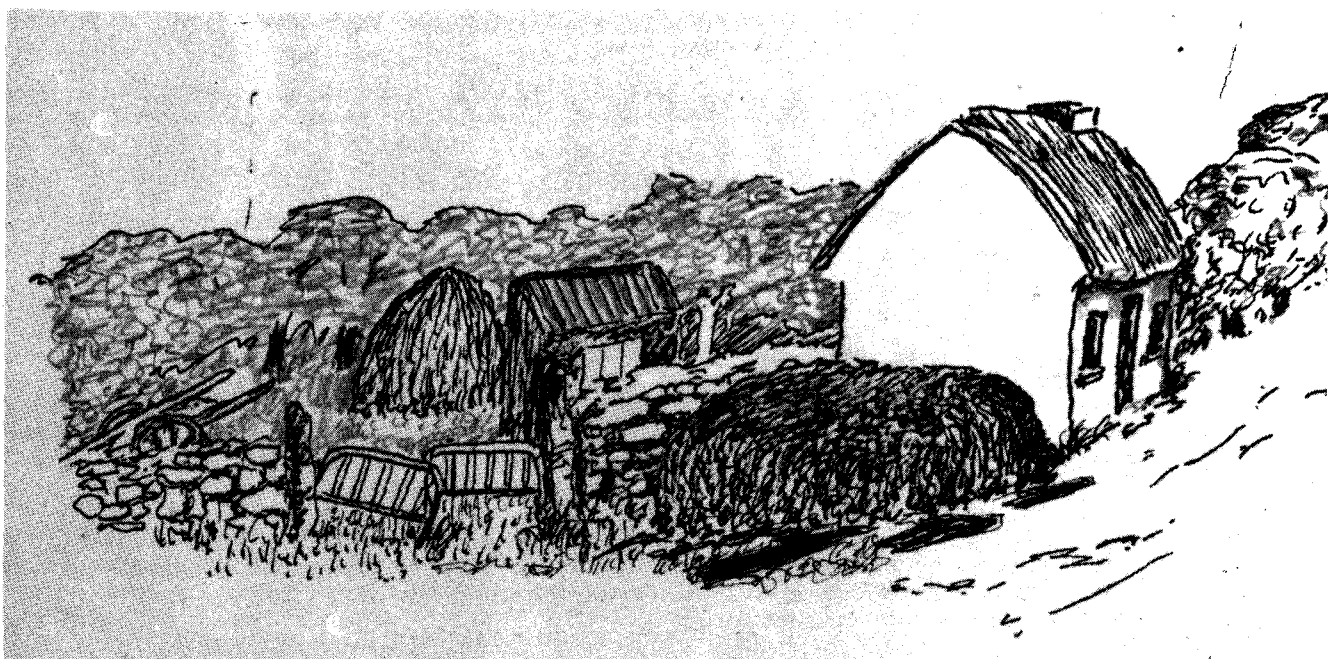

THE PARK DANES



HOUSES AND LANDMARKS

In the last century, two rows of mud-walled, thatched cabins formed the main housing in Park, with clusters of similar dwellings dotting the various boreens. The thatch was often a do-it-yourself job and had to be tied down with ropes on stormy nights to prevent the roof from being blown away. Since the beginning of the present century, new houses have gradually replaced the old mud cabins. Many of these dwellings are long, one-storey buildings of a pleasing, functional design, with a door off centre and three windows, one at the right and two at the left. This basic design is still used even in the modern houses now being built in Park.

Inside the houses the flagged kitchen was heated by an open hearth fire. This form of heating was later replaced by grates with hobs and by the great cast-iron ranges made at the Limerick Foundry. The furniture consisted of a deal table and sugan chairs as in the usual rural dwelling of the time. One different feature of the Park kitchen was the dresser with its glassed doors, crammed full of china, lustre and ornaments in Staffordshire pottery style. A bobble-fringed wool cloth covered the mantelpiece, on which rested an impressive array of brass candlesticks. The whole interior presented an unusual combination of rural Irish and urban Victorian decor.

by PATSY
HARROLD

PART TWO

Leaving the noisy bustle of the city centre, with its shops, hotels and cinemas, and entering the country quietness of one of these houses, was like stepping straight from the modern world on to the set of a T.C. Murray drama.

A remarkable feature of the district was the absence of regular gates to the gardens and fields. The entrances were closed off with old iron bedsteads, which were held in an upright position by an intricate system of wires and ropes. Thus the thrifty, resourceful Parkmen prolonged and transformed the lives of the rusty frames. But the sight of the old irons at the close of a summer's day could be a melancholy one, conjuring up pictures of the same bedsteads supporting long departed toilers in the small bedrooms of the thatched cabins.

The topography of the district had many other unusual features. Two interesting relics of the Williamite Siege, King William's Well and the Pillar Standard, were to be found in Singland. It was through the old road of Park that King William is said to have passed to

the Shannon on his way to Limerick in 1690. He was seeking the best route to the river and, having gained this knowledge, passed it on to General Ginkle who made his successful journey the following year.

Maurice Lenihan visited Singland and in his **History** describes the stone column erected by William where he pitched his tent:

"In this parish of Singland, or St. Patrick's, there are some remarkable relics of the siege; one is this 'standard pillar' of King William (so called) and is pointed out by the inhabitants as the pillar on which the Royal Ensign of William was raised during the siege of 1690. It is on the high road which leads to Singland House and is sometimes called 'the pillar' simply ... It is built of 'ashlar masonry', thirteen feet high and about three feet in diameter; the stones are rather large and in most cases they are roughly chiselled ... a short wall or buttress is built up against it to the N.W., and appears to be contemporaneous with the pillar itself ... About a thousand yards distance to the North, in a direct line, is New Castle House, in which it is asserted King William spent his time during the siege".

Lenihan also recorded his impressions of King William's Well.

"The other object here of interest connected with the siege is King William's Well, which is about 100 hundred yards from the pillar and in a



A 15th century stone from the old St. Patrick's Church.

field about 50 yards from the high road and nearly opposite Singland House on the other side of the road. "A stream of pure water runs to the road from the well, and joins another stream from the well of Shesaree, which is some distance off on another road. King William's Well is deep but covered with a thick coating of leaves and greenish, weedy deposit which conceal its waters from view - at least so it was on the beautiful evening I visited the locality. Tradition says that a large flag or standard lies buried in a field near the well. There are other evidences about that it was the site of a camp; and the well is said to have supplied William's troops with water during the sieges".

Maurice Lenihan liked the people of

Singland so much that he wrote: "I have never in any place met people more ready than they are in this locality, at telling the traditions connected with the siege, and showing where the well, the standard pillar, etc., are placed".

The historian's words of praise were to remain valid for more than a century. The stone column and King William's Well were located on land owned by the Cunneen family. The well has survived and can still be seen today. But the column, which had stood up to the 1960s, has perished. A member of the Cunneen clan, in a burst of misguided energy, demolished "King Billy's Pillar" and removed it from his land.

But other Park landmarks have proved more durable in withstanding the ravages of time and the changes in political and religious thought. One

such spot is Paddy's Hedge. Before the cutting of the Canal in 1757, a boreen connected Pennywell Lane with the Abbey Ferry, which operated between King's Island and Lower Park. The boreen became known as Paddy's Hedge and was in disuse for forty years before the building of Park Bridge in 1798. In due course, Paddy's Hedge became a haven for countless generations of young Limerick lovers, who were naturally attracted by the double row of luxuriant hawthorns and who courted in the many cosy nooks amid the greenery. But this romantic bower also attracted the attention of a few over-zealous priests, who frequently disrupted the courtship of the young couples by threats of the certainty of hell-fire and the more immediate certainty of the vigorous application of a blackthorn stick.

The spot also featured in the words of the old Limerick song, the first line of which runs, "As I passed Lock Mills to Paddy's Hedge". A shebeen was once located there among the hawthorns.

On the city side of Park, near the Corbally Road jetty, is a piece of land known as the Goose's Corner. A fowl market was held at this spot. Local people and farmers from the surrounding countryside sold their geese and chickens to Limerick shoppers, trade being traditionally brisk at Michaelmas and Christmas. Eggs were also sold there and were particularly popular at Easter, following the long, rigorous Lenten fast. It is reputed that when a fowl epidemic wiped out flocks of the geese, they were buried on this site. In the summer evenings the Corner was used as a meeting-place and open-air dance arena. The old people leisurely passed their time away sitting on the low boundary wall, chatting and watching the younger dancers.

Park, like most country districts, had its Big House, Park House, a mansion standing on its own grounds, was purchased in 1809 by Dr. Young, the Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick, for use as a diocesan seminary. After the college was moved to Henry Street, the house served as the Bishop's Palace for Dr. George Butler, until he purchased another mansion on the site of the present diocesan college in Corbally. Park House was demolished in the mid-sixties to make way for the College Park housing development. Another spacious residence, Pennywell House, owned by Richard Harold, was situated at the corner of Pennywell Lane and the canal. The ruins of this stone house remained standing until the 1920s.

Beside the road known as the Funeral Road is Lucas' Lough, a boomerang-shaped pond which always holds a plentiful supply of water, even during the longest drought. The Lough is a favourite haunt of children fishing for coarse fish. The name of the pond is a corruption of the original Irish words,

Poul na Luichre (The Pool of the Rushes). A little hall near the Lough is named **Ard na Luichre**.

Before the main Dublin Road was built a thoroughfare called Hymie's Boreen linked the present St. Patrick's Road with Corbally. The thoroughfare went through Singland and Rhebogoe and carried on into the heart of Park to the Shannon. The Boreen was the main artery in and out of the district before the building of Park Bridge. When the canal cut through the road in 1757, an alternative link-up was made between Pennywell Lane and the rest of the road on the north side of the canal. After this change, Hymie's Boreen was cut off and fell into disuse. However, new houses have been built in the area in recent years, and the widening and resurfacing of the Boreen should lead to new life along the ancient thoroughfare.

When Park Bridge was built in 1798, an unusual clause, inserted in all the old leases in the district, stipulated that the tenants were entitled to an abatement of £2 per acre in the rental of their lands should the bridge at any time fall into disrepair. The landlord was thus obliged to keep the bridge in good repair. The rents of the land were raised when the bridge was built and in 1865 the rental of Corbally was £6.16.6 an acre. Before the building of this bridge a ferry service across the Abbey river linked Park and the city.

One feature of agriculture in Park in the seventeenth century has long since disappeared. The following entry in the Civil Survey of 1654/56 shows that fruit growing was an important part of the activities of the people there at that time:

"Parke: halfe a plowland with many orchards upon it, mearing the north with the lands of Corbally, on the east with the lands of Rebogue and

a branch of the river of Shannon, on the south with the highway leading from Limerick to Rebogue, on the west with a branch of the river of Shannon called Gowlebegge. Owing thereout to the Corporation of Lymicke."

Nor is there now any traces of the spa which was operated in the eighteenth century. Maurice Lenihan, in his **History**, published in 1866, wrote: "At Park there was a chalybeate spa, which about sixty years ago was much frequented, but which has not only fallen into disuse but has been completely forgotten in latter years. This most likely is the spa which is commemorated in the song of Garryowen."

Before 1825, the people of Limerick, like rural dwellers, got their household water in containers from the nearest well or pump. In that year, the Limerick Waterworks Company constructed two large tanks at Gallows Green, capable of holding 600,000 gallons, pumped from the Shannon by a 40-horsepower steam engine. This was the first attempt by the Limerick Corporation to instal a controlled water system in the city.

The new engine was set up at Rhebogoe, close to the Shannon, and was known as the Rhebogoe Waterworks, and, more familiarly, as the "Engine House". This well built stone building, with its chugging pumps and belching smoke stack, was a well known landmark and served as a half-way house for the many generations who enjoyed the delights of walks along the towpath from the canal harbour to Plassey Bridge.

For nearly sixty years the Engine House provided Limerick with a limited water supply. If the distribution system was not ideal, it at least gave a constant source to the many public pumps

and fountains in the city.

In 1880, the Corporation, in reply to advertisements, received proposals from a number of contractors for the construction of a waterworks capable of supplying the full needs of the people. Eventually, a scheme submitted by a firm named Paskin was accepted and the Clareville Waterworks' was established.

The old Engine House at Rhebogoe continued to operate as an auxiliary station for fifty years. After the building fell into disuse it served as a welcome resting place for fishermen and strollers before it was summarily demolished.

In his **History** Lenihan gave further details about the district. He wrote:

"In 1750, chiefly through the piety and munificence of Richard Harold Esq. of Pennywell, a chapel was built in St. Patrick's Parish on Park Hill, above Pennywell. In the hill the Williamites had a battery during the last sieges. The chapel having become ruinous, a site on his property was offered free, by Mr. Harold's son (Richard Harold also), on which to raise another by a more convenient place on the lands of Monamuckey, nearer to the city, and on a line with the new road to Dublin, was chosen in preference, where it was built ... The new church was built in 1816. It is in the form of the letter T, and is small but neatly fitted, having the entrance surrounded by trees. The building was much improved in 1835".

Some stonework from the ruined chapel has survived by the Rhebogoe hillside to the present day. Another Roman Catholic Church, St. Bridget's, was built on Singland Hill in the past decade. This building is a timber structure with a concrete brick cladding.



A Park house, from a watercolour painting.