

Irishtown

Notes on a walk taken by the Society on November 15th, 1953. Conducted by J. S. Gibb & W. J. Phelan. Much of the information was supplied by Jim Keogh.

No attempt was made to reconstruct the historical Irishtown, the most ancient part of Kilkenny. Students of this are referred to Ledwich's "Antiquities of Ireland," Hogan's "Kilkenny" and Canon Carrigan's "Ossory." This walk and talk concentrated on the Irishtown of the past 100 years and the times and people remembered by the old inhabitants.

Irishtown proper was enclosed by walls erected probably about the time of the English town walls, i.e. in the fifteenth century. These walls had four gates, their situation is remembered and their names are used still to-day.

(1) The *Watergate* marked the southernmost end of the town crossed by the Brega at Cotterills Bridge, and connected the Irishtown then as now with the English-town. James Hughes, grandfather of the present Hughes family of Parliament Street, was last keeper of this gate and toll bridge.

(2) *Dean's Gate* was situated west of Coach Road. Dean St. This is where Cromwell's army, under Col. Evers, entered the town on 28th March, 1650.

(3) *Troy's Gate* at junction of Vicar Street, Green Street and Drysdale Lane. This lane is not now a public road, but continues up from Green Street, runs through Palace Grounds.

(4) *Green's Gate* at the Nore end of Green Street, but some 100 yards north of the bridge of to-day.

We will start at the Watergate end of Irishtown and on the East side.

Nos. 1, 2, 3, Irishtown were premises of the O'Hanrahan Bros.: 80 years ago those seven brothers came to Kilkenny from Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, and took over from their uncle, William O'Kenny, who carried on a bacon

business here. Timothy O'Hanrahan, later of Tenny Park, was the most noteworthy of these brothers from the public view point. He was a founder member of the Gaelic League in Kilkenny and staunch supporter of Irish manufacture, identifying himself strongly with the Kilkenny Woodworkers and Kilkenny Woollen Mills. About 1898 he bought and restored the Rothe House, for which the Kilkenny people owe him the sincerest gratitude. A plaque at the back of the Rothe House asks a prayer (in Irish) for him living or dead.

There are some interesting stones built into the walls at the back of No. 1 Irishtown, commemorating the O'Hanrahan family. Another slab has this inscription "Irishtown Crane, erected by voluntary subscriptions of the inhabitants for public accommodation. William Grace, Portrieve." There is no date.

No. 1. Irishtown was the property of the Hobans before being taken over by Michael O'Hanrahan. The Hobans were monumental sculptors working from about 100 to 80 years ago. Many of their tombs may still be seen in our churchyards, especially St. Canice's Catholic Church, and in Cathedral. They emigrated to America many years ago. The family is reputed to be connected with the architect of the White House.

This property, No. 1, 2 & 3, belong now to the D'Arcy family. Nos. 1, 2 & 3 are now in possession of the Rogers, Conroy and McEvoy families.

No. 4. Now the Post Office. Lately a bakery and meat store, owned by James White, Fintan Phelan and later still a fancy store owned by Mrs. Hennessy. Present occupier, Miss O'Keeffe.

No. 5. Once the residence of Alderman William Kealy, proprietor of Woollen & Corn Mills on the Bleach Road. No trace of either mills to be seen to-day.

During a big flood a daring rescue was carried out to the staff of the mills. Mr. Nolan of Dunmore swam his horse out to their help at great personal risk carrying out food and so saving the lives of Mr. Brennan and Mr. Smith who were marooned. The Kealy family grave is in St.

Canice's Cathedral. William Kealy died 1879.

The Sheridans were last occupiers of No. 5 Irishtown. At present it stands empty.

No. 6. The names connected with this house are Thomas Beard, a tailor; Mr. Cahill, a cooper; John Williams, a butcher, and James Benad, a cabinet-maker. The present occupier is William Dunne.

No. 7. This was the premises of Mark Fitzpatrick up till about 30 years ago. For 40 years before that he ran a bakery, grocery and meal store there, which was managed by Miss Cecilia Martin. At that time, the bakers' ovens were heated by furze and this was supplied to Marks by Murt Tobin, the famous Kilkenny drummer. His band played at all the important Kilkenny functions, St. Patrick's Day, Etc. It is said of him, that he always exhorted his men: "For God's sake, let ye all play the same tune." After Mr. Fitzpatrick's death, a portion of No. 7 was taken over by the Kilkenny Woodworkers who used it as a show-room, and Tim O'Hanrahan ran a dairy in the other part. The present owner, Mr. Power, runs a restaurant in No. 7, and Mr. Kennedy a butcher's shop in No. 8.

No. 9. The names connected with No. 8 are Drea, Costello and McGowan. The present owner is Mrs. Lenehan. No. 7 still boasts two fine Georgian windows and fanlight.

The Corner House, known as Sherman's Corner, is now in possession of Mr. Monahan, Fruit Importer. Its postal address is actually No. 1 Dean St. Its present owner was lately Mayor of Kilkenny. This house was built about 80 years ago by John Shearman, fowl merchant, uncle of the Shearmans of High Street.

During the visit of King Edward and Queen Alexandra to Kilkenny in 1904, Peter de Loughry hung out the Black Flag here. In contrast to this, Velvet Lane, near by, lived up to its ancient name and was beautifully decorated for the occasion. Balconies were erected at Monahan's store for those who required a good view of the procession of the Royal Pair to St. Canice's Church. In Velvet Lane in the last years of the 18th century lived James Perry, a violin

maker of great repute. His business premises were in Red Lane. His violins are still used and cherished by Kilkenny folk.

WEST SIDE OF STREET

No. 10 Irishtown. Present occupiers, the Walsh family, who carry on a meal and corn store. Before Daniel Walsh, this Corner House of Irishtown was occupied by William Phelan and before that by Mr. and Mrs. Birch. Eighty years ago this Corner was known as Kitty Birch's Corner.

No. 11. The names connected with No. 11 are Gregory Marshall, Mrs. Gibbery and John Holohan. The present occupiers are the King family who have carried on Bakery and Provision Store for past 50 years. The Kings and Hoban's, the sculptors, were related.

No. 12. The old inhabitants of Kilkenny will remember 'Yankee' Kelly in his shop here. James Kelly was a very clever engineer and his frequent trips to America earned him the name 'Yankee.' He is said to have lit up statues on Feast Days for Black Abbey, long before electricity was available in Kilkenny. He was a benefactor of Black Abbey. Before Mr. Kelly's time, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy ran a licensed business here. One of their sons was Monsignor Murphy. No. 12 is now Mr. Philip Tracy's Garage.

No. 13. The names connected with No. 13 are Clohoseys, clothiers; Maddigans, jewellers; Dan Scott, Delaneys, tailors; Benad, cabinet maker; Forte's, fish and chip shop. Judith Clohosey's of Irishtown's tomb is in St. Canice's Churchyard, dated 1790. No. 13 is now vacant.

No. 14. The names here are Alexander Summerfield, shopkeeper; James Troy, William Harding, James Walsh, Mrs. Ange, James Mulrooney and Mr. and Mrs. Kane. The present occupier is Mrs. Marnell who has a sweet shop here. Harness manufacture was once carried on in No. 14 by two brothers called Kelly.

No. 15. This house, like the next, No. 16, is part of Kelly Estate. Henry Pay lived here a 100 years ago, and Hugh Connors later. John Delaney carried on a tailoring business here. Now occupied by Bert Kelly.

No. 16. This is the property of the Kelly family since 1853. Thomas Kelly of Three Castles, nephew of Michael Rafter, High Street, started a wine and spirit business here in that year. In a deed of conveyance to Michael Cahill of Ballyconra House in 1860, the premises are said to have been formerly occupied by Philip Lawler and John Cartwright, weighmaster. These premises are described in all legal matters as the "Old Crane." Cartwright Tomb in St. Canice's, commemorates death of Anthony Blunt Cartwright 1799, possibly named after Mayor of Kilkenny, who took down Market Cross in 1771.

Besides carrying on a wine and grocery business, Thomas Kelly was also an undertaker, a harness maker, a coach builder and had cars for hire. He reconstructed the houses at the East side of the Ball Alley after the street had been widened there in 1861 and rechristened St. Canice's Place. All the roofing timber was cut in his saw pit, which was in use till 1904. Thomas Kelly's grandson, Mr. John Kelly, still carries on the coach building trade in No. 16 Irish-town, or as it was always known, "Kelly's of the Flags."

No. 17. This is the first house in Irishtown at the West side and most southern part and directly faces the O'Hanrahan property. The first name we have connected with it is that of William Morrissey who came here about 100 years ago. A Mr. Conway had a bacon business in part of the premises and it was commonly known as "The Lad Shop." Mr. Morrissey acquired the lease from Lady Anesley after Mr. Conway's time and built a fine premises, carried on a hardware business on an extensive scale. William Morrissey died in 1881. His son John retired from business. Next occupiers were the Harringtons who continued the hardware business and ran a mail car between Kilkenny and Urlingford, a side car drawn by horses which were changed en route. The Conway girls were remembered for their musical talent, as also are the Harringtons.

Later the premises were bought by Mr. Treacy who sold them to the present occupier, Mr. Lowry, who continues the Hardware business here with which this place had long been identified.

In the *Dublin Penny Journal* of August 18th, 1832, there is a nice description of Irishtown in John Banim's "Roman Merchant." The inn the merchant stayed in, the bow window of his little shop, the kindly and inquisitive neighbours leaning over the cross doors, the little bridge in and out of the Hightown comes clearly to us, through the height of almost 200 years, for Banim describes the doings of 80 years before his time. The student of this part of Kilkenny will be interested in the tale and will wonder, too, how much of it is fiction and how much of the strange happenings actually occurred.

A Glimpse into the Past : When the Vane Fell

On an iron plate attached to the weather cock, recently removed from Kilkenny's Town Hall, appears the following engraved inscription :

THE VANE FELL 1880 : T.P.P.

John McCraith, Mayor 1834.

Simon Morris, Mayor, 1875.

The first was Mayor in 34,
 He, poor man, is now no more ;
 The next was Mayor in 75,
 He, poor man, is now alive.
 Please tell the Council, you who last,
 I find the Ball is falling fast,
 And should we two have been forgotten,
 Please tell the Council all is rotten.

On the back of the plate was engraved : Erected by Power and Son.

Power and Son were the well-known engineering and hardware firm in High Street, where Mr. James Delehanty now carries on a similar business.

An indentation on the plate would appear to be caused by a bullet, probably in the Civil War of 1922.

The weather cock was sent to a Dublin firm for overhaul recently and the plate was returned.