

St. Michael's Rowing Club

OF Limerick's present rowing clubs, St. Michael's was the last to be established. But instead of saying that it is the youngest club, perhaps it would be more correct to say that it is the most modern club.

For everything about it has the mark of youthful virility. It was the first in Limerick to streamline transport to regattas, first to introduce the training tank, first to bring its Limerick oarsmen before the public of Ireland through the medium of television. And, if we may call it a social reform in sport, it was the first club in Limerick to break the old social barriers to rowing. It continues to do away with barriers. Its current ambition is to make the enclosure a memory and bring the finishing line nearer to the spectators.

But if it lives so much in the present, it has, too, an affectionate regard for the past, and for the men who made it such a memorable one.

The parent body of St. Michael's Rowing Club is, of course, St. Michael's Temperance Society. The Rowing Club has as officials, C. Mullins, deputy vice-president; Ged Dunnevan, honorary secretary; E. Phayer, captain, and M. Phelan, vice-captain.

There are thirty oarsmen in training, and on the water are two maiden eights, a junior four and an under-age four. This full complement of crews will compete at to-day's Cork regatta.

The crews had a late start in training, due to the bad weather, and—the Munster Junior Cup. And, if you are wondering what rugby has to do with it, many of St. Michael's oarsmen are recruited from Young Munster Rugby Club.

But, despite the late start, the maiden eights are making good progress. The junior four is an excellent combination and this year's under-age four has exceptional promise. Exceptional for the club has twelve oarsmen under-age, and from them it is hoped to form a crew which will beat the toughest opposition.

Coaching this season are Joe Wheahan, Willie Carmody, Paddy Stapleton, Cyril Mullins and Mick Gilligan. Coxswains are Cyril Mullins and Paddy Egan.

Though he is not, Paddy Egan has reason to be the proudest cox in St. Michael's Rowing Club, or, for that matter, in any club. For, in 1956, he steered to victory the senior eight that made rowing history for St. Michael's. It was the club's first win in senior eight class and they broke the record in very definite fashion. They swept the boards in the senior events at Limerick and Galway, led by their famous stroke, Mick Phelan.

For the record here they are: M. Phelan (stk.), P. Treacy, Stephen Meehan, Ted Phayer, T. Bourke, C. O'Shaughnessy, Noel Kilbridge, Tom Cooney and P. A. Egan (cox).

Last year, with Paddy Stapleton as captain, the club won the first senior fours at Waterford Regatta. For Paddy it was a happy coincidence and a proud memory. It was thirty years

since the club won the same trophy, and since Paddy stroked the crew that won it.

It was 1928 when Paddy started his rowing career. His crew competed in the Tallan Games of 1928, and were awarded Diplomas of Honour. In 1930 his eight had an unbeaten season. In 1931 they went under to the famous Emmett eight in the Senior Union Cup. But that year he won a senior four against stiff opposition.

A proud memory of the club is the unbeaten maiden eight of 1945, which rowed under the captaincy of that indefatigable club worker Tommy Hanrahan. The eight, which was stroked by Willie Carmody, was unable to compete in the Union Cup owing to the transport difficulties prevailing at that time. But later, down south, they met the winners of the premier maiden trophy and beat them.

Dick O'Halloran has a record which, for Limerick clubs anyway, must be unique. He was club captain for the nine years' period 1946 to 1954. His right-hand man during the term of office was Jack McCutcheon.

In 1955, Christy Hazlman took over, and established a club record by winning nine trophies. The record was again broken under the captaincy of Cyril Mullins with fourteen victories.

In 1931 the exiled members of St. Michael's were remembering their old club in tangible fashion. They commissioned the famous boatbuilders, Simms, to build the "Miss America." And from America to cox in its first outing came Ted Forsythe. However, it was not until 1956, at Galway Regatta, that the "Miss America" won its first race for the club.

Another generous gesture by the New York exiles was the presentation of the New York Cup in 1936. That year, the Limerick hurling team, All-Ireland champions, travelled to America. With them went Tom Dwyer, harness-maker, Roche's Street, who received the cup on behalf of the club.

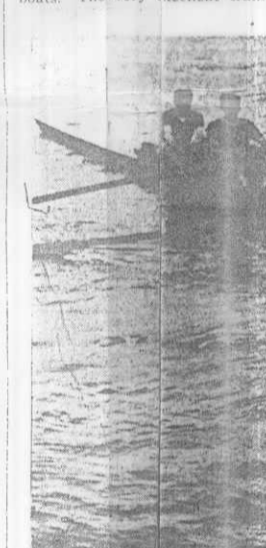
The club has had its share of vicissitudes. In 1933 the club-

house in the Docks was demolished to make way for the Dock Extension Scheme. But the hospitality of Athlunkard Boat Club was offered, and gratefully accepted. There they trained for the Senior Union Cup, but were beaten by Trinity in the final after leading most of the course by four lengths.

The new premises were built under the patronage of the then Bishop, Most Rev. Dr. Keane. A fund-raising campaign was initiated by Very Rev. Dr. Cowper, and the many willing helpers included Mr. Jimmy O'Dea, who gave the proceeds of a midnight matinee at the Savoy, and Mr. Donogh O'Malley, who organised a number of successful swimming galas to help. At that time, Paddy Beegan was secretary, a position he filled with distinction for the remarkable period of thirty-nine years; John White, deputy vice-president, and the other officials included Paddy Hoare and Paddy Ryan.

The new boathouse was officially opened in 1941. It houses a full complement of boats—a fine eight, a fine four, three clinker eights and two clinker fours.

To reduce the high expenses incurred in travelling to regattas, St. Michael's were the first in Limerick to sectionalise their boats. The very excellent train-



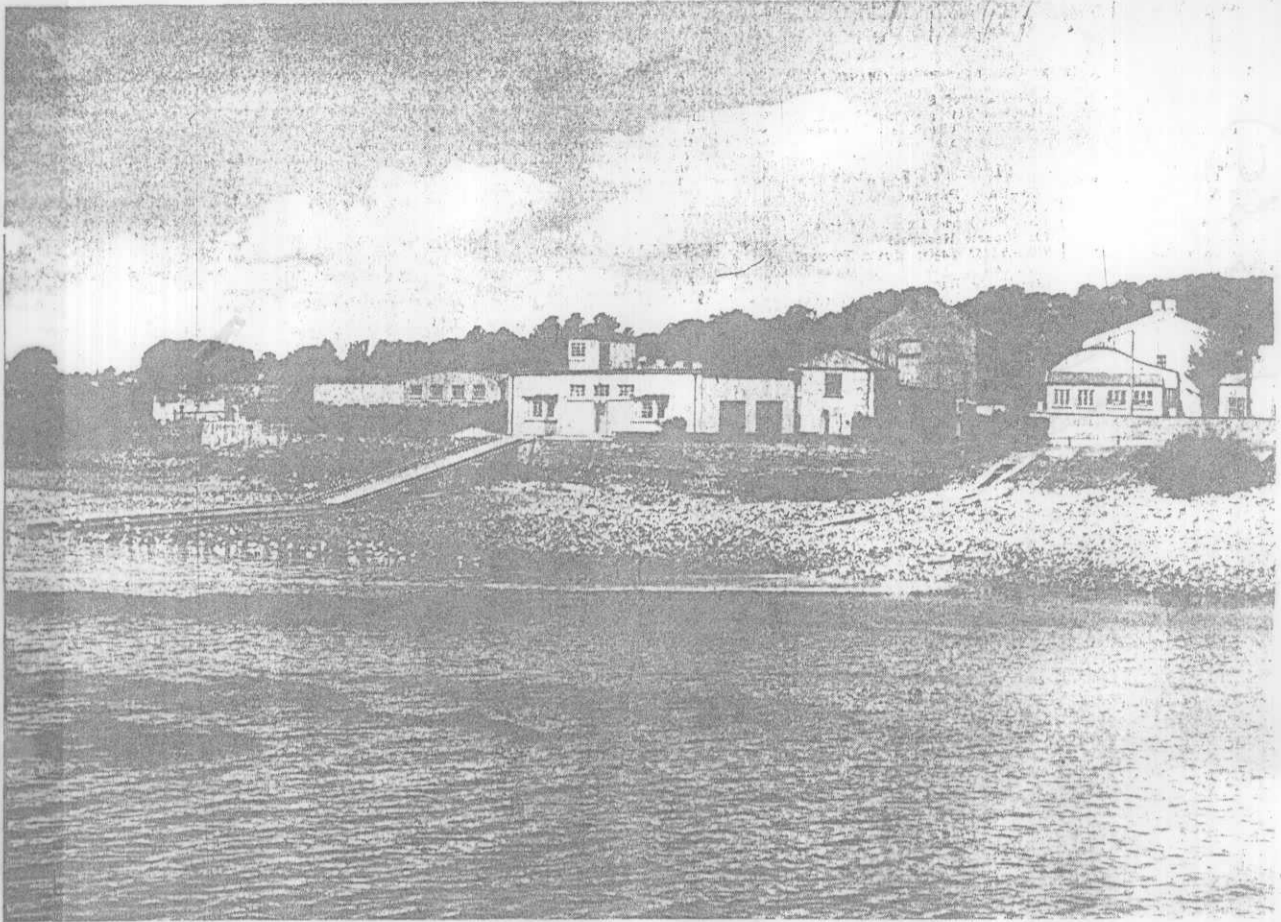
ing tank, also the first in Limerick, was built by the voluntary labour of the club members. The tank is adaptable in that the oarsman can row either stroke or bow by simply re-arranging the seat. It was designed by the captain, E. Phayer, and built under the direction of the vice-captain, M. Phelan, and Cyril Mullins.

The club numbers among its oarsmen three members of the Gardaí—Bill Cunningham, Michael Murphy and Jim McDonagh. A number of the boats are named after prominent members.

There is "Neil" in memory of the well-known painting contractor Ned Nealon, who was a great and life-long stalwart of rowing; "David," after Most Rev. Dr. Keane, a great benefactor of the Rowing Club; "Patrick," after Most Rev. Dr. O'Neill and "Fitzpatrick," after Rev. Father Fitzpatrick, a former president. This year's Limerick Regatta will see a long-left reformation which is sponsored by the club. The finishing line will be brought up to a point at Cecil Street, and the enclosure will be abolished. Spectators will, of course, be greatly facilitated by this innovation.

Club. Alderman Michael Joyce was the first captain of St. Michael's Rowing Club. And he was one of its most popular members. He had been a member of the Society's hurling team, and was also prominent in the famous Dramatic Class. Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer always took a great interest in the welfare of St. Michael's, and had a great personal regard for "Mick" Joyce. He never lost an opportunity of poking fun at him. On one occasion the Bishop was paying tribute to Mr. Joyce, who had been referred to by previous speakers as "a pillar of the Temperance Society." Humorously

rowing correspondent, his column in the "Limerick Leader" under the non de plume "No. 7" was widely read. Mick told me that the "Leader" was the first paper in Ireland to devote a weekly column to rowing notes. He was captain of the Rowing Club for 1917 and 1918. 1919 saw him "on the run" from the Black and Tans. One of the club's great strokes was Paddy O'Dwyer, who won a number of memorable races. The club was now firmly estab-



St. Michael's Rowing Club as seen from Russell's Pier.



One of St. Michael's maiden eight crews. Major current problem for the club is its slipway. At low tides, oarsmen are greatly inconvenienced, and have to wade into the water. The committee are making every effort to have a proper slipway put down, and it is hoped, with the co-operation of the Harbour Board, that this laudable aim will soon be achieved. And now a few words about the early years of the Rowing Club.

The popular M.P. was elected first captain and Jack O'Dowd vice-captain. After the initial difficulties had been overcome, and a boat or two put on the shelves, the great opening night came. Probably for the first time in the history of rowing, crews were drawn from the working classes exclusively, and they proudly donned the blue and gold singlets and went into training. The first eight, a hefty combination, were: Henihan, Cartillon, Hayes, Brinn, O'Dowd, Jackson, O'Connell and McCormack, with M. Hanrahan cox. Though they did not win, their photograph still has an honoured place on the Society's walls. The club's first win was the Murphy Cup in 1901. The following year saw the club colours rowed to victory in the race for the Cleeve Cup. The crew was: Jim Griffin, Pat Hannon, Jack Hanrahan and Bob Quin. The combination was an outstanding one and rowed unbeaten in Cork, Dublin and Limerick. A prominent oarsman of the club in the early years was Mr. Michael Hartney. He joined in 1904 and rowed in the first eight that won the Quin Cup. As a

lished, thanks to the splendid spirit of co-operation that existed among its members. Among those who kept its flag flying during the difficult years of the first World War were Tom McCarthy, Jack Hanrahan, Joe O'Halloran, Tom O'Dwyer, Paddy and Jack O'Connell, T. Brawl, Ned McInerney, the Ryans, Phonsie Enright, Tom and Jack Savage and Paddy McInerney. St. Michael's is one of the most vigorous and progressive of Irish rowing clubs. And its members of to-day are capable of the magnificent achievements won by those who went before.

M. Phelan, Vice-Captain (left), Cyril Mullins, D.V.P. (centre) and E. Phayer, Captain, examining the new outboard engine which is used to help in training the crews.



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