



Booking out in Blackrock



by Louis Hemmings

CARRAIG BOOKS, a second-generation book shop, was originally founded by the late Alfred Day. In 1952 Day brought his family to Ireland from Bristol and started a mail-order, used-book business in Sandycove, County Dublin. Next, he opened The Harcourt Bookshop, at 94 Harcourt Street. Simultaneously Alfred opened Liffey Books, beside the Ha'penny Bridge, but closed it after a few years.

In 1962 Day closed The Harcourt Bookshop, and moved premises to Kildare Street, where he opened The Museum Bookshop. Later, in 1968 he moved to a larger premises in Blackrock. Carraig Books was established in a fine neo-Tudor building. Previously this building had housed the Miranda Tea Rooms. There was a generous footprint of retail space there.

In the large rear garden were a number of small chalet-style dwellings which were rented out for summer holidays. In earlier times, the Blackrock Baths was a big tourist draw. Samuel Lewis, in his Topographical Dictionary, makes note to this effect by saying: "the facilities for sea-bathing render this a place of great resort during the summer months; several respectable boarding-houses have been opened for the accommo-



Carraig Books is closing its shop after half a century

dation of visitors...".

Alfred Day started filling up the grey-painted shelves with thousands of books. Many large book collections came from religious colleges, as they closed down in the 1970s. Personal libraries of deceased collectors, clergymen also lecturers also generated a steady supply of books.

Book catalogues were printed regularly in the printers at the rear of the shop, for the mail-order business. Local Dublin history chapbooks were reprinted. Facsimile copper-plate engravings of Irish landscape scenes were reproduced and hand-coloured. These proved to be good sidelines for a thriving business.

The Carraig Books Chapbook Reprints evolved as another interesting and somewhat profitable sideline. These booklets were curated by a Dr Wall, a retired librarian from the Irish Folklore Commission. Titles included McCready's Dublin Street Names, PJ M'Call's In The Shadow of St. Patrick's, and Fr Donnelly's History of Dublin Parishes. The last chapbook published was Liam McColl's detailed History of Blackrock village and surroundings.

There are few second-hand bookshops left in Irish cities, towns and suburbs. Readers are moving to

“ It follows the likes of Greene’s, Clare St; George Webb’s, Aston Quay: Fred Hanna’s, Nassau St and Kennys of Galway – but will remain online



cut-price megastores, migrating to e-books and seduced by the ease of online One-Click purchases. Booksellers also must take some blame for decline: many are reluctant to promote, using new-fangled marketing stratagems.

Carraig Books favoured old style, black and white, hard-copy catalogues to promote its stock. These were posted out every few months detailing new offerings in a proper and full bibliographical way. To date 300 catalogues have been issued. These catalogues once had a circulation of up to 1200 copies worldwide. In recent years, unfortunately, the print run declined by 90%.

An immense stock has built up over the years, now standing at approximately 100,000 books, with less than 50% on display. There are three public rooms displaying an exuberance of authors and subjects: Irish interest, religion, literature, arts, antiquarian, railways, chess, cricket, genealogy and more. Carraig specialises in books of Irish and Catholic interest and in old, out-of-print, rare and antiquarian books.

In many side rooms, and elsewhere in the imposing three-storey red-brick building, there are many more shelves groaning with books. Then there are the rooms

packed tight with small towers of boxed books, awaiting the light of day.

Sean, now reaching retirement age, will be slowly winding down the bookshop side of the business in 2017. His genial smile and helpful attitude will be missed, as much by the serious collector, as by the local buying a two-euro book from the display outside the shop. It follows the likes of Greene’s, Clare St; George Webb’s, Aston Quay: Fred Hanna’s, Nassau St and Kennys of Galway in shutting its doors. Although the shop will shut after 48 years in Blackrock, Ruth Hickey will be maintaining the online presence of Carraig Books. **L**

www.carraigbooks.com

Louis Hemmings has been writing poetry and prose since 1972 and worked intermittently in Carraig Books. His homage to Carraig Books available free of charge in Carraig Books, Blackrock and is also available online at: www.louishemmings.com.

Dora Kazmierak has been taking photographs since she was a child: www.instagram.com/dorakazmierak/