

# Limerick Turkish Baths

**L**n the nineteenth century, the use of pools or baths was functional rather than for leisure. In the 1830s, Limerick Baths were in Henry Street, and opened from six in the morning until ten at night. A portable bath with hot water and attendant was provided to any part of the city for people who could not leave their homes. The charges were advertised as follows:

Fresh Warm Bath	2s 0d or 12 for £1
Salt Warm Bath	2s 6d or 10 for £1
Fresh Cold Bath	1s 8d or 15 for £1
Salt Cold Bath	2. 0d or 12 for £1
Fresh Shower Bath	0s 10d or 30 for £1
Salt Shower Bath	1s 0d or 24 for £1
Hot Air or Steam Bath	3s 0d or 8 for £1
Sulphur or Chlorine Bath	3s 6d or 7 for £1
Nitro Mur Acid Bath	4s 0d or 6 for £1
Harrowgate Bath	5s 0d or 5 for £1

While baths run on a commercial basis provided a service for those who could afford to pay, there was also a need for bathing facilities for the poorer classes. On 17 October 1860, in the *Munster News and Limerick and Clare Examiner* newspaper, the medical doctors of

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by Tom Donovan

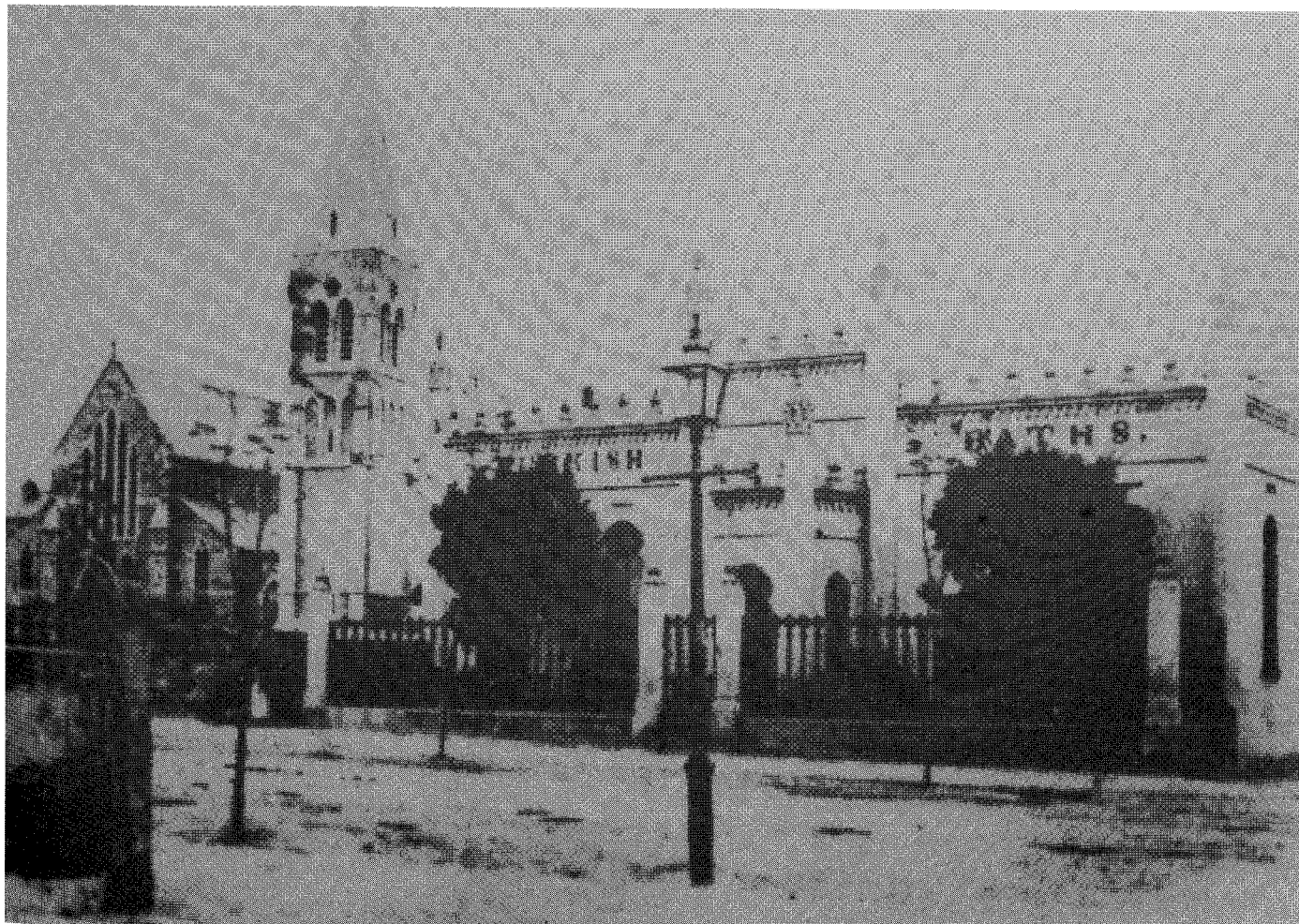
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Limerick published an open address to the Mayor and Corporation of Limerick. They bemoaned the lack of 'baths and washing accommodation to the people at large'. It was their opinion that 'it would be of great benefit to the citizens, if the Corporation provided baths. It would also reduce the medical expenses as well as promoting the cause of cleanliness and hygiene'. The doctors also hoped that if the baths were established it would be an example for the County of Limerick to follow. The address was signed by Thomas Westropp MRCS, 6 Upper Mallow Mallow Street, and countersigned by

W.H. Murphy,	John Wilkinson
Daniel Griffin,	William Westropp
Arthur H. D'Esterre,	Vernon Russell
W.H. Gore,	Robert R. Gelston
T.J. Gelston,	Samuel Hunt
Robert Fitzgerald,	Joseph Parker
Thomas Carey,	E.H. Homan
R. Haines,	Robert Frith
J. Carroll,	Miles V. Burke
James O'Shaughnessy	William J. Geary

Bernard Kavanagh	Stephen McMahon
Edward Homan	Jonathan Elmes
Thomas Nash	Amos Vereker
J.W. Bouchier	Thomas Kang
M. Brodie	Daniel Tracy
John Allen	

Four days later, in the same newspaper, the address by Dr Westropp and his thirty one fellow doctors was welcomed, by the proprietors of 'The Turkish Baths' on Military Road (now O'Connell Avenue) and Westland Street (possibly Westland Row). They boasted that 'they were the pioneers of the sanitary movement, by establishing Turkish Baths in the city. They were extending their service to the working classes by the erection of another Baths establishment, now nearly completed'. They hoped their 'new baths would be within the reach of the poor man and cleanse the inside of the body as perfectly as other baths could cleanse the outside'. Fortunately the newspaper carried a description of the baths, which had been established in 1859, for its readers who had not visited them, and left a wonderful insight into the operation of the Turkish Baths.



The Turkish Baths, O'Connell Avenue, St. Alphonsus Church behind, c. 1880.

**"The Turkish Bath  
In Limerick"**

'We believe the population of Limerick in general do not know so much as they might about the handsome building which stands on the Military Walk, and is designed in a somewhat more novel style of architecture than they have been accustomed to mark. It has a handsome and imposing front, richly stained glass windows, and the roof is surmounted by numerous little pointed turrets or minarets, while vases and other architectural ornaments rest on graceful columns at the several angles. No doubt, many of the more intelligent class, who frequent the popular promenade in the vicinity, know that it is "The Turkish Bath," and can judge for themselves that it has externally a very 'beautiful' appearance. But beyond that, many know little of its interior construction, or in what material respects it differs from the ordinary baths to which they have been accustomed. People have some delicacy in entering establishments merely to see them, and several would deem the intrusion as improper as to walk into Cruise's Hotel and ask to be shown through all its ample compartments without having an intention of sojourning therein. Save those, and they are many, who use the Turkish Baths, few visit it interiorly, in order to become acquainted with the utility or luxury which it affords. For these purposes, however, the institution is admirably adapted, and fitted up, regardless of cost, in a style of rich and

**N O W O P E N ,  
SARSFIELD STREET,  
(Late Brunswick Street),  
NEW TURKISH BATHS**

ALSO,  
HOT AND COLD WATER, RECLINING,  
SHOWER, WAVE, NEEDLE, AND VERY  
LARGE PLUNGE BATHS.

THESE magnificent Baths, in the erection and fitting of which the Proprietor has spared no expense, contain all that the most recent improvements can provide for benefit, comfort, and enjoyment of its patrons. They are specially notable for the spaciousness of their apartments, perfect ventilation, (on which the whole value of the Bath depends), and the care and exactness with which its operations will be conducted. Four hot chambers have been provided, including a capacious Shampooing Room, with varying degrees of heat, thus meeting the requirements of all.

The Cooling Room is very large, and got up in first-class style. The Shampooers have been selected with great care, and no effort will be wanting to render the attendance prompt and obliging, under the personal supervision of manager and proprietor.

Admission to the Turkish Baths daily—  
From 6-30 a m to 9 a m ... 1s 0d  
Do 9 do 5 p m ... 2s 0d  
Do 5 p m to 8-30 p m ... 1s 0d  
Hot Water Bath, Morning and Evening ... 0s 6d  
From 9 a m to 5 p m ... 1s 0d  
Shower, Needle, Wave or Plunge, ... 6d each  
Cold, Tepid, Reclining, and Shower Baths for Ladies.

D. TAYLOR, Sole Proprietor.

Dec 29

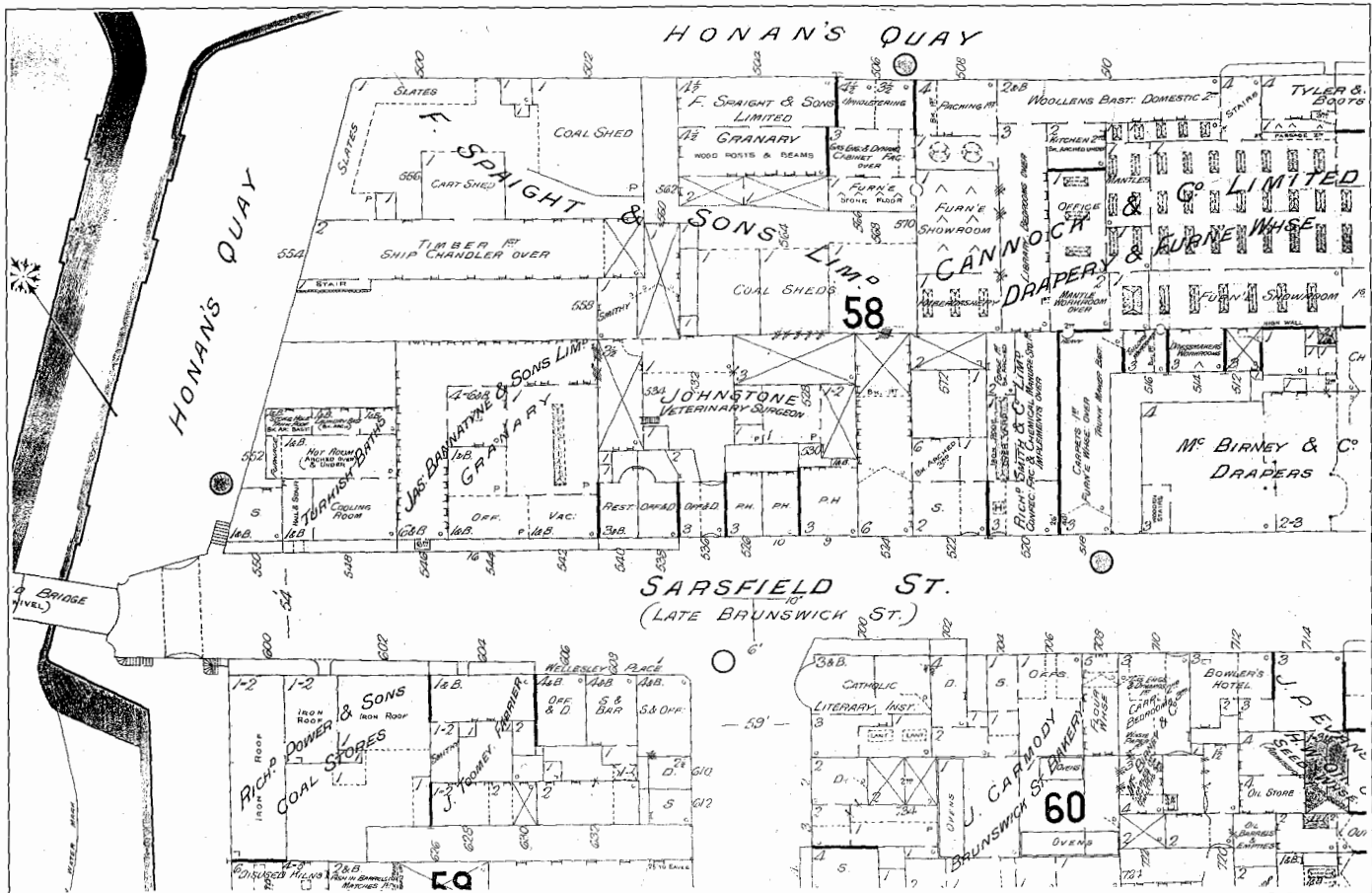
**Advertisement for the Sarsfield Street  
baths, Limerick Chronicle, Thursday  
29 December 1887.**

tasteful elegance that must be seen, and the operations explained, in order that all may be fully appreciated.'

'The circumstances attending the establishment of the Baths in Limerick

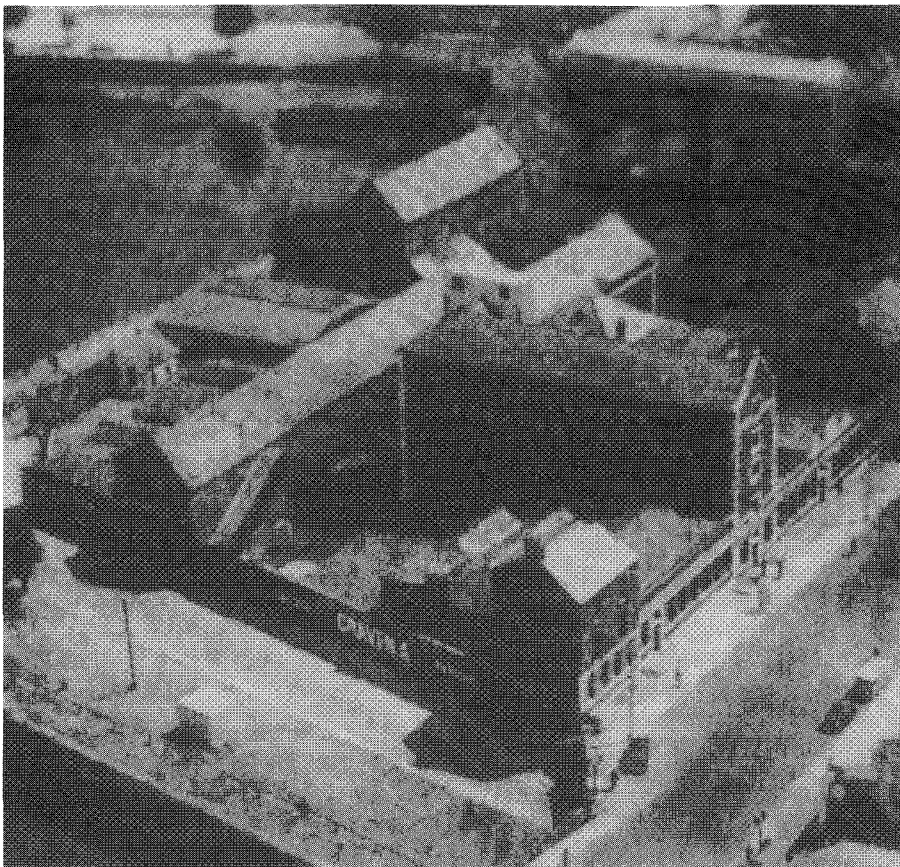
may be briefly related. The great popular favour which the original establishment at St. Anne's Hill, Blarney, acquired produced a desire in other parts of the Kingdom to obtain like facilities for curative and healthful purposes. But that which would appear to be every body's business might have turned out to be nobody's, had not our energetic and enterprising fellow citizen, Mr. Samuel Wormleighton, undertaken, in conjunction with Dr. Barter, to build and fit up the Baths of which we now propose to give a brief account.'

'Entering by the side door in Charles Street\* and through the office, where the intelligent chief attendant supplies every information that can be desired, the visitor is introduced into the first of three chambers of which the Bath apartments consist. This is called the Divan (the apodyterium of the Romans); it is open to the atmospheric air, and furnished with elegantly upholstered couches and sofas, in enclosed chambers, somewhat resembling the state rooms of the gorgeously fitted up ocean steamers of the Peninsular and Oriental Steam Company. In this chamber the Bather exchanges his clothing for a dress and a pair of wooden slippers, and to this room he subsequently returns. The second room to which the bather is introduced is the first stage of the bath, and it is elegantly furnished with marble slabs and mattresses. The light is admitted from the roof of stained glass, of various tasteful designs, and it tends to produce a dreamy and tranquillising state of mind favourable to the equal circulation of the



Sarsfield Street from Charles E. Goad (London): Insurance Plan of Limerick, March 1897.

Limerick Museum.



Aerial view of Spillane's tobacco factory, Sarsfield street, the day before the staff were paid off, 18 June 1958.

Limerick Leader.

blood. This room is heated from 120 to 130 degrees, but the air though dry it is respired with perfect ease and here a most agreeable sensation is felt - a sort of quiet langour begins to be experienced, and in this state the party remains until perspiration is freely and fully produced. Not until that time is thoroughly arrived is he allowed to enter the third chamber. This is called the *sudalorium*, that is, the sweating room. On the occasion of our Reporter visiting it, the heat of the apartment was raised to the excessive pitch of 155 degrees. Yet there was no painful effect, no difficulty of respiration. The feeling was rather a strong desire to enjoy all the effect of the soothing influences. The room is heated from beneath by flues, which are hermetically sealed, so that no furnace air can by any possibility reach the apartment. Marble seats are furnished upon which are placed light frames of wood as protection for persons using the chamber. The heat of this chamber is from 140 to 160 degrees - it was fully 155 on the occasion of our Reporter's visit, but there being an ample supply of fresh air from below, and free ventilation above, no inconvenience was experienced. Under increased temperature the pores of the skin are brought into full action, and the material excitement is observable in the pulse. In this chamber the bather is subjected to shampooing if desired. It is a highly invigorating process, which materially assists in freeing the pores of the skin, while it calls into activity all the sinews and muscles of the body. During the

profuse perspiration in this chamber, cold water is drunk abundantly - a large tumbler full three or four times, or oftener. Contiguous to the heated chamber are recesses containing fountains, which are supplied with hot and cold water, so arranged that the water may be mixed to the exact temperature most agreeable to the requirements of each individual, and also giving off a sufficiency of moisture to prevent the hot air from being too dry. Here the cooling, refreshing, and cleaning process takes place. The bather then returns for a few minutes into the dry air of the heated chamber, to secure a perfect reaction, and is then conducted back to the Divan and the atmospheric air, where, on couches already described, he enjoys a luxurious tranquility. This part of the process may be termed the ionic stage, in which the highest amount of physical gratification is experienced. The time spent in the bath is usually about two hours altogether, but of course it may be somewhat shortened at the wish of the bather.'

'There are separate suites of the apartments for ladies, constructed like those described, but perhaps more richly decorated, and the bathers are waited upon by respectable female attendants.'

'It would scarcely be within our province to offer remarks upon the medicinal properties of the Turkish Bath. We have every reason, however, to believe that, used discretely, under medical advice, it operates effectually as a curative agent in many diseases, and even to those in perfect health is a source

of recreation and luxurious indulgence.'

The Turkish Baths appear to have closed down in the late 1880s.<sup>1</sup> They were established in 1859 and were remodelled in 1872, still under the management of Richard Barter and S. Wormleighton, to make them "one of the finest for its size, one of the most perfect institutions of the kind in Ireland."<sup>2</sup>

Like all successful ventures, the baths soon had competition in the form of imitators. In November 1887, D. Taylor of Eden Terrace opened a Turkish Baths at Sarsfield Bridge. Twenty men were engaged for seven months in the erection of the baths. During the construction, Taylor sued a mason, Peter McNamara, for refusing to finish the work. The action proved unsuccessful. Despite this, it was boasted that the brickwork in the baths was "the finest to be seen anywhere."<sup>3</sup> In 1914 the baths were advertised as being under new management, open from 8 am to 8.30 pm, owner Michael O'Brien, and continued to be so advertised until 1925.<sup>4</sup>

In 1899, when the firm of Richard Smith & Co. on Sarsfield Street went into liquidation, Spillane's tobacco factory took over the premises. They had been manufacturing tobacco in William Street for seventy years and acquired and refurbished the Sarsfield Street premises in order to begin the manufacture of cigarettes, as well as continuing to manufacture their famous Limerick Roll and Garryowen Plug.<sup>5</sup> Over time they acquired the neighbouring premises on Sarsfield Street, including the baths building, and by 1930 were operating from Sarsfield Street only. In 1958 Spillane's tobacco factory closed down. The company, which began manufacturing in 1829, was acquired by the Dublin firm, Murray & Co., who transferred all the machinery to its Dublin factory.<sup>6</sup> The lovely brick building, which spanned from Sarsfield Street to Honan's Quay and became famous for its trade mark, two red setter dogs at its entrance and the legend 'Smoke Craven A Cigarettes', was finally demolished. It is now the site of Dunne's Department Store and practically all memories of Limerick's Baths are now gone.

\* Charles Street is now St Gerard Street.

#### SOURCES

1. *The Limerick Herald* newspaper, 24 June 1832.
2. The last mention of the Turkish Baths at Military Road in local trades directories is in 1886, when the manager / superintendent was James Connolly.
3. *Old Limerick Journal*, no. 22, Winter 1987.
4. *Cork & Munster Trades Directory* 1914 - 1925.
5. *The Munster News and Limerick & Clare Advocate* newspaper, 29 April 1899.
6. *The Limerick Leader* newspaper, 18 June 1958.