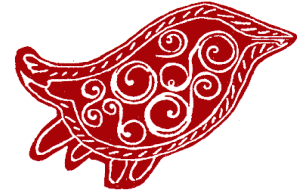


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Military Defences of Cork.

By J. T. COLLINS.

Tradition has handed down the situation of some raths, duns and other fortified residences, which once existed in the immediate vicinity of the city of Cork. St. Finnbar's early church was erected within *Lisheen-Uí-Chonnlain*; Mac Conglinne, the eighth century satirist, was bound to a pillar stone which stood in *Rathín mac nAedha*, on the *faithche*, or green, on the south side of Cork, now represented by Greenmount. North-east of the city, where the military barracks now stand, was a great rath, the name of which survives in the townland name—Rathmore. Overlooking the northern branch of the Lee was an earthwork so ancient that when the first Anglo-Normans erected a castle on it, they accepted its native name of the *Sean-dún*, and it has been known through the centuries as Shandon.

There are no traces extant of the Danish occupation of Cork, but there is a possibility that the Protestant Church of St. Nicholas occupies the site of the residence of the last Ostman mayor, Gilbert, son of Turgarius. Gilbert led the naval forces of Cork against the Anglo-Normans in 1173, while Dermot McCarthy led the land forces. Danes and Irish were defeated and Gilbert was slain. The victorious Anglo-Normans erected a church within his *curia*, or court yard, and dedicated it to St. Nicholas, and successive churches dedicated to that saint have since occupied this site.

The defences of Cork during its Anglo-Norman occupation rested upon its strong walls and their fortified towers. The citizens obtained murage grants, or were sometimes forgiven arrears of rent, for their erection and maintenance. They, by their charter, were compelled to pay 80 marks yearly to the Crown, with 6 marks rent, for the *faithche* or green on the south side of the city (then styled "le Faythe"). In 1316 the Mayor and community were forgiven £30 arrears of these rents for their expenses in building anew the wall around the city. Father Wolfe (a Papal envoy) in 1574 described Cork as a city well walled, strongly situated in the middle of the Lee, the entrance being by wooden bridges, but there was a hill above and near the city from which one could batter down the houses with artillery and kill the people in its open squares with arquebuses.

About this time a fortification was erected outside the walled city, on a steep rock which overlooked the southern arm of the river. From time immemorial a church, known as *Teampul Croghenigh*, or the Church of the Cross, had stood on that rock. In charters of the reign of King John, dealing with grants of land in the vicinity, a "*Crucem de Cameleire*" is mentioned. This cross may have stood on the rock and given its name to the church. The new fort, though erected at the expense of the citizens, was named after the reigning queen, Elizabeth, and it still bears her name.

Shandon Castle, on the north side of the city, was erected soon after the Anglo-Norman invasion, probably by the Prendergasts. It passed to the De Cogans and Barrys, and served as a manorial feudal centre until the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Then it became the official residence of the Lord

President of Munster, and the vital nerve-centre of English power in the south of Ireland. Sir John Perrott, Sir Warham St. Leger, Sir Walter Raleigh, Edmund Spenser and other Elizabethan notabilities held court and council within its halls and there concerted the means and measures which brought about the downfall of the great confederation led by the Earl of Desmond.

In the spring of 1600 Hugh O'Neill, with a military force, passed by the North Gate of Cork on his way to take a view of Kinsale. He offered the citizens an exchange of cattle, hides and tallow for bread, beer and provisions. The offer was refused, but it is stated that the Mayor of the city would not allow a single shot to be fired at O'Neill's army as it passed westward along the slope of the hill, though a few soldiers from Shandon Castle slew some stragglers.

Sir George Carew, the new Lord President, charged with the task of preparing Munster against an expected Spanish invasion, took up his quarters in Shandon Castle in April, 1600. He described the defences of Cork as exceedingly weak and not able to withstand the Spaniards. In his opinion a strong garrison there was no use, for the army that was master in the field would carry the city. Carew devoted the ensuing months to successful efforts to create dissensions amongst the Munster chiefs who seemed likely to aid the invaders. In June, 1601, James Fitzthomas, who had been selected by the Anglo-Irish gentlemen of Munster as the Earl of Desmond, was brought a prisoner from Kilbehenny to Shandon Castle, and, at the same time, Florence McCarthy More was treacherously arrested and detained there. Both were dispatched to the Tower of London and never again saw Ireland. Thus Carew sent the two chiefs of the Irish and Anglo-Irish of Munster safely out of the way. In reply to a suggestion from London that Shandon Castle should be taken down lest, if captured, it should be used to attack the city, Carew replied that the razing of Shandon would serve no military purpose, for every hill and ditch around the city commanded it just as well as Shandon did.

The armies of O'Neill and O'Donnell do not appear to have passed close to the city on their march to Kinsale in 1601, but the citizens are said to have been jubilant when the news arrived that O'Neill, encamped at Belgooly, had cut off the army of Mountjoy and Carew from Cork. Their joy was short-lived for the disastrous rout at Kinsale soon followed.

Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork, laid the foundation of his fortune when he left Shandon Castle on the Monday morning following the battle of Kinsale to convey the news to Queen Elizabeth. In the aftermath of the battle many Irish gentlemen were tried at Shandon for treason. Amongst them was Dominic Collins, the Jesuit friar, captured at the siege of Dunboy and subsequently executed in his native town of Youghal.

When, in 1603, the Mayor and Council of Cork refused to proclaim the new king, James I, Lord Roche made the proclamation from Shandon Castle. The citizens put Cork in a state of defence and demolished Elizabeth Fort so that it could not be used against them. Lord Mountjoy arrived with an army, overawed them into submission, and one of the penalties imposed was that they should rebuild the fort they had lately broken down.

During the Confederate wars of 1641–1652, an attempt was made to invest the city by the Irish of South and West Cork. Their headquarters centred on Rochfordstown Castle, about four miles south-west of the city. In April, 1642, a party from their camp raided the suburbs, but were pursued by some of the garrison under Lord Inchiquin and Sir Charles Vasavour. A panic set in, the Irish fled, and the city was never afterwards in any serious danger from them.

A description written about that time states that Cork stood on an island, was well walled, with navigable rivers on each side. There was a Fort (Elizabeth) at one end of the town and Barryscourt (Shandon), a castle of good strength, at the other end, both well manned to defend the suburbs.

Oliver Cromwell spent the winter of 1649 in Cork City and it is said that he caused the walls of Elizabeth Fort to be raised higher. A report shortly after the Restoration of Charles II stated that it was the only place of strength in Cork, but that its walls and parapets were broken and cracked in places.

In March, 1689, James II landed at Kinsale and came to Cork. He is said to have received the Earl of Tyrconnell, his Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, and his principal officers of state in Shandon Castle. Cork remained faithful to him after the Battle of the Boyne, and when William of Orange returned to England he dispatched John Churchill, Earl of Marlborough, to reduce the city to submission.

Churchill landed at Passage in September, 1690, and his army dragged the artillery across the country, while his ships sailed cautiously up the river. An outwork called the Cat Fort had been erected on a higher ground than Elizabeth Fort and it was the first defence met by Churchill's troops. Colonel Hales stormed it and the defenders retired within Elizabeth Fort. Other Williamite forces marched from Mallow and Fermoy and joined with Churchill, thus surrounding the city. Cannon drawn to Fair Hill threatened Shandon Castle and its defenders withdrew inside the city walls, whereupon the Williamites occupied the castle and bombarded the city. Elizabeth Fort was fiercely attacked but held out, and the main attack was made on the eastern wall of the city. Two vessels coming up the river played their cannon on the wall and made a breach. The Williamite troops crossed the river somewhere near where the School of Commerce now stands. The Duke of Grafton, who was with them, was mortally wounded. (The spot where he fell is said to have been where Rochford's Lane joins Grafton Street, just behind the G.S.R. Bus Office). Terms were then arranged and the city capitulated after four days' siege.

During the ensuing century the city of Cork spread far beyond the walls, which, having served their purpose, were demolished until scarce a remnant was left. The suburbs which were burned during the siege of 1690 were rebuilt and extended along the rising ground on both sides. The city also advanced in prosperity and became one of the chief supply centres for the British Navy. When the French Fleet arrived in Bantry Bay in December, 1796, it was estimated there were contained in the city stores and provisions to the value of near one and a half million pounds sterling, the greater part of which was intended for the use of the Navy in the war

against France. The capture or destruction of these stores would have had a crippling effect upon the activities of the British Fleet. Threatened with a French landing, two armies marched from Dublin and converged on Cork, while all troops that could be raised locally hastened towards Bantry. Instructions were given to break up the three roads leading from Bantry to Cork, by spade and pick-axe, so as to impede the French artillery when landed. It was quickly discovered that the line of march to Cork was indefensible and the military decision was that the main line of defence should be behind the Blackwater, having its centre on Kilworth.

A storm drove the French Fleet out to sea, but when the wealthy Cork merchants and landed proprietors of the county found that their goods and lands were to be left to the mercy of the French, their indignation was unbounded. Edward Cooke, the Under Secretary of State, wrote: "I hear there is much serious discontent at Cork at finding it had been determined to abandon the city to its fate and to make the great stand at Kilworth." The General-in-Charge (Dalrymple) wrote from Bantry justifying his tactics: "How can roads be destroyed in a country of stone, and where there are seven or eight roads running parallel to the same point? . . . The country between Bantry and Cork is not that of chicane; the strongest and best army will therefore find its way against such obstacles as may present themselves . . ."

(In the event of a landing) . . . "In four days the enemy's light troops will be in possession of Bandon . . . Seven thousand grenadiers and twelve thousand old infantry inured to war, with light troops moving by two or three roads, will find us a very small impediment. Cork would capitulate immediately, the harbour and forts would be theirs in two or three days after."—(Dalrymple to Cooke).

Summoned to Dublin, he repeated his contention that the intervening country was such that every military position could be turned and the outcome entirely depended upon the "best, and best fought, army."

In 1750, Shandon Castle had fallen into ruin, and in 1770 it was sold by its owner, Richard Earl of Barrymore, to Samuel Jervois, of Brade, near Leap, Co. Cork. Shandon Castle Margarine Factory now occupies its site and an inscription on its wall records the fact.

In 1835 Elizabeth Fort was used as a female convict prison. In later years it reverted to military use, becoming a station of the Cork City artillery. In 1920–1921 it was occupied by "Black-and-Tan" sections of the Royal Irish Constabulary and later handed over to the Irish Provisional Government, formed under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921. In August, 1922, during the course of the Civil War, Elizabeth Fort was burned by the anti-Treaty forces prior to evacuating the city. The external walls, however, still survive in their entirety, and afford a good example of the art of mediæval fortification.