

EDITORIAL

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Driving shoppers out of Limerick

THIS IS make-or-break weekend for businesses in Limerick city centre struggling to stay afloat amid the swirling waters of recession.

Christmas shopping revenue could constitute a lifeline. It is a case of coin or bust. Turnover over the next two or three days will be crucial.

That is a measure of the desperation of the situation.

The global recession which saps commerce everywhere is one thing. The peculiar local factors confronting businesses in downtown Limerick is something else.

No, the villains of the piece are not the gnomes of Zurich but the politicians of Limerick who have acceded in the creation of a municipal mate hostile to trade.

Rates outstripping inflation mean more bankruptcies and redundancies.

A punitive parking charge capriciously applied is driving motorists out of town.

Intimidated by the system, more and more shoppers from the county and the suburbs are steering clear of the city centre.

How tragically ironic that Corporation rightly canonised for urban renewal should now seem hell-bent on urban decay.

Steps
(Thompson's funeral directors)
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A four-horse hearse outside Thompson Undertakers on New Year's Day, 1925. On left is a pair-horse carriage for clergy.

Immortal funerals

PEOPLE remember funerals more than anything else, according to Limerick undertaker Frank Thompson.

"When they could buy a Rolls Royce and forget about it, they never forget the funeral. It's extraordinary; it creates a bond between people. Most of the people I dealt with down the years, I was always friendly with them afterwards or they were very friendly towards me."

Franks says that very occasionally someone would not pay for a funeral.

"But sure, what about it. Lots make the effort to pay, then half-way through they fell down. In the present times a lot of people are finding it tough."

Embalming is a service undertakers have to provide, particularly if they have to arrange the return of bodies to other countries.

Frank learned the skill through a correspondence course in the 1950s, and his son Brian became the youngest qualified embalmer in the country in 1976 and is a

member of the British Institute of Embalmers. He studied in Manchester.

If a person dies and it is likely that there may be a delay in contacting a family member who is abroad, they usually suggest embalming the corpse.

"Embalming involves the injection of the chemical Formaldehyde into the veins and arteries. It takes about an hour and the

amount of fluid is determined by different factors.

It is a difficult procedure as it is not easy to locate veins and arteries and you must know it," said Frank.

They had to hold the bodies of five foreign sailors who were drowned off the Clare coast many years ago for a period of six weeks before they were returned home for burial. That was the longest they had to retain embalmed bodies.

Frank says that an increasing number of people are purchasing grave plots and making provision for their funerals.

"Every week we have about two or three people making enquiries about buying their graves. A grave in Kilmurry is £200, Mount St Oliver is £220. But a single grave in Mount St Oliver will take four people, because they go so deep.

"A single grave in a lot of places will only take two."

Every undertaker has had funeral inci-

One of his men had not been told about the platform and when he descended the steps thought he was standing on the floor of the vault.

As the final prayers were being recited, the unfortunate man stepped backwards and fell off the elevated structure down in the vault.

"We could all hear the moaning and groaning coming up from the vault," said Frank.

"He had fallen down on the other old caskets that were there. All I could hear below was 'Sweet —, where am I, am I in hell?' And the language was tough.

"It was a very posh funeral. One of the old ladies asked me, 'Mr Thompson, are we having a problem?' I said, 'Oh no my lady, and there was my man shouting below me inside the vault.'"

Eventually after the casket was placed in the vault and the mourners had left, they had to mount a resurrection from the vault and the injured man was brought to hospital.

(CONCLUDED)

SPECIAL REPORT

JIMMY WOULFE

dents which caused consternation at the time but which they can recall with a smile.

He remembers a funeral for a well known family in the county where they were to place the lead-lined casket in an old vault. The vault was down 14 feet and they had to descend steps into it.

To help with the lowering of the heavy casket, Frank decided to erect a small platform on the floor of the vault on which men inside could stand and lower the casket from the top.

