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BIG CHANGES LOOMING

CHANGING LIMERICK

A major series on the transformation of the county
Patricia Feehily reports



I can't be easy when you're a funny man and someone asks where you grew up, and you say: "Hospital".

But that's not the reason why comedian Jon Kenny is among a growing band of Hospital natives who would like to see the old name, Gleann Aine, used more often.

He likes the lyrical sound of the name, as well as its associations with a Celtic goddess, and he's not joking.

But that's neither here nor there. Hospital will always have a certain place in his heart—whatever it's called.

"I have only good memories of growing up in Hospital. I think friends mean a lot and that's where I made my first friends.

"Hospital is changing, but while I live just a stone's throw away from it now, and my mother, Mary, still runs a business there, I'm a bit out of touch with the town and I wouldn't be best qualified to comment on the changes."

He was more than surprised to learn, however, that his was the first name mentioned whenever we asked in Hospital: "who is the town's most famous son or daughter?"

parish having taken the title of their lands from the same landlord 16 years before that under the Wyndham Land Act.

It was, like nearly every small rural town in the country, stuck in a kind of a structural time warp until recent times, but then it became one of the first Limerick towns to get a facelift under the village renewal scheme in 1995—Hospital man, Cllr Eddie Creighton was chairman of Limerick County Council at

The farmers of Hospital had a joint stock company here a few years before Dromcollogher in 1884—the first farmer-owned creamery in Britain or Ireland

operators—until now—probably because of its location and the fact that the local sewerage and water facilities were not exactly the stuff of a developer's dreams.

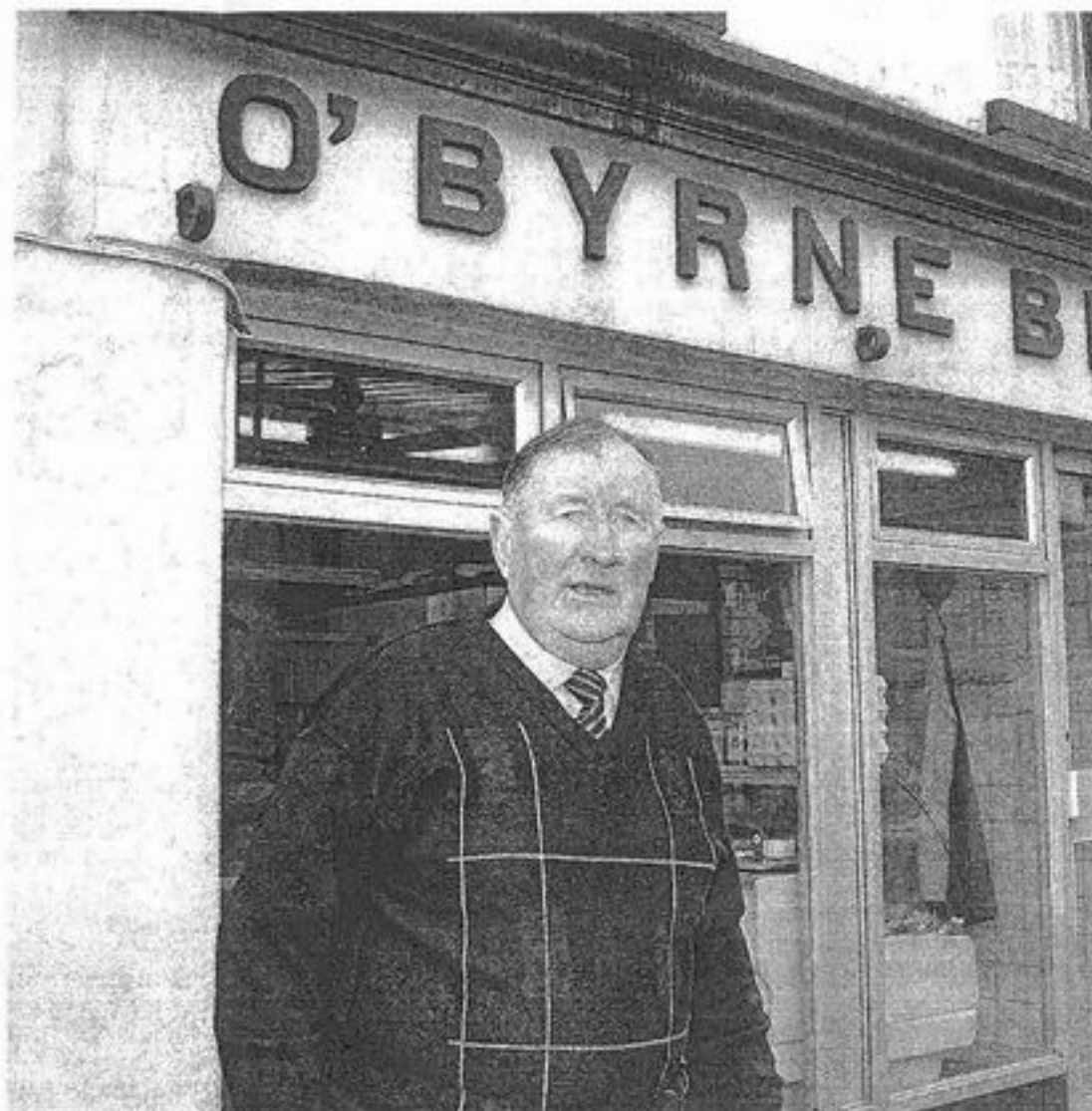
But big changes are looming. Planning permission was granted about a month ago for 69 houses, a hotel and 30 light industrial units at Castlefarm, a site more affectionately known locally as 'The Clover—a synonym that might yet prove propitious.

There was local opposition to the first proposal, which included several apartments, but a revised plan, minus the apartments, seems to have proved more acceptable.

"We opposed the initial plan, but we would support and encourage the revised plan," said community council chairman Canon Conor Ryan.

He said that the people of Hospital would like any new developments to proceed "at a gentle pace" so that the town could retain its identity, absorb the newcomers and help them to integrate.

"There is a great sense of community here," said Canon Ryan, a Thurles man, "even the newcomers feel it and they find it easy to integrate."



Hospital community activist Pat O'Byrne, whose family had a butcher's shop in the east Limerick for more than a century



Above: Hospital's origins can be traced back to the 13th century when the Knights of St John of Jerusalem arrived in the town

Below: Peg Creighton who returned to the town over 40 years ago from Birmingham



NO 19: HOSPITAL

Population: 1,206, an increase of 5.5 per cent on the 2006 figure.

Famous for: the first farmer owned creamery in the British Isles—the Munster Dairy Company—and for horses, hurling and hospitality.

Famous sons: Jon Kenny, comedian; Damian Reale, Limerick senior hurling captain in the 2007 all-Ireland final; Liam Reale, athlete; Declan Murphy, jockey; the Quish brothers, Pat, Tom and John, champion handballers; Michael O'Toole, journalist, and PP Hogan, horse trainer.

Biggest events: The visit of former US presidents, Richard Nixon, in 1970 and Gerald Ford in 1977; visit of President Mary

has been running as a fundraiser now for half-a-century, and the three times a week meals for the elderly. She was also secretary of the local badminton club for 25 years.

Her husband, Eddie, is a long serving PD county councillor and was twice chairman of the council. Peg takes the phone calls when Eddie is away, and meets many of the people he represents.

Community council member Pat O'Byrne was born and grew up in Hospital—his family ran a butchers' stall there for

place, he said, with its three second level schools—the Presentation sisters and the De La Salle brothers contributed immensely its own bank and a creamery that brought suppliers from a radius of seven or eight miles.

They would, however, like to see a full time Garda station opened up again in the town.

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first farmer-owned creamery in Britain or Ireland.

But it has an even more interesting future—being classified in the County Development Plan as a fourth tier "other centre".

The council says that it has an "ambitious vision" for Hospital, proposing to make it a clean, safe, sustainable community—a place where people will want to live and a place that people will want to visit, situated as it is on the banks of

you say. Hospital. But that's not the reason why comedian Jon Kenny is among a growing band of Hospital natives who would like to see the old name, Gleann Aine, used more often.

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He was more than surprised to learn, however, that his was the first name mentioned whenever we asked in Hospital: "who is the town's most famous son or daughter?"

The origins of the town go back to the early 13th century and the arrival of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem, but local historian Michael O'Sullivan informed us that it wasn't until 1927 that Hospital became a truly independent town when the inhabitants finally succeeded in buying out their tenancies from the Earl of Kenmare—the farmers of the

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the time

Ever since, it has presented a vibrant and go-ahead image, with its own homegrown food industries, several progressive businesses and one of the biggest and best secondary schools in Munster—John the Baptist Community College.

But amazingly, it hasn't proved a magnet for the devel-

opment of a developer's dreams.

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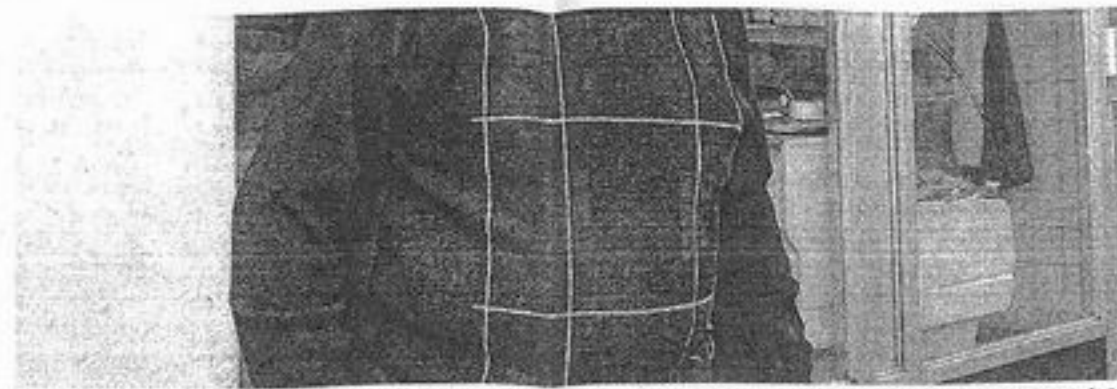
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"There is a great sense of community here," said Canon Ryan, a Thurles man, "even the newcomers feel it and they find it easy to integrate."

One of those newcomers back in 1993 was Monica Hennessy, who came to live in Hospital, a place she had never known and with which she had no connection whatsoever.

She was born in London but made her home in Hospital, adapting readily to life in a small town. She married local farmer John Hennessy, and is now one of the most active



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Biggest events: The visit of former US presidents, Richard Nixon, in 1970 and Gerald Ford in 1977; visit of President Mary Robinson to unveil a plaque at the site of the old creamery in 1995, and the switching on of the electricity in April 1949.

community workers in Hospital.

"This is a great community," she said.

Peg Creighton, another active community member, is a native of Glin, and lived in Birmingham for several years before she and her husband

Eddie, returned to Eddie's home town of Hospital.

"I've been here now for over 40 years and I've always found it to be a friendly and very supportive community," said Peg.

Like Monica, she's involved in the community council, particularly with the Bingo, which

has been running as a fundraiser now for half-a-century, and the three times a week meals for the elderly. She was also secretary of the local badminton club for 25 years.

Her husband, Eddie, is a long serving PD county councillor and was twice chairman of the council. Peg takes the phone calls when Eddie is away, and meets many of the people he represents.

Community council member Pat O'Byrne was born and grew up in Hospital—his family ran a butchers' stall there for over 100 years.

Now retired from the business, but still farming, he said that there were an awful lot of things going on in Hospital, particularly services such as the Family Resource Centre.

Asked about the changing face of the town, he replied: "It is changing, and I would say it's for the better."

But it was always a good



place, he said, with its three second level schools—the Presentation sisters and the De La Salle brothers contributed immensely its own bank and a creamery that brought suppliers from a radius of seven or eight miles.

They would, however, like to see a full time Garda station opened up again in the town.

"We have a great garda here, but what we'd like to see is a fully manned Garda station.

"There were three guards and one sergeant stationed here at one time," he recalled.

The town has an interesting past, all chronicled by local writer and historian Michael O'Sullivan who disabused us of the notion that Dromcollogher had the first farmer-owned creamery in the country, telling us that the farmers of Hospital had a joint stock company here a few years before Dromcollogher in 1884—the

first farmer-owned creamery in Britain or Ireland.

But it has an even more interesting future—being classified in the County Development Plan as a fourth tier "other centre".

The council says that it has an "ambitious vision" for Hospital, proposing to make it a clean, safe, sustainable community—a place where people will want to live and a place that people will want to visit, situated as it is on the banks of the Mahore river in the heart of the Golden Vale.

Some would say that this sums what Hospital is and always was—friendly, sustainable and inviting—and that the real challenge will be to maintain the traditional friendly and inclusive nature of a country town in the pursuit of the council's vision.

IT'S not every farmer's wife these days who dishes up 120 dinners every week, but it's a labour of love for Monica Hennessy.

"They were short of a cook when I joined the community council, so I offered my services," she said.

Every week, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays she prepares dinner at the community hall with the help of people such as Peg Creighton, and serves up a main course meal and a dessert to the over 65s of the parish. Anyone who cannot travel to the hall for dinner has the meal delivered to their home.

"We want to ensure that they get nice nutritious home cooked food, and for those who cannot leave their homes it is a chance to keep in contact."

Monica had never even heard of Hospital when she first came to Ireland from her native London in the early 1990s.

"I bought a house here in Hospital and I have been here

LONDONER MONICA SERVES THE ELDERLY



Monica Hennessy: she had never heard of Hospital before she came to Ireland from London

ever since. The first thing I did was to join the community council. I have always found it a great and very supportive community," she said.

She is treasurer of the community council and says that one of their biggest fundraisers is the Monday night Bingo session that has been running successfully now for 50 years. The proceeds also help to fund summer outings and Christmas parties for the senior citizens, as well as providing a local coal fund for them.

Monica married local farmer John Hennessy, and although she was born and reared in the city of London, she never had any qualms about helping out on the farmyard. They have a suckler herd and the first taste she got of farming was when she was called on to help with a calving crisis.

"When something has to be done, you just get down and do it," she said.

The Hennessys have two grown-up daughters, Sonia and Jane.

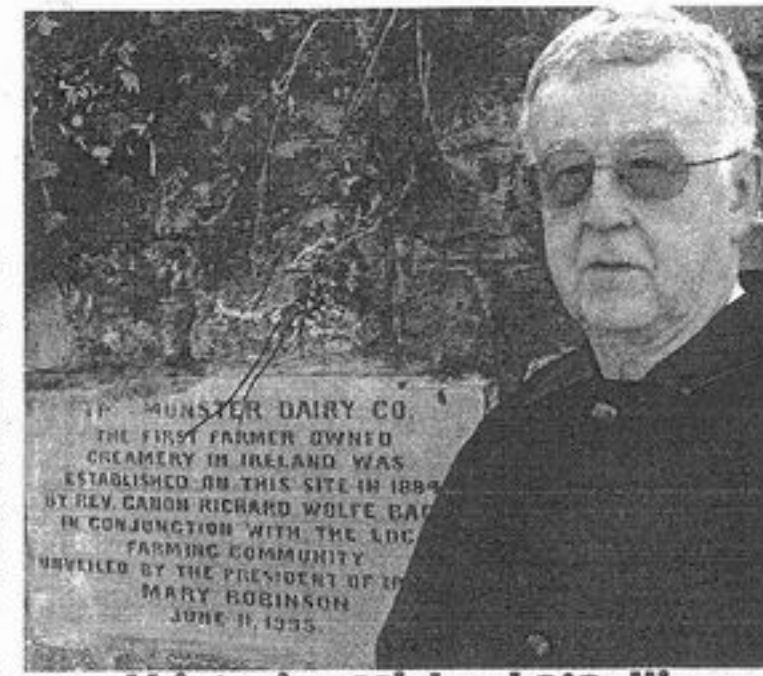
HOSPITAL is a goldmine for any historian and there is nothing about the story of the town that Michael O'Sullivan doesn't know. He has written a couple of books and several articles on the history of the town, and in recent times he has produced two fascinating publications, Glimpses of a Century Past, capturing in picture, the story of the entire 20th century in Hospital.

"It has a very interesting and unique past," he said.

Michael was born and reared in the town, and worked for 42 years with the Tipperary Co-op. Most of his spare time is spent researching the town's history. At the moment, he is one of a group researching and writing the history of the Presentation Sisters in Hospital.

The town was founded in the 13th century when the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem established there, and had a chequered history from the suppression

VILLAGE WITH 'A UNIQUE PAST'



Local historian Michael O'Sullivan: 'Hospital was always a great centre for education'

of the monasteries down to the last century when the tenancies of the town were finally bought out in 1927 from the Earl of Kenmare.

"It was always a great centre for education even before the arrival of the Presentation Sisters and the De La Salle Brothers. Before the introduction of the national school system, a diocesan report revealed that there were eight hedge schools in the parish, with 50 pupils attending each of them.

"We also had the first farmer-owned creamery in the British Isles—a joint stock company founded in 1884," he told us.

Michael and his wife Mary have four children: Brian, who runs one of the two pharmacies in the town; Niall, who runs the Centra shop, and Sinead (Lehane) and Aisling (Cleary).

McGowan's

Coopers Are on the move

Coopers Are Moving
Coopers are moving from Blackberry Retail Park to a Coopers online Business. See: www.coopers-wines.com

CONCRETE Homes are SUPER Homes

