

Langton Houses

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The old Langton mansion over the Butter Slip on the High Street, Kilkenny was built by Nicholas Langton FitzRichard, who was described in the civic records as "a great and magnanimous man". It is evident that he was a man of talent, as he became Sovereign of Kilkenny in 1606, Alderman in 1609, and Mayor in 1613. His fellow townsmen thought enough of his ability to send him to the court of King James the First in London to sue for a new charter which would elevate his native place to the dignity of a city. Nicholas succeeded to the full extent of their wishes and brought home with a document that has since come to be known as the Great Charter of Kilkenny. It is not strange, then, that Langton was chosen to represent the City of Kilkenny, in company with his father-in-law, Patrick Archer FitzEdward, in the Parliament that sat in Dublin in April of 1613 to regulate the affairs of the nation.

Because of its size, the Langton house came to be known as "The Great Stone House" of Kilkenny. It extended from the High Street to Low Lane, now Kieran Street, and included the buildings on either side of the Butter Slip which are now occupied by Lanigan and Nolan, Solicitors, the Cafe Maria, Bourkes, and Shearman's Fish and Poultry Shop. Its builder was twice married: first to Lettice Daniel, whose father was agent to Lord Ormonde and secondly to Nichol Archer, the daughter of a Mayor of Kilkenny. By both wives, Langton fathered twenty five children and therefore built a home well equipped to house such a large family.

The premises are situated on a piece of land once called the "Freren Band" as it was abbey property confiscated by Henry VIII: It was on the east side of the High Street and adjoined the house in which Nicholas Langton was living. The facade of the "great stone house" is now much changed. Only one of its four round-headed arches remains. This gives entrance to the passage known as the Butter Slip, intended for horse and carriage traffic between High Street and Low Lane.

It was my grandfather, Michael John Madden, and his brother, James Comerford Madden who sold their ancestral home to the Wall family in 1866. The brothers were living in Sydney, Australia when they inherited the property and a country home at Danville, Co. Kilkenny, from their older brother, Father Edmund Madden, who had died in Monmouth, England, on March 28, 1865.

Possibly Nicholas Langton copied some of the features of the Rothe House in Coal Market, now Parliament Street, which was built in 1594 by his cousin and his wife's brother-in-law, John Rothe FitzPiers. The facades of both buildings presented thee customary archways to the street and both im-

paled the escutcheons of their builders. The arms of John Rothe FitzPiers are still to be seen, as are the arches in the front of his house, but the armorial bearings of Nicholas Langton have disappeared along with the great chimney which in both cases crowned the front gables of the houses. Interiorly the two buildings contained massive fireplaces and oaken floors supported by huge timbers resting on stone corbels. One can best form an impression of the general appearance of the Langton residence by visiting Rothe House. In the last few years it has been expertly restored and now contains the museum of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society.

Having considered the city mansion of Nicholas Langton, we now turn to his country house which was situated on the River Nore at Grennan, near Durrow, County Leix. In 1864 a portion of it existed in ruins. It was settled by Nicholas or the eldest son of his first marriage, James Langton, who died there, but it passed from the possession of his immediate descendants to the Wheeler family. Nicholas himself ended his days in this house, December 21, 1632, and was brought by boat to Kilkenny and buried in his own monument in the great choir of St. John's Abbey.

One may wonder if when Nicholas Langton acted as emissary of the town of Kilkenny in the court of King James the First, he seized the opportunity to visit the ancestral home of his grandfather, John Langton FitzRichard in Lancashire.

It was situated at Wigan and known as Low Hall. This moated house of the Lords of Hindley, was held by the annual rent of three pepper corns in free socage of the head of the family, the Baron of Newton, as Lord of the Fee of Makerfield, of which Hindley was a member. After John Langton, a younger son, left England for Kilkenny in 1486, the line of the eldest son continued on at Wigan until 1733 when the last Squire, Edward Langton died.

By 1960 practically nothing remained of the manor house of the family and the farm house which followed it, but evidence of the original moat which surrounded them could be seen.

Let us turn now to Danville House a few miles out of the City of Kilkenny. It was built by Michael, son of Sylvester Langton and his second wife, Mary Sexton, and great-grandson of Nicholas FitzRichard. I have in my possession a portrait of the builder, done in 1794 by John Comerford. He wears the powdered wig and lace cravat, the green and white striped vest and navy blue coat with gold buttons of his time. He was blue-eyed and of florid complexion and had a look of opulence. Undoubtedly he did well in the wine trade in which he was engaged with his cousins in Cadiz, Spain. Michael never married and lived to an advanced age. His companions at Danville House were his half-sister, Jane Langton, and his niece, Alice Langton who also never married. In her will, which was probated July 30, 1824, she left an "office, chalice and vestments". From which it is safe to assume that on occasion Mass was said at Danville.

Danville is set in its own park which contains trees so huge that they must have been planted by the builder. There is a leaded glass fan light over the door and parquet floors of the entrance hall. The spacious rooms con-

tained polished Kilkenny marble fireplaces and panelled window shutters. One wonders if Edmund Madden of High Street, Kilkenny, Michael Langton's nephew by marriage who was the proprietor of a cabinet-making firm, had a hand in the construction of this lovely country house. The kitchen was noteworthy for its size, and upstairs in the sleeping quarters, were canopied beds. Mr. Edward Stallard the present owner told me that in removing part of the flooring in the old house for the purpose of inserting some pipes, they found that animal bones had been placed among the beams to absorb any moisture that might collect there. When my brother and I returned for a visit in 1970, we noticed on the sideboard in the dining room, silver bearing the initials of our great-grandmother, Bridget, the daughter of Edward Cahill and Anne Martin. She had married Michael, son of Edmund Madden and Jane Comerford, about 1817. This substantiated a family tradition that the Madden brothers had sold the property furnished, leaving behind such personal effects as family silver.

These builders of former centuries were very thorough in the way they constructed their homes. Today their descendants are scattered in many continents and in some cases still preserve the tradition of their accomplishments. What a stimulus they have to build upon the great traditions of the past.

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