

LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Celebrating
250 years -
1768 - 2018

DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE

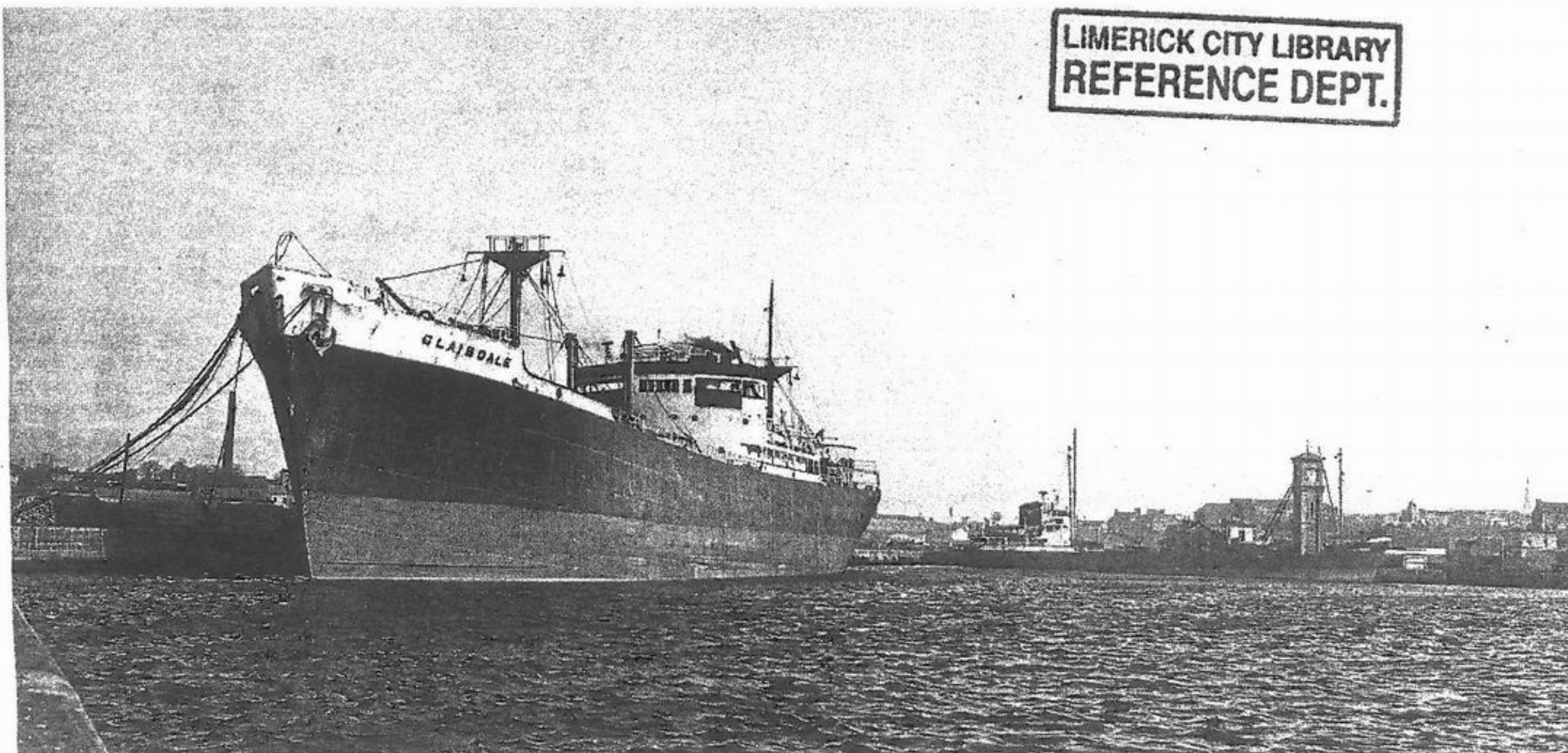
INSIDE THIS WEEK



Do you know them?
HELP US FILL IN OUR VAST ARCHIVE BY
NAMING THESE PEOPLE PAGE 12

'Sitting on the dock of the bay': Busy times at Limerick Docklands

In the first week of November 1962, the Limerick Docks experienced one of its busiest periods in many years. The total gross tonnage of ships in the Docks at the time was approximately 22,000, with various cargoes totalling near 10,000 tons. All union dock workers were fully employed discharging the cargo even so three ships were tied up due to an absence of skilled labour. The ships came from Denmark, Russia and America



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Retailer's roots run deep

FROM THE ARCHIVES

SHARON SLATER

LIMERICK CHRONICLE HISTORIAN



THE Roche merchant family left their mark on Limerick society from the mid-eighteenth to early nineteenth century. John Roche and his wife Anne Stackpool had four sons: Stephen, Philip, John and Thomas, all of who would become independently wealthy in their own right.

John Snr was described as a merchant prince. In 1755, he fitted out a huge ship, the largest of its kind ever seen in Limerick, and dispatched it to the West Indies. He had it mounted with 14 sixteen-pounder guns to fend off pirates on its haz-

ardous journey.

While his sons Stephen and Philip remained in Limerick, John continued the family business in Dublin and Thomas in Rotterdam. Stephen was the father of William Roche of Roche's Hanging Gardens fame. John and Anne also had two daughters: Christina and Anastasia. Anastasia married another Limerick merchant, Ignatius Nihell, who was not as successful as his brother-in-laws, having lost his fortune and ending up in debtor's prison in England in 1769.

His son Philip Roche, born March 23, 1820, left his mark throughout

the city, but is most well known for the Granary building on Michael Street. A contemporary remembered him as "a merchant prince and venture" and Fr. White would list him as one of the most successful businessmen in southern Ireland at that time.

Until recently, it was believed that Philip Roche, due to his Catholicism, was prevented from buying land in his own right, so asked a protestant friend to lease the land for the Granary. In fact, Philip Roche took out a lease for the term of 999 years on 25 March 1779 from Edmond Sexton Pery and quickly began his development of the area. He erected the Granary building in 1787.

Some Limerick Catholic families such as the Arthurs and Roches were prominent in business before the Catholic Relief Act of 1778. This act allowed Catholics to inherit or purchase land. Although, it was also not unusual for any merchant, no

This morning, at his residence, in Lower Glentworth-street, WILLIAM ROCHE, Esq. late M.P. for the city Limerick, and a Magistrate of the Borough, also Life Commissioner of St. Michael's, and President of the Limerick Institution. The demise of this highly respectable gentleman, whose life, for half a century, has been closely identified with the welfare of Limerick and warmly devoted to the best interests of Ireland, must elicit an expression of universal sympathy and regret from his countrymen. His intellectual endowments were of an eminent order, and derived additional lustre in public as well as private society from patriotic sentiment, refined courtesy, and genuine benevolence of heart. Mr. Roche was the first Roman Catholic gentleman in Ireland appointed to the commission of the peace for a corporate borough, and he was elected member for his native city in December, 1832, which he continued to represent in three Parliaments, with undeviating integrity, and, we shall add, for the benefit of his constituents, without a compromise of honor or principle, for the period of nearly ten years. Mr. Roche took leave of public life in July, 1841; and it was a remarkable incident in his political career, that when pressed to declare himself a Repealer, upon the eve of an election, and when his return was threatened by the champions of that measure, the late Daniel O'Connell declared in Limerick that "William Roche was the only man in Ireland from whom he would not demand a pledge." The remains of this lamented gentleman will be interred in the Stackpole vault of his family at the Cathedral of Limerick, on Monday next.

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On April 27, 1850 the Chronicle recorded the death of merchant William Roche

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The Roche family left its stamp on Limerick

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matter their religion, to take out leases as opposed to owning plots outright.

Philip had excellent vision when it came to financial investments. He was an adventurer, importer and exporter of flax, cereals and seeds, and one of the most successful business figures of his day. He used the Granary warehouse to store the provisions he traded in, which he mostly supplied to the government.

Just like his father, Philip had his own trouble with hazardous trading to the West Indies. In 1792, when England was at war with Holland Philip sent out two ships from Limerick under the Dutch flag. These ships were seized and the goods valued at £15,000 were divided among the British fleet and army. Even here we can see how wealthy Philip was, trading in goods of that value when his ground rent for the St Michael's area was just over £1 a year.

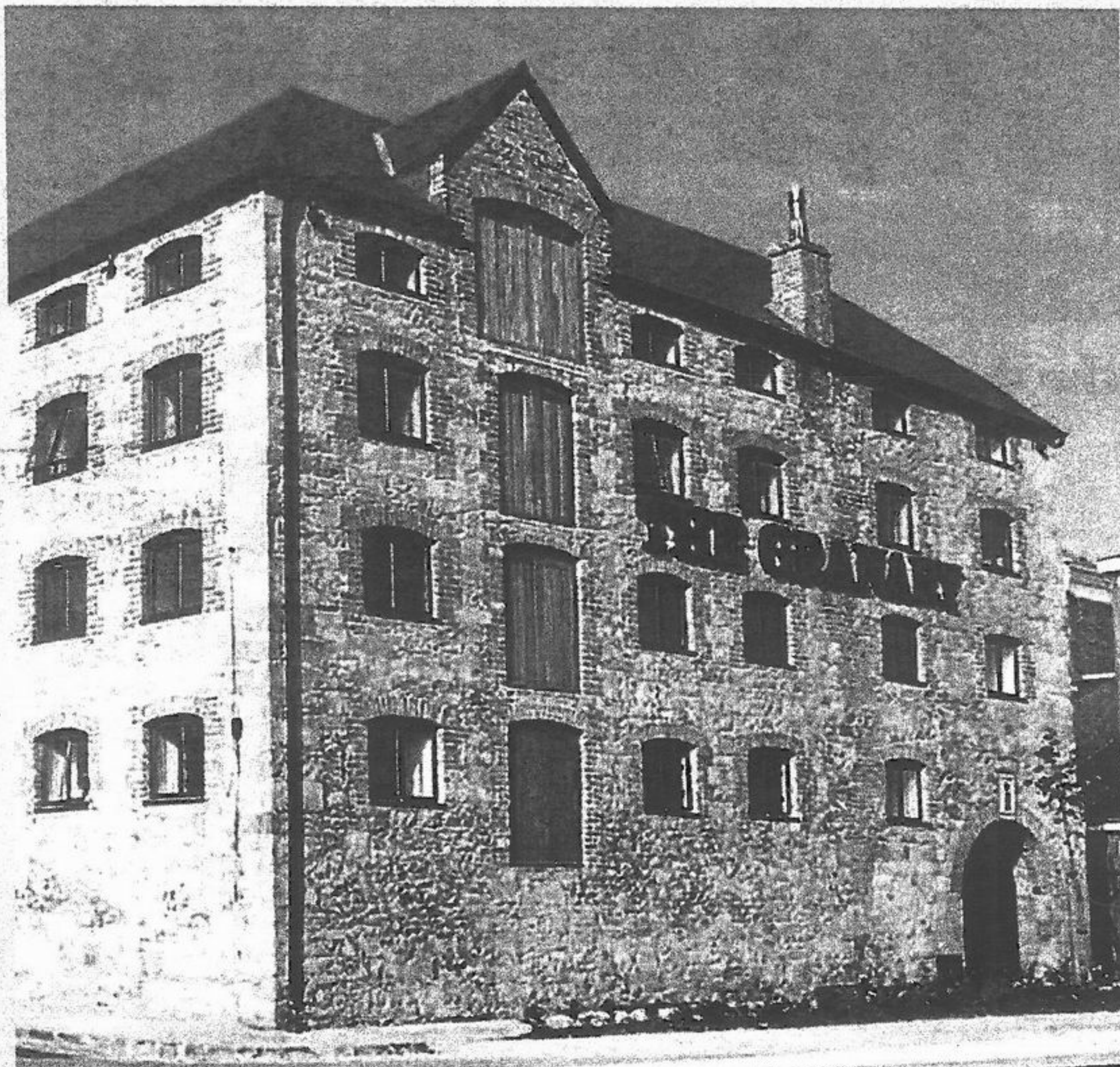
The Limerick Chronicle reported Roche's death on June 7, 1797:

"On Sunday morning, died at his seat at Newcastle, after short illness, Philip Roche John, Esq, of this City, well known as one of the most extensive Merchants in the Kingdom. — Panegyric, which has nothing new to bestow upon the dead, was never more justly applied than to his character; by his deservedly lamented death, the industrious Farmer as well as the numerous Poor have lost a valuable friend, his Family the best of Husbands and Fathers, and the World in general a good and wise Man. — His remains were interred in the Family vault in Drumbanny Church-yard."

Jim Kemmy wrote that Philip was a "charitable man (who) frequently gave grain to the starving people of the city." His last will and testament give a sense of his caring for both members of his family and his wider community can be seen. He also set out a provision to repay the sum of the debts of his deceased brother Thomas.

Philip Roche married Margaret Kelly and had two children, John Philip and Margaret. Philip outlived his only son by 9 years. So the Granary building was bequeathed to his extended family, the Kellys. Philip Roche was married to Margaret Kelly, the daughter of John Kelly, merchant, who erected the altar in St Mary's Chapel in 1760. John Kelly's son Michael was married to Christina Roche, sister of Philip Roche who was then the uncle twice of Thomas Kelly.

Philip Roche also built a number of houses on Bank Place and Rutland Street. Bank Place takes its name from the Bank of Limerick,



The Granary on Michael Street was built in 1787 by Philip Roche. It was used as a warehouse until the 1970s. In February 1980 the Shannon Free Airport Development Company bought the entire building, which was extremely dilapidated. The Limerick Library relocated to the building in 1985 after a redevelopment costing £3 million

"These ships were seized and the goods valued at £15,000 were divided among the British fleet and army"

popularly known as Maunsel's Bank, which was located at No 6 Bank Place. This bank was established in 1789 and ultimately failed in the banking crash of 1820.

Philip was the uncle to the banking Roche's, who had buildings at what is now 97 to 99 O'Connell Street. It was at the rear of these building that his nephew William built the famous Roche's hanging gardens, which are being redeveloped at the moment.

William Roche (1775-1850) was born in Limerick to Stephen Roche and his second wife Sarah O'Brien in Limerick. His mother was the heir to large estates in Rathkeale, Co. Limerick and Tuam in Galway.

William and his brothers were keen financiers, he and three of his five brothers went into banking. Thomas (1768-1855) was in partnership with William in Limerick. George (1860-1846) and James (1770-1853) 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 and went into business with another brother Stephen in Cork. James and Stephen married the Moylan sisters of Cork. John (d.1825) and took over his father's business in Dublin. While a final brother, Richard (d.1803) took hold orders. There were also five Roche sisters.

In 1801, William and Thomas set up a bank in Charlotte's Quay, Limerick. A few years later, they bought building on O'Connell Street, which they used as their bank as well as their homes.

During the 1819-1820 National Bank Crash, they were the only bank to survive in Limerick. In 1824, they were the only bank recorded in Pigott's Trade Directory of Limerick. In 1825, Provincial Bank acquired their estab-

lishment and in 1966, this was taken over by Allied Irish Banks.

Not only was William a banker, but he was the first Catholic M.P. for Limerick. He entered government on 10 December 1832 and left 23 June 1841. He was good friends with Daniel O'Connell, who would stay with him when he was visiting Limerick. Daniel O'Connell once declared, "William Roche was the only man in Ireland from whom he would not demand a pledge"

While in government, he was very vocal on issues surrounding the emancipation of the Catholics, Jews, and opposed slavery. He was a Magistrate for Limerick and the first Roman Catholic in Ireland to become a Commissioner of the Peace. During his political career, he would stay at 5 Duke Street, Westminster, London.

Today we remember William Roche for his famous garden. In 1808, he built his impressive garden to the rear of his bank on O'Connell's Street. It stretched to Henry Street and covering approximately one acre of land. The garden cost £15,000 at the time, which is the equivalent

of €600,000 today.

The garden sat on a series of vaulted roofed stores. The floor of the garden was flagged and cemented together, and excess water was lead 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. Due to their sturdy construction these vaults were allocated as air raid shelters during the Second World War.

On top of these vaults sat a series of terraces which were connected by stairways. On the bottom terrace grew a variety of flowers. While 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. The top terraces of the gardens were hot houses, conservatories and glass-houses. Here he grew grapes, pineapples, peaches and oranges. At its highest point the garden reached 70 feet above street level.

These gardens were visited by almost every notable visitor to Limerick, in-

cluding in 1809 Charlotte Lennox, Duchess of Richmond. William died unmarried and childless on April 27, 1850 he did not leave instructions for the upkeep of his gardens. As a result his gardens were sold and dismantled soon after his death.

William's brother and business partner Thomas Roche's outlived him by five years. His obituary in the Chronicle on December 15, 1855 read

"This morning, at his house in George's-street, after a short illness, in his 87th year, Thomas Roche, Esq, elder brother of William Roche, Esq. M.P. for this city, deceased, and surviving partner of the late highly respectable and independent Bank of Thomas and William Roche, of Limerick, the only one, probably, in the South of Ireland, that passed through the disastrous commercial crash of private banks 40 years ago, with perfect honor and integrity. Mr Thomas Roche was like his brothers, a gentleman of highly cultivated mind and of strict moral rectitude in all his extensive business transactions. His domestic life was pure and irreproachable, his politics ever liberal and consistent."

The life of his brother James Roche was recorded in the Chronicle on April 1, 1854:

"Mr James Roche was born in Limerick some eighty three years ago, of an ancient and wealthy family. At an early period of his life, he was sent to France, and educated in the Catholic College of Saintes. After completing his studies and paying a short visit to Ireland, he settled in Bordeaux, where he became acquainted with the most distinguished leaders of the Girondists. Mr Roche was in Paris during the horrors of the first Revolution, and in 1793 was arrested there as a British subject, but was released on the death of Robespierre.

For some years after his liberation, he passed his time between Paris and Bordeaux. At the close of the last century, he returned to Ireland, and commenced business in Cork as a banker, in partnership with his brother. He resided in a handsome countryseat near the river Lee, and there amassed a splendid library.... Mr Roche after this he resided in London as Parliamentary agent. He also spent several years in Paris, and witnessed the revolution of 1830. Eventually he returned to Cork, where he performed the duties of a magistrate and director of the National Bank until his death in the early part of 1853."

The Roche family are remembered today chiefly for the Granary building, the Hanging Gardens and Roche's Street.