

KILLALOE: A PRE-NORMAN BOROUGH?

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ABSTRACT. Post-Norman records indicate that Killaloe was an early borough. It probably predated the Normans. Here the early history of the related and adjacent sites, Killaloe (Cell Da Lua) and Kincora (Ceann Coradh), is traced. The one was a monastic site and later cathedral, the other a royal centre of the Uí Briain kings of Ireland—a unique combination outside the Scandinavian towns of Ireland. This settlement had urban functions, was a centre of royal and episcopal administration, and had a Hiberno-Scandinavian community.

KEYWORDS: borough, settlement, royal fortress, urbanisation, Hiberno-Scandinavians, Killaloe, Ceann Coradh, Muirchertach Ua Briain

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In 1177 Henry II granted the Ua Briain kingdom of Limerick, excepting the city and the cantred of the Ostmen, to Philip de Braose but his attempt to take possession met with failure outside the walls of Limerick.¹ Eight years later, in 1185, John, as lord of Ireland, ignored this earlier grant and bestowed considerable parts of east Munster in a series of major fiefs, the largest of which, consisting of the borough of Killaloe and five-and-a-half cantreds in the kingdom of Limerick, went to Ranulf de Glanville and Theobald Walter. The actual charter recording this grant survived in the Butler archive at Kilkenny Castle until the eighteenth century and it was first published by Thomas Carte in 1736.² Between that time, however, and the cataloguing of the collections by Curtis earlier in this century the original was lost. Nonetheless, the text survives in an inspeimus of 1572.³ and there is an important variant of it in the agreement arrived at between Theobald Walter and Philip de Braose's nephew, Walter, in 1201.⁴ The text of the latter document states that the grant to Theobald Walter consisted of:

quinque cantredas terre et dimidium in terra de Munestir scilicet burgum de Kildelo cum medietate cantredi qui vocatur Truoheleked Maeth in quo ille burgus situs est cum omnibus pertinentiis suis, et totum cantredum de Elykaruel cum omnibus pertinentiis suis, et totum cantredum de Elyhohogarthi cum

1. G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans* (4 vols, Oxford 1911–20), ii 33, 38–39.

2. T. Carte, *A history of the life of James, duke of Ormonde* (3 vols, London 1736), i p xix.

3. E. Curtis (ed), *Calendar of Ormond deeds 1350–1413*, 321: no 426.

4. E. Curtis (ed) *Calendar of Ormond deeds, 1172–1350*, 11–12: no 26; J. T. Gilbert, *Facsimiles of national manuscripts of Ireland* ii (London 1878) no lxvii.



omnibus pertinentiis suis, et totum cantredum de Ewurmun com omnibus pertinentiis suis, et totum cantredum de Areth et Wetheni cum omnibus pertinentiis suis, et totum cantredum de Owethenihokathelan et de Owenthenihoffernan cum omnibus pertinentiis suis

This grant has long been recognised as a cornerstone in the study of the Anglo-Norman penetration of Tipperary⁵ but it also has another significance. It is the first and, with the exception of the original charter, the only mention of the borough of Killaloe. On the basis of this reference Killaloe was included by Martin in his list of medieval Irish boroughs⁶ and, in an earlier paper, I mistakenly used it as an example of an Anglo-Norman borough founded beside a pre-Norman ecclesiastical site.⁷ Mistakenly, because I assumed that the borough had been founded by Theobald Walter. There is absolutely clear evidence, however, that the Anglo-Normans did not establish a foothold at Killaloe until thirty years after the grant was made and that this hold lasted no later than 1231.⁸

The grant raises the important question for Irish urban studies of whether the use of the term *burgus* is significant or not. *Burgus* had the clear legal meaning of a settlement with burgesses⁹ and in late twelfth-century Ireland the term was used very sparingly. In the years between 1172 and 1200 only eleven Irish settlements, including Killaloe, are so described.¹⁰ Should it be inferred, then, that an incorporated

5. Orpen, *Normans*, ii 102-03; A. Gwynn and D. F. Gleeson, *A history of the diocese of Killaloe* (Dublin 1962) 176-77; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A history of medieval Ireland* (London 1966) 67-69; C. A. Empey, 'The settlement of the kingdom of Limerick', J. F. Lydon (ed) *England and Ireland in the later middle ages* (Blackrock 1981) 1-25; G. Cunningham, *The Anglo-Norman advance in to the south-west midlands of Ireland* (Roscrea 1987) 64-67.

6. G. H. Martin, 'Plantation boroughs in medieval Ireland with a handlist of boroughs to c.1500', D. Harkness and M. O'Dowd (ed), *The town in Ireland*, Historical Studies 13 (Belfast 1981) 23-53.

7. J. Bradley, 'Planned Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland', H. B. Clarke and A. Simms (ed), *The comparative history of urban origins in non-Roman Europe*, Br Archaeol Rep Int Ser 255 (Oxford 1985) 411.

8. The first effective Anglo-Norman presence in Killaloe occurred in 1216 when the justiciar Geoffrey de Marisco built a castle which is last referred to in 1231 (*Calendar of documents relating to Ireland 1171-1251*, no 1908); Orpen, *Normans*, iv 55-56; Gwynn and Gleeson, *Killaloe*, 179-80; Otway-Ruthven, *Medieval Ireland*, 87-89; Cunningham, *Anglo-Norman advance*, 74-78.

9. Adolphus Ballard begins his book, *The English borough in the twelfth century* (Cambridge 1914), with the raw statement: 'The lawyers of the twelfth century applied the name of borough to certain places and gave the name of burgesses to their inhabitants; this they did to distinguish these places from their neighbours which were called manors' (1). There is still considerable discussion of the meaning of borough, burgess and burgage tenure at the time of Domesday Book (1086) but a century later the situation was more clear cut. Borough origins aroused heated debate earlier this century between scholars such as Maitland, Petit-Dutaillis, Tait and Stephenson. A convenient critical survey is provided by S. Reynolds, *An introduction to the history of English medieval towns* (Oxford 1977) 3-37, 98-102; cf. A. Ballard, *British borough charters 1042-1216* (Cambridge 1913); J. Tait, *The medieval English borough* (Manchester 1936).

10. References to Dublin (c.1174), Drogheda (1194) and Limerick (1197) will be found in G. Mac Niocaill, *Na Buirgéisí XII-XV aois* (2 vols, Dublin 1964), i 76, 172, 236; Kilkenny, Ferns and Kildare (all c.1176) will be found in *Calendar of ancient deeds and muniments preserved in the Pembroke Estate Office, Dublin* (Dublin 1891) 11; Cork (c.1182): E. St. J. Brooks (ed), *Register of the hospital of St John the Baptist without the New Gate Dublin* (Dublin 1936) 323, 334; Wexford (1172): *Cal Doc Ire 1171-1251*, no 39; Naas: (1199) *Chartae, privilegia et immunitates*, Ir Record Comm (Dublin 1829-30) 5; Waterford (1195): J. T. Gilbert (ed), *Chartularies of St Mary's abbey, Dublin* (2 vols, London 1884), ii

urban settlement was granted to Theobald Walter or should Killaloe be regarded as having been elevated to this status by scribal error or administrative desire?

The chance of a scribal error seems slight. There are two documents of relevance: the original charter as translated by Carte and as preserved in the inspeximus of 1572, and the agreement reached between Theobald Walter and Walter de Braose in 1201, quoted above. The spelling of the place names in the charter and in the agreement is different and this indicates that the text of the agreement was not a simple transcription of the earlier charter. At the very least, the substance of the grant had to be rehearsed at Lincoln in 1201 when the agreement was made and this substance remains the same: the borough of Killaloe together with five-and-a-half cantreds. Accordingly, the use of the word *burgus* would appear to be deliberate. Indeed, the curious feature of the grant is the description of Killaloe, a well-established cathedral site, as *burgus* rather than *civitas*.¹¹ The implication is that both grantor and grantee believed in the existence of an incorporated settlement at Killaloe. Could they have been mistaken?

KILLALOE

Killaloe's situation at the southern end of Lough Ree, on an old and now submerged fording-point of the Shannon, has always been geographically important (see fig 2, p 170). The National Museum of Ireland houses some 1156 stone axe heads found in the river Shannon at Killaloe and these provide a clear indication of the importance of the ford in Neolithic and Early Bronze Age times.¹² In addition the Museum also houses 8 bronze spearheads, 2 bronze daggers, 4 bronze rapiers, 5 bronze swords, 2 bronze sickles, 1 bronze chisel, 1 iron sword, 1 bronze spear-butt, and 144 stone net-sinkers which show that its importance as a ford continued throughout prehistoric times.¹³ Indeed, it has been argued that it was the very control of this crossing which subsequently caused the Dál Cais to be elevated to national prominence.¹⁴ In view of

99. There is a possibility that the charters granted to Trim, Kells, Swords, and Duleek (Mac Niocaill, *Na Buirgéisí*, 74-75; 185-59, 321; J. F. Morrissey (ed), *Statute rolls of the parliament of Ireland 12/13-21/22 Edward IV* (Dublin 1939) 828-31) may have been granted by 1200. The number of borough references increases dramatically during the thirteenth century (see Martin, 'Plantation boroughs'; B. J. Graham, 'The documentation of medieval Irish boroughs' *Bull Group Study Ir Hist Settlement* 4 (1977) 9-20, 5 (1978) 41-45).

11. The description of Killaloe as both *civitas* and *urbs* occurs in the Codex Salamanticensis Life of Flannan: W. W. Heist (ed), *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae* (Brussels 1965) 284 (cap. 7).

12. Almost all were found in the course of drainage works and the 1930s were the bumper years for discoveries: Dublin, National Museum of Ireland 1912: 10; 1929: 1084; 1932: 6598-6639, 7204-09; 1934: 73, 86-104, 149-96, 5650-01, 5653-5835, 10746-10858; 1935: 34, 183-348; 1936: 1784-85, 3762; 1937: 2580-83, 2609, 2761-63, 2807-09, 3501-14, 3550, 3613, 3630-32, 3695-3703; 1938: 159-61, 270-78, 8610-50; 1939: 382-84, 407-08, 424-31; 1941: 28, 152-55, 1521; 1943: 104-05; 1944: 93; P1955: 16-18.

13. Only some of this material has been published: G. Eogan, *A catalogue of Irish bronze swords* (Dublin 1965) 49, 144; B. Raftery, *A catalogue of Irish Iron Age antiquities* (Marburg 1983) 89, 129; C. Burgess and S. Gerloff, *The dirks and rapiers of Great Britain and Ireland* (Munich 1981) no 313, 331, 5070; see also *Rep Nat Museum Ire*, 1933-34, 14; *ibid*, 1935-36, 18.

14. J. V. Kelleher, 'The rise of the Dál Cais', E. Rynne (ed), *North Munster studies* (Limerick 1967) 241.

this geographical importance it is all the more puzzling then that the earliest evidence for settlement beside the ford does not occur until the end of the tenth century. Topographically the pre-Norman settlement had three major elements: Cell Da Lua 'the church of Do Lua (Mo Lua)', the royal site of Ceann Coradh (Kincora) 'head of the weir', and a bridge across the Shannon.

CELL DA LUA

The origins of the church are obscure and pose a basic historical problem in so far as the church-site appears to be named after one saint, Mo Lua, while its abbots are referred to as the coarbs of another, Flannán. Apart from the place name, however, Mo Lua's links with Killaloe are tenuous.¹⁵ The church is not mentioned in his *Vitae* and the only ancient connection lies in the twelfth-century *Life* of Flannán which states that it was believed that the church had been founded by Mo Lua.¹⁶ Molua (Lugaid moccu Óche) was a native of Corcu Óche, a minor people in the present Co Limerick, and is best remembered for his foundation at Clonfert-Mulloe in Co Laois. His connection with Killaloe probably rests on the introduction of his cult to Clare in the seventh and early eighth centuries with the movement of the Dál Cais and Uí Fidgente north of the Shannon following the collapse of the Uí Fiachrach Aidni.¹⁷ It may well be that the name originally referred to Friar's Island,¹⁸ now submerged, 1 km to the south of the town, and was applied by extension to the ford.

Flannán was a member of the Uí Thairdelbaig, the dynasty from which Brian Bóroime and the later Dál Cais kings descended.¹⁹ On the basis of the genealogies, Flannán seems to have lived in the late eighth century and he is probably to be identified with Flannán of Cell Ard, on the west coast of Clare, who died in 778.²⁰ It would seem then that as the Dál Cais attained political prominence so the cult of Flannán replaced that of Mo Lua but because the place name had become established by this time, it was retained.

The location of St Flannán's church, at the foot of Ceann Coradh indicates at once the intimate connection between royal residence and ecclesiastical site (see fig 2, p 170) as well as reflecting the dependency of the latter on the former. In contrast to the siting of virtually every other major early Irish church, Killaloe occupies not a dominant position but a subsidiary one. It is sited not on the hill overlooking the

15. Binchy (in Gwynn and Gleeson, *Killaloe*, 6) has suggested that Cell Da Lua may mean 'church of the two waters'; cf. O'Donovan's comments in the *O. S. letters, Co Clare*, ii 339-41.

16. Heist, *Vitae sanctorum Hiberniae*, 382 (cap. 4).

17. D. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais—church and dynasty', *Ériu* 24 (1973) 52n.

18. R. A. S. Macalister and H. G. Leask, 'On some excavations recently conducted on Friar's Island, Killaloe', *J Roy Soc Antiq Ire* 59 (1929) 16-28; Gwynn and Gleeson, *Killaloe*, 12-13.

19. M. A. O'Brien (ed) *Corpus genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1962) 237; P. Walsh (ed) *Genealogiae regum et sanctorum Hiberniae* (Dublin 1919) 119-20; Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', tables 1-2.

20. This suggestion has been made by Ó Corráin, 'Dal Cais', 52n, and by A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval religious houses: Ireland* (London 1970) 86. The obit is given in AI and for the suggestion that it may have been inserted during the period while the annals were under Killaloe influence see K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, *Chronicles and annals of medieval Ireland and Wales: the Clonmacnoise group texts* (Woodbridge 1984) 39.

Shannon, which was occupied by Ceann Coradh, but on a narrow ledge of ground between the foot of the hill and the river. The date of the foundation of the church is unknown but according to the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* it was built by Brian Bóroime,²¹ and the earliest direct reference to it occurs in 991.²² The annals record a number of raids and burnings during the eleventh and twelfth centuries which reflect its growing importance.²³ In 1116 they specifically mention that 'Cell-Dalua, with its church (*tempall*) was burned'.²⁴ Its growth and importance was also reflected at the synod of Ráth Bresaill in 1111 when it was named as the see of the diocese of Killaloe. Muirchertach Ua Briain, patron of the synod and high-king of Ireland, was buried in the church in 1119²⁵ and it was to be the burial place of other members of the Ua Briain family.²⁶ A further indication of its importance is provided by its use as a meeting place for the promulgation of laws. In 1050 it was the venue for an assembly of the chieftains and clergy of Munster, called together by Donnchad, son of Brian Bóroime, to legislate against lawlessness caused by food shortages.²⁷

The exact extent of the ecclesiastical site is unknown but the curving line of John St/ Bridge St and its alignment with the site of the bridge suggests that this may delimit the original western boundary of the enclosure of Cell Da Lua.

CEANN CORADH

According to the Annals of Inisfallen the fort (*cathir*) of Ceann Coradh was built in 1012 by Brian Bóroime.²⁸ In 1016 it was attacked and destroyed by the Connachta²⁹ but, despite such raids, it continued to be the most important Ua Briain residence. Even after Limerick had become the Ua Briain capital it remained the symbolic centre of their power.³⁰

Ceann Coradh occupied the high ground at the west end of the modern town on the summit of which St Flannán's (RC) church now stands.³¹ A weir extended across the river Shannon at this point until modern times, and it is presumably from this feature

21. J. H. Todd (ed) *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: the war of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (London 1867) 139.

22. AI; Gwynn and Gleeson, *Killaloe*, 5n.

23. Raids and burnings are recorded for the years 1914 (CS), 1061 (AI), 1081 (AI), 1084 (AFM), 1116 (AU), 1142 (AFM), 1154 (AFM), 1185 (AU).

24. ALC, AU, AFM.

25. MiscIrA, AFM.

26. It was presumably the burial place of Toirdealbach ua Briain who died at Ceann Coradh in 1086 and Conchobar Ua Briain, *leth-ri* of Thomond, is specifically mentioned as being buried at Killaloe in 1142 (MiscIrA, CS, AClon sub 1134).

27. AFM; for the context see D. Ó Corráin, 'Nationality and kingship in pre-Norman Ireland', T. W. Moody (ed), *Nationality and the pursuit of national independence* Historical Studies 11 (Belfast 1978) 23.

28. The reference to Ceann Coradh in the *Mórhimpeall Éireann uile* cannot be taken as contemporary since the source is twelfth-century and seems to relate closely to the activities of Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn. See T. J. Westropp, 'Types of the ring-forts remaining in eastern Clare (Killaloe), its royal forts and their history', *Proc Roy Ir Acad (C)* 29 (1911-12) 194-98.

29. CS s.a. 1014; AFM s.a. 1015; AClon s.a. 1009.

30. Donnchad mac Briain (†1065) seems to have inaugurated this practice which was continued by his successors Toiridelbach ua Briain and Muirchertach Ua Briain; see D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin 1972) 142; F. J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (Dublin 1973) 271.

31. O'Donovan, *O. S. Letters, Co Clare*, ii 346-47; Westropp, 202-03.

that the site obtained its name (fig 2). The components of the fort are unknown but the references to it as a *dún* or *cathir* indicate that it was a fortified enclosure defended either by a palisade or a stone rampart. Its situation on the hill overlooking the ford is a commanding one affording fine views in all directions. The only documented feature within the fort is a sacred well which is mentioned in 1061. In that year Aed Ua Conchobair, king of Connacht, 'burned Cill-Dalua, and demolished the fortress (*dún*) of Cenn-coradh, and ate the two salmon that were in the well of Cenn-coradh, and the well was afterwards closed up by him'.³² It might also be inferred from the annalistic entry of 1107 that there was a storehouse within the enclosure. In that year Ceann Coradh was struck by lightning and the king's store of beer and mead, amounting to 60 vats (*dabhach*), was destroyed.³³

THE BRIDGE

In 1071 a bridge was built across the Shannon by Toirrdelbach ua Briain in the space of two weeks,³⁴ but if the *Cogadh* is to be believed there was already a bridge there in the time of Brian Bóroime.³⁵ Almost one hundred years later, in 1171 the bridge was destroyed in a raid on Killaloe by either the Uí Maine or Uí Chonchobair.³⁶

THE URBAN STATUS OF PRE-NORMAN KILLALOE

Prior to the coming of the Normans Killaloe appears to have been a sizable settlement with the unique combination, outside of the Scandinavian towns, of a royal fort and cathedral placed side by side. It was a centre of substantial building activity in the twelfth century. This is reflected not simply by the re-buildings of Ceann Coradh and Cell Da Lua which took place in the aftermath of the documented attacks but also by the surviving remains. The vaulting of St Flannán's Oratory indicates that it is of twelfth-century date³⁷ and it is evident that a substantial Romanesque cathedral was also built, probably in the 1180s. This is represented now by a series of decorated stones and by the reassembled door, the most ornate example of its kind in Ireland,³⁸ which is built into the south wall of the present cathedral. There is also a fragmentary cross-shaft, now recumbent at the foot of the Romanesque door, which shows that, as at Cashel, patronage was not exclusively confined to structures.

Killaloe was an important centre of learning and literary activity during the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries. The Uí Énna were a noted learned family who supplied a number of abbots and bishops to the church.³⁹ The best known of them, Domnall Ua hÉnna, corresponded with Lanfranc on both secular learning and theological matters,⁴⁰ and he was one of the pioneers of Irish church reform. It was at

32. CS s.a. 1059.

33. AFM.

34. AI.

35. Todd, *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, 145.

36. AFM.

37. H. G. Leask, *Irish churches and monastic buildings* i (Dundalk 1955) 36-37.

38. *ibid.* 151.

39. Ó Corráin, 'Dál Cais', 57-58.

40. Gwynn and Gleeson, *Killaloe*, 105-08; cf. D. Bethell's comments in 'English monks and Irish reform in the eleventh and twelfth centuries', T. W. Moody (ed), *Historical Studies* 8 (Dublin 1971) 127-

Killaloe that the Annals of Inisfallen were being compiled in 1091⁴¹ and there is evidence from the Lives of Flannán that literary composition continued there during the twelfth century.⁴² There is evidence, too, for the presence of at least one highly-skilled craft worker, probably a metal smith, in the form of a slate motif-piece now in the British Museum.⁴³ It is decorated with interlace of eleventh/twelfth-century style which interestingly shows Scandinavian influence. Further indications of a Scandinavian presence at Killaloe are provided by the survival of the place name Laxweir, recorded by Worsaae in the nineteenth century,⁴⁴ and the runic-inscribed stone commemorating Thorgrim now inside the cathedral.⁴⁵ The site figures in the Icelandic sagas as the residence of king Brian where it is referred to as Kunjattaborg or Kanakaraborg⁴⁶ and the use of the suffix *-borg* emphasises the fortified nature of the royal residence. The survival of the place name and the documented presence of Thorgrim suggests that the Scandinavian influence may be explained by the presence of a small Hiberno-Scandinavian community at Killaloe.

The settlement also had contacts with the continent. Of the two surviving twelfth-century lives of Flannán, the first appears to have been written by a foreign cleric, possibly an Anglo-Norman, at Killaloe prior to 1163,⁴⁷ the second by a person who had studied law, medicine and letters in France and the Rhineland and who was sufficiently interested in continental affairs to include events such as Frederick Barbarossa's capture of Milan in 1162, as dating mechanisms for miracles attributed to the power of Flannán.⁴⁸ Presumably this means that at least some of his readers and listeners were similarly informed.

Viewed in the context of Muirchertach Ua Briain's reign as king of Munster and as high-king, this cosmopolitan atmosphere is not surprising. Muirchertach's external contacts are well known.⁴⁹ In 1088 he sent timber to William Rufus to roof West-

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41. A. Gwynn, 'Were the "Annals of Inisfallen" written at Killaloe?', *N Munster Antiq J* 8 (1958-61) 30-31; but see Grabowski's comments in K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, *Chronicles and annals in medieval Ireland and Wales* (Woodbridge 1984) 87-88.

42. D. Ó Corráin, 'Foreign connections and domestic politics: Killaloe and the Uí Briain in twelfth-century hagiography', D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (ed), *Ireland in early medieval Europe* (Cambridge 1982) 225-26.

43. U. Ó Meadhra, *Early Christian, Viking and Romanesque art: motif-pieces from Ireland* (2 vols, Stockholm 1979-87), i 85-87, ii 60-61.

44. J. J. A. Worsaae, *An account of the Danes and Norwegians in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London 1852) 324.

45. R. A. S. Macalister, 'On a runic inscription at Killaloe cathedral', *Proc Roy Ir Acad (C)* 33 (1916-17) 493-98; idem, 'Note on the runic inscription at Killaloe', *Roy Ir Acad: Minutes of Proc: Session 1930-31* (Dublin 1931) 2-4.

46. G. Vigfusson, *Icelandic sagas relating to the British Isles* (2 vols, London 1887), i 327; G. W. Dasent (ed), *Njala: the story of Burnt Njal* (2 vols, Edinburgh 1861), i p xciii.

47. Ó Corráin, 'Foreign connections', 225.

48. *ibid.*, 223; for the suggestion that there may also have been a small Anglo-Norman community at Killaloe, *ibid.*, 226.

49. E. Curtis, 'Murchertach O'Brien, high king of Ireland, and his Norman son-in-law, Arnulf de Montgomery, circa 1100', *J Roy Soc Antiq Ire* 51 (1921) 116-24; A. Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain, politics and naval activity in the Irish Sea', G. Mac Niocaill and P. F. Wallace (ed), *Keimelia: studies in medieval archaeology and history in memory of Tom Delaney* (Galway 1988) 397-415.

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minister Hall.⁵⁰ One of his daughters married Sigurd son of Magnus Barelegs, king of Norway, and in 1102 another daughter, Lafracoth, married Arnulf of Montgomery.⁵¹ Shortly afterwards Muirchertach sent a fleet in support of the revolt led by Arnulf and Robert de Belleme against Henry I as a result of which Henry imposed an embargo on Irish trade.⁵² Only subsequently through the intercession of Anselm of Canterbury were good relations restored between Henry and Muirchertach.⁵³ He was in contact with Edgar, king of Scotland, and in 1105 received the rather exotic gift of an animal of remarkable size, probably a camel, from him⁵⁴ and he also sent aid to the Welsh princes. These contacts show him as a king with interests in the wider world and help to explain the cosmopolitan atmosphere at Killaloe.

In summary then it may be said that the range of documentary, archaeological and topographical evidence shows that the pre-Norman settlement at Killaloe was the result of the fusion of both ecclesiastical and secular elements. The settlement clearly had a number of urban functions. As a royal palace and episcopal see it was a centre of administration; the cathedral was a centre of learning and ritual as well as being a patron of both art and architecture. It was at the lowest bridging point of the Shannon and as such it was an important focus for communications. There is evidence for the presence of at least one specialist craftsman and there are hints of the existence of both Hiberno-Scandinavian and Anglo-Norman communities. In an Anglo-Norman context, indeed, the range of its urban functions would rank it as a town rather than simply as a borough.⁵⁵

It has been generally accepted, however, that the Anglo-Normans introduced the borough concept as part of their colonization of Ireland in the later twelfth century. That this is not so is shown by the letter sent in 1121 from the 'burgesses and clergy' of Dublin to Ralph d'Escures, archbishop of Canterbury.⁵⁶ The letter clearly implies that Dublin had borough status but from where was this derived? Was it merely the assumption of a title which its Anglo-Norman counterparts had already adopted or would it be that the title of borough was one bestowed by a king? Britain experienced exceptional urban growth throughout the eleventh century and Domesday Book indicates the importance which boroughs had achieved.⁵⁷ This shows that by 1086

50. T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (ed), *A new history of Ireland*, viii (Oxford 1982) 54.

51. Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain', 405, 411.

52. *ibid.* 411-12; J. Ryan, 'The O'Briens in Munster after Clontarf III: the reign of Muirchertach O Briain, king of Munster (1086-1096) and king of Ireland (with opposition) 1096-1114', *N Munster Antiq J* 3 (1942-43) 20.

53. F. X. Martin, 'The first Normans in Munster', *J Cork Hist Archaeol Soc* 76 (1971) 51.

54. AI 1105; Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain', 407.

55. For a definition of 'town' in an Anglo-Norman context see Bradley, 'Planned Anglo-Norman towns' (note 7 above), 417-20.

56. 'Omnes burgenses Dublinae civitatis cunctusque clericorum', M. Rule (ed), *Eadmeri historia novorum in Anglia* (London 1884) 297. Dublin is the only Hiberno-Scandinavian town for which there is documentary evidence of borough status but archaeological excavations have uncovered a burgage plot pattern in Viking-period contexts at Waterford and Wexford which is comparable to that found on the excavations at Fishamble Street, Dublin. This may indicate that these settlements had similar status.

57. It has been calculated that forty new towns were founded in England in the period between 1066 and 1130 and eighteen in Wales during the same time: M. Beresford, *New towns of the middle ages* (London 1967) 327. In addition many of the older urban sites experienced expansion and renewal. There

boroughs and burgesses had certain rights and privileges and that the concept of burgage tenure existed. Most of these early communities functioned without charters and it was only during the reign of Henry I (1100-35) that boroughs began to extend their liberties by the purchase of charters from the king, as is evidenced by the charters of Bury St Edmund's (1102-03) and Canterbury (1104).⁵⁸ In Wales boroughs are known by 1100 at centres such as Monmouth, Caerlon, Cardiff, Brecon, Pembroke and Tenby,⁵⁹ while in Scotland the first documented boroughs appear before 1124 at Berwick and Roxburgh, and before 1127 in the cases of Dunfermline, Edinburgh, Perth and Stirling.⁶⁰ The 1121 allusion to Dublin's borough status then is one which is chronologically in keeping with developments elsewhere in England, Scotland and Wales.

The 1121 reference also occurs a mere two years after the death of Muirchertach Ua Briain and, in view of his known external contacts, it is tempting to think that he may have been responsible for its status. He was a king who had a more than average interest in towns. He had begun his career as governor of Dublin⁶¹ at a time when it was the most important town on the Irish Sea and he installed his brother Diarmait as *dux* of Cork and governor of Waterford⁶² before the latter aspired to replace him as high-king. As king of Munster and high-king of Ireland, his capital was at Limerick⁶³ and indeed it may be observed that unlike his successors in the high-kingship, he was essentially a town dweller.

Viewed in this context the potential development of Killaloe as an urban site should not cause surprise but it is impossible to be certain that Muirchertach was the person who initiated the process. Ó Corráin has suggested that the cosmopolitan tradition which characterises his reign may have continued after his death to be reflected in the lives of Flannán.⁶⁴ In the same way it may be that the urban characteristics which one sees in the reign of Muirchertach may have been galvanised later in the twelfth century into the borough that Theobald Walter aspired to obtain.

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had also been considerable urban growth prior to the conquest, see J. Haslam (ed), *Anglo-Saxon towns in southern England* (Chichester 1984); S. Reynolds, *An introduction to the history of English medieval towns* (Oxford 1977) 34-45.

58. A. Ballard, *British borough charters 1042-1216* (Cambridge 1913) p xxvii-xxviii.

59. I. Soulsby, *The towns of medieval Wales* (Chichester 1983) 7.

60. G. S. Pryde, *The boroughs of Scotland* (Oxford 1965) 3-5.

61. Candon, 'Muirchertach Ua Briain', 399-401.

62. *ibid.* 409; F. J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London 1973) 271.

63. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans*, 142; Byrne, *Irish kings*, 271.

64. Ó Corráin, 'Foreign connections', 226.

Fig. 2. Killaloe in the twelfth century

