

A stroll through Thomas Street

Thomas Street is reputed to be named after Thomas Unthank, a prominent Limerick city merchant. The Unthinks, originally from Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, settled in Limerick in the 1700s and rose to prominence in business and the medical profession. The family were also involved in social and commercial activities. The Society of Friends (Quaker) graveyard in Ballinacurra, near Punch's Cross, was established through the benevolence of Joseph Massey Harvey who purchased the land from Margaret Unthank, widow of Thomas Unthank. It is said that Thomas Unthank planted the yew trees in the cemetery from seeds taken from a tree at the head of Napoleon's grave at St Helena.

Thomas Street has long been associated with commerce and enterprise. The junction of Thomas Street and O'Connell Street served in the 1800s as the premises of 'Blundell & Co, Watchmakers, Jewellers & Opticians'. A Blundell clock is thankfully still in perfect working order in Villiers' School on the North Circular Road, Limerick. This corner, a prime trading location, was also the home of the 'barrow boys', street traders who sold fresh fruit and vegetables to passing customers. Their fate as traders, in this location, was sealed in 1961 when Limerick City Council voted by nine votes to six to relocate them to the corner of Ellen Street and Patrick Street where the building occupied by the Planning Department of Limerick City and County Council now stands. The well known firm of Davis Printers now located on the Ballysimon Road traces its origins to No 6 Thomas Street where Christopher Davis set up an electric printer and bookbinding business in the early 1900s. Goodwin's shop extended from William Street into 9/10 Thomas Street. The business was established by Robert Goodwin in 1832 and was taken over by his nephew James Goodwin in the 1860s. Goodwin's sold best quality china including the brands, Wedgwood, Dresden, Sèvres, Capo de Monte as well as Venetian glass. They also sold original oil paintings by local and national artists. On July 23 1963 the entire store was engulfed in flames reaching 100 feet into the sky and in a very short time the premises was burned to the ground. Goodwin's relocated to Lower Cecil Street where they traded until the mid 1980s.

The building at 17 Thomas Street was the home of the O'Mara family. James O'Mara (also O'Meara) was born in Toomevara, County Tipperary in 1817. O'Mara lived in Mungret Street initially, where he was involved in the wool trade (possibly as

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an agent for his father-in-law) and started a small-scale bacon-curing business in the basement of his house. He also worked as a clerk in Matterson's bacon factory for a period. He rose from these humble origins to found O'Mara's Bacon Company which traded on Roche's Street and over the years the business extended into Thomas Street incorporating Ann Street. The business went from strength to strength and expanded into Russia, where they acquired the

Russian Bacon Company in 1891 and for the next twenty one years were the biggest suppliers of slaughtered and cured bacon in Russia and were also trading in Yugoslavia and Romania. They also set up a bacon curing factory in Canada and a son of James O'Mara ran a bacon curing factory in Mexico City. In 1878 Mr O'Mara and his family moved to live in 17 Thomas Street. He was appointed High Sheriff and in November 1887 received an Irish-American Fenian, who had come to Limerick to give the oration at the unveiling of a memorial to the Manchester Martyrs in Mount St Lawrence Cemetery.



James O'Mara and Hanora Foley with some of their children. Back (left to right): James O'Mara, Jack (bapt 1856), Jim (bapt 1858). Front (left to right): Hanora (bapt 1860), Hanora Foley, Joe (born 1864), Frank (bapt 1862). Photo c.1868.

(Courtesy Dr Mark Humphrys) See humphrystree.com

Conradh na Gaeilge (Gaelic League) has had a strong presence in Limerick since its foundation, by Dr Douglas Hyde, in 1893. On June 5 1915 the Limerick branch of Cumann na mBan was founded in the Gaelic League Rooms at 18 Thomas Street with over 100 women joining. This building was also the offices of the 'Limerick Vigilance Committee' a censorship movement founded circa 1913 to prevent the sale of objectionable material in local newspapers, which included for example reference to divorce and murder cases. On the 29 November 1913 a meeting held at the O'Connell monument was attended by 5,000 citizens of Limerick to protest against 'the sale of evil literature in the city'. The following newspaper article was published in the *Donegal News* of 25 November 1911

CRUSADE AGAINST EVIL PAPERS Limerick's Appeal to Ireland

Sir, - Will you allow us to appeal to the public on a matter which is at the present moment, in our opinion, of the utmost importance to the people of Ireland.

Every week for some years past literature of an immoral tendency has been dumped on our shores by the ton. The evil is steadily on the increase. Objectionable books, which arrived in single copies a few years ago, for individuals, are now despatched to our people by the score and by the hundred. Foul pamphlets of the most degrading and vile type are privately circulated among the youth of this country. Newspapers practically unknown in Ireland up to a short time ago now reach these shores by the thousand. These newspapers contain as the only appeal to their readers, every minute particular of the most revolting criminal cases. Nor does their power for evil end in exciting their readers to depraved imaginings. These newspapers contain the advertisements of firms which seem to live for the single purpose of spreading knowledge of all that is most vile and repulsive in human nature, the advertisements constituting even a greater public danger than the newspapers themselves. These English Sunday newspapers and other rubbish of a similar kind we, of the Limerick Vigilance Committee, have set ourselves to drive from our midst. We have struck the first blow against this immoral invasion. As far as our city is concerned we have arrested its progress, but, unaided by the rest of Ireland, we fear for our ultimate success. We, therefore, appeal to the people of Ireland to help us in our crusade. The movement we have instituted against this vile literature has spread quickly to many places in Ireland.

Limerick Vigilance Committee
18 Thomas Street, Limerick
November 19th, 1911

No 19 Thomas Street, now trading as the 'Cornstore Restaurant', has had a long standing connection with the wine trade in

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AND FINISH.

✱

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Clerical
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ALL CLOTHS GUARANTEED.

51 THOMAS STREET.

Advertisement from 1900

the city. John Powell, William Herbert and Peter O'Brien are names of wine and spirit merchants listed in local trade directories of the mid to late 1800s. Peter O'Brien moved to this premises in 1836 from No 9 Bank Place (The Sarsfield Bar) and became one of the leading wine merchants in the south of Ireland. His son Peter O'Brien, 1st Baron O'Brien (1842-1914), who resided in Carnelly House, Newmarket-on-Fergus, County Clare was Lord Chief Justice of Ireland for the period 1889-1913. O'Brien was one of the principal prosecutors in the case of the Phoenix Park murders and it is said his life was threatened as a result. He was known as 'Peter the Packer' because of his ability, in politically sensitive cases, to pack juries with jurors who could be trusted to convict. His main personal foibles were his refusal to wear a judicial wig and a lisp so pronounced that it often made his remarks difficult to decipher. The O'Brien name is still on a stone plaque on the building. The business was taken over by William Lloyd wine and spirit merchant in the 1870s.

No 24 Thomas Street is still the business premises of the Kleiser family, known in the city for over a century as the providers, to their patrons, of premium pianos. The Kleiser family are of German origin and settled in Reading, England in the mid to late 1800s. George Kleiser secured the position of manager of Piggott's musical store (now Savin's) on George (O'Connell) Street. He left this position at the turn of the century and was employed by the firm 'H Strong, Piano Tuner' in British Guyana and the family still have a small stuffed alligator which George brought with him on his return home in 1902. He commenced business in No 24 from where it still operates making it the longest serving business on the street. Mr Daniel Tucker opened a hotel in No's 30 and 31 in the 1880s. It is alleged he lost this business in a game of cards. It later became Fox's Hotel and the adjacent bow became known as Fox's Bow. The bow archway is an interesting feature as it gives to the mind's eye an elongation to the streetscape.

The Fire Station which was located at the top of Thomas Street was always a popular place to visit for the young boys of the city. Access to an engine cab often resulted in a "Walter Mitty" moment for would be fireman, of driving heroically to the rescue with bells and sirens in full volume. The station had moved to these premises from Roche's Street in 1942 and with the increase in city traffic it was relocated in later years to its current site in Mulgrave Street. No 37 was the Benedict Bureau which in the 1950s was run by a Mr Cleverly as an employment agency. Candidates were guaranteed a job if they had the 3 Rs. The jobs were mostly in London and Mr Cleverly would pay for the new employee's fare and also provide a financial package to help support the new employee. £1 would be deducted from the weekly wage until the debt was paid off.

W & C McDonnell Ltd, butter and margarine manufacturers had an extensive business premises at No 39 Thomas Street. Limerick Museum archives show correspondence dated Dec 14 1910 for "the renewal of the certificate for our Margarine and Butter Factories ... under the Sale of Food & Drugs Acts 1876 to 1907." The company was originally founded in 1836 when they dealt in corn and butter. It was one of the very early starters in the margarine business and by 1876 it was in operation in Limerick.

The Thompson family have been funeral directors in the city since the foundation of the business in Roche's Street by Christopher Thompson in 1909. The business moved to its current location, 40 Thomas Street, in 1922. On the death of the founder in 1961 his son Frank, who had joined the firm in 1938, took over as managing director and on Frank's death his son John is carrying on the service to the people of Limerick. A notable funeral of the 1960s was the burial of Donough O'Malley TD who as Minister for Education introduced free secondary education. Many readers will recall Finucane's Electrical store which traded at 41/42 Thomas Street for many years. This premises, now an urban garden, was the location of the former Schwab Electrical Engineers. Mr Schwab had come to Ireland with Siemens during the construction of the power station at Ardnacrusha. After the completion of the Shannon scheme he stayed in Limerick and commenced business repairing motors and dynamos.

Dr Joseph John Long arrived in Limerick in 1897. He established his 'Medical Mission' at No 47 and in the following years was to experience very strong opposition which often resulted in violence he being on occasion under physical attack. In his book "Medical Missions in Ireland" Dr Long describes some of his experiences-

Again and again I received the attention of a mob in one district or another. To shout "Dr Long" was to signal for a rush from lanes and courts of excited and ignorant people who believed that they were doing good by shouting, hissing, spitting and howling, as if poss-

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 1927

A. J. SEXTON AND SON'S AUCTIONS.

THE SALESROOMS, THOMAS STREET.

SPECIAL HIGHLY IMPORTANT SALE BY PUBLIC ACTION OF

**SUPERIOR HIGH-CLASS FURNITURE
AND HOUSEHOLD APPOINTMENTS.**

(Being the entire contents of a City Residence). Reserved for convenience of Sale.

TO BE HELD AT ABOVE ON
FRIDAY NEXT, NOVEMBER 9.
COMMENCING AT 12 O'CLOCK.

NOTE.—No other Furniture taken for this Sale.

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48 O'Connell Street, LIMERICK.

Advertisement from 1927

KLEISER'S
MUSIC STORE, 24, THOMAS ST., LIMERICK.
DRUMS HARMONICAS
RECORDERS FLAGEOLETS
EVERYTHING FOR THE SCHOOL BAND
(117p)

Advertisement from 1959

BOYS' READY-MADE CLOTHING

FOR SCHOOL WEAR.

In Sizes and Trends, all of the most fitting and stylish designs. They also invite the attention of the Clergy to their special

CLERICAL SUITINGS AND OVERCOATINGS.

WARRANTED FAST BLACK AND WILL NOT GLOSS.

— FIT GUARANTEED. —

FLEMING'S

49 Thomas St.
Limerick.



49 Thomas St.
Limerick.

OUR OWN MAKE GUARANTEED

The Only House in the City solely confined to Umbrellas and Walking Sticks, Goggles, the only owners where Fast-Black Goods can be bought at a Reasonable Price.

RECOVERINGS A SPECIALITY—LADIES' from 1/8. GENTS' from 2/6.

ALL ORDERS EXECUTED AT ONE HOUR'S NOTICE.

Advertisement early 1900s

essed by demons and who regarded me as fair game. I had a police escort as usual to give me personal protection but a surprise kick from an apparently respectable person or a spit from a passing factory girl could not always be guarded against.

Visitors to the 'Medical Mission' did so at personal risk and were ushered into a waiting room and entertained with harmonica playing, hymn singing and praying as they waited to see the doctor. Fleming's umbrella and walking stick manufactures were the only such enterprise in Limerick at the turn of the twentieth century and traded at 48 Thomas Street.

Geary's Hotel which traded at numbers 49 and 50 Thomas Street was a favoured hostelry for Limerick people over the years. This building was the death place of Commandant Michael Scanlan 1st Battalion East Limerick Brigade IRA on 27 October 1920. Scanlan, a native of Galbally, who was teaching in Kilmallock, was being conveyed in military custody to William Street RIC Barracks. In the proximity of the barracks he jumped from the police lorry and ran into Thomas Street where he hid in the basement of the hotel. A group of Auxiliaries found him and he was shot. He

died later that evening. It was later the business premises of the late Jack Bourke, who served as Mayor of Limerick on three occasions. His election in 1968 was somewhat unique in that he and Cllr Coughlan were tied at eight votes each and the chain of office was awarded to Cllr Bourke when his name was drawn from a hat by school-boy Dermot Morris.

A beautiful stone building, which dates back to 1821, stands at the junction of Thomas Street and Augustinian Lane. In the 1800s it served as the premises of Messrs J P Evans & Co, who are recorded in trade directories of that period as 'Agricultural Implement & Seed Warehouse, Oil & Colour Merchants, Soap & Candle Manufacturers, Perfumers, Druggists and Glass Warehouses'.

Mr Evans was succeeded in the 1850s by his manager Mr Journeaux, who ran the business until 1872. He persuaded his nephew Mr Edward Cleeve who lived in Quebec, Canada to relocate to Limerick and enter the business. Cleeve became famous for forming the Condensed Milk Company of Ireland from where Cleeve's Toffee became famous worldwide. Edward Cleeve resided in Woodland House, Castleconnell.

Another prominent business to trade in these premises was the firm of John

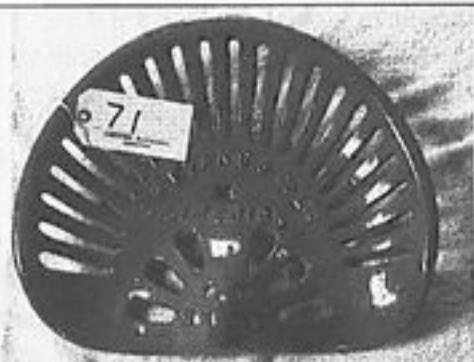
McBirney Drapery Department store. In more recent times it was the premises of McCarthy's Furniture Store which was founded by Peter McCarthy around 1800. McCarthy's traded in a few different locations in the city and moved to Thomas Street in 1968. Ecco Shoes is the name over the door in 2014 and if one looks toward the top of the building markings reputed to be the result of gunfire during the Civil War period are still visible.

Numbers 54 - 58 Thomas Street have been and remain to this day individual business premises. Trades directories record the following over the years - No 55 - Edward Delaney, Cork Cutters (1846), No 56 - L O'Grady, Spirit Dealers (1920), No 57- John Bizley, Toy Dealers (1840), No 58 - J & G Daly, Millinery, Mantle & Costume Warerooms (1918). Some readers will recall the following businesses which operated from the aforementioned premises in recent times, The Central Bar, Des Ryan Travel, Murray and Fitzgibbon Insurance Brokers and Slot TV which offered a 'Pay to View' television service at a rate of 2 shillings for four hours viewing.

Car owners were well served on Thomas Street with the Standard Garage (main Austin Dealers) in No.9, the Bremen Motor Company (Austin and British Leyland) in No.20 and the National Garage, (agents for Hillman, Riley, Humber and Fiat) in No. 39.

NOTE

Tom O'Farrell and Randel Hodkinson are committee members of the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society. In 2013 the society invited them to lead a guided tour of Thomas Street and some relevant material from that tour is reproduced in this article. See www.thomsocblogspot.ie



AUCTION ADVERTISEMENT -

JP Evans agricultural machinery seat.

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