

up of citizens of very similar social standing and wealth, with very little social interaction between the various ghettos.

pragmatist who fears that the negative publicity directed at Limerick in recent times, could, if not countered now, impact on

others," he reminds you. He talks of four areas in which they will optimise their resources: teaching, research,

reach children at a younger age, even at primary school." Their Soccer for Success Project, for instance, has been successful

Alcohol is obviously a factor, but most of his students, he said, have a responsible attitude to alcohol. "In fact," he said, "we are now

Sat Oct 13th 2001

Tranquility in a townhouse garden

By **MARTIN BYRNES**

ONE of the reasons that Limerick is not as elegant as, say, downtown Dublin or London W1 is the absence of fine squares.

Dublin has its St Stephen's Green, its Merion Square and its Fitzwilliam Square, and, in its leafy suburbs, Grosvenor Square and Leinster Square. Even on the northside of the Liffey, there is still something distinctive about Mountjoy and Parnell (formerly Rutland) Squares.

In London, one has dozens from which to choose, Belgrave Square, Grosvenor, Berkeley, Portman, Bedford, St James'; these are centred on the Belgravia, Marylebone and Mayfair triangle. Even little Onslow and Carlyle Squares in Chelsea have a charm.

All these Georgian or Edwardian houses face on to well-kept, lawned and timbered spaces in the centres of their squares.

But Limerick didn't

make it, despite a very concerted effort to build a modern, new town outside the defensive line of the old walled city—and hence the name Newtown Pery, named after the Pery—pronounced peery—family, now Earls of Limerick.

Glasgow was similarly laid out in a grid pattern, but they, too, neglected to allow space for open squares. Manchester more-or-less radiates from Central Station, but it, too, made little provision for open squares. Birmingham, more of a heavy industrial city than Manchester, also built in blocks rather than in squares.

It was trading towns, where merchant princes lived, which had the luxury of well-proportioned squares.

So Bristol has fine examples in brick, and Edinburgh beats them all, because most of its "squares" are either round or crescent-shaped, a bit like Limerick's Crescent, but larger and mostly granite. Bath is legendary.

The squares of Rome and Florence follow the outlines of previous military or monastic establishments, as do the squares of Abbeyfeale, Askeaton, Newcastle West and Tralee, possibly Rathkeale.

Limerick has St John's Square, a limestone, brick behind quadrangle, built as a one-off. And then there is Pery Square.

Which isn't a square at all. It's one eighth of a square.

The idea was to have four built sides to what is now the People's Park. Twelve large very swanky houses were to comprise each side.

One half of one side was built.

These are the six houses which are known as the Tontines, the uniform, four-over-a-basement houses at the Barrington Street end of what is called Pery Square.

A tontine is a form of investment whereby several shareholders subscribe equal sums and derive an annual income

from the project thus financed, but only for their lifetimes until the last living investors obtain the whole lot for themselves.

In the case of funding of the six Pery Square houses, this meant 89 shareholders, each putting in £120, and that £10,680 financed the construction, which was completed in 1838. The numbers whittled down by natural attrition until the last six shares were worth one house each.

However, by that time, the fashion for grand townhouses had fallen into disfavour, so the other seven-eighths of the square were never completed, and in vogue among the gentry and merchants instead were pleasing rural retreats "away from factory smoke and the bustle of urban life".

That quote comes from a fascinating new book, as elegant and impressive as the building which it extols, called *The Georgian House and Garden*—a historic Limerick House.

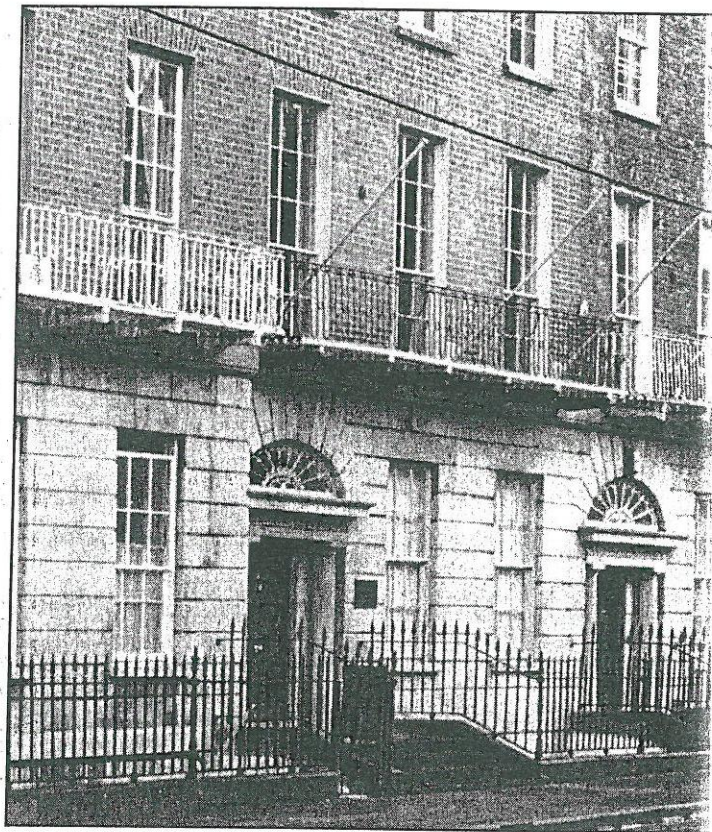
It tells the story of Limerick Civic Trust's loving restoration of 2, Pery Square to all its Georgian splendour, the finest example of vernacular Georgian in the country.

Limerick Civic Trust is a voluntary group, supported by business and industry and the local authorities.

And it has achieved miracles in its fewer than 20 years existence, largely through the energy of its founding director, Denis Leonard.

Another find has been the meticulous research and patient skills of historian and editor Dave Lee. With Maria Gonzalez, and a team of researchers, he produced the two-volume Georgian Limerick books.

Now, we have this new, slimmer offering, called just *The Georgian House and Garden*—a historic Limerick House. It puts the development of 19th century Limerick in excellent context, and this reviewer has no hesitation in recommending it without reservation.



•Pery Square, Limerick's Georgian square, with its fine Tontine house

Na Piasaigh B: S Dowling
take place at Na Piasaigh G.A.A. club on