

Plaque in Frank McCourt's memory unveiled at South's

■ Richard Harris and Kate O'Brien will also be part of new Limerick literary trail

ANNE SHERIDAN

THE award-winning writer Donal Ryan – who saw his work rejected by publishers nearly 50 times before critical acclaim came – has spoken about how Frank McCourt remains one of his literary inspirations.

Following the six-year anniversary of the death of McCourt, who penned the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Angela's Ashes*, Donal unveiled a plaque in his memory – outside the famous pub, South's in Limerick city, where Frank famously had his first pint.

Mr Ryan, author of *The Spinning Heart* and *The Thing about December*, said sometimes you can love a book so much you "start to kind of love its writer" and he still regrets the one opportunity he had to meet Frank.

"I could talk all the day about Frank McCourt. I only saw him in the flesh once, and he was sitting on a Limerick street, collecting for people in need – and that fact, I think, sums him up. I was too shy to even speak to him, let alone tell him I loved him. But I always regret the chance of not telling him I loved his books.

"Any time I try to be a writer I draw on Frank McCourt. Any time I try to be a teacher of writing I draw on Frank McCourt. His legacy is perfect and unassailable.

"*Angela's Ashes* was one of the greatest childhood memoirs of all time, and certainly the most beautiful, and 'Tis and Teacher Man, in many ways are books on how to live, how to teach and how to write, that will enrich the lives of readers until the end of time," he said.

Of the plaque erected outside South's on Quinlan Street, not far from where McCourt lived on Barrack Hill, Donal said it will remind visitors to the city that a "beautiful spirit once dwelled here; that these cold stones still contain some of his energy and his life.

"I'm so grateful to be asked to be here, and so proud to be part of this lovely tribute to one of the greatest sons of Limerick – Frank McCourt," he said, to rousing applause.

The plaque unveiling was co-ordinated by Dominic Taylor, of the Limerick Writers' Centre, who said "this venue will now become a stop on our literary walking tour of the city, for visitors to Limerick who



Writer Donal Ryan unveils the plaque to Frank McCourt with his younger Alphie McCourt, who travelled from New York for the event, and the metropolitan mayor of Limerick Jerry O'Dea. The plaque will be placed outside the pub this week

Picture: Michael Cowhey

wish to walk in the footsteps of a writer of inspiration".

This plaque, he said, is part of a wider project to create a Limerick Literary Trail.

In July of last year the centre unveiled a plaque outside the Locke Bar on George's Quay to commemorate war poet Robert Graves and his association with the city.

In February of this year President Michael D Higgins unveiled a plaque to poet Desmond O'Grady outside the White House bar.

It is also their intention to erect plaques around the city in memory of other writers, some famous and some well so.

Mr Taylor said they have plans to honour another 10 people with literary connections in this way

before next summer, funding permitting.

Among those they wish to erect a plaque in memory of, include Kate O'Brien, whose controversial

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Award-winning author

work was once banned in Ireland; Richard Harris, the actor, who when he wasn't gracing the big

accomplished poet. "He only had one collection of poetry published, but he was a very good poet, which many people don't realise," said Mr Taylor. Venues for the forthcoming plaques have yet to be set in stone, he added, and emphasised that all the work of the writers' centre is voluntary.

Angela's Ashes details Frank having his first alcoholic drink in South's and it had been a regular stop-off for him whenever he returned to Limerick.

"It was Frank's favourite pub in Limerick and he regularly called in on his return visits, as a result it is a must stop off for tourists who come to Limerick, after they have visited the Frank McCourt Museum around the corner," he added.

Alphie, who lives in New York, was among those in attendance for the unveiling, and said their mother Angela would be very proud. "Today represents yet another bridge, despite all the begrudgery that has gone before. As they say, the definition of Irish Alzheimer's is we forget everything but the grudge," said Alphie, who like his brother Malachy, has also written his own memoirs.

He said Frank, who referred to himself as "only the teacher", "loved Limerick, the people in the lane, their humour, their humility, and their ability to carry on".

The ladies and gents' toilets in the pub are named Angela and Frank on the door, in a nod to McCourt and his mother.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Funding sought for Manor Fields carpark

THE group behind the Manor Fields complex in Adare is seeking funding from Limerick City and County Council to pay for a new carpark to service the facility.

Chairman James Collins and secretary Elaine Sparling presented their plans to councillors from the Adare Rathkeale area this month. They include the development of a full-size astroturf pitch built to FIFA regulations. This will be in addition to the facilities that are already in place including an all-abilities playground and grass playing pitches.

Mr Collins the construction of the astroturf pitch would give them the ability to attract sports organisations to use the facilities, thereby generating revenue.

He added that the money for the astroturf pitch had been secured but that they were seeking funding for the carpark from the council.

Call for public meeting on Curraghchase

INDEPENDENT councillor for the Adare-Rathkeale area, Emmett O'Brien, has called for Coillte to provide a public information evening for the people of Limerick to allow them voice their input into the future management of Curraghchase park.

Mr O'Brien welcomed the reopening of the camping and caravan park. "I have recently, however, spoken to local constituents in the Kilcornan area on the matter I sense over the last number of years Coillte has not been as proactive as it could in terms of promoting the positive of the parks and selling it as a tourist destination," he said. "I have called for a public information evening to be held in Kilcornan Community Centre as I there seems to be a distinct lack of communication from Coillte with us councillors and the locals. It is important that users of this wonderful park have an input."

Neville calls for speed ramps in Askeaton

TOM Neville, the Fine Gael councillor for the Adare-Rathkeale area, has called for the erection of speed ramps on the road into the Askeaton soccer club grounds.

"This is a residential area which sees clusters of traffic volumes at match times, training and other events," he

told this month's meeting of the Adare-Rathkeale municipal district. "There is particular danger with traffic coming from the other areas who are not fully aware of the access road and its surroundings. From my understanding speed ramps need to be within five metres of a public light and there is adequate public lighting located along this road. I'm calling on the council to prioritise



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