North East

AREA NEWS

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Author James rustling up novels about local cowboys

James Dee tells Patricia Feehily that if you squint you can see Clint in Silvermines

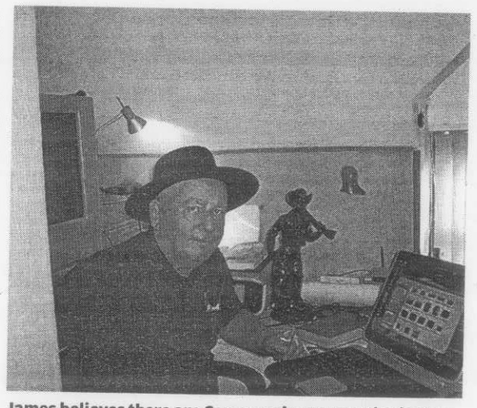
BACK in the 1970s, he was the first Irish military policeman to walk the streets of Beirut.

Now ex-army man from Murroe, James Dee has become a prolific writer of Westerns – all based in what he calls "real cowboy and injun territory" in the Slieve Felims, the Galtees and the Silvermines.

He has just finished his fourth novel, and is working on his fifth.

The first, And Bring your Bowley, published by Choice Publishing based on his young days in Murroe, got great reviews. Now he is concentrating on Westerns.

"My cowboys have mostly Irish names, though their nicknames are usually the stereotypical names of the Western genre. Their speech is a mixture of the old cowboy lingo and the Irish way of speaking. Neither species spoke Oxford English, so don't be looking out for grammatically correct dialogue," he warned.



James believes there are Commanche war parties in the hills ... if you look closely enough , that is

His third novel, which was published before Christmas, sounds especially intriguing, but it's actually downright hilarious. It was his first Western and he called it Massacre at Union Junction.

The hero is a gunslinger called Shallee Kid who sadly never fulfilled his father's ambition of appearing even briefly in a Tipperary hurling jersey because of poor "hand to eye" co-ordination.

Instead of ending up in politics like a true GAA star, he becomes a cowboy and wipes out half the countryside, which James says is now even more ironic than he ever intended it to be.

"I don't know where he came from. I just thought of the name, wrote it down and the story flowed from there. But I think there's a bit of myself in him.

"When I was a kid in school in Newport, I was turned down for a place on the hurling team that afterwards won two All-Ireland Vocational Schools finals.

"I was told I had poor hand to eye co-ordination. I didn't know what that was, but the teacher told me to go away and work on it."

He was devastated, he said, but often wondered what would have happened if he had been selected and had pulled on the Tipperary jersey.

"Would I have burst into flames at the touch of those devil colours. Would the blue and gold have weakened my east Limerick blood like Kryptonite weakened Superman?"

But either way, he wasn't deterred.

"I tried to wear the green and white jersey too, got a trial for the Limerick minors playing at centre field, but I was laid out at a match down in Doon. A gangly youth from Doon cleaved the head off me and I bit the dust." he said.

He won't say where exactly in east Limerick the showdown in Massacre at Union Junction takes place, but "there's a four crossroads in Union bog behind my mother's house in Murroe, and if you want to say that's where the junction is located, I'll just deny it".

He doesn't see anything incongruous about basing a Western in east Limerick and North Tipperary.

"I love the area. I travel home to Murroe via Silvermines and every time I stop in the village and look up towards the church, I can almost see Clint Eastwood striding down the street. And if you look up at the hills behind, you can see a war party of Commanche cresting the hilltop – if you look closely enough".

His fourth novel, Wixted's Gold, is also a Western, but this one is based in the Galtees, where presumably you can also see Indians if you look closely.

Anyway, Western lore is in his blood. A great-uncle of his, William Sweeney, was an "injun fighter", stationed at Fort Sidney, Nebraskba, back in the 1880s.

"I joined the army as a young fellow and served in the Lebanon. I served as a military policeman with UNIFIL and I was the first Irish policeman to walk the streets of Beirut. I didn't hear of anyone before me anyway".

The novel he is currently writing is based on his army days.

He has been writing all his life.

"In the beginning, I wrote articles for Ireland's Own and then for the army magazine An Cosantoir."

He and his second wife, Catherine, live in Ferbane. His first wife, Colette, died a few years ago.

Massacre at Union Junction is available from Choice Publishing, Drogheda, and can be ordered online

Fears that downturn could hit Castleconnell sports facilities

FEARS are growing in Castleconnell that the slowing of housing development in the village could see Limerick County Council abandoning its plan to ensure new sporting facilities for the expanding community.

In the council's village development plan, up to 43 hectares were earmarked for development, most of it for housing.

But at least one large estate and a substantial extension to another estate have been stalled in the recession, and the 12 to 14 acres proposed for acquisition for sporting amenities to cater for the increasing population may not now materialise.

Pat Dempsey, chairman of the local development association, said that there was a crying need for land for sporting facilities and other amenities to cater for a population that had already expanded anyway..

"There is a lack of open space. We have some passive open space, riverside walks etc, but they need to be further developed and improved.

"Open space for more active pursuits is in very short supply, with one GAA field and one temporary soccer pitch available. The soccer club, in particula, has a very uncertain future because of this," Mr Dempsey said.

The soccer pitch at Castleconnell: future development of the local club's facilities are in doubt due to the downturn

The chairman said that the needs of the area should not be denied because of a reduction in planned developments, or because some planned developments had been shelved.

He pointed out that there was no open space available to accommodate multi-purpose playing pitches, an athletic track, handball alley, or indoor sports such as squash, no playground and no cycle tracks

"These facilities should be an essential part of the social infrastructure of any modern town or village," he said.

"We are working with the council to ensure that a landbank such as that mentioned in the plan is made available to the community. Another meeting is being arranged to discuss this matter further," he said.

He said that they were hopeful of a positive outcome, but the current circumstances had worried them.

"During the unprecedented development of Castleconnell in the past few years, substantial development levies were collected. We now believe that significant funding to make land available to the community should be available. We are waiting with interest the outcome of our campaign," he said.

Landowners urged to cut their hedges

BRIAN Stokes, local election candidate for Castleconnell area, wants landowners to cut hedges that are enroaching on the roadways and posing risks to walkers.

"In recent weeks, sev-

"Often at this time of year, hedges have grown up to the margin of the road as they were not cut after the summer. This causes many pedestrians difficulty when walking as they cannot move in from

1. The law on hedge cutting is outlined by Section 40 of the Wildlife Act 1976, incorporating section 46 of the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000.

At risk

"In some cases, the county council may have already raised concerns about a particular hedgerow and have asked the landowner to cut it," Mr Stokes said.

"That leaves two weeks

Newport Historical Society recalls fair days

HISTORIC fair days of old will be recalled at a talk in O'Sullivan's lounge in Newport this Thursday night, organised by Newport Historical Society.

The speaker is well-known local historian Liam Armshaw from Cappawhite, and it promises to be

This is one of many events organised by Newport Historical Society, which was first formed in the early 1980s.

"It was formed by local people who thought we were losing our sense of place and forgetting the valuable lessons from the past. It not only in Newport, but around the area and further afield".

"All our members enjoy an open approach to history and associated topics Although serious when needed, a lighthearted manner is the rule of thumb. Good companionship is obligatory. Each month

New members and guests are always welcome.

"We recently launched our book, Ballymakeogh Old Church and Graveyard, edited by Patrick J Ryan. This wonderful book took several years to compile, with its thousend of entries and detailed,