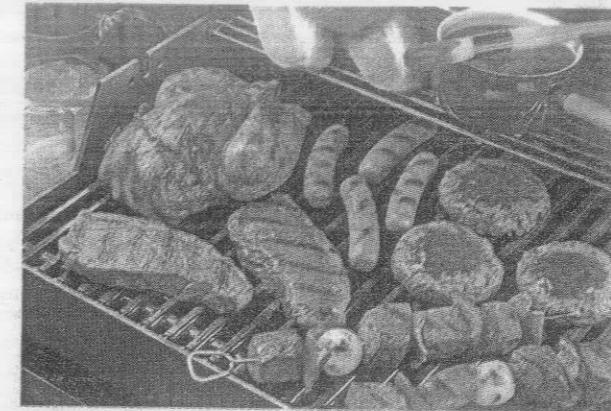


Leader 2

SATURDAY 17 MAY 2008

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AS I stand on Lord Edward Street on a dusky Wednesday evening, staring at an unremarkable one-storey building, it is hard to believe that this is where the oldest brass band in Limerick (and arguably the oldest brass band in Ireland) meet up every week.

The Boherbuoy Brass and Reed Band, who have been delighting Ireland with their music since their formation in 1850, meet up to practice here twice a week, playing several concerts each year - including one this Friday night at Crescent College Comprehensive.

Despite my reservations, when I walk into the building, I feel an immediate sense of warmth. The band's oldest member, Patrick Phelan, who prefers to be known merely as "Pa", grabbed my arm, saying "Oh you must be the fellow from the Leader," before enthusiastically showing me some of the photos on the wall of their facility.

The 50-strong band can boast a rich history, despite their humble beginnings - set up in Culhane's Stables, in Hifle's Brow, on what is now known as Parnell Street. Since then, they have had more than ten homes, from the second floor room of a house in Edward Street to King's Lane, city



Derbhile De Paor, conducting the Boherbuoy Band in rehearsals at their band house, Lord Edward Street ahead of this Friday evening's concert

PICTURE: DERMOT LYNCH

ated just off Boherbuoy, where the band took its name. They eventually settled on their current band-hall, which serves as a treasure trove of their history, with photos dating back to the 1890s.

The centre also houses recordings from the Boherbuoy Band, dating from the 1920s, as well as instruments from around the same period. It really is worth a visit.

The Boherbuoy Band were formed in 1850, and entertained crowds of people on the People's Park bandstand twice a week through the summer - on a Wednesday and a Sunday afternoon.

But it was not until 1885 they first tasted real glory - winning the All Ireland Band Championships.

To celebrate the achievement, Limerick's Mayor, Ambrose Hall inscribed silver medals for the players - after they were presented with a 'five valve silver played euphonium'.

The group repeated the feat on home turf a year later, beating newer bands from Newcastle West, Waterford and Cork, adding a "silver played cornet" to their rapidly growing collection of garlands.

However, the band had to wait until last year - at New Ross in Wexford - before winning anything on a truly national scale again. They won the Intermediate category at the

>> CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

And the band played on

Jim Kemmy said their music sustained people in drab times, providing gaiety when it wasn't to be found elsewhere. After 158 years on the march the Boherbuoy Band is still going strong and its members tell **Nick Rabbitts** how their love of music keeps the show on the road in these busy times



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WOLESELEY



... Catherine Street in partnership with her brother Paul

PICTURE: ADRIAN BUTLER

RAUGHAN

rick butchers continues at O'Connell
an Craughan knows things can not remain

ve gotten.

As you get to and faces. The me with friendly get to know what hat they'll be hen they come . You don't get my places these an just go to for their meat. in different do our own ook all our own d we cure our ham. We've awards five sion for some which is nice, ng too.

ul is a partner

effort. Paul and I are a good team, we support each other in every way. Our parents had the shop before us. It's very much a family business.

There's new things coming on line all the time. You only get out what you put into it. We're the oldest butcher shop in Limerick, but you have to keep looking for fresh ideas and new products.

The new pedestrianised streets are wonderful. There's a lot more flow of people around the city now. You can see just by looking down Thomas Street and Bedford Row how popular the pedestrianised areas are. That brings more life to the city in itself - seeing all the new cafes and shops like

in my spare time. I live in Parteen with my husband Ger. We've been married for the last 27 years, and have two sons - Philip, who's 25, and Thomas, who's 22. We lived in Parteen for 12 years. It's a lovely area - you've such easy access to the city. It's something we can take for granted in Limerick. I couldn't manage living in Dublin and commuting to work for hours on end.

A lot of the old butcher shops are closing down. In the last seven or eight years about 12 butchers around the city have closed down. A lot of butchers are retiring, and there aren't too many of the younger generation are picking up the trade. It isn't a very glamorous job. But

and the band played on

» CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

42nd National Band Championships - organised by the Irish Association of Brass and Concert Bands.

The championships were held in UL's concert hall this year and though they didn't manage to win, having stepped up a level from last year, the band were extremely proud to perform at home.

Speaking after the tournament, chairman Don Phelan said, "The members were delighted to be performing on home ground. They really set out what they achieved to do. That is to take on the challenge of a demanding test piece and perform it well and, in doing so, take its place as one of the most successful bands in the country."

Winning the 'Intermediate' section at the National Band Championships last year is, for most members, the band's greatest achievement.

The band's members are, however, refusing to rest on their laurels. Pa, who plays the euphonium, said, "I am sure the younger members of the band, within five or ten years, will become senior national champions again, to copy the bands of the 1880s."

As well as playing in the past at Limerick's hurling games, the group also marches down O'Connell Street on St Patrick's Day each year.

A great supporter of the Boherbuoy Band and the man who laid the foundation stone of their current home was the late Jim Kemmy. His protege, Limerick East Labour TD Jan O'Sullivan has also been supportive of the band since Mr Kemmy's death 11 years ago.

Musical director, Derbhile de Paor said, "In 2006, we went to Quimper, Limerick's twin city. Jan came with us. We played outside the Civic Offices there. Jim was a great supporter of the band and was always the Vice President, so when he passed away and Jan took on his mantle, we invited her to be vice president of the band, and she still is. She sends us letters of congratulations and support."

At this year's IACCB tournament, the Boherbuoy Band managed to persuade current Mayor Ger Fahy, and Cllr Maria Byrne to present the awards.

Last summer, at the invitation of President McAleese, they played at the Áras an Uachtaráin garden party, something Derbhile described as a "major honour."

Another major honour the band enjoyed was to play for President John F Kennedy on



The Boherbuoy Band can be relied upon to provide the sound and colour at any public event, such as the opening of the new gates in the People's Park this year

PICTURE: MICHAEL COWHEY

his visit to Ireland in 1963 - only months before he was assassinated.

Pa remembers the occasion well, saying: "As the president left Shannon Airport, he vowed to be back to hear us again. Sadly he never was."

Something which amazes everyone involved with the band, is the way they have remained together, with high

Growing up in Limerick, people grew up to the sound of the Boherbuoy Band. Their music has helped to sustain people during personal and public tribulations, during the days when the sound and the colour of the band provided the only gaiety in a drab world - Jim Kemmy

numbers, even in today's world of soundbites, the internet and five minute lunches.

Chairman Don Phelan - a coronet player - reflected this, saying: "It is a very friendly environment to play in, and we have a good ensemble. We all play for each other. In this day and age, its very hard to

keep, with work commitments. Our membership goes in circles, and at the moment, we are on an upward scale."

There have been five marriages in the band - including conductor Derbhile, who met her husband Ger Power - but Pa sneakily hinted there may very well be a sixth on the way.

For all their history, one problem the organisation faces on a daily basis is money. The band is run on a completely voluntary basis: chairman Don is an electrician by day, while Derbhile is principal of Castleconnell National School.

She describes keeping the band going as a "blood sweat and tears" effort.

"We busk in the streets at Christmas. That is how we keep the band going - we play in about ten different streets, and that is the only way we can do this," said Derbhile.

The fact of the matter is, according to Don, they receive no government funding, because there is no one set place for them to play to.

"We would love to build on top of our centre, so we can have a meeting room, and other facilities. But at the moment, we just have to keep ourselves going from year to year. The issue that all groups have is that there is no set group to go to for Military bands or concert bands. If you go to one door, you are sent elsewhere, if you go elsewhere, you are sent back to the same place again," explained Don.

Up until the late 1970s, the band was an all-male affair -

but following the building of their new hall, there were appropriate toilet amenities to cater for both genders. These days, women are strongly represented in the band, none more so than Derbhile de Paor, one of the few female conductors in Ireland.

Pa remembers the first time a girl joined in.

"In the early 70s - around 1972 - there was a man and his daughter listening to every session we played for about two or three months. One day, the chairman was coming in, and he brought them in to hear the band. The man said he enjoyed it so much that he asked if his daughter could join the band," he recalled.

As well as welcoming everyone, Derbhile feels the Boherbuoy Band are "ambassadors" for Limerick in its times of negative publicity coming from the gangland feuds.

She said: "I feel we can turn the tide of negatives some small little bit. Organisations like the band, organisations with young people are positive examples of the youth in our city."

And as I leave the bandhall, to the sound of the inspirational tune "You Raise me up", I am left in little doubt the Boherbuoy Band can easily go on for another 150 years.

The band play their summer concert this Friday at Crescent Comprehensive at 7.45pm. They are always looking for new members. If you play a brass instrument, and want to get involved call Don Phelan on 087-2777495.

Generations band together for music

PATRICK "Pa" Phelan is the longest serving member of the Boherbuoy Band, having joined the group in 1940. Even at the age of 78, Pa attends almost every practice session, where he plays the euphonium. Born just two doors away from where the



since the day I could walk." In a time without the distractions of television and the internet, everyone used to follow a particular band. "Being in band was the pastime. If you did not play in a band, you would follow a band. You would know all the marches, and you would know all the music every member of the band was playing, and the people at that time judged the bands against the Boherbuoy," Pa explained. And his proudest moment was winning the IACCB National Band Championship in New Ross last year.

the brass band circuit, having taken part in five competitions to date. She has been playing the coronet in the band - like her father chairman Don - since she was nine. "All my family are in the band, and this is why I joined," she said.

