High Street
(Continued)

By Mrs. W. J. Phelan

High Street from the Tholsel to the Parade on the East Side.

The Shops next the Tholsel

89 and 90 High Street. Now Mr. Nicholas O'Keeffe's was owned before him by the Drea family and before them by their uncle, E. Molloy. It was rebuilt about 1800.

91 and 92. P. T. Murphy's was formerly owned by Cornelius Quinn who had held the Office of Mayor of Kilkenny in 1893. He sold boots, principally hunting boots and may have made boots. His two daughters later lived in William St. The burial ground of the Quinn family is in St. Canice's Cathedral ground where a fine Celtic Cross marks the grave.

93 High St., is given in Bassett's Guide of 1884 as M. A. Shirleys Confectioners. Later it was incorporated with Stone and Leeches. Later still it was owned by Keating and Gaule's, Electricians, now by Mr. Sherwood.

The Misses Chambers lived in 93 till recently.

The Corner House, next Sherwood's was, till about 30 years ago, Stone and Leeches, Linen Drapers and Baby Outfitters, a very reputable firm to serve ones time to, Stone and Leeches carried a hallmark of efficiency. Mr. John Kelly took over about 30 years ago, and is of the opinion that his house is a very old one. It has lovely arched cellars, so typical of old Kilkenny. He says these cellars are all fitted for wine. This Corner House may have been the site of Finn's Leinster Journal, later the Kilkenny Journal. Rev. James Graves writing in the Irish Literary Inquiries (1865) says:—
"The site of his (Finn’s) house is now well-known, it stood in what is now Mary’s Lane, having been made a lane by a wall which was subsequently built, enclosing the Churchyard, and what is better it stood and its site still is quite close to the Kilkenny “Tholsel” Town Hall or “Pratorium” being the corner house next High St., now occupied by a cloth shop, the Tholsel being only a few houses farther north.”

The following paragraph is taken from Finn’s Leinster Journal, December 5th, 9th, 1767:— “Edmund Finn, Printer, Bookseller and Stationer removed from St. Mary’s Churchyard to the house in High St., lately occupied by Mr. Kieran Laffan, Chandler opposite Mr. William Watters.”

The Cloth Hall, next Mary’s Lane on the South side, once owned by Mrs. David Walsh who resided at Lacken Cottage and later at Fairview was afterwards the property of M/s. Roe and Griffith, and is now Mr. Good’s. It was once the offices of the Confederated Press. P. M. Egan says “Printing was first introduced into Kilkenny by Flan McEgan who previously resided in Tipperary. He was selected by the Confederate Assembly to print its transactions and is described as the most eminent scholar in Munster.”

Next door, Mr. O’Connell’s, Chemist Shop, was lately Dr. Whites and before him Dr. Fitzsimons. Dr. White came to Kilkenny from Miltown Malbay, in the Co. Clare. The Manager of this shop, Mr. Gilmore, married a Miss Smith, whose father owned the Boot Shop next door (97 High St.).

98 and 99, now Woolworths, was once the Shee House, and retained its fine wainscoting and old stone chimneys in Mr. Graves time, a 100 years ago. It was divided into tenements in that time. The slab on its front, states that these are the Arms of Henry Shee of Kilkenny, and Frances Crisp, his Wife. Henry Shee was Mayor of Kilkenny in 1611. The date on slab is broken off, but Mr. Graves believes some one who saw the date, and it was 1580. Thus, in this little part of old Kilkenny we have at least four houses, dated actually or by inference to the 16th Century, that is:— The Archer House, The Shee House, The Old Tholsel, and the “Hole in the Wall.” The Shee House was the Meaney Home in our
childhood. They carried on grocery and provision store here. Their monument is in the old St. John’s Cemetery. Woolworths came here over 21 years ago, and took down completely the inside of the building, merely partly retaining its outer contour and the Coat of Arms.

100 High St., was part of the old Shee House and was a Watchmakers and Jewellers shop and owned by Mark Shearman in 1854. It continued in the possession of the Shearman family until about 1949 when it was sold to Mr. P. Crotty, who now carries on a Confectionery business there. The original old pointed gable and octagonal chimneys were ornaments of High St., till 1949 when they were taken down as being unsafe.

Next comes Purcells, another old Kilkenny family and one with an honourable civic record. Mr. Joseph Purcell, father of the present owners was Mayor of Kilkenny twice, once 1900-1901 and again 1911-1912. The Purcells are related to Kelly’s, the Coachbuilders of Irishtown who have been there more than 100 years.

The vacant lot next Purcells (102) was owned by Downeys, considered by some as the birthplace of Late Archbishop of Liverpool. They were followed here by Harding’s.

Allen’s comes next and was owned before them by Nicholas Kenny. Before that again by Duggan Brothers, one of the latter, Richard Duggan, moved up to The Monster House in 1896.

Bridgett’s Drapery next to Allens was a bakery owned by a Mr. Walsh. Wall’s was once Bishop’s Confectionery and later the British and Argentine Meat Co. P. S. Gaule had a Drapery at 106 in 1902.

Miss McCormack’s was Mrs. Ryan’s and before Mrs. Ryan’s was owned by Miss Brophy and later Miss Cleere, sister of the late W. K. Cleere of the Ormonde Road. Here were two circular Iron Balconies, which were removed a few years ago after a fire. Mr. Coyle had a Stationery Shop here and his father and uncle before him, and it once belonged to Michael Banim, the Author and Postmaster of Kilkenny.
John Coyle, uncle of Mr. John Coyle was Mayor in 1889. Coyle's owned both this and the jutting out shop, now Mrs. Mulcahy's, late Allen's Seed Shop. Banims owned only Miss McCormack's part.

Mr. Murphy was late Proprietor of the Harp Bar, now owned by Mr. O'Keeffe, an Inistioge man.

The Kilkenny Journal covered the whole corner from White's Chemist (formerly Teehan's) to White's, Victuallers in Rose Inn St. About 1902 the printing works were transferred to Patrick St., but the Office remained where White's Chemist Shop now is until about 25 years ago.

Maxwell's carried on a Newsagents business in the corner shop. Con Maxwell had taken over the Journal in early years of the last Century. His direct descendants, the Kenealy family, own the paper to-day. Maxwell's sold to Crokers, Crokers to Jeffersons and Jeffersons to Elliotts.

Over Maxwell's and looking out on to the Parade were the Sinn Fein Headquarters, in the election of 1917 when Mr. Liam Cosgrave, represented Sinn Fein, and the late J. Magennis the old Parliamentary Party.

Crockers Cross was situated here opposite the Bank of Ireland. Lr. Patrick St. was sometimes called Crokers St., on account of the Cross. This Cross was raised to commemorate the date when (Graves said): "The Stalwart Burgesses of Kilkenny, headed by their valiant sovereign, John Croker, boldly left the shelter of their walls, and on the day of the exhalation of the Holy Cross in 1407 proformed good services against Irish foe and English rebel at Callan.' This Cross was gone over a 100 years ago, and we have never seen a print of it.

West Side—10 and 11 High St. (now Boyle's and the Woollen Hall) was the site of the premises of W. J. Douglas, auctioneer and stationer in 1854. In 1854 too, Potters opened a grocery in 12 High Street now Lipton's. A Miss Potter married Ronan who carried on business there till Carroll and Butler took over sometime before 1884.

In 19 High St. (the old Archer House) now in the possession of the O'Doherty family, Francis Sheehy Skeffington
and Thomas McDonagh stayed when they were teachers in St. Kieran's College in 1901 and 1902. Miss O'Gorman, Castle St., Ballyragget knew Thomas McDonagh's room—"it was on the corner going back into the garden, 2nd floor, turn left." Miss O'Gorman states that Mrs. White was a Shearman and Mrs. Peter McDermott were relatives of Canon Doyle.

The house of Mr. N. Purcell, Dentist, was once St. Mary's Glebe, more than 100 years ago—the Minister's who attended St. Mary's across the way lived here; the most famous of these was the Rev. Peter Roe a very high church clergyman whose life has been written by Rev. Samuel Madden.

Williams and Finn, Bankers, Kilkenny

William Williams registered himself as a banker, the 17th May, 1800, and in a few months (1st October) took Michael Finn into partnership. In 1803 the firm had put 4,000 notes under three guineas and 500 under ten pounds into circulation. There even figures are always suggestive, and indicative of careless management, and probably were a mere guess. The legitimate inference from them is that no proper record was kept of the notes issued, and consequently the partners could not be aware of the extent of their liabilities. At all events putting notes in circulation was found to be such a simple and easy matter that the firm sought a wider field for its enterprise and accordingly opened a branch in Dame Street, Dublin, in 1804.

How industriously and successfully it used its fresh opportunities was made apparent when the inevitable failure came in 1820 and its liabilities were declared to be £300,000. Sir John Newport, the Waterford banker, in evidence given before a Committee of the House of Lords, positively swore that Williams and Finn were never worth a shilling, and that the bank was commenced without any capital whatsoever. Of the personal history of the partners, I know nothing. Mr. W. F. Finn, sometime M.P. for Kilkenny, was probably a relation of the banker.

(C. M. Tennison, M.R.I.A.)