

BRUCE'S BANK

THE LARGE derelict brick house with the elegant stone doorway at No. 6 Rutland Street began its life as the privately owned Bank of a Mr. Bruce in the latter half of the 18th century. American architect Frank Lloyd Wright once referred to bank buildings as "Temples to the Money God" and Limerick's banks have always lived up to this description.

Limerick Savings Bank in Glentworth Street, or the "Stone Jug" as it is locally known, is the latest in a line of splendid tributes to Mammon which began with the fine buildings of Bank Place and Rutland Street two hundred years ago. Privately owned by the Roches, Maunsells, Unthinks and others, these banks gave a service to Limerick which was quite exceptional for their time.

Bruce the Banker was one of the "characters" of his day. He had only one leg; the place of the other being taken by an iron stump. He always carried a thick blackthorn stick to help himself get about, and when debtors begged for clemency, he was known to whack his iron stump with the blackthorn stick, saying "that is the softest part of me". Perhaps this is the origin of the phrase used locally to describe a miserly person: "the softest part of him is the heel of his boot".

Mr. Bruce ended his days in Plassy House (now N.I.H.E.) which he bought from Robert Maunsell for £5,000.

The great British Cabinet Minister John Bright was persuaded to relinquish the calm of a fishing holiday at Castleconnell in order to meet some local gentlemen who were supporters of his to discuss a Cabinet Crisis of the day. The historic meeting was held in Bruce's Bank and an uninvited guest who insisted on meeting John Bright was the later-celebrated T. P. O'Connor, a lifelong member of the House of Commons.

And what of No. 6 Rutland Street today? The fine stone doorway is the subject of a preservation order placed upon it by the late Donagh

O'Malley, T.D., at the request of local poet-journalist Seamus O'Connell who organised a petition campaign for that purpose during the time when Mr. O'Malley was responsible for the Office of Public Works. The stone of the doorway is covered with flaking paint which, because of its tone grey colour gives the false impression that the doorway is crumbling.

In fact, the stonework is in remarkably good condition and could easily be made to look quite presentable, if not beautiful, by the judicious use of a wire brush. (Sand blasting is not required and could have harmful effects).

Although only a shadow of its former glory, the house deserves better of us, located as it is between City Hall and the Custom House.

The following are some suggested improvements for the facade:-

The brick windows could be smooth-plastered, painted black and then striped white to give the impression of glazing bars and sashes in the style of the period; this solution to blank windows can be seen to good effect in many gentlemen's residences throughout the area. The really frightful remains of a shopfront could be removed and replaced to two blank windows (as described above).

The existing door could be scraped and painted; or even replaced; and the side-lights and fanlight restored. This would have the benefit of allowing a glimpse to the passerby of the lovely stucco work frieze with lions' heads and triglyphs which is the only vestige of the original interior that survives.

Perhaps at some future and more prosperous time, Bruce's work can be restored to serve the city which, even in its decrepitude, it has for so long adorned.

NOTE: The cost of the short-term improvements would not be great and the psychological benefit to the immediate area and to the City at large, would be considerable.

Perhaps some local firm would consider commissioning the work (in co-operation with the Corporation) as an enlightened form of advertising.



PENNYS Store at the Crescent Shopping Centre.