

All kinds of everything at the versatile Stella

GRAINNE KEAYS, ARCHIVIST

MANY of our readers will have been saddened to hear that the Oyster Ballroom in Dromkeen was destroyed by fire last weekend and will no doubt have been moved to reminisce on the halcyon days of showband era of the 1950s and 1960s. While thousands of photographs were taken at each of the various ballrooms around the city and

county, our archives contain very few photographs from these venues, probably because freelance photographers – for example the famous Frank Photography (Frank's Snaps) – satisfied the demand for pictures. Of course, these treasured images, stamped on the back, are to be found still in thousands of local homes.

Our own archive does, however, have an interesting

collection of photographs from the Stella Ballroom which we are delighted to bring to you today.

In Seán Curtin's A Stroll Down Memory Lane (Vol 3), we are told the ballroom, now used primarily as a bingo hall, was owned by the McDonogh family before the Bird family took it over in the '60s. It attracted top acts including the BBC Band, the Clipper Carlton, Bridie

Gallagher, the Dutch Swing College Band, and the Johnny Quigley Big Band. Seán goes on to say: "On the opening night under the Bird family name the Jim Farley Big Band performed with Ger Cusack in support. Other big names included the Royal Showband, the Capitol Showband, the Dixies and the Freshmen. Ger recalls also that he had the pleasure of playing with the likes of world famous

names at the venue such as Acker Bilk, Emile Ford, P.J. Proby, Terry Lightfoot, Long John Baldry with one Reg Dwight in support (he later changed his name to Elton John)."

The ballroom was not just used for dances but also as a venue for exhibitions and meetings as our photographs will attest. Our oldest photograph in this collection features the Fine Gael Annual

Dance which was held at the Stella on October 14, 1953. Bud Clancy & His Dance Orchestra entertained the apparently extremely fit dancers from 10pm to 3am. Admission cost five shillings (supper extra).

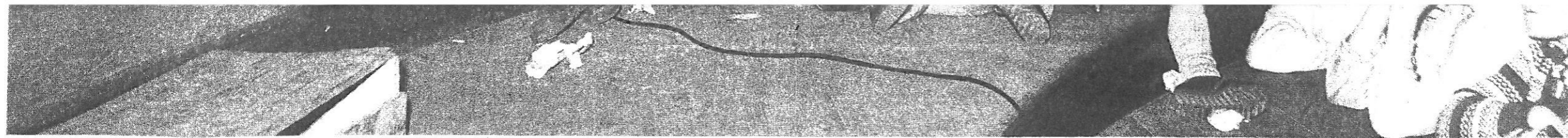
We also feature a previously unpublished photograph of the distinguished Mayor of Limerick, Frances Connell, at the opening of a Motorcycle Show held at the Stella on April

5, 1963. The first of its kind in Ireland, the show was organised by Harrington's Motorcycles and was modelled on the motor show at Earls Court in London. Admission cost one shilling.

We also feature photographs from a children's party held in 1961 but whatever catches your eye, we hope that this look back at the Stella in its heyday will bring back happy memories for many.

That's entertainment: Local kids having a ball during a children's party at the Stella in 1961





These intriguing pictures were taken by Limerick Leader staff man Donal MacMonagle 54 years ago, but having searched our back copies from that year we conclude that they must never have been published. All these years on, we proudly present them



A penny for their thoughts: the Leader's masterful photographer Donal MacMonagle captured these three lads with eyes wide open



These youngsters were tucking into buns and cakes, served up by the busy ladies making their way down the line



All these years later we're not sure what the on-stage entertainment at the Stella was - readers who were there can contact us on 061 2214503 or email news@limerickleader.ie



Tea and company: happy faces at the Stella Ballroom in 1961. Alas, as the pictures appear never to have been printed, we have no information about who is included

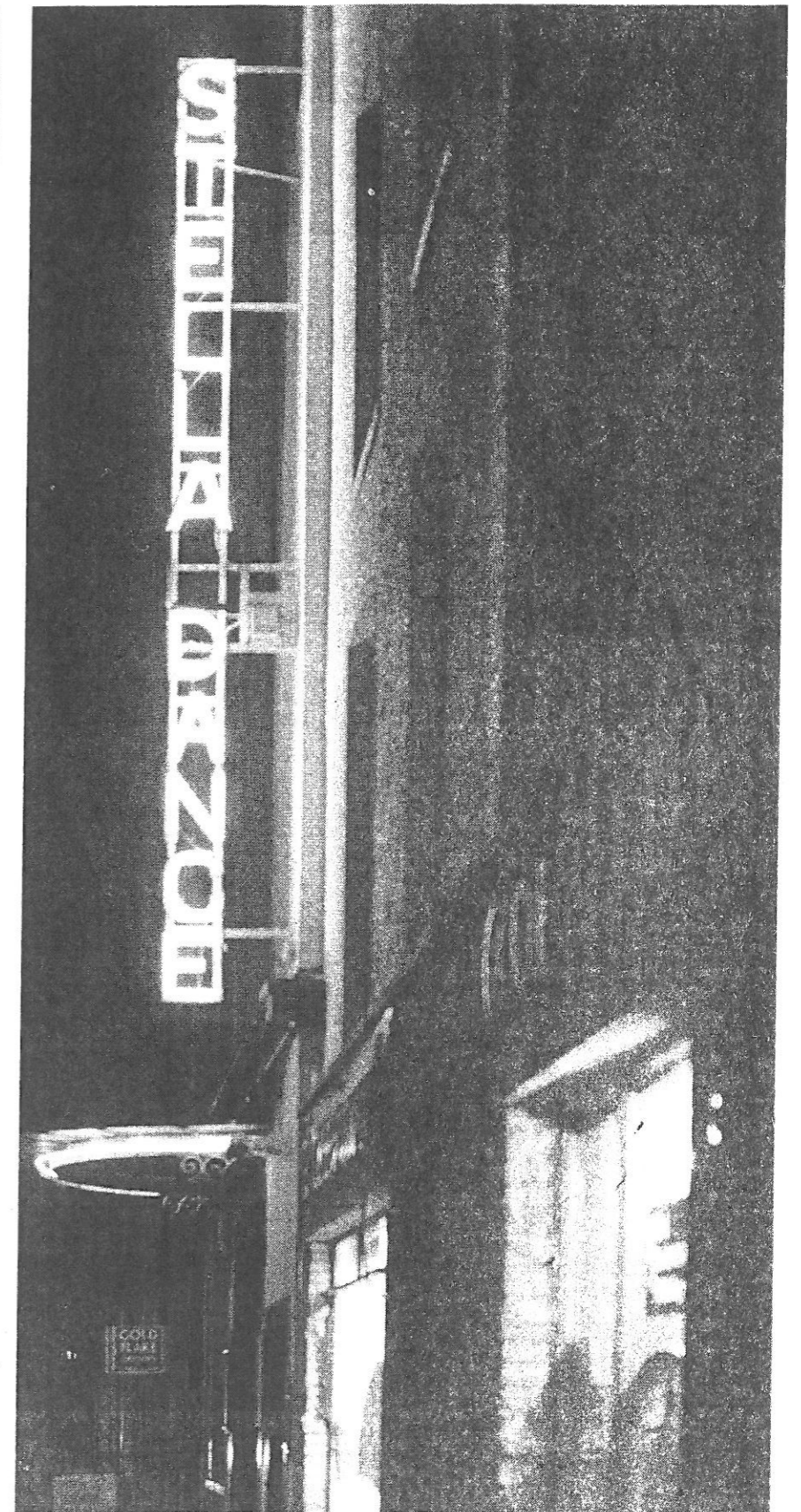
W 24/7/365 ON THE WEB
The big local stories are on: www.limerickleader.ie

THE STELLA BALLROOM

ARCHIVE SPECIAL 21



One of Limerick's finest ever mayors, Frances Condell, got into the spirit of things before officially opening the Motor Cycle Show at the Stella Ballroom on April 5, 1963. The show was organised by Harrington's Motor Cycles of Foxes Bow, a legendary name in the Limerick motorbike scene



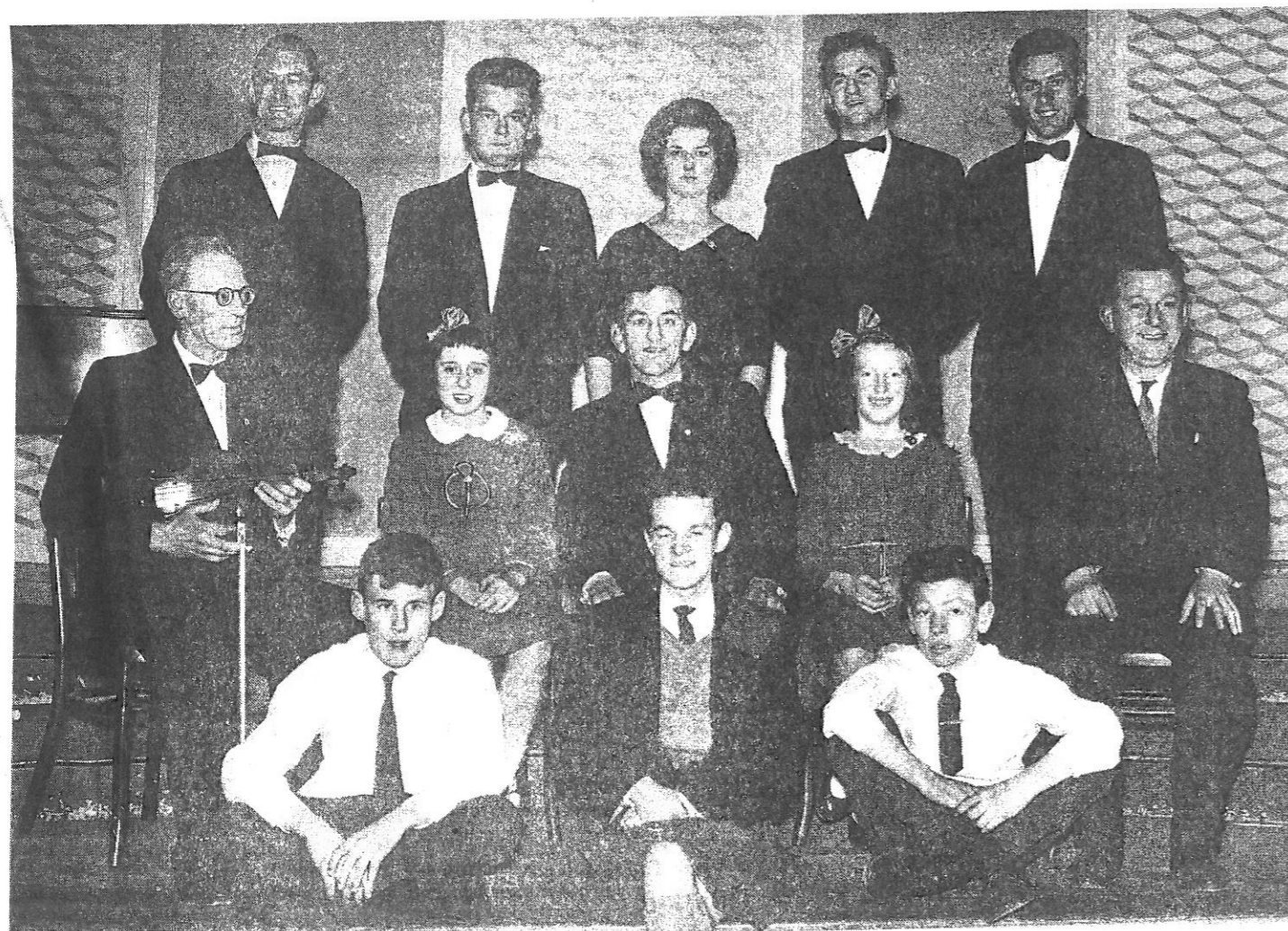
This atmospheric picture shows the neon lights outside Stella Ballroom in Shannon Street on April 10, 1957. Who could resist the prospect of dancing, after such an eyecatching invitation?

Sixties style on Shannon Street: Fashion, politics and the best of music, the Stella had it all going on!

Sixties style on Shannon Street: Fashion, politics and the best of music, the Stella had it all going on!



There was serious style on the catwalk erected at the Stella Ballroom for the Bolger's Stores fashion show in March 1961. Perhaps readers will recognise family members – or even themselves – among the packed house as the models showed off the style



This picture, of Michael Ryan and Company, was taken at the Stella in February 1962, with everyone pictured looking spruced up to the nines



This is the earliest picture in our archive taken at the Stella and it shows a group of local Fine Gael members posing for our photographer ahead of a dance on Wednesday, October 14, 1953. A good time was had by all!