



Limerick salutes its brigadistas with memorial unveiling

■ Festival honours the six Limerick men who fought Franco in the Spanish Civil War

MIKE DWANE

LIMERICK has "righted a historical wrong" in honouring the six local men who travelled to Spain in the 1930s to fight Franco and fascism.

Of the six who fought in the Spanish Civil War, three were never to return to Limerick. Jim Woulfe from Athea and Emmett Ryan from Catherine Street both died in Spain. And Frank Ryan from Elton, who is still revered in Spain, was taken prisoner and brought to Nazi Germany, where he later died.

The three other Limerick men to join the International Brigades were Gerard Doyle, Paddy Brady and Joe Ryan, all from the city.

That they have now been immortalised with a permanent limestone monument outside City Hall is thanks to the efforts of the Limerick International Brigades Memorial Trust (LIBMT), a voluntary group not affiliated to any political party.

And the unveiling of the monument on Sunday by Frank Ryan's grandniece Charlotte Ryan Wetton was the culmination of a weekend-long festival organised by the trust and supported by Limerick City of Culture.

According to Ger McCloskey, spokesperson for the LIBMT: "Like all civil wars, the Spanish Civil War was a bitter conflict that pitched neighbour against neighbour and led to decades of division in Spanish society. The huge influx of foreign fighters, particularly to the Republican side, was also representative of growing international concern in relation to the rise of fascism throughout Europe."

"We are grateful to Limerick City and County Council for supporting our bid to remember those Limerick men who fought with the democratically elected Spanish government against fascism. By being provided with a site within the grounds of Limerick City Hall



The crowd who attended at City Hall on Sunday for the unveiling of a memorial to the six Limerick men who fought against Franco during the Spanish Civil War



Remembering Limerick's gun-runners

COLM WARD

THE crucial roles played by Limerick people in the importation of arms for the newly formed Irish Volunteers in the summer of 1914 will be marked with the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at Mount Trenchard Churchyard in Loughill this Sunday.

This churchyard is the last resting place of Mary Spring Rice, a prominent member of the crew of the Asgard which landed 900 rifles and ammunition at Howth, helped by her fellow crew members Erskine and Molly Childers.

Conor O'Brien of Foynes Island who later made the first circumnavigation of the globe in a vessel, the Saoirse, flying the flag of the newly independent Irish Free State, is also buried at Loughill.

O'Brien was the owner and skipper of the Kelpie in 1914 and, along with his sister Kitty and Foynes sailors George Cahill and Tom Fitzsimons, conveyed a second consignment of arms from Germany to St Tudwall's Island, off the Welsh coast.

The 600 rifles and 10,000 rounds of ammunition were transferred there to the Chotah, owned and skippered by Limerick-born Sir Thomas Myles, then president



Molly Childers and Mary Spring Rice on the Asgard

of the Royal College of Surgeons, and were landed at Kilcoole, Co Wicklow on August 1 1914.

A commemorative booklet is being published by the Mount Trenchard Memorial Committee.

The memorial plaque has been sculpted by Cliodhna Cussen, a native of West Limerick whose work is well known locally and around the country.

Members of the public are welcome at the Mount Trenchard churchyard, which lies three miles west of Foynes, on the N69 Road for the unveiling of the plaque at 2 pm on Sunday. A shuttle bus will run on the day between the churches at Foynes and Loughill to the site and visitors are asked to use this facility if possible.

An appeal to local businesses and the public is being accompanied by the sale of commemorative scrolls to raise funds for the Memorial Fund.

Kennedy the top claimant

are delighted to have a permanent public memorial to the six Limerick born brigadistas, whose efforts have previously gone largely unrecognised," said Mr McCloskey.

It was particularly fitting that Limerick City and County Council should support the festival and the erection of the memorial.

When Barcelona fell to Franco's fascists in January 1939, the members of Limerick Corporation had, according to the Limerick Chronicle, "congratulated General Franco on the capture of Barcelona and on his fight for Christianity and freedom and requested that the Government recognise the administration of the Patriot Leader".

Sinn Fein's Cllr Maurice Quinlivan said it had been a grievous historical wrong that Limerick had been the first city in Ireland and one of the first in the world to recognise one of the 20th century's great butchers as the legitimate ruler of Spain.

"With the erection of this memorial we have atoned for a huge historical wrong when the then Limerick Corporation of the 1930s passed motions of support for Franco on a number of occasions," declared Cllr Quinlivan.

"The Corporation recognised Franco's government following the fall of Barcelona in January 1939 and even sent him flowers. The dictator wrote back to the then mayor to express his gratitude in what must count as one of the most shameful periods in the political history of our city council.

"Today with the support of Limerick City and County Council and Limerick City of Culture, I am particularly proud that we have made a lasting commemoration to the six Limerick men who fought with the democratically elected government in Spain. By taking this step we have removed a stain of shame from our city's history."

Speaking for the Council, the cathaoirleach Cllr Kevin Sheahan said: "The men who fought with the International Brigade are commemorated around the world and it is fitting that those



Tony Fitzsimons and Paul Sheehan, ONE Limerick



Charlotte Ryan Wetton, grandniece of Frank Ryan, and Michael McNamara, Limerick Trades Council, looking at the memorial plaque unveiled to the Limerick men who died in the Spanish Civil War

six ordinary Limerick men who found themselves in extraordinary circumstances will now be remembered in their native place. It should also be said that a number of Limerick men who travelled to Spain in support of Franco subsequently fought fascism during the Second World War and they are also remembered on this occasion."

"This memorial project is based on a voluntary effort by a committed group of people and Limerick City and County Council is happy to support them in their effort to commemorate the part played by Limerick men in momentous world events," Cllr Sheahan added.

Ms Ryan Wetton, who lives in Kent, was only one of many who travelled from abroad to take part in the festival. Many had come

from Spain itself, while visitors from the United States, Canada and United States - including relatives of the men being honoured - also attended.

Cinta Ramblado, a Spanish member of LIBMT whose republican grandparents were among those disappeared by El Generalissimo's goons, said she was overwhelmed by the occasion.

"I am also very grateful as a person of the south of Spain to these men who came to fight for me, for all of us and for the chance of having a better world. I believe they were real citizens of the world who fought for values that still remain today and I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart," said Ms Ramblado.

Sarah Bennett, sister of Joe Ryan



Rob and Ella McNamara, Limerick, fly the colours of Republican Spain



Simon Donnelly, designer of the LIBMT memorial, alongside his work



An injured Frank Ryan, back row on right, puts his arm around fellow Limerick man Joe Ryan, in beret, during the Spanish Civil War

and the only surviving sibling of the men, also laid a wreath in their memory.

The unveiling ceremony was preceded by a procession through the streets of Limerick featuring the Spanish republican flags recently banned at the coronation of Felipe VI. Trade unionists, including SIPTU president Jack O'Connor and leading members of the movement in Limerick, also took part in the parade.

While the festival - Even the Olives Were Bleeding - included solemn ceremonies and serious lectures on the conflict and the Irish left of the 1930s, it was also a celebration of culture, film music and food. Walking tours of the city were also provided for the many

visitors.

A show by Andy Irvine and Peter O'Malley at 69 O'Connell Street on Saturday was a sellout.

And Clohessy's was the venue for much of the festivities, featuring shows from Los Paddys de las Pampas and a fusion of Irish trad and flamenco.

Those who missed many of the historical lectures on Limerick and the Spanish Civil War can still learn more by reading "From the Shannon to the Ebro", a collection of writings on the subject published by LIBMT to coincide with the festival.

The anthology is available in O'Mahony's bookshop on O'Connell Street and can also be ordered online at www.omahonys.ie

FORMER Mayor of Limerick Pat Kennedy has been paid the highest gratuity payment in the country, figures out this week show.

Former southside councillor Kennedy, who retired from local politics after almost 50 years, received a settlement of €64,204, according to figures obtained by national media this week.

The payments, known as gratuities, are made in recognition of long service and to provide support for politicians after they either lose their seat or step down from local councils.

They follow a complex formula based on the current representational payment of €16,724 annually, plus the number of years served.

Members elected before the year 2000 - like Mr Kennedy - are also entitled to extra gratia payments based on the number of years the served prior to the millennium.

The former Fine Gael councillor - who was latterly an Independent - was only able to claim €64,204 as the settlement payments are capped at 40 years.

"My own personal view would be that it would be better if councillors were not paid. But that was what was agreed by the [councillor] representative associations with the government of the day. Who am I to be the one

Mr Kennedy asked. Overall, Limerick City and County Council is facing a €750,000 bill to pay off its former members.

This comes in spite of the fact the local authority only set aside €564,000 for the payoffs scheme.

Although it has only emerged this week that Mr Kennedy is to get the highest payout of all the country's local councillors, the Limerick Leader initially revealed the councillor's gratuity settlements immediately after May's election.

Former Fianna Fail county councillor Eddie Wade is to receive €61,755 after 35 years service, while Fine Gael's Mary Jackman will take home €57,540.

Former Cathaoirleach David Naughton claimed €53,255.

There will also be payouts for 21 more councillors who either retired, or lost their seats in the local election.

According to the formula, councillors elected in 1999 will be able to claim €47,514, while this number falls to €33,448 for members elected in 2004.

Younger councillors who lost their seats, or stepped down from local politics, will not get their severance until they reach the age of 50.

Councillors are currently entitled to severance payments if they have spent a minimum of two years on the council

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Limerick sharp-shooter is new world champion

COLM WARD

LIMERICK has a new world champion after 18-year-old Rathkeale man Ian O'Sullivan took gold in one of the toughest and most prestigious events in the sport shooting calendar.

Ian secured victory in the final of the Junior Men's Trap event at the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF) World Championships last Wednesday.

The 18-year-old overcame competitors from 32 countries to take gold in the prestigious clay pigeon shooting event which is being held in Granada.

"I'm thrilled," said the delighted gold medalist who defeated Australian Jack Wallace to take victory in the final.

"I will tell them [my Irish friends] that I'm the world champion. I don't know if they will believe me!"

He admits that the result was unexpected, having entered the competition with "no expectations".

"I had a European championship and a world championship but this was an Olympic discipline and it would be way harder," Ian explained.

Trap shooting involves hitting clay targets fired from any one of a number of traps located 16 yards away from the shooter. Each target can travel up to 76 metres, at speeds of around 100kph, so speed and accuracy is essential.

"You have two shots to hit the target and you have to fire the two shots almost instantly because the target will go out of range otherwise," Ian explained.

The competition saw the young Rathkeale sharp shooter taking on 65 competitors from 32 different countries.

"Some of the lads I would

be competing against would be professional shooters. The likes of the Czech Republic, Italy, Australia, Russia - all their junior shooters would be in the army. They would be training on shooting ranges every day," he explained.

Ian, who is studying business with sport in LIT, is the third generation of his family involved in competitive shooting. Parents Brian and Valerie are understandably proud of his achievements. "We're all delighted," said Brian. "He has won a lot of stuff before but this is the Formula 1 of shooting."



Success! Ian O'Sullivan is congratulated by mum Valerie