

Eyeing the beauty that surrounds you

By PADDY MORONEY

IF ANYONE has an eye for beauty in Limerick—and there must be many—then "Buildings of Irish Towns" will be a text which will please from cover to cover.

That it became a standard reference work before it was even published, recently, is an indication of how its fame had preceded it in the bookshelves.

Limerick receives, pictorially, more than its fair share of attention—the examples here are only some of the illustrations which kindle a new insight into one's own place.

Contrasting

Authors Patrick and Maura Shaffrey take a delight in the kind of contrast and charm to be found only in Irish towns.

"The atmosphere and appearance of Ennis, Co. Clare, is in marked contrast to Cookstown, Co. Tyrone," they say.

And they add: "Beragh, Co. Tyrone, is the quintessence of a small town, with its small-scale buildings arranged on either side of the single street. Galbally, Co. Limerick, is another small town with roughly the same population, providing a similar level of services, but in this instance, the buildings are grouped around a central open space."

"Buildings of Irish Towns" deals with the history and structure of Irish towns with the factors which have shaped their influence.

It explains the design, style, materials and craftsmanship of our building tradition. It points out the influence of prevailing architectural theories and the relationship of particular buildings to their surroundings.

It is the lot of every reviewer to find fault, sadly, and there is but one in the instance of this book: for a reference work, to be studied by students and professionals alike in the world of architecture, it is unfortunate that it lacks an index.

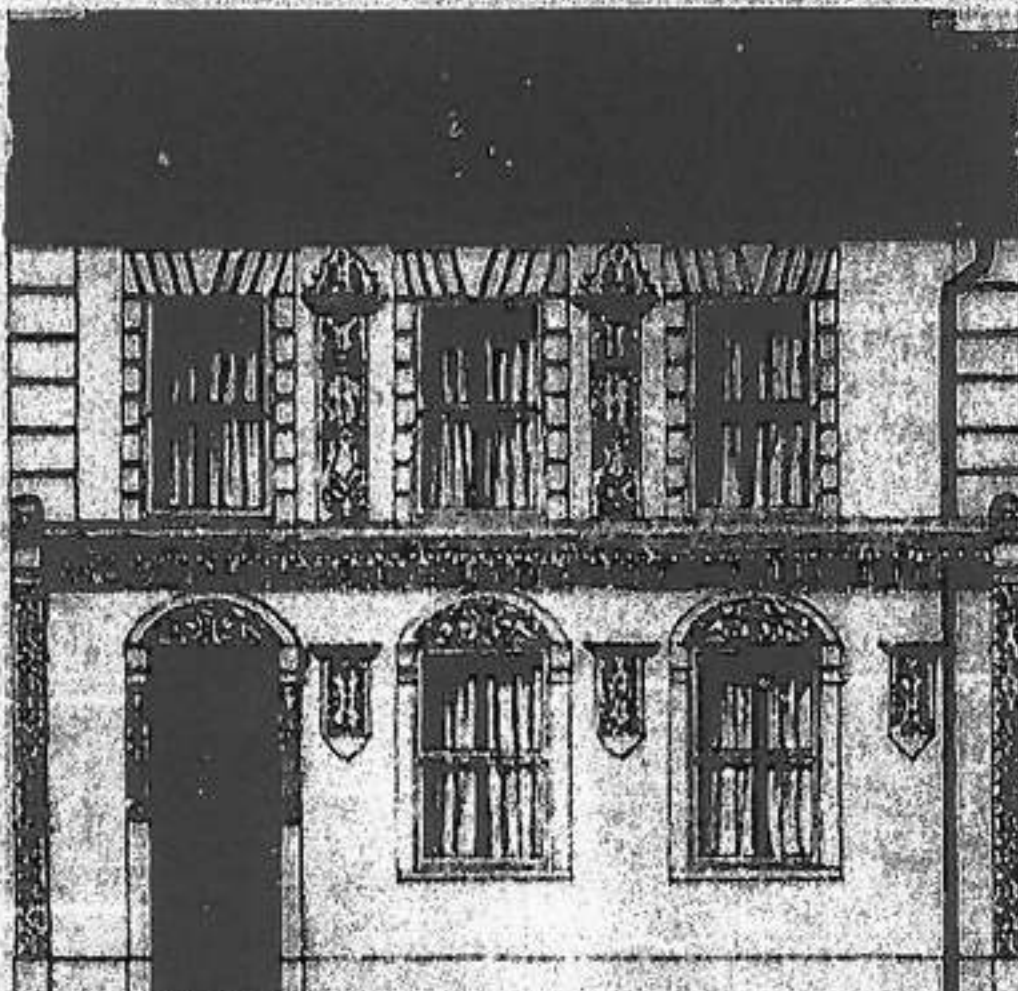
No mumbo-jumbo

But then again the publication avoids the trap of sinking into a mire of professional mumbo-jumbo: that it has to be professional one cannot quibble, that it is in fact readable to the ordinary layman one must admit. It is a charming work.

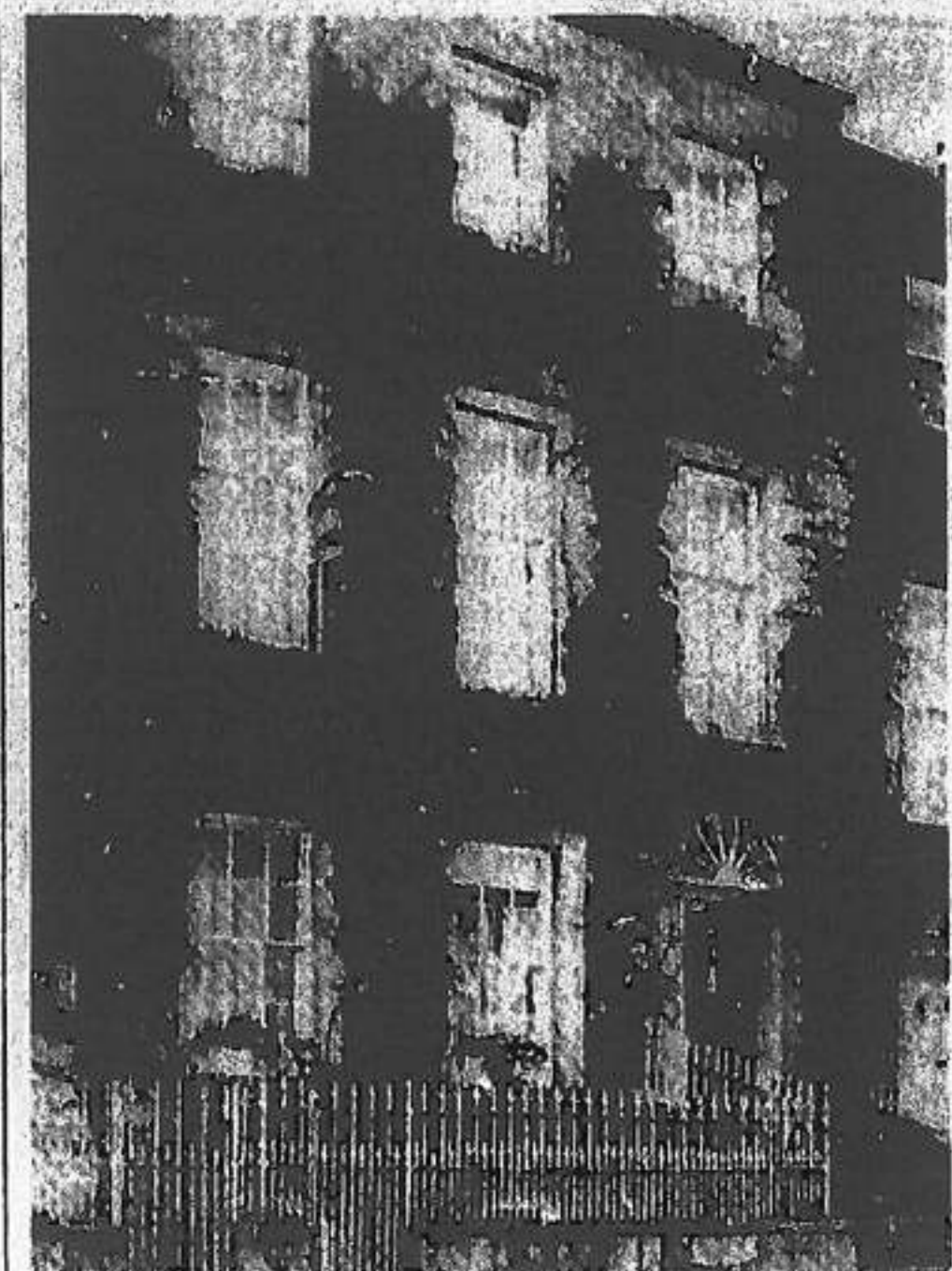
There are plenty of colour drawings by Maura Shaffrey, and there are chapters of the development of towns and their structure, housing, public buildings (only some, for even the very good would take in an encyclopaedia) commercial buildings, industry and transport.

And there is a description of architectural styles, a bibliography and a list of buildings with their architects, builders and location.

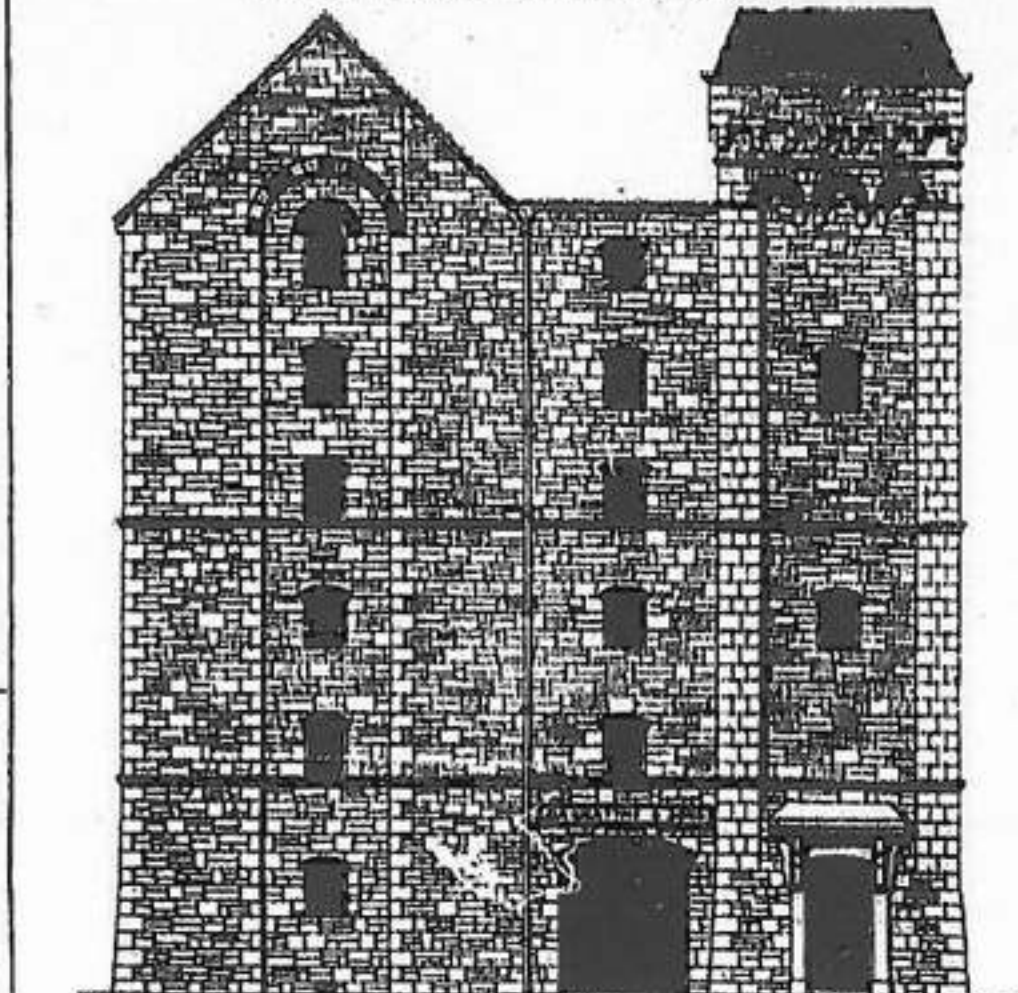
Limerick city is mentioned in the text a couple of times, though not liberally. This is no kind of text which dwells on a city or town, and leaves it at that. The authors are more concerned with the



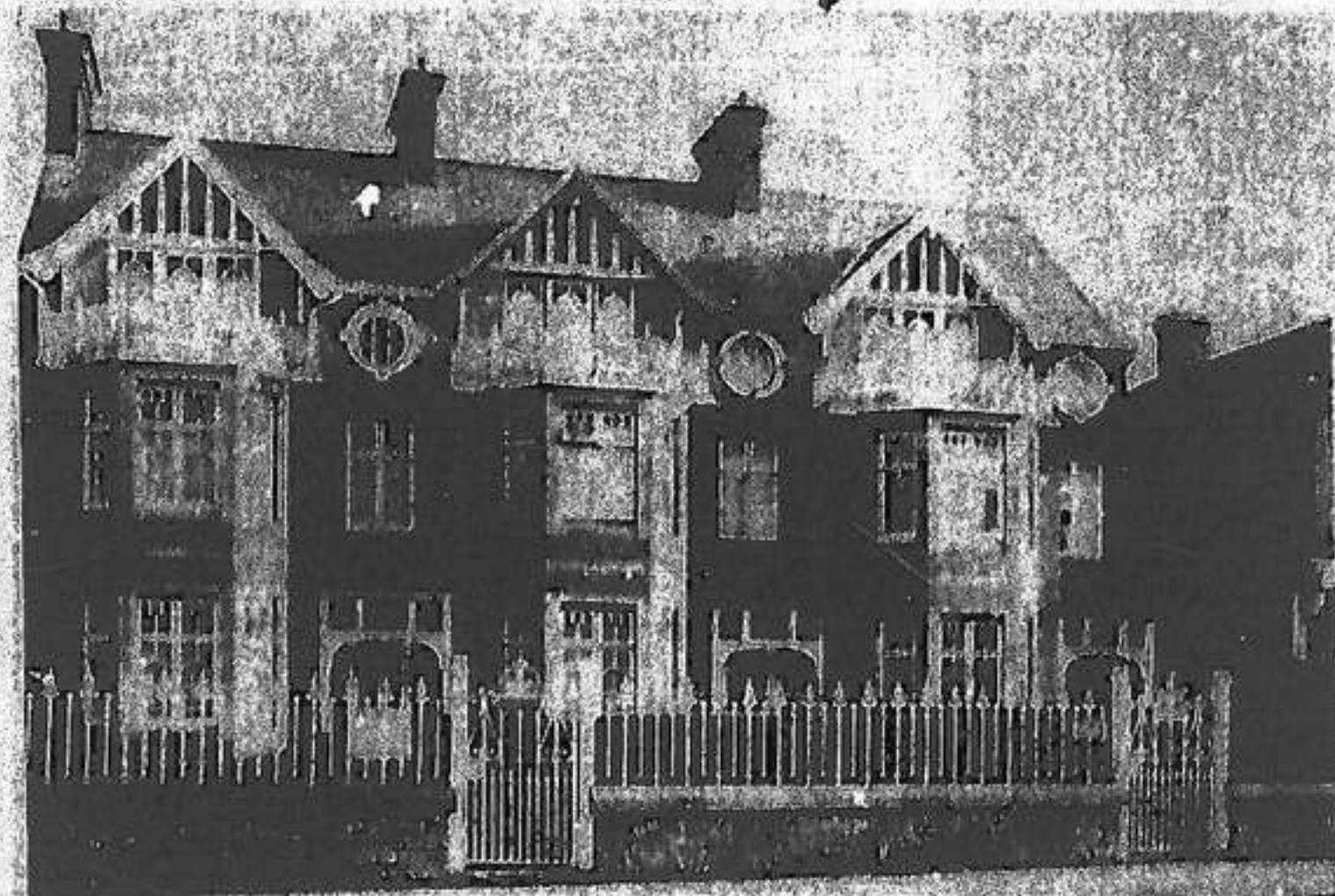
Abbeyfeale's Main Street—elaborate plasterwork on a small street house, perhaps by Pat McAuliffe or a local tradesman influenced by his work.



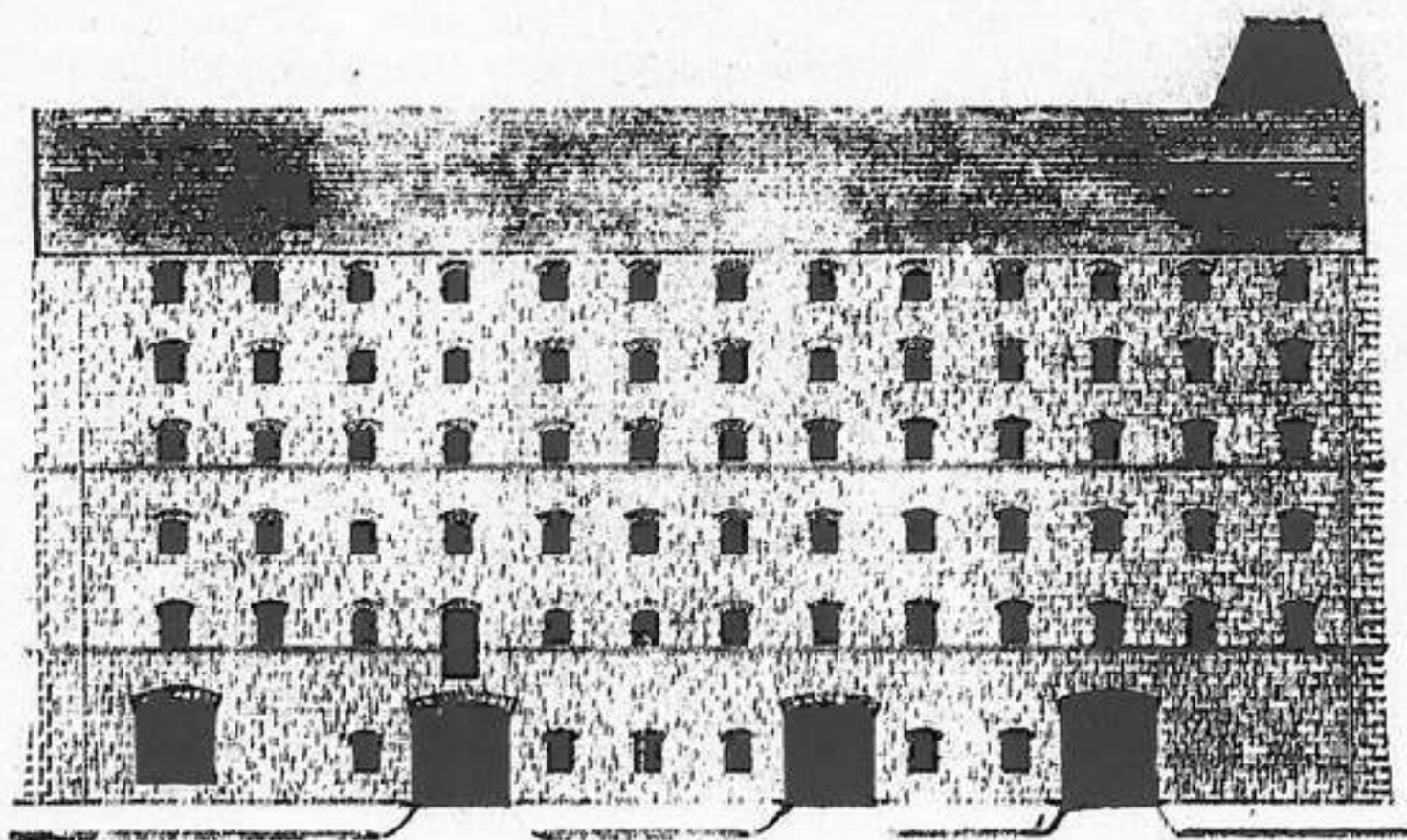
Tralee's Day Square—typical early 19th century houses, all with distinctive expressions, but in the classical style. They form a significant part of the local architectural heritage.



Limerick city, Dock Road—Ranks Mill. This is the north-eastern front, seen inside the dock gates.



Limerick city, Ballinacurra—early 20th century houses in a flamboyant mixture of Tudor with arts and crafts style. They are narrow-fronted and though the accommodation might not be much different from the earlier, more simple, Georgian style, the outward expression is much more elaborate.



Another view of Ranks Mill, this time from the public road. It was formerly Bannatyne's Mill. Ranks is a sturdy and robust building typical of the period, which is 19th century.

structure of Irish towns in general, and then make passing reference to examples.

Alms Houses

There is one reference to Limerick which may be of interest to the historian: "It is remarkable that cities such as Dublin, Water-

ford and Limerick—all strong mediaeval centres—have no remaining visible domestic buildings that pre-date 1600.

"Indeed, they have few, if any, pre-dating 1700."

The native Limerickman will immediately think of the Widows' Alms Houses, off Nicholas Street,

as a tailpiece to add to that passage.

But the work is, overall, a fine one which will find its place on the shelf of the devotee.

"Buildings of Irish Towns," by Patrick and Maura Shaffrey, The O'Brien Press, Dublin, price £19.95.

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