

Sir Alex's passion for Irish history

BY NICK BRAMHILL

MANCHESTER UTD boss Alex Ferguson has revealed a secret passion for Irish history.

Fergie said he is a huge admirer of Michael Collins, who he describes as a "romantic figure", doomed once he signed the Anglo-Irish Treaty and agreed the partition of the Six Counties.



Sir Alex, whose wife Cathy has Irish roots, said he has huge respect for the network of people Collins built up between 1916 and 1922, which he likened to the modern-day CIA.

"I started reading history many, many years ago and one of the topics I took was Irish history from the Easter Rising through to the Civil War," he said.

"I was fascinated by Michael Collins. I think he was never going to be successful at the talks in London. Even, as he said in his own words, he signed his death warrant that day when he signed the Treaty with the partition.

"Everybody expected him to come back with no partition, but I don't think he was ever going to get that. I don't think the British Government was ever going to allow that."

In a revealing interview on RTE radio last week, Ferguson also spoke of his distaste for greedy football agents, citing examples of outrageous demands that have been made on behalf of some of his players.

"It's a hard job to deal with agents, although I don't deal directly with them myself, but I remember one agent wanted a striker to be paid for all the goals he scored. I said, 'Could you please remind him we're buying him because he's a goalscorer.'

"Another agent once asked me to buy a block of flats for a player.

"That's what you've got to deal with today. It's unbelievable."

TD's fury at Irish Government's apathy towards 'Famine Song'

BY PHIL MAC GIOLLA BHAIN

A DONEGAL TD has angrily reacted to what he believes is the continuing inactivity of the Irish Government in the face of racist abuse aimed at Irish people in Scotland.

Deputy Joe McHugh has hit out at the so-called 'Famine song' which implores the Irish in Glasgow and people of Irish descent to "go home" to Ireland because "the famine is over".

This song was the subject of an official correspondence between the Irish Government and the Scottish Executive in 2008. The matter was raised on the floor of the European Parliament by Eoin Ryan MEP, then the member for Dublin, in November 2008.

West of Ireland MEP Marian Harkin has written to the Scottish soccer authorities and to UEFA President Michel Platini in 2009 complaining about the ongoing racist abuse of Irish players and Irish people in Scottish soccer stadia, mainly by Rangers fans. Harkin also pointed out that Rangers were the only senior club in Britain to have had no Republic of Ireland players in their first-team squad since the Republic was established as a FIFA-recognised entity. Shortly after this Rangers appointed a scout for Ireland and last year signed Cork-born goalkeeper Alan Smith to their U19 team from Crumlin United.

In June 2009 Lord Justice Carloway in the High Court of Justiciary in Edinburgh ruled on the 'Famine Song' in a case involving a Rangers fan called William Walls. The judge said of the lyrics: "They are racist, calling upon people native to Scotland to leave the country because of their racial origins."

McHugh said last week: "I am dismayed and angered to hear that this odious hateful song, despite being categorised as illegal by the High Court in Scotland, is still heard in Scottish soccer stadia. I know the people that sing the 'Famine Song' are not representative of Scottish society or of Scottish people in

UNSATISFACTORY:
Donegal Fine Gael TD Joe McHugh criticised the Irish Government's lack of action over the Famine Song.



general. However they do seem to enjoy some tolerance from the Scottish soccer authorities. That is troubling to me.

"However most of my anger, as a Dáil Deputy, is directed towards the current Irish Government. I have submitted Dáil Questions to Micheál Martin who has the Foreign Affairs Portfolio. All I received was an unsatisfactory written answer prepared by civil servants who could not even characterise the 'Famine Song' as racist. I received a standard reply about "sectarianism".

"This 'Famine Song' is racism against all Irish people and against the Irish community in Scotland in particular. Many of my constituents here in Donegal have relatives in Glasgow so this issue is a local one for me. I will be in contact with Mr Martin to see what direct communications the Irish Government has had with the Scottish Executive since I brought this matter to his attention in 2008. I expect answers!"

Kieron Brady, who is an ex-Sunderland and ex-Republic of Ireland international footballer, is now an equality and anti-racist expert with Celebrate Identity Challenge Intolerance (CICI). He echoed the sentiments of Joe

McHugh TD on the issue of anti-Irish racism in Scottish football. "If the objective of the football authorities in Scotland is to remove all vestiges of religious and racial prejudice then they have to take the courageous step and act against clubs.

"I think that the Irish Government should have been relaying their concerns about these matters long ago but again I would welcome their input as long as it is comprehensive and sustainable.

"The Scottish legal authorities have made clear that singing the song known as the 'Famine Song' is illegal for racist and sectarian reasons. Indeed there have been successful prosecutions which demonstrate that fact.

"Rangers FC and the SPL have both expressed their wish that the song should not be sung by spectators attending SPL matches and have drawn spectators' attention to the fact that such singing has been confirmed as being illegal. The SPL supports Rangers FC in communicating this view to its fans. It is the police who have the responsibility for dealing with illegal activity in Scotland and the SPL support them fully in this regard, whether at and around its games or elsewhere."

Ah-ha! It's the Father Ted creators!

BY NICK BRAMHILL

THE CREATORS of Father Ted have told how they get more recognition for a cameo role they played in another offbeat comedy than for penning the timeless Craggy Island scripts.

Writers Graham Linehan and Arthur Mathews once played two RTE TV executives in an episode of I'm Alan Partridge.

In the episode, To Kill A Mocking Alan, Linehan and Mathews travel to Norwich to sound out socially incompetent TV presenter Partridge, played by Steve Coogan, for a job.

However, it all goes horribly wrong when tactless Partridge upsets the pair when he refers to the Irish as "toothless simpletons", before further displaying his ignorance of Irish popular culture and history with a torrent of insults. In reference to the potato famine and the 2million who were forced to emigrate, he quips: "You pay the price if you're a fussy eater. If you can afford to emigrate, you can afford to eat in a modest restaurant."

And, in a discussion about U2's classic song Bloody Sunday, he again misses the point about its reference to the 1972 massacre in Derry, saying: "That song real-



Steve Coogan's character Alan Partridge.

ly encapsulates the frustration of a Sunday."

Linehan said his five-minute cameo in that episode gets him more recognition on the streets than all the scripts he wrote for Father Ted. "We're not recognised at all for Ted," he said. "We did an episode of Alan Partridge once and we got more recognition for that, even though I was wearing a big wig.

"One time I was walking along the street and a garda van pulled over. Two guards said, 'Come here, you'. 'I went over to them and one of them shouted out, 'Ah-ha', Alan Partridge's catchphrase."

Aer Lingus to fly daily from Gatwick to Shannon

AER LINGUS' decision to establish a daily route from London Gatwick to Shannon from March 27 has been welcomed.

Newly-appointed Shannon Airport Director Mary Considine said the move was a vote of confidence in the airport for 2011. She said: "For Aer Lingus to add Gatwick, not least with its early arrival time at Shannon, to its growing network of services is a real boost for us and, indeed, the greater west of Ireland region."

The service will originate in Gatwick with a 6.50am departure and an 8.15am arrival time at Shannon. The return leg from Shannon will depart at 9am, arriving in Gatwick at 10.25am.



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New website celebrates successful Irish

A NEW website called www.eireofsuccess.com has been launched to celebrate the successes of people of Irish heritage around the world.

Eire Of Success will provide all people of Irish heritage around the world with a platform to celebrate and discuss the achievements of their

peers via free discussion forums and with the addition of pictures and videos.

The founder of Eire Of Success, Michael Sloyan, said: "There are close to 80million people of Irish heritage around the world and as a migrant community they have achieved incredible success. In

every field they have chosen they have been successful — whether sport, politics, literature and so on."

Michael is the son of Irish immigrants who arrived in Birmingham in the late 1940s. His father was from Charlestown, Co. Mayo where the family have lived on the

same farm since the mid 1850s.

Michael has worked with the Irish community in Birmingham for many years. He says of his website: "Eire Of Success will be freely available to all people of Irish heritage no matter where in the world they are."