

ST. MARY'S FIFE AND DRUM PRIZE BAND



The St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band which will take part in next Sunday's All-Ireland Championships. Back row, left to right: V. McElligott, M. Galvin, J. Keane, K. O'Donnell, P. Hayes, J. McMahon, J. Cronin, J. Galvin, M. Galvin, Centre row: J. Sheehan, E. Murphy, G. McCoy, G. O'Brien, C. Kiely, D. Mulcahy, P. Manning, J. McGrath, T. McGrath. Front row: C. McGrath, Hon. Sec., P. Casey, J. Daly, W. W. Gleeson, M. Bourke, President, T. McCarthy, S. Meehan, Hon. Treas., A. Hurley, Vice-President, and J. McNamara.

Centenary of Famous Limerick Fife and Drum Band!

BY WILLIE W. GLEESON
THE ANCIENT City of Limerick, historians tell us, is the oldest County Borough in Ireland or Great Britain. It had a Mayor, Corporation and City Council (1197) — ten years before London, and much longer before such places as Edinburgh, Cardiff, Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Waterford or Galway could claim the honour.

In the year 812, Limerick under the Danish viking ruler, Turgeisus, became the island parish of St. Mary, the name it bears to this day; hence, "There is an Isle", famed in prose and poetry, and sung in a loud voice wherever a Limerick heart beats.

The Pioneers
One hundred years ago, in the autumn of the year 1885, to be precise, St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band, to the roll of the drum and an assortment of whistles, was founded. As to the co-founders, who were they? I dare not hazard a guess, since to do so, would be both unwise and unwise were I to omit the name of one, through inadvertence, although this outstanding musical combination was at the time twenty years young when this poor scribe touched down on terra firma!

However, it is safe to assume that among the pioneers, were such stalwarts (whom I knew personally), like: Paddy Sammon, Tom Fennell, Jack McNamara and Michael McNamara — two of the quartette of famed McNamara's Band — Paddy (Halley) Kennedy, Jack Gogarty, Jim Ring, Paddy (Sparrow) O'Donoghue and his two brothers, Ned Walsh, John Lynch (hon. secretary), Tom Fennell, Jack McNamara, J. Hayes, J. Doyle, Gerry, Michael and Jimmy Frawley. Others there were whose names I am, at this juncture, unable to recall, suffice it to say:

The names of those co-founders have vanished in the gloom, like the ember which in the fire, or the body in the tomb. But today, in the ray, their shadows still they cast, in the parish of St. Mary, their memories of the past!

From the band's humble beginnings in the former Protestant Bishop's palace, Church Street, next Nicholas Street, Barrington's Mall and Fish Gate Lane, to its present commodious premises in Mary Street, time and circumstance have witnessed many changes for the better, as the successes at the numerous band contests prove, towards the close of the last century.

Under the baton of maestro Steve Collins, this musical combination — which the previous year had won the Championship of Munster, first time out in September 1985, annexed the All-Ireland Championship at their first attempt, against the greatest opposition in the land. The prize-winning ten-piece band, which included "Ludia de Lammormoor", with "Gems of Ireland" as the play-off. The following year (1896), in Dublin, the band was placed second, losing by a single point.

Long list of successes
Other championship successes were: Limerick-1908, 1909, 1910; Waterford-1911, 1912; there were no contests during World War I (1914-18), or in the years during the Anglo-Irish and Civil Wars. At later contests which were not regular, the band again achieved success at Limerick-1927, 1928, 1930; Cork-1931; Limerick-1967. (The void between the years 1931-1947, and from 1948-1962, few, if any, were held). In 1963 and 1964, Limerick were again tops at Wexford-Limerick venues; Dublin-1965; Waterford-1975, the band "stole the show", winning three 1st prizes in all categories, as well the prize for Best Conductor, George Tweedie. While at the Limerick Festival, 1972, 1973, 1974, the band carried off the Category Award for the best Fife and Drum band competing.

Newsdays, national band contests are unknown — and more's the pity. However, for the benefit of music-lovers, it will be of especial interest to know that Test-



The Centenary book and the special centenary tape recording of the St. Mary's Band which are on offer at the package price of £5.00. They may be had from any member of the committee and are superb value.

pieces and play-offs, which earned for the band its wreath of laurels, included: Mozart's Idomeneo, Le Nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, Die Zauberflöte; Beethoven's two Masses, Oration, The Mount of Olives, and some smaller choral works; Fidelio and nine symphonies; Schiller's Andie Freude, Haydn's Ora-Forio, The Creation, The Seasons, 150 symphonies, 77 quartets, 40 trios; Gounod's Mirrella, Filemon and Baucis, La Reine de Saba, Mireille, Mass of Saint Cecilia, Romeo and Juliet; Wagner's Lohengrin; McCoy's Fantasia, Les Muegonnes, Hibernia, Colleen Bawn; Winton's La Fille de Madame Amgot, Emerald Isle; Verdi's Il Trovatore; Wallace's Bohemian Girl and Benedict's Lily of Killarney.

I will remember the early days of Radio Athlone/2RN, when listening and witnessing in St. Mary's band room, to the parish-born Paddy O'Donovan-Ried, recording — to the accompaniment of his wife the former Miss Elizabeth Clifford — his favourite piece, Bird Songs at Eventide. Also, the same afternoon, when two young army officers from the Army School of Music, called to the house of Patrick Sammon, whose name, a household name, could not be mentioned often enough in the article, seeking his aid in the collection of Irish traditional ballads and classical music, at the request of Col. Fritz Brassas. As was to be expected from a man of Sammon's kind-hearted nature, the request was granted.

It may not be known among the some of his closest friends that he (Sammon), as well as being bandmaster and conductor, was also a composer of some fine works to his credit. Hereunder is a brief list of his outstanding gems: The Loved Shannon Shore (1898), The Walls of Limerick, Irish Selection, A Wreath of Roses, Selection, dedicated to Our Lady of Limerick; Old favourites, Marching songs: Mother Eire, Glorious Patrick, Treaty Stone, Black Battery (1890-91); Twenty Years Ago (1898) — Dublin Town (Arthur Griffith).

Another former bandmaster/composer, Tom Glynn, who led the local Sinn Fein Band (September 27, 1917) — the funeral of Tom Ashe, Ireland's first hunger-striker. He also composed the beautiful waltz, Fairy Valley, whilst other band members arranged such rousing tit-bits as The Leinsters, Dashing Forward, Second to None, The Emigrant and Home, Country Home.

Finally, and since the story is all about music, music, music, and there are some flourishing musical societies and first-class choirs, as well as numerous bands, of various nomenclature, in our midst, it will not be out of line to give some more of the operatic scores from the vast library, or repertoire, of Saint Mary's All-Ireland Fife and Drum Prize Band, 1885-1985.

Storehouse of Music
The score of the opera, with the date in parentheses of its first performance, and the name of composer, are set out as follows: Aida (1871), Verdi;

the Mayor, with four mace bearers; the City High Sheriff and High Constable, with members of the City Council and Corporation staffs would also be present. The clergy of St. Mary's at the time, who have long since departed this life were: Rev. Fr. Shanahan, P.P.; Rev. J. Rea, C.C.; Rev. M. O'Gorman, C.C.

The last Sunday in November (month of the Holy Soul) is day set aside by the band for a Mass of Remembrance for deceased members, which is celebrated at 12 noon in the parish church.

Grand Old Customs
It has been said of old customs and traditions that they die hard — but when? Take for example, the Archconfraternity Annual Retreat, which is customary on the night of the opening, and again on the final night's closing, one of the local bands plays the members of the different divisions of men to the Church of St. Alphonsus where the retreat is being conducted by a month of members of the Redemptorist Order. St. Mary's — like Boherbuoy and St. John's Prize Bands, as well as the City Youth Band, at times at great inconvenience, have never once failed to put in an appearance. Such is the esprit-de-corps among our city musical combinations. Ad Multos Annos.

In the building of the beautiful Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Architectural Gem the parish church, which took three years to complete (1929-32), at a cost of £47,000, including furnishings, was completely free of debt by 1934. In this connection let it be said, St. Mary's Band played a noble part in the raising of funds, from the word go, their spacious-hall was at the disposal of the church committee, in the holding of concerts, plays, sales of work, card drives, jumble sales, dances, etc. All free of charge; and with what success, were the unselfish and generous efforts crowned, is beyond reckoning!

Down Memory Lane
St. Mary's All-Ireland Fife and Drum Prize Band has, during its one hundred years' existence, been honouring an old custom of parading through the parish on every New Year's Eve, and thence to the vicinity of St. Mary's Cathedral, there to sing the old year out — and the New Year in. What a happy and joyful thought!

As a small boy, I can well remember, as I stood, on one such occasion, as it passed up Athlunkard Street, where I first saw the light, 80 years ago, stopping at the island corner where a group of men and women were singing songs, such as "I breathe once more my native air", "In old Madrigal", "The blue-ridded mountains of Virginia", "Moonlight on the lake", "There is an Isle", etc. To the surprise of all present, the band joined in the proceedings, rendering musical accompaniment in faultless fashion. To the accompaniment of the voices and the mellow tones of the fife, is something that will always bring my mind back to those happy days prior to World War I.

After the joyous peals of the bells on the old cathedral tower had ceased, and before departure, a voice in the crowd, shattered the silence in a rich baritone voice, when he rendered in faultless fashion:

Alas! those chimes so sweetly stealing,
Gently darest, gently doest to the ear,
Sound like pity's voice revealing
To the dying "death is near".
Yes, yes those chimes so softly
As from some holy sphere,
Sound like hymns of spirits
To be dying.

To be dying, "Peace is here".
Comel abide with us in heaven,
Here no grief can reach thy breast.
Comel approving Angels wait
In the mansions of the blest.

Around the period mentioned, a red-letter day in the "Parish", is the Feast of Our Lady's glorious Assumption into Heaven (August 15). On that occasion the band, in full regalia, would attend High Mass at noon in the parish church, and with the exception of the laying of the floors, built in its entirety by the whole-hearted co-operation of the members in their spare time, financial aid, too, was not wanting from many kind exiled friends and former members in America. It certainly is a hall of which any organisation, or association,



The President of St. Mary's Fife and Drum Band, Mr. Michael Bourke (second from right) presenting the Centenary Book to 83-year-old Mr. Paddy Quigley, Hon. Treasurer of the organisation before emigrating to the United States in 1924. Also in picture are Mr. Aidan Hurley, Vice-President; Mr. Colm McGrath, Hon. Sec.; and Mr. Padua Hayes, committee member.



St. Mary's all Ireland champions 1963. Standing: T. McGrath, S. Meehan, treasurer; M. Bourke, C. Connors, G. Clancy, J. McNamara, J. O'Dwyer, C. Kiely, bass drum; T. McCarthy, vice president; M. Kelly, J. McGrath, C. O'Dwyer, J. McMahon, V. Keyes, J. Harris, A. McGrath, E. Murphy, Seated: P. Danford, C. Nash, B.M.; M. Ryan, G. Tweedie, conductor; J. Daly, J. Kiely and P. Casey.

would feel proud to possess, even as a money-spinner alone. After a sumptuous repast had been partaken of, an impromptu programme — vocal and instrumental — followed. And what a treat, still spoken of whenever old-timers meet. First to oblige was the President with "Shades of Evening", sung with gusto, in his usual robust style, which evoked loud and prolonged applause. Next was Dan Doyle, U.S.A., with "Happy Moments" (most appropriate to the occasion), in a bass voice, that would bring a blush to the cheek of some of our operatic "stars". This was followed by Mr. MacNamara (still happily with us), on the violin, rendered in faultless fashion, "The Broken Melody", others to oblige were Jack Clancy, Larry Murphy, Paddy Sammon, Jim Ring, Paul Mackey, "Halley" Kennedy, Felix Lynch, Paddy O'Donoghue, whose "Boys from Garryowen" almost tore down the house (to use a metaphor). The last item of a most enjoyable lengthy programme — and which must go on record — was the striding old Irish jig and reels by Jim Hanrahan on the dulciana, which was of his own manufacture.

A truly wonderful re-union, which ended with songs of the good old days, racy of the soil, in which all joined, followed with the National Anthem.

Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.
—Longfellow.



St. Mary's all Ireland Prize Band champions 1963. Standing: T. McGrath, S. Meehan, treasurer; M. Bourke, C. Connors, G. Clancy, J. McNamara, J. O'Dwyer, C. Kiely, bass drum; T. McCarthy, vice president; M. Kelly, J. McGrath, C. O'Dwyer, J. McMahon, V. Keyes, J. Harris, A. McGrath, E. Murphy, Seated: P. Danford, C. Nash, B.M.; M. Ryan, G. Tweedie, conductor; J. Daly, J. Kiely and P. Casey.



St. Mary's all Ireland champions 1975. Back row: P. O'Donoghue, band sergeant; J. McMahon, M. Kelly, K. O'Donnell, T. McCarthy, J. Cronin, H. Hockedy, bass drum; J. Daly, Middle row: C. O'Connor, J. McNamara, J. McGrath, C. Kiely, staff major; J. Fitzgerald, A. McGrath, E. Murphy. Seated: A. Hurley, C. McGrath, hon. sec.; S. Meehan, hon. treas.; M. Bourke, president; G. Clancy, vice president; G. Tweedie, conductor; J. Daly, band master.

SENIOR FIFE AND DRUM CHAMPIONSHIP

Republic of Ireland Senior Fife and Drum Championship will be held at St. Mary's Hall, Mary Street, Limerick, on Sunday, May 19th.

This contest was accepted to be held in St. Mary's hall as a special occasion to commemorate St. Mary's Band Centenary, 1985. Bands will compete from Limerick, Wexford and Waterford. It is now ten years since the last fife and drum contest was held (1975). On that occasion St. Mary's Band, Limerick, winning four first prizes, Waterford being the venue.

P. COONEY CAR SALES LTD.
Corbally Road, Limerick
☎ 47490 / 47133.
Wish every success to ST. MARY'S PRIZE BAND on their centenary year.
ANY MAKE OF CAR SUPPLIED.
OPEN ALL DAY SATURDAY.

The band that will receive the highest amount of marks will then be deemed as the winners.

There are two events: No. 1, Best Corps of Drums; No. 2, Selection Piece which on this occasion will be "Minstrel Echoes."
Contest will commence at 3 o'clock sharp on Sunday next, May 19th, in St. Mary's Hall, Mary Street, Limerick. Republic of Ireland Senior Fife and Drum Championships are the brainchild of Pat French, former secretary of St. Patrick's Band, Wexford.

Congratulations and best wishes to St. Mary's Prize Band on their centenary year from
AQUA/PET PRODUCTS LTD.
25 CATHERINE STREET, LIMERICK
Everything for the Bird Fancier and Animal Lover
Also: Full range of Tropical and Coldwater Fish, Aquariums and Accessories.
TEL: 46556.

Congratulations and best wishes to St. Mary's Prize Band on their centenary year
— from —
SHEILA'S FRUIT & VEG.
51/52 Athlunkard Street, Limerick
PHONE: 46016.
"The Shop that sells Local Produce"

Congratulations and best wishes to St. Mary's Prize Band, Limerick, on their centenary year
— from —
GERRY & COLETTE McLOUGHLIN
"THE TRIPLE CROWN BAR"

Congratulations and best wishes to St. Mary's Prize Band on their centenary year
— from —
NOEL O'CONNOR
BEEF & PORK BUTCHER
Wickham Street, Limerick
TEL: 44174.

ST. MARY'S PRIZE BAND CENTENARY 1985
Republic of Ireland SENIOR FIFE & DRUM CHAMPIONSHIP
St. Mary's Hall, Mary Street, on Sunday, May 19th — Commencing at 3 o'clock. Admission £1 by Ticket only
Tickets can be purchased at St. Mary's Hall and John Costello, 1 Broad Street.