

# THE STRITCH FAMILY: THE RISE AND DEMISE OF A LIMERICK PATRICIAN FAMILY

By

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## FIRST DRAFT OF ARTICLE

*'John Stritch, a gentleman of fair character and inheritance, was forced to depart the town of Genes in Italy by reason of the great spoil and pillage done to the said town by the Saracens and Infidels, A.D. 933; and Henry I being the Emperor of Rome, the said John, with his wife and four sons, came from Paris in France and there died. In process of time his children and offspring came to Rouen in Normandy, from thence into England, and part of them came to Ireland; and by reason of removing of them into sundry places and shires, some of them are called Stretch, Stritchee, Stretchy, Stridch, Strich, Strit, Strett, Strethem.'* **(Lenihan, Maurice *Limerick, Its History and Antiquities, Ecclesiastical, Civil and Military, from the Earliest Age*, originally published 1866, reprinted Mercier Press 1991, O'Carroll, Cian (ed.), p. 139n.)**

The story of the Stritch family in Ireland begins on 1 June 1293 when John, son of Reginald de Strete is granted a letter of protection to travel to Ireland with Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester. **(*Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland, 1293-1301*, Sweetman, H.S. (ed.), Longman & Co., London, 1881, Entry 31, p. 22.)** Letters of protection (the equivalent of the passports of today) were also granted on that occasion to John de Hastings, Henry de Montimer, Gaudinus de Clare and John de Tydemershe. There seems to have been quite an entourage of Anglo-Norman knights travelling together to the newly conquered territory in County Clare, possibly as a protective force for Gilbert de Clare, or perhaps just as speculators with a view to gaining lands and property for themselves. Regardless of the purpose of their original remit, we do know that the de Stretes did stay on and settled in the de Clare territory of Thomond.

There is a possibility, however, that other members of the family had arrived in Ireland before 1293, for only two years later the Justiciary Rolls for Ireland record that Gerald De Rupe was charged with the death of Henry Stritch who had wounded his brother, Walter de Rupe. **(*Calendar of Justiciary Rolls of Ireland, Vol. I 1295-1303*, Mills, James (ed.), Tanner Ritchie Publishing, 2009, p. 11.)**

This was not the only occasion that the family name appeared in connection with legal proceedings. On 7 June 1297 John Stritch was before the courts and found in mercy for many defaults; the defendant acknowledging that he owed John Le Blund 16 crannocks of wheat and 18 crannocks of corn, valued at 100 shillings. (**ibid. p. 129.**) A crannock was a measure of cereal used in Ireland until at least the end of the fifteenth century. The measure varied according to the cereal: a crannock of wheat consisting of 8 bushels and of oats, 16 bushels. The term 'in mercy' implies that Stritch was at the mercy of the court and had to pay a fine - for the expression 'Let him be in mercy' signifies 'Let him be fined'.

Just three years later, at a court sitting held on 21 June 1300, three men bearing the name of Stretche - Thomas, Henry and Adam - were found in mercy of the court because they had witnessed an assault that the court decided they could have prevented, but did not. They, along with twelve others, were given fines. (**ibid. p. 343.**)

The next reference we find to the family is again in the Judiciary Rolls concerning a trial that took place in Limerick on 12 November 1313 whereby Germeyn Selyman of Glynnogyr was charged with the felonious slaying of James, son of Simon. Sitting as a juror on this case was John Stritch. Another member of the family, Richard Stritch, was summoned to attend the jury but did not present himself, so he became liable to a fine. An interesting aspect of the case was that the defendant refused to acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court over him as he was a 'clerk and neither can nor ought to answer here'; i.e. he was a man in holy orders (a clergyman) and was claiming privilege from secular law. He then withdrew and fled to the church of Glynnogyr for sanctuary. Found guilty by the jury, the cleric suffered the confiscation of his chattels, i.e. all movable and removable goods, to the value of £6 4s 8d. (***Calendar of Justiciary Rolls of Ireland 1308-1314 Prepared by Herbert Wood & Albert E. Langman, and revised by Margaret C. Griffith, Stationary Office, Dublin, Dublin, 1956, pp. 303-4.***)

The first reference to the Stritchs holding any official office in Ireland occurs in 1328-1329 when Henry Stritch, serjeant, was fined for not doing his duty (**Hodkinson, Brian *Who Was Who in Medieval Limerick; from Manuscript Sources, limerickcity.ie/museum, click on 'Local History Resources in Limerick Museum'***) The term serjeant may refer to a military, administrative or legal position. Whatever the details of the case, we know that by the early fourteenth century the Stritch family had become sufficiently well established citizens of the English stronghold of Limerick to be entrusted with one of the principal offices of the city.

However a hundred years were to elapse before a member of the family achieved the highest political office in the city, Nicholas Stritch being elected mayor in 1427. He was to be the first of several of his family to be so honoured and their involvement in the political life of the city would bring them both great power and wealth, but also expose them to great peril of their life. Indeed, a descendant of Nicholas did suffer death for his political activities at the hands of the Cromwellians in 1651.

During Nicholas Stritch's tenure of office the Mayor and Council of Limerick sent a petition to King Henry VI asking to be given custody of Limerick Castle which had been granted to James, Earl of Desmond in 1422. (***Fitzgerald & M'Gregor History***

*of Limerick Vol. II, 1827, pp. 94-5.*) The citizens of Limerick did not trust Desmond as he levied a form of tax on them known as tributes whereby the merchants had to hand over part of their merchandise to him on goods being shipped on the Shannon estuary or by road from Waterford and Dublin.

Whilst the Earl of Desmond was not the only local lord to extort profits from them in this way, his having custody of the Castle gave him even more power over the city and a stronghold in their midst. It meant that he was capable of turning his gallowglasses on them and take their city should he decide to forego his allegiance to the Crown and seize power himself. Limerick's appeal was granted and the Mayor and Council held the office of Constable of the Castle for the following ten years. **(Hodkinson, Brian, *The Constables of Limerick Castle*, limerickcity.ie/museum, click on 'Local History Resources in Limerick Museum', click on 'Constables'; *Calendar of Patent Rolls 1422-29*, p. 390; see also Lee, David (ed.) *Remembering Limerick*, Limerick Civic Trust, Limerick, 1997, p. 91.)** Similar petitions were also sent by Dublin and Waterford, and other loyal English cities in Ireland, to the monarch at this time for the protection of their rights, property and goods from neighbouring lords, whether Irish or of English descent.

We can assume that by the early fifteenth century the Stritchs were merchants trading in whatever was most profitable. Also beginning to gain civil power during this century were the Arthurs, Comyns and Creaghs. **(Begley, Rev. John, *Diocese of Limerick, Ancient and Medieval*, Brown and Nolan, Dublin, 1906, p. 238.)** who were to become the leading patrician families of the city.

During his mayoralty Nicholas would have had to cease trading in adherence to the terms of his office, but it was also an opportunity for him to use his position to secure greater protection and power for the members of his social class. In such a relatively small, walled medieval city steadfast in its loyalty to the Crown, and governed by a handful of merchant princes, social relationships within the elite would have been closely meshed in matters both large, and small - in 1380, for instance, John Stritch is mentioned in the will of Gelian Beaufort, wife to the then late Martin Arthur, as one of her debtors - he owed to her a crannock of corn. **(The Arthur Manuscripts', McLysaght, Dr E.A., & Ainsworth, John F. (eds.), *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* Vol. VIII, 1958, p. 7. *ibid.*)**

A debt is also acknowledged in the will of Thomas Arthur in 1426 where we find that he owed Christina Strux (Stritch) the sum of £10 and that he had also bequeathed £3 11 shillings to a John Red £3 for the wardship of Christina Strux. **(The Arthur Manuscripts', McLysaght, Dr E.A., & Ainsworth, John F. (eds.), *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* Vol. VIII, 1958, p. 7.)**

Transactions between the wealthier members of society at a higher, spiritual plane are also recorded in the documentary evidence that survives from the late medieval period. In the 1401 will of Thomas Balbeyne, a very wealthy and successful citizen of the city, he bequeathed to Nicholas Stritch his Chapel of St James in the southern part of St Mary's Cathedral. Balbeyne had been generous to St Mary's, where he had paid for the erection of two chapels - St James and St Mary Magdalene. **(Westropp, T. J., 'St Mary's Cathedral, Its Plan and Growth', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 1898, p. 38.)**

In the will of Richard Bultingfort, who died in 1405 after having served five or six times as mayor of Limerick, and was benefactor to the Chapel of St James, he likewise left his burial rights in the chapel to Nicholas Stritch. (*ibid.* p. 40.) A grave inscription that is no longer extant, but recorded by travel writer Thomas Dineley in 1680, states:

*'John Stretche, Aldermane, third sone to Bartholomewe,  
This monumente made in Febrarye most true,  
Where he and his heyres males resignt theyre mortalle bons,  
Till Chryste do come to judge all mans atte ons.'* (Shirley, Evelyn Philip (notes by Maurice Lenihan) 'Extracts from the Journal of Thomas Dineley' *Irish Archaeological Journal*, RSAI, Vol. VIII. 1864-1866, pp. 433-4.)

We do not know the date of this tomb inscription for John Stretche. However, as the title 'Alderman' often implies that a person was a former mayor we can hazard a guess that the individual in question may have been John Fitz Bartholomew Stritch who was mayor of Limerick in 1594. (Lenihan *Limerick, Its History and Antiquities*, p. 700.) The date of his death is not known, but 1614 has been suggested. (Westropp, *op. cit.*, p. 115n1.) So, for at least 200 years the final resting place of the leading males of the family was St Mary's Cathedral.

#### *The Black Tax*

By the later fifteenth and early sixteenth century port cities such as Limerick, Galway and Waterford were becoming very wealthy from the very extensive Irish trade being carried on with France and Spain. Irish ships were seen on all the main trade routes and were serious competitors in the field of commercial enterprise. Irish merchants were so well known in the main trading ports on the west coast of France that inns were referred to as 'The Irishman's Hostelries'. (Hogan, James *Ireland in the European System, Vol. 1, 1521-1558* Longman, Green & Co., London, 1920, p. 2.)

However during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the merchants of Limerick suffered great financial losses due to the plunder of their ships heading up the estuary to Limerick. These vessels were subject to a 'black tax' levied by the various native chieftains who held castles on the banks of the Shannon. In an account of an Inquisition taken by George Aylmer, the Chief Justiciary for Henry VIII, in 1542 he lists the goods ships being illegally taxed by various chieftains on the Shannon estuary,

*'from Kilrush to Finnes Island', so merchants were losing greatly from this problem, those named as guilty of this plunder were: O'Brien of Carrigaholt, McMorrogh, of Finnes, O'Cahaine of Kilrush, and McNamara. ( Lenihan op. cit. p. 91n.)*

Following is an extract from a document that gives a sense of the financial losses being suffered by the merchants of Limerick, not only on their merchandise arriving by sea but also by road from Waterford. It explains why they were so determined in their petitions to gain some control over the situation,

*'Item, we find that Tibbit Bourke of Caherkinlish in the county of Lymerick Gentl., the 10th day of Januarii . . . and divers before and after did take of one William Young of Lymerick, merchant, for seaven loads of oaths, 7d. and so of divers others of the said citty daylie. And of James Fox of the same for ten barrells of wyne departinge out of the same citty into the countrie 2d. in extortion.*

*'Mahone O'Bryen of Carrigogunnel in the countie of Lymerick, gentl. Did take of Domynick Whyte of Lymerick, mercht. the 10th daye of December, 33rd Henry VIII for 3 barrells of wyne 3d. and for ten barrells of wyne 20d. and soe from day to day for divers others of the said citie in extortion.*

*'And so did Murrough McMahan of Balliolman of Christopher Creagh of Lymerick, merchant, for custom of 2 hogsetts of hearings 3s. 8d. and 5 dykers of hydes 7s.4d. and of every boath that cometh to that citty by his castle 7s.4d. and soe of divers others.*

*And O'Conoughour of Carrigafoyle did take of **John Stritch** [author's emphasis] For his ship coming to Limerick 3s 4d and 20 gallon of wyne and so of every ship that cometh to that town with wyne'. (**ibid.**)*

Such extortion must certainly have had an effect on the price of goods in the city. The problem had been ongoing for many years; we know that in 1505 the citizens had built an oared galley to protect their ships in the estuary from piracy. (**ibid. p. 70.**) By 1500 this kind of Mediterranean style warship was a common sight all over coastal Europe, with piracy of all kinds rife. Such a vessel was fast and easily manoeuvrable, not dependant on favourable winds, and so serviceable for intercepting any perceived threat to the shipping it was protecting. Galleys at this time carried three oarsmen to a bench and were built about 40 metres long by about 5 metres wide, usually with twenty four benches each side, with a single mast supporting a lateen sail. Typically it was armed with a single heavy bronze cannon set at the bow. (**O'Neill, T. *Merchants and Mariners in Medieval Ireland* Irish Academic Press, Dublin, 1987, p. 128.**)

As the sixteenth century advanced, Irish commerce was confronted by dangerous rivals. English Pirates such as Stukeley, Drake and Frobisher had mastered their trade of freebooting, secretly encouraged and supported by Elizabeth I; this created yet another problem for the merchants as they attempted to get their cargoes intact from port to port.

The merchants were also strengthening their ties with France by sending their sons to be educated in French Universities, this was quite a common practise for noble and merchant classes in Ireland for many centuries, some took religious vows and in 1544 Andrew Stritch was appointed Dean of the Cathedral of St. Mary's in Limerick by Henry VIII, succeeding Andrew Creagh, who had resigned his appointment and was pardoned for offences unknown, so at one time or another all of the most powerful families had members holding high ecclesiastical office in Limerick. (**Begley, Canon *John Diocese of Limerick in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* Brown &**

**Nolan, Dublin, 1927, p. 164.)** His death was recorded as 10 May 1554 and he was succeeded by Roger Skyddy. (*Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns, Vol. I, 1521-1558, Edmund Burke Publisher, Dublin, 1994, p. 193, article 998.*) Also recorded in 1539 as Warden of the Monastery of Friars Minors of Limerick City was Brother John Stritch. (*Limerick Papers, National Library online, Collection List 121, MS. 41,673/6, p. 10.*)

During the first half of the sixteenth century the Stritch name appeared as mayor many times in the city's rolls. Nicholas Stritch was mayor in 1503, 1504, and again in 1510. In 1528 a Nicholas Stritch was appointed Mayor, but we have no way of knowing if this was the same man who had held the office three times previously. (**Lenihan op. cit. p. 695.**) It was during this latter mayoralty that a synod of Bishops was held in Limerick during which Nicholas Stritch requested, and was granted, the power for him and his successor's to imprison ecclesiastical debtors until they had repaid their debts. (**ibid. p. 579.**)

1536 saw Bartholomew Stritch take the position as Limerick's first citizens and in 1548 William Stritch was Mayor. During these years Stritchs were bailiffs of the city on five occasions.)

William Stritch deserves more than a passing mention as he was caught up in a very interesting power struggle which took place in the city at this time. Edmund Sexten was a very powerful man and a favourite of Henry VIII having served as his 'master of the sewer', and was the first 'mere irishman' who had the right to be elected mayor, a right bestowed on him by Henry VIII, and to be inherited by his 'heirs male'. He was the subject of intense jealousy from the citizens of Old English descent as they alone could hold public office before this, and an Irishman given the same rights as them seems to have made them feel quite threatened. Also Sexten was appointed by Henry as one of his inquisitors during the Reformation, overseeing the confiscation of monastic lands and being granted a huge amount of former monastic holdings for his trouble. (**ibid. p. 80.**)

In a letter to the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Lord Bellyingham, dated 11 October 1548, William Stritch, Mayor, declined Bellyingham's suggestion to elect Edmund Sexten as his successor, adding the cryptic remark that the bearer, Hector Arthur, will give further information. (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1509-1573 Hamilton, Hans Claude (ed.), Longman, Green & Co., London, 1860, p. 89.*) What reasons were given we will never know, as William was not going to commit them to paper; perhaps fearing his comments may come back to haunt him in the future. Wise and very diplomatic, as Sexten was a very powerful man. William was instead succeeded by a kinsman of his, John Fitzgeorge Stritch, and William was again elected Mayor in 1552.

However the Stritchs animosity towards Sexten may have nothing to do with jealousy, as we find further explanation from the *Carew Manuscripts*. During the term of Lord Leonard Grey as Lord Deputy of Ireland, Grey, a notoriously corrupt deputy who used his term in office to increase his own wealth by extortion, travelled around Ireland with the purpose of having the citizens swear the Oath of Supremacy. He falsely stated that,

*'...while I was at Limerick, certain merchants of the same were impeached for treason for victualling and maintaining your Irish rebels, Morough O'Brien and others, Stephen Harold, treasurer of Limerick, Pearse Harold, Walter Harold, James Harold, **Thomas Stritch, Bartholomew Stritch** [author's emphasis] and Edmund Harold, of Limerick, merchants, I took then and examined them, part of them confessed the matter laid to their charge, I have put them and all their goods in safe guard till your pleasure be known.'*  
**(Calendar of Carew Manuscripts, 1515-1574 Brewer, J.S. & Bullen, William (eds.), Longman, Green & Co., London, 1867, p. 147.)**

Edmund Sexten substantiated Lord Grey's claims, accusing Bartholomew Stritch of coming to the aid of an enemy of the King by releasing him upon being elected Mayor the year after Sexten's own mayoralty of in 1536. (**ibid. p. 153.**) Subsequent to this an investigation into the behaviour of Lord Grey was ordered and 'Information again Lord Leonard Grey. Lord Deputy of Ireland' was gathered by John D'Arcy for Henry VIII in October 1540. One of the accusations against Lord Grey, was that he falsely impeached Bartholomew Stritch for treason. (**ibid. p. 171.**)

In total, D'Arcy and the Duke of Ormonde compiled an indictment of ninety counts against Grey. He was sent to the Tower of London and beheaded on Tower Hill on 28 July **15.. (? ed.) (Dictionary Of National Biography, Vol. VIII, Oxford University Press, 1938, pp. 639-40.)** Bartholomew Stritch was exonerated, but surely Edmund Sexten's part in the false accusation was not soon forgotten, and the Stritchs dislike for him was exacerbated by his monopolising of the spoils of royal ecclesiastical policy and being awarded so much of the confiscated religious properties.

In explanation of Lord Grey behaviour - the reason for his execution was primarily treason; the other offences were secondary - it should be noted that at this time a member of this English Court, accepting an appointment for service in Ireland was seen as a form of exile. The likes of the honest Deputy's such as St Leger and Sydney soon realised that if they paid their bills and did not resort to extortion as Grey did, they would find themselves extremely out of pocket and left with virtually no resources of their own. Thus only those of a lesser moral conscience could survive their Irish term of office and still remain financially solvent. As a result those who did accept government posts in Ireland tended in the majority to be of a lesser quality of character who did not even attempt to find a solution to the problems being faced by the country. (**Longfield, Ada, Anglo Irish Trade in the Sixteenth Century, Longmans, London, 1924, p. 18.**)

The sixteenth century was a very turbulent one for Ireland, and Limerick in particular as it was on the edge of Desmond territory and would therefore play no small part in the Desmond Wars, with great detriment to this city's citizens and finances. William Stritch was granted the office of 'Gauger and Searcher of Limerick, (similar to today's Customs officers) to hold during their majesty's pleasure with such fees as Nicholas Creagh and Humphrey Sexten had', this appointment took place in March of 1554. (**Irish Fiants Vol. I, p. 302, article 70.**) So the family were certainly seen as loyal and trustworthy citizens.

In June of 1574, Richard and Thomas Stritch were taken prisoner with three others by Edmund McSheehy's son; the McSheehy's were the Earl of Desmond's gallowglasses

and an extremely ruthless and merciless lot. They were held at Carrigafoyle Castle, pending the release of McSheehy's other son who was being held at Limerick. (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland 1571-1575*, Mary O'Dowd (ed.), Public Records Office, Kew, Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2000, article 1012.) The McSheehys were well known for their cruelty and were accused of the 'preying, spoiling and murder of 80 English families,' Murtagh was reported to have escaped from his imprisonment at Limerick, (*Description of Ireland in 1598*, Hogan SJ, Fr. Edmund (ed.), Gill & Son, Dublin, 1878. p. 204.) perhaps some deal was done to allow or aid his escape because Thomas survived his ordeal as he was sent to London the following March with James Gould with a petition from the Mayor and Council of Limerick to solicit the confirmation of their charter and other petitions. (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland 1574-1585* p. 85. )

The family at this time also had property on Scattery Island, as reported in an inquisition into the island taken for Elizabeth I in 1576, 'that James Stritch of Limerick, has to him and his heirs a stone house on the island paying 12d. yearly to the Bishop of Limerick' (Begley, *Diocese of Limerick, Ancient and Medieval*, p. 397.) Many other prominent Limerick families are also named as having property on the island such as Sexten and Arthur. Having a property on Iniscathay [sic] Scattery, was obviously a way of fortifying the estuary and protecting their merchandise from plunder by the locals as their ships travelled up the estuary to Limerick.

At this time the family were trading with Bristol and importing all manner of merchandise, as we see in the records of Bristol port the name of Thomas Stritch appears in 1576 as 'merchant of Limerick' importing from Bristol to Waterford, on board the 'Katherine of Waterford' various commodities including Playing Cards, Combs, Knives, Frankincense, Merrell's, (type of board game) Cumin seeds, etc., (Flavin, Susan & Jones, Evan T., *Bristol Trade with Ireland and the Continent, 1503-1601*, Four Courts Press, 2009, p. 694.) and in the same year, John Stritch of Limerick was also importing similar items through Cork. (*ibid.* p. 689.) Thomas Stritch was listed as Mayor of Limerick in 1590 and John Stritch was mayor in 1582, and the Thomas Stritch mentioned above as taken prisoner by the McSheehys could be this same merchant.

A quite unusual story with regard to this family was regarding an appeal by the Bishop of Limerick in a divorce cause between Richard Stritch, son of Bartholomew, Stritch of Limerick, Alderman and Elinora Creagh. (*Irish Fiants, Vol. II. 1558-1586*, article 4186.) From the same source comes notice of the appointment in 1578 of James Stritch as one of the commissioners to make inquisition in several counties for concealed lands of monasteries, also the family were continuing to be buried in St. Mary's Cathedral, so it seemed for a time they were embracing the new religion, and judging by this commission, Queen Elizabeth I was in no doubt as to their loyalty. (*ibid.* article 3489.)

The Fiants of Edward VI notes nomination of Roger Skyddy to the deanery of the Cathedral of BVM of Limerick vacant by the death of Andrew Stritch, dated 10<sup>th</sup> May 1552, (*Irish Fiants, Vol. I., article 998.*) This Rev. Stritch had obviously embraced the reformation, however a kinsman of his also Andrew Stritch did not as he is listed as martyr, died while imprisoned in Dublin in 1594. (Montague, Patrick N., *The Saints and Martyrs of Ireland* Colin Smythe, 1981, p. 82.)



This loyalty was much encouraged by the policy of keeping separate the main factions; English by birth, or English by blood, and the native Irish, it was thought that by playing these parties off against each other it was possible to keep the country weak and divided, yet partly under royal dominance, particularly in the cities which were the garrisons during the wars of the sixteenth century, which is why these Royal appointments were given to the loyal citizens to reiterate the faith which the monarch placed in these citizens and the loyalty of her English citizens of Limerick was to prove imperative during the Desmond Wars.

When the Earl of Desmond's cousin James Fitzmaurice arrived in Dingle in July 1579 with a appeal from Pope Gregory XIII to aid the noble and holy mission of Fitzmaurice, and also carrying special letters encouraging the Earls of Desmond and Kildare and their galloglasses to join in the great and new struggle for faith and country, he was accompanied by Bishop O'Hely, two Franciscans bearing banners, one of which was the Papal Standard, and four other priests and four friars. It was no doubt a reason for great worry amongst the authorities. The Bishop and some of his party subsequently travelled to the castle of James' cousin, the Earl of Desmond at Askeaton. In the absence of the Earl they were received cordially by the Countess, but she contrived behind their backs to send word to the authorities in Limerick of their arrival. Unaware of this, the bishop left the next day for Limerick where he hoped to find out the whereabouts of the Catholic forces in order to join with them. En route to Limerick the Bishop was taken prisoner by Mayor Nicholas Stritch and his men, who handed him over to the ruthless Lord President of Munster, Drury, who duly court-martialled and executed the Bishop. **(Ronan, Fr. M.V., *Reformation in Ireland under Elizabeth I, 1558-1580*, Longman Green & Co., London, 1930, p. 631-638n)**

The greatest burden inflicted by the Desmond Wars on Limerick was undoubtedly the imposition of cess (the billeting of soldiers on a community to be supported at a fixed levy). Elizabeth I was very lax in the payment of her soldiers in Ireland so it was left to her loyal citizens in towns such as Galway, Limerick, Cork and Kilmallock to feed and house the soldiers that descended on their towns at times in their thousands. Soldiers during these respites from battle and travel, behaved as they liked and since they were not subject to common law, there was no means of redress. When a soldier was quartered in a house, he only paid two pence a meal. *The Students Book on Ireland* written in 1560 mentions the system of cesses, describing the as – ‘the commandeering of provisions at prices far below the market rates, and often not paid for – or by sheer unlicensed quartering of men on the inhabitants of a city, soldiers did not

*‘contente himself with such there as the husbandmen hath for his own provision, but mislikinge the same will kill such victualles as he beste fancieth, as often as his office, pigges, capons, hens or chickens if any be in the house and for want of these he often must agree with him to give him clerely 15d sterling a daye to be clerely rid and discharged of him.’ (Longfield, op. cit., pp. 18-19.)*

It is not surprising that a petition sent to Queen Elizabeth I by the Mayor, Bailiffs and Commonalty of Limerick in 1575 requires that they be as free from cess as the cities of Dublin and Waterford are. **(*Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts Calendar of***

***State Papers, Carew 1575-1588*, Brewer, J.S. & Bullen, William (eds.), Longman Green & Co. London, 1868, p. 26.)**

In October 1579 a few months after the Mayor of Limerick, Nicholas Stritch, had handed over Bishop O'Hely to Lord President Drury, Lord Justice of Ireland, William Pelham had cause to complain about the behaviour of the citizens of Limerick, who had confiscated from one Constance Ailward, the beef he was bringing for the army, he also directed them to that:

*'the boats belonging to the city of Limerick, will serve to sundry purposes for furtherance of her Majesty's service, as you of that corporation are thought to be admirals of that whole haven, we commit to you the special trust to draw home to that city all the boats of that river without delay', (ibid. p.160)*

So whilst reprimanding the Council in one breath, he was reminding them of how important their loyalty was in the next, he no doubt understood how much resented the cessing of troops was to the city, as was further confirmed when he again wrote to them the following May 1580 justifying the practice and again reminding the corporation of their place, it would appear they had again been complaining:

*"Your wants are extreme, and your corporation has been greatly burdened, but you perceive that the soldiers have been brought thither to defend you from the malice of your traitorous neighbours. You affirm that your store of victuals is clean wasted. Had you followed my advice, this might easily have been prevented, whilst there remained plenty of grain to be had at reasonable prices. I will however, take order for the soldiers to be victualled from her Majesty's store . . . . The assembly cannot be removed to any other place."*  
**(ibid. p. 252.)**

Perhaps Pelham was being unjust to the city of Limerick considering when he arrived in Limerick the previous October, he was presented by Mayor Nicholas Stritch with one thousand citizens, armed, with which he marched to Fanningstown, and there conspired with the Countess of Desmond to have her husband declared a traitor. (FN: Ferrar, J. ***History of Limerick*, Watson & Co., Limerick, 1787, p. 111**)

Again in 1582 the Mayor of Limerick bore a petition from the citizens of Limerick, to the Queen,

*'They have been so spoiled in peace by wrongs of neighbours, in war by enemies, in peace by extortion of officers, in war by oppression of soldiers, that many honest housekeepers are begging about the country, pray for allowance of their petitions by the bearer their Mayor.'* (***Calendar of State Papers Ireland, 1574-1585*, p. 391.**)

This was not a problem that went away, as in 1589 the Vice President of Munster, Sir William Herbert, wrote:

*"The order of cessing of soldiers and their taking of meat and drink and money, none can rightly conceive, but that they had seen it, how implacable they are, I would never have believed it, if I had not both seen and heard their*

*disorder*” (Maxwell, *Constantina Irish History from Contemporary Sources, 1509-1610*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1923, p. 214.)

On 19<sup>th</sup> June 1588, Richard Stritch, merchant of Limerick, was ordered by Elizabeth I to surrender his two water mills, which she called ‘*the Royal Mills*’ which she had assigned to Gamaliel Cruce, gent, the mills were described as situated ‘*on the bank of the Shenyn in Limerick between Cordowes on the west and the manor of the chantor of the cathedral, of the queens ancient inheritance.*’ (*Irish Fiants, Vol. II, op. cit., article 5194.*)

This must have been quite a shock to Richard Stritch, as the previous year the Lords of the council in England had written to Sir John Perrot, Lord Deputy of Ireland. directing a lease or fee farm to be made to Richard Stritch, gent, of Limerick of certain mills adjoining the walls of Limerick, which he alleged to have been in the possession of his ancestors for 300 years. This order was dated October 12<sup>th</sup> 1587, (*Patent and Close Rolls of Chancery in Ireland from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 45<sup>th</sup> of Elizabeth I, Vol. II, James Moran (ed.) London, 1862, p. 151.*) Surely Richard Stritch thought he had asserted his rights to this property, only to have this overturned, and the mills awarded to one of the newly planted Protestants. However Richard did again gain possession of these mills, only a few months later they are again granted to him by Elizabeth by lease ‘to hold for 60 years at a rent of £4.13s.4d. (*Irish Fiants, Vol. II, op. cit., article 5195.*)

The gradual siphoning off of property and power from the Old English Catholic merchant class must have been beginning to be felt as in the state papers some eleven years later in March of 1600 we see complaints made against the city of Limerick;

*‘Wine sent by the Mayor to James FitzThomas and Piers Lacy . . . The Mayor welcomes great numbers of rebels into the city . . . The powder and munition of the city not gathered into its storehouse, but issued to the rebels. Disloyalty of William Stritch, the Mayor, who was young, and insufficient to discharge that place, and of his father John Stritch, in the latters first mayoralty . . . The Mayor and townsmen vaunt that they assaulted the Constable of the Castle of Limerick “and cut off his head, and brought the same into the island and played at football with it”. They brag likewise that they have executed a Lord Justice and buried many Englishmen in their cellars . . . The Mayor refuses to supply means for bringing soldiers from Askeaton to Limerick, and to prevent the rebels if distressed by Ormonde from passing over the river in Limerick.’* (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, March to October 1600, Atkinson, George (ed.), Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, London, 1903, pp. 12 & 13.*)

Similar complaint was made by the Earl of Thomond to Sir Robert Cecil in January 1600 stating that the:

*‘townsmen of Limerick relieve the rebels by all means they can, murder our soldiers and commit captains, continually quarrel with our lieutenants and other officers, The Mayor pulls off the hats of the lieutenants and gentlemen and treads on the same’* (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1599- 1600,*

**Atkinson, Ernest George (ed.), Her Majesty's Stationary Office, London, 1898, p. 402.)**

While we can only surmise as to why the heretofore loyal citizens of Limerick were acting in this way, surely they must have felt in some way justified in their actions. Or was it that William Stritch was simply a man who liked to court controversy. As Carew found reason to complain about him to the Privy Council when he wrote in January 1601 that the Earl of Tyrone had the previous February left Cork and was heading north towards Ulster, the Earl of Ormond wanted to meet him in battle before he was out of Munster, and requested the assistance of the Earl of Thomond to this end, in order that they would have all her majesty's forces then garrisoned in Limerick to join Ormond and united against the enemy Tyrone, they would finally defeat him. Sir George Carew, the President of the Council of Munster, requested that William Stritch, then Mayor supply the garrison with horses to this end, the Mayor 'utterly refused', meaning the force at Limerick could not unite with Ormond and the Earl of Tyrone escaped. Ormond placed the blame for this solely on William Stritch and the Council of Munster were planning on fining him for same, they subsequently decided against this as they believed such action '*will not rectify their hollow hearts but rather increase their insolencies.*' (***Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts 1601-1603, Brewer, J.S. & Bullen, William (eds.), Longmans, London, 1873, p.7.***) Perhaps the corporation of Limerick were hedging their bets, by showing support to both sides, ensuring that no matter what the outcome, their future was assured.

The same William Stritch is described as of the 'Middle Temple' which implies that he was both a lawyer and a Protestant, according to inquisition taken of Sir. William Bourke on 8<sup>th</sup> October 1595, (we know this was the same man as he is described as son of John Stritch, Alderman,) and on this date he had mortgaged a carucate (approx. 100-120 acres) of Camuse [sic] an area near Bruff, from Sir William. (***Calendar of Inquisitions formerly in the Office of the Chief Remembrancer of the Exchequer prepared from the MSS of the Irish Record Commission, Margaret C. Griffith (ed.), Stationary Office for the Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1991, p. 395.***)

Outside of the social upheaval of these wars, they were also a great impediment to trade. In the fifteenth century Irish trade had enjoyed unrestricted communication with the Continent, but the Elizabethan Wars put a ban alternately on trade with France and Spain, although these bans were evaded by the issuing of licences. There were greater costs involved in trading due to the dangers involved in sea journeying during time of war. The granting of licences also led to an increase in smuggling which in turn reduced the profits for the legitimate merchants.

Prior to these wars Limerick was flourishing as a trading port with a great share of the Spanish wine trade which became the subject of intense jealousy between the merchants of Limerick and Galway. Limerick also exported great quantities of corn and other commodities for the rich neighbouring districts known then as Kennory and Conelogh in north Co. Limerick. Payne (**Who is Payne? – ed.**) in a contemporary description of the area described *there is more plenty of venison fish and foule than anywhere else in Ireland* and that the area was the "*garden of the land for the varietie and great plenty of grain and fruites.*" (**Longfield, op. cit., p. 32.**)

Sir Anthony St. Leger stated in 1543 that '*from Limerick and Cork the Spaniards and Bretons have the trade as well as the fishing there, of buying their hides, which is the greatest merchandise of this land*'. (**ibid. p. 59.**) Much of the information regarding what was being traded at this time mentions salt hides and apart from fish they were the staple products desired in exchange for wine and salt which were the primary imports. (**ibid.**)

Hides were far more valuable and important in the sixteenth century than we can nowadays imagine, since furs and skins were in use for clothing and trimming of clothing, also for bed covering and rugs. In addition, up until the second half of the sixteenth century they provided essential writing material as vellum had not yet been replaced by paper. The fur of the Irish martin was highly prized amongst the upper classes of Spain and France as an alternative to European sable. (**ibid. p.73.**)

Spain was the biggest customer for hides from Ireland, but they were also sold to France, Italy and the Netherlands, Cow and calf skins were exported in very large quantities under the name of salt skins. There were numerous entries in the custom records for them and they were highly prized, with prices ranging between 13s 4d and £3.6.8d per dicker (i.e. ten) of skins.

Irish horses were as highly sought after in the sixteenth century as they still are today. Also greatly desired by the dignitaries of Europe were Irish wolfhounds, which were frequently given as gifts between courtiers around Europe. These fine animals became very scarce as a result and cross-breeding with greyhounds was necessary to prevent extinction. Prior to this Irish wolfhounds were generally white or cream in colouring, but this cross-breeding resulted in the grey colour we associate with the Irish wolfhound of today. (**ibid. p. 137.**)

Imports from the continent were mainly luxury goods as Ireland could produce most of the basic necessities for itself. By far the most important of these luxuries was wine and the great quantities of fish and hides sold to France and Spain were paid for in wines. It was imported in great quantities and sold at a quite affordable price and, so we can assume, consumed in great quantities by most of the social classes.

To give an idea of the scale of this import into Ireland the following is an extract from the *Book of Augmentation of the Queens revenue by the impost on Wines* for the year ending Michealmas 1570:

Dublin	£711. 16s. 0d
Drogheda	£154 5s. 4d
Waterford	£200. 10s 8d
Rosse	£ 8. 8s. 8d
Cork	£340. 8s. 0d
Galway	£127. 16s. 8d
Limerick	£400 00s. 0d ( <b>ibid. p.137.</b> )

As we can see from this table Limerick was comparatively the greatest importer of wine outside of Dublin and per head of population way ahead of any other city.

Limerick was for many centuries celebrated for its imported wines, as late as the 1860s residents of London would send to wine merchants in Limerick for hampers of wine and port. (Shirley *op. cit.*, p. 440n.)

The Stretches were very involved in the importation of wine and through the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries many references are found in relation to their involvement in the trade, as many other Limerick merchant families in general were. On 19 December 1614, for instance, William Stritch of Limerick imported 8 ton of sacke (Spanish wine) into Limerick, on board the *Francis* of St. Maloes, value £16. (Kearney, H.F., 'The Irish Wine Trade, 1614-1615', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. IX, 1954-1955, p. 420. 0

During Elizabeth I's wars with Spain a ban was imposed on trade in Spanish wine within her domain. This resulted in great hardship for the people of Limerick who had already suffered greatly from the affects of the Desmond Wars.

The Lord Justice wrote to William Pelham on February 28 1580 from Limerick of '*Spanish device in sending much wine to Ireland in order to make pilots*'. This perhaps contributed to the fears of the English of a Spanish invasion through Ireland and the great trade in wine between Spain and Ireland only aided to familiarise the Spanish with the Irish coast and inform the Spanish on the fortifications in place along the Irish coast. (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland 1574-1585*, p. 210.)

The merchants of Limerick also played their part in the conflict by providing information gleaned from their commercial journeys to France and Spain, as is evidenced in 1591 when information supplied by James Fanning, Alderman, and Bartholomew Stackpool, merchant of Limerick, was reported to Lord Burghley, Elizabeth principal advisor,

*'The Bishops of Spain are appointed to raise 6000 horsemen and a number of footmen at their own expense to march by land to France . . . Thirteen millions of gold arrived from the Indies. The King of Spain will not venture the gold by sea for fear of Englishmen. An English ship bearing Flemish colours was laden with about 12 canon, and stole away from Cadiz with that booty'* (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1588-1592*, p. 392.)

This information must have been of great value to the Queen and her advisors.

Sir George Carew wrote to Sir Roger Cecil in 1601 arguing that the '*impost (Duty) on Spanish wines is a great means to enrich her to maintain her wars in Ireland.*' (*ibid.*, p. 140.)

The towns of south western Ireland were greatly dependant on the wine trade with France and more particularly with Spain as the area had been laid to waste and greatly impoverished by the Desmond Wars. The necessity of this trade was acknowledged by the authorities even in times of blockade and the acquisition of information at the ports of Spain about numbers of ships or potential invasion plans was an added incentive to allow trade to continue. So the practice of granting of licences to merchants deemed trustworthy was introduced.

Since Limerick has suffered severe commercial hardship, a patent to Limerick merchants for importing wine was their compensation for their losses and key to recovering from the economic depression which followed the wars.

During the Mayoralty of Thomas Fitzwilliam Stritch, in 1590, Richard White, agent for Limerick, petitioned the Privy Council regarding *'The great poverty of the citizens of Limerick by the late commotions of Desmond, prays for licence to trade with the leaguers for 200 tons of Spanish Wines to be transported to Limerick to be paid for of such Ireland commodities as are now prohibited.'* (**ibid., p. 374.**)

The decline in trade had done so much damage commercially that by the end of the sixteenth C none of the merchants of Limerick owned their own ships, although at the beginning of this century most merchants had. This gave rise to the use of Factors, whereby one man might act as a factor on the continent, choosing and purchasing wines for several merchants of the same town, and also the hiring of French or Scottish ships to carry their merchandise back to Ireland. (**Longfield, op. cit., p. 141.**)

In 1590 Richard White of Limerick wrote to the Privy Council citing the great poverty of the citizens of Limerick by the late Desmond Wars, and requesting licence to trade with the French for wine. (**Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1588-1592, p.375.**) Carew, writing to the Privy Council in 1600, reported that *'most of the Irish merchants that trade with Spain (the town of Waterford excepted) do lade their goods in French bottoms.'* (**Calendar of Carew Manuscripts 1589-1600, p. 470.**)

When James Bourke of Limerick, Merchant was given his licence it stated he had Permission to: *"import into Limerick from France, Spain or Portugal 200 tuns of wine yearly for three years in any French or other foreign vessel"* (**Reference required –ed.**)

However, it would seem Limerick did not recover as quickly from these wars as did the rest of the country, as Robert Cogan, Inspector of Taxes, reported the following in his report in 1611, that Limerick's trade was small compared with other cities, and valued at £10,000 a year, compared to Waterford which he valued at £80,000 and Cork and Galway at £20,000 each. (**Maxwell, op. cit., p. 373.**) This may have been due to the fact that the county had been laid to waste agriculturally by the English soldiers during the Desmond wars (this was a tactic used to induce famine in order to gain the rapid capitulation of the rebels) and had little to trade with; or that due to lack of ships owned by Limerick merchants they were using Waterford ships to import their goods.

While the sixteenth century was a period of highs and lows, nothing of that era prepared Ireland for what was to come in the seventeenth century. Although the first forty years saw a general return to political and financial stability, the twenty years following would bring much tragedy, financial devastation and previously unimaginable hardship to the once very wealthy merchant families of Limerick.

The reign of James I brought new hopes to Catholics for better treatment if not toleration than they had experienced under Elizabeth I, initially at least. James I abolished recusancy fines whereby Catholics were fined for recusing themselves from

attending Protestant services and paid fines to do so. James had abolished these fines in return for assurances that the Papal Nuncio would do all in his power to keep Irish and English Catholics loyal and obedient subjects of the King, though James request to Pope Clement VIII for the excommunication of turbulent Catholics was refused. James was alarmed when by 1604 the number of priests and Catholic converts had greatly increased since he had abolished recusancy fines. Although he did not reintroduce the fines immediately, he did issue a proclamation in February 1604 banishing priests.

However subsequent to the Gunpowder plot of October 1605, in 1606 Parliament reacted by introducing a Recusancy Act of greater severity, though moderation was tolerated by the new Oath of Allegiance, which was to make a distinction in favour of Catholics that refused to acknowledge the power of the papacy to depose Kings. **(Somerset Fry, Peter & Fiona, *A History of Ireland*, 1998, [What page? –ed.](#))**

In Limerick the century began optimistically with the grant of a new charter for the city by James I in March 1609. This charter making Limerick City a county within itself; changing the office of Bailiff to that of Sheriff and creating the ‘Merchants of the Staple’ giving the merchants of the city certain rights to trade in various staple goods such as wool, which could only be sold to foreign merchants in designated staple towns. The Irish Staple had begun in the thirteenth century and the original staple towns were Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Drogheda.

This charter, and similar charters granted to other towns including Belfast, Galway, Kilkenny, Derry, Carrigfergus, New Ross, Wexford and Youghal, confirmed them as staple towns. The real significance of the staple lay in the regulation of debt, providing better security for merchants to trade under. The power of the staple was enhanced by a close relationship enjoyed with the municipal government. The Charter of James I dictated that the Mayor of each town should be made Mayor of the Staple usually the year following his mayoralty. In many cases the sheriffs of the towns often went on to become ‘Constable of the Staple’ **(Ohlmeyer, Jane and O’Ciardha, Eamon, *The Irish Staple Books, 1596-1687*, Dublin Corporation Publications, 1999, p.7.)**

The name of John Stritch is one of the first to appear in James’ Charter as ‘merchant of the staple’, alongside the names of the other great families which made up the trading elite of the city, such as Galway, White, Burke, Sexton, Roche, Harrold etc. **(Ferrar op. cit., p. 312.)**

Limerick’s trade goods at this time consisted of corn, hides, pipe staves, woollfells, skins, tallow, salmon and beef and returned wines, iron, salt, and English commodities from Bristol fair twice a year. **(Maxwell, op. cit p. 373.)**

Troublesome times returned in 1611 with what was to become known as the ‘Battle of the Mayors’. The mainly Catholic Corporation were electing Catholic citizens to the offices of Mayor and Sheriff, who were quickly deposed for either openly going to mass or not attending the Protestant services, i.e. non-conformity. In 1614 the sheriff for the city was Nicholas fitzNicholas Stritch, who was deposed, followed in 1614 by William Stritch who was elected Mayor but was also deposed. In 1616 James fitzJohn Stritch was made sheriff but also was deposed. That same year John fitzJohn Stritch,



most likely a brother of said James was recorded as Sheriff, conformed. The resolve of the Mayors appeared to be broken, as what followed between 1616 and 1625 all the Mayors were Protestant, this may have been because a similar political battle took in Waterford which resulted in 1617 in that city having its charter revoked. (**Potter, Matthew *First Citizens of the Treaty City, The Mayors and Mayoralty of Limerick 1197-2007, Limerick City Council, 2007, pp. 35-6.***)

It is interesting that the first of the Stritchs involved in this Battle of the Mayors, Nicholas fitzNicholas Stritch, was most likely raised by Thomas Ashe of Trim, an Elizabethan adventurer, and friend of Sir William Russell, who was Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1594-1597. In 1602 Thomas Ashe was granted '*the wardship and marriage of Nicholas, son and heir of Nicholas Stritch, late of limerick and custody of his lands, during minority. The Minor to be educated in Trinity College, and to be maintained and educated in English religion and dress.*' This Protestant upbringing obviously had no lasting effect on Nicholas. (***Irish Fiants, Vol. III, 1586-1603, article 6630.***)

From the mid 1620s new hopes for Catholics came in the shape of 'the Graces'. The Graces were a series of royal concessions on land and religious issues to be offered by Charles I in return for support for the Crown, initiated by the 'Old English' as a means of demonstrating that Catholicism and Royalism were not mutually exclusive. (**Lenihan, Pdraig *Confederate Catholics at War, 1641-1649 Cork University Press, 2002, p.14.***)

In 1628, during the mayoralty of James Stritch, the 'Old English' were joined by new English Protestants in a parliamentary delegation to England, they carried fifty-one requests for reforms important to both communities, most of which were granted, including reduction of official fees, easing of licensing controls on export, and regulations to reduce the depredations of the army on local communities (i.e. cessing). Also the rights of Catholics heirs to succeed, as since the Reformation only Protestants could have their eldest son inherit and catholic estates had to be divided up amongst the sons. In order to weaken the power of the Catholic landowners, division of Catholic estates was a way of ensuring few of their large estates remained intact. This was also granted, as was the right of Catholics to practice law by taking the 'Oath of Allegiance'. They were not however, granted their request for the right to hold public office and Catholics were still liable for recusancy fines.

In return for these grants, Ireland was to return three times a year £40,000, which gave Charles I some financial independence from his troublesome parliament. Although the money was paid, Charles I and his Lord Deputy continually deferred implementation of the Graces. In the 1630s, however, as Charles I was becoming increasingly worried by his more puritan and pro-parliamentarian government, the monarchy attempted to secure support in Ireland by finally granting the long promised Graces. (**Somerset Fry op. cit. p.147**) However, once again they were not implemented; and contributed to the intense resentment in the country that led ultimately to Catholic Confederate uprising of the 1640s and rebellion in Limerick.

Getting back to the economic conditions of this period, the Irish merchants had recovered sufficiently to be again able to own their own vessels for trading, it was reported that from 1630-1640 the number of ships owned by Irish Merchants had

increased a ‘hundred fold’, This can be ascertained by a compliant in 1632 that Dutch merchants were ‘*cutting the Irish out of the shipping industry*’, therefore to compete and find this a problem, cities must have had a trading fleet of their own, “*before the Dutch trade here, there belonged above twenty ships and barks to Dublin alone.*” (O’Brien, George *The Economic History of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century*, Dublin 1919, p. 67.)

Also the town of Wexford was reported to have been a place ‘mighty in ships and seamen’. (*ibid.*) It would be fair to assume this economic growth was not confined to the east coast, and that Limerick too was enjoying the economic boom. Of great assistance to the ability of the Irish merchants to trade abroad must have been Lord Deputy Wentworth’s success at clearing the seas of pirates, for by 1635 it was reported that “*pirates are banished and trade reviving.*” (*Calendar of State Papers, Ireland, 1633-1647*, p. 13.)

The great wealth of the Stritchs at this time can be confirmed from the Irish Statute Staple Books list of creditors and debtors for the years 1596-1687. Included among the creditors were:

<b>Creditor</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Ms</b>
Lucas Stritch	Limerick	Merchant	2-Jul 1641	£840	BL
Patrick Stritch	Limerick	Merchant	6-May 1639	£2000	BL
Thos. Stritch (son of Patrick, Merchant of Limerick)	Dublin City	Merchant	2-Oct 1639	£630	BL
Wm. Stritch	Limerick	other; (Son of William)	2-Jul 1641	£840	
Wm. Stritch	Limerick		3-Feb 1607	£105	

(Ohlmeyer & O’Ciardha, *op. cit.*, p. 159.)

Judging by the vast amount of money they were in a position to lend, they were extremely wealthy at this time. Patrick Stritch, father to Thomas (who was the mayor of Limerick during the 1651 Cromwellian siege of the city), was in a position to lend £2000, an enormous sum of money for those days. Stritch’s Castle was valued in the Civil Survey as worth £26 in annual rental income in 1640.

The first forty years of the seventeenth century were a time of prosperity, of rebuilding and re-establishing trade connections. The twenty years that followed, however, obliterated all that had been before, and life for the Old English merchant class would change almost beyond recognition. By 1642 the Lord Justices reported that all manner of trade in or out of Dublin had been stopped, and a year later complaints were being made that “*few or none dare now come hither with any commodities, and indeed the merchants here, having all their remaining stocks and estates wrested from them by the state,*” (O’Brien *op. cit.*, p. 110.)

Therefore the period from the confederate uprising in 1641, to the eventual Cromwellian suppression of the country in 1654, was one of great hardship for the upper classes, but for the peasantry of the country, the poor ‘mere irishe’, faced starvation and death. In 1642 the Lords Justices reported that they had to ‘burn much corn to keep it from the rebels’; the soldiers also destroyed as much wood as they could. As early as 1643 the Lords Justices wrote to England that if they were not speedily relieved they were *‘like to perish, for famine doth much threaten us.’* (**ibid. pp. 105-6.**)

and led in 1642 in the first siege of Castle of Limerick, which of course the Stritchs played a major and decisive part, as not only did they fight with the confederates but the home of one of them, Stritch’s Castle was used as the headquarters for the Confederates, and attacks on the Castle of Limerick (or King John’s Castle as we know it) were launched from the roof of that property.

*May 19<sup>th</sup> 1642 “The enimie layd at us more fiercly and for ye adioyning castle killd John Skegge, a little girl & boy & hurt some 3 women & children, a bullet shot from the enemy was catcht in a boy’s mouth without hurt the boy laughing”*

*June 7<sup>th</sup> 1642 “This afternoon after calling from Stretches-castle to ours on the street-platforme was a letter in answer to one before sent to ye maior of ye towne.”*

*June 9<sup>th</sup> 1642 “In the afternoon upon the sound of a drumme from Streetches Castle they sent a letter onto our Captain.”* (**Diary of the Siege of Limerick Castle, 1642; McEnery, M. J. (ed.), Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, Vol. XXXIV, University Press Dublin, 1904, p. 178.**)

Included in a list of besiegers of the castle are Bartholomew FitzNicholas Stritch, Bartholomew FitzStephen Stritch and Captain Stephen Stritch. (**Wiggins, Kenneth Anatomy of a Siege: King John’s Castle, Limerick 1642, Boydell Press, 2001, p. 254.**) The siege was successful and led to the Confederates retaining power in Limerick until the city was finally taken by Cromwell’s forces nine years later.

During these terrible years, in 1645, Thomas FitzPatrick Stritch was elected as Sheriff for the city of Limerick, and John Burke elected Mayor, this unfortunate Mayor was stoned by the citizens of Limerick for attempting to proclaim the peace of Ormond, in an incident that became known as ‘Stoney Thursday’, although Thomas Stritch was Sheriff, his part if any in this incident remains unrecorded. (**Lenihan, Maurice Limerick, Its History and Antiquities, p. 159.**) The Mayor was subsequently deposed and replaced by the more militant Dominic Fanning, (**ibid.**) who along with Thomas Stritch played a major role the next siege of Limerick, by Cromwell’s forces in 1651.

Upon his election as Mayor in October 1651, Thomas Stritch on receiving the keys of the city, took them at the head of a procession of all the public guilds through the city to St. Marys Cathedral and placed the keys at the feet of the statue of the Blessed Virgin and asked for her protection for the city. Thomas Stritch then addressed they assembly and called on them all to be faithful to God, to the Church and to the King, and stated his readiness to die for their cause. (**ibid. p. 182.**)

His loyalty and conviction was proved by the fact that they city was not taken during his term, and he was not spared by Ireton but, along with Dominic Fanning and others who had according to General Ireton, “*who opposed and restrained the deluded people from accepting the conditions so often offered to them,*” was excepted from mercy. **(ibid., p. 183.)**

The importance of the role played by Thomas Stritch in this conflict is emphasised by contemporary accounts of the siege, the account below is from the *Diary of the Parliamentary Forces*:

*“By removing the then Major [sic] (Alderman Strech) commanding the city militia, and by his malignancy hardening them and others unto the obstinate resistance until the 6 of October (the time by their charter limited for electing another in his place), and who not (if not affected yet) not so disaffected to us.” (J. Gilbert, J. (ed.), A Contemporary History of Affairs in Ireland from 1641-1652, Book III, Part.1, p. 262.)*

Information on how Thomas Stritch was captured is also gleaned from Edmund Ludlow’s account of events at Limerick. Second in command to Ireton, Ludlow was shortly afterwards to replace Ireton as Chief Commander of the Parliamentary forces in Ireland following Ireton’s death from the plague in Limerick on 26 November 1651. **(Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. XII Oxford University Press, 1938, p. 256.)** The articles of surrender were signed on 27 October and, as Ludlow records,

*‘Two days after the delivery of the town, the mayor came to the place of worship, where our court of guard met; and whether by his words or actions he gave cause of suspicion, I cannot tell, but they seized him, and upon examination found who he as; whereupon they commanded him to prison. The Bishop of Limerick was the only excepted person that was yet to be discovered.’ (Gilbert op. cit, p. 271.)*

Stritch’s fate was swiftly decided; the entry for 30 October 1651 in the *Diary of the Parliamentary Forces* stating,

*‘Alderman Strech, late Major of Limerick, another of the excepted persons, was found out and executed. As others he had vowed the holding out of Limerick during his yeare, or time, of government, and accordingly acted with an high hand towards it.’ (ibid. p. 259.)*

A letter written by Ireton to William Lenthal, Speaker of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of England, gives more details of execution Thomas Stritch’s fate,

*‘. . . But it hath pleased God since the surrender, providentially To discover and deliver onto our hands, three persons of principal Activity and Influence in the obstinate holding out, the last years Major, the Bishop of Emley, and Major General Purcell; all whom we presently hanged, and have set their heads on the gates.’ (ibid., p. 267.)*

### *After the Cromwellian Siege*

The immediate family of Thomas Stritch did manage to escape and hid on the Island of Aughnish on the Shannon. In a letter written by an Edmund Berry in July 1653 we read that,

*'Little James Stritch wrote me of late from St. Malos: he tells me his mother and great-mother, brethren and sisters, and uncles remaineth in a little island upon the river of Limerick called Ashnish. His uncle Patrick Stritch died four days after his arrival in St. Malos . . . I wish you had one of Thomas Stritch's children to be presented to some Cardinal.'* **(Dunlop, Robert Ireland Under the Commonwealth, Vol. 1, p. 92n.)**

This James Stritch was perhaps at some stage presented to some Cardinal as by 1655 he was a student in the Irish College in Rome and in 1669 he was being described as Dr. James Stritch awaiting passage to Ireland. '*Little James Stritch*', having finished his studies, was returning home to Limerick, which had sad memories for him. **(Begley, Diocese of Limerick in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, p. 479n.)**

After James II ascended the throne in 1685, and Catholics were enjoying a brief period of toleration, the Archbishop of Cashel held a provincial synod where Dr James Stritch, Vicar General for the Diocese of Limerick and procurator of the Chapter of Limerick, assisted. He was also appointed to rule the diocese following the death of Dr Douley, Bishop of Limerick, until a new bishop was appointed. **(ibid. pp. 488-9).**

### *Cromwellian Confiscations*

The fate of the other Stritches can be discovered in the extensive confiscation and transplantation records so meticulously recorded by the Cromwellian authorities. Bearing the now vilified name of Stritch, in Limerick the biggest losers of the Cromwellian confiscations were:

James Stritch lost property worth £129 (including Stritch's Castle) in the city and 160 acres in Connolloe worth £40.

Nicolas Stritch lost property valued at £126 in the city and 105 acres of land in Pubblebrian, valued at £35.

William Stritch lost property valued at £28 in the city, but in the county his confiscated properties amounted to a castle, a mill, four cottages and outbuildings in Skule in Small County. William also lost land in Pubblebrian and Adare amounting to approximately 730 acres with a total value of approximately £135.

Other Stritchs had various smaller properties confiscated in the city, Kilmallock and elsewhere in the county, but the three members of the family mentioned above were certainly the ones who paid the highest price for rebellion. The total amount of land confiscated from the Stritchs in Co. Limerick (many of them listed in the certificates of transplantation as 'of Limerick City') was 1564 acres. **(Simmington, Robert C., *Civil Survey, County of Limerick 1654-1656*, Vol. IV, Irish Manuscripts Commission, 1938.' Page number(s) ? – ed.)**

Whilst the family were essentially urban merchants and town dwellers they also held extensive property in the county on which they owned, or had built, great houses and castles (tower houses), including Rathuard, Caherguillamore and Skule (or the 'two Skulls?'). In Westropp's *Ancient Castles of Co. Limerick* we have good descriptions of the properties owned by the family as they stood at the beginning of the seventeenth century, many of which have totally disappeared, with the exception of Rathuard.

**Rathuard** (near Ballyneety?) is described by Westropp as a round castle, square inside, 20½ feet internally and four stories high, the third floor vaulted. In 1583 it was described as 'well repaired with an iron door, balne, pigeon-house and other buildings' owned by J. Browne. In 1589 it was granted to Robert Anstey by Elizabeth I in 1589 (Fiant 5363) and by 1600 it was held by Nicholas Stritch in 1600. **(Westropp, T.J.; 'Ancient Castles of Co. Limerick' *Royal? Irish Archaeological Journal* Vol. XXVI, RSAI, 1906-1907, p. 88)**

**Skool** (Barony of Small County, Parish of Fedamore). First mention of the Stritchs in connection with this property is the grant in 1588 to 'John Stretche for the two Skulls 23s.4d. to hold forever in fee farm by fealty in common socage'. **(Irish Fiants, Vol. II, Article 5274)** In 1612, J. Stritch held the Castle, bawn, water-mill and two weirs at "ambo skules", in fee; his son William succeeded. In 1639 James Stritch held the Castle, bawn and mills. **(Westropp op. cit. p. 176.)** At the time of the Cromwellian confiscations it was the property of William Stritch of Limerick, an 'Innocent Papist', and granted to Captain George Ingoldsby. **(Begley *Diocese of Limerick in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* p. 176.)** This castle, reputed to have been built by King John according to Dineley, was in a ruinous state by 1840. **(Shirley, Evelyn Philip 'Extracts from the Journal of Thomas Dineley', *Irish Archaeological Journal*, Vol. IX, 1867, p. 197.)**

**Caherguillamore/Rockbarton:** Once the possession of the Earl of Desmond, in 1639 Jas. Stritch held it, as his grandfather J. Stritch had done. In 1655 it held by William and Elizabeth Stritch, and given to Captain Robert Morgan. **(Westropp, op. cit. pp. 178-9.)**

### ***Transplantation***

The orders to transplant instructed that all those confiscated of their lands had to remove themselves before the 1 May 1654, or face execution. Half of the province of Connaught west of the Shannon, including portions of Co. Clare, was set apart for Irish proprietors. According to the orders each person had to get a certificate, describing his or her personal appearance, position, age, and that of each member of

their families; also the amount of cattle, horses, crops and personal belongings they would be bringing with them. This document known as a ‘Transplanters’ Certificate’ had to be presented to the Commissioners for the Allotment of Lands in Connaught in Loughrea, before 1 February 1654. **(Simmington, op. cit., Introduction. Page ? – ed.)**

The precise acreage allotted to individuals can be difficult to ascertain because different lists were compiled at the time and there are variations between them. Simmington gives two sources for his tally, one is the Ormond List and the other what is known as the Headford list, given here in brackets. Among those transplanted were,

William and Elizabeth Stritch of Limerick who were transplanted to Ardrahan, Co. Galway and there given 844 acres.

Thomas FitzJames Stritch, and his daughters Ellen and Ellis, went to Tulla, Co. Clare and given 524 acres (Headford - 711 acres).

Patrick Stritch was moved to Athenry, Co. Galway and allotted 138 acres there (H?).

Andrew Stritch was given 200 acres in Kilkeedy Parish in the Barony of Inchiquin, Co. Clare (H - 163 acres) and is also listed as being granted 200 acres in Moylogh Parish in the Barony of Tiaquin, Co. Galway. (H - 80 acres) **(ibid. Page ? –ed.)**

The daughter of Thomas Stritch was reported to have married Richard Woulfe and they were living at Tirmaclane, Clarecastle in the 1659 census. **Which daughter? – ed. (Census of Ireland, 1659 Pender, Seamus (ed.), Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2002, p. 179.)**

Those who did not transplant themselves after the date decreed were classed as vagabonds and faced ‘transportation beyond the seas’, being herded into ships bound for the West Indies to work as indentured servants and slaves as punishment, although many preferred the term indentured servants. This implied that they could eventually work as a freemen or women after a certain time had elapsed, but for many they never regained their freedom. Much evidence exists to support this, John Lynch, the Irish historian who had been driven into exile during Cromwell’s rule, wrote shortly after the restoration of Charles II that ‘Irishmen had been torn from the arms of their wives and children by ‘civic vultures’, transported and sold as slaves in the West Indies.’ **(Blake, John W., *Transportation from Ireland to America, 1653-1660*, Irish Historical Studies, Vol. III, 1942-43, pp. 269-81.)**

There is no doubt that order after order for the transportation of vagabonds were given between 1653-55 by the Cromwellian authorities. The West Indies were in dire need of cheap labour for the plantations there, so the government was killing two birds with one stone - ridding the Irish countryside of vagrants and providing a much needed work force elsewhere. **(ibid.)** Although no evidence of any of the Stritchs being transported to the West Indies exists; a Fr. John Stritch of Limerick, a Jesuit Priest, led a mission to the Leeward Islands 1650-1660. **(Silke, John A ‘The Irish Abroad’,**

*A New History of Ireland, Vol. III, Early Modern Ireland, 1534-1691*, Moody, T.W. & Martin, F.X. (eds.), Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 631.)

The reasons for some of those bearing the Stritch name having to leave Ireland and some staying and being transplanted would have depended on the roles played by them in the decade prior to the Cromwellian conquest. The authorities had compiled a list of numerous offences for which 'Persons were excepted from pardon or life' and those 'excepted' included all those who had been actively involved in the rebellion, had borne arms or contributed men.

Those who were transplanted fell under the category of 'all those who were of the Popish religion in Ireland between 1 October 1641 and 1 March 1650 who did not manifest their constant good affection to the Commonwealth had to forfeit 1/3 of their estate and receive the other 2/3 in whatever place parliament appointed.'

Examinations took place by Cromwellian officials to determine guilt and those questioned had to account for their political conduct over the previous ten years. Although the initial orders were for the hanging of all those found guilty of offences against the Commonwealth, many of these sentences were later to be commuted to transportation as otherwise there would have been tens of thousands executed. (Simmington, *op. cit.* Introduction. Page ? – ed.)

There is no evidence of Nicholas Stritch being granted land in the Transplanters' Certificates. However, he does appear in the Census of Ireland 1659, being described as Gent, Titulado, residing in the Barony of Bunratty (*Census of Ireland 1659 op. cit. p. 163.*). Thomas, son of James Stritch also appears in the Census of 1659, still in parish of Killaloe, where he and his daughters had been transplanted too, the number of people in his household was then eighteen. (*ibid. p. 174.*)

In the same census, William Stritch is listed as living on St. Thomas' Island, on the outskirts of Limerick City. He had already, it seems, returned to re-establish himself in his native city, if indeed he left at all. His household may have left without him, or he returned to continue his business in Limerick, leaving them in Connaught. (*ibid. p. 166.*)

In the records of the *Corporation Book of Ennis* 1682-87, there are numerous mentions of the Stritchs and it was well known that many of the Old English merchants of Limerick had settled in that town. William Stritch is listed as a tenant of the Earl of Thomond in his rent rolls of Ennis, 1681, William was renting a property from Henry, Lord O'Brien, and paying £4.10 shillings per annum so it must have been quite a substantial property to warrant such a high rent as the majority of property on the same lists were being rented for between 10 shillings and £1 per year. (O'Dalaigh, Brian, *Corporation Book of Ennis, 1660-1810*, Irish Academic Press, 1990. p. 374.) In the list of Grand Jury members of Ennis Corporation, 1692-1810 the family are well represented and Michael Stritch was an appraiser for the Borough of Ennis for 1736. FN (FN: *ibid. p. 128. An appraiser was an officially appointed, or licensed, valuer.*)



Following the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 the Stritchs and members of other leading families were beginning to make their way back to their native city. At the time of the Restoration, for example, John and Bartholomew Stritch were living in Brussels. They applied for, and were granted, passports to return to Ireland to search for relatives. **(Jennings, Fr. Brendan, OFM *Wild Geese in Spanish Flanders, 1582-1700*, Dublin, 1964, p. 436.)**

Many highs and lows lay ahead for the Stritch family in the centuries ahead as they tried to rebuild their lives. But that story is for another article, or perhaps part two of the tale of this very interesting family, whose fates were so intricately interwoven with the city they had helped build and which we live in today.