
GURKY McMAHON WAS BURIED TODAY

Thomas (Gurky) McMahon was born in 1890, before the "gasoline buggy" or the cinematograph were invented, when a glass of stout cost a penny, a whiskey twopence, and the fare to America was ten pounds sterling. He died yesterday, aged eighty years, and was buried today at Mount St. Laurence Cemetery.

Gurky McMahon was a legend in his own lifetime. He was making Limerick laugh before Hope and Groucho Marx and Durante were ever heard of and long before the toothy Rowans and Martins were born.

We stood at the gate of the cemetery as the cortege came up Mulgrave Street, not daring to quote any of his famous jokes, but remaining silent out of long respect. As the hearse drew nearer a whispered and urgent enquiry - a supplication almost - to the sexton to re-assure ourselves that this was really his funeral. And a stab of bitter sorrow to be told that it was.

No more than twenty mourners shuffled silently behind the hearse, self-conscious it seemed at their own lack of numbers, and three modest wreaths rested on the coffin. Up at the front the undertaker's man, black-clad and straight as a rod, walked past with measured solemnity.

The doctors, solicitors, and shop-keepers might not have known Gurky McMahon, but there is hardly a working man in Limerick who did not claim the privilege of his acquaintance. For Gurky was essentially a working class hero, a docker who toiled relentlessly for a spartan existence against the gruelling odds and grinding poverty of his day, and all the time he preserved his compassion and legendary humour - a working class humour, simple, unsophisticated.

Gurky leaving his brand-new house in the then brand-new Island Field to go to a nearby shop for a pint of milk in a jug and on his way back forgetting which was his own house, because they all looked the same, and saying to a group of children playing on the street: "Come here, young fellas. Did ye see e'er a man coming out of one of those houses along there with a milk-jug in his hand, and could you show me the house he came out of?"

by SEAN BOURKE

Gurky in England, returning in the evening from work for his dinner in a Birmingham lodging house. There is a small steak-and-kidney pie and one solitary potato on his plate. Gurky sits down, picks up a fork and prods the potato. Looking up at the landlady he says: "That's grand, ma'am. You can throw the rest of them up now!"

There were hundreds of such stories bandied about the pubs and clubs of Limerick (and of Manchester, Birmingham and London) during the 'thirties, 'forties and 'fifties. And, of course, as with all legendary figures, there was much more attributed to Gurky McMahon than he could reasonably be expected to have achieved.

But Gurky's brand of humour was, like all humour, the product of his age and passed with the passing of that age. Born before the motor car was invented, he died when men's footprints were on the moon.

On the outer edge of the small group of mourners at the graveside, two old men, contemporaries of Gurky, and deaf with the years, reminisced loudly into each other's ears with cupped hands, whilst the elderly white-haired Canon slowly intoned the *De Profundis* in the new vernacular.

And in the clear March sky above the cemetery the vapour trail of a modern jetplane on its way to America seemed symbolically to underline the ending of an era.

As we drifted silently out of the cemetery, a neighbour's child smilingly asked: "Whose funeral were you at?"

"Gurky McMahon's".

"Who is he?"

Thomas (Gurky) McMahon had outlived his own legend. But did you ever hear about the time Gurky went up the town to get a new shovel...?

Higher Education. Hundreds of new trees have now been planted and other improvements carried out in an estate which had been neglected for nearly 40 years.

Chief among the more interesting features of Plassey is the "Garrison Wall", an intriguing name for the stout buttressed bulwark that once jutted well into the river. The famous landmark is a little bit older than the mill, and was built to break the force of the great flow of the river along the south shore, thus giving protection to the horse-ferry which operated before the present bridge was built. The wall also protected the ferry-keeper's house (now owned by Mrs. Sheehy), close to the mill. The keeper's house on the Co. Clare side (Peg's Height) was not directly effected by high water, though often isolated for long periods. No trace of this house now remains.

The western field is often referred to as "the American ground". This strange name was coined in the last century when the ballast from returning coffin ships was

used to fill in this low-lying area.

The bridge, more popularly known as "the Black Bridge", built by the Shannon Navigation Company about 1830, superseded the picturesque horse-ferry and opened up the Clare side of the river to generations of Limerick citizens. The bridge was reconstructed in 1949.

Plassey, in its palmy days, would hardly have been the same without Shanny's pub, which stood for a hundred years at the Clare side of the river.

Though the great sweep of the Shannon is now reduced to a trickle, and cattle graze where once the salmon and trout found sanctuary, there is still much left to remind us of other days; and there is hope that future generations will enjoy the beauty of the new groves that the hundreds of shoulder-high saplings promise. There are hopes, too, that there will be a greater awareness of the need to foster and preserve all the good things to be enjoyed at Plassey and, indeed, all around us.

possible stimulated his courage by the the used of some spirituous liquors, he again prepared himself for the fray. In the evening word came to the police in Clare Street station that a row of a very serious nature was taking place at the head of John Street. Head Constable Phelan and all the force available under his command, immediately proceeded to the scene of the occurrence. On the ground lay Connors besmeared with blood, his head being a mass of bruises. He was taken to Barrington's Hospital where he was treated by Dr. Carey.

It was stated that John Moran, his daughters (2) and a man named Halloran ran down Clampett's Lane. The police went in pursuit but the fugitives managed to get into Moran's house. A sledge-hammer was, after some delay, procured to break in the door, but before they could even approach within a yard of it a volley of stones, bricks and bottles were thrown at them from the top garget of the building in which the besieged located themselves, and so incessant was the downpour that the police had to desist and retire under an archway. Fortunately they received no serious injuries. The police then attempted to force their way by placing tables over their heads but the protection was not sufficient, and they were again forced to retreat. It was decided to surround the building, and an additional force was sent for to the William Street Station.

Up to ten o'clock yesterday morning the besieged successfully defied the police to arrest them. Mr. McCarthy R.M., who had been sent for at an early hour requested the parties to surrender but they refused to do so, and said if any member of the constabulary dared to approach the house, they would stone them to death. It should be stated that the house in which the besieged were located is at the bottom of a lane so narrow that two men could hardly walk abreast when passing through it. Mr. McCarthy and the Mayor held a consultation in reference to the matter, and directed the police to guard the house until 10 o'clock this morning when the house would be forcibly entered if the occupants continued to resist the law. This contingency did not arise as at 10 o'clock last night it was discovered that the birds had flown. They managed, it would appear, to escape through a hole in the roof. They have not been arrested.

But the Clampett's Bow brigade did not escape for long. Once again Head Constable Phelan comes into the picture. At the City Police Court, held on March 3rd, one of the Moran girls and three of the chalking boys were charged. The Chronicle reporter continues the saga on the same edition of March 4:

At the City Police Court this morning, Mr. McCarthy, R.M., and Capt. Spaight presiding, Head Constable Phelan made an application to the Bench in connection with the Irishtown affrays. A young woman named Moran was charged with dangerously assaulting with others not yet made amenable, a young man named David Connors, inflicting such wounds on him as necessitated his removal for treatment to Barrington's Hospital. His life being in imminent danger, the accused was remanded for a period within eight days on the application of the head constable. Two brothers named Meehan, and a young boy named Pender were rehandeled on a charge of a serious assault on a boy named Dwyer in the Irishtown on Sunday night.

Two months later the other Clampett's Bow hatters were "made amenable". The Limerick Chronicle reported on May 3:

Patrick Moran, brought up in the custody of Head Constable Phelan, charged with having assaulted Martin Connors, on the evening of the 2nd March. Connors deposed that he was standing on the door of Mrs. McGrath's in Broad Street, when the accused and his two daughters, and a man named Halloran came up. The latter caught hold of him by the scarf, while the prisoner gave him three strokes of an iron bar on the head. Ac-

cused kept beating him for three-quarters of an hour. The prisoner followed him up to his house and beat him again. From the effects of the wounds which he (witness) received he had to enter the hospital where he was treated for 6 weeks. A girl named Johanna Sheehan gave corroborative evidence. Head Constable Phelan said that there was a charge of burglary against the prisoner, and if the Bench sentenced him now for the assault it would interfere with his being sent for trial to the Quarter Sessions for the latter offence. The Bench decided to send him for trial to the Quarter Sessions.



A Limerick Lane Similar to Clampett's Bow.

At the Quarter Sessions Patrick Moran and John Barrett were convicted of seriously assaulting Martin Connors, arising out of the Clampett's Bow siege and they were each sentenced to eighteen months hard labour (Limerick Chronicle report, June 26, 1879).

But the matter did not end there. All the other Limerick sieges throughout the centuries have been honoured in song and story and Clampett's Bow was no exception. It is said that every battle calls forth its writers and poets, and thus emerged Thomas Stanley Tracey to celebrate the 1879 siege. It was a fortunate combination of writer and subject, as Tracey sat down to sing the praises of the men and women of Clampett's Bow. An accomplished journalist, linguist, Trinity graduate, and writer of verse, he brought all his talents into play in capturing for posterity this historic confrontation. Tracey called his mock-heroic epic "Chalk Sunday" or "The Battle of Clampett's Bow". One is unlikely to find these verses in the conventional history books but no centenary commemoration could be written without their inclusion: