

NOW IT'S RICHARD HARRIS, THE POET

By MARTIN BYRNES

"THE LONDON Times is difficult to come by in Portland, Oregon," wrote Richard Harris in September 1988.

He was writing to the literary editor of The Times in England, and was enclosing a slim, 44-page book of poetry in the hope of favourable review.

The mystery now is how that very copy of the book, including its covering letter to The Times of London, found its way to a second-hand bookshop in Cork. And the further co-incidence of its being bought by this writer in the not unreasonable belief that Limerick's Oscar-nominated actor had turned his hand to literary matters.

And the book is one of a limited run of just 300 for-sale copies.

As it transpired it was not our Richard Harris who wrote the book, but the co-incidences had not ended. As more than a million men face each other in the desert, it was unusual that the book be called "Letters from a Soldier", that the book be an American production, and that it have the further advantage of being well written.

In fact, there are five "Letters from a Soldier", and all of them would seem to speak clearly and uncensored as to what is really in the mind of a serviceman in a foreign and hostile land. Here is a sample:

This affair was a border skirmish,
A holding action along a remote
And northern front.
The column pulled out on Wednesday
Past smoking distortions of war.
Past the utter fear of peace.
The night is rich with troubled dreams.

Patterns torn from pieces of the diving stars.
We camp by the bruise of a roadside.
We are in another space.
So why this obsession with
That child of summer
Framed in a broken doorway?
And why this deep and stiffening sadness
For the last ten miles?

Dr Richard Harris a medical practitioner since 1965, and lives in Portland Oregon. He has married, he has divorced, and has two sons.

This intense little gem of a book, examines little family crises and home situations as well as larger images such as the plight of the Jewish people under the Nazis:

I was a Jewish child at a time
When other Jewish children were being
Baked like bread in ovens. Then
Stacked into tidy quiet rows.
(In Germany, neatness always counted.)

So, nearly three years late, wrong country, wrong paper, and prompted only because we thought for a moment that the physician was an actor, Dr Harris finally gets his review.

All Dr Harris matter-of-factly concluded his (apparently unread) letter to The Times, so shall we conclude this unusual tale:

"If anyone cares to order a copy, they may be obtained from:

Book For
6318 SW Montgomery Suite 340
Portland, Oregon 97201
Star-Gazette Dept
They sell for \$11.95 per copy.



A THOMONDGATE chemist has headed a group which has presented £10,000 worth of modern art to the city.

And now Mr Luke Kiernan and his group are in the process of winding up, their job done.

But the result of the eight-years of work are two great collections of work, one of which is in Mary Immaculate College and the other is on display for the first time at the City Gallery, Pery Square.

The Mary I group consists of about 30 items, and addition to the the City Gallery permanent collection is 22 items, with a purchase value of about £10,000.

Group secretary, painter, Mr Samuel Walsh, of Athlunkard, explained:

"We are the Limerick Contemporary Art Society, and we have varied in number between 45 and 55 people over the years, since our formation in 1983.

"The object was to acquire contemporary work not otherwise available here."

He said that initially the focus was on collecting the best work of local and regional artists. Some works were commissioned, but most were acquired from the market. This changed, however.

"Choosing art can be an emotional thing, and we wanted to get away from that," he said. "So we changed policy to selecting a list of artists. Then we chose the best possible examples of their work."

And how was the cash collected?

By subscription mainly, but there were other efforts made to raise the necessary cash.

There was a small committee, elected annually by the general membership.

However, although the group is winding up, it is not disbanding altogether.

"You may take it that the new Friends of the City Gallery group, which is to be

established, will be of the same composition as the present organisation."

The administration of the new organisation would be in the hands of the City Gallery officials, said Mr Walsh.

"Personally, I hope to spend the remainder of my life painting, not administering," he said.

He admitted that the group had done its work quietly over the years.

"The object was to put the collection together, and we concentrated on that," he said.

WOMEN ARTISTS TO SHOW

A major exhibition by two Limerick-based artists will open at the Flag Cafe (DAILY co-op), 5 Broad Street on this Thursday evening.

Mary Peters and Helena O'Sullivan will show their recent work under the title "Partners".

The exhibition will run to March 19th.

Currently showing at the same venue is an exhibition of recent works by Kevin Quinlan, which opened last Thursday.

The gallery and restaurant are open from 10am to 7.30pm, weekdays.

CECILIAN'S GATHER

FOLLOWING their successful get-together last year of the old and present members, the organising committee have decided to run another gathering at the Two Mile Inn on Saturday, February 23.

Anybody wishing to purchase tickets for this should contact Ann Hackett at 53122, Al O'Connor at 364484 or Frank O'Donoghue at 54120. Tickets are priced at £6 which includes supper and music.