

## News

# City's rich heritage leaves Georgian on our minds

■ Limerick city has retained much of its Georgian past, from its redbrick townhouses to its public parks. O'Connell Avenue resident **Flann Wellesley** writes about how Limerick came to have such a rich Georgian heritage and says it is more important than ever to preserve it

WHEN walking the streets of Limerick, one is privileged aesthetically with the view of street upon street of towering redbrick townhouses. That many of these buildings are now offices and retail units detracts in no large part from their beauty, indeed it may serve as a testament to the continued utilitarian value of these Georgian houses, as they are called.

The name is derived from the period in history when several kings by the name of George ruled Great Britain and Ireland – a period of relative peace in Ireland, coming after the Jacobite wars and preceding the rebellion of 1798. With peace of course comes an element of stability – abundantly in this case – and a large measure of economic growth. As I have no intention of analysing this period from a Marxist perspective, I stress that the economic growth spoken of is in the context of those for whom these redbrick townhouses became a habitable aspiration, the Ascendancy.

The lion's share of credit for this architectural period must go to the Wide Streets Commission. Set up in 1757 by an Act of Parliament (at the bidding of the Dublin Corporation), this commission succeeded in reshaping the urban landscape of our modern cities. Among the decrees dealt out by the commission was that of its namesake: in the future, buildings facing each other across a primary route in



Georgian redbricked houses in magnificent Pery Square, one of the city's architectural highlights

dwellings. O'Connell Street in Dublin is the clearest product of this directive. Another essential directive issued by the commission was the introduction of parapets to any new dwellings. An extra several inches of brick along the roof edge was instrumental in preventing the spread of fire along entire streets – a common occurrence previously as Samuel Pepys can attest to with the Great Fire of London (1666).

only the nearby tenants would have access. In this way Pery Square in Limerick sprang up.

However, in spite of developments in urban safety, cities of the period were still often lacking in any real sanitation measures. Household rubbish was thrown onto the streets and horse-drawn carriages had none of the difficulties imposed on the jarveys of Killarney this summer. In short, cities

illuminated doors, for example. With foot-scrappers, their utilitarian value was soon far exceeded by the demand for aesthetics as this was one of the few alterations that could be made to the façade of the townhouse by a mere tenant without the consent of the landlord, a crucial factor. The following years were to witness a whirl of foot-scraper designs, each more elaborate than the last – each less utilitarian

discerning reader might be disappointed to discover that there was no absolute darling of this period of designer foot-scrappers; no Alessandro Galilei or James Gandon. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that one particular designer left his signature stamp on a sizable number of foot-scrappers in Limerick.

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After independence, successive Irish governments were criminal in their neglect of these beautiful buildings, seeing them as emblematic of British imperialism. Irish Georgian Society has done sterling work in rectifying this situation throughout the country. However, even these stalwarts of conservation have neglected to some extent the peculiar and quirky phenomenon of the Georgian Irish foot-

## Thieves give householder the Monday blues

Eugene Phelan

SOME people don't like Monday's but for city thieves it is turning out to be their favourite day.

And according to Sgt Liam Sheehan, crime prevention officer at Henry Street Garda station, last Monday was a particularly bad day for break-ins in Limerick.

Televisions, jewellery, laptops and numerous other items were stolen in different break-ins around the city. And the robberies were made easier in some cases by people not locking doors or windows.

And with the nights getting darker, Gardai warn that there will be more crimes by opportunist thieves once people continue to leave doors of homes open, or windows not locked properly.

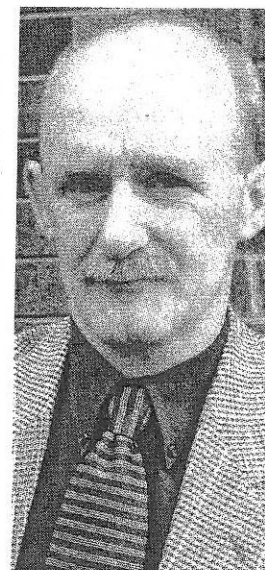
"It doesn't matter what day of the week it is, or what time of the day it is, house burglaries can happen at any time," Sgt Sheehan said.

He made his comments after revealing a number of burglaries, including one which happened at 9pm on Monday when the occupants were in their home on Old Cork Road.

The injured party was upstairs at the time with children when intruders came into the house downstairs and stole a Dell laptop computer, a mountain bike and a mobile phone.

"This incident just goes to show once again how careful one has to be and how sneaky a thief can be once given the opportunity," said Sgt Sheehan.

In a break-in at Castletroy thieves got into a house between 5am and 8.30am. The



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window unlocked or open then you are leaving yourself vulnerable," he warned.

Also on Monday a home was broken into in Clonlara between 9am and 1pm.

The thieves broke an upstairs rear window to get in and ransacked the house, taking a number of items and some cash.

Two televisions were taken, an LG40 and LCD and an LG combi DVD, a white Apple Mac Notebook, some jewellery, a friendship gold ring, 18ct gold band ring, 18ct ladies wedding ring, ladies Raymond Weil watch, a Citizen watch and some smaller pieces. Anyone with any information should call Ardnacrusha Garda station on 345136.

At The Forts, Dooradoyle there was a break-in between 9am and 5pm. No one was at home at the time.

Taken was a Hewlett Packard laptop, an Apple iPod, Samsung mobile phone, Nintendo DS and 13 games, as well as a small amount of cash.

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The name is derived from the period in history when several kings by the name of George ruled Great Britain and Ireland – a period of relative peace in Ireland, coming after the Jacobite wars and preceding the rebellion of 1798. With peace of course comes an element of stability – abundantly in this case – and a large measure of economic growth. As I have no intention of analysing this period from a Marxist perspective, I stress that the economic growth spoken of is in the context of those for whom these redbrick townhouses became a habitable aspiration, the Ascendancy.

The lion's share of credit for this architectural period must go to the Wide Streets Commission. Set up in 1757 by an Act of Parliament (at the bidding of the Dublin Corporation), this commission succeeded in reshaping the urban landscape of our modern cities. Among the decrees dealt out by the commission was that of its namesake: in the future, buildings facing each other across a primary route in the city had to be of a certain width apart.

With the passing of this, Irish urban development was transformed utterly. Gone were the winding, crooked mazes we so associate with medieval towns. These hazardous firetraps were to become a thing of the past as, throughout the towns of the country, rickety buildings were torn down to be replaced by brick and mortar



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Blocks of these new townhouses tended to be commissioned by wealthy landlords and the emerging class of mercantilists. Those who paid for a block would live in the most grandiose whilst renting out the three or four remaining units to others of the middle and upper class. Several blocks would often be built facing each other across a square-railed green area for which

only the nearby tenants would have access. In this way Pery Square in Limerick sprang up.

However, in spite of developments in urban safety, cities of the period were still often lacking in any real sanitation measures. Household rubbish was thrown onto the streets and horse-drawn carriages had none of the difficulties imposed on the jarveys of Killarney this summer. In short, cities were dirty places and a walk through one would ensure one's shoes were in need of a foot-scraper.

With the rapid expansion of Georgian townhouses during this time, one can see elements of competitiveness among neighbours creeping in as a means of breaking the uniformity of the prevailing architecture – the elaborate designs on rose windows above brightly

illuminated doors, for example. With foot-scrappers, their utilitarian value was soon far exceeded by the demand for aesthetics as this was one of the few alterations that could be made to the façade of the townhouse by a mere tenant without the consent of the landlord, a crucial factor. The following years were to witness a whirl of foot-scraper designs, each more elaborate than the last – each less utilitarian than the last indeed – as neighbours sought to outdo each other in the beauty of their own particular façade.

The tulip mania which struck the Ottoman Court in the early 18th century might be the closest analogy for this period – although the exorbitant prices paid for these foot-scrappers was not likely to lead to ruination for any Limerick gentlemen! The

discerning reader might be disappointed to discover that there was no absolute darling of this period of designer foot-scrappers; no Alessandro Galilei or James Gandon. However, there is some anecdotal evidence that one particular designer left his signature stamp on a sizable number of foot-scrappers in Limerick.

Like the rest of what we know of as the Georgian period of architecture in Ireland, the "foot-scraper craze" ended amidst the ruinous aftermath of the 1798 rebellion. Following on from this and the subsequent Act of Union in 1801, Ireland descended into social decline and economic stagnation as focus shifted back to Britain for the elite.

Georgian redbrick houses were abandoned by the rich and became tenements for the most part.

After independence, successive Irish governments were criminal in their neglect of these beautiful buildings, seeing them as emblematic of British imperialism. Irish Georgian Society has done sterling work in rectifying this situation throughout the country. However, even these stalwarts of conservation have neglected to some extent the peculiar and quirky phenomenon of the Georgian Irish foot-scraper and the brief but influential impact they had on the high society of this country.

That more and more of these relics of a bygone age seem to be inexplicably disappearing from the fronts of Georgian redbricks does not seem to be raising the alarm it merits; thus awareness must be made of their worth to our own historical and cultural heritage.

## the Monday blues

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And with the nights getting darker, Gardai warn that there will be more crimes by opportunist thieves once people continue to leave doors of homes open, or windows not locked properly.

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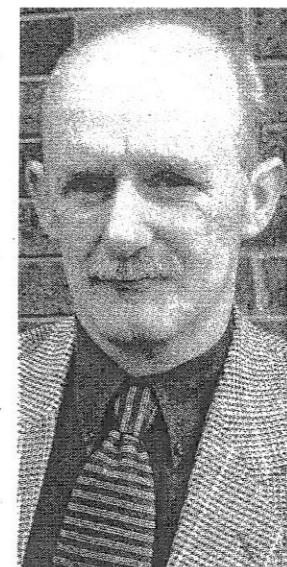
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"This incident just goes to show once again how careful one has to be and how sneaky a thief can be once given the opportunity," said Sgt Sheehan.

In a break-in at Castletroy thieves got into a house between 5am and 8.30am. The occupants awoke not having heard anything, but discovered a laptop was missing as well as a Philips home cinema system and some cash.

"There was no damage caused by the thieves to get into the house, but it's possible that a window may have been left open. I would ask every household everywhere is locked up and secure before you go



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Web: [www.stllogistics.ie](http://www.stllogistics.ie)

