St Mary's Band take the prize at City Hall
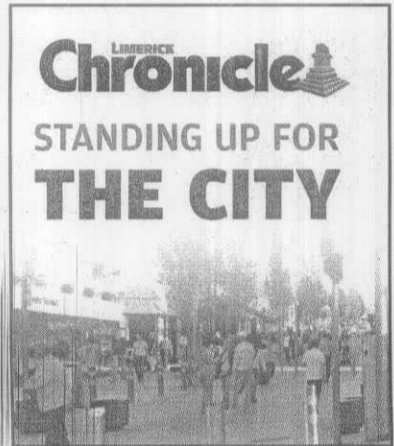
■ Civic reception for St Mary's Prize Fife and Drum Band who celebrate their 125th anniversary

Chronicle
STANDING UP FOR
THE CITY

Kevin Cronin

Former mayor Kevin Kiely with Jack McGrath, president St Marys Prize Band pictured diring the civic reception at City Hall for St Mary's Prize Band, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary
PICTURES: OWEN SOUTH

This picture shows members of St Marys Prize band in 1935. Back row: Patrick Kelly, Thomas Kelly and Thomas O'Mahony. Pictured in front are Oliver Kiely and Michael Kelly.
PICTURE SUPPLIED BY MAUREEN SPARLING

IT was a proud day for St Mary's Prize Fife and Drum Band last Wednesday as members, spanning ages from nine to 90, were finally awarded a civic reception in recognition of the band's 125th anniversary.

An administrative hiccup by city hall forced the band to turn away on the original date set for the reception, May 30, when the venue was double-booked by Limerick's Africa Day celebrations.

But there were smiles all round as former Mayor Kevin Kiely, in one of the final acts of his mayoralty, apologised for the embarrassing incident and did his best to make amends.

Jack McGrath, president of the band, said: "No apology is needed. This is way better than the reception we got a few weeks ago. We survived two World Wars and being locked out of city hall."

Mayor Kiely said he has held 63 mayoral receptions over the past year but that this was only his second civic reception.

"St Mary's band has an unrivalled record and you're a credit to your city," he added.

The mayor recalled the history of the band, which was founded in the autumn of 1885 and won its first All-Ireland championship that same year.

"I am very proud that my grand-uncle Christy Kiely and late uncle Cyril Kiely were members. My own mother Kitty Kiely went to New York with the band in 1992 and for 12 months after she kept talking about it. It was her first time ever in America," Cllr Kiely said.

Derek Mulcahy, bandmaster, told the Limerick Leader: "It's great for the band to get a civic reception. Our oldest member is Paddy Casey who is 90. Everyone is delighted and thrilled to be here. Our younger members got time off school as well, so that made it a double whammy for them."

Aidan Hurley, Vice President, said the band should have got the honour years ago but that "it's never too late".
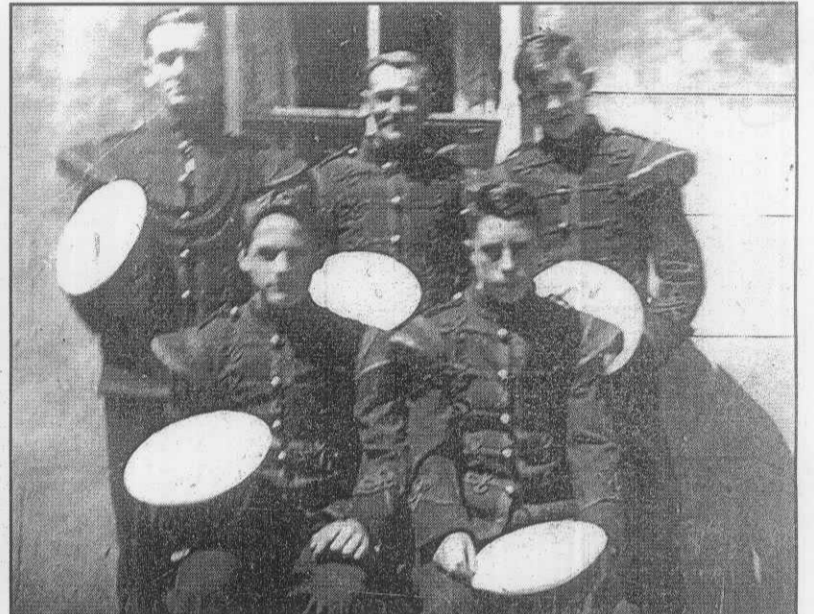
"We've had mayoral receptions before, but a civic reception means an awful lot. 125 years is a long time. I was delighted to be president from 1989 to 1993. Our first president Todsy McNamara was responsible for our hall. We have played in many St Patrick's Day parades, twice in America, and are going to Spain for our fourth time this year," he added.

Since the band's origin, it has had

Members of the St Marys Prize Band at the Civic reception in City Hall held in their honour by former Mayor Kevin Kiely

only five presidents, Patrick 'Todsy' McNamara, Paddy O'Mahony, Michael Burke, Aidan Hurley and Jack McGrath, with many of its founding members Abbey fishermen.

Cllr Ger Fahy said: "Its only appropriate that we acknowledge voluntary organisations that have made major contributions to our city on a social

and cultural level. No organisation survives by accident. It survives because of so much ongoing commitment for decades."

Cllr Gerry McLoughlin agrees that St Mary's band was a very worthy recipient of the civic honour.

"I remember when St Mary's won the junior cup in 1968. Without the

band playing, there wouldn't have been the same sense of euphoria," he said.

Cllr Kieran O'Hanlon said he was particularly delighted to see so many young members in the band, who are the future, adding that the band has brought happiness and fun to everyone in Limerick.

Cllr John Gilligan said: "I can't think of anyone who deserves a civic reception more.

"There are very few bodies that have lasted this long. They're much more than a band, they're part of our community. St Patrick's Day and the Band Parade wouldn't be the same without them."