

History of Tallaght

The documented history of Tallaght dates back to early Christian Ireland but the many archaeological sites in the area suggest the presence of Bronze Age and perhaps even earlier settlers in the area.

The place name Tallaght is derived from the words *támhleacht*, meaning a plague burial place. The earliest mention of Tallaght in recorded history is the account of Parthalon in the Annals of the Four Masters. Parthalon the Greek was one of the early invaders of Ireland. A plague killed 9,000 of his followers in one week and they were buried in Tallaght and its environs and so the place came to be named *Taimleach Muintire Parthalon*. However, the burials which have been found in the Tallaght area are all normal pre-historic interments, mainly of the Bronze Age, and nothing suggesting a mass grave has so far been recorded here.

With the foundation of the monastery of Tallaght by St. Maelruain in 769 A.D. we have a more reliable record of Tallaght's early history. The monastery was a centre of learning and piety and was particularly associated with the *Céli Dé* spiritual reform movement. It was such an important institution that it and the monastery at Finglas were known as the "two eyes of Ireland". St. Aengus, an Ulsterman, was one of the most illustrious of the *Céli Dé* and devoted himself to the religious life. Wherever he went he was accompanied by a band of followers who distracted him from his devotions. He secretly travelled to the monastery at Tallaght where he was not known and enrolled as a lay brother. He remained unknown for many years until his identity was discovered by Maelruain. They later wrote the Martyrology of Tallaght together and St. Aengus also wrote a calendar of saints known as the *Féilire of Aengus*.

St. Maelruain's Church of Ireland now occupies the site of the original monastery. The present day church was built in 1829 and replaced an earlier one to which the still existing tower belonged. The tower is four stories high and has a spiral staircase. An external stairs gives access to the first floor and the spiral stairway to the floors above. The third floor has a vaulted stone ceiling above which is the flat roof and a small turret. In 1662 the church wardens were granted a sum of £100 in compensation for damage done by Captain Alland who had been stationed there with his troops in 1651. He stripped off the roof of the church and used the timber slates and pews for his own house. He also used the paving stones to pave the entrance to his kitchen and fed his horses from the font.

There are a number of interesting historic features in the grounds of the church. On left inside the churchyard gate is a font called St. Maelruain's Losset. This is a wide and shallow granite stone trough or font. 'Losat' is an Old Irish word denoting a wooden trough used in former times for kneading bread. It is likely that the country people named it from its similarity in shape to the lossets which they used in their homes. St. Maelruain's Cross lies south of the font. It is a small ancient cross set in a pedestal which is fixed in a circular granite base resembling a mill stone. The pedestal and base were formerly known as Moll Rooney's loaf and griddle and the font was called Moll Rooney's Losset. There are a great many tombstones in the graveyard dating mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries, and some even from the 17th century. One of these commemorates Colonel John Talbot of Belgard who sat in the Parliament of James II and took part in many important military engagements. The graves of the artists Oisín Kelly, Evie Hone and Elizabeth Rivers are in the new graveyard at St. Maelruain's. Also to be seen in the grounds of the church is the remains of the fosse,

the ancient curved bank which enclosed Maelruain's monastery. The best view is from the carpark at the rear of Smith's Toystore.

St. Maelruain died in 792 and was buried in Tallaght. The influence of the monastery continued after his death, as can be judged by the fact that, in 806, the monks of Tallaght were able to prevent the holding of the Taitin Games, because of some infringement of their rights. In 811 the monastery was devastated by the Vikings but the destruction was not permanent and the annals of the monastery continued to be recorded throughout the following centuries. After the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1179 Tallaght and its appurtenances were confirmed to the See of Dublin and became the property of the Archbishop. The complete disappearance of every trace of what must have been an extensive and well organised monastic settlement can only be accounted for by the subsequent history of the place, the erection and demolition of defensive walls and castles, and the incessant warfare and destruction that lasted for hundreds of years.

Throughout the greater part of the 13th century a state of comparative peace existed at Tallaght, but subsequently the O'Byrnes and O'Tooles took offensive action and were joined by many of the Archbishop's tenants. As a result of this the land was not tilled, the pastures were not stocked and the holdings were deserted. In 1310 the bailiffs of Tallaght got a royal grant to enclose the town. No trace of these defensive walls survive and we don't have any evidence of their exact location, except for the name of the Watergate Bridge which spans the stream on the Oldbawn Road.

In 1324 building commenced on Tallaght castle and it was finished some time before 1349. A century later it was reported to be in need of repair. When Archbishop Hoadley replaced Archbishop King in 1729 he found it in ruins, which he demolished and built himself a palace at a cost of £2,500. By 1821 the palace too had fallen into ruin and an Act of Parliament was passed which stated that it was unfit for habitation. The following year it was sold to Major Palmer, Inspector General of Prisons who pulled the palace down and used the materials to build his mansion, Tallaght House, as well as a schoolhouse and several cottages. Tallaght House is now incorporated in the buildings at St. Mary's Priory.

An ancient tower was spared in the demolition of the palace and was later incorporated into the buildings of St. Mary's Priory where it still stands today. It contains a spiral staircase and was originally four stories high but is now reduced internally to two. Attached to the castle was a long building which was used in the archbishop's time as a brewery and later on as a granary and stables. Under the Dominicans it was converted into a chapel and was used as such until 1883 when the new church was built. The grounds of the Priory, the old palace gardens, still retain many features from the historic past such as the Archbishop's bathhouse, the Friar's Walk and St. Maelruain's Tree.

The old constabulary barracks on the main street was the scene of the engagement known as the Battle of Tallaght which occurred during the Fenian rising on 5th March 1867. On that night the Fenians moved out to assemble at the appointed place on Tallaght Hill. The large number of armed men alarmed the police in Tallaght who sent warning to the nearest barracks. There were fourteen constables and a head constable under Sub-inspector Burke at Tallaght, and they took up a position outside the barracks where they commanded the roads from both Greenhills and Templeogue. The first body of armed men came from Greenhills and, when they came under police fire, retreated. Next a party came from Templeogue, and were also dispersed. In 1936 a skeleton, sword-bayonet and water bottle were found in a hollow tree stump near Terenure. It is thought that these were the

remains of one of the Fenians who had taken refuge there after the Battle of Tallaght and either died of his wounds or was frozen to death.

The 17th and 18th centuries brought many changes to Tallaght. Many mills were built along the Dodder and this brought new prosperity which saw the building of many houses in the area. In 1888 the Dublin to Blessington Steam Tramway opened and it passed through Tallaght Village. This provided a new means of transporting goods and also brought day-trippers from the city.

The 20th century saw the biggest changes taking place in Tallaght, however, when it was decided in the 1960s by Dublin County Council planners that a new town would be built around Tallaght village. This decision started the process that turned Tallaght from a small country village into the place we know today. Further significant changes took place in the 1990s with the construction of major buildings such as the Square Shopping Centre, the hospital and IT Tallaght. With the reorganisation of local government in the Dublin region, South Dublin County Council came into existence and set up its headquarters at Tallaght in 1994. Since the early 1970s, Tallaght has developed from a small village into a huge suburban area, with a population of over 100,000. It is still a rapidly changing area. The designation of tax incentive sites and the arrival of the LUAS have encouraged a development boom.