

# Our first taste of post-war inflation

APART from the atrocities of the Black-and-Tans, 1920 came in with a dramatic increase in the prices of most commodities.

As you might expect, the increase in the price of the pint of stout to nine pence caused the greatest outcry.

The bottle of stout at seven pence, and the glass of whiskey at one-and-six-pence, caused a lesser howl, because those who drank

Dispensary every Friday by the relieving officer. This unenviable office was held for many years by Tom Keane, a native of Parteen. Tom was a gentle giant of well over six feet and weighed above seventeen stone, or thereabouts. He had a powerful bellowing voice that could be heard at the off side of Gerald Griffin Street as he used this only weapon against the crowd of pitifully vociferous supplicants who gathered around his office in the drab Dickensian building.

## PLAYGROUNDS

In those days the uncluttered streets were the playgrounds of the city. Each district had its own special building or gable end as a handball alley. Hurling and cricket and 'rounders' in Cathedral Square, where funerals always upset the game, as the best place for the wickets was in front of the Cathedral door. Of course the appearance of a Civic Guard caused a scatter until the coast was clear again. As late as 1935 the

house holders of Roche's Street complained of the danger to their windows from the footballs and hurling balls of those playing games on the street. Fancy playing a game of football in Roche's Street to-day!

## PAWN SHOPS

Pawnbroking, which can only thrive on poverty, was going strong in the twenties - and well into the fifties. I remember the black shawled women crowding into Patey Brown's old world pawn shop in Broad

Street on Monday mornings. Many much needed articles were left here as pledges for small loans - bed clothes, wearing apparel, tools and household ornaments.

Among the more unusual pledges recorded in city pawnbroker's ledgers were artificial limbs and eyes. These articles were always regarded as gilt edged securities for loans, but were only accepted directly from the owners, who had to be well known to the pawn broker.

Saturdays saw the release of most of these pledges, especially the wearing apparel, which was to lend a little respectability for Sunday wear, and the wooden leg which gave the cripple a little short lived independence.

Broad Street had two other pawn shops at that time. Jack Clifford's and John Dowd's. Mikey Jackson's in Denmark Street was a busy place in the bad times, so was O'Brien's in High Street and Parker's in Parnell Street.

MORE NEXT WEEK



## My Limerick



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**KEVIN HANNAN**

spirits could not afford to let it be said that they would inveigh against paying a few extra pence for their drink - after all the drinking of a small whiskey was a status symbol.

The increase in the price of the four pound loaf to nine pence ha'penny, and a corresponding increase in the price of other essential foodstuffs seriously affected the woman with the 'house full of children' - and there were many houses full of children in those days, as women were encouraged to have large families, irrespective of the means of providing for them. In the poorer districts families were crowded into earthen floored cabins having only one or two small apartments, or huddled in the garrets of cotted houses. There was incredible squalor and overcrowding with all the attendant disease and high mortality rate among children. I remember seeing two boys going with a bucket into the street to collect mud for the purpose of repairing a pot hole in their bedroom floor!

The women of Browne's Lane and Dickson's Lane, in Boherbuoy, took full advantage of the local lime kiln and used it to cook their dinners on Sunday afternoons - the assistance of this free, if inconvenient, method of cooking as hardly necessary for the week-day dinners. Elsewhere in the poorer districts all cooking was done on a fire grate set between two white-washed hobs. Coal at half a crown a bag (twelve and a half pence), was usually purchased in small lots, sometimes as small as a stone (14 Lbs). Turf and wood blocks were always available from the many 'turf and block men' who made their sales from horse and donkey creeks through the lanes and streets. Turf was sold at five sods for tuppence and blocks at six-pence a dozen. These vendors came from the Castleconnell area.

## POVERTY

The great slump of the twenties was further aggravated by the difficulties that faced an infant Government. The affects of the inflation that were imperceptible during the war were now a harsh reality. There were no hand-outs as we know them to-day, except for the niggardly mites handed out to the very poor at the City

His name was a bye-word in Limerick for more than thirty years. Persons in extreme poverty were advised by others to 'go to Kane'. It was just like sending them to the devil. Most of those who had to endure the humiliation of the dispensary had nothing good to say of Tom. To some he was a 'dog' to others a 'tyrant' and a 'savage'. In reality he was kind and considerate and felt compassion for those at whom he

roared in order to convince them that he had only a small sum of money to distribute among far too many. He was a splendid character who had to endure the fairy godfather who was keeping all the money for himself. The weekly budget was so small that the average sum payable to families was about a half crown (twelve and a half pence). It was well known that Tom's compassion was often so

excited at the plight of a disappointed applicant when the last shilling had been doled out that he gave some assistance out of his own pocket.

However, the Society of St. Vincent De Paul relieved much hardship among the poor at that time. Their officers visited the hovels and saw conditions for themselves. They helped in a practical way with bedding and clothing where they say the greatest need.



Mick Griffin and Philly Daly, Castle Street and Jack O'Leary, Upper Carey's Road, pictured 27 years ago.

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