

Ireland's Heritage

Desmond Castle

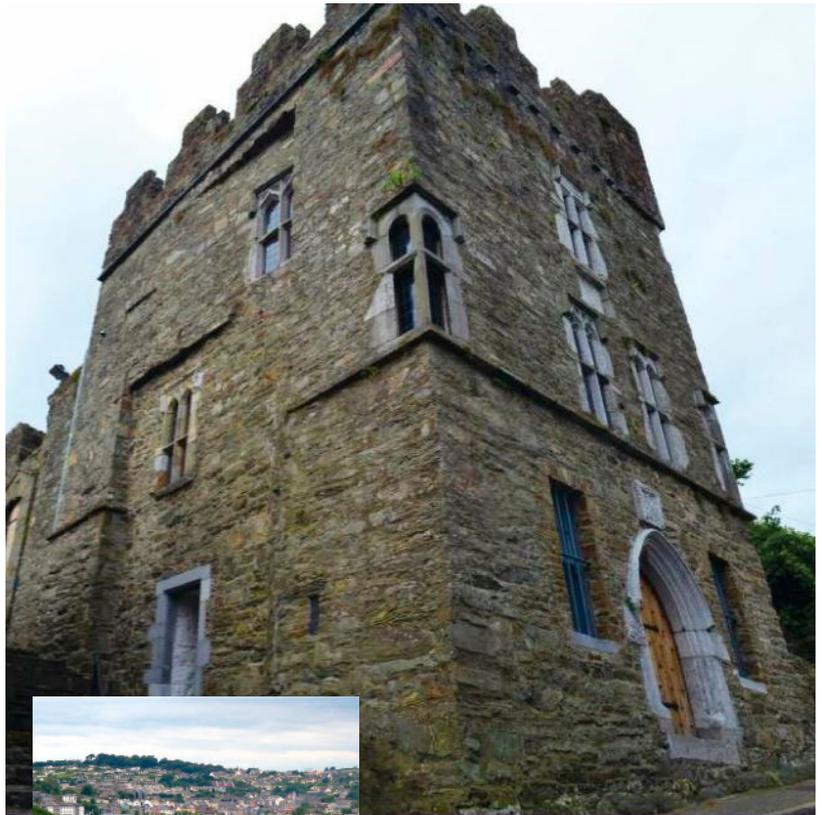
Desmond Castle in Kinsale, Co Cork, is one of around forty surviving 'urban tower houses' in Ireland. Urban tower houses are found in several medieval towns and were the homes of either wealthy merchants of the town or rural gentry investing in urban property. In some, the ground floors would have been shops or warehouses, with residential accommodation overhead.

The medieval town of Kinsale, in County Cork, was an important trading port since the 13th century. By the 15th century, it was under the control of the most powerful Anglo-Norman lords in Munster, the FitzGerald Earls of Desmond. The castle was built as a town residence by a branch of that family.

In 1600 and 1601, it was used as a magazine for storing weapons and gunpowder during the Spanish occupation of the town which lasted for 100 days prior to the Battle of Kinsale in 1601. Later, and for many years, it served as a prison down to the mid-nineteenth century.

The castle is located on rising ground overlooking the main part of the historic town, where its occupants could observe the marketplace—the centre of activity in this port town.

Desmond castle has been extensively renovated in recent years and is a very popular tourist attraction in Kinsale.



Above: Desmond Castle, Kinsale, Co. Cork, is an urban tower house.



Left: The medieval town of Kinsale.

Courtesy of Clme2 (CC BY-SA 3.0) <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kinsale#/media/File:Kinsale-harbour2.jpg>

Life in Medieval Ireland

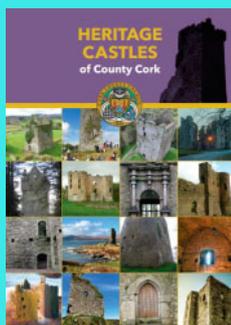
Castles were such a significant part of medieval society. An understanding of castles is crucial to a fuller understanding of life as lived in Medieval Ireland. They are not the full story of course, and far more medieval people lived outside of castles than in them. Nevertheless the castles, and the people who occupied them, dominated the lives of medieval people in much the same way Government dominates our lives today through parliament, courts, prisons and legislation governing almost every aspect of our lives. These functions of modern Government operated in medieval times though the castles.



Illustration by Rhoda Cronin

How a typical tower house would have looked c. 1500.

Text and images courtesy of "Heritage Castles of County Cork"



Heritage Castles of County Cork

On page 7 of this issue of Nature's Web, Conor Nelligan tells us about his work with the Heritage Unit of Cork County Council. One of the books produced by the unit is "Heritage Castles of County Cork", which looks at the Castles, Tower Houses and Fortified Houses of the County, many of which still stand proud today. The book tells the stories of the County's Castles and those of the family names that are connected with these structures. It also informs us to what life was like in the County during Medieval Times, both within and outside Castle walls. The book can be purchased in bookshops around the County or downloaded in PDF format from:

<https://www.corkcoco.ie/en/arts-heritage/publications-documents-links>