



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 rear 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 complete new covered broad-wheel Stage Waggon, erected from the best English model, 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 Thomondgate 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 highwaymen.

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 mantelpiece 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 Chesteron's lines to read, "The rolling English drunkard made the rolling Irish roads!" Also, they

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 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.