

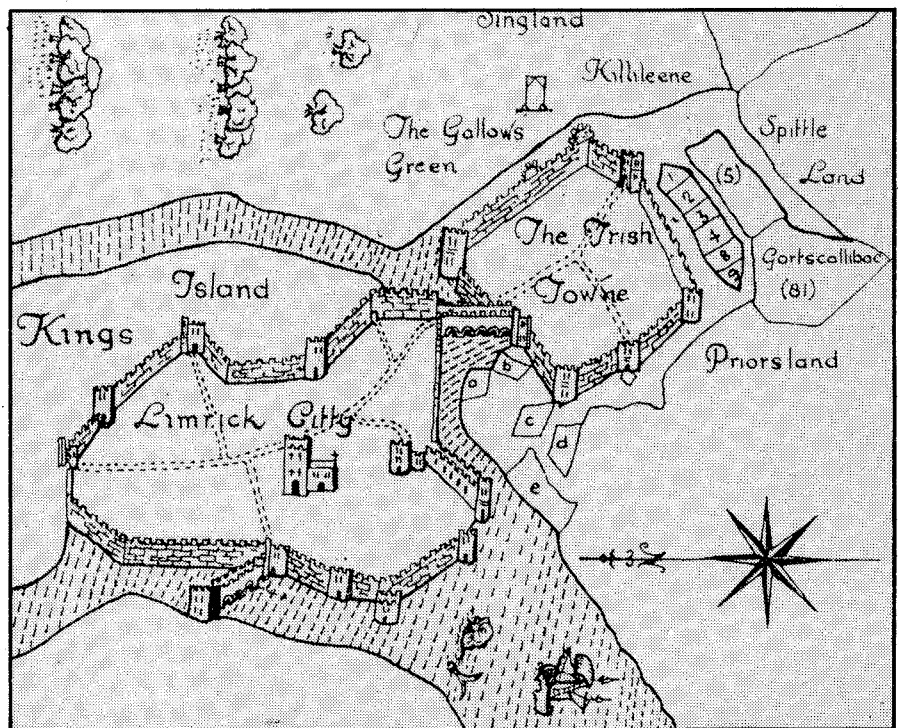


THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE SIEGE

BY KEVIN HANNAN

Before William of Orange arrived at Limerick, those living in the suburbs outside the walls were brought into the city for their safety, and their homes and all other buildings were destroyed so that they might not provide shelter or defence for the besiegers. Some of the older residents of Park, Rhebogue, Singland and Garryowen had memories of a similar nightmare forty years before when their homes were razed to the ground before the arrival of Ireton before the city. They were uprooted again and their old familiar haunts left to a foreign horde. They were the first victims of the sieges. We are fortunate in having a first-hand account by the Jacobite scribe John Stevens of the self-destruction of Singland, Park and Garryowen: 'Though the buildings of the suburbs were not for the most part equal to those within the walls, yet all these at our first coming, except that small part about St. Francis Abbey in the Island, were laid level with the ground for the better defence of the place and all the gardens and orchards utterly destroyed'.

Three hundred years ago, the fields and gardens of the area between St. Patrick's churchyard and the Shesharee stream (this runs parallel with the Groody river from Singland Mill to the Dublin Road) was bristling with armed men of many different nationalities, Dutch, German, Danes, English, some Irish and others; for this was the Williamite encampment. The selection of this high ground overlooking the city was surely the natural choice of a military commander saddled with the task of trying to break down the defences of Limerick. The district commanded a fine view of the city, and a cannonade from such a height would be doubly effective; furthermore the sites of the forts which had been thrown up forty years before by the Cromwellians had come into their own again. Cromwell's fort (on the site of the reservoir), and Ireton's fort (close to the left of St. Patrick's churchyard, looking towards the city) found mention again in dispatches. The names of these two forts were changed during the occupation to 'Mackey's fort' and 'Nassau's fort', but



Limerick c. 1654, from the Down Survey.

the old names re-asserted themselves after the war.

In a field, a few hundred yards from the present Singland Mill, King William raised his standard on a stone pillar erected by his engineers. This was a structure resembling the stump of a round tower, but not as wide. It was so well made that it was still standing and capable of holding up a standard right up to the day in the late nineteen-forties when, sadly, it was removed by the landowner. (I have always felt guilty for not using my camera on the many occasions I visited it, but then I never dreamed anyone would cart away so important a feature).

Both St. Patrick's Road and the road leading from it, known as 'Singland Road' or the 'Blood Mill Road', were in existence long before 1690, and were much used by the Williamites, especially the latter which led to their encampment and the standard pillar. St. Patrick's Road led to the Lax Weir at Corbally. The road pattern is still the same today despite

being intersected by the Shannon Navigation canal in 1757, then by the Corbally Road, after the building of Park Bridge in 1798, and being intersected by the Limerick/Ennis railway in 1859, where it joins the present Corbally Road. The route to the river at Corbally was as follows: St. Patrick's Road, through the present Singland Cross, on to Rhebogue Cross (Pump Cross), through Hymie's Boreen (this is cut off by the canal), through Park and on to the Mill Road.

This high ground of Singland stretched towards the north to Park Hill and levelled out in the water meadows of Rhebogue and then to the Shannon.

It was the bombardment from Park Hill that first made so promising an impact on the wall that the cannon were moved to within eighty paces of it to finish the work of opening the now famous breach.

There is a strong local tradition that King William enjoyed the luxury of the best dwelling in the district - Newcastle - now a ruin but still standing by the

Dublin Road above the Groody River.

This fine tower house was the home of the Roche family who were dispossessed under the Cromwellian Act of Settlement. The property was ordered to be returned to the family after the Restoration, but owing to a dispute with the Limerick city coroner, the Roches never returned to Newcastle.

An attempt was made in recent times to demolish this fine old landmark, but the Thomond Archaeological Society succeeded in influencing the Office of Public Works to issue a temporary order for its preservation.

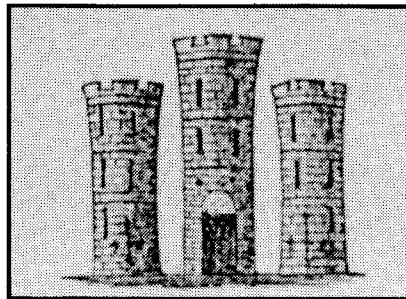
THE RIVER CROSSINGS

The situation of the first crossing of the Shannon by the Williamites is the source of confusion and bewilderment to anyone with an intimate knowledge of the river in the vicinity of Limerick, and to those who depend on Maurice Lenihan's account of it. After William had received an emphatic rejection of his demand for the surrender of the city, he decided that his purpose would best be served if his troops got a footing on the right bank of the Shannon. To this end, Lenihan tells us '... a party of the Royal regiment, and other dragoons, were sent to view the ford of Annaghbeg, of which William was informed, and which he proceeded to visit himself, a place about two miles above the city'.

Annaghbeg is opposite Plassey mill, and is just about two miles above the city. The old ford was marked up to very recent times by two short rows of rocks running parallel to the river bank, marking the width of the river in three more or less equal parts. This was the famous pass of Annaghbeg. To the angling fraternity it is known as 'Peg's Height', but to the Abbey fishermen only the ancient Gaelic name of 'Drominbeg' had any meaning.

Lenihan further elaborates by telling us that 'George Foxon, a Dutchman, owned the lands of Annaghbeg at this time, on which he built a large brick house'. This house was on the high ground behind Annaghbeg lock, and was reconstructed by the Arthur family towards the end of the eighteenth century. This fine house, *Morelands*, was occupied by the Campbell family for nearly forty years from 1930. It was demolished to make way for the Burlington Industries development.

Almost in the same breadth, Lenihan assures us that the crossing was made a few perches above the old churchyard of Kilquane. He describes the legend of the treachery of Philip McAdam in pointing out the ford to the Williamites. McAdam is supposed to have been rewarded with a large tract of land in the vicinity, but Lenihan consulted a descendant of the supposed traitor in Blackwater House,



Woodcut of plaque over Mungret Gate, from Maurice Lenihan's 'History of Limerick'.

Major Thomas Stannard McAdam, who showed him documents which proved his ancestors were in possession of the lands they had at that time long before the sieges of Limerick.

The *Jacobite Narrative*, a reliable diary of the events of 1690/91, tells us that 'they (the Williamites) passed the Shannon near Samuel Foxon's house ... two miles up from the city'. This would have been the exact distance between Annaghbeg and the city, taking account of the extra length of the miles at that period; furthermore there was a tendency to underestimate distances. This would indicate Annaghbeg as the site of the crossing. Story's map, which is quite good but not to scale, shows the first crossing which appears nearer to Corbally than Annaghbeg. This confusion may have influenced Lenihan to rely solely on the tradition of the lower crossing. The map, which appears in Ferrar's history, also illustrates the later crossing between Lanahrone, through Illaunahrone, to Athlunkard. This appears to be accurate, as there is ample evidence to prove that this crossing was made from the townland of Lanahrone (the big field adjoining the Irish Estate housing complex, above Athlunkard Bridge) to Illaunahrone, better known as Lanahrone island, and then to the mainland at Athlunkard.

In August, 1691, a year after the first crossing, the Williamite diarist, Col. Richards, when referring to movements of Jacobite forces on the Clare side of the river mentions the pass of Annaghbeg: 'The enemy's horse now makes a motion and have camped on the side of a hill 3 miles above the town, over against Foxon's house where the king (William) last year forded over the Shannon'. This ford is mentioned again by Richards after a 1691 Williamite crossing, in which he took part, below Castleconnell (about the site of the present footbridge): 'The enemy, now having the alarm moved three regiments of foot that lay at Foxon's house'.

Lenihan, who may have bowed to the long standing tradition, mentions Annaghbeg, and then goes on to deal exclusively with the site of the Corbally-Church Field crossing. He tells us that

the point of landing was marked by a large mushroom shaped stone to which the Williamites fixed their pontoon chains. This was known as Carrig-a-clouragh (the rock of the chains), and was situated on the Clare shore: a few hundred yards downstream of Athlunkard Bridge. He goes on to tell us that this relic was shattered by explosives in the last century. I well remember seeing the large pieces lying shattered by the riverside before they were covered up by the alluvial deposits resulting from the depletion of the river channel after the Shannon Scheme. I could never imagine this stone holding a pontoon bridge of tin boats across the Shannon at that time, there being no Corbally mill-dam to soften the strong sweep of the river at this point.

The stretch of the Shannon here was known to many generations of anglers as 'Eassy' - a place abounding in waterfalls, two miles downstream of Annaghbeg, which would have been a less turbulent crossing. To the Abbey fishermen it was part of the enure of Corribalawn, or Carrig. If the crossing was made at this point, it would have been through the fishing drafts of North Smidaun, South Smidaun and Shore Lugnafarna, names that were used by the Abbeymen long before 1690.

J.G. Simms, one of the most reliable historians of the period, assures us that the 'Williamites crossed the Shannon at the ford of Annaghbeg, which seems to have been rather a mile above the present Athlunkard Bridge'. The name, Annaghbeg (Annabeg) is preserved in the little lock house on the Clare side of Plassey bridge. Mail has been delivered here for ninety years to 'Ryan's, Annabeg'. Though Maurice Lenihan's romantic story of Carrig-a-clouragh and Philip McAdam has supported the Corbally crossing, we must accept the evidence of the contemporary diarists who tell us that the first crossing was made at Annaghbeg, near Samuel Foxon's house.

Lenihan was seriously in error when writing of the river conditions during the crossing: 'It was expected by the Williamites that they would meet with great difficulties and dangers in the passage of the river ... because the river at this season of the year was particularly swollen and rapid'. Anyone with any knowledge of the Shannon knows that the river level is normally at its lowest in August and at its highest in January and February.

The term 'fording the river' would lead one to think of men wading or riding horses across the river at shallow places: this was most unlikely, as there was no part of the Shannon in the vicinity of Limerick fordable at that time. The crossing at Ballyvalley by Sarsfield's horsemen was accomplished by the horses half-swimming, half-wading. It was certainly beyond the power of man to ford the river in the ordinary way.



Outer and inner Citadel walls in the grounds of St. John's Hospital.

During periods of very low water, it may have been possible to cross with great difficulty.

A radical change in the levels of the river occurred after the Shannon Hydro Electric Scheme. The two fords at Killaloe, Ballyvalley and Clarisford were flooded; so also was the shallow stretch immediately below Killaloe Bridge that afforded good angling to wading anglers before 1929. The reverse effect is to be seen in the main channel between Parteen Villa and Stoney Bank at Corbally, where the level of the river is reduced to a mere trickle for the greater part of the year.

Even today, with the normal pre-Shannon Scheme level of the river reduced by nearly half, it would not be possible for one to cross the river by wading, even at its lowest summer level, either at Annaghbeg or Carrig-a-clouragh. Apparently the use of pontoon bridges in the shallower parts of the river was a precaution against mishaps which might be fatal if the bridge was fixed over a deep stretch.

THE BREACH

Despite Lauzun's declaration that the walls of Limerick could be knocked with roasted apples, the defences withstood a fierce bombardment from the eighteen and twenty-four pound shot from the heavy guns on the heights of Singland and on Park Hill. It was only when a

number of twenty-four pounders were brought to 'eighty paces of the wall' that a breach, forty yards wide, was made in the wall close to the Black Battery. After the dismantlement of the fortifications in 1760, a road linking the Irishtown to the village of Pennywell was opened through the site of the breach. This thoroughfare is still called the 'New Road'.

The repairs to the breach, carried out after the withdrawal of the Williamites, were clearly discernable from the back yards of the three cottages on the New Road just outside the walls, but are now well hidden by a great mass of vegetation.

THE BLACK BATTERY

This was the battery tower which was situated where the wall from the citadel turned a right angle towards Old Clare Street. It was probably so called from the black limestone, or marble, of which it was built. This much spoken of material was abundant in the Garryowen quarry (this was at the southern end of the present Sarsfield Avenue). The tower is marked out in a number of old maps as the 'Devils Battery', or 'Devil's Tower', a name it may have earned the hard way by withstanding the cannonade from Singland and Park.

The explosion here which may have

killed and wounded a number of Brandenburgers was probably much exaggerated. When one ponders the low casualty rate from massive syntex explosions in the northern part of our island, it is hardly likely that an isolated explosion of ordinary gunpowder could have wrought the dreadful carnage we read about.

THE CITADEL

The Citadel, the military headquarters of the Irishtown, was situated between the Black Battery and John's Gate, but nearer to the latter. It was a well fortified enclosure, having a strong gate which was connected by a short link to the Kilmallock Road. Part of this short link road is still as it was in 1690. This is the last 60 yards of upper Pennywell Road where it joins Garryowen Road (at the side of St. John's Cathedral tower) and a smaller gate to the city. Fortunately, these two treasures are with us still, and as strong as ever. No doubt these would have disappeared many years ago if they were not in the care of the St. John's Hospital authorities since 1780, when the hospital was founded.

The Guard House, or Gate House as it is sometimes referred to, was completed in the early seventeenth century. It withstood a heavy bombardment during the two sieges and still shows the marks of the cannon shot on its outside face. It was used as a barracks long after the sieges, and in 1780 was taken over by Lady Hartstonge, who set it up as a fever hospital. This charitable lady was deeply affected by the numbers of poor people afflicted with fever (usually cholera) who were dying in their hovels without treatment of any kind. The conditions attendant on the treatment of the sick in those days is clearly illustrated in this first hospital in the city where, at the beginning, there were four beds and four patients to a bed!

The hospital continued to expand along the city wall outside the Citadel compound eastwards towards the Black Battery. If the hospital authorities from the beginning were compelled by necessity to sacrifice an interesting part of the city wall and part of the citadel walls in the extension of the hospital, the establishment of this most useful institution insured the preservation of the Guard House and inner citadel gate and an important section of the city wall.

In conjunction with the mad rush to extend fire precautions which swept the country (Limerick especially) after the Stardust tragedy, our local planning authority allowed a fire escape to be erected at the west end of the hospital building right in front of the Guard House obtruding the view of the interesting north doorway. This, in my opinion, was an insensitive act and a sad mistake.