CORNER BOYS

by Joe Malone

markets, this area was the traditional shopping centre for country people. The daily parade of rural folk incurred the wrath of the corner boys, who spent most of their verbal energy lampooning and lambasting the tightfisted "country mugs".

But the mood of the place would change dramatically when a salt boat from Siberia appeared on the Shannon. As if by spontaneous action, Tinsley's would burst into life. The big green gate would fly open; jute bags would be handed out to workers, with horse-nails to fasten the bags round their necks and, dressed like druids, caps back to front to keep the salt from flowing down their backs, the unloading began. This sudden explosion of activity upset the unhurried tempo of the corner boys' diurnal routine and, like MPs crossing the floor of the House, many of them - perhaps fearing contamination by the frenetic activity - crossed the street to a safer vantage point.

But there was some hopeful consolation. As the task of unloading the cargo neared completion, publicans often came to their doors with satisfied smiles on their faces. This was also a signal for the watchful observers. Salty

The well-known Limerick character, Steve "Mack", at his post.
work meant thirsty men. The corner boys would begin to sidle along towards the nearest pub. On these occasions they believed firmly in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

Another corner where city and rural people intermingled was Clohessy’s of the Mall. The Baal’s Bridge brigade cast a street-wise look at the long line of spalpeens who shuffled up and down the Irishtown. The spalpeens came into Limerick from the surrounding counties and stayed in the rough overcrowded lodging houses of Broad Street, Mungret Street and High Street. In spring and summer times they lined the walls of the Abbey river and waited, for the farmers to hire them. The clippity-clop echoes of their half-laced, hob-nailed boots along the footpaths of the Irishtown beat a dirge to the passing of these forgotten casualties of rural life.

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