



Leader Memories

with SEAN CURTIN

email: scurtin@limerickleader.ie

Worthies of Thomond ... Old Limerick industries ... Next week ... more great pictures

OLD LIMERICK INDUSTRIES

How they declined due to repressive measures

The following interesting paper on "Ancient Limerick Industries" was prepared by Mr. T. Costelloe and read at a meeting of the Old Limerick Society and appeared in the Limerick Chronicle on Tuesday, May 27, 1944. It has been reprinted in its entirety from that date

From the earliest times there has been a striking interdependence between the political and economic history of our country.

In the year 1428 Nicholas Arthur freighted a ship from Limerick with cloth, furs, etc., as a present to Henry 6th. Irish cloth was so valued that in a manuscript in the British Museum, we read of a prosecution of a man for stealing a piece of Irish cloth at Winchester. In the year 1698 a large trade in serges was carried on with Spain and Portugal. The quality of the material made in Limerick was equal to the best produced by English looms. The Weavers and Combers became the strongest guild of trade in Limerick. On St. Blaise's Day, 3rd February, they wore an orange coloured lock of wool in their hats. This custom fell through in 1842. In 1698 King William 3rd was presented with an address from the English Parliament to discourage the woollen trade. His answer was an Act passed the following year imposing a duty of 4/- on every pound's worth of cloth exported. The Protestants in whose hands the trade was, almost exclusively, threatened to transfer their allegiance if they did not get protection. The restrictions were nearly all withdrawn but sufficient left to interfere with the development of this manufacture. By 1835, English competition had completely destroyed the weaving trade which flourished at Garryowen, Thomondgate and Park. At this time 259 weavers presented a memorial to the Corporation and a vote of £50 was passed so that the Mayor could export as many weavers as the money would allow.

The art of dyeing was well established early in the 19th century. Mungret Street had two dye works, Dickson and Scanlan; one at Thomondgate, Moore's; Miles



Russell's Mill Among Limerick's greatest employers were the various milling houses of Ranks, Roche's and, of course Russell's. Our picture shows the mill in Henry Street on the day it was demolished in March of 1970. the Riverfront Building and Gleasons Londis Shop now occupy much of this site

At first he employed 300 children and grown girls. Wages ranged from 1/- to 5/- per week. Before long he erected a factory where the Good Shepherd Convent now stands at Clare Street. The finished articles were sold in England. Some time later, he brought over a Mr. Lloyd. In 1840 there were three factories in Limerick: Leycester Greaves, Patrick Street; Lloyds, Clare Street and Walker & Lambert, Newtownmahon. By 1850 there were 8,500 females employed in the trade. Spanish Donnas had their mantillas made in Limerick and magnificent robes were fashioned for royalty. Limerick lace was superior to that manufactured in Brussels. By 1865 the numbers employed had fallen considerably.

and Wm. Wallace, William Street. In 1824, Major Hedges Mansell built Plassy Mills, later occupied by Reuben Harvey. In 1827, J. N. Russell & Sons added flour milling to their already extensive business. They were the first to see the advantage of steam power and Newtownperry Mills, built in 1837, were fitted up with steam machinery. The stone bearing the original Coat-of-Arms of Limerick was purchased by Russell when the old Mayoralty house in Quay Lane was taken down and built into the front of Henry Street Mills. On either side of the stone is the date 1837. Over the stone, cut in relief, are the Russells Arms with the name underneath, John Norris Russell. About this time there were about 50,000 barrels of flour produced annually in the mills in

What free trade and machinery left undone was finished by the famine. Early in the 19th century there were two distilleries in Limerick, Philip Francis Russell, Lock Quay, and Steen, Brown & Co., Thomondgate. In 1837, Steen's Distillery was producing 455,000 gallons of whiskey annually. Later the distillery came into the hands of a Scotch firm named Walker who brought over all Scotch employees. Duty on Irish whiskey was on the volume of spirits put into bond, no allowance being made for evaporation or soakage.

TANNING INDUSTRY

Early in the 19th century there were twenty tanneries in Limerick but owing to the treatment meted out to the trade by the English Government, it is

GLOVE MANUFACTURE

The manufacture of gloves was for centuries famous. It owed its superiority to a secret, in the exclusive possession of a glove-maker named Lyons. He frequently got orders from the Court of Russian and other European courts. Limerick gloves could not be sold in the English market for fear of destroying the home trade. In 1820 there were four glove-makers in Limerick: James Lyons, Mary Street; Michael Burke, 24 Patrick Street; William Dwyer, 35 Patrick Street and John Sullivan, Bridge Street. In 1867, the number was reduced to one, Thomas Burke, 1 Bedford Row. Mr. Tate's effort to revive the manufacture was not successful.

The House of Industry was founded in the North Strand in 1774 by the Grand Jury Presentments on the county and city, to which was added £200 by Dr. Edward Smith of Dublin, towards providing 13 cells for the insane, at first calculated to accommodate 200 inmates. Prior to 1823 the number was augmented to 380. A wing was then added for the accommodation of 70 infirm women. There were two workrooms for spinners and weavers. The inmates were employed in various occupations.

BUILDING AND REPAIRING SHIPS

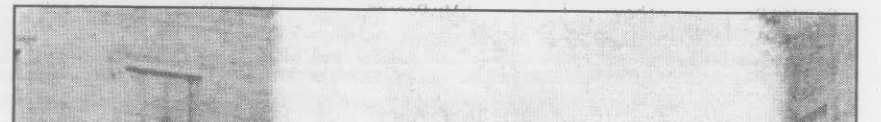
In 1757 our ships traded with the principal towns of France, Portugal, Spain and Netherlands, with fellow countrymen who had built up flourishing warehouses. In 1815, the first square-rigged vessel ever built in Limerick was launched from the Dry Dock at Newtown, tonnage 150 tons. Mullock & Graham were the owners. At the patent slip it was possible to repair ships up to 500 tons. Messrs. Russell had a shipyard close by and it was said that the sails for vessels were made at Lansdowne Factory. When Harland and Wolff were looking for a site for a shipbuilding yard they were greatly impressed by Russells but decided it was at the wrong side of Ireland. In 1822 the exports from Limerick amounted to £480,000 and by 1932 the figure had risen to £1,000,000.



Fire hazard Limerick's old city was a complete fire hazard in the 1950s. Many of the buildings were seriously dangerous with many fires causing untold damage. Our picture shows the aftermath of the Tannery fire in 1950. Just two years before that there were two huge fires in Sarsfield Street, the old County Library and what is now Debenhams were destroyed by fire. Of course, Todds was burned only nine years later. Indeed, the fiftieth anniversary of that great conflagration occurs this August



Croom Mills The Revenue Commissioners now occupy the site of the old Croom Mills Bakery in Francis Street. The entire street was demolished in the early 1970s with the bakery having been gone long before that.



manufacture. By 1835, English competition had completely destroyed the weaving trade which flourished at Garryowen, Thomondgate and Park. At this time 259 weavers presented a memorial to the Corporation and a vote of £50 was passed so that the Mayor could export as many weavers as the money would allow.

The art of dyeing was well established early in the 19th century. Mungret Street had two dye works, Dickson and Scanlan; one at Thomondgate, Moore's; Myles of Nelson Street; Mahony in The Square and Barrett's of William Street.

LINEN AND LACE

In 1807 the Chamber of Commerce gave premiums for the produce of linen and for yard and flax sold in the market; it built or contributed to build, at the expenditure of some thousands of pounds, a linen hall in Carr Street. The markets were held every Friday and Saturday. In 1851 Messrs Russell was successful in obtaining a grant of land from the Marquis of Lansdowne. The latter was very particular that none of his property should be defiled by business or trade. In 1853 the Lansdowne flax and spinning and weaving factories were opened by Messrs Russell to relieve unemployment. In 1864, the High Sheriff convened a flax meeting for the purpose of reviving the flax trade and resulted in a company being formed. Messrs Russell and Tate were largely responsible for the success attained. In 1867, the Limerick Flax Co. Manager, Mr. Alexander Stewart, was operating at Garryowen.

Limerick Lace, which had won for itself world-wide reputation, was introduced in 1824 by a Mr. Walker of Oxford.

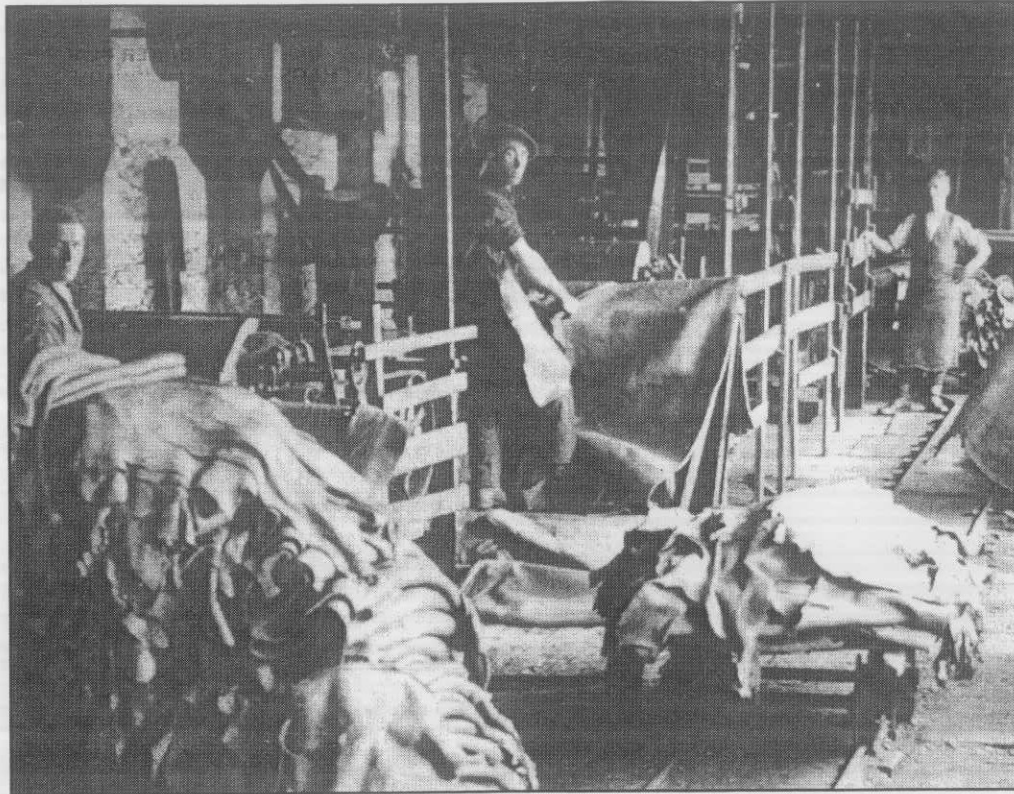
Cheapness of labour was the attraction.

He purchased stores at Mount Kennett and brought over ten girls as teachers.



Limerick Lace Another of Limerick's great industries was Limerick Lace. This shop was at 20 O'Connell Street, currently the site of Ferguson's Chemists

tioned for royalty. Limerick lace was superior to that manufactured in Brussels. By 1865 the numbers employed had fallen considerably.



Tanning Another of Limerick's indigenous industries was the tanning industry. This picture was taken at O'Callaghan Tannery in Tan Yard Lane. That building was burned to the ground in the 1950s.

CORN MILLS

In 1296, Gascony drew supplies of corn from Limerick. In 1812, Limerick was one of the six centres from which corn flowed to England. In 1820, there were four corn mills in Limerick - Samuel Caswell, George's Quay; John, James and Robert Hogan, Golden Mills, near Newgate Brewery; James O'Gorman, Curraghour,

Limerick. It is interesting to read that turf was much used in manufacture. It is also noted that turf was still the fuel of the lower classes and also used in the kitchens of the higher ranks.

BREWING AND DISTILLING

Brewing, one of the most ancient of domestic arts was known in Limerick for many centuries. The Danes possessed the secret of brewing the heather. It is related that at the final expulsion of the Danes, a father and two sons were put to death at Ballyportery Castle in West Clare for refusing to betray the secret. The earliest brewery of which we have an authentic record is the City Brewery, established in 1739 at Newgate. This date can still be read on the stone set in a wall where the brewery stood. In 1814, after a long spell of idleness, it was repaired by the owner, Michael Rochford. As the building was a ruin, a new mill wheel and the necessary machinery had to be erected. In 1837 there were seven breweries, each producing 5,000 barrels of ale, porter and beer, which was mostly consumed locally. After 1792, hops and malt could only be imported from England. The breweries had to pay import duty. There was a heavy duty on Irish beers exported to England as against a duty of only 10% on English beer coming into this country. The English hop growers had our brewers in their pockets. Hence, we had only three breweries in 1865, Fitzgerald's Brewery in Mulgrave Street which stood near the present rope-walk (Johnny Connell, famous in song, was the owner); Steen's in Clare Street, off Lelia Street, and the Old City Brewery.

easy to see why the number fell to four in 1820 and two in 1867. In Ireland the tax was levied on the pits as against on the skins in England, hence the tanners were encouraged to run as many skins as possible through the pits and produce an inferior article. The four tanneries in operation in 1820 were John Ryan, John's Gate; Matthew Kelly, Little Island; Jer Ryan, Francis Abbey, and Matthew Ryan, Mungret Street. The poet, Andrew McMahon, kept a tan yard previous to this time. In 1840 we had three tanneries, Michael Donovan, John Street; James Kelly, Abbey and Denmark Street; E. O'Callaghan, Abbey and Bank Place. The provision and coopering trade was revived about 1826 by an Englishman named John Russell whose establishment was the largest in Ireland, and who spent £200,000 a year on the purchase of pigs and manufacturing of bacon. In 1865 the principal houses were Mattersons, Oaks, Shaws, Hogan and McDonnell. Philip John Roche, in 1787, spent an enormous sum of money in building the great stores at the Mardyke. He also built a range of houses on the south side of Rutland Street and the south side of Patrick Street. As he was a Catholic, he had to get his relative, Right Rev. Dr. Pery, Protestant Bishop of Limerick, to purchase the site. Until his death in 1797, he carried on a large trade with Holland in rape seed, flax, etc. These stores later became the property of Thomas Kelly, Esq., Shannon View, who rented them as bonded stores. In 1770 Thomas Mark built some fine stores adjacent to Baal's Bridge.

Early in the 19th century there were twenty tanneries in Limerick but owing to the treatment meted out to the trade by the English Government, it is

Mullock & Graham were the owners. At the patent slip it was possible to repair ships up to 500 tons. Messrs. Russell had a shipyard close by and it was said that the sails for vessels were made at Lansdowne Factory. When Harland and Wolff were looking for a site for a shipbuilding yard they were greatly impressed by Russells but decided it was at the wrong side of Ireland. In 1822 the exports from Limerick amounted to £480,000 and by 1932 the figure had risen to £1,000,000.

CITY OF CASTLES

Limerick in the 16th century was known as a city of castles. At Garryowen there were black marble quarries that supplied materials for the castles, citadel, walls, monuments, bridges and houses of Limerick. Dinely, in his tour of Ireland in the time of Charles II, visited Limerick in 1681 when Whitamore was Mayor. He stated that even the streets were paved with it. He described the houses as tall, built with black and polished marble with partitions some five feet thick, and battlements on the top, and the best cellars for so many in any city in Ireland or England.

MAKER OF FAMOUS FISHING HOOKS

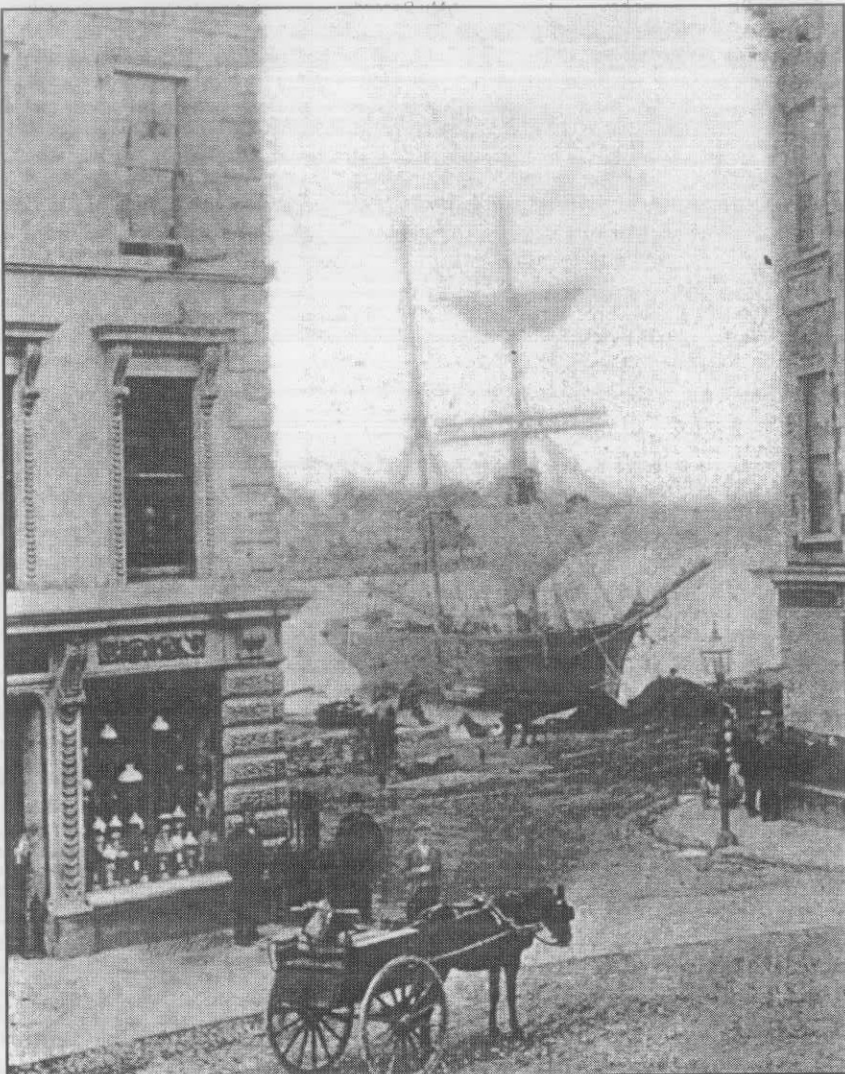
David O'Shaughnessy, maker of the famous fishing hook, lived in Limerick in the 19th century. It was said that every fishing hook was worth a salmon. For form, lightness and temper, it could not be imitated. The cast steel was sent to nailers in the country, who heated it in a turf fire to a certain particular temperature, taking care it was not over-heated. It was then beaten out by the nailer and returned to the hook-maker.

Sellers (of Croom) was justly praised for his success in preparing the steel. As the steel was still soft, the hook-maker gave it the symmetrical form and tempered it. Salmon hook cast was sold for 2d and trout hooks for less. In 1865 the trade was carried on by Michael Sellers of Quay Lane.

Brass and iron founders, coppersmiths, nailers, soap-makers, brogue-makers and hatters also had their places in old Limerick.



Croom Mills The Revenue Commissioners now occupy the site of the old Croom Mills Bakery in Francis Street. The entire street was demolished in the early 1970s with the bakery having been gone long before that.



Arthur's Quay For many years Arthur's Quay was the main docking area in Limerick. Build by the Arthur family, it finally moved down river in the 18th century. The ship is docked where the Tourist Office is now situated

Worthies of Thomond

NO. 14

PETER WOULFE

By Robert Herbert

PETER Woulfe, mineralogist, alchemist and chemist, was born about the year 1727 at Tircullane, near Limerick City, where he received his early education. When fifteen years old he went to Madrid, where his brothers resided, and later to Paris to work under the chemist, Rouelle, to whom he had been recommended by the Limerick surgeon, Silvester O'Halloran.

In 1752 he worked under Doctor Charles Lucas of Dublin, in London, and was then appointed Surgeon-General at Guadaloupe. On his return he spent a time studying the mines in Germany and France and was employed by Lord Bute and other rich people to advise on and arrange their collections of natural

Worthies of Thomond was a column written by Robert Herbert, City Librarian, which began on July 10, 1943, and carried on for several years. Such is the interest in this column which we randomly published over the past months it was suggested that maybe the entire series be re-printed. No. 14 recounts the life of Peter Woulfe, an alchemist, born near Limerick City

curiosities. At this time, Ferrar says, he was the acknowledged first chemist in Europe.

He was the first modern to examine and exploit the tin deposits in Cornwall, in 1766, and in the following year he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society for his paper on "Experiments on the distillation of acids and volatile alkalis," in which he described an apparatus which is still known as Woulfe's Bottle. He received the Copley Medal, the highest award of the Royal Society

in 1768.

In later life Peter Woulfe became erratic and is said to have had strange religious and alchemical ideas. He breakfasted at four each morning, and admission to his rooms would only be gained by persons knowing the secret signal. He had no faith in the medical profession and would not have them near him. In 1803, he took ill, refused to be treated by a doctor, and died, alone and unattended in the same year.