

Memories of Henry Street

by Gerry Gallivan



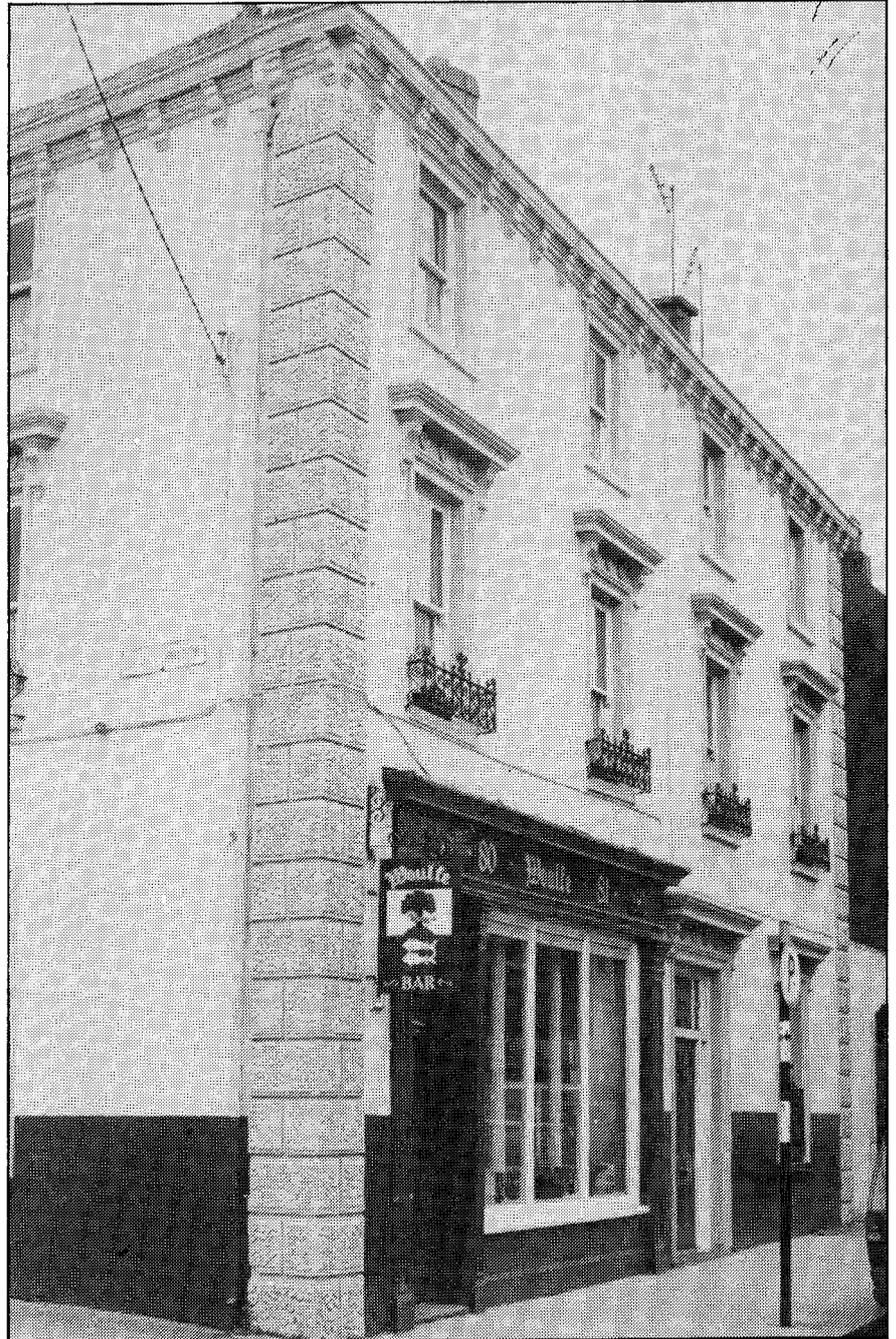
he Henry Street that I knew during the 1920s and early 1930s was a comfortable, down-to-earth place to grow up in. Of course, one cannot

just take the street itself in isolation, the whole locality, with Henry Street as the focal point, is what I have in mind. Running into it at various points, like tributaries to a river, were Frederick Street, Clontarf Place, The Windmill, Newenham Street, Hartstonge Street and several others but Henry Street was the common denominator, being the bread-basket of the area with its wide selection of shops ... and there certainly was a variety. Even in my own section, bounded at one end by Clontarf Place and by Hartstonge Street at the other, we had more than enough to go on with.

It was a close-knit community and, while we might not all have been on first-name terms, there was very little we didn't know about each other. The shops played their part in this: they were places for casual meetings where snippets of information and harmless gossip mixed easily with domestic purchases. Maurice Counihan ran a spacious establishment where the traditional swinging door separated pub from grocery. Maurice, a large lugubrious man, seldom separated from his beloved bowler hat, kept a casual but watchful eye on the goings-on. His attractive assistants, the Misses Geary, Lowe, and Murphy also come to mind and they often gladdened our young hearts with their dispensing of NKM caramels and Cleeve's slab toffee. Never before and never since has toffee tasted so good.

The Whelans had two shops, the Henry Street Dairy and the other up the steps at the corner of Frederick Street. They were run by Ms. Whelan and her daughters, Maisie (the only one who ever and always called me Geddie), Rita and Angela. Joe Whelan, the son of the family, rowed for St. Michael's Club and, with his father, worked for the local builders, no more than a few steps from the house. A horse-drawn cart bearing churns of milk arrived at the dairy each day between four and five and, when we could rise to it, this was our signal to come with glasses or cups for pen'orths of ice-cream; with a spoon you could drag it out longer than with tubs or wafers.

Practically next door was Shahan's where you could buy anything in the line of food and where Elsie was always abreast of the social activities of



Woulfe's Bar, Henry Street.

the young gladiators who played for Bohemians, Young Munsters and Garryowen. It was here too that the Tubridy's horse-drawn van seemed always to arrive simultaneously with the motor van of Humphrey's bakery filled with trays of fresh steaming bread. Further down the road was Bridie Brown's, a shop renowned in the area for skirts, kidneys, breastbones, with a

dash of confectionery thrown in for good measure. The local wags would tip a ha'penny to youngsters to pop their heads inside the door and ask Bridie how her breastbones were that day.

Across the road from the Windmill corner was Dick Meskill's newsagency, a shop I'll always associate with Christmas. Here you'd find comic cuts, *The*

Champion, The Bullseye, The Magnet, set out in colourful rows, but the nostalgic whiff of newsprint, new paper and the thrill of Christmas annuals still come to mind ... those irresistible covers with their shining faces, and flowing scarves. Butcher Sheahan's, The Villiers' School and Halvey's garage were close by. Moynihan's at the corner of Hartstonge Street was where white-aproned male assistants sliced ham to perfection, wrapped packages of tea and coffee in heavy brown paper, then tied it with string, leaving a loop for your finger.

Quinn's was the main garage; I dare say it helped that the sons were fine sportsmen; Kevin, a Garryowen rugby forward of note, also rowed for Shannon Rowing Club; Vinny coxed for Shannon and Dickie was actively involved in tennis and badminton. The most elegant shop around was Kearney's at the corner of Newenham Street, the pungent aroma of ground coffee is an enduring memory. The son of the house, Kevin, sadly recently deceased, was a champion springboard diver, and his sister, Louise who set many a heart a-flutter, married Joe McNeice, who played on the wing for Young Munsters.

South's pub and the Southside Dairy were a few doors further on and between them was Mol Dwyer's premises, where you could get anything from Drummer Dyes and bulldog clips to gas mantles and fly paper. Close at hand was Ryan's newsagency where, apart from comics and newspapers, you could get Reckett's Blue, Lifebuoy soap, apples, oranges, and half-time jimmys, once you'd pushed through the door with the tinkling bell and braved the atmosphere that was always heavy with the smell of paraffin. Jim Hanrahan had a licensed premises a few doors down from us. At that age my only acquaintance with its interior was when I was sent for change, to get coppers for the gas. But I'll always remember the picture on the wall of Lindbergh's plane 'The Spirit of St. Louis', swooping precariously within feet of the Atlantic waves.

Two of the joys of those days were 'the pens' at the bottom of O'Curry Street Hill, and the bill boarding beside Whelan's corner shop. The pens were a kind of partitioned stockade where herds of cattle were driven on designated days, and naturally, we kids would be there in our dozens hanging over the railed fences and if each of us couldn't be Hopalong Cassidy we could, at least, be cow-puncher parades of his from the Bar 20. The bill boarding was reserved for advertising future and current cinematic attractions. A man with dungarees, a step ladder, a large brush and a bucket of paste would come at regular intervals and, with rapid, expert slashes of the brush, would unfold before our popping eyes,

in gloriously coloured posters, the secrets of the coming week ... Bebe Daniels in 'She's a Sheikh', John Boles in 'Rio Rita' or Maurice Chevalier in 'Innocents of Paris'.

connection was part and parcel of the Windmill tradition though there were, of course, other occupations too. Among the people I recall are the Kirby, Houlihan and Douglas families.



The Windmill en fete, during the Eucharistic Congress, 1932.

Yes, we were a close-knit community and, when I think back on it, names keep tumbling ... Lynchs, Simpsons, O'Connors, Michael and Tommy O'Brien, their sister, Betty, and their grandmother, Mary. Around the corner in Clontarf Place lived Maudie Madigan, the Carmodys, the Bensons, the Cooneys, the O'Dohertys (Paddy would play later for Young Munsters) and the Halls ... Gladys and Lovie added glamour to the locality, while their brothers, Jack and Sammy, gave great service to the Limerick Boat Club. My brothers, Cyril, Jim and Eddie, and I also rowed for Limerick Boat Club ... as did Joe White and Charlie O'Connor.

Newenham Street boasted Paul A. O'Brien, Mayor of Limerick (1925), the well known Lentin family, and the Garryowen Halpins, - 'Dasher', the father, was an Irish Rugby International. His son, John, was one of the specialists; the other sons were also rugby enthusiasts.

Joe O'Sullivan who, like my brother Cyril, was one of the leading amateur actors in the city, lived in Frederick Street, as did the brothers Eugene and Timmie and Jackie O'Sullivan, all sea-going officers with the Limerick Steamship Company. Seafaring and the dock

One feature of life indelibly associated in my memory with the Windmill is the singing at the corner of the street. Around eight or nine o'clock at night, young men would gather on the steps near Bridie Brown's to swap yarns and to sing the old songs in natural untutored harmony. I have only to close my eyes in moments of nostalgia and I'm back once more in the drowsy calm of still summer evenings hearing them again, and the words of the old favourite 'Heart of my Heart' could have been written specially of them:

"Heart of my Heart', how I love that melody,
'Heart of my heart', brings back a memory,
When we were kids at the corner of the street,
We were rough and ready guys, but oh how we could harmonise".

All right, so if it's easy to be sentimental looking back from a distance of fifty years and more I readily admit it. There had to have been problems, disappointments, disruptions ... of course there were, but none of it changes the fact that Henry Street was a good place for a youngster to be when feeling his way towards life.