



THE SHELBOURNE
DUBLIN
A RENAISSANCE HOTEL

The Shelbourne Hotel was established in 1824 by a Tipperary man, Martin Burke, whose ambition was to open a hotel in Dublin that would 'woo genteel custom who wanted solid, comfortable and serviceable accommodation at a fashionable address'. To achieve this, he leased three houses - numbers 27, 28 and 29 St. Stephen's Green - in the most fashionable part of the city and, "in consideration of a down payment of £1,000 and the promise of a further £2,000 at a later date, and a yearly rent of £300" Burke and his heirs were granted the leasehold interest for 150 years.

Burke was regarded as a man of means, substance and considerable style and, having secured the leasehold of these three houses at Dublin's most prestigious address, he set about making The Shelbourne the 'quality' hotel of his dreams.

The name Martin Burke chose for the hotel reflected his sense of history but also his shrewd sense of business. He exchanged his family's name on the premises for something grander and named it after William Petty, 2nd Earl of Shelburne, Prime Minister of Great Britain from 1782-83. Taking that name while also taking the liberty of adding an 'o' – instantly linked the hotel with the fame of the late Lord Shelburne and with the ascendancy in general.

Within a year of its opening, The Shelbourne was firmly established as a favourite of visitors 'doing the season' and was at the centre of Irish upper class social life. Martin Burke had realised his ambition. Since its beginnings in 1824, The Shelbourne Hotel has been at the centre of Ireland's life and is a near microcosm of Ireland's history.

In 1825, gas lighting came to Dublin and The Shelbourne Hotel was the first Dublin hotel to be lit by gaslight. In 1842, during his famous visit to Ireland, William Thackeray stayed in the hotel for six and eight pence a day. He wrote in his Irish Sketch Book that he found the hotel "majestically conducted by clerks and other officers".

Within twenty five years of opening, Martin Burke added the adjoining houses, 30 and 31 St. Stephen's Green and 12 Kildare Street. This group of houses, together with their gardens and outbuildings, stood on the site of what is still today the main Shelbourne Hotel building.

At the time of Martin Burke's death in 1863, The Shelbourne's position as 'Dublin's premier hotel' was unassailable – The Shelbourne Hotel was and remains very much a part of the fabric of Irish life. Martin Burke is remembered as a great hotelier who 'contributed to the welfare and improvement of Dublin'.

In 1865, The Shelbourne Hotel was purchased by Messrs Jury, Cotton and Goldman, who undertook extensive rebuilding and renovations. Quality service was the order of the day and the new owners ensured that the infrastructure supported this in every aspect. In 1867, the hotel was officially reopened, complete with coffee room, ladies' coffee room, table d'hôte room, general reading room, smoking room, billiards room, hairdressing room and telegraph office, as well as 15 bedrooms with bathrooms and 24 first-class sitting rooms arranged en suite.

During 1871, the Gaiety Theatre opened and famous actors and actresses from London companies became frequent visitors to the hotel. The playwright, George Moore, while staying at The Shelbourne, was inspired to write 'The Bending of the Bough' and 'A Drama in Muslin'.

In 1881, electricity reached some parts of Dublin and, in time, The Shelbourne Hotel.

During the period 1880 – 1900, The Shelbourne became the focus of Irish social and sporting life. The year revolved around the social seasons – racing, bloodstock and shows at the Royal Dublin Society (RDS).