

The background image shows a view of Limerick City, Ireland, featuring several large, circular stone towers (part of the city walls) built on a riverbank. The towers are made of grey stone and have arched openings. In the distance, a stone bridge with multiple arches spans the river. The sky is overcast and grey. The text is overlaid on the image in a white, sans-serif font.

Limerick City's Coat of Arms: A Visual Review

- Kevin Michael Stevenson, PhD
- Culture Night Limerick, 20th of September, 2024
- Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland



Photo: Kevin Stevenson, Henry Street

Aims of the Presentation

- To propose two questions:
- 1) Is the Limerick City Coat of Arms a Composite or a Representation? The **Mont de Piété hypothesis** and the issue of translocation.
- 2) Can we use the current array of Arms found in Limerick to determine the potential date of a mysterious version of the Arms?

Purpose and Limitations

- The presentation hopes to provide an approach to understanding the Limerick City Coat of Arms and its evolution. It does not provide an exhaustive list of the Coat of Arms, hoping that the presentation will provoke interest in the history of Limerick, its symbols and its beauty.

Photo: Kevin Stevenson, Island Road, Limerick



Coat of Arms: Definition

A coat of arms can be termed a heraldic visual design on the surface of a shield (escutcheon), surcoat or tabard, forming the central element of a full heraldic achievement that consists of shields, supporters, crests and a motto. -Tom Kenny (advertiser.ie)



Photo: Kevin Stevenson, Abbey Bridge

Coat of Arms: Purpose

The coat of arms is part of a hereditary symbolic system deriving from early medieval Europe and establishing identity in battle.

Arms also denote family, alliance, adoption, property, and profession (Britannica).



Photo: Kevin Stevenson, Rhebogue Road

For Comparison: County Limerick Coat of Arms



Photo: Kevin Stevenson, O'Connell Street, Limerick

- Sarsfield
- Milk and Pasture
- Golden Vale
- May, 24. 1976



Photo: O'Byrne, 2009, p.131, Sarsfield Statue, Cathedral Place

A Closer Look at the Cross on the County Shield

- The colours of the arms are green and white for the county.
- The Celtic cross (pattée) is for churches of the county and possibly alike the Emly Shrine.
- The crest depicts Patrick Sarsfield Irish commander at the Siege of Limerick.
- Motto: “Remember Limerick”

Irishpost.com (January 10, 2022)



The Emly Shrine: Cross Pattée



Photo: MFA Boston



Cross Pattée – also known as patty, formée, form, is often associated with St. Patrick

- **(Ma – negative space)**
- **(Nōtan – Japanese Artform)**
- **Are we meant to see a cross or the negative space that resembles a four petaled flower?**
- [MA: Place, Space, Void – Kyoto Journal](#)

The Importance of Symbolism

- St. Patrick was founding bishop of the Irish church, the symbol of the cross pattée therefore may be associated with him.
- St. Patrick's garments are often decorated with the cross pattée.
- [Symbols and Legends about St Patrick « Events & News | Irish Chaplaincy | Paris \(irishchaplaincyparis.fr\)](http://irishchaplaincyparis.fr)



Ireland, King John (1199-1216), Halfpenny, third 'rex' coinage (1208/9 – c. 1211/12), Limerick mint, moneyer Willem. Crowned facing bust, pellet to left and right, all within triangle. Rev, cross pattée within crescent, three pellets around, all within triangle, 0.69gm (S. 6232). Coinarchives.com

The Evolution of the Limerick Coat of Arms

- The original **Limerick City** coat of arms dates to the 17th century being revised in the 19th due to not being correct heraldically in terms of design
- -Jimmy Woulfe, May 2009 [400-year-old craftsman's error rectified as Limerick gets 'correct' coat of arms](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/400-year-old-craftsman-s-error-rectified-as-limerick-gets-correct-coat-of-arms-1.1111111) ([irishtimes.com](http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/400-year-old-craftsman-s-error-rectified-as-limerick-gets-correct-coat-of-arms-1.1111111))
- The evolution of the Arms derives from the municipal seal which was granted officially by Elizabeth I in 1583.
- The oldest examples are found on coins dating from 1658 depicting a castle with two towers subsequently with an added third central tower.
- (Potter, 2014, Limerick City Archives, Limerick City Council 1197-2014)



Rarecoinsandtokens.co.uk

Primitive Versions of the Arms

The city arms with a twin towered gate-house without dome or conical roof between the two towers. <https://museum.limerick.ie/index.php/Detail/objects/5264>]



Limerick Council purchased mace (1739) (Potter, 2014)

Coins Favoured the Triangular Version (War and Commerce)



Description: Militia AG Medal. 1795-1798.
CORPORATION AND CITIZENS ★ LIMERICK. Issued to participants in the Limerick Militia who fought the Battle of Colony. (Baldwin & Sons, 2024)

Stein Brown Distillery
Tokens from Limerick
(Kennetpans) (above)



Ireland, Limerick. Truck
ticket. MacDonnell & Co.
(galata.co.uk) (below)



Triangular/Conical Depiction = Commerce?

- Stein Brown & Co, copper
Two Tubs Provenance: W
2542 and 2544 C.J. Denton
1988; others S.E. Schwer
(Noonans Mayfair
Auctioneers January 2013,
lot-tissimo.com)



LIMERICK MILITIA MEDAL FOR COLLOONEY 1798 SILVER, UNMARKED



The Battle of Collooney refers to a battle that occurred on 5 September during the Irish Rebellion of 1798 when a combined force of French troops and Irish rebels defeated a force of British troops outside of Collooney near Sligo Town. It is also known as the Battle of Carricknagat.

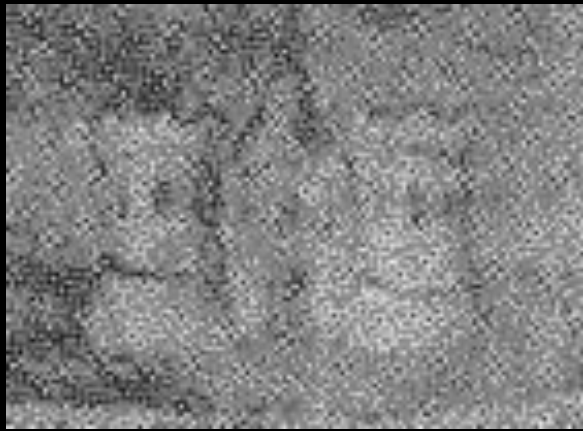
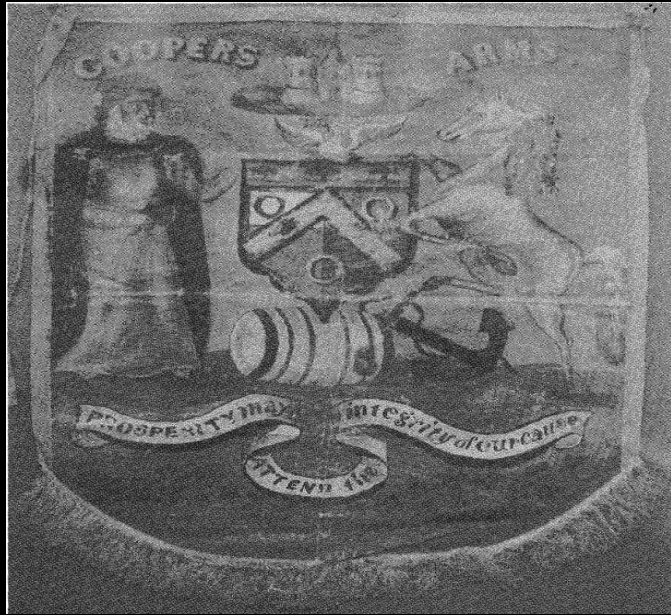


The subsequent battle, on the afternoon of 5 September, lasted about an hour and a half, where some 50 people were killed or wounded on each side and one hundred of Vereker's men surrendered.

At the meeting on 8 October 1798 the Limerick City Council granted medals to non-commissioned officers and privates of the regiment.

Lyon & Turnball, 2015
Auction

- [Shorter Collooney History \(eircom.net\)](http://eircom.net)



Linkage between commerce and the triangular

- Morgan McCloskey, *The Old Limerick Journal, The Coopers of Limerick Craft of the Past*, Winter Edition, 1999 pp. 42-44.
- Example of the Arms of Triangular shape on a ceremonial apron worn by coopers (mid 1800s)

The Mayor's Chain with the Domed version

- The coat of arms adopted its modern appearance in the mid 1800's depicting a castle with three towers with cone shaped central structure with a cross on top and the portcullis raised, becoming the official version in 2009 (Potter) eventually adopting a more domed form
- [Limerick's first directly-elected Mayor invites public to join the inauguration festivities | Irish Independent](#) (independent.ie, Erica Sassone)



Examples of the Limerick Coat of Arms



Photo above: heraldrywiki.com

- These two depictions convey the peculiar issue with the Arms' evolution.
- On the **left** we have what we term the 'Domed version'
- On the **right** we have what we term the 'Triangular version'.
- Is the Domed version depicting an influence from Rome with an acorn or pinecone at the centre?



Photo above: Coffee Hag Album, stamp 1935 Irish Free State KaffeeHandelsgesellschaft AG (Kaffee HAG) in Bremen, Germany, started with the publication of heraldic stamps and collector's album Heraldrywiki.com.

The Acorn



- The acorn is a literary and decorative motif in Roman and Greek culture symbolic of *fertility* and the creation of new life. **St. Mary's Church** (right) with an *ogee cupola* at the top of the belltower resembling the Arms.
- The acorn served as a shape for counterweights in the depictions of Roman balances
- The acorn could have symbolised the gods who measured fairness of transactions between customer and sellers [The Symbolic Meaning of the Acorn – a Possible Interpretation | Studies in Ancient Art and Civilisation \(akademicka.pl\)](#)



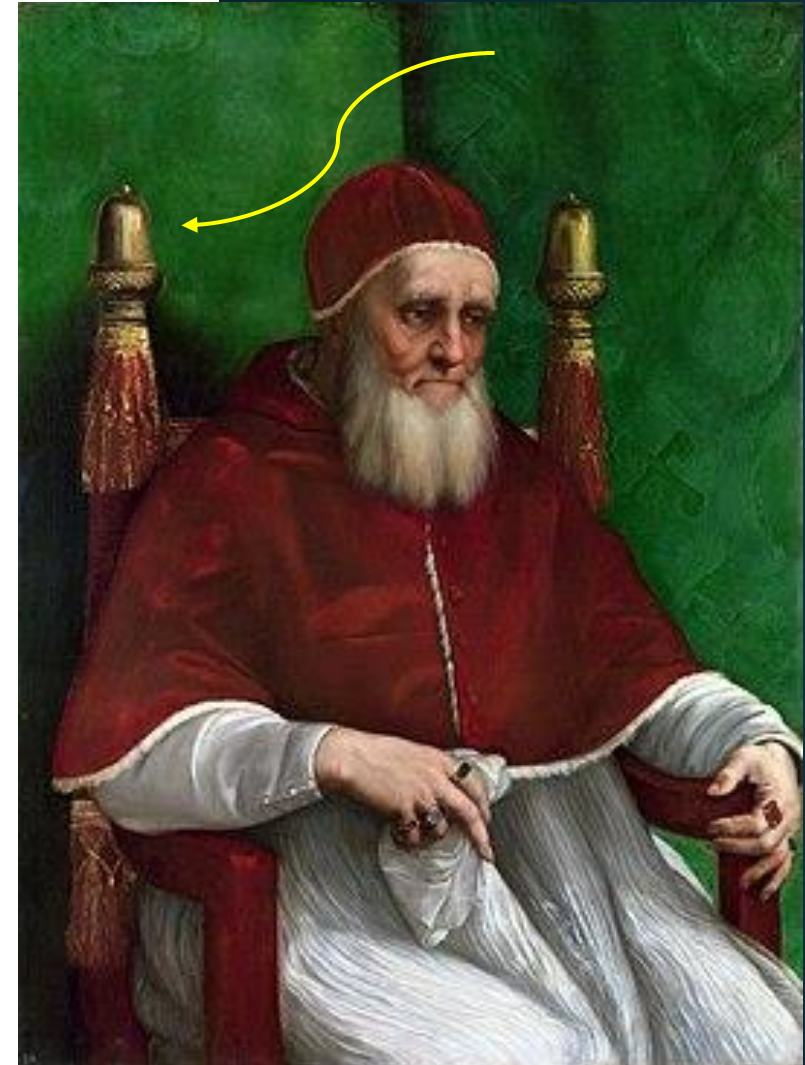
Acorn Depictions

The finials of the chair are acorns representing the Della Rovere emblem. Jones, Roger; Nicholas Penny (1983).

Giuliano, who became Julius II in 1503.[1] Sixtus IV built the Sistine Chapel, which was named after him. Julius II was patron to Michelangelo, Raphael and many other Renaissance artists and started the modern rebuilt of St. Peter's Basilica.

www.treccani.it

Painting:	Pope Julius 2
Artist	Raphael
Year	1511–1512
Medium	Oil on wood
Dimensions	108 cm × 80.7 cm (43 in × 31.8 in)
Location	National Gallery, London, Uffizi and other versions



The Pinecone

- immortality and rebirth
- like the acorn, the symbol of the pinecone has spread across Europe
- [Pinecone Courtyard - Vatican Museums \(vaticanmuseumsrome.com\)](http://vaticanmuseumsrome.com)



Usage of the Pinecone Today

- An example of the Pinecone in use at the entry of a house in Limerick



Photo: Kevin Stevenson, Rhebogue Road

Pinecone and Plant

- The plant in the bottom left photo looks like a pineapple plant, again the motif of pine
- The Pineapple plant symbolises hosting, welcoming and warm receptions; hence you see it above gateways
- [| The Joy of Plants](#)





Another Example of the Pinecone at St. Patrick's Church, Clare Street

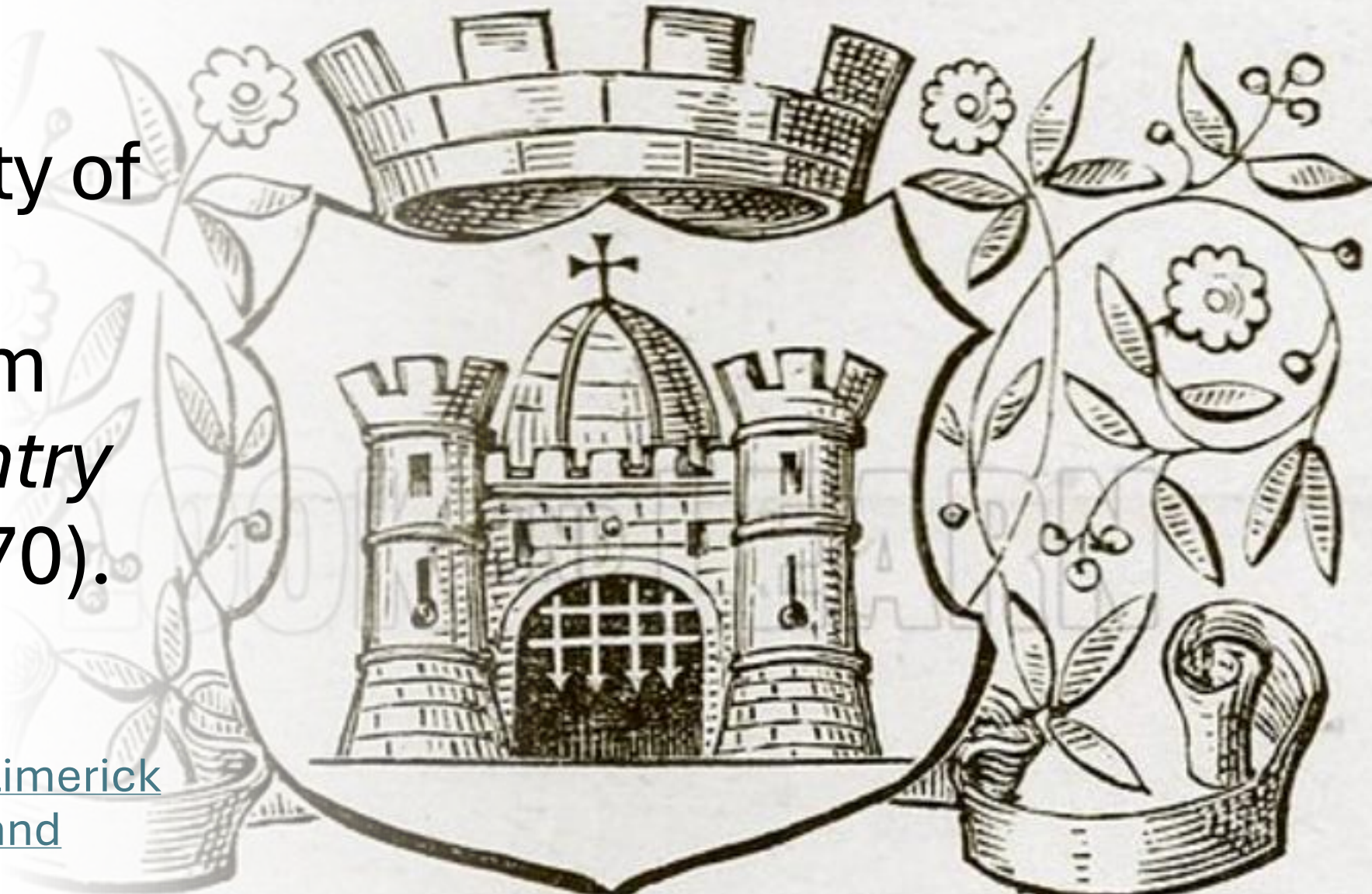
• Photo: Kevin Stevenson



Arms of the City of
Limerick.

Illustration from
Our Own Country
(Cassell, c 1870).

[Arms of the City of Limerick](#)
[stock image | Look and](#)
[Learn](#)

The coat of arms of the City of Limerick is depicted within a shield. The central element is a detailed illustration of a castle with two prominent towers on either side of a central arched gateway. Above the castle is a crown with a cross on top. The shield is surrounded by a decorative border of leaves and flowers. A ribbon or scroll is visible at the bottom right of the shield.

ARMS OF THE CITY OF
LIMERICK.



Arabic Dome

- Gothic architecture is a misnomer as the Crusaders would have brought back the influence of Arabic style architecture back to Europe. The Visigoths are considered a German tribe who settled in Spain, for example, but their architecture was not Arabic looking as Gothic architecture distinctively is as we know it.
- Saracen influence – (e.g. pointed arch, ribbed vaults, and the trefoil arch)
- [Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe | Middle East Institute \(mei.edu\)](#)
- Photo: Kevin Stevenson, Island Road, Limerick

Gothic Window and Door

- returning Crusaders set up new kingdoms in the 1100's which copied styles of the lands they conquered, calling them the Saracens, meaning "people who steal." The Norman French subsequently brought the styles to Normandy which spread to Ireland and Britain.
- [Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe | Middle East Institute \(mei.edu\)](#)



- Dyserth O'Dea Castle (left)



- King John's Castle (right)



University of Limerick – Blazon and Arms

Origin/meaning

The arms were officially granted on September 15, 1972 to the National Institute for Higher Education (Limerick).

[Coat of arms \(crest\) of University of Limerick \(heraldry-wiki.com\)](http://heraldry-wiki.com)



Photo: University of Limerick, Aoife Skelly

Classification of the Arms (different centre pieces)



Photo: near Sarsfield Bridge. O'Callaghan's Strand, O'Byrne 2009.

Pineapple/Acorn



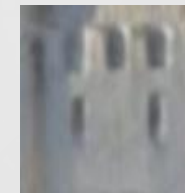
Dome – Arabic or Well-Rounded



Triangular – Flag or no Flag



Battlement



The civic motto adopted in the mid 1800s in Latin: *Urbs Antiqua Fuit Studiisque Asperrima Belli* = 'an ancient city well versed in the arts of war' (Potter, 2014)

1739 (is this the first?)

other boundary marker
editions:

1842 (triangular),
1878 (dome),
1891 (dome)



- On wall of restaurant in **City Hall**. This carving is from the site of the **City Brewery on New Gate Lane**. It has inscribed 'The City Brewery 1739' and was transferred to the City Hall. *-translocation-*

Is this depiction from 1840 or older?

- (A) City Crest, wall of **Toll House, Castle Street**. The domed **Mont de Piété** not built till 1837 so not in citizens' memory just yet therefore the triangular is preferred...? Is this depiction translocated thus older than 1840?
- The view from the **Toll House** or St. Munchin's Church could have allowed for the dome of **Mont de Piété** to appear between the towers of John's Castle at the entrance; hence the preference for the dome over time.



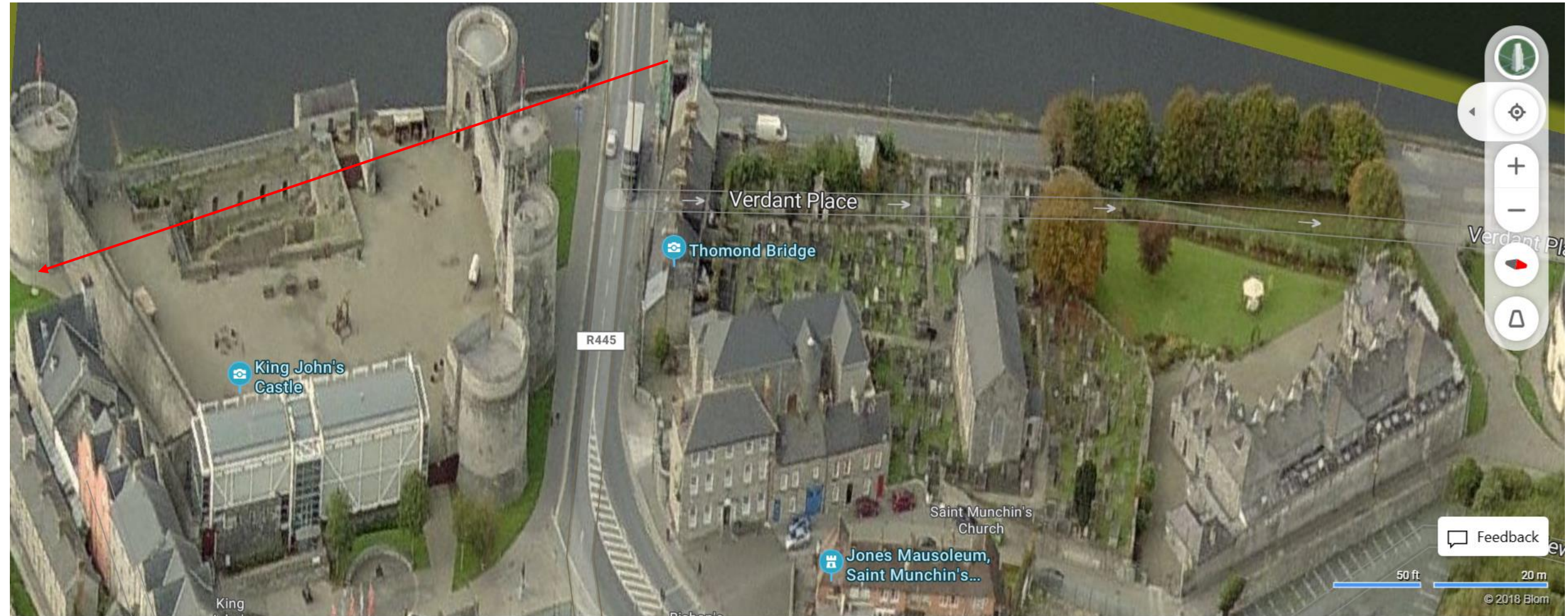
The Toll House

- It is possible that the relief was transported to the **Toll House** making it older than the building itself built in 1840 (Municipal Corporations Act).
- The **Toll House** is a Gothic Revival Style in limestone patrickcomerford.com
- Photo of one end of Thomond Bridge



Photo (right): Kevin Stevenson, Thomond Bridge

The view from Toll House (Bing Maps)



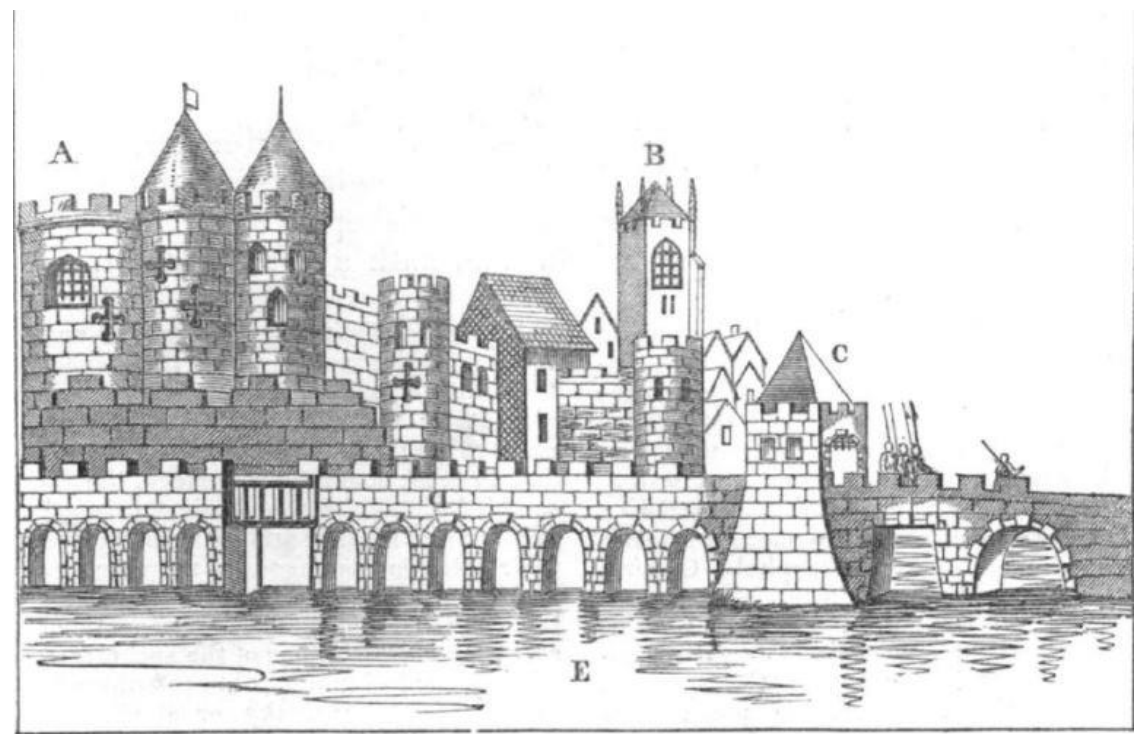
King John's Castle



Photo: Kevin Stevenson

Triangularity as Capriccio Composite?

- Were some artists 'between minds' using the triangular or domed version? And therefore it was not a matter of concrete chronological evolution?
- We can see the triangularity on the top of the towers in this depiction (right) which could have been destroyed from the many sieges of Limerick in the 17th C.
- But the question remains if the arms is an example of a **Capriccio Composite** due to the fact that the triangular structure and dome could be representations of church or state for example rather than actual buildings
- [Teachers Resources – King John's Castle \(kingjohnscastle.ie\)](http://kingjohnscastle.ie)



A. King's Castle. B. Cathedrall. C. The Watch-House on y^e Bridge. D. Thomond Bridge. E. Shannon River.

Capriccio

Is the Limerick Arms a Composite and therefore an example of Capriccio in which the Dome and Triangular Structure do not and have not ever existed making the Arms a fictional composition?

- Artist: Giovanni Paolo Panini, Italian, c.1692-1765
- Title:A Capriccio with Saint Paul Preaching to the Romans, with the Temple of Vesta and Pyramid of Caius Cestius
- Date:1742
- Medium: Oil on canvas
- Dimensions:72.5 x 98 cm
- Signed:lower left: I.P. Panini Romae 1742
- Credit Line:Milltown Gift, 1902
- Object Number:NGI.727

[A Capriccio with Saint Paul Preaching to the Romans, with the Temple of Vesta and Pyramid of Caius Cestius by Giovanni Paolo Panini | USEUM](#)



1842 Triangular Boundary Sign



- This depiction was erected in 1842 after the construction of the **Toll House** in 1840
- It is difficult to ascertain what the triangular structure in the middle represents
- It could represent buildings erected in the castle, on castle walls or a local church

Photo (left): O'Byrne, 2009. p. 4. Boundary sign at the Union Cross, Ennis Road. Erected in 1842

Changes to Boundaries and Organization 1840

Before the Twelve Judges, in the Queen's Bench Chambers.)

MURDER OF MR. PATRICK SHINE.
The Queen, at the prosecution of the Attorney-General v. Robert Houlahan and Patrick Noonan.

It will be recollected, that at the last Summer assizes of Limerick these men were convicted of having murdered Mr. Shine, at Carrigparson, on the 2th of January, 1842. They were defended by Mr. O'Shaughnessy and Mr. Coppinger, who made several points at the trial, relating to the venue, which were reserved for the decision of the 12 Judges, by the learned Judge Jackson, before whom they were tried. To give time for arguing those questions, the execution was respited till the 20th Inst.

Mr. O'Shaughnessy on this day opened the argument on behalf of the prisoners. His first proposition was, that no evidence was given by the Crown to shew that Carrickparson, where the murder was committed, was within the county of Limerick where the venue was laid. The only evidence was that of the Widow Shine and Sir Richard Franklin relative to the venue; and the effect of this evidence was to show that before the Corporation Act Carrickparson was within the Liberties of the City of Limerick. It was, therefore, the duty of the Crown to shew not only when the Corporate Act but the Boundary Act, and Victoria, chapter 108 and 109, came into operation; for, until the election of a Town Council, the Boundary Act did not come into operation. He then urged that the decision of the Court of Queen's Bench, in the case of the Queen at the prosecution of Martin Honan v. Vereker, reported in 4 v. in Law Reports, 382, in Trinity Term 1842, established that up to that time the new Corporation had no legal existence, it having nullified all the previous proceedings; that therefore the Boundary Act could not have yet come into operation, and that Carrigparson being consequently in the county of the city in January, 1812, according to Mellor's case, 1 L. & R. 144, it should have been alleged in the indictment that the murder was committed in the county of the city, with a suggestion to the county.

Before 1841, the official name was 'the Mayor, Sheriffs and Citizens of the City of Limerick.'

From 1841 to 1899, it was 'the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the Borough of Limerick.'

From 1899 to 2001, it was 'the Mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses of the County Borough of Limerick.' All three were usually shortened to 'Limerick Corporation.

(Potter, 2014, Limerick City Archives, Limerick City Council 1197-2014)



Photo: Park Canal and Shannon River junction, Kevin Stevenson

Same Arms different Centre- Pieces

- Why we can consider the Arms of Limerick a Composite is due to it being a composition not an exact replicated representation of a building, object, or structure. (triangular to domed)

• 1878



• 1842



Photo: O'Byrne, 2009, New Street and O'Connell Avenue

Boundary History

The boundary of Limerick City has been extended twice since 1841.

1841

In 1878: municipal fire brigade, private gas company

1878

in 1950 it doubled in size to 5,155 acres and in 2008 it increased by 50 percent to 7,675 acres.

1950

(Potter, 2014, Limerick City Archives, Limerick City Council 1197-2014, Limerick.ie)

Punch's Cross

- We have the two different versions of the Arms (triangular and domed) a couple of metres from each other on different streets
- This leads to the notion that they might be representing different areas of Limerick

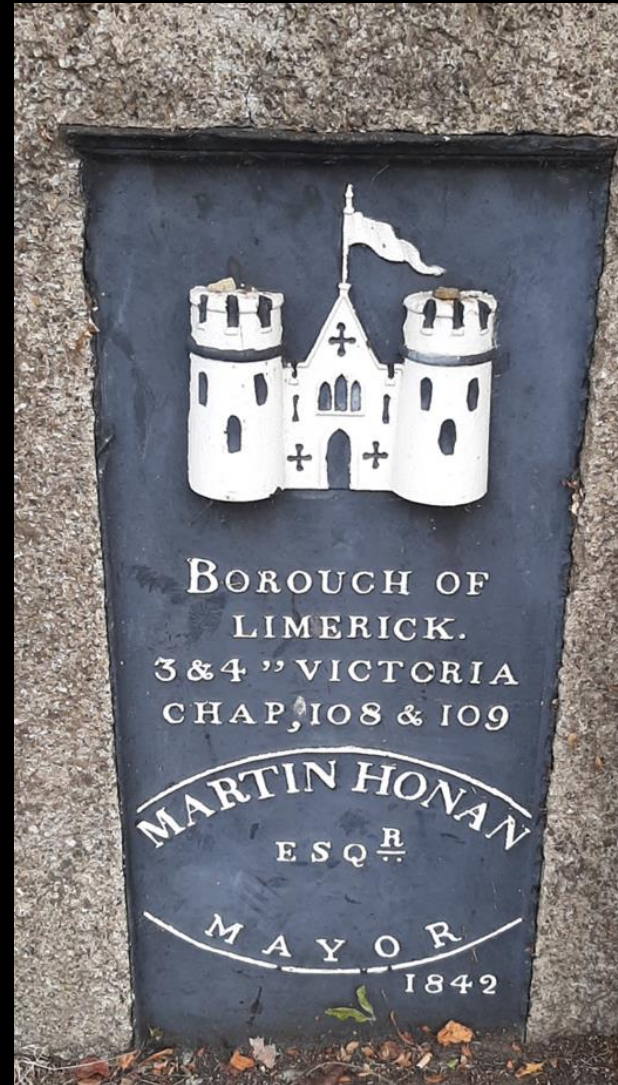


Photo: Kevin Stevenson (New Street and O'Connell Avenue) – Punch's Cross

Different Craftspeople Hypothesis

- We can rule out that different craftspeople had a preference for the dome or the triangular structure as H. Lee & Sons created both of these versions (right).

See:
https://www.gracesguide.co.uk/Harrison_Lee_and_Sons

AND

- Patrick McDonnell. "LIMERICK IRON FOUNDRIES 1806-1989"

Photos: Kevin Stevenson



New Street



South Circular
Road and New
Street Roundabout



A closer look at 1842

- Triangular
- Flag (note: the Toll House version is without a flag)
- Three windows in centre
- Battlement is behind triangular structure
- This edition appears to be replaced by the 1878 edition where perhaps it was important to include the dome of **Mont de Piété** built 1837 (hypothesis)



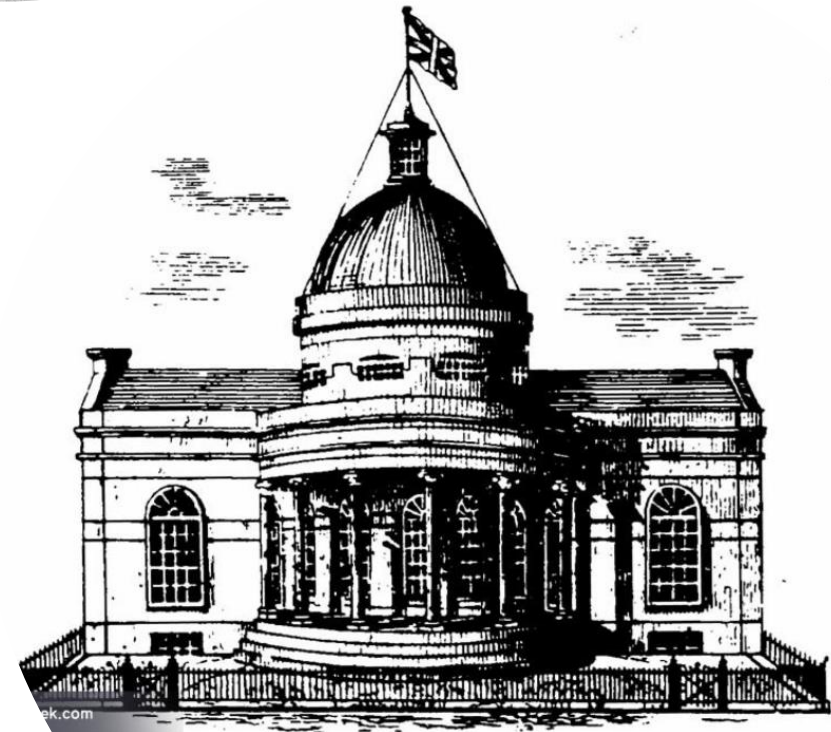
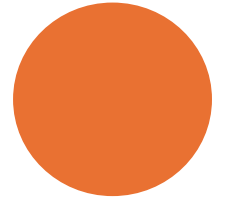
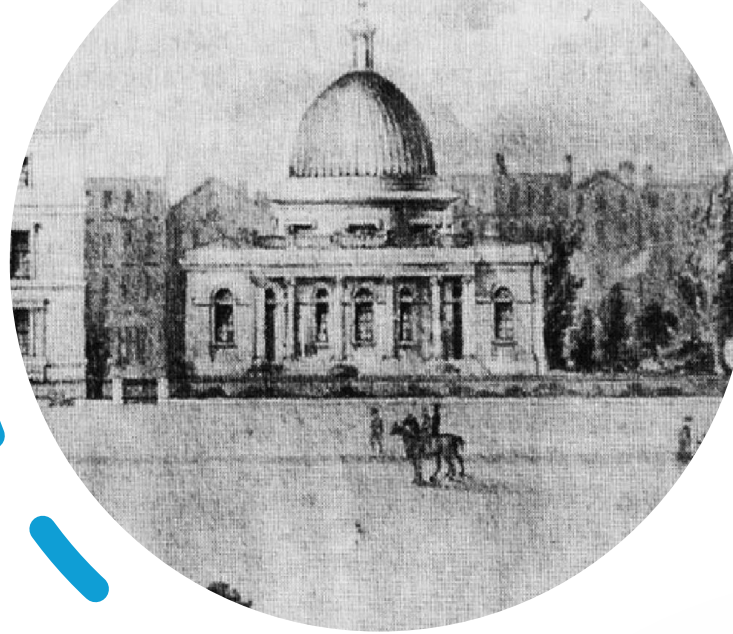
A closer look at 1878 (first depiction of dome)



- Dome
 - Cross
 - Protected entrance
-
- Is the dome the **Mont de Piété**
 - 1837 - 1892?
 - Has the dome entered the memory of locals after a view from the **Toll House**?

Mont de Piété

- Mont de Piété at George's Quay and Mary Street: Charitable Pawn Shop
- [Mont de Piété 1837-1892](#) • [Limerick Places](#) ([limerickslife.com](#))
- 1837-1892



Potential Toll House View of Mont de Piété



[toll house limerick - Bing Maps](#)

Potential Toll House View of Mont de Piété (long view) (Bing Maps)



Is this one circa: 1878 or older? Did it form the basis for the domed edition?

- This carving originated from the site of the **City Prison on Merchants Quay** (1789-1988) now at Council Chamber Limerick City Hall. Another translocation.
- [1789 – Former County Court House & Gaol, Merchant's Quay, Limerick | Architecture @ Archiseek.com](#)
- It appears to be including the emphasis on the battlements of the castle wall in the centre much like the earlier Brewery Arms from **1739 now at City Hall Restaurant.**
- Photo: O'Byrne, 2009, p. 46



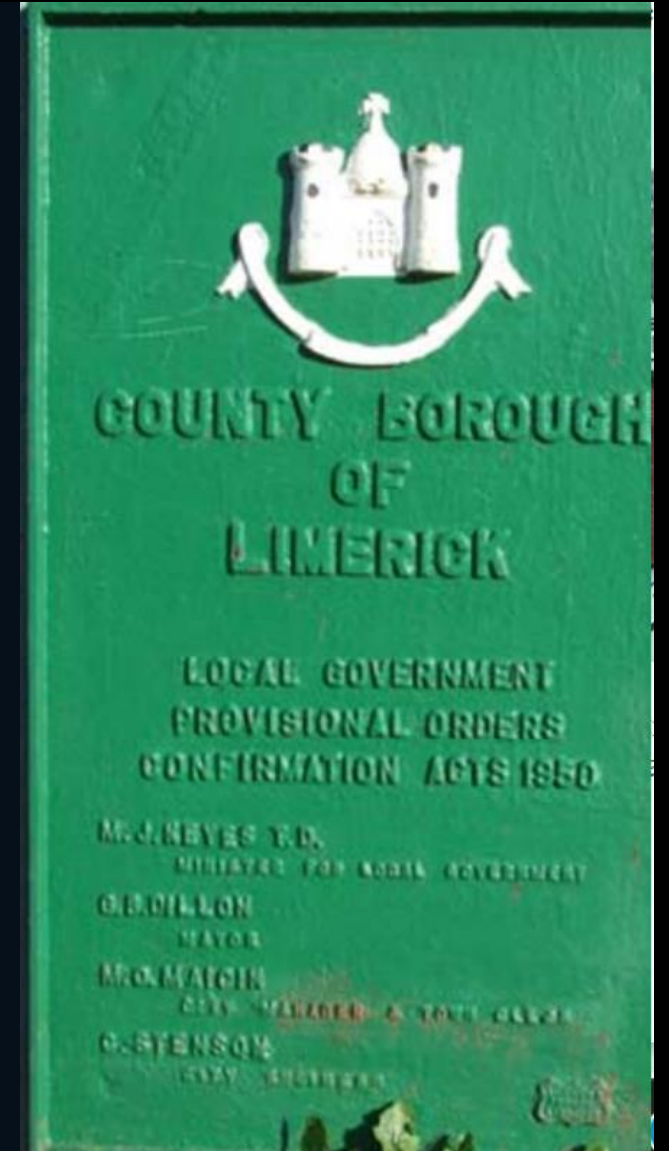
Brewery 1739 vs. City Prison Merchant Quay (year 1789?)





1891 and 1950

- Both of these occurrences share the dome of the 1878 boundary edition and the City Prison depiction.
- The 1950 edition on the right appears to look like Sacré-Coeur in Paris, but is it supposed to be **Mont de Piété**?



Yesterday and Today

- 1891 edition with white paint today which can highlight some features whilst depreciating others



Photos: as references as per previous slides

The Big Questions

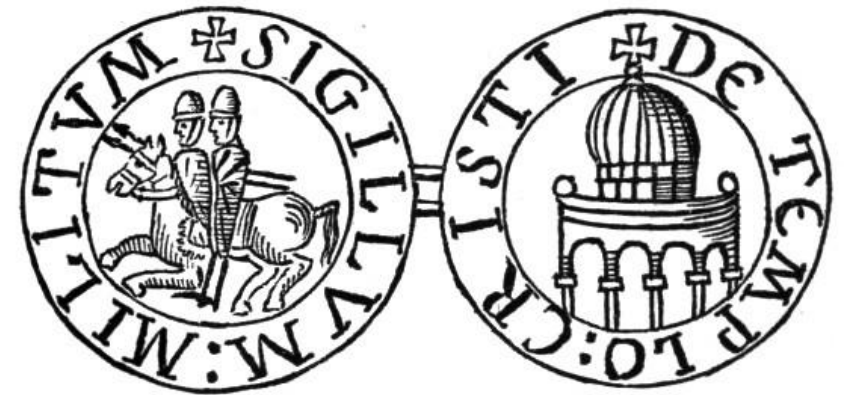
- Can you use this 'evolution' of the shield (battlement – triangle – dome) to provide an estimate for an undated example of the Arms?
- Is the change from battlement to triangular roofing to dome chronological?



Photo: The Treaty Stone, Aoife Skelly

What is the date of the City Prison Merchants Quay (built 1789) depiction?

- Due to translocation it is difficult to determine but not impossible meaning this depiction can be older than 1837 when **Mont de Piété** was built.
- If it is older than 1837 then the dome would not depict the **Mont de Piété (1837-1892)** and perhaps depicts an example of the *Templum Domini* (**Solomon Temple Jerusalem**) alluding to the importance of **Crusades (1095-1291 AD)**.



Drawing: Archer, T.A., 1894

Is the below Mosaic from 1837 onward due to the Dome of Mont de Piété?



It was noted anteriorly the motto was provided in the mid 1800s.

Photo: Kevin Stevenson,
taken at the Irish
Georgian Society
Museum, William Street
Dublin. July 07, 2020

Some Speculative Answers

If the Merchant Quay's Goal (Prison) Domed version, which we do not have a date for, was created at the same time as the building of the Goal (1789), then this mysterious Mosaic piece could be older than 1837 as well, also alluding to the *Templum Domini*



If so, why was there an epoch of using the triangular structure in the Coat of Arms?



Translocation in Action

If trans-located then perhaps older than 1789 (date of Gaol being built)

If translocated then perhaps older than 1840 (date of Toll House)



1739
(Brewery to
City Hall)



1789?
(Quay Gaol to
Council Chamber)



1840
(from? to Toll House)



1842
(Boundary Mark)



1878
(Boundary Mark)

?



?

Important: this depiction has the Latin motto inscribed which was commenced in mid 1800s

Conclusions

- We saw that the craftspeople who created the depictions of Limerick City's Coat of Arms adopted both the Dome and the Triangle but knowing who commissioned their work to understand their motivations would be illuminating
- The Arms are most likely a composite
- Increased Capriccio if the Dome represents Jerusalem but it is possible the Dome represents Mont de Piété
- the date of the Mosaic and Domed version from the Merchant Quay Prison most likely mid- 1800s. Triangular (conical) = distillery, merchant
- The Triangular structure is still uncertain. We can eliminate the dome as an acorn.



References

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- Archer, T.A., *The Crusades: The Story of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem* (1894), p. 176. The design with the two knights on a horse and the inscription *SIGILLVM MILITVM XRISTI* is attested in 1191; see Jochen Burgdorf, *The central convent of Hospitallers and Templars: history, organization, and personnel (1099/1120-1310)*, Volume 50 of *History of warfare* (2008), [ISBN 978-90-04-16660-8](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9789004166608), pp. 545–546
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