

# The Town Wall of Kilkenny

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## PART I

“**K**ILKENNIE, the best uplandish towne, or (as they terme it) the properest drie town in Ireland, is parted into the high towne and the Irish towne. The Irish towne claimeth a corporation apart from the high towne, whereby great factions grow dailie betweene the inhabitants. True it is that the Irish towne is the ancients, and was called the old Kilkennie, being under the bishop his becke, as they are or ought to be as this present. The high towne was builded by the English after the conquest, and had a parcell of the Irish towne thereto united, by the bishop his grant, made unto the founders upon their earnest request. In the year 1400, Robert Talbot, a worthie gentleman, inclosed with wals the better part of this towne, by which it was greatly fortified . . . . In the yeare one thousand foure hundred and fifteene, in November, Robert Talbot, a right noble man that walled the suburbs of Kilkennie departed this life”<sup>1</sup>

It is fitting that a paper purporting to deal with the defences of Kilkenny should begin with this quotation, as its last two sentences have been central to the discussion of the town wall since the early seventeenth century. The attempts to identify Robert Talbot and the fact that Stanihurst’s source remains unknown have made Kilkenny more fortunate than most Irish towns, for they have kept a controversy alive among local historians and have occasioned historical notice of the wall for over three hundred and fifty years.<sup>2</sup> Although this work has been done at local level, no study of Irish town walls as a military and social phenomenon has been published, and

<sup>1</sup>Stanihurst in Raphael Holinshed’s “Chronicles of England, Ireland and Scotland” (1586): “The description and history of Ireland” pp. 26–27. and “The Chronicles of Ireland” p.76.

<sup>2</sup>Rothe, D. “De Ossoriensi Diocesi,” 12, published in Carrigan, Canon W. “The History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory” III p.4.

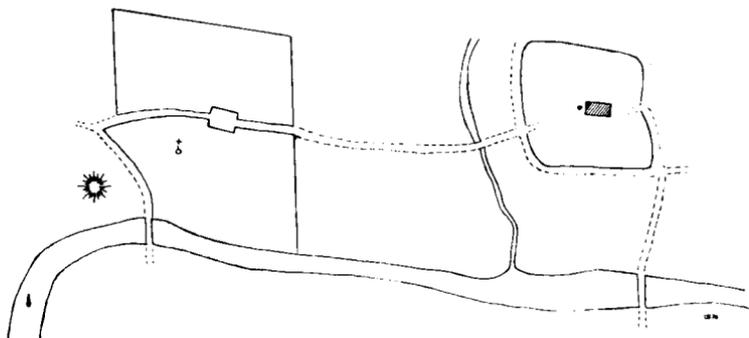
Ledwich, E. “A History of Irishtown and Kilkenny” (1781), pp.385–6.

Prim, J. G. A. “The Builder of the Walls of Kilkenny” in JRSAI 1 (1849–51), pp.34–37. Hogan, J. “Kilkenny” (1884), pp.14–15.

Carrigan, Canon W. op. cit. III, p.17; Mrs. C. J. Kenealy, “The Walls of Kilkenny” in OKR, 2 (1948), 32.

Birthisle, D. “Gateways in the Wall of Kilkenny” in OKR, 18 (1966) 5.

we must turn to Great Britain for parallels and comparisons, but this is only how it should be as the British Isles are probably best treated as one architectural province throughout the Middle Ages. My aim in writing this paper has been two fold: firstly to attempt to trace the development of the defences of Kilkenny and link architectural and historical evidence together as far as is possible, and secondly to list and describe the existing portions of the wall. The documentary sources which are relevant to this discussion are of five types, viz. maps, murage grants, records of the collection of the murage toll, incidental references in charters and narratives, and rent rolls; each of these shall be considered in due course.

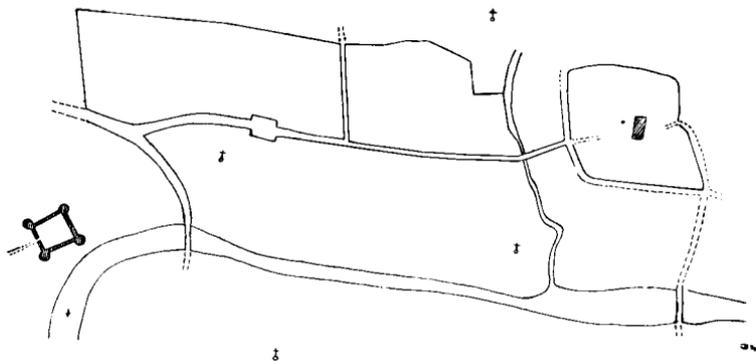


### I. KILKENNY c.1200

Our knowledge of the course of the wall is principally dependent on Rocque's map of the city published in 1753.<sup>3</sup> The walls of the hightown are shown distinctly and enclose a rectangular area approximately 1000 ft. x 2600 ft. The walls possess four mural towers, all facing towards the west, and seven gateways. There is no wall on the eastern side of the town, which is bounded by the river Nore, although a tower and wall to the east of St. Francis' "Abbey" may be construed as part of the defences; and no clear indication is given that Irishtown or the parish of St. John's were walled. The map presents the medieval town at its greatest extent, yet it is possible to trace in outline the growth of the town until the time of the erection of the wall in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The town which was founded at the foot of the Norman castle c.1190 was probably square in shape, stretching from present day Rose Inn Street to present day James' Street (Map I). With the arrival of

<sup>3</sup>Reproduced in Carrigan, *op. cit.* III, facing p.4.

William le Mareschall in 1207 and the establishment of Kilkenny as his Irish seat, so many colonists flocked to the town that the bishop granted the land between present day James' Street and the river Bregagh to William in order to accommodate the new settlers.<sup>4</sup> On the south side the town expanded to form the existing boundary of St. Mary's Parish, which was established about this time (Map II). The entrances to the town then became the focal points



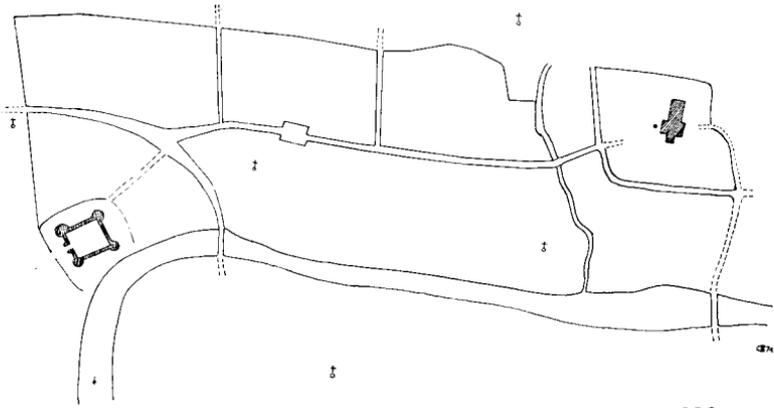
## II. KILKENNY c.1240

for settlement, and while there is no documentary evidence, it would appear that by the time of the construction of the wall land had been added in Patrick Street, while the Irishtown spreading around the new cathedral and the northern and western entrances to the hightown had become a clearly defined unit (Maps III and IV). Throughout these periods of development the town was probably defended by a fosse and rampart of earth, but it was hardly sufficient to protect an expanding town in a frontier situation, and the first definite indication of the townspeople's interest in defence appears in the mid-thirteenth century when the Earl of Gloucester petitioned the King "to grant to his burgesses of Kilkenny a murage for seven years to enclose their vill, according to the form of the murage of Bristol."<sup>5</sup>

The basic justification for the construction of a wall was one of defence, and during the thirteenth century the inhabitants of Kilkenny needed protection not only from

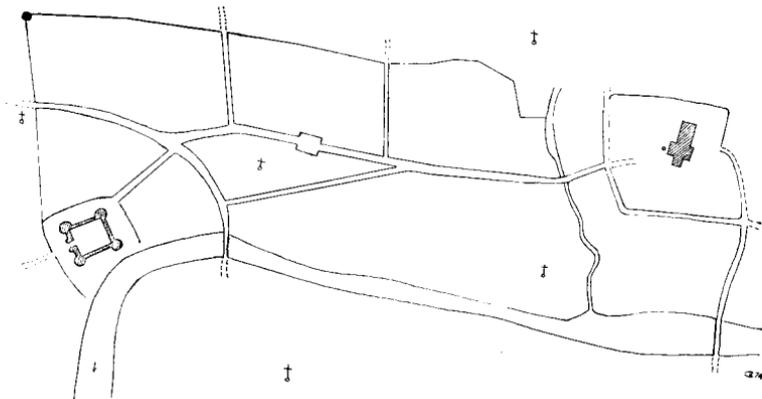
<sup>4</sup>c.f. Graves, Rev. J. and Prim, J. G. A. "The history, architecture and antiquities of the City of Kilkenny I: Irishtown," *JRSAI*. V (1858-9), 322-31.

<sup>5</sup>CDI, I, No. 732.



III. KILKENNY c.1280

attacks by the native Irish, but also from inter-baronial strife. There were other reasons however which made a wall advantageous to the townspeople: parliaments, which would bring trade, would be encouraged to sit in towns which could withstand attack. Traders would be likely to establish themselves where their business would be secure. Tolls could be collected more easily when the means of ingress and egress were limited to a few gates. Mural towers and the rooms over gates could be rented out and thus provide needed revenue for the town authorities. A closer watch on the movements of people in and out of the town could be kept, while walls also acted as a barrier



IV. KILKENNY c.1320

against plague and the entry of infected persons. The possession of a town wall was a status symbol, and the arms of Kilkenny — a triple turreted gatehouse — show that civic pride perhaps, played a part in its construction. The thirteenth century seal of the barons of London and the seals of Colchester and Shrewsbury also portray sections of a town wall, and in Medieval art and cartography the wall is represented at the most distinctive feature of a city. To the medieval mind the wall was an indication of a great city, its magnificence a sign of economic prosperity and a reflection of what the town thought itself to be.

The construction of a town wall was a slow, laborious and costly project however, and throughout the Middle Ages the murage grant remained as the most important source of revenue for any town wishing to build a wall. The grant consisted of the permission of the King to levy a toll on specific goods entering the town, the proceeds of which were to be used to construct the wall. Wherever the grant occurs it is an indication of the desire to construct permanent defences of stone. The monies raised by the grant were restricted and varied considerably from year to year,<sup>6</sup> so that it was impossible for a town to budget its building programme. The collection of the toll was complex and the money normally passed through many hands before reaching the town treasury, so that there were many opportunities for speculation. As the revenue raised was normally small, the grants were continued over long periods of time, and this makes the uses to which the money was put even more suspect. Merchants and religious began to gain exemptions from the payment of murage and this factor coupled with the many opportunities for abuse rendered the murage grant ineffective as a means of raising revenue, and in England it was largely replaced during the fourteenth century by a tax based on an assessment of the inhabitants' property in the town.

The known murage grants of Kilkenny cover a period of almost two hundred years between c.1250 and 1440. The first grant appears to be the one quoted above in which the Earl of Gloucester petitions the King to grant a murage for seven years. This grant is given the impossibly early date of 1216 by Sweetman in his "Calendar of Documents." It must refer to some time after 1232 when Bristol received its first grant, and probably to after 1248 when the Earl of Gloucester inherited the Mareschall's estates in Kilkenny,

<sup>6</sup>c.f. Turner. H. L., "Town Defences in England and Wales," Appendix B, pp.231—237.

thus a date of 1250 should not be too far from the true date of the grant. The grant shows the Earl in an interesting light, for it was unusual for a lord to fortify his towns, as it made his tenants less dependent on him for protection. Here however, it appears that the Earl saw the economic advantages which a wall would bring to his town and the increase in revenue which he could expect from it. The second grant occurred in 1266 when Henry III ratified "the murage granted for three years at the instance of G(ilbert) de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Hereford by Edward, the kings eldest son . . . to the men of Kilkenny, to fortify their city."<sup>7</sup> The first grant whose text survives occurs in 1282 and I give here for the sake of completeness:—

"Grant to the bailiffs and men of Kilkenny for three years from the feast of St. John the Baptist, in the tenth year of our (Edward I) reign, of the following customs to aid them in enclosing their vill, namely:—  
from each ship coming to the vill laden with wine or other merchandise, 3d.

from each boat laden with merchandise, 1d.

from each last of herrings, 2d.

from each thousand herrings,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

from each seam of herrings,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

from each cartload of seafish, 4d.

from each seam of seafish, 1d.

from each 20 salmon, 1d.

from each horse, mare, ox or cow,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

from each hide of horse, mare, ox or cow, fresh, salted or tanned,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

from each last of oxhides, 6d.

from 10 sheep or hogs, 1d.

from each salt pig,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

from each hundred sheep's fells, 2d.

from each hundred of skins of lambs, rabbits or hares,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

from each timber of fox skins, 1d.

from each thousand of badger skins, 6d.

from each timber of squirrel skins,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

from each sack of wool, 2d.

from each wey of wool,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

from each truss of cloth, not bound,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.

from each bound truss of cloth of the value of 24s. or more, 1d.

from each hundred of linen or canvas cloth, 1d.

from each whole cloth,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

from each hundred nets, 1d.  
 from each cartload of billets,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.  
 from each hundred of foreign boards, 1d.  
 from each hundred of muvels, 1d.  
 from each garb of steel,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.  
 from each hundred of felt, 1d.  
 from each hundred of pitch, oil or tar, 1d.  
 from each cartload of lead, 2d.  
 from each hundred of wax, 1d.  
 from each wey of grease, tallow, butter or cheese,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.  
 from each seam of corn,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.  
 from each hundred of pepper, 2d.  
 from each hundred of almonds, 1d.  
 from each hundred of cummin,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.  
 from each frail of figs,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.  
 from each frail of raisins,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.  
 from each seam of onions,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.  
 from each thousand artichokes,  $\frac{1}{4}$ d.  
 from each hundred of butter, 2d.  
 from each hogshead of white peas, 2d.  
 from each hundred of alum, 2d.  
 from each celdre of salt, 1d.  
 from each hogshead of wine, 1d.  
 from each hogshead of cinders, 1d.  
 from each hundred oars, 2d.  
 from each millstone,  $\frac{1}{2}$ d.

At the end of three years the customs shall cease and be abolished. Granted at Devizes, April 12, 1282.”<sup>8</sup>

This is followed by further grants — in 1284, of four years;<sup>9</sup> in 1291 of four years,<sup>10</sup> and in 1306 of five years.<sup>11</sup> It is unfortunate that the “Calendar of Documents” stops at 1307 for it is likely that the grants are continued throughout the fourteenth century. The text of a grant of 1375 “to aid the *repair* of walls, pavements and bridges”<sup>12</sup> is given by Ledwich. It would seem to indicate that the wall was complete by 1375. Two fifteenth century grants, one of 1406 and the other of 1440 are preserved in the corporation archives, but both remain unpublished. The existence of another fifteenth century grant is suggested by the memorandum of c.1429 that Maurice Stafford was paid 26s. 8d. for “his labours and expenses about the charter

<sup>8</sup>CDI, II, No. 1913.

<sup>9</sup>CDI, II, No. 2136.

<sup>10</sup>CDI, III, No. 912.

<sup>11</sup>CDI, V, No. 537.

<sup>12</sup>Ledwich, op. cit. Appendix V, pp.550—553.

of the murage of the town."<sup>13</sup> The text of yet another grant, of uncertain date, is transcribed in the *Liber Primus*.<sup>14</sup> These grants, then, would suggest that some form of work, whether in the nature of construction or repair, was in progress on the Wall between c.1250 and 1440; it now remains for us to see what information can be gleaned from the records of the collection of the murage toll.

Kilkenny is not as fortunate as some English towns, where the murage records survive to give an almost year by year account of the progress of the wall — for us they survive solely in relation to murage farming. This was a method by which the town authorities set the collection of the murage, with all the difficulties involved therein, to a private individual in return for a stipulated cash payment. The list of those to whom the murage was farmed and the amounts which they paid for it is almost complete for the years between 1370 and 1401,<sup>15</sup> and after the latter date no mention is made of it. The first occurrence is in 1352 when "William le Lumbard received the murage of the town of Kilkenny at farm from the community for one year . . . paying £4 sterling."<sup>16</sup> This payment is very small, and is not explainable as a result of the plague of 1349 for the murage is farmed throughout the century for similar sums, viz. in 1371 for eight marks (£5. 6s. 8d.), in 1374 for nine marks (£6), in 1386 for 33 crannocs of lime, in 1401 for £2. If such were the monies available for construction it suggests that the walls were either of poor quality or else that this income was used purely for repair work. The fact that the existing portions of the wall are not very impressive (by English standards) and do not display any great architectural merit might be taken to support the former surmise. In view of the charter published by Ledwich, however, which specifically mentions the repair of the walls I would favour the theory that these monies were used for repair work only, and I would therefore suggest that the wall of the hightown had been completed before 1352. Some incidental references to the wall are worth noting here. In four grants of land dated between 1331 and 1351 "the great wall of the town" is mentioned as a boundary,<sup>17</sup> and although the medieval burgages of Kilkenny have not been plotted as yet on a modern map, it would appear correct to suggest from these

<sup>13</sup>LPK, p.62.

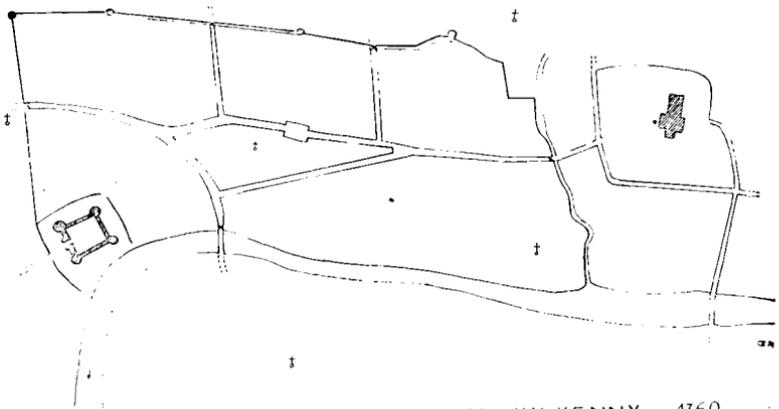
<sup>14</sup>LPK, pp.120—21.

<sup>15</sup>cf. LPK, pp.39—53.

<sup>16</sup>LPK, p.33.

<sup>17</sup>Curtis I, Nos. 627, 733 and 804, and LPK pp.30—1.

grants that the greater part of the west wall of the town was standing by 1351. The earliest mention of a gate is of Walkelin's Barre in a charter of 1305,<sup>18</sup> while the "middle gate of Kilkenny" is referred to in 1334 when the prior of the Black Abbey received its key.<sup>19</sup> The "middle gate" is difficult to identify, but perhaps it is St. James' Gate which would have been the nearest gate to the Abbey until the construction of the Black Freren Gate. Thus it is not too venturesome to suggest that the wall of the hightown, begun c.1250, was completed by 1352 (Map V). It may be



objected that this period of one hundred years is unduly long for the walling of the hightown, but it is worth bearing in mind that the circumvallation of Southampton took 120 years, Coventry 180 years, Norwich and Newcastle approximately 60 years, and these towns were not much larger than the medieval hightown of Kilkenny.

As I have already mentioned abuses were almost inevitable in the collection of the murage toll. These abuses were basically of two kinds: either the money was embezzled by the collectors or stolen — as at Dundalk in 1305<sup>20</sup> — or else money was extorted or gathered illegally

<sup>18</sup>JRSAI, XII (1872—73), 532—33. Some years ago a great controversy surrounded the origin of the name Walkin's Gate. Without wishing to revive old passions the name Walkin appears to be derived from Walkelyn a surname which is found in the early fourteenth century at Gowran ("Red Book of Ormond," pp.43, 47, 98) and in Leicester ("Archaeologia," XLVII (1882), p.99).

<sup>19</sup>LPK, p.27.

<sup>20</sup>"Calendar of Justiciary Rolls," Edward I, part II (1305—09), p.126.

— as at Scarborough in 1274 when the burgesses were accused of taking the toll for two years longer than granted. Another example of the latter was found at Kilkenny in 1376 when the sovereign of the hightown was forbidden to obstruct the sale of victuals in Irishtown “under pretence of custom for murage.”<sup>21</sup> One of the problems at Kilkenny appears to be that the murage farmers defaulted on payment, for the authorities became noticeably insistent on prompt remuneration. In 1378 payment is stipulated as being due at the end of the year, in 1382 as payable in halves due at Easter and the feast of St. Michael, while in 1383 it is due quarterly at Christmas, Easter, the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist, and the feast of St. Canice.<sup>22</sup> In the last mentioned year John Rothe bought the murage for 100s., and he was to be the subject of the only recorded but very momentous case of embezzlement in Kilkenny. On October 21, 1384 he was charged that “against his oath and against the Liberty of Kilkenny he concealed the money of the murage of the said town granted by King Richard and said many outrageous words to the sovereign” to which he pleaded guilty. He seems to have enjoyed great favour, however, and was only admonished for his crime, and indeed the words he said to the sovereign were considered to be of more importance than the money he concealed. His sentence was in the form of an obligation, that he would give a cask of wine to the sovereign should he ever again rise up against him.<sup>23</sup> Apart from these niceties of the law, the case is of interest to us in that it caused a closer watch to be kept on the gathering of the murage toll and the appointment of a custodian of the murage and keepers at the existing gates, the list of which survives:—

“Robert Barton was elected to the custody of the murage of the town of Kilkenny for one year, receiving thence for his labour 20s. and rendering a faithful account thereof, etc.

Martin Towker is keeper of the murage of the gate of Walkynnesbarr’, taking yearly for his labour, 3s.

John Vale is keeper of the murage of St. Patrick’s gate, taking yearly for his labour, 4s.

John Corviser is keeper of the gate of Irishtown and of that murage, taking yearly, 8s.

Thomas Malgraff is keeper of the murage of St. John’s Gate, taking yearly for his labour, 4s.

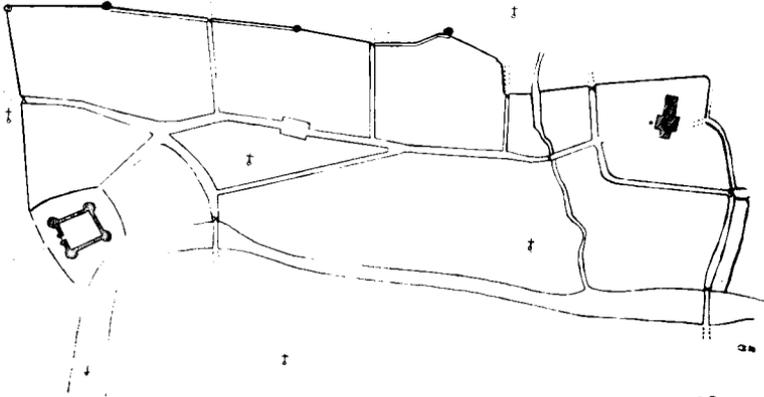
<sup>21</sup>Ledwich, *op. cit.* p.355.

<sup>22</sup>L.P.K. pp.41—42.

<sup>23</sup>L.P.K. p.44.

Thomas Abraham is keeper of St. James' Gate, taking from the murage 2s. yearly."<sup>24</sup>

This list of the gates indicates that the Black Freren Gate and the Castle Gate were added subsequent to 1384. The "brittas of the Friars Preachers" is mentioned in 1397,<sup>25</sup> and the Castle Gate was in existence by 1427<sup>26</sup> and possibly by 1393.<sup>27</sup> The piercing of the walls for the construction of gates to friaries was quite common and is found at Dublin,<sup>28</sup> Shrewsbury and Worcester among others.



VI KILKENNY c1400

The late date for the construction of the Castle Gate was due to the fact that the castle defenses remained separate from those of the town,<sup>29</sup> and this weakening of them could only come at a time of relative peace in the country. It is difficult to reconstruct the defences of the castle, but it would appear that the Norman motte was superseded by a wedge-shaped fortress with towers at each angle, to which a twin-bastioned gatehouse was added in the late thirteenth century. The whole was probably surrounded by a moat and an outer wall.<sup>30</sup> Even in the seventeenth century the castle remained formidable, and Cromwell

<sup>24</sup>LPK, pp.43 - 44.

<sup>25</sup>LPK, p.52. In the "Liber Primus" "brittas" seems to be used as an equivalent of "gate."

<sup>26</sup>Rothe op. cit. 23.

<sup>27</sup>cf. LPK, p.112.

<sup>28</sup>Goodbody, Mrs. D. "The Walls of Dublin" in "Dublin Historical Record." XVII (1962), pp.127-9.

<sup>29</sup>cf. LPK, p.13.

<sup>30</sup>In this form the Castle would have been remarkably similar to Caernhill, the Earl of Gloucester's English seat cf. Clarke, G. T. "Medieval Military Architecture in England," I, 315 -335, and R. A. Brown "English Castles" (1962), p.83.

wrote to Parliament "we finde the castle exceedingly well fortified . . . so that if we had taken the town, we must have had a new work for the castle,"<sup>31</sup> while the defences of the main gate are described as a mount of stone, a castle, an outergate and a small castle.<sup>32</sup> There would appear to have been some neglect of the defences in the fifteenth century, for we find the Earl of Ormond granting land "between the inner and outer walls of the castle of Kilkenny, for the purpose of raising and building houses"<sup>33</sup> in 1434. It can be inferred from the grants of murage to Kilkenny during the first half of the fifteenth century that the town defences did not fall into total decay. Nonetheless, the fact that the *Liber Primus* mentions no collector of murage after 1401 would raise suspicion as to the uses to which the money was put. Apart from the castle gate the "Portebridge" is also mentioned as being in existence in 1427; it was possibly some form of drawbridge to the castle, or more likely a gatehouse on the east side of St. John's Bridge.

The murage of Irishtown is first mentioned in 1377,<sup>34</sup> and it is the earliest indication that this area was walled. The course of the Irishtown wall remains doubtful, but the best conjecture is that of Hogan,<sup>35</sup> which is based on the house and field boundaries shown on Rocque's map. The original defences of Irishtown probably possessed three gates viz. Dean's Gate, Troy's Gate and Green's Gate to which Watergate, the entrance to the hightown was later added. The area enclosed by the walls was approximately one-fifth of the size of the hightown, and this ratio is all but maintained in the amounts at which the respective murages were farmed.<sup>36</sup> This raises the question of whether the walls of Irishtown were being constructed or repaired in 1377? If the walls of Irishtown and hightown were of equal strength, we could deduce from the retention of the same ratio between land area and the amount of the murage that the wall was being repaired. The walls of Irishtown and hightown were not of equal strength however, and it is because of this factor that I believe the walls of Irishtown were still being built in 1377. It is worth noting here that the murage of Irishtown was bought from the Sovereign and Burgesses of the hightown and not from

<sup>31</sup>J. T. Gilbert, "A Contemporary History of Affairs in Ireland 1641—'52," II, p.385.

<sup>32</sup>R. C. Simington, "The Civil Survey," VI pp.534—35.

<sup>33</sup>Curtis, III, No. 115.

<sup>34</sup>LPK, p.41.

<sup>35</sup>Hogan, "Kilkenny," map opposite p.13.

<sup>36</sup>LPK, p.41 ff.

their counterpart (the Bishop) in Irishtown. The earliest indications of exemptions from payment of murage occur in the late fourteenth century. In 1384 the murage of Irishtown was farmed to Maurice Taullor for 16s. but it was stipulated that "if the abbot and his men pay the murage then the said Maurice shall pay 2s. more to the sovereign and community."<sup>37</sup> The burgesses of the hightown also claimed exemption from payment and in the confirmation charter of their rights (1383) they are "quit of toll, lastage, passage, pontage, murage and all other customs and dues throughout the realm of . . . the king of England."<sup>38</sup>

It is with regard to the Irishtown that we must assess the significance of Robert Talbot (?—1415) called "the builder of the walls of Kilkenny" by Stanihurst, Marleburgh, Ware and others.<sup>39</sup> While this would appear to be a false ascription, the insistence of the chroniclers cannot be easily ignored. Their source remains unknown, and is not among the existing town records. The fact that the source appears to be unknown to David Rothe,<sup>40</sup> the Bishop of Ossory and early seventeenth century historian, would indicate that the chroniclers received their information somewhere outside Kilkenny. It is known that Richard Talbot was the sovereign of Kilkenny in 1399—1400,<sup>41</sup> and it is worth noting that Burke<sup>42</sup> and Ledwich<sup>43</sup> say that *Richard* Talbot was the builder, but this has been generally accepted as a scribal error for Robert. Nonetheless, whichever Talbot the historians intended, the claim of building the walls must be discounted on the basis of the material cited above, and the probability that the hightown was completely walled by 1352. My conclusion is that the construction of the wall of Irishtown was completed in 1400, when the then entire town of Kilkenny would have been circumvallated, and this may explain why the chroniclers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attributed the building of the walls to Robert Talbot.

It appears that until the late fourteenth century the expansion of the town was confined to the west bank of the Nore, and although there was some settlement on the east bank, the ward of St. John's only began to expand in

<sup>37</sup>LPK, 44.

<sup>38</sup>LPK, 14.

<sup>39</sup>cf. Prim in JRSAI, Vol. I (1849—51), pp.34—37.

<sup>40</sup>cf. Rothe, op. cit. 12.

<sup>41</sup>cf. Gilberts list of the sovereigns of Kilkenny in the "Second Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission" (1874), Appendix p.259.

<sup>42</sup>cf. Prim op. cit.

<sup>43</sup>Ledwich, op. cit. 385.

the fifteenth century. Throughout the latter century it is referred to as being either "by Kilkenny" or "outside the walls."<sup>44</sup> By the early sixteenth century however, it was considered as a part of the town, and was surrounded by its own ditch and perhaps some portions of a wall.<sup>45</sup> It is likely that "St. John's" was not completely walled until the seventeenth century, for the first indication that it is walled occurs in Cromwell's letter to Parliament on the capture of Kilkenny in 1650 (see below), while Rothe, also writing in the seventeenth century indicates that it was not walled.<sup>46</sup> Apart from this expansion of the town the fifteenth century would appear to have heralded a neglect of the town's defences, as no records of the murage toll are kept while the castle weakened its defences. Yet by the end of the century new towers appear to have been erected outside the Castle Gate, the Hightown Gate, and St. John's Gate;<sup>47</sup> four of the Gates were "made new and repaired" in 1500,<sup>48</sup> while the existence of the Outer Gate of St. John's is noted in 1506.<sup>49</sup>

The development of guns and ordnance brought about a great change in military fortifications. Medieval defences were rendered useless because of the highly destructive effects large guns had on the fortresses of the time, while, needless to say, cannon mounted in forts, themselves disrupted the formalised and leisurely routine of besieging armies and brought about a totally new form of warfare. While cannon were known in Ireland during the late fourteenth century, their usage did not become popular until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, probably because of the excessive size and unwieldy nature of the early bombards. Although the making of guns at Kilkenny is mentioned in 1517<sup>50</sup> one receives the impression that the townspeople remained oblivious to the existence of artillery until the seventeenth century. It can be presumed that the townspeople still engaged in archery — indeed they probably exercised their skill as Ledwich suggested<sup>51</sup> in the area of St. Canice's parish known as "the Butts." The bastioned system of defence which developed in the Mediterranean and spread quickly across Europe in the mid-sixteenth century —

<sup>44</sup>cf. LPK, 54, 58, 75, etc.

<sup>45</sup>cf. Watters, JRSAI XII (1872-'73), pp.204-206.

<sup>46</sup>Rothe, *op. cit.* 12.

<sup>47</sup>LPK, 116-117.

<sup>48</sup>LPK, 82.

<sup>49</sup>LPK, 93.

<sup>50</sup>LPK, 103.

variants of which are found at Galway and Kinsale — did not affect the medieval fortifications of Kilkenny. The gates of the town, which were normally the best defended sections of the wall were rented out under the usual requirements of maintaining them “stiffe, strong, staunch and tenantable” and of allowing the sovereign and burgesses free access to them in time of “danger, war or necessity.”<sup>52</sup> This practice is found in almost every medieval walled town, for it was one of the few sources of revenue available to the town authorities. The earliest occurrence of this practice in Kilkenny is in 1393, when according to the rent roll of that year four gates were rented: St. Johns Barr to John Deier for 2s., Walkynesbarre to Robert Dullard for 20d., while the names of the tenants do not survive for “St. Patrick’s brittas” and St. James’ brittas.”<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless this renting of the gates would lead naturally to modifications in their defence as the tenants made adjustments to turn them into more comfortable living quarters. Too much emphasis can be placed on the military character of the gates, and it is important to remember that they also served as concentration points for the collection of tolls. While we have noted the seemingly oblivious attitude to cannon, it would be a mistake to think that the defences were totally neglected: William Body wrote in 1536 that “the town of Kilkenny is well walled and well replenished of people and wealthy,”<sup>54</sup> while the wasting of lands around the town during the revolts of Silken Thomas, the Earl of Desmond and Hugh O’Neill ensured that the walls remained functional. The rebels did not utilise cannon, however, and the anachronistic forms of defence probably continued at Kilkenny until the arrival of Oliver Cromwell.

The defences of the city were greatly strengthened when it became the seat of the Confederate Parliament in 1642. Dutch engineers were employed,<sup>55</sup> ordnance was brought to and from the city, ramparts were probably laid against the walls to protect them from cannon shot, while the regulations of the night watch at the time still survive.<sup>56</sup> These precautions proved to be necessary when the city was besieged by Cromwell in 1650. It was to be

<sup>51</sup>Ledwich, *op. cit.* 358.

<sup>52</sup>Watters in *JRSAI*, XII (1872--73), p.p.202--222 gives the texts of many rentals.

<sup>53</sup>LPK, 112-113.

<sup>54</sup>Letter of William Body to Thomas Cranwell in “Calendar of the Carew Mss.” Vol. I, 105.

<sup>55</sup>Calendar of the Mss. of the Marquis of Ormonde” (*Hist. Mss. Comm.*), Vol. I, N.S. (1902), 53.

<sup>56</sup>Watters, *op. cit.* 218.

the only siege in which the town defences were tested, and while the town surrendered after a week, the basically medieval defences proved themselves capable of withstanding cannon shot. While this siege has been dealt with elsewhere,<sup>57</sup> I shall quote Cromwell's own account which will suffice here:—

“ . . . coming with our body within a mile of the town we advanced with some horse very near unto it; and that evening I sent Sir Walter Butler (governor of the castle) and the corporation a letter (summoning them to surrender) . . . We took the best view we could where to plant our batteries; and upon Monday the 25th our battery consisting of three guns began to play. After near a hundred shot we made a breach, as we hoped stormable — our men were drawn out ready for the attempt; and Colonel Ewers ordered with about one thousand foot to endeavour to possess the Irishtown much about the time of our storming, which he accordingly did, with the loss of not above three or four men. Our men upon the signal fell upon the breach, which indeed was not performed with usual courage nor success, but were beaten off with the loss of one captain, and about twenty or thirty men killed or wounded. The enemy had made two retrenchments or counter-works which they had strongly palizado'd; and both of them did so command our breach, that indeed it was a mercy to us, we did not further contend for an entrance there, it being probable that if we had, it would have cost us very dear.

“ Having possessed the Irishtown, and there being another walled town on the other side of the river: eight companies of foot were sent over the river to possess that, which accordingly was effected, and not above the like number lost that were in possessing the Irish town. The officer that commanded th' party in chief, attempting to pass over the bridge into the city, and to fire the gate, which indeed was done with good resolution, but lying too open to the enemy shot, he had forty or fifty men killed and wounded, which was a sore blow to us. We made our preparations for a second battery, which was well near perfected. The enemy seeing himself thus begirt sent for a treaty, and

<sup>57</sup>Gilbert, J. T. "A Contemporary History of Affairs in Ireland 1641- '52." Vol. II. op.365ff; Murphy, D. "Cromwell in Ireland," 293-319; Carrigan, op. cit. III. 33-44; Clohosey, J. T. "Cromwell's Siege of Kilkenny," OKR, 8 (1955), 36-47; Keane, J. E. K. "The Cromwellian Siege of Kilkenny," OKR, 16 (1964), 75-82.

had it; and in some hours agreed to deliver up the castle upon the articles inclosed . . . and we look at it a gracious mercy that we have the place for you (Parliament) upon these terms."<sup>58</sup>

Some accounts which follow on the Cromwellian siege are of interest: the Civil Survey took notice of many of the defences and mentions a sallyport and "drawinge bridge," situated near the castle;<sup>59</sup> the Down survey maps show Troy's Gate as the only fortified entrance of the Irishtown;<sup>60</sup> the drawings of Francis Place show the wall from the south, with alterations in progress at the Castle.<sup>61</sup> Preparations were made for a siege in 1689-'90, but when the news of the battle of the Boyne reached the city, the merchants gave their allegiance to William and elected a new mayor, after which the threat of a siege disappeared. Some of the documents relating to these preparations have been published<sup>62</sup> and these show that the gates were repaired and given new locks, the ordnance overhauled and the gun-carriages repaired, St. Mary's church was turned into an arsenal, sakers were placed on the "half-moons" of the city walls, and ramparts were laid against the walls. These hasty preparations would indicate that in the forty years following the Cromwellian siege the defences were neglected once again. The "half-moons" or demi-lunes were outworks, which resembling a bastion with a crescent shaped gorge, were constructed to protect a bastion or curtain wall, but in this case it is possible that it is the bastions of the city wall itself which are alluded to.

After 1690 the city defences were no longer used for military purposes and in common with those of other towns in Ireland they fell into decay.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless the mayor and citizens still endeavoured to make revenue from them:—the rampart at Evans Lane was rented out in 1735 and again in 1758;<sup>64</sup> ramparts at St. James' Gate and Walkin's Gate were worth 12s. 6d. in 1740,<sup>65</sup> while that at Tobins Lane brought in £4 per annum at late as 1794.<sup>66</sup> The rooms

<sup>58</sup>Gilbert, *op. cit.* 385.

<sup>59</sup>Simington, *op. cit.* p.552.

<sup>60</sup>National Library Ms. 720.

<sup>61</sup>*cf.* Maher, J. "Francis Place in Drogheda, Kilkenny, Waterford, etc." *JRSAI*, LXIV (1934), esp. Plate XII (now in the National Gallery of Ireland).

<sup>62</sup>*cf.* Ledwich, *op. cit.* 441—443, and Watters, *JRSAI*, XVII (1885), 36—39.

<sup>63</sup>*cf.* Holland in *JCHAS*, XXIII, Series 2 (1917), 199—205.

<sup>64</sup>Rent roll of 1812 (in possession of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland).

<sup>65</sup>*ib.*

<sup>66</sup>Rent roll of 1794 (in possession of R.S.A.I.).

over St. James' Gate were rented to William Watters in 1765<sup>67</sup> while the Tilbury (i.e. Kilberry?) tower is mentioned on the rent rolls of the early nineteenth century and was probably inhabited until its destruction c.1840. It would appear that St. John's Gate was inhabited until its disappearance in the flood of 1763. The defences of Irishtown and the ward of St. John's were probably taken down or destroyed in the early eighteenth century. The new policies of road-widening and the rendering of easy access to the city caused the destruction of much of the defences. The widening of the Castle Road in 1769 resulted in the demolition of the Castle Gate.<sup>68</sup> The construction of the Ormonde Road in 1836 caused the destruction of the wall there. The removal of Walkin's Gate in 1788,<sup>69</sup> the Irishtown Gate at the turn of the eighteenth century, St. James' Gate in 1860 and St. Patrick's Gate c.1895 were excused as part of the policy of facilitating ingress to and egress from the city. The wheel had turned full circle — the policy for which the gates were built to control had now swept them away. In 1809 houses were erected on the site of the wall between Walkin's Gate and the bastion at Colliers Lane,<sup>70</sup> and in 1860 the wall between James' Street and the Kilberry tower was removed in order to erect a school.

During the past seven centuries the role of the town wall has changed from a position in which it was indispensable to the life of the town, to its present one of curio. In summarising the historical evidence, three phases in the circumvallation of Kilkenny may be distinguished. Firstly, the building of the hightown wall in the late thirteenth — early fourteenth century; secondly, the walling of Irishtown, probably completed in 1400; thirdly, the walling of St. John's in the seventeenth century. The available evidence suggests that the construction of the hightown wall took the greater part of a century, and that the medieval defences remained in use until the Cromwellian assault. After the excitement of 1689-'90 the defences fell into decay, although the Corporation still utilised them to gain revenue. In the next issue the existing sections of the wall will be examined and the architectural evidence assessed so that a comprehensive picture of the wall may be obtained.

<sup>67</sup>Rent roll of 1812.

<sup>68</sup>cf. JRSAI. XII (1872-'73), 57.

<sup>69</sup>Hogan, *op. cit.* p.15 note.

<sup>70</sup>ib.

**ABBREVIATIONS**

- CDI—Calendar of Documents relating to Ireland, 1171--1307. 5 vols. London 1875--1886.  
CLAJ—County Louth Archaeological Journal.  
Curtis—Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 6 vols. Dublin, 1932--43, edited by Edmund Curtis.  
JCHAS—Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society.  
JGAS—Journal of the Galway Archaeological Society.  
JRSAI—Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland.  
LPK—Liber Primus Kilkenniensis, ed. and trans. J. Othway-Ruthven, Kilkenny, 1961.  
NMAJ—North Munster Antiquarian Journal.  
OKR—Old Kilkenny Review.

**THE DISCOVERY OF A PORTION OF 13th CENTURY  
WALL AT KILKENNY CASTLE**

CLAIR FOLEY

IN October and November 1973, during the preparation of ground for a new boiler house at the South East Corner of Kilkenny Castle, an archaeological investigation was undertaken by the Office of Public Works under the direction of C. Foley. It was hoped that foundations of an early corner tower would be found. Excavation in the area 8 x 14 metres, revealed a portion of a wall 1.80m. wide, which though not complete was standing to a height of 1.45m. This appears to have been a portion of an outer curtain, or bawn wall. It was not running parallel to the present South Castle wall, but at an angle to it on a N.W./S.E. axis. Twenty five sherds of 13th century pottery, and an assortment of nails were found in a layer of occupation debris lying at the base of this wall. This layer extended Northwards towards the present Castle Wall and averaged 60 cms. in thickness. It was blackest in the area next to the discovered portion of wall, becoming increasingly greyer towards the present Castle. It was overlain by a layer of soft mortar and small stones. This appears to be the debris of a collapsed building. Lying over this was an average of 4.50m. of redeposited boulder clay which has brought the old ground level up to the ground-floor window level of the present Castle.