



BAILE STAIRIÚIL

Historic Town



FIODH ÁRD *Fethard*

EOLAS TURASÓIREACHTA *Visitor Information*

Holy Trinity Church

This magnificent medieval parish church, formerly dedicated to St John the Baptist and now the Holy Trinity, dates to the first decade of the 13th century. Its large belfry is of rare architectural distinction and is datable, by the 'flowing' tracery of the west window, to the last quarter of the 15th century. Further works were executed in 1785 and 1815. As the vast majority of Irish medieval churches are now roofless ruins, Holy Trinity is a rare and precious exception.

The precinct of Holy Trinity Church is a nationally important and highly interesting medieval space. The churchyard is surrounded by six high-status medieval buildings – Court Castle, Edmond's Castle, two late medieval houses, and two almshouses. It is likely that most, if not all, of these buildings were ecclesiastical. There was formerly a third almshouse within the churchyard itself.

Origins of Holy Trinity Church

In 1208 William de Braose made a gift in perpetuity to the Hospital of St John the Baptist at Newgate, Dublin, of all the ecclesiastical benefices (tithes and other income) of the parish of Fethard, together with 'one messuage (possibly the parish church) in my town of Fethard, with twelve acres of land and a suitable place to consecrate a cemetery.' Newgate Hospital was endowed with substantial landholdings in County Tipperary and the valuable tithes, i.e. ten percent of the yearly produce, of some 20 parishes, mostly around Fethard.

The priests administering the church were the Fratres Cruciferi or 'Crutched Friars', an obscure order of Augustinians founded in Jerusalem to provide medical services to crusaders and pilgrims. Newgate Hospital was a 'double house', i.e. a male and female hospital run by canons (a monk who was also a priest) and canonesses (nuns). They provided the clergy in Fethard until 1305 when responsibility for pastoral care passed to the Archbishops of Cashel. It seems likely that Newgate also operated a hospital in Fethard.

The Dissolution of the Monasteries

Newgate formally surrendered its landholdings and tithes to the Crown in February 1539. Thomas Everard, the last prior, returned to Fethard as vicar with a pension of £15 per annum. Within the church is a fragment of a coat-of-arms of Henry VIII likely to date from c.1539-41 following the Archbishop of Cashel's (Edmund Butler) public declaration of acceptance (in Clonmel) of Henry's claimed supremacy of the church in Ireland. However, Mass is known to have been offered here as late as 1577.



The impressive west tower of Holy Trinity Church

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MEDIEVAL CHURCH *Medieval Church*

Fethard's late medieval statues now housed at the National Museum of Ireland



John the Baptist



Christ on Calvary



God the Father

Very few wooden religious statues remain in Ireland from the medieval period. Fethard is exceptional in having no less than three. They had been hidden to prevent their destruction at the hands of iconoclasts during the Reformation. The statues are representations of God the Father, Christ on Calvary and perhaps most appropriately (for Fethard), St John the Baptist.

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Remnant (left) and reproduction (right) of the coat of arms of Henry VIII showing 'per pale' the green and white livery of the Tudor family.



Hackett memorial



Robert Jolly memorial

Among the many interesting stone features of the church and its precinct are the ruined chancel, the two-storey sacristy and south chapel, piscinae, medieval grave-slabs, the Hackett tomb and the Jolly family monument.

