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Design & Print: Mobius Design



Introduction



By Dr Matthew Potter,
Limerick Museum and Archives

Limerick is famous for many things: its sporting tradition, agricultural and industrial heritage and its contribution to the arts. However, its name has been made famous worldwide by one thing: a witty five-line poem called the limerick.

The limerick is the most popular poem in the world's most widely spoken language, English. One third of the world's population, amounting to two billion people, speak English as either their first or second language. Many of these have read limericks, laughed at limericks, or even tried to write their own limericks. As a result, the people of Limerick have a link to a global poetic community made up of millions of people.

In 2014, Limerick Museum and Archives received funding from the City of Culture to investigate one of the greatest mysteries in literature: what is the link between the poem and the place, Limerick and the limerick. Where did the limerick begin? Who made it popular? Why is it called after Limerick?

All of these questions and more are discussed in this book. Like detectives, we search for clues,

examine them and see if they can help solve the mystery. In some cases, we have been able to answer the questions, and in other cases, we can only offer our best theories.

However, there is a lot more than answering these questions in our little book. Have you ever wanted to write a limerick? Well, all the rules are set out clearly and concisely. Did great writers look down on the limerick? Shakespeare wrote limericks and you can't get much greater than him! Also, you can read about some of Limerick's own great writers, the Maigue Poets, who used limericks like weapons in their funny public fights.

We also went in search of Limerick's great writers of the future by having a limerick writing competition open to all primary schools in Limerick city and county. All of the winning poems are included in the book, and they show that the art of limerick writing is alive and well in Limerick.

So, open our book and enter the wonderful world of the limerick. Maybe, you will start writing your own limericks!



5 Rules for writing a limerick

1 Number of Lines

A limerick must have five lines.

1. There was an old man of Nantucket
2. Who kept all his cash in a bucket;
3. But his daughter, named Nan
4. Ran away with a man.
5. And as for the bucket, Nantucket.

2 Number of Syllables

Lines 1, 2 and 5 must have 9 syllables.

Lines 3 and 4 must have 6 syllables.

There/ was/ an/ old/ man/ of/ Nan/tuc/ket	9 syllables
Who/ kept/ all/ his/ cash/ in/ a/ buck/et	9 syllables
But/ his/ daugh/ter/ named/ Nan	6 syllables
Ran/ a/way/ with/ a/ man/	6 syllables
And/ as/ for/ the/ buck/et/Nan/tuck/et	9 syllables

In recent years, lines 1, 2 and 5 are allowed to have 8 syllables and lines 3 and 4 have 5 syllables.

3 Rhymes

The rhyme scheme is AABBA.

Lines 1, 2, and 5 rhyme with one another.

Lines 3 and 4 rhyme with each other.

There was an old man of Nantucket	A
Who kept all his cash in a bucket;	A
But his daughter, named Nan	B
Ran away with a man	B
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.	A

4 Rhythm

A limerick is divided into a number of da-DUM and da-da-DUM rhythms. When saying a limerick, the DUM parts are emphasised.

There WAS/ an old MAN/ of NanTUCK/et	da-DUM /da-da-DUM/ da-da-DUM/da
Who KEPT/ all his CASH/ in a BUCK/et;	da-DUM /da-da-DUM/ da-da-DUM/da
But his DAUGHT/er, named NAN	da-da-DUM/ da-da-DUM
Ran aWAY/ with a MAN --	da-da-DUM/ da-da-DUM
And AS/ for the BUCK/et, NanTUCK/et.	da-DUM /da-da-DUM/ da-da-DUM/da

5 Humour

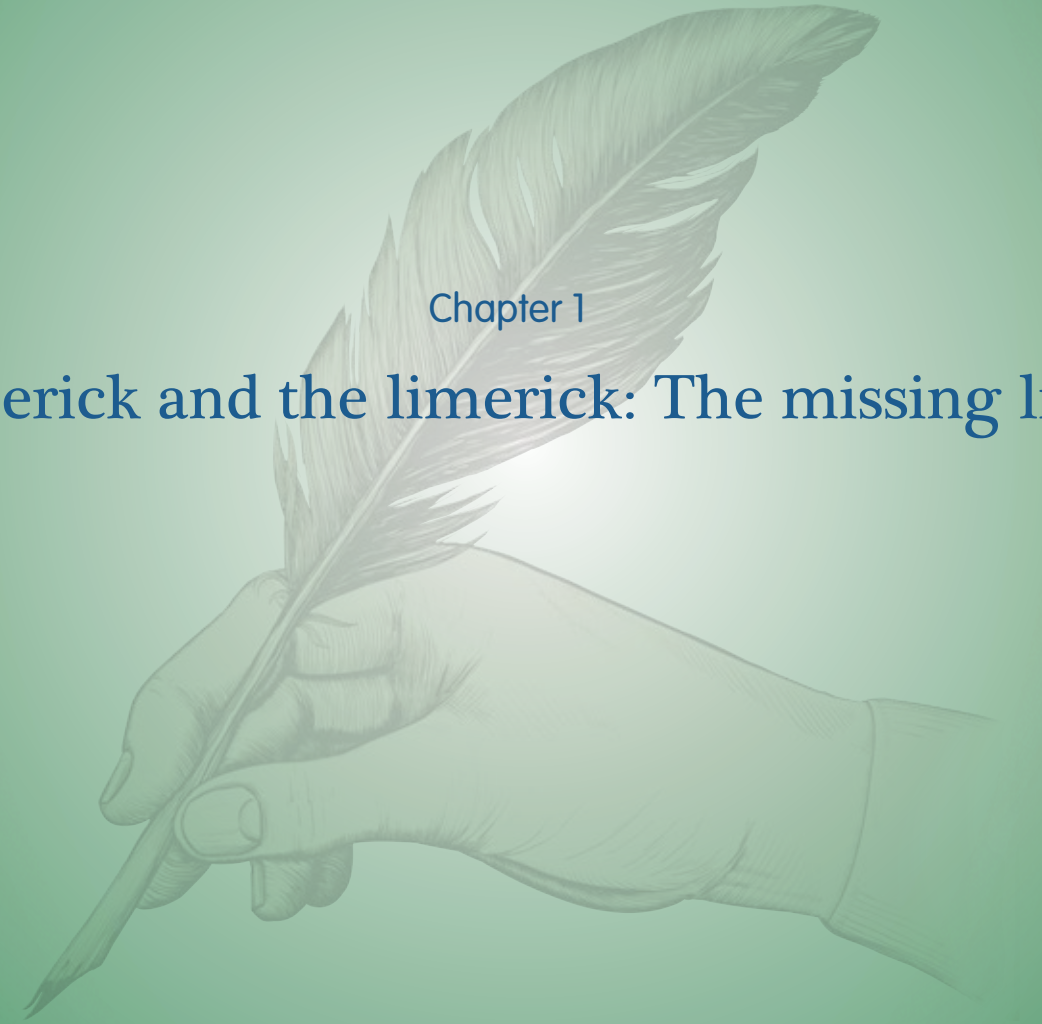
A limerick is supposed to be funny or even vulgar.

There was an old man of Nantucket
Who kept all his cash in a bucket;
But his daughter, named Nan
Ran away with a man.
And as for the bucket, Nantucket.

A funny place-name is used.
The old man does something silly.
The daughter has a funny name.
The daughter does something naughty.
The punch line is a pun: Nan took it.

Chapter 1

Limerick and the limerick: The missing link



Limerick and the limerick: the Missing Link



This book will attempt to discover the missing connection between Limerick the place and limerick the poem and will examine various theories on why the limerick is called a limerick.



Limerick - the place

The first recorded place called Limerick dates back to **922**, when the Vikings founded the city. There are over forty places in the world called Limerick, the majority of which are in America, all named after Limerick, Ireland.



Why is the limerick poem important?

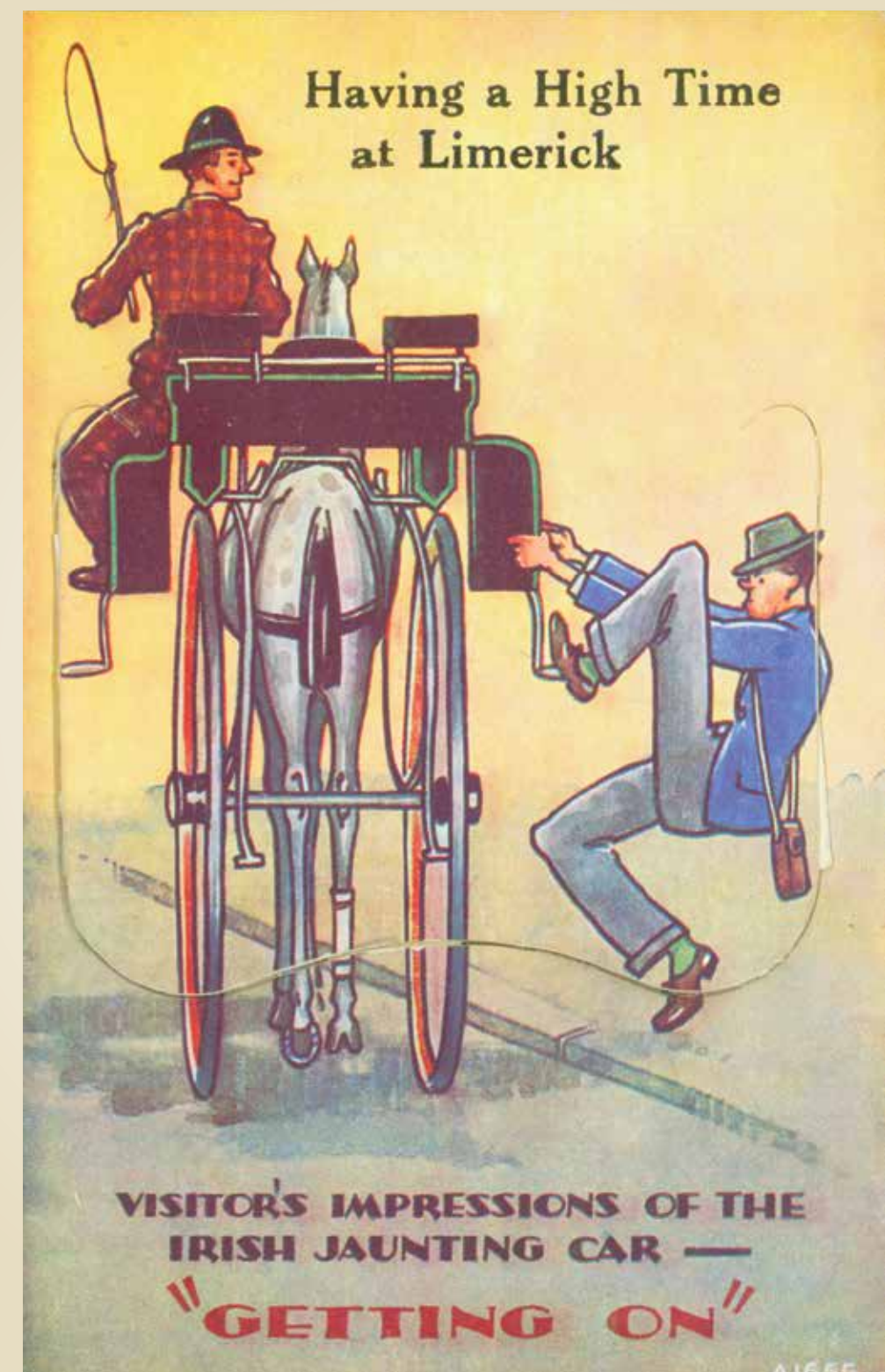
Limerick is the only place in the world to give its name to a type of poetry or indeed any other literary form. There is no Dublin ballad, Kilkenny play or Cavan song. The limerick is important because:

- The limerick is the only form of poetry first created in the English language. All other forms were borrowed from other languages, e.g. the Haiku is Japanese, the Ode is Greek.
- The rhythm of the English language suits the form of the limerick. As a result, limericks are now mainly written in English.
- English is spoken by one third of the world's population. Many of them have read limericks, laughed at limericks and written limericks.

Where did the limerick poem start?

The limerick poem has been around almost as long as the place called Limerick, though the poem was not called a limerick until the **1890s**. The story of the limerick as we know it can be divided into two time periods:

1. **1260 to 1861**, when the limerick slowly developed.
2. **1861 to the present**, when the limerick became popular. **1861** is important as the third edition of *A Book of Nonsense* by Edward Lear (**1812-88**), father of the contemporary limerick appeared.



The oldest limerick

The oldest known limerick in English is included in a song called 'Sumer Is Icumen In' (Summer has Arrived), written in **1260**. Well known for the past 800 years, it was used in the soundtrack to the **1973** film The Wicker Man. 'Sumer Is Icumen In' is written in Middle English and goes as follows:

Middle English	Modern English
Sumer is icumen in Lhude sing cuccu! Groweth sed And bloweth med And springth be wode nu	Summer is a-coming in Loudly sing cuckoo Groweth seed And bloweth mead And springs the wood anew
Sing cuccu!	Sing cuckoo!

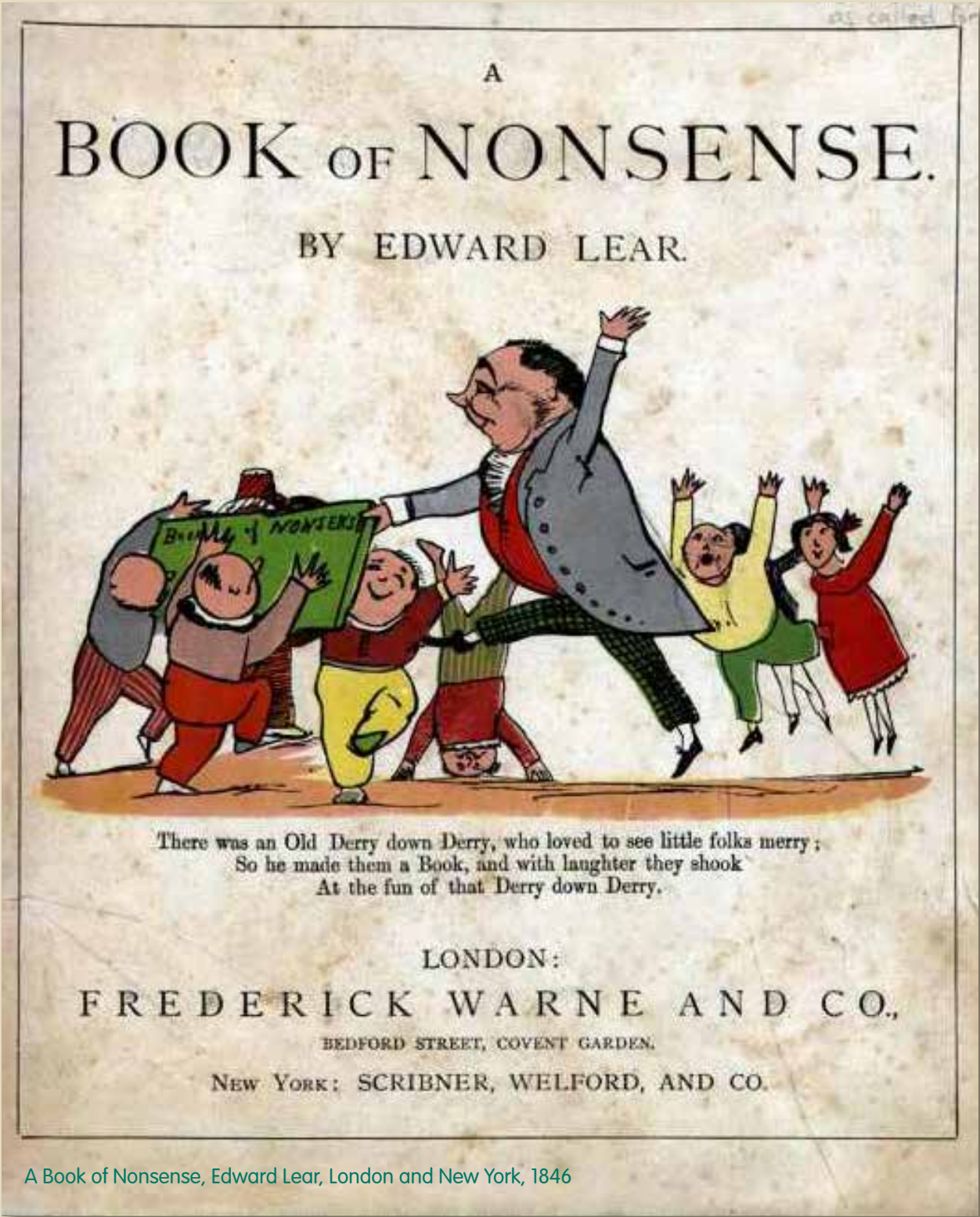
Three centuries later, after a period of obscurity, the limerick was revived in the late sixteenth century. William Shakespeare (**1564-1616**), who is often regarded as the greatest figure in world literature, used the limerick form as part of longer passages in four of his greatest plays: Othello, The Tempest, King Lear and Hamlet.

In Hamlet, Ophelia who has gone insane, sings the following lines:



By Gis and by Saint Charity,
Alack, and fie for shame!
Young men will do't,
if they come to't;
By cock, they are to blame.

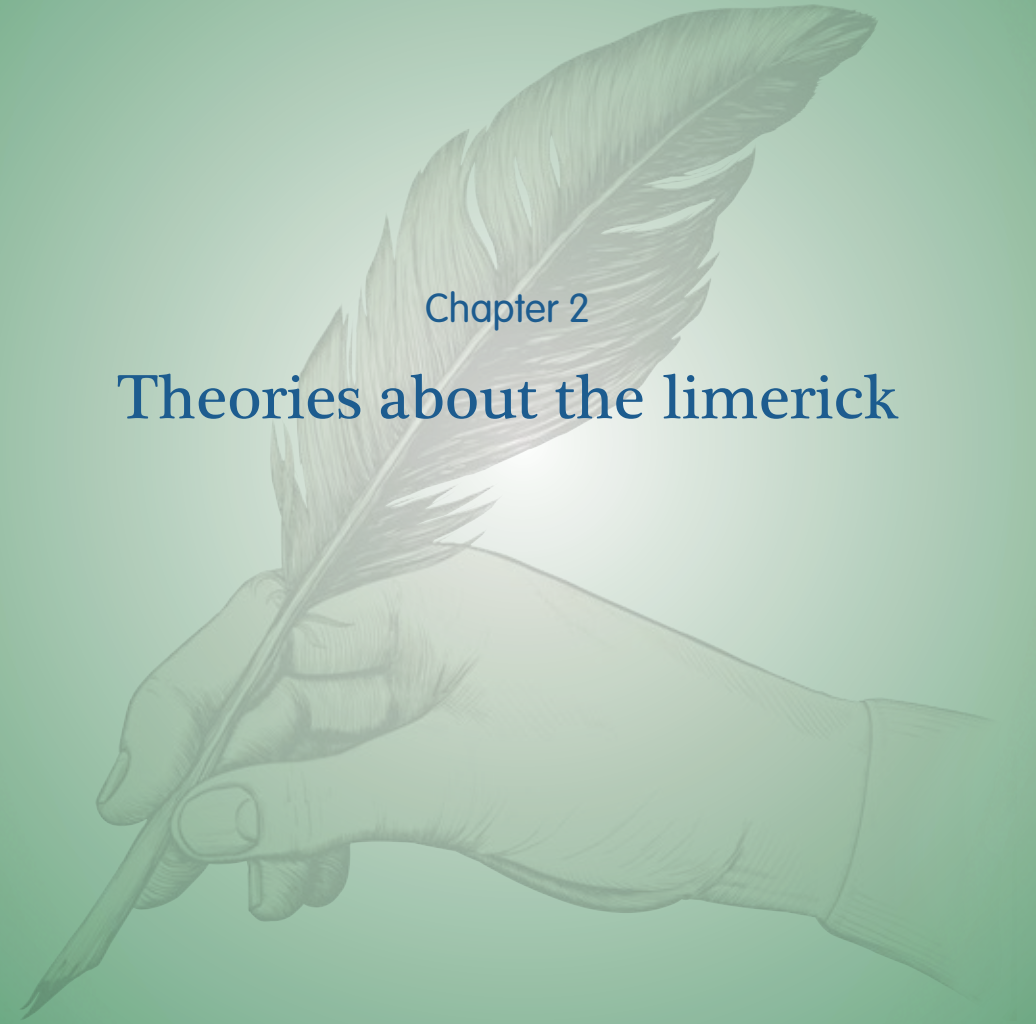
Quoth she, before you tumbled me,
You promised me to wed.
So would I ha' done,
by yonder sun,
An thou hadst not come to my bed.



A Book of Nonsense, Edward Lear, London and New York, 1846

Chapter 2

Theories about the limerick



Poem and Place: The Link to Limerick

Now we will look at some theories as to the link between Limerick the place and limerick the poem.

Theory 1: Nothing Rhymes with Limerick

The first theory that we will explore is that during limerick poem writing competitions in the late nineteenth century, Limerick was considered to be the hardest of all place names to rhyme. York and Cork, for example, both rhyme with 'pork' but Limerick was not so easy! As a result, people were challenged to write limerick poems rhyming with Limerick. This led to the name limerick being given to these poems.

However, this theory is not a very convincing one, because a man called Elmo Calkins succeeded in writing a limerick using the name 'Limerick':

Pray search this wide land with a glimmer stick
For there must be some lad at his primer quick,
Who when pressed can supply
A lot better than I
An acceptable rhyme scheme for 'limerick'.

Theory Number 2: The Irish Brigade

Some think that in the early **1700s** soldiers of the Irish Brigade might have taken the limerick poem from Ireland to France or from France to Ireland. The Irish Brigade in the French Army was made up of Irish Catholics who left Ireland after the broken Treaty of Limerick, 'Cuimhnigh ar Liumneach,' (Remember Limerick) was their motto. As a result, some think that the limerick poem is called after the Treaty of Limerick.



Theory Number 3: The Maigue Poets

Our journey to discover the 'Missing Link' takes us to County Limerick, home of the Maigue Poets. There is a popular theory that the limerick poem was invented by the Maigue Poets, Seán Ó Tuama and Aindrias Mac Craith, who used it in their spiteful dispute in the **1750s**.

The first person to call Seán Ó Tuama and Aindrias Mac Craith the 'Maigue Poets' was Father Patrick Dinneen in **1906**. They were a group of poets in Croom, County Limerick in the eighteenth century and are called after the River Maigue, on which Croom stands. The Maigue Poets were one of many groups of Irish language poets that flourished in eighteenth century Munster.



Maxwell's Lane, Croom, County Limerick, location of Sean O' Tuama's pub



Patrick C Fitzgerald kindly showing Dr Matthew Potter of Limerick Archives the grave of Sean Ó Tuama in Croom

The Tales of Two Former Friends

Sean Ó Tuama and Aindreas Mac Craith, were two close friends and poets, whose quarrel resulted in their composing a great many vicious limericks.

Sean Ó Tuama (**1707-75**) was a teacher turned publican who held his famous court of poetry in his pub on the Bridewell or Maxwell Lane, Croom. In **1769**, he moved to Limerick city and opened another pub in Mungret Street. He died on 30 August 1775 and was buried in the Church of Ireland churchyard, Croom.

Aindrias Mac Craith (**1710-95**) was a teacher, and although he used the pen name An Mangaire Sógach' (the 'Merry Peddler') he never worked as a peddler (someone who travels around, selling small goods). He is buried in the graveyard of the collegiate parish church of SS Peter and Paul, Kilmallock.

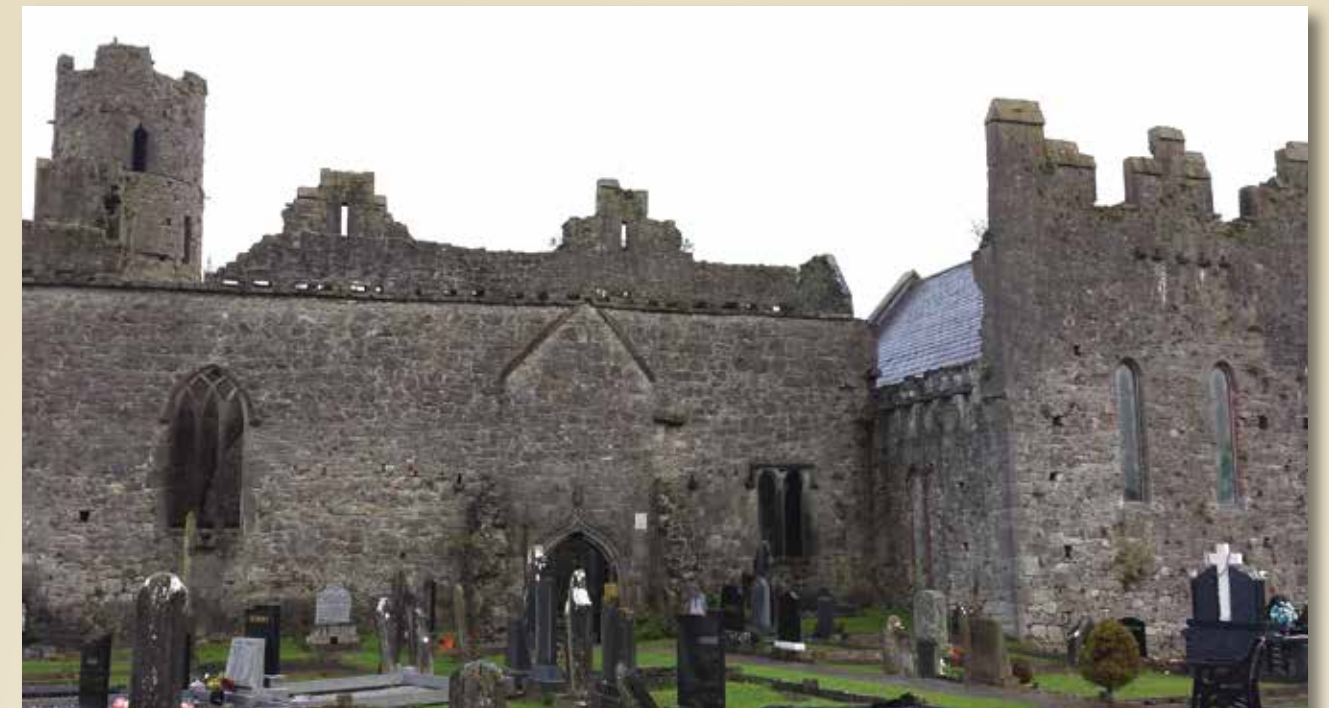
In the **1750s**, the two old friends fell out when Ó Tuama attempted to recover an unpaid debt run up by Mac Craith in his pub. Ó Tuama decided to collect the money by sending a limerick to Mac Craith:

I'm a person who daily sells drinks
And my company sets to high jinks
But I say, by the way
If someone fails to pay
It's my loss when the account sinks.

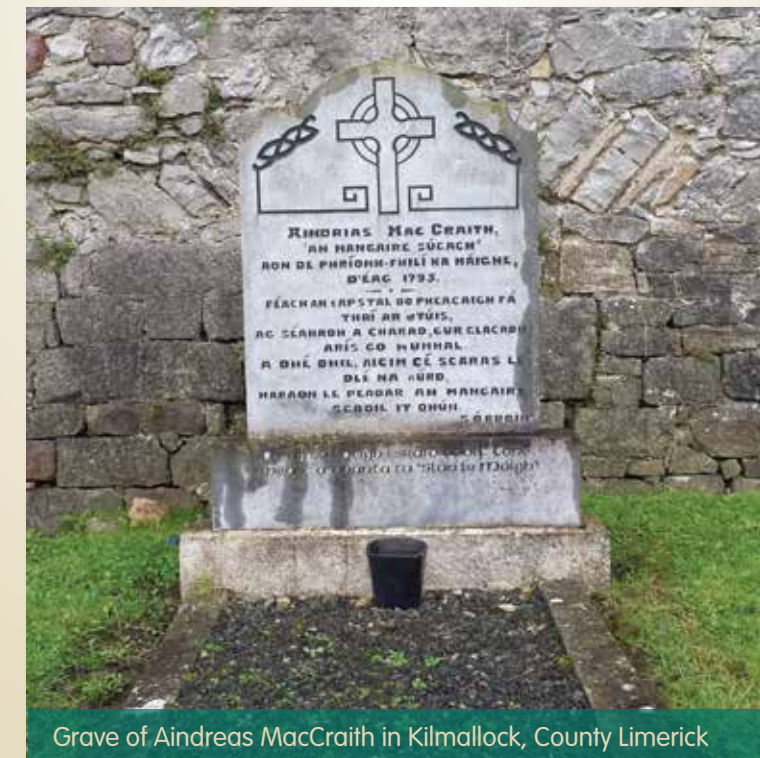
Mac Craith replied angrily:

You're a man who sells drink by the splash
Your brandy and ale are a mash
All who drink your bad booze
Their memory lose
And their brains are confused in a hash.

We don't know if the debt was ever paid, but Ó Tuama and Mac Craith remained enemies and their quarrel created many spiteful limericks.



Collegiate Parish Church of SS Peter and Paul, Kilmallock



Grave of Aindreas MacCraith in Kilmallock, County Limerick

Did the Maigue Poets influence the development of the limerick in English?

- The Maigue Poets did not invent the limerick. It was around for 450 years before they were even born.
- They wrote their limericks in the Irish language.
- They never used the term 'limerick' for any of their poems.
- However, they did write limericks in the correct format.
- Well known-Limerick poet John Liddy says that 'the limerick was part of their poetic arsenal.'
- Here is a limerick by Aindreas Mac Craith which conforms to the rules of the limerick in both English and Irish version.

Nil binneas it laoi náit shean-dán
'S ní milis dar linn do steanncán
Bíonn iomad de thuise
Do gloine gan líonadh
Is d'uisce na dige it phonnseáin.

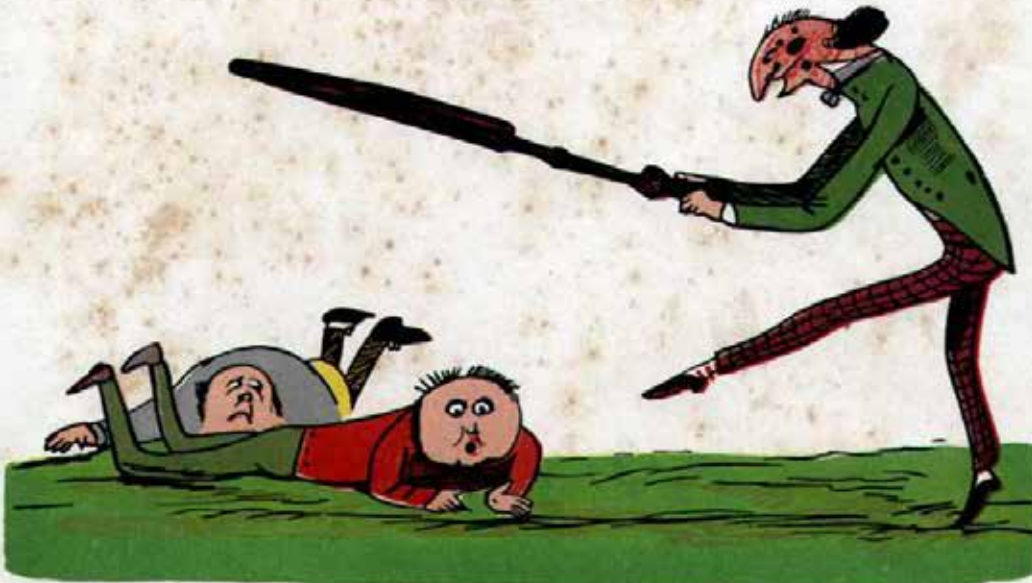
Your lays and old poems are as sour
As the drink that you splash as you pour
Too much of the glass
Stays unfulfilled by your lass
And your punch was dishwater before.

How the Maigue Poets became Famous and became associated internationally with the limerick

In **1850** their poetry was translated from Irish manuscripts into English for the first time. They were then published by John O'Daly in The Poets and Poetry of Munster **(1800-78)**.
In **1906**, Father Patrick Dinneen's book Filidhe na Maighe: The Maigue Poets appeared. This was the first time that they were called the 'Maigue Poets'. This title publicised their work and made their limericks known internationally.



There was a Young Girl of Majorca, whose Aunt was a very fast walker ;
She walked seventy miles, and leaped fifteen stiles,
Which astonished that Girl of Majorca.



There was an Old Man with a poker, who painted his face with red ochre.
When they said, " You're a Guy ! " he made no reply,
But knocked them all down with his poker.

Images from A Book of Nonsense, Edward Lear, London and New York, 1846



There was an Old Man of Peru, who never knew what he should do ;
So he tore off his hair, and behaved like a bear,
That intrinsic Old Man of Peru.



There was an Old Man of the West, who never could get any rest ;
So they set him to spin on his nose and his chin,
Which cured that Old Man of the West.



'There was an Old Man with a beard, who said, " It is just as I feared !—
Two Owls and a Hen, four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard ! "'



There was a Young Lady whose eyes were unique as to colour and size ;
When she opened them wide, people all turned aside,
And started away in surprise.

The Limerick as a popular nursery rhyme

After **1700**, limericks became mainly used for nursery rhymes. In **1744**, a book of nursery rhymes called Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book was published in London and included a limerick, Hickory Dickory Dock:

Hickory, dickory, dock,
The mouse ran up the clock.
The clock struck one,
And down he run,
Hickory, dickory, dock.

1820: The Birth of the Modern Limerick

In **1820**, The History of Sixteen Wonderful Old Women, the first ever book made up of limericks only, was published. Unlike modern limericks, these poems generally repeated the first line as the fifth line, in whole or part, a feature later copied by Edward Lear. This was an easier way of writing limericks but it was not accepted from the late nineteenth century when limerick competitions became very popular. This is one of them and you can see that the first and fifth line are almost the same.

There was an Old Woman at Gloster,
Whose parrot two guineas it cost her;
But his tongue never ceasing,
Was vastly displeasing
To that talkative Woman of Gloster.

Edward Lear (1812-88): Father of the Limerick

Painter and writer Edward Lear created the modern interest in limericks, with the publication of A Book of Nonsense (**1846**). Lear did not invent the limerick and never called them 'limericks.' In total, Lear wrote 212 limericks. Although Edward Lear visited Ireland twice, in **1835** and **1857**, he never visited Limerick!



Lear's limericks usually have the following:

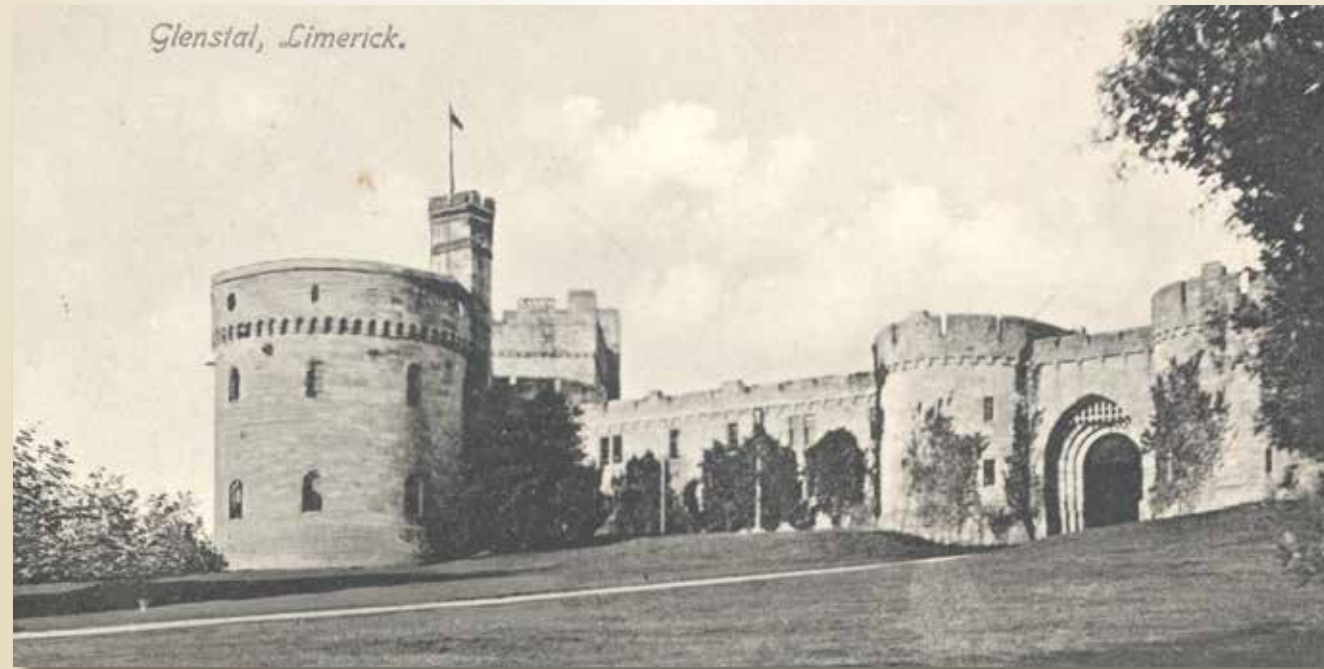
1. They start by describing a strange person.
2. Tell us where he/she lives.
3. Describes their unusual appearance, strange behaviour or something that happened to them.
4. Tell us the results of their strangeness.
5. Finishes by repeating the first line.

An example:

There was a Young Lady of Norway,
Who casually sat in a doorway;
When the door squeezed her flat,
She exclaimed "What of that?"
This courageous Young Lady of Norway.

Golden Age of the Limerick (1861-1939)

The Golden Age started with the publication of the third edition of Lear's A Book of Nonsense. Soon after, a division between clean and vulgar limericks emerged, which continues to the present. The limericks craze reached its peak in the early twentieth century with dozens of competitions being organised by magazines and newspapers in Britain and the USA.



Theory Number 4: The Limerick Punchline

Another theory as to why the limerick is called a limerick goes back to a popular game where people at parties made up poems in the limerick format ending with a chorus containing the words 'Will you come up to Limerick?'

An early example was discovered in a Canadian newspaper called the St John's Daily News of **30 November 1880** as follows:

There was a young rustic named Mallory
Who drew but a very small salary
When he went to a show
His purse made him go
To a seat in the uppermost gallery.

Chorus: Won't you come to Limerick



The limerick in Limerick today

The limerick continues to enjoy widespread popularity. The TV show the X factor featured weekly judge Louis Walsh reading one of 'Louis' limericks' to millions of viewers.

During the **1991** Treaty 300 - 'Wild Geese Festival', a limericks festival was held in Jury's Hotel, which commissioned a large painting by John Shinnors, showing the Maigue poets reciting limericks in a pub. It is currently on display in the Strand Hotel, which is built on the site of Jury's.

Limerick writer Críostóir Ó Floinn has written two important works containing the limericks and poetry produced by the Maigue Poets, The Poets of Merry Croom (1994) and The Maigue Poets, Fili na Maighe (**1995**).

Since **2010**, the Limerick Writers Centre, under the direction of Dominic Taylor, has organised an annual limericks festival.

In **2013**, the Limerick Writers Centre published a history of the limerick called The Curious Story of the Limerick, researched and written by Dr Matthew Potter of Limerick Museum and Archives.

During Limerick City of Culture **2014** a group headed by Mark Manning, Serena Hartigan, and Tara Hartigan created a tour of Limerick city using QR Codes and held a competition to find limericks for their plaques. They also received limericks written by famous Limerick people such as Terry Wogan and Dolores O'Riordan.

For this publication Limerick Archives created a competition open to all primary schools in Limerick city and county, inviting students in 4th, 5th and 6th classes to create their own limericks, about Limerick during Limerick's year as National City of Culture.

One of the finest poets in modern Limerick is Brian J. Slattery and he continues the tradition of writing limericks.

Saint Patrick

Saint Patrick is known far and wide
For the shamrock, and the Trinity
inside
And his long coat of green
Could often be seen



So have we found the Missing Link?

Theory Number 5


Although we still don't know for certain how the limerick got its name, we have found a theory that seems to be the closest to the truth, which states that while the Maigue Poets did not invent the poem, they gave it the name 'limerick' without realising it!

During Ireland's Literary Revival (**1890-1920**), great writers such as W B Yeats and John Millington Synge were inspired by pride in Ireland's medieval Gaelic civilisation. In **1892**, one such writer, Dr George Sigerson claimed that medieval Irish poets had invented poetry that rhymed and that the English had copied it from them. This annoyed and amused English writers. In response, they decided to mock Sigerson's claim by alleging that all rhymes invented by the Irish were poor quality, vulgar five line verses. These English writers called these vulgar poems 'limericks' latching onto the fame of the Maigue Poets from County Limerick, who had written satiric poetry. They glossed over the fact that Maigue poets work was high quality and not vulgar- just mean!

The earliest reference we can find of someone calling these poems 'limericks' is in an **1892** American magazine called Printers Ink. This is the same year that Sigerson made his wild claim that the Irish invented rhyming. The co-incidence of the claim and the first reference to the limerick both occurring in **1892** makes our theory the most likely to be true in our opinion.

The name 'limerick' caught on and spread world wide.





Chapter 3

Limericks by Limerick schoolchildren





The Giant's Saga, Royal De Luxe's Granny on Sarsfield Bridge and Clancy Strand, Limerick, September 2014.
Photographs courtesy of Sean Curtin

With Warm Irish Wishes from
Limerick



'Tis the broth of a boy I'm sending
In the broth of an Irish Stew.

To convey all the hearty good wishes
That I send with these views to you.

A big old Granny

In Limerick an old Granny from France,

Came to entertain people by dance -

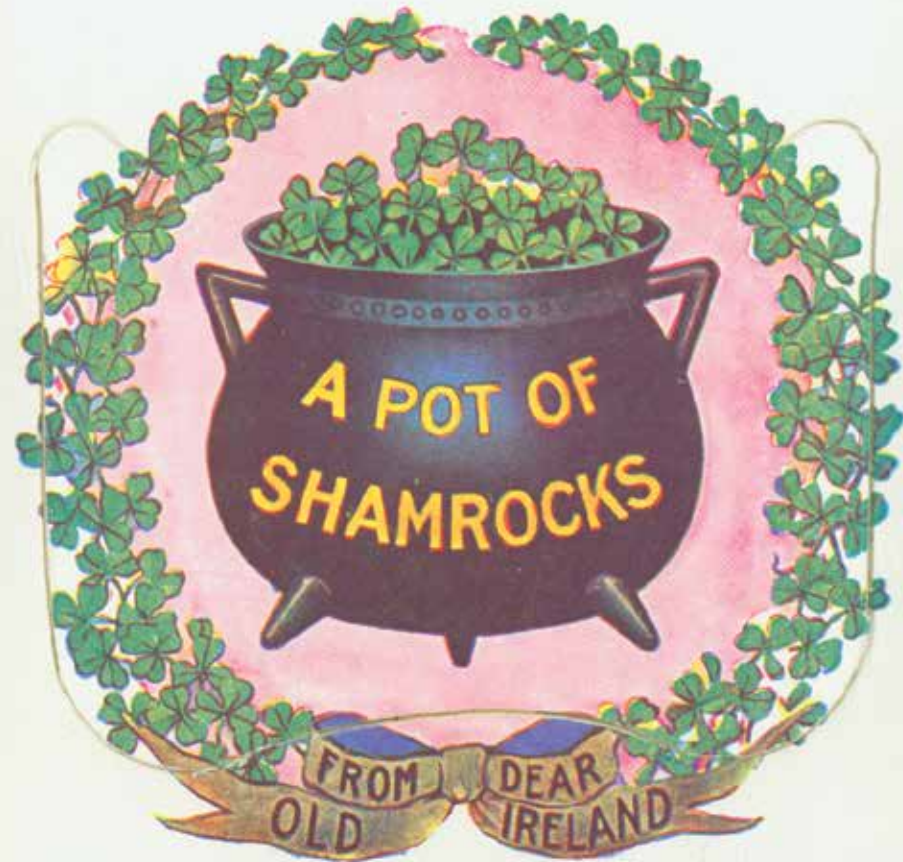
She is quite old and big,

Often wears a Fake wig,

And always likes to pee ⁱⁿ her pants.

The End

With Warm
Irish Wishes from
Limerick



Though this Old Irish Emblem is now brimming o'er
With the dear little shamrocks I send thee,
Still my heart holds as many good wishes and more
That Good Luck and Good Fortune attend thee,

Limerick

There once was a mean bunch of Vikings,
who decided to go do hiking,
they made our great city
and stayed, what a pity!!
This small poem I hope you are liking.

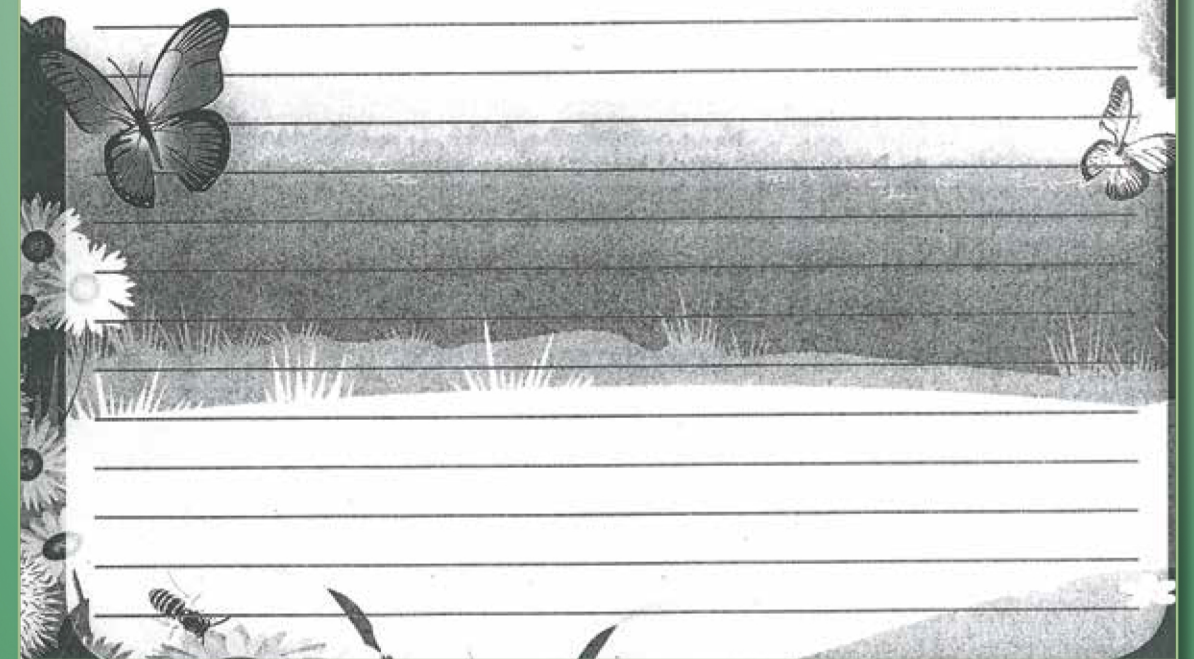


I'M FEELING IN THE PINK.

My Limerick

Visit King John's, Lough Gur and Lime tree
 U.L.I.T for your degree.
 In Thomond we will maul
 We'll shout on Munsters Paul
 Were the City of Culture yippe.

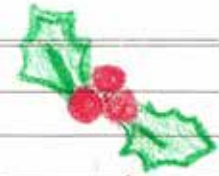
By Dara Prendergast
 Caherline National School
 6th class
 Mr. McCarthy



I'm Trying to be Good
at Limerick

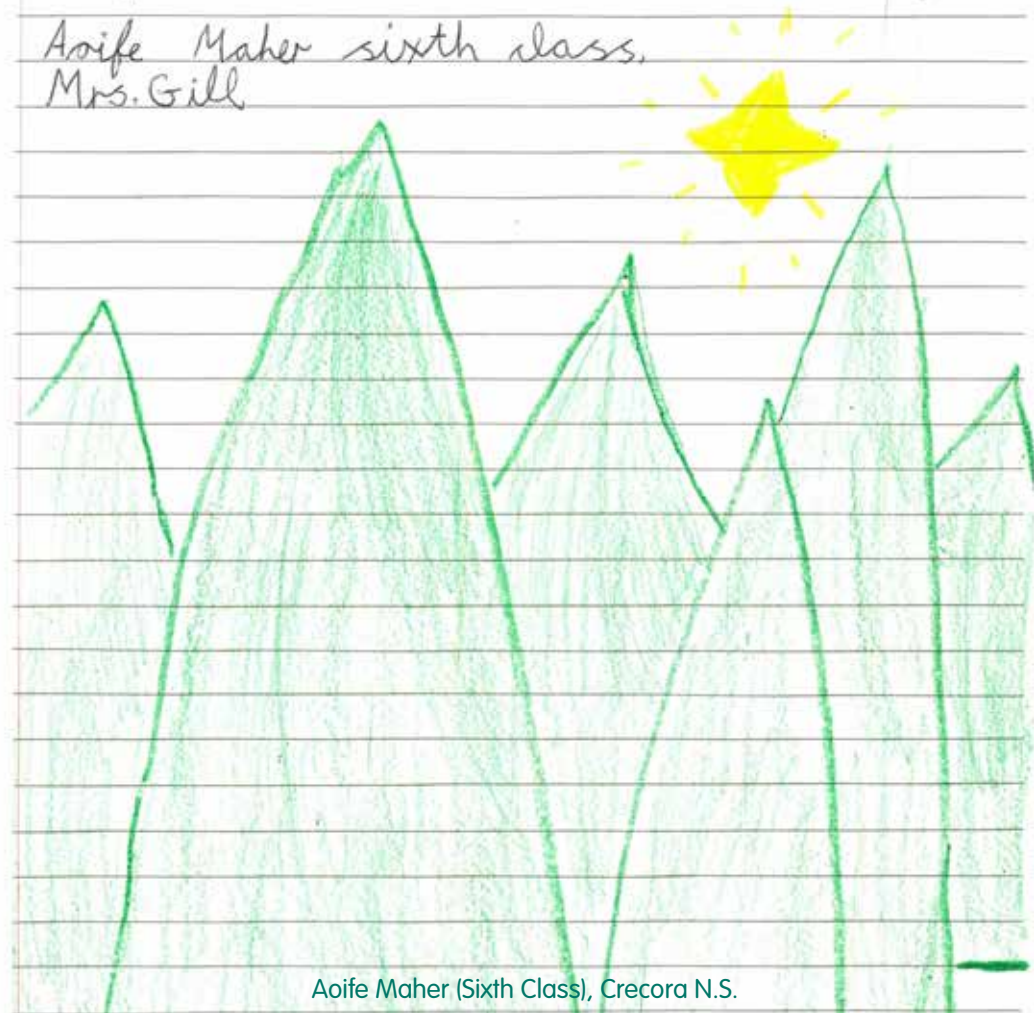


Christmas Lights

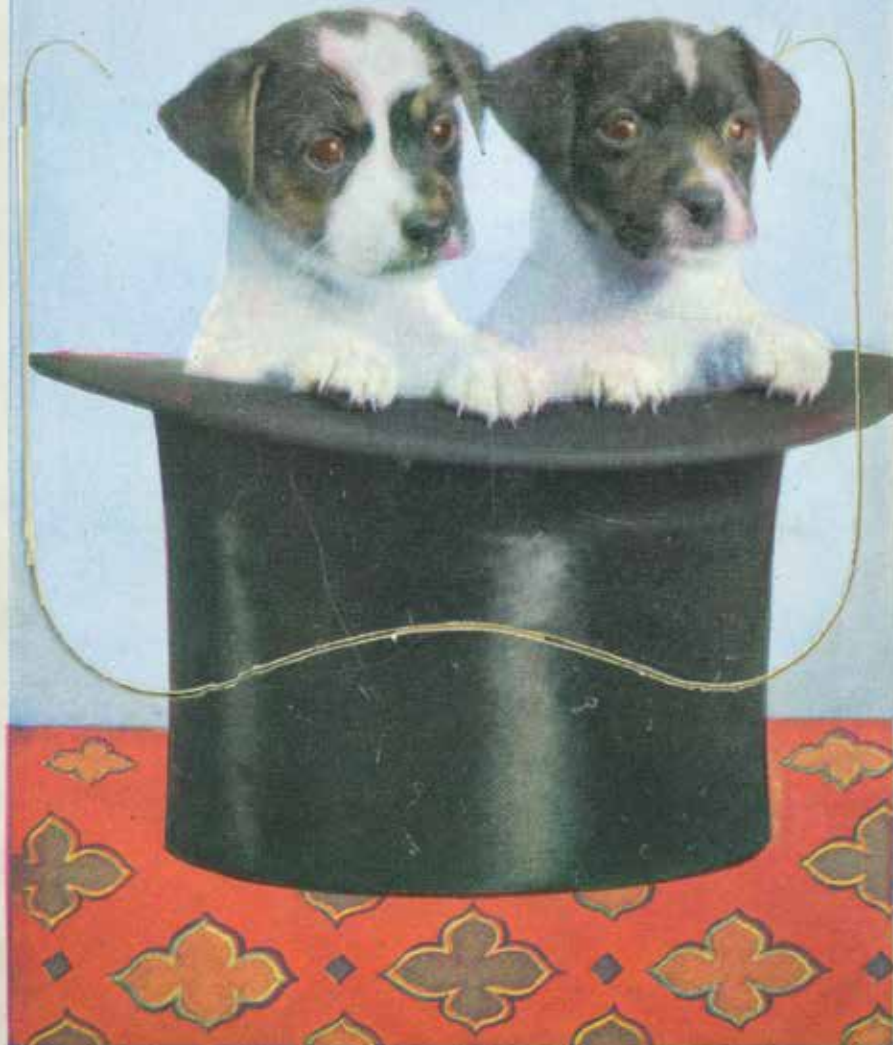


This year turning on the
Christmas lights
They look so beautiful and so bright
All the elves will be there
Gliding through the cold air
But you won't see them, they're out of sight!

Aoife Maher sixth class,
Mrs. Gill



Having
A Topping Time
at Limerick



The Witch of Croom

There was once a witch who lived in Croom,

She flew around on her big black broom,

She cackled every night,

Gave everyone a fright,

When her monster cat fell off the broom.



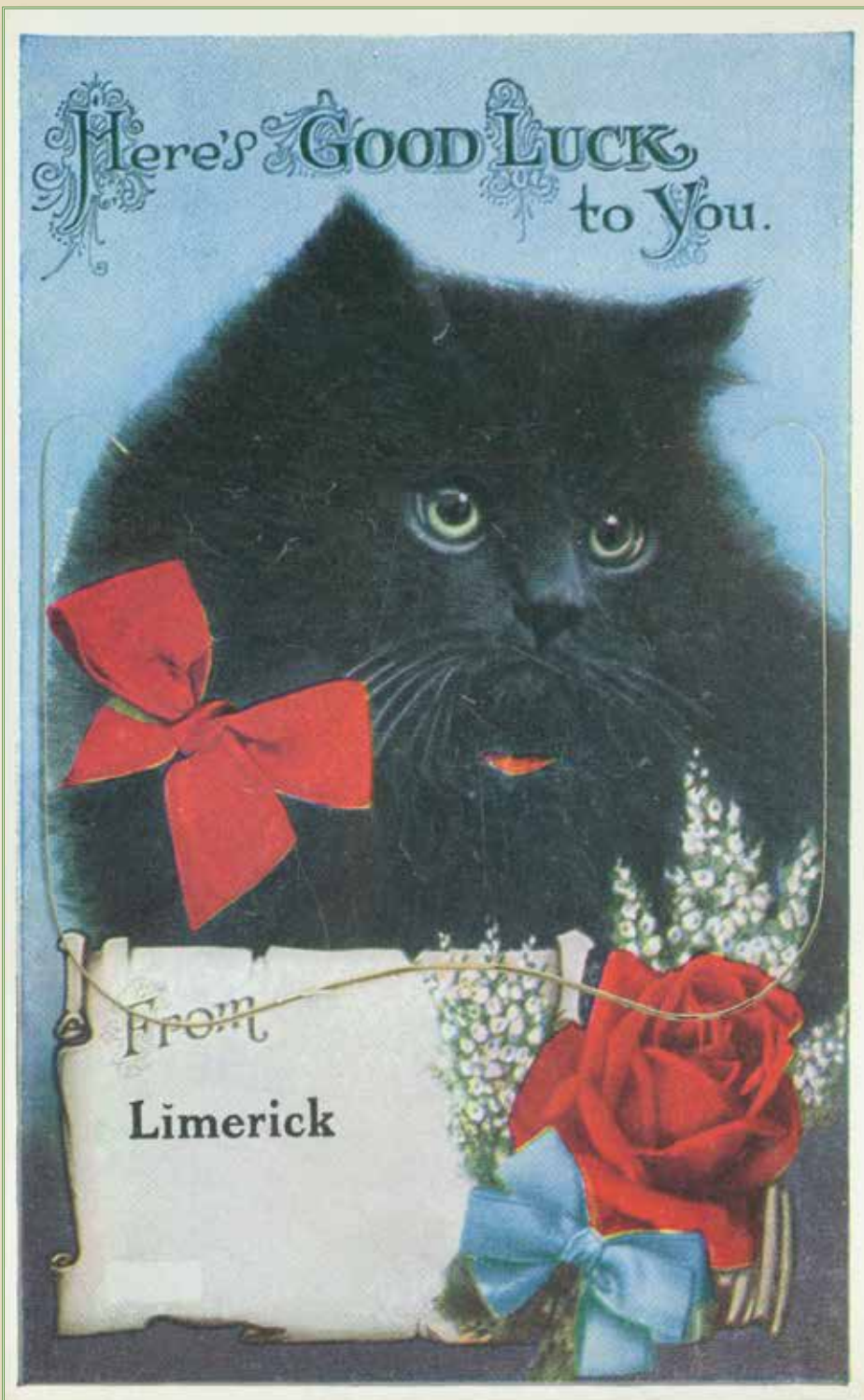
The witch...



Ella O'Rourke (fifth class)

Ms. Duffy

Ella O'Rourke (Fifth Class), St Mary's, Croom



Limerick at Night

If you go to see Limerick at night,
You will not be let down by the sight,
For on sweet Parnell Street,
Nice people you will meet,
For the good folk of Limerick don't fight.

"Limerick"
you're my
Lady

Ellen Slattery 6th Class, Bruff



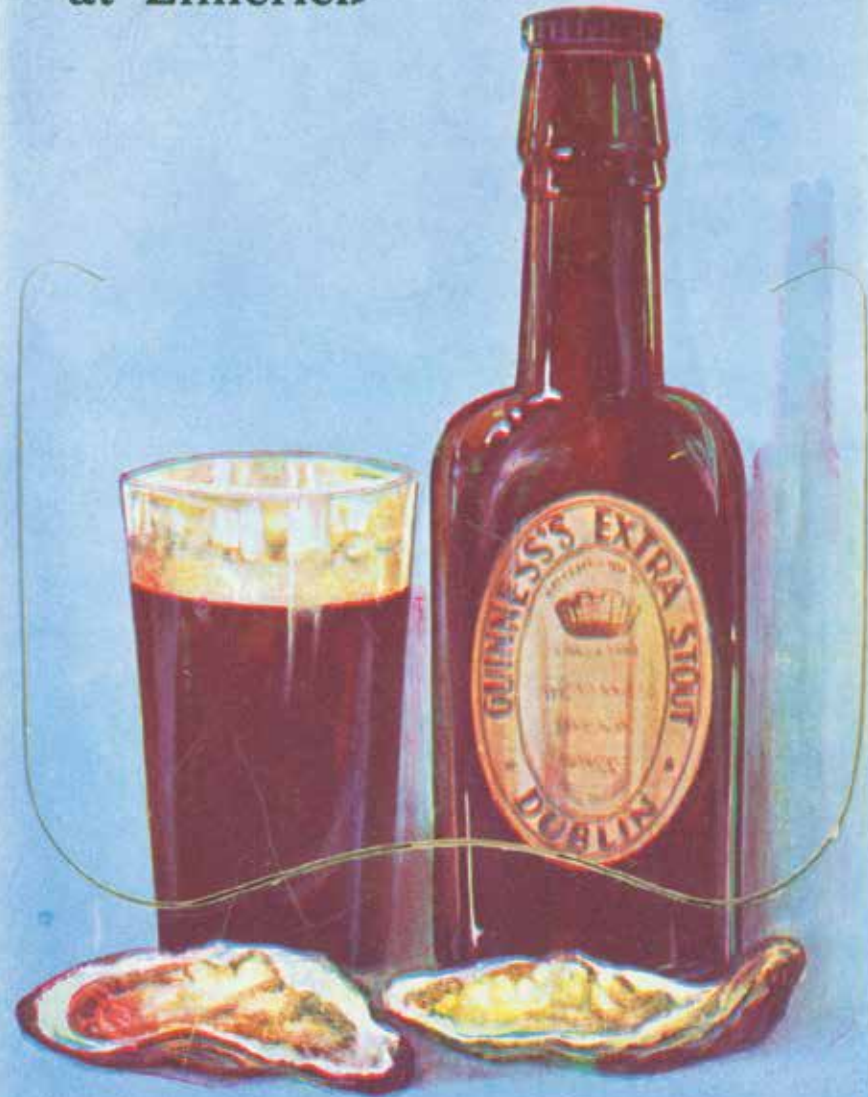
The weather is good at
Limerick



Limerick won the Munster final,
The video of it went viral,
Marty Morrissey screamed,
What a fantastic dream,
The day Limerick won the final.

Name: Alex Fitzpatrick
School: Donoughmore N.S.
Class: 6th class
Teacher: Mrs Cleary

It's "Good for You"
at Limerick



In Limerick city lies
Thomand park.



It's where the Munster
team do their part.

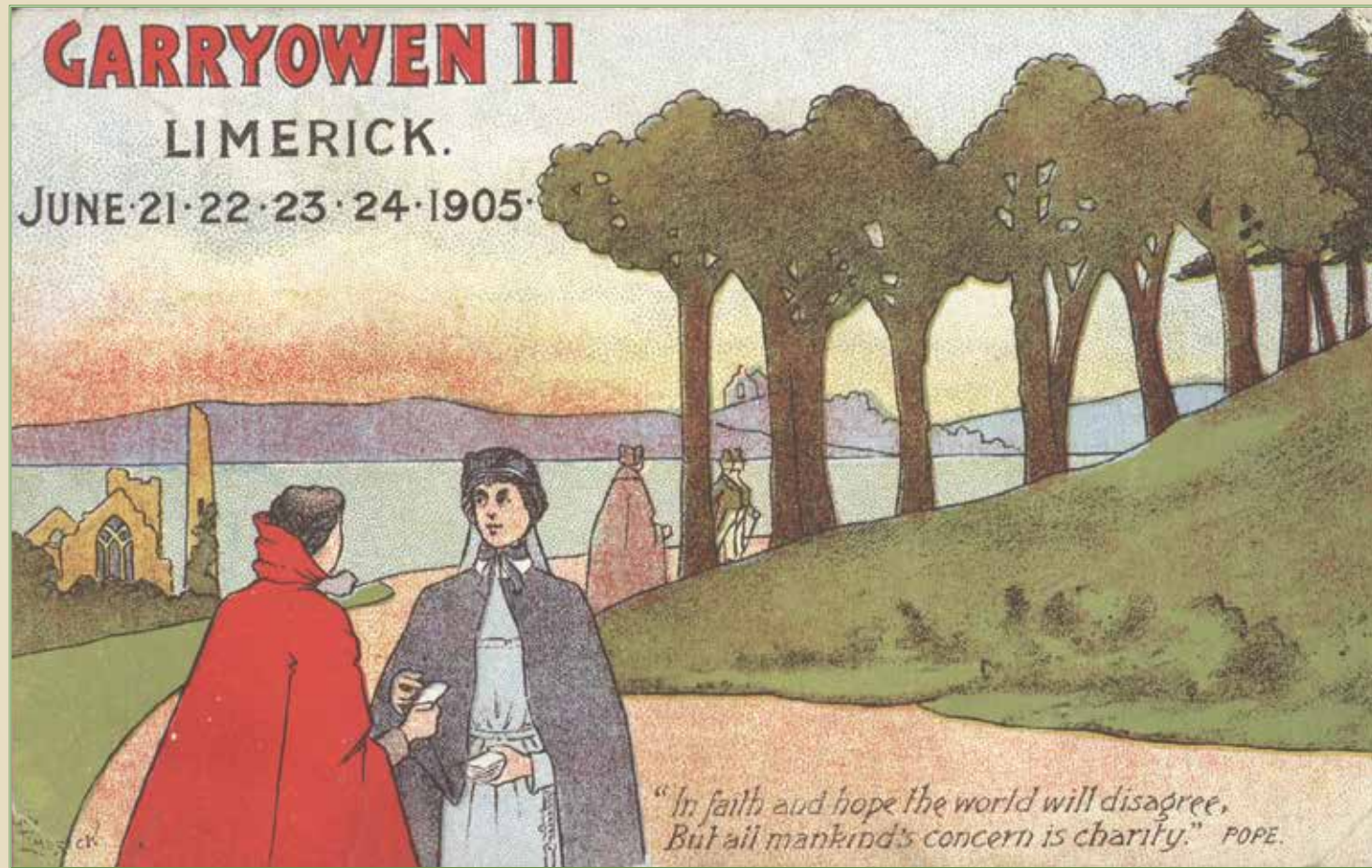
It's where they train to
win.

With sweat on all their
skin.

But to please everyone's
cheerful hearts.

O'CONNELL STREET, LIMERICK: Limerick, the fourth largest city in Ireland, is situated at the head of the Shannon estuary. It is a thriving seaport and industrial centre and a place of major historical interest. Its famous Treaty Stone, historic Castles and Cathedrals, and centuries old traditions, are rich with a history dating back to A.D. 922 when Limerick was a Norse settlement. Shannon Airport is 13 miles away.

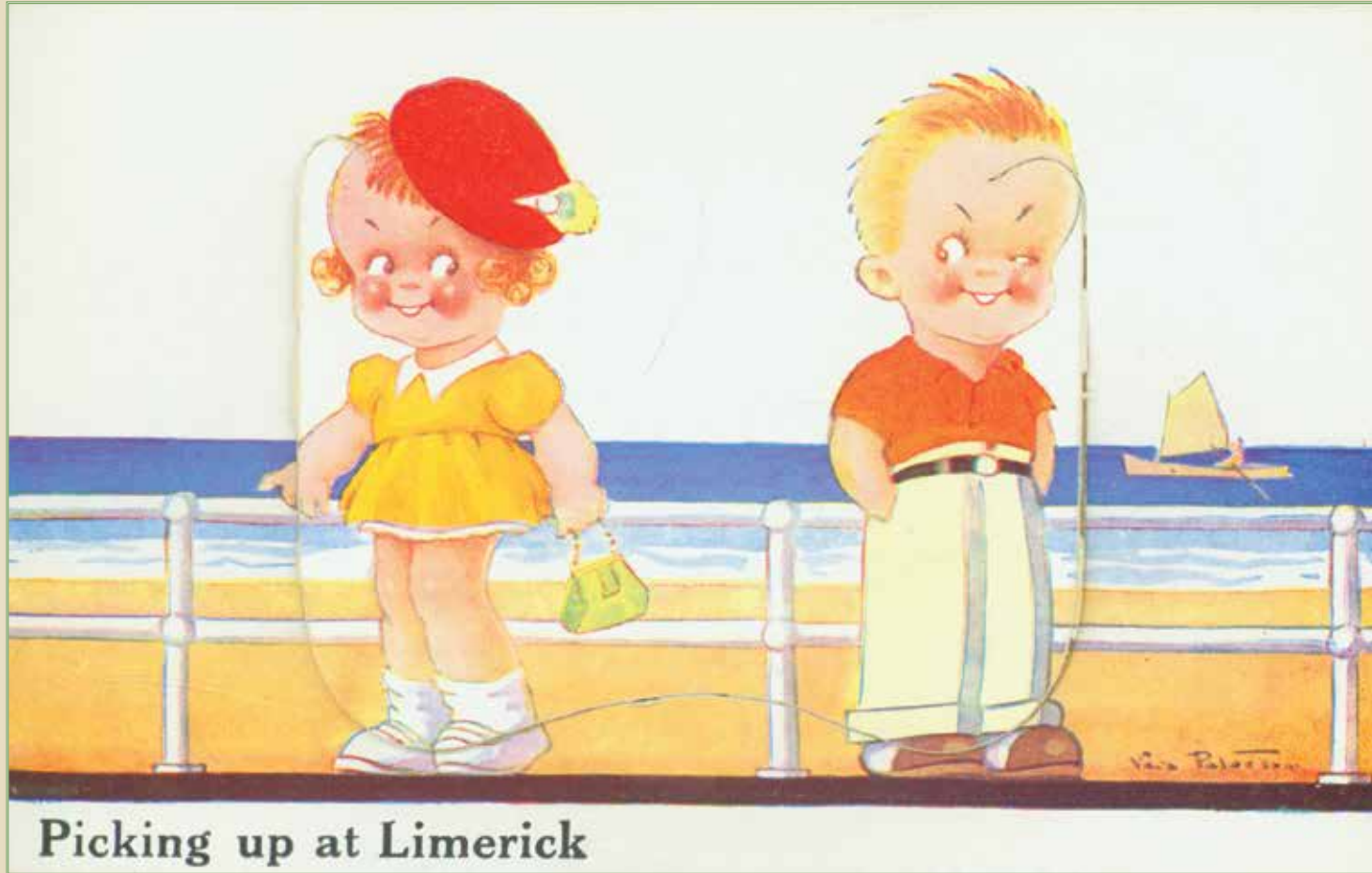
Published by Cardall Ltd., Dublin. Printed in the Republic of Ireland.



My Limerick

The River Shannon sparkles at night,
With King John's castle, oh what a sight,
Full of culture this year,
Huge Granny did appear,
Limerick's colours are green and white.

By Amy Phelan, 6th Class
Toureen, Croom, Co. Limerick
Manister N.S., Manister, Croom, Co. Limerick
Mr. Peter Lavin
061 397 220

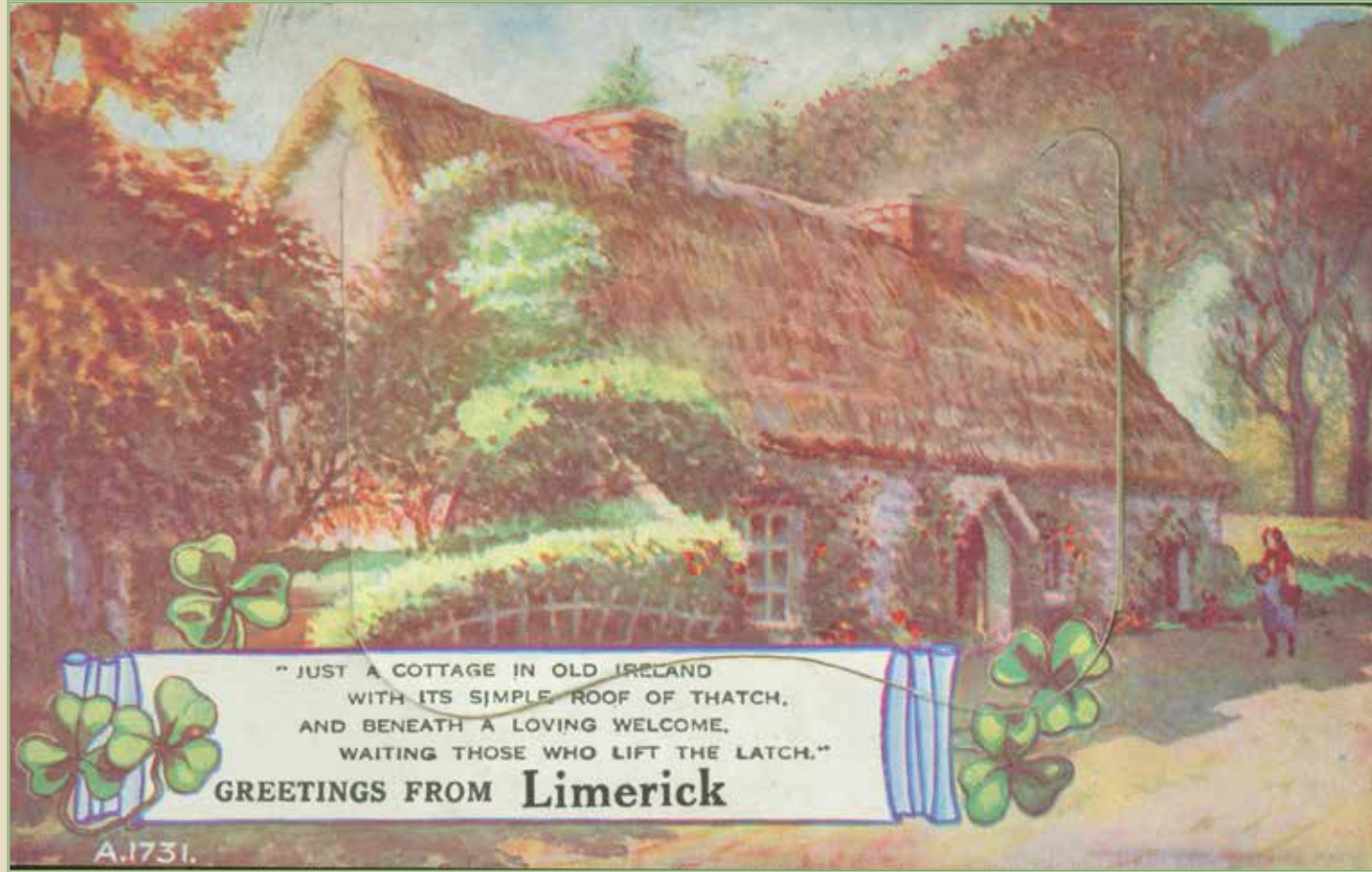


Limerick Poem

There's a girl from Limerick City.
 She went abroad, it was a pity,
 But then she came back broke
 She was dressed in a cloak
 Now she is sitting and so pretty.

Student's Name: Ava Dorman
 Address: 4 Stenson Close
 Farranashone, Limerick
 School: Salesian Primary School
 Class: 4th class
 Teacher: Ms O'Malley

WINNER
3RD
PRIZE

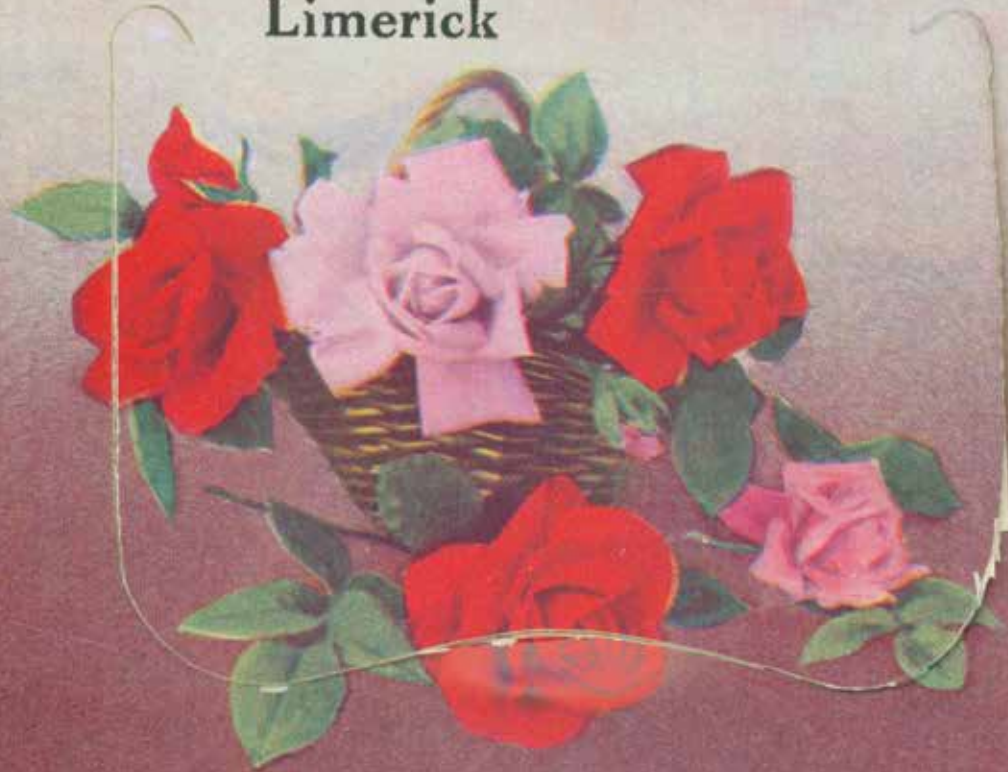


Paul O Connell

There was once a little boy named Paul,
Who grew up to be freakishly tall,
He had flaming red hair,
And played rugby with flair,
He put the fear of God in that ball

Ben McNulty

Best wishes from
Limerick



Patrick Sarsfield, the Country man
From him the Williamites surely ran
On the hill without save
From Pats men bold and brave
It was all a part of Sarsfield's plan

WINNER
1ST
PRIZE

LIMERICK!

Patrick	Sarsfield	the	Country	man			
From	him	the	Williamites	surely	ran		
On	the	hill	without	save			
From	Pats	men	bold	and	brave		
It	was	all	a	part	of	Sarsfield's	plan

Limerick and the Limerick: The Missing Link

Beautiful Limerick

Oh beautiful Limerick by the sea
A great place to have a cup of tea
All the shops on the street
What a wonderful treat
Where you never get stung by a bee.

by Amy Shannan



Amy Shannan (Fourth Class)(2), Bilboa N.S., Cappamore

In St. Munchin's school, I'm in fourth class
Most of the time, we're having a blast!
But fifth class comes next year
And the homework to fear
Oh my goodness, the years go too fast!

Allanah Kiely fourth class
Mr. Conboy
St. Munchin's G.N.S



Allanah Kelly (Fourth Class), St Munchin's G.N.S., Limerick



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Photograph courtesy of Sean Curtin

