

Some Limerick newsboys

PART TWO

by Frank Renihan

All the old newsboys who faithfully served the people of Limerick down through the years are now forgotten by the present generation. And there were some outstanding characters and personalities among these men. Their names, their doings and the stories told about them are never far from my mind.

There was the famous Jack "Tar", the Cooney brothers, "Lordy" Moran, the Regan brothers, "Hat" O'Brien, Mickey Ward, the Hanley brothers and "Corky" O'Brien, who used to sell his papers outside the Coliseum in O'Connell Street. It was a difficult task to keep "Corky" on his beat, for he had a habit of attending the funeral of almost everyone that died.

Another legendary seller was Ab Sheehan, who was renowned as a Young Munster fan and who sported a black and amber scarf the length of himself. The last of that newsboy clan was Mikey Gleeson, who was known the length and breadth of Ireland for "minding" cars at race meetings. It could well be said that an era came to a close with Mikey's death last year.

Of the newsboys who came before my own time perhaps one of best known and most lovable was Mick McHugh. He was a man who won a soft spot in the hearts of his many customers and, indeed, in the hearts of all those who enjoyed his humorous quips and sallies. He always spoke in a soft voice, half husky but always pleasing — almost melodious.

Invariably well dressed, he was rarely seen without his well-shaped hat. Like many other sellers, he was "respectable" and clean spoken. With his contemporary, Jack "Tar", he carried on his work right through the Black and Tan troubles and afterwards during the Civil War. In

the mid-'thirties he slipped quietly from the stage of Limerick street life and was forgotten.

The old Limerick Chronicle office in O'Connell Street had an old world atmosphere of its own. Many familiar figures, who later went on to become leading men in the local and national newspaper world, started off with the paper. I have warm memories of my dealings with such men as Paddy Moroney, who started with the Chronicle as an office boy and who went on to become circulation manager. (His son of the same name is at present a sub-editor with the paper). In the editorial department there was Paddy Fitzgibbon, who became editor and was a brilliant leader writer; his brother Daly, who was racing correspondent and Denny Glynn. Des Hanrahan was a versatile sports writer who later moved over to the Limerick Leader. He is now chairman of Bord na gCon. Harry Pickford, one of the backroom boys of the Chronicle, became a director and went to London when the Limerick Leader acquired the paper.

Another Limerick journalist, whose name became synonymous with the Chronicle, was Dick Naughton. His column "Limerickman's Diary" was widely read and much appreciated. Dick had a life-long interest in local history and literature. His work in compiling the "Down Memory Lane" and "Memory of the Past" features gave him the opportunity to combine both his interests in the one exercise. He loved his native city and modestly concealed his knowledge and scholarship behind a quiet, retiring disposition. His untimely death was a great loss to local historical studies.



Frank Renihan, doyen of the city's newsboys, brings the welcome news.



MI. McNamara, for 50 years Limerick's master billposter.

The *Chronicle* is the oldest newspaper in the country, having been founded in 1766. The paper was published on three evenings a week — Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. Under the conditions of an old arrangement, the newsboys, in order to ensure their supply of the paper on the evening of publication had to go through the following schedule: On a Monday morning they had to rise at the crack of dawn and take up their positions outside the *Chronicle* offices until a member of the staff arrived to open the door. The first newsboy into the office would then pay for a half-dozen or dozen next evening's papers. It was a case of the papers being made available to the newsboys on the basis of the advanced booking. This procedure continued for three mornings a week for as long as the old printing machines were used.

When the *Limerick Leader* took over the printing of the *Chronicle* on a rotary press machine this arrangement was changed, and life became a little easier for the newsboys. Last year the *Chronicle* was reduced from three editions a week to one issue — a larger tabloid publication coming out every Tuesday; Jim this move signalled the final break with the old distribution arrangement.

In my 44 years selling newspapers on the kerbsides of Limerick I have seen many changes, good and bad, in all aspects of life. But the working conditions of newsboys have escaped this transformation and have remained basically unchanged. The boys continue to serve the people by selling the papers in all kinds of weather on the streets of the city, as other newsboys have done before them.

Late arrivals and unsold papers still remain occupational hazards. There is no guaranteed weekly wage and "wet-time" payments are unheard of. There are no handouts from the state, no medical cards, no holiday pay and no pension schemes. There is no economic security

for newsboys; many of them have died penniless and are buried in paupers' graves.

If the newsboys were in other jobs they would start and finish at regular times, get a weekly wage and have a certain amount of time off. There is no reason why the large and wealthy newspaper industry should not provide these conditions and facilities for the street sellers of their papers.

The newsboys play an important role in the newspaper industry throughout the world. It is about time that some of their dedication and devotion to duty was repaid by the press owners. There is no reason why these owners should not come together with the newsboys to work out an agreement to guarantee the sellers a weekly wage, regular hours and a pension and sick pay scheme. The newspapers would also gain, as each paper would get an equal share of the street distribution and selling and a regular service morning and evening.

There are many characters, events, places and happenings left out of this narrative. It would take a book to chronicle all of the experiences I have had on the streets of Limerick down through the years. One man, however, who gave me the inspiration to record some of these for posterity was the late Fr. Thomas Dunlea, a Co. Tipperary man who spent much of his priestly life in Australia. His efforts were rewarded when he was given the OBE for services to underprivileged children. He was the man largely responsible for the building up of a place called 'Boystown' in New South Wales. I had the pleasure of meeting him when he came back on holiday a few years ago. And it was he who suggested that I record some of the newsboy history of this ancient city.



The well known Limerick character, Mick McHugh.