

# A SENSE OF PLACE

by Paddy Lysaght



ou often hear a remark like this: "I know the city fairly well". This may be true in one sense; one may have wandered about its

streets several times, casting a critical eye at its architecture, its shop fronts, its ever-changing faces. One may be able to point out the old City Gaol, the Exchange, or tell the story of the Christian Brothers' school in Bridge Street, where Daniel O'Connell defended Scanlan, the murderer of the Colleen Bawn. The Potato Market, Mungret Street, Pery Square and even the Windmill may be familiar sights; one may even remember where Francis Spaight came from, and who Tait's Clock commemorates. But this knowledge is likely to come to a halt when one prys deeper into the history of our historic city.

Since we should all be curious enough to know who we are and from whence we came, I suggest that the following snippets may whet our appetites and encourage more of us to dig more deeply into Limerick's historic past and cast a more critical eye at the remains of this past that are scattered about the city. We may even be stirred to read those well-documented histories of our city, too well-known to enumerate here.

If the following sundry odds and

ends of information be of any use or interest, there is no reason why they should not be continued in some future issues of the *Journal*.

## DAN HAYES

There is a short inscription in St. Mary's Cathedral which reads: *DAN HAYES, AN HONEST MAN AND A LOVER OF HIS COUNTRY*. This inscription was composed by Dan himself before his death. He was the son of a landed County Limerick man who settled in London. He was also a patriot, a poet and a translator of Cicero, and for some time after his mother's death he became a rake and a drunkard. He died in London in 1767, having expressed a wish to be buried in Limerick. In his will he bequeathed the residue of his estate to establish a hospital for the sick and wounded of Limerick. But Dan Hayes's hospital never materialised, for his relatives successfully contested his generous will.

## THE TREATY STONE

A conundrum, formerly bandied about in Limerick ran thus: "Why is the treaty of Limerick like an eaten plum?" And the answer? - Because all that remains is the stone.

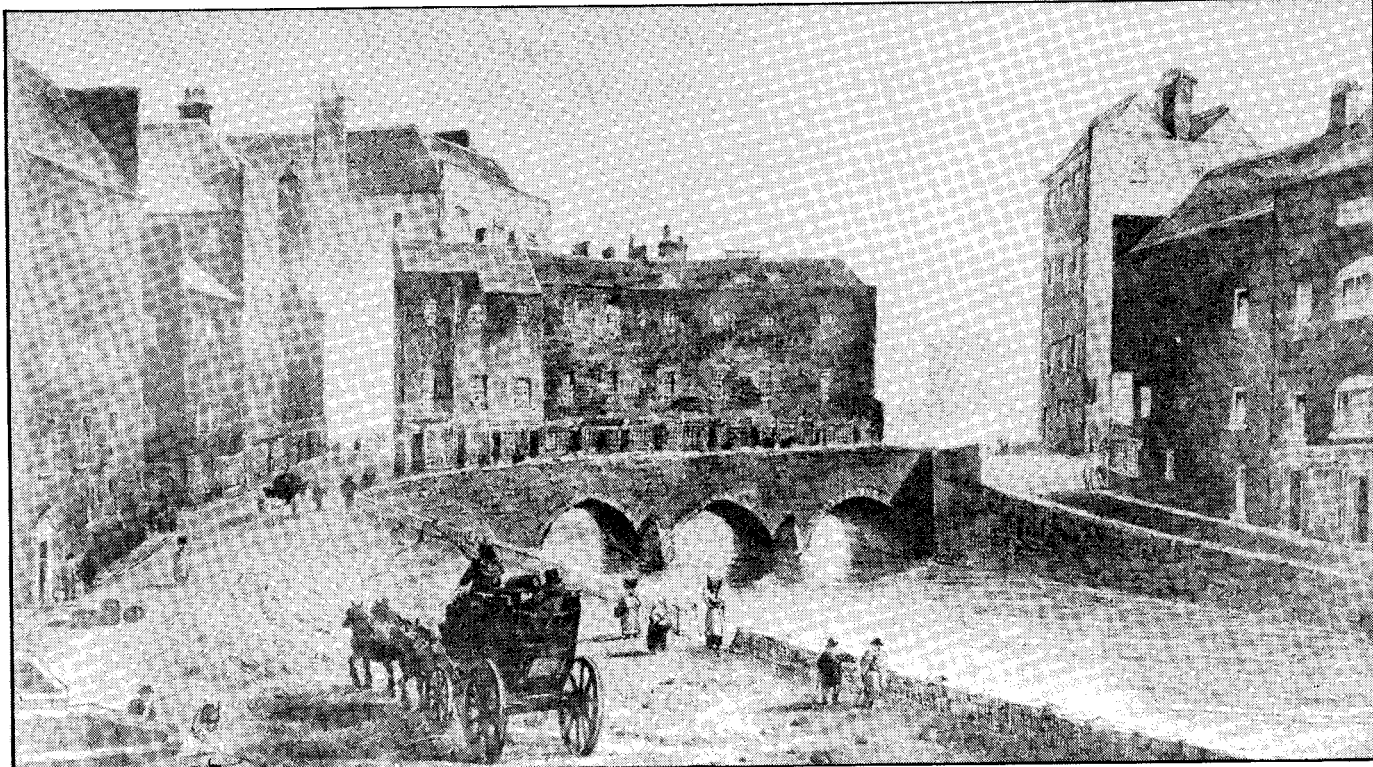
## THE COUNTY CLUB

The present residence of the Augustinian Fathers in O'Connell Street was formerly the town house of one Mr. Pryce Peacock, who sold it to the newly-formed committee of the County Club, Limerick, in 1813. In November, 1946, it was purchased by the Augustinian Order for £15,000. So, for over a hundred years, the building was the rendezvous of the county aristocracy, the landed classes and those in the service of the crown. But times change; the power of the landlords is now but a memory, and the lands they possessed are now in the hands of the Irish tenant farmers.

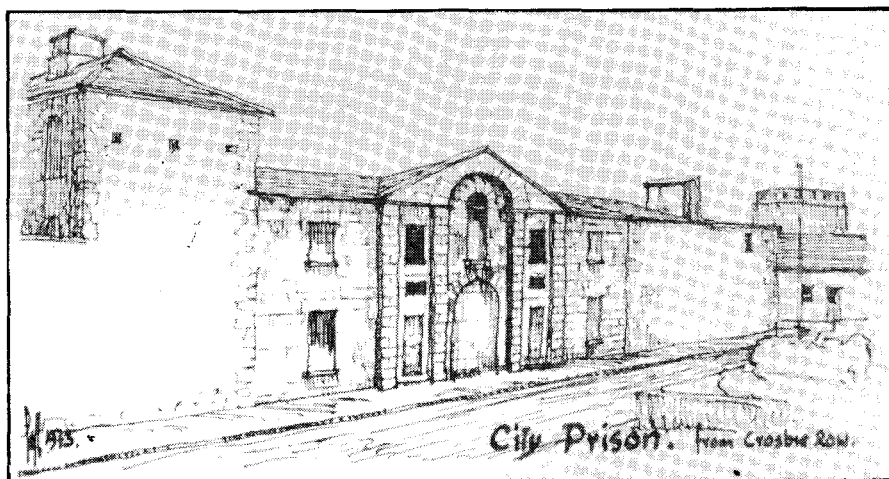
## FRANK O'CONNOR

Who do you think wrote the following piece about Limerick and its people? "Everyone you drank with in Cork frankly admitted that he did not believe in God, but that in the other accursed hole (Limerick) every soul he met put on a pretence of orthodoxy. Maybe my cousin was right, and what's wrong with Limerick is that everybody's business is known".

It is hard to believe that our author had not his tongue very much in his cheek when he wrote this, for he was a great friend of many Limerick people,



Old Baal's Bridge.



The old City Prison. (This and the other drawings in this article by S.O.P. O'Ceallachain).

notably Stan Stuart, with whom he often stayed and with whom he often went on excursions about Limerick. Our author was none other than Frank O'Connor, the novelist and short story writer.

### STREETS

Gerald Griffin Street was formerly called Cornwallis Street, Sarsfield Street was formally called Brunswick Street and O'Connell Street was formerly called George Street.

### JOHN FRANCIS O'DONNELL

John Francis O'Donnell, though now almost forgotten, is certainly one of Limerick's foremost poets. A journalist, he was born in 1837 and lived in Gerald Griffin Street. He contributed to the *Nation* and many other magazines, notably Charles Dickens' paper *All The Year Round*. D.J. O'Donoghue, author of the *Poets of Ireland*, claims that he was one of the chief modern poets of Ireland, and another critic went even further, describing him as the best of the *Nation's* poets.

### GERALD GRIFFIN

Who wrote the words of the well-known song: "My Mary of the Curling Hair"? None other than our own Gerald Griffin.

### THE THREE-ANGLED BULLRUSH

Between Thomond Bridge and Barrington's Pier a rare plant, unknown elsewhere in Ireland, grows profusely along the edge of the river. It is the Three-Angled Bullrush (*Scirpus triquetra*), and is seen at its best during August and September. In Britain the plant is confined to a few tributaries in the South of the country.

### THE LODDON LILY

The same stretch of river is also the home of a rare flower, the Loddon Lily (*Leucojuns aestivum*). Besides the Shannon, it is only found in the Thames and the Loddon in England. Walk along the bank to Barrington's Pier in April-

May and you will see its white flowers in clusters of 3 to 6 peeping between the willows and the sallows.

### BASSETT'S NOSE

Why is Bassett, who was a printer and publisher of *Bassett's Chronicle*, famous?

Because he had a long nose, and someone wrote this comic lampoon about it.

"Bassett's nose is long,  
Bassett's nose is strong.

'Twere no disgrace to Bassett's face,  
If Bassett's nose was gone".

### RICHARD CROSBIE

On 27th April, 1786, one Richard Crosbie performed what was then a remarkable feat: he ascended in a balloon from the square in the Limerick Corporation yard at Clancy's Strand (formerly the House of Industry) and drifted over Limerick, Kerry and Clare. He descended near Newmarket-on-Fergus where the people fled in terror from this visitor from another world. Subsequently, he was entertained by Sir

Lucius O'Brien at Dromoland, and on his return to Limerick he was chaired enthusiastically through the city.

### MATTHEW BRIDGE

Matthew Bridge, is the third bridge to be built between Bank Place and Bridge Street. Before 1762 the spot was the site of a ferry operating between Bank Place and what was then called Quay Lane. Matthew Bridge is called after the temperance reformer, Father Theobald Matthew.

### THE PURDONS

Three ladies surnamed Purdon once lived in one of the houses on Baal's Bridge. They never married, simply because they thought no-one good enough for them, hence the now almost forgotten Limerick proverb: "As proud as a Purdon". Another Purdon, Edmund, who may or may not have been a relative of the three 'superior' ladies of Baal's Bridge, entered Trinity College in 1774 and became a friend for life of his fellow student, Oliver Goldsmith. He eventually became a London hack, and when down on his luck, as he often was, Goldsmith helped him. When he died, Goldsmith wrote his sad epitaph for the Wednesday Club. It is poor Edmund's only claim to fame. It reads:

"Here lies poor Ned Purdon, from misery hurled,  
Who long was a bookseller's hack;  
He led such a damnable life in this world,  
That I don't think he'll wish to come back".

### THE MARKETS FIELD

Before the G.A.A. transferred to the Gaelic Grounds off the Ennis Road, all the big important G.A.A. games were held in Garryowen in the Markets Field.



Old Limerick trio at the Exchange, Nicholas Street, pictured by Owen South.