

# The Danish City *by W.W. Gleeson*

In its long history Limerick has experienced many invasions. The Danes were early visitors but the influence of their occupation and settlement still survives. Danish placenames and buildings have long been part of the topography of the city.

Danish names are still plentiful in Limerick. Among the best known such families are Harold (or Harrold), Peacocke and Dallman.

Perhaps the oldest Danish structure in Limerick is the Lax Weir - or what is left of it. The weir is almost as ancient as the city itself, and there are many references to its chequered history in the Davis Manuscript. The word "lax" means salmon in Danish, hence the name of the weir.

The Lax Weir (salmon traps or gaps) once connected Corbally with Parteenalax; while one has only to travel a short distance to College Park to view the park gardens, or allotments, which are laid out in similar fashion like those of Denmark... a headstone instead of hedging as the demarkation line of each plot.

Limerick's old landmark, the Tholsel - or what remained of it - vanished, at the hands of the Limerick Corporation, in the late autumn of 1978. Built by the descendants of Firgesius and his hordes of Vikings, who sailed up the Shannon in the year 812, and who in the years that followed made our ancient city the island we know it as today: King's Island.

The Tholsel (Danish for Town Hall) is only one of many traces left by the Danes, after they "called it a day", on Good Friday, February 25, 1014, and settled down to lead more peaceful lives.

The Davis Manuscript records the building of the Tholsel in 1449 and describes how the building was some centuries later turned into a prison.

**This year the foundation of the Tholsel's laid,  
Where justice in those days was well displayed,  
The use diverted, now 'tis common jail,  
Where men do lie, not wanting crimes - but bail.**

Quay Lane - now Bridge Street, since the bulding of Father Matthew Bridge in 1843 (or thereabouts) - is another legacy. The name "Quay" in Danish terminology (pronounced KAY) means the "principal street leading to the river or sea" (to quote King Haakon, according to the late Professor Haddon, of Wexford, a widely-travelled medico-missionary).

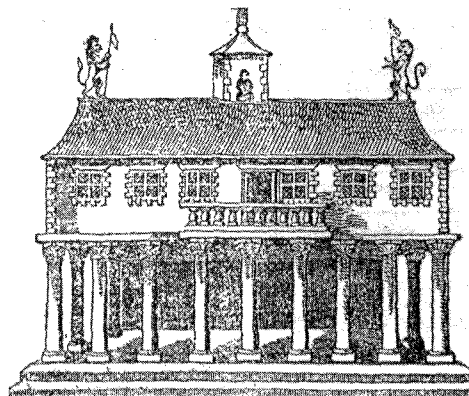
It is a striking fact that George's Quay, around the corner from Quay Lane School, is pronounced "Seoirse Ce", (note - KAY, not KEY!) While in Paris, "Quai D'Orsey", on the north bank of the river Seine, is pronounced KAY - horsey!

When Edmund Sexton Pery laid out the new town, or city of Limerick, as it is today, in the second half of the 18th century (1760), the first thing to go was the famous Walls for the greater part, which, as the records show, went into the construction of the quays along the Shannon, from Thomond Bridge to the West End.

Later, the County Infirmary and County Courthouse, both in St. Francis' Abbey, fell into disrepair; likewise Thomcore Castle, at the junction of Mungret Street/Broad Street/John's Mount (John Street), and the female prison in Bow Gate (St. Augustine Place).

It was not until 1936, however, that the tidal wave of destruction really commenced.

At a meeting of the Limerick City Council, the "Fathers", then numbering 40 members, by unanimous



The Tholsel, 1681.

vote, gave permission to demolish the Tholsel and Thomcore Castle, and that was that.

Next followed Fish Gate, alongside the remains of the Augustinian and Dominican churches - now a car park. Corbally and Plassey Mills met with a similar fate, the rubble being used to build the annexe of St. Joseph's Hospital. No. 29 Mungret Street, a solid four-story building where Sarsfield lived, and which was later the Catholic bishop's house where such notables as Owen Roe O'Neill and Archbishop John Baptist Rinucinni dined, was demolished to make way for a supermarket - now yet another car park! All this destruction continued the coming into operation of the City and County Management Act, November 8, 1934.

Some years ago, two brothers residing in Castle Lane, off Athlunkard Street, discovered in their back yard the foundation stone of the first Jesuit House in Ireland. It bore the inscription: "A Deo Victoria, 1634". Today it may be seen under the right window of the Crescent Hall, in splendid condition. Behind a notice board on the side wall of the Brazen Head in O'Connell Street, lies hidden the foundation stone of the re-built Irishtown Brazen Head (1794) from its original building, 23 John Street, removed by the late Donough O'Malley, when he owned the "Head".

Regarding the destruction of famous city landmarks, Councillor Thady Coughlan, when Mayor, had this to say: "There is far too much vandalism and destructoin of public property, and I would strongly appeal to the citizens to demonstrate clearly that they are not prepared to sit back and allow the good name of the city to be sullied by irresponsible blackguards". That was in July, 1975.

Who then, were the "irresponsible blackguards" of whom Mayor Coughlan spoke?

Judging by the way things look at present O'Brien's Castle (or what remains of it) in Athlunkard Street), Abbey North Gate, Town Wall Gate and West Watergate, won't be long there. Will yet another of Lord McAulay's travellers from far-off New Zealand stand on the broken arch of Baal's Bridge, there to view the sites where once stood the glory and the gory or our blood and race, St. Mary's Cathedral and King John's Castle while...

**The names of their founders  
have vanished in the gloom.  
Like the dry bough in the fire  
or the body in the tomb;  
But today in the ray, their  
shadows still they cast,  
These temples of forgotten  
gods - these relics of the past.**