

# LIMERICK CITY BEER HISTORY

## 2.6 Brewing in Limerick City

### Medieval History

The oldest form of brewing associated with Limerick is the brewing of heather as practiced by the Danes (the earliest Viking settlers in Limerick). The methods however, were secret, and the cause of much argument and were protected to the death in many cases.

The first monastic settlement in Limerick was in 1171. It was Peters Cell situated on the Kings Island (English Town) section of the city. It was established at the behest of Domhnal Mor Ui Briana, the then, Chieftain of the area. Although there is no reference to brewing this was undoubtedly the first brewery in Limerick as all monastic settlements of the time would have brewed ale for themselves and for selling in the local area.

### 2.6.2 Brewing from the 1700s onwards

Breweries were the most registered business in Limerick City between the years 1710 and 1740. In 1769, a Limerick printer and bookseller named John Ferrar published the first directory of the city. There were at the time in operation six breweries and three coopers, but only one maltster, as at the time many breweries malted their own grains.

This number however, fluctuates through different surveys and directories and the author cannot say for sure how many

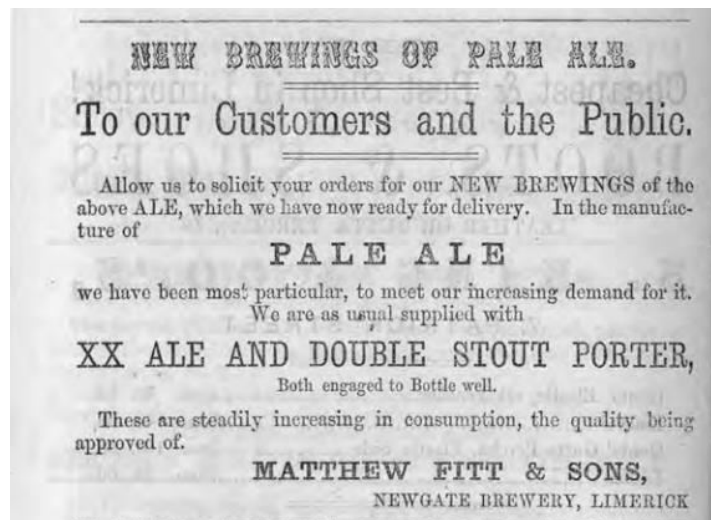


Figure 2: Stone Placard City Brewery 1739

breweries were in operation, Lucas in 1788 lists five, Holden in 1809 lists seven and Dean in 1838 lists six. O’Flaherty in his atlas of Limerick lists some fifty six breweries as having operated in Limerick City, but this number is also inaccurate as having studied the list at least two breweries are repeated; the Newgate Brewery & Fitzgerald’s Brewery. Changes in Ownership can account for the two mentioned, but it is the suspicion of the author that employees and past owners are also contained in O’Flaherty’s list.

### 2.6.2.1. Fitts Brewery

The oldest brewery on record in Limerick is the City Brewery on Kings Island near King John’s Castle. The stone placard from the brewery dates it at 1739. It first appears under the name Long (Alderman & Co) who became Mayor of Limerick in 1744 (Limerick Corporation



*Fig. 03 Advertisement for Fitts Brewery*

Index 1843). It was later operated by Mathew Fitt and his sons. It was known locally as Fitt’s brewery and they produced both ale and stout (Keane, 1981). On the 1840 Limerick Ordinance Survey (LOS) map the Brewery is marked in two places in close proximity to each other along the shore line at kings Island. The main part of the brewery stood on the current site of the City Council buildings and car park. (For exact location see LOS map & p 37 & 38)

### 2.6.2.2. Connells Brewery

The best-known brewery was Connell’s Brewery, known locally as the Garryowen Brewery. Its foundation stone is in the custody of Limerick City Council and dates the construction of the brewery at 1780. The brewery stood in the space between Fair View Terrace, Geraldine Villas, Johns Avenue and the Rope Walk (Fitzmaurice,

Hannon, 1991). The 1840 Limerick Ordinance Survey (LOS) map showed the brewery stretching from the Greenhill Road, Garryowen to Mulgrave Street and was on the site currently occupied by St John's Villas and Park View Terrace just to the southeastern corner of the "Markets Field" football grounds. The brewery is listed as Connell's until 1809. After which it becomes the Connell, Fitzgerald brewery until 1842. Passing to the Fitzgeralds through the marriage of Connell to Margaret Fitzgerald on nineteenth of October 1836 (McNamara, 2016). The brewery was popular locally and provided employment for up to 40 men. After 1840, it appears as Fitzgerald & Co until it ceased trading. It ceased trading in 1881 (Keyes 1945). The last brewer was John and Margaret's son Arthur (McNamara, 2016). It was the last brewery in Limerick until recent times. (For exact location see LOS map & p 37 & 38)



*Fig. 04 Label for Garryowen Brewery*

### **2.6.2.3 St John's Brewery**

St John's Brewery is marked on the 1840 LOS map as being directly behind the site of the current St Johns Cathedral, a plot that is occupied by St Johns Girls School at present. The founder of this brewery was also a Fitzgerald Francis Connell Fitzgerald a brother of John Francis in the Garryowen Brewery (McNamara, 2016). The Cathedral of the same name was built beside it many years later (Keane, 1981). Ferrar in 1769 lists the brewer as John Brennan, this is the last listing for this brewery. (For exact location see LOS map & p 37 & 38)

### **2.6.2.4. The Thomond Brewery**

The Thomond Brewery was situated on Clare St and was begun by a family named Stein. The 1840 LOS map shows this brewery as Boyd's brewery. It was one of the last three in operation in Limerick and operated until the late 1870s. The brewery was later demolished and was replaced by the Good Shepherd Convent (Keane, 1981). The Stein family would later found the Limerick Distillery also known as the

Thomond Gate Distillery, which would later be purchased by Archibald Walker of Scotland (Townsend, 1997) (For exact location see LOS map & p 37 & 38)

#### **2.6.2.5. The Palmerstown Brewery**

In his Limerick Journal entry, “Limerick Breweries” in 1981 Keane references a brewery named the Palmerstown Brewery and suggests that it was situated in the Mungret Street area of the city. Having examined the 1840 LOS map there is no listing as being on Mungret St, there is, however, an O’Neill’s brewery listed on Johns St which is in close proximity to Mungret St. there is also a listing for a brewery on the nearby James’s St also part of the Palmerstown area. (For exact location see LOS map & p 37 & 38)

#### **2.6.2.6. The Canal Brewery**

The Canal Brewery was built on the north bank of the canal and was funded by Walker and Co from Cork, “*the building became one of the finest establishments of the kind in Munster; but did not prosper for any length of time*” (Lenihan, 1866). The building is clearly marked on the 1840 LOS map and occupied the site of what is currently the Grove Island Complex, and St Mary’s rugby club ground. (For exact location see LOS map & p 37 & 38)

#### **2.6.2.7. Mrs Tuckers Brewery**

Last of all was Mrs Tucker’s Brewery at No. 5 North St. John’s Square (*St John’s Square, Limerick* is divided north and south and numbered 1-5 on each side). Mrs Tucker did not operate for very long and the brewery was small in comparison to others (Keane, 1981). The brewery was situated to the rear of the house and is still partially visible to this day. However Mrs Tucker did not keep a good house and conditions were said to be appalling. The premises later became a public house until the licence transferred to a nearby property (Fitzmaurice, Hannon, 1991). The premises are not represented on the 1840 LOS map but would have been on the corner closest to St John’s Church. The premises became a butchers shop in the early 1920’s and remain a butchers to this day. (For exact location see LOS map p 37 & 38)

### **2.6.3 A New Brewery for Limerick**

A new brewery was suggested for Limerick City in 1893 and was to be built on the Dock Road. Funded by the city (£12,500), and by London investors (£75,000), who were represented by Mr. Evans of Davis, Evans and Company Solicitors. The venture while considered to be good for the city and strongly supported by trades-people but was objected to by the nearby Redemptorist Church. All local tradesmen became shareholders in the venture to raise the capital needed but the venture never became a reality as the London investors withdrew their support for reasons not given (Collins, 1980).

### **2.6.4 The Toohey Brothers**

Two brothers John Thomas and James Mathew, Toohey were well-established brewers in Sydney, Australia. They ran the “Toohey’s and Tooth’s” brand, which became very popular. James would later become Vice President of the Victuallers Association and hold a seat in the Australian Parliament (1885-93). Although they lived their lives in Australia, John was born in Limerick before his family later moved to Australia (Walsh, 1988).



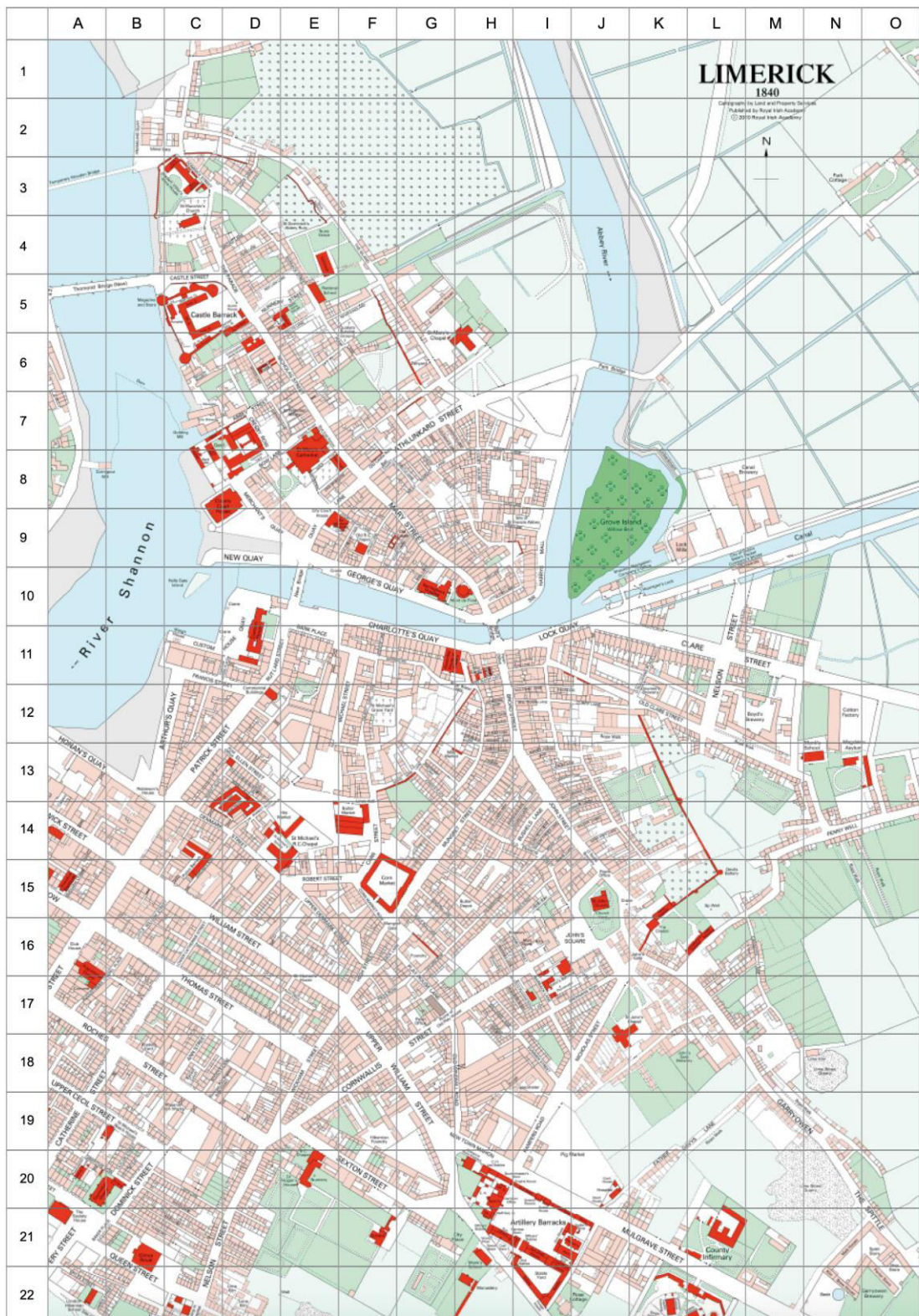


Fig. 05 1840 Map of Limerick City

**Grid style referencing will be used to pinpoint brewery locations within the city:**

- Peter's Cell/ Mrs. Odel's Townhouse 7 F
- Fitt's Brewery 7 C
- Connell's Brewery/Garryowen Brewery 21&22 N&O
- St. John's Brewery/ St. John's Gate Brewery 18 K&L
- Palmerstown Brewery - O'Neill's Brewery 15 J Upper Left Corner  
- James' St brewery 16 I Left Side
- Canal Brewery 8&9 L&M
- Mrs. Tucker's Brewery 16 I upper Right