

# “THE WALLS OF KILKENNY”

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THE paper stated: The first walled towns in Ireland were built by the Danes. They came as merchants and were allowed by the Irish Chieftains to build towns at the chief ports for the benefit of their commerce. Three Danish brothers built towns of Dublin, Waterford and Limerick. In the course of time they built other towns which they fortified with Walls and Ditches. The native Irish race did not as a rule live in towns but in small hamlets or bali. When the Anglo-Norman invaders arrived they too built walled towns for their followers and their wives and families to live in. The citizens of these towns enjoyed special privileges. In this way the Hightown or Englishtown of Kilkenny was founded. Outside many of these walled towns there existed an Irishtown in which the native race dwelt. The two towns are described as follows: “The one a kind of fortress or military town wherein dwelt the invaders with their wives, families and servants, the other an assemblage of cabins and booths occupied by the native inhabitants who supplied the towns with such wares as eggs, milk and butter and were employed as carpenters, masons, etc.”

## IRISHTOWN OF KILKENNY

The Irishtown of Kilkenny was, however, a more important place than this. It too, was a walled town though, as we shall see, its defences were never as thorough nor as well attended to as those of the Hightown. It had also a Corporation, a Civil Magistrate known as “the Portrieve” and had the right to send representatives to Parliament and to hold markets, etc.

It is generally agreed that it existed as a town before the Englishtown was founded and its walls were probably of more ancient date.

Of the actual building of the Walls of Kilkenny we have very little information. Stanihurst records that “in the year 1400 Robert Talbot, a worthie gentleman, enclosed with walls the better part of the town by which it was greatly fortified.” But that there were walls in existence before this can easily be inferred. In 1375 letters patent were issued granting to the Corporation very considerable tolls for the repair of the Walls, Bridges and pavements. As early as 1302 we have a grant to William Outlaw of a stone house near Walkelyn’s Bar or Walkin’s Gate.

Bishop Rothe in his treatise on Kilkenny writes: "The City Gates with their guards and the yearly salary of the said guards in the year 1384 are mentioned in our archives in the following order: (1) Walkinsbarr; (2) St. Patrick's; (3) Irishtown; (4) St. John's; (5) St. James." In 1427 there are mentioned in addition to these the Gate of the Friars' Preachers, the Castlebarr and the Portebridge." This seems to indicate that these latter entrances did not exist in the earlier walls. Mr. Drea holds the theory that the early walls ended where the "Journal" Office is at present, that is to say, that they coincided exactly with the present St. Mary's parish. This theory agrees with the proposition that there was no Castle Gate as it would be scarcely necessary to have two gates so close together.

### ROBERT TALBOT

Robert Talbot was a member of the prominent Kilkenny family of Talbot who have given their name to the townland of Talbot's Inch. He was related to Lord Ormonde and is thought to have been a wine merchant. Mr. John J. Prim, in a paper read to the Kilkenny Archæological Society in 1884 suggests that he was probably sovereign of the town for the year 1400 in which the walls were commenced. In this way his name became associated with their erection though it was really a municipal undertaking and not as some historians suggest, carried out at his own expense. He also quotes a Parliament held in Kilkenny in the year 1408 in order to have a Tallage (Charter of Tolls) granted, and suggests that this was granted to cover the expense of the Town Wall recently erected.

The Wall built by Talbot is described by Ledwich as follows: "It began at the Earl's old stable not far from the Castle Gate and making a semi-circular sweep or nearly so, ran across the end of the Coal Market and took in the Franciscan Abbey; the Nore secured it to the north ward so that the new town was quite enclosed."

It contained the following gates: Two in the south wall, the Castle gate and St. Patrick's; three in the west wall, Walkin's gate, St. James' and the Black Friars' gate; and two in the north wall, the Hightown or Watergate, and the grey Frieren gate. The inner St. John's gate stood at the Rose-Inn Street side of John's Bridge. I will deal with the far side of the river later.

### LEASES OF CASTLES

Almost all these gates had houses or castles built over them which were let out on lease by the Corporation. The municipal documents include records of these leases. They were all on similar

lines. In some cases the lessee undertook to build the castle, in other cases merely to repair and strengthen it. All leases include provisions for the free access to the buildings at all times of danger or commotion of the Sovereign and Burgesses and City Watch and Ward; also provision for keeping the Castle in a strong state of defence. Only freemen of the city were allowed to occupy these castles.

I will now go around the site of the wall and mention any items of particular interest beginning with:

### THE CASTLE GATE

This stood in the roadway at the head of the Parade just beyond the Castle. It was not actually attached to the town wall which ended at the stables and there was no castle over it. For a small castle or lodge which stood near it William Shea paid the Corporation 6s. 8d. annually in 1628. This castle may be clearly seen on Rocque's map of the town. When Cromwell attempted to take the town he commenced his bombardment here. He attempted to batter the end of the Marquis of Ormonde's stables between the rampart and the castle gate, but was successfully repulsed. Eventually he marched round the walls and gained entrance through Dean Street. The next gate we meet is:

### ST. PATRICK'S GATE

Between Upper and Lower Patrick Street. This was the last of the old gates to exist. It was only taken down at the close of the last century by the late Mr. Cleere. Before demolition Mr. Cleere had a photo taken of the old gateway and castle built over it.

This castle was built in 1626 as evidenced by a lease of that date to Richard Rothe FitzEdward in consideration, inter alia, of his building the castle. He also undertook to build two corbel towers upon the wall of the castle for the defence of that part of the City Walls.

According to Hogan the Corbel Stones could in his time be plainly seen in the wall over the Arch from the Upper Patrick Street side.

The wall then ran diagonally across the present Ormonde Road to the Bastion which stands in the Technical School yard. This bastion or look-out tower is known as Talbot's Castle. Near it was found in 1854 an ancient cannon which was presented to the Archæological Society's Museum. This is the only one of the four bastions which survives in a good state of preservation. The wall then ran parallel to Patrick Street and practically in a straight line to Walkin Street gate. Parts of it still form the boundary wall of the gardens behind the Patrick Street houses. Behind the Provincial

Bank we shall see the remains of another bastion. At the "Journal" Office there was a Sallyport or small opening in the wall and right of way formerly existed here from Patrick Street straight through to New Street.

The Walkin's gate or Walkelyn's Bar was a most important one as the Cork Road entered the city here. There are many references to this locality in ancient deeds. It is sometimes called the Walking Street or Wankennes Street. The gate was removed probably in the year 1788. For rooms over this gate David Roche paid the Corporation the annual rent of 8d. in 1628.

The wall continued along the Sconce, which, incidentally, takes its name from its proximity to these ancient fortifications, to the head of Collier's Lane where another bastion stood. This part of the wall and the bastion were taken down about the year 1809 and the range of houses known as Garden Row, which were recently removed, were built on this site.

The next item of interest is St. James's gate which stood at the head of James's Street. There is a good portion of the wall still existing here adjoining the Presentation Convent grounds. There is a lease of the Castle which stood over this gate to Walter Archer FitzWalter in 1599. Concerning it Hogan said: "The Castle, which stood on this gate, was taken down as low as the top of the arch early in the present century (i.e. the 19th) and replaced by a modern dwelling house. The whole structure was removed in 1860 when the Christian Brothers' establishment was erected there. The wall then continued along James's Street Sconce. At the head of Evans' Lane stood another bastion which was known as the Kilberry Tower or Tilberry Tower. The name Kilberry is supposed to be a derivation of Kilbride or the Church of St. Bridget and it is thought that the very old Church of St. Bridget which was one of three churches taken down to build the Bishop's Palace (14th century) formerly stood here. It was also called Jonas' Tower. In 1628 Edmund Archer paid 8d. a year to the Corporation for the vault over the Kilberry Tower, while Henry Maynwaring paid 16s. per year for a garden at the Kilberry Tower. It was taken down about 1830. The house built on the site of this tower is now occupied by the Christian Brothers. I understand the Corporation claim a portion of this house and also a strip of their garden as Corporation property, being the site of the ancient town wall.

From here the wall slopes down to the present Abbey Street, where some portions of it still exist, and in which the FRIARS' GATE stood. Of this gate Hogan writes: "Trinific Lane was the ancient title of the street now called Lee's Lane (at present Abbey Street) and the Inner Frieren Gate was the name of the gateway—one arch of which is still standing in the same street." A lease of the Upper Rooms over the Castle of this gate was made in October, 1633, to Stephen Daniel. He undertook to build the

said Castle "and cover same with oaken timber and slate within three years and same to uphold stiffe strong staunch and tenant-able." From here the wall ran due south to the Bregach River and thence along its bank to the Nore.

### HIGHTOWN GATE

At Watergate stood the gateway which separated the Hightown or Englishtown from the borough of Irishtown. It was usually known as the Hightown Gate. When the Mayor of Kilkenny passed through this gate he dropped the point of the City Sword to show that he claimed no pre-eminence in the Borough of Irishtown. It also possessed a Castle which was let to Walter Lawless in 609 upon the usual conditions.

### THE GRAY FRIEREN GATE

This was not a public gateway. It led from the Abbey grounds into Chancellor's Orchard and it had no castle over it. It is not mentioned as one of the city gates by Bishop Rothe, nor is it included among the city gates listed for defence in 1641 to which we shall come later.

At the point where the walls terminated at the River Nore there stood a small tower known as Evan's Turret, which may still be seen. Cromwell also attacked the wall here in the grounds of the Franciscan Abbey with pickaxes and succeeded in making a breach. The site of this breach which was later built up again is said to be still visible. At the same time his armies attacked John's Bridge and attempted to burn the gate there but they were beaten off and many officers and men killed.

John's Bridge was defended by a gate on the Rose-Inn Street side, which had also a castle built over it. This castle and gate were swept away by the flood in 1544 but in 1580 we find a lease to Edmund Shortall and to Anstace Shee, his wife, of the gate house over the west-end of St. John's Bridge with a provision that they shall build up the walls of the castle to the same height as the old walls and embattlements. It also provided for free passage under the gate house for man, horse, carriage, car and cart.

This is probably the Portebidge referred to by Bishop Rothe. It was also called the Inner John's Gate, the outer St. John's Gate being at the Monastery.

It was apparently the custom for the Sovereign and Burgesses when letting land adjoining the Town Wall to include a provision requiring the tenant to keep the wall in repair. We have a lease of portion of the Black Abbey lands adjoining the Town Wall. We have also frequent mention from the very earliest times of tolls granted for murage. At the time of the Williamite Wars a consider-

able amount of money was spent keeping the gates and fortifications in repair. John Archdekin, Mayor in 1690, claimed £1 16s. for iron supplied for mending the locks on the City Gates after the rout of the Boyne.

He also claimed £24 for mounting seven iron sakers (def. small obsolete piece of artillery). Four were placed on the half-moons of the city walls and three about the Castle of Kilkenny.

In the Archæological Journal for 1892 Mr. Waters gives a list of Original Documents in the possession of the Corporation which includes a receipt for nine shillings from Henry Harper for providing three locks for the city gates dated August, 1691.

A petition from Gregory Marshall's widow for payment for 2½ tons of scantling timber at 24s. per ton supplied for the repair of the city gates also supplied in 1691.

A petition from Lawrence Sargeant, gunner to the city, stating he had been taking care of the guns of the city for the last three years and had been paid nothing. An order was made in June, 1694, that he be paid £4 for his services as gunner for the three years.

Besides their use for defensive purposes the guns were also discharged as a mark of honour to welcome distinguished visitors to the town.

It was apparently the duty of the Aldermen of the city to oversee the Watch appointed to guard the city at night. We have a document, dated 27th November, 1641, which sets forth the duties of the Aldermen in this respect. This was during the 1641 rebellion and regulations were very stringent. The Alderman who was on duty for the night interviewed the Watch at 9 o'clock and appointed them to their respective stations. The number of Watchers at each gate is strictly set forth—two at St. Patrick's Gate; four at Castle Gate; four at St. John's Gate; two at Walkin's Gate; two at St. James' Gate; two at the Abbey Gate, and four at the Hightown Gate. The Alderman also appoints one of their number to be Captain. He is responsible for seeing that the Watch is relieved, etc. At nine o'clock the Alderman delivers the watchword for the night and if anyone is found on the streets after that hour who could not give the watchword he was to be committed to prison or to the stocks "as the captain shall think fit."

### FORTIFICATIONS ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE RIVER

The walls here originally surrounded the monastery of St. John. Accordnig to Hogan they commenced at the small river which formerly crossed John Street, to the point where the small bastion still stands, ran eastwards to Maudlin Street, along this street to John Street and crossed it to Michael Street. At this point St. John's outer gate stood. It continued along Michael's

Lane enclosing the Abbey grounds and turned down to join the small river again.

The only important gate at this side of the river was the St. John's Outer Gate or East Gate. For rooms over this gate James Bruin paid the Corporation in 1628 the modest sum of 4d. per year.

St. Michael's Gate was an entrance into the rear of St. John's Abbey grounds from Michael's Lane.

### THE IRISHTOWN WALLS

This wall started at the Bregach River, crossed Dean Street at Dean's Gate, then up the hill and crossed in front of the Cathedral door, from thence down at the back of the Bishop's Palace to Troysgate and from that to the Nore.

Troysgate stood at the entrance into Vicar Street. Tradition says that the tower which originally stood over this gateway fell down in the time of Elizabeth and was not again rebuilt. The Portrieve or Chief Magistrate of Irishtown had a prison here. One of his duties was to seize provisions brought to market and exposed for sale on Sunday.

Greensgate stood at the town side of Greensbridge. In 1618 porters were appointed for Dean's Gate, Troysgate and Green's Gate whose duties were to collect the tolls and also as "appraisers for meat" which means, I daresay, that they had to inspect the meat brought in to the market and see that it was fit for sale.

There is no doubt that the citizens of Kilkenny were very glad to have the protection of its stout walls, particularly during the troubled years of the 17th century. During the wars of the Roses also there was much disturbance in this locality. The walls were most valuable also to preserve the city from plunder at the hands of a beaten and retreating army whose soldiers would be uncontrolled. The elaborate precautions taken after the Battle of the Boyne are evidence of this.

