

A LIMERICK CATASTROPHE OF 1864

When seven died in Denmark St. blaze

FIRES were not of frequent occurrence in Limerick a century ago any more than they are to-day, and the worst ever recorded in the City's history happened in 1837 as a result of a gunpowder explosion in the premises of a merchant named Richardson.

A lesser known, and a catastrophe almost as great as that of 1837, occurred in Denmark Street on the morning of April 8, 1864. Seven lives were lost as a result of a smouldering burning which went on all through the night and was only observed when it burst into flames at 6 o'clock in the morning.

The night watchmen had nearly all returned to the station house, after duty, when the alarm was given by one of them, named Martin English. He was passing by Denmark Street when he saw a crowd assembled, as he put it, "in terrific fright" before the house. Smoke was pouring from the roof and at the windows of the attic storey a man and a woman were seen in their night clothes calling out for help.

Night Watch Inspectors Shiel and Forrest were quickly on the scene and they were followed by the Fire Brigade and the Corporation engine. It was then evident that the upper storey of the premises, occupied by a Mr. Patrick Ryan, was in a blaze and all the inmates in imminent danger.

Ryan was overseer of the printing department of the Limerick Reporter and Vindicator, which was owned by the Limerick historian, Maurice Lenihan. Living with Ryan in the apartments were his wife, two sons and two daughters, and his father-in-law, Charles Shine. The latter was for many years bass singer in the choir of St. Michael's Catholic Church.

The rescuers immediately set to work. Ladders of great height were procured from nearby premises, where work-

men had been engaged painting.

CHARRED BEYOND RECOGNITION

The attic storey, where Ryan and his wife were observed, was their first objective, as it appeared that Ryan was about to leap to his death. His wife was standing close by him, with a child in her arms, and she was seen to fall suddenly backwards into the flames. It was stated at the inquest afterwards that her body was so charred that it could scarcely be discerned as that of a male or female.

Although frightfully burned in both hands and lower extremities, Ryan climbed on to the ladder and was assisted to the street. He died later in Barrington's Hospital. Mr. and Mrs. Ryan's four children, whose ages ranged from 14 years to 18 months, were burned to death in the apartment.

The lifeless body of Charles Shine was found on the lobby of the first staircase by rescue workers.

On the floor beneath that of the Ryan family lived William Hickey, a hatter by trade, and his wife, and on the first floor Patrick Nolan, a tailor, and his family. The upper staircase having been completely buried away, Hickey and his wife were brought from their apartments to the street by means of a ladder. Nolan and his wife got out by the hall-door entrance.

JURY'S VERDICT

It appeared that the fire extended from two middle back apartments to the front, burning the staircases and igniting the roof, which fell in just as Mrs. Ryan was seen to disappear.

At the inquest, held later, the Mayor and the Coroner suggested that ladders ought to be kept in every insurance office in the city. At that time the different insurance offices operated their own fire engines.

The fire was the scene of many acts of heroism by the rescuers. The following verdict was returned by the jury:—

"That the said several persons came to their deaths by suffocation, from the burning of the house in which they resided, and in which other families also resided, on the 8th day of April instant. We also beg to record our approbation of the exceedingly praiseworthy manner in which the Constabulary exerted themselves, also in approbation of the exertions of Denis Quinn, Messrs. Collins, Palmer, of the firm of Messrs. Tait & Co., and also of the praiseworthy conduct of Palmer, of the Sun Insurance office."



Protest against poor effort by Shannon Rescue Service

A PROTEST against the poor service provided by the Shannon Airport rescue service on the night of the 24th September when two young boys from Foynes, Co. Limerick, were adrift in the Shannon was made at Monday's meeting of the Limerick Co. Council by Mr. Denis Naughton, Co.C.

Mr. Naughton said that the two boys went adrift when they went out to secure a launch after it was torn from its moorings by the storm. Inspector Jim Bailey and the parents of one of the boys notified the Airport authorities at 8 o'clock and received a reply that it

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