THE “LIBERTIES” OF LIMERICK.

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The Norsemen, usually known to us as the Danes, had established themselves in Dublin, Waterford and other places along the Irish coast early in the ninth century. They sailed up the tidal estuary of the Shannon, but their course was effectually blocked by an island fortress at the head of the tide-way some sixty miles from the Western Ocean. It was not until the year 855 that they effected a landing on this island, but their permanent settlement was not made till 922, when they founded a Danish town and called it ‘Luimneach’, i.e. Limerick, the name of the estuary of the Shannon, over which they had sailed. This island town dominated the whole country and commanded the only ford connecting the east and west banks of the river. Before the end of the tenth century the O’Briens and men of Thomond conquered the foreigners and established themselves in the town which was inhabited by both “Gaeils and Galls” for the next two hundred years, when the Anglo-Normans, in their turn, drove out the O’Briens, and introduced the feudal system and English laws, thus establishing an English town in the midst of the native Irish population. The mere Irish, being compelled to live outside the walls, made the settlement on the left bank of the river called in time the “Irish-town.”

Limerick was incorporated under a Charter of John, Lord of Ireland, and his brother, Richard, the citizens being empowered to elect annually a Mayor and bailiffs according to the English custom.

Limerick, thus converted into an English town, practically remained so down to our own time; for more than six hundred years there is neither a “Mac” or an “O” to be found among the names of the Mayors, Bailiffs or Sheriffs of the town.

It will be asked who were these Normans, who, under their Duke, William, conquered England in 1066, and whose grandsons now formed this English town in the midst of a Celtic population. They were of the same warlike race, and were descendants of the Norsemen who had
founded this island city three hundred years before. Early in the ninth century, the Norsemen had made settlements along the coasts of France, Spain and Italy, and having conquered a large district in the north-west of France, they in time made peace with the rulers of that country, embraced Christianity and intermarried with the natives. The name Norsemen was softened to Normans, and their settlement became known as the Duchy of Normandy. The mixture of the blood of the more civilised southern people evolved a race, brave, warlike, masterful and more cultured than their forefathers—the hardy vikings of the north. These then were the Normans who became overlords to the inhabitants of Limerick (of English and Welsh descent) as may be noted by the names appearing in the following grants:—

John, Earl of Moreton and Lord of Ireland, who had granted a Charter to Limerick in 1197, also gave grants to the following Norman Knights and gentlemen:—

William de Burgo in 1197.
Hamo de Valois in 1198.
William de Braosa in 1200.
Galfridus Fitzrobert, 1201.
Robert Sergeant in 1201.
Humphrey de Pikenile.
Lauvelekin Fitzwilliam.
William de Naish,

who in their turn, made grants of lands and building sites to the newly-incorporated citizens of Limerick.

King John had granted forty ploughlands to the Mayor and citizens of Limerick at the rent of £40 yearly, and this is the foundation of the "Liberties of Limerick." Twenty-four of these ploughlands were on the south and east sides of the river, sixteen being at the north and west extending as far as the Parish of Kilfinninane in the County Clare.

In the space of four hundred years there were fourteen Charters granted by English Sovereigns to the citizens of Limerick. It is only necessary here to give a summary of that of Elizabeth in the twenty-fifth year of her reign.
considering the fidelity and obedience which the citizens of that city to us in all things hitherto freely showed, and were ready to show at their own very great expenses, labours and charges, especially in the most wicked rebellion by Gerald, Earl of Desmond, and his confederates, against us and our royal power, very lately attempted, and perpetrated;” etc. “We have willed that our city of Limerick shall be and remain for ever hereafter a city in itself, and that the citizens of the said city be and for ever hereafter shall remain one body corporate and politic, in deed, fact and name, by the name of Mayor, Bailiffs and Citizens of the City of Limerick,” etc. This Charter then confirms all former charters and grants “the salmon weir, the island of Iniscattery in the Shannon and twenty-four acres of land, a house and castle in the island to the Mayor and citizens of Limerick for ever, and their successors at the annual rent of £3 12s. 8d.; also ten cottages, one church in ruins, twenty acres of wood and stony ground in said island called beechwood with all the tithes and the several customs following:—From every boat of oysters coming into the city of Limerick, once a year 1,000 oysters, and from every herring boat, once a year, 500 herrings.” The Queen also granted the customs of the several gates of the city.

By the Charter of James I., granted in 1609, the prohibition in all previous charters to the effect:— That no person who is by blood an Irishman, or who shall live as an Irishman shall be preferred to any dignity or ecclesiastical benefice in the Cathedral Church of Limerick without licence, dispensation or toleration of the dignity, etc.,” is omitted. This charter also declares the extent of the county of the city—“ That all and singular houses, waters, water courses, soil and bottom for the space of three miles at every side to be measured by the Earl of Thomond and others shall be likewise annexed to the aforesaid county of the city of Limerick as part and parcel entirely of the aforesaid city distinct and separate from our county of Limerick, etc., and together with our aforesaid island of Iniscattery, shall be one county of itself with power to the Mayor, Sheriff and citizens to hold one Admiralty Court of record in every week through the year.”

Under this Charter an Indenture of Perambulation was made on the 31st August, 1609, between Donat, Earl of Thomond, Bernard, Lord
Bishop of Limerick, Sir Francis Barkley, Knight, and Sir Thomas Browne, Knight, on the one part; and the Mayor, David Whyte, the Sheriffs and Citizens of Limerick on the other part. This important instrument sets out the ancient liberties and franchises of the city, and orders the limits to be bounded by great stones or other notable signs.

The Indenture recites letters patent dated 3rd March, 6th James I, and states that “the Commissioners have perambulated, measured, limited, meared, and bounded unto the said Mayor Sheriffs and Citizens, three miles of land, and they declare the said county of the city of Limerick to extend and reach to the bounds of all parts, according to the admeasurements as they are hereinafter declared, and that the under written towns, castles, lands and hamlets and other places named for mears, limits and bounds, are the extreme bounds, limits and true mears of the said city—three miles from the exterior of the said city, cast, west and south.”

It goes on to give the bounds, the first being from St. John’s Gate to a mound or moat at Killcowline, and the second was from the same gate to the hill of Carrigparson. The third was northwards along the
Shannon to the Castle of Doonass, and the fourth was from Mongerett Gate to Brienduffe's (O'Brien) Mill at Clairinie, thus "....the mear taken from the mills of Brienduffe's, called the mill of Clairinie, drawing to the north-west as the watercourse thereof runneth through the bog of Campire, and then leading to the bog directly to the great stone standing in the hedge called Legancampyne, and from the said stone to Craggenecorbally, mearing headway with the Lord Bishop's and Brienduffe's land, and so along the highway till it comes to the heap of stones called Lishdermode, Ikallie, and so to Shanane, in the highway, betwixt Tirevowightragh on the west and Tirevowighbagh on the east. The great castle of Crattlaghmoell on the north of the Shannon standeth right over against this way, mearing Tirevowightragh west and Tirevowighbagh on the east." (1)

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(1) "The heap of stones" (Lishdermode Ikallie or Cahir na caile), was utilised fifty years ago in making the sunk fence bounding Tervoe demesne and Cooper Hill. A part of the East rampart remains and is about a hundred yards N.W. of the back entrance to Tervoe. A limestone chair, polished by long use, was found in this fort and is still preserved.
This survey was only of the South Liberties. By an inquisition taken in 1615 (given in "Lenihan’s History of Limerick," p. 140) it was found that most of the ploughlands (granted by King John to the Mayor and Commonality of Limerick) to the north of the city were then in the possession of the O'Briens and Macnamaras, and the bounds of the Liberties seem to have contracted to within a mile of the city walls, co-extensive with the present North Liberty Barony (1 A). The present townland names within the Liberties practically correspond and are the same as the ploughlands granted by the Charter of John.

In the great National upheaval of 1642 the citizens of Limerick joined the “Confederate Catholics,” and fought for the King against the Parliament. They refused to accept Ormonde’s Peace of 1648, and continued the struggle against the Parliament until the city surrendered to Ireton in October, 1651.

(D) The extreme North West bounds of the South Liberties, according to this perambulation, was fixed where the upland of Tieveoughtragh and Tieveoughtragh joined the corcase land. See notes on a Danish settlement in this district by J. G. Barry, Journal R.S.A., 1935, p. 198. “The great castle of Crataghmoel on the north of the Shannon standeth right over against this way.” The corcase land is clearly omitted, as the creek which is shown to be the boundary on the map joins the river to the N.E. and is not opposite Cratloe Castle. This explains why the bounds were fixed at the point D, the end of the Upland. The late Lord Emily informed the writer that it was a tradition in his family that the banks of the river between the Maigue and Ballinacurra were made with the assistance of a grant from the Irish Parliament of 1634, when Wentworth was Lord Deputy.

The townland names in the South Liberties will be found in the map. The following are the townland names mentioned in the North Liberties:—Castleblake (Faranshone), Ardgallagh, Cahirdavy, Shanevill, Kilbrash, Farrrenconery, Ballygrenan, Clonecanon, Farrinengown, Ballynaghtenmore, Meylick, Ballyquaquentheg, “Prior’s land, 15 acres, Farrankelly, 7 acres, parcel of the said forty, which Prior’s land is parcel of the former six granted by the King to Edmond Sexton, yielding no rent to the Corporation. “The lands undenamed are a parcel of the ploughlands, parcel of the said forty, which said eight Richard de Clare held of the Kings of England in fee of the said Mayor and Commonality, viz:—Knockishin, Ballycurenaw, Capaghthamore, Glancorose, Boyleigh, Cratloekeel, Cratlokeel, Cratlohnmore, Querreby, the same do lie near the city, and answer no rent to the Mayor, are by tradition and hearsay from ancient men affirmed to be within the old and ancient Liberties and North west side of the city.” See Fitzgerald’s Hist. of Limeric., Appendix p. 21. The full text of this interesting document (Inquisition of 1615) may be found in “The Diocese of Limerick” by Rev. J. Begley, page 419.

1 A Monobratther (the monks bog) is omitted in Petty’s map (No. 1). It is not included among the townlands mentioned in the Inquisition of 1615. That it was part of the ancient Liberties there is no doubt. The omission is due to the fact that it was valueless as a cut out bog and swamp. It was included in the Corporation property in 1634 when the Causeway or “Long Pavement” was made through it, at the Corporation expense, to connect Parteen and North Clare with the city. The following inscription, in raised Roman Capitals, was put up at Mile End (Whitehall) and is now inserted in one of the parapets of Whitehall Bridge.

“HUNC PONTEM AC VIAM STRATAM FIERI FECIT PETRUS CREAGH FILIUS ANDRÆ MAJOR CIVITATIS LIMERICENSES SUMPTIBUS EJUSDEM CIVITATIS. A.D. 1635,”
Limerick city, with 12,000 Irish acres of the Liberties, had been offered by the Parliament to English "Adventurers" for £30,000 and a rent of £625 a year. This offer was not successful in obtaining purchasers, owing, no doubt, to the unsettled state of the country, and the difficulty of taking possession of other people's property without their consent. In the confiscations that followed the surrender of 1651 (when Alderman Pierce Creagh FitzPierce was Mayor) the old English of Limerick lost everything although by the terms of surrender they were secured in their lives and properties with some notable exceptions. From the Book of Distribution and roll of Transplanters Certificates from the Prestincts of Limerick no Irish name appears on the list of old proprietors who forfeited their estates within the Liberties, except that of O'Brien of Carrigogunnel. Under the Cromwellian Settlement the new English got possession of the South Liberties, excepting the Bishops lands, estimated at ten ploughlands and lands on which Protestants had already settled.

Sir William Petty (Surveyor General to the Parliament) and ancestor of Lord Lansdowne got a grant of 1,453 Irish acres in the North Liberties.

In 1653 an Act was passed by Cromwell's Parliament, "that the English adventurers, officers and soldiers, shall be permitted to purchase the forfeited houses in Limerick, at six years' purchase, and that the said city of Limerick shall have equal privileges, franchises and immunities with the city of Bristol in England, and Charters granted to the inhabitants thereof under the great seal of England."

By an Act of Cromwell's the following year the Commons of Ireland were limited to thirty, of which the counties of Limerick, Clare and Kerry had only one member, to be elected at Rathkeal (Sir Hardress Waller of Castletown was the first elected), and the city of Limerick and Kilmallock one. William Purefoy was the first. In 1656 Cromwell granted a Charter to Limerick, by virtue of which the English party elected twelve Aldermen, and in the month of June they elected Colonel Henry Ingoldsby Mayor. Colonel Ingoldsby was one of Cromwell's most trusted officers and had been made Governor of the city by Ireton.
This Corporation, composed entirely of the new English, remained exclusively Protestant (except for the brief interval from 1688-91, when the old English, many of whom inhabited the Irishtown, returned to power, down to 1841, when the Honorable H. Vereker was the last Mayor.

Under the Municipal Reform Act the old state of things ceased. The Irishtown was no longer the centre of Local Government. The new Limerick, with an extended boundary of 2,600 acres, contained the "Englishtown," the "Irishtown," and the "New town," with a population of 48,000. The "Macs" and the "O's" formed the new municipal body and governed a united Limerick for the first time for over six hundred years. During the tenure of office of the old Corporation only one instance is recorded of the Mayor and Corporation riding the bounds of the Liberties and franchises of the city. This occurred in 1765 when Thomas Smyth was Mayor. Having ridden the bounds of the North and South Liberties (for full and detailed account of this perambulation, see "Lenihan's History of Limerick," p. 355), they proceeded to Scattery Island and claimed Admiralty Jurisdiction and the rights over the island granted under the Charter of Queen Elizabeth (2).

When the new Corporation came into office it was found that their predecessors had leased, for terms of lives renewable for ever, all the corporate lands that had not previously been alienated. The Liberties, for fiscal purposes, were now added to the county. The South Liberties became portion of the Baronies of Pubblebrien and Clanwilliam, and those on the Clare side of the river were formed into the North Liberty Barony and added to the County Limerick (3).

(2) In the summer of 1854, when a schoolboy, home for vacation, the writer went with a relative down the river to Scattery Island on the invitation of the Mayor, Alderman Henry Watson (who had been twice Mayor in the days of the old Corporation). The dart was thrown into the water to the west of the island to mark the limit of the Mayor's Admiralty Jurisdiction under the Charter of Elizabeth. After lunch, the Mayor, with some members of the Corporation, landed on the island and claimed all the rights and customs under the same charter. On the return of this party to the steamer, it was found that she had grounded and the party had to await the flowing tide next morning to return to the city. The schoolboy fared better than the "City Fathers" as he spent the night in a Kilrush hotel.

(3) Before the Municipal Reform Act the South Liberties contained 14,754 Irish acres, and the North Liberties 1,714 Irish acres. Tervoe demesne had been taken out of the South Liberties and added to the county. The western limit being now the Bishops lands along the bounds of Conigar to the Shannon, and some townlands adjacent to the city on both sides of the river were included in the Borough. Leprasy
The only landmarks worth mentioning in connection with the ancient “Liberties” of Limerick are the inscribed stones marked A, B, and C, on the accompanying map (Down Survey of the South

Liberties of Limerick) (No 2). The first stands on the side of the Bohermhor at Carrigparson. The second is at the junction of the Boherbane

was very prevalent along the Irish coast in Medieval times, and Lepers Hospitals were erected in most of the coast towns. In the time of Henry III, one and a half ploughlands near the city were granted to endow a Lepers Hospital. Lenihan puts the site of this hospital on the south side of the Ballinacurra river. This was a mistake. The site is now the new cemetery adjacent to the Munster Fair Green, and the townland is still called “The Spital Land, i.e. The Hospital.
with the Limerick and Kilmallock road, and situated on the bounds of
the townland of Ballyogartha, Scart and Ballyneety. The third is
situated on the roadside on the hill of Friarstown (Ballinabrather).

The Carrigparson stone measures 2 feet 2 inches by three feet
three inches, and the inscription is in contracted Roman capitals:

The Libs. of the City
of Lk. Afc'd
1786
Sr. Cr. Knight,
Mayor.

The Liberties of the City of Limerick ascertained 1786, Sir
Christopher Knight, Mayor.

The second stone, on the Kilmallock road, stands two feet one
inch over ground, being one foot eleven inches wide, and is inscribed
thus:

The Libs. OF THE
C--Y OF Lk. Afc'd.
1786 Sr. Cr. Knight,
MAY'r.

The Liberties of the City of Limerick ascertained 1786, Sir
Christopher Knight, Mayor.

The curious thing about these inscriptions is that they are alike and
inscribed by Sir Christopher Knight, Mayor, 1786. According to
"Ferrar's History of Limerick," Christopher Knight was Mayor in 1785, and William Fitzgerald, of Ballyneety, succeeded him in 1786. An explanation is to be found in the following extract from "Ferrar":—

"October 13, 1785.—His Grace the Duke of Rutland, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, accompanied by the Duchess of Rutland, arrived at the Lord Bishop's Palace at Newtown Pery. On the 14th His Grace had a levee at the Bishop's Palace, and was formally addressed by George Smyth, Esq., Recorder, on behalf of the Corporation; by Doctor William Maunsell for the Clergy; by John Philip Roche, Esq., for the Merchants. His Grace received them all very graciously, and was presented by Mr. Recorder with the Freedom of Limerick in a gold box. His Grace conferred the honour of Knighthood on the Chief Magistrate, Christopher Knight."

"It was in the Mayoralty of Sir Christopher Knight, the flagging and paving of the streets commenced, and he was an active promoter of this necessary and useful work. On every occasion he was indefatigable in the discharge of his duty."

These inscriptions were evidently meant to commemorate the honour conferred on him by the Lord Lieutenant, though the stones were not erected until the following year, 1786.

As the Mayor was elected on the first Monday after Michaelmas in each year, Christopher Knight's term of office did not expire till September 29th, 1786.

The third stone measures thirty-six inches by twenty three inches, and is inscribed thus:—

" Libertys of Limerick,"

Ascertained 1812,

William Hunt, Esq.,

Mayor.
The Hunts of Friarstown were a cadet branch of the Vere Hunts of Curraghchase, and had resided for many years at Licadoon House. In 1731 Henry Hunt of Licadoon got a lease of lives of 376 acres (exclusive of the bog) of the lands of Friarstown from Henry Ingoldsby, M.P. for the city in 1713, at a rent of £212 16s. Renewal of this lease was made to his eldest son and successor, Vere Hunt, in 1789, inserting the lives of his sons William and the Rev. John Hunt, William Hunt succeeded his father, and was elected Mayor of Limerick in 1812. He was grandfather of the late John Hunt, J.P., of Friarstown, whose widow, Mrs Anne Hunt, is now in possession of these lands.

This brief account of the Liberties of the City of Limerick is a mere echo of the past. The Liberties have no connection with the city except the Parliamentary Franchise which the inhabitants still retain. They are gone with the forty ploughlands granted to the citizens by John’s Charter; Scattery Island is gone and so is the Lax Weir (4).

(4) Scattery Island was in the possession of the Mayor and Corporation of Limerick in the reign of Charles II, and was let to a tenant. It seems to have reverted to the Crown subsequently, probably owing to the non-payment of the reserved Crown rent. The island came by purchase into the possession of the Keane family. The present landlord is Marcus Keane, D.L. of Beach Park, Ennis.

The Mayor and Corporation of Limerick, in the year 1717, let the Lax Weir and Fishery of the Shannon to a syndicate, on a lease of a hundred years and the reserved rent of £300 a year. In 1834 another lease was given to Mr. Poole Gabbett of Corbally for a hundred years at the same rent. In 1885 this rent with other rents received from the remainder of the Corporation lands was sold in the Landed Estates Court to pay off certain debts due by the Corporation. Mr. A. Bannatyne purchased the rent reserved from the Weir for £5,050. The interest under the lease of 1834 now belongs to a Company of London Fishmongers.