

## Welcome to Kilkenny Castle

**KILKENNY CASTLE** stands dramatically on a strategic height that commands a crossing on the River Nore and dominates the High Town of Kilkenny City. Over the eight centuries of its existence, many additions and iterations have been made to the fabric of the building, making Kilkenny Castle today a complex structure of various architectural styles. The original Anglo-Norman stone castle was built for William Marshal, 4th Earl of Pembroke (c.1146-1219) during the first decade of the thirteenth century. Kilkenny Castle later became the principal Irish residence of the powerful Butler family for almost 600 years. The Butler ownership began when James c.1360-1405), 3rd Earl of Ormond, purchased the castle in c.1391, and lasted until 1967 when Arthur, 6th Marquess of Ormonde (1893-1971) presented it to the people of Kilkenny in return for a token payment of £50. The buildings have been in the care of the Office of Public Works since 1969, and many important programmes of archaeological excavation, conservation and restoration have been carried out here.

### Tour of the Castle

This leaflet follows the tour, room by room, providing details about the architecture, decoration, furnishings and paintings of the castle. It also covers intriguing medieval spaces and features beneath the ground floor of the present building.

### The Castle Gateway

Today you entered through the principal entrance to Kilkenny Castle, the impressive Classical gateway situated on the Parade. To right of the archway are remains of the recently excavated dry ditch or moat, which was filled in during the seventeenth century to enable the construction of this gateway in the curtain wall. Also of note are the heavy sloping batter of the walls, the garderobe chute and the small thirteenth-century Postern Gate with stone steps leading into the moat. Two circular towers stand on either end of the wall. The massive Parade Tower, the largest of the three remaining towers, retains much of its original proportions and fabric, although the windows in these towers are later insertions. The massive pedimented gateway based on the classical triumphal arch dates from the end of the seventeenth century. It was largely

completed before 1710 and while the finely carved Corinthian capitals and a keystone executed in the lighter coloured stone are mostly original, the decorative festoons were added during the nineteenth century. Tall wooden doors guard the entranceway and the colourful coat of arms is that of the Butler/Ormonde family. When the castle was used as a residence, a porter or gatekeeper was employed to be on duty at all times and would probably have lived in small rooms within the gateway. The gateway range has been recently refurbished as part of the Parade Tower Conference Centre.

### The Courtyard

The principal residential block of the castle was largely rebuilt in the 1830s, and the interiors were reconstructed during the most recent restoration programme. A mainly nineteenth-century range directly opposite the entrance gateway houses the Picture Gallery, its position marked by four handsome oriel windows with stone tracery and diamond-paned glass. This range was built on the foundations of a building constructed for the second Duke of Ormonde. Around the courtyard, drainpipes with elaborate lead rainwater heads are inscribed with the date 1682 and decorated with the Ormond crest. Some of these are replicas after the original.

During a prolonged visit to Ireland in 1394-1395, King Richard II of England spent the month of April 1395 in the Earl of Ormond's great castle at Kilkenny. The reconstruction drawing attempts to show what the castle might have looked like during his visit, when it was at the height of its medieval development and before the many post-medieval changes.

### The Entrance Corridor

Admission to the castle is through the central doorway of the residential block. The spacious entrance corridor constructed during the nineteenth-century rebuilding runs the full length of the block. Initially the central section formed a porte-cochere, a projecting porch for carriages, which was later extended to encompass the largely glazed corridor that adds a Gothicised dimension to the interior and allows for easier circulation on this level.

## **The Ground Plan**

The ground plan shows the current plan of the castle. The residential block is situated between the north and west towers with the River Wing to the east and the Parade Wing to the west. The modern Conference Centre is in the South Tower. Those areas with the thickest walls are the medieval foundations of the castle.

## **The Terrace Corridor**

A short flight of steps joins a corridor situated under the garden terrace. On the left hand, a passageway that has been cut through the north curtain wall of the castle leads into a small cellar. The curved shape of the adjoining tower may be seen where it projects into the room. Excavations have revealed the footings (foundation) of a sixteenth-century building that was probably built for Thomas, 10th Earl of Ormond, before 1580. Out in the corridor, near the entrance to the cellar, a glass panel inserted in the floor covers access to another postern gate that opened into the dry moat, which ran around three sides of the castle. Proceeding along the corridor, a flight of steps at the opposite end leads back to the Entrance Corridor.

## **The Undercroft of the West Tower**

The Terrace Corridor leads to the undercroft of the West Tower, in a well-preserved circular chamber the massive girth of the thirteenth-century walls is evident. There are plunging arrow loops within the wall embrasures and an example of wicker centering on the ceiling that was used to support the vault during building process. From here a short flight of stone steps leads up to the entrance of the Withdrawing Room.

## **The Withdrawing Room**

This elegant room has been recreated to its original 1830s proportions. It was designated as a withdrawing room during the 1850s. Here the ladies withdrew from the dining room leaving the men to enjoy their port and cigars. Remnants of hand painted Chinese wallpaper may be seen on the walls; the monochrome infill has been carefully carried out at the studio of David Skinner. The elegant fireplace is a nineteenth century reproduction of an earlier French design.

## **The Dining Room**

This room was a dining room in the 1860s. On the walls is a handsome hand blocked wallpaper. The cast iron fireback probably depicts Bacchus in his chariot being drawn by two tigers or leopards, surrounded by floral and Classical motifs.

## **Entrance Hall**

An entrance hall has been situated here since the seventeenth-century rebuilding of the castle, although the modern hall occupies a larger area than the earlier one. The doorway cut through the massive curtain wall was twice remodelled in the nineteenth century and leads out onto a stone terrace above the Rose Garden. Features in the room include a handsome black and white stone floor that was inserted during the nineteenth-century rebuilding. Two fine marble fireplaces with heavy bolection moulding, usually a seventeenth-century feature, are situated at either end of the hall. The marble table is supported on an eighteenth century base. The portraits in this room are from the family collection, which were purchased by the Irish government from the family estate in 1995.

## **The Ground Floor**

Throughout the lifetime of the castle the names and functions of rooms were altered as fashions changed. For instance, during the seventeenth century the ducal apartments were situated in this area of the ground floor.

## **The Grand Staircase**

The impressive nineteenth-century mahogany staircase was designed and made by the local firm of R. Furniss and Son, the Parade, Kilkenny. It leads up to the doorway of the Tapestry Room in the North Tower; where it then turns to give access to the first floor.

## **The Tapestry Room**

This large room is situated in the North Tower; here it is also possible to appreciate the massive thickness of the original walls. The shape of this room has been altered by being opened out, although the circular section occupies the same space as the seventeenth-century Great Chamber. During that period the room had embossed and gilded leather hangings on the walls, these were replaced in the eighteenth century by a set of tapestries that was part of a series of seven from

Brussels. They tell The Story of Publius Decius plus a Roman Consul and were attributed to the workshop of Jan Raes, after designs by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). These tapestries are currently stored off site for conservation purposes. The Gothic style hand blocked wallpaper is modern. Probably the nest portrait of James Butler, 12th Earl and 1st Duke of Ormond, may be seen hanging above the fireplace. This is an photograph portrait by Sir Peter Lely (1618-80), court painter to Charles II, and shows the duke wearing robes of the Order of the Garter holding the wand of Lord Steward in his right hand.

### **The First Floor**

The State Rooms of the sixteenth and seventeenth century Castle were situated on this floor. At that time there was a lavishly furnished drawing room hung with a set of fine tapestries, The Story of Diogenes. From this room double doors led into a state bedroom and, beyond, to the duchess' closet, which was situated in the West Tower. Within the damask hung closet here was an interesting collection of small cabinet pictures. Today the space s occupied by the Ante Room, Library and Drawing Room, as it was in the late nineteenth century.

### **Anteroom**

This small chamber and the room below were constructed in the area where in earlier stone staircase was situated.

### **The Library**

The decoration of this room is a recreation of the furnishing styles of the mid to late nineteenth century when major renovations of the castle interiors were carried out. Rich fabrics are used throughout to recreate opulent, period interiors where the walls are covered in specially woven French silk poplin, as revealed by a remnant found behind a skirting board, based on the original pattern made by the famous firm of Premeaux of Lyons. Garnet-red curtains of heavy quality silk damask in a pomegranate pattern made by the same firm are hung below original and matching reproduction pelmets, all gilded in gold leaf. An original glazed bookcase in mahogany stands in the corner, from this others have been carefully reproduced in the same fine wood. A large mirror over the mantelpiece has also been carefully restored and re-gilded. The Berber-style floor carpets

are based on patterns adapted from Izmir motifs and these were specially woven by the firm of Woodward Grosvenor who had produced the originals.

Some of the paintings in the room are from the Ormonde collection but a number of appropriate portraits were brought in recently to replace those that were sold from the castle during the 1935 sale.

### **The Drawing Room**

This room has been furnished in the same period style as the library. Some surviving paintings from the original Ormonde collection are also hanging here. On the west wall is The Five Eldest Children of Charles I, dating from the seventeenth century, by an unknown artist after the original by the Flemish painter, Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641). Among other paintings in this room are an interesting, if damaged, subject picture. An Allegory of Avarice, signed by the Flemish painter Jan de Herdt (fl. 1646-72) and several eighteenth-century Italianate landscapes. Over the fireplace are two nineteenth-century Scottish landscapes painted by a member of the Nasmyth family of Edinburgh.

### **The Staircase**

The staircase based on Moorish design, offers an exciting and innovative space. It was created by the architects Deane and Woodward to allow appropriate access to the Picture Gallery and also to provide another major staircase in the circulation of the awkwardly shaped building. It is a rising half-turn stairs around a square sky-lit well. Charles William Harrison (1835-1903), the stone carver, is credited with the carved naturalistic foliage and small animal details that decorate the stairs.

### **The Picture Gallery Wing**

The Picture Gallery Wing was built during the early nineteenth-century building programme carried out by the architect William Robertson.

It was constructed on earlier foundations. Robertson's Picture Gallery, in keeping with his work on the rest of the castle, was in Castellated Baronial style. Initially the gallery was built with a flat roof that had begun to cause problems shortly after its completion. The distinguished architectural firm of Deane and Woodward was called in during the 1860s to make changes to the overall design of the

Picture Gallery block, and other corrections to Robertson's work. These changes included the insertion of four oriels in the west wall and the blocking up of the eight existing windows, while another oriel was added to the east wall. A pitched roof was put in place, with central glazing. The hammer-beam roof structure is supported on carved stone corbels also by Harrison. It was decorated by John Hungerford Pollen (1820-1902), then Professor of Fine Arts at Newman College, Dublin, using a combination of motifs ranging from the quasi-medieval to the pre-Raphaelite, with interlace, gilded animal and bird heads on the cross beams. This decorative scheme was criticised by a contemporary, writing in *The Irish Builder*, as a roof probably intended to be Byzantine but is merely bizarre.

### **The Marble Fireplace**

The double fireplace made of Carrara marble, designed by J. Pollen, is also in a quasi-medieval style and was supplied by the firm of Ballyntyne, of Dorset Street, Dublin. Elegant foliage carving attributed to Charles Harrison covers the hood and a frieze beneath is decorated with the Butler/Ormonde arms and significant episodes from the family history. These depict: the purchase of Kilkenny castle by the earl of Ormond in 1391; the chief butler offering the first cup of wine to the newly crowned king; King Richard II who was godfather to the third earl's son and who visited Kilkenny castle in 1395; the coat of arms of the Butler/Ormond family; James, 1st Duke of Ormond, refusing to surrender his sword on entering the Irish House of Lords in 1634; A Lady from the Ormonde family dispensing food to the poor; and James, 1st Duke of Ormond returns in triumph to Dublin in 1662.

### **Paintings**

Some of the portraits here date from the seventeenth century while others are of a later date. In the nineteenth century, the picture collection at Kilkenny Castle consisted of almost 300 paintings; a mixture of ancestral and royal portraits, Dutch landscapes, Italian religious paintings and Italianate landscapes.

### **The Kitchen Corridor**

This corridor is down three short flights of stairs from the Picture Gallery and houses the

Butler Gallery of Contemporary Art It also leads to the Victorian kitchen which, with its old cooking range and rows of polished copper pans, is a good example of its type.

### **The Gardens**

In previous centuries the Castle was surrounded by parklands • enclosed by gardens with generous tree planting. This was gradually whittled away and changed over the centuries and, the castle was first handed over to the people of Kilkenny in the 1960s, only fifteen acres of land was attached. However a few years later the Marquess of Ormonde generously donated more land, which has provided a fitting setting for the castle and a splendid amenity

After the castle was taken over by the Office of Public Works, new entrances were created to give access to the park. The entrance near the Parade Tower has nineteenth-century cast iron gates that came originally from Saint Stephen's Green. The open parkland to the south of the castle has been replanted with emphasis on trees and shrubs that provide year round colour. Pathways have been restored and some have been extended

On the west side of the castle a formal garden with axial paths radiating from a central fountain retains much of the basic form that could have been there during the ducal period. The existing fountain is probably the base of an original seventeenth century water feature. Two lead statues stand on pedestals near the castle: one is of Hermes after the original in the Vatican Collection, and the other is of Diana the Huntress. All of the garden features, including the terracing, have been recently restored.

### **The Medieval Room**

Medieval Room, in the base of the Parade Tower, may be accessed when not in use. Features in the room include plunging arrow loops inserted in the massive walls that are indicative of the strongly defensive nature of the early castle. In the centre of the room is a stone pillar and re-used timbers dating from the later medieval period. During the nineteenth century remodelling of the castle the room was converted to use as a wine cellar.