It is difficult to pinpoint the precise date of the introduction of a printing press to Limerick. At least two writers, James Buckley and Robert Herbert, have studied the subject, but because evidence of the earliest printing in the city has long since vanished, they were unable to draw any definite conclusions.

Writing in the Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, in October-December, 1902, James Buckley set out some of the difficulties involved in documenting the history of Limerick printing in the seventeenth century:

The introduction of printing presses into our provincial towns was an event of the first importance in our local social life in the past, and to trace the product of these presses is now a subject worthy of attention ... There is not at present sufficient evidence to infer that a press was engaged in Limerick in the first half of the seventeenth century. During the angry and protracted civil wars of that century printing became quite common in Waterford, and was first introduced into the cities of Kilkenny and Cork.

Limerick at that time did not form an active political centre in the sense that the other-mentioned cities did. When the garrison fell into the hands of the Irish, in June, 1642, the citizens closed their gates to Royalists and Parliamentarians, carried on their trade at sea, and remained steadfast to Catholic and Gaelic principles until the miserable surrender-if not actual betrayal-of the city to Ireton in Oct., 1651. Like effects are produced by corresponding causes, and those circumstances go far to account for the absence of a press there before 1650 ...

The period of the revolution (1688-9) witnessed a change in the position of Limerick. The city was at that time the most important, politically, in the South of Ireland, and the tide of war rolled hotly round its walls to the very last, so much so, that it was the last sod of Ireland that resisted the new regime. Tyrconnell, too, after the defeat of the...

A seventeenth century perambulating press.
VERS

COMPOSEZ PAR UN PERE CAPUCIN IRLANDOIS,
Qui a traduit en Anglois les Dialogues de la Pierre de
Touche Politique de M' Le Noble, & qu'il a mis
à la reff de sa Traduction imprimée à Limerick dès le
mois de Juillet 1690.

IN L'APIDEM L'V POLITICUM
CLARISSIMI ET CONSULTISSIMI VIRI DOMINI, D.
EUSTACHII LE NOBLE,
IN SUPREMO MEDIOMATRICUM SENATU
QUONDAM PROCURATORIS CATHOLICI,
CARMEN
IMPRESSUM IN FRONTE CIBISMI, QUOD
PRIMUM EJUS OPERUM
ANGELICI JURIS FECIT IN HIBERNIA.
FR. PAT. MIC. SAC. CAP.
ANNO M. DC. XC.

USUIS ES; ARGUTO QUI SERA CERNERE
Ludo
Mixta cupis, magni fertile vatis opus,
Hac tibi, fed Graco de fonte, & fonte
Latino,
EUSTACHII mihi NOBILIS atri dedicat.

The first page of the July, 1690, poem.

Jacobites at the Boyne, constituted the
city of his government by establishing
the vice-regal court there. During that
sanguinary struggle it may reasonably
be supposed that a press was constantly
employed there for civil and military
purposes-for printing notices, posters,
proclamations, war bulletins, and
literature of that sort, which would
ordinarily be of inconvenient size for
preservation, and appearing at somewhat
irregular intervals and in a fragmentary
condition, would consequently soon have
perished.

And there is clear evidence available
to show that at least one printer was
operating in Limerick in the last quarter
of the seventeenth century. Robert
Herbert, in his work, Limerick Printers
and Printing, Part One, published in June
1942, gives this information:

An entry in the (Limerick) Corporation
Minute Book for the year 1680 reads as
follows and probably refers to Samuel
Terry the printer: 'Samuel Terry certified
by Mr. Reid to have been his apprentice
for seven years, and well and truly
served his time, admitted to the freedom
of the city'. If this is Terry the printer, it
would take printing back nearly 20 years
earlier than was hitherto supposed and,
in addition, would give us the name of
another printer, Mr. Reid, who must
have been printing here from 1673 to
1680.

Samuel Terry went on to become a
fully fledged printer in his own right and
printed a variety of books at his premises
on Baal's Bridge.

During the Williamite campaigns of
1690 and '91, a perambulating press was
almost certainly used to print military
proclamations and bulletins in Limerick.

Not one scrap of all this material has
survived, but there is evidence to show
that at least one printing press was in
use, and a reprint of one of its
publications - a Latin poem - has been
preserved in the British Museum.

The Latin poem was composed by
Father Patrick, an Irish Capuchin friar -
Patrick Michaelpolitanus Hibernus* - in
an introduction honouring the author of
a book he had translated from the
French. The book in question was a
political treatise entitled Dialogues de la

Pierre de Touche Politique, written by M.
Eustace le Noble, a prolific writer on
political matters during the reign of King
Louis XIV in France. Fr. Patrick's
translation was printed in Limerick in
July, 1690.

Unfortunately, the present very rare
copy of Fr. Patrick's poem is no longer
attached to the book which it originally
prefaced; it is a reprint of the poem itself
which was published in Paris as part of a
small collection of contemporary poems,
and is to be found among the rarer items
in the British Museum collection. The
name of the printer of the book has
therefore been lost.

The poem itself has no intrinsic value.
It is simply a eulogy, lauding Eustace le
Noble to the skies in the bombastic style
of all 17th century eulogies - a torrent of
praise with little or no factual content.

The last lines of the poem are in
French, and indicate that M. le Noble had
recently died.

That Fr. Patrick should have had his
book printed in Limerick is not as
surprising as it might seem at first sight.
The Capuchins came to Limerick in 1688
and rented a house, the delapidated
remains of which may still be seen in
Curry Lane.

Their presence in Limerick was short-
lived; the Siege of 1691 and its aftermath
would have forced the Capuchins to
disperse again and probably even to
return to France, where Fr. Patrick had
obviously lived before his hopeful return
to the promise of Jacobite Ireland.
Perhaps some French archive will yet
yield the secret of his identity-his and
that of so many more who, like him, were
thrown upon the mercy of France in this
period.

However, we are fortunate that a
reprint of his poem has survived. The
work is referred to as follows in the reprint:

Vers composez par un Pere Capucin
Irlandais, Qui a traduit en Anglais les
Dialogues de la Pierre de Touche
Politique de Mr. Le Noble, et qu'il a mis
à la teste de sa Traduction imprimée à
Limerick des mois de juillet 1690.

The fourth page of the poem.

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The Place and date - Limerick, 1690 -
appear on two of the poem's four pages,
making it an authentic reprint of one of
the earliest known publications to have
been printed in the city.