

GIFTS TO THE CITIZENS

by Kevin Hannan

Before the Williamite sieges of 1690 and '91, the two main suburbs of the city of Limerick were on and around the high road to Thomond and outside John's Gate on the Kilmallock road. Though the number of cottages of the market gardeners in Park, Rhebogue and Singland were considerable, they were more scattered. Shortly before the arrival of William of Orange at the gates of the city, the inhabitants of these areas were forced to destroy their homes and all other buildings that might have afforded shelter to the besieging army. They were the first victims of the sieges and positive losers from the outset, for they would never see their old homes again. We are fortunate in having a first-hand account of this self-inflicted destruction of Garryowen and Thomondgate from a Williamite scribe, John Stevens:

'Though the buildings of the suburbs were not for the most part equal to those within the walls, yet all these at our first coming, except that small part about St. Francis Abbey in the Island, were laid level with the ground for the better defence of the place, and all the gardens and orchards utterly destroyed'.

Thus the two main battlefields were cleared for action, the results of which make a sad page in our history. After the

sieges, of course, Garryowen and Thomondgate came back into their own again, and the market gardeners of Park returned to their ancient plots; but there was little further suburban development for nearly seventy years, and then the main thrust was towards the desolate, impoverished parish of St. Michael. This was the suburb that was to become the new city of Newtown Pery.

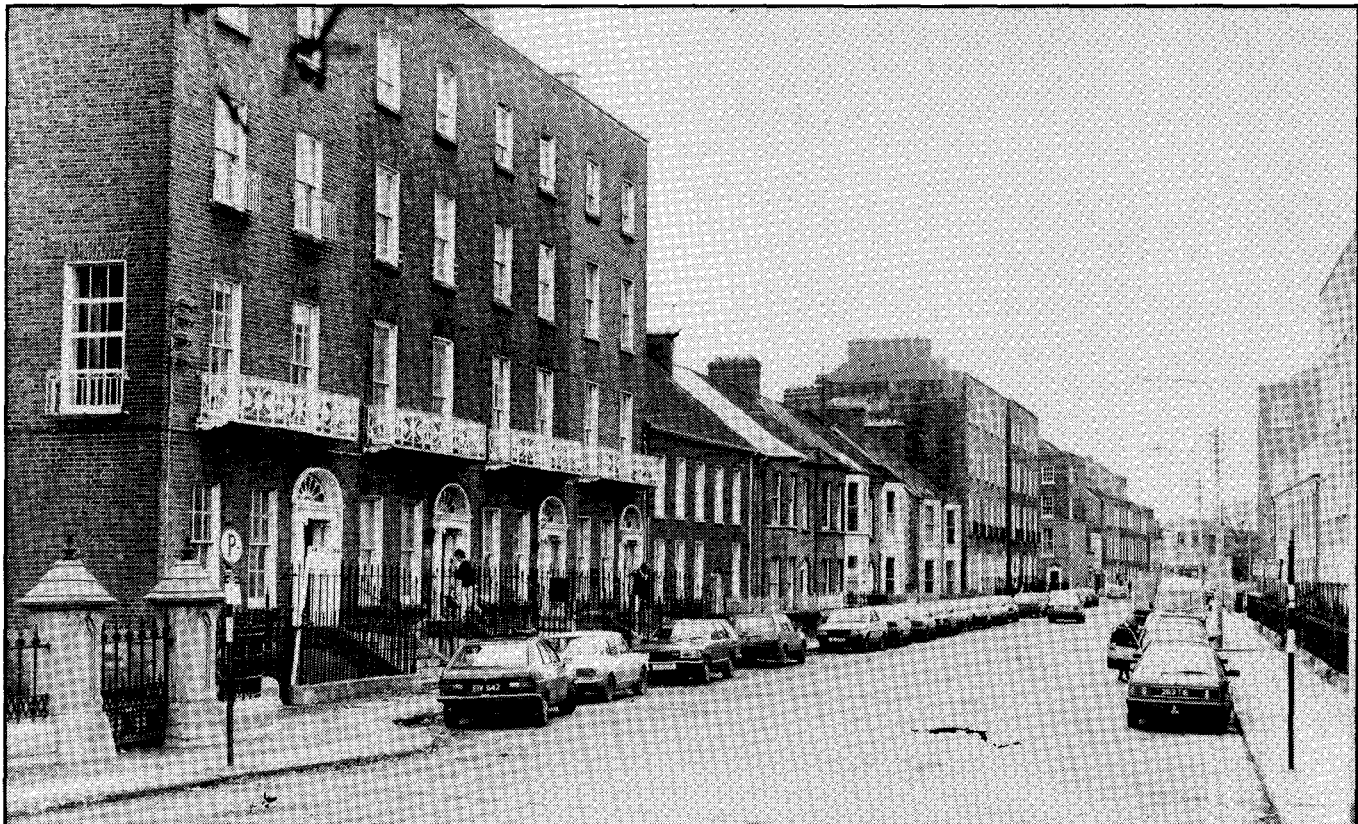
It was not until the construction of the Wellesley (now Sarsfield) Bridge in 1835 that development took place along the right bank of the Shannon River downstream of the city, though the magnificent Strand House had been built in 1770 by Giles Vandeleur: but it was the ever resourceful Barrington brothers that made possible the development of much of this land, which had been subject to considerable flooding at every spring tide until they completed the great embankment between Stonetown and Coonagh. This thoroughfare came to be known as 'Barrington's Bank', and became one of the popular 'walks' away from the city up to the motor car 'take over' of the 1950s, when most people seemed to find more pleasure in travelling to places farther away. The bank, though still as attractive as ever, temporarily lost its popularity as a

recreational area, but still performed its primary function of containing the great tides of the Shannon.

With the opening of the new Shannon Bridge earlier this year, the bank has happily gained a new lease of life, as citizens daily stroll along beside the Shannon to view the estuary from the splendid vantage point that is Barrington's Pier. The pier itself was built by the Barringtons, in conjunction with the landlord, the Marquis of Lansdowne, into the deep water of the river. Both the pier and the bank remain as memorials to the Barringtons, and will continue to remind generations to come of the great charity and benevolence of the family.

When these great works were completed, at much cost, the Barringtons built a beautiful house near the pier and adjacent to the ruin of Kilrush Church - the oldest building in or about the city - and called it Old Church. After some time they also built two more fine houses, Shannon Lawn and Tivoli, in the same townland.

After the opening of the new bridge, many wealthy families followed the Barringtons into the virgin greenery now made more accessible by the new thoroughfare, and soon a building boom provided a bonanza for the city's building workers. The development proceeded with remarkable speed, and soon Limerick's most select suburb was the



Barrington Street, Limerick, 1988.



Barrington's Bank, Limerick, 1988.

envy of those in less congenial situations. Forty years later, the list of householders contains the names of many of the well known merchants and business people of the nineteenth century: the Alexanders lived at *Beechlawn*, *Bellvue* and *Evergreen*. This family had a ship chandlery at the corner of William Street and O'Connell Street. Eugene O'Callaghan was at *Lota*, and M.J. Cleary occupied *Fort Mary*. The Russell family, friends of the Barringtons, had two of the finest houses in the area, *Thornville* and *Shelbourne*, the latter probably the finest of the lot. George Boyd, of the famous firm that still bears his name, was at *Kilmoyle*. Other splendid residences were *Oreland* (McKern's); *Wellesly Lodge* (Laird's); *Portland* (Murray's); *Shelbourne Cottage* (McNamara's); *Shannon Lawn* (Spillane's); *Sunville* (Cruise's); *Ardhu* (Revington's) and *Shannonville* (de Courcy's).

Encouraged by the enterprise of the Barringtons, the Russells saw the potentialities of the reclaimed land by the river and, in 1851, commenced building their flax-spinning and weaving mill at Lansdowne. They also built the Lansdowne Shipyard, the enclosure and slipway of which could be seen up to the development of the Shannon Bridge a few years ago. Many fine vessels were built here before the turn of the century, including the *Shelbourne*, a ship that sailed the Cape route to Australia on many occasions. Tom Crehan, father of the famous Shakespearian actress, Ada Rehan, worked in the yard as a shipwright up to 1860, when he emigrated with his family to the United States.

The spinning and weaving mill operated for a number of years before it

shut down dramatically as a result of being sabotaged by a disgruntled master weaver who had been brought in as a specialist some time before. This man made a hurried departure from the city, and was followed to the railway station by the whole displaced staff of the factory. Whether he brought with him any permanent marks of this encounter is not recorded.

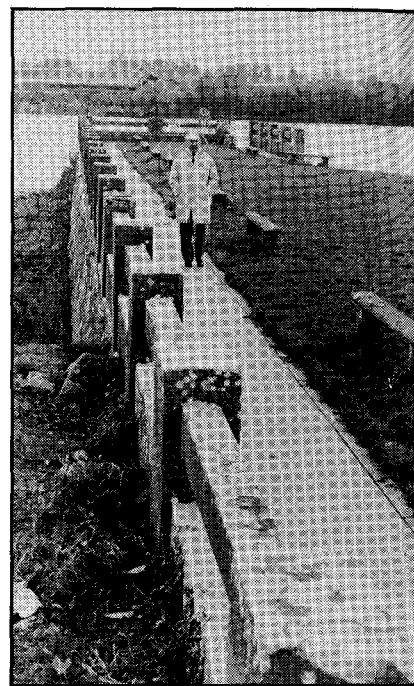
The factory re-opened after a few years as a flour and corn mills. In a short time, the concern passed into the hands of the Cleeve brothers, who re-arranged it for the manufacture of butter and other milk products. This business prospered to such an extent that a new company was formed by Thomas Cleeve, Edmond Russell and M. Beauchamp.

In 1889, this firm, (to be known for the next eighty years as 'Cleeve's'), opened their grand new factory across the road from the old weaving mill. They established creameries all over Munster, and their produce was exported to America and many European countries. Chocolate was also manufactured there but in a separate building adjacent to the main factory. This smaller building was later developed as a toffee and confectionery manufactory.

Thomas Henry Cleeve (afterwards Sir Thomas) was born in June, 1844, at Richmond, Quebec. He came to Limerick as a young man to assist his uncle, Mr. Journeaux, proprietor of J.P. Evans and Company, a prosperous concern with extensive premises in William Street and Thomas Street. He quickly rose to a prominent position in the firm, but was for ever restless and eager to get on and make the most of his time. His first adventure outside the confines of J.P. Evans and Co. was at a mill on Howley's Quay, where, with the assistance of his three brothers who had joined him some time before, he engaged in the baling of hay. This commodity was in great demand at the time and the compact, handy-sized bales were easy to handle and economic to transport. A sizeable quantity of this product had a ready market in England, which was, at that time, engaged in the Zulu War.

Cleeve, whose enterprise was matched only by the Barringtons, Peter Tait and John Norris Russell, was to become chairman and managing director of the Condensed Milk Co. of Ireland, and senior partner of Cleeve Bros. of Limerick, London and Liverpool. He became the sole proprietor of the old firm of J.P. Evans and Co., where he had launched his career, and was a large shareholder in the Cleeve Canning and Cold Storage company of New Westminster, British Columbia. Despite his many business commitments, he took a lively interest in local affairs. He was a deputy lieutenant for Limerick City, and headed the poll in the Castle Ward in 1905. He was High Sheriff in 1899, 1900, 1901 and 1908, the year of his death.

Alas, the great Institution of Cleeve's has lost its identity, and the fine stone building erected with so much promise, just a hundred years ago, stands as an anti-climax to great enterprise and endeavour. The condensed milk and the famous toffee are only a memory for the older folk, but the area around the old factory and the North Circular Road remains as one of the most select suburbs in the city.



Barrington's Pier, Limerick, 1988.

Strangely enough the Barringtons took no part in the commercial development on the lands which they had reclaimed from the muddy waters of the estuary. This development, the hospital on George's Quay and the grand castle at Glenstal, were the results of their more noble ambitions, which drained their resources, and might even have proved ruinous to themselves, yet they were never tempted to go back into business, an activity that ceased with the closure of their pewter works on Charlotte's Quay. They had greater things in hand for the benefit of their fellow citizens, for they were free from private spleen and avarice. Their benevolent actions were always supported by the hearty concurrence of the people at large, though, unfortunately, the purses of the great majority were not adapted to the purpose of practical assistance.

While the future of the silent, empty hospital is uncertain, the building, and the pier and embankment at the head of the estuary, will continue to serve Limerick well into the future as memorials to their founders and compliments to their virtue, for no family has served the city so effectively as the Barringtons.

Long may they be remembered!



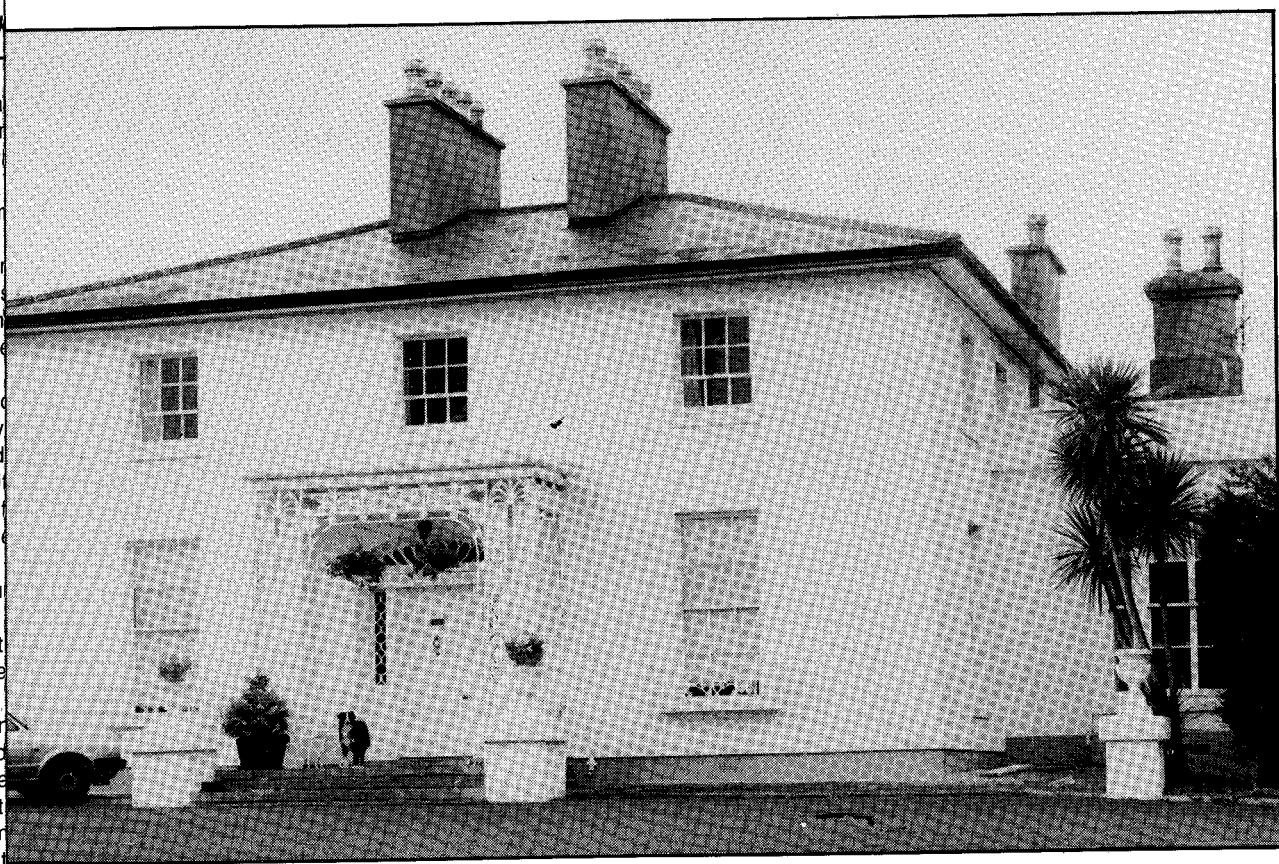
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'Tivoli', North Circular Road, Limerick, 1988, formerly a Barrington residence.

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