

# On to a winner— if he gets backing

By EUGENE PHELAN

**BERNARD** Sheehan was certain that he was on a winner when he started his Irish leather belt and watch strap business back in 1975.

Bernard, who has been involved in numerous occupations which have varied from an accountancy clerk to a builder, and from breadman to manager of Great Universal Stores in England, is now even more confident than ever—even though his business is almost grinding to a halt.

At one stage Bernard, who is 38, had more than ten men working in his rented out premises at 19 O'Connell Street but now he can only afford to pay two men.

Well known in racing circles as an amateur jockey, Bernard is very disappointed that he did not get a grant or aid of any kind to help his business which, he says, could be a great employer.

## Confused

He declared: "I am utterly confused with the practical administration of the Industrial

Promotion Authority whose primary function, on the instructions of the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Energy, is to provide jobs."

"Barnaby of Ireland"—his company—started operation in January, 1975, and progressed from producing 100 watch straps a week to a present capability of 5,000 crafted and presented in an attractive package, which is silk-screened on the premises.

From leather belts and watch straps, and other small leather items, Barnaby of Ireland have now gone into hand-crafted heraldic tapestries in leather with each coat of arms executed to order.

Asked if he did not think they were a little "pricey," at £65 apiece, Bernard replied: "They are terribly cheap. Some families are quite happy to pay £75 or £85 for a framed wall-print from Pakistan, while I can supply a superior article of aesthetic value cheaper."

It has always been Barney's ambition to start a manufacturing business of his own.

While employed as a jewellery representative, he noticed that the majority of watch-straps being sold were imported products from areas between Taiwan and Birmingham.

## Finest

"This was despite the fact that we have the finest tanneries in the world, and an enormous supply of leather. That is why I decided to start up," he says.

Barney says that in no way is he operating his business for the money.

"It is for the satisfaction of knowing that I am employing people. It is not for the money. Anyway, I only make about £20 a week at present for myself."

Barney's enterprise started tremendously and, not long after commencing operations, he had eleven men employed.

He received great demands for his products, but now blames himself partially for the fall of his firm's fortunes.

"My own conduct was atrocious. I tried to do too many things. What is needed for a company to progress is a responsible person for designing the progress of that business without any other responsibility," commented Barney.

"You can't design it, manage it and sell it as well."

Barney, it seems, became a little over-ambitious by trying to produce too many different products instead of concentrating on one, namely, the

**Barnaby of Ireland has been struck by the curse of St. Munchin, who promised that the stranger, would flourish while the native would perish in Limerick.**

That is the opinion of well-known and established Limerick jeweller, Mr. J. J. Keaneally, who sells Barnaby's products at half the price of its imported rivals.

In fact, Mr. Keaneally is one of the few Limerick jewellers selling that company's products.

"It is a first-class product, and it is typical of Limerick people that he is getting little support," said Mr. Keaneally.

He said that one-third of the watch straps he had sold from his Wickham Street premises were made by Barnaby of Ireland, and that the figure would have been higher only for the fact that the Limerick company did not make the "double strap."

As well as having a first-class product, according to Mr. Keaneally, he can sell the Limerick-made strap for 75 pence, while its foreign rival sells at £1.50.

And he added: "Funny thing, if it is made in Limerick, some people think it can't be good... they won't support their own: it's the old curse of St. Munchin again."

"The same thing happens all too often: running down our own," said Mr. Keaneally.

He was of the opinion that the service given by Barney Sheehan was excellent, and he was very disappointed that more people did not sell products in their premises.

watch straps which were going very well.

## Finance

Lack of finance was a definite factor in stopping Barney's operation from progressing.

He could not afford a telephone and therefore people found it impossible to get in contact with him, as he did with them.

Although he tried to employ a salesman, he found that anyone he interviewed for the job were just not interested in trying to sell leather products and pre-

ferred more attractive jobs like selling chemical products with car supplied, salary and security.

He also revealed that right now he could not afford to have a salesman on the road, and that he had to do this work himself.

"As well as that, we have about 21 jewellers in the city and there is only one of them pushing my watch straps.

"It's a waste of time calling to the rest of them," he added.

Naturally, he is very disappointed with the support he has got from the jewellers in Limerick, but he is hopeful of a change of heart in the future.

## Closure

He says that, unless a situation evolves where his business is recommended for development grants, and the staff are provided to develop it, he will call it a day.

Bernard has been in contact with Shannon Development, who are now responsible for small industries in the region, and Mr. Gerry Lowe, the Development Company's representative in the city, had good news for Barnaby of Ireland, this week.

Mr. Lowe spoke of the company and how, after an exhibition of Barney's products in the U.S., there had been no response and it had proved very unsuccessful.

But, he said, his company was interested, and that in fact "business service people" would be visiting Barnaby of Ireland to have an in-depth look at his operation.

They would be able to give him advice and help him to organise his business better. Then they could look at his operation with an eye to giving him a grant.

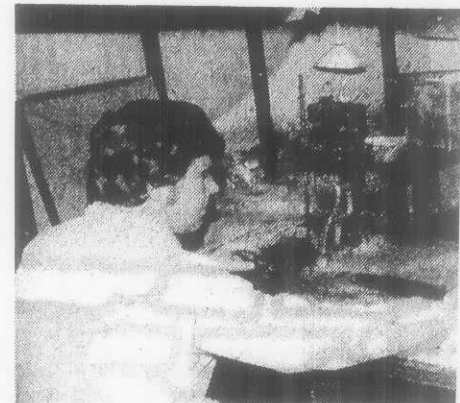
The business service people would be able to put him in the right direction. Hopefully, they would be able to see him shortly, but he pointed out that they were extremely busy in the city and that he had also problems contacting Barnaby who was at the time in England, promoting his products.

Barney Sheehan maintains that he needs cash grants from personnel, a marketing manager, a new product development man, an accounts clerk and secretary, instead of large grants towards machinery and capital equipment which, he says, he does not need.

According to Barney, Mr. David Scott, economist at Shannon Development, encouraged him to invest his resources in the tapestries. The recommendation to spend his money and develop the tapestry was done with the assurance that he was eligible for a research and Development Grant, claimed Barney.



Barney Sheehan.



Thomas Kiely (left) and Maurice Lynch



At the opening of the Winter Art Exhibition, Limerick, was Miss Mary F

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