

**THE Syndaco (Mayor) of Rome marvelled at it in 1875 at a function for all the mayors of the world.**

Limerick's Great Mayoral Chain is one of the city's finest treasures, and is certainly the most impressive of any Irish city. It is insured for £1 million.

It has been to America on several occasions, has been admired by the Pope and heads of State. And it is inscribed with descriptions of the events which have made modern Limerick what it has become today.

The original chain was fashioned in London about 1820, and consisted of small linked discs, about the size of 5p coins. There was no room on them for elaborate engraving, and merely carried the name of the holder of office, year by year.

Then the tradition arose of mayors adding a link, engraved with some details of the events of their years of office. To date, 68 such additions have been attached to the original chain.

The last to be added was that of the mayoralty of the late Alderman Mick Lipper, to mark Limerick's All Ireland hurling victory of 1973. The previous one was given to the present chairman of the Harbour Commissioners, Mr Ted Russell in 1957, during his third mayoralty, "by the 16 surviving former Mayors".

The "Reformed Corporation" (post 1841) mayors added far more bulky discs, which were inscribed with an account of local, national and world events during that mayoralty. They were, in fact, large round medallions, about three inches across, but with a circular hole in the middle, thus converting it to a link, attached by a small gold ring to the remainder of the chain.

Some are medallions with diametrical holes punched near the rim to achieve the same link effect.

Three are actual medals, and hang from the main body of the chain. One of these was presented by the first mayor of the Reformed Corporation, Martin Honan, who placed it as far as possible away from the links of his corrupt predecessors.

The others are those of James Casey and of Mr Michael B O'Malley, solicitor, who was mayor in 1948/9, and who is living today.

Casey's claim to official fame is that he briefly acted as Deputy Mayor after the assassination of Mayor George Clancy in March 1921, later taking the chain in more ordinary circumstances.

The passing of the Municipal Reform Act on November 9th, 1841, is recorded on Honan's medal.

Among the other events chronicled on the chain are:

**DIED IN OFFICE**  
Pierse Shannon, Corbally House, died during his 1844 mayoralty.

**NEW BRIDGE**  
William J Geary recorded the laying of the first stones of 'The Abbey River Bridge' in 1845.

**FAMINE!**  
"Edmund F G Ryan, Mayor, 1846. Floating Docks commenced. Total failure of the potato crop. £5,000 collected in the city for the poor."  
**O'CONNELL DIES**  
"Thomas Walcott, Mayor, 1847. The Liberator died at Genoa, 15th of May. General Election, J O'Brien and J O'Connell (son of the Liberator) elected."

"Michael Quinn, 1848. Got possession of the Island Bank for the citizens. Railway communication opened 9th May between Dublin and Limerick."  
**THE DOCKS**  
"Alderman John Boyce, JP, 1849. Presented the Corporation address to Her Majesty at the Levee in Dublin. Laid the foundation stone of the Floating Docks, on which occasion he was presented with a silver trowel."

**GREAT EXHIBITION**  
"Laurence Quinlivan, 1850. Presided at a banquet of the citizens to General Lord Gough on his return from India, 16th May. Attended Lord Mayor of London's banquet to Prince Albert and the Mayors of the United Kingdom in furtherance of the great industrial exhibition of all nations."

**EARL ELECTED**  
"Thadeus McDonnell, JP, 1851. The Earl of Arundel and Surrey was elected MP for the city."

**ELECTIONS**  
"Thomas Kane, MD, JP, 1852 and 1857. Robert Potter and Francis W Russell, Esq., returned as members for Limerick at the General Election."

**DOCKS OPENED**  
"William Henry Hall elected Mayor, 1853. Great Munster Fair, New Cornmarket and Floating Docks opened by the Earl of St Germaines."

**FOUNTAINS**  
"Henry O'Shea, 1855. Public fountains erected for the poor of the city."

**CRIMEAN WAR**  
"Henry Watson, Mayor 1823, '24, '25, '26 and 1854. Irish Militia embodied. The mayor this year traversed the land and water boundaries of the Corporation Municipality. War against Russia declared."

**SILVER CRADLE**  
Michael Robert Ryan, JP, 1859. General Election 4th May. F W Russell elected third time, Major Galvin elected for second time MP for the city. Silver cradle presented to Mrs Ryan by the Town Council and Corporate officials of the city according to the ancient custom of the city to commemorate the birth of a son and heir on the 30th of January in the year of his Mayoralty.

(According to the files of the Limerick Chronicle, Ryan also restored the ancient Arms of Limerick, and had the blazon inscribed over the City Jail and other public buildings, and even went so far as to have the coat of arms inscribed on the brass buttons of Cororation officials.)

**DIED**  
Another mayr who died in office was Alderman William Fitzgerald (1860), and this fact is recorded on a link to his memory.

**U.S. CIVIL WAR**  
"John Thomas McSheehy, Shannon Lawn, Mayor of Limerick for the year 1861. Presented by the citizens with a valuable testimonial on leaving office. Civil war broke out this year in the hitherto United States of America. The Prince Consort died on the 14th December this year. £1,100 collected for the purchase of fuel for the poor of the city."

**FAMINE**  
"Alderman W Lane Joynt, Mayor 1862, appointed Clerk of the Crown for County Limerick. Great distress in Lancashire, consequent on the Civil war in America."

**CHURCH**  
Robert McMahon (1863) records the dedication of Mount St Alphonsus, and the transfer of the Corcanree sloblands to the city.

**GAS WORKS**  
In 1864, Eugene O'Callaghan noted the renovation of the Gas Works.

**TREATY STONE**  
It was J R Tinsley who noted in 1865 that outdoor relief was still required for the starving poor, and it was he who arranged that the treaty stone be raised on a pedestal, and that was also the year in which Tait's Clock was started, and the fountain in front of St John's Cathedral was built.

**FIRST LIBRARY**  
William Spillane (1870).

became president of Limerick Boat Club, and his link notes the opening of the Corcanree embankment, the passing of the Irish Land Act and the opening of Limerick's first public library.

**FRENCH DOINGS**  
The year 1871 (Robert McDonnell) observes the siege and capture of Paris by the Prussians, but curiously omits the declaration of the German Empire at Versailles in the course of that action. One of the Limerick MPs, Colonel M Maunsell, became Postmaster General, a cabinet member, that year.

**NEW VOTING**  
Earl Spencer, Lord Lieutenant, opened the new docks in 1873, and voting by secret ballot was introduced to Ireland for the first time, in the mayoralty of J J Cleary.

**BUTTING IN**  
Cleary was in office again 1874 when the first General election under the new Act returned Isaac Butt and Richard O'Shaughnessy for Limerick.

**MAYORAL TRIAL**  
The result of the 1875 mayoral election went to law, and was finally adjudicated upon by Justice Keogh, declaring Ambrose Hall to be the chosen candidate.

**SPIRE GIFT**  
Catholic Institute opened in 1876, in the mayoralty of Thomas E O'Brien, and that year also saw the commencement of the spire of Mount St Alphonsus at the sole expense of ex-High Sheriff, Alderman Quin.

**PIUS IX**  
The City Council and Mayor Stephen Hastings sympathised with the death of Pope Pius IX, and with the election of his successor, Leo XIII, in 1878.

**LONGEST MESSAGE**  
The year 1879 is commemorated by the very wordy link of Michael O'Gorman. He notes that Isaac Butt died, that the Mount St Alphonsus spire and bells were completed, that the gas works were bought by the city, that Gladstone became Prime Minister, that the foundation stone of the dock clock was laid by the mayor's

daughter, and includes several other items of international trivia.

**BRIDGES, SPIRES**  
St Michael's church was completed in 1882/3, and so was St John's spire, according to the link of the mayor, Alderman John Counihan, who also noted the planting of the first trees on Military Road (O'Connell Avenue), that Sarsfield Bridge (then Wellesley) was opened toll-free, and Athlunkard Bridge was opened, and the water-works were taken over.

**PRINCE SNUBBED**  
Stephen O'Mara was the first nationalist mayor (1885), and his mayoralty co-incided with a visit by the Prince of Wales to the railway station. The City Council, under O'Mara refused to turn up for him. "Not received by the Mayor and citizens" is how the

link puts it.

**NEW HOUSES**  
Francis O'Keefe was mayor from 1887 to 1890, and supervised the building of the first artisans' dwellings.

**YOUNG**  
William O'Donnell (1890/1) claimed to be the youngest mayor on record.

**PARNELL**  
Perhaps the most beautiful medal on the chain is that of Patrick Riordan (1891), which commemorates the death of Parnell. One side has Parnell's head engraved, the other carrying the Treaty Stone.

**BARRINGTON'S**  
William Nolan (1895-6), for whom Nolan's Cottages are named, managed to raise £3,000 for Barrington's Hospital from a huge fete at Garryowen, then an open field area. Garryowen won the Munster Cup that year, and

# THE MAYORAL CHAIN TELLS ITS OWN TALE



The most significant civic moment of the year occurs with the handing over of the chain by the outgoing mayor to his successor. In this instance, Cllr Madden received it from Alderman O'Driscoll. This was the only occasion this century in which a mayor gave the chain back to the man from whom he had received it.

By MARTIN BYRNES

## SPONSOR SOUGHT FOR '300' LINK FOR CIVIC CHAIN

THE GREAT Mayoral Chain should have a link added to mark the tercentennial of the Treaty of Limerick, says the mayor.

A sponsor is asked to step forward. "I would greatly welcome such a civic-spirited gesture," Mayor Madden told the Limerick Chronicle.

Since the chain was first created 170 years ago, mayors have added 38 flattened-ring shaped or hanging medallions to commemorate significant events of their years of office.

The last link to be added was in 1973 to mark Limerick's most recent All Ireland senior hurling victory.

The chain is solid gold and is now insured for £1 million. "It is our greatest civic symbol," said Mr Madden. "I treat it with enormous respect, because it represents the office of first citizen in a permanent way, whereas I will be replaced by another person."

"The striking of a new link for this year would be a very significant gesture, and would instantly become part of the history and of the pride of the city and of the region," he said. Mr Madden asked the Limerick Chronicle to publicise the idea generally such that potential sponsors of the new link might ponder the possibility.

"I would wish, however, that the sponsor be Irish and that the craftsmanship be Irish," said the mayor.

Inside this issue of your Limerick Chronicle, we carry a detailed account of the chain and of its importance to Limerick and beyond.

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## KEANE TO BE SEEN

Another John B Keane production is to take to the boards in Limerick in four weeks.

The can't-put-a-foot-wrong-these-days Listowel author's recent play, *The Chastitute*, has been chosen by Quarry Players, and is currently in rehearsal. It is a funny look at the desperate effort of a rustic to find a mate, sensitively handled, yet bawdy.

Tom Quinn stars, with Peter Kennedy, Maura Reidy, David Fielding, Barbara McLoughlin and John Gibbons, under the direction of Mike Kearney.

It will be staged at the Belltable for six nights from Monday, March 18th.

## PRESIDENT WANTED DIVORCE

Mrs Mary Robinson proposed divorce to an Oireachtas committee after just two days of sitting, it emerged this week.

Mrs Robinson, then a senator, was described as being 'simplistic in her thinking' by Cllr Willie O'Brien, Patrick Swell, who was then a TD and chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Marital Breakdown.

"I feel that these experts are brilliant in their own limited fields, but when they stray off their speciality, they are lost," Mr O'Brien told the Limerick Chronicle.

"The committee existed, in my view, to examine all of the problems surrounding marital breakdown. It was simplistic just to propose divorce on the second day of sitting on this most complex issue," said Mr O'Brien.

The committee sat behind closed doors, and reported in 1984, leading to the subsequent defeated divorce referendum.

## DUBLIN'S KERRY CHOOSES DUBLIN'S LIMERICK

The title of "Kerry Person of the Year", awarded by the Kerry-men's Association in Dublin, went to ESB boss, Dr Paddy Moriarty.

But the commission to create the presentation went to Limerick sculptor, Deirdre Cussen.

Ms Cussen, a member of the celebrated County Limerick legal family, is wife of conservationist Pdraig O Snodaigh. She has written extensively in Irish in both verse and prose.

Her creation for Dr Moriarty, in polished limestone, depicts a foraging bird.

## HARNEY TO SPEAK

Environmental Protection Minister, Ms Mary Harney, will address the local branch of Earthwatch at Jury's Hotel on the evening of Monday, March 4th.

The group ordinarily meets every Monday at the Flag Cafe, Broad Street, to discuss conservation and environmental projects.

## DELEGATES PREPARE

The Fianna Fail Ard Fheis has been fixed for the weekend of Friday March 8th to Sunday 10th, at the RDS. Delegates from both Limerick constituencies are expected to attend in the usual numbers.