

# A Child's Parish Christmas

The road to Bethlehem  
Lay along the dark ridge of Park  
In the silent countryside  
Beyond the Abbey river...  
Images after sunset  
Of a woman laden donkey  
Led by a bearded man  
Along unfamiliar paths  
In cold moonlight.  
History was a living thing,  
And every Christmas was always  
The first happening in our  
Ancient narrow streets.  
To celebrate Christ's birth  
Each year in the candle-lit chapel  
At the incense-charged midnight mass.  
The side altar crib  
Was the true stable,  
With straw-strewn steps  
Leading to real figures  
In the deep red glow  
Of a St. Mary's nativity.  
In the adult world

Of late night and dark streets  
The youthful joy of admission  
To their grown-up preserve  
Was secondary to the sight  
Of shepherds in passage  
Over the Clare Hills,  
And star-led Kings  
Coming from the east  
Beyond Keeper.  
Later, when the window candle  
Was extinguished  
And its tallow smell  
Mingled with the festive aromas  
Of special preparations,  
I listened to fading footsteps  
Along the street outside,  
While father played Santa  
For younger children  
Before a silent world  
And 3 a.m. bed called, . . . .  
A Parish Christmas had begun again.

DONAL O MURCHU

the same area as "Davis's Garden").

In a note on his 1825 map Joseph James Byrne wrote:  
... the entire foregoing land and houses was shown me  
in a casual manner by Mr. William Carr whose  
property immediately adjoins it on the south, as be-  
ing the Kings Island — which agrees fully with the  
description furnished me; being the King's Island  
next adjoining the City Walls of Limerick on the  
North East, bounded by the said walls and the River  
Shannon.

Thus, sixteen years after Francis Waller had written  
the song in his honour, Billy Carr was still walking his  
garden. But no clues are given about the destiny of his  
three beauteous sisters, and we will never know whether  
they were at this stage 'happily married to a mayor, and  
a lawyer and tar'. Nor will we ever know if Billy invited  
the Dublin cartographer into his roomy stone house to  
partake of some whiskey from his big flawless bottle.

The old Limerick name of Carr features prominently in  
the history of the city. In the nineteenth century Carr's  
Livery Stables in Athlunkard Street are frequently listed  
in the record books of the Limerick Night Watch. Wan-  
dering animals and fowl were rounded up and impounded  
at the stables. It seems certain that these impressive  
stone-built stables were originally used by Billy Carr for  
his own horses. Later the building and yard, passed into  
the hands of the old Limerick family of sandmen — the  
Shanahans — who continued to use the premises until  
the 1940s.

But though his name, his garden and his sisters are now  
forgotten, one part of Billy Carr's property has endured.  
Before Athlunkard Street was built in 1824, a solitary  
house stood on that section of King's Island, just outside  
the city walls. This house (now almost hidden beside the  
present St. Mary's Catholic Church) was built about 1720  
and is one of the oldest inhabited houses in Limerick. The  
building has served as the home of successive parish  
priests of St. Mary's right up to the present day. This  
magnificent old house was the residence of Sweet Billy  
Carr, and it was here that he drank his whiskey and sur-



Billy Carr's house.

veyed the big praties, the tall trees and his three lovely  
sisters, as they gently perambulated their King's Island  
garden.

Now if you have a mind to live frisky  
And trouble and grief would you mar—  
I'd advise you to go and drink whisky,  
Along with the sweet Billy Carr!