

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL
Report by the Executive Director Educational Services

Corporate Cultural Sub Committee 20th March 2012

Subject: A J Cronin Plaque Dumbarton Library

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To advise the Corporate Cultural Sub Committee of the plans to unveil a plaque at Dumbarton Library and public talk, commemorating author A J Cronin, as part of the West Dunbartonshire Booked! Festival in May 2012.
- 1.2 To seek funding from committee to fund a plaque to A J Cronin and associated public talk on this celebrated local author as part of the West Dunbartonshire Booked! Festival.

2. Background

- 2.1 The Libraries and Museums Service was approached some months ago by author Alan Davies with regard the potential for West Dunbartonshire Council to lead on public recognition of the author A J Cronin.
- 2.2 A J Cronin was a Scottish physician and novelist. His best-known works are *Hatter's Castle*, *The Stars Look Down*, *The Citadel*, *The Keys of the Kingdom* and *The Green Years*, all of which were adapted to film. He also created the Dr. Finlay character, the hero of a series of stories that served as the basis for the popular BBC television and radio series entitled *Dr. Finlay's Casebook*.
- 2.3 Born in 1896 in Cardross, his grandparents were from Alexandria and Dumbarton. When seven years old, his father, died and he and his mother moved to her parents' home in Dumbarton where Cronin became an outstanding student and Dux at Dumbarton Academy.
- 2.4 Having worked as a doctor, in 1930 Cronin changed career and researched his first novel 'Hatters Castle' using files at Dumbarton Library. He composed *Hatter's Castle* in the span of three months, and the manuscript was quickly accepted by a publisher. The novel, which was an immediate and sensational success, launched his career as a prolific author.
- 2.5 Many of Cronin's books were bestsellers which were translated into numerous languages and latterly into film. Noted for its deep social conscience, Cronin's work often examines moral conflicts between the individual and society as his idealistic heroes pursue justice for the common man.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** There currently exists no public acknowledgement of A J Cronin in West Dunbartonshire. This paper advises committee members of the plans to install a plaque at Dumbarton Library celebrating this famous local writer. The plaque will acknowledge the role which Dumbarton Library played in researching his novels, and his links to the town and surrounding area.
- 3.2** The plaque will be unveiled as part of the West Dunbartonshire 'Booked!' Festival in May which promotes a range of author talks and workshops and is one of the few wholly free literature festivals in the UK.
- 3.3** The unveiling of the plaque will be followed by a free public talk by Cronin's biographer Alan Davies on the life and works of A J Cronin with contributions from local historians.

4. People Implications

- 4.1** There are no personnel issues associated with this report.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** Funding is requested from committee towards costs of providing a plaque in Dumbarton Library to commemorate this famous local author. Costs to engrave and supply a suitable plaque are expected to be up to £500.
- 5.2** Funding secured from Creative Scotland along with core funds from Educational Services fund the 'Booked!' Festival and will contribute towards costs for the provision a free public talk on the life and works of A J Cronin public talk.

6. Risk Analysis

- 6.1** There is no increased risk to the Council associated with the contents of this report.

7. Equalities Impact

- 7.1** No issues were identified for potential equality impact in this report.

8. Strategic Assessment

8.1 How will this help make best use of our money?

The provision of a commemorative plaque to A J Cronin supported by a free public talk on his life has been approached in line with Best Value. The event forms part of WDC's 'Booked!' festival for which Creative Scotland funding has been secured towards costs of author visit; thereby maximising the potential of WDC investment.

8.2 How does it make better use of our physical and human assets?

This initiative makes best use of resources through the attraction of external monies to support this event as part of the council's 'Booked!' Festival.

8.3 How does it change or impact on service provision?

The initiative will enhance the library building and acknowledge the impact that Dumbarton had in supporting the works of this famous local author. In addition the 'Booked!' Festival supports social inclusion by providing free public events including author talks and workshops, making it one of the few free literature festivals in the country.

9. Conclusion and Officer's Recommendation

9.1 The committee is asked to note the contents of this report in relation to the planned provision of a plaque at Dumbarton Library to mark the life and work of local author A J Cronin. Members are also asked to note the associated free public talk on Cronin as part of the council's 'Booked!' Festival.

9.2 Members are asked to consider providing funding of up to £500 towards the costs of commissioning a plaque to A J Cronin to be unveiled at Dumbarton Library as part of the 'Booked!' Festival in May 2012.

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