

The Limerick Post's Rose Rushe recalls a brief encounter with the late Frank McCourt

The King of Limerick writers is dead - Long live the King

FRANK McCourt passed away peacefully last Sunday, a few weeks after he was diagnosed with skin cancer.

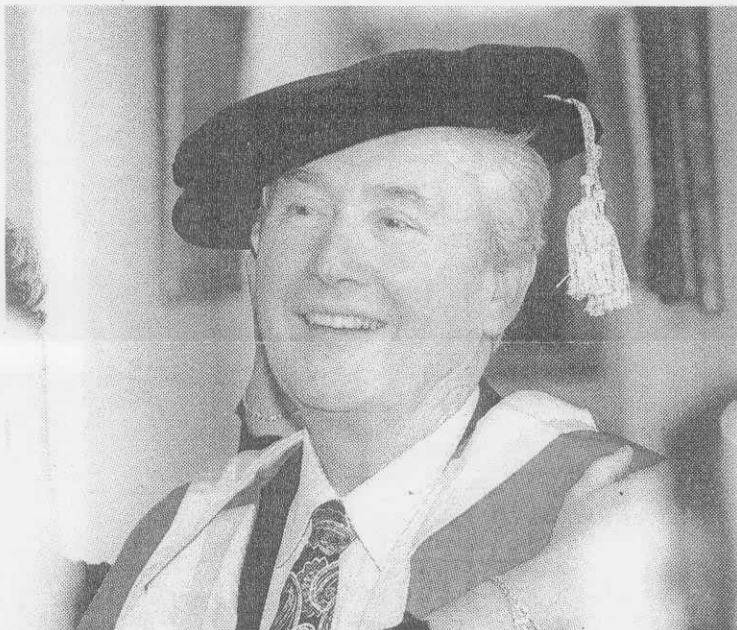
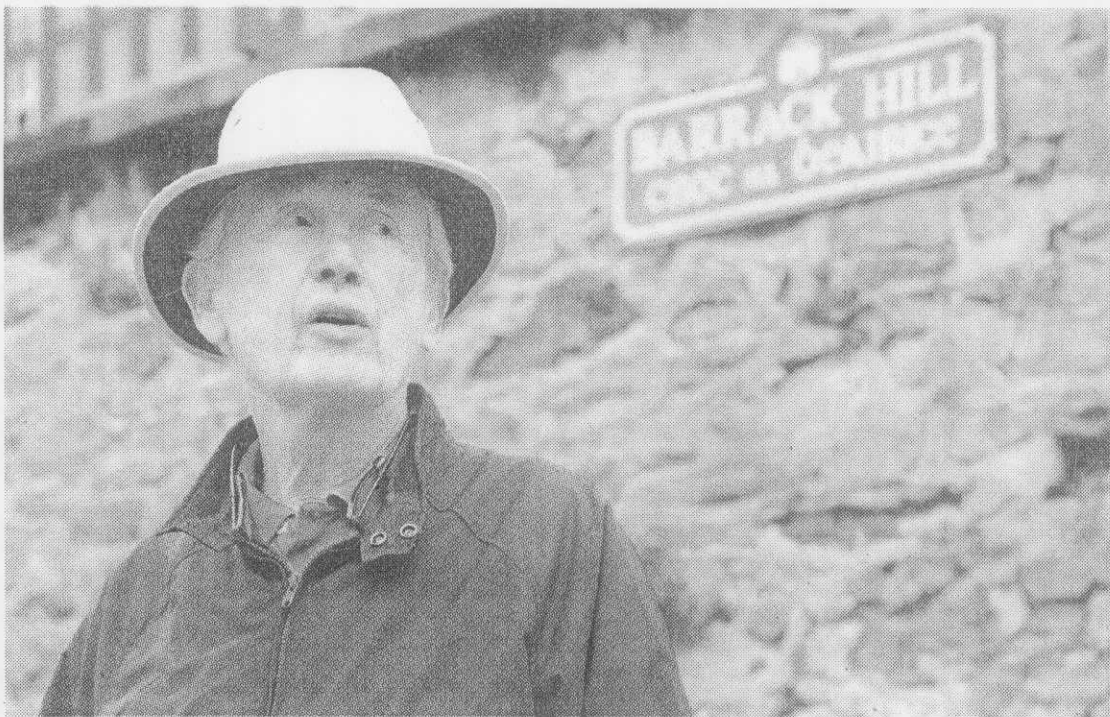
Limerick's best known export to the 20th century world had achieved a great deal in his 78-year life, infamy with the glittering prizes.

A brilliant writer had emerged in late years from the ashes of his youth. Drink and lack of focus bedevilled McCourt's early years in America and marriage, but the rock on which he foundered was lack of self-belief.

His star finally ascended as his masterpiece *Angela's Ashes* (1996), won the western world. Its revelations as much as lyrical prose and canny dialogue were seismic in effect. *Angela's Ashes* was later filmed, with many of the scenes shot in Limerick streets, and was an international success.

Frank McCourt's sin was to break the covenant of silence that hauled bourgeois Limerick out of the gutter and into, vanilla suburbs.

The smell of damp and dampened spirit rose from his script, the child's



insight into the dynamic of sexuality - his mother's, the tubercolic girls of school - disturbed.

Angela's Ashes was published after decades in America, when McCourt had been lauded by his teaching job and helped by his relationship with his third wife.

This safety of remove angered many who had been named, perhaps shamed, in the book. It angered those who did not know the McCourts and their ilk at all and who had not been the foot-bruised poor. It angered those who took offence at his depiction of clergy and his experience of Catholic faith and scholarship. His perceived lack of loyalty to family and the cult of motherhood angered, too.

No-one denied his way with words or storytelling but it took the book's reception overseas to convince a suspicious Irish population that there was greatness in the swill.

I met Frank McCourt when he had become a son of Ireland. Writer in residence at UL, firmly married, feted at festival, the focus of Hollywood, he was establishment itself at this point.

Surprisingly fresh-skinned for one who lamented his looks and health, he was courtly. Mild, softly spoken, suited and booted, there was nothing to suggest in McCourt's manner the demons unleashed. He was tired of the challenges re names and dates, of who was who at Leamy's school and who poured his first villainous pint. I didn't go there.

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stories, what was good and happening. He loved that my tigin at Bowman Street was back to back with homes he had fled, that Mike O'Donnell's walking tours had swollen local streets with exploration of text. Ellen was present with McCourt, immediate, protective. He doted on her, face to face, and would have been a lesser man without her substantial grace. Autographs signed, McCourt passed on to the next horse race, obliging adulation and fencing blows whenever.

Our heritage is finer and brighter for him, something he never anticipated in his depth of regard for the past that made him great.

He is survived by wife Ellen, daughter Maggie and three grandchildren.

Mayor Kiely and UL pay their tributes

TRIBUTES poured in all week, from many parts of the world.

Mayor Kevin Kiely had this to say: "I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of one of Limerick's most successful and talented sons, Frank McCourt.

"I had the pleasure of meeting Frank personally on quite a few occasions and as someone who enjoyed his books immensely, I was delighted and honoured to meet him.

"For a boy coming from such an impoverished background to enjoy such a glowing international literary career and win the Pulitzer Prize is remarkable.

"Frank's book, *Angela's Ashes*, and the subsequent movie thrust Limerick into the world spotlight, his compelling memoir brought a tourism boost to our city and he was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Limerick, an institution he had always hoped would exist in his home town.

"My sympathies go out to his wife Ellen, daughter Maggie, brother Malachy and extended family.

"Limerick is very proud of, and will never forget, Frank McCourt".

The Arts Council extended its deepest condolences to the family and friends.

Remarking on the news, Mary Cloake, director of the Arts Council, said: "Frank McCourt was an outstanding and talented writer, whose work reached a great number

of readers and achieved critical acclaim. Unquestionably, *Angela's Ashes*, his most famous work, is a stunning, affecting piece of literature that made a deep and lasting impact on its readers. Mr McCourt's lyrical and crackling prose, coupled with his innovative approach to dialogue, exerted a significant influence on the memoir as a genre, and on literary writing more generally. Though his first book was published relatively late in his life, Frank McCourt has made a unique contribution to Irish literature and its popularisation, both in Ireland and internationally".

The University of Limerick was greatly saddened to learn of the passing of a dear friend, supporter and colleague, Dr Frank McCourt.

Speaking on behalf of all at the University, acting president Professor Paul McCutcheon, said: "Dr McCourt will be sorely missed by all of us at UL, he was a regular visitor who spoke and lectured here on a number of occasions. Many of our students had the good fortune to interact with him as part of their studies. He was an avid supporter of this institution and we appreciated greatly the time he gave to promoting and ensuring our success. He made a significant contribution to English literature and was a cultural treasure of Limerick city. We would like to offer our condolences to Ellen and Frank's family at this very sad time."

Ger and friends walk from Dublin to Limerick

CASTLECONNELL native, Ger Fitzgerald, will lead a sponsored walk from O'Connell Monument on O'Connell St, Dublin to the O'Connell Monument on O'Connell St, Limerick on this Saturday, in support of the Karen people of Burma.

Ger, along with three Burmese exiles living in Ireland and Irish friends, hope to complete the 200km route in seven days arriving in Limerick on Friday July 31, at 5pm. The walkers will overnight in Naas, Monasterevin, Mountrath, Roscrea, Nenagh, Castleconnell, and finally Limerick, arriving in each town at around 5pm.

A seminar based at St. Patrick's College in Maynooth, Ger organised the sponsored walk after viewing a documentary on the attacks perpetrated by the Burmese ruling junta against the Karen people, who are based on Burma's Eastern border. For many years, the Karen people have been subjected to an intensive campaign by the Burmese military, which has resulted in one of the worst human rights and humanitarian crisis in the country.

'Top Down approach' - deputy Niall Collins

THE abolition of guangos, excessive waste and "a top down approach" must be implemented before the areas of social welfare, education and health are considered.

This is the view of the Fianna Fail deputy, Niall Collins, who is also a member of the Public Accounts Committee.

"People will accept the recommendations once the plan is implemented in a Top Down approach," he commented, as details of the McCarthy Bord Snip Report are being absorbed by the electorate.

"The report's recommendations, many of which are necessary to restore order to our public finances, are very harsh potentially on some sectors of our society, and in order to deliver these recommendations across the board, the government must adopt a top down approach - excessive waste, the guangos and duplication must be first dealt with".

The deputy said that publication of the report will allow the people to debate the issues and provide an opportunity to reform the structures of public service.

Drop in new business start ups

STATISTICS released by ICC Formations reveal that there was a 20% drop in the number of new business start ups in quarter 2, 2009 compared to quarter 2, 2008.

With the exception of 'telecommunications' and 'electricity, gas and water,' all sectors saw a decrease in the number of companies being formed.

"Replicating the trend from Quarter 1, the housing sector continues to be the hardest hit with 'real estate and renting' and 'construction' once again showing the biggest decreases of 57.5% and 35.5% respectively.

"In total 402 fewer companies were formed in these sectors in quarter 2, 2009 compared to quarter 2, 2008" explained head of professional services at ICC Formations, Jon Rock

In total there were 826 fewer companies formed in the Republic of Ireland in quarter 2, 2009 compared to quarter 2, 2008.

"Not surprisingly, the biggest drop was in Leinster with 517 fewer companies formed here - Dublin alone accounted for 326 of these. There was a drop of 17% in Munster and 24% in Connacht and whilst Ulster saw the biggest % drop of 40.9% this was with relatively low numbers.

However, it was not all bad news, as some counties did see an increase in the number of companies formed.