

Treading the Treaty Boards. Acts in the history of Limerick Theatre

by Gavin Dillon

The Kingdom of Ireland, was one of the last in Europe where theatres were erected.¹ The story of Limerick theatre mirrors, by and large, the wider history of theatre in Ireland. Regarding Irish theatre, there is scant evidence of any form of drama during the early medieval period. Ritual storytelling and public poetic performances were common in the courts and households of the wealthy and powerful, but were not an organised form of theatre which would be recognisable today. It is probable that religious material may have been performed to an extent, but this was more than likely in the form of public oration or sermon rather than being a scripted, dramatic piece with a cast of characters.² While Mystery/Morality plays have been discovered in Ireland, there is no supporting evidence to suggest that they were performed in Limerick.³ The earliest extant reference which mentions some form of theatre dates from the latter half of the thirteenth century. It admonishes such performances on saintly feast days in places such as churchyards or cemeteries. However, it suggests a performance tradition during this period, albeit apparently frowned upon in certain religious circles.⁴

It is not until the sixteenth century that we find compelling evidence for a theatrical tradition in Ireland. It is recorded that by 1528 it had become customary for the Mayor of Dublin to invite the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland to a play, so the tradition must have begun some years prior to this.⁵ Further, evidence exists for dramatic events accompanying weddings and wakes, mentioned in records from 1569 and 1582.⁶ This timeframe also seems to suggest the growth in popularity of mummers, dressed as Saint Patrick and, sometime later, Oliver Cromwell. The real beginnings of theatre as we know it in Ireland have their roots in the seventeenth century. The early part of that century saw rules and regulations emerge regarding the governance of Corpus Christi plays. However, a landmark event occurred when Charles I granted the right to open a theatre in Dublin in 1637, together with the governance of all other productions in the 'Kingdom of Ireland', to one John Ogilby. This was the original theatre in Smock Alley, which closed in 1641 but re-opened in a new location some years later.⁷

The 1630s saw much political and financial intrigue in Dublin theatre, owing to the city's nature as a Protestant and quite Puritan-influenced population centre, though with a presiding governing court anxious to promote theatre in general, which was quite at odds with the Puritanical outlook in England during the same period. Ireland, with its immense wealth of lore and legend, provided ample material to spark the imagination of London playwrights fallen from favour during the Puritan subjugation of theatre in England. The first play written using Irish legendary material sought to appease both Anglo-Irish and Puritan sensibilities and was composed and staged in 1639. Its key protagonist was Saint Patrick. The Restoration of Charles II saw the construction of Ireland's first dedicated theatre at Smock Alley, built by the aforementioned John Ogilby. Though it faced stiff Puritan opposition from the outset, it remained a cornerstone of the Dublin theatrical community from 1662 until 1778.

The following two centuries had an explosion in the number of active theatres in Dublin. In 1732 the Rainsford Street theatre opened, while Aungier Street theatre opened the following year. Between 1758 and 1767, Crow Street Theatre sparked what could be referred to as a 'theatre war' with the Fishamble Street theatre, which had nationalist leanings, opposing the pro-monarchy outlook of Crow Street. The nineteenth century saw further developments following the re-opening of Fishamble Street (1827), with a lull in the middle of the century, most likely due to a combination of political events and the famine in 1741, which swept through large portions of the countryside. The opening of the Gaiety (1871), the Mechanics, now the Abbey (1874), the Star of Erin, now the Olympia (1879) and the Lyric (1897/8), all showcased a city in recovery, or at least railing against the devastating Great Famine.

It is possible to view the history of Limerick theatre as occurring in phases, each of which seem to occur following a period of turmoil. Following the sieges of the seventeenth century, the famine of the nineteenth and the World Wars of the twentieth century the arts had a revival in the city. This study of theatre in the city from its beginnings until the Second World War draws largely on previous efforts by Len Bateman⁸ and James McMahon⁹ together with other material from the archives of the Limerick City and County Library at the Granary.

Having recovered from the sieges of 1690 and 1691, Limerick was the largest city in Munster, boasting a populace of around 25,000 to 30,000 and was building to become the third most prominent city in Ireland after Dublin and Belfast. The first known theatrical space in the city was at St Peter's Cell, previously an Augustinian nunnery, in the north-eastern section of what was then English town.¹⁰ The popularity of theatre in Ireland was growing rapidly during this period. The Irish attitude towards touring companies from Britain was one of respect and, somewhat, of awe. This was greatly at odds to the general view of the acting profession in Britain, reflecting the Puritanical views of the previous century, that male actors were at best ungentlemanly, while female actresses were little different from prostitutes. In contrast to this outlook, British actors and actresses were noted as strutting around towns in Ireland to the great admiration of the local populace. Little wonder, then, that theatre troupes from Dublin should greatly look forward to their summer tours of the country, and such tours, by both British and Irish companies, seem to have been well established by 1720 at least. There seems to be little reason to assume that Limerick was any different.¹¹ Efforts were made by 1732 to draw up plans for a permanent venue to cater to the theatrical needs of local and visiting gentry, who found the city to be otherwise quite run down and shabby.¹² However, these plans would not come to fruition for many decades.

From 1736 onwards, records are available showing Peter's Cell as a popular venue and tour destination for Dublin theatre troupes, most notably the Smock Alley Company which performed summer shows there each season as part of a tour which encompassed Cork, Carlow and Kilkenny.¹³ In 1760, the refectory space in which performances occurred

was transformed into a dedicated playhouse space, including dressing rooms, a box pit and a viewing gallery.¹⁴ Due to this development, Peter's Cell became even more attractive as a venue to stage summer shows and boasted numerous productions by Dublin's Crow Theatre Royal Company. This amalgamated company, at first under the managerial eye of Spranger Barry, performed each year for a decade until the close of the venue in 1770. As testament to Limerick as an alternative theatre centre, it was noted that peaches were served as refreshment to audience members, rather than the more traditional oranges of London or Dublin. In September and October 1768, the Crow Street Theatre troupe performed under the leadership of Spranger Barry's deputy, William Dawson. Due to a combination of romances, sexual liaisons and an air of general intrigue, together with performances of excellent quality, the company drew 'daily excitement' from the local populace during their stay.¹⁵

Following Spranger Barry, the celebrated Harry Mossop became the manager of the combined Dublin Theatre Company in the 1760s. He transferred the touring arm of this company from Cork to Limerick, reflecting the city's rising status as a suitable and exciting venue. That decade saw a general revitalisation in the city and pervading air of progress as the original, medieval town walls were demolished and new buildings erected in their place. Mossop had great ambition for Limerick, and published his ideas for his touring company in the *Limerick Chronicle* on 24 October, 1768, in which he outlined his vision for the future of summer shows in the city.¹⁶ Unfortunately, he ran into huge financial difficulties and eventually sold his rights to stage shows in Limerick to Tottenham Heaphy in 1769 or 1770. This led to the decline of Peter's Cell as a venue for theatrical performances due to Heaphy's plans for a purpose-built theatre.¹⁷

Heaphy went on to raise sufficient funding to convert a premises previously occupied by Edward Gubbins, a cartwright and coach-builder, into the first purpose-built theatrical venue in Limerick in 1770. Named the Theatre Royal, it was constructed on the corner of Cornwallis Street and Playhouse Lane (now the corner of Gerald Griffin and Little Gerald Griffin Streets). Heaphy raised £600 by charging twenty-four members £25 each for the privilege of having a silver membership card granting unlimited access to all productions.¹⁸ The theatre is described as being 80 feet long and 40 feet wide, with a very small stage and no accompanying accommodation rooms for visiting actors. Audience entry to the theatre was less than ideal, being along a small, narrow and dirty alley which ran through the Gubbin's kitchen. The theatre also had a non-traditional facade, as it had been the premises of a coach-wright. For all this, records show that the Theatre Royal drew large crowds to see the leading professional names of the day together with local amateur groups which frequently drew crowded houses. The audiences for local amateur productions brought with them their own sense of personality, conversing loudly during productions and being generally raucous. It has been remarked that they brought their attitude towards performances in Peter's Cell with them into the new theatre.¹⁹ This trend of Limerick audiences with an individual sense of vocal appreciation or critique is one which remained a feature of the Limerick theatre experience for the next century and a half. It was commented upon in his *Recollections* by the famously pro-Limerick John O'Keeffe, the Dublin-based actor who married Heaphy's daughter. He wrote of new productions:

When we could, we did not venture any affair until we had taken the mind of the Limerick audience, not even to Dublin

or London. Limerick gave us its mind as generously when the play or the person playing was to our fault as to our favour... in Limerick, as a rule, they endured the worst play to the end, but took care to let us know what scenes or lines or actors, were to them unsufferable (sic). This they did by angry stamping of feet and calling, but only in regard of the part objected to, and not, as in other towns, the idea of stopping the performance.²⁰

Heaphy made numerous attempts to move the Theatre Royal to a more upmarket (and, by extension, civil) venue, but all ultimately failed, even when one of the city's civic leaders, Thomas Smyth, donated a plot of uncovered land for the project on Assembly Mall (Charlotte's Quay) next to where the Public Assembly House was built.²¹ The first Theatre Royal was finally destroyed by fire in 1818, after suffering a decline due to the opening of another theatrical venue on George (now O'Connell) Street.

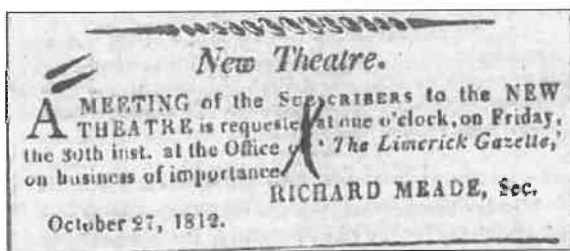
The closing of Peter's Cell also coincided with the construction of the new Public Assembly House. A committee was established to oversee this sorely needed civic amenity, and capital was raised to the sum of £2,000 to construct the Assembly House on land granted on a 999-year lease by the Reverend Dean Hoare.²² This was completed on 11 September, 1770. It served as a general meeting room for various civic groups and held many theatrical and musical performances, though it was never a dedicated theatre space. In 1790, the main meeting hall was converted into theatre-specific hall by Sir Vere Hunt and opened on the 31 January with a performance of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. The Assembly House held all manner of performances, featuring some of the period's most noted musical and theatrical stars.

It is worth noting that, during the eighteenth century, Limerick was not solely a place that welcomed touring acts, but also produced some writers and actors of its own. The most famous of these was certainly Andrew Cherry, born on 11 January, 1762 in Quay Lane, now Bridge Street, near St Mary's Cathedral.²³ While Cherry went on to have a decent career as a dramatist and playwright, finding brief fame in Belfast and with some productions staged at Drury Lane in London, he found his niche as a dedicated and adept theatre manager. He possessed, by all accounts, a range of non-existent acting talents, while his literary output is judged on the one hand (kindly) as having little merit, and on the other (not-so-kindly) as having 'no originality and nothing whatsoever to recommend them.'²⁴ Many of his works remained unpublished and unproduced, but he remained a popular figure in certain circles and died in Monmouth, Wales, in 1812, a month following his fiftieth birthday.

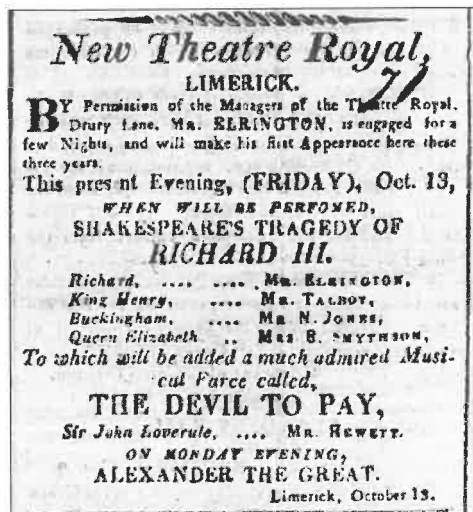
In the years following the turn of the century there was a downturn in the economic success of Limerick, which had been apparent during the previous decades. Living conditions in the early 1800s are best described as miserable, said to be the worst in the country at the time due to a combination of lack of food, clothing and housing and unhealthy sanitary conditions.²⁵ A sense of abandonment is described as pervading the city at the time, for while the national government acknowledged the squalor of the city, it did little or nothing to alleviate it or improve matters. The citizens decided to build a new theatre in the 'New Town' on George (O'Connell) Street. It was hoped that this would provide a welcome distraction from the unfortunate state of the living conditions of the poor. Between 1810 and 1814, finances were raised and the new

building was erected in the middle of George Street in what was fast becoming the economic hub of the city.

Following the destruction of Heaphy's premises in 1818, this became the new Theatre Royal and was decidedly larger than its predecessor. It measured 100 feet in length and 58 feet in width, making it nearly fifty per cent larger than Heaphy's. The stage itself was also markedly bigger, being a significant 40 feet in depth. While the theatre enjoyed initial success, it was short-lived and the building was sold in 1822 to Reverend Cronin of the Augustinian Order, who moved into the premises and established the Augustinian Church at the location in 1823. The building was purchased, largely due to public donation, by the Augustinian Order for £400, one tenth the £4,000 it had taken to originally build the theatre over the course of its four years of planning and construction. Following the sale, the Assembly House in Charlotte's Quay was once again fitted up as a theatre in 1824 and opened with Shakespeare's Richard III.



Notice for a meeting of the subscribers to the new theatre inserted in the General Advertiser: or, Limerick Gazette 27 October 1812.



Advertisement for the New Theatre Royal in the General Advertiser: or, Limerick Gazette 9 September 1816.

However, Limerick would remain without a specifically-designed dedicated theatre space until 1841.

Limerick's third incarnation of a Theatre Royal was built by Joseph Fogerty in June 1841 on Henry Street and was accompanied by a row of housing in Fogerty's Range, today Theatre Lane, off lower Mallow Street. According to Maurice Lenihan's History of Limerick, Fogerty, 'after having taken down a circus which he had built in Queen Street' built the theatre on piece of ground which he took from the Earl of Limerick.²⁶ It was a one-storey building even larger than its previous namesake on George Street, measuring 110 feet long, 66 feet wide and 30 feet high, making it the biggest theatre in the country following the destruction of Dublin's Theatre Royal by fire in 1880.²⁷

This period may be regarded as the second age of Limerick

theatre, as the Theatre Royal remained the heart of Limerick comedy, music and drama until its closure due to destruction by fire in January 1922. Over the course of this eighty-year period, the theatre was rarely dark for more than a few days, even during the Great Famine which dominated the late 1840s, or its aftermath. Indeed, it is probable that the Famine led to an explosion in theatrical events in the city (and nationally) during the late Victorian era. The reaction to poor living conditions in the early nineteenth century by building a theatre was mirrored in the aftermath of the Famine. There was an almost desperate need for entertainment to shift the focus from the national sense of depression.

All the while the Limerick public and critics alike were most discerning in their appreciative standards, the latter writing scathing reviews of theatrical performances, which they felt were below their accepted standard, together with discriminating reports of plays deemed to be of good quality. The public in general became known as one of the most vocal audiences in the country, loudly (and often) voicing their approval or disapproval of a show. The disapproval was considered very serious if the audience began to ignore the production entirely and turn their attentions to their own amusement.²⁸ This continued the trend of vociferous and discerning Limerick audiences going back to the early days of Peter's Cell. Limerick thus regained a reputation in the nineteenth century for being a proving ground for new productions and new talent, the idea being that if it was good enough for Limerick, then London, Paris or New York would not pose much of a problem. The third Theatre Royal, therefore, saw some of the finest British and European talent arrive in Limerick from the worlds of theatre, comedy, opera and musical performance. Some of the leading stars of the time, reported to have performed at the venue, were Joseph O'Mara (a Limerick man), David Hourigan, Anna Russell, John McCormack and pantomime artists Paul Bernard and C. Kendal Irwin together with local lady and soon-to-be superstar, soprano Catherine Hayes.

One of the biggest and most colourful events staged by the Theatre Royal was the 1897 sept-centenary of the civic charter granted to the city by England's Prince John which, by all contemporary accounts, was received very enthusiastically by the citizens. A popular annual event was Pool's Myriorama, a series of painted images of famous locations on a roller-canvas with accompanying music provided by Pool's orchestra. The paintings were replaced by projected photographs, as advanced technology came to Limerick. It is interesting that pictures of the Boer War (1899-1902) sparked outrage among the populace. The reception given to these images was so hostile that it forced the theatre to close for several nights.²⁹

In the latter years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries there was an increasing interest in Irish language productions, showing Limerick's increasing sense of nationalism prior to the outbreak of the First World War. This nationalism was evident in the frequency of political meetings held at the venue, including one Unionist meeting in October, 1912, which led to three nights of rioting in the city and the boycotting of the Theatre Royal for over a week.³⁰ The aftermath served to highlight a sense of community and civic partnership, evidenced, in January 1922, by the combined efforts of the Irish Republican Army and the Royal Irish Constabulary to put out the fire that eventually destroyed the building.³¹ Such co-operation, while not unheard of, was unusual enough to warrant much comment at the time and highlights the integral role of the Theatre Royal in the city.³² Theatrical productions in the years preceding the conflagration became less frequent as film gained popularity, but as an entertainment venue, the theatre remained hugely popular.

ONE WEEK.
THEATRE, CHARLOTTE'S-QUAY, LIMERICK.
By permission of the Right Worshipful W. Gibson, Mayor,
MR. GALLAHER,
 THE CELEBRATED DRAMATIC VENTRILOQUIST,
 HAS the honor to announce to the Nobility, Gentry,
 Officers of the Garrison, and Inhabitants of Limerick
 and its vicinity, that he will open the Theatre next
 MONDAY evening, May the 20th 1836, and continue every
 evening that week; on which occasion Mr. G. will give his
 unrivalled Entertainment, entitled
FAMILY EXOTICIES;
Or, The Adventures of Richard the Ventriloquist,
 IN TWO ACTS,
 which embodies several different Characters, all acted and
 transformed by Mr. G. alone, without any assistance but his
 own Voice in his favour.
 * * * For further particulars see hand-bills.
 Doors open at Seven—Curtain rises at Eight o'clock.
 Boxes, 2s. 6d. Pit, 1s. 6d. Gallery, 1s. Half-price to
 all parts of the house at half-past 9 o'clock.
 Limerick, April 27.

*Advertisement for theatre in Charlotte's Quay in the
 Limerick Chronicle 26 April 1836*

The increased need for entertainment following the Great Famine was so pronounced that a second theatrical venue was opened. In 1856 the Athenaeum was opened by George Howard, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland and seventh Earl of Carlisle. It was predominantly the brainchild of the Limerick branch of the Athenaeum Literary and Scientific Society and its president, William Lane Joynt. The new theatre was paid for by public subscription and located at the redeveloped site of St. Michael's parish rooms on Cecil Street. Highlighting the growing public passion for all forms of performance, the parish rooms had been paid for by the populace of Limerick at a cost of £1,100, but sold a relatively short time later for a mere £300 to little or no complaint.³³ The ideals of the Athenaeum went beyond the foundation of a theatre solely for entertainment. The impetus was to create a 'Temple of Learning', with lecture theatres, meeting rooms and exhibition spaces forming a cultural hub where:

...everyone, irrespective of class, religion or politics, could attend lectures and participate in free debate. The Athenaeum became a dynamic for change. Between 1853 (and) 1914, all major figures in Irish politics lectured there. The venue was the home of every musical and cultural society in the city and the location of the city's first public library and the Limerick School of Ornamental Design which led to the development of technical education in Limerick.³⁴

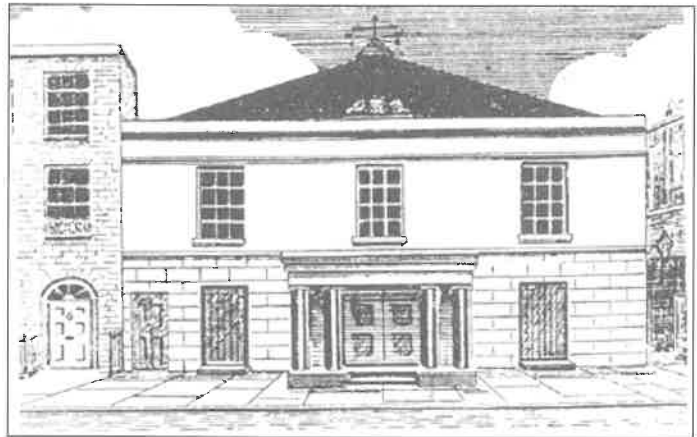
In addition to providing entertainment, the Athenaeum functioned as a reaction to the religious sectarianism that had led to the abandonment of plans to form a University in Limerick during the 1830s and had brought about the closure of the Limerick Philosophical Society in the 1840s.³⁵ Following the opening of the building, it soon became apparent that dwindling audiences and mounting bills would necessitate a revision of the use of the spaces therein. Sadly, the Athenaeum was opened for hire by the public only a year after its general opening and numerous dramatic and artistic bodies used of the building. The School of Art was housed there between 1856 and 1912, grand opera and operettas were held frequently, Anew McMaster and his famous Shakespearean company first played Limerick at the venue in 1926, films

were often shown and numerous sports clubs were linked with it, including Garryowen Rugby Club, which was founded there in 1884.³⁶

Theatre Royal, Limerick.
 IMMENSE SUCCESS OF THE
 "TICKET OF LEAVE MAN."
 GRAND GARRISON NIGHT!
 Under the Patronage of
 COLONEL BORTON AND THE OFFICERS OF
 THE GARRISON,
 Last Night but one of the Season!
 GREAT SUCCESS OF
 MR. DAN MOYNEHAN.
 ON to-morrow Evening (FRIDAY), 12th August
 the performance will commence with the pow-
 erful Drama of THE TICKET OF LEAVE MAN
 and positively the last night of its representation.
 Hawkshaw - Mr. ELPHINSTONE.
 Songs of Her Majesty's Curian, giving a descriptive
 of her Majesty's visit to Ireland, and Trust to Luck
 MR. DAN MOYNEHAN.
 To conclude with the laughable Farce of
 THE IRISH TUTOR.
 Terry O'Rourke, (with Songs)—Mr. Dan Moynehan
 Doors Open at half-past Seven; commence
 Eight.
 PRICES OF ADMISSION:

Boxes,	...	...	2	6
Stalls,	...	...	1	6
Pit,	...	...	1	0
Gallery,	...	...	0	6

*Advertisement for the Theatre Royal, with admission prices in the
 Limerick Chronicle 11 August 1864.*



*The Old Theatre Royal, Henry Street, Limerick,
 from a drawing by J. F. Walsh.*

As with the Theatre Royal, the advent of cinema saw a downturn in theatrical interest at the Athenaeum and the venue suffered a dwindling in popularity as a venue following the foundation of the Free State. This continued for some twenty years as the venue was leased by a succession of groups for various purposes. Declining numbers, together with political disagreement were common during the early 1940s, with various groups seemingly unable to agree on the best path for the future. The College Players, a popular local drama group wrote to the VEC, now owners of the venue, arguing that it be returned to its original purpose as a theatre and leased to them at a discount, but to no avail.³⁷ The Athenaeum eventually closed in 1946, only to re-open the following year as the Royal Cinema and it traded until the cinema closed in 1985. It reopened again as the Theatre Royal (fourth version) in 1989 for a brief period during the 1990s, renamed the Athenaeum once more in 1995, until its eventual closure. Plans are currently in progress, which could lead to it re-opening as a venue once again.

From the closure of the Athenaeum as a theatrical space in 1946, Limerick's dedicated theatre venues were reduced to the tiny stage used by the College Players in Theatre Lane, at the back of the previous Theatre Royal, and Jack Bourke's City Theatre in what was another theatrically fallow period when the vast majority of live performances in the city were musical. The rise in popularity of showbands in the 1950's and 1960's, and musical variety performances replaced more traditional forms of theatrical entertainment. The city remained without a dedicated sizeable theatrical venue until the opening of the Belltable Arts Centre in 1981, beginning what may be described as the third era of Limerick theatrical history. While Limerick was bereft of a dedicated theatrical space during the 1950s, the 1980s had a rebirth in more traditional forms of theatre performance which has continued to this day, and may be referred to as the third age of Limerick theatre.³⁸ This may be a separate chapter in the story of the stage in Limerick, which as a tradition remained discerning and slightly different from the rest of the island.

References

1. W.R. Chetwood, *A General History of the Stage* (London, 1740), p 49.
2. Peter Kavanagh, *The Irish Theatre from the earliest period up to the present day* (Tralee, 1946), p. 2.
3. Ibid. See, for instance, the discovery of the *Pride of Life*, dating from the thirteenth century and discovered in Dublin during the nineteenth century. pp 2, 3.
4. Ibid. p 5. We know that the friars of Kildare were staging re-enactments of the Crucifixion in the late thirteenth century.
5. Ibid. p 6. The office of Mayor was elevated to Lord Mayor in 1665 by Charles II.
6. Ibid., pp 8-9.
7. Ibid.
8. *History of Limerick Theatre (HOLT-P) 1722-1818, 1895-1899, 1900-1906*, (three volumes of material compiled by Bateman at the Limerick City and County Library).
9. James McMahon, *If Walls Could Talk* (unpublished work, 1996). This is the history of Limerick's Athenaeum Theatre set in a very broad context which gives as much information about Limerick, as a city throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as it does about the theatre itself.
10. Today, this is the area immediately east of the bottom end of Peter St. south of St Mary's School.
11. *From St Peter's Cell*, HOLT-P 1720-1818, p 2. See also W. Smith-Clark, *The Limerick Stage, 1736-1800*, *Old Limerick Journal* (Winter, 1981, no.9), p 13
12. Maurice Lenihan, *The History of Limerick* (1866, revised and ed. Cian O'Carroll, 1991), p. 331.
13. *The Irish Theatre*, p 184
14. *From St Peter's Cell*, p 2.
15. *The Limerick Stage, 1736-1800*, pp 13, 14.
16. *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 October, 1768.
17. *From St Peter's Cell*, p 3.
18. Ibid.
19. *The Limerick Stage, 1736-1800*, p 14.
20. F. P. Carey, Famous Irish Actor and his Limerick Wife in the *Limerick Leader*, 5 January, 1946. The memoirs of O'Keeffe in his original book contain numerous tales of theatrical life in Limerick.
21. *The Limerick Stage, 1736-1800*, p 18.
22. *From St Peter's Cell*, p 3.
23. See Sharon Slater, Limerick Life website at: <http://limerickslife.com/andrew-cherry/> (8 January, 2013)
24. *The Irish Theatre*, p 407.
25. *From St Peter's Cell*, p 5.
26. *Lenihan*, p498n. It may have been competition from a rival Queen's Theatre, which was opened in Thomas Street by a Mr Collins that prompted Fogerty to develop the Theatre Royal.
27. *From St Peter's Cell*, p 10, describes the interior as follows: 'The floor sloped toward the stage. The stage was so spacious and the theatre so well constructed that no matter where one was seated the stage never appeared far away. The elaborate drop-screen was painted by the well-known artist, Henry O'Shea. A statue of Shakespeare stood in the centre; on either side two female figures represented Music and Comedy (with lyre and mask) and the other Tragedy (with poison and dagger). Underneath ran the words 'All the World Is a Stage'. There was no stage curtain. The pit was divided from the stalls by a barrier. The seats in the latter were padded and had a back rest. The former were wooden benches. Around the sides of the interior ran a circle gallery known as 'The Gods.'
28. J. F. Walsh, The Old Theatre Royal, *Old Limerick Journal* (June, 1980), p 13.
29. Ibid. p 15. For more details on the hostile feeling in Limerick, see Des Ryan *Opposition to the Boer War, Limerick, 1899-1902* in *Old Limerick Journal* Number 40, Summer, 2004.
30. Ibid.
31. The R.I.C. nickname 'Black and Tans' was first used in Limerick. Christopher O'Sullivan first used the term, in *The Limerick Echo*, when he described 'the strange type of individual wearing a black cap and tunic of the Royal Irish Constabulary and khaki trousers of the British soldier'. Ennis-based comedian Mike Nono perpetuated this when he used it on stage during one of his comedy shows at the Theatre Royal. The name entered common usage in the following years, referring to the militia employed to impose order upon the dissident Irish across the country. See Sean Spellissy and John O'Brien, *Limerick: The Rich Land* (Ennis, 1989) p. 61.
32. *Limerick Chronicle*, 24 January, 1922, and following days.
33. *Limerick Chronicle*, Letters to the editor, 8 January, 1855. A Mr William Sheehy lodged his complaint at the sale of the parish rooms, but even here his complaint regards the cost of the sale rather than any dissent towards the establishment of a new theatre.
34. *If Walls Could Talk*, p 11.
35. Ibid. p 22.
36. Ibid. pp. 35-37.
37. Ibid. p 78.
38. Limerick City and County Library holds a wealth of records for this period, including newspaper cuttings and original documents from the 1930s to the present day.

Gavin Dillon was born and grew up in Limerick city. He has been involved in theatre in the city at many levels over the years, both on and off stage, including membership of the Limerick Youth Theatre and as a competitor in Féile Liamní. He later moved to Cork, where he currently lives, and completed his PhD in Medieval Irish History and Literature at UCC in 2013.