

BUNRATTY CASTLE - A SHORT HISTORY

by Christopher Lynch

The name Bunratty means "Mouth of the River Raite". The Castle is built beside the river now called The O'Garney. The site was strategically important, commanding as it did, the channel used by all up river shipping to the port of Limerick. As the visitor approaches the Castle today along the modern road from Limerick through farmlands which were formerly impassable marshes, you must picture it as it looked in mediaeval times, and up to the 18th century standing on an island, washed by the tide and only accessible by a track which wandered down from the old road from Limerick to the west at Sixmilebridge.

The island on which the Castle stands was known as Tradraighe, it was fortified by the Norsemen, who were subsequently driven out by Brian Boru. The present Castle is the fourth to be built at Bunratty. The first Castle probably a timber "Bretesche" was built by a Norman Knight, Robert de Muscegros, in 1251. King Henry III granted the cantred of Tradraighe to de Muscegros in 1248 for an annual rent of £30.00, he also obtained a licence for holding a market and a fair at Bunratty. By the end of the 13th century, Bunratty was a town of 1,000 inhabitants.

In 1276 De Muscegros Grandson handed the castle back to the English King, who in turn granted it to another Norman knight, Thomas de Clare. De Clare had some Irish blood in him, as he was the great great grandson of Eva McMurrough and Strongbow. He built the second Castle. This was a strong stone tower surrounded by defensive walls. Despite the Irish blood in his veins, the O'Briens disliked De Clare, for they resented their lands being taken by a Norman. In 1277 Brian Ruadh O'Brien was deposed as King of Thomond by his nephew Turlough Mor. Brian joined the Normans in order to try to win back his kingdom - but De Clare was a heartless man. The Annals of Loughfea record that he was entertaining Brian Ruadh to a Banquet in his new stone Castle at Bunratty. "After they had poured their blood into the same vessel, and after they had pledged Christ's friendship, and after they had exchanged mutual vows by the relics, bells and croziers of Munster, De Clare had Brian Ruadh taken outside and torn asunder by horses, his head cut off and his body gibbeted to a post outside the castle of Bunratty". This foul deed was remembered forty years later by the Irish Chieftains, who wrote a letter to Pope John XXII complaining about the conduct of the Normans in Ireland. In 1280, Turlough Mor O'Brien and his brother Donal with all their forces attacked Bunratty at night and many horse and foot soldiers were killed. They besieged the castle so closely that the inhabitants of the castle and town were unable to bury their dead, and a terrible epidemic raged, killing off many of the inhabitants. Despite this De Clare was able to hold on to his castle.

It was not until the famous Battle of Dysart O'Dea in 1318, that the O'Briens were able to defeat the Normans and drive them out of Thomond forever. When the news of the death of De Clare reached his widow at Bunratty, she hurriedly gathered up her wealth and set fire to the castle and town and set sail for England. The Irish victors pressing on to Bunratty found it, in the words of the Chronicler "Deserted, Empty, Wrapt in Fire". So perished the second castle, it was restored again probably by Robert de Well for King Edward II of England, and stood for a few more years, only to be destroyed by the combined forces of the MacNamara's and the O'Briens

in 1332.

The third castle was built in 1353 by the Kings Justiciar in Ireland, Sir Thomas de Rokeby. How long it stood is uncertain before it was taken again and destroyed by the Irish, for over 200 years the stronghold of Tradraighe remained in Irish hands.

The present castle was built about the middle of the 15th century by Maccon Sioda MacNamara, Chief of Clann Cuilein, it was completed by his son Sean Finn before he died in 1467. This castle was built on a different site from the earlier one, which appears to have occupied the high ground where Bunratty Castle Hotel now stands. Perhaps this was because the old structure was irreparably damaged. The castle belonged to the MacNamara's until about the year 1500 when either through marriage or by conquest it fell into the hands of the O'Briens.

In 1558 Bunratty is noted as one of the supreme strongholds of Thomond, it was taken from Donal O'Brien of Duagh, the last King of Thomond who died in 1579, by Thomas Fitzwalter, Lord Justice of Ireland and given to Conon O'Brien the third Earl. The O'Brien's at the time owned many castles in Clare and Thomond. Their chief seat was at Clonroad Mhor at Ennis, which was undoubtedly the residence of the second and third Earl. It appears that Donach the fourth Earl or the "Great Earl" as he was known moved his chief seat from the Palace at Ennis and made Bunratty his headquarters.

He carried out a lot of improvements to the castle. He covered the top of each corner tower with brick ceilings and added the uppermost rooms on the south side of the castle as well as putting on a new lead roof on the castle. He had the Great Hall Chapel, and other chambers richly decorated with stucco work, some of which still survives to this day. The Great Earl must have lived well, for among the finds discovered in the garde-ropes at the time of restoration was a fragment of diamond engraved glass of a very precious kind, and a number of German wine flask fragments which suggests that the Earl was enjoying the luxury of goods imported from as far away as the Rhineland.

One of the most famous events in the history of the Castle was the great rebellion which began in 1641, Lord Forbes occupied Bunratty on the orders of the English Parliament, this was the time when Charles I, was involved in a struggle with Cromwell, Barnaby the sixth Earl of Thomond was in power at the time. He was a champion sitter on the fence and succeeded in being royalist, rebel and roundhead at one and the same time. He left the castle for England when Forbes arrived and finally contrived to end his days in the odour of loyalty to the King in full possession of his honours and estates.

In 1646 Parliamentary Forces occupied Bunratty which was still a most important strategic position. The Confederates had occupied Limerick and if the Parliamentary Forces could hold Bunratty, they could prevent any ships arriving at, or leaving the port of Limerick and sailing up the Shannon. The defence of the castle was in the hands of Admiral Penn, the father of the celebrated founder of Pennsylvania. William Penn himself,

whose mother came from a place close by the castle, and as a small child apparently stayed in the castle. After a long and fierce siege, the Confederates were encouraged and stimulated by the arrival in their camp of Cardinal Rinnucini the Papal Legate to the Confederation of Kilkenny. Admiral Penn eventually surrendered and was allowed to sail in his ship to Kinsale.

Rinnucini was captivated by Bunratty and wrote of it:

"I have no hesitation in asserting that Bunratty is the most beautiful spot I have ever seen. In Italy there is nothing like the Palace and grounds of Lord Thomond, nothing like its ponds and parks with it's three thousand head of deer".

High praise indeed from a man who had visited a great number of palaces throughout Europe. A part of the formal garden which Rinnucini so admired was discovered just to the west of the castle, when excavations were carried out there in the 1960's. Here we see part of the area once covered by a Mote, part of which was later filled in, and the gardens which Rinnucini referred to took it's place. Some of the paths and walls have since been restored, however, a large portion of it remains as it was found.

The later history of Bunratty is uneventful, it appears before he died in 1657 Barnaby the sixth Earl leased the castle to a John Cooper. He is probably identical with the famous "Cornet Cooper" third husband of Maire Ruadh O'Brien, who married him to save her estates, but who according to legend threw him over the battlements of her castle at Leimaneigh, while he was shaving himself. However, Bunratty remained in O'Brien's hands until Henry the Eight and last Earl of Thomond sold it to Thomas Amory in 1712 for the sum of

£225.00 and an annual rent of £120 to include "The castle farm and lands of Bunratty of 472 acres with free ingress, egress and regress for coach or cart through the park of Bunratty to the town of Sixmilebridge". Amory in turn sold the castle to Thomas Studdert who took up residence in the castle about 1720. The Studdert family later built a handsome modern residence in the grounds of the demesne and Bunratty was allowed to fall into gradual neglect and decay, until the roof of the Great Hall collapsed towards the end of the 19th century "an event which was the talk of the countryside".

About the year 1850, while repairs were being carried out to one of the apartments in the Castle, workmen had occasion to remove part of the floor to discover a vast chamber beneath. They descended into it, and found it to be draped with magnificent brocaded silk; a quantity of the same rich material was folded up and laid on the ground, but fell to pieces on being exposed to the air. In the middle of this subterranean apartment was a skeleton with a long knife beside it, the handle of which was of massive silver splendidly chased. The chamber had neither door nor window nor any apparent means of entrance.

The later history of the castle is tame and placid. The O'Briens never again occupied Bunratty and the ruin of the castle was purchased by the 7th Viscount Gort in 1956. Lord Gort restored the castle with financial assistance from various State Agencies. The castle was restored and opened to the public in 1960. It is now furnished with the Gort Collection of early furniture, tapestries, and works of art, and has been arranged as the chief seat of about 1600.

Throughout the countryside, one cannot fail to notice the surprising number of ancient buildings, whose strong high walls and narrow windows suggest a military or a defensive purpose. And, I think, one cannot fail to feel some degree of curiosity about their physical features and architecture, their purpose and use, the people who inhabited them and life within the tower house walls in those distant days. In the next few pages I hope to throw some light on these questions.

The counties of Cork, Limerick, Tipperary, and Clare in particular have an abundance of tower houses, many of which are in remarkable good condition after 500 years. Most of the local tower houses date from the 1450 – 1500 period, which was the golden era of Irish castle-building. When people refer to these buildings as castles, they are not strictly correct. The word castle has acquired a rather wide meaning. Essentially a castle is a fortified stronghold, designed to fortify a strategic position. Generally, a castle consists of a large keep, surrounded by towered walls, or by a moat and walls. Bunratty castle and King John's castle can justly be termed as castles, whereas it is doubtful if many of the others merit the title.

However, there is no doubt that the ordinary tower houses had at least a defensive purpose. They were designed as fortified residences by the MacNamara Clan, chiefs of Clancullen, who used them to overawe their territory in south Clare. The more powerful O'Brien clan, Kings and later Earls of Thomond acquired some of these tower houses almost immediately or throughout the 16th century and occupied them until the 17th century. Not only were the tower houses designed as defenses against the attacks of outsiders, but as protection against various factions of the chief families also. The early 14th century was an extremely turbulent time as one branch of the O'Brien family harassed, attacked and often killed their cousins. The succeeding centuries were more orderly but many acts of violence are recorded, such as an account in the Four Masters A.D. 1514: "Donogh, son of Conor O'Brien was vindictively and unbecomingly slain by the sons of Torlogh O'Brien, son of Murrogh O'Brien, namely by Murrogh and Donogh". Cattle raiding was another method of recrimination, and so, the tower houses were plentiful and strategically positioned. In 1580, there were 42 MacNamara tower houses and it is said that they were positioned so that each tower house could be seen from at least one other. Unfortunately, many of them have disappeared so it is not certain how true this is.

ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN

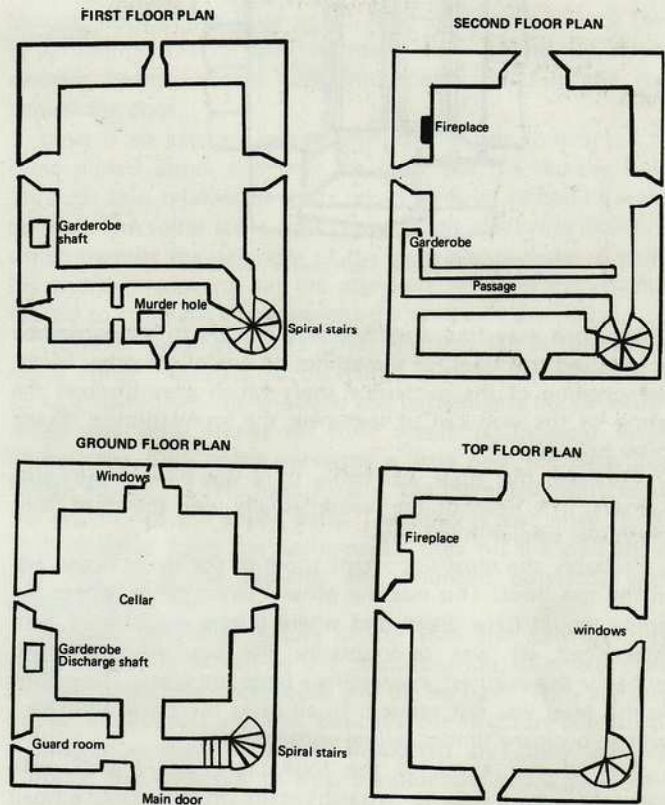
The tower house was quite a departure from the earlier massive strongholds, both in design and architecture. The most probable origin of this new design can be found in the so called "£10 Castles". These were the result of a plan of King Henry VI to maintain control over the area of the Pale. In the year 1429 he issued a statute which stated: "It is agreed and asserted that every liege man of our Lord, the King of the said counties (The Pale) who chooses to build a castle or tower sufficiently embattled or fortified, wither the next ten years to wit 20 feet in length, 16 feet in width and 40 feet in height or more, that the commons of the said counties shall pay to the said person, to build the said castle or tower ten pounds by way of subsidy".

The introduction of these simple tower houses probably led to the more elaborate tower houses that can be seen throughout the whole country.

The general interior arrangement is best illustrated by the following floor diagrams of the typical 15th century tower house, such as Rathlahine (5) or Drumline (4).

Tower Houses in South Clare

by John O'Brien

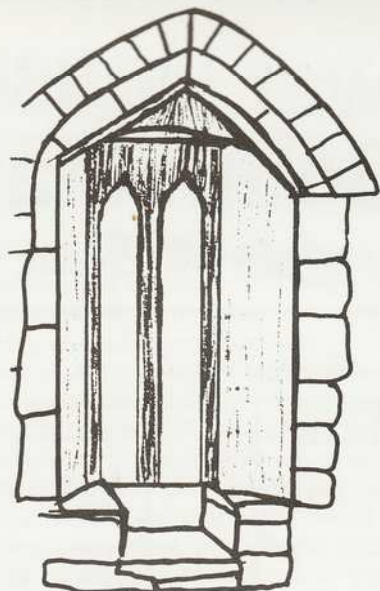


At the left of the entrance lobby is a small room, probably used by the guard or porter. At the right, a spiral stairs serves all the main floors. Rosmanagher tower house is an exception, having the stairs on the left and the guard room opposite. Facing the main entrance is a door-way to a large room with narrow slit windows. This room was used solely as a storage room or cellar, being too dark for any other purpose. Today, of course, most tower houses have large holes in the walls, where the original narrow windows were, the well cut stone of the windows and of the inside recesses having been removed for building purposes in more recent times.

The first floor has a large vaulted room over the cellar. Also on this level is a passage-way over the main entrance lobby, to a small room corresponding to the guard room underneath. The floor of this passage way contains the murder hole, through which unwelcome visitors could be subjected to many kinds of unpleasantness.

On the next storey, the layout is basically the same but at this point, the windows are slightly bigger.

The typical window is technically known as an ogee-headed light with square headed moulding. Some good examples are still to be seen in Drumline, Cratloe, and Rosmanagher tower houses. Rosmanagher in particular has a very elaborately cut stone window over the main entrance. Windows were closed by shutters, probably glazed, fitting against the inside surface of the stone jambs, and the pivot holes in which the shutters were hinged are to be found in the better preserved windows.



Typical 15th & 16th century window

Also one may find a passage way leading to the garderobe or toilet on this floor, or sometimes on one of the other levels. The opening of the garderobe shaft which goes through the centre of the wall can be seen near the foundation in all the tower houses.

Although this floor was badly lit it was part of the living quarters. The head of the house usually used the third floor which was similar in lay-out.

Probably the most important room of the tower house was on the top floor. This was the general living room, where the family would have dined and where guests would have been entertained. It was undoubtedly the best lit room and probably the warmest, containing a large fire place. The ceiling on this level was not vaulted. In all cases there was a hip roof with an ordinary timber ceiling underneath.

Around the eaves of the roof there was a wall walk accessible by a narrow straight stairs which entered a small turret at a corner of the building. The hip roof was of high pitch, with the gables at the narrow ends i.e., the front and the back. These gable walls were very narrow, built on the inside of the main walls in order to allow space for the wall walk which went right around the building. The walk was constructed of stone slabs which sloped outwards over the main walls to drain off the water from the roof. These slabs are still in place on Rosmanagher tower house.



Stone slabs of the original wall walk of Rosmanagher.

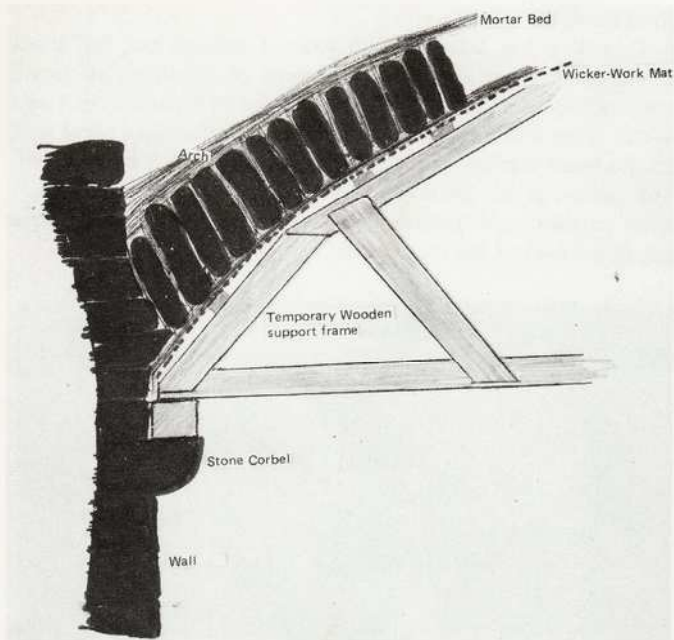
The battlements were built on top of these stones and consequently were not as stable as the main part of the wall. This is one of the reasons that most tower houses are without their battlements today. The other reason is that the Cromwellian forces rendered many of the tower houses defenceless by knocking the battlements or breaking down the stairs.

Among the interesting features of the 15th Century tower houses are the arched doorways and vaulted ceilings. The lower doorways of most of the ruins have met the same fate as the windows. However some have survived such as those at Rathlahine, and Rosmanagher.



Doorway at Rosmanagher Tower House.

Many people wonder how the builders of 500 years ago succeeded in erecting the thick vaulted ceilings which, today, seem as strong as ever. In the older Norman castles, the vaulting was supported during construction by the long wooden planks which were laid on a frame to the shape of the ceilings, but the Irish developed a simpler technique. Long wooden beams were laid on the stone corbels, against the side walls, and cross beams were placed on them at intervals of a few feet. On each of these cross beams was constructed a frame approximately the shape of the ceiling, and over these was placed a large wicker-work mat, which could be adjusted to the precise shape of the ceiling. On top of the wicker-work, a layer of mortar was laid, onto which the stones were placed, more mortar being worked between them from above. When the arch had set firmly, the timbers were removed, leaving the wicker-work in the ceiling. Even to this day, the print and in some cases the actual rods of the mat can be seen in the vaulted ceilings. Most of the tower houses listed on the map have examples of this.



Very little remains of the buildings surrounding the tower houses — for two good reasons. Firstly the stone walls and buildings were easily dismantled for other building purposes throughout the last two hundred and fifty years or more. Secondly, some of the minor buildings probably would have been of mud and wood construction. Without excavation little definite can be said of their construction or layout. However the formation of what may have been walls or out-houses exist at a few sites, notably Drumline. In most cases, the tower house is built on an elevated site, and there is evidence of a moat at most sites. This introduces another aspect of the tower house, — its defensive qualities.

As has been said, most castles and tower houses were protected by a moat, either immediately around the building or outside the courtyard. The moat would not have had an elaborate drawbridge as has Bunratty. Instead it would have been traversed by a simple bridge which could be pulled back on rollers.

The windows in the lower half of the tower house were extremely narrow and consequently practically impenetrable. The interior window recesses were often rectangular in shape so as to afford an archer ample elbow room. The main door would seem to have been very heavy as is evidenced by the large stone hanging eyes into which the hanging irons of the door fitted. A good example is to be seen in Drumline. Doors were normally kept closed by strong wooden beams, sliding back into special holes in the wall behind the door.

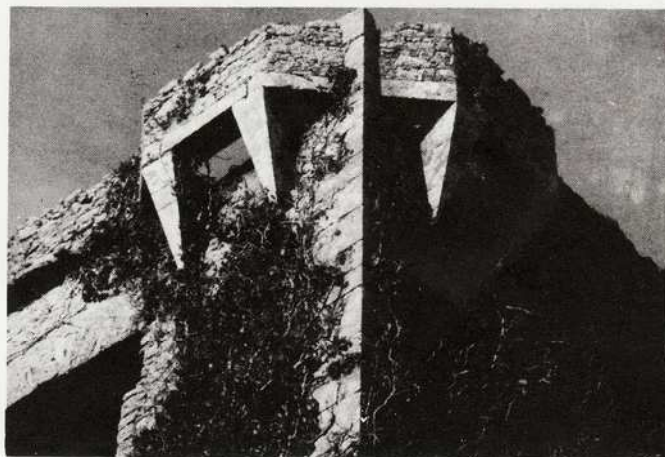
Even if an attacker gained entrance he was confronted by three closed doors and over his head was the murder hole. Through this, missiles or shots could be fired or boiling water poured. The spiral stairs goes round in the clockwise direction which permits the defender of the stairs plenty room to swing his sword downwards on the attackers, whereas the attacker tended to strike his elbow against the centre of the stairs.

However most attackers never got this far as there were many other obstacles to overcome outside. In addition to firing arrows from the windows and battlements the defenders could also drop stones on their assailants. In most tower houses, the walls splay outwards a little near the base. The reason for this is two fold. Firstly, the increased width helps the stability of the upper walls. The other is that when stones were dropped from the battlements, they hit the wall about five feet from the ground, and bounced outwards with considerable force.

Another defensive feature of the 15th and 16th Century tower houses is known as the machicolation, of which there are two types, the machicoulis and the bartizan. They are very similar in structure and use. Basically the structure consists of a projecting stone hoarding supported by stone corbels. Through the underside of this, the defender had a good view of the base of the castle, without being exposed to danger. The machicoulis was a rectangular structure, usually directly over the main door, and the bartizan, an angular structure at a corner. The bartizan, of which a good example is to be seen at Cratloe tower house, had the advantage of being placed at a corner, and so commanded a better view. It also had the advantage of having no sharp corners and so was stronger against battering attacks. The corbels which once supported a machicoulis are to be seen in Drumline tower house and Rathlahine tower house has the support stones of the original bartizan.



Rosmanagher tower house



Bartizan on Cratloe tower house.

Having looked at some of the physical aspects of the tower houses, we face a much more difficult task, in attempting to trace their history. Generally, the minor castles have little place in historical records. Of course all of them have a history, even if nothing more spectacular than that of the families who lived in them. And we can assume that many of their occupants did have fairly colourful lives in the turbulent years of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries but the meagreness of historical data cannot be overcome.

Nevertheless, we do have some insights into conditions of the times and the life within the tower house walls. And what better description can there be than eye-witnesses accounts. The following are quotations:

Luke Gernon in "A Discourse of Ireland" 1620 comments on traditional Irish hospitality quote: "We are come to the castle already. The castles are built very strong and with narrow stairs for security. The Hall is the uppermost room, let us go up — you shall not come down again till tomorrow. The Lady of the house meets you with her Trayne. Salutations past, you shall be presented with all the drinks in the house first the ordinary beare then aqua vitae, then olde ale. The Lady tastes it, you must not refuse it. The fire is prepared in the middle of the hall, where you may solace yourself till supertime. You shall not want sacke or tobacco. By this time the table is spread and plentifully furnished with variety of meats, but ill cooked and without sauce . . . When you come to your chamber do not expect canopy and curtains".

Other writers make similar observations about the lack of comfort in the tower houses. M. Bouillaye le Gouz in 1644 says: "The castles of the nobility consist of four walls; extremely high and thatched with straw, but to tell the truth, they are nothing but square towers or at least having such small apertures as to give no more light than there is in a prison. They have little furniture and cover their rooms with rushes, of which they make their beds in Summer, and straw in Winter. They put rushes a foot deep on their floors and on their windows and many of them ornament their ceilings with branches".

We can only hope that an account by Cuillar in 1588 is much exaggerated: "The Irish have no furniture and sleep on the ground, on a bed of rushes, wet with rain and stiff with frost". Another traveller, Thomas Dinely spent some time in south Clare in 1680/81, notably in Rathlahine tower house which was then owned by Giles Vandelure. He was not very complimentary either. The following is an extract from his observations on his way from Limerick to Sixmilebridge: "The soil is generally rude, boggy, neglected, woody shrubby, wild, marshy, and great bogs and ponds are seen upon the very tops of hills and mountains as is Gallows Hill between Limerick and Sixmilebridge in the County of Thomond".

On Friday night December 10th 1680, Dineley writes that he observed a comet from the castle of Rathlahine and followed its progress for more than a month thereafter.

With a few exceptions, the tower houses listed in the map are 15th century in date. Bunratty was built in the very early 1400's by Sioda MacNamara. It was finished probably by his son Sean Mac Conn McNamara who also built Knappogue Castle. Drumline tower house was the work of this man's son John, and it was a grandson of Mac Conn who built Rathlahine tower house about the year 1490. Drumline and Rathlahine are very similar in design. Rathlahine is in better condition but has undergone much reconstruction and it has lost almost all its main windows. It has however a very good example of 15th century doorway, excellent vaulted ceilings and some

good stone slit windows.

Drumline has lost its main vaulted ceilings but the small rooms are in good condition and some of the upper windows are in good condition. The hanging stone in the main doorway is still there and on one of the corbels on the right hand wall of the main section, there is a stone carving of a man's head. The gables, as can be seen are thin walls built inside the main walls as explained earlier. This is unlike Rosmanagher whose gables are part of the main walls.



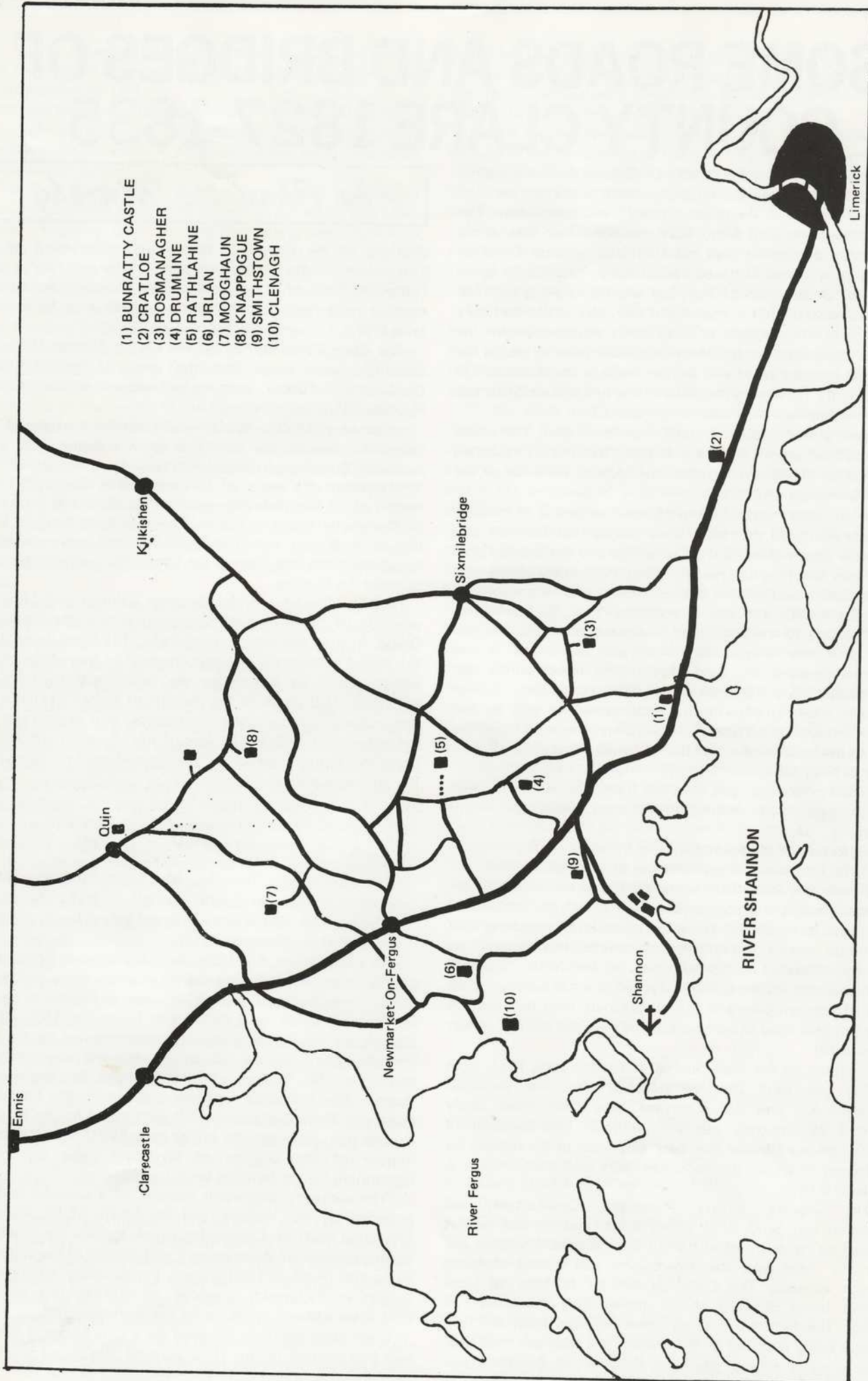
Unusual stone window from Rosmanagher.

Rosmanagher has an unusual stone doorway. The stairs here are on the left hand side which is not conventional. Cratloe which is a later tower house is locked up so its interior cannot be examined. But one cannot fail to see the bartizan which is in excellent condition. Mooghaun castle is now restored and is a private residence.

Urlanmore castle was built by the Mac Clancy family, who were hereditary Brehons of Thomond. This tower house contains faded but once beautiful murals depicting a hunting scene. Clenagh was built by the Mac Mahon family of which the famous Maura Ruadh was a member.

The subject of tower houses is so large that it has had to be treated in a very summary fashion here. However incomplete this article had to be, it is hoped that many of the questions have been adequately answered, and hopefully, some more questions posed. If it has helped in any way to awaken curiosity and create interest in this neglected part of our heritage, to me it will have been a success.

TOWER HOUSES IN SOUTH CLARE



BASED ON THE ORDNANCE SURVEY BY THE PERMISSION OF THE GOVERNMENT.

SCALE APPROX. 1/2" TO 1 MILE.

A TRAGEDY OF PUBLIC VOTING - SIXMILEBRIDGE, 1852

by Keith Scally

During the summer of 1852 the Conservative government called a general election. This election had important consequences for the Tenant Right League, for Sadlier and Keogh defected to the new Whig-Peelite coalition, contrary to their pledge. But in the Clare village of Sixmilebridge, ("the Bridge"), the tenants had more immediate difficulties — how to express their democratic wish.

Three candidates were nominated to fill the two seats in the constituency of County Clare, Sir John Fitzgerald, Mr. Cornelius O'Brien, (both Liberals) and Colonel Vandeleur (Conservative). The last had aroused tenant suspicions because of the evictions executed on his estates near Kilrish during the Famine. Despite this, other Conservative landlords had brought pressure to bear on their tenants to vote tory. Meanwhile, the local clergy and tenants in general pressed the case of the Liberals. It ought to be borne in mind that polling was carried out in public; tenants who voted not according to the wishes of their landlord risked eviction. Vandeleur, however, was afraid that if some of his prospective supporters were allowed into Sixmilebridge alone, they might be induced to vote Liberal. Thus 18 voters from the lands of the Marquis of Conyngham were provided with a military escort.

The government was expecting some trouble during this election. As a result a magistrate, John C. Delrage, accompanied the troops escorting the 18 voters. By the powers invested in a magistrate, Delrage could order the soldiers to open fire if "rebellious disorder" broke out. And it would appear that he was anticipating such agitation, because he ordered the soldiers to prime and load their guns before setting out from Limerick.

The tenants' excitement first manifested itself, on this 22nd July, 1852, when four of Vandeleur's supporters arrived in the Bridge with two tenants in their charge. A crowd seized the two voters and carried them off. Their release was secured by appeals from one of the Liberal candidates. These two later voted Conservative.

When the 18 voters with their military guard entered Sixmilebridge, women weeding potatoes near the village green threw some stones at them. Heedless, the party continued on towards the Courthouse, where the voting was taking place. A hostile crowd had gathered at the polling centre. They hissed, boomed and pelted stones at the troops, some of which hit and injured soldiers. Mr. Delrage ordered the crowd to desist. They persisted. The magistrate repeated the command, accompanied by a threat of retaliation by the troops.

The mob now burst through the guard and dragged a few voters off, as they had done earlier in the day. The troops fired

at the mob, killing five immediately and wounding eight others, two of whom later died. Some of the dead were voters dragged from the carts. The sound of the shots brought another magistrate from the Courthouse, though he was too late to do anything.

An inquest began on 24th July, and lasted some three weeks, with one of the new M.P.'s, Sir John Fitzgerald, presiding. To prevent any further outbreaks of emotions, a large body of military and constabulary was encamped at Sixmilebridge. By a majority verdict, 12 to 5, the jury returned a verdict of "wilful murder" against Delrage and eight troops. Bail having been refused, they were sent for trial at Ennis, from where the case was transferred to Dublin. However, before the opening of the trial, the government intervened and the charges were dropped.

At the ballot, the two Liberals were returned; Fitzgerald received 1,152 votes, O'Brien 1,141 and Vandeleur 1,139. A relief fund for the families of the dead was established by a local landlord, Mr. Wilson.

The final act happened in June, 1853. Colonel Vandeleur appealed to a parliamentary committee to have the election declared null and void, and he succeeded. In the ensuing election, Vandeleur was defeated more decisively: O'Brien, 1,374 votes; Fitzgerald, 1,350 votes; and Vandeleur, 1,297 votes.

Two months after the massacre, a ballad singer was arrested in Limerick for having "inflammatory ballads" in his possession. One referred to the Sixmilebridge incident:—

All by a cruel magistrate . . . is his name,
He gave them orders for to fire, the people for to slay.
Our Catholics they assembled, it being the election time,
But little they suspected to be cut down in their prime.
Oh, . . . may you suffer, you're the cause of all the fray.
This murderer he was taken, and sent to Ennis gaol,
With those cruel-hearted soldiers, their sorrow to bewail;
And at the next assizes they will have to stand their trial.
May the trap and gallows be their end, all for their horrid crime.

The "Limerick Chronicle", of 22nd September, 1852, which printed the above ballad, left blank spaces where the magistrate's name occurred.

(This article, by the same author, first appeared in "Co. Clare, No. 1", published by St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, 1972, pp. 17-19.)

Something old - Something new

Sagging thatch, crumbling walls and deserted, decaying buildings have become all too familiar a sight in the recent past of Co. Clare. Of course, not all buildings have come to this sad state and today many of these old cottages and houses have been given a new lease of life by being put to a new use thus retaining the old structures to fit in with a new style of living. The houses in the following article are but a few of the ones in South Clare that come into this category.

by *Max and
Maureen Halliday*

BUNRATTY COTTAGE



Opposite Bunratty Castle on the banks of the O'Graney River stands a small attractive Georgian house which nowadays is a boutique. Until 1956 it had been Bunratty Post Office. For the next fifteen years it stood derelict until Mrs. Vonnie Reynolds bought it and transformed it from a decaying, abandoned post office to what it is today – the delightful, eye catching Bunratty Cottage Fashion Shop. To browse among Irish tweeds, knitwear and Waterford crystal is a far cry from the stamps and postal orders of the past but although the stock and style is so up to date one is still aware of the atmosphere of great age and dignity.

SHANNON FARMHOUSE



This typical farmhouse of the Shannon region of South Clare can now be seen in Bunratty Folk Park. It stood originally on the land where Shannon Airport is now. In 1959 it was due for demolition to make room for a runway extension. Fortunately it was decided not to demolish it but to remove it stone by stone to the grounds of Bunratty Castle where today we can walk around inside and get a glimpse of a home of the not too distant past.

O'GORMANS COTTAGE – SHANNON



Approximately 250 years old this thatched cottage is the last remaining one of its type in what is now the new town of Shannon. The boren on which it stands once had twenty-three such buildings including a forge and a wheelwright. Unfortunately nothing remains of these twenty-three but O'Gormans cottage is still in use although no longer a farm. The cottage itself is the headquarters of the local drama group whilst what was originally the cow byre has been converted to a pottery where one can watch a craftsman at his work. So, although the other crafts have gone from this boren a different one has now come to help retain some of the old character of the area.

BALLYCAR RAILWAY STATION – NEWMARKET-ON-FERGUS



Built in the late 1800's the railway station was in use for passenger traffic until 1964. What could have become a derelict railway house when this service ceased is now a charming home and studio. Ballycar Design is a textile craft workshop where one can admire and buy beautiful embroideries, hand made soft toys and hand painted aprons among other things. The studio is open to the public every Thursday from March 17th to October 1st so one can visit and see just how well the old blends with the new.