

# Limerick's Mayoral chain — links with history

IF LIMERICK'S new Mayor, Councillor Paddy Madden wants to be immortalised on the principal Mayoral chain, now estimated to be worth at least £1 million, he will have some strange inscriptions to follow.

The medallions on the chain, according to a booklet issued by City Manager, Mr Jack Higgins, weren't big enough for some Mayors to record the important happenings of their terms, and some of them have inscriptions running on to the edge.

## Custom

From 1822 onwards it became customary, but not obligatory for a mayor in office to add a flat ring engraved with his name and year of office.

Then inscriptions were added and the rings became medallions, and became larger and larger, as mayors vied for space.

Some of the inscriptions are revealing.

For instance some, like John Daly (1900) were proud to record their ex-convict status. Others like Robert Mc Mahon (1862), were more interested in recording the fact that he was presented at the Queen's levee at St James palace.

The Mayors wives were scarcely mentioned. But one was luckier than the others.

The wife of Michael Robert Ryan, Mayor in 1859 produced a son and heir in the year of his mayoralty and in accordance "with the ancient custom of the city" was presented with a silver cradle by the Town Council and Corporation Officers.

There is no mention of such sexist notions in today's City Council affairs.

More than one Mayor died in office, including Pierce Shannon, in 1884 and Alderman William Fitz-

gerald in 1860, who was only 34 years of age.

Some Mayors were apparently more energetic than others, sort of yesteryear joggers. Henry Watson, who was four times Mayor of Limerick recorded on his medalion that he had "traversed the land and water boundaries of the Corporation Municipality."

James Spaight, 1856, recorded that he had opened an old peoples home, and seen the foundation stone of St John's Cathedral laid. "Peace with Russia" was his final contribution.

The Mayors of the twentieth century were never found wanting either.

The first Sinn Fein Mayor in Ireland — Alphonsus O'Mara, 1919, proudly recorded the fact that he had refused to take the oath of allegiance.

The murder of Mayor Michael O'Callaghan by British Forces in 1921 is recorded and the fact that the then Deputy Mayor James M. Casey was later to become the first Mayor elected under the Limerick City Management Act in 1934.

Joseph P. Liddy, in 1959 saw the inauguration of President de Valera, and in his second term in 1971, received President Richard Nixon in Limerick. He was in turn received by Nixon in the White House, and back in Limerick presided over a civic reception for Appollo 13 Astronauts James Lovelle, Jack Swigert and Fred Haise.

It was a far cry from that day in 1850 when Mayor Laurence Quinlivan presided over a citizens banquet for Lord Gough on his return from India or that other day two years earlier when Mayor Michael Quinn announced the opening of Railway communication between Limerick and Dublin.