



THE ORIGINS AND EARLY YEARS OF BARRINGTON'S HOSPITAL

B 23241

by Mark Tierney

It is difficult to say when exactly the idea of building a general hospital, to serve the poor and sick of Limerick, first came to be seriously considered. The years 1821-22 may be taken as a possible starting point. There was a crisis in the city of Limerick, in 1821, owing to the outbreak of what was called 'epidemic fever'. It meant that the existing hospitals were unable to deal with medical and accident cases, being occupied entirely by 'fever' cases. At the time, the word 'fever' denoted either typhus, typhoid or cholera. Apparently the epidemic was most prevalent in the Irishtown part of the city, particularly in Palmer's Town, Margaret Street and the surrounding lanes. No class of the inhabitants escaped its attacks, though it was most general and severe amongst the poor.

Already by this time Limerick had its own 'Fever and Lock Hospital',⁽¹⁾ better known by the name of St. John's. It also had a lying-in hospital and a lunatic asylum. However, none of these establishments provided medical help for general casualties and accident cases in Limerick.⁽²⁾ It needed a general hospital to deal with the increasing number of medical cases. In Dublin, a number of general hospitals had been built by private individuals: Stevens' Hospital by Dr. Stevens; Mercer's by Mary Mercer, and so on. These institutions provided medical aid for the working classes, who were most prone to accidents, and also for the poor. The example of such hospitals in Dublin was not lost on some observers in Limerick, among whom were Matthew Barrington and his father, Joseph Barrington.

However, the planning and also the financing of such an institution required much thought, and it could not be rushed into. In the days before quick transport it was essential to have the proposed general hospital near to the greatest concentration of population most likely to use it. When the actual building of the new hospital got under way, the *Limerick Chronicle* made the following pertinent observation: 'We conceived the situation of Barrington's Hospital well arranged, being placed in the vicinity of the working portion of our community, and contiguous to the Old Town, where accidents generally occur, and where timely

assistance is most required by the Poor'.⁽³⁾ This explains why Barrington's Hospital was built on the site, still called 'George's Quay', on the edge of Irish-town.⁽⁴⁾

In a letter to the prominent citizens of Limerick city requesting their support for Barrington's Hospital, the Rev. Dr. J. Ryan, Catholic Bishop of Limerick,

summed up the circumstances which inspired the founders of Barrington's Hospital:

'The City and Liberties containing it is supposed, 90,000 inhabitants, have been hitherto, however strange it may appear, without the benefit of a city hospital.

It is true the County Hospital opened its doors and afforded an asylum and medical aid to a portion of the sick poor of the city, but when it is



— ANNO UNDECIMO —

GEORGII IV. REGIS.

Cap. lxxii.

An Act for the Management and Direction of the Hospital founded by Joseph Barrington and his Sons in the City of Limerick.

[29th May 1830.]



THIS HOSPITAL was founded and erected by
JOSEPH BARRINGTON and his SONS
MATTHEW, DANIEL, CROKER, and SAMUEL BARRINGTON
for the relief of the Poor of their native City.

A. D. 1829

*Incorporated
by act of Parliament.*

A. D. 1830.

Foundation plaque of Barrington's Hospital.

considered that the County Hospital is often found inadequate to its own imperative claims, and that the City patient is only received on the score of courtesy or benevolence, and not from any undeniable claim, the necessity of a city hospital is very little lessened by the possibility of such limited and precarious relief.⁽⁵⁾

From the beginning of 1829, the Barrington family began purchasing the houses and land which would provide a site for the new hospital. Although Joseph Barrington was to get much of the credit for the actual building, it was his son Matthew who provided not only the money, but also the business expertise which went into the venture. This is obvious from Matthew Barrington's account book for 1829. A few entries will give some idea of the interest which Matthew Barrington took in the matter:

'20 Jan. 1829. Paid John Murphy for his Interest in Ground and premises on George's Quay ... £350.00

Paid Lords Longford and Devesci arrears of rent due thereon ... £25. 16 10d

Like to Rev. E.D. Hoare ... £72.

Paid Nicholas Mahon Esq. for Interest in his yard ... £5.00.⁽⁶⁾

Work began on Barrington's Hospital in March, 1829,⁽⁷⁾ and it is obvious that Joseph Barrington was a kind of clerk of works, or overseer. According to the account book of Matthew Barrington, the latter paid Joseph Barrington every week, for the rest of 1829, sums of between £10 and £36 'for the workmen and materials'.⁽⁸⁾ Tradition has it that

during the construction Joseph Barrington – then an elderly man – had his favourite armchair, pipe and umbrella set down opposite the building, and sat there the entire day regulating the masons and other workmen and at the slightest sign of careless work or inefficiency on the part of the builders, there was trouble. The building was constructed entirely in cut stone, three storeys high, with stone stairs and balcony leading to the main entrance. We know, of course, that Joseph Barrington had taken upon himself the supervision of the building, and also paid the wages to the men. Hence his presence throughout the construction.

The *Limerick Chronicle* sent one of its reporters to observe the activity in George's Quay in autumn, 1829. His report, published on 14 October, 1829, makes interesting reading:

'Seldom, if ever, has it fallen to our lot to congratulate our fellow citizens, or our own feelings, on so splendid an offering to humanity and charity, as now presents itself to our City; one of no less magnitude than that of a Hospital for the Poor of Limerick now building, on a most extensive scale, at the expense of a humane and benevolent individual.⁽⁹⁾ *For some months past, the eye of our fellow citizens, as they passed along Charlotte's Quay*⁽¹⁰⁾ *, has been arrested on beholding a number of artificers and workmen, busily engaged in erecting a handsome cut-stone building on the opposite side of the river. Conjecture had long been afloat to assign a cause for this*

handsome structure, but at length the enigma has been solved. The building is now admitted by its benevolent and charitable founder, Joseph Barrington Esq., to be intended as a General Hospital for the Poor of his Native City, who suffer from accident or chronic disease...⁽¹¹⁾

The architect of Barrington's Hospital was Frederick Darley.⁽¹²⁾ It was originally designed to have space for sixty beds, and took nearly two years to complete. According to one eye-witness, when it was finished it presented 'a handsome front, surmounted by an illuminated clock, which latter adornment was for a long time the only one of its kind to be seen in the South of Ireland'.⁽¹³⁾ The total cost of the building, which was borne solely by the Barrington family, came to £10,000.⁽¹⁴⁾

An Act of Parliament, titled 'An Act for the Management and Direction of the Hospital founded by Joseph Barrington and his sons in the City of Limerick', was obtained on 29 May, 1830. The cost of having this Act passed through parliament was borne by the Barrington family.⁽¹⁵⁾ The Act stated that the five members of the Barrington family were its governors, and named them as follows: Joseph, Matthew, Daniel, Croker and Samuel.⁽¹⁶⁾ The full title of the hospital was to be: 'BARRINGTONS HOSPITAL AND CITY OF LIMERICK INFIRMARY'.

Apart from the five members of the Barrington family, the Act provided for seven ex-officio governors. These were: the Bishop of the diocese of Limerick, the



ANNUAL REPORT OF BARRINGTONS' HOSPITAL AND CITY OF LIMERICK INFIRMARY.

Statement of the Receipts and Disbursements of the Institution, from 1st April, 1839, to 31st March, 1840.

RECEIPTS.		DISBURSEMENTS.	
	£ s. d.		£ s. d.
Balance on hands 31st March, 1839,.....	34 14 6	Salaries and Servants' Board-wages,.....	176 5 0
Annual Subscriptions paid up in part for 1840,..	45 3 0	New and Sour Milk,.....	112 17 0
		Medicine, Lint and Surgical necessaries,.....	100 0 0
DONATIONS.		Bread,	50 0 0
Lord Clarins,.....	£10 10 0	Flannel, Calico, Sheeting and House Linen,.....	29 10 4
Thomas Disney, Esq. of Dublin,....	5 0 0	Potatoes,	32 13 5
Captain Kane, from Rev. Mr. M'Donnell, Restitution Money, }	5 0 0	Beef, Mutton and Cows' Heads,.....	28 4 0
Anonymous, per Alderman Gibson, }	2 2 0	Hardware,	8 2 5
Amount of Charity Sermons,.....	174 7 11	Incidental Expenses,	6 11 3
Grand Jury Presentments,	200 0 0	Making Ticks and House Linen,.....	5 4 3
Government Grant, less by Fees of Office,.....	89 0 7	Straw,	3 3 11
Paid by Patients on admission,.....	5 3 6	Whitewashing Hospital, cleaning Chimnies, &c.	10 6 0
Request of the late Rev. Thomas Enraght, P. P.	5 0 0	Hogs' Lard,.....	2 8 6
Rent of House in Mary-street,	4 12 2	Collecting Subscriptions,.....	2 8 0
		Keeping Clock in order,.....	2 0 0
FINES.		Carpenters', Masons' & Slaters' Work & Repairs.	8 12 0
A Fine from Mr. Costelloe,.....	£0 10 0		
Do. from the Bridge Commissioners, 1 0 0 }	1 10 0	Total Disbursements,.....	£576 6 1
Cash in Poor-box,.....	1 6 6	Balance on hands,.....	17 12 1
From Mr. Haynes, Manager of the Mont-de-Piete, unclaimed overplus after first Auction }	10 8 0		
		Disbursements and Balance,.....	£593 18 2
Total Receipts,.....	£593 18 2	Mr. Boyd allowed as Governor for Life,.....	21 0 0
Donation, in Ale, from J. B. Boyd, Esq.....	21 0 0		
Balance on the Year's Account,.....	17 12 1		

Debts due in arrear of the Hospital, over £1000.

HOSPITAL REPORT.

Remaining under treatment 31st of March, 1839,.....	32
Medical and Surgical Cases admitted to this date,	308
Total,.....	340
Discharged Cured,.....	214
Died,.....	43
Discharged at their own request,.....	28
Ditto Relieved,.....	11
Left the Hospital,.....	7
Discharged to attend as Externs,.....	3
Ditto irregular,.....	3
Ditto, having got Fever,.....	2
Recommended to the Sea-side,.....	1
Incurable,.....	1
Remaining under treatment this day,.....	27

Total Interns, 340

Extern Patients, whose cases did not require admission, (or who could not be admitted in consequence of the limited nature of the Funds of the Hospital, and the great Arrears of Debts due,) but who received Advice, and were prescribed for and dressed in the Surgery, during the year, 13,302

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or, or Vicar, of the parish in which hospital was situated, the Mayor of Limerick, the Member of Parliament for the City of Limerick, the President of the Limerick Chamber of Commerce, the

Rev. John Ryan and the Rev. Thomas Enraght. The Act further provided that 'All donors of a sum of not less than twenty guineas were to become Governors for life, and any subscribers of a sum not

less than 3 guineas, to be Governor for one year'. An annual meeting of the governors was to be held on the second Monday of January each year, for the purpose of electing, by ballot, a standing



In consequence of the arrears of debt due by the Institution, and with a view to limit the expenditure as much as possible, the cases of Patients selected for admission were in general of the most urgent nature; diseases of the Chest, Stomach and Bowels were most prominent, occurring in old and broken-down constitutions, and greatly aggravated by the extreme inclemency of the Winter Season, added to which, the dearth of every article of provision and the high price and scarcity of fuel, contributed to increase their numbers to a very great amount. Among such cases, mortality was, of course, to be frequently expected, and in every one of them, the Institution was obliged to bear the funeral expenses.

Since the opening of the Hospital, no year presented so favorable a report in the department of accidents, which heretofore made up nearly one-third of the cases generally admitted. Seventy-five per cent of such accidents were either caused by, or occurred in a state of intoxication, and not infrequently terminated in the loss of a limb or life. Happily, the past year affords a pleasing retrospect, and the contrast between it and the previous years, both as to the frequency and important nature of the accidents admitted, gives an abundant proof of the blessed effects produced on the mass of the people by temperance, and the abstaining from intoxicating liquors. The dreadful and disgusting scenes heretofore witnessed, both in the streets and in the persons of the miserable objects who usually were brought to this Hospital, at all hours of the night, in a half lifeless state, have now, thank God, passed away; and when accidents do occur, they are such as no human foresight could possibly prevent. May such a desirable state of the people long continue.

At a Meeting of the Committee of the Hospital, held in the Board-room, on Tuesday, the 21st April, 1840,

The Right Worshipful RICHARD FRANKLIN, Esq. Mayor, in the Chair,

The following minute was ordered to be inserted on the Books of the Institution:—

"The Accounts for the year, from the 1st day of April, 1839, to the 31st day of March, 1840, were laid before us this day, and having examined the same, and compared them with the Vouchers, we declare the same to be correct.

"We regret, however, to state, that there appears Accounts due to various individuals, for Medicines, Provisions, Coals, Chandlery, Bedding, &c. and several other matters supplied to this Establishment and the Patients, to the amount of over *One Thousand Pounds Sterling*, and which there are not Funds to have discharged at present."

(Signed)

RICHARD FRANKLIN, Mayor of Limerick,
and Chairman,

PHILIP M'ARDELL,
CROKER BARRINGTON, R. N.
FRANCIS SPAIGHT,
JAMES HARVEY.

Governors.

COMMITTEE FOR 1840.

The Right Worshipful Richard Franklin, Mayor of Limerick,
The Hon. and Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Limerick.
The Right Rev. Dr. Ryan, R. C. B.
William Roche Esq. M. P.
Thomas P. Vokes, Esq.

Pierce Shannon, Esq.
William Howly, Esq.
Phillip M'ArdeLL, Esq.
Francis Spaight, Esq.
James Harvey, Esq.
Pat. O'Callaghan, Esq.

Sir Joseph Barrington, Bart.
Matthew Barrington, Esq.
Daniel Barrington, Esq.
Croker Barrington, Esq. R. N.
Samuel Barrington, Esq. A. G. C.
William Martigan Barrington, Esq.
Croker Barrington, Jun. Esq.

MEDICAL OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTION.

PHYSICIANS.

MICHAEL BRODIE, Esq. M. D.
WILLIAM JOHN GEARY, Esq. M. D.

SURGEONS.

JOHN S. THWAITES, Esq. L.R.C.S.I.
RICHARD FRANKLIN, Esq. L.R.C.S.I. & L.
THOMAS KANE, Esq. A.B. L. R.C.S.I.

Resident Apothecary and Registrar,
Mr. ALLEN.

N. B.—By the Act of Parliament, 11th Geo. 4th, incorporating the Governors of this Institution, all Donors of Twenty Guineas and upwards, are constituted Governors for Life; Subscribers of Three Guineas, are Annual Governors; of Two Guineas, to recommend Ten Patients; and of One Guinea, Five Patients Annually.

Donations or Subscriptions in support of the Institution, will be thankfully received and acknowledged by the Committee; by Sir JOSEPH BARRINGTON, Bart. Treasurer, and by Mr. ALLEN, at the Hospital.

(R. P. CANTER, Printer, corner of Francis-street.)

committee of thirteen persons. These thirteen persons elected, plus the Barrington family, as named in the Act, were responsible for managing all the affairs and business of the hospital for

one year.

Some of the provisions of the Act were unique in their day, especially those relating to the number, class and conditions of service of the medical

officers. According to one report these provisions were 'striking at the very root of medical monopoly in hospitals and throwing upon the advantages which these institutions offer to the profession

at large, when the candidates are properly educated'.⁽¹⁷⁾ Thus it was left to the discretion of the committee 'to elect such and so many physicians and surgeons as they think proper'.⁽¹⁸⁾ Those elected were to continue in office for a period of five years only. 'Such physicians and surgeons nevertheless to continue to attend and serve at the Hospital without fee, salary or reward, unless the Committee shall be unable to procure the attendance of efficient physicians and surgeons upon these terms'.⁽¹⁹⁾ Furthermore 'all such elections shall be from the members of licentiates of one of the Colleges of Physicians or of Chartered Universities, or one of the Royal Colleges of Surgeons'.⁽²⁰⁾ Evidently the inspectors of the hospital were very impressed with these provisions, and felt that they helped to prevent the abuse of the hospital by the management class, which they had observed in other hospitals.

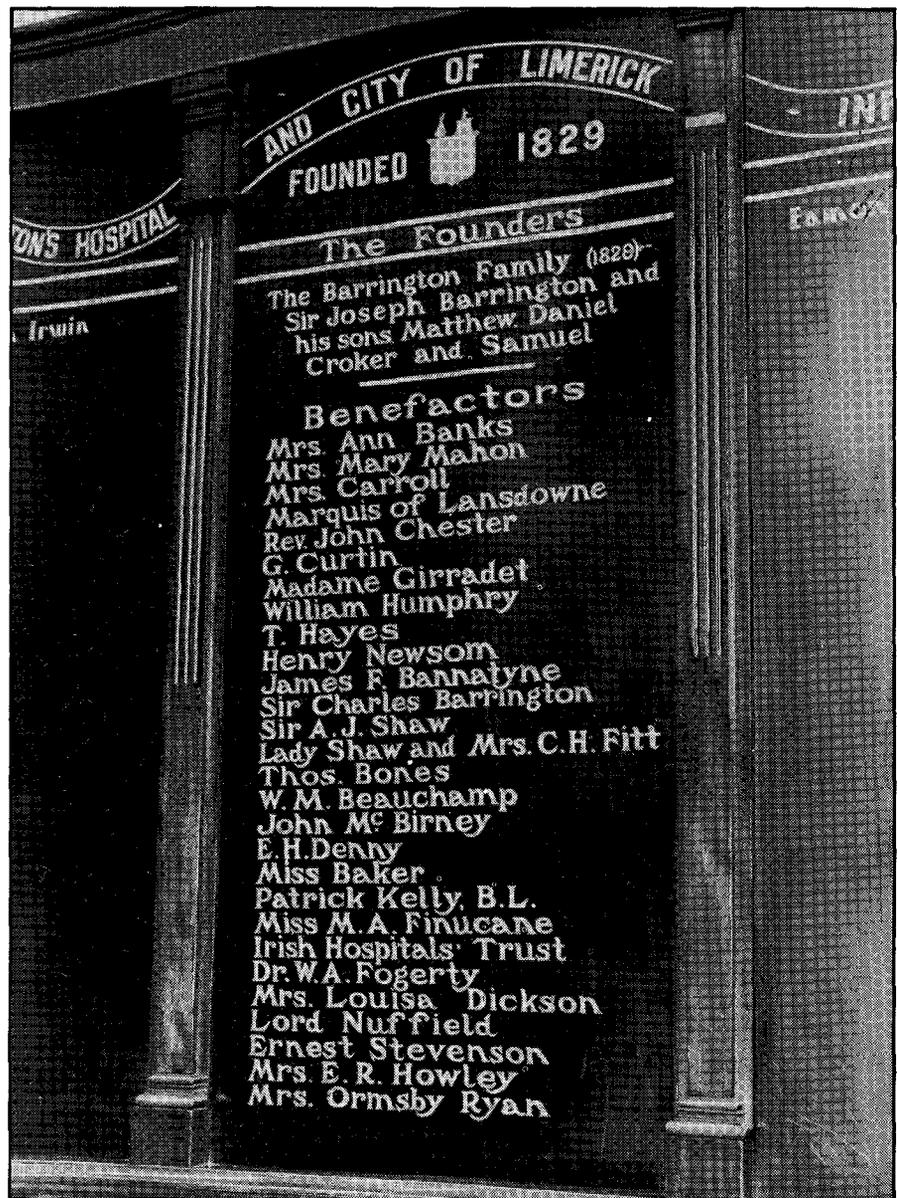
The final section of the Act dealt with conditions for admission. The Act clearly states that the hospital was intended for 'the use of the Poor of the City and County of Limerick'. However, there was a qualifying clause added, which laid down that 'except in cases of sudden accidents, which may require immediate relief, no person shall be admitted into said hospital but upon a written recommendation from one of the governors'.⁽²¹⁾

Strange to say, there was some opposition to the building of Barrington's Hospital.⁽²²⁾ A group of people thought of getting up a petition to parliament to oppose the object of the hospital. However, they did not get much support, and the *Limerick Chronicle* gave them short shift. In an article entitled 'The Barrington Hospital', the newspaper printed a letter in which the writer expressed his surprise at such opposition:

'I have seldom read in any Journal an affair more characteristic of the bad taste and feeling of the City of Limerick, than that which appeared in your widely circulated paper of the 3rd instant (i.e. 3rd March, 1830), to present a Petition to Parliament to oppose the object of Barrington's Hospital. Is there a large city in the British dominions provided with less convenience and necessary asylums for the sick and suffering poor than Limerick? Can its citizens shrink from supporting an institution that is benevolently given them?'

However, the petition never materialised, and the better sense of its instigators evidently led them to withdraw their opposition.

Thus, with the building completed, on 28 July, 1831, a public meeting of the hospital governors was held 'for the purpose of receiving said Hospital from the founders and electing by ballot a standing committee' for the year.⁽²³⁾



List of benefactors of Barrington's Hospital.

Following a discussion about the possible means of obtaining finance for the hospital, it was unanimously decided to notify the absentee proprietors of the city and liberties about the opening of the hospital and request their support. Finally, a ballot took place, and the first governors of Barrington's Hospital were elected.

A motion was made just before the adjournment by Mr. William O'Sullivan 'that some permanent testimonial of the grateful feelings of their fellow citizens towards the Founders should be erected in the Hospital. The Messrs Barrington requested as a personal favour that the motion may not be followed up (to which disinterested sentiment the meeting for the present acceded, though anxiously ready to testify their unanimous approval)'.⁽²⁴⁾ Perhaps at this stage, the Barrington family knew that Joseph Barrington, the acknowledged founder of the Hospital, was about to be made a baronet, in the person of Joseph

Barrington Esq'.⁽²⁵⁾ Undoubtedly, the building of the hospital gave the Barrington family great prestige among their fellow citizens in Limerick, but the baronetcy gave them a wider recognition, and served as a reward for services rendered.

The first committee of the hospital, whose job it was to manage and organise the running of the institution, consisted of the following persons: Dr. John Jebb, the Protestant Bishop of Limerick, Dr. John Ryan, the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Wm. Roche, M.P., Ald. F.G. Mahon, John Kelly, A.J. Watson, Wm. Howley, Rev. Thomas Enraght, J.M. Harney, T.P. Vokes, W.E. Ryan and John Carroll.⁽²⁶⁾ This committee met on 30 July, 1831, and proceeded to elect the first staff. John Allen was appointed first apothecary, at a salary of £50 a year, a position he held until his death in 1849. In addition to his duties as apothecary, Mr. Allen also acted as the hospital's registrar and accountant.⁽²⁷⁾ Mr.



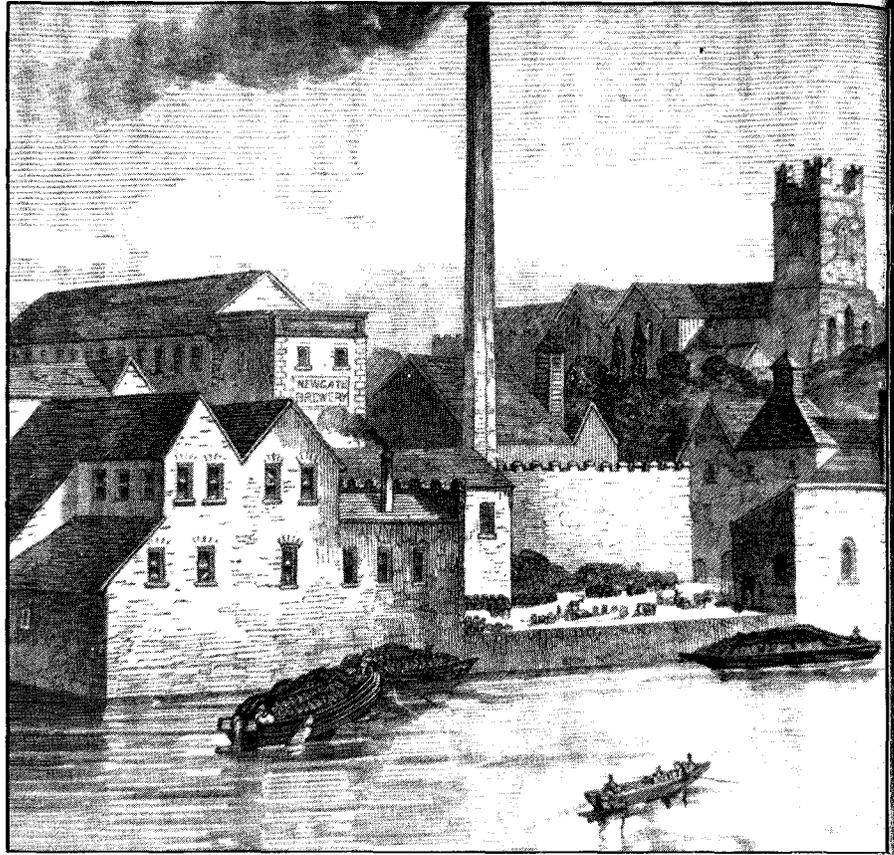
Allen's wife, Catherine, became the first matron, at a salary of £30 a year. An account was next opened with the Provincial Bank of Ireland.⁽²⁸⁾

The first medical staff were appointed at a committee meeting held on 1 August, 1831. Physicians: James F. Carroll, Wm. J. Geary and Michael Brodie. Surgeons: Richard Franklin, John Thwaites and Thomas Kane.⁽²⁹⁾ The doctors attended the hospital without a salary, and all except J.F. Carroll served more than one term of office. They were all distinguished men in their own profession, but also very publicly spirited. Three of them served as mayors: Richard Franklin, 1839-40, Wm. J. Geary, 1844-45, Thomas Kane, 1854-55. Dr. Carroll resigned in 1832 and was replaced by another physician, Dr. Fitzgerald, who served the hospital until his death in 1834. On the death of Dr. Fitzgerald in 1834, it was decided not to replace him. By this time, only one-third of the hospital's accommodation was being used for medical patients, and, therefore, two physicians were considered adequate to deal with all medical matters.⁽³⁰⁾

At this same meeting of 1 August, 1831, Margaret Ryan and Ellen O'Dea were appointed nursetenders, at a salary of four guineas a year plus board.⁽³¹⁾ Neither of the nursetenders remained very long. Margaret Ryan resigned as early as January, 1832, and Ellen O'Dea had to be discharged from her duties following 'frequent instances of intoxication'.⁽³²⁾

The next problem was to equip the hospital with beds, medical appliances, surgical instruments etc. Colgan and Sons of Limerick made 30 iron beds; Irish blankets were bought at 10/- per pair. Other items bought were: furniture, linen, flannel, coarse linen, pewter ware, night caps, frieze floor cloths, candlesticks, sconces, quills by 100, and a kack-line to dry clothes upon.⁽³³⁾ Gaslight was not introduced until 1836, and cost between £10 and £12 for one year. Prior to the opening of the hospital, the Limerick Night Watchmen were paid 6d per week to keep an eye on the building.

The committee's main concern, before actually opening Barrington's to the public, was to assure a regular income for the hospital. To this end, a memorial was sent to the Lord Lieutenant, the Marquis of Angelsey, asking for an annual grant for Barrington's Hospital, pointing out that the Meath Hospital in Dublin was already in receipt of £100 per annum.⁽³⁴⁾ However, it took several letters to and from Dublin Castle before Sir William Gossett, the Chief Secretary, wrote on 11 November, 1831, granting that 'all fines and penalties imposed under the Act. George 4th, Chap., 58 and 56, be given to the Governors of Barrington's Hospital'. The governors were informed that they would



A mid-19th century view of King's Island.

be entitled to the financial support provided in both Acts of Parliament, once the hospital was opened for the reception of patients. In order to qualify for these grants, Barrington's was opened to the public on 5 November, 1831, with accommodation for thirty patients. However, the official opening was arranged for 1 December, 1831, when the doors were opened 'for the reception of the Poor and victims of accidents'.

The hospital also qualified for a grant each year from the Limerick Grand Jury. The sum agreed on for this presentment came to £200. However, it was agreed by the committee that they required more funds to run the hospital efficiently. An appeal made by the Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Dr. Ryan, 'to all persons possessing property within the City and Liberties to afford their effectual support to this valuable institution', brought in £400, as well as several generous bequests. Over the next few years, curious items of income helped to keep the hospital finances going: the sale of a silver watch; a gift of ale from Mr. J.B. Boyd to the value of £21; gift from the stewards of Limerick Races, 1835, worth £5; Thomas King of Spike Island, to send £1 annually, and so on.

The hospital by-laws were finally approved on 7 February, 1832. They make interesting and even amusing reading, and were set out under ten headings, or rules, for the committee, physicians and surgeons, physicians, surgeons, registrar, apothecary,

housekeepers, nurses, porter, intern patients. Under the heading, 'intern patients', the following rules were laid down:

- Sect. 4: No patient to play at cards, dice or any other game in the Infirmary.*
- Sect. 6: No patient to spit upon or otherwise to soil or abuse the beds, wards or floors, nor to introduce tobacco, or chew tobacco.*
- Sect. 8: Any patient who shall introduce spiritous or malt liquors of any kind or accept same, shall be immediately discharged.*
- Sect. 10: All patients to wash their faces and hands and comb their hair every morning before breakfast, and to wash his or her feet every second day, and he to be shaved every Sunday and Thursday. When the Patient is unable these are to be done by the Nurses and House Barber. Each Patient who is not confined to bed is to make up his or her bed and fold up his sheets and blankets immediately after he or she rises, if able to do so, and to be in sufficient time so as to be*

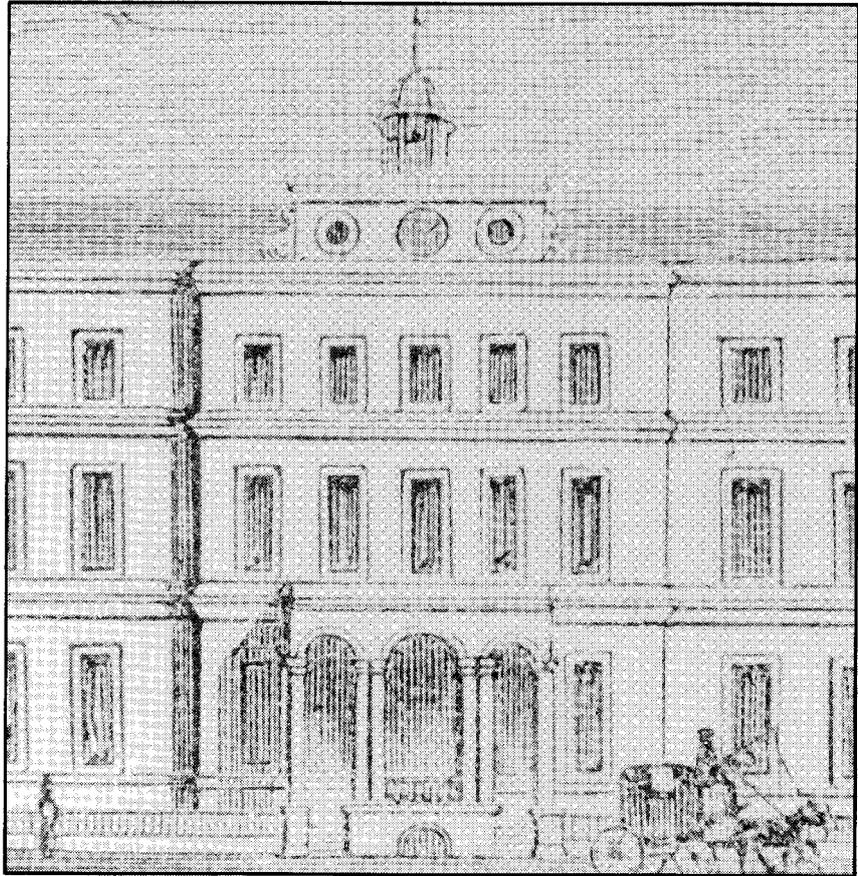
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One of the rather unusual regulations of the hospital was that referring to admission. Only those who had received 'tickets of recommendation' from one of the governors could be admitted. 'All tickets of recommendation to be given to the Porter, which shall be filed and entered in a Book to be kept for that purpose ... Patients to remain in the Hall in an orderly manner, until called by name'. However, exceptions were made for emergency accident cases. This was probably necessary to avoid a flood of patients applying for entry to the hospital, which was strictly limited in its number of beds. Between 1 December, 1831, and 5 June, 1832, the hospital continued to admit medical and surgical patients. On the latter date, the governors received a request from the Board of Health to turn over the hospital entirely to victims of the cholera epidemic, which had been ravaging the city for some time, and was claiming about twelve deaths every day. The Fever Hospital had become overcrowded and three temporary hospitals had been opened in the city to cope with the crisis. However, these arrangements proved unsatisfactory, mainly because of the shortage of trained staff. The governors consented to the request, and handed over the hospital, with the stipulation that it was to be returned to them in proper condition when the epidemic was over. All patients under treatment in Barrington's were to be removed to the County Infirmary.

During nine months, Barrington's continued open for cholera cases. Of the 1,537 cases treated, 986 recovered, and 551 died. Sometime in January, 1833, the governors of Barrington's began to get anxious, feeling that the hospital might never be returned to its original use. i.e. for medical and accident cases and also for the sick poor of Limerick.⁽³⁶⁾ The governors requested the Board of Health to return the hospital to them, pointing out that there was the greatest reluctance on the part of the citizens who resided in the parish and neighbourhood in which the hospital was situated to enter it, so long as the Health Board continued to use the Guard House as a depot for cholera patients. The governors also requested that before handing back the hospital, the Health Board should have it cleaned, painted, and any damage which had occurred to the building repaired. It was only in July, 1833, that the governors were satisfied that the Board of Health had 'reinstated Barrington's to the same condition it had been previous to 5 June, 1832'.⁽³⁷⁾ At the end of July, 1833, the hospital was reopened for the reception of patients under the same regulations as previous to June, 1832. It is recorded that Joseph Parker had painted the hospital for £18, and that the building was in excellent condition. This fact is borne out by the



The entrance to Barrington's Hospital in the 1830s.

report of the visit to the hospital in 1835 of the Earl of Mulgrave, the Lord Lieutenant, and his *aide de camp*, the Hon. Captain Liddle. His Excellency was very pleased with his visit and Capt. Liddle sent a donation of £5.⁽³⁸⁾

Once the hospital had been reopened on 29 June, 1833, the medical staff decided to establish a medical library.⁽³⁹⁾ All the medical gentlemen of the city were invited to subscribe to the library, and within a year, more than two hundred books had been collected for reference. It was housed in the boardroom, with access permitted every day, except on the days the board met. Some of the books donated were very valuable and old. It was a useful addition to the hospital, which up until then had lacked any such reference library.

Between October, 1833, and June, 1834, 392 patients had been received and treated in the hospital. Of these, 29 still remained under treatment in June, 1834. During the period from October, 1833, to June, 1834, an average of twenty to thirty applicants were refused admission each week. Their refusal was not as a result of lack of space, for the hospital had sufficient room for sixty beds, but because of lack of funds to support such numbers. Indeed, this problem of sufficient finance to run the hospital was to be the greatest difficulty facing the governors during the first decade. The following is a table of patients admitted to Barrington's for the

years 1832-39:

1832244
1833356
1834449
1835394
1836436
1837332
1838317
1839308. ⁽⁴⁰⁾

Thus the total number of medical and surgical intern patients treated in the hospital between 1832 and 1840 totalled 2,836. Of these, 1,972 were cured and 273 died. The mortality of interns occurred mostly among surgical patients brought in after accidents. They suffered from 'severe compound fractures of the head and limbs and gangrene'.⁽⁴¹⁾ The prevailing cause of mortality among medical cases was 'dysentery in its last and most fatal state'.⁽⁴²⁾ Some patients were brought in dead for the purpose of having an inquest held on the body, by order of the mayor. In many cases they were brought in dead 'with a view to obtaining a coffin which the friends of the deceased were unable to procure'.⁽⁴³⁾ In addition to the treatment of interns, the hospital treated a large number of externs. During the years 1832-39, over 100,000 externs were treated.

—On 4 January, 1837, the advantages of Barrington's Hospital were realised, when a gunpowder explosion occurred at Richardson's Corner, off Denmark Street and George's Street, late at night, and many people were injured as a result.



Nine people were admitted to the hospital, 'who were wounded in a deplorable manner'.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Though all the beds in Barrington's were occupied at the time, given the emergency and the seriousness of the injuries, six additional beds were purchased to accommodate those brought in. All the reports of this terrible event state that the consequences would have been worse but for the timely assistance of the Barrington's medical staff.

A number of interesting points are raised in the annual report of the hospital for the year ending 31 March, 1840. First of all, the hospital was in debt to the tune of over £1,000. The problem of providing sufficient funds to run Barrington's had always been a headache for the governors. It seems that the matter got quite out of hand between 1837 and 1840, owing mainly to a number of severe winters, when there was a great increase in the number of poor and old people to be treated. Added to this was the fact that the cost of provisions was high, so that the hospital bills from grocers and other suppliers increased considerably. Yet, the actual income of the hospital did not rise appreciably. The total receipts for the year in question (1 April, 1839, to 31 March, 1840,) came to £593. 18s. 2d.⁽⁴⁵⁾ Something had to be done about putting the hospital finances on to a more solid basis. It was with this in mind that a Mont de Piété was established. As the Mont de Piété will be treated in a separate article, it is not necessary to elaborate on it here. Suffice to say that it failed in the long run to provide the required money to run the hospital without incurring debts.

The second interesting point which emerges from a study of the 1840 report is the evidence it provides for the revolution in the social life of the people of Limerick in the wake of the Temperance Movement, then at its height. Sociologists comment on the increase in population in Ireland throughout the 1830s, and point out that the drinking of intoxicating spirits was a serious problem at this time. The sale of illicit whiskey – *potteen* – and the proliferation of unlicensed public-houses – *sheebens* – made it easy and cheap to buy drink. It is true that the government tackled this problem by passing the Spirits Licence Act of 1836, but it was mainly thanks to the crusade conducted by Father Theobald Mathew, O.F.M. Cap., that the curse of drinking was removed or at least somewhat controlled. Many people were induced to take the so-called 'pledge' or promise to abstain altogether from intoxicating liquor. That this fact helped to reduce the number of accidents, and hence the number of people seeking admission to Barrington's, is borne out by the report of 1840, which contains the following comment:

'Since the opening of the Hospital, no

year presented so favourable a report in the department of accidents, which heretofore made up nearly one-third of the cases generally admitted. Seventy-five per cent of such accidents were either caused by, or occurred in a state of intoxication, and not infrequently terminated in the loss of a limb or life. Happily, the past year affords a pleasing retrospect, and the contrast between it and the previous years, both as to the frequency and important nature of the accidents admitted, gives an abundant proof to the blessed effects produced on the mass of the people by temperance, and the abstaining from intoxicating liquors. The dreadful and disgusting scenes heretofore witnessed, both in the streets and in the persons of the miserable objects who usually were brought to this Hospital, at all hours of the night, in a half lifeless state, have now, thank God, passed away; and when accidents do occur, they are such as no human foresight could possibly prevent. May such a state of the people long continue'.⁽⁴⁶⁾

It is evident from a short perusal of the history of Barrington's Hospital during its first decade of existence, that it reflected the general history of the people of the city. Barrington's had by then become part of the Limerick scene, as it was, indeed, to remain until its closure earlier this year (1988). A small, but significant part of Limerick has died, with the end of the Barrington's era. We will never see its likes again.⁽⁴⁷⁾

Notes

1. Founded in 1780 by Lady Hartstonge, a sister of Edmond Sexton Pery.
2. Census of Ireland 1821.
3. *Limerick Chronicle* (henceforth *L.C.*) 24 Oct., 1829.
4. Quoted in the *Limerick Leader*, 14 May, 1945, an article by M.E. Gleeson: 'History of Barrington's Hospital'.
5. The *Board Book of Barrington's Hospital and City of Limerick Infirmary*, Vol. I (1831-45), pp. 14-15 (Henceforth *B.B.I.*). The letter, which is undated, was read at a meeting on 30 Aug., 1831, and obviously was written sometime earlier.
6. *Account book of Matthew Barrington*, Vol. I, p.113. This is a large ledger, containing most of Matthew Barrington's financial affairs, both as Crown Solicitor for Munster and as a private individual. It covers the year 1811-47.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. This refers to Joseph Barrington,

not yet knighted.

10. Situated opposite George's Quay. Joseph Barrington lived in Charlotte's Quay. The houses have long since been demolished.
11. *L.C.* 14 Oct. 1829.
12. Account Book of M. Barrington, I, p.113, under 18 July, 1829: 'Paid Frederick Darley, Architect, in full for plans'. This entire page gives items under the title 'Barrington's Hospital'.
13. Maurice Lenihan, *History of Limerick*. p.478.
14. *Ibid.* p.479.
15. The Act was called II Geo. IV, c.72; full text given in *L.C.*, 10 March, 1830.
16. The portrait of the Barrington family, who founded Barrington's Hospital, painted by Cregan, originally hung in the boardroom of the hospital, but is now in Glenstal Abbey.
17. *British Parliamentary Papers* (1836), Vol. 30, p.375.
18. See note 15 above.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *L.C.* 3 March, 1830.
23. *B.B.* I, p.1.
24. *Ibid.* p.3.
25. *L.C.* 21 Sept., 1831.
26. *B.B.* I, p.4.
27. Mr. Allen kept very neat records; we still have a copy of the hospital by-laws, written in his fine hand.
28. *B.B.*, I, p.5.
29. *Ibid.* p.6.
30. *Ibid.* p.138.
31. *Ibid.* p.7. These were the days before trained nurses, who first appear in the records in 1887.
32. *Ibid.* p.150.
33. *Ibid.* pp.27, 41-2, for a full list of such items bought.
34. This memorial is given in full in *B.B.* I, pp.35-7, and dated 5 May, 1831.
35. *B.B.*, I, p.39.
36. *Ibid.* p.113, under the date 14 Jan., 1833.
37. *Ibid.* p.116.
38. *Ibid.* p.169, under the date 25 Aug., 1835.
39. *Ibid.* p.123-4, under 29 Oct., 1833.
40. *Ibid.* p.312.
41. *Ibid.* p.189.
42. *Ibid.* p.189.
43. *Ibid.* p.224.
44. *Ibid.* p.210.
45. *Annual Report for Barrington's Hospital*, April, 1840.
46. *Ibid.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Author's Note: I should like to acknowledge help given me in writing this article from two helpful sources: (i) Ms. Susan Connolly's 'Health Services for Intern Patients in Limerick City, 1765-1838', and (ii) Ms. M.E. Gleeson's 'History of Barrington's Hospital' in *Limerick Leader*, 14 May, 1945.