

Economic, religious and cultural colonisation by the Anglo-Normans in Irish cities during the 12th century

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Anglo-Norman; colonisation; economy; religion; culture

Introduction

The Anglo-Normans began their conquest of Ireland in 1169 following an invitation from Dermot Mac Murrough, King of Leinster, who had been forced from his dominions by the King of Connaught. Having received permission from King Henry II of England to raise volunteers in his kingdom, Dermot went to Bristol where he made contact with the Anglo-Norman lords of south Wales. In return for promises, including that of his daughter, Eva, to Strongbow (Lord of Tottenham Wolaston Chepstow), Dermot easily persuaded the Anglo-Norman lords to intervene in Ireland.

In the light of Dermot's appeal to the Anglo-Normans and their willingness to enter an Irish domestic quarrel, it is relevant to examine the evidence for the inter-relationship between the two islands in the preceding years. The archaeological evidence from Waterford and from Cork, to a lesser extent, will be used to assess the level of pre-invasion influence.

Evidence for 11th/12th-century trade

As with other medieval Irish towns, historical references to trade in Waterford are sparse in the centuries before the arrival of the Normans. For example, the existence of a fleet at Waterford is mentioned for the year 1080 (Evans 1990, 35.1; 195; 204), but details of the routes plied by their ships are not recorded for this period; consequently, archaeological material is of singular importance. British wares are present in the archaeological assemblage of Waterford from the late 11th century

onwards and in Cork from the early 12th century (Gahan *et al.* 1997). British wares remained dominant until the mid-13th century. In particular, pottery from the Ham Green Kiln near Bristol represents the largest single group of medieval pottery recovered from the excavations (*ibid.*; Gahan/McCutcheon 1997, 286). The so-called proto-Ham Green wares were recorded in large quantities from late 11th century contexts in association with Ham Green cooking ware, Bath Fabric 'A' and, from the later end of the sequence (i. e. early to mid-12th century), some south-east Wiltshire glazed wares. Other British pottery of 11th/12th-century date recovered from Waterford includes Cornish cooking pots, with characteristic grass markings, and a variety of other coarse wares that are most likely of English manufacture (Gahan/McCutcheon 1997, 289). The French wares cover a similar time span to the English pottery. The earlier wares, i. e. those present from the 11th century up to the early 13th century, are primarily of North French origin. Pottery from south-west France, which was to dominate from the mid-13th century, was present but only in relatively insignificant amounts. The North French wares include Normandy cooking ware, North French White Wares and decorated jugs of Orléans, Rouen and Paris type.

Against this background of trade dominated by the Norman homelands and the rapidly consolidated Norman territories in Britain we get a picture of port cities that were very much part of a trade network pivoting on the port cities of southern and south-western England. The Anglo-Norman armies may not have set foot on Irish soil before 1169, but throughout the 12th century Irish port towns, especially Wa-

terford, were key components of an expanding economic colony. It is, therefore, not coincidental that the initial thrust of the Norman invasion focused on the south-east of Ireland, and the capture of Waterford City was critical for a foothold on the island.

Domestic architecture

Cultural, social and religious trends cannot be isolated from the economic background that sustained the port towns. If we briefly examine domestic architecture in Waterford, we find that by as early as the 1080s a new form of house had made its appearance in Waterford. These houses, known as sunken-featured buildings or semi-basemented buildings (fig. 1) have a distinct morphology (Walsh 1997). Of particular relevance to the architectural development of Hiberno-Norse towns are the stone-built entrances. The houses were constructed in Waterford in the mid- to late 11th century, but they had gone out of use and been backfilled by the mid-12th century. In all six examples were excavated but the new type of building formed a relatively small percentage of the overall architectural tradition, which continued to be dominated by post-and-wattle houses (Scully/McCutcheon 1997). Sunken buildings appear to be part of a general North-western European development (Richards 1991, 61) and replaced wattle-walled houses in York in the 10th century (Hall 1984) and were common in London from the mid-10th/11th century (Horsman et al. 1998). Walsh (1997, 53) suggested that the introduction of this new form of building in late 11th-century Waterford 'indicates that the impetus for this expansion [of the town] was related, amongst other factors, to an influx of peoples whose ideas of building types were considerably different from the previous norm'. Perhaps this suggested influx only represented a small number of merchants or merely the exchange of ideas acquired in the course of the Hiberno-Norse burgeoning trade contacts with Anglo-Norman Britain and North-West France. There is no compelling reason to see adoption of new styles of architecture in terms of population movements, but cultural influence must be acknowledged. The construction of sunken-featured buildings was not the only architectural innovation adopted in Waterford, for the early 12th cen-

tury saw a replacement of the long-established tradition of post-and-wattle construction of domestic architecture. Houses were built of large, squared, earthfast timber posts set in opposing pairs on the long walls with the interweaving bays filled by vertical staves set in a grooved beam or sill-beam, hence the so-called 'sill-beam houses' (Scully/McCutcheon 1997). By the mid-12th century, houses of sill-beam construction had all but replaced the wattle-walled houses within the walled town of Waterford and were numerous in Cork (Hurley, forthcoming). Part of a house constructed of vertically set staves was excavated at South Main Street, Cork (Trehay, forthcoming), and this was dated by dendrochronology to AD 1131–1132. A sill-beam house at Hanover Street (fig. 2; Cleary, forthcoming), of similar proportions to the early 12th-century sill-beam houses in Waterford produced dendrochronological dates centring on the mid-12th century. The Anglo-Norman conquerors would have found little difference between the domestic architecture current in mid-12th-century England and the houses they encountered on reaching Waterford in 1170 and Cork in 1179. Stone houses, or at least one stone house, had also been constructed in Waterford prior to 1170. To date, the stone and timber house located between High Street and Peter Street is the earliest and only example of its type to be excavated in Ireland and has few parallels in Britain (fig. 3). The stone walls were certainly adequate to carry a second storey and the weight of the roof. The presence of the flank-

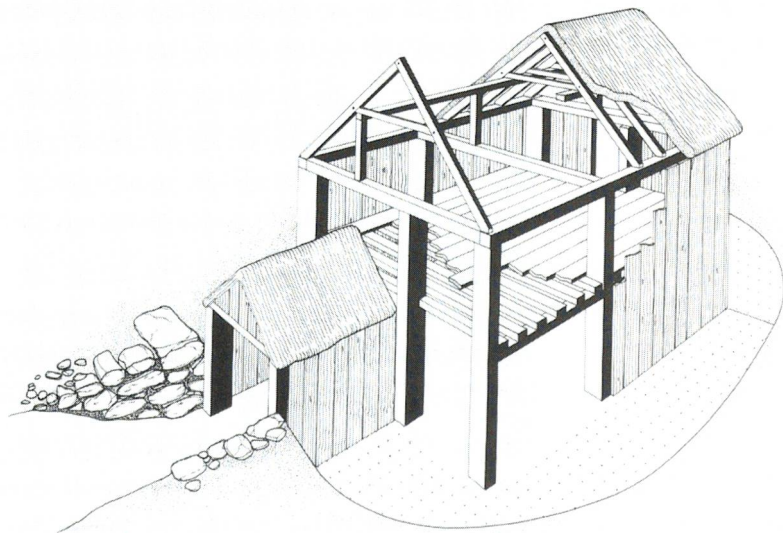


Fig. 1: Reconstruction of sunken-featured house, Peter Street, Waterford, built c. AD 1080.



Fig. 2: Foundations of sill-beam house of mid-12th century date at Hanover Street, Cork (Photograph: R. M. Cleary).

ing timber uprights indicates that the second storey may have been constructed of wood. The closest parallel for the design are the English 'cruck house' where three pairs of long curved oak beams were linked by the ridge-tree at the apex to form an 'A' frame.

The posts in the Waterford house were, however, set vertically and not crucked; consequently, the Waterford stone house is clearly in a similar tradition to the sill-beam houses, but instead of sill-beams and staves the shell of the house was of stone and mortar while the roof (and possibly an upper storey) was carried on the flanking earthfast posts. Most importantly, the stonework and finishing of the building was of high standard. The style of stone work and type of mortar was similar to that used in

the walls of the stone chancel and nave ends of St Peter's Church and to the gate piers/wall ends excavated on Peter Street (Hurley 1997, 28–9). All were of ashlar-like masonry bonded with yellow lime mortar. The defensive stone wall is dated to the second quarter of the 12th century, while the stone house is likely to date to the period 1150–1175.

Churches

This background of strong trading contacts and cultural influences from 11th- and 12th-century Britain provides a context for some well-known historical facts. In 1096 the Hiberno-Norse of Waterford established their own diocese and Malchus (Meal losa Ó hAinmire) was consecrated the first Bishop of Waterford by Bishop Anselm at Canterbury (Gwynn/Hadcock 1970, 100). Malchus, who had been trained as a Benedictine monk at Winchester, is credited with the building of the Cathedral of the Blessed Trinity, Christ Church, in Waterford (Smith 1746, 115). Malchus remained in Waterford until 1110 AD and then translated to Lismore and later to Cashel. According to Harbison (1978, 81), Malchus, one of the leaders of the 12th-century reform of the Irish Church, is likely to have been responsible for the building of a church in Lismore, which reflected the architectural developments that he would have seen during his stay in England at the end of the 11th century.

St Peter's Church was a multi-phased monument founded in the mid-11th century and disused in the 17th century, whereafter part of the site was used for domestic habitation, part as a stable and the remainder as a burial ground. The earliest structure of St Peter's Church may have been wooden, but the evidence for this is equivocal. Many post-holes pre-dated the first stone church. Some of these may have resulted from pre-church domestic buildings or even scaffolding posts associated with the construction of the stone church. Nevertheless the presence of a burial ground, in the Christian tradition, pre-dating the first stone church is indisputable. The location and alignment of the burials did not clearly indicate the likely position of a church structure, but the balance of the evidence is taken to indicate that the wooden church probably occupied roughly the same area as the

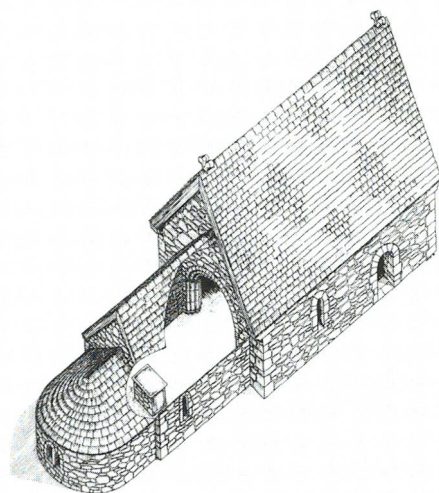
first stone church (Hurley/McCutcheon 1997, 193). In all, sixty-two burials and a further five grave cuts were associated with Phase 1 of St Peter's Church, i. e. mid-11th/early 12th century. The majority of Period 1 graves were lined with timber planks, twenty-six graves had no evidence for lining and two interments were placed in charcoal. The timber lining is analogous to the later stone-lined graves and is not interpreted as representing coffins in which the body was carried. Only two graves produced evidence for transportable coffins; one was a hollowed tree trunk and the other contained seven nails pointing inwards. Within the timber-lined graves pairs of stones flanking the skulls were common. In England the so-called 'pillow stones' or 'ear muffs' are a distinctive feature of both earlier and probably some later Saxon burials (Rodwell/Rodwell 1982, 301), where the practice was common between the 9th to the 11th centuries, while few examples post-date the 13th century (Schofield 1988, 20). In Ireland, however, the practice continued in the 13th century (Hurley/Sheehan 1995, 62; Brosnan 1993). The 11th-century burial practice has its closest parallels in England (Hurley/McCutcheon 1997, 195), but perhaps the strangest indication of this influence is seen in the occurrence of two interments surrounded by charcoal. Both burials were located to the west of the first stone

chancel and had been partially cut by the construction of the chancel foundation trench. The practice of encasing bodies with charcoal is known from pre-Conquest and early post-Conquest Britain and from Scandinavia, where it occurred sporadically between the 9th to mid-12th century, but said to be most common in the mid-11th century (Gilmour/Stocker 1986, 20). At Winchester, thirteen of the burials associated with Building G, The New Minster (pre-1110), were in wooden coffins lying on a bed of charcoal (Biddle 1964, 211) and a body was deposited in a layer of charcoal in a grave located between the old and new minsters. The latter pre-dated the demolition of the old minster in 1093–4 (Biddle 1965, 257). Similarly at Durham a charcoal burial was dated to the early 12th century (Kendrick 1938, 236). The first stone structure at St Peter's Church was the chancel (fig. 4), which was built in conjunction with the east end of the nave. The chancel was rectangular, 5.25 m east/west x 4 m north/south internally. The construction of the remainder of the nave in stone may have begun shortly after the completion of the south-east and north-east corners. In any case, the construction of the chancel with projecting nave ends indicates that the stone church was originally conceived of as a two-celled structure. An apse was added to St Peter's Church as a secondary feature in the mid-12th century.



Fig. 3: Stone and timber house of c. 1150–1175 excavated at Waterford. Much of the original timber floor also survived.

Fig. 4: Reconstruction drawing of St Peter's Church, Waterford, as it would have appeared in mid-12th century.



The apse foundations consisted of a semi-circular setting of coursed stones abutting the east end of the chancel. It enclosed an area 2.6 m north/south x 2.9 m east/west. Only the foundations of the apse survived.

In Britain, parish churches with an apse at the east of the chancel belong most frequently to the wave of church building taking place from the late 11th to the early 12th century following the Norman conquest, although they also occurred on Anglo-Saxon churches of earlier date in southern England, particularly in areas under the influence of Canterbury (Britnell

1990, 86). To date, the apse at St Peter's Church, Waterford, is a unique feature in the general context of Irish churches of this period, but it is possible and indeed likely that other churches in the Hiberno-Norse ports were provided with similar features.

Conclusion

Historians have frequently seen the arrival of Norman knights and cavalry in Wexford in 1169 as the commencement of the conquest and colonisation of Ireland. Far from being the mist-shrouded Hibernia of Roman times, 12th-century Ireland was a spatially, economically and culturally defined entity in the eyes of the Anglo-Normans. History has recorded the involvement of Anglo-Norman Britain in Irish Church affairs throughout the 12th century – especially through their influence on the Hiberno-Norse port cities (Gwynn/Hadcock 1970). Archaeological excavations, especially those in Waterford, clearly demonstrate that economic and social influences preceded the historically documented events, suggesting that south-eastern Ireland was already well within the greater cultural colony of the Norman world.

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