tting the finishing touches to her miniature horse and cart at the rs' summer play camp in Southill. (LL)

BYRNES ON TUESDAY

A WEEKLY MISCELLANY WITH MARTIN BYRNES

JACK BOURKE came to Limerick in 1953.

He was young and idealistic, and had come to run the City Theatre, which the family had acquired.

And what better man—steeped in the tradition of Dublin theatre, a tradition which spanned the generations from the time when Dublin was the second city of the Empire and acted accordingly.

Jack's father, Lorcan, had presided, almost lorded, over Irish theatre.

He owned the Gaiety and Queens theatres, the Masterpiece and Capitol cinemas in Dublin, was managing director of Eamonn Andrews Studios (Eamonn was his son-in-law) and his costume supply company and theatrical lighting firm were known to every group, professional or amateur the length of the land.

Like his son, he was elected to the local Corporation, and was deputy Lord Mayor of Dublin on a variety of occasions.

But it is Lorcan's father in turn of whom this story tells. Because Jack Bourke's grandfather, P J Bourke, is the subject of a major new scholarly book written by the Associate Professor of English at the University of Iowa and published by Syracuse University Press, New York state.

And it shows him to have been instrumental in keeping the flame of nationalism alive through the rough days at the early part of this century.

He wrote plays, he acted in them, he ran theatres and had a professional company of actors.

The title of book, *For the Land They Loved,* is taken from one of P J Bourke's plays about the 1798 Rebellion, *For the Land She Loved.*

It bears the proud subtitle of "Irish Political Melodramas, 1890-1925".

P J Bourke was born in Dublin in 1883, but his father, Lauerence died just nine years later.

By the time the boy was twelve, his mother was dead too, and he spent the next six years being cared for by a variety of aunts in Kildare and Wicklow.

But the theatre beckoned, and he moved, alone, to Dublin at eighteen, a van-man for Arnotts by day, and producing simple plays in obscure venues by night—painting scenery and making costumes himself.

Married in 1905 to Margaret Kearney, the two set about establishing a business. She, a professional seamstress, began sewing backdrops for the Gaiety—a daunting task, as the stage was forty feet across.

And P J was writing. His most popular play, *When Wexford Rose*, was premiered in the Father Mathew Hall in 1910 and produced in the more spacious Queen's Theatre in 1912. Others of his works were *For Ireland's Liberty* and *In Dark and Evil Days* (both 1914) and *For the Land She Loved* (1915),

P J was an actor, a good accordeon player, and a devastating mimic. He had developed quite a reputation by his early twenties, and had gathered about him the band of actors, his so-called No 1 Company.

The American book states: "Bourke's was a talent for the times—politically passionate, thoroughly theatrical, socially aware."

And he toured, bringing his No 1 Company to Limerick playing, we understand, the Lyric.

Bourke wrote and produced Ireland's first full-length film in 1917, *Ireland, a Nation*, using the same melodramatic skills which he had perfected in his stage work. The exercise cost him a fortune, and nearly beggared him when it was banned after just one night's performance at the Rotunda.

His plays had been closely watched by Dublin Castle too,

As early as 1914, the posters for his *In Dark and Evil Days* were ordered to be taken down or painted over all around Dublin. This play was performed successfully as a result, filling houses at various re-productions up to 1925.

He produced *For the Land She Loved* at the Abbey—just. The Castle gave out loudly to the theatre manager, St John Ervine, who manfully stood his ground, but barred Bourke from his theatre thenceforward.

Referring to Dublin in 1915 as a pressure cooker, the author Cheryl Herr, says that Bourke was directing his plays at working class people—not the usual Abbey patrons.

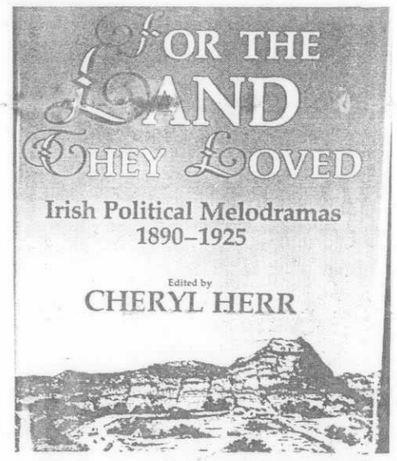
And in the immediate aftermath of the 1916 Rising, Bourke's *Insurgent Chief* drew appreciative crowds to the Queens.

In fact, the book reproduces four plays of the time in full, Bourke's *When Wexford Rose* and his *For the Land She Loved*, as well as J W Whitbread's *Lord Edward, or '98* and *Wolfe Tone*, by the same author.

These are taken to represent the genre of the Irish political melodramatic theatre of the time up to the establishment of the Free State and beyond.

But the book also tells a tale which is well worth telling—about how one family dominated the theatrical scene in this country in its heyday—up to the coming of film and television.

P J Bourke himself died in 1932, by which time his family was firmly established as the primary family of Irish theatre production.



The front cover of the new book.

QUEENS
—Twenty-six— THEATRE (as Reserved St. Dublin)
6-30 | Twice Nightly | 8-30
MONDAY, 26th APRIL, '20, and during the week
P. J. BOURKE'S
FOR THE LAND SHE LOVED
TIME THE SPRING OF 1798
Produced by J. B CARRICKFORD
Irish and Ensemble Dances arranged by EILEEN I'ENNOX MAGEE
Songs by J. L. Sullivan and Lena Pembroke
SEATS BOOKED AT THEATRE
Dress Circle 2/4
TEL. 0956
Gallery 6d. | Pit 1/2 | Upper Circle 1/6 | Grand Circle 2/9 | Stalls 3/6

The first play produced in the Abbey by P J Bourke.

Garryowen greens are a rat trap – councillor

THE GRASS is so unkempt at Garryowen that rats will be able to use the tall grass as cover to come right up to the houses and to where children play acording to Cllr Kieran O'Hanlon.

He says that the sports clubs keep their pitches mown, but that there are large areas which are overgrown.

He is satisfied that the growth carries potential dangers to children and, accepting that City Hall is hugely in debt, suggests that one comprehensive cut now would at least reduce the hazard.

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