

Maudlin Street

KATHLEEN WRAY

CASTLE BAWN

Maudlin Street is situated in that part of our ancient City which lies at what was the extreme eastern side. The outer gate of St. John stood in the centre of the Street between Michael's Lane and Maudlin Street. Maudlin Street is so named from the Maudlins or Magdalen Place to which it leads. It is a continuation of Michael's Lane which, with Greenshill, formed the way from Loughmeryan at Dunmore (where there was a celebrated Mansion of the Earl of Ormonde) to his farmyards and barns at the end of this Street. The place of the "Barns", known later as the "Magdalenes" appears to have extended from the "Magdalen Gate" to the "Magdalen Mill" and included within its area that part of the Street from the Castle to the Mill at the end of the Street. It also included the Graveyard and adjoining gardens between Maudlin Street and the present Dublin Road. This place of the Barns was strongly fortified and defended being as it was the agricultural depot for the Castle at the other side of the River. The "Bawn" was furnished with a Mill known as the "Magdalen Mill" which was propelled by an ancient water course, which ran parallel to the Nore from a submerged weir at Noremount, Friar's Inch, and crossed John Street near the entrance to John's College.

MAGDALEN CLOSE

This enclosure or "Bawn" was entered from three different roadways, one Maudlin Street, one by St. John's Place, later the Dublin Road, and one from what is now "Williams" Lane. This last road approached to cross the river here when it was fordable and formed the south eastern boundary of the Magdalen Close. Communication with the Castle was by means of a great shallow or fordable rapid, otherwise there was no communication over the river between the two localities nearer than the ford or great bridge at the present site of Greensbridge. This enclosure was broken into and its defences and privacy destroyed when the present Dublin Road was first

constructed and carried down "Windgap Hill" on its way into the town of Kilkenny at the early part of the 16th Century. After this a public thoroughfare was constructed which passed out through the Magdalen Gate and approached the town down the present Maudlin Street.

LEPROSY CASTLE

At this point a few words about the Magdalen Castle part of which is still to be seen. This is but one of three castles which have been located there. It would appear to have been intended for the defence of the Gateway here which probably formed the principal entrance into the "Close". It is almost 75 feet in height and about 25 feet at its buttressed base. In 1598 the Corporation of Kilkenny leased the Castle to a Merchant of the town "reserving the use of the best chamber thereof for such as shall be infected of the "dyseas commonly called Leprosie".

BARNS CHURCH

The place of the barns besides being furnished with a Mill was also provided with a Church and this Church was furnished with a Parish and endowed with "sixteen acres of free land". We do not know by what title this Church was denominated, but I quote from Mr. Gerrard Lee's Pamphlet on "The Leper Hospitals of Leinster" as follows :

"The old church of the Parish stood within the present churchyard at Maudlin Street and was dedicated to St. Stephen after the erection of a Leper hospital there. Although the latter is usually called the Churchyard in Maudlin Street it is referred to in documents of the 18th Century as St. Stephen's Churchyard. It existed early in the fourteenth century as in 1327 the Master of the House resigned to St. John's priory a claim to certain moneys".

Its name appears to have been designedly ignored by the Earl Marshall when he confiscated its Parish and its landed property by transferring them as endowments to his newly founded priory of St. John. The 16 acres of free land with which the Church of the Barns had been endowed he also bestowed on the Priory after which this Church of the Barns sank down to a Chapel of Ease under the name of the Magdalen Chapel. In the year 1794 with the advanced liberality

of the age the Corporation of the city executed a lease of “the Churchyard, the chapel, the priest’s house and Garden” to James Laffan and John Helsham as trustees for 500 years at 6d. per annum from 25th March of said year and (on the title of this Lease) was founded in the year 1840 the Catholic Church of the Parish which was demolished in recent years when a new Church the “O’Loughlin Memorial” was erected.

ORMONDE BLOCKS

Over the years the “Barns” disappeared and Maudlin St. became a street of small dwellings with a few larger houses here and there. While still owned by the Ormondes blocks of these dwellings were granted “in fee” to various private individuals at ground rents which to the present day are still paid.

In the house at the corner known as the “Distillery House” lived Major Kingsmill a famous personage in early nineteenth Century. He was Mayor or Deputy Mayor for many years. He was the lessor of the first block of houses and Representatives of his descendants still collect rentals. Another large portion was leased from James, Duke of Ormond in 1708 to a William Andrews, through him to a Protestant Clergyman, Rev. John Browne and through the Revd. Gentleman to his descendants to a lady — Alice Lyster Ramsey — of Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. This portion of the Ormond property was known as “All That and Those the Dog Kennel, House Yard and Garden with Appurtenances situate lying and being in and near Magdalen Street in the suburbs of the City of Kilkenny — a yearly rent of £2 3 8 was fixed in 1708 to be paid in perpetuity”. My father purchased some of this property and we still pay the yearly rental. Other Lessors of the property were William Bradish, James Kelly, Patrick Kelly, Miss Margaret Shortall, Vernon Lamphier to name but a few. A great many of the houses are now owned by the Corporation who have re-built some and repaired others.

SEMINARY LANE

Of the larger houses the most interesting is a large three storey building adjoining what has always been known as “Seminary Lane”. This house has been used for a variety of purposes. It was a Seminary for Priests before they removed to

Birchfield and St. Kieran's College. Then it was used as a Police Station — after that as a residence for the De La Salle Brothers and finally as a private residence. It is now owned and occupied by Mr. Dan Kennedy and his family. Almost opposite is another three-storied house enclosed in a walled garden. It may have been the residence of Revd. John Browne. From my memory it has been occupied by people called Murphy, then for many years by Dowlings (who had a bakery in the Street), again by Mr. Allen, now in High Street. It has just been purchased by Mr. Pratt after some years of being unoccupied.

OTHER LANES

In the Chapel yard lane there were two or three cottages later used as stables. The two houses at the corner of the lane were I am told one complete house used first as a Bishop's residence, later as a residence for the Parish clergy. Finally it was taken over by the Corporation who raised the roof and divided it into two. In addition to Seminary Lane there were several other small lanes leading off the street, all with their quota of small dwellings. Kelly's Lane at the end of the street was the largest and connects Maudlin Street with Williams Lane and the Hebron Road. There was a salt refinery too owned and run by the Healy family.

WORK AND PLAY

From the earliest times until now many crafts and trades were carried on in this locality. There were blacksmiths, shoemakers, dressmakers, tailors, wheel-wrights and cart-makers, laundresses etc. One house, Mrs. Davis', was known as the "Mangle House" where women were employed as laundresses. I have been told that Kelly's lane and the houses on the hill were owned by Mr. Walsh one time owner of the Cloth Hall.

There were at least two corn mills. That at the end of the Street was used from very early times. Then it was used as a stone mill to cut large stone blocks for building. The open space by the river was known as "The Stones" which name may have been given to it because of the stepping stones across the river there. Until the 1st World War St. John's eve was celebrated here with bonfires and dancing.