

# Daniel Donovan

C.T. 1958

By Carl Whiteley



**MAKING** his way through Bridge Street the other day was 71-year-old Daniel Donovan. The name may not be familiar, but he must be as well-known as the "bellman". In fact, he is the local tinker.

We stopped Dan in his tracks. "You're a man of the times," we said. "Only just," he replied. So before this ancient craft is allowed to fade away we grabbed Dan as a suitable personality to restart this weekly feature.

There is no doubt that the trade of the tinker is gradually dying out. Dan agrees, but so far as he is concerned, it will continue in this part of the country until he himself "fades away".

For over 40 years he has been peddling his trade in and out of the streets of Christchurch. His truck, on which he carries his grinding machine, is as quaint as his craft. It was built specially for him by a gypsy when he started his business in 1908. Dan calls it his "mobile factory".

Born in County Antrim, he came to this country as a baby-in-arms when his father decided to transfer the family business to Deptford, London.

## ACCOMPANIED FATHER

As a small boy, Dan accompanied his father on his rounds in the London area. He went from door to door seeking trade and then watched the skilful hands of his father until he was allowed to use the grindstone himself. When his father died in 1908, Dan had attained the skill and he continued the business on his own account.

**Dan decided to modernise the business and bought a new truck for £38. "It would cost me about £200 to have one built like it today," he said. The gypsy who built the truck was a clever coachman in Deptford.**

"When it was new it attracted the whole neighbourhood," recalled Dan. "It was a beautiful machine and business was good. Of course, there was no other method of sharpening knives in those days, and the knives then were genuine steel."

But the trade of tinker includes several other jobs and Dan is skilled at them all.

## "TRADE CRY"

To give some idea of the work he carries out Dan recited his old "trade cry" which he shouted when entering a street. These were his words: "Carving knives, table knives, scissors to grind, water cans or baths to mend, china or glass to mend".

**Dan is no longer allowed to use his "trade cry" in the streets. Instead, he goes quietly to the doors and if he is not already known recites his little piece. He is proud of the fact that he has had a street traders' licence for over 40 years.**

"These days people don't rush out like they used to," said Dan, "but I still have plenty to do. I have my regular customers and one or two contract jobs."

He has been repairing the mats at Christchurch Town Hall for the past 12 years and has a contract to repair the physical training mats at the Bournemouth schools.

## SHARPENED BAYONETS

During the last war he sharpened 50 bayonets for a detachment of American servicemen stationed at Westbourne and on one occasion "put an edge" on a boomerang at a private residence. "And I have sharpened swords galore," he added.

During his 40 years in this area, Dan has had opposition. "They used to come in droves and sometimes I had as many as six other tinkers in my area. But I have always survived them.

**"Some of these men were not fully trained tinkers and some times they would let the customers down. This was bad for trade because people thought I was in the same category," he added.**

But Dan knows his job and his customers know that too. His trade may be dying out but so long as Dan can set out from his home at 30a, Wyndham Road Boscombe, at nine o'clock every morning and return at 5 p.m., feeling no worse for a good day's work the Christchurch area will still retain one of the oldest street trades.