THE THOLSEL OF KILKENNY

IN November, 1947, the members visited the Tholsel and examined the valuable documents and furnishings of the building. The Mayor (Ald. J. P. Pattison, T.D.) Alderman John Magennis and Mr. Timmins welcomed us and gave us every assistance. The following notes are taken from Mrs. W. J. Phelan's paper, read on that occasion.

THE HISTORY OF THE BUILDING

The present Tholsel is the third of its kind in Kilkenny. The word comes from the Saxon Tholsel: Thol—Tax and Sel—Seat. From the time that the walls were built around Kilkenny about 1400, there must have been impositions or taxes on goods and animals coming in and going out of the walled city just as there are those taxes between Department and Department in France to-day. The Tholsel was where these businesses were carried out.

The first Tholsel stood in Kilkenny at the beginning of the 16th century and it may have been there 200 years or more before. Authorities dispute about its location, but probably it was where the old Victorian Hotel stood and the Munster and Leinster Bank now stands. Some say it was the block of houses—7, 8 and 9 High Street, that is Daly's, Mannings and Reynolds, but Hogan definitely considers this last block as the site of the old City Gaol.

There is a story told of Pierce Butler capturing the "Iron Gate" from McGilla Padraig, his hereditary enemy, at Coolkill and setting it up in triumph on this old Tholsel.

When Hogan wrote his history of Kilkenny in 1884 an underground shop of this old Tholsel was still there, and could be entered from the street by the original stone staircase under the coffee room windows of the Victoria Hotel. There was also a Gothic doorway with neatly dressed stone jambs and arch head of the original place.

The second Tholsel was built about the end of the 16th century on the site of where we stand to-day and was in existence for 100 years along with the original Tholsel and more or less used for the same purposes. This gives rise to much confusion in research, but we now see clearly that the old Tholsel was on the site of the Munster and Leinster Bank, the second Tholsel was on the site of the present one and the third is the actual building where we are to-day.

From Rocque's map of the city in 1757 we have the ground plan of the "New Tholsel." It occupied half the width of the present Tholsel and that half nearest the road. When the present Tholsel

was built it covered much of St. Mary's Lane, and a row of houses
behind it was demolished. The new Tholsel, i.e. the second Tholsel,
also had shops on its ground floor; four shops which brought rents
of about £5 a year.

In 1756 we find the upper floor being used for City Chambers.
This is probably when it became known as the Town Hall, and
this term is interchangeable now with "Tholsel" but I hope we
hold on to the older name. The new or second Tholsel resembles
ours of to-day. It had a cupola with a bell and a two-dial clock.
This clock, then as now, was our chief timekeeper. In 1759 the
Bishop, Thomas de Burgo, sent a pastoral letter to be read at the
Masses on Sunday preceding Christmas. In this he prohibits Mass
to be said earlier than 6 o'clock and adds " by 6 o'clock, I mean
6 o'clock according to the Tholsel clock."

Robert Stephens was paid £4 a year for repairing the Tholsel
bell and John Wilkinson was paid £5 a year as clock keeper. These
items come from William Colles's ledger, who was treasurer to the
Corporation from 1750 to 1768.

About this time, 1750, we can see from the ledger that much
repairs had to be done on this building—slating, glazing, mending
the floors, etc., so in 1759 arrangements were made to meet the
cost of the new building which was completed in 1761. The cost
appears to have been £1,315 5s. 8½d. Hogan, writing in 1884, says
that to-day i.e. 1884, it would cost £3,000. In 1947 we can only
imagine how much.

Hogan says there is no memorial of the artist who planned our
Tholsel, but traditionally he is supposed to be Italian. A wall
placque containing the names of the civic authorities then in being
was intended to have been placed on the south side, where the
Kilkenny arms are now. This placque was to have read:

This Tholsel, rebuilt 1761.
Anthony Blunt, Esq., Mayor.
Eland Mossom, Recorder.
John Waters, Henry Gale, Sheriffs.
Sir William Evans Morress, Knight, John
Blunden, members of Parliament.

The placque was not put up because a " Pent House " was built
against the south side of the Tholsel and stood there until 1812.
It was removed at that time but the builders and civic authorities
of the Tholsel were dead and it was considered better to put the
Kilkenny Arms instead.

THE ANCIENT DOCUMENTS

Mrs. Phelan pointed out some of the valuable documents in
the possession of the Corporation. The Liber Primus, a famous and
valuable book, was the old Minute Book of the first Corporation;

its first entry was made in 1231 and its last in 1537. Geoffrey de Turville, Bishop of Ossory, in 1247, gave to the Black Abbey a grant of a conduit of water no bigger than his ring. Here we have the grant with the ring still attached, 700 years old, as interesting and as historic a document as we have in Ireland. Then there is the deed of a house to William Outlaw. He was son of the infamous witch, Alice Kytler, and lived in Walkin Street near the present Dispensary. There is the Charter of James I in 1609 which made Kilkenny a city. A letter of William of Orange from his Royal Camp at Bennettsbridge after the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 reinstates the old Corporation. This letter is as easily legible as if it were written yesterday. These are just a few of the charters and deeds safely preserved in the large safe installed for that purpose.

Among the furnishings of the Tholsel we must notice the lustres which are a gift of Dr. Robert Cane, Mayor in 1845. Each pendant bears the following inscription: "These lustres were presented to the Corporation and Burgesses of Kilkenny by Dr. Robert Cane, M.D., Mayor 1845. Dr. Cane, who also presented the Gate Lodge to the Canal, was one of the original members of the Kilkenny Archæological Society. The bust of John Banim in Carrera marble, sculptured by John Hogan, has an inscription underneath composed by a Marquis of Ormonde. There is also a snuff-box of John Banim's to be seen.

The picture of the old John's Bridge was presented by M. L. Potter, a name illustrious in our civic records. Then we have Rocque's map of Kilkenny, a most useful piece of cartography, made in 1757. Another and more recent map of Kilkenny in 1861 was presented by Councillor Cole in 1933. P. M. Egan, Mayor, himself an illustrious Kilkennyman and prolific writer on local history, presented the busts of Parnell and Gladstone. There are also pictures of Michael Banim, former Postmaster and brother of John Banim, and of Alderman Nowlan, distinguished patron of the G.A.A. The clock was presented by Captain Otway Cuffe, former president of the Gaelic League, a name honoured and beloved in Kilkenny. The placque of John Redmond was presented by Mr. Biggar, of Belfast.