

CROSBIE ROW

Crosbie Row, situated in the most ancient part of the King's Island, was built on the edge of the river Shannon. The place was called after the distinguished Limerick clergyman, Dean Crosbie.

Up to recent times Limerick was made up of a collection of small communities, each following its own distinctive types of occupation. Crosbie Row was a village within the old walled city, a village of fisher folk.

In its long history Crosbie Row has come within the parishes of St. Mary and St. Nicholas, the latter being the seamen's church. Two rows of yellow washed cottages were divided by bowways where the sun rarely shone. The imposing presence of St. Mary's Cathedral and New Gate Prison overshadowed the humble lifestyle of the fisherwomen and fishermen.

The name most associated with the place is not Dean Crosbie but that of a young man named Gerald Griffin, from the neighbouring Bow Lane. Griffin went on to achieve literary fame with the creation of "The Collegians" based on the Colleen Bawn trial. This book is regarded as one of the best Irish novels of the nineteenth century.

It was the Crosbie men and women who sat and waited for John Scanlan, the alleged murderer of Ellen Hanley, to be escorted to the Courthouse in Quay Lane. Women jeered and shouted, "Hang him, hang him". Scanlan was found guilty of the murder of the young fifteen-year old Ellen Hanley and sentenced to be hanged at Gallows Green. The same crowd gathered to pour scorn on the condemned man but a change of heart took place when the horses, which pulled the carriage with Scanlan inside, stalled at the top of Baal's Bridge. Cries of "He's innocent, he's innocent", were heard. "It's a sign from the Almighty", said an old man. And Scanlan went to his death, head bowed in grief, muttering, "I'm innocent, I'm innocent".

Gerald Griffin covered this tragic story as a young journalist for the Limerick newspaper for which he worked at the time. The crime and the events leading to the trial greatly influenced him and he was stirred some years later to write "The Collegians", from which derived the opera "The Lily of Killarney" by Julius Benedict and Boucicault's "Colleen Bawn". The courthouse where Scanlan was sentenced later became a school run by the Christian Brothers and was named in honour of the island's most il-

by Joe Malone

lustrious literary son, Gerald Griffin.

Tragedy came to the door of Crosbie Row itself some years later. Two young men and a thirteen-year old boy, while poaching on the river Maigue, were shot at by a bailiff named Madigan, who gave no warning to the unarmed fishermen. Madigan put a bullet through the heart of one of the men and seriously wounded the other. As he was about to finish off the wounded man, whose cries for mercy Madigan jeered at, the young boy forced the gun from the bailiff's hand, hit him with the oar and knocked him into the river. The boy rowed to the middle of the Shannon and with the aid of the tide which was on the make, rowed into the Abbey river to the slip at Barrington's Hospital. On arrival his two companions were dead. With the aid of an influential landlord, Madigan escaped to Australia. Crosbie Row mourned for many a day afterwards.

Most of the older Crosbie Row men spent some time in His Majesty's Service. In the evenings they would saunter off to the bandroom of St. Mary's in Nicholas Street and practice their fife and drum playing. They were a peaceful and contented band until 1889.

The Parnell-Healy split was fought with the same intensity in the bandroom of St. Mary's as it was in committee room No. 15 in the House of Commons. The only difference between the cities was that in London the scandal and slander-filled debate was confined to the two rival factions in the Irish Parliamentary Party, whilst in Limerick it was brother against brother. So, while Parnell walked the streets of London, a broken and dejected man, the divided loyalties of the bandsmen of St. Mary's led to the formation of No. 9 Band in honour of the nine members who sided with Parnell in London. There were now two bands in the parish of St. Mary's. The breakaway band supported Parnell, the remaining

members supported Healy and the majority grouping within the Parliamentary Party.

There was still a further diminishing of ranks when the Great War broke out. Men of the No. 9 Band "went down to the sea" and some fell in Flanders and on other battle fields. There was a humourous side to their enlistment. Kennedy the RIC man cycled into Crosbie Row waving the orders for "call up" and shouting into the low celled windows at the men who were in bed nursing sick heads: "Get up, get up, England is at war; the King needs ye". The reply was: "The King will have to wait until Monday. Our uniforms are in the pawn". It was Sunday morning and the bells of St. Mary's seemed to herald the impending nightmare the men of Crosbie Row would soon face "at the front".

There was general chaos and confusion. The pawnshops were closed and the pawnbrokers were on a day's outing in Castleconnell. Kennedy called a meeting of the men and told them that the pawnbrokers had broken the law, "His Majesty's property cannot be pledged", he declared. Off to Castleconnell went the Crosbie Row men in search of the pawnbrokers on their spree. Kennedy gathered the "Uncles" together and reminded them of their loyalty to the Crown. One pawnbroker replied that "the King will have to pay before we'll part with the uniforms". However, Kennedy eventually won the day and succeeded in redeeming the battledress.

Crosbie Row was demolished in the 'fifties and with the cottages also went the old name of Crosbie. But today if you walk down the street which bears the name of Andrew Cherry, that talented Limerickman of many roles, you will find the remains of an old bandroom where the famous Mickey Ra'agh trained the youth of the area in the art of fife and drum. But that's another story for another Journal.

The two rows of cottages which still house the last of the Crosbie Row fishermen, the O'Farrells, who came from Lough Rea in 1641, are now all that remain of this long and colourful story of old Limerick.

A postcard sent to Feathery Bourke by his nephew Tommy O'Grady on 31st August 1940.

POSTCARD REPRODUCED BY I. SALMON LTD

Post Card

SALMON SERIES

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ADDRESS

Wikie.
Will you send me
down my Sunday
Penny tomorrow
I want to bye see
Creme I went swimming
today. Tom O'Grady

Mr M. Bourke
40 High St
Limerick
Ireland

very hard, frequently labouring around-the-clock loading and unloading scrap and feathers and skinning horses and cattle. Feathery showed a natural aptitude for this work and quickly became expert in all aspects of the trade.

During the periods of Lent, Feathery and his mother diversified their operations. "Black" fasting was the order of the day at this time and the Bourkes began trading in salted herrings. The herrings were placed in brine in five or six barrels and sold outside the store at Cornmarket Row. At Easter what herrings remained unsold were eaten by Feathery and his mother.

In the early nineteen-twenties the Black and Tans set fire to three houses owned by the Bourkes in Cornmarket Row. During the fire Feathery's mother, Lil, rushed into the burning buildings and later emerged tightly clutching two pillow-cases stuffed with money. It was during this period also that Feathery pulled off one of his biggest business coups. The Strand Barracks had served as a base for the British military forces, and during the Civil War it had been occupied by republican forces. After this war, the Barracks was put on the market for sale, and, despite some intimidation by local nationalist forces, Feathery attended the sale and bought the property for a proverbial "song". He later sold the Barracks to the Limerick Corporation at a big profit.

In 1932 Fianna Fail came to power and the "Economic War" with Britain began shortly afterwards. Feathery did not approve of this "war" and feared for his own and the Irish Government's currency. It is well known that "businessmen make poor revolutionaries" and Feathery was no exception to this rule. He had no intention of going down with the "wrap-the-green-flag-round-me-boys" and took steps to ensure his economic survival if the worse came to the worse. In 1933 he exchanged £2,205 in Irish currency for English currency at the Westminster Bank in London, and

locked the money away in his own private safe for the threatened rainy day.

Despite the economic recession, Feathery kept going, and, after his mother's death, he redoubled his money-making activities. This overwork brought on a bout of illness, and, on doctor's advice, he was forced to take a rest. Faced, for the first time in his life with the prospect of taking a holiday, Feathery braved the daunting task of venturing alone into the big, unknown world. A sea cruise was suggested as the best means of convalescence, and Feathery agreed to make the necessary arrangements for a trial trip.

On May 3rd, 1937, he wrote to the International Travel Bureau, 19 Commercial Buildings, Dublin, and for £3.2.6d booked a place on a "grand" tour of Scotland, leaving Dublin by steamer on May 15th and returning on Tuesday morning, May 18th. Despite the relatively modest cost involved, Feathery was determined to get the best possible value for money by travelling in the third-class section. In his letter of May 3rd he informed the Bureau of this intention. On May 5th the Bureau promptly replied:

We have reserved a place for you on the above Tour as requested, but with regard to the berths we wish to point out that on Scotch boats there is very little sleeping accommodation, the berths only being available for those travelling saloon, and for that reason most of the party prefer to travel that way as it is very much more comfortable. However, if you decide to travel 3rd as already stated, we will make that reservation for you and we will refund you the 5/- when we meet you on board.

Feathery got the message and sent on a further 10/- to secure a first-class berth. However, second thoughts crowded in and he changed his mind about the excursion. He again wrote to the Bureau and got a refund of his pay-

ments.

When Feathery eventually managed to get away on a sea cruise his maiden voyage was not a success. He travelled in his work-a-day clothes and, dressed in a cloth cap and an old, shabby suit, the out-of-place dealer spent a lot of his time in the confinement of his ship's berth. Despite this set-back, however, he persevered and arranged to go on another trip on the T.S.S. *Tuscania* from 26th June to 9th July, 1937. On this occasion, his brother-in-law Leonard O'Grady had him rigged out in new shirts, hat, blazer and white trousers, and, for the first time in his life, Feathery travelled in style.

During this cruise he visited many places, including Madeira, Lisbon and Gibraltar. The holiday seems to have had a good effect on his health and his humour. On his return to Limerick he tried to trace the address of one of his fellow-passengers. It is obvious from the playful tone of his letters to a table companion that he greatly enjoyed himself and that he found the company of a Miss Woods particularly interesting. The letter, dated July 13th, stated:

I am sure you will be surprised at receiving this note from that bold, bad man on the *Tuscania* who made several attempts to get away with your purse and failed badly. I would like you to remember it was all in fun, without any serious intentions, and I am sure you looked on it in the same way. Both yourself and your husband were the life of the table and we all enjoyed your company to such an extent that I myself found it hard to part. I trust you arrived home safe and sound and your husband likewise, and that we shall meet again, if not in this Earth, with God's help in Heaven. I wonder would you have Miss Woods' address in London, as I did not get it from her before we parted in Dublin, and, as you know, I would like to drop her a line. I herewith enclose addressed envelope of the address I will be at on the 24th of July.