

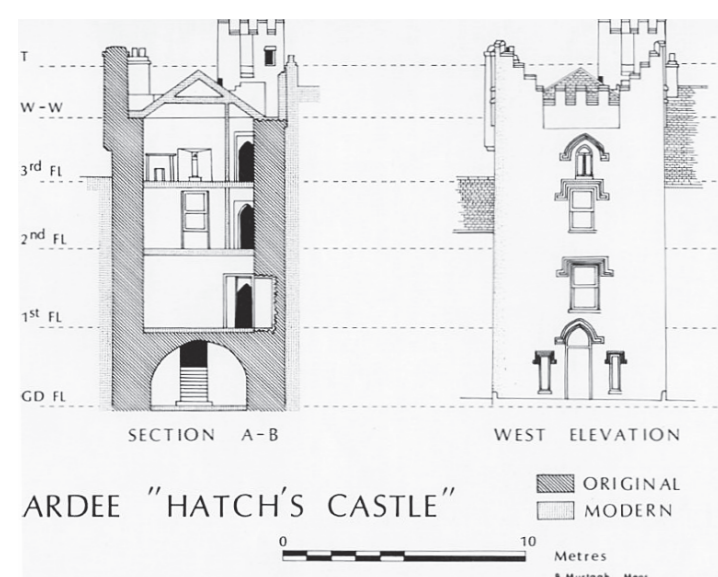


## Hatch's Castle

This building is a smaller, four-storey town house fronting onto Market Street, a continuation of Castle Street, 200m north of the Courthouse. It is currently inhabited as a private residence. It is known as Hatch's Castle, after the Hatch family who occupied it in the eighteenth century. There are four floors, with a wall-walk and turret above. The ground-floor plan is roughly rectangular, with semicircular turrets projecting outwards at the eastern corners. The most likely location for the original entrance is on the west, where the modern entrance is located.

Above: **Hatch's Castle, Ardee.**

Below: **West elevation and section of Hatch's Castle** (after B. Murtagh).



## Chantry College

Located to the east of St Mary's, outside the present graveyard wall, is an unusual medieval building known locally as 'the college'. It was formerly used as the residence for chaplains to St Mary's and was occupied by the church sexton as recently as 1875.

The simplicity of the building belies its significance. Historian and archaeologist Noel Ross has pointed out that a chantry is an endowment for the maintenance of priests to sing Masses, usually for the founder. He further states that the Ardee chantry college is unique in County Louth. While there are other chantries known in places such as Dundalk, Termonfeckin and Drogheda, the chantry college in Ardee was built specifically to allow chaplains to live in common.



Above: **The Chantry College, looking north-west.**

Constructed with high-pointed gables on the east and west sides, the original building had four floors. The walls are constructed of rough-coursed masonry with limestone quoins. The original entrance to the building was by means of a pointed doorway on the north-west, where there was a vault over the ground floor. The internal space on the ground floor measures 6.4m by 4.3m.

It is unclear how the upper storeys were accessed from the ground, but Bradley suggested that there may have been a wooden staircase on the exterior of the north wall. On the first floor there is an opening that may be a flat-headed window and another that may have been a doorway. A further opening on the east wall appears to be a blocked fireplace with a flue that continues through the gable of the second floor. The top floor appears to have accommodated a loft.



Above: **Motte, known as Castle Guard or Dawson's Moat, on the outskirts of Ardee.**

## Carmelite Friary and Hospital of St John the Baptist

Two important sites known to exist at Ardee are no longer identifiable. The Carmelite Friary is thought to have been founded by Ralph Pipard in 1302. It is likely that the building was of substantial proportions, as it accommodated the meetings of several provincial Carmelite chapters during the fourteenth century. Richardson's map of 1677 indicates that its location is most likely to have been near the river and within the southern end of the town wall on the east.

The Hospital of St John the Baptist, founded by Roger Pipard c. 1207, is likely to have been located outside the town walls on the southern side of the river. The name John Street may preserve an association with the precinct of the hospital at this location not far from Moore Hall. Richardson's map shows a church at this location, south of the river and to the east of the bridge. Human remains have been discovered in this area in recent years, possibly reinforcing the location as the burial ground of the hospital.

## Motte and bailey

The remains of a motte and bailey provide some of the earliest evidence for an Anglo-Norman presence at Ardee. It is likely that the motte would have been constructed around 1185, when Prince John granted the barony of Ardee to Gilbert Pipard.

The motte, known as the Castle Guard or Dawson's Moat, is located on the eastern outskirts of Ardee on the south side of the river, c. 900m from the present bridge. The mound that forms the motte, on top of which a wooden castle would have been erected, stands over 9m high, with a diameter of 60m at the base and a flat top measuring 16.4m across. It is likely that the bailey would have been located on the north side, but it has been levelled along with the banks and ditches that would have surrounded the motte itself.

### Further reading

Bradley, J. 1984 Ardee—an archaeological study. *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* 20 (4), 267–96.

Murtagh, B. 1989 Hatch's Castle, Ardee, County Louth—a fortified town house of the Pale. *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* 22 (1), 36–48.

Ross, N. 2011 The walled town of Ardee—selected extracts. *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological and Historical Society* 27 (3), 339–65.



Location map.

Cover: **Sculpture by Ann Meldon Hugh entitled 'Cuchulain carrying the slain Ferdia', located in public area beside bridge.**

### Credits and acknowledgements

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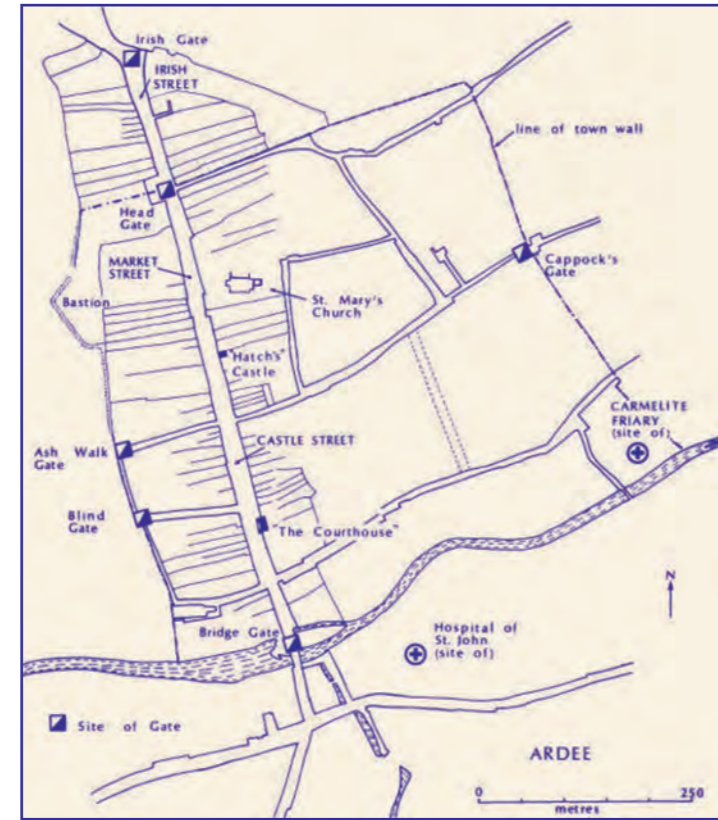


# Where Ferdia fell: Ardee, Co. Louth

## Introduction

The town of Ardee, some 18km south-west of Dundalk, shows evidence of development from the thirteenth century onwards. Today the town is a vibrant shopping venue, its long main street allowing many shops, services, bars and restaurants to present their wares to the passing pedestrian. As a result of its continuity of development, much of the fabric of the medieval town has been removed and now lies beneath ground level. Nevertheless, the surviving monuments are both spectacular and unusual.

The name Ardee—which gives the town a cachet that is arguably the envy of every other town in Ireland—is the Anglicised form of *Ath Fhirdia*, ‘the ford of Ferdia’, a reference to an episode in the epic tale *Táin Bó Cuaigle*. It is here on the southern extremes of the Plain of Muirthemne that Cuchullain fought a heroic duel with his friend Ferdia. The fight is thought to have taken place just upstream from the present bridge.



From top: **Outline map of Ardee, showing town defences and location of sites referred to in text** (after Bradley).

**View of River Dee from close to bridge, looking west.**

**The present bridge spanning the River Dee, viewed from west.**

## The death of Ferdia

Of the many incidents recorded in the *Táin*, the combat with Ferdia ranks among the most traumatic episodes for Cuchullain. The story is set at a fording point on the River Dee and features the use of magical armour and fabulous weaponry worthy of any modern-day science-fiction novel.

Ferdia was the foster-brother of the Ulster champion Cuchullain. Both had received their training as warriors from Scathach. In her attack on Ulster, Queen Meadhbh of Connacht encouraged Ferdia to take up arms in single combat against Cuchullain at the ford, promising him her daughter Finnabair in marriage. The two heroes confronted one another with taunts before falling to battle. They fought for two days with no clear victor. On the third day they fought with increased intensity. Ferdia, protected by a magical skin of horn and a millstone that hung from his neck, eventually fell victim to Cuchullain's secret weapon, the *gae bolga*, a sophisticated, multi-headed barbed spear designed for fighting in rivers, which Cuchullain could launch with his foot.

## The bridge

Natural fording points on rivers are important for transport and communication and have a strategic value. The riverside location and the presence of a natural fording point would have been among the reasons for the establishment of a town here. Its location on the River Dee was significant throughout prehistory, with some evidence indicative of Mesolithic activity close to the town and its environs.

There is no indication of the date of the first bridge at Ardee, but it is likely that the original bridge would have been wooden. There are references to repairs to a stone-built bridge being organised in the early fourteenth century, when it is likely that a gate would have defended the town on the north bank of the river. Richardson's map of 1677 depicts a three-arched bridge at this location.

An indication that Ardee may have had more than one bridge is indicated by a reference to a grant by the archbishop of Armagh of an indulgence of 40 days to all who contributed to the repair of the bridges at Ardee. The present bridge appears to be of eighteenth-century origin.

## Town walls and street plan

The principal line of communication through Ardee is the wide, north/south-running Market Street and Castle Street, c. 800m long. Like many other medieval towns, Ardee appears to have developed around a market-place. John Bradley remarked that Market Street is first mentioned as Main Street in 1344, and it would appear that the cross that stands outside St Mary's may have been located here, replacing a wooden market cross that formerly occupied that location. Houses would have lined either side of the street, with their burgage plots extending to their rear. Other than the castles described below, little is known of the early houses in Ardee. Small streets and lanes would have occurred at intervals to the right and left of the main street, giving access to the rear of the properties.



Ardee was besieged and captured on three occasions. In 1315 it was taken by Edward Bruce; it fell to Conn O'Neill and Manus O'Donnell in 1539; and Sir Phelim O'Neill captured it in 1641. The town was defended by walls, which enclosed over 25 hectares (60 acres) by the seventeenth century. There is now little trace of the town walls above ground, but their rectangular plan can be determined through the use of early maps. Outside the walls on the north was a suburb at Irish Street.

The early maps show that there were six gates. The Head Gate stood at the top of Market Street; another gate further to the north on Irish Street was known as the North Gate, suggesting that the extramural suburb had its own defensive wall projecting off the original town wall. Cappock's Gate provided access from the east. On the south, access via the bridge was provided by Bridge Gate on the northern side of the river. On the west there were two gates, the Blind Gate and the Ash Walk Gate. Regrettably, none of the gates survive.

North of the Ash Walk Gate there is a projection outwards in the town wall known as the Bastion. This feature would appear to be a seventeenth-century artillery fortification providing protection against attack from the west.

Above: **Extract from Richardson's map, showing layout of streets, houses and other buildings in 1677.**

Top right: **The west façade of St Mary's Church, Ardee.**

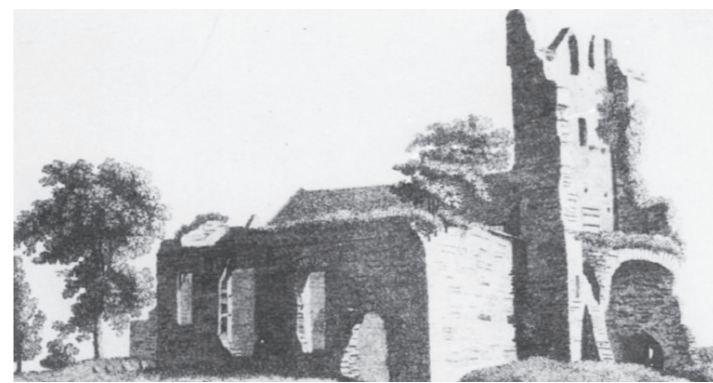
Middle right: **St Mary's viewed from the north, showing the rear of the blind elevation marking the site of the medieval north aisle.**



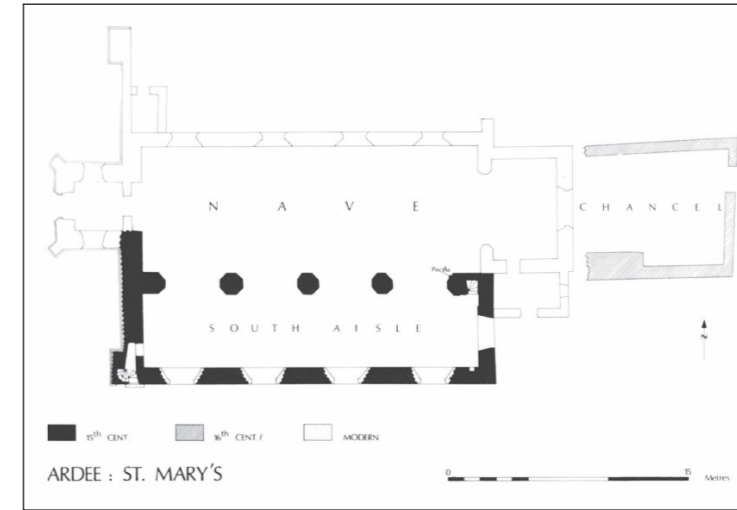
## St Mary's

A church had been established in Ardee before 1197. In 1315 it is recorded that Edward Bruce had burned 'the church of St Mary the Virgin, full of men, women and children'. The surviving structure of St Mary's Church incorporates three phases of building within it—the fifteenth-century church, a sixteenth-century addition and the present nineteenth-century church. The present nineteenth-century façade on the west side is an impressive construction, with a blank elevation on the north which appears to be an attempt to mark the position and layout of the no-longer-upstanding medieval northern aisle. The medieval southern aisle is incorporated into the early nineteenth-century building and is separated from the nave by four pointed arches supported on octagonal piers with moulded capitals.

The chancel, extending from the east end of the nave, is considered to be a sixteenth-century addition, although the heavy render covering the building makes it difficult to appreciate.



Above: **Illustration from Grose's *Antiquities of Ireland* (1783), showing the medieval remains of St Mary's in ruins. It is likely that the remains of the medieval tower are intact within the present church tower.**



Above: **Floor plan of St Mary's, showing phases of building** (after Bradley).

Below: **Fragment of sixteenth-century Market Cross mounted on concrete shaft and base.**

## Medieval cross fragment

A fragment of a disc-headed cross, likely to date from the mid-sixteenth century, stands in front of the façade north of the entrance to the church. This may be the remains of a cross that once stood in Ardee's marketplace. The surviving limestone fragment has been re-erected on a concrete shaft and base.

The west face of the cross bears a representation of the Crucifixion under a canopy, while the east face shows a representation of the Virgin and Child under an ogee-headed canopy. The north arm bears a slightly damaged IHS inscription in false relief.



## The Courthouse

Located on the east side of Castle Street, this building ranks as the largest fortified town house to survive in Ireland. The mass of its masonry makes it the most noticeable of the remains of the medieval town of Ardee. Dating from the fifteenth century, this structure was previously known as 'Ardee Castle', 'St Leger's Castle' and 'Pipard's Castle'. Today it is more commonly referred to as the Courthouse.

Rectangular in plan, with projecting turrets at the north-west and south-west angles, the building stands four storeys high. The original entrance to the tower was through a pointed-arched doorway in the north-west angle. The door was protected by a machicolation on the outside, with a 'murder-hole' on the interior.

The ground floor has a rounded barrel vault, and access to the upper storeys is by means of a stairway in the north-west turret. The structure has been in continuous use, with most of the windows being replaced and modernised over time. A twin-light ogee-headed window survives at ground level, however, while three original windows—single loops with an internal splay—survive on the fourth floor.



Above: **The impressive west façade of the Courthouse.**

Right: **Engraving of 'the Town-Castle of Artherdee' from Wright's *Louthiana*, published in 1758.**

Below: **West elevation and section of the Courthouse** (after B. Murtagh).

