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Introduction

"The honest desire of rescuing our history from oblivion, of transmitting remarkable events to posterity, supports the historian in his undertaking, renders him superior to every difficulty, and repays the toil of reading and collating a number of manuscripts and old books." Thus wrote John Ferrar, author of the first history of Limerick, in the preface to that work, in 1787.

Within its limitations, the quotation gives us an attractive and idealistic description of the vocation of the historian. The passage of nearly two centuries has, however, altered the concept of what history is all about. The study of "remarkable" people and events has invariably meant history written from above and conceived in the narrow terms of the ruling families and a chosen cultural elite. As a result, high politics and the doings of the rich and powerful occupied the centre of the historical stage through the centuries. The annals of the poor are, by comparison, so brief as to be almost non-existent. It is time the balance was redressed and history opened up in a broad, democratic way.

People without a full and unbiased knowledge of the culture and civilisation of their locality and country are prisoners of history. Throughout Ireland today a strong desire has grown for a knowledge and understanding of the island's history. The continuing Northern Ireland conflict has increased the urgency of this desire. It is therefore appropriate that The Old Limerick Journal should appear at this time.

Local history has long been the province of enthusiasts, some with more enthusiasm than understanding. Most local historians developed and wrote in isolation from their fellows. But at least one attempt was made to bring all local history enthusiasts under the one umbrella.

The Old Limerick Society was founded in November, 1943, with high hopes and ambitions. The aims of the Society were:

1. To promote the study of the history and antiquities of Limerick.
2. To acquire and conserve local documents, books, plans, etc.
3. To create and foster an interest in everything pertaining to Old Limerick, and thereby help to cultivate a better civic spirit.

The Society also worked to preserve local monuments, buildings, documents, legends, ballads, etc.—which were in danger of being lost—and to record and maintain sites of historic interest.

In December 1946 the Society produced its first, and only, journal. This magazine made a valuable contribution to the study of Limerick's history. The journal contained five articles, a book review and an account of the proceedings of the Society, which included talks during the winter sessions and summer visits to historic places.

The Society continued in existence for a few more years but eventually petered out in 1953. Its dissolution was a serious loss to the cultural life of Limerick. Since that time much good work has been done by the Thomond Archaeological Society, the local press and individuals in the promotion of the study of local history.

This journal and the re-formed Old Limerick Society wish to take up, continue and expand on the work of the 1940s group. We hope our readers will find an immediate sense of the past and its people in these pages. We hope they will find this sense in pictures and articles on the buildings, streets and waterways of the city, on the fields and farms of the country - and the workers who lived and laboured on them through the centuries.

At the beginning of this Introduction the point was made about how remarkable it is that so much history has been written from the vantage point of those who have had the charge of running - or attempting to run - people's lives and how little from the real-life experience of people themselves. This journal will attempt to chart some of the real-life experience of Limerick and its people.

*A knowledge of the past is essential
for an understanding of the present*