

# The Limerick School of Art and Design, 1852-54

## Introduction

**T**he first officially recognised School of Painting in Limerick City in the nineteenth century was that founded by Jeremiah Mulcahy in 1842, and situated at 19 Catherine Street. According to a contemporary report, "Mulcahy was prepared to teach every branch of the Art, both in oils, watercolours, sepia, Indian ink and pencil drawings".<sup>(1)</sup> His school had only a limited success, mainly because it ran into financial and other difficulties during and after the Famine years. It was closed down in 1862, when Mulcahy moved to Dublin.<sup>(2)</sup> However, in the meantime, another school of art had been founded in Limerick, in July 1852, following a public meeting in the rooms of the Limerick Institution at 49 George's Street.

In order to understand how the Limerick School of Art and Ornamental Design came into existence, we have first to turn our eyes to London. In 1851, the Great Exhibition was held in the Crystal Palace, London. It was meant to be a curtain-opener for people to come and admire the advances made in Britain throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, in the realms of industry, agriculture, science and art. It proved a tremendous success, attracting visitors from all over Europe and America. More importantly, when the exhibition closed, the organisers found themselves with a large balance left over, a sum of £213,305. It was proposed to set aside this large sum of money - worth more than £30 million in today's currency - to further the teaching of art and design throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

The man behind this latter proposal was Henry Cole (1808-1882). He had been one of the principal organisers of the Great Exhibition, in his capacity as Secretary of the Board of Trade in London.<sup>(3)</sup> In October, 1881, he became Secretary of the London School of Design, and in January, 1852, Secretary of the Department of Practical Art, also centred in London. He had in mind the setting up of so-called *subsidiary* schools of art, in the principal cities of Great Britain. He approached Lord Monteagle (Thomas Spring Rice), whom he had already met, when the latter was Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1835-39, and discussed the possibility of founding one of the proposed schools of art and design in Limerick.

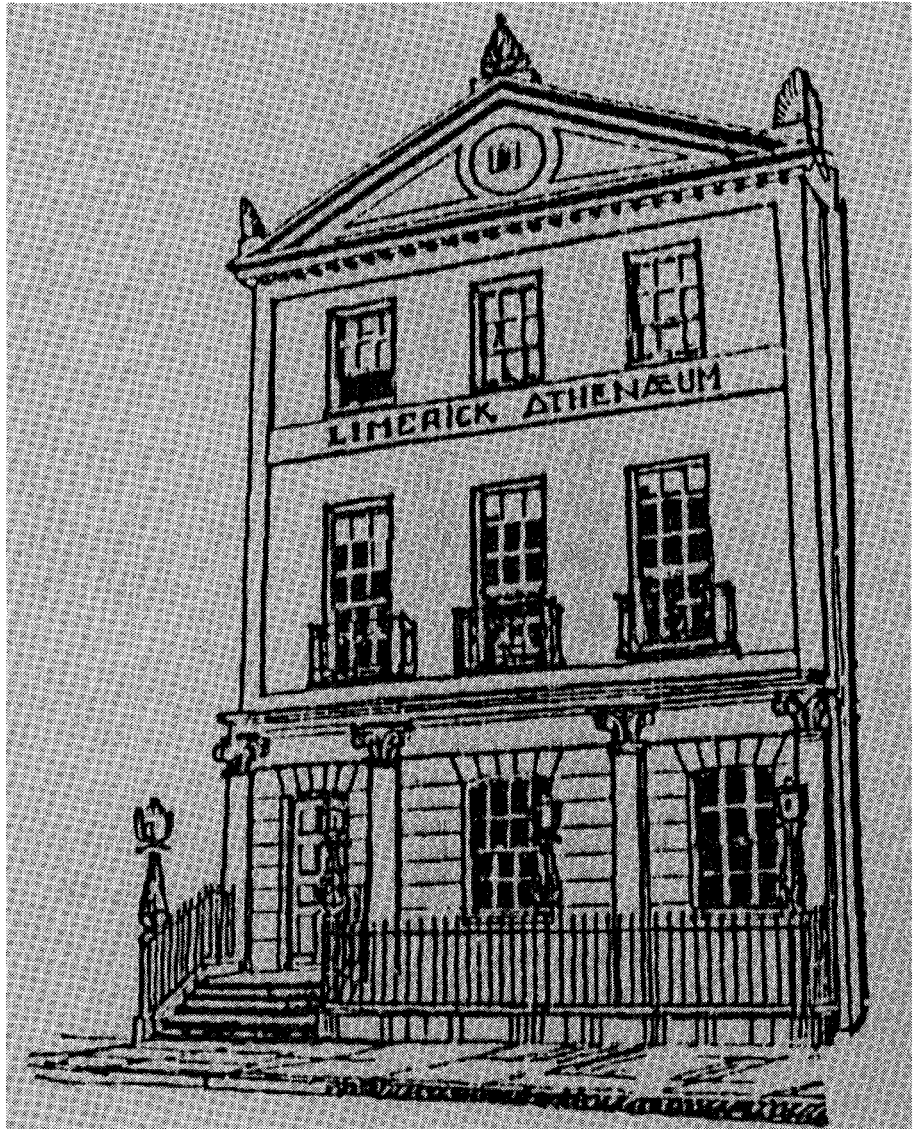
Early in July, 1852, a committee of Limerick persons was formed "to promote

by Mark Tierney

Literature, Science, Art and Music. They collected £1,256, and purchased a building in Upper Cecil Street, which later became known as the Athenæum Hall (behind the present Theatre Royal).<sup>(4)</sup> Henry Cole attended this meeting, and warned its listeners that "Money alone is insufficient for the establishment of a School of Design. You must treat a School of Design as you would an oak tree; you must allow it to grow upwards and afterwards nourish and take care of it".<sup>(5)</sup> The school opened its doors in September, 1852. At the end of this first year, on 4 July, 1853, an exhibition of the pupils' paintings and designs was on display in the school

premises, for viewing by the general public. It was also considered fit to hold a ceremony of the distribution of prizes, presided over by the Church of Ireland Bishop of Limerick (William Higgin).<sup>(6)</sup> One of the exhibits was a painting of Catherine Hayes, the famous Limerick opera singer.<sup>(7)</sup>

We get a colourful account of the distribution of prizes from the *Limerick Chronicle*, whose reporter was evidently highly impressed by the occasion. Over three hundred people attended, which indicates the interest and impact of the school on the people of Limerick. It is interesting to note the democratic spirit which reigned in the establishment, in that "the Committee had left the arrangements wholly in the hands of the pupils and students".<sup>(8)</sup> In his speech at the



The Limerick Athenæum.

prize-giving ceremony, Dr Higgin noted that "the subject of Art education was attracting the most serious attention of the people of England ... If we, in this city of Limerick, would imitate the perseverance and energy of our brethren in England, especially when joined to the native taste and capacity which we possess, the result would be to place us amongst the first rank of European nations". He adverted to the presence of Mr Long and Mr Anglim, the services they have rendered to the city, and of the success which had attended the efforts to raise a fund for the establishment of an Athenæum.<sup>(9)</sup> There follows a list of the prize-holders, and an account of other speakers, who make constant reference to the pride which the city of Limerick has taken in its School of Art.

From its very beginnings, the Limerick School of Art and Design was affiliated to the Royal Hibernian Academy of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin,<sup>(10)</sup> and to the National Art Training School, South Kensington, London.<sup>(11)</sup> "This connection with South Kensington brought immediate and much needed assistance to unendowed schools like those at the Limerick Athenæum. Public examinations were held, in the results of which prizes and medals were awarded; fees were paid to schools on the results at the examinations, and grants were paid towards buildings and maintenance costs, while aid could also be procured for fittings and apparatus".<sup>(12)</sup>

The annual report of the Limerick School of Art, for the year ending 31 July, 1854, which is given in full in this article, is an interesting document. First of all, it was printed in Limerick, at the School of Art, which indicates that the pupils had access to a pretty sophisticated printing machine in the Athenæum. It had its own seal, or logo, with the words "Limerick School of Ornamental Art". The printed list of the council and officers who formed the committee is most impressive, headed by the Earl of Dunraven, who was president. One notices that the committee was composed of both Protestants and Catholics, which indicates the undenominational nature of the school.<sup>(13)</sup> Undoubtedly, the brains and driving force behind the daily running of the school were Robert Anglim, the secretary and treasurer, and David Wilkie Raimbach, the headmaster.

The Limerick School of Art seems to have been controlled in some measure by the Department of Science and Art. At the same time, it employed several teachers and monitors under the National Board of Education System. It was also associated with the London-based Board of Trade, which organisation contributed six so-called "Department Medals" at the half-yearly examinations. All these endowments enhanced and benefitted the general organisation and standard of the Limerick School of Art.

Four final features of the school are worth commenting on. First of all, the large numbers of students attending the



Portrait of Thomas Spring Rice by Sir Martin Shee, commissioned by the Limerick Chamber of Commerce and hung in 1822.

school, which reached a peak of 133 in March, 1854. Secondly, the subjects taught: *Outline Drawing, Classic Architecture, Gothic Architecture, Painting, Decorative Art, and Sculpture*. Thirdly, the ages of the students, which range from "under 15" to "above thirty". This would seem to suggest that the Limerick School of Art catered for adult education, as well as for younger pupils. Fourthly, and most important of all, is the break-down of the "Occupations of the Male and Female Students". There were 123 male students, of whom 50 were schoolboys, while the rest represented a wide spectrum of professional and skilled workers - from architects to watch-makers. Of the 87 female students, 27 were schoolgirls,

while the rest were teachers, governesses, lace-workers, etc.

From a careful study of this report,<sup>(14)</sup> one can see that the Limerick School of Art and Design fulfilled an important service to the people of the city during its time of existence. Unfortunately, the funding from London ceased towards the end of 1854. When news of this withholding of funds, for which Henry Cole was blamed, reached Limerick, a local cartoon vilified him as *Old King Cole*. In spite of this setback, it continued to operate in the Athenæum in Cecil Street, thanks to the continued support of the general public in Limerick. Then, in 1912, when the demand for places became so great, it had to move to a larger building in

O'Connell Avenue, under the name of the Municipal Technical Institute.<sup>(15)</sup> By 1912, it had become known as the *Limerick Schools of Art and Science*.<sup>(16)</sup> The academic year of 1853-54 seems to have been one of its "finest hours".

#### REFERENCES

1. *Limerick Reporter*, 25 Jan., 1842.
2. Milo Spillane, *Two Centuries of Popular Education in Limerick*, 2.37 (Unpublished Thesis).
3. Cole had been the man who helped introduce the penny-postage scheme in 1839.
4. J. O'Donnell, "Technical Education in Limerick", in *Our Catholic Life*, Vol. VIII, 1961, p.23.
5. Quoted in a forthcoming book: *If Walls Could Talk: The Limerick Athenæum*, p.44.
6. *Limerick Chronicle*, 2 July, 1853.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. Founded in 1823. Cf. Thom's Irish Almanac 1852, p.349.
11. W. Ellis, *Irish Educational Directory* (1887), p.156.
12. Milo Spillane, *op.cit.*, 2.38.
13. Ever since the establishment of the National Schools System, in 1831, there had been continual disputes - especially among the Irish Catholic hierarchy - over the question of so-called *mixed schools*, where Protestant and Catholic children sat side by side in a class-room. Such discrimination and prejudice did not exist in the Limerick School of Art.
14. A copy is preserved in the library of Glenstal Abbey, Co. Limerick.
15. I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the work of Milo Spillane, *Two Centuries of Popular Education in Limerick* (1973), especially Chapter III: "The Beginnings of Technical Education". The work is not paginated, but divided into sections. I have given references to these sections.
16. For a fuller treatment of the later history of the Limerick School of Art and Science, see J. O'Donnell, "Technical Education in Limerick", in *Our Catholic Life*, Vol. VIII, 1961, pp.23-24.

## ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

### Limerick School of Art

FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31ST JULY, 1854

WITH AN

APPENDIX AND TREASURER'S STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS



LIMERICK:

PRINTED AT THE SCHOOL OF ART

1854

## COUNCIL AND OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

THE EARL OF DUNRAVEN

VICE-PRESIDENTS

LORD MONTEAGLE, THE MAYOR OF LIMERICK

WILLIAM FITZGERALD

MICHAEL GAVIN

DANIEL GRIFFIN, M.D.

WILLIAM L. JOYNT

THOMAS KANE, M.D.

VEN. ARCHDEACON KEATING

THE LORD BISHOP OF LIMERICK

HENRY MAUNSELL

HENRY O'SHEA

HENRY OWENS

JAMES PAIN

JOSEPH ROBINSON

FRANCIS W. RUSSELL, M.P.

RICHARD RUSSELL

FRANCIS SPAIGHT

REV. JAMES SYNAN

REV. WILLIAM TARBOTTON

REV. DAVID WILSON

HONORARY SECRETARY AND TREASURER

ROBERT ANGLIM

HEAD MASTER

DAVID WILKIE RAIMBACH

SECOND MASTER

WILLIAM LINNAEUS CASEY

## ANNUAL REPORT

THE Session commenced with a very considerable falling off in the attendance of the students as compared with the first opening of the School - a result to be attributed in some measure to the augmentation in the rate of Fees, which took place in consequence of the urgent and repeated request of the *Department of Science and Art*; but the numbers attending the various classes steadily increased, until they almost attained the original amount.

Several Teachers and Monitors of schools under the *National Board of Education* have attended the School during the past session at the desire of the Commissioners, who have entirely paid their expenses. The results have, on the whole, been favourable, one Teacher having gained sufficient knowledge to be enabled to teach Elementary Drawing in his own school. Two Local Prizes have also been awarded to individuals from among them.

On the first of January Mr William Linnaeus Casey, whose appointment as Second Master, had been for some time under consideration, commenced his duties, and has since proved a most valuable and indefatigable auxiliary to the Head Master.

Previous to the close of 1853 Classes for instruction in Elementary Drawing, were organised in the Cathedral, Leamy, S. Munchins, Sexton-Street Female National, Henry-Street, and Muslin Schools. These Classes were opened in January and have been carried on since in a most satisfactory manner.

In addition to the usual class lectures on Practical Geometry, Perspective and Projection, several lectures on artistic subjects were given during the winter months, by the masters. They were attended by all the students, and the public were admitted as far as the limited size of the lecture-room would permit.

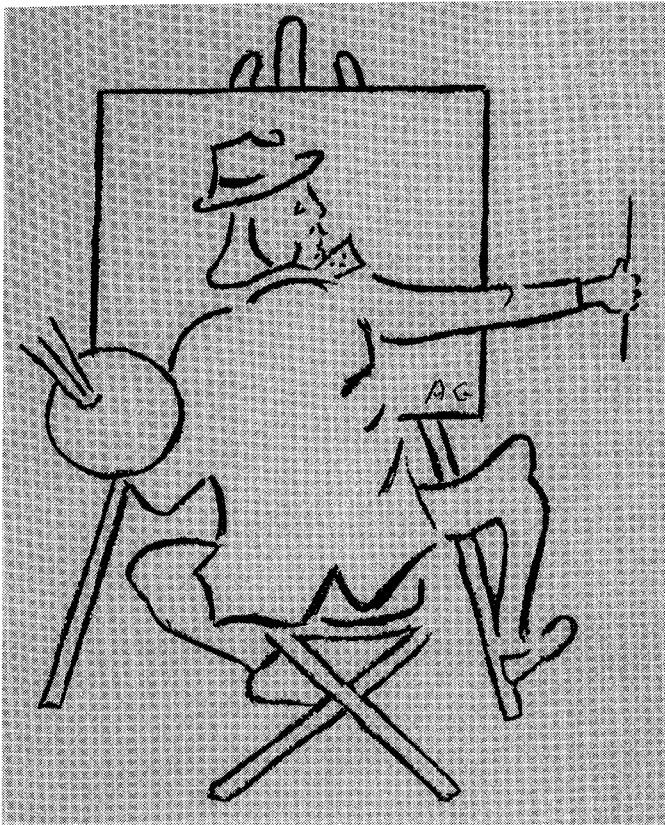
During the Session six "Department Medals" have been awarded to students of the Limerick School of Art by the Board of Trade, for works contributed to the half-yearly general examinations and competitions, in London. It is gratifying also to know that the Limerick School - one of the few of those individually noticed in the Examiners' Report - is characterized as "a most satisfactory contributor".

The conduct of the students and their progress during the Session have been most commendable.

## Appendix

### NUMBER OF STUDENTS ATTENDING IN EACH MONTH OF THE SESSION

MONTH	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL
September	36	24	60
October	34	32	66
November	50	45	95
December	54	37	91



Drawing by Arthur Grayson.

- JOHN O'GRADY. *Tarsia, outlined.*  
 PATRICK O'HALLORAN. *Shaded Ornament, Shaded Sphere.*  
 KATE RYAN. *Tarsia, outlined.*  
 JOHN SCOTT. *Practical Geometry, Tarsia outlined.*  
 MARY SEYMOUR. *Tarsia outlined.*  
 JOHN SULLIVAN. *Perspective, Tarsia outlined.*  
 MARY SULLIVAN. *Shaded Ornament.*

AGES OF MALE STUDENTS

Under fifteen	52	Twenty-five and under thirty	10
Fifteen and under twenty	30	Above thirty	4
Twenty and under twenty-five	21	Total,	123

AGES OF FEMALE STUDENTS

Under fifteen	31	Twenty-five and under thirty	4
Fifteen and under twenty	34	Above thirty	2
Twenty and under twenty-five	16	Total,	87

OCCUPATIONS OF MALE STUDENTS

Agriculturist	1	Masons	2
Architect	1	No Occupations	15
Baker	1	Plasterers	2
Builders	3	Portrait Painter	1
Butler	1	Potter	1
Carpenters and Joiners	12	School-boys	50
Carvers	3	Spinners	2
Civil Engineers and Surveyors	4	Stationer	1
Clerks and Accountants	9	Teachers	5
Coach-painter	1	Tin-plate Worker	1
Drapers	3	Watch-maker	1
Engineers and Millwrights	3	Total,	123

OCCUPATIONS OF FEMALE STUDENTS

Lace-drawer	1	School-girls	27
Lace-worker	1	Teachers and Governesses	19
No Occupation	39	Total,	87

ABSTRACT OF TREASURER'S ACCOUNTS  
FOR THE YEAR ENDING JULY 31ST 1584

Dr.		Cr.	
To Balance in hands on foot of last account	£3 1 5	By Debts from last Session	£52 12 11
To Subscriptions and Donations	89 11 6	By One Year's Rent	52 10 0
To School Fees received	152 13 8	By Fire Insurance	2 7 3
less half paid to Master	81 14 5	By Porter and Charwoman	21 12 0
	70 19 3	By Coals	7 2 3
By Proceeds Conversazione	5 0 0	By Advertizing	3 6 6
		By Examples Materials &c.	12 3 6
		By Printing Press and Types	6 13 6
		By Postages	1 5 0
		By House Incidentals	8 14 5
		By Balance in hands	4 10
	£168 12 2		£168 12 2

ESTIMATE OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE  
CURRENT YEAR

Debts due from last Session, viz:-	
Gas balance, first year	£14 4 7
Ditto, half-year to close of last Session	22 8 8
Pipe water	2 7 0
Advertisements, say	5 0 0
	44 0 3
One Year's Rent	52 10 0
less rent of offices	25 0 0
	27 10 0
Gas, £25; Coals, £10 35 0 0	
House Servants	20 0 0
Fire Insurance, £2 7 3; Pipe water, £2 7 0	4 14 3
Advertising, Stationery &c.	10 0 0
House Incidentals, Postages &c.,	10 0 0
	79 14 3
To be provided for exclusive of Examples -	£151 4 6

January	68	38	106
February	71	35	106
March	72	61	133
April	58	57	115
May	59	53	112
June	42	45	87
July	34	38	72

SUBJECTS OF LECTURES DELIVERED

OUTLINE DRAWING	MR. RAIMBACH	26TH JANUARY
CLASSIC ARCHITECTURE	MR. RAIMBACH	28TH FEBRUARY
GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE	MR. RAIMBACH	30TH MARCH
PAINTING	MR. CASEY	27TH APRIL
DECORATIVE ART	MR. RAIMBACH	25TH MAY
SCULPTURE	MR. CASEY	29TH JUNE

STUDENTS TO WHOM PRIZES HAVE BEEN AWARDED  
LONDON MEDALS.

AWARDED IN DECEMBER 1853, AND IN MAY 1854.

- THOMAS DONNELLY, [2] *Practical Geometry, Studies of Ornament.*  
 JAMES LEDGER, [2], *Tarsia, outlined, Elementary design.*  
 GEORGE OLLIS, *Tarsia, outlined.*  
 RICHARD RANDALL, *Laocoon in outline.*

LOCAL PRIZES.

AWARDED IN JULY 1854.

- BENJAMIN BREW. *Practical Geometry, Ornament outlined from the Cast, Elementary design.*  
 THOMAS BURKE. *Ornament outlined from the Cast.*  
 WILLIAM CLARKE. *Shaded Ornament.*  
 JOHN DUGGAN. *Ditto,*  
 JOHN FLANNAGAN. *Four Architectural Prizes.*  
 EMMA GABBETT. *Shaded Sphere.*  
 MARY H. GABBETT. *Flower painted from nature, Elementary design.*  
 JAMES F. GOGGIN. *Practical Geometry.*  
 ROWLAND H. HARRIS. *Perspective, Ornament in outline from the Cast, Flowers painted from the flat.*  
 JAMES LEDGER. *Foliage in outline, Isometrical projection.*  
 MARY-JANE O'BRIEN. *Painted Ornament.*