

# THE NORMANS IN LIMERICK

**W**hen the Normans gained control of Limerick City they immediately set about organising it on the lines of their own systems of ownership and political power. Part of the picture of life in medieval Limerick from the newcomers' point of view can be gleaned from a study of the documents contained in the Calendar of State Papers. All of the following information is taken from these entries.

Towards the end of April, 1204, King John decided that a yearly fair should be held in the city on the 11th November, the feast of St. Martin.

Edmund, bishop of Limerick, was, on 5th July, 1215, granted an annuity of ten pounds of silver in exchange for the site of a mill and for the fishing rights of Limerick. The bishop had entered into a dispute with the king concerning these rights. However, the grant was in frankalmoign, which meant that the bishop had to make a return for the silver in the form of prayers.

by **Charlotte Murphy**

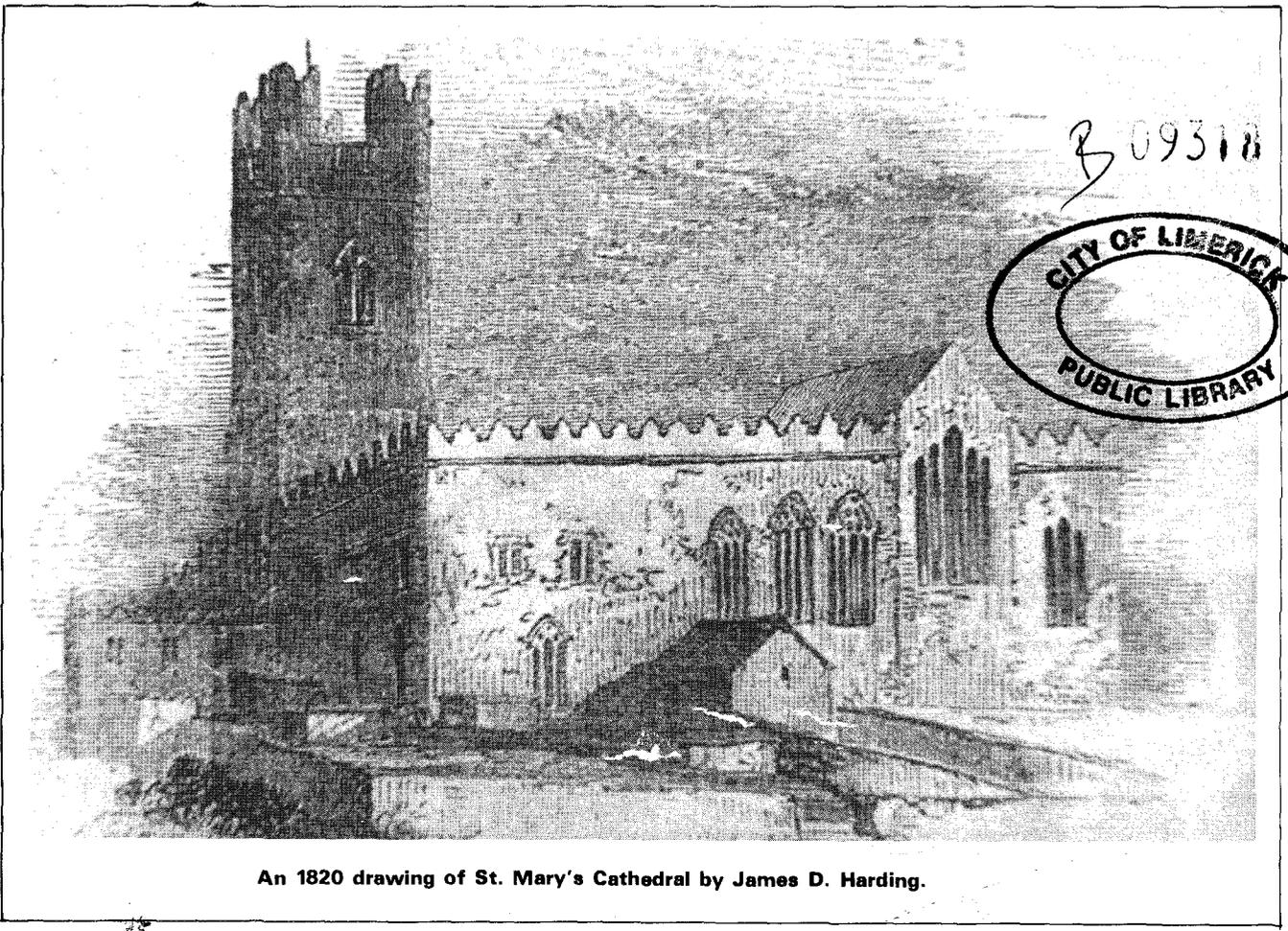
On the night of 18th October, 1216, King John died in his forty-ninth year; his heir was a boy of nine who was crowned as Henry III. Around 24th June, 1217 Reginald de Breouse acknowledged receiving from the young boy the custody of the castle and city of Limerick to be held until the king's fourteenth year at which time Reginald undertook to return them once more to the crown.

In an unintentionally amusing entry it is learned that an inventory of stores was taken at the castles of Athlone, Limerick and Dublin in 1224 and in Limerick all that was found of value were articles, such as broken dishes, worth eighteen pence.

The Dean and Chapter of the cathedral received a letter sent by the king on 27th April, 1225. It informed them of his grant to Geoffrey de St.

John of the prebend or stipend going with the office of treasurer of the church at Limerick upon the resignation of John de St. John; it seems probable but it is not stated that the two men were related. A choir stall was also to be assigned to Geoffrey. In the same year the king granted to Hubert, bishop of Limerick, permission to hold, on every Tuesday, a market at his manor of Mungaret (Mungret).

Geoffrey de Mariso was justiciar from 1215 to 1221 and again from 1226 to 1228. The justiciar was the supreme law-officer and head of the whole judicial and administrative machinery; he was also the commander-in-chief and presided over the council of the barons and prelates. In 1227 de Mariso was given fifty marks to spend on the repair of the houses within the castle. But in 1235 the bishop of Limerick was writing to the king begging for justice; it appears de Mariso and his son William had robbed the church of Limerick of much



An 1820 drawing of St. Mary's Cathedral by James D. Harding.

land at Kilmallock.

By 1237 the walls of the city were uppermost in the minds of the rulers. From the following quotation it may seem that Limerick had no walls prior to that date. It is impossible that the city could have existed for roughly four hundred years without such protection but it may have been that the walls were wooden before the Normans took the matter in hand. It is a very interesting question that can only be solved by excavation.

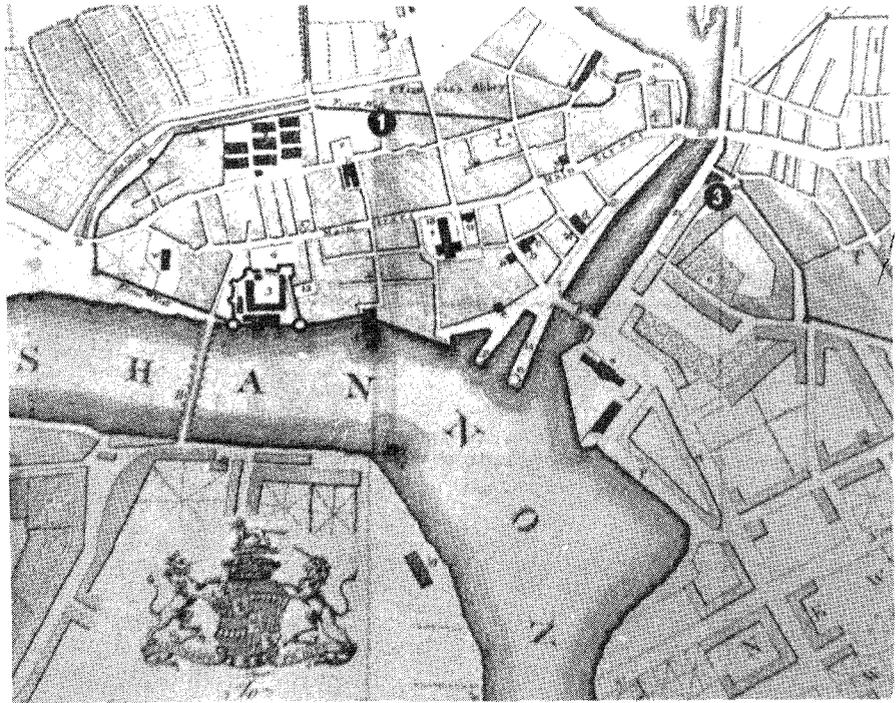
"Grant to the King's good men of Limerick, that they may take for six years from Michaelmas to enable them to include their city the following customs, namely:- For every crannock of wheat coming to the city on sale  $\frac{1}{2}$ d; every crannock of oats  $\frac{1}{2}$ d; every horse, ox, or cow 1d; every four hogs 1d, every six sheep 1d; every last (measure of weight or quantity) of hides 2d; every sack of wool 4d; every hogshead of wine 2d; every wey (usually 182lbs.) of iron 2d; every cartload of lead 2d; every truss of cloth or other merchandise 4d; every crannock of salt  $\frac{1}{2}$ d; every crannock of wood 2d; every wey of onions or cheese 1d; every hogshead of honey or butter 4d; every mease of herrings  $\frac{1}{2}$ d; every horse-burden of salmon 1d; and every hundred of wares 2d; the customs to cease after the six years.

Mandate to the justiciary of Ireland to cause these customs to be proclaimed and observed; the justiciary and citizens shall select two men of the city to collect the money. The citizens ought more liberally to contribute their own money to include the city".

In 1241, the city was ordered to construct a galley that could be used anytime and anywhere on the king's service.

Limerick once possessed a mint; a house was hired for the purpose from 8th September, 1252 to 'the third of the calends of April, 1254' (30th March), at four pence a week. The house had to be specially fitted up for the purpose and the cost of the general improvements and for the benches and doors was 11/5 $\frac{1}{2}$ .

The citizens of Limerick, in November, 1275, were looking for a reduction in their annual payments to the king; there were a number of reasons why they were seeking the change. For example, they had to pay for a fishing pool they did not require. For three years and only three years, they rented, at one hundred marks a year, a fishing pool in the water of Limerick from the justiciary, Maurice Fitzgerald, who acted for the king. The rent was fully paid when the three year term ceased but Maurice and every succeeding justiciar had refused to retake the pool from the citizens. We begin to see more clearly the roots of the dispute when the



**An 18th century map of Limerick**

citizens state that the pool, in times of peace, was worth only twenty marks a year, clear profit.

Another reason they had for seeking the reduction was the fact that all of the land that the king had given to them could not be cultivated. Of the forty carucates (a measure of land with the nature of the soil, being as much as could be tilled with one plough, with eight oxen in a year, and usually one hundred and eighty acres to one hundred and sixty acres) which the citizens held from the king at £40 a year sixteen were uncultivated because they were on the Clare side of Thomond Bridge and the Irish there were constantly at war with each other and the city.

Of the other twenty-four carucates, the bishop held ten and a half carucates for which he paid £10 a year at the Exchequer of Dublin. The disputed fishing pool was on the bishop's land. The prior of St. Mary's held one carucate in frankalmoign and the hospital of St. Laurence held one carucate free of rent. So, finally, eleven and a half carucates remained to the citizens which was let at £20.3s.4d., per year and the point being made was that they deserved a reduction of £7.6s.8d., to allow for the sixteen carucates lying unused at the Clare side of the bridge.

King John had granted to the citizens of Limerick all the liberties and free customs given to the citizens of Dublin. In order to make things absolutely clear, Edward I set out exactly what these liberties were in February, 1292. A citizen need not answer any charge against him by any power other than the court of Limerick if he had possessions only in Limerick. Even if he

committed suicide, he need not fear the power of the noble or officer of the crown could force the citizens to give food, clothing, or lodgings to their soldiers or followers against their will.

While travelling throughout Ireland, a trader who was also a citizen did not have to pay money to attend a fair or market or a toll to use any stretch of road or to cross a bridge. None of the citizens "shall be adjudged in an americiament (an infliction of a penalty left to the 'mercy' of the inflictor) of money unless according to the law of the hundred (court) namely, by forfeiture of 40s". The only three infractions of the law for which a higher punishment could be inflicted was if the person broke the set rules in relation to the price or quality of bread and beer or did not do what was required of him in relation to 'the watch' (the method of policing the city).

A stranger could not stay in the city for longer than forty days, if he was a merchant selling goods; also he could not buy from another non-citizen corn, hides or wool. A stranger could not keep a wine tavern except on board a ship, and from every ship coming into the port carrying wine two hogsheads went to the king. The citizens, their widows, sons and daughters did not need the permission of their lord to marry; they were allowed to form guilds and the Knights Templars and the Knights Hospitallers had to observe all of the customs of the city in relation to men and land 'save one alone'. (I do not know and cannot work out what this reference means). The right to elect a mayor belonged to the citizens. A yearly fair, lasting for fifteen days, 24th July to 7th August, was also granted.