

Forty Years on the Trumpet and Euphonium

WHEN Christopher O'Byrne joined St. John's Brass and Reed Prize Band in 1926, it was known at that time as St. John's Workingmen's Band. As we stated in our opening article last week, it was founded as the Victuallers' Band and, under its first change in title became St. John's Temperance Band. But though the Band had changed its name from time to time its policy of service to the community has remained unaltered, and, for over a century it has been part of Limerick's civic life.

In his 40 years of membership Christy O'Byrne has served under nine bandmasters — the late Frank Imbush, J. O'Shaughnessy (organist at Sacred Heart Church), the late Jack Patterson, Ned Mooney, Albert Kersley, Jim Moahe, Stephen Collins, M. Doyle and the present holder of the office, William Ferguson.

Some members of long standing when he joined were Messrs. Doyie, Hinchy and Beatty, Denny Langan, John Maher, Mick Power (the well-known harvey, who had his stand at Pitt's corner), Pa Keane, Jack Cannon, Gus Greene, Tommy Quilligan, Stephen Collins and

the Wallace brothers of Mary Street. Among the officials were the President, Patrick Ryan of Garryowen, and the Treasurer, Gerry O'Donovan of Rossa Avenue.

A GREAT PROCESSION

One of his most striking recollections of those early days with the Band is the great religious procession of June, 1933. Twenty thousand citizens took part, and there were striking scenes of devotion along the route from St. John's Cathedral to Pery Square. The city was

gaily decorated with a profusion of flags, bunting and streamers; the Papal colours predominated in the scheme and Eucharistic Congress and national flags were everywhere to be seen.

Recalling the events of that great day, Christy says the procession was headed by a cross-bearer and acolytes in surplice and soutane; next in order came the secondary schools of St. Munchin's College, the Christian Brothers, Crescent College and Mount St. Alphonsus Monastery. Immediately following were the Arch-Confraternity of the Holy Family, the men's Confraternities of the Sacred Cincture, the Blessed Sacrament and the Third Order of St. Francis. The Mayor and members of the Corporation walked next, and then came Christian Brothers and the clergy — Jesuits, Redemptorists, Dominicans, Franciscans, Augustinians and the secular priests.

And then came the canopy, under which was the gold monstrance containing the Blessed Sacrament, borne by the Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Keane. Other priests who carried the monstrance on the route were — Very Rev. Canon Hannon, P.P., St. Mary's; Very Rev. Canon O'Dwyer, P.P., V.F., St. Munchin's; Very Rev. Canon O'Leary, P.P., St. Patrick's, and Very Rev. Fr. Fitzgerald, Provincial of the Redemptorist Order.

The women's section walked just behind the canopy, being headed by the secondary school girls. Then followed the Confraternities attached to St. John's Cathedral, St. Alphonsus, the Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Augustinians, St. Michael's, St. Munchin's, St.

Mary's and the Dominican churches.

Hymns were sung to the accompaniment of St. John's Brass and Reed Band along the route, which was by John St., Broad St., Mary St., Nicholas St., Thomond Bridge, the Strand, Sarsfield Bridge, O'Connell Street, Barrington St. and Pery Square. Three other city bands attended—the Boherbuoy, St. Mary's and Sarsfield, Fife and Drum.

CARDINAL VAN ROSSUM

Among the many other memorable occasions—too numerous to detail here—were the visit to Limerick of Cardinal Van Rossum, C.S.S.R., and the Eucharistic Congress ceremonies in Dublin.

The Band is very proud of the fact that it played at the opening of all the Marian Shrines in Limerick. But, in 1928, there was one engagement that Christy O'Byrne failed to fulfill:

While walking along Arthur's Quay, sprucely dressed in his uniform, on the way to join his Band for the opening of the Grotto at Cratloe, he heard a cry for help from the river. Rushing to the quayside, he saw that a child was in difficulties in the water and without hesitation, he dived, fully clothed, to the rescue. The child he had saved from drowning was son of the then Secretary of the Band, Denis Murphy.

The ceremonies at Cratloe were out of the question for Christy that day. He had been looking forward very much to playing at the opening of Cratloe Grotto but, as he made his

way homeward in his dripping uniform, he was consoled by the thought that he had saved the son of a friend from drowning.

EMERGENCY DAYS

In 1939 the members of the Band joined the Local Defence Force as a Unit and served throughout the Emergency until their disbandment in 1945. During that time they were the band of the 49th Battalion and played in that capacity all over the country. When the Emergency started, Christy himself was in the 4th Battalion and transferred to the 9th Battalion in Sarsfield Barracks, where he remained as bugler until September, 1945. He plays the trumpet and euphonium.

Family loyalties have always been a strong feature of the Band, and the grandchildren of founder members—the Cantillons, Greaneys and Reeves to mention a few, are prominent players. Another feature, too, is the number of brothers who are members, such as the Driscolls, the Cantillons, the Reeves and the Healys.

OFFICERS

And to-day, St. John's Band is looking forward to another century of service to Limerick. Guiding affairs are Very Rev. Father Gallagher, Honorary President; Johnny Clarke, Honorary Vice-President; Christopher O'Byrne, Chairman; Patk. O'Donoghue, Vice-Chairman; Patrick Malone, Treasurer; Committee: Jack McGrath, Jimmy McCormack, Patrick Greaney, Michael Kelly, Jimmy Miller and Thomas Quigley.

The Band's 38 members practice in a Nissen hut attached to the rear of St. John's Pavilion. But this accommodation is sadly inadequate and the members are in need of a new bandroom where they would have proper facilities for practice. The cost of their new uniforms, which were first worn during the 1967 St. Patrick's Day parade, has made heavy inroads on their scanty funds. The Band's only source of income is the proceeds of a collection in the public houses and an annual collection in the shops. They do not make any house-to-house collections.

(Continued Next Saturday)

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Free travel for old folk

The Department of Finance and C.I.E. have almost completed the details of the plan to give free bus and train journeys to old-age pensioners and it is likely that the scheme will come into general operation by mid-June. The big job will be to agree on the amount that C.I.E. should receive, in addition to the annual subsidy as compensation for allowing free travel, or, indeed, whether any subsidy should be granted at all apart from the usual £2m. But this aspect is not expected to hold up the start of the free travel and the aim of the Minister, Mr. Haughey, is that the old people will be able to take advantage of the scheme during this summer. Technical plans also concern the method of identification of the old-age pensioners in bus and train, but it is believed that presentation of the old-age pension card or a special pass will be sufficient.

Will visit Derry to study Siege

The members of the Military History Society of Ireland will visit Derry during the week-end June 3 to 5, to study "The Siege of Derry, 1689." Dr. J. G. Simms, Vice-President of the Society, will deliver a lecture and conduct a tour of the Old Walls. The Society's President, Sir Charles Petrie, will preside.

THOMAS ASHE PAGEANT

President de Valera will be present at the Thomas Ashe pageant in Dingle on June 4 to mark the 50th anniversary of the patriot's death.