

Baseline archaeological study of Francis Street, Dublin 8.

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Topographical development of Francis Street

One of the factors that aided Dublin's development was its location on the convergence of four highways (Irish *slighe*) during the early medieval period. One of these was the *Slighe Chualann* which ran southwards from a crossing over the River Liffey along what was to become Francis Street (Clarke 2002, 1). The north end of Francis Street met a crossroads where the *Slighe Chualann* intersected with another highway that ran east-west, the *Slighe Mhór*. The latter highway traversed Ireland and divided it into symbolic halves called Leth Conn (north) and Leth Moga (south) (Clarke 2002, 1). It has been suggested that a wayside church associated with St Mo Lua was possibly established at this crossroads, while a short distance to the east, lay an open market space that eventually became known as the Cornmarket which acted as a focal point for the later medieval city. Morphologically this open space looks like the core of an early medieval settlement – a place known as Áth Cliath in the documentary sources. On the north-eastern side of the settlement is reputedly the oldest church site in central Dublin – St Audoen's. The crossroads, market space and churches are encompassed within a curving pattern of streets, lanes and property boundaries that may represent the outline of this early medieval settlement; indeed an ancient ditch in the southwest area is referred to in two thirteenth-century documents (Lennon 2008, 1). It was common for such church-related settlements to be enclosed within an oval circuit defined by an earthen bank and ditch. The northern end of Francis Street would have been encompassed within the settlement of Áth Cliath, and it is possible that traces of this enclosure may run underneath the street in a roughly northeast-southwest orientation, following a lane along the north side of the Iveagh Markets. The southern end of Francis Street was defined by the Commons Water, a tributary of the River Poddle which flowed in an easterly direction along a well-defined valley, part of which still bears the street name The Coombe (Irish *com*, for valley) (Clarke 2002, 2).

The later Hiberno-Norse town wall – one of the earliest of its kind outside the former Roman Empire – respected the course of the *Slighe Chualann* running parallel to it, albeit at a fairly consistent distance (Clarke 2002, 4). Dublin's first annual fair (which ran for eight days) was instituted by King John in 1204 just outside Newgate, a short distance to the northeast of Francis Street. Only later in the thirteenth century did the annual fair come to occupy a more open area, a site called the Fair Green which lay between Francis Street and the city wall and ditch. This stretch of open ground beside the city walls would have served the needs of both defence and market (Clarke 2002, 7). The

early medieval highway, the *Slighe Chualann*, fossilised in the orientation of Francis Street and Augustine Street, continued to be an important route and allowed access, through the city walls and Bridge Street, to the crossing over the River Liffey (Clarke 2002, 7). The Franciscan Friary was established by 1233, located on a site between Francis Street and St. Patrick's Street, within a short distance of St. Patrick's Cathedral and the archiepiscopal palace and chapel of St Sepulchre (Clarke 2002, 7). Francis Street was a significant part of the topography of medieval Dublin given its mention in documentary sources: in c.1200, it was known as Great Street, the King's highway in 1325, St Francis's Street in 1337, St. Francis Street in 1363 and 1446, St Fraunces Street in 1575, and St Francis Street in 1610, to take a few examples (Clarke 2002, 14).

John Speed's map of Dublin in 1610 depicts the street lined with houses on either side of it; illustrating that it was an integral part of the city's urban environment, even though it lay outside the city's western defences. The southern end of the street was marked by mural gate called St. Francis's gate – this presumably was associated with the monastic precinct of St. Francis's friary. Bernard de Gomme's map of Dublin in 1673 presents a different picture – the western side of the street appears to have been occupied by enclosed fields with no housing development apparent (Lennon 2008, map 6).

By the early eighteenth century, Francis Street was firmly integrated into the urban environment of Dublin as evidenced by a map by Charles Brooking in 1728. A number of laneways ran to the east and west of the street – Limerick Alley, Hanover Lane, an un-named lane, and Plimcot Street to the east; and Marks Alley, Garden Lane and Swifts Alley to the west (Lennon 2008, map 12). John Rocque's map of the city in 1756 shows a high density of housing on both sides of the street. There may have been a program of street widening as the western frontage still encroached upon the street before its intersection with New Row to the north. The street also narrowed at its immediate southern end where it intersected with the Coomb, on the location where a mural gate had stood in the early seventeenth century according to Speed's map. A watch house was located midway down the street, at a staggered junction with Plunket Street to the east and Indian Alley (formerly Swifts Alley) to the west (Lennon 2008, map 16). Other lanes running off Francis Street in 1756 were Limerick Alley, Hanover Lane, Chappel Lane (the anonymous lane on Brooking's map) to the east and Mak's Alley, Cammon Hall (newly extended to Francis Street from Ash Street) and Garden Lane to the west (Lennon 2008, map 16). Directly across from the Iveagh Markets, on the opposite side of the street, was St Nicholas's Hospital which was founded in 1753-54. In from the street, at the end of Chappel Lane, St Nicholas's of Myra, a Roman Catholic establishment was founded on the site of the

medieval Franciscan abbey in 1685. This chapel was built following the succession of the Catholic monarch, James II, when Irish Catholics felt emboldened to reclaim religious sites for public worship. Saying that, the location of St Nicholas's of Myra in a rear end property, linked to Francis Street by Chappel Lane (and also more circuitously by Plunket Street) suggests that a degree of discretion was still necessary in a city like Dublin where a substantial proportion of the population was Protestant. A few years later, in 1692, a Presbyterian meeting house was founded immediately to the southeast of the Catholic church, on a corner of Plunket Street. Presbyterians, like Catholics, were constrained by the penal laws of the time, and similarly had to exercise a degree of discretion with regard to places of public worship. Both places of worship are depicted on Rocque's map of Dublin in 1756.

By the mid-eighteenth century, there was urban encroachment on common land – of the medieval commonages only Oxmantown Green and Little Green remained (Lennon 2008, 1). Fair Green at the northern end of Francis Street was to be no different. The decision to build on these commonages stemmed from a desire on the part of the city's planners to redevelop Dublin as a modern city. Communal access to Oxmantown, Hoggen and Little Greens was gradually restricted as these spaces were reclaimed for domestic housing and businesses (Lennon 2008, 3). The gates within the medieval city walls were successively dismantled from the late seventeenth century onwards, while the extramural gates such as St. Francis's Gate at the southern end of the street were demolished at some stage between the 1670s and the 1730s (Lennon 2008, 2). The various monastic houses to be found in medieval Dublin were dissolved following their dissolution in the 1530s, with the Franciscan Friary in the vicinity memorialised in the name of its patron saint given to the street.

Archaeological investigations on Francis Street

Given the location of Francis Street within the inner city of Dublin, there have been a number of proposed developments for the street and in the immediate surrounding area. On 28-29 Francis Street, medieval and post-medieval deposits, along with a pit were uncovered (Excavation licences 96E0100 & 96E0223). A large number of clay tobacco pipes were uncovered suggesting the possible presence of a local clay pipe factory. The present-day Iveagh Markets is situated on what was commonage in medieval times, the Fair Green. This was open ground that lay between the south-western stretch of the city wall and the northern end of Francis Street. Archaeological excavation there uncovered the uppermost fill of the external ditch of the city wall, along with a wall that actually sat in the ditch fill (97E0297). A later investigation also uncovered the upper fill of this ditch (99E0261), along with its external edge. A masonry structure was found along the edge of the ditch, disturbed by a later ditch recut. This structure possibly was the remains of a bridge abutment or a

mill. Another investigation in the Iveagh Markets (99E0261) revealed structures belonging to Sweetman's brewery (1791-1880s) which had stood on the property beforehand, along with four structures fronting onto Francis Street which were identified as being the lower ground floors of 'Dutch Billys' – late seventeenth-century in date. To the rear were cobbled yards which were smaller in width and were associated with earlier street front buildings, possibly the very same buildings depicted on Speed's 1610 map. Medieval garden soils, possibly associated with the Fair Green which originally included the site, were uncovered underneath the cobble yards. There were also garden soils revealed in the southeast of the site, as well as refuse pits that contained locally produced medieval pottery. An eighteenth-century plot boundary wall between nos. 22 and 23 Francis Street replicated two earlier plot divisions, the earliest possibly dating to the fourteenth century. Later investigations in the Dry Goods Market of the Iveagh Markets revealed medieval intercutting pits overlain by a post medieval building. This later phase was characterised by a series of pits and two buildings (03E0261). On 22-27 Francis Street, red brick basements were found filled in with post-medieval rubble (99E0184).

At Francis Street car park, between Thomas Street and Swift Alley, medieval and post medieval garden soils, along with a possible mill water course were uncovered (03E0621). This may be the water course depicted as traversing the north end of Francis Street in de Gomme's map of 1678. It crossed the street flowing in a south-easterly direction towards St. Nicholas's Gate in the southernmost point of the City Walls. Post-medieval walls and industrial waste deposits containing ash deposits and tobacco clay pipe fragments were also uncovered at the Francis Street car park. On 55-56 Francis Street post medieval wooden water barrels and a rubbish pit were located in the rear of the property (05E0381). Similar water barrels were uncovered at 101-103 Francis Street (06E0419). On No. 85 Francis Street, medieval cultivated soils, along with a large pit containing waste from nineteenth-century tobacco clay pipe manufacture were uncovered at the rear of the property. Wooden water pipes were also found. A small pit was found in the front end of No. 87 with refuse from a late seventeenth-century tobacco clay pipe manufacturer (95E0058 ext). On 95-97 Francis Street, three walls of nineteenth-century date were uncovered, with a subsequent investigation also uncovering deposits and a metalled surface of medieval date (97E0077).

At 123-33, seven clay pipe kilns and associated industrial buildings of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century date were uncovered. Medieval features were also uncovered – trenches for water pipes and several pits. A building, of clay wall construction with a stone wall footing, of thirteenth- to fourteenth-century date was also found (96E0349 & 97E129). Intriguingly this building ran parallel to

the street, which is at variance with the orientation of the buildings on the same street as depicted on Speed's map of 1610, when the buildings were placed at right-angles to the street. On the basis of this map, it can be argued that by the late medieval / early modern eras, buildings were constructed with their gable ends facing onto the street. This probably reflected the limited availability of land in the area on which to build a house. The fact that the remains of the high medieval house was placed parallel to the street, would suggest that there was less demand for street frontage in earlier times. It is also important to note is that only the rear wall of this building was uncovered (at c.13.5m O.D.), and was only 3m in from the modern street frontage suggesting that the street had been widened at some stage, removing most of the medieval building. The subsoils in the trench in which the building was found (Trench A) sloped from west to east, and were reached at a depth of 13.44m O.D. at the west end of the excavation and 12.82m O.D. at the southeast end of the site along the Francis Street end.

On 95-97 Francis Street, a metalled surface was uncovered at c.13m O.D. which possibly represented the remains of the original thirteenth-century street surface (99E0692). Medieval soils indicate that the street was possibly relaid further east, closer to its modern orientation. A sixteenth- or early seventeenth-century ditch uncovered probably marked the western edge of the post medieval roadway, which would have lain beneath the modern street. There was no evidence for buildings on the site at this date, which conflicts with Speed's map. The lack of a building on the street front at the time is paralleled at Nos 85-86 Francis Street where excavation uncovered the same seventeenth-century ditch towards the street front. As mentioned above, the western side of Francis Street was depicted as open ground in de Gomme's map of 1673, but medieval buildings and a piped water supply have been at a site further north on the west side of Francis Street (97E0129). It is therefore possible that the maps by Speed and de Gomme are depicting a stylised view of the street. There may well have been some buildings, particularly in the vicinity of the Friary, but it would seem that these did not line the whole length of the street as depicted by Speed. By the eighteenth century, the street was completely occupied on both sides, as indicated on maps by Charles Brooking (1728) and John Rocque (1756).

The Franciscan friary was located to the west of Francis Street, and such foundations were popular locations for burials given the Order's strong pastoral mission among the local community. On 34-36 Francis Street, part of the cemetery of the friary was revealed with the uncovering of 84 burials (94E0069). Four of these were stone-lined burials, while the bases of two wooden coffins were also revealed. There was a dump of clay pipe bowls, dating to the mid to late seventeenth century. More

of the cemetery was revealed in Nos. 39-42 where 16 burials of seventeenth-century date were uncovered (99E0452). The presence of these late burials suggests that the cemetery continued in use even after the friary had been dissolved in the mid-sixteenth century. A school house was built over part of this cemetery in the mid-nineteenth century. A dump of clay pipe kiln waste was also found on the site. In another archaeological investigation of Nos. 160-188 Francis Street, a human burial of sixteenth- or seventeenth-century date was revealed (95E0058 ext.).