



Glimpses of old Limerick

THIS WEEKS sketch shows the Town Hall, Rutland Street. This our third Town Hall since Limerick received a charter from King Richard the first of England in 1197 empowering the election of a Mayor. (That King Richard grant makes Limerick the oldest chartered city in Ireland).

The first Town Hall was the Tholsel (built in 1451) in Mary Street, in the English town of Limerick.

In 1673, the Corporation moved to the nearby City Exchange built at the sole expense of Mayor William Yorke. Only the fine arcaded facade of this building survives today—its part of the boundary wall of St. Mary's Cathedral in Nicholas Street.

The Corporation continued to use the City Exchange as a Town Hall until 1846.

The building they then transferred—the present Town Hall—was originally the Commercial Buildings in Rutland Street, in the Newtown district of Limerick.

The Commercial Buildings were erected in 1805 for the Mercantile Body, which was later incorporated as the Limerick Chamber of Commerce.

The Commercial Buildings contained the most spacious and elegant coffee rooms in Ireland. In 1833, the Chamber of Commerce—the title change took place in 1815, bought the town house of the late Mr. Gavin in George's Street—now O'Connell Street. "The noble edifice", as Lenihan—in one of his

many footnotes in his history of Limerick—described the Commercial Buildings, fell into sad decline. The Limerick Evening Post and Clare Sentinel and the Star newspapers were printed there.

The once elegant coffee rooms were a sugar store. The offices suffered neglect. As a result of all this, the Commercial Buildings became a valueless property.

It reverted back to the landlord, Thomas Kelly, Esquire, Shannon View, Castletroy.

The determination of the reformed Corporation in 1843 to occupy it as a Town Hall saved it.

The Corporation moved in there in 1846. It made an excellent Town Hall, with a Council Chamber, and Mayor's and Town Clerk's offices, and apartments for the sergeant-at-mace, a watch house—the headquarters for the Limerick City light watch, or municipal police—and a newsroom. According to some architectural historians, the Town Hall compares very favourably with the classical style Custom House (nearby in Rutland Street) as to which is the most graceful building in Limerick.

In recent years, the Limerick Corporation and City Council declared the council chamber unsuitable for meetings.

In fact a then Alderman, Steve Coughlan, called the place "a shambles". For innumerable years, the Corporation (and city councillors) have hatched

grandiose plans for a new Town (or city) Hall. They've all proved abortive. Forty years ago, it was to have been built at the site now occupied by Jury's Hotel, on the Ennis Road.

In the mid-1970s, a plan for a new City Hall (at the Watergate Car Park), was commissioned from a Dublin architects' firm. It was never realised—the model of the Watergate City Hall can be seen at the City Library. City Council meetings are held at the County Courthouse, Merchant's Quay by kind permission of the County Council! Typically, no-one in the Corporation or City Council had the vision to adapt the Town Hall for civic ceremonies and build a suitably commodious staff and services complex at the nearby Mardyke-Watergate area. Portraits of former Mayors enhanced the Town Hall's interior until very recently.

Their removal gives the place a feeling of a lost civic cultural dimension. Some Corporation officials and personnel have been transferred to offices in the graceless-modern Sarsfield House at Arthur's Quay.

Lovers of Limerick's Georgian architectural heritage, and its civic cultural image in general—devoutly hope that the transfer to Sarsfield House doesn't mean that the fine old Georgian Town Hall is in for another abandonment and decline.

□ Words: SEAMUS O CINNEIDE.
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Dangerous driving case is dismissed

A 13-YEAR-OLD girl, who was knocked down by a car when she was on her way to school, attended Bruff Court with the aid of sticks to give evidence in a case of alleged dangerous driving against John Walsh, Rathcanon, Kilmallock, the driver of the car.

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