

A Celebration of the Life of

Professor Liam Ryan





Professor **Liam Ryan**

Introduction

Liam Ryan, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Maynooth University, Limerick man, hurler, story teller, priest, writer and local historian passed away in May 2015. Liam's lengthy career at Maynooth coincided with the development of the university as a secular institution and the flourishing of the social sciences. In this small publication produced to coincide with the memorial event, we have gathered the reflections and reminiscences of Liam's former colleagues, students, family and friends. They testify to Liam's contributions to sociology and social policy, to the life of the university and to the lives of the many people he touched in the course of his professional and pastoral career. The testimonials assembled here include memories of Liam, favourite anecdotes, stories that reveal his character and personality, as well as his pedagogical style, his capacity for kindness, and friendship, and his great good humour. We are very grateful to all those who have contributed and hope that this will constitute a fitting memento vitae of our fallen friend and colleague, Liam Ryan.

Mary P. Corcoran

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My brother

Fr. Seamus Ryan

My first duty is to express the thanks and deep appreciation of the remaining members of the Ryan family, Mary the eldest, (Liam came second), then myself Seamus, and finally Enda, to the Department of Sociology, and other friends of Liam, who conceived this enterprise, and have put Trojan work into organising it.

Before launching briefly into my own memories of my brother, it is only fitting that I pay brief tribute to the parishioners of Cappamore who gave him a wonderful welcome when he returned to his native parish to live in the late PP's house in semi-retirement. Of course all this was further enhanced by the splendid welcome given to Liam by the current PP, Fr Dick Browne, who had decided to remain in the Curate's house because of its more central location in the village. Liam enjoyed years of good health, and active involvement in the parish before sadly been laid low by a stroke which greatly reduced his mobility. Never one to easily succumb to 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' (Shakespeare), he battled his way back to extensive involvement in parish life. It is only right that I acknowledge the great contribution made to his well-being by his sisters Mary and Enda who in turn week-in and week-out descended every day on the presbytery to cook and clean and ensure his well-being for the day ahead.

Our Shared Years of Learning

Earliest years were spent at Tionn an Tairbh National School less than half-a-mile from home, a one roomed school house where we were blessed with two excellent teachers: Julia McCarthy and our Aunt, Ellen Ryan, both from our parish of Cappamore who instilled in most of us an early interest in poetry. A favourite of Liam's Aunt was a Thomas Moore poem 'Oft in the stilly night'. Even now, so many years later, the words have an evocative power reaching us again from that small schoolhouse. And, perhaps for you too who came to know him over the years. How much it means to us that you, strangers to us, thought so highly of Liam to organise this evening in his honour, and kindly invited us, family and friends of long ago to gather with you here. Here are a few verses, doubtless familiar to many of you.

Oft, in the still night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me;
The smiles, the tears,
Of boyhood's years,
The words of love then spoken;
The eyes that shone,
Now dimm'd and gone
The cheerful hearts now broken!
Thus, in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain hath bound me,
Sad memory brings the light
Of other days around me.

Secondary School

After Tineteriffe came five years of boarding school together in St. Flannan's College, Ennis, sharing a single small room with Liam, he being always a year's class above me ('48–53, '49–54). Playing together on the hurling field for St. Flannan's created a great bond between us so that there were times when you knew you could die for him, and other times that you felt you could kill him! And you know, on occasion it very nearly happened!

Besides the hurling we were both very interested in athletics. Liam was a great sprinter, in all the years in St Flannan's or later in the seven years in Maynooth, I never saw him beaten in sprint, any distance from the 100 yards up to the 440ies. I was better at the long races and stronger when it came to throwing the shot or the javelin. One day we were practising with the Javelin, throwing it towards each other standing about 40 or 50 yards away. I really got good rhythm behind one throw and shouted to him to move back. He turned and unfortunately slipped on the wet grass and the javelin came right down on the back of his right thigh, luckily missing the femur bone but leaving a deep wound requiring hospital treatment. But typical of him he still went to the athletics meeting next day bandaged up and won a silver medal in one of the sprints!

St. Patrick's College Maynooth

We spent seven years in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth ('53–60, '54–61) after which we were ordained priests. Liam spent a further two years study in Dunboyne House writing a thesis on the controversial topic of 'Natural Law' for which he was accorded a Doctorate in Theology in 1962. He went on to do further studies in the United States in the area of Sociology, eventually returning from there to take up a post in the faculty of Sociology in UCC.

He spent happy years there, renewing friendships partly forged over years of association with Munster hurling. Some years later when the top job in the department of Sociology at Maynooth became vacant he was glad to apply for the post and fortunate enough to be successful. The rest is history, a history we are all enabled to recall and celebrate in story and song tonight because of the splendid gesture of the Department of Sociology in organising this evening's event. Liam was a dear brother to us and a valued and dear friend to many here tonight.

I would like to finish with two small items which you will find in the Memorial Card of his passing. There is a copy available for collection by everybody. The first is a short poem by Noel Coward, author and actor whom Liam greatly admired from his visits to Maynooth. Liam accepted the sad news of his own impending demise with a courage typical of him, a courage he found well expressed in a poem by Noel Coward.

When I feel sad, as Keats felt sad
That my life is so nearly done
It gives me comfort to dwell upon
Remembered friends who are dead
and gone
And the jokes we had and the fun
How happy they are I cannot know
But happy am I who loved them so.

We want to say to you now: 'Liam,
indeed you did love us well!'

The Memorial Card concludes with the well known 'Hurler's Prayer' and a photo of Liam leading out the Limerick Team as captain in the All Ireland Hurling Semi-Final of 1955 against Wexford in Croke Park. As the years pass it is the memory of the winning of hard fought Co. Limerick Championships that stand out now more than the Inter County Games perhaps because they fought 'for the honour of the little Village' (Knocknagow, Charles Kickham).

The two outstanding forwards for Cappamore were always Liam Ryan and his lifetime friend and neighbour, Paddy O'Malley who is happily here with his wife Brid this evening. It gives me great pleasure to ask Paddy to bring my piece of the evening to an end by asking him to read 'The Hurlers Prayer'. Remember that in those halcyon days of Cappamore GAA magic, Paddy won six Co. Limerick Hurling Championships!

A rich life

Michael D Higgins, Uachtarán na hÉireann, President of Ireland.

I had the privilege of knowing Liam well over many years, principally as a fellow university teacher, and while his loss will be sorely felt by all of us who knew him, the memory of his rich life, and the gratitude we all feel for his immense contribution to Ireland will endure for generations to come, as his life included so much of what was Irish, for example hurling, the importance of locality, community, and the Irish abroad.

Liam understood, at a profound level, that all dimensions of life should be embraced and engaged with passion and vigour. In the realms of sport, intellectual life and spiritual inquiry, Liam's wonderful energy found a full and generous expression.

In celebrating his life, there is so much to remember with joy. His feats on the hurling field are legendary, but like all Limerick men he showed a healthy and catholic attitude to the more restrictive rules of the Association and enjoyed Limerick's success in all codes.

Liam's spirituality was deep and his contribution to St. Patrick's College and to the Church in Ireland has been well recognised.

As I have said, it is in the area of academic life that I came to know Liam best.

Informed by a passionate social ethic, and above all by a peerless intellect, Liam's contribution to the discipline of sociology from its earliest days in the sixties in Ireland is immeasurable. He possessed all of the skills and knowledge of the finest empirical social scientists, for sociology for Liam was never a mere abstract discipline. He approached the subject from the perspective of a deep concern for what he could see happening in our communities and might be amenable to change. His work on early school leaving and social housing in his native Limerick remains as important and as relevant now as it did 50 years ago.

Liam had so many friends that anecdotes about him are plentiful and they tell the story of a life well lived, with humour and compassion, but I will remember Liam as a great mind and a great spirit applied for the service of his community. No better could be said of anyone.

A gentleman

Jane Gray

Liam Ryan was a gentleman. I remember his graciousness as he helped me to settle into my new position when I arrived at Maynooth in 1994. As a staff member with young children I was grateful for his consideration in taking on responsibility for evening and weekend meetings and events that were difficult for those of us with family obligations to attend. He was, of course, great company, but I also remember with gratitude his aura of calm in the face of the many small emergencies that make up the daily academic round. On one occasion, when I encountered Liam while in a state of panic about some administrative hiccup, he looked at me with a puzzled expression and said: 'Jane, there's always a solution.' That phrase, and its accompanying memory of Liam, became the motto that helped me cope with being head of Department many years later.

A great mind

Tony Fahey

I had my first lectures in sociology from Liam Ryan in Maynooth in 1970, the year after he took up the professorship in what was then a one-man show – he was the entire department of sociology for his first couple of years. I finished a primary degree with him three years later, by which time he had been joined by Mícheál Mac Gréil and Michel Peillon. I stayed on for another two years to take a Master's degree – and I think I'm right in saying that I was the first of his students to do so.

Forty years later, I am still an academic, trying to do for students in UCD what he did for me and my generation in Maynooth so long ago. In all that forty years, no one has stood before my mind's eye as guide and inspiration in the singular way that Liam Ryan has done. Others have represented contrasting models of what it means to do academic work and have laid out a path of professional development that I have been happy to follow. But few have embodied in the same way the sharp intelligence that his mind excelled at and that set a standard on that front that I have always struggled to attain. It might seem strange to say that since by the conventional criteria of academic success, he did not stand out. His published corpus of scholarly writing was not large, he was not a high flyer on the international conference circuit, he was not lavished with academic honours either in Ireland or abroad. Nor was he a charismatic intellectual leader within his own circle. He did not fire up impressionable students with radical rhetoric nor set in motion any new intellectual bandwagon.

Yet there were certain ways in which he stood apart from and above all those I have come across who did have stellar academic careers. There are many scholars I have listened to or read who were interesting and challenging, creative and ingenious, influential and well worth the admiration they receive. In a day-to-day way, they have laid out the tracks that I have followed in my own work. Yet there is a sense in which none had that peculiar intellectual power that emanated from Liam Ryan when he hit his best form on his best days. I find it hard to pin down exactly what that power was, but I felt a flash of recognition when I came across John Ruskin's summation of what intellectual achievement entails:

'The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something and tell what it saw in a plain way. Hundreds of people can talk for one who can think, but thousands can think for one who can see.'

Seeing things and telling what he saw in a plain way was what Liam Ryan the academic did. There are plenty of successful scholars who can do research, build the details of their findings and come to worthwhile conclusions – who can think, in Ruskin's terms. Thinking in this way is the backbone of academic work and is a worthy thing to do, none the less so for being open to so many. But there are few who can cut through a welter of detail and with sharp precision hew out a startling insight, often with casual ease. It was his ability to see a topic in his idiosyncratic and compelling way and talk plainly about it in tones that could range from the sombre to the sardonic to the outrageously funny that captivated me as a student and that

stayed with me ever since as a model of what one could do if one only one had the wit and brainpower. Indeed, if there is a single skill that he exemplified better than anyone else it was the 'telling in a plain way', the ability to take a complex idea or train of thought and with a run of lucid, graceful language render it in exact, elegant and compelling form.

I have many reasons to be grateful to Liam Ryan, not least the good educational grounding which, along with Mícheál and Michel, he delivered in the spartan academic set-up that was Maynooth in the early 1970s. When I found myself a number of years later joining a class of twenty or so students in a sociology PhD programme in a large American university, I was surprised to find that that grounding was as good as anybody's there, a remarkable testament to what Liam and his two colleagues had conjured up with so little resources some years before. Like many others, I also enjoyed his good company and his story-telling, his wit and his generosity. But in the end, to sum up what I feel was distinctive about his character as an academic, I refer to another professor in another university who in his full intellectual hauteur once declared that the purpose of the education he provided was to enable students 'to witness a great mind communing with its subject matter.' Liam Ryan had too sardonic a view of the world ever to say that either about himself or anyone else, but it was in fact what he often did. I was privileged to be there to see it happen and have carried the memory and the inspiration of it with me ever since.

The Mannheimian intellectual

Micheal Mac Greil, S.J

Since the sad passing of Father Liam, many tributes have been paid to him. He was a highly gifted person as a priest, sportsman, scholar, intellectual, social critic and community leader. He has been recognised as one of Ireland's leading sociologists and critical social thinkers. But he was much more than a respected academic; he was an intellectual in the Karl Mannheim sense, i.e. he was able to be loyal to and critical of his own culture and its institutions.

I had the privilege of knowing Liam as a colleague and friend for forty years. He first came to my attention with the publication of his important work, *Social Dynamite*, a critique of urban planning as exemplified by a newly built housing estate in Limerick in the 1960s. After he left his lecturing position in UCC to become Professor of Sociology at Maynooth, I joined him in the Department of Social Studies in Autumn, 1971 and thus began our 25 year period as academics in the college. For me it was a 'grand apprenticeship'. Liam's contribution to the development of the Social Studies Department within the college must be acknowledged. Five new academic departments have emerged from the original in the areas of Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology, Applied Social Studies and Adult and Community Education. This is no mean legacy for 'the quiet man' at its head.

Liam's own areas of academic specialisation were: the sociology of religion, rural and urban society and social policy. His own PhD study was on the Irish Immigrants in London.

I believe Liam was disappointed at our failure to develop a sociology of Irish society. In 1996, he wrote, '...we now have available a wide range of statistics about our characteristics as a society, but we know much less about our character – what we think and feel about our world, about ourselves and others...' He thought that we, that is, sociologists suffered from a kind of 'sociological inferiority complex' within the discipline and tended to look to the 'superior ideas' of classical sociologists from Europe and the United States. I trust I am interpreting Liam's thoughts accurately.

In addition to his academic and administrative work within the university, Liam was also involved in the broader Irish society through public lecturing and active participation in numerous conferences and congresses. He was a member of the Whitaker commission which reported on the Irish Prison System in the 1980s. I always admired Liam's moral courage and integrity. He was a wonderful colleague and companion. His sense of humour, charity and tolerance were contagious. As Professor and head of department he gave us lecturers full academic freedom and strengthened our self-confidence. He tried to run his department on the principle of consensus and helped to draw the best out of his colleagues. He was very much student-centred. Liam had credibility in his church, his university and Irish society.

Ni bheidh a leitheid arís ann. Ar dheis De go raibh a anam uasal.

A time for jokes and a time for principles

Michel Peillon

When I first arrived in Dublin, I was taking up a visiting lectureship at UCD, which involved some weekly teaching assignments at Maynooth. As term was soon to start, I was meant to meet the Head of the Sociology Department who had made a brief return from the US to attend the national hurling final. Micheál MacGréil had driven me to Maynooth for the occasion, but we missed Liam by a few minutes and he was already on his way back to the American Mid-West. I was not to meet him for another year and by the time he resumed his functions at Maynooth, I was a permanent staff member in the Sociology Department. I had not met him, but I knew that here was a person hard to get hold of.

Liam Ryan turned out to be a most liberal head of department. He simply trusted you and let you get on with the job. He was available for support and advice, if needs be, but in an informal way. Formal departmental meetings were rare enough occasions, and taking minutes of such meetings went against the grain. It seemed to suit us all. We probably had more departmental lunches than departmental meetings, at least in the early years. I actually looked forward to such meetings. They often came to an abrupt end, having failed to discuss the matter that had triggered the gathering, mainly because Liam had to rush to another meeting!

These meetings started with general gossip, a useful and entertaining source of information. Liam enjoyed a very wide circle of acquaintances and friends, and a lot of information (sometimes of an indiscreet nature) came his way, which he passed on to us. And there were jokes, lots of jokes. I wish I could remember them, but it really was the way he told them. Often, I would hear the same joke several times over a fortnight or so. But it did not lose anything from being repeated, and it would make me laugh every time.

Liam had a stint as Vice-President of Maynooth College, and his brief at the time covered the computerisation of the campus. This was the time before laptops and it was a matter of selecting a huge computer (it was said at the time, quite wrongly, that the computer was providing most of the heat for the nearby swimming pool) and setting up a large network around it. Liam was quite happy with the results of his efforts, and he qualified them with much satisfaction as 'state of the art'. The Information Technology system changed pretty quickly and, years later, every office had its own autonomous PC or laptop. Liam had one on his desk too, but I never saw him using it. I have long suspected that the man who brought IT to Maynooth never switched on his PC. You would never have reached Liam through emails.

There was another side to Liam, and he rarely talked or joked about some matters. Liam was Vice-President when the College was engulfed in a most serious crisis: that of the sacking of two priests who were College staff members. As Vice-President, he would have been expected to condone the sackings. Liam must have come under horrendous pressure to issue a statement supporting the President and the Governing Body of the College (at that time the Catholic Bishops of Ireland) in their action. He did not issue such a statement, knowing well that he would pay dearly for not doing so. There was for him a time for jokes and a time for upholding principles. I have always had considerable respect for the way he held his line on this matter.

A most un-bossy boss

Mary P. Corcoran

By a strange quirk of fate Liam Ryan and my father, Tom Corcoran, grew up equidistant from the Limerick-Tipperary border. Cappamore in Co Limerick, Liam's home place and Hollyford, Co. Tipperary where my father was born, are about 15 miles apart as the crow flies. I remember my Dad talking about local reference points such as Tipperary town, Cappawhite and Doon. Limerick Junction (Co.Tipperary!) was the link with the outside world, the point through which emigrants departed and to which they returned. The two men were born 20 years apart, my father in the historic year of 1916 and Liam in 1936. There the comparisons end. Tom, the eldest of five on a small holding left school early, emigrated for a time, returned, married, and raised six children in the Dublin suburbs. Liam, a brilliant student, athlete, hurler and local hero, went on for the priesthood and earned two doctorates, one in theology and one in sociology. Liam had the gift of a brilliant mind and the opportunity to use that mind throughout his life in his various roles as scholar, priest, leader, confidante, colleague and friend.

In 1988 I had completed field work for my doctorate and was returning to Ireland from New York to write up. With a degree of chutzpah I wrote to every third-level institution in Ireland alerting them to my imminent return and asking if there were any opportunities for work. I received replies (99% negative) from every single one with the exception of Liam Ryan. Liam didn't bother to reply at all.

At the time I remember thinking he must be a tough nut to crack! As it turned out Liam's good friend, Rev. Prof. Conor K. Ward did respond. He offered me part-time work in UCD for a couple of years until the summer of 1990 when St. Patrick's College, Maynooth advertised a three-year Junior Lecturer post, the first job in Sociology in Ireland to be advertised in almost a decade. Competition was fierce. I was interviewed by Michael Ledwith, Eileen Kane, Michel Peillon and Liam. Liam was his laconic and inscrutable self but he seemed genuinely pleased when he phoned me later to tell me I had the job. Twenty-five years later, I am still here. Liam's vote of confidence in me meant a lot, at a personal level and professionally. Gaining that post launched my academic career.

I will try to put this delicately. Liam was not naturally managerial. He disliked all forms of bureaucracy down to having a planned agenda for a Department meeting. He had a natural authority and that was what defined him as 'the boss.' Not the straitjacket of rules, regulations, procedures and systems. If you were planning an event and needed some funds Liam would happily fish in his trouser pockets and pull out a few notes and hand them over. There was no need for a requisition form! The Department worked very well under his paternalistic leadership. Visits by External Examiners were a particular highlight as we would repair to Barberstown Castle or Moyglare Manor to toast the end of another successfully completed academic year.

Liam was pretty much unflappable. When my daughter Maeve was born in the Coombe in June 1992, Liam was one of the first visitors through the door. I happened to be propped up in the bed breast feeding at the time. Liam was not in the least fazed. Funnily enough though, he did not visit me in hospital when my son Fintan was born three years later! Liam maintained an air of calm solicitude almost all of the time. He never seemed to be in a hurry anywhere, and the vagaries of academic life (and academic leadership) never seemed to get him down. Perhaps at some deeper level he remained somewhat detached from the fray. Certainly, the cutting wit with which he punctuated his contributions demonstrated his refusal to tolerate arrogance, ignorance and pomposity.

Liam had great clarity of expression. He had no time for obfuscating language. He used to advise graduate students that they had to be able to articulate their research project in a single sentence with a question mark at the end. It was no use saying you were 'interested' in this or hoping to 'explore' that. You had to have a problematic, a puzzle, a question that would be answered through the proposed research. I saw students quake under his forensic stare as they scrambled to frame their research questions. It is a simple but effective piece of advice and one that I dispense to graduate students to the present day.

When Liam retired in 2000 it felt like the passing of the old guard. Liam was one of the last clerical heads of Departments across Maynooth University. It must have been strange for him to see the men with whom he had shared scholarly and vocational roles disappear from the campus one by one. The institution was changing rapidly and I think Liam was happy to be moving on. As far as I can recollect his farewell do in the staff common room in the Arts Building was an affair that was both poignant and hilarious. Various of those present made speeches about Liam and he responded in kind drawing on his legendary reservoir of aphorisms, anecdotes and allegories. I do remember carrying on the party afterwards in Liam's rooms (the first time I had ever been there) with Tom Collins, Tony Fahey and others.

In recent years my only contact with Liam was at Christmas time. I would send him a card ever year and he would telephone for a chat shortly thereafter. He took a terrific interest in all that was going on and offered great encouragement. He was particularly supportive about my husband Alex White's entry into national politics. In 2012 we celebrated the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Sociology Department at Maynooth, the longest established on the island. By then Liam was learning to live with the effects of his stroke and though he initially demurred, we persuaded him to attend. Due to the kindness of his good friend Noel Dalton, Liam was able to spend the day with us, meeting old friends and former students and catching up on campus gossip.

Liam was smart, funny, irascible and humane. He was the greatest of company when he was on form. One of his favourite practices was to quote liberally from the treasure trove of G.K. Chesterton quotations that he had committed to memory. Here is one that I think captures the essence of Liam:

'The really courageous man is he who defies tyrannies young as the morning and superstitions fresh as the first flowers. The only true free-thinker is he whose intellect is as much free from the future as from the past.'

– G.K. Chesterton,
What's Wrong with the World

Liam's Worlds

Tom Collins

In hurling parlance, Liam's was a life of two halves.

He was born into De Valera's Ireland. Like De Valera, fifty years earlier, he would spend his boyhood in rural Limerick. And he would in many ways have been the iconic young male of that time and place – intellectually gifted, captain of the county hurling team, a Maynooth seminarian. He hit every right note.

This trajectory would continue for him when, in the late 1960s and still in his early 30s, he would return to Maynooth as Professor of Sociology. He rapidly achieved a growing national reputation as a social commentator and public intellectual, with his work in the housing estates of Limerick proving particularly prescient. In the mid 1970s he would become vice-president of the College and play a key part in the early transformation of the College into a secular university.

Those of us who were his students in the 1970s probably met him at his best. We were also closer to him in generational terms which meant that he knew enough of our world to make it strange and unfamiliar to us. He was an intellectual anti-hero who did not so much interrogate the claims of alternative belief systems as dismiss them each in turn with an ironic remark or a perfectly directed barb. He brought an intellectual scepticism to all assertions, enhancing its impact with a beguiling and occasionally withering wit.

Liam was the ultimate subversive. No intellectual fault line escaped him. No claim to authority, regardless of the source or persona, went unchallenged. And so he would muse aloud why, if 95% of priests would make excellent bishops, they were always selected from the other 5%. Or, in his eulogy to his truculent friend Fr Gerry Maher in The Pugin Chapel in Maynooth he would remind the episcopates ranged around the altar that Maher was a 'lion in a den of Daniels.' He would recall with some mirth Jeremiah Newman's aspirations towards egalitarianism when, on being appointed president of Maynooth, he addressed colleagues with the remark that 'we are all equal here, from me down.'

He always held that it was not so much a person's age which shaped one's world view as the period one grew up in. And he himself was of the generation which would in their youth dismantle the Ireland they grew up in and also, through the Second Vatican Council, attempt the same feat with the Church. With regard to Vatican Two, he would suggest that its primary impact was to reverse centuries of Church teaching asserting the innate tendency of humanity towards evil. Vatican Two, he held, started from an opening proposition to the effect that people were innately good and could be entrusted accordingly – a predisposition he would himself embody.

It may be something of an over-generalisation to say that in the second half of Liam's life he became increasingly distanced if not on occasions disenchanted with the failure of the Church to develop on the course it laid down in the deliberations of the Vatican Two.

This would have very personal implications for him. In the protracted High Court case in the second half of the 1970s involving the dismissal by the bishops of the laicised priests Malachy O'Rourke and PJ McGrath from the staff of Maynooth, Liam was the most senior Maynooth cleric who opposed the bishops' position.

This would mark a key turning point in his career and in his future relationship with his Episcopal superiors. He would not have known it then but it would prove a case of virtue being its own reward. Liam could not have survived comfortably as an insider in the hierarchical church in Ireland over the past two to three decades. He would have found himself too closely associated with a direction and world view with which he would have differed profoundly.

Nor was he ever particularly at ease with the changing nature of Maynooth. He leaned towards the medieval university, unencumbered with growing student numbers, the demands of departmental and staff management, and the formalisation of systems and procedures within an increasingly corporate environment. Nonetheless, his legacy to Maynooth should be recognised. Apart from his direct and lengthy association with the Sociology department, he was the prime mover in the establishment of three additional departments in the university – Adult and Community Education, Anthropology and Applied Social Studies.

Shortly after his retirement Liam returned home to Cappamore, where, as he once said to me, the only thing expected of him was to keep himself and the house warm.

And it is good to think that he did find warmth there in his last years – in his own place among his own people. While Liam commanded great esteem and great affection throughout his working life, he was always something of an outsider – even in dramas in which he was himself deeply involved. He was like many rural men of his time – more at ease with matters of the mind than of the heart. So while he always gave generously and in a completely selfless way, he was slow to receive. His deep humanity tended towards silence on the matter of feelings and to be guarded around any expressions of an emotional nature.

A rural place like Cappamore would implicitly understand this. It would know in its essence how to care while not being invasive; how to give while not putting the receiver 'under a compliment' and how to acclaim the return of one of its finest.

Like Liam, it would understand the power of the understated and the music of the oblique approach.



Liam Ryan's Picture

Eileen Kane

Rarely has a photograph captured a personality as successfully as the one of Liam Ryan published in the Maynooth University News. It's all there – the unassuming nature, the gentle kindness, the intellect, the wit and a slight dash of mischief. And what should have been technically impossible, that twinkle.

Liam and I first met in 1966, when he asked me to give an anthropology course at UCC, where he was Professor of Sociology. Soon, he moved to Maynooth and for a number of years we worked hard to set up a department there. Thanks to his steadfast advocacy it finally happened, and he was delighted because the subject fascinated him. He often sat in on lectures. I remember that after one session on ancient Mesoamerican ball games, in which the losing captain or even the entire team might be executed, he said he was going to propose this as a 'more peaceable' way to deal with disputes in the priests' dining room.

Liam combined serenity with intellectual rigour, and it was never more apparent than a few hours before he was due to give a major speech. 'Give me one good idea,' he'd beg anyone he happened to meet, and knowing his famous wit and speaking style, one felt privileged to be involved. But it took a lot to pique his interest; he might gently reject your offering before you finished speaking, and you worried then that perhaps your idea was simply the sludge of an intellectually lazy mind. But if he accepted it – and you never knew until the speech itself – he nestled your idea in a humorous opening, smelted it into its purest form, illustrated it with historical, literary and mythological references, brought it home with a farming anecdote, and concluded with a mischievous twist that left you wondering how serious he'd been all along.

Liam was many things – humble, generous, obliging to a fault, and a very gifted sportsman, but the characteristics I remember most were his unflappable nature, his droll humour and a great intellect that he probably kept reined in so as not to embarrass the rest of us. It's all there in the photograph.

A guiding hand

Pauline Cullen

I was an undergraduate student of Liam's in the late 1980s and subsequently worked for him and the department as a teaching assistant and later a junior lecturer in the early to mid 1990s. A core requirement for the undergraduate honours degree at that time was the completion of a fairly significant thesis. Liam was my supervisor for this work. In this context, sitting in his office I encountered a different version of the Professor than the one who had taught me alongside a couple of hundred undergraduates. In those meetings and exchanges (which at least initially I was petrified to attend!) an erudite but also jocular Liam offered helpful guidance. He pushed me from a tentative and immature assessment of my topic to produce something of which I could be proud. This ignited in me a sense that sociology might be a possibility for me beyond the undergraduate degree.

Having completed a Masters Degree partly in Maynooth and abroad, Liam invited me to tutor and then lecture in the department. This vote of confidence was a turning point in my life and enabled me imagine a future in teaching and researching. During this time I spent the summers in the United States. My memories are shaped of phone messages from Liam relayed through my mother in Wicklow and phone calls made by me to Liam from pay phones on Queens Boulevard in New York City to arrange teaching and tutoring tasks for the next academic year.

Working for Liam could be demanding at times, but his capacity for patience, kindness and humour meant that even as a junior cog in the wheel I felt able to seek his counsel. A turning point came in 1994, when I was offered the opportunity to study for a doctorate in New York. Liam in his unique way communicated that although I would have to leave in the middle of the academic year, which would not suit him at all, this opportunity could not be passed up.

Those early years of sponsorship had enabled me (a first generation college student) to imagine myself as an academic and set me on path that would change my entire life trajectory. I returned to Maynooth from the United States in 2009 to take up a lecturing position in sociology. Liam had long since retired, although he remained present in the recollections of his colleagues. I had the privilege to meet him again at the Department's 75th anniversary celebrations. While Liam was changed by the passage of time and his illness, his laconic wit and incredible intellect provided a bridge to the past. I found myself reverting back to the young woman who had worked so hard to try to make her Professor proud of her all those years ago. Liam's sociological contributions remain for me a source of intellectual inspiration. However, it was his belief and confidence in me for which I am most grateful.

Service to others

Brian Conway

Few people have as many gifts as Liam Ryan had. Hurler. Songwriter. Historian. Sociologist. What people seem to remember most about him, though, was that he was a great conversationalist. He was marvellous at telling stories and he had the happy knack of making it seem like they just tripped off the tongue. He was nice company to be with. You felt at ease in his presence.

For all that, perhaps the most defining thing about Liam Ryan was his loyalty to the church. A priest for over 50 years, he was ordained in Maynooth in 1960 for the archdiocese of Cashel and Emlly. He spent nearly all of his working life there, teaching and advising generations of students. Indeed, Liam Ryan's priesthood was an apostolate of service to others. This was expressed in lots of ways. His generosity with his time. His reluctance to say no. His sympathy for the underdog. And when students came to him with difficulties, his instinctive approach was to privilege the pastoral over the academic. Of course, I'm not describing a saint. He had no great fondness for bureaucracy. He certainly wasn't a files and record-keeping man.

As a scholar, he will probably be best remembered for his study of early school leaving in Limerick, aptly titled *Social Dynamite*, one of the earliest empirically grounded and theoretically informed works in Irish sociology. But he also wrote on other important topics – in outlets such as *Social Studies*, *Rural Ireland* and *The Furrow* – including the sociology of religion, prison conditions, and the family. In all, he wrote with eloquence and insight in equal measure.

Fittingly, he lived out his last years in his native Cappamore. Fr. Liam Ryan will be recalled with affection for many years to come as a priest-sociologist who, despite his wide learning and travelling, never lost his sense of place. May he rest in peace.

The clerical professoriate

Vincent Comerford

Liam Ryan is forever associated with the development of Maynooth as we know it. His predecessor, Jeremiah Newman, was professor of Catholic Sociology and Catholic Action. Liam was appointed as Professor of Sociology. Newman's teaching duties over the years had been confined largely to providing a course on Politics for the Honours Philosophy classes. Within a short while Liam was attracting the largest classes in the college to Sociology.

In attempting an appreciation of Liam, it may be worth reflecting on the old Maynooth clerical professoriate because while he helped to transform it he probably retained aspects of its ethos. Everyone who knew Liam can judge for themselves if he did and to what extent.

Down to the mid-sixties Ancient Classics and Philosophy each had three staff, English had two, and the other Arts and Science subjects mainly one each. These were all professors of equal status. By and large they were individuals who following seven years as students were seen by their peers, and more importantly by their bishops, as intellectuals who would fit into academic life more easily than into a parish. Their formal responsibilities were straightforward: mainly to teach courses, set examinations and turn in marks twice a year. Imposing new books on the world did not have to be done just for the sake of doing it. The informal challenge was another matter.

That was to inspire students, to win the admiration or at least appreciation of captive classes, and to pass on the flame of scholarship. In this as in other areas there was a strong sense of emulation. Although they resided in the college the professors did not belong to a community. Their few formal communal obligations included turning up for meals in the residents' refectory. Each did so prepared to defend his own corner.

Except for the minority who aspired to be bishops, Maynooth professors had reached the pinnacle of ambition, usually at an early age. The salary was good by the standards of the time. Subject to maintaining the basic decorum of clerical life, the position of the professor was untouchable. There was little the president could advance either by way of admonition or reward: he was *primus inter pares*. There were no spare resources with which to incentivise. In fact willingness to make do with what was available was taken for granted.

This is not the occasion for a complete assessment of the old Maynooth. However, it may be that Liam can be seen as having drawn on it for some of his landmark contribution to what followed.

Unobtrusive inspiration

Seamus O' Cinneide

When Liam Ryan succeeded Jeremiah Newman (later Bishop of Limerick) as Professor of Sociology in Maynooth College in 1968 he inherited one academic department, the Department of Sociology: by the time he retired from NUI Maynooth he could have taken credit for three further departments that he had launched or inspired, the departments of Adult and Community Education, Applied Social Studies and Anthropology. He was not a man to claim credit for things: it is only right that we who knew him should give him the credit.

It was Liam's idea in 1979 that social studies at St Patricks College, Maynooth, which at that time was formally comprised only of sociology, should be expanded to include a post-graduate professional course that would attract graduates from other institutions and not just Maynooth graduates. Social work, the best known of the 'social' professions was well provided for in some of the other Irish universities. But there was a burgeoning interest in community development in Ireland, including among clerical graduates of Maynooth. Yet there was no university-based professional course in that area. Liam proposed a new post-graduate professional course, the Diploma Course in Community Work. He knew the ins and outs of getting such a proposal adopted and he achieved that without any fuss.

When the first academic appointment connected with the course was advertised the response was underwhelming. But Liam did not give up. The deadline for applications was extended and conversations were held. I applied for the post and was appointed to it with effect from 1 September 1980. The Higher Diploma in Community Work was offered for the first time the following year. That was the beginning of the Department of Applied Social Studies.

Initially at least I reported to Liam but he had no wish to be boss. He supported initiative and was there when you needed him. He let you get on with the job and expected you to do that, but was good for advice on strategy and tactics. He knew how the Maynooth administrative and academic systems worked and how to work the systems: how the battle lines were drawn on any issue, how to get an item on an agenda after the official deadline, who to contact for this or that. Unlike the inverted Micawbers, 'always waiting for something to turn down', he was positive and practical. In due course he was happy to see Applied Social Studies, and the other specialisms he had fostered, do their own thing.

Liam was a cherished colleague, an unobtrusive innovator, an entertaining raconteur, and much more. Those who will get to know him later from what he wrote will not be able to fully estimate his genius. It is up to us who knew him to spread the full story.

I was lonely after him and regret that I did not make a pilgrimage to Limerick. He is still, and always, an unobtrusive inspiration.

Insider-outsider

Mary B. Ryan

I took sociology in first year intending to drop it. However I was intrigued by it and continued with it for my degree. The start of second year coincided with Pope John Paul II's visit to Maynooth. I had already seen the Pope in the Phoenix Park and Galway – too much! Maynooth College and all of Ireland seemed to be in love with John Paul. At that time Maynooth was definitely a college of two halves, the Arts Building filled with lay students and the Old Side filled with clerics. There were lots of places on the Old Side that were forbidden to lay students, especially women. As a young woman growing up in rural Ireland this was a familiar experience. The Church seemed an alien male world which actively discouraged critical reflection.

Liam Ryan in his sociology lectures in second year changed my thinking about the church, social institutions and the stories we construct about identity and ideology. He looked a typical cleric; dark suit, white collar, cape flying as he flew late into lectures armed with a large bundle of books. We learned in time to read his mood by the amount of books he carried. Unlike other clerics, he never preached, never tried to convince us with his arguments. He delivered his lectures in a thoughtful, slightly bemused tone of voice. He questioned familiar values and assumptions, simultaneously taking up the position of the insider and outsider. He had little time for hierarchy, power and privilege. He drew attention to the silent and hidden stories of the marginal and excluded.

This was a totally new experience for me; to critically reflect on an institution while still being a member of it. Liam taught us that there are no simple answers to creating an equitable and just society, that life is indeed complex. Time and time again he reminded us that people in their search for new answers repeat past mistakes. In the demand for quick solutions there is little appetite for thinking, reflection and learning from experience or history. He understood the quest to make a difference in life and had sympathy for failure and vulnerability. While he encouraged us to get actively involved in social projects; he was realistic about resistance to change. There was some possibility we might make a difference and we could probably do no worse than those in power. He had a great capacity to appear as if nothing really mattered while simultaneously being supportive and committed to the endeavours of others.

Liam was at ease in the world of ideas; he was immensely well read and could argue from every position. He was also comfortable and interested in the local, the ordinary and the applied. He was gracious and courteous to young female students, especially those like me who were impatient to make a difference in life. He gave me tutorials the summer I did an MA qualifier and employed me as a tutor while doing a MA in Sociology. He was also supportive of my decision to abandon the MA to work in Adult Education. He was both a realist and an idealist.

I learned from Liam that to be human is to be vulnerable, to have the capacity for hope and disappointment, love and loss. He embodied the discomfort of occupying the insider-outsider position and the challenge in making the familiar unfamiliar. I learned that if you seek to occupy such an ideological position you need a strong network of supportive relationships and like-minded colleagues. I suspect he found it a challenge to build such a network. I hope in his life after Maynooth he found such a place back in his community.

The radical edge

Pat O'Connor

Like most Irish sociologists, I cannot remember when I first met Liam Ryan: he just seemed to always have been there. Indeed since he spanned roughly fifty years of Irish sociology, he was always there. Smiling, with a razor sharp intelligence and a wry, slightly ironic sense of humour, he was totally accessible and unintimidating. At heart, he was a teacher. I saw him in action as an external examiner: seeing redeeming features in students and in work that others might have ignored. Clear thinking and insightful he held a mirror up to complacent privilege in his early School Leavers Study. He was for many people a voice of integrity and potential challenge: one that the institutional Roman Catholic Church could have considerably benefitted from if it had the courage to appoint him to the hierarchy.

But he was 'too radical' to be a bishop. That razor sharp intelligence and social conscience made him a marked man in those contexts. I wish he had written more; been more public in his critiques. It is difficult not to see this as the price he paid for his vocation.

May he rest in peace.

Humane scholar

Maurice Devlin

Like many other people I first encountered Liam Ryan through his Social Dynamite study. In the early 1980s I returned to college to study sociology via UCD's postgraduate 'conversion' programme and I wrote a dissertation on young people and youth culture. There were numerous international sources to draw on, but hardly any Irish ones. A rare exception was Liam's study of school-leavers in a Limerick housing estate, published in the Maynooth-based journal *Christus Rex* in 1967 (Liam was then lecturing in University College Cork). It was very valuable to me not just for my immediate purposes but as a model of sociological scholarship: highly readable, based on rigorous empirical research and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data through an explicitly articulated theoretical lens (William I. Thomas's 'total situation', which includes objective conditions, pre-existing attitudes and the individual and group 'definition of the situation'). It was also socially engaged and engaging, demonstrating a sense of responsibility and an awareness of the ethical challenges facing external researchers in 'tough' areas with 'what is dubiously referred to as a 'reputation''. Responding to the condescension and 'amused hostility' he had encountered among public officials regarding the area under study, Liam commented:

'There is always the danger that any published analysis of this social class may hurt the feelings of people and damage their chances of bettering themselves. To publish any information, even in a sympathetic spirit, could underline the distinction between these people and the better educated classes, and so become a source of discrimination and segregation. I have no desire to add to the 'amused hostility'.'

Accordingly, while it strikes a sombre note of warning (as its title suggests) the article concludes in a practical and purposeful way:

'Parkland is a community concern and the resources of the community must be mobilised. A citizens' body with representation from schools, churches, employment agencies, labour and management, central and local government agencies should be established to tackle the problem...The voluntary societies are doing a good job, but the manner of their 'charities' hasn't changed for centuries.'

Much of what Liam wrote in that article now seems prescient, and so much more could and should have been done in response to his analysis:

'Cities are for people, and people need playgrounds and swimming pools, halls and community centres, and something to remind them that they are more important than motor cars or traffic lights or office blocks or supermarkets.'

'Parkland' was pseudonymous for Ballinacurra Weston, which had been built fifteen years beforehand, in the early 1950s. Today, the Limerick Regeneration Watch website still provides a link to Social Dynamite, noting it is 'more insightful' than much contemporary commentary.

After he came to Maynooth as Professor of Sociology, Liam's initiative in establishing the community work programme was one of the many ways in which he tried to put his own ideas into action. He recruited Séamus Ó Cinnéide as Director and subsequently Anastasia Crickley, and I was the third member of staff, part-time from 1985 and full-time from 1990.

This single postgraduate programme was to become a 'Centre' which in turn was to become the Department of Applied Social Studies, encompassing social policy as well as community and youth work, and it is one of the many institutional manifestations of Liam's legacy.

When it became clear that I would probably stick with academic life I thought I had better do a PhD and I asked Liam to supervise me, mentioning an idea I had for tracing the emergence and development of youth culture in Ireland after the opening up of the economy in the late 1950s. His response was: 'Are you mad? You're creating an awful lot of trouble for yourself asking a question like that.'

He urged me to choose a topic for which the data was more readily accessible and so I concentrated on contemporary media representations of youth. This interested me greatly; him not at all. But his practical support and advice were invaluable, and helped me to complete the study on schedule while working full-time.

He was an unfailingly kind and decent man, highly and warmly thought of by the community and youth work students whose backgrounds were so diverse. He was grounded and humane; and his humanity seemed most conspicuous when hurling was involved. I have a vivid memory of seeing him from afar on the Monday morning after the 1994 All Ireland Hurling Final, when Offaly had scored two goals and five points in the dying minutes of the match to overtake Limerick, who had been on the verge of their first win since 1973. Even at a distance, he looked heartbroken.

But he had a fabulous and mischievous sense of humour, which he was happy to deploy at his own expense. My photocopy of Social Dynamite has a handwritten comment in the margin, made by a previous reader. Alongside the passage where Liam writes about the people of Parkland's general hostility to employers ('they have a chip on the shoulder about the employer being always against the worker') is the disgruntled exclamation: 'typical conservative!' Liam would have a good laugh at that, and approve of the reader's active engagement, if not the defacing of the text.

Integrity and Probity

Anthony O'Farrell

I gather that it was Jeremiah Newman who founded the Department of Sociology and Catholic Action. He became President, and went on to become Bishop of Limerick in 1974. By the time I arrived on campus, in 1975, Liam had taken over and the department's title had lost three words. I don't know which happened first.

Liam played a central role in College life. He was Vice-President, and he served on the Higher Education Authority, which provided most of our income. We had no computer, but Liam had selected one to buy, and he handed me the task of negotiating with the HEA for the money. This was instructive. With the cash in hand, I set up the Computer Centre and looked after it until it could be handed over to its first full-time Head, John O'Connell. We enjoyed strong support from the HEA in those years, and I'm sure Liam's influence was significant.

I dealt amicably with Liam on matters such as budgets, accommodation and timetabling, and found him always sensible, sane and pragmatic. He was a patient negotiator. He always knew exactly what he wanted to achieve, but had a disarming way of appearing not to care about the outcome. He was a bit like the bus driver who said that he didn't really mind if the bus went over a cliff – it was entirely up to the passengers.

When he quoted a newspaper, it was always the Irish Independent. One felt that he liked to stand a little outside the establishment.

He was a competent bridge player, but in this as in everything else he was not aggressive. We enjoyed a good many house-games, and pleasant conversation.

When he retired he cleared out his office, and gave me the papers to burn in my stove at home. I read a few, before I burned them, that were more than interesting, but I'll keep them to myself, except to say that nothing reflected ill on Liam, who was a model of integrity and probity. It was a privilege to have known him.

His own man

Tom Inglis

Of course Liam was a priest: he always wore clerical clothes. But he was a priest unlike many others. He was his own man. He was able to stay on the fence and convince those in power that he was a safe pair of hands and those on the outside that he was just like any other man. But when it came to crucial issues, as happened in the early 70s, he stood his ground.

He was a shrewd man. He was a skilled cultural tactician. He was able to charm all those who met him into thinking that he was soft, meek and mild. And he was, but he had very strong opinions as to what was right and wrong, good and bad. He was a great judge of character.

The reason why it is important to think of Liam as a priest is because when sociology was in its early days, Liam, like Edmund Dougan in Galway and Conor Ward in UCD, were the driving forces that shaped the discipline. Sociology departments were a bit like small dioceses. The professors were all-powerful. They created a particular habitus.

And so, in the 1970s, there was a recognisable brand of sociology student that began to emerge from Maynooth. They were very different from the methodologists from UCD and the new lefties from TCD. They had their own way of thinking and talking about sociology. It was something they had learned from Liam. He was not an ideologue. He was not committed to any theory or method. But he was deeply committed to revealing and telling the truth about Ireland. I don't think many other professors inspired so many students.

It was not that Liam was a great writer or researcher, but he was a great teacher and he inspired a whole generation of sociologists who came from Maynooth. He seemed to know his students intimately as they did him and they all loved him. I never met anyone who did not love Liam.

I had many run-ins with Liam, not least in our understanding of Catholic Ireland. But they were never acrimonious. He had such skills in handling people and I never objected to being handled by him. The last time I met him was at an SAI conference in Waterford when he was being awarded honorary life membership. At the end of the night, we spent a long time at the bar talking about the way our lives had gone. It was prime time with him and, as always, I felt honoured.

Of Grace and Danger

Anthony G. Cunningham

When I first heard of Liam's death, alongside the sadness, I felt that pang of guilt we often feel when we have fallen out of contact with someone who means a lot to us and who has played a significant role in our lives. In a vain attempt to connect, I trawled the internet looking for some news on those missing years. In doing so I came across two photographs that captured the essence of Liam. The first was a picture where he had slipped the constraints of the priesthood and played the role of winning captain, albeit as 'Tom'. The second was a later picture of him tackling his friend Dick as they shouldered each other and drew on a sliothar. In both pictures that full smile complete with sparkling eyes shone through and exuded the delight he had in good company and well contested sport.

I first encountered Liam on a cold winter morning 1994 in Class Hall D in the old arts block. As first time Oscale (Distance Education) students we were somewhat nervous to meet the 'Professor'. Liam arrived and began to give a slightly formal but genial introduction to the principles and practice of Sociology wherein he stressed the social justice dimension, tolerance and recognising difference and diversity. As he warmed to his subject these worthy aspects were quickly followed with an irreverent tour of the founding fathers and their qualities and characteristics which included tales of bloodymindedness, debauchery, infidelity and adultery, unrequited love, addiction, violence, depression and madness.

He took particular pleasure in relating in detail the practice of 'cerebral hygiene' as espoused by Comte before informing us with even greater glee that as attractive as such a methodology might seem it was one that would attract poor marks, if any at all, and was not to be recommended. In the course of those fifteen minutes or so the chill of the room had disappeared and the university itself seemed a more welcoming and warmer place where the practice of sociology and our education felt less 'distant'.

Over the years our dealings grew and he became a 'mentor' of sorts, a 'boss' and a colleague who never preached or patronised and who understood the importance of freedom to as well as freedom from. I found him to be generous and kindly, good humoured and supportive, loyal and trustworthy, funny and wise, sometimes combative and often caustic. When I finally got to Maynooth as student on the MA and then PhD programme his commitment to openness and diversity were manifest in the perspectives of the staff and a department that was 'catholic' rather than Catholic. In our conversations he articulated a pride in and a protectiveness of his colleagues which was never narcissistic but based on his delight in and respect for scholarship and good company.

While the new managerialism of the contemporary university often assembles on the basis of similarity and compliance with the corporate mission statement, Liam had surrounded himself with Protestants, Atheists, Buddhists, Lapsed Catholics, Agnostics, Catholics, Functionalist, Intellectuals, Positivists, Post-Positivists, Weberians, Marxists, Post-Structuralists, Network Analysts, Radical Political Economists, second and third wave Feminists, Contrarians, Conformists, Liberals, Conservatives, Lefties, Anarchists, Cultural, Social and Historical Scholars, more Intellectuals, scholars of modernity and post-modernity etc, often overseen by Maureen Redmond, his Right Hand. As a student and staff member this offered a rich, exciting, often exhilarating, always rewarding (if not always harmonious) experience which contributed crucially to the happiest days of my life.

One of the last times I met Liam was at an interview for a job. I have to admit I was not overjoyed at the fact that he was there, given the robust and tricky interviews we had in the past. True to form he went in low and hard. The question he asked started out well enough when he began 'Tony, I know you to be a fine scholar', at which point he picked up my application form and continued, 'but I'm looking here at your Leaving Certificate results which can only be described as poor, how do you explain that?'

I have to admit that the question 'winded' me, as a jab to the ribs from the butt of a Hurley might, and I was a little lost for words and on the verge of floundering. However as I looked him in the eye I caught a glint and spark of belief and reassurance, and felt the wave of nausea subsiding as I heard myself say the answer could be found if he read Paul Willis or Mairtin Mac an Ghail. The glint turned to a broad congratulatory smile of delight, with the faintest of winks, as if to say good man you blocked that one well, shrugged off the tackle and scored a nice point. I did not get the job but I have a treasured memory of a great game and a man who I admire and respect for his danger as much as his grace.

A sporting life

Proinnsias Breathnach

It is a cause of great regret to me that I am unable to attend the commemorative event for Liam Ryan on December 4, as I will be out of the country on that day.

I joined the Maynooth academic staff in 1972, which means that I had the pleasure of knowing, and working with, Liam Ryan for several decades. Our level of interaction at academic level was actually quite limited, apart from administrative meetings of one kind or another. However, I well remember when, shortly after I moved to live in Maynooth in 1975, he turned up at my house one afternoon to ask me if I could fill in at (very) short notice for someone who was unable to deliver one of the extramural studies classes which were run by the Sociology department at the time. This was my first exposure to the world of adult education, and the class in question (located in Trim) was an eye-opener. The enthusiasm, commitment and loquaciousness of those attending contrasting sharply with the diffidence and (in some cases) lack of interest of Maynooth undergraduates.

Liam would also ring my up from time to time looking for a couple of key ideas which he could incorporate into some guest lecture which he had been invited to give on a topic outside his immediate comfort zone in terms of expertise. Heaven knows how many other colleagues got similar calls, but I think Liam was well aware that the best lectures frequently are built around just one or two central questions.

Liam had a more substantial indirect academic impact on me through the establishment, within the Sociology department, of the Centre (now Department) of Adult and Community Education and the postgraduate Diploma in Community Work (now part of the Department of Applied Social Studies). I had a considerable level of interaction with both these units while doing research in the area of community development in the 1980s.

My links with Liam were much more of a social and sporting nature (the two, themselves, frequently being intimately intertwined). We both had a passion for hurling, although Liam was much more proficient at playing it than I ever was. He always held it against me (a Waterford man) that Waterford denied him an All-Ireland medal in 1957. In 1955 Limerick had come from nowhere to win the Munster hurling championship with a fleet-footed team which became known as 'Mackey's greyhounds' (after their trainer, Limerick hurling legend Mick Mackey). Liam and his brother Seamus were key members of that team. They lost the All-Ireland semi-final to the great Wexford team of the time but, after a hiatus in 1956, they were 'rearing to go' again in 1957. However, their first game, against Waterford, coincided with exam time in Maynooth which ruled Liam and Seamus (both clerical students) out. Waterford won that game by four points and went as far as the All-Ireland final (a game they should have won). Liam maintained that had he and Seamus been available, Limerick would have beaten Waterford and would not have fallen at the last hurdle like Waterford did.

Twenty years later, during Rag Week in Maynooth, I attended a Gaelic football game between the staff and students played on Rhetoric pitch. Liam played in that game and I was amazed by his fitness, pace and drive. I was even more amazed that a hurler from east Limerick was so handy at playing Gaelic football! Unfortunately, some time afterwards Liam was involved in a bad car accident which greatly slowed him down physically.

Speaking of Rag Week brings to mind one of the great legendary stories associated with Liam. In the 1970s a favourite Rag Week stunt was for students to kidnap a member of staff, take him (I don't know if it ever happened to a 'her') somewhere and call the College administration looking for a ransom which would (allegedly) be paid to charity. After falling victim myself on one occasion, thereafter I used to carry a hurley with me when walking around the campus during Rag Week to fend off potential kidnappers. What happened to Liam was that he was seized upon when he was either getting into or out of his car and driven off in his own car by his kidnappers and brought down to Kilkenny (for some reason unknown to me) where the group repaired to a suitable hostelry while awaiting the outcome of their ransom demands. Liam asked to be allowed go to the toilet (a reasonable request in light of where they were holed up) and while he went inside, his captors stood guard outside to prevent escape. However, it so happened that Liam had a spare set of keys on his person, and being a fit and agile person, managed to get out through a window and drove back to Maynooth, leaving his abductors stranded 75 miles away!

Liam and I were also members of the now-defunct Bodenstown Golf Club (they say old hurlers never die, they just take up golf instead). Indeed, Liam served a stint as President of the club. We played many an enjoyable round together although, needless to say, he was also much better at golf than I was. An unusual aspect of his play was that, while he hit all other shots from his right side, he putted left-handed.

Back in the halcyon 1970s, when the college was much smaller, celebratory staff dinners were held in what used to be called the 'Pros' ref in the first and second terms. These were magnificently sumptuous multi-course affairs (including brandy and cigars), but the highlight of the evening was being invited afterwards to the follow-up party in Liam's rooms. Liam was a terror with a whiskey bottle in hand. While I considered a half-full glass to be more than ample, Liam regarded it as being half-empty and requiring further replenishment. These were mighty social occasions, although the longer the evenings went on, the less one remembers of them!

When the college abandoned these dinners, visits to Liam's rooms became less regular. I think the last time I was there was when Maynooth hosted the Fitzgibbon Cup (the Higher Education Hurling Championship) in the 1990s. The great Maynooth team which won the cup twice in the 1970s was invited back for the occasion, and were duly invited (as was I) by Liam to a get-together in his rooms.

Liam was particularly proud that two fellow-priests from Limerick (the brothers Paudie and Willie Fitzmaurice) were members of that team. My claim to fame was that several renowned members of that team (including Seán Silke, Iggy Clarke and Andy Fenton of Galway and Seán Stack of Clare) had been students of mine. The ensuing mixture of whiskey, hurling talk and nostalgic reflections on Maynooth in the 1970s was both figuratively and literally intoxicating!

Although we have met many times since, it was great to bump into Seán Silke and his wife Pat (another former student) at Liam's funeral in Cappamore. Once again, we shared great memories of a great guy.

Engaged and engaging

John Coolahan

I associate the late Professor Liam Ryan with the incorporation of the Sociology of Education as a serious discipline within the study of Education in Ireland. Education had emerged as a major issue of political and public debate within the changing Ireland of the 1960s. A range of reports was published including 'Investment in Education' (1966), 'Report of the Commission on Higher Education' (1967), 'Report of Steering Committee on Technical Education' (1967). All sectors of education came under review. While the policies on 'free' secondary education, the regional technical colleges and the reconfiguration of higher education got most public attention, a range of other reforms was also introduced including the reform of the primary and post-primary school curricula and the restructuring of teacher salaries and teacher education. For those of us who were young teachers in that era, it was a heady and exciting time to be about. Into that vibrant, maelstrom of education ideas an innovative and impactful new study was published in 1966 – *Social Dynamite*. This aptly titled study was a penetrating analysis of the socio-economic and educational problems presented by educational inequalities in new suburbs of Limerick. It brought home to us the significance of Sociology of Education as a mode of enquiry, with humane concerns very much in evidence. Its author was a young priest, Fr. Liam Ryan, who for many of us had the added allure of being a county hurler.

My first encounter with Liam, in person, was on an October morning in 1969, when, as a member of the first cohort of students, on the first MEd course in Ireland, in Trinity College, I was delighted to find that our lecturer in the Sociology of Education was this same author. Professor Val Rice, who had initiated the course, had invited Liam to be a visiting lecturer in the subject. The class's expectations were not disappointed, as Liam opened up the subject for us in an engaging and thought provoking way, laced with a wry sense of humour. The cluster of about twelve, pretty 'mature' teachers, enjoyed a dialogic style of participation in these sessions, and had our mental horizons greatly expanded and enriched by the experience. Subsequently, Liam became so absorbed in his work in Maynooth that he had to forsake the Trinity engagement. During the years following graduation in 1971, I met him on an occasional basis, but kept in touch with his activities and writing.

It was following my appointment as Professor of Education in Maynooth, in 1987, that our paths again crossed frequently. At that time he was Professor of Sociology and headed the Adult Education Centre at the College. He made me feel very welcome to the campus and we held discussions on a regular basis. I always found him to be a most helpful colleague in general contact and as a fellow member of the Academic Council, a significant body in the university at that time. Of various joint encounters between us, I will just highlight one. As others will no doubt attest Liam was very generous with his time, and responded willingly, when possible, to requests for assistance from outside bodies.

One such request, which we both received, was from the Co. Cork Vocational Educational Committee to address a two-day educational conference. However, it was being held far away, in Schull Community College in West Cork. Not in the least daunted, Liam decided that he would drive us both on the long itinerary. The two-way journey may have been long in terms of distance, but in terms of felt-time duration, it seemed to fly with all the discussion, anecdotes, jokes etc. which were exchanged. What was also notable on site was the great respect in which he was held and the quality of his engagement with other participants. While he made an impactful and influential formal conference input, it was also clear that he was very much at home with these personnel, in a rural environment, focussing on how better to serve the educational needs of the community. This style of engagement will be the memory of him which will stay longest in my mind. When Liam located to pastoral ministry in his beloved East Limerick, he occasionally wrote to me enquiring about various issues, including NUI Senate affairs, which clearly indicated that, while removed from the metropolitan academic arena, he retained a live interest in educational affairs and policies.

I regard it as a privilege to have been in a position to have been a student of Liam's, to be a university colleague with him, at an era of great change in university life, and to have shared some enjoyable times with him. He employed his multifaceted talents to great effect.

My neighbour

Patrick Hannon

Liam and I were neighbours in Dunboyne House for the ten years or so leading to his retirement. Of course we'd known each other as members of the resident staff since the early Seventies, and one was well aware of his various gifts, not least that of importing a note of realism into the debates about the future of Maynooth that preoccupied all staff in the decades prior to the Universities Act 1997. But a neighbour's view is something else, and it gave a glimpse of some of the complexities of a complex and rich personality.

For all that he was gregarious Liam was a private person, and he respected the privacy of others. He wore learning lightly and was uncomfortable when others paraded theirs. He was quietly generous when he saw need; it wasn't from himself that one gathered this. His counsel was prized for its blend of kindness and common sense.

Various of his talents resulted in early appointment to a vice-presidency; his sense of justice seems to have played a part in the decision not to re-appoint him for a second term. He was a loyal member of the Academic Staff Association, a sane voice at a time when staff opinion on controversial issues was angrily divided.

Private, quiet, even diffident, but unmistakably kind, and unmistakably a welcoming and generous host – it's of these memories above all that this neighbour's view of Liam Ryan is made. Requiescat in pace.

Meeting Liam

Peter Denman

I encountered Liam Ryan long before I met him. As a first-year student in UCC in the late sixties, one of my four subjects was Social Philosophy – a twin-track subject which served as a preparation for continuing with either Sociology or Philosophy. The sociology strand was taught by Liam in the steeply tiered Dairy Science theatre, then the largest lecture space on the campus. We listened respectfully to him as he introduced us to the possibility that society does exist, is a proper topic of discourse and is susceptible to analysis. His lectures at that time were earnest and straightforward, but already marked by the refreshingly trenchant pragmatism I later came to see as characteristic.

Nearly a decade later, I arrived in Maynooth in 1977 to take up my first real post. My beginning here was contemporary with that of the newly commissioned Arts Building, which squatted low and square on its mound in the middle of the grassy expanse that was the north campus. I was in temporary lodgings that October, had a run of lectures to prepare, and the pristine new office with its central heating offered a quiet workspace after hours. So it came about that I was back there late one evening, thinking I was more or less alone in the building.

It was a rainy night, and I must have stepped in a puddle or something on the way in, because I had taken off my shoes and socks to dry them on the radiator while I sat barefoot behind the desk with my trousers rolled in J. Alfred Prufrock fashion. This sartorial eccentricity didn't matter until there was a knock on the door to which I automatically responded 'Yes?', and when it opened there was Professor Liam Ryan.

'I saw from the light you were working late, and I thought I'd introduce myself and welcome you to Maynooth', he said affably. To this I could only respond with another 'Yes', as I stood up but did not dare to venture from behind the desk and reveal my bared extremities. So there followed a brief but extremely awkward conversation as we exchanged pleasantries at a distance, he standing at the door but not being invited to come any closer while I felt trapped behind my desk at the other end of the office and wishing he would just go away. It was not a good footing on which to start my academic career. In all our years as colleagues afterwards I never recovered sufficiently from the embarrassment to explain my gauche reception of him that evening; nor did I ever forget that Liam Ryan was the first of the senior established faculty to go out of his way to say a word of welcome to a newly arrived temporary junior lecturer.

Insight and empathy

Damian Hannan

There are few people one remembers with such fond memories as Liam Ryan: always with a smile and with warm appreciation and admiration.

I first met Liam when I came home from graduate school in Michigan State in 1967 with my PhD in sociology. Liam had not only completed his PhD at the University of St. Louis, Missouri and returned to UCC, but had also completed and published his ground breaking work on early school leaving – one of the most serious social problems in Ireland, even today. (*Social Dynamite*, 1967).

We partly exchanged places in the early '70s when Liam went to Maynooth to head up the department there after Newman left and I went down to Cork to take up his work load at UCC. At that time we met relatively frequently – informally as well as at meetings to set up the Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI), at SAI annual meetings, but mostly I remember meeting him and greatly enjoying his company at international European Sociological Meetings. His incisive interventions in formal debate and his very personal style of wit, great personal warmth and interpersonal skills in formal discussions and interpersonal relations made for a fantastic companion.

Liam's early published research work focussed on two of Ireland's most serious social problems that have persisted to this day: his early work on one of the most crucial school-to-work/unemployment transition points for lower working class children; and his later work on Limerick's disastrous social housing policy – in concentrating Limerick's most deprived families in large, isolated communities. The former preceded any serious follow-up ESRI studies by over a decade and the latter remains the most effective study published of one of our most serious social problems and ineffective local authority responses to this day.

Beside the descriptive and analytical rigour of his research publications, Liam's empathic observational and narrative quality stands out; so one's understanding and empathy with the subjects of his work: not alone what happens but why and how, and what the meanings experienced (expressed and unexpressed) are: providing that deeper understanding and empathy with the subjects of his work that more statistical/analytical research work fails to provide. In my own research publications, for instance, I always wished I could achieve that insightful, empathic observational and narrative quality as is present in Liam's research work.

Finally there is one outstanding achievement I must mention – his very effective work in building up the Sociology Department here at Maynooth – built with foresight and skill.

A rural sociology odyssey

Patricia O'Hara

Liam's love of travel, his generosity and sociability were to the fore when he was a member of the small group of Irish rural sociologists who attended international conferences in the 1970s and 1980s.

Sociology as a discipline was then in its infancy in Ireland with rural sociology most prominent. Liam's predecessor at Maynooth, Jeremiah Newman, had produced the first survey of rural life – the Limerick Rural Survey – in 1964 and had championed an empirical, survey-based approach to understanding Irish rural social problems. Newman had developed international contacts in the field with the high point being Maynooth's hosting of the European Society for Rural Sociology Conference in 1967. When he took over in 1969, Liam took up the baton of advocating a more scientifically based approach and the application of sociological theory to rural and other societal issues. A key vehicle for this was his editorship of *Social Studies* which he launched in 1972.

Recognition of the importance of rural sociology had also prompted the establishment of the Rural Sociology department at An Foras Taluntais (AFT – the Agricultural Institute) in the mid-1960s. Headed by the late Patrick Commins, when I joined in 1974, it comprised five rural sociologists and had an active, well-funded research programme. The ESRI was the other main organisation with a sociological research programme. It had added *Social* to its title in 1966 and appointed Damian Hannan, author of *Rural Exodus*, to lead its sociological research.

Damian came from UCC where he had earlier succeeded Liam as Professor of Sociology.

A small group of sociologists from AFT and ESRI working on rural issues became the core attendees at rural sociology conferences abroad. Liam, in carrying on and broadening the Maynooth tradition, was part of the group which on occasion included individuals from the other universities as well. In Liam's case his sociological imagination was matched by his enthusiasm for travel and adventure.

The first international conference that I attended as part of this group was in Torun, Poland in 1976. At the height of the Cold War, venturing behind the Iron Curtain was exciting and mildly daunting and involved much red tape. At the conference, we quickly discovered an affinity (now well-recognised) between Irish and Polish people. The most dramatic moment was when Damian mislaid his boarding pass at Warsaw airport and was held up at the departure gate. Liam's droll comment to a very forlorn Damian as he faced the prospect of being trapped behind the Iron Curtain was typical: 'Don't worry, we'll write and send you the odd food parcel.' (Needless to say, after much checking, counting and scrutiny of documents Damian was eventually allowed to board).

Liam's adventurous spirit and munificence to colleagues was reflected in his decision to drive alone, via the UK, to the International Rural Sociology conference in Uppsala Sweden in 1978. He duly showed up at Stockholm airport to meet our very late flight and ferried us all to our hotel.

Our daily commute to Uppsala in his car was undoubtedly illegal for carrying too many passengers. But Liam was undaunted by unfamiliar laws, routes, roads and backseat drivers and ferried us back and forth with great glee. After our safe return to Stockholm each evening, we tried to repay his kindness by leading serious sociological investigations of its hostelries.

By the time we travelled to Finland in 1981, we considered ourselves Scandinavia-smart and decided to venture to the Arctic Circle after the conference. The long night train trip was relieved by endless card games involving much hilarity, and it was in the eerie light of the midnight sun that we rather sleepily walked to the hotel. As he observed some of us women shuddering a little when we passed through the shadows, Liam in his customary deadpan way came out with:

Two ugly sisters from Fordham
Went out for a walk to beat boredom
On the way back,
A sex maniac
Jumped out from a bush...
and ignored 'em.

That was Liam on our conference trips – brilliant, witty and generous; a teller of endless fascinating and amusing stories and always ready with the perfect bon mot, his delight in the appropriate limerick, on this occasion, overriding the risk of offending our feminist sensibilities.

He was both genius and jester and left us a store of unforgettable memories.

Hospitality and satirical wit

Maria Slowey, Jakarta, All Soul's Day, 2015

Dear colleagues and friends of Liam Ryan's
– I send warm greetings from Jakarta!

I am truly delighted that Mary Corcoran and colleagues at Maynooth University are honouring this great man in such an appropriate way.

I am however disappointed not to be able to be with you in person – and just cheered up slightly by reflecting that swapping the Irish Times for the Jakarta Post as a daily read would probably have tickled Liam's fancy: some stories in the latter are rather different to what he'd be used to in the Irish Times e.g: regular tales of elephants trampling villages; volcano eruptions; and machete attacks on schools by irate parents when children don't get the results they expected. But others Liam would find all too familiar, if in slightly different form – especially those reflecting hypocrisy of religious hierarchies and weekly stories of heads of Anti-Corruption Units being charged with... corruption!

Like all who encountered him, I have many wonderful memories of Liam from whom I learnt so much – both personally and professionally. Liam was one of the genuinely radical intellectuals of Ireland, who – along with another very different Rev Dr Liam from Maynooth (Liam Carey, Director of Adult Education) – promoted women's equality issues in indirect, but effective ways.

And of course, we all have rich memories of his famous...or rather, perhaps 'infamous'...satirical wit – which nevertheless was always accompanied by incredible hospitality and personal warmth.

One particular memory stands out for me from 1983/4 when Tony Fahey and I were left in charge of Maynooth's extensive extra mural programme – a year of many highlights, not least of which was finding Tom Collins's football boots in the wardrobe in my office... but, as they say, that's another story!

At the end of the year Tony and I struggled to find names of adult education students who were eligible to receive certificates – not an easy task as we had trouble even finding a list of the classes that were actually taking place the length and breadth of the country that year. All worked out fine but we ended up exhausted after a long day of ceremonies (as a side note, after this experience Professor Fahey fled the hard work of adult education, to the easy ride of 'mainstream' Sociology teaching).

Anyhow, Liam then kindly invited us to his rooms for a debriefing over a very welcome glass or two...but that wasn't enough for him, as he spontaneously invited us to a celebratory dinner in Moyglare Manor... as a junior lecturer this was an incredible treat, and being invited to first taste the wine still a novelty. I asked Liam if he'd ever seen anyone turn down wine they'd been invited to taste, and he said yes; he had, just once... at a dinner during a Bishops' Conference on the theme of Poverty...

I did get home safely to Dublin that night, but, truth to tell, have no actual memory of how...

So, dear fellow admirers of Liam and his legacy, I'm there with you in spirit. I hope you all enjoy a fitting celebration of this extraordinary man's life and work as he would wish you to – and also trust all have lined up designated drivers to get you home safely.

Educational innovator

Attracta Halpin & Damien Courtney

Professor Liam Ryan contributed in a very significant way to the development of social studies in the Regional Technical Colleges (now Institutes of Technology) and in other colleges which came within the scope of the National Council for Educational Awards (which later became HETAC, now incorporated within QQI). He was involved at a policy level in the deliberations which resulted ultimately in the establishment of a framework of qualifications in child care and social studies designed initially for those working in residential childcare and disability settings (the first National Diploma in Child Care having been designed for workers in Loughan House, then a centre for young offenders).

Thirty years on, with programmes in social studies up to honours degree level now provided in each of the IOTs, many postgraduate programmes and some doctoral studies, it's very easy to forget that in the 1980s, there were no programmes of education or training available for those working in institutions for young offenders, in residential child care and disability settings apart from degrees in social science provided by the universities, leading to professional qualifications in social work.

Liam could see the need for education and training at different levels and for the professionalisation of child care services to the ultimate benefit of the vulnerable children, young people and disabled in the care of the state. He was a member of two NCEA working groups which formulated policy, and later took part in and chaired many programme review panels. His insights on issues of programme design, curriculum development, student assessment and work placement were always positive and supportive. He was an important voice in the initial development of programmes and in the gradual establishment of a framework of qualifications in this field.

Thus, he contributed in no small way to the fundamental educational and training dimension of the fledgling profession of social care workers which has come of age with the establishment of CORU, the health and social care professionals council, and specifically in 2015 its constituent Social Care Workers Registration Board.

That was the serious side of Liam Ryan and at this remove, some of the detail of the discussions, the documents, the visits, the reports and all the hard work and commitment that enabled serious educational progress to be made during that period and which has been built on further since then is inadequately dealt with in this short tribute.

We will remember with fondness the humanity of the man himself, the warmth, the wit, the great charm, the smile, the good humour, the lively personality and the kindness. We quickly came to understand the cohesive power of the GAA in Ireland, when Liam would break the ice with a new group (usually all male) with an introductory 'Your county look promising this year' or 'hard luck last Sunday'. Very quickly the conversation was flowing and a cohesive group had been formed, able to share ideas and work together constructively. After the preparatory work had been done and the panel of experts were fully briefed on the task of the morrow, he brightened many an evening in a dreary hotel, regaling the company with tales, sparkling repartee and some gossip. He was generous in every respect.

He had quotes at will. A favourite one was the following from Hilaire Belloc:

'Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine,
There's always laughter and good
red wine.
At least I've always found it so.
Benedicamus Domino!'

Liam may the Catholic sun be
always shining on you.

Going the distance

Kay MacKeogh

My first of many memories of Liam Ryan was meeting him in Haydens Hotel, Ballinasloe, on the way back from a hurling match in the 1970s. Others will probably share their memories of Liam's Maynooth career, his academic achievements and his legendary hospitality. I will focus on his pioneering contribution to extending access to education as Subject Leader for Sociology in the Oscail distance education BA programme, a role he carried out with finesse and his usual aplomb for many years. This programme is a unique example of inter-university cooperation which started in the late 1980s when seven Irish universities agreed to come together to develop a joint BA, to be delivered at a distance. I was tasked with coordinating the development of the BA programme from the early days. This involved working with academics from Maynooth, UCD, UCC, UCG, UL, DCU, and TCD to design and develop a modular programme based around Literature, History, Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology. The whole process took over five years before the first students enrolled in 1993.



Getting over forty academics from seven universities to agree on a joint curriculum, assessment, accreditation, was at times like minding mice at crossroads; getting seven universities to agree on a joint enrolment system, with each university awarding degrees to its own graduates was nothing short of miraculous. Liam from the very beginning was instrumental in bringing the ambitious plans for the degree to fruition. As Subject Leader for Sociology he brought together a team from the various universities to design a curriculum for the sociology stream – six modules in all. That was some achievement in itself as these sociologists had never before sat down together to discuss what they were teaching and why. Liam used his skills of negotiation, diplomacy, humour, and persuasion to achieve consensus on the course design. His next task was to identify/persuade/coerce/encourage busy academics to write course materials for the programme which he did with great success. I don't know what methods he used on his colleagues in Maynooth Sociology department to persuade them to write course materials, but I remember various members of Maynooth sociology department hiding behind pillars whenever I hove into view – those who were a little behind with deadlines (they know who they are & I saw you!). Liam himself even wrote course materials for the first year module based on his work on poverty in Limerick in the 1960s.



Together with a team of subject leaders and university registrars Liam laid the foundations for a degree which has opened opportunities for thousands of adults throughout Ireland and beyond; many of them have gone on to masters and PhDs and some are now researching and teaching in universities here and abroad. Among his many other sporting, academic and religious achievements, his contribution to distance education in Ireland should be celebrated. His friendship, encouragement and commitment will not be forgotten.

Humanities Degree Subject Leaders 1993: LtoR Professor Liam Ryan, Maynooth [Sociology]; Professor Noel Sheehy [UCD]; Professor Garrett Bardon [UCC]; Professor Kevin Barry [UCG], Dr Chris Curran [Oscail DCU]; Kay MacKeogh [Academic Coordinator, Oscail DCU].

Prophetic researcher

Eileen Humphreys

I grew up in an area very close to where Liam Ryan is from originally, Cappamore, Co. Limerick. From when I was at school, I knew of Liam Ryan and his reputation as an academic – there weren't many people like that around at the time. All of his family were considered very clever and talented people, qualities highly valued in rural Ireland. I benefitted from it. His sister, Mary Teresa Ryan, taught me at secondary school in Newport and she opened up educational possibilities for us that went way beyond the school curriculum.

When I started to research social disadvantage in Limerick City, one of the first things I read in the 'Special Collections' of the library was *Social Dynamite*, a study of early school leavers in the new social housing estates in Limerick City in 1965. I remember so well reading through it, the old feel to the discoloured pages and being very careful turning the pages so that the binding wouldn't come apart. It was a page turner. It was of its time, in the descriptions of the lives of families and the community, but also well before its time. He wrote about the contribution of 'officialdom' to the problems that were in evidence, attitudes of the better-educated classes towards poorer people in social housing seeing them as deceitful, immoral and lacking motivation, bad policies including social segregation, poor planning and poor estate design and the dislocation and breaking up traditional social networks that came with re-location to the new estates.

It was many years before these types of issues were debated in Ireland. When I went to conduct research on the same and similar estates in Limerick 40 and 50 years later – I expect, speaking to some of the descendants of the people in *Social Dynamite* – I could see how prophetic Fr. Liam's work was.

The most memorable parts of *Social Dynamite* are the graphic descriptions of life on the estates in Limerick, and the way the story is told – the times in people's lives when they were hopeful like moving into the new house coming from slums; the Hire Purchase firms and money lenders 'sitting on the doorsteps' to sell them furniture and everything else to fill the house which they couldn't repay; getting the job in the factory but then the job was gone, and there were no prospects with no skills and no education, more and more children on less income, children raising children, overcrowding, despair, and then the cycle started again with the next generation. Forty to fifty years later, the very large families have gone but, like the descriptions in *Social Dynamite*, you find children home alone, no food in the house, indebtedness and no capacity to repay, addiction with more substances now than alcohol, intimidation and lack of trust, gossip and conflicts between neighbours and in families, the impact of the bad reputation of the place and the 'class distinction' in the wider population.

As an academic, Fr. Liam doesn't only tell the story but this account of life is connected to the sociological literature, international experience from the US and the UK, and the debates in policy and politics at that time. This included the great hopes for free education in Ireland but Fr. Liam pointed out that this will not automatically solve the problem. It didn't. With free education now for at least two generations and 'supports' from official policies to keep and support children to stay in school, in 2010, we found that 70% of young parents in the southside social housing estates of Limerick city, where Social Dynamite was conducted, have only a Junior Cert qualification or lower.

Fr. Liam approaches the study using the concept of the 'total situation' of the child's life – the whole context, the conditions, the attitudes within the group influencing behaviour as well as how the child sees their own situation and how this influences their expectations. Solutions similarly need a 'total situation' response – more holistic approaches from 'officialdom' and changed attitudes in the wider population. Fifty years on, Social Dynamite was 'spot on'!

A Quiet Man

Pádraig Ó Gormaille

My recollections of the late Liam Ryan are simple.

First Arts

In September 1970 I took Sociology in First Arts and discovered that Liam Ryan was among the most interesting of all our lecturers in a subject of which we had no previous knowledge. He had become Professor the previous year, a detail lost on us 'Chubs', but he was the only academic in Sociology (Micheál MacGréil came in 1971), and for us there was only one question: could Sociology be taken seriously? How could we know? His deadpan style of delivery was no help in comparing it with traditional subjects and he was so comfortable when lecturing that he made it appear easy. In a filled Callan Hall I used to sit in the row behind a late friend from Kerry whose great loves were Ancient Greek and Modern English and for whom Sociology was unashamedly a fourth filler subject. His notes from Liam Ryan, directly in my field of vision, were inscribed on a foolscap page folded four times in tiny but legible handwriting, all in distinct comparison to my own non prizewinning script which endeavoured to capture more rather than less. Liam Ryan's lectures were structured, clear and interesting. He cleared the way for the neophyte by sharing an understanding of the world and Anglo-American society which we had never previously encountered and which our other subjects did not touch on as directly, as sharply or as appealingly. The Canadian Marshall McLuhan and John Berger are two of the thinkers he taught us that year whom I have not forgotten.

The Essay

In Second Term, 1970–71 we had to do a long essay on the Sociology topic of our choice. The title of my topic is lost in the dust of time but I clearly recall using the resources of the journal *Christus Rex*. An Irish Quarterly Journal of Sociology. Little did I know that the last issue had just appeared (it was succeeded in 1971 by *Social Studies* with Liam Ryan as Editor-in-Chief), another detail lost on young undergraduates. Much more important was Liam Ryan's feedback on the essay which was handwritten in a foolscap notebook as was then common practice. He was most gracious when I called to his rooms in Long Corridor. Profs were considered to be gods in those days but they did not have offices or secretaries. He received the visit standing and was quietly affirmative in a way I was not used to. He had read the essay in spite of its length not to mention my handwriting, barely raised his gaze, said little and spoke in a low tone; but he was positive and the barely smiling dark eyes said it all. It appeared one could take Sociology seriously after all. When we read our First Arts results the following July in the *Irish Times* – the usual means of communication at that time and there was a week-old issue at the Irish Embassy in Paris where we were doing a French course at the Catholic University – his assessment in my case proved flattering but, for better or for worse Sociology was not to be for yours truly; although our class did subsequently produce at least one leading Irish academic Sociologist.

Rag Week kidnap

I came on the French staff in September 1974 as a Full-Time-Non-Permanent Lecturer – that was the term used then – and my friend from Greek and English, by then in Second Divinity, had me kidnapped from a lecture during Rag Week 1975 and unceremoniously paraded around the campus on the back of the hijacked College lorry, the latter quite a feat in itself. My captors kept a tight grip on their hostage on the back of the open truck, making escape impossible, but momentarily relaxed their hold in order to retain balance as the lorry negotiated the corner around Junior Chapel. We careered past President Tomás Ó Fiaich and his colleagues between Riverside Lodge and Dunboyne House making it look as if I was actively enjoying the caper. Liam Ryan was also abducted during Rag Week (1975?) and brought to a pub in Kilkenny in his own maroon (or was it purple?) Vauxhall Viva from where his ransom was to be negotiated for charity live on the Gay Byrne show. He deftly retired to the Gents and thanks to a spare car key quietly drove back to Maynooth, leaving the students to hitch a lift home. Oh that I had had his foresight or could have overcome my own captors. He was as ever modest in victory with barely a twinkle of delight in his eye afterwards.

Faculty meeting(s)

In 1982 as Secretary of the Faculty of Arts, I recall the day he requested new staff to teach Anthropology, a new subject within Sociology, promising that the initiative would never be used to justify the creation of a new department, a crucial issue in a Faculty where resources and voting rights were carefully monitored. Then too he spoke quietly, without raising his voice, with an apparent meekness that deftly concealed the strategy of the next move when the opportunity would arise. What followed is of course history, and fair dues he succeeded where others had failed, some of them storming out of meetings and swearing never to return. Ach sin scéal eile. Not Liam Ryan's style. In my own case the Chair of Romance Languages to which I moved in 1990 became two separate chairs of French and Italian five years later, plus ça change...

Finally: My PhD thesis in modern French literature (Toulouse) was awarded in the specialism of Littérature et histoire sociales (Literature, History and Society) and I am in no doubt about Liam Ryan's influence. He gave Sociology its *lettres de noblesse* forty-five years ago and as a result I went on happily to teach French and Québécois literature from a historical and cultural perspective for several decades. For that I shall be forever grateful to the quiet hurler from Limerick.

A man of steel

Willie Smyth

Liam could be an elusive figure. During one Rag Week in the mid 1970s, a group of students kidnapped him (not an easy thing to do), confiscated his car keys, and drove him deep into the countryside to the edge of the Pale. There, 'imprisoned' in a warm hostelry, Liam eventually requested permission to go to the Men's room. This request was granted. Liam slipped out through a back door or window, got into his car and drove back to Maynooth in high glee. His captors were left stranded for hours in Kilkenny. They had neglected to check and see if Liam had a spare set of car keys.

Liam was a born story teller. He quarried his stories and insights from his weekly rounds of meeting people, gossiping with colleagues, visiting the less fortunate, and dealing with wayward students. And always his stories and pungent observations were laced with sociological insights. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was much debate and analysis about the reasons for the then sharp decline in religious vocations (some of it led by the head of the sociology department, a former President of Maynooth College and Bishop of Limerick, the late Jeremiah Newman). Liam's response to the debate was typically succinct and witty: 'The better question' he observed 'was to ask why there were so many vocations in the first instance'.

But it is the steel of the man that I most wish to honour. During the bitter conflict between the college authorities and Malachy O'Rourke and PJ McGrath (R.I.P.), a row erupted about the holding of a meeting of the Faculty of Arts. Malachy O'Rourke, persona non grata at the time, was then Secretary of the Faculty. Orders came from on high via the College Registrar, that the next meeting of the Faculty was not to be held. In a quandary as the newly elected Dean of the Faculty, I sought Liam's advice; he had been a former Dean. As I remember, Liam advised me that the Faculty of Arts was an autonomous body within the College structures and that the meeting should go ahead. So the Faculty met. Malachy, the secretary, sat to the right of the Chair and a non-too pleased Registrar to the left. The minutes were read, the agenda discussed and normal business transacted. In advising me, Liam was at once fearless and respectful of proper procedure. His clarity of thinking, courage and integrity could be relied on. Ar dheis De go raibh a anam dilis.

On the Dunboyne

Eamonn Conway

I happened to bump in to Liam on the afternoon I got my Arts degree results in the Autumn of 1983. Sociology having been one of my subjects, Liam invited me up to his room for a drink to celebrate. As he toasted my achievement he said he looked forward to welcoming me back on to the Dunboyne, a colloquial expression for doing further studies at Maynooth. Liam's rooms were in the Dunboyne building, where priests doing postgraduate studies were then housed. I humbly demurred, indicating that such a prospect seemed far too daunting, as, at the time, it genuinely did.

In order to encourage me, Liam produced from his bookshelf a rather flimsy looking document. I recall it as not having been any more than seventy pages; it may even have been less. He then went on to explain to me that it was the successful doctoral dissertation of a then senior member of the hierarchy. A mitigating factor for its slimness may have been that it had been written during the war when access to research sources was limited. Nevertheless, when I did end up 'on the Dunboyne' four years later, that encounter with Liam helped me keep the relative importance of the project upon which I was about to embark in perspective. It was an early and important lesson in the reality that sic transit gloria mundi.

No need for formalities

Bill Heffernan

As a boy growing up in Adare in West Limerick in the late seventies, early eighties, Maynooth was just another place the Pope had visited and sociology had not even entered my vocabulary, let alone stirred an academic interest for me. Yet the name Liam Ryan was well established in my psyche. I had long been regaled with stories, perhaps legends, of 'Mackey's Greyhounds' and their prowess up and down the hurling fields of Ireland. Central to those tales were two young brothers from Cappamore, Liam and Seamus Ryan. Liam famously captaining Limerick to Munster success at only nineteen years of age, still the youngest ever winning captain of a Munster title.

Roll on a decade or so and I find myself in the privileged position of being a student of Professor Liam Ryan's in Maynooth. Over the next few years I got to know Professor Ryan quite well, both through his lectures in sociology and through his involvement with the Fitzgibbon hurling team in Maynooth. While attendance at lectures was never my strong point I always made a special effort to make it to Professor Ryan's. He had the ability to put complex theories into a context that could be easily understood but also to do this in a most entertaining manner. He also gave really good hints approaching exams.

One of my standout memories of Professor Ryan in action was at a public debate between himself and Professor Joe Lee. This could only be described as an intellectual slugging match between two geniuses in their prime, where the levels of intellect and humour were absolutely mesmerising and all carried out as much

for their own entertainment as that of the audience. I think a quote from Chesterton sealed victory for Professor Ryan in the end.

When I finally went on to do an MA in sociology I once again had the honour and privilege of having Professor Ryan as my supervisor. During this time I met with Professor Ryan every six to eight weeks to discuss my progress but one thing I had never become comfortable with was how to address him. These meetings inevitably began with me addressing him as Professor. He would smile and sit down and we would discuss Limerick hurling, which happened to be going quite well at the time. When he thought I was sufficiently comfortable he would say something like 'You know Billy, you don't need to call me Professor' and I would reply 'Okay Father!' He would then reply with 'No need for formalities, 'Liam' will do fine.' 'Okay', I'd reply and he would smile and we would discuss business. I think the best I ever did was 'Fr. Liam', I was a hopeless case but God bless the man, he tried.

No words of mine could do justice to Professor Ryan. He was the quintessential scholar and gentleman. One of those rare individuals who had it all in abundance – sporting ability, intellect, humour and compassion but perhaps most significantly he carried all this with a sincere humility, which empowered all to feel utterly comfortable in his presence.

I would like to finish by saying 'Thank you 'Liam' for all your support and encouragement in my academic endeavours and thank you for all those chats in the nineties, when we solved all of Limerick's hurling problems but most of all thank you for your humanity.' May you rest in peace, Liam.

Waiting for Liam

Mark O'Brien

Thursday, 5.05pm: the Aula Maxima. It's winter outside and no warmer inside. The door bangs again and those seated in the first few rows turn their heads – like an anxious wedding party – to see if it's him. It's not. It's just some more students hurrying to get seats to see whether, this week, he will turn up. Those heading back down the country for the weekend look at their watches, then at their bags. They exchange glances with their friends that silently say – 'stay or go?' Someone mentions that the fresher hurling team might have had a game today. Heads scan the rows of seats to see whether the lads that usually carry hurleys are missing. It's hard to tell: no-one is quite sure. Stay or go? Just then the door bangs again and a slight figure in black hurries up the aisle. To the half-trained ear, the distinctive footfall confirms it's him. He grabs the bannister and climbs the half-a dozen steps onto the stage. Standing exactly mid-stage – and without notes of any kind – he picks up exactly where he finished last time, but only after sheepishly explaining his absence the previous week. It was, he explains, a funeral of a long-standing friend that he had to attend. Eyebrows rise as first years wonder just how risky it is to know this man who seems to be forever attending funerals.

But then minds concentrate on the topic at hand as the Devotional Revolution, or the decline of small farms, or the change from protectionism to free trade is discussed at length. Later that term his occasional absence from lectures was aptly captured in a humorous way. As the Students' Union prepared to launch its new publication *The Source*, blank mock-up front-pages were pinned to notice boards around the campus. In the Arts Block one wag put pen to paper to write an imaginary headline – 'Liam Ryan Shows up to Lecture – Shock' – that never did make its way into the paper. Given the affection that students had for Liam there's no doubt that the irreverence was meant – and would have been taken – in an affable way. For while his module – *Contemporary Irish Society* – may have focused on how Ireland had changed following industrialisation in the 1960s, his absence from the Aula Maxima every few weeks indicated that some things – friendship, comradeship and support in time of need – remained as strong as ever.

Bons mots

Fiachra Ó Céilleachair

It was 1988 when I arrived in Maynooth. I was a raw, eighteen year old from Co. Waterford, imbued with determination that Irish society would change. I was enthusiastic to serve in the battlefield around those issues then known as ‘the liberal agenda’. As I headed into my first Sociology lecture in Callan Hall, I was dubious at the thought of listening to a priest for an hour – in Maynooth, of all places. It wasn’t long, however, before I was drawn to ‘Liam’ Ryan. It was unusual to hear anyone refer to him, using the prefix ‘Father’.

Stood at the lectern in a black cloak, Liam peered upwards over the top of his glasses at the scores of youngsters stacked up behind the handful of mature student to the front. Ryan’s delivery was in a softly spoken, steady tone. Just as the temptation toward distraction in boredom was being encountered by this listener, I noticed Liam raise his right hand to grip a handle of his glasses between his thumb and index finger. There seemed to be a glint in his eye, amid a wry smile. He probably knew that the humorous anecdote he was about to deliver would go down well. ‘As ye know’, he told us, ‘Maynooth was founded in 1795, given the go-ahead by King George the Third. A debate has raged ever since, however, as to whether it was his last act of sanity or his first act of lunacy!’

I remember that Liam had also just returned from a sabbatical stint lecturing at a college in the US. Prof. Ryan was full of stories about what he saw there, particularly contrasting the US’s affluence to what we knew in Ireland in the late 1980s.

It was exceptionally rare, for example, that any recent school leaver studying at Maynooth in those years would have either a car or use of one. Looking up into his Callan Hall audience, Liam Ryan memorably said: ‘You know, in the college I was in over there, students tend to have two main concerns. One is where to get sex and the other is where to get parking’, as he smiled, he added: ‘but sure, ‘tis very few of ye have a car now I’d say!’

Liam’s sense of humour, from that point onward, was something I can fondly recall. So too, however, do I remember the brilliant analytical observations and intellectually challenging asides (often laced with acerbic wit) that dotted his lectures – and conversations – like gems. I’d say it was probably the same, first lecture of his that I attended – when addressing the topic of Ireland’s ‘Devotional Revolution’ – that Liam looked up at us in the same way as earlier described and said: ‘When you hear it asked as to how come, nowadays, Catholic vocations in Ireland are so low – ask as to why they were ever so high!’ Our minds were further jogged by such remarks from Liam as: ‘Advertising tells us that you’ve missed part of the day if you haven’t read the Irish Times. Of course, what it doesn’t tell you is that you would miss the whole day if you did read all of the Irish Times!’

In later years, I got to know him personally. A learned man, Liam once told me that he loved to read Thomas Hardy – as many of that writer’s characters reminded him of people he knew whilst growing up in East Co. Limerick. Upon telling him that my mother was a native of the same area and known for her ballad singing, Liam sat back in his chair, looked straight at me and began to recite one of her songs:

'Tis well I do remember too,
when in my youth and bloom,
I hunted on the mountain side
by Cappamore and Doon,
By Carrickbeg and Castletown,
that place where I well know,
And Gurtavalla's muddy banks
where the Mulcair river flows.'

I hadn't realised that Liam Ryan's father Willie had won two All Ireland hurling medals with Limerick in the second decade of the 20th century. Liam was also modest enough not to draw attention to his own distinction in the GAA world, a still standing record of being the youngest winning captain of a Munster senior hurling final winning team – achieved in 1955 as a nineteen year old with a Limerick team that also included his brother Séamus. When the Fitzgibbon Cup universities hurling tournament finals were hosted by Maynooth in 1995, Liam Ryan was very much to the fore. I recall being at a lavish banquet, the off-the-field feature of the weekend, in a transformed Cleric's Refectory in the college. When Liam stood up to speak, he had correctly judged that visitors were in awe of the elegance of the occasion: 'Of course' he said jokingly, 'we have to ate like this every night!'

The final of that Fitzgibbon Cup was played in Clane, between UCD and what was then known as Waterford RTC. I was among a small group gathered on a winter's day upon a truck trailer at the side of the pitch – a grandstand, as it were. Proceedings on the trailer were dominated by Marty Morrissey, who was seated at a makeshift desk commentating on the game.

Liam Ryan had deduced that the score or so figures huddled so close behind (including some not normally shy with their offerings on hurling matters) were muted in their own reactions to the game. Liam, being so worldly wise however, would also have known that the earphone clad Marty was too engrossed in his commentary and that neither the commentator or the RTE microphone and broadcast would necessarily hear any remarks passed by those at close quarters. After one lively, rhetorical flourish of Marty describing what had happened in front of us, Liam Ryan turned to those closely assembled and with great mirth in his soft Limerick accent said: 'Well, I suppose 'tis good to have at least one expert here anyway!'

In concluding, there's one very Maynooth-infused remark of Liam Ryan's that I remember him heartily laughing along with the audience in their reaction to him delivering it. Apparently, the toilets off Loftus Hall (used for exams and theology lectures in the old campus) had been converted from what had previously been prayer rooms for seminarians in Liam Ryan's day. By all accounts, the new toilets looked quiet palatial, certainly by comparison to such facilities elsewhere on campus. 'Some of the infrastructure from our daily prayer room had been left in place after the change', advised Liam, 'none more so than the wall's written reminder to us in daily prayer, now positioned over the toilets, that we turn a compulsory task to a privilege and a joy!'

By the time I left Maynooth, it was a privilege and a joy to know Liam Ryan.

The Great Communicator

Cormac Forkan

Hearing of the recent passing of Professor Liam Ryan brought a plethora of happy memories flooding back, reminding me of my time studying sociology in Maynooth, in the early to mid 1990s.

His first year module, Modern Irish Society introduced concepts such as the prevailing class structure, the high levels of age dependency, increasing secularisation and counter-secularisation trends as well as the 'auxiliary state' that prevailed until the late 1950s in Ireland. Liam's presentation style was always calm, collected and cleverly witty. He was a tremendous communicator and had the ability to explain the difficult and dense material in terms suitable for his audience! A favourite expression of his was, 'We will do this in a systematic fashion...' where he would examine the pros and cons of the issue in hand. The greatest gift Liam passed on to my generation of undergraduates I would suggest, was the realisation that it was okay to use a critical, sociologically informed lens, to interrogate the social structures in which we were immersed at that time.

Two further memories relate to Departmental budgets. In a second year lecture in 1992–93, Liam arrived as he proclaimed, 'empty-handed.' He had intended bringing a photocopy of an article on the Rutland Street Project for a lecture in his Social Policy module.

However, Maureen Redmond, the Departmental Secretary had alerted him to the fact earlier that day that he had overspent the photocopying budget by €3,000 (not sure of exact amount but it was a lot at the time!) and that no photocopying could be done! He proclaimed his innocence to the packed lecture hall and his shock at how such an issue had arisen, albeit with a glint of devilment in his eyes! On the flip side of budget deficits, he called a meeting with all of the postgraduate tutors involved in first year sociology tutorials in 1995. After presenting each of us with Slattery's, Key Ideas in Sociology, he advised us that there was a budgetary issue he needed to talk to us about. 'I hope none of you will be too upset or shocked with your stipend for the tutorials at the end of the term...It is just that I have some additional money in the budget which I will be sending your way!'

For me, Liam represented all that is good about those who have the responsibility of shaping the minds of the next generation of social actors. At a professional level, his ease of communication and wit made him a pleasure to listen to, long before the need for PowerPoint and the like. At a personal level, his door was always open for students in need and he was committed to advocate on their behalf, be it emotionally, financially, spiritually etc. To conclude, as a friend of mine and also a former student of Liam's said upon hearing of his passing, 'Liam was a man who oozed kindness and intelligence, both in like measures'.

Hedging his bets

Rita Edwards

I am one of those people who find it difficult to discard old lecture notes. A quick root in the garage unearthed a musty handout 'First Arts Sociology 1991–92' – Understanding Contemporary Ireland – 25 Lectures – L. Ryan. The lecture notes still remain neatly attached to the handout. Among the main topics which were to be discussed on his course during my first year in Maynooth as a mature student of 40ish years was 'Prospects to the year 2000 – the main distinguishing features of Irish society now and how they may change by the end of the century.' In one of his lectures Fr Ryan noted that 'it's easy to see where Ireland has come from, but not where it's going.' It is interesting to read that in his lecture dated 30 April 1992 he highlighted one of the then problems in Irish society – that of homelessness. Plus ça change. My memory of Liam Ryan is of a kind man, one with a wry sense of humour. I can still see him standing in St Joseph's Square, with his hands in his pockets talking to a group of us about life in general and about farming families, in particular. He mused that the eldest son usually got the land and that any remaining sons were either educated in the professions or entered the church. I am almost sure he said, 'I was destined for the church.' And then, with a grin said something to the effect that if there really is an after-life – he was in a good place because by becoming a priest, he had in effect, 'hedged his bets.' Thank you Liam for contributing to the many happy years I spent at Maynooth.

A fine scholar

Enda Delaney

My abiding memory of Professor Liam Ryan is the First Year Sociology lecture in Callan Hall which could hold over 260 people. He relished this opportunity to influence and nurture students. I now realise that such events are essentially performative, and that Professor Ryan was one of the great performers. He kept out attention by gems of wisdom, jokes, stories, and insights into the human condition, especially the Irish condition, the true significance of which was only to emerge for me later in life. His lectures were events, something people wanted to attend rather than felt they had to. I still remember the great time we had singing Jingle Bells in the last lecture before the Christmas break.

When I started my work on the Irish in post-1945 Britain I came across Professor Ryan again. It is not well known but his doctoral research completed in the United States at the University of St. Louis (1973) is one of the best studies ever of the Irish in Britain in the late 1960s. Based largely on interviews with nearly 1,500 migrants in London, it is a fascinating exploration of the two worlds of Ireland and Britain at this time, packed full of perceptive observations, underpinned by a deep knowledge of rural Ireland, especially those petty yet important class distinctions that extended across the Irish Sea. It was a sign of his modesty that the dissertation was never published in full, as it certainly should have been. It is remarkable study to which I refer frequently in my own work, a once-off like its distinguished author, a fine scholar and a passionate educator.

Lunch with Liam

Ann Prendergast

Fr Liam Ryan was my supervisor for my MA Sociology (Taught) Thesis in 2000. My subject was 'Rural Re-settlement in Ireland' and it involved me researching and interviewing 10/12 families who had previously lived in inner-city Dublin and had now relocated to (very) rural Ireland. I decided to travel to these locations and carry out interviews with the families. Liam helped me formulate questions, set up interviews and organised my route map.

All my meetings with Liam took place in The Roost Pub, where Liam always insisted that I have something to eat! I was actually working full time at the time, and was well able to pay for lunch (I was hoping, in fact, to treat him). But no, Liam always insisted on paying for lunch and he always said the same thing 'Pick anything you like, have something nice.' When I'd say 'Liam, this is my treat', he'd always say 'No, no, put away your money.'

I don't know, sociologically, how much progress was made during these working lunches, but I certainly found a very kind, wise confidant who understood the value of a kind, supportive word. He listened. He understood that a kind, encouraging word of support was as important as help with theory and analysis.

When I was at my MA graduation ceremony with my family, Liam was the first person I met when I left the building. He immediately invited myself and my Mum to join him for a glass of champagne in his room. We weren't able to take him up on his offer as we were going on to a family celebration and when I explained this to him he said 'Aww, and it's chilled.' My Mum often regretted not taking 'that very nice priest' up on his offer of champagne, but sadly, as my Mum has now also passed away, perhaps Liam and herself are catching up on that glass of chilled champagne up above!

Liam Ryan was a kind, decent, stylish man who was approachable, knowledgeable and generous. He had the students' best interest at heart, always.

Ní bheidh a leithéid arís ann.

Ever prescient

Paul Clear

I've often heard it remarked and have indulged myself on more than once occasion with friends on what I believe to be a shared Irish penchant: memories of teachers both good and bad. Moreover, we seem to remember the bad easily and the good far less readily. Professor Liam Ryan seamlessly occupied the latter role. As just one of an untold number of students who studied under Liam, I in no way feel qualified to speak of the man. In saying as much, the memories of my undergraduate days are tinged with an indelible fondness in no small part owed to Liam. As a lecturer he possessed that rare combination of infectious enthusiasm and command of his field with a stellar sense of wit and warmth. Looking back, in some ways he seems to have been emblematic of the bridge that once spanned the then campus. Or as he amiably referred to in one lecture as representing the 'sacred and the profane', with the adage that it was up to us to decide which site occupied which.

As an undergraduate in Maynooth from 1998 to 2001, I was fortunate enough to have had Liam as a lecturer for the three years I studied sociology. As a first year with little or no knowledge of what sociology actually entailed, he effortlessly laid out the science behind what many of us unknowingly thought at the time was 'the fluff'. Regardless of the topic he had that uncanny ability of making the most complex of concepts or theories understandable, grounding what appeared at once abstract in the everyday. Moreover, he did so with a genuine belief in people and their place in society.

Although some time has passed since

I sat in the Aula Maxima or the old class halls in the Arts block listening to Liam Ryan's lectures, from what I can remember he never seemed to espouse one particular school of thought or if he did, he never made it obvious, but left you to form your own opinions, draw your own conclusions. The lightness of humour and his informal style meant that each lecture seemed to pass without notice of time. The often light hearted anecdotes that he shared in lectures seemed to make the questions sociology posited more accessible and relevant.

I remember my undergraduate project on Emmet Larkin's 'Devotional Revolution' for no reason other than Liam's reply to a question I asked his opinion on. Namely the drop in vocations in Ireland, to which he replied that observing, measuring and questioning change was what sociology was all about, that it was only a matter of time before the Church in Ireland would be offering a form of emergency service, a '999' service for births, deaths and marriages. In a Sociology of Education lecture he once regaled us with the tale of a trip to see a rugby match in Cardiff with a group of friends, jovially recalling the return home after a protracted and unscheduled detour. 'Education', he remarked, 'like the trip to Wales, is not just about the destination but the journey.' Exams in and of themselves were not the measure of a person's ability, which in today's context of educational reform seems particularly apt.

In retrospect, the fact that nearly fifteen years on I still remember Professor Ryan's lectures says something of the educator he was. Although the bridge between the north and south campus has gone, the fond memories of those formative years in Liam Ryan's lectures still remain.

Our friend Fr. Liam Ryan

Noel and Grainne Dalton

Here, traveller, scholar, poet,
take your stand
When all those rooms
and passages are gone,
When nettles wave upon
a shapeless mound
And saplings root among
the broken stone
And dedicate – eyes bent
upon the ground,
Back turned upon the
brightness of the sun
And all the sensuality
of the shade –
A moment's memory
to that laurelled head.

W.B. Yeats – from Coole Park, 1929

A number of years ago, Liam gave a very moving spiritual oration at the funeral of a mutual friend. Afterwards we told him that he might do something similar when we departed. In that way we would have the consolation that his sermon would bathe us in a wonderful light. Given that he outflanked us with his sad passing, we are now left with the daunting task of having to craft in words an image of this great human being. Forgive us Liam that our attempt will inevitably fall short in trying to sum up our deep friendship.

When Liam came to Maynooth in 1969 as the first lecturer in sociology, his first series of lectures were on culture. On explaining the passing of a way of life, he quoted an Indian Sioux chief who compared this to the breaking of a pottery bowl. In Liam's death we also feel that someone precious has been lost and the bowl has been broken. In the following personal reminiscences we hope we can give some understanding of the nature of our friendship.

It is a great honour to write about Liam – as a great friend, not as the academic – others are better placed to remember his more intellectual qualities. Some people live life with reference to the titles they have attained, not Liam. We are writing about the private persona of Liam, not the public persona as professor or well known sociologist. These snippets of our times together represent a friend in all his human decency – his supportiveness of friends whom he thought had been badly done-by, his stubbornness, his non-judgement of people, his love of hurling and all sports, his love of poetry, his love of all kinds of trivia and his love of the craic.

We first met Liam in the early 1970's when we were both Sociology students in Maynooth. We became friends and remained so over the following 40 plus years. Liam was easy to be friends with. He was part of all our family occasions – from our own wedding in 1975, the christening of our three children, significant birthday celebrations, the weddings of our children. Emma's wedding was in the Unitarian Church and Liam celebrated the wedding with the minister.

As he had had the stroke at that stage he took advantage of a personal driver and the bridal car to travel to Toner's pub arriving white ribbons and all. Bystanders in Baggot Street gaped at the priest getting out of the wedding car and going into the pub.

Liam christened our grandchildren. He always said that ours were the only weddings and christenings where he officiated on request but still had to give a present. The last christening occasion was for our grandson Harry after Christmas in 2014. Neither the stroke nor the big cold church in Athboy deterred him – and he partied afterwards. As he always said 'God bless our innocent mirth.'

He babysat for our children – ONCE. We were watching a film in our house in Maynooth when there was a sudden need to head to Holles Street Maternity Hospital, baby number two was on the way. Luckily Emma, the baby, didn't wake up that night even though Liam stayed awake all night, worrying as to what he would do if she did wake up! Needless to say, he didn't charge for his services.

No request was ever too much to ask of Liam, even as a character witness in Court. We were in Court in Kilcock (one and only time) for drinking after hours in Caulfields in Maynooth. Liam came along and was on the verge of perjury in the nice things he said about us. He also went to the same Court to give character references to a bunch of students who had stolen a bus during Rag week.

We often fondly remember his friend Mary O'Neill who was teaching in Neilstown in Dublin. Mary organized a pub quiz for her school. The four on our team were a professor and three teachers. We couldn't possibly let her down in front of her children's parents. We came last. Liam was adamant we leave immediately lest they gave a prize to the team that came last.

We also remember Liam on a week in Edinburgh, staying in our daughter Ana's flat. We walked The Royal Mile in torrential rain. He wore a fabric non-waterproof jacket and refused to wear a rainproof coat or carry an umbrella. He was soaked but was delighted that he saw James Connolly's birth plaque at Cowgate. We also went to Hadrian's Wall somewhere near Newcastle. Liam stayed in the car as he had gotten wet enough in the week – it was lashing down again. We climbed up the slippery slope. On the way down, Ana was the first to fall and then her mother. Liam laughed with the remark that barbarians always crash.

Speaking of foreign parts, on a weekend in London we met his old friend, Fr. Nottingham. We had a great night out in a very posh Italian restaurant and finished singing Irish rebel songs. The kitchen staff came out to listen. Liam even arranged tickets to an Arsenal match as he knew the man who looked after their boots. He always knew someone.

One of his great loves was to relax in the company of friends. And what great company he was. His other friends in Maynooth, the Houlihans and in Banagher, the Naughtons particularly loved his company. Being in Liam's company was enriching, rewarding, enjoyable and never boring. In all the time we spent with Liam, he was always a supreme conversationalist and storyteller. You could say he was rooted in the great Irish seanchai tradition. It would take a huge volume of books to detail all his stories and sayings. We remember him telling us, after he attended a poverty conference in the sumptuous surroundings of a four-star hotel, 'I can't wait to attend the next conference on celibacy.'

Sporting tales littered his vast repertoire. He often recounted an incident from a Limerick/Cork Munster Championship match in the 1950s, when a Limerick back beat Christy Ring to the first four balls. Christy calmly informed the Limerick player that the crowd had come to see Christy Ring, not him.

Liam's wit was often sardonic. He referred to his support for a fellow colleague as a factor in his not being selected for a bishopric. His comment was 'Now that I think of it, I never thanked my colleague properly.'

Liam, in his vastness of knowledge, was a truly Renaissance man, but he was always rooted in the soil of Cappamore. On our visits to Cappamore, he was always eager to show us everything of interest in the area. We particularly remember our visit with him to the monument at the site of the Dromkeen ambush.

He even suggested that it was a bigger ambush than Kilmichael! In that case we suggested that he write a song called 'The Boys of Dromkeen.' He was steeped in the knowledge and appreciation of where he came from. To paraphrase Paddy Kavanagh – by knowing his own half-acre, he truly came to know the universe.

Liam never spoke of his considerable achievements. He was a modest man. He always spoke particularly fondly about his time in UCC. He loved Cork. One of his preferred sayings from that time was 'Don't be afraid of it boy.' It was probably fitting that his last hurrah was in Cork, on Bere Island, at the wedding of Fina Dalton and Colin Duggan. He had all his Cappamore friends around him, minding him. As he said himself that weekend, if he had gone to the doctor beforehand, he would not have been on Bere Island. He lived life to the full at all times.

These are only a few of our memories of Liam. When Liam died we could not fathom how so much wit, wisdom, poems, history, memories of hurling exploits, retained details on all sorts of matters, Christmas Quiz answers etc. held in one head could be lost forever. We will miss his great company but we will remember him with love forever.

We imagine that when Liam met his God in May 2015, the encounter was full of wit and repartie, poetry and stories. And God, being from Cork, might have said 'Don't be afraid of it boy.'

Ar dheis De go raibh a anam.

Fr. Liam Ryan – a personal perspective

Maura Walsh

The sad loss of Fr. Liam on 27th May 2015 was a terrible blow not only to his family and friends but also to the whole parish of Cappamore, Co. Limerick. Fr. Liam was a Cappamore man through and through. He never missed an opportunity to express his pride in and loyalty to Cappamore and its people.

When he returned to Cappamore in 2003 I felt we were indeed very fortunate to have such a learned man living among us. His sermons were always most interesting and informative. We were treated to poetry recitations and history lessons on a regular basis all appropriate to the message he wanted to impart. He had the qualities of an excellent teacher in that you always came away with a nugget or two of knowledge after listening to him. He had wit and wisdom in abundance – the wisdom to get his message across through the medium of a story and these stories were more often than not laced with his famous rapier-sharp wit.

I remember one sermon especially when he told the congregation that he had once had the honour of hearing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King speak. This great preacher compared the dimensions of the ancient temple in Jerusalem to a well-lived and well-balanced life. This temple's dimensions – its length, breadth and height – were all equal. The length signified what we achieve for ourselves in life, the breadth what we do for others and the height our relationship with God. Using this as a yardstick, Fr. Liam's was certainly an exemplary life.

Many of my memories of him stem from my acquaintance with him through my work as Principal teacher in Scoil Chaitríona. I knew that Fr. Liam was an historian therefore I invited him to come and speak to the Fifth and Sixth Class on many occasions on the Famine and its consequences in the locality. The first time he came the children had completed a project on this topic and Fr. Liam admired their work and spoke to them on the topic holding their attention for well over an hour. I was amazed that this man, who had spent his life in the groves of academe, could relate so well to primary school children. But then a teacher is a teacher whatever the age group. That day I was also in awe of the fact that he brought a treat for the class – Tayto crisps for each child – so appropriate considering the subject of his talk!

Over the years Fr. Liam celebrated many school occasions with us. He celebrated many Masses, Holy Communions and Confirmations and Sixth Class Graduations in which the school children were involved. In fact, Fr. Liam said the Beginning of the School Year Mass in 2006 as Fr. Browne was not available that day. This was the year when the Convent School and the Boys National School amalgamated. Fr. Liam planted a tree on the school grounds after the Mass to mark the inauguration of Scoil Chaitríona.

Fr. Liam was most certainly 'sui generis' – in a class of his own – he is sadly missed in his native place and indeed further afield. We were indeed privileged to have had the honour of knowing him. Suaimhneas síoraí dó.

A tribute to the late Rev. Fr. Liam Ryan

John, Mary, Eilish and Dervla Naughton

It was around the time of my engagement, that I first came to meet the great Liam. It was in my sister-in-law's home namely the Houlihans in Maynooth. Mary and Donal were having guests to dinner to celebrate the engagement of John to myself. It was also on that occasion that I met Noel and Grainne Dalton all of whom went on to become good friends.

John had decided long before me, that he wanted Liam to marry us. So, that night after a few drinks he asked Liam would he do the honours. Of course, said Liam, but you know it is the bride's prerogative as to which priest she asks to witness the marriage. No problem, says John, I will sort that, meaning I would have to go back to my own nice parish priest and explain matters, which I duly did. He accepted it graciously and was also a guest at our wedding. Liam had a record that he did not want broken. All of his wedding ceremonies that he had performed had survived. He did not wish to get caught out on this occasion.

After that, Liam was a true friend and an invited guest to all family events. He was present for the christenings of both of our girls and indeed was there on the sad occasions where he concelebrated funeral masses for our late parents.

To describe him as a kind gracious man would be an injustice. He was far more. His intellectual mind commanded an audience. It was a great pleasure to listen to him regaling wonderful anecdotes. His knowledge of history, combined with his sociological insights and wonderful wisdom was unsurpassed. He was one of the first sociologists to study how people displaced from one area to another coped with the change. The professionals who are dealing with the current migrant crisis in Europe could gain valuable insights and knowledge from his work.

In the last week before he passed away, I visited him in Limerick. He was still alert and although frail regaled me with some stories. He was focussed on returning to his home and endeavouring at some stage to obey his parish priest, who was also his friend. Unfortunately, that journey to his home in Cappamore did not come to pass. He took a different route. However, his legacy steeped in kindness and intelligence will always remain with us.

Ar dheis Dé go rabih a anam.

Dr. Liam Ryan: President of the Cappamore Historical Society

Ellis Duggan

Fr. Liam's love affair with Cappamore Historical Society commenced in early 1991 when he was asked to write the history of the GAA in his native parish. At the time, the history of Cappamore was being compiled by the Historical Society. It was an affair which continued until his untimely death in May of this year. He was our President and a truly great one.

Liam's contribution to Cappamore Historical Society was immeasurable – all our projects were enhanced by his wisdom and vision. In 1992, he launched Cappamore, A Parish History and in 1994, as President of Cappamore Historical Society, he welcomed President Mary Robinson to Cappamore, where she was presented with a copy of the publication. He organised a visit to Aras an Uachtarain accepting the invitation of President Michael D Higgins in 2013. Other projects included a commemorative stone and plaque to the victims of the Famine and a plaque with the names of all Cappamore Parish Priests dating back to 1471. He unveiled a specially commissioned stained glass window to commemorate the beatification of Bishop Terence Albert O'Brien, who was born locally. In 2005, Liam launched *Where the Mulcair River Flows*, a songbook of local songs and verse.

As an All-round sportsman, Liam took great pride in John Hayes' rugby career with Munster, Ireland and the Lions. He put pen to paper and captured John's achievement in verse. This song has been heard near and far with Fr Browne, (his former student) known to give a great rendition. Liam took great pride in another publication by the Historical Society, *As Time Goes By*, a collection of over 1,000 photographs compiled in book form dating back to the 1850s which was launched in 2010. His work on all of these publications was immense, in compilation, layout and text which he did not always take credit for. He used his great skills generously and with integrity to empower others.

Liam was a great orator and a great story teller and was known to give history lessons from the altar. Liam's lectures and homilies frequently began with a verse or a line from a poem or song. Quoting Martin Luther King, (whom he met while in America) Liam spoke of how the quality of a person's life could be measured 'by the length of it (what they made of their lives), by the breadth of it (how they reached out to others), by the height of it (how they gave time to God).' 'A good life should be equal in all three', he quoted. If Liam's life was measured by these standards, then all qualities were equal and in abundance. He had the ability to capture his audience and he could move from the profound to humour with ease.

Liam was wonderful company and he liked to 'hold court' which he regularly did and had most willing audiences. During the lighter occasions if one was not paying attention his comment was... 'I have lost half of my audience already.'

He loved table quizzes in particular and was fiercely competitive. One could nearly be assured of a win if a member of his team. There was hardly a question he couldn't answer and if there was a difference of opinion his quip would be 'argue with me privately, but never in public.' He has been known to go home after a quiz and research whatever the disagreement was about, follow this up with a telephone call no matter what the hour, to confirm if their answer was correct!

Liam loved to travel and before each journey he and his sister Mary T did research and were better guides and informants than any in the place being visited. He was an informed and entertaining travelling companion. Passing through villages and towns or over mountain ranges, he had something of interest to say about each place.

Historical Society members are renowned for their fun and laughter, song and dance and many a journey and evening went all too quickly as songs were sung and stories told. When called upon, Liam's repertoire usually included 'Dangerous Dan McGrew' and 'Big Bad John' which he delivered with aplomb. He could recite Shakespeare and many other poets at will. We remember hearing him recite Shakespeare on an early morning train in Rome. When asked about his memory of such verses he replied that he had a photographic memory and could visualise the page.

Liam's easy manner enabled many of us to create new eyes. He made the extraordinary seem ordinary and the ordinary seen extraordinary.

He spoke of historical figures as if they were his neighbours and historical events as if they were last week. We felt as if we were walking through history when Liam and Mary T. led many trips at home and abroad.

Liam never lost his common touch. A local character in Cappamore, having seen the photograph of Fr Liam and Fr Dick Browne, pucking around in the hurling field in Cappamore before the Championship match between their two counties in 2005 informed him that they were holding the hurleys incorrectly. Fr Liam said: 'My friend, tell me how to bless myself, tell me how to say Mass but don't tell me how to hold a hurley.'

When faced with a challenge Liam's usual comment was: 'This is it, this is the thing, this is what you are up against.' Liam often quipped: 'God grant us the gift of Christian resignation.' He displayed that resignation after his stroke on Feb 14th 2011, not alone in the immediate aftermath, but in subsequent years, through his forbearance and acceptance. He never lost his independence, his determination, his competitiveness, or his humour. He would say: 'Thank God I went from the feet up rather than the head down.'

Of someone who sympathised with him and told him they knew someone who had 'got a year' after the stroke he laughed and said: 'I won't be keeping that company anymore.'

We will lovingly remember Liam our friend, with joy and with deep gratitude for enlightenment and for the gift and of his time with us.

'I have glorified thee on earth:
I have finished the work which
gavest me to do...' John 4:34.

Contributors

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Willie Smyth

Maura Walsh



Ar dheis Dé go rabi h a anam.

