GERALDINE TRALEE

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AN IRISH MEDIEVAL TOWN

by

JOHN BRADLEY

PREFACE

L ike so many towns in Ireland, Tralee does not have much of a continuous, documented history until relatively recent times.

All the same, the distant past is not wholly in darkness. Geraldine Tralee (roughly 1200-1600), the focus of the new experience and the present guide, may indeed be gone, but in the patient sensitive hands of John Bradley and his collaborators, it has been teased back to life: streets and bridges, trades and burgesses, walls and gatehouses, tolls and inns, the port, the Dominicans and their "abbey", the castle, the corporation and the borough.

Tralee is now approaching its eighth centenary, and what is being evoked in this new venture is not so much the Anglo-Norman Geraldines, who founded it, as the first half of its existence, before it took on its present form.

Indeed the project is much more than Tralee or its Geraldine past. Drawing brilliantly on survivals from all over Ireland, and calling on many crafts and disciplines, what the designers in fact have re-created is a typical if composite port-town of medieval Ireland. As such it is the first of its kind in Ireland and is a splendid example of a marriage of imagination and scholarship.

Leonard E. Boyle O.P.

Prefect

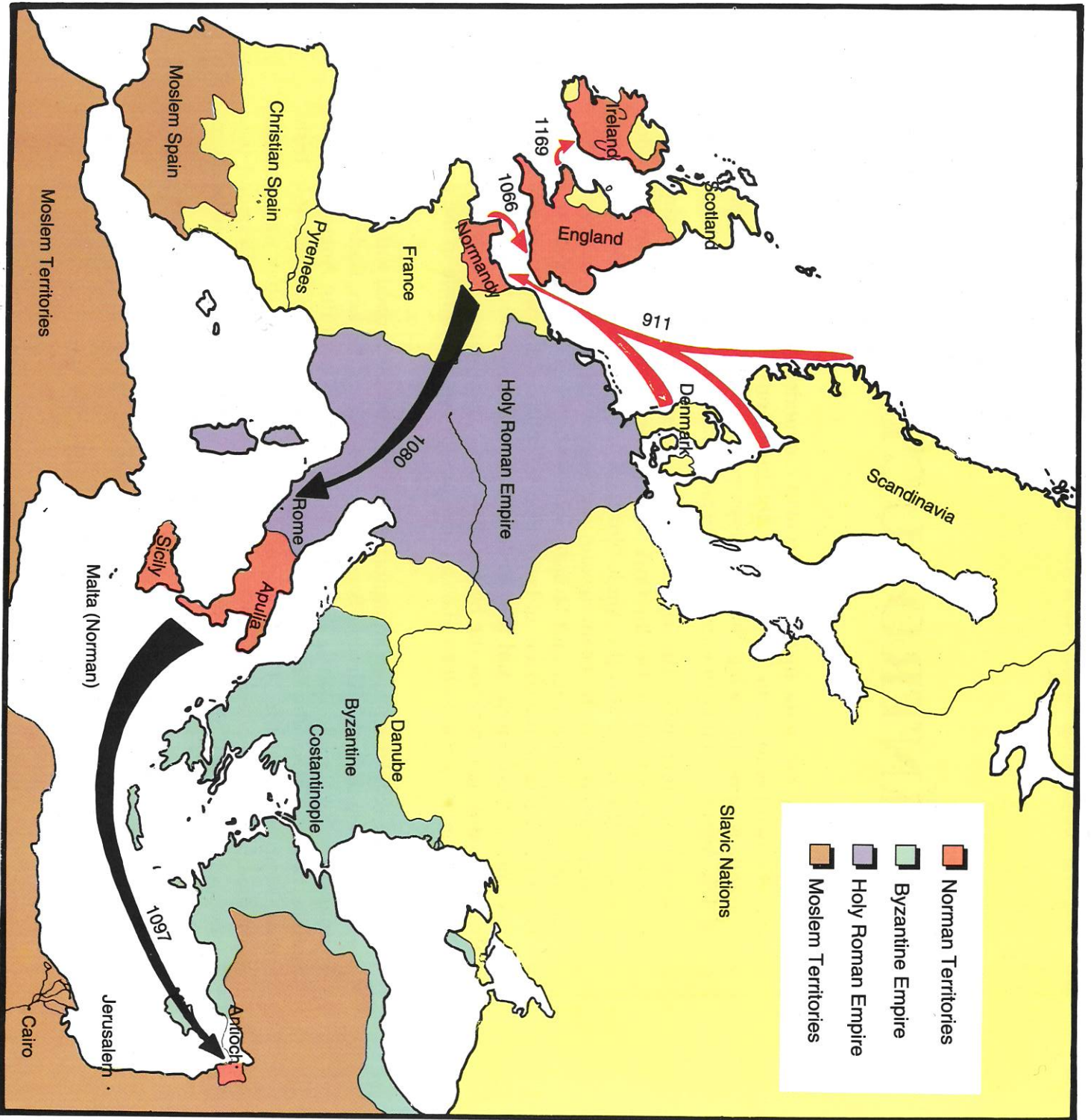The Vatican Library

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Geraldine Tralee

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INTRODUCTION

The Middle Ages were the formative period of the modern world. In the course of one thousand years, from 500 to 1500 A.D., the nations which constitute Europe today gradually came into being. Such developments rarely happened peacefully and the Middle Ages were a time of wars, of pillage and invasions.

Ireland was invaded twice during the Middle Ages. Firstly by the Vikings who established the port towns of Dublin, Cork and Limerick, and secondly by the Anglo-Normans. Of the two, it was the Anglo-Normans who had the greater long-term effect. They transformed the economy and established the network of towns which endures over most of Leinster and Munster to this day; they introduced the idea of parliament and gave us the system of laws which we still use; they were great builders and patrons of the Church, and they endowed many abbeys and friaries. However, their most enduring legacy was the bond which they forged between Ireland, Britain and the Continent; a bond which plays an increasingly significant role in the present time.

Many families that later played an important role in Irish life arrived with the Anglo-Normans, among them the Barretts, Barrys, Brownes, Blakes, Burkes, Butlers, Dillons, Fitzmaurices, Joyces, Plunketts, Wallaces and Wogans. Of all the Anglo-Norman families, however, it was the FitzGeralds that were to be the most prominent in Irish cultural and political life. The FitzGeralds, or Geraldines as they were called, established two great medieval dynasties: the Houses of Kildare and of Desmond (i.e. Kerry and Limerick). It is with the Geraldines of Desmond that our story is concerned and with Tralee, their capital town.

Areas of Norman Activity in Europe and the Mediterranean.

Map labels:

- Moslem Territories
- Moslem Spain
- Christian Spain
- Pyrenees
- France
- Normandy
- Ireland
- England
- Scotland
- Scandinavia
- Denmark
- Holy Roman Empire
- Rome
- Sicily
- Apulia
- Malta (Norman)
- Byzantine Constantinople
- Danube
- Slavic Nations
- Antioch
- Jerusalem
- Cairo

Dates on map: 1169, 1066, 911, 1080, 1097

Legend:
- Norman Territories
- Holy Roman Empire
- Byzantine Empire
- Moslem Territories

THE NORMANS

The Normans were one of the most feared and warlike peoples of Western Europe during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. They were descended from a group of Vikings who settled around the French city of Rouen in 911. They were called *Nordmen* or Northmen because they came from Scandinavia and in time the land they settled became known as Normandy, "the land of the Northmen."
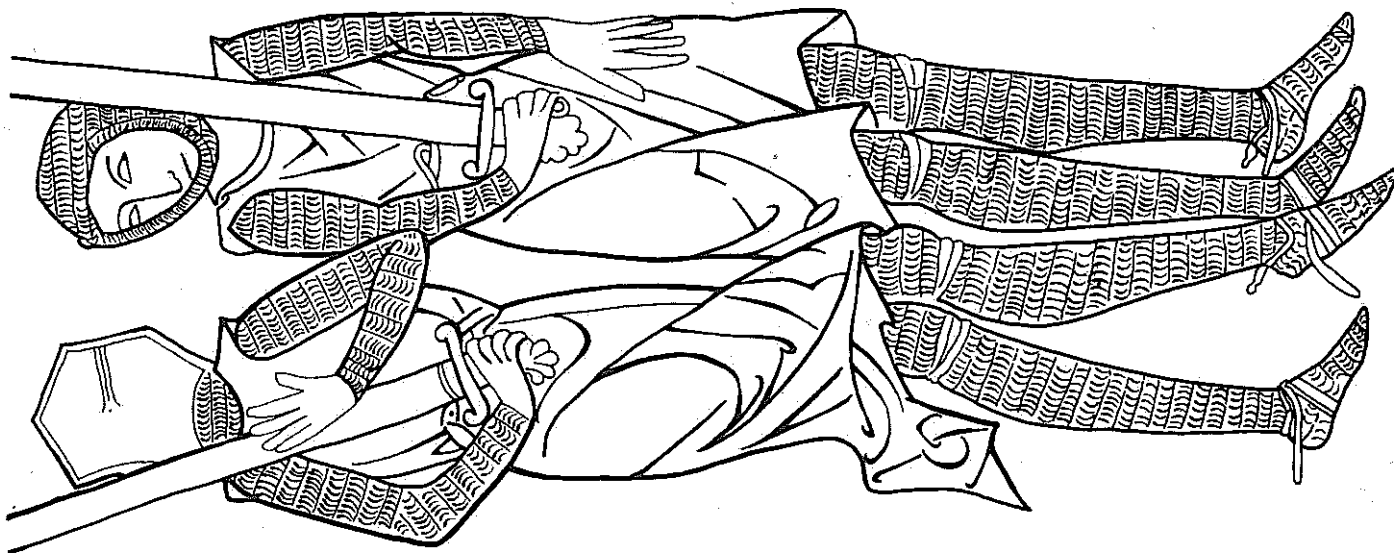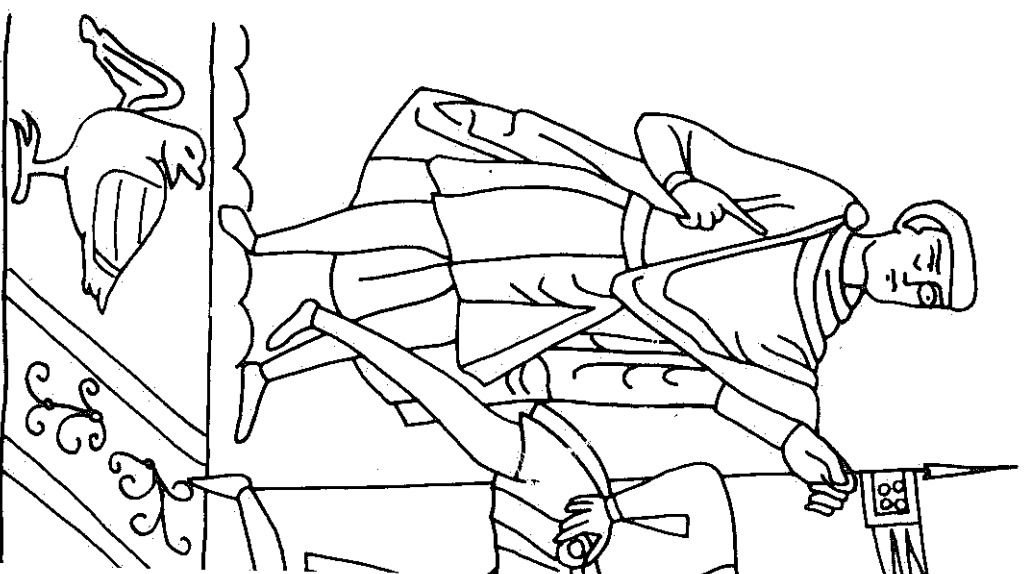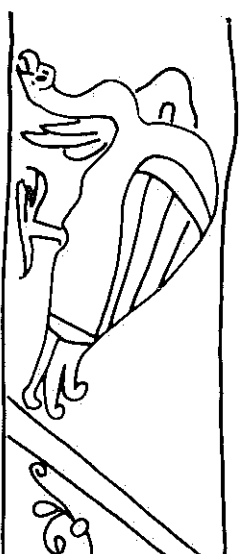
Wherever there was warfare, the Normans were to be found — in Italy, Sicily, Greece, Turkey, Syria. In 1066 under their leader, Duke William, they invaded Britain and crushed the English at the Battle of Hastings. They

Henry II

were not liked by the English who remembered them in the Robin Hood stories as villainous and rapacious, like the Sheriff of Nottingham. Around the year 1100 the Normans began to move into Wales and Scotland and established settlements there.

In the twelfth century Ireland was mainly a rural country but there were a number of port towns like Dublin, Cork and Limerick as well as monastic towns such as Armagh, Clonmacnoise and Ardfert. Politically, Ireland was divided into four main kingdoms, Munster, Leinster, Connacht and the northern Uí Néill kingdom of Aileach which equated with the later province of Ulster. The Kings of each province fought between themselves for the high-kingship of Ireland.
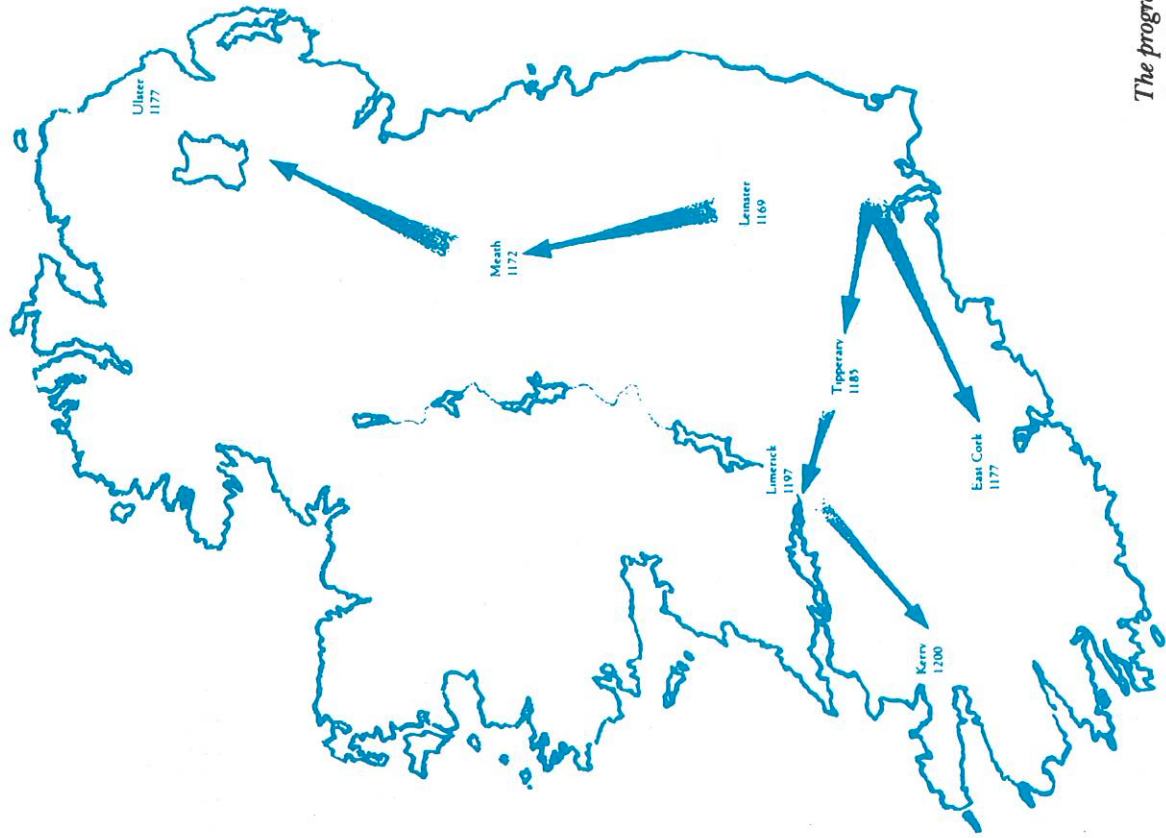
In 1166 Rory O'Connor, king of Connacht, defeated Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster, and O'Connor became high-king. Dermot MacMurrough went into exile but he was determined to regain the kingship. He sought help from King Henry II of England who gave him permission to enlist people to assist him. In 1169 the first Normans landed at Bannow Bay,

Map labels:
- Ulster 1177
- Meath 1172
- Leinster 1169
- Tipperary 1185
- Limerick 1197
- East Cork 1177
- Kerry 1200

The progress of the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland to 1200.

Co. Wexford, and these were followed in 1170 by a larger group under Richard FitzGilbert de Clare, known as Strongbow. The Normans put Dermot MacMurrough back on the throne of Leinster and when MacMurrough died in 1171, Strongbow succeeded him.

Later in 1171 King Henry II of England arrived and Strongbow submitted to him. Before leaving, Henry II granted Meath to one of his followers, Hugh de Lacy. Within a short time other Norman adventurers began to conquer lands in Ireland for themselves. By the year 1200 the Normans had reached as far as Kerry and in the following years much of the fertile flat lands in the north of the county were taken over.
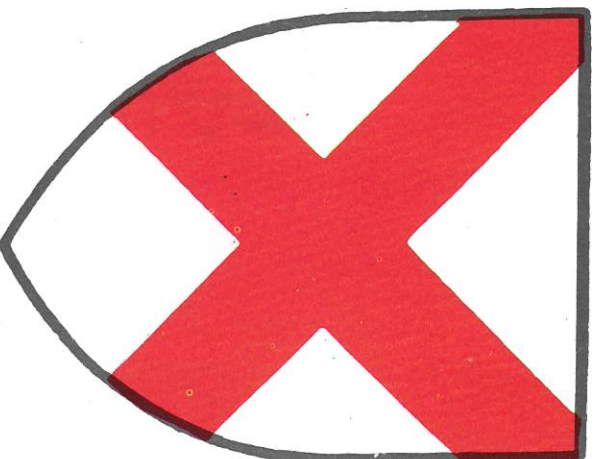
THE GERALDINES

The Geraldines were one of the most important Norman families in Ireland. They traced their origin to a man named Gerald of Windsor so they were called Geraldine or FitzGerald because Fitz was the Norman-French word for son. All of the FitzGeralds in Ireland descended from this man.

There were two main branches of the Geraldine family, known as the **Houses of Kildare and Desmond**, after the places where they owned land. The greatest of the Kildare Geraldines was Gearóid Mór (Gerald the Great), popularly known as the *"all-but-king-of-Ireland"*. At a famous meeting with Henry VII, the king is reputed to have said "If all Ireland cannot rule this man then it is meet that this man should rule all Ireland." Gearóid Mór was chief governor of Ireland until his death in 1513 when his son, Garret Oge, took over.

The power of the Kildares was greatly resented by English government officials who began to plot against them. Garret Oge's son, "Silken" Thomas was manipulated into a rebellion which was ruthlessly suppressed in 1534 after which the power of the Kildares declined.

The Desmond Geraldines descended from Thomas, a son of Maurice FitzGerald who led the first expedition of Normans in 1169. Thomas was granted land at Shanid near Shanagolden, Co. Limerick, around the year 1200. He died about 1214 and was succeeded by his son John who established the town of Tralee and founded its Dominican Friary. By a process of marriage, purchase and conquest the Desmond Geraldines gradually acquired virtually all the lands which had been settled by the Anglo-Normans in Limerick and North Kerry.

In 1329 Maurice FitzGerald was created first Earl of Desmond. He served as Chief Governor of Ireland and fought in France with King Edward III. Gerald, the third earl, popularly known as **Gearóid Iarla**, was famous for his skill as a poet in Irish and he composed the well-known poem, *"Speak not ill of Womankind"*. His fame among ordinary people still survives in the folk-legends of Lough Gur, Co. Limerick, where he is believed to lie sleeping beneath the waters ready to rise and revisit his lands on an enchanted white horse.

The Desmond Geraldines adopted native Irish customs and manners to such an extent that they became known as *"more Irish than the Irish themselves"*. Despite this Gaelicization the earls continued to serve in office and never seriously wavered in their loyalty to the crown. During the Wars of the Roses, Thomas, the eighth earl, played a key role in securing Ireland for the Yorkist cause and was thanked by Edward IV after his accession in 1461. Thomas became too powerful, however, in the eyes of English officials and he was summarily charged with treason and executed at Drogheda in 1468 *"without crime, without guilt, without right, without law"* in the words of one annalist.

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and threats Gerald, the fifteenth earl, was forced into rebellion. Munster was devastated and after his capture and beheading in 1583 the medieval earldom came to an end.

Lough Gur, Co. Limerick

monarchy alienated them further from the Crown. The landings of French troops at Dingle in 1570 and of Spanish forces in 1579 reinforced Government mistrust of the Desmonds. By a series of intimidations

GEARÓID ÓG FITZGERALD

"And the learned relate that there was never in Ireland a Foreign youth that was better than he. And he was killed in treachery by a Saxon Earl ..." (Annals of Ulster).

After the execution of the eighth earl the Desmonds remained aloof from the activities of the Dublin and London governments. They became involved in the Yorkist plots at the end of the fifteenth century and the subsequent discovery of treasonable correspondence with the continental enemies of the new Tudor

GERALDINE TRALEE

Tralee appears to have been founded about 1216 by John FitzThomas FitzGerald. He was also responsible for establishing the Dominican Friary in 1243 and the arrival of this religious order suggests that Tralee was already a sizeable settlement by the middle of the thirteenth century. The name is derived from *Trá Lí*, "the strand of the Lee", the river which flows into the sea at this point.

There is no evidence for any pre-Norman settlement on the site of the town but it is likely that the Anglo-Normans were attracted here by the presence of the important church and settlement at Ratass, less than a mile away. Doubtless Tralee was established where it is because of its proximity to the sea which would have directly adjoined the town during the Middle Ages. Subsequently this land silted up and much of it has been reclaimed.

Tralee was laid out along a main street known as **"Burgess Street"** which is possibly the present High Street. Other streets which are mentioned in later medieval documentation include **"Great Castle Street"** and the **"Street of the New Manor"**, perhaps to be identified with Bridge Street and Castle Street respectively.

Little information survives on the houses of the town but both stone and timber houses were present. A Market Cross is known to have existed and it was here that the gaoler of Tralee was hanged in 1641.

The Port remained important until the beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1628 a Hamburg ship of 120 tons was captured when it came into Tralee harbour with a cargo of pipestaves. Due to the silting caused by the River Lee, however, large ships had to anchor in the bay and unload their cargoes onto smaller boats which ferried them to the quays of Tralee.

The first reference to Town Walls occurs in 1286 when the townspeople were granted a charter enabling them to collect a toll on all commodities brought into the town for sale. The earliest evidence for the presence of a corporation and a borough organisation occurs in 1298 when the burgesses of Tralee are noted as paying 100 shillings in annual rent to the Desmond FitzGeralds. On the basis of this rent it can be suggested that Tralee had a population of between 500 and 600 people.

The town was the location of a seigneurial Castle belonging to the Earls of Desmond which is refered to in sixteenth century documents as "the Great Castle of Tralee". It occupied the junction of the present day Castle Street and Denny Street and was demolished in 1826 to make way for Denny Street.

St. John's Parish Church was probably founded in the thirteenth century and it is first referred to in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1302-6 when it was valued at 40 shillings. The present (C of I) parish church incorporates substantial portions of an earlier building.

The Dominican Friary was founded in 1243 by John FitzThomas FitzGerald who was buried there in 1261 after his death at the battle of Callan. It was one of the principal burial places of the Earls of Desmond and it was here that the first, second, tenth, eleventh, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth earls were interred. A number of architectural fragments still survive including portions of the cloister. From these it is clear that the abbey was considerably rebuilt during the fifteenth century. It consisted of an extensive complex of buildings, located in the vicinity of The Square, which was removed during the Cromwellian period to supply building stone for the townspeople.

The documentary evidence on the history of medieval Tralee is sparse but what there is suggests that the thirteenth century was the great growth period of the town, that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were periods of stability and that in the sixteenth century Tralee began to expand again.

In 1580, however, as part of his scorched earth policy, the town was burned by the Earl of Desmond. It is clear from contemporary documents that this destruction was severe and it wiped away much of the medieval town. The incoming planters laid out new streets and demolished much of what had survived the burning. There can be little doubt, however, that Tralee's place as the modern county capital is due to the prominence given it by the Geraldines, a prominence which the new settlers themselves developed and increased.

The Dominican Friary, Sligo, founded in 1253 ten years later than its counterpart in Tralee.

THE IRISH MEDIEVAL TOWN

The re-creation of Geraldine Tralee has proved to be a task requiring not just archaeological and historical knowledge but also an element of imagination. The destruction of Tralee in the years after 1580 was so thorough that no medieval building survives in the town and even the identification of the original street plan poses problems. In constructing *Geraldine Tralee*, the sometimes bare facts have had to be interpreted in the light of what is generally known about the medieval Irish town, particularly in North Munster.

Town Defences

The distinguishing feature of every medieval town was the possession of a Town Wall. This was not just a defensive feature it was also a 'status symbol', a clear demarcation of where the countryside ended and the town began. More particularly it was an architectural assertion of the independence of the townspeople, a celebration of their wealth and industry, and a statement of their freedom from the summary justice and capriciousness of the manorial lords to whom their country cousins might find themselves subjected on occasion.

Not all towns, however, had walls of stone. Earthen ramparts, such as those which protected Duleek or formed the earliest defences of Drogheda, could withstand attack every bit as successfully as walls of stone. The possession of a stone wall, however, marked a certain coming of age: it announced to all and sundry that you had arrived at a town which held its urban status in high regard.

The Town Walls of medieval Ireland were relatively straightforward affairs. They consisted predominantly of curtain wall with as few mural towers and gatehouses as possible. Only in Dublin and the wealthier port towns such as Waterford and Cork were non-essential mural towers to be found. These functioned primarily as residences rather than defending the weak points of the town as such. The curtain wall itself was plain and tended to be protected by a battlemented walkway; arrow-loops and embrasures at ground level, such as those which survive at Kilkenny, were relatively few. The majority of urban gatehouses were small rectangular buildings such as those still standing at Athenry, Carlingford, Kilmallock and Loughrea. In the larger towns more elaborate twin-towered structures were sometimes built like the barbican which survives outside the site of St. Laurence's Gate at Drogheda.

The gatehouses permitted control over individuals entering and leaving the town.
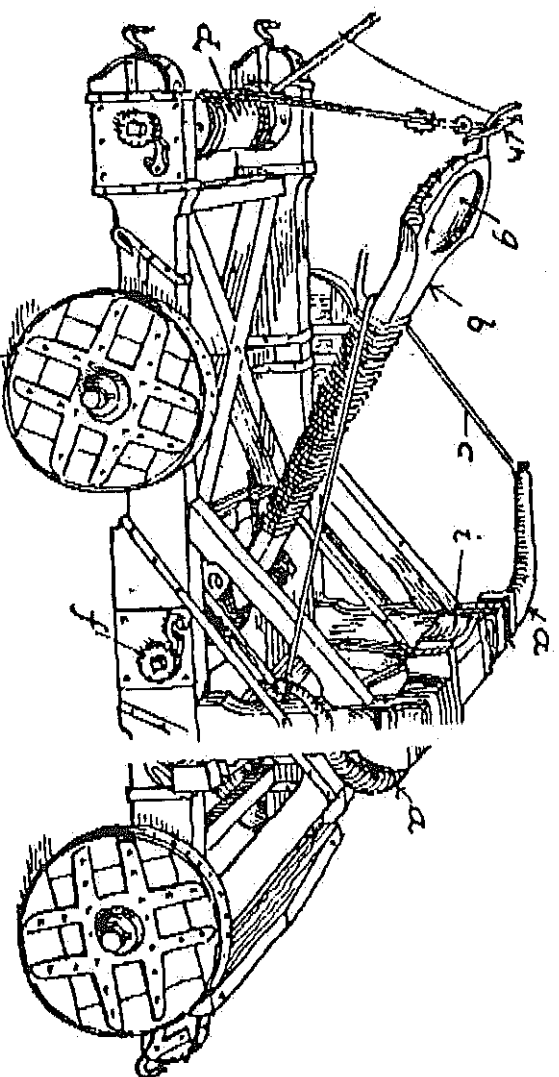
A Catapult or Mangonel used in siege warfare prior to the invention of cannon (drawing after Leask).

Spies or potential criminals might be arrested and diseased persons kept out but the primary function of the gatehouse was as a customs' post. Tolls had to be paid on all commodities brought into the town for sale. The monies so collected were meant to be expended on public works, on the repair and maintenance of the town wall, on building bridges and paving the streets. In effect, however, the mechanism of collecting tolls was so cumbersome that it allowed plenty of room for embezzlement and by the year 1400 most Irish towns had discovered that it was cheaper to contract out the collection of tolls. "Farming the murage", as this practice came to be known, proved to be long-lived. In 1835 the Municipal Corporations Commissioners, appointed to investigate and reform parliamentary boroughs, were surprised to discover that murage was still being collected for the maintenance of walls which had long since ceased to exist. For most small market towns, however, it remained one of the few sources of steady income and at Cashel, for instance, murage was still collected at markets and fairs until the 1950s.

Tralee was probably defended by earthen ramparts until 1286 when it received its first murage grant. Nothing now survives above ground of its medieval defences but the rectangular gatehouse is a type which was built in the market towns of the late thirteenth century. The Tralee example is based on a detailed survey of the surviving remains of such a gatehouse at Rindown, Co. Roscommon. Accordingly, it is open-backed in the manner of the simpler thirteenth century towers and gatehouses. Town defences were rebuilt and maintained over the years and the stepped crennelations on the wall and gatehouse are of fifteenth century style.

Map of Britain and Ireland c.1530. Tralee is spelled as Truby.

Streets and Market Places

Within the wall the street layout of the medieval Irish town was essentially linear. Only a handful of towns, among them, had a more complex plan. The typical market town such as Ardee, Co. Louth, or Fethard, Co. Tipperary, had a long main street, sometimes twice as wide (or more) as the side streets which ran off it. The main street also functioned as the market place and a cross was a normal embellishment.

Sometimes the Market Cross was of wood, as at Ardee, but more usually it was of stone and mounted on steps. The only fifteenth century example to survive, at Athenry, is of pillar type and this was probably the most common form as it is also used for fifteenth century wayside crosses. Elaborate canopied crosses such as the destroyed example from Kilkenny seem to have been very rare.

The Market Cross was the place where public pronouncements and proclamations were read and in a non-newspaper age these would have provided one of the principal sources of information for the townspeople. As the focal point of the town the market cross was also the place where executions and public punishments, such as flogging or being placed in the stocks, were carried out.

Reconstruction of the Athenry market cross, Co. Galway.
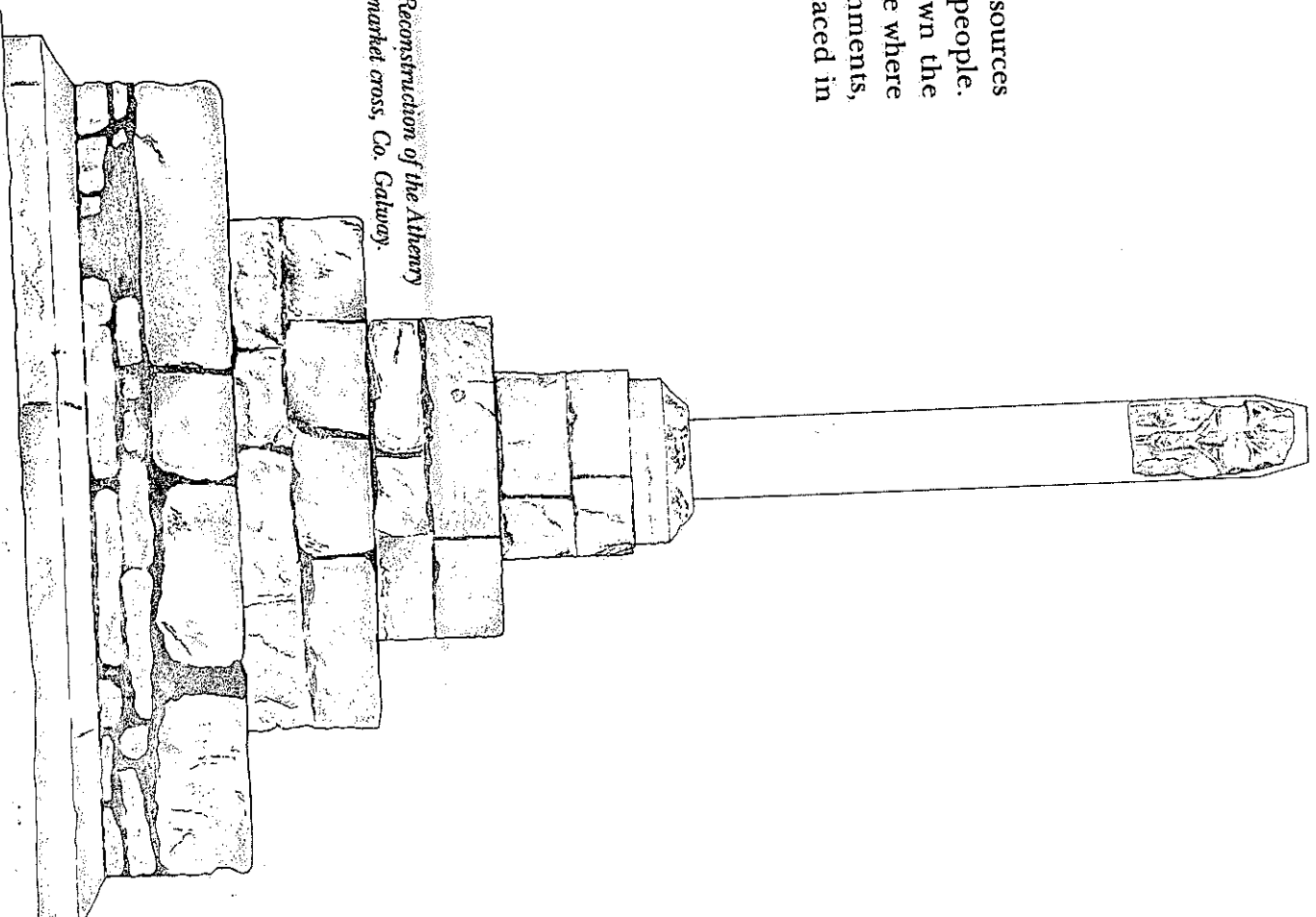
Houses and Shops

The colonists who settled in the original Anglo-Norman towns were given a plot of land on which to build a house for themselves and their family. In the smaller market towns this normally stretched back from the main street to the town wall. It was termed a **burgage plot** and the people who took up these plots were known as **burgesses**. In practice the plots tended to be much longer than they were broad and accordingly it was normal to place the short or gable end of the house on the street frontage.

Behind the house there might be subsidiary buildings, sheds, cess pits, wells and a garden in which herbs, vegetables or fruit might be grown. Tower houses began to appear in towns during the fourteenth century and they became a feature of the fifteenth century Irish town. The example at the corner of the reconstructed street is based on the building known as "The Mint" at Carlingford, Co. Louth. Similar tower houses still survive at Cashel, Fethard, Limerick, Kinsale and Ardee, among other places.

The majority of dwellings, however, would have been timber-built and thatched although a percentage would have been roofed with shingles or slates. Archaeologically, very little is known about the nature of these timber buildings. At Wexford post-and-wattle houses of Viking period type were still being constructed during the thirteenth century but it is not known if the practice continued later than this time. Elizabethan maps depict simple mud-walled houses plastered externally but these appear to have been confined to the northern part of the country.

Timber-framed houses were introduced by the Anglo-Normans and they were
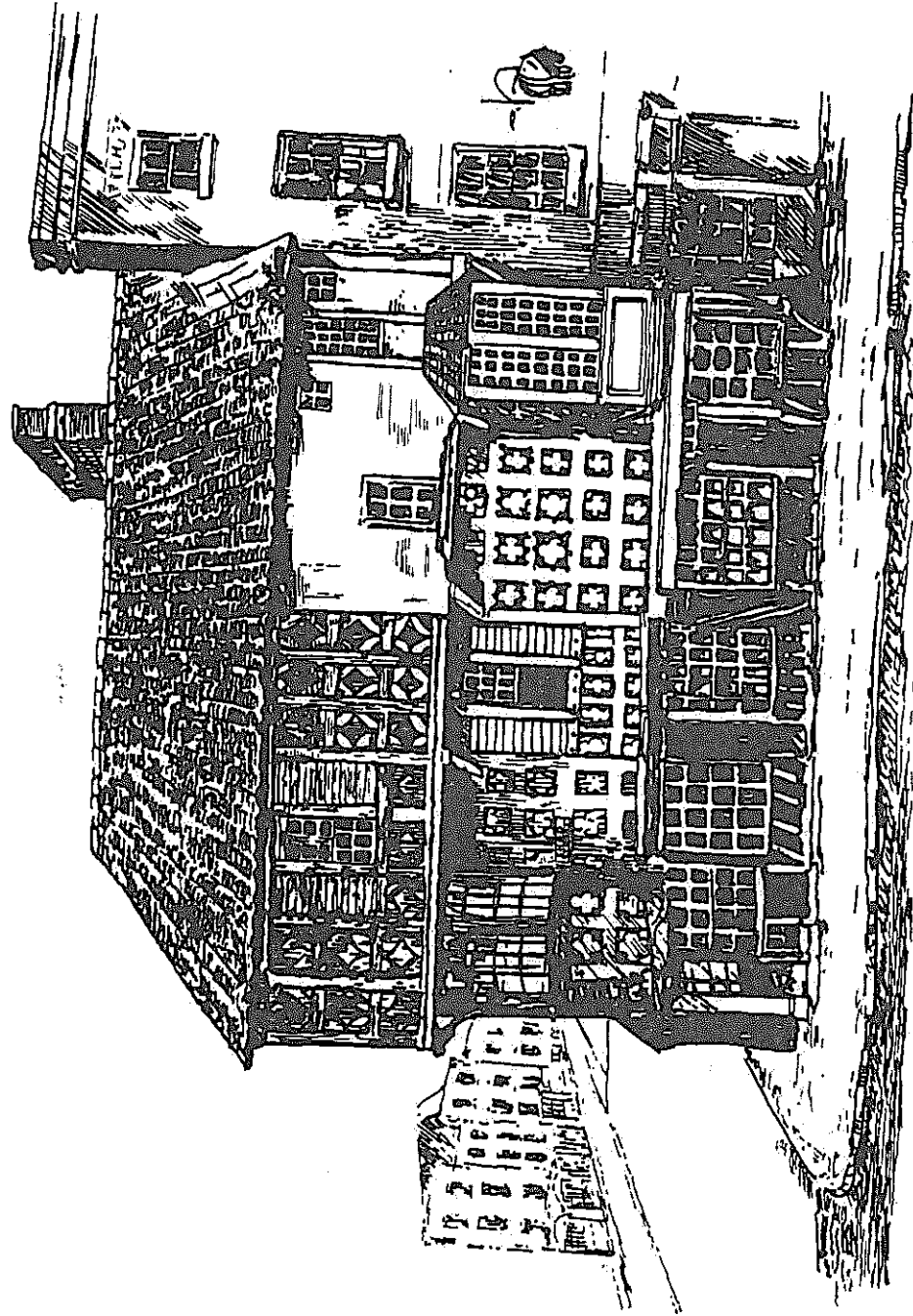
The Bathe House, Drogheda, Co. Louth. An elaborate half-timbered building constructed in 1570 and demolished in 1825.
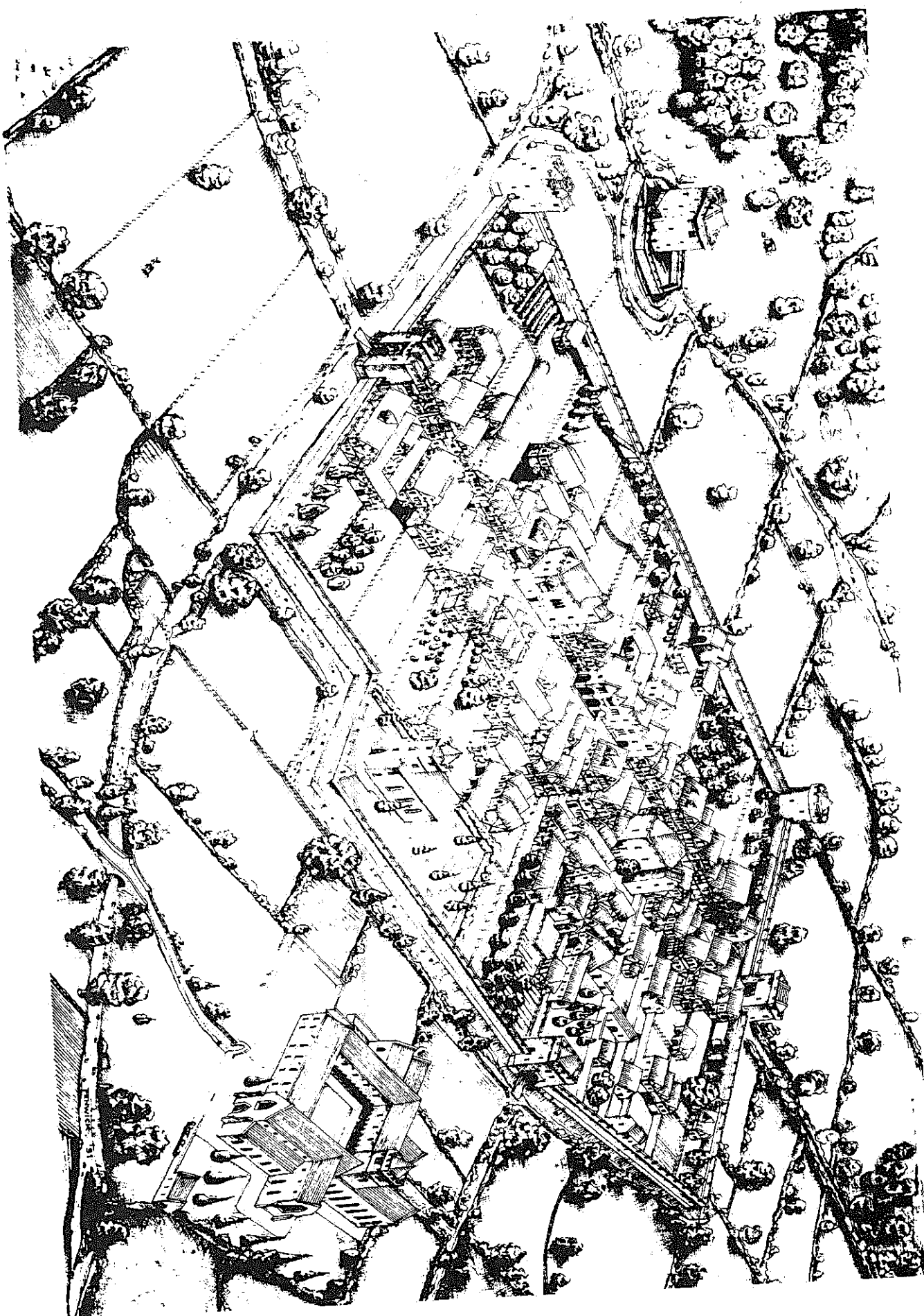
almost certainly the predominant house type in the south and east of Ireland until stone buildings began to replace them in the sixteenth century. The many documentary references to *"timber houses"* should probably be understood as alluding to timber-framed buildings but the only examples whose structural layout can be determined are confined to Dublin and Drogheda. Houses with a stone ground floor and a timber superstructure were a feature of English and Welsh towns and it is likely that this type was also represented in Ireland. Although most Irish port towns maintained strong contacts with the continent between the thirteenth and mid-sixteenth centuries it is likely that the predominant influences on timber-framed buildings derived from Britain. The urban tower house is a feature which Ireland shares in common with Scotland but it is rarely found elsewhere.

The walls of most timber-framed buildings were constructed of post and wattle plastered externally. Internally one can only assume that some of these walls may have been panelled to keep the damp and cold at bay. Apart from the vaulted chambers of tower houses our only evidence for house interiors of this period is derived from Kilkenny where a floor beam survives from a room just under 5.5m wide. Although there is evidence from Lough Gur for the presence of fireplaces and chimneys in rural dwellings of thirteenth and fourteenth century date, fireplaces only begin to regularly appear about the middle of the fifteenth century, replacing the braziers and open-hearths of earlier times.

In many, though not all, houses the ground floor on the street frontage functioned as a shop where the owner's craftwork was exposed for sale. Lean-to stalls might be set up on market day but most shops tended to be small booth-like affairs. This is the explanation of the medieval name Bothe (Booth) Street which occurred in a number of towns, including Drogheda where it is still known by the grander sounding name of Shop Street. Arcaded walkways, which are a feature of many English and Continental towns, developed at Kilkenny but it is the only Irish town, to my knowledge, where this phenomenon occured.
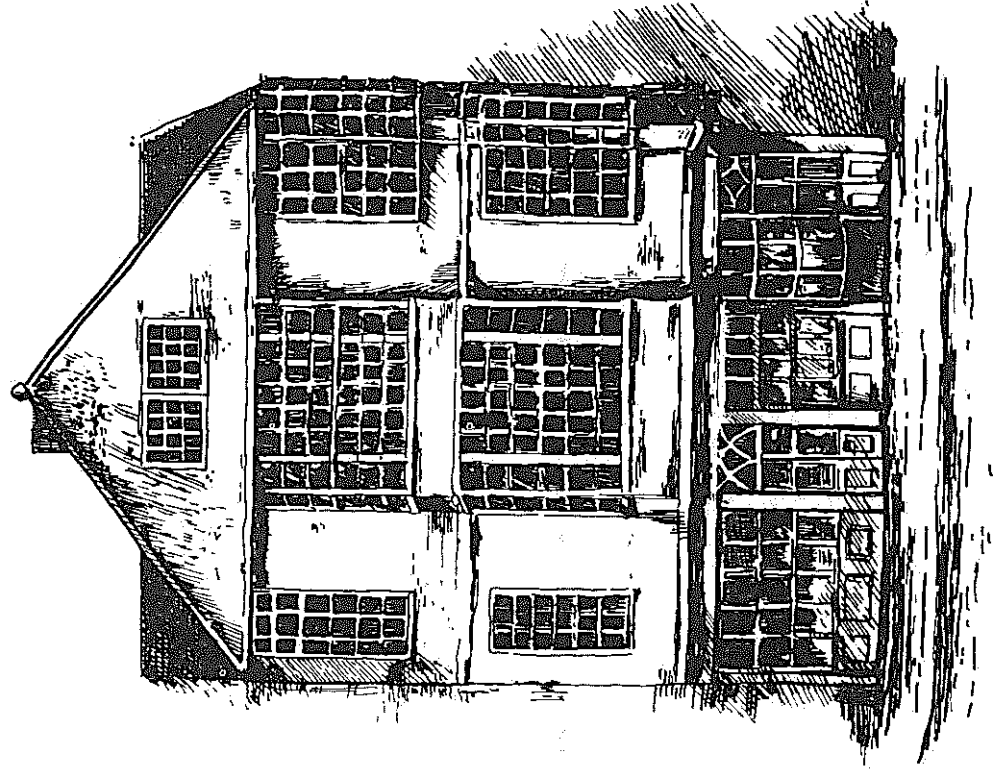
*The last timber framed house in Dublin, demolished 1813.*

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Trade and Crafts

Urban society consisted of merchants, craft-workers and labourers. The merchants were entrepreneurs who might themselves (or in combination with others) fit out ships and finance overseas ventures. The ship might sail with a commodity such as skins or mantles which would be sold in France. Wines would then be purchased and brought back to the Irish market. The risk of loss was great because of both piracy and shipwreck but the profits could be very substantial indeed. By the fifteenth century the merchant class had obtained a firm grip on the government of most Irish towns and in effect formed an oligarchy.

Most craftwork was home based and family oriented. Occasionally teams of carpenters, masons and smiths might journey to a castle or church and work there for a number of months in the year but these were the exceptions. Generally the craft-worker would produce solely for the local market and he would spend his day manufacturing objects which he hoped to sell in his shop.

The range of urban crafts included carpenters, coopers, drapers, embroiderers, glovers, hosiers, furriers, potters, shoemakers, smiths, tailors, and
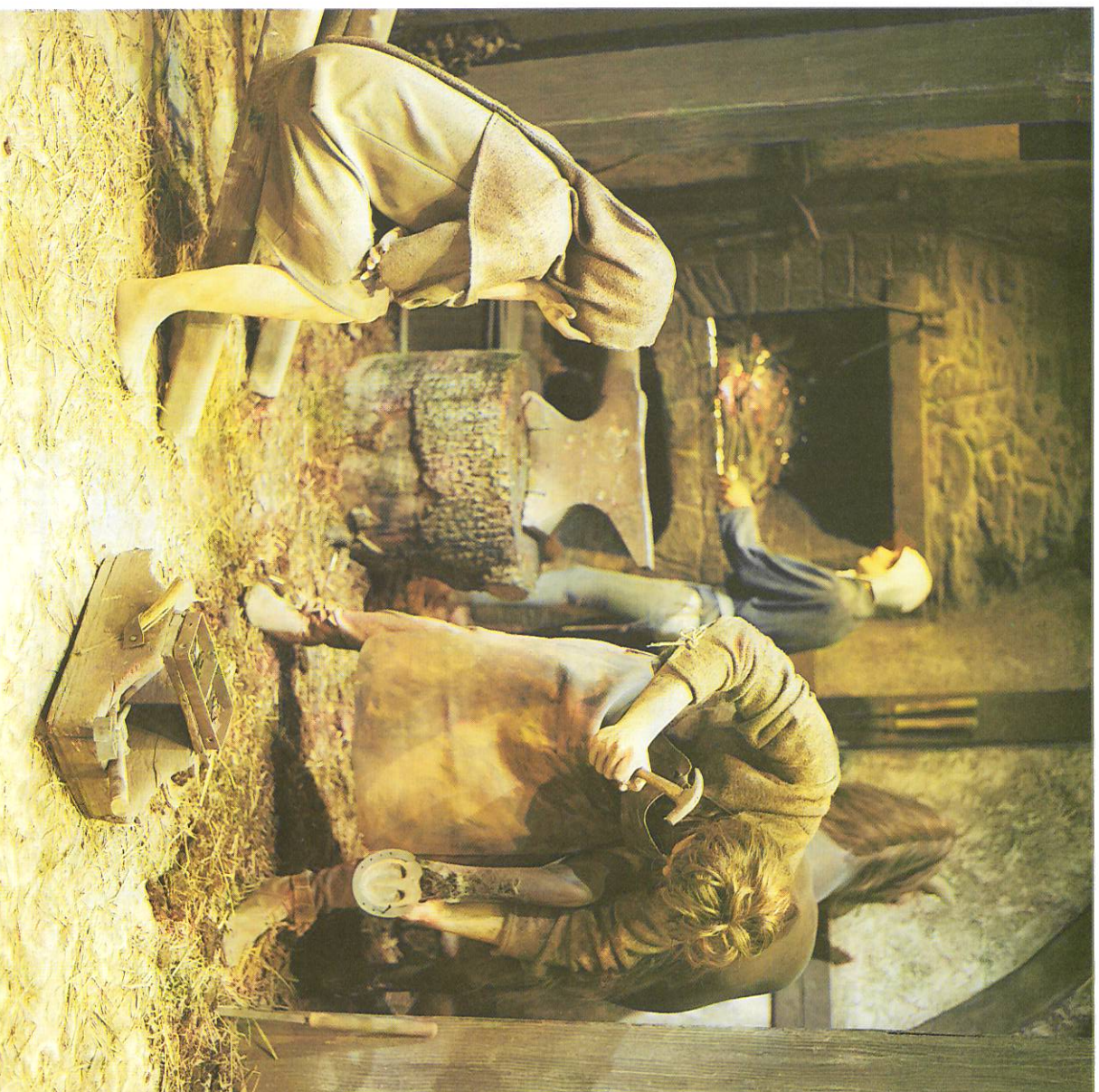
Blacksmith's forge, Geraldine Tralee.

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weavers. Related to these were the providers who dealt in food: bakers, butchers, fishmongers, grocers, poulterers, and vintners.

In the larger towns there is evidence for the concentration of craft-workers in certain streets and areas. Names like Brogue Lane in Tralee, Skinner's Row in Dublin and Dyer Street in Drogheda indicate the former quarters of leather and textile workers. Some trades had to be conducted outside the town particularly those utilising ovens or kilns which might explode with the consequent risk of setting fire to the town. At Dublin, for instance, both Cook Street and Crocker Street are found outside the old (Scandinavian) walled town while the kilns found at Carrickfergus and Downpatrick were also just outside the built-up areas of the town.

Archaeological excavations have uncovered evidence for the activities of coopers, carpenters, leather workers, bronzesmiths, and ironsmiths while there is documentary evidence for a great range of guilds and for industries such as shipbuilding. There is also a growing body of archaeological evidence for the manufacture of woollen cloth which together with hides constituted one of the great export commodities of medieval Ireland.
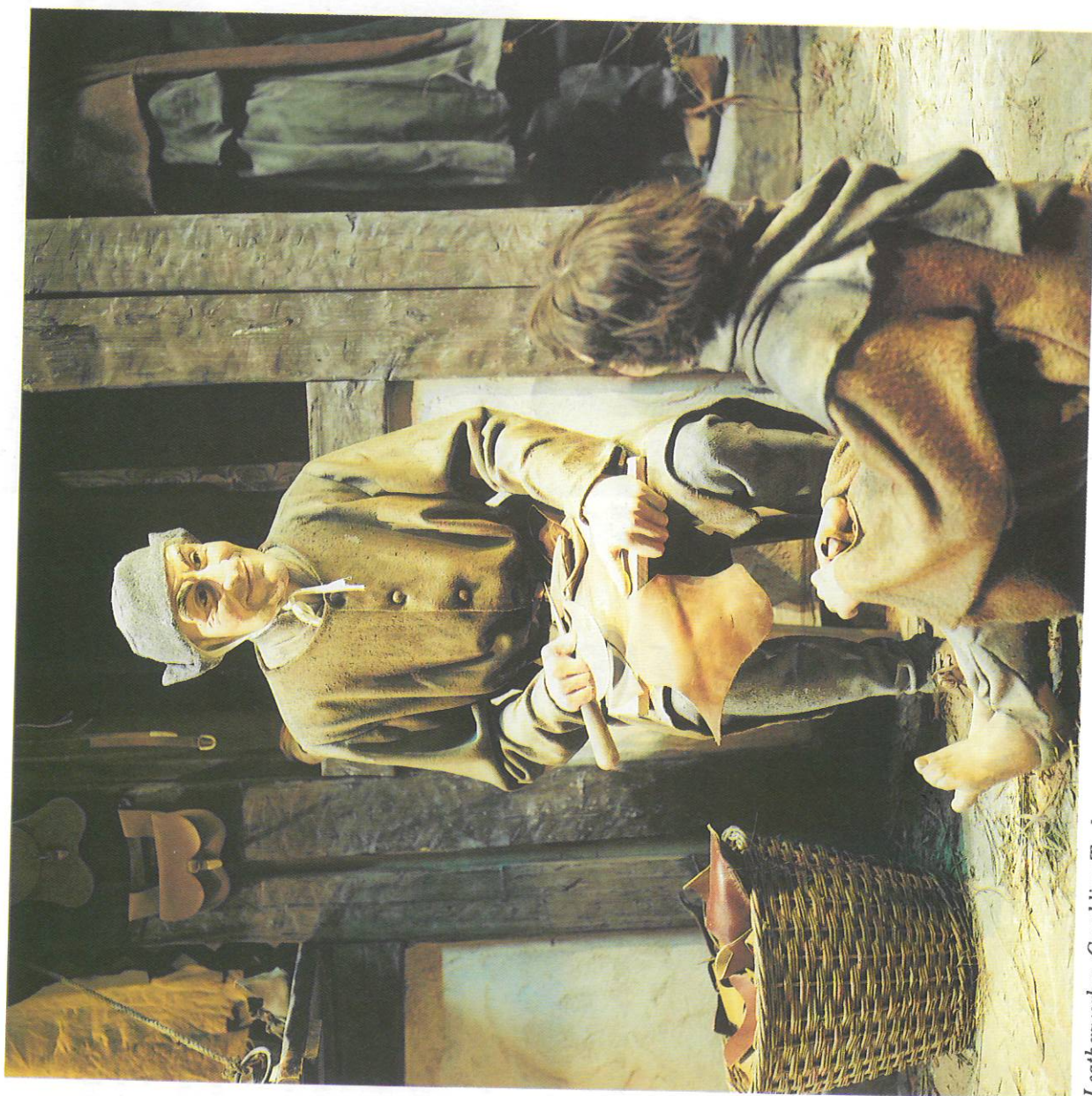
Leatherworker, Geraldine Tralee.

The butcher, leather-worker, general merchant and smith were an essential feature of every market town. The butcher would have sold mostly to the townspeople and this would have included beef, mutton and pork, as well as calves' heads, pigs' feet, offal and tripe. Game and fowl would also have been available although the killing of some creatures, such as pheasant and deer, was technically confined to the aristocracy.

The leather-worker would have obtained the raw hides from the butcher and utilised them to make bags, purses, belts, thongs,

Merchant's shop, Geraldine Tralee.

gloves and shoes. The workshop of such a leather-worker who specialised in cobbling was found in the excavations at High Street, Dublin.

The general merchant is an individual about whom we have little information until the sixteenth century. Some were entrepreneurs like Germyn Lynch of Galway, who sailed ships to France and Spain bringing pilgrims to the shrine of St. James at Compostella and returning with French and Spanish wines. Others would simply have been dependent on suppliers from the larger port towns.

The blacksmith was essential and played much the same role as the motor mechanic today. Every town had to have one or more to keep horses shod and to manufacture the tools and implements necessary for farming and craftwork.

The merchants, craftsmen and providers owned their own houses and were burgesses of the town. They played a role in its administration and annually elected a governing official and a council to regulate their affairs. At the bottom of the social scale was the labourer who owned no property and who was dependent on others to employ him. A labourer's wage would have amounted to about one shilling per week while the cost of a horse would have been about one pound.

The Port

The port areas of Dublin and Drogheda have been examined archaeologically and the docksides were found to be front-braced in common with the tradition of Atlantic Europe. Some towns, such as Dublin and Tralee, had shallow harbours and large vessels had to anchor in the bay and offload their cargoes into smaller boats.

It was because of Dublin's shallow harbour that Dalkey developed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries into the port of the Dublin. In other cases, such as Clonmines and Bannow, Co.

Wexford, the silting up of the harbour led to the eventual abandonment of the town. In some instances the town wall directly overlooked the dockside but this could be an obstacle to commerce and in other places it seems that warehouses fronted directly onto the quayside.
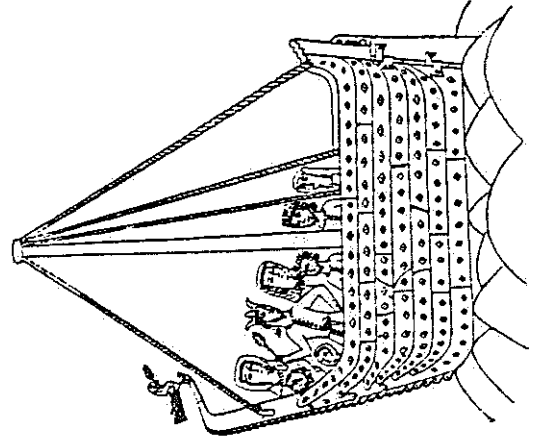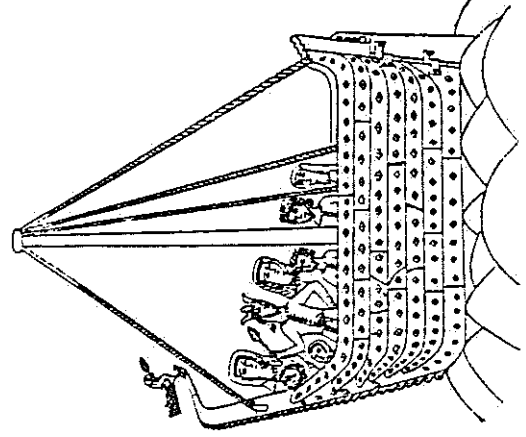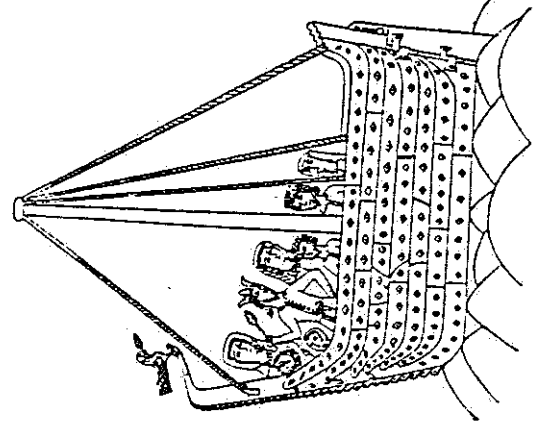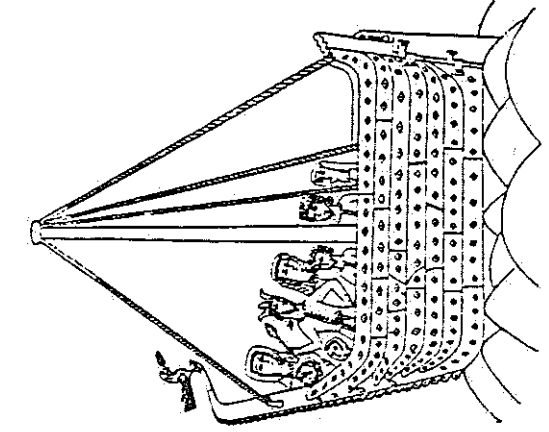
Ardfert Cathedral, 5 miles north of Tralee on the R551. Founded by St. Brendan in the sixth century, it was substantially added to by the Anglo-Normans.

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The Church

The Church was omnipresent in medieval society. It presided over every major event in the ordinary townspeople's life; it solemnised birth, marriage and death; it anointed kings and inaugurated mayors and provosts; it blessed the fields for fertility, and the sea to ensure safe passage. The church was the meeting place of guilds and in towns which did not possess a tholsel or town hall it was the usual venue for corporation meetings and assemblies. Architecturally, its towers and spires dominated the skyline.

The churches were, of course, principally places of prayer and it was a characteristic feature of the Anglo-Norman town that it possessed just one parish church. Only in Hiberno-Scandinavian towns and in a handful of older monastic towns (such as Kilkenny) does one find a more complex parochial pattern.

Monasteries, run by religious orders, were also a feature of the towns. Contemplative orders, such as the Cistercians at St. Mary's in Dublin or the

The Franciscan Friary of Muckross, near Killarney, founded in 1448.

The Franciscan Friary, Ardfert.

Benedictines at Cashel, were a rarity and in general the religious orders represented in the towns can be divided into mendicants and hospitallers. The mendicants included the Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans and Franciscans. Their friaries were almost always built outside the town wall or on its edge.

A hospital was a regular feature of every medieval Irish town and was generally maintained by a religious order such as the Fratres Cruciferi. These hospitals catered for the aged, sick and infirm townspeople and because of the dangers of contagious diseases they were usually built some distance from the town, perhaps a mile or so. The remains of very few hospitals survive but their location is often preserved in the placenames Spiddal, Spittlefields, Maudlin or Maudlinland often to be found in the vicinity of many of our older towns.

The reconstructed cloister arcade in *Geraldine Tralee* is based on two sources, the surviving fragments in the grounds of the Dominican Friary at Tralee and the ruins of the Dominican Friary at Sligo.

The Castle

If the Church presided over the spiritual welfare of the townspeople it was the castle which dominated their political life. Virtually all Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland were developments from the manor and so there were very few towns like New Ross which did not possess a seigneurial castle either in the town, as at Dublin, or immediately outside it as at Ardee and Buttevant.

Generally the castle tended to be located in an angle of the town walls where it could be easily protected not just from outside attack but also from the townspeople in time of rebellion. The lord of the town (in the case of Tralee this would have been the Earl of Desmond) would reside here on occasion but generally his affairs would have been looked after by a steward or constable. The town rents, normally fixed at one shilling per burgage per annum, would have been payable here as would the dues from court fines and market tolls. In general the castle would have interfered as little as possible in the affairs of the town but its presence served to remind the townspeople of who was in charge when it came to the crunch.

Tralee Castle is known to have been located at the head of Denny Street where it meets the Mall and Castle Street. It is clear that it was a substantial structure but nothing is known of its appearance. Accordingly it has been represented by a battlemented wall of fifteenth century style.

Carrigafoyle Castle, near Ballylongford, stronghold of O'Connor Kerry and subsequently of the Earls of Desmond.
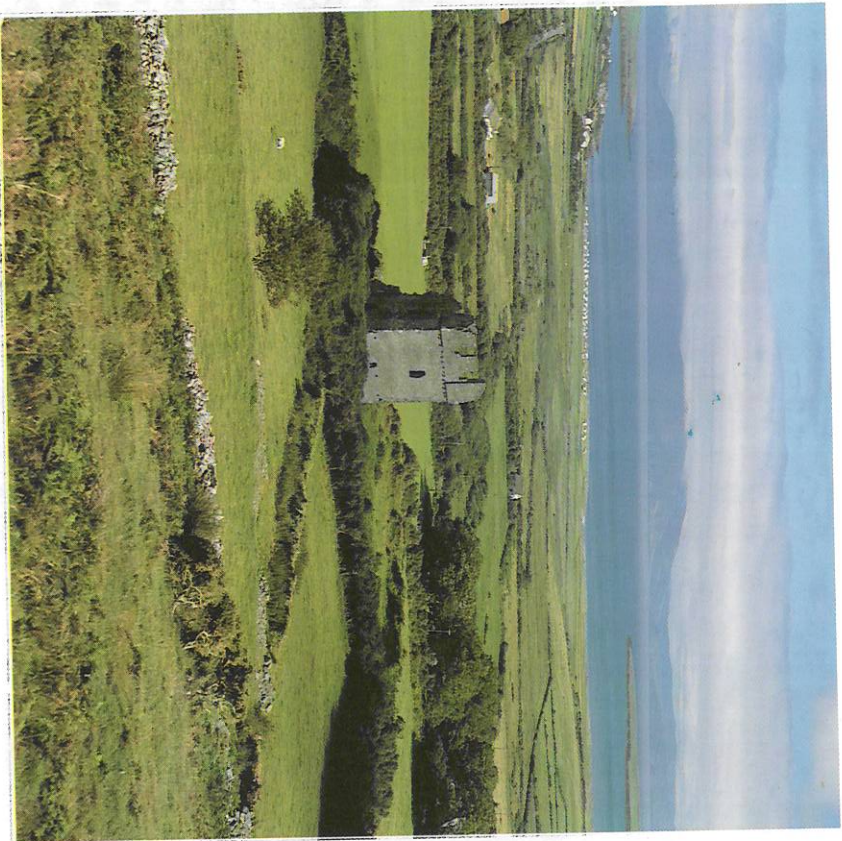
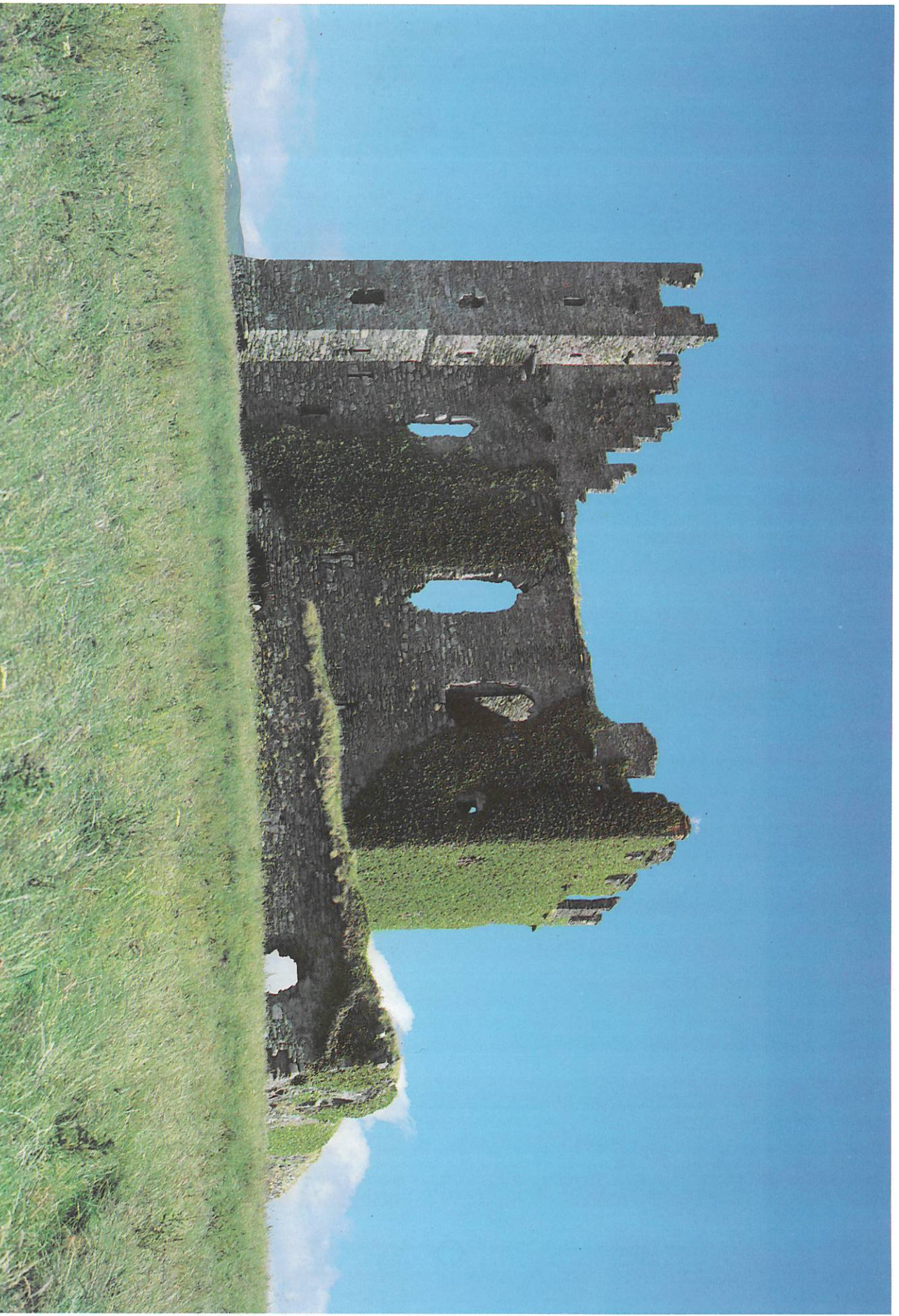Rathinane Castle, near Ventry, was one of the principal fortresses of the FitzGerald Knights of Kerry.
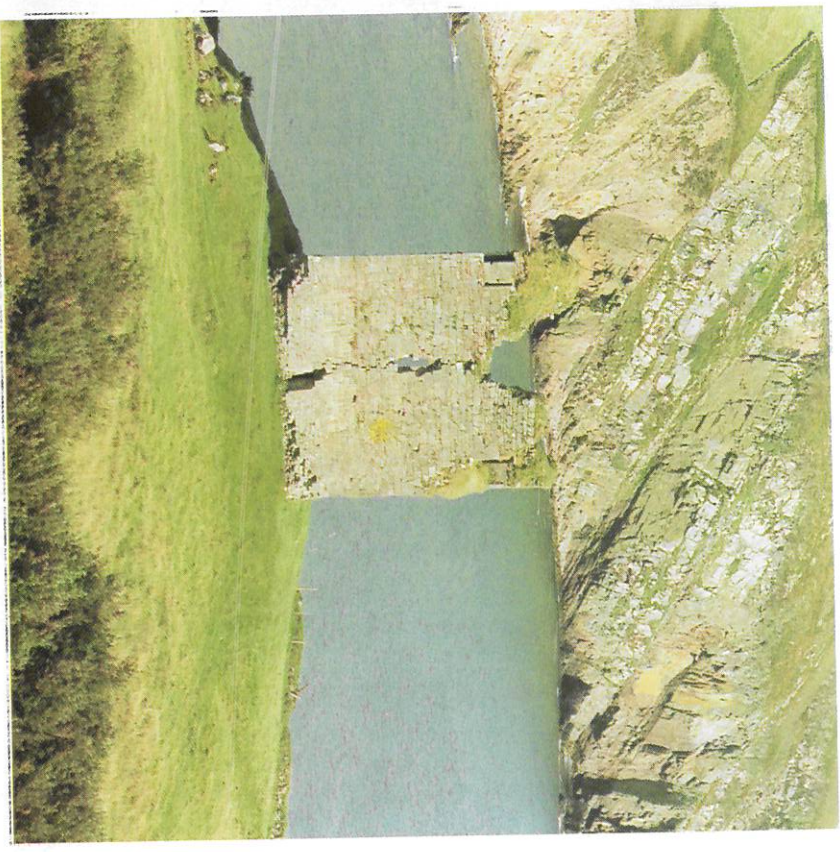
Minard Castle, south of Anascaul, another residence of the FitzGerald Knights of Kerry.

Ballymalis Castle, near Killorglin, stronghold of the Murray family.

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*Ballycarbery Castle, near Cahirciveen, was built in the fifteenth century by the MacCarthys.*

Food and Diet

Most townspeople would get up at sunrise and go to bed shortly after sundown. Breakfast consisted of bread, butter, cheese, eggs and milk. Bread was everyone's basic food. Most families baked their own but professional bakers often operated in the towns. The milk of cows, sheep and goats alike was used and from it a wide variety of butters, cheeses, curds, custards, skimmed-milks, buttermilks, creams and yoghurts was prepared. Dinner was normally eaten about noon or shortly before. It would have commenced with bread and soup (known as pottage) followed by a main course of fish or meat. The commonest soups were vegetable ones, made with cabbages, lettuces, onions and garlic. Potatoes, of course, were not known in Europe at this time.

The church forbade the eating of meat on Fridays (and until late in the Middle Ages, on Wednesdays and Saturdays) as well as during the season of Lent. This meant that for almost half the days of the year people's diet was restricted to fish and dairy products.

For most people fish meant salted or pickled herrings. Great fleets of English, Spanish and Irish ships caught thousands of fish off the south-west coast during the summer. There was a big salting and pickling industry to process them and
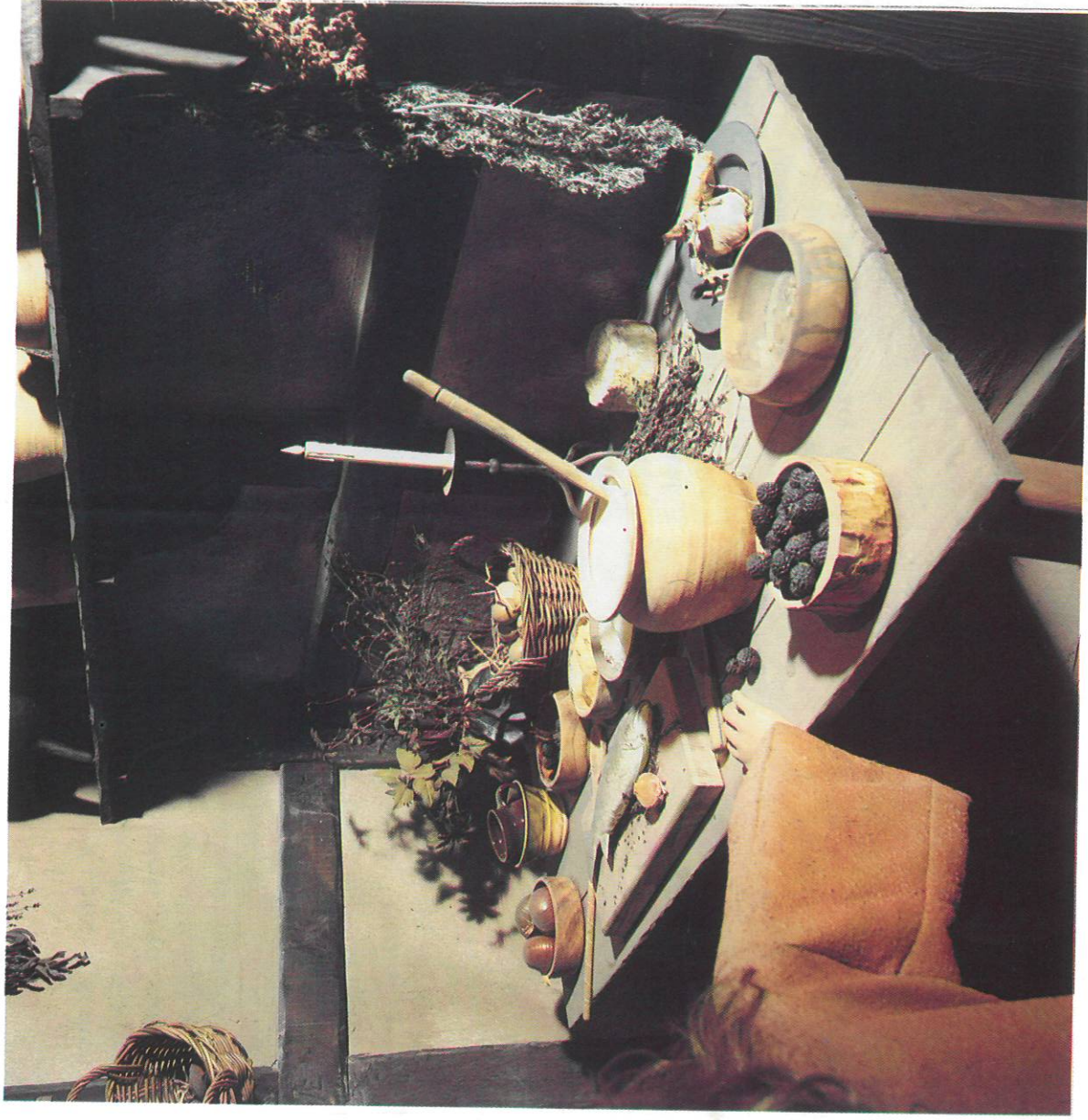
Kitchen table, Geraldine Tralee.

Tralee doubtless played a role in this. Herrings had to be landed and salted within three days or else they would decay. Other fish which was available included cod, ling, hake and haddock as well as salmon, trout and eels. Shellfish such as crab, lobster, cockles, mussels and oysters were popular also. Dried cod, known as stockfish, was as hard as a board and it had to be beaten and soaked in water before being cooked.

Beef, mutton, veal, kid and pork were the principal meats. All domesticated animals (except the horse) were smaller and less meaty than present-day breeds which have been specially-bred to produce maximum amounts of meat. The Anglo-Normans introduced the rabbit to Ireland and the modern Irish word *coinín* is in fact derived from the French word *conín*. Wild deer and boar were the preserve of the aristocracy who hunted them for sport.

Poultry, game birds, and waterfowl were eaten by everyone and hens were to be found in even the poorest households. Most dishes were strongly seasoned. Salt, pepper and mustard were universally applied but there was also a demand for ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves. Sweet dishes included honeytoast, pears in wine syrup, roasted apples, and curds. Plums, damsons, strawberries and blackberries were also very common. The principal drinks were milk, ale, mead and wine. Neither tea nor coffee, of course, had yet made their way to Western Europe. It was normal to have a light supper before retiring. This would have consisted of bread, butter and milk.

Fisherwoman, Geraldine Tralee.

Clothes

In the Middle Ages clothes were used to indicate a person's status and there were laws governing the clothes which people could wear. The noble and the wealthy enjoyed great finery but, in addition to work clothes, every townsman had holiday wear ("Sunday best") that was as decorative as wealth and law permitted.

In the mid-fifteenth century fashionable townsmen wore a doublet over a shirt and hose. The doublet was a fitted and waisted padded jacket while the hose was a full-length breeches tailored to fit the leg. The hose was attached to the doublet with cords sewn into the lining. Underneath it townsmen normally wore brayes or underpants, usually made of linen.

Tall caps, called *Phrygian caps*, were sometimes worn but most people preferred hoods with a liripipe. The liripipe was an extension of the point of the hood so that it hung in a tail which could be worn long or gathered up and wound around the head. Pointed leather shoes and gloves were worn by all who could afford them. The Irish mantle was a great enveloping wool cloak known as a *brat* and famed as a waterproof.

Travellers, Geraldine Tralee.

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Women tended to wear a long woolen gown known as a *houppelande*. This had fitted shoulders, a wide V-neck, and it fell in deep tubular folds which were belted at the waist. The sleeves were funnel shaped. They widened from the shoulders so that one end of the cuff hung low occasionally even trailing the ground. These gowns were brightly coloured: violet, russet, blue and black are recorded.

Another woman's gown was the *cotehardie* in which the sleeves ended at the elbows and had long streamers hanging from them. Underneath the gown townswomen normally wore a smock as an undergarment and above it a full-length linen tunic known as a *kirtle*. Women's hair was plaited, twisted or structured and then covered with a hair-net, an embroidered headress and often with a veil as well.
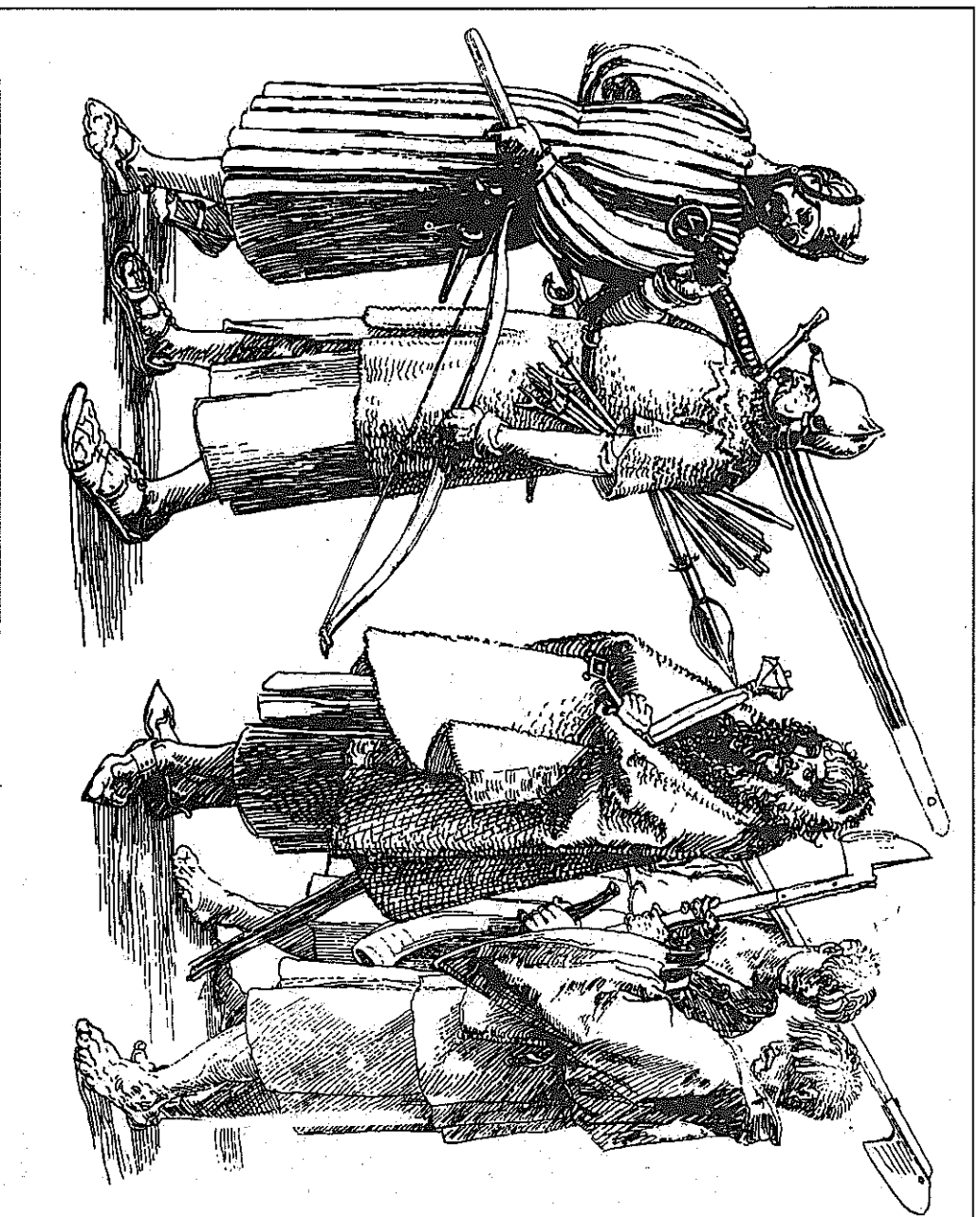
Adaptation by Jane Savage of the famous sketch by Albrecht Dürer of Irish mercenaries on the continent in 1521. The central figure is wearing an Irish mantle.

Games and Pastimes

Most of the daytime was spent working but in the evenings people relaxed, invited neighbours in, recounted stories, and played games. Board games, such as chess and draughts, were evidently popular; chess pieces have been found on a number of excavations including Dublin and Cork. Dice games were also common but card games were only beginning to be introduced at this time.

Outdoor games included blindman's buff, bowling, football, hurling, stone-tossing and wrestling. Archery was a competitive sport and most towns had butts where the townspeople could practice. At any social gathering music and dancing were among the principal entertainments while jugglers and puppeteers might also perform.

Horse racing was as popular then as it is now. Jousts were held in which individuals might engage in hand-to-hand combat but the full panoply of the tournament, as such, does not seem to have reached Ireland.
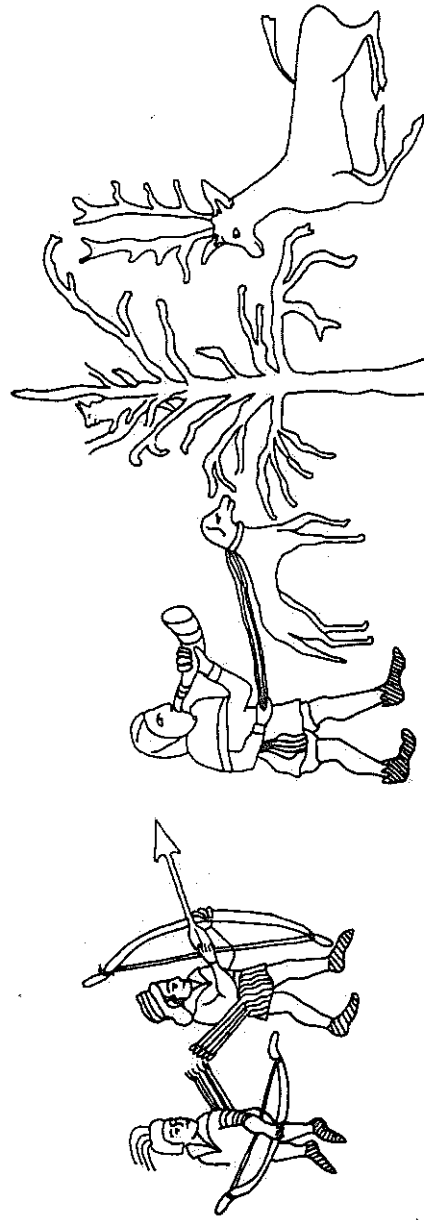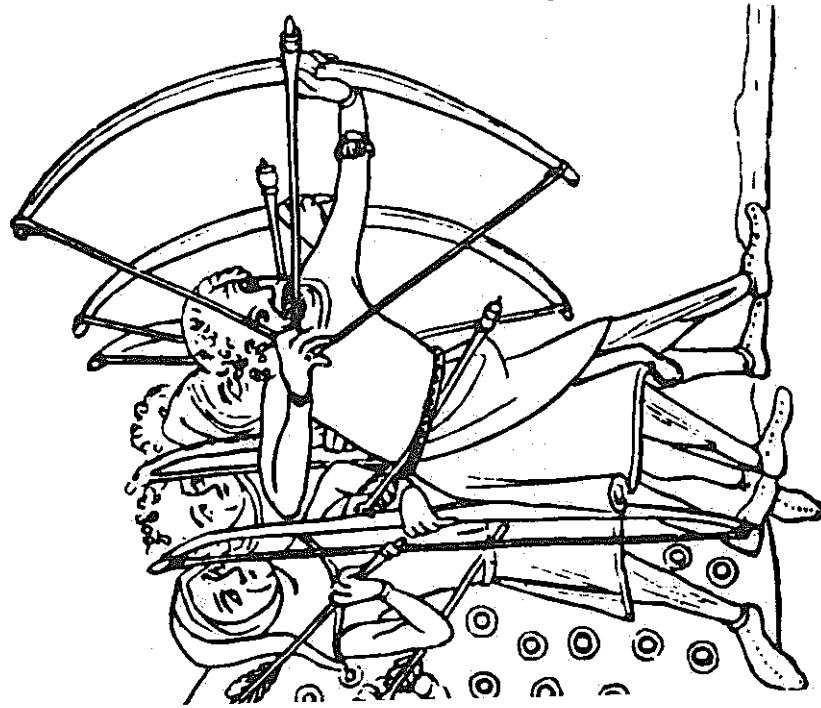
*Hunting Scene
Holycross Abbey,
Co. Tipperary,
15th Century.*

THE END OF THE MIDDLE AGES

The conventional date for the close of the Middle Ages in Ireland is 1534, the year in which the FitzGerald fortress of Maynooth was captured and the rebellion of "Silken" Thomas was suppressed. In many parts of Ireland, however, the old order continued long after 1534. In Kerry, it was only with the destruction of the Earldom of

Desmond and the killing of the fifteenth earl in 1583 that the Middle Ages effectively came to an end.

The extensive lands which had been ruled by the Desmonds were reclaimed by the Crown. Subsequently, however, they were granted out to new men who undertook to introduce English colonists on whose loyalty the

government could rely. Foremost among these planters was Sir Edward Denny whose business abilities succeeded in securing Tralee as the county town of Kerry.

In the challenging years which followed, however, the old town was swept away and with it went virtually every visible vestige of Tralee's medieval past. It is to be hoped that the Medieval Experience will help to recall once more the spirit of Geraldine Tralee.

RE-CREATING GERALDINE TRALEE

Artist Paddy O'Donnell at work on the Market Cross, Geraldine Tralee.

GERALDINE TRALEE has been reconstructed from a wide variety of archaeological, architectural and documentary sources. Every available piece of information on the medieval history of the town was tracked down and utilised.

From the documentary sources it is clear that the medieval town had a main street flanked by houses of timber and stone, a market cross, town walls, a parish church, a harbour, a friary belonging to the Dominicans as well as the "Great Castle of Tralee". Regrettably the documents do not provide any indication of what these buildings looked like. It is a fair guess, however, that the buildings of Tralee were broadly similar to those being constructed elsewhere in Ireland during the Middle Ages. In the case of the surviving fragments from the cloister of the Dominican friary at Tralee one can see that the original arcade was

similar to the extant examples at Muckross, near Killarney, and Sligo Friary.

In the course of creating Geraldine Tralee, town walls, castles and churches throughout Ireland were investigated for details of their masonary and design; illuminated manuscripts and monumental tombs were combed for information on clothes and weaponry; archaeological excavations were sieved for evidence relating to crafts, trade and industry. The resulting re-creation endeavours to convey the sights, sounds and smells of a typical Irish market town of the year 1450. In re-creating Geraldine Tralee, however, skills other than those at the archaeologist and historian were needed. The delicate art of the medieval sculptor, for instance, has been lost and before making the market cross Paddy O'Donnell had to examine the technique of the medieval artists in detail in order

to imitate their skill successfully. The craft of the leatherworker has not completely vanished and Tomas Breathnách, known to most people of Tralee as an greasaí, was able to draw on a lifetime of knowledge when making the shoes for the medieval figures. In building the houses we were able to utilise the experience of Dubliner Tommy Bassett, one of Ireland's foremost set builders.

A range of specialists worked together to cast the costumes so that they could be seen to best advantage. These were co-ordinated by Event Communications of London, one of the leading companies in graphic design. Without the co-operation of these people, and many more who must remain nameless for reasons of space, Geraldine Tralee could not have been re-created. To each and all Tralee UDC expresses its thanks and it hopes that the resulting "experience" is one which you, the visitor, will enjoy.

John Bradley, consultant archaeologist, Geraldine Tralee.
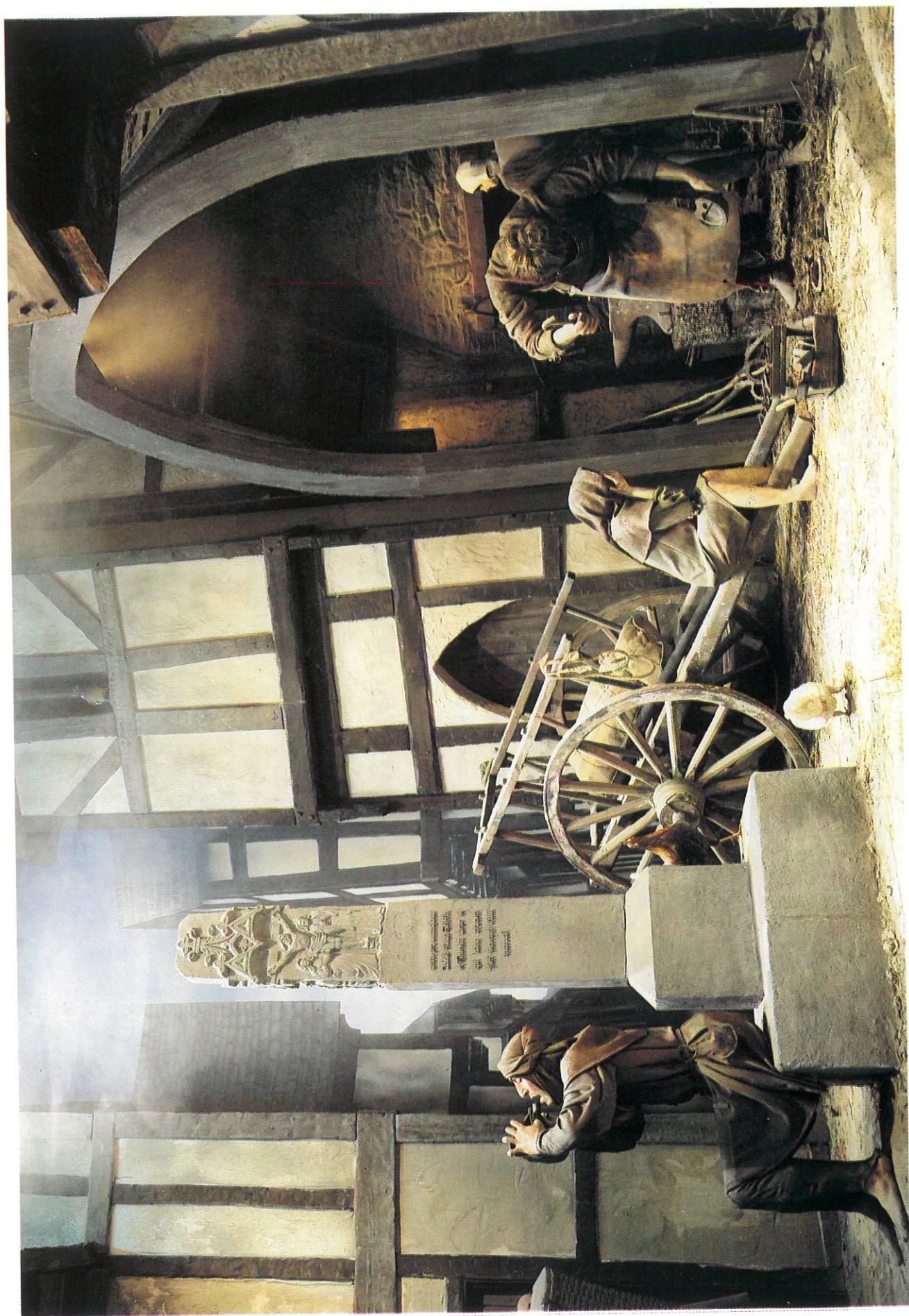
The market place, Geraldine Tralee.

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BOOK ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PROJECT ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cathair na nGearaltach