

CIVIC RECEPTION FOR THREE LIMERICK WOMEN OF DISTINCTION



Friday, 6th March 2015

Three 'outstanding Limerick women of distinction' have been posthumously honoured by Limerick City and County Council during a civic reception at the University of Limerick this afternoon (Friday).

Author, philanthropist and activist **Charlotte Grace O'Brien**, international aviator **Sophie Mary Peirce** and novelist and playwright **Kate O'Brien** were honoured at the event which was organised by Limerick City and County Council in association with the University of Limerick (UL).

The event was held at UL in celebration of International Women's Day this weekend and in recognition of the University's bid for an Athena SWAN award which recognises and celebrates good practice in recruiting, retaining and promoting women in STEMM (science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine) in higher education.

Mayor of Limerick, Cllr Kevin Sheahan described the decision to posthumously award the three women a civic reception as 'historic and unique' as they were never publicly acknowledged for their exceptional achievements during their lifetimes.

"I would hope that all of us here today can in some way be inspired by the respective achievements of these three women," he said. "Like many pioneering women of their time, all three lived their lives by thinking globally and acting locally. They are not the first nor will they be the last Limerick

women to achieve great things. We must however, publicly acknowledge them and cherish their memory so their stories may inspire others.”

Relatives of the three women attended the ceremony which was hosted by RTE broadcaster Claire Byrne in front of an invited audience which included Minister for Finance, Michael Noonan, TD; Minister for Education, Jan O’Sullivan TD and Mrs Sabina Higgins, wife of Úachtaráin na hÉireann, Michael D Higgins and former MP Edwina Currie.

Charlotte Grace O’Brien (1845-1909) from Cahirmoyle, Co Limerick was an author, philanthropist, and activist in nationalist causes and the protection of female emigrants. The harrowing human struggle of 19th century emigration from Ireland made a significant impression on her and she devoted her life to aiding and improving the challenges faced by young Irish women emigrants. She was also a poet, botanist and author whose writings shone a light on the Irish struggle. Among her achievements was her overseeing of the establishment of the Our Lady of the Rosary Mission in New York, dedicated to immigrant aid, and her O’Brien Emigrant Home, in Cobh, Co Cork.

Sophie Mary Peirce (Lady Sophie Mary Heath) 1896-1939, Knockaderry, Co Limerick founded the British Women’s Athletic Association and held the record as British Champion javelin thrower. She commands a litany of firsts, the first female member of the London Light Aeroplane Club, the first female aviator to qualify as an engineer in the USA, and the first female pilot to fly for KLM airlines. A breaker of numerous records and a mentor to Amelia Earhart, she was an inspiration and vanguard for many women.

Kate O’Brien (1897-1974) was a well-known Limerick figure and the inspiration for the Limerick Literary Festival which gathers and honours literary figures, attracts academics, renowned authors, critics, playwrights, journalists and poets of international status. Her work reflected the many struggles of middle class Irish women at the time, and their bid for individuality and love. Also of renown are her travelogue essays in her book, *My Ireland*.