

Malahide Castle Architecture

When the first lord Richard Talbot came to Malahide in 1170, his family were also Lords of Shrewsbury in England. This was in the reign of Henry II. Talbot's lordship of Malahide was confirmed by the King's son, Prince John, who subsequently became King of England. Also confirmed on Richard was the Advowson for the Church of Malahide and when he died in 1193, he presented his brother, Walter Talbot with that benefice.

Where did the Talbots live when they first came to Malahide? Through the local historical society's research, it seems highly probable that they lived at Wheatfield, opposite the Community School. Here stands today the remains of a Motte and Bailey in an excellent state of preservation. It must be realized that in those very early days the Talbot estate extended to over 600 acres. The Motte and Bailey is a distinctive Norman trademark and, of course, the Talbots were originally Normans from France. This home would have been quite extensive containing stables, barns, workshops as well as a wooded home all protected by a stockaded ditch. There is no exact date as to when the Talbots moved to the site of the present day castle. The earliest portion of the present day castle is a keep-like tower of three storeys which dates to the fourteenth century.

Within this tower a circular staircase remains. We can assume that the first edifice to appear on the present site would have been around 1250.

We know that the Talbots founded the monastery of the Holy Trinity at Templeogue in 1259 and in 1262 Richard Talbot was Archbishop of Dublin.

By 1330, the family established themselves in about half the counties of Leinster, were Members of Parliament, County Sheriffs and were entrusted with the defense of many English garrison towns. So it is fair to assume that by 1350, Malahide Castle was a structure of some importance. The earliest reference available is at the top of a Patent granted by Edward IV to Sir Thomas Talbot in 1486 where a sketch of a castle exists.

A manuscript of the early sixteenth century lists the Castles and Garrisons of County Dublin and it includes Malahide and Belgard Castles.

There is also written evidence in existence today of repairs carried out between 1605 and 1609. The Down Survey of 1657 gives an important reference to the Castle and its 605 acres when it was owned by "John Talbot of Malahide, Irish Papist". Accompanied by a sketch, it is described as "a good stone house and orchards and gardens and many ash trees with other houses in good repair".

It is difficult to visualize today that the castle was once surrounded by a fortified wall with front and back gates. There are recorded references to the gate of the wall being forced by Wicklow raiders in 1534. This outer

protective wall had a ditch, the very evident depression in the field south of the front door marks the site of this old wall and ditch. Over the years the wall was allowed to run into disrepair and was used as a quarry whenever stones were required. The stones were used for the walls of the garden, stables and farm buildings. A story goes that some of the Dublin Garrison assisted Myles Corbet's relations in an attempt to recapture Malahide Castle and besieged the wall with cannon. A cannonball was found imbedded in the wall in 1798 which lends credence to this story. The old tower in the garden would have formed part of the wall fortifications and has been used as a detached post to cover some farm buildings. Twenty years ago, it was used as an apple loft. The remains of the original ditch can still be seen running parallel to the railway.

The Castle was at one time called the "Court" and was originally square.

By 1640, Malahide Castle was gaining in prominence. It was attacked by Cromwell in 1641, after he had sacked Drogheda. When the Castle surrendered, it was immediately seized on by Corbet for his own residence, being as he observed, "the strongest Castle in the neighbourhood of Dublin". He lived in the Castle at a yearly rent of £50, until Charles II was restored to the Throne. Besides the outer wall, the Castle was also protected by a moat. This is clearly evident today if one looks to the left as the front door of the Castle is approached. The dried-up moat is perfectly obvious if one visits Malahide Gardens and views the Castle from the southwest extremity. Prior to the moat being filled in and planted with flowers and evergreens, the Castle must have presented a magnificent appearance with its drawbridge, portcullis and barbican. The present portcullis at the rear of the castle is only an imitation. When Sir John and Lady Catherine Talbot returned to Malahide at the Restoration, "the first act of this spirited lady was to order the demolition of the outworks and defences of the castle, alleging that her son and heir, Richard, that she was resolved Malahide should never again serve as a stronghold to invite the residence of an usurper". The usurpers, of course, were Cromwell and Corbet who took over the Castle when John Talbot was banished to Connaught during the Cromwellian Plantation. In the 1650's the Castle must have been in poor condition, as the original application for a grant of £50, made by Myles Corbet states: "It is an Irish Castle. I find it ruinous and must spend £500 on its repairs". Around 1700, Malahide Castle received a new lease of life and many structural changes took place. Two towers were added and many of the windows enlarged. The Great Hall was the first room to be renovated, and, needless to say, it required renovation as it dates back to 1475. It has been re-roofed and re-windowed, but its walls and supporting stone-vaulted undercroft are in their original form. The Hall measures 42' by 22' and is overlooked by a Minstrel's Gallery. In the years between 1765 and 1782, the west wing of the Castle was completely reconstructed after a fire, and the present Drawing Rooms were added. Prior to the fire, the two drawing rooms were divided into four rooms by tapestry hangings, a most unusual feature to have four rooms with no doors. At this time, also, alterations were made to the bedrooms and

several floors and ceilings were raised. Off the drawing rooms two circular turret rooms were added and the North wing of the Castle developed. There is an area of mystery about the Oak Room as there is no record of the insertion of the oak paneling. Originally, the inner portions of this room would have been the principle room of the ancient tower house. There is a tradition in the Castle which states that one of the Talbots was warned in a dream that he must build a votive chamber "garnished with ivory pillars". Ivory, however was hard to get and expensive, so he put in oak columns, painted white, saying, "The Blessed Virgin will never notice the difference". However, after some time, he was unable to bear the sight of these "candles", as he called them, and had them painted black. Today the Oak Room is one of the finest examples of a 16th century pannelled room, with the walls overlaid with richly carved oak, highlighted by a set of six very fine carved panels depicting incidents from Biblical stories. The Oak Room was enlarged to the South by Colonel R.W. Talbot in 1820, when he added on the Entrance Porch and the two small squared towers. Originally, there was no entrance on the south side, but there was a shell-lined grotto there. There used to be a statue of Edward IV over the original doorway but it seems to have disappeared during the 1820 renovations. The library and the rooms above and below were originally separate from the rest of the building. They are said to have been built by a "Mr. Talbot, who came over from Wales, meaning to leave his property to the family as his nearest heirs. But, in consequence of a quarrel which took place between the servants of the two families, he went back to Wales".

When the vaults on the ground floor were converted into the cellar by the 4th Baron, a doorway from the yard was closed and a horse's skull was found embedded in the floor, which looks as if horses had at one time been kept there.

The Castle was let for the Summer of 1825 to the Marquess of Wellesley, but that was the only time it was voluntarily let out.

So, one can see the huge changes brought in Malahide Castle, over the centuries. Today it is a square, castellated building with circular towers flanking the corners. The old moat has been drained, but like that of the Tower of London, not completely filled up. The declivities of the original wall and ditch now constitute steep banks of greenest verdure, planted, in places, with shrubs that love the shelter.

The lodges and gateways have been changed and improved over the years. Many trees had to be felled to give these buildings a finer aspect. The Dublin approach to Malahide, used by vehicles, passed in front of the Castle until the 5th Baron, wishing to avoid the expense of keeping it up as a carriageway, turned it into a walk. The public road was then changed to it's present route, west of the castle.

Facing the 1990's, the Castle serves as an oasis in the midst of urban development. In a sense, it is a time-machine to whisk locals and foreigners back into historic days of old. Luckily, it is the aim of Dublin Tourism to preserve one of Irelands most historically important castles and to keep it open to the public.