

Ballingarry Castle

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Ballingarry occupied a strategic position in the pass through the hills that stretch nearly from the Deel to the Maigue separating north and south Connello, a natural gateway used since ancient times by the indigenous tribes. It became of importance during the trouble-fraught English rule in Munster. Already in 1408 we find Henry IV sanctioning a payment to wall the town because 'the greater part thereof has been destroyed by Irish foes and English rebels'. Town and castle were then in the possession of the de Lesse or de Lacy family, whose association with Ballingarry dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century at least. The castle as we see it today was built in the fifteenth century, when the Earls of Desmond held undisputed sway over the region, and following the destruction of 1408. Its tall, slender battlemented tower is both strong and elegant.

The de Lacys were united to the Earls of Desmond by bonds of marriage, tradition, politics and faith, and from the beginning of the Desmond wars they sided with the rebels. Ballingarry Castle was one of those which Captain John Ward reported to Cecil he had reduced in his campaign of 1569, when the men of the garrison were butchered. After the defeat of the Earl of Desmond in 1583, John de Lacy forfeited the castle, but later he was pardoned for his complicity and reinstated. Later again, Connello was divided into seigniories, and in 1607 the castle and lands were surrendered by John de Lacy to the adventurer Richard Boyle, first Earl of Cork, though the de Lacy family seems to have remained in residence. On 19 May 1630 the Earl leased the castle, inappropriate rectory and tithes to David de Lacy, son of John, for 'seventy-five pounds of good and lawful money of England, pure sylver without misture' annually.

David was bound to hand over the premises in good repair on the expiry of the twenty-one-year lease. The Earl reserved the patronage of the living to himself, however, granting it to his cousin, Richard Boyle, later Bishop of Cork. The de Lacys managed to survive at Ballingarry until 1654, when the Civil Survey shows William Lacie *alias* 'Lacie of Ballingarry', an Irish papist, as proprietor of Ballingarry Castle.

Like most of the Catholic landowners, the de Lacys were eventually swept away in favour of landlords loyal to the English interest. In 1667 the Castle and lands were awarded to Major John Odell, who had suffered losses elsewhere in the county in the Rising of 1641. He came to live at the castle with his wife and children, serving as High Sheriff of the County in 1678-9. After his petition to the Government to fit up and fortify Ballingarry Castle was rejected he built a mansion near by in 1685.

The castle may have suffered when the town of Ballingarry was burned by the Jacobites in 1691, but it continued occupied, frequently by the parson as there was no glebe house until 1822. It was known locally as Parson's Castle. In 1820 during the Rockite troubles it served as a barracks, and then as a sick-bay during the cholera epidemic. In the mid-nineteenth century, when Castle Lane was a fashionable quarter, Dr Robert Odell lived in the old castle for many years with his wife and children. Ballingarry is now a sleepy depopulated village, and its castle a cowhouse.

The elegant ruined tower of the de Lacy castle, built in the early fifteenth century