

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS** delivered by **DR MAURICE MANNING**, on 21 April, 2005, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **VINCENT DOYLE**



A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

Editing a daily newspaper, in this case, a newspaper which consistently outsells all its rivals, which can rightfully claim to be the national newspaper of its country and which has been an integral part of a changing, evolving society is a task which requires an extraordinary range of skills and strengths, and when that job has been done, and done successfully over two and a half decades of unprecedented change then we are talking about a genuinely remarkable person.

And I should caution at the outset, lest these words be seen as a valedictory address, the editor in question shows no sign of moving, nor emphatically is there any pressure on him to do so.

Vincent Doyle is the seventh editor of the *Irish Independent* in its hundred-year history. Editors of the *Irish Independent* are not fly-by-nights. They are meant to last the course, to be men of substance, to leave their imprint on the paper and, when they move on, to leave a paper in an even stronger state than when they inherited it.

In Vinny Doyle's case he inherited a paper in good running order. His immediate predecessors, Aidan Pendar and Louis McRedmond ensured that. Earlier editors, especially the legendary Frank Geary had provided a rock of solidity and certainty, as permanent and enduring as the institutions of the State itself, ensuring the centrality of the *Irish Independent* in all aspects of the State and society it served.

Over the century of its existence the *Irish Independent* has never been pretentious, has never sought to be the fashionable, the *avant garde* newspaper. It did not have to. Its talent lay elsewhere – in reflecting the values and aspirations of the vast majority of Irish people – middle Ireland – never losing contact with that constituency, but ensuring its loyalty by proving itself a reliable, honest, accurate newspaper, its emphasis on just that, providing news that could be believed, that was wide-ranging and comprehensive, as concerned with the parochial – which in truth is the first concern of most people – as with the global. But whether global or local, always accurate and disinterested.

The *Irish Independent* evolved step by step with the evolving Irish State. It began its life as part of the movement for national independence. It supported the Treaty and gave its support to the Free State. In those early years it broadly supported the Treaty side – though never formally or uncritically. It was in essence a conservative paper, Catholic in ethos, nationalist in tone, moderate in style and for much of its life this was the face the *Irish Independent* presented to the public.

But as society changed so did the *Irish Independent*. In this new and changing world no party could take it for granted, no institution – state, church or financial – could assume its approval or claim immunity from its scrutiny. It took a leading role in guiding, examining and supporting key changes in Irish life – strongly European, vigorously championing the modernisation of Irish society and institutions, resolutely opposing violence while supporting reconciliation – promoting change, but never losing sight of its history or ethos.

For the past twenty-four years Vincent Doyle has been the editor of this, Ireland's

most successful newspaper. Before that he was editor of the *Evening Herald*, successfully moving it from broadsheet to tabloid and in the process turning its fortunes. He has guided the *Irish Independent* from the days of hot metal and spitting lead spots, hand-set headlines, linotypes, then to paste-up and scalpel to the present anaemic world of the silent computer screen. Some say he greatly misses the smells of ink and newsprint, the shuddering noise of the huge printing presses, the squalor and anarchy that was such a part of the old newspaper world – and I am sure he does – but nostalgia has never prevented him from being at the forefront of change. The *Irish Independent* under him has changed and changed dramatically, but never with such ferocity that it startled or lost its broad cathedral of readers. He virtually single-handedly created one of the best newspaper marketing successes in the country – the *Independent's* Saturday magazine which boosted that day's circulation massively – and was also the driving force behind the launch of the paper's stable of magazines and inserts; its *Friday*; *City Life*; *Weekender*; *Independent Property*; *Farming Independent*. And most recently, and most spectacularly the new compact *Independent*.

Vinny Doyle has the characteristic of all great editors in that he leads from the front. He is universally referred to by staff as "The Boss". Newspapers do not have time to be run by Committees; they are more like ships which are run from the bridge and the captain's word is law.

This kind of authority has to be earned. Vinny has earned it because of the unrivalled breadth of his experience and track record. Staff know that he can do every job on the paper, and has done all of them at some time in his career.

He is a hands-on editor who thinks nothing of pulling on his sleeve bands and making up a page himself. Nothing escapes his eagle eye. There is nobody else who could have launched the new compact edition in so short a time with so little disruption.

The other source of his authority is the taking of responsibility. Vinny stands over what appears in his newspaper and takes responsibility when something goes wrong. Woe betide the person who caused it to go wrong – they may well wish they had never been born. But any public flak is taken by the editor.

Staff – and rivals – are in awe of his competitive instincts. The first editions of rival publications are scoured in the early morning hours to see how they compare. There is gloom and recrimination if it is thought they have done better, or got a bigger story, and joy unconfined when they have not. Legendary stories of the ways he got one over on the opposition on past occasions are still told at the bar.

When asked in a recent book; 'What are the rewards for editing the biggest morning paper in the country?', he said; 'The only real reward is the pleasure of the task itself – that ultimately it was better to have been an editor than not have been one. You need tenacity, energy, commitment and above all, resilience. You need to live, eat and drink newspapers all day long.

'When it's going right, it's like drinking champagne all day long – the most satisfying job in the world.'

Let the champagne continue to flow. It has been well earned.

*Praehonorabilis Cancellaris, totaque universitas.*

*Presto 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.*