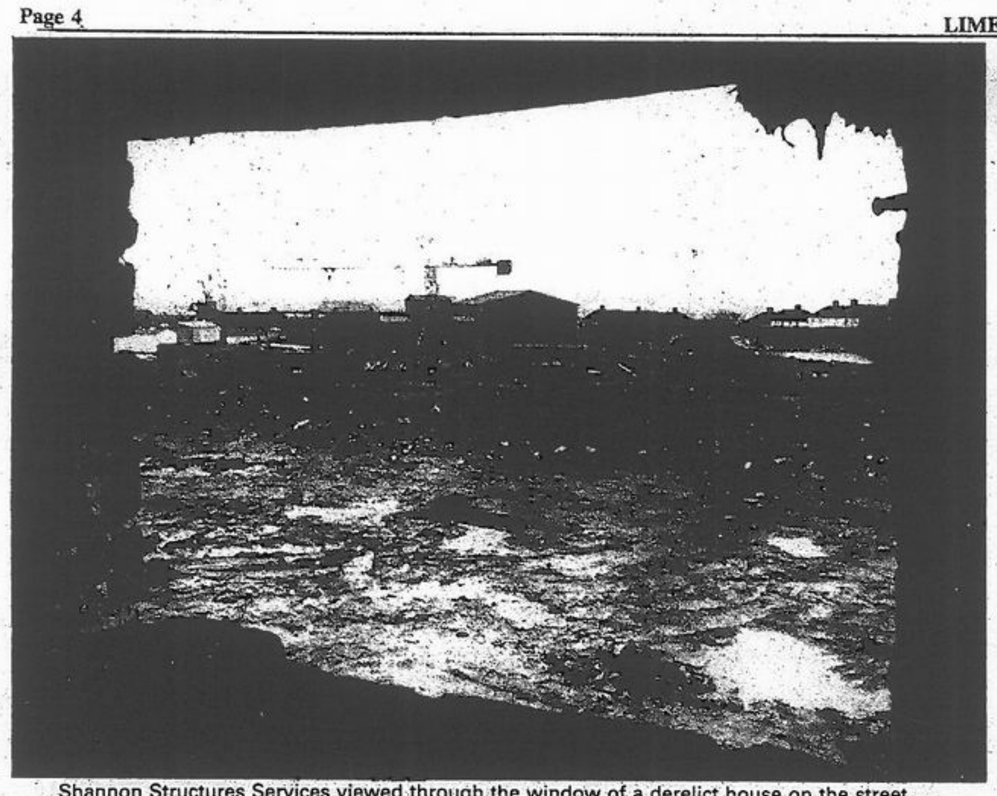
DOWN YOUR STREET — Edward Street

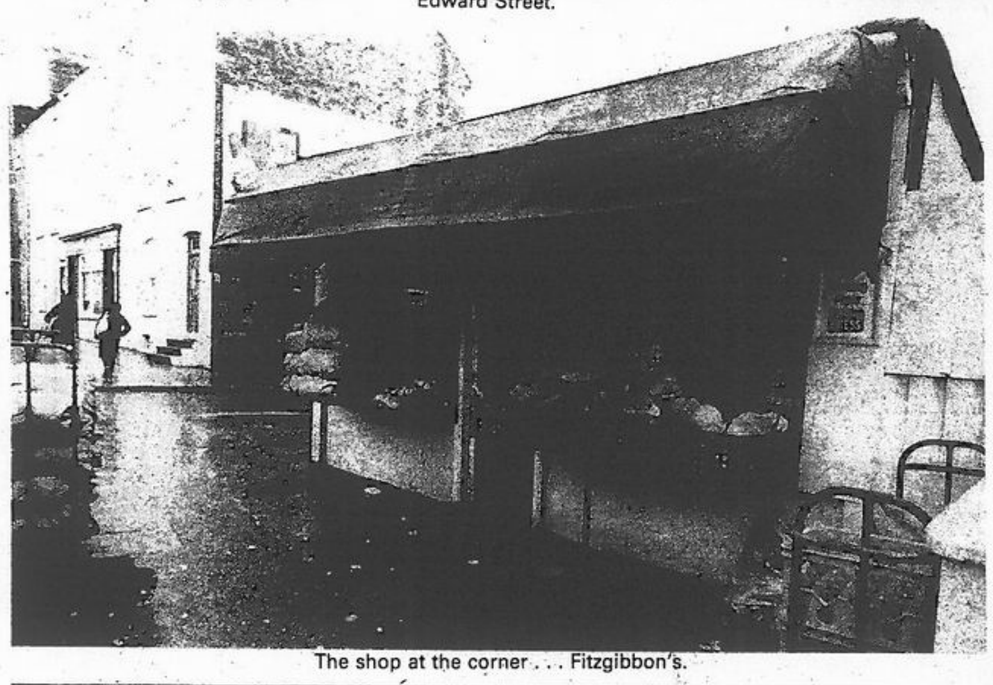
Excuse me, there's a cow on your roof



Shannon Structures Services viewed through the window of a derelict house on the street.

Delivering the milk the old way.

Edward Street.



The shop at the corner . . . Fitzgibbon's.

EDWARD Street, once a thriving hive of activity, is now honeycombed with derelict sites and has all the appearance of an area just coming back to life after a bomb blitz.

The road twists and turns its way down the hill. And each bend is punctuated by the signs of decay that have devastated the area.

Whole streets have been torn down within Edward Street and comparatively little has been done to arrest the decay.

From the red bricked Edward Street Garda Station to Quin's Cottages once stood the 35 houses that made up Hall's Range. Now only one remains.

Half-doored

It was a line of two storey houses, all half-doored and looking on to Hall's Quarry.

A house that has withstood the ravages of time is Bill Murphy's public house, now run by his son, Joe. His practice of restricting the clients in the lounge to the fairer sex has been well documented but another incident that Joe will never forget can be revealed now.

One afternoon about 16 or 17 years ago he was busy tending bar when his next-door neighbour ran in and told him that there was a cow on Joe's toilet roof. Neither Joe nor his customers believed him.

"He insisted that there was really a cow on the roof so I went to see for myself and to my utter amazement–there was," recalled Joe.

"I went in and told the others but they did not believe me . . . they were all afraid of being caught. But out they came in dribs and drabs and saw for themselves that it was true. One fellow, who was last to see the cow, said afterwards that he thought that your man was after the mad pension."

Steep drop

He explained that at the back of the bar there is s steep drop of, about 25 to 30 feet with a narrow ledge outside his perimeter wall. The cow worked her way along the ledge, up on to the neighbour's wall and from there on to Joe's back house.

"She was an in-calf heifer and I believe they can do some pretty strange things when they are that way," remarked Joe.

"We called the Garda and the Fire Brigade but no-one would believe us. The cow's feet were sticking through the slates and only the joists were keeping her up. Then came Martin Mullins, who worked for de Courcy's, the owner of the cows, and somehow or other he got the cow down safe and sound. She calved a few days later," related the friendly barkeeper.

Shannon Foundry is a name that has always been synonymous with Edward Street. However, many people will now be sorry to hear that the Shannon Foundry complex there is no longer part of the company and is now known as Shannon Structures and Services, having no connection with the foundry plant on the Dock Road.

The new company is built in Hall's Quarry, an area which was once "the most attractive unofficial playground in the city."

Quarry pond

It had everything children could ask for. On one side there was a grassy area where they could play football and on the other was the quarry pond which is fed by a spring in the quarry and once played host to a shola of roach.

These roach made fair game for may young anglers that came to catch them. The pool was rarely used for swimming as it was "just that little bit too dirty."

The pool, often a source of joy, also brought sadness, as many an over-adventurous youth met a watery death there.

The area is now fenced off and the pool is slowly being filled in, and no longer a mecca for fun loving kids.

Five years ago Michael Fitzgerald opened a small supermarket in Edward Street. Then, the busy thoroughfare provided him with a secure base for his thriving grocery business. Of late, however, things have not being going so well as Michael might like.

His plight is shared by many small shopkeepers all over Limerick and indeed all over Ireland.

"The first three years here were great but recently my trade has dwindled as many of my customers prefer to shop in the shopping centres, particularly Dooradoyle," he remarked.

Mark-up

"They can cutprice me. When I have something on special offer they can match it and still have a bigger mark-up," stated Michael.

"VAT has me crippled. It is no longer a small shop. I keep so many books that it is like a small business," he added.

Asked would he ever consider taking a unit in a shopping centre, he remarked. "I would not even consider it. I would lose my individuality and have to do what I am told by them. I would have to open and close when someone else decided and would have my freedom restricted."

There are seven magnificent pubs in Edward Street, three on one side and four on the other. On the Sarsfield Barracks side there is the gaily painted Slattery's, O'Connor's, Noonan's and Coyne's Mountain Dew.

The other side boasts O'Sullivan's, Bill Murphy's and Albie Carroll's.

Hanging from the roof of "Albie's" are 20 hurleys belonging to hurlers that would provide an almost unbeatable panel.

Mackeys

"There are two of the Mackeys, Ringy's, Ollie Walsh's and, of more recent times, Eamonn Grimes and Sean Stack of Clare," stated Ivan Ryan, who manages the bar for the deceased owner's daughter, Catherine.

The bandroom of the Boherbuoy Brass and Reed Band is in Edward Street. Once upon a time most of the members came from the area–Edward Street and Carey's Road.

The corner across from O'Connor's bar at the junction of Edward Street and Wolfe Tone Street once housed Lucey Breen's chip shop. Alas, like so much of the street, it has disappeared, except for the caved-in shell that remains.

Dan Quinlivan has lived on Edward Street for over 60 years and still carries on his work as a dental mechanic.

"All the old stock of the area are gone. The atmosphere is completely different. It was much more homely them. The women used to go up to the park in groups for a chat. They could not afford to go to Kilkee in those days," said Dan with a smile.

Traffic

"The traffic is terrible now. That is the most dangerous street in all of Limerick out there. There will be a bad accident here soon if something is not done," he added.

"It is completely without control. There are no restrictions on the cars. They can just belt along regardless."

He remembers when the troops in Sarsfield Barracks were not Irish.

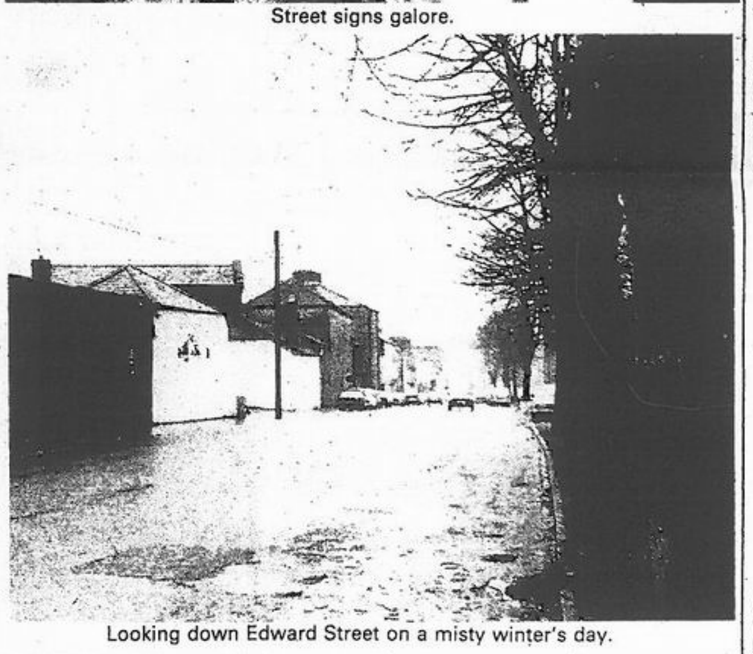
"They were not the worst–didn't they keep the pubs going? However, during the Troubles it became very tense here."

He also added that there was rarely any trouble in the area.

It is hard to imagine anyone causing any trouble with a Garda Station and Army barracks in the one street.

The barracks lines the street for about 200 yards. The grey limestone walls with occasional lookout slits bear ominous testimony to the force within.

Street signs galore.



Looking down Edward Street on a misty winter's day.

Flashback . . . Martin Mullins leads the herd-head for heights through Murphy's Ba

Report: Conor Keane Pictures: Owen South

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