

# the country's national treasures in history

**LOOKING AHEAD:**  
John O'Mahony: "My  
vision for the future  
is a vibrant, dynamic  
museum."



## O'Shea on Monday



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### Shopping? It can turn you into a real basket case!

**LOOKING** for ketchup?

Try the car park.

Sometimes, we can admit it to ourselves: Life can be a bit baffling. We wander around, not knowing what we are doing, if we are going the right way. Choices surround us but we don't know what the right choices are. Yes, we are a man in a supermarket. Last week was a good week for the typical Irish consumer (which includes both you and me) as a new 'consumer czar' was appointed to fight the tough fight and champion the rights of the customer against those nefarious retailers.

This is a very good thing because it was revealed last week that:

- Irish people pay 23% more than other Europeans for the same products.

- 87% feel they are frequently overcharged.

- 94% cannot pronounce czar.

Irish people have long had a love/hate relationship with supermarkets. They either love them or hate them, or don't really think about them enough to love or hate them.

But did you know that when the first Dunnes Stores in Ireland opened on Patrick Street in 1944 the surging crowd outside grew so excited they forced a window in? When was the last time you were that excited about groceries?

If I could write about just one subject today, I would like that subject to be 'how the abandonment of the ban on below-cost selling in supermarkets would affect the Irish consumer'. Unfortunately, I know next to nothing about that subject, so instead, I will just make some pointed and relevant observations about supermarkets. The main thing you need to know about supermarkets is that the retailer wants you to spend as much time as possible in their store, because the longer you are in there, the more purchases you are likely to make. Although a supermarket may appear to be simply a place to buy food and other household necessities, in reality the cutting-edge arrangement of shelves and layout of aisles is expertly designed in such a way to make sure you the consumer have to traverse the store three times before you can find your wife's trolley.

If you have no wife, and are a basket case like me, have no fear; the retailers have a plan to keep us in the store too.

People who shop regularly at a store go straight to the things they want without looking at other products on offer.

Store workers will be told to take a popular product (such as ketchup) and move its display around, so that while you are looking for it, you may see and buy something else.

**ROBERT O'SHEA**  
*has some handy  
tips on saving  
money down at  
your local at the  
supermarket.*

I laugh in the face of this attempt to finagle more money from my wallet. What I do early on in the shopping expedition is pick up two cereal boxes and hold them on either side of my head as blinkers to the enticing shelves.

With my two hands accounted for I do have to kick the basket down the aisles, but I can tell you that it is worth any embarrassment in the long run. As I wander from aisle to aisle in search of a bottle of ketchup, booting along my basket, the notion often strikes me that the ubiquitous CCTV cameras might be more than simply security against shoplifting. Maybe they (the Government) are moving all the stuff around and studying us like mice in a maze to see what our reactions will be. Is it a coincidence that on numerous occasions after finding what I wanted I have been offered a bit of cheese on the end of a cocktail stick by a person in a white coat?

It sounds a little crazy but let's not forget that when you're holding two cereal boxes to the side of your head it can feel like everybody is watching you.

Even after gathering all your supplies, you are still not safe.

The checkout offers the most dangerous opportunity of impulse buying.

You will probably have to stand in a queue for a while and the only thing to do is stare at those delicious Maltesers right in front of you. They are only an arm's reach away. Hold strong.

We all remember the cautionary fable of Jack and the Beanstalk where Jack impulse-bought some beans from an old hag after he had traded in his cow and when he got home he found those beans were out of date and so he threw them out the window and a huge beanstalk sprouted, which wasn't covered by the Sales of Goods and Supply of Services Act of 1980. Avert your eyes from that display. You will soon be outside and walking away from these seducers.

So there, who needs a 'consumer czar'?

If you follow this advice, like me, you will save a few quid each and every week. When you buy as much cereal as I do, those savings come in mighty handy.