

FATAL CATASTROPHE—FIRE IN DENMARK STREET—SEVEN LIVES LOST.

Since the dreadful catastrophe which occurred in this city in the year 1837, occasioned by the gunpowder explosion at the establishment of Mr. Richardson, gun manufacturer, nothing of so calamitous a nature resulting in the loss of a number of lives, took place as that which it is this day our painful duty to record. Fires are not of frequent occurrence in Limerick, and any that we have chronicled resulted only, through the interposition of Providence, in the destruction of property. But, alas! in the present instance, seven human beings have fallen victims to what could not, to an extent, be designated a "devouring element" but to the result of a smouldering, unobserved, and treacherous burning, which must have progressed throughout the previous night, and as to the origin of which no positive clue has been yet had, as all the survivors who occupied apartments in the cottiered house, where the sad calamity took place are quite ignorant upon that point, while the lips of those who have gone to their long account are closed in death. The deplorable catastrophe in question took place yesterday morning at about six o'clock, at a house in Denmark-street. The night watchmen had nearly all returned to the station house after duty, when the alarm was given by one of that body named Martin English, who, when passing the head of the street, saw a crowd assembled in terrific fright before the house, from the roof of which smoke was issuing, and at the windows of the attic story were seen a man and woman in their night clothes calling out for help and assistance. The inspectors, Messrs. Shiel and Forrest, lost no time in hurrying to the scene of danger, quickly followed by the fire brigade and Corporation engine. It was then evident that the upper story of the premises, occupied by Mr. Patrick Ryan, (overseer of the Printing department of the Reporter and Indicator), his wife and children, two sons and two daughters, and his father-in-law, Mr. Charles Shine, many years bass singer in St. Michael's Roman Catholic chapel, was in a blaze, and all the inmates in imminent danger. The good and humane persons who congregated at the spot, instantly set to work, and ladders of extreme height having been procured from premises in the vicinity where workmen had been engaged painting, were brought into requisition with all expedition. The attic story, where Mr. Ryan and his wife were observed, was the first essential to be looked to, as he was evidently intent upon leaping from the window at the moment, while his wretched wife, who stood close by him at the time, with a child in her arms, and in agonising despair, was suddenly observed to fall backwards, no longer able to bear up against her painful sufferings, the amount of which could only be imagined by those who subsequently saw her charred body, which, as stated by Dr. Bourke at the inquest, could scarcely be discerned as that of a male or female, Ryan, who for many years laboured from paralysis of the hip, was a feeble substitute for exertion, yet, although frightfully burned in the hands and lower extremities, the poor man came out upon the ladder, and by assistance descended to the street, where he was placed in a bed and conveyed to Barrington's Hospital, where he received every necessary treatment, but at 11 o'clock last night death put an end to his sufferings. Mrs. Ryan was also brought down, it is needless to say, lifeless, as were the dead bodies of her four children, whose ages averaged from 14 years to 18 months. The lifeless body of Charles Shine, which was found upon the lobby of the first staircase, was next revealed, and so far terminated this appalling scene, the recollection of which will long remain in the minds of the public. In the floor beneath that of the Ryan family lived William Hickey (hatter) and his wife, and on the first floor Patrick Nolan, a tailor, and his family. The upper stair case having been completely burned away, Hickey and his wife were brought from their apartments to the street, by means of a ladder, almost simultaneously with the descent of Mr. P. Ryan, and Nolan and his family got out by the hall door entrance. From appearances the fire extended from the two middle back apartments to the front consuming the staircases and igniting the roof, which fell in just as Mrs. Ryan was seen to have disappeared. The Right Worshipful the Mayor, the constabulary under Sub Inspector Hamilton, and Head Constable Moodie, were early on the spot; Mr. Hamilton rendered great assistance; he ascended the ladder after his men, and in the midst of the burning mass aided in getting out the bodies through the windows. Mr. Robt Lambert, who was up with the engine of the Sun Fire Office, ascended the roof, and thereby entered the apartment of the Ryans, where the spectacle that presented itself was appalling, and he did all in his power under the circumstances. Sp56 Constable Moriarty was very active, and assisted in bringing out the dead body of the unfortunate Shine. Mr. Palmer, of the establishment of Canuck and Tait, and several respectable persons, rendered every possible assistance. We subjoin the proceedings at the inquest, which will be read with interest.

THE INQUEST.

An inquest was held on yesterday, at two o'clock, in the City Grand Jury Room, before John Gleason, Esq., City Coroner, and the undernamed highly-respectable jury, on the bodies of the victims of this fearful occurrence. The Right Worshipful Eugene O'Callaghan, Mayor; John Thomas MacSheehy, Esq., J.P.; J. O'Shaughnessy, Esq., M.D., J.P., and Robt. M'Mahon, J.P., were also present.

Ambrose Hall, Esq., foreman, John Joseph Cery, James Fife, John Connolly, (junr.), Joseph Canter, Joseph Kirby, George Walshe, John O'Brien, James Darby Goggin, Mathew Walshe, James M'Kay, John Meale, Esqrs.

The Jury having been sworn, the Coroner said—Gentlemen you have a most melancholy duty to perform, one which is seldom imposed, thank God, on citizens of Limerick to discharge. We will now proceed to view the bodies of these poor victims to this most deplorable occurrence. I am happy to find that I have, on this inquiry, the assistance of the chief magistrate of the city, together with that of some of his brother justices.

The jury accompanied by the Coroner went to the dead-house and viewed the bodies, and on their return the inquiry was proceeded with.

John Coffey—I am sixteen years of age, and I live in the Abbey; I am a tailor, and my employer's name is Pat Nolan, he lived in the house that was burned; I went to work before 6 o'clock; I saw no smoke nor anything; the hall door was only put to; I went upstairs to the workshop; I laid my hand on the door to push it in as I usually did, but I found it hot and locked; I awoke the master by knocking at his door, he slept front, and I called out there is fire in the room; my master answered me, I went up part of the stairs leading to the upper room, and I called out fire, fire, but got no answer; I returned to my masters room who was in bed, and dressed himself, we then unlocked the workshop, and saw fire there lighting, the stage we used to sit on was on fire; I then went to the police barrack and rang the bell, and informed the man on duty of what I saw; I returned to Denmark-street then; the husband and wife, and child, were at the windows crying for mercy; Patrick Ryan, the husband, was at one window, his

wife and child the eldest little boy at the other window crying out for mercy, they occupied the top room; there were people at this time walking in the street but they could not see the fire; I shouted "fire," "fire!" and while I was at the police barrack three men brought a ladder, one of them went up and brought down the man Ryan, and the wife and child fell in back; I saw nothing else; a crowd collected about the place, Mr. Ryan was brought to the hospital; I went away; I dont know what became of my master.

To the Mayor—Efforts were made after Mr. Ryan was brought down by a man who went up one of the three ladders, but the place was on fire, and the men who went up them could not get in. The name of the man who went up the ladder and brought down Ryan is Quin. Quin is in the employment of Mr. William Henry Hall.

The Mayor said Quin is a most courageous and efficient man, and rendered great service on this occasion.

To the Jury—The watchmen were at the Town-hall going to the watch-house to give up their coats at this time, and there were none of them in Denmark-street, but even if there were they could not see any smoke; my master lived in the first floor and the workshop was in the back room; I worked there until 7 o'clock yesterday evening; there used to be a fire constantly in that workroom for heating the irons, and my master's family used to cook their victuals on it; I heard Mr. Russell's bell ring and then it was, I think, about ten minutes to 6 o'clock before I left my home at Thomond-Gate, to go to work.

Wm. Hickey—I am 79 years of age; I am a hatter by trade, and I occupied the second floor in the house that was burned under Patrick Ryan; I got up at 4 o'clock and went to bed again, there was then no sign of fire, but about six o'clock Mrs. Hickey called out to me as I was dozing asleep, and said the house was on fire; we both got out of bed as fast as we could; I had barely time to pull on my trousers with my wife's assistance; the room at this time was getting unbearably hot and we were nearly suffocated; there was a ladder put up to my window and another to Mr. Ryan's; I and my wife were brought down by Mr. Forrest and Mr. Collins, a young gentleman at Mr. Tait's; I went down first as my wife would not go first, all the world would not get her to move till she saw me down first; she was true to the last; no better wife ever lived; we were both saved thank God; I saw Ryan on the same ladder but I was so terrified that I could not take notice of scarcely anything; I did not see anything of Mrs. Ryan who lived above me; I can say that the fire did not originate in my apartments as the fire was carefully raked every night at 9 o'clock; Ryan was brought down by Mr. Quin who is in the employment of Mr. Hall; the use I made of the back room was to work in it and we used to heat the irons in the grate and cook our victuals in it; we raked the fire and put it into a can; I used the fire at two o'clock; I can safely vouch that it was not in my place the fire originated; I was not in the house since; I lost everything I had and have nothing on my feet but slippers; a man of the name of Edward Kelly, a butcher, was very active, and rendered me great assistance, and only for him, for it was he that brought the ladders we would have all been lost; there was not a match in my place yesterday.

The Coroner asked in what circumstances Ryan and his family were as something should be done to bury the bodies.

Mr. Lenihan, proprietor of the Limerick Reporter, said that Ryan was in his employment twenty years, but he was afraid the poor fellow had nothing to spare. He had a large family to support.

The Mayor said he was quite sure the Board of Superintendence would feel disposed to pay any expense which might be incurred on this truly melancholy occasion.

The Coroner then gave an order to the Mayor's Sergeant to expend the sum of £3 towards procuring coffins and other matters necessary for the interment of the deceased. Mr. Lenihan said that he would also contribute towards the necessary expenses of the decent interment of the victims of this melancholy catastrophe.

Denis Quin—I am aged 29 years; I am in the employment of Mr. Wm. Henry Hall; this morning, at something about six o'clock, being in bed, I heard a noise in the street, and thinking it might be a row, I went to the front door, and saw Mr. Ryan and his wife and Mr. Hickey and his wife at the windows, crying out for assistance; Mr. Ryan and his wife were at the windows of his own apartment; smoke, but very little, was gushing from the windows; the greater smoke was from Mr. Ryan's; I saw all this with a glance of my eye, and I proceeded immediately to put on my trousers; I did not wait to put on my boots, but ran with all my might to the police-barrack in William-street, and rang the bell very hard entirely, and saw Constable Mercer, and told him that there was a fire in Denmark-street, upon which he said that he was just informed of it; I told him to hasten down, that life was in danger, and that the persons in danger would throw themselves out of the windows; the constable ran down Todd's-bow with all his might; I cried "fire escape," "fire escape," a couple of times; I saw a ladder against Mr. Todd's house, it was tied at the top and I desired a man who was standing by to go up and cut the rope; another man who is in Mr. Todd's employment said he would not allow the ladder to be removed but I insisted on taking it by force; I then got it and several persons assisted me in taking it down; it was very long, to Ryan's house where we found Constable Mercer who assisted me in placing it against the burning house and up to Ryan's window who was nearly exhausted; I ascended the ladder and I told Ryan to be cool as I was afraid he would throw himself on me as I knew him to be paralyzed; the first thing I asked him was where were the children? He said they "are all gone," he then descended the ladder with me; the flames were then gushing out of the window; I saw his abdomen; his thighs and arms were all burned which must have been caused by the burning sill of the window; I knew that Mr. Hickey was comparatively safe as I saw no fire or smoke gushing out of his window, to which I also saw ladders approaching as I was ascending to rescue Ryan and his family; Ryan came down with me in a very critical position, his hands were fearfully burned and I did not know the moment when both of us would come tumbling down on the street; I did not.

The Coroner said that he examined the premises, and found that Hickey's apartments were fearfully burned, but whether the fire ascended from Nolan's or descended from Ryan's they were all at a loss to know.

Mr. Lenihan said that he saw Ryan in the hospital, who told him that there were neither matches nor fire in his apartments that night.

Denis Quin said, in reply to the Coroner, that the fire escape was not at the scene of conflagration nor did it come there for nearly an hour afterwards.

Mr. Connolly (a juror) said that he saw the flames in the lower part of the house at about twenty minutes past six o'clock in the morning, flame and smoke were rushing out of the top windows.

Denis Quin—Neither the shop nor the dining-room over it have been injured by the fire.

Mr. Hamilton, Sub-Inspector, was examined and said—This morning at a quarter past six o'clock by my watch which I subsequently compared, as to time, with Mr. Wallace's clock, a report was made to me that there was a fire in Denmark-street, upon the receipt of which I immediately jumped out of bed, and ran to the upper back window in my house, and which window looks in the immediate direction of Denmark-

street, and I saw the back of the house in Denmark-street, and from its chimney; I saw a tremendous volume of smoke ascending and flames gushing out from the second floor back window; it was from either the second window or lobby window that I saw the flames rushing forth; it was the second window from the top; my view of the lower part of the house was obstructed by the intervening houses, and I could not see the tailor's room window. I saw flames rushing from the middle room window, and smoke from the upper window, but no flame; I hurried on my clothes, and then rushed as fast as I possibly could to the scene, at which I arrived in a few minutes; I did not hear the watch cry the hour, and I must say that I seldom hear them cry anything; when I reached the scene I saw a long ladder reared against the house, and which reached to the top windows, and I saw two shorter ones raised to the windows of the second floor, and I saw some men on them assisting two persons to descend from the second floor window, the young man Quin, who had previously saved; I saw, as I heard, was amongst them; there was no one then on the long ladder for Ryan had been saved at this time; in the top room I saw the windows down, and one of them broken; I went up the long ladder in order to see if there was any one in that room, but I found the window so hot that I could not raise it, and the gush of heat from it was so powerful as to render it impossible for me to persist in my attempt to raise it, or to thus render assistance to any one that might be inside, and so I had to retire; the exertions of Mr. Forrest, Inspector of the watch, were most energetic and decidedly praiseworthy in the highest degree, and as to my own men I will say nothing now, but will represent their good conduct in the proper quarter.

Mr. A. Hall—It is now so much the habit to abuse the police that it would be a very desirable change in the fashion of the day, if we could say something in their favour, and as you, Mr. Hamilton, will not furnish the jury with the means of doing so we must continue to get them in another way.

Mr. Hamilton—I saw Mr. Lambert, the conductor of the Sun engine, there, and I am bound to say of him that he is a bold, steady, clever, and courageous fellow; one who understands his business and knows what he is about. Denis Quin is also a cool, courageous, active and fearless man.

The Mayor agreed with Mr. Hall as to the thanks due to the police on this occasion, and an opportunity should not be lost of letting them know how much their services on this most melancholy occasion were appreciated by the citizens, and also of making their superiors acquainted with their zeal and energy in the public service.

The Coroner said that it was very delicate of Mr. Hamilton not to speak publicly in praise of his men, but then the citizens of Limerick ought to adopt another mode of showing how deeply and how sensitively they appreciated their services.

Myles Burke, Esq., M.D., said—I was called this morning shortly after six o'clock to the scene of the burning, and the first thing which attracted my notice was a hand cart, with a sheet thrown over it; I ascertained that it contained the body of old Mr. Shine; I did not examine the body at that time; I then went into a house nearly opposite the burnt house, and there I saw Mr. Ryan, who is now in Barrington's Hospital; he was dreadfully burned in the front of his person—the abdomen, the chest, his arms, hands, and extremities, were all fearfully burned; I dressed the burns with the assistance of Constable Mercer, who kindly and charitably lent me his aid; I got for Ryan wine, and having covered his aid, Constable Mercer and another Constable conveyed him to Barrington's hospital, where Dr. M'Mahon took charge of him; and then I subsequently examined the six bodies which now lie in the dead house: one of them is the body of poor old Mr. Shine, I also saw the remains of a woman, who, I was told, was his daughter, Mrs. Ryan, but who was so charred that, except for one portion of her breast, which remained visible, it would be rather difficult to distinguish to which sex it belonged; there were four children—two males and two females—the eldest boy was about 14 years old, and the youngest child was somewhat about 18 months old—one of them was burned most severely; it is my opinion that they must have been first suffocated by the smoke, and then fell into the fire and were burned, and that must have been the case with all the parties; I got the wadding with which I dressed poor Ryan from Mr. Connolly, one of the jurors.

Head-Constable George Moodie deposed—A few minutes after 6 o'clock I received a report of the fire, and, looking from the Barrack-yard towards Denmark street, I saw an immense volume of smoke issuing from the rear of a house in that street; on proceeding to the house, in front of the street, I saw very little appearance of the fire.

Coroner—That shows that the fire was confined to the back of the house.

Mr. Hamilton—There is not much appearance of the fire in the front of the house even as yet.

Head-Constable Moodie—I went into the house with Sub-Constables Moriarty and Sweeney, and others, and, on reaching the first landing, I observed lying upon it a dead body, almost naked—it had covering only about the shoulders; the feet were inclined towards the front of the house, and the head towards the back—the head was very much burned; this was on, as I have said, the lobby of the first floor; the jambs of the door were in flames, and all the wood work of the back-room door was utterly consumed; I recognised the dead body to be that of poor old Mr. Shine; Sub-Constables Moriarty and Sweeney took off their great coats, and, placing them about the dead body, carried it down stairs and placed it in a hand cart, covering it with a large sheet.

To the Mayor—The dead body was found on the landing into Nolan's apartments; the stairs were burned; the fire has had very little effect on front rooms, while the back rooms were burned away.

Mayor—It is strange that so old a man, and barely able at any time to walk, in consequence of paralysis, could make his way down stairs from the room to the first landing, whilst no one else in house—his son-in-law, and Hickey who lived on second floor—could get that way. I understand that poor Shine was 76 years of age.

Coroner—The last time I saw the poor old fel was at the crossing from the Telegraph office. Th were carts and cars passing, and the poor fellow alarmed and nervous, and I went out to him; led him across, and placed him on the flagway safely.

The Right Worshipful Eugene O'Callaghan, Mayor sworn and examined—When I first heard of the it was about 20 minutes after 6 o'clock and I at o proceeded to the scene, when I arrived there I was happy on seeing the efforts that were making by ev one there to save life if they could; all parties, ev one was most active particularly the Constabul and some of the Watch establishment; I heard several witnesses examined on this melancholy subj and they have stated that which I can only iterat I saw the dead bodies carried down stairs by Mal one of the watchmen, and who exerted himself v much; I saw Mr. Hamilton ascend the ladder, try to get into the room where the dead bodies w subsequently found.

Mary Kelly was examined to identify the bodies the deceased and did so with the exception of infant.

Patrick Nolan, the tailor who lived on the f floor, and who had been called for several times by Coroner, but who did not appear in answer to calls made upon him to do so, and who was threaten with committal to prison for contempt, at len made his appearance, and when asked why he not present himself when called on, said that "did not get the summons in time." After a rebu from the Coroner, he was sworn, and on being e minded said—I occupied the first floor in the ho now burned in Denmark-street, and immediately o the shop; I used to have a fire in the back roo which was used as a workshop by me, and for the p poses of my trade, as also for cooking my victua I am sure that that fire was put out last night, same as on any other night; I frequently looked i that room at night, but I did not look into it I night, as there was no occasion for me to look at because my mother looked after my little househ affairs—I left them to her; I am not a married ma I beg pardon, I burn gas in the back a front rooms, and last night I went to look after t gas, and I saw it all out, and I gave a slight glim at the hearth, and saw no fire on it; I use a grate the front room, but it was a hearth I had there burned turf; there were no matches in that roo but there were in my bed room; I had two men work on yesterday; the boy, examined to-day, w not an apprentice; he is a workman, and there w another man at work with him; when he call me this morning I got up and let him in; that is t fact.

Coroner—Why, Coffey has sworn that when he car to your house this morning he found the hall door lyi to—not shut.

Witness—The hall door was not open this mornin when Coffey came; he knocked at the hall door, a after I opened it; he came and knocked at my do after I had opened the hall door for him.

Coroner—This is very odd. Coffey has sworn th he found the hall door open. I will read his eviden for you.

Mr. Goggin (juror)—It would be better, in r opinion, to hear out this man's evidence first.

Mr. M'Mahon, J.P.—In my opinion, the poor m is nervous, and excited, and does not well know wh he is saying. He has a most excited, nervous look.

Witness—I did not open the hall door; the onl thing Coffey had to do was to push it in, but I open my room-door, and then Coffey told me that he fou the smell of smoke; I then went to the workshop a opened it, and when I did so, I found fire and smol rushing down upon me; I then ran to my room get my mother out of danger, and having brought h down to the hall, I went up stairs to get her g ments and my own; my mother is over 80 years age; there was at this time a fire and a large body smoke in the back-room, and both came out again me; I carried my mother down stairs without assi ca.

To the Mayor—This was immediately about s o'clock; after I got my mother down stairs I a sisted to dress her, and then to dress myself.

Mayor—I did not see you at the fire.

Witness—I saw your Worship there, and I sa Mr. Hamilton going up the ladder.

To the Mayor—The smoke was coming from tl ceiling and tumbling down the stairs; I was in n workshop at five minutes to eleven o'clock last ni sharp; there was a little portion of turf there; sou of it is there yet without being burned; I heard s o'clock strike, but I heard no watchman call out tl hour; my clock was perfectly right; I compar yesterday at twelve o'clock with the bell of S Michael's Catholic Church, and also on yesteris evening at six o'clock, and my clock struck six abo five minutes before Coffey called me.

The Coroner said that Mr. Forrest, of the nigh watch, had something to say in reply to an observati made about the watch leaving their beats before s o'clock.

The Mayor observed that that could not be a watchman called him about five minutes after s; Mr. Hamilton said, if a watchman was in the stre at that hour there was nothing in front of the hou that would attract his attention.

The evidence closed here.

The Coroner then said that the jury had given t the investigation of this case a considerable portio time, and to all the witnesses a most patient hearing and he was very happy that with he and they had th assistance of the chief magistrate of the city with ths of the other justices who attended. A great deal o evidence had been given on this most lamentabl o currence, but still they were left in total ignoranc a to how the fire originated, but whatever was the caus it was plain that the six bodies which they had see lying dead lost their lives by this sad and calamitou fire. He (the Coroner) did not know what othe verdict they could arrive at but that, the decess lost their lives by suffocation, and were subsequentl burned.

Mr. A. Hall—We can't return any other verdict.

Coroner—Gentlemen I think we are all bound t render justice to the Constabulary—their right to ac knowledgments on our part is founded on the evi dence of the Mayor and upon that of Mr. Hamilton and it would be a gross injustice to Quin and Forrest; if they were passed over, because it has been clearl established that they exerted themselves nobly on the occasion. I also suggested to the Constabulary this morning that from the magnitude of the case, it would be necessary to have a highly respectable jury, and I am happy to say that they carried out my i junction by selecting so respectable and intelligent a jury as I have the honour to address, or as ever assiste a coroner in the discharge of his duty. I would be very remiss, indeed, if I did not allude to the serv ices of Denis Quin, who deserves, at least, the thanks of the jury.

Mayor—And also that respectable young man, Mr. Collins, of the firm of Messrs. Tait and Co., who exerted himself as much as man could do; he also had several young men of that respectable establishment working at the engine. I must also observe that Mr. Palmer, also of that establishment, exerted himself in a most praiseworthy manner.

The Mayor suggested that laddersought to be kept in every insurance office in the city.

The Coroner agreed with the Mayor, for fatal as that fire was, what would it be if it occurred in the middle of the night.

The jury then returned the following verdict—"That the said several persons came to their deaths by suffocation, from the burning of the house in which they resided, and in which other families also resided, on the 8th day of April instant. We also beg to record our approbation of the exceedingly praiseworthy manner in which the Constabulary exerted themselves, also in approbation of the exertions of Denis Quin, Messrs. Collins, Palmer, of the firm of Messrs. Tait and Co., and also of the praise worthy conduct of Palmer, of the sun office."

The jury finally said that they would respectfully recommend Denis Quin to the Corporation for some token of their approbation of his conduct.

The jurors were then discharged.

DEATH OF MR. P. RYAN.—As stated above, Mr. Ryan died last night in Barrington's Hospital from the effects of the injuries he received. An inquest was held to-day, and a verdict returned in accordance with the facts detailed. His remains will be removed for interment in the new cemetery, from Bank-place, on to-morrow evening, at four o'clock.