

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:
PROFESSOR DERMOT KEOGH, in University College Cork on 2 June, 2006, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*, on **PROFESSOR J J (JOE) LEE**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

John Joseph Lee was Professor of Modern History/History at University College Cork from 1974 to 2002. He is now Professor of History and Glucksman Professor for Irish Studies and Director of Glucksman Ireland House, at New York University.

Born in Tralee in 1942 to Thomas and Catherine Lee, he spent his early years in Castlegregory, County Kerry, - a town and a county with which he has retained a close bond throughout his life. His family moved to Dublin where he won a scholarship to the Franciscan-run Gormanston College. The Franciscan heritage, personified by his uncle Fr Michael Lee, raised his awareness of the importance of community and solidarity as a basic principle of a healthy society. The Franciscans also helped him develop his lifelong love of history, a subject in which he achieved 100 per cent in his Leaving Certificate.

Graduating in 1962 from UCD with first class honours in History and Economics, he took a temporary job as a teacher at St Andrews, Clyde Rd., Dublin. Asked at the interview could he coach cricket, he replied confidently 'yes,' and then spent the days that followed in his room with book and bat, before a mirror, learning the rules of a game of which he now has an encyclopaedic knowledge and which he has followed with a great passion since.

Joe Lee soon joined the Department of Finance as an Administrative Officer and worked briefly in the section that was preparing for Ireland's membership of the EEC. Although he found the work challenging and his colleagues stimulating, his heart was set on becoming a professional historian. When he received an offer of a post as a Temporary Assistant Lecturer from the History Department, UCD, he took the bold step of leaving the pensionable civil service and switched careers to pursue the muse of Clio. In the mid-1960s he completed his MA on the history of the railways in nineteenth-century Ireland. This thesis established his reputation as a leading authority in the field.

Embarking on doctoral research, he did not take the then conventional path of immediately going to Cambridge. Instead, he became the first UCD historian to be sent to the Institute for European History, Mainz where he met young historians from almost every country in Europe. That experience left an indelible impression which continues today to influence his approach to doing history - the need to work in a comparative, international context.

In 1968, he moved from Germany to Peterhouse, Cambridge, where he held a number of posts, including that of Director of Studies in Social and Political Sciences. He published *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* in 1973. The following year, he moved back to Ireland as Professor of Modern History at UCC in succession to Oliver McDonagh. He later served as Head of the unified Department of History, a position he held until his move to America.

Drawing upon his European experience, his ideal at UCC was to broaden the European and Atlantic contexts in which historical scholarship was developing. Building upon the outstanding work of his predecessors, he stamped his own personality on the teaching of his department. Supported by his academic and administrative colleagues, he helped widen the curriculum, develop new areas of regional specialisation and attract large numbers of postgraduates.

A most energetic and inspiring teacher, he worked closely with the Department of Adult Education, and was heavily involved in launching and, for several years, directing a European Studies Degree in Cork, representing Ireland on numerous European Union committees, including the Committee on developing a European history curriculum in the framework of the Bologna Agreement.

His European interests led to the publication of several works, including the seminal chapter on "Labour in German Industrialisation" in the *Cambridge Economic History of Europe* in 1978 and the editing of *Ireland in the EEC* in 1983 and *The Shifting Balance of Power - Exploring the 20th Century* in 2000 – based on a selection from his weekly column in the *Sunday Tribune*.

At UCC, his administrative responsibilities included a three-year period as Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1976-9) and as Vice-President of UCC (1982-5). He was elected four times a member of the Governing Body on which he served for twelve years, and he also served on the College's Finance Committee for nine years. Joe Lee was elected for a five-year period on the Senate of the National University of Ireland.

That very heavy administrative burden did not detract from his teaching and research activities. He travelled constantly to archives in Ireland and abroad. This required the understanding and support of his wife Anne and their three children. Among his major works to date, *Ireland 1912-1985 - Politics and Society* was published in 1989. It has enjoyed wide critical acclaim, winning the Irish Independent/Irish Life Prize for History in 1991; and both the Aer Lingus/Irish Times Prize for Literature (non-fiction) and the J.S. Donnelly Snr. Prize for History and Social Sciences in 1992. It is testimony to its enduring relevance and eloquent style that this 754-page volume has become a best seller, a standard teaching text and a classic.

Elected a Member of the Royal Irish Academy in 1985, he was awarded an Eisenhower fellowship in 1989. His visiting academic appointments include: the EUI, Florence, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Pittsburgh, Austin and Colby.

In 1993, he was elected to Seanad Éireann, retiring after a single term. One senator, with whom he shared an office, regarded him as being great fun, fiercely independent-minded, of the highest integrity and impossible to categorise politically. He is remembered in those political circles for his sterling work on the Universities Bill, and, in particular, his perceptive campaign to safeguard academic freedom from officialdom. His long-term interest in Northern Ireland made him an active member of the British-Irish Parliamentary Body.

Since being invited to become Director of Glucksman Ireland House and the Irish Studies Programme at NYU, he has revelled in the freedom for initiative that the American system allows, and in the intellectual stimulus of an Irish Studies programme which thrives on the fructifying potential of seeing Ireland whole across a range of disciplines. The demands of expanding a programme at NYU have not prevented Joe Lee writing extensively about Irish diaspora experience, or from co-editing in March this year, a 730-page book, *Making the Irish American*.

Joe Lee, historian, teacher, public intellectual, politician, patriot and generous colleague will teach on the History Department's new MA programme on the Irish Diaspora at UCC in the coming academic year.

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 Litteris, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.