

Those of us who were acquainted with Plassey before its devastation during the occupancy by the 'Rehabilitation' Institute, will remember the ferry house, with its grand backdrop of beeches and elms. This was a delightfully situated cottage, especially in pre-Shannon Scheme days, when the majestic sweep of the river flowed within a few feet of the front door. Its cosy smallness beside the towering mill lent it a special charm.

The site of this fairytale dwelling was not chosen for the scenery around it, but for the more mundane purpose of accommodating the ferry keeper whose job it was to ferry the horses across the river. These were engaged in the arduous task of towing the barges between Limerick and Killaloe on the canal operated by the Shannon Navigation Company, who had purchased the site from the Maunsell family.

The hazardous ferry ceased to operate in 1840 when the black bridge was erected.

The Ferry House at Plassey

PATRICK CURTIS
The first ferry keeper was Patrick Curtis, whose salary was fifteen pounds a year, plus the house and the narrow strip of foreshore between the garrison wall and Plassey bridge. The Curtis family continued to live in the house until the famine years. The house has had many occupants down the years, some of whom were employed by the Navigation Company.

THE HEFFERNANS
The Heffernan family were in occupation for a long time up to the years of the first world war. John Heffernan's sons were giants with flaming red hair. They fished the river with snap nets in defiance of the Abbey Fishermen, who had set up their own society in 1905. The Abbeymen, despite their numbers, made little impression on the giant Heffernan brothers, who had the goodwill of the Russells, and afterwards

William Wellington Baily, who owned the fishing rights between Plassey Bridge and the mill dam, three quarters of a mile upstream.

The story is told that the brothers - all over 6 ft. 6 ins. - found it tiresome reaching down to the counter ever so often for their pints, so they found it more convenient to rest them on the fanlight! They were said to be amusing raconteurs, and were very popular with the many trippers who came to enjoy the delights of

Plassey.

THE MADDENS
John Madden, recently returned from New York, where he had been captain of the New York hurling team, took up residence in the ferry house in 1918. John's family had been associated with the canal company since its beginning. Griffith's Valuations sets out the name of the keeper of the tide lock in 1854 as "David Madden." John, with his brothers, Mike and Tommy, had numerous certificates of the

Carnegie Hero Trust for lifesaving from drowning. A cousin, Andrew Madden, received a similar certificate, with a special citation praising his outstanding bravery in rescuing the engine driver during the train crash at Birdhill in 1914. John's most daring rescue occurred on a dark night in October, 1926, when he dived, fully clothed, into the well of Plassey (Annaghbeg) lock to rescue Mrs. Ryan, the lock keeper, who had missed her footing on the lock planking while making her way home.

John's brother, Tommy, a powerful and courageous swimmer, who had the greatest number of lifesaving certificates to his credit, was, ironically, one of the victims of the Plassey drowning tragedy of 1930.

Another brother, Denis, was long domiciled in Dublin, where he was the proprietor of the Garryowen Transport Company. Denis was an engineer with many outstanding talents. In the 1930s the British Admiralty accepted and purchased a device which he had invented for assisting in raising immobilised submarines from the sea bed. Some time before he had fitted a bicycle with floats and an ingenious gear system, which he used to cycle at unusual speed up the centre of the canal and the Shannon to Plassey bridge. The feat was watched by a great crowd. Denis died at a very advanced age, having some time before, at the age of 92, driven his own car from Dublin to Limerick to attend his brother's (Mike) funeral.

John Madden's grandson, Paddy, was Mayor of Limerick 1991/92.

OTHER OWNERS
John moved near to his old homestead on the canal bank in the mid 1930s, and a new tenant, Paddy McNally, of Cappavilla, moved in to the ferryhouse. Paddy left in 1938 and the house was taken over as a summer house by Harry Bowles, brother of J.J., the famous handballer.

Mr. Bowles sub-let the house to Christy Considine, a gentleman who has been part of the Plassey scene for the past fifty years.

PAUL SHEEHY
Finally the late Paul

Sheehy took a long lease of the property in the forties. Paul, who was a fine athlete, was an outstanding youth leader and Plassey enthusiast. He held the rank of Captain in the Irish Brigade in the Spanish Civil War.

Mr. Sheehy spent much time and expense renovating and reconstructing the house. His untiring restoration work left the house in its pristine condition. Unfortunately after this labour of love was completed Mr. Sheehy became ill and passed away.

Some time afterwards the house was seriously damaged by fire, but was restored again by Mrs. Sheehy.

THE SPOILED SCENE
Unfortunately the romantic prospect of the ferry house from the Clare shore, or from the bridge, is spoiled completely, not only by the disappearance of its arboreal backdrop, but by the appearance of a number of huts which crowd into the space between the Garrison Wall and the house.

Only once in the present century did the mighty Shannon floods compel the occupants to leave the house. This was in 1927, when the water entered the house and completely surrounded it. That was the year when the water flowed through the hand rails of Plassey bridge. On that occasion John Madden and his family took refuge in his mother's house on the canal bank.



Trauma

*I want someone's shoulder
To cry upon,
I want someone to love.
To express my feelings on,
You are the solution
To my lost son.*

*My son is gone,
His mind hates us all;
Now he is six feet under,
We loved him last fall.*

*My feelings are eternal,
For you and my son;
I could not believe
He died from a gun.*

*Cruelly taken away,
He cannot return;
For he took himself,
So for those lost years,
I cry and yearn.*

—AIDAN KEARNEY

FINAL TOUCH

Final Touch, Limerick's premier gift shop, with outlets in the Crescent Shopping Centre and at 122 O'Connell Street, Limerick, offers great gift value this Christmas.

Both of these outlets boast a huge range of gifts, novelties, housewares and furniture. The extensive selection of gifts and novelties includes soft toys, glassware, Aynsley china, kiddy's novelties, pot pourri scents and executive toys.

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