

RATHKEALE:

A market and post-town, and a parish, in the barony of Lower Connello, 14 miles (S.W. by W.) from Limerick, and 93 $\frac{3}{4}$ (W.) from Dublin; containing 8800 inhabitants, of which number, 4972 are in the town. It was a place of importance from a very early period, being the site of a priory of Augustinian canons of the order of Aroasia, founded and endowed with 12 marks annually by Gilbert Harvey, in 1289, and further endowed by Eleanor Purcell, a descendent of Harvey, who also caused it to be dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The town and neighbouring district formed part of the possessions of the Earls of Desmond, who had three strong castles in the town, one of which was intended to guard the passage of the Deel. After the battle of Monaster-Neneagh, fought in 1579 between Sir Nicholas Malby and Sir John Desmond, the latter fled this place, whither he was pursued and forced to retreat to Askeaton, where he was again defeated by Sir George Carew. On the landing of the Spaniards at Smerwick, in 1580, the queen's forces, commanded by the Lord-Deputy Grey, the Earl of Ormonde, and others, assembled here; and on the Lord-Deputy leaving the place, Captain (afterwards Sir Walter) Raleigh remained behind in ambush and surprised a number of the Irish who had collected to plunder the deserted camp, for which gallant service the corporation presented him with the freedom of the town, and he in return repaired the castles of Rathkeale and Matrix. In 1654, the town was fixed on for the place of election for the member to represent the counties of Limerick, Clare, and Kerry in Cromwell's parliament, into which he proposed to introduce 100 members for Ireland: but though the corporation is frequently noticed in history, nothing is known of its origin, charter, or constitution, further than that it was disfranchised by Cromwell, on the ground that the town had refused his army a sufficient supply of provisions, and its privileges were never after restored.

The town is situated on the mail road from Limerick to Tralee, on both sides of the River Deel; in population it is second only to Limerick in the county; it consists principally of a single street, a mile in length, with smaller streets and lanes branching from it. The river passes through the middle of the main street, and is crossed by a bridge now in a dilapidated and dangerous state. There are several large and handsome houses, most of which are uninhabited, and a few good shops; but the town in general presents a poor and mean appearance: a number of Palatines settled in the town and neighbourhood, whose neat cottages and farmsteads form a striking contrast to most of the adjacent dwellings. The market, which is large and well supplied, is held on Thursday; the fairs are on 7 February, 4 April, 1 and 19 June, 5 August, 18 September, and 18 November; those on 19 June and 19 September, which are chiefly for horses, are very much frequented; those of April and September, are for horned cattle, great numbers being sold; the remaining fairs are chiefly for sheep and pigs; all the transactions in the market and fairs are carried on in the open street. The town is a chief constabulary police station; the quarter sessions for the district are held in it in January, March, June and October; and petty sessions every Thursday. The court-house is a large and convenient old building, but much out of repair. The bridewell is one of the largest in the county, containing three day-rooms, three airing-yards, and eight cells: it is under good regulations. The fever hospital, built in 1830 near the town, at an expense of £400, has accommodation for 25 intern patients; and there is a dispensary.

The parish comprises 10, 705 statute acres, as apportioned under the tithe act, and valued at £11, 868 per annum. The surface is undulating: the soil is some parts light, in others a stiff clay. About five out of eight parts of the land are under tillage; two in meadow, demesnes and plantations; and one is rough pasture and marsh; besides which there are about 120 acres of common, and 100 of exhausted bog. The system of agriculture is improving; the principal crops are wheat, potatoes, oats, and barley, with some flax and clover. The population is almost wholly agricultural, the only manufacture being that of linen on a small scale for domestic use. The flour-mill at Castle Matras has been fitted up by the proprietor, J. Southwell Brown, Esq., in the most complete manner and with the most improved machinery, which is propelled by the current of the River Deel: the mill can grind 20,000 barrels of wheat annually, and gives employment to 100 persons. A lead mine at Curraghnadaly, a mile from Rathkeale, is about to be worked: there are indications of the same metal at Mount Brown, three miles distant. The surrounding country is highly interesting, presenting a number of rich and varied prospects embellished with numerous seats and flourishing woods and plantations: the most remarkable are Beechmount, the residence of T. Lloyd, Esq.; Ballywilliam, of T. M. Maunsell, Esq.; Mount Brown, of J. S. Brown, Esq.; the glebe-house, of the Rev. C. Warburton, chancellor of the diocese, Knocknakilla, of the family of the late T. Studdart, Esq.; Rathkeale Abbey, the property of the representatives of the late George Lake, Esq., and now the residence of J. Hewson, Esq.; Wilton House, of W. K. Brown, Esq.; Deansfort, of Mrs. Brown; Mount Southwell, of F. Brown, Esq.; Enniscoush, of J. Hewson, Esq.; Stoneville, of H. Massey, Esq.; the Glebe Castle, of the Rev. C. T. Coghlan, the incumbent of the adjoining parish of Kinscannel, the origin of the singular name of which has not been ascertained; and Castle Matras, or Matrix, also of J. Southwell Brown, Esq. This castle, which stands about a mile from the town, was erected in the reign of Elizabeth, and is a square castellated building, 90 feet high; it was besieged by Cromwell, but the only traces of injury it retains are the marks of a few cannon shot. It stands on a prominent situation on the banks of the Deel, forming a picturesque object in the landscape, and commanding extensive views of the surrounding country, including the Shannon, and the Clare and Tipperary mountains; it has lately been put into a state of complete repair, in doing which due attention was paid to preserve its original character by its proprietor, who proposes to make it his permanent residence. All these are within the parish; not far distant from the town are Altavilla, the residence of T. G. Bateman, Esq.; Riddlestown, of Gerald Blennerhasset, Esq.; Clonard, of J. F. Massey, Esq.; Elm Hill, of I. Studdert, Esq.; Glenville, of John Massey, Esq.; Cahermoyle of W. Smith O'Brien, Esq.; and Nantinan House, of T. H. Royse, Esq.

The living is a rectory, in the diocese of Limerick, united from time immemorial to the rectories and vicarages of Kilsannel, Clounagh, and Clounshire, and to the rectory of Dundonnell, together constituting the union of Rathkeale and the corps of the chancellorship of the cathedral of Limerick, in the patronage of the bishop. The tithes amount to £656.6.2., and of the benefice to £1247.13. The glebe-house was erected in 1819, by aid of a gift of £100 and a loan of £1500 from the late Board of First Fruits: the glebe comprises 10 acres, in two portions, one near the church, on which the Glebe Castle stands; the other a mile distant, on which the glebe-house is built. The church is a very handsome edifice, in the early English style, with a lofty square tower, embattled and crowned with crocketed pinnacles: it was erected in 1831, near the site of the former church, and is built of black marble raised from a quarry on the river's bank near the town: it stands on a gentle eminence west of the river, close to the old site of Castel-Southwell. In the R.C. divisions the parish is the head of a union or district, comprising also part of Kilsannel parish, and the whole

of the ancient parishes of Rathnasaire and Kilcoleman. The chapel, an ancient and plain building, with a new front, is in the town; in which there are also places of worship for Wesleyan Methodists and Independents. There are two free schools under the London Hibernian Society, and a school supported by Colonel White: in these schools are about 140 boys and 100 girls: there are also nine private schools, in which are about 200 boys and 70 girls. At the upper end of Main Street are the ruins of the ancient priory, already noticed; the tower and western gable are complete, and the side walls nearly so; but the building was small and its architectural details are by no means interesting. Two miles to the north of the town are the fine ruins of Liosnacaille Castle, built by the Mac Sheehys, who were introduced into this part of the country by the seventh Earl of Desmond in 1420; and two miles to the south is Ballyallinan Castle, on the eastern bank of the Deel, built by the O'Hallinans; the latter was taken in 1600 from Rory Mac Sheehy, by Dermot O'Connor, in execution of a plan for delivering the Sagan Earl of Desmond to the English, but he was shortly after besieged in it, and compelled by his own followers to surrender.