

LIMERICK IN FOCUS



BY TOM TOBIN

Cruise's Hotel — Part of Limerick, old and new

A PART OF LIMERICK'S HISTORY FOR OVER 173 YEARS

CRUISE'S ROYAL HOTEL, so much a part of the colourful history of Limerick over the past 173 years, is very much in the news again. It has been taken over by the Trinidad Sugar Estates Company, Ltd., and will continue to expand in the years ahead. Already, plans are ready to be put into effect and all members of the staff have been assured that their employment will not be affected in any way.

But there is one who will not be staying on . . . He is Mr. Colm Kenneally, who has been associated with Cruise's since 1952, first as Manager and later as owner. Having sold the famous hotel recently, he will say farewell to Limerick and set out again to establish another hotel in an area so far undecided . . . but certainly far from the banks of the River Shannon.

The story of Cruise's Royal Hotel is very much associated with the development of Limerick. Established in 1791, its many interesting and colorful associations date back to before Blaqueni's time. In those far off days, the Royal Mail Coach passed through what is now the entrance door, ignored the ladies drinking tea and cocktails in the lounge, made no stop at the public bar and probably stabled in what is now the Desmond Hall or the Ballroom.

CHARACTERS
Many were the important characters of history to stay at Cruise's. Daniel O'Connell was a very popular personality there, and following his famous election in Clare—the first Catholic to be elected to Parliament since the Treaty of Limerick, he stayed at Cruise's and addressed one of the biggest meetings seen in the city. Smith O'Brien, John Mitchel and Thomas Francis Meagher spent much of their time at Cruise's, and many are the stories associated with their Limerick visits.

Cruise's has had its day of tragedy also, and witnessed the opening scenes of that terrible murder which was afterwards romanticised by Gerald Griffin as "The Collegians", dramatised by Dion Boucicault as "The Colleen Bawn" and put to music as the opera, "The Lily of Killarney," by Sir Julius Benedict. The writer of the original story of the murder of Ellen Hanny—the True Story of the Colleen Bawn by one who knew her in life and saw her in death," was the Rev. P. Fitzgerald, Rector of Tarbert. He stayed in Cruise's the night before he accompanied the tragic couple in a steamer down the Shannon. He claimed to have enjoyed a hearty dinner with them on that occasion.

MANY MEMORIES
But, as I have mentioned, there are many memories attached to Cruise's, and all of them of interest. The founder of the hotel was Edward Cruise. Then came George Russell "Francis"—the "Francis," his father's name, to distinguish him from the many other Russells, great benefactors of Limerick in days gone by. He retired in 1806 and was succeeded by Samuel Dickson, William Collopy and later Eliza Moriarty, who became a very good friend of Daniel O'Connell. The years moved on and in Dublin a young Corkman had his eye on Cruise's. He was Mr. Kenneally, who was at the time managing a well-known hotel there. But before telling the unusual story of how his dream came true, let us look back a few years to the beginning of Mr. Kenneally's successful career. A native of Crookstown in Co. Cork, he was educated in Mungret College, where he established his first connections with the City of the Broken Treaty.

His first hotel was Jurv's in Dublin, where he gained his first experience of the business, and from there went to the White Heart Hotel in Windsor. In the following years he served in the Rodney Hotel, Vere Gardens, Kensington, London; The Savoy, London, and the Great Eastern Hotel also in the same city. It was at this stage that he decided to go to the Continent but before the time came he received a letter to the effect that if he was interested in the appointment of Manager at the Moira Hotel in Dublin he would be afforded the opportunity of appearing for interview. Mr. Kenneally was most certainly interested but he had just one doubt in his mind. He was considered too young? The fact is he was appointed and became Ireland's youngest hotel manager at the age of 22 years. That was in 1851. It was the following year that he learned of the vacancy at Cruise's Hotel in Limerick. The thought of returning appealed to him and it was a happy O'Connell, indeed, when he entered the hotel so many memories as manager. At this period the hotel was owned by a company, led by Mr. Paddy

visitor who arrived around 4 or 5 in the evening and had a wash and dinner afterwards found that it was impossible to buy Waterford cut glass, or any souvenirs. The various stores throughout the city were closed and because of this many were losing a considerable amount of business. It was his opinion and, indeed, that of many others too, that the matter called for the special consideration of all those concerned.

IRISH CABARET
Another important matter mentioned by Mr. Kenneally was the lack of suitable entertainment facilities. These were seriously lacking in Limerick and because of this fact a very high proportion of their tourists stayed only one night in the city. In fact, it could be stated that the figure would reach 98%. What was very urgently needed to hold their tourists was something Irish in the way of entertainment.

Visitors did not want to go to a cinema or a dance. These were forms of entertainment that they could have in their own countries. He believed that Irish cabaret, featuring music and song of the Ireland past, and present, was the answer and he would like to see it launched in Limerick in time for the coming tourist season. It would mean much more than many people realised and would certainly help to hold their visitors for much longer than just one night. He has no doubt that there would be a big future for tourism in Limerick in the years ahead, but Limerick would have to be geared to handle it to the satisfaction of the visitor.

LOYAL STAFF
Mr. Kenneally told me that he will feel lonely in leaving Limerick and particularly in parting with such an excellent staff—a staff who pledged their loyal support to him at all times. "I am deeply indebted to them for their tributes," he told me yesterday, and I will always remember them. We have always been a very happy family here in Cruise's. I know every member of the staff personally and their progress and welfare have always been my concern. As I have said, I will be very sorry to leave them, but I have the consolation of knowing that their jobs are assured and will not be interfered with. I would also like to say that the general public in Limerick have always been very kind to me and have given me wonderful support down through the years.

It was good to hear from Mr. Kenneally that he is very happy that such an enterprising company is taking over Cruise's. "The board members are young and progressive, with a very substantial capital. They intend to take up where I have left off, without delay and will continue to expand and develop the hotel," Mr. Kenneally said that the chairman of the board, Mr. Gerard Browne, would do much for the hotel and for Limerick also.

LIMERICK ASSOCIATIONS
Mr. Browne's wife has Limerick associations and is most anxious to visit Limerick to find out if she has any relatives still in the area. Another member of the Board, Mr. E. D. Lyndon Ayres, has family connections in Cork while Mr. F. G. Tombs has Irish relatives also. The Right Hon. Lord Montagu and Lady Montagu, also directors of the company, visited Limerick recently and stayed at Cruise's. They were greatly impressed by the hotel and the staff in general. Other members of the new Board are Messrs. E. H. Ellis, J. R. Ekins and A. C. Farquhar.

One of the most unusual features to be seen just inside the entrance of the famous hotel is the Fountain of Coarivry. This is quite a distinctive fountain which was built in 1861 when the custom of throwing coins into it was established to aid local charities. These rotate every month and up to date over £1,000 has been collected. A most valuable contribution to the worthwhile efforts of numerous local organisations.

LEAVING THE STAFF
During the course of my visit to Cruise's I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Mary Hand who has been twelve years with the hotel as manageress. Mrs. Hand has seen many changes in the hotel business but the greatest has been the tremendous increase in the volume of trade . . . and the continuous growth over recent years. Born in County Fermanagh, Mrs. Hand was educated in the Loreto College, Dublin, and spent eight years in the Civil Service attached to the Dept. of Industry and Commerce. On her marriage to Mr. Walter Hand, an engineer with the E.S.E., she came to Limerick and joined the staff of Cruise's where she remains today, still very much a part of the internationally famous hotel.

Almost everyone in and around Limerick knows Mrs. Norrie O'Brien whose residence is at 21 Pearse Ave. (near the new work at Cruise's in 1952 when Mr. James Donnelly, now manager of the Old Ground Hotel in Limerick, was in command. She has been there since and has seen many of the changes that mark the colourful story of this Limerick hotel. A waitress who has specialised in functions of all kinds, Norrie has three daughters, one of whom is married. She is Mrs. Jerry Keenan of Thomondage. Her other girls are Anne and Helen, both of whom are going to school. Norrie's husband works at the Lyric Theatre. In her spare time with Cruise's Hotel, Norrie has met many personalities of Church and State, as well as many stars of the film world, radio and TV. She too, will be sorry to see Mr. Kenneally go.

MET THE STARS
I met Mrs. Maureen Cole, another well-known waitress and mother of four children. A widow, she works in the grill-room, where she has made many friends over her many years service. Maureen actually took up duty with Norrie in 1949 and since then she has met such well-known personalities as Van Johnson, Victor McLaglen, Gregory Peck, Rock Hudson and Barbara Rush. When I asked Maureen how she felt about the departure of Mr. Kenneally, she was quite frank and stated: "There's no doubt in the world we will miss him. Some of us did not always agree with him, but we always found him perfectly just and a very good man to work for at all times. We wish him every good luck wherever he goes and whatever position he takes up."

GOT HIS WISH
In 1958, Brian returned to Cruise's. He was always anxious to return there some day—but

as head chef. He set his wish with Limerick at 17 years of age and worked for McDermott & Co. in Dublin, eventually returning to Limerick at all times. He worked with Sine O'Brien in Limerick. He is happy and contented with his job. He would like to win an F.A.I. Junior Cup medal with Limerick. He is also interested in the hotel. Brian expressed his regret at seeing Mr. Kenneally leave them. He had always been a very good friend to all of them on the staff and they would miss him very much.

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A veteran of Cruise's

Head Chef, Mr. Kenneally, who has been associated with Cruise's for over 17 years, is leaving Limerick to go to Dublin, where he will be in charge of the staff of the Lyric Theatre. In his spare time with Cruise's Hotel, he has met many personalities of Church and State, as well as many stars of the film world, radio and TV. He too, will be sorry to see Mr. Kenneally go.

WILL BE MISSED
Mrs. Maureen Cole, another well-known waitress and mother of four children. A widow, she works in the grill-room, where she has made many friends over her many years service. Maureen actually took up duty with Norrie in 1949 and since then she has met such well-known personalities as Van Johnson, Victor McLaglen, Gregory Peck, Rock Hudson and Barbara Rush.

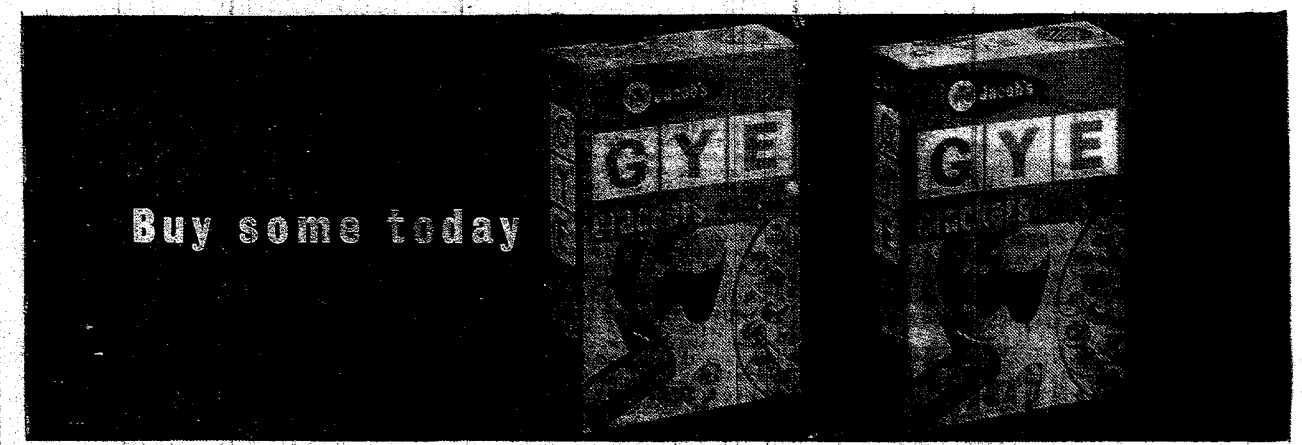
PERSONALITIES
Other personalities who have been associated with Cruise's include Miss Rosemary Kelly, who has been associated with Cruise's for over 14 years, and Miss Patricia O'Brien, who has been associated with Cruise's for over 10 years. Both of these ladies have met many well-known personalities of Church and State, as well as many stars of the film world, radio and TV.

MADE GOOD
It was Mrs. Maureen Cole, another well-known waitress and mother of four children. A widow, she works in the grill-room, where she has made many friends over her many years service. Maureen actually took up duty with Norrie in 1949 and since then she has met such well-known personalities as Van Johnson, Victor McLaglen, Gregory Peck, Rock Hudson and Barbara Rush.

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