

JOSIE

by Jim Kemmy

Uttered ne'er a word but sailed on,
With measured pace and stately aplomb,
Man of many coats and regular beat
Unhurried traveller along life's street.
No business blues or petty politics for him,
Cared not who went out — or who got in!
Puffed his pipe to his heart's content,
Josie, Limerick's last free-born gent.



Josie fills his pipe. Picture by Joe Hartnett.

A life-long and dedicated “drop-out”, ever before the term became fashionable or had even been invented ... A stocky man of indeterminate age who wore the same distinctive uniform winter and summer: an old, shiny cap pulled well down over the neatly-shaped head; a thick scarf smothering the neck; a long, black overcoat, tied in the middle like a Franciscan's robe, covering an indefinite number of shorter coats ... A battered pipe going full steam ... A fixed, averted stare ... A quiet, metallic voice ... A pair of woolen socks, tucked tightly into heavy boots ... A stout walking-stick, held sergeant-major style, permanently under the left arm ... Put all these, and a few more images together and a picture of Josie comes into focus.

Once seen, the spectacle of Josie sailing forth on his daily rounds was a sight to be remembered. For forty years he has been a familiar figure in Limerick, being usually seen making his purposeful way around the city's back streets. In that time few people can claim to have seen Josie without his all-the-year-round rig-out. In a

changing society, he remained impervious to time, clime and shifting dress patterns.

Though Josie originally came from the Blake's Boreen area of Rosbrien, he could not be considered anything other than a citizen of the entire city. And, befitting such a description, he had lived in many and varied abodes throughout Limerick. In his earlier years, he showed a preference for the uptown part of the city but in recent times he gravitated towards downtown districts in his choice of accommodation.

In the 'fifties and early 'sixties Alec Bogue's house at Emmet Place, off St. Joseph's Street, became a hospitable haven for an assortment of casually employed building tradesmen. During this time the house was Limerick's nearest equivalent to Dublin's “Catacombs”. Josie, who had earlier lived in a room off Little Barrington Street, found a regular place among these often out of work but ever resourceful artisans.

Some time afterwards he took up residence in a semi-derelict house off Gerald Griffin Street, until the Cor-