

WHEN JAMES Joyce expert Danis Rose arrived at the launch of Dublin's ReJoyce Festival on February 2, 2004, he could hardly contain his excitement. The five-month-long event, scheduled to mark the 100th anniversary of Bloomsday, was billed as the world's greatest Joyce celebration.

And, to top it all off, Mr Rose had just heard of a previously undiscovered cache of original Joyce documents for sale in Paris.

Mingling with the enthusiasts present, he immediately sought out Dr Luca Crispi, the National Library's resident Joyce expert.

In hushed, urgent tones, he told Dr Crispi that a renowned French book dealer, Jean-Claude Vrain, was preparing to sell the invaluable archive of documents.

Used in the preparation of *Finnegans Wake*, the material – which included a 1937 typescript, a notebook and six sheets of manuscript dated 1923 – was a historical and literary goldmine.

And if there was a new Joycean treasure to be had, Mr Rose naturally wanted it for Ireland. He believed the National Library would surely make a bid.

Dr Crispi agreed the library would be interested and the two spent some time discussing the importance of the documents.

Once word of the cache was out, it must have spread like wildfire.

The rarefied world of international Joycean scholars is a small, tight-knit one – and new discoveries of lost manuscripts are as rare as hen's teeth.

So intimate are the interlocking ties that Dr Crispi's wife, Stacey Herbert, is another renowned Joyce expert.

Their appreciation of Joyce had brought the American pair together. They were once employed at the Department of Comparative Literature in New York's Buffalo University but had since travelled the world to study and share their knowledge with other scholars and academics.

News of the new manuscripts must have also quickly reached the ears of Laura Barnes, the woman chosen by the Government to coordinate the ReJoyce 2004 festival.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, 40-year-old Miss Barnes is a renowned rare-book dealer and Joycean specialist with a considerable knack for turning a profit.

Twice married, first to a Michael Gene Barnes and then to a Damien Weldon, she has recently used both surnames as well as her birth name, Rosenfeld.

Before heading up the Joyce celebration, Miss Barnes had already successfully acquired rare Joyce material worth well in excess of half a million dollars and is listed as owning several properties in New York and San Francisco.

In 2003, one of those properties fetched a handsome \$3.35m – around €2.5m.

After forging a successful career with some of New York's best rare-book dealers, she founded her own company, Araby Books – named after a story in Joyce's *Dubliners* – before being appointed to a string of Government consultancy positions in Ireland, beginning with the ReJoyce Festival curator's job.

Since June, she has been heading up the struggling James Joyce Centre in Dublin's North Great George's Street.

No one knew it that day in February 2004, when the ReJoyce festival was launched with a convivial wine reception and speeches, but the existence of the Paris cache was destined not become public knowledge for more than two years.

It was March 2006 when the National Library proudly announced that it had bought the manuscript part of the cache for €1.17m.

However, the purchase was marred by a sequence of events which, to this day, remains steeped in controversy and intrigue.

Yet one critical fact is clear. Originally, the manuscript was available for purchase at just €400,000 – almost €800,000 less than the library, which is 100pc funded by taxpayers, ultimately paid.

Incredibly, the library allowed a third party to nip in and snap up the documents for the asking price – before immediately selling them on to the library for almost three times that figure.

ALTHOUGH THE identity of that third party was shrouded in a veil of secrecy throughout the deal, it was finally revealed as none other than Miss Laura Barnes – aka Weldon, aka Rosenfeld – only after the sale had been completed.

The library, in a statement, insisted that none of its staff involved in the deal had any conflict of interest. Library director Aongus Ó hAonghusa said he had not entered negotiations for the material until Sotheby's approached the library in December 2004 – 10 months after the ReJoyce launch party.

But that does not appear to tally with library correspondence first obtained by the



By **Michael O'Farrell**
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Phoenix Magazine under the Freedom of Information Act.

It also appears at odds with a conversation Danis Rose remembers having with library expert Luca Crispi in June 2004.

Having informed Dr Crispi of the discovery in early February 2004, Mr Rose spent the remainder of February and March helping the Paris dealer, Mr Vrain, to 'identify and assess' the academic value of the material he was selling.

DURING THE course of this assessment, Mr Rose clearly remembers telling Mr Vrain that he had informed the National Library in Ireland about the documents.

Then in June, at a chance meeting with Dr Crispi, Mr Rose asked him about the negotiations because he wanted to give the go-ahead to a Guardian journalist to break the story of the new cache.

But Dr Crispi warded him off.

'Crispi tells me negotiations are at a delicate point – the vendor might suddenly disappear if the transaction becomes public. Do I want to see the documents in the National Library of Ireland available for scholarship?' Mr Rose writes in one of the FOI letters.

'He asks me (pleads even) to keep it quiet until the end of the summer, at which point he will let me know the score.'

This extraordinary plea for secrecy must also be seen in the light of internal library communications penned by Dr Crispi that same month.

Other FOI documents show that in June 2004, Dr Crispi told director Mr Ó hAonghusa of 'extraordinary' Joyce manuscripts held by a French book dealer in Paris.

'At this stage, the material can be acquired as a single lot,' the Joyce expert excitedly wrote.

By the end of June, Dr Crispi wrote: 'For now, nothing will happen in Paris. I was told we have the right of first refusal through July.'

Dr Crispi's next mention of the manuscript is in October, when he writes: 'As far as I know, nothing will happen until next year – but everything is proceeding on course.'

Less than two months later, in December, he would be sitting in Sotheby's, alongside his director, negotiating to buy the manuscript from Laura Barnes for a massively inflated price.

So what happened between October 2004, when Dr Crispi was assuring his superiors that everything was in order, and December 2004, when Miss Barnes bought the manuscript?

What came of the library's seeming first right of refusal?

In its only formal statement on the matter, the National Library said that no one had offered it anything for sale at any stage except Sotheby's – on behalf of Miss Barnes.

The library's position is supported by Arts Minister John O'Donoghue, who told the *Dáil*: 'At no stage was the material on offer to the National Library at a lower price than was subsequently agreed.'

Mr Ó hAonghusa has also said, by way of explanation, that the library could not buy from a small Paris dealer who could not possibly offer the same assurances of provenance and authenticity that the Sotheby's name provides. Attempts to contact Mr Ó hAonghusa were unsuccessful.

But many familiar with the deal are unhappy with these explanations.

Among the dissenters was Mr Rose, who wrote to Mr Ó hAonghusa in March 2006 after the purchase had finally been publicly announced.

In his letter, Mr Rose said he found 'some aspects of the purchase disturbing'.

The blonde, Joyce's lost manuscript and fresh questions over €1.1m deal that was 'kosher beyond kosher'

'My first question is: on being informed of the offer, did the National Library follow it up straight away? Did the library engage in negotiations with M. Vrain? If not, why not? And why in the end pay almost three times the asking price?'

Mr Rose's letter went on to query the June discussion in which Dr Crispi had pleaded for secrecy.

'He said that the securing of the manuscript by the library should take only a few months more.'

'Was Dr Crispi acting on behalf of the National Library when he asked me in June 2004 to help to keep confidential the ongoing [negotiations for the] purchase of the manuscript by the National Library?'

One month later, Mr Ó hAonghusa responded: 'Your letter seems to be based on the assumption that the National Library can simply buy material from anyone, without following any procedures.'

'You will appreciate that, particularly in the case of material involving James Joyce, care is needed and it is incumbent on a State institution such as the National Library to ensure that important issues such as authenticity, provenance and ownership are prop-

erly dealt with. In the case of this latest Joyce acquisition, proper procedures were followed at all times and I am satisfied that the State has received value for money for the acquisition.'

Mr Ó hAonghusa also defended Dr Crispi. 'Dr Luca Crispi, the National Library's James Joyce Research Fellow, had a marginal role in relation to this acquisition. He provided expert advice as to the content, context and authenticity of the manuscripts. He had no role in relation to the negotiations, all of which were conducted by my senior staff and myself.'

Dr Crispi has never publicly commented on the controversial sale. Attempts to contact him at the National Library and at his Dublin home were unsuccessful this week.

LUCA CRISPI, his wife Stacey Herbert, and Laura Barnes are three of the best known Joyce scholars in Ireland at the moment – and all three have worked together on an impressive list of Joyce projects for more than half a decade.

In 2000, Miss Barnes is credited, together