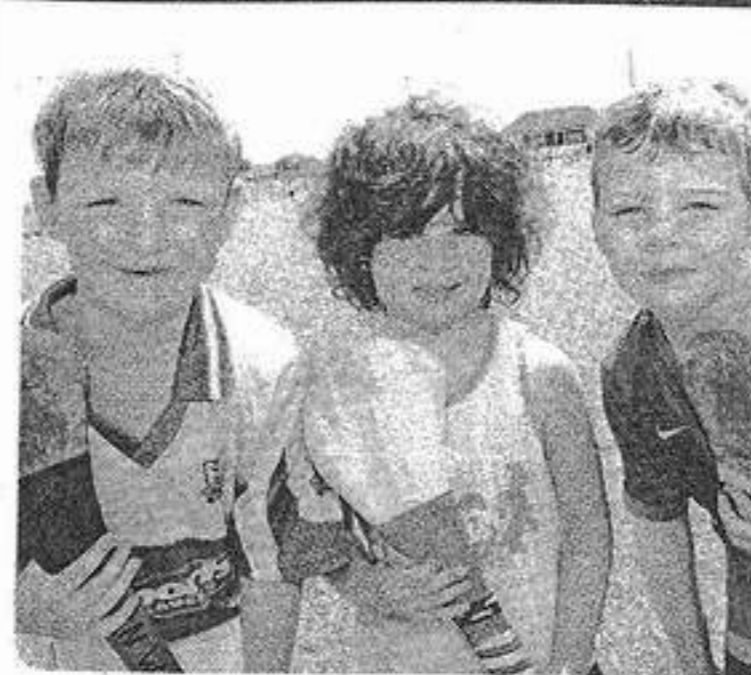


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Curtain up for Frank and Angela

After the book and film comes Angela's Ashes, the city-bound musical. **Anne Sheridan** talks to the creative force behind the production

BARRACK Hill, the last week of June, before the good weather came. The place where it all began for Frank McCourt in the backstreets of Limerick now has graffiti etched on the wall, and two-storey apartments where he spent his "miserable, Irish, Catholic childhood".

The area, just off Wolfe Tone Street, has moved on, but it seems the ghost of the Pulitzer Prize winner is destined to live on.

Frank joked that he wanted his ashes scattered in the Shannon - "let them pollute the river" - but it's here they really lie. As if on cue, a group of tourists round the corner and pace their way up the top of the hill, led by a tour guide revealing the chequered youth of Limerick's most famous author.

Moments earlier, drizzle began to fall and umbrellas were quickly parachuted open. The omnipresent rain of Angela's Ashes.

Adam Howell, the composer behind Angela's Ashes: A Musical, and actress Sarah Ayrton, who will play Angela in the forthcoming

production, could only smile at this series of serendipitous moments.

"Did you see that that was an Angela's Ashes tour," he says with delight, after the photographer finishes taking their picture.

"The cast of 22 has become like a little Angela's Ashes club or society and they don't want the journey to end."

"It's very eerie being here, looking out over the River Shannon, being in South's pub and having a Guinness is very strange, and being in the McCourt museum where Frank used to be in the classroom," he says.

This is his second trip to Limerick. He has seen all the newspaper cuttings about Frank framed in South's, where he had his first pint; he has spent hours in the Frank McCourt museum,

housed in Frank's former school Leamy's on Hartstonge Street, and Sarah has even posed for a picture by the toilet doors in South's, named Frank and Angela.

The cast of 22, he says, has "become like a little Angela's Ashes club or society" and they don't want their journey to end.

Adam never got to meet Frank, but since reading the book at the age of 15 Frank's life has indelibly been woven into Adam's, becoming a part of his own and sometimes it's hard to separate the two. "I've read the book numerous times and watched the film countless times," he says.

On his last trip, when he returned to Derby and told the cast they had visited Windmill Street "everyone was like 'Ooh, what's Windmill Street like?'"

Now just 26, the theatre graduate from Derby in England has been determined to bring it to the stage for years. He wrote the music lyrics for the play, while collaborator Paul Hurt adapted the book for the stage.



Adam Howell, who wrote the musical version of Angela's Ashes, at Barrack Hill with Sarah Ayrton, who will star as Angela

Picture: Adrian Rutten

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