



Dutch-gabled houses of the Engishtown.

Terence Albert O'Brien, after the 1651 siege, when victims of the plague were carried there to die.⁽⁷⁾ However, in this same area (Mungret Lane), there is also mention of a store-house made of stone, then used by Cromwell's soldiers, which had hitherto been a hospital.⁽⁸⁾ It is possible therefore that Limerick had a hospital prior to 1600. However, if there is some doubt about the date for the city's first medical establishment, there is no doubt about the county. Archdell is

quoted as saying that in 1467 a hospital for lepers was founded, under the invocation of St. Brigid, at the village of Hospital in the County of Limerick.⁽⁹⁾ The hospital was supported by royal grant, and as late as the 16th century its master resided in Mungret Street. An establishment such as this was apparently most necessary, as leprosy, smallpox, malaria, jaundice and yellow fever were quite common at this time, interspersed with various famines and

plagues, the plague of 1651 being the most notable. Leprosy was on the wane by 1652, but it had previously been particularly prevalent in Munster.⁽¹⁰⁾

At this time, the land on which Barrington's Hospital is now built was then occupied by three stone houses, one of which had been owned by the Mayor of Limerick, Peter Fitz-Peter Creagh. During the 1651 siege, Creagh surrendered the city to Ireton, Cromwell's son-in-law. Living in the two adjoining houses were James Creagh and Patrick Harold, described as 'Irish Papists'. Once the houses were confiscated by Cromwell after the siege, they were leased to Christopher Sexton at a yearly rent of 4½ pence from Limerick Corporation.⁽¹¹⁾ Sexton's ancestor, Edmund Sexton, (a direct lineal ancestor of the Earl of Limerick) acquired this land and most of the city from Henry the VIII on the dissolution of the monasteries.⁽¹²⁾

Limerick had, however, a number of very eminent local doctors at this time, among them Dr. Thomas Arthur, whose healing devices consisted mainly of aromatic balsams and healing juices. He received his earlier education at Bordeaux and Paris, and graduated from the University of Rheims. However, unlike the later surgeons to Barringtons Hospital, who gave their services gratuitously, Dr. Arthur was very attentive to his fees, and realised a large fortune,⁽¹³⁾ much of which was confiscated by Cromwell after 1651, but restored to his estate after his (Arthur's) death.

By the mid-18th century, Limerick had two very different pictures to present to the public eye. Like many other cities, the busy commercial front hid the slums and large tenements where people lived in acute poverty; some of these hovels were located at the rear of what is now Barrington's Hospital. In 1769, there were approximately 58 grocery shops, 22 wine merchants, 14 brewers, 17 chandlers, 22 woollen and linen drapers, 7 tanners, a distillery, some brush-makers and a few salt-bailers in the city.⁽¹⁴⁾ The Barringtons are listed pewterers in Broad Street, though they later moved to Charlotte Quay. The chief imports at this time consisted of rum, sugar, timber, tobacco, wines, coal and salt. Exports comprised of beef, pork, butter, hides and rapeseed.

The poor in the tenements of the inner city suffered from serious malnutrition, which together with poor unsanitary living conditions, led to a high mortality rate. The situation on the land was even more acute, causing huge migration to the city. By 1770, the country had recovered somewhat from two severe famines, one in 1729 and another in 1741.

The diet of the city's poor consisted mainly of oatmeal and, in the rural areas, of potatoes, with sour milk occasionally. This sparked off the House of Commons inquiry in 1793 into the state of the poor in Ireland.⁽¹⁵⁾ The only reliable figures at