

ASKEATON:

A market and post-town, and a parish (formerly a parliamentary borough), in the barony of Lower Connello East, 16 miles (W.S.W.) from Limerick, and 113 miles (S.W. by W.) from Dublin; containing 2799 inhabitants, of which number, 1515 are in the town. This place is indebted for its foundation and early importance to the Fitzgeralds, who had a magnificent castle here, and of whom James, seventh Earl of Desmond, founded a monastery in 1420, for Conventual Franciscans, which was reformed, in 1490, by the Observantine friars, and ranked among the finest ecclesiastical structures in Ireland. In 1558, James Fitzgerald, fifteenth Earl of Desmond, and High Treasurer of Ireland, died here and was buried in the monastery. He was succeeded by his son Garret, called by way of distinction the Great Earl, who forfeited his life and his large estates by his participation in the insurrection during the reign of Elizabeth. In 1564 a provincial chapter of the Franciscan order was held in the monastery; but in the hostilities which broke out soon after, the monks were expelled and some of them put to death by the English forces. The Earl of Desmond, who, in 1573, had been in the custody of the mayor of Dublin, made his escape to the castle of this place, which, in 1579, he garrisoned against the Queen's forces under Sir Nicholas Malby. In April of the following year it was attacked by Sir George Carew; but the garrison retired during the night, leaving a train of gunpowder which blew up part of the fortress, and the English took possession of the remainder of the castle, which was the last that held out for this powerful earl. In 1642, Lord Broghill sent 200 men to defend the town, which was then walled, and to prevent the inhabitants from revolting to the insurgents; it was for some time bravely defended by this force, but was at length compelled to surrender. In 1648 the Confederate Catholics took possession of the abbey, and commenced repairing and restoring it.

The town is pleasantly situated on the road from Limerick to Tarbert, and on the banks of the River Deel, which discharges itself into the Shannon about two miles below, and is here crossed by an ancient bridge of five arches connecting the opposite portions of the town: it contains about 260 houses, of very indifferent appearance. The Deel runs through the demesne of Inchirourk-More, and has a waterfall, or salmon leap, the scenery of which is wild and romantic; there is a beautiful view of it from the town. The fishery belongs to Mr. Hunt, and was formerly of considerable value, but it has been much injured by the erection of the Scotch weirs on the Shannon, which the proprietors are taking steps to remove. The trade consists principally in grain and flour, which have been exported direct to the foreign markets. There are two large flour-mills; one near the castle, the property of Mr. Hewson, is very extensive. The town is advantageously situated for trade, from its vicinity to the Shannon, and having a good river up which the tide flows, capable of admitting vessels of 60 tons' burden, and which might be deepened at a trifling expense, so as to admit vessels drawing 15 feet of water to the bridge: the quays are spacious. In the spring, considerable quantities of sea-weed and sand are landed for manure. The market day is Tuesday, and a market-house is about to be erected on ground given by R. Hunt, Esq. Fairs are held on 30 July and 9 October, for horses, cattle and sheep. Here is a station of the constabulary police. The borough was incorporated by charter of the 11th. of James 1 (1613), under the style of ' the Sovereign, Free Burgesses, and Community of the Borough of Askeaton'; and the corporation was made to consist of a sovereign and 12 free burgesses, who,

amongst other privileges, were empowered to have a court of record, to be held every Monday, for the trial of all actions personal to the extent of five marks. It returned two members to the Irish Parliament until the Union, when it was deprived of the franchise; and of the £15, 000 awarded in compensation for the loss of that privilege, £ 6, 850 was paid to Henry Thomas, Earl of Carrick, £ 6, 850 to the trustees of the will of Hugh, Lord Massey, £1, 100 to Sir Vere Hunt, Baronet, and £200 to Sir Joseph Hoare, Baronet. The corporation has since become extinct. A court of petty sessions is held before the county magistrates every alternate Tuesday. A manorial court, with jurisdiction to the amount of £10 late currency, was formerly held every month before the seneschal, who was appointed by Sir Matthew Blakiston, Baronet, lord of the manor; but it has been discontinued in consequence of the establishment of the petty sessions, and no seneschal has been appointed since the death of the last, in 1834.

The parish comprises 6138 statute acres, as apportioned under the tithe act. The surface is very undulating, and numerous rocky knolls rise considerably above the ordinary level. The lands are arable and pasture; the soil is everywhere light; but the system of agriculture, though advancing, is still capable of further improvement. Limestone of good quality is obtained in great abundance; and copper ore has been discovered in several places, but no attempt has been hitherto made to work it. The scenery is pleasantly diversified and enlivened with numerous gentlemen's seats, of which the principal are Inchirourk- More, the residence of R. Hunt, Esq.; Shannon View, of J. Browne, Esq.; Mantle Hill, of J. Hunt, Esq.; Castle Hewson, of W. Hewson, Esq.; and the Abbey, of the Rev. M. Fitzgerald, P.P. The living is a vicarage, in the diocese of Limerick, with the rectory of Lismakeery and the vicarage of Iverus united, forming the union of Askeaton, in the patronage of Sir Matthew Blakiston, Baronet; the rectory is impropriate in R. Hunt, Esq.

The tithes amount to £450, of which £300 is payable to the impropriator, and £150 to the vicar; and the tithes of the benefices amount to 410. The church, situated in the town, is in a very dilapidated condition, and has been condemned by the ecclesiastical provincial architect. The glebe-house, a large and handsome residence, was built in 1827: the glebe comprises 17 $\frac{1}{4}$ acres. In the R. C. divisions the parish is the head of a union or district, comprising the parishes of Askeaton, Iverus, Lismakeery, and Tomdeely; there are two chapels, one in the town, and one at Ballystean, both thatched buildings. Adjoining the church is a parochial school for boys and girls; four public schools afford instruction to about 190 children; and there are three pay schools, in which are about 150 boys and 50 girls. There is also a dispensary. The present parochial church is that of the commandery of Knights Templars, founded in 1298; on the south transept, now in ruins, and separated from the church by two lofty arches which have been rudely closed up; and near the east end are the remains of an ancient tower, square at the base and octangular above. This tower and also the church and transept are precisely in the state in which they are described in the 'Pacata Hibernica', published more than 200 years since. To the west of the church are the remains of the once stately castle, boldly situated on a rock of limestone in the River Deal; and near it are those of the banqueting-house, a very spacious and elegant building, and, with the exception of the roof, still in a very perfect state; the arched vaults beneath are very extensive, and the windows of the great hall are lofty and of beautiful design. On the eastern bank of the river, and at a short distance to the north, are the venerable ruins of the Franciscan abbey: it is built entirely of the dark grey marble which is found here in great abundance; the cloisters are nearly entire, and of beautiful character; on each side of the enclosed quadrangle are twelve lofty pointed arches supported by cylindrical columns with

richly moulded capitals; and in the centre of the square is an ancient thorn of stately growth. The church, with the exception of the roof, is partly standing; the eastern gable, with its lofty window, has some beautiful details in the later English style; the other portions are much decayed, and large masses of the walls lie scattered around, as if detached by the force of gunpowder; these ruins are close to the bank of the river, and are almost washed by every tide. Two miles north of the town are the ruins of Court Browne castle, seated on an eminence overlooking the Shannon. In 1834 two very splendid fibulae of pure gold were found near the town; and, in the following year, several ancient gold coins were discovered in sinking the foundation of a wall on the west side of the river. Silver chalices, crosiers, and a great number of coins have been found near the abbey and the castle.