Changing Fashions, Eyre Square

There is a wonderful mix of the modern and the traditional in this photograph which was taken at the corner of Eyre Square and Rosemary Avenue in the mid 1930’s. The lady in the foreground is wearing a plain black shawl, a petticoat and a ‘práiscín’ which was a heavy canvas apron worn to protect the skirt. Two others are wearing beautifully patterned shawls which must have looked very elegant and colourful. They had probably come into town to sell their wares, and then went shopping with the proceeds, and their baskets are now full. The other ladies in picture are all dressed in more ‘up to date’ coats and berets. It looks as if all of these people are waiting for a bus.

The photograph was taken from outside Hayes McCoy’s Hairdressing Rooms. The weighing scales in the foreground told you how heavy you were when you put a penny in the slot. These scales were quite common before bathroom scales were invented. The men we see on the right were sitting on the windowsill of what was once the offices of ‘The Galway Pilot’, and was later occupied by The Norwich Union.

Next door was James Ward’s garage. You can see the three petrol pumps (which must have been 10 feet high) outside the door on the edge of the footpath. The first ever petrol pumps to come to Galway were placed inside the door of this garage in 1918. The first mechanic to work there was Jim Bowen from Mary Street. At one stage, the Black and Tans brought in a number of Crossley tenders for servicing, one of the mechanics there completely immobilised them and then went ‘on the run’ until the truce.

This garage was originally called Rosemary Lodge, presumably the same Rosemary who gave her name to the Avenue. Does anybody know who she was?

Wards actually started business in 1905 with a bicycle shop which was situated between McGoldrick’s chemist shop and the Imperial Hotel. It was outside that shop that the first outdoor petrol pump in Galway was situated.

The building on the left facing us was occupied by Geraghtys solicitors. The one on the right was a private home owned by Mrs. Murray. She let the ground floor to ‘Ginger’ Murphy, a bookmaker, and it was later occupied by Tim Colleran’s auctioneers. The empty space to the right of that building later became a showroom for Ward’s garage. You can see the back of the Savoy cinema in the distance.

This photograph is one of many included in a delightful memoir entitled The Way We Were written by Declan Hassett and published some years ago. Most of the book and illustrations are of Cork interest, but he writes nostalgically about visits to Galway and about his cousins, the Quigley family from Devon Park.

Finally, a recommendation for children of all ages. As part of the exhibition on Padraic Ó Conaire currently on show in the Museum, there is a short film recorded by Maud Hand with animation by Edith Pieperhoff of “My Little Black Donkey” by Ó Conaire. The narration is by children from 3rd class in Claddagh National School. It is a delight, and will put you in good humour.

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