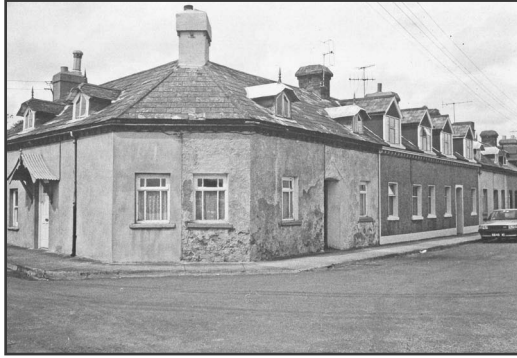


## Images from *Lismore in Stone* 1989



One of the most interesting streetscapes in Lismore. It constitutes the junction of Upper New Street and Lower New Street. As well as having an aesthetic eye, the designer of the street also anticipated the dangers of a 90 degree bend and dealt with it by introducing two consecutive 45 degree turns. This particular corner also preserves much of the original appearance of the two houses which were accommodated by the construction.



Looking up Lower Church Street with the North Mall at one's back. For many years the house in the left foreground had a very fine walled garden. In the early 1900s Ms. Curry grew flower bulbs here for export to England

## sounds from Lismore

By Tom O'Donoghue

I have never been a serious student of psychology as an academic discipline. Also, I have no desire to take up the subject at this stage of my career despite encouragement from various colleagues. Yet I find their urgings interesting, stimulated as they are by my sharing of memories with them, particularly those of my mid-adolescent years. 'Yes', they tell me, 'the psychology of memory is a fascinating subject. It will help you to understand better those sounds and images you keep recalling'. 'Indeed', they continue, 'they are indicative of something really important in the make-up of your personality'. 'But', I keep protesting, 'I don't want to engage in introspection. I particularly don't want to analyse my memories of sounds. I just want them to keep returning so that I can continue to savour them'.

I am not sure if there is any pattern in the manner in which I keep getting into those discussions with colleagues about my memories. Sometimes it is after intensive meetings with postgraduate research students of a particular type. I am referring to the most annoying ones who always want to draw us into counselling sessions about their personal lives rather than focus on the academic research issues on the agenda. At other times it is during periods of relaxation at weekends under the afternoon sun. What seems to regularly happen in these and other settings is that, for whatever reason, I am compelled to talk about myself, not in terms of current and planned career-oriented projects, but rather of who I am, the migrant at the other end of the world, constantly dreaming of a community – one that was and is no more, except for a set of discrete memories. And these memories, while leading to images and recall of events, smells and tastes, are always activated by sounds. And these sounds are nearly always from Lismore of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Most of the sounds that come floating back to me do so when I

am lying in bed somewhere during the day or late afternoon taking a nap. These are times when I am not exactly asleep, yet also not totally awake; occasions I find of stimulated imagination. At such times it is often as if I am transported back to our family home in Parks Road and I am dozing in the front room upstairs overlooking Pat Troy's house which 'in my time' was the home of Dr. Healy. Alongside was the doctor's Palladium cinema, with the tower of the Catholic Church poking up in between and rising over the rooftops of the South Mall dwellings. A bell tolls and registers with me as the 6.00 pm call to the Angelus, rung out by Jim Ross, the sacristan. Jim succeeded Tom Heelan, of whom I have only a vague image. He is sitting outside the sacristy entrance, puffing a pipe, while around him boys older than I are skidding around lunging at each other while they wait to be called in to march, sweaty and red-faced, onto the altar for rosary and benediction on a mid-summer Sunday evening. My memory of Jim, by contrast, is vivid. He replaced Tom around the same time as I became an altar-boy, along with Brendan Kelly-Lynch, John O'Donnell, Anthony Cahill and Michael Walsh. I remember him as a strict, yet kind and protective gentleman. I was also told at home with pride that my uncle Tom had been Jim's best man, that he had been the best treasurer the Lismore GAA club had ever had, and that as well as being from Kerry, he was clever. Somehow, I think, there was meant to be a connection between the latter two characteristics.

More sounds came with the memory of Jim. Sounds beget memories which beget sounds, so it seems. I recall the beat of his feet on the hard and polished parquet floor that led from the main altar of the Church (or the chapel as we used to call it, in rather quaint Welsh Methodist style); the clang of the cover coming down on the base of the thurible when he sealed it, convinced that the charcoal was sufficiently red to keep the incense burning; and the banging of doors on our timber lockers where we each kept our surplice and sutan, like mini-priests. A turn in the bed and it's back to 'reality' again, but not for long. Soon a banging sound

from about half-a-mile away becomes the echo of Harry Vaughan's action beating out his heavy hammer on the anvil in his forge in Chapel Street. I spent many happy days there, even rainy ones; no, especially rainy ones as it provided Harry's nephew, John, and I with an interesting place to be when we could not wander around the Fair Field. John lived across from my father's original home where I regularly stayed with my grandmother, my aunt Nelly, and her husband Billy Power.

Harry's forge was full of many other sounds: the clip clop of horses of all shapes, sizes and types; the voices of farmers, gentry and would-be gentry from holdings stretching from Cappoquin to Lismore, with their amazing variety of accents; the buzz of the welder in the hands of Harry's brother, Pad, as he made railings, gates and other useful things in the highly organised workshop next door; and the sawing of Tim Connell who occasionally came to do some carpentry in another building also located within this interesting enclave which to me was known as Vaughan's Yard. Above all else, however, I remember the distinctive smell created by Harry placing a red hot horse shoe on a horse's hoof. He did this using one enormous hand to hold the horse's foot between his legs and the other to hold the horse shoe firmly with a long black thongs. When the iron met the horse's hoof a great fog of steam arose. In later years it dawned on me that the foot was being shaped to suit the shoe, while at the same time the shoe was being shaped to fit the foot – a dynamic activity indeed. After the first placing on the horse's hoof, Harry would plunge the shoe, still perched at the end of the thongs, into a large timber barrel of jet-black water, to cool it down. He then took it back to the anvil, using his hammer and his judgement to beat it into a better shape. And so he continued, breaking only occasionally to use a white-handled, curved, and very sharp knife to pare away some of the horse's hoof and reveal a white mass, somewhat like the inside of beet sugar, underneath the clay-coloured exterior.

I also learnt a lot from Harry. That is not surprising since he

had a gentle way of insisting that I learn certain things from him. I had to know that his own father, John Vaughan, had been ‘best man’ to, and best friend of, my grandfather Tommy Donoghue (no ‘O’ in those days!) who had come to town from Boolakiely (Top-o-the-Hill) to be a baker and to pass on his native Irish-speaking competencies as a founder member of Lismore’s Gaelic League. I was also regularly regaled with stories of the exploits of both as playing members of the famous Blackwater Ramblers football club of the turn of the twentieth century, alongside Billy Hogan’s grandfather Garret, Harry Whelan’s grandfather Paddy, and the athletic Johnny Baldwin from Church Lane. The latter Johnny, it seems, was small and very slight. Harry told me that one day the Ramblers went to Youghal to play the Nils of Cork and they postponed the commencement of the game for 30 minutes so that Johnny could arrive and line out. When the Nils saw Johnny they thought it hilarious that the game was held up for one of such diminutive stature. ‘However’, Harry concluded, ‘the Ramblers had the last laugh, with Johnny running rings around the Nils’ backs, notching up score after score to bring the honours back to West Waterford’.

The image of another Johnny, Johnny Cahill of Fernville, also regularly comes to me on hearing a very different sound, that of a chainsaw. He was the first person I remember having this great new invention in Lismore, just like I remember Mick Brien being the first person in Parks Road to have a car and the Geoghegans being the first family in Chapel Street to have a television. Like Johnny Baldwin, he was also small and slight of stature. However, I remember him as a person with an amazing capacity for work. After 8 hours or more on the ‘day job’, he would walk his dogs, maintain his extensive vegetable garden, and bring his chain saw from household to household, carving up the slabs which Bobby Bible and his donkey delivered to us from the Castle sawmill so that we could keep the cold at bay over the long winter evenings. My other memory of Johnny is of his generosity, and that of Chris

Kearns, Mossy Hyland and Billy Lineen, who piled us into their cars evening after evening over the summer months to go and play in the Western Board's under 16 and minor hurling championship games. I regularly featured on those teams as a useless álán, yet a necessary member to make up the vital 15 so that we could keep the flag flying during those lean years of underage GAA in Lismore. I was occasionally told by a local nasty or two that I was cowardly. I think they were correct, although their motive was to inflict emotional hurt for some sadistic reason to counteract my attempts to ensure that I avoided physical pain. I was also, of course, bereft of the God-given skill of the sport of Setanta. The one thing I could do was run with speed and occasionally it allowed me to be able to get to a ball well in advance of my pursuers. So lacking was I in the basic craftsmanship, however, that I regularly failed to drive the ball and instead became a marked man, and in more ways than one. The sound of breaking ash across my chest is one I choose to regularly suppress, though I will never forget at least one Ballyduff later 'great' sending me on my way black and blue from top to bottom. But then, in the words of the immortal Charlie Ware (relayed to me by my father), I have to keep reminding myself that 'Tisn't a parlour game'.



Young hurling friends in Lismore.

Rarely did we play a match which brought forth yells from the crowd. Rarely was there even a crowd. I did, however, hear yells in other places and sometimes the memories of these occasions are brought back to me by similar sounds in other parts of the world. Of all of those memories, the ones which recur the most are of workers in Dowd's yard out the back of our house. They

seemed to operate like soon-to-become air traffic controllers, using their special skills of sight and sound to guide driver colleagues seeking to reverse their fruit-and-vegetable laden trucks out the narrow exit facing the Alms Houses. 'Back away, back away', the voices boomed, at what must have been appropriately-chosen intervals. Later, I was to become a member of this team of workers as a 'helper' during the holiday months. I travelled with Tommy Nugent from Ballysaggart to Mitchelstown and its surrounds, with Dick Tobin from Ballyduff as far west as Newmarket and Banteer in County Cork, and with Michael Coffey from Mount Melleray as far north as Cashel and Dundrum in County Tipperary. I learnt about Bonita and Chikita bananas, about boxes of Granny Smiths from New Zealand, about Red Delicious from Tasmania, about Jaffa oranges from Israel, and about avocado pears from God-knows-where. My favourite run was with Tony Dowd, to Middleton and Youghal, ending up in Ardmore and settling down to a great feed of eggs, bacon and chips as we were entertained with delightful conversation in Perks' café next to their amusement arcade. I was also fascinated by the build-up of tension every morning before heading off on our sales' task as we awaited the phone-call from the 'Boss' himself, H.R. Dowd, direct from the markets in Dublin, to decree the price of tomatoes for the day. The nature of the economic activity which dictated this practice has remained a mystery to me, but I relished the associated drama as Michael Savage, the receiver of the daily message, appealed for quietness all round as he sought to process every detail coming out of the large black phone which sat in the corner alongside the sink.

And if sounds of 'back away' remind me of happy summer days at Dowds, the sound of a lone motorbike conjures up an image of cold, wet, dreary winter mornings. I have very clear memories of these and of being drawn to the window around 7.45 am to witness Mick Landers from Towns Park passing by on his way to Tourin Grassmeal Factory to drive the great big lorry for Mr Jameson all the way to Belfast. Mick was always as-one with his motorbike,

bent over it in race-like fashion and wearing a great long belted coat and an airforce-like leather cap with a strap under his jaw, while the spitting rain lashed into his face. In later years I reflected on this commitment to family and employer which brought Mick and his generation to work in hail, rain or snow. Speaking of snow, I am also reminded of the morning our jovial neighbour, Tommy Whelan, came to the door and asked my mother if she would loan him her pushbike for the day so that he could cycle to Middleton where he worked as a butcher. His motorbike had broken down, the snow was on the ground, yet he was determined to front up at his place of employment. These adults of my youth became my later heroes.

Over time the existence of certain patterns in my world of memory-provoking sounds suggested themselves to me. They were always related to my teenage years, they always centred on adults, and they always brought me back to Parks Road. One day not so long ago I thought the long-standing pattern had been disrupted. I lay down for my usual afternoon nap to the sound of Radio National, an Australian radio station which, despite its title, specialises in broadcasting programmes in English from other stations around the world, including the BBC. I retreated into my half-removed-from-the-world state of relaxation, a state in which I remained for about 15 minutes until I began to realise I was hearing the sound of Susan Parkes, my one-time thesis supervisor at Trinity College Dublin. 'This', one part of my brain was screaming, 'is mad. Why should Susan's voice be playing in my head from my memory bank'. 'Worse', another part of my brain roared, 'it's bad. No, Susan is delightful, but the pattern is broken. I only want Lismore sounds. Others could be nice, but what if this is the beginning of a loss of what I savour most'. Then I pulled myself together, forcing myself back to full alert again. I need not have worried. Susan's voice was still to be heard. It was coming from the radio, not my head. Amazingly, it was a replay of a programme broadcast originally on Dutch Radio about a teacher-in residence project which Susan



was overseeing at Trinity. The pattern was safeguarded, it was not disturbed. I was happy again. I'll leave it to the psychologists to hypothesise as to why I am so wired up. Also, their explanations will not interest me. What is important is that Lismore of the late 60s and early 70s still remains in my head, to be activated by sounds when in the appropriate frame of mind. I would not wish my condition to be otherwise.