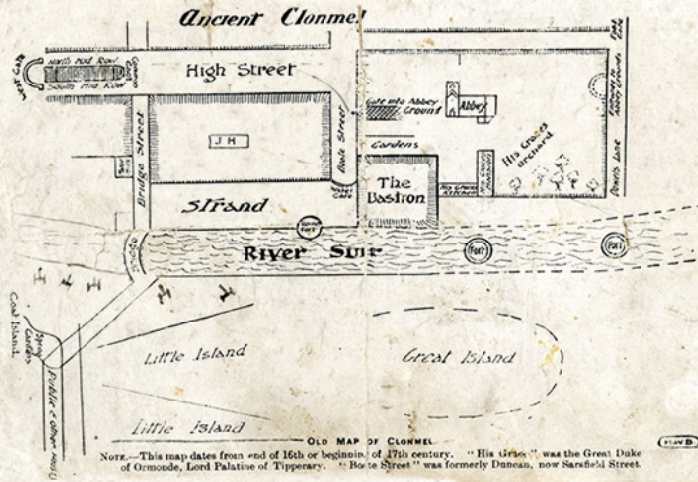




Walls of Clonmel Falláí Cluain Meala



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Liam O'Duibher for supplying text



Clonmel Walled Town



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Walls of Clonmel

Fallaí Cluain Meala



Background

On 8th April 1298, Otho de Grandison, Lord of the Manor of Clonmel was given a murage grant which authorised him to levy tolls for ten years on merchandise in the town of Clonmel in order to raise money for building a town wall. It was a period of great unrest with the Norman towns subject to frequent attacks by the native Irish. Even though it took a long time to build and was a financial burden on the burgesses, a town wall afforded good protection and every effort was made to keep it in good repair. Further grants were made in 1316, 1319, 1335, 1364, 1408 and 1463. When completed, the wall stood 425 m long E-W and between 250 to 300 m wide N-S, enclosed a rectangular area of approx. 14 hectares. It was 7.5 – 8.5 metres high and 1.5 metres thick. For added protection the wall was surrounded by a fosse or ditch which is thought to have been about 7 metres wide and 3.5 metres deep.

Whats on view today.

Apart from the North-West corner which encloses part of Old St. Mary's churchyard, there are only a few fragments of the medieval town wall above ground today. On the West side, traces of it may be found to the rear of various premises along Wolfe Tone Street and traces of the East Wall can be seen backing the houses on Upper Emmet Street. Beside the Omniplex, near the junction of Emmet Street and Kickham Street, are the remains of the North-East tower.

Structure of Walls

Along the North side of Old St. Mary's churchyard, the town wall extends for a length of 115 metres and on its Western side it extends for 110 metres. Built of uncut blocks of local sandstone, it measures 6 metres in height and has an average thickness of 2 metres. At the Western end of the North stretch there is evidence for a wall walk and, on the inner face of the wall, there is a number of semi-pointed niches, which may have been constructed to support the wall walk. In the North-West corner there is a rectangular shaped tower known as the Magazine Tower, it contains chambers at ground and walk level and was the residence of the sexton of St. Mary's for a time in the nineteenth century. During the 1798 rebellion the tower was used as a magazine. On the Western section of the wall there is a rectangular tower with rounded corners and a similar tower is located on the Northern section. The three towers date from the fifteenth century.

Prior to the Siege of Clonmel in 1650, the North Wall may have continued in a straight line along William Street and Catherine Street to meet the East Wall at the North-East tower just west of Emmet Street. However, the Goubet map of 1690 shows the wall turning sharply southwards along Mary Street before running eastwards immediately south of Morton Street. Excavation has shown that the wall then crossed Gladstone Street, just north of SS Peter's and Paul's church, and continued on to meet the East Wall at the North-East tower. The East Wall ran for 100 metres from the tower south of the houses in Emmet Street and along Dowd's Lane down to the river. Excavation has shown that the lane sits on the town ditch which over a period of time was infilled with rubbish. There is now no trace of the South Wall but the Goubet map shows a wall with six circular towers along the river, running from the bottom of Dowd's Lane to the southern end of the West Wall.

Gates

There were five gates in the medieval wall. The present West Gate, erected in 1831, stands on the site of the original gate. The North Gate probably stood at the junction of Morton Street and Gladstone Street while the East Gate, also called Kilsheelane Gate, was at the intersection of Emmet Street, Dowd's Lane, Parnell Street and Mitchel Street. The South Gate was at the end of the present Bridge Street and the Watergate was at the bottom of Sarsfield Street.

Towers

In addition to the three towers in the NW corner and the NE tower in Kickham Street, the Goubet map seems to show 6 structures in the Watergate area that might be mural towers in the medieval wall.

In the second half of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth, Clonmel experienced an industrial revolution which caused the town to expand and a new quay, mills and warehouses to be built. As a result of this development, the South Wall was demolished to make space for the new buildings and to facilitate access to the river. The other walls, apart from the NW section, suffered a similar fate. What remains is an important part of our heritage. It is our duty to preserve them in memory of those who built them and of Aodh Dubh and his gallant defenders in the Siege of Clonmel and as a reminder to future generations of the achievements of their ancestors.