

# SOME EARLY TENANTS OF ST. JOHN'S SQUARE

ST. JOHN'S SQUARE, one of the finest examples of Georgian architecture in Ireland, has had its beauty further enhanced with the reconstruction work being carried out on one of the buildings—St. Patrick's Hostel—by the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Some time ago the Limerick Corporation decided that the square should be preserved for posterity. An interesting account of the history of the area was given by the Clare historian, James Frost, in Vol. III of the Journal of the Limerick Field Club, published in the early years of the present century.

Frost tells us that, some time after the last siege of Limerick, that part of the city wall which extended from St. John's Gate towards the West was demolished, leaving a wide, unoccupied space. On this ground, in 1751, it was proposed to build some houses in the form of a square. The originator of the scheme was John Purdon, whose seat was in Tinerana, Lough Derg.

Purdon associated himself with Edmund Pery — afterwards Viscount Pery—who was the landlord of the site, and with the Rev. Henry Smith, William Monsell of Tervoe and Rev. William Cecil Pery. It was arranged that a house be built for each of the three last named, and that five other houses be erected at the joint expense of Purdon and Pery. All were to be constructed to a uniform plan, size and cost. Smith, Monsell and Rev. Pery each got their

own house by contributing to the common purse.

Purdon superintended the building, and each completed house cost £630. Sexton Pery retained one for his own use, and the other four were let to Mrs. Dorothea Crump (widow of General Crump), who later married Rev. William Cecil Pery (afterwards Viscount); Mrs. Catherine Fitzgerald, a widow, who soon transferred her title to George Rose; Alexander Franklin, Richard Borough (a member of the Borough family of Querin, Co. Clare). The uniform rent was £32 a year. A Mr. Ambrose Wilson of Caherconlish, acquired the house intended by Edmund Pery for his own use.

## WINTER RESIDENCES

All these houses, Frost goes on to say, were large and commodious and for many years continued to be inhabited by wealthy county families. Towards the end of the 18th century they were used as the winter houses of the Glentworths, the Dicksons, the Vere Hunts of Curraghchase, the Monsells of Tervoe, the Tuthills of Faha, the Wilsons of Caherconlish, the Roses, Franklins, Boroughs and others.

The large incomes from the tenantry of these families assured the landed proprietors much affluence, and their St. John's Square town houses were centres of social gaiety and hospitality.

In those days, Frost explains, travel by road was hazardous. For instance, when Madam Burton, the mother of Lord Conyngham, was on a journey from Buncraggy, Co. Clare, to Dublin, she had to send an advance force of 12 men to clear the Cratloe mountain road of boulders so that her carriage could pass through. In circumstances like these provincial towns became the refuge of the county families. Limerick was no exception to the rule; apart from the St. John's Square the winter residences of many of the gentry of Clare and Limerick were situated in various parts of the city.

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three years ago for the d state of repair. To-day, g modern lines, a spacious cold showers and television,

tion is provided on the premises for a limited number of men. The cubicles are neat and clean, and the "institutional air" is completely absent from all sections of the hostel. In fact, the footbaths, toilets, dining hall, television room, recreation room and other apartments are of the highest standard.

The provision of these amenities and the construction work that yet remains to be done will, no doubt, mean a substantial drain on the funds of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. The members are doing magnificent work in St. Patrick's Hostel. But they do not seek their own glory. "There is One that seeketh and findeth."

