

# Janesboro and District

## Dating back to St. Patrick

The first radical change in the scene was the development of the Great Southern and Western Railway between 1848 and 1859. Though this was the first major alteration in the picture the real transformation of the district did not take place until the late 1930s and 40s when the great Janesboro and Rathbane housing schemes were developed, thus providing splendid modern type dwellings for the working classes in a district for long reserved for the middle classes. In due course the Kennedy Park, Keyes Park and South Hill housing developments provided one of the most populous suburbs of Limerick.

Obviously the spiritual welfare of the numerous families uprooted from their city parishes and transplanted in the wide ranging parish of Donoughmore could hardly have been catered for if Fr. Fred Rice, the then parish priest of Donoughmore, did not expend his great energies in establishing the splendid new church of Our Lady Queen of Peace. Providentially he foresaw the great population expansion of the years ahead.

Unfortunately some of the interesting historical associations of the old place are inclined to be forgotten or overlooked. According to the old maps the greater part of the parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace was in the parish of St. Nicholas. This did not matter a lot since the area was so sparsely populated, but in reality the parish of Donoughmore covered the whole area from St. John's to the outward bounds of Cahernorry, at least from the time of the registration of the clergy in 1704. At that time Fr. William Fleming registered for the parishes of Cahernary, Caheravahally and Donaghmore. This area was substantially the extent of the parish of Donoughmore before the parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace was founded.

While Fr. Fred Rice has a lasting memorial in the new 'Janesboro' church, that of an earlier parish priest of Donoughmore, Fr. Timothy

Halpin, is now obliterated. This was the little rustic boreen that turned off to the left of the main road near South Hill and was known to generations of schoolboys and courting couples as "Father Halpin's Boreen." Fr. Halpin died 15th May, 1900.

The 1841 ordnance sheet also delineates St. Patrick's Well, which, according to tradition, was used by St. Patrick to baptise a number of converts from the district before he plodded on to his better known location at Singland. The map also shows the famous 'Windpump' a short distance at the rear of South Hill House. This was a very deep well from which water was pumped by a small windmill.

Waller's Well is also set out in this map. It was quite common in olden days for whole districts to be named after wells, such as Pennywell, Coleman's Well, Patrick's Well, etc. Thus Waller's Well was a rural district well known to Limerick's citizens for many generations.

It may be of interest to touch upon some of the more notable residents of the 'big' houses in the area. Rathbane House and stud was owned at the turn of the century by a wealthy retired rubber planter, William Wellington Bailly.

### Sir Peter Tait

South Hill House was the home of Limerick's famous rags-to-riches hero of the nineteenth century, Sir Peter Tait, whose life story reads like a fairytale. Tait was born in Shetland in 1828, his father was Thomas Tait from Tingwall. While still in his teens Peter left his island home to seek his fortune. He arrived in a sloop at Limerick harbour in 1846 and secured a position as a draper's apprentice at the firm of Cumine and Mitchell (afterwards Cannocks). Both proprietors of this firm being Scots it is understandable that the lad from Shetland would be employed in preference to a local, though Scotsmen in general were in demand as drapers assistants at this

By KEVIN HANNAN

LIKE many other suburbs of the old city of Limerick the area south of the point where the railway line crosses the Roxboro Road was once a quiet and salubrious district boasting a few fine residences that housed some wealthy families. These are set out in the 1841 Ordnance Sheets as: "Janesboro," "Rathbane," "The Lodge," "Ivy Cottage," "South Hill," "Beech Hill" and "Fort Prospect". The sites were well chosen, on the activity of a hill that commanded a panoramic view of the city with the splendid backdrop of the Clare hills.

period.

Apprentices 'lived-in' at the large stores at the time but most were left off during the slack period from October to April. Thus young Peter Tait found himself on the streets of a strange city with only a few shillings in his pocket. His offer to the management of the firm to work, without pay, for his bed and board having been turned down, the enterprising young man bought himself a hawker's basket and went from door to door in the lanes and streets of the city selling small articles of haberdashery. His enterprise prospered, and in a short time he was selling articles of drapery, mainly to sailors disembarking at the harbour after long voyages.

In a remarkably short time Tait had made enough money to opppppppen his own business in a premises in Bedford Row where he employed a number of women making shirts and caps. (In those years everyone wore a cap). Soon he was back in his old firm, not as an apprentice, but as full partner. The firm was now "Cannock and Tait."

At this time the Singer sewing machine had just been perfected and the ambitious young Shetlander saw the potentialities of its use. Limerick being a garrison town Tait was well aware of the great difficulties and expense in providing uniforms for a whole regiment at a time when every stitch had to be made by hand. Full of confidence and

expectation he consulted the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin and explained his plan to manufacture army uniforms quickly and cheaply by a revolutionary system of employing a number of workers each performing a different operation in the manufacture of the garment. This man was so impressed with Tait's idea of mass producing uniforms that he prevailed on the war office to support the project. Tait was given a contract to equip a regiment with uniforms, to be supplied to the Central Military Stores in London. He succeeded so well in fulfilling his undertaking that the authorities gave him an unlimited contract to supply the army in general.

Tait was now well and truly on the road to prosperity. He purchased an old auxiliary workhouse in Lord Edward Street and worked there for some time before erecting one of the most modern factories in Europe on the site.

In due course Tait supplied uniforms to the forces engaged in the dreadful Crimean War and afterwards to the Confederate forces during the American Civil War, breaking the Yankee blockade of the American ports on one memorable occasion with his steam ship 'Evelyn', one of his three ships which transported his finished uniforms from the port of Foynes to America and England. His other vessels were 'Elvey' and 'Keepie.'

By this time Tait was a rich man with man of his early ambitions already realised, so

he decided to settle down in earnest. He married Rose Abraham, the beautiful daughter of Thomas Abraham, of Fort Prospect, the magnificent mansion not far from the splendid South Hill house where he settled down with his bride.

That the young tycoon never allowed success to go to his head was evidenced in the hawkers basket which he kept hanging in the hall at South Hill as a reminder to himself and all visitors to the house of his early days as a struggling waif.

Tait was also an outstanding success with the people of Limerick. He subscribed to every charity and made his name synonymous with acts of benevolence in all directions. He was a good employer and treated his workers generously. He was elected Mayor in 1865 and held the office for three years. In 1867 the citizens decided to erect a fitting memorial to him in recognition of his services to the city; this is the handsome clock tower in Baker Place, known as "Tait's Clock."

Like many a good man that went before him Peter came a 'cropper' when he entered politics. He stood as a Tory candidate in the '67 general election and was defeated. After this event his popularity began to wane, but many who disagreed with his politics were really sorry for him. The big man might have recovered if he had learned the lesson of his election defeat, but he succumbed to the temptation

to enter as a candidate in a bye-election in his native Shetland in 1873, where he banked on the support of his family's widespread friends and connections. But he was wrong in his calculations; the Shetlanders appeared jealous of his rise to prosperity in Ireland and gave him no support. He was defeated, and the shattering effects of the disaster resulted in a loss of interest in his business.

After a few years Tait retired to England (he had a house in London) and left the control of the factory to his son, who, lacking his father's knowledge and ability, caused the business to decline.

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