HISTORIC LIMERICK AREA

The District Of Old Garryowen

INTERESTING PAPER BY MR. JOSEPH KEYES

At a recent meeting of the Old Limerick Society, Mr. T. F. O'Sullivan, B.E., chairman, presiding, the following interesting paper on "The District of Old Garryowen" was read by Mr. Joseph Keyes:—

I am taking for the subject of my talk to-night that district termed generally Garryowen but more exactly the area bounded by Cathedral Place on the west, Mulgrave Street to the south, and on the other sides Garryowen and Greenhills. Sometimes I may stray further afield.

A glance at the map shows that a great change has taken place in this area during the past 100 years, and many of the old names have been changed. The Cathedral had not been built and Cathedral Place, as we know it, was called Rampers Road as far as the junction of Summer Street, opposite the Haymarket gate, and from that to St. John's Hospital was called Nicholas Street, so there were two streets of that name, the other being the present one in St. Mary's Parish. The R.C. Church then stood near where the Sarsfield statue is at present and there was a large building where the fountain stands. On the ground of what is now St. John's Girls' School was a small brewery, while the site of the Cathedral was occupied by a number of small houses. The Cathedral itself was begun in 1856, and the spire, which is 280 feet high, was not completed until 1883.

On the old maps, the road beside the Cathedral is called Garryowen; further up near the Markets Field it was called the Spittal, and at its termination near Blackboy Pike called Green Hills. At the rere of Green Hills was the original Fair Green, and at the south end of it was Gallows Green. The Markets Field was formerly a large quarry which was gradually filled in and converted into its present condition. A very interesting place is that which lies between Garryowen and Mulgrave St. on two sides and on the other is bounded by the road in front of the Markets Field and the Rope Walk opposite the Mental Hospital. This was the site of the famous old Garryowen Brewery, owned by a man named Fitzgerald, which gave direct employment to 40 men. Its main entrance was through a large imposing gate opposite the present Market's Field gate; on each side was a high wall extending to Garryowen and Mulgrave Street. This wall had a number of square windows, similar to those which may be seen in the old mills of the city, and in later years it often served as a grand stand for numbers of young men who, from it, had a free view of matches in the Markets Field, the walls of which were then only about half their present height.

There was a large two-storey building just where St. John's Avenue is at present. This was the residence of one of the owners. Beside it was an iron wicket gate, and from that to the end of the rope-walk there was a wall about 4 feet high with a cut stone coping into which was set an iron railing, bringing the whole to about 9 feet high. In the centre of the grounds, some distance from the end of St. John's Avenue, was a circular pond about 15 feet in diameter, the sides being stone built. This supplied the water required for the brewery and for one of the industries which succeeded it. I was unable to discover what became of this spring, but the water was probably turned into some sewer.

In addition to the employment given directly, this brewery was a great boon to the farmers of the surrounding district, as it provided them with a ready market for their grain crop, which after it had been treated in the factory provided an excellent food for cattle. The brewery closed about 64 years ago.

After being idle for a time the premises were taken over and converted into a factory for the manufacture of blood and bone manure, the raw materials being supplied from the local bacon factories. This business did not last very many years and, because of the unpleasant smell it caused, it was transferred to more suitable premises in what had been a flour mill at Singland, where it had the advantage of a water wheel worked by a stream. Incidentally, I may mention that this stream worked four other mills, McAuliffe's milk factory in Ballysimon, and a small mill for dressing marble which is now occupied as a private dwelling house near the roadside, where large slabs of the marble may yet be seen. It was from this district [illegible] material was taken for [illegible] been separated, an amount of it was taken home again to feed stock, while numbers of women and children carried large quantities away for home-baking. This factory gave considerable employment for a number of years, but finally closed about 1895. About this time the city had commenced to expand and this site was taken over for building purposes, and in 1895 those houses called Grattan Villas, opposite the Mental Hospital, were built, and in 1899 the front of the old factory was taken down and a range of brick houses called Geraldine Villas was built. Later this range was continued over to Garryowen and the entire lot were occupied by soldiers from the Strand and Artillery Barracks. In 1905 Fair View houses in Garryowen were built and a short time after St. John's Villas and Avenue, thus completely removing all traces of what had been three local industries.

I have referred to a rope-walk as a boundary already; let me now return to it for a short time. Unlike the others, which are extinct, this industry, which is well over 100 years in existence, is still in production, which is a testimonial to the quality of the goods produced there. Perhaps a few words on how ropes are made may be of interest.

The walk is over 100 yards long, completely covered in, so that work may go on in all kinds of weather. Along the centre are placed a number of wooden pillars at regular intervals, and from these extend arms or brackets on which the ropes rest while being manufactured. The raw material, jute and hemp, arrived in bulk like wool, and the rope-maker, having wound a lot of it around his waist, fixed a small portion to a wheel, which was turned by another man. The rope-maker then walked backwards, giving out the hemp slowly, so that it was gradually twisted into a cord. This work required very considerable skill, so that a uniform amount of material was let out; otherwise one part would be too thick and another too thin. When a large number of these strands were ready the actual rope-making commenced. The required number—2, 3 or 4—were taken and fixed on to the wheel already referred to, or to a similar one, which is mounted on four wheels. A large block of wood, called a top, is then used, with each strand passing through a separate hole and brought out through one at the end. They are then fastened to the wheel, and while one man turns this rapidly another pushes the top forward, thus bringing the strands together, so that, going in as three or four, they emerge as a firm, well-made rope. Of course, there are other details to be attended to, but this is the main part of the manufacture. There are at present a good many men working there and the prospects for the future are very bright.

The County Infirmary was opened to the sick on 15th June, 1811. It was built by Lord Emly to replace one which stood at St. Francis Abbey. Inserted into the wall in the entrance hall is a large stone slab bearing the following inscription:—"County of Limerick Hospital erected by private subscription both of County and City of Limerick on the ground given in perpuetuity at a grain of peppercorn a year by Edward Sexton Perry, 1760." This stone was placed in its present position in 1943 by our distinguished fellow citizen, Dr. John Devane, who takes a very deep interest in the institution as did also the late Dr. Fogarty.

At the end of the Infirmary grounds and beside the stone yard of Mr. John Coffey is a building at present divided into two houses; at one time it was a well-known tavern called Fox and Geese, because outside it was a sign board showing the former taking care of a flock of the latter. In connection with this I have heard that during the period after the rising of 1867 the prison was crowded with political prisoners, but not all the Fenians wore convict garb, because some of the warders were also members of the organisation. Which fact explains how on certain occasions 2 or 3 prisoners could slip out in the evening and adjourn to the Fox and Geese. After they had had their refreshments they would quietly return to their cells. This continued until they finally escaped to America, and the mystery of their disap-

Fitzgerald, which gave direct employment to 40 men. Its main entrance was through a large imposing gate opposite the present Market's Field gate; on each side was a high wall extending to Garryowen and Mulgrave Street. This wall had a number of square windows, similar to those which may be seen in the old mills of the city, and in later years it often served as a grand stand for numbers of young men who, from it, had a free view of matches in the Markets Field. the walls of which were then only about half their present height.

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On the Ballysimon road, between the railway bridge and Clino, were two brick yards—one owned by the late Mr. John Portley and the other by a Mr. Walsh. The latter was a large concern, having two kilns for burning the brick and a large shed covering the engine and machinery. There were several sets of rails on which small lorries brought the clay to the machines, where it was pulverised and shaped before being put into the kilns. Having been made into the shape of bricks, they were first laid on boards to dry for a few days, and then placed, criss-cross, in the kiln until it was full to the roof. The doors were then built up and fires, set in a number of spaces which were placed around the kiln, were then lighted. There was a flue in the centre of the roof, through which the smoke was emitted. It took about seven days continuous burning before they were ready; the fires were then drawn and the bricks taken out. There were about 40 men employed and most of the brick used in Limerick at the time were made here. It closed about 45 years ago and was a great loss.

But to get back to Garryowen, the brewery site had another period of idleness until it was again taken over, this time by a Milk Co., and when a lot of new separating and butter-making machinery had been erected it commenced business. Every morning a long row of farmers' carts could be seen delivering their milk, which, after it had

would be too thick and another too thin. When a large number of these strands were ready the actual rope-making commenced. The required number—2, 3 or 4—were taken and fixed on to the wheel already referred to, or to a similar one, which is mounted on four wheels. A large block of wood, called a top, is then used, with each strand passing through a separate hole and brought out through one at the end. They are then fastened to the wheel, and while one man turns this rapidly another pushes the top forward, thus bringing the strands together, so that, going in as three or four, they emerge as a firm, well-made rope. Of course, there are other details to be attended to, but this is the main part of the manufacture. There are at present a good many men working there and the prospects for the future are very bright.

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On the map there is a building shown in the markets ground, beside the tram track, which was a hospital over 100 years ago. Later it was used as a married quarters for soldiers stationed in the nearby barracks. It is now very dilapidated and it will probably soon disappear.

We are now back in the markets, which were at one time a very busy part of the city. The Limerick pig market was one of the most important in Munster owing to having four bacon factories beside it. It also served a rather unusual purpose, as it was here a man named "Sequah" practised both as dentist and doctor about 50 years ago. He was a very striking personality with long hair brushed back almost to his shoulders. He drove to the markets every evening about 3.30 o'clock in a most elaborate equipage which resembled a glorified stage coach. On top was seated a band or orchestra which played, if not sweetly, at least very loudly, while he waved to those on the sidewalk. Arrived at the markets, the horses were removed and the driver's seat soon became a dentist's chair, to which he invited anyone who wished to have teeth extracted free of charge. It was surprising how many availed of the offer. I do not know if cocaine had been introduced at the time, but he certainly did not use it, and the band overhead drowned the cries of the patients.

The Haymarket is in Cathedral Place, beside the Parochial House. Hay is not in much demand now, but forty or fifty years ago, before the coming of the motor car, and when all travelling and haulage was done by horse, it was no uncommon sight to have loads of hay extending from the weigh-house in the market, up Cathedral Place and down as far as William Street Barracks, and a corresponding number down Lelia Street and Clare Street.

The Butter Market, now Messrs. Molloy's, was completely enclosed and flagged, and had rows of tables extending the full length of the building. On these tables the farmers' wives displayed the lumps of butter and here most housewives bought their weekly supply, but the greater portion was sold in firkins for export.

In the open, to the rere, stood the Cornmarket. To facilitate the trade, paths about four feet wide and two feet high extended from

[redacted] August.

one end of the market to the other. Beside these the farmers drew up their loads of grain, while the buyers moved up and down sampling the various lots; loads of corn were then often counted by the hundred.

We have now completed the circuit of this district of old Limerick. Perhaps I have gone further than I originally had intended, but the study of old records awakens memories so that one thing leads on to another, and if you, in listening, have derived half the pleasure that I had in writing these few notes I am well pleased.