

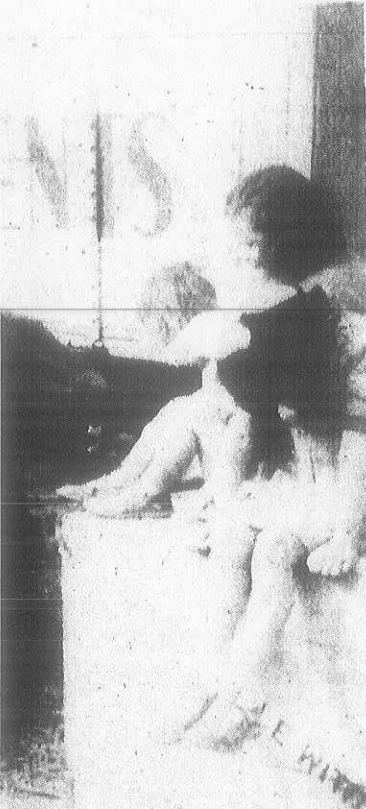


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recalled: "There was many a time, too, when 'tragedy' nearly struck at the Chronicle. "One such occasion was during the last war, when newsprint was strictly rationed with the consequent loss of revenue from advertising and sales, and on a few other occasions when the old gas engine that powered the press failed to function properly and the pages had to be pushed up on a handcart to 'Andy' Eakins or McKearns' to 'run off'."

These pages were actually large metal frames which contained, in a tightly-gripped matrix, the lead-castings of print and pictures in a form ready for the printing process. The Chronicle used publish on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, and it had the distinction of being the first newspaper in Ireland to have the story on the streets of the election of Pope John XXIII. It was a Saturday afternoon, and a large crowd had gathered



house, which stood well into al, was the venue for regular nt attendances. Among the all of "Belle Field", as the site antic "dive-bombers", a kind rose high over the city as it ourite pieces of music of the

been seen, all ears strained for the word. But it was only when the new pope emerged on the balcony - there had been a delay because, reportedly, the new man had fainted at the news - that the name "Ron-calli" emerged. Instantly, the word was sent to the typesetters, Tony Price and Mickey O'Halloran, and the pre-written story in their hands suitably amended to make a headline - the rest of the story had been pre-written with short biographies of every candidate already typeset in metal, ready for insertion. The insertion of the relevant name and biography was done on the flatbed of the large Cossar printing press itself, contrary to usual practice, and the closed-up page rolled into the machine.

In a matter of mere seconds, the Cossar press in the Limerick Leader premises at No 54 was rolling, and the first copies on sale on the streets, just in time to catch the crowd dispersing from on front of the Chronicle office after reading the window-poster.

The Chronicle had beaten the Dublin papers to the streets by minutes, on one of the great international stories this century - in those days, the Evening Press and Evening Herald ran a "bush" - a late or local news column printed at their Limerick offices on the normal issues.

It was not the last time that the Chronicle was "first on the streets", or had used that great old institution of local newspapers worldwide - the window-poster. But it was the Chronicle's crowning glory ... for an afternoon.

Before the Chronicle moved office, it had one final "stroke" to pull. It had always been a dream that, one day, there would be oil in "them thar hills", and Ireland's fortune would be made.

A report arrived that oil had been found in rocks near Kilkee, thought the account had been more reticent about where the oil might have come from or whether it existed in anything remotely approaching a commercial quantity.

The Chronicle carried the story as a front-page "lead", naturally, for the many Limerick people who sojourned at "Limerick-by-the-Sea", as Kilkee was affectionately known as to some.

But the paper, though carrying a picture of Kilkee, was stuck for a picture of the new oil. Then someone had an idea. Grabbing ace photographer Donal McMonagle, editor Paddy FitzGibbon took himself to the printing works where they persuaded one of the operatives, the late "Murty" Cosgrove to put his hand down into a drum of thick black printing ink and have it photographed as "a sample of the oil found" - a broom was used to steady "Murty's" hand for the shot. The readers loved it, even if they were puzzled, if not downright sceptical, for the amount of such oil and the absence of an oil drilling rig.



Lansdowne Tennis Club, in the 1950's. Some well-known faces.

CRUISE'S Royal Hotel was knocked, less than two months ago, ending exactly two centuries of service by that premises to the city of Limerick. and its journalists.

The Limerick Chronicle was only 25 years in operation when it was opened for the first time.

But even before it was built, the old Limerick Chronicle—destined eventually to have a premises only a few doors away—had become the Limerick city agent for a form of transport that was to make Cruise's the haunt of journalists: the stagecoach.

It is fitting, therefore, that the Chronicle should, in its 225th year, pay a final tribute to a building so regularly frequented by its journalists and directors for two centuries of news-gathering.

The hotel has seen a melancholy anniversary of 200 years of service, and no more; the newspaper celebrates its 225th, with many a year of service to come.

Many Limerick people do not know that Cruise's was once a stage-coach hotel. It was the terminus for all stage-coaches coming up from the south, in the final decade of the 18th century and in the first half of the 19th century at least.

For several decades, until the advent of the railways in the latter half of the last century, Cruise's Royal Hotel was the overnighting centre for stage travellers, most particularly the famous Bianconi coaches which maintained an exemplary service, unrivalled in Europe, for its regularity, punctuality and sheer reliability, not to mention speed.

The coaches were, of course, a postal service, requiring fast changes of horses for the coaches at short intervals along the way. Few people nowadays appreciate that the entrance to Cruise's Hotel was actually a gaping opening into a lane, in the old days, that still exists to the rere of where Cruise's stood. The coaches were overnighted in mews in the back lane, which allowed access to the front of Cruise's to take on their passengers, and then depart along the main road at the customary fast-trot.

"A compleat new covered broad-wheel Stage Waggon, erected from the best English modell, for the carriage of goods and passengers from Dublin to Limerick in five days,

# The year that Cruise's Hotel was knocked

sets off from the proprietors, No 31 St Mary's Abbey, Dublin, every second Thursday.

"Orders received at their office, as above; at Mr Andrew Watson's, Limerick; Mr Barry Smith, Nenagh; and Mr Reynolds in Roscrea. The public may depend on the strictest integrity and attention from the proprietors, one of whom will attend on the road constantly.

"Rates of carriage: "Merchants' goods, 3s 6d per cwt.

"Small packages or parcels under 56lb, one half-penny per lb.

"Passengers with 14lbs luggage through all or any part of the road, one penny per mile.

"Stages at Newbridge, Maryborough (today's Portlaoise—editor), Roscrea, Nenagh and Limerick.

"It will arrive in Limerick the first time on Wednesday, the 24th inst."

The entrance to Cruise's Hotel was a simple Georgian doorway to the right of the lane exit.

In those days, Cruise's was known as the Royal Mail Coach Hotel, which was, in the 19th century, to become known as Cleary's Hotel.

Many legends and stories about the stage-coaches have been lost to public memory, but not to the files of the Limerick Chronicle.

Prior to the advent of the Bianconi coaches, whose network stretched everywhere, there were several other notable coach services, one of them being Buchanan's.

It ought to be said that there is a romantic image of stage-coaches, glamorised by the Christmas card and a fanciful view of the Dickensian period. Going by coach, over roads that today would not even take a car, was something only for those with a strong constitution.

Years before Cruise's was opened, in 1791, a Thomond-gate man, Andrew Buchanan, first regularised road transport, pioneering stage-coach services.

Many years before the

famous Bianconi was even born, Buchanan's coach plied the perilous Limerick-Dublin route regularly and punctually, braving danger from the elements and from the highway-men.

Before Buchanan's day, there was no public mode of conveyance. Roads were few and bad. "The rocky road to Dublin" was not then a comic song: it was a perilous reality.

In the interests of self-preservation, travellers banded together and relied on their marksmanship or swordsmanship to protect them from the plundering highwaymen. Weapons were freely available—duelling was common in those days, including among lawyers, whose true initiation into the profession was answered in the assent when someone asked, "Has he blazed, yet?"

Buchanan's stage-coach, appropriately named "The Fly", sped the dangerous Limerick-Dublin route with the first regular service in 1760, six years before the Limerick Chronicle was founded.

Prior to that time, intending travellers met at a coffee room in Quay Lane, where the Chronicle first began, and on a particular day being selected to leave, a notice was displayed over a mantlepiece and signed by all the passengers.

The journey took as long as five days, the same horses being used throughout, covering an average of 25 miles a day at little more than a walking pace. Others found it more convenient and less tiresome to travel by comfortable passenger barge along the grand canal, when the canals were built much later, towed by horse from a tow-path - the path out along the grand canal from Clare Street, and that along by Plassey were tow-paths. It was slower, of course, but one got there.

Buchanan decided to improve on his slow service and set up his headquarters at a place called the Head Inn in Gerald Griffin Street. This was a fashionable hotel in its day, and had as its patrons the

famous Mrs Siddons and other stage personalities who visited Limerick.

"The Fly" was a picturesque sight as it passed through St John's Square, through the Irishtown, across Baal's Bridge, through the English-town, across Thomond Bridge and then right for Killaloe. It even negotiated part of Keeper Hill on its long route to Dublin.

The journey was completed punctually in four days by "The Fly". This gave travellers an extra day in the Capital. An even greater improvement was effected a short time after by using a lightly-built coach and having relays of ready-harnessed horses at appointed halts.

These and other improvements enabled the journey to be made in three days by a coach called "The Balloon" and the driver was a very proud man indeed to have covered so great a distance in what was then considered so short a time.

Twenty years elapsed before any further changes of note took place, and it was not until 1730 that an analysis of "The Fly" and "The Balloon's" performances resulted in further alterations and improvements.

Amongst these, the route was changed and the road newly constructed. Instead of going across Thomond Bridge and by Killaloe, the coach proceeded by Clare Street and direct to Nenagh. This route was responsible for reducing the Limerick-Dublin journey to two days.

It was ultimately completed in only one day, though this required a cock-crow start and a late arrival. This was certainly no mean achievement when it is realised that the roads then were very few and badly engineered.

In their planning, no care was taken to avoid hills or cut through them. If they were planned by Englishmen, we might slightly alter Chesterton's lines to read, "The rolling English drunkard made the rolling Irish roads!" Also, they

were so indifferently constructed and so badly cared for that, in bad weather, long stretches were impassible.

Buchanan's first coach had a hard job to do, and consequently it was very large and heavy in its construction. The horses, too, were harnessed after the same style and many unnecessary straps and buckles were used which were afterwards dispensed with.

When stagecoaches were first established, the mails were conveyed from Limerick to Dublin three times a week. They were placed in saddlebags at each side of the horse, which was ridden by a courier,

who travelled a fixed distance, usually ten miles.

A fresh man and horse then took over, and they were then so relayed until they reached their destination. The relief, however, very often took the form of a highwayman, who was not by any means the colourful gallant which Hollywood would have us believe.

Busily grinding through the muddy roads, Buchanan's wagon wheels turned mileage into money. Then the inevitable competitors came and his skies darkened—for a while. The advertisements quoted in this account of the "War of the Wagons" are taken from the Limerick Chronicle file for 1784.

1784 itself was a particularly trying year for Buchanan when a company Messrs Foster and Osborne, with headquarters in Dublin, decided to exploit the profitable Limerick/Dublin route.

The following announcement and rates of carriage, published on March 25, 1784, surely caused his sword to rattle in its scabbard.



One of the older buses which remained in service with CIE down into the late 1960's when they were replaced by the new Atlantean buses.