After the first decade of the thirteenth century there is a drop in the number of earthwork castles being built, and the number falls away rapidly in the following decade. The phase of stone castle-building is not so brief. It begins in the late 1100s, takes off in earnest in the early 1200s, and continues, though not at an even pace, through the thirteenth century and into the early years of the following century.

**Fig. 1—Shanid Castle, Co. Limerick (Photo OPW)**

**Traditional forms**

Most of the castles built in Ireland in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries belong to a fairly clear stylistic and conceptual tradition stretching back to the early 1100s. They are buildings for which the best parallels are in twelfth century England and Wales (and France, but to a much lesser extent), and from that point of view they can be called 'traditional'. Common to most is the keep or donjon, a single building which was the strong-point and residential focus. Keeps of three principal plan types - square or rectangular, circular and polygonal - were being used in Ireland by 1210. They were generally three or four storeys in height, with their entrances at first floor level.
Their lower storeys, used for storage and perhaps also as garrison space, were thick-walled for both structural and defensive reasons, and had little natural light. By comparison, the upper storeys contained the well-lit public and private chambers, complete with fireplaces, cupboards and toilets. In some cases a two-storey building, a 'hall', was built alongside or instead of a keep, to contain high status public and private space.

The most numerous and the best-known keeps in Ireland are square or rectangular in plan. On the whole, they seem to have their architectural pedigree in mid to late twelfth century English work: Adare (Limerick) and Carrickfergus (Antrim), among others, belong to that architectural tradition which produced such keeps as Carlisle, Guildford and Scarborough. Certainly the most unusual of the square/rectangular keeps in Ireland is at Trim (Meath). It is comprised of a square block with towers projecting from the middle of each wall face. The origin of the design is to be found in mid-twelfth century English castles such as Orford and Kenilworth where towers containing chambers project from central residential blocks. The Irish keep which relates most closely to Trim is at Maynooth (Kildare), where shallow pilasters (buttress-like projections) project from the centre of three wall faces and accommodate small wall chambers.

Rectangular keeps were vulnerable in times of assault; their corners could only be protected from the parapet above, and in any case were susceptible to destruction by battery and missiles. Where castle-builders perceived such a danger they could opt instead for circular or cylindrical keeps. The first castle-builders of Anglo-Norman Ireland were doubtless aware that they had a choice between such plan types, and some opted for the cylindrical form. There are at least eight cylindrical keeps in Ireland, if we include the enigmatic building on Hook Head in Wexford, and the even more enigmatic Parkavonar Castle (Aghadoe) overlooking the Lakes of Killarney. Cylindrical keeps are particularly common in the Welsh March, and most Irish examples, such as Dundrum (Down), and Ardfinnan and Nenagh (Tipperary), appear to be related towerish keeps.

The polygonal or multi-sided keep is typologically between the rectangular and the cylindrical keep, and was perhaps devised, like the latter, in response to the inherent weaknesses in the design of the former. Found most frequently in the second half of the twelfth century in France and England, it appears in Ireland at the end of the 1100s. It achieved little popularity. Only three Irish examples can definitely be dated to the period around 1200: Castleknock (Dublin) and Shanid (Limerick), both of which are fragmentary, and Athlone (Westmeath), more intact but with later alterations. Significantly, all three examples are built on earthworks, just like many of their English comparanda. Towerless enceinte (enclosure) walls outlined the summits of the earthworks at Castleknock and Shanid, enclosing the keep at the latter castle and incorporating it at the former. These stone enceintes - of which a further example is found associated with the cylindrical keep at Dundrum (Down) - are clearly indebted in their conception to the earlier forms of timber enceinte which would have crowned the earthwork castles which were discussed in Part I (see Arch. Ire. 4:3). There was probably an enceinte wall around the keep at Athlone as well, but most of the original fabric of this wall has been lost through major programmes of re-fortification in the thirteenth and nineteenth-centuries.

The towerless enceinte walls which constitute the earliest outer defences at these sites are not unparalleled in twelfth century work in Britain, but it is more usual in all areas to find some towers, however shallow in projection, along such circuits, as is the case at Adare, Carrickfergus and Trim. Perhaps the most interesting Irish survival of an early enceinte is at Crafn customer (Louth), built in the 1190s, possibly by the same architect who worked (albeit to different specifications) at Trim. It can be compared with the early twelfth century phase of the great de Lacy castle of Ludlow (Shropshire) and to Newcastle, Bridgend (Glamorgan), a baronial castle of c. 1170-80, even to the extent that all three are cliff-top castles.

**New Developments**

Around 1200 there was a transformation in the way western European castles were conceived and built. Inspired by what the returning crusaders had to say about the fortifications they encountered in the eastern Mediterranean, many castle-builders of the years around 1200 paid particular attention to the outer defences of their castles, constructing cylindrical or D-shaped towers at intervals along the circuit walls. Starting with Richard I’s Château-Gaillard in Normandy, built between 1196 and 1198, new castles of any importance possessed such features. The military emphasis also shifted from the keep to the outer walls, prompting the abandonment of the concept of the keep as a free-standing or visually dominant structure, and the incorporation of its functions within those buildings behind the enclosing wall or forming part of the enclosure. Thus we find 'keepless'
castles developing in the same period. The new ideas reached Ireland shortly after 1200, although they did not supplant the comparatively conservative castle-building tradition which was already established. In fact, the fashion for building cylindrical keeps continued under royal patronage in France well into the 1200s, so the Irish cylindrical keeps might be considered fairly up-to-date by contemporary standards; this is especially the case at Nenagh where the other parts of the castle (now sadly mutilated or destroyed) are typical of the 'new' architecture of the early thirteenth century. But the type for which the castle-builders of Norman Ireland had a clear preference, the rectangular keep, went out of fashion in England and France when the new ideas came in. Only in the backwaters of the world ruled by the English king - the west of Ireland (at Athenry in Galway, for example) and the south-west of France - was the rectangular keep still in vogue after about 1220.

Some older Irish castles had ingredients of the new architecture incorporated in them: the twin-towered gateway at Carrickfergus, and the barbican and south curtain at Trim, are prime examples of this new sophistication appended onto older works. But the new developments are best seen in the small number of high status castles (royal or of the highest baronial stratum) begun immediately after 1200 and built to 'keepless' plans.

Ireland has three outstanding examples of the new, largely 'keepless', type of castle: Dublin, Limerick and Kilkenny. By far the most important of the three is the royal castle in Dublin, begun in 1204 and more or less complete within twenty years (see Archaeology Ireland 4:2). Welsh archaeologist Jeremy Knight has noted the similarity between the plans of Dublin and the contemporary western French castle of Coutray-Salbark (Deux-Sèvres). Dublin is probably best considered a 'keepless' castle although one of the towers along its circuit - the Record Tower - was large enough to function as a keep. Limerick is fairly comparable with Dublin in plan. A 'bawn' is recorded here in 1200. Repair work amounting to £733 in 1212 indicates that something substantial had been built by this date. Jeremy Knight has compared the plan of Limerick to those of Cilgerran and Grosmont in Wales, both of which are slightly later, but the comparison is not exact. The little-known northern French castle of Goulancourt (Oise), built by an ecclesiastical lord between 1210 and 1220, compares a more favourably with Limerick than anything of the same date in England or Wales, certainly with respect to the gateway and its relative proportions. William Marshall’s Kilkenny was built to a trapezoidal plan; the closest parallel at so early a date would seem to be Saumur, built by French king Philippe Auguste.

King John and William Marshall, builders of at least two of the three, were aware of contemporary architectural developments elsewhere, as their building work in England and Wales bears witness, but it is interesting to note that as early as 1200-10 it is not possible to find entire 'keepless' castles with cylindrical corner towers in England or in Wales, indicating that the first keepless castles built on either of the two islands were built in Ireland. Architectural concepts spread quickly across geographical boundaries and political frontiers in the middle ages. A small group of thirteenth century Irish keeps deserves special mention in the context of this French influence. They are comprised of rectangular blocks with cylindrical corner towers. Harold Leask described them as 'towered' or 'turreted' keeps; they are better described as 'four-towered' keeps to avoid confusion with the term 'tower keep' which is commonly used to describe keeps which are, quite literally, towers. Four definite thirteenth century examples of four-towered keeps survive: Terryglass (Tipperary) and Carlow, both of which are early thirteenth century, and Lea (Laois) and Ferns (Wexford), which are mid-thirteenth century. There are no comparable English castles until the fourteenth century, and this has suggested to Leask and others that the type evolved in Ireland.

In design these keeps are quite ingenious: they possess the traditional rectangular form in combination with the defensive advantages of cylindrical towers. Somewhat ironically, they compare favourably with the keepless castles like Dublin. It is possible that the type evolved in response to the new ideas of architectural planning as a compromised version of the traditional keep. On the other hand, the four-towered keep is found in the Paris Basin and central west France. Two examples in particular - Nemours (Seine-et-Marne), built between 1150 and 1180, and Romefort (Indre), built around 1175 - anticipate the plan used at Carlow before 1220. It is likely, then, that these keeps articulate a link between France and Ireland in the early thirteenth century.

In summary, the late twelfth-early thirteenth century period during which the Normans invaded Ireland, and established and secured their colony, was a time of spectacular advance in the art and science of military architecture in western Europe. In the first fifty years of the Norman colony in Ireland we find stone castles of conservative or traditional form alongside castles which are the products of the new ideas then circulating in England and France. There is a case to be made for postulating a movement of architectural ideas between France and Ireland in this period.

The pattern of castle-building for the thirteenth century was largely established by about 1220; alongside small numbers of keeps and halls, keepless castles continue to be built, culminating in the late thirteenth century castles of Roscommon, Ballymote (Sligo) and Greencastle (Donegal), all based on the models of castles built in Wales.