

# Visitors Impressions: John Harden, 1797

*The extended family of John Harden (1772-1847) lived in various parts of Co. Tipperary, the descendants of Cromwellian settlers. His immediate family lived at Borrisoleigh. On his tour of the south-western counties in 1797, he was accompanied by two friends, George Holmes and William Sinnett, and his groom, Lyons. The original manuscript of his diary of the tour, intended for his own use only, was published unaltered in the Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society between 1953 and 1956, and was, in the meantime, donated to the Royal Irish Academy by one of his great grandchildren. Here punctuation has been added and some spelling has been modernised.*

Thursday, 17 August 1797



After taking leave of our good friends Mr. & Mrs. Lawrence (N.B. promised her some drawings) we got on Thursday 17th thro' as charming country as any possible, variety, improvements & fertility everywhere abounding. Arrived at Killaloe (7 miles). We were delighted with the windings of the Shannon which runs here of great breadth & rapidity, but full of shallows under a bridge of 19 arches. These shallows interrupt the free navigation of the river up to Lough Derg, but in order to obviate that there are canals cut from hence to Limerick here & there wherever it is impassible in the river, but I believe 'tis but ill attended to & neglected. The bridge here divides the Counties Tipperary, Limerick & Clare, Killaloe lies in the latter. The Shannon is navigable up to Carrick-on-Shannon & will be shortly complete to the cut of the Grand Canal at Portumna, so that there will be inland navigation to Dublin. We spent very little time in viewing the town, which has little or nothing attractive save the situation, which is fine. The Cathedral is a poor building but very ancient (it has undergone some modern repairs internally under the direction of Bishop Knox, who has also added some addition to the spire but the style totally incorrect). As you enter the great aisle - which is of good extent & remarkable for the prolongation of sound, supporting the human voice for half a minute or near it - is the entrance to the tomb of Bryan Bourhoime, who was buried here. The arch is built up, but the supporting pillars, capping and springing of the arch are exposed, and tho' of a soft bad quality of free stone & so very long done, are yet curiously wrought & in preservation worth minutely viewing. There is little else worth seeing, the present Bishop, Dr. Knox, has shewn a mind much unlike men of the same function in his day, who instead of avarice & sensuality has planned & superintends a free school for the education of 50 children (at his own expense) is about establishing a factory here for spinning



John Harden, from a miniature painting

woollen yarn - & moreover has instituted a dispensary, which is attached to the buildings of the church, where a physician prescribes & the apothecary daily administers relief - what an example for full fed Prelates. "Go ye & do likewise." We were shewed a small building in the churchyard on the south side of the Church of very uncouth & antique fashion but perfect, roofed with stone cut square, and clad with ivy, said to be built by Bryan Bourhoime as a place for confinement or security for his daughter, but I think it sounds most unlikely - if Bryan wanted to seclude his daughter there were many lonely Islands in the Shannon to build on instead of a populous town, as this evidently has once been. The church is supposed to have been built by Donald,

King of Limerick, in 1160 - the stone for building is very bad, as may be perceived even in the tombstones, which are so bad as not to be able to bear a face, or have any letter cut on them. The town is built on the side of a hill, consequently the street is steep & badly paved. There is little worth seeing in Killaloe, but if the traveller takes boat (as we intended) & visits Lough Derg & Portumna, he will be highly gratified, the Shannon here forming itself into an extensive sea, in many places from 8 to 10 miles across, with beautiful islands (some with ruins) scattered thro' it. I regret our disappointment of a boat, but having made enquiry of a boatman he answered 'twas too late in the day to set off then, but that he & his comrade would take us up next day to Portumna for 5/5d & their dinner. The delay of a day, & no inn to sleep at changed our minds, & we declined: so mounted our horses & kept moving on towards O'Brien's Bridge, having the Shannon winding its varied form all the road on our left: we were now in the County Clare. The day changing we pushed on, till we came to O'Brien's Bridge (4 miles). Here we sheltered & had some refreshment, a good house and keeps good carriages, the Shannon rolls by the door, a fine breadth under a bridge of 10 or 12 arches. We made no delay here as the day still threatened, but rode over the bridge (now in the Coy Limerick) and thro' a choice road thro' bog for 2 miles till we came to Castle Connell, a place much celebrated by the virtue of its medical waters & fashionable resort of company. The houses are numerous, but chiefly small thatched lodges, built along the road. We rode on fast, it now raining heavily on us, and determined to spend a day here, a place so much spoken of & enjoy an evening. At length thro' a ride of six miles or better, which we rode thro' heavy rain, we arrived at Limerick about 5 o'clock Thursday 17th Aug. '97 - eight miles & 1/2 farther. We had scarce seated ourselves in our inn when we dispatched an invitation to two or three friends of Wm Sinnetts, Mr. John Meade & Mr. Jno Kennedy &c. to take a steak with us. They declined but promised to spend the

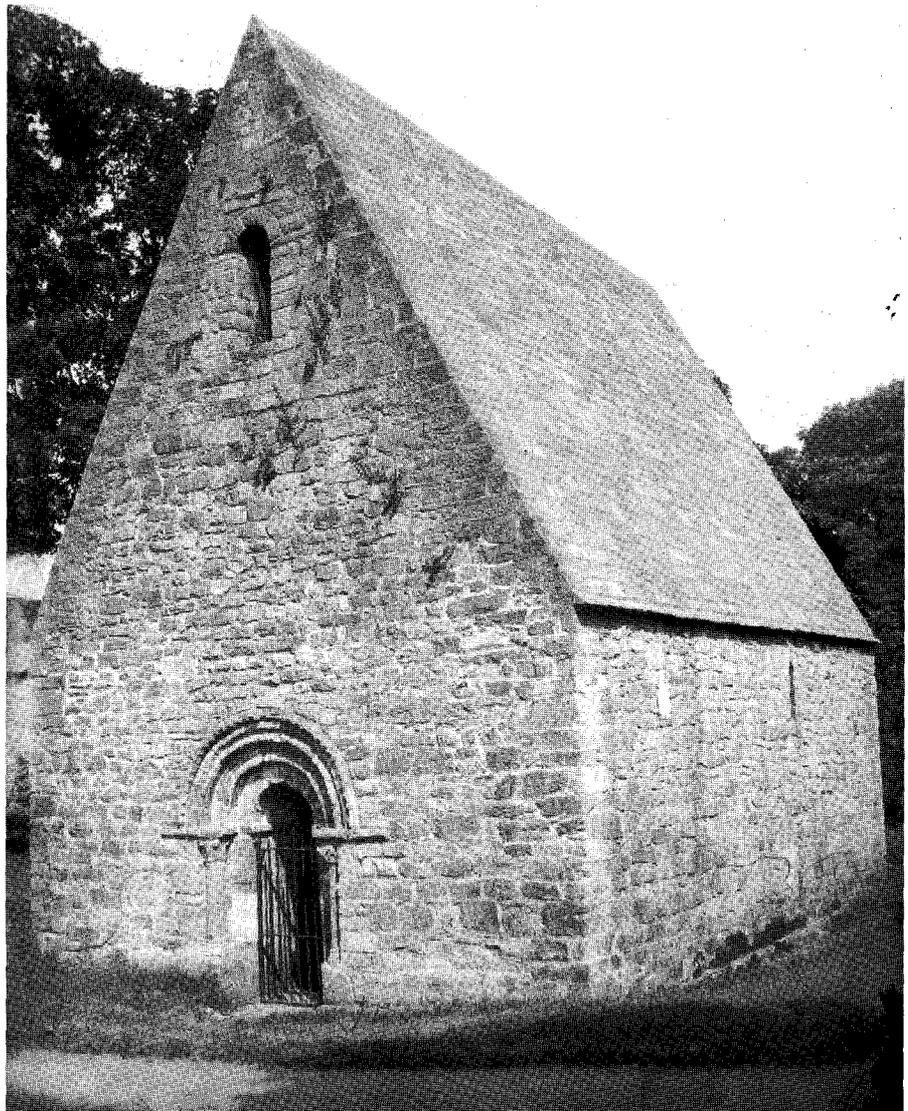
evening. Accordingly they came & two or three more, Mr. Peter Arthur & Mr. J. M. A. etc. We had a most jovial evening (those lads can drink). An invitation followed from everyone, each claiming us, to-day, to-morrow, next day & so on, & promising to intersperse variety with amusement. We were glad of so favourable an opportunity and thanked them. Went to bed a little over done.

### Friday, 18 August 1797

Breakfasted this morning with Mr. Peter Arthur, to whom & his brother, Martin Arthur, we feel much obliged for their kind attention. After breakfast we walked all thro' the city & outlets. Viewed the Cathedral, which is a very ancient Gothic pile containing many detached chapels in which are many curious old family monuments, particularly one belonging to the family of the Arthurs in the Chapter room, very unsuitable and old. The Cathedral is a fine old building - the end window in the Choir remarkably rich, and the family monument of the Lords of Thomond (with a high wrought panegyric on their ancestry & honours) well worth remark, the variety of marbles comprising it very costly, the whole well executed. The under part of the seats of the stalls of carved oak (similar to Chester) worth remark. Were on the steeple, from whence is most charming prospect above 30 miles in circumference with the broad Shannon winding thro' its fertile meads, crown'd with ships and deserving a royal Navy.

Limerick a very improving town or city. The new additions in New Town Pery are equal to any Dublin buildings, and add much to its appearance. The old town is falling very fast into decay, has been a place of immense strength as appears by the dismantled towers, old walls of impenetrable composition, and gates. It is built chiefly on an island encircled by the arms of the Shannon, which here runs of great breadth!

It was the strongest fortress in the Kingdom, until Government gave the citizens liberty to dismantle all the walls and castles. Had they been preserved, it might have vied with Chester for beauty & situation; however, there only very few parts of the wall now remaining of the usual breadth about 40 ft. Our friend Mr. Arthur took us and shewed them, on which part there are now gardens & orchards in full bearing. We were pointed out the fort from which Cromwell battered the town and still retains his name. We were also shewed where the army of King William, having made a breach, about 1500 Grenadiers made an entry and were to a man cut to pieces. The town has been considerably enlarged and is every day increasing. It was besieged by King William 3rd in 1690, when the garrison forced the King to raise the siege, tho' there was no army to relieve it. It was again invested in 1691 & when the town capitulated on the 13th Oct. following, the garrison obtained very honourable terms, being allowed to retire wherever they



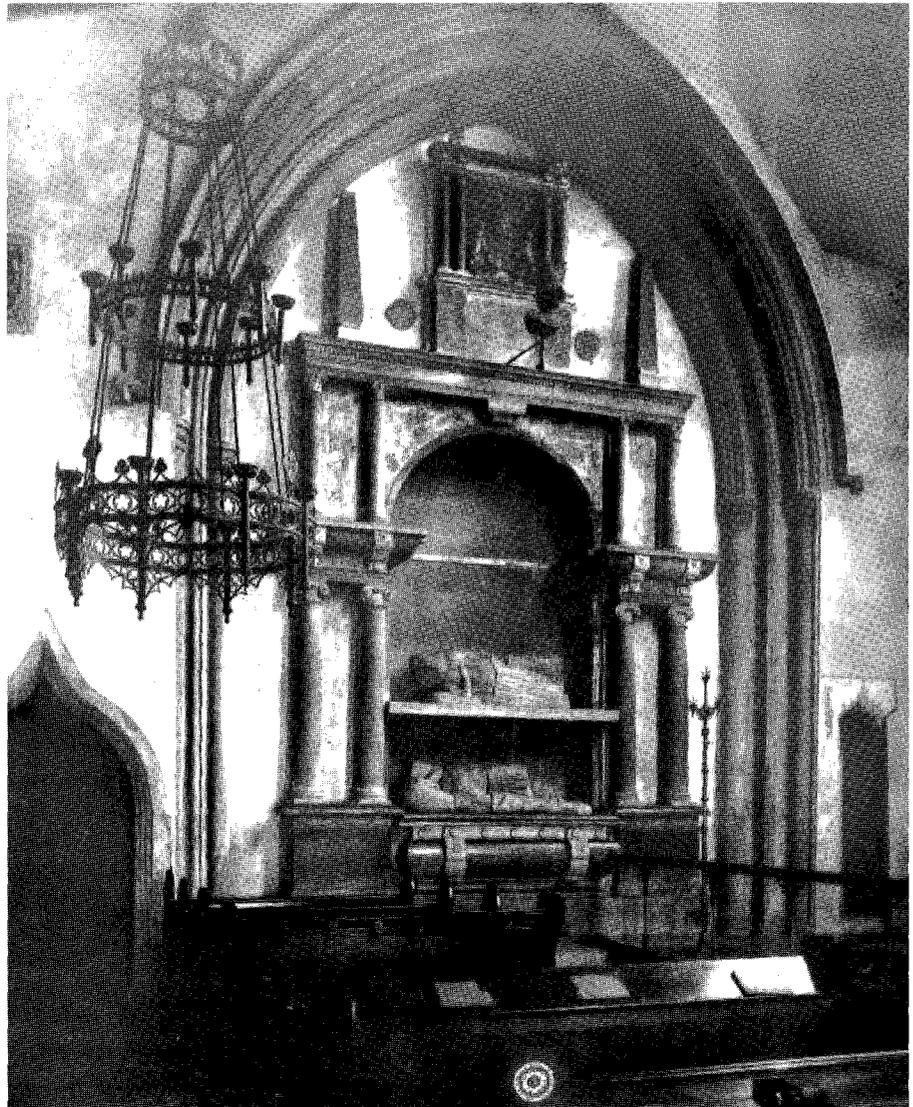
Oratory at Killaloe, 1897.

(Limerick Museum)

pleased and were tolerated in the free exercise of their religion. Limerick also sustained a severe siege in the time of Cromwell from Ireton, whose army was bravely repulsed in several attacks & would have been totally ruined but for the feuds and animosities that prevailed in the town, some being attached to the Nuncio, others to the King, & a considerable majority inclined to a surrender. It hath a military Governor & Town Major on the Establishment and generally a good number of soldiers, cavalry generally 1 regiment & Infantry generally two regiments, for which there is excellent accommodation, the laboratory for making all kinds of military equipments (of which there were now great plenty here) worth viewing. The civil government is by a Mayor, Recorder, Sheriff and Town Clerk. It is the See of a Bishop united to Ardfert & Aghadoe, has a very ancient Cathedral, good ring of bells, & remarkably handsome steeple, which is a striking feature viewed from every side. It gives the title of Viscount to the Earl of Clanbrassill. The new additional buildings increasing every day are in a very good style & equal any in Dublin, are distinguished from the old town by the name of Newtown Perry and are very

pleasantly situate. The city of Limerick contains about 5,000 houses and the estimation of the inhabitants about 60,000. There are docks, quays and a custom house, which is a very neat building, built upon a large square enclosed quay in a good style. The river runs in front and on the right hand are very convenient docks. On the opposite side of the river is the House of Industry, a large quadrangular building, but I believe not well attended to. The great Shannon don't run thro' the city, but divides itself about 1/2 a mile above & constitutes that part called the Abbey River, from enclosing an old Abbey called St. Francis's, but of which there now remains no vestige. Over this branch are two bridges, the one called Baal's, an old building with houses on one side. All the way over it is composed of three arches. Just at its junction with the main branch, which here runs round & insulates that part called the Irish Town, is new bridge, a neat light building of three arches well executed & the prime entrance to that part of the town called New Town. There is only one bridge across the Shannon in its main body, called Thomond Bridge, and unites that part called the English Town, which is poor & inconsiderable, with the city. This is a very old building and had been a

considerable defence to the city in its fortified state, having at the further end a drawbridge with a strong castle erected on the bridge to protect the pass. It is rumoured & with some appearance to truth, that 500 men of Cromwell's army, retreating from a sally across here, were every one swept down & lost. This drawbridge has been removed & the arches they occupied now built up & blank. There is also very small remains of the castle now standing, save the foundation & part of one side wall. It consists of 14 arches, very low, no two corresponding, the whole perfectly flat, with the least rise, and has stood the most tremendous floods, when most other bridges have fallen. Tradition says it cost but £30 in building. Near this we were shewed a very large square stone on which they tell the articles of capitulation were signed. There are here the most perfect remains of the walls standing, with the towers which defend them (& which represent the Arms of Limerick), particularly that part near Thomond Bridge, which I believe was the citadel, for there are 4 large towers with a strong wall & embrazures immediately adjacent. The Foot Barracks are situated in the old courtyard, the walls wash'd by the river. That had occasion in the building, some of them, to remove part of the town wall, which exceeded any thing conceivable for hardness and cost nearly as much in blasting away about 12 ft. in length as would have completed a good barracks. The wall here was near 18 or 20 ft. thick & impenetrable. The Shannon is navigable from the sea up to Limerick for vessels of 500 & 600 tons and for vessels of 900 tons within a mile hence to a place called Pool (we saw a Danish Merchantman lying there of 900 t.). It is also navigable by means of canals (adjoining its banks here & there, where flats & shoals sometimes prevail, now on this and now on t'other side of the river, as occasion requires) as far as Killaloe, where it forms a noble lake called Lough Derg, which is in some places seven & nine miles broad & of unfathomable depth. It is also navigable up to Portumna, 18 (miles), so on for an inland reach of 150 miles (& when the Grand Canal forms its junction at Portumna will communicate with Dublin). Whilst we were here a vessel laden with foundry & iron utensils came hither by water from Arigna (where are celebrated iron works). It is nevertheless much to be regretted that the conduct of the Corporation is such that the canal is now so much neglected & disused that a vessel is scarce seen on it and going fast to decline. In Limerick I believe I saw but one church (I mean the Cathedral of which I have spoken). There may be one or more. There is one near new town, there is some religious building, for I remarked the beauty of the window & was informed that it originally belonged to St. Francis Abbey (aforesaid). It is remarkably handsome & well put together in its new station. The shops are smart and have good trade, the people tasty & fashionable.

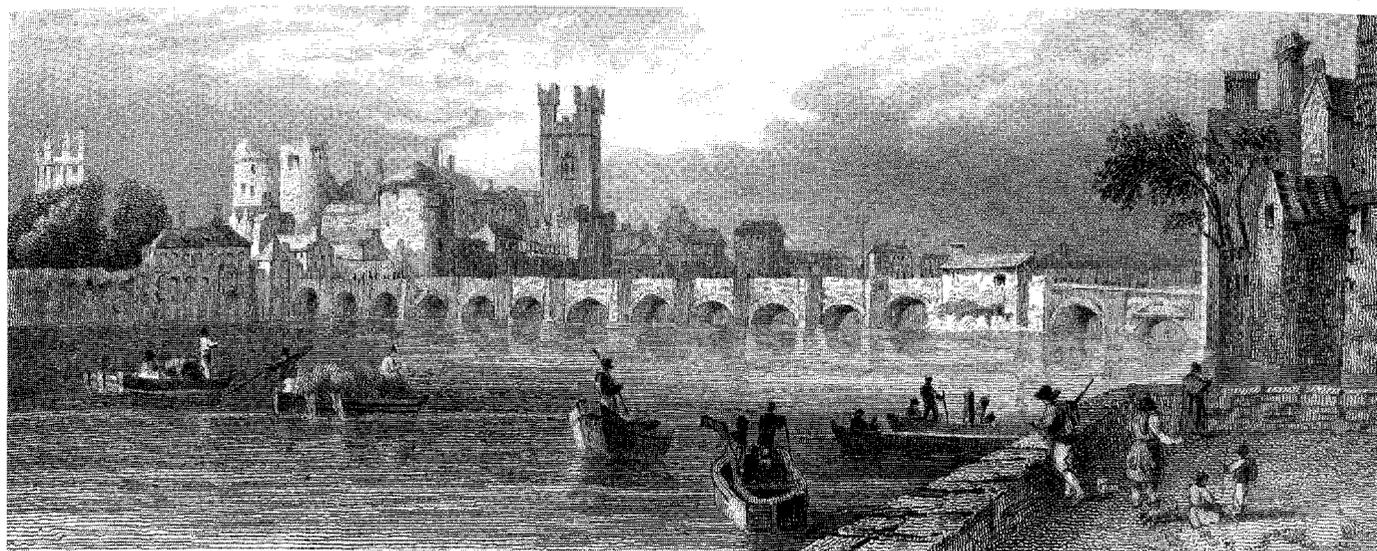


The Thomond Memorial in St. Mary's Cathedral, 1890s.

(Limerick Museum)

There is a neat building on Charlotte Quay which was originally used for an Assembly & Concert rooms, but has of late been at the expense of Sr. Vere Hunt converted into a Theatre, but being too small is now quite disused. They have got a temporary building, in a bad situation & very unpromising externally, which answers for a Theatre. The houses in Bank Place are very elegant, also that part called Arthur's Quay, which is the chief walk for the ladies resident in the town. Patrick's St., William Street, & in short, all the buildings in Newtown Perry are neat, handsome & well executed. Limerick has all the appearance of a place extensive in commerce, if we only view its docks, merchant's stores, shipping and coffee houses, frequented by great numbers and well supply'd with English & Irish papers by way of Dublin & Waterford occasionally. If we may judge by the attention of several, the leading feature (of the people resident in Limerick) is hospitality - I never received more marked attention, every civility without restraint or ceremony. We went to see the new Barracks, a little detached from the city. Their situation is good, well planned & executed, but the difficulty of finding water insuperable. They were sinking a well and had got 80ft., thro'

which they had nearly the whole way to quarry & blast thro' a species of stone harder than marble & not unlike that at Kilkenny, & as yet had not come to water and may go as much farther, perhaps with no better success. This don't reflect much credit on the abilities of the projector. However, the situation, buildings, plan & accommodation are choice. We afterwards visited the museum of Captain Ouseley on the Quay, where we were gratified by a display of many curious reliques of antiquity - and a choice collection of ancient Irish weapons & instruments of war found in various parts of this Kingdom, most rare - he is a man of ingenuity & his cabinet collected with taste. We were much gratified, but regretted tho' not having the pleasure of the Captains company, he being from home. We dined this day with our friend Mr. John Meade, High Street in the Irish Town, where we had the most complete Fridays dinner I have ever seen, nothing but fish, but that of the most rare & delicate quality, salmon, hake, pike, soles, trout, plaice, lobster, eels, with variety of sauces. Here we met a pleasing group, amongst the rest Mr. Stephen Roche, who politely gave us a letter of introduction to his relation, Mr. Cronyn, Killarney,



Old Thomond Bridge by W.H. Bartlett from Rev E.H. Proctor's *Ireland Illustrated*, 1831.

(Limerick Museum)

### Saturday, 19 August 1797

and the next day took us to view the concerns of his late uncle, Mr. Phil Roche, decd. Whether we reflect on the magnitude of this mans mind in a mercantile point of view, or consider the extensiveness of his concerns merely as a matter of convenience for the prodigious embankments of his professions, we are equally amazed. I confess myself unable to form *any* idea of trade, as it would never have entered my mind to have sunk such a fortune (as Mr. Roche did) in the erecting of such immense concerns in order to anticipate a return from trade - and in which he was so well recompensed - (having as his nephew & executor, Mr. Stephen Roche) declared & of which he took his oath as executor & administrator, died worth one hundred and seventy five thousand pounds or nearly to £200,000 - and at the time of his death in the full course of trade & adding year after year to his stores, building lofts, closing in & roofing by the acre &c &c. How much to be regretted the loss of such a man, who gave employment to such numbers yearly & such essential benefit to his country, but Death had selected him for his prize & the triumphant victor trampled his helpless enemy. Those concerns are esteemed as extensive and on as good a plan as any in Europe. They cover more than two acres under the slating, besides detached offices. We returned much gratified. We also visited the Thomond Brewery & Distillery - a very great concern - worth seeing. This morning (Saturday) we, in company with Mr. Martin & Mr. Peter Arthur, took a walk to the Salmon Weir, where is a neat breakfasting house about 2 miles distant. Their wish to shew us the environs & everything amusing was particularly conspicuous and notwithstanding the unceasing rain (during Friday night) which rendered the walk (which has been raised all along the Abbey river to keep off floods from the low meadows called *the Bank*) not only unpleasant but dangerous, being all soft clay & slippery. Yet sooner

than disappoint us, they accompanied us and when we arrived, we were recompensed by a sweet prospect of the river Shannon, here very broad, and the weir with trap for taking eels & salmon, made of wicker work, extending entirely across: this is the work of the Corporation of the City Limerick (as I understand) in order to enrich themselves, but, as I've been told, they have been much mistaken; for the river being so shut up that a sufficient quantity of mother fish cannot make their way up to spawn, consequently a great decrease in numbers - so avarice defeats itself. We were received into as neat a little breakfasting house where everything, utensil & furniture, shewed the most exact cleanliness. We got a most excellent breakfast & after having had so good a walk, enjoyed it doubly. The river here forms an island of about 30 acres, remarkably rich, called St. Thomas's Island. There are here remarkably fine bolting mills belonging to Mr. Gabbitt. The seat of Mr. Maunsell just opposite adds greatly to the scene, being a neat brick dwelling with sloping lawn to the waters edge, finely improved & wooded & behind the fine range of the Coy. Clare mountains cultivated to the summit. This house is in great repute and a favourite spot for indulgence & recreation to the citizens, where they spend many days, bringing out materials for dining & getting them dressed here. We disliked the walk by the bank so much that we determined to go home the carriage road & indeed it is difficult to say which was worse, save that on the first we were not sure of our feet one moment and on the latter, tho' we were on a road, 'twas a foot deep of water & mud. So much for variety. I should not omit mentioning the very fine prospect from a rising hill, as we returned, on the left side the road, called Gibbet Hill, which commands a most extensive view, with the Shannon meandering as far as Castle Connell and down again with Limerick, its steeple & shipping. It is a charming scene. Returned into Limerick and amused ourselves 'till dinner time, when we went & partook of a friendly dinner with my

friend John Kennedy (Patrick St.) & his wife. Had a very pleasant group, met a Mr. Shea, a young gentleman & resident of Limerick, who amused us very highly with his violin. Spent a very agreeable afternoon.

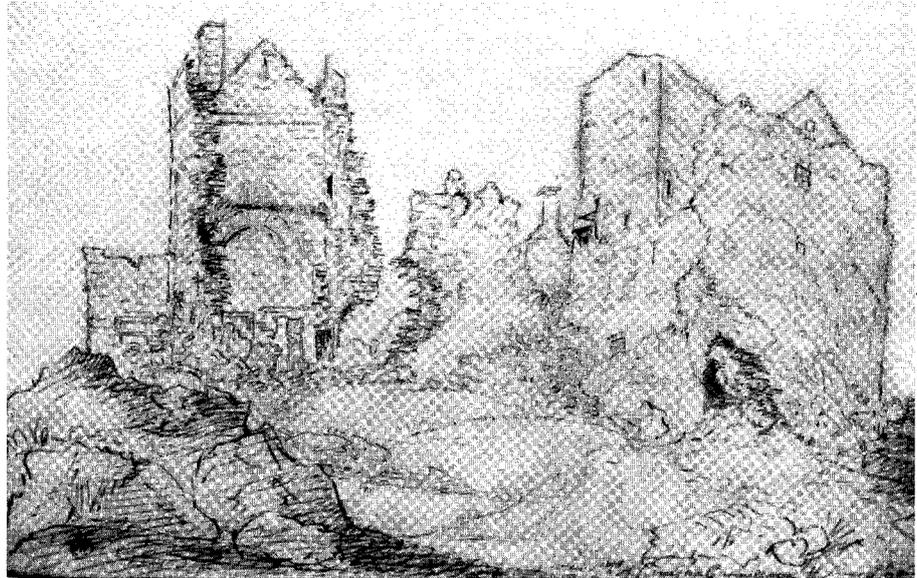
### Sunday, 20 August 1797

Breakfasted this morning with Mr. Martin Arthur, \_\_\_\_\_ Street, where we had a Munster breakfast (or in my mind a Catholic one), composed of two or three courses of choice steaks with Staffordshire Beer, turkey & hen's eggs, &c. &c., which went off capitally. From hence we went to hear church service performed at the Cathedral & which was so full we could scarce gain admittance. However, after various trials we succeeded. 'Twas completely the reverse of Cashel, where we had *charming music* & bad praying & preaching. Here we had wretched music (I mean the vocal parts, which were performed by a bad clerk & 8 or 10 poor boys of some charter school dressed as a choir intolerably bad). The organ by Mr. Osborne very well, but indeed the sermon from Mr. Hoare was as fine a piece of composition as possible & delivered with equal grace & judgment. I regretted much that he seemed declining in health, for if his example (which I understand is the case) equals his precept, surely he must daily make converts: I confess he fixed my attention most forcibly, withdrawing my rambling thoughts to the weighty subject he was discussing. After church we ordered our horses and in company with 5 or 6 Limerick Bloods (with them was Mr. John Meade, an easy traveller & with whom my friend Holmes & I rode all day, leaving the dashers to leap & cross the country, which seemed to constitute their entire diversion), whilst we fair & easily jogged it on, admiring the change of scene & winding river fertilizing & enriching as it prolonged its course. We visited Tervoe, the seat of Mr. Maunsell, on the banks of the Shannon about 3 $\frac{1}{2}$  miles distant from Limerick. It is a charming situation, finely planted & improved, the timber well

grown. The possessor is every day adding fresh grounds; planting &c. & is enclosing the whole in just now with a fine wall. From hence we rode about one mile farther to view the Rock of Carrignagunnell (or the Rock of the Candle, as I've heard it translated), once the great and almost impregnable castle of the Lords of Thomond. It stands majestically elevated on a great extent of rock, raised on every side at least 80 ft. above the surrounding surface. The access is steep & difficult. From the venerable & prodigious remains of ruin, this must have been a residence fit for a prince. It can boast of everything appertaining to grandeur, the extent it covers, the style of workmanship, but above all, the beauty of situation; for in my life I think I never saw such a country as it overlooks for a circumference of 50 or 60 miles, the highly improved & fertile county of Limerick round its base for many miles, with the entire command of the Shannon almost from the sea, Limerick City under it - and then you overlook the grounds of Mr. Maunsell & Genl. Massey, of fine extent - you can hence view & reckon clearly five counties: Limerick, Clare, Tipperary, Cork & Kerry. I must say truly I felt our progenitors had more taste, more spirit & more energy than I have yet witnessed in any succeeding generation, & I know begin to think it rational if a man wishes to preserve the name of his family for ages to come, let him with enterprise undertake virtuous & charitable duties, let him acquit himself a neighbour & an honest man, and by so doing have *his* name celebrated, to his son, with a bright example to follow & imitate; and at same time, let him if his circumstances enable it, let him build an house (nay a castle, if it may be) that will strike the eye of the passing stranger and bring across his mind the remembrance of his good works, when every tongue is dumb in relating the heroic actions of his well spent life - let him erect a monument that shall stand generations, and outvie old time, that it may be an incitement to the traveller, who thro' curiosity led thither, may be led to imitate the virtues he hears recorded. Go and do likewise. We were highly delighted with this old castle and determined on spending Monday (the day following) in privacy here. So descended, mounted our horses & rode home another road by Genl. Massey's. After a ride of ten miles we returned to Limerick and dined with Mr. Peter Arthur (Charlotte Quay), where we were rather intemperate.

### Monday, 21 August 1797

Monday morning. Breakfasted at Mr. John Arthur Meade's, Broad St., very neat, where we met his sister, Mrs. Gleeson (the young widow), who very politely engaged us to spend the following day, Tuesday, at her mother's lodge at Castle Connell & to accompany her & some young friends to the assembly & sup out. We agreed directly and promised ourselves much pleasure in realizing it. My



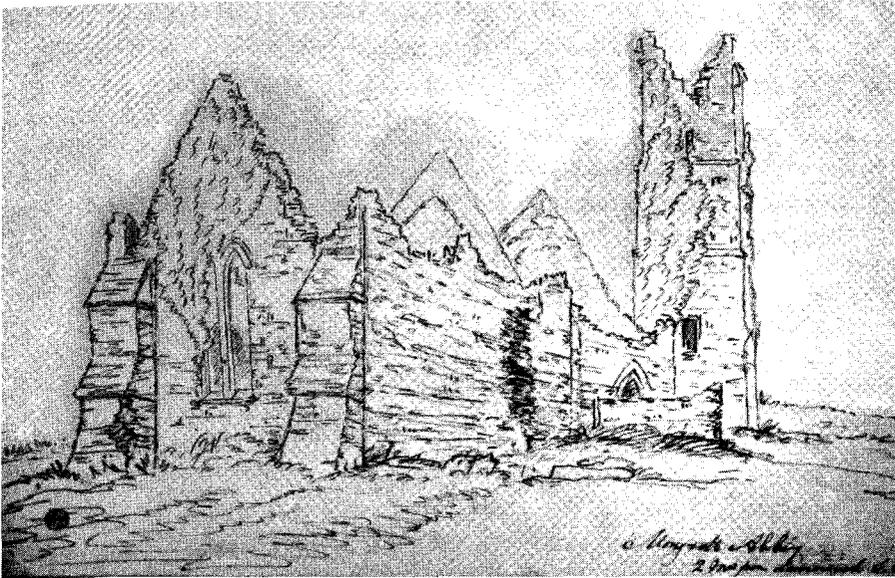
Sketch of Carrigunnell by John Harden, 1797

friend Holmes & self now mounted horse accompanied by Lyons, who carried the sketch book and so rode on for Carrick na Gunnell (as we intended in our way thither we stopped at the little church of Mungret, once a celebrated college, now mouldring in decay). G.H. made a very neat drawing of it. There is nothing particularly attractive in it but, being a place of some antiquity, was worth making a sketch of. We proceeded on to Carrig na Gunnell, had our horses put into a small inner room of a cottage & mounted the rock. The day was uncommonly favourable and the prospect enchanting. G. H. made two most successful sketches and I endeavoured at two more. We amused here 'till appetite warned us by the dinner bell, & on looking at the hour, four, it near 5, but the time being so pleasant slept over unnoticed. Quite satisfied with ourselves we descended, having enriched the folio, and proceeded to where the horses had been left. And only think, the good woman of the house, judging we should be fatigued & hungry & have 5 miles to ride before dinner, had to obviate all our difficulties, laid her table & neat white cloth, covered with nice potatoes, butter, milk & eggs: her clean hearth and inviting welcome, tho' uttered only by her *eyes* & spoke in a language unintelligible to us (I mean our native Irish), we complied and she seemed happy in having it to bestow: she gave it unasked, and as her daughter told me, her mother regretted 'twas not better. We arose refreshed and I felt more grateful for this simple repast than for all the full fed luxuriant banquets we had since we came to Limerick. After giving her daughter some little compliment to buy a ribband, at the receipt of which she blushed, and such a tint overran her healthful cheek, but I can't say more. We mounted our horses after blessing our kind hostess and rode into Limerick (in all 10 miles). For the first time since we came here, we had an opportunity of walking after dinner, the evenings being universally dedicated to Bacchus. It was a charming evening: and met a great number of smart, fashionable,

& very handsome girls. Returned to our lodging quietly & retired, after an agreeably pass'd day.

### Tuesday, 22 August 1797

This morning breakfasted with the smart widow Gleeson. W.S. vastly agreeable (at least she seemed to think so). We accompanied her after breakfast according to engagement to Castle Connell. She was drove in a gig by W. S., who said a thousand kind things on the occasion. But my horse being lamed by a cursed shoer, we agreed 't would be better to travel in a chaise and accordingly hired one, which brought us there, remained & brought us in the evening to and from the assembly so cheap as 11.4½ for three. Lyons attended the gig on Mr. S's mare. After a drive of six miles we arrived at Castle Connell. The road here equals any I have ever seen. This is quite the beau place, equipage, parade, liveries, visiting &c &c. and all the gay habiliments of fashionable effeminacy. The situation is picturesque - the town lies low & is composed of unconnected buildings ranging along the low road that runs verging the Shannon. They are neat little thatched cottages inhabited by people of the first rank & respectability during the season, who come for the benefit of the waters which are much esteemed, highly chalybeate, of the same nature of the German waters, not muddied, less purgent & sparkling, deemed excellent in bilious cases & obstructions of the liver. They spend their time here actively and pleasantly, usually rise about 7 o'clock, take a tumbler of water, which has little or no taste, rather iron than anything else, perfectly clean, but by frequent using has stained the tumblers an iron mould and when it turns over the flags, the same stain. They after this ride single, double or car, take a second tumbler, still keep moving and generally drive the one road in succession from that 'till breakfast about 9. They then prepare for carriage or horseback & so keep airing 'till about 2, when they drink



Sketch of church at Mungret by John Harden, 1797

spa again & exercise for an hour; then return, dress for dinner and afterwards walk on the road or mall for 2 or 3 hours or prepare for private parties or assemblies (every Tuesday & Friday). Thus succeeds one day to another. There prevails less distance or affected pride here than anywhere I know. Each seems happy to accommodate the other, & I swear I don't think I saw one invalid whilst there, save only those whose constitution was not for mixing wine with their water, had taken the wine by itself & now came to add the water. We drew up to Hermitage, the seat of Mr. Bruce about 1 mile distant hence. It lies on a bank over the Shannon. On the opposite side lies the seat of Mr. Hugh Dillon Massey (son of Sir H. D. M.), called Doonass. They mutually assist the other. Hermitage is without doubt as handsome a place, whether in respect of house, interior elegance or diversity of surface & beauty of prospect as can be met with. The ornamenting, the house is neat, rich & light, without being paltry, the sloping lawns to the very water beautifully planted and washed by the Shannon, which here tumbles for the space of above half a mile in extent, fall after fall some 10 ft. - 8. 6., 3ft., & so on with the most tremendous violence and in the most fanciful forms, creating in its course several islands, many of which are finely spotted with trees and have cattle on them. Rook Island is the best wooded & most picturesque. After having rambled thro' Hermitage in company with Mrs. G., our friends and Mr. Wilkinson & his pleasing sisters and enjoyed very highly the many enchanting prospects it commands, particularly from the drawing room & end window of the eating parlour & along the balcony *outside*, we returned, rambled about the town & ascended the old castle belonging to Connell of celebrated memory. This stood firm on a piece of rock 30ft. high, commanding the river & hanging over the bridge, the High road runs immediately at its base. From its situation commanding the whole town & navigation of the River Shannon, it must have been a place of

considerable strength, as the huge remains still standing evidently shew. It was knocked to skivers by the order of the Prince of Hesse, who commanded the garrison of Limerick. It was a strong fortification in 1690. However, the relics still existing form a fine object look'd at from every side, particularly down the river from the Spa. The gay parade of the inhabitants, the number of cotts frisking backwards and forwards, some pleasuring, others fishing & so on, rendered the scene interesting & novel. Returned to dinner & having refreshed and enjoyed the evening 'till near 9, went to dress for the assembly. We had engaged private rooms for the night (which had remained unsettled in a lodging house) where we were quiet & had good beds. We were much pleased with the assembly, which tho' not crowded, yet sufficient to make a cheerful evening, and having three smart women of our group, rend'ed it still more interesting. There were many very fine girls & women, but rather a scarcity of lads. We broke up early & returned to sup in private with our ladies, after which we retired to our lodging, with our minds reflecting with satisfaction on the day and evening spent.

### Wednesday, 23 August 1797

We went over to breakfast with Mrs. Meade & her daughter, the widow (Wm. Sinnett seemed to make an impression on her & we gave him every opportunity of being gallant - he squir'd her along the roads, & G. H. and self brought up the rear). We had agreed to take a walk along the banks the river to enquire at Mr. Wilkinson's lodge for the young lady (his daughter), who spent the evening before with us. The walk here is very wild & beautiful, merely a footpath for one person along the river edge thro' rocks & briars & affording every opportunity to the attentive swain to pick the steps with care for his admir'd mistress, & which my friend Wm. done to a hair. Having at last with some difficulty and a deal of pleasure

arrived at Mr. Wilkinson's neat little lodge on the banks of the Shannon, we were joined by the young ladies (& Mrs. Carroll, a married sister & a very pleasing woman). We put across the river in two cotts, over to Mr. Hugh D. Massey's charming seat, Doonass, where we rambled about for two or three hours, ascended the Turret, which is an ornamental object, built with brick, very convenient, three stories high, the roof's lofty & of a hexagon figure. It stands out boldly in the most rapid part of the stream descending from the salmon leap, on a huge projecting rock & commanding a delightful view. I forgot to mention that our Limerick friends, attentive as usual, had invited us to spend a day on the water in order to see some of the beauties of the Shannon, to which we readily assented, but upon enquiry were glad to change our minds, finding from their habits that merriment consisted in excess & dissipation & fearing some accident in a dangerous river from headstrong intoxicated men, so we had in our minds (as the party was made for us) determined on riding out & home sooner than trust an uncertain element with uncertain company, but to join them & have our day cheerfully spent, for which wise resolve we have great reason to be thankful, as the result will shew. Wednesday, (this very day) was the day fixed for our excursion and the place Rook Island distant at 1/2 a mile down the river hence. Finding it thus, the moment we arrived at Cas. Conn. on Tuesday we sent Lyons off to our friends in Limerick, acquainting them of our detention by reason of the ladies & the assembly, but that we would join them next day at Rook Island & to beg their indulgence, in consequence of which we amused ourselves 'till near 4 o'clock Wednesday, when Mr. Wilkinson, G. H. W.S. & self put across to Doonass and I desired the boatmen wait our return at 7 same evening, which they did. We had a charming walk down to where we were appointed to meet & just as we arrived they, our Limerick friends, sailed up (Mr. Martin Arthur Peter Arthur Jno Kennedy, Mr. Shea &c. &c), a very agreeable group & laden with all kinds of good things in the eating & drinking way - the horns from the Tyrone regiment, the fifes & drum from the Limerick Artillery: the weather was delightful & the utmost harmony & cheerfulness prevailed. Would it had rested here, but inebriety followed cheerfulness and mischance had near dark'ned the whole evening. As we had planned to ride home quietly, so we stole away one by one and left the boys with the pint tumblers & mugs bumpering away to their sweethearts & to work home their own way. We mounted our horses, which Lyons had ready at Cas. Conn. and notwithstanding a thousand requests to spend that evening & night and the good inclination of some part of our trio, yet I carried my point & we rode home 6 miles triumphant, amid, I fear, a thousand ill-natured rebukes & jests from the ladies left behind, but I was not to be appeased. We joined the



Ruin of Hermitage, 1948.

(Limerick Museum)

party of gentlemen (with whom we had spent the forenoon) on our return at the lodgings of Mr. Shea, where we were handsomely entertained, save only with the recital of the evenings adventures and particularly the exploits of one Mr. W-k-n-s-n, an enlightened savage in my mind, who conceiving one of the boatmen as drunk as himself, intended him some offence, seized him by the hair (at the risk of everyone's life in the cott, a mere giggling thing), dragged him over, then flung him into the river & just suspended him above water to save life 'till he landed him at the distant side the river near 2 miles from Limerick, from whence the poor half drowned wretch had to walk home at 10 o'clock at night (I must say when I heard that the unfortunate man was refused redress on representation of the facts to the Mayor, that I pitied him much, & felt for the partial distribution of justice to the lower ranks of society, too frequently tho'

grossly maltreated). After prolonging the evening considerably, we retired satiated and with a firm resolve to quit Limerick as soon as possible, notwithstanding every exertion our friends made to add to our amusement & which certainly succeeded equal to our wishes, save only the unceasing sacrifice of every afternoon to the Bottle, even to intoxication, no such thing as a walk or evening indulgence. We retired to our chambers reflecting on two days most agreeably spent (Tuesday & Wednesday), the weather being very fine made all our pleasures treble.

#### Thursday, 24 August 1797

Rose and it being wet, frustrated our intentions of departing (add to that a second vagabond smith hurt my horse in shoeing and detained us). The rain continued unceasing. Breakfasted at our lodging and wished to remain one day at

rest, but our esteemed friend, Mr. Martin Arthur (whom & his brother's attention were friendly & attentive), came and insisted on our taking a dinner in the family way. We agreed and spent the intermediate part of the day at our lodgings writing letters, sketching &c &c. At 1/2p'5 we were joined by all the party with whom we were boating yesterday and, hearing of our intending to leave them so soon, determined on one nights hard work. To it they fell, & in the course of my life I never saw what drinking was 'till then (particularly a Mr. Edwards, whose system, after the Venetian's fashion, equals anything I've met). Nevertheless, tho' we were made the marks for directing the force of their artillery against, my friend G. H. & self got off after many struggles, victorious, & left the besotted wretches to wallow in their filth. Retired disgusted with their misdoings, and blessing our good stars that had implanted in our nature such a dislike to drinking, & resolved on quitting Limerick next morning in order to renovate for our intemperance.

#### Friday, 25 August 1797

This morning fine, prepared our things, cleared off our bill, & after having taken breakfast with the widow G\_\_ in order to apologise for our abrupt departure on Wednesday evening & taking a certain lad (whom she wished to stay) along with us, parted all good friends, mounted our horses and turned our back on Limerick, regretting that our friends had so much mistaken the mode of making us happy, & that we had not more frequent interviews with the ladies there. Nevertheless impressed with the most lively feeling of their hospitality & wish to please, we were obliged to leave our friend W. S. (who had engaged a party of friends for this evening as a return for their attention) behind us to entertain them, and we agreed to meet together on the next evening at Askeaton on our way to Killarney.



Doonass House, c.1950.

(Limerick Museum)