

LIMERICK BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR INDUSTRIES AND WORKERS

by P.J. Ryan

There were many watermills in and near the city. With the introduction of steam power, these mills did not become obsolete but continued in use up to 1920. A notable watermill in its day was one on the Maunsell estate at Mungret which produced blankets and serges. The Yorkshire family of Maunsell followed Cromwell into Ireland and settled at Tervoe. Members of the family entered parliament. The first Baron Maunsell, Lord Emly, became Postmaster General around 1862. Through the efforts of a French Jesuit refugee from the Paris Commune, Emly was converted to the Roman Catholic belief. This change of belief marked the decline of the family fortunes. Through Emly's influence, the Jesuits acquired the Model Farm at Mungret and founded Mungret College in 1882.

Emly's property was mortgaged and sold. His mansion was gutted by scrap metal dealers. The woods he loved were cut down and the estate again became a wilderness. The vacant windows of Tervoe House look out on two hundred tons of cow dung piled high to mature on the front lawn of the mansion where formerly a pair of mastiffs, linked by a six foot chain, mowed down and savaged any Irish who dared to walk on the sacred ground. The pillared portico from Tervoe House now adorns the front entrance of the old Jesuit College at Mungret and gives the place an air of modest affluence.

With the introduction of steam powered mills, Limerick became the centre of the flour milling industry in the south of Ireland. Working conditions in those mills were near akin to slavery. The workers worked twelve hours each day for six days a week. Food was brought to them by their relatives. The workers had to eat while working; they were not permitted to rest. Domesticated animals are allowed to rest while eating; the workers were denied this privilege. Writing in **The Shamrock**, Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, has this to say: "I worked for three years in one of those mills; it was like three years penal servitude".

In order to keep those mills in continuous operation, many six-storied grain stores were built in various parts of the city. In these stores the provincial harvest of grain and imported wheat was stored. As the grain had to

be continuously turned, working conditions in dust and near darkness were appalling. The men kept the same working hours and working conditions as the mills. In 1913 there were five flour mills in the city. The employees earned their living and raised large families on the rotting of their lungs and premature deaths. They thanked the Lord for the constant jobs. They praised their virtuous God-fearing employers, who had ample reason for their fear of the Diety.

Cleeve's Condensed Milk Factory on the north bank of the Shannon was the largest milk-processing factory in the country. It operated a box factory and cooperage to export its products. The employees had decent wages and hygienic working conditions. This was due to the foresight of the Cleeve family who knew that due to the perishable nature of the milk entering their factory a strike could ruin them in a short time. Cleeve's also operated a toffee factory at Charlotte Quay. The total in the two factories was almost 1000 contented employees. Cleeve's had a good export trade. The products of these two factories helped to load many a boat which otherwise would have left port in ballast. The decline of the factory was due to the burning of many of its creameries by British forces in 1920.

The locomotive repair yards of the Great Southern and Western Railway at Roxboro gave satisfactory employment to over 600 men. This repair depot and the two iron foundries in the city gave some scope to many a budding genius with mechanical aptitude.

All of the foregoing were the big industries of the city. They were productive enterprises and not parasite sales organisations. A smaller and homely industry was the manufacture of clay pipes for the tobacco smoker. Merrit's factory in Broad Street in the Irish town employed over 20 of their relations making clay pipes. They made a standard plain pipe selling at 1d, and

several other ornamental types for ceremonial occasions such as the waking of the dead before a funeral. Pipes of special design were made for newly built houses and were embedded in the walls when the house was being built. Due to the fragile nature of the pipes there was constant employment in their manufacture. The family imported two cargoes of 50 tons of pipe clay every year from Liverpool.

The mineral water industry in Limerick was carried on by several families in the Sexton Street area. They obtained the natural mineral spring water from wells sunk over fifty feet deep.

The secret of success of the Limerick bacon factories and their world wide reputation for quality lay in the mineral springs from which they obtained their supplies of bacteria-free water. There was some preservative quality in the water which gave the bacon good keeping qualities and made it tender, succulent and world famous. The quality of these mineral springs was well known in Limerick. In the newer part of the city, Newtown Pery, many of the houses had wooden pumps in their basements, some of which were in use until recently.

During excavations at Watagate, within the boundary of the city walls, a twelve-foot wooden pipe, or conduit, was found ten feet below the surface and nearby, also was found a large stone wheel with toothed edge which was part of an apparatus for drawing up barrels of water from a deep well within the walled city. As the Shannon and Abbey rivers are tidal, with tides of over fourteen feet, it is obvious that a dependable water supply within the bounds of the city wall was vital to the defence of the city. Cannon balls and other weapons found on the site would indicate that the well was in use around the time of the Siege of Limerick in 1691. In time the well would have become polluted by seepage from the St. Michael's graveyard, less than one hundred feet distant. The well would then have been filled in and abandoned.

It is clear, then, that a dependable water supply within the city walls, under the control of the garrison, was vital to the defence of Limerick city.