

Urban History Atlas

Athboy Town
1000 – 1911

Joe Mooney 2009

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Abbreviations

(Not shown in footnotes)

A.F.M.	<i>Annals of the four-masters</i>
Cal. Doc. Ire.	<i>Calendar of documents relating to Ireland</i>
Cal. Gormanstown Reg.	<i>Calendar of the Gormanstown register</i>
Cal. Pap. Letters	<i>Calendar of the papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland</i>
CS / Civil Survey	<i>The Civil Survey AD 1654 – 1656</i>
C. of I.	Church of Ireland, Irish Church, Established Church
H.C.	House of Commons of Britain and Ireland
Griffith's	<i>Valuation of tenements: County Meath (1854)</i>
Letters and Paper For. Dom. Henry VIII	<i>Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of Henry VIII</i>
MCI	<i>Commission of inquiry into the municipal corporations of Ireland</i>
MGWR	Midland and Great Western Railway
N.L.I.	National Library of Ireland
RIC	Royal Irish Constabulary

Athboy Town 1000 – 1911

Athboy is situated on the western edge of the Boyne catchment area on the Athboy / Trimblestown river. Indeed its siting is possibly determined by it being a fording point on this river, which is a major tributary of the Boyne. The area map of the Boyne and Liffey catchment area (Fig. 1) suggests that all major towns in Meath are associated with their local river system. Trim and Navan both retain medieval stone bridges.

O'Keefe and Simington quote the Statute Rolls of Henry VI c.1463 which states that 'divers customs to be levied on the towne of Trim, Naas, Navan, Athboy, Kells and Fore and in the franchises of said towns for the murage, pavage and repair of bridges of the said towns are

greatly strengthened', suggesting that there was a bridge in Athboy at that time¹

Athboy lies at the western end of a large expanse of glacial till with

small bands of alluvial and gley soils along the Athboy river. (Fig. 2) This type of well drained soil makes it very suitable for tillage and grazing. The town itself lies across the shallow valley of the Athboy river.

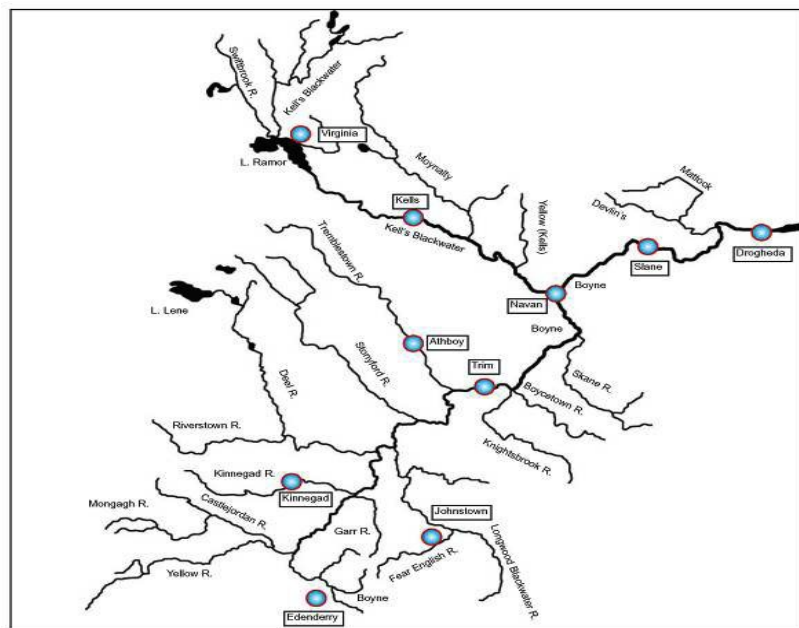


Figure 1 The Boyne catchment showing the main tributaries and important towns.

¹ P. O'Keefe and T. Simington, *Irish Stone Bridges, History and Heritage*, (Dublin, 1991) p.29.

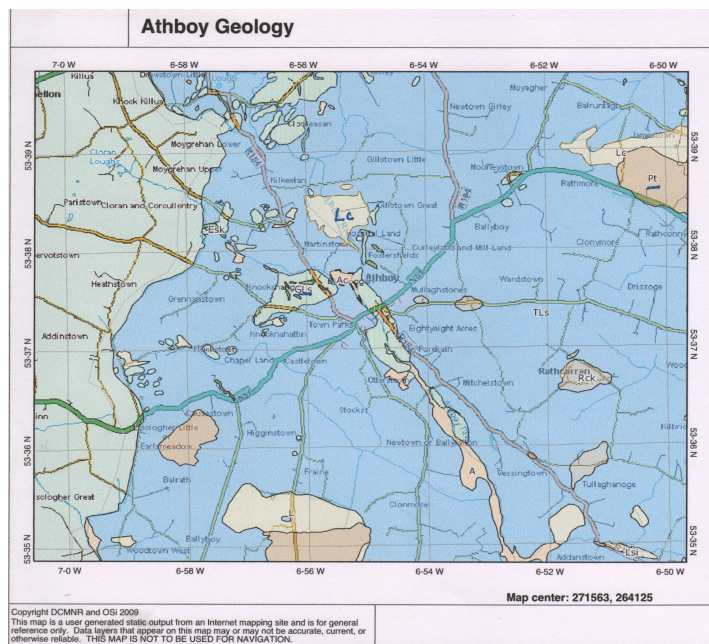


Figure 2 Athboy geology, showing bands of alluvial soil among large tracts of glacial till

south which makes an east-west river crossing at this point in north Leinster very important.

Therefore Athboy is an important crossing point in the Boyne catchment area, an important



Figure 3 Topographical map of Athboy area, with 10 m. contours highlighted.

focus for those travelling in the Northeast and is placed at the western edge of a large area of major agricultural production and suitable as an important market location. It is also close to the hill of Tlachta which is one of those prominent meeting places like

This shallow valley or alluvial plain remains fairly flat on the western side with a small rise of 30 metres to the north-east, forming the Hill of Ward or Tlachta (Fig. 3). The main street rises slightly towards the west along a small ridge of alluvial soil which may possibly have helped the town develop on this side due to better drainage. There is much bogland to the north east and

Tara and Slane mentioned in the Dinnsenchas. Again it is not an important monastic site but it does have an importance in that it is close to Kells and Fore and being on the route to the west is a suitable location on the route to Clonmacnoise. Colm O'Lochlann in his paper on the ancient roadways of Ireland mentions the following occurrences of the ford at Athboy as follows:

The Tripartite Life of St Patraic (c. 950)

Slane to Tara and westward to Uisnech via Trim, Athboy, Delvin, Moyashel, Mullingar and Dysart ²

Acallamh na Senórach (c.1050)

Dundalk to Uisnech via near Drogheda, Navan, Athboy, Mullingar.

The Táin (Rot na cCarpat: Road of the Chariots) (c. 1100)

Tara to Athlone via Tlachta, Athboy, Delvin, Rath Connell, Mullingar, Moate, Athlone.

The importance of the route west to Galway from Dublin via Athboy is also shown in the almanac: *Wedhouse, 1619* which gives this route as: Dublin, Trim, Athboy, Mullengare, Ballimore, Athlone, Ballinesloe, Kilconell, Athenry, Galloway.³ Finally this road from Dublin to Athboy via Trim was designated as a turnpike in 1733.⁴

Prior to the Norman invasion Athboy was associated with the nearby ill of Tlachta indeed it was known as *Áth Buidhe Tlachtgha* – The Yellow Ford of Tlachta in the Annals. The first reference is of 1022 which states:

The victory of *Áth-buidhe-Tlachtgha* was gained by Maelseachlainn over the foreigners of *Áth-cliath*, where many were slain.⁵

There is a further reference to Maelseachlainn in 1167 which states:

2 Colm O'Lochlann, 'Ancient Roadways' in John Ryan (ed.) *Féil-sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill: essays and studies presented to Professor Eoin MacNeill*, (Dublin, 1940) p. 465

3 I. Brecknock, *Wedhouse, 1619 an almanacke for the yeare of our Lord God, 1619, with a briefe description of Ireland ...*, (London, 1619) P.14 Retrieved from <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> 20/03/09.

4 David Broderick, *The First Toll Roads: Ireland's Turnpike Roads 1729 – 1858*, (Cork, 2002)

5 John O'Donovan (ed.) *The Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters [Annála Ríoghachta Éireann]*, (AFM) Vol. 2. (Dublin, 1848-51). M1022.1, retrieved from <http://CELT.ucc.ie> 20/03/09

A great meeting was convened by Ruaidhri Ua Conchobhair and the chiefs of Leath-Chuinn, both lay and ecclesiastic, and the chiefs of the foreigners at Áth-buidhe-Tlachtgha. To it came the successor of Patrick; Cadhla Ua Dubhthaigh, Archbishop of Connaught; Lorcan Ua Tuathail, Archbishop of Leinster; Tighearnan Ua Ruairc, lord of Breifne; Donnchadh Ua Cearbhaill, lord of Oirghialla; Mac Duinnsleibhe Ua hEochadha, King of Ulidia; Diarmaid Ua Maeleachlainn, King of Teamhair; Raghnaill, son of Raghnaill, lord of the foreigners.⁶

Within two years of this meeting those involved had different problems with a new set of foreigners. In Meath, despite a few setbacks, the Normans began a systematic occupation of the whole of East Meath in 1175 and Hugh de Lacy had established the baronies, handing the barony of Lune to William de Muset who established his *caput* at Athboy.⁷ The lands then passed into the Tuite family. This family was mentioned in the Gormanston register in c. 1235 where 'Nicola de Tuyt, sometimes wife of John de London' received a gift from the Hospital of St. John at Trim. This Nicola de Tuyt is mentioned as 'lady of Athboy' on the death of herself and her husband (now John Loundres) in 1284. It was through her son Vilmyne de Loundres (or William de London) that the barony passed to this family and later the Preston family (of Gormanston) over the next 150 years.⁸

Having established the manorial system and divided the area into these manageable estates it was important for the Normans to establish military control over the surrounding area. The Normans were prone to utilise the existing defences, or settlements and in the case of Athboy they possibly erected their first earth and timber castles on earlier earthworks. John Bradley mentions that the earliest reference to a Norman fortification at Athboy is of 1211 (although this was destroyed by Cormac Art O'Melaghlin in 1213) and suggests that this represented a motte close to Tlachtgha, overlooking the town of Athboy.⁹ There is a further reference in 1276 about arrears due to Nicholas Dunhevet 'due to him for the custody of the castle of Eboy (Athboy)'.¹⁰

6 AFM, M1167.10, retrieved from <http://CELT.ucc.ie> 20/03/09

7 John Bradley, 'The Medieval Towns of Co. Meath' in *Riocht na Midhe*, viii, no. 2, (1988-89), p. 34

8 James Mill and M. J. McEnery (eds), *Calendar of the Gormanston register : from the original in the possession of the right honourable the viscount of Gormanston* (Dublin, 1916), pp 4,151.

9 Bradley, 'The Medieval Towns of Co. Meath', p. 35

10 H.S. Sweetman (ed.), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland*, (5 vols, London, 1877), ii, p.47

Where these castles existed is not known. The obvious area within the parish boundaries would be Castletown which is on the south-western edge of the town and probably represents a later extension of defensive building towards the marches.

However apart from defensive requirements the Normans understood the value of the fertile land in the Athboy area and made efforts through the manorial system to exploit it. This may have required immigration and the high amount of Norman names in this area would suggest that this happened. One aspect of this immigration is the requirement to establish Athboy as a manorial centre and one incentive for this is to allow borough privileges to those now living in the town. This would have an advantage for the townspeople in that it gives them property rights and the freedom to regulate their own affairs. It also has advantages to the lord of the area in providing profit from tolls and customs, and requiring that some of the duties of service such as the provision of men-at-arms would be supplied by the townspeople. It also provides a location for assizes and parliaments.

Burgage status requires a charter and a town government headed by a provost or portrieve. The first mention of this institution refers to John Le Forester, provost of Athboy in 1329, which suggest the town government was in place prior to that time.¹¹ There is a further reference to an issue of two burgages in 1337.¹² Most of the early mentions of the town charter refer to the Latin calendar of the *Close and Patent Rolls of the Irish Chancery*, published by the Irish Record Commission (ed. Edward Tresham) in 1828. This calendar refers to a bakehouse in 1402, trading in skins and furs, a charter of Henry IV of 1407 given to the provost and commonalty which includes a right to establish a merchant guild. There is also mention of a corporation and court. In 1423 the town subscribed 20s towards the cost of defending the Pale against O' Conchobhair Failghe.¹³ As mentioned above the town also was required in 1463 to maintain the walls and streets and bridges.

The physical remnants of the Norman town should contain some evidence of the

retrieved from MEMSO, 20/03/09.

11 Mill & McEnery (eds), *Calendar of the Gormanston register*, p.156.

12 *Forty-fifth report of the deputy keeper of the public records in Ireland*, [Cd. 7027] H.C. 1913, p.48.

13 Bradley, 'The Medieval Towns of Co. Meath', p. 36

walls, burgess plots and market place, with the usual market cross. The first reliable map of the area, the Down survey (Map 1) shows little apart from the townlands of the parish. The associated Civil Survey shows thirteen castles, one church, one abbey and a bridge, all owned by a number of (Catholic) landlords.¹⁴ Castles possibly indicate residences of burgers and other free townspeople rather than defensive structures. There is little archaeological evidence of the medieval town and the circuit of the walls is not really known. Based on the property boundaries plotted on the Scalé map of 1767 (Map 2), and shown on the OS map of 1836, Bradley¹⁵ and Thomas¹⁶ show two different of the circuits of the town walls (Map 3). Bradley shows a smaller circuit and there is an assumption here that the burgess plots on the east bank of the river and in the north western sector represent early suburban enclaves not enclosed by the wall as Thomas suggests. Settlement on the east side of the river has been confirmed by archaeological evidence but there is nothing to indicate whether this is inside or outside the walls.¹⁷ Further archaeological evidence shows the remains of a depression / ditch to the north west and the remains of a 26m section of wall to the south west. Bradley shows only two gates, a western gate on the Kildalkey road junction and an eastern gate on the west bank of the river at the bridge (Map 4). He also shows the position of the remaining mural tower. As well as these east and west gates the *Commission of inquiry into the municipal corporations of Ireland* (MCI 1835) suggests another gate called John Raie's gate and a Five-mile gate, the whereabouts of which are not known.¹⁸

Other references to parts of the town, granted to the corporation by a charter of James I, and found in the MCI are: messuages outside the east gate at Knockauley mountain; 9 messuages on Trim street (now Trim Road) and its lane (now Mill Lane); ten messuages on the East-street (now Upper Bridge Street) on the eastern side of the market cross, east thirteen messuages, a shop and cellar in the High-street (now Market Street), seven messuages outside John Raie's gate; five messuages in Conaght-street (now Connaught Street); a messuage and courtyard on the northern part of the bridge;

14 R.C. Simington (ed.), *The Civil Survey AD 1654 – 1656*, (Dublin, 1940), p. 210.

15 Bradley, 'The Medieval Towns of Co. Meath', p. 40

16 Avril Thomas, *The walled towns of Ireland*, (Dublin. 1992) p.8

17 Meath 1997:414 97E0170 retrieved from <http://excavations.ie>

18 MCI, p.120, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 314.

two messuages outside the west gate. There is also references to land owned by the corporation and commonalty of Athboy: two parcels of common land of 65 acres and 58 acres respectively; seven acres of enclosed meadow on the west side of the river; seven parks called West Parks; 180 acres of fields within the liberties on either part of the town.¹⁹ All this evidence would indicate that as well as property within the town wall the corporation held lands and property outside the walls. Bradley's contention of suburban areas is possibly true and the existing town boundaries which represent a total area of 267 acres (20 acres within the town walls) may reflect the original holdings of the corporation.

The other medieval organisation that should leave some evidence of their contribution to the town is the church. A charter of Hugh de Lacy of is witnessed by Master S. (possibly Simon), parson of Athboy and by Simon (de Rochfort) bishop of Meath (c.1206).²⁰ Further references exist such as: in 1256 where William de Cornerio is allowed to hold a number of benefices, including Athboy²¹; and in 1302 where the value of the vicarage, temporalities of the rector and the tithes of the same are outlined.²² The most detailed description of the parish church is King Richard's patronage of the rectory of St. James Church in Athboy, to the tune of 100 marks, which has a perpetual rector and vicar who have cure of souls of the parishioners.²³

Quoting Tresham again, Bradley suggests that a Carmelite friary was established in 1317, from a grant of William de Loundres, at Mullaghstones, east of the town.²⁴ In the papal letters of 1405 there is a note about the relaxation of penance 'to those who... visit and give alms for the repair and conservation of the Church of the Carmelite's House in Athboy, ... which needs no small repair.'²⁵ The de Loundres family and later the Preston

19 MCI, p.120, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 314.

20 John Gilbert (ed.), *Register of the the abbey of St. Thomas, Dublin* (London, 1889), p. 13. retrieved from MEMSO 29/03/09.

21 W. H. Bliss (ed.), *Calendar of the papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters vol. 1 A.D. 1198-1304*, (14 vols, London, 1893), i, p. 333. retrieved from MEMSO 29/03/09.

22 H.S. Sweetman (ed.), *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland*, (5 vols, London, 1877), v, p. 255 retrieved from MEMSO, 20/03/09.

23 W. H. Bliss (ed.), *Calendar of the papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters vol. 5 A.D. 1396-1404*, (14 vols, London, 1893), v, p. 265. retrieved from MEMSO 29/03/09.

24 Bradley, 'The Medieval Towns of Co. Meath', p. 38

25 W. H. Bliss (ed.), *Calendar of the papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters vol. 6 A.D. 1404-1415*, (14 vols, London, 1893), vi, p. 68. retrieved from MEMSO 29/03/09.

family as well as granting land, retained the advowsons as well as the land of the parish church in perpetuity.²⁶ These were later granted to Holy Trinity Church in Dublin in 1479.²⁷ At the dissolution the Carmelite House was in the possession of Thomas Casey (by Fiant Henry VIII – 1540²⁸) who was living in the friary and using the stones of the cloister to make repairs. All goods and chattels were later sold.²⁹ There is still no evidence as to the location of this friary. Thomas Casey, merchant of Athboy was also granted land and cottages and tithes in Mullingar, Dunboyne and Moymet.³⁰ It can be assumed that the secularisation of the Church of the Holy Trinity allowed them to hold onto the lands and tithes due to the parish church at Athboy and facilitated its changeover to the reformed church. Although nothing remains of the Carmelite friary, the 15th century western tower of the parish church is still extant together with an early 16th century grave slab.

What is now left of the medieval town are the remains of a town wall to the south east, the tower of the original parish church and the original street pattern. There is some documentary evidence most of which is summarised in the MCI. This evidence lists a charter of 1408 (Rot. Pat. 9 Hen, IV. p.1.a.7.) which is detailed in a further charter of Henry VI (1426). This shows the standard burgage rights and privileges: markets; fairs; courts; election of a provost; collection of tolls on behalf of the town and the manor etc. A new charter was issued in 1575, by James I, by letter patent where previous rights were surrendered and regranted to the burgesses and commonality with corporate status. This charter allowed the election of a portreeve, appointed him as justice of the peace, granted a court of record, a weekly market and granted the lands and messuages outlined above, within and without the town walls of approximately 800 acres and in other parts of the barony, notably in Trim.

Thus the medieval town of Athboy represented a typical medieval market town. It had one long main street running basically east-west from the bridge to the west gate

²⁶ Mill & McEnery (eds), *Calendar of the Gormanston register*, p.156.

²⁷ *The twenty-fourth report of the deputy keeper of the public records in Ireland*, H.C. 1892 (C. 6765) p.109

²⁸ *The seventh report of the deputy keeper of the public records in Ireland*, H.C. 1875 (C.11175) p.48

²⁹ N.B. White (ed.), *Extents of the Irish monastic possessions: 1540-541* (Dublin, 1947) pp 266-267.

³⁰ White (ed.), *Extents of the Irish monastic possessions*, pp 60-291.

which was on the main trade route to Delvin, Mullingar and Galway. Indeed Galway seemed to be a prominent focus for trade with names like Blake and Browne associated with the town. The main street widens at its centre. The Scalé map of 1767 shows a gap in the buildings at that point with a small square structure of approximately 10 ft in width beside the street. This may represent the crane, which was in existence in 1835.³¹

In the sixteenth and seventeenth century Athboy maintained its corporate status and the King's writ prevailed in this part of Leinster with the collection of customs, fines and levies and the return of revenue to the exchequer. Typical of this was where three former provosts were fined in 1508 for levying 'throwtoll' without authority.³² In another case, three merchants, John Stanley ('custard monger'), Roland Chamerlyne, and Walter Branston, from Athboy were pardoned in the Court of Chancery.³³ The sixteenth century, *Calendar to Christ Church deeds*, also show the names of prominent people in the corporation, such as Thomas Dardys, Thomas Wattenhall, Robert Scurloke, Robert Skyrett, John Danston, and Christopher Cusacke (sheriff of Meath).³⁴ Other names appearing in the rolls with reference to land acquisition are Thomas Graunt, John Tyrell, and Barnabas Scurloke.³⁵

However it was war, pestilence and plantation that were to dominate in these two centuries. The Geraldine rebellion was of little consequence to the town except that some land near Athboy was forfeited, to be later returned to Gerald Fitzgerald.³⁶ In 1575 a plague was mentioned that affected Athboy.³⁷ In 1599 the nine-years war affected the town with the arrival of Tyrone's forces nearby and its subsequent garrisoning.³⁸ It would seem that initially in 1641 that Athboy took the Confederate side, however

31 MCI, p.121, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 315.

32 Steven Ellis, 'The Irish customs administration under the early Tudors' in *Irish Historical Studies*, xxii, 86, p.274

33 James Morrin (ed.), *Calendar of patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland* (2 vols, London, 1861), vol. 1, 161, retrieved from MEMSO, 17/02/2009

34 *The twenty-fourth report of the deputy keeper of the public records in Ireland*, H.C. 1892 (C. 6765) p.109

35 Morrin, *Patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland*, vol. i, 127

36 Morrin, *Patent and close rolls of chancery in Ireland*, vol. i, 263

37 John O'Donovan, 'Annals of Dublin (continued)' in *The Dublin Penny Journal*, i, 40, (1833), p.315.

38 E.G. Atkinson, (ed.), *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland* (23 vols, London, 1899), vol. vii, pp 268-270

Ormonde was able to garrison the town with 400 foot and 600 horses.³⁹ When Ormonde took the royalist side against Cromwell in 1647, and joined with the Leinster confederates under William Preston the town was re-garrisoned with 300 foot under Capt. Walter Dardis⁴⁰

The only description of Athboy in that period is from Col. Michael Jones who lead the Cromwellian army to Athboy in October 1647. He described the town as 'a town corporate, 5 miles from Trim. It is of some largeness, fortified without with a well ordered line, within with strong buildings, the ordinary houses being of stone, there being beside six castles, and a church with a high steeple'. Jones took the town, describing how he approached it from the Delvin Road and how his 8 troopers, without orders, forced the gate, without damage to themselves and took one of the castles. The foot soldiers seeing this climbed the ramparts and took the town and the defended church steeple. The defendants desired quarter, which was given and they took 7 captains (one being the aforementioned Captain Dardize (sic)), and 5 Lieutenants, and 7 Ensignes with 300 soldiers. Jones left the town garrisoned with a regiment of foot and a regiment of horse.⁴¹

Having troops in the town was a feature of urban life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The *Acts of the Privy Council in Ireland (1556-1571)* state that the portereefe of Athboy was required to provide 8 archers (thus the throwtoll) to the army in 1556 and the town itself had to provide sojourn for men and horses in 1566.⁴² War affected the price and supply of victuals and scarcity raised prices for the local townspeople.

39 H.M.C., *Calendar of the manuscripts of the marquis of Ormonde preserved at Kilkenny Castle*, vol. i, 49.

40 Atkinson, *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland*, xvii, 619.

41 Anon., *The late successful proceedings of the army commanded by Collonel Michael Jones in his late expedition against the rebels in Ireland*, (London, 1647) pp 3-5.

42 H.M.C., *Fifteenth report, appendix, part III, the manuscripts of Charles Haliday, esq., of Dublin*, (London, 1897), pp 15, 188.

A note of 1599 shows in the *Calendar of State Papers of 1603*:

A peck of wheat at Dublin	£4 10s	at Athboy	£5 10s
Beer malt	“ £3	“	£4
Oate malt	“ £1 15s	“	£3
An Irish beef	“ £5	“	£10
A veal	“ £2 10s	“	£4
A wine quart of ale	“ £0 0s 6d	“	£0 1s 0d
3 eggs	“ 2d	1 egg	“ 1d
A cock	“ 2s	“	4s
A hen	“ 2s	“	4s 6d
A pound of salt butter	“ 1s 6d	“	2s 6d ⁴³

In 1591 possibly as a result of the depredations of war the town petitioned the Lord Deputy to not only renew their charter but to have 'further priviledges, immunities and lybertyes graunted unto them, which are annexed to their petitions and sent you herewithall.'⁴⁴ Whether this request was granted during the reign of Elizabeth is unknown, however a note to Chichester from James I in 1609 suggests that 'he accepts a surrender from the portreeve, burgesses and commons of Athboy, ... of all their lands and heridatements, in consideration that part of the said town was burnt in the rebellion of the traitor Tyrone, and that the then portreeve with many of the townsmen was slain in the defence thereof, and in the service of our Crown and regrant them their lands without fine, for ever to be held of the castle of Dublin in common soccage and not in capite or by knight's service.'⁴⁵ In capite suggests that the the land was owned by the town in fee simple and the suggestion of soccage would ensure the revenues were returned to the royal exchequer at Dublin, maintaining the king's ownership of the town.

43 Atkinson, *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland*, xi, 96.

44 J.R. Dasent (ed.), *Acts of the privy council of England*, (22 vols, London, 1895) vol. xxii, 20-21.

45 Atkinson, *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland*, xiii, 285.

The king's warrant was applied on July 20th 1610, allowing the portrieve, burgesses and commons of the town their charter and liberties, with weekly markets, yearly fair, tolls and customs; and that all strangers be prohibited from selling wine and aquavita by retail in said markets and fairs, in regard that part of the town was burned in time of the rebellion of the traitor Tyrone and the then traitor portrieve with many of the of the townsmen were slain in the defence thereof for the service of the Crown, and to enable them to rebuild the said town and the walls thereof⁴⁶.

In addition the town was also granted in Athboy (MCI, p.120):

4 messuages and their appurtenances outside the east gate on Knockauley mountain;

9 messuages with their appurtenances, in Trim-street and its lane on the eastern part of the bridge;

10 messuages on the East-street, on the eastern side of the market cross;

13 messuages, in the High-street;

1 shop and cellar on the same street;

7 messuages outside the gate, called John Raie's gate;

5 messuages in le Connaght-street;

4 parks on the south side of the cemetery;

7 acres of enclosed meadow land, on the west side of the river, next to the lands of Cloning;

7 parks, called the West Parks

180 acres, in fields, within the liberties on either part of the town;

St. Catherine's weir, on the river

A clothmill and watercourse on the same, near Ferrancrohie;

A chief rent of 20d Irish, out of a messuage and courtyard, on the northern part of the river;

A chief rent of of 2s 8d Irish out of 2 messuages outside the west gate;

All messuages, tofts, gardens, lands, tenements, mills, rents, reversions and services and all other King's hereditaments whatsoever, in the town and fields and lands of Athboy, (saving one messuage, with a garden and sixty acres in the town and fields of Athboy, an annual rent of 50s Irish, another messuage and garden in Athboy, and an annual rent of 10s Irish);

Together with messuages in Trim, park and dovecot outside the Blaygh gate in Trim, an acre in Druestown, half an acre in Cowlronan, land in Curraghton, messuages and land in Chamberlaynstown, a messuage in Ardmulchan, a messuage within the walls

46 Atkinson, *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland*, xiii, 481.

of Navan and an annual rent of 10s Irish out of Gormanstown's land in Pluckstown.⁴⁷
Altogether this gives the corporation a total of 65 messuages in the town and an estimated population of 300.

As indicated above the town was refortified with an outer line of “works” and an inner wall, which existed at least until 1647 when Col. Michael Jones took over.

Following the Cromwellian conquest, William Petty laid down a survey of Ireland which included the barony of Lune in which was set out the boundaries of the parish of Athboy. (Map1) The subsequent civil survey details the ownership of lands in the town of Athboy as follows:

17 Catholic gentry, including Lord Gormanstown, Lord Trimblestown and Sir William Hill, together with Blakes, Moores, Caseys, Cusacks, Sherlocks, Brownes etc., all of whom have been mentioned above, had 13 castles, 1 house and 48 tenements. In addition Nicholas Plunkett also a Catholic had an Abbey (possibly the old Carmelite one), the town itself had a church, bridge and 20 tenements. William Smith a Protestant clerk, (possibly cleric) had 5 tenements.

This gives a total of 87 habitable buildings and a population of 400.⁴⁸

Most of the catholics were transplanted and their land offered to adventurers soldiers and supporters of the Cromwellian army. After the restoration, it would seem that Sir George Rawden and William Brett were granted the lands at Athboy under the Acts of Settlement and Explanation (1660). The plots listed in the town are as follows:

- 3 tenements and gardens on the east side of Wraye's-gate street within the wall.
- 1 waste tenement and garden in the same street.
- 2 gardens on the west side of Wraye's gate, without the walls
- 2 tenement and gardens on the same street.
- 3 backsides
- 1 waste tenement and garden on the same street.
- 2 tenements and gardens on the west side of Connaught street.
- 1 waste tenements and gardens on the same street.
- 8 waste houses and gardens without the Five-mile gate.

⁴⁷ MCI, p.120, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 314.

⁴⁸ R.C. Simington (ed.), *The Civil Survey AD 1654 – 1656*, (Dublin, 1940), p. 210.

5 cabins on the north side of Connaught street.
 1 house and garden on the same street.
 2 gardens on the same street
 2 waste tenements and gardens on the same street.
 3 stone houses, castle type, on the west side of Wraye's street (alias High-street).
 4 large houses and gardens on the same street.
 3 waste house and gardens with old walls on same street.
 1 waste castle and garden on same street.
 2 gardens with walls on same street.
 4 houses and gardens on same street
 1 house castle type, with remains of castle on both sides of bridge.
 8 waste houses, tenements and gardens behind the houses on Wraye's-street.
 2 stone houses and gardens on same street.
 1 house with backside and thatched castle type house on same street.
 2 tenements and gardens with brewhouse on the same street.
 House, gardens and mill belonging to Lord Trimblestown.
 2 tenements, gardens, cabins and backside on same site.
 Old walls of castles, backsides and garden on same site.
 1 house, backside and garden in the lane leading to St. James' church.
 5 waste houses and gardens in West-street on the south side of the north-bridge.
 2 houses, cabin, stables and gardens on the north side of East-street
 3 waste tenements, backside and gardens on the same street
 Backside and garden of East-street, in blind lane, alias Cottner's lane
 8 waste houses and gardens on the same side of Cottner's lane.
 1 house and garden on the other side of this lane.

In addition Rawden and Brett were granted the 180 acres, of the liberty of the Corporation, and all those several houses and tenements in Athboy, formerly belonging to the town together with part of a capital house or messuage and appurtenances outside Wraye's gate.⁴⁹ It would seem that there was a quit-rent of £1 17s 6d due on the messuages and a rent of £5 15s 7 ½ d due on the other properties, subject to redemption by the corporation, as is stated in the report of the commissioners to inquire into this in

49 *The eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth and the fourteenth and fifteenth reports from the commissioners appointed by his Majesty to execute the measures recommended in an address of the House of Commons, respecting the public records of Ireland.* H.C. 1825 (428) p.145.

1824.⁵⁰

This again gives a total of 89 tenements, castles, cabins and houses which equates with the number of buildings listed in the civil survey. Rawden may have acted on behalf of the Duke of York, later James II, as he was confirmed of the lands of regicides and additional lands in the barony of Lune by letters patent in 1669. (*Patent Rolls 21 Charles II*). In any case there is a caveat in the a note found in the state papers relating to Ireland in 1669 which state that: 'Nothing pass in order to the renewing of the Charter of Athboy co. Westmouth.' This may indicate that the corporate holdings were about to be rescinded at that time. In any case it would seem that Rawden took over all the messuages and appurtenances owned by the corporation.

Rawden's grants help to identify some more features of the town. It gives the west side of Wraye's street as an alias for the High street which implies that the gate at Connaught street / Kildalkey road as being Wraye's or John Raie's gate. It also identifies another gate called the 5 mile gate, which obviously refers to Trim 5 miles away and should therefore be on the current Trim road. The grant mentions those houses and gardens outside the walls but does not include Trim street within this category. This would suggest that it was within the walls and the east gate therefore was further east of the river than Bradley suggests and is more in line with Thomas' plan (Map 3). The plots on Wraye's street show by being defined as castlewise, or by being built of stone, are the prominent buildings of the town. All the gardens in this area mention old walls which gives rise to the possibility that sections of the town walls, having proved useless are being torn down. The mention of backsides suggest the original Norman burgess plots with entrance at the side of buildings to gardens at the back are still in use. Houses behind the main street also suggest the continuation of the Norman idea of 'back-lanes'. Three new lanes are identified, one leading to St. James church, one called Cottner's lane behind a plot on East-street and the third off Trim street, possibly leading to the river. The house, gardens and mill belonging to Lord Trimblestown is mentioned together with houses, cabins and gardens on the same site.

⁵⁰ *Quit rents and crown lands. Copy of the report of the commissioners appointed to inquire respecting His Majesty's quit rents and crown lands in Ireland.* H.C. 1824 (458) p.35

There is no mention of where this is located except that the descriptions of the houses and gardens suggest an urban location within the walls.

The most obvious point about these grants is the amount of derelict properties, being at 41 properties just less than fifty percent of the total. This reflects the depredations of war and would indicate that the population had possibly been reduced to maybe 200 people.

However it came about, the local MP for the town, Thomas Bligh, holder of much of the Preston lands since the Cromwellian distribution, gained ownership of the town by 1695. The commissioners on municipal corporations could not ascertain how he acquired the property and could not find any conveyance from the corporation, particularly the 800 acres of commonage in Knockshangan, the Stocks, Eighty-eight Acres, Forerath, and Mullockstones where the Bligh family retained tenants until the twentieth century.⁵¹

In addition, possibly to circumvent any attempt by the town to retain its rights and liberties, Thomas Bligh sought and was granted a charter by William and Mary, to erect into a manor, the 'town's-lands and commons of Athboy, together with other denominations of land, ... all in the barony of Lune, and a power given to Thomas Bligh, his heirs and assigns, to hold a Court Leet twice a year, and a Court Baron every three weeks, or seldomer, before a seneschal, to be appointed by him or them'.⁵² This basically circumvented the power of the burgesses and portrieve, allowing the Lord of the manor to appoint the corporation, hold court and designate the two Members to the Irish Parliament. The report of the MCI Determined that no manor court was held in the previous 35 years.

In 1801 claims of compensation due to the demise of the franchise were entered by the Bligh family, together with charters to the borough of Athboy. An amount of £15,000 was granted.⁵³ The final result was that after the act of Union, with

⁵¹ MCI, p.121, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 315.

⁵² MCI, p.121, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 315.

⁵³ *A return, presented to the House of Commons, of all claims for compensation on account of representative franchises.* H.C. 1805 (53) p.15.

disenfranchisement, the corporation fell into disrepute, and was regarded as being extinct in 1835. An indication of the situation that prevailed after the union, was that tolls were forcibly resisted in the town in 1828 and were abandoned⁵⁴

There is little evidence of the development of the town in the eighteenth century. Casey and Rowan have identified only one remaining 18th century building, being the hall adjoining the medieval tower on St James' church.⁵⁵ There are also indications that most of Danescourt (or Dance's Court on the Scalé map), a house just outside the walls of the town is 18th century.

The Bernard Scalé book of maps produced for Lord Darnley, shows approximately 100 buildings inside the walls of the town, and 50 outside the 'walls'.⁵⁶ If populated at one family per building, would give a population of just over 750 people. The only streets indicated on this map are Connaught Street and the 'Dublin Road' which extends all along the main street of the town.

The town retained its importance only as a market town, the Bligh family requesting that the number of fair days being increased to four in their presentation to William and Mary. The market remained on Thursdays. *Pigot's Directory* verifies the market day, and shows the fair days to be the 23rd of February, 4th of May, 4th of August, and the 7th of November.⁵⁷ The Earl of Bective on the Headfort Estate in Kells was a prominent cattle producer in the 18th century and mentions for example sales of heifers at the Athboy "faire".⁵⁸

Map 4 is an extract from William Larkin's map of Co. Meath of 1812.⁵⁹ Athboy (as well as Navan!) just happens to be placed at the intersection of 2 sections, so it is difficult to enlarge to determine urban features. Again it shows only one church in the town and identifies Dance's Court as the only other prominent building. Both of these

54 MCI, p.121, H.C. 1835 (24-28), 315.

55 Christine Casey and Alistair Rowan, *The buildings of Ireland: North Leinster*, (London, 1993), p.126.

56 Book of estate maps for Lord Darnley, by Bernard Scalé (1767), (N.L.I., 16, 135), reproduced with permission from the National Library of Ireland.

57 *Pigot & Co's Directory*, 1824

58 Headfort Papers, Country Day Book 1718, (N.L.I 25,300 (2).

59 Map of County Meath, 1812 / 17 originally 2 inches to 1 Irish mile (1:43,680), courtesy TCD map library.

are the only surviving eighteenth century buildings in the town. The other buildings are shown only in schematic form. Another interesting aspect of this map is that it shows no direct road connection between Navan and Athboy. This period also contained the first statutory census of Ireland which commenced in May 1813. Although heavily criticised, Brian Gurrin contends that the figures represent tolerably accurate house or family counts for this period. The population of Athboy is given as 1877.⁶⁰

The next map which gives details of the town, is the 1826 'Survey of the Town of Athboy'⁶¹ Originally at 5 perches to the inch (approximately 1:1000) the map is too large to scale, however a number of photographs are enclosed (Map6). The importance of this map is that it shows the locations of a number of 18th century buildings: the hotel, the alms houses, the dispensary, the pound and the original Catholic chapel, which later became the site of St. James' Church, it also gives the name of this street as Chapel Street, leading out into Winding Harbour towards Castletown.

Pigot's directory mentions the merchants and tradesmen of the town. Some of these can be identified on the Darnley estate map. As with the Larkin map, the Darnley map was drawn close to the census of 1821. The town of Athboy including the Commons, shows 334 inhabited houses, with 392 families. There are 20 uninhabited houses in the town and a total population of 1748. This census also counted school attendance and showed 115 male and 87 female children in school. It also mentions that Lord Darnley supports a school of 60 mixed students and Lady Darnley a school of 20 females. Neither of these schools are shown on the estate map.

The first O.S. Map of 1837 (Map 7) shows little more than the estate map but does identify the infant school.⁶² Combining this with Griffith's valuation provides further detail of the buildings in the town.⁶³ Beside the Infant school on the fair green is an Industrial and Adult school-house, with teachers, house and garden. The national school-house is identified as well as the courthouse, both on the Main-street. The old

60 Brian Gurrin, 'No country for young men – the 1813-15 census returns for County Meath' in *Riocht na Midhe*, xvii (2006), pp 173-202.

61 A survey of the town of Athboy, of the estate of the Earl of Darnley, by James Vaughan and son, 1826 (Meath County Library, Navan)

62 O.S. Map of County Meath, Sheet 29, Scale 1:105,60 (1837), courtesy TCD map library.

63 Richard Griffith, *Valuation of tenements, County of Meath*, (London, 1854) pp 99-115.

national school is mentioned in the 1901 census next to the building which Casey and Rowan identify as the 'Town-hall', and is of a 'Victorian municipal Gothic style of c. 1860.'⁶⁴ This building according to the historical plaque became the National school in 1885. The courthouse became part of the RIC barracks complex in 1863. Griffith locates this barracks on the site of the current Bank of Ireland, on Upper Bridge Street. It should be noted that Upper Bridge Street starts at the Market House in the 1901 census and therefore the schools and the barracks complex are more properly part of Upper Bridge Street as Griffith's Valuation states. The National school which started with 270 pupils has been in the town since 1839.⁶⁵ One other public building mentioned in Griffith's Valuation is a school on Church Lane which is part of the established church system. This is undoubtedly the C. of I. parochial Hall shown in later O.S. Maps beside the Glebe. These are indicated on the map 4.

Transport was important to a market town like Athboy. In the early nineteenth century, canals were the new means of transporting bulk goods from one place to another. The original petition of the Royal Canal Company included a cut to Trim, Athboy, Kells and Delvin.⁶⁶ This and other plans, like the extension to the Boyne navigation, never came to fruition so a railway was the next item on the agenda. For the winter fair in 1859 *The Irish Times* recorded that: 'a large number of buyers arrived last night on the northern train, and posted off to cars thence to Athboy' [a distance of 30 miles].⁶⁷ The nearest point on the railway system to send cattle to is the Hill of Down on the Mullingar line. The line to Drogheda had been completed in 1844, the line to the Hill of Down in 1847. In 1858 the Dublin and Meath railway was incorporated to build a 23 mile line from Clonsilla, on the Mullingar line, to Navan, with a branch line to Athboy via Kilmessan and Trim. The line to Athboy was opened in 1864 and leased to the MGWR in 1869. Cattle trains became the mainstay of this line until it was closed in the 1950s. The engine house and station remained in situ and were converted into apartments in the 1990s.

⁶⁴ Casey and , *The buildings of Ireland*, p.126.

⁶⁵ *Sixth report of the commissioners of national education in Ireland, for the year 1839*, H.C. 1840 [246] p. 54.

⁶⁶ *Report from committee on petition of Royal Canal Company*, H.C. 1810-1811 (235) p.55

⁶⁷ *Irish Times*, Nov 9, 1859.

Tolls and customs were collected in Athboy until 1828, by which time the administration of the town had become defunct, with no officers elected nor courts held. Any infrastructural functions were carried out under the auspices of the County Grand Jury of which contained a number of members from the town. A county and baronial cess was applied to tenants and landlords to support these works, all of the applications for funding placed before the Grand Jury in the form of 'presentments'. Historically most presentments involved road building and repair in the 18th century. The provision of housing was left to the individual landlords and the provision of education was left to private individual until the advent of the national school system in the 1830s. The first National school in Athboy parish was in Fraine in 1834. The first National school in Athboy town was erected in 1839. Tithes were also applied to the tenants and landlords of the parish which were given over to the Established Church.

When this system was removed in 1838, a new Poor-law system was introduced with similar funding but now administered by a Board of Guardians some of whom were elected by the ratepayers, the others co-opted by the County administration. Athboy became part of the Trim Union which funded the workhouse at Trim and various dispensaries including the one in Athboy. The parish of Athboy became an electoral division in its own right for the Trim Board of Guardians. In 1895 Trim Town Commission removed itself from the Trim Union. The Board of Guardians remained in existence for a few years until 1898 when they became part of the Trim Rural District Council with membership restricted to elected councillors. Athboy Parish, with other townlands was formed into the District Electoral Division of Athboy. In 1899 Meath County Council and the Grand Jury system of presentments abolished. Meath County Council took over the role of road building and other local government activities from the Grand Jury, and left the role of health and housing to the Rural District Councils. This allows the electorate of the DED of Athboy to elect two members to the Trim Rural District Council, and a number councillors to Meath County Council. Some members of the RDC now formed the new Board of Guardians and other boards such as education. The RDC was abolished in 1925, and since then Athboy only elects councillors to Meath County Council.