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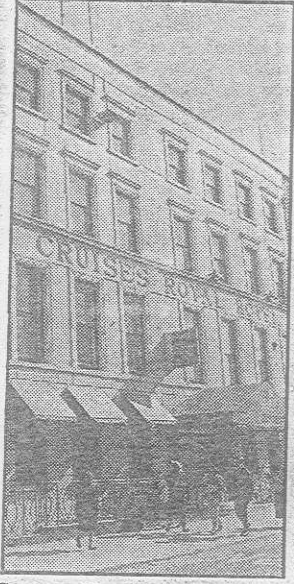
# Why demolish Cruises?

**CRUISES HOTEL**, dating from 1791, has played a leading role in the social and political life of Limerick. It was the Bianconi coach station, the venue for mass meetings addressed by O'Connell, Parnell and de Valera. But now the building it occupied on O'Connell Street is closed and threatened with demolition to make way for a large-scale retail-based development laid out along a new pedestrian street.

According to itself, Limerick Corporation is "committed to preserving the heritage that is essential to Limerick's identity and ensuring its harmonious co-existence with the ambitious projects we are continuously developing". History, it says, "means so much to Limerick. Each generation carries the task of passing that history to the next. And with each generation, that history becomes a little richer".

But Limerick Corporation, like most local authorities, is in favour of "development", in the generic sense, and saw nothing wrong with granting permission last October to Vallbury Ltd to demolish Cruises Hotel, as well as much of Denmark Street, for a "neovernacular" scheme consisting of 142,000 square feet of retail space, 93,000 square feet of offices, 25 apartments and a multi-storey car park.

A pair of octagonal towers would flank the entrance to the proposed pedestrian street, but the buildings on either side don't even maintain the parapet height of O'Connell Street. For this and other reasons, such as the fact that the new street would disrupt the grid of the Georgian town, the scheme has been appealed by the newly-formed Living City Group — even though this means taking on the establishment.



*Cruises Hotel . . . Could it be the Shelbourne of Limerick?*

There is a view in Limerick that the city needs more high-quality shops, though it is doubtful if its economic base is strong enough to take another scheme of the scale proposed — especially on a site just across the street from the new shopping centre at Arthur's Quay. All shops in the city must also compete with the three large out-of-town shopping centres in Co Limerick, beyond the corporation's boundary.

Cruises could, of course, be refurbished as a hotel, because it is a remarkable fact that there isn't a single Grade A hotel in the city centre. Jury's is across the river, off the Ennis Road, in a squat complex of two-storey buildings, and the latest Grade A hotel to open is the Castletroy Park, out near Plassey. If the shopping scheme is abandoned, might Cruises become the Shelbourne of Limerick?

Not surprisingly, there has been some controversy over the building, with some critics suggesting that it will look like a pair of metal-clad crates linked together with glass and steel. Indeed, even the architects accept that it probably wouldn't have survived if it had to go through the planning process. But it may yet be seen as Limerick's answer to the much-praised pyramid at the Louvre.

Separated from the castle by a green space on the bank of the river are the new civic offices, which the councillors have unaccountably decided to call City Hall. The product of a "design and build" competition won by McInerneys and Burke-Kennedy Doyle and Partners, it comes with shocking pink porticos, dark blue windows set in a "Graniti" facade, multifarious hipped roofs and sheer lift towers.

Inside, along its "glazed street" looking out on a landscaped garden above the river, console brackets from the old courthouse which stood on part of the site are laid upside down, like footscrapers. In the sound-proofed city council chamber, you can still hear the rush of the Curragour Falls while the adjoining district court, in Perry Mason style, has a view of the Shannon from the judge's shower.

The relationship of this new complex with the square outside, which it meets at an angle, is not the happiest, but it certainly projects a more democratic image than Dublin Corporation's bunkers at Wood Quay. Standing above the square, opposite the 1810 neo-classical courthouse, is St Mary's Cathedral, perhaps the least altered of Ireland's medieval cathedrals, which is currently festooned with scaffolding.

St Mary's is undergoing a £2.5 million restoration programme, for which £1.1 million has already been raised. The Taoiseach, Mr Haughey,

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