

LIMERICK

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LIMERICK IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY HELD MANY UNIQUE BUILDINGS, ONE OF THESE WAS KNOWN AS 'ROCHE'S FOLLY' OR 'ROCHE'S HANGING GARDENS'

William Roche was born in Limerick in 1775 to Stephen Roche and Sarah O'Brien. His father was the son of John Roche, a Limerick merchant, and his mother was the heir to large estates in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick and Tuam in Galway. His uncle, Philip Roche, built the Mardyke Warehouse in 1787, which is now known as the Granary where the Limerick City Library is held. The street sign he inserted during construction can still be seen today.

William and his brothers were keen financiers, he and three of his four brothers went into banking. George and James, set up a wine exporting company from Bordeaux, France. While in France, James was imprisoned for 6 months in France during the French Revolution. After his release, James returned to Ireland where he set up a bank in Cork with another brother, Stephen.

In 1801, William set up a bank in Charlotte's Quay, Limerick with his brother Thomas, with whom he would remain in business with for over 20 years. Three years later they bought a building on 99 George's Street (O'Connell Street) which they moved into two years later. During the 1819-1820 National Bank Crash, they were the only bank to survive in Limerick and in 1824 they were the only bank recorded in Pigott's Trade Directory of Limerick. In 1825 their bank was acquired by Provincial Bank and in 1966 it was acquired by A.I.B. Bank.

Not only...

WILLIAM ROCHE'S HANGING GARDEN:

In 1808 William Roche built his extensive garden to the rear of his bank on George's Street to Henry Street, covering approximately one acre of land. These cost £15,000 at the time, which is the equivalent of €600,000 today. At its highest point, the garden reached 70 feet above street level. The terraces were connected by stairways.

The garden sat on a series of vaulted roofed stores. The floor of the garden was flagged and cemented together and excess water was directed out of the garden by lead pipes to prevent leakage to the stores below. The soil in some of the terraces went up to 5 foot deep. The garden was heated and cooled by a series of flues, channels, vents and windows.

The Top Terraces of the gardens were hot houses, conservatories and glass houses. Here he grew grapes, pineapples, peaches and oranges. The Middle Terraces were where he grew pears, apples, plums, and various types of vegetables, with a section in the centre for melons and cucumbers.