

The Medieval Towns of Kerry

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The Anglo-Norman colonization of North Kerry resulted in the foundation of the towns of Dingle and Tralee and the boroughs of Ardfert and Rattoo. The lay-out and characteristics of these towns are considered, and their history is briefly summarized.

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The Anglo-Normans who settled in Kerry during the thirteenth century revolutionised the existing economic structures by the introduction of a system of land management which was based on manor, village and town. Prior to their arrival the largest settlements were the ecclesiastical sites of Ardfert and Ratass, whose prominence in the Annals together with their surviving twelfth century remains would suggest that they may have functioned as "monastic towns".¹ They differed significantly from the Anglo-Norman towns in so far as they functioned not so much as redistributive centres, but rather as centres of learning and of ritual, and, to a lesser extent, of administration and manufacture. For the Anglo-Normans, however, towns as centres of trade, of business and of marketing, were an essential part of their economic ethos. The success of the towns was based on the efficient exploitation of the economic resources of thirteenth century Ireland, and their decay occurred when the economic organization that supported them began to crumble.

There is little documentary evidence on the initial Anglo-Norman penetration of north Kerry. It is evident, however, that it was an extension of the colonization of Limerick and that it began around 1200. The principal figure involved was Meiler FitzHenry who was granted the area early in the reign of John, but it is not known how far his settlement of Kerry progressed during the first decade of the twelfth century, if at all.² The most important Anglo-Norman thrust occurred around 1214-15 when, taking advantage of internecine strife among the MacCarthys, a chain of castles was constructed along the river Maine, and a castle was built at Killorglin.³ The effect of this was that it enabled Anglo-Norman settlement to consolidate in the fertile lowlands of north Kerry and in the Dingle peninsula (Corcaguiny). In 1216 Meiler FitzHenry retired to a monastery, leaving no son to succeed him, and his Kerry lands reverted to the crown. Most of these, except for Corcaguiny, were granted out afresh to John FitzThomas FitzGerald, son of Thomas FitzGerald of Shanid, ancestor of the earls of Desmond and the lords of Kerry or Lixnaw.⁴ Corcaguiny was divided into two parts, Offerba, the eastern part, which was granted to John de Clahull, and Ossurys, the western part, granted to Robert de Marisco.⁵ De Marisco's daughter Christiania subsequently sold Ossurys to Maurice FitzMaurice, from

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¹C. Doherty, "The Monastic Town in Early Medieval Ireland", in H. B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds.), *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe*, Oxford 1985, pp. 45-75.

²G. H. Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, 4 vols., Oxford 1911-20, III, p. 123; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval Ireland*, (London 1968), p. 86.

³S. Ó hInnse (ed.), *Miscellaneous Irish Annals, A.D. 1114-1437*, (Dublin 1947), p. 91.

⁴Otway-Ruthven, *op. cit.*, p. 87; K. Nicholls, "The FitzMaurices of Kerry", *J. Kerry Archaeol. Hist. Soc.*, 3(1970), pp. 23-29.

⁵Orpen, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 133-134.

whom it passed, probably with the manor of Killorglin, to Thomas de Clare.⁶ The de Clare possession was relatively brief, however, and his heiresses appear to have given it to the Desmonds. By the middle of the fourteenth century, then, virtually all of the lands which had been colonised by the Anglo-Normans in the early thirteenth century had come under the control of the Desmonds, or of their cadet branch, the lords of Kerry or Lixnaw.

In Kerry, the Anglo-Normans founded three centres that we may call towns, Ardfert, Dingle and Tralee, and one borough, Rattoo.⁷ Other boroughs may have existed but if so the documentary evidence has not survived. Castleisland, for instance, was one of the principal Desmond castles in Kerry and quite possibly had a borough attached to it but, in the absence of documentary evidence, there is no means of demonstrating this. Originally each of these towns must have had a governing charter and town books recording decisions, rents and dues, but none of these now survive. Information on the topography and layout of the towns has to be derived at second hand from other sources such as the royal administrative records and other incidental notices. It is unfortunate that no Desmond archive survives comparable to the Butler collection, and that the chartularies of abbeys like Abbeydorney and Rattoo are lost because they would also have shed light on the internal features of Kerry's towns. One of the most useful topographic sources is a Desmond document, nonetheless, the 1584 survey of the forfeited Desmond lands which preserves some of the street names of late medieval Tralee, and is informative on Ardfert and Dingle.⁸ There are no early topographical views of significance and the earliest town plans are those of Ardfert, showing the lands of the baron of Kerry in 1697, and Tralee, prepared by Charles Smith in 1756.⁹ Wright's brief account of Dingle in 1579, Molyneux's description of Kerry (c.1682), Smith's Kerry, and the Ordnance Survey letters, preserve much primary information on topographical features which have since vanished.¹⁰ Among the secondary sources Hitchcock's two studies of Dingle stand out,¹¹ but by far and away the most useful are the long series of papers and studies published by Mrs. Hickson between 1872 and 1897.¹² No archaeological excavations have taken place to date within any of the towns.

The distribution of the borough and towns is confined to north Kerry and Corkaguiney, and reflects the area that was colonized by the Anglo-Normans. The fact that Ardfert, Dingle

⁶E. St.-J. Brooks, "The Family of Marisco", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 61(1931), p. 65, fn. 104; *Cal. Docs. Ireland 1285-92*, no. 1028.

⁷For a discussion on the definition of town in medieval Ireland, see J. Bradley, "Planned Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland", in H. B. Clarke and A. Simms (eds.), *The Comparative History of Urban Origins in Non-Roman Europe*, Oxford 1985, pp. 417-420.

⁸*A Survey of the Honours, Manors, Lordships, Lands, etc. forfeited by Gerald, 15th Earl of Desmond... 1584*, Public Record Office of Ireland, Dublin 1881.

⁹The original of the Ardfert map was destroyed in the destruction of the Public Record Office in 1922, but a copy survives in the Library of University College, Cork. The Tralee map was published in Charles Smith, *The Antient and Present State of the County of Kerry*, Dublin 1756, plate facing p. 340.

¹⁰Wright's account was published by R. Hitchcock, "Dingle in the Sixteenth Century", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 2(1852-3), 139-143; W. O'Sullivan, "William Molyneux's Geographical Collections for Kerry", *J. Kerry Archaeol. Hist. Soc.*, 4(1971), 28-47; Smith, *op. cit.*, The Ordnance Survey letters for Kerry have recently been published as: J. O'Donovan, *The Antiquities of the County of Kerry*, Cork, 1983.

¹¹R. Hitchcock, *art. cit.*; idem, "The Castle of Corkaguiney, County of Kerry", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 3(1854-5), 345-356 and 384-397.

¹²M. A. Hickson, *Selections from Old Kerry Records*, London 1872; idem, *Selections from Old Kerry Records*, 2nd ser., London 1874; idem, "Notes on Kerry Topography, Ancient and Modern", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 15(1879-82), 161-168, 349-364 and 571-586; 16(1883-4), 297-305; 17(1885-6), 495-500; 18(1887-8), 442-448; 19(1889), 114-118; idem, "Ardfert Friary and the FitzMaurices, Lords of Kerry", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 25(1895), 32-40 and 330-337; 26(1896), pp. 227-239; 27(1897), 232-242.

and Tralee survived as towns into the sixteenth century testifies to the enduring nature of that colonization despite the reverses occasioned by the battle of Callan (1261) and its aftermath. Ardfert was the principal ecclesiastical centre in Kerry and the episcopal see. Both Dingle and Tralee were ports, and access to the sea with its consequent overseas trade was undoubtedly important in preserving the urban integrity of both sites during the later Middle Ages. The earliest reference to the port of Dingle occurs in 1278-79 when Percival of Lucca accounted for £12 new custom received on the king's behalf from merchants leaving the port of Dingle.¹³ Both Otway-Ruthven and Graham point out that the ports of Dingle and Tralee were important enough in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries to be centres in which customs were collected,¹⁴ and although probably never more than a minor port, Dingle was one of the safest anchorages on the west coast, while the port of Tralee could still accommodate vessels of 120 tons in the early seventeenth century.¹⁵

It is difficult to gauge the size of any of the Kerry towns in the Middle Ages simply because of the substantial amount of destruction which occurred during the Desmond wars at the end of the sixteenth century and the Confederate wars in the middle of the seventeenth century, and, in the case of Tralee, the Jacobite war of 1690-91. Ardfert was partly abandoned and it shrank in size after being burnt by the Earl of Desmond in 1580, while Tralee was so totally rebuilt during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that its medieval core can only be identified with difficulty. Dingle is the only town where the Anglo-Norman street plan survives into the present, but even here the exact northern and southern limits of the town are unknown. Rattoo, in common with many boroughs, was abandoned before the end of the Middle Ages and nothing at all is known of its internal layout.

The street plan of Dingle was linear in form, similar to that in the majority of Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland¹⁶ but the original street plan of Ardfert and Tralee remain unclear. It is tempting to think that Castle Street and the Mall preserve a former linear pattern but, as discussed below, this is unlikely to be the case. A burgage plot pattern is to be found only in Dingle, where it is of long burgage form, the prevalent type in Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland.¹⁷

The murage grant of 1286 provides strong evidence that both Ardfert and Tralee were protected by town defences,¹⁸ but no town wall fragments survive at either site nor can an outline be suggested for the course of the wall. By contrast the line of the wall at Dingle is reasonably self-evident on the east and west sides of the town but its northern and southern line is unclear. It is likely, however, that the medieval wall of Dingle enclosed a roughly rectangular area. All three towns were associated with manors, bearing out Empey's remark that the Anglo-Norman town in Ireland is an outgrowth of the manor.¹⁹ At Ardfert the castle appears to have been located close to the cathedral but the precise relationship between castle and town at Dingle and Tralee can only be guessed at.

The single parish and parish church is a characteristic feature of Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland and the Kerry examples are no exception. St. James' churchyard at Dingle backed

¹³*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1252-84*, p. 415.

¹⁴Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ireland*, p. 123; B. J. Graham, "The Towns of Medieval Ireland", in R. A. Butlin (ed.) *The Development of the Irish Town*, London 1977, p. 41.

¹⁵W. Childs and T. O'Neill, "Overseas Trade", in A. Cosgrove (ed.) *A New History of Ireland*, II, pp. 492-524, at p. 523; *Cal. State Papers Ireland 1625-32*, p. 402.

¹⁶Bradley, "Planned Anglo-Norman towns", pp. 431-7.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹⁸*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1285-92*, no. 226.

¹⁹C. A. Empey, "The Manor of Carrick-on-Suir in the Middle Ages", *J. Butler Soc.*, II, no. 2 (1982), 208.

onto the town wall, a pattern known from elsewhere in Ireland,²⁰ but the relationship between St. John's, Tralee, and the town is unclear. At Ardfert the cathedral fulfilled the role of the parish church, in functional terms. Friaries and hospitals were located outside the walls of most Anglo-Norman towns²¹ but, due to destruction and alteration, the exact relationship is unclear in the two Kerry examples of Ardfert and Tralee. Nonetheless, it is argued below that the friaries were sited at the edge of the settled area in these towns.

The pre-existing ecclesiastical settlements were a clear factor which influenced the choice of town site at Ardfert and Rattoo. Undoubtedly both also had the added advantage of a ready-made infrastructure, in the form of routeways, to give them an extra attraction. Dingle and Tralee, however, were new towns founded to all intents and purposes on virgin soil and there can be little doubt that it was their economic potential as ports which motivated their choice of site. Its proximity to Ratass may also have been a factor in the case of Tralee.

The poor documentary coverage for the Anglo-Norman towns of Kerry makes it difficult to calculate their foundation date. A date between 1200 and 1215, when the Anglo-Normans appear to have conducted their most energetic activities in north Kerry, is likely for the initial settlements at each of these sites, but solid documentary evidence only becomes available for Ardfert in 1295, Dingle in 1278-79, and Tralee in 1298, while the existence of the borough of Rattoo is only known because of an incidental reference in a late sixteenth century source. Nonetheless, because of the need to consolidate the military gains quickly it is likely that settlement commenced early rather than late.

THE SITES

The entries which follow concentrate primarily on physical features, viz. streets, castle, town walls, churches and the evidence relating to foundation date. Emphasis is placed on the location of features rather than on description.

Ardfert (Illus. 1)

Ard ferta, "the height of the burial mounds" presumably derives its name from a prehistoric cemetery to which the ogham stone, now mounted on concrete supports SE of the cathedral, may have belonged. Ardfert today is little more than a village but for most of the Middle Ages it was the most important settlement site in Kerry. It is generally regarded as having been established in the sixth century by St. Brendan of Clonfert but nothing is known of its history until the eleventh century.²² In 1046 the *damh liac*, "stone church", of Ardfert was destroyed by lightning,²³ and the burning of the settlement is recorded in 1089, 1152, 1179 and 1180.²⁴ At the Synod of Raith Bressail, in 1111, Ratass was chosen as the episcopal see of Kerry but it was soon replaced by Ardfert.²⁵ Architecturally the importance of Ardfert during the eleventh and twelfth centuries is evident

²⁰Bradley, "Planned Anglo-Norman Towns", p. 445; cf. the examples of Cashel, Carrick-on-Suir, Clonmel, and Fethard: J. Bradley, "The Medieval Towns of Tipperary", in W. Nolan and T. G. McGrath (eds.) *Tipperary: History and Society*, Dublin 1985, pp. 34-59.

²¹Bradley, "Planned Anglo-Norman Towns", p. 445.

²²A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland*, London 1970, p. 62.

²³*Ann. Inisfallen*, sub anno.

²⁴*Annals of the Four Masters*, sub annis 1089, 1179; *Ann. Inisfallen*, sub annis 1179, 1180; *Misc. Irish Annals*, sub annis 1152, 1180.

²⁵Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Relig. Houses*, pp. 62 and 95.

from the remains of two Romanesque buildings, one incorporated into the west end of the cathedral, while the nave of the other, Templenahoe, survives.²⁶ The site of a round tower which fell in 1771 is also known.²⁷ A further indication of the possible size of the twelfth century ecclesiastical site is the Molyneux description of c.1682 which noted two further churches and an anchorite's cell.²⁸

The first evidence of direct Anglo-Norman influence occurs in 1217 when the justiciar, Geoffrey de Marisco, unsuccessfully attempted to impose an English bishop on the vacant see in preference to the Irish candidate already elected.²⁹ The first reference to its borough status occurs in 1297 when John le Draper was described as a burgess of 'Ardart'³⁰ while the existence of a municipal authority may be deduced from the mention of the provost in 1295.³¹ The only indication that Ardfert was possibly a sizeable settlement by the mid-century is the foundation of the Franciscan friary by Thomas FitzMaurice, lord of Kerry, c.1253.³² Even this date is insecure, however, because it is likely that it is based on the misreading of a fifteenth century inscription.³³ The earliest contemporary reference to the friary is in 1307.³⁴

Almost nothing is known of Ardfert between the early fourteenth and the late sixteenth centuries, but while some desertion may have occurred, it is not until Desmond power was broken that it clearly declined. In the 1584 survey of forfeited Desmond lands, "the late burgh of Ardarte" is described as "prostrated and devastated".³⁵ The cathedral was never rebuilt after the burning of 1580 and this fact alone indicates that the population had dwindled. The census of 1659 returned a population of 47³⁶ and in 1687 Sir Richard Cox described it as "of late soe decayd that it contains onely a few Cabbins".³⁷ A few years earlier Molyneux noted "an infinite deal of stone walls and traces of old foundations, which show the place to have formerly appeared in a better figure than it bears at present".³⁸ Nonetheless, the borough survived, if only as a legal fiction, into the nineteenth century.

The actual site of the medieval borough cannot be accurately determined but its most likely position was in the strip of ground between the cathedral and Ardfert Abbey. The road south of the cathedral widens into a triangular space known as the Fair Green which looks to be of recent date. Accordingly nothing can be said about the layout of its original streets and houses, although there is sixteenth century documentation for these.³⁹ A market cross and pillory were mentioned in a dispute of 1312, according to King.⁴⁰

²⁶A. Hill, *Ardfert Cathedral, Kerry*, Cork 1870; idem, "The Cathedral and Other Churches at Ardfert, Co. Kerry", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 16(1883-4), pp. 291-295; H. G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, I, Dundalk 1955, p. 155.

²⁷G. L. Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, Dublin 1979, p. 113.

²⁸O'Sullivan, "William Molyneux", p. 40.

²⁹J. A. Watt, *The Church and Two Nations in Medieval Ireland*, Cambridge 1970, p. 73.

³⁰*Cal. Justic. Rolls Ireland 1295-1303*, p. 128.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 21.

³²Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Relig. Houses*, p. 242; cf. Nicholls "The FitzMaurices of Kerry", p. 25, fn. 8.

³³Nicholls, *ibid.*, pp. 24-25; E. B. Fitzmaurice and A. G. Little, *Materials for the history of the Franciscan Province of Ireland*, Manchester 1920, p. 19.

³⁴*Cal. Justic. Rolls Ireland 1305-7*, p. 408.

³⁵*Survey of the... Lands forfeited by Gerald, 15th Earl of Desmond*, pp. 7 and 31.

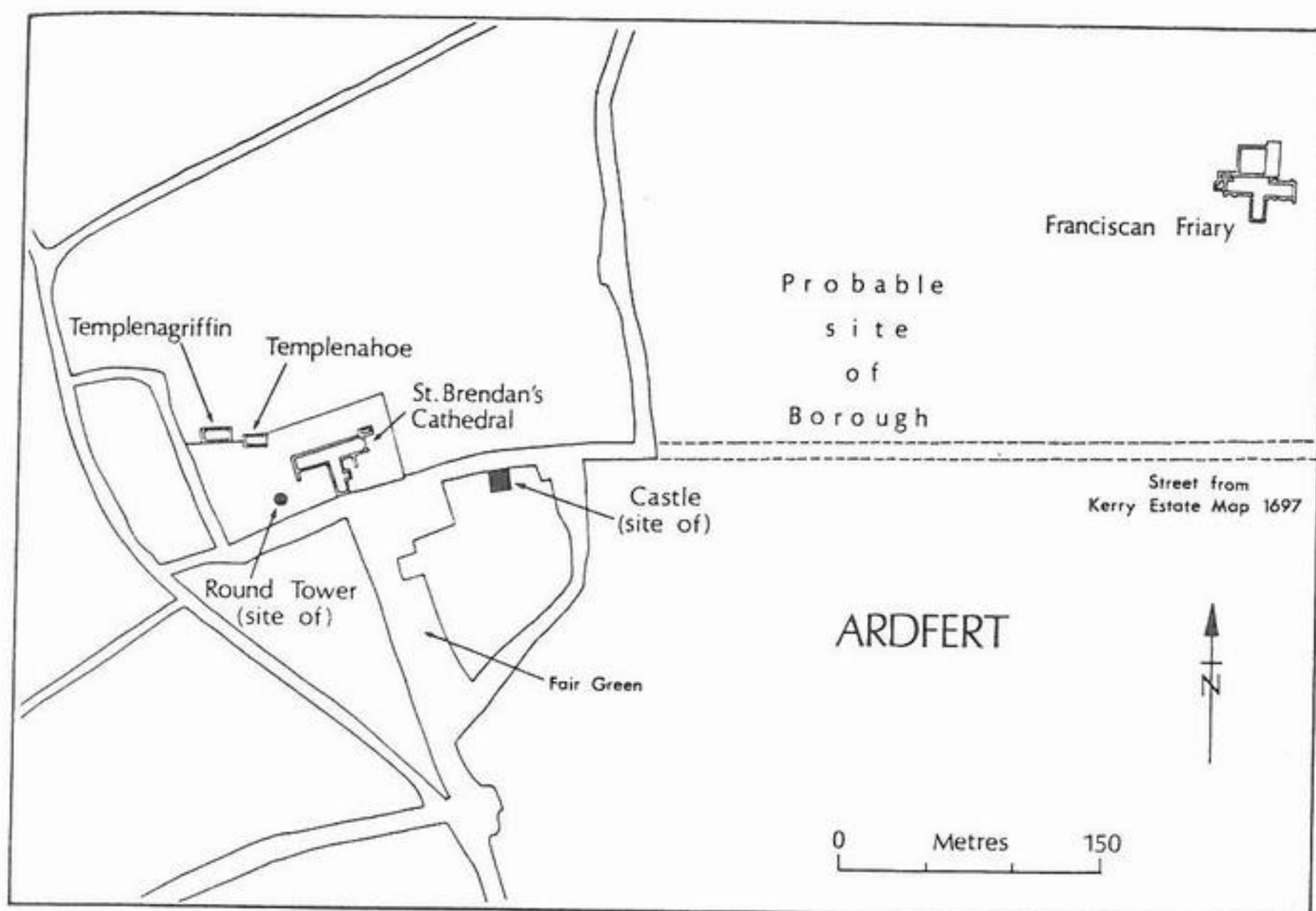
³⁶S. Pender (ed.), *A Census of Ireland c. 1659*, Dublin 1939, p. 248.

³⁷P. de Brún, "Sir Richard Cox's Description of Kerry, 1687", *J. Kerry Archaeol. Hist. Soc.*, 5(1972), 39.

³⁸O'Sullivan, "William Molyneux", p. 40.

³⁹Streets and houses are mentioned in *Survey of the... Lands forfeited by the 15th Earl of Desmond*, p. 7, and *Cal. Carew Mss 1574-88*, p. 451.

⁴⁰J. King, *King's History of County Kerry: part 1*, Liverpool 1908, p. 17.



Illus. 1. Outline plan of Ardfert showing the principal medieval features.

The earliest positive evidence for a castle occurs in the late sixteenth century when the FitzMaurice barons of Lixnaw held one at Ardfert, but references to a royal prison in 1295 and 1307 suggest that it already existed.⁴¹ Hickson located the seventeenth century successor of this castle "close to the old cathedral", while Nunan placed it "adjacent to the cathedral on the East side".⁴² Neither writer produces contemporary records, however, to support their statements.

Although no trace of town defences survives, the murage grant of 1286 to Thomas FitzMaurice, lord of Desmond, to enclose the vill of 'Ard', and the reference to the collection of murage in 1311-12 indicates that Ardfert was walled.⁴³ It is quite possible that these defences were of earth and timber rather than of stone.

Historically almost nothing is known of St. Brendan's Cathedral but, architecturally, it can be suggested that it was built c.1260,⁴⁴ incorporating twelfth century Romanesque

⁴¹*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1574-85*, p. 261; *Cal. Justic. Rolls 1295-1303*, p. 44; *Cal. Justic. Rolls 1305-1307*, p. 416. I am grateful to Mr. Andrew Halpin for these references of which I was not aware when I compiled my list of Anglo-Norman towns from which Ardfert was excluded. See Bradley, "Planned Anglo-Norman Towns", pp. 447-455.

⁴²M. A. Hickson, *Selections from Old Kerry Records*, 2nd ser., London 1874, p. 3; F. Nunan, *Kerry's Ancient See and Shrine: Ardfert-Brendan*, Tralee 1950, p. 38.

⁴³*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1285-92*, no. 226; E. Tresham, *Rotulorum Patentium et Clausorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Calendrium Hen. II—Hen. VII*, Dublin 1828, p. 19: nos. 15 and 21.

⁴⁴H. G. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, II, Dundalk 1960, p. 114.



work belonging to its predecessor. The south transept was added in the fifteenth century, and the vestry/mortuary chapel, altered in 1688, was built during the sixteenth century. Close to the cathedral is the small fifteenth century church of Templenagriffen.

The Franciscan friary was located at the west end of the settlement. The church was essentially a thirteenth century structure onto which a transept and west tower were added in the fifteenth. The cloister and north range are also of fifteenth century date. It was one of the principal burial places of the FitzMaurices of Kerry.⁴⁵ The first reference to the hospital of Ardfert occurs in 1597 when George Isham received a grant of lands including "a ruinous house, called the Spittle House of Adarte".⁴⁶ Smith suggested that this was established in the fourteenth century.⁴⁷ It was probably located in the modern townland of Gortaspiddle.

Dingle (Illus. 2)

Apart from the placename, derived from *an daingean*, "the stronghold" (could this have been the flattened ringfort south of the town in Farran townland?), there is no evidence of any pre-Norman settlement at Dingle and it seems to have been a new foundation on virgin soil. It is first mentioned in customs returns of 1278-79, when it was evidently functioning as a port.⁴⁸ An inquisition of 1322 describes it as the capital messuage of Thomas de Clare in the cantred of Ossurys, and from this it may be deduced that it formed part of the cantred granted c. 1216 to Robert de Marisco.⁴⁹

Dingle was burnt in 1316 by Diarmait MacCarthaig, lord of Desmumu,⁵⁰ and the effects of this were noted in the 1322 inquisition which described de Clare's manor as "unbuilt" and added that many free tenants had left because of the war.⁵¹ Nonetheless the town survived. Royal customs officials were assigned there in 1334 and 1395, while in 1461 it was proposed to make a grant to William, lord de Bary, from the customs and cocket of Dingle.⁵² In 1485 the seneschal of Kerry held the assizes at Dingle,⁵³ a clear indication of the continued existence of the town.

The strategic importance of Dingle became most apparent in the late sixteenth century. In 1570, during the rebellion of James FitzMaurice, the town was occupied by a French force,⁵⁴ while in 1579 FitzMaurice landed six Spanish ships at Dingle and subsequently burned the town.⁵⁵ The destruction was so great that the town was largely abandoned according to Pelham and new incentives had to be devised to encourage the merchants and fishermen to return.⁵⁶ In 1582 it was besieged by the earl of Desmond and, according to one English traveller's account, "the castle and all the houses in the Towne, save foure,

⁴⁵B. Jennings, "Brevis synopsis Provinciae Hiberniae Ff minorum", *Analecta Hibernica*, 6(1934), 153.

⁴⁶*Cal. Pat. Rolls Ireland 18-45 Eliz.*, p. 413.

⁴⁷Smith, *Antient and Present State of Co. Kerry*, p. 204.

⁴⁸*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1252-84*, p. 415.

⁴⁹*Cal. Inquis. Post Mortem*, VI, p. 160; Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, III, p. 133; Otway-Ruthven, *Med. Ireland*, p. 87.

⁵⁰*Ann. Innisfallen, sub anno*.

⁵¹*Cal. Inquis. Post Mortem*, VI, p. 160.

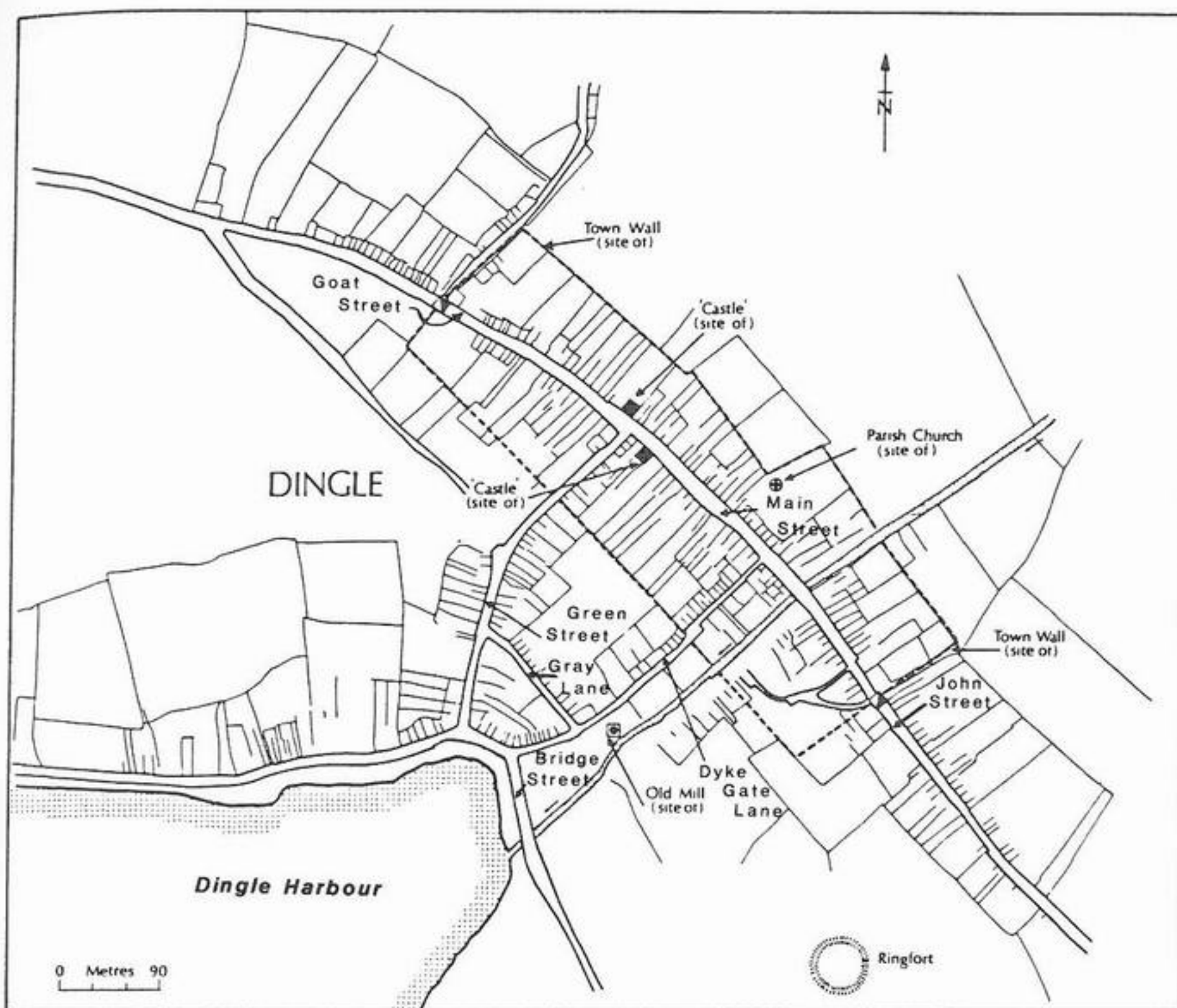
⁵²44th Rep. Deputy Keeper Public Records Ireland, pp. 51-52; Tresham, *Rot. Pat. Claus. Canc. Hib.*, p. 152: no. 44 and p. 269: no. 68.

⁵³*Cal. Carew Mss. Misc.*, p. 377.

⁵⁴*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1509-73*, p. 435.

⁵⁵*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1574-85*, pp. 173-174; see *ibid.*, pp. 197 and 216, and *Cal. Carew Mss. 1574-88*, p. 214.

⁵⁶*Cal. Carew Mss. 1574-88*, p. 254.



Illus. 2. Outline plan of Dingle showing the principal medieval features.

were won, burnt, and ruined by the Erle of Desmond. These foure houses fortified themselves against him, and withstood him and all his power perforce, so as he could not winne them".⁵⁷ The end of the Desmond wars marked an upturn in Dingle's fortunes, however, if only because it was burned no more.

The street pattern is linear consisting of one main street, which slopes downhill from north-west to south-east. The burgage plot pattern still survives on either side of it, and stretches back to a long linear boundary on the south, which almost certainly preserves the line of the town wall. Dyke Gate Lane and Green Street may have been established in the seventeenth century and appear to represent expansion into the harbour area.

It is evident from Wright's 1589 account that a number of fortified town houses existed in the town at that time,⁵⁸ and the foundations of one still survive on the north side of

⁵⁷Hitchcock, "Dingle in the Sixteenth Century", p. 140.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

Goat Street, while the sites of others can be identified.⁵⁹ A number of curious decorated plaques, probably derived from houses of this period, also survive.⁶⁰

The first of a number of proposals to enclose Dingle occurred in 1569 when it was suggested that the president of Munster should be given £1000 for the purpose.⁶¹ In 1594 Perrot, the lord deputy, listed Dingle as one of seven towns he hoped to wall, if given extra revenue,⁶² while Sir Thomas Norreys described it in 1598 as "not being walled nor otherwise defensible".⁶³ Puzzlingly, the 1598 Description of Ireland describes it as "a walled Towne",⁶⁴ but the anomaly between these two contemporary descriptions may be explained by Wright's hint that portions of the medieval town wall survived in 1589.⁶⁵ According to Smith the walls had decayed very much by his time⁶⁶ and today their approximate outline can only be gauged with difficulty. The south-eastern line of the wall evidently followed the long linear boundary at the rear of the burgage plots fronting onto the south-east side of Main Street. On the north-east side of Main Street it is fair to assume that the wall enclosed St. John's churchyard. These are the only indicators of the former line, however, and, in the absence of excavation, there is no satisfactory way of establishing the northern and southern extremities of the town. The outline on the accompanying plan (Illus. 2) is based on the plot pattern and simply follows the course of the major boundaries.

The medieval references to the manor of Dingle and subsequent sixteenth century references to garrisons imply that there was a castle at Dingle but its site is unknown. The parish church of St. James is first recorded in 1428 as a perpetual vicarage of the Augustinian Canons of Killaha.⁶⁷ The oldest tomb in the churchyard is one of 1504, but it and the cut stones in the churchyard leave no doubt about the fact that the medieval church stood within the large rectangular churchyard on the east side of Main Street.⁶⁸

Rattoo

The sole evidence for the existence of a borough here is the 1597 grant of a burgage "in Ratowe" to Trinity College Dublin.⁶⁹ There can be little doubt, however, that the borough was of Anglo-Norman origin. Its founder was most likely Meiler FitzHenry himself. The round tower clearly indicates the Early Christian origins of the site but documentary evidence is non-existent.⁷⁰ A hospital dedicated to St. John the Baptist (Fratres Cruciferi) was founded by Brother William c.1200,⁷¹ but later in the thirteenth century it became an Arroasian abbey dedicated to SS Peter and Paul.⁷² There is no evidence of the borough's original size or extent but it is reasonable to assume that it was located in the vicinity of the church and round tower.

⁵⁹Hitchcock, "Castles of Corkaguiney", p. 353; J. Cuppage *et. al.*, *Archaeological Survey of the Dingle Peninsula*, Ballyferriter 1986, pp. 380-381.

⁶⁰Cuppage, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-383.

⁶¹*Cal. Carew Mss. 1515-74*, p. 396.

⁶²*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1574-85*, p. 533.

⁶³*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1598-1599*, p. 400.

⁶⁴E. Hogan (ed.), *The Description of Ireland... in Anno 1598*, Dublin 1878, p. 189.

⁶⁵Hitchcock, "Dingle in the Sixteenth Century", p. 140.

⁶⁶Smith, *Antient and Present State of Co. Kerry*, pp. 73 and 177.

⁶⁷Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Relig. Houses*, p. 169.

⁶⁸Cuppage, *op. cit.*, pp. 381-382.

⁶⁹17th Rep. Deputy Keeper Public Records Ireland, p. 65: no. 6123.

⁷⁰Barrow, *Round Towers*, pp. 109-113; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Relig. Houses*, p. 43.

⁷¹*Reg. St. John the Baptist, Dublin*, p. xvi; Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Relig. Houses*, pp. 191 and 216.

⁷²Gwynn and Hadcock, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

Tralee
(Illus. 3)

There is no evidence for any settlement at Tralee before the foundation of the Anglo-Norman borough. Hickson's suggestion that 'Gwyar's burgage', mentioned in a late sixteenth century document, preserves the memory of a pre-Norman church of St. Guaire is very unlikely and must be regarded as unproven.⁷³ The exact foundation date of Tralee is unknown but the establishment of the Dominican friary c.1243 suggests that the settlement was sizeable by the mid-century.⁷⁴ Similarly the murage grant of 1286 must be another indicator of its size and importance.⁷⁵ The earliest evidence of its borough status occurs in 1298 when an extent noted that the burgesses of Tralee paid 100 shillings in rent annually.⁷⁶

References to the town in the later Middle Ages are few but they are sufficient to show that it continued to function.⁷⁷ The destruction caused during the Desmond wars was extensive. The town was burned in 1580⁷⁸ and was so badly damaged that the 1584 survey of Desmond's forfeited lands described it as "formerly a well-inhabited borough, with a castle and edifices in it, formerly well and fully repaired, but now ruined and broken".⁷⁹ The same document describes many of the buildings, burgages and tenements as "prostrated", "waste", or "broken". In the ensuing Munster plantation Tralee was granted to Edward Denny in 1587⁸⁰ but any attempts at reconstruction were interrupted by the rebellion of the 'Sugán' Earl of Desmond in 1598-1600. In 1598 Tralee was abandoned by its English garrison and settlers,⁸¹ and proposals of 1600 recommended the complete rebuilding of the town⁸² but the degree to which these were carried out is unclear. Nonetheless the early seventeenth century saw the reconstruction of the town under the patronage of the Dennys. It was granted a new charter in 1613,⁸³ English colonists were attracted and a survey of 1622 noted that thirty-two new English households had been established.⁸⁴ These developments were interrupted in 1641, when over one hundred houses were burned,⁸⁵ and in 1691 when it was burnt by the Jacobites.⁸⁶

The series of seventeenth century burnings and reconstructions appears to have obliterated the medieval street plan. Smith's map of 1756 shows a long east-west axis running from the west side of High Street, via Bridge Street and the Mall to Castle Street. Much of this pattern, however, is probably of seventeenth and eighteenth century date. The concentration of small streets on the west side of the axis on Smith's map suggests that this was the

⁷³M. A. Hickson, "Notes on Kerry Topography, Ancient and Modern", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 15(1879-82), 578.

⁷⁴Gwynn and Hadcock, *Med. Relig. Houses*, p. 230.

⁷⁵*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1285-92*, no. 226.

⁷⁶*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1293-1301*, no. 551, p. 255.

⁷⁷Tresham, *Rot. Pat. Claus. Canc. Hib.*, p. 51: no. 29; *ibid.* 94, no. 168; see E. Curtis, *Cal. Ormond Deeds 1413-1509*, p. 35.

⁷⁸*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1574-85*, p. 223; *Cal. Carew Mss. 1574-88*, p. 237.

⁷⁹*Survey of the . . . Lands forfeited by Gerald, 15th Earl of Desmond*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁰*16th Rep. Deputy Keeper Public Records Ireland*, p. 39: no. 5043.

⁸¹*Cal. State Papers Ireland 1598-1599*, p. 325.

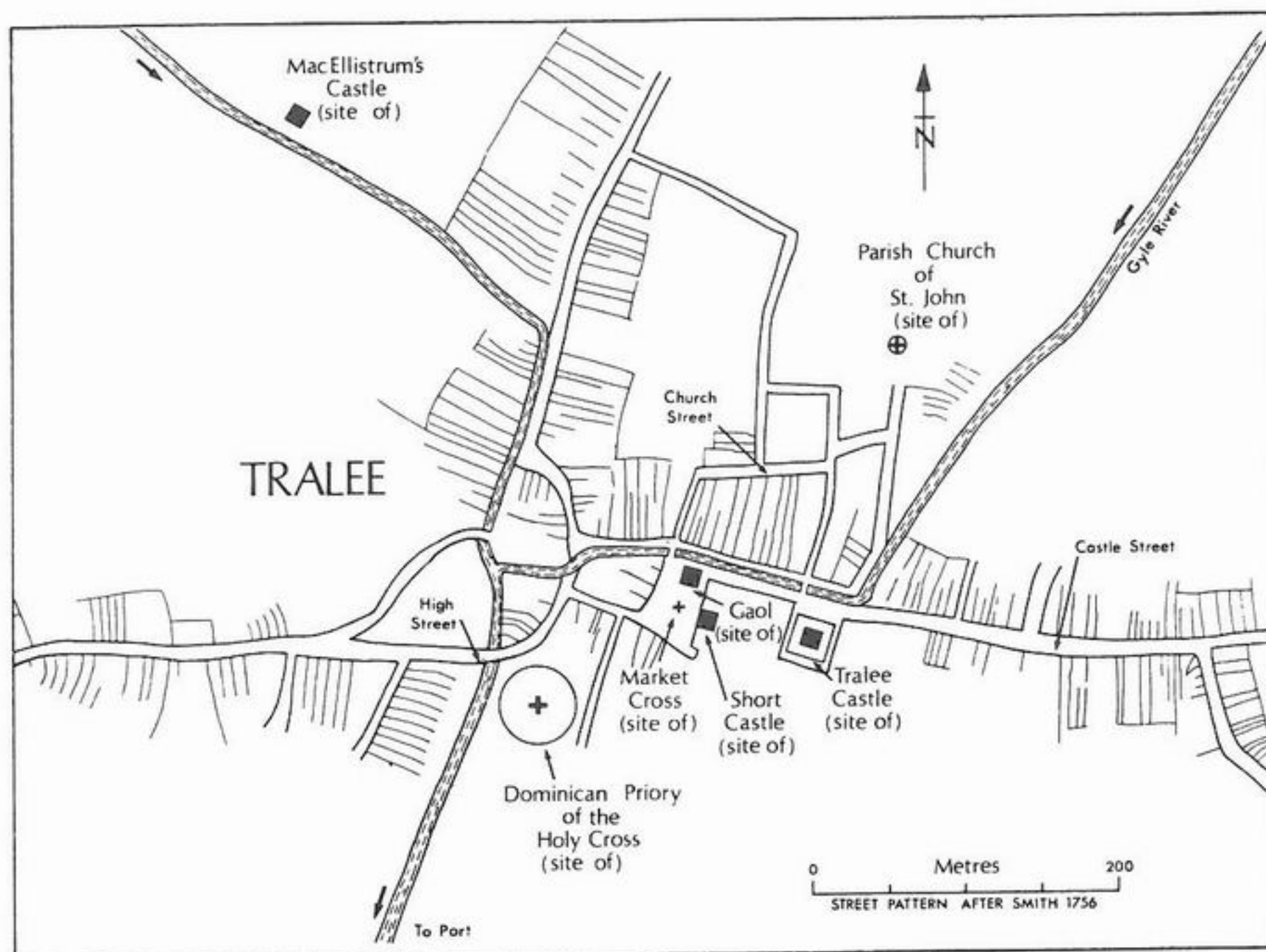
⁸²*Cal. Carew Mss. 1589-1600*, p. 505.

⁸³M. F. Cusack, *A History of the Kingdom of Kerry*, London 1871, appendix vi, pp. lii-ix; M. Weinbaum, *British Borough Charters 1307-1660*, Cambridge 1943, p. 223.

⁸⁴M. McCarthy-Morrogh, *The Munster Plantation: English Migration to Southern Ireland, 1583-1641*, Oxford 1986, pp. 174-175.

⁸⁵M. A. Hickson, *Selections from Old Kerry Records*, London 1872, p. 198.

⁸⁶Smith, *Antient and Present State of Co. Kerry*, p. 322, note b.



Illus. 3. Outline plan of Tralee showing the principal medieval features.

old core of Tralee, despite the fact that the castle, parish church and Dominican friary are located outside it. It was a normal feature in medieval towns for the castle to be located on the edge of the town, while friaries were commonly outside or on the periphery. The location of the parish church, however, is more difficult to explain.

The 1584 survey refers to three streets, Burgess-street, Great Castle-street, and "the street of the New Manor".⁸⁷ It is tempting to identify "Great Castle Street" with the present Castle Street, but it is more likely to have been The Mall or the portion of Bridge Street leading towards the castle. The "street of the new manor", presumably the street leading to the manor, is probably the present Castle Street or perhaps the street known as Moydore Well. Burgess Street is now unidentifiable; it may be High Street. Smith mentions the former existence of a market cross but its location is unknown.⁸⁸

Sixteenth and seventeenth century references indicate that there were a number of fortified houses within the town, but of these only the so-called 'short castle' can be approximately located.⁸⁹ Outside the town, the remains of Castle MacEllistrum survived until the mid-1870s.⁹⁰

⁸⁷*Survey of the... Lands forfeited by Gerald, 15th Earl of Desmond*, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁸Smith, *Antient and Present State of Co. Kerry*, p. 307.

⁸⁹M. A. Hickson, "Notes on Kerry Topography, Ancient and Modern", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 15(1879-82), 57.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*; J. O'Donovan, *The Antiquities of the County of Kerry*, Cork 1983, p. 79.

No trace of the town defences survives and there is no indication as to their course. The existence of a seigneurial castle of the earls of Desmond at Tralee throughout the medieval period may be assumed, although nothing is known of its origins, or of its history prior to the mid-sixteenth century. The earliest direct reference to it is the enigmatic record that Sabina, heir of Robert Mac Learnys, granted "the Great Castle in Tralighe" to James, earl of Desmond in 1548-9.⁹¹ It is referred to in the 1584 survey simply as "the site of . . . great Castle of Tralee".⁹² The castle was granted to Edward Denny in 1587 and it was restored in 1627.⁹³ Smith's map of Tralee shows that it occupied the north end of Denny Street. It was demolished in 1826.

St. John's parish church was probably a thirteenth century foundation and is first referred to in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1302-6, when it was valued at 40s.⁹⁴ It has been suggested that the church was held by the Knights Hospitallers because of its dedication to St. John, but there are no contemporary records to confirm this.⁹⁵ The present church incorporates substantial portions of an earlier building, but its date is uncertain.⁹⁶

The Dominican priory was founded in 1243 by John FitzThomas FitzGerald, who was buried there in 1261, after his death in the Battle of Callan. The friary was one of the principal burial places of the FitzGeralds of Desmond.⁹⁷ It was granted to Edward Denny in 1587, and subsequently it was dismantled by the Cromwellians for use as building stone.⁹⁸ Hickson located the site of the priory in the area east of Stoughton's Row and Mary Street, and both Rowan and Hickson suggest that the Square occupies the site of the priory's cloisters.⁹⁹ At present, however, all that can be said is that while the priory was clearly located in this general area, the documents do not allow of greater precision. A number of architectural fragments survive in the rockery garden of the modern Dominican church.¹⁰⁰

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⁹¹*Cal. Carew Mss. Misc.*, p. 397.

⁹²*Survey of the . . . Lands forfeited by Gerald, 15th Earl of Desmond*, pp. 10-11.

⁹³16th Rep. Deputy Keeper Public Records Ireland, p. 39: no. 5043; Hickson, *loc. cit.*, pp. 580-581.

⁹⁴*Cal. Docs. Ireland 1302-7*, p. 296.

⁹⁵M. A. Hickson, "Notes on Kerry Topography, Ancient and Modern", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 16(1883-4), 297; see Gwynn and Hadcock, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

⁹⁶See H. L. L. Denny, "Tralee Parish Church", *J. Assoc. Preservation Mems. Dead Ireland*, 7(1907-9), 363-364.

⁹⁷[A. B. Rowan], "The Antiquities of Tralee", *Kerry Magazine*, 1(1854), 33-34.

⁹⁸16th Rep. Deputy Keeper Public Records Ireland, p. 39: no. 5043; O'Sullivan, "William Molyneux", p. 38.

⁹⁹M. A. Hickson, "Notes on Kerry Topography, Ancient and Modern", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 15(1879-82), 585; Rowan, *op. cit.*, p. 2; M. A. Hickson, *Selections from Old Kerry Records*, 2nd ser., London 1874, p. 107.

¹⁰⁰Denny, *loc. cit.*, p. 361; P. Harbison, "Some Medieval Sculpture in Kerry", *J. Kerry Archaeol. Hist. Soc.*, 6(1973), 9-25; idem, "A Lost Gothic Roof-boss from Tralee", *J. Kerry Archaeol. Hist. Soc.*, 7(1974), 143-4.