The Night of the Big Wind

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Broken window glass was incessant. To add to the panic, whole stacks of chimneys were tumbled down and in several instances the entire slated roofs sunk, transforming bedrooms into a mass of rubble.

Houses Rocked Like a Cradle
At Arthur's Quay, the houses rocked like a cradle and when the terrified occupants rushed from their beds they were met by the rush of water from the inflowing tides, raised to an unusual height by the force of the wind.

At the old houses in the English and Ennis towns, the wind was destructive. The tattered houses were evacuated. The occupants, many of them clothed in only a blanket or sheet. In their rush to escape what seemed instant death, took shelter in the old exchange which was opened to received the homeless.

Dashed against Bridge Parapet
In the docks, the storm raged with even greater fury. The frame work of the new Sarsfield Bridge was shook, and one of the arches was reported to be in a dangerous state. Many of the larger cut stones, bedded in cement, were wrenched from their position, and others were totally displaced. The balustrades at the west side of the bridge, forming a range of polished cut pillars in part of the

The Limerick Chronicle of Saturday, October 28, 1961, carried an account of one of the most devastating storms in Irish history when they wrote of 'The Night of the Big Wind' which occurred on January 6, 1961 and which was described as 'a night of terror, desolation and destruction.'
Shipping in the port suffered heavily. One vessel was sunk bottom upwards at the outer quay below Sarsfield Bridge. The small boats of merchants at the lower quays were dashed against Sarsfield Bridge. There they crashed and were broken up by the mass of stone parapet. One ship dragged from the quay and in upon her decks a stone pillar at least two tons in weight, to which she was moored.

FATALITIES AT COONAGH

The embankment at the Lambsave side of the river was breached in many places by the raging floods. The water rushed over the town and flooded a vast area of the country. At Coonagh, a man named Hickey and his wife and two children were washed away by the flood. The father and both children were drowned. Mrs. Hickey was thrown onto a hedge where she clung desperately throughout the night until rescued by neighbours in the morning. Several houses were washed away. Before the storm, thirty boats had left the quays and many of them were wrecked. Early casualties were three at Grass Island, one at the property of John Tomlin of Carragh, a second, Mark Anthony of Luske, and a third, William Quenham.

The Eliza, a sailing vessel belonging to John Mullican, swamped in the docks. John Hartigan, a sailor of the Richmond structure, was killed by a stroke of the ship's boom which severed his head from his body. At the Custom House, a light of forty tons was washed ashore and dried out on the quay. Thomond Bridge was not yet built at this time. A temporary wooden structure spanning the river here. Over this the waves washed with fury, and it was thought that the piers would be washed out of the river bed. However, it weathered the desperate storm and flood and not a timber was displaced.

EFFECTS IN Limerick and District

Some effects of the hurricane in County Limerick and District were: The churches of St. John's and Cappagh were completely wrecked; Castletown and Chapel Royal church spires blown down; houses at Ballina were destroyed, also in Askeaton and Killaloe. At Cahiragh, 200 cows were washed away. Coonagh inundated, salmon weir and Island Bank broken; at Elin Park oak trees 50 ft. in height and 13 feet in circumference uprooted; one wing of the Parochial Church at Barretstown burned. The fever hospital, Courtenay, Barracks and church at Newcastle West were severely damaged; at Kilrush the Victoria Hotel was destroyed. Ballybranan Castle was burned. Twelve men of the Roundstone Company Station were drowned. At Castle in Henry Street, a great iron-roofed shed was stripped and sheets hung, bent into all sorts of fantastic shapes, into the streets. Such was the scene of destruction.

The catalogue of loss was not completely in Limerick, the damage caused to private houses was estimated to be in excess of £20,000 and in the Port sixteen lives were lost. Then, as now, the Big Wind blew something some good. Soles and masons were in demand at £4 per day and shops were closed.

Coonagh was ravaged by storms, wind, rain and floods on the Night of the Big Wind of January 6, 1839, but in October 1962 the area was again flooded. Unfortunately, there were no fatalities on that occasion.

Kilkee was ravaged by storms in 1951 and Limerick man Charlie Tyranny, whose dad was Station Master, took the pictures for posterity.