

Some Old Limerick Newspapers

WILLIAM P. MULLIGAN

7 Newenham Street, Limerick

The accidental discovery of some early nineteenth-century issues of *The Limerick Journal* newspaper is described and details on the paper and its printer are provided. An analysis of the content of the particular issues is set in the context of the period and the other newspapers printed in Limerick at that time.

After the premises of *Roches Stores, Ltd.*, on the corner of Sarsfield St and O'Connell St Limerick, was burned down in the early hours of Wednesday 28 January 1948 the company secured temporary accommodation at the opposite side of Sarsfield Street in premises that had been recently vacated by the *Irish Omnibus Company*. Even though a replacement building was soon erected on the old site, trading continued at this location and eventually extended into the *Limerick Hotel* next door, whose proprietor, Mr. George (Tiger) O'Brien, incidentally had detected the fire and raised the alarm.¹ The *Limerick Hotel* was established in 1804 by Anthony Swinburne who placed an advertisement in the *Limerick Chronicle* 'to inform the Nobility and Gentry that he has just opened an HOTEL in the house lately held by Francis Ryves, Esq., Brunswick Place nearly opposite Messrs. Furnell's Bank, Newtown Pery'.² It was named after its owner as an advertisement of 1812 shows:

Alexander McDonald – Observing the shameful dirty and bruised state in which fish are being exposed for sale in Limerick Market and being encouraged by several Gentlemen – Proposes to open a Fish-Stall in Brunswick Street opposite Swinburne's Hotel.³

This name long survived, as a postcard in Limerick museum dated circa 1924, referring to the *Limerick Hotel* as 'formerly Swinburnes', shows. *Roches Stores* continued to trade in these premises for over fifty years, finally leaving in 2000.

Around 1960 a young man, Jerry Byrnes⁴, working as a porter / storesman in *Roches Stores* found three early nineteenth-century copies of *The Limerick Journal* newspaper behind a window-shutter of an upstairs room of 2 Sarsfield Street, part of the old *Limerick Hotel*. He brought them home to his parents and they were re-discovered amongst the possessions of his widowed mother when she died some years ago and returned to him. He has loaned them to me for the purpose of this research.

The three copies are in good condition and are headed *Edward Flin – The Limerick Journal*. No. 3,368 Vol. XXXII, Saturday, December 5, 1812; No. 3,371 Vol. XXXII, Wednesday, December 16, 1812; No. 3,372 Vol. XXXII, Saturday, December 19, 1812. The masthead of each also reads: 'Printed and published on Wednesdays and Saturdays by EDWARD FLIN, at Commercial Buildings, Limerick'.

What is known of "Edward Flin" and *The Limerick Journal*? Maurice Lenihan in his copious notes has:

The *Munster Journal* was succeeded about 1787, by the *Limerick Journal*, of which Mr. Edward Flinn (sic) was the proprietor; this Journal enjoyed the patronage of Lord Clare, to

¹ *Limerick Leader* (LL), 28 January 1948.

² *Limerick Chronicle* (LC), 4 August 1804.

³ LC, 2 December 1812.

⁴ Michael G. Byrnes of Knocknagoshel, Co. Kerry, (the author's brother-in-law) recently retired after twenty years service with the United Nations.

whom the owner of it was agent, and reaped a harvest by the publication of the Castle Proclamations. Mr. Flinn, who was a Catholic, resided in Mary-street, opposite Quay-lane; Athlunkard Street not having been made for many years afterwards... Andrew Cherry, the comedian, and author... served his time as an apprentice in the printing office of the *Limerick Journal*... Mr. John Gubbins, a successful portrait painter, also served his time in the *Limerick Journal* office. ⁵

In his list of Limerick printers and newspapers, Dix⁶ has six entries for Flin and the *Limerick Journal*:

- (1) List of Printers – Edward Flin 1783-92.
- (2) 1787 *The Limerick Journal* – Proprietor Edward Flin [vide Madden, *Irish Periodical Literature*, vol. II, p. 205.]
- (3) Edward Flin – Mary Street.
- (4) 1789 *The Limerick Journal*, May 4th [Edward Flin] [Massey]
- (5) 1791 *The Limerick Journal* Vol. XIII No. 1308 October 10th Monday 4pp. of 4 columns each [E.Flin] [T.C.D. in vol of Mis. Newspapers.]
- (6) 1791 “Same” Oct 17th, Monday, Vol XIII, No. 1310? [T.C.D., do]

Robert Herbert has two relevant entries in his study of Limerick printers:

Edward Flin was Proprietor and Printer of the *Limerick Journal* which probably started in March 1779, and was continued until December 1819 when Flin offered it for sale. He gave his address sometimes as “corner of Quay Lane,” sometimes as “opposite Bridge Street,” and other times as “opposite Quay Lane.” These addresses probably all referred to the same house. He was also a bookseller. ...Flin died during or before 1824.⁷

The first issue of the *Limerick Journal*, which was always owned by Flin, probably appeared on 19 March 1779. On 18 December 1819, Flin offered ‘his old established newspaper *The Limerick Journal* which has been published near 40 years’ for sale and it is therefore more than likely that the paper continued until this date, although no number is known after the year 1802. It probably ceased to exist in 1819. The surviving copies of *The Limerick Journal* indicate that it was published twice weekly. Herbert listed the following numbers still surviving in 1947:⁸

Vol	No	Date	Source/Location
III	219	23/4/1781	Dix
IV		3/3/1782	CO
VII	642	19/5/1785 4/5/1789	CL Massey
XIII	1253 to 1316	31/3/1791 to 7/11/1791	CO
XIII	1318	10/10/1791	TCD
XIII	1319	17/10/1791	TCD
XVI		19/5/1794	CL
XVI	1274	25/12/1794	CL
XX	1696	17/11/1798	CL
XX	3121	10/8/1799	CL
XXIII	2308	12/6/1802	CO
XXIII	2316	10/7/1802	CO

Herbert has the wrong issue numbers (1318-1319) for the two T.C.D. possessions, the Dix entry (1308 + 1310) would be correct. Herbert states that the Vol. XIII issues (1253-1316 *recte* 1314 - 31/3/1791 to 7/11/1791) were in the possession of CO. (Chronicle office). The microfilm reel of the *Limerick Chronicle* (copies in the City of Limerick Public Library and Mary Immaculate College Library) for 1791-4 starts with the *Limerick Journal* issues 1229 (Thursday January 6, 1791) to 1250 (Monday May 21, 1791), this series does not appear in the lists of either Dix or Herbert. On the reels there are also gaps in the 1253-1316(1314) series – 1283 to 1291 inclusive (Thursday July 15 to Thursday August 10) 1297 (Thursday September 1) 1301 (Thursday September 16) and 1313 (Thursday November 3) are missing. Furthermore the 1802 issues (XXIII-2308 12/6/1802 & XXIII-2316 10/7/1802) are not on any of the early 1800 *Limerick Chronicle* reels in either institution.

The *Newsplan project* although a more modern source has only one, brief, entry: 'Limerick Journal Flynn (sic) ?1776 -? May be a continuation of Andrew Welsh's Limerick Journal. N.L.I. 8 July 1784. Micro Film Priority 1'.⁹

The three 1812 papers, and the 1791 issues available on microfilm, show that it consisted of four pages with four columns on each page. The 5 December 1812 [Saturday] issue (No. 3,368) has the four columns of the first page and the first column of the last page devoted to 'Foreign Intelligence – France' and consist of reprints of military despatches giving the French account of the progress of Napoleon's army invading Russia and French defence of Spain against Wellington in the Peninsular War. In the centre pages the Prince Regent's speech at the opening of Parliament is quoted in full with the dateline London, November 30. The only reference to Ireland in his speech seems to be a veiled one 'I have derived the greatest satisfaction from the success of the measures adopted by Parliament for suppressing those acts of outrage and insubordination which appeared in some parts of the kingdom...' *The Address...of the Roman Catholic Prelates...to the Clergy and Laity of the Roman Catholic Churches of Ireland*, is printed with the dateline Dublin, Dec. 4. This is followed by what would be the editorial column in a modern paper which also contains news from the Peninsula – taken from *The Cork Mercantile Chronicle* of 2 December. The only item of strictly Limerick news is that Thomas Fitzgerald Gent, of Ballingarry, has been admitted an Attorney of the Court of Common Pleas and a Member of the Hon. Society of King's Inns. There is a graphic account of a 'gang of robbers' attacking a house in Birdhill, Co. Tipperary and of an attack on the 'Galway Coach' at Parsonstown as it proceeded to Loughrea. In the remaining three columns five local merchants advertise their wares, a Proclamation appears on behalf of 'The Lord Lieutenant And Council of Ireland', the 'Collector of Quit and Crown Rents' gives final notice to all persons concerned and then, under 'Lands and Houses', seven properties are advertised for letting including 'the lands of Ballinacurra Weston opposite the New Barracks.'

In issue 3,371, Wednesday 16 December 1812 the format is similar but the news from the Russian Front now has a British point-of-view, as the intelligence quoted is taken from a letter of 'His Majesty's Ambassador...at the Court of Russia' to Lord Castlereagh. Except for the advertisements on page three the only local news item for this issue is the death listing, 'On Saturday, at the Castle Barracks, James Campbell, Esq. Paymaster of the 2nd bat, 72d Regt. quartered in this city. He left an amiable widow and eight children to deplore his loss. His remains were interred on Monday morning

⁵ Maurice Lenihan, *Limerick, Its History and Antiquities* (Limerick 1866, reprint 1991) p. 360, n 3.

⁶ E. R. McG Dix, *List of Books, Pamphlets and Newspapers Printed in Limerick From the Earliest Period to 1800* (Limerick 1907) pp 7, 25, 26, 28.

⁷ Robert Herbert, *Limerick Printers & Printing, Part One of the Catalogue of the Local Collection in the City of Limerick Public Library* (Limerick 1947) p.12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52; CO is *Chronicle* office, CL is City Library while Massey has not been identified: the issue-numbers for Vol. XVI. No. 1274, and Vol. XX. No. 3121 are obviously incorrect.

⁹ James O'Toole, *Report of the Newsplan project in Ireland* (Dublin and London rev.ed. 1998) p. 159.

at St. Munchin's with military honours.' The main pages of issue no. 3,372, Saturday 19 December 1812 are taken up with reports of the proceedings of the British parliament, as well as 'Court Appointments' whilst the 'London' column deals with military matters. The 'Dublin' column, dated 17 Dec. has a report of the 'Aggregate Meeting of the Roman Catholics' at the Theatre, Fishamble Street – one of the opening shots of the Catholic Emancipation Campaign though the name of Daniel O'Connell is not mentioned. In the 'Limerick' news the Chamber of Commerce announced the opening of a new corn-market for the regulation of the corn and wheat trading in the city.

There were two other papers published in Limerick at this time. *The Limerick Chronicle*, in existence since 1766, was published by Henry Watson and D.F.G. Mahony, at the King's Arms, 2 Rutland Street¹⁰ and *The Limerick Evening Post* was 'Printed by Joseph Hely for the Proprietor Dan Geary at the office No. 10 William Street.'¹¹ The three papers issued on the same days – Wednesday and Saturday – each week. The front page of the *Limerick Chronicle* of Wednesday 2 December 1812, No. 9807, is entirely devoted to advertisements of a local nature. Like the *Journal*, the *Chronicle* gives the despatches from the various fronts or theatres of war – Canada, Russia, Spain – including also reference to the defeat of Soult¹² at Corunna. These are continued into page two where one can also read of a meeting of Protestants in Roscommon 'at which Catholics were prevented from speaking' as well as troop movements, naval appointments and births, marriages and deaths. Page three contains announcements, advertisements and notices mostly of a local nature – such as 'Limerick Musical Society will meet...in Mr. Rea's rooms, Brunswick Street'. Relegated to the back page is the proclamation of the Lord Lieutenant and Council – taken from the *Dublin Gazette* – a list of British Corps serving in the Peninsula, a 'Letter to the Editor' about the Freemasons and an article on 'Representation of Scotland in New Parliament' which lists all forty-four elected members for that area. Comparing the content of the *Limerick Journal* and *Limerick Chronicle* one would have to conclude that the latter would have won any circulation battle on the basis of the coverage of local news and advertisements, so it is hardly surprising that the former closed its doors during the more difficult trading times of 1819-20.

The Limerick Evening Post had a format not unlike the *Limerick Chronicle* – announcements and advertisements on the front page, foreign news, Government and other official notices, letters to the editor in the centre pages and more announcements and advertisements of local flavour on the back page. It is the only one of the three newspapers to mention the proceedings of the *Limerick Historical Society*:

The debate on last night's question having been adjourned by unanimous consent, the same question is proposed for discussion at the Assembly Rooms on Monday the 7th instant:- "Is man Happier in a State of Ignorance than a State of Knowledge?" Doors open at seven – the chair taken at half-past seven – and, in future, the debate is closed at precisely Ten o'clock. Tickets to be had at 4d each at Messrs. Barry, O'Brien McDonnell and Geary, Stationers, Dec.2.

In a letter to the editor on the subject of the first meeting of this *Limerick Historical Society*, apparently held on the 21st November 1812, 'A Citizen' praised the society in the following terms: 'The Institution is a feast of reason and a luxury of souls – while it feeds the mind, it forms the heart – while it teaches how to think and speak, and explore with profit the regions of intellectual wealth...'

The earliest surviving copies of the *Limerick Journal* do not give an exact address for its printer, just 'Limerick: Printed by E. Flin' it is clear that Flin lived in the Quay Lane / Bridge St / Mary St

¹⁰ LC 1812 issues.

¹¹ *Limerick Evening Post* 5 December 1812; see also Herbert, *Limerick Printers*, pp 14; 53; O'Toole, *Newsplan*, p. 159.

¹² French marshall defeated by the British under Sir John Moore, 16 January 1809.

area. In September 1801 'Edw. Flin' was one of nine 'Gentlemen' elected to a committee for the Mercantile Coffee House in Bridge Street.¹³ Sometime before 1812 Flin moved to the Commercial Buildings, where the copies discussed in this article were printed. In 1804 estimates were invited from builders for the construction of the Commercial Buildings in which: 'The Centre is to be for the Coffee-House &c. The Wings for two houses each, with shops'.¹⁴ The Coffee-House opened for business on 29 September 1805¹⁵ while on 27 August 27 1806, the Proprietors offered to set the 'Tavern, Hotel and Coffee-Rooms of the Commercial Buildings'.¹⁶ The citizens of Limerick were informed on 3 December by Louis Pedrana that he had been granted the lease of the 'Whole and Extensive and elegant premises...Grand Coffee Room...as also of a most spacious Tavern and Hotel, adding that he 'has had the Honor to serve Several Princes and Noblemen in the Capacity of Cook'.¹⁷ This did not apparently ensure success for his venture, as in 1809 the 'Commercial Coffee-House, Hotel, Coach Houses, and Livery Stables' were again vacant.¹⁸ When the premises was offered to be set, fourteen years later, it was stated that a large portion of it had been 'lately occupied by Mr. Edward Flin, Printer...' so it seems likely that he had moved there in 1809.¹⁹ He was still in Rutland Street in December 1820 when an advertisement appeared announcing a general meeting of the proprietors of the Commercial Buildings 'to take into consideration a proposal received from Mr. Edward Flin, respecting *holdings in the concern*'²⁰. The Commissioners of Saint Michael's Parish had rented a room from him for their meetings at this period also.²¹

Despite the evidence that Flin was still using or letting part of the Commercial Buildings in 1820 and beyond, Robert Herbert's contention that the paper ceased to exist in 1819 seems correct. The journal was offered for sale in December 1819. He also asked for settlement of accounts by those who owed him money²² and Saint Michael's Parish Commissioners resolved at a meeting on 17 January 1820: 'That the sum of three pounds eighteen shillings be paid by the Secretary to Edward Flin, Editor of the *Limerick Journal*, being the amount of his bill for advertisements for Parish purposes from May 6th 1818 to November 30th 1819'.²³ As no further issues of the paper have come to light nor any references to Flin's involvement, it would appear that no purchaser came forward and publication ceased. He was by then either old or in illhealth or perhaps both and within a relatively short time he was dead. Herbert's contention that "Flin died during or before 1824" was probably based on the fact that the 1823 advertisement is the last record of his name to be found in print. Recent research reveals that, in fact, he died on 30 July 1822 and was buried in the graveyard of Saint Mary's Cathedral.²⁴

No record of the exact location of the grave is extant and no headstone survives, if one was ever erected. There are other Flins buried there, over half a century previously, in 1741, 1743, 1753 and 1761, but it is not possible to make any connection between them except that they share the same name. However in Whitelaw's *History of Dublin* (1818) there is mention of 'Mr Flin...was a bookseller in Limerick, and a native of Howth...' ²⁵ Maybe our Edward Flin was the son of a former citizen who returned to the City of his forebears and is buried with them in the shadow of the ancient Saint Mary's Tower. This writer would like to think so.

¹³ LC, 30 September 1801.

¹⁴ LC, 6 April 1804.

¹⁵ LC, 18 April 1805.

¹⁶ LC, 27 August 1806.

¹⁷ LC, 3 December 1806.

¹⁸ LC, 4 February 1809.

¹⁹ LC, 16 July 1823.

²⁰ These words are partly obliterated in the paper.

²¹ 'Resolved to look for suitable rooms for meetings...Notice to be served on Mr. Edward Flin', Minutes of the Proceedings and Orders of the Commissioners of Saint Michael's Parish, Book no. 2. 1819-1833, (SMPCM2) May 1819, (Limerick Archives).

²² LC, 18 December 1820.

²³ SMPCM2, 17 January 1820.

²⁴ Thanks to Margaret McBride, Limerick Archives and Noreen Elliker, Saint Mary's Cathedral.

²⁵ See 'Review of Books', *NMAJ*, 13, no. 2.(1942) p. 125.

