The Bull Inn, although dating only from the beginning of the seventeenth century, was perhaps the very first "house of call" which was ever established in the Irishtown, whilst there may have been, and probably were, older inns in the Englishtown of Kilkenny. It is not till the latter portion of the sixteenth century that the Corporation of Kilkenny seems to have turned its attention to the necessity of providing suitable accommodation for casual sojourners in their town, the abbeys being then all suppressed. On the 13th January, 1591, as appears by the "Red Book," they granted "an annuity of 40s. per annum for the keeping of an ordinary for strangers," and also passed a bye-law that "all victuallers and other freemen of the town shall provide free bedding for strangers, on paine of 40s." But not content with this general rule, whenever letting houses, which were the property of the municipality, to victuallers, they introduced special clauses into the leases, imposing on the tenant the necessity of being suitably provided with accommodation for lodgers, as in the case of a lease made shortly after the date referred to, to one Richard Langton, of a house, orchard and garden in St. John's, at 16s. per annum, the Corporation, as lessors, covenanted that the tenant should "keep two feather beds, four flock and two chambers, with good sheets and furniture necessary, nomine poenae 20s., toties quoties."

But still a regular inn seems to have been a desiderum in Kilkenny which the previous arrangements of the Corporation had procured no substitute for, and, accordingly, on the 12th January, 1609, they came to the resolution of granting "an annuity to Adam Bridr for keeping an inn and post house"; and ten years later, under the date 11th October, 1619, we have the following record in the "Red Book," in which "mine host" is evidently the same person as above referred to, although a portion of the name became defaced: "A pension of £5 per annum allowed to Adam B — for keeping an inn to entertain the Lords, Justices and noblemen and gentlemen coming to the city." On the same day it was order: "No inhabitant to keep any victualling house or ale tavern without the walls of the city." At this time the mere
keeper of a tavern, instead of having the inducement of "an annuity" held out to him, in addition to the profits to be derived from his guests, had to pay for the privilege of holding a licence to retail strong liquors on his premises. In 1613 licences to keep taverns in Kilkenny city were granted by the Crown to Walter and Michael Ryan, merchants; Richard Rooth and Margaret, his daughter; Nicholas and Thomas Ley; William Murphie, merchant, and Rosse (Rose), his daughter.

**KETTLER'S INN**

The most ancient inn and tavern which we can find any special reference to is mentioned in the charter of Charles I, granted to the Corporation of Kilkenny in 1639, whereby the right of the civic body was confirmed in, amongst other matters, a rent of 13s. 6d., arising from a house near Kyran's Well, "anciently called Ketlersin," held by William Shee, and a rent of 3s. "from the house called Smulkin Tavern, in the Castle street, held by Peter Archer." The former, in a docket of the Corporation leases of the time, is called "Ketler's Inne," and is stated to be held by William Shee, in fee, at 18s. per annum. This inn, from its description as neighbouring Kyran's Well, must have stood near the northern end of King Street, where, in the Corporation market, Kyran's Well is situated. The house, of which Mr. James Gregory is the tenant, adjoining Kyran's Well, was probably Ketler's Inn. The upper portion of the building is of the Elizabethan period, but the basement, which is vaulted, is obviously much older, and perhaps may be of the fourteenth century.

The "Smulkin Tavern" is frequently mentioned in the Corporation records, the earliest reference to it that I can find being in a lease made by that body to Pierce Archer Fitz John in 1615, whereby he covenanted to pay them 22s. per annum for 61 years for "a messuage in Castle Street next to the Smulkin Tavern." Can it be that the name was a corruption of "smoking tavern"? The Cromwellian settlers were not without establishing at least one inn and one tavern in Kilkenny. Richard Inwood was an innkeeper of the town in 1661 and was denounced by Griffith Williams, Bishop of Ossory, a staunch Royalist and strict Churchman, as being a frequenter of a conventicle established there by "the fanatic limbs of the Beast," as he loved to designate the Cromwellians. Inwood issued a penny token bearing on the obverse the device of a windmill, which may, therefore, be presumed to have been the sign of his inn, the position of which in the town I have been unable to discover. At the same time Thomas Talbot, a vintner, struck another token, with the device of the sun in full splendour, also, as I am led to suppose, the sign of his tavern, which, as appears by the Ormonde rental, was
situated in High Street, adjoining Carrion Row on the south side. "Thomas Young, innkeeper," was nominated one of the Aldermen of Kilkenny under the charter of James II in 1687.

**THE SHEAF INN**

The earliest established inn which was still carried on and applied to the purposes of a hotel within the memory of persons now living in Kilkenny was "The Sheaf," in Rose-Inn Street. The writer of "A Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland" informs us that he put up at that house, and in a letter dated Kilkenny, August 30th, 1775, in remarking on the good breeding and polished manners which distinguished the Kilkenny folk of every degree in that day, he observes: "The cook belonging to the inn, the Sheaf of Wheat, wears ruffles; and though an old man is as full of vivacity as politeness. He brings me every day, after dinner, some delicious pears, and says he keeps a few for the quality who resort to the house, and that he has done so for thirty years." In that case "The Sheaf" must have been in existence as an inn in 1745; but, indeed, there is every reason to suppose that the establishment must have been opened at the very beginning of the century. Mrs. Reynolds, during whose proprietorship "The Sheaf" saw its palmiest days, became connected with the house in 1750, when it was already an inn in considerable repute, carried on by the Blount or Blunt family, whose interest in it she purchased. In 1715 a meeting of the leading Jacobites of the district, which was jealously watched by the Hanoverian party, took place in Blunt's house. A list of those who attended it is preserved, with this heading prefixed: "The names of such persons as were present at Mr. Thomas Blunt, sen., his house, being a publick ale-house, in the city of Kilkenny, on the 29th April, 1715." The building is remembered by many as a quaint old structure, within wainscoted throughout with ancient oak, and externally having a high-pitched gable to the front and displaying over a porch—its principal entrance—a large and gilded representation of a wheatsheaf as its sign. In the middle of the last century it was the custom of all noblemen and gentlemen when travelling to bring with them a supply of bed linen to be used at the inns at which they should put up at night; but such was the fame of Kilkenny for "clean bedding," and of "The Sheaf" in particular for the order and propriety of its management that travellers of rank would turn many miles out of their direct course in order to pass the night there in preference to the inns of the neighbouring towns. It was the proud boast of Mrs. Reynolds that no nobleman or gentleman ever thought of unpacking his own supply of bed linen in her house. It was still at the beginning of the present (19th) century the head inn of the city.
This inn, although it had many rivals, and gradually yielded its supremacy as the chief hostelry of the town, continued in existence till it became so old and dilapidated that its removal was necessary, and the two present houses in which the late Mr. T. Lawrenson carried on the grocery business, as well as the adjoining one of Mr. William Hogan, were built on its site. Its last great and dying effort was the supplying of a public dinner on a vast scale given to the citizens by the late Hon. Charles H. B. C. S. Wandesforde, then M.P. for the city, on the occasion of his being sworn into the office of Mayor of Kilkenny, at Michaelmas, 1816. Almost up to the last, however, its prestige as the leading inn was acknowledged by the billeting of military officers upon that house whenever regiments were passing through the town on the march, and by the Dublin and Cork mail coach office being connected with it and the coaches stopping and starting from its doors.

**THE ROYAL GARTER INN**

A rival inn, established in the same street as “The Sheaf,” had connected with it competing public conveyances. Watson's Almanack for 1768 informs us that “Sullivan and Mooney's four flying stages go in a day from 10th April to 10th September, from the Black Bull Inn in Capel Street, Dublin, to Kilkenny, viz., Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday; and from the Royal Garter, in Kilkenny, to Dublin, on the same days, from 10th April to 10th September. But from 11th September to 9th April the four stages set out from each place on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and go in a day and a half.”

There is a conflict of testimony as to its site in Rose-Inn Street. The late Major Madden, Treasurer of the Corporation, who died in 1845, being then in his 73rd year, stated that in his memory the house now occupied by Mr. Hennessy, butcher, fronting King Street, was “The Garter,” and that when he was young the judges on circuit had their lodgings in that inn whilst holding assizes in Kilkenny. On the other hand, Mr. John McCreery, senr., and Mr. Patrick Gwynne, two of the oldest surviving citizens, but both considerably younger than Major Madden, declare that they remember “The Garter” at nearly the close of the last century, on the opposite side of Rose-Inn Street, between King Street and Sir Richard Shee's Hospital. Its last proprietor was named Lindsay, and some of the old inhabitants still bear in memory the refrain of a metrical lampoon in which some local rhymster had attacked the inn and proprietor when it was decaying, running thus:

Oh! Luckless Lindsay, of the Garter Inn,  
Where all's going out, and nothing coming in.
Another old inn in Rose-Inn Street which survived till very lately was "The Bush," situated within a few doors of "The Sheaf." At the end of the last century and beginning of the present (19th) "The Bush" was kept by a person named Hawkins, originally a waiter at "The Sheaf" and who was a non-commissioned officer in one of the volunteer companies established in Kilkenny in 1798, known as Captain Hamilton's Corps. The Cavan Militia, when quartered in Kilkenny early in the present century, established an Orange Lodge at "The Bush," which rendered its proprietor very unpopular, and Hawkins was made a constant butt for the pasquinades of Watty Cox's Magazine.

The house of Mr. Hewitson, although a private residence at the period immediately before taking it for a hotel, was previously an inn within the memory of persons now living, but it was not called after any sign, being known as Royal Mail Inn from the mail coaches at one time stopping before its doors, or as Lighton's Inn from the name of its then proprietor. It was not an establishment of any note.

Another old rival of "The Sheaf" was "The Swan" in William Street, formerly known as Bolton's Lane. Thomas Story, a well-known Quaker, "lodged at the Swan Inn, Thomas Date, master." In my memory and for some time previously this establishment had sunk into a mere public house and "carmen's stage," and the rear of the Monster House premises now occupies its site. Also contemporary with "The Sheaf" were "The Munster Arms" and "The Brazen Head," both in Walkin Street, then one of the most important streets in Kilkenny, although among the narrowest, as it was the entrance to the town from the Cork direction, and the Cork coaches drove through it. The former of these, kept by a person named Malone, and situated within three doors of the corner of High Street on the north side of the street, was a second-rate establishment frequently chiefly by the manufacturers of friezes from the counties of Tipperary and Cork when they came to the Kilkenny frieze fairs, which, although long since disused, are still recorded every year in some of the almanacks. "The Munster Arms" decayed along with the fairs and has long since ceased to exist.

"THE BRAZEN HEAD"

"The Brazen Head," however, was a first-class inn, the name of which appears to have been given without its having shown any corresponding sign. It stood on the opposite side of the street, where Mrs. Menton's hardware establishment now is. It was a competitor of "The Sheaf," and under the proprietorship of Mrs. Devereux took its place as the chief inn of Kilkenny till the opening of "The Hibernian" or Club House Hotel, the first
establishment of the kind in the city which assumed the more high-sounding appellation of “hotel.” The founder of this hotel was Mr. James Rice, who had been house steward to the Kilkenny Fox Hunters' Club, established by the late Sir John Power in 1797. The club had its club-house in Patrick Street, under the management of Rice, but in 1817, at the time of the opening of the new Cork road to Kilkenny, it was formed into a hotel, Mr. John Walsh entering into partnership with Rice, adding to the club-house the adjoining house, which had been the residence of Archdeacon Helsham. The new portion of the premises was that nearest to the Cork road. The portion adjoining the house of P. Watters, the Town Clerk, had been the residence of Mr. Abraham Prim, upon whose removal to Gowran it was taken by the hunt club to form their club-house. Messrs. Rice and Walsh opened their establishment as The Hibernian Hotel and Fox Hunting Club on the 4th August, 1817.

Before the era of the “gentlemen’s plays,” when the Kilkenny Theatre, which was built by Owenson, the father of Lady Morgan, was used every year by strolling companies, the players generally lodged at a minor inn in the neighbourhood, known as “The Goat’s Beard,” in Castle Street. Another inn contemporary with “The Sheaf” was the “Red Lion” in the Coal Market, which in 1768 was kept by Michael Keogh, and the premises appear to have remained the property of his descendants, although long since converted into two private houses, being that of Mr. M. Shortall, solicitor, and the adjoining house, till sold in the Encumbered Estates Court a few years since. After Keogh had retired from business an eccentric citizen named Robert Evans became host, but changed the name of the establishment to “The Ormonde Arms.” The first Masonic Lodge established in Kilkenny, warrant No. 642, from the Grand Lodge of Ireland, was opened in apartments at this inn. A rival “Red Lion” was opened at the other side of the town in 1768, when Robert Johnston announced in Finn’s Leinster Journal of Saturday, January 30th, that he had fitted up a house in John Street as an inn, with the sign of the “Red Lion,” and the locality being near the old infantry barracks, intimated that he expected large patronage, but “in particular from the men of the army.” The John Street “Red Lion” does not appear to have ever attained the celebrity of its Coalmarket namesake, which had a more important competitor in its immediate neighbourhood in “The George,” kept by Robert Meighan, and which, from the following advertisement, would seem to have been a respectable establishment: “Mr. Meighan begs leave to inform the gentlemen that the Ordinary on the Race Week will be at his house, at the sign of the George, in Coalmarket, on Thursday, the 7th, and Saturday, the 9th July, 1763.”
A more ancient George Inn existed in Irishtown, but before the period referred to it appears to have been given up, as the premises, in an advertisement of 1768, of the property of a bankrupt named Gregory Newman, tanner, include that person's interest in "a house, formerly the George Inn, with a stable, malthouse and yard in Irishtown." There was also at that time a minor inn of some repute in Coal Market, known as "The Eagle," kept by a person named Proctor. The house, still known as the Eagle Inn, is situated between Evans's Lane and the ancient residence of the Rothe family, modernly termed Wolf's Arch. "The Royal Arms" in John Street bore on its signboard, in my memory, the date 1800, but this would appear to have been but a revival of a former inn of the same or kindred name, as "The King's Arms" is mentioned among the houses in arrears of ministers' money in St. John's parish in 1770. It was kept at that time by Patrick Butler, and the premises must have been spacious, as many large public entertainments appear to have been given there. In the "Leinster Journal" of 1768, for example: "At night George Ogle, Esq., gave a most elegant supper and ball at the King's Arms to a great number of the nobility and gentry of this city." And again: "The friends of the Speaker (Hon. John Ponsonby) and Mr. Agar intend dining at the King's Arms in John Street on Tuesday next, being the first day of the quarter sessions, to drink success to them and their election." Patrick Magennis, who appears to have re-opened this inn under a slightly changed designation in 1800, had for a long time previously served John, Earl of Ormonde, as butler in Kilkenny Castle.

Another person still remembered by his familiar appellation of Tom Clayton, who had been in the service of the same Earl of Ormonde, as his Lordship's valet, was for many years proprietor of an establishment in Kilkenny whose convivial repute was long famous in song and story—not an inn, but a tavern, known as "The Hole in the Wall." This tavern was the great supper house of Kilkenny and was particularly patronised by John Butler, Earl of Ormonde. Anyone who may inspect the premises where this once famous tavern flourished must be astonished that so mean a building and one so limited in size could ever have such a name and so high a patronage. A narrow alley, fifty feet long by six feet in width, opens under an archway between two houses in High Street, directly opposite the entrance to St. Mary's Church, and at the end of this cul-de-sac, with the gable end presented to the passage which it blocks up, the width of the approach leaving scarcely more than room for the door of admission, is a small two-storied building which appears to have been originally a store or outhouse (a use to which it has now again returned) of one of the proprietors of the two shops in the street between which the alley opens. It was, however...
made sufficiently comfortable within, with the aid of the good
cheer which its kitchen and cellar afforded, to attract its nightly
visitants in such numbers that many persons living remember
the narrow approach almost completely blocked up with the
sedan chairs in which the company were ordinarily conveyed
thither in wet weather. The character of the house, after the
death of its noble patron in 1795, gradually sank, till, from the

Kilkenny: Bull Inn, Irishtown, VII 179

leading tavern of the city, it descended to the position of a public
house of the lowest class, and ultimately the local authorities
felt constrained to withdraw its licence.

The only existing remains of the earlier Kilkenny inns is the
ruin of the Bull Inn in Irishtown. Of its internal arrangements
we have no means of forming any accurate idea, as it has been
unroofed, and all its doors and partitions removed, as long as I
can remember it; but externally it presented a high-pitched gable
to the front, surmounted by a massive stone chimney. The door opened in the centre of the ground floor, but it has been modernly altered and built up. At either side of the door was a large square window divided by mullions into three compartments and surmounted by a drip label. The second storey was also lighted in the front by two square windows, each divided by a single mullion, being narrower but loftier than those below, and also having drip labels above. In the third storey there were two narrow, flat-leaded lights. To the rear the stone-framed windows were all extremely small in the ground floor, not being more than a foot square; but the stories above showed high, narrow, slit-like lights. Between the two second-storey windows in the street front two carved stone escutcheons present themselves, one charged with the arms of the builder and the other displaying a rude representation of the animal from which the house took its name, and being, in fact, its sign. The charge on the former escutcheon is an eagle displayed, over all two bendlets, with, at the base, the date 1602, and beneath, in old English letters, the inscription: "Insignia Roberti Jose." On the shield to the left a bull is carved, in relief, at the base, there being a less prominent design, apparently intended to represent a dog pursuing a deer. The inscription above the shield is, in Roman letters, "Bullis Inne," and beneath, in old English characters, are the words, "Nomen lujus faedi dicitur."

Robert Jose, or Joyce, appears to have been a clergyman and a member of the Chapter of St. Canice's Cathedral. In 1614 he was procurator to the Chapter. He built the gate and flight of steps leading from Velvet Lane to the Cathedral cemetery, as appears by the inscription similarly cut on both faces of a stone over the gateway arch, so as to read on either side as follows:—


Before the end of the 17th century the proprietorship of the Bull Inn seems to have lapsed to the head landlord, the Bishop, and the premises themselves to have fallen into a ruinous state. By lease of 1687 the Bull Inn was granted to Francis Rowlidge, of Irishtown. The interest of Francis Rowlidge in the premises seems to have passed to the Loughnan family, the present lessees of the premises. The City Grand Jury, within the past twelve months (1862), in widening the alley to which it gave name, also presented the old inn as a dangerous public nuisance, from the incline which the gable presented, and took it down to within a few feet of the windows of the second storey, in which mutilated condition it now remains.