

Old Carey's Road

by Paddy Moloney



arey's Road lies between Boherbuoy and the Roxboro Road on the south-side of Limerick. The road is called after Joseph Carey, the 19th century Limerick doctor who was noted for his charitable work for the poor of the city.

It was my birthplace as well as that of my father and grandfather and I have a natural affinity with the area. In this article I will try to describe some of its traditions and customs, 'all from memory', and if I lapse, due to the time factor, I hope I will be forgiven by those who read my story.

From Boherbuoy to the gateway of the old Cork railway yard the throughfare was paved with stone sets and from the railway gate to the Roxboro Road it was a 'dirt' road. The pathways were paved with flagstones. With the passage of time, the road came to be surfaced with concrete. The road took a sharp rise above the Quarry Boreen where the Cork railway bridge spanned the road. Adjacent to the bridge was the 'gas house', owned by the Great Southern Railway and used for the manufacture of gas from coal, for the lighting of the railway carriages and also used for cooking in the dining-cars. Alas, the bridge and the gas house have gone for all time.

There were several laneways running off the road: King's Lane, Young's

Lane, Richardson's Lane, Dickson's Lane, Sparling's Lane, the Quarry Boreen, Anderson's Court, Pump Lane, Walsh's Lane, Punch's Lane, Lee's Lane, Donnelly's Lane, Glover's Lane. Some of the laneways were paved with cobble stones.

The houses in the laneways and the road were small as a rule, but there were some exceptions. The houses had slated roofs, some of which had to be grouted with mortar when the rain leaked through. The house had, for the most part, lime or cement frontages. There were, at the time, a few thatched houses left. Window shutters and half-doors were in vogue then and many of these shutters were a throw-back to the War of Independence when they had been fitted to prevent the Black and Tans from shooting-up and wrecking the people's houses.

The houses were invariably kept very clean and tidy and the people were the salt of the earth - a true spirit of Christian sharing pervaded the community.

There were four public houses on the road: Frost's, Nunan's, and Ford's, Jim O'Brien's (later Alice Lane's). The shops were as follows: Morgan's, Healy's, Farrell's, Star Dairy, Hartley's (later Higgins's), Maggie Murphy's, Dowd's, Howard's, Kitty McInerney's (McGrath's), Janie McCormack's,

Davises, Lynch's, Kiely's, Houlihan's, Monica Clancy's, Hennessy's, Hanrahan's, Ryan's and Cathy Cowles'.

There were all kinds of people living there, stonecutters, masons, dockers, railway workers, shoemakers, dressmakers, Corporation workers, painters, carpenters, fitters, seamen and, of course, many were forced to take the emigrant ships to the United States of America and Britain, as unemployment was ever prevalent.

The aftermath of the First World War (1914-1918) and the Wall Street crash of 1929 did nothing to improve the situation. People were mostly poor, but happy, despite their circumstances. There were no electric appliances and gas cookers were a rare commodity. There were a few ranges and most cooking was done on open fires and baking on bastable ovens and griddles. There was the rare radio, usually of the wet battery type. Most babies were born in their mother's homes or at the lying-in hospital in Bedford Row.

The schools for the area were the Villiers', St. Joseph's, Leamy's, the Presentation and Christian Brothers in Sexton Street and the Henry Street School. There was, as far as I can remember, a small kindergarten school near the Roxboro Bridge, opposite Hamilton House. The latter was the



Lower Carey's Road in the 1940s.



The old railway bridge at Carey's Road.

residence of the locomotive superintendent of the Great Southern Railway.

For the most part, the children amused themselves. Street games were the order of the day. The games played by girls were skipping, pickie, swings and dancing. The boys occupied themselves with whipping and pegging tops, marbles, rugby, hurling, soccer and rounders.

People of limited means had to have recourse to the form of hire purchase that was then in existence. Women known as docket women issued letters of credit to the value of certain amounts which were brought to shops to obtain the goods required. There were a number of Jewish drapers in Thomas Street, who operated an easy payment system from their premises. There were also a few loan offices where cash could be obtained on a modest scale.

Marriages in those days were, as now, very important affairs. After the ceremony, the wedding party usually returned to the bride's house for the wedding breakfast and festivities.

When a person died, the corpse was 'laid out' at home, clothed in a shroud or habit, as it was better known. There were certain women in the road who specialised in preparing the corpses before they were brought to the church. Lighted candles in brass candlesticks were placed on a small, linen-covered table in the room where the remains were laid out prior to the funeral. People coming into the houses to sympathise with the relatives of the deceased went into the room to say a prayer. Before leaving the house the people were offered refreshments of stout, wine, tea etc.

At that time, all funerals had horse-drawn hearses and carriages. There was a mourning coach (somewhat larger than the ordinary carriages) in which relatives of the deceased travel-

led. The hearse had two and, sometimes, four horses and the horses were often bedecked with plumes. One of the last Brougham coaches, of the fold buck roof variety, was sold to an American air pilot and transported to the U.S.A. for the marriage of his daughter.

Prior to the advent of the talkies, we went to the following cinemas when we had the money: Lyric, Central, Tivoli (or Gaff), Abbey, Athaeneum (Royal), Coliseum and the Gaiety. Many of these cinemas continued into the era of the talkies.

When the people were transferred to new houses, one of the first families to be transferred to Prospect was the O'Dwyer family from Dickson's Lane.

During the 1930s, Carey's Road formed part of the track of the 'round the houses' motorcar races. At one of

these races the Duke of Grafton was killed while driving his racing cars on the Roxboro Road. Another colourful participant in that race was the Prince of Siam driving under the racing name of B. Bira.

I would like to round off my piece with two stories told at the fireside of many houses in Carey's Road when I was a boy. Tom was the story-teller and he had spent four years in the trenches in the First World War.

When the order came to go 'over the top' with fixed bayonets, Tom's friend, the regimental sergeant-major advised him: "If I will lead the charge, you, Tom, will remain behind to make sure that all the rest go over the top". Tom carried out the order, and, as he himself went over the top amidst shot and shell, a decapitated head passed him and a voice from the head said, "Keep down, Tom, they (the Germans) got me!".

An assistant director of the Arch-Confraternity was sent to Carey's Road to look up reluctant members of the Confraternity. After a period, he returned to his boss, the director, puffing and blowing and said that he had not had much success, adding that the place was like a rabbit burrow, with men going in one hole and out the other.

In the early 1950s, the houses of Carey's Road and its surrounding laneways were demolished and the Limerick Corporation built a fine estate of houses and flats. Many of the old families were re-housed in the new dwellings and continue to live there to the present day. But some of the character of the old place was lost forever in the transition.

(I am grateful to Mr. Charlie Bartlett for vetting the names of the laneways in this article).



Lower Carey's Road, leading towards Edward Street, in the 1940s.