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Late Medieval Structures in Clonmel: Further Remarks

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In a previous issue of this Journal the author described several late medieval fragments in Clonmel (Holland 1992 and refs.). The purpose of this note is to amplify the description given there of one structure, to correct one statement and to describe a more recent discovery.

The final paragraphs of the previous article described a stone building situated at the end of Collet's or White Friars' Lane, and tentatively interpreted it as "a late medieval urban dwelling, related in its features to a tower house, with two storeys and possibly a garret, a first-floor hall and a ground floor for storage" (ibid, 201). Since that was written access to the site has become easier because of the construction of a roadway along the river, immediately adjacent to the structure. Several trees growing in front of it have been removed but the structure is still ivy-covered.

The ground floor, previously interpreted as having been used for storage, is likely to have had a more active function. There would appear to have been originally at least four openings in the southern long riverside wall, at ground floor level. All are now heavily overgrown with ivy, and most have been altered.

The most westerly opening is a sandstone doorway with parallel jambs, an external splay and a slight reveal. Portion of a stepped hood moulding survives. The head of the doorway has been replaced by later wooden lintels and the doorway is spanned by a flat arch of pitched rubble voussoirs. The embrasure is a wide and shallow one, again covered with pitched rubble voussoirs.

The most easterly opening is a latrine chute opening, with a cut-stone surround now heavily spalled by modern rubbish burning but with holes for iron bars visible. Between it and the doorway described above are three windows with hood moulding and two other openings which could be later insertions. The window immediately to the west is c. 1m in width, flat headed, with a hood, and a central mullion which is now missing.

A property division wall was later built up against this window some time after it had been blocked. The stone of the window dressings has been badly damaged by burning and the property division wall has been demolished during the road construction. The window is in close and, one would have thought uncomfortable, proximity to the latrine chute. The next opening, to the west, is one of the two which may be later insertions.

The central window is narrow (83cm in width) with a central mullion, a flat head and a hood moulding. It is 1.38m in height. The next opening to the west seems to be a second later insertion. Finally the sixth opening, immediately to the east of the doorway, is a three-light mullioned window with a hood moulding and bar holes. The eastern part of the window is blocked up but one mullion base is visible. It is c. 1.38m in width.

The interior of the building is filled by rubble and vegetation and there are also a number of what are probably later sub-dividing walls. The north-eastern sector of the building has been removed by modern building works. The external dimensions of the building are 8.25m in width and c. 17.85 in length. The wall near the doorway is 1.2m in width. The riverside



(southern) wall is covered by a dense growth of ivy. The masonry appears to be of sandstone and shale.

On the first floor of the building the western gable has been repaired in recent times, but still has the remains of a fireplace. The southern sandstone jamb stones survive and the stump of a large wooden lintel beam, c. 26 cm square, remains embedded over the jamb. The beam, a later insertion perhaps, is chamfered on its external angle to match the chamfer on the jambstones. The northern side of the fireplace is missing. The first floor openings are still ivy-covered, but the window openings and latrine passage in the southern (riverside) wall can be confirmed. The row of gutter stones and the small latrine window, its outer opening rebuilt perhaps, can also be seen.

We would appear therefore to have a late medieval urban dwelling with features relating to tower houses but with a ground floor provided with windows and a doorway and with riverside access. The building would not therefore have been a first-floor hall as such, but the first floor was probably the main domestic area. The window type, two-light with window hood, can be found on buildings dating from the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries, and we might expect well-to-do merchants to live in such a dwelling. The doorway gave access to the riverbank.

Some other information can be added to the previous article. The two-light window with window bars, located further up the lane on the eastern side, and thought to be roughly contemporary with the structure noted above, is not now accessible as a modern building has been built in the previously open area beside it. It may still be in position. The building now occupied by Powers Dental Repairs, no. 57 O'Connell Street, Clonmel is a narrow property, perhaps once being part of an adjoining plot.

In the rear wall, and visible from the car-park at the rear of Brady's shopping mall, is a tall window (Plate 1) with hood moulding, facing outwards and northwards. Some of the sandstone jambs are visible on the eastern side. This fragment adds further archaeological evidence for the existence of secular late medieval dwellings in Clonmel.

Finally it may be of interest to note that among the illustrations of various archaeological sites and objects painted by Daniel Grose (c. 1766-1838) and recently published (Stalley, 1991) is a picture (no. 41) of St. Mary's, Clonmel executed between 1792 and 1805 when the White mortuary chapel shown was demolished. It was a rectangular structure built up against the southern wall of the church, flush with the church's west end. It had a gabled roof (then



Plate 1 – window in the rear wall of 57 O'Connell St., Clonmel.

missing), two quatrefoil windows in the south wall, and another feature in the west wall. A string course ran around the building, apparently from the ends of the door's hood moulding.

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See also refs. in Holland 1992.

