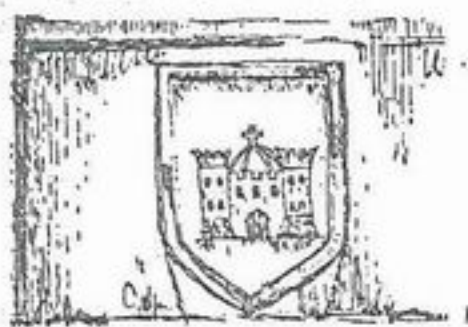


The young Garryowen gentlemen amused
themselves by wringing the necks off all the geese
... and the knockers off all the doors



Garryowen

MOST of us take the name of Garryowen for granted. We know that a famous military air, a Limerick senior rugby team, an "up-and-under" rugby kick and a few other sporting groups have been called after it, that the "Walls of Garryowen" were badly battered by shot and shell during the Williamite sieges ... and not much more.

But how did the Limerick district, known as Garryowen for more than two hundred years, originally get its name? Gerald Griffin, writing in 1828, gives this account in his book *The collegians*:

'Tradition has preserved the occasion of its celebrity, and the origin of its name, which appears to be compounded of two Irish words signifying Owen's garden. A person so called was the owner, about half a century since, of a cottage and plot of ground on this spot, which from its contiguity to the town, became a favourite resort with the young citizens of both sexes. Owen's garden was a general rendezvous for those who sought for simple amusement or for dissipation. The old people drank together under the shades of the trees, the young played at ball, goal, or other athletic exercises on the green; while a few lighning by the hedge-rows with their fair acquaintances, cheated the time with sounds less boisterous, indeed, but yet possessing their fascination also.'

But the ordered life in the garden and

in Garryowen itself was destined to be rudely disturbed by the unwelcome arrival of a gang with another kind of sport in mind. Gerald Griffin cast a mildly sardonic eye on these young men and their activities:

'These young gentlemen, being fond of wit, amused themselves by forming parties at night, to wring the necks off all the geese, and the knockers off all the hall-doors in the neighbourhood. They sometimes suffered their genius to soar as high as the breaking of a lamp, or even the demolition of a watchman ... annoying the peaceable inmates of the neighbouring houses with the long continued assaults on the front doors, terrifying the quiet passers-by with every species of insult and provocation, and indulging their practical propensities against all the geese in Garryowen.'

Who were these disorderly young men? they were the sons of merchants and wholesale traders of the city. We know two of them by name: their leader, Johnny Connell, and another tearaway, Harry



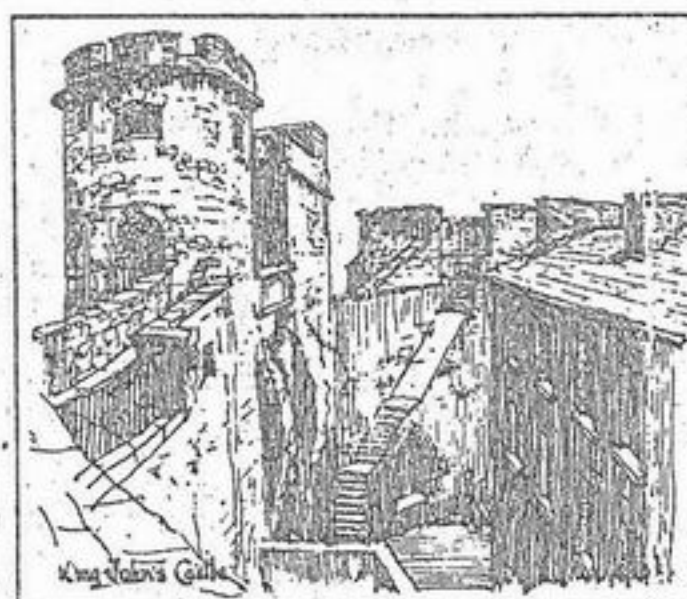
JIM KEMMY TD tells the story of the Limerick district with a name that is known around the world ...

O'Brien. The Connell family owned one of the two breweries in Garryowen, but young Johnny showed more interest in making mischief than in making porter.

The boys did not, by all accounts, confine themselves to Garryowen. Writing in the middle of the last century, the Bard of Thomond, Michael Hogan, in his best poem, "Drunken Thady", tells how the gang made one of its rampages into St. Mary's parish and shattered the hushed midnight mood of Christmas Eve:

'The sweet-toned bells of St. Mary's tower,
Proclaimed the Saviour's natal hour!
And many an eye with pleasure glistened!

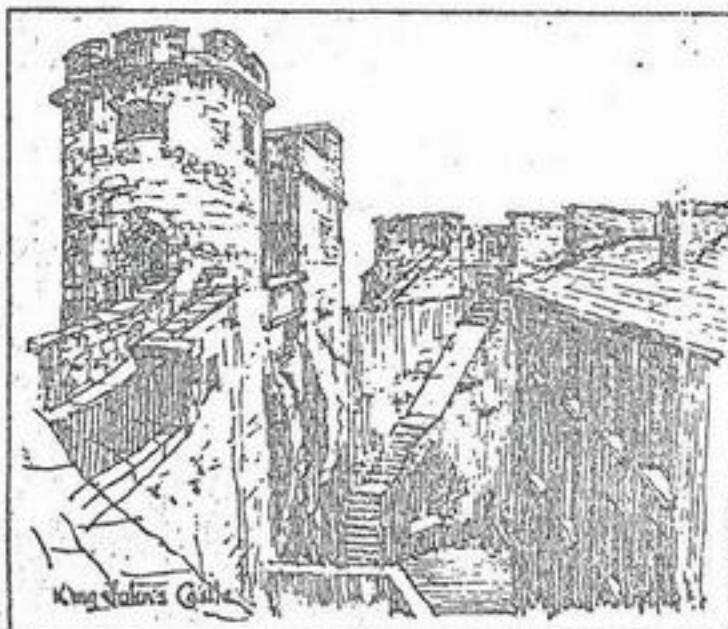
And many an ear with rapture listened!
The gathered crowd of charmed people
Dispersed from gazing at the steeple:
The homeward throng of parting feet,
Died on the echoes of the street;
For Johnny Connell, the dreaded man,
With his wild-raking Garryowen clan,
Cleared the streets and smashed each lamp,
And made the watchmen all decamp!



But the greatest celebration of Johnny Connell and his boys is to be found in the song 'Garryowen'. The unknown versifier who composed the words has ensured that the name of the old place will live forever.

The song starts off with a rallying call to "each jovial blade" to "come booze and sing" and not to reckon the cost:

'Let Baccus' sons be not dismayed,
But join with me each jovial blade:
Come booze and sing, and lend your aid;
To help me with the chorus:
Instead of spa we'll drink brown ale,
And pay the reckoning on the nail,
No man for debt shall go to jail
From Garryowen in glory!



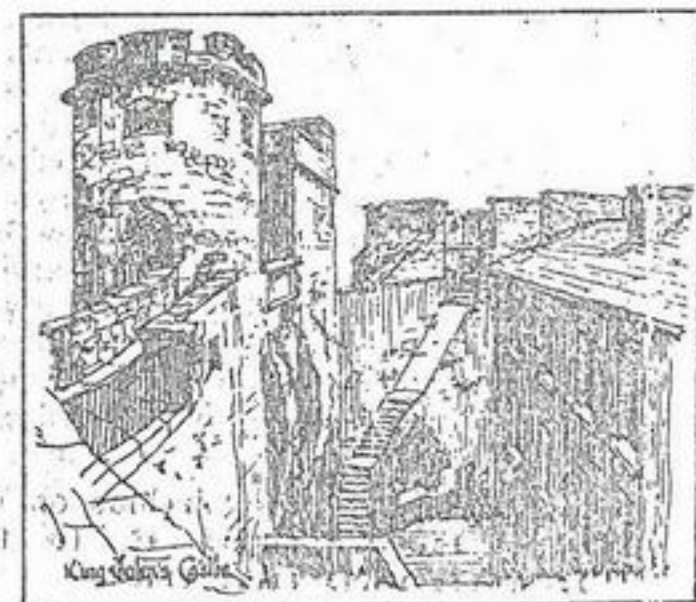
Street lamps were first erected in Limerick at the expense of Alderman Thomas Rose in 1696. The hissing flickering gas-lamps made an easy target for the "boys", as did the feeble old watchmen who vainly tried to protect them. The song declares:

'We are the boys who take delight in
Smashing the Limerick lamps when
lighting,
Through the streets like sportsmen
fighting
And tearing all before us.
We'll break windows, we'll break
doors,
Then watch knock down by threes
and fours,
Then let the doctors work their cures,
And tinker up our bruises.'

Even the mayor, bailiffs and sheriffs held no tears for the gang:

'We'll beat the bailiffs out of fun,
We'll make the mayor and sheriffs run;
We are the boys no man dares run;
If he regards a whole skin.'

● To Page 7



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