

Georgian cellars filled with concrete amid safety concerns

■ Concern locally that Limerick's city centre's "unseen heritage" is in danger of being lost due to works

Alan Owens

LIMERICK city centre's "unseen heritage" is in danger of being destroyed, a leading member of a local environmental awareness group has claimed.

Ex-councillor Sean Griffin, who is honorary secretary of the Limerick Environmental Awareness Group, has claimed that the "unseen part of our heritage, will be wiped out" due to the fact that Limerick City Council do not currently have a heritage officer, conservation officer or architect in their employment, despite the millions of euro worth of works taking place currently in the city centre.

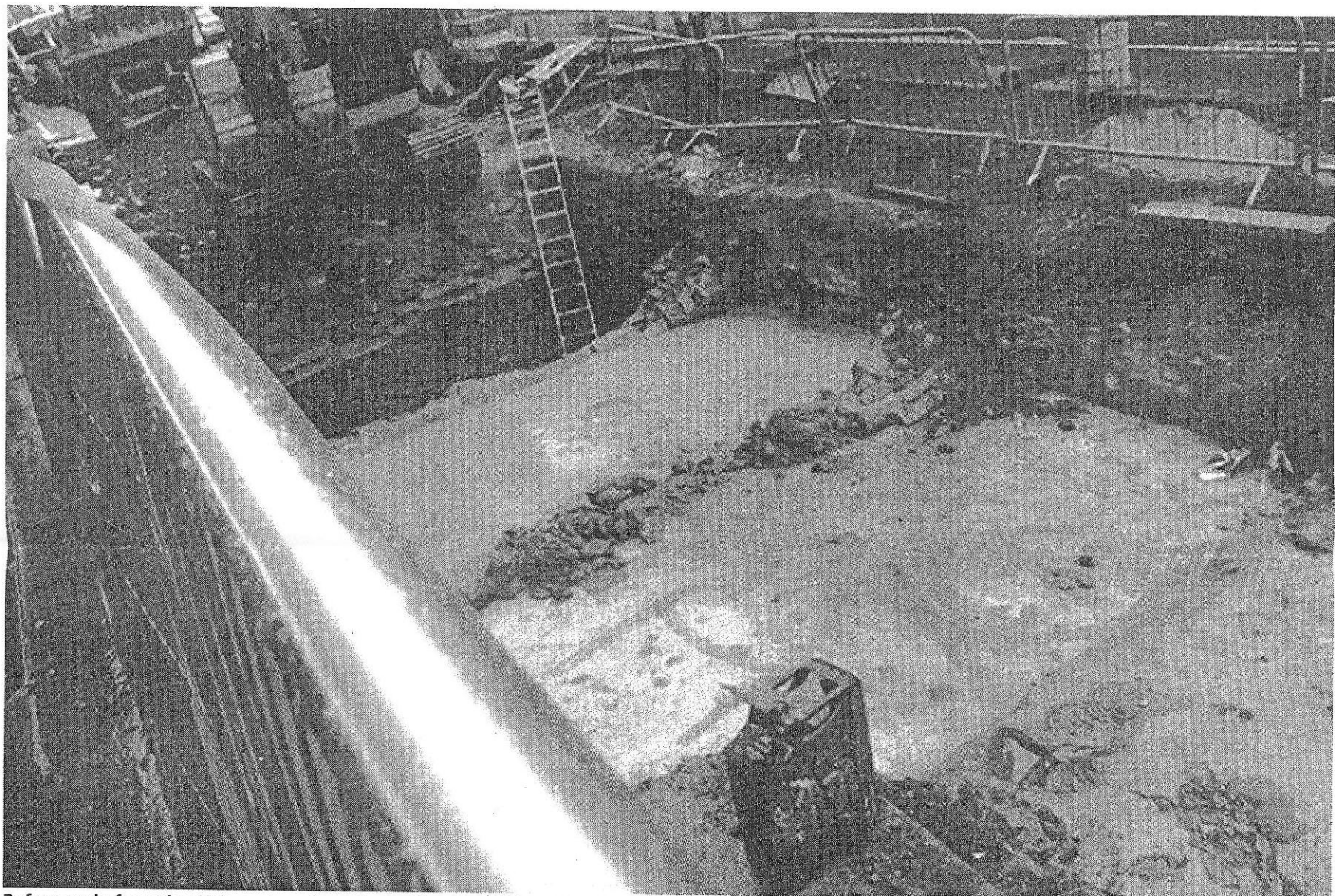
Outrage has been expressed at the decision to fill in a series of 18th century Georgian cellars with concrete on Limerick's William Street as the multi-million euro works to relay the street continue, with a local website recently publishing pictures of the works.

The popular Bock the Robber website carried pictures of the 200-year-old Georgian caverns which have been filled in with a foam concrete due to safety concerns, sparking a big reaction locally.

"One of the major problems that exist in the city is the fact that we don't have a specialist type of person working for Limerick City Council, they are operating without any expertise," said Mr Griffin.

"Until it is resolved, we are going to lose our heritage, particularly the unseen part of our heritage, it will be wiped out. The roadworks had to be done, but they did not have to destroy our heritage in doing so."

The Leader understands that this concrete-pouring solution to the problem of the network of underground tunnels that run throughout the city - due to the modern city centre's construction in Georgian times - has



Before and after: The 18th century Georgian cellars on William Street are filled in with concrete foam amid safety concerns

PICTURES: BOCKTHEROBBER.COM

taken place in Bedford Row, Thomas Street and now William Street - and may become a major issue when O'Connell Street is remodelled as part of the 'Orbital Route' plan.

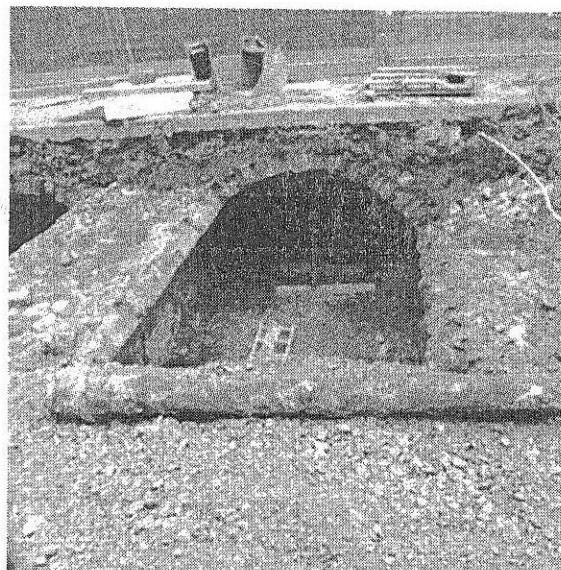
Vincent Murray, senior engineer with Limerick City Council, confirmed that some of the cellars had been filled in in recent weeks, stressing that they were not safe for the heavy overhead traffic on the street.

"In general, we are trying to maintain what is in situ," Mr Murray said. "Some of these cellars are damaged, they have cracks in their roofs and are unsafe. Basically, when they were constructed, they were designed for horses and

carts and not the traffic we have going through the city these days.

"Our project team surveyed them all and some of them have to be decommissioned as they are not safe in their current state. The roofs are taken off them and they are then filled with a medium strength concrete. It is a foam concrete which will fill in all the crevices and gaps," he added.

The local chapter of the Irish Georgian Society has yet to raise any concerns with the city council regarding the William Street cellars, but it is thought that it may do so when it comes to the relaying of O'Connell Street in the future.



What lies beneath: a Georgian cellar, exposed as the road works continue on William Street



Another look at the 18th century Georgian cellars that run under William Street