

Chapter 20

Jack McNamara and Laurence Olivier

ERIC SHAW

Henry V is a 1943 British film adaptation of William Shakespeare's play of the same name. It stars Laurence Olivier, who also directed. The play was adapted for the screen by Olivier, Dallas Bower, and Alan Dent. The score is by William Walton.

Hundreds of locals were hired as extras for the Agincourt battle scenes filmed in neutral Ireland in 1943. The Battle required a large number of extras and the Irish Local Defence Forces (LDF) provided the extras for the infantry. For the cavalry requirement, men with experience of horses were particularly sought. Jack McNamara from Patrick Street, Clarecastle, saw the advertisement in the local paper and applied. The production company paid £1 a day for men to work with horses. An additional pound was paid to anyone who brought his own horse. His daughter, Nora McNamara Healy, recalls that Jack brought his horse from Clarecastle to Wicklow and was away for about three months. He earned £6 a week while working on the film. The two and a

half hour film reached its climax with the 15 minute Battle of Agincourt scene, which cost £80,000. Jack had parts in which he had to fall from his horse. At the completion of the film, the extras were allowed to keep their costumes. Jack brought a pair of chain-mail gloves and a hat home. Olivier later wrote to Jack thanking him and a copy of the letter is shown below.

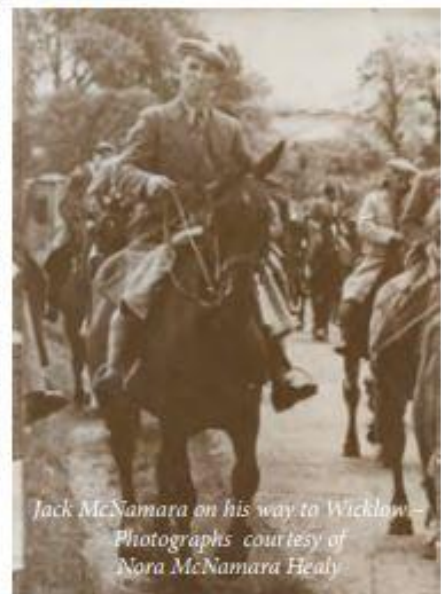


1943 poster for the film Henry V



Jack McNamara and his horse Moll

The letter and Jack's hat from the film are now in the Clare Museum. The film was shot on location at the Powerscourt Estate in Enniskerry, Co. Wicklow. The interior sets were constructed at the Denham Studios in Buckinghamshire, England. The film, which was photographed in three-strip Technicolor, was hailed by critics for its ebulliently colourful sets and costumes, as well as for Olivier's masterful direction and acting. In 2007, the film was digitally restored to High Definition format and re-released.



Jack McNamara on his way to Wicklow -
Photographs courtesy of
Nora McNamara Healy

Two Cities Films, Ltd.,
Powerscourt,
Co. Wicklow.
23rd July, 1943

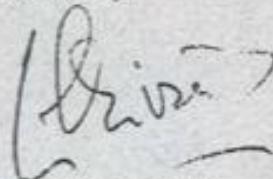
Dear Mr. McNamara,

I am so pleased to take this opportunity of thanking you most gratefully for your fine work for 'Henry V'. It has been a great joy to me to work with such fine men and such grand sportsmen as you and indeed all the horsemen have been.

I do hope that the future may hold in store for you all that you most wish for in life. I hope too that we shall have a chance of meeting and perhaps working together again one day.

Please accept my best wishes, my grateful thanks, and my kindest thoughts.

Yours sincerely,



LAURENCE OLIVIER

John McNamara, Esq.,
Clarecastle,
Co. Clare.