

(1 page)

Notable events in the 'thirties in Limerick

1936 was a noteworthy year in the social and commercial history of Limerick. The dreadful slums were being tackled with great purpose and resolution, and already the greatest part of the Island Field housing development had been occupied by the former residents of the unsavoury ghettos of the Irishtown, and some areas of Boherbuoy and the Abbey.

In September of that year Mr. Pat Molloy, who had already completed 480 houses in the 'Field' at a contract price of £450 per house, had successfully tendered £29,823 for 74 extra houses there. This popular contractor had just completed the concreting of all the principal streets, except O'Connell Street, which had been completed by 'Paver' Dillon six years before. The year also saw the beginning of the Distillery and Janesboro housing schemes, and also the beginnings of the great development of housing in the Prospect area.

Those of us who lived through this period cannot help comparing the dreadful living conditions in the slums, particularly Old Francis Street and Palmerstown, with the splendid new dwellings in salubrious locations. But there were many in the Island Field for whom the grand vista of the wide sweep of the Shannon with its picturesque back drop of the Clare Hills had no charms. They longed for the old hovels, with all their privations and squalour, where they had lived all their lives. Likewise, others who were moved long distances inveighed against their isolation from their old familiar haunts.

With the new houses came the freedom from the nightly task of trimming smelly paraffin lamps, and emptying still smellier toilet pails. The novelty of switching on the electric light was an additional pleasure, not to mention the convenience of modern toilets.

The Shannon Hydro Electric Works (Shannon Scheme), completed six years before, made the greatest impact in the lives of the people, and made it possible for the government that had branded it a white elephant, when they were in opposition, to launch the industrial revolution.

New factories were cropping up like mushrooms all over the country, and if some of the products did not measure up to the imported variety at the beginning, protective tariffs ensured a ready home market.

Limerick, already blessed with well established traditional industries, such as bacon curing, milling, clothing manufacture, tanning, timber yards and docks, was favoured with new factories for the manufacture of shoes at Mulgrave Street; a nut and bolt factory near the harbour, and, most important of all, a cement factory at Castle Mungret, four miles from the city centre.

These industries provided job opportunities for those who were permanently barred from jobs in the traditional industries, which were reserved for members of the families long associated with them.

The announcement in the Limerick Chronicle of May 21st, 1936, that Limerick had been chosen as a centre for the cement industry (along with Drogheda), created quite a stir in all circles. The

news was received with great jubilation all around, though the choice of Limerick for the industry was not altogether unexpected.

Fifty years before engineers had declared that the almost limitless quantities of blue clay in the area of the estuary just west of the city was ideally suited to the manufacture of first class cement.

The following month a site was selected in the midst of millions of tons of raw material at Castle Mungret, and soon we had our own cement. From the beginning the product of this factory hardly needed the tariff protection, as it was considered by experts to be not inferior to any foreign brands.

Looking back, one must regret the necessity of importing the hundreds of thousands of tons of cement

that were used in the construction of the Shannon Scheme, the city streets and the early housing developments. What a bountiful blessing it would have been if we had had our own cement factory at the time.

On the cultural side the Savoy, opened in 1935, provided the citizens with the finest cinema and theatre in the country. Here renowned musicians performed on the great Compton organ, and on the stage.

In 1936 the citizens were thrilled to attend the performances of Fritz Kreisler, Paul Robeson and Jol McCormack.

In that year also an Art Gallery for the city was mooted and was soon afterwards established in the premises of the Carnegie Free Library.