

# Kilkee and Russell Crowe pay tribute to Richard Harris

By Valerie Sweeney

RUSSELL Crowe and Richard Harris became firm friends on the set of *Gladiators*, in 1999.

The friendship between the two men was so deep that Russell agreed to take a break from filming, to unveil a Richard Harris memorial statue in Kilkee, last Saturday.

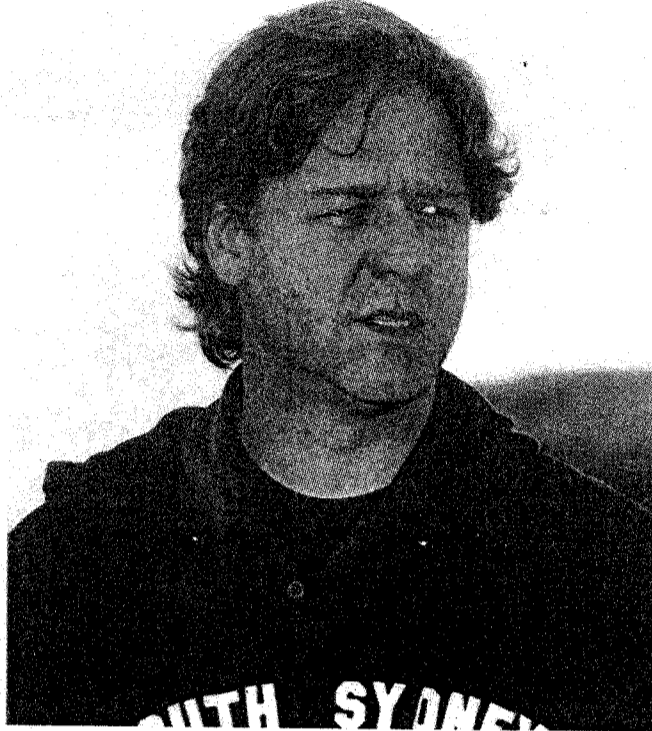
The atmosphere on the day was fantastic, as the crowds followed Limerick's St. John's Brass and Reed band from the square to the spot near the pollock holes, where the statue was ready to be unveiled.

“This is a wonderful, happy occasion for the Harris family and I'm very proud to be associated with it,” said the Mayor of Limerick, Joe Leddin,

“We've been giving free concerts in Kilkee for quite a few years,” said John Doyle, the conductor of one of Limerick's oldest established bands. “When we were approached to lead the parade to Richard Harris' statue, we were delighted to oblige”.

The band has been invited to take part in next year's St. Patrick's Day parade in Boston,

Actor Russell Crowe takes time out to meet the locals on a visit to Kilkee, Co. Clare



about being part of St. John's Band is that we're all the same, young and old. I'm the oldest member and we have young flute players as young as nine and 10. It's a great outlet for the young and they really enjoy themselves”.

Most of the large crowd were made up of people from Limerick, who holiday in Kilkee every year, as did the family of Richard Harris. Alice Hannon, from Janesboro, proudly told of her

She was with Helen Clooney from Mulgrave Street, and Lena Purcell from Rosbrien.

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joined on the podium by the Mayor of Kilkee, Claire Haugh, Phil Coulter and Manuel Di Lucia, the chairman of the memorial statue committee.

Richard's brother Bill,

“This union started a family tradition of spending every summer in Kilkee, which has been carried on to this day, I am proud to say that the 5th generation of the Harris family is now carrying on that unbroken relationship.

“Of all the eight children in our family, Richard adored Kilkee. The rugged waves and towering cliffs seemed to unleash that wild yearning to achieve the unachievable against the odds, which was embedded in his psyche. He cycled along the edge of the 30 foot walls, was one of the first people to dive off the dangerous rocks in 'newfoundland', and was the first person to swim across the dangerous currents of Kilkee Bay, unaccompanied by a rescue boat. He also holds the unbroken record for winning the Tivoli racquetball championships five years in-a-row”.

Bill told the crowd that Richard spent all his spare time in the picture house in Kilkee, which bore the posh name of The Olympia Theatre. “He loved the cinema. He spent hours watching all the black and white movies. He would often treat the people of Kilkee to stand-up impressions of Jimmy Durante, Marlon Brandon, Al Jolson, and Danny Kaye. Richard had that dogged determination to succeed. He would never let go. If he was thrown out of the front of a building he'd climb in the back. We thank you for honouring our brother”.

Richard's three sons, Richard, Jared and Damie, gathered to pay tribute to their famous father. “He had a great pride in us and encouraged us in everything we wanted to do,” Jared told the audience.

“He loved telling us about Kilkee. Dad called many places home, but he loved to visit them and then move on. But there was a special place in his heart for Kilkee. It was here that he began his dream of turning Dickie Harris, the teenager, into Richard Harris, the actor. He always said that the best summers of his life were spent here”.

Jamie regaled the crowd with several of Richard's famous escapades, and told of his ability to make up a throwaway line or a good excuse, at the spur of the moment.

“He was a difficult man to be married to, as he would leave to go for a pint of milk and might not come back for days. On one occasion, a few days turned into a good few weeks. Dad always came back and usually had a severe dressing down from mum. “But this time, he knew he was really in trouble, and was madly trying to come with a good reason for his prolonged absence as he rang the doorbell. When my mother finally opened the door, ready to give vent to her frustrated feelings and worries, he stood there and breathlessly said, ‘Why didn't you pay the ransom’”.

Jamie said the family are overwhelmed at the thoughtfulness of the Kilkee people for honouring their father.

“We, as his family, want to thank very deeply and sincerely the people in this town of Kilkee for this great honour which you've bestowed on our father. This statue is a living memorial to my father. He'd have loved to have been here”.

When Russell Crowe was announced, a huge roar could be heard reverberating from the cliffs around the bay. The famous Oscar winner mixed freely with the crowd and allowed photographs to be taken.

“Richard and I had a very deep friendship, We had many deep conversations. His main topics of

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conversation were rugby, followed by his love of Limerick, the crack in the pubs he drank in, and his passionate love affair with Kilkee.

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“When I agreed, he replied, ‘Then you don't mind if I yell



Richard Harris

pint of Guinness in Richard's local, Charlie St. Georges, then went on to sample a pint in several other of his favourite pubs. I then visited the Cliffs of Moher and found myself in Dublin on the

day-of-the match.

“Because we had the tickets booked, I decided to go. Well, the Australians couldn't do anything right on that day. The Irish team rang rings around them. Tears flowed down my face at the final whistle, and I found myself saying silently, ‘Richard, you're not dead. You're here to see what you've waited 37 years for. You're here to see Ireland beat the

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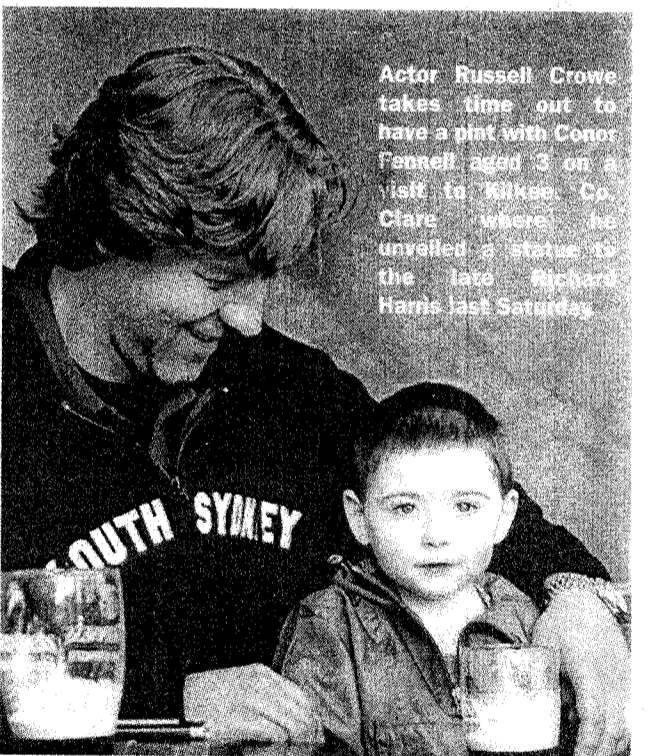
Russell Crowe addresses the gathered crowds at the unveiling of a memorial statue to Richard Harris.

where it will be lead by senator Jack Harte.

Mick Enright, aged 92, has been in the band 57 years, and was proud to be playing for Richard Harris. “It's a great day for Limerick,” he said. “I'm very proud to be here. What I like

connection with the Harris family. “My father, Paddy Sullivan, drove the horse and cart from the Harris' William Street premises. He delivered oats, wheat and barley to their customers around Limerick. I'm really thrilled to be here as it is a link with my past”.

addressed the crowd. He was there with Richard's other two surviving brothers, Noel and Ivan. He was emotional as he told the huge crowd of the marriage of his great-grandfather, James, to Ann Meehan from Kilbaha, near Kilkee, in 1850.



Actor Russell Crowe takes time out to have a pint with Conor Fennell aged 3 on a visit to Kilkee, Co. Clare where he unveiled a statue to the late Richard Harris last Saturday.

abuse at the Wallabies and talk about the All Blacks in hushed tones”.

Russell and Richard had bought tickets for the Ireland/Australia match at Lansdowne Road, in 2003.

“Unfortunately, he died before the match. I was so upset about his death, I decided to come on a pilgrimage to Ireland as soon as I got a break from filming and take in many of the places he'd talked about.

“I went to Limerick and drank a

Australians”.

At that point in Russell's speech, he paused emotionally, then pointed and said, “Look, there's a rainbow, Hello Richard”.

Russell unveiled the memorial statue, which is at present located on private land near the Kilkee's famous Pollock Holes.

The statue's permanent location is proposed for the East side of Kilkee, in Wellington Square, but the matter is at present the subject of a Bord Planala appeal.