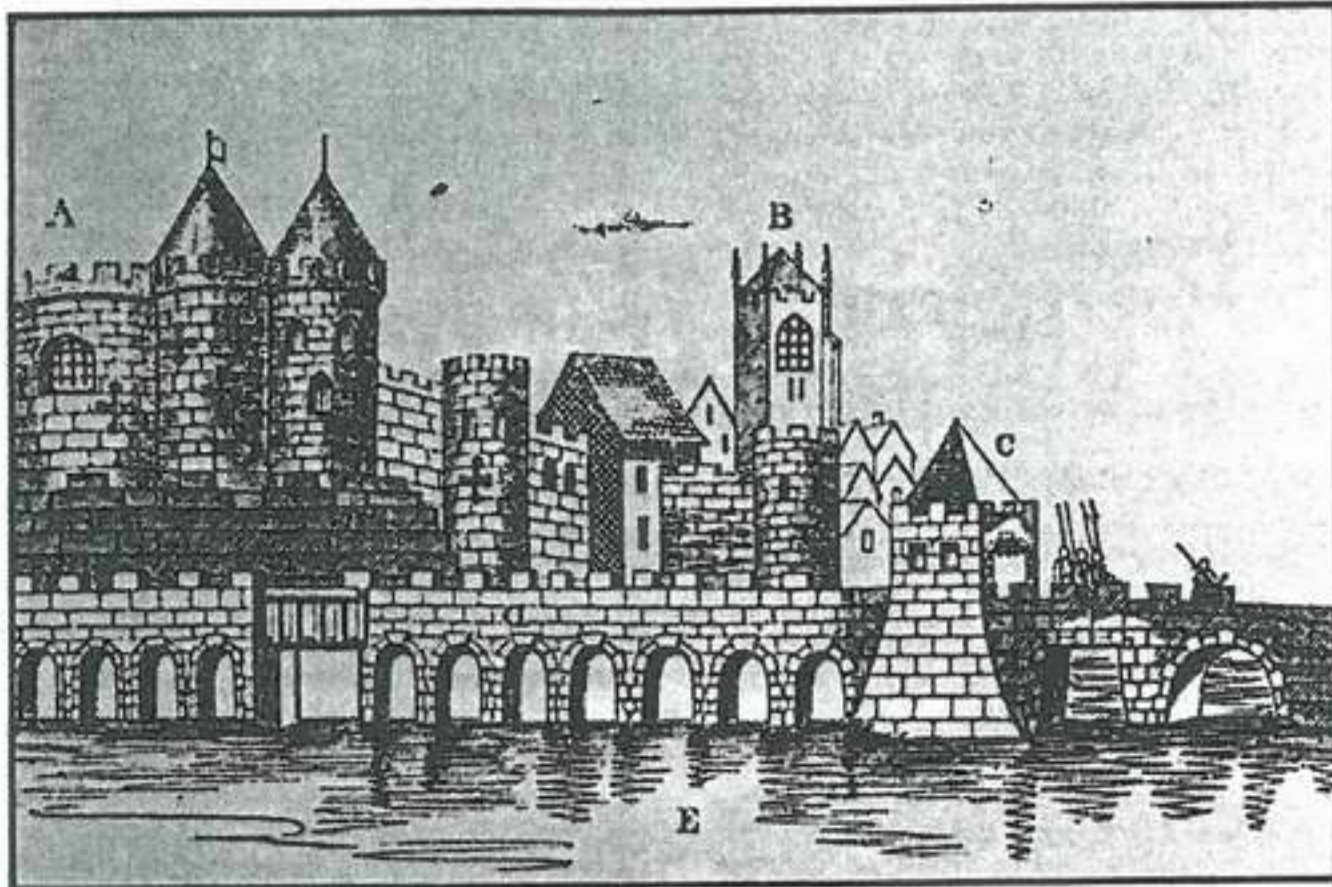


# Limerick in 1689

**B**y the 1680s, Limerick had become one of the strongest fortresses in Ireland, and was the chief centre of the civil and military government of the south-west of the country, and second in importance only to Dublin. Other major walled cities and towns were Galway, Athlone, Derry, Coleraine, Carrick Fergus, Dungannon, Dundalk, Drogheda, Dublin, Waterford, Kinsale and Cork. By the standards of the time, it was a considerable achievement - a medieval city that had not outgrown the areas enclosed by its centuries old walls which encompassed the English and Irish towns. While these were two distinct towns, they also were complimentary to one another, and between them had a combined circumference of 3 miles protecting an area of 70 acres. Although both towns were different in shape and character, they were roughly the same size at 35 acres each, and joining them was only one bridge of four arches, known as Ye Bridge, the Tide Bridge, Baal's Bridge, or the Bald Bridge (Droichead Maol), i.e. a span without parapet walls. It had been built over the narrowest point of the Abbey River in 1340 when it replaced an existing structure. There was a drawbridge on the English Town side at Baal's Bridge North Gate.(8)

As the Irish Town was constructed after the English Town, it was much better fortified; its walls were up to 10ft thick and 40 ft high in places, and had strong towers or bulwarks, some mounting cannon, and five gateways. (15) - (19) The principal streets were *An Boher Mor* (Broad Street) which ran south from Baal's Bridge South Gate. (15) Branching from Broad Street was Mungret Street which ran south west as far as 'Mongrett' Gate, (18) and John Street which ran south-east as far as St. John's Gate, (17) (also known as Kilmallock Gate). Mungret, Broad and Palmerstown lanes ran off these streets. The major buildings were Shambles Castle (J), Thomcore Castle (O), St. John's (Protestant) Church (L), the Pest House (hospital) (X), and, just outside the walls, St. Michael's Church (M) was situated on a small island linked to the Abbey River. At that time, the Abbey River was known by its Irish name, *Ghabal Bheag*, meaning the little branch (of the Shannon). The Irish Town contained the greater part of the parish of St. John's and a part of that of St. Michael's. A considerable part of the town was made up of gardens and orchards.

The English Town on King's Island had many towers, mounting cannon at strategic points, and fourteen gateways (1) - (14) and its walls were 4 ft. thick in most parts and 3 ft in others. High Street,



*King John's Castle, St. Mary's Cathedral and Old Thomond Bridge, as drawn by Thomas Dineley in 1680.*

**BY RICHARD AHERN**

or Great Street, bisected the town and stretched from the Island Gate (3) to Baal's Bridge North Gate. (8). From the Great Street ran many laneways: Bishop's, Bonfield's, Bow, Broad, 'Change (Exchange), Creagh, Courthouse, Emlline's or Hemlin's, Fish, Flag, Gaol, Gridiron, Halyard's, Jenkin's, Meeting-house, Merritt's, Mill, Monks, Newgate, Prison, Quay, Red Lion, Stag, Tholsel (Town Hall) and Whitehorse lanes. The street names were Castle or Thomond Street, which led to Thomond Bridge, and across to the Clare side of the Shannon, St. Dominick Street, or Abbey Lane, and, of course, the High or Great Street. The principal buildings were King John's Castle (B), the Tholsel (I), the City Courthouse (S) in Quay Lane (S), St. Mary's Cathedral (A), the County Courthouse (G), just outside the walls in St. Francis Abbey (G), from which the Abbey River takes its name, the Exchange (F), St. Peter's Cell Church (E), Ald. Dominic Fanning's House (U), St. Dominick's Abbey (D), and St. Nicholas' Church (K). The English Town contained the parish of St. Mary (which included Scattery Island, near Kilrush, Co. Clare), and parts of the parishes of St. Nicholas and St. Munchin. The Great Street was lined with the many fine and substantial residences of the wealthier citizens, while the poorer inhabitants lived mainly in the Irish Town. The commercial activity of the English Town provided employment outlets, many of which were filled by workers from the Irish Town. The Assembly (Corporation) was responsible

for the running of both towns.

There were many stone memorials inserted in the walls, usually on or near one of the gates and in some cases the inscription referred to major repair works that had been carried out. In all, there were about fourteen inscriptions and most were in Latin. For instance, built into the gateway (6) at the bottom of Gaol Lane, facing St. Francis Abbey (G) was a niche with a statue of St. James and a tablet which read as follows:

*Sancte Iacobe  
Defende nos ab hoste  
Hic bellona tonat, sedet hic astra  
renascens,  
Hac pietas ad aquas, ac sacra pandit iter.  
Anno domini MDCXLVII  
R.R. Caroli Dominic Fanning Praetore  
David Creagh et Iacobo Sexton vicec.*

A direct translation of this inscription reads:

*St. James  
Defend us from the enemy  
Here war thunders; here renewed justice  
sits;  
Along this way duty reveals the road to  
the waters and holy shrines  
AD 1647  
In the reign of Charles; Dominic  
Fanning Mayor.  
David Creagh and James Sexton Sheriffs.*

At Mungret Gate (18) was another inscription:

*In the reign of  
King Charles  
Peter Creagh - Mayor  
AD 1643*

Another example was the dedication, in gold letters on black marble, on the side of the Bridge Gate (2) facing the city:



*The Freeman's Duties without Tax or Rate*

*Repair'd this Place the Thomond Bridge and Gate*

AD 1674

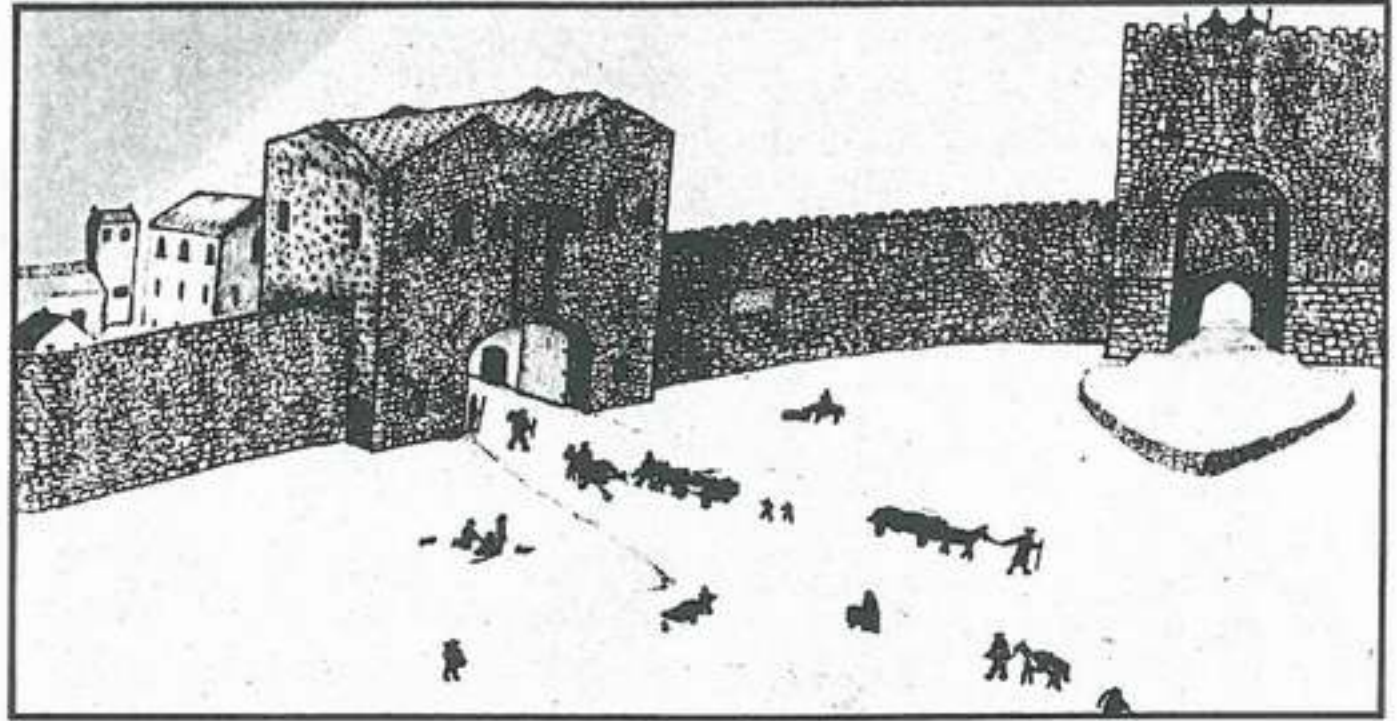
*William York, Esqr. Mayor.*

Some of the surrounding townlands outside the city were Killeely (Killeely), Shanbollye (Shanabooly), Cluoinedrainagh (Clondrinagh), Cownagh (Coonagh), Cahir Davin, Farrintoine (Farranshone), Mone Mrahyr (Monabraher), Prior's Land, Garryglosse (Garryglass), Rathbane, Corckanrye (Corkanree), Corballie (Corbally) and Gallwone (Galvone). These lands were made up of pasture, arable, meadow, red bog, marshland, dry arable and shrubby wood. Some of the surrounding parishes were St. Patrick's, St. Laurence's, Kilmurry, Carnary (Cahirnarry) and the parish of Mongrett (Mungret). Outside the walls of the Irish Town was Gallows Green (V) where miscreants were hanged for major and not-so-major crime. On nearby Singland Hill was Ireton's Fort, and about a half-mile south of St. John's Gate, (17) on the road to Kilmallock and Kilkenny, stood Cromwell's Fort. (These structures were renamed Mackay's Fort and Count Nassau's Fort, respectively, by General de Ginkle, after two of his commanders, in 1691). On an area prone to flooding on the northern part of King's Island was another fortress, about a half-mile north of Island Gate, (3), known also as Cromwell's Fort - a star-shaped stronghold and roughly squared at 100 yards a side. There was yet another fort on the Clare side of Thomond Bridge, called, appropriately, Thomond Fort (W), while further out on the road to Ennis, at Killeely Cross, was the Mayor's Stone which read:

*This paving was wholly ended at the charges of the Corporation, James Whit E Fitziamas Exqvair Being maior anni di MDCXXXVIII.*

Close by, a plentiful supply of timber was to be had from the Thomond Woods, and stone known as 'black marble' was produced in Altamira Quarry. Near Parteen was Quinpool Bridge, and six miles further north, Bunratty Castle. On the west side of St. Thomas' Island stood the ancient Lax Weir, and to protect it was the little castle known as *Caislean an Corra* (Castle of the Weir) where members of Limerick Corporation had the privilege of being able to '... have a salmon or more to eat in the weir-house castle at any time for nothing,' while freemen could have as many as they could eat in the castle (at Lax Weir) for 9d each. Eastwards, on the Clare shore, was Kilquane graveyard.

Inside the walls, the most outstanding building was, of course, St. Mary's Cathedral (A), with its adjoining college and dean's house (which occupied more



*St. John's Gate and Citadel, drawn by Richard Ahern.*

ground than it does today).

Beside the west side of the cathedral was the Quay or Great Quay, constructed almost 200 years earlier (circa 1500), much of it built with money from the forfeited cargo of contraband goods from a Bristol ship. (Limerick appears to have had certain agreements with Bristol, covering such trading transactions, and in 1680 freemen of the city of Bristol did not have to pay any inward or outward tolls here.) The 100ft wide entrance was guarded by two towers, and six pieces of artillery, on the taller southern tower, helped to make the quay a well protected and safe harbour. Between the towers a strong chain was extended for increased defence.

From the tall tower the wall reached to a height of about 30ft at low-water, and ran for about 600ft eastwards to Quay Lane Gate (10). This section was built on two levels, and the upper level was used as a walk by the people of the city. The wall had undergone major repairs, nearly 50 years before, in 1640/41, during Mayor William Comyn's term of office. Inside the dock was an irregular piece of water made up of quays and jetties. The Great Quay was capable of discharging vessels of 200 tons or more, but the much larger merchant ships could only sail to within a half-mile of the city and, on occasions, no further than Bunratty Castle. The large open area on the landward side of the Great Quay allowed ample space for the discharge and loading of the city's imports and exports. Exports included ale, bacon, barley, beans, beef, butter, cattle on the hoof, corn - for which Limerick was noted - feathers, articles of frieze (wool), hides of cattle, deer, goats and otters, horses, malt, oats, peas, pipestaves, rapeseed, salmon and other types of fish, silver and lead from the lands of John MacDermot O'Kennedy in the Barony of Upper Ormond and from the mines at Dunally (both in Co. Tipperary), tallow, tanned hides, timber, wool and woolfells. These exports were classed as going 'to England' or 'to Foreign Parts' such as France, Spain, Holland, Portugal, Italy and other Mediterranean ports. The

English parliament usually permitted exports to continue to countries it was at war with. Imports consisted of coffee, deal boards from Norway, hops ('best quality') from England, iron, lemons, madder, oranges, sugar from the West Indies, pottery from North Devon, Staffordshire and Buckley, salt, sheep ('to improve local stock'), tobacco (by Richard Pierce) from Antigua in the West Indies and wine. The bulk of these imports came from England, Scotland, Spain, France and Holland. On the whole, the volume and value of imports exceeded that of exports, and smuggling was a common practice.

Close to Baal's Bridge and opposite Dominick Fanning's house (U) stood the Tholsel (I), which was built between 1449 and 1451. It had two large inscriptions in Latin on the outside wall, one of which read:

*Behold this building in two parts supported by columns. Kindly celestial justice occupies. With public money Jordan Roche, Mayor of the City AD 1640*

In the upper part of this two-storey building was the town court, and justices of the peace residing there were John Bourke, Tieghe McMahon, John Fitzgerald, John Ankettle and Edward Lacy. The lower part was an Exchange, spanned by a series of arches, where commercial transactions took place. This was one of the essential buildings in the English Town, but in 1673 the Assembly (Corporation) and the hub of the commercial activity moved from this old building to the newly-built Exchange (F) on the Great Street. This was constructed at the expense of Mayor William York and, some years later, in 1685, Mayor Robert Smith donated 'the Nail', a limestone pillar with a brass top on which tradesmen publicly paid their bills. In the same year he (Smith) repaired the Island Gate (3) fortification and over the portal placed an engraving to commemorate the event.

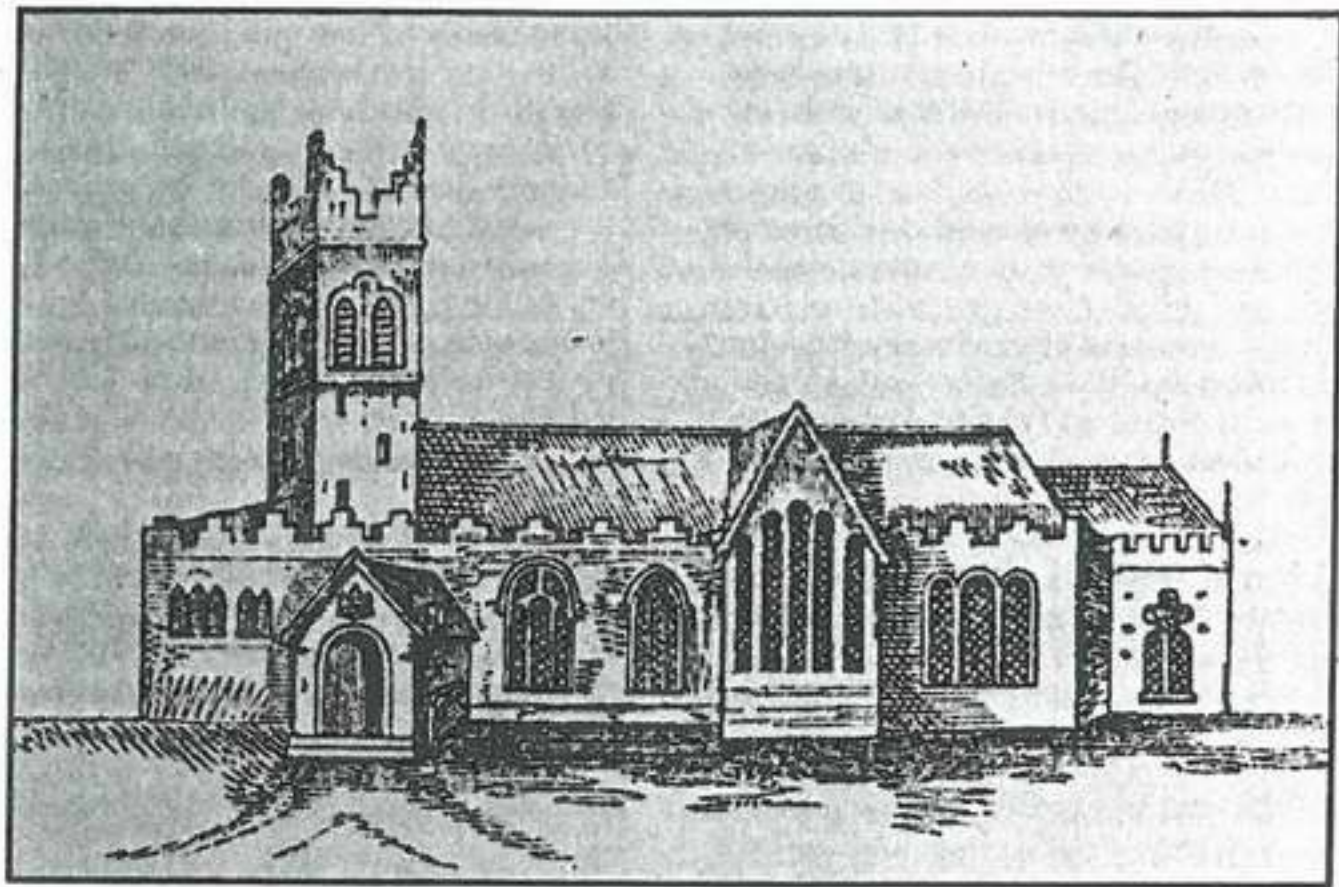
King John's Castle (B), an irregular five-sided fortress with strongholds at



the angles, dominated the city. The castle's early history is one of neglect: in 1330 it was badly in need of repair, and again in 1576 'the ruins of the King's Castle' were repaired. In 1611, the south-east tower, close to St. Nicholas' Church (K), was replaced by a solid four-sided bastion which overlooked the city and had 5 or 6 cannon on it. The north-west keep, that nearest to Thomond Bridge, is said to be the oldest part of the castle. In 1680, the constable was Lord Viscount Blessington, Sir William King served as governor, and some of the military stationed there were Major McGuire, Thomas Cullen, George Creighton, Gilbert Talbot, Swift Nicks, Francis Jones and John Motlow. From the castle to the Clare side of the river ran a ledge of rock known as Curragour Falls, and at this point it was safe to walk across at low tide. Close by was the ancient Thomond Bridge (built c.1359 at the cost of £30.) of 14 arches on which was Bridge Gate (2), an egress and drawbridge. This gate was on the Clare side of the bridge between the 12th and 13th arch. The span was 150 yds in length and only 8 feet - 10 inches in width, with a floor of planks.

Just inside Island Gate (3) was St. Munchin's church (C) which had been founded in the 5th century by St. Munchin (or Manchenus), the first bishop of Limerick, and was originally a wooden structure. It was rebuilt by the Norsemen in the middle of the 10th century and was the cathedral church until the building of St. Mary's Cathedral in the late 12th century. Directly outside Island Gate (3) was a bowling green, a 'house of entertainment' (theatre), a large garden area and a promenade. There were smaller areas or lots let out by the constable of the King's Castle for grazing. St. Dominick's Abbey (D) was built in 1227 by Donogh Corbrac O'Brien, (buried there in 1241) King of Limerick, for the friars of the order of St. Dominick. (This brotherhood possessed lands in and about the municipality and a chapel on St. Thomas' Island.) The monastery had been rebuilt by James Fitzjohn, 6th Earl of Desmond, in 1462. A papal university was established there in 1644 by Pope Innocent X. Just inside St. Peter's Cell Gate (4) was a nunnery founded in 1172 for Augustinian nuns, dedicated to St. Peter, and was known as St. Peter's Cell.

Outside the ramparts, near Gaol Lane Gate (6), was St. Francis' Abbey (G), which for the most part was in ruins. As this priory was outside the city walls, it was officially in the county of Limerick, and the county court sat in this old edifice. On Sundays, it was used as a place of worship by a preacher named Baily. It had been taken over by the Franciscans, on 4 October, 1687 (St. Francis' Day), and was consecrated by the Right Revd. John Moloney, Catholic Bishop of Limerick. Close by Baal's Bridge North Gate (8) stood the priory of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine (H). This south-east corner of the English Town was low-lying and subject to flooding at the bend of the



*St. Mary's Cathedral, 1680.*

Abbey River. As a result of this problem, the foundations of the priory (H) were undermined and this led to the collapse of part of the building in the 15th century.

Across Baal's Bridge in the Irish Town were some of the more prominent buildings were Droumcore (or Thomcore) Castle (O), built by Thomas Corre in 1401. The Citadel (R) was built into the ramparts between 1590 and 1650 (the building we see in the grounds of St. John's Hospital today is still, basically, the same today). Set into the wall close by was a memorial to the effect that on 1 May, 1650, Mayor John Creagh and his sheriffs, David Rochfort and James Bonfield, gave £200 to cover the cost of outworks at the fortress. Inside the walls was St. John's Protestant Church (L), and in the direction of Mungret Gate (18) was the newly-built (1688) Capuchin Church (N), where the first Mass was said by Friar Maurice White from Clonmel. In the north-west wall of the Irishtown was West Water Gate (19), which was one of the more elaborate entrances of the city. (It was probably built in the 14th century, and it is on this gateway that our present coat of arms is based). There was an inner barrier, which was a replica of the outer one, for added defence should attackers break through the outer gate. It got its name from its position on the western wall of the Irishtown and from its close proximity to the Abbey water-side, from which a small inlet was constructed and ran almost to the gate itself. This little cove provided access for small boats. A short distance from West Water Gate was St. Michael's Church (M), built in the late 12th century (destroyed by 1651) and its graveyard (which has survived to this day). The church and graveyard were located on an island formed by a diversion of the Abbey River.

The houses of the people were for the most part built of square blocks of stone, with cellars underneath, many with slate roofs, some thatched and some with bat-

lements on top, which gave the place an appearance of strength and dignity. These buildings were impressive, and Limerick had been described as the 'City of Castles'. The dwellings were narrow, an average of 18ft in width and very long - up to 208 ft. A smaller number of habitations were of cagework framed in timber and covered with thatch, slates, tiles or other material. These were beginning to decline in number and were being replaced by the stronger more fire-resistant stone built houses. The cabins of the poorer classes in the back lanes were of wattle, covered with clay and thatch. They were easy victims to some fierce fires that raged from time to time, such as those that destroyed many houses in Creagh, Bonfield's and Hamlin's lane during the early to mid-17th century. The small number of homesteads outside the walls were generally of the cabin type, whitewashed and thatched with straw and leaves, with a hole in the roof, to let the smoke out, and sometimes not, in which case the door was left open. They seldom had a proper floor - just the earth - and only some had windows. Inns, shops and business houses had signs hanging outside which were easily identifiable by people who were unable to read, and these signs also served for advertising purposes. In the main, houses were not numbered, but in the wealthier parts of the city they had developed a system whereby a merchant living at, for instance, number 4 Thomond Street in the Englishtown might have had a small outhouse or cabin for his servants and workers, and this dwelling would have been given the number 4.

There were a total of 80 inns and taverns, including Francis Whitemare's 'The Signe of the Globe' and William Allen's, on the same thoroughfare in the Englishtown, while over in the Irishtown was the 'Old Bear Inn' in Broad Street, which had been rebuilt nearly 50 years earlier, in 1640, by Piers Creagh. It was



mostly travellers who stayed in these places, but the accommodation as so wretched and limited that they preferred to stay in 'a gentleman's house'. They often had to eat meals in these inns with a shell, as knives and forks were unknown except in up-to-date establishments. The alcohol, served in pewter mugs, was beer and whiskey, or wine adulterated with cider and spirits. Brandy, claret and French claret was also available. The inn-keepers could not supply liquor during religious services on Sundays. Drunkenness was a national weakness, and the sale of drink was subject to many regulations, including licences. There were many large and small brewers, who employed a considerable number of people. The quality of the beer varied considerably.

The streets, paved with stone from the local quarries, were rough and uneven, and in wet weather were knee-deep in mud in parts. The scavengers (street-cleaners) worked to keep the city clean but their efforts did not have the desired effect because of the inadequate street-cleaning system. Some years earlier in 1678, the town clerk and the controller of the Assembly (Corporation) were appointed to devise methods 'for the keeping of candle-light' on dark nights. Responsibility for street-lighting was placed upon householders and the system was that lanterns and candles were hung from selected houses, determined by the mayor and sheriffs, from 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. in winter. There appears to have been a problem with large numbers of animals because a resolution was passed by the Assembly which prohibited the keeping of swine inside the walls and dogs on the streets after 10 p.m.

The majority of the inhabitants spoke Irish, while the better educated and the upper classes required a knowledge of it only to communicate with workers and servants. The speaking of Irish was not regarded as a mark of inferiority, and was in fact spoken by Irish gentlemen in London. English was generally used for leases and other legal documents, (even wills in Irish were an exception since the 1620s). Irish surnames underwent great changes with the change-over from Irish to English as the language of authority and law. This produced a system that was notoriously indifferent to the spelling of English.

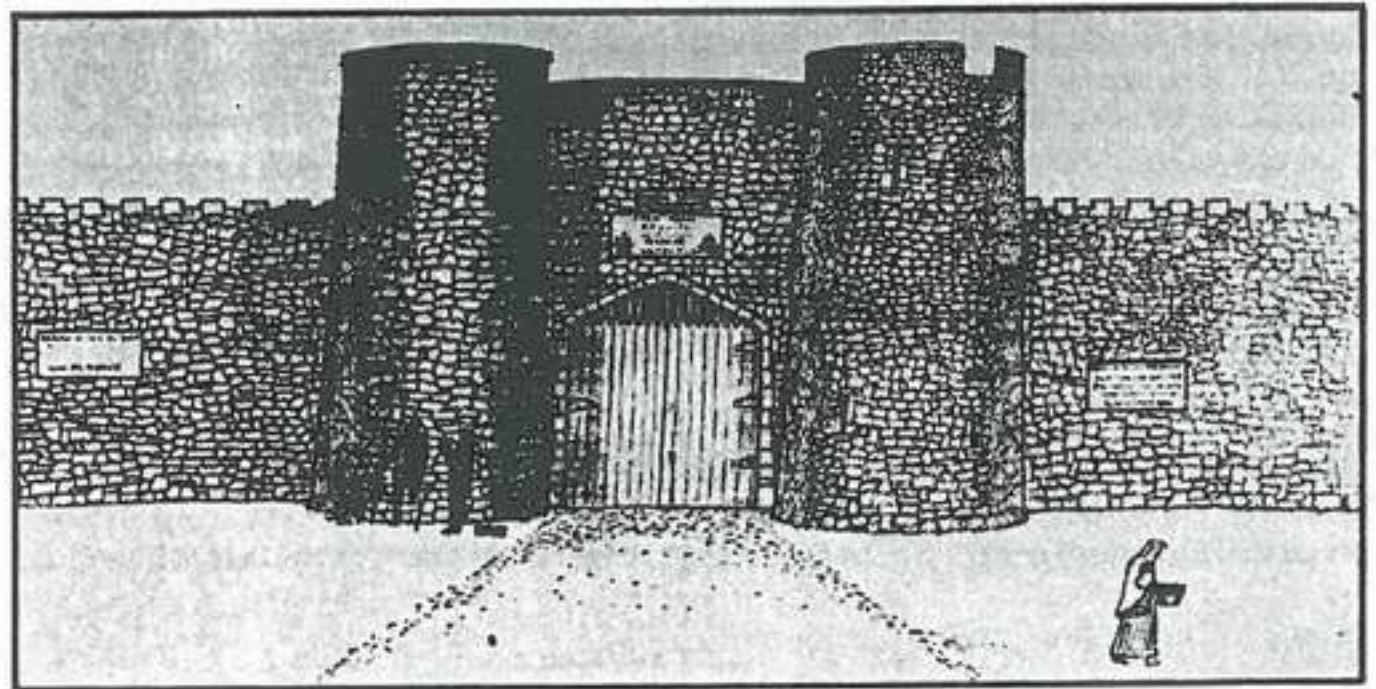
Diet was based primarily on milk and its many solid and semi-solid forms. It also included beans, beetroot, boxty bread, cabbage, cane sugar, cockles, crabs, eggs, fish such as hake and pilchards, gruel, hens, honey, leeks (boiled), metheglin (mead), milk - (sheep's and goat's), mussels, mutton, oatcake, oysters, peas, rabbits, salt, snuff and 'sweet milk' - a mixture of new milk and 'roots' (potatoes). Poorer people were not accustomed to regular meals, while the affluent hardly considered breakfast a meal, as sometimes it only consisted of just a glass of claret or xeres (sherry). It was customary in this period to drink

less often than today but to consume much more. The populace was not self-indulgent regarding food, and it was considered a sin to eat meat or eggs on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Prayers at meals were said in Latin. Orchards were common and a large section of the Irishtown was covered with them. Some of the fruit trees cultivated were the May Duke Cherry, the Bellegarde Peach, and the Cairne Apple, known also as the Irish Strawberry or Arbutus.

The English attempted to introduce a policy of segregation, as illustrated by a bye-law passed (in 1512) which stated '... that no citizen should be admitted on the Panel (Corporation) as a full burgess,

shaven, which in turn led to the fashion for night-caps. Perched on the head or wig was a wide-brimmed hat, with the brim turned up, and sometimes trimmed with gold lace. Also worn were  $3/4$  length coats, with ribbons on the shoulders and sleeves. Ribbons were also attached to shoes, garters, shirts, tall walking sticks and anywhere else space could be found to attach a cluster. Lace was used with almost as much abandon and sometimes the clothes were richly embroidered.

Women's clothes were not as elaborately decorated as the men's, and women did not wear wigs. Their skirts touched the ground and the shoes were made of velvet, leather or silk, and were



*Mungret Gate, drawn by Richard Ahern.*

unless he could speak English well, wear English apparel . . . be a married man . . . ' This separatist policy was based on a residential qualification, but did not extend to the exclusion of the Irish labour force from the Englishtown during the working day. It was not very successful and was difficult to enforce. In fact, the majority of house-owners were 'Irish Papists' (Catholics), and while they were officially barred from administrative posts, a number of 'Papists' were aldermen. Limerick subjects continued to adopt English manners and customs and remained faithful to the crown. With the accession of King James II in 1685, the Catholic religion was officially recognized, a papist governor was appointed and a change occurred in the religious ascendancy of the Assembly. Two years later, in 10 June, 1687, to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Wales, a son of James II, Mayor Robert Hannan distributed 3 hogsheads (approx. 190 gallons) of wine, at his own expense, among the populace. (Some other forms of measurement were the 'firkin', a small cask capable of holding about 8 gals; 'barrell' which contained  $31\frac{1}{2}$  gals or from 190 to 350 lbs, depending on its contents; 'hogshead' was a liquid measure of capacity equal to  $52\frac{1}{2}$  gals or 63 wine gals).

Men of wealth and style wore long hair, occasionally their own, but more often a wig. Heads were cropped or

black or white in colour. Little jewellery was worn, except for a single strand necklace, by some women. Sewing and embroidery, making preserves and cordials, and, of course, the rearing of children was the usual routine of women. Fashionable colours for men and women were green, red, yellow and blue. Pocket watches on chains were carried by the wealthier men, whose day began before dawn with the ringing of the bell of St. Mary's Cathedral (A) at 4 a.m. Afternoons were regarded as time for recreation. To signal an end to the day, St. Mary's bells were again rung at 8 p.m., by which time most people were preparing for bed. At that time, the new year began on 25 March each year, in accordance with the Julian Calendar. The sequence in, for example, 1689 was 25 March, 1689, April, May . . . November, December, January, February and up to 24 March, 1689, then came the beginning of the next new year, 25 March 1690, and so on. (The Gregorian Calendar came into effect in most European countries between 1582 and 1700, but did not apply in Ireland, England and Sweden until 1752). gunmoney coins bore the month as well as the year, and so coins marked March, 1689, and March, 1690, were more than likely issued in the same month.

The houses of the upper classes were elaborately furnished with expensive beds, carpets and wall-hangings; they



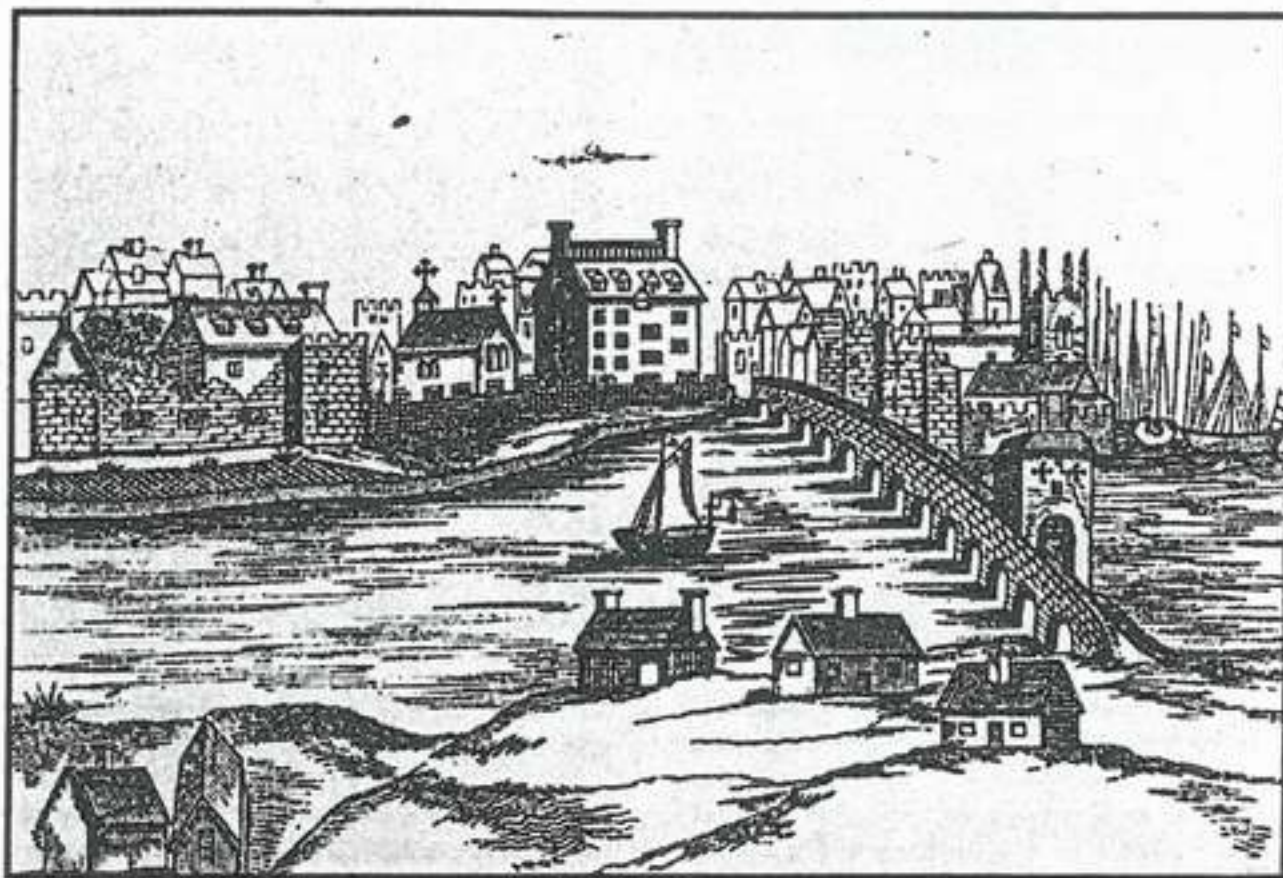
were also comfortable, but sanitation was undreamt of. Household effects usually included utensils for home-brewing and distilling, large brass pans for boiling beef, a bathing-tub, which for the most part was stored away in a backroom, and some people bought and kept pet monkeys. Those who were well off enjoyed bowls on the bowling green just outside Island Gate.<sup>99</sup> Football was a 'useful and charming exercise' with the ball made 'of leather, as large as a man's head and filled with wind; it is tossed with the feet . . . .'. They enjoyed fox-hunting on horseback, and some attended the principal races at the Curragh, County Kildare, in March or April, and in September. Others preferred hunting pheasant, grouse, hare, partridge, woodcock and wild duck, with the assistance of hawks, nets or greyhounds. Another recognized form of recreation for gentlemen was shooting with the cumbersome single-barrelled and expensive, 'fowling piece'. Indoor games consisted of chess; a game of cards, of Spanish origin, called *L'ombre*; 'Tables' (dice); 'Playing at tables' (billiards) and shovelboard. People sometimes hired travelling acrobats, jugglers or fire-eaters for their parties at which 'jests' were told and riddles posed. Among the gentry, most men and women played the harp, and in their homes 1 or 2 instruments were to be found. On occasions, a harper was hired to play for them at their meals. These men of leisure, professionals and businessmen, would sometimes transact deals, or just converse over a light refreshment in the city's popular coffee-houses. Besides coffee, a chocolate drink, advertised as 'an excellent West India drink' could be had, and a new beverage was being introduced, through the coffee-houses, known as 'China drink' or 'China ale' (tea).

Clothes were washed only every few months and washday caused considerable upheaval. The wealthy could reduce their workload by hiring water-carriers to bring water from a well or the river to the house, to be heated in a cauldron, and yet more water was required for rinsing. The washing was done in the kitchen or backyard while space for drying was a problem in bad weather. Others cleaned their clothes in the nearest river by rubbing them against stone or sand and then leaving them on bushes or rocks to dry in the wind or sunshine. Some houses had their own water supply through lead conduits and cisterns but this source was unreliable as it failed regularly due to the decay of the lead. This type of water supply was used mostly by brewers' inn-keepers and water-carriers.

The impoverished of the city were hard-working and supplied practically all their own wants, such as making their own clothes from sheep's wool and brogues (shoes) from cowhide. Some grew 'a square' of hemp or flax which they used for spinning and weaving the family's clothes. Inside their tiny homes there was at least one family who, at

night, would sleep, in most cases without sheets, on beds of straw and rushes. Whole families would sleep together fully dressed in everyday clothes lying down in order, the eldest daughter against the wall furthest from the door, then all sisters according to their age;

would be shared with these people, and the news from other parts of the country and other countries was passed on. They loved poetry and music, especially sad music of traditional Irish airs. Certain qualities such as hospitality, conservatism, superstition to a remarkable



*Thomond Bridge and Kings Island, 1680.*

next came the mother, then father and sons in succession, and finally strangers (travelling pedlars) closest to the door. Sunday was the chief day for their pastimes and sports, when they engaged in racing each other and hurling (the ball used was made from hair torn from a cow's back, rolled tightly with the hands until it became solid). There were 10 to 20 players a side, broken bones were a common feature, and the victors prize was a barrel or two of ale which was drunk on the spot. Wrestling was a recognized form of public entertainment, attracting large crowds, and men taking part in it were sometimes killed. In general, people were cruel to animals and indifferent to their suffering. 'Sports' such as bull-baiting, dog-fighting and cock-fighting were enjoyed by all classes. Dancing was very popular, and groups of people both young and old would gather under a large tree and, to the accompaniment of a fiddle, a trump (horn) or bagpipes, would dance the day away. During the hours of darkness, small groups would meet in each others' homes and sit around the fire playing music and telling stories. All would share a pipeful of tobacco and a whiff of snuff, drink whiskey and talk. There was a system of poor relief in Limerick that was superior to that in any other part of the country. Prostitution was widespread and carried on, among other places, in the taverns, and venereal disease caused many problems and often resulted in death.

Both the rich and poor were generous, hospitable, affectionate towards their children and fond of strangers passing through, particularly French or Spanish wayfarers. Some of what they had to eat

degree, credulity, improvidence, respect for tradition and the aristocratic system, courteousness, love of music, dancing and story-telling were common to all classes. The poorer people tended to be sometimes quarrelsome, curious, 'great liars', hard drinkers and more cheerful and lively than the English. Practically everyone had a great propensity to gambling and it was indulged in at the drop of a hat at any hour of the day or night. They tried their luck at 'tables' (dice), games of cards known as 'Five Cards' or 'All Fours', at public gatherings and in houses. Gamblers stood to lose not only their money but also moveable goods, and some were not above cheating on occasions. There were public lotteries, with a chance to win £1,000 for 1/- or 1,900 guineas for 5/- run by the government, and sometimes the profits were allocated to a specific purpose, as was the case in June, 1665, when the money was allotted to the Royal Fishing Company.

In all classes, except the destitute, marriages were arranged by the parents. Upper class alliances were often concluded by the wedding of their quite young children, some as young as 12 years of age. After the ceremony, the juvenile bridegroom and bride were taken back to their respective homes to await an age more fitting to matrimony. The more common age of marriage was 17 to 18 years, large families were produced, and at least half of the children died in infancy. Polygamy was common and, in an attempt to enforce monogamy, the Irish Parliament found it necessary to pass a law over 50 years earlier in 1634. Bigamy was confined to the more prosperous classes, but sexual promiscuity was gen-

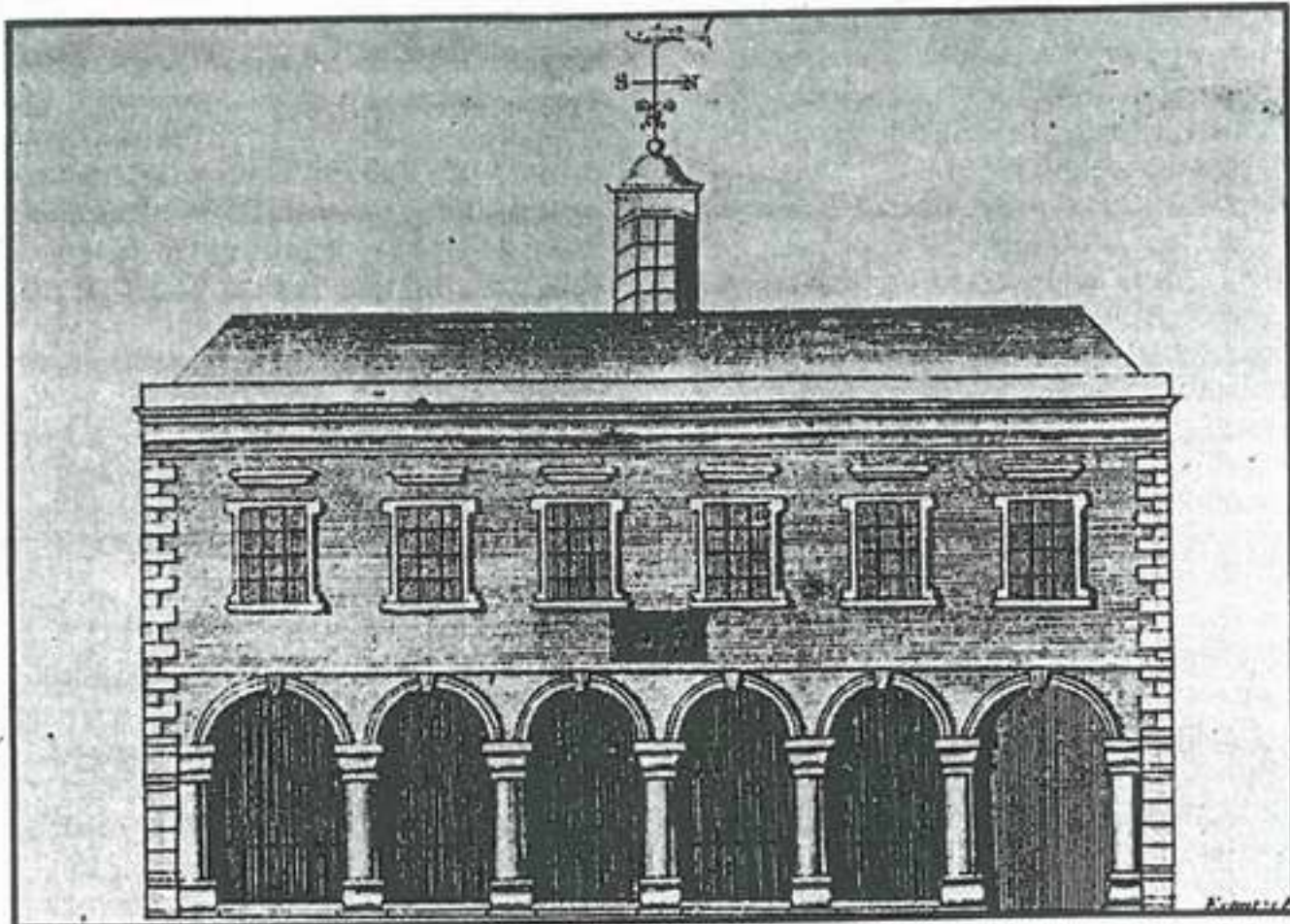


eral. Divorces were relatively easy to obtain. After a baptism ceremony, a wealthy couple would celebrate the event by inviting friends to their residence where meat, fish, milk and butter were available, while music was provided by harp, jews-trumps or bagpipes. Sometimes, men would cohabit, without condition, with single women, their children were considered legitimate in their father's lifetime but after his death became 'bastards'. Illegitimacy was common and had not constituted a very serious handicap in life, but when English government had established itself as the undisputed authority, the illegitimate son could no longer hold a position of legal equality compared with the legitimate son/s. The aristocracy thought it no shame to keep a mistress openly. Ordinary people had not a very high sense of morality but were, on the whole, a decent good-mannered lot.

Personal cleanliness was not considered essential by anyone; everyone was dirty, as it was the norm to go for months without bathing. The rich were liberal in their use of perfumes but did not succeed in overcoming the much stronger scent of unwashed bodies; lice in their heads and wigs and bugs in their beds were taken for granted. Nudity in its proper place was not indecent, and many people slept unclothed. All ranks, men and women, were excessive tobacco smokers and most kept a pipe in their possession . . . and yea, the very children too . . . One habit that was considered absolutely disgusting was that of wind. It was so abhorred that it was hardly ever even mentioned by name.

Superstitious beliefs and practises were many and varied: for instance, all classes believed in the existence of banshees, while those in rural areas believed in fairies. From the very badly off to the aristocratic, the fear of witchcraft was widespread. Any man setting out on a journey in the morning would be upset and probably would return home if he met a red-headed woman. The poorer inhabitants hung a St. Bridget's Cross over the door to secure the house from fire, and under the cross was a horseshoe to deter devils, witches and thieves. There was poverty, discomfort, pain and death and these were usually accepted as marks of God's will to be borne with courage and good cheer. Most people may have been careless in attending religious services but were, for the most part, passively and traditionally Catholic. The priests attempted to keep the Catholic faith alive, but the activities of the Church were somewhat disorganized. The priests were also commanded to prohibit drinking at wakes, the holding of wakes at night and to condemn bandits and superstitious practises. They were forbidden to drink whiskey in public, attend fairs or markets, or take a female (even a relative) with them on horseback.

The poor, both Protestant and Catholic, were almost entirely without



*The Exchange, from John Ferrar's History of Limerick, 1787.*

education and considered it the luxury of the few, while the middle class sent their children to schools intended for those of the poorer freemen.

Here is a list of some of the Christian names, not already cited: Bryne, Christopher, Dermud, Garrett, Geoffrey, Humphrie, Lawrence, Marttin, Matthew, Patrick, Phillip, Raulfe, Stephen and Nicholas. Some of the surnames were Arthur, Bell, Bendon, Benetts, Bones, Cantillons, Chevens, Cockayne, Connor, Comyn, Crabbs, Creagh-fiz-Richard, Dallman, Daniell, Davis, Doudins, Dowlye, Duffe-Creagh, Fentons, Ffaninge, Ffintington, Field, Fitz-Nicho, Fox, Fullfowrds, Gaffens, Galway, Gibbins, Gilbert Graliands, Hallie, Harrold, Harte, Harttwells, Hartstonge, Holmes, Holton, Hopkins, Joanes, Jackson, Kash, Kemp, Lee, Lysaght, McJohn, Monsell, Mullonie, Newman, Nihill, Oge-Wheit, O'Grady, Peacocke, Pery, Petchlie, Power, Raskes, Rick, Roch, Roch-fiz-Jurdane, Ronane, Rose, Savadge, Scotts, Southwell, Stacpoll, Stapleton, Stephens, Stritch, Synner, Thyrry, Trants, Trenells, Wade, Walle, Waller, Ward, Watter, Webb, Wheitroe, White-fitz-Edmond, Wilkinson, Willson, Yearwell and Young.

Travel was on horseback, and roads were so bad that even main routes were little more than ill-defined tracks, and wheeled traffic encountered constant difficulties such as carts and carriages sinking axle-deep or overturning in muddy or soft patches. The poor did not have reason to travel, and, in any case, the long hours of work did not allow it. Usually, only the wealthy or government officials would have reason to set off on horseback to, say, Dublin. Even this was a rare occurrence and of considerable importance in their lives, with a corresponding amount of danger attached to it, that frequently wills were made before

setting out. The trek by the shortest route of 120 miles to Dublin took about 4 days, to Cork 3 days, and trips to Galway were usually made by sea. One of the dangers on the roads all over the country was the rapparees (highwaymen). They operated in bands of 20 to 30, and sometimes as many as 100, with some of the group on foot. Known as the 'tories' or 'kerns', their activities in counties Clare and Kerry caused much trouble for travellers, and some people were afraid to travel because of them. In Limerick, there were a few hackney carriages and sedan-chairs licenced by the Assembly. Communications between Ireland and the outside world were not as backward as those within the country. Weather permitting, there was a weekly sailing from Dublin to Holyhead, and there were other routes such as those from Limerick, Carrick Fergus, Waterford and Cork. A passenger did not always land where he intended as a change of wind could result in a ship bound for Limerick ending up in Cork, Waterford or elsewhere. What turned out to be a particularly lengthy journey was undertaken by a Mr. Freke and his son who left Chester in England on 15 August for Dublin, and 'after having bin neer seven week cast up and downe . . . every howre expecting the fate of a mercyleless sea', eventually arrived in Dublin on 25 September. This passage would normally have taken 5 or 6 days. The usual port of departure or arrival in England for ships travelling to and from Limerick, and other ports in the south of the country, was Bristol. People travelling by sea needed 'passes' issued by a man in authority. Lighthouses were beginning to emerge as an aid to shipping. However, dangers were not confined to tempests, unchartered shores or half-rotten food, because crews and passengers had to contend with pirates from as far away as Algeria. They stole the ships and sold the



people on board as slaves in North Africa—men and women fetched about £40 each.

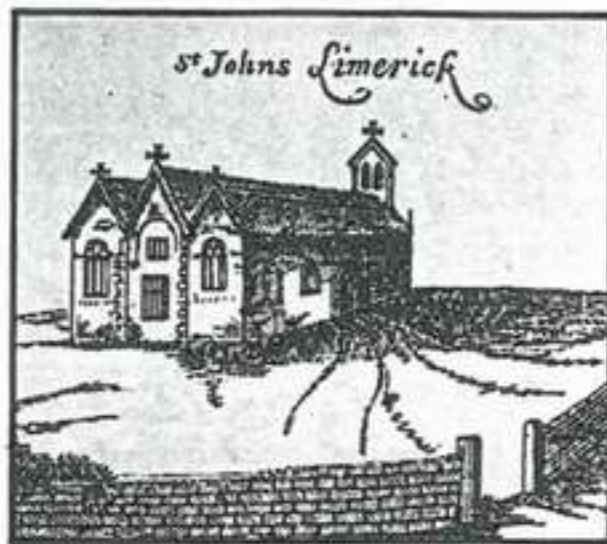
Weather had its extremes too. For example, on the 3 November, 1683, a severe frost 8 ft. thick appeared on the Shannon and lasted for over 4 months. Locals took advantage of this by taking a short-cut from the King's Island to Parteen, crossing the ice on foot with horses and carts.

Men of influence and position had close connections in England, and correspondence between Limerick and London took between 5 to 10 days, but in bad conditions up to a month or more. Correspondents wrote in duplicate (in case a letter got lost), the postal service, established by Cromwell over 30 years earlier, in 1657, pressed on against the odds. Letters, however, were still lost or opened en route. The cost of the post, or 'the mail', was relatively high. A letter from Limerick, via Dublin and Holyhead, to 'Warwacksheare' (Warwickshire) in England, cost the following:

Post paid to Dublin 4d (in one hand)  
Forward to London 2d (in another hand)  
From London to Warwacksheare  
2d (in yet another hand)  
Total 8d.

There was a reluctance to use the mail for short distances and there was no recognized machinery for house-to-house delivery. In some places, the local postmaster delivered letters in English towns free of charge. Prepayment was not the norm, as there was no guarantee a letter would reach its destination if there were no fee to be collected.

Word from other towns and villages was brought by wandering pedlars, who sold small quantities of salt, snuff and tobacco to the poor. There were also weekly newspapers, printed in Dublin or London, such as *The Athenian Mercury*, *The Post Man*, *The Protestant Mercury*, *News-Letter*, *Post Boy* and *The Flying Post* or *The Post Master*, all made up of 1 or 2 leaves, costing 1d or 2d. These could be



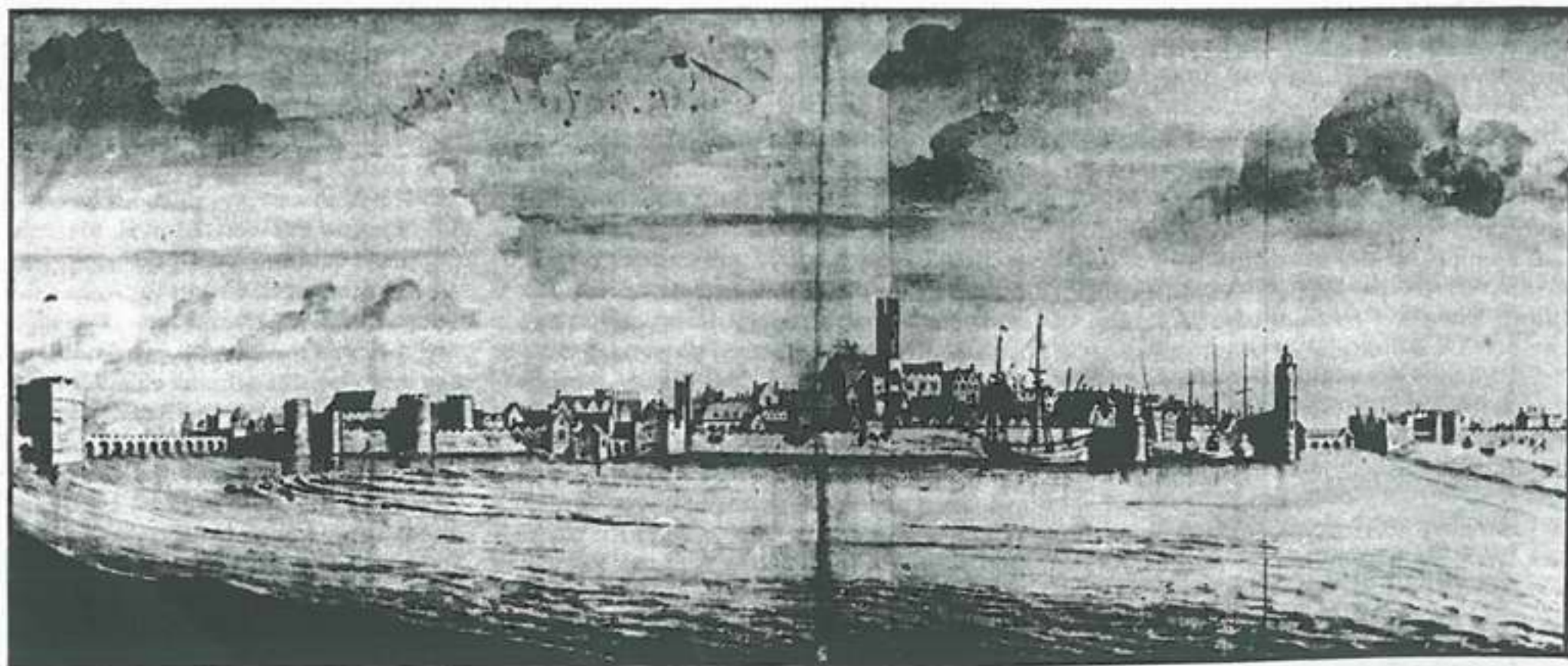
St. John's Church, 1680.

found in coffee-houses, and contained snippets of news from Amsterdam, Brussels, Cologne, Constantinople, Cremona, Genoa, Hamburg, Hungary, Lincoln, London, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, The Hague, Venice, Vienna and Warsaw. Most of the news from capital and other municipalities being about armies, imperial forces and ambassadors being sent here and there. There was also information on merchant ships and their cargos at sea, the countries they were coming from and when they were expected to arrive in Limerick or other Irish ports. The news also reported on people found drowned or hanged, the deaths of aldermen and prominent people, thefts of money from shops, people being 'knockt' down and robbed by thieves, proclamations from 'His Majesty's Castle of Dublin', murder trials and accounts of notorious tories (highwaymen). Some of the advertisements, were for money, exchequer bills or goods, usually silverware, lost or stolen, with rewards of 1 to 5 guineas being offered. Servants, having 'ran off' after robbing their 'masters', were described in detail and any information making identification easier was given, for example, 'he is a speaker of Irish'. There were outlandish notices by quacks claiming medical skills and marvellous remedies: 'All clap (venereal disease) pains etc. eased by purging

in 24 hours'. Medicines from 'physicians' that would 'cure all ulcers, scabs, sores, itch, leprosy, and venereal diseases . . . at all times of the year, in all bodies, expecting nothing if he cures not'. This cure—all cost three shillings for a quart, or one shilling for a box of the pills, and 'a better purger . . . was never given, for they cleanse the body of all impurities, which are the cause of dropsies, gout, scurvy, stone or gravel, pains in the neck and other parts'. The 'healer' sometimes ended his message by warning the reader to 'take heed whom you trust in medicine, for its become a common cheat to profess it'.

The types of fuel used were turf, coal, wood, furze, fodder and cowdung which had been dried in the sun.

King James set up a mint of his own in the deanery house next to St. Mary's Cathedral (A), and one of the commissioners in charge was Walter Plunket. Here 'gun money' was minted from brass. However, the normal everyday currency was made up of foreign coins from England, Scotland, Spain, Portugal and France. Those in circulation were as follows (their value being determined by weight): gold coins were the double ducat (£0-18-0); guinea (£1-4-0/£1.20); riders (£1-2-6); Spanish or French quadruple pistole (£3-4-0) and Spanish suffrain (£1-8-0). The silver coins were the ducatoon (£0-5-9); English crown (£0-5-5); English shilling (£0-1-1); Mexico or Seville piece of eight (£0-4-9); old Peru piece and French Louis (£0-4-6); pillar piece of eight (£0-4-8); Portugal Royal (£0-3-8) and the rix dollar or cross dollar (£0-2-4<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>). Other coins were the farthing, halfpenny, penny, sixpence, groat (2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>p), shilling, half-crown and crown, with farthings, halfpennys, and pennies making up the bulk of change in daily use. The standard of engraving was sometimes poor, and it was not easy to determine the official issue from counterfeit money. There were also tokens, privately struck, on thin copper, brass or lead flan, in denominations of 1d, <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub>d



A drawing of Kings Island by Thomas Phillips, 1685.



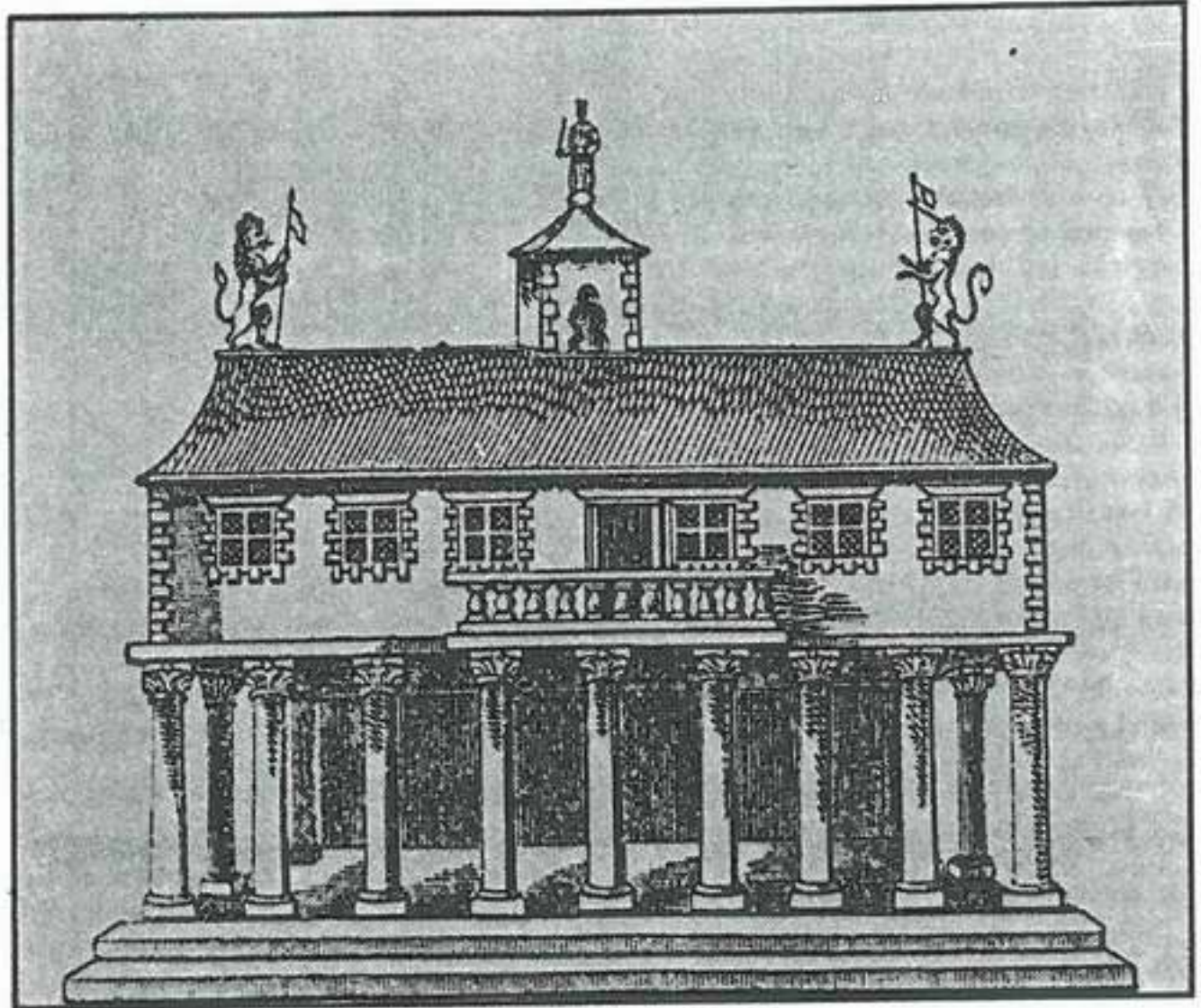
and 1/4d. The blanks came in all shapes and sizes, but round ones were most common. They were used in the same manner as cash, and the people generally accepted them as a form of money even though they could only be redeemed for goods. Tokens were issued by merchants, chandlers, butchers and apothecaries such as Anthony Bartlett, John Bennet, Edward Clarke, Rowland Creagh, Thomas Linch, Thomas Marten, Richard Pearce and Edward Wight.

Everyday items cost:

ale (hogshead)	£3
butter (1lb)	8d
cabin of a poor man was valued at	5/-
chicken	8d
cow	£3
Douay Bible	10/8d
dogs (sporting)	£6
eggs (20)	1d
gloves (ladies)	6d
haircut	4d
hat	20d
hearth tax,	4/-
hen	1/6d
horse	£20 to £60
horse (well-bred)	£125
horse nag	5/- to £1
knife or fork	2d
meal in a tavern	1/6d
military despatches by footman	
to Waterford and Cork	14/-
mutton (a quarter)	8d
pig	3/-
postage, Limerick to	
Dublin or Cork	4d
salmon	10d
sheep,	10/-
shirt (of fine quality)	3/-
stockings	6d
wine (quart)	4d
wool (per ton)	8/-

The whole annual expense of a poor family of 2 adults and 4 children was about 55/- while at the other end of the scale, an income of about £500 was required for all the wants and luxuries of a family mixing in fashionable circles. Interest rates for a mortgage were as high as 10%, and for borrowing money 8%, compared with only 4% in Holland. The poor were forced to pawn their clothes or other necessary implements, and for the sum of £1 would repay 6d every week. The mayor's salary was £200 annually, plus his out-of-pocket expenses; his chef was paid £10 per year and given a free linen cloak; scavengers earned £6 annually and labourers were paid 4d a day and their dinner. Doctors' fees were very high; for instance, Dr. Thomas Arthur of Mungret Street visited his patients (doctors did not have consulting facilities in their own homes) and charged 10/- to £1 in the 'big houses' and half-a-crown to the less-well-to-do.

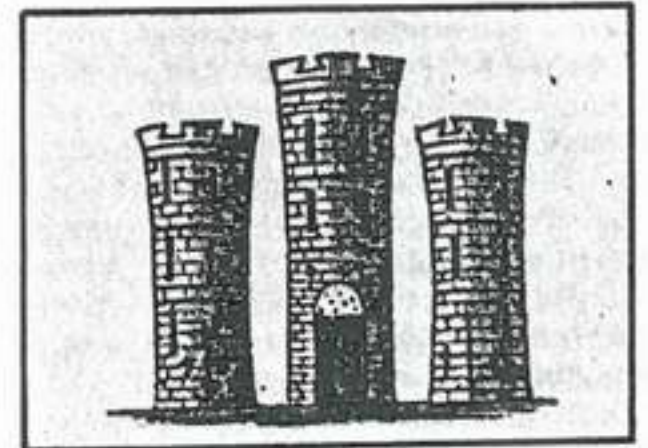
In summer, the gates of the English and Irish towns opened at 4 a.m. and closed at 10 p.m. and in winter 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. The tolls levied at these gates when goods were passing in or out of the city varied from 1/4d on a sheep, to 3d on a



The Tholsel, 1680.

barrel of wine, aquavita (whiskey), a pack of cloth or 12 hats, horse-drawn trailers of hides or timber 4d, and boatloads of rapeseed coming into quay 1/-. The freemen were exempted from the tolls or duties normally payable at the gates and, on becoming one, each new freeman paid an initial fee of almost £1 to the Assembly. If one were not a freeman, one could not belong to one of the trade guilds (or corporations). The freedom of the city was occasionally presented, with considerable ceremony, to a distinguished man as a mark of the city's respect and honour. From time to time, freemen were asked to forego one or other of their privileges. Nearly 20 years earlier, in 1673, they were required to pay the tolls, as the extra money was needed to repair Thomond Bridge, and in 1679 lost the same immunity for 2 years, as the money went to meet the heavy costs incurred in protracted litigation with Sir George Preston concerning the Assembly's salmon weir.

Trades in the city were those of bakers, bricklayers, brogue (shoe)-makers, butchers, carpenters, carvers, chandlers, confectioners, cooks, coopers, curriers, dyers, glover, gunsmiths, joiners, linen-weavers, locksmiths, malsters, masons, millers, periwig (wig)-makers, pewterers, plasterers, ropemakers, saddlers, sailors, sailmakers, schoolmasters, shearmen, ships carpenters, slaters, smiths, tailors, tanners, tobacco-makers, weavers and wool-combers. The profession of the bard was the most honoured in the country, and these scholars could write in Latin with as much ease as they did in Irish. Such banking as was done was in the hands of brokers who were usually goldsmiths. The majority of the population



Woodcut of plaque over Mungret Gate.

could not avail of medical aid. As the science of surgery was still in its infancy, it was regarded almost as a trade rather than a profession and was practised in a very rough and ready way by barbers as a sort of spare time job. The connection between hairdressing and surgery was accepted and officially recognized, as there was a glut of barber-chirurgeons (surgeons). Printing was provided by a Mr. Reid and Samuel Terry. The tanning of hides provided much employment, and many tanneries were located inside the east wall of the Irishtown and in parts of the Englishtown. There were 4 corn mills worked by the coming and going of the tide (an unusual feature at the time): the Queen's Mill and Thomas Arthur's Mill, built near the Curragour Falls on the River Shannon; the other two were on the Abbey River, one, Nicholas Arthur's Mill, was midway between Baal's Bridge North Gate (8) and Creagh Lane Gate (9), and opposite it, near St. Michael's Church (M), was the Prior's or Common Mill. There were also several



horse-operated works inside both towns. Practically every craft had its organized guild which was governed by strict rules.

Two big markets were held each year, the fairs of St. John the Baptist and St. James, which lasted for 2 weeks. During the latter, no arrest for debt could be made, and to show that this was the case, a white glove was hung outside the Exchange (F). It was at fairs and other such gatherings that the town crier or a bellman would make announcements of public interest. Causes of complaint from tradesmen and sellers were the large number of hucksters coming in from the country to sell their wares, poultry, wild-fowl and rabbits, in the streets, and they also obstructed the movement of traffic through the city. Attempts were made to keep them out but the regulations had little effect. Dealers and traders also complained of the noise from the shambles (slaughter-houses), and the strong smells from the fish markets, which they sought to confine to certain areas.

Outside the walls, on the Clare side, was the extensive Thomond Forest which supplied the city with timber for building and fuel, and which was also exported to England for the building of galleons. In the forests, among the animals to be found and hunted, were badgers, foxes, wolves and squirrels; pine martens were scarce and their fur valuable.

An organized system of policing was unknown and, as the streets were dangerous at night, it was the military, who were seldom available when required, that was called out. The soldiers were easily bribed, and just as easily intimidated. In criminal court cases, particularly where the accused were poor men, miscarriages of justice were frequent. Debtors found themselves in prison, if unable to discharge their liabilities, for the greater part of their lives. In many cases, they were incarcerated without trial, and some died of starvation inside prison. Bribery and corruption were part and parcel of the system and permeated the whole government service, even to the customs officers who would pass gentlemen's baggage when bribed to do so. There was great difficulty in executing impartiality, as many of those in power were protected by officers and were also protecting others. Most officials had their price. One exception to this general rule occurred in 1670 when Mayor Robert Shute was accused at the Assizes of raping his maid and of other serious crimes. Crooked dealings and dishonesty in business were rare, but petty thieving was common. Allowing for the relative scarcity of valuables, the incidence of burglary was low. Poaching of deer, cows and sheep was commonplace, and they were also attacked by dogs and wolves. Perjury was somewhat rare, and one of the punishments for this crime was to have 1 or 2 ears nailed to the pillory, but it was not rigorously enforced. Forgery resulted in the loss of 1 or 2 ears. The perpetrators of murder



*The Nail', now in the City Museum.*

were publicly either burned alive or hung, drawn and quartered at Gallows Green (V). While the death sentence was applied to all 'serious' offences, it was not applied in cases of the then equally serious crime of witchcraft, probably because of the general air of superstition.

The population was increasing and had begun to outgrow Limerick's old walls. The city, was densely populated with some 11,000 people. (A careful census taken in 1659 showed the total population of Ireland at 500,091 of which 153,282 lived in Munster). While the enclosure functioned as a protective device, it was also a health hazard and regularly led to plagues of smallpox, typhus and bubo (bubonic), all of which wiped out many people. These insanitary conditions and the general way of life led to other diseases and illnesses such as:

'Ague (acute and violent fever), 'Bloody flux' (dysentery), 'Griping of the guts' (spasmodic constricting pains in the stomach), 'Planet-struck' (becoming paralytic because of the supposed malign influence of an adverse planet), 'Rising of the Lights' (hysteria), 'Scald head' (head diseased with ring worm), 'Spotted or Purple Fever' (swine fever), 'St. Anthony's Fire' (shingles) 'Starved' and 'Tympany' (swelling or tumour of any kind.)

Almost half of the children born died before the age of 5 years. A very small number, 1 in a 1,000, attained 90 years and only 1 in 3,100 lived to 100 years and upwards. Because there was such ignorance regarding safety, fatal accidents from drowning and fire occurred all too

often. A case in point at this time was when 218 barrels of gunpowder, stored in the tall tower at the southern end of the quay, exploded accidentally. Nearly one hundred people were killed, including Sheriff Abraham Bowman, Alderman John Lacy and Arthur Lillis. The blast shook the whole city and, as a result, Zachary Holland and Mrs. Butler 'died of the fright'.

The people of Limerick had the ability to withstand the rigours of sieges, such as that by Oliver Cromwell's son-in-law, Henry Ireton in 1651. Their spirit would soon be put to the test again, as two more sieges were to follow in 1690 and in 1691.

On Thursday, 17 July, 1690, John Stevens, a regular visitor to Limerick, had this to say: '... when first I saw this city, about 4 years before, it was inferior to none in Ireland but Dublin and not to very many in England. I have lived to see it reduced to a heap of rubbish . . . . Such are the effects of war'.

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