

St. Canice's Place (Ancient Bull Alley) and Vicar Street

THESE are notes of a walk and talk given by Dr. W. J. Phelan and the late J. S. Gibb on the 15th November, 1953. Much of the information was supplied by Jim Keogh.

The Traveller of the olden days from Irishtown to Freshford passed through the Bull Alley and Vicar St. before he emerged from the Town at Troysgate. To-day the Bull Alley is St. Canice's Place, it changed its name during the mayoralty of John Hogan, historian, in 1883 when it was widened. A plaque commemorates the mayoralty of Thomas Power in 1861. In its narrow state, it was so narrow that people could almost have shaken hands across its roadway. Vicar Street still retains its ancient name and a few remains of some of its ancient buildings, and Troysgate is still Troy's Gate, though it has none of its once defensive character.

Bull Alley took its name from the old Bull Inn, a handsome stone structure of the Tudor period and still a substantial ruin. Its history has been written by John G. A. Prim in the R.S.A.I. Journal of 1862 and a drawing of it appears by Eric Bligh in May Sparks guide of Kilkenny (1926). The left hand side as we walk to Freshford is where the widening took place and the houses here are therefore less than 100 years old, of what was there before 1861 we have no record.

These houses on the left of St. Canice's Place were built by Thomas Kelly of Irishtown, and are now owned by his grandson. The first on the corner of Velvet Lane (No. 10 St. Canice's Place) now the home of Miss Barron, Dressmaker, was a licensed premises owned by a William Ward about 90 years ago. Many amusing stories are still told of him. More recent names connected with No. 10 are Sixsmith and Mooney.

No. 9, now Miss Kelly's shop, was once the home of Thomas Trehy, Brogue Maker. High class kid boots were

made and sold by him for as little as 9/6. Mr. Trehy's hobby was breeding game cocks. He was an expert at spurring them and he fought them successfully at many centres all over Ireland.

No. 8. A harness maker, called Deegan, lived here before it became the Bandroom of St. Canice's Temperance Band. On the First Thursday of every month for many years the Band played in Bull Alley and up to St. Canice's Church for the Temperance Meeting. Father Coughlin now Canon Coughlin of Rosbercon was very proud of his Band. Leahy is another name connected with No. 8.

No. 7 another harness maker, James Walsh, lived here. He was followed by John Mahony, Painter and Decorator.

No. 6. Now Arthur Connicks, a Barbers, was once Yankee Kelly's Machine Shop. Chasing tops were made here. Kellys also owned 5 and 4.

No. 5. A vegetable shop owned by Gag Lennon whose hard hat, black coat and obedient donkey are remembered with affection by the dwellers of St. Canice's Place. John Kenna, a stone cutter, followed Mr. Lennon, now No. 5 is owned by Mr. Guilfoyle, Bootmaker.

Let us go back again to the corner of Irishtown and take the buildings on the right of St. Canice's Place.

No. 1. St. Canice's Place, now Dan Walsh's store, was once the home of the Confederation Club, and a photograph of it with its Irish sign Cumann an Comlucta has just come into our possession. This photograph owned by Mr. O'Connell of the Irish House, was taken at the turn of the century, and shows many of the old patriotic citizens under the shadow of a fanlight. This fanlight is decorated with two pikes and a harp. If any reader wishes to see this photograph, it can easily be arranged by applying to James Keogh, 25 Vicar St. Patrick O'Keeffe and Thomas Lalor were also one time residents here.

No. 2. Next Walsh's store is King's Store and was once the sweet shop of James and Theresa Marshall, and later owned by Michael Holohan. Holohan's Door is now at Phelan's Forge on the left side of St. Canice's Place.

No. 3. Sweeney's comes next. The names here are Purcell, Kerwick and Michael McSweeney. The latter was an Alderman, and 4 times Mayor of Kilkenny i.e. 1932, 33, 34 and 35. A great advocate of all things Irish, he was brother of John McSweeney who lives nearby, at No. 12 Vicar St.

After we pass the Bull Inn we meet Mr. Brannigan's Coalyard which seems situated on part of the old inn premises. A Tudor window is still visible here. A Corporation Yard about 100 years, the later names here are Kelly, Lee and Brannigan.

VICAR STREET. Vicar St., so called from the ancient House of the Vicars Choral which stood in its middle runs due North and South and practically all of its East side was once occupied by the Church Dignitaries. Three of their ancient manses may still be traced here i.e. The Chancellors, The Treasurers, and The Manse House of the Prebendary of Tiscoffin. Carrigan and Hogan both cite this last named at No. 22 Vicar St. which in Carrigans time belonged to Miss Connery and was a Public House and Livery Yard. Miss Connery's was an important place during the British regime when she billeted about 20 horses. Miss Connery gave a stain glass window to the Black Abbey. She is buried in St. Canice's Cathedral. Grace and Doheny are other names connected with No. 22 and James Brennan is the present occupier. A piece of a buttress is still to be seen here, otherwise no remains of its ancient ecclesiastical dignity are now visible.

No. 21. This house and 22, 20 and 19 were built by Nicholas Shortall, 90 years ago. He was followed here by the Forristals and Brennans. No. 20. The names here are Hayden, Brannigan, Shortall and Holohan. No. 19. This was an "Eating House" owned by Michael Walsh before the Daltons came to live here. The Daltons work the Chancellors Mills here very successfully.

Next is Chancellor's Orchard, which is a little nearer the Nore than the residence of the old Chancellors of the Cathedral. Dr. Carrigan says the ancient edifice was taken down in 1800 and the present Georgian building er-

ected. Some members of the Bibby family were born here and it later became the Curate's house for St. Canice's Catholic Church. Fathers Coghlan, Holland and Carroll are still remembered by the inhabitants. Other names connected with Chancellor's Orchard are Murphy, McCarthy, Professor D'Arcy and Mr. Connolly. This house and 18 and 19 Vicar St. were Sullivan property.

No. 18. The Dunne family have occupied No. 18 for the last 80 years. A great friend of the Irish language, Richard Dunne was a cooper, butter and egg merchant and made his own firkins. His Irish sign has been an encouragement and inspiration for more than 50 years.

No. 17. This house and the two next i.e. 16 and 15, have evident remains of antiquity. The walls, 4 foot thick, the old beams in the dining room and kitchen of 15 and 16, Tudor windows in the back, give us a date in the 16th century. Miss Costigan, the late proprietor of No. 17, often said there was a connection between her home and the Cathedral of St. Canice and that once a Bishop had been killed at the back door. No's. 17, 16 and 15 appear to have once formed a single house, the house of the Vicar's Choral, which Hogan states to have been in this position i.e. "the middle of Vicar Street" and modernised in Hogan's own lifetime. The house of the Vicar's Choral was an additional residence for the Vicars of the Common Hall, built in Elizabethan manner and from its remains, must once have been a very magnificent mansion.

Nos. 15 and 16 are now the property of the Cleere family, who are carrying on a wholesale grocery business. Before their occupation, Phelan, Brennan and Larkin were the names here.

No. 12. About 100 years ago, a tailor named Michael Kavanagh lived here. About 1900 John McSweeney came here and built this house and shop. A fine orchard behind this house supplies magnificent fruit for his customers. Mr. McSweeney is keenly interested in Greyhounds and owned and bred many a good and successful animal.

No. 11. The names here are Comerford, Kerwick, White Foley and Rabbitt.

No. 10. The Quinn family lived here and had an eating house. They were followed by M/s. McNulty, Dermody and McGrath. Present occupants Mr. and Mrs. Walton.

No. 9. Now Ace Repairs, a shoe repair shop. This premises was occupied by Miss Kitty Mulhall about 80 years ago.

In the next house Sally Burgess ran an eating, lodging house where 50 years ago a bed might be had for as little as 8d. a night.

Midway between No. 14. Vicar St., and the corner at Green Street, Hogan states to have been the site of the Treasurer's House. He bases his statement on Rocque's Map of Kilkenny (1757) as he also bases his assertions about the other ecclesiastical houses. No remains of antiquity are visible to-day.

On the corner of Vicar Street and Green Street, Joseph Mulhall has his premises. His father, Martin, originally came from Ballyfoyle, where the name Mulhall is frequently met with. Mr. Joe Mulhall besides being a keen business man is a great lover of greyhounds and of coursing and has been President of the Irish Coursing Club. This house of Mr. Mulhall's at the corner of Vicar St. and Green St. Hogan states to have been Alderman Connell's house. This Alderman Connell appears frequently in the documents and was a Town Clerk towards the end of 17th Century.

Here we cross the street and turn back to Irishtown.

The first building we meet on our right side is the Palace Yard, which still shows traces of Tudor windows. Perhaps it was a building connected with the old Common Hall. A pump was here about 30 years ago. The wall between this and Troysgate was taken down about 20 years ago to widen this thoroughfare.

No. 28. About 100 years ago, the occupant was John Lacey, Farmer and Provision Merchant. About 70 years ago there was a branch of the Gaelic League here. Expenses were difficult to defray and the late E. T. Keane, Editor of the Kilkenny People (a resident of No. 24) and a keen Irish language enthusiast, came to succour of the League, took a lease of the house and saved the situation. After the

Gaelic League, came John Purcell who was a collier and after him the Crennans, Painters and Decorators.

No's. 27 and 26 are now vacant. The names here are John Hannon, brogue maker, Mrs. Langton, John Keeffe, harness maker and Patrick Kavanagh, tailor.

No. 25. For 100 years No. 25 has remained in one family's possession. Here about 1860 Patrick Ring from Rathkyle, Castlecomer, set up a grocery shop and a dairy. His daughter married Michael Keogh, and the Keogh family continue to live here, but do not carry on the original business. One son, Jim, handles the Kilkenny Archaeological Journals and much of the Society's correspondence.

Between No's. 25, Vicar St. and No. 24, is the laneway leading to the Common Hall. The name is quite familiar to us, but the actual site of this important and historic building is difficult to point out with complete certainty.

No. 24. About 100 years ago this was the White Swan Inn. Its proprietor is not remembered. In 1904, James Kelly of Irishtown rebuilt this house and its first occupant was the late E. T. Keane, of the Kilkenny People. Mr. Patton is another name here and it is now occupied by the owner—Mr. Tom Kelly, son of "Yankee" Kelly.

No. 23 is owned and occupied by Miss Mary Kelly, whose father, James Kelly lived here all his life. This James Kelly was no relation of James Kelly who built No. 24.

That part of St. Canice's Place next and to the right of St. Canice's Steps has a house as old as any that stands in Kilkenny to-day, at least coeval with the Rothe House which has a date 1594. This house is now divided into four (O'Brien, Trehy, Durney and Nolan are the names). The inhabitants say that there was once a Monastery here and a Bishop's mitre found. To the left of the Steps is a stone house, now used as a store by Mr. James Monahan, Fruit Merchant, and has an old stone plaque which says "Jacobus Shee, Procurator, 16 . . .

Here we take leave of a neighbourhood as ancient and historic as any in Kilkenny—Ledwich in 1804, John Hogan in 1890 and Dr. Carrigan in 1904—all have written exhaustively of it. These have been our authorities for its story.