

Leader 2

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2009

Cats get cream: fat cats and hurling cats are getting everything, fumes Patricia Feehily >>P3



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former Macra secretary starts style consultancy venture >>P4



He loves it! Artist Kieran Carey from Murroe tells us what he loves about Limerick >>P4

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The freedom of Limerick is one of the highest honours the city can confer. According to one former mayor, if you're offered it you have to turn up and receive it, thus ruling out the prospect of the Boer freedom fighters being added to the list

When an IRB-dominated Limerick City Council voted to confer the freedom of the city on six Boer independence fighters at the end of the 19th century, the motive may well have been to stick it to our British overlords. But the men's names have never been added to the roll of freemen, an anomaly that one local historian believes should be rectified
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Will they ever take our freedom?

■ Historian Tadhg Moloney claims six Boer leaders from the 19th century should be granted the freedom of the city

Mike Dwane

SOMETHING doesn't add up down at city hall. Not the council's finances, it has to be said, but one of its most prized documents - the roll of freemen of the city - is apparently missing a few names.

Local historian Dr Tadhg Moloney says he has uncovered a number of errors and anomalies on Limerick's Roll of Freemen, and "doesn't know where to turn next" in his campaign to have six Boer fighters added to the list.

In the course of researching his doctoral thesis on constitutional nationalism in Limerick at the turn of the 20th century, Dr Moloney, of Gouldavoher, discovered that the nationalist-dominated Limerick City Council had voted to confer the city's highest honour on the men - who include the former president of the South African Republic Paul Kruger and Martinus Steyn, former president of the Orange Free State - but their names have been omitted from the official roll.

Endeavouring to find out why, Dr Moloney claimed to have been "fobbed off" by two mayors (Ger Fahy and John Gilligan) but he reserves most of his chagrin for the "bureaucrats in City Hall" who ignored the recommendation of their own historian that the Boers be added.

When he first raised the matter of the forgotten freemen in 2008, Dr Moloney received an



Dr Tadhg Moloney of Gouldavoher, pictured right, was among those who helped with the restoration of the Freedom of Limerick to the 4th Earl of Dunraven. Also included are, from left, Dr Matthew Potter, University of Limerick, Prof Liam Irwin, History Department, Mary Immaculate College, Desmond Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, former Cllr Kieran Walsh, then deputy Mayor of Limerick, Lord Meath and Lord Dunraven

PICTURE: DERMOT LYNCH



1930 attended a ceremony or signed a roll despite Council votes to award the honour to them. Nineteenth century MP Edward Dwyer Gray was conferred with the Freedom of Limerick on the same day as Michael Davitt in 1882 despite the fact that he was unable to sign the role owing to his demise between the vote to honour him and the actual ceremony.

Dr Potter said it was clear recipients could be honoured in absentia.

"I can think of no reason why the six (Boer) individuals were not enrolled as Freemen of Limerick and I believe that this omission can and should be rectified as soon as possible. I will therefore be recommending that this be done as soon as possible," Dr Potter wrote to Dr Moloney in February 2008.

It was with great surprise therefore that the Gouldavoher man received a further letter from City Hall in August 2008 that as "no record of a meeting was found" at which the men were conferred with the Freedom of Limerick.

"Admission to the Roll of Honorary Freedom is effected at special meetings. As such special meetings did not take place, the above names are not included in the Roll," the letter stated.

After he made further inquiries, Dr Moloney was advised by Council officials his best bet was to seek political support but he claims he was "fobbed off" when he approached the two mayors, Ger Fahy and John Gilligan.

Ironically, Cllr Gilligan's "great-grandfather" or

be done for the fellow who wrote about the rain [McCourt]. You have to actually sign the book.

"I don't see the Boers getting it unless we dig up the six of them and ship them to Limerick to sign it. I'd have no problem with that. There's probably still more life in them than others below. They have to first accept it and then come to Limerick. Even the Pope had to come to Limerick to get it."

One reason today's councillors might be reluctant to honour the Boers was the establishment of a racist state soon after independence that gave a new word to the English language - apartheid.

"It was a symbolic gesture at the time in relation to the struggle against Empire and one I would have agreed with probably in that political atmosphere. But the only South African I'd like to see getting it would be Nelson Mandela, although he would have to drag himself over to Limerick first," he said.

Dr Moloney countered it was clear from the Dwyer Gray case that dead men could be made freemen. There was a more recent precedent in the Fourth Earl of Dunraven, whose support for conscription saw him removed from the Roll by a vote in 1918. It was Dr Moloney who led a campaign, supported by ex-councillor Kieran Walsh to have his name restored to the roll by a vote of Council only two years ago, by which time Dunraven was long since gone to his maker.

Imposing the political standards of today on the Boers of 1800 was not the

finances, it has to be said, but one of its most prized documents - the roll of freemen of the city - is apparently missing a few names.

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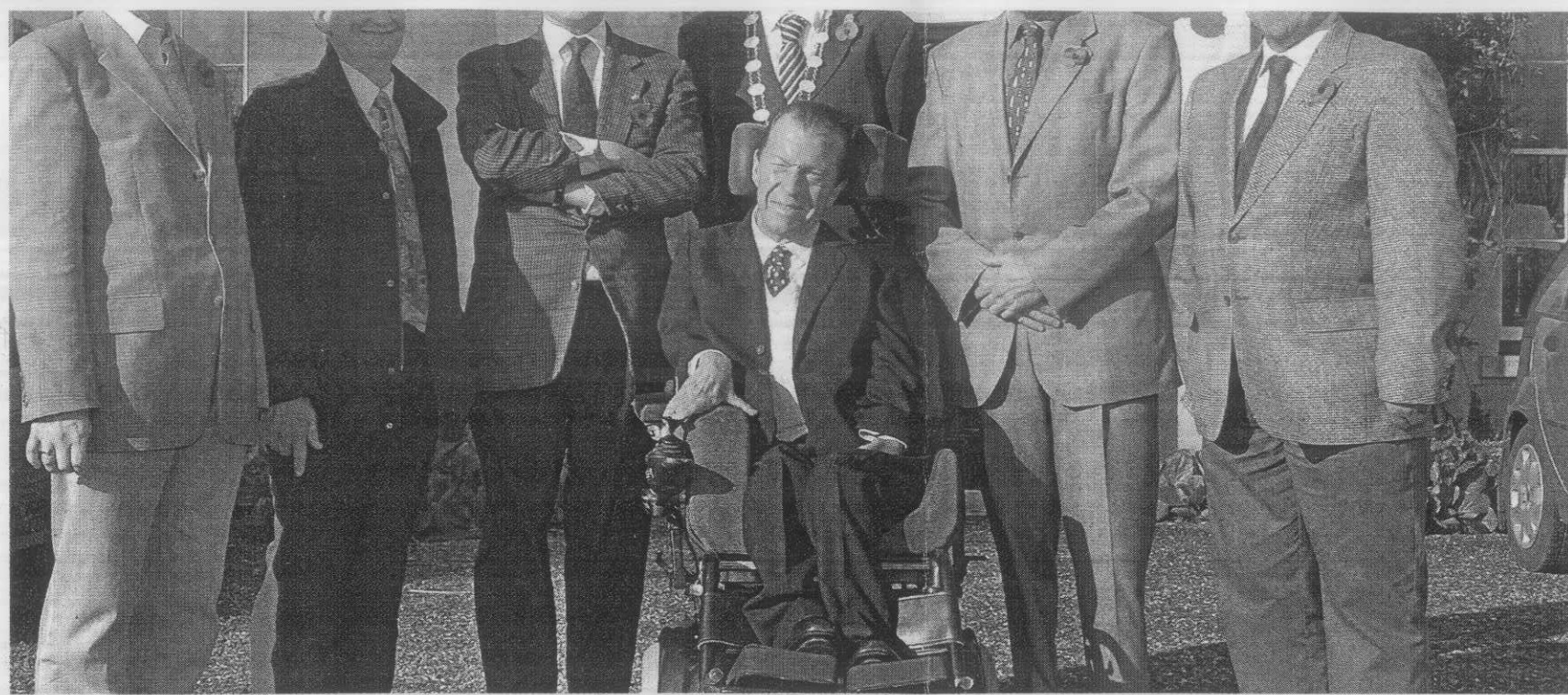
Endeavouring to find out why, Dr Moloney claimed to have been "fobbed off" by two mayors (Ger Fahy and John Gilligan) but he reserves most of his chagrin for the "bureaucrats in City Hall" who ignored the recommendation of their own historian that the Boers be added.

When he first raised the matter of the forgotten freemen in 2008, Dr Moloney received an encouraging response from the City Council, who wrote on April 2 that while there was no room on the official Roll of Freedom to add the names, the Boers would be recognised in the Council's booklet on Freeman and "the omitted names will be included in same".

This promise followed a report by the author of Limerick City Council's official history, Dr Matthew Potter, who is currently on secondment to the University of Limerick from City Hall.

Writing to Dr Moloney in February 2008, Dr Potter suggests the omissions centre on the failure of the men to attend a special ceremony and sign the roll in person but this appeared to have been no impediment to others who do appear on the official roll today.

Freedom of the City stems from the Municipal



Dr Tadhg Moloney of Goulevoy, pictured right, was among those who helped with the restoration of the Freedom of Limerick to the 4th Earl of Dunraven. Also included are, from left, Dr Matthew Potter, University of Limerick, Prof Liam Irwin, History Department, Mary Immaculate College, Desmond Fitzgerald, Knight of Glin, former Cllr Kieran Walsh, then deputy Mayor of Limerick, Lord Meath and Lord Dunraven

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Former mayor John Gilligan handing over the chain to Kevin Kiely. The latter suggested Frank McCourt should posthumously receive the freedom of the city, but Cllr Gilligan says a person has to be alive to claim the honour

Privileges Act of 1876 and Dr Potter notes this piece of legislation "set out no procedure as to how someone was made a freeman after the vote of Council had been taken (to confer them with the honour at a subsequent ceremony). It did not specify that in order to become...a Freeman it was necessary to attend in person to be conferred and/or sign the Roll of Freedom".

It was during the mayoralty of ex-Fenian John

Daly that moves to honour the Boers - then fighting against the British Empire of which Ireland was still a part - were initiated. Writing in the latest edition of the Old Limerick Journal, Des Ryan notes that of the 40 members elected to the Council in 1899, 21 were members of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Daly moved quickly to honour nationalist like Tom Clarke and Maud Gonne with the Freedom of Limerick.

Ryan records that it was on the same day Yeats' muse was conferred at a ceremony that a vote was taken to bestow the same honour on Paul Kruger. A Cllr Stokes, who was loyal to the Crown, was one of only two councillors to oppose this in a vote and it is a measure of the febrile atmosphere of the time that the other dissenting councillor, Hayes, was, as Des Ryan says, "mobbed" and had to be protected by police.

Dr Moloney has unearthed a report from the Cork Examiner where cries of "Throw out the rat" rang out against the two members opposed to honouring Kruger. It is clear that then, unlike today, decisions to confer the freedom of the city were debated in public. Meetings in 2009 are held behind closed doors for fear somebody might refuse the honour and leave the Council red-faced.



Paul Kruger, former president of the South African Republic is one of the 'freemen' of Limerick

Between December 1900 and October 1902, votes were taken approving six Boers for the Freedom of Limerick: Kruger, Steyn, the three generals De Wet, Botha and De la Rey and a Captain O'Donnell who the Council then believed was from Limerick but Mr Ryan says was actually from Waterford.

While some of the men were in Europe around this time - either negotiating with Joseph Chamberlain and Lord Kitchener or

seeking support from other colonial powers on the Continent - none of them found the time to come to Limerick for a ceremony or sign the roll.

But Dr Potter notes that the absence of the recipient from the conferral ceremony did not prevent others from being added to the roll. Neither William O'Brien MP (who refused the honour unless John Redmond also got it) in 1887 nor Papal Nuncio Mnsgr Paschal Robinson in

erick on the same day as Michael Davitt in 1882 despite the fact that he was unable to sign the role owing to his demise between the vote to honour him and the actual ceremony.

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After he made further inquiries, Dr Moloney was advised by Council officials his best bet was to seek political support but he claims he was "fobbed off" when he approached the two mayors, Ger Fahy and John Gilligan.

Ironically, Cllr Gilligan's "great-grandfather or great-granduncle" was a member of the Council who voted to honour the Boers in the early 1900s.

"I didn't fob off Mr Moloney," Cllr Gilligan said, "but I did explain to him at length that the freedom of the city is offered to somebody; they decide whether to accept it or not; and if they do, they have to come to Limerick for the ceremony and they have to sign the roll. Only then are they considered to have been granted the freedom of Limerick."

He said it relation to Mayor Kevin Kiely's suggestion Frank McCourt be posthumously honoured that "it's exactly for the same reason that we can't give it to somebody who's dead. I'd like to see Richard Harris get it or even Patrick Sarsfield, who did more for Limerick than anybody else. But it can't be done and it's for the same reason that it can't

them to Limerick to sign it. I'd have no problem with that. There's probably still more life in them than others below. They have to first accept it and then come to Limerick. Even the Pope had to come to Limerick to get it."

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Imposing the political standards of today on the Boers of 1900 was not the point, said Dr Moloney, himself a former member of the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement.

"From my research, it is clear that you were considered a Freeman once the Council voted you in. Kruger never came to Limerick for a ceremony but when he died in 1904, the Limerick Leader described him as a Freeman of Limerick. You didn't have to come to Limerick either because Gladstone, who was ailing and couldn't come to Limerick at the time, signed his name when a delegation from Limerick went over to England to get him to sign it," Dr Moloney said.

"The politics of the Boers then and today don't really come into it as far as I'm concerned. All I'm asking for is a little bit of consistency from the Council on the highest honour Limerick city can confer."