



Dorothy Stewart's watercolour of the pump at Pennywell in the 1930s.



Pennywell Memories

by Michael Brew

Whenever I think of Limerick my thoughts go back to Pennywell and Claughaun in the 1930s and 40s. Pennywell could be likened to a little village in the sense that it was self-contained: there was a church (St. Patrick's); three pubs (McGrath's, O'Doherty's, Owen Ryan's [Al Bar]), a grocery shop (Goggin's); a post office (Kavanagh's); five sweet shops (O'Malley's, Birdie Reals, Carmody's, Doyle's and Humphreys'); a laundry (Good Shepherd); two hurling teams (St. Patrick's and Claughaun) and, best of all, some of the best neighbours in the city.

I remember Mrs. Mulcahy, affectionately known as Dr. Mull, who was the first person called if there was illness in a house. She tended a lot of people from cradle to grave. Martin Mullins had an abattoir near St. Patrick's Well; the Sexton family made and sold ice cream from push barrows and 'Waxy' Daly was our local boot and shoe repairer.

We were a happy little community and every door was open. No invitation was needed to visit our houses. For recreation we played in the Angle, jumped trenches in Bulleen's field and swam in the Canal. We walked to the Groody river in our bare feet on hot tarmac and then jumped into the swirling waters to wash off the tar. We often met Mick Moore on his way back from his ablutions in Groody where he had a dip every day, winter and summer. We watched the older boys play pitch-and-

toss at the Pound where we sent one of our pals into Aggie Malleys' for a pennyworth of Woodbines (two and a half cigarettes for a penny). The brave lad was rewarded by having the half and the rest of us shared the two fags in Peter Ryan's forge. In winter, we filled buckets of water from the pump at the top of the hill on the Dublin Road and poured it down the hill to create a slide. We picnicked in the quarry on Rhebog Hill, and aped Flash Gordon by jumping off a ledge into a pile of stone dust, our coats opened wide to simulate a cloak. We played handball against the gable end of Ryan's house, and ran when someone spotted Guard White approaching. In bed at night we lay awake and listened to 'Floods' Hickey's rendering of 'The Hat Me Father Wore' and other arias.

I recall that my father bought a wireless and, on the occasion of an All-Ireland Hurling Final, he would remove the window in the kitchen, put the wireless in the window, and all the neighbours would bring out their chairs and sit around outside the window to listen to the match. Despite hardship, unemployment and emigration, they were very happy and carefree times in the '30s and '40s. A simple event such as a visit to the Tivoli and Thomond cinemas was a treat we all relished.

I remember the names of my

neighbours who lived in Pennywell, the Connells', Hartigans', Ryans', Berkerys', Browns', Mulcahys', Connors', Mullanes', Danahers', Clancys' and others too numerous to mention. Many have passed on but I have retained vivid recollections of them and of their innocent lives.

Visiting Limerick in July, 1993, after an absence of 20 years, I walked around all the old haunts and found great changes, some good and more not so good. It was good to see the improvements to St. Patrick's School, but I was shocked to see the condition of the old Canal: it has been allowed to deteriorate very badly. I am sure with some investment and thought it could become once again the popular area it was in my young days. We used to walk up the canal bank to Plassey on Sundays in the summertime and see the families picnicking by the cliffs. I have never forgotten the aroma from the wood fires, or the taste of the food prepared and eaten in the open air.

I have fond memories of my time at St. Patrick's School, of Mr. McMahon and Mr. Coleman the teachers, and of all the boys who were in my class. Some, alas, have now passed on: Eamon ('Budda') Mullane, Willie Cusack, Joe Kirby and there may be others whom I have not heard about.

Pennywell and Claughaun may have changed much in appearance but in my mind's eye it remains as it was 50 years ago. Long may 'the village' retain its distinctive charm and traditions'.