

CHANGING CUSTOMS AND HUNT

By PADDY MORONEY

THE Custom House in Limerick is no more — as a custom house, that is.

Its function has been transferred to the neighbouring Sarsfield House — move celebrated by staff last Friday afternoon with a reception.

The Custom House in Patrick Street, has been in

operation as such since it was custom-built, to use a phrase, in the year of grace 1765.

Built on Custom House Park, its original function had to do with the extensive shipping movements up the Shannon to Limerick.

In those days, the park was a large quayside area serving the ships which used berth there, convenient to the Patrick Street/Arthur's Quay area which was, in those days,

the commercial heart of Limerick, along with the Bridge Street area and Nicholas Street on King's Island.

All incoming ships had to declare their cargoes to the Custom House, which then charged duty, much as today. The revenues then, as now, went directly to Dublin, where the old Irish Parliament — known in its latter days as Grattan's Parliament — administered the whole island.

The situation was compounded by the fact that the population of Ireland was already measured in millions — Limerick in tens of thousands — and the ships had a small carrying capacity by today's standards. This increased the amount of paperwork, at a time when carbon copies were unknown, and documents had to be counter-signed, "a true copy".

The adjoining park marks the confluence of the Abbey

River and the Shannon, where is located the historic Hellsgate Island, now only visible at low water.

The custom house continued its function for the entire mid-west area throughout the era of the so-called "union" with Britain, up to last Friday, when the Customs and Excise Service closed the doors on over two centuries of history.

A cheese-and-wine reception was held by the forty staff after the close of business, to quietly mark the event.

The Custom House, up to last Friday evening, served not only the Limerick Region - Counties Limerick, Clare and Tipperary North Riding — but also parts of north Cork, Offaly and other peripheral areas.

It also served Shannon Airport. The customs section dealt with the usual importations as well as vehicle registration, while the excise division dealt with pub licensing, duty on

drinks, etc.

The vehicle registration section has moved to River House at Charlotte Quay.

In recent years, the Custom House Park—for long closed to the general public and almost un-noticed — was extensively renovated, with sculptures mounted throughout, and linked with the Potato Market, across the Abbey River, by a metal footbridge.

However, it was a constant battle to keep vandals away from the splendid facade of the Custom House itself, and it was repeatedly defaced by graffiti.

The facade — the Patrick Street entrance is really the rere — which faces towards the river, in keeping with its function in shipping, is regarded as one of the finest 18th century designs of custom house anywhere in the world.

The Custom House is to be extensively renovated for its future role in displaying the treasures of the Hunt Museum.

St. Michael's celebrates Fr Ryan's silver jubilee

ST. Michael's parish in Limerick will be the setting for the twenty fifth anniversary celebration for Fr. Thomas Ryan on next Sunday (June 20), at the 11.30 a.m. Mass, according to a spokesperson for the church. The purpose of the celebration is to give thanks to Almighty God for the twenty five years of his work as a priest.

The committee of the parish who are helping with the planning extend an invitation to all of Fr. Ryan's friends and acquaintances

scouts and girls guides. "I think that the discovery that one can be human and continue to be an effective priest has been significant for me," he said. He went on to say that "being able to be present to people in their moments of grief and their moments of joy is one of the great gifts of the priesthood."

He indicated that the considerations that prompted him to study for the priesthood were that "it provided a way of pursuing a life that is God-centred being able to serve and be available to people, and being able to preside at the celebration of

over the past twenty five years. "It is more than the sacramental aspects such as the celebration of the Mass and sacraments," he said. "I have also come to realise that one (a priest) cannot be all things to all people — different personalities and needs have to be acknowledged. I also realise that a priest is not working as a one-person band, he must work in a team with other priests and laity." Perhaps, the most significant change for him is "the acceptance that the church, being composed of ordinary women and men is not a perfect society, as he initially con-

Fr. Ryan wrote a book on the history of the church and community of Janesboro, and as a person who has spent practically all of his life in Limerick is well informed on the history and culture of this city. He has used travel, attendance at conferences and personal study to stay abreast of developments in the church, and in society. His personal goals for the future include a commitment to continuing personal and ministerial growth so that he can better serve the people entrusted to him.

The 11.30 a.m. Mass on June 20 will centre on his

*beautiful
& big*

THE LARGER LADIES FASHION HOUSE