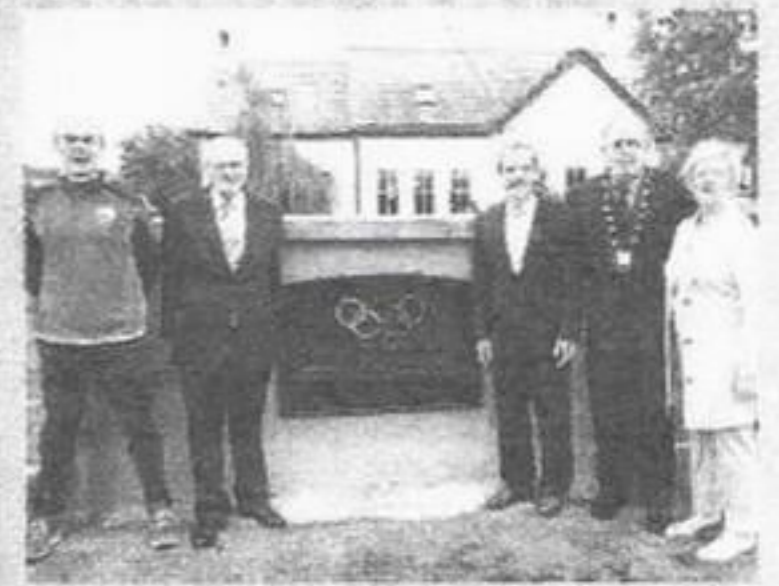


# LIMERICK CHRONICLE

Celebrating  
250 years -  
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DOWN MEMORY LANE WITH THE COUNTRY'S OLDEST TITLE

## Rise and fall of a parish

Continued from last week

**B**EFORE 1770 an attempt was made to build a church in O'Connell Street at the corner of Bedford Row, but it was never finished; I don't know why.

Some few years afterwards the unfinished building was dismantled and the materials used to build St. Georges Chapel further up the street, on the side of the present Provincial Bank Of Ireland.

This was a small building and could hardly be regarded as an edifice that would enhance the prestige of the ascendancy religion or reflect the religious fervour of its members.

Furthermore, the church was a private one, and not a parish church in any sense.

Archdeacon Maunsell looked after the spiritual welfare of an ever-increasing flock for many years without a parish church.

A way was found, however, to relieve the congestion, to some extent, by the erection of a trustee church - one connected with a charitable institution.

This was to be an asylum for blind females.

The church, dedicated to the Blessed Trinity, was bolstered up on both sides by a magnificent house - one the Asylum and the other the home of the Minister in charge - was completed in 1831 at a total cost of £5,273.

The money was largely collected by the Rev. Edward Newenham Hoare, curate of St. John's, who made several trips to England in his fundraising campaign.

The work was ably assisted by the Bishop, Right Rev. Dr. Knox.

Like many other Protestant churches, Trinity outlived its noble purpose.

Completely re-designed internally, and with a brush-up of its splendid facade, it serves more people than ever before and in many different ways, as the headquarters of the Mid Western Health Board, at the top of Catherine Street.

It was not until 1832 that a site for a parish church - the first in nearly 300 years - was provided in Vize's Fields by the Earl of Limerick.

Great difficulties would seem to have been encountered in getting the worthy project off the ground, for the new St. Michael's was not finished until 1844; and then there shouts of disapproval from those who contended that, through an extraordinary miscalculation, the



Generous donation: In 1781 St Michael's new parish church was built at Denmark Street on a site donated by Patrick Arthur. Mr Arthur also contributed largely to the cost of the building

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church was built in the centre of a street that was intended to run parallel to O'Connell Street right out to Ballnacurra.

This amusing circumstance was a most fortunate error, for it left us with Pery Square, our most beautiful thoroughfare, and a fitting monument to the man who helped so much to give us a new Limerick.

Of the original Watergate foundation, only the graveyard remains.

Fortunately this long vandalised and neglected spot has lately been adopted by the Limerick Civic Trust, and its future as an important local monument is assured.

During the course of this restora-

tion work the grave of Ellen Arthur, sister of Patrick Arthur, was discovered.

Let us hope that this laudable work will encourage others to protect it in the future.

As far back as 1887, the graveyard was a source of embarrassment to the powers that be.

At the time the Local Health Authority decided that "representations be made to the Local Government Board for the closing of St. Michael's burial ground in the City of Limerick for the protection of public health and the maintenance of public decency, and to prevent a violation of the respect due to the remains of the deceased."

Shortly afterwards the place was officially closed, through one other interment took place there as recently as 1945.

This was an old parishioner who had died in the United States and who had expressed a wish to be buried with his ancestors in St. Michael's.

What of the Catholic church in the parish? It is certain that its followers were in the doldrums from the mid-

1500s until the first Catholic church since that time was opened in the Irishtown in St. John's parish.

This was set up - I can't say it was built - outside John's Gate by Fr. O'Connor.

This was simply a Mass house, made up by merging two or three small houses.

The important building was known as "Fr. O'Connors' chapel." It stood close to the city wall near John's Gate, in or about the site of the present Cathedral Villas.

The parishioners of St. Michael's and St. John's worshipped here until 1753 when Fr. John Leahy opened his grand new parish church a little further to the west.

The congestion was eased in 1781 when St. Michael's new Parish church was built outside the walls (at Denmark Street) on a site donated by that great public benefactor and developer, Patrick Arthur, who also contributed largely to the cost of the building.

Improvements were carried out from time to time as circumstances permitted, and a considerable enlargement was carried out in 1805.

After serving the parish for just a hundred years, the old church was replaced by the present fine edifice.

During excavation work in connection with this development, large quantities of human bones were unearthed.

It was presumed at the time that these were the remains of those who died during the assault on the fortifications at this point during the siege of 1690.

By order of the administrator, the bones were carefully collected and buried under the church's altar.

The story of St. Michael's is interspersed here and there with incidents of high drama and studded with star performers, but these are its palmy days - days of peace when the church and its history are taken for granted.

But a look back through the ages to the little church on the slobland island outside the West Water Gate of old Limerick tells us much about the city and its people.

This article first appeared in The Limerick Leader on September, 17, 1996.