



TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY: **DR MAURICE MANNING**, on 20 September 2007, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **PADDY HARTE**

A Sheánsailéar, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle, Paddy Harte has been a politician for most of his life, from his election to Donegal County Council in 1960 and Dáil Éireann a year later. He represented his county in Dáil Éireann until 1997, serving on his party's front bench and as a minister of state and as spokesman on Northern Ireland through some of the most difficult days of the Troubles. He has won many awards for public service and has been especially noted for his leadership in the search for peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland.



Paddy Harte is one of the small number of Irish politicians who have published a personal account of their life and times in Irish politics. His book '*Young Tigers and Mongrel Foxes*' which was published in 2005 is more than just an account of his own contribution and adventures in Irish politics – though they make vivid, lively and controversial reading. It gives a valuable and colourful account of life and politics in Donegal in the 1950s and 1960s, showing not just the rivalries and issues but the personalities and the feuds which were the life blood of local politics in that era, recalling the celebrated aphorism of Tip O' Neill "that all politics are local". It is a lively account and one for which future historians will be grateful.

If there was one consistent theme in Paddy Harte's political career it is his outspokenness and honesty. He certainly wasn't always right – even he would reluctantly admit to that - but he was right more often than he was wrong and on the big issues he was nearly always right.

For him the big issues were not always the obvious ones, and were invariably born out of his own personal experiences as a public representative. It was for example his meeting a mother with a beautiful ten year old girl suffering from what we would today call intellectual disability and was then called mental handicap which began a lifelong commitment to reform and to the provision of better services in this area and indeed to changing the attitudes of



people towards those suffering from intellectual disability. Paddy Harte was a politician not a theorist and throughout his career the memory of that girl remained a driving force in his political life.

Paddy Harte was no stranger to the smoke filled room of politics, no shrinking violet when it came to the rough and tumble of constituency or national politics. In an age of robust political debate and heavy shouldering he gave as good as he got.

But he was also very conscious that the point of politics was to serve and most of all to bring about change - to reform what needed reforming, never to be afraid to challenge the establishment or the status quo. It was this drive which made him such a passionate supporter in his own party of the 'Just Society' in the 1960s with its commitment to social change and economic investment, emphasising the responsibility of the state towards the less well off. On all of the issues his stance has been vindicated by the passage of time.

But it was Northern Ireland which preoccupied him. Unlike a majority of TDs of all parties in Dáil Éireann in the 1970s and 80s he knew Northern Ireland. He knew the people, the terrain, the complexity and the history. He knew at first hand that Northern Ireland was a dysfunctional state in need of radical overhaul. But he knew too that the murderous campaign of the IRA was not the way to do it. And he had the courage to state these views loudly, clearly and persistently.

Throughout those dark and terrible days, days whose history is now being rewritten before our very eyes, he was a voice of calm, of restraint, of deep-felt, sometimes almost heartbroken outrage both at the crimes being committed in the name of Irish Republicanism and at the slowness, and worse, of the Northern authorities to make an adequate response.

But politics and Northern Ireland for Paddy Harte were about more than just outrage. He saw his unionist neighbours on both side of the border as people, not as enemies, not as a problem. He began the hard and dangerous work of reconciliation, of finding common ground of providing mutual support and encouragement in the face of the bigotry of both communities, in face of the easy comfortable slogans and the certainty of tribal convictions.

Paddy Harte was no sociologist or academic. He was dealing with real people in a situation which seemed only to get worse and worse. It was hard grinding work. It was unglamorous and largely unacknowledged - and it was dangerous. His friend Billy Fox had paid with his life for his convictions - or maybe just for being of the wrong religion. It would have been easier for Paddy Harte - and he was a man with a young family - it would have been easier to have



stayed away from the difficult issues. It is to his eternal credit that he never did, that he never lacked the courage to speak out loudly and clearly.

But Paddy Harte will be remembered most of all for his efforts to restore and respect the memory of those, from all communities, who died in the First World War. These were the men who, at best were written out of our history, but worse, whose memory was tainted, who became almost the unspeakables. Paddy Harte fought with a small group of like minded people from both communities to change this, to get recognition for these men, men who came from every town and village in this country. He succeeded in getting that recognition, both at official level and in the public consciousness.

But it was about more than recognition of past official and public amnesia. It was also an act of great national reconciliation, bringing together the two traditions of this island, establishing a common bond which would ultimately see the heads of States of this country, the United Kingdom and Belgium standing in silent tribute on Messines Ridge in 1998.

If we think back to the frozen attitudes of even twenty years ago, that picture on it own is a silent but eloquent tribute to the extent of Paddy Harte's achievement.

Paddy Harte in all of his political and personal life has had the unflinching support of his wife Rosaleen, and their nine children. They too share in this honour conferred on him today by the National University of Ireland.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.