

# POST SPECIAL REPORT

HISTORY

# Great Limerick

A NEW book featuring biographies of great Irish people has more than 30 entries from Limerick. 'Great Irish People' is the first ever county-by-county Dictionary of Irish Biography, compiling figures in Irish history from the Flight of the Earls in 1607 to the present day and

Lynda Foley extracts the some of the

## Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert (Lola Montez) 1818 – 1861

ONCE described by music composer Richard Wagner as 'A common Irish hussy with a brass neck and a personality that men found irresistible'. Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert frequently adopted the name Lola Montez and was married on many occasions. She enjoyed some success as an exotic dancer and had liaisons with a number of famous men, amongst them the Tsar of Russia Nicholas I, the French novelists Balzac and Dumas as well as the composer Franz Liszt. Around 1845, 60-year-old King Ludwig of Bavaria, who was smitten by Gilbert's charms, bestowed upon her the titles of 'Countess of Lansfeld' and 'Baroness Rosenthal' and he spared no expense in granting her anything and everything she desired. This meant that, for a not inconsiderable amount of time, Gilbert was the *de facto* ruler of Bavaria. However, due to the many rash acts she carried out, she was eventually banished from the kingdom, with the king being forced to abdicate in favour of his son, Maximilian II. Gilbert eventually travelled to the United States where a play on her life, Lola Montez in Bavaria, was successfully staged. In the final years of her life she engaged in many charitable activities before she died in New York in 1861.



## John Creaghe Physician and Anarchist 1841 – 1920

JOHN Creaghe qualified as a doctor at the Royal College of Surgeons in Dublin before establishing a medical practice in Mitchelstown County Cork which operated until 1874. He later emigrated to Buenos Aires, Argentina where he became a follower of anarchism but by 1890 Creaghe had relocated to Sheffield, England. He co-founded the Sheffield Anarchist newspaper. In 1892 he returned to Argentina where he established La Protesta in 1903; a publication that exists to this day. Although continuing to work as a doctor, Creaghe invested a considerable amount of his time, energy, and money into propagandist ventures, one of which resulted in the formation of the Regional Workers Federation of Argentina (FORA) and in 1911 he moved to the USA, settling in Los Angeles, California. There he became associated with Mexican anarchists and produced another influential anarchist newspaper, La Regeneración. During his life, Creaghe helped pioneer a movement of great significance to labour history in Argentina and Latin America in general, and he died whilst imprisoned for anarchist activities, on 19 February 1920 in Washington DC.



## Cornelius Colbert 1888-1916 and Edward Daly 1891 – 1916 - Revolutionaries

EDWARD Daly was the younger brother of Cumann na mBan founder, Kathleen Clarke, wife of Tom Clarke, who was a signatory to the Irish Proclamation of Independence. Stationed as commandant of the 1st Battalion of the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rising in the Four Courts, Daly was involved in the most intense fighting of the rising. He was forced to surrender his battalion on 29 April 1916, and was subsequently tried by court-martial and executed by firing squad on 4 May 1916. He was just 25 years old. Born in Athea, Cornelius Colbert was also executed on May 8 1916 in Kilmainham Jail for his part in the Rising. Colbert railway station in Limerick City and Con Colbert Road, Dublin are both named in his memory.



## Catherine Hayes Opera Singer 1818 – 1861

CATHERINE Hayes was born in Patrick Street and coming from a poor background, worked at the home of Lord Limerick in Henry Street as a cleaner. There, Church of Ireland bishop, Doctor Edmund Knox heard her singing as she worked and was so impressed by the quality of her voice, he arranged for her to study under Antonio Sapia in Dublin. At the age of 19, Hayes gave her first performance and she went on to become a prima donna at La Scala, Milan. In 1849 she gave a command performance to Queen Victoria with the Royal Italian Opera Company, and made a triumphant return to Limerick the following year to appear at the Theatre Royal. She gained world renown as an opera singer, touring extensively throughout Europe, Australia and the United States, where there is a street in San Francisco named after her. Throughout her life, Hayes was a generous benefactor to many charitable organisations and she helped in the restoration of St Mary's Cathedral in Limerick. She died from a stroke in London, England at the age of 43 and is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, London.



## Lady Heath Aviator 1896 – 1939

SOPHIA Theresa Catherine Mary Pierce-Evans was born in Knockderry House, Newcastle West, and was raised by two aunts from infancy after her father brutally murdered her



mother. Educated in Dublin, she was a keen athlete and was the first Irish woman to compete in the Olympics. Heath, who was also founder of the woman's Amateur Athletic Association of Great Britain, spent two years as a dispatch rider based in England and France during World War 1 and it is whilst in France that she had her portrait painted by the famous Belfast painter Sir John Lavery. She took up flying lessons in 1925 and became the first woman to hold a commercial flying licence in Britain the following year. Heath was also the first woman to parachute from an airplane and she made her name as an aviator, being the first female to fly a small open cockpit airplane from Cape Town to London, England. Married three times, it was her marriage to Sir James Heath, some 40 years her senior, that bestowed on her the title of 'Lady' and which also financed her flying ambitions. She became the first female pilot with Dutch airline KLM but unfortunately suffered a serious accident when she crashed her plane into a factory roof during the National Air Races in Cleveland, Ohio in 1929. Heath had a metal plate inserted into her skull as a result of the accident, and it had a detrimental effect on her health for the remainder of her life. She died destitute, following a fall from a tramcar in London in 1939.

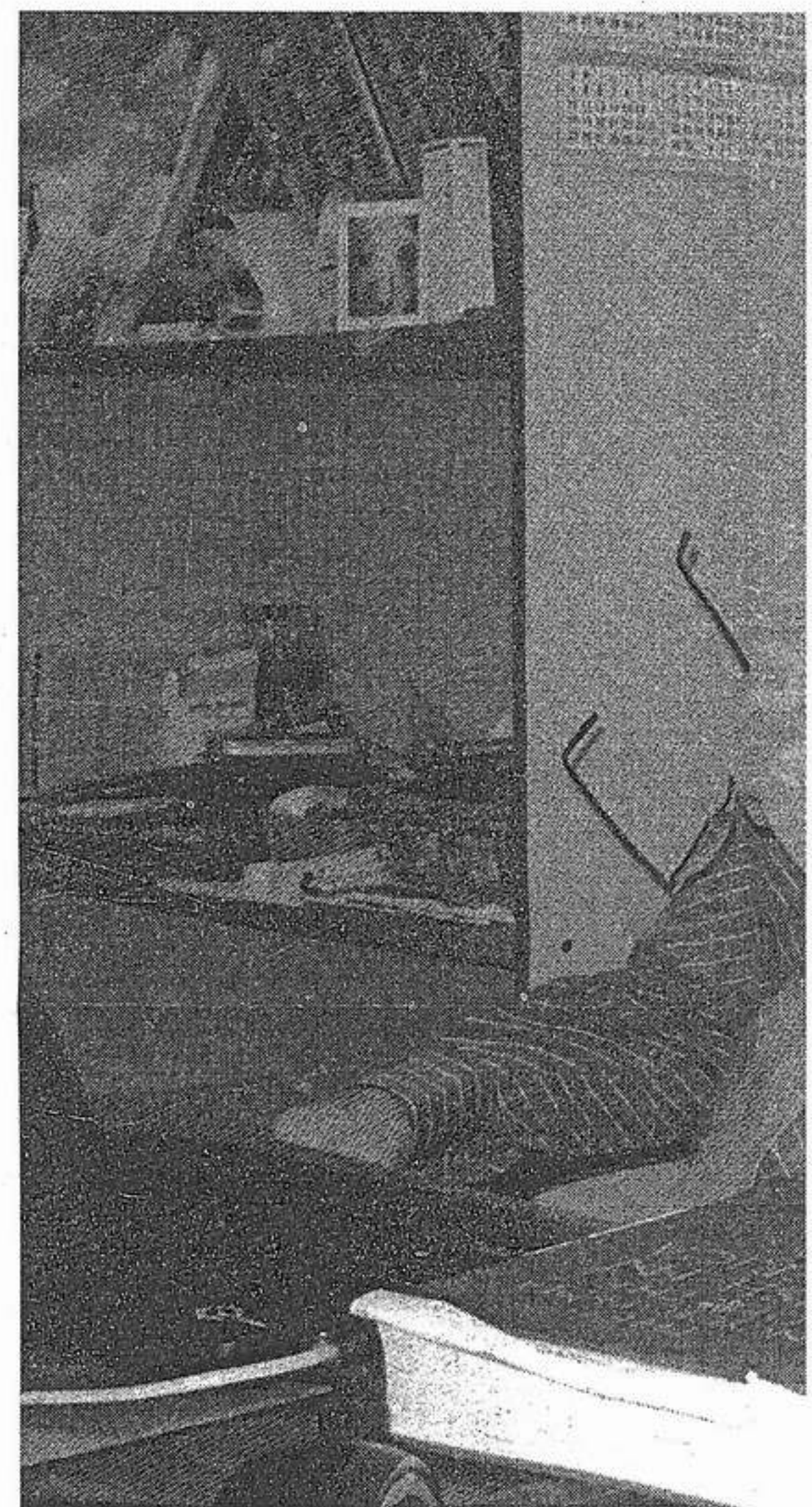
## Phillip Embury Co founder of Methodism in the United States 1728 – 1773

PHILLIP Embury was born in Ballingarrane and was educated at the village school before he became a carpenter's apprentice. On June 9 1760, he set sail from Customs House Quay for New York City and arrived on August 10. Having settled, he commenced his missionary work and in 1768, utilising his carpentry skills, he helped build the first John Street Methodist Church in Manhattan. Along with his cousin Barbara Heck, as well as Robert Strawbridge, Embury is considered to have been a co-founder of Methodism in the United States.



## Timothy Joseph Ahearne Olympic Gold Medal Winner 1885 – 1968

FROM an early age, Timothy Joseph Ahearne from Athea was a prolific performer in the long jump and triple jump at sporting events throughout Ireland. Whilst representing Great Britain and Ireland at the London Olympics in 1908, he successfully won the gold medal with his final jump and until Lynn Davies won the long jump 56 years later, Ahearne



## From Bohemian to biographer

SÉAMUS Moran was born in Ballinasloe in 1936 and educated in architecture. He lived on the Ennis Road in Limerick for many years, operating the business and enjoying a retirement of some years at Dine Restaurant at Connagh Cross as well as operating a business in Bunratty.

He went to live in Spain, where he purchased two leisure properties and operating the business and enjoying a retirement of some years. He had the opportunity to complete his dictionary of Irish biography, a memoir of Irish nationalist Thomas Francis Meagher, and a memoir of Seamus played senior rugby with Bohemians Rugby Football Club of four has been married to Vera for 55 years.

He said Limerick has produced numerous people of extraordinary civil engineer Michael O'Shaughnessy who worked in San Francisco following the earthquake there in 1906. He was the designer of the Golden Gate Bridge.

"Although O'Shaughnessy died before the bridge was completed, San Francisco said, 'Mr O'Shaughnessy, I give you your bridge'."



