

Irish Possessions of St. Thomas of Acre

By ERIC ST. J. BROOKS. R.I.A., 1956.

“IN Ireland there were two houses or hospitals which became possessions of the order (of St. Thomas), though the evidence points to their having originally been independent foundations. These were the Hospital of St. John the Baptist at Kilkenny, and that of St. John the Evangelist at Carrickmagriffin (Carrick-on-Suir), which are subsequently found as possessions of the London house.” The house at Kilkenny, like the one at Carrick-on-Suir, was originally independent, as the documents do not specifically state that the Hospital founded at Kilkenny in the time of William Marshal I. had any connection at that time with the order of St. Thomas of Acre.

“The earliest reference to the Kilkenny house is in the charter of Gilbert Marshal, earl of Pembroke (1234-41), who gave and confirmed to the knights and brethren of St. Thomas of Acon the house of St. John the Baptist at Kilkenny, with all its lands and appurtenances, for the sustenance of the knights and brethren of the Hospital of St. Thomas in the land of Jerusalem; on condition that the brethren of the said house of St. John of Kilkenny should maintain due care of the sick, as was provided and ordered by William Marshal, the grantor’s father and Isabella, his mother. The foundation, therefore, goes back to the time of William Marshal I. (i.e., before 1219), but the actual grant or transference to the house of St. Thomas of Acre may not have taken place until the time of his son, say, twenty years later (c. 1235). It may be well to note in passing that this Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Kilkenny is quite a distinct foundation from that of the much better known hospital of St. John the Evangelist in the same town, also founded by the Marshal and whose ruins still stand. The smaller hospital of St. John the Baptist disappears from our view after the thirteenth century and had probably ceased to exist.”

The Ormond family, who later succeeded the Marshals in Kilkenny, always had a close connection with the house of the Order of St. Thomas in London. Several members of the family are buried there: Thomas the 10th earl, by his will, dated 1576, asked that if he died in Ireland he was "to be buried with mine ancestors in the chancel of St. Canice's Church of Kilkenny, and if within the realm of England then I will that my body be buried in my father's tomb at St. Thomas of Dacres in London."