A stroll from Pery Square to Wolfe Tone Street and Environs

by Tom O'Farrell

This guided walk commences at the City Art Gallery, Pery Square. This building dates from 1906 and was designed by the architect George P. Sheridan. It housed both the City Library and City Museum (1916) until the 1990s when these facilities were relocated to the Granary and St John's Square respectively. The historian P. J. Ryan informs us –

Shortly after construction the Carnegie Library became known as the Limerick Free Library. The only part open to the public was a small reading room where the poor that were literate could read the newspapers many availing of the heat on a cold winter's day. Books could only be borrowed by presenting a catalogue giving the title and number as well as a brass plate with the borrower's number. The borrower being closely questioned to establish his bona fides in the library.¹

Pery Square remains to this day a splendid example of fine architecture. Sir Joseph Barrington and Sir Edmund Sexton Pery were to the forefront of the development of a fashionable square in the then modern district of the city, Newtown Pery. Many citizens and visitors consider its primary feature to be the six Tontine buildings facing the People's Park. These houses were built between 1836 and 1839. The term Tontine traces its origins to Lorenzo de Tonti who initiated this scheme of property construction in France in the 1650s. Tontine companies were time bound and the validity of shares issued depended on named individuals nominated by the original shareholder. Upon the death of the nominee the share became extinct and the surviving shareholder 'won all'. (This gave rise to many nominees suffering mysterious accidents resulting in death and Tontine companies were eventually declared illegal). The Limerick Chronicle dated 28 April 1838 records James Pain as the architect supervising the construction of the Pery Square Tontine project and the original plan was to build eight terraces of six houses. The aim of the Pery Square Tontine Company was to create an investment opportunity for its shareholders by initially building six houses from which rental income could be derived. The articles of association of the company provided that the last six shareholders should inherit the assets. Eighty-nine shares at a cost of £120 per share were initially issued and held by twenty-three people. One nominee was HRH Prince Albert. The first recorded tenants of these houses were Daniel Barrington, Michael Gavin, Mrs Lloyd, Peter O'Brien, Rev Willis, and Thomas P. Volkes.

St Michael's Church of Ireland stands at the southern end of Pery Square. Designed by James and George Richard Pain it was consecrated in 1844 and built in a simpler form than the original design and without a spire. In 1877, Joseph Fogarty & Son carried out improvements to the church, which included the addition of an extra stage to the tower, a new forecourt and new chancel which incorporated the east window designed by James Pain which was removed from Saint Mary's Church of Ireland Cathedral and reduced in size. The chancel was added at a cost of £2,000 by William and Robert Fogarty. The church re-opened on 18 November 1877. The stained glass, which illustrates the Parables, was erected in 1878. Further work was carried out in 1883 with the design of the mural monument in memory of Mrs. Purdon Wilkinson. The work was carried out by Charles W. Harrison, Dublin to the design of Joseph Fogarty & Son. The stone cut piers and the tiled entrance floor of the church were given as gifts by Robert Hunt J.P. Its décor has been maintained over the years by local ecclesiastical decorators the Hodkinson family.

Proceeding along Barrington Street we come to number 15, the home of John Daly (18 October 1845 – 30 June 1916). He was an Irish revolutionary, and a leading member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. He was uncle to Kathleen Clarke, wife of Tom Clarke, executed for his part in the 1916 Rising and a leading member of the IRB, and her brother Ned Daly who was also executed in 1916. Daly was active in politics serving as MP for Limerick city and he also held the office of Mayor from 1899 to 1901. John Daly was too ill to take an active part in the Easter Rising and died in June 1916. In 1967, to commemorate the centenary of the Fenian rising and Daly's role in the pursuit of Irish independence the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society erected a plaque at this residence. In this the centenary year of the 1916 Rising this residence again comes to local prominence as many of the 1916 leaders visited the house in the years prior to the Rising.

Little Barrington Street runs at the back of St Joseph's Church on O'Connell Avenue connecting Barrington Street with St Joseph's Street. This area consisted originally of three addresses, Little Barrington Street, Carroll's Row and School House Lane. A notable resident was the late Frank McCourt, of Angela's Ashes fame, who was educated in the nearby Leamy's school. The Fianna Fáil Culture Club held meetings here, the site and building being provided by John Daly at the rear of his home. This national organisation was founded with the object of developing the national and military spirit amongst the boys of Ireland.

Little Barrington Street was the home of Lance Corporal Joseph O' Driscoll who...
served in the Royal Munster Fusiliers in WW1. Captured at Eureux, France he wrote the following in August 1914:

Mother,

Just a line to let you know I am alive and well.
We have been captured by the Germans. There are about 140 killed and 50 wounded. The rest are alive but prisoners. If you want to write to me my address will be, Lance Corporal O'Driscoll, Prisoner, German Army.

The Limerick Leader dated 14 January 1922 reported a claim by Mary Paget, School House Lane for €1,000 compensation upon the death of her husband. He died following a beating by the Black and Tans on August 15 1920. On 16 November 1942 the German U-boat 608 sank the merchant ship the Irish Finta. Frank Murphy, age 38 years and resident of 1 Carroll’s Row died in this war time tragedy. There is also a commercial aspect to this area of the city; Duggan’s Glaziers traded in Little Barrington Street in the 1930s and Mr Bussoli traded for many years as an ecclesiastical statue maker/decorator at his business premises in School House Lane. St Joseph’s Church was designed by Corbett Architects and built by John Ryan and Sons. It was officially opened on the Feast of St Joseph 14 April, 1904. The chief celebrants were Dr Fennelly Archbishop of Cashel, Dr Edward Thomas O’Dwyer Bishop of Limerick and Rev Andrew Murphy president of St Munchin’s College. Built as a church of ease for St Michael’s parish then the largest parish in Munster, St Joseph’s did not become a parish until 1973. Similar to St Michael’s COI church the décor of this church has also benefitted down the years from the skills of the Hodkinson ‘hand’. Moving on to O’Connell Avenue (Military Road) to the junction with Clontarf Place and the tasty confectionery of Kakes and Kandies may be recalled by many. The proprietors, the Harrington family, were very popular amongst the sweet toothed people of Limerick. Cllr Win Harrington, who went to her eternal rest in June 2016, served as a well respected city councillor and was a resident of Clontarf Place, which also housed two unique building in days gone by. The Limerick Skating Rink entertained patrons from far and wide and had the bragging rights in 1879 of securing the great wonder of the age - the electric light - the second place in Ireland to have it. In 1910 the rink had become an Electric Picture Palace and the Epsom Derby horse-race of that year was shown there among other features. The Mendicity Association a charitable society providing daily food to the poor of the city was also housed on Clontarf Place in the nineteenth century.

Walking along Old Wellington Terrace in the direction of Military Path, O’Connell Avenue we come to the residence of Steve Couglan (1910-1994), who was one of the most colourful figures in the political history of Limerick city. He commenced political life with Clann na Poblachta and was subsequently a Labour Party TD for Limerick East from 1961 to 1977 and Mayor of Limerick 1951/52 and 1969/70. His son Thady also served as Limerick’s first citizen. In 1974, Thady was elected to Limerick City Council as a Labour Party councillor, while his father was still a member. This marked the first time since 1842 that a father and son served on the council together. In 1975, he was elected Mayor of Limerick and aged 24 was a year younger than the previous youngest Mayor William O’Donnell (Mayor in 1890). In August 1975, he represented Limerick Corporation at the funeral of Eamon de Valera. In October of the same year, he was present at the canonisation of Oliver Plunkett, where he met Pope Paul VI and future Pope John Paul II who was bishop of Krakow at the time. Outside the business premises of Bobby Byrne’s people of a certain age will recall Counihan’s and Walsh’s shops which were subsequently taken over by the Sexton/O’Callaghan family who traded here up to the late 1990s. Upon their retirement from business the shop was purchased by the Byrne family. Cllr Byrne served as Mayor in 1978/1979 when he welcomed Pope John Paul II to celebrate Mass at Limerick Race Course. He had the pleasure of seeing his daughter Maria elected to Limerick City Council in 1999, Cllr Maria Byrne was Mayor in 2010/2011 and elected to Seanad Éireann in 2016. The areas newest politician, Cllr John Costello (Sinn Fein) grew up in Emmet Place, St Joseph Street. He was co-opted to the council following the election of Cllr Maurice Quinnivan to Dail Éireann in February 2016.

Immediately across the road stands the Limerick School Project. The school was officially opened in 1989 and was initially accommodated in a premises leased from the Red Cross at Cecil Street. In 1996, it moved to the current premises on O’Connell Avenue. At the turn of the twentieth century this site was the business premises of Ebrill Bros, auctioneers. Many people recall the enjoyable carnivals held here in the 1950s and 1960s. It was also the location of the School of Professional and Management Studies and a School of Engineering until this facility was relocated to Limerick Institute of Technology in Moylish. The weary walker would have been suitably catered for 100 years previously in the Limerick Turkish Baths which stood on the site of the present day Munster Terrace, O’Connell Avenue. Built in 1859 the baths provided patrons with the best in luxury. In September 1872 it was announced that the baths had undergone extensive improvements. The heating was improved in the gentlemen’s department. In the ladies department there was better ventilation and more light than formerly. The baths were open from 6 am to 8.30 pm and the prices were Morning
or Evening 1/- and Midday 2/-. There were hot, tepid and cold shower baths as well as a plunge bath. Moving onward and upward to the ‘Red Tech’, which is a beautiful building that opened in 1911. Prior to this technical instruction was being provided in several different centres in the city. In 1910 the Technical Instruction Committee decided that a large central institute was needed and after considering a few locations across the city this site was secured. The increasing demand for technical education made it necessary for an extension which was completed in 1926. An Mhldiscoil was formally opened on 5 Sept 1855. The principle of Model Schools in the nineteenth century was to provide non-denominational education to students by uniting children of different creeds into one system while taking care not to interfere with religious beliefs. This concept met with opposition from the Catholic Hierarchy with Cardinal Paul Cullen declaring that, “the whole system tends to inspire children with the absurd idea that all religions are equally good”.

In 1862 Catholic children were forbidden by the hierarchy to attend model schools. An Mhldiscoil later became ‘an scoil lánghaige’ and remains so to the present day. The most notable event in its history is the disastrous fire which occurred in September 1977 when the building was totally destroyed. It re-opened in 1986 and the architects deserve credit for preserving the beautiful stone facade which adds to the architectural and cultural life of our city.

Roden Street separates these landmark houses of education. In 1911/1912 Roden House was home to Christopher Isherwood. He came to Limerick upon the posting of his father to the New Barracks (Sarsfield Barracks) and received his education at Miss Mercer’s Richmond High School (known in later years as ‘Maes’ Secretarial College) on Quinlan Street. Isherwood was born in 1904 on his family estate close to the Cheshire-Derbyshire border. He was the eldest son of Frank Bradshaw Isherwood, a professional soldier who fought in the Boer War and his wife Kathleen (née MacNeil Smith), whose family were successful merchants. Frank Isherwood was the son of John Henry Isherwood, head of the landed gentry family of Isherwood of Marple Hall and Wybersleigh Hall, Cheshire, and a descendant of the regicide John Bradshaw. Christopher Isherwood later in life became a famous novelist, best remembered for the works Mr. Norris changes Trains (1955) and Goodbye to Berlin (1939) both novels being based on his experiences in Weimar Germany. In 1939 he moved to California and his involvement with Hollywood began where he undertook movie writing work. Many of his writings became movies such as A Single Man and Cabaret. Isherwood recalled in later years that his devotion to cinema was as a direct result of watching his first movies in Limerick. On 28 September 1912, aged eight years, he saw his first movie in the Gaiety Cinema, at 45 O’Connell Street. Barrack Hill connects Roden Street with Wolfe Street and runs adjacent to the western boundary wall of Sarsfield Barracks. The origin of its name is self-evident. Sarsfield Barracks dates to 1798 and Limerick historian Maurice Lenihan records the barrack complex to be one square mile. A District Military Prison was added in 1845 and records show 87 prisoners serving sentences in the mid 1860s. The barracks was destroyed during the Civil War and renamed Sarsfield Barracks in 1929. Wolfe Tone Street resident Bridie Madden RIP (no 25) informed the author of her memories of the Irish Civil War period when a Free State sniper positioned on the roof of St Michael’s COI Pery Square fired shots across neighbourhood rooftops as part of the National Army’s efforts to dislodge Anti-Treaty forces. The Madden family took refuge in the basement of their home for their own personal safety. The Bureau of Military History witness statement of Alphonsus J O’Halloran, 2nd Lieutenant Limerick City Regiment Irish Volunteers records that on Whit Sunday 1915 a contingent of Irish Volunteers were jeered from the barracks by groups of British soldiers as they marched along Wolfe Tone Street passing Spellacy Square. Among the Irish Volunteers who marched that day were Padraig and Willie Pearse, Tom Clarke, Ned Daly, Liam Mellows, Sean McDermott, Eamon de Valera, Terence Mc Sweeney, Tomas McCurtain.

Above: Bootscraper outside the Model School

Left: Wolfe Tone Street Boys 1940s
Back Row - (L-R) Seanie Keane, ?, Liam Cummins, Carl Keane.
Middle Row - (L-R) - ?, Kelly, - Harrington, - O’Brien, John McKilligan, Eddie Kelly
Front Row - (L-R) Bobby Harrington, John Harrington, Jimmy McKilligan, Jimmy Harrington, Vincent Cummins
and George Clancy. Mr. John Haran of 1 Barrack Hill may well have known those who marched that day. Writing in the Irish Independent on 1 August 1978 on a matter other than nationalism his interesting contribution to the War of Independence period is somewhat revealed.

AGED AND PAYE

Sir -

Should the Government be sincere and those that spout PAYE, then they would stop charging Income Tax to the Old Age Pensioner. In my own case, with a little over £100 per month and over 40 years service to the State £22 odd is deducted in Income Tax. I served four years with the Old I.R.A., 24 Defence Forces and 11 with Customs and was a volunteer from 1913 and trained under Major Sean MacBride in Wesport, Co. Mayo. I was a canvasser for Sean McEntee in Monaghan in the 1918 General Election.

John P. Haran (age 83)
1 Barrack Hill
Limerick

The name Haran and Barrack Hill links to Duhan and Wolfe Tone Street and of course the band Granny’s Intentions. In the mid 1960s, band members Cha Haran and Johnny Duhan were the musical pride of the neighbourhood. Local success quickly became national and in 1967 the band signed a recording contract with Deram Records in London. They played many UK and Irish venues with changes to the line up as some members pursued other careers before the final break up in 1972. Johnny Duhan continued in the music business and one of his best known compositions The Voyage was recorded by Christy Moore in 1989. Wolfe Tone Street was formerly Coloney Street and before that Westland Road. The Westland name survives to this day in the name of two terraces of houses. Westland Terrace sits between McNamara Terrace and Mount Pleasant Avenue and Westland Villas a terrace of four houses adjacent to Bobby Byrne’s public house.

The Jewish pogrom of 1904 is probably what most people associate with Wolfe Tone Street. A sermon by Redemptorist priest Fr Creagh against the trade of Jews in the city gave rise to some members of the Jewish community being physically assaulted. The history of the Jewish community in Limerick and Coloney Street, as it then was, has been comprehensively covered by many writers including Des Ryan in earlier editions of the Old Limerick Journal. The following ‘hidden history’ stories of the Jews were relayed to me by family and neighbours over the years. Frank Imbusch (Bud Clancy’s band) recalled how as a youth he would be called by a Jewish neighbour to boil a kettle as the Jewish man considered this to be an act of work and therefore something no to be undertaken on the Sabbath. The Imbusch family lived in No.18. A postman delivering letters would therefore expect next door to be No.19, but the address is actually No.18A. Both these properties (18 and 18A) served as the Hebrew Synagogue Chambers at the time of the Jewish pogrom. It was from these chambers that Rabbi Levin wrote to the RIC seeking protection in 1904. The Model Dairy at No.82 was the home and business premises of a Jewish family named Morrison in the 1940s. During the Feast of Unleavened Bread which commences the night following Passover Mrs. Morrison’s granddaughter then a toddler would be sent quietly to the Cummins Home (No.21). There the author’s grandmother would treat the
young girl to a warm meal as the Jews only ate unleavened bread (not to the child's taste) during this seven day feast. No 21 was formerly the home of James McKinley who served as a sergeant with the Canadian Machine Gun Corps during WWI. On the night of 4 June 1917 he was killed while asleep in his tent by a bomb dropped from a German aeroplane. Rifleman William Carroll of the London Regiment (Post Office Rifles) and son of Mrs Annie Carroll 44 Wolfe Tone Street, died aged 25 years on 21 May 1916. In August 1940 a Limerick Leader report illustrated the concerns of local people during wartime:

At the request of the residents of Wolfe Tone St, Mount Pleasant Avenue and McNamara Tee, a Novena of Masses for world peace and the protection of Ireland will be offered up at the Redemptorist and Jesuit Churches.

The house at No. 63 Wolfe Tone Street served as an RIC barracks until Edward Street RIC/Garda barracks was built in the 1890s. The Jewish community used No.63 as a meeting house, after the RIC moved to Edward Street. The new building was not built as designed, but the layout planned to include the following accommodation: Ground floor: office, day-room kitchen, scullery/pantry, yard with two coal sheds, WC and ashes room, urinals, coal yard. Two cells, ablution room and bath and a large parade ground at rear. First floor: Married Constable quarters with two rooms, Head Constable quarters with two rooms and WC. Second floor: Store, dormitory for eight men and dormitory for six men and WC.

In the 1930s Wolfe Tone Street had the first prosecution in the Irish Free State for the unlawful possession of a wireless transmitting apparatus. Michael Madden Junior (No.25) was fined £1 and two guineas for this offence, the Hon Justice Flood presiding. Michael Madden was friendly with Jim Carroll who resided with his sister Mrs. Keane at No.79. Together with their friend Charlie O'Connor this trio set about delivering a nightly radio broadcast to the citizens of Limerick from the O'Connor home No. 84 Henry Street. The station was named the 'City Broadcasting Service' and included programmes such as 'What's on Tonight,' which informed listeners of the local cinema listings. There was also a health education aspect to their programmes with Jim Carroll reading swimming lessons from a book. Jimmy Morton (No 22) was friendly with this trio and as part of some early trial broadcasts from the Madden home played the mouth organ informing listeners it was an organ recital from the monks in Mount Melleray. Mr J Toomey proprietor of the Wolfe Tone Dairy (No. 87) paid the station £10 to advertise his sale of ice cream. Mr Toomey soon had a regular queque stretching from his premises to the junction with O'Connell Avenue.

Next door to the Keane residence was the home of the Haselbech family (No 77). It was here in the early twentieth century that Mr. Franz S Haselbech (1885-1973) developed many of his magnificent photographs of Limerick and beyond. Ireland now has an invaluable archive as the Haselbech collection has recently been lovingly restored and some of the images have been published by the photographer's granddaughter Patricia Haselbech Flynn. Local photography has also been well served by the work of Gerry Andrews who grew up in No.80 Wolfe Tone Street. He served his time as a process engraver at the Limerick Leader newspaper and was appointed Works Manager at the company in 1981. His interest in photography started as a nineteen year old and his 'Trojan work of recording Limerick’s Life in the 1970s was published recently in his book Shaped By History. Gerry has a specific interest in photojournalism and social documentary photography and in 2012 he was awarded a Fellowship by the Irish Photographic Federation for his work in this genre. Later that year, he was awarded an Associate of the Royal Photographic Society for his work in Burma and in 2013 he was awarded an AFIAP by the Federation Internationale de L’Art Photographique.

Gerry’s sister Brenda is a well known artist whose works include a portrait of the late Jim Kemmy TD specially commissioned for the Jim Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick.

The street has had different names down the years but in 1976 the name Harland & Wolfe Tone Street would have been very appropriate. On Thursday 22 July of that year there was great local excitement as neighbours gathered outside the Donlon home (No 72 - also a former Synagogue) to witness the preparation for and launch of the St Conora, a 32 foot trawler built on site. A 25 foot crane was required to lift the vessel over the garden wall. The boat was formally launched at Limerick Docks by Mrs Imelda Donlon and blessed by Rev JP O’Riordan C.S.S.R. Much to the author’s dismay he missed all the fanfare as he was on holiday with his family in Fanore, County Clare. “You missed it... You should have seen it...” is all he heard from the boys of the neighbourhood for what seemed like an eternity. Great disappointment set in but on hearing of his plight Mr Donlon kindly arranged a day trip for author and family on the St Conora the following summer. Unfortunately for the Donlon
family the excitement and happiness brought about by the St Conora was short lived, as the loss of Michael Donlon RIP (aged 15 years) who drowned accidentally whilst completing a day's fishing in 1979, was a huge blow.

Constance Smith (1929 - 2003) was born in No 44. Her father served in the Irish Army and died when Constance was aged 11. When Constance won a Dublin beauty contest aged 16, to find the girl who looked most like screen actress Hedy Lamarr, Smith's mother sent the photo to a film studio. As a result, Constance won a screen test, and although reluctant to seize the opportunity, she was pushed into the film industry by her mother. Constance moved to London where she briefly joined the Rank Film Organization. A clash of personalities between Constance and studio executives led to her dismissal and for a period she languished between acting school and bit parts in several British "B" films. In 1950, she was first noticed after playing an Irish maid in The Mudlark. Impressed with her performance, 20th Century Fox offered her a contract. Upon her arrival in Hollywood, producer Darryl F. Zanuck cast her opposite Tyrone Power in I'll Never Forget You (1951). However, she soon decided Constance was not experienced enough and replaced her with Ann Blyth. She was most active in the 1950s, appearing in Hollywood features such as Man in the Attic and Treasure of the Golden Condor (1953) and Impulse (1954). Constance was a presenter at the Academy Awards ceremony in 1952. She married English film director Bryan Forbes in 1951; they divorced in 1955. Unfortunately Constance's personal life took a downward spiral with periods of mental health problems throughout the 1960s and 1970s and her final years were a far cry for her 'Silver Screen' days. She died in London in 2003. In the 1950s the Roycroft family lived in No 48, a three storey building incorporating a shop owned by their aunt, Mrs. Manifold. Writing in the Limerick Christmas Gazette in 1995, Mike Roycroft shared his memories of an exotic neighbour living across from the shop.

Across the road from Auntie's shop lived Mrs Jackson perhaps the most exotic person living on our end of the street. This small woman with a sallow complexion and brown liquid eyes that bespoke southern climes had had an eventful life, dancing it was reported for Queen Victoria and later being captured by the Japanese in Singapore in 1942.

Other neighbours often referred to "The Spanish lady... who lived at the top of the street" and the author believes Mrs. Jackson and the Spanish lady to be one and the same person. As you read this article at the close 2016 a verse from a poem published on 1 February 1908 will suffice to wish you all a prosperous 2017. The poet, Grace Lorenzo O'Malley of 29 Westland Street (Bowman Street) was the winner of a poetry competition sponsored by the Ulster Herald newspaper.

### A Happy New Year

A happy New Year
And lots of good cheer,
May Fortune come never too late;
Let us toast to the fair.
And know not a care.
In the year Nineteen Hundred
And Eight.

Acknowledgements

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**Endnotes**

1. As part of the 2007 summer outings programme of the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society, I led a walking tour of Wolfe Tone Street, Limerick taking in parts of all the following city thoroughfares: Barrington Street, School House Lane/Little Barrington Street, St Joseph Street, Clontarf Place, O'Connell Avenue, Roden Street, Barrack Hill, and Edward Street.


4. Franz S. Haselbeck's Ireland - Selected Photographs compiled by Patricia Haselbeck Flynn (Cork 2013).

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**Tom O'Farrell** is a committee member of Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society currently serving as Deputy President. Born in 21 Wolfe Tone Street, he has always had an interest in the history of his neighbourhood and enjoys researching and sharing the yesteryears of this area of Limerick city.