

Court listening to the sharp tongue of Judge De Burca as he admonished various criminals and, not infrequently, their legal representatives.

My older colleagues on the Leader told me that court work was the most valuable kind of journalism of all. You

saw of our dear editor Brendan Halligan as he pored over the copy. But I would allow myself to dream from time to time. When nothing interesting was happening - usually during the suffocating tedium of parking offences - my mind would wander far and wide. In those days I dreamed of being a war correspondent. The idea was to leave Limerick behind and head for the wild frontiers of God

of fierce shelling around Beirut and of attacks on the positions held by the Irish. Among the UNIFIL contingent were a substantial number of Limerick boys. I worked and worked on Brendan Halligan. I told him I could file any number of stories about our brave boys on the Front line. "Think of the kudos of having your own man there," I said. My colleague Eugene Phelan sniggered to himself.

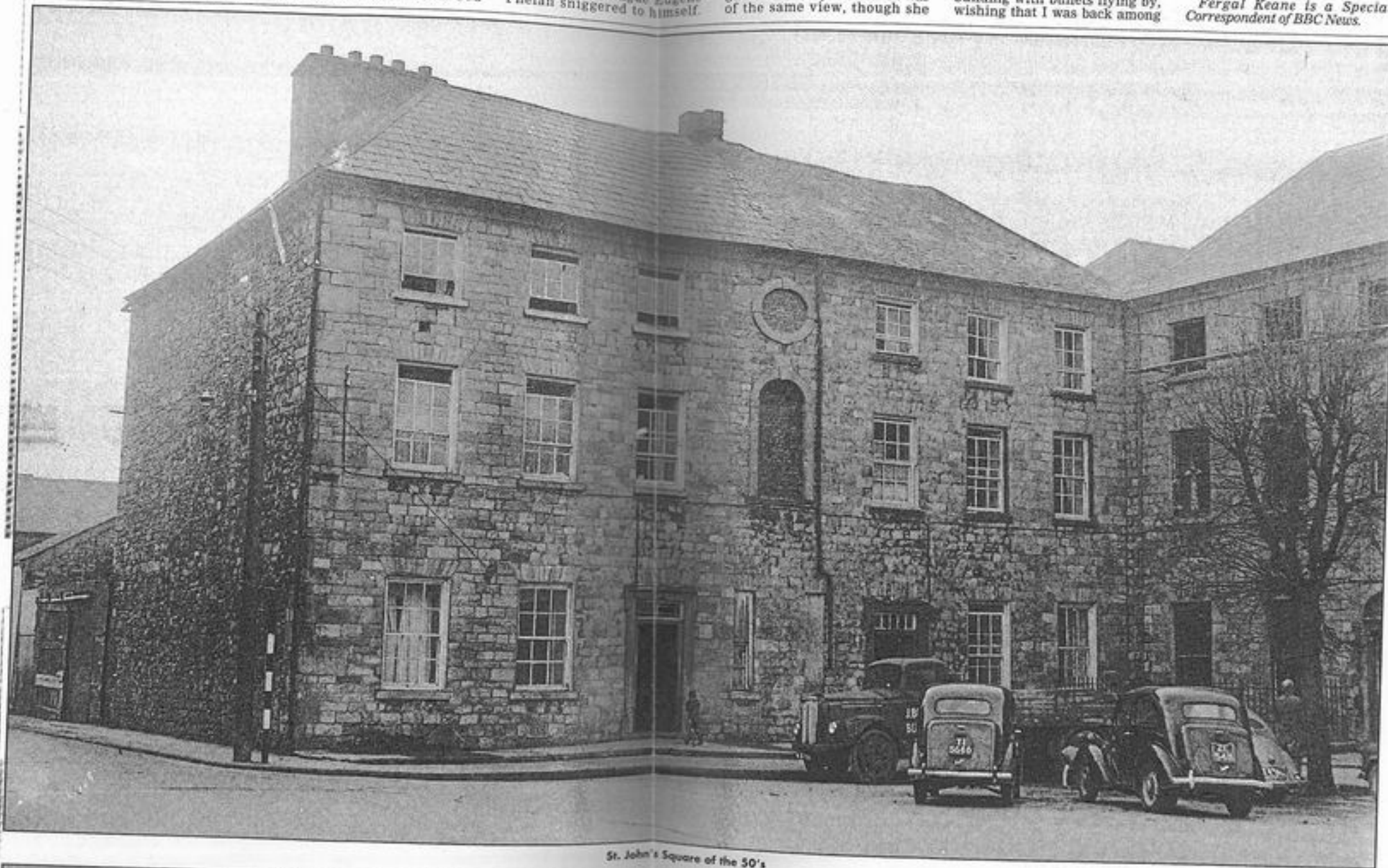
innoculated against every disease known to man and beast. I emerged sore and sick but trembling with excitement. I was two years out of school and heading for my first war. Back at the office Cormac Liddy took me to one side and advised me that I was a "buck ape" who should come to his senses if he didn't want to come home in a wooden box. I think my then girlfriend Jenny O'Sullivan was of the same view, though she

though I suspect privately he had argued against letting me go. He and the board were absolutely right. I probably wouldn't have survived for very long in the terror of the Israeli assault on Beirut.

Since then I have been to many wars, far more than I want to remember. And sometimes I admit I have found myself sitting in an abandoned building with bullets flying by, wishing that I was back among

a fear that more war and destruction lie waiting for us. But it does not quell my sense of hope for humanity. There is much joy in the world and much laughter. In my life I doubt if there will ever again be the amount of laughter I enjoyed in my Leader days - but for those years of our passing century I am deeply, deeply grateful.

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St. John's Square of the 50's

