

# Falling Gradient

JOE Coleman was reared in Thomondgate in the city and now lives in Meelick with his wife Adalean. Joe works as a supervisor in Bus Éireann in Limerick, where he is also involved in training staff. Though Joe has been involved in screenwriting in the past, Joe says he only began writing seriously in 2004 after he completed a creative writing course at Limerick Senior College. Further education is important to Joe, who has obtained qualifications in human resources and sales and marketing and has received awards from various validating bodies. As well as writing fiction, Joe has a great interest in local history and the extract published today is taken from his story "Limerick and the Railway." Joe's own family has been involved in that history and a second extract is to be published in next week's column.

**By JOE COLEMAN**

I HAVE had a lifelong interest in railways, having come from a family tradition of railway people on both sides. My father was a professional railwayman for 46 years; he was hard working and committed to the job.

He worked the "Top Link" passenger roster but loved to work the overnight rambling goods to Waterford.

He drove the last scheduled steam train from Limerick in 1963, and one of the last passenger trains on the "North Kerry" in 1970's. He always enjoyed the job; he described his early days as a fireman during the war years as being "pure slavery."

The railway came to Limerick in 1848 and was built by the Waterford & Limerick Railway Company; it crossed the Dublin to Cork line at almost right angles on a manganese diamond crossing, just north of Limerick Junction station, which has the longest platform in Ireland at 1,567 feet. It is also one of the coldest places on earth. It exists only

as a railway junction and is world famous. It is in the townland of Solohead.

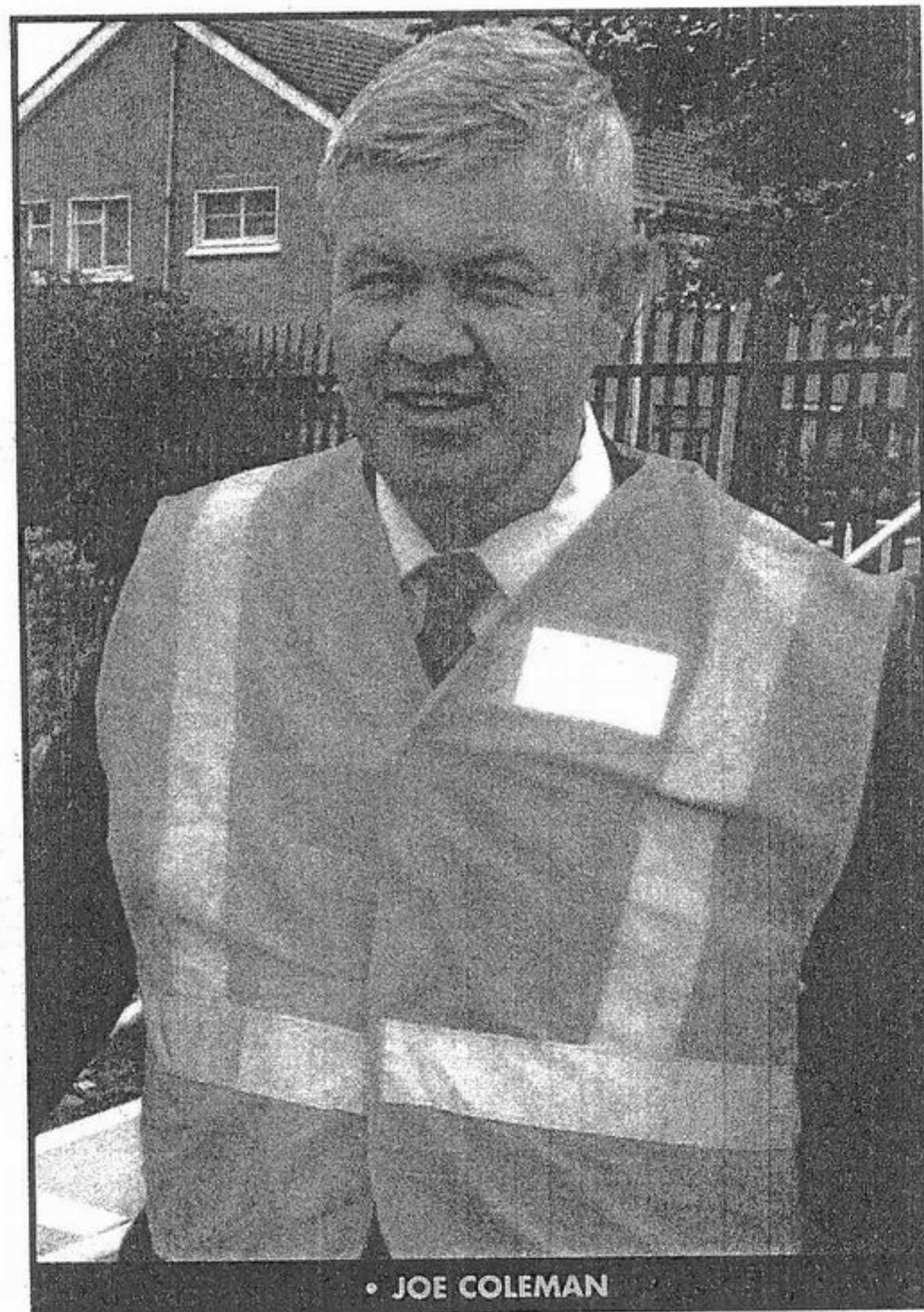
The original station at Limerick was just east of the present steel Roxboro Road Bridge, on what is now the carriage wash and engine shed. The present station at Parnell Street dates from 1857 and was designed by Sir John McNeill. It was renamed Colbert Station in 1966 after one of the leaders of the 1916 rising. It once had extensive track work that was later simplified.

There was a markets branch that crossed both the Roxboro and Ballysimon roads; and a siding to Mattersons Meat Factory, both lines have long gone, but the remains of one of the loading banks is still to be seen.

The greatest engineering feature in the area is the bridge over the river Shannon on the line to Ennis. It is the second bridge to occupy the site, built between 1908 and 1911 at a cost of £9,000 it was recently upgraded for the new commuter service and now permits the 113-ton GM 201 class locomotives over the route. The

Fridays-only through service from Dublin is hauled by 1960's GM locomotives working in multiple, all other services are operated by modern railcars. The line was opened from Ennis to Longpavement in 1859 having been built by the Waterford and Limerick, later to become the Waterford, Limerick and Western, and taken over by the Great Southern & Western Railway of Ireland in 1901.

One of my fondest memories of this line was travelling to Galway during the 1960's. We used to go to Salthill for the day, I didn't care if I ever saw the beach, as it was the train that was the highlight of the day for me, my father used to work the "special", whenever possible, so that the whole family could spend the day together. One of the great treats was watching the locomotive run round its train at Athenry, before completing the journey in both directions. In later years my father used to tell me that I knew more about the railway than he ever did, I could talk about nothing else at the time.



• JOE COLEMAN