



This week the People's Park is filled with those trying to make the most of the sunny weather. In 1975, this young family were also enjoying the sun in the People's Park

Brothers who left their mark

FROM THE ARCHIVES

SHARON SLATER

LIMERICK CHRONICLE HISTORIAN



Quin Abbey, Co. Clare, has been a regular visiting spot for inhabitants of Limerick city for many years. There were a few recorded cases of day-trippers returning with mementos from this historic site.

Two of these day-trippers were brothers, Joseph Fisher Bennis (1839-1928), and Edward Bennis (1838-1918) who were caught up in

the 1860s rage in phrenology. Phrenology was the practice of reading bumps in the skull to determine personal traits.

The brothers were the only sons of William Bennis, an earthenware dealer in William Street and his wife Anne; they had an elder sister Anna Fisher Bennis born in 1836. The brothers had a shop at 26 Patrick Street, which they later moved to George's Street. According to Joseph Fisher's son, Ernest Henry Bennis



A guide to phrenology published in 1859, the Bennis brothers would have followed this guide

(1870-1956), in a pamphlet published by the Limerick Literary and Economic Society in 1936, the governor of the city gaol gave the brothers permission to examine some of the

heads of the prisoners.

This did not stave the brothers' appetite for the subject as Ernest goes on to say that after closing their shop, one evening in 1860, the two brothers travelled the 15 miles to Quin Abbey. Here they filled a sack each with skulls, which they brought back to Limerick and for "over fifty years at lectures on phrenology by Joseph F. Bennis these skulls were exhibited, and many a man had his "bumps" told by Joseph Bennis".

In 1848, their uncle, George Geary Bennis (1793-1866), saved the life of King Louis Philippe of France during an assassination attempt. In 1854, he was awarded the title of Chevellor for this action.

George had left Limerick for London, and later France in 1822. While in Paris, he edited the Galiguan newspaper and published several books as well as amassing a

large library of over 10,000 books. Upon his death, George Geary bequeathed his library to the citizens of Limerick. His nephew, Edward Bennis, was tasked with travelling to France to gather these books. In October 1868, Edward Bennis wrote to John Ellard, Esq., the Town Clerk (this letter was also published in the Chronicle), in dismay that the library, which was given over to the Corporation two years earlier, had not been put into the public sphere and were sitting idle in the Corporation stores.

Michael Hogan, the Bard of Thomond, in 1868 took exception to this situation and wrote the following verse:-

*One small transaction here I name,
Be it recorded to their shame.
From France to Limerick Harbour
straight*

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE →

EX: LIMERICK LEADER
30TH JUNE 2018
PAGE 45-46
(LIMERICK CHRONICLE INSET L.2)

An abduction involved the kidnapping of a woman, who was typically well off. The abduction would lead to the loss of her reputation and she was often forced to marry her abductor to avoid bring shame on her family. Unsurprisingly, not all of these kidnapping attempts were successful.

Limerick was not immune to these marriages by abduction. Late on the Sunday night of November 14, 1847, Roger Molony of Lisnamuck, Croagh. Molony a well to do farmer, and sales master at Curragh Chase Wood, was home with his wife and children most of whom were in bed.

Suddenly a gang of six men, Patrick Gleeson, Jeremiah Garvan, Michael Madigan, Thomas Frawley, Michael and Daniel Looney all bearing guns, entered the house.

stairs and ran into the bed of her sister Mary.

Kate felt an arm around her and although it was night there was enough candle light from another room for her to recognise Michael Looney as they had attended school together. He asked her name and when she responded she was dragged from the bed by three or four of the men. She grabbed the bannister which broke as she was carried down the stairs and out of the house.

The gang carried Kate, who was dressed only in her nightdress, to a hedge where she "first knew" Michael Looney. After this, the gang continue to travel for about a mile in the old night through wet boggy fields. Looney carried Kate on his back for a while as they travelled.

Jack Farren but remained there only long enough for Kate to get a drink of water. Next, they travelled to the home of Richard Creagh, where Kate was informed that she was to remain there as a priest was being located to perform a marriage between her and Looney.

The Chronicle of December 4, 1847 reported that Kate was "entitled to a fortune of £300" and the armed men broke in with the "intention of coercing her to marry..."

The gang did not expect their plan to be thwarted by Mrs Creagh who gave the distraught Kate sanctuary and protection. Mrs Creagh returned Kate to her parents the following morning.

Meanwhile the Molonys had raised the alarm and four of the men were quickly apprehended at the Rathkeale Bridewell as they at-

approximately 27 cases of abduction in the country

tempted to find a priest willing to perform a wedding. Michael Looney and Patrick Gleeson remained at large for a number of days but were captured on their arrival in Cork on the Charleville coach.

All six men were tried in Limerick in January 1848. The gang were only charged with "attacking and breaking the dwelling and appearing in arms", not at all for the abduction. Strangely, Kate pleaded leniency towards Michael Looney stating that he had acted kindly to her by carrying her through the bog.

ploy by Kate to marry Looney, though Kate and her family vehemently denied this. It was not uncommon for some abduction to actually be consensual because it forced parents to consider an otherwise unsuitable son in law.

Ultimately, all six men were found guilty as charged, though an expression of leniency was issued for Michael Looney. Michael received a sentence of twelve months in prison while the other five were sentenced to be transported to Australia for a period of fourteen years.

It can be presumed that Roger died soon after this, as four years later, his son John was the head of the household. In 1851, Michael Looney was recorded as still living in the area. It is not known what became of Kate Molony.

Mindful brothers left a huge mark on city

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

*A library was sent of late
Bequeathed by dying man
To the erudite Corporate clan
Poor man he really did resign
His literary pearls to swine
For when the books arrived in dock
Or Neros wanted no such stock
The freightage they refused to pay
The library was cast away
Into a limber-store to rot
And 'Bogstick' rose to 'second thot'.*

This complaint fell upon deaf ears and it would take almost forty years before the library would be incorporated into the collection of the Limerick City Library, Pery Square.

In 1872, Edward Bennis set up a factory in Bolton to develop an automatic self-cleaning furnace. His invention was to prove a great success with increases in efficiency achieved together with reductions in smoke emissions.

ATHENÆUM, LIMERICK.
THREE NIGHTS MORE
OF THE
AMUSING AND INSTRUCTIVE EXPERIMENTS
ELECTRO BIOLOGY AND PHRENOLOGY
BY
PROFESSOR G. W. STONE
AT THE
ATHENÆUM,
MONDAY, TUESDAY, AND WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18th, 19th, AND 20th.
Doors Open at Half Past Seven to Commence at Half Past Eight o'Clock.
ADMISSION:
Front Seats, ... 3 6 ... Children, ... 0 6

A guide to phrenology published in 1859, the Bennis brothers would have followed this guide

Joseph Fisher Bennis saw Limerick change completely during his almost ninety years in the city. He was born into an era of the ruling Protestant merchant class. He witnessed the rise of the Fenians and the fall of the Protestant establishment. He witnessed the atrocities

of the First World War and the impact of both the Civil War and the War of Independence. As a member of the Society of Friends (Quaker), he would have remained a pacifist during these tumultuous times.

In April 1868, at the Friends'

Meeting House, Duncan Street, Cork he married Emilie Frances Carroll (1835-1919), daughter of James Carroll, Summer Hill. They had five children, only two of whom outlived their parents.

The Chronicle of November, 1, 1928 wrote of his death:-

"An old and highly esteemed citizen Mr J. F. Bennis, passed away on Tuesday last in the 89th year of his age. He was, up to his retirement from business some time ago, head of the grocery firm of Messrs Bennis & Sons, O'Connell street and was also concerned in insurance business.

His long and honoured life was indeed one of untiring activity, and yet apart from business he found leisure in which to follow up scientific pursuits, and various economic topics of local and general interest. On these he was a frequent contributor to the 'Chronicle,' especially as regards astronomical phenomena, of which he was a keen

student. He was the oldest surviving member of the Protestant Young Men's Association, and in his prime was a prominent figure at its debating class, where, as elsewhere, his bright and cheery manner and fund of humour made him very popular. Mr Bennis belonged to an old Limerick family, and was a member of the Society of Friends. To his son, Mr E. H. Bennis, and other relatives, sincere sympathy is expressed in the city in their bereavement. The funeral, which took place this afternoon was private."

His son, Ernest Henry Bennis, carried on the family business until he retired in 1953 and family lore until his death in 1956. Following his death, the Leader noted on May 5, 1956 that:-

"The deceased was regarded as an authority on old Limerick, on which subject he delivered, from time to time, lectures to different cultural bodies. He took a great interest in archaeology and botony."