



# SIR MATTHEW BARRINGTON: 1788 – 1861

## THE REAL FOUNDER OF BARRINGTON'S HOSPITAL

**M**atthew Barrington (1788-1861) was the eldest son of Joseph Barrington (1764-1846). The latter was knighted in 1831, becoming Sir Joseph, succeeding to a title which was created in 1611, when Sir Francis Barrington was given a baronetcy by King James 1st of England. The first of the Limerick Barringtons was Francis, who came to Ireland with his cousin, Sir John Barrington. John served in Cromwell's army, and received grants of land. Francis settled in Limerick and was buried in St. Mary's Cathedral in 1683. It is generally accepted that Francis had a son, Samuel, known familiarly as 'Little Sam Barrington'. He was living in Dublin, in St. Michan's parish, with his wife and family, from 1665 to 1674.<sup>(1)</sup> In the parish register of St. Michan's, he is usually described as a 'smith', but he is once termed a 'jack-smith', which would indicate that he was a maker of the clockwork roasting 'jacks', used for operating clocks at the time.<sup>(2)</sup> He may be identified with the Samuel Barrington who had a contract for the maintenance of the Tholsel Clock in Dublin.<sup>(3)</sup> On arriving in Limerick, he set up a business as a 'clock and chime maker'. However, he died two years later, in 1693, as can be seen from the inscription on his tomb

in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, which runs as follows:

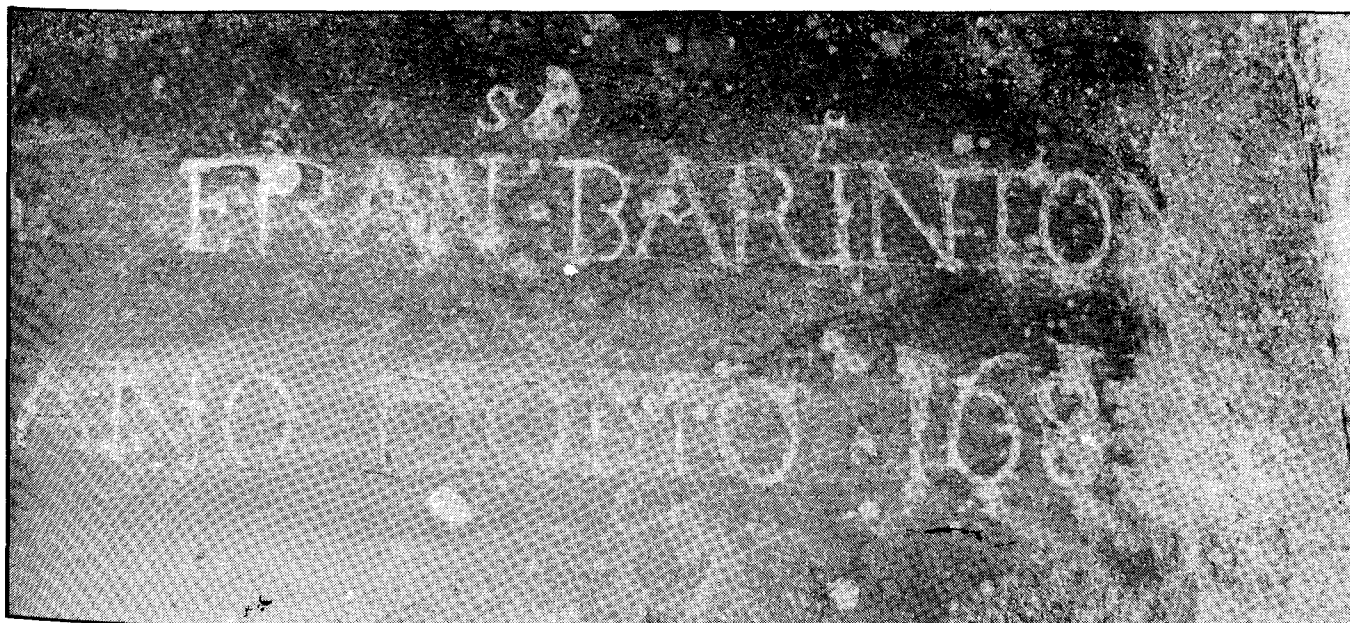
*'Memento Mory. Here lieth littell Samuell Barington, that great undertaker of famous cittis clock and chime maker. He made his one time goe early and latter, but now he is returned to God his creator: the 19 of November, then he pleast and for his memory this here is placed by his son Ben. 1693.'*<sup>(4)</sup>

Benjamin carried on his father's business in Limerick, extending it considerably. He had a contract with the Corporation of Cashel, Co. Tipperary, for fitting up and making a clock for the sum of five pounds.<sup>(5)</sup> Along with clock-making, he also ran a copper foundry. He became Sheriff of Limerick in 1714, and later was made an Alderman. His son was also called Benjamin, and likewise became Sheriff of Limerick, in 1729. This last Benjamin had four sons, Matthew, Croker, John and Benjamin, all of whom became freemen of the City of Limerick.<sup>(6)</sup> The eldest son, Matthew, had two children, a daughter Mary, and a son, Joseph. Joseph, who became a freeman in 1819, was the father of Sir Matthew.

The future Sir Matthew was born in Limerick on 21 May, 1788, and baptised in St. Mary's parish. By any standards, Matthew was an outstanding man. He broke away from the family clock-making

business, and trained as a lawyer. While keeping his contacts with Limerick, his native city, he spent much of his time in Dublin, building up a practice as a solicitor. He had his office in 13 Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin, and another in George's Street, Limerick. When only twenty-six years of age, he was offered the post of Crown-Solicitor for Munster, from the previous holder of the office, Samuel Prendergast, who was forced to retire through ill-health.<sup>(7)</sup> The salary of the Crown-Solicitor was £15,000 a year, and his duties covered the counties of Limerick, Cork, Tipperary, Kerry and Clare, where he handled all legal business for the government. It was a very prestigious position, apart from being lucrative.

That same year of 1814, when he became Crown Solicitor for Munster, Matthew married Charlotte Hartigan, daughter of William Hartigan, of Dublin, a medical doctor and professor of anatomy at Trinity College, Dublin. The marriage was celebrated on 1 January, 1814, in St. George's parish, Dublin. She brought him a very considerable dowry, as can be seen from the 'settlement' or 'agreement', dated 24 December, 1813, entitled 'The Settlement On the Intermarriage of Matthew Barrington with Miss Charlotte Hartigan'.<sup>(8)</sup> The dowry consisted of a large piece of land in the barony of



Francis Barrington was the first member of the family to be buried in Limerick, in 1683, at St. Mary's Cathedral.



**Matthew Barrington, 1830, from Martin Cregan's family portrait.**

Connelloe, Co. Limerick, as well as a sum of money in excess of £2,000. This acquisition of land in Co. Limerick - the first owned by a Barrington - seems to have given Matthew great satisfaction. Indeed, it whetted his appetite to acquire more land.

Sometime in 1818, Matthew's eye fell on a large estate in east Limerick, which had originally belonged to Lord Carbery, who died in December, 1804. The estate had become heavily encumbered, and when the 5th Lord Carbery succeeded to the title in 1804, he found that the rents of the property in Co. Limerick hardly sufficed to pay the £2,000 income left to the widow of his predecessor. In any case, he only lived three years to enjoy his title, and was in turn succeeded by a cousin, Sir John Evens Freke, of Castle Freke, Co. Cork, who became the 6th Lord Carbery. The daughters of the 5th Lord Carbery claimed a share in the rents of the Co. Limerick estate, but what with mortgages, legacies and the payment of interest on loans, they could not expect very much by way of actual money. They lived in Capperullen House, in the parish of Abington (Murroe), Co. Limerick, and awaited for some good fortune to come their way. Matthew Barrington was to be their benefactor if not, indeed, their saviour.<sup>(9)</sup> The first concrete evidence we have of Matthew Barrington taking an interest in the Carbery estate is the bridge which he constructed over the River Mulcair, and which was called 'Barrington's Bridge'. An inscription on the bridge, which is constructed of iron, and is still in use, reads: 'Erected by M. Barrington, 1818'. The next piece of evidence is the correspondence carried out during August to November, 1818, between Matthew Barrington and Bartholomew Stritch.

On 17 August, 1818, Matthew Barrington wrote to Stritch, then in London:

*'May I request of you to attend to the following matter for me while you remain in London. I shall not make an apology to you for the trouble, as I am convinced I need only tell you that it is a subject in which I am much interested. The late Lord Carbery, who lived at Laxton, in Northamptonshire, England, and died in 1804, made his will in that year, leaving his Irish estates to his wife's jointure of £2,000 a year. May I ask you to find out the legatees, and make a bargain for me with them.'*<sup>(10)</sup>

Stritch replied in two letters, dated 29 August and 1 October, 1818, giving the results of his enquiries.<sup>(11)</sup> The main problem was the absence of Lady Carbery - the widow of the late 4th Lord Carbery - in France.

However, Matthew Barrington went ahead with his plans to buy the Carbery estate, though he had to do so first of all by offering to lease some of the property. This was done by a deed, dated 11 December, 1818, by which he leased Capperullen, Garranbane, Glenstal, Meentolla, etc. for annual rent of £150.<sup>(12)</sup> The Tithe Applotment Book (1827) for the Parish of Abington, Co. Limerick, states that Matthew Barrington was in possession of Glenstal, Meentolla, etc.<sup>(13)</sup> When the parish priest of Abington, Fr. Thomas O'Brien Costello, was giving evidence in London in 1825 relating to the state of religion in Ireland, he stated

that 'there has been a new line of road run through the parish since I came there,<sup>(14)</sup> leading from Limerick to Tipperary; a great many new cottages have been built upon that road; there has also been a new village built on Mr. Barrington's estate in the parish'.<sup>(15)</sup> This new village was an extension to Murroe, which henceforth would take precedence over Abington village. Matthew Barrington had brought in artisans and craftsmen to live there, in readiness for building Glenstal Castle. At the same time, Matthew was planting trees on his estate. A large notebook, entitled 'Memorandum as to Planting', in Matthew's handwriting, gives details of the great number of trees he planted. One section begins as follows: 'On the month of September, 1822, I agreed with Mr. Arthur Baylor of Fermoy, to plant part of the Land of Glenstal in the Co. of Limerick ... The years 1823, 1824 and 1825 I made similar agreements with him for planting the parts of said estate'.<sup>(16)</sup> The list of trees and number planted is very impressive: 20,000 ash, 13,000 oak, 30,000 Scotch fir, 8,000 sycamore, etc.<sup>(17)</sup> In the year 1822-23, he planted 143,350 trees. The first rhododendrons were planted in October, 1829, imported from Liverpool 'in pots'.<sup>(18)</sup> These were put in the care of 'Ryan of Belvidere'.<sup>(19)</sup> During all this time, Matthew Barrington had his chief residence at Clonkeen House, just beside Barrington's Bridge, on the Murroe side.

The year 1831 was to be a very busy



**Barrington's Bridge, Lisnagry, erected in 1818 by Matthew Barrington.**



Daniel.

Sir Matthew.

Sir Joseph.

Sir William.

Samuel.

Croker.

Sir Croker.

one for Matthew Barrington, in his capacity of Crown Solicitor for Munster. There was a great deal of agrarian and political unrest, especially in Co. Clare. One of the chief instigators of political trouble in that county was a well-known duellist, The O'Gorman Mahon. An interesting correspondence took place between Daniel O'Connell, the Liberator, Lord Stanley, the Chief Secretary, and Matthew Barrington, in May, 1831. These letters have never before been published, and that is the main reason for printing them here.<sup>(20)</sup>

1. Lord Stanley to Daniel O'Connell, Dublin Castle, 7 May, 1831:

'Sir, Your letters of yesterday's date have been communicated to me by Sir William Gosset, and have been laid before the Lord Lieutenant.<sup>(21)</sup> His Excellency will not shrink from any responsibility, which he may incur should he feel it necessary to take the most decisive measures for the restoration of tranquility in Clare, and the neighbouring counties.

I am to convey to you his Excellency's thanks for the important information which you furnish, respecting the language and conduct of Mr. O'Gorman Mahon. His Excellency fully appreciates its value, and is prepared to act upon it, if justified by sufficient confirmation, with promptitude and vigour. If, therefore, evidence upon oath can be procured of the expressions imputed to him, I am to request you will communicate with Mr. Vokes or

Captain Vignobles,<sup>(22)</sup> before one of whom the deposition should be taken, and who will receive by this day's post, directions to act thereupon **immediately**, upon their own view of the sufficiency of the evidence ... They will also be directed to communicate with you upon the subject.

With respect to proceeding against Mr. O'Gorman Mahon for any penalties to which he may have subjected himself, His Excellency does not think it expedient to take any immediate steps. The subject, however, will be kept in view'.

2. Matthew Barrington to Lord Stanley, Limerick, 8 May 1831. (3 o'clock)

'Sir, I have just left Mr. O'Connell who sent for me at 2 o'clock and gave me a letter from you to him respecting the conduct of Mr. O'Gorman Mahon in Clare. I have communicated with Mr. Vokes, and Mr. O'Connell has given me a letter from the Roman Catholic Dean of Limerick, to the R.C. Dean of Clare (O'Shaughnessy) to send to the witness. Mr. Vokes forwards it to Ennis, and on the witness arriving here, he will take the information and act on it. The post is going'.<sup>(23)</sup>

3. Daniel O'Connell to Matthew Barrington, Listowel, 8 May, 1831 (Sunday night)

'My dear Barrington, On reflexion, I think you should speak to Vokes not to mention my name, and I presume you do not think it necessary to do so

except at Headquarters.<sup>(24)</sup>

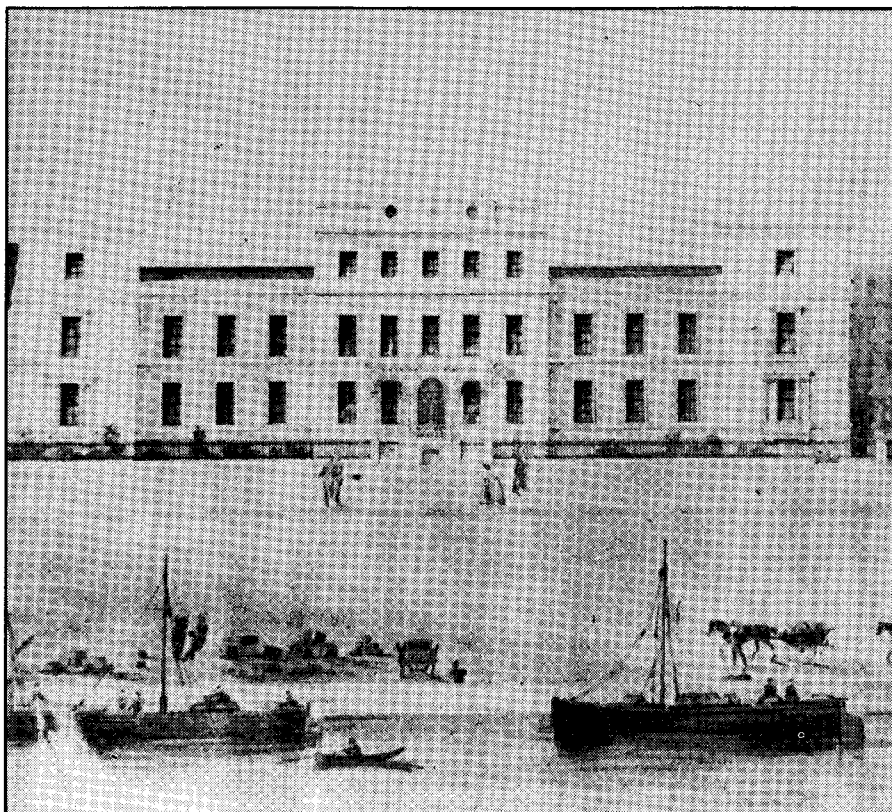
**'Most Confidential** - Do you think you could get a Reform candidate for Clare, if both my Son<sup>(25)</sup> and O'Gorman Mahon were to resign. Think over this till Tuesday, but do not mention it to a human being'.<sup>(26)</sup>

It would take us too far away from the story of Matthew Barrington to follow this matter any further. Suffice it to say that a great number of letters are preserved in Dublin Castle, written by the Crown Solicitor for Munster, in the 1830s.

However, one of the principal matters uppermost in Matthew Barrington's mind in 1831, apart from the opening of Barrington's Hospital, was the question of a baronetcy for his father, Joseph Barrington. Throughout 1830 and 1831, Matthew had been investigating the possibility of claiming a title for his family, basing it on their rights to a title through Sir Francis Barrington, an ancestor. The matter took a long time to receive final approval, as it had to go through the British Prime Minister, Lord Grey, and also await the good pleasure of his Majesty, King William IV, who reigned from 26 June, 1830 until 20 June, 1837. Matthew took upon it himself to see the matter through, and it was to him that Lord Stanley, the Chief Secretary, wrote announcing the good news of a successful conclusion to the matter. The letter from Whitehall is dated 8 September, 1831:

'My dear Sir,, I have great pleasure in enclosing a letter from Lord Grey to your father, formally announcing his





**Barrington Hospital in the 1830s.**

*Baronetcy. You must allow me, with my congratulations, to express my own feeling that this mark of His Majesty's favour has been influenced by your service.*<sup>(27)</sup>

*I have settled with Spring Rice<sup>(28)</sup> that you and he should call at 12 o'clock on Saturday at the Irish Office (London), to go through, with the Solicitor-General and myself, the Clauses of the Irish Reform Bill. I shall wish also to have some conversation with you on the Whiteboy Act Amendment Bill. It is my wish to remove the **Capital Punishment**, and substitute Transportation for Life, or a less penalty in all cases which are only indictable under their Extraordinary Statutes. It will be received as a great boon, and be at least equally efficacious with the present law.*<sup>(29)</sup>

The *Limerick Chronicle* announced the baronetcy in its issue of 21 September, 1831 as follows:

*'Limerick has the gratification of seeing one of its most respected and esteemed citizens elevated to the dignity of a Baronet, in the person of Joseph Barrington, Esq. This is not the first member of the ancient house of Barrington so elevated and so honoured. One of the oldest baronets is Sir Fitzwilliam Barrington, the sole representative of Sir Francis, created a baronet in 1611. He was grandson to Margaret Plantagenet, Countess of Salisbury, and thus allied to the Royal blood, and was nephew to Cardinal Reginald Pole. The*

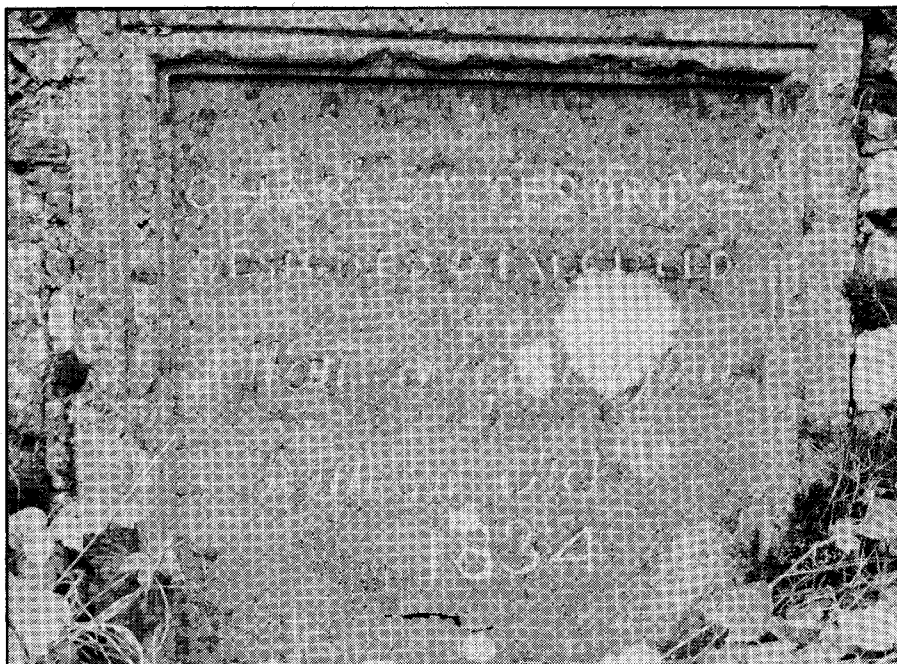
*members of this family were numerous, and many quitted their paternal soil to seek their fortunes in other countries. During the wars, one of the family settled in Limerick, as appears by a monument in the cathedral of that city in 1691; his descendants have since continued to reside there.'*<sup>(30)</sup>

It was in the wake of this good news about his father obtaining a baronetcy, that Matthew - who knew that he would

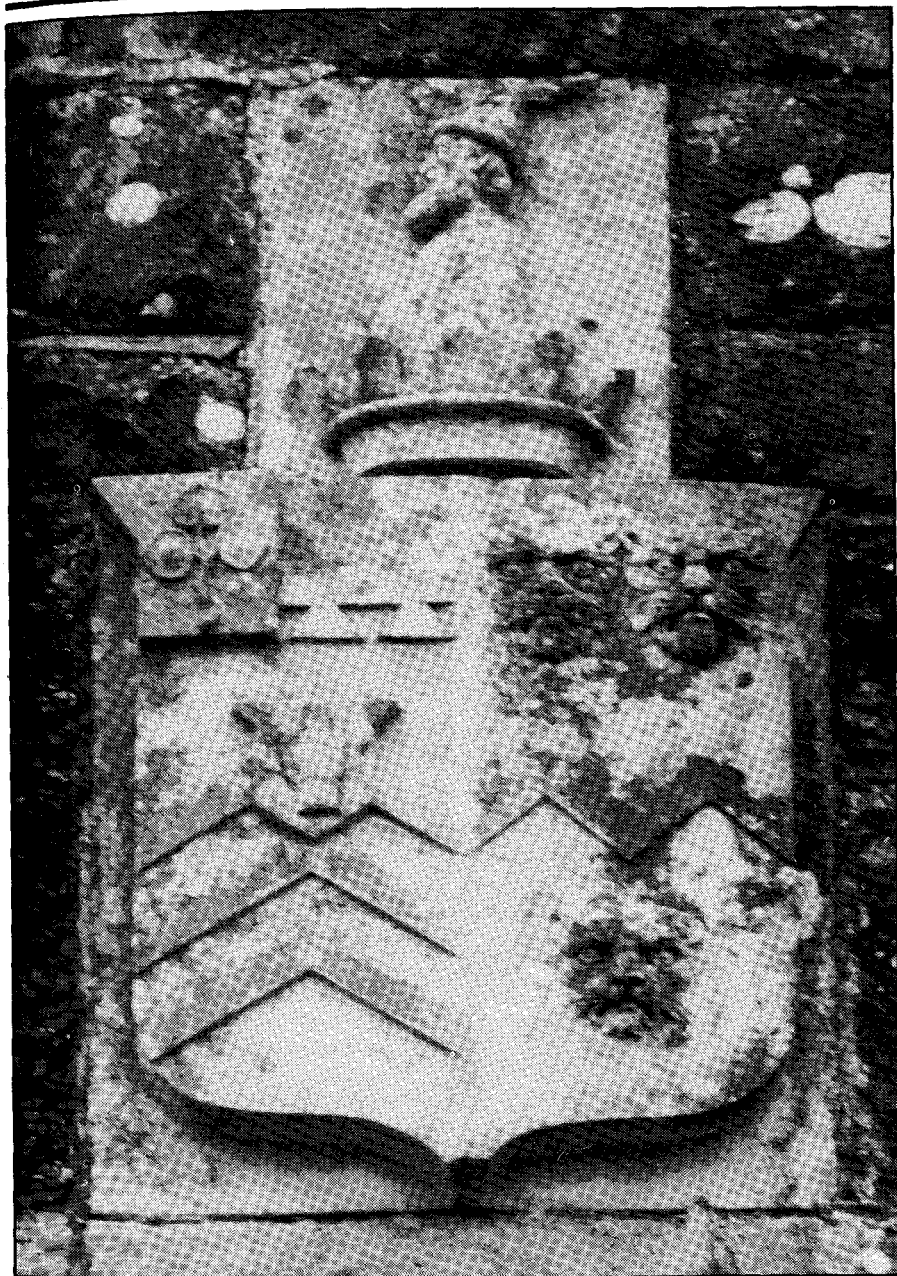
one day succeed to the title - began to make plans to build himself a castle on his Co. Limerick estate. He had finalised his holding late in 1831, when he paid the princely sum of £30,193.15s.10d for the Carbery estate. The story of the building of Glenstal Castle is told elsewhere in this issue of the *Old Limerick Journal*, and need not be repeated here. Suffice to say that the first part of the architect's master-plan was completed by 1839. Matthew Barrington, his wife Charlotte, and their eight children, along with a retinue of servants, moved into the castle in 1840.

At this time, Matthew Barrington had increased his interests in other domains than that of Crown-Solicitor. The Irish railways were beginning to be established, and Matthew was to be eventually appointed solicitor to the Great Southern Railway. In fact, it was he who chose the site for Limerick Junction, and gave it that name. In a letter to the railway authorities, he recommended that they should plant trees to give shelter to future travellers. Sad to say, his advice was not taken in this matter, so that Limerick Junction remains one of the most exposed railway stations in Europe. He was also elected to the River Shannon Commission in 1839, to give legal advice on the way in which the river could be best used in the public interest.<sup>(31)</sup>

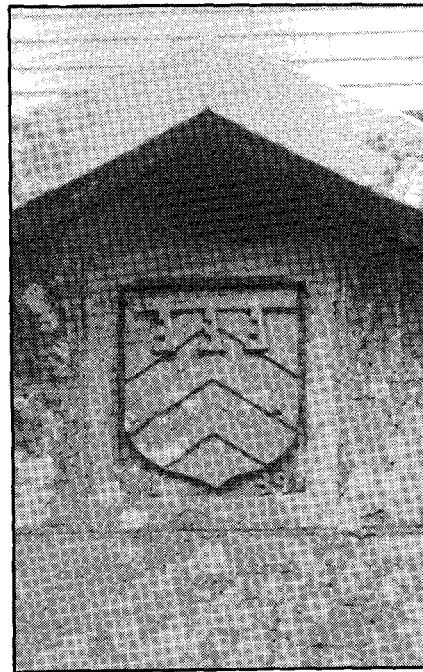
At the same time Matthew maintained a private practice as a solicitor both in Dublin and Limerick. Indeed, he was beginning to find his work as Crown-Solicitor for Munster rather over-taxing. Sometime in 1839, he tried to have his eldest son, William, associated with him in this post. He wrote to the Chief Secretary, Lord Morpath, in Dublin Castle, requesting this favour, but the



**The foundation stone of Charlotte's Bridge, 1834, called after Charlotte Barrington, wife of Matthew. (Charlotte Quay, Limerick, was also named after Charlotte Barrington.)**



*The Barrington coat-of-arms at Glenstal Castle gatehouse.*



*Detail above door at Glenstal Castle gatehouse.*

*numerous claims upon the charity of the public, to make a new appeal to their generosity. It is scarcely necessary to state, that the extreme misery of the largest portion of this parish deprives its inhabitants of the means of carrying on the requisite repairs'.*

The circular, which was printed and ran to a full page, came to the notice of Matthew Barrington, who wrote the following letter to Dean Hanrahan, on 15 May, 1839:

*'My dear Sir, I received your letter respecting the repairs of Saint Mary's Chapel, and enclose an order for £10 subscription thereto. I have always felt a deep interest in the affairs of the Parish, and hope you will be enabled to make your contemplated improvements extensive and permanent'.<sup>(34)</sup>*

This incident of subscribing £10 (worth about £100 in modern currency) was but one example of Matthew's great heart and wide charity. His purse was open to all in need, especially when the call for help came from someone in his native Limerick.

It would be impossible to give a complete picture of Matthew Barrington in this short article. When his father, Sir Joseph, died in 1846, he succeeded to the title, and was henceforth known as 'Sir Matthew'. It was the crowning moment of his life, and he was especially proud of the title on his wife's behalf, as she now became Lady Charlotte. He had owed her so much from the beginning of his married life, not just the land in Co. Limerick which she had brought him by the marriage dowry, but also for presenting him with eight healthy children, and being such a support in his

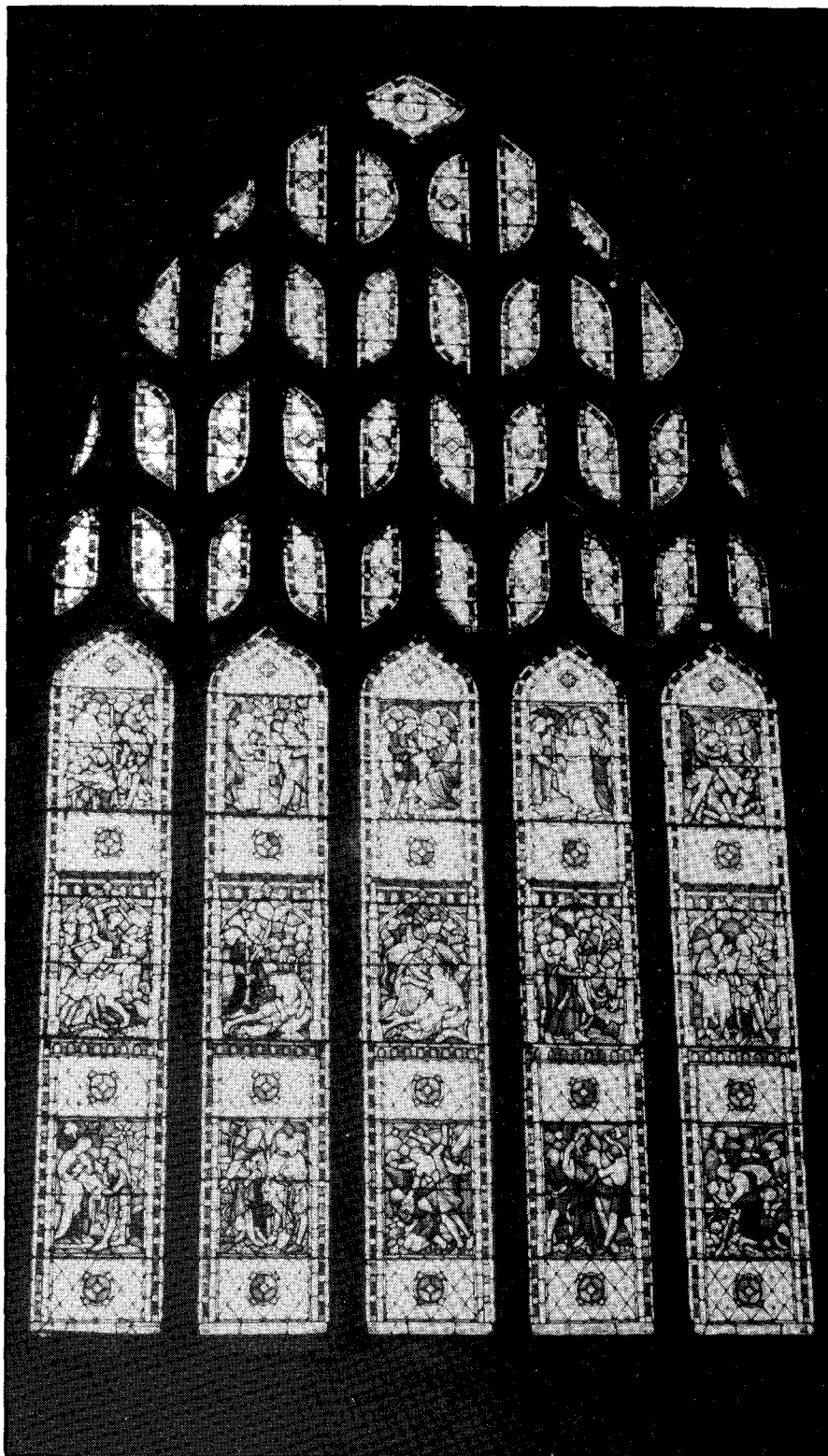
matter was referred by Morpath to the Under-Secretary, Thomas Drummond, who turned down the request. The long correspondence over this matter between Drummond and Morpath, and also between Drummond and Spring Rice, shows how much the Under-Secretary was determined to prevent any jobbery in the public service in Ireland. Thomas Drummond had nothing personal against Matthew Barrington, but objected to the young Barrington - then only twenty-one years of age - being given such a responsible position as Crown Solicitor. Drummond pointed out in a letter to Spring Rice, dated 22 August, 1839, that he was 'engaged in drawing up a plan for improving the present mode of conducting Crown prosecutions in Ireland ... It appeared to me that the appointment asked by Barrington was altogether inconsistent with that plan'.<sup>(32)</sup>

R. Barry O'Brien, the biographer of Thomas Drummond, in summing up this incident of Matthew trying to get his son William appointed alongside himself as Crown-Solicitor, says: 'It may be added that Barrington was a man of great ability, and decided popular views - reasons sufficient for inducing Drummond to keep him in active service, and to see that no one else did the duties of his important office'.<sup>(33)</sup>

Thomas Drummond's opinion of Matthew Barrington was quite right, in that Matthew was not only a man with 'popular views', but also a liberal. This was evidenced in his attitude towards Catholics. He believed in ecumenism, long before that word came into common use. In April, 1839, the parish priest of St. Mary's 'Chapel', Rev. C. Hanrahan, sent round a circular, stating that:

*'The present condition of this Chapel compels me, notwithstanding the*





IN MEMORY OF CHARLOTTE WIFE OF  
SIR. MATTHEW. BARRINGTON. ART.  
WHO DIED NOVEMBER 18<sup>TH</sup> 1858.  
HIS WINDOW WAS FILLED WITH STAINED GLASS  
BY HER SON. ROGER. BARRINGTON.  
AS A MARK OF AFFECTION.

domestic life. Glenstal became a very happy place under her guiding hand and caring interest for everyone. Sir Matthew was an improving landlord and, in all, planted over 600 acres of forest, reclaimed a vast quantity of land, and was kind and indulgent in his relations to his tenantry. His rent-roll from his estate was about £5,000 per annum. During the Great Famine, he gave his tenants a reduction in their rents, and in many cases did not exact any payments. In 1850, he gave a grant of land in the village of Murroe for the building of a national school, and provided the stone from his quarries for the building. The school was opened officially in 1852, and Sir Matthew and Lady Barrington were its patrons.

Sir Matthew could have entered public life as a Member of Parliament for Limerick City or County, but declined to do so. In the run-up to the general election in 1832, he made an address to the electors of Limerick:

*'Gentlemen, Having been solicited by several electors to offer myself for the representation of my native City, I trust, I may not be deemed presumptuous, in stating my reasons for declining to accede to a request, which I must ever remember with pride and gratitude. To be considered worthy of the honour of being the Representative of Limerick, by any portion of my fellow citizens, could not fail to excite in me the liveliest emotions'.<sup>(35)</sup>*

Evidently, he did not see his future in the House of Commons in London, and had committed himself to living and working in Ireland. Towards the end of his above address, he said: 'I shall continue as a citizen to do all in my power to further the objects which I have always had at heart - The improvement of my native City - The Employment of its population - and the relief of its distressed poor'.<sup>(36)</sup>

Sir Matthew died on 1 April, 1861, aged 72, and was buried in the family vault in St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick. Numerous tributes were paid to him in the newspapers and journals. The following is only a short extract from a long eulogy, printed in a weekly magazine called *The Warder*, April, 1861:

*'Sir Matthew was one of those men who acquire without art, or flattery, or even extraordinary social talents, by the sheer force of vigorous common sense, a fund of genuine kindness, and entire simplicity of mind and manners, a powerful ascendancy over the convictions and the wills of others ... Every plan he undertook was one of great and evident public usefulness. Like most men who unite public spirit with strong affections, the special field of his patriotic labours was the place of his birth. To his personal munificence, Limerick owes Barrington's Hospital, in connection with which he established a "Mont de*



*Piete', which though admirably planned, failed in consequence of local mismanagement, and Sir Matthew, from his private purse made up its losses, and repaid the Board of Works £3,000 advanced to carry it on. To him and to Lord Monteagle, Limerick owes the beautiful Wellesley Bridge,<sup>(37)</sup> the new docks, and nearly all the public improvements of the town. He was, too, we believe, the originator and certainly the most zealous and efficient of the promoters of the great Munster Fair. His activity was incessant, and everything about him felt the influence of his sagacious and active mind, kind heart, and firm but liberal hand ... Retrospects even imperfect as ours are not without their use - they help to keep a fine social example before the public mind, and to stimulate kindred spirits to emulate one of the most remarkable, and valuable Irishman of this century'.*

## NOTES

1. Register of St. Michan's parish, Dublin.
2. These 'roasting-jacks' were worked by weights.
3. Gilbert, *Ancient Records of Dublin*, IV, p.432.
4. Printed in M. Lenihan, *History of Limerick*, p.596.
5. Ibid., note 2.
6. The date of Matthew's Freedom of the City of Limerick was 1747.
7. Articles of agreement between Samuel Prendergast, Crown-Solicitor, with Matthew Barrington, 4 July, 1814. Barrington Papers (henceforth B.P.) Glenstal Abbey. Matthew Barrington was to give Samuel Prendergast a share in the emoluments of the post of Crown-Solicitor for Munster. This agreement lasted until 1820, after which Prendergast ceased to receive any share in the monies of the Crown Solicitor's office. Cf. deed of agreement, 9 May, 1820, between M. Barrington and S. Prendergast. B.P. B.P.
8. The property in question consisted of land in the townlands of Moneymihill and Knockfinish (or Knockfinisty).
9. M. Barrington to B. Stritch, Dublin, 17 August, 1818. B.P.
10. These two letters are also in B.P.
11. Original Deed in B.P.
12. Tithe Applotment Book for Co. Limerick. Public Record Office of Ireland. (P.R.O.I.)
13. He was Parish Priest of Abington, 1814-50.
14. *Report of the Select Committee on the State of Ireland, 1825* (Commons Report), p.412. (Parl. Papers)
15. Memorandum as to Planting, 1822-



**The West Window, St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick, erected as a memorial to Sir Matthew Barrington; designed by William Slater; stained glass by Messrs Clayton & Bell; building by Messrs John Ryan & Son, Limerick.**

16. B.P.
17. Ibid. p.3.
18. Ibid. p.11.
19. Belvidere was another name for the townland of Garranbane, on which Glenstal Castle was built.
20. All these letters are in B.P.
21. The Lord Lieutenant was the Marquis of Anglesey. The Chief Secretary in Ireland was Edward Geoffrey Smith-Stanley, commonly called Lord Stanley.
22. Both these men were local magistrates.
23. This letter is a copy, in M. Barrington's hand.
24. Dublin Castle.
25. John O'Connell.
26. This is an original letter, written in O'Connell's hand and signed by him. He has written 'Strictly Confidential' on top of letter.
27. A reference to Matthew Barrington's services as Crown-Solicitor.
28. M.P. for Limerick and later Lord Monteagle.
29. B.P.
30. Also in B.P. are two interesting letters referring to the baronetcy, one from Sir Robert Peel to J. Massy Dawson, 30 Jan., 1830, the other from the Duke of Wellington to J. Massy Dawson, 3 May, 1830. Both writers held out very little hope of Barrington getting the baronetcy.
31. See reference to this appointment and the fact that it would 'bring him in a very handsome sum', in R. Barry O'Brien, *Thomas Drummond*, p.360.
32. Ibid., p.368.
33. Ibid., p.374.
34. B.P. Printed circular 'St. Mary's Chapel' and on back a copy of Matthew Barrington's letter to Dean Hanrahan in his own hand.
35. 'An Address to the Electors of the City and Liberties of Limerick, 9 July, 1832'. Printed in L.C. 10 July, 1832.
36. Ibid.
37. Now Sarsfield Bridge.



**W**e were last week accidentally prevented from offering our humble tribute to the memory of the late Sir Matthew Barrington, Bart., who was not only one of the most eminent, but, in his own walk and way, without any question, one of the greatest men who has appeared in active life among us during the last forty years. During that long period he filled the arduous office of Crown Solicitor on the Munster circuit, as nobody acquainted with the social features of Ireland needs to be told, incomparably the most important criminal circuit in this country.

How he acquitted himself in this, during a long period of his official services, most difficult and onerous position, successive Governments have testified; and the late George Bennett, Q.C., for more than a quarter of a century leading Crown prosecutor upon the same circuit, no mean judge of efficiency in that department, has often been heard to declare that Sir Matthew was not only the best public officer he ever met with, but the best he could have imagined. In those awful periods when Ribbonism seemed to have established itself in a military occupation of the country, when scarcely a mail came up to Dublin without intelligence of some midnight attack upon houses, and plunder of fire-arms – some premeditated assassination – or some atrocious incendiarism – when the gentry lived in a state of siege, and such of the poorer classes as were not in complicity with the Ribbonmen, under a breathless terrorism – it needed no trifling amount of firmness and energy to front successfully so dreadful a combination, and no mean tact, wisdom, and perseverance to discover where evidence was to be had, and to induce the terrified people to mount the witnessbox. Again, during the stormy period of O'Connell's long, crafty, and formidable agitation, there were difficulties of another sort. He had to contend with the audacity and resources of a veteran politician, and the scrutiny and unscrupulousness of the most cunning and daring of lawyers, possessed of an immense public influence, a dangerous sort of Parliamentary position, and the closest relations with the people themselves, who were ready enough to furnish, not only all the facts that might establish a case against the conduct of the prosecutions, had the slightest slip been committed, but equally prompt to colour or to fabricate evidence whenever necessary, with the same object. Through this most exhausting ordeal he carried himself with a high and invincible sense of duty, and with the most consummate judgment, not only blameless, but with the applause and admiration of all who wished well to the country. There never was once in his administration, the slightest submission to the really awful pressure of those evil

## SIR MATTHEW BARRINGTON, BART: OBITUARY

times, and O'Connell himself, at the bar the formidable and unwearied champion of the outlaws and ruffians who, circuit after circuit, and special commission after special commission, crowded the Munster docks, came soon to respect as well as to fear the man who, if he had never shrunk from the dangers or the obloquy that attended his duty, had also never once played him a trick – who dealt frankly and mercifully with the prisoners – never sought for a more official triumph – considered only his high and awful charge in relation to the public safety and the public morals – and who was so far from availing himself either of technical advantages, or of the chances of a surprise, that he used – at first to his amazement – to hand him the Crown depositions across the table to read – relying always upon an honest case, and just as anxious as the prisoner's solicitor and lawyer that no innocent man should by any accident suffer. In this large, we may say noble spirit, were the Munster prosecutions conducted by him, and no man has ever passed from so high and arduous an office more clear and pure to the great tribunal of our common Creator.

But Sir Matthew Barrington was much more than a model Crown Solicitor. He was one of those men who acquire without art, or flattery, or even extraordinary social talents, by the sheer force of vigorous common sense, a fund of genuine kindness, and entire simplicity of mind and manners a powerful ascendancy over the convictions and the wills of others. In his hands that which, first stated, looked like a vision, soon acquired the symmetry and solidity of fact. Once a project had fairly seized upon his mind, those who knew him well felt satisfied that he would never rest until he had, at all events secured for it, no matter what the difficulties in the way, a fair, working trial. Every plan that he undertook was one of great and evident public usefulness. Like most men who unite public spirit, with strong affections, the special field of his patriotic labours was the place of his birth. To his personal munificence Limerick owes Barrington's Hospital, in connection with which he established a 'Mont de Piété,' which though admirably planned, failed in consequence of local mismanagement, and Sir Matthew from his private purse made up its losses, and repaid the Board of Works £3,000, advanced to carry it on. To him and to Lord Monteagle Limerick owes the beautiful Wellesley Bridge, the new docks, and nearly all the public improvements of the town. He was, too, we believe, the originator and certainly the most zealous and efficient of the promoters of the great Munster Fair. His activity was incessant, and everything

about him felt the influence of his sagacious and active mind, kind heart, and firm but liberal hand.

He had been thrown unusually early into active life. He had seen and spoken with men of another generation, the types of a state of society now happily known only to history, and his recollections of these strange specimens of humanity were eminently curious and amusing. He had himself seen a vast variety of Irish life, and had conducted many severely contested elections, among others, those of Spring Rice – now Lord Monteagle – for Limerick; and yet never made a personal enemy, or lost a friend.

The death of Sir Matthew Barrington is a public event. Limerick will feel his loss in a special manner. There is no project for the improvement of the city, the increase of its business, or the solid advantage in any way of its people, that will not be the weaker for his loss. He was a man of wise projects, of indefatigable labour, of ready and always active sympathy, and of genuine and unobtrusive patriotism. In social or business intercourse he had none of the tricks by which men force themselves upon attention. He was entirely without pretension, most unaffectedly modest and patient in discourse, a ready and anxious listener, and careful to select and store in memory everything worth preserving. It needed under this simple and modest bearing something of a kindred intelligence to appreciate the immense and essential superiority of Sir Matthew Barrington. No one who took the trouble to observe could fail to be struck at once, by his simplicity and breadth of view – by his faculty of seeing at a glance, and retaining indestructably all the essential points of a case or a question in which he was in anyway concerned. He was gifted with a mind such as Napoleon used to describe as characteristic of his ideal of a General 'clear as his own field glass, and which never forms to itself pictures'. There was in all its impressions of external things an absolute fidelity which never left him in fault or in doubt for the data of the problem to which he applied his acute judgement, his powers of selection and combination, and his sound but kindly knowledge of human nature.

Had we rested satisfied with merely announcing the death of such a man we should have expressed neither our own nor the public estimate of our loss. Retrospects even imperfect as ours are not without their use – they help to keep a fine social example before the public mind, and to stimulate kindred spirits to emulate one of the most remarkable and valuable Irishmen of this century.

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