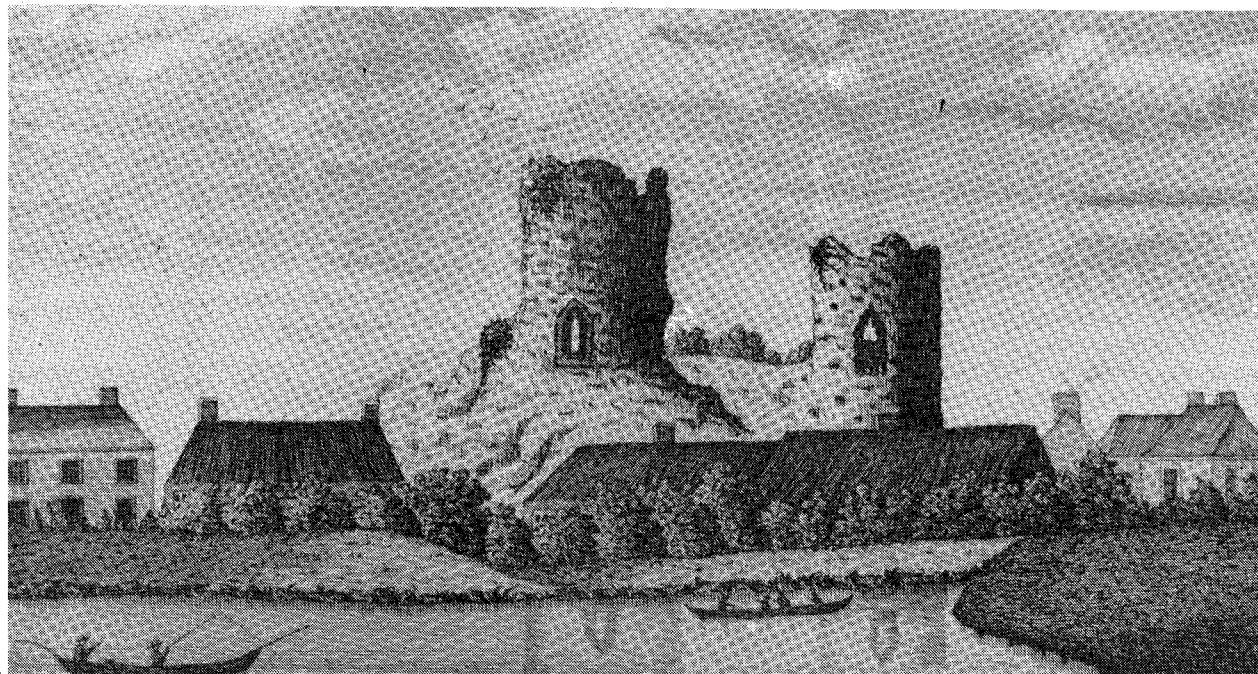


Castleconnell

by KEVIN HANNAN

* part one *



Castleconnell, engraved for John Ferrar's "History of Limerick, 1786.

As far back as 1813, Castleconnell was referred to as a town, although some preferred the more romantic description of village. In that year, the **Irish Penny Magazine** opened a short account of the place, "Castleconnell, a town of 112 houses, and 700 inhabitants, is situated in the Barony of Clanwilliam Co. Limerick". Some years later, we read Samuel Lewis on the same subject: "Castleconnell, or Stradbally, a post town and parish in the Barony of Clanwilliam Co. of Limerick ... containing 5616 inhabitants of which number 1313 are in the town."

Many other literary visitors to the place in the past have expressed their admiration for its natural beauty and romantic setting, with particular reference to the great river - a feature, they say, that 'made' Castleconnell, and, no doubt, they were right. What other aspect could have given so much character and brought so much fame to the historic village? Even to-day, when the much depleted river means far less to Castleconnell than it did in pre-Shannon Scheme days, it would be unthinkable to imagine the place without it. The castle, too, would hardly have been erected on the rocky eminence if the river did not mean so much to its defences on all sides. (The building was at one time completely surrounded by water). Judging by the savagery of the times, inhabitants

of castles - a bountiful breed - had little time for scenery: much of their time seems to have been spent watching for enemies. It was a time when life was a real cat-and-mouse existence for those who believed that might was right.

While the Cromwellian campaign in Ireland proved the uselessness of such buildings as impregnable defences, it was not until after the Williamite wars that the privileged classes emerged from the semi-darkness of their stone cocoons and engaged in the raising magnificent mansions in classical styles, there being no further need to consider the defensive aspects of the location.

Those early proprietors, now freed for the first time from the necessity of living in ungainly fortresses, did not build just in any old place; they were most discriminating, and sought out sites commanding panoramic prospects and salubrious situations. At least some of these found their heart's desire by the broad cascading river thundering through its rock strewn channel at Castleconnell. They further refined the rugged grandeur of the place by planting the beautiful parkland trees that were afterwards to transform the whole area into a fairyland. The generations who enjoyed the wonderland of Castleconnell owed much to those people, after all to plant a grove of trees was a virtuous act - a gift to posterity. We might even overlook the fact that some of these benefactors were

descendants of those who acquired their estates by murder and plunder.

There were others, many years before, who chose to live in the same area, but for different reasons. There is abundant archaeological evidence that tells us of a community that grew up along the river here in the stone age. These were known as the river-ford people, and many of their possessions were uncovered during the cutting of the old Shannon navigation canal, towards the end of the eighteenth century and, later still, during the excavations in connection with the Shannon Hydro Electric Canal in the 1920s. The collection and preservation of artefacts from the latter site was due to the late Andy Killeen, who was the civil works engineer employed on the project. Mr. Killeen, who was a noted sportsman and antiquarian, was afterwards president of the Thomond Archaeological Society. A large number of items unearthed in the vicinity of Cussane and Killaloe, during the early excavations, are housed in the British Museum having escaped possible re-interment in the dungeons of Kilmainham.

The famous Castleconnell village itself grew up around the central institution in the place - the castle. This fortress, which was originally a wooden structure, was first established by an intrepid adventurer from the Dalcassian territory across the river. He was one O'Coining, or Gunning, whose ambitions seem to have been unbounded, for we find that he owned a tract of land stretching between Castleconnell and Carrigogunnel. Although he must be regarded as one of the country's early iand-grabbers, his name is enshrined for all times in both places.

Gunning, and his immediate descendants, were unfortunate enough to live long before land acts and title deeds; they received no notice to quit before they were turfed out by the O'Brien's, who were loathe to tolerate for too long a rival to their territorial omnipotence so close to Thomond. We are not sure of the date of this eviction, or how much blood was spilt in the process, but the first mention of the O'Brien occupation of Castleconnell spells out the date - 1174.

On that occasion, Donal More O'Brien, King of Limerick, while on his way from Thurles where he had been successful in a battle with the English, stayed overnight at Castleconnell as guest of his uncle, Dermot O'Brien and his kinsman, Mahon O'Brien. During the small hours of that fateful night, the king, with his hangers-on, set upon their unsuspecting hosts and gouged out their eyes. We are told that Dermot did not survive the mutilation - and small wonder!

This was the self same Donal who donated his palace overlooking the harbour in Limerick as a site for the Cathedral. He also endowed a number of religious houses over a wide area. While he is best remembered for these acts of piety his treachery in leading his Dalcassians on the side of the Normans against Roderic O'Connor will never be forgotten.

After a tempestuous occupation of the castle by the O'Briens - they were in almost continuous contention with rival chieftains - King John granted the site to William De Burgh (Bill Bourke, in modern parlance) who rebuilt the fortress in a grand style. It is certain that Bourke, notwithstanding the backing of the good King John, would have found it difficult, if not impossible, to set up house in Dalcassian territory if Donal Moore was not his father-in-law. However, this family connection provided only a transitory immunity from the attentions of the ever hostile O'Briens; although sixty years were to elapse before the castle was attacked and destroyed by another savage, Suidaine O'Brien, who, for good measure, slaughtered the garrison. But the Bourkes were made of stern stuff for we find that Walter rebuilt and extended the castle in a manner that made it the most important stronghold in east Limerick. The pitiful remains we see today belie the once great expanse of the complex



The view from Woodlands.

for we know that a troop of horse was once accommodated in the great hall.

William De Burgh was created Baron of Castleconnell in 1578 by good Queen Bess, as a reward for slaughtering the dissident, James Fitzmaurice. This was not, however, a happy occasion for the noble lord, for he lost his two sons in the skirmish that won him the title and a letter of sympathy from her Majesty. This shattering tragedy occurred during an encounter between the Bourkes and Sir James Fitzmaurice in the area between Barrington's Bridge and Boher. It appears that Fitzmaurice, while trying to seek an avenue to Connaught, failed to conciliate the affections, or otherwise obtain the goodwill of either the O'Briens or the Bourkes, both of whose families had made their submissions to the Queen and thus retained their estates, before he siezed a pair of plough horses from one of Bourke's tenants, who immediately raised the alarm and reported the incident to his master at Castleconnell. William immediately called his garrison to arms and gave chase, overtaking the Desmonds at one of the Mulcair river fords, probably at Gurteen-na-maol, or possibly Poulcarthy, a little further downstream, for there is a strong local tradition that Fitzmaurice and his men had crossed the Newport river at a ford where Barrington's Bridge is now situated. The ford at Gurteen-na-maol was directly in line with the place where the conflict ended.

James Fitzmaurice, a kinsman of the Bourkes, and known to history as the "Arch-traitor of Munster", was killed at the first encounter at the Mulcaire river ford and, in a running battle between that place and the higher ground at Killanure, William's two sons met the same fate.

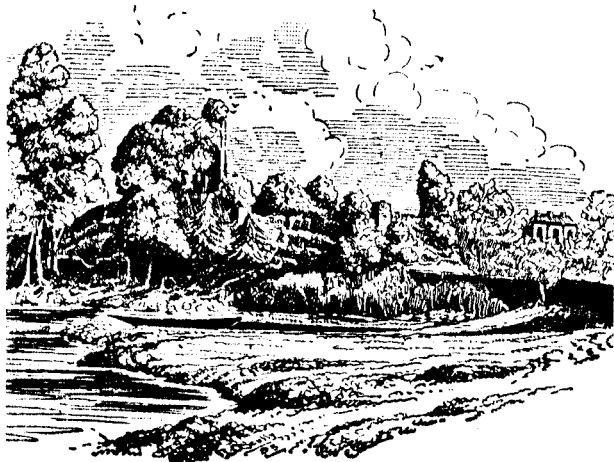
If one is to judge by the number of human skeletons unearthed at this place in the 1930s, during excavations for gravel, it would appear that both factions almost wiped themselves out. It is most intriguing to reflect on the old tradition that has long been kept alive in the area of Boher and Abington that the little hill where the gravel pit was opened was the site of the main battle on that fateful day, and that it has always been claimed locally, - long before the human remains were discovered - that this was a place of great slaughter after the Bourke's horses were stolen by 'a crowd from Kerry'.

It was poor consolation for Sir William to be raised to the peerage with the title, 'Lord Baron Bourke of Castleconnell'. He was left in his cold grey fortress to mourn the violent deaths of his two fine sons - and all over a pair of plough horses.

Lord Castleconnell, who survived the Killanure disaster for an anguished four years, was succeeded by his grandson, John, who was probably a minor at the time. After a few years, the young lord figured in another tragedy. While in London (in 1592), he fell foul of a certain Captain Arnold Cosby, an Elizabethan buck who had been lately granted a considerable slice of Co. Limerick. A difference of opinion arose between the two, possibly over something less important than a pair of plough horses, and a duel was arranged. It was first agreed that the engagement should take place on horseback, but Cosby, at the last minute, called for the contest to take place on foot. While Bourke, who seems to have agreed to the change, was stooping to remove his spurs Cosby treacherously ran him through. The captain was arrested, tried and convicted of murder, and was hanged over the spot where Lord Castleconnell died. A quaint rhymester of the time recorded the incident:-

"John Bourke, Lord Castleconnell, was basely slain
By Capt. Arnold Cosby - for they twain
Resolved to fight; but Cosby stops, demurs,
Prays Castleconnell to take off his spurs;
And as he stooped, yielding to his request;
Cosby most basely stabs him through the breast,
Gave 21 all dreadful wounds - base act
And Cosby only hanged for the horrid fact".

John was succeeded by his younger brother, Richard, who, after a short but tempestuous career, also met a violent death, this time much nearer to home, on the banks of the Cammoge river at Grange where the old Kilmallock Road crosses the river. He had been engaged in a fight with the O'Connors - a conflict that also accounted for Richard's younger brother, Thomas. The title fell to the last brother, Theobald, who set about carrying on the bloody heritage of Castleconnell. The Bourkes took the Confederate side during the rebellion of 1641 and lost their estates at Castleconnell and Brittas during the Cromwellian occupation. After years of great privation and poverty, they were given back their properties after the restoration. Lord Castleconnell's 'beg up' to Charles II is indicative of the sorry plight of the wealthy classes who were reduced to the ranks under Cromwell:- "... for five or six years trailing a pike in the Duke of York's regiment, he understood no misery, but now he has run in debt for



Looking towards Erinagh.

food and raiment, and is at the end of his credit, in imminent danger of imprisonment for his debts, and unable further to subsist if your majesty relieve him not".

Castleconnell enjoyed a relatively peaceful period during the thirty years after the restoration, but the fateful year of 1690 saw the Bourkes once more ousted from their stronghold and their properties taken over by the

Williamites. They were back again, however, towards the winter of that year after the raising of the siege of Limerick and the withdrawal of William's army to winter quarters. It was a short respite: the Williamites were back the following year and thoroughly demolished the castle. At the same time the title 'Lord Castleconnell', became extinct.

The Bourkes, without standing or title, gradually infiltrated the ranks of the common people and a new ascendancy took over Castleconnell, though the ground landlord of the place in 1866, and probably long afterwards, was Sir Richard Donnellan De Burgo, Bart. This man lived at the 'Island', and barely escaped with his life when he was attacked by his servants after returning from a visit to Limerick on the 14th. of August, 1862. He was severely wounded and would certainly have been finished off were it not for the intervention of his wife, and his guest, Sir Thomas Fitzgerald.

Today, the devastation caused by De Ginkle's gunpowder is mercifully shrouded in evergreen vegetation, and only the tallest remnants stand out to indicate that a fine castle once stood on the great rock. It is a landmark of great charm and character, and lends an air of romance to one of our most historic sites.

THE SPA

On a more peaceful note, the famous chalybeate spa is another integral part of Castleconnell, although people nowadays find much more positive satisfaction in the local pubs. Gone are the days of the great crowds converging on the village, attracted mainly by the mysterious health giving spring. Common carts, traps, side-cars, back-to-backs and even donkey carts were to be seen on every road leading to the spa. Great numbers came from Limerick in the train on Sunday afternoons during the summer, and there were those who walked from as far away as Nenagh and Tipperary, while great numbers strolled out from Limerick.

Most people drank the spa water and topped off their day in the locals. If some of those who imbibed not so wisely felt somewhat seedy the following morning they usually attributed their discomfort to the spa, while others related a feeling of improvement in their health to the self same water, though the sensation - either way - might have resulted from the effects of the liquor, depending on the quantities taken.

For more than two centuries the famous water held the respect of all classes, including the medical profession, who, in the 18th century, hopefully prescribed it in cases of doubtful diagnosis. Some doctors found it "successful in the treatment of ulcers, billous complaints, obstruction in the liver, jaundice and worms".

Dr. Martin, an eminent Limerick doctor (at least that's what John Ferrar, the historian, thought of him) of the 1670s, believed the spa to have many curative properties; while Dr. Ruty, a prominent English physician, observed: "... an earth worm put into the water instantly dies, hence it was found effectual for worms in children".

Unlike the sulphur, magnesium and iron wells of Lisdoonvarna, which are most unpalatable, the Castleconnell brand is most pleasing to taste - that is if the purest of spring water can be said to have any taste at all. The legend of the spa is all but dead. Almost every physical disorder today has an antidote in a small jar or bottle. The mineral spring of Castleconnell was too good to be true, and too cheap to be good.

SALMON ANGLING

Would the castle and the spa have been enough to make the name of Castleconnell an enduring household word all over the country, and far outside it, if its salmon and

trout fishing was not the most sought after in all Europe? I think not. Every Waltonian's dream of paradise was surely Castleconnell. For almost all it remained a dream and still does. Preserved by and for a foreign and Anglo-Irish ascendancy class for two and a half centuries, and by a native government for the past forty five years, the local angler has been effectively kept out. This gross injustice was highlighted in the mid-fifties when the great guerrilla leader, Commdt. Sean O'Carroll, was arrested and imprisoned for daring to fish in the stream he fought so hard to make free for all to enjoy, and not a privileged few. Such is the hypocrisy of every Irish government since 1922.

Up to the completion of the Shannon Hydro-Electric Works salmon catches were touching on the phenomenal, both in quantity and size of fish, on the Castleconnell waters. 'Big water, big fish', a rule well known to every angler, was borne out here. The stories of giant salmon, some taken, and others (the bigger ones, of course) 'lost at the gaff', mostly represent tales of the imagination. The farther back one goes in search of outstanding catches the more fantastic the results. An ancient document, the **Cronicon Scotorum**, sets out details of a rare monster: "A salmon was caught at Luimneac this year (1109), which was twelve feet in length, twelve hands in breadth, without being split open; and the length of its neck fin was three hands and two fingers". This story illustrates the anglers gift of seeing his catch gain much weight after it is hooked and landed.

On the realistic side, however, there are many well authenticated records of giant salmon of more than 50 lbs. taken at Castleconnell. A 54 pounder caught by John Milburn in 1903 is the record rod caught salmon for the Shannon. This fine fish was just 3 lbs. short of the Irish record - one of 57 lbs. taken in the river Suir by a Mr. Maher, in 1874. In April 1879, the **Limerick Chronicle** records:- "The finest fish, both in contour and quality, which perhaps has ever been taken from the prolific waters of the Shannon was exhibited on yesterday at the stall of Mrs. Lyons, Bedford Row. This lordly salmon weighed 53 lbs., and was hooked at Castleconnell on the forenoon by an angler of piscatorial notoriety". The colourful description of the angler suggests a very modest disciple of old Isaak, or one who took the fish under doubtful circumstances. At the time, it was one of the heaviest salmon ever taken in the British Isles and it seems extraordinary that it should end up on a fishmonger's slab in Bedford Row.

All through the last century, and well into the present one, great salmon have been taken here; its popularity was universal. Millionaires trod the banks, and found enjoyment in the simple things of life; they fished in the sparkling pools, drank ale and whiskey in the friendly taverns and found solace in the old world atmosphere of the village. The wealthy visitors were a boon to the local people, almost all of whom enjoyed an improvement in their living standards.

Experienced gillies, with their expertise and local knowledge of the fisheries, were indispensable: every visiting angler had to have one; it was a badge of respectability, and to venture on to the river bank without one was unthinkable. Gillies were employed to fish commercially by some fishery owners and lessees, as can be noted from the many press reports of catches made in this manner. A snippet from the **Limerick Chronicle** of May, 1913, tells us that: "... the men employed by Mr. Wm. Enright, at the Newgarden Fishery took several fine salmon up to 40 lbs. in weight. These were on display at a Limerick fishmonger". Hundreds of such news items appeared from time to time in our local papers and helped to establish the reputation of Castleconnell among those who had no other contact with the place. Up to the decline of the fishery in the 1930s hardly a week passed



Looking upstream from the Turret.

without reports of outstanding catches. A report of March 1879 goes on: "Some fine salmon have been landed this week on the Castleconnell waters. On Tuesday, 11th. inst. Capt. F.C. Lester Kay (Queen's Bays, now quartered in Dublin), accompanied by Mr. J. Byrne, County Inspector, R.I.C. Galway District, attended by the redoubtable Patsy Hickey and Maurice Johnson, fished on the preserves of Mr. E.J. Ingham, with much success; Capt. Kay having killed to his rod, two salmon, weighing 37 lbs. and 19 lbs. Capt. H.B. Rhodes, who holds the Newgarden Salmon Fishery, caught two salmon of 13 and 30 lbs. The fishermen, Hickey and Bourke, on the Erinas, or World's End Fisheries, caught two salmon of 25 and 30 lbs.. The fishermen, Enright and Dwyer, on the Landscape Salmon Rod Fishery, on the 14th inst., landed one beauty of 37 lbs., and Cpt. Vansettart, 3 salmon at the Heritage. Mr Henry Hodges arrived on Wednesday afternoon at his usual fishing quarters, the Shannon Hotel. Several other English gentlemen are expected next week".

The social cleavage that existed in those days between the gillies and the privileged sportsmen they assisted is clearly evident in this report. It is notable that Johnson, Hickey and Dwyer are given no title whatsoever, while even those 'expected from England' are referred to as 'gentlemen'.

Prominent among the distinguished visitors to the village were Lord Randolph Churchill, John Bright the British cabinet minister, and George Peabody, the American millionaire and philanthropist. Peabody and Bright were fast friends and always arranged their meetings in Castleconnell beforehand. The former left a lasting mark of his bounty in the fine wrought iron railing and base blocking surrounding the Roman Catholic Church, where an acknowledgement can be seen engraved in one of the gate piers. It is said that Peabody was 'shamed' into this act of generosity by a scheme set in motion by a number of parishioners, with the connivance of the parish priest, Rev. Patrick Hennessy. On the wealthy visitor's arrival, he was welcomed outside the railway station by a great bonfire which was fed principally by the old wooden railings that had surrounded the church. Peabody immediately ordered new railing after a village diplomat gave him the 'message'.

On another occasion, in July 1868, Peabody attended a fete at Coolbawn House, the residence of Capt. Vansittart, a great sporting personality, who, with his wife, entertained on a lavish scale, (and we have numerous accounts of their hospitality). On this occasion their guests included 350 children from the Castleconnell and Mountshannon schools. A report of the function at the time tells us that: "... the elite of the neighbourhood were also invited and entered thoroughly into the spirit of the evening". Peabody, who, of course, was the principal guest (being a millionaire), responding to an address of

thanks by Miss Doulon, a young monitress, said that "... the poorest child present has as good prospects now as he had when he began in the world; that he was an example of what might be obtained by industry, frugality and, above all, truthfulness". At that time there was plenty of industry in store for most of the youngsters - but no money. Frugality was endemic for the same number and truthfulness was held up to them at all times as a pre-requisite to eternal salvation. An unwavering adherence to these three virtues by the most ambitious among them was unlikely to have turned out a millionaire. George Peabody kept the great secret to himself.

John Bright was an outstanding character in British politics and was a cabinet minister for many years. Like many busy men, he liked to get away from it all when circumstances permitted; he liked Castleconnell best of all and enjoyed many pleasant fishing holidays there. During one of his visits to Limerick city he was brought on a tour of the historic areas by the mayor and a number of councillors. He evinced a particular interest in the Treaty Stone, and on the same evening the Corporation, in the course of an address of welcome, briefly explained the Treaty of Limerick as follows: "About a century and a half ago England made a solemn compact with Ireland. Ireland promised fealty, and England promised to guarantee to the Irish people civil and religious equality. When the crisis was over England handed Ireland over to a faction that has ever since bred strife and disunion".

Lord Randolph Churchill once described Castleconnell as a "pleasant oasis where time appears to stand still". Many other distinguished visitors, too numerous to mention here, spoke and wrote of the charm and tranquility of the place.

THE REGATTA

Long before the tide way in Limerick city was chosen as a venue for the annual regatta, Castleconnell, from the World's End upstream, was the scene of the great aquatic carnival. In those days, the sport was confined strictly to those who were euphemistically described as the 'better class', and no working man, no matter how athletic or



Business card of John Enright.

enthusiastic, could ever hope to bridge this divide. As far as the executives of the various boat clubs were concerned the man who had to 'earn his bread by the sweat of his brow' was an undesirable character and unfit for membership of the various boat clubs. The commoners, however, formed an integral part of the regatta, a part without which the whole exercise would have been a flop. Boat races without the crowds would be like so many flies walking across the ceiling of an empty room.

These were gala occasions and even the fishing and the spa were forgotten. Crowds lined the banks on both sides of the river, and the angling cots had a quiet afternoon on the placid waters, away from the turbulence downstream of the World's End.

Despite the class differences, the music of the military bands, which was a most necessary part of the pageantry, was a pleasure shared by all. Everyone enjoyed the general atmosphere of pleasure and enjoyment, but when the day was done the old order of class distinction was pursued with the usual fervour.

A report of the regatta of July, 1875, proudly sets out the names of the patrons: "Lord Massey; Hon. G.N. Fitzgibbon; Sir Croker Barrington; Sir Greville Smyth; Colonel Pearson, 3rd. Buffs.; Colonel Catty, 46th Regi-



A group of Castleconnell gillies (This and other pictures have been kindly provided by B. Enright, Castleconnell)

ment; Eyre Lloyd, Esq. D.L.; Richard Bourke, Esq. D.L.; Capt. Vansittart and Capt. Ingham". No Celts here, though the committee tapers off a little towards the end: "Richard J. Gabbett, J.P.; Wyndham Gabbett, J.P.; C.B. Barrington, J.P.; A. Bannatyne, W.G. Gubbins, J.P.; Cecil H. Fitzmaurice; E.F. Warburton, R.M.; N.J. Blackhall, Captains Osborne, Allen and O'Grady. Hon. Secretary, Dr. Ryan".

The same news item goes on to report: "The gentry of the district too, honoured the sports with their presence and goodly numbers." Is there an implication here that the ordinary people dishonoured the sports, or, at least, that they did not matter?

Since those far off days of frivolity and excitement the tranquil stretch of water above the World's End has reverted to its original owners - the coots and the moorhens, and the gentry have found that same equality with their lowly neighbours that is inevitably shared by king and beggar.

THE ENRIGHTS

Visiting anglers during the latter half of the last century, and right up to the 1930s, depended much on local methods of fishing, and, above all, on locally produced tackle. Flies and baits supplied by Nestor Brothers of Limerick were in special demand. The most prized and important item of the angler's impedimenta, however, was the greenheart rod manufactured by the firm of John Enright and son of Castleconnell. The quality and worth of these fine weapons were no mere abstract values that were imbibed through the usual advertising catch phrases: John Enright himself competed in various casting competitions outside the country, and enjoyed the distinction of winning the world championship at St. Louis and the Earls Court Exhibition. He was an all-round sportsman and a favourite with dignitaries from many countries. He was one of the pioneers of the Garryowen Rugby Club, and an outstanding athlete. He died in 1908 at the early age of 44. His father, John Enright, founder of the famous firm, died in 1871.

Any discourse on the Enrights would be incomplete without reference to Jim and John Hogg, senior members of the firm, whose work was unsurpassed. Pat (Styler) O'Halloran, a Limerick city man, who worked at Enright's for some time, was noted for his three splice salmon rods.

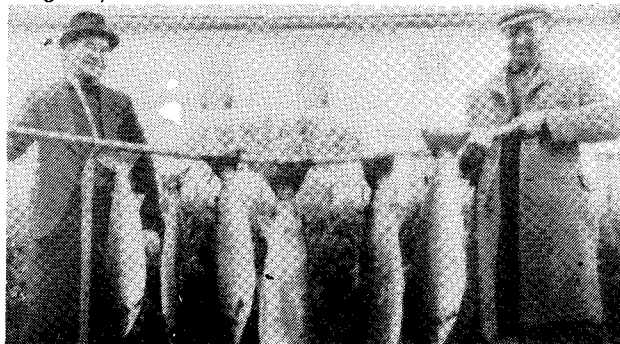
The great angling writer and ichthyologist, H. Chomondely Pennell, visited the Castleconnell rod factory in the 1880s and was so impressed that he wrote a most complimentary article in the **London Times**. At that time, Pennell was impressed by the exacting skill employed in the manufacture, especially in the method of splitting the greenheart rather than sawing it. This system ensured a true grain in the finished rods.

Among the many letters of appreciation was one from a Russian angler: "... Last year I received two rods of 12 and 14 foot which have proved to me that the Quality of your rods is beyond praise. I enclose you a photograph in which you see me with a salmon of 22 lbs., which I caught with your 12 foot rod. This year I have arranged with a sporting firm in St. Petersburg to look after their fishing section, and I am thinking of introducing your rods to Russia and should probably require 20 to 25 rods to start with".

The Enright family ran the Shannon Hotel (now the Shannon Bar). This was one of the most famous 'anglers rests' in the country (and still is) where many a memorable day on the river was recounted in an atmosphere that anglers are wont to describe as 'the best part of the day'. The premises were purchased in 1918 by Denis O'Donovan, a popular business man, and was the scene of the most dramatic incident in the village since the blowing up of the castle. The **Limerick Leader**

recounted the awful happening at the time: "In a dreadful occurrence at Castleconnell on Sunday, April 17th., an esteemed citizen, Mr. Denis O'Donovan, and two constables, lost their lives".

He was a very popular business man. While in Limerick where he had made his home for many years, no one was welcome more than Denny O'Donovan, as he was familiarly called, in whatever circles he moved. A few years before his death, he purchased the Castleconnell Hotel, for a long period under the management of the Enright family, and had also represented in Limerick the well known firm of J.J. Murphy and Company. The hotel was a well known resort for anglers, and in addition to extending the business Denis O'Donovan had made it a residence for himself and his family. He was there as usual for the week-end, and it was on that fateful Sunday night, while he was enjoying some well-earned leisure with his family, that death came so unexpectedly and so tragically.



Jim Myers (on right) and companion.

Towards eight o'clock that night, Mr. O'Donovan was asked to provide refreshments for three men who had travelled from the direction of Newport on bicycles. He complied with their request, and while the men were standing at the bar, some four men from the Crown forces, which it subsequently transpired were in the village and had posted men in several areas, entered the hotel. Two of the four men advanced to the bar, through the hall, and called out to the visitors standing at the counter, "Hands up". The three men, who seemed to have regarded the challengers as raiders, drew their revolvers and fired. Then shots were interchanged, one policeman being shot dead and another wounded. The door leading from the bar into the hall was closed, but not before another fatality occurred, when a Crown Force man, who was peering through the window looking from the yard into the hotel, was also shot dead. The third man of the bicycle party got into a place of safety, being only slightly wounded. The other party of four escaped without injury and in a few minutes were joined by others from outside.

A Lewis gun, it was stated, was brought into the hall of the hotel and the residents there alleged that it was put into operation for a short time. However, there was no one in the bar by this time and Denis O'Donovan, who had meanwhile sought as much protection as the situation could afford, was asked to name the men whom he had supplied with refreshments. His reply was that he could not tell. Soon after, Mr. O'Donovan was found in the yard shot through the body, and pierced with bullet wounds. Dr. Ryan of Castleconnell saw O'Donovan ten minutes before he died, and he was attended by a clergyman, but the poor man was fast sinking at the time and expired shortly afterwards. It was a most harrowing spectacle. No one could see the yard, the scene of the shooting, or the bar, blood smeared about the woodwork and passages damaged in the firing - no one could witness these things without the sickening sense of horror which the spectacle presented.