

# St Canice's Cathedral, Kilkenny –Medieval Buildings

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Dioceses were formed at the Synod of Rathbreasail in the year 1111 AD. The Diocese of Ossory was one of these and consequently would also have had a cathedral church. Although many large 12<sup>th</sup> c Romanesque churches still exist from this period, the cathedral church of Ossory has vanished without trace. The traditional belief is that this church stood somewhere on the site of the present Church of Ireland Cathedral. This fine building is dated to the 13<sup>th</sup> c, built in the Gothic style favoured by the Norman invaders.

In the mid 19<sup>th</sup> c sections of the foundations of an earlier building were found beneath and adjoining the chancel of the present building. This pointed to a building with N-S orientation along its long axis. Carved stones from this earlier building have also been found embedded in the walls of the present cathedral.

Our survey inspired by an article in the Old Kilkenny Review of 2004; *St Canice's Cathedral by Coilin Ó.Drisceoil*. This very professional and well researched article referred to the use of modern geophysical techniques for reading beneath the ground. The survey was conducted mainly in the chancel of the cathedral and the corresponding SE part of the churchyard outside. The survey sought in particular to locate the 12<sup>th</sup> c (pre Norman) Romanesque Cathedral known to have existed before the present 13<sup>th</sup> c building.

## Summary of Results

### Mid 19<sup>th</sup> Excavation

#### **1. The 12<sup>th</sup> c Cathedral?**

Partial remains of foundation of 12<sup>th</sup> c building found beneath chancel of cathedral which suggested a building with North-South orientation.

#### **Other 12<sup>th</sup> buildings or earlier?**

##### **2. In Graveyard**

### Geophysical Survey 2003

Not part of survey

2. Portion of foundation of building found outside in churchyard.  
Orientation NE-SW.  
Speculated that this was remnant of the earlier 12<sup>th</sup> c cathedral

### Divining Survey 2006

1. Trace of church building with apse at East end. Dimensions approx 23 x 12 metres. Orientation East-West.  
Romanesque Style.  
Use; Cathedral

2. Found two buildings joined with common entrance.  
Dimensions approx 11.3m x 3.6.  
Use Bishop's Palace.

3. Small church Dimensions approx 12 x 7 metres, which straddled the South boundary wall. This church had also had an apse at East gable  
*Incidentally the door of this church faced the tower door, but not exactly as had an earlier timber-frame church farther East.*

4. Stone building was located at the back gate; Dimensions- 13 x 7 metres.  
Use; Library/ Meeting Room

The results of the earlier surveys threw up three questions which were not satisfactorily answered ie;

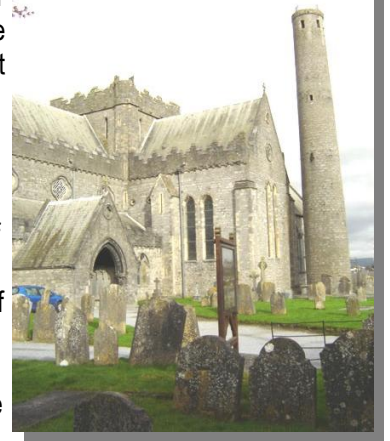
1. Traditionally the door of the round tower would face the entrance door of the main church.

2. Churches normally are orientated along an East-West axis.

3. Where were ceremonies conducted while the original 12<sup>th</sup> cathedral was being demolished and the new building constructed in the 13<sup>th</sup> c.?

Neither the building discovered beneath the cathedral chancel or that discovered outside during the geophysical survey satisfied these requirements.

Our survey satisfies the first two requirements satisfactorily. *It is likely that ceremonies continued in the smaller church during the demolition / construction phase..*





Bishop's Palace. Partly marked out



Site of small church 11th c.

St Canice's Cathedral & Churchyard. Kilkenny

