Irish Idiom in Limerick City's Vernacular English

FRANK PRENDERGAST, M.A.

Mayorstone Park, Limerick

The author presents a list of Irish words which have survived in the spoken English of Limerick city. These have been compiled from research over a forty year period in the older areas of his native city. They are presented in tabular form with the original Irish word, where it can be established, listed first, followed by an indication of its pronunciation, an explanation of its meaning and examples of its usage.

The number of people in Limerick city who spoke, or could speak, both Irish and English according to the 1851 census was 4,204. This figure had reduced by slightly less than three-quarters, to 1,135, over the forty years to 1891.[1] It should not be too great a cause of surprise, therefore, that Gaelic words and expressions figured so strongly in the ordinary English vernacular down to the 1960s and indeed to the present time. Even today, although less noticeably so now, among the younger generation, the specialist in this field can easily discern the occasional use of Irish idiom especially in the context of stress or emotional situations. This is particularly evident in the area of verbal abuse or sarcasm where the ultimate emphasis is called for to add colour to the vernacular invective but can apply also with corresponding softness of tone in terms of affection or sympathy.

The use of the term 'vernacular' is deliberate: such words or expressions were usually frowned on and not generally used by the more educated or 'cultured' segments of the city's population and were regarded by them as being vulgar. There was in the experience of this writer a very definite form of snobbery involved. A possible genesis of this attitude can be identified in the observation of the historians Fitzgerald and McGregor in their statement that "the Irish language is rarely spoken by the inhabitants [of the city], except when they have to transact business with the neighbouring peasantry. And it is necessary for the occupiers of these shops which the latter frequent to be able to speak the native tongue."[2] Given that these shops were hardly likely to be located in the new Georgian precincts of the city it is reasonable to assume that the areas where 'the peasants' did their business were in the older and less prosperous districts such as Thomondgate, St. Mary's parish, the Irishtown, Watergate and Garryowen. Another significant factor in the growing usage of English was the introduction of the National School system in 1831 by the National Board of Commissioners. Despite initial controversy between the Catholic church and the British government on policy issues, "almost a million pupils had been enrolled by 1860."[3]

The minutes of the meeting of Limerick Corporation of 23 February 1860 however record the reading of an application of John Roberts to be an Irish interpreter at the Courthouse.[4] This is ample testimony to the presence of Irish speakers in the more deprived areas and social categories who, as always, figure largely in court proceedings. Thus the poorer elements of the population from the city's ghettos or slum areas were the rich repositories of words and expressions which were part of their

[1] Breandán Ó Madagáin, *An Ghaeilge I Luimneach 1700-1900*, 1974 pp 20-1.

[2] P. Fitzgerald & J.J. McGregor, *The History of the County and City of Limerick 1826-7*, vol., ii p. 54.

[3] Loreto O'Connor, *Passing on the Torch, A History of Mary Immaculate College 1898-1998*, 1998 p. 4.

[4] Ó Madagáin, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

people's speech in Irish for countless generations and contributed so much, in turn, to the beauty and precision of their own language patterns.

This is true of course also of many other places throughout Ireland and has been commented on by specialists in this field of study. Peter Westland, for instance, in his standard textbook on public speaking emphasises this in his chapter on the choice of words.[5] Explaining that the orator Cicero recalled with approval Caesar's saying that the right choice of words is the very source of eloquence he points out that:

> the only important thing about the established custom of expressing ideas is that through use over a long period of time the exact use of these sounds to convey various shades of meaning has become well developed. In some languages especially those belonging to races gifted with considerable imagination vocabularies of astonishing range have resulted. In Gaelic, for instance, even the almost illiterate have a wider choice of words than the highly educated people of other tongues. They have several words to express 'child' and definite words to represent a child sleeping, sitting or talking. The choice of the wrong word is immediately obvious to those who know what is meant when there is such an extensive vocabulary to choose from. English people are less fortunate in the range of their ordinary working vocabulary and have to add adjectives to nouns to reach clarity of expression.

Independent support for this viewpoint came also from Conn Murphy, the late distinguished Rights Commissioner, a native Irish speaker and noted Gaelic scholar, who asserted with authority that the extent and content of an Irish farm labourer's vocabulary exceeded vastly that of his English counterpart. Kenneth Tynan, the noted English theatre critic in one of his reviews for the *Observer* newspaper noted that "where English playwrights can be often miserly in their use of descriptive words, the Irish on the other hand use colourful expressions with the prodigality of a drunken sailor in port."

The high survival rate of words and terms of abuse or insult in the local vocabulary is due possibly to the fact that, despite the steady encroachment of English usage, the new language had not taken sufficient hold on the public to serve in an argument or crisis and the speakers lapsed back to the armoury of their cradle language for relief and satisfaction. This is easily noticed in the section dealing with invective in the appended list of Irish words collected by the author in the area of St. John's and St. Patrick's parishes during his youth there in the 1940s and 1950s. The parents of that generation were the children of those recorded in the 1891 census. Radio was a rare, if growing feature of community and family life while television was restricted to those very few who could receive B.B.C. transmissions before R.T.E. came on air in 1960. The adverse impact of these forms of media on the use of Irish idiom in everyday speech has perhaps been exaggerated. The fact that they have added immeasurably to the expansion of new vocabulary need not necessarily mean, surely, a corresponding decline in the existing stock of words in the family's or community's own natural language deposit whether Irish or English.

After all, as Professor David Crystal of Bangor University, the distinguished author of *The Cambridge Encyclopaedia of the English Language*, explained to the delegates at this year's (2000) Pan Celtic Film Festival at Aberystwyth in Wales

> One of the principal reasons that English has become a major world language is precisely because it borrowed without inhibition words and terms from a lot of other nationalities and civilisations. The Celtic speaking nations should do likewise.

[5] Peter Westland, Public Speaking, 1946, p. 46.

The Limerick City Word List

In this segmented vocabulary of over 250 Irish words and expressions it will be noted how large a section relates to invective, almost 60, whereas those of endearment or sympathy are considerably fewer. Westland's comments are particularly apt where words of contempt or disgust are involved e.g. slíbhín [sleeveen] a sly person or gaimbín [gombeen] literally a usurer but colloquially the most contemptible and despicable type of person in Irish society. This applied particularly in the nineteenth century to the agent who enforced the worst excesses of a rack-renting landlord on a defenceless tenantry, especially in famine times, usually to his own advantage.

In all such cases listed there is no room whatever for doubt or ambiguity in meaning, as described by Westland. While there may be interesting parallels in other countries or languages, the difference here is their importance and retention in what has been described as one of the greatest language shifts in European history "the great decline of the Irish language over the last century and a half; a cataclysm unique in its intensity the like of which has not befallen any other European nation in a thousand years."[6] It may be noted that some of the words listed, e.g. *stróc* meaning appetite and *oigher* meaning a chaffing of the skin behind the knees from wind chill, should not be confused with the similar sounding English words, stroke and ire. It is interesting also that where some words listed here were used to describe body parts or functions this was always done in the most natural and uninhibited fashion without any trace whatever of diffidence or embarrassment or suggestion of bawdiness or vulgarity.

General Terms

Aeríocht	Aireekt	An open-air entertainment
Ailp	Alp	Dollop, a large piece / to swallow greedily – "he dolloped it back"
Amplais	Amplish	A difficulty, spot of bother
Ard-Fheis	Aurdesh	A national convention of a political party
Earc luachra	Athlookert	A lizard, used to describe a child with a big appetite – "he must have an athlookert in his stomach"
Babhta	Bout	Period – "a bout of work"
Bán	Bawn	Grassland
Báinín	Bawneen	A knitted white woollen jumper
Báirín breac	Barm-brack	A native fruit-loaf, baked usually for November Eve – Oíche Shamhna

[6] Seán de Fréine, *The Great Silence,* 1965, p. 7.

Bairneach	Bawrnick	A limpet, used also as a nickname by some Limerick people for natives of Kilkee – "the Bawrnicks"
Bean a'tí	Banatee	The woman of the house
Bean sí	Banshee	A fairy woman, a female spirit
Blas	Blas	Accent, said of the Irish speaker – "she has the blas"
Bodhrán	Bowraun	Deafener, a drum
Bóiseán	Boshawn	A cow-pat
Bóithrín	Boreen	A lane-way, a little road
Bolgadán	Bolgadawn	A fat person, or cow, a "sheep's fart", a mushroom-like fungus
Bonnleac	Bounlick	A callus, or bruise on the sole of the foot, said also when the foot "goes from under"
Bos	Boss	The palm of the hand, the flat part of a hurley
Bothán	Bohawn	A small old house, generally neglected
Brabach	Brabock	Extra/advantage – "there's no brabock in that for me"
Bran	Bran	Chaff
Breac	Brack	Spot, speckle, trout, said sometimes of an old item of clothes – "there isn't a brack on that"
Bríc	Brick	A brick-shaped loaf, especially in its unbaked shape
Bróg	Brogue	A boot, or shoe
go brónach	Bronak (go)	Sad – "s/he is very gobronak in her/himself
Buaileadh bos	Boola Boss	The clapping of hands in applause
Búdán	Boodawn	An animal's horn, the pith of a horn, used also in bawdy conversation to describe a penile erection
Caca	Kockaw	Excrement, dirt used to warn children against handling filth/dirt - "stop, that's kockaw"

Cáibín	Kaubeen	An old hat
Cadráil	Kodrawl	Prattling talk
Cailín	Kolleen	A young girl
Cál Ceannfhionn	Kolcannon	Mashed potatoes with chopped cabbage or onions and butter, a very popular meal, especially with young children
Call	Kawl	Need – "you have no kawl to do that"
Carn	Karn	A heap, or pile
Carraigín	Karrageen moss	A popular edible sea-grass
Céad míle fáilte	Kade meela faulte	A hundred thousand welcomes
Céilí	Kaylee	Irish dancing, a "social"
Ciaróg	Kiarogue	A beetle
Ceobhrán	Keovrawn	A heavy dew, or misty rain
Ciotóg	Kitogue	A left-handed person
Cliotar *origin uncertain*	Clitter	Used to describe a slap with the open hand viz "I gave him a clitter across the face"
Crios	Kris	A belt
Crúibín	Kroobeen	A pig's foot, a very popular delicacy, especially after a session i a pub
Crúiscín	Krooskeen	A small jug
Crústáil	Kroosting	Throwing stones, clods as missiles at somebody
Currach	Korak	A rowing boat
Dáigh	Daw	A stupid person – "he's no daw"
Dearg	Darrig	Stab or a short, sharp punch – "he gave him the darrig"

Dhera	Yerra	An interjection expressing disbelief or indifference
Dia linn	Deealing	"God with us", said when somebody sneezes
Didí	Diddy	A woman's pap, or breast – a colloquial term
Dó buí	Dobee	Yellow clay
Dorn	Dorn	A fist, or fistful – "I gave him a dorn" i.e. a dig, or a punch
Dreas	Drass	Turn, as in "take turns" – "let you take a drass now"
Dríodar	Dreedur	Dregs, as of old drink in a bottle
Drisín	Drisheen	A type of pudding or sausage, but generally associated with Cork city
Dearóil	Droll	Miserable, wretched – "s/he' is as droll as a bellows
Dúidín	Doodeen	A clay pipe, smoked by men and old women
Duilisc	Dillisk	A very popular edible sea-plant
Dúr	Dour	Stupid, sullen or grim – "a dour expression on his face"
Féasóg	Faysogue	A beard, stubble
Fáinne	Faunye	A ring, or symbol worn by some Gaeilgeoirí to encourage the use of Irish
Feic	Feck	To jeer at – "he made a right feck of himself"
Féirín	Fayreen	A gift, but used colloquially sometimes in a warning sense to a child – "put on your shoes, or you'll get a fayreen (cold) from walking barefoot on the road or grass
Feis	Fesh	A festival or competition of Irish music and/or dancing
Feirc	Ferk	The tilt of a cap or hat
Flúirseach	Floorshuk	Plentiful
Fraochán	Fraughan	Hurts, or bilberries, collected especially in the Cratloe area

Gabháil	Gwawl	An armful: of hay, turf, sticks etc.- "s/he brought in a Gwawl of turf for the fire."
Gaeltacht	Gayltact	Areas where Irish is spoken as the first language
Gág	Gawg	A crack or split in the skin, generally on fingers
Gealasacha	Galluses	Braces for pants or trousers
Geansaí	Gansey	A jersey
Go leor	Galore	Enough, plenty – "they had food/drink galore there"
Garlach	Gawrlick	An urchin, a brat
Glám	Glawm	To grab somebody/something – "he made a glawm for her/it"
Glib	Glibs	A fringe of hair – "you'd want to get the glibs cut"
Gliogar	Glugger	An addled or sterile egg
Gob	Gob	Beak or mouth – "shut your gob"
Gogaí	Guggy	A childish word for a soft egg
Gríosach	Greesach	Hot ashes, a regular custom in the Killalee area was for each person around the bonfire on May-eve, or Oíche Bhealtaine to take a shovel-full of the gríosach to their own fires at home for good luck.
Gioc *Origin uncertain*	Gyuck	Used generally to describe any twisted appendage or projection
Cogar-mogar	Hugger-mugger	Whispering secretly by two or more people
Deorum	Jorum	A drink, a measure – "he had a few jorums in him"
Ciléar	Keeler	A shallow tub – "a keeler of herrings"
Caoineadh	Keen	A lament, a cry
Caidhp an Bháis	Kibosh	The judge's black cap – "to put the kibosh on it"

Cipíní	Kippens	Twigs or small sticks used as kindling
Cis	Kish	A basket of turf or brógs – "s/he is as thick as a kish of brógs"
Longar	Langers	Drunken, swaying motion – "they all got langersed drunk
Leadradh	Lather	A beating or thrashing – "the teacher gave him a right lathering"
Léasadh	Lacing	A beating or hitting – "he got a lacing from his father"
Leipreachán	Leprechaun	A type of fairy
Lios	Lios	A fairy fort/dwelling place
Lab	Lob	A lump of money, or butter
Loch	Lock	A lock of water, a lake
Liúdar	Looder	A blow, a stroke – "he gave him a looder on the chin"
Lúidín	Loodeen	The little finger – "she can wind her father around her loodeen"
Mallafústar	Mallafoosther	To give a beating to somebody -"I'll mallafoosther you"
Maiseach	Masher	Beautiful – "he is a masher", i.e. an attractive, well-dressed man
Meas	Mass	Respect, regard – "s/he has no mass on anything"
Mhuise	Wisha	An interjection meaning "indeed" or "well!, well!"
Míle murdal	Meela murhter	Trouble, uproar, confusion
Muta	Motty	The target stone in the game of pitch and toss
Nádúr	Nawther	(i) an affection for somebody, (ii) to long for something – "I have a nawther for an ice-cream"
Oighear	Oyer	The chaffing on the face or behind the knees from the wind
Peaindí	Pandy	A child's term for mashed potatoes
Peataire	Pataire	A chubby child
Pincín	Pindeen	A small fresh-water fish, "a thorny-back"

Piseoga	Pishogues	Superstitions, old customs/beliefs
Piseogaireacht	Pishoguery	Belief/practise of superstitious customs
Poitín	Poteen	Illicitly distilled whiskey
Peallachán	Pollakaun	A hoard of money, savings – "she has the ould pollakaun" – said of somebody deemed to be a good marriage prospect, money-wise
Púca	Pooka	A ghost
Poc	Puck	A blow or a stroke; a he goat
Puisín	Pusheen	A little kitten
Raic	Racket	A riot, an uproar
Ráth	Rath	A ring-fort, a fairy dwelling-place
Rác	Rawk	(i) to rob an orchard or (ii) to scramble for money thrown in the air by the bridegroom, for neighbouring children
Ríl	Reel	A lively whirling native Irish dance
Rí-Rá	Ree-Raw	Hubbub, uproar
Ruaille-buaille	Rooley-booley	Commotion, rough and tumble
Sceilp	Shkelp	A piece of/slice – "s/he took a shkelp out of it; he got a shkelp of land on which to build a house."
Seilimide	Shally-muddy	A snail
Seanfhocal	Shanokal	A proverb
Sean-nós	Shanose	Old-style singing in Irish
Scál	Skawld	Boiling-hot tea – "a mug of skawld"
Seanchaí	Shankee	A traditional storyteller
Seantigh	Shanty	An old hut, a small flimsy building
Searbhas	Sharoos	Sarcasm, bad-minded resentment

Sí-gaoithe	Shee-geeha	A fairy wind, the fallen leaves being blown in clusters by the wind
Síbín	Sheebeen	An illicit pub
Síle	Sheela	An effeminate man/boy
Sail Éile	Shillaly	A cudgel, a wattle
Seoinín	Shoneen	A west-Briton, an upstart, a hanger-on
Sleag	Slag	To slag somebody, to tease/wound somebody
Sleán	Slane	A special spade for cutting turf
Sliotar	Sliotar	A hurling ball
Smeádar	Smather	A mess – "her face was smathered in jam"
Smúiteán	Smehane	A small quantity of spirits, "a half-one"
Smidirín	Smithereen	A small fragment
Snas	Snas	Gloss or polish – "put a snas on that"
Sniog	Snig	To hit somebody on the knuckles with a deck of cards
Solc / Sulc	Sulk	This was shouted by someone throwing a fistful of coins or sweets into the air to invite a scramble or free for all for them
Sop	Sop	A wisp of hay
Súgán	Soogaun	A rope made of hay
Spéic	Spake	Speech – "let him have his spake"
Spailpín	Spalpeen	A farm labourer
Spreang	Sprong	A four-pronged fork
Steamar	Stem	Jot, tittle – "she hasn't a stem of sense"
Stróc	Stroke	Appetite – "s/he has a great stroke"
Tánaiste	Tanaiste	Deputy Head of Government

Taoscán	Tayskaun	A small quantity of drink, e.g. whiskey
Táth	Thaws	Marbles
Tá sé *Origin uncertain*	Thaw shay	Used always to describe a spendthrift – "s/he would spend money like thaw shay"
Tiuc	Tchock-tchock	Said when calling hens
Tuilleadh	Tilly	A little extra/more – said by a milk-man selling milk from a tankard in an ass and cart : "here's a tilly for the cat"
Tóir	Thore	Hunt, pursuit – "don't draw a thore on us"
Tóisín	Tosheen	A little measure in the form of a small cone-shaped bag made of paper, e.g. a tosheen of sweets
Tír na nÓg	Teerna Nogue	Legendary land of eternal youth

Words and Terms of Invective

Many of the words described here were prefaced by the phrase: "You are a right ...." in direct engagement with the object of the insult, or "s/he" in terms of third parties. They were more often used as descriptive rather than vindictive terms.

Ainniseoir	Ainnishore	Down and out, unkempt person
Amadán	Omadawn	A foolish person (male)
Bacach	Bacock	Lame or crippled person, often described as "a bockedy-arse"
Bacach ar foraoir	Bacock a ferreel	Spelling and meaning uncertain, used by a mother to scold a child – "you bacock a ferreel"
Bairneach	Barnick	A limpet. A "Barnick" was a light-hearted term used by Limerick people to describe natives of Kilkee, possibly due to their collection and sales of periwinkles and dillisk
Baitín	Bottheen	A blackguard, an objectionable man with an obsessive interest in young boys
Balbhán	Balvaun	From "balbh", dumb, a silent person

Banbh	Bonnave	A young pig, used to describe a child: "s/he is as bold as a banbh"
Bastún	Bosthoon	A stupid, lazy person, applied generally but not specifically to rural men
Buachaill	Boochal	A "boyo", somebody offensive or too clever for their own good
Buaileam Sciath	Boolum	A boaster or intimidating braggart: "don't be acting the boolum"
Cábóg	Kawbogue	A rustic, a labourer (or a toothless, prattling woman) always used only in respect of country people
Cluasacha	Kloosachs	Ears, said of somebody with prominent or protruding ears
Caid	Kod	A ball, "to make a kod or a balls of something" (De Bhaldraithe)
Craiceálaí	Krackawley	A giddy young person
Cráite	Krawte	Tormented, bothered, used by parents to an obstreperous child: "stop, you have me krawte"
Dalla ? *origin uncertain*	Dallacking	Messing or tricking about: "stop that dallacking"
Dailtín	Daltheen	A cad, usually associated with smaller members of the species
Aghaidh Fidil	Eye-fiddle	A mask, used to imply that the subject was ugly: "s/he is a right eye-fiddle"
Flaithiúlach	Flahoolagh	Generous, sometimes said sarcastically of a person to be very decent at the town pump, i.e. with somebody else's goods
Fuadar	Foother	Rush/hurry: "s/he is in a right foother"
Fústar	Foosther	Busy, agitated behaviour: "s/he is foosthering about the house"
Geaitse	Gaatch	Antics, affected manner/actions: "will you look at the gaatch of him"
Gotha	Gohack	Behaviour, same context as in geaitse, but generally mispronounced as "gohack"
Griog	Grig	To annoy or tease, used by a parent to a child tormenting or teasing a sibling: "stop grigging him/her"

Hea heáidi *Irish form uncertain*	Hah-haadee	Very commonly used, with emphasis on the middle syllable, by somebody catching somebody else out in the commission of something secretly illicit, sinful, or illegal, e.g. thieving, stealing
Leadránach	Ledrawnack	Boring, long-winded
Lúdramán	Loodramaun	A lazy person
Lorgadán	Lurgadawn	A lazy person, a fireside person, possibly from the heat marks on the shin (lorg)
Meigeil	Meggle	A goat's beard: "the fellow with the meggle"
Maoimheach	Meeving	Begrudging, miserable facial expression: "s/he had a thin meeving look on her/his face"
Núidí Náidi	Noody-nawdy	Dead-and-alive person, but always/frequently used to describe an interfering, generally female busybody, or "nosey-parker"
Óinseach	Ownshuck	A foolish woman
Peata	Pata	A pet, said to a demanding "cry-baby": "you are a right pata"
Peatacháin	Patacawn	Said of somebody who hangs on to their mother's apron-strings
Piollárdaí	Pilgarlick	A very common term of abuse in Limerick, possible mispronunciation of piollárdaí- a good for nothing, always used in that sense and in respect of men only: "he's walking around there like a pilgarlick"
Plámás	Plawmaws	Flattery: "stop your plawmaws"
Pluca	Plucks	Cheeks, face: "look at the plucks on him"
Préachán	Praykawn	A crow, a person who cannot sing
Pus	Puss	A mouth, a cross expression
Pustachán	Pustakawn	A pouter
Paidhseán	Pyesawn	A delicate, complaining, lamenting person
Ráiméis	Rawmaish	Nonsense, senseless talk: "stop talking rawmaish"

Scrábaí-lúbaí	Scrawbee-looby	An expression used almost exclusively to describe a badly scored goal, that barely straggled past the goalkeeper, almost by mischance : "a scawbee-looby kind of goal" c.f. Scráb (scrape) and lúb (bent, or twisted)
Slíbhín	Shleeveen	A sly, scheming person, a hateful epithet, amongst the most venomous in the entire stock of insults
Sleamhnánaí	Sloony-nawnee	A sly scheming person
Smig	Smig	Chin, used disparagingly about chin-whiskers
Súilí	Sooly-eyes	A hurtful term used mostly by schoolchildren to taunt those of them who suffered from sore eyes, or squinting eyesight-a common enough feature
Stropa	Strap	A bold girl, a prostitute: "she's a bold strap, that one"
Straoil	Sthreel	An untidy person, generally but not uniquely, spoken of an untidy girl or woman
Stuachán	Stookawn	A boorish, sulky, ignorant person
Tadhg an dá thaobh	Taigandawhayve	A two faced person
Trína chéile	Threenakayla	(i)mixed up, in disorder (ii)used commonly in Limerick of a family or group who have widespread involvement or connection with each other: "be very careful of that crowd-they're all threenakayla"
Uisce faoi thalamh	Ishkafayhalav	Intrigue, conspiracy (literally water under the ground) : "be careful, there's some ishkafayhalav there"

Words and Terms of Endearment

a stór	Asthore	My treasure, often used in gentle disagreement or in urging friendly caution: "John, asthore, I would be very careful about doing/saying that"
Créatúr	Kraythur	Creature, "The poor kraythur (person/animal)", said in pity/sympathy

Fáinne óir ort!	Faunye-ore ort	"Good on you", generally said to the winner in card-games
Go leor	Galore	Enough
Garsún	Gorsoon	A young boy (c.f. French Garcon), used forgivingly "sure he's only a gorsoon"
Gasúr	Gossoor	Same meaning as Garsún and used in the same context
Grámhar	Grawvar	Loving, amiable, soft-natured: "she is a very grawvar person"
Hábú *Origin unsure, but possibly Irish*	Haboo	A crooning sound used by a person while putting a baby to sleep. Used almost universally in Limerick for well over a century
Maith go leor	Magolore	Good enough, said of somebody who is pleasantly or mildly drunk: "s/he is magolore"
Mí-ádh	Mee-aw	Misfortune: "what mee-aw is on you"; also said of somebody with a problem, e.g. of drink: "God help him/her s/he is only a poor mee-aw"
Mo lann gonta	Mo lown gownta	Well done! Good on you!
Seachrán	Shaughraun	Astray, generally used forgivingly / understandingly of somebody who has gone, or is absent on a "thare", or drinking bout: "s/he is on the shaughraun"
Siogaireach	Shagger	A lean lanky person or horse: "the poor shagger"

Where I have made the comment *origin and/or spelling uncertain*, it generally means that I have failed to trace the word in any Irish or English dictionary despite extensive research. Their constructs/phonetics would appear to be definitely Irish in origin and are often unknown by scholars of the language unfamiliar with the vernacular of Limerick city.

One expression in particular "Doll-dydee" was very widespread in, and was apparently unique to, Limerick city. The original Irish spelling and meaning are unclear, but it was always used, as an interjection, to express open disbelief when somebody was praising him/herself unduly, or exaggerating a claim for having done something good or wonderful. It led very often to rows and fisticuffs. It was commonly used by the late Donogh O'Malley T.D., the former very popular Minister for Education. The late John Healy used the term as the title to his obituary tribute, on Donogh's untimely death, in his celebrated *Backbencher* political column in *The Irish Times*.

There may be many more such Irish words which have defied the author's endeavours over forty years or so to list them. These listed here show the colourful descriptive idiom that marks out, indelibly, English as it has been spoken in Limerick for well over the last century. P. W. Joyce, the

great Gaelic scholar from Glenosheen in County Limerick, published his pioneering work in this field *English as We Speak it in Ireland* in 1910. A noted expert on Irish place-names, folklore, music and language, his contribution is possibly the greatest primary source on the study of Irish idiom in the English, which we speak here. In that work he stated that "my own memory is a storehouse of idiom and vocabulary: for the good reason that from childhood to early manhood I spoke like those among whom I lived – the rich dialect of Limerick and Cork." It is to be hoped that this rich idiom and vocabulary will survive, enhanced, for another century at least, the first of the new Millennium.
Ní beag a bhfuil ráite.

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