

Numismatic Society of Ireland (Northern Branch)

Field Trip to Limerick and Galway

21st to 23rd August 2015

Our small group left Belfast at about 8.30 on Friday 21st August. The journey was uneventful and after a couple of short stops we reached The University of Limerick at the planned time of 2.00.

Limerick

We were greeted by Ken Bergin, Head of Special Collections and Archives, before we even reached The Library door. He explained that he had spotted us from his office window.

We entered the library and came face to face with the full skeleton of a Giant Irish Deer on display near the entrance.



University of Limerick Library

We then had the opportunity to view a display of World War I medals and a death plaque along with letters and diary of Pat Armstrong detailing the events of the war in a series of correspondence with his family during his service. This is part of an online project called 'Long way to Tipperary' based on the letters and diary and updated on a weekly basis.

After a brief a history of the collection and an account of the main functions and objectives of the collection Ken took us to see 'The Conlon Collection' on display. The collection is relatively small but of high quality. It illustrates the full story of coinage in Ireland from Ring Money to the early 19th century and also contains some Irish tokens. Whilst some members studied the coins others discussed some of the important books held by the library. We were also shown a selection of countermarked coins connected to the troubles in Northern Ireland and a lively discussion ensued. We presented a copy of the Society's Occasional Papers Nos. 52-58, containing the paper written by John Rainey about Gunmoney struck in Limerick. We left the University and headed for St. Mary's Cathedral, unfortunately we arrived just as it was closing.

A brief look around confirmed that a longer visit the next morning was a must.



St. Mary's Cathedral, Limerick

The next morning we spent an hour or more in St. Mary's Cathedral, the oldest building still in daily use in Limerick. It is on the site of the O'Brien royal palace donated in the 11th century by Donal Mór O'Brien a descendent of Brian Boru. Donal is buried in the cathedral near the main altar. The cathedral is being renovated at the moment but none the less has an air of quiet contemplation. The original structure is still very apparent and the wonderful 'Great West Door' in the Hiberno-Romanesque style is said to have been the entrance to Donal Mór's palace. Above the door is a 14th century tower which houses the belfry containing a peel of eight 17th century bells, which we were fortunate enough to hear ring out on Sunday morning as we visited the castle. A further treasure is the set of 15th century 'Misericords' or 'Mercy Chairs' provided for the ease of the clergy during long services. They are the only examples of their kind in Ireland. They are beautifully carved with a series of beasts depicting good and evil sometimes in conflict.



Misericords in St. Mary's Cathedral

We then headed for 'King John's Castle' just a short walk from St. Mary's. Construction of the castle was begun in 1175 by Raymond le Gros one of Henry II's most powerful barons. During the struggle between the O'Briens and the Normans the castle changed hands several times being burnt down on one occasion. With the submission of the O'Briens to King John the construction of the present castle got underway in 1212 with the grant of a large sum of money. It was the centre of royal power and administration in Munster, remaining garrisoned by the British Army until May 1922.



View of King John's Castle from Thomond



Willem the Moneyer



Excavations in the castle courtyard

During its life time the castle has seen its share of conflict none more so than during the 17th century when the city endured three sieges.

Our visit began with an excellent audio-visual exhibition showing the history of the castle from when the Viking town was founded and subsequently built over by the Normans. We were taken through its use as the centre of trade and administration including its use as a Medieval mint in the 12th and 15th centuries. This included a description by way of a hologram display of Willem the Moneyer on how coins were minted in 12th century.

After progressing through various sections detailing the background and history of the sieges of the city we went through a section of the archaeological dig where we could see first-hand some of the siege mines below the walls.

We then emerged into the courtyard where there were more archaeological digs open to view, this time showing the layout of the earliest remains of the Viking settlement.

It was at this stage that we realised we had become too engrossed in the displays and that we only had 20 minutes to get to The Hunt Museum, at least a 15 minute walk away, in time for a tour which had been arranged for 2.00. After gathering the members together we headed off knowing that a return visit to the castle would have to be made the next day.



The Hunt Museum



O'Dea Mitre



The Bronze Shield

The Hunt Museum houses a collection formed by John Hunt and his wife Gertrude during the 1930's to 1950's. The collection comprises of a diverse range of works of art from Neolithic times to the 20th Century, selected for their quality and design. We had arranged to join a free tour entitled 'The History of Ireland in 10 Objects', however when we arrived we discovered, to our delight, that we had been allocated our own personal guide. We were told that the tour would take approximately one hour but there was no need to hurry, in the event we spent almost two hours. The theme was a focus on 10

objects of special significance to or connection with Ireland. The objects were a Neolithic axe, a Bronze Age shield, the 'Antrim Cross' 850 AD, a Medieval drinking horn, the O'Dea Mitre and Crozier 15th century, a series of Penal Crosses 16th – 18th century, Ardagh Chalice and 16th century Mether, 'Nights Candles are Burnt Out' a painting by Sean Keating, a display of fashion designs by Sybil Connolly and finally The Customs House itself, home of the collection, a Palladian style building designed by Davis Ducart in 1769. Along the way we were side-tracked by a host of other items on display including a Dekadrachma of Syracuse mounted in a medieval frame with an inscription indicating that it was thought to be one of the 30 pieces of silver given to Judas, though this is most unlikely.



Dekadrachma of Syracuse

This is a stunning eclectic collection housed in a fine setting and well worth the visit. Our tour was made all the more enjoyable by the knowledge and enthusiasm of our guide Mike.

On the way back to the hotel we decided to cross the river Shannon to the Thomond side and admire the view of the castle and old town. We also took the opportunity to have a look at 'The Treaty Stone' on which the treaty ending the Williamite War was signed. It has a rather fine brass frieze depicting the events leading up to the signing of 'The Treaty of Limerick' in 1692. This was followed by a quick stop at Bunratty Castle, now a theme park and banqueting venue.



The Treaty Stone and some scenes from the frieze

The day was rounded off with a drink in The Lock Bar, by the canal, followed by an excellent meal in the Azur restaurant nearby.

On Sunday morning we returned to King John's Castle and explored the various displays in and around the courtyard and tower rooms. One of which received our special attention as it was furnished as a mint. It had the tools of the trade on display as well as a hologram of Willem the moneyer explaining their use and his role in the production of the coins. In the corner was a press in which we were able to mint our own souvenirs from 5 cent pieces. From there we took walk along the battlements and in

to various rooms where episodes during the 17th century sieges were dramatized and explained via holographic presentations. We then headed for Galway.



Willem the Moneyer, his mint and some tools of his trade



A coloured version of the Pacata Hibernia map of Limerick (c. 1600).

Galway

The journey took about an hour and a half. The city was bustling with visitors and we were fortunate to find parking spaces close to the Corrib River and near the old area of the city. It was lunch time and luckily we found a restaurant with a quiet table and reasonable menu. After a rather good meal we decided to have an impromptu meeting.

David Collins read us a short paper about the coinage of King John and Edward IV struck at Limerick and Edward IV struck in Galway. The coinage of Limerick issued for John comprised of 'moon faced' halfpennies of John as Lord of Ireland struck by *Siward*; also pennies and halfpennies of the Rex coinage minted by *Willem* and *Wace*. The coinage of Edward IV included groats, halfgroats and pennies of the Cross and Pellets issues, both Heavy and Light. Though some of these coins are very rare and the most of them are scarce, they can be found. The coins of Galway on the other hand are extremely rare and only known by one or two specimens of Edward IV Heavy Cross and Pellets issue groats, halfgroats and pennies. The only known penny of Galway belonged to a founder member of our society, Dr. Agnew, but this was stolen in the 1970's and never recovered, the only halfgroat is pierced

and is in the British Museum. Thanks to David were expressed and a short discussion about Irish Medieval coinage ensued.



Blake's Tower



Impromptu meeting



Re-constructed walls

After lunch we went for a walk through the old city. The layout of the streets has changed little since the 16th century. We visited the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas which was founded in 1310 and extended in the 16th century. Christopher Columbus is said to have worshiped in the church in 1477 and perhaps inspired by tales of St. Brendan. After the siege of 1652 Cromwell's troops used it for stabling their horses and also damaging many of the features. The church is Church of Ireland and is also used by Romanian and Russian Orthodox congregations as a place of worship. Battle Standards of The Connaught Rangers founded in 1793 hang on the wall by the Sacrament Chapel.



Damage caused by Cromwell's troops



Orthodox Church side Chapel



Connaught Rangers Banner

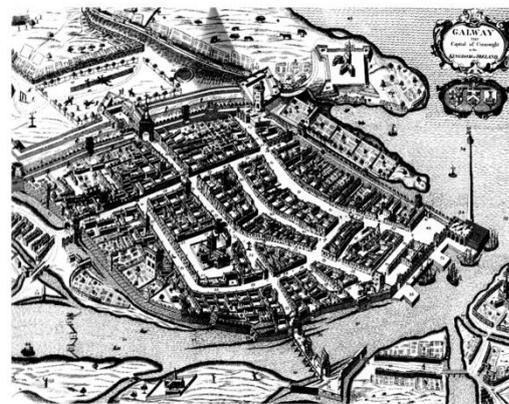
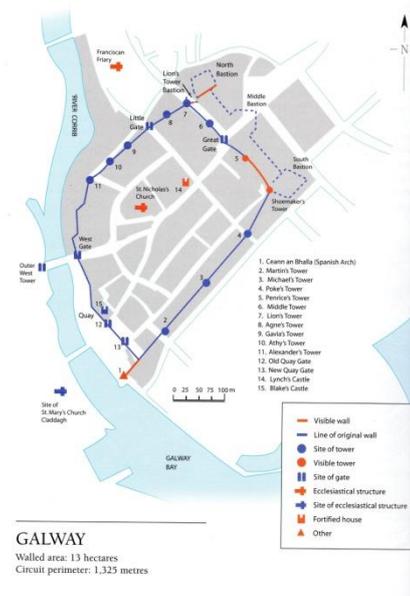
Leaving the church we went to look at a reconstructed section of the city wall and tower built inside inside a modern shopping centre. On the way there we passed the two 15th Century Tower Houses of the Lynch's and the Blake's, two of the 14 Tribes of Galway, families who controlled the trade and commerce of Galway from the middle-ages to the 17th century. We then headed towards the Spanish Arches and on the way had a look at 'The Hall of The Red Earl' the recently excavated site of the great hall of Richard de Burgh now open to view at the old Customs House in a specially built glass viewing area. We also made a diversion through the 'King's Head' public house which is said to have been owned by Charles I's executioner and bought with the proceeds for this service.



Plaque outside the King's Head pub



Spanish Arch



Map of Galway in 1651.

Our visit ended with a short visit to The Galway Museum situated close to the Spanish Arches. We left Galway at about 5.00 and reached Belfast about 10.00, being held up in heavy traffic caused by a tragic accident near Banbridge.

All in all it was a most enjoyable trip during which we were able to see that the old medieval areas of both these, now modern cities, are still very much as they were in the middle-ages in layout and still have quite a few features and buildings remaining. The fact that in King John's Castle the minting of coins was featured so prominently in the display and the activities carried on in the castle was very pleasing indeed. Our visits to the collections at The University of Limerick and The Hunt Museum were most enjoyable though perhaps deserving of a little more time to browse.

Coins of Limerick

Halfpennies were minted in Limerick by John as Lord of Ireland, and Pennies and Halfpennies as King of England.



King John Halfpenny of Limerick moneyer Wace

Edward IV had groats, halfgroats and pennies struck at Limerick.



Edward IV Penny of Limerick



Edward IV Groat of Limerick

Coins of Galway

The only coins struck in Galway were during the reign of Edward IV and are extremely rare. In fact the penny shown below is unique and was among the collection of Dr. Agnew stolen in the early 1970's and has never been recovered.



Edward IV Penny of Galway



Edward IV Groat of Galway



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Maps by Katrina Bouchier of Environmental Publications, originally published in *Irish Walled Towns*, John Givens, 2008, The Liffey Press, by permission.