

## 1. The Civic Office Site

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LIMERICK CITY LIBRARY  
REFERENCE DEPT.

Located at Curraghgour Falls, the first ford across the Shannon above its mouth, the Civic Centre is probably close to the landing place of the Viking longships in the 9th and 10th centuries.

Throughout the middle ages, the site was occupied by the house and garden of the Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral, bounded on the west by the City wall and the river. A map of the City C.1590, giving a birds-eye view from the West, shows the Dean's house, fronting Newgate Lane, as a large two-storey slated house with chimney, the upper storey in the slope of the roof. The garden is shown bounded by three single-storey houses on the river side, and three along the east end of Bow Lane. In 1784, the Deanery moved to Henry Street, close to the new Bishop's Palace there.

The building of the City Jail on the site between 1811 - 1813 was planned as early as 1788. A plan of the site of that year in Limerick Museum shows the Deanery yard and adjacent strand crossed by the City wall, with the dimensions of the intended jail outlined. The City wall is described as staunch and durable, 14 feet high and 6 broad at the surface of the yard, and fronted with hewn stone. The strand is described as being a rocky foundation, dry in summer but with water rising 10 or 12 feet in spring tides. The 'Old Weigh House' of the Corporation is shown against the City wall at the end of Bow Lane. The office of Weighmaster was one of the sinecures of the Corporation, usually occupied by a member of the Council.

The jail replaced the one built on the site of the Tholsel, Mary Street, in 1750. In March 1811, the Grand Jury presented the sum of £6,123.4.3 for the purpose, to be assessed off the City and the county of the City at £1,000 per annum. The jail was finished in November 1813, and had a stage or drop in front for the execution of criminals. Lenihan (1866) reported that the stage had not up to then been used. The City Courthouse on the Merchant's Quay front of the jail was in use from the Mid - 1840's, when the old Courthouse on Bridge Street was sold for use as the Gerald Griffin Memorial School in 1845. The jail was closed in 1904, and leased in 1908 for 99 years to Geary & Sons, biscuit and sweet manufacturers. The factory closed and the contents were auctioned in March 1981. The Courthouse continued in use as the District Court until 1958, when it became the Motor Tax Office and the City Solicitors Office of Limerick Corporation.

At the Northern end of the Civic Office site was a mill, in the river, shown on a map of the City C.1575 with access through a gateway in the City wall over a triple-arched bridge. The map of C.1590 names this as Thomas Arthur's Mill, and shows a second mill, the Queen's Mill, at the landward end of the bridge. In 1789, the City Brewery was established on the site, and its foundation stone, showing the city arms, is incorporated in the cafeteria of the new centre.

A detailed description of the brewery, then called Mathew Fitt & Sons Newgate Brewery, is given in George S. Measom's 'Tours of Ireland', 1866. He describes it as one of the largest in the country and one of the first established in the south of Ireland. The brewery premises extended from Newgate Lane to King John's Castle. Towards the end of the 19th century, a small housing estate, called Nolan's Cottages after William Nolan, who was Mayor in 1895 and 1896 and Town Clerk up to the 1930's, was built on the Newgate Lane section of the Brewery.

To the South of the Civic Centre, where the county Courthouse and the potato market now stand, was the medieval port of Limerick. This was an irregular body of water surrounded by quays and jetties, and guarded by pier-like projections of the City wall terminating in towers. Dineley (1680) reported that it could accommodate vessels of around 200 tons. The waters of the port were gradually filled in and built upon as new quay walls were built southwards along the river in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. The last section of the port, the Long Dock, was covered over and opened as the potato market in 1843.

## 2. Government of the City - Locations

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Tradition states that the first seat of government of the City, the Viking Thingmote or Parliament, was on the adjacent site where St. Mary's Cathedral now stands. When Murtough O'Brien, King of Thomond and great-grandson of Brian Boru, moved his royal seat to Limerick in 1101, he built his palace on the same site. Donal Mor O'Brien, King of Limerick from 1164-1194, granted the site for the erection of the Cathedral.

The Tholsel (Town Hall) on Mary Street was built 1449 -1451, and was the meeting place of the Corporation for two centuries. At the time of the Civil Survey, 1654, the Tholsel is described as "The Old Courte" .. formerly the Towne Clerk's Halle .. " and the Town Hall is placed on Quay Lane (Bridge Street) at the east corner of Court House Lane.

In 1673, William Yorke, Mayor, built at his own expense the Exchange on Nicholas Street, and bestowed it on the Corporation. It was rebuilt by the Corporation in 1702 at a cost of £1,500 and rebuilt again in 1777/78. The Tholsel was rebuilt as the City Jail in 1750. On Quay Lane (Bridge Street) opposite Gerald Griffin School and now in the Cathedral grounds, the Corporation had a Mayor's House between 1720 - 1782.

The Reformed Corporation decided in 1843 to acquire the former premises of the Chamber of Commerce on Rutland Street as the Town Hall. Negotiations were begun in February, 1844, finalised in April, 1846, and the first meeting of the Corporation there was held on 21st January, 1847.

## CORPORATION MOVES

At the time of the Reform of Limerick Corporation in 1841, the old Corporation held its meetings at the Exchange in Nicholas St. It is to be noted that this Corporation did not administer the whole City of Limerick; St. Michael's Parish was administered since 1807 by 21 Commissioners. I have been unable to find out where said Commissioners held their meetings initially, but from 1827 they were based at 43 George's St. They were not affected by the 1841 legislation and continued to function until 1853, when they were finally merged with Limerick Corporation.

The first meeting of the Reformed Corporation of Limerick took place on 11 November 1841 in the County Court House. The old Corporation at first refused to recognise them, but soon gave in and the new Corporation held its meetings at the Exchange from 17 November 1841.

In 1846, the Councillors felt the Exchange was inadequate and bought the lease on the Commercial Buildings, which had previously housed the Chamber of Commerce, for £600 from James O'Hara.

The first meeting in the new premises took place on 21.1.1847, and the name was changed to the 'Town Hall'.

(One notes in passing that on the occasion of their move to new premises there was a lot of talk of providing a new Museum!)

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'O. Mahon', with a horizontal line underneath.