

Limerick's Hollywood stars in new book on Irish actors

By ANNE SHERIDAN

LIMERICK film stars, Constance Smith and Richard Harris, are a focus in a new book by Ruth Barton, "Acting Irish in Hollywood, From Fitzgerald to Farrell".

But it was the largely undocumented life of Constance Smith that most fascinated the author.

"I had never really heard of her but then I couldn't stop researching her life. She had a really tragic

lifestyle. Were she alive now she'd be in her 80s, so I'm sure there are people in Limerick who know or have heard of her," she said.

Ms Barton first began researching the life of the Limerick actress by putting a notice in the Irish Post newspaper and was consequently contacted by her niece, who wanted to know more about her.

"Initially her family felt disgraced by her, but now they were all very curious to find out about her life," she said. "Many of the people she lived with in Dublin

contacted me. Everyone who has met her remembers her because she was so beautiful," she said. "She ended up coming back to Limerick in her later years with a very respectable man and received a regal reception," she said. While the film *Cradle of Genius* was opening in 1960 in New York, Smith returned to the house of her birth in Wolfe Tone Street.

Noted as being one of Ireland's forgotten film stars, Ms Barton said "It seemed regrettable that Constance Smith should have

been so completely forgotten, given that she was once, if briefly, a Hollywood star. It's always good to bring people back to life."

It is believed that she was born in Limerick in 1928 but her family moved to Dublin within a year of her birth. Compared to Maureen O'Hara and Grace Kelly and described as an Irish rebel by Hollywood studios, she starred in a litany of successful films such as *The Lure of the Wilderness*, *Red Skies of Montana* and *The Treasure of the Golden Condor*.

Her life was nothing if not

colourful - given to drug overdoses, periods in psychiatric hospitals and self-harm, she died in 2003 of natural causes. Her relationships were even more turbulent and it has been claimed that Fox loaned her money to have an abortion after she became pregnant by her first husband, the English actor Brian Forbes.

"This is not a story with a happy ending. Those who knew Constance assumed that she could not live much longer in the manner that she did," concludes Ms Barton.

A chapter on the life of legendary actor Richard Harris is accurately titled "Touching the Gods", which charts his rise to fame and details his performances in *This Sporting Life* and *The Molly Maguires*, among others.

The book is the first academic study of Irish film stars in Hollywood, which also contains essays on Barry Fitzgerald, George Brent, Maureen O'Sullivan, Maureen O'Hara, Stephen Rea, Gabriel Byrne, Pierce Brosnan and Colin Farrell.

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