

## Ronnie Herlihy

The statue, the statue, the statue ... as I was saying earlier I always was aware of the statue as a thing or more than just a thing I should say you know – simply because where I grew up on Cove street was literally just around the corner from Fr Mathew's old chapel where he started off his mission in Cork let's say and I knew that growing up my mother used tell me about Fr Mathew, this great man who actually lived on Cove street, literally just two or three doors from where I was growing up – his house at the time was – I can only vaguely remember his house because it was demolished in the kind of mid seventies – I think I may have only about ten at the time so I remember it but only just vaguely. I was aware of Fr Mathew then as something that was out there then, as a young fellow, as a ten year old or whatever age I was when I knew it. Going in town then I could see the statue – I made the connection all the time for that you know so I suppose that's how I became aware of the story of Fr Mathew as such you know, of the person and even later on when there was these historical plaques going up in the city, around 1985, they put up a series of plaques to various different people and the Fr Mathew plaque at that stage was actually put on our house on Cove Street because there was just a car park where his house used to stand so there was nothing to put a it on . Ours was the nearest house to it so they put it up on our front wall and that was something again that kind of piqued my interest in the man himself and in the statue I suppose and it was always there in the back of my mind and in school in 1979 – 7 I think it was in Deer park secondary school we all did this, various historical projects for one particular year and the one I picked was Fr Mathew – myself and two others guys – I kind of forced them along. They wouldn't really have been aware of him as such like. Anyway I said we're doing Fr Mathew. That's grand so. We did that like you know so again the statue came into it. As I say we were in the library looking up stuff and all the rest and we were looking at when the statue was built and that's probably more when I became aware of the statue and when it was there and the year it was put up and all that was probably around that time so – I would probably have been about fourteen, fifteen say, at the time you know. But as I say I've always had an awareness of the statue because of the connection with home. Fr Mathew always kind of relates to home with me you know. As I said the church was around the corner, the house was ten yards to my right so – and then later on in life I suppose the statue then became, as you say 'twas a landmark in the city and everybody was aware of the statue. Nobody called it Fr Mathew Statue. 'twas just the statue as they say, going back for a hundred years 'twas just the statue – where the trams stopped and the busses stopped and all the rest. 'Twas statue was one of the locations and em, but again from probably the memories of - the connections with the statue later on as we went through our teens and into our twenties would have been probably the GAA games and the coming home and you'd be standing behind the statue and you'd be watching the teams coming down from Paddy Barry's corner and going on to Bridge Street and you'd be standing by the statue and the statue would be all dressed up of course n the colours as well like you know. So again that was ah – as it moved on you had that kind of that eh Fr Mathew was just there – he was just part of Cork – he wasn't a Cork man but he was part of Cork and he was always for everybody that was alive today in Cork, there was never a time that we didn't have Fr Mathew so in that sense the statue was just – its always been there you know. We know the history of it or most people would know the history of it. As I say my own memories were the connection with home, the house first, then home, then the GAA games and stuff and the many great nights we had celebrating Cork teams coming down with mostly Liam McCarthy at the time you know. But we

all used to gather round by the statue watching, waiting for the bus to come around by Paddy Barry's corner.

Q: And what about your kids, my kids, the new generation ...

A: Again sure, they probably wouldn't, other than that fact that as I say that he's just been there, he's always been there, he's just part of the furniture now as we say in Cork you know. As we were saying earlier, he doesn't have any specific meaning to most people these days you know and maybe if I wasn't living on Cove Street where I was living, he probably wouldn't have had the same meaning to me other than through the history side of it which I got to know later on but at that early stage if I was living maybe somewhere else, either on the north side or anywhere else on the south side, I wouldn't have had that kind of connection in my own mind with Fr Mathew anyway growing up so even, forty odd years ago probably the mental connection with Fr Mathew was probably lost I'd say you know to what he was to Cork and what he did for Cork back in 150 or 160 years ago whenever it was so ...

Q: So should we bother celebrating 150 years ...

A: I think there's always room for celebrations. I mean God knows we need celebrations don't we (laugh). Whatever excuse or how you celebrate it – he was the temperance man of course so do you have a tea-party like they did of old you know. We start up a few temperance institutes you know. Or maybe hold it in the old temperance hall in Fr Mathew Quay where they started – Fr Mathew's or St Finbarr's Hall I think it was called that time. Maybe hold it there – do a march from the statue over to the side of the Holy Trinity which was the kind of, the iconic place we have, I mean the Holy Trinity, it's also known as the Fr Mathew Church or the Fr Mathew memorial church so there are still, the main physical real strong physical connections to the city through both the statue and the church. I mean the church is one of the most iconic buildings in the city so and it's called Fr Mathew Memorial Church for that specific reason you know so em, should we have celebrations - I think why not. I mean 'tis always good to celebrate and a man like that would deserve, somebody with that – with that connection to Cork all his life would certainly deserve it you know. It would be nice to see.