

# Echoes and Reflections

## SIXMILEBRIDGE

An explanation of how Sixmilebridge got its name is given in the diary of Thomas Dineley, who told us so much about our own country during his travels through it in 1680. His explanation is as follows: "From Bunratty Castle, the seat of the Earl of Thomond, into the town of Sixmilebridge – belonging also to that noble family – is three miles; whence to the City of Limerick, to which there are two ways, namely, by the Oil Mills and Cratloe Castle, beyond it, or over the famous mountain, famous for an admirable prospect, hanging, as it were, over Sixmilebridge town and commonly called by the name of Gallow's Hill; this is the upper, the other the lower way to Limerick, and from the town to the city is six miles either way, whence the town hath its name".

## TURKISH BATHS

Over a hundred years ago, there were numerous complaints that the city was without a public wash-house, and the much discussed swimming pool remained propositional (and remained so for the best part of a century). It was suggested, very meekly, that a Municipal Turkish Baths would not only pay, but earn a dividend. In November, 1887, D. Taylor, of Eden Terrace, opened a Turkish Baths at Sarsfield Bridge. Twenty men were engaged for seven months in the erection of the baths. Relations between the employer and the workers were not very happy and Taylor sued a mason named Peter McNamara for breach of contract in refusing to finish the work. The action, which was heard by the Mayor, Francis A. O'Keefe, in the court of conscience, was unsuccessful. The Baths flourished for many years and enjoyed a patronage which extended to Clare, Tipperary, North Kerry and Waterford.

The building was afterwards better known as Spillane's Tobacco Factory, and, despite the strife between mason and employer, the brickwork was said to be the finest to be seen anywhere.

## ARCHDEACON ROSS-LEWIN

The Ven. Richard Ross-Lewin was born in 1849 at Rose Hill in East Clare, where the family had considerable property. Many sons of the family gave distinguished service in the British Army and Navy. Richard himself served for many years in the Royal Navy before taking Holy Orders in 1877. He was installed to the incumbancy of Kilmurry in 1886, and this charge he held until the time of



Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond.

his death in 1921.

He was popular with Protestants and Catholics alike and is remembered for his little book of poetry, most of which refers to his native Co. Clare, but a few beautiful pieces are woven around his adopted surroundings, particularly his 'Men of Park'.

## THE BARD OF THOMOND

It is extraordinary that the Bard never lampooned or otherwise publicly abused (as he did to several decent men) the thugs who mugged him on Matthew Bridge in November, 1878. He may have found the incident too humiliating to recount, but the following account appeared in the *Limerick Chronicle* at the time: "A few nights ago, the Bard of Thomond, Mr. Michael Hogan was proceeding to his house at about eleven o'clock when he was waylaid on Matthew Bridge. Three roughs knocked him down, beat him savagely, stripped him of some of his clothes and robbed him of a pocket-book which contained some money. The poet received injuries of a very serious character. He hopes he will be able to identify his assailants, but no arrests have yet been made".

## THE POLO FIELD

In a discussion on the origins of the game of polo, which experts had agreed had originated in Northern

India, Lieut-Col. H.T. Russell, a member of an old Limerick family closely identified with the cultural and industrial development of the city, said: "I have always understood that polo was first played in the British Isles by the 17th. Royal Hussars on the land of Rathbane, a farm on the outskirts of the city of Limerick, then the property of my family, about 1868 or 1869. The regiment – or possibly a detachment – was then stationed in Limerick, having just returned from India... When I was a boy a particular field was known as 'The Polo Field', and possibly is still designated. The property was disposed of by my father to the late Mr. W.W. Baily, who established there the well known stud-farm".

The Polo Field is now swallowed up in the great housing development in the area.

## ELECTRIC LIGHT

The first shop in Limerick to be illuminated by electric light was Copeman's, at 130 O'Connell Street, and the date was December 17th, 1887, just a hundred years ago. Copeman's marked the occasion with a grand display of Christmas cards by electric light, and its advertisement stated: "If you don't want to buy, call and see the first electric light in a Limerick shop".

The Christmas cards sold at fifty for a shilling!

## THE THOLSEL

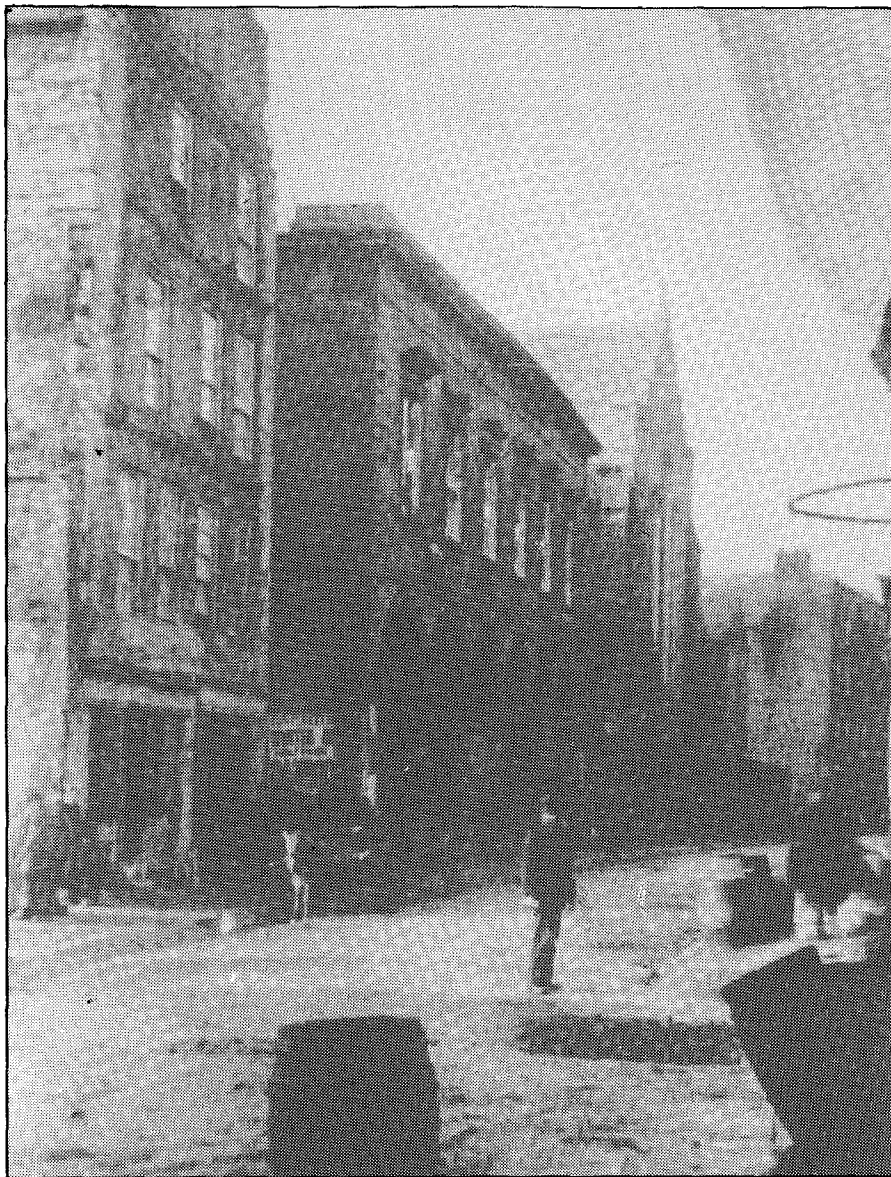
Next to St. Mary's Cathedral, the Tholsel was probably the most important building in the old city for nearly 300 years.

From the middle of the 15th century until the construction of the Exchange in the latter half of the 17th century, the building served as a Town Hall – the administration centre of the old city.

After the building of the new Town Hall, the Tholsel building was modified to serve as a prison. It remained the Bastille of Limerick until the new city prison was completed in 1813.

It will be forever remembered as the place where the most appalling cruelties and savagery were suffered by those unfortunates who were arrested on the flimsiest evidence of sympathising with the United Ireland movement during the 1897/8 period. The numbers of innocent victims who were hanged and flogged to death by sheriffs Lloyd and Webb are beyond counting.

The massive building remained in a state of quiet dereliction until the City Councillors thought about destroying it – a trait which, unfortunately for the



*The Exchange, Nicholas Street, at the turn of the century.*

city, has proved to be endemic.

In 1936, the City Council gave permission to a Mr. McNamara to demolish the building, provided 'he erected a plaque to mark the spot'.

No plaque was ever erected. The facade and the wall at the southern side were taken down, with great difficulty, for the walls were five feet thick, and a huckster shop (a solid concrete effort) was erected over the dungeon. Part of the old structure can still be seen behind the shop, 'The Tholsel', which stands on the site today.

### A BALLAD OF PETER TAIT

In 1866, and during the following two years of the mayoralty of Peter Tait, the ballad in his honour, written by Thomas Walsh, of Watergate, was sung in pubs and at gatherings here and there in and around the city.

This effort was written to the air of the 'Green Gown Lass', and called on the electors to 'stand by Peter Tait' as they will 'find he won't be bate, for he is

worthy of a sate, says the green gown lass'. The doggerel goes on to shower praise on the mayor, 'that our city would be great if we had a few like Tait', as 'they would close the poorhouse gate'.

But despite this exhortation, people did not 'stand by Peter Tait'. They promptly forgot his generosity and the great industry he had built up from nothing. He found to his cost that there was no mercy for failing politicians.

### CLAY PIPE INDUSTRY

The recent demolition of Merritt's old premises in Broad Street recalls the once thriving industry that was carried out there.

The firm of John Merritt manufactured 21 different types of pipes; these were made from the best Cornwall clay and were exported in their thousands to several countries, including South Africa, Australia, Canada and the United States.

Other clay pipe manufacturers were

Garvey's and Kinevane's.

### THE COLLEEN BAWN

It may not be generally known that a step-sister of Ellen Hanley, the Colleen Bawn, was alive just a hundred years ago at Lissavara, Adare. Although well advanced in years, she was still in full possession of her faculties, and, according to a report at that time, 'related with extraordinary vividness and accuracy of detail nearly all the incidents connected with the romantic history of Eileen. She can describe the personal appearance of the principal characters of the tragedy'. She states that she was present at some of the meetings of Scanlan and the Colleen: she remembered many of the curious facts 'which were never published in any of the written accounts of that strange tale of love and murder'.

### CITY WATER SUPPLY

Water on tap in our homes is quite a modern revolution; indeed a 'H and C' sign outside guesthouses is an added badge of respectability. But a hundred years ago, most of the household water was drawn from wells and pumps all over the city.

Here is a list of some of the principal wells and pumps in the city: Molly Gleeson's Pump, in front of the butter-market in Cathedral Place; two pumps at the rear of Clare Street brewery; a pump near the Claughaun Bar; a well, largely-used, near St. Patrick's chapel, Pennywell, off Clare Street, on the road to Park; Halfpenny Well, near Park Lock; a well at the rear of the convent of St. Mary's; Sarsfield's Well at the rear of Nicholas Street; pump at the end of Pump Lane (St. Francis Place). Spring well at the corner of the Quarry Road; a pump near the schoolhouse on the High Road and the splendid fountain in Cathedral Square.

### O'DWYER BRIDGE

In 1931, the late Rev. Dr. Cowper submitted a copy in Gaelic of the English inscription for the new bridge sent him by the Limerick Corporation: "This bridge is dedicated to the memory of the Most Rev. Dr. O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick, 1886-1917, an Honorary Freeman of the City, in recognition of his great services to Church and country". The Gaelic League was disappointed at the Corporation's intention to place the English inscription on the bridge, as it was felt that in thirty or forty years time Ireland would be a native-speaking country.

Both plaques were duly erected, one on each side of the bridge. The one with the Gaelic inscription was destroyed by vandals after a few days and was never replaced.