



he Limerick Typographical Society can trace its origins back to 1819. In 1879, it became a branch of the Typographical Association and, in

1964, on the formation of the National Graphical Association, its affiliation to that body was automatic.

Much could be written of the heroic part played by the staunch trade unionists of those early years, particularly in the stormy periods of industrial and political strife when seditious literature, ballads and broadsheets of the explosive kind were the order of the day!

I well remember during World War I, when apprentices to the printing craft were paid anything from 2/6 to 4/- a week (1st year), with an additional 1/- increase annually until the completion of the 7-year term. What is more, a working week was 52 hours, with no annual holidays, two bank holidays, and, should you have the misfortune to fall ill, well, you had it – or had not it – no wages, no sickness benefit ... and the employer couldn't care less.

Work – slavery would be more apt – usually commenced at 8 a.m. in job, or commercial houses for journeyman and apprentice alike. Lighting the fire, operating the treadle machine, 'washing up' the machines and umpteen formes with potash (a liquid that smarted the eyes, and almost burned the fingers to the bone) were all part of the daily routine. (Should the boss be living in the upper portion of the establishment, an apprentice could, on occasions, be called on to do the shopping for dinner).

Conditions in newspaper offices were no less different, except on post days. Long before the introduction of the rotary press, an apprentice was obliged to fold, wrap and stamp the bundles of papers which, when ready, he brought to the post office and railway station for dispatch. That done, he returned to the office where he was given his 'supply' to be delivered, on foot, to regular customers residing at places between the Racecourse and Corbally Mill, or Caherdavin and the Fairgreen, as the case may be.

Work for him finished around 9 o'clock and, when pay-day arrived, he was not rewarded to the extent of even one penny by way of overtime ... it was all in the week's work!

It will have been noticed that I have refrained from mentioning the names of those stalwarts of the past, and rightly so. Had I attempted, in my effervescence and appreciation, to do them simple justice and omitted the name of even one of the old brigade, all my best efforts would have gone for nought. Suffice it to say, their names will be enshrined in the annals of 'Limerick

Some Limerick Print Workers

by W.W. Gleeson



The tombstone of Maurice Lenihan.

and Printing' long after this old comp will have passed on. However, I must exempt the officers of the Society from this general rule.

Moving outside the confines of the Shannonside city, I think it only proper that mention should be made of the section secretaries: James Real, Ennis, Michael Moylan, Nenagh, and J.W. McCormack, Birr, who between them gave over 100 years of loyal and devoted service to the Society, for the betterment of their colleagues.

This link reminds me that the combined skills of print workers from the region made a unique contribution to a remarkable achievement in modern printing history.

In 1967, the Irish University Press set up shop at Shannon and, with the aid of the most modern techniques in lithographic and film-setting, carried out the largest printing contract in the world – the re-printing of the British Parliamentary Papers (or 'Blue Books').

Craftsmen from Limerick and other parts completed this gigantic task, but, sadly, the company was forced to close in 1973. Happily, today, another company, Elsevier, continues the Shannon tradition of fine quality typesetting and printing.

In conclusion, and with a justifiable pride, I would like to recall the names of those officials of the parent body (Limerick) who, whether as president or secretary, down the past four score and ten years, have given sterling and loyal service, not to the 'cause of printing' alone, but also to the trade union movement. They were: Matthew Harvey, P.M. Cusack, B.C.; R.P. O'Connor, B.C.; John Gleeson, John Christie, C.G. Carey, Paddy Cusack, B.C.; Paddy Doyle, B.C.; James Casey, B.C. Mayor; Michael Hartney, Ald. Mayor; John Ryan, John Healy, W.J. Conlan, Tom Dargan, Felix Ryan, J. McSharry, G. O'Halloran, J. O'Halloran, J.A. O'Donovan, W. Naughton, W.W. Gleeson, P. O'Byrne, J. O'Connor, P.J. Butler – longest serving secretary (1948-68) and also the youngest ever to fill the office – Christy Power, Paddy Doyle, Michael O'Halloran, Ronnie Kirwan and Joe Kelly.

Another outstanding citizen, with printer's ink in his blood, was Maurice Lenihan, journalist, master printer, historian, town councillor, justice of the peace and mayor of Limerick, whose *History of Limerick* is the greatest treasure of our ancient city's storied past.

The last decade has seen drastic changes, and it is not easy to predict the affect of the technological onslaught on the craft. New methods have replaced old skills and already the work of the compositor has been greatly eroded. The lessons of history clearly show that the advance of technology cannot be stopped or diverted, and there is no reason why the Limerick print workers cannot meet and master this latest challenge. But no matter what the future holds, let us hope that they will always maintain the best traditions of their craft.