

Lovers of Irish art may feel a sense of familiarity with his picture by Walter Osborne, even if they have not seen it before, or visited Dinan in Brittany. For it shows the same motif: gateway at Dinan which is featured in the much -admired painting *The Hôtel Beaumanoir's Portal, Dinan, 1883* also known as *Old Convent Gate, Dinan, 1883*, by Osborne's contemporary Joseph Malachy Kavanagh, in the National Gallery of Ireland (NGI. 1194).

The medieval walled town of Dinan in the district Cote d'Émeraude in the north of Brittany, was often the first port-of-call for Irish and English visitors to the Continent, quite easily accessible by ferry from Southampton to St. Malo, and then by local steamer down the River Rance. Strategically situated on a hill above the river, Dinan was a picturesque medieval town encircled by a stout wall, notable for the port, the imposing St. Servan Church, the Tour d'Horloge dating from the 15th Century, and the Jardin Anglais; as well as for its cobbled squares and streets, stone entrance gates, and stone bridges. There was a long-established English colony there, and throughout the 19th Century, Dinan attracted many artists, including Dagnan and Stanfield in the Romantic period, the Pre-Raphaelites Seddon and Boyce, History painters Ward and Lady Elizabeth Butler, and French Realists Corot and Bonvin. Shortly before Osborne's visit the old stone Porte de Brest had been demolished.



The Hôtel Beaumanoir's Portal, Dinan, 1883
by Joseph Malachy Kavanagh (1856-1918)
Photo © National Gallery of Ireland

Of more significance to Walter Osborne was the fact that young English contemporaries, such as Ralph Todd, Blandford Fletcher, William Breakspeare and Edwin Harris (some of them students in Antwerp) had painted in Dinan c.1879-80. After completing their studies in Antwerp Osborne and Kavanagh travelled to Brittany in spring or early summer 1883. In spite of the town's historic sites Osborne preferred the more quiet or secluded corners of Dinan, for example the narrow Rue de l'Apport leading from the Place des Merciers, and the Rue du Jerzual, which led downhill to the port.

The large gateway (entitled *Old Convent Gate* in Kavanagh's picture) is situated on the Rue de l'Apport, the Renaissance portal to the Hôtel Beaumanoir, built in the 15th Century. Rather than showing the gate from outside, bathed in sunlight, the artist represents it from inside and largely in shadow. Framed by the gateway, an elderly street cleaner with a long-handled twig broom pauses from his work, standing in reflection, or looking at the viewer. He wears the plain costume of the Dinan worker: wide-brimmed hat, blue jacket, faded trousers and wooden clogs. The painting is a fine piece of Social Realism. Yet the man stands in shadow, and Osborne's attention is given as much to the architectural features of the scene, and contrast of sunlight and shadow, as to the human presence. Although small in scale, the picture is well constructed, and painted with a kind of rapturous verisimilitude. Osborne was attracted by the variety of rough textures: old stone, weathered wood, cobblestones, slates, tiles, grass and foliage, on which sunlight falls.

He shows the imposing gateway with its latticed upper area through which the sun pierces. The gate and the workman's hut appear in a state of neglect, the timberwork battered, and weeds growing. (Behind the artist was a small square in which the manor was situated, while the top of the gate's exterior was decorated by a religious statue and curling fish motifs). Warm sunlight in