

*Our distinguished contributor was widely congratulated last year upon his completion of fifty years of service to journalism. Here, he discourses upon a proud civic possession . . . .*

## Limerick's Unique Mayoral Chain

BY C. C. CREGAN.

A FORMER Mayor of Limerick, Ald. Ambrose Hall, who occupied the Civic Chair in 1875, was fond of boasting that the City got its Charter from King John of England two years before one was given to London. The same claim has often been made since by others, less by way of pride in the "honour" than as showing that this is a very ancient municipality.

The Mayoralty, at any rate, is the highest office Limerick can bestow on one of its citizens, and attached to it is a valuable chain of very great interest because of the events and incidents of which it is a sort of permanent chronicle.

This chain, worn by the successive occupants of the Municipal Chair, is something unique of its kind. It is of solid gold and is several feet in



Ald. G. E. Russell, Mayor of Limerick, Patron of Feile Padraig. Ald. Russell is wearing the famous Mayor Chain, subject of this article.

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length. Designed in the first instance to the order of a former Limerick Corporation and made by a London firm of goldsmiths, several additions have been made to it by successive Mayors.

## FIRST ADDITION.

The first addition to the original chain appears to have been made in 1821. This consists of a plain gold ring with the simple inscription:—"Thomas Jervis, Esq., Mayor, 1st October, 1821." The precedent thus set by Mr. Jervis has been pretty faithfully followed ever since although there are some breaks in the sequence.

Up to 1842 the practice was to add rings but then it became the custom to put on medallions of various sizes. The change was probably due to a desire to have more space for inscriptions.

The first medallion added was given by Martin Honan, Mayor for 1842 and '43, and it records that "the Municipal Reform Act became law in Limerick, November 9th, 1841."

## GRIM REMINDER.

A grim reminder of the British-produced famine is furnished by the following inscription in a medallion added in 1846 by the Mayor for that year—Edward F. G. Ryan—"Total failure of the Potato Crop; £5,000 collected in the City for the poor." The medallion put on by Thomas Walnutt, Mayor for 1847, tells that the Liberator died at Genoa that year and that John O'Connell, the Liberator's son, and John O'Brien were returned members of the British Parliament for the City.

Ald. John Boyce was Mayor for 1849, and it is duly recorded in the Chain that he presented the Corporation address to Queen Victoria at a Levee in Dublin, and that the same year he laid the foundation stone of the Limerick Floating Dock.

Nationality does not appear to have been a strong factor in the public life of Ireland in those days, for we learn further that the Mayor for 1850, Lawrence Quinlivan, presided at "a Banquet of the citizens to General Lord Gough on his Lordship's return from India," and "attended Lord Mayor of London's banquet to Prince Albert."

Nothing more exciting is recorded for the Mayoralty of Thaddeus MacDonnell in 1851, than that "the Earl of Arundel and Surrey was elected M.P. for the City."

## O'CONNELL STATUE.

The medallion contributed by Dr. Thomas Kane, Mayor for 1852, says: "The O'Connell Statue was inaugurated 15th August," while we learn that the foundation stone of St. John's Cathedral was laid in 1856, during the Mayoralty of James Spaight. Thomas Boyce was Mayor in 1857, and it is mentioned that in that year "the Judge of Assize attended in state at the Catholic Cathedral, with the Mayor and members of the Corporation in their robes, being the first occasion since the Reformation."

The "big events" recorded for the Mayoralty of Edward Gabbet in 1858 are:—"Visit of H.R.H. Prince Albert, 28th June—Russian guns placed on Wellesly Bridge."

Even the American Civil War figures on our Mayoral Chain, for the medallion inserted by John Thomas McSheehy, of Shannon Lawn, Mayor for 1861, records that "Civil War broke out this year in the hitherto United States of America," while Ald. William Lane Joynt, Mayor in 1862, mentioned for posterity that there was "great distress in Lancashire consequent on the Civil War in America."

Coming to 1856, the then Mayor, Ald. John Richard Tinsley, inscribed the fact that it was that year the famous Treaty Stone of Limerick was placed on its present pedestal.



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The first public Free Library in Limerick was opened on December 15th, 1870, during the Mayoralty of William Spillane, and the following year, when the Civic Chair was occupied by Robert McDonnell, an address from the Mayor and Corporation was presented to Colonel William Monsell, M.P. for Co. Limerick, at Tervoe House, "on his appointment as Postmaster-General." John J. Cleary was Mayor for 1872-'73-'74, and it was during his tenure of office the Ballot Act was passed for Ireland and Isaac Butt elected M.P. for Limerick City.

### PRESENTATION OF SILVER CRADLE.

We are further told that "a silver cradle was presented to the Mayoress by the Corporation and citizens, value 250 guineas." This, by the way, was not the only occasion on which a gift of this kind was made, for it is on record on the Chain, too, that in 1859, a silver cradle was presented to Mrs. Ryan, wife of Michael Robert Ryan, then Mayor, "by Town Council and Corporate Officers in accordance with ancient custom of the City to commemorate the birth of a son and heir."

Ambrose Hall was Mayor in 1875, John Francis Walker in 1876, Stephen Hastings in 1878 and Michael O'Gorman in 1879-'80. The "links" added by these wearers of the Chain record nothing of any particular note or interest.

During the Mayoralty of Ald. Jerome Counihan in 1882-'83 Wellesley Bridge was re-named Sarsfield Bridge, and made free of toll, and a Bill was passed to free Athlunkard Bridge from toll.

### FIRST NATIONALIST MAYOR.

Limerick's first Nationalist Mayor held office in 1885 and 1886 in the person of Stephen O'Mara. The Medallion added by him says:—"Elected M.P., Queen's Co.—Ossary Division. Home Rule Bill introduced by W. E. Gladstone. Right Rev. Dr. George Butler died. Rev. E. T. O'Dwyer consecrated Bishop. Failure of Munster Bank. Visit of Prince of Wales to Railway Station. Not Received in City by Mayor or Citizens. First Mayor elected as Nationalist."

Francis O'Keeffe, Solicitor, was Mayor for the three years, 1887-'88-'89, and he was succeeded in 1890 by William J. O'Donnell, described in his Medallion as "the youngest Mayor of Limerick on record." Then came Ald. Patrick O'Riordan, who was Mayor in 1891, and who included in his Medallion a representation in relief of Parnell, who died that year.

William M. Nolan was the High Sheriff in 1890 and Mayor in 1895 and 1896, and a lengthy recital in the Medallion inserted by him states that "Garryowen Football Club won Munster Cup, presented by Mayoress."

### FIRST FENIAN MAYOR.

Limerick had its first Fenian Mayor in the person of John Daly, who held office for three years, 1899, 1900 and 1901. One side of the Medallion which he added to the chain mentions his arrest and trial in 1884 and his imprisonment in Portland Prison in 1896. The other side contains in relief a representation of a pike transfixed by a rifle, shackles and wreath of shamrock.

John Daly took the Chain with him to America on one occasion and a former wearer, Ald Ambrose Hall, objected to his doing so, on the grounds that the visit was a private one and the precious symbol of Limerick's ancient dignity might be lost.

The custom of adding links to the Chain has been pretty faithfully observed in subsequent years, but there are some breaks.

The Chain, weighing 32 ounces troy, is insured for £2,000 and kept locked in a strong room in the City Hall.

This interesting insignia of office is historically as well as intrinsically valuable and Limerick is very proud of it on account of its many interesting associations. Though big and rather cumbersome, it is invariably worn at special and important functions, but for ordinary use the Mayor has a smaller gold chain to wear over his vest.