

# O'Malley recalls life in the shadow of the gunmen

■ Former minister also describes friendship with the late Det Garda Jerry McCabe

MIKE DWANE

DES O'Malley says his children were "fortunately too young" to have a clear memory of the occasion on which a coffin was landed into the front garden of the family home in Corbally.

As Minister for Justice in the early 1970s, he led the fight against subversives at a time of great uncertainty. Regarded as an authoritarian by republicans, this was the minister who introduced the non-jury Special Criminal Court, banned Sinn Féin from the airwaves and who had even identified possible camps should the introduction of internment prove necessary.

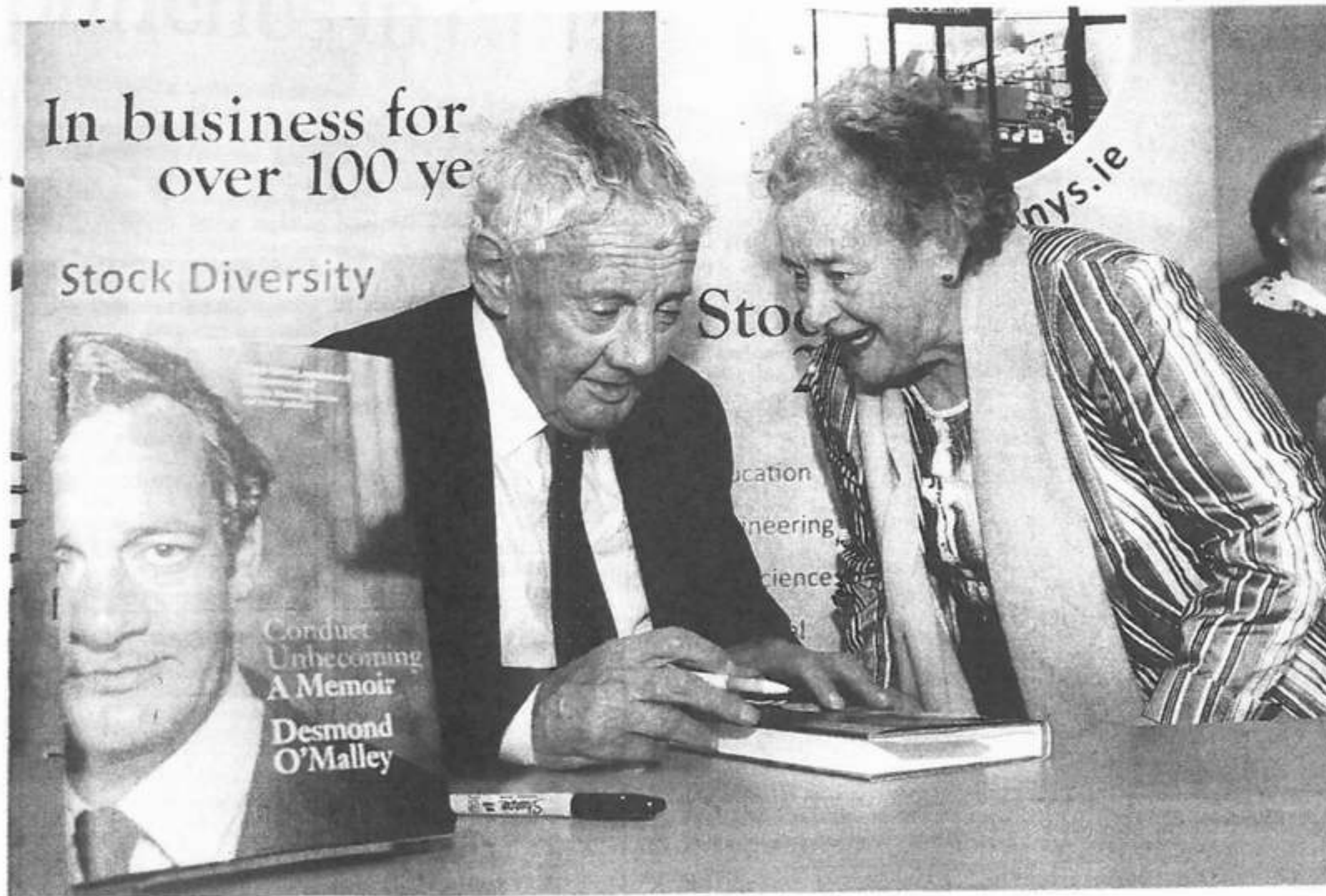
It wasn't, but the gardai did find it necessary for Des O'Malley to carry a gun at all times. And in his newly published memoir, *Conduct Unbecoming*, he describes the occasion when staying with a friend in Ballsbridge – at a time when he was advised to never stay longer than a week in any one place – and officers ordering him to get on the floor. A rifle with a telescopic sight had been found in a flat across the road that had been rented a few weeks earlier by someone with a northern accent.

He was in Dublin when the coffin was thrown into his front garden in Limerick. But his wife Pat and their young children were at home.

"They used to throw in red paint as well. That was supposed to represent blood, you see," says Mr O'Malley after a marathon two-hour book signing in which all 250 copies at O'Mahony's on O'Connell Street were snapped up.

Pat, to whom he dedicates the last word in his memoir for putting up with the stresses and absences, seems to have taken the intimidation in her stride.

"Do you know I met two men here today to get books signed? They were both retired gardai who used to spend part of 1970 in our garage. They said she used to make



Des O'Malley signs a copy of his memoir *Conduct Unbecoming* for Monita Holland, Strandville, at O'Mahony's bookshop on Saturday

Pictures: Gareth Williams

if they knew there was a march coming out to the house, would advise Pat to take the kids out in advance and she would take them away for a few hours."

Even after Des O'Malley left ministerial office in 1973, he still needed security. And among the gardai assigned to him was his late friend Jerry McCabe, murdered by the IRA in Adare in 1996.

"When I would come from Dublin, himself and Ben O'Sullivan [seriously injured in the same

strange thing you don't see now at all. It was very uncomfortable, a big comedown from the Mercedes. I used to say 'Why are you in this kind of car Jerry?' 'It has a great engine,' he would say. 'It will do 150 miles an hour if we ever need it to'. They were both trained to drive fast and they would alternate. One would drive, I would be in the front seat and the other would be in the back seat with a submachine gun. That's the way we used to go around."

*Conduct Unbecoming* recalls the

detective had told Mr O'Malley it was "the boys down the road in Patrickswell we have to watch".

"And of course among those who killed him was one of these people from Patrickswell," he says.

Much of *Conduct Unbecoming* focuses on Mr O'Malley's political tussles with Charles Haughey before and after he was drummed out of Fianna Fail.

And while he is magnanimous enough to recognise Haughey's organisational, intellectual and

are still around today. "To some extent you could say things have improved and that the problems today, the type of cronyism we are seeing, is not as financially blatant as it was. There isn't the same degree of favouritism of a major kind like there was in that time in the 1980s.

"Appointing people to boards and that is nice for their ego but it isn't a huge deal. But it is still apart of that mentality that grew up in this country, unfortunately, fostered in the past and it won't disappear

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Maternity hospital remembrance service

UNIVERSITY Maternity Hospital Limerick will hold their annual remembrance service on Sunday, November 2 (3pm) in the Church of the Holy Rosary, Ennis Road, Limerick.

The service is in acknowledgement and remembrance of babies who have died through miscarriage, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirth or neonatal death. This special event creates a space for parents, families and staff to honour babies who have lived just short lives but have left lasting impressions on the lives of those who love them.

Commenting on the event, Marie Hunt, bereavement counselling midwife added: "The event marks the significance of these babies lives; regardless of gestation, and affords family, friends and those who cared for them an opportunity to reflect and grieve for the loss of their loved ones. There will be an opportunity to acknowledge each baby by name if families wish as each baby's name is called out followed by a special candle lighting ceremony".

All affected by early infant loss are welcome.

### Dolan's art sale in Castletroy Park Hotel

HUNDREDS of people are expected to attend the ever popular autumn art and antiques sale from Dolan's auction house in the Castletroy Park hotel on Sunday week.

The auction will take place on Sunday, November 9, from 2pm, with telephone bidding also available. Viewings of all lots are open to the public on Friday, November 7, from 12.30 – 8pm, and on Saturday, November 8 from 10am – 8pm.

Some of the art for sale is by artists such as Norman Teeling, Val Byrne, Arthur K Maderson, Robert Eggington, Limerick born Henry Morgan, landscapes of Ballybunion beach by John Morris, along with three pieces by the late Limerick artist Jack Donovan. One of the most expensive pieces up for sale, Burren Storm, is an acrylic on linen by Charles Harper, RHA, priced from €4,000 to €6,000. The full catalogue is available to view online.

### Dr Ed Walsh to give a talk on silversmithing

AS part of Limerick Craft Hub's celebration of National Design Week, Dr Edward Walsh, UL President Emeritus, will deliver an illustrated talk on silver and silverworking with special reference to Limerick and demonstration of silver working techniques.

"Showcasing the best of design, handmade in Limerick, the Limerick Craft Hub is proud to host the renowned Dr Walsh, whose wealth of knowledge in silversmithing and in particular the history of the world famous Limerick silver



young to recall it really. The gardai,

they were kept on. We used to go around in a blue Vauxhall car, a

in Adare in March 1996.

They joked that nothing ever happened in Adare and the late

somebody who had a profoundly corrosive and corrupting influence on Irish public life, traces of which

overnight," says Mr O'Malley. *Conduct Unbecoming* is published by Gill and Macmillan and is now on sale at €24.99

will delight the audience to this free event. During the week of national celebration of Irish design, it is all the more relevant to hear and see live silversmithing in Limerick, echoing the traditions of the past through to the modern silversmithing studio in the Limerick Craft Hub," said Clare Jordan.

It takes place on Tuesday, November 4 at 7.15pm at the hub, which is on Lower Cecil Street.



Peter and Bernadette Boylan, Ennis Road



Pat Kearney of Rooney Auctioneers gets Mr O'Malley to sign a copy



Colette Cotter of O'Mahony's Bookstore with the author

## Dessie pulls no punches in candid memoir

MIKE DWANE

OFTEN abrupt while still in office, it would be unrealistic to expect Des O'Malley to sugar the pill in his memoir.

And *Conduct Unbecoming* is all the better for that approach. Conversational and sometimes almost bitchy in tone, there are withering one-line assessments of those who he crossed in political life.

Albert Reynolds is given a fool's pardon for his perjury accusation at the Beef Tribunal as the former Taoiseach didn't have the capacity to understand the evidence. Pádraig Flynn was "positively repulsive" during that Reynolds administration. Former running mate Willie O'Dea is portrayed as

somebody with limited interests in life outside of politics and an anecdote is told of how the sitting TD was out canvassing the morning after the general election results were in.

"The unfortunate man seemed to have nothing else to do and no other interests," O'Malley writes.

The author warned last month that *Conduct Unbecoming* would likely upset the Haughey family but said that could not be helped.

They won't be the only ones in a memoir that is candid in the extreme. We are not four paragraphs in when O'Malley's predecessor in the Department of Justice Micheál Ó Móráin is described as "fond of drink and derelict in his duty" at a time when all hell is about to break loose in the

form of the Arms Crisis of 1970.

Another portrayed as fond of the sauce is the former Bishop of Limerick Dr Jeremiah Newman.

"Conduct unbecoming" was infamously the charge which led to O'Malley being expelled from Fianna Fail for his failure to oppose Barry Desmond's measures to make condoms more widely available in 1985. But Fianna Fail were not the only ones putting pressure on O'Malley over contraception.

Knowing that O'Malley saw no reason to oppose the bill, the bishop had sent two emissaries – one a priest, the other a cousin of O'Malley's – to the home of the backbench TD.

"The priest was clearly uncomfortable with the task he had been given. 'His Lordship feels you

should vote against this legislation. He feels that as a Catholic you should abide by his guidance," he told O'Malley before being despatched to tell the bishop the TD would use his own judgement.

A few years later, O'Malley – now leader of the Progressive Democrats – is pointedly snubbed when Haughey comes to Limerick to open the Shannon Bridge.

Having signalled the new party favoured a separation of Church and State, O'Malley was crossing the new bridge when he heard a "roar" behind him from a "worse for wear" bishop.

"If you think you are going to separate church and state you are very wrong. You'll only be able to do that over my dead body," Bishop Newman had warned him

before launching into a "torrent of criticism. I realised he was tired an emotional and eased away from him into the crowd," O'Malley writes.

Nor does the author spare himself from criticism: for remaining as PD leader for too long; for not having the personality for such a role and so on. But his "greatest failure" in political life had nothing to do with his battle against the IRA during the Troubles nor his own troubles with the Haughey faction.

Rather, it was failing to persuade Limerick city officials not to repeat the mistakes in the planning of Southill by building a similar large estate on the northside.

"We've been reaping the social costs of those decisions for several decades now," he says.

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## DESSIE'S EARLY DAYS: SNAPSHOTS FROM THE POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE YEAR

### On his early years in Limerick

When I was growing up in the 1950s the Catholic Church had a big influence on life in Limerick. The clergy probably had a stronger grip in the city than in other places. The local bishops were milder men than their counterparts in Dublin or in Galway or in Cork. But the real religious influence in Limerick was not in the bishop's palace: power resided with the Redemptorist Order, which was very much in its fire-and-brimstone phase.

The Redemptorists had an excessive degree of control. Their zeal drove many people away from Limerick, including the local novelist Kate O'Brien, whose books were banned. I remember being in a cinema in the city when there was a commotion in the back seats. A Redemptorist priest was stalking the aisles with an umbrella in his hand. He had spied some poor fellow who had his arm around a girl. For this indiscretion this fellow had been poked in the back with the point of the umbrella. It was common practice for cinema-owners to allow the Redemptorists into films to make sure

there was no hanky-panky when the lights went down.

### On his short-lived amateur drama career

When I came back to Limerick from UCD I threw myself into amateur dramatics [picture below] with the College Players and the Old Crescent Players. I particularly remember a production of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and a comedy, *My Three Angels* by Samuel and Bella Spewack, that was a commercial success. I entered the Féile Luimnigh drama competition, performing a number of extracts from Shakespeare plays, including *Richard III*. The adjudicator was Ria Mooney, artistic director of the Abbey Theatre. She was staying with an aunt of mine during the week of the festival, and I think she felt the need to repay the favour, as I got through to the Munster final in Charleville. This time the adjudicator, who was from Wales, brought me down to earth. Worse was to follow.



The drama critic of the Limerick Leader – who wrote anonymously, but everyone knew he was the army chaplain at Sarsfield Barracks – delivered a withering review of my performance. "Des O'Malley's Richard the Third might more accurately have been called Richard the one-third because that was about all he got out of it."

### On his uncle, Donogh O'Malley (right)

Donogh's reputation as a hell-raiser was well established. One story will suffice. He and one of his boon companions, a tiny man with large jug ears, went off to Shannon Airport on one occasion. Shannon was a 24-hour airport and therefore had a 24-hour bar licence. An American woman in the bar appeared to be fascinated by the small man's appearance, which prompted Donogh to approach her and ask her if she would like to buy the little fellow, that he was an authentic leprechaun. The woman declared that she coveted nothing more in the world than her own leprechaun, and the price was struck at \$100. Jug Ears was half way to the plane before he realised what was afoot and began to protest.

The \$100 was restored to the woman and the little fellow was restored to the bar.

I have to be honest in saying that my father had a lot of trouble with Donogh. When my father was ill, and I was studying in Dublin, he asked me to meet Donogh to talk about a matter in which my father was helping him. He was difficult. I didn't get any co-operation. My father was considerably more tolerant than I was. The real shame of Donogh's premature death was that by this time he had quietened down a good deal and was becoming more effective in using his talents to good effect as a Government minister. That final stage of his life was tragically short. I think that if he had lived he would have been at the height of his powers in the 1970s. As against that, his mother told me in 1970, when she was over 90, that she now understood why God had taken Donogh when he did. "If Donogh was still alive he would have been involved with his pals Haughey and Blaney in whatever they were up to."



## Flood risk consultation in three county towns

A PUBLIC consultation day on draft flood maps in Croom, Askeaton and Rathkeale will take place on Thursday, November 6 in each of the three towns. The draft maps are being drawn up as part of the National Catchment-based Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Programme. This is aimed at identifying areas at risk of flooding and developing long term, sustainable plans to address this risk.

Work on the draft flood maps has involved extensive surveying and analysis of river flows and the development of computer models to determine how flooding occurs. Based on this work, a range of draft flood maps has been produced by Jacobs Engineering on behalf of the Office of Public Works.

The public consultations will be held in Croom Enterprise Centre between 1pm and 7.30pm, in Askeaton Library from 2.30pm to 4.30pm and from 6pm to 7.30pm and Rathkeale Library from 12pm to 1pm and 5.30pm to 7.30pm.