



Net! A spare roll of courtside netting makes as good a place as any for a bit of relaxation for this ladies' foursome.

Notable events in the 'thirties in Limerick

1936 was a noteworthy year in the social and commercial history of Limerick. The dreadful slums were being tackled with great purpose and resolution, and already the greatest part of the Island Field housing development had been occupied by the former residents of the unsavoury ghettos of the Irishtown, and some areas of Boherbuoy and the Abbey.

In September of that year Mr. Pat Molloy, who had already completed 480 houses in the 'Field' at a contract price of £450 per house, had successfully tendered £29,823 for 74 extra houses there. This popular contractor had just completed the concreting of all the principal streets, except O'Connell Street, which had been completed by 'Paver' Dillon six years before. The year also saw the beginning of the Distillery and Janesboro housing schemes, and also the beginnings of the great development of housing in the Prospect area.

Those of us who lived through this period cannot help comparing the dreadful living conditions in the slums, particularly Old Francis Street and Palmerstown, with the splendid new dwellings in salubrious locations. But there were many in the Island Field for whom the grand vista of the wide sweep of the Shannon with its picturesque back drop of the Clare Hills had no charms. They longed for the old hovels, with all their privations and squalour, where they had lived all their lives. Likewise, others who were moved long distances inveighed against their isolation from their old familiar haunts.

With the new houses came the freedom from the nightly task of trimming smelly paraffin lamps, and emptying still smellier toilet pails. The novelty of switching on the electric light was an additional pleasure, not to mention the convenience of modern toilets.

The Shannon Hydro Electric Works (Shannon Scheme), completed six years before, made the greatest impact in the lives of the people, and made it possible for the government that had branded it a white elephant, when they were in opposition, to launch the industrial revolution.

New factories were cropping up like mushrooms all over the country, and if some of the products did not measure up to the imported variety at the beginning, protective tariffs ensured a ready home market.

Limerick, already blessed with well established traditional industries, such as bacon curing, milling, clothing manufacture, tanning, timber yards and docks, was favoured with new factories for the manufacture of shoes at Mulgrave Street; a nut and bolt factory near the harbour, and, most important of all, a cement factory at Castle Mungret, four miles from the city centre.

These industries provided job opportunities for those who were permanently barred from jobs in the traditional industries, which were reserved for members of the families long associated with them.

The announcement in the Limerick Chronicle of May 21st, 1936, that Limerick had been chosen as a centre for the cement industry (along with Drogheda), created quite a stir in all circles. The

news was received with great jubilation all around, though the choice of Limerick for the industry was not altogether unexpected.

Fifty years before engineers had declared that the almost limitless quantities of blue clay in the area of the estuary just west of the city was ideally suited to the manufacture of first class cement.

The following month a site was selected in the midst of millions of tons of raw material at Castle Mungret, and soon we had our own cement. From the beginning the product of this factory hardly needed the tariff protection, as it was considered by experts to be not inferior to any foreign brands.

Looking back, one must regret the necessity of importing the hundreds of thousands of tons of cement

that were used in the construction of the Shannon Scheme, the city streets and the early housing developments. What a bountiful blessing it would have been if we had had our own cement factory at the time.

On the cultural side the Savoy, opened in 1935, provided the citizens with the finest cinema and theatre in the country. Here renowned musicians performed on the great Compton organ, and on the stage.

In 1936 the citizens were thrilled to attend the performances of Fritz Kreisler, Paul Robeson and John McCormack.

In that year also an Art Gallery for the city was mooted and was soon afterwards established in the premises of the Carnegie Free Library.

PARK HOUSE, CORBALLY

Park House, recently demolished in the development on the handsome housing estate of College Park area, was a fine mansion standing in its own grounds when purchased by Dr. John Young in 1809 for use as the diocesan seminary which he had established at Palmerstown in 1796, and afterwards moved to Newgate Lane and Peter's Cell. Later the college was moved to Lord Limerick's house at 103 Henry Street. Park House then served as a bishop's residence until Dr. George Butler purchased the mansion that stood on the site of the present college. This was formerly the home of a prominent local merchant, Pierce Shannon, who had purchased the greater part of the townland of Corbally from Col. Monsell in 1833. Shannon was a man of outstanding drive and enterprise, for he built several of the fine houses in the district and laid out the grounds. He also laid out and developed the present Corbally road from the top of the Mill Road to the Athlunkard Bridge.

He became an Alderman of the Limerick Corporation and was elected Mayor in 1844. While in office he used his great influence to have the city boundary extended to Corbally and Park.

He died suddenly while conducting a meeting of the Corporation and is buried in St. Munchin's churchyard.

Some fine residences stood on the high ground at the right hand side of Corbally Road. "Janemount" was the home of bakery proprietor, Stephen Tubridy. Next was "Avondale", home of the famous hatter, Vanesbeck, whose premises were at William St./O'Connell St. corner. Next was "Ashton Cottage" which changed hands many times. Then we had "Roseville", the residence of William Holliday, was the showpiece

of the district with its most beautiful garden. Trippers to Corbally could not pass the gate without feasting their eyes on the exotic spring wonderland. St. Clare Hobson's residence, "Lanahrone House", stood well in from the road and commanded a splendid view of the river. The site, and much of the lands are now taken up by the Irish Estates housing development.

Hobson is reputed to have been the first man in Limerick to drive a motor car.

William McDonnell, of "India Ville", claims another 'first' — he introduced the manufacture of margarine in Ireland. McDonnell, who died in 1921, had a long and honoured life in the public life of the city, and was prominently identified with its commercial and industrial interests. His name, as city treasurer, is to be seen on the entablature of Spillane's tower which was built on the Corkanree embankment in 1870.

The well known Dean Bunbury lived at "St. Anne's", next door. This was, at one time, the Church of Ireland Deanery. Next is "Geraldine", once the home of the post master general.

"River View", next on the way out, was the home of John Able, a man who certainly lived up to his name. He erected an observatory on the roof of the house and spent much of his time looking away from the earth. With the co-operation of his next door neighbour, Ned Finn of "Mary Ville", he built a perfectly round gate lodge between the two properties, the building being divided in the centre, internally.

Other fine houses were "Woodlands", "Mary Ville", "Mary Villas", "Roseneath", "Lax Weir Cottage", "Myrtle Lodge", "Corbally House" and the most beautifully situated of all — "Corbally Cottage", the home of the Walcott family.

Some of these houses still stand, others have lost their values and identities through the encroachment of modern housing. Many of the buildings reflected the judgement and good taste of their owners and of those who selected and laid out the sites. We should be grateful to those early proprietors for their foresight in planting the beautiful trees which are now in their full maturity. The great Californian redwood in the garden of Mr. John Dundon's beautiful home was one of those planted in 1815 to celebrate the victory of Waterloo. These splendid specimens, planted at that time, were known as "Wellingtonias".

Not far from the old gate to the Bishop's Palace was situated the Killeen graveyard, where, for many years, the remains of unbaptised infants and 'suicides' were buried. The practice of prohibiting the interment of these classes in consecrated ground prevailed into the present century. Nowadays many are ashamed to admit that such practices ever existed. In recent years many of these places were consecrated and used as general cemeteries.

O'Driscoll's well known property was in the possession of a rope maker during the building of the Limerick/Ennis railway in 1859. Since the railway line could not be diverted from intersecting the rope-walk a small bridge was erected over the permanent way so that the craftsman could continue with his industry. This bridge can be seen at the end of Mr. O'Driscoll's car park.



Limerick Corporation architect Jim Barrett pointing out the defects to Shannon Rowing Club building. The club is to be renovated.