

From Frontier Town to Renaissance City: Kilkenny, 1500–1700

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IN 1500 KILKENNY WAS A TYPICAL MEDIEVAL TOWN, well walled, dominated by its castle and cathedral, possessing a number of parish churches and chapels, two friaries, a house of Augustinian canons, and a large hospital located a short distance outside the walls. The townspeople's affairs were regulated by the corporation according to a system of rights and privileges which had been asserted and reaffirmed in a series of charters commencing in the early thirteenth century. The town's trade was essentially local and regional, but occasionally there were merchants who forged direct connections with Britain or France. In many ways it was no different from any other small medieval town in north-western Europe, but there was one way in which it felt distinctive. The town was on the frontier. Ten miles to the north was the territory of the O'Brennans, while twenty miles away were the even more feared MacGillaPatricks. These Gaelic Irish families occasionally preyed on merchants, practised rustling, or stole goods from outlying cabins within the liberty of the town. To the townspeople they were socially and culturally inferior, untrustworthy and dangerous. They were also economic rivals because the Gaelic Irish had established markets dealing in hides, yarn, fish, corn and tallow, which reduced the town's revenues from murage and market tolls. It was a threat that was dealt with by military force.

In 1517 the sovereign of Kilkenny marched a troop of townsmen to Cullahill, the castle of the king's enemy, Brian MacGillaPatrick, and captured it. The great iron gate or portcullis was removed and brought to Kilkenny, where it was hung on the walls of the Tholsel as a trophy to remind any other Irish lord that Kilkenny was not to be toyed with.¹ Thirty-six years later, in 1553, the young King Edward VI died in the arms of his closest friend, Barnaby FitzPatrick, the grandson and successor of Brian MacGillaPatrick. On a human level, the transition from Cullahill to the palace of Greenwich, from wild Irish to court intimate, was an epic one but it also epitomises the trajectory experienced by Kilkenny as it changed from a frontier town into a Renaissance city. FitzPatrick had as little say in the course of events that plucked him

¹ C. McNeill, ed., *Liber primus Kilkenniensis* [henceforth *LPK*] (Dublin, 1931), p. 139.

from the fastnesses of Upper Ossory and brought him to the court of Henry VIII, as the town of Kilkenny had in the events that were to shape it: the Reformation, the power struggle for control of Ireland between Old English and New English, the conflict of Crown and parliament, the Jacobite and Williamite wars. The town was too small, too provincial indeed, to mould events, except for a short period when it occupied the centre stage during the years from 1642 to 1649. Then, while England was divided by civil war, it was the capital of the royalist Catholic Confederacy with all the trappings of an independent power: departments of state, parliamentary assemblies, ambassadors, palatial dwellings, elaborate civic rituals and political intrigue. In short, it was a Renaissance city. During the second half of the seventeenth century Kilkenny experienced the fate of many other Irish towns as a new English élite displaced its traditional governing class. On the surface this transformation is a narrative of change, but at a deeper level it is also a story of continuity.

The late medieval town

By the time of the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169, Kilkenny was already the largest inland settlement in south-eastern Ireland. This settlement, subsequently known as Irishtown, was focused on St Canice's Cathedral (the Irish name, *Cill Chainnigh*, from which 'Kilkenny' is derived, means 'the church of Canice'), its lord was the local bishop, and until 1843 it remained an independent borough with its own corporation and officials. In the course of the thirteenth century, the Anglo-Normans built a new and larger town adjacent to Irishtown. This new settlement, aligned on the long axis of High Street, which linked the Irishtown Gate with Kilkenny Castle, became known as Englishtown or Hightown.² The thirteenth century was a period of great prosperity and it is still evidenced by the remains of several religious structures as well as the cathedral and the castle, which dominate the skyline of Kilkenny today. By contrast, the fourteenth century witnessed a period of decline. There were famines between 1315 and 1317, smallpox epidemics in the 1320s, and cattle plagues in 1321 and 1324–5.³ The severest problem was undoubtedly the Black Death, which arrived in Kilkenny in 1348 and was graphically described by a local Franciscan, Friar Clyn.⁴ There is topographical evidence for population decline in the form of deserted suburbs, the demolition of extramural churches, and the presence of waste or abandoned plots, up to fifty years later in some instances.⁵

² J. Bradley, 'The early development of the medieval town of Kilkenny' in W. Nolan and K. Whelan, eds, *Kilkenny: history and society*, Geography Publications (Dublin, 1990), pp. 63–73.

³ R. Butler, ed., *The annals of Ireland by Friar John Clyn* (Dublin, 1849), pp. 12, 13, 15, 16.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 36–7.

⁵ W. Carrigan, *The history and antiquities of the diocese of Ossory*, 4 vols (Dublin, 1905), I, p. 281, and III, pp. 174, 192; *LPK*, pp. 24 [1372], 81 [1383], 88–9 [1406]; the decline in the burgage rent of Irishtown may also reflect abandonment, see H.J. Lawlor, 'Calendar of the Liber Ruber of the diocese of Ossory', *PRIA*, 27, section C (1907–9), 191.

In the countryside around Kilkenny, depopulation was accompanied by a Gaelic revival that placed the land between Gowran and Carlow in the hands of Gaelic Irish families such as the O'Nolans and MacMurroughs, who were hostile to the townspeople. By the end of the fourteenth century, the overland routes between Kilkenny and the royal administration in Dublin were cut off.⁶

Despite this isolation, the *Liber Primus*, the oldest of the town books, demonstrates that, throughout the fifteenth century, Kilkenny remained a functioning urban community. It was a period of urban consolidation characterised by subtle social and economic changes, reflected topographically by redevelopment and rebuilding within the town. There is evidence of a demand for building space within the walls but no sign of suburban expansion while, during the second half of the century, both major bridges and almost all of the town gates, mural towers, churches and religious houses were modified or rebuilt.⁷ James Butler, third earl of Ormond, purchased Kilkenny Castle from the Despenser family in 1391 and the town became the capital of the Butler lordship, amounting to over one million acres in counties Kilkenny and Tipperary. It was no longer administered by government officials as it had been in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries but, in the words of the Ordinances of Fethard (1428×35), Kilkenny formed part of 'one land under one lord', the earl of Ormond.⁸

During the first half of the fifteenth century the earls exerted a powerful local influence, although this declined after 1452 when the political ambitions of the Ormonds prompted them to take up residence in England. The fifth earl was executed in 1461 after fighting on the Lancastrian side at the battle of Towton. His brothers John, the sixth earl (1461–77), and Thomas, the seventh earl (1477–1515), preferred to live on their Wiltshire estates, but the death of Thomas without male heirs occasioned a crisis that led to the separation of the English and Irish lands. Much of the Wiltshire property eventually passed to the seventh earl's grandson, Sir Thomas Boleyn, better known as the father of Anne Boleyn and grandfather of Elizabeth I. In Ireland, however, the Butler lands were claimed by Piers Butler, a direct descendant of the third earl, and in 1538, after the Boleyns had fallen from favour, he succeeded in having himself recognised as eighth earl of Ormond.

Piers' cultural background combined both Gaelic-Irish and Anglo-Irish strains and he was adept at making the best of both worlds. He established a grammar school in Kilkenny which, under the tutelage of Peter White, was to become one of Ireland's most famous colleges. He is also credited with importing Flemish weavers to make

⁶ C.A. Empey, 'The Butler lordship', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 1/3 (1970–1), 179–81; A. Cosgrove, *Late medieval Ireland, 1370–1541* (Dublin, 1981), pp. 13–16.

⁷ E. Curtis, ed., *Calendar of Ormond deeds*, 6 vols (Dublin, 1932–43), III, nos. 115, 124; for the references to buildings and other topographical data throughout this paper, see the relevant entries in John Bradley, *Kilkenny* (Irish Historic Town Atlas, no. 10, Dublin, 2000).

⁸ C.A. Empey and K. Simms, 'The ordinances of the White Earl and the problem of coign in the later middle ages', *PRIA*, 75, section C (1975), 185.

tapestries, carpets and cushions for Kilkenny Castle.⁹ In addition he levied the customary rights of Gaelic lords on his Anglo-Irish subjects, who deeply resented it. In an inquisition of 1537 he was named as the lord of the town of Kilkenny, entitled to all of its chief rent which amounted to £18 Irish, but he was also denounced by the corporation for the exactions that he imposed upon them.¹⁰ While the services exacted by the earl may have been demanding, the outspoken condemnation of their lord by the corporation indicates that it had become accustomed to a certain independence during the half-century of Butler absence. This incipient independence was linked to the development, from the late fifteenth century onwards, of an oligarchy of about fifteen families, in whose hands wealth and political influence were concentrated. The names of ten were grouped together in a well-known couplet:

Archdekin, Archer, Cowley, Langton, Lee,
Knarborough, Lawless, Ragget, Rothe and Shee.¹¹

There were other influential families also, the Hacketts, Savages, Sherlocks and Walshes among them, and together with the previous ten they controlled every civil and almost every ecclesiastical position within the town. Some families were particularly prominent in public life. A member of the Rothe family, for instance, was sovereign on eighteen occasions between 1440 and 1544; the Archers held the position sixteen times between 1434 and 1544, while the Shees were sovereigns on seven occasions between 1493 and 1544. Control by these three families increased in the early sixteenth century and, between 1494 and 1544, only eighteen of the fifty sovereigns were not Archers, Rotheres or Shees.¹² Dynastic supremacy was perpetuated by interfamilial marriages and the creation of a ruling patriciate, a feature that Kilkenny shared with many other late medieval and early modern towns.¹³ When the dissolution of the monasteries brought new land onto the market, these families were excellently poised to take advantage of the speculative opportunities that it afforded. In 1539 the sovereign and burgesses wrote to Thomas Cromwell asking that they might be granted the two friaries and the Hospital of St Mary Magdalen, and in 1543 their wish was acceded to.¹⁴ The acquisition of this

⁹ L. Miller and E. Power, eds, *Holinshed's Irish chronicle* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 59–60; T. Carte, *An history of the life of James, duke of Ormonde*, 3 vols (London, 1786), I, p. 1.

¹⁰ The figure of £18 Irish was reported by the corporation, see H.F. Hore and J. Graves, eds, *The social state of the southern and eastern counties of Ireland in the sixteenth century* (Dublin, 1870), p. 109; the commoners of the town, however, valued the rent at '£14 or more', *ibid.*, p. 130; cf. *ibid.*, p. 136 and W.G. Neely, *Kilkenny: an urban history, 1391–1843* (Belfast, 1989), p. 32.

¹¹ Carrigan, *Ossory*, III, p. 74.

¹² *Second report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission* (London, 1871), pp. 259–60; Robert Shee was sovereign from 1493 to 1497, but the sovereign for 1497–8 is not recorded, *LPK*, pp. 97–9.

¹³ G. MacNiocaill, 'Socio-economic problems of the late medieval Irish town', in D. Harkness and M. O'Dowd, eds, *The town in Ireland* [Historical Studies XIII] (Belfast, 1981), pp. 7–21; D. Nicholas, *The later medieval city, 1300–1500* (London, 1997), pp. 180–202; P. Clark and P. Slack, eds, *English towns in transition, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 1976), pp. 126–40.

¹⁴ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 38; Kilkenny Corporation Archive, CR/B/15.

new land made possible the first suburban development for over two hundred years and during the second half of the sixteenth century there is evidence for the laying out of house-plots on lands that had formerly belonged to the religious houses, particularly in Maudlin Street, on the estate of the former hospital, and Blackmill Street where the Dominican friary was located.¹⁵

The Reformation

Apart from the reallocation of church lands, the Reformation appears to have had relatively little impact in Kilkenny until the 1570s and 1580s. This was due to the absence both of an active policy of reform and of competent ministers to carry it out. There is one exception—John Bale, who took up residence as bishop of Ossory in 1553. Remembered now largely as the pioneer of English literary studies, ‘bilious’ Bale (as he was called by his opponents) was a powerful preacher and a prolific propagandist for his own vision of Protestantism. In the six months that he spent at Kilkenny, Bale infuriated his clergy, antagonised his superiors, and outraged traditionalists among the burgesses of the town. He introduced the 1552 version of the Book of Common Prayer, he replaced the splendour of vestments with the simplicity of a black gown, and he cleared the cathedral of images and statues. His freshness, or perhaps his shock value, appealed to the younger generation, who supported him and performed the biblical dramas that he wrote as counterblasts to the conventional Corpus Christi mystery plays. Such zeal, coupled with his denunciations of dissolute clergy and dissipated administrators, aroused local opposition and shortly after the accession of Queen Mary he was forced to abandon Kilkenny.¹⁶ For the remainder of the century the religious practices of the town fathers seem to have remained traditional, occupying a middle ground that leaned towards Catholicism or Protestantism, as occasion required. The parish churches appear to have been short-staffed and some, if not all, fell into decay. The appointment of Nicholas Walsh as bishop in 1577 gave the reformed church its best leader since Bale, but after his murder in 1585 the situation reverted to what it had been.¹⁷

By this time, energetic, Counter-Reformation priests, many of them members of the old civic families, had begun to minister in the town, sometimes openly but more often privately. In 1599 the Franciscans managed to get their old friary back, but the Dominicans were less successful because the Black Abbey had been converted into a court house and gaol. On the accession of James I in 1603, however, the Dominicans seized the Black Abbey and restored it for Catholic worship; the parish churches of St

¹⁵ Kilkenny Corporation Archive, CR/I/8–9, 16, 19–20, 22, 24, 30, 32; CR/H/2.

¹⁶ S.G. Ellis, ‘John Bale, bishop of Ossory, 1552–3’, *Journal of the Butler Society*, 2/3 (1984), 283–93.

¹⁷ C. Quinn, ‘Nicholas Walsh and his friends: a forgotten chapter in the Irish reformation’, *Journal of the Butler Society*, 2/3 (1984), 294–8.

Patrick and St Mary were also repossessed and for a time it was thought that the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, might reinstate Catholicism. Such beliefs proved illusory but it took a year, during which the Dublin government had to step in and imprison the sovereign, before the churches returned to Protestant use.¹⁸ The incident demonstrated that, while the practice of Catholicism was prohibited, it commanded a huge popular following in the town, and during the early seventeenth century it continued to grow. By 1608, when the Jesuits had established themselves, there were sixteen Catholic priests in the town; by 1613 the number had increased to twenty-seven, including three Franciscans who had built a new friary the year before;¹⁹ in c.1618 the Cistercians inaugurated a novitiate; by 1622 the Dominican community numbered eight, and by c.1635 a friary of Discalced Carmelites was set up. Meanwhile in 1614 and again in 1624, Kilkenny was the venue for provincial synods.²⁰ By contrast, in 1615, only four ministers of the established church, including the bishop and dean of Ossory, officiated in the city.²¹

Renaissance influences

The survival and revival of Catholicism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were due in large measure to the protection that it received from one of Ireland's most powerful political figures, Thomas Butler, the tenth earl of Ormond, who succeeded to the title in 1546 and died in 1614.²² A cousin of Queen Elizabeth and educated at court, he was an important patron of the arts and architecture. One of the dedicatees of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and the addressee of several Irish poems, he introduced English Renaissance building styles to the south-east. The mansions that he constructed at Kilkenny Castle and at Carrick-on-Suir in the 1560s provided the inspiration for the smaller-scale housing of the urban merchant class.²³ The remains of about ten such merchant houses survive and depictions of others are known. Rothe House, built between 1594 and 1610, is the most complete and provides an almost unique insight into the living conditions of the wealthy urban middle class at this time.

¹⁸ Carrigan, *Ossory*, I, pp. 77–9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 84–5.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 98; Bradley, *Kilkenny*.

²¹ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 50.

²² C. Brady, 'Thomas Butler, earl of Ormond (1531–1614) and reform in Tudor Ireland', in C. Brady, ed., *Worsted in the game: losers in Irish history* (Dublin, 1989), pp. 49–59; J. Kirwan, 'Thomas Butler, 10th earl of Ormond, his early career and rise to prominence: parts 1–II', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 3/4 (1994), 514–30; 4/1 (1997), 67–85; J. Kirwan, 'Thomas Butler, tenth earl of Ormond (c.1532–1614); his stewardship of the family estates' in J. Kirwan, ed., *Kilkenny: studies in honour of Margaret M. Phelan* (Kilkenny, 1997), pp. 58–78.

²³ B. Murtagh, 'The Kilkenny Castle archaeological project, 1990–1993: interim report', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 4/5 (1993), 1112–13; J. Fenlon, *Ormond Castle* (Dublin, 1996).

It consists of three houses, separated by courtyards and linked by side-buildings, arranged parallel to each other towards the front of a long burgage plot. Each house is rectangular in plan and rises to a height of three storeys. The first house, on the street frontage, has an arcaded ground floor that functioned as a covered walkway linking the house to its neighbours; behind the walkway were shops with cellars underneath for storage. The main reception room, heated by open fireplaces on the first floor, was a spacious, timber-panelled hall with a stuccoed ceiling, and had an oriel window overlooking the street below; Rothe's private chambers were beside this room, while the servants' quarters were under the roof on the second floor. The master bedroom was on the north side of the second house and the southern two-thirds of this house comprised his wife's suite of apartments with its own service area, including a kitchen. The principal kitchen, however, occupied the ground floor of the third house and the children's rooms (there were four sons and eight daughters) were on the floors above. In all, spread between the three houses, there were twenty-three living rooms. In addition there was a brew-house, a kiln, a well, a cistern, and a long garden with a pigeon house, stretching back to the town wall where it appears to have adjoined a mural tower, which Rothe later converted into a summer-house.²⁴

This complex of buildings, one of the city's smaller 'mansion houses' (as contemporaries termed them) was, in effect, a miniature Renaissance palazzo. The owner, John Rothe, was mayor of Kilkenny in 1613 and one may note, in passing, that his wife was an Archer, his son-in-law a Shee. John Rothe died in 1620 and from his will it is clear that virtually all of his wealth was derived from properties throughout counties Kilkenny and Tipperary. With two exceptions, all were former church lands.²⁵ Rothe House itself was built on the property that for at least 150 years had been the town house of the Cistercian abbots of Duiske Abbey, Graiguenamanagh.²⁶ Like other members of their class the Rotheres may have been devoutly Catholic, but their wealth and social position were based on the disestablishment of the Catholic Church.

Such houses were a feature of the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century townscape, and an arcaded stone walkway, substituted in places by a wooden pentice, served to link the individual frontages and to create a covered passage similar to the Rows at Chester.²⁷ A visitor to Kilkenny in 1613 described the presence of about forty houses 'of grey marble most of them supported by pillars', recalling Luke Gernon's better known description:

²⁴ W. Healy, *History and antiquities of Kilkenny* (Kilkenny, 1893), pp. 381–97; K.M. Lanigan, *Rothe House* (Kilkenny [1966]); J. Graves, 'Ancient street architecture in Kilkenny', *JRSAI*, 1 (1849–51), pp. 45–6, describes the wainscoting and stucco, mentioned in the will simply as 'wainscott, seelings of my hall and chambers'; the room total is derived from R.C. Simington, ed., *The Civil Survey, A.D. 1654–1656*, vi (Dublin, 1942), p. 515; Kilkenny Castle, by contrast, had 51 rooms, *ibid.*, pp. 534–5.

²⁵ Healy, *Kilkenny*, pp. 381–97.

²⁶ Curtis, *Ormond deeds*, vi, p. 63.

²⁷ Graves, 'Ancient street architecture', pp. 41–7.

The houses are of grey marble fayrely builte, the fronts of they houses are supported (most of them) with pillars, or arches under which there is an open pavement to walke on.²⁸

Forty years later, in 1654, the Civil Survey listed thirty houses with more than twelve rooms, 147 houses with between five and twelve rooms, and 131 houses with four rooms or fewer. Seventy houses (or 22 per cent of the total) had a ground-floor area of more than 1,400 square feet (130 square metres), while the largest covered almost 3,230 square feet (300 square metres).²⁹ John Rothe's will provides an insight into the furnishings of such buildings: not just furniture—dining tables, extendable tables, chairs, benches, stools, long stools, planed-stools ('scabbetts'), joint-stools (that is, crafted by a joiner), cupboards, linen cupboards, a great cypress chest, a cypress bureau, and keyboard instruments; linen and soft furnishings—tablecloths and coverings of linen, diaper-linen, and the linen known as Holland cloth, canopied beds with sea-green curtains, tapestry coverlets, and mattresses of feathers and flock; but also kitchenware and tableware—vessels and utensils of silver, pewter, brass, hammered metal ('batry') and iron; and valuables, including gold and silver jewellery.³⁰ The living standards of the urban bourgeoisie undoubtedly improved during the late sixteenth century, but the condition of the poor had, if anything worsened. The wages paid to labourers in 1603, for instance, were virtually identical to those in the Statute of Labourers of 1349.³¹

The dissolution of the monasteries affected the poor because several of the religious houses had hospitals where, in addition to treating the sick, they also looked after the old and infirm. The hospital of St Mary Magdalen appears to have been maintained, albeit deprived of its lands, because it was in effect a retirement home for elderly burgesses, but there was no place to accommodate the destitute. In 1582 Sir Richard Shee established an almshouse for six 'honest, poor, unmarried men' and six widows of fifty years of age or more. The men were housed on the first floor, the women on the ground floor, and the provision of separate entrances, one at the front, the other at the rear, meant that there could be no accidental encounters between them. Each individual had a room, but no connection—not even conversation—was permitted between men and women; the only time they came together was for two hours of prayer, in which they were led and supervised by the master. The marriage of a resident, or refusal to attend weekly divine service, or conviction for an offence such as fornication, adultery or drunkenness, led to automatic expulsion.³² In 1608 Stephen Luker established the hospital of St Mark and, in his will of 1614, Thomas Butler, tenth earl of Ormond, left money to establish another almshouse, the hospital of Our Blessed

²⁸ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 68; C.L. Falkiner, *Illustrations of Irish history and topography, mainly of the seventeenth century* (London, 1904), p. 354.

²⁹ Neely, *Kilkenny*, pp. 70–1.

³⁰ Healy, *Kilkenny*, pp. 384–6.

³¹ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 64.

³² *JRSAI*, 6 (1860–1), 313–20.

Saviour, later known as the Ormonde Poorhouse; about this time too David Kelly established the Maudlin Street Poorhouse.³³

From at least the 1580s the burgesses had made representations that Kilkenny should be raised to the dignity of a city and, in 1609, James I accorded it this status. The city was declared to consist of both the Irishtown and the Hightown, although the corporations were to remain separate, and it was licensed to have three market days, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Saturdays, and three annual fairs, each of three days' duration, on the feast days of St Patrick (17 March), St John the Baptist (24 June) and St Canice (11 October). The first officer was to be styled a mayor, and the council was to consist of eighteen aldermen. The first mayor was Robert Rothe and thirteen of the aldermen were Archers, Rothes or Shees. The charter also listed the thirty-six members of the merchant staple, which controlled the city's trade, all but fifteen of whom were Archers, Rothes or Shees, demonstrating yet again the political dominance of these families.³⁴ Almost all were Catholics and in the politically divided island of the early seventeenth century, with its deep antagonisms between Gaelic Irish, Old English and New English, they were naturally part of the Old English grouping, loyal to the Crown but worried that the Crown no longer valued their allegiance because of the presumption that all Catholics were agents, or potential agents, of France, Spain or Rome.

As long as there was a powerful Protestant earl of Ormond to protect their interests, these fears were remote but uncertainty increased after the death of the tenth earl in 1614. His heir was a recently widowed daughter, Elizabeth. The Ormond property was eventually settled on her and a marriage was arranged with one of James I's Scottish favourites, Richard Preston, Lord Dingwall. The Ormond title and little else was inherited by the earl's Catholic nephew, Walter, who was imprisoned for six years because of his refusal to accept this settlement.³⁵ In 1616 the political power of the city's Catholics was severely shaken when their monopoly of the mayoralty was broken. From 1612, senior civic officials were required to take the oath of supremacy, renouncing allegiance to the pope and accepting the Protestant king as head of the church. In 1616, government commissioners compelled four mayors-elect of Kilkenny in quick succession to resign until a Protestant candidate, who would take the oath, was nominated by the corporation.³⁶ In general, however, the twenty-five years between 1614 and 1639 were years of religious toleration. David Rothe, appointed Catholic bishop of Ossory in 1618, resided openly in the city from about 1625 and, in the course of his

³³ Genealogical Office, Dublin, MS 87, fos. 143–52; J. Hogan, *Kilkenny* (Kilkenny, 1884), p. 270; E. Ledwich, *The history and antiquities of Irishtown and Kilkenny from original records and authentic documents* (Dublin, 1781), p. 401.

³⁴ Neely, *Kilkenny*, pp. 22–3.

³⁵ V. Treadwell, *Buckingham and Ireland, 1616–1628, a study in Anglo-Irish politics* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 121–30; D. Edwards, 'The poisoned chalice: the Ormond inheritance, sectarian division and the emergence of James Butler, 1614–1642', in T. Barnard and J. Fenlon, eds, *The dukes of Ormonde, 1610–1745* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 58–64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

episcopate (which lasted until 1650), he organised a functioning diocese with a functioning parish system.³⁷

The city was always keen to demonstrate, however, that while it might be Catholic, it was loyal. This is evidenced, for instance, in the deference and civic ritual with which the lord deputy, Thomas, Viscount Wentworth, was received in 1637. The surface of John Street, along which he entered the city, was strewn with rushes; a triumphal arch of timber was erected at John's Bridge, the musicians of the earl of Ormond played for him as he passed; two hundred men mustered before him as a guard of honour; two stages were constructed at Croker's Cross from which orations in praise of the deputy were delivered and a specially composed song of welcome was sung. He then proceeded to the Tholsel, which had been specially decorated for the occasion. Two hogsheds of wine—one white, the other of claret—were consumed at the reception, which concluded with a fireworks display.³⁸ Wentworth was to have a lasting local importance because he promoted the career of the twelfth earl of Ormond, James Butler.³⁹ Butler had been educated at court, he was a prominent Anglican, and he had reunited the Ormond title with the Ormond lands by marrying his cousin, Elizabeth Preston. With the exception of the ten years that he spent in exile with Charles II in France, James Butler played a key role in Irish politics from the day he succeeded to the earldom in 1632 until his death in 1688.⁴⁰

The Confederation of Kilkenny

In 1642 the Old English became the reluctant allies of the Gaelic Irish owing to the success of the rising in Ulster, a year before. The rebellion, led by Ulster gentry, swept through the planted counties, specifically targeting English Protestants. Perhaps as many as 3,000 settlers were killed, while many more were humiliated, tortured and forced to flee. Ulster had been the most Protestant of the Irish provinces but, with the success of the rebellion, Protestants were confined to the coastal counties of Donegal, Londonderry, Antrim and Down and, with the exception of some towns and forts, the whole interior of Ireland was placed under Catholic control.⁴¹ The outrage felt by the government in Dublin and, particularly, by the increasingly powerful parliament in

³⁷ P.J. Corish, 'David Rothe, bishop of Ossory 1618–50', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 2/3 (1984), 315–23.

³⁸ *JRSAI*, 16 (1883–4), 242–9; the mayor's speech of welcome to Wentworth is to be found in Ledwich, *Irishtown and Kilkenny*, pp. 412–14.

³⁹ W. Kelly, 'Ormond and Strafford, pupil and mentor?', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 4/1 (1997), 88–106, is an important reassessment of this relationship.

⁴⁰ Carte, *Ormonde*; [W. Gardner] Lady Burghclere, *Life of James, first duke of Ormonde*, 2 vols (London, 1912); J.C. Beckett, *The cavalier duke, a life of James Butler – 1st duke of Ormond, 1610–1688* (Belfast, 1990); Barnard and Fenlon, eds, *Dukes of Ormonde*, pp. 1–175.

⁴¹ Cf. the map in M. Ó Siochru, *Confederate Ireland, 1642–1649, a constitutional and political analysis* (Dublin, 1999), p. 31.

London, demanded the defence of English and Protestant interests in Ireland. Their reaction was to group all Catholics together, whether rebel or loyal, Gaelic Irish or Old English, as the common enemy. The Dublin administration's immediate reaction was vindictive, imprisoning and torturing several members of the Pale gentry. This shocked Irish Catholic opinion and forced the Old English into making an accommodation with the Ulster rebels. The government's response, however, was motivated as much by potential gain as by anger. Every previous revolt had been followed by confiscation and the extent of the 1641 rebellion meant that huge estates would come into government hands. In March 1642 the English parliament forced Charles I to sign the Adventurers Act that used Irish land as the security on which to raise loans to send forces to Ireland, and it also prohibited the king from granting pardons to rebels without the consent of parliament.⁴²

In May 1642 a national congregation of the Catholic clergy, joined by the leading nobility and gentry, met at Kilkenny, probably because of the prestige that Bishop Rothe enjoyed. It gave ecclesiastical approval to the rising because it was in defence of the royal prerogative, the liberties of the kingdom, and the Catholic faith.⁴³ It called for the setting up of a provisional government under a supreme council, and arranged for the election of a general assembly of confederate Catholics representing the parliamentary constituencies. Kilkenny, as the country's largest inland town with spacious housing and lodging, was an obvious choice for the general assembly that convened in October 1642. The assembly maintained that it was not a parliament because such a claim would usurp the king's prerogative that it was allegedly trying to preserve; nevertheless, it had all of the trappings of a sovereign government and it was certainly viewed as a parliament both at home and abroad.⁴⁴ Although the assembly was to convene at Waterford on one occasion, Kilkenny was the capital of Irish resistance for the next seven years and historians have long designated both the phenomenon and the period as the 'Confederation of Kilkenny'.

The assembly was unicameral with bishops, lords and commons sharing the same chamber. It met in one of Robert Shee's town houses, which had been built, on what a later age called Parliament Street, by his grandfather Sir Richard Shee. In the Civil Survey of 1654 it is listed as having thirty-three rooms; one of the apartments, measuring 49 by 47 feet (15 by 14.25 metres), was spacious enough to function as the assembly room, while committees and delegations met in the adjoining houses.⁴⁵ Aware of the developing rebellious situation in Britain, the confederates declared their loyalty to the Crown and, in order to gain international support, they portrayed the movement not as a revolt but as a crusade to achieve religious freedoms. They sought the restoration of the privileges and rights of the Catholic Church to what they had been in the 1530s

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–5, 85.

⁴⁵ *Civil Survey*, vi, p. 523; Shee owned a second house which was even larger, *ibid.*, p. 501; Carrigan, *Ossory*, III, pp. 61–3.

and, in an effort to heal divisions within their ranks, they required all Catholics to take an oath of association, affirming loyalty to God, king and country; common law was to be upheld and maintained except where it was directed against the Catholic Church.⁴⁶ These were general aims, but when the actual negotiations commenced, the real agenda was put on the table. The confederates sought secure title to their own properties, appointments to public office and government administration, Catholic control of parliament, limitations on the terms of office of chief governors, the reversal of Wentworth's plantation in Connacht, and the right to establish inns of court, universities and common schools.⁴⁷ These grievances were long-standing, but they ran completely counter to government policy and, with the outbreak of civil war in England, the most that any government could do was equivocate.

Realising that a parliamentary victory would entail a new conquest of Ireland and the confiscation of their estates, the confederates hoped for a rapid, compromise settlement with the king. The assembly endeavoured to allay Protestant fears by affirming that land ownership had to be restored to the way it was before the rebellion, by protecting Protestant-owned property and by prohibiting assaults on Protestants. The reality on the ground was different, however, as unruly mobs took the law into their own hands and vented their resentment. Houses of Catholics and Protestants alike were looted in Kilkenny, churches were desecrated and, although no Protestants were killed, many were intimidated into abandoning their homes, while others were stripped naked and abused.⁴⁸ Most found refuge in Kilkenny Castle, from where the countess of Ormond escorted them to Carrick-on-Suir and arranged safe passage to Waterford.⁴⁹ Looting seems to have stopped only when Richard Butler, Lord Mountgarret, commander of the armed forces in the town and the future president of the supreme council, intercepted Richard Cantwell, a member of the local gentry, in the process of looting and shot him dead.⁵⁰ Despite the demands of extremists within the assembly, such as the archbishop of Cashel, who called for the execution of all Protestants, looting and intimidation served only to embarrass the confederate government.⁵¹ A similar unease affected Bishop Rothe who was reluctant to occupy the bishop's palace and St Canice's Cathedral, knowing that it would send out all the wrong signals, but in the jubilant mood of Catholic triumph, he was persuaded to rededicate the church and take possession of the temporalities of the see.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ó Siochrú, *Conf. Ire.*, pp. 47–8.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–1.

⁴⁸ J.T. Gilbert, ed., *History of the Irish confederation and the war in Ireland, 1641–1643*, 2 vols (Dublin, 1882), I, pp. 56–7; for the evidence of assaults on Catholic houses, see Carte, *Ormonde*, I, p. 267; Neely, *Kilkenny*, pp. 84–6, reviews the evidence of the 1641 depositions regarding alleged murders in the town.

⁴⁹ Gilbert, *Ir. conf.*, I, p. 57; *Calendar of the manuscripts of the marquess of Ormonde preserved at Kilkenny Castle* (HMC, 11 vols, London, 1895–1920), new ser., II, pp. 367–75.

⁵⁰ Gilbert, *Ir. conf.*, pp. 56–7; Carte, *Ormonde*, I, pp. 267–8.

⁵¹ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 85.

⁵² J. Lynch, *De praesulibus Hiberniae*, ed. J.F. O'Doherty, 2 vols (Dublin, 1944), I, pp. 388–9; Carrigan, *Ossory*, I, p. 103.

During the following years there was a Catholic renaissance reflected artistically in the quality of the stone tombs erected between 1642 and 1648. The old parish churches, many of which were in disrepair, were rebuilt, the Dominicans regained their old friary, the Capuchins established a new one, the Jesuits founded a college and novitiate, the Franciscans opened a nunnery, and Bishop Rothe established a college in Rose Inn Street.⁵³

In England the parliamentary forces quickly became openly hostile to the Confederation, but the king played a cat-and-mouse game. On the one hand he needed confederate money and arms, on the other he could not grant their demands because he would lose support in England by accommodating perceived rebels. The king's principal negotiator was the earl of Ormond, who successfully arranged a one-year truce with the confederates, during which time the final terms of agreement were to be worked out between the confederates and the king. In 1643 Ormond was created a marquis for his efforts and appointed as lord lieutenant of Ireland, the first native to hold the post in over a century. The marquis, who was kept informed by his supporters and tenants of almost every move in Kilkenny, showed no desire to reach an early settlement and talks were dragged out over five years. The swirl of unresolved negotiations, sometimes secret, sometimes not—sometimes in Ireland, at other times in England—generated dissension and distrust among the confederates and accentuated the existing divisions between Old English, Gaelic Irish, Ormondists and moderates. These difficulties were compounded by the lack of a unified military command and by the blinkered leadership of religious zealots. In particular the papal nuncio, Giovanni Battista Rinuccini, in whom so much hope was placed, proved to be politically intransigent. By the time the confederates decided to ignore him and appeal to Rome, whatever chances they might have had were lost. In fairness, no one in Kilkenny could have foreseen, even as late as 1647, that parliament would put the king on trial for his life, or could have prophesied a commonwealth or republic. With the execution of Charles I, however, all confederate hope ended. A little over six months later, on 15 August 1649, a parliamentary army under the control of Oliver Cromwell landed at Dublin and in March 1650, after a siege lasting one week, Kilkenny surrendered.

Cromwellian Kilkenny

Saying that he had come 'not to destroy but to cherish them', Cromwell levied a fine on the inhabitants of £2,000 sterling (which was, incidentally, sixty-six times the valuation of Rothe House) and appointed Colonel Daniel Axtell as their military governor.⁵⁴ At

⁵³ Bradley, *Kilkenny*, under relevant entries.

⁵⁴ Carrigan, *Ossory*, III, p. 40; J.P. Prendergast, 'The clearing of Kilkenny, anno 1654', *JRSAI*, 6 (1860–1), 343.

first, Kilkenny was permitted to retain its mayor, corporation and privileges, but shortly afterwards they were suppressed and instructions were issued that the property of all citizens was to be confiscated.⁵⁵ Under Axtell's patronage a Baptist community developed in the city and, although Catholic clergy were required to leave, some priests continued to minister.⁵⁶ In 1653, however, a decree of banishment was published against all Catholic clergy and those who did not comply were arrested; one priest who defied the decree was executed.⁵⁷ In 1654 the order was issued to clear Kilkenny and transplant its citizens to Connacht but it proved difficult to implement because the economic infrastructure that kept the city functioning consisted of the bonds and links built up between the old Catholic families.⁵⁸ In practice, it was simpler to lease some of the confiscated houses to their occupants rather than risk starvation or the total breakdown of the supply routes. Some householders were exiled to Connacht and they subsequently complained that they were forced to move at the worst time of the year and that their goods received only a fraction of their value at auction because of the glut on the market.⁵⁹ Only the better-off sector of society was affected because servants and manual labourers were required to stay and serve their new masters.⁶⁰

At the time of transplantation, or immediately afterwards, the city was surveyed and valued with a view to reallocating its properties. The resulting document, the Civil Survey, provides an insight into the building fabric and appearance of the city.⁶¹ It is, unfortunately, incomplete but the surviving fragment lists over 200 residential buildings, 63 per cent of which were stone-built with roofs of slate, 16 per cent had stone walls and thatched roofs, while 21 per cent were constructed of wattles and clay and were also thatched. Almost all houses had an associated yard. The stone houses, as well as the largest houses, were concentrated in Castle Street (now The Parade) and High Street (including the later Parliament Street). Patrick Street had surprisingly few stone houses, but this may reflect the incomplete nature of the record rather than the reality on the ground. The majority of the wattle-and-clay houses were located on the lanes and side streets off High Street. Gardens were evenly spread across the city but there was a noticeable concentration of orchards between the axis of Parliament Street/St Kieran Street and the Nore. Outhouses, brewhouses, malt houses, bakeries and kilns were also fairly widely dispersed. The tanneries were located in the Irishtown and John Street, but there were none in the

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 97.

⁵⁷ F. Ó Fearghail, 'The Catholic Church in County Kilkenny, 1600–1800' in W. Nolan and K. Whelan, eds, *Kilkenny: history and society* (Dublin, 1990), p. 214.

⁵⁸ Prendergast, 'Clearing of Kilkenny', p. 343.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*; Carrigan, *Ossory*, III, p. 45.

⁶⁰ Prendergast, 'Clearing of Kilkenny', pp. 334–5.

⁶¹ *Civil Survey*, VI, pp. 499–557.

Hightown. Cattle, horses, pigs and poultry were kept in the city. Although the stables and cow sheds were fairly evenly dispersed it is noticeable that poultry houses were confined to the Hightown and while there was only one pigsty in Parliament Street, there were seven in Patrick Street.⁶²

In 1656 the corporation was restored and Abel Warren was appointed mayor.⁶³ One of its first acts was to admit three Catholics to the right to vote, Walter Archer, James Bryan and Edward Rothe—a clear indication that members of the old merchant community had managed to survive the clearances—and, in an example of puritan zeal, instructions were issued to arrest anyone found drinking or playing cards during the times of divine service.⁶⁴ A year later the merchant guild was re-established and the guilds of merchant tailors, cordwainers and carpenters were re-instituted but there are indications that much of the city's trade had collapsed.⁶⁵ Kilkenny is referred to as being in decay, and when repairs were ordered for St Canice's Cathedral and St Mary's Church, the corporation appealed for contributions from the citizens because its own former sources of revenue no longer existed.⁶⁶ In the census of c.1659 the population of the city was enumerated at 1,311, about one quarter of which—359—were New English; the real totals, however, when children and the very poor are included, were probably double these numbers.⁶⁷ The majority of the New English (220) lived within the walls of the Hightown where they constituted half (50.05 per cent) the population. Within the Hightown, the settlers were concentrated in High Street and Castle Street, where they formed 73 per cent of the population, whereas in Patrick Street and Parliament Street they formed 30 per cent. In the Irishtown the settlers were 40 per cent, and in John Street 35 per cent, of the total.⁶⁸ Outside the walls of the Hightown there were 147 people, only three of whom were English; outside the walls of St John's, there were 144 people, six of whom were English, while outside the walls of the Irishtown, there were 225 people, only ten of whom were English. This pattern indicates that it tended to be the larger, wealthier and more secure, stone-built properties within the walls that were occupied by the New English.

⁶² This summary is based on the work of A. Byrne, 'The use of the Civil Survey for the reconstruction of the socio-economic topography of Kilkenny city', BA dissertation, Dept of Geography, UCD, 1985.

⁶³ T.C. Barnard, *Cromwellian Ireland: English government and reform in Ireland, 1649–60* (Oxford, 1975), p. 63.

⁶⁴ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 99.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 99–100; J. Graves and J.G.A. Prim, *The history, architecture and antiquities of the cathedral church of St Canice, Kilkenny* (Dublin, 1857), pp. 43–4.

⁶⁷ S. Pender, ed., *A census of Ireland, circa 1659* (Dublin, 1939), pp. 431–2; the totals have been arrived at by including only the built-up areas; a further 411 lived within the rural area of the liberties; on the use of these census figures, see D. Dickson, 'Inland city: reflections on eighteenth-century Kilkenny' in Nolan and Whelan, *Kilkenny*, p. 334.

⁶⁸ The name of Irishtown is left blank in the census, Pender, *Census Ire., 1659*, p. 431.

The Restoration

The city's fortunes improved with the Restoration because James Butler, who had gone into exile in France with Charles II, was restored to favour, made a privy councillor, created duke of Ormonde⁶⁹ at the coronation in 1661, and once more appointed as lord lieutenant of Ireland. Ormonde's proximity to the centres of power meant that he was able to regain some confiscated properties (particularly Butler ones). He made his dislike for the Cromwellian corporation clear by claiming the entire city as his on the grounds that, at the outbreak of the rebellion in 1641, he had been granted all forfeited property within his territories. He obtained a charter to this effect from Charles II, listing over 185 properties in the city, but the corporation fought him and spun out the proceedings for fifteen years.⁷⁰ Eventually, in 1676, a settlement was concluded whereby Ormonde received rents worth about one-tenth of what he had claimed.⁷¹ Effectively only the lands held by regicides were confiscated by the Restoration regime, but this was good news for some in Kilkenny because Axtell had been the officer in charge of the guard at the execution of Charles I. Accordingly a few of the Old English managed to regain their houses, although large numbers of hopefuls remained unsatisfied.

After his return Ormonde transformed the castle and had a substantial impact on the appearance of the city. With the exception of the hall and gallery built in the 1560s, Kilkenny Castle had remained a largely medieval fortress and the duke set about converting it into a French-style chateau. Parapets were demolished, ornamental cornices and tall chimneys added, large multi-paned and rusticated windows were punched through the 11 feet (3.5 m) thick walls, tall conical roofs with campaniles were placed on the towers, the huge moat was filled in, and formal terraced gardens were laid out.⁷² English and French gardeners were employed to redesign the gardens, a French *fontainier* constructed a fountain with a jet of water 24 feet (7 m) high, and an elaborate water-house with a summer banqueting room was built.⁷³ The latter building was a showpiece, designed to impress. It was two storeys high, circular in plan, and crowned with a cupola and gallery; the floor was paved with slabs of black and white marble, the ceiling was frescoed with angels, and the centre occupied by a black limestone fountain in the form of a trophy from which a jet of water rose into the hollow of a ducal crown suspended above; it was designed by the court architect Hugh May with an input from

⁶⁹ The spelling of Ormonde with a terminal 'e' first appears in the patent which created James Butler a marquis in 1642; it was retained when he was elevated to the dukedom, see [P. Butler] Lord Dunboyne, 'The Butlers', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 18 (1966), 47 where the date is mistakenly given as 1652.

⁷⁰ H. Butler, 'The Charles II charter', *Journal of the Butler Society*, 1/7 (1977), 541–4, and [G. Marescaux (ed.)] 'Occupants of Ormond houses, Kilkenny, 1641 and 20 years later', in *ibid.*, 545–50.

⁷¹ Neely, *Kilkenny*, pp. 122–3.

⁷² Murtagh, 'Kilkenny Castle', p. 1113.

⁷³ E. Malins and the Knight of Glin [D. FitzGerald], *Lost demesnes: Irish landscape gardening, 1660–1845* (London, 1976), pp. 6–7; K. Lamb and P. Bowe, *A history of gardening in Ireland* (Dublin, 1995), p. 21.

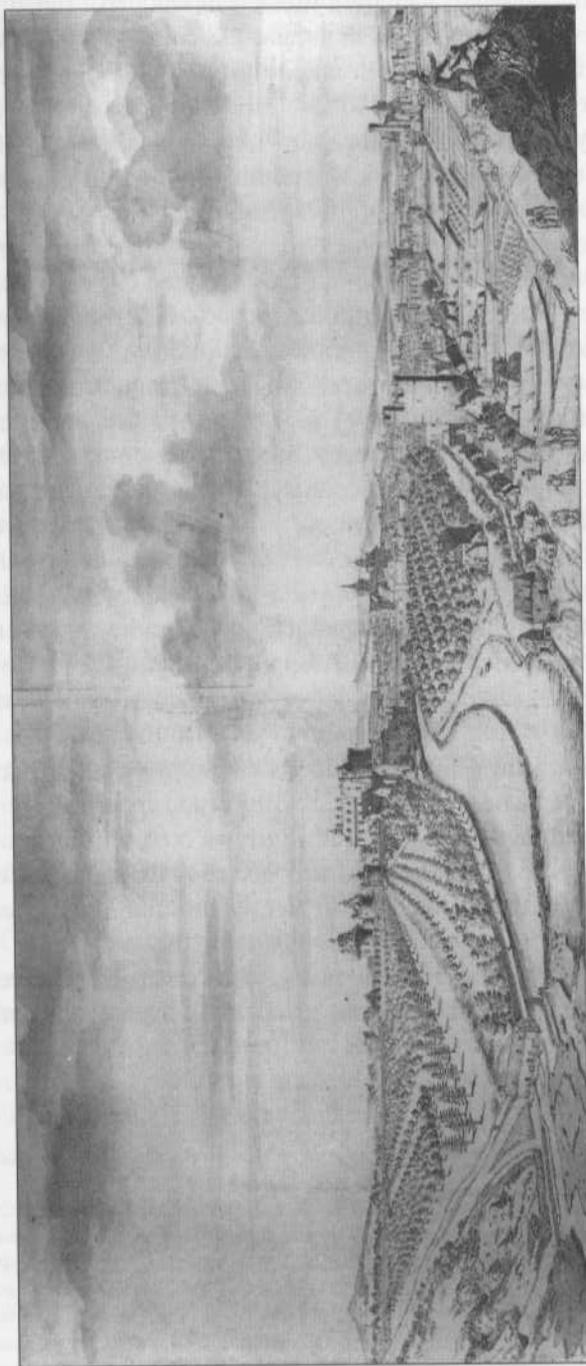


Figure 2.1. Place's view of Kilkenny, c. 1698 (reproduced by courtesy of the National Gallery of Ireland).

Sir Christopher Wren.⁷⁴ The terraces were dressed in lead, in French fashion, and in 1689 four lead statues (two of which, Diana and Hercules, still survive) were ordered from the London statuery maker, John Bonnier.⁷⁵ Grinling Gibbons' designs for an iron gate to the great courtyard were rejected in favour of those of a local ironmaster, largely because the Kilkenny work was £20 cheaper.⁷⁶ A tree wilderness, cut through with avenues and vistas lined with Scots pines, was planted to the south of the castle and can clearly be seen in Francis Place's view of 1698 (Figure 2.1).⁷⁷

The duke had the east side of Castle Street demolished in order to create The Parade, a new formal approach to the castle that integrated it directly, for the first time, with the town.⁷⁸ He established a new grammar school, Kilkenny College, in 1666 and provided it with a charter in 1684; he upgraded the quality of overnight accommodation by introducing at least one experienced innkeeper from Britain; and, in 1676, he enhanced the corporation's civic regalia by replacing their lost great mace with a new one of silver.⁷⁹ An indication of the respect that the duke commanded is provided by the funeral of his daughter-in-law, the countess of Arran, in 1667, which was conducted with all the solemnity of a state occasion. The cortege was escorted through the town to St Canice's Cathedral by 500 members of the gentry and nobility, all dressed in black, followed by sixty coaches carrying additional mourners; the catafalque itself was accompanied by the countess's great banner, borne by the son of an earl, while an officer of the household carried her coronet upon a cushion; they were received at the cathedral by the bishop of Ossory and his clergy, together with the dean, four bishops and an archbishop, all of whom were on hand to perform the obsequies and to demonstrate the restored Anglican Church's skill in ceremony and pageantry.⁸⁰ Griffith Williams, the Protestant bishop of Ossory, had returned from exile to St Canice's in 1661 to find it unroofed, lacking doors, the windows broken, the tombs dismantled, 'utterly defaced and ruined'.⁸¹ He was physically obstructed by Baptists when he started to repair it, but by 1667 the cathedral was clearly functioning. Nevertheless reconstruction work continued well into the 1670s.⁸²

The Restoration also brought Catholic priests back to the city. There were twelve in 1660 and fourteen in 1662; one Franciscan priest had already returned in 1658.⁸³ By

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ormonde MSS*, new series, vi, pp. 279–80.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; J. Fenlon, 'Episodes of magnificence: the material worlds of the dukes of Ormonde' in Barnard and Fenlon, *Dukes of Ormonde*, p. 151.

⁷⁷ Lamb and Bowe, *History of gardening*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ B. Murtagh, 'Kilkenny Castle, The Parade, Kilkenny' in *Excavations 1997*, p. 103.

⁷⁹ Ledwich, *Irishtown and Kilkenny*, pp. 508–17; *Ormonde MSS*, new series, iii, p. 454; J.G.A. Prim, 'The corporation insignia and olden civic state of Kilkenny', *JRSAI*, 11 (1870–1), 295–7.

⁸⁰ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 106.

⁸¹ Graves and Prim, *St Canice*, p. 43.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 45–51.

⁸³ Ó Fearghail, 'Catholic Church in County Kilkenny', p. 214.

1667 there were four parish chapels, a Jesuit chapel, a Capuchin friary, a Dominican house, a Franciscan house, and five schools, one of which was run by the Jesuits.⁸⁴ Ormonde was clearly worried about the high visibility of Catholicism and communicated to the mayor his wish that mass should not be celebrated within the walls of the city.⁸⁵ In 1669, when Josias Haydocke carried out a religious census of the city, he was depressed by the fact that while the numbers of Catholics, particularly those in business, had increased, the Protestant population continued to decline.⁸⁶ By 1678 all four parish chapels were located immediately outside the walls, but by 1683 the rebuilding of chapels within the walls, presumably belonging to the religious orders, provoked a reissue of the ban and prompted Ormonde to wonder how 'they can be so mad as to do so extravagant a thing in my town, and where I so often reside'.⁸⁷ The superior of the Jesuits was arrested and several of the clergy fled.⁸⁸ The placing of Catholic chapels outside the walls provided an impetus to extramural development and initiated the ribbon development that was such a distinctive feature of the eighteenth-century city and is clearly visible on Rocque's map of 1758 (Figure 2.2). Control of the corporation had remained in the hands of Cromwellians since 1660, but with the accession of James II in 1685 and the abandonment of the oath of supremacy, Catholics began to play a more prominent role in civic life. A new Catholic college was opened in 1686.⁸⁹ In 1687 the city was granted a new governing charter, and a new mayor and aldermen belonging to the Catholic Old English families were appointed.⁹⁰ The new corporation made a gesture towards inclusiveness and included a handful of Cromwellians, among them Josias Haydocke, the city apothecary, who had masterminded the corporation's stance against the duke of Ormonde a decade before.

The Jacobite and Williamite City

James II's pro-Catholic and pro-French policies provoked a revolt in England and the king fled to France. In March 1689 he landed at Kinsale and proceeded, via Kilkenny, to Dublin where the Irish parliament declared the lands of Protestant supporters of William of Orange, such as the second duke of Ormonde, to be forfeit. James II appears to have disliked Dublin and instead spent most of the winter months from November 1689 until January 1690 at Kilkenny, residing in the castle.⁹¹ During this

⁸⁴ W. Burke, *The Irish priests in penal times, 1660–1760* (Waterford, 1914), p. 19.

⁸⁵ *Ormonde MSS*, new series, VII, p. 139.

⁸⁶ Neely, *Kilkenny*, pp. 124–5.

⁸⁷ *Ormonde MSS*, new series, VII, p. 139.

⁸⁸ J.G. Simms, *Jacobite Ireland, 1685–91* (London, 1969), p. 10.

⁸⁹ J. Leonard, *A university for Kilkenny* (Dún Laoghaire, 1996), p. 25.

⁹⁰ Kilkenny Corporation Archives, CR/A/3.

⁹¹ J.G. Simms, 'Kilkenny in the Jacobite War, 1689–91', *Old Kilkenny Review*, 13 (1961), 13.

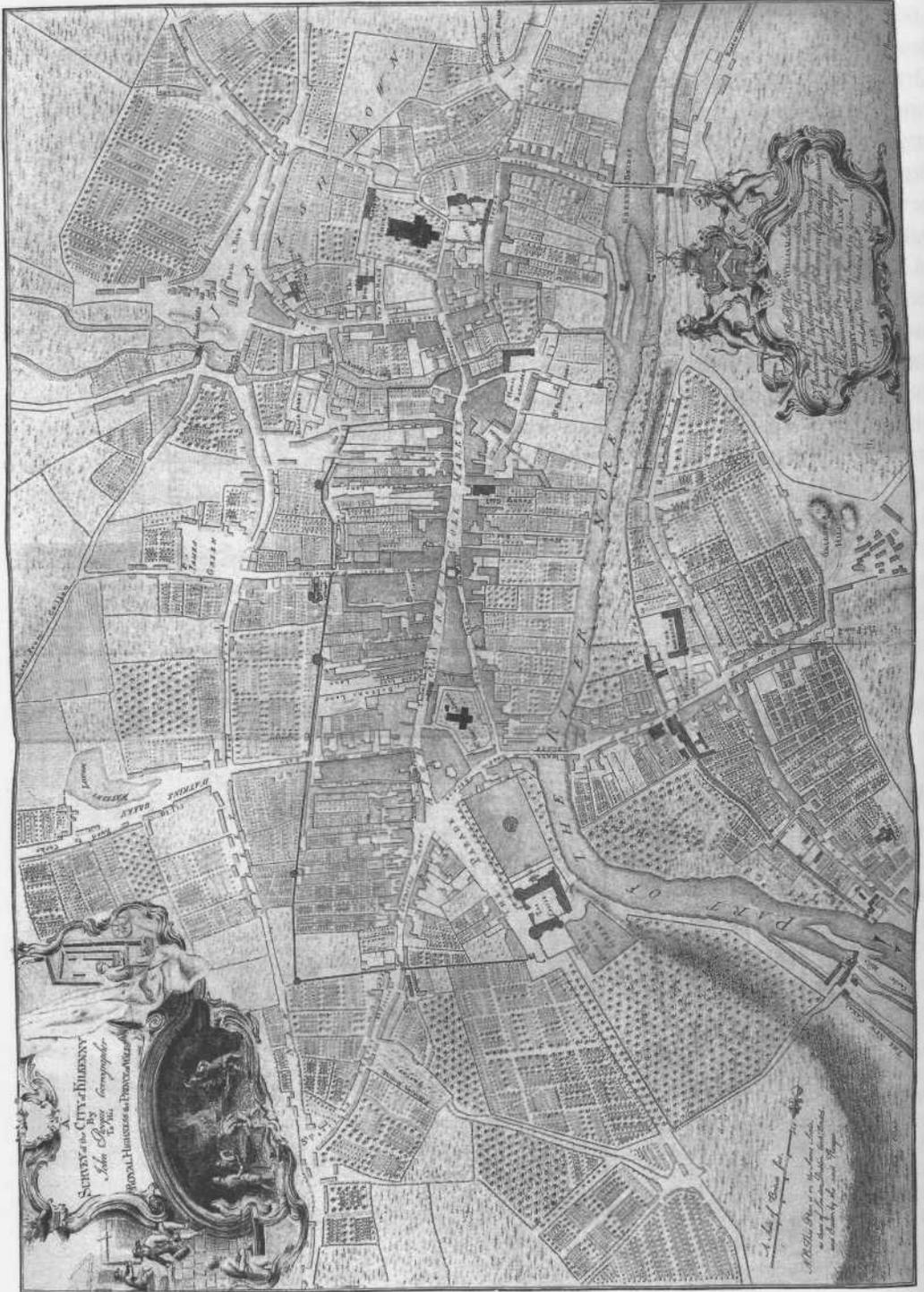


Figure 2.2. Rocque's map of Kilkenny, 1758 (reproduced by courtesy of Trinity College, Dublin).

time he elevated the Catholic college, which had taken over the premises of Ormonde's grammar school at Kilkenny College, into a university as the Royal College of St Canice.⁹² Six months later, after James's defeat at the battle of the Boyne, the university was forced to close. James's retreating army passed through Kilkenny on its way to Limerick and forced the citizens to pay protection money in order to save the city from looting.⁹³ Kilkenny surrendered to the Williamites without firing a shot, and the propertied Old English families, who had supported James almost to a man, lost everything.⁹⁴ Several decamped, followed the army to Limerick and eventually went into exile on the continent, where they served in the armies of France, Spain, Austria and Russia.⁹⁵ The second duke of Ormonde, who had fought with William at the Boyne, raced ahead so that he would be present to receive the king in state at the castle. The Williamite army, commanded by General Godert de Ginkel, camped beside Kilkenny, making the city its winter headquarters from October 1690 until May 1691, when it moved on to besiege Limerick.⁹⁶ Before entering Kilkenny, William III suspended the corporation and appointed an exclusively Protestant body in its place.⁹⁷ There was a clean sweep of the old regime. Of the old council members, only Josias Haydocke, described in 1684 as 'a cunning man . . . [who] will play his part better behind the curtain than upon the open stage', displayed that greatest of political skills—survival—and was appointed to the new one.⁹⁸ He died three years later, shortly after he had been elected as MP for the city, a symbol of the tenacity, endurance and will to succeed of the new Kilkenny élite.

The continuing tension between the new élite and the Catholic middle class was graphically expressed by the mayor when he complained in 1708 that 'the Protestants of this city are but a handful faced with an inveterate and implacable enemy'.⁹⁹ Protestants who married Catholics were excluded from office, but this rule proved unenforceable and had been waived in 1697.¹⁰⁰ The application of the penal laws led to the closure of all Catholic churches in 1698, although within a few years the restrictions were eased and the churches began to function again. The construction, also in 1698, of infantry barracks in the old St John's Priory, and of cavalry barracks in the former Franciscan friary, increased the élite's sense of security and, despite the terror occasionally generated by Whiteboys and the rebellion of 1798, the strength of the garrison ensured that Kilkenny was largely untouched by revolution or military violence until

⁹² Leonard, *University for Kilkenny*, pp. 29–40.

⁹³ Simms, 'Kilkenny in the Jacobite War', pp. 14–15.

⁹⁴ Carrigan, *Ossory*, III, pp. 45–6.

⁹⁵ Neely, *Kilkenny*, pp. 151–2.

⁹⁶ Simms, 'Kilkenny in the Jacobite War', p. 16.

⁹⁷ Kilkenny Corporative Archives, CR/K/76.

⁹⁸ *Ormonde MSS*, new series, VII, p. 231.

⁹⁹ Neely, *Kilkenny*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

the 1920s. In the census of 1702 there were 292 Protestant families and 715 Catholic ones in the city, making a total of 1,007 families and a population of perhaps 5,000.¹⁰¹ Kilkenny was unusual in having only a very small number of nonconformists, and the few Baptists who were present in Cromwellian times appear to have left shortly after the Restoration.

Economic development in Kilkenny during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was characterised by an increased exploitation of natural resources, but the foundation of the city's prosperity remained its rich agricultural hinterland and, in particular, the sale of cattle and grain. The medieval corn mills continued working and several new mills were built; new treatments for textiles were introduced and the brewing industry was expanded. In 1654 there were four tuck mills for the fulling of cloth, but they were clearly ancillary because two corn mills were present at each of these sites. Frieze, a rough, heavy woollen cloth, was manufactured during the second half of the seventeenth century, although competition from Carrick-on-Suir forced the weavers to produce worsted, a finer quality fabric.¹⁰² Ironworking increased in importance from the middle of the seventeenth century as new sources of ore were discovered near Castlecomer.¹⁰³ The 'town foundry' appears to have continued as the successor of the medieval common forge and functioned until at least the end of the eighteenth century. The iron gates for Kilkenny Castle were manufactured locally in 1682 and were judged to be every bit as good as London workmanship of the period.¹⁰⁴ One of the major industrial changes of the post-medieval period was the shift from private brewing, a traditional right of the city's freemen, to public brewing. Two malt houses are mentioned in the Civil Survey of 1654 and at least five others are evidenced shortly after the Restoration, suggesting that commercial brewing became a feature of the urban economy during the second half of the century. In 1691 at least one brewer, Miles Lyons, and two maltsters were operating in the city.¹⁰⁵

Continuity and change

In looking at the issues of continuity and change in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century town, it is the changes that are at first apparent—the end of the feudal and Gaelic worlds, and the increasing cultural Anglicisation of town and people; the shift in power from a universal church to a national church that forced the majority religion

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 114, although Neely suggested a population of c.4,000; cf. Dickson, 'Inland city', p. 334 and fn. 4.

¹⁰² W. Tighe, *Statistical observations relative to the county of Kilkenny made in the years 1800 and 1801* (Dublin, 1802), p. 544.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 43 and 73–6.

¹⁰⁴ *Ormonde MSS*, new series, vi, p. 465.

¹⁰⁵ J.G.A. Prim, 'Documents connected with the city of Kilkenny militia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries', *JRSAL*, 3 (1854–5), 254–6.

underground, typified architecturally by the conversion of the town's religious houses into barracks and court houses; the shift in the focus of trade from France and Spain to Britain; the disappearance of the Rothe–Archer–Shee nexus that had controlled the town for centuries and its replacement by a New English governing class. Looked at in this way the changes between 1500 and 1700 were dramatic, but looked at structurally it is the continuities between the medieval town and the Renaissance city that are most striking. The feudal exercise of lordship became the aristocratic patronage of the Renaissance, and the control that the Butlers exerted over their city was every bit as powerful in 1700 as it had been in 1500. Although there may have been a change in the direction of trade, the economic activity of the city followed medieval trends; it was not until the eighteenth century, with the exploitation of marble and coal, that any new industries were initiated. Except for the years between 1650 and 1655 the corporation continued as the regulatory body of the city, conducting its affairs according to precedent and determining its rights by careful attention to tradition. The new élite buried their dead and worshipped in the old medieval churches; they lived in the medieval and Renaissance houses built by those whom they had displaced; much of their wealth, like that of their precursors, derived from control of the urban burgagery; and the visible dominance of the walled city provided for the new élite both status and a right to rule, just as it had for the medieval burgesses. In one way, the period was one of social upheaval but in another, there was no real social change. One élite simply replaced another. Appropriation of the structures of power and symbols of wealth endowed the new regime with legitimacy. The message to ordinary townspeople was clear. The families at the top might have changed, but otherwise it was business as usual. Continuity and change, so often viewed as opposites, were intimately linked at Kilkenny because, paradoxically, change was effected by means of structures and symbols whose continuity was viewed as essential, while the structures and symbols continued because they were necessary to effect change.

Note. I am particularly grateful to the editors of the Irish Historic Town Atlas, Dr Howard Clarke, Dr Ray Gillespie and Professor Anngret Simms for reading through the text and making valuable suggestions. I also wish to thank Michael Potterton and Patricia Ryan for their help.

Abstracts

JOHN BRADLEY

From Frontier Town to Renaissance City: Kilkenny, 1500–1700

This paper is a study of continuity and change in Kilkenny between 1500 and 1700, when it was transformed from a frontier market town into a city of such centrality that it functioned for a number of years as an alternative Irish capital. The agencies of change were mainly external. By 1700 the civic families who had traditionally controlled the city had been swept away and replaced by a new oligarchy, composed primarily of colonists. In 1500 religion was a factor that united the townspeople; by 1700, it divided them. In 1500 the town's skyline was dominated by the spires of religious houses; by 1700 these buildings functioned as courthouses or military barracks. Although this transformation was dramatic, there were continuities, particularly in the form of urban government, in the way in which power was brokered, and in the continuing importance of a great lord's role in the development of the town. The paper concludes that continuity and change were effectively bedfellows.

ALAN DYER

Small Towns in England, 1600–1800

The argument of this paper is that small towns were still of great importance in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, despite the growth of large cities in this period. Small towns were growing in numbers until the early eighteenth century, and developed a sophisticated range of shopping and leisure facilities for the gentry, as well as vital economic facilities for country people. The public market, around which most of them still centred, retained its important role in the agrarian economy, despite the rise of private dealing. Small towns strengthened their role as centres of specialised manufacturing, and they also serviced the growing traffic along the roads. The small number of the new towns of this period bear comparison with the more familiar urban plantations of the Middle Ages. In fact, small towns were probably more vigorous and better able to compete with large ones at the end of this period than they had been at the beginning of it, and it can be claimed that, considered over its complete history, the market town was at its highest point of development in the years around 1800.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
<i>Cal. S. P. Ire</i>	<i>Calendar of State Papers, Ireland</i>
HC	House of Commons
JCHAS	<i>Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society</i>
JRSAI	<i>Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland</i>
KTCM	Records of the Corporation of Kells, 1685–1787: NLI MS 25446, 8 vols
LPK	C. McNeill, ed., <i>Liber primus Kilkenniensis</i> (Dublin, 1931)
NA	National Archives [Dublin]
NHist.	<i>Northern History</i>
NLI	National Library Ireland
<i>Parl. Gaz.</i>	<i>The Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland</i>
PP	Parliamentary Papers
PRIA	<i>Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy</i>
PRO	Public Record Office
PRONI	Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
RO	Record Office
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
UH	<i>Urban History</i>
UHY	<i>Urban History Yearbook</i>
VCH	<i>Victoria County History</i>