

# Knowledge was matched only by his generosity in sharing it

■ Mainchin Seoighe's legacy will be celebrated in Knockfierna, writes Pat O'Donovan

WHEN Eamonde Valera died in 1975, many in his native Bruree were surprised that India declared three days of national mourning to mark the event. After all, Dev's 14 years as president were not politically active, so he had really been out of mainstream public life for nearly a generation.

But one man recognised the standing in which Dev was held, and was by no means amazed that India should have held him in great affection. That man was Mainchin Seoighe, historian, antiquarian, folklorist, writer, lecturer and council official, all of which skills, except in his career as the latter, he honed and perfected in an entirely unpaid capacity.

Mainchin was a personal friend of Dev's and realised at an early stage that Ireland's "free state" of 1922, and the subsequent phases of developing it to that of a full republic (apart from the Northern Ireland issue which lingered) had been a template for many other elements of the once mighty empire to follow as they wrested their independence from a colonial past.

Mainchin Seoighe (Mannix Joyce) knew that, during a difficult public life which had commenced in the cauldron which forged the state, Dev had done things which were to become recognised more outside of Ireland than within, among them his imaginative upholding of independence during the 1930s, a decade of world privation, and the constitution of 1937 which broke new ground among former colonies of all fading empires.

This month, Ireland commemorates the visit to Ireland of John F Kennedy as incumbent President of the United States.

Those who attended the official or more casual encounters between President Kennedy and President de Valera on that occasion were struck

by the fact that Kennedy, the most powerful man on earth, deferred to Dev with true reverence and treated him as a statesman of the highest standing.

An international figure he may well have been, but to Mainchin Seoighe Dev was first and foremost a Bruree man and, through his mother Nora Deady who had been a school companion of Dev's, a true friend.

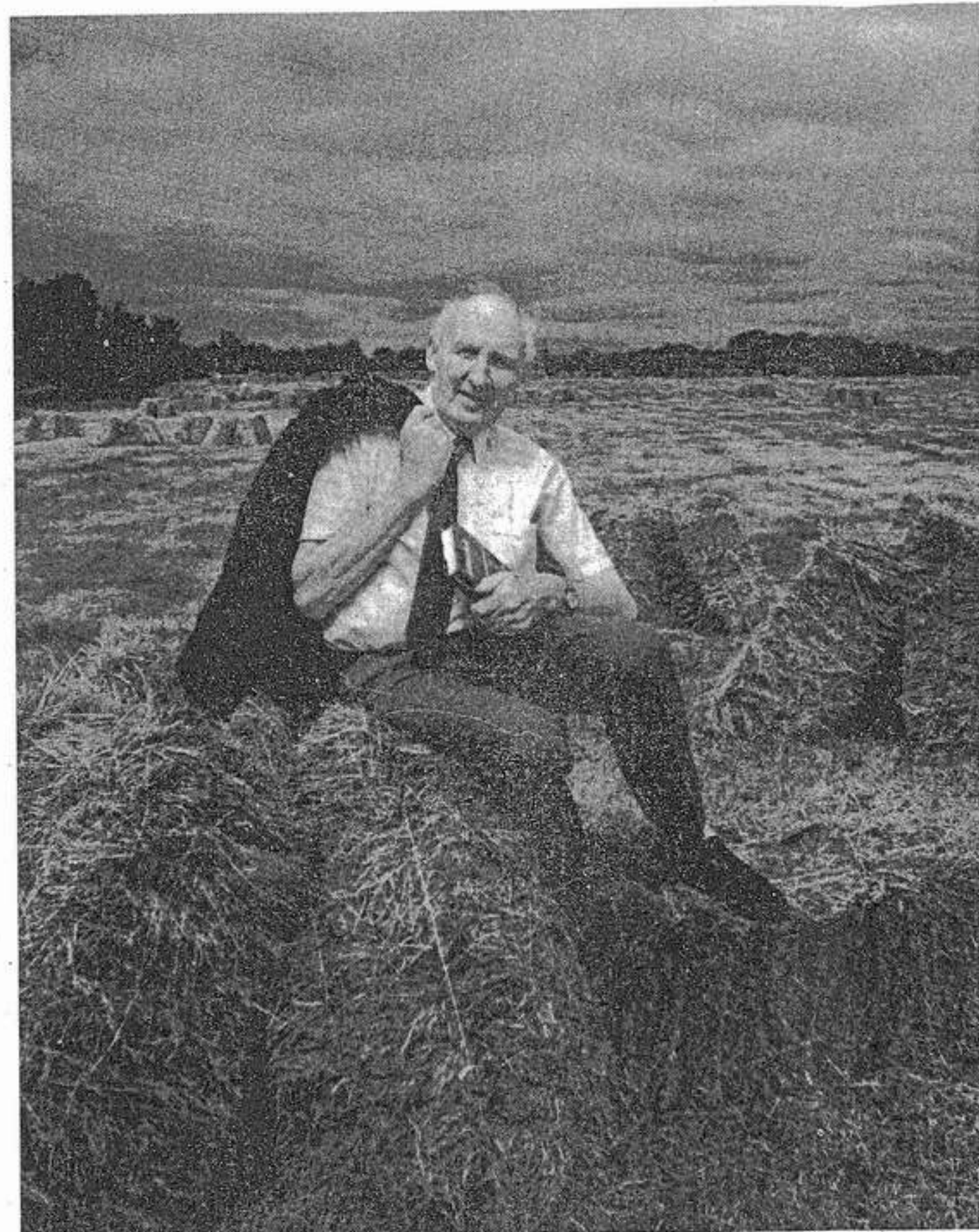
It was the energy and ability of Mainchin Seoighe which encouraged the development of Dev's old schoolhouse in the village to be greatly extended and enhanced to become Arus de Valera, the museum and community centre.

It was to there that Dev, as president on October 14, 1972, came to perform the opening, where he recounted memories surrounding all the memorabilia which had been lovingly collected for the display, and to spend the day meeting his friends of yore, sometimes unannounced in their own kitchens. It was Dev's 90th birthday, and was to be his last visit home.

That day in Bruree was auspicious for another reason, again involving Mainchin Seoighe. It happened that a youngish broadcaster named Donncha O'Dulaing, a neighbour's child from Doneraile, had been seeking an interview with Dev for some time, hoping that the old man would reminisce about his schooldays.

Not presupposing anything, Mainchin made the introductions and, within a couple of minutes arrangements were being put in place for not one but the makings of several interviews which were later broadcast under the series title, *The Boy from Bruree*.

Mainchin Seoighe joined Limerick County Council in 1941 but never moved nearer his office, preferring to stay in his native Tankardstown, between Bruree and Kilmallock.



Mainchin Seoighe was a great scholar and always encouraged budding historians

However, in 1941, although both Bruree and Kilmallock had railway stations, war shortages meant that trains connecting with Limerick were few and buses were fewer, so the young Mainchin often completed the journey 20 miles each way, entirely by bicycle. He continued to live in the home place and, for many years until his retirement from the County Council as its information officer in 1985, was a familiar sight walking for the evening bus at Colbert Station to take him home.

The year 1990 was a very

memorable one for him because, although he had written very many splendid books on a wide variety of subjects of historical and social interest, and had already long surpassed any possible competitor in the longevity of his weekly column in the *Limerick Leader*, his humility was genuine and, when told that the National University proposed to confer an honorary doctorate of letters on him, along with fellow Limerickman and close friend, Ciaran Mac Mathuna, both on the same day at a ceremony at UCG

(NUI Galway) he was quite taken aback. In 2001, he was even further surprised to be accorded Gradam an Phiarsaigh.

From its inception as a mere concept in the 1980s, Mainchin Seoighe was completely supportive of the principles behind the revival of the Festival of Lughnasa and of the documentation and restoration of the structures and artifacts of Knockfierna, which are of both historic and prehistoric importance. His visits to the events at the Rambling House there were many and invariably

instructive.

Mannix Joyce got his baptismal name in honour of Charleville native Daniel Mannix, Archbishop of Melbourne, but his surname connects with the folklorist brothers Joyce, Patrick Weston and Robert Dwyer, of Glenosheen, in whose literary memory he founded a cultural weekend, and through their kin, with Ulysses author James.

This weekend, Knockfierna Heritage Society hosts the second of what is determined to be an annual weekend to commemorate Mainchin Seoighe who, had he lived, would now be 93. The principal speaker will be that shy young broadcaster from 1972, now himself in his eighties, Donncha O'Dulaing.

On this Saturday night at the Rambling House Knockfierna, starting at 7.30pm, the evening's events will commence with visual recordings of the late Mainchin Seoighe which had been recorded in Knockfierna during his visits in the 1980s & 1990s.

This is a night not to be missed, followed by a session of singing, music and storytelling. On Sunday Donncha O'Dulaing will speak on the life and times and his association with Mainchin Seoighe followed by a guided tour through the recently reopened old roadways which have revealed spectacular views and an abundance of flora and fauna to boot.

The evening will conclude with a session of music, song and story. All are welcome to this event, which is free of charge.

The committee expect a large crowd to attend this weekend's events to show their appreciation for one of Limerick's finest gentlemen and historian, antiquarian, folklorist, writer, lecturer and council official and last but not least most generous with his information and knowledge to all budding historians.

## Mainchin Seoighe - a scholar and a gentleman remembered

NORMA PRENDIVILLE

THE late Dr Mannix Joyce, folklorist, historian and columnist, will be remembered and his lifetime's work honoured this weekend at the second ever Mainchin Seoighe Memorial Weekend.

The event is being organised by the Knockfierna Heritage Society, with which Mannix Joyce had a long association before his death in July 2006.

Mannix Joyce, who was known the length and breadth of Limerick for his weekly *Limerick Leader* column using the pen-name An Mangaire Sugach, had a great passion for his native Limerick, its history and folklore and it was this passion which was the driving force behind the ten books he published in the course of his life.

And his great gift to all those he came in contact with was the gentle but persuasive way he shared his extensive knowledge.

Born in Tankardstown, Bruree in 1924, he never left his native place and his entire working life was spent with Limerick County Council, first in the rates department and then as information officer. But his friendships, through his writings and through letters, extended right throughout the country and indeed the world. And he was unfailingly courteous to everyone.

In 1944, he began what was to become one of Ireland's longest-running columns, *Odds and Ends*, in the *Limerick Leader*. He continued writing it for 59 years.

One of the signal honours of his life came in when he was awarded an honorary D Litt from NUI Galway.

A life-long friend of Eamon de Valera, Mannix Joyce played a pivotal role in establishing the de

Valera museum in Bruree and was for many years the keystone of the Joyce Brothers Summer School.

Explaining why the Knockfierna Heritage Society is undertaking a memorial weekend, its chairman Pat O'Donovan said: Mannix Joyce had been a frequent visitor to the Rambling House in Knockfierna from its early days in the 1980s. And he was always a very welcome visitor and ever generous with his time and knowledge, Mr O'Donovan said.

This Saturday night, beginning at 7.30pm, Mannix Joyce's spirit will be rekindled when recordings of some of his Knockfierna visits will be broadcast. "This is a night not to be missed and will

**"Mannix Joyce had a great passion for his native Limerick, its history and its folklore"**

be followed by music, storytelling and singing," Mr O'Donovan continued.

On Sunday, broadcaster Donncha O'Dulaing, will be the guest speaker and this will be followed by a guided tour of Knockfierna and another Rambling House session. All events are free and all are welcome.

"We expect a large crowd to attend this weekend's events to show their appreciation for one of Limerick's finest gentlemen and historian, antiquarian, folklorist, writer, lecturer and council official and last but not least, a man most generous with his information and knowledge to all budding historians," Mr O'Donovan said.

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