by his grandmother after his father died. Mainchin realised that Dev, a personal friend, was not only a great Irish leader but an international statesman whose reputation was more appreciated in former colonies such as India than at home.

The venture was one of the most dynamic examples of self-help, with strong tourist potential, as Albert Reynolds saw when he visited it as Taoiseach, as indeed did Limerick-born Gaeltacht ministers Tom O'Donnell and Michael D Higgins, who also appreciated our 20th-Century Mangaire Sugach.

At a personal level I am fully conscious of the persuasive nature of Mainchin's teaching in the columns of the *Limerick Leader* where faith and fatherland, language and good citizenship were concerned. His door was always open, his advice and help to young Irish writers were always freely and patiently given.

Mainchin's life and work were recognised by the Galway college of the National University with an honorary doctorate. We shall all miss him. *Deanaimid comhbhrón lena bhean Proinsias, agus a ghaolta go leir. Solas na bhFlaitheas go raibh aige.*

Sunday Independent, July 16 ²⁰⁰⁶ ~~2007~~