

Bishop Malchus – Winchester Cathedral’s link with Waterford City, Ireland

In the late eleventh century the Irish Norse who had populated the Waterford area of south-east Ireland since 914, wrote to Anselm, the archbishop of Canterbury, asking for a bishop to be consecrated for them. Although they had been Christians for a century, they did not have a bishop of their own.¹

The letter was signed by Muircheartach Ó Briain, a great-grandson of Brian Boru. He was king of Munster at the time but had ambitions to rule the entire country and signed the letter as ‘king of Ireland’. The decision to request Malchus’ appointment was made after a synod at Waterford in 1095 convened by the king which decided that they would be subject to distant Canterbury and not the nearby Archbishop of Cashel or any other Irish Church authority.²

The man they had in mind was Malchus (or Máel Ísu Ua hAinmere), an Irish Benedictine monk who had been at Winchester Cathedral under Bishop Walkelin (or Walchelin) for many years. Their letter to Canterbury, according to Eadmer’s *Historia novorum*, said that Malchus ‘is well known to us as of noble birth and character and steeped in apostolic and ecclesiastical learning, [and] catholic in his faith.’³ Nothing, however, is known of his ancestry or family background. One source gives his birth as being in 1047.⁴ His candidature was supported by Bishop Walkelin in a letter to Anselm.⁵

On the 28th of December 1096 Malchus was consecrated at Cambridge as the first bishop of Waterford by archbishop Anselm.⁶ Fifteen years later in 1111 he was also appointed archbishop of Cashel. Malchus lived to the great age of 88, dying at Lismore in 1135.⁷

¹ A. Breen, “Ua hAinmire, Máel-Ísu (Malchus)”, *Irish Dictionary of Biography* (2009); <https://www.dib.ie/biography/ua-hainmire-mael-isu-malchus-a5311>, accessed 24 May 2022

² D. Ó Ceallacháin, “Relic of the True Cross”, *Waterford Treasures* (Waterford, 2022); <https://www.waterfordtreasures.com/news/relic-of-the-true-cross>, accessed 24 May 2022

³ M. Rule (ed.), *Eadmeri Historia Novorum in Anglia* (1884; reprint Cambridge, 2012), p. 77.

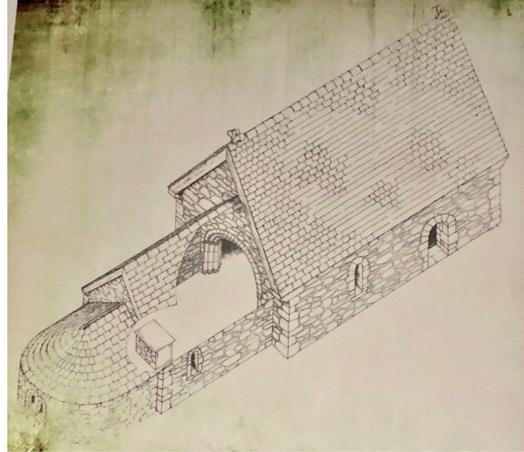
⁴ Breen, *Ua hAinmire*, online.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See <https://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/bmalchus.html>

⁷ Breen, *Ua hAinmire*, online.

Malchus was renowned as a builder, like his former bishop Walkelin, and constructed St Peter's church, located in Peter's Street, which was probably Waterford's first parish church.⁸ Its design may have been based on a parish church in Winchester. (Photo right) St Peter's had a rounded apse at the eastern end, a common feature of Norman churches built in England after 1066 but unique in Ireland. The church's foundations are now preserved inside Waterford City Square Shopping Centre. Malchus also began building Waterford's cathedral soon after his arrival on the site of the present Christchurch Cathedral.⁹



One of a bishop's tasks was to obtain relics for his cathedral. By a gift from Pope Paschal II (1099-1118) to Muirheartach Ó Briain, the cathedral received a relic of the True Cross, which was made up of five pieces of wood arranged in a cross and enclosed in silver. The relic remained in Waterford after Malchus' resignation as archbishop of Cashel until 1620 when it was removed from the cathedral for safekeeping. After passing through several hands, it returned to Christchurch Cathedral in the 1930s and is now in the Medieval Museum at Waterford City.¹⁰

Other Winchester connections in Waterford are the inclusion of Winchester saints in a thirteenth century liturgy¹¹, and a late 12th century knife similar to one found in Winchester. The knife was found by archaeologists close to the site of St Peter's Church. Made of iron and decorated with copper plates, it has a Latin inscription which reads: WHAT IS CUT WITH THE SHARP EDGE, MAY IT BE FILLED WITH THE POWERFUL LOVE OF CHRIST.

- This article is based on notes written by Friends' member Patrick Daniell, as a result of his visit to the Medieval Museum in the Viking Triangle at Waterford City.
- The image of the original St Peter's Church in Waterford can be found in the Medieval Museum.

⁸ D. Ó Ceallacháin, *Relic of the True Cross*, online.

⁹ *Ibid*, online

¹⁰ *Ibid*, online.

¹¹ D. O'Connor, "Bishop Malchus: His Arrival in Lismore, and the Winchester Saints in a Waterford Calendar", *Decies* 62 (2006), p. 49-65.