



Frank McCourt's widow Ellen unveils the bust last weekend in front of a huge crowd of wellwishers at the Leamy Art School and Gallery on Hartstonge Street

PICTURES: MICHAEL COWHEY

Creative writing chair at seat of learning in Frank's memory

Anne Sheridan

A CHAIR in creative writing is to be established at the University of Limerick in memory of Frank McCourt, who was "a wonderful ambassador for the UL cause".

University president, Professor Don Barry made the announcement at Leamy's on Hartstonge Street last week, where a bronze bust of the Pulitzer Prize-winning author was unveiled.

The focus of the new programme, Prof Barry said, should be 'the memoir as an act of creative writing'.

However, it should also "reach out to parts of the city that feel distanced from the formal education system" in recognition of the author and teacher, who changed the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of students in New York.

"At a very profound level Frank McCourt touched the hearts and minds of countless people, not only in Ireland, not only in the

Ms Friedrich said: "I don't know what he's written, perhaps we will never know."

"Everything he wrote was a combination of charm and wit and humour and dead-on accuracy - it's hard to come by," she lamented.

In the Strand hotel that night, further tributes were paid to the Angela's Ashes author.

Former pupil Susan Jane Gilman, now a successful author, enlisted in McCourt's creative writing class in Stuyvesant high school in 1979, and counted him as a "friend, mentor and champion".

"Frank McCourt is responsible for me being a writer. When my second book hit the New York Times bestseller list he was the first person I called. And I cried, and I said 'You made me who I am', and he laughed and he said 'I did! Didn't I?'"

In her writing, he urged her not to "run away from your roots, but to embrace them".

Brothers hold court for Frank

Anne Sheridan

IN THE words of Don Barry it was a hard act to follow. Or "the most challenging warm up act I've ever had".

"I'm sure any sensible person out there is saying 'the poor guy has to follow the McCourts,'" said Prof Barry, president of the University of Limerick, of which Frank was a trustee on their Foundation board.

For all their success, they were unaffected, funny, and charming. Ultimately, they proved that where you start in life doesn't have to dictate where you end up.

While sustained formal education eluded the McCourt brothers in their early years, they went on to achieve success, make the New York Times best-sellers list and even claimed a Pulitzer Prize, among a string of literary



Celtic Tiger years, though he reckoned he "saw his tail as he went out the window".

He recently read an article on the subway in New York, detailing that Ireland has suffered the worst economic setback in decades. He enjoyed a laugh at that.

"I was thinking to myself we grew up in an economic setback, we lived in an economic setback..." Ireland has had nothing but a series of economic set



John and Una Heaton and actor Mike Finn playing the school master at the unveiling last weekend

Irish diaspora but throughout the world."

People from the worlds of arts, culture, education and politics gathered at Leamy's for the unveiling.

Present were McCourt's

She described him as "a sleeping giant...who sleeps with the Gods and will always be here for us."

Director and writer Peter Sheridan, brother of Jim, also attended the

Or "the most challenging warm up act I've ever had".

"I'm sure any sensible person out there is saying 'the poor guy has to follow the McCourts,'" said Prof Barry, president of the University of Limerick, of which Frank was a trustee on their Foundation board.

"I come along with a formally prepared statement, no songs, no quotations."

The 'Brothers McCourt' took to the podium outside Leamy's school on Hartstonge Street on Thursday last as a bronze bust of their brother Frank was unveiled.

Alphie spoke first, then Michael, then Malachy.

All looked to Frank - the one up above, and the other perched proudly in the garden, smiling royally at this irony of ironies. They couldn't help but smile too.

Like Frank, they didn't hold back. They were warm, and they were real, and wrapped the crowd up in their every word. Limerick had, finally, welcomed its long lost sons back into the fold.

doesn't have to dictate where you end up.

While sustained formal education eluded the McCourt brothers in their early years, they went on to achieve success, make the New York Times best-sellers list and even claimed a Pulitzer Prize, among a string of literary awards.

"I think he did alright," said Malachy McCourt, 78, of his eldest brother.

Malachy, the author of two memoirs and self-described as "possibly the greatest failure of Leamy's school", said the school said later dubbed "the Leamy Academy of Surgeons, because they cut us up so much".

He was once asked in America where he had obtained his degree.

He hadn't one, he responded. And what about his second level education? Nope. Neither he did have his "primary certificate" from Leamy's.

So how did he get on the bestseller list, following the publication of his first memoir, *A Monk Swimming*, he was asked?



Malachy, Alphie and Mike pose with Ellen at the bust outside the Leamy school on Hartstonge Street at the weekend

Well, he was a avid reader, so he just "re-arranged the words, and wrote them down".

Years later the State bestowed upon him an honorary primary certificate. "So I am on my way," he enthused.

In a nod to the naysayers of Angela's Ashes, Frank's first memoir, he said the best thing you can do is take the advice of Oscar

Wilde, who said, "Forgive your enemies, it annoys them."

"So f*** 'em, you know" - Malachy's words, not Wilde's.

He pondered whether his brother is up in heaven, but believes where ever he is, he is doing alright.

"If there is a heaven I'm not sure if Frank is there. But a saint is a sinner who has been severely edited.

As Dorothy Parker said, 'Give me heaven for the comfort, and hell for the company'."

And then signed off with another nugget of advice: "Live every day as if it's your last, because one day you'll be right."

Michael McCourt kept his speech short, and succinct, with a few expletives thrown in for good measure.

cle on the subway in New York, detailing that Ireland has suffered the worst economic setback in decades. He enjoyed a laugh at that.

"I was thinking to myself we grew up in an economic setback, we lived in an economic setback..." Ireland has had nothing but a series of economic setbacks, he concluded.

He mused that if Frank were watching he "would laugh at the foolishness of everyone coming out in the rain" or would say "go home and go to bed, or go for a pint".

Each of the brothers are different, unique, and yet quite alike. As Frank's agent Molly Friedrich said, they broke the mould when the McCourts were born.

While Frank emigrated as a promising clarinet player, Alphie on the other hand 'was asked to leave town and take his pipes with him'.

Still, it was "a fabulous day," he said, and his legacy will live on.

"The artist articulates all of us. And that was Frank, our brother, the great artist."

John and Una Heaton and actor Mike Finn playing the school master at the unveiling last weekend

Irish diaspora but throughout the world."

People from the worlds of arts, culture, education and politics gathered at Leamy's for the unveiling.

Present were McCourt's literary agent Molly Friedrich, Deputy Willie O'Dea, model agent Celia Holman Lee, deputy Mayor Maria Byrne, film-maker Peter Sheridan former classmates Billy Campbell and Eric Lynch.

Artist Una Heaton, whose family own the building and who organised the commemoration, said, "Of all places to have it, I think Frank would be happy to have it here today." A museum in honour of Limerick's most famous author is also being planned.

New York-based agent Molly Friedrich said his first memoir is now "moving into the classic stage where it endures the test of time."

McCourt was working on a novel prior to his death last July, aged 78, but

She described him as "a sleeping giant...who sleeps with the Gods and will always be here for us."

Director and writer Peter Sheridan, brother of Jim, also attended the unveiling having first met the McCourt family in New York in the mid-1980s, when he had "vaguely heard of them".

"There were so many similarities in their story to our story - urban, working class, poverty, education. It was just extraordinary meeting those guys. It was like a meeting of souls. It was just a feeling that I'd known them all my life, and we've remained friends ever since," said Mr Sheridan.

Eamonn Cregan, director of corporate affairs at the University of Limerick, recalled asking Frank how he found fame and success, which came in his 60s following the publication of his first memoir, *Angela's Ashes*.

"He replied: 'Fan-f***ing-tastic!'"

Ryan lays down law for true calling

Anne Sheridan

NOT SO long ago the name William Ryan was completely unknown in high society literary circles in London, Limerick, or indeed any part of the world.

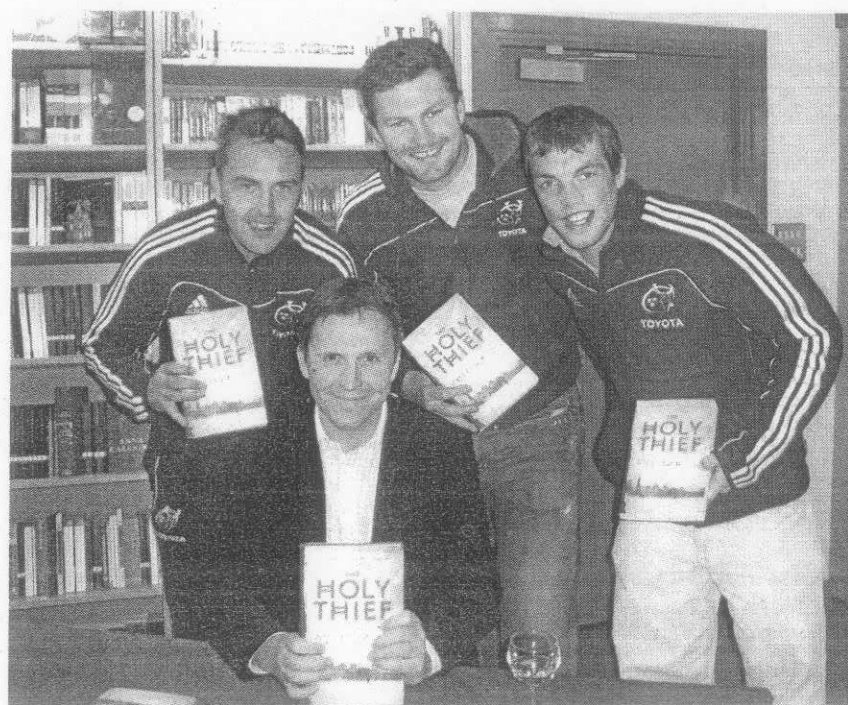
And yet the London-born author, whose family are from Limerick, now seems destined for superstardom after receiving a three-book deal by Pan MacMillan / Mantle, who have hailed him as "an outstanding new voice in historical crime fiction".

His first book, *The Holy Thief*, is due for sale in the United States at the end of August, it is already on sale in nine countries, with copies translated into French, Spanish, German, Italian, Polish, Czech, and Serbian.

At the launch in Limerick last week, all 200 copies in stock sold out within a matter of minutes.

"It was an extremely successful launch, one of the most successful we've had in recent years," said Frank O'Mahony, of O'Mahony's on O'Connell Street.

Mr O'Mahony said he read the book a number of months ago, and while he



Author, William Ryan with Munster rugby players, Niall Ronan, Donnacha Ryan - his cousin - and Ian Dowling at the launch of his book *The Holy Thief*

PICTURE: ADRIAN BUTLER

was unaware that he actually knew the author, he had begun recommending it to numerous people.

"The feeling within the publishing industry is that it's going to be very successful. It's a fiercely good read. It's now in stock

again, and is probably the quickest selling new fiction title we've had for quite a number of years," he said.

Educated in Glenstal Abbey School, the 45-year-old gave up his job as a lawyer in the City in search of something more

meaningful.

"I always wrote a little bit and this was something I always wanted to do. I didn't really want to be a lawyer any more; I didn't find it very rewarding, so I decided to give writing a try. It seems to be doing

pretty good," said its modest author.

In his spare time, Mr Ryan wrote on an occasional basis for television and film before completing a Masters in Creative Writing at St Andrews University in 2005, which he said definitely helped bridge his change in careers.

The Holy Thief is set in Moscow in 1936, when Stalin's Great Terror is beginning. A young American woman is found dead in a church, and her mutilated body is displayed on the altar for all to see.

But when Captain Alexei Dimitrevich Korolev is asked to investigate, his every move comes under close scrutiny and his moral and political ideals - as well as his life - come under threat.

The author Kate Mosse has praised his first work as "a subtle, superb mystery...with a sense of place and period to rival even the greatest of the Russian masters."

He is currently writing *Bloody Meadow*, the sequel to *The Holy Thief*.

The Holy Thief by William Ryan is available to buy now in all good bookshops

Author: city being shortchanged

LIMERICK is being "short-changed" by the Government due to the stalled regeneration project and other delayed commercial projects aimed to revive the city centre, according to acclaimed author Helena Close, writes Anne Sheridan.

Speaking to the Limerick Leader about her new novel, *The Clever One*, Ms Close said she previously had doubts about the regeneration plan, but is now "even more disillusioned".

"I think everybody is disillusioned now. It's a very sad state of affairs. I think we deserve better. Limerick is such a beautiful city, but I just think we're being short-changed. We were promised the Opera Centre and now we have a ghost town in the centre of Limerick," said the Clare-based author.

Originally from Westbury, her new contemporary work touches on the life of a young woman growing up in one of Limerick's disadvantaged regeneration areas.

It focuses on a gifted teenager who is an "outsider" in her own family, and whose younger sister becomes involved with an abusive small-time criminal.

She previously wrote to Brendan Kenny, the chief executive of the Regeneration agencies, expressing her concerns but said she was blown away by the letter she received in return, and began to think maybe it could actually work.

However, since then the public funding for the scheme has been



Close call: Helena admits to being disillusioned by how the regeneration process has stalled

severely cut.

The Clever One is Ms Close's third novel in her own name, following on from *The Cut of Love*, published by Hachette Books last May and Pinhead Duffy in 2005. It has been hailed as a "bravely written novel which explores the boundaries of love and loyalty, and the lengths we are prepared to go to in protecting them".

It was also described by one reviewer as being politically incorrect, which she said she was delighted by. "I'm very proud of that. You say it the way you see it, really."

She has already begun working on her new novel, for which she has received a bursary from the Arts Council after submitting a proposal.

"I love what I do. Even the small bursary just gives you a bit of freedom because I can take my time now and enjoy it, so I'm looking forward to writing that. And again, it will be another one set in Limerick," she said.

The prolific author has also just finished another book with Trisha Rainsford, aimed at 10 to 15-year-olds, called *Band World*, which has been sent to their agent.

She previously penned four novels under the pseudonym Sarah O'Brien with co-writer, Ms Rainsford - one of her best friends.

Now, the literary duo are also working on a short movie, while fans of Ms Close can keep up to date with her life and work through her new blog, *The Write Stuff*.

"You wouldn't know what you'd see on that," she laughed. "Sometimes I forget people are reading it."

Her most recent blog post focused on the 2.6 earthquake in Clare earlier this month - proof that life is sometimes stranger than fiction.

The Clever One by Helena Close is available to buy now in local bookshops