

# St. John's Gate

for the feathered songsters that thrilled out their lives over the graves of bishops and priests and the merchant princes of Limerick from early times.

## SEASONAL SMILES

One farmer met another driving a horse and cart along the road. "Well John," he said, "where are you going with the manure?" "Well," said John, "I want that for the rhubarb at home."

The other started to laugh. "Well," said John, "what are you laughing at?" "Ah, nothing much," was the reply, "but we put custard on ours."

Teacher: 'Use the word climate in a sentence.'  
Helen: 'The mountain was so steep, I couldn't climate.'

were often to be seen enjoying the lively jargon of the buyers and sellers as they excitedly waited for the clinching of the bargain with the traditional spit and slap of the palm.

### Buyers' market

The local professional pig buyers had little time for this ancient Celtic bargaining system, and usually enjoyed the benefits of a buyer's market. They were a small but relatively comfortable fraternity who merely acted as middle-men between producer and bacon factory. They were always deemed "respectable" if for no other reason than the obviously lucrative nature of their avocation, which also exalted the envy of those who had to work hard for a bare existence. It can be said, too, that they were the envy of some of the local professional classes whose educational standards were high, but whose earnings fell short of those of the pig buyers.

On the whole they were decent respectable fellows, although some of the more envious of their critics, to highlight the independence and arrogance of some of the fraternity, often quoted the story of the pig buyer who demanded that the wheels be taken from a farmer's cart so that the animals in the creel could be more easily examined.

Alas! the pig buyers are gone the way of the coopers and the sandmen, and the great bacon industry of which the city was famous since the early years of the last century, is almost gone with them. To their credit, the O'Mara family clung to a spar of the wreck and held on to the very last.

Close to the markets, on the Cathedral side, stands the Sarsfield memorial, lately freed from the blanketing foilage of the horse chestnuts that surrounded it. The story of this magnificent statue goes back to the 1830s, when the Sarsfield Memorial Committee was established. This body met from time to time with the very best of intentions, over a period of more than forty years, before the fruits of their lubberly labours produced one of our finest memorials, and at the same time stirred up a political cauldron that resulted in the refusal of the Corporation to grant permission for its erection in any of the sites suggested by the committee — by this time augmented by a number of city councillors. After deliberations lasting more than a year and a half a site was approved by the City Council, "... at the head of Bank Place and fronting the Custom House, which in view of the ancient Cathedral would be seen from the Town Hall and the Mall."

Other sites mentioned on this occasion were: West of the Wellesley Bridge, opposite the Toll House. Enclosed esplanade, front of St. Mary's Cathedral. Space in front of same.

Near Treaty Stone. Near Castle, where it joins Thomond Bridge, left hand side coming from Castle Street.

Front of Ordnance House upper end of William Street. Between St. John's Cathedral and St. John's Church. Lower Glentworth Street, between Bank of Ireland and National Bank.

The Russell Park (The Peoples Park). In front of same. In George Street (O'Connell Street), at the junction of Mallow Street. Same, at junction of Glentworth Street. Same at the junction of Thomas Street.

### Objection

Ambrose Hall, the veteran city councillor, made a strong objection to "... placing so fine a statue, intended to last for all time, in this failing locality in which there will not be a

house standing twenty years hence, and which meantime exhibits a melancholy picture, and is otherwise objectionable on account of its nameless associations." It was finally decided to seek a suitable location outside the control and jurisdiction of the Corporation, and shortly afterwards the present site in the Cathedral grounds was offered to the committee and gratefully accepted. For nearly a hundred years it has remained in semi-obscurity, unknown to thousands of visitors to the city — and not a few citizens.

When one considers that the memorial was placed in its present position because no more suitable site was available at the time, and that we now have untrammelled by affiliations that would militate against any move to honour our greatest folk hero, the memorial should now be taken out of the shadows and set up in St. John's Square, where it could be admired by everyone, visitors and locals alike.

Close to the gate stood the Citadel, the guard house and gates of which can still be seen in the grounds of St. John's Hospital. Unfortunately, this historic building has been lately vandalised by having an ugly fire escape erected right in front of it. On the eastern side of the guard house stood St. John's tower, the magazine containing the ammunition for the defence of the Irish town. This was demolished in the 1830s to make way for an extension of the hospital.

At the eastern end of the hospital enclosure stands the pitiful remains of the "Devil's Battery": This was once a strong tower that defied the fire power of the Williamite guns all through the sieges, hence the name. This remarkable fortification stood at the point where the wall turned off at a right angle towards Old Clare Street. The defences here bore the brunt of the fierce cannonade from the batteries set up on the heights of Singland. The main breach was made at a spot now marked by the elevator attached to the hospital. The other was where the New Road now passes through the wall.

### Black Battery

Close to the main breach, at the eastern side, stood the famous Black Battery, an underground magazine that exploded during the assault on the breach, killing a number of the crack Brandenburg regiment. It is not known if the explosion was accidental or otherwise.

The remains of these battered fortifications stand as a reminder of that vital period in the history of our city, when the might of the Williamite army was held at bay outside the walls of Garryowen.

St. John's Hospital was founded in 1780, in the old guardhouse of the citadel, by Lady Hartstonge, wife of Sir Henry Hartstonge. This remarkable woman, who was sister of Edmond Sexton Pery, was stirred by a desire to assist the fever stricken inhabitants of the city. At this time the word "hospital" meant nothing to most people. Physical injuries and disease were given some of the spot attention if there was a doctor able to get around to it: more often than not there was no medical attention. Surgery as we know it today was unknown, though Dr. Sylvester O'Halloran was making a brave bid to look into the future in his primitive County Hospital in St. Francis Abbey, which was founded 15 years before.

After a short time provision was made for the treatment of venereal disease in women — a highly prevalent and dreadful disease for which there was no cure. The valuable institu-

tion then became known as the "Fever and Lock Hospital."

The nursing sisters of the Little Company of Mary were introduced in 1888, and their exacting standards of efficiency and general administration abilities have made the hospital one of the finest in the region.

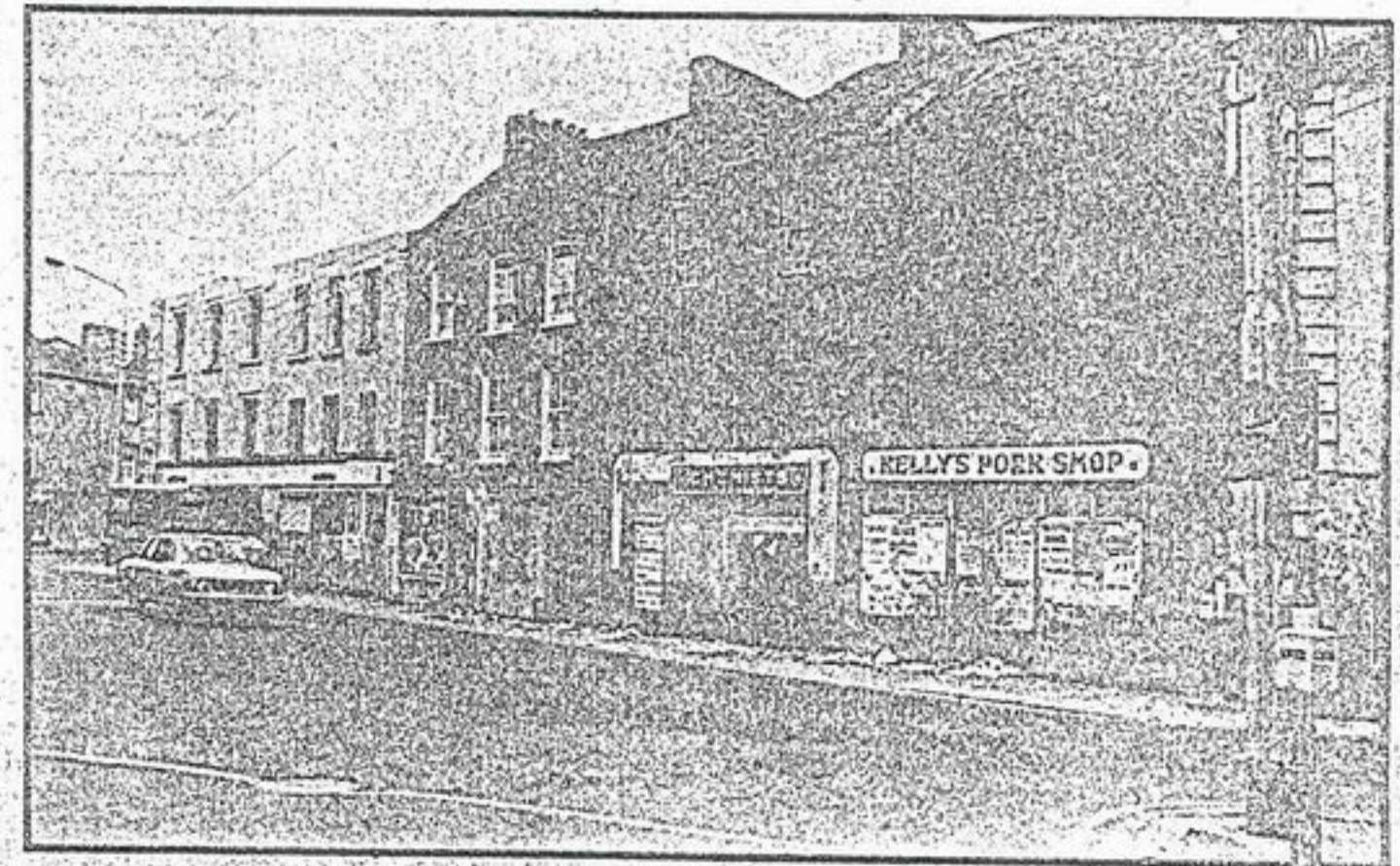
Across the wide thoroughfare of the Cathedral Square, and in perfect conformity with the storied district, stands the Protestant parish church of St. John the Baptist, surrounded by its centuries of graves. The graveyard once extended beyond its present enclosure, but was tucked into its present tidy shape in 1693 when the existing wall (on the south eastern side) was erected. An inscribed slab commemorating this event is still to be seen set in the

wall facing St. John's Hospital gate. Linehan's translation of the Latin script is as follows:

"John Foord being Mayor, and promoter of this work, the parishioners of St. John of the Holy Cross after the recent havoc of the war procured the building of these walls of the cemetery of their own expense A.D. 1693. John Pateison, Vicar Edward Uncles, Robert Kemp, church wardens. John Barry, sculptor."

I have seen many graves unearthed in the surrounding streets during the road making and cable laying of the thirties.

Up to the late forties, when the churchyard's many trees — yews, hawthorns and elms — were cut down, the place was a verdant oasis in the teeming jungle of the Irish town, and a sanctuary



Parnell Street just prior to demolition in the '70s.



**Denis McGuinness**

## DRESS SUIT SERVICE

All Types of Gents Formal wear  
Wedding ★ Dress Dances ★  
Debs., etc.

Also Plain Suits available for  
Weddings, Dinner Dances and  
all informal occasions

Telephone  
(061) 311142

Only 400 yards from  
Railway Station

**173 Hyde Road, Prospect,  
Limerick**

**LATE OPENING EVERY EVENING**




CATHEDRAL Place, now a busy thoroughfare, was quiet enough before the coming of the bacon factories and the markets. That part of the street between St. John's Cathedral and Symth's Row was originally named St. Nicholas Street, and that part extending to Mulgrave Street, Rampars Road. This street name was of very special historical interest and should not have been changed. The word 'Rampars' is a corruption of 'ramparts'. The 'ramparts' were, of course, the great banks of earth piled against the walls of the Irish town where they were vulnerable to the cannon fire from the heights of Singland. These earthworks, which were constructed after the retirement of the Williamites to winter quarters in the autumn of 1690, can be seen in the grounds of St. John's Hospital, and in the garden of Town Wall Cottage. The whole street was afterwards called Chapel Street, after Fr. John Leahy's parish church (1753); after the building of the Cathedral it came into its present title — Cathedral Place.

After the corn market had been removed from its old site at Mungret Gate and set up in the fine open space at the west side of the Cathedral the whole area smelt of new-mown hay the whole year round. This was much appreciated by the local people, who were thus enabled to tolerate the less prepossessing odours from the pig market a little further up the street.

These markets have long since ceased operations, but there are many who remember the hay carts, which were an unforgettable feature of the place. Only the heads of the poor overburdened beasts could be seen as they drew the heavy and cumbersome loads long distances to the market. Straw was also brought in the sold in and same manner.

### Hay and straw

Hay and straw were purchased by the hundreds of horse and donkey owners in and about the city, and also by certain types of the poorer classes who could afford no better than straw bedding. A number of "Hay and Straw" stores served as retail outlets.

The adjoining butter market was also a busy and colourful place. Butter was sold in the "lump," or in firkins — small wooden hoops — and was brought to market on carts of every description from the surrounding country side. It was judged by taste and consistency of colour, and the numerous cow hairs and other flotsam that showed up against the bright background were accepted as if the contamination was unavoidable.

A Mrs. Burke, who kept a public house opposite St. John's presbytery gate, was known as 'Taste me Butter,' from her custom of inviting prospective buyers to sample her stock. In those days butter was not of a uniform standard quality, but varied greatly according to the expertise of the maker and the standards of hygiene applied in its manufacture.

On the roadside outside the market stood Molly Gleeson's pump, a celebrated meeting place for the people of the district before the fountain was erected in the Cathedral Square. There were many such pumps around the parish, some of which survived up to a few years ago. The one at Black Boy Pike was in use up to the 'fifties.

A carnival atmosphere pervaded the adjoining pig market on market days. On arrival at the market horses and donkeys were untackled and allowed to rest after their long journeys, while their owners stood by their creels, until the grunting and squealing occupants found new owners. Groups of schoolboys, on their way home from the nearby Christian Brothers' school,