

Local Markets thriving

For all the modernisation that the country has seen in the past thirty years, there is still one recipe for economic and community success that gives most towns a unique quality. These drivers are the local markets. Places where the old meets the new and you can find a thriving combination of small and large specialised suppliers of crafts and specialised foods.

Specialisation and a sense of the individual and the rare are what make markets attractive. They provide a shopping experience based more in social interaction between buyer and trader, and thus are a much more interesting and interactive way to shop.

THE MILK MARKET

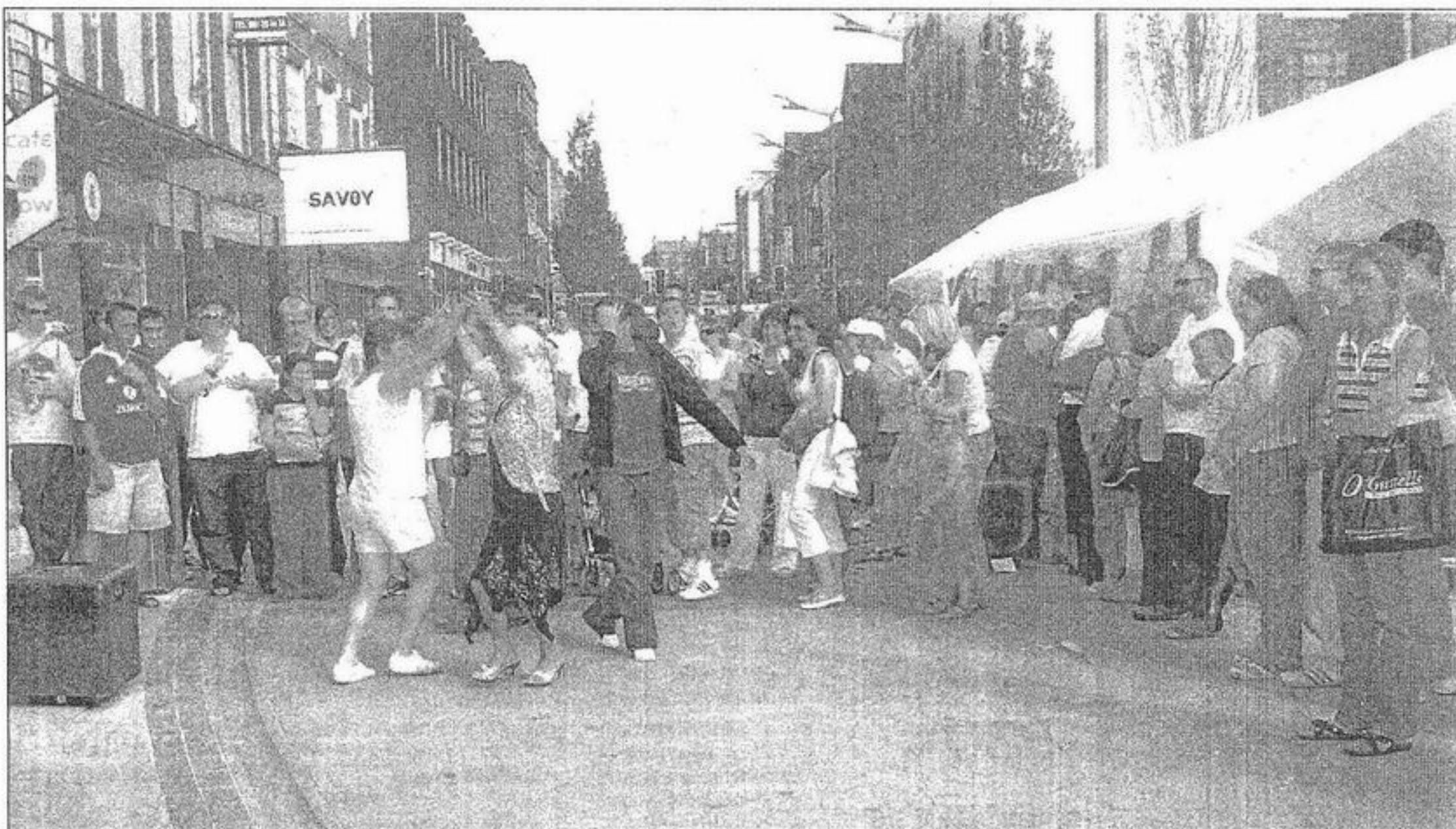
Nowhere is specialisation and the tendency towards the unique more evident than in Limerick's very own Milk Market. An institution in its own right, the Milk Market is a veritable magnet for families looking for somewhere to relax and spend time on a Saturday morning.

Recently the trustees of the Milk Market endorsed a multi million euro plan to revitalise what is one of Limerick city's hidden gems. Anyone who ventures to the Milk Market on a Saturday morning will be met with a barrage of choice in relation to craft and foods. There are more speciality food stalls here than you can imagine, and there is also a wonderful sense of community. The Milk Market is a focal point for commerce and community, and as such the trustees have identified as an essential part of the fabric of Limerick city, and a part that gives the area energy and vitality.

With that in mind the plan is to overhaul the Milk Market, making it more user friendly and multi-purpose. It is also envisaged that the market might open on six days a week. The idea behind this is that it creates more choice for the people of Limerick. Different days may well be earmarked for different types of stallholders. With some days dedicated to crafts while others are dedicated to food. Again this is only at the planning stage, but it shows an effort to diversify the retail base of the market and give it an extra dimension.

One of the more ambitious plans is to erect a roof over the market which will allow protection from the elements and make for a more comfortable and enjoyable experience for people who frequent the market. Making the market weatherproof will only add to its attractiveness for stallholders, traders and Limerick people alike.

As things stand the Milk Market itself is a landmark which isn't all that obvious. Interested parties are hoping to illuminate it at night, thereby drawing attention to something which really deserves to grab people's attention. The keyword for most people is multi-purpose use. While the Milk Market serves its market



Bedford Row market is a hit with Sunday shoppers

function extremely well, it also has the potential to provide a public space of sorts for the people of Limerick. Outdoor drama, children's entertainment, maybe even a mini soap-box corner have been some of the used put forward for sections of the market. As part of Limerick's Unfringed Festival in recent months a specialised drama and artistic installation was held in the market at night and proved a great success. Once plans are underway for the rejuvenation of the market then such uses may well become a welcome part of the market's life.

VARIETY AND CHOICE

The market also serves the valuable function of allowing stallholders from all over the county and as far afield as Cork and Clare to sell their specialised produce. The market allows a platform for many people with small businesses to promote their products and sell them. Very often these businesses are specialised and unique. A huge degree of enterprise is already being encouraged in the market, and it provides access for both people selling their wares and the more discerning customer in Limerick city. Economically it adds an extra something to the city centre and allows people access to goods they wouldn't find in their local supermarket. On top of this the stallholders all have specialised knowledge of what they sell, whether it is French food, Olive Oils or cheeses. This makes the Milk Market unique, and a friendly convivial antidote to ordinary every day shopping.

The market itself has a long history stretching back over one hundred and sixty years. It could well be argued that this new development is a pivotal moment in that history. The Trustees of the market have stressed that they are looking forward to taking a more

active and dynamic role in the running of the market. They now feel that it is time to think creatively and put in the kind of work that will maximise the market's potential. Another encouraging addition to the market is to be a restaurant in Market House overlooking some of the stalls. With an already huge amount of families attending the market this restaurant will no doubt see a huge influx of business. It will also allow people to stay that little bit longer and will add more to their shopping experience. Ultimately the market is being earmarked as a focal point for this part of the city. It is hoped that the economic vitality it brings, along with its attractiveness for the people of Limerick will help to give the area a jolt in the arm, and prove a real catalyst along the road to rejuvenation.

BEDFORD ROW MARKET

The Market on Bedford

Row has proven to be a resounding success during its relatively short life span. Stretching up to Thomas Street it sells specialist foods and arts and crafts and it has shown that there is definite demand for specialisation and an open air option for shoppers. You can buy anything from home made sweets and chocolates to special home baked breads and cakes. The market is deceptive, while it looks small in size it manages to pack a lot in in terms of choice for the consumer.

BEDFORD ROW - THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT

Bedford Row has become brand new focal point for shoppers. It has managed to create a new heart for the city, turning what was once a standard street into something with real character and choice. The street of course has its own wonderful focal point in the form of the

Richard Harris statue which was unveiled last year. As a tribute to one of Limerick's most famous sons it is hard to best it and the amount of onlookers who congregate around it is testament to the man's legendary persona.

What sets Bedford Row as it is now apart from so many other streets is its wonderful mix of the old with the new. In demolishing the Grand Central cinema the developers took the admirable option and decided that the street needed to retain a little bit of its heritage. They also realised that Bedford Row would need a landmark building. With that in mind they retained the façade of the Methodist church which is now enclosed in a glass atrium. The old has been married with the new in a very stylish manner, and it adds to the street's rather elegant new character.

As well as providing a community focal point with the Sunday market, Bedford Row

has also become a core area for some rather stylish shopping. The future also holds more promise. A new high class restaurant is planned for the area, and a café will be open in the new shopping complex which is due to open in the area. Bedford Row will become an extension of the café quarter extending through to Thomas Street. It seems that making the street pedestrian friendly has given it a new lease of life, a something else for the people of the city to frequent with their families.

The City Central complex on the site has been earmarked for mixed use, with 10,000 square metres of retail space planned, along with floor for office space. This will further enhance the area's dynamic sense of itself, and is hoped to attract big name stores to the complex, which will no doubt make it even more popular.



The Milk Market has been in existence for more than one hundred years. This picture was taken 1958 and supplied by Sean Curtin's A Stroll Down Memory Lane