
TALBOT'S INCH

By JOHN S. GIBB

TALBOT'S INCH is a townland in the County of Kilkenny, about one mile north of Kilkenny City. The lands were named after the Norman family of Talbot but whether or not they had a residence there, I cannot find any record. On the southern side of the Inch or flat meadows in the right angle bend of the Nore there is the remains of a courtyard wall about 100 yards long and soon after I came to Kilkenny about 40 years ago, I was told by Mr. Mark Cassin, an old farmer, that in his youth he had lifted flagstones from the yard just inside the wall. If a house was there it was a bad position as this field floods nearly every year. It is more likely that it was a bawn for cattle. He also mentioned that gold and silver were buried there. (Of this story more later). The Talbots were among the first of the Norman families to settle in or near Kilkenny, and their story and history is very similar to that of other Norman families and an early period when they were merely witnesses and took little part in the commercial activities of the city and county—then at a later time when they were very prominent citizens their names occurring constantly in city and county record and then a period of decline and the same process goes on to-day.

Gilbert Talbot, an ancestor of the Earl of Shrewsbury, married Petronilla, daughter of James 1st Earl of Ormonde, and a later connection between the families was the marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of the 4th Earl of Ormonde, with John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. The earliest mention I can find of the Talbots is in 1233 and many of the early references to them refer to their acting as witnesses to deeds, etc., executed in relation to grants, quit rents and other matters pertaining to the settlement of lands the Normans had acquired. Theobald Walter Butler, of Ireland, is the chief figure in these deeds and it is interesting to note that at first he was Theobald Walter Chief Butler of Ireland and that this title gradually changed in the course of about a hundred years to Sir Walter De Butler. In 1259 an Ormonde deed relates that—Robert Talbot (Taleboth, Talebot) grants to Theobald Walter Chief Butler of Ireland and his heirs that land which Peter de Kayllo formerly held in Locheryn and Le Cranach (Crannagh) which he held at the donation of the said Theobald. This was in consider-

ation of lands granted in Co. Carlow. This Robert Talbot was a witness to many other deeds and in 1270 he executed another deed granting lands in Loughcapple to Theobald Butler.

The first mention of lands at Talbot's Inch, though not by name, is in a deed of 22nd June, 1331. "Thomas, son of Richard Parmenter, grants to Peter de Arderne three acres in the tenement of Dromdelgany, which lands lie in length from the highway to the land of John, son of Geoffrey Talbot, and in breadth between the lands of the said John and the land of Robert Crocker. On May 1st, 1332, we get Talbot's Inch definitely mentioned "Thomas Parmenter grants to Richard, son of Peter de Arderne, John de Arderne, brother of the said Richard, Isabella, sister of the said Richard, and John and Peter Arderne, of Kilkenny, and the heirs male of the same, for ever all his right in two acres and one stang of land in the burgage of Irishtown, lying in length between the lands of William Peter Geoffrey and in breadth from the lands of John, son of Geoffrey Talbot, to the lane which leads to Talbot's Ynche. This lane is still in existence and was part of the old road to Freshford. It started at the foot of Bishop's Hill (where a branch leads down to the Bishop's Meadows) and continues on past a hut known as the Powder House, and on past Mr. Charlie McCreery's house and the new County Hospital to Mr. Brannigan's farm where a portion of the road may still be seen near the sandpit.

In 1342, on the Monday before Christmas, William, son of John Fowler, grants to Peter de Arderne $2\frac{1}{2}$ acres of arable land in the town of Kilkenny—which land lies in length from the highway leading to the grange of Robert Fitz Hugh to John Talbot's land and in breadth from the land of the said Robert to the lands of the Bishop of Ossory (Bishop's Meadows).

To go back to city records in 1322 Thomas Talbot was granted a pardon for trespass against the Crown in consideration of services he had rendered in fighting against the O'Nolans and other native clans on the eastern border of Kilkenny. From this time on the Talbots became increasingly prominent in the affairs of town and county. John Talbot in 1334 and 1340 was Sheriff of Kilkenny and had to render an account to the court of barons of his work. There must have been some errors in his accounts because the Seneschall of Kilkenny was ordered to arrest John so that he could give a statement of his arrears. In 1345 he was again before the courts to render an account and he was short of cash by £10 10s. 3d. and he was committed to the custody of the city marshal. Whether he was kept in custody or in prison for almost three years we do not know, but, on the 10th of March, 1348, a mandate was issued from the Treasurer of Kilkenny to the Seneschall of the city suspending

the distraint and he was eventually forgiven the debt to the extent of £10 6s. 9d. leaving 3s. 6d. unaccounted for. In spite of these little troubles he was evidently an esteemed man of good credit for we find that in 1366 he was accepted as a surety for John de la Freyne and also went bail for both the Seneschall of the liberties of Kilkenny and the sheriff of the cross of Kilkenny. Again in 1357 he was Portrieve of Kilkenny and in 1375 answered for John de la Freyne as attorney for him in the Court of the Exchequer.

In 1381, when a very old man, he went surety for his son, Robert, as sheriff, and he is presumed to have died somewhere about this time, his tomb being in St. Canice's Cathedral, but there is no date on it. This John Talbot, who, I think, is the John Talbot of the Ormonde deeds, left three sons who are all frequently mentioned in the city records. Robert is the most prominent, and he is generally regarded as the builder of the city walls, but it is more likely that he was responsible for the collection, and looking after of the murage tolls of the city as there is a reference to land outside the great wall of the city in 1331 (14-4-31). He may also have lent money to the city for wall building on the security of the tolls. But Mrs. Kenealy has told us all about this on a previous occasion, so I'll just mention that Stanihurst the annalist, records that "Robert Talbot, a worthy gentleman, enclosed with walls the greater part of the town by which it is greatly fortified. He filled many offices as a citizen of Kilkenny—Sovereign in 1374, '75, '80, '84. Was placed first on the roll of 12 chief burgesses for many years, and was Sheriff of Kilkenny seven times. In 1382 he, and five other burgesses were appointed to supervise and audit the tolls of the city. In 1403 Thomas of Lancaster, the King's son, summoned a parliament to meet in Kilkenny, and Robert Talbot paid 50s. for a pipe of wine for the entertainment of Thomas. This meeting was probably about the repairing or rebuilding of the walls. He had a house near the gate in Irishtown for 1d. per year in 1383, the rent being increased to 2d. per year in 1402. He died about 1415, and in 1417 his widow paid the Corporation 9d. for a year's rent for Keteller's Hall. He is also buried in St. Canice's Cathedral. His brothers, Richard and Thomas, both filled the office of Sovereign of Kilkenny—Richard in 1399 and 1404, and Thomas in 1402. Thomas was also Coroner for Kilkenny. After the death of the three brothers there is no mention of any of this family of Talbot or indeed of any Talbots for over two centuries. In 1661 a Thomas Talbot was a vintner, and tailor in Kilkenny, who issued penny tokens in the course of his trading, but he is supposed to be a Cromwellian importation. The lands of Talbot's Inch then passed into the hands of the Cotteral family, who had their main lands near Kells—a Talbot heiress evidently marrying a Cotteral.

A tomb in St. Canice's Cathedral dated 2nd December, 1550,

records the names of Adam, and John Cotteral, and Richard and Walter Lawless, Lords of Talbot's Inch. The conjunction of the names is explained by a Cotteral heiress marrying a Lawless, and thus the Lawlesses came to Talbot's Inch. The Lawless and Cotteral families are both of Norman origin, but I will not go into any detail about them, as in many ways their history is parallel in many respects to that of the Talbots. They were Sovereigns, and Sheriffs of the city, and the Lawless name is mentioned many times in the Liber Primus, one Walterus Lawless in 1537 being indicted, and denounced before the Jury of Kilkenny as a grey merchant or forestaller. Another Walter Lawless, descendant of the above Walterus, was stated by the chronicler of the Cloncurry family to be "a man born to be lucky." He attracted the favour of James the First, and was granted seven Manors in Waterford, Tipperary, and Kilkenny, but Prim, and Graves say that this is a mistake as he was in the confidence of the Earl of Ormonde, and that he only held the lands in trust. He married a daughter of Robert Roth, and one of his grandsons was also a Walter Lawless, who was a great friend of James the Second. He was with him at the Battle of the Boyne, and was with James on his retreat south to Wexford. James had silver plate with him engraved with the Stuart coat of arms, and he left or gave this silver plate to Walter Lawless who retained it, and it is or was until recently still in the possession of the Cloncurry people at Lyons the family seat. This possession of the Stuart silver may account for the story told me by Mark Casson that gold and silver was buried at Talbot's Inch. This gold and silver story is very persistent along the Nore valley in the North of the county: I know of at least five other places where treasure is supposed to be, but this is the only one with any foundation as far as I can ascertain.

The Lawless lands were forfeited in 1703. John Hartstonge, Bishop of Ossory, bought the estate of Talbot's Inch—174 acres, for £455 in trust for his brother, Sir Standish Hartsonge, who was M.P. for Irishtown. On Hartstonge's death he bequeathed the lands to his brother John. These Hartstonges were a Norfolk family, but John was educated at John's College Grammar School. He was chaplain to the Duke of Ormonde. A nephew, another Standish Hartstonge, was M.P. for Irishtown in 1711.

And now there is a gap in the record. Up to now I have not been able to find out who were the owners of the land between 1711 and 1890. About 1890 or thereabouts a Mr. Murphy was farming the land, and from that time to 1906 Mr. Morris was in occupation. Whether they were the owners or not, I have not yet been able to ascertain, but in 1912 Lady Desart bought the lands of Talbot's Inch from Col. Frederick McCastie, and another. Lady Desart, as I have said, came to Talbot's Inch in 1906 March 17 and soon after

built the village primarily for employees working at the Woodworkers, tobacco-growing, and Woollen Mills. In these days of town planning it is interesting to recall that Talbot's Inch is one of the very few planned villages in Ireland, situated as it is high up on the bluff or old glacial river bank overlooking the River Nore, with an open space separating it from the main road, a secondary road supplying the village while at the rear a lovely view extends over miles of typically Irish countryside.

Lady Desart died in June, 1933, and the lands and village were sold. As I was one of the tenants since 1909 I was able to purchase my house and land and I am now possessor of a small part of these historic lands of Talbot's Inch.

Lady Desart called Talbot's Inch *Aut Even*—a pleasant place, so that I can truly say with the Psalmist—The lines have fallen unto me in pleasant places—yea I have a goodly heritage.

