























Geraldine Tralee 1450AD

Medieval Tralee is the main town of the powerful Geraldine family, who rule much of Southern Ireland and are descended from a Norman Knight, Gerald de Windsor, from whom they take their surname, Fitzgerald. In the course of almost 300 years they have intermarried with the native Irish, adopting Gaelic customs and language. They remain loyal to the crown of England but have become “more Irish than the Irish themselves”. Although their plotting will eventually lead to the destruction of Medieval Tralee, at present the Geraldines are at the height of their power and their ‘Coat of Arms’ hangs above the town gates. For safety, the gates are kept locked between sunset and sunrise.

Gates Keeper

Medieval Tralee is the most important trading centre and market town in this region. Anyone bringing in items for sale must pay taxes, known as tolls, based on the value of goods. Although the gatekeeper is a form of security guard and customs officer, the most important part of his job is to collect the tolls on behalf of the Fitzgeralds, the Earls of Desmond.

The Butcher

The meat sold by the butcher is slaughtered at the rear of his shop. Beef mutton, pork, game and fowl are all for sale, but for many of the townspeople, meat is a luxury item eaten only on special occasions. Every part of the animal is utilised. The butcher sells the animal hides to the leatherworker, who uses them to make shoes, gloves, bags, cloaks and belts.

Main Street

You now have a vantage point of Tralee’s main thoroughfare ‘Burgess Street’. This is the market street to which local farmers bring food and produce for sale. The houses of Tralee are built of different materials. The wealthy live in stone houses, like the one on the left which is protected with battlements overhead. Others live in the half-timbered buildings which have wattle walls plastered with mud to keep out the wind and rain. The Curious odour comes from one of Tralee’s open sewers.

Houses & Shops

The ground floors of the houses facing onto medieval Tralee’s main street are mostly used as shops and workspaces, much like any modern high street. The shopkeepers or craftsmen live with their families on the floors above. If they have an apprentice, however, he probably sleeps down here under the workbench or the counter. Items ‘bought’ in these shops are not usually purchases with money, because banknotes do not exist and coins are rare. Even the smallest coin is the equivalent of a huge amount of money, since they are made from silver and gold. Most day-to-day transactions involve the customer exchanging something valuable of theirs for the item that they want, a process known as bartering.

Market Cross

The Market Cross is at the centre of the town and it is here that official proclamations are read out and news announced. This is also the place where criminals are punished by being placed in the stocks, or if their crimes warrant it by hanging. Remember this town is controlled by the Geraldines – so be careful not to anger them for it is they who make the laws and administer the justice. The Geraldines influence over Tralee extends back to its very foundation, since the town was

originally laid out by John Fitzthomas Fitzgerald, and later, in 1286 its walls were planned by Maurice Fitzgerald.

The Inn

The Inns are popular as alehouses and places of entertainment, as well as being somewhere for visiting merchants and pilgrims to stay. Visitors are a common sight in Medieval Tralee, since it is a busy port and trading centre. Merchants come here to arrange commercial deals and many pilgrims pass through on their way to places such as Santiago De Compostela. These travellers inevitably attract the attentions of criminals and it was here that Henry Peveril of Bristol was recently robbed of goods worth 100 marks. The O'Sheas and the O'Connors, are performing here today. They are famous for their singing and harp playing and are often invited to entertain the Earl of Desmond himself who is well known as a patron of poetry and music.

The Port of Tralee

We are now entering a warehouse overlooking the quayside. Here goods are stored for export abroad or before being transported inland. Tralee trades with Bristol in England and also with France and Spain. Its main imports consist of wine, salt and iron ore. Its exports are hides, wool, timber and fish. The port of Tralee is quite small due to silting, but vessels of up to 30 tons can still dock near the town by coming up a narrow channel. Larger ships anchor in the bay and unload their cargoes into smaller boats. Tralee, like Dingle, has a small fishing fleet. We catch cod, ling, herring, hake and haddock. Shellfish such as crab, cockles, mussels and oyster are also plentiful. The fish are landed at the quay and preserved by means of salting. What there is to eat depends largely upon the season. Many fruits and vegetables are only available in the summer months, which is also when the great shoals of herring appear off the coast. Food can quickly become scarce, especially during the winter

or if the weather is bad, so it is vitally important to preserve it when it is in plentiful supply. Medieval methods of preserving food are salting, pickling, drying and smoking above a fire. Religion also dictates what can be eaten and when. The church plays a major part in everyday life and strictly enforces rules such as those forbidding the eating of meat on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays as well as during lent.

Religion

The Geraldines are great patrons of the church and Tralee, like most Anglo-Norman towns, has both a parish church and a monastery. The Abbey of Tralee is a favourite burial place of the Munster Geraldines and the founder of Tralee are buried here.

The Destruction

In 1580, the Earl of Desmond burned down the town of Tralee together with the Great Castle that was begun by his ancestor, John Fitzthomas, in 1216. The destruction of Tralee was part of a deliberate 'scorched earth' policy in his power struggle with the English crown. During the conflict both sides burned and looted everything of value to their enemy. After the Desmond Rebellion and as part of the Munster Plantation, the town and castle were granted to Edward Denny and rebuilt. Less than twenty years later, during the late 1590's, the town and castle were attacked and destroyed once again. In 1613 a charter from James 1 brought Tralee the status of a borough, a weekly market and an annual fair. Although the town grew in prosperity, further destruction followed during the rebellion of 1641-4. and by the end of the 17th century very little of Medieval Tralee survived.

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Geraldine Tralee: Birth and Destruction of a Medieval Town



1169 Anglo-Normans invade Ireland

Anglo-Norman adventurers begin to conquer lands in Ireland, reaching Limerick around the year 1200. In the following years virtually all of the fertile lands in Limerick and North Kerry are conquered by the powerful FitzGerald, also called Geraldines.

1214-15 Anglo-Normans secure Kerry

The Anglo-Normans build a chain of castles along the river Maime from Castleisland to Killorglin. The southern part of the county along the River Maime stays under Irish control throughout the Middle Ages.

1216 Foundation of Tralee town by John FitzThomas FitzGerald

There is no evidence for any urban settlement at Tralee before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. However, the place name *Trá Li* (the strand of the river Lee) is older than the town itself and people have probably been living in this area since ancient times.

1232 The Irish defeated at Tralee

Despite numerous attacks by the Irish, namely by the MacCarthy's, Tralee remains in the hands of the Geraldines until the end of the sixteenth century.

1243 Foundation of Dominican Priory by John FitzThomas FitzGerald

The arrival of this influential religious order suggests that Tralee is a well-established town by the year 1243. A wall panel at Abbey Street car park marks the site of the medieval monastery, also known as 'the Abbey'. Excavations in 2000 revealed the remains of

the building's footprint, now preserved a couple of feet underneath the tarmac. Nearby, archaeologists made a gruesome discovery: a medieval murder victim who was brutally ambushed, beheaded and hastily buried more than 500 years ago!

1261 The Irish defeat the FitzGerald at the Battle of Callan

John FitzThomas FitzGerald and his son Maurice are killed at the Battle of Callan, near Kilgarvan "as well as fifteen knights, besides eight noble barons and many young squires and countless soldiers". John and his son were buried in the Dominican Priory.

1278/79 First record of Dingle town

The Anglo-Normans set up towns as centres of trade and commerce wherever they settled. In Kerry, the Anglo-Normans founded three towns, Ardferit, Dingle and Tralee. They all would have had a town charter and town books recording decisions, rents and dues but unfortunately none of these now survive.

1286 Tralee receives a murage grant to build a town wall

The distinguishing feature of every medieval town was the possession of a town wall and Tralee, the capital town of the FitzGerald's, would have been no different. Unfortunately, no trace of the town wall survives and there is little indication as to its course.

1295 Theft in the monastery

It is recorded that 'Nicholas Strange of Traly' stole four ells and one mark of silver from the Dominican monastery and also wheat from the

chapel of St Mary there. Nicholas was probably "pilloried" at the market cross as punishment. Tralee's medieval market cross stood near modern day Tralee Garda Station.

1298 Tralee has 100 houses and about 600 inhabitants

Records state that townspeople pay 100 shilling in annual rent to the FitzGerald's, one shilling per property. Tralee was laid out along a main thoroughfare known as "Burgess Street" which is possibly the present High Street. This was the market street to which local farmers brought their food and produce for sale.

1302-6 St John's church valued to be worth 40 shillings

Tralee's medieval parish church once stood on the site of St John's Protestant church on Ashe Street. It probably began its life as a hospital held by the Knights Hospitallers, built some distance from the town centre because of the danger of contagious disease like leprosy or the plague. Leprosy was brought to Europe by returning crusaders and pilgrims. Interestingly, nearby 'Clounalour' means 'the Meadow of the Leper'.

1325 Murder in the monastery

Diarmaid MacCarthy is assassinated in the abbey. Nicholas FitzMaurice or his son William were believed to have committed the murder. Violating the sanctuary of a church was a serious offence. William was blinded as punishment and his men, who were not of noble birth, were hung, drawn and quartered.

1329 Maurice FitzGerald is created first Earl of Desmond

The FitzGeralds established two powerful medieval dynasties in Ireland: the Houses of Kildare and of Desmond (i.e. Kerry and Limerick). Over time, the Desmond Geraldines adopted native customs and manners and became known as "more Irish than the Irish themselves".

1348 Black Death arrives in Ireland

Like in other medieval towns, the plague spread rapidly in the crowded streets and lanes of Tralee. Victims could die within a matter of hours and carts brought the dead to mass graves outside the town wall at night. Up to half the town's population may have died from the Black Death in the following years.

1356 First Earl of Desmond buried in the Abbey in Tralee

Maurice FitzGerald was Chief Governor of Ireland and fought in France with King Edward III in the Hundred Years War. The Dominican priory was one of the principal burial places of the FitzGerald.

1375 Henry Peverell, a merchant from Bristol, is robbed of goods to the value of 100 marks

Tralee traded with Bristol in England and also with France and Spain. The medieval port of Tralee probably stretched from the Mount Brandon Hotel to the modern Dominican church of the Holy Cross. Nearby Inns were popular as alehouses offering accommodation for passing sailors, pilgrims and merchants. Naturally, Inns were also frequented by

criminals and so it happened that a merchant from Bristol, Henry Peverell, was robbed in one of the Inns in Tralee!

1411 Siobhán, daughter of Gerald the third Earl, buried in the Abbey

Her marriage to a MacCarthy is a typical example of a political marriage alliance between rival families.

1468 Eight Earl of Desmond charged with treason and executed

Thomas FitzGerald had been loyal to England but became too powerful. His body was brought from Drogheda to Tralee and buried in the Priory.

1537 Reformation in Ireland

Church lands and properties are confiscated by King Henry VIII of England. Four years later he declares himself King of Ireland.

1579 Murder at the Great Castle

Near the junction of the Mall, Denny Street and Castle Street once stood the Great Castle of Tralee. It was probably the first building erected by the FitzGeralds to protect their newly founded town. The Great Castle was one of several castles, gatehouses and other fortifications. One of Tralee's rivers – the River Gyle, also called Big River – was an open stream and flowed down what is Ashe Street today, forming a wide and deep moat half circling the Great Castle before continuing westwards towards the Bay. In 1579, the last Earl of Desmond's brother John FitzGerald ordered two crown officials to be murdered in their sleep while they were staying at the Great

Castle of Tralee. Unwilling to prosecute his own brother, the Earl of Desmond, Gerald FitzGerald, is declared a traitor and forced into rebellion.

1579-1583 Desmond Rebellion

During this large-scale military conflict Munster is devastated due to a 'scorched earth' policy deployed by both sides. Thousands of people suffer terrible atrocities and die.

1580 The Earl of Desmond orders Tralee to be burnt down

Despite this desperate measure, Tralee is captured and the priory occupied by 300 footmen and a company of horse.

1583 Earl of Desmond killed in the woods of Sliabh Luachra, near Tralee

Deserted by most of his followers, he is hunted down, killed and his head sent to Queen Elizabeth I to be impaled on London Bridge.

1585 Munster Plantation

The Earl's death signals the end of medieval Kerry and the beginning of Munster's colonization with English settlers.

1587 Tralee granted to Edward Denny and rebuilt

Ten years later, the town is destroyed again and in 1652 Cromwell's army totally deface the abbey and 'not one stone is left upon a stone'.

