

Mayor Ger Carty: On the Unveiling of the ROBERT and UNA BRENNAN MEMORIAL on 25th June 2016

Robert Brennan, a native son of Wexford town, was born in John's Gate Street and reared here in both Abbey Street and in George Street where he was a star pupil of the Christian Brothers School.

Brennan was largely self-educated. He went to night school to qualify to do a course to become a Surveyor and was employed by the County Council. But in his heart of hearts he was a creative writer and journalist in which he was self-trained.

He was County Secretary of both the Gaelic League and Sinn Féin and a member of the IRB, sworn in by Sean T O'Kelly over Barker's shop in South Main Street.

He was appointed Acting Officer Commanding by his fellow officers during the Rising in Enniscorthy, where his approach might be well described as being cool, cautious and collegiate. His surrender to Colonel French marks both men out as eminently capable to control the serious situation that they faced.

It was in prison his ability was spotted by de Valera and others and his career thereafter became a kaleidoscope of the eventful years that followed. He was Sinn Féin National Director of Elections in 1918; he developed the Dáil's counter-propaganda organ, *The Irish Bulletin*; and it was he who established the Department of Foreign Affairs. As First Minister in Washington (1938-1947) he worked very successfully to preserve Irish neutrality. Journalist, playwright and novelist, he wrote a hugely successful detective series for *Ireland's Own*.

Robert married in 1909 to Úna Bolger of Oylegate. The year before, at eighteen, Una persuaded William Sears of the *Echo* to give her a column where, straight out of Loreto, she was instantly influential as a forceful young nationalist-feminist journalist. Una Bolger, now Una Brennan, was aunt to Jim Bolger the famous horse-trainer and second cousin to writer Roddy Doyle.

Una Bolger had a big part in the establishment in 1908 of *Bean na hÉireann* - the paper of *Iníní na hÉireann* founded by Maud Gonne. Una was their Wexford Co. Secretary. They held their meetings in Monck Street. Úna was of course in Cumann na mBan and was one of the women given the honour of hoisting the Tricolour on the Athenaeum. Her female colleagues appointed her Acting Officer Commanding of Cumann an mBan in the Athenaeum during the Rising.

One of Una and Bob's children, Maeve, became an iconic columnist with the New Yorker Magazine and a world master of the short story – most of which concern her youth in Dublin and holidays to Wexford, including stays in her Granny's corner house in George Street here beside us. She is a significant potential asset for Wexford tourism and *Wexford's Culture Mile*.

This is by any measure a remarkable list of contributions, achievements and connections for one family – a list of which this town can be duly proud.

Our lives are shaped very much by the exemplars we hold up to ourselves. We are aware of the power of example: our county motto is *Exemplar Hiberniae*. We are also affected by the times we live in, whether peace or war or recession. Like the Brennans in their time, many people in town today have been carrying on as best they can these past years despite severe difficulties. Often short of money, they are rearing and caring, and fighting on, though finding the going hard – just like Bob Brennan's mother [Bridget Kearney of Selskar, the undertakers] did, in her corner house here beside us. People are making do, getting on with it, like others before us.

Like Bob going to night classes to make something better of himself, in hard times our heroes can inspire us to hang in there and fight to help ourselves and our community. The more local our heroes the better. Heroes who made it on our home ground: made it with what they had to hand. Ordinary local heroes are a reference point, a local coordinate to remind us we can make it.

I believe it is good public policy from our Borough Council to do honour to Robert and Una Brennan among our town's local heroes and remind ourselves of their achievements. The members of our Borough Council, and I as Mayor, believe that this monument will reassure and inspire us into the future.

Agus leis sin, a dhaoine uaisle, déanaim an cloch seo a nochtadh.