

Chronicle Jottings — 1845

"IN EIGHTEEN hundred and forty-five when Daniel O'Connell was alive," Paddy was doing spectacular things as well as working on the railway. Resplendent in corduroy britches he might be found escaping from Nenagh jail, cracking skulls with the Terry Alts at Killaloe, or going down with the emigrant ship. These, and a number of more respectable and patriotic activities, are recorded in a collection of clippings from the 'Limerick Chronicle' for 1845, which a Cookstown, Co. Tyrone reader, Mr. H. Todd McMillen, found in an old box. The cuttings were sent 143 years ago by a Thomas Dean of Dundanlon Castle, Cork, to G. B. Greenough, who at that time lived in Tullylagan House, just outside Cookstown.

The escape from Nenagh jail was described as 'the most ingenious and daring we have heard of in modern times'. The prisoner, James Ryan, was under sentence of transportation for 15 years for highway robbery. The account goes on to say:

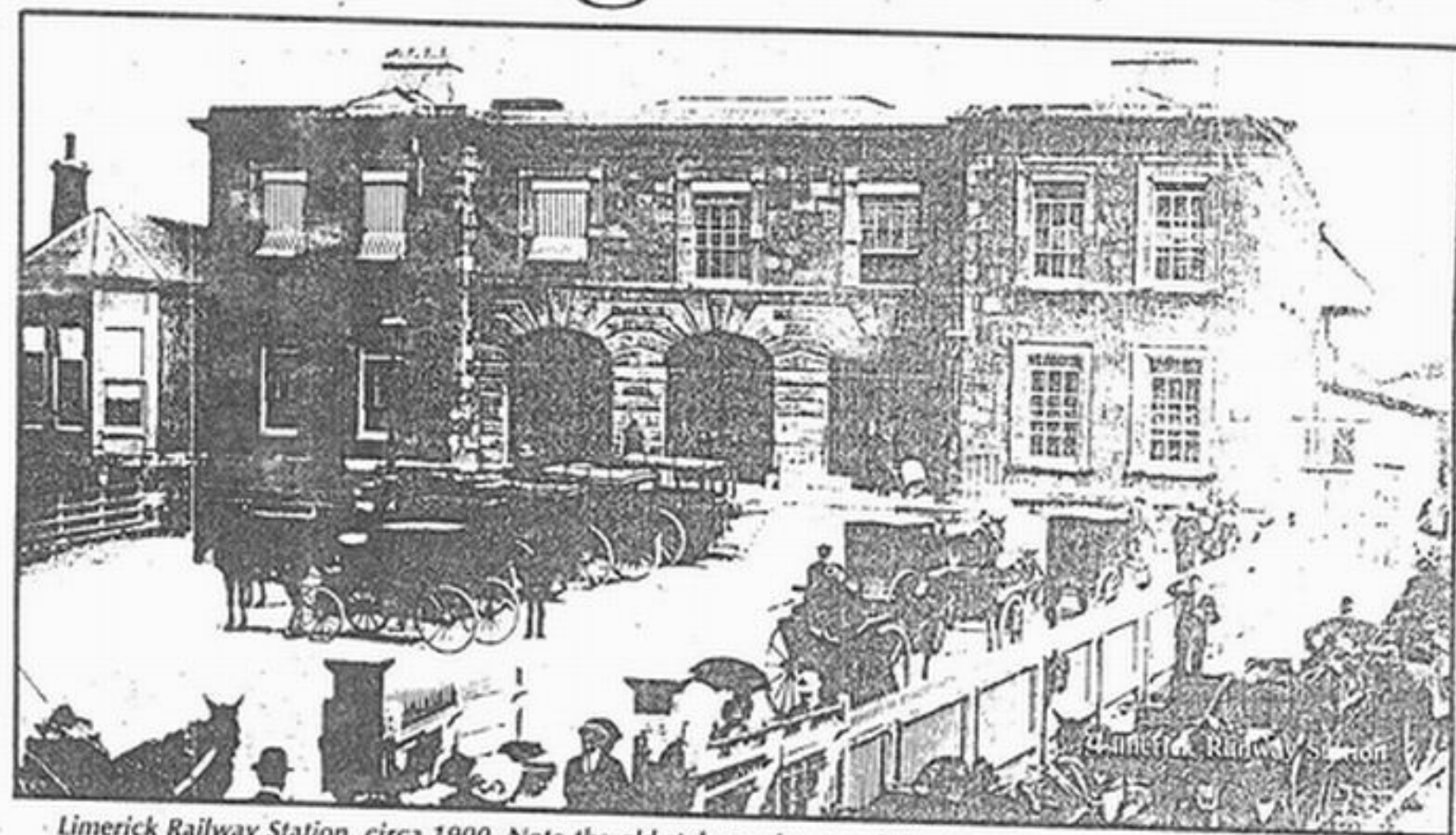
"The prisoner, together with two men named Sheedy and Maher, was locked up in his cell by the Governor at the usual hour after having received the spiritual admonitions of Mr. Power, Roman Catholic Curate. The guard was doubled by the Governor of the jail in consequence of private information which he received that the prisoners were planning a general rising.

"Mr. Smith, the Governor, and Mr. Rock, the deputy Governor, previous to retiring for the night, examined the ammunition and carbines of the sentries and afterwards visited them on guard and cautioned them to be vigilant.

"The escape of the prisoners was accomplished by the most ingenious means. His cell was situate over the privy, and by means of a small hold-fast he succeeded in raising one of the

floored. He then cut away by the same means the brickwork and plaster, taking with him his quilt which he tore up, twisted into the form of a rope and tied together so as to make it sufficiently long for his purpose. By this he descended into the privy and got over the yard railings, which are about ten feet high.

"He then crossed similar railings of another yard where at the saw pit he got a ladder, got over the fence on the shed and descended into the other yard. His footprints were then traced towards the females' side of the jail where he placed the ladder against the wall and having filled one of the jail clothes bags with stones and attached it to the end of the quilt, he flung it over the wall and then drew himself up from the ladder which did not reach more than half way up the wall. He then dropped to the other side by the rope, and thus for the moment our 'modern Jack Sheppard' has escaped. He is a native of Doon, Co. Limerick, and has lately lived near Newport. Mr. Smith, the Governor of the jail, has offered a reward of £20 for



Limerick Railway Station, circa 1900. Note the old style carriages and the tea room on the left now demolished.

Unfortunately for Ryan, he was 'apprehended' at Carrigatoher bog, greatly bruised and shattered from a fall he sustained during his escape bid.

THE TERRY ALTS

Meanwhile, farmers were combining fun with business at Killaloe. The effray, which would make front page headlines today, was compressed into a small paragraph: "The fair day of Killaloe was disgraced by a bloody affray between contending factions of the Terry Alts, when six hundred men proceeded from the Tipperary side of the Shannon to fight against the other faction."

factions has been but just acquitted of a Whiteboy offence at the assizes."

TRAGEDIES

Tragedy struck in Longford town: "As a number of emigrants were about to depart from the harbour of this town this morning by the canal boat, a most melancholy occurrence took place, ending in the loss of seven lives.

"There were inside of the boat about twenty persons, nearly at one side, and on the opposite side was placed their luggage. A number of friends of the emigrants endeavoured to get on

near Newcastle-on-Tyne. Mr. Coutts has in hand fifteen iron sailing vessels. This is certainly a wholesale way of introducing this material for ship building and is strong presumptive evidence of the great likelihood of their more general adoption prior to the end of the present year."

The iron ships had incontrovertible advantages over wood, we were told, and over a dozen were outlined: "There being no limits to the size of iron vessels, as there are to wooden ones, on account of the want of sufficient size of timber to construct the latter; they

made even more secure, and new regulations came into force — appropriately enough on Fools' Day — "The Act to Amend the Laws of Marriage in Ireland, and to provide a registry of such marriages, will come into operation on Tuesday next, the 1st of April, and the Registrar appointed for the district of Limerick will hold his office at 29 Roche's Street, corner of Catherine Street, where forms of notice will be supplied, certificates and licences granted, and there marriages may be solemnised, pursuant to the provisions of the said Act, of which all



Limerick Railway Station, at the turn of the century.

On 1st July the Battle of the Somme began, and throughout the rest of the war the 17th Battalion never moved far away from that fatal river, which became the borderline around which the decisive battles were fought between 1916 and '18.

Private Downey found time to write regular letters and postcards to his home, but none has survived. He also

They advanced and fought throughout the next day and assembled for another attack that night. Despite their exhausted state, at dawn, on 30th August, they were marched back again to a spot near Frise, where they had expected to be able to take time out for a sleep, but, instead, after washing, shaving and breakfasting, were moved at 10.30p.m. along the Somme tow-

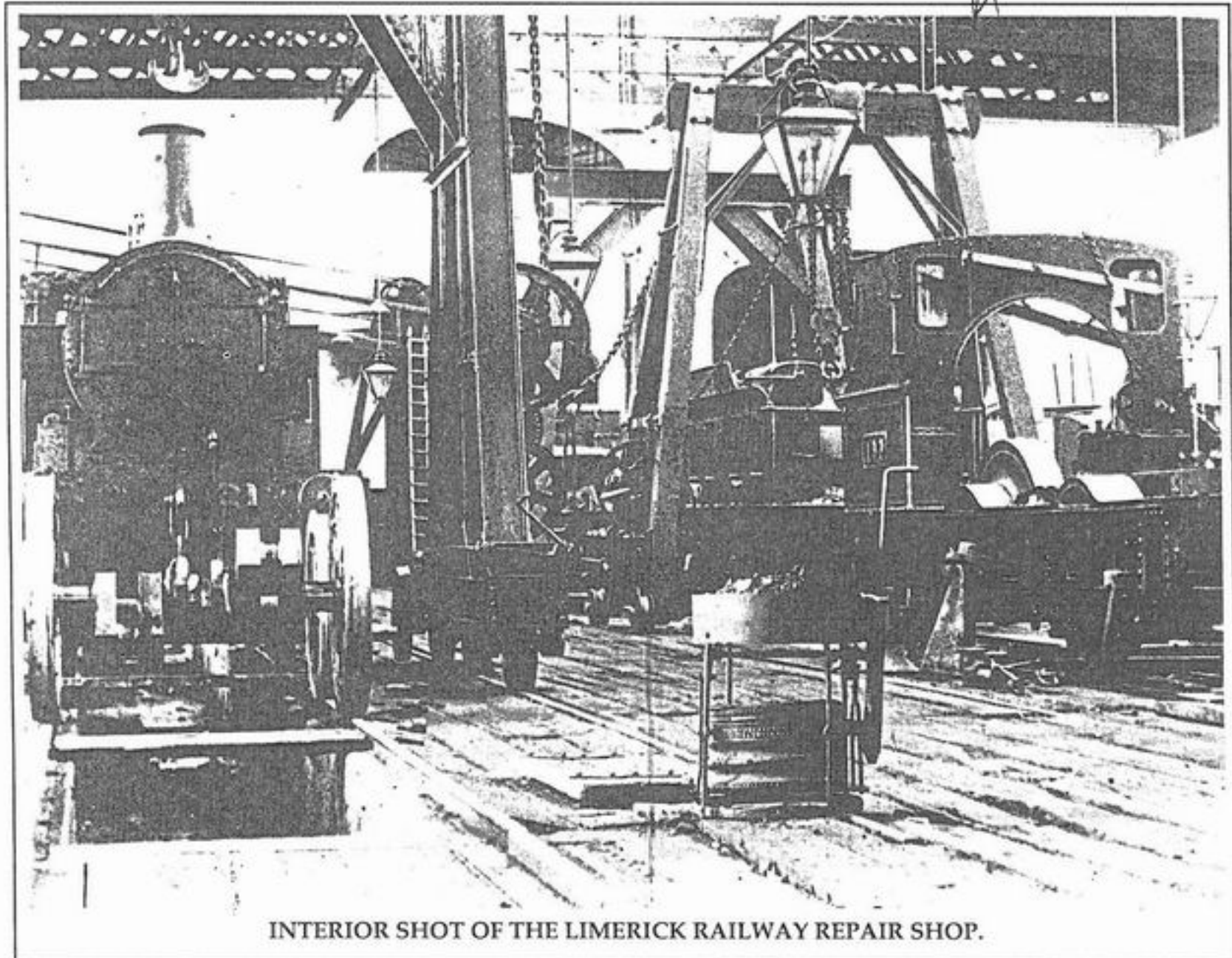
ken as a concession to the weariness of the men.

German resistance proved less than had been expected and Mount St. Quentin was taken – but at a price. In the three-day period from August 31st to 2nd September the 17th had a casualty rate of about 45% – eight officers and 151 men of the other ranks. Trooper Downey was one of the lucky

Limerick railway network: Limerick to Tralee; Limerick to Waterford; Dublin to Kinsale; Ballingrane to Foynes; Killonan to Nenagh. It appears that this action was taken by the Government in order to create a fear among railwaymen and the general public that a complete shutdown of the Irish railway system was on the cards. This implied threat did have an effect and was the main reason for the strike ending on December 15th.

From the map it is evident that the Limerick railwaymen were the most militant section of Irish railway workers because the Government would not have shut down the Limerick lines unless they were already suffering severe disruption.

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INTERIOR SHOT OF THE LIMERICK RAILWAY REPAIR SHOP.