

# Wall again?



Locally port at Town Wall Garden, off Picture: JOHN F. WRIGHT

plaque to death when fellow I.R.A. volunteers unsuccessfully tried to rescue him from Royal Irish Constabulary custody at the City House, in 1919.

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## PHOTONOTES OF OLD LIMERICK

### St. John's Church

Saint John's Parish Church (in St. John's Square) - sadly defunct since the early 1970s and currently being adapted as a museum by Limerick Corporation - was built in 1852. It replaced a church on this site, built by King Donal Mor O Briain - King of Limerick and Thomond - sometime in the 1160s.

It was mentioned in the annals of Bishop Donat's time (circa 1200) and was called Ecclesia Sancta Johannis de Sancta Cruce de Jerusalem - The Church of St. John of the Holy Cross of Jerusalem.

Situated immediately inside the City Wall, near the Citadel, St. John's medieval church was directly in the firing line during the 1651 Cromwellian siege and the Williamite 1690 and 1691 sieges.

Dineley, the observant English travel writer and antiquarian, who visited Limerick in 1680, records that it was an impressive church, in the Gothic style, with a nave, two side aisles and a double-chambered bell tower.

In 1693, Mayor John Foote - through a public subscription fund - had the churchyard wall repaired after damage in the recent wars.

A Latin inscription on a 1693 stone plaque - on the outside of the wall, facing the entrance to St. John's Hospital - commemorated this restoration.

The medieval church lasted until 1852, when as a happy result of the uniring zeal of the then rector, the Reverend John Elmes, the new church was built.

He was rector for 31 years. In another of his appeals for building funds, he mentioned that the majority of St. John's were so badly off, they could only barely afford to contribute £10 out of the £400 for which he was then appealing!

In a postscript, he said that he would be grateful for postage stamps, as they would help to defray postage expenses.

A congregation of 700 (200 in excess of its seating capacity) attended the 1852 opening ceremony. With the archdeacon, Mr. W. G. Gubbins and Mr. J. Boyd (of the famous Limerick firm), representing the church warden, asked the bishop to consecrate the new church.

To the organ accompaniment, the clergy and the congregation joyously sang "The Hallelujahs".

The architect was Welland - architect to the Church of Ireland Commissioners - who also designed the communion table and the lectern.



The ceiling above the east window and the principal "altar" was ornately embellished with golden rays by J. H. Mulcahy, the famous Limerick landscape artist, who had his studio in Catherine Street - his best known landscape work is a typically romantic view of Tarbert.

One of the stained glass windows had just previously been seen at the Great London Exhibition, where it won great praise.

The inscriptions on the tombs and gravestones in the churchyard are of great historical interest - reflecting the peculiarly varied strands of Limerick's religious and commercial historical tapestry from the 17th century to our own times.

The most interesting memorials are the few surviving slabs of a tomb, erected in 1634 by Phillip Roche in memory of his father, Phillip Roche, Mayor, who died in 1592.

On the surviving slabs one can see carvings of the pincers, hammer and scourge used during the Passion and Crucifixion of Christ - and the thirty pieces of silver paid to His betrayer, Judas.

Due to exposure to the elements, these interesting carvings are in serious danger of inescapable deterioration - Limerick Corporation should take immediate preservation steps, as they should with the badly deteriorated 1693 wall restoration stone plaque.

Sir John Bourke, of Brittas Castle, hanged in Elizabethan times for sheltering a Catholic priest, is buried there.

So are the Catholic bishops of Limerick, Dr. David Kearney (1760-1778)

and Dr. Denis Conway (1779-1796) and Dr. Michael Peter McMahon, Catholic Bishop of Killaloe, granduncle of Marshall McMahon (a native of Doonbeg, near the city) of the French Army and President of France during the Franco-Prussian War at the close of the last century.

After the 1800 Act of Union (with Britain) Bishop McMahon - who resided at Lock Quay - was an equally shrewd co-secretary for the Irish Catholic Hierarchy with Dr. Young (Bishop of Limerick) when the British Government unsuccessfully tried to get them to accept a version of Catholic Emancipation which would include a British Government veto on the appointment of Irish Catholic bishops.

A fragment of Mayor John Foote's tomb, dated 1693, can be seen there.

According to Lishtown folklores, John Foote is said to have been the prototype for Shawn na Scub, the poor brushmaker-pedlar, who became the first Mayor of Limerick!

Father John Thayer, a native of Boston - an Unitarian Chaplain with George Washington's Army - who became a Catholic priest and a noted preacher in Limerick city under the auspices of Bishop Young - is buried there.

The Church of Ireland, too, has beloved clergy buried there.

The Reverend John Elmes' tomb can be seen just around from the West Door. Poignantly, one of the inscriptions tells of the death by drowning of his 22 year old son.

Directly opposite the West Door is the grave of Rev. Canon Frederick Langbridge, rector of St. John's, who died in 1922.

A native of Birmingham, he was Master of Arts graduate of Oxford University, a prolific poet, author of Christmas carols and a respected contributor to leading London dailies.

A theatre enthusiast, Canon Langbridge successfully adapted Dickens' novel, "A Tale of Two Cities," for the stage for his friend, John Martin Harvey, the famous English actor-manager, who frequently appeared at the Theatre Royal, Henry Street.

Canon Langbridge's stage version, entitled "The Only

Way," is still used in London theatres.

During the troubled Home Rule period (just before 1914) this English-born Protestant clergyman told the Royal Irish Constabulary (in a letter in the local papers) that he had no need of their offer of a protective police squad as he lived in complete friendship and harmony with his predominantly Catholic and Nationalistic neighbours.

There's an impressive 1800 John Norris Russell (of the famous milling family) tomb.

One of these Russells furnished its commodious inside with a table and chairs and spent spells therein drinking tea!

In reply to curious city gossips, this eccentric miller replied that he did so to acquaint himself with his abode in the next life, while still in this one!

The 1862 Cruise family tomb is there - the famous Limerick hoteliers. Touchingly, there's a grave of John Smiles, a commercial traveller, of Wallail, Staffordshire, England, who died in Limerick after a brief illness in 1847.

J. H. Mulcahy, the artist who embellished this 1852 church, is buried in a vault with a tall obelisk.

Luke Bernard, Postmaster of Limerick - died 1832 - is buried nearby.

Even casual passersby notice above the wall facing the entrance to St. John's Hospital, the top of a vault surmounted by a handsome urn.

This is the early 19th century Unthank family vault - this family resided at St. John's Square and Mungret Street, in the 18th and 19th centuries.

One of the Unthanks, Joshua (after whom Joshua's Lane, off Mungret Street, got its name) generously helped the local 1847-'48 Great Famine victims and had a soap factory in the Mungret Street-Watergate area.

In 1960, some vandals rifled the Unthank family vault and smashed a skull to get some gold teeth.

According to contemporary Lishtown folklores, the Ghost of Joshua Unthank terrifyingly appeared one dark night to confront one of the sacrilegious vandals!

Photo: JOHN F. WRIGHT. Text: SEAMUS O CINNEIDE

## LIMERICK HOTEL'S GRAND SUCCESS

By A SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

LIMERICK'S oldest city centre hotel - "The City" - is playing a vital role in pioneering a new holiday concept in Ireland.

double their bookings into Ireland with limited facilities. Between April and November, 1982, it will receive up to 100,000 guests from the programme.

The Grand City Extended Vacations, to be held at the hotel, will be the only of its kind in Ireland.