

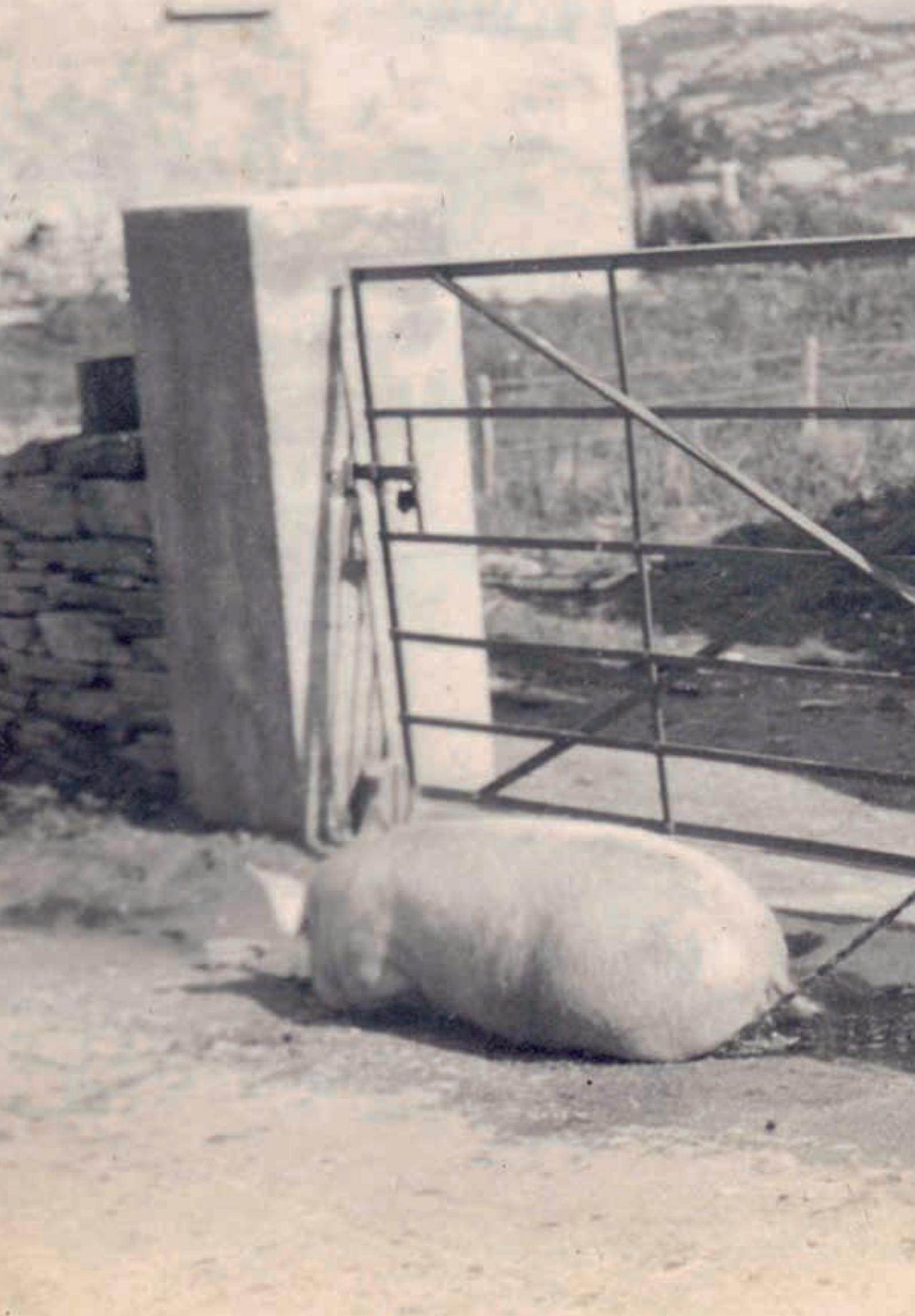
PIGTOWN

A HISTORY OF LIMERICK'S BACON INDUSTRY



By Ruth Guiry

Edited by: Dr Maura Cronin and Jacqui Hayes





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Courtesy Sean Curtin

Inside Cover: Courtesy Limerick Museum

 **PIGTOWN** A HISTORY OF LIMERICK'S BACON INDUSTRY

By Ruth Guiry

Edited by: Dr Maura Cronin and Jacqui Hayes

PROLOGUE

'There are many who imagine that 'piggy' has only to be killed, and put into a barrel or some such receptacle containing salt, and bacon is produced.

But such is not the case. To produce GOOD BACON you must be able to procure good, well-fed pigs; you must have elaborate premises, skilled workmen and stupendous machinery. All these we claim to have.'

(Limerick July 1898, Matterson's)

This is the fourth publication in the series produced by Limerick Archives since 2012. All have been supported to varying degrees by Mary Immaculate College in a partnership between 'town and gown' that has produced a significant body of work.

In 2012 we published *Ranks; The Industrial Heart of Limerick City* by Dr Edward Whelan. Students from Mary Immaculate College History Department were a valuable support in carrying out a series of oral history interviews with the former Ranks workers. In 2014 as part of City of Culture we published *Amazing Lace, A History of the Limerick Lace Industry* by Dr Matthew Potter, Historian with Limerick Archives. Dr Maura Cronin read the typescript and gave wise advice. Our third publication was a major co-production with both the History and Geography Departments of Mary Immaculate College on Mount St Lawrence cemetery. A digitisation and mapping project culminated in the publication of *City and Cemetery, A History of Mount Saint Lawrence Limerick* by Dr Matthew Potter

With three successful publications completed, we considered what topic we should turn to next. The bacon industry was top of the list. The reputation of Limerick ham, the food culture that arose from a plentiful supply of cheap products, the story of the pork butchers, the pig buyers, the sounds of the city with factory horns signalling the call to work: all of these still resonate in Limerick in the memories of its citizens and former workers. A definitive account of this industry that operated at the centre of the city, supplied by the farms of rural county Limerick for over 180 years, had never been written. In early 2015 we commissioned Ruth Guiry to undertake the research with the guidance of Dr Maura Cronin.

The project has been assisted greatly by colleagues in Mary Immaculate College, mainly Dr Helene Bradley Davies for her invaluable advice on the historical geography of Limerick city and input on census, directories and mapping in Limerick and also to Dr Tadgh Moloney for primary sources. Thanks to colleagues in Limerick Archives and Limerick Museum especially Dr Matthew Potter and Brian Hodkinson for their ongoing support for the bacon project. A great deal of preliminary research was carried out in Limerick Museum and Archives by Milla Filin and John Elliott as part of a wider project to create a permanent memorial to the Pork Butchers (opened on Upper William Street in June 2016).

We are deeply grateful for the support of the former workers. Their stories and the images they donated have contributed enormously to capturing a sense of what the industry meant to Limerick and life within and outside the factories.

In Limerick Archives we have a small collection relating to Matterson's donated when the factory closed and it is very satisfying to see this book emerging from the combined surviving material culture and oral testimony.

Thanks to all those who donated and sourced images: Tony Punch, Joe Hayes, David Bracken and Limerick Diocesan Archives, Sean Curtin, Sharon Slater, the *Limerick Leader* and the Mechanics Institute. Thanks to Mary Immaculate College for the use of their facilities and to Mike Finn for allowing us to use the title of his play *Pigtown*.

Finally we'd like to thank Ruth Guiry our wonderful researcher who has produced an authoritative and accessible account of one of Limerick's defining industries.



Matterson's

OF LIMERICK



FROM SOUP TO-SWEET-READY TO EAT...

and very good too!

AUTHOR'S NOTE

This publication is my first piece of published work. The idea was sparked by the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society who wanted to commemorate the bacon factory workers who left their footprint on Limerick's socio-economic history. The project started with the pork butchers but would not have been completed without the input of two institutions who have cooperated so closely in this work – Limerick City and County Council and Mary Immaculate College.

Within the Council, a huge thank you is due to Jacqui Hayes, Archivist, Limerick City and County Council, whose experience in guiding and editing local studies in Limerick's history proved invaluable in this project. Thank you also to Kieran Lehane, Physical Development Directorate, Limerick City and County Council, who backed this project from the start and provided the funding. I am very grateful to Jacqui and Kieran for giving me the opportunity to research and write about Limerick's bacon industry.

Within Mary Immaculate College, the Geography and History Departments provided the academic advice on both research and writing. Dr Maura Cronin, Department of History, supervised the project and ensured that I achieved a balance between personal memories and documentary sources. Dr Helene Bradley-Davies, Department of Geography, advised with the use of census material, maps and official records. Their advice and support was essential for this project.

I would like to thank Milla Filin, Limerick Museum, and Dr Tadhg Moloney, Mary Immaculate College, for their input and assistance with this project in terms of primary material, both visual and documentary. Dr Matthew Potter, Limerick Archives, shared his great knowledge of Limerick's history, for which I am very grateful.

Thanks to Dr Ursula Callaghan, Patrick Morrissey, Malinda Wittkopf and Mark Bradley for transcribing the oral history interviews. Thank you to David Bracken, Limerick Diocesan Archives and Michael McNamara, Limerick Mechanics Institute, for allowing me access to private files.

While researching this book, I had the pleasure of meeting twenty-seven interviewees, who all contributed to my understanding not only of the bacon industry but also of the Limerick social scene from the 1940s onwards. They are all listed in the appendix. I am especially grateful to Joe Hayes, formerly of O'Mara's factory, for his help and advice with interviewees, contacts, photos and other details. A special thank you to Tony Punch, Sean Curtin and many more of the interviewees for allowing us to use their photographic images relating to the history of the Limerick bacon industry

Finally, I want to thank my fiancé, Don, for his patience with this project and for listening to me talk about pigs for the last year!

Ruth Guiry





Denny Pig Market W.J. Shaw

O'Maras M. Spain Matterson & Sons

Aerial view of Limerick with locations of bacon factories highlighted c.1950

Courtesy English Heritage

Shaw & Sons advert c.1890-1910

Courtesy National Library of Ireland



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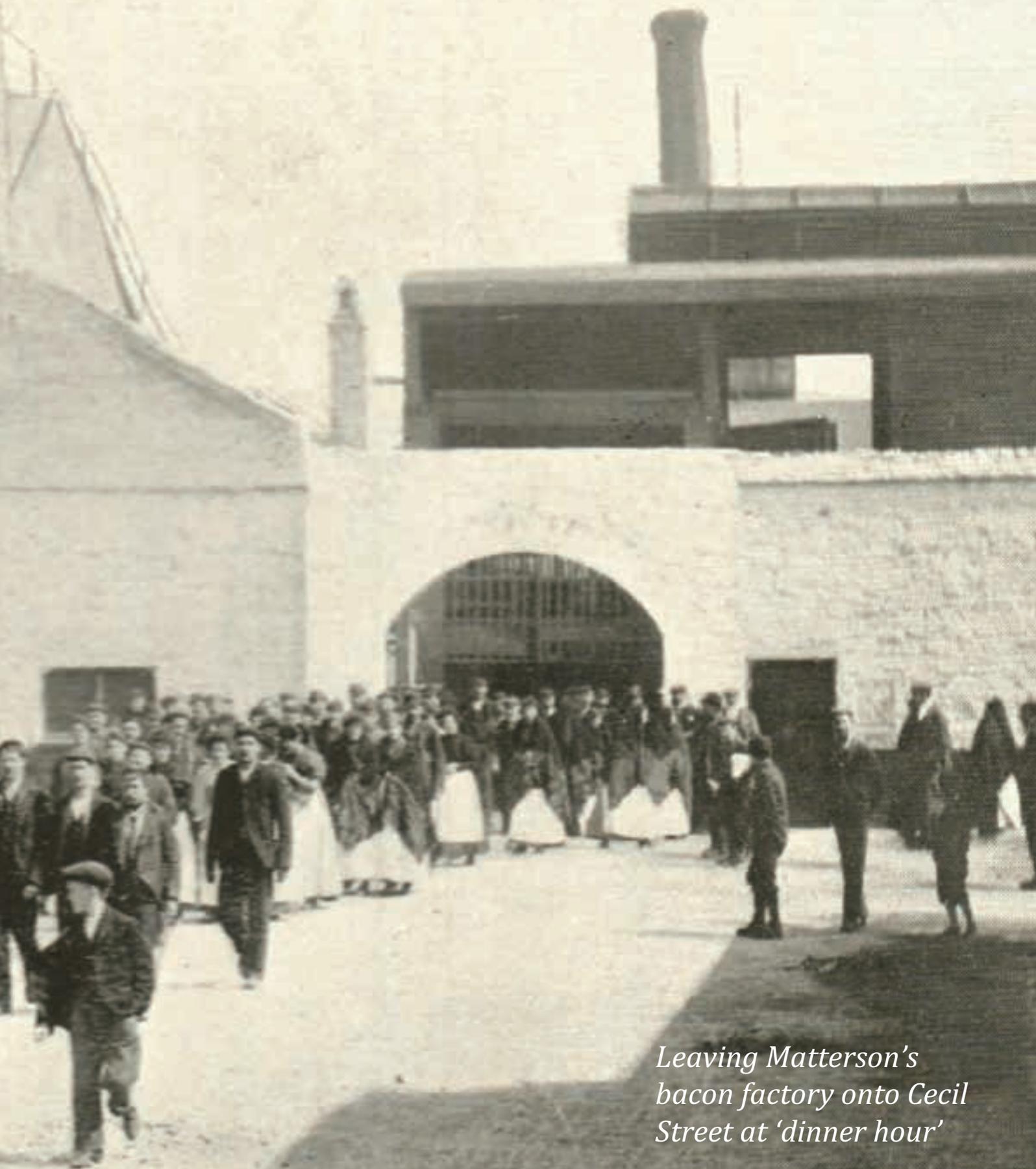


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INTRODUCTION



*Leaving Matterson's
bacon factory onto Cecil
Street at 'dinner hour'*

Courtesy Limerick Diocesan Archives

Our brands are well known to the public, the name "MATTERSON" encircling each, and none are genuine without it.

Our Representatives are :—LONDON—Wm. Matterson & Co., Wellington Chambers, London Bridge. BIRMINGHAM—J. Matterson & Sons, Ltd., 62 and 63 Clement Street. MANCHESTER—J. Matterson & Sons, Ltd., 68a Corporation Street. LIVERPOOL—Wm. G. Belas, 8 Chicago Buildings, Stanley Street. CARDIFF—Charles F. Howard, 59 Despenser Street. DUBLIN—O. & R. Fry, 12 Hawkins Street. CORK—John G. Belas, 15 Patrick Street. CONTINENTAL AGENTS—Joseph Leete & Sons, 36 St. Mary-at-Hill, London.

To give an idea of what a Bacon Factory is like, we have pleasure in presenting you with a few views of our Limerick premises, together with photographs of our Directors and some of our Representatives, which may interest you.

We have the honour to be

Your most obedient servants,

J. MATTERSON & SONS, LTD.,

Limerick and Waterford.

*A souvenir booklet of Matterson's,
listing representatives and
displaying images of the factory.*

Courtesy Limerick Diocesan Archives





The pig - now there's one beautiful animal. Stout, proud, cheerful, loyal...Man's best friend is the pig! I should know. I've killed thousands of 'em. In a century and a half, fifty million porkers have met their end in this town.¹

The history of the bacon industry

The history of the bacon industry in Limerick began as early as 1810 and continued until the late 1980s. The bacon industry certainly did put Limerick on the map and it was not long before the city was leading the way in curing and exporting on an impressive scale, so much so that it became a real 'city of pigs' where, as Frank Corr put it, 'King Pig' ruled, providing employment for literally thousands of people, food for every table and a symphony of tastes, sounds and aromas which gave Limerick something of the ambience of a bustling city of the East.¹ By the late nineteenth century there were four major bacon factories operating in Limerick city – Denny's, Matterson's, O'Mara's and Shaw's.² In 1895 some 3,200 pigs had been killed in the Limerick bacon factories in one week in August. By 1911, 2,500 pigs were being killed weekly in O'Mara's factory alone.³ By the late 1950s, when three of the factories were still in full operation, one pork butcher remarked that he had been killing '937 pigs in one day'.⁴

The importance of the pig

While the beginnings of this factory-based bacon production in Limerick date to the early 1800s, the importance of the pig to the Irish economy, both rural and urban, had been established long beforehand. Easily reared, feeding off waste from both households and (in the cities) hotels and institutions, the pig – alive or dead – had multiple uses. For the pre-famine Irish peasant, the living pig produced the manure so essential for fertilising the potatoes on which the family lived. Arthur Young, visiting Ireland in the late 1770s noted the universal presence of the pig in cottiers' gardens and half a century later the German visitor, Johann Kohl, described the pig as the 'the beast that pays the rent', fattened and sold to ensure that the family remained secure in its cabin and land.⁵ Dead, he was not only an item of food for people from the poorest to the richest, but his skin was used in the manufacture of shoes and fine gloves, his hair provided the bristle used in brush-making and his bladder, cleaned and inflated, provided a football for children in country and town.⁶ Tommy, one of the main characters in Mike Finn's drama, *Pigtown*, summed up the pig's contribution to the human as follows:

The pig is the most generous animal on God's earth. Ham and bacon. Rashers and sausages. Skirts, kidneys, liver, eye bones, backbones, pig's heads, pig's toes, lard. Bladders for footballs. Bristles for brushes and shit for roses. Nothin' wasted but the squeal...⁷

Pig breeding and feeding

The ongoing agricultural revolution in Britain led from the later eighteenth century onwards to an increased awareness of the need to breed different types of pig for different markets.⁸ In the earlier part of the century, when population growth both in Ireland and in industrial Britain led to an increased demand for



Pigs at market. Courtesy Limerick Museum

food, a pig that was large and easy to fatten was considered ideal – both for home consumption and for export. Ireland shared in this growing awareness of the need to improve pig breeds: the quick-fattening Neapolitan, as well as oriental varieties of pig, were imported and crossed with the Irish Greyhound pig, whose large frame made it ideal for breeding. The result was a fast-growing pig that produced a large quantity of fat meat.⁹ Further improvements in pig breeding were made in the closing decades of the century with the establishment in 1887 of the Bacon Curers' Pig Improvement Association, a body including both British and Irish curers, which supplied quality boars free of charge to farmers.¹⁰ The favourite breed of the Bacon Curers' Pig Improvement Association was the Large White Ulster pig which, it was believed, would help Ireland to compete better in international bacon markets.¹¹ But though the Ulster was widely popularised in Munster it was challenged by other 'improved' breeds – the Yorkshire Whites, Tamworths, Howards and Lincolnshires – that provided a leaner bacon more in keeping with changing public tastes.¹² Top among these was the Yorkshire, reputedly one of the best lean bacon pigs, widely advertised in Irish newspapers, and promoted especially from the 1890s onwards.¹³ But there were different regional tastes in the matter of pig breeding. In west Limerick and north Cork, the Ulster pig maintained its popularity, a sardonic song composed sometime between 1890 and 1920 presenting the rearing of Yorkshire as involving too much work:

Oh a rún, a rún, what shall we do, for our credit is running down
The humour is gone from every man in country and in town.
When they go to a dance, a treat or a prance, or to practice some reels or jigs
Sure the lassies can't stay, they must hasten away to fatten those Yorkshire
pigs.¹⁴

With this focus on specialist breeding, there was a growing emphasis on feeding pigs in a way that would improve the quality and flavour of their meat, and from the 1880s onwards, those rearing pigs were advised to turn to more specialised care and feeding. Small producers were less able to afford these new methods and the Irish Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction complained as late as 1900 that throughout the country:

the impression prevails that any place is good enough for a pig, and old stables, coach-houses, and other disused buildings are requisitioned for swine-tending: many swine are consequently badly housed, and in other respects ill-attended to, hence they become liable to various derangements of the digestive and other vital organs.¹⁵

But larger farmers, and those in the Golden Vale dairying region in the hinterland of Limerick city, were particularly able to produce good pigs, since they could mix surplus milk with the feed. Other large producers made grain (either oats or barley or imported maize) a central part of the pig's diet.¹⁶

This breeding and feeding ensured that Limerick bacon was both a delicacy whose flavour recommended it to the great and powerful, and a cheap food that fed the poor. As one man put it, 'the whole of Limerick was fed out of the bacon factories.'¹⁷ Phillip O'Sullivan remembered how 'in the shop on Roches Street, my father would sell a few ton of offal every week, the offal would be the breast bones, eye bones...' along with 'tails, toes, and pig's head'.¹⁸ All this provided affordable meat to people with large families and little money:

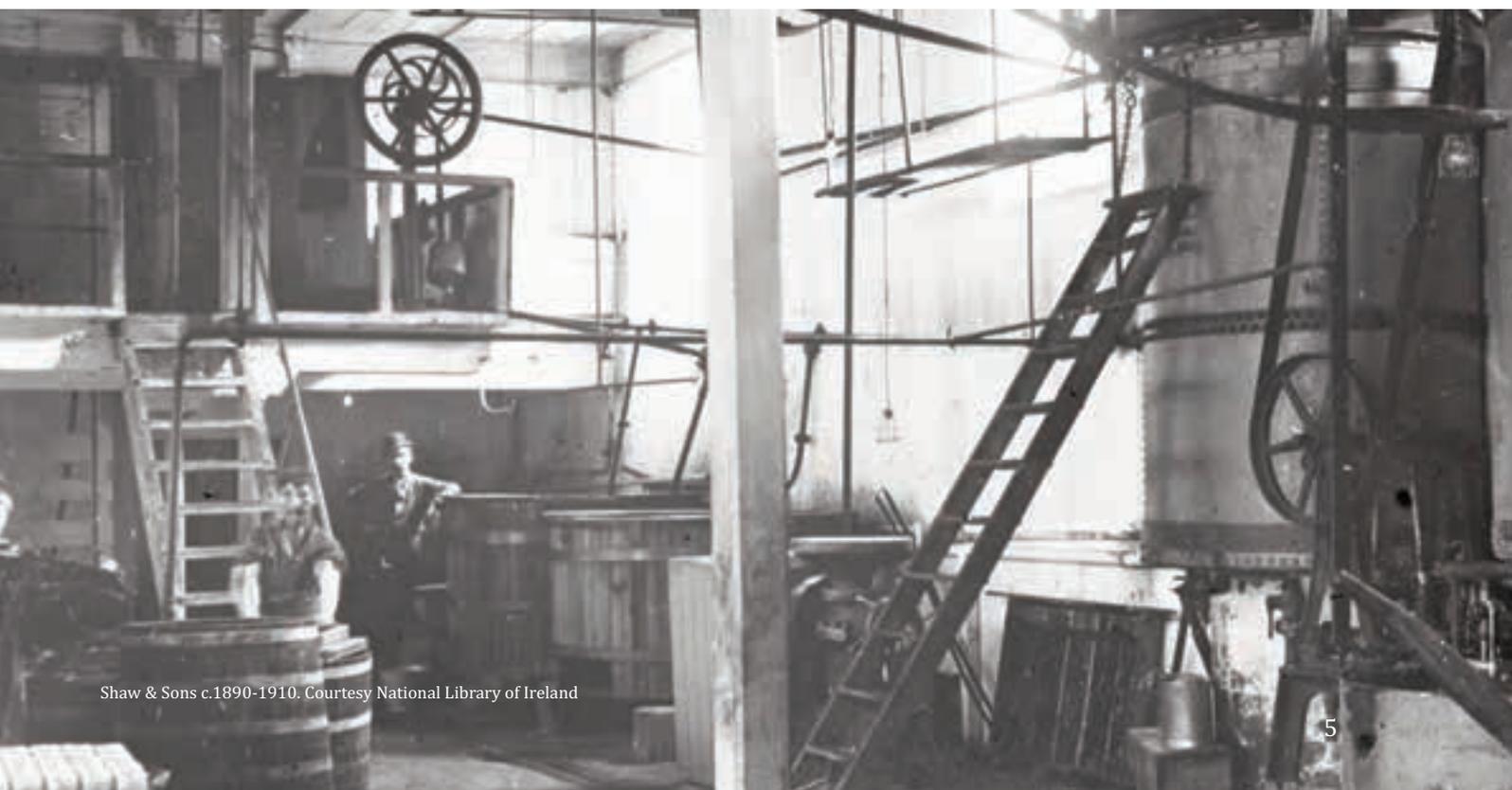
Backbones were dog-cheap. Sure the old people on barely any wages, they'd buy two or three of them and break them up – into a pot – pot is full then with bones... and the kids, that's what they were all reared on. Throw the carrots and parsnips into it, you'd make soup out of it. I used to love 'em...¹⁹

Such food was tasty as well as cheap: Susan O'Mara remembered how:

We'd all get loads out of a pig then...you'd loads out of a pig...they'd get all bones and breast bones, and this bones and that bones. Everything was used...everything was used...nothing went to waste...and you'd have packet and tripe then of a Sunday morning for your breakfast ... and that was the favourite breakfast – packet and tripe...²⁰

At the upper end of the market was the famous Limerick ham which was reputedly eaten by Queen Victoria, included in the provisions of the ill-fated *Titanic*, and in more recent times presented to visiting dignitaries like the U.S. President, Ronald Reagan, as well as being supplied to Áras an Uachtaráin.²¹ The city's bacon companies were intensely proud of their ham, as is clear from the souvenir booklet printed for O'Mara's centenary in 1939:

The English beef, the Welshman sheep,
The Scotchman haggis gnaws;
The Esquimo holds walrus fat
Between his greasy paws;
The Frenchman nibbles froggies' legs;
New Yorkers gobble clams,
But Irishmen who know what's what
Stick to O'Mara's Hams.²²





Pig carcasses hanging in shed, Shaw & Sons c.1890-1910. Courtesy National Library of Ireland

The curing process

It was believed that the secret of bacon curing in Limerick went back beyond the eleventh century and that the Vikings that settled in the city learned about curing from the natives and brought the skill back to Denmark with them. Whether this claim was true or not, there is no doubt that the advanced curing techniques developing in Europe and America from the eighteenth century onwards, were carried out in Limerick.

There were two main types of curing methods – ‘dry’ cure and ‘wet’ cure. Limerick ham (the long ham or hind leg of the pig) was made using the dry curing technique – also called the salt-and-stack technique, while Limerick bacon (sides, back or belly of the pig) used the ‘wet’ cure technique.

The production of old Limerick ham involved repeatedly rubbing the meat with dry salt, saltpetre and sugar and then leaving the meat to stand for over two months, usually from mid-October to December. The salt and other dry substances dissolved in the fluid exuding from the meat. Next the hams were carefully trimmed and suspended in a room for drying and smoking. For drying, a coke fire was brought in for at least seven hours, often overnight. For smoking, the fires were removed and a bed of straw and sawdust was lit in the room and allowed to smoulder for at least 10 to twelve hours.²³ While the method was similar in each factory they all had had their own recipes - O’ Mara’s recipe is still held by the family.

Bacon was ‘wet’ cured. This involved soaking raw meat in brine stacked in large tanks. The most famous wet cure was the ‘Wiltshire’ cure, originating in England but soon adapted in bacon factories in Ireland, Denmark and Holland.²⁴ A further stage in the development of this process was reached when the Irish Bacon Curers’ Association introduced the brine pump into the country. This allowed for the more even injection of brine (a solution of salt and water) into the meat during the curing process, producing a better flavour in the bacon.²⁵ By the 1880s a further development in curing occurred in Limerick when, due to a shortage of money on the part of some producers, short-cuts were made in the accepted curing process, so the meat was



SHAW'S

Limerick
Mild Cured
LOW FAT LOW SALT
TRADITIONAL
HAM



turned out in a 'half-cured' condition. The fortunate result was a 'sweeter' and less salty meat which created the unique sweet taste that made Limerick bacon famous.²⁶

At the National Exhibition in Dublin in 1882, medals were awarded to Shaw's and Matterson's, while O'Mara's won gold medals at the Munster-Connaught Exhibition of 1906, the Liverpool Grocers' Exhibition 1907, and the Belfast and Bradford Exhibitions of 1908.²⁷ Michael O'Mara attributed the success of the firm's exhibition success to the fact that it never changed the cure:

Those hams... were still the old dry-cured ham. They never saw brine or the injection, nothing like that at all. It used to take about three months to cure them. If you saw them... there's nothing like them. The only thing that would look slightly like them [is] Parma ham... but it would look much better because the Parma hams have all mold on them, you know, and these things were shiny – you could see your face in them. And our brand was built into the skin – O'Mara Limerick Ltd. And that's how Limerick got the name for ham: the hams were cured separately and we did that right up to the end.²⁸

By the late 1980s, however, although the name and reputation of Limerick ham and bacon lived on in memory, it was no longer produced. Breast bones, eye bones and packet and tripe had become a minority taste, the many bacon shops in the city were beginning to close with Frank Corr vividly recalling the changing economics that also hunted the pigs from various nooks and crannies of the city where they had been bred for almost two centuries, and the industrial modernisation that brought about the closure of every one of the bacon factories in Limerick over the course of two decades.²⁹ The closure of Clover Meats in 1972 was sealed when, six years later in 1978, part of the site was acquired for an expansion of the Limerick Prison facilities; Matterson's site, which had lain vacant after it ceased killing and transferred its canning operations to Moyross in 1972, was cleared in 1989 for the new Employment Exchange; and O'Mara's made way a decade later for a multi-storey car park.³⁰





*A wonderful image capturing
the famous O'Mara's Limerick
bacon advertisement*

Courtesy National Library of Ireland



Display Stand, Shaw & Sons, c.1890-1910
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

ENDNOTES

- 1 Frank Corr, 'City of Pigs', *Limerick Association Yearbook*, 1991, p. 23.
- 2 *Limerick Leader*, 21 August 1895.
- 3 *Freemans Journal*, 21 December 1911.
- 4 Eddie McManus, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 9 May 2016. Denny's closed its Limerick operation in the 1930s, and in 1950 Shaw's was bought by Clover Meats.
- 5 Arthur Young, *A tour in Ireland with observations of the present state of that kingdom* (London, 1789), pp 54, 140, 370; Johann Georg Kohl, *Travels in Ireland*, (London, 1844), p. 50.
- 6 Eddie McManus; Oaksie Fitzgerald, interviewed by Annette O'Byrne, 13 November 2015.
- 7 Mike Finn, 'Pigtown Tommy', *Iowa Review*, vol. 31, no. 2, Fall 2001, p. 101.
- 8 Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: the transformation of the agrarian economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge, 1996), pp 115-117.
- 9 Oisín Fitzgerald, "The Irish 'Greyhound' Pig: an extinct indigenous breed of Pig" in *History Ireland*, 13.4 (2005), pp. 20-23.
- 10 *Cork Examiner*, 24 October 1902; *Limerick Leader*, 24 March 2007.
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- 13 *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 November 1953.
- 14 We are indebted for this reference to Siobhan Ní Chonaráin, Riarathóir, Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann.
- 15 Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, *Report of proceedings under the Diseases of Animals Acts for the year 1900* (London, 1901), p. 14.
- 16 *Limerick Leader*, 25 May 1895.
- 17 Joe Hayes, interviewed by Maura Cronin, 24 November 2015.
- 18 Phillip O'Sullivan, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 13 July 2016.
- 19 Joe Joyce, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 23 May 2016.
- 20 Susan O'Mara, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 8 May 2016.
- 21 Eddie McManus.
- 22 Extracted from a souvenir booklet of O'Mara's centenary dinner, Savoy restaurant, Limerick, 11 Feb 1939. Any lack of political correctness can be explained by its dating from the 1930s. Extracted from Humphry's Family Tree; <http://humphrysfamilytree.com/OMara/bacon.co.html>
- 23 Frank Gerrard, *Sausage and Small Goods Production* (London, 1951) p. 82.
- 24 Alan Davidson, *Oxford Companion to Food* (Oxford, 1999) p. 171.
- 25 Alan Vamen and Jane P. Sutherland, *Meat and Meat Produce: Technology, Chemistry and Microbiology* (London, 1995) p. 12; Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: the impact of the industrial revolution on the Irish Industry, 1801-1922* (London, 2009) p.57; *Limerick Leader*, 26 August 1950; Martin Mac Con Iomaire, 'The Pig in Irish Cuisine past and present', in H. Walker (ed.) *The Fat of the Land: Proceedings of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery 2002*, (Bristol: Footwork), pp. 207-215.
- 27 Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire, 'The Pig in Irish Cuisine and Culture', *M/C Journal*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2010, online <http://journal.media-culture.org.au/index.php/mcjournal/article/view/296>.
- 28 *Freeman's Journal*, 25 October 1882, 19 January 1883, 23 November 1907, 6 March 1908, 21 December 1911.
- 29 Michael O'Mara, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 9 May 2016.
- 30 Frank Corr, 'City of Pigs', *Limerick Association Yearbook*, 1991, p. 23.
- 31 *Cork Examiner*, 8 November 1975, 15 February 1978; *Limerick Leader*, 14 August 1989; *Irish Press*, 27 May 1986.



CHAPTER 1
THE RISE OF THE LIMERICK
BACON INDUSTRY



Making hay in county Limerick c.1900

Courtesy Sharon Slater and David Ludlow

Group of pork butchers probably outside O' Mara's Bacon factory where Jack Walsh worked. Note the aprons on the butchers and the hats

Courtesy Dinny Keogh (via Gerry O'Sullivan)



CHAPTER 1

THE RISE OF THE LIMERICK BACON INDUSTRY

The dominance of agriculture

Because of the dominance of agriculture in the Irish economy, the processing of foodstuffs had become vitally important by the end of the eighteenth century – especially corn milling, baking, biscuit making and the production of salt meat.¹ The provisioning of the British navy during the Napoleonic wars provided major markets for Irish food. Cork exported large quantities of processed foods between 1780 and 1820 for military and naval consumption.² Limerick salt pork was exported to destinations as varied as London, Liverpool and Jamaica.³ Limerick's growing prominence in the bacon trade at this time was due in part to its fertile hinterland, which ensured that it had a constant supply of pigs fattened on the residue from dairying and tillage farming – a reality that continued for a century and a half, with pigs streaming into the city from 'north Cork, west Limerick and all south Tipperary, up to north Tipperary and then into Clare.'⁴

Even when peace returned from 1815 onwards, outside demand for Irish foodstuffs increased as the urban population in Britain continued to grow, and some interesting changes in the pattern of exports began to appear. From the early 1820s onwards, butter, beef and pork were gradually displaced by bacon in the export table. For instance, while the amount of pork exported through Limerick port was halved (from 12,369 barrels to 6,962) between 1820 and 1829, the export of bacon for the same years almost quadrupled (from 12,672 to 46,160 cwts.) So important had the trade become by the 1830s that a number of merchants in the city equipped the so-called 'Limerick Liners', small ships plying between Limerick and London for the transport of hams for the London market, the ham reputedly travelling in cabins to ensure its safe arrival.⁵ Improvements in the transport network by land and sea increasingly benefitted Limerick's bacon trade, its port continuing to facilitate the export of both live pigs and finished bacon. Beginning in 1848, Limerick became the centre of a network of railways radiating out towards Waterford and Dublin (1848), Clare (1859), Cork (1862), Tipperary (1863) and Kerry (1867) – enabling the easy transfer of live pigs to the city factories and the outward transport of finished bacon to the ports of Cork and Waterford.⁶



'One of the butchers'. Meat processing in Shaw & Sons. c.1890-1910. Courtesy National Library of Ireland



The hanging shed in Shaw and Sons, c.1890-1910
 Courtesy National Library of Ireland

The beginning of a factory system

This combination of fertile hinterland and improved transport together explain why bacon curing in Munster cities was first organised on a factory basis in the 1820s and 30s and why it attracted entrepreneurs from outside the island. The Lunham Brothers of Berwick-upon-Tweed established a factory in Cork in the 1830s, while Henry Denny entered a partnership with a long-established general merchant in Waterford city in 1820 and ten years later set up his own bacon curing business there.⁷ Limerick's establishment of factory-based bacon production had begun even earlier when the Chamber of Commerce, newly established in 1807, welcomed a number of entrepreneurs in different areas of manufacture ranging from lace to bacon, and who left their mark on the economy of the city. These entrepreneurs include Peter Tait who, eleven years after arriving in Limerick in 1844, established the great clothing business that only closed its doors in the 1970s, and Charles Walker who established the manufacture of Limerick lace on a commercial footing in 1829.⁸ Two of the most influential bacon entrepreneurs were John Russell and Joseph Matterson, both from Cumberland, who entered a partnership as bacon provision merchants in Roches Street in 1816.⁹ By 1820 Matterson seems to have established himself as a sole trader, owning and operating factories in both Limerick and Waterford, with thousands of pigs slaughtered weekly. The business survived for over 150 years until its closure in the 1980s. William John Shaw, whose family originated in Co. Down, established his factory in 1831. The business was unnamed on the 1840 Ordnance Survey map but by the 1870 Ordnance Survey map it had acquired the title of Garryowen Provision Stores.¹⁰ This business lasted until 1943 when it was taken over by Clover Meats of Waterford.¹¹ Joseph O'Mara came to Limerick from around Toomevara in County Tipperary in the early nineteenth century – possibly the 1820s although we do not have the exact date – and set up a bacon provision store in his house on Mungret Street in 1839.¹² In 1840 he proceeded to set up a factory on Roche's Street, the business lasting until 1986.¹³ Denny's were a much later arrival: originally established in Waterford, they opened their Limerick factory at Cathedral Place in 1872, continuing in business until the 1930s.¹⁴



Chilling Plant, Shaw & Sons, c.1890-1910
Courtesy National Library of Ireland

A. G. INERNEY



Pigs in Parnell Street on their way to the factory, c.1900

Courtesy Sharon Slater and David Ludlow





Sausage Department, Shaw & Sons, c.1890-1910. Courtesy National Library of Ireland

The Great Famine (1845-1850) hit the country around a quarter century after the establishment of the first bacon factory in the city, but though the human misery that it wreaked on Limerick city is in no doubt, its effects on the industry are difficult to calculate.¹⁵ One report in the *Cork Examiner* in 1853 attributed the severe decline in the number of pigs exported (from 400,000 in 1847 to 110,000 in 1851) to the near annihilation of the cottier class who before the famine had fattened pigs to pay the rent.¹⁶ Despite this decline the export trade was the lifeblood of bacon curing in Limerick and other Munster centres, from the 1850s onwards. While Waterford exports dominated the trade to London around mid-century, Limerick and Belfast supplied Lancashire and the North of England.¹⁷ But Limerick bacon had to face the serious matter of foreign competition. In this they were not alone: from the late 1870s onwards European agricultural products were being undercut by those of North and South America, Australia and New Zealand as they were more easily transported to Britain and other European markets following the introduction of reefer ships (refrigerated ships) in the 1870s.¹⁸ Irish bacon was therefore being undermined by the cheap 'hard tack' American bacon that was cornering the working class market both at home in Ireland and in Britain.¹⁹ At the same time, Germany's imposition of tariffs on imported bacon forced Denmark to direct its exports towards Britain so that by the 1890s Danish bacon was undercutting Irish bacon in Britain by as much as £3 per ton, and a decade later Denmark, Holland and Poland between them provided ninety per cent of the bacon on the British market.²⁰

Expansion and competition

In spite of these problems, however, Limerick grew to be the largest bacon curing and exportation centre in Ireland, its output by 1900 equalling that of Waterford and Cork combined, and the last two decades of the nineteenth century saw increased entrepreneurship in the industry.²¹ Foreign markets were cultivated and offices and branch factories of Limerick firms were established elsewhere in Ireland, Britain and further afield. By 1898 Matterson's had customers in England,



*The Sorting Hall
in Shaw & Sons,
c.1890-1910*

Courtesy National Library of Ireland





The Managing Directors of Matterson's. Courtesy Limerick Diocesan Archives

Wales, Scotland, France, Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Egypt, South Africa, India, China and North and South America.²² Henry Denny's youngest son, Edward, set up Edward Denny & Co. in London and began expanding internationally, establishing operations in Germany, Denmark and the United States between 1885 and 1900. By the time he died in 1905²³, Edward Denny was one of the most powerful men in the international meat industry.²⁴

✓ We regret to learn that on Saturday last the death took place, after a short illness, of Mr. E. M. Denny, of Chiddingstone Castle, Kent (head of the well-known firm of Messrs. H. Denny & Sons, of London, Waterford, Cork, and Limerick). Mr. Denny, who had reached a ripe old age, was stopping at Bexhill in Sussex, where his demise occurred. His funeral took place on Tuesday, and the entire works at all places above mentioned were closed as a mark of respect to his memory.

PAY PERIOD	DEPT	EMPLOYEE NO	NAME				NETT PAY	BASIC PAY	BONUS PAY	+ TAX ADJUST
05	057	167	M O SULLIVAN				28.94	22.68	0.00	0
TAX CODE	TAX FREE PAY	BASIC RATE	SERVICE RATE	CUM 3% BONUS	BASIC HOURS	ROUNDING LOAN	OVERTIME PAY	SICK PAY	- TAX ADJUST	
4B	26.04	.5742	.0188	7.13	39.50	0.00	11.20	0.00	0	
WEEK NO	OVERTIME 1/2	OVERTIME 1	OVERTIME 2	OVERTIME ACTUAL HOURS	OVERTIME PAYABLE HRS	PAYMENT	SERVICE PAY	HOLIDAY PAY	GROSS	
48	3.00	0.00	7.50	10.50	19.50	28.94	0.75	0.00	34	

O'Mara's, Tsarist Russia and Romania

O'Mara's opened an office in London in 1893 and a decade later purchased Donnelly's factory on Dublin's Cork Street, establishing agencies throughout Britain, France, Belgium, Canada, the United States and South Africa.²⁵ Their export business had already been expanding from 1891 onwards when a team of local pork butchers and bricklayers, on O'Mara's own initiative, travelled to Tsarist Russia to help set up the Russian Bacon Company at Griozza in the Tamboff region.²⁶ The timing and the choice of site was shrewd, at least for the shareholders in the new company: Tamboff's volume of grain growing promised a plentiful supply of pig-feed, labour there was cheap, and should the proposed bacon trade succeed, it looked likely to provide major competition to American bacon on the British market.²⁷ At its inception the company's directorship consisted of three London-based and two Irish businessmen – James O'Mara and William Abraham, MP for County Limerick: but by 1899, O'Mara's had acquired the rights to the company which they continued to lease from by the Tsarist government until the revolution of 1917. The advancement of the O'Mara enterprise continued into the early twentieth century. In 1902 James O'Mara travelled to Romania to investigate opening a factory there, attracted (as in Russia) by the low cost of salt and the availability of both cheap labour and maize for feeding pigs, while two men from the Limerick factory were sent to Romania to train the new workforce.²⁸ In 1906 the determined marketing approach of the firm was evident in its acquisition of a packing house in Palmerston, Ontario, from where tinned goods were regularly shipped to Calcutta.²⁹

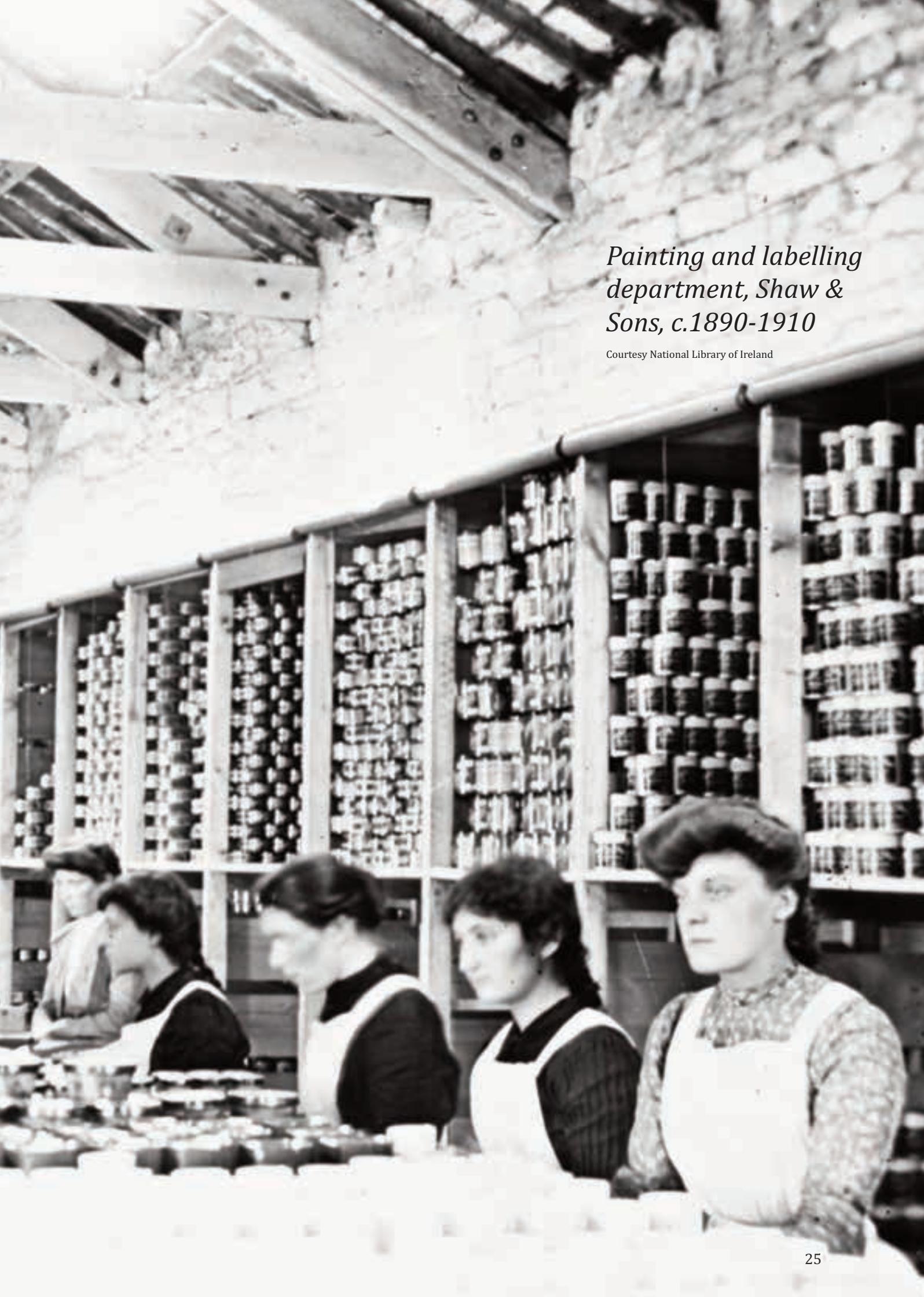
The Limerick bacon industry before 1914

The two decades before World War I were good for Limerick bacon. Despite the undercutting by Danish and other European bacon, the Irish product was actually doing very well on the British market. This was partly due to the reduction of competition from American bacon because its importation into Britain decreased as bacon consumption in the United States itself increased with rising population and falling food prices.³⁰ It was also due to Limerick bacon firms' success in modernising production methods and machinery and diversifying their range of products. As early as the mid-1860s an English visitor to Matterson's had described the factory as 'one of the first of its kind in Ireland' and three decades later in the 1890s, Matterson's claimed to use the most modern and hygienic methods and, with an eye on the future, diversified into canning and bottling meats and meat products for the home and export market.³¹ Later they moved into canning peas which were grown on the south side of the city and out towards Killonan.³² Similar diversification was evident in Shaw's: in 1906 a representative of the *Irish Independent* who visited the plant gave an enthusiastic description of the range of products – 'canned meats of all varieties, from Limerick bacon and eggs to prawns, aspic jelly, sausages, and puddings of best quality' – as well as the advanced methods of cooking and canning the meat and soldering the cans, the recycling of grease, and the use of colour-coded (and Irish-made) labels for ease of identification when on the shop shelves.³³ O'Mara's factory had also modernised: by 1911 it had installed a gas-fired refrigeration plant and the advancements in its killing and processing lines attracted a deputation from the Paris municipal council anxious to observe the factory's operations at first hand so as to 'apply such modern methods of slaughter to abattoirs to be erected in France.'³⁴ In fact, in 1912 O'Mara's was described in the *Irish Times* as 'the most important bacon factory in the British Isles.'³⁵

TAXABLE PAYMENTS	GROSS PAY TO DATE	SICK FUND BALANCE	SICK FUND AMOUNT	DEDUCTION 4 BALANCE	DEDUCTION 4 AMOUNT	V.H.I.	HOSPITAL FUND	* NON TAXABLE ADJUSTMENTS	
0.00	1442.61	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
TAXABLE PAYMENTS	TAX PAID TO DATE	SAVINGS BALANCE	SAVINGS AMOUNT	PENSION BALANCE	PENSION AMOUNT	DEDUCTION 8 AMOUNT	SOCIAL CLUB	- NON TAXABLE ADJUSTMENTS	
0.00	50.45	9.00	1.00	2.00	0.50	0.05	0.05	0.00	
GROSS PAY	REF UND	TAX DUE	DEDUCTION 3 BALANCE	DEDUCTION 3 AMOUNT	IRISH LIFE BALANCE	IRISH LIFE AMOUNT	UNION DUES	SOCIAL WELFARE	TOTAL DEDUCTIONS
4.63		2.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.63	1.21	3.44

A wage slip displaying all employee details, including a department number and employee number.
Courtesy Jerry O'Sullivan, for Michael O'Sullivan.





*Painting and labelling
department, Shaw &
Sons, c.1890-1910*

Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Bacon curers and merchants

These four big firms of Matterson’s, Shaw’s, O’Mara’s, and Denny’s dominated Limerick bacon production for almost 180 years – and maintained their businesses in the same locations over that entire period, largely because from 1848 onwards the nearness of the railway station facilitated the transport of pigs inward and finished bacon outwards. But there were several smaller bacon producers that came and went over the same period – names like McDonnell, Nash, O’Keeffe, Sugrue, Spain, Kelly, Russell, Hanrahan and Lynch.³⁶

Figure 1. Location of Bacon Factories in Limerick



Source: Ordnance Survey, 1900, 1:5000 (Courtesy of John Elliot)

The Primary Valuation of Tenements recorded the presence of a number of bacon related activities in the mid-1850s (Table 1).³⁷ These were concentrated around Roche’s Street, Cathedral Place (Ramper’s Row) and Mulgrave Street.³⁸

Table 1. Bacon Related Activities in the Primary Valuation

Name	Location	Rateable Valuation	Description
Leslie Acheston	17 Roche’s Street	£48	Bacon stores
Joseph Matterson	24 Roche’s Street	£96	Bacon stores, house, offices & yard
Maurice Lee	51 Roche’s Street	£15	Butcher and bacon store
Timothy O’ Brien	3 Ramper’s Row	£34	Pig market
John Russell	2 Old Windmill Street	£200	Bacon stores and tanyard
John Sheehy	6 Mass Lane	£20	Bacon store and yard
Frances P. Russell	4 Island Lane	£44	Pig market and slaughter house
John Russell	84 Park	£104	Corn, bacon stores and yard

The trade directories of the time also make reference to bacon curers, bacon merchants, provision curers and provision merchants. Eight distinct bacon manufacturers/ curers were identified. The earliest references were to Matterson & Sons and Stephen Sullivan on Roches Street, Denny & Sons on Upper William Street and Thompsons on the Roxborough Road.³⁹

Table 2. Bacon Curer/Manufacturers 1879-1920 (Limerick City Trade Directories)⁴⁰

Name	Location	Years
Matterson & Sons	Roche's Street	1879, 1886, 1908, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918
Denny & Sons	Upper William Street	1879
	Mulgrave Street	1886, 1908, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920
Stephen Sullivan	Roche's Street	1879
Thompson	Rathbane Cottage, Roxborough Road	1879
W. J. Shaw & Sons	Mulgrave Street	1880, 1884
O Mara Ltd.	Roche's Street	1912, 1913, 1914, 1918
O Brien	Roche's Street	1908
Lynch & Spain	40 Roche's Street	1912, 1913, 1914, 1918, 1928

The number of bacon curers recorded in the censuses of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were far greater.⁴¹ In 1881, for example, 198 people (109 males and eighty-nine females) were recorded as provision curers/dealers. The censuses, however, do not record the number of businesses involved or where they were located in the city.

Table 3. Provision Dealers/Curers 1871 – 1911 (Census of Population)

Year	Description	Males	Females	Total
1871	Provision/Curer, Dealer ⁴²	43	27	70
1881	Provision/Curer, Dealer	48	30	78
1891	Provision/Curer, Dealer	109	89	198
1901	Provision/Curer, Dealer	29	84	113
1911	Provision/Curer, Dealer	46	106	152

References to bacon and provision merchants in the trade directories were more numerous. It is, however difficult to establish whether those listed were engaged in the entire bacon process from killing to curing, or whether they simply dealt in provisions on a wholesale or retail basis. Many of these were also classified as bacon manufacturers in the trade directories.

Table 4. Bacon Merchants 1879-1920 (Limerick City Trade Directories)

Name	Year	Street
Clancy, John	1875	West Watergate
Denny Messrs.	1875, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915	Mulgrave Street
Shaw W.J. & Sons	1875, 1891, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920, 1913	Mulgrave Street Garryowen Bacon Factory
Longbottom, John	1879	Upper Cornwallis Street
Matterson J. & Sons	1880, 1884, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920	Roche's Street
Denny Henry & Sons	1891	27 Upper William Street
Hogan Mrs.	1891	24 Upper William Street
O'Halloran, Michael	1891	28 High Street
O'Mara Ltd.	1891, 1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918	Roche's Street
Looney & Co.	1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920	10 Gerald Griffin Street Upper
Lynch & Spain	1912, 1913, 1914, 1915, 1918, 1920	40 Roche's Street
Denny Henry & Sons Ltd.	1914, 1918, 1920	Mulgrave Street
Neazor	1915, 1918, 1920	57 William Street Upper
O'Connor, Daniel	1915, 1918, 1920	57 William Street Upper
Prendergast, Mary	1915, 1918, 1920	33 Wickham Street
Rea O. G.	1915, 1918, 1920	47 William Street Upper

Provision merchants were more prolific, peaking in the second decade of the twentieth century (Figure 1). Similar to the bacon merchants, the majority were found in close proximity to the bacon factories, on Roche's Street, Upper William Street, Mulgrave Street, Mungret Street, Nicholas Street, Gerald Griffin Street (Cornwallis Street), Wickham Street and Thomas Street (Table 3).

Figure 1. Provision Merchants 1840-1920 (Limerick City Trade Directories)

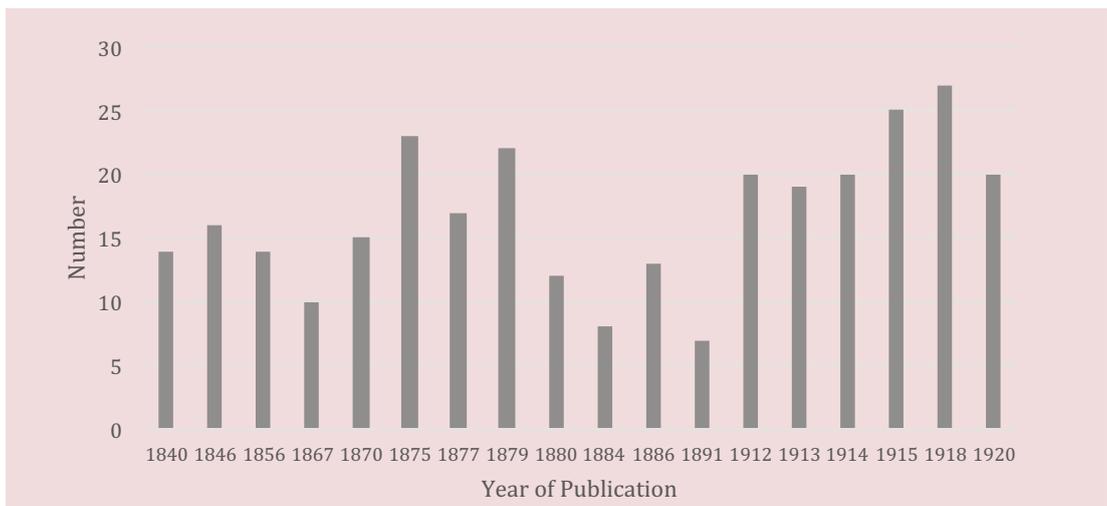


Table 5. Location of Provision Merchants 1840-1920 (Limerick City Trade Directories)

Street	1840	1846	1856	1867	1875	1879	1886	1912	1915	1918	1920
Thomas Street		1	1		1	1					
Wickham Street			2		3	2			1	1	1
Cornwallis Street					1		1	1	1	1	1
Nicholas Street					1			1	3	4	
Mungret Street	1			2	3	2		1	2	2	2
Mulgrave Street	1			1			1	2	2	2	2
William Street		3	2	3		3	1	1	1	1	1
Georges Street						1	2	5	3	3	2
Roche's Street	2	3	2	3	7	7	6	6	5	5	5

Layout of the factory

Physical Structure

In terms of physical structure, many of the factories were described as possessing similar characteristics. Goad's insurance maps of 1897 provide an insight into the layout of these factories. J. Matterson and Sons, on Roches Street (Figure 2) contained 'abattoirs, bath room, branding stove, chill rooms, condenser tank, dry houses, lard chill room, lard refinery, lard store, offices, piggeries, refrigerating machinery, salt store, sausage factory, sausage skin factory, smoke houses, tanks, tinned meat, tin room.'⁴³ Similarly W. J. Shaw and Sons, on Mulgrave Street (Figure 3) contained a 'baling shed, carpenter, chills rooms, economiser, furnaces, gut house, two ham lofts, hanging shed, hose reel, lard drying, offices, piggeries, two pumps, railway siding, refrigerating machinery, sausage factory and smithy'.⁴⁴ A similar layout was found in O Mara and Sons and Denny and Sons (Figure 4).



A 1949 snippet of a Roches Street Trade Directory

Lynch and Spain Irish Ham and Bacon advert. Courtesy Limerick Museum

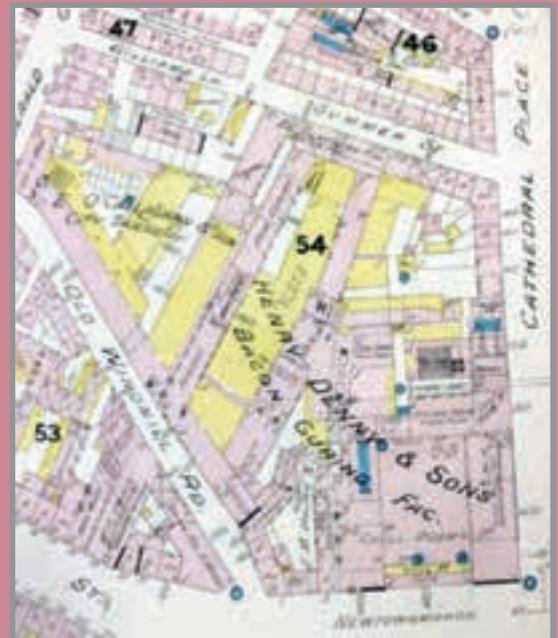
Figure 2. J. Matterson & Sons Roches Street, 1897 (Goad)⁴⁵



Figure 3. W.J. Shaw & Sons, Mulgrave Street, 1897 (Goad)⁴⁶



Figure 4. Henry Denny & Sons, Cathedral Place, 1897 (Goad)⁴⁶



A few interviewees were able to recall more contemporary features of the factories. One interviewee remembered the walls of O'Mara's factory as being covered by 'all white tiles' and that the 'floor had to be cleaned down into gullies' which led into the sewerage.⁴⁷ It was 'like a big old shed,' recalled Marie Madigan, with all the men working on the lower level carrying the bacon and hams over their shoulders.⁴⁸ The offices were much more comfortable as work places. In Shaw's at least, while they were described as 'old fashioned, no computers, nothing like that... [with] wooden desks which were there since the factory was built,' they were also 'well heated'.⁴⁹

The main problem was that the factories were located in the city centre and therefore lacked the space needed for expansion and modernisation. The close proximity of other industrial



P60 Matterson's Papers, Limerick Archives



Matterson's female staff members in the 1970s.
Courtesy *Limerick Chronicle*



O'Mara's bacon factory. Courtesy Tony Punch

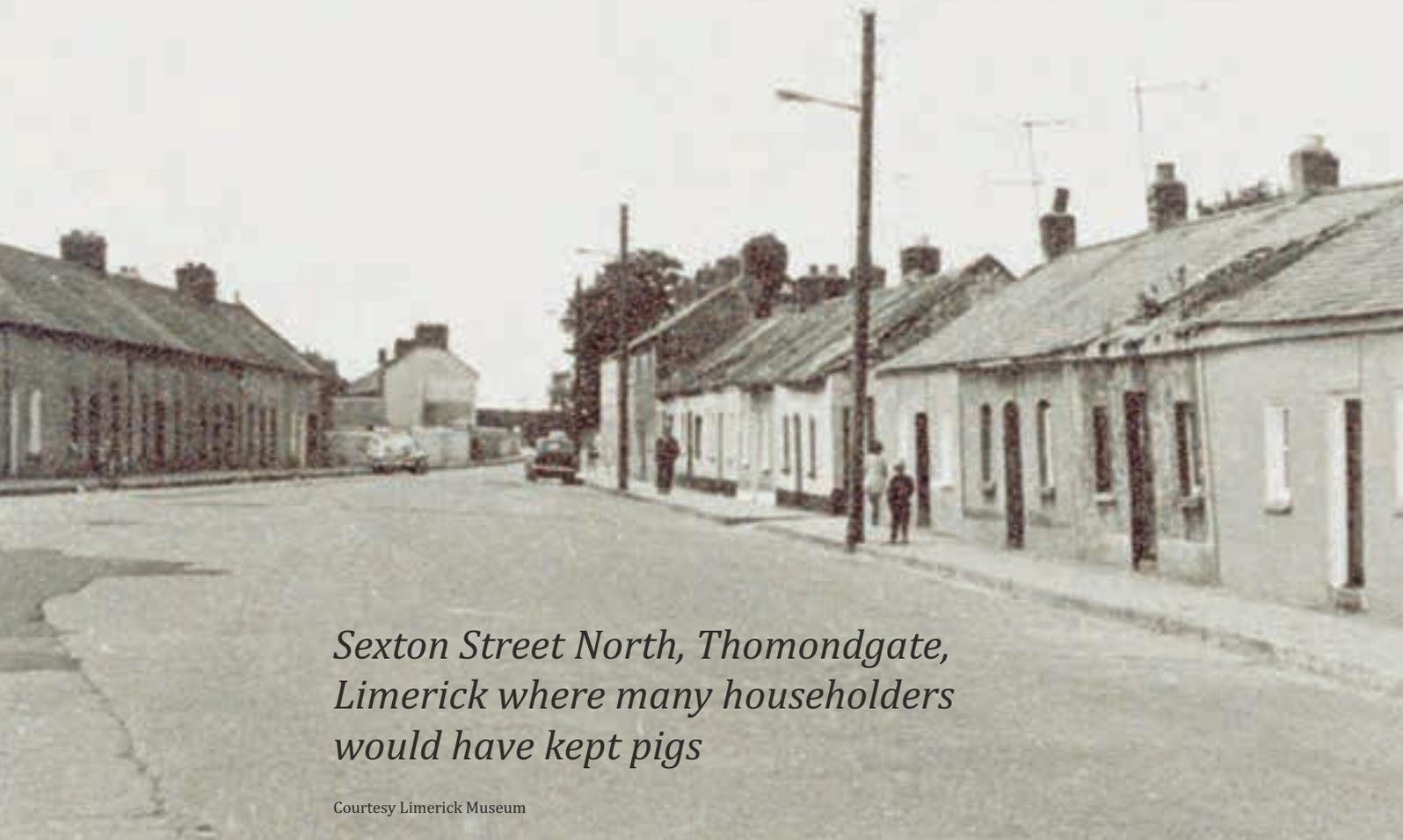
outlets together with the labyrinth of congested streets and lanes meant that space for expansion was at a premium.⁵⁰ It would have been easier to relocate to the outskirts of the city, however that would have cost the factories large amounts of money.

The location of the factories

Health issues

Due to their city centre locations, the safe removal of animal waste and carcasses from the factories was a key issue in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Urban health was a growing concern and local authorities attempted to apply national regulations in order to reduce disease and improve living conditions.⁵¹ The Towns Improvement Clauses Act, 1847, stipulated how waste material and meat not suitable for human consumption were to be removed and deposited.⁵² Prior to this legislation, obnoxious waste had been deposited on the street until heavy rainfall washed it away. The Nuisance Removal Acts of 1855, 1860 and 1863 tried to enforce regulations in this area, but the factories, while generally compliant with legislation, were casual enough in their attitude to the disposal of waste.⁵³ As late as August 1911, people in the city wrote to Limerick Corporation requesting that factories be ordered to remove the offal from animals early in the morning so as to avoid the smells and offensive sight of such a task.⁵⁴ In response, Matterson's send a curt response to the Corporation, pointing out while they planned to carry out the operation earlier in the day, carting offal 'cannot be considered carting roses or other delicious compounds through the city... It is one of those things which the public have to be forbearing about.'⁵⁵

The presence of slaughter houses, piggeries and knacker yards was also causing concern. The Primary Valuation identified a number of slaughter houses on Cattle Market Lane, Curry's Lane, Hackett's Lane (off Lower William Street), Island Lane and Stable Lane (off Ahern's Bow) in 1850. The Nuisance Removal Acts of 1855, 1860 and 1863 were aimed at relieving the insanitary conditions that could be caused by activities of these businesses. These acts required all slaughter houses and knacker yards to obtain a license and be registered. They stipulated that these premises should be kept in a clean and proper state and that all filth should be removed at least every twenty-four hours. Breaches of the legislation would result in a penalty of £5



*Sexton Street North, Thomondgate,
Limerick where many householders
would have kept pigs*

Courtesy Limerick Museum

which would be applied daily until the situation was rectified. In order to ensure these rules were kept, inspectors were sent to examine the areas and report any nuisances that were brought to their attention.⁵⁶

Public Health Acts also addressed the issues of animals being kept in close proximity to living quarters and the cleaning up of the street.⁵⁷ More specifically the Sanitary (Veterinary Inspectors) Order in 1909,⁵⁸ the Fresh Meat Bill in 1929⁵⁹ and the Pigs and Bacon Act of 1935⁶⁰ all contributed to general improvements in living conditions, pig breeding, slaughtering and the selling of meat for human consumption. Though the number of small slaughter houses had fallen considerably by the twentieth century, some still continued to operate into the early 1970s. Concentrated mostly around Locke Quay, Thomondgate, Broad Street and Denmark Street, their function was largely taken over by the Limerick Municipal Meat Plant from 1972 onwards. Such establishments were concerned mainly with the killing of cattle and sheep, however, and the killing of pigs was mostly confined to the bacon factories.⁶¹

The keeping of pigs

There had always been a tradition in Limerick of keeping pigs in the 'back yard' of private houses and selling them on from here. This tradition survived into the twentieth century:

There was hardly ... a house [without pigs in the back]...But once youyou got beyond the canal or beyond the river here [near the City Hall], from that all out, all down...nearly all the houses had the pigs in the back... down the Island Field, all out Thomondgate, everywhere...the older houses now – not the newer ones. The ones that would have been built from the fifties on, I'd say, discontinued that practice though they used to collect the [swill].⁶²

Eddie McManus remembered how:

every lane had a couple of pigs...they used to call it "pay the rent" ... my aunt's husband was rearing – he had six. All the laneways like Donovan's Lane now, a couple of people used to rear pigs down there ... all the people now around Park used to rear pigs.⁶³



Ollie O'Brien 'kept pigs all his life' over one hundred at a time behind his house in Mulgrave Street.⁶⁴ This keeping of pigs in domestic situations was, however, becoming a cause of concern in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At Caledonia Place, in 1911, a complaint to the Public Health Committee was made against a Mrs. Hickey who kept three pigs in the back yard of her house (a size of 21ft by 14ft). While the yard was kept clean, the space was considered too confined for the animals.⁶⁵ Six months later another complaint was made about Mrs. Hickey's residence where the pigs were causing a nuisance to neighbours. The children living next door to the residence were frequently sick and the doctor commented on how the presence of pigs might be the cause of the illnesses. Another complaint was made against Mrs. Donohoe on Sexton Street in 1911. She had a small yard (16ft by 20ft) in which she kept pigs, a donkey, geese, ducks, hens and a couple of dogs.⁶⁶ The smell from the bones and refuse in the yard attracted other dogs. The letter also reported that a small lake of filth had formed. On wet days, steam and smells arose from the heap and the smell was unbearable.

Conclusion

Over the course of a century Limerick's bacon industry had grown from small beginnings to large-scale production. The four factories advanced the city's economy and reputation in several ways: they provided large-scale employment in the killing and curing process; they provided the foundation for a whole range of associated activities ranging from the selling and buying of pigs to the retailing of bacon; they boosted the income of the pig producers of the surrounding counties; and they put Limerick on the map internationally. The social and health issues that accompanied the killing and processing of meat in the centre of the city were indeed serious, but in the context of the time the factories were considered to be models of efficiency and modernity. Behind the success of the Limerick bacon industry lay the entrepreneurial spirit of their founders and the business drive of those who managed them in the later decades of the nineteenth century. But other forces also drove the factories, forces which were seldom mentioned in the newspapers or official documents of the time – the sweat and skill of those who worked in the bacon industry, both on the factory floor and in the many related occupations outside the factory gate.

ENDNOTES

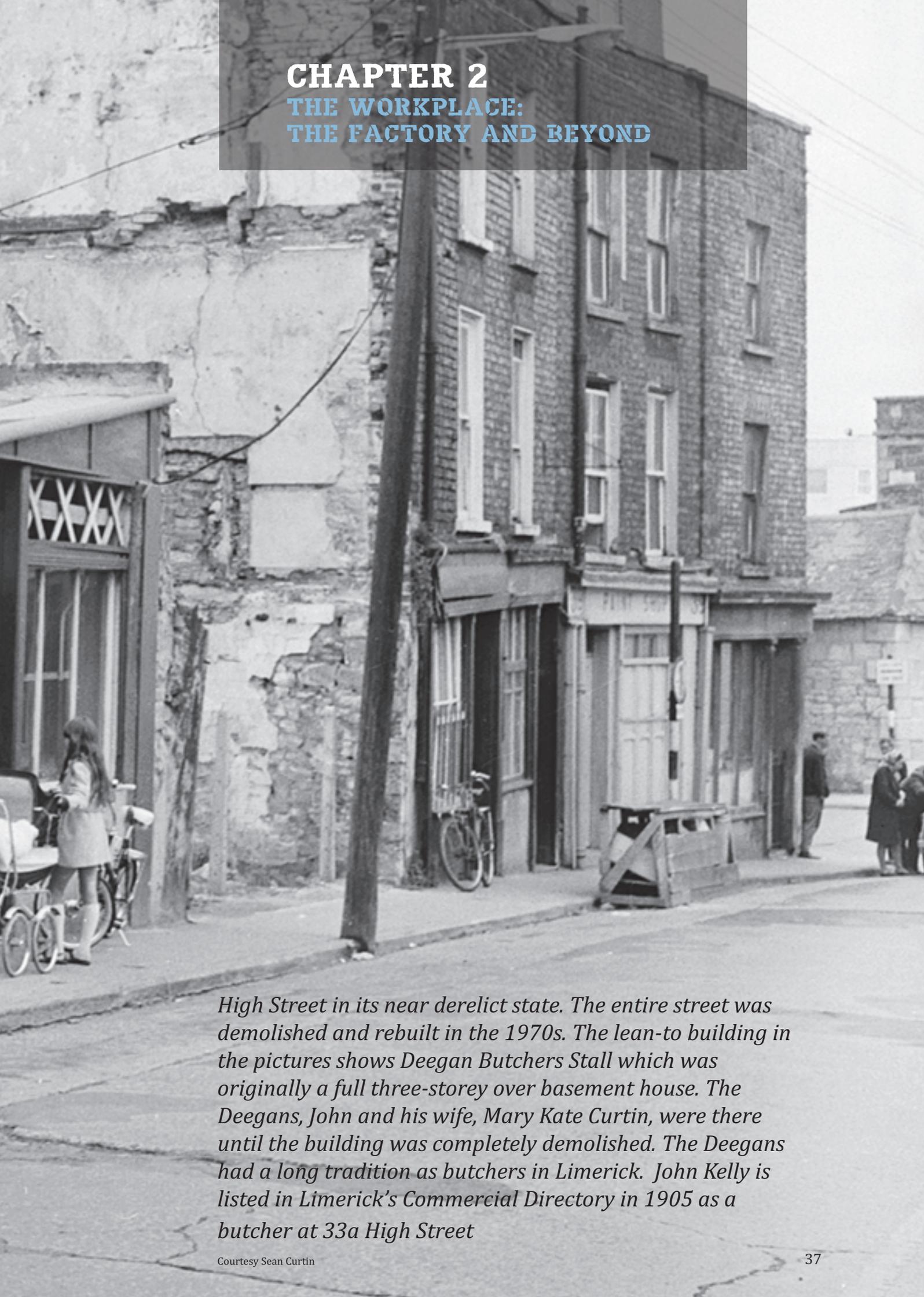
- 1 Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 55.
- 2 Cronin, Maura, 'From the "Flat o' the City" to the top of the hill: Cork since 1700' in Howard B. Clarke (ed.), *Irish Cities* (Cork, 1995).
- 3 *Limerick Chronicle*, 29 January, 26 October 1814. We are indebted to Dr Ursula Callaghan for this reference.
- 4 Ronnie Long, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 28 April 2016; *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 November 1964.
- 5 *Limerick Leader*, 14 April 1934.
- 6 Joe Coleman, 'Limerick as a Railway Centre', <http://www.irrs.ie/Journal%20182/182%20Limerick.htm>, Accessed 16 April 2016.
- 7 The Denny brand survived even when Kerry Foods bought out the Irish operation in 1982. Denny, 'History of Denny' (<http://www.homeis.ie/About-Denny/History-of-Denny.aspx>); Kerryman, 20 June 2012.
- 8 Jim Kemmy, 'The Tait's in Limerick and Melbourne', *Old Limerick Journal*, no. 23, 1988, pp 82-7; *Limerick Leader*, 8 September 2014; Matthew Potter, *Amazing Lace: A History of the Limerick Lace Industry* (Limerick, 2014).
- 9 John Russell opened a bacon curing establishment in 1826 in Newtown Mahon. It was still in operation in 1875. (*Limerick Reporter* and *Tipperary Vindicator*, 11 May 1875)
- 10 Eamon O'Flaherty, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, No.21, Limerick (Dublin, 2010) p. 36.
- 11 <http://www.limerickchamber.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Historical-Context.pdf>.
- 12 Frank Prendergast, 'The decline of traditional Limerick industries' in Lee and Jacobs, *Made in Limerick* (Limerick 2003), vol. i, p. 6.
- 13 Patricia Lavelle's notes on James O'Mara. <http://humphrysfamilytree.com/OMara/james.senior.html>. Eamon O'Flaherty, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, No.21, Limerick (Dublin, 2010) p. 36.
- 14 *Bassett's Limerick City Directory, 1879*.
- 15 Kevin Hannan, 'The famine in Limerick', *Old Limerick Journal*, no. 32, 1995, pp 21-4.
- 16 *Cork Examiner*, 19 September 1853.
- 17 Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution*, p. 56.
- 18 Nick Tolerton, *Reefer ships: the ocean princesses* (Christchurch, 2008).
- 19 Mary Daly, *The First Department: a history of the Department of Agriculture* (Dublin, 2002), p. 3.
- 20 Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution*, p.57; *Limerick Leader*, 25 May, 21 August 1895; *Farmer's Gazette*, 22 December 1900; *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 August, 4 September 1954.
- 21 Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution*, p.57
- 22 *Souvenir of a visit to the Limerick Bacon Factory with compliments from J. Matterson & Sons Ltd., 1898, Limerick and Waterford*, (Dublin, 1898).
- 23 *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 January 1905.
- 24 Denny, 'History of Denny' <http://www.homeis.ie/About-Denny/History-of-Denny.aspx>.
- 25 Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution*, p.57
- 26 Lysaght, 'Limerick's bacon factories', p. 12; *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1906; *Fermanagh Herald*, 30 September 1905; *Freeman's Journal*, 21 December 1911.
- 27 *Munster News*, 9 May 1891.
- 28 M. McCloskey, 'O'Mara's of Limerick and their overseas businesses' in *Old Limerick Journal* (Summer 2001) p. 1.
- 29 *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1906.
- 30 *Limerick Leader*, 6 June 1913, *Freeman's Journal*, 30 January 1915.
- 31 *Cork Examiner*, 2 November 1895.
- 32 Ronnie Long.
- 33 Lysaght, 'Limerick's bacon factories', p. 12; *Cork Examiner*, 18 July 1904; *Irish Independent*, 2 June 1906; Quaney, 'Electrification of Shaws', p.32.
- 34 *Freeman's Journal*, 9 August 1911.
- 35 *Irish Times*, 28 August 1912.
- 36 In 1844, Mr Russell had a corn and bacon store on Howley's Quay. It was described in the *Limerick Reporter*, as being 'remarkable for the excellency of its curing, having the advantage of fine cold air from the river and is capable of manufacturing near 1000 pigs weekly' (*Limerick Reporter*, 24 May 1844). B. Hanrahan had a small bacon store on Prospect Row 'midway between New Markets and New Docks' In 1855 a 'To Let' advertisement appeared in the *Limerick Reporter*. The property was described as 'very well suited for small bacon store with yard and out-houses and premises'. (*Limerick Reporter*, 20 April

- 1855). A Denis Lynch had a corn and bacon store to the rear of 9 Wickham Street. In 1855, the lease for this store was advertised in the *Limerick Reporter* and the business was described as a 'profitable trade for 10 years' (*Limerick Reporter* 16 February, 17 April and 27 May 1855). The trade directories record the presence of Lynch and Spain on Roches Street in the early decades of the twentieth century. Goad's map of 1897 records a records a bacon store and smoke house belonging to M. Spain on Roche's Street and a bacon manufactory belonging to M. Kelly and Sons on Cathedral Place.
- 37 Records of the General Valuation Office relating to Limerick, Printed Tenement Valuation, Union of Limerick, 1850.
 - 38 No mention is made directly to Shaw's bacon factory on Mulgrave street, however a Messrs. Shaw and Duffield were recorded as owning Garryowen steam mills, stores and yard at 17 and 18 Mulgrave Street, valued at £148. Numerous references were also made to 'stores' in the Valuation, the precise function of which was not stated.
 - 39 *William Bassett, Limerick City Directory* 1879 (Limerick, 1879)
 - 40 For full details on the Limerick City Trade Directories see Bibliography of Limerick Directories of 18th and 19th centuries at Limerick City Library <http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/TradesReg/TradesReg.aspx>.
 - 41 Printed census reports for full references see W. E. Vaughan and A.J. Fitzpatrick, *Irish Historical Statistics 1921-1971* (Dublin, 1978), pp 353-61.
 - 42 Curers were involved in the production, preservation and sale of bacon; dealers were simply involved in its sale.
 - 43 O'Flaherty, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, No.21, Limerick (Dublin, 2010) p. 36.
 - 44 O'Flaherty, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, p. 36.
 - 45 C.E. Goad, Insurance Plan of the City of Limerick, 1897 (University of Limerick)
 - 46 This map also recorded the presence of M. Kelly & Sons on Cathedral Place and Ed. Slattery on Summer Street.
 - 47 Michael O'Halloran, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 13 May 2016.
 - 48 Marie Madigan, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 12 May 2016.
 - 49 Liam Foley, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 19 May, 2016.
 - 50 The Primary Valuation records the presence of numerous store houses on Roches Street and in 1897 both Matterson & Sons and O'Mara & Sons were competing for space with Bannatyne and Sons, Flour and Roller Mills. Denny & Sons was located beside the pig market and the Artillery Barracks, low intensive yet significant users of space in the city at the turn of the twentieth century.
 - 51 Ruth Guiry, 'Public health and housing in Limerick city 1850-1935: a geographical analysis', MA thesis, Mary Immaculate College Limerick, 2013. <http://hdl.handle.net/10395/1977>.
 - 52 Towns Improvement Clause (1847) pp.40-43.
 - 53 Nuisance Removal and Disease Prevention Act, 1855 (18 & 19 Vict. c. 116 & c. 121); Nuisance Removal and Disease Prevention Act, 1860 (23 & 24 Vict. 77); Nuisance Removal Act for England Amendment Act, 1963 (26 & 27 Vict. c. 117).
 - 54 Limerick City Public Health Committee Diary Book, 25 August, 1911. Limerick Archives.
 - 55 Limerick City Public Health Committee Diary Book. August 1911, Limerick Archives.
 - 56 Séamus O Maitiú, *Dublin's Suburban Towns* (Dublin, 2003) pp 85-86
 - 57 Public Health Act, 1848 (11 & 12 Vict. c. 63); Public Health Act, 1858 (21 & 22 Vict. Cap. 57).
 - 58 Sanitary (Veterinary Inspectors Order, 1909 in George T.B. Vanston, *The Law relating to Public Health in Ireland* (Dublin, 1913) pp 1103-1105.
 - 59 Agricultural Produce (Fresh Meat) Act, 1930, No. 10/1930.
 - 60 Pigs and Bacon Act, 1935, No. 24/1935.
 - 61 County Borough of Limerick: Register of Slaughtermen. Veterinary Office, Limerick City and County Council.
 - 62 Ronnie Long.
 - 63 Eddie Mc Manus.
 - 64 Ollie O'Brien, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 2 December 2015.
 - 65 Limerick City Public Health Committee Diary Book, 8 March 1911.
 - 66 Limerick City Public Health Committee Diary Book, 8 April 1911.



CHAPTER 2

THE WORKPLACE: THE FACTORY AND BEYOND



High Street in its near derelict state. The entire street was demolished and rebuilt in the 1970s. The lean-to building in the pictures shows Deegan Butchers Stall which was originally a full three-storey over basement house. The Deegans, John and his wife, Mary Kate Curtin, were there until the building was completely demolished. The Deegans had a long tradition as butchers in Limerick. John Kelly is listed in Limerick's Commercial Directory in 1905 as a butcher at 33a High Street

*Matterson's
men at work*

Courtesy Sean Curtin





CHAPTER 2

THE WORKPLACE: THE FACTORY AND BEYOND

By the 1960s Limerick's bacon factories accounted for the direct employment of almost seven hundred workers, men and women.¹ But they also employed many others indirectly – farmers, pig buyers, pig drovers, salesmen, shop assistants and clerks. Tony Sexton, who worked as an electrician in Clover Meats, for instance remembered how 'there was a huge maintenance staff. There was thirty-eight people in maintenance... We had two carpenters, ...a maintenance plasterer...'² Outside the factories, there were also butchers' shop and grocery shops involved in the selling of Limerick bacon – McNamara's and Halls in Roche's Street; Pat O'Connor's at the top of William Street; Ray's; Maher's and Cusack's in Parnell Street, and a very large number of small shops including that run by Hanna Howard in the old Irishtown, who was remembered as wearing a shawl and specialising in the sale of backbones, pig's toes and pig's heads.³

Pig Buyers

The number of pigs produced by 'small man's industry' in the city's lanes could not meet the constant demands of the bacon factories, so a constant supply of good quality pigs from elsewhere was necessary to ensure the continual working and profitability of the bacon factories. The pig buyers of Limerick city therefore played a central role in the success of the bacon industry, linking the farmers who produced the pigs with the factories that processed them. While many buyers were independent, others were employed directly by the bacon factories to source pigs at fairs in Limerick city, West Limerick, North Cork, Tipperary and Clare. Charlie Quaid remembered how:⁴

It was cattle fairs they used to go to a lot even though there was pig fairs ... there was cattle fairs but there would be a certain amount of kreels of pigs ... that where they would buy most of them ... a lot of them would be independent buyers ... our crowd seemed to be connected with Matterson's from the time they came... [They would] attend the pig fairs early morning about six seven o'clock and then they'd have their own lorries and they'd bring the pigs back into Matterson's ... Another feature which lasted until the early sixties was the pigs that come by train and they land above in ... Matterson's bank up ... near the walls alongside St. Lawrence graveyard.⁵

Competition for the best quality animal was great, though it was often simply part of a healthy rivalry within families as was the case between Joe and Dan Quaid:

There used to be quite a competition between them Joe and Dan there ... Joe was Charles' son and Dan then was Michael's son ... Joe worked in Matterson's as well and they were competing against each other ... Not in a bad way just a like half a crack like ... they wouldn't want a bad pig going in but they would be trying to pawn it off on one another.⁶

These pig buyers were known to be

skilled, knowledgeable men who were able to quickly and accurately estimate the value of an animal They ensured a high quality of animal for the bacon factories, checking that a pig wasn't too fat or too lean, that its limbs were of the right proportion and the health of the animal adequate.⁷

The numbers of pig buyers in the city varied through time and these fluctuations depended on local and sectoral factors. Census figures are available from 1871, however up until 1936 those engaged in the buying and selling of pigs were not differentiated from those dealing in cattle and sheep (Table 4). A closer examination of the Limerick city house returns for 1901 and 1911 helps to identify the numbers involved in the selling of pigs only. In 1901 for example, seventy-one people specified pig buyer as their primary occupation, a similar figure of seventy-six was recorded for 1911.⁸ In 1936, only sixty-two pig buyers were recorded for the city as a whole. The Pig and Bacon Act of 1935 led to a further reduction in numbers as it changed the way the trade was conducted, removing the need for a middleman. This downward spiral in numbers continued and by the early 1960s as a result of the centralisation policy advocated by government the pig buyer was all but removed as a buttress between the farmer and curer. This allowed the factories to deal directly with those rearing the pigs and facilitated government regulation of the industry.⁹

Table 6. Pig Buyers in Limerick City 1871-1951 (Census of Population)

Census Year	Males	Females	Total	Description
1871	85		85	Dealer/Sales Cattle, Sheep & Pigs
1881	145	1	146	Dealer/Sales Cattle, Sheep & Pigs
1891	136	2	138	Dealer/Sales Cattle, Sheep & Pigs
1901	133		133	Dealer/Sales Cattle, Sheep & Pigs
1911	95		95	Dealer/Sales Cattle, Sheep & Pigs
1926	52		52	Pig Dealer
1936	62		62	Pig Dealer
1946	25		25	Pig Dealer
1951	28		28	Pig Dealer

Residence and family

Pig buying was also identified as a key commercial activity in the trade directories. As the purpose of a trade directory was to record and advertise the presence of a business, the cost of advertising may have been prohibitive for some and therefore many of the less affluent pig buyers went unrecorded. This may account for both the reduced numbers documented and the absence and subsequent reoccurrence of pig buying businesses in the trade directories (Table 7). Athlunkard Street, followed by Cathedral Place, were the most popular locations for these pig buyers.

Table 7. Numbers of Pig Buyers in Limerick City 1875-1891 (Trade Directories)

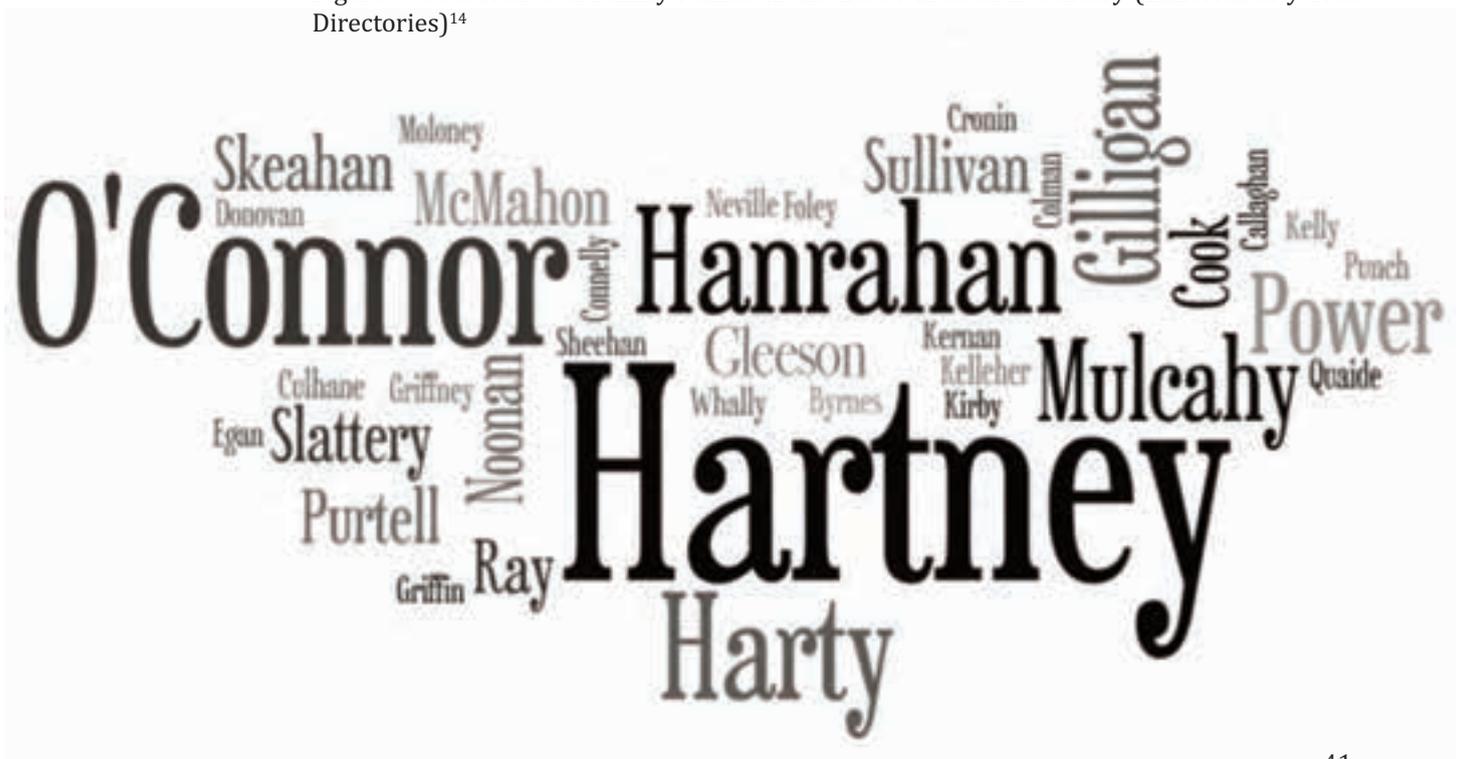
Year	Number of Pig Buyers
1875	5
1877	33
1879	44
1880	36
1884	13
1891	11

Despite temporal variations in the numbers involved in pig buying, similarities in family names and locations were evident. Ronnie Long explained how the pig buyers

were nearly all related. There was the Reids – which was Paddy Reid a great rugby player – that family. You had the Quaid’s... Mickey Quaid, all his land is nearly where the hospital is now and Garryowen Rugby Club and all that. And the nursing home at the corner in Ballykeeffe, that was Mickey’s home... Then there was Crowes, the Crowes of Sixmilebridge, the present shop. Tim Crowe, a very good athlete – Timmy Crowe the great – they were all related. There was Healy’s, the big house as you go over the wire bridge. Down on the right – that was the Healy family.¹⁰

The census confirms the prominence of these and other key families in pig buying, including the O’Connors, Sheahans, Donovans, Haurahans, Murnanes, Hartneys, Kellihers, Quaid’s, Gilligans, Purtills, Hanrahans, O’Hallorans, O’Briens, Kirbys, Reids and Crowes (Figures 5 & 6). Pig buying was a male occupation and father-son partnerships were very common. The 1901 census recorded the presence of seven such partnerships¹¹ as well as five circumstances in which two or more sons were involved in the pig buying trade.¹² The situation in 1911 was similar with ten father/son partnerships.¹³

Figure 5. Occurrence of Family Names in the Late Nineteenth Century (Limerick City Trade Directories)¹⁴



**FAIRVIEW RANGERS
A.F.C.**
**WEEKLY
DANCE**
TUESDAY NIGHT
ST. MARY'S HALL
DRINK NEXT TIME CONSIDER
THE BOTTLE NOT THE GLASS
BE SURE YOU GET THE BEST
ALSO NUMEROUS CASH SPOT PRIZES
DANCING 8.30-12 **ADMISSION 2/6**



Front of J. Ryan's bar at Blackboy Road, 1963

Courtesy Limerick Museum

Figure 6. Occurrence of Family Names in 1911 (Census House Returns)¹⁵



While pig buying families were located across the city, particular concentrations were found in St Mary's parish. As McGrath has noted, the 'main families associated with pig buying in St. Mary's parish were the O'Connor, Sheehan, Reid, Murnane, O'Donovan, Gleeson, Hartney and Gilligan families'.¹⁶ In contrast, the Hanrahans were concentrated in Roches Street, the Kirbys in Garryowen, the O' Brians along the Blackboy Road, the O'Hallorans in High Street, Purtills in James Street and the Quaid's in Nelson Street and the Upper Carey's Road.¹⁷ Over time some of these families moved to new addresses in the city, for example the Quaid's 'started off in Nelson Street and then they moved down to John Street and then they wound back up here when they got the house off the Matterns',¹⁸ however, for the most part, there was considerable residential stability.

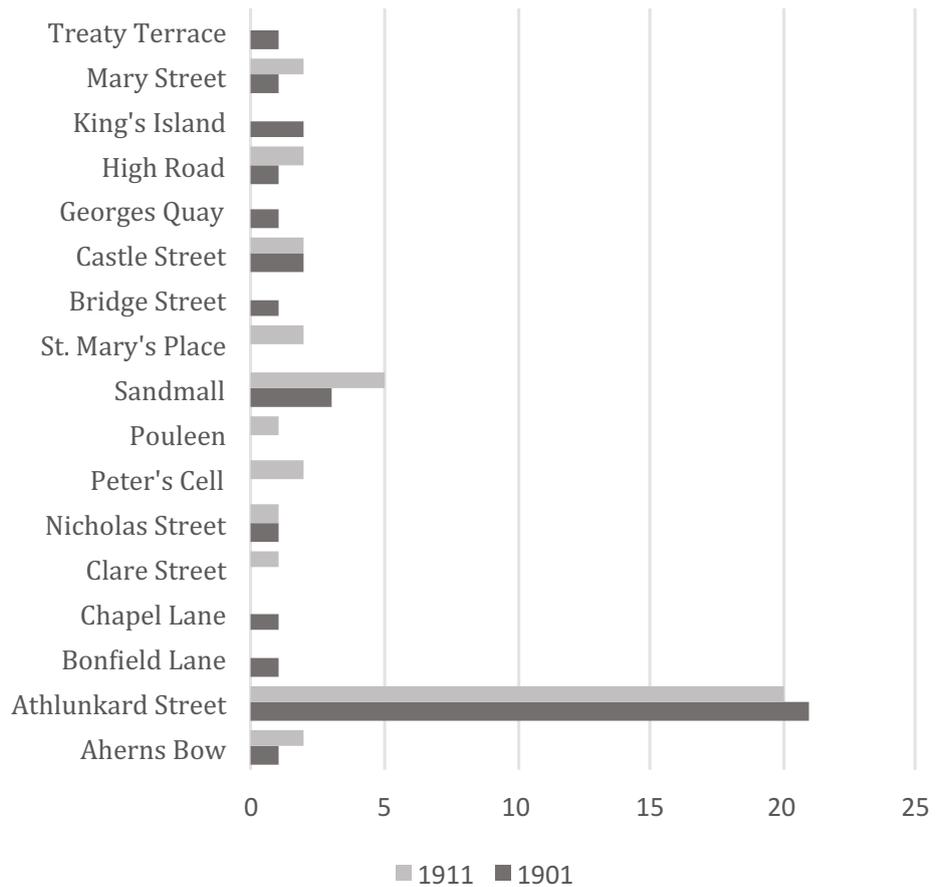
Traditionally, pig buying families were located on Athlunkard Street. In *Bassetts Directory* of 1879, forty-four percent of all pig buyers were recorded as residing on Athlunkard Street. This pattern was replicated in 1901 and 1911 (Figure 7). In the 1911 census, pig buyers were recorded in fourteen of the fifty-six houses enumerated. Many of the houses on this street were originally leased by the bacon factories, who in turn rented them to the pig buyers. These houses were ideally suited as they had long spacious back gardens which could be used to keep pigs. In 1911, twenty-seven piggeries were recorded on this street.¹⁹

At the height of the bacon industry, it was reported that there were at least fifty pig buyers living on this street 'who travelled throughout the country, sometimes as far as Ballinasloe by train, buying for the O'Mara's, Shaw's, Matterns' and Denny's. The Hartys, Sheahans, Reids, O'Connors and O'Donovans were known far and wide at fairs. Many of them were connected through marriage and bore double-barrelled names'.²⁰ Such was the number and persistence of pig buying families on Athlunkard Street that it acquired the nickname 'Pig' or 'Grunt' street:

There's a street down in Athlunkard Street, they used to call it Pig Street.... all the buyers were down there...the Donovans and the Reids and all that... they were all pig buyers. They'd go down the country buying the pigs. They'd nearly know, nearly judge a pig [without touching it].²¹

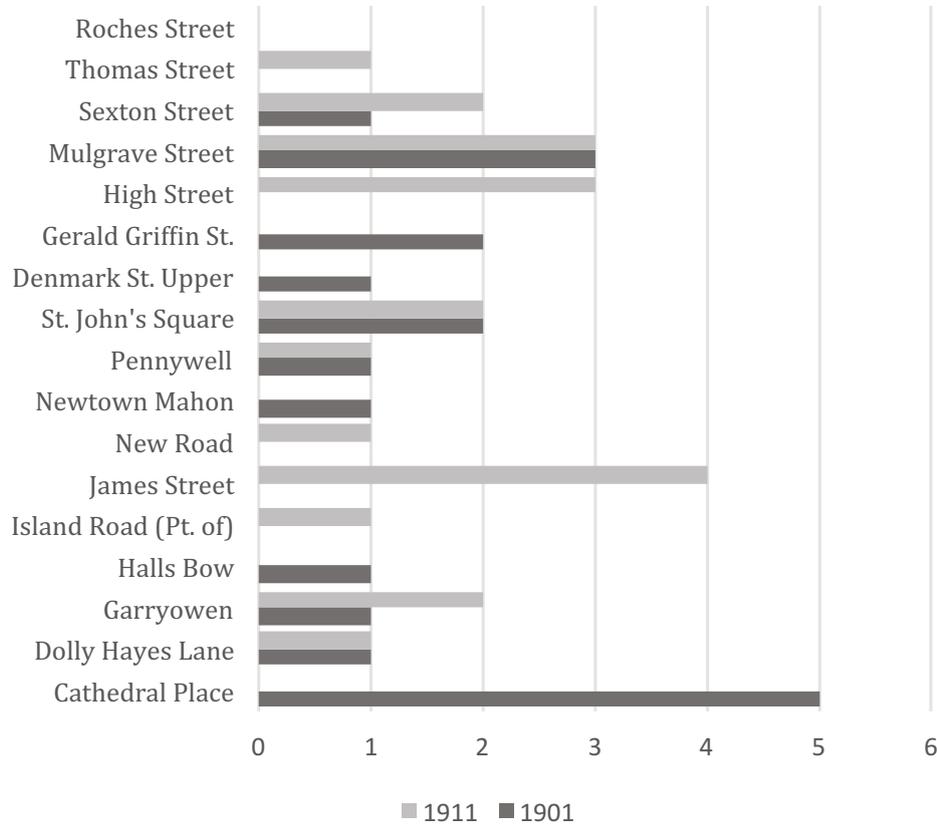


Figure 7 Pig Buyers by street in the Abbey and Castle Wards 1901 and 1911²²



A second concentration of pig buyers was found on Mulgrave Street, Cathedral Place, Sexton Street, Gerald Griffin Street, Johns Square, and Roches Street. Proximity to the market and bacon factories was central to the choice of location for these pig buying families.

Figure 8. Pig Buyers by Street in the Irishtown and Market Wards 1901 and 1911



A final concentration of families was found along Nelson Street, Henry Street South and the Carey's Road. Ease of access to the railway, in particular to Matterson's Bank running along the back wall of Mount Saint Lawrence cemetery, was a central reason for locating in this area of the city.



A group of staff members working at the Matterson's Bacon Factory in Roches Street c.1920. Courtesy Michael Phayer
 Image Right: Joe Quaid, pig buyer, on the left with his friend Jimmy Hanrahan, August 1941. Courtesy Charlie Quaid



Pig buying and prosperity

The majority of the city's pig buyers lived in relative comfort, for the most part in good quality, single-family dwellings. Many were able to support large families²³ and a significant number had at least one servant.²⁴ They were highly regarded among the working class population in the city 'if for no other reason that the lucrative nature of their trade which was the envy of those who had to work hard for a living.'²⁵ Their social position in the wider city was reflected in the obituaries that many received in the local newspapers.²⁶ In 1903 for example, the funeral of Michael Gilligan, pig buyer of Saint Mary's Parish was attended by the Mayor, Michael Donnelly, the local M.P. Michael Joyce and the members of the Corporation. The *Limerick Leader* had previously announced his death by saying that

Seldom, indeed has any event called forth such spontaneous outpouring of regret and genuine sorrow that which has been occasioned by the death of Mr. Michael Gilligan, one of Limerick's oldest and most respected citizens.²⁷

In 1939 the *Limerick Leader* also announced the death of another member of a prominent pig buying family, Mr. Charles Harty of 42 Nicholas Street:

The cortege was of very large proportions and of a thoroughly representative character. The deceased was well known throughout the county and was everywhere deservedly held in high esteem. An exemplary Catholic, he was a very kindly and charitable man and a sincere and upright disposition had won for him the confidence and respect of a very wide circle of friends and acquaintances.²⁸

The relative wealth of these pig buyers was reflected in the assets that many left after their death. James Gilligan of Mulgrave Street died on 6 January 1898 and left to his widow Ellen £525 3s 6d.²⁹ John Gilligan who died a couple of months later, on 17 May 1898, left £604 13s 9d to his wife Margaret.³⁰ These inheritances represented significant amounts at the end of the nineteenth century and reflected the relative wealth of the Gilligan family.³¹

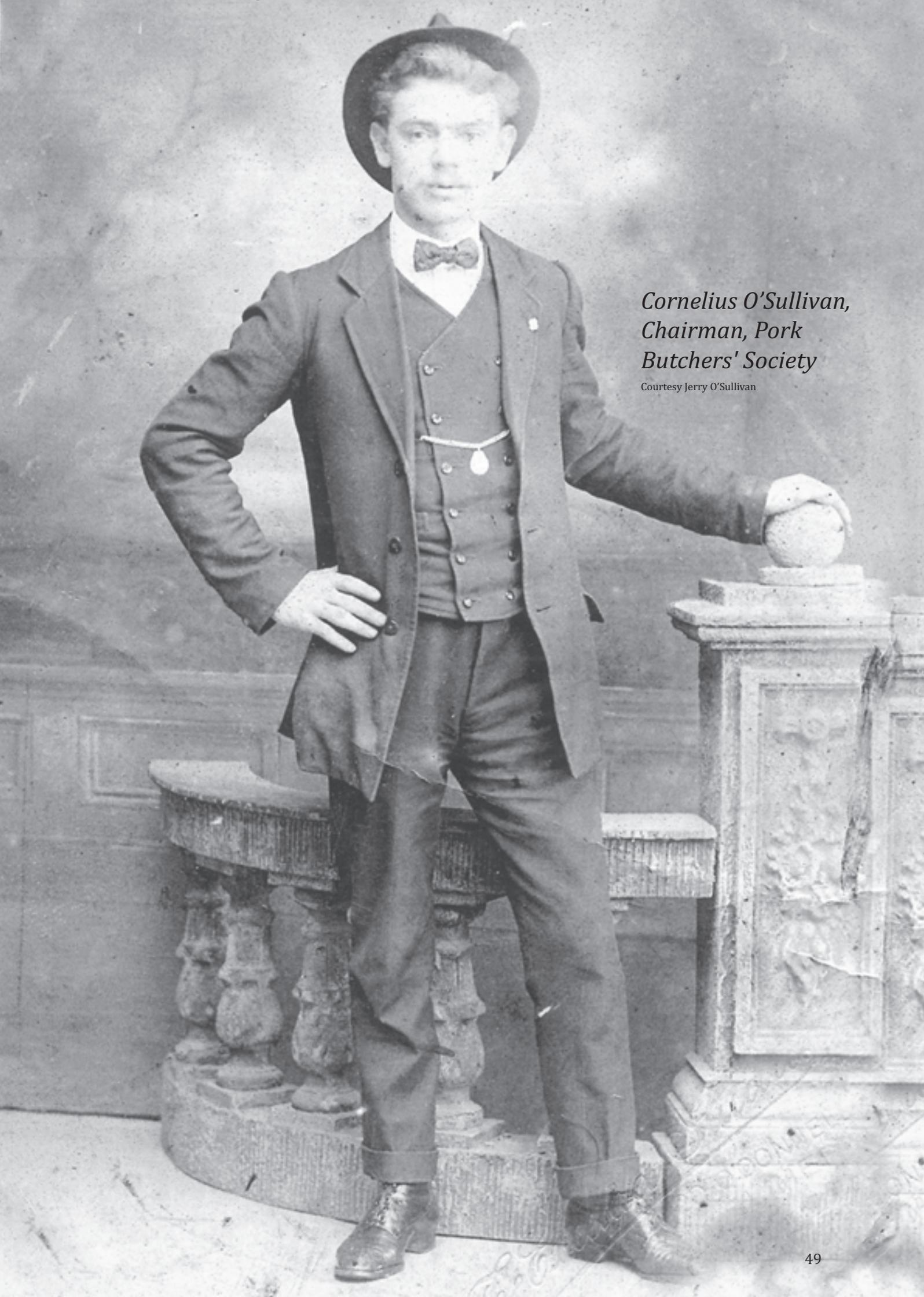
Pork Butchers

While the term pork butcher can be applied to a person butchering pigs or dealing in pork products, in the Limerick bacon industry it refers specifically to those who killed the pigs and then prepared the meat. It was essentially a male occupation and was closely associated with certain families. In 1901 thirty percent of all pork butchers recorded were part of father/son butchering families. The Hartys of Mungret Street had five pork butchers in the family (the father and four sons), while the O'Hallorans of Garvey's Range and the Fitzgeralds of Dolly Hayes' Lane had each four pork butchers in the family. Other prominent pork butchering families included the Ryans, McNameras, Griffins, Considines, Carmodys, Skeahans, Galvins, and Hanlys.

By 1911 the percentage of father/son partnerships had increased to fifty percent (fifty-three family units) of all pork butchers recorded. The Casey family of Dixon's Lane had five pork butchers in the family, while the O'Briens of Clare Street, the Foristals and Listons of Blackboy, the O'Hallorans of Garveys Range and the Braddishs of Watergate each had four pork butchers in the family.

Family connections

Such connections were vital in getting a job in the bacon industry. Becoming a pork butcher was possible only for those with family roots in the trade: 'it was like the Royal Family passing on a kingdom, because your father had to be a pork butcher before you could become a pork butcher...there were fathers and sons obviously, and then you had grandfathers, uncles, first



*Cornelius O'Sullivan,
Chairman, Pork
Butchers' Society*

Courtesy Jerry O'Sullivan



Ollie O'Brien, Jim O'Brien, Courtesy Oliver O'Brien



James O'Brien, Courtesy Jim O'Brien

cousins.³² The workplace therefore came to reflect the family structure of the employees. In some cases 'six brothers from the same family worked throughout the different factories' and this was considered the norm.³³ The downside of this was that family loyalties could complicate labour matters:

Hardly a week passed... in my fifteen years that there wasn't a strike... because basically, there was so many families there... And if one family member got in trouble, the rest of the family intervened.³⁴ One got – and kept – the job 'by right' as one's father had done, a practice dating back at least to the closing decades of the nineteenth century.³⁵ For women, too, while a small number responded to job advertisements, the main way into work in the bacon factory was through having family members already working in the industry.³⁶

The importance of the family network was obvious in the way wages, in most cases, were given up at home to help the mother with the family budget:

Any money I had I gave it to my mother, you know, and that time now you would need a couple of bob you know... We always brought our money home to our mother... but then your mother would give you back something, my mother would never take it all off us...she'd say 'take that back now' or my grandmother was working there as well and she'd share it and she'd say, 'If you need anything now let me know...and I'll give it to you...'³⁷

One woman who had travelled to England in 1961 remarked on how surprised she had been at the number of girls there who did not give up any wage at home, but instead all lived in flats – a culture shock for a person brought up in a large family where the children were expected to contribute to the household expenses.³⁸ But one's place in the family often determined whether one gave up one's wages or kept them oneself. Eddie, who was the youngest in his family, was able to keep his earnings:

O, I kept my own wage. Well, I mean, I was the baby and my father was working. Everyone had plenty. Now, if they wanted something, naturally, of course, I used to give it to them, but I had my money...³⁹

Family closeness meant a tight rein was kept on the young, especially in relation to those they might meet at the dances:

And we'd go over to the dance and we had to be home early. Go home late? You wouldn't go home late that time...your mother would be half way up the street... 'Get down out of it...get down out of it...' We'd have to be in about before twelve o'clock...and if we weren't, my grandmother would come out up the corner to meet me... and she'd say nothing. But my mother might give out to me... My grandmother wouldn't, like, you know, cause I was kind of her favourite, you know. She'd let no one say anything about you: 'She's alright now, she's all right now', she says, 'She's all right...' All they wanted to know was who'd be the fella you're with, like...who was the fella you were going out with ...and there'd be lots of them...[The mothers and grandmothers] would be going out to the corner and they'd be looking in the laneway [to check on you]...⁴⁰

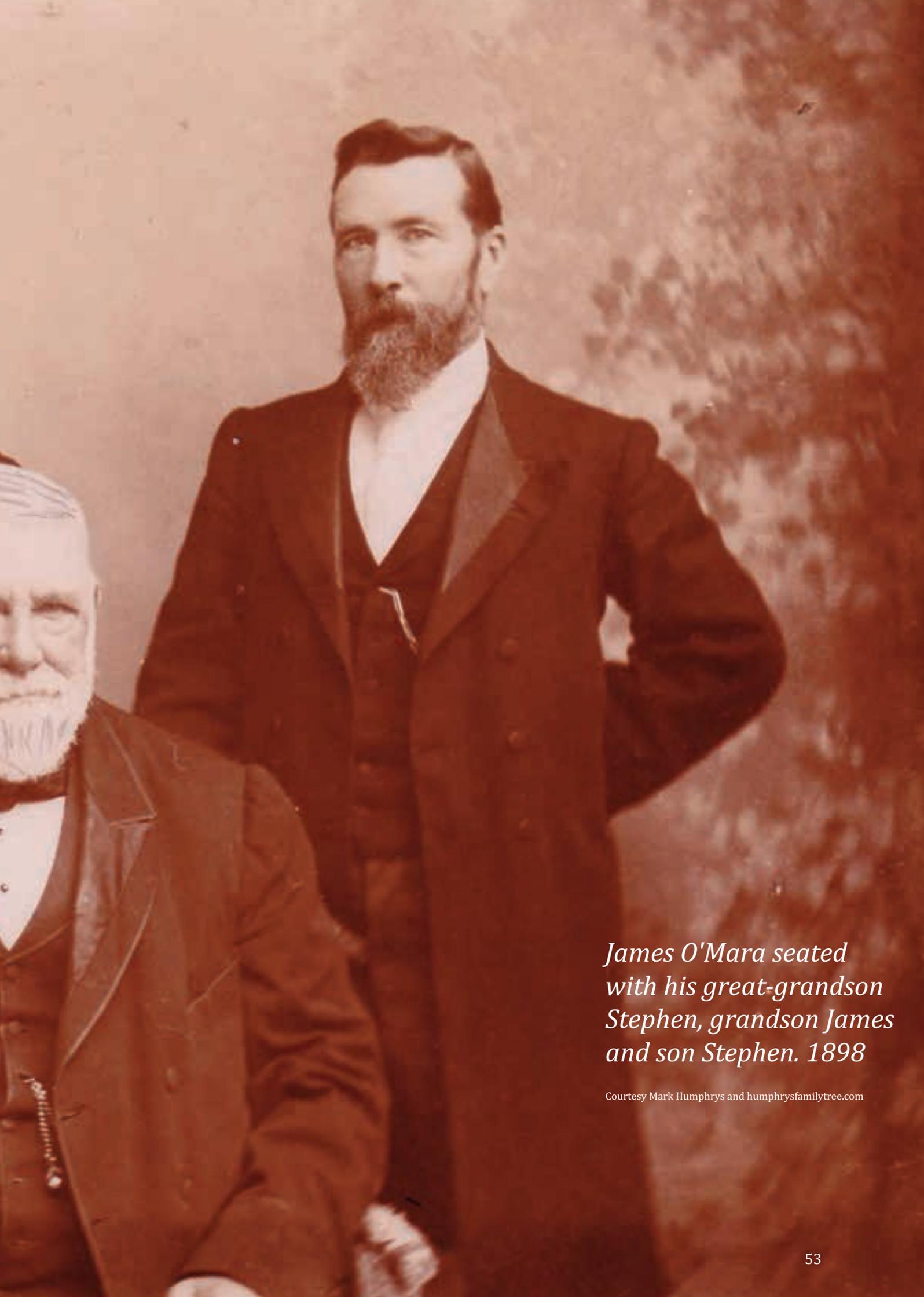
A man's world

In one sense, the Limerick bacon industry was predominantly male. The census revealed that in 1901, of the 183 pork butchers recorded in the city and its environs (Blackboy Road) only three were female.⁴¹ By 1911, Bridget Turner of Athlunkard Street (probably a retailer of pork) was the solitary female of the 271 pork butchers recorded. When women did find employment on the factory floor they were concentrated in the sausage room or cannery. In 1901, twenty-five women were employed as sausage makers, by 1911 this had increased to eighty.⁴² Three women were also employed as clerks in the offices in 1911, however for the most part the office workers were predominantly male (Table 8). The same pattern seems to have applied half a century later, one man estimating that perhaps fifteen of the forty office workers in Shaw's office in the 1950s were female while another considered that a total of twenty women staffed O'Mara's shop, gut house and sausage department.⁴³ In Matterson's, which had moved into canning from the later nineteenth century onwards, the proportion of women was higher: 'there was a lot of women employed there in the sausage house, maybe fifty or sixty women in the sausage house. There maybe could be more, and then the cannery...'⁴⁴

Table 8. Employment in Bacon Factories by Type and Gender 1901 and 1911

Occupation	1901 Males	1901 Females	1911 Males	1911 Females
Bacon Merchant	2		6	
Management	2		2	
Clerical Staff	21		30	3
Salesman			4	
Foreman	1		2	
Pork Butchers	178 ⁴⁵	3	263	1
Sausage maker		25		3
Labourer	13		16	77
Messenger			1	
Firemen/stoker	3		5	
Engine Drivers	2		2	





*James O'Mara seated
with his great-grandson
Stephen, grandson James
and son Stephen. 1898*

Courtesy Mark Humphrys and humphrysfamilytree.com



Athlunkard Street, Limerick. Courtesy Limerick Museum

Much further down the hierarchy, among the poor of Limerick's lanes, a young boy's first contact with the bacon factory, apart from having a father or sibling who worked there, was in feeding the pigs or driving the family's or neighbour's pigs to the factory: 'I used to hunt them up to Clover. I put a rope around their leg, my father told me, and they couldn't run away on you.'⁴⁶

When a boy finally got to work in the factory around the age of sixteen he dealt with the pig from when it arrived at the factory gate to when it left the factory as a ham or sausage. If he joined the factory as a casual worker (as opposed to a 'butcher boy', i.e. the son of a butcher), he could find himself driving pigs from the station to the factory or from the lorries into the yard, cleaning up after the killings, or heaving sides of bacon from the butchering line to the tanks and back to the lorries – all tasks that required the physical strength of a man. The process began at the factory gate where the pigs arrived from the train station, various marts, or from the pig buyers' lorries, to be counted and then stamped with the supplier's number.⁴⁷ Then they were herded into sties or pens – usually with fourteen pigs in a pen.⁴⁸ In some cases if it was really busy 'some lorries would be outside on the road and they wouldn't be able to get in, one lorry could be inside the gate and the other outside waiting to get in.'⁴⁹

From the sty, the pigs were sent one by one up a ramp where each one in turn was chained by the hind leg, usually by two men. This work at the pens and the ramp required speed, skill and strength. Because of the sweat and blood accumulated in the course of the work, most of the men involved were bare from the waist up. Joe Joyce was one man who had this really difficult job of chaining the pigs, frequently chaining six hundred a day. Only one pig could be chained at a time, which meant that the chainer had to be quick on the job – and the job was not over until the last pig had gone through:

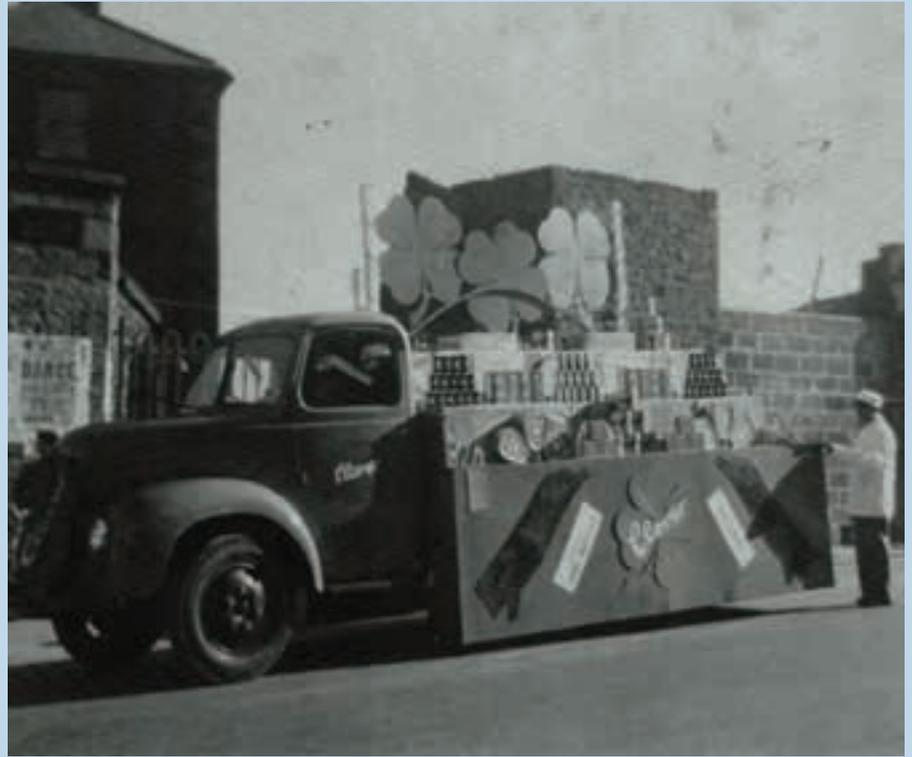
I was inside in a place, the size of this (around eight by ten feet) and the pig would come in...ten would come in to me, in a special gate, and I was inside with nothing on only a pants, no shirt, no nothing, put the chain around them, and they firing up on top of you and backfiring on top of you...ten every few minutes and six hundred pigs then...⁵⁰



Staff members jarring carrots. Courtesy *Limerick Leader*



Angela Joyce, Anne Fitzgerald and Kay Morrissey.
Courtesy Joe Hayes



A St. Patrick's Day Float for Clover Meats. Courtesy Oliver O'Brien

The pig was then stunned, the stunner being introduced in the 1920s and coming into almost universal use in the 1960s, partly through pressure from the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.⁵¹ The unconscious pig then passed on to the pork butchers whose tasks ranged through 'the killing line, cutting line, baling, striking...various jobs with various names...' The most important tasks involved using the butcher's knife and once you got used to handling the knife, that was the basic thing.⁵² In fact, the handling of the knife was a sign of one's skills and position in the workplace: 'You had to be a pork butcher to handle a knife, and [otherwise] you weren't allowed to handle one.'⁵³ This was hardly surprising, since the man on the killing line – the sticker (the man who used the knife to 'stick' or stab the pig) – had to be quick when he stabbed the pig in the neck in the direction of the heart so as to cut the aorta or main blood vessel, the whole procedure taking a mere twenty seconds.⁵⁴

This was tough work: while there could be slack periods in the day, butchers, casual workers and Yanks worked extremely hard.⁵⁵ It was no wonder one man remembered how 'my father didn't want me to go in because he didn't want me to do what he was doing, naturally, because the work was too hard, too messy...'⁵⁶ This was echoed by Michael O'Halloran, whose father had shown him how to cleave a pig but warned him:

Whatever you do, don't get caught for this job', because his back was shagged over it. And I said, 'I won't!' I'd see him when he'd come home and his back would be crucified, and he falling asleep – so I tried to give him a break on the line.⁵⁷

Skill and speed

But this work was as much about skill as strength. Whether in the yard or on the killing or butchering lines, the men employed in the bacon factories learned their skills from those with years of experience. There were three types of butchers in the Limerick factories – A, B and C.⁵⁸ A man started off as a type C butcher and worked his way up to type A. Some people were not qualified to do certain jobs, e.g. one could not slaughter a pig unless one was an A butcher and a young man who wanted to advance had to learn the many different skills with a knife. John

Tierney recalled one of his first mornings on the job:

I think my first morning in O'Mara's, there were five of us called up to the office, Joe Hayes, Larry Duggan, Tony Madden, Seamus McNamara and myself. Five of us were about early twenties and O'Mara sat us down inside and he says, 'I want to make top butchers out of the five of ye', he says. 'We know you are top butchers as it is, but we want to make super butchers out of ye. We are going to spend the time on the job, and by the time I'm finished' he says, 'you will be able to do every job on the line'.⁵⁹

This training by older workers was vital: they showed the younger man how to do a certain job and then told him to take over for a few minutes – the best way to make a person learn:

When I went in as a young lad, say...I was with a man, he was seventy odd years of age, and he taught me most of what I had to do...where butchering was concerned. He taught me how to sharpen a knife, how to steel a knife, saws, the cleavers, the whole lot... I was only a lad you know and Mick was showing me how to stick pigs. Amazingly...He'd stick maybe half a dozen pigs: 'There you are now...there you are – off you go...Hah! Stick a few now!'⁶⁰

This task required a quick and skilled worker; otherwise there was the danger that the sticker might get a sharp kick from the pig or, if the pig did not 'bleed out', that the meat 'would all get bloody then blood.. so you'd be losing. It costs money...you had to take off the bloody parts, you see...'⁶¹ This was echoed in the contemporary butchering manual from O'Mara's which stated that:

in recent years there has been a steady improvement in the quality of pigs available for curing as reflected by the increase in pigs grading Grade A Special and Grade A. Having obtained the right quality of bacon pig, it is necessary to ensure a high standard of butchering, processing and presentation at factory level in order to produce a product up to the required standard for export.⁶²



O' Mara's Bacon Factory Courtesy Tony Punch



Dan McMahon, Michael Hanley, Con Considine and Patrick McMahon of Matterson's. Courtesy Sean Curtin

Once killed, the pig was moved on to the butchering bench. First the carcass went through scalding water for a few seconds to remove any hair, before being passed through a furnace and then sent through a scraper (for approximately six seconds) to remove the last of the unwanted hair. Then it passed to the butchering line where began another very precise and thorough process. Firstly, the carcass was opened and the belly removed. Things did not always go smoothly, as Eddie McNamara remembered:

There'd be more times then, and you'd be opening the belly ... and you'd hit an abscess. Oh! And it'd be as green as shamrock. And that'd go all over you and you'd come out then, and what had you to wash yourself with only cold water...?⁶³

Then the breast bone was split and the carcass was passed to the next man to remove the pluck (liver/lung/heart/windpipe). Then the steak and lard was raised, which involved running the knife down both sides of the bone and lifting off the steak. And the lard was lifted by hand, and had to be weighed. Two men marked the pig, a process which involved clearing as much meat from the back bone as was possible before the carcass was cleaved or split. Then the next man removed the bloody pieces from the shoulder/neck. The head was then 'rounded' to loosen the head from the carcass and the shoulder meat pulled before the carcass was taken to the scale to be weighed and graded. Next the lard and kidneys were removed and the backbone was the last item to be taken out before the carcass was washed out and passed through a sprinkler system before going on to the chilling room.

After hanging in the chill room overnight, the carcass was brought to the cutting room where the steak and then the loin bone was removed, followed by the 'long toe' (back bone) and tail piece. The breast bone and neck bone were taken out and the neck end was removed to 'square



The sausage making department, Matterson's 1961

Courtesy Joe Hayes

the shoulder'. The next job was to 'start a pocket', which meant that the joint between the blade bone and shoulder bone was broken and the short toe (front leg) removed. Then the blade bone was removed and the sides were cleaned out to 'clean the side', i.e. get rid of the last of the waste. Once the top of the rib was taken off, the carcass was injected with pickle to cure the bacon, this being done from the 1970s onwards by a pickle pump (also known as an 'injection star'). The final stage was to 'start a pocket', i.e. stuff salt in the space from which the blade bone had been removed – a vital step to prevent tainting. The sides of bacon were then passed down a chute to the curing room where they were piled into a tank and salt spread on the shoulder, gammon and along the side of the carcass. The tank was then battened down and filled with pickle for between four and five days, after which the meat was taken out and loaded onto pallets. Each of these different roles in the process was allotted to different people. If you 'came down off the killing line, you couldn't go into the bacon house, the sweat would be running off you, and you couldn't go into the ice house dripping in sweat because you would get pneumonia'.⁶⁴

Women in the factories

Very few women were available to interview in the course of this project, which was a pity as their stories not only confirmed the men's memories, but also threw light on other aspects of the bacon industry. Most of the women employed in the bacon factories began work at a young age, usually about sixteen or seventeen and finished work after they got married, though others stayed on for another while or until they became pregnant.⁶⁵



Shop assistant at Richie Rays. Courtesy Tony Punch



O' Mara's. Courtesy Tony Punch



The sausage room in Denny's, Waterford. Courtesy National Library

Training the women

Like the men, women in the bacon factories were trained by watching what others did. 'If you were doing it, another girl would sit with you and you would show her what to do'.⁶⁶ Women were mainly employed in the gut room where the contents of the pig's belly were sorted and washed, cleaning the livers, hearts and lungs which were wheeled down from the killing line's chute on a gut car.⁶⁷ Susan remembered how the guts were 'cleared out, and when they were cleared out then, they rubbed salt into them', after which the guts were re-steamed, re-washed, pickled and salted.⁶⁸ Her specific role was washing the fat from the meat:

They would have all the pigs then, they would take off all the skins, and then they take off what they call the 'mudgin', the fat, and they throw it into a big, big, big tank of water and you'd throw salt in it, but that was my job then, I'd be washing it around, washing it, washing it, and washing it and then... I'd have to take out the plug and let the water down because you'd want to have it clean, and all that was packed away and sent away.⁶⁹

Women also worked in the sausage-making room, filling and linking the sausages, but they had no role in mixing the sausage filling, which was carried out by two male sausage makers from a well-guarded recipe.⁷⁰ Women were also involved in packing the boxes to go down to the delivery vans:

You had loads of boxes you had to pile them up and you had to...take the boxes then and put the pounds of sausages that's wrapped in the paper and half pound wrapped in the paper and I put them into the box then down at the very end you had to count one pound, two pound, three pound but you get used to it then like...after a while then you know...⁷¹

They also trimmed away the fat from the hams to ensure they were not overweight, vacuum-packed them, and worked on the scales in the factories' wholesale shops that catered for local retailers.⁷² Others who were employed by Clover Meats or by Matteredons worked in the cannery.⁷³ During World War II, Teresa Hayes, had memories of packing stewed steak in brine to supply to the troops, 'and we would be putting our address on the box... so one of the girls got a letter back from one of the soldiers, a like a pen pal... telling us "thanks for feeding him."⁷⁴ Finally, there was the inevitable cleaning up. For one former O'Mara's worker it involved going up on Wednesdays with another woman from the sausage house to 'scrub the big office'.⁷⁵ For another the memory was of cleaning up in the sausage house itself:

And then there was all the rubbish, then its cleared up you have to go down on your hands...well I used to do it...I don't know about anyone else...go down pick all the dirt up with your hands and throw it into a bucket then and throw it out...⁷⁶

For all workers, the cold in the workplace was unforgettable: even Clover Meats, the most modern of the factories, was 'very cold, wet, damp...like a big warehouse, like a two storey warehouse... they never heard of a door...everything was in the open, draughts everywhere...'⁷⁷ For the women, in particular, hard work and cold ran through their memories – 'You see, a bacon factory was meant to be cold!' – especially in the gut and sausage-making areas where the temperature had to be controlled.⁷⁸ Two heating pipes ran through O'Mara's sausage house and the girls rested their feet on them to stay warm, while woman recalled how 'the rafters, the rafters were wide open, and we'd be working away with bags around our shoulders, and the snow coming down on top of us, and we [were] frozen... and our hands would be frozen with the salt'.⁷⁹ The gut-house especially was constantly wet from washing down the blood while in the packing area the women had to take the meat from the freezer and their hands were always 'icy cold', so much so that they put them into a bucket of hot water to warm them up again.⁸⁰



Mary Ryan, from Garryowen at work in O'Mara's. Notice the apron and wellies for the work uniform. Courtesy Tony Punch



The interior of the killing and hanging house at Matterson's. Notice the damp concrete flooring. Courtesy Limerick Diocesan Archives



An image of the Waterford hanging house which includes the logo on the carcasses. Courtesy Limerick Diocesan Archives



A notice from Clover Meats in relation to the appointment of a new hygiene supervisor, 1971. Courtesy Jerry O'Sullivan



Matterson's Vans and their drivers, c.1920. Courtesy P60 Matterson's Papers, Limerick Archives

Van Men and others

Outside the factory was another vital group of workers – the van-men – who were responsible for the distribution of the bacon to shops in the city and far beyond. One van man, Paddy Kiely, commented that ‘they [the pork butchers] made it and I sold it.’⁸¹ This appears to have been an enjoyable job in some respects, but it was also tough, involving driving across the country to deliver to as many shops as possible. ‘Postcards from Newcastle West and from Clarecastle [would come in]; people would send on a postcard and they would look for four hard cure middles, a pound of sausages and three hams to deliver on Thursday.’⁸² Vans from the bacon factories delivered in Clare – from Lissycasey on to Kilkee – and parts of other neighbouring counties:

Besco supermarket, the Five Star supermarket, you’d have to fill all those places up in the morning before you’d go to the country to sell to, say, Ennis, Lahinch, Kilkee and all those places. You’d have all those supermarkets serviced with bacon and rashers and sausages as well before you left the city...⁸³



It was not just a matter of delivering: the responsibility for money was a serious one.

You had to be city salesman... you had to lodge your money...you had to keep an account of the stock...so you were jack of all trades...⁸⁴

On the other hand, money could be left in the van without it being stolen.

Sometimes you would just hide it in different places...Today, I might put it under the mat in the van, tomorrow, it might be behind the seat somewhere and then you could be "Jaysus, where did I put it?"⁸⁵

The vans delivering in western Connacht encountered a further money complication: locals often used the dollar (worth about £5 at the time) in paying for bacon:

When you were leaving the office in the morning, you had to find out what the dollar was worth...because a lot of the people in Connemara were getting money home from relations in America, and they would pay you in dollars... this would be in the fifties now...and the other thing was road cheques, I'll always remember.⁸⁶



A delivery van from O'Mara's. Courtesy Tony Punch



Courtesy Tony Punch



Courtesy Tony Punch



Bottom four images courtesy Paddy Kiely, above, Paddy Kiely as a van driver for Matterson's

For those who delivered to Northern Ireland the job was complicated by customs and security:

you had to have everything written up in triplicate to export your bacon out into another country, another state, and you had to have everything signed and properly done out – otherwise they wouldn't accept you and eh...you'd be stopped by the army five or six times alright... to check your licenses and insurance, checking had you any illegal stuff at the back of the van.⁸⁷

While it seldom involved the heavy physical work of the butchers and factory labourers, working in the distribution side of the bacon industry appears to have been more strictly controlled by the company. The salesmen had to be able to sell the product in order to compete with other salesmen and with other factories – something that became more pressurised with the passing of time. Rules were also becoming stricter: at one meeting, the van men were told that if they were caught with a box of matches in the van or anything that was not related to bacon, then they faced suspension.⁸⁸ There was little comfort on the job: until the late 1960s there 'were no fridges in the vans' for the meat, and no heat for the driver. As a trainee, young Michael O'Mara (son of the owner of the factory) worked as a van man on the run out of Claremorris:

I used to stay out in Teeranea. I remember coming home one night...but it was one of these old vans, and the snow started to snow...a real blizzard, and the wiper started to go...I couldn't see anything...I opened the window anyway [in those days you could open back the windscreen], and I drove, I got into the factory in Claremorris, and there was a watchman, a gateman, it was late at night...he was opening the gate, and he looked at me and he said "I don't believe what I am seeing"...There was the shape of my head and the shoulders around me, the rest was frozen snow [laughs], and no heaters in those days ... and certainly no radios.⁸⁹

Tony Flannery remembered how in some cases:

the floor would be rotten away with salty water etc....You might need two or three jackets' he recalled, in case the first one got wet and you would need to change it.⁹⁰

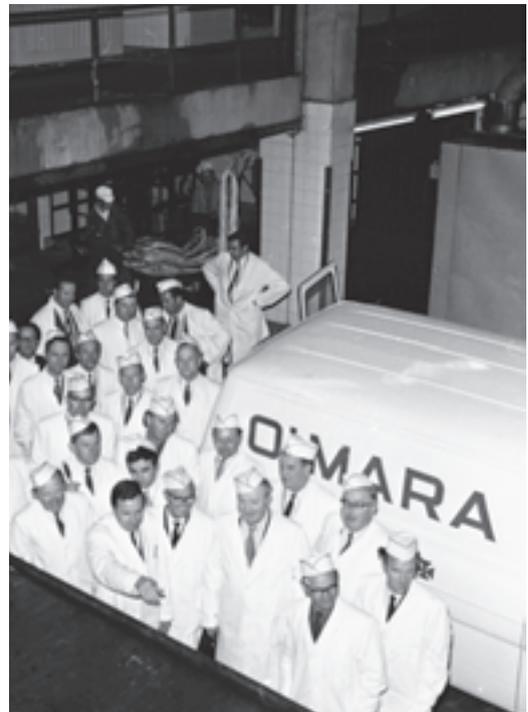
You brought two, maybe sometimes you brought three flasks of tea, black tea. You brought the milk and the sugar and bread whatever it is - You wouldn't get, like today, you wouldn't get a garage or anything like that...but you could get a cup of tea or make up your own. There was no such thing as a sandwich, you brought everything that you had: it was like going on an expedition to... the wilds of different places, really! I often got a breakdown on the van and you wouldn't see a house for maybe two to three miles away... you wouldn't see a house around the place, you'd have to walk along the road if you got a puncture or get down, get out the spare wheel. If the spare wheel's punctured [you'd] get out your patches, take out the tube....⁹¹



Spin-offs

Finally, there were workers who were not directly employed by the factories but whose livelihood and the bacon industry were closely linked. A man known locally as Mattie Spoons collected from the factories the left-over blood that was used in the manufacture of packet at the famous Treacy's store. He wheeled a drum on a wheelbarrow under the gully to collect the blood, stirring it constantly so as to remove the clots, and then wheeled it all the way back down to St. Mary's to make the packet.⁹² Another man, Danny Cusack:

had a horse and float, and he used to get the back bones and ribs, [and bring them] down to Hannah Howard's [on Mungret Street]... Danny was throwing back bones on to the float and would go down to Hannah, Hannah would buy them then...She had a big huge table, and a woman would get a backbone, and she'd just break it in two and throw it into a bag, and that was it.⁹³



English buyers visit O'Mara's bacon factory. Courtesy *Limerick Leader*

The Working day

Working clothes

On the job, the clothing required varied with the task. Office workers wore a suit, shirt and tie while those working in the delivery side of the industry dressed similarly to the office workers – to ensure that they were ‘presentable’ when dealing with clients. ‘When you were on sales you had to be a little bit more respectable, clean shirt, or collar...’ with a white coat over their suit.⁹⁴ On the factory floor clothing was functional. Women wore white coats over their dresses (‘not pants!’), a turban to keep their hair out of the food, and some remembered wearing their fathers’ socks inside their boots or clogs in order to keep warm.⁹⁵ The butchers wore a coat also, either white or with navy and white stripes, though on the killing line some stripped to the waist.⁹⁶ All wore clogs, which ‘were great in the cold weather’ because they prevented one slipping on the frosty ground.⁹⁷

Actually when we went up to O’Mara’s first, we got a pair of clogs, and you got a canvas bag, you tied the canvas bag around your waist and that was your protective clothing... you would change the bag everyday...you put the old bag that was used to pack the bacon.’⁹⁸ There was an ‘old box in the centre of the floor and the old clogs...if you got a new pair of clogs, you would just throw the old pair in the bin.’⁹⁹



Shaw’s workers in the 1800s. Courtesy Pat Brosnahan

One of the resounding memories in people’s stories was the medley of sounds, the clogs on the streets – ‘All the men wore clogs... and clod, clod, clod...that’s what you’d hear’ – and the hooter ‘at the top of Clover Meats...the Clover siren used to wake everyone in Limerick at 7.45... It was an old war siren...It would call everyone...all over.’¹⁰⁰ Jim Kemmy, in an article written in 1990, remembered how:

Many of the butchers came from the Garryowen, Pike and Pennywell area. I grew up amongst them and knew all their families well. One of my most vivid childhood memories is of the clip-clop of the butchers’ clogs as the men made their way through the lanes and byways of Garryowen to the sound of Shaw’s hooter.¹⁰¹



*Matterson's men at work in
the hams section at the pea
processing plant across
Lady's Lane*

Courtesy Sean Curtin



The Hooter

The other sound most remembered in Limerick was the work siren that blew in the morning. 'In those days there used to be a hooter that went off in Limerick...at a quarter to eight in the morning' to call all the men and women to work – that is, for all but the office workers, whose day ran from 9 in the morning to 5.30 in the evening¹⁰² For the factory workers the length of the day was much the same for men and women, but varied according to the nature of the job and the volume of business. The hours were usually from 8 am to 5.30 pm, though the chainers were usually in by 7am and finished at 3pm, since they had to wash down the yard before heading home.¹⁰³ While winter was usually quiet, coming up to Christmas and during the summer months from May to September both butchers and the women in the various departments could work overtime from 6 pm to 10 pm – the extra hour from 6 pm being known as a 'banger' while the four hours 6 pm to 10pm was called a 'triangle'.¹⁰⁴ In Matterson's cannery the summer months were the toughest, when 'the farmers would bring the fresh garden peas... for the first three months you would have to work nearly all night to keep the machine going... because farmers were coming in...'¹⁰⁵

The Break

There were two breaks from work during the day: tea break was at 10 am when workers washed their hands and had their tea, whether in the canteen of the more modern Clover Meats factory, the more primitive accommodation in the other factories, or even sitting by the killing line.¹⁰⁶ At lunch time, which was at 1 pm, the majority of people travelled home for their one-hour lunch break, when a sandwich was eaten before heading back to work again. Everything was easier for the worker with a bike: getting to and from home was comfortable enough for those living in Garryowen or the Blackboy, but trailing down to St Mary's Park or Killeely was another matter: 'You had an hour then to come home, we'd have to move from Clover Meats and down into St. Mary's Park now...all in an hour and back and get our dinners and straight back to work again...'¹⁰⁷ Marie Madigan was one employee who 'had to cycle from Killeely, the other side of town at 7 o'clock in the morning, to the cannery' whether there was sunshine, rain or frost when 'I fell off my bike one morning going to work and went back up on it again...'¹⁰⁸

The van men's day was totally different. The advantage of 'going out on the road' was the five-day week – Monday to Friday – while until 1962 those on the factory floor worked on Saturday mornings also.¹⁰⁹ But the van men's day was long. They arrived in the factory at 7 am to load up the van, and were gone before 8 am when the other workers were only starting work. Michael Sheehan, who was the lead salesman for O'Mara's in Limerick, remembered how 'We often loaded the van at eight o'clock in the morning, and the van would be nearly touching the ground with the weight of the stuff that was in it, and we'd come back at five o'clock that night and there would be hardly nothing in it...'¹¹⁰ But for those on longer runs the starting time was much earlier. Michael O'Mara remembered doing a 'two day run' through Connemara from Claremorris in the 1950s.¹¹¹ Those doing the Limerick-Dublin journey had to time themselves to get to Dublin for 7am when the four vans operating within Dublin started their rounds: 'The hours were unreal... one of my brothers used to go up to Dublin at three o'clock in the morning... with a truck load of stuff.'¹¹² On the Belfast run, 'you'd leave here three o'clock in the morning.., maybe two o'clock in the morning, it would take you seven hours to get up to Belfast.' Whether doing the Dublin or another run, most vans did not arrive back in Limerick until 6 o'clock in the evening while others were still on the road late at night.

Black Puddings

Meat neck scraps from Killings

PAB - 200 lbs

Rice cooked 180 lbs

Spice (see below) $\frac{1}{2}$ per Block ($\frac{1}{2}$ cwt)

Water nil

Spice 7 lbs Black Pepper

1 a Cloves

5 a Salt

4 a Brynite

White Puddings

Meat: Bloody bits from Cutting

2 a Maws & Pluck

PAB nil

Rice cooked $2\frac{1}{2}$ cwt

Spice 9 lb (to $\frac{1}{2}$ cwt)

Water nil

Spice 7 lb White Pepper

$\frac{1}{2}$ a Nutmeg

$\frac{1}{2}$ allspice

$\frac{1}{2}$ Sage

5 lb Salt

4 lb Brynite

NB

These are only approximate proportions
as there is no definite weight of blocks

Wages

Wages differed, depending on whether the employee was a butcher, a boy, a 'Yank', an office worker, a van man or a female worker. 'Boys' – those under twenty-one years – who worked in the factory were on a different wage to that paid to the butchers: 'You were called a boy, and then you went on to be a man' and you got a man's wage. However, some workers were paid as boys long after their twenty-first birthday, one man explaining how 'You couldn't get married on a boy's wages. A girl would be better to go away and find someone else as how could you keep her on boy's wages?'¹¹³ For men, wages were broken down according to the three categories of butcher, with the A man in the mid-1950s on top weekly wages of roughly £6.17s., the B man was on about ten shillings less, and so on.¹¹⁴ The men's wages were considered 'poor enough before overtime' but after the 1950s they improved a great deal.¹¹⁵ For those working in Clover Meats, especially, the supply of tinned beef to the US troops involved in the Korean War meant increased business with the killing of cattle as well as pigs.¹¹⁶ The inception of the Intervention Beef scheme,¹¹⁷ with three or four containers of beef being sent to the continent every week, brought even more benefits to those working in Clover:

When we started boning intervention beef we had money when nobody had it. And you could be boning up to eight o'clock at night... Our basic pay was about forty-two pound but you could earn bonuses if you earned so many cattle a day...¹¹⁸

Salesmen worked on commission. They got for example, a 'basic pay of just say £100 or £200 [a week], and after that then it was one per cent' commission. For every £100 of product sold, the salesman got back £40.¹¹⁹ Women usually got about £2.16s.4d for their week's work, which had risen to approximately £3 by the mid-1960s and some female employees got a bonus in the busy summer months.¹²⁰ Office workers got a bonus at Christmas time, while some of the factories had bonus schemes for the van men.¹²¹ Tony remembered how Donnelly's [linked with O'Mara's since 1906 and bought over by Clover Meats in 1967] had a particularly good incentive scheme: 'If you didn't take a day off outside of holidays, didn't take a sick day or anything for a full twelve months, you got £100 into your hand Christmas week, plus commission and wages. It was like winning the lottery'.¹²²

Conclusion

Paddy Kiely's story about the sorting of wages on a Friday afternoon summed up the character of the Limerick bacon factory as a workplace by the late 1950s:

We got out wages... on a Friday night. You just went up to the office, and Johnny Carey was the transport manager, so you got your wages. Your wages were inside a five-ounce tin of peas... and Johnny just turned it up on the counter... your few pounds or whatever, the whole lot, but you just went in and you called out your number. Of course he had it off by heart, Paddy Kiely was twenty-six, and this fella was twenty-seven, but the same tin was put back up again and filled for next Friday.¹²³

This combination of efficiency and make-do typified the bacon factories in the three decades before they finally closed. Just as the wages were kept in improvised containers, but were also accurately computed, the working conditions in the industry combined the old and the new. Despite the progressive mechanisation of the killing and curing process, everything finally rested on the strength and skills of the men involved – passed down from father to son or from the older to the younger men and women. Though the physical work environment was improving as buildings were renovated, better facilities made available for break-time, and lifting equipment introduced, nothing could change the cold and wet conditions in which both male and female employees operated. And despite changing times and attitudes, the hierarchy of the factory remained, with a distinct pecking order which lasted until the business finally faded in the 1980s.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Those working in pork, bacon and canned foods in the city totalled 655, with up to another 130 in linked businesses outside the city bounds. Census of Ireland 1966, vol. 3 – Industries. Table 5, 'Males and females at work in each Province, County and County Borough classified by industry'. <http://www.cso.ie/en/census/censusvolumes1926to1991/historicalreports/census1966reports/census1966volume3-industries/>
- 2 Tony Sexton, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 19 May 2016.
- 3 Brenda Doyle, interviewed by Jackie Mullane, October 2012, Oral History Collection, Mary Immaculate College; Michael O'Halloran.
- 4 In the late nineteenth century the fair in Limerick Pig Market was held on the first and third Tuesday of the month. On 2 September 1890, 1,200 pigs went on sale in Limerick. Pig prices however were on a downward spiral with the best ones selling as low as 44s per cwt. It was reported that all pigs were purchased for the local factories. (*Limerick and Clare Advocate*, 6 September 1890). At the height of the dispute between the pig buyers and the merchants in the late 1890s, the pig buyers offered the highest price at this fair. On one such market day in November 1896, the pig buyers offered the farmers 36-37 s per cwt while the merchants offered only 34s. As a result, the farmers would only deal with the buyers. (*Limerick Leader*, 9 November 1896).
- 5 Ronnie Long.
- 6 Charlie Quaid, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 15 December 2015.
- 7 John McGrath, '*Sociability and socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's Parish, Limerick. 1890-1950*', Unpublished thesis, History, Mary Immaculate College (Limerick, 2006) pp 172-173.
- 8 Census Returns 1901, unpublished house returns, National Archives of Ireland, online, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>.
- 9 *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 December 1963.
- 10 Ronnie Long.
- 11 James Murnane and his two sons Denis and John, residing at 18 Athlunkard Street with their mother and two sisters were recorded as pig buyers in 1901. By 1911, Denis was married and living with his wife Annie and daughter Martha in 11 Ahern's Row. John was still living with his father, mother and two sisters in Athlunkard Street.
- 12 Daniel and John Quaid, living in 43 Nelson Street with their mother and two sisters were recorded as pig buyers in 1901. They were following in their father Charlie's footsteps. He was a pig buyer for Matterson's and had died in 1900 (Charlie Quaid).
- 13 William Purtill and his three sons, Edward, Michael and William, living in 6 James' Street were recorded as pig buyers in 1911. In 1901, however, William had obviously sent his sons Edward and Michael off to learn the trade as they were recorded as pork butchers.
- 14 A. Kirk, *Data Visualisation – A Handbook for Data Driven Design* (London, 2016), p. 174. 'A word cloud shows the frequency of individual word items used in textual data or documents'. The words are sized according to the frequency of usage in the Limerick trade directories.
- 15 Ibid. The words are sized according to the frequency of usage in the 1911 House Returns. Census of Ireland, National Archives of Ireland 1911, National Archives of Ireland, online, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>.
- 16 McGrath, '*Sociability and socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's Parish, Limerick. 1890-1950*', p. 172.
- 17 This data has been extracted from the 1901 and 1911 censuses.
- 18 Charlie Quaid.
- 19 McGrath, '*Sociability and socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's Parish, Limerick. 1890-1950*', p. 176
- 20 *Limerick Leader*, 26 April 1986.
- 21 Eddie Mc Manus.
- 22 The term ward was first introduced into the Limerick landscape following the Municipal Corporations (Ireland) Act of 1840. These wards consisted of Abbey, Castle, Irishtown, Customhouse, Market, Shannon, Glentworth and Dock. It was believed that the ward would be easier to manage and essential for the efficient governing of the city in the mid nineteenth century. Following the Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1891, the district electoral division (DED) became the unit of choice for collecting census data and corresponded to all intents and purpose to the ward boundaries.
- 23 In 1911 the average number of children per pig buying household on Athlunkard Street was four, however families like the Reids of 19 Athlunkard Street had ten children, one of whom, Hugh Reid, was also a pig buyer. Michael Quaid and his wife Annie, living on the other side of town on the Carey's Road also had ten children, one of whom, Patrick, was recorded as a pig buyer.
- 24 In 1901, six of the eleven pig buying families on Athlunkard Street had at least one servant. Charles Harty of 7 Athlunkard Street employed two – Lizzie Meade (30) and Hanora Bannon (12).
- 25 Kevin Hannan, *Limerick: Historical Reflections* (Limerick, 1996) p. 275.
- 26 McGrath, '*Sociability and socio-economic conditions in St. Mary's Parish*', p. 173.
- 27 *Limerick Leader*, 17 August 1903.
- 28 *Limerick Leader*, 11 February 1939.

- 29 In 1911 Ellen was residing in 1 Peter's Cell with her three sons and a daughter. Her son Christopher had followed in his father's footsteps and taken over the family business. They are living in a second class house with five rooms.
- 30 In 1901 Margaret Gilligan was residing in 5 Peters Cell with her three sons, two daughters and a servant. They were living in a first class house with eight rooms.
- 31 Calendar of Wills and Administrations, 1898, p. 175.
- 32 Michael Lehane, interviewed by Jackie Mullane, October 2012, Oral History Collection, Mary Immaculate College.
- 33 Jim O'Brien, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 2 December 2015; Ollie O'Brien.
- 34 Noel McMahon, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 29 June 2016.
- 35 Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien.
- 36 Marie Madigan.
- 37 Susan O'Mara.
- 38 Brenda Doyle.
- 39 Eddie McNamara.
- 40 Susan O'Mara.
- 41 Mary Carmody of Clare Street, Anne Skeahan of Conway's Bow and Bridget Scanlon of Symth's Row
- 42 Only three of the eighty women were described as sausage makers, the remainder were described as either labourers or workers in the bacon factory.
- 43 Liam Foley; Jerry O'Sullivan, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 2 December 2015.
- 44 Stephen (Oaksie) Fitzgerald.
- 45 Three of these were described as 'pork butcher apprentice'.
- 46 Joe Joyce, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 2 December 2015; Ronnie Long.
- 47 Joe Joyce.
- 48 Michael O'Halloran.
- 49 Joe Joyce.
- 50 Joe Joyce.
- 51 *Limerick Leader*, 18 June 1958; 22 October 1960; Paddy Bennis; Liam Foley. Some unsuccessful attempts were made to use gas instead of a stunner in the 1950s but this was thought to detrimentally affect the quality of the meat and was discontinued.
- 52 Joe Hayes; Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien.
- 53 Stephen (Oaksie) Fitzgerald.
- 54 *Kerry Weekly Reporter*; 1 November 1902.
- 55 'Yanks' were seasonal workers who could not rise in the ranks because their fathers were not pork butchers and they did not get the overtime work.
- 56 Noel McMahon.
- 57 Michael O'Halloran.
- 58 Michael O'Halloran.
- 59 John Tierney, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 5 February 2016.
- 60 Joe Hayes.
- 61 Joe Hayes.
- 62 *Pigs and Bacon Commission, Butchering Manual for Wiltshire Bacon*, (Limerick, no date), p. 3.
- 63 Eddie McNamara.
- 64 Joe Hayes.
- 65 Nancy Waters, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 29 January 2016; Hilda Reddan, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 29 January 2016.
- 66 Joe Joyce; Joe Hayes.
- 67 Eddie McNamara.
- 68 Susan O'Mara.
- 69 Susan O'Mara.
- 70 John Tierney.
- 71 Susan O'Mara.
- 72 Susan O'Mara.
- 73 Marie Madigan.
- 74 Teresa Hayes, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 25 January 2016.
- 75 Brenda Doyle.

- 76 Susan O'Mara.
- 77 Noel McMahon.
- 78 Hilda Reddan; Marie Madigan; Susan O'Mara.
- 79 Susan O'Mara.
- 80 Hilda Reddan.
- 81 Paddy Kiely, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 14 December 2015.
- 82 Phillip O'Sullivan.
- 83 Tony Flannery, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 2 December 2015.
- 84 Tony Flannery.
- 85 Paddy Kiely.
- 86 Michael O'Mara.
- 87 Tony Flannery.
- 88 Paddy Kiely.
- 89 Michael O'Mara.
- 90 Tony Flannery.
- 91 Tony Flannery.
- 92 Michael O'Halloran.
- 93 Joe Hayes.
- 94 Liam Foley; Paddy Kiely.
- 95 Hilda Reddan.
- 96 Joe Joyce.
- 97 Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien.
- 98 Joe Hayes.
- 99 Joe Hayes.
- 100 Tony Sexton; Joe Donnellan, interviewed by Jackie Mullane, October 2012, Oral History Collection, Mary Immaculate College.
- 101 *Limerick Leader*, 11 August 1990.
- 102 Michael Lehane; Eddie McNamara; Liam Foley.
- 103 Joe Joyce.
- 104 Breda McCarthy, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 29 January 2016; Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien; Hilda Reddan.
- 105 Teresa Hayes
- 106 Joe Joyce; Joe Hayes.
- 107 Susan O'Mara.
- 108 Marie Madigan.
- 109 Ronnie Long.
- 110 Michael O'Halloran.
- 111 Michael O'Mara.
- 112 Paddy Kiely.
- 113 Eddie McManus. A similar practice was also carried out in Ranks Mills.
- 114 Tom Fitzgerald, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 19 May 2016.
- 115 Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien.
- 116 Eddie McManus.
- 117 In order to guarantee beef prices for farmers, the European Economic Community 'intervened' by paying a specified price for beef when the wholesale price fell below a certain level. John Mark and Roger Strange, *The food industries* (London, 1993), p. 264.
- 118 Liam Foley; Eddie McNamara.
- 119 Paddy Kiely.
- 120 Nancy Waters.
- 121 Liam Foley.
- 122 Tony Flannery.
- 123 Paddy Kiely.



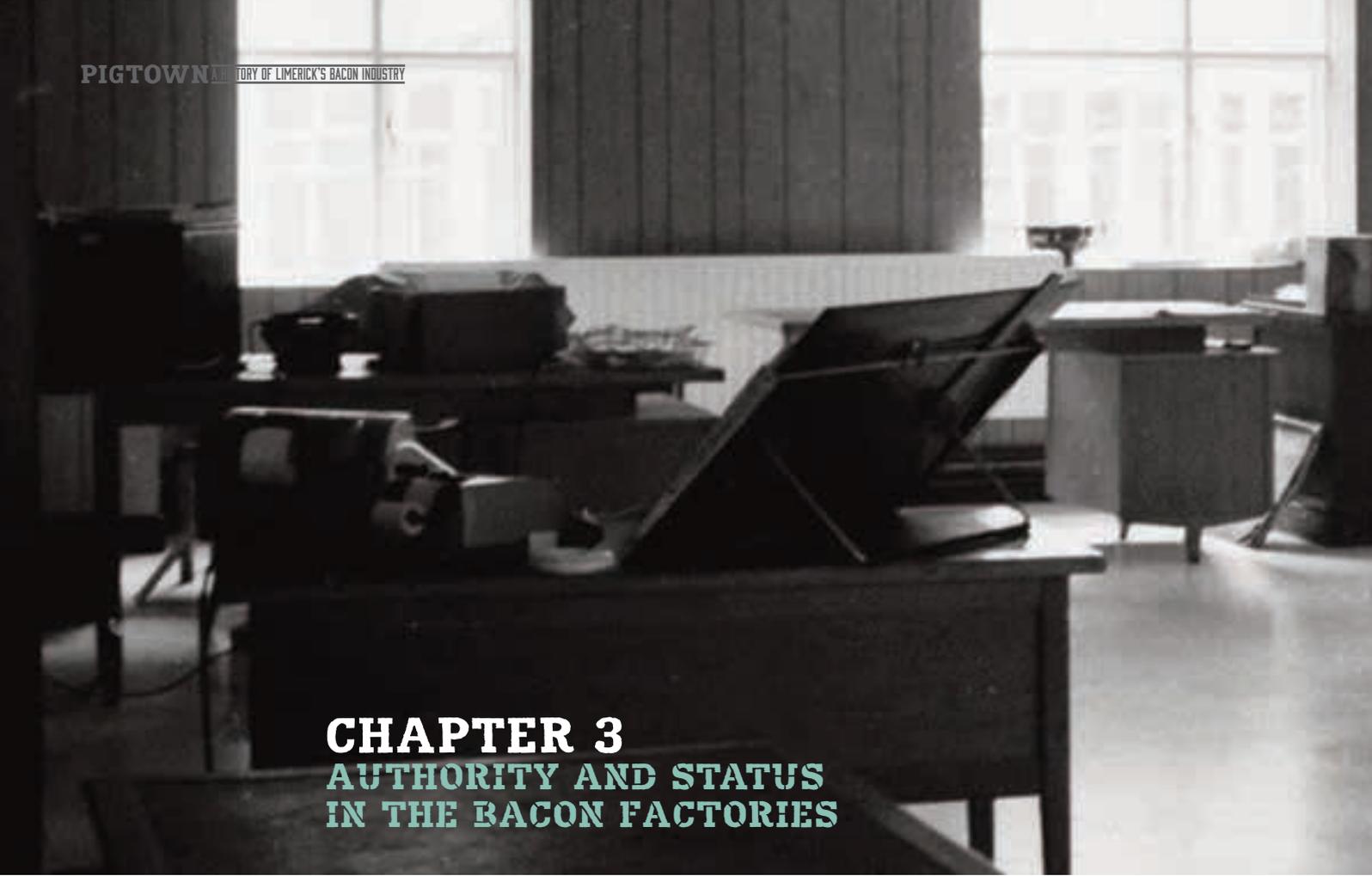
CHAPTER 3

AUTHORITY AND STATUS IN THE BACON FACTORIES



*An office in Shaw &
Sons, c.1890-1910*

Courtesy National Library of Ireland



CHAPTER 3 AUTHORITY AND STATUS IN THE BACON FACTORIES

The bacon industry in Limerick had its own internal pecking order. At the top were the owners, whether the family members in whose hands were the privately-owned factories like O'Mara's and Matterson's or the more remote ownership of Clover Meats which had taken over the original Shaw's factory by the 1950s. But even in the latter case remnants of the old family ownership remained, Malcolm and Eric Shaw staying on as directors into the 1960s.¹ In all the factories there was a more or less uniform management structure – extending from the Managing Director downwards to the General Manager, Assistant Manager and Office Manager, and then to the various foremen or supervisors in the different departments.²

Managers and workers

While memories differ as to the day-to-day contact between management and owners on the one hand and the workers on the other, it seems that the relationship generally involved a combination of distance and familiarity. One man remembered how, as a casual worker in O'Mara's during the summer months, 'You called everybody Mister' while a butcher in Clover Meats remembered addressing (and still referred to) the managers there in the same way.³ Sometimes the Christian name and the 'Mr' were combined: Mr O'Connor, the general manager of Clover Meats was often called Mr Leo, and Michael O'Mara, ultimately the owner of O'Mara's Bacon Factory, remembered the same thing when he began work there as a supervisor in the 1950s:

Sure some of the older ones used to call me Mr. Mickey – Mister! I remember I used to shrink when I'd hear the 'Mister' but, I mean, everybody else in the factory called me Mickey, I think.⁴

If the bridging of the gap between those giving and those taking the orders was easiest in the smaller factories, it also depended on the nature of the personalities involved:

Well, they were all fair enough d'ye know. I can't wrong any of them, d'ye know. The manager, Mr O'Connor he was all right too. He was one of our own, like, you know.⁵



The office at O'Mara's

Courtesy Tony Punch

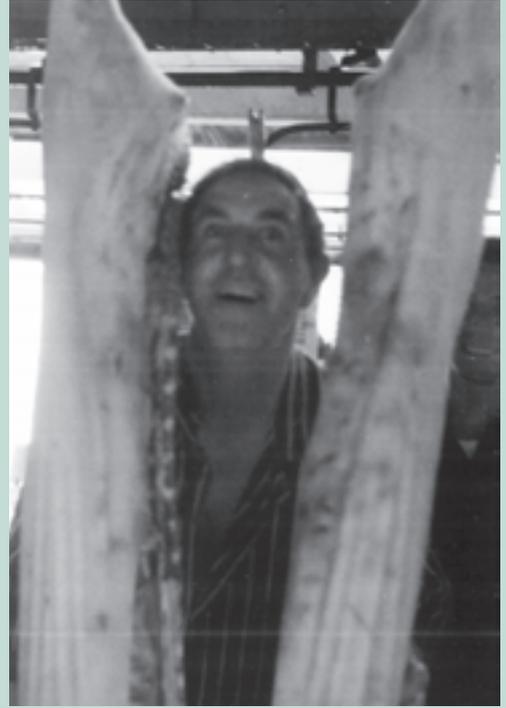
The Management

Matterson's management were remembered as 'decent people, they were very fair', and Douglas Leach in particular was singled out as a really nice man.⁶ The key to good relations was respect. Michael O'Mara described the workers as 'completely and absolutely honourable, honest, hard-working and dignified. There was just an innate dignity [about them]....'⁷ Where managers respected workers in this way, such respect was returned: even when the manager could 'eat the face off you' for a breach of the rules, once he 'didn't hold it in for you' relations remained good.⁸ In Clover Meats, for instance, Mr O'Connor, the manager, was remembered as 'a gentleman, and his bark was worse than his bite, if you know what I mean.'⁹ The management's willingness to turn a blind eye now and again was equally important. Jack O'Mara, who was owner and director of O'Mara's until 1970, could remind workers that his eye was on them while, at the same time, ignoring some of the devilment that went on. It was easy enough to turn a blind eye when the rule-breakers were very good workers, as can be seen in this story of two workers in O'Mara's:

He was fond of a tippie and he had a buddy that [was the same]. So on a Monday morning [when things were slack] he'd come up - 'Well, how's it going?' And the two of them - hand in the pocket - and there was a side gate, you see, where we were working. They'd go out the side gate and up to McKnight's pub above at the corner for two tiddles. And they'd come back down then and they'd just shout in - 'Joe!' So I'd be there working and I'd pull them up - there was a little gap in the wall where they could put their toe in, you see. And I'd catch the hand and 'up you come!' So no-one would be the wiser. So I was there one day and I was cutting up the sausage meat like, you know, and next thing I heard 'Joe!'. So I dropped the knife and next thing I got a tap on the shoulder - 'It's all right- I'll get them.' Jack O'Mara - the big boss man. Up to the gate - 'Come on!' - He pulled the two of them up. Never another word said about it.¹⁰



Col. R. C. Longford, Director of Matterson's Ltd. Courtesy *Limerick Leader* .



Brendan O' Halloran at work in O'Mara's Bacon Factory c.1960. Courtesy Michael O Halloran



O'Mara's possibly Richie Rays shop. Courtesy Tony Punch

The O'Mara factory was run on what Michael O'Mara called 'Victorian' values – i.e. a belief in hard work and the perfection of skills – values that were expected of the owner's family members as much as of the workers employed in the business. Michael himself started off in 1950 'in the lowest, in the hardest part of the factory, any place the people didn't like, driving up the pigs to be killed. I went from that right through everything in it. And ... If something went wrong, you took responsibility for it, you got up and you paid for it.'¹¹ While he considered that he 'wasn't even nearly as skilled as any of the fellows in the factory', his hands-on approach earned him their respect:

He was a gentleman. He wasn't just a boss - he was like one of our own. He often came out of his office when we'd be short of men, take off his tie, roll up his sleeves, put on an apron, and he'd go up there and butcher. That's why I always admired him. He was never frightened to get wet, to go mucking in.¹²

This memory of Michael O'Mara was also confirmed in the stories of women who worked in the factory: 'He'd be all dressed up and he'd take off his coat and sure he roll up his sleeves and he would go in with all the butchers and he'd be doing – he'd help them and all...'¹³ This positive view of O'Mara's management was also evident in Breda's memory of overstepping the mark when bringing hams to the railway station:

I went up. I see the red carpet, walked up the red carpet in my wellingtons... I didn't know who 'twas for. A hand went on my shoulder – a detective! 'You walked on the red carpet.' 'Yes, says I to him, 'I did'...

'Well you shouldn't have.'

I said to him, 'I'm doing nothing, I was only up to post off hams for O'Mara's', I said. 'I didn't know who the carpet was for.'

'That's for the President, says he, 'The President is coming in by train. We have a good mind to arrest you.'

'To arrest me, for what?'

He said, 'that was there for the president and the president only'.

I said – 'Come here, says I to him, 'What's the difference between the President and me? If he could walk on the red carpet, so could I.'

Inevitably, a complaint went in to O'Mara's regarding the incident, and Breda was called into the office to explain. Having heard her account, Michael O'Mara made no comment but shook his head and eventually said: 'Do me a favour – go back to work.'¹⁴

Matterson's c.1960.
From the back:

Marie Kiely, Nuala McManus,
Derry Joyce () Mavis Phehan
(RIP), Betty Moloney, Noreen
Buckley, Paddy Madigan (RIP)
Frankie Duggan, Seanie
Fitzgerald, Breda Connors, Lena
Blackhall, Helen FitzGerald,
Marie Griffin, Patsy Tully;

Dolores Curtis, Madelene
McCarthy, Bela Brock, Marie
Griffin; Joe Judge;

Margie McNamara (RIP) vera
Moynihan, Betty Galligan,
Francis Duggan, Dorothy
O'Dwyer, Breda Viners;

Carmel Viners, Annie Howard,
Teresa Bourke, Cathleen
Wallace; Rose-Ann McManus,
Carmel Clancy

Courtesy Paddy Kiely and Joe
Hayes



Office staff

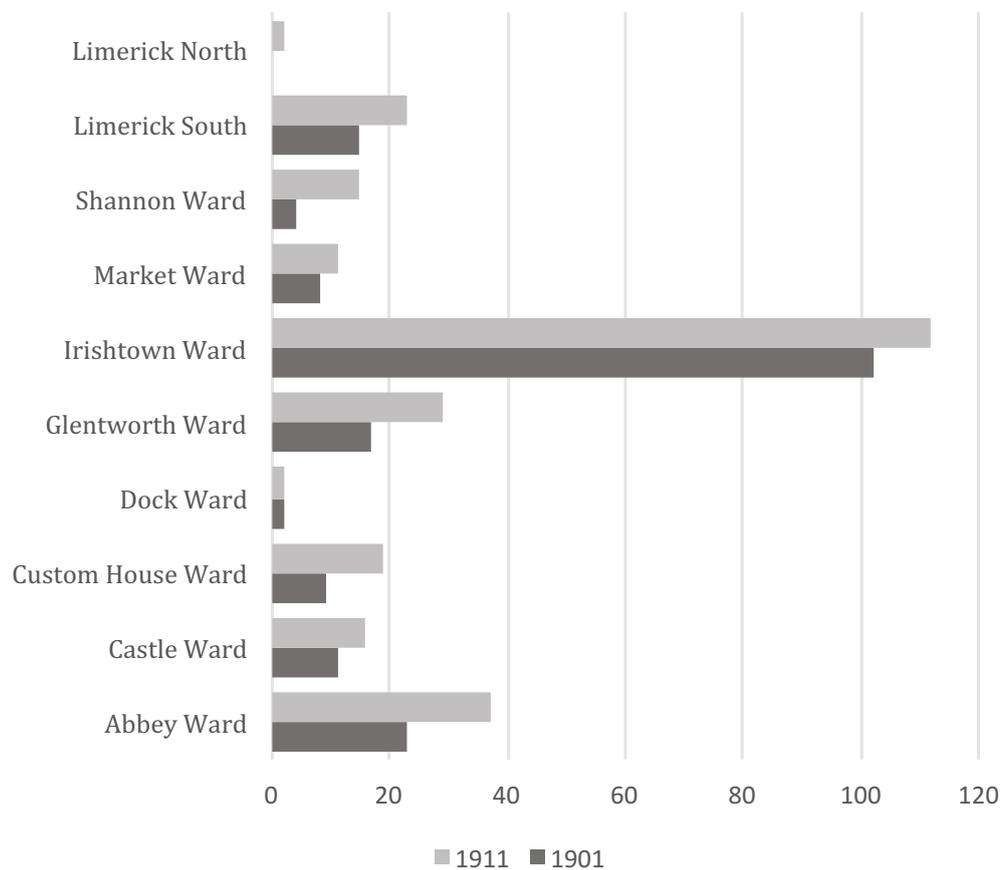
Below the ranks of the owners and managers there were four main categories of workers that interacted with one another to a greater or lesser extent – the office staff, the pork butchers, the casual workers and the women working in the gut house, the sausage making, and (in the case of Matterson's) the cannery. Between the office staff and the other workers there was relatively little contact within the workplace, though some of the male office staff, who worked in Clover Meats, went down periodically to check cattle coming in and meat going out.¹⁵ Female office workers were certainly in a different sphere to those on the factory floor: one man remembered a few of the office women as being 'a bit stiff' while some of the women who worked in the gut and sausage houses agreed – 'They stayed in their office, they never interfered with us.'¹⁶

The office staff worked the same hours as other workers, and some did have periodic jobs in the production areas of the factory but these office workers occupied different worlds to the people on the factory floor. According to the 1911 census they lived in different areas of the city to the factory floor workers – Ascot Terrace (3), Ballincurra (3), Colooney Street, Crescent (2), Emmet Place, Hartstonge Street, Henry Street, Henry Street South, Mallow Street, Military Road (3), Mulgrave Street, Newenham Street (2), North Strand, Quin Street (2), Quinlan Street, Richmond Street, Johns Avenue, Lelia Street and Wellington Terrace. They lived in large houses, with an average of eight rooms per house and a room density of 1.5 rooms per person. Furthermore seven of the twenty-one families employed a servant, again an indication of the relative wealth at their disposal. Culturally they were also quite distinct, as over half of those employed in the office were either Church of Ireland, Methodist or Plymouth Brethren.¹⁷ While this profile may have changed over the following seventy years, there is no doubt that they were to some extent seem as 'a different class of people. They were an elite crowd, you see; because we had no education and they had, do you understand? You mightn't see it like that today, but that was it. That was life – that's the way life was.'¹⁸

Address and status

The distinction between office workers and those on the factory floor was also reflected in the addresses of the two groups. We have the greatest detail for the early twentieth century because of the availability of the census figures for 1901 and 1911, which show that pork butchering families were found across the city, but were especially concentrated around the railway station, in the Irishtown and around the Blackboy. (Figures 11 & 12).

Figure 11. Pork Butchers by Ward in 1901 and 1911



Unlike the pig buyers and office workers, these pork butchers and their families tended to live in small and often overcrowded houses. In a 1908 housing report, it was stated officially that a room containing two or more people was deemed overcrowded.¹⁹ James McNamara, pork butcher, lived in 38 Back Clare Street in 1911 with his wife, six sons and two daughters.²⁰ Apart from his fourteen year old son (Michael) who was a 'telegraph messenger' he was the only wage earner. This family of ten lived in a two room property, a far cry from the housing conditions experienced by those working in the offices. John McCann and his wife, four sons and three daughters, were also living in overcrowded conditions in their four roomed house on Cathedral Place.²¹ Limerick, like other Irish towns and cities, had a major housing shortage. The result was overcrowding, i.e. more (sometimes much more) than two people per room, as officially defined at the time, until the public housing schemes began in earnest in the 1930s. But even then, the overcrowding continued, Joe Joyce remembering how, in his family, 'there was fifteen of us born in the house...'²² Overcrowding did not necessarily mean either misery or poverty. Cramped conditions co-existed with close community and neighbourliness. As another man who was brought up in the Blackboy remembered, 'growing up in the Pike was a great place. We were all neighbours and we all knew each other.'²³

Distinctions in the factory

Such overcrowded conditions were experienced by the vast majority of workers on the factory floor; whether butchers, labourers, or women workers. But once within the factory there were definite status differences. Among the women there was little obvious distinction (apart from that between office and manual workers), perhaps because their numbers were fewer than those of the male workers. A few were remembered as trying to confine themselves to the ham packing area in an obvious attempt to avoid the smellier tasks in the gut house. Though such avoidance was seen as a matter of 'having notions', individual memories suggest that it was due more to individuals' squeamishness about the smell and feel of the guts (something of a disadvantage for someone working in a meat factory!) and to the intense cold in areas that were always wet and draughty.²⁴

Pork butchers and casual workers

The most obvious status difference was between the pork butchers and the casual workers, generally referred to as 'Yanks'. The pork butchers were decidedly in the top ranks of the factory workforce. Obviously there was the matter of skill. Killing and butchering was a highly skilled occupation, reflected in the extra five shillings on wages in the 1950s for 'using a knife.'²⁵ But the wage difference was less important a distinguishing feature than the issues of skill and family: even if there was only a matter of shillings between the wages of 'a grade A butcher and [those of the] fella pushing pigs up and down the lane,... the grade A butcher would hardly talk to that fella... because he wasn't skilled.'²⁶



Garvey's Range, Limerick, Courtesy Limerick Museum

Butchering was passed from father to son, and to no-one else, which made it an exclusive trade, closed to 'outsiders' and very conscious of its superiority. As the saying went, 'What's the difference between the Pope and a pork butcher? A pork butcher can become Pope, but the Pope can never become a pork butcher.'²⁷ The sense of pride in the craft, and of the right of a butcher's son to follow his father's trade, comes out clearly in the memories of one man who worked in Shaws from the age of sixteen:

When I went in they put me on this belly car as they called it. 'Twas where the bellies came down and you put them into a car and you brought them around then to the girls in the gut house. I cried my eyes out, I did. This wasn't me, you know, I just couldn't do it, like. So my father came down and he straightened them all out, said - 'Hey! He's a butcher's son. Give him a job!'... So by the age of seventeen, then, I got man's wages as they called it.²⁸

Another man recalled how he learned as a young boy how family connections were essential to entering butchering:

Mr O'Connor was the manager at the time, I went in looking for a job and... he refused me a job, like, simply because I didn't know what the situation was. I just went in and asked him for a job because... my brother said there was jobs coming on in Clover Meats... I just asked Mr. O'Connor for a job... you know I was small and timid at the time, like, you know, you wouldn't be strong enough at the time...And when I was coming out, then, I met an uncle of mine outside the door and he said 'Eh...what are you doing?,' 'I'm down looking for a job... 'When are you starting?' 'No I - he told me there was no jobs here.' 'Your family's in here,' he said... He went up to the office to see O'Connor. Well, five minutes after, Mr O'Connor came down. 'Come here, come here,' he says to me, 'Did you tell me you were a butcher?' I didn't know what a butcher was. I didn't know - you see, at that time your father had to be a butcher before you could become a butcher. My father had died when I was seven, so I didn't know, and my brother didn't bother telling me that you could go and get a job.²⁹

As a result of this emphasis on skill and family tradition, there was a clear distinction between the pork butchers and the Yanks who came in as casual workers either in the summer months (when boys were free from school and which was also the factories' busy season), or as long-term workers in the yard and other areas of the factory outside the killing and butchering lines.³⁰ Though nobody was quite sure where the term originated, one man explained that it was used for those who 'were like Yanks - Americans - they came and went.'³¹

One man who remembered working in O'Mara's during the school holidays described a Yank boy as:

...a boy that just went in. There was a distinction between that and a butcher boy. A butcher boy would go in because his father was working as a pork butcher, he could rise up ... to be a pork butcher. A Yank boy would never have risen up...³²

While some Yanks had almost continuous work in the factory, others seem to have had as little security as did casual workers on the docks or in the mills - standing outside the factory gate on a summer morning, and hoping to be one of the twenty or so picked by the manager for a few weeks' work.³³ At a personal level there was no real division between butchers and Yanks: 'We all palled around together - we had fabulous times'³⁴ but in terms of status within the factory there was definitely a distinction. While the butcher who left the factory for a time,

possibly to go to England, could hold his place by paying a reduced membership fee to the Pork Butchers' Society, the Yanks had no such security. Some of the women (probably able to look at the situation more clearly from outside the ranks of the male workers) felt in retrospect that 'some people were not very nice to the Yanks' while a former office worker remembered a joke cracked in Shaw's: 'When are we going to get the British out of Ireland? As soon as we get the Yanks out of Shaw's!'³⁵

Demarcation of work

There was also a clear distinction between the butchers and the transport staff. The transport men could not interfere in the work of butchers and *vice versa*. One story highlighted the loading and unloading of the bacon sides for transports.

Four sides of bacon were packed together and they would be piled up against the wall...at night then, you couldn't touch that until the butchers were finished at 6 o'clock, or whatever time, and then we would back our truck... and there was a hoist then, you put the hook onto it, press a button, up it went...but the point I'm coming to is, I could be up in that truck, at 4 o'clock, or whatever, mad to load the truck, I wouldn't be allowed to load it. That was the butchers job...all I had to do then was fix it up on the truck my own way.'³⁶

Once loaded, the bacon went to the station and into the CIE wagon. Once again, the demarcation between occupations was obvious: the van-men were not allowed to touch the sides of bacon, which were put on the wagon by the CIE workers:

We went up there one day, there were two wagon loads of bacon, right, and when we went up, the order was cancelled, and we had to go up and take it back out. The CIE workers wouldn't take it back out, it was we who had to go up and take it out, and by Jaysus, it was an awful job...a side of bacon would weight roughly 60lbs, wouldn't it – there or thereabouts?³⁷

While it was difficult for outsiders – especially in the changing times of the 1960s and 70s – to understand the butchers' insistence on their special role within the industry, their attitude was geared to maximising employment within the trade:

Everyone had their own job and you had nothing else to do. And if you had nothing to do, you had nothing to do. But that was the way 'twas done, and the reason they done that was to get employment in, you see. If the one person done everything, you'd have only the one person employed, but when you needed one for everything, you had twenty people employed.³⁸

Trade Union Inheritance

This was an inheritance from the labour tradition of the later nineteenth century when a new type of unionism spread throughout Britain and Ireland, distinct from the craft unions in that its focus was on 'winning improvements in wages and conditions' for unskilled and semi-skilled workers.³⁹ This 'new unionism' found ready recruits in the bacon industry in Limerick, Cork and Waterford as the butchers, who were conscious of their own particular skills but who were not recognised by either employers or the traditional trades as being skilled workers – something that was reflected in the unwritten rule in Limerick that pork butchers could not wear a collar and tie going to work – a privilege confined to the sausage maker and foreman.⁴⁰



Matterson's Staff. Courtesy Joe Hayes

The introduction of a new unionism

Though the origins of the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society are usually traced to 1890 – in the middle of this period of the spread of 'new unionism' – the society was in fact founded some twenty years earlier, around 1870, and had already made its presence felt in the city when some of its members were prominently involved in political debates in which the Congregated Trades (the trades' council of the time) took part.⁴¹ The early Pork Butchers' Society made its labour militancy felt in 1884, when bacon production in the city was almost paralyzed by a dispute affecting Denny's, Matterson's and Shaw's in relation to 'pig money' – i.e. a bonus of one penny paid on top of his regular wages to each butcher for each pig he had killed during the week.⁴² This was a very bitter dispute. The affected factories kept production going by employing some pig buyers and the firms' clerks to kill the pigs, and so great was the resentment among the striking workers that the buyers and clerks had to be given police protection. The atmosphere after the strike was very bitter when (though the details are hazy) a large number of the strikers were permanently replaced by other men who had resumed work towards the end of the dispute.⁴³

The reason that the 1884 dispute has been forgotten and that of 1890 has been popularly remembered as the starting point of the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society is that in 1890 the pork butchers of the country's three most prominent bacon-producing cities – Cork, Limerick and Waterford – joined together to form the Amalgamated Pork Butchers' Society. This body sought the restoration of 'pig money', which was being eroded progressively by the larger bacon companies that had been involved in the dispute of six years previously – Lunham's in Cork, Matterson's in Limerick, Shaw's in Cork and Limerick, and Denny's in Waterford and Limerick.⁴⁴

What evolved in 1890 was a complicated strike-cum-lockout as the new Amalgamated Society and these larger bacon factory proprietors faced each other. The strike actually originated in



John Fitzgerald, Pork Butcher President, making a donation to Bishop Henry Murphy, 1959.
Courtesy Thomas Fitzgerald

Waterford and Michael Sheehan, the leader of the Society men there, became the overall organiser of the workers throughout the three centres.⁴⁵ The newspapers of the day gave major coverage to the strike, and the public reaction was 'mixed, with some arguing in favour of the striker's demands and others criticising the inability of merchants and men to negotiate a settlement.'⁴⁶ There were four main issues involved in the strike. The first was the selective payment of the 'pig money' that had been at the heart of disputes in the previous decades, Shaw's factory refusing to pay the penny on pigs brought to the factory by pig buyers' (as opposed to those delivered directly by farmers). Secondly, there was a matter of lack of uniformity in the wages rates and working hours in the three cities, Limerick, Cork and Waterford. Thirdly, pork butchers sought to establish parity with the craft societies which were considered to be more skilled and therefore better paid and with better working conditions. Finally, the pork butchers wished to enforce a closed shop environment in which only Society men and those with family connections in the trade could gain employment.⁴⁷ On the other side, the bacon curers sought to equalise pay rates at the lowest level possible and aimed to eliminate 'pig money' payments in all centres.⁴⁸

Bishop and butcher

The resolution of the strike was eventually achieved through the intervention of the Catholic bishop of Limerick, Thomas O'Dwyer, who acted as arbitrator between the Society and the bacon companies. Local folklore among the city's pork butchers today dates the settlement to 15 August 1890, and stresses that the appreciation of the butchers for the bishop's efforts was perpetuated in the decision of the society to attend a special mass in St John's Cathedral each year on 15 August. Up to the closure of the last bacon factory in the mid-1980s, this custom continued, the butchers taking an unpaid day off while other employees in the factories went

on with their usual work.⁴⁹ However, Bishop O'Dwyer's help in settling the strike was not without its downside, since it was followed by the side-lining of the original leader of the strike, Michael Sheehan who had previously been active in unionising the pork butchers in Waterford and who had worked in Shaw's factory since coming to Limerick. Once the settlement had been reached and he tried to resume his employment he found the gate shut to him, and although the other workers in the factory threatened to strike in his support, it is not quite clear whether he was re-employed.⁵⁰ What went wrong for Sheehan is not quite clear. It may have been that as an outsider he was never fully trusted within the close-knit world of the Limerick pork butchers. Or his attitude may have been too militant for many of those he led. As their livelihoods (and those of their families) depended on a settlement with the employers, they seem to have been willing to adopt the compromise solution put forward by Bishop O'Dwyer. Sheehan's experience was not unique. In a period when trade union funds were limited, and a protracted strike meant hunger for those involved, compromise was often the most realistic approach – though it could lead in the long run to deep divisions in the ranks of those who had formerly been united. Limerick was not unique in this regard: five years later there was a major dispute in the bacon industry in Waterford when there was an internal conflict among the pork butchers there in relation to the alleged breaking of society rules by some members.⁵¹

They say that history is written by the victors, so the shabby treatment of Sheehan – 'the forgotten hero of the 1890 lock-out' – has been wiped from popular memory in Limerick while the (not undeserved) veneration of Dwyer has continued.⁵² The pork butchers conferred the honorary presidency of their society on the bishop, the position also going to his successors. The annual mass on 15 August was a major expression of the strong Catholicism and traditional social attitudes of the majority of the pork butchers generally: at the mass, year after year, presentations were made by the Society to the bishop (either a personal gift like a fountain pen or a financial contribution to some important church project like the diocesan college building fund).⁵³ It was not surprising that in the early 1940s when there was major concern in conservative circles regarding the spread of socialism and communism, Bishop David Keane, told the butchers at their annual mass while men such as they formed the backbone of the city's workers, there was 'no danger of 'isms' infecting Limerick.⁵⁴ Such social traditionalism was a product of the time and the place. Limerick was a strongly Catholic city whose population were described at the O'Mara factory's centenary dinner as 'a loveable and God-fearing people.'⁵⁵ Besides, many of those still active, or at least influential, in the Pork Butchers' Society by the early 1950s were old men, a number of whom had been present at the society's foundation at the end of the previous century, and they carried the attitudes of an earlier time into the mid-twentieth century.⁵⁶

The Pork Butchers' Society

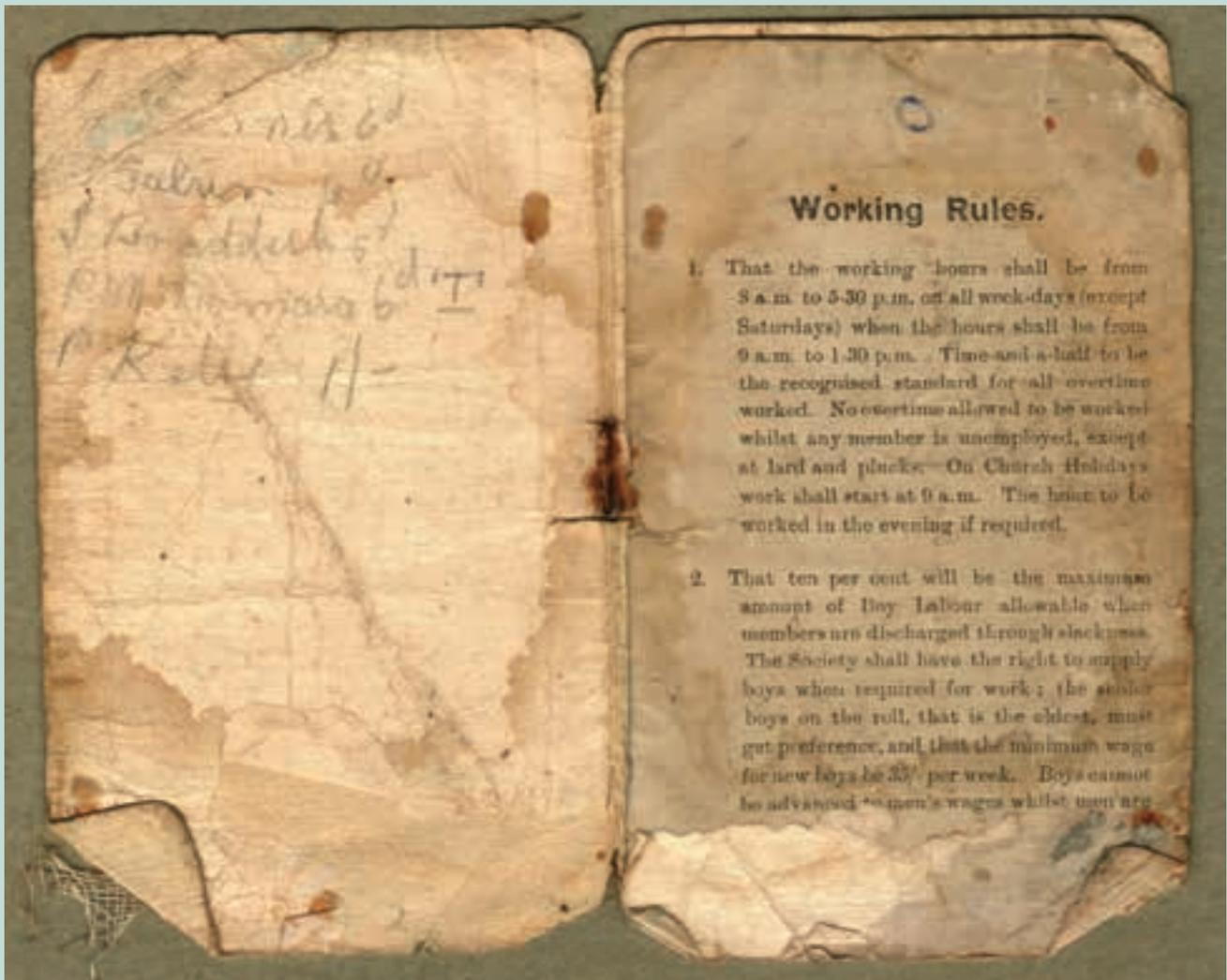
Membership of the Pork Butcher's Society was quite exclusive: it was confined to those who were capable of 'using the knife' and – especially importantly – to those whose fathers were members of the Society. The main function of the society was the protection and support of its own members, especially in times of unemployment. In 1893, for instance, when Shaw's resorted to laying off butchers during a slack period, the Society initially campaigned against the lay-offs and, when these became inevitable, made payments to support those who had lost their jobs.⁵⁷ This prefigured the activity of the Society over the following eighty years: it combined the functions of a trade union (defending the wages and working conditions of its members) with those of a benefit or friendly Society (contributing to the upkeep of unemployed members and their families, and paying the funeral expenses of members who died). The pork butchers' weekly dues to the Society (between four-and-sixpence and five shillings per week in the 1920s and six shillings by the 1950s) were lodged into a fund from which to pay these benefits. The ledger recording these payments survives for the years 1924-1931, giving us a profile of the city's pork butchers in hard times when the support of the society essential for survival.⁵⁸ The high rate of unemployment among the butchers comes across in the number of times the word 'emigrant' was entered beside members' names, and in the high amount of



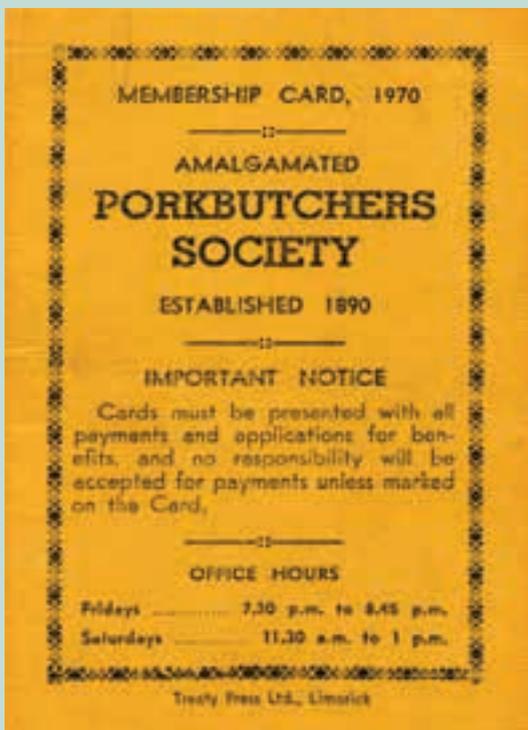


*FAI Cup match in
Dublin in the
1950s*

Courtesy Sean Curtin



The working rules of the Pork Butcher Society. Courtesy Jerry O'Sullivan



Membership Card of the Pork Butcher Society. Courtesy Jerry O'Sullivan



Striking workers at O'Mara's, Courtesy Tony Punch

arrears noted. For the year 1926, for example, thirty-five per cent of members were in arrears for the months of January, February and March of 1926, the arrears ranging from 5s to approximately £9.1s.⁵⁹ As the twentieth century passed, the Society continued to safeguard the jobs of those who had emigrated, ensuring that once a reduced membership fee continued to be paid during a butcher's absence, his job was available to him on his return.⁶⁰ None of this, or course, operated in favour of the casual workers who, while they might remain in the city, still had to move over when the Society member returned from England to reclaim his job or when a young man from a butchering family looked for work.

The fluctuations in the membership of the Society are difficult to make out in those early years. In 1892, directly following the strike, the Amalgamated Union had 562 members, but this fell to 519 in 1893, possibly because of a fall-off in the Waterford branch. By 1912 the Cork branch had left the Amalgamation (though it continued to operate as a separate society), leading to a further reduction in membership so that by the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society had an average annual membership of 307 members.

Table 9. Pork Butchers' Society Members 1924-1931.

Year	Members
1924	387
1925	338
1926	325
1927	291
1928	289
1929	282
1930	275
1931	269

The Limerick pork butchers maintained this society until (and beyond) the closure of the city's bacon factories in the 1970s and 1980s, but also affiliated with the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union in 1921. Despite the break-up of the Amalgamation covering the three cities of Cork, Waterford and Limerick, the Limerick pork butchers maintained an active role in labour affairs outside Limerick in the early twentieth century. Eight years before affiliating with the Transport Union, their society actively supported those locked out in Dublin in 1913, and, in fact, sent a contribution of £500 to assist them, the sum being recouped by a levy on its own members.⁶¹ This was the highest contribution sent in by any group, prompting Jim Larkin to say that the name of the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society should be written in gold – something of which the members of the society remain proud to this day.⁶²

Disputes in the bacon industry

Following the big strike of 1890, and despite frequent brief stoppages of work, there was no major dispute in the bacon trade for several decades. Even when a major butchers' strike erupted in Dublin in 1945 (largely over pay and workers' demands for extra holidays) the Limerick factories were not affected.⁶³ The reasons for this relative harmony in the industry were complex. Firstly, the Pork Butchers' Society maintained a tight control over the work procedures in the Limerick factories and had a definite and long-established procedure for dealing with disputes. The butchers in each of the three factories had a committee of nine men elected yearly by the butchers in that factory. These nine were divided into groups of three, each group taking its turn to negotiate with management when the occasion arose:

You had three acting ... you'd have three for January, February, March, April then you'd pull back and the next three would go in for the next four months and the next three for the [last] four months... Anything that went wrong in the factory, you'd see the people acting on the committee go into management to sort it out. If that failed you'd look for your [Society] officers to come in; now, they could come up from Clover's and Matterson's as well ... you'd also have one [Society officer] in each factory, at least one in each factory and they'd come in ...and if that failed you brought the Transport Union in.⁶⁴

Because the butchers were also affiliated with the Transport Union, major disputes that could not be resolved by the Society were then passed to the Transport Union – so that when the Limerick bacon industry entered its final years from the early 1970s onwards, both the Pork Butchers' Society and the ITGWU were involved in the negotiations.⁶⁵ This was both a strength and a weakness. It was a strength in that it was essential to have the support of a large union behind what was (in country-wide terms) a relatively small group of workers like the pork butchers. It was a weakness in that the two bodies did not always agree: the Pork Butchers' Society was made up of a small and somewhat exclusive group of workers determined to maintain the traditions of the trade, while the ITGWU represented a much larger proportion of the working population and, despite its all-out efforts to save jobs in the Limerick bacon industry when the crisis of the 1970s arose, it may have lacked sympathy for the traditionalism of the butchers.⁶⁶

How much the attitude of individual firms towards their employees (and vice-versa) contributed to either stability or tension within Limerick's bacon industry is not clear. It was significant that back in the 1880s and 1890s O'Mara's factory was not involved in the big disputes within the industry, while the larger firms of Shaw's, Denny's and Matterson's were strike-bound and – more importantly – were responsible for forming what was in effect a union of employers against the workers.⁶⁷ Similarly, as the bacon trade in Limerick neared its end in the early 1970s, relations between workers and management in the larger concerns soured and bitter things were said. For instance, during a series of disputes in Clover Meats (which had recently been described by the Pork Butchers' Society as 'one of the best employers in the city') one butcher told a major management figure to his face that he 'wouldn't run a fish and chip shop.'⁶⁸ In contrast, while smaller concerns did not escape disputes, the aggravation between worker and employer seems to have been diluted by a mutual acceptance of things as they were. In O'Mara's, where the plant and equipment had become seriously out-of-date by the 1960s – it was dismissed by workers elsewhere as the 'offal shop' – the personal touch of its owners was its salvation:

... [The butchers] would be going on strike because Shaw's were going on strike for something, Shaw's because Matterson's were. Then Shaw's became Clover Meats and, jeepers, they seemed to be going on strike every week... I don't know – I had nearly forgotten about it! But I know it was quite common that there was going to be a strike, you know... but having said that, they were difficult but they were the nicest fellas you could meet....lovely fellas, yeah! Really nice. They were kind of a special breed unto themselves. I don't know what it was – they were gentlemen, you know...⁶⁹



Laila Madden, Matterson's. Courtesy *Limerick Leader*



Clover Meats Strike. Courtesy Sean Curtin



Clover Meats Soccer Team 1953-'54. Courtesy Oliver O'Brien



Clover Meats. Courtesy Sean Curtin

Changing times

But with the benefits of hindsight, it might be said that from the mid-1960s onwards, the world of bacon production was changing. For those lucky enough to be employed, these were good times: memories of overtime and high earnings – especially with the introduction of the intervention beef scheme – dominate the stories of those who were young workers in the factories in the 1960s.⁷⁰ But problems were building up for the Limerick bacon industry. Increased competition from Denmark, Ireland's entry to the EEC, and the changing attitudes to productivity and work practices all competed with the rising demands of workers for their share of rising prosperity – all reflected in the various disputes that took place in the Limerick bacon industry from the mid-1960s onwards. In November 1961 Matterson's management locked out twenty men who had arrived late for work – an unusually severe reaction to what was traditionally considered a minor transgression: the result was a lightning strike by the pork butchers. This strike spread in turn to the other workers in the factory who, instructed by the Transport Union, quickly returned to work.⁷¹ Though the issue was swiftly resolved, the incident was a sign of the growing tensions between different unions and the swiftly changing attitudes and relationships within the industry. Five years later, in 1966, Limerick bacon workers were involved in the country-wide campaign among industrial workers for an extra week's paid leave, a pay increase of £1 a week, and a weekly £5 non-contributory pension for workers who had reached the age of sixty-five.⁷² In this dispute, where the Transport Union and the Federated Union of Employers confronted one another, about 3,500 bacon workers in thirty-four bacon factories throughout the country were affected, including the members of the Limerick Pork Butchers' Society. While the Labour Court decision was largely favourable to the workers, other contemporary developments were less positive.⁷³



Conclusion

These events occurred in a time when working conditions and production methods were changing swiftly. Old firms were taken over by new concerns and modes of production were changing: Shaw's had already been bought over by Clover Meats in 1950 and Matterson's, which had ceased killing and moved completely into canning in 1966, was purchased by Erin Foods in 1968.⁷⁴ As these changes occurred, the old structures and relationships within the bacon factories also changed. Therefore, when a major rationalisation scheme was introduced in 1971 (but already mooted in 1963) to streamline the Irish bacon industry in the face of foreign competition, this was a major threat to the traditional running of the Limerick factories.⁷⁵ Not only did such rationalisation involve the closure of small firms – which had little enough impact on Limerick city's bacon industry – but the work practices of the whole bacon curing process were under scrutiny.⁷⁶ This rationalisation involved a number of issues that caused concern among the pork butchers but the two main sticking points were a proposed incentive scheme and the issue of whether the Pork Butchers' Society had the right to accept or reject any bonus schemes that might be proposed by management in the future. While the incentive scheme issue was ironed out for the moment, the question of the Society's role in future schemes could not be resolved. This proved a particularly divisive issue: some thirty of the pork butchers voting against settlement on these terms, more favouring (or at least not condemning) it, with other workers outside the Pork Butchers' Society equally divided on the matter. There was also apparently some division between the Pork Butchers' Society and the Transport Union, both of which were involved in the negotiations on behalf of the workers.⁷⁷ The condemnatory attitude of the press, local and national, did little to heal divisions. In the heat of the moment there were sweeping statements about 'thirty workers putting three hundred out of work' and 'restrictive practices that had built up over the years' and more about 'the appalling history of labour relations in Clover Meats.'⁷⁸ The immediate outcome of the dispute was the closure of Clover Meats in October 1972, and although O'Mara's – which had not been affected by the dispute – continued to operate for another fourteen years, it was clear that the old world of pork butchering in Limerick was coming to an end.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Liam Foley.
- 2 While factory proprietors like the O'Maras and Shaws were, like the majority of the workers in the industry, Limerick-born, some of the middle management were outsiders – O'Mara's manager, Leo Colleran, and Clover Meats' John Mullins, were both Kilkenny men. Interview with Jim O'Brien, Ollie O'Brien.
- 3 Joe Donnellan; Terry Hayes, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 19 May 2016. Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 4 Michael O'Mara, interviewed by Jacqui Mullane, October 2012, Oral History Collection, Mary Immaculate College.
- 5 Stephen (Oaksie) Fitzgerald.
- 6 Tom Fitzgerald.
- 7 Michael O'Mara.
- 8 Joe Hayes.
- 9 Terry Hayes.
- 10 Joe Hayes.
- 11 Michael O'Mara.
- 12 Michael O'Halloran.
- 13 Susan O'Mara.
- 14 Brenda Doyle.
- 15 Liam Foley.
- 16 Joe Hayes; Brenda Doyle.
- 17 Census of Ireland 1911. National Archives of Ireland, online, <http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/>.
- 18 Eddie McNamara.
- 19 The Cost of Living of the Working Classes Report of an enquiry by the Board of Trade in the working class rents, housing and retail prices, together with the standard rates of wages prevailing in certain occupations in the principal industrial towns of the United Kingdom, with an introductory memorandum (1908) p.63
- 20 Census of Ireland 1911, National Archives of Ireland, online, http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Limerick/Limerick_No_1_Urban/_Back_Clare_Street_East_/625377/
- 21 Census of Ireland 1911, National Archives of Ireland, online, http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Limerick/Limerick_No_6_Urban/Cathedral_Place/629131/
- 22 Joe Joyce.
- 23 Eddie McNamara.
- 24 Brenda Doyle; Marie Maddigan.
- 25 Eddie McNamara.
- 26 Ronnie Long.
- 27 Joe Hayes.
- 28 Eddie McNamara.
- 29 Larry Duggan.
- 30 Ollie O'Brien.
- 31 Eddie McManus; Joe Joyce.
- 32 Michael Lehane.
- 33 Liam Foley.
- 34 Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 35 Brenda Doyle; Liam Foley.
- 36 Paddy Kiely.
- 37 Paddy Kiely; Joe Hayes.
- 38 Eddie McNamara.
- 39 Emmet O'Connor, *A Labour History of Ireland, 1824-1960* (Dublin, 1992), p.46.
- 40 Eddie McManus.
- 41 *Munster News*, 17 December 1884, 9 January 1886.
- 42 *Irish Times*, 20 September 1884.
- 43 *Freeman's Journal*, 14 September 1884.
- 44 *Irish Times*, 27 January 1890.
- 45 Dermot Hartigan, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 5 February 2016.

- 46 Dermot Hartigan, 'Limerick Bacon and the Great Munster Lock-Out, 1890', M.A. thesis, Mary Immaculate College Limerick, 2012, p.14.
- 47 Dermot Hartigan, 'Limerick Bacon and the Great Munster Lock-Out, 1890', p. 14
- 48 Dermot Hartigan.
- 49 Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 50 Hartigan, 'Limerick Bacon and the Great Munster Lock-Out', pp 74-80.
- 51 *Limerick Leader*, 23 October 1985.
- 52 Hartigan, 'Limerick Bacon and the Great Munster Lock-Out, 1890', p. 97.
- 53 *Limerick Leader*, 12 November 1942, 17 August 1959; *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 July 1943.
- 54 *Limerick Leader*, 12 November 1942; *Limerick Chronicle*, 8 July 1943.
- 55 *Limerick Leader*, 18 February 1939.
- 56 *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 November 1950.
- 57 *Munster News*, 9 January 1886, 19 November 1887; *Freeman's Journal*, 17 January 1902. We are indebted for these references to John McGrath.
- 58 Limerick Pork Butchers' Society Ledger 1824-1931; Stephen (Oaksie) Fitzgerald.
- 59 Limerick Pork Butchers' Society Ledger 1824-1931.
- 60 Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 61 Arthur Ivor Marsh and Victoria Ryan, *Historical Directory of Trade Unions*, Volume 5 (Aldershot, 2006), p. 205.
- 62 Ollie O'Brien; Jim O'Brien; *Limerick Leader*, 19 September 2011.
- 63 *Limerick Chronicle*, 21 July 1945.
- 64 John Tierney; Joe Hayes.
- 65 *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 December 1961, 3 August 1972.
- 66 Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien; *Limerick Chronicle*, 3 August 1972.
- 67 *Irish Times*, 20 September 1884, 27 January 1890.
- 68 Terry Hayes.
- 69 Eddie McManus; Michael O'Mara.
- 70 Terry Hayes; Eddie McNamara.
- 71 *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 November 1961.
- 72 *Limerick Chronicle*, 16, 19, 26 April 1966; *Irish Press*, 16 March 1966.
- 73 *Irish Times*, 25 April 1966.
- 74 *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 June 1968.
- 75 *Irish Times*, 1 October 1971.
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Courtesy Tom Fitzgerald

CHAPTER 4

THE SOCIAL SCENE



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THE SOCIAL SCENE

Much of what was remembered by those who worked in the factories concerned the sociability that went with the job. People who worked in the same industry and who also lived side-by-side in what was a relatively small city almost inevitably socialised together, with the result that their social life soaked into their work.

Women's chats

For the women working in O'Mara's Thomas Street shop that sold to the city retailers, there was always the chance of a friend or sister dropping in for a chat – though if the chat went on too long there was the danger of Jack O'Mara ('Old' Mr O'Mara) appearing with a warning against the waste of money and time:

'Go on – put your hand in my pocket and take it out altogether!'¹

Sometimes it was knitting rather than talk that got in the way:

We used to knit a lot, and Olive and Mary myself... we were three best knitters there. And I remember my uncle's wife, Breda, she didn't know a needle from wool! And we were inside one morning – it was cold – there we were and Patsy Callaghan and Breda came in and Mary was after leaving down knitting that she was after – actually 'twas an Aran jumper that she was after doing – and Breda took up the knitting in her hand and she was looking at it. And next thing the door opened and Mickey O'Mara walked in. 'I am so surprised at you, Breda' he said. Because Breda wouldn't say boo to a goose. She was very quiet. And she wasn't knitting at all – but she couldn't say it was Mary Ryan. He gave out yards to Breda anyway.²



Shaw's & Sons c.1890-1910

Courtesy National Library of Ireland







O'Mara's Bacon Factory Social Scene. Courtesy Tony Punch



The tea break

The morning break provided another opportunity to socialise. When money was flush, the girls sent out for buns or borrowed money for ice-cream.³ One woman remembered the scene in O'Mara's:

On a Monday then, after getting paid on Friday... the first thing we'd do is go up to Carmody's [shop]... And he'd open every morning about half past seven, and we'd get two Woodbines ... If there was any of us broke we'd go up to one of the butchers and... and when they'd see us coming they'd always know we were looking for something, you know... 'What are ye doing now?' I'd say, 'I'd love a smoke... I'm short such an amount.' 'Here's two shillings.' Now two shillings that time was like two pound now. And we'd go up and come down with the fags, with apples, and with a big, big bag of penny sweets. And we'd be all sitting down eating then, you know, the boys and all used to mix with us.⁴

For the men in O'Mara's, especially on a Saturday morning, the break could involve a favourite meal that involved filling a bucket of sausages with boiling water and renewing the water several times until the sausages were cooked – not a sizzling brown but a pale pink. For those accustomed to the dish, it was 'the loveliest thing ever - if you were dying from a hangover, it was the best thing - I swear to God, 'twould cure you.'⁵ Newcomers were less impressed, as was the lad who on his first day in Clover Meats was offered what to him looked like raw sausages – not in a bucket but at a table in the canteen – though his shock was lessened by the camaraderie that prevailed and the way he was treated as one of the group.⁶

Whether generational divisions were bridged through the mixing at the break is unclear. One butcher (who began work in Shaw's – later Clover Meats – in the 1950s remembered the younger men being ordered away from where the older men were chatting – 'Married men in here only – no single boys!'⁷ But he figured that as time moved on the old ways changed and the tea and lunch breaks increasingly provided the opportunity for socialising between different generations. 'In the canteen at the lunch break, we'd all sit down then ... the gossip and the craic! In would come the old fellas and they'd be laughing, and [making] a joke' while one man remembered how the butchers were 'always up to divilment - the old fellows were nearly worse than the young fellows'.⁸



O'Mara's Bacon Factory Social Scene. Courtesy Tony Punch

Humour 'Ball-hopping'

In a world where someone who 'never smiled' was regarded as odd, pranks and 'slagging' were a major ingredient of the social life of the bacon factories.⁹ Whether on the butchering line or in the gut house, there was 'great camaraderie, great banter... they were the wittiest people ever.'¹⁰ Practically everyone who spoke to us about working in the bacon industry could remember the 'characters' who were there. There was the man who was 'a terror for fibs and tall stories':¹¹

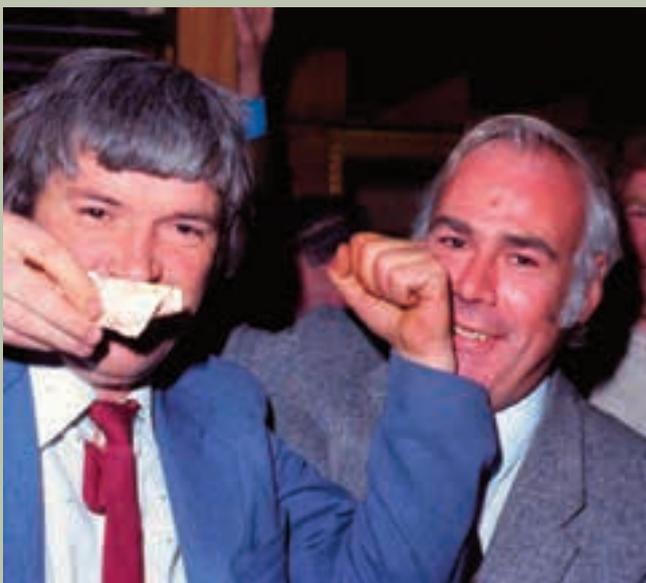
Everybody had something. You had the serious guy, you had the joker, you had the liar...Then you'd have another fellow - he'd be the brainchild - he'd be doing crosswords and things like that. Everybody had a different thing... And you'd have another fellow and if you dropped a knife he'd cause an argument over it...¹²

The interviews with former workers, both men and women, were full of phrases like 'a great laugh and a joke', 'great laughs', 'ball-hopping' and 'slagging'.¹³ Favourite targets were the school groups (especially girls) that came to the factory on educational visits or to collect animal organs for dissection in biology classes. Joe Hayes remembered how:

I was at work one day with Mick when I was a young fellow and lads came in, young girls actually, and they were doing a thesis on this, and they were standing and they were looking up at us at work. And Mick stuck a pig, you see, and he turned around and he looked down and he got the knife like that and [he pretended to lick it]- he didn't actually lick the knife but they thought he was licking it!¹⁴ The youngsters - sure they were gone like that!

Michael O'Halloran had a similar story:

We had girls coming in from the Presentation. They were doing biology. So they came looking for a heart, and they came looking for the eyeballs. So I went up, anyway. My boss, Mikie Callaghan - Yawnie -he says 'Holly, will you get them a few eyes and put them into a bag.' 'I will of course' says I. So I went up and took the eyes out of the pigs and put them into a small little bag and I put two in my hand. And the girl was there. She said - 'Did you get me the eyes'. 'They're in there... and here's something for yourself' and I gave her the two eyes and they poppin'...you should see her roaring and she ran for it.'¹⁵



'Playing Molly Bawn'

'Getting a rise' out of fellow workers was an ever present opportunity and newcomers were fair game. If a new girl arrived, 'you'd play Molly Bawn on her' with the usual requests to go for 'a bucket of steam'. Things could go too far – one girl fainted when fooled into salting the carcasses rather than the guts, and another had eventually to be rescued by a supervisor from the constant pranks of other workers.¹⁶ But even established workers could become the targets of the 'few stunts'. The occasional concrete block was packed into the boxes of lard that were passed down the slide for loading; pieces of fat were pegged at another unsuspecting butcher on the cutting line, or were pushed into a smouldering cigarette butt and popped onto the conveyor so that the whole place reeked with the smell of burning fat.¹⁷ 'Mixer' Galvin, who still smoked a clay pipe in the 1950s:

used to leave his pipe up on the tray. And some of the wise guys got it out and took out the tobacco and put nitrite (saltpetre) into it. And your man comes down - I witnessed this actually - and lit his pipe ... and the next think - woosh - the flame would go up ... and we were all watching him - just a little flame every now and then when he'd hit a piece of nitrite...¹⁸

Some of the women making the sausages remembered being locked into the cloakroom by the men from the butchering and curing departments and the keys thrown out of reach onto a roof, while another woman was trussed up in a sack on her last day at work before her wedding.¹⁹ Some of the carry-on was simply verbal: a man was guaranteed a blackguarding 'if they heard you had broken up with your girlfriend...' while during the gutting process some of the girls 'would be holding the pig's tail and they'd get an awful ragging for doing that!'²⁰ The men in the factory were not the only ones to look out for. Messenger boys were noted for their capacity to get the mischief going and then disappear, leaving someone else to carry the can, as two girls working in O'Mara's shop remembered:

The messenger boys would come in. And they'd be fool-acting - pushing each other around the place ... the snow was thick outside the door and they came in, anyway, and they started throwing snowballs at one another. Next they rounded on the two of us and started hitting us with the snowballs and we were screaming, and Mickey O'Mara came down and kicked up murder. 'I was on the phone', he said to us, 'to such-and-such a fellow in London for an hour, and they can hear ye screaming' he said, 'over in London.' And we were soaking wet and they [the messenger boys] were gone, of course...²¹

Nicknames

But the men did not have it all their own way. Some of the girls in O'Mara's gut house specialised in 'taking the mickey' out of one worker by constantly calling down to him and addressing him as 'love', while another, aggravated by one man's slowness in delivering the salt, gave him a nickname that outlasted the bacon factory by thirty years: 'I turned round and said – "Aboo, we're waiting for the bloody salt. Are you asleep?"' The name stuck then. Up to the present he's called Aboo.²² Such nicknames were part of a close-knit society where duplication of first names within families could cause confusion (there might be four Johns within three generations of a family)²³ and where everyone's characteristics, family connections and latest activities were on full view every hour of every working day – 'If you sneezed in Clover Meats, they'd hear about it in O'Mara's.'²⁴ Girls sometimes inherited some version of their father's nickname, but nicknames were generally applied to men rather than to women. 'Everybody had a nickname - from the oldest to the youngest' and the variety was endless - Yaka, Miko, Yawnie, Buller, the Divil, Holly, Cake Bread, Bottle, Barney, Flintstone, Logger, Lappa, Tasty, Timmy-Boy, Chicken, Twiddles, the Guard, the Quiet Man... Even Michael O'Mara, the owner of the factory,

was known as 'the Furnace' since, as one man remembered it, 'you could see the fire in his eyes' if he was pushed too far.²⁵ And no offence was taken:

'You'd get names, you see, and you'd answer to anything, and it didn't bother you. You wouldn't be saying "What?" Off you'd go and that was it...'²⁶

Though the 'head men' – despite the use of nicknames – were seldom the deliberate target of the pranksters, nobody was immune. There were stories about fooling good-natured supervisors into giving off-time or a financial hand-out through spinning totally creative tales of having a new baby at home or (in the case of one man in Clover Meats) of ditching the drink to take up fishing:

He went up to Mr O'Connor this day and he was badly stuck for the price of the few pints.

'Mr O'Connor', he says, 'I want to borrow a tenner.'

'For what, Christy?'

Now Christy was great worker - one of the best I ever worked with...

'I'm going fishing', he says to him.

So Mr O'Connor says to him - 'Go in there to Mr Hurley' - he was the money man - 'and tell him I said to give you the tenner, and by the same token, Christy', he says, 'the first fish you catch, bring it back to me.'

'Mr Leo', he says, 'You're the first fish I caught.'²⁷

Singing, sport and drinking

Sing-Songs

If wit shortened the day and lightened the task, so did singing. Singing was everywhere: 'I remember them singing above in my own house. The neighbours would come in, and that's what it was all about.'²⁸ In the factory there was even singing on the killing line (small comfort to the pigs) and coming up to Christmas the place resounded to 'Jingle Bells' and the like.²⁹ On the cutting line (where carcasses were boned and prepared for curing) one man would strike up a song of the day and as the others joined in, passers-by in the street got the full benefit of the performance:

A chap went into the office one day, he was passing up Thomas Street. And the cutting line was at that end of the building, like, upstairs. And he went up to Mickey O'Mara's office and wanted to know if there was a party going on. We were all above, working away, singing away, and he thought there was a party going on inside.³⁰

The taste in music was broad – any songs popular at the time, ranging from the Eurovision songs of the year to numbers like 'The Volga Boatman' popularised by Glenn Miller and his orchestra in the 1940s.³¹ For the women working in the gut or sausage house singing was an equally effective way to get through the work – 'We learned every song that was going' – and when things were quiet in Matterson's canning room and the girls moved to the sausage line, their singing of Nat King Cole's 'Too Young' could be heard in the butchering department.³² Singing did not stay within the factory: names like Mick Fahy and Gerry Madigan were mentioned as wonderful singers, on demand for social occasions outside the factory. Others entered public talent competitions, especially 'Tops of the Town' held in St John's Pavilion in the 1960s and later in the hall of the CBS in Sexton Street, in which the main group from the bacon factories was Matterson's appropriately named 'Rasher Revellers.'³³



Courtesy Oliver O'Brien



Matterson's, winners of the inter-firm league, 1966. Courtesy Paddy Bennis and Tom Fitzgerald



O'Mara's soccer team. Courtesy Tony Punch



O'Mara's soccer team. Courtesy Tony Punch



Dennis Keogh, Dave Ahearne, Tom McAvoy, Tommy Wallace, Brian Liston, Tony Shepard, Jerry O'Sullivan. Courtesy Joe Hayes

Sporting activities

Other factory-linked outside activities were also remembered. At one level were the clerical staff of Clover Meats who were invited to play tennis at the house of one of the firm's director's Eric Shaw, on South Circular Road, while at one stage in the early 1950s Matterson's had a ladies' badminton team that played in competitions throughout Munster.³⁴ Most work-related sports activities, however, were a male concern (as one woman put it, 'We wouldn't have enough money to buy a bat!'). For the men, these activities helped not only to sharpen sporting competition between different factories, but bridged the gap between butchers, yanks and office workers, representatives of all groups playing together on the same teams.³⁵ An inter-firm rugby tournament was organised in 1953 as part of An Tóstal, a celebration of Irish life and sport, in which Shaws fielded a team.³⁶ Inter-firm soccer figured prominently (there were two Clover Meats teams) as well as football and hurling in which the factories competed with each other and with clubs from other firms like the ESB, Spaight's, and even the army.³⁷ The funniest memories, however, related to the Tug-O'-War team. Here the pork butchers, their muscles well exercised from their work, were particularly successful, and almost fifty years later were still 'slugging' less able opponents who could hardly 'pull a spoon out of pandy.'³⁸

The pub

The public house figured prominently in the bacon factory workers' memories of socialising. Urban folklore in Limerick says that the work in the factories was so hard – and in the curing area involved working with such large quantities of salt – that men were bound to be thirsty.³⁹ While this story was not mentioned by any of those whose memories we recorded, there is no doubt that among the men, drinking was part of the culture of both work and leisure: as one man put it, the bacon factory workers were 'great characters, great drinkers, great workers.'⁴⁰ This certainly had its downside, meaning that the factories 'now and again would be short of labour...the butchers were fond of drink and a lot of them wouldn't be around on a Monday morning.'⁴¹

Michael O'Mara remembered the consternation caused in the 1950s in the factories by a hike in drink prices:

I remember once the pint of Guinness went from one shilling and two-pence to one shilling and sixpence. And the whole discussion in the factory that morning was 'Never again!' They would never touch a pint again. There was no way they were going to pay one-and-sixpence for a pint, you know. And here was poor old Mixer. And he was about seventy years of age at the time, and he puffing the pipe all the time and he was listening to them all. He took out the pipe, anyway, and he put it down, and he said - 'Do you know something - I'll follow it to a pound and I'll give it up then.' In other words, he gave himself about forty years because if it was one-and-sixpence it'd take at least thirty or forty years to reach a pound.⁴²

Others remembered especially fondly the visit to the pub when work finished on a Friday, or how the closure of the factory for the short Christmas break was marked by a longstanding tradition among the older men of heading for the snug in John Ryan's pub on Roche's Street.⁴³ Lady Day, 15 August, the traditional free day for the pork butchers was spent, following the mass in St John's, in Jerry O'Dea's pub on Mulgrave Street.⁴⁴ This public house was in some ways the social centre of the bacon factories. The pork butchers were the first to patronise the new lounge there when it opened in the early 1970s and this is where workers went to mark the closing of the Clover Meats factory in 1977.⁴⁵ It was also – along with Ryan's and the Horse and Hound on Mulgrave Street – where O'Mara's thirsty workers (like the men that Jack O'Mara helped back in over the wall) went for 'a beano' or quick drink during the working day. O'Leary's, Burke's and Butler's pubs around Dominick Street were the main recourse of the



Customers at Richie Rays shop off Roches Street. Courtesy Tony Punch

Clover Meat workers, so much so that one man working on the back gate of the factory was frequently sent out by the foreman to fetch them back to work. For O'Mara's workers, McKnight's was one of the favourites, as was 'Bilko's' in Foxes Bow, where a boy was sent across to bring back a pint for those in need of it, or where men slipped out on Monday morning for a 'curer'.⁴⁶ The women who worked in the shop at O'Mara's had memories of their immediate supervisor (whose hair was fairly sparse) periodically slipping out, as he put it, for 'a haircut'. 'What hair, Mikie? Oh, the bit at the back.'⁴⁷

For others workers the form of sociability was different, though the centrality of the public house and sport was equally evident in the lives of the pig buyers. Charlie Quaid, thinking of his own experience and the stories passed on by his uncles (all pig buyers), described the gatherings of pig buyers on the nights before the pig fairs when a strong sense of camaraderie developed:

The Gores, they were from Waterford, now I know some of the Cork people, in rugby, and there's one of them there, but Noel Murphy people were in Cork Rugby, they were pig buyers as well from Cork...well involved, they would all book into the same place these nights away ... before the fairs, were sort of rousing affairs, you get all the pig buyers from ... in the one boarding house ... the crack was good like.⁴⁸

For the van-men the work-linked sociability was different again: it involved building up friendships with the shopkeepers to whom they delivered supplies over a long period:

You were meeting people daily; you heard their trials and tribulations, their woes and – Saw people, generations grow up alongside you. You'd call into a shop – there'd be a new born baby there and before you'd leave he'd be, what, going to college or something...The kids would be grown up round the place. It was nice to see – it was lovely to see...⁴⁹

The annual social

There were certain memories of sociability shared by women and men. The annual social in the National Hotel or the Shannon Arms 'were great craic altogether – we'd have a right session then.' So were the retirement parties at which women retiring were presented with a silver tea service and men with a wallet of notes.⁵⁰ In a small world where the family and neighbourhood network had helped people to get a job in the factories in the first place, both men and women remembered how workplace and neighbourhood together provided opportunities for socialising. While the pig buyers, who travelled through the countryside in the course of their work, married girls from county Limerick and from Tipperary and Clare, bacon factory workers' marriages were with other locals whom they had met in the factory or dancehall, but who were usually known to them beforehand as the son or daughter of a neighbour or even of another bacon factory worker. The stories were full of memories like – 'I met my wife there as well'; 'I met my husband there - but we didn't speak to one another in the factory!'; 'I met my wife in the sausage house. We were introduced by her supervisor.'⁵¹

Excursions, pictures and dances

But generally women's memories of sociability outside the workplace were different to those of the male workers. There were some stories of day excursions to Doonass on Jimmy Davis' horse and car ('a float, we used to call it'), or later of bus tours to Galway or, during the annual two week's holidays, day trips to Ballybunion or Lahinch: 'then once we done our work, we used to have lovely days out at the seaside. We used to have a bus and the whole lot of us would go down to Ballybunion for the day and come back that night...'⁵² But 'that was about the size of it'. Most leisure time was spent within the city. A major focus was on Jack Bourke's City Theatre and the Crescent Theatre- 'there'd be shows on up there, all the big shows "Oklahoma" and all those' – or the films at the Lyric, the Royal, the Carlton, and the Savoy where tickets could be booked in advance. In a way, the cinema and the workplace merged with one another: on Monday morning at the break the story of the film was told to those who had not seen it – more time wasting! – so that the supervisor had to threaten – 'If ye don't get back to work... I'll give ye your cards and ye can good-time at the Labour!'⁵³



Courtesy Pat Brosnahan



A Clover Meats excursion to Lahinch. Courtesy Joe Hayes

A bit of dancing

Dancing rounded off the amusement on Sunday night:

We'd often go to the dancehalls, as sixteen year olds we'd go mad, with Joe Dolan, you know, and you'd love to see him...Come Friday night you'd get your wages and you'd be all excited, you going out to the hop. Half-crown to get into the dancehall, the Jetland. Joe Dolan, he was brilliant, honest... Joe Dolan with the white suit... And you had Dickie Rock, and we all excited waiting to go in.⁵⁴

'I used be killed out from dancing!', was how one woman put it, either in Todsie's on Mary Street, or the céilís in St John's Pavilion with music provided by the McDonagh, St. Patrick's or Dalcassian Céilí Bands.⁵⁵ One of the attractions of the dances and céilís was the possibility of a spot prize, as one lady particularly remembered:

I remember I was at a dance in St John's one night and ...'twas coming up to Christmas time, you see, and it was one of those [dances with the] spot prizes, and your man... would say 'Now, take four steps to the right, and your man would walk and say 'Take four steps to the left' and the couple nearest him [would get the prize]. And Frank followed him and dragged me with him – and we got the prize! I was mortified! ... I think 'twas bath cubes...⁵⁶



The beauty fix

Beauty and fashion figured prominently in the women's memories. Those who had worked in the lard loft remembered how 'they used to say the lard would be great for your hands, and we'd be rubbing it in...!'⁵⁷ Unsurprisingly, then, much of their money – or, rather, what they got back from their parents after 'handing over' their wages – was saved for clothes and makeup. Panstick, which was all the range in the late 1950s was high on the list:

And there was the makeup club, then, there was a shop down in Broad Street – McGilligans – and you'd pay a shilling a week, and after ten weeks then you'd have ten shillings which was a lot that time, and you'd go in then and you could get your makeup – and you'd think you were great...⁵⁸

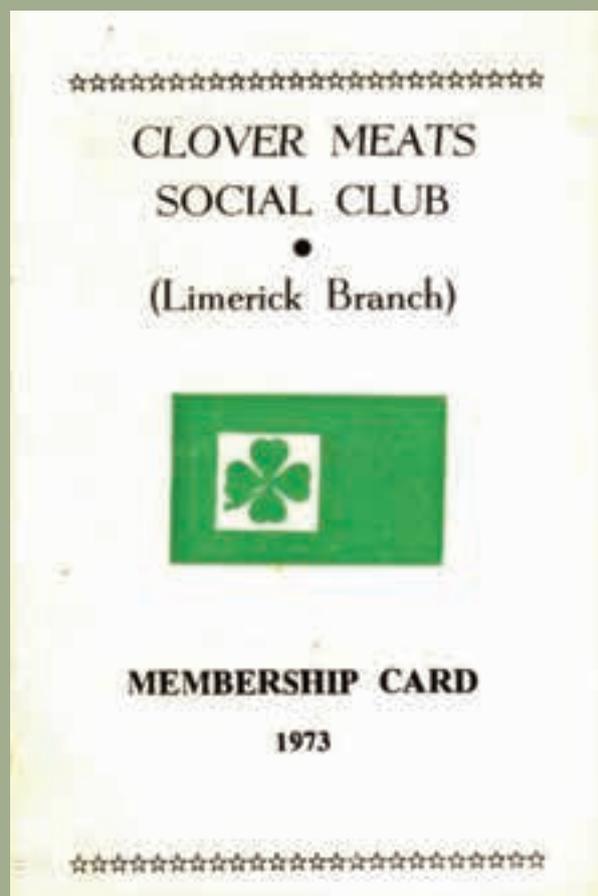
For some, the spare money never really materialised so swapping rather than buying clothes was the norm, though resourcefulness ensured that the final effect was a good one:

Sure we'd never buy clothes... we'd have to share them... If we wanted dresses Friday night, I'd have the different coloured dress belonging to my friend... You'd wear a skirt, well, a check skirt was only five bob. You'd wear that, but you'd wash it... you hadn't loads of clothes.⁵⁹

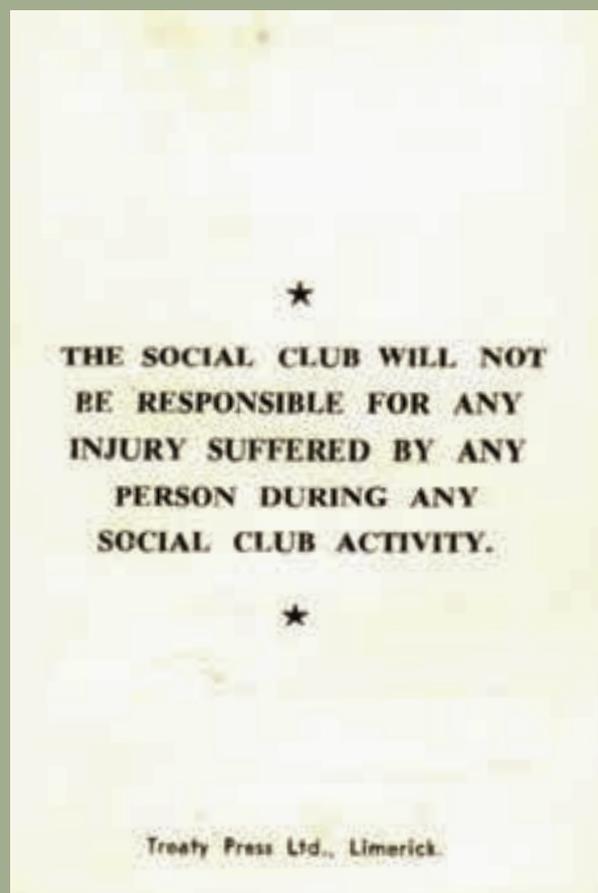
For those less straitened, the money could be saved towards tokens for fashionable clothes – machine-knit cardigans to be got in a shop in William Street or the 'lovely wide skirts with the net underneath' available in Bolgers Stores.⁶⁰

Conclusion

The Limerick bacon industry, like other working places of the day, had its own social scene. To some extent there was a gender difference in the leisure engaged in outside the factory gate. Women's memories were largely of cinema, dances and – to a lesser extent – excursions to the seaside. Men's social scene, on the other hand, was centred on the public house – each factory having its own favourite watering place. Sport also figured in the men's leisure activity, soccer and (to a lesser extent) rugby and Gaelic games helping to bridge the workplace gap between butchers, casual workers and office staff. Within the factory itself, while the work was very hard, those who had acquired sufficient skill could keep their hands on the job while turning their eyes, ears and voices elsewhere. Despite the noises of the factory, talking, joking, pranks, banter and even singing went on over the course of the day and these provided the real fuel that drove the work as well as the ultimate leveller of distinctions.



Sport played a large role in the social scene of the bacon industry. These images show the Clover Meats membership card of 1974. Courtesy Jerry O'Sullivan



ENDNOTES

- 1 Olive Fitzgerald, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 29 January 2016; Mary Fitzgerald, interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 29 January 2016.
- 2 Hilda Reddan.
- 3 Brenda Doyle.
- 4 Brenda Doyle.
- 5 Michael O'Halloran.
- 6 Michael Lehane.
- 7 Ollie O'Brien; Jim O'Brien.
- 8 Joe Hayes; Peggy Quinn, interviewed by Jackie Mullane, October 2012, Oral History Collection, Mary Immaculate College.
- 9 Hilda Reddan; Eddie McNamara.
- 10 Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 11 Tom Fitzgerald.
- 12 Micheal O'Halloran.
- 13 Joe Hayes; Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 14 Michael O'Halloran.
- 15 Michael O'Halloran.
- 16 Peggy Quinn.
- 17 Michael O'Halloran.
- 18 Michael O'Mara.
- 19 Nancy Waters.
- 20 Jerry O'Sullivan; Eddie McNamara.
- 21 Olive Fitzgerald; Hilda Reddan.
- 22 Brenda Doyle.
- 23 Brenda Doyle; Hilda Reddan; Olive Fitzgerald; Nancy Waters.
- 24 Joe Hayes.
- 25 Michael O'Halloran; Brenda Doyle; Tom Fitzgerald; Joe Hayes; Ollie O'Brien.Hayes.
- 26 Eddie McNamara; Michael O'Halloran.
- 27 Terry Hayes.
- 28 Eddie McNamara.
- 29 Jerry O'Sullivan; Tom Fitzgerald.
- 30 Joe Hayes; Terry Hayes.
- 31 Tom Fitzgerald.
- 32 Olive Fitzgerald; Breda McCarthy; Marie Madigan; Tom Fitzgerald.
- 33 Breda McCarthy; Terry Hayes; *Limerick Leader*, 16 February 1963, 21 February 1970.
- 34 *Limerick Leader*, 8, 22 March 1952; Liam Foley.
- 35 Liam Foley.
- 36 *Limerick Leader*, 4 February, 27 April 1953
- 37 Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien; *Limerick Leader*, 24 August 1955, 7 March 1953, 20 April 1957, 15 October 1960, 10 October 1962, 25 February 1963, 13 January 1968. Social clubs were a feature of most large firms including Aer Lingus, Ranks, CIE and the Clothing Factory.
- 38 Jim O'Brien; Ollie O'Brien.
- 39 Maura Cronin, 'You'd be cured while you'd be waiting: memories of the Limerick Dispensary. 1930-1972' in John Cunningham and Neil Ó Cíosáin (eds), *Culture and society in Ireland since 1750: essays in honour of Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh* (Dublin, 2015), p. 390.
- 40 Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 41 Noel McMahan.
- 42 Michael O'Mara.
- 43 Eddie McNamara; Michael O'Halloran.
- 44 Michael O'Halloran.
- 45 Terry Hayes; Jerry O'Sullivan.
- 46 Tom Fitzgerald; Joe Hayes; Terry Hayes; Eddie McManus.
- 47 Olive Fitzgerald.
- 48 Charlie Quaid.
- 49 Tony Flannery.
- 50 Joe Hayes; Jerry O'Sullivan; Michael O'Mara.

- 51 Jerry O'Sullivan; Mary Fitzgerald; Olive Fitzgerald; Tom Fitzgerald; Marie Madigan.
- 52 Olive Fitzgerald; Mary Fitzgerald; Susan O'Mara.
- 53 Brenda Doyle.
- 54 Peggy Quinn.
- 55 *Limerick Leader*, 16 May 1955, 22 February 1956, 8 June 1960.
- 56 Hilda Reddan.
- 57 Olive Fitzgerald.
- 58 Brenda Doyle.
- 59 Peggy Quinn.
- 60 Olive Fitzgerald.



Tony Punch and Mick Brin, Courtesy Tony Punch



*General Packing Department,
Matterson's Limerick*

Courtesy National Library of Ireland

CHAPTER 5

THE DECLINE OF THE BACON TRADE





*Limerick 1953; O'Mara's
and Matterson's Bacon
Factories are in the
background with the
Dominican Church and
Tait's clock to the fore*

Courtesy Sean Curtin



CHAPTER 5

THE DECLINE OF THE BACON TRADE

Despite contemporaries' tendency to blame the pork butchers for the closure of Clover Meats in 1972, the roots of the Limerick bacon trade's decline ran back much further than that. In fact they were already visible from the end of the nineteenth century, and this despite ongoing modernisation and the continuing high reputation of Limerick bacon on the international market.

Changing fortunes

Matterson's business, for instance, experienced some major financial difficulties in 1895 when, without sufficient working capital, it was found necessary to become a limited liability company.¹ This change in the company's structure was dealt with by cutting back drastically on the family's expenses, a move that involved the dismissal of servants, the sale of horses and (in 1908) of the family residence at Castletroy.² The fortunes of the other bacon factory owners are less easy to ascertain. There is no doubt that their social position was far above that of those working for them: Joseph Matterson was a magistrate, Alexander Shaw was president of the Chamber of Commerce.³ Their residences were in the most prosperous areas of the city. In 1901, Stephen O'Mara, Bacon Merchant was residing in 9 Harstonge Street, with his wife, two children and two domestic servants. By 1911, he had moved to 4 Stonetown on the North Strand and was living with his two sons, a daughter and a live-in house maid and cook. Both of his residences were described as first class houses, the former with thirteen rooms and the latter with sixteen rooms. In 1911 Alexander Shaw, bacon merchant resided in 35 North Circular Road with his wife, son, chauffeur, parlour maid and cook. Matterson's address was in Georges Street (now O'Connell Street).⁴ On the other hand, even where prosperity seemed to exist, resources were not always as unlimited as might have appeared from the outside.⁵ Though referring to half a century later, Michael O'Mara's memories of growing up in the 1940s and 1950s show that some bacon factory owners, at least, were not as affluent as they appeared:

People think...I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth... but yet the silver spoon was fairly rusty I tell you... We lived in a house on the Ennis road, and [later] in another house in Patrickswell – a very old house. It was falling down around us so...anyway...am...it wasn't, but it took an awful lot of maintenance...⁶



Office in Shaw & Sons, c.1890-1910

Courtesy National Library of Ireland

Political issues

This gradual decline of the fortunes of Limerick's bacon industry and industrialists was certainly affected by political developments in the years after 1914, international rather than national events having the greatest impact. Though there was a disruption of pig fairs during the short-lived Limerick Soviet in 1919 that briefly put paid to pig killing in the city's factories, the War of Independence and Civil War had little obvious impact on the bacon trade.⁷ It was the outbreak of War in 1914 – and especially the effects of German submarine attacks on merchant shipping – that shook Irish and Limerick bacon production. On the one hand, the dangers posed to American shipping by the submarines worked in favour of Limerick bacon, since they led to a further decline in the import of American bacon, with a consequent increase in the demand for Irish bacon both at home and in Britain. On the other hand, the Limerick bacon industry itself suffered the effects of submarine attacks: the sinking of merchant ships involved in the export trade included that of the Clyde Steamship Company's Arranmore in March 1916 as it carried a cargo of Limerick bacon to Glasgow.⁸ The dangers at sea also affected the import of animal feed. Farmers now found themselves unable to feed their pigs so that by 1916 breeding stocks in the country were actually being sold for slaughter – good for the bacon factories and workers in the short-term, but disastrous in the long-term as was obvious by 1918 when the supply of pigs to the Limerick factories was in danger of drying up.⁹ This in turn meant that unemployment spiralled and by 1918 only one in seven of all workers in the local bacon industry were employed, their problems compounded by the rising price of food.¹⁰ These misfortunes were increased when the British Ministry of Food, in an effort to feed its own population and support its own bacon curers, increased the level of live pig imports from Ireland, further reducing the number of pigs available to Irish bacon curers at home.¹¹

Many of these problems continued to affect Limerick bacon in the later 1920s. Although southern Ireland had gained its political independence in 1921 as the Irish Free State, its economic relationship with Britain did not really change, and Irish bacon's slippage on the British market was not reversed. Business continued to decline as feed stuffs remained very expensive, and the export trade in live pigs continued to the detriment of bacon exports. In

1912 it was reported that 223,000 live pigs were exported to Britain compared to 61,000 bacon and hams. By 1916-17, the export of live pigs had increased to 239,000 while the export of bacon had decreased to 54,000.¹² Indeed alarm was expressed by Irish bacon curers that the Ministry of Food was increasing the export of 'live hogs in the interests of the English bacon curers and pork butchers' only. By 1929, bacon exports were marginally lower in value than that of live pigs.¹³

Government intervention

Throughout the 1920s there was some debate as to whether independent Ireland should follow a policy of free trade or protectionism. The protectionist option triumphed in the early 1930s, partly because of the political outlook of the new Fianna Fáil government and partly because there were real fears of the dumping of cheap foreign agricultural produce on the Irish market – a fear especially relevant to the bacon industry where prices were falling and levels of importation rising.¹⁴ One result of this was increased state regulation of the bacon industry. Heavy duties were imposed on imports and there was an increased drive to find new markets and to increase state regulation of the production and sale of bacon.¹⁵ The *Pigs and Bacon Act* of 1935 was the first stage in this increased state regulation. It tightened up the licensing regulations for slaughtering, curing and selling bacon, made provision for more stringent examination by veterinary officers of the killing and curing procedures in the factories, and stipulated that the finished bacon, when approved, had to be marked with the government stamp. The mode of transport to the point of sale was regulated and the prices paid to producers and by consumers were set out.¹⁶ Besides this, the act set up both a Pig Marketing Board representative of producers (farmers) and curers (bacon factory owners), and a Bacon Marketing Board, largely representative of the curers.¹⁷

Whether this move to boost the state's economy and serve the interests of both the producers and the curers succeeded or failed is unclear. The annual reports of the Board (1935-39) were positive as to its achievements. It emphasised the thirty per cent increase in the number of pigs killed in the bacon factories between the 1920s and the 1940s and claimed the credit for '... establish[ing] order in a trade where formerly chaotic conditions largely obtained...'¹⁸ In contrast, Limerick local opinion was unrelenting in its criticism of the new boards and of government policy in relation to the bacon industry. In 1939, at a dinner to celebrate the centenary of O'Mara's bacon factory, Stephen O'Mara made a speech strongly critical of state intervention: 'We should be a solid phalanx ready to face the government or the opposition or civil servants or Bacon Boards or Price Commissions or veterinary or any other individuals or bodies should they threaten our welfare or our rights.'¹⁹ Even when the Pig Marketing and Bacon Marketing Boards were replaced by a single Pigs and Bacon Board in 1940, the complaints in the press continued regarding government intervention and the inadvisability of civil servants being 'given powers for ordering industries about which they knew nothing.'²⁰ The main problem was that government policy in relation to the bacon trade was focussed on rationalisation – exactly what local opinion in Limerick opposed.²¹

The main grievances of the curers (and, indirectly, the pork butchers) in relation to rationalisation were the price controls enforced on both live pigs and finished bacon and – more importantly – the quota system, which laid down the number of pigs to be killed per factory at any given time.²² While this quota system ensured the survival of smaller factories, it was particularly resented when it resulted in consignments of pigs bypassing Limerick for delivery to bacon factories in Cork and elsewhere – especially when in a time when local pork butchers were on short time.²³ The failure of the Limerick bacon trade to persuade the Minister of Agriculture to relax the quotas and price restrictions ensured that resentment against government continued over the next two decades. In the 1960s the local Labour TD, Stevie Coughlan – not a man to mince words – dismissed the head of the Pigs and Bacon Commission head as 'inexperienced', blaming the 'indolence and neglect' of the Department of Agriculture for the declining fortunes of Limerick bacon production.²⁴



Mick O'Brien, Pat Hanrahan and (Dessie Fitzgerald). Clover Meats, Courtesy *Limerick Leader*

THE organising of pig production on co-operative lines in Counties Limerick and Clare producing top quality pigs as a solution to the present bacon crisis in Limerick has been placed before the Minister for Agriculture by Mr. Tom O'Donnell, T.D.

He said that the first essential for a viable bacon industry in Limerick was an adequate supply of top quality pigs and this, in turn, could only be assured by making pig production economically attractive to farmers in Limerick and the hinterland.

Mr. O'Donnell, in presenting his scheme to the Minister, said that in view of the present difficulties experienced by one of Limerick's oldest industries, Meats, Matricorns, and in the interests of the future of the bacon industry as a whole in the Limerick area, he was putting it forward.

TRAGEDY

"It will be readily appreciated that Limerick enjoys an international reputation as the premier Irish bacon curing centre, and the quality of its products is well known at home and abroad," he said. "It would be nothing short of an economic tragedy if this major industry was allowed to collapse and such a collapse would have disastrous repercussions in Limerick City and its surrounding countryside.

"The first essential for a viable bacon industry in Limerick is an adequate supply of top-quality pigs, and this in turn can only be assured by making pig production economically attractive to the farmers in the Limerick hinterland. I propose, therefore, that immediate action be taken to launch a vigorous campaign to encourage pig production in Counties Limerick and Clare," he concluded.

CONFERENCE

"In view of the apparent success of co-operative pig production in certain areas of this country, it is suggested that the possibility of organising pig production on co-operative lines in Counties Limerick and Clare should be explored. Towards this end, the Department of Agriculture should immediately hold a conference with the L.A.O.B., the Pigs and Bacon Commission, the Dairy Disposals Co. and the Limerick Bacon Factories and the farmers' organisations, Limerick and Clare.

"The Limerick bacon industries can be saved and the livelihood of several hundred workers can be safeguarded provided the Government takes steps to encourage pig production by making it profitable for the farmers of Limerick and Clare," he concluded.

ASSURED

In a special press statement, Deputy T. O'Donnell said that it was time to face facts if we want to preserve our traditional Limerick industry. The future

of the bacon industry in Limerick can be assured if, and only if, the Government takes immediate action to increase pig production in the Limerick area. The Department of Agriculture, the Pigs and Bacon Commission, the L.A.O.B. and the Dairy Disposals Company, together with the bacon factories and the farmers' organisations could provide the solution to the whole problem provided the Government and the Minister for Agriculture is prepared to offer the necessary facilities and incentives.

PROPOSAL

Deputy O'Donnell said that his proposal to the Minister was perfectly feasible and he would see every means at his disposal to have it implemented. He said that his proposal for a major co-operative pig producing enterprise in Limerick and Clare would in practice entail the erection of a number of large pig fattening stations in the area. The farmer members of the Co-Op. would keep sows and rear sucklings until about 12 weeks old. The sucklings would then be transferred to the local fattening station for finishing.

DEPUTY SUSPENDED

In the Dail yesterday, Atd. Stephen Coughlan, T.D., was suspended for disobedience to the Chair during Question Time. The Deputy refused to sit down when asked by the Ceann Comhairle.

Earlier, Deputy Coughlan had questioned the Minister for Agriculture on the position of the bacon industry in Limerick in relation to the discussions which had taken place between the Pigs and Bacon Commission, the Bacon Curers' Association and An Bord Gristin to allow free-impacted grain for fattening at a subsidised price that would make it economical for farmers to produce pigs.

When the Minister did not reply, the Ceann Comhairle called the next question, but Deputy Coughlan demanded an answer to his question and when he persisted he was told by the Ceann Comhairle to resume his seat. He refused to do so until he got an answer to his question. He was then suspended and left the house saying that he was doing so under protest and that he was trying to save the Bacon industry whatever politics the Minister was playing at.

9 March 1967, Courtesy *Limerick Leader*

Producer-Curer Tensions

But neither government policy nor the successive regulatory boards were entirely responsible for the grievances of which local bacon producers complained. As the Bacon Marketing Board explained in 1938, the bacon industry was also affected by fluctuations in farming itself:

Few trades are subject to such varying influences as those with which the bacon-curing industry has to contend – influences which are beyond the curers' and the Board's control. Farmers and others engage in or relinquish pig production as it suits their own immediate needs, intensifying or reducing their output according to the demands made upon their time or resources by other agricultural activities...²⁵

One problem that was very difficult to surmount in developing the bacon industry was the distrust that had traditionally existed between the farming interest and the urban-centred bacon industry. There was a firm conviction on the part of the farmer-producer – 'the poor man who carries the mash to the pig' – that he was grossly underpaid for his work.²⁶ In the 1940s the solution, at least as far as some saw it, was to change the structure of the bacon industry to a co-operative basis, i.e. rather than continuing the traditional division of the industry between the three separate interests of pig producer (farmer), broker (pig buyer) and curer (factories), a co-ordinated or co-operative approach should be taken 'under the general direction of a central organisation.'²⁷ A decade later, the growing threat of Danish competition briefly drove farmers and factories together: in 1959 a meeting between the Bacon Committee of the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association on the one hand and the Bacon Curers' Association on the other planned to establish a more efficient system which producers and curers worked on a co-operative basis with a uniform scale of payments for pigs, thus eliminating competition between different factories.²⁸ By 1964 a Limerick Pig Development Co-operative Society had actually been set up with the objective of establishing a co-operative pig fattening station which would guarantee to farmer-suppliers a stable price for pigs all year round, and would then sell on to the factories.²⁹

But unity was difficult to achieve. In county Limerick the 1964 cooperative society was largely a big farmer organisation which did not seem to attract the smaller farmer-producers, and by the end of the decade the Minister for Agriculture was still vainly urging farmers' organisations, the dairy interest, the factories and the Pigs and Bacon Commission to get an initiative under way.³⁰

Clover Meats closure threat latest

There is a strong likelihood that the threatened closure of Clover Meats in Limerick will be averted.

According to a statement from I.T.G.W.U. leader Mr. John Bashford, who is extremely optimistic, the men are accepting the suggestion of a trial period.

During this period, a proposed new scheme, to make the plant more efficient and economical will be tried out.

About 250 people would be affected by the closure, if it came about within the next week or so, as had earlier been predicted.

The pork butchers employed at the plant were earlier stated to be "dubious" about the proposed new scheme by management.

But following a general meeting this week, at which there were major changes on the pork butchers' committee, the men decided to accept a trial period.

A union official said in Limerick this Friday that a meeting between the management and unions would take place this Friday afternoon regarding the threatened closure of Clover Meats. He said that he was hopeful to a successful outcome to the meeting.

Clover Meats closure threat. *Limerick Leader*, 21 August 1976



Baker Place, with Matterson's chimney in the background, courtesy Sharon Slater

The traditional distrust between farmers and trade unions also played its part here.³¹ On the one hand, farmers resented the loss of earnings involved when disputes and work stoppages occurred in the bacon factories, since even a few days' delay meant that the pigs became too fat to fetch the best bacon prices.³² The *Irish Farmer's Journal* not infrequently published irate letters putting forward the view that the bacon industry trade unions included 'a large quota of irresponsible individuals...'³³ On the other hand, bacon factory workers were more than a little distrustful there of any involvement by farmers in the running of the bacon industry, a distrust reflected in the claim made in 1963 by Stevie Coughlan, the Labour TD for Limerick City, that working conditions in the co-operative factories were inferior to those in privately owned concerns.³⁴ He can hardly have been referring to the physical conditions in the factory – most stories emphasise that Clover's provision of more modern facilities were a major advance on what prevailed in the city's other bacon factories. What he may have been echoing was the workers' (especially the pork butchers') antipathy towards a more remote style of management – one which was unable or unwilling (unlike the culture in O'Mara's) to accommodate itself to the traditional ways and attitudes of the Limerick bacon workforce, and which came to a head with the closure of Clover Meats in 1972.

Pressure from outside

But the problems of Limerick bacon went beyond the immediate local scene. From the 1930s onwards, the industry was being increasingly affected by political developments outside the immediate world of producer and curer. Britain's imposition of tariffs on Irish bacon during what became known as the Economic War of 1932-38 impacted on the Limerick factories, and when this dispute had been resolved the outbreak of World War II, despite the Irish Free State's official policy of neutrality, struck another blow at the Irish bacon trade. Submarine warfare's threat to shipping, as during World War I, led to a shortage of imported pig feed and a consequent fall in the supply of pigs, while the rationing of motor fuel caused difficulties in transporting fattened pigs to the factories.³⁵ Considerable inventiveness was needed to deal with this problem, and Michael O'Mara remembered one carpenter working in the Claremorris branch of the firm who actually adapted one of the company's lorries to run on gas:

He invented gas cylinders, two cylinders... and in between the cabin and the body he put two cylinders... One was a filter and the other used to burn charcoal, and the

charcoal would go in through this filter and the gas would go into the engine and it used to run the lorries. And the charcoal we made – we were in the timber business. We made the charcoal and the charcoal was burnt in this through tweed filters...³⁶

Such measures, ingenious though they were, had only a limited effect on the fortunes of the bacon business. As almost everywhere in Europe, production fell as the number of pigs being reared was more than halved – and this at exactly the same time as pig numbers in the United States and Argentina doubled – with major repercussions for Irish bacon production in the long run.³⁷ Limerick felt the pinch of wartime conditions: the number of killings declined by seventy-five per cent between 1940 and 1943, and as early as mid-1942 it was estimated that up to sixty per cent of the city's pork butchers were either unemployed or on short time.³⁸ This situation continued right through the 1940s: unemployed Limerick butchers either headed for other work in England or spent their days in the local Pork Butchers' Society Room where they could chat – 'There'd be a fire there... they were all idle, you know.'³⁹

The challenge of foreign competition that began in the later nineteenth century was also becoming more serious. Despite the downturn in Dutch and Danish bacon production during the war, these two countries' share of the market grew progressively once peace returned, and this competition became more serious with the establishment of the Common Market (later the European Economic Community) in the late 1950s.⁴⁰ Though Britain declined to become a member of the Common Market in 1957, its membership of the European Free Trade Association from 1960 brought it into closer economic contact with Denmark, and this facilitated even more importation of Danish bacon into Britain to the detriment of both the native bacon industry in both Britain and Ireland.⁴¹ The Danish challenge became even greater from 1973 when Ireland, the United Kingdom and Denmark joined the EEC together, and Danish exports had unlimited access to the British market. There was now 'too much competition... [Ireland] couldn't produce the stuff cheap enough, they couldn't compete...'

Denmark killed and processed 'in one factory in a week what we did in [the whole of] Ireland in a week.'⁴² As another man put it, 'I'd say it was too costly to keep four or five hundred people employed for what you were getting back out from the pig.'⁴³

Changing tastes

Probably the most important reason that Danish and Dutch bacon outperformed Irish and Limerick bacon trade in the years after 1945 was the changing taste in meat. While the flavour and quality of Limerick bacon remained particularly high, the public at home, but more especially in outside markets, now wanted lean meat – not the fat bacon that had always been considered 'sweeter'. Therefore, once wartime rationing ended, the British consumer who had 'gratefully accepted' fat Irish bacon during the war years, preferred to buy the leaner Danish product in particular.⁴⁴ As a result, the exportation of lower grade bacon to Britain was cut back drastically in the late 1950s, with a consequent stock-piling at home of fat bacon that factories were unable to clear from their stores.⁴⁵ When, in the 1970s, other changes occurred to put a further nail in the coffin of Limerick bacon.⁴⁶

People's taste varied they changed like...there was am...we'll say people introduced say chicken as an alternative and then the chickens were quartered, chickens were cooked, the chickens were dressed differently – they went into selling chicken in a big way, same way with pizzas, everything... Before [that]... you could put in two to three hundred pounds of sausages [into Roche's Stores] and the next morning you would have to replace them again. But who's eating sausages today? Who's eating rashers today?⁴⁷

BLUE + CROSS

every day

Pig foods
Cattle foods
Poultry foods
Parata flaked maize



Courtesy Vivienne Leo

All **BLUE + CROSS** rations have a guaranteed declared analysis and are made from freshly milled wheatfeed

And it was not just a matter of taste: consumers, especially in Britain and Europe, were becoming choosy about the packaging of their meat, wanting it, like the Danish and Dutch product, vacuum-packed in polythene and table-ready – a far cry from the greaseproof and brown paper wrapping in which Limerick consumers had always carried home their meat.⁴⁸

It was not that curers and regulators were unaware of changing tastes among the public. After independence, attempts had been made to meet changing tastes in bacon by improving pig breeding, encouraged by government bodies and various interest groups from the Pigs and Bacon Board in the 1940s and 50s to the Limerick Pig Development Co-Operative Society in the 1960s.⁴⁹ Therefore, the efforts of later nineteenth century progressive pig breeders to produce a fast-growing but lean pig were redoubled in the decades after independence. The Yorkshire's popularity continued in the immediate post-independence decades, from the 1950s the Landrace pig (native to the Baltic and Nordic countries) – large, lean, and capable of breeding with the 'uniformity of a mass-produced motor-car' – displaced the Yorkshire and dominated Irish pig and bacon production thereafter.⁵⁰

As in the past, advice was given to pig producers as to the feeding stuff to be used to ensure quality bacon. Already by the 1930s there was an increasing use of factory-produced pig feed, the 'Blue Cross' brand manufactured in Ranks' Mill on Limerick's Dock Road being purchased widely for this purpose throughout Munster and beyond.⁵¹ But small producers had not the means to buy such specialist feeding stuff. Well into the 1950s, farmers who sold just a few pigs to the factories four or five times a year continued to feed their animals on potatoes or on windfalls in the orchard, while householders raising pigs in the back yards of villages, towns and cities throughout Ireland and Britain fattened their animals on kitchen waste, even if – in the words of one man in reference to bacon pigs reared in Dublin city – 'they were all slimy pigs [after] eating all the rubbish from the hotels.'⁵² The diet of Limerick's back-yard pigs was remembered by a number of people: 'All the small potatoes, you'd keep them to feed the pigs... and you fattened them then at the last month with bran.'⁵³ Joe remembered how he'd help a neighbour in Donoghue's Lane: 'I used to bring over a bucket, when I'd come up from school, I used to go down and collect all the skins out of all the lanes and feed them pigs.'⁵⁴ European Community rules eventually eliminated that practice and potatoes, bran and pig swill of all sorts gave way to commercially produced pig feeding cubes, increasingly advertised in the national and local press from the late 1960s onwards.⁵⁵

There wouldn't be hardly a house [without pigs in the back]...but once you ... you got beyond the canal or beyond the river here where the site of the present Corporation Offices from that all out all down...nearly all the houses had the pigs in the back...the whole down the Island Field, all out Thomondgate everywhere...the older houses now – not the newer ones. The ones that would have been built from the fifties on, I'd say, discontinued that practice but they used to collect the [swill].⁵⁶

Rising standards

'Hygiene and everything else came into it' was how one man summed up the demise of the Limerick bacon factories from the 1950s onwards as more exacting standards in the production, curing and packing of bacon changed the basis of the local industry.⁵⁷ None of this monitoring of hygiene was entirely new, of course. In the 1890s, the veterinary inspectors in Limerick factories, acting under the Public Health Act of 1878, had carried out stringent inspections of freshly killed meat for any traces of disease. Following independence, especially after the passing of the several acts relating to the killing and processing of meat from the early 1930s, there were increasing checks of this sort.⁵⁸ Here the main emphasis was on procuring disease-free meat for processing in an era when tuberculosis was a major killer, and the inspection in Limerick factories was particularly thorough, involving meat for home consumption as well as for export.⁵⁹ The concerns were not groundless: veterinary checks showed that a sizeable

proportion of pigs coming to the Limerick factories in the 1930s were diseased and the bacon had to be destroyed – to the detriment of farmers and factories alike. It is not surprising that there were (probably inaccurate) claims that healthy meat was being destroyed by over-zealous inspectors, since small producers who were totally dependent on the factories for their livelihood were especially affected by stringent enforcement of regulations. For instance, when swine fever spread through the country in 1957, one small producer in Broad Street lost four of her thirteen pigs to the disease, and the other nine were destroyed.⁶⁰

Even as consciousness of the need for hygiene in meat production grew in the 1950s, conditions in the Limerick factories – built over a hundred years earlier – left a lot to be desired. In the yards the picture was particularly bad. Eddie remembered how, when he first joined the workforce in Shaw's:

...the cats and they eating with the rats. Down at the back here they used to pump the water out ...But the cats and the rats used eat together... But you'd see the place around there that time was alive – even in Clover Meats time – but they got rid of an awful lot. Like, you'd lift a bag and the place would be full of rats. And in the summer time when the heat would be there you'd often see things – you'd see liver going across the floor, you know – and worms, the worms were in it.⁶¹

It was not necessarily that hygiene was totally ignored. In fact, given the conditions of the time there was great effort put into cleaning up at the end of the day. John Tierney remembered how water from the well in Coll's Yard next to O'Mara's factory was used to wash down the bacon factory:

It was supposed to be the finest water in the city...so we used to use that. We couldn't use it all, we had to use... seemingly we had to use a certain amount of the city water...so we used to use the city water for washing down the factory...For everything else we used to use the spring water...So we had to be very careful and we had to have it analyzed and checked to ensure that there was no bugs or anything else in there.⁶²

But there were major problems involved in dealing with waste, as Michael O'Mara explained:

But then effluent...you couldn't, you couldn't build an effluent plant. The waste was going into the Shannon... But that's what went on for years.... I presume the river was polluted but we never heard about it...but, ah, fortunately then I saw the writing on the wall.⁶³

O'Mara's was not alone in this: as one butcher remembered:

none of the factories had effluent plants... Excuse the expression, shit and dirt everything went in...blood...everything went straight into the sewers... straight into the water...You'd see the blood flowing out...when the factory was working...⁶⁴

On the factory floor, on a day-to-day basis, there were also many hygiene-related shortcomings, taken for granted in the past but now, with the benefit of hindsight, totally unacceptable. In Shaw's, for instance, parts of the equipment were:

... very old and antiquated... There was a lot of timber tables and then [when Clover Meats took over] they changed over to stainless steel... Shaw's would have had no steel, they were antiquated, and they weren't going to invest no money.⁶⁵



Mulgrave Street, site of the former Denny Bacon Factory. Courtesy Sean Curtin



General Packing Department 1902 Shaw & Sons, c.1890-1910. Courtesy National Library of Ireland



Matterson's factory as it was demolished. Courtesy Tony Punch

Joe Hayes spoke of O'Mara's factory only having only two hand basins in the entire factory – nothing unusual at the time.⁶⁶ There were no tea making facilities in the factory, so until the late 1940s cans of tea were carried around at break time with tin cups shared by everyone, until teapots were eventually introduced. And there was little provision for dealing with accidents. In Clover Meats 'there was a nurse there, one nurse, and you are talking about a place that had knives sharper than razor blades.'⁶⁷ In O'Mara's, any deep cut was dealt with by heading for St John's Hospital where the sister in charge stitched it up.⁶⁸

Attempted modernisation

Over the next twenty years the factories made major efforts to modernise and to comply with European regulations. Clover Meats (which had taken over Shaw's in 1949) had, through the installation of mechanised and pneumatic conveyors, eliminated manual handling of animals and meat.⁶⁹ There was also a more stringent inspection of meat: Paddy Bennis recalled how a laboratory across the street from Matterson's factory carried out daily analysis of fresh meat and newly manufactured sausages, while similar analysis was carried out on site in O'Mara's and Clover Meats.⁷⁰ There were also hopes in some quarters that a more co-operative approach – such as that in the dairy industry – might bring Irish and Limerick bacon back into the race for markets. Not everyone favoured the move towards co-operative production: by the late 1960s the idea of cooperative pig farming still had not taken on to any great extent in Limerick or Clare.⁷¹

The difficulties faced by the existing bacon factories in achieving modernisation was both financial and spatial. Clover Meats' overhaul of their factory over the course of the 1960s cost in excess of £500,000 and O'Mara's had already spent almost a million pounds on modernisation of their Limerick, Claremorris and Donegal plants before realising that much more was required.⁷² The location of the Limerick factories was also problematic: still situated by the 1960s in the triangle between Mulgrave Street, Gerald Griffin Street and Roche's Street – exactly the same place in which they had been opened well over a century previously – they had no room either to expand or to convert their premises to meet European hygiene requirements. Even grants from Europe were difficult to take up unless operations were transferred from the city centre to the outskirts.⁷³ When O'Mara's closed its Roche's Street factory in 1986, the obsolescence of the building and the cluttered nature of the location were pointed out, along with the collapse of the export trade, as two of the major reasons for closure.⁷⁴ The

only future for the bacon companies was (if they could) to move to locations outside the city where modern plants suitable for new production methods could be built.

In this regard Galtee Foods, which had been established in Mitchelstown in 1966-68, provided a model in several ways. Not alone had this company established its plant on a green-field site where further expansion was possible, but it had also prioritised the convenience of the consumer. Though still selling 'the odd side of bacon', Galtee responded to changing tastes in food, bringing in measures that had given Danish bacon the advantage in the market by reducing the amount of salt in order to make the ham 'sweeter' and putting the emphasis on pre-packed food:

Galtee came on the line and they revolutionized the whole trade as far as I was concerned and they brought in a lot of equipment... people had the in store demonstrations to promote their products and the ladies dressed up as all sort of gimmicks and gadgets... Cooking a product inside in a store, and it would knock the socks off you the smell of the bacon and the sausages frying. It was a great attraction for people. They loved it...they loved it...all these things but am...yeah...they brought out all sorts of gimmicks to sell their products...⁷⁵

The firm scored a major victory when they started to supply Shannon Airport's duty-free shop and flight kitchens.⁷⁶ It was on Galtee that the new Limerick Bacon Company modelled itself when it opened its modern purpose-built factory in the Raheen Industrial Estate, opened fourteen years earlier on the southern edge of the city.⁷⁷ This was one of the new specialised meat factories of the 1980s, which did not kill on the premises but bought in its meat for finishing, at its busiest processing 110 pigs an hour over each five-day week.⁷⁸ Established under the auspices of Shannon Development and with advice from the Dairy Science Department at University College Cork, the Limerick Bacon Company had modern machinery, a food laboratory, experimental kitchen, and special effluent treatment facilities and it seemed to point to a bright new future for Limerick bacon. For almost a decade it won prizes for high standards of hygiene, supplied retailers and other businesses in Limerick city and Waterford, using the first refrigerated vans in the region but, more importantly, as was the case with a number of similar new meat companies of the mid-1980s, it had its eye on foreign markets, being licenced to export to the United States.⁷⁹ This was a major triumph as larger concerns like Kerry Foods and Roscrea Foods failed to get such a licence, and the Limerick Bacon Company's success was due to its success in producing a product with minimal salt which was preserved through pasteurisation.⁸⁰ In some ways, this company was the victim of its own success, being bought over by Dairygold, a company with its eye on expansion.⁸¹



LIMERICK CANNING FACTORY TO CLOSE

By LEADER REPORTER

IN THE WAKE of the Ranks disaster, another traditional Limerick industry—the canning section of Matternons—is to close, it was confirmed this Thursday.

The ultra-modern Meyrow plant with a capacity for 100,000 cans per eight-hour shift is to be used under a rationalisation plan of the Irish Sugar Company, of which Matternons is a subsidiary.

The closure will take effect from March 22 next with a loss of 36 jobs.

Just 12 months ago 71 people were employed in the packing section.

The news was broken to the heads of departments of Matternons at a meeting with management this Wednesday evening.

They were also told that the company was looking for a buyer for the profit-making meat processing section.

Standards

The Thurston Aid, Frank Powerpoint told the Limerick Leader that he was greatly disappointed that the company had decided to close the canning operation.

"It is one of the best modern in Europe in fact, with a capacity of 100,000 in eight hours—they have not with the best existing mechanical technologies in Europe and production standards," he remarked.

At Limerick House this Thursday he said that he would be meeting with Mr. Paddy Maguire, T.D., Minister for State at the Department of Agriculture, to see if anything could be done.

Efforts

"I am aware that efforts were made to rescue a year for the owners but I feel that this is an area which should be kept within the public sector because it is part of an indigenous industry," he added.

He said that every effort should be made to keep the plant open until an alternative could be found.

He claimed that "from day one" the Irish Sugar Company never wanted Matternons.

Spokesman

It is also believed that a number of similar jobs at Matternons could be lost with the closure of the canning operation.

A spokesman for the Irish Sugar Company confirmed this Thursday that the plant was to close and that the meat factory there was March 22.

He added that the arrival of the Irish Sugar Company was that the meat processing section of Matternons was a viable operation and would be kept open. However, he did not rule out the possibility that this section could be sold.



Shannon: booming business can pose problems.

MAY 30 1986

Bid to save jobs at Clover Meats

LAST-MINUTE efforts to prevent fifty job losses at Clover Meats were being made on Wednesday evening. A spokesman at the Trinity Street plant said there was "real danger" the factory would close on Friday.

Production has been disrupted by industrial unrest at the plant taken over in March 1985, by DG Doyle Ltd., of Kildare.

Plant Manager, Mr. Dan Galvin, refused to comment on the situation there and Irish Transport and General Workers Union officials were silent too.

However, it was learned some of the workforce was laid off last Friday after the ITGWU members voted to continue a work-to-rule situation in a row over bonus payments.

Union officials had been negotiating a bonus scheme with management but workers are reported to be "totally dissatisfied" with the outcome.

There are now fears in the trade union movement locally that if the

plant closes it may never open again.

DG Doyle Ltd. took over the factory last year after the liquidation of the Clover Group left 107 workers redundant in Wexford.

The Doyle meat empire is owned by the Curji family, Kenyan Asians based in Newbridge whose interests lay mainly in the midlands until the Wexford operation commenced.

They also control the Midland Bacon Company in Tullamore and there are fears in Wexford that local plant will become a mere distribution depot for the servicing of orders if the current crisis is not solved.

ITGWU branch secretary, Tommy Carr, is conducting negotiations on behalf of the workforce. However, he was at his union's annual conference in Cork this week and efforts to make contact with him failed.

Asst. branch secretary, Paddy Foley, refused to comment on the situation. "I am not dealing with it. I know nothing about it," he said.

Fears for Matternons and McMahons as 4 disputes hit Shannon

OLD CITY FIRMS ON BRINK OF CLOSURE

But the process of modernisation was not sufficient to resurrect the Limerick bacon industry. Despite the modernisation of Matterson's canning facility when it moved to Moyross in the early 1970s, some felt that its ultimate decline could only have been averted if representatives of the firm had kept their eyes on Denmark to learn from producers and curers there how the Limerick bacon industry might be revived:

We never went with the time. What we should have done at the time was send the same fellas that went over to Denmark, send them back in twelve years and see what they were doing, and how they were successful.⁸²

When Limerick Bacon Company did visit these Danish plants in the 1970s, they learned that the Danes' entirely mechanised production methods were more than twenty-five years ahead of even the new purpose-built plant at Raheen – a sign of the almost insurmountable competition that the local industry faced, based as it was on traditional methods of both production and operation.⁸³ Joe Hayes brought it all together when he gave his explanation for the final collapse of the Limerick bacon industry:

I think myself – I might be wrong – that when you went into the Common Market the writing was on the wall, because before that we were self-sufficient, we were exporting. But on joining the Common Market the Danes and the Dutch, the French and the Germans could export as well. And they were exporting bacon at a better price, I presume, because they were more advanced. That put pressure on the bacon factories then. That was the demise of the bacon factories, in my opinion.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Although the factories are no longer in operation, the memories of this once bacon-driven city are still alive in many of the former employees of the factories, each of whom has something of interest to share. This book is built on two foundations. The first is the enthusiasm and initiative of the members of the Pork Butchers' Society, the pioneers who suggested a project to memorialise the Limerick bacon factories. The second is the generosity of the men and women – pork butchers, casual workers, 'Yanks', office workers, van drivers and factory managers – who so generously shared their memories with us. They spread the word among their friends and former workmates that the project needed their stories; they patiently explained technicalities and skills of which we had previously no knowledge; and they opened up for us a working world that, while it is now gone, lives on in the personality, humour and dignity of those who were part of it.

Our only regret is that, for reasons of space, we could not include in the book every story that we were told. We have tried to give a representative example of the memories of those who spoke with us, and, where possible, to weave these memories with the evidence of the time (information from newspapers and official reports), all the time aware that every source has its own bias and perspective. Newspapers, despite the appearance of impartiality, have their own slant on events, and official records – Dáil debates, parliamentary reports, ledgers and even census material – are not always either impartial or accurate. And memory is memory – it is natural that individuals can remember the same event or situation in different ways, not necessarily because they are falsifying evidence or covering up reality, but because everyone's experience is different to that of others. These memories, whether they confirm or contradict one another, are irreplaceable. They throw light on what the 'official' record cannot do – the humour, friendships and tensions of workplace and neighbourhood – and the atmosphere of a city where pigs and bacon shaped not only diet but also livelihood, community and reputation.

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- 56 Ronnie Long
- 57 Paddy Bennis.
- 58 *Limerick Leader*, 4 March 1895; *Limerick Chronicle*, 22 April 1936; Agricultural Produce (Fresh Meat) Act 1830, Disease of Animals Act 1935 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/>.
- 59 Agricultural Produce (Fresh Meat) Act, 1930, Clause 27, 1. (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1930/act/10/section/27/enacted/en/html#sec27>, accessed 22 April 2016); *Limerick Leader*, 13 June 1931.
- 60 *Limerick Chronicle*, 5 February, 14 December 1957.
- 61 Eddie McNamara.
- 62 John Tierney.
- 63 Michael O'Mara.
- 64 Larry Duggan.
- 65 Tony Sexton.
- 66 Joe Hayes.
- 67 Tony Sexton.
- 68 Eddie McNamara.
- 69 *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 February 1967, 31 October 1972.
- 70 Paddy Bennis, Interviewed by Ruth Guiry, 10 December 2015.
- 71 *Limerick Chronicle*, 9 March 1967.
- 72 *Limerick Chronicle*, 23 February 1967; Michael O'Mara.
- 73 Larry Duggan.
- 74 *Limerick Leader*, 8 March 1986.
- 75 Tony Flannery.
- 76 *Limerick Leader*, 8 March 1986.
- 77 *Limerick Leader*, 13 July 1968, 25 November 1970.
- 78 Phillip O'Sullivan.
- 79 Tony Flannery Interview, 2 December 2015; *Farmer's Journal*, 28 December 1985; *Irish Independent*, 26 May 1986, *Cork Examiner*, 27 May 1986.
- 80 Phillip O'Sullivan.
- 81 *Cork Examiner*, 25 July 1991; Phillip O'Sullivan.
- 82 Paddy Bennis.
- 83 Phillip O'Sullivan.
- 84 Joe Hayes.



Group of early female employees, Shaw & Sons, c.1890-1910. Courtesy National Library of Ireland



INTERVIEWEES

As part of this project a series of oral history interviews were carried out. We are deeply grateful to all the participants for their time and the invaluable contribution they made to the project



Tony and Breda Hanley



Teresa Hayes, Matterson's



Dermot Hartigan, Researcher,
Mary Immaculate College



Charlie Quaid, Pig Buying Family



Jim O'Brien, Clover Meats



Joe Joyce, Clover Meats



Jerry O'Sullivan, Clover Meats



Terry Hayes, Clover Meats



Joe Hayes, O'Mara's



Larry Duggan, O'Mara's



Mary Costello, Clover Meats



John Tierney, O'Mara's



Eddie McNamara, Clover Meats



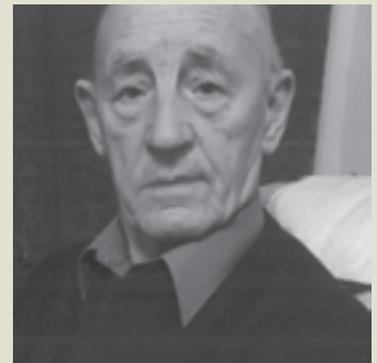
Olive Curry (Fitzgerald), O'Mara's



Liam Foley, Clover Meats



Marie Madigan, Clover Meats



Ollie O'Brien, Clover Meats



Michael O'Mara, O'Mara's



Nancy Waters, Clover Meats



Susan O'Mara, O'Mara's



Noel McMahon, Clover Meats



Tony Flannery, Limerick Bacon Company, Clover Meats, Donnelly's



Eddie McManus, Clover Meats, Matterson's, O'Mara's



Paddy Kiely, Matterson's

Interviewees not pictured

- Paddy Bennis, Matterson's
- Philip O'Sullivan, Limerick Bacon Company
- Brenda Doyle, O'Mara's
- Stephen FitzGerald, Matterson's & Clover Meats
- Tom Fitzgerald, Matterson's, Clover Meats & O'Mara's
- Ronnie Long, Matterson's
- Hilda Reddan (Murphy), O Mara's
- Tony Sexton

Sausage House
Women

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec											
180	McNamara	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
181	Hartnett	J.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
182	Ryan	C.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
185	O'Grady	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
186	McNamara	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
187	McNamara	L.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
188	Madigan	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
190	O'Mara	E.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
192	Fitzgibbon	m.	-	-	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	-	-	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
193	Tapley	B.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
194	Frawley	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
195	Bennet	S.	-	-	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
196	Storan	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
198	McNamara	E.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	Left													6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6				
201	Salmon	A.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
203	Keane	N.	6	-	-	-	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
205	Camody	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
206	Gabri	J.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
207	O'Connell	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	Left													6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6			
208	O'Boone	C.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
217	O'Mahony	T.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
270	Bennet	N.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
271	Butler	A.	6	6	6	6	6	6	Left													6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6				
310	Hennessey	G.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
347	Hardaker	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
348	Corneille	A.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-											
418	Murphy	P.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
419	Shine	C.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	Left													6	6	6	6	6
420	McMahon	K.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
423	Buckley	S.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
424	O'Boone	R.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
425	Butler	P.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
426	Caulfield	I.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
427	Fitzgerald	m.	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6											
	Hayes	T.	Left													6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6							



Group of former bacon factory workers with some of team that worked on the Limerick bacon factory project with Limerick Museum, Limerick Archives and Mary Immaculate College



Mike Finn, playwright and author of *Pigtown*, first produced by Island Theatre Company in 1999

Launch of memorial to the Pork butchers

by Jerry O'Dea, Mayor of the Metropolitan District of Limerick, June 2016.



Larry Duggan, Chairman of the Pork Butchers Society, Jerry O’Dea, Mayor of the Metropolitan District and Ruth Guiry, author of Pigtown, A History of the Limerick Bacon Industry.

Group of former bacon factory workers with some of team that worked on the Limerick bacon factory project with Limerick Museum, Limerick Archives and Mary Immaculate College.



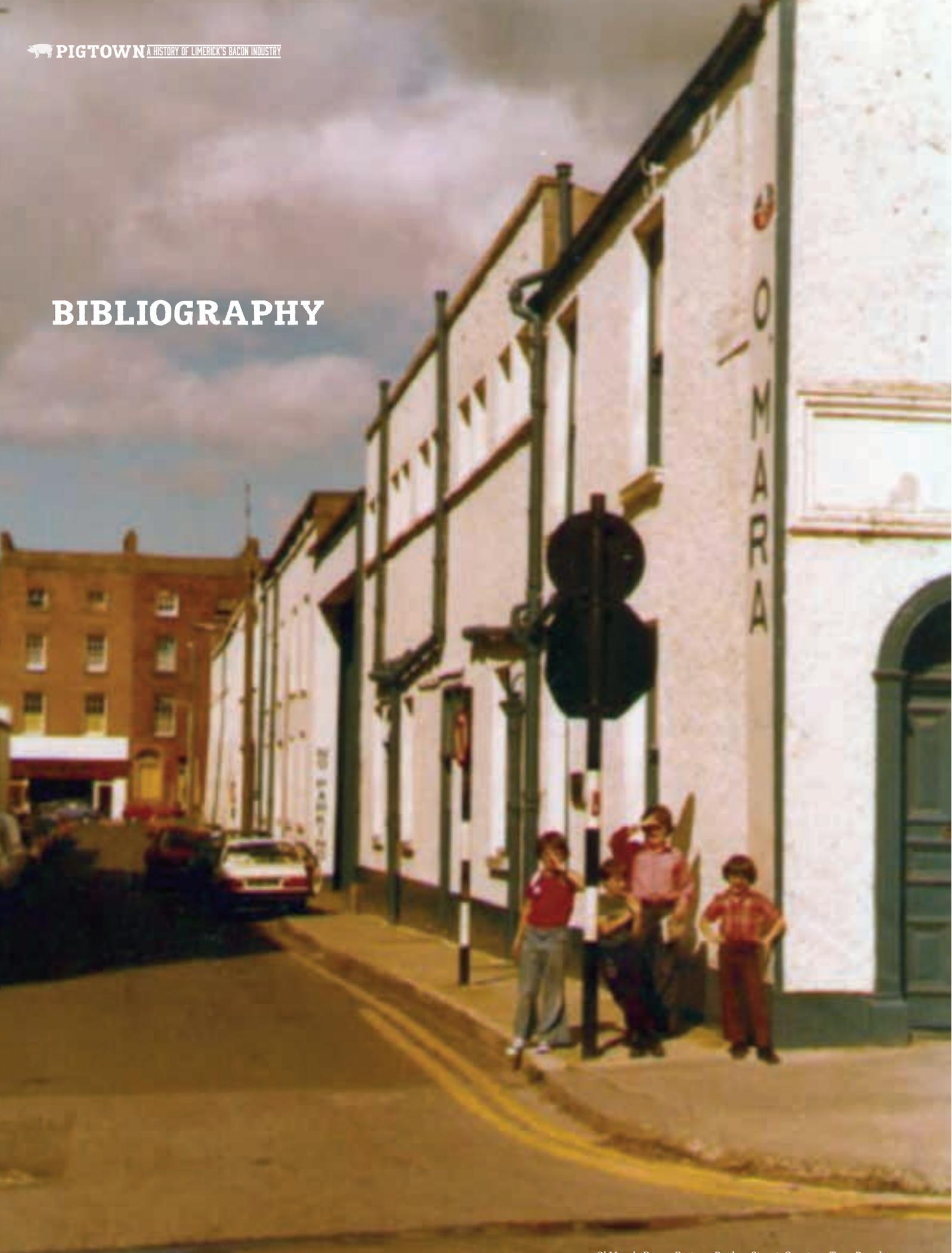
Barbecue at O'Connor Butchers, Wickham Street, Limerick. Courtesy Noel O'Connor.

Six generations of the O'Connor family traded in Limerick as craft butchers, on Wickham Street, Little Catherine Street and William Street. When the factories closed in the 1980's Noel O'Connor cured ham and bacon, followed by his brothers Pat and John, keeping the craft alive in a small scale way. Noel O'Connor recalls collecting blood from the three factories- Shaw's O'Mara's and Matterson's for puddings. He spoke of making Limerick brawn by boiling pigs heads, boiling pigs feet separately and using the gelatine to set the final product into a square shape to be sold in slices. He made white pudding often by cleaning the pig's belly, using the lungs 'or 'lights' and other parts all boiled together and mixed with breadcrumb and spices.



Noel O'Connor leading his team across Thomond Bridge carrying a 68 feet long black pudding in an attempt to break the Guinness Book of Records for the longest black pudding in 1991. Courtesy Noel O'Connor

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Pork Butchers Mass 1 August 1975

Tony Galvin, Brien Liston, Tony Bennis, Donal O'Sullivan, Frank Duggan, Jerry O'Sullivan, /
?Leddin, Mick Doherty, Jim O'Brien, Paddy Fitzgerald, Thady Coughlan, ned O'Sullivan, Jim Walsh,
Tommy Bennis, Sean Fitzgerald, Mick Mckeown, Ger Scanlon, Derry Joyce, Bishop Jeremiah
Noonan, Paddy Hanley, Tom Joyce, John Sheehan, Joe McNamara, Fr. Collins, Frank Byrnes, Joe
Hayes, Jerry McNamara, Sean Doyle, Sean Joyce, Eugene Scanlon, Tommy Fitzgerald, Jim
Liston, Eddie McNamara, Liam O' Shaughnessy, Gerard O'Sullivan, Sean Fitzgerald, Steven Hayes.
Joe Joyce, Jack McManus, Tommy Wallace, Jimmy Ryan, Tony Fitzgerald, Terry Hayes

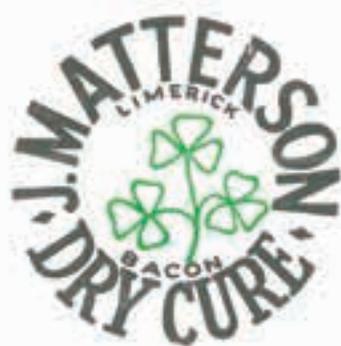
Courtesy Joe Hayes

ARE you aware that half the Bacon sold in this country is Foreign? Are you sure, if you were dissatisfied with your Bacon, that it was Irish?

If you want
THE BEST BACON

Ask for
MATTERSON'S
The Oldest Bacon Curers in Ireland

*Look
for*



*this
Brand*



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Some of MATTERSON'S Canned Specialities

Made on the same recipe for over 100 years, packed by the most modern Canning Plant and guaranteed absolutely pure. Sold by the best Grocery and Provision Stores everywhere. Ask for Matterson's Shamrock Brand.

And, of course, there are the famous MATTERSON'S SAUSAGES AND PUDDINGS, household words where quality and fine flavour are considered. To make sure you are getting the genuine Matterson quality, insist on seeing the Matterson Label.



Tinned BRAWN & TONGUE

Each of these famous Matterson Specialities is made up in three sizes—7 lbs. nominal, 28 ozs. nominal and 20 ozs. nominal. You will find them always pure and fresh. Matterson's name and Shamrock Brand are guarantees of quality and perfect purity on Tinned Goods.



Tinned PORK SAUSAGES



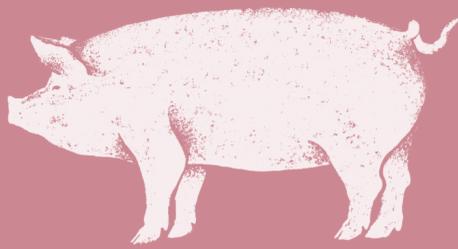
Another famous Matterson Speciality. Each tin contains six delicious Pork Sausages in Jelly, ready cooked. They can be eaten cold or they can be heated.

A Speciality for PICNICS

And for Afternoon Tea or Light Lunch. These handy sizes of Matterson's Ham Paste, Lunch Tongue and Brawn contain 5½ ounces nominal and are exactly the same quality as in the larger tins.



Limerick Bacon is famous—Matterson's Limerick's best



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Luimnigh
Limerick
CITY & COUNTY
COUNCIL

