

Stars shine at premiere

Two times Oscar-nominated actress Emily Watson was among the stars at the British premiere of the movie version of bestseller Angela's Ashes.

The glitzy celebrity-packed event in London was a world away from the poverty-stricken pre-war slums of Limerick conjured up by Frank McCourt's hugely-successful memoirs, and brought to life by director Alan Parker.

Ulrika Jonsson, former EastEnders star Patsy Palmer and actor John Hurt were among celebrity guests at the charity screening at the Odeon in Leicester Square. Watson, who arrived in a demure

grey trouser suit accompanied by husband Jack Waters, said it had been "quite intimidating" meeting the author when he appeared during filming.

"You build this fiction up in your head about whatever you're doing and then that person turns up," she said.

Also at the premiere was actress Pauline McLynn - best known as Mrs Doyle in Channel Four's Father Ted - who appears in the film.

She said: "I had a tear in my eye myself when I was leaving the cinema after I first saw it. It's wonderful."

Soft side of 'hardman'

Screen hardman Robert Carlyle, whose movie villains include James Bond's latest megalomaniac foe, revealed his soft side when he was reduced to tears - by a lost cat.

The actor lost the pet near his home in Glasgow and was overcome when he was reunited with the skeletal animal.

"We found it in the street," Carlyle told Heat magazine. "It was a tiny emaciated thing, it hadn't eaten for two weeks, it had big black clumps of muck and stuff all over it. That was probably the last time I cried, when I got my cat back."

Carlyle has played a string of film and TV nasties

since finding fame, including Begbie in Trainspotting and Renard in the World Is Not Enough.

He was awarded an OBE a year ago but has so far avoided jolting the title down whenever he has to sign his name.

"But there's always a wee buzz when you see it written down," he said. "You're actually supposed to have it there, whenever your name's in print, apparently. So I've heard."

In his latest film, Angela's Ashes, he plays an alcoholic father and had to work with a number of children. He ensured their best behaviour by buying them football tops.

History writers in court battle

Controversial historian David Irving was branded a liar as he launched his High Court libel action over a claim that he is a "Holocaust denier".

He claims that author Deborah Lipstadt and publisher Penguin were part of "an organised international endeavour" to destroy his career and "vandalise" his legitimacy as a historian.

He says that the "waves of hatred" generated by Professor Lipstadt's book, Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory, had robbed him of financial security for the future.

They deny libel and yesterday their counsel Richard Rampton QC told the court: "Mr Irving calls himself an historian. The truth is, however, that he is not an historian at all, but a falsifier of history. To put it bluntly he is a liar."

Catastrophe

"Moreover, the lies which the defendants in this case will show that Mr Irving has told concern an area of history in which, perhaps, it behoves any writer or researcher to be particularly careful of the truth: The destruction of the Jews by the Nazis during World War Two - the Holocaust - and Adolf Hitler's role in that human catastrophe."

Earlier, Mr Irving, who is representing himself, said he intended to show that "far from being a Holocaust denier", he had repeatedly drawn attention to major aspects of the Holocaust.

The hearing before Mr Justice Grey, who is hearing the case without a jury, is expected to last 12 weeks.

Music centre chief resigns

The chief executive of the troubled National Centre for Popular Music has resigned after just four months.

Martin King took up the reins of the Sheffield-based attraction in October but is now to step down to be managing director of the Alexandra Palace exhibition centre in north London.

The 41-year-old was brought to Sheffield to improve the fortunes of the pop centre, which was forced to call in insolvency experts last year after failing to attract the number of visitors it had hoped for.

Money

Mr King, who will remain on the pop centre's board of directors, said: "I'm leaving with regret but the offer from the Alexandra Palace was too good to turn down."

"I live in north London and have spent six hours a day travelling to and from Sheffield since joining the national centre. The new job pays more money and is just half-an-hour from where I live."

The pop centre, which received £15 million in National Lottery funding opened last March. Some 400,000 visitors were expected each year but only 104,000 had been through the doors in the first six months.

The disappointing figures prompted managers to axe 16 of the centre's 79 jobs and to appoint Mr King as chief executive.

Body in well solves 57-year puzzle

A coroner has recorded an open verdict on a woman whose remains were found buried in a well 57 years after she disappeared.

Young mother-of-two Jessie McMahon vanished from her Hampshire home in April 1942 after saying she was going to collect firewood.

A Portsmouth inquest heard yesterday that her skeleton had been found by workmen last year, and that she had probably been pushed into the well.

Portsmouth coroner James Kenroy said foul play seemed probable, but the skeleton had lain undiscovered for too long for cause of death to be identified.

After the inquest and the open verdict, Mrs McMahon's daughter Eileen Howard said she was convinced her mother had been killed.

Skeleton

Mrs McMahon disappeared in 1942 when she was 31. The dissolved well at Liss, near Petersfield, was recently uncovered and workmen told to turn it into a garden feature.

As they excavated the rubble and debris last June they found the skeleton lying headfirst in the well, with the skull lying about 17ft down.

The well was sealed off by police, and detectives painstakingly traced the wedding ring and shoes which were found with the skeleton.

Local historians led police to the legend of a woman who had disappeared from Liss Place farm during the war and had never been seen again.

From details of the story detectives were able to contact Mrs McMahon's daughters, Eileen and Maureen, who were aged eight and four at the time of the disappearance.

DNA tests eventually linked the remains with the family.

Decision on fate of boy

Authorities in Pennsylvania will decide whether a couple can visit the disabled 10-year-old son they are accused of abandoning at a hospital on Boxing Day.

Delaware Family Court Commissioner Patricia Tate Stewart said Pennsylvania should decide whether Richard and Dawn Kelso can see their son.

They have been charged with counts of child abandonment. As a condition of their bail, the couple cannot see him.

On Friday the Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families took custody of Steven Kelso, who uses a wheelchair and needs a tube to breathe and eat.

He has remained at Al Du Pont Hospital for Children, in Rockland, Delaware, since December 26, when police say Dawn Kelso wheeled the boy into the emergency room with a note saying they could no longer care for him.

Challenge over ban on Tyson UK fight

Boxing promoter Frank Warren was today set to challenge a ban on Mike Tyson entering Britain for a fight in Manchester. Immigration officials warn the former world heavyweight champion could be barred due to a rape conviction.

The Home Office said promoters of the sell-out fight scheduled for the end of the month would be given the chance to argue the case to allow the boxer in. They must show "strong compassionate reasons" why rules which normally ban entry to anyone convicted of an offence carrying a sentence of a year or more should be waived in the case of Tyson.

UK faces fine over dirty sea at resorts

Britain could be fined for failing to clean the sea off Blackpool and Southport beaches. The north-west resorts were under fire for the second time from the European Commission.

Brussels has stepped up its campaign to force the Government to meet legally-binding cleanliness standards for coastal bathing waters.

The UK has already been hauled before the European Court of Justice for failing to meet the requirements of the Bathing Waters Directive, which should have been applied in 1985.

Now the Commission is threatening a second visit to the Luxembourg court because the two resorts still do not meet the standards.

A Commission spokesman said yesterday that Brussels had reasoned to send a "reasoned opinion" to the Government.

Crucial

This is the final legal step before launching full court proceedings if Britain cannot convince Brussels it is meeting EU standards.

The Bathing Waters Directive was first introduced in 1976 as a crucial public health measure to ensure that all bathing waters around the EU coastline meet minimum quality standards set by Brussels.

This includes a limit on bacteria and a requirement that all member states carry out regular water quality monitoring.

Governments were given until 1985 to make the necessary changes to national cleanliness standards.

But by 1990 Blackpool in Lancashire and Southport in Merseyside had still not complied and the Commission took Britain to court for what it called "a chronic failure" to meet EU cleanliness norms at the tourist spots.

The future of shopping was being outlined today as retailers spelled out their vision of giant superstores.

They will offer everything from food, clothes and furniture to movies and even doctors' surgeries.

Described as "destination centres" by retail analysts, the hypermarkets of 2010 will bring the entire high-street under one roof, a conference in

His conviction for raping a beauty queen in 1992, for which he served three years of a six-year jail term, means he can be turned away should he arrive as planned by Concorde on Sunday.

Warren, who stands to lose millions if the bout is called off, said he hoped the matter could be resolved before the planned fight with Julius Francis at the MEN arena on January 29.

He was outraged officials had left it so late, after thousands of tickets for the bout were sold and hotels booked by spectators and media from around the world.

Warren added: "I certainly would not accept this decision. I'm trying to establish what the position is but it is not a closed door and we will be working on it."

"I'm disgusted that no-one had the courtesy to pick up the phone and tell me about this problem. It's not as if we put this fight on last week, we did this back in the first week in December."

"We have done everything as we have done for any boxer - we have gone through the normal formalities of bringing a boxer into the country."

Law

Tyson was jailed in 1992 for raping Miss Black America contestant Desiree Washington. He was also jailed for 12 months in February last year for attacking two motorists and was released in June.

Immigration rules ban entry into the UK of anyone convicted either here or overseas of an offence which carries a sentence of at least 12 months under UK law.

Tyson has no right of appeal, but UK supporters can make representations.

A Home Office spokesman said nobody involved in the fight had taken any steps before this to get in touch with the Home Office. But the immigration service faces pressure not to give Tyson special consideration.

Tyson regained the WBC heavyweight title after defeating Frank Bruno in 1996. He also gained fame after biting off part of opponent Evander Holyfield's ear in a fight in 1997.

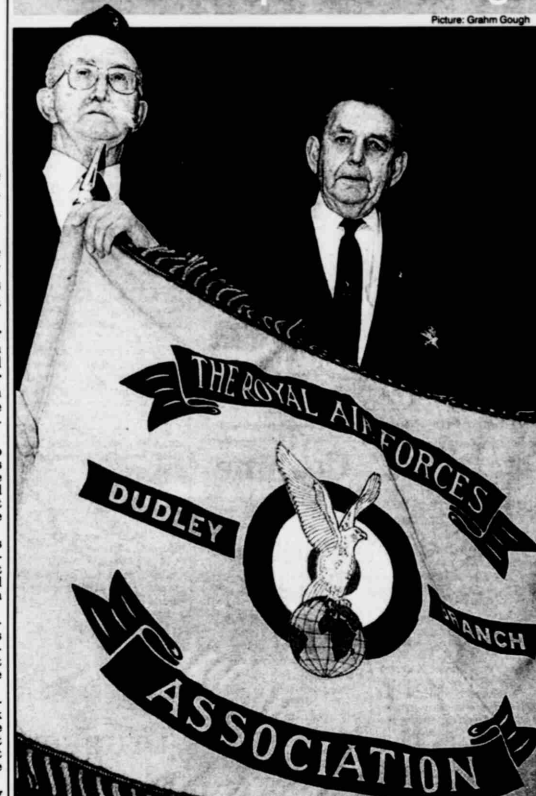
"They are behaving like the Inquisition. I feel bullied."

London will hear. But the changes would not necessarily spell doom for local shops, it was claimed.

They would have to learn to adapt their marketing strategies in the face of competition from global players.

Consumers are driving the demand for one-stop shopping, said Joanne Deane, chief executive of the Institute of Grocery Distribution. She said:

Comrades plea over flag



Dudley RAFA standard bearer John Deane, left, and president Jim Lewis with the new standard

Dudley members of the Royal Air Force Association are appealing for the return of their original standard - which went missing more than 40 years ago.

The association, which had hung the standard in St Thomas' Church in Dudley, says the flag was moved and lost during renovations.

But it was recently spotted on a stall at a car boot sale at Trentham Gardens in Stoke-on-Trent and apparently bought by a woman who was in a white van.

Standard bearer John Deane said the flag was an important part of the association's history.

He said: "The standard is about 40 years old. We do have a new one, but the old standard is an important part of our history."

"We would love to re-hang it in the church."

Anyone with information can telephone Mr Deane on 07971 271439.

Nick Stewart, co-author of the report, said such a combination was rare.

"If you have an area with high employment it is a trade-off for poor productivity and vice versa."

"Regions with most people in work normally have to fill vacancies with under-skilled workers and people who do not want to do the jobs."

UK 'has more employment'

The UK has achieved higher employment than most of its European peers but only at the cost of lower productivity, latest research published by business analysts suggested today.

The UK has one of the best employment rates for adults in Europe, with nine out of 12 British regions ranked in the top half of league tables produced by analysts Business Strategies.

But every region except London is in the bottom half of productivity tables.

This fares poorly with some regions on the Continent which achieved both high employment and high productivity.

Ober-Bayern in Germany was ranked number three for employment levels and made 15 in the production table.

The event was to take place on January 23, but the town councillors have decided to spare the goat.

Goat will be spared

The town of Manganese in north-west Spain is to forgo the annual tradition of tossing a goat from its bell tower.

The move comes after pressure from animal rights activists.

Traditionally, the annual festival of St Vincent - the town's patron saint - cannot begin unless a goat is thrown 50ft from the bell tower. It is then caught in a tarpaulin.

The event was to take place on January 23, but the town councillors have decided to spare the goat.

Hypothermia death

A coroner has recorded an open verdict on a retired telephonist found dead in her Worcestershire garden by a home help. Gwendoline Morgan, aged 91, who lived alone, was found at Blackmoor Road, Malvern, on January 9, with her walking frame by her side. Worcestershire coroner Victor Bound told an inquest yesterday that a pet dog said the pensioner died of exposure and hypothermia.