

**GLIMPSES OF
LIMERICK**
by WILLIE
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Old Town Hall ain't what it used to be

THE beautiful cut-stone building, the City Hall, Rutland (formerly Father Mathew) Street, built in 1865, as the Commercial Building, was taken over by the Corporation in January, 1847.

Prior to 1673, the Corporation and City Council had their headquarters in the Tholsel (Town Hall), Mary Street — later to become the City Gaol, or Pest House, up to the year 1811. Parts of the 'edifice' which may still be seen in Gaol Lane, are over 500 years old, while some sources give the date as the middle of the 9th century.

Two fine pieces of carving which were in the Exchange, Nicholas Street, which for a brief time served as the Town Hall, are still preserved namely, the Royal Arms in the Mayor's office and the other in the Council Chamber. The Sword of State and Maces (4) occupy the Town Hall, respectively. Whilst an illuminated charter, granted by Charles II is also kept at the Museum.

The Council Chamber contains two fine paintings of Daniel O'Connell (1849) and Mayor Fitzgerald (1863). There are also paintings of Gerald Griffin, Mayor O'Callaghan, Mayor Clancy, Bard of Thomond, Robert Emmet and the blowing-up of the Siege Train at Ballynecety (1690).

In the Mayor's office there are paintings of Bishop Ryan (1864), Bishop Butler (1885), and Maurice Lenihan, printer and local historian, who was Mayor in 1884.

To this day there is, so far, no painting of Catherine Hayes, Ada Rehan, Bishop Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, Freeman of Limerick (1916); nor is there a picture of Brother Welsh, a Limerickman, who for 40 years was superior of famed Sexton Street C.B.S., while our City Fathers, God bless them, must have never heard mentioned the illustrious name of Sylvester O'Halloran, of Thomondgate, founder of the first College of Surgeons, in St. Francis' Abbey (1776).

However, all is not lost. The old "Parish" is remembered with paintings in the Town Hall: Fr. Michael FitzGerald, P.P., St. Mary's, up to 1871, and Fr. Laurence O'Keeffe, C.C., St. Mary's, up to his death in 1887. (On reliable authority, the writer has since been informed that these paintings are now in Ozanam House, Upper Hartstonge Street, where they can be seen.)

Note: The foregoing is a reprint of the original. Fortunately to have been discovered in the writer's home long before the Corporation bulldozer moved in, thus putting paid to the house where he first saw the light, as well as the other five houses, nos. 36 to 41 Athlunkard Street, to make room for yet another car park !!

Night Watch respected by citizens of the city

I REMEMBER them very well, some by name, a fine body of men. At 11 o'clock p.m., they would set out in pairs from their headquarters — a suite of rooms at the rear of the Town Hall — and proceed on foot to their allocated beat, or station, which covered every street and laneway, inside what was then the city boundary.

They were heard before seen, since they wore nailed boots which heralded their coming; no youngster would be on the street when those guardians of the peace — for guardians they were — made their appearance. People in those days enjoyed a good night's sleep. Doors and windows had not to be barred-up with protective iron frames, to keep away burglars, vandals, aye, and even murderers.

Caught

Any drunken rowdies who, perchance, happened to be caught roaring, shouting or otherwise disturbing the peace, wouldn't be asked to go home quietly, but told firmly: "Get you on you noisy villians, bet you on you noisy villians, and to this midnight bawling put an end". (Lines from a popular ballad pre-1914) Or again: "Plague upon you, plague upon you, drunken rascals" (also from the same ballad); do you want to spend the rest of the night and morning in the cold basement of the Town Hall?

In these good/bad old times there are those who will remember a little house at the Watchhouse Cross, and another near the Retreat House, on the North Circular Road, which served as checkpoints . . . and a drink of cha, maybe! for those dedicated men.

The Night Watch were respected by the citizens of all classes, in our ancient county borough, during the eighty years of devoted service to the community. They mourned their passing with the setting up of native government in 1922.

Theirs was a job of work well done!

In the interim, awaiting the arrival of our own native police force, the Garda Siochana, a voluntary body composed mainly of members of the Old IRA, and known as the Limerick City Police, did an excellent job in upholding law and order for which we will always feel grateful and remember with pride.

Watchman, what of the night?
All's well!! Slán.