

# A 1690 POEM

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**I**t 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.*



*Old Baal's Bridge, the location of one of the first printing works in Limerick.*



V E R S

Patricius,  
p. Michaelipolitanus

COMPOSEZ PAR UN PERE CAPUCIN IRELANDOIS,  
Qui a traduit en Anglois les Dialogues de la Pierre de  
Touche Politique de M<sup>r</sup> LE NOBLE, & qu'il a mis  
à la teste de sa Traduction imprimée à Limerick dès le  
mois de Juillet 1690.



IN LAPIDEM LYDIAE POLITICUM  
CLARISSIMI ET CONSULTISSIMI VIRI DOMINI, D.  
EUSTACHII LE NOBLE,  
IN SUPREMO MEDIOMATRICUM SENATU  
QUONDAM PROCURATORIS CATHOLICI,  
C A R M E N  
IMPRESSUM IN FRONTE CIBISMI, QUOD  
PRIMUM EJUS OPERUM  
ANGLICI JURIS FECIT IN HIBERNIA  
FR. PAT. MICH. SAC. CAP.  
ANNO M. DC. XC.



UISQUIS es; arguto qui seria cernere  
ludo  
Mixta cupis, magni fertile vatis opus,  
Hæc tibi, sed Græco de fonte, & fonte  
Latino,  
EUSTACHIUS mirâ NOBILIS arte dedit.

The first page of the July, 1690, poem.

Seu magis est voto Gallica terra  
Maacte potens animis, & utramque  
Effe fatis genti solus utrique po

Pangebat  
Limerick in Hibernia  
6<sup>o</sup> Kalendas Quinimiles  
1690.

Fr. PATRICIUS Michaelipolitanus  
Hibernus, Sacerdos Capucinus.

The fourth page of the poem.

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 Irlandois, Qui a traduit en Anglois 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 dès le mois de Juillet, 1690.

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.

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 - 'Patricius Michaelipolitanus 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*

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