

Corpus Christi Processions

My memory of these processions is that everyone assembled in the grounds of St. Mary's College. Prayers were recited there, possibly a rosary, and then we walked, in organised groups, to Eyre Square. The route brought us along St. Mary's Road, Henry Street, Dominick Street, over O'Brien's Bridge, up Shop Street and around Eyre Square. We entered the park via a gate opposite The Great Southern and were shown to our places, and there the assembled multitude attended Benediction. A special stand was erected to accommodate the altar. Hymns were sung.

Many of the streets along the procession route were decorated with flowers, little altars, holy pictures, banners and flags for the event. The residents of Henry Street always put on a special show. Those taking part marched in groups like Sodalities, Children of Mary, Nurses, Schools, The Order of Malta, Boy Scouts etc. Banners were carried, uniforms worn, some sodalities wore special sashes. It was very solemn, and if you took part as a young school child, a mild form of torture. The town centre was brought to a standstill.

The group in our photograph (which was kindly given to us by Helen Spellman) are all female students from UCG. Obviously the gowns and mortarboards were handed out more freely in those days. Those women not wearing the mortarboards have all got hats on, many of the 'cloche' variety popular in those years. They are crossing over O'Brien's Bridge which was named after William Smith O'Brien. It was built in 1880 and has two wide arches with Italianate piers at either end. It replaced the west bridge which, for many years was the only river crossing, and where legend has it, the gate into the city carried the words 'From the ferocious O'Flaherties, O Lord deliver us'.

The photograph was taken from the walls of the Shambles Barracks, which at that time was a derelict site, an ugly desolate wasteland. In the centre of the weedgrown area was a dilapidated building. It was all subsequently knocked and cleared and St. Patrick's National School built there.

The high wall we see on the far side of the street was much loved by bill-posters and was usually covered with advertisements for cinemas, dances etc. It was part of McDonough's fertiliser factory. The premises on Bridge Street at that time were occupied by Carr's Paint Shop, Pierce's Jewellers, O'Mahony's Drapery which later became Stauntons, Fahy Travel, Lynskey's Restaurant, Hoey's Bar which was taken over by Paddy Feeney and later John O'Flaherty, and finally there was a sweet shop which at one time was a barber's shop occupied by Con Healy.

The building on the far side of the bridge is the Bridge Mills which is still the same today, but the profile of the back of Lower Dominick Street has changed considerably.

The Galway Archeological and Historical Society are hosting a lecture on Monday next, 11th April, 2011 at 8pm in the Harbour Hotel. The title of the talk is "Astronomy: Pre-history and History in the West of Ireland", and it will be given by Dr. Malachy Thompson. All are welcome.

TK

Please forward any queries/comments to oldgalway@kennys.ie

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