

MISCELLANEA

AN ASKEATON MYSTERY SOLVED

A short article titled 'An Ancient Cross in Askeaton?' was published in the double-issue of our journal for 1973-4.¹ The author, Donal T. Flood, made the assumption that he had identified a monument surmounted by a cross, which is shown in an early seventeenth century map, near to the Franciscan friary. This map (Fig. 1), drawn by Thomas Stafford, an Elizabethan soldier and secretary to the Lord President of Munster 1600-3, was printed in *Pacata Hibernia*, a chronicle of the Elizabethan conquest of Munster, in 1633.² Westropp stated clearly, in his comprehensive series of articles on Askeaton published in 1903-4³, that this structure had disappeared.⁴ Flood decided, however, that Westropp was mistaken and had simply failed to notice its existence, just inside the gate of the cemetery beside the friary. He accounted for this uncharacteristic lapse by the distinguished antiquarian with the somewhat unlikely conjecture that it resulted from his fear of a bull 'who had horned up the graves in every direction'⁵ or its concealment by brambles and furze.⁶

Flood makes reference to 'local tradition' in regard to a pre-Norman ford on the river Deel which he uses to support a highly implausible explanation for the structure. He seems to have made no effort to use such oral evidence for contemporary history, which would have avoided the error into which he fell and the wider dissemination of it by the *NMAJ*. The 'monument', which he regarded as the survival of the one illustrated in *Pacata Hibernia*, is in fact a 'home-made' headstone erected in 1951 (fig. 2).. It was placed over a brick-lined grave which a local man, Michael Magner, dug for himself, shortly after his 82nd birthday, near the stile which leads into the graveyard, at the southern end of the friary grounds. Several persons in the 'ould town' of Askeaton attested to this writer their acquaintance with Michael, who lived at The Quay, a mere forty yards from his chosen resting place. They also recalled witnessing the casting process of the cement structure. An English journalist wrote a story about it and photographed a proud Michael beside his construction. This was reproduced in the *Limerick Leader* on 29 September 1951. Michael enjoyed visiting and displaying his projected last resting place until his unexpected death on 23 May 1954, from complications arising from a broken hip sustained in a fall.⁷ He had not inscribed his name on the headstone and it, or the date of his death, was never added subsequently, allowing Flood's imagination to run unchecked.

Michael Magner was described as 'gentle and unassuming...a very popular figure with young and old alike.' He never married and four of his siblings emigrated to America; a sister was still living in County Limerick in 1951.⁸ His original and distinctive memorial has given him a permanent place in the history of his native town and has become a favourite story for guides bringing visitors to the friary. There is, certainly, a superficial similarity between the *Pacata* illustration and the headstone, and it is tempting to speculate that Michael Magner might have seen the 17th century sketch and modelled his own memorial on an ancient prototype. One should never solve one conundrum in History without creating another one!

Michael O'Halloran

¹ *NMAJ* xvi (1973-4) pp 88-9.

² [Thomas Stafford], *Pacata Hibernia: Ireland appeased and reduced, or a historie of the late warres of Ireland, especially in the province of Munster under the command of Sir George Carew*. London 1633; 2 vols, Dublin 1690; 2 vols, (ed.), S. H. O'Grady, London 1896.

³ T. J. Westropp, 'Notes on Askeaton, County Limerick': Part 1 – The History, AD900 to 1579, *JRSAI* 33 (1903) pp 25-40; Part 2 – The History after 1579, *idem.*, pp 153-74; Part 3 – The 'Abbey', *idem.*, pp 239-54; Part 4 – The Church and the Castle, *idem.*, 34, 1904, pp 111-32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, part 4, p. 116.

⁵ *Ibid.*, part 3, p. 254.

⁶ *NMAJ* xvi (1973-4) p 88.

⁷ Information from Tony Sheehy, a neighbour of Michael Magner and a 'one-man' force for the promotion of the history of his own town, who first drew my attention to the *Limerick Leader* article.

⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 29 September 1951.

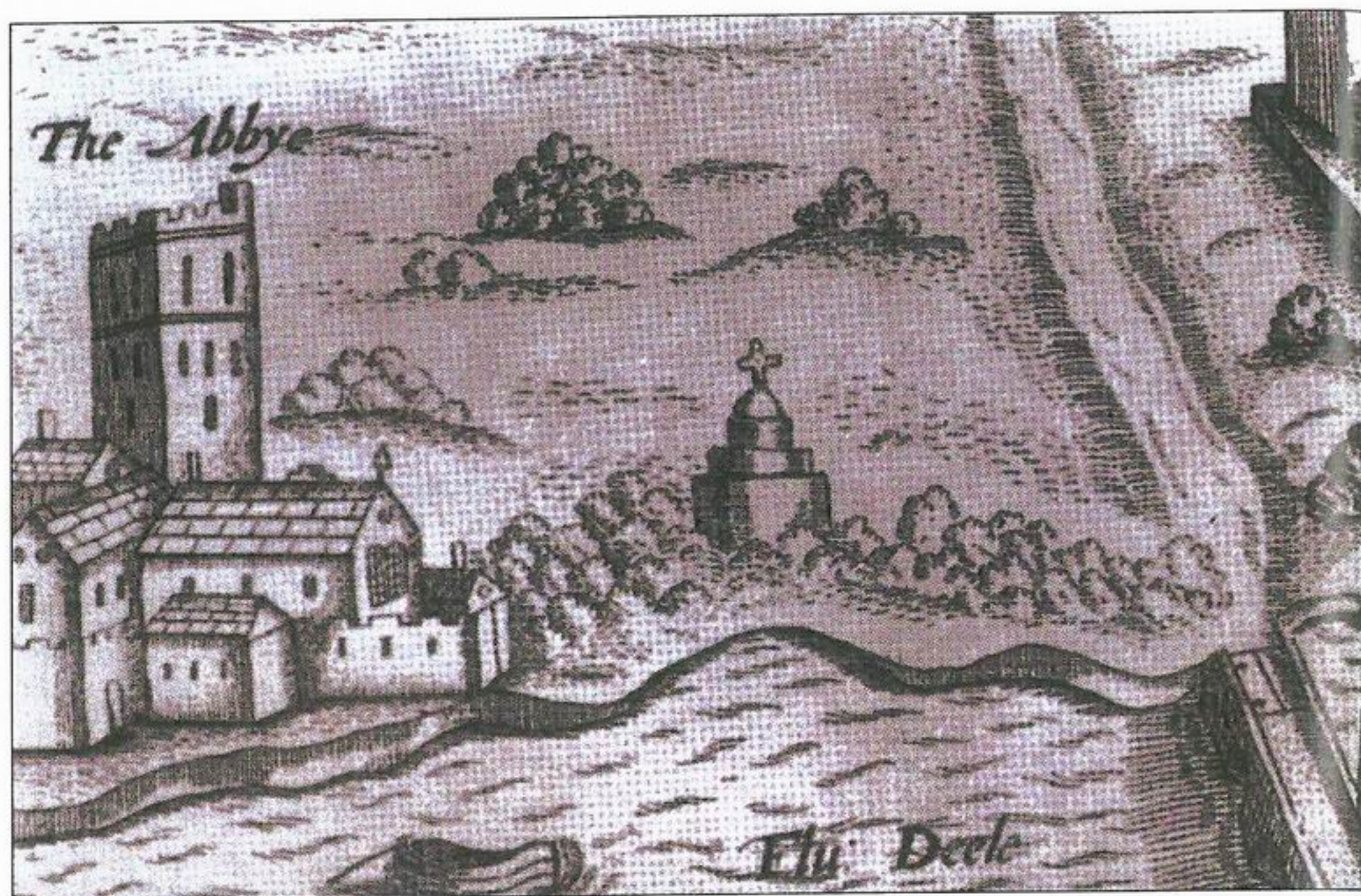


Fig. 1 Detail of map of Askeaton 1633 (*Pacata Hibernia*)



Fig. 2 Magner gravestone

GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS AND THE WELL AT SINGLAND

While the interest of Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-89) in Celtic Studies has often been commented on,¹ his long note of 1870 on Irish folklore, popular tales and dialect has seemingly been neglected. The first part of it is thus given here in the hope of prompting further discussion by Irish folklorists. After recording a tale of ghostly underground ploughmen and horses near Brentford, Middlesex, Hopkins wrote:

I was with the laybrothers that week. Br. Fitzgerald capped this story. At Singland, Co. Limerick where he comes from is a spring hot in winter, perishingly cold in summer. a sort of Hippocrene. called Torgha Shesheree (?), that is the Spring of the Pair. from a pair of plough-horses which were swallowed up there. the water springing up at the place. (But as the story was told me first and as it is in my notes, they were taken there to drink. the earth opened and swallowed them. and then the water sprang up at the spot: perhaps the bull is from some confusion in my account. — His account, given since, is that the plough-horses were taken there to drink, were swallowed up and the spring much greater since: its miraculous heat and cold, I suppose, dates from then. It is ab— [here I broke off months ago and cannot fill up: I must have been going to give the size or depth]. There are in it two broad stones, in one of which is the hoof-mark of one of the horses, and you may put your arm to the shoulder down it and feel no bottom.²

This passage (given exactly as printed, with Hopkins's square brackets and unclosed parenthesis) has several points of interest. Perhaps the chief one is in showing how local knowledge is essential in clarifying it. Singland does not appear in the Ordnance Survey's *Gazetteer of Ireland*³ or on the half-inch map. But the editor has kindly given its whereabouts (two miles east of Limerick) to the writer.⁴ It has historic associations. In the same general area is St Patrick's Well (grid reference R 6156) which marks the site of an early monastery, with a round tower and church demolished in 1766. Patrick allegedly used the well (a place of pilgrimage on 17 March) to baptize Cairthenn, king of Dal gCais.¹⁴ The monastery of Clonkeen was founded about 600 by St Mo-Díomóg. Otherwise known as Domnoc, he figures in Welsh hagiography as a disciple (skilled with bees) of St. David and is linked with monasteries at Bremore, north of Dublin and Tibberaghny near Carrick-on-Suir. His feast day is 13 February.¹⁵

The name 'Torga Shesheree' presumably represents the Irish *Tobar seisreachí* meaning the spring of the plough-team, originally of six animals (compare Irish *sé* 'six'),¹⁶ *Seisreach* 'plough-team; ploughland, measure of land equal to sixty acres. The Plough (in astronomy) occurs in other Irish toponyms, including *Seisreach Cille hOnchon* at Killonahan (R 5245) eight miles south of Limerick.¹⁷

¹ A. C. Breeze, 'G.M. Hopkins and Dolly Pentreath of Cornwall', *Devon and Cornwall Notes and Queries* xxxix (2002) pp 46-7.

² *The Journals and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed., Humphry House and Graham Storey, Oxford 1959, p. 440.

³ *Gasaitéar na hÉireann* (Baile Átha Cliath 1989).

⁴ OS 6" sheet 13, 4.0 cm from east margin, 20.0 cm from north margin, national grid 16211/15295, townland Cahernarry (Keane), it is not named on the SMR: it is briefly discussed by Caoimhín Ó Danachair, 'The Holy Wells of Co. Limerick', *JRSAI* 85 (1955) p. 217 where it is stated to be in Rathjordan. The Hon. Editor is grateful to Larry Walsh of Limerick Museum for his help.

¹⁴ Lord Killanin and M.V. Duignan, *The Shell Guide to Ireland* (2nd edition, London 1970) p. 377.

¹⁵ *Rhigyfarch's Life of St David*, ed., J.W. James, Cardiff 1967 pp 41-2; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Rel. Houses*, pp 396, 407.

¹⁶ Joseph Vendryes, *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien: Lettres RS* (Paris 1974) S-97.

¹⁷ P.S. Dineen, *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla* (Dublin 1927) p. 1020.

So Brother Fitzgerald's story shows how imaginative explanations arose for what originally meant no more than 'spring of the ploughland'. Hopkins's linking of Fitzgerald's tale with Hippocrene, the spring (below the summit of Helicon) made by a stamp from the hoof of Pegasus (for which the Muses loved him) is more poetic still.

The editors of Hopkins's journals do not identify Fitzgerald though they provided the dates and occupation of another Jesuit lay brother, John Byrne (1841-1909) who incidentally gave Hopkins material for more notes on Irish popular tradition.¹⁸ It should be possible to obtain information on Fitzgerald given that we know he came from the Singland area. I understand from the Hon. Editor that the well has been damaged and is in imminent danger from building development in the area. He has also pointed out to me that a local historian recorded another version of the story in 1991:

A farmer was ploughing in the field one Sunday. He took his horses to this well for a drink. The print of their hooves remained imbedded in the stones by the well. This frightened the farmer so he never worked on a Sunday again. Folklore also offers another legend about the well. It is said to have been visited by six kings when they were on their way to some meeting.¹⁹

This writer also states that it is situated in the parish of Donoghmore and that the small stream that runs from the well is a tributary of the Groody river.²⁰ Other local researchers may be able to discover more information on this well and its legends and folklore. Specialists in Hopkins studies will be interested in such work. They shall then see more clearly the poet's extraordinary curiosity which made him write down what he heard on Irish dialect and tradition, including the folklore of this interesting well.

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LAW AND ORDER IN EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY LIMERICK

In the first decade of the nineteenth-century, the Mayors of Limerick took a firm stance on law and order issues and used their office vigorously to enforce the law. The following examples give a flavour of such activities.

A PROCLAMATION, BY THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL RICHARD HARTE, ESQ., MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LIMERICK.

Whereas, it must appear a matter of deep concern to all well-inclined People, the rapid increase of Vice, Immorality and Profaneness throughout the City. It is therefore at this time mostly highly incumbent on all Magistrates, to put in execution the Law, for the prevention of such, and particularly to enforce an Act passed in the 29th year of the Reign of the late King Charles, the Second, intituled, An Act for the Better Preservation of the Lord's Day, commonly called Sunday. Also an Act passed in the 9th year of the reign of the late King William the Third, intituled An Act for the more effectual suppression of Blasphemy and Profaneness. Also, An Act passed in the 21st year of His present Majesty, intituled, An Act

¹⁸ *Journals and Papers*, p. 407.

¹⁹ Gerard Healy, *The Hidden Excitement of Monaleen and Milford* (Limerick 1991) p. 107.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

for preventing certain Abuses and Profanations of the Lord's Day, called Sunday; and also Acts passed in the 41st and 45th year of His present Majesty; and all other Laws now in force for the punishing of Vice and Immorality.

Now I the Mayor of the City of Limerick, feeling it my indispensable duty to exert the authority committed to me for the suppression of these increasing evils, do hereby give Notice, that all persons who shall be found within my Jurisdiction, Playing at any Sports or Games, Selling of Flesh Meat, fish, Fowl, Roots, Herb, in Stall, Standings or Shambles on the Lords Day, during the Day, shall be punished with the utmost rigour of the Law.

And I hereby do require all Church-wardens, High and Petty Constables, to make strict enquiry within their respective districts and parishes, of such person or persons who Sell Spirits on Sunday, or who keep Disorderly or Gaming Houses, and to return the names of the keepers of such as come within their knowledge to me, in order that they may be punished as the Law Directs.

And the better to enforce obedience to the Lord's Day, all such Church-wardens, High and Petty Constables, and others who assisting in detecting and prosecuting of Offenders will meet with every support and encouragement that the Law will afford.

Richard Harte, Mayor, Limerick. October 8, 1806.¹

REGRATERS AND FORESTALLERS.

The Mayor viewing the pernicious tendency of persons regrating many articles of Life, instead of such necessities being sold by the owners in the Public Markets, and by which the poor individuals purchase them at an enhanced price, gives this Public Notice, that he is determined to put in force the law, and to punish most severely all persons who shall be found guilty of Forestalling in any manner whatsoever; and he calls upon the Inhabitants to point out to him any abuse of this nature, in order that the shameful practice may be more readily detected.²

Richard Harte also wanted to stamp out two reprehensible practices that, however, continued up until modern times – the giving of drink 'on the slate' or 'on tick' and employers or foremen paying workers their wages in a pub:

The Mayor gives notice that he is determined, pursuant to Statute, to refuse ordering payment for any Spirituous Liquors, where credit is given, unless the Quantity sold at one time amounts to Twenty Shillings; and further that where persons pay wages to Journeymen at the house of a Retailer of Spirits, such wages may not only be recovered again from the employer, but such retailer forfeits his bond, and his license will be withdrawn.³

In another edict he shows a determination to prevent the necessity for trading on the Sabbath:

I request the Merchants and other Gentlemen, who have a number of labourers in employ, will be so good as to cause them to be paid their wages on Friday, to enable their families to

¹ *Limerick Chronicle*, 6 October 1806.

² *LC*, 11 October 1806.

³ *LC*, 8 October 8 1806.

purchase the necessities of life, on Saturday, which will prevent the constant breach of the Sabbath; those poor people being now obliged to frequent the Markets, where such articles are usually exposed for sale, on Sunday, notwithstanding my determination to enforce the Penalties for such offences under the Act of Parliament.

Richard Harte, Mayor.⁴

In 1809 the Limerick Chronicle offered the following eulogy for such efforts:

The extraordinary exertions of our present worthy Chief Magistrate, is become the theme of every Citizen; ever to be seen in the Streets and Highways detecting Regrators and Forestallors, before the Labourer rises from his bed, and his vigilance has made groups of villains who batten on the Poor Man's earnings betake to other callings not so dangerous to Society; and while he bestows the fines inflicted on offenders, in relieving real objects, he has exerted his authority in either driving hence the sturdy vagrant, or sending to the House of Industry those disgusting Mendicants, who have so long disgraced every public avenue to or in this City.⁵

In 1810 Harte (now Sir Richard having been knighted during his year of office by the visiting Lord Lieutenant General, the Duke of Richmond⁶) and the incumbent Mayor, Francis Lloyd, dealt firmly with what appears to be one of the earliest recorded strikes by workers in the city:

The entire of Wednesday was occupied by a hearing, the most patient and impartial we have ever witnessed, before the Right Worshipful Lloyd, Esq., Mayor, and Sir Richard Harte, one of the Charter Justices, and, as it concerns not only all masters and employers of every description, but the working classes of the community in this and every part of Ireland, we think it a duty we owe the Public, to state the circumstances. James Moynihan; Patrick Neill; Patrick Kelly; Dan Reidy; and John Donnellan, labourers employed at the Distillery of Messrs. Stein, Brown and Co., in this City, were charged with having, in furtherance of a Combination to obtain an advance of wages, absented themselves without reasonable cause from the service of their employers, within the accustomed hours of working – it appeared that those persons and about twenty others at 11 o'clock in the forenoon of Saturday last quitted the concerns in a body; and it was proved by the testimony of four respectable witnesses, that their departure was not only without permission, but that considerable detriment and inconvenience occurred to the particular process in which they had been employed.

A defence was ingeniously attempted, but evidence being offered of the prisoners, it appeared that the persons who were brought forward for that purpose, were all concerned in quitting the work, and of course their testimony was inadmissible; and it being proved that they were of the party, they were committed to Jail to abide their trials for the like offence – their names are Michael Fahy; Michael Rice; J. Callinan; and J. Boalman.

The Justices after a short consideration, pronounced the sentence of the Law on the five persons who were tried, which is, that they be each imprisoned Six Months in Common Jail, under the Act of the 43rd of the King, Chap 86, entitled "An Act to prevent unlawful

⁴ LC, 11 October 1806.

⁵ LC, 22 November 1809.

⁶ Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick, its History and Antiquities* (Limerick 1866) p.417.

Harsh as this sentence was, they were more fortunate than one of their workmates, who apparently didn't participate in the 'combination' who met a worse fate the following morning:

On Thursday the Right Worshipful Francis Lloyd, Esq., Mayor, as Coroner held an Inquest on the body of Stephen Connor, a workman in the employment of Messrs. Stein, Brown and Co., Distillers, who fell, early on that morning, into a pan of scalding water – Verdict 'that he came to his death by accidentally falling into a Copper containing hot wort at the Distillery, whereby he was scalded and burned and of such scalding and burning died.'⁸

William P. Mulligan

⁷ LC, 26 May 1810.

⁸ *Ibid.*

