

Limerick author is acclaimed in London

By LEADER REPORTER

SIXTY-FIVE-year-old Jerry O'Neill might not be too well-known in his native Limerick for his literary prowess but in England he has been receiving rave reviews for his two recently-published books.

Yes, it is all happening for the son of former Limerick postmaster Ned O'Neill, with film rights of his book sold and the BBC wanting to write a six-part serial for television.

But his new-found fame did not come easily. "I went around for 11 months to just try and get someone to read my work — it was impossible — but when eventually someone did, they liked it," he explained while home on a trip to his native Limerick.

Sexton Street

A former minor footballer with Limerick and captain of the first-ever minor football team to come out of C.B.S. Sexton Street, J. M. O'Neill has had an exciting and varied life.

He grew up in Cecil Street and his family were very well known in the city and employed about 10 people in a thriving cooperage.

After school he got a job with the Bank of Ireland and can thank them for posting him to Kilrush where he met his wife, the then Mary Murray. Itching to travel, he headed to London and worked with Colonial Bank and soon was off to Nigeria and the Gold Coast.

After exciting years abroad, it was back to London and he worked as an agent in the building trade. In 1966 he left that job and rented a pub and established the Sugawyn Theatre and Sugawyn kitchen for traditional Irish music.

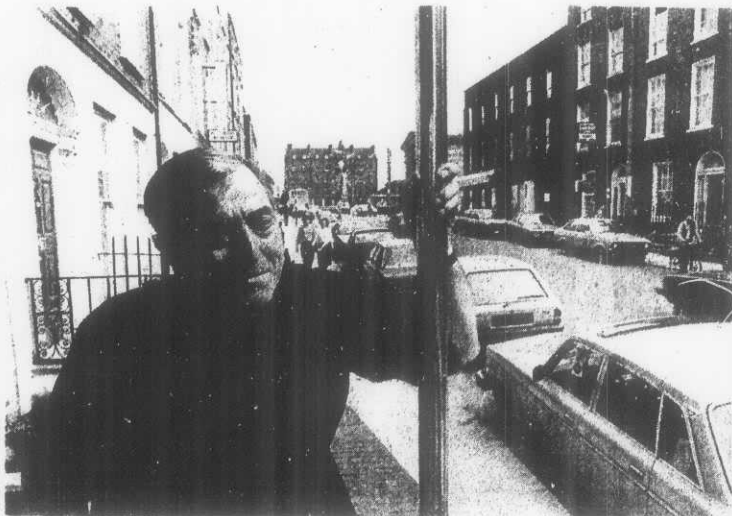
"There were many callers and people like the Furey Brothers and Davy Arthur, Paul Brady all played there," he recalled.

Long hours

The long hours of working in a pub took its toll and he decided to call it a day. While in the pub he had written one play which had got good reaction.

He went on to write other plays but then turned his energies towards writing books: "It was a lean time in London for stage plays with all the musicals so I went for a novel."

He writes under J. M. O'Neill and his two books "Duffy is Dead" and "Open Cut" are doing very well. He has appeared on BBC and got good reviews and subsequently RTE, UTV, Radio London and BBC Radio 4 were among the



Back home in Limerick, author J. M. O'Neill.

other networks to recognise his talents.

The Daily Telegraph, Observer and Guardian gave very positive reviews which pleased him very much.

He jokingly recalled one reviewer's comments about "Duffy is Dead": "He said there was a lot of humour and hardness which amounted to poetry at times — it was a bit over the top but I will take all the praise I can get."

"Open Cut" is more in the thriller category and, he feels, is more popular with the masses. But he believes that his better work is in "Duffy is Dead".

Marvellous

"Duffy is Dead" is mournful, funny, warm, a marvellous comedy of Irish low-life, lovingly set among the streets, shops, pubs and people of London's East End. With its quirky, quicksilver wit, this remarkable novel shows J. M. O'Neill to be a writer of extraordinary talent," according to Heinemann, London, the publishers.

"Open Cut" is set in the building world and with the film rights purchased, hopefully will hit the screen shortly.

He is currently working on a third book and is concentrating on this before he takes up any other job offers. "I think it is better to concentrate on one thing at a time" — so the BBC will have to wait.

He has written numerous plays but it was in this newspaper that he first saw his work in print. The late Gerry Ryan, chief reporter with the Limerick Leader, persuaded Jerry to write pen pictures on his colleagues on the C.B.S. football team. "I was on air when I saw it — two feet off the ground," he remembers.

Friends

Friends he recalls include Frank and John Thompson (Frank the undertaker and John the architect), George O'Connor, insurance agent, and of course former neighbour Tom Collins, publican, Cecil Street.

LEADING ITALIAN EXPERT JUDGE E

By A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

THE EXHIBITION of Visual Art (EVA), now in its 11th year, is due to take place in the Limerick City Art Gallery from 24th October to November 28th next.

Idea Panicelli, curator of the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna in Rome, is to select and adjudicate for the event.

Scholar

Born in Rome in 1949, she studied art history at the University of Rome, graduating in 1972. She was external assistant curator at the Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna, Rome, 1972-1976, and curator at the Palazzo Ducale, Mantova, 1976-1978, before moving to her present position in 1978. Since 1984 she has been co-editor of "Bell Italia" with Radio Televisione Italiana.

A Fulbright scholar, she has lectured and written extensively on art as well as being curator of many important exhibitions.

She contributes regularly to exhibition catalogues and magazines including Art Forum (New York), Neue Kunst in Europe (Munich), Il Giornale dell'Arte (Turin), Fasset (Zurich), Figure (Rome), and L'Espresso (Rome).

The EVA awards this year comprise a patrons award of £1,000 to the most outstanding work in the exhibition, and three

open award. The City is now the previous and more expected. Artists work at: Belfast Ireland, 7th and 8th p.m. Cork - Tobin Str a.m.-5 p.m. Dublin Temple Septembe Limeric Square, 1 p.m. Further about the from the E Gallery, Phone 06



Rita Lillis, Abbeyview, Adare, enjoying a glass of wine with friends and fellow staff members at the Arduh Ryan Hotel, Ennis Road, after winning £5,000 in the National Lottery. Also included are Kieran Walsh, Maura Ryan, Marie Maher, Catherine Finnerty, Eileen Crowe and Noleen Mullins.

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