

# Conservation Plan for FORT PROTECTOR Portlaoise, Co. Laois



Prepared for Laois Heritage Society

**lotts** Architecture + Urbanism





**Conservation Plan for  
FORT PROTECTOR  
Portlaoise, Co. Laois**

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The Fort of Maryborough, on which construction began in 1547-48, is of considerable historical significance, locally, nationally and internationally. The establishment of a military fort in the southern flank of the Pale was seen as vital to the English interests in Ireland - the defence of the Pale, the English enclave around Dublin, against the formidable and warlike native Irish clans, particularly the O'Moores and O'Connors.

The English wanted to re-establish Royal authority in the Pale and extend it across the country. Apart from the nuisance of constant attacks on the Pale and the inability of the English to control the lands occupied by the powerful clans in the Irish midlands, the hostility of the O'Moores and their allies also caused problems for them in linking up with the other main royalist bases in Waterford, Cork and Limerick.

Innumerable attempts were made over the course of almost four centuries, from the coming of the Normans to the Tudor period, to crush the ongoing native resistance in the midlands to foreign rule. In order to finally rid itself of the troublesome O'Moores, the English regime resorted to extreme measures, even by their own ruthless standards. The decision to effectively eliminate the O'Moores by military means, by plantation and eventually by transportation was the first major step by the English towards the expansion of their Kingdom by colonization.

The history of the O'Moores and the construction of the Fort of Maryborough are, therefore inextricably linked with the era of the Tudor Conquest of Ireland and with such historic figures as Queen Mary I, after whom Maryborough (Portlaoise) was named, Queen Elizabeth I and a host of other influential historical figures of the era.

It was decided to effectively exterminate the O'Moores and the other septs with deep-rooted affinity to Laois and Offaly and give their lands to faithful servants of the Crown. The Plantation

was the first of its kind in Ireland and was the model used for the Plantations of Munster and Ulster, which followed, and for the colonization of America (Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607) and so many other countries around the world in later times. It can be claimed that the British Empire, the biggest Empire the world has known, started here.

It is said that history is written by the victors and this is certainly the case with Irish history. The English down through the ages have been good at keeping records and reports. The history of Ireland handed down to us in the written form is usually from the English perspective.

The history books therefore tend to ignore the fact that the Irish had an enlightened and orderly society long before the English got their act together as a nation. The O'Moores and the old Gaelic clans had their own language, customs, and laws, as well as their own bards and musicians. The Irish generally did not keep written records, so their story is largely overlooked except for what was passed down to us by word of mouth and what has survived from the limited output of the Gaelic scholars of old.

But that was not the picture of the Irish that was portrayed by the English. The Gaelic clans were branded instead as wild and savage by such ancient scribes as, for example, Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales) in the 12th century and John Derrick in his *Images of Ireland* in the 16th century. Projecting such a contemptible impression of their adversaries made it easier for the militarists in London to win the seal of royal approval for their policy for what might today be called "ethnic cleansing".

The subjugation of Laois and Offaly began in 1547 with the improvisation of an army base at Daingean in Offaly and the building of a new military Fort, called Fort Protector, at a defensively strategic location, now Portlaoise. The Laois fort was named after Edward Seymour (Lord Somerset), brother-in-law of King Henry

VIII, and Protector of England during the minority of his nephew, King Edward VI. The plan was formalized as plantation by law in 1556, the 3rd and 4th of Philip and Mary.

The campaign of colonization was conducted with brutality, officially sanctioned by the Lord Deputy. But, despite their heavy losses of leaders and men in the conflict, the embattled O'Moores continued to stoutly defend their territory against the heavily armed colonists and militia and continued to harass the settlers and towns within the Pale.

The biggest thorn for the English administration in the 1560s and '70s was a dashing young rebel, Rory Óg O'Moore, who was fostered by, and married into, the O'Byrne clan of Wicklow. His reputation as a heroic and fearless champion of his beleaguered people and his credentials as a future leader were well established when he was elected chief of the O'Moore clan in 1571.

His daring tactics proved so effective that it threw the plan to resettle the lands of the displaced Irish into disarray. He was the living version of an Irish Robin Hood. He proved a nightmare for the settlers who, in consultation with the Lord Deputy, Sir Henry Sidney, invited the outlawed septs to a peace parley at the ancient Rath of Mullaghmast, near Athy in County Kildare in March 1578.

The Annals of the Four Masters recalls the "horrible and abominable act of treachery committed by the English". The Annals tell us that the Irish "were summoned to show themselves with the greatest number they could be able to bring with them ... and on their arrival they were surrounded on every side by four lines of soldiers and cavalry, who proceeded to shoot and slaughter without mercy, so that not a single individual escaped by flight or force".

It is hardly surprising that official sources are almost silent on the massacre of the O'Moores and their allies at Mullaghmast. Afterwards the

Lord Deputy praised the leading settlers, Francis Cosby and Robert Hartpole, for their "great diligence, policy and painstaking" in wiping out the leaders of the midland clans.

But Sidney must have regretted that his nemesis, Rory Óg, did not fall into his trap. The English combed the countryside committing numerous atrocities against his kin before he was eventually hunted down and killed, not by the English nor by the settlers, but by his Irish cousin, Barnaby Fitzpatrick, who was loyal to the Crown and was rewarded with title and lands for his dastardly deed. The O'Moores, despite these adversities, continued the fight against their oppressors for another twenty years as the younger members of the clan took up the torch.

The Fort of Maryborough was central to the English campaign of colonization and it was the focus for many attacks by the rebels. By 1607, however, the long struggle of the war-weary and much depleted O'Moores and their allies, as well as Irish resistance around the country, was finally crushed. The survivors of the seven septs of Laois were rounded up and banished from their homeland to lands in Kerry, left vacant and desolate by the wanton campaign of ethnic cleansing of Munster during the Elizabethan-Desmond war.

This should have been the end after sixty years of resistance and rebellion by the dispossessed O'Moores and their supporters. It wasn't. In 1641 a countrywide rebellion of the Irish against English rule started. One of its main leaders was an eminent descendent of the O'Moores – Rory O'Moore, a nephew of Rory Óg, the legendary hero of past battles.

Once again, the Fort of Maryborough figured prominently as a strategic military base and changed hands a number of times during the decade long war between the Catholic Confederates and the Royalists forces. But its century long manifestation as a functioning military fort came to an end with the coming of

the Parliamentarian forces of Oliver Cromwell. It was substantially reduced by his New Model Army, under Generals Hewson and Reynolds, in 1650.

A small town had grown around the Fort, and continued to expand after its decommissioning. This town of Maryborough became the first plantation town in Ireland. Laois was renamed the Queen's County and Offaly became King's County. Up to the 1900s, Maryborough was a modest county town of about three thousand people. At the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, it was renamed Portlaoise. It is now one of Ireland's fastest growing towns with a population of 30,000.

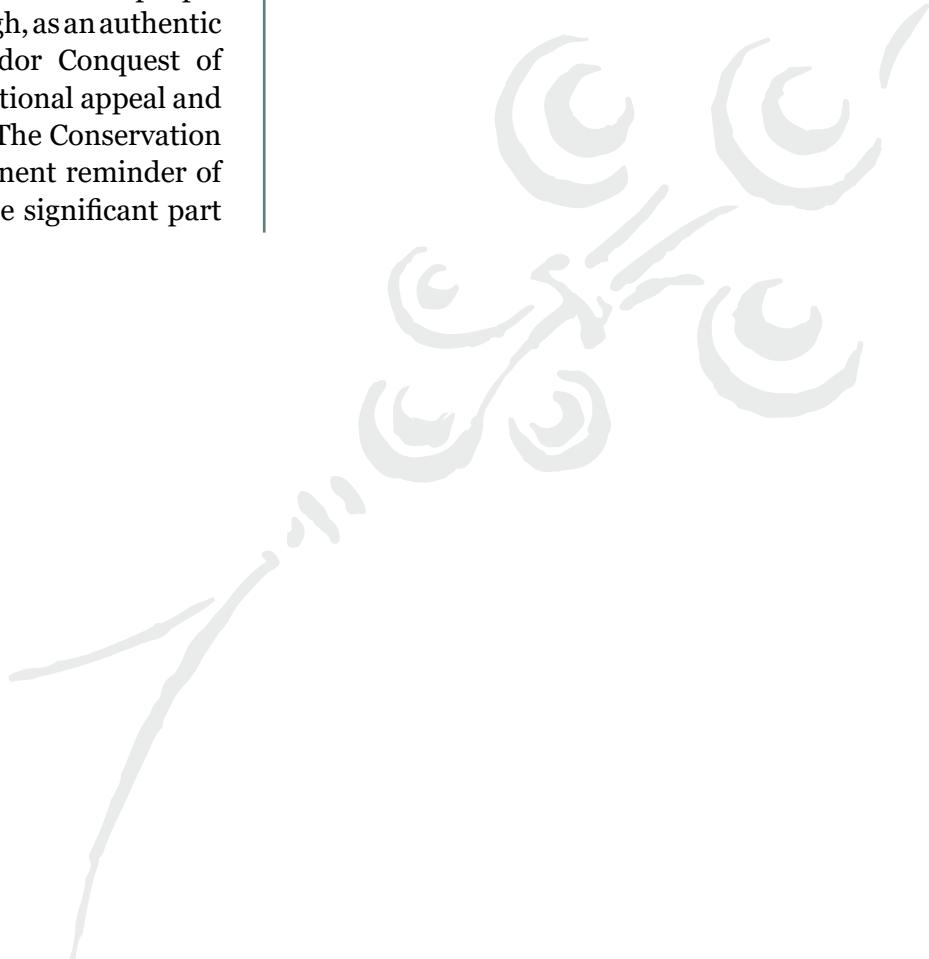
Fort Protector represents the most visible sign of the military aspect of the Tudor Conquest of Ireland. Miraculously the battlements of the Fort have survived to a remarkable extent, despite the vicissitudes of the past five centuries, including its reduction by Cromwellian forces. The Tudor period holds a fascination for millions of people today and the Fort of Maryborough, as an authentic and substantial artefact of Tudor Conquest of Ireland gives the Fort an international appeal and has obvious tourism potential. The Conservation of the Fort will also be a permanent reminder of the reason for its existence – the significant part

the O'Moores played in trying to maintain the old order in Ireland.

Laois Heritage Society has been highlighting the significance of the Fort of Maryborough in the Irish historical landscape for over twenty years. It is an architectural and monumental treasure that has been hiding in plain sight as the town of Portlaoise grew around it over the centuries.

Thanks to the enlightened efforts of Laois Heritage Officer, Catherine Casey, and the inspirational research work of Richard O'Loughlin, and his project team fellow members, Dr. Eoin O'Sullivan and Dr. Diarmuid Wheeler, as well as the help and encouragement given to us by Laois County Council and the Heritage Council, the significance of the Fort of Maryborough has been rescued from the shadows of history.

**Teddy Fennelly & Michael Parsons**



The Fort Protector is where the story of Portlaoise began. Once a mighty fortress at the forefront of English efforts to expand control over all of Ireland, the Fort lost its importance 100 years after it was built, fell into obscurity and the town grew in around it. In 2015, when the Laois Heritage Society initiated the preparation of this Conservation Plan, the Fort had been largely forgotten, and its significance and potential as a heritage site were not properly appreciated.

The Fort Protector is not a simple site to manage or conserve. Over three centuries it has become fragmented into multiple properties, some privately owned, some in public ownership, and some of them built upon with buildings which are significant in their own right. The former external defences outside the wall have been subsumed into building plots on the Main Street, Railway Street and Church Avenue, enveloped into an industrial mill at Fitzmaurice Place, and covered over by the street on Tower Hill and other areas. The complexity of uses and owners means a large number of stakeholders have an interest in the site, alongside other parties, such as the planning authority, the business community and bodies concerned with the protection of architectural and archaeological heritage. The Conservation Plan process is a formal methodology which was designed for this type of site, to bring together such diverse entities and interests to agree a shared strategy for the site as a whole.

The Conservation Plan was commissioned by Laois Heritage Society, funded by the Heritage Council and prepared by Lotts Architecture. It comprises four main parts.

The first part aims to understand the site in a fully rounded way, through historical research, study of documentary sources, and visual analysis of the walls and the site. This work has been supported by a detailed electronic survey and an archaeological excavation by Gort Archaeology, both funded by Laois County Council. A scholarly essay by Dr Diarmuid Wheeler entitled *A Model*

*of Tudor Colonisation: The Historical Evolution of Fort Protector* uncovers the historical context of the Fort from its establishment to its demise, alongside a chronology of events. Analysis of three surviving sixteenth-century maps yields insight into the surrounding landscape of the Laois-Offaly plantation, the form and dimensions of the Fort itself, and the layout of the nascent town, giving the names of the first settlers and depicting the houses in which they lived. Eighteenth and nineteenth-century estate maps, deeds, written accounts, historic Ordnance Survey maps, illustrations and early photographs further help to create a picture of the historic form of the Fort.

The visual analysis of the Fort recorded that 80% of the perimeter wall has survived above the ground. The entire Fort is described, divided into the 22 properties over which it is now spread, including 14 properties which lie inside the walls. The descriptions interpret both the standing fabric and what is known about features which lie buried under each of the sites, informed by the archaeological excavation on the future public library site, which found that the walls were exposed to a depth of c. 2m below the present ground level.

The second part of the Plan assesses the significance of each feature of the Fort. This includes the Fort wall, the former surrounding ditch and other features which survive below the ground, such as the imposing ‘Castle of Maryborough’ opposite Lyster Lane, and the timber-framed barracks referred to as the ‘King’s House’. A subterranean tunnel has come to light on several occasions over the past 100 years, but has never been properly charted. Associated sites related to the foundation of the town also add to the importance of the Fort, including the stone tower of the historic ‘Store House’ preserved within the former Presentation Convent, the milling site at Fitzmaurice Place which evolved over four centuries, the changing course of the Triogue River, and the much under-valued Ridge Burial Ground. This section culminates in a Statement of Significance of the Fort.

The third part is a review of issues related to the conservation of the Fort Protector. A great deal has been achieved in this respect since this process began 5 years ago. The ‘Old Fort Festival’ has placed the Fort front-and-centre in the public perception of the town’s heritage; Laois County Council now owns half of the Fort interior; The public realm plan *Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond* has recognised the area as the cultural quarter of Portlaoise; Fitzmaurice Place has been transformed as a green amenity focussed on the eastern wall of the Fort, and funding has been obtained through the Historic Towns Initiative run by the Heritage Council and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and also through Project Ireland 2040 to enable further valuable public realm enhancements.

The Plan looks beyond these successes to imagine how the Fort interior might be gradually integrated to become a single heritage site, encompassing the Old Barracks and, at some point, the underground remains of the former castle. Proposals have been made to make part of the Fort interior publicly accessible, including a viewing platform in the round corner bastion to overlook Fitzmaurice Place and connect visually to the landscape in which the Fort was situated by its military founders. The need is identified to create stronger linkages, both across the Fort interior, but also externally to the Old St Peter’s Graveyard, the Ridge Burial Ground, and to the Main Street itself. The Fort is a great resource in terms of recasting the identity of Portlaoise at national level. The interpretation of the site is essential in this respect and the suggestion is made of presenting its story in a future Museum of the Midlands.

The Plan looks also at the role the Fort plays in wider developments, notably the planned regeneration of the Presentation lands for quality public housing, and future plans for the CBS lands.

The fourth part of the plan consists of policies for the conservation of the site. These aim to institute a joined-up approach to conservation works in order to preserve the integrity of the site. The policies address repairs and restoration of the Fort wall itself, works to reveal its external and internal defences and for the presentation of the Fort interior.

# Section 1

## Introduction



## **1.1 Outline Description**

The Fort Protector is a large rectangular fortress, measuring 105m x 127m externally, which is embedded in the urban fabric of the town of Portlaoise. The Fort was built in 1547-48 by English forces under Edward VI as part of the suppression of the Gaelic Irish territories of the O'Mores and O'Connors. The plantation of Laois and Offaly followed shortly thereafter and was formalised in the creation of Queen's County and King's County in 1556.

The establishment of the Fort marks the foundation of the town of Portlaoise, formerly Maryborough, which began as a fortified enclosure around its walls. Its significance is complemented by nearby sites relating to the genesis of the town: The churchyard and ruin of the sixteenth-century Old St Peter's Church to the west; a stone tower surviving from the historic 'Store House', preserved within the nineteenth-century Presentation Convent to the east; the Triogue River, the present course of which marks the southern extent of the original town; and beyond that the historic Ridge Graveyard, set on an esker ridge, originally an important defensive formation east of the town.

The Fort served the intended purpose as a military stronghold for just a hundred years. In 1650 it was disabled by the army of Oliver Cromwell, beginning its eventual decline and virtual disappearance into the background of the town. Today the interior of the Fort is subdivided into a number of separate properties, and although 80% of the enclosing wall survives in some form above the ground, it is concealed from view by buildings around much of its perimeter.

Before the commencement of the Conservation Plan process, the Fort was widely unknown, even to the people of Portlaoise, and its immense heritage significance was not fully appreciated.

## **1.2 Conservation Plan Project**

The Conservation Plan has been undertaken over three phases, in 2015, 2016 and 2017. The aim of

the Plan is to create a policy framework to guide all future decisions on the development of the Fort, to enhance its standing in the town and to enable its eventual presentation as a heritage site. It is felt that a properly presented Fort site would promote the regeneration of the town centre and could become an important place for the interpretation of the history of the Midlands. In the intervening period, work has commenced on some aspects of the conservation of the Fort and while the Plan has been updated where possible, it remains a living document, with changes happening around the Fort on a daily basis.

## **Project Team**

The Conservation Plan has been prepared using a transdisciplinary research approach. The professional team consisted of conservation architect Richard McLoughlin of Lotts Architecture, archaeologist Dr Eoin Sullivan of Gort Archaeology, and historian Diarmuid Wheeler.

The team reported to a steering committee consisting of Teddy Fennelly and Michael Parsons of the Laois Heritage Society, and Catherine Casey, Heritage Officer of Laois County Council.

## **Collaborative Process**

The work involved widespread collaboration over the three years. Consultation took place across each of the three phases with a wide body of property owners and stakeholders. All three team members gave talks to the Laois Heritage Society, and further presentations were made to the Laois Heritage Forum and as part of the County Library Lecture Series on Architectural Heritage. Tours were organised each year during National Heritage Week, and as part of a Military History Society of Ireland summer tour to Laois in 2017.

The Fort Protector was a prominent topic in public-consultation sessions as part of the Public Realm Strategy for Portlaoise, prepared in 2016-17 for Laois County Council by a multi-disciplinary team led by GVA Planning and Regeneration.

Early engagement with traders in Main Street, including property owners along the southern side of the Fort, led to the inauguration of the ‘Old Fort Festival’. The festival, now an annual (though interrupted by Covid 19), celebrates the history and heritage of the town, with a range of family heritage activities related to the Fort, including historical re-enactments, arts and crafts, heraldry, falconry, archery, as well as food and music events. The festival has brought the Fort Protector to the fore in the minds of the people as the signature monument in the town, integral to the town’s identity.

## **Methodology**

The Plan has been prepared following the methodology devised by the late James Semple Kerr (1932-2014) and included in the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter for the Conservation of Places of Cultural Significance (see Fig 1).

This approach was developed specifically for heritage sites of complexity, to enable adoption of an agreed conservation strategy based on an accepted understanding of their significance and the threats which it faces, as assessed by professionals from all relevant disciplines, working in a collaborative way in consultation with all those having a stake in its future survival. The Plan therefore is composed of four main parts.

### ***1. Understanding Significance***

This is the result of three means of evaluation: Documentary research into primary and secondary sources on the history of the Fort and how it developed; Physical analysis through observation, archaeological investigation and electronic surveying techniques; Oral sources and traditions, and the meaning and associations which the site has to the people who know it.

Based on assessment of the understanding gained, a Statement of Significance is formulated. The statement makes direct reference to the Categories of Special Interest which are identified for statutory protection in the Planning Act,

but also takes account of all other aspects of significance, such as intangible heritage values and the potential of the Fort to transform the urban environment and cultural landscape of the town.

### ***2. Identification of Conservation Issues***

Analysis of issues which threaten the significance of the Fort, such as multiple ownership, unsuitable use, poor repair and presentation and lack of awareness. The future survival of the Fort depends also on funding opportunities, and on development of ideas for its sustainable development.

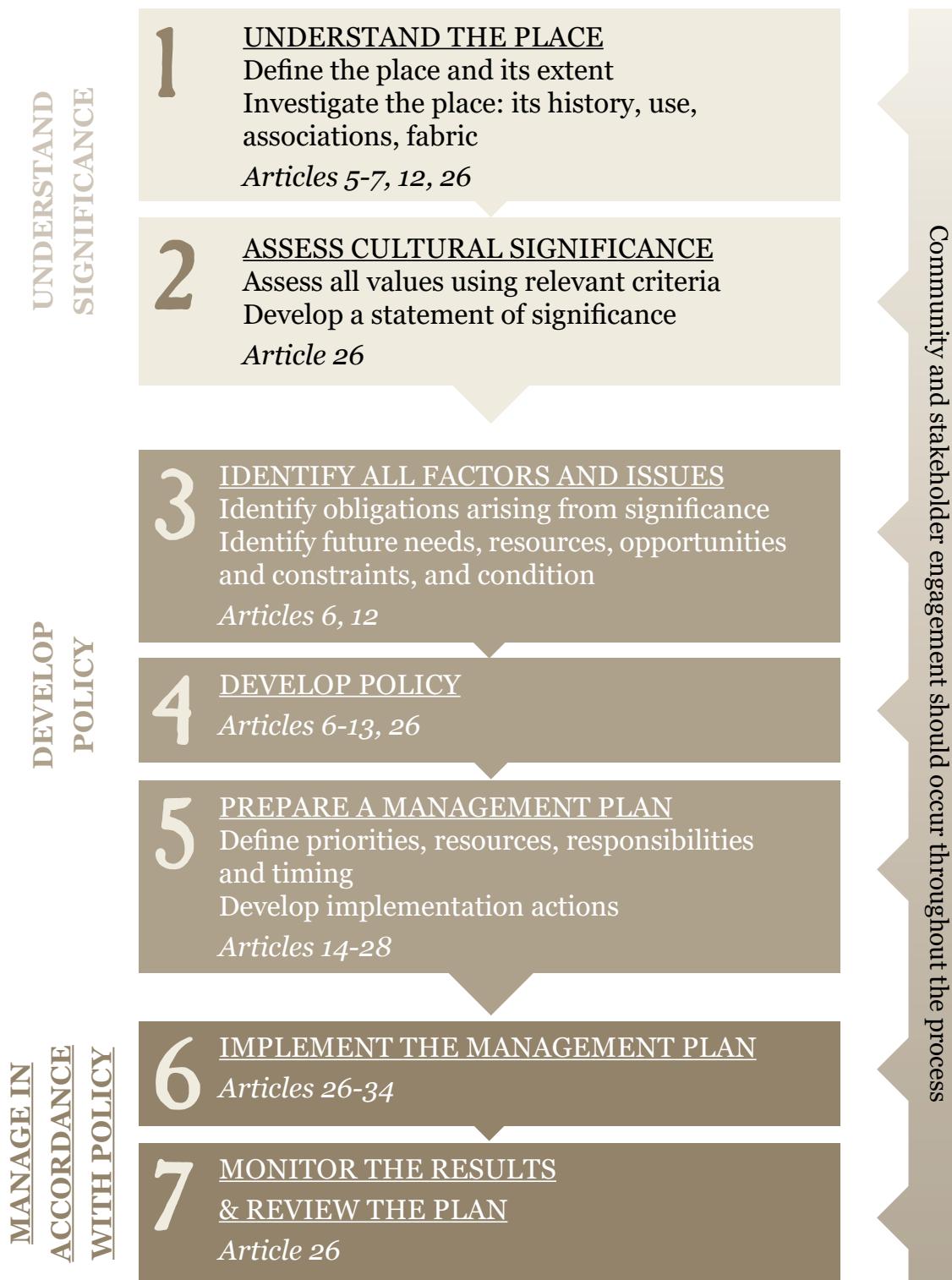
### ***3. Development of Management Policies***

A set of policies have been drawn up to manage, eliminate or mitigate threats to the significance of the Fort through planning, repair and conservation, identification of suitable new uses, raising of public awareness, education and interpretation, to bring about the informed conservation of all aspects of significance, especially where these may be competing interests.

### ***4. Management Plan***

The management plan sets these policies out in order of priority, and identifies how these might be funded. The plan also set out how the process should be monitored and reviewed to take account of changing circumstances and emerging issues.

## ***Conservation Plan Methodology***

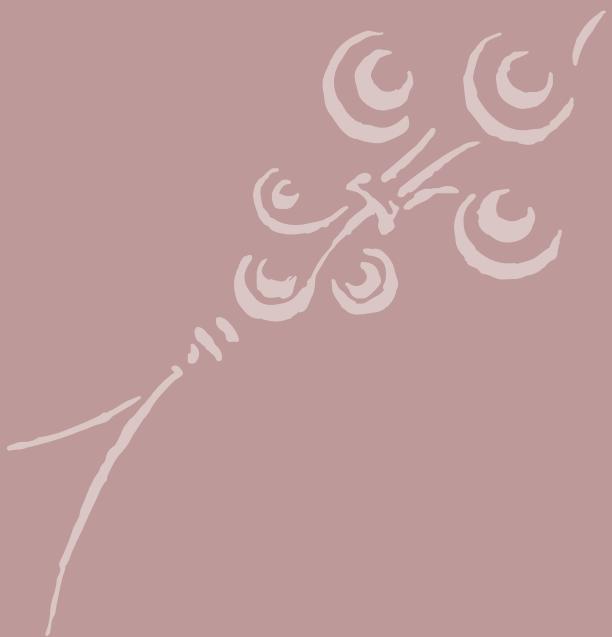


*Fig. 1: Diagram showing Conservation Plan methodology from the Australia ICOMOS Burra Charter for Places of Cultural Significance, updated 2013 (Courtesy of the ICOMOS)*

# Section 2

## Understanding the FORT PROTECTOR

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## **2.1 A Model of Tudor Colonisation: The Historical Evolution of Fort Protector**

**Dr Diarmuid Wheeler**

In Laois and Offaly, before their official shiring as Queen's County and King's County, the Tudor government viewed garrisons as a way of bringing direct rule and royal authority to the midlands and crushing any resistance from the Gaelic native rulers of the region. Laois and Offaly were Gaelic Irish heartlands, considered 'wild' and 'barbarous' by the English Tudor government and so they considered it essential to construct forts there to keep the O'Mores and O'Connors in check. Sweeping through the stronghold of the O'Connors in northern Offaly, the government first established a garrison at Daingean, in what became known as Fort Governor, built on the site of O'Connor's chief seat.<sup>1</sup> Further fortifications were established in Gaelic dominated territories such as at Castlebrack, in O'Dunne's territory of Tinnahinch, at Leighlinbridge in Carlow and in modern day Portlaoise where the government constructed Fort Protector starting in 1547.<sup>2</sup>

Military strongholds such as Fort Protector and Governor were built to house English garrisons and secure English influence in the region as well as policing the border of the Pale to protect its 'civil' inhabitants from the regular raids of the Gaelic Irish.<sup>3</sup> In order to construct Fort Governor, the Tudor officials William Brabazon and Lord Deputy Edward Bellingham dismantled a local church in the area and took

advantage of the masonry there.<sup>4</sup> The evidence suggests the defences were constructed 'of sods and clay', materials used to make many of the new low-lying artillery fortifications of the period. Bellingham's men probably came from the English held Calais and Boulogne garrisons in France and had the necessary skills to carry out such a task.<sup>5</sup> At Leighlinbridge on the other hand, Robert Cowley, Master of the Rolls, had long called for the territory to be walled and inhabited which he argued would help make all of Leinster 'clear English'.<sup>6</sup> Thomas Cusack, another Master of the Rolls, alleged that this would prevent attacks by the Gaelic Irish, particularly the Kavanaghs, upon trade convoys en route from Ross and Waterford.<sup>7</sup> The stronghold itself was originally a Norman castle built in the late twelfth century before being reconstructed in the year 1547.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately, practically no sources remain that tell us how Fort Protector was built. We know the location itself was chosen because it was on rising ground, surrounded to the south and east by the natural defensive barricades of the river Triogue and an esker known locally as 'the Ridge', which greatly added to its strategic importance. The evidence certainly suggests that there was no pre-existing settlement or structure on the site but we know that the Gaelic Irish referred to the fort, following its construction, as simply "Campa", which literally means "camp". Even the name Port-Laoighise appears to have been a misspelling and instead was supposed to say something along the lines of Fort-Laoighise or the fort of Laois. What is clear, however, is

<sup>1</sup> Brady, *The chief governors*, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup> AFM, s.a. 1547 & 1548; Lord Deputy Bellingham to the Privy Council, August 1548, TNA, SP 61/1/84. Mentioned in the Annals as late as 1580 as Port-Laoighise.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Cowley's plan for the reformation of Ireland, November 1541, TNA, SP Lord Deputy Croft and Council to the Privy Council, 26 January 1552, TNA, SP 61/4/4; Instructions concerning Ireland, 2 November 1556, BL Lansdowne, Ms. 159 fol. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Montaño, *The roots of English colonialism*, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> Bryson, 'Sir Anthony St. Leger and the outbreak of the midland rebellion, 1547-8', p. 265.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Cowley to Secretary Cromwell, June 1536, TNA, SP 60/3/35.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Unknown Author, 'Leighlinbridge and the Black Castle', *The Irish Penny Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (Autumn, 1840), pp 65-6.

that the workmen and supplies were gathered from as far afield as Kilkenny and Waterford and carts were supplied from Dublin and other areas of the Pale to transport the wood to the forts.<sup>9</sup> In the eyes of the government, Forts Protector and Governor were not simply outposts but were instead built to accommodate large garrisons and hold vast quantities of supplies.<sup>10</sup> Overall, the construction of the two fortifications in Laois and Offaly was an extremely expensive undertaking and cost close to £7,000, a huge sum at the time.<sup>11</sup>

The architectural form of these centres of defence centred on burly, rounded bastions, much like the one at Fort Protector, expanding outwards from a keep. Moats or ditches were usually kept dry and defended by loops for maximum utilisation of arquebus fire from above. The square tower on the south-east corner of the stronghold most likely served as a watchtower, but if based upon the Henrician model, could very well have served as an artillery tower for housing guns and to provide quarters for the garrison and some of the lower ranking officers.<sup>12</sup> The administration hoped that these fortifications would eventually transition into market towns with English farms and estates branching out from them.

From 1547-66, Fort Protector went from strength to strength, and by November 1566, Lord Deputy Henry Sidney suggested and Queen Elizabeth approved that Maryborough, the renamed title

of the fort, would be transformed into a market town claiming that it already stood as one of the most formidable strongholds in the English Pale ‘walled with stone and guardable against any Irish rebel’. In little over a year, the Lord Deputy was optimistic that the settlement would be ‘rich...well peopled’ and self-sufficient.<sup>13</sup>

On the 4 April 1570, Maryborough finally received its charter, on paper at least, evolving from a military fort into a civil, anglicised market town.<sup>14</sup> However, this image of a flourishing English hub of “civility” in a Gaelic dominated heartland is a deceptive one, as by 1575, despite its urban status in the eyes of the government, Maryborough remained little more than a garrison settlement and was said to have been in great decay, desperately in need of urgent repair.<sup>15</sup> Despite this, the fort of Maryborough was still considered one of Ireland’s most important settlements. So much so that the government decreed that from that point onwards, every Lord Deputy was expected to reside there for at least two months of the year.<sup>16</sup>

In 1580, at the height of the Second Desmond Rebellion, somewhat of a religious crusade in Ireland against the Queen and the Protestant faith, the Queen’s County was targeted by Viscount Baltinglass, a staunch Catholic and supporter of the counter-reformation, alongside his dispossessed O’More and O’Connor allies.

9 Thomas Walshe to Bellingham, 28 August 1548, TNA, SP 61/1/81; Matthew King to William Payne, 16 December 1548, TNA, SP 61/1/151.

10 Bellingham to Tallon, March 1549, TNA, SP 61/2/26; Richard Brasier to Somerset, 14 November 1548, TNA, SP 61/1/122.

11 Memoranda by Bellingham, 1548, TNA, SP 61/1/123; Account of the vice-treasurer, 27 May 1548-19 December 1549, TNA, SP 65/5/49; Lord Deputy Croft and Council to the Privy Council, 26 January 1552, TNA, SP 61/4/4.

12 J.R. Hale, *Renaissance War Studies* (London, 1983), pp 73-7.

13 Lord Deputy Sidney to Sir William Cecil, 18 November 1566, TNA, SP 63/19/292; Queen Elizabeth to Lord Deputy Sidney, 16 January 1567, TNA, SP 63/20/342.

14 Carey, ‘The end of the Gaelic political order’, p. 222; Lennon, *Sixteenth-century Ireland: the incomplete conquest*, p. 185.

15 Sir Henry Sidney’s plat, 1575, TNA, SP 63/52/1501; Howard B. Clarke, ‘Planning and regulation in the formation of new towns and new quarters in Ireland, 1170-1641’, in Anngret Simms and Howard B. Clarke (eds), *Lords and towns in medieval Europe* (Surrey, 2015), pp 542-3.

16 Orders to be observed by the Lord Justice, 31 March 1579, TNA, SP 63/66/17.

*The rebel coalition allegedly quickly seized every hold and castle in the Laois shire, bar three. Maryborough was one such stronghold they failed to take despite a long siege. Four crown soldiers were killed in the assault and a great deal of plunder and livestock were taken including the constable George Harvey's horses. A force of 300 or 400 horse and foot subsequently surrounded the fort so that there was 'none that could come out of the town'.<sup>17</sup> The siege was eventually lifted when the garrison managed to rally just in time to save the settlement from total destruction.<sup>18</sup>*

*In December 1597, Captain Walter Hovenden was killed outside the walls of Maryborough and his forces, jointly under the command of Warham St Leger, suffered a significant defeat at the hands of the Gaelic rebel coalition including the O'Mores and O'Connors, loyal to Hugh O'Neill, Earl of Tyrone. In the aftermath of the battle, the fort was burned, the rebels allegedly taking advantage of 'a negligent guard'. It would appear that the attack was a result of the garrison's refusal to pay a ransom of beef to the insurgents.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the year 1598, the government desperately tried to break through the rebel blockade to relieve and resupply the desperate Maryborough garrison.<sup>20</sup> They finally succeeded in September 1598 despite heavy resistance from the Gaelic rebels.<sup>21</sup> The relentless pursuit of this goal is evidence of just how crucial the stronghold was to the government and their forces in the area and the overall crown presence in the midlands. The Lords Justice Loftus and Gardener in fact argued that it was crucial to bring provisions to furnish the market with*

*victuals...both for the ease of the country, and to avoid the murmur of the people towards the soldier'. Maryborough was even referred to as one of the few places left with a 'little show of life of the kingdom'.<sup>22</sup>*

*By 1601, however, the situation in Laois gradually improved, so much so, that allegedly, 'a couple of horsemen' could 'ride safely to Maryborough... that country being...almost desolate'.<sup>23</sup> Taking advantage of the lull in fighting, Chancellor Adam Loftus warranted Maryborough's urgent repair and the establishment of an iron gate for its protection.<sup>24</sup> In December 1601, Ormond alleged that Patrick Crosbie, or Patrick MacCrossan as he should be known, (his brother was a bard to the O'Mores and his father's mother was an O'Kelly), purchased the majority of 'the tenements in Maryborough...whereby many of the English were driven to abandon the place and now there is no house or tenement there without the fort'.<sup>25</sup>*

*In early 1604, Sir John Davies, the solicitor-general of Ireland, accompanied by the Chief Baron of the Exchequer Sir Thomas Fleming, travelled throughout Leinster where they conducted and oversaw several quarter sessions in seven shires and were pleased to find 'many civil and substantial gentlemen and freeholders...in Maryborough 'in a word, they found the public peace well established within the Pale and counties'.<sup>26</sup> Still, the fort remained decayed. In order to amend this, the government decreed that any incoming constables were*

<sup>17</sup> Mr. John Barnes to Lord Deputy Grey, 4 September 1580, TNA, SP 63/76/10.

<sup>18</sup> George Harvey to Lord Deputy Grey, 28 August 1580, TNA, SP 63/75/74.

<sup>19</sup> Sir Ralph Lane to Sir Robert Cecil, 8 December 1597, TNA, SP 63/201/97.

<sup>20</sup> Sir Geoffrey Fenton to Sir Robert Cecil, 25 June 1598, TNA, SP 63/202/83; The Lords Justices Loftus and Gardener and the Council to the Privy Council, 4 September 1598, TNA, SP 63/202/57.

<sup>21</sup> Sir Geoffrey Fenton to Sir Robert Cecil, 13 September 1598, TNA, SP 63/202/66.

<sup>22</sup> The Lords Justices Loftus and Gardener and the Council to the Privy Council, 23 November 1598, TNA, SP 63/202/168.

<sup>23</sup> John King to Sir George Carey, 9 February 1601, TNA, SP 63/208/43.

<sup>24</sup> The Lord Chancellor Loftus and Sir George Carey, 29 September 1599, TNA, SP 63/205/180.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas, Earl of Ormond and Ossory to Secretary Cecil, 2 December 1601, TNA, SP 63/209/208.

<sup>26</sup> Sir John Davies to Cecil, 19 April 1604, TNA, SP 63/216/236.

expected to continuously maintain the fort by strict commandment'.<sup>27</sup> Sir Arthur Chichester, Lord Deputy, was frustrated at the government's unwillingness to set funds aside for Maryborough's repair, especially considering the fact that the government regarded it as a place of 'principal import for keeping and governing the country' which had been left very weak, for these they want money to do them effectually. To patch them up were to small purpose'.<sup>28</sup>

Peace largely prevailed in the Queen's County until the year 1641 when a considerable uprising broke out throughout the country mainly by Irish Catholic gentry, who sought to seize control of the English administration to coerce the government into granting greater concessions for Catholics. The O'Mores, much like they had throughout the 16th century, rose in unison to attack multiple fortifications throughout Laois including the fort of Maryborough. So desperate was the condition that its inhabitants were reduced to, that James FitzThomas Butler, first Duke of Ormond, was forced to march from Dublin to relieve the desperate garrison. Ormond and his accomplice Sir Charles Coote managed to break through the rebel blockade to relieve the stronghold and reinforce it with sufficient arms, ammunition and provisions.<sup>29</sup> In 1645, the Irish Confederacy declared war on the Parliament of England, at the time of Oliver Cromwell's rise to power. Rejecting Ormond's offer of peace, Owen Roe O'Neill marched on the fort of Maryborough in September 1646, which he subsequently seized as well as the strongly fortified castle near modern-day Kilminchy.<sup>30</sup>

At the time, Sir William Gilbert was chief constable of the fort and in the past was highly praised by Charles I for his 'good service there'.<sup>31</sup> Allegedly, Laoiseach O'More played an instrumental role in the assault on Maryborough and in its aftermath, the fort was quickly shored up with Gaelic Irish soldiers under the command of Phelim O'Neill and Officers McDonnell and McHenry respectively.<sup>32</sup> At this time, James Tuchet, third Earl of Castlehaven, appointed Lieutenant General of the Irish-Royalist army, was ordered to drive the then considered 'renegade' Owen Roe O'Neill from Leinster and thus marched on the fort of Maryborough, armed with a train of artillery. Refusing to surrender, the fort being well defended and provisioned, Castlehaven's cannon opened fire and struck the stronghold with at least seventeen shots. Lieutenant Daniel O'Neill, Phelim's subordinate, launched a coup amongst the garrison and threatened to kill Phelim unless he surrendered. Left with little alternative, the garrison yielded on 9 May 1649.<sup>33</sup>

The Duke of Ormond's subsequent failure to seize the last remaining parliamentarian outpost in Ireland at Dublin ensured that Oliver Cromwell, at the head of a formidable Parliamentarian army was able to land on Irish shores in August 1649. The Parliamentarians were fighting for supreme control of government and before landing in the country, overthrew King Charles I and executed him. Cromwell and his forces quickly overran Ireland including the midlands. There, Maryborough was put under the joint command of Colonels John Hewson (one of those who signed the King's death warrant) and John

27 Wards, 1607, TNA, SP 63/221/112.

28 Brief of Remembrance (by Sir Arthur Chichester) for the Lord Danvers, 8 August 1609, TNA, SP 63/227/460.

29 O'Hanlon and O'Leary, *History of the Queen's County*, p. 512.

30 Ibid., pp 521-3.

31 The King to the Lord Lieutenant for Sir William Gilbert, 18 November 1643, *Calendar of the State Papers relating to Ireland, of the reign of Charles I*, Vol. 2: 1633-1647, no. 1345.

32 Letter of Thomas O'Connor, 6 December 1838, in John O'Donovan and Michael O'Flanagan (ed.), *Letters containing information relative to the Antiquities of the Queen's County collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1838*, Vol. 1 (1933), pp 172-4.

33 O'Hanlon and O'Leary, *History of the Queen's County*, p. 532.

Reynolds. After which point, the sources state that the tower and structures inside the fort were demolished out of fear of it falling once again into Royalist hands and the stronghold deserted.<sup>34</sup>

In summary, the Laois-Offaly plantation was launched to bring the Gaelic Irish of the midlands to a ‘reasonable submission’ as quickly as possible with ‘certain garrisons of men of war... in every quarter’.<sup>35</sup> The Tudor government firmly believed that ‘substantial garrisons’ and an effective plantation in the midlands region would put an end to the relentless incursions of the O’Mores and O’Connors upon the English Pale, the heartland of English “civility” in Ireland and would in turn encourage the natives to ‘humble themselves to not only perpetual peace, but also to a quiet obedience and order’.<sup>36</sup> The enterprise, at least in its early stages, implemented little change in Laois and Offaly. An inadequate survey combined with insufficient land grants and significant Gaelic resistance ensured that the region remained largely unsettled by the early 1560s.

That being said, the plantation and the fort of Maryborough unquestionably had potential and captured the attention and imagination of the Tudor administration.<sup>37</sup> In fact, it presented the blueprint for wider colonisation schemes throughout Leinster and Munster and finally Ulster, which the administration hoped, would wipe out the final elements of Gaelic culture that had gradually crept into otherwise loyal English districts.<sup>38</sup> Essentially, the planting of Laois and Offaly with English freeholders and the construction of fortifications such as Maryborough in Gaelic dominated territories became a significant feature of governing the kingdom of Ireland and served as a model for future colonial ventures throughout the island and beyond.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 195.

<sup>35</sup> The Lord Deputy and the Council of Ireland to Henry VIII, 18 January 1540, TNA, SP 60/9/5.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas, *The Pilgrim*, pp 66-8.

<sup>37</sup> Maginn, *William Cecil, Ireland, and the Tudor State*, p. 48.

<sup>38</sup> Quinn, ‘Edward Walshe’s “Conjectures”’, pp 303-22; Maginn, *William Cecil*, p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Maginn, *William Cecil*, p. 49.

## Lieutenants of Maryborough

1548-9	<i>William St Loe, knt.</i>
1558-64	<i>Henry Radcliffe, knt.</i>
1576	<i>Barnaby FitzPatrick, knt.</i>
1582	<i>William Collier, esq.</i>
1584-99	<i>Warham St. Leger, knt.</i>

## Constables of Maryborough

1565-78	<i>Francis Cosby, esq.</i>
1578-98	<i>George Harvey, esq.</i>
1598-99	<i>Philip Harvey, gent.</i>
1599-1602	<i>Francis Rush, knt.</i>
1602	<i>Philip Harvey, gent.</i>
1605	<i>John Bingley, gent.</i>
1607-10	<i>Henry Power, knt.</i>
1611-23	<i>Adam Loftus, knt.</i>
1623-43	<i>William Gilbert, knt.</i>
1643	<i>Henry Gilbert, knt.</i>



Fig. 2: "This is the attire of soldiers and peasants in Ireland, beyond England" drawn by Albrecht Dürer, 1521. From left, an Irish warrior with spear and quilted war coat, two Scottish gallowglasses each bearing the 'claidheamh móir' or great sword, one wrapped in a 'feileadh móir' or great kilt, and attending them two barefoot Irish 'kern' or peasant warriors carrying pole axes (courtesy of the Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/Jörg P. Anders).

### 2.2 Chronology of Historical Events

Year	Historical Events and Developments	Wider context
1169		Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland
1171	O'More sub-kingdom of Laois granted to followers of Strongbow under the feudal system	Irish kings submit to Henry II. His son, later King John, named 'Lord of Ireland'.
c. 1340	Laoiseach Ó Mórdha (died 1342) regains control of the ancient O'More territory from Roger Mortimer.	Gaelic resurgence in progress.
1485	English rule contracted to The Pale, under regular attack by Irish septs of O'Byrne, O'Toole, O'Connor and O'More, exacting 'black rent'.	End of the Wars of the Roses in England and accession of Henry VII as the first Tudor monarch.
1509		Accession of Henry VIII.
1534	Revolt of 'Silken' Thomas, Lord Offaly and later tenth earl of Kildare (1513–1537). End to the nominal control of Ireland by great Hiberno-Norman families.	Henry VIII declared Supreme Head of the Church of England.
1536		Act of Union incorporates Wales as an integral part of the Tudor kingdom. Welsh law and customs abolished and territory brought under English common law and administrative structures.
1537	Confiscation of the earldom of Kildare extends the Pale to the borders of Laois and Offaly. Gaelic chief Brian O'Connor-Faly, brother-in-law and ally of Silken Thomas, driven from his territory of Offaly by Lord Leonard Grey.	
1538	O'Connor submits to English rule and is reinstated in his lands. As the new leader of the Geraldine cause, he continues to mount attacks on the Pale	Henrician forts: A major building programme undertaken under Henry VIII between 1539 and 1547 to defend the coast of England and Wales from the threat of French and Spanish invasion.
1540	Lord Deputy Sir Anthony St Leger pursues a policy of conciliation, seeking to incorporate the lords of Gaelic Ireland into the Tudor state. The Tudor government hoped that such a move would produce a more peaceful extension of royal authority throughout the country	
1542	Policy of 'Surrender and Regrant' is introduced. The programme of reform required renunciation of Brehon law, swearing fealty to the king, a promise to adopt the English tongue, embrace English customs and common law and renounce the Pope. The newly introduced English manner of succession known as primogeniture, whereby land passed to the eldest son, proves to be at odds with the Gaelic Irish system of tanistry where generally the worthiest and wisest of the male relatives of the chief were elected ruler of their respective clan. Primogeniture causes bloody and dynastic struggles within numerous lordships.  Ruairí Caoch Ó Mórdha submits to the government and is granted the anglicised title 'Rory O'More of Lex'	Henry VIII adopts the title 'King of Ireland' under the Crown of Ireland Act of the Irish parliament.  Scots defeated at the Battle of Solway Moss, news of the defeat said to have led to the death of James V of Scotland, Henry VIII's nephew.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Historical Events and Developments</b>	<b>Wider context</b>
1545-6	Ruairí Caoch killed by his brother Giolla-Padraig Ó Mórdha, overturning the surrender and regrant scheme set in place by the government, driving the sept into open rebellion with the crown. Brian O'Connor-Faly joins forces with the O'More lord to launch fresh assaults on the Pale.	English war with Scotland known as 'The Rough Wooing' (1543-1549).
1546	Construction of the Fort of Leighlinbridge on the site of a dissolved monastery in the hope of making all Leinster 'clear English'. The fortress was expected to keep the Kavanaghs in check and protect the trade route to Munster.	Midlands rebellion in full swing.
1547	Lord Justice Sir William Brabazon, making an alleged show of force throughout southern Leinster, invades Laois and Offaly, laying waste to the two territories over thirty days. The two chiefs flee into Connaught. In June the Regency Council under Somerset send Sir Edward Bellingham with troops and supplies to secure the territories. A garrison of 100 horsemen, 100 men armed with guns, 100 armed with battle-axes, and 100 pikemen or bowmen in addition to attendants are stationed in the subdued territory over the winter. Comerford suggests that this garrison was housed in the building which forms the core of the former Presentation Convent, marked 'Storehouse' on the early map of Maryborough.	Accession of Edward VI aged nine. His uncle, Edward Seymour assumes control of the Regency Council as Duke of Somerset, 'Lord Protector of the Realm' and 'Governor of the King's Person'. A 'court' built in Athlone Castle as a residence for the Lord Deputy
1548	Construction of the Fort by Francis Bryan, Marshall of Ireland. The Fort was named after Somerset, the Lord Protector, but referred to as 'Campa' in contemporary Irish documents. The Fort Governor in Daingean, fortress of the suppressed territory of Offaly, is also named in honour of Somerset.	Sir Edward Bellingham serves as Lord Deputy from 1548-1549
1550	Dublin government proposes the idea of a plantation, financed by private enterprise. The new policy of displacement and plantation pursued in Laois and Offaly reflects a sentiment expressed by St Leger a decade before in a letter to Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540) in which he reported that the country is "much easier won than kept", "for unless it be peopled with others than be there already, and also certain fortresses there builded and warded, if it be gotten the one day it is lost the next". The Tudors deemed a submissive population essential to long term security and so proposed the importing of English settlers to safeguard the Pale, calling for the existing inhabitants to be expelled. An order of 15 March forbids anyone of the name of Ó Mórdha to hold land in Leix.	

<b>Year</b>	<b>Historical Events and Developments</b>	<b>Wider context</b>
1550/1	In the first attempt at a plantation of Laois and Offaly speculative leases are made to gentry of the Pale and to English and Welsh soldiers. Restrictive, short term leases ensure that settlement is wholly inadequate for a colony to take hold. The two forts remain little more than military strongholds.	The King's printer in Dublin prints an edition of the Book of Common Prayer, the first book published in the country by the new printing press.
1552	Sir William St Loe, lieutenant of Fort Protector, allegedly restored peace to the countryside of Laois. Henry Wise described as captain of the Fort in his absence	Sir James Croft departs Ireland.
1553		Accession of Mary I, the first English queen to rule in her own right. Restoration of the Catholic religion.
1556/7	Creation of Queen's County and King's County. Queen's County is made up of the O'More territory of Leix (Uí Laoighis) compromising the modern baronies of Cullenagh, Maryborough West, Maryborough East, Stradbally, Ballyadams and Slievemargy, but extended north to the River Barrow to include the O'Connor territory of Irry (Aireamh) and part of the O'Dempsey territory of Clanmalire (Clann Mhaoilughra), now the barony of Portnahinch, lands which had been part of the Gaelic lordship of Offaly. Fort Protector was renamed Maryborough in honour of Mary I. The King's County consists of the eastern part of the modern county of Offaly. Its stronghold, Fort Governor, was renamed Phillipstown after Philip II of Spain. Francis Cosby commissioned as General of the Kerne.	Mary's husband becomes Philip II of Spain. During his reign the Spanish Empire reached the height of its global power, 'the empire on which the sun never sets'. They rule jointly as King and Queen of England and Ireland for her lifetime.
1558/9	Maryborough besieged and burned. Sir Henry Radcliffe, brother of Lord Deputy Thomas Radcliffe, appointed lieutenant and constable of the Fort. Francis Cosby empowered to exercise martial law.	Accession of Elizabeth I. The monarch is declared the official head of the Church of England.
1563	Second phase of plantation. The plantations were not universal across the lands of the new counties. Small but steady flow of settlers gradually set down root in the region. Gaelic Irish granted a stake in the enterprise for the first time. Settlers preferred to locate close to the Forts and to Carlow in the less isolated area along the River Barrow and in the area around Edenderry and Monasteroris. Francis Cosby granted the religious house of Stradbally.	Thomas Radcliffe campaigns against Shane O'Neill.
1565	Francis Cosby made constable of the Fort. At this time the garrison consisted of one porter, one drummer, one ensign, one surgeon and 39 arquebusiers (infantry bearing a muzzle-loaded firearm called the arquebus, forerunner of the musket)	Sir Henry Sidney becomes Lord Deputy, having previously worked under his brother-in-law the Earl of Sussex
1567	Maryborough considered a formidable stronghold situated in the heart of the English Pale, 'walled with stone and guardable against any Irish rebel'.	Shane O'Neill killed by the MacDonnells

Year	Historical Events and Developments	Wider context
1569	Queen Elizabeth passes legislation which empowers the government to shire native Irish territories at will.	Outbreak of First Desmond Rebellion in Munster. The Tudor government had turned its sights on establishing 'lord presidencies' or military governors to keep the lordships in order and undermine the authority of the ruling magnates. This greatly upset the Desmond FitzGeralds who proved unwilling to see their authority undermined.
1570	Maryborough granted borough status and receives its charter. The town was expected to hold a weekly market on a Thursday and the Burgomaster, the town mayor, was to receive customs on cattle and goods sold for the repair of the walls and general paving. This suggests that the defences shown on the map of the town may have become inadequate.	Battle of Shrude, Co Mayo. Sir Edmund Butler bends the knee to the crown and is eventually pardoned for his role in the Butler revolt.
1571	Ruairí Ó Mórdha, son of Ruairí 'Caoch', rallies the dispossessed factions of his clan and vows revenge upon Lord Deputy Sidney for the execution of his kin over the previous five years. A strong support base sees the Laois firebrand elected as chieftain. A furious assault upon the midlands plantation follows.	John Perrot appointed Lord President of Munster. Sir Thomas Smith attempts to establish an English colony in North Down which is swiftly burnt and destroyed by the Clandeboye O'Neills.
1572	O'Dunne territory of Iregan (Uí Riagain, now the barony of Tinnahinch) becomes part of Queen's County	End of the First Desmond Rebellion.
1577	Massacre of Mullaghmast: Virtually all of the Gaelic leaders of Laois and Offaly, including over 180 members of the O'More clan, were killed by English and Gaelic-Irish crown loyalist forces at Mullaghmast, Co Kildare.	Sack of Athenry by the Burkes.
1578	Ruairí Óg and his wife Maighréad, sister of Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne, were hunted down and killed soon afterwards. Ruairí was killed by his cousin, the crown loyalist Barnaby FitzPatrick and it was said that 'for a long time after his death, no one was desirous to discharge one shot against the soldiers of the crown'.	Before his death and in retaliation for the massacre at Mullaghmast, Ruairí burns the town of Carlow.
1580	The Baltinglass rebellion, launched by James Eustace, 3rd Viscount Baltinglass, a fanatical supporter of the counter-reformation, rallies dispossessed O'Mores to his cause. The rebel coalition burn and sack Maryborough alongside Sir John of Desmond that Autumn. Four crown soldiers were killed in the assault and a great deal of plunder and livestock are taken including the constable George Harvey's horses.	James FitzMaurice FitzGerald lands with a small force of Irish, Spanish, and Italian troops at Smerwick on the Dingle Peninsula and commences the Second Desmond Rebellion. The bloody and devastating uprising lasts until 1583 and results in the decimation of the male ranks of the Desmond dynasty. Sets in motion the Plantation of Munster.
1586	Queen's County deemed 'so impoverished' that it was 'not able to live'.	County Longford is shired as a separate county to Westmeath.

Year	Historical Events and Developments	Wider context
1588		Lord Deputy William Fitzwilliam becomes Lord Deputy of Ireland for a second time. Spanish Armada is launched
1594		Nine Years War (1594- 1603)
1596/7	<p>Maryborough burnt in successive years by Uaithne Mac Ruaidhri Ó Mórdha (Owny McRory O'More). Owny was the son of Ruairí Óg and was fostered in the Wicklow mountains by his uncle Fiach MacHugh O'Byrne.</p> <p>In 1596 Owny wins the Battle of Stradbally bridge. Alexander Cosby and his eldest son Francis are killed resisting the rebels. The victory encourages the rebellious elements of the O'Mores into rebellion with the crown.</p> <p>William MacRory O'More cornered and killed in the woods outside Stradbally.</p> <p>Warham St Leger, governor of Laois and lieutenant of Maryborough suffers a crushing defeat alongside Captain Walter Hovenden, who is slain in the encounter with the Gaelic rebel coalition, outside the walls of the stronghold.</p>	<p>Dublin Gunpowder disaster: 126 people killed and up to 40 houses destroyed while barrels of gunpowder are being unloaded at Dublin quays.</p> <p>English forces suffer a defeat at the hands of the MacDonnell clan of Antrim alongside their O'Neill allies.</p>
1598	David Good recorded as vicar of St Peter's Church.	English defeated by Hugh O'Neill at the Battle of the Yellow Ford. Sir Henry Bagenal is killed during the fighting.
1599	Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex and Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, ambushed at the Pass of the Plumes after having relieved a siege of the Fort.	English forces suffer heavy defeat at the Battle of Curlew Pass, Roscommon. Sir Alexander Radcliffe and Sir Conyers Clifford are killed in the engagement
1600	<p>A band of Owny McRory O'More's men lured into the Fort and massacred by the governor Sir Francis Rush. Mac Giolla Padraig (Fitzpatrick) territory of Upper Ossory becomes part of Queen's County.</p> <p>Owny killed in a crown skirmish.</p>	<p>Indecisive Battle of Moyry Pass.</p> <p>Landing of Henry Dowra at Lough Foyle, a major blow to Hugh O'Neill and the rebels.</p>
1601	Majority of tenements of Maryborough purchased by Patrick Crosbie.	Siege and Battle of Kinsale: Hugh O'Neill, Hugh Roe O'Donnell and a Spanish invasionary force are defeated and retreat to Ulster.
1604-6	Peace allegedly well established in the county and the inhabitants regularly attended quarter sessions and protestant service in Maryborough.	<p>Derry receives its charter.</p> <p>Sir Arthur Chichester appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland,</p> <p>Start of Ulster Plantation. Lowland Scots settle in North Down.</p> <p>Book of Common Prayer translated into Irish.</p>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Historical Events and Developments</b>	<b>Wider context</b>
1607-8	Large numbers of Gaelic Irish of the ‘seven septs of Laois’ resettled in North Kerry as part of the Munster Plantation. O’Mores gradually return to the Queen’s County over the following decades and rebuild their military prowess.	Flight of the Earls. Construction of James’ Fort in Kinsale. Sir Cahir O’Doherty, Lord of Inishowen burns and sacks Derry before being shot and killed at the Battle of Kilmacrennan.
1635	Corporation of Maryborough granted two fairs by Charles I	
1641	Sir Rory O’More (c. 1600-1655), a nephew of Ruairí Óg, is one of its four principal organisers of the Rebellion	Rebellion marking the beginning of the Irish Confederate War.
1642	Catholic Confederation founded. Rory O’More, recruits Owen Roe O’Neill, a grand-nephew of Hugh O’Neill, from the Spanish army	English Civil War between Charles I and Parliamentary forces.
1646-7	Maryborough and a fortification at modern-day Kilminchy taken by Owen Roe O’Neill. The Fort is surrendered by its Governor Sir William Gilbert to Sir Phelim O’Neill, the Irish Confederate leader.	Decisive Catholic Confederate victory at the Battle of Benburb. James Butler, 1st Duke of Ormonde, surrenders Dublin to parliamentary forces.
1648	The papal nuncio Rinnuccini takes refuge in Maryborough. Later that year the town is retaken by Lord Castlehaven for the King	
1649	Fort surrendered to Royalist forces wishing to banish Owen Roe O’Neill and his forces from Leinster.	Execution of Charles I. Oliver Cromwell lands in Dublin. Siege and sack of Drogheda, Wexford and New Ross. The inhabitants are massacred by Parliamentarian forces.
1650	Most of the Fort substantially demolished by Oliver Cromwell’s New Model Army under generals Hewson and Reynolds.	Cromwellian conquest of Ireland.
1685	Maryborough Fort in a poor state of repair, “the walls of the King’s house decayed and the timbers having been carried away”.	James II becomes King of England, Scotland and Ireland.
1792	Remains of the Castle of Maryborough drawn by Daniel Grose	Catholic convention in Dublin.
1801	In his Statistical Survey of the Queen’s County, Sir Charles Coote refers to the vestiges of the stronghold of the garrison of Maryborough: “one round tower is still preserved, and part of a square one, which was very strong; here the Governor resided and had a grand court. The gardens are yet taken care of &c.”	Legislative union of Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland.
1835	As recorded in the Ordnance Survey Letters, the last part of castle called the Maryborough Fort “was cleared away by Mr Graves”. The letter states that the place where it stood is about 200 feet to the rear of Mr Coleman’s house in the town.	



Fig. 3: Soldiers of Sir Henry Sidney carrying severed Irish heads, from J. Derrick's *The Image of Irelande*, with a Discoverie of Woodkarne, 1581, published Edinburgh 1883 (courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy)



Fig. 4: Rúairí Ó Mórdha, lord of Laois from 1557-1578, portrayed as a 'wild woodkerne and defeated rebel'. From J. Derrick's *The Image of Irelande*, with a Discoverie of Woodkarne, 1581, published Edinburgh 1883 (courtesy of the Royal Irish Academy).

## 2.3 Evolution of the Fort and Town

### Earlier Development

The reasons for the choice of location for the Fort Protector are not recorded. It seems most likely that the Fort was built on a ‘green-field’ site. The presence of a watercourse and the position of the site in the wider landscape may have influenced the location, rather than the existence of an earlier settlement.

The townland and civil parish name ‘Borris’ is indicative of a medieval borough and it is possible that a hamlet survived in the area. However, the townlands ‘Borris Great’ and ‘Borris Little’ lie well outside the town to the north east, and it is therefore unlikely that the location of such a borough would correspond to that of the Fort. It has also been suggested that the Ridge Graveyard to the east of the Fort could be the site of an earlier church, possibly serving the Newtown of Leys, a medieval settlement known to have existed in this part of the county (Bradley et al, 1986).

The name used by the Gaelic Irish for the Fort, ‘Campa’ meaning ‘camp’, implies that it was created in the open, rather than at a pre-existing settlement.

### Map of ‘Leis’ and ‘Offalie’, c. 1560

The eastern parts of Laois and Offaly which were planted in the 1550s are depicted on a contemporary map, which survives in three versions, known as the Cotton map (British Library), the Carew map (TCD Library) and the Greenwich map (National Maritime Museum, Greenwich).

These maps, in particular the Cotton map, give unique insight into the landscape, political divisions and buildings of early modern Laois and Offaly. The edge of the Kildare lordship is shown defended by towns and castles, with a particular concentration around Athy and Carlow, but also in the more forested areas further north at Rathangan and Monasterevin. Dense forests are

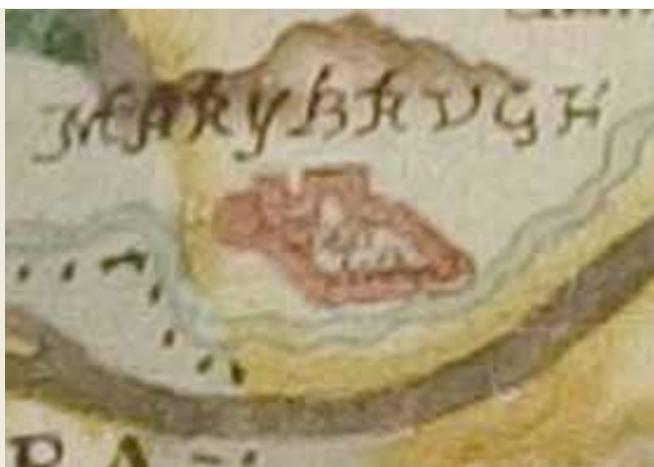
shown covering much of the county traversed by passes. Rivers, hills and bogs are shown, as well as castles, settlements and some roads. The maps also show territorial boundaries of clans subordinate to the O’Mores and O’Connors, such as the O’Dowlings, O’Lalors and O’Dempseys. The map may predate the formal creation of the counties in 1556, as the new county and town names are not used.

Portlaoise is marked as ‘Protectour’, depicted by a small vignette in three dimensions, as was common in early cartography. A similar image is also reproduced on the Carew copy of the map, marked ‘Marybrugh’ (Fig. 6). Both images show the rectangular enclosure with round flanking bastion at the NE angle, a gatehouse or archway on the western wall, the castle on the SW corner. The Carew map appears to indicate battlements. The interior appears to contain some smaller structures or enclosures.

In neither depiction is the enclosure of the town shown outside of the Fort, which would seem to indicate that the settlement did not extend outside until sometime later. By contrast, the depiction of ‘Dinain’ (Daingean) shows some settlement outside the walls, possibly reflecting the existence of the Fort as an O’Connor stronghold prior to its occupation by the English (Fig 7).



Fig. 5: Extract from map of c. 1563 showing Fort Protector and its context (courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton Augustus I. ii. 40, 072971)



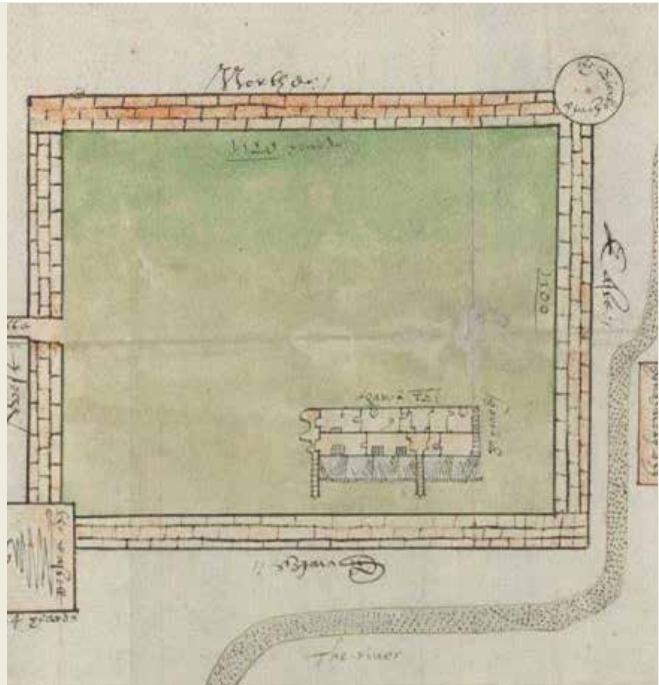
*Fig. 6: Extract from Carew version of the map showing 'Marybrugh' (courtesy of Trinity College Dublin, Hardiman Atlas, IE TCD MS 1209/9)*



*Fig. 7: Extract from map of c. 1563 showing the Fort Governor as 'Dinain', now Daingean (courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton Augustus I. ii. 40, 072971)*

The site for the Fort was evidently chosen to command the open plain, using the natural defences offered by the Triogue River and the esker ridge. The Triogue is shown as a distinctly meandering watercourse, passing close to the walls. A ditch is shown around the walls of both forts at Daingean and Protector, coloured in black, which may suggest an earthwork as opposed to a water filled moat. The esker, now known as the Ridge of Portlaoise, is shown running alongside the Triogue. Only parts of this ridge survive today, the section closest to the Fort being the Ridge Cemetery.

### Plan of the Fort of Maryborough, c. 1560 (Hardiman Atlas)



*Fig. 8: 'Plot of the Forte of Maribrough', c. 1560 (courtesy of Trinity College Dublin, Hardiman Atlas, IE TCD MS 1209/10)*

An undated 'plot of the forte of Maribrough' is part of a collection of maps held by Trinity College Dublin (Fig. 8). The coloured drawing shows the Fort in a composite plan-elevation with measurements of its principal features in contemporary yards. The perimeter wall is shown as '120 yards' on the north side and '110 yards' on the east side (site survey confirms the actual length as 127m x 105m). The entrance to the Fort is shown at the centre of the western side, marked as 'The Gate'. The round bastion on the NE angle is annotated as 'The Blocke house'. The tower at the SW angle is marked as 'The Castell', annotated as being 14 x 17 yards of the period, which, based on the above calculation would equate to c. 13 x 16m. A note in contemporary script (Fig. 9) gives the following description: The tower beyng 17 yeards longe and xiiii yeards broade cont [?] on the toppe by estimacon 238 square yeards whch [which] beyng layde & bounded with leade every yearde \_\_\_\_ [value] pounds weighte amounte [or and unto] the \_\_\_\_

(Interpretation of script by Bridget McCormack and Sinead Holland of Laois Co Library is kindly acknowledged).

A freestanding building, presumably barrack accommodation, is shown within the Fort, close to the SW corner, measuring 8 x 32 yards. Based on the measurements of the surviving north and east walls this would equate to 7.5 x 30 m. The building is shown in a composite of plan and elevation. Its form suggests a timber-framed structure, with a trussed roof, possibly thatched, with windows below the eaves, a 'side-wall' chimney stack suggesting a hall interior, and an external gable chimney stack, all features of larger vernacular dwellings of the period in England.

The former mill race is shown marked as 'The river', showing that this was the original course of the Triogue river. The building which survives in the core of the former Presentation convent is shown, annotated as 'The brewhouse'. The reverse of the map bears the following legend in a different hand, probably added later:

*The Queen's County consists of Leax, ancyontlye O'More's lands, Slewmarge; inhabited also by the O'Mores; Glanmalirie, O'Demisies country; part whereof is in King's Countye; Iregan, O'Doyne's countye.*

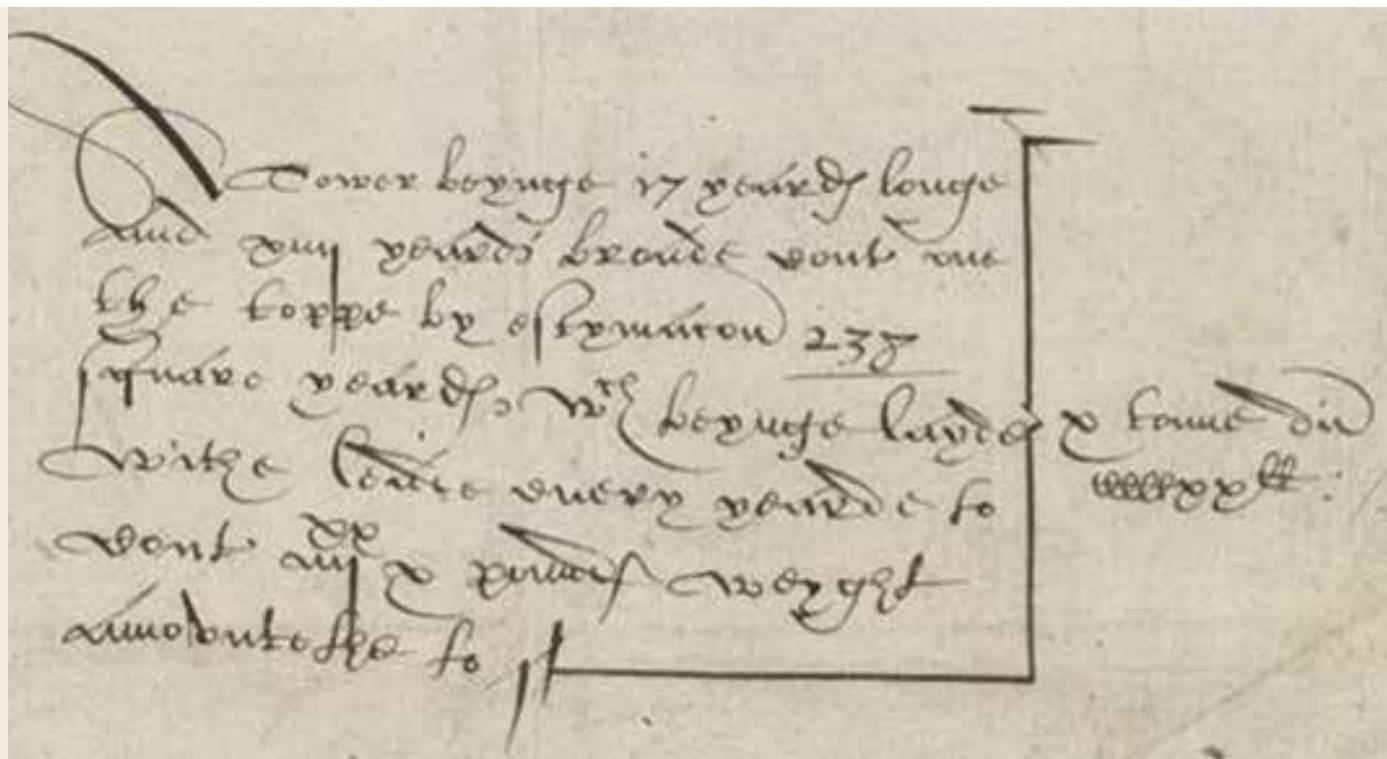


Fig. 9: Note on 'Plot of the Forte of Maribrough', c. 1560 (courtesy of Trinity College Dublin, Hardiman Atlas, IE TCD MS 1209/10)

## Map of Fort and Town of Maryborough, c. 1570

A map (Fig. 10) of unidentified origin and date, held in the National Archives of England and Wales (TNA) in Kew, depicts the Fort and the nascent town of Maryborough some fifteen years after its foundation. The map measures 335 x 516mm (or 14 x 20 inches) and is drawn in sepia ink with an inscription on the reverse ‘Maryborough: John Tomkin: A plot of Maryborg, Lyinster: Colman’. Andrews and Loeber have dated the map to c. 1571 based on the reference to Tomkins, a tenant recorded in 1570 and 1593. This would mean the map was drawn during the period of stability after the town was granted a market in 1567, achieved borough status in 1569 and was incorporated in 1570, and in advance of the very turbulent years of the early 1580s and late 1590s (Horner, 2018). Although not to scale and schematic in nature, the map includes many details of interest.

The Fort is shown as square on plan with a round flanking bastion and a square tower on opposite corners, the entire structure encircled on all sides by a ditch, with a gateway on the western side. The symbol for the ditch matches that for the river, possibly indicating that it was filled with water.

The square tower or castle is shown having a doorway from the inside of the Fort. The round bastion is open to the interior. A bank or raised platform is shown around the perimeter, interrupted at the entrance gate and at the square tower, the raised level covering the full interior of the round tower. The barrack building is shown parallel to the south wall, having a tripartite plan with three doors and external chimney stacks.

The town is shown surrounding the Fort on three sides (north, east and south), the western side of the town broadly aligning to the western wall of the Fort. The town enclosure is depicted in the same style as the Fort wall, although it is more likely to have been a palisade. The Triogue River is shown flowing through the town, following a meandering course, parallel to the eastern wall of the Fort. An earthwork is shown outside the wall on the eastern side and part of the northern

and southern sides. It is unclear whether this continued all the way around, or petered out as depicted with the rise of the ground towards the west. The depiction of the three meeting points of this feature with the river appears to suggest it was not filled with water.

The town is shown having two streets. One extends alongside the south wall of the Fort and continues to the east wall, with town gates at either end. The other street is shown narrower, running along the northern wall, with a town gate on the western end. It wraps around the corner bastion, and connects to the space between the east wall of the fort and the river. A gate may be suggested where this space meets the southern street.

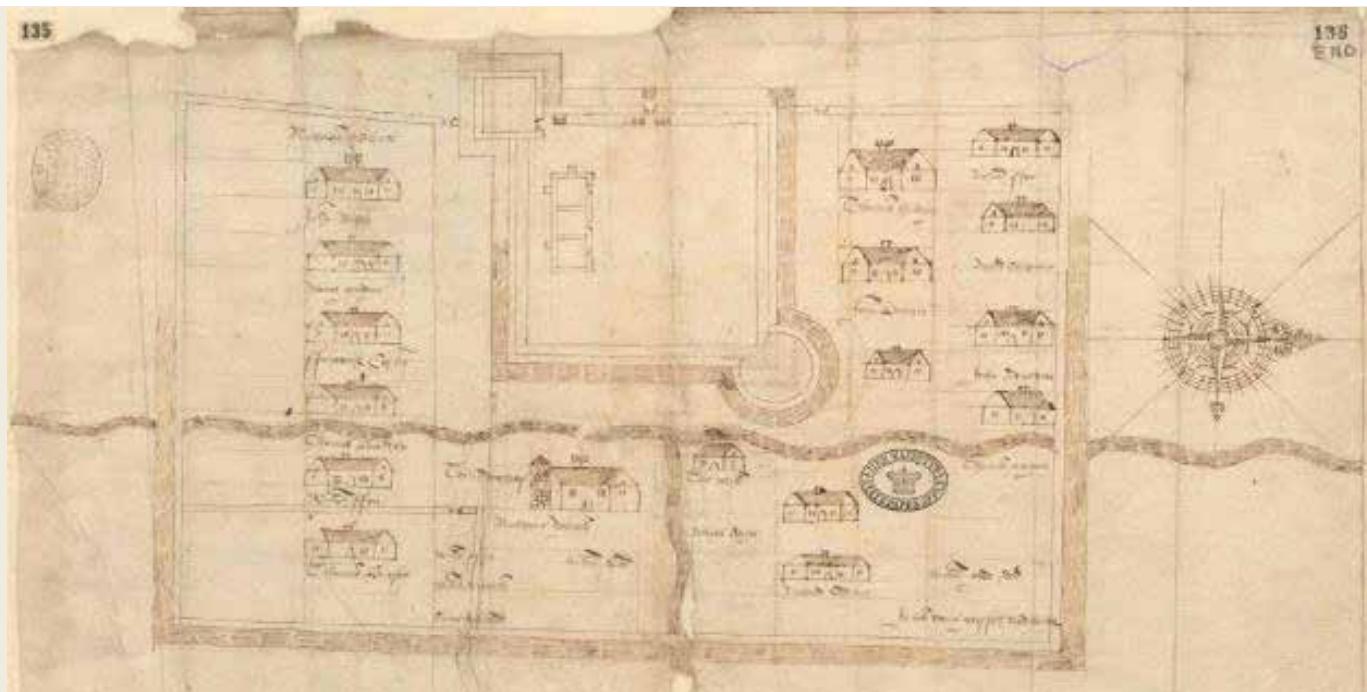
Seventeen structures are shown inside the town. Six houses on the southern side are drawn in elevation south of and perpendicular to the main street, with the following names of seven householders written in contemporary script:

Nicholas Whiete  
John Rathe  
Robert Geordge  
Ffraunce Cosbie  
Thomas Lambden  
Willian Ffyn  
Thomas Parson

The easternmost house, that of Parson, is shown within an intramural enclosure, through which the southern street passes, with an inner gate as an additional defence to the town. The following three are written on the section of street within this enclosure, without houses:

William Ffyn  
William Vicareg  
Evane Ap. Richard

On the north side of the Fort there are two rows of houses, three close to the Fort and four adjoining the northern perimeter. These bear the following householder names:



*Fig. 10: Map of Maryborough, c. 1560 (courtesy of the National Archives for England and Wales, Kew MPF 1/277)*

Thomas Harding

John Payntor

Thomas Margan

Two more houses are shown east of the round corner of the Fort., and two more names are given:

Robert Ayere or Ap ere? (name seems to relate to the mill)

Richard Weldon

To the right of these houses is written:

William Good ded (deceased)

In his roome Gryffith Ap. Robarte

The houses (see Fig. 11) are depicted as single-storey, having four or five bays with two-storey gabled end bays, mullioned windows and central arched doorways, and central chimneys. The largest structure in the town is shown adjoining the inner gate of the intramural enclosure to the north, and alongside the river. This is annotated as 'The Store Hows' (Fig. 12) and is shown as a two-storey building with a gabled three-storey end bay and a stone tower having a domed roof

Richard Ffox

Richard Chapman

John Denovett

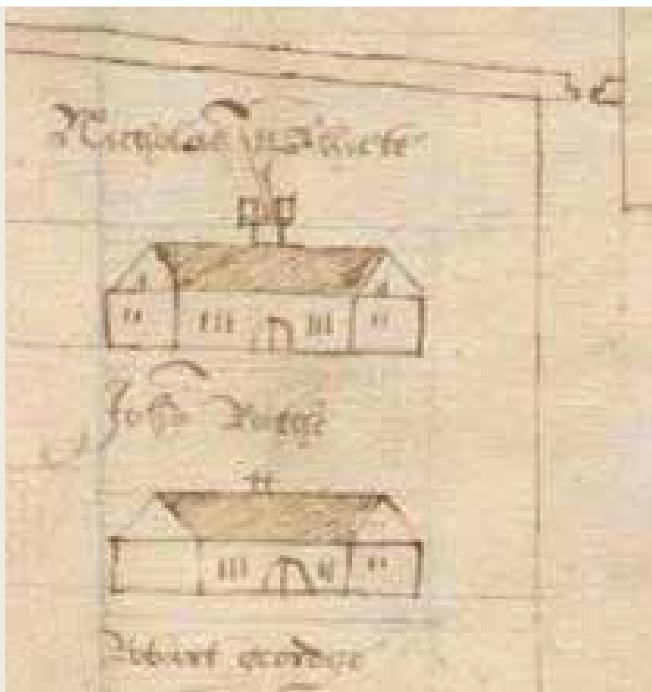
adjoining the inner gate, evidently of defensive purpose. Two further names are written below this house:

Anthoine Rogers

William Beard

A mill is shown as a smaller three-bay structure with a two-storey gabled end bay. It is located at a branch from the river flowing east, probably a tail race, as seen in this position on later maps. Plank bridges are shown in three locations, at the entrance to the Fort, at the eastern gate of the town, and where the southern street passes over the Triogue. The esker ridge is faintly shown to the east of the town as a series of humps along the bottom of the sheet. A road is shown leading northeast from the town gate through the ridge.

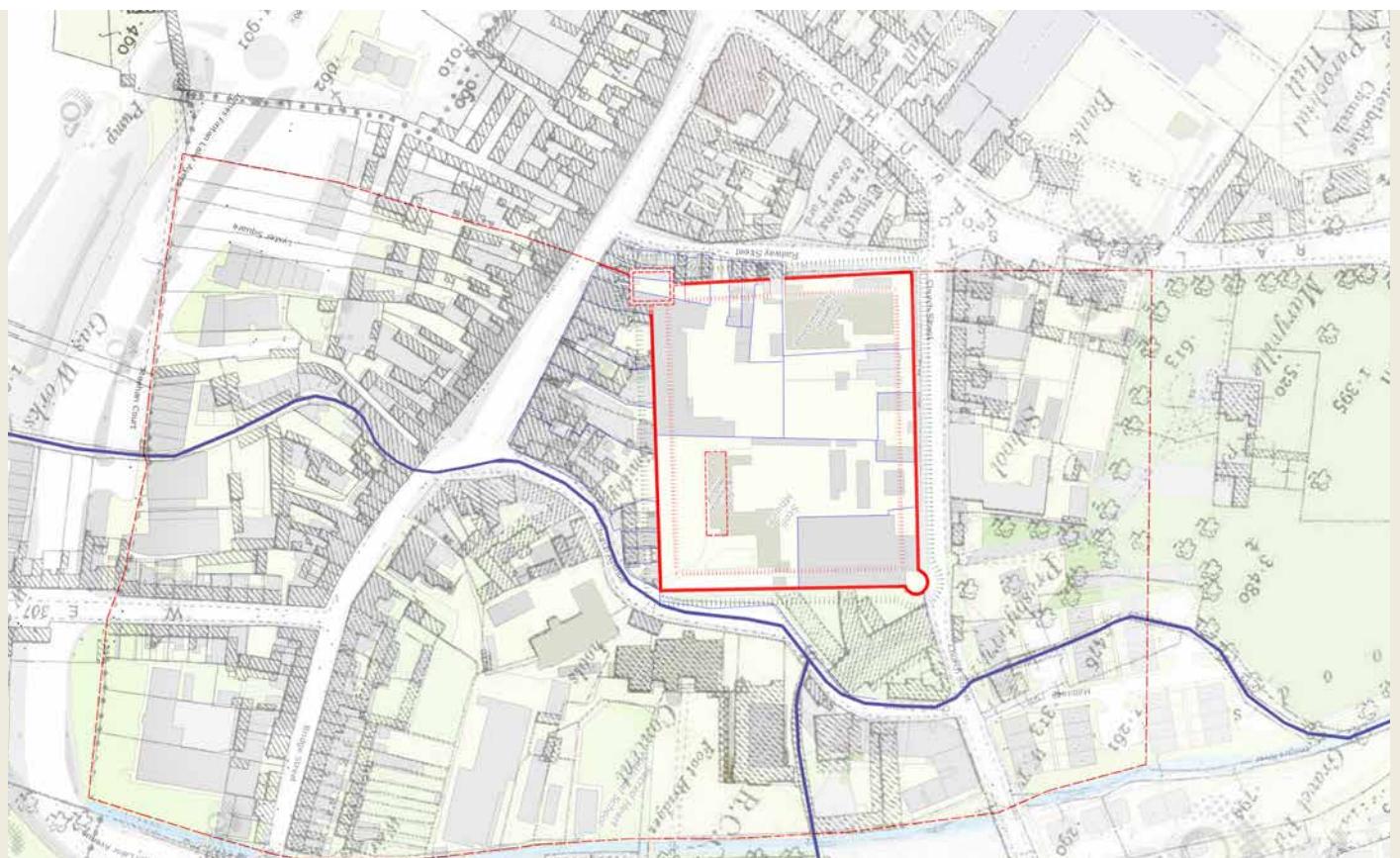
Interpretation of script used here is taken from a letter printed in the Leinster Express of 6 November 1915 from a reader signing as M. J. B. The author of the letter noted the sprinkling of Welsh names (with prefix 'ap') amongst the early settlers of the town, stating that the family names Cosby and Weldon were the only ones to survive down to that time in the county.



*Fig. 11: Typical house variations from Map of Maryborough, c. 1560 (courtesy of the National Archives for England and Wales, Kew MPF 1/277)*



*Fig. 12: The 'Store House' from Map of Maryborough, c. 1560 (courtesy of the National Archives for England and Wales, Kew MPF 1/277)*



*Fig. 13: Interpretation of the extent of the town as shown on the Map of Maryborough of c. 1560 overlaid on maps of 1907 and today (base maps courtesy of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland).*

## Seventeenth-century development

Following the turbulent years at the end of the sixteenth century, the tide was changing in favour of the settlers by 1601, with the death of Owny McRory O'More in 1600 and the defeat of the Gaelic Irish at the Battle of Kinsale. In August 1601, Samuel Molyneaux, the Clerk of the Royal Works in Ireland, made a report on repairs needed to the crown forts at Maryborough, Philipstown and Athlone (Loeber, 1981) but, aside from this, records on the form and fabric of the Fort in this period do not survive.

In 1650, after 100 years as a military fortification, the Fort was taken by Oliver Cromwell's generals Hewson and Reynolds and disabled as a military fortress. The castle, which stood at the southwest corner, appears to have been reduced to ruins at this time but, evidently, much of the remainder of the perimeter wall was left in place.

The only detailed map of the period, the 'Down Survey' of 1656-58, surveyed as part of the Cromwellian plantation, does not provide detail of the layout of the town, apart from symbols for a 'castle', 'fort' and 'towne'. At this time there was a "Faire yearly upon the 24th of June and a market weekly upon Thursday granted by Charter to the Corporacon of Maryburrough, and kept in the said towne. Also two ffayres yearly granted by Patten to Mr James Grace of Dublin, and to be held in the Corporacon of Marybourrough upon the first of May and 24 of August yearly (TCD Down Survey website).

An impression of the degraded condition of the Fort in the late seventeenth century can be gained from a letter dated August 1685, held by the National Library of Ireland. This letter, from Lord Justice Boyle to the Earl of Granard, relates that the Fort was in the hands of 'great fanatics' and 'wholly neglected and almost uninhabited', also stating that 'the timber of the King's house that was therein carried away and the house demolished' (Hist. MSS. Comm Report 2, App. 1874, p.212). This may be a reference to a timber-framed barrack building shown on Tudor maps of the Fort which may have survived the destruction by Cromwell's forces.

## **Eighteenth-century development**

The first formal survey of the town since the sixteenth century is a small map of 1721 (Fig. 14) undertaken by surveyor Theobald Bourke for the Parnell family, as part of a set of estate maps of the ‘Manor of Pallace’ near Maryborough. The survey survives in the form of a copy made by Samuel Byron, the Dublin city surveyor, in 1789 (Horner, 2018). It includes a small map showing numbered properties within the town which were leased by the Parnell family. The map is very small and schematic and no street names are given. It shows the fair green, Main Street, the set-back at the earlier courthouse, Bridge Street, the Triogue River, Ridge Road and Borris Road, then the road to Dublin.

The outline of the Fort is shown, as are Church Street, St Peter’s Church, Railway Street, Tower Hill and Church Avenue with the millrace. Within the Fort, the Old Barracks and the castle are shown. The castle is drawn as a U-shape and appears to sit inside the Fort rather than on its corner. The map shows the lower square extending to the wall of the Fort. However, memorials of deeds predating 1721 for plots on the north of Main Street extending back to the wall suggest that the map may be inaccurate in this respect.



*Fig. 14: Enlarged extract from Parnell Estate map of 1721 by Theobald Bourke as redrawn by Samuel Byron in 1789, showing a large open market place to the south of the Fort. Also shown are the Old Barracks and (possibly) the castle. Numbers refer to a partially illegible list on the map (possibly) of leaseholders and occupiers: 1) Counsellor Dixon's? held by? 2) Co Dixon's? 3) Ditto by Coun. Evans; 4) Ditto by Col. Wallers; 5) Ditto by the Clerk of the Church; 6) Col. Wallers by Mr Dodridge; 7) Ditto by Mr Foster; 8) Counsellor Evans by Doctor Walker (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).*

The town is shown in greater detail on a survey of 1766 (Fig. 15) by Richard and Charles Frizell of part of the estate of Sir Brook William Bridges in the ‘liberties of Maryborough’ (Horner, 2018). The map encompasses lands to the north-west and north-east of the town and its principal purpose was to record the properties of the Bridges family, which are edged in red. These included nine plots within the town, two of which adjoined the Fort; a large plot at the corner of what are now Main Street and Church Avenue, which extended back to an irregular line, probably marking the external

defences of the Fort, and the northern part of what is now Fitzmaurice Place at the corner of Tower Hill and Church Avenue. The style of the map is to show elevations to denote buildings, drawn in a symbolic manner. However, certain buildings of note are picked out. Notable among these are the mill, and elevations of old St Peter’s Church, depicted as a four-stage tower with pointed roof, weather vane and a two-storey nave, and of the old courthouse, sixteen years before it was destroyed by fire in 1782.



Fig. 15: Extract from Bridges estate Map of 1766 (courtesy of Laois County Library)

The Fort is not given prominence, reflecting its disappearance from view in the streetscape by this time. The rectangular enclosure of the Fort is not shown, and details of the Fort can only be made out by interpreting the depiction of the surrounding streets. Two-storey houses are shown on both sides of the ‘Main Street of Maryburrow’, with rear gardens to the rear, which would have extended to the Fort wall or, more probably, to the external ditch outside it. ‘Church Lane’ (now Railway Street) is shown with single-storey houses backing onto the Fort over its full length. The course of the street is simplified to a straight line, omitting the bend at the southern end, and the castle remains are not indicated in any way. The wall itself is not shown, but the limited space at this side suggests the houses must have backed directly onto it. ‘Barrack Lane’ (now Tower Hill) has single-storey houses on the north side only, leaving the Fort wall exposed to view as it is today. Buildings shown close to the north-east corner could be interpreted as being the barracks, despite their orientation parallel to the street. The mill is shown in the same location as on the 1560s map of two centuries earlier, adjoining the property of the Bridges family at Fitzmaurice Place. ‘Bridewell Lane’ (now Church Avenue) is shown with single-storey houses on both sides where it runs parallel to the Fort. The relationship of the houses to the Fort wall is not clear as the plots to the rear of the houses are not shown. The interior of the Fort is marked with parallel dotted lines, used elsewhere to signify gardens.

A drawing of 1791 by the antiquarian Francis Grose recorded the ruins of the ‘Fort in the town of Maryborough’ about 45 years before they were torn down (Fig. 16). Grose’s depiction is difficult to interpret. It shows an unusual three-storey structure with large openings at both upper levels, the top level being a slightly tapered cylindrical tower. The left-hand edge of the middle level is broken away at high level, suggesting that the ruin shown is not the full width of the original structure. At ground level the ruin covers a greater area, and the thickness of the walls indicate that this is also part of the structure. A section of the Fort wall can be clearly seen to abut the ruin on the right of the

image, tapered on the inner side similar to parts of the wall which survive today. The ground level is shown at a considerable incline, falling towards the wall. This is unusual given that the site of the castle is at the high point of the Fort site.

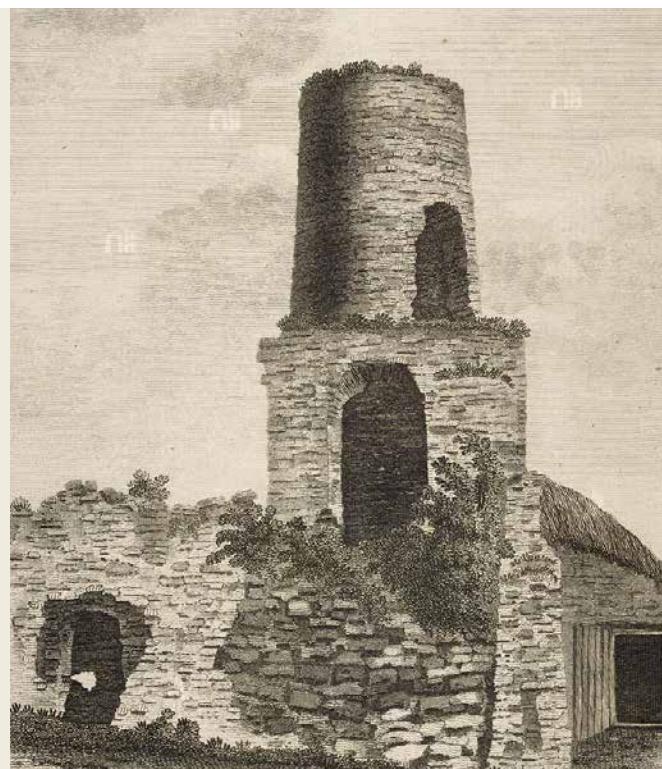


Fig. 16: Fort in the Town of Maryborough, drawn by Francis Grose, 1791 (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

A possible interpretation of this drawing is that it depicts only a corner fragment of the original structure, which, based on dimensions on the 1560s plan, would have measured 14.5 x 17.5m. Alternatively it may not be the castle at all but remains of a gatehouse described in a letter 40 years later (see below).

## Nineteenth-century development

A map of the estate of Sir Eyre Coote, dated 1823, by Dublin-based surveyor William Jones encompasses the ‘Town of Maryborough’ with particular focus on those parts which belonged to the estate, but also showing the street layout and principal buildings as well as the esker ridge. Sir Eyre Coote (1762-1823), an Irish-born British soldier and politician who served as Governor of Jamaica, inherited the estate from an uncle of the same name. Both were closely related to the Coote family of Ballyfin House, whose adjoining property is also noted on the map.

The Fort belonged to the Eyre Coote estate at this time and is therefore shown in very good detail (Fig. 17). It is shown in three numbered holdings, presumably leased out separately:

- 1) The mill and mill pond, extending outside most of the eastern wall of the Fort.
- 2) A large open area comprising three-quarters of the Fort interior, extending the full length of ‘Barrack Street’ (now Tower Hill), and half the length of ‘Church Lane’ (now part of Railway Street). The interior of the round bastion, annotated as the ‘Old Tower’, stands in a

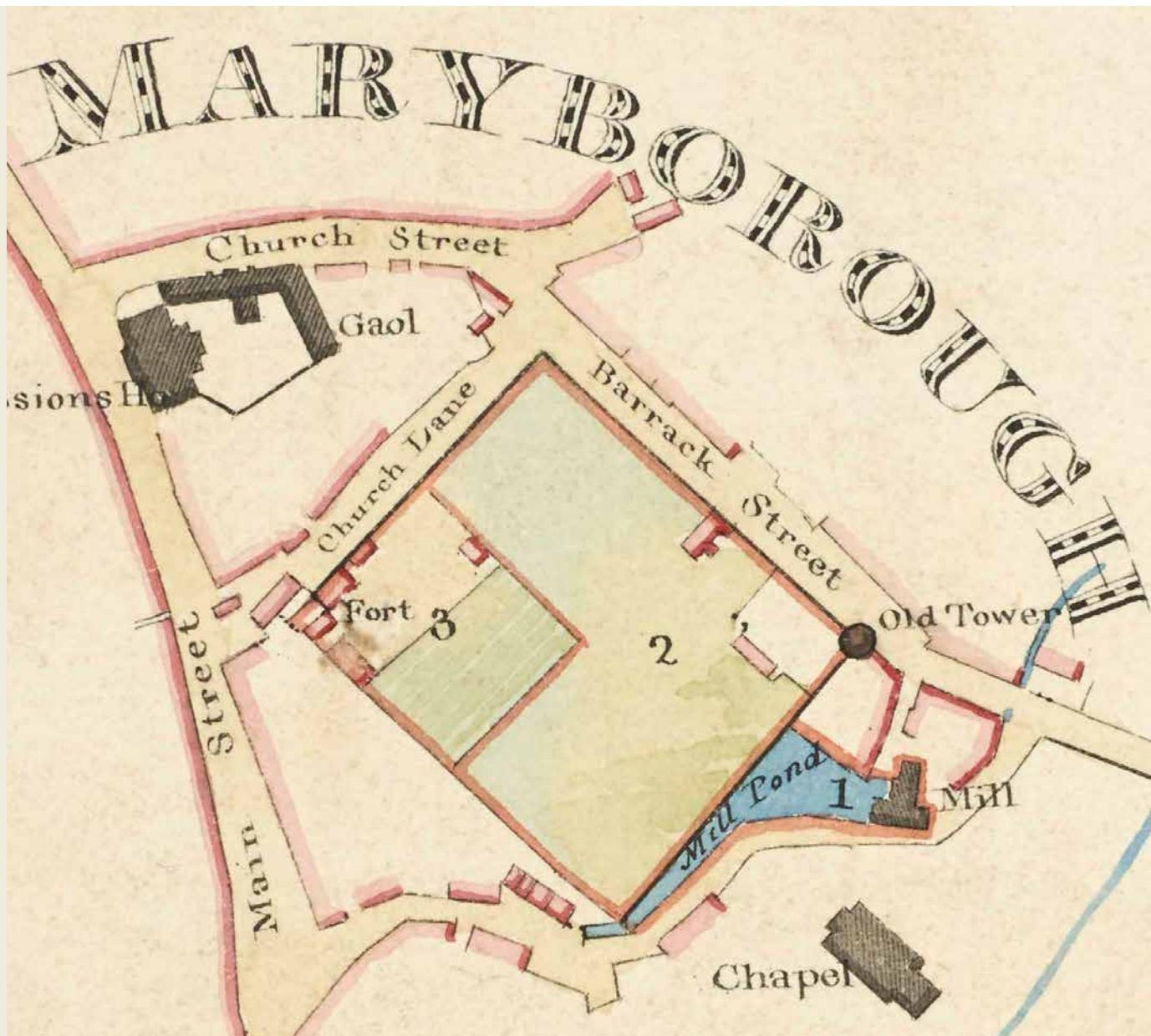


Fig. 17: Detail from 1823 map by William Jones of the estate of Sir Eyre Coote showing the Fort. North is to the right of the image (courtesy of the Hampshire Record Office, Eyre Coote papers: 11M61/737)

rectangular paved enclosure with a building on its south-eastern side. The building referred to on the Ordnance Survey some years later as the ‘Old Barracks’ is also shown.

3) A rectangular plot at the southernmost quarter of the Fort. This area is subdivided in two roughly equal parts, one unbuilt, the other paved and having a cluster of buildings annotated ‘Fort’. Dotted lines would appear to indicate the remains of the castle, twelve years before their removal. These lines connect to a free-standing structure outside the Fort enclosure, which may also have incorporated remains of the castle.

A letter from a Mr John Hanbury to the Leinster Express of 5 November 1831 gives the following description of the remains of the Fort as it survived at that time. Although some historical details are not accurate, the letter contains an interesting first-hand description of the fabric of the Fort as it survived at that time.

*The old Fort on the north side of the Main Street was built by the O'Moores, ancient proprietors of Leix, about the year 1250. This fort may be justly called a chef d'oeuvre of military architecture. The ruins of the castle do not, however, prove that building to have been very strong; but the surrounding wall, enclosing about three acres, defended by ramparts, is, without exception, one of the most impregnable pieces of architecture in the kingdom.*

*There does not appear to have been more than two gates, one north of the house within the garrison, in which Arthur Moore Mosse, Esq. now resides: the other on the eastern side almost opposite. These two gates were defended by watch towers in which strong guards were placed. The ruins of one of these towers are still visible. – Near the western tower, opposite Mr Mosse's door were the remains of a very curious sentry-box, which was pulled down by that gentleman some years since in*

*improving his lawn, nearly adjoining is a draw-well, about twenty feet deep, from which the fort was supplied with water. The Northern part of the garrison opposite the chapel does not appear to have been defended by any tower, but it is supposed that a guard was stationed in that quarter. The river running beneath is part of the fosse which surrounded the fortification. In proof of this, I will only say that before Mr Mosse erected the small iron gate, there had been a high arch to the old entrance, which rendered ingress and egress extremely disagreeable, particularly with a burden. Mr Mosse, on stopping up the old entrance, experienced considerable difficulty in making a new one to the present coach house and stable to the rere of the dwelling house. I have myself seen a man employed for four days in removing one stone; nor could he have done so had he not used iron wedges. The masonry is admirable and unparalleled in modern architecture. The wall is built in a peculiar manner, not being perpendicular, like other walls, but the top inclining inward at least three feet farther than the base: This adds considerably to the strength of the building. On the site of the house now occupied by Mr James Molloy, commonly called the “Four Awls”, there stood in ancient times a very strong prison, to which there was a subterraneous passage from the castle. Part of this passage is still visible, also the ruins of two octangular chimnies, built upwards of 300 years. It is not at all improbable that they had been chimnies of the Prison. [...] the new fort of Maryborough was alternately in the position of the opposite parties, till the coming of Oliver Cromwell, who bombarded it from the place where Mr. Clarke's mill now stands, (others say from the ridge nearly adjoining,) and destroyed a great portion of the wall bellow Mr Mosse's house with part of the watch tower and sentry-box to which*

*I have alluded. A great quantity of human bones were dug up a few years since near this place, no weak proof of a bloody battle between Cromwell and the O'Moores. The fortification then fell into the position of the crown, and was bestowed on the Marquis of Droguedha. It subsequently fell into the hands of the family of Handcock, and latterly, with the lands of Borris, it became the property of Sir Eyre Coote, who demised it to the late Campbell Quinn Eyre, under whom Mr Mosse the present occupier derives his title.*

Arthur Moore Mosse, a relative of the famous surgeon Bartholomew Mosse (1712 – 1759), is listed in the Dublin Almanac of 1847 amongst office holders of the Queen's County, as Secretary of the Grand Jury, one of three Inspectors of Weights and Measures, and as a Commissioner of Affidavits. The description indicates that his house was one of the cluster in the corner of the Fort, seen on the 1821 map of the Eyre Coote estate (Fig. 17). The description forms a picture of the visible remains of the castle just four years before they were removed. Comparison with the Eyre Coote estate map and the Ordnance Survey town plan of 1839 help to form an interpretation. The two gates described stood on the north and east side of Mosse's house and the watch tower of the western one was still standing. It seems probable that this was the round tower shown in Grose's depiction of in 1795 (Fig. 16). Orientation may be confused by the rotation of the Fort north and west may both refer to the north-west, and east may refer to the south-east. The 'coach house and stable' may be those shown on historic aerial photos (Figs. 22 and 23), now replaced by the function room of the Town Hotel, and the new gate created by Mosse to access them is very likely to be the entrance to the Town Hotel carpark, as this is shown on subsequent maps. The location of the draw well is likely to be that marked 'pump' in the town plan of 1839, but the sentry-box, gates and high arch are impossible to locate precisely, although all of these features lay in the south-eastern section of the Fort. The location of the former prison, called

the 'Four Awls', the subterranean passage and the octagonal chimneys appear to refer to the former Presentation convent, although this is known to have been a convent after 1824.

The last remains of the castle were finally cleared away in 1835. The Ordnance Survey Letters of John O'Donovan record that this was done 'by Mr Graves' and that that the place where the castle stood was 'about 200 feet to the rear of Mr Coleman's house in the town'. (Letter of 6 December 1838 as transcribed in M. Herity (ed), Ordnance Survey Letters Laois, Dublin 2008).

A small-scale map in a Report on Municipal Corporation Boundaries Ireland, 1837 appears to show the castle prior to its removal, curiously shown away from the corner of the Fort as in the Parnell map of 1721. The accompanying report by Thomas R. Mould describes Maryborough as 'a Town of very little importance or wealth, possessing a very inconsiderable Market, compared to other Towns in the County (particularly Mountmellick)' (Horner, 2016). The industrial town of Mountmellick had overtaken Maryborough in population by 1821. The census of 1841 shows Mountmellick with a population of 4,755, well ahead of the county town of Maryborough with 3,633, and the other larger towns in the county, Portarlington with 3,006 and Mountrath with 3,000 (Horner 2018).

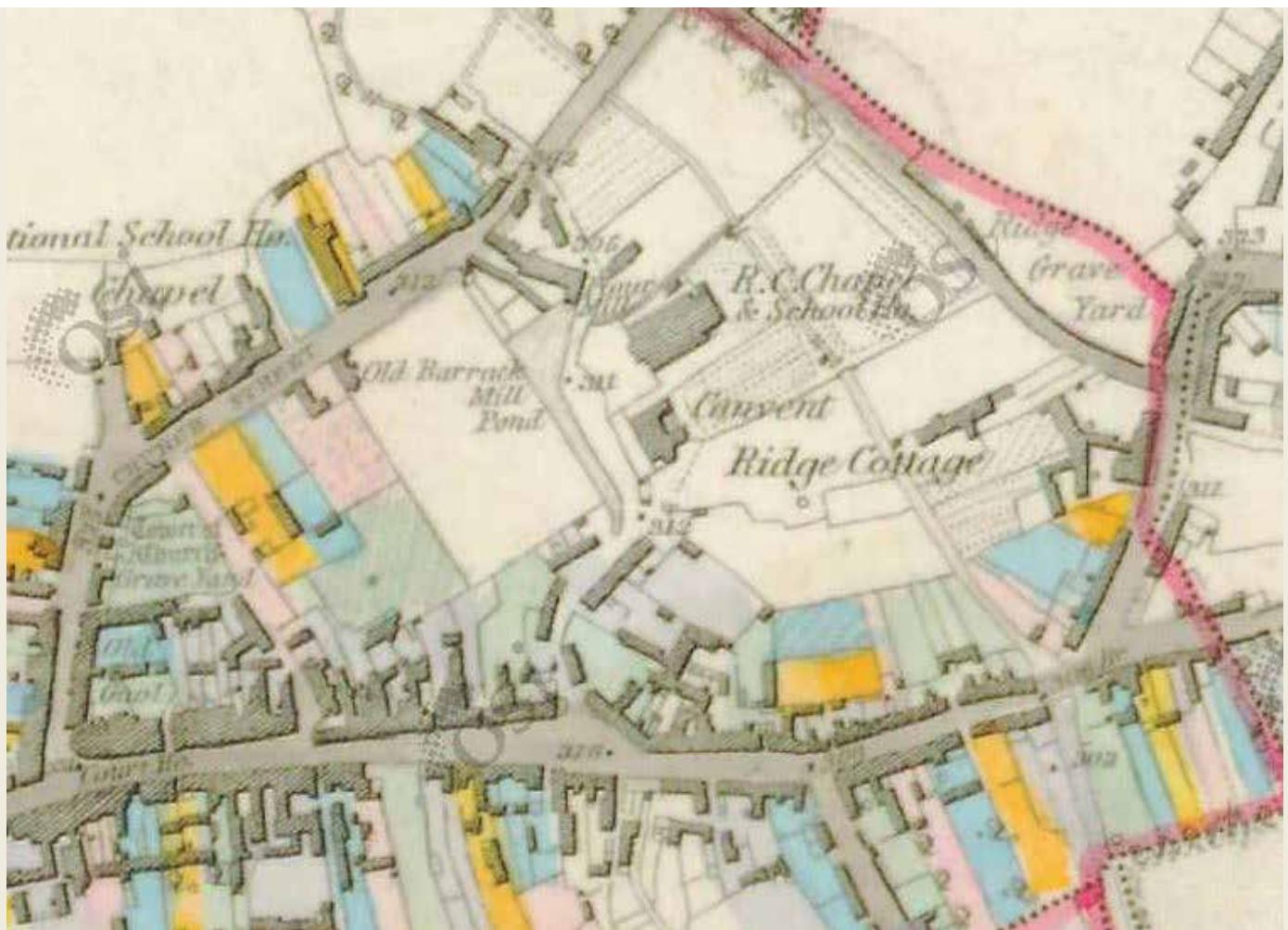


Fig. 18: First edition Ordnance Survey of 1839, original scale 6" to 1 mile (courtesy of the Ordnance Survey of Ireland).

The Ordnance Survey first edition map of 1839 and an unpublished town plan of the same date show the Fort in very good detail (Fig. 18). Internally the western half was subdivided, but few buildings had been added, aside from the group of buildings later annotated as the county animal pound. The eastern half was entirely unbuilt upon. East of the Fort, the 'flour mill' and 'mill pond' are shown as well as the convent before its enlargement in the 1870s.

The line of the former ditch which surrounded the Fort is readily distinguishable in the pattern of building plots behind the Main Street. The plots along the street were evidently extended to the rear to cover in the ditch, which was divided out broadly perpendicular to the Fort wall.

An unpublished town plan at scale of 5 feet to one mile was prepared at the same time (Figs. 19 and 122). It shows the same features, but also the raised bank on the east and part of the north and south sides within the Fort, and a ‘draw well’ close to the NE corner. The larger scale allows the site of the castle to be examined in greater detail. The Fort wall is denoted by a thicker line, and this appears to show the outline of the western side of the tower. Apart from this indication, it remains

difficult to identify the outline of the tower with any degree of certainty. The ‘Old Barracks’ on Tower Hill are marked, showing that a military presence had remained in the Fort until 1809, when the ‘New Barracks’ (now the Garda Station) were built, taking the characteristic form of a Napoleonic-era fort with star-shaped corner bastions.

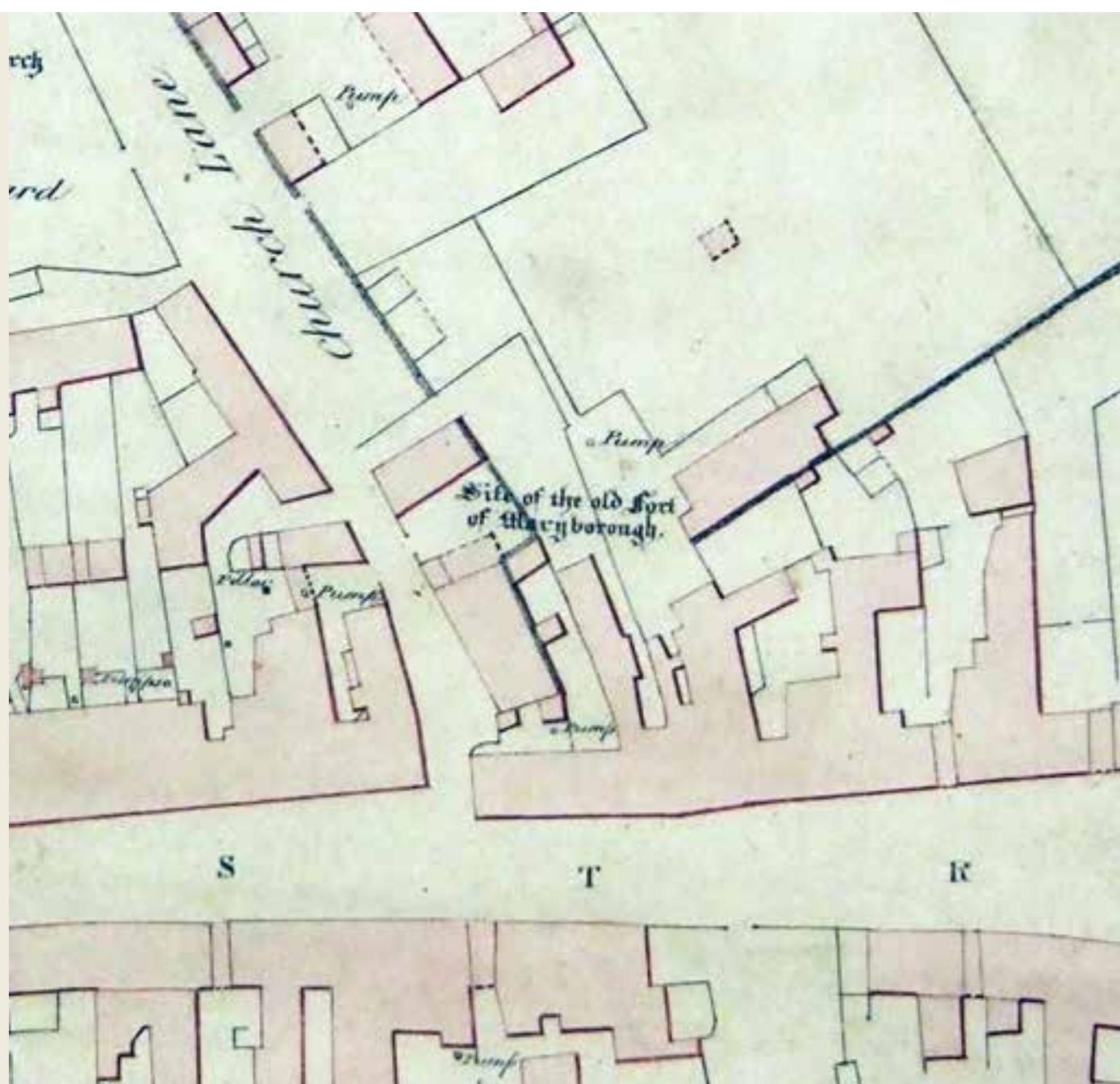
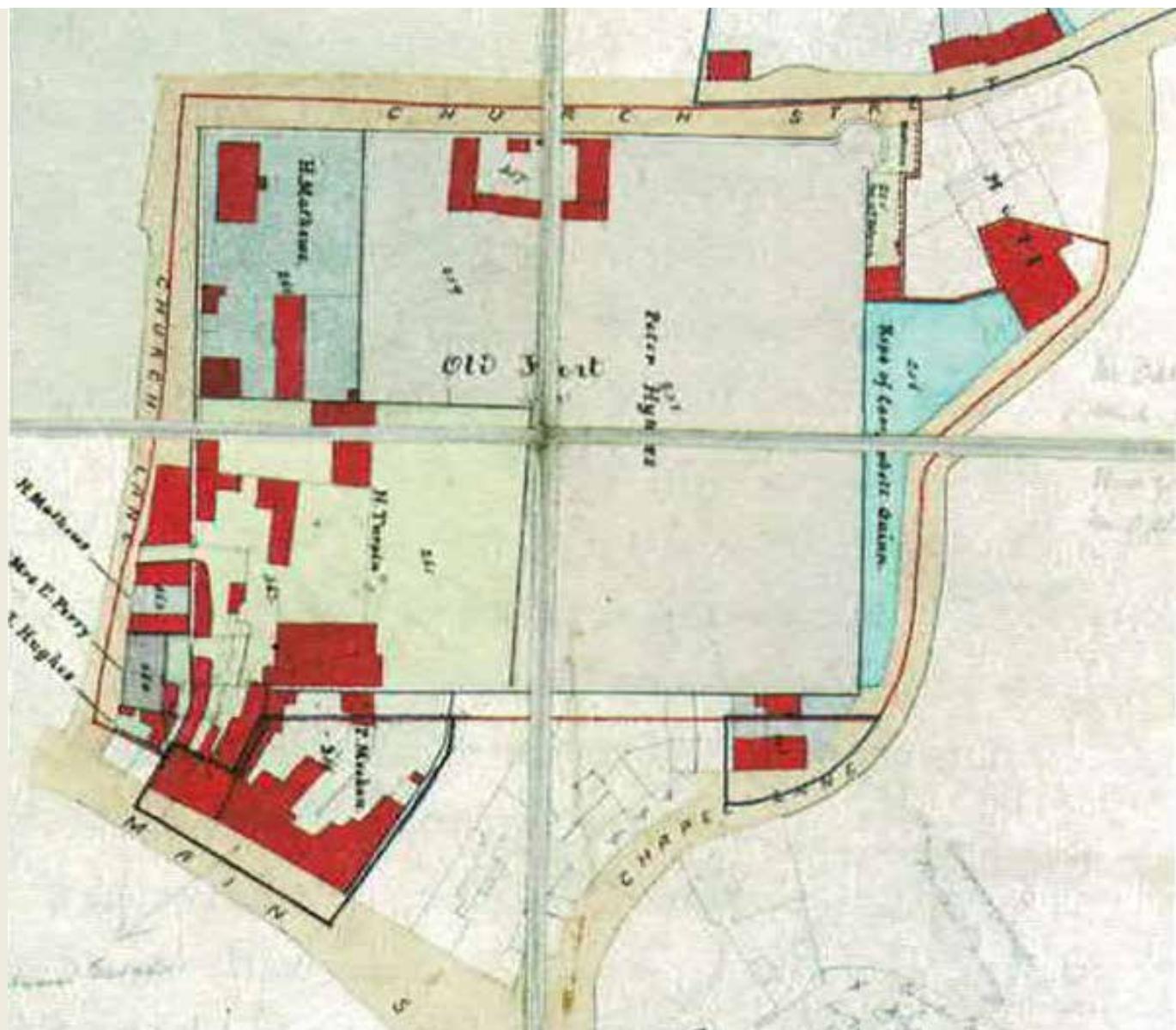


Fig. 19: Extract from unpublished town plan of 1839 (courtesy of the National Archives)

A map of about 1850 held by Laois County Council, probably copy of a Valuation Office map (Fig. 123), shows the Fort and town centre in greater detail, with plot divisions. Since 1839 the Technical School had been built in the north-west corner, as well as a building outside the line of the wall on Railway Street, where the pair of houses north of the entrance to the Town Hotel car park now stand. The Old Barracks is shown in a garden with a formal paths, prior to further subdivision of the site for construction of the redbrick houses, which now occupy that site.

The Fort as it appeared at the close of the nineteenth century is shown in very good detail

in another set of maps of the Eyre Coote estate, surveyed by civil engineer E. F. Saunders in 1895 (Fig. 20). A red property outline around the Fort encompasses what would once have been the external defences, running through the ends of the building plots on Main Street and along the centre line of Tower Hill. On Railway Street the boundary splayes out to encompass properties on the sites of the former castle, gatehouse and external defences. A similar layout seen on earlier Valuation Office maps. To the east of the Fort, the property included the mill pond and what appears to be the original mill site, as well as the footprint of external defences outside the round bastion.



*Fig. 20: Map of the Fort by E.F Saunders, one of a series showing the properties of the Eyre Coote estate in Maryborough, 1895 (courtesy of Laois County Library)*



Fig. 21: Lawrence Collection photograph of Mill Pond, Catholic Church and Presentation Convent. (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

### Twentieth-century development

The 25' Ordnance survey map of 1907 (Fig. 126) shows relatively little change, apart from the Victorian houses on Railway Street and Tower Hill, and various outbuildings.

A bird's-eye photograph of 1932 (Fig. 22) shows the eastern part of the Fort as an open unbuilt area, known locally as the 'Rampart Field'. Fitzmaurice Place is shown built over by the industrial buildings of Odlum's Mills. The former mill pond had become a green strip of ground planted with trees outside the eastern wall of the Fort. A range of stable buildings occupied the site of the present function room structure to the rear of the Town Hotel. The former Catholic church can be seen alongside the Presentation convent on Church Avenue, forming a Catholic precinct typical of Irish nineteenth-century town expansion (see Fig. 21).



Fig. 22: Aerial photo of the 'Rampart Field', Odlum's Mill, Catholic Church and Presentation Convent, 1932 (courtesy of Sean Murray)

Photographs taken over the second half of the twentieth century show the expansion of development inside the fort, notably the the granary building and Scoil Mhuire (1954), and outside the Fort, the buildings of different dates which comprised the Odlum's mill on Fitzmaurice Place.



Fig. 23: Aerial view 1956 (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)



Fig. 24: Odlum's Mills, c. 1980, on the site of present day Fitzmaurice Place, with an earlier house in foreground and the round bastion of the Fort in the background ([www.portlaoisepictures.com](http://www.portlaoisepictures.com), courtesy of Mary Phelan)



Fig. 25: Round bastion with Odlum's Mills in background (Courtesy of Michael Scully)



Fig. 26: Breach in round bastion c. 1990 (Courtesy of M. Deigan)



Fig. 27: Current aerial view (Google maps)

## 2.4 Other Plantation Structures

### Fort of Leighlinbridge, 1546

The Fort Protector was one of four government forts built in the region in the period of a few years (D'Alton, 2009). The first of these was at Leighlinbridge on the River Barrow, built as a fortified base and centre for military operations by Lord Deputy Bellingham during his campaign against Giolla-Padraig O'More and Brian O'Connor Faly. The new Fort reused the substantial remains of a Carmelite monastery which had been founded in the thirteenth century and suppressed in 1543 as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries.

A wall was built to enclose the former monastic accommodation, an area of 90m x 70m. A pre-existing tower at the head of the bridge, known as the 'Black Castle', built in 1320, was adapted and formed the NW corner (Fig. 28). A circular tower was built on the opposite corner to flank the adjacent walls (Fig. 29). The resulting Fort was remarkably similar in plan form to the Fort Protector, and may have provided the model for it (Fig. 30).



Fig. 29: Round bastion at Leighlinbridge

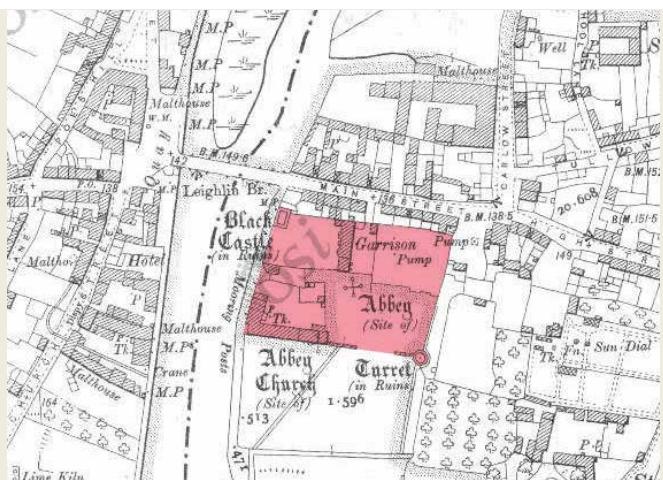


Fig. 30: Remains of Leighlinbridge Fort, built c. 1546 (Ordnance Survey of Ireland)



Fig. 28: The 'Black Castle', Leighlinbridge

### Fort Governor, Daingean, 1547-48

The fort in Daingean can be regarded as the twin of the Fort Protector (Fig. 31). It was sited to control the territory of the O'Connors in the same way as the Fort Protector was to control the O'More lands; It was named 'Fort Governor', which, like Fort Protector, was in honour of the Duke of Somerset, who ruled briefly during the minority of Edward VI as 'Lord Protector of the Realm and Governor of the King's Person'. Fort Governor was to become the origin of Philipstown (now Daingean), the original county town of King's County, as Fort Protector was the origin of Maryborough, county town of the Queen's county, both settlements celebrating the Edward's successor Mary I and her Spanish consort Philip.

However, like Leighlinbridge, the Fort Governor was not a new-build, but was constructed around a pre-existing castle of the O'Connor Falys. This does not appear to have been an ancestral seat of the O'Connors, but an outpost built to protect against attacks from the English Pale to the east. English forces had captured from the O'Connors in 1537 and again in 1546.

D'Alton describes a substantial bawn of c. 85 x 80m either adapted or newly constructed around the pre-existing castle. The Fort had a gate tower in the centre of the west wall and a flanking tower in the centre of the remaining three sides.

The castle was converted to a dwelling in the eighteenth century and was demolished in 1927 (Fig. 32).

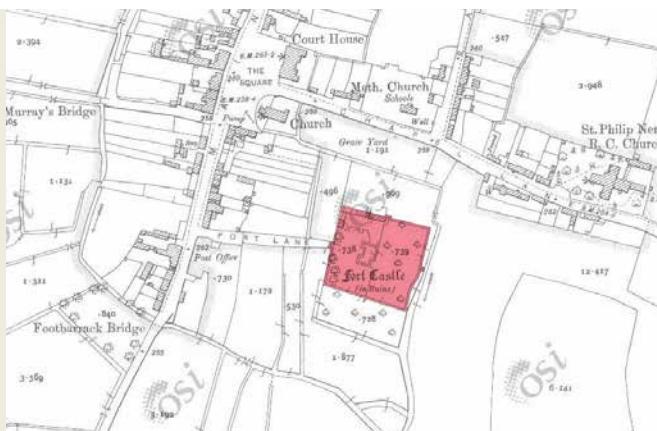


Fig. 31: Daingean Fort, as shown on Ordnance Survey map of 1908 (Ordnance Survey of Ireland)



Fig. 32: Remains of Daingean Fort

## Fort of Blackford

The smallest of the four forts was built at Blackford on the frontier between Kildare and Laois about half way between Stradbally and Athy. Various dates are suggested by D'Alton, possibly 1538 during the suppression of the Silken Thomas rebellion, or after the other forts in 1560.

Analysis of the image on the Cotton and Carew versions of the map of c. 1560 indicates a square enclosure with diagonally opposed circular flankers to the north east and southwest, around a three-storey tower, some remains of which are still standing.

## Blackwater Fort, Co Tyrone

An image of the second Blackwater fort in Co Tyrone (Fig. 33), built in 1587 to defend a vital river crossing shows remarkable similarity to the Fort Protector, having a similar round bastion open to the interior, entrance gateway in a similar location with meandering approach road, a surrounding ditch depicted in the same manner as contemporary views of Fort Protector, and various structures within the fort. A corner castle depicted as a substantial timber structure connects across the river to an equally large tower house of stone.

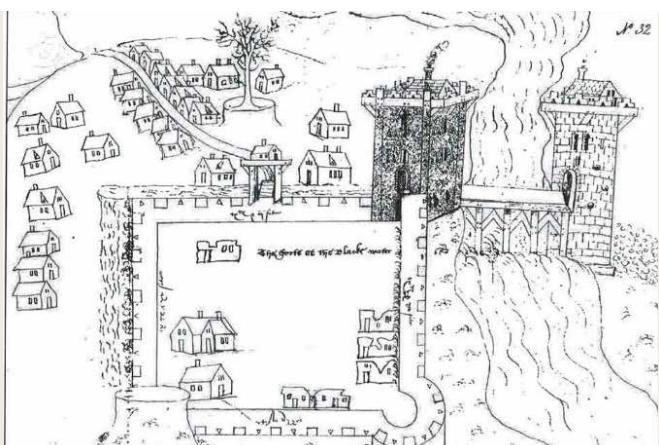


Fig. 33: View of the second Blackwater fort, Co Tyrone, of 1587 (courtesy of the National Archives of England and Wales, Kew, MPF99)

## 2.4 Archaeological Research

By Dr Eoin Sullivan, Gort Archaeology

Fort Protector is an archaeological monument and is protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014.

The Urban Archaeological Survey for County Laois (Bradley, Halpin, and King, 1986) gives an account of the archaeological features of urban centres in the county. The Survey established and mapped zones of archaeological potential for these urban centres, which recommended that proposed development within these zones be subject to archaeological assessment and mitigation at the planning stage of the development. The Urban Archaeological Survey delineates the walls of Fort Protector which are shown within the confines of the postulated walled town that developed around Fort Protector. The walled town is in turn demarcated within a proposed zone of archaeological potential. The zone of archaeological potential assists researchers and

the different professions to identify areas where archaeological mitigation should take place for planned developments thereby identifying and preserving (in situ or by record i.e. scientific archaeological excavation) the archaeological strata and the archaeological heritage of Portlaoise town for future generations. The site is shown and described in the Record of Monuments and Places

### Summary of Archaeological Works

A number of developments have occurred within the zone of archaeological potential for Portlaoise that have either required an archaeological assessment in advance of construction or archaeological monitoring during construction (see Fig. 34). A total of eleven archaeological licences were issued over a twenty-year period commencing in 1993 within the zone of archaeological potential. The majority of these archaeological licences were for archaeological assessments, requiring the excavation of linear test trenches or test pits within areas of the site of the proposed development.

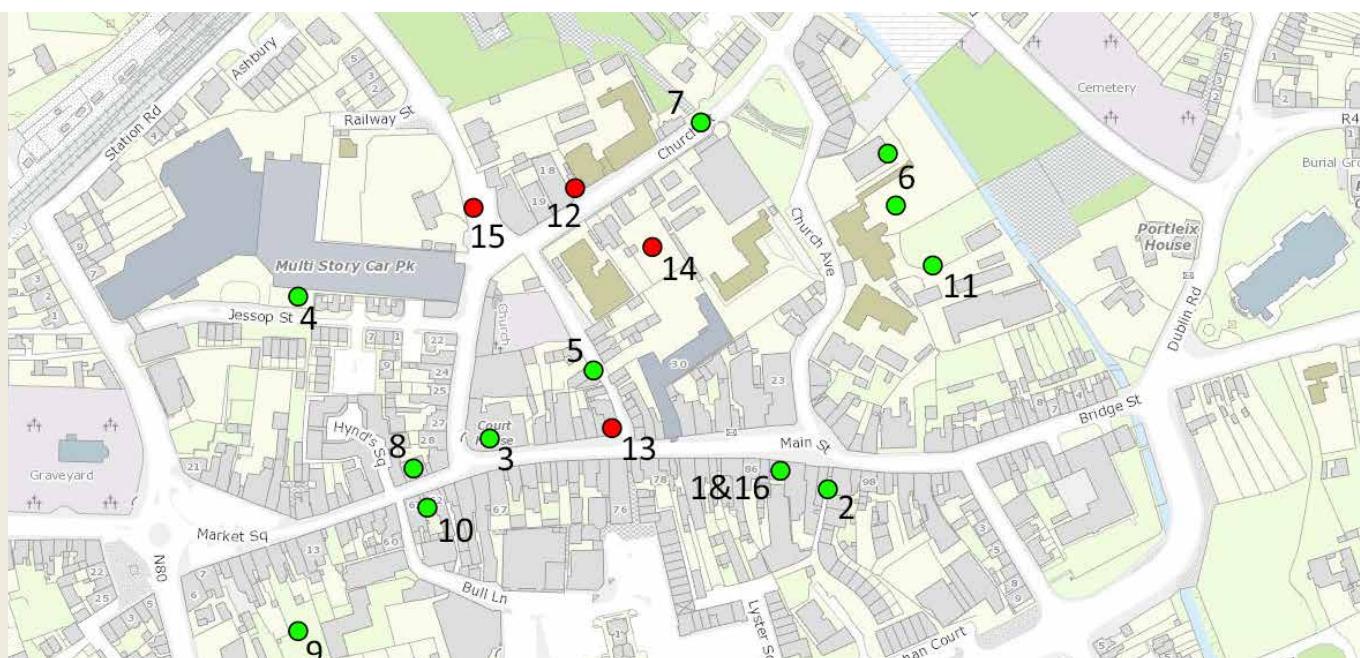


Fig. 34: Locations of previous archaeological works, licenced and unlicensed (Eoin Sullivan)

#### Licenced assessments

1. 93E0169 - 88/89 Main St.
2. 96E0277 - Peppers Lane
3. 96E0365 - Old Gaol, Main St
4. 99E0392 - Jessop St.
5. 00E0104 - Church St./Ave.

#### 6. 03E0596 - Church Ave

7. 03E0975 - Church St.
8. 03E1304 - 43/44 Main St.
9. 05E0130 - JF Lalor Ave.
10. 07E0517 - Bull Lane
11. 11E0442 - Church Ave.

#### Unlicensed monitoring

12. 05N0344 - 18 Church St.
13. 06N0119 - 34/35 Main St
14. 06N0179 - Tower Hill
15. 07N0138 - Church St.
16. 94N0017 - 88/89 Main St

An archaeological assessment on Peppers Lane in 1996 (Delaney 1996: 96E0277) revealed a 15m long surviving section of a mill race channel that was part of the head race of the mill pond and stream which fronted the eastern exterior of Fort Protector and supplied water to Odlum's mills.

The archaeological monitoring of the installation of the Portlaoise Broadband Network in 2003-04 along the carriageway of Church Street (Delaney 2003:03E0975) enabled the identification of a cut, which the archaeologist interpreted part of a ditch or moat at the exterior of the Fort wall close to the circular bastion.

Two archaeological assessments on adjacent sites on the opposite side of Church Avenue gives us good information about the topography and use of the land between the Fort and the River Triogue. The archaeological assessment of the Presentation convent/church of SS Peter and Paul revealed the foundations of the nineteenth-century church. The land to the rear of the Presentation Convent revealed the existence of a possible subterranean passage/drain immediately to the rear of the bay in the building and matched the location shown by Deigan (1991). The assessment revealed that the land was built-up ground to a height of c.2m above the subsoil, but there was a crude limestone wall at the base of the excavated trench at the north west of the site. The nature of the build-up of ground between Fort Protector and the River Triogue was explained as part as being related to the use of the land for the dumping of human cess in the seventeenth century until the municipal waste system was created in the town in the eighteenth century. The ground was built-up by a height of c.2.5m.

Archaeological monitoring within close proximity to Fort Protector at Church Street (Martin Doody: 05N0344), Main Street (Martin Doody: 06N0119) and Main Street (Clare Mullin: 94N0017) found nothing of archaeological significance.

The monitoring of the installation of a Bord Gáis connection along Church Street (Kerins 2007:

07N0138) revealed that the present-day road is c.1.20m above the level it was at in the eighteenth century.

Archaeological monitoring of the construction of the surface car-park to the rear of Site 5 within Fort Protector did not uncover any features of archaeological significance.

Only one full hand excavation of a site took place within Portlaoise, namely the redevelopment of the Old Gaol beside St. Peter's graveyard. The excavation revealed five male skeletons in a graveyard within the courtyard of the Gaol (O'Reilly 1996: 96E0365).

The results from the archaeological information gathered through the archaeological works in Portlaoise enable us to visualise Fort Protector as being on quite steeply sloping ground, notably from the wall to the Triogue and from the north west along Railway Street. The land to the west past St. Peter's graveyard is agricultural land at a higher elevation.

### **Archaeological Text Excavation at Site 18 (formerly Shaw's carpark), 2017**

As part of the research for the Conservation Plan, Laois County Council funded a research-based test excavation within the car park of 23 Main Street, the site for the new county and town library building formerly Shaw's (Site 18). Dr Eoin Sullivan of Gort Archaeology undertook the excavation under Excavation Licence 17E02223 (see Figs. 35 and 36).

The objective of the limited test excavation was to identify any surviving sub surface evidence for a moat or ditch along the southern side of Fort Protector, as indicated on some of the cartographic sources. A single test trench measuring 5.50m (N/S) and 3m (E/W) stepping to 0.50m (E/W) at the base, was excavated by hand between Monday 22nd and Wednesday 31st May and Monday 26th to Thursday 29th June 2017. The test excavation resulted in the

identification of a surviving seventeenth-century level at the foot of the Fort wall and extended along the length of the trench. This level overlaid an organic layer which in turn overlaid the natural subsoil. The Fort wall was constructed on a low man-made sloping foundation platform and this formation level is located at a depth of 2.2m below the present surface of the car park. There was no indication for a moat or ditch at this portion of the Fort wall that would have had a defensive/military function, but rather a shallow low area of the site which enabled the build-up of an organic layer (Sullivan, 2017).

The absence of a ditch at this point may be explained by the proximity to the original course of the Triogue River, which provided a natural defence.



*Fig. 35: View of C5 (centre of trench) with C15 in foreground (Eoin Sullivan)*

## 2.6 Electronic Survey

An electronic survey of the Fort wall was carried out to create a coherent record of the visible standing remains of the structure, and to put the various parts of the wall into context.

### Methodology

The electronic laser survey was carried out by Apex Surveys Ltd in December 2016. The equipment used was Leica Scan Station P30/P40 long-range laser scanner, coupled with Leica Viva GS14 by Leica Geosystems (see Fig. 37). All accessible standing remains of the perimeter wall were measured including levels of primary features and of the ground surface on the inside and outside of the wall, all related to a common baseline. Areas where historic masonry was exposed were recorded in rectified orthophotographs. The data gathered in the laser field-survey was presented by Apex Surveys in a set of plans, elevations, orthophotographs and in a basic 3-D model.

### Uses of the Survey

Although 80% of the perimeter wall of Fort wall survives above ground, much of this is in sections which cannot be seen together, as they are isolated within separate properties. The survey allows standing sections in rear yards and within buildings such as the Town Hotel, Kavanagh's pub and Lilly's Bar to be seen together in context and, crucially, gives relative levels showing the relationship of all parts of the Fort wall to the profile and gradient of the ground. Levels of the top and base of each part of the wall, on the inner and outer sides, permit a proper understanding of each surviving section of the wall, showing how each part fitted into the whole.

This survey is an essential tool for the proper understanding of the Fort wall. The drawings provided by Apex Surveys were used by Lotts Architecture as the basis for a set of drawings showing the surviving fabric of the wall, differentiating fabric of original and later dates, and including some interpretation of the form of missing elements. These drawings are reproduced



*Fig. 36: View of C12 (drain) mid excavation from south west (Eoin Sullivan)*

in stripped-down form in Appendix 2 of this document.

The survey will serve the following purposes:

- It allows the surviving fabric of the Fort to be properly mapped, quantified, understood and interpreted.
- It allows a joined-up representation of the entire surviving structure in plan, sections, elevations, and three dimensions, related to its present context and to the gradient of the streetscape.
- It enables a more accurate interpretation of the historic form of the Fort Protector. It can be used to create conjectural reconstructions of the how the Fort may have looked when still an active fortress in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

- It can be used to communicate an understanding of the Fort Protector to stakeholders and the wider public, both in Portlaoise and further afield, demonstrating the significance of the site, and placing it in the context of other Irish fortresses and historic walled towns.
- It forms the basis for detailed condition surveys of each part of the Fort wall, which are needed to specify conservation works.

The electronic survey has been used as part of a three-dimensional representation of the town centre created by RealSim Ltd for Laois County Council as part of the public realm strategy '*Portlaoise - 2040 and Beyond*'.

## **2.7 Description of the Fort**

### **Natural Topography and Urban Situation**

The site for the Fort appears to have been selected to command a relatively flat expanse extending between the Slieve Bloom Mountains to the northwest and the Dysart hills and Cullenagh Mountain to the east and south. An esker, the Ridge of Maryborough, formed a natural line of defence to the east.

The Fort was not built on the relatively flat area west of the current courthouse, but on the sloping ground which extends down from there to the original meandering course of the Triogue River, which provided a water source for the new settlement. The castle was positioned at the highest point on the southwest corner, and the Triogue curved around the southeast corner. The 'Store House' was aligned to the southeast corner on the other side of the Triogue to guard the entrance to the town which surrounded the Fort on three sides. The first St Peter's Church was built on an east-west axis to the west of the Fort.

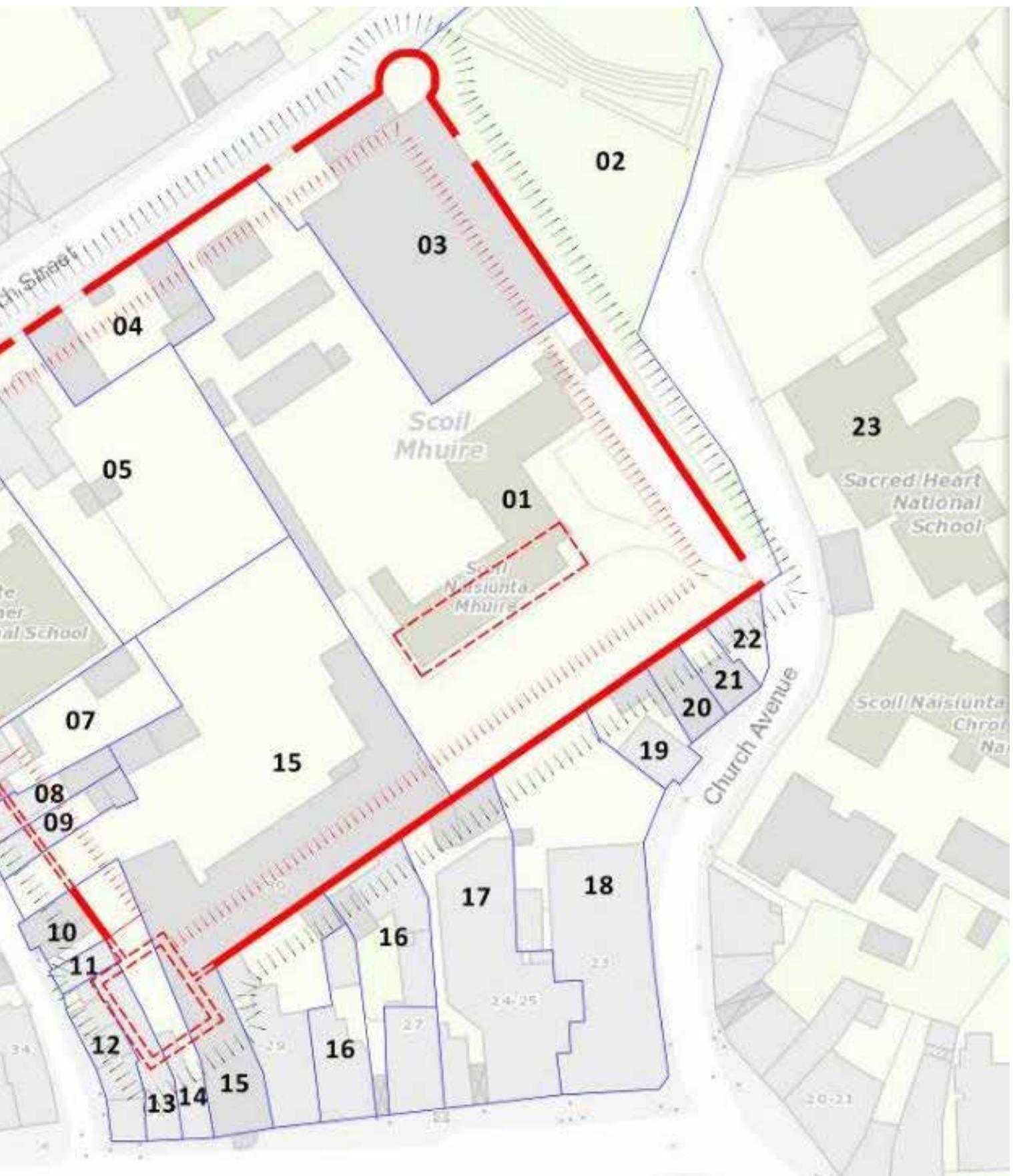
The Fort is located in the heart of the town of Portlaoise, set at an angle to the course of the Main Street, the buildings on the north side extending back to its walls. To the east the curve of the Triogue is reflected in the serpentine form of Church Avenue. Church Street/Tower Hill run parallel to the north side. Railway Street splay slightly away from the west side to bypass the corner tower which formerly projected from its corner.

### **Site-by-Site Record of Fort Protector**

The following description of the Fort as it survives today is arranged by individual properties within or adjoining the walls, starting at the eastern corner and moving counter-clockwise around the site. The record incorporates descriptions of special features by archaeologist Dr Eoin Sullivan.



*Fig. 37: Site-by-Site Record of Fort Protector*



## Laois Music Centre (formerly Scoil Mhuire National School)

Address:	Church Avenue	Eircode:	R32 V074
Owner:	Laois County Council	Folio Number:	24522F
NIAH ref:	12504200 (Fort)	RPS ref:	468 (Fort)

### General:

L-shaped site encompassing 37% of the Fort interior, formerly known as the 'Rampart Field'.

### North Wall of Fort:

18m section facing Tower Hill/Church Street, 800mm thick at top. Internal face 1.40m high, rendered above raised ground level, possibly preserving internal rampart beneath. Street side 3.20m high.

### East Wall of Fort:

Facing Church Avenue, site of mill pond on OS maps of 1837 and 1908. Fort wall lowered to a height of 2.8m on street side, raised c. 1954 with two courses of concrete blockwork, in-situ concrete coping and tubular steel railing with mesh infill, stepping up at junction to Site 03. External face constructed of rubble limestone, repointed in 2018-19 as part of Fitzmaurice Place and Fort Protector Enhancement Scheme. Internal face covered by a raised embankment, possibly the internal rampart shown on sixteenth century maps of the Fort (Fig 43). School gateway of 1954 forms a breach in the SE corner.

### South Wall of Fort:

Fort wall 2m above the present ground surface on inside, formed as earthen embankment c. 15m wide similar to E side, possibly historic rampart. Thickness c. 65mm at top. Rendered along its full length, with pronounced bevel of c. 100mm between 1.0 and 1.1m from top of wall (Fig. 44). Wall is c 3.4m high on outer face (Sites 18 – 22). Neighbouring building on Site 20 is built partially onto the wall top of the Fort wall.

### West side:

Rubble stone boundary wall built when Fort was subdivided, southern section possibly eighteenth century, northern section c. 1830. At NW corner, walls of former barracks on adjoining Site 04 is rough-cast with basal portion of exposed rubble masonry (Fig. 44).

### Buildings:

School buildings of 1954. The main building is constructed on slightly raised ground. Southern wing occupies approximate position of the timber-framed barracks shown on sixteenth century maps (referred to as the 'King's House'). Long play shelter with round columns along eastern perimeter, typical of OPW schools of the period by Basil Boyd-Barrett.

### Ground:

Extensively built up by importation of material. Central portion surfaced with tarmac probably over rubble infill.



Fig. 38: South wall of Fort and internal bank



Fig. 39: Former 'Old Barracks' on adjoining Site 04



Fig. 40: Inner face of N wall



Fig. 41: External face of E wall, S end



Fig. 42: Higher section of E wall adjoining mill site



Fig. 43: Inner face of East wall with bank



Fig. 44: Exposed section of E wall at school gateway

## Fitzmaurice Place (site of former flour mill and mill pond)

Address:	Church Avenue	Eircode:	-
Owner:	Laois County Council	Folio Number:	24906F
NIAH ref:	12504200 (Fort)	RPS ref:	468 (Fort)

### General:

Fitzmaurice Place is a public urban space outside the Fort on the eastern side. It was named in honour of the aviation pioneer Col James Fitzmaurice (1898-1965) raised in Portlaoise, who achieved fame as one of the crew of three aboard the Bremen, which completed the first east-west crossing of the Atlantic in April 1928. Fitzmaurice Place was reconfigured in 2018-19 as part of the Fort Protector/Fitzmaurice Place Enhancement Scheme as a public green space replacing a paved area and amphitheatre on the site of a large flour mill demolished c. 1990.

### East Wall of Fort:

The full length of the east wall of the Fort survives forming the western edge of Fitzmaurice Place and Church Avenue. The northern part which faces Fitzmaurice Place was raised in mass concrete in c. 1940 to form the wall of a large granary building on Site 03. At the NE angle of the Fort a round battered flanker survives at the corner to Tower Hill/Church Street. A former opening in the tower was built up with rubble stone in the 1990s. Conservation work to the outer face of the wall was completed in 2019, and a wide gateway formed in mass concrete was built up on its outer face with concrete blockwork faced with rubble stone masonry.



Fig. 55: West wall and corner flanker or bastion of the Fort

## Ground:

During the works in 2018 extensive concrete remains dating to c. 1940 were found to exist below ground, including connecting passages under the Fort wall in several places, which were retained in situ and recorded by Colm Flynn Archaeology. A concrete slab extends c. 3m out from the wall over much of its length, below which the profile of the historic earthwork ditch may survive.



## Mill race and mill pond:

The OS map and unpublished town plan of 1839 (Figs. 18 and 122) shows a millrace and triangular mill pond on the southern half of Fitzmaurice Place. The millrace appears to have been a raised construction as seen in a historic Lawrence Collection photo (Fig. 21). It is possible that stone was taken from the Fort wall to construct this. The mill pond tapered into an open mill race along the southern part of the wall, possibly using the profile of the defensive ditch. The 2018 works uncovered of the course of a vaulted mill race along the western edge of Church Avenue, including a wheel pit.



## Subterranean structures:

Secondary sources refer to a tunnel which was uncovered twice over the course of the 20th century, assumed to connect the Fort to the former Presentation Convent (originally the ‘Storehouse’).

## Public sculptures:

‘Etilt’ by John O’Connor, erected in 2001 in stainless steel, to commemorate Col Fitzmaurice, was relocated in 2019 to NE at Tower Hill. ‘Instruments’ by Mary McGinty, a group of four limestone sculptures relocated in 2019 from James Fintan Lalor Avenue.

*Fig. 46: Site of former mill pond*



*Fig. 48: Flanker or bastion with repaired breach*

## Laois County Council Depot (formerly granary of Odlum's mill)

<b>Address:</b>	Fitzmaurice Place/Church Street (Tower Hill)	<b>Eircode:</b>	-
<b>Owner:</b>	Laois County Council	<b>Folio Number:</b>	24522F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	468 (Fort)

### General:

This site occupies 11% of the area of the Fort in the NE corner, including the circular corner tower, which is its primary architectural feature. A large industrial granary formerly part of the Odlum's Mill complex has been constructed over most of the footprint of the property, composed of three distinct parts, described below.

### Corner Tower of Fort:

A circular tower at the NE angle of the Fort forms a bastion at the corner of this site, its function being to provide flanking fire against attacks to the adjoining north and east walls. The internal diameter is 8.2m, walls are 1.5m thick on average and 4.8m high internally and 5.6m externally. One third of the circumference is open to the interior of the Fort. Built of roughly coursed limestone (Fig. 49), the exterior battered for defence. It is now open to the sky. Inner face indicates there were three internal levels, the ground, and timber floors at 1.70m at 3.80m above ground. Uppermost section built of smaller stone, possibly an addition or repair dating from the various attacks of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, matching the upper floor level and the top of the main Fort wall. A former large opening broken through in the SE quadrant of the tower was rebuilt during the 1990s using matching rubble stone in cement-based mortar up to the height of the upper internal level and repointed externally in 2019 (Fig. 48).

### Inscribed letters:

Irregular shaped stone deeply incised with the letters or initials 'TP' located on the interior of the tower close to the northernmost point, c. 400mm below the line of the upper internal floor (Fig. 51). Function and date unknown, possibly a mason's mark for construction or repair work.

### East Wall of Fort:

48m length, 3.5m high to outside. Wall altered within the granary, with additional structural elements to raise the wall and support the roof. These consist of a concrete plinth 960mm high and 240mm deep, piers 450mm wide and 230mm deep up to the top of the Fort wall, 700mm deep above this extending to the roof. Mass-concrete wall 2.5m high set on top of the Fort wall, flush to the outside with an internal ledge of c. 470mm, estimated thickness 180mm (Fig. 67). Concrete surface between piers may be a render coat applied to the face of the Fort wall, or a new internal skin. Probable that concrete and plinth were cast against the inner face of the wall without separation layer. Piers may cut into the historic wall fabric. Wide doorway forming a full-height breach with mass-concrete reveals and head, closed on the outer side in 2019 with concrete blockwork and rubble stone masonry, salvaged from a demolished bridge. Works outside the wall in 2019 showed the wall is breached below ground in several locations with passages constructed in mass concrete, possibly for conveying grain.

### North Wall of Fort:

22m length, 3.6m high above modern street level, breached by a wide gateway opening to Church Street/ Tower Hill off a small yard. Battered on both sides, c. 650mm thick at the top and c. 1.2m at the base. Vertical inner face to bottom 1.5m, not built to a smooth face, indicating it was covered by the earthen bank shown on the OS town plan of 1839. Eastern half of upper section has rough face and contains random pieces of red brick due to earlier repairs. The summit of the wall at the entrance gate to the yard contains a regular double line of red brick giving a gently sloping summit terminal at the entrance.

### **External ditch:**

Archaeological monitoring of a linear trench in the roadway along Church Street/Tower Hill in 2003 revealed the presence of black sub surface deposits, which were interpreted as possible fill of the fosse/moat, indicated on map of c. 1560 (Fig. 10). The trench did not cut through the deposits to the base of the fosse/moat, but a possible cut for the moat was noted. The cut for the moat was located at the eastern end of Church Street, very close to the circular tower of the fort.



*Fig. 49: Interior of round bastion*

### **Granary building:**

The largest structure is at the Fitzmaurice Place side, having a shallow-pitched apex-roof of corrugated steel or asbestos-cement. Mass-concrete additions appear to have been cast onto and against the masonry of the Fort wall. Projecting mass-concrete piers to the inside extend the full height from floor to eaves supporting steel roof trusses. Concrete floor with underfloor cavities and passages passing below the Fort wall to Fitzmaurice Place.

Parallel to this, away from the Fort wall, a long lean-to structure extends along the full length of the building. The interiors of the buildings are connected but separate. Dividing wall also of mass concrete with projecting piers supporting single-pitched lean-to trusses. The floor is concrete.

A flat-roofed structure extends from the northern gable of the larger building to the north wall of the Fort on the Tower Hill side. The concrete appears to have been cast against the masonry of the Fort wall. The structure is open at both ends and allows access from the open yard to the inside of the round bastion. The floor is concrete.

### **Ground:**

No floor in circular tower; Tarmac in yard; Concrete within buildings. ‘Draw well’ shown on Ordnance Survey map of 1839 in vicinity of the open yard, and marked as a pump in 1907. Underground silos and/or conveyors may exist within the site.



*Fig. 50: View of circular bastion from the north east looking towards Church Street*



*Fig. 51: Detail of initialled stone located at geographical north point of tower interior (Eoin Sullivan)*

## Site incorporating former ‘Old Barracks’

<b>Address:</b>	Church Street (Tower Hill)	<b>Eircode:</b>	-
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	17740F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	468 (Fort)

### General:

Disused and overgrown site comprising 3% of the area of the Fort, now occupied by two structures arranged parallel an either side of a yard, perpendicular to the Fort wall. The eastern structure replaced a building marked on the Ordnance Survey unpublished town plan of 1839 as ‘Old Barracks’ (Fig. 122), which at that time was situated within the bounds of Site 02, formerly known as the ‘Rampart Field’.

### North wall of Fort:

c. 27m length of wall, interrupted by a full-height gateway. The wall was reconfigured at either end of the site to form the gable ends of the two structures. On the street side, no break can be identified between the sixteenth-century Fort wall and the upper portions of the gables. Portions of the internal face were removed when Building 1) below was altered.

### South wall:

Internal wall to Site 05 built between 1823 and 1838.

### Buildings:

Eastern structure on site of ‘Old Barracks’: Building with wide arched door similar to a stable having a profiled metal roof and an internal loft floor (Fig. 53). Northern gable integral to the Fort wall. Shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1839 (Fig. 18) marked as the ‘Old Barracks’, shown as a wider building than the present structure, extending to the line of the dividing wall which runs across the inside of the Fort. The site boundaries at that time suggest it stood on Site 01, known formerly as the ‘Rampart Field’. This

earlier building would possibly have been built as a reduced military barracks at some point after the Fort was disabled in 1650. The barracks moved to the present Garda Station in 1804. Between the years 1839 and 1907 it was re-configured as the present narrower stable building opening onto Site 04, and a lean-to was added on the southern gable, extending forward to the dividing wall across the Fort. A detailed analysis of the fabric is required to ascertain the sequence of building.

### Western structure:

A two-storey stable structure, shown on the Eyre Coote map of 1823 (Fig. 17) and the OS map of 1838, of which the north, south and west walls survive. Northern wall integral to the Fort wall. East wall facing the yard demolished and replaced with an open-fronted steel structure having a corrugated asbestos-cement roof of lower pitch. Original pitch visible in the south elevation, altered with concrete block (Fig. 57). Fort wall extends up to present pitch, indicating it was higher than the original pitch. Roof extends forward of the original line of the east wall and encompasses the remains of a small projection to the south east, shown on the OS map, in which a former doorway to Site 05 survives blocked on the southern side in red brick (Fig. 57).



Fig. 52: View from Tower Hill. Wall in foreground is boundary to Site 01 (Laois Music Centre). The tower of the Old St Peter’s Church can be seen in the background.



Fig. 53: Eastern structure with Fort wall to the left



Fig. 54: Interior of eastern structure with eastern wall of early nineteenth-century date



Fig. 55: Interior of fort wall within eastern structure



Fig. 56: South gable of western structure with blocked doorway to neighbouring Site 05



Fig. 57: Southern side of blocked-up rectangular doorway



Fig. 58: Structures on site of Old Barracks seen from the upper floor of the former Vocational school

## Breen and Manning; Laois International School

<b>Address:</b>	Church Street (Tower Hill)	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 FK03/R32 V027
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	17740F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504198 12504197 12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	260 259 468 (Fort)

### General:

Pair of red-brick Victorian houses (Figs. 61 and 62) c. 17m wide, formerly dwellings for employees of Odlum's Mill, set back from the street with front and rear gardens, now in single ownership and occupying c. 12% of the area of the Fort. The two building plots were formerly of different size, but the boundary wall to the rear has been removed forming an extensive car park within the centre of the Fort area, extending east behind Site 04 and south over half the width of the Fort to the same depth as the former Vocational School (Site 06) which adjoins it to the west.

### North Wall of Fort:

Front garden wall is a lowered section of the Fort wall with distinctive battered profile, finished in ruled-and-lined render and breached by a vehicular gate and two pedestrian garden gates (Fig. 59). Inside face masked by garden shrubs.

### East wall:

Rubble stone dividing wall dividing the Fort into two almost equal parts. Former doorway at the northern corner blocked up with red brick. Upper portion visible on the opposite side of the boundary wall in Site 01.

### Ground:

Formerly a grassed open area before the Victorian houses were built. Archaeological monitoring (06No179 Delaney 2006) of the mechanical stripping of topsoil in 2006 to create the current carpark (Fig. 60) revealed that only small parts of the site consisted of undisturbed topsoil with a depth of c. 300mm, most of the surface area being made-up ground. Original soil consisted of dark brown/black silt with humified organics and contained glass, plastic refuse and sizeable quantities of brick, slate and paving stones. Occasional isolated pieces of cut stone were found in the topsoil, none of which were architectural fragments and none associated with archaeological features or structures.



*Fig. 59: Fort wall reconfigured as garden wall*



*Fig. 60: Site to rear*



*Fig. 61: Rear of houses*



*Fig. 62: Front elevations*

## Dunamase College (Former Vocational School)

<b>Address:</b>	Church Street (Tower Hill)	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 WE02
<b>Owner:</b>	Laois-Offaly Education & Training Board (LOETB)	<b>Folio Number:</b>	-
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504183  12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	n/a  468 (Fort)

### General:

Dunamase College occupies c. 12% of the Fort interior at the NW corner. The two-storey building built in two stages is set back from both Tower Hill/Church Street and Railway Street. The Fort wall has been lowered to form the site boundary of much of the site.

### North Wall of Fort:

Historic wall lowered and rendered to form boundary wall along c. 30m frontage of Church Street, breached by one pedestrian and one vehicular gateway, each formed with deep rectangular Art-Deco style piers. The inner face of the wall remains un-rendered. The corner is rounded showing that the angle of the Fort was curved.

### West Wall of Fort:

Historic wall lowered and rendered to form boundary wall along c. 32 m of Railway Street, breached by a pedestrian gateway with deep rectangular Art-Deco style piers. The inner face of the wall remains un-rendered. The Fort wall does not survive across the frontage of the 1950 extension.

### Buildings:

The Art-Deco style former Vocational School was built in 1934 to design of Patrick Joseph Sheahan (1893-1965). Although not included in the RPS, it is a significant building of architectural and social heritage interest. It replaced the earlier Technical School, which stood much closer to the street

corner within the present setback, as shown on a Valuation map of 1898 and OS map of 1907. A school extension was added on Railway Street in 1950 by the architect James Rupert Edward Boyd-Barrett (1904-76), on the site of the County Animal Pound, which is known to have been considerably lower than the street.

### Notable feature:

A cannonball was uncovered during the construction of the extension. This is now displayed in a glass case in Portlaoise College, Mountrath Road.

### Ground:

Most of the ground within this site has been disturbed by buildings. Ground disturbance associated with the construction of the buildings over the site of the former County Animal Pound would indicate that no features or soils of archaeological interest would survive at this portion of the site. The animal pound was set deep below the level of the road within the line of the interior of the fort (Teddy Fennelly pers. Comm.).

### Nearby features:

Archaeological monitoring some distance from the NW corner of a 20m linear trench excavated by Bord Gáis on Railway Street north of the roundabout (07N0138, Church Street, No. 15 in Fig. 34), revealed an original ground surface dating from the seventeenth century, as indicated by sherds of pottery from deposits at a depth of 0.70 to 1.20m below the current road surface.



Fig. 63: NW corner of Fort wall, lowered as boundary wall to former Vocational School



Fig. 64: Elevation to Church Street with lowered Fort wall breached by gates.



Fig. 65: Unrendered inner face of lowered Fort wall on Railway Street



Fig. 66: Footpath on site of former defensive ditch



Fig. 67: Rounded NW angle of Fort wall



Fig. 68: Extension of 1950 by James Boyd-Barrett, on site of former Pound. Modern boundary retains no fabric of Fort wall

## Michael Kavanagh Cycles

<b>Address:</b>	3 Railway Street	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 PV29
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	-
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504184 12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	n/a 468 (Fort)

### General:

Substantial two-storey four-bay Victorian building, extending forward of the line of the Fort wall, possibly occupying the site of the sixteenth-century gate. C. 3% of the Fort area lies within the site.

### West Wall of the Fort:

The OS map of 1838 shows the Fort wall and the part of the plot which lies within the confines of the Fort. The present houses were built across this line, extending forward into what was once the defensive ditch. It is unlikely that any above-ground remains of the Fort survive on the site.

### Gateway to the Fort:

Sixteenth-century maps show that the gateway was located mid-way on the western wall. This would suggest it stood on this site. This would place the gate opposite the lane which skirts the southern boundary of Old St Peter's churchyard. This position would have allowed troops entering the Fort a direct approach to the gate. It is unlikely that the churchyard wall would have been built in a position which blocked this approach. Further examination is needed to determine if the churchyard wall predates the closure of the Fort in 1650.

### East Wall:

The site extends back to a rubble-stone boundary wall within the Fort. This wall is shown on the OS map of 1838 and forms the boundary to the car park of the Town Hotel (Site 15).

### Buildings:

Comparison of a Coote estate map of 1895 and Valuation Office map of 1898 shows that the main house was built between those years. It consists of dwelling over a shop with integral carriage arch and a large rear return. A gabled outbuilding close to the end of the site, shown on the first edition OS map of 1838, has been examined by archaeologist Colm Flynn and may survive from the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

### Ground:

It is probable that the base of the Fort wall remains in place beneath the house.

### Nearby features:

Archaeological monitoring of a trench excavated along Railway Street for the Portlaoise Broadband Network (03E0975) revealed a layer of red/brown redeposited silty clay, overlaid by 300mm of aggregate road material. A stone-built box culvert of large mortared limestone slabs ran along Railway Street having an average height of 670mm and an average width of 380mm, filled with dark grey silt and sand. A wall made of roughly-cut stone with a possible rounded cap was partially exposed at a depth of 350mm below ground surface at the southern end of Railway Street.



Fig. 69: View from Railway Street



Fig. 70: This churchyard wall to the left may mark the original approach to the Fort gateway



Fig. 71: Context in Railway Street



Fig. 72: Rear view from inside the Fort

<b>Address:</b>	<b>2 Railway Street</b>	<b>Eircode:</b>	<b>R32 PWE5</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Privately owned</b>	<b>Folio Number:</b>	<b>7349F</b>
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	<b>12504185</b> <b>12504200 (Fort)</b>	<b>RPS ref:</b>	<b>n/a</b> <b>468 (Fort)</b>

### General:

One of a pair of two-storey Victorian houses with rear returns (Sites 08 and 09). 0.8% of the area of the Fort lies within the site.

### West Wall of the Fort:

The OS map of 1838 shows the Fort wall and a smaller plot, entirely within the confines of the Fort. The present houses were built across this line, extending forward into what was once the defensive ditch. It is unlikely that any above-ground remains of the Fort survive on the site.

### Buildings:

Comparison of a Coote estate map of 1895 and Valuation Office map of 1898 shows that this house and the adjoining houses on Sites 07 and 09 were built between those years. An earlier building, shown on the 1895 map, occupied the same frontage as the pair of houses, but only extended back as far as the line of the Fort wall. Small ancillary structures occupy the end of the site.

### Ground:

It is probable that the base of the Fort wall remains in place beneath these houses.



*Fig. 73: Front elevation*



*Fig. 74: Rear seen from interior of Fort*

Address:	1 Railway Street	Eircode:	R32 T2YY
Owner:	Privately owned	Folio Number:	20151F
NIAH ref:	12504186  12504200 (Fort)	RPS ref:	n/a  468 (Fort)

### General:

One of a pair of two-storey Victorian houses with rear returns (Sites 08 and 09). 0.9% of the area of the Fort lies within the site.

### West Wall of the Fort:

The OS map of 1838 shows the Fort wall and a smaller plot, entirely within the confines of the Fort. The present houses were built across this line, extending forward into what was once the defensive ditch. It is unlikely that any above-ground remains of the Fort survive on the site.

### Buildings:

Comparison of a Coote estate map of 1895 and Valuation Office map of 1898 shows that this house and the adjoining house on Site 08 was built between those years. An earlier building shown on the 1895 map occupied the same frontage as the pair of houses, but only extended back as far as the line of the Fort wall. Small ancillary structures occupy the end of the site.



*Fig. 75: Front elevation and side facing entrance to the Town Hotel car park*



*Fig. 76: Rear returns*

## Vejas Continental Food Shop

Address:	Railway Street	Eircode:	R32 C598
Owner:	Privately owned	Folio Number:	-
NIAH ref:	12504200 (Fort)	RPS ref:	468 (Fort)

### General:

Single storey structure used as a shop with a small yard to the south side, both outside the Fort wall, probably built over the defensive ditch.

### West Wall of Fort:

Back wall incorporates a c. 5.5m length of the Fort wall, raised in rubble stone to form a gable. The inner face of the wall is visible in the rear yard of Bergin's Jewellers (Site 14). The adjoining entrance to the Town Hotel carpark (Site 15) cuts through the Fort wall exposing a cross section to view in the side elevation to the north (Fig 78). The external face of the Fort wall is visible in the small yard on the south side adjoining Site 11. The external face is covered by render, 3.30m in height above the surrounding ground surface, and the wall narrows from 2m above the present surface level to the summit.

### Building:

Single storey shop and yard both shown on the OS map of 1838.

### Ditch:

The building occupies the width of the former ditch surrounding the Fort. The alignment of Railway Street forms an acute angle to the wall of the Fort in order to pass the SW corner tower which projected forward from the line of the wall.



Fig.77: View from Railway Avenue. Note section of Fort wall incorporated in back wall



Fig. 78: Section of Fort wall incorporated in back gable

## Jack Nolan, Locksmith and Shoe Repairs

Address:	Railway Street	Eircode:	R32 R7D1
Owner:	Privately owned	Folio Number:	7322F
NIAH ref:	12504200 (Fort)	RPS ref:	468 (Fort)

### General:

Single storey shop extending to the line of the Fort wall, with small yard to the side.

### Ditch:

The building occupies the width of the former ditch surrounding the Fort.

### West Wall of the Fort:

The back wall of the building is of rubble stone, and although aligned with a portion of the Fort wall forming the back of Site 10, the masonry does not match the battered face of that wall. It is therefore assumed that it has been rebuilt in the alignment of the Fort wall which would once have formed the property boundary.

### Building:

The side wall is of rubble stone, and this would be a plausible position for the north wall of the castle which formed the corner tower of the Fort, shown on Grose's engraving of 1792. The unpublished OS town plan of 1839 uses the same thicker line for this wall as used for the surviving Fort wall. On the other hand, the thickness of the wall does not suggest a structure of defensive construction. It is possible that the wall was built against the castle wall, before the castle was demolished. Further investigation is needed to resolve this question.



Fig. 79: Front elevation



Fig. 80: Rubble stone back wall may incorporate fabric of Fort.

## Zara Jewellers; Golden Stitches; Istanbul Turkish Barbers; iRepair Shop

<b>Address:</b>	Railway Street 33 Main Street	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 CH26; R32 D96E R32 C448; R32 YT10
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	6355F; 12967F 857L; 2119L
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12506010 12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	n/a 468 (Fort)

### General:

Four small two-storey buildings, three on Railway Street, and one on the corner facing Main Street (no. 33).

### Corner Tower of Fort:

The castle or corner tower of the Fort formerly stood in this general area, but no fabric survives to show its position. The castle had been demolished when the unpublished OS town plan was surveyed in 1839. This town plan marks the back wall of these properties in the thicker line used to denote the Fort wall, suggesting there was evidence at that time that it was part of the castle, or perhaps, that they were built against the wall of the castle.

### Buildings:

The lease for No. 33 dates to 1824, around the time the remains of the castle are believed to have been demolished. The building behind No. 33 has been rebuilt since 1839 at an angle to meet the rear corner of No. 33. Prior to this the gable of no. 33 extended forward of the line of buildings in Railway Street. The occupants of the shops in Site 12 were unaware of the presence of a basement in their property. Site 11 abuts the rear of these premises and extends farther than them, thereby enabling access through a rear door to an enclosed yard shared with Site 11.

### Ditch:

The shallow form of the plots suggests that they may have been built against the castle walls, across the width of the former ditch surrounding it.

### Buildings opposite:

Archaeological monitoring of the demolition of two buildings on the opposite corner of Railway Street (06N1119, Martin Doody Unpublished Archaeological Monitoring Report for 33/34 Main Street, Portlaoise) revealed the existence of an earlier basement within the footprint of the building, filled with modern debris. No features or soils of archaeological significance were encountered during the monitoring of the site works.



Fig. 81: Corner of Main Street and Railway Street



Fig. 82: Two buildings in Railway Street dating to before 1839. Yellow building was added later.



Fig. 83: View from Railway Street



Fig. 84: Nos. 32 and 33 Main Street seen in context at the corner to Railway Street

## Virgo

<b>Address:</b>	32 Main Street	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 TF86
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	138L; 43F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12506009  12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	n/a  468 (Fort)

### General:

A small two-storey shop having a single-storey extension covering the entire rear of the plot.

### Corner Tower of the Fort:

Below-ground remains of the castle are now known to exist under the floor of this shop. These were viewed by archaeologist Eoin Sullivan in a chance passing by during building works in the summer of 2018. Lifting of floorboards revealed a void at least 1.50m deep beneath the shop floor. Floor joists were noted to bear on a thick stone wall beneath the party wall to Site 14, but not parallel to it, the face of the wall at the end near the street being 1.50m from the party wall, tapering to 0.80m at the back of the room. The wall uncovered is therefore in excess of 1.50m thick, indicating a defensive structure. An opening in the wall splayed to a width of c. 800mm on the eastern side, blocked up with hand-made yellow brick (Figs 85 and 86). This would indicate that the wall is part of the western elevation of the castle, with the interior on the eastern side within Sites 14 and 15. More detailed investigation of this structure would help to plot the location of the corner tower.

### Ground:

Extensive built archaeological remains would appear to be present beneath the floor. Above-ground fabric is unlikely to survive within this site.

### Buildings:

The site corresponds to at least a part of the site of the castle. The property is registered in two folios, which may indicate that one plot lay inside the former castle and the other outside, possibly over the former surrounding ditch.



Fig. 85: Front elevation



Fig. 86: View of basement in Site 13 with blocked splay opening to left (Eoin Sullivan)

## J. Bergin Jeweller

<b>Address:</b>	<b>32 Main Street</b>	<b>Eircode:</b>	<b>R32 RC93</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Privately owned</b>	<b>Folio Number:</b>	<b>12728F</b>
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	<b>12506008</b> <b>12504200 (Fort)</b>	<b>RPS ref:</b>	<b>n/a</b> <b>468 (Fort)</b>

### General:

A three-storey building with a long rear return and a shop at ground level. The site extends behind Sites 10-13 and includes half of the present vehicular entrance to the car park of the Town Hotel.

### Corner Tower of the Fort:

Map analysis suggests that the central part of the site would have formed part of the site of the castle. Archaeological remains may survive but no fabric above ground could be identified. The owner of the property is not aware of any basement beneath the property.

### West Wall of Fort:

A length of the Fort wall is incorporated into the gable end of Site 10, which faces into the rear yard of Bergin's. The basal sloping portion of the fort wall as seen at the southern side of the entrance to the Town Hotel carpark, has been incorporated into the gable end of the building of Site 10. The wall abutting the side of the Site 10 is set slightly back from the upper gable of the building. The lower portion of the length of wall in the yard has a curving base, which is not typical of the fort wall and appears to have been robbed out. The upper portion of the wall at the southern end, which is a later addition, has a reused piece of cut stone incorporated into the wall fabric close to the summit of the wall. The fabric of the wall indicates activity reflected in a possible recess in the wall marked by red brick insertions at the top corner and occasional fragments of red brick. This wall and the area of the yard warrant further investigation.

### Ground:

Extensive archaeological remains are likely beneath the floor.



Fig. 87: Front Elevation



Fig. 88: Detail of internal façade of west side of fort wall to the right of plate with later ope to left of plate

## The Town Hotel (formerly Aird's Hotel)

<b>Address:</b>	29-30 Main Street	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 XA43/R32 EFY8
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	1627F; 9328F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12506007; 12506006 12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	200 468 (Fort)

### General:

The site consists of a formally fronted three-storey hotel building at No. 30 Main Street extending across the line of the south wall of the Fort, connecting to a large area within the interior of the Fort. The area within the Fort is at higher level and comprises c. 19% of its area, encompassing several modern single-storey structures and a carpark entered off Railway Street. The adjoining plot at No. 29 Main Street is in the same ownership and consists of a formal three-storey building known as the Medical Hall which is integrated with the hotel at the upper levels, and has a yard to the rear bounded by a c. 21m long surviving section of the Fort wall.

### South Wall of the Fort:

There are two visible sections of the Fort wall. One is of exposed rubble painted white in a lobby connecting the rear dining room of the hotel with a beer garden behind the Medical Hall (Fig. 121). The longer section forming the boundary to the beer garden is rendered. The wall is broken through in one location at higher level where it connects to a long function room which runs parallel to the wall inside the Fort, also extending behind Site 16 and part of Site 17.

The wall is 1.10m wide at the doorway. The plastered section of the fort wall slopes gently to a height of 2.40m above the present ground surface level and there is a pronounced bevel that is c. 200mm high. The adjoining length of the fort wall for the western 3.90m is faced with plaster and painted with a mural. The wall is 2.40m in height. The interior of the Fort wall is masked by walls of the function room structure within the Fort.

### Corner Tower of the Fort:

Maps of the sixteenth century show a rectangular bastion, set out from the walls of the Fort to enable enhanced flanking fire. The extent, exact location and physical form of the corner tower or 'castle' is unknown, however some evidence can be derived from examination of the fabric and comparison to maps. The party wall between Nos. 29 and 30 is c. 900mm thick and may incorporate remains of the east wall of the castle. Building contractor Richard Kirwan, who laid a drain down the centre line of the hotel (No. 30) in the 1970s recalls a substrate of stone contrasting to the ground conditions in the rest of Main Street. It appears likely that this passed through the southern wall of the castle.

### Buildings:

The main three-storey hotel building appears to have been built in two parts. One extends back to the probable line of the ditch which surrounded the Fort. The other extends from here into the Fort itself. It is unlikely that any over ground fabric of the Fort wall or corner castle survives within its footprint.

### Fort Interior:

The carpark to the rear gives a spatial sense of the extent of the interior of the Fort (Fig. 91). The entrance from Railway Street is some 20m south of the original gateway, but it allows a view across to the former Presentation Convent, originally the 'Storehouse'. Boundary walls to Sites 01 and 05 are of rubble stone built at some point since the decommissioning of the Fort in the Cromwellian period.

## Ground:

Extensive archaeological remains are likely beneath the floor.



Fig. 89: Front Elevation



Fig. 90: Section of wall to rear of No. 29 within lobby to No. 30



Fig. 91: View across Fort interior to the 'Storehouse' / former Presentation Convent

## Kavanagh's Pub and Venue, The Wren's Nest (includes site to rear of former Post Office)

<b>Address:</b>	<b>27-28 Main Street</b>	<b>Eircode:</b>	<b>R32 EP2K; R32 KC03 R32 WRR0</b>
<b>Owner:</b>	<b>Privately owned</b>	<b>Folio Number:</b>	<b>18395; 6763F</b>
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	<b>12506004 12504200 (Fort)</b>	<b>RPS ref:</b>	<b>202 468 (Fort)</b>

### General:

The site to the rear of No. 27 Main Street, formerly the Post Office, extends back to the Fort wall. This site is in the same ownership as Kavanagh's pub at No. 28 Main Street, though the latter site does not adjoin the wall.

### South Wall of Fort:

A section of the Fort wall forms the rear boundary, much of it visible within a narrow yard behind an outbuilding built parallel to the wall. The section of fort wall is 10.40m in length and 2.40m and 2.10m in height above the present ground surface at the western and eastern areas respectively. The wall is constructed with a mix of varying sizes of pieces of stone, some of which are natural linear blocks set on their lengths, coated in lime render in places. The wall tapers in as it rises upwards and the wall summit is 600mm thick. The summit abuts a mass concrete block wall. (Fig. 94). The Fort wall is also present further to the east of the yard behind a dry lining in the single-storey kitchenette to the rear of Kavanagh's pub.

### Buildings:

The outbuilding runs parallel to the wall, at an angle to the main part of the plot which is perpendicular to Main Street. This pattern is seen also on Sites 15, 17 and 19 indicating that the original plots extended only to the line of the ditch which surrounded the Fort, and these rear structures were built over that ditch when properties were extended to the Fort wall itself.



Fig. 92: Front elevation



Fig. 93: View of external façade of the fort wall in Site 16 from the east (Eoin Sullivan)



Fig. 94: Detail of later building activity abutting the summit of the fort wall (Eoin Sullivan)

## Lilly's Bar/Studio 26

Address:	24-26 Main Street	Eircode:	R32 WFP3 R32 E181
Owner:	Privately owned	Folio Number:	15338F; 8938F
NIAH ref:	12506002; 12506003 12504200 (Fort)	RPS ref:	204; 201w 468 (Fort)

### General:

Two adjoining properties, one a small shop on Main Street and the other a large building extending to its rear and back to the Fort wall.

### South Wall of the Fort:

C. 18m of wall survives along the rear of the site, some visible within a store building at the end of the site, and another section behind the back wall of a higher structure backing onto Site 01 (Fig. 95). The easternmost section is located to the rear of a kitchen area of Lilly's Bar and is 5.20m in length. It continues behind a dry line wall to the rear of a secure store to the east which is continues to Site 18. The visible section of wall is 2.40m in height, with a concrete coping. Above this a connection has been made from the store to the long function room which runs on the inside of the wall in Site 15. Due to the fall of the ground in Main Street, there is a level change of c. 2.5 to 3m from one side of the wall to the other. The wall consists of a mixture of pieces of rough stone with no apparent coursing (Fig. 97). A second length of the fort wall is located further west, masked by a substantial freezer unit.

### Inscribed letters:

Two discrete pieces of flat-faced stone bear inscribed letters/initials. The most visible of these is inscribed "SB" on a block of limestone c. 550mm by 300m, located between 2.50m and 3.00m from the western corner at a height of 700mm above ground. The letters are simple and not carved with any great detail into the stone, and partly covered by lime render. The inscription "PB" is fainter and only visible in raking light (Fig. 98). It is located between 3.95m and 4.30m from the western corner of the wall and a height of 1.30-1.60m above the ground. It is interesting to note that this stone is located at a cardinal point of the fort, namely the centre point of the south wall, where it meets the north-south internal dividing wall. This may relate to the activities of the Ordnance Survey when mapping the fort in the early nineteenth century.



Fig. 95: Extension seen from Site 01

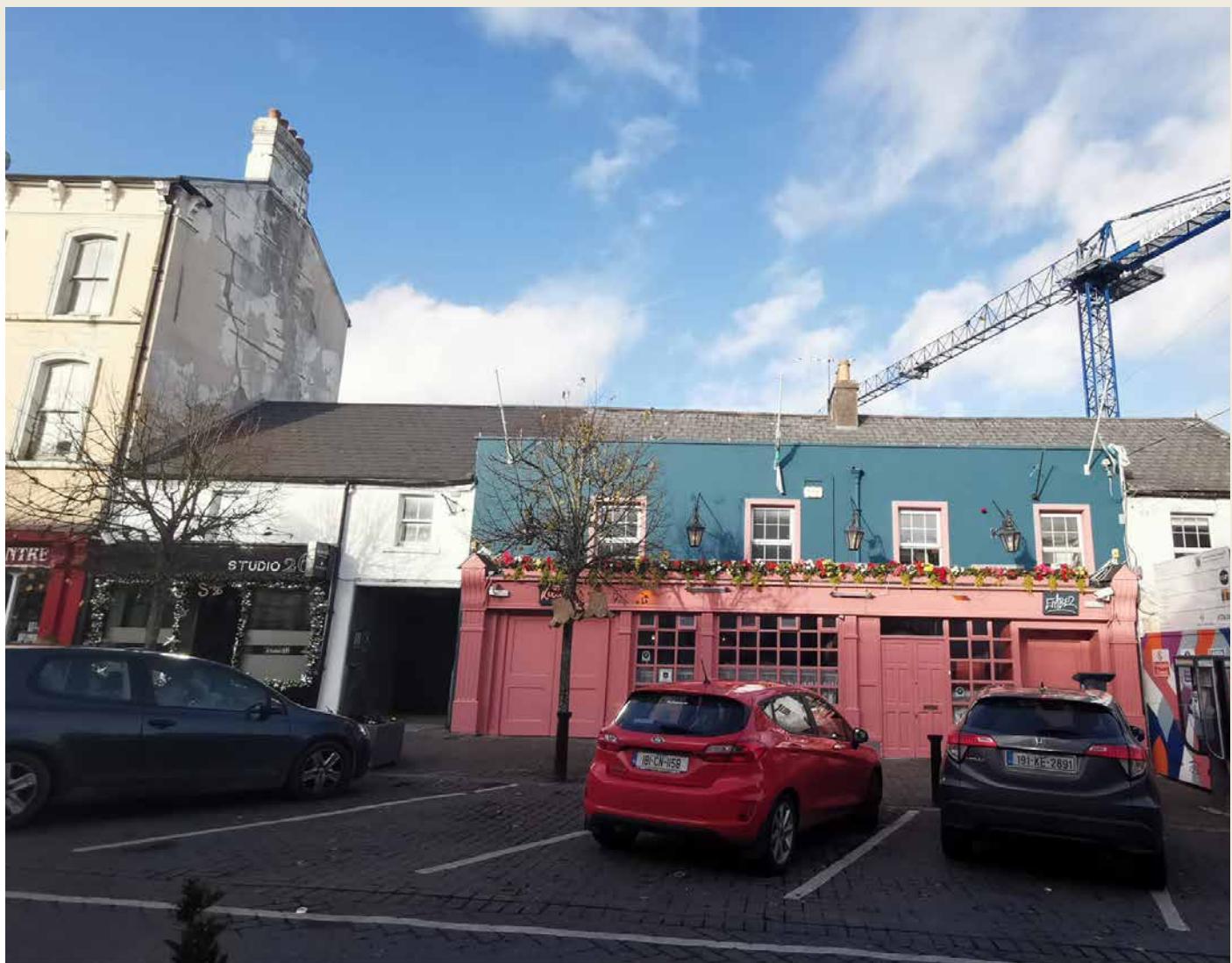


Fig. 96: Front elevation



Fig. 97: External face of the South wall of Fort Protector in Site 17 (Eoin Sullivan)

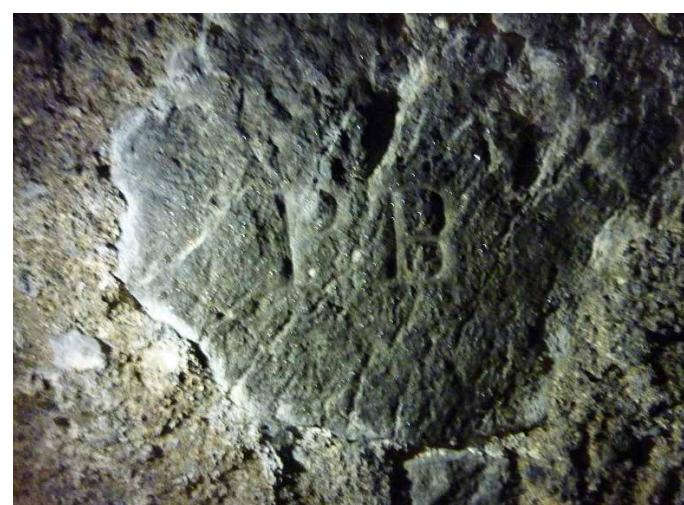


Fig. 98: Detail of faintly initialed stone on external Face of Fort wall (Eoin Sullivan)

## Site of new Laois County Library (under construction)

<b>Address:</b>	23 Main Street	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 CH02
<b>Owner:</b>	Laois County Council	<b>Folio Number:</b>	32237F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12506001 12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	n/a 468 (Fort)

### General:

The new Laois County Library is under construction at the time of publication (Fig. 99), replacing the former Shaw's department store on the frontage to the 'lower square' and a large utilitarian extension bounding Church Avenue. The rear of the site (formerly Shaw's carpark) extends back to the Fort wall where 18.8m of the wall survives across its full width. The new civic use presents an exciting opportunity to enhance the presentation of the Fort.

### South Wall of Fort:

External face of the wall forms the back wall of the site, between 3.20m and 3.35m in height above ground, with a further 2.2m below ground (see below). It survives in good condition, constructed in uncoursed masonry of varying sizes of irregular limestone. Upper 1.1m of thinner masonry leans slightly inwards above a continuous course of small stone (Figs 100 - 102), corresponding to a bevel on the interior face within Site 1 (Fig. 44). It is difficult to ascertain whether this is the original height of the wall or an alteration.

### External ditch:

An archaeological test excavation was undertaken by Eoin Sullivan at the base of the wall in 2017 to explore and record the nature of the external defences, as this was an accessible location in public ownership likely not to have been disturbed by construction. The excavation showed that the Fort wall was constructed on a low man-made sloping foundation platform located at a depth of 2.2m below the present ground surface. It identified a surviving seventeenth-century level extending out from the foot of the wall, over an organic layer on the natural subsoil. There was no indication of ditch at this portion of the Fort wall, but rather a shallow low area which enabled the build-up of an organic layer, possibly a widening of the Triogue River. The curving course of Church Avenue reflects the former line of the Triogue River which curved around the SE corner of the Fort, and the absence of a ditch at this point may be explained by the proximity to the original course of the Triogue, which would have obviated the need for a man-made ditch in this location. (See investigation report by Eoin Sullivan at [laois.ie/heritage](http://laois.ie/heritage))

### Internal rampart:

Further test excavation in Site 1 on the inside of the wall to expose the internal embankment would enable a full sectional view of the Fort wall.



Fig. 99: Corner seen from lower square



Fig. 100: Detail of exterior of fort wall, showing thin line course, in Site 18 from the south west  
(Eoin Sullivan)



Fig. 101: View of external façade of fort wall in Site 18 from the east  
(Eoin Sullivan)



Fig. 102: Fort wall forming rear boundary of site

## Glamour Beauty Salon

<b>Address:</b>	3 Church Avenue	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 T02Y
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	-
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	468 (Fort)

### General:

The largest of four small properties on Church Avenue which back onto the Fort wall close to its SE corner. The rotation of the front elevation is determined by the meandering course of the Triogue River, which became a mill race when the river was redirected, and is now culverted under Church Avenue.

### South Wall of Fort:

Length of wall on this site is c. 11m. No access was gained onto this site.

### West Wall:

Rubble stone wall forms cranked boundary to Site 18, raised in mass concrete.

### Buildings:

An L-plan house to Church Avenue. Narrow passage on eastern side leads to a rear yard. Separate two-storey derelict structure on the NE corner of the site, built against the Fort wall.

### Ground:

The house stands on ground between the Triogue and the south wall of the Fort. Test excavation in Site 19 indicates that this area was originally 2.2m lower as a flat expanse in front to the Fort wall, probably a widening of the Triogue River.



Fig. 103: Front elevation



Fig. 104: Site seen from rear yard of Site 18



Fig. 105: Derelict building to rear seen from Laois Music Centre (Site 01)

<b>Address:</b>	Church Avenue	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 V0PF
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	5770F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	468 (Fort)

### General:

A late 20th century replacement building with shop at ground floor and rear yard bounded by c. 7m length of the Fort wall. This is one of four small properties on Church Avenue which back onto the Fort wall close to its SE corner.

### South Wall of Fort:

No Access was gained to this site.

### Ground:

The house stands on ground between the Triogue and the south wall of the Fort. Test excavation in Site 19 indicates that this area was originally 2.2m lower as a flat expanse in front to the Fort wall, probably a widening of the Triogue River.



*Fig. 106: Front elevation*

<b>Address:</b>	Church Avenue	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 XA4A
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	25774F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	468 (Fort)

### General:

A two-storey dwelling with back yard bounded by c. 5m length of the Fort wall. This is one of four small properties on Church Avenue which back onto the Fort wall close to its SE corner.

### South Wall of Fort:

No Access was gained to this site.

### Ground:

The house stands on ground between the Triogue and the south wall of the Fort. Test excavation in Site 19 indicates that this area was originally 2.2m lower as a flat expanse in front to the Fort wall, probably a widening of the Triogue River.



*Fig. 107: Front elevation*



*Fig. 108: Rears of Sites 21 and 21 seen from inside Fort*

## Scully's Fruit and Veg

<b>Address:</b>	Church Avenue	<b>Eircode:</b>	R32 F973
<b>Owner:</b>	Privately owned	<b>Folio Number:</b>	5771F
<b>NIAH ref:</b>	12504200 (Fort)	<b>RPS ref:</b>	468 (Fort)

### General:

A small plot used as a fruit and vegetable yard backing onto the SE corner of the Fort wall. This is one of four small properties on Church Avenue which back onto the Fort wall close to its SE corner

### South Wall of the Fort:

c. 7m of its length enclosed within open-fronted sheds.

### East wall:

Later rubble stone wall and gateway to bounding onto Church Avenue.

### Buildings:

Single-storey open-fronted sheds.



*Fig. 109: Wall to side of property adjoining entrance to Laois Music Centre (Site 01)*



*Fig. 110: Gateway to site*





### 3.1 Fort Wall

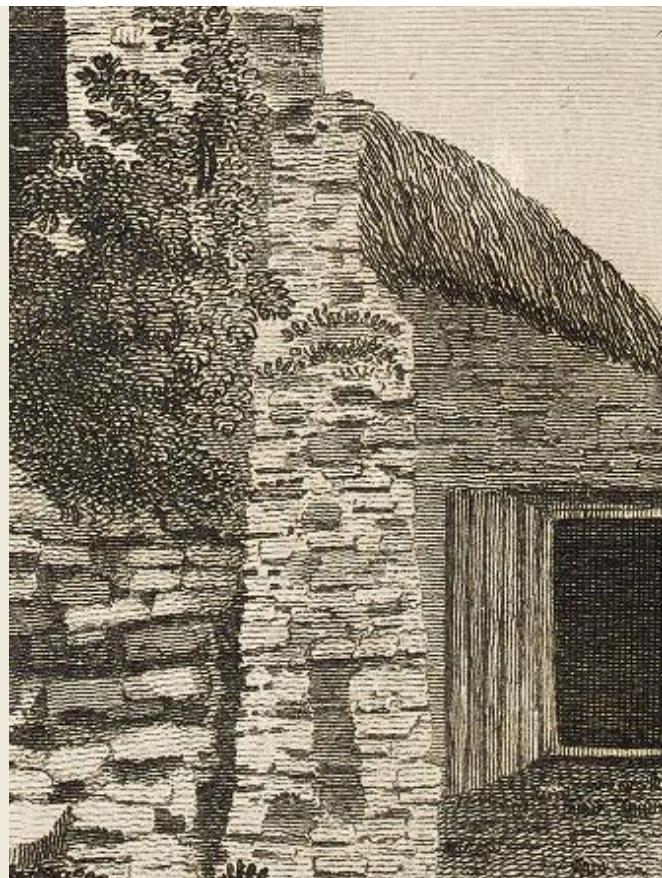
The defensive wall is the most visible part of the Fort Protector. The wall survives in part on all four sides of the Fort. The Fort is recorded in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH Reg No.12504200). It is a Recorded Monument (ref. no, LA013-041001) and a protected structure (RPS ref. 468) and thereby protected under the National Monuments Acts and the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The east side is most evocative of the historic form of the Fort, having a long full-height section of wall, terminating at the round corner bastion. The Fitzmaurice Place Fort Protector Enhancement Scheme, completed in 2019 has repaired the fabric of the wall, and improved its presentation in the town. The east wall has been lowered over half of its length and has suffered various breaches both above and below ground in the time when it lay within an industrial flour-milling site. The north side is also prominent in the historic streetscape, likewise, terminating at the round bastion, and forming a visible ensemble with the tower of Old St Peter's Church. The north wall displays signs of encroachment by the town over the centuries, raised at the gables of the former 'Old Barracks', and lowered over the western half where the battered wall survives in the front boundary of the Vocational School and of two domestic houses. The west side is no longer visible, but is of particular archaeological interest, as the site of the original gateway to the Fort, and of the square corner tower, reflected in the course of Railway Street at its southern end. The south wall survives over most of its length, embedded within the fabric of the town, but visible within many yards, and inside the Fort itself.

The NE corner is marked by the round bastion. The SW corner was the site of the 'castle', a large structure of some 13 x 16m in the general area of sites 13, 14 and 15, below-ground remains of which are known to survive. The NW corner has a rounded profile, rendered on the outside, but with exposed masonry visible within Site 06 on the inside. It is probable that the rounded detail was repeated at the SE corner, which was removed

to form the present gateway. The original Fort entrance, shown on early maps at the middle of the western side, has been lost, but it is probable that its position is reflected in the width of Site 07.

The wall is built of rubble stone, uncoursed, with large flat-faced stones in many places, mixed with smaller units. There is evidence that the wall was rendered with a rough-cast finish. Samples of this render were analysed by Kevin Holbrook as part of the Fort Protector Enhancement Scheme in 2019. The mortar was a well compacted mortar of 70-75% primarily limestone aggregates with minor silica fines and clay traces, and 25-30% lime binder which included non-hydraulic lime as well as a reasonable hydraulic content. Well-dispersed small even-sized lime inclusions and lack of large lime inclusion were evidence of a well-prepared material.



*Fig. 111: Detail of wall cross section from Fig. 16, drawing by Francis Grose of 1791 (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)*

Both faces of the wall are formed with a battered surface, more pronounced on the outside. On the inside the bottom of the wall was covered by an earthen bank (see Section 3.4 below). In places there is a thinner upper section, with a sloping ledge at its base. In Site 01 this is on the inner face, in Site 15 on the outer face. There are no visible gun or arrow loops around the circuit of the fort. Likewise, no evidence for crenellations, such as merlons, corbels or wall walk was found. Crenellations are associated with sites of high status and it was common for these to be thrown down when a military site was disabled. Comparable garrison sites such as Leighlinbridge or Daingean Fort similarly do not have surviving crenellations, although loops were noted at Leighlinbridge. Future archaeological excavations at the base of the walls may provide more evidence to enable a definitive judgement to be made.

A fragment of re-used cut stone was found in the SW corner between Sites 11 and 14 in a later addition to the top of the wall. This is the base of a cut-stone window, probably from the corner tower which stood in that location until 1824, or possibly from the nearby Old St Peter's Church. No other re-used stone was identified in the wall fabric, suggesting that the stone came directly from a quarry, rather than from earlier structures. Re-used cut stone may still come to light when the wall is cleared of overgrowth or later renders stripped.

Three stones were identified bearing incised letters, possibly initials. The inscription "TP" is on the inside at the northernmost point of the Fort in the upper part of the circular bastion. The inscription "PB" is on the outside at the centre of the south wall. The origin or purpose of these stones is uncertain at this point, but they may be the initials of crafts people who worked on or oversaw the construction of the fort, or subsequent repairs. Such features are interesting pieces of the cultural heritage of the fort that offer a connection between the formal Fort and the people who built or inhabited it.

### **3.2 Castle of Maryborough**

The SW corner of the Fort was occupied by 'The Castell', as annotated on the Hardiman Atlas plan (Fig. 8). Notes on the plan tell us that it had a lead-covered roof and gives dimensions which allow us to estimate that it measured c.13 x 16m, a comparable footprint to Morett Castle or Cullahill, and close to double the size of Clonreher, Clonburren, or the 'Black Castle' in Leighlinbridge. The castle was disabled in 1650, but survived as a ruin depicted by Francis Grose in 1791 (Fig. 16) until it was finally torn down in 1835. Its size and estimated position are shown in Fig. 112. This derives from the dimensions given in the Hardiman Atlas plan, underfloor remains viewed by Eoin Sullivan in Site 13, and an interpretation of how later buildings built around the castle have left an imprint in the plot pattern. There are no visible indications of any remains above ground.

There is a possibility that the Fort was built at an earlier medieval bawn or tower house, as was the case at Daingean and Leighlinbridge, but no documentary record or physical indication has been found to date to support such a theory.

Historically the castle was the most striking element of the Fort Protector. Understanding of the castle is essential to a proper appreciation of significance of the Fort. Further examination of the buildings on Sites 13, 14 and 15 is needed to come close to even a basic picture of what once stood on this site. Geophysical survey, or ground penetrating radar (GPR) could be undertaken in unbuilt spaces within the area to locate sub-surface remains of the castle. The yard to the rear of Site 14 (Bergin's) offers an opportunity for such investigation. If feasible, archaeological test trenches could be undertaken to study and record any remains identified. This could lead to a clearer picture of this important aspect of the plantation Fort.

### **3.3 External Defences**

A defensive ditch is shown on maps of Maryborough and of Laois and Offaly the 1560s (Fig. 8 and Fig. 10). The exact nature and extent of the ditch is unclear. Sufficient archaeological investigation has not yet taken place to provide evidence of its width, depth or indications of any associated features. The test excavation carried out in 2017 by Dr Eoin Sullivan established a different profile of the external ground in Site 18. This uncovered a low-lying surface 2.2m below the present ground level composed of a flat organic layer extending out from the wall over the natural subsoil. This may have formed a widening of the Triogue River, which curved around the SE corner of the Fort near that point, acting as a water-filled external defence, possibly at the level of the base of the ditch.

The external defences on the north and west sides are largely built over or lie beneath public roads. Archaeological monitoring in 2003/4 during the installation of the broadband network close to the round tower on Church Street/Tower Hill (03E0975) identified a cut, which was interpreted as possibly related to the ditch. However, due to the nature of the works, there was no opportunity to widen the trench and ascertain the nature and extent of the cut.

The external defences on the eastern side beneath Fitzmaurice Place are likely to have been disturbed by underground passages constructed under the wall as part of the Odlum's Mill complex. Further south the former course of the Triogue may have formed the external defences, and this was later reconfigured as the mill race and mill pond.

On the south side of the Fort, analysis of Ordnance Survey maps, both historic and current, provide some evidence of the width of the ditch where it ran behind the properties on Main Street. Study of plot configurations shows a distinct pattern in the historic boundaries to Sites 16 to 19. These run perpendicular to the street as far back as a certain line, at which point they change direction and run perpendicular to the Fort wall. This suggests that

the plots perpendicular to the street ran back to the ditch, and that the strip of land occupied by the ditch was later divided up perpendicular to the wall and added to each property. Based on an interpretation of these maps and historic ground rents, Bradley refers to an external ditch and its subsequent backfilling: "an external ditch partly filled with water is shown on the plan of 1560. This was subsequently backfilled and the owners of the properties on Main Street acquired the extra piece of ground adjoining the wall of the fort. The line of the ditch is presented in the kink which a number of these allotments have near the Fort. Miss Helen Roe informs us that a separate ground rent was paid for this extra stretch of land" (Urban Archaeological Survey 1984). At Sites 12 to 15 the change in direction of the plot lines is much closer to the street, possibly reflecting the position of the former square tower or castle.

Recent public-realm works at Fitzmaurice Place uncovered a concrete slab outside the Fort wall over the length of the granary building (Site 03) and at the corner bastion. In places, concrete basements were uncovered outside the wall, and the base of the wall was penetrated in several places by ducts, presumably for conveying grain from the granary building into the former mill. Construction of these structures would have removed of evidence of the moat or ditch in those areas. Remains may survive under the concrete slab in other places along this part of the wall, but geophysical investigation could not penetrate the slab and excavation would be impossible without major works.

Other parts of the external defences either lie beneath private properties (Main Street) or under public footpaths (Church Avenue, Tower Hill and Railway Street), which makes archaeological excavation difficult. However, geophysical surveys could produce evidence about the nature, extent and location of the moat or ditch. Such investigation in the following areas would be of interest:

- Railway Street: The entrance to the car park of the Town Hotel offers an opportunity to study

a cross section on both sides of the Fort wall beneath the surface.

- Tower Hill: Excavation for installation of the Broadband Network identified a cut on this side, which was possibly for the moat (Delaney 2003). A geophysical survey of the footpath, particularly at the base of the circular bastion could yield informative results.
- Church Avenue: The external defences outside the low wall to the Laois Music Centre (Site 01) would have been altered by the mill stream. Geophysical survey might identify sub-surface remains of the surviving moat and the impact of the industrial heritage on these.
- Plots on Main Street and Church Avenue: Redevelopment to the rear of buildings on Sites 15-22 sites would present an opportunity to carry out a geophysical survey.

The results of the geophysical survey could be used to identify areas where targeted excavations might take place, if feasible.

Excavations within a public space that can be controlled can enable the public to see the progress of the archaeological excavation. Where possible, remnants of the moat could be incorporated into the public space, enabling public engagement, and information boards could underscore the significance of the Fort and its role in the formation of the present-day town.

### **3.4 Fort Interior**

Little is known about the original layout and use of the Fort interior. Tiny images on the Cotton map indicate a series of structures, and the other sixteenth-century maps discussed in Section 2.3 give more detail. The town plan of c. 1560 shows an internal raised walkway around the inside of the walls with steps where it is interrupted at the main gateway and at the corner castle, but not at the round bastion. The Ordnance Survey map of 1838 shows an earthen bank running around the inside of the wall on three sides. It is not clear if this earthen bank is

that shown on the early town plan.

The earthen bank survives only in Site 01. On the south and east it takes the form of a wide grassy bank, possibly widened on the south side. On the north side to Tower Hill the bank has been covered over, as the former school yard is raised in this area. Adjoining this, in the yard of Site 03, the bank has been removed exposing jagged stonework at the base of the wall, showing that the part of the wall covered by the bank was not faced with regular stone.

The earthen bank has been interpreted as a ‘fire step’, a raised surface from which the garrison could fire on attackers at lower level outside. However, Col Donal O’Carroll, President Emeritus of the Military Heritage Society of Ireland and a member of Laois Heritage Society, was consulted on this question, and his view was that the bank was too wide and possibly too low to have served this purpose.

Further archaeological investigation is needed to form a proper understanding of the Fort interior. This could consist of test excavations or geophysical surveys, or a combination of both. Geophysical survey, or ground penetrating radar (GPR), can be used to identify areas where archaeological excavation would yield the most informative results. It may be able to detect whether the earthen bank survives beneath made-up ground at the north wall of the Fort in Site 01. It is probable that much of the internal area consists of undisturbed ground, in particular the former ‘Rampart Field’ in Site 01. A cross-section through undisturbed ground inside the Fort, through the raised bank and extending up to the Fort wall could link up with the cross section which has already been excavated on former Shaw’s site and ultimately produce a stratigraphic section through the site.

Outside of Site 01, the main open areas of archaeological interest are Sites 05, 07, 14 and 15. Archaeological monitoring during construction of the surface car-park in Site 05 revealed no

structures or soils of archaeological significance within the depth excavated. It is probable that the car-park area of the Town Hotel (Site 15) also has a low probability of surviving sub-surface archaeological material, due to the relatively shallow cover of topsoil.

### Tudor barracks or ‘King’s House’

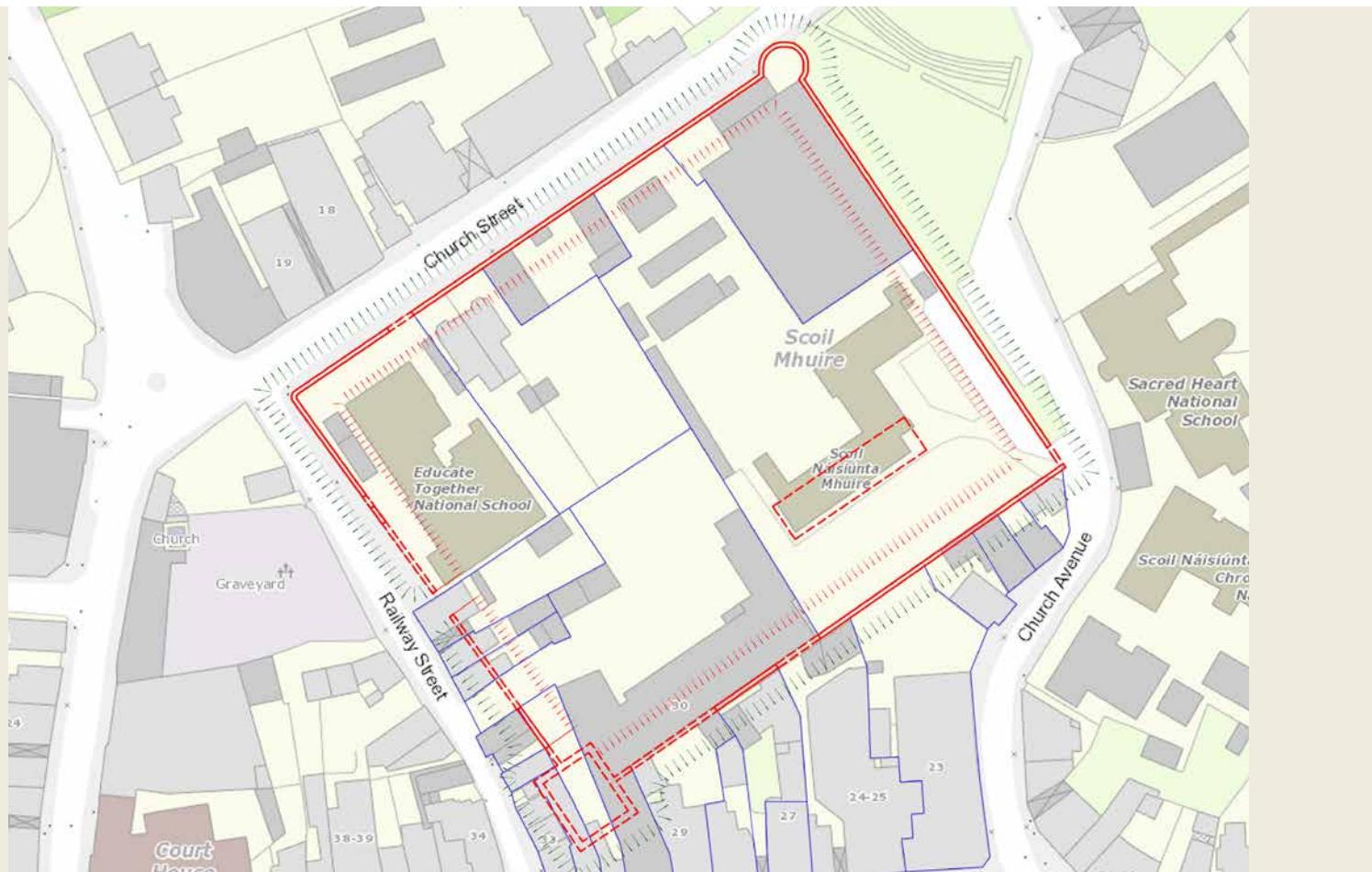
The Hardiman Atlas plan (Fig. 8) shows a long timber-framed building, possibly a barracks, in the southern part of Site 01, its form reflected also in the less precise National Archives plan (Fig. 10). This timber-framed building may be the ‘King’s House’ described over a century later in a reference of 1685 as being in a ‘bad state of repair with the timbers removed’, having survived the Cromwellian destruction of the Fort.

The building measured 8 x 32 yards, which we can estimate to equate to c. 7.5m x 30m based

on measurements of the Fort walls. The position of the structure, as shown on the Hardiman Atlas plan has been estimated in Fig. 112. This corresponds quite closely to the south block of the former Scoil Mhuire, now the Laois Music Centre. Archaeological remains of the building may survive in the adjoining area, or indeed, beneath the present building.

### Later dividing walls within the Fort

Boundary walls of rubble stone within the perimeter of the Fort, some freestanding, some embedded into fabric of buildings, reflect the history of the site after it ceased to be military fort, and therefore contribute to the significance of the site. Walls of interest survive dividing Sites 01, 04, 05, 06, 07, and 15.



*Fig. 112: Estimated form of the Fort overlaid on the present-day map*

## **Buildings within the Fort**

Laois Music Centre (Site 01): The former Scoil Mhuire primary school building is of no particular architectural significance. The long play shelter along eastern perimeter of the school site is typical of OPW schools of the period by Basil Boyd-Barrett and makes a positive architectural contribution.

Granary building (Site 03): This large mass-concrete building was built in c. 1940 by Odlum's Ltd as an extension of the industrial flour milling plant on Fitzmaurice Place, breaking through the Fort wall in two places, as well as further penetrations for conveyance of grain. The Granary is a simple storage shed of no architectural heritage interest and insufficient technical interest to merit inclusion in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS). The structure has a negative impact on the appreciation of the Fort Protector site and its historic environs.

Former Old Barracks (Site 04): Two structures on the occupy the site of the 'Old Barracks', which was replaced in 1804 by the present Garda Station. The eastern structure is a barn built between 1838 and 1907, possibly retaining some fabric of an earlier building. The western structure is shown on the OS map of 1838, but only three external walls survive. Both structures integrate the Fort wall into its their northern gable. Although in poor condition, these buildings and the site they occupy reflect the continued existence of a military barracks on the site after it ceased to be a military fort.

Red-brick houses (Site 05): Two houses which are significant in their own right as good examples of Victorian domestic architecture, and both protected structures. The front garden wall incorporates part of the Fort wall, representing an idiosyncratic layering of heritage features which adds to the fascination of the site.

Dunamase College (Site 06): The Art-Deco style former Vocational School dating from 1934, designed by Patrick Joseph Sheahan (1893-1965)

is not included in the RPS, but is a significant building of architectural and social heritage interest. The extension of 1950 on Railway Street by the architect James Rupert Edward Boyd-Barrett (1904-76) replaced the County Animal Pound, which is known to have been considerably lower than the street.

Houses on Railway Street (Sites 07, 08 and 09): These three houses of consistent design dating to the late 1890s straddle the line of the Fort wall. Outbuildings to the rear of the properties may be of greater age. The foundations of the Fort wall must be expected to survive beneath these houses.

Structures to rear of the Town Hotel (Site 15): Largely modern single-storey structures, which replaced outbuildings seen in historic maps and aerial photographs. Aside from the historic part of the hotel building, which projects across the line of the Fort wall, and is a protected structure, the lower modern buildings do not contribute to the significance of the Fort.

## **3.5 Related Sites**

### **Triogue River**

As part of the Conservation Plan process, archaeologist Sean Murray and town residents Seamus Dunne and John Ireland (RIP) accompanied the author on a walk of the course of the Triogue River. The walk showed that the Triogue has been diverted on numerous occasions, to enable development and to improve the head race to the mill on Church Avenue.

The natural course of the River Triogue to the north and south of the town follows a distinctly meandering course, matching the depiction on the map of Leis and Offalie of c. 1560 (Fig. 5). The sixteenth-century map of the Fort shows this meandering course, annotated as 'the river', passing between the SE corner of the Fort and the 'brewhouse' or Storehouse, which later became the Presentation convent (Fig. 8). This natural watercourse was later changed to form a better head race to the mill, and was culverted beneath

Church Avenue, and the main flow of the river was diverted to a lower straight course.

The OS map of 1907 shows a weir and aqueduct at a point on the New Road, now at the periphery of the town. From there, the Triogue followed a straight course, skirting the town centre, since at least 1721, when it was depicted on the Parnell estate map (Fig. 14) with a bridge in the current location on Bridge Street. This line is assumed by Bradley (1999) to mark the extent of the town shown on the map of c. 1560. It appears probable that the ditch on the east of the town provided a ready-made channel for the new course.

The course of the mill race and of the Triogue are part of the story of the Fort Protector and contribute to the understanding of its significance.

### Presentation Convent

The former Presentation Convent is an important building incorporating fabric of the ‘Store House’ which is contemporaneous with the Fort and one of the earliest buildings in Portlaoise. Archaeological investigations on this site show that it and the neighbouring site of the former Catholic church (now demolished) were substantially raised during the late seventeenth century.

At the time of writing, development has commenced for the integration of this historic building into a social housing development by Sophia Housing in partnership with Laois County Council and Co-operative Housing Ireland. A full archaeological survey of the historic buildings and the wider site will form part of this development.

### Subterranean passage to Convent

A subterranean passage dating to the Plantation period is said to connect the Fort to the convent building, but its existence has not been established with certainty. The Store House stood just inside the entrance to the town, outside the Fort wall, and such a passage might have served as a route for settlers to retreat into the safety of the Fort during attacks.

There is some evidence for a passage to the rear of the Presentation Convent, but its purpose, nature and date are unclear. Deigan (1991) quotes an extract from a collection of papers dated 1901, held in the County Library (Carey and Matthews, Portlaoise and District, p. 10), which refers to the discovery of a passage when foundations for the ‘new convent’ were being built. This probably refers to the enlargement of the refectory by James Purcell Wrenn in 1901, as recorded in the Dictionary of Irish Architects (dia.ie). The record describes how one Patsy Lynch entered the passage and “following its course for a few hundred yards, he came upon loads of ridge gravel in heaps ready to be spread over the damp ground, but unused for centuries”. “Greatly alarmed”, he reported this to the Rev. Dr Taylor PP, who “knowing that the grounds were part of the outer defences of the Fort” ordered him to close up the entrance. The location of the refectory and the reference to the ‘grounds’ suggest that this discovery was made to the rear of the convent. This tunnel again came to light during restoration work in the convent in 1951, possibly when the bow-end of the refectory was added to the rear of the convent. The tunnel was viewed by Sr Carmel of the Presentation Order and Mrs Enid Elizabeth Cosby, both of whom were interviewed by Michael Deigan some 40 years later in 1991. Mrs Cosby’s recollection was of beautifully built, very big, brick passageway with an arched roof. To enter you would have to stoop a little, and the passage ran west towards the Fort, and also in the other direction. Sr Carmel’s recollection was that it was 5’ (1.5m) wide.

An archaeological assessment was carried out in 2003 involving excavation of a trench to the rear of the convent to identify evidence of survival for such a feature (O’Flanagan, 2003). The test excavation revealed the upper portion and exposed the sides of man-made stone feature that was 0.85m wide and ran perpendicular to the convent building. The trench was excavated to a depth of 1.70m, and the structure appeared to be cut into deposits of a grey brown sandy soil. The overlying rubble of redbrick and stone was unstable and prevented further examination of

the feature. The feature was interpreted as either a subterranean tunnel or a drain.

Each of these discoveries were made to the rear of the convent, and descriptions are too vague to establish if the tunnel actually passed under Church Avenue. Other anecdotal references to a tunnel under the street may simply relate to the culverted mill stream, which is well documented. A tunnel connecting to the Fort would need to be very deep to pass under the millstream, and on balance seems improbable.

### Ridge of Maryborough

The Ridge is a natural esker, which formed a geographical line of defense to the east of the Fort. The esker is part of the foundation story of the town, having probably been an influencing factor in the choice of the site for the Fort. Formed as it is of gravel, the esker has been removed for building material where it passed through the town centre, with the notable exception of the Ridge Burial Ground. The Burial Ground affords an exceptional vantage point from which the significance of the site of the Fort can be properly appreciated, allowing the Triogue River, the Presentation Convent, the Fort and Old St Peter's Church to be seen in the context of the natural landscape.

This historic graveyard is an important heritage site in its own right. It is a Recorded Monument (Ref. No. LA013-102001) and is included in the Laois Burial Ground Survey of 2011 (Site Lo25). It has been suggested that the graveyard represents a pre-plantation church site (Ref. No. LA013-102), possibly the church of the medieval settlement Newtown of Leys (Bradley et. al. 1986).

It is an oasis of green in the heart of the town, with some grave monuments dating back to the eighteenth century, and has the potential to enrich the understanding of the historic town and provide an amenity rich in history and heritage.

### Mill site

The historic mill site is shown in depictions of the town since its foundation. Remarkably, milling continued on the site up until the closure of Odlum's in the 1990s, a milling heritage of over four centuries. The historic mill stood parallel to the former Catholic church on Church Avenue, its tail race originally falling downhill to the Triogue.

The remains of the mill are a Recorded Monument (Ref. No. LA013-041005) and thereby protected under the National Monuments Acts.

### Old St Peter's Church and Graveyard

The churchyard site is an important part of the history of the foundation of the town. A separate conservation report by archaeologist Margaret McCarthy (2016) has been prepared, alongside a programme of conservation works carried out by Portlaoise Tidy Towns in partnership with Laois County Council.

The church and graveyard are Recorded Monuments (Ref. Nos. LA013-041002 and LA013-041004 respectively) protected under the National Monuments Acts. The site is also a Protected Structure - RPS186 - protected in the Laois County Development Plan, and recorded in the NIAH (12504175 Church and 12504276 Graveyard).

### **3.6 Statement of Significance Architectural Interest**

The Fort Protector marks the establishment of the town of Portlaoise, which began as a Fortified enclosure on three sides of the Fort wall. It was one of two major plantation forts built as garrisons of the newly conquered territories of Laois and Offaly.

Its significance is complemented by a number of adjacent sites relating to the genesis of the town, including a contemporary stone tower embedded within the nineteenth century Presentation Convent which adjoins the Fort to the east, and

the Old St Peter's Church to the west.

## Historical Significance

Building of the Fort commenced in 1547-48 as part of the suppression of the Gaelic Irish territories of the O'More and O'Connor clans. The plantation of Laois and Offaly followed shortly afterwards and was formalised in the creation of King's County and Queen's County in 1556. This was the first English plantation in Ireland, following the Tudor policy to expand English control outside of the Pale. It was followed by the plantations of Munster (begun 1586), Ulster (begun 1606) and other smaller plantations.

In international terms the Fort can be seen as the beginning of English colonial expansion, built 60 years before the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. In 1920 the town was renamed after the Fort, the old name 'Maryborough' being changed to Portlaoise, the Gaelic term used for town, meaning 'Fort of Laois'

## Technical Interest

The construction of the Fort is of interest as an example of military engineering and fortification in the Tudor period.

## Archaeological Interest

As an archaeological site the Fort Protector is of national significance, being the best above-ground survival of a plantation fort from the Tudor period (1485-1603) in Ireland. Aside from the upstanding Fort walls, underground remains are known to survive of the castle at the south west corner and of an external defensive ditch or moat. Little is known of the archaeology of the Fort interior, but the perimeter bank known from cartographic sources survives in places and it is possible that remains of the 'King's House' may survive underground. The whole site offers the potential to uncover artefacts in use throughout the history of the Fort.

The Fort is of interest in relation to issues of conflict. Remains of people who perished in

attacks on the fortress, or items of warfare, may be present around the external perimeter. The history of the Fort is closely connected with the history of Old St Peter's Church and graveyard, and inhabitants of the Fort and people who died in conflicts are likely to have been buried there.

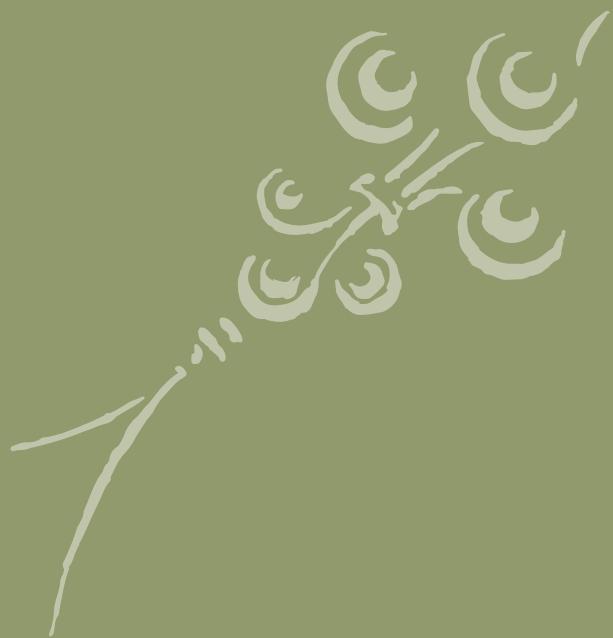
It remains unknown whether there was an earlier structure or settlement at this location pre-dating the Fort. Archaeology of the castle site or of the Ridge Graveyard, may hold answers to this question. The original course of the Triogue river, which defended the eastern corner of the Fort, was adapted for industrial use as an open water-channel and mill pond, and culverted as a millrace on Church Avenue and Pepper's Lane. The archaeology of Church Avenue may also confirm the existence of a subterranean passage linking the Fort to the former 'Store House', known to date only from anecdotal descriptions.

## Potential as a Significant Heritage Site

Today the interior of the Fort is subdivided into many separate properties, some large and some small. Although 80% of the enclosing wall survives in some form above ground, the Fort remains widely unknown to the townspeople and to visitors, and its immense heritage significance is not fully appreciated.

# Section 4

## Conservation Issues



## **4.1 Awareness and Interpretation**

### **Public Awareness of the Fort**

The significance of Portlaoise as Ireland's first Plantation town is not widely appreciated, at local or national level, apart from amongst history enthusiasts. The Fort Protector has been a largely unknown and under-appreciated site. Although it is generally known that Portlaoise was established as part of the Plantation of Laois and Offaly, it is not generally understood by the wider population of the county that there are substantial surviving remains of a key built feature of the plantation.

This lack of awareness represents a threat to the significance of the Fort. The Fort lies in what might be regarded as the 'back lands' of the town. It has only a minor presence in the urban landscape of the town, and many regard it as an ordinary stone wall like any other which one might see in a historic setting. Low regard can result in poor decisions being made on the future of the site, and lack of interest or opposition where damaging developments are proposed. Similarly, around the perimeter of the Fort, lack of awareness can lead to modifications within individual properties, which can erode the integrity of the site.

The Fort is one of the primary heritage sites in the county. Conservation of the Fort could be more readily achieved if this were widely recognised, and for this to happen, an increased level of awareness needs to be generated. The Fort Protector/Fitzmaurice Place Enhancement Project has been an important first step in making the structure of the Fort more visible, better presented, and more widely known outside of the town. Publication of this Conservation Plan will play further part, as well as the public consultation undertaken. Public talks, newspaper articles, publications and features in broadcast media can all help to embed the site in the public consciousness.

In parallel with the Conservation Plan process, the Laois Heritage Society has commissioned a Heritage Interpretation Plan for the historic town centre of Portlaoise. This was published in 2019.

The proper appreciation of the Fort can give the town a new identity and a national standing as an important part of the story of Ireland's Ancient East.

### **Image of the Town**

A well conserved and appropriately presented Fort Protector would be a unique heritage site. Few towns in Ireland have a history so closely bound up with the Tudor conquest of this country and the development of a heritage site would create a direct link to that history. Currently there is only the vaguest of awareness, at national or even local level, that the name 'Port Laoise' refers to an actual physical structure, and the association of the town with the Laois-Offaly plantation is not usually made.

Restoration of the site could fundamentally change the perception of the town. The restored site would give greater meaning to the name 'Port Laoise' and the town could become synonymous with this momentous period in Irish history, as Kilkenny is synonymous with the medieval period, or as Dublin is associated with Viking or Georgian history.

### **Old Fort Festival**

The 'Old Fort Quarter Festival' illustrates the power of the Fort to form a strong identity for the town. The festival started in the summer of 2016 as an initiative of local traders in association with the Laois Heritage Society. It takes place in June each year, the programme including live outdoor concerts alongside a range of cultural events of wide popular appeal focussed on the Fort and its history, from heritage talks to open air market stalls, historical re-enactments, and guided tours. In 2019, the main festival venue was inside the Fort itself in the Laois Music Centre site, with other events taking place in Fitzmaurice Place and Old St Peter's graveyard.

The first years of the festival have been a very successful first step in changing the perception of the Fort in the minds of the public in Portlaoise and the wider county. It has brought the Fort to



Fig. 113: Old Fort Festival (courtesy of Michael Scully)

the attention of the wider public, and shown how caring for the Fort can enhance the historic centre of the town.

### Interpretation of the Fort Protector

To complement improvements to the presentation of the Fort, an essential component will be a well-conceived interpretation concept. Signs, trails, finger-posts and information boards can hugely enhance the experience of the town centre, and can strengthen the brand of the ‘Old Fort Quarter’. The Laois Heritage Society has commissioned a Heritage Interpretation Plan for the historic town centre of Portlaoise, published in 2019.

### Tourist Potential

The restored Fort can be imagined as a part in the wider story of the late medieval period. It can appeal to military historians, to people with an interest in history and heritage, but can also have much wider appeal.

The success of the HBO historical-fantasy television series ‘Game of Thrones’ has generated a public interest in the turbulent events of the late medieval period. Drawing its fictitious plot lines from a wide variety of historical events and figures, from the English ‘Wars of the Roses’ to Irish personages such as Silken Thomas and Gráinne Mhaol, the series presents to dramatic effect the violence and the intrigue of a period of political turmoil in which ancient power structures come

under threat, recalling the bloody period in which the Fort was built, exemplified in the Massacre of Mullaghmast of 1577.

### **Archaeology and community outreach**

Despite the fact that the Fort is located in the town centre, it is perhaps fortunate that two sides of the Fort (southern and eastern) are buffered by the presence of later buildings and associated yards from the road. This has resulted in the probability of surviving ground with minimal subsurface disturbance. These sites offer an opportunity to obtain stratigraphic information, through archaeological excavation, that would give conclusive information about key physical features of Fort Protector.

If archaeological excavations took place, they should ideally be in the context of a research excavation which would be driven by the objective of answering specific questions we can ask of the Fort.

The archaeological assessment has identified a worthwhile avenue for the conservation of Fort Protector and community outreach. Specific portions of the Fort are recommended for further archaeological works as part of the conservation and interpretation of the Fort. There is a growing appetite amongst communities for involvement in archaeological projects. There are unique opportunities in this conservation project to carry out some of the archaeological excavation as a community archaeology project, which could invite community members to partake in the activities of the archaeological excavation process.

In addition, open days and planned site visits for school children and interested groups would strengthen the profile and value of the archaeological excavation and the conservation of the Fort in particular. It is recommended that a social media platform for the Conservation of Fort Protector be established in the short term as a means of disseminating the information gathered together thus far to the local community and a wider culturally curious audience.

Links with other interested groups and stakeholders from similar projects (e.g. Enniskillen Castle) should be nurtured and field excursions organised.

### **Museum of the Midlands**

The plantation of Laois-Offaly was the first English plantation in Ireland, a new form of colonisation which eventually saw the conquest and anglicisation of the whole country, differing from the feudal order introduced in the Anglo-Norman invasion. This pattern may be said to have been a model for subsequent colonisation in North America and across the British Empire.

Whilst the more successful plantations of Munster and of Ulster have left a strong built legacy in terms of urban design, the built remains of the Laois-Offaly Plantation are more dispersed, and apart from academic study, little attention is paid to them. The Fort Protector if restored would be the key structure which could uncover and help interpret this under-represented period of history.

The story of the Fort Protector is the story of the foundation of the town of Portlaoise, and of the westward expansion of the English colony at the beginning of the modern era. The town of Portlaoise is the ideal location to present this story in the form of a Museum of the History of the Midlands.

An ideal home for such a museum would be the neo-classical courthouse of 1805 by Sir Richard Morrison. The location would form a further link in the ‘chain’ of sites, which could transform the experience of the town centre.

## **4.2 Fort Interior**

### **Statutory protection**

The Fort Protector is an archaeological monument included in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) and is therefore protected by law under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2014. All works carried out within the Fort or close to its perimeter must be notified to the Minister of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht two months in advance of any works, and the work must comply with all conditions imposed for the protection of the site.

In addition, the fabric of the Fort Protector is a protected structure and works which would affect its special character, including work within its curtilage, will require planning permission or, in the case of parts which are in the ownership of Laois County Council, approval under Part 8 of the Planning Regulations.

### **Multiple ownership**

Development over the centuries has encroached on the fabric of the Fort, extending up to the south wall of the Fort over most of its length over what had been a large open market place, and building over the former defensive ditch. Already by 1837 urban development had begun to extend into the Fort, with the south-western corner subdivided into small plots around the site of the recently demolished castle, and extending along Railway Street to the point where the Fort entrance had been located. By this time, the property divisions seen today in the remainder of the western half of the Fort had become established, although apart from the outbuildings referred to as the ‘Old Barracks’ and the internal boundary walls, none of the buildings standing today had yet been built.

Until the mid-twentieth century development was restricted to the western half of the Fort interior, and an aerial photograph of 1932 shows a large open space, which was known as the ‘Rampart Field’, covering the eastern half (Fig. 22). The photo shows what appears to be a green strip outside the eastern wall, occupying what had been

a raised mill pond, also seen on historic Ordnance Survey maps and in a Lawrence Collection photograph of c. 1900. The photo also shows a two-storey range of outbuildings against the inside of the south wall, with smaller accretions, on the site now occupied by the Town Hotel function room.

By 1959, Odlum’s Mills, which stood outside the Fort on what is now Fitzmaurice Place, had extended into the Fort, building a large granary building in the north-eastern corner, and the remainder had been acquired by the Presentation Sisters who built the Scoil Mhuire primary school as a free-standing building.

Today, the course of the perimeter wall of the Fort forms the boundary to, or bisects, 22 individual properties. Conservation of a site which is subdivided amongst a large number of owners and occupiers requires a coordinated approach. To achieve success the Conservation Plan must recognise all of these parties as stakeholders, and the policies which are developed would need to be adopted by a key number of them.

Two property owners have the largest stake in the future of the site. These are Laois County Council (Sites 01, 02, 03 and 18) and the Town Hotel (Site 15). The Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB) controls a large site within the Fort (Site 6), but have a lesser role to play as this site is substantially built upon. Owners of a number of smaller properties can play a significant part in the enhancement of the site, notably the owners of Sites 04, 13 and 14.

Any owners having wall sections or even below-ground remains on their property, or at its boundary, can make a difference by conserving and presenting them in accordance with the Conservation Plan.

## Potential for assembly of a heritage site

The development of the interior of the Fort as a visitor attraction would necessitate a degree of amalgamation or linkage of sites, whether under single ownership or under agreement between individual parties. The following diagrams show the potential which can be achieved by amalgamation of sites.

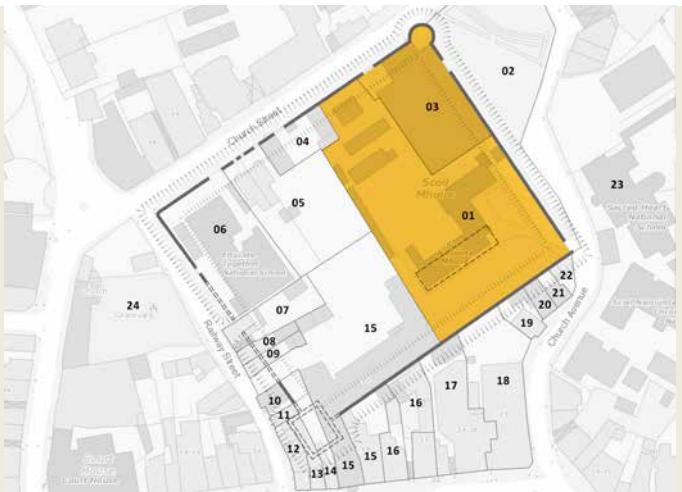


Fig. 114 / 1 : Potential for assembly of a heritage site within the Fort Protector.

Sites 01 and 03 are now owned by Laois County Council, making up almost 50% of the Fort interior. These sites encompass the Laois Music Centre and the granary building.



Fig. 114 / 2

Site 04 includes historic structures which, if acquired and appropriately developed would enhance the experience of the site.



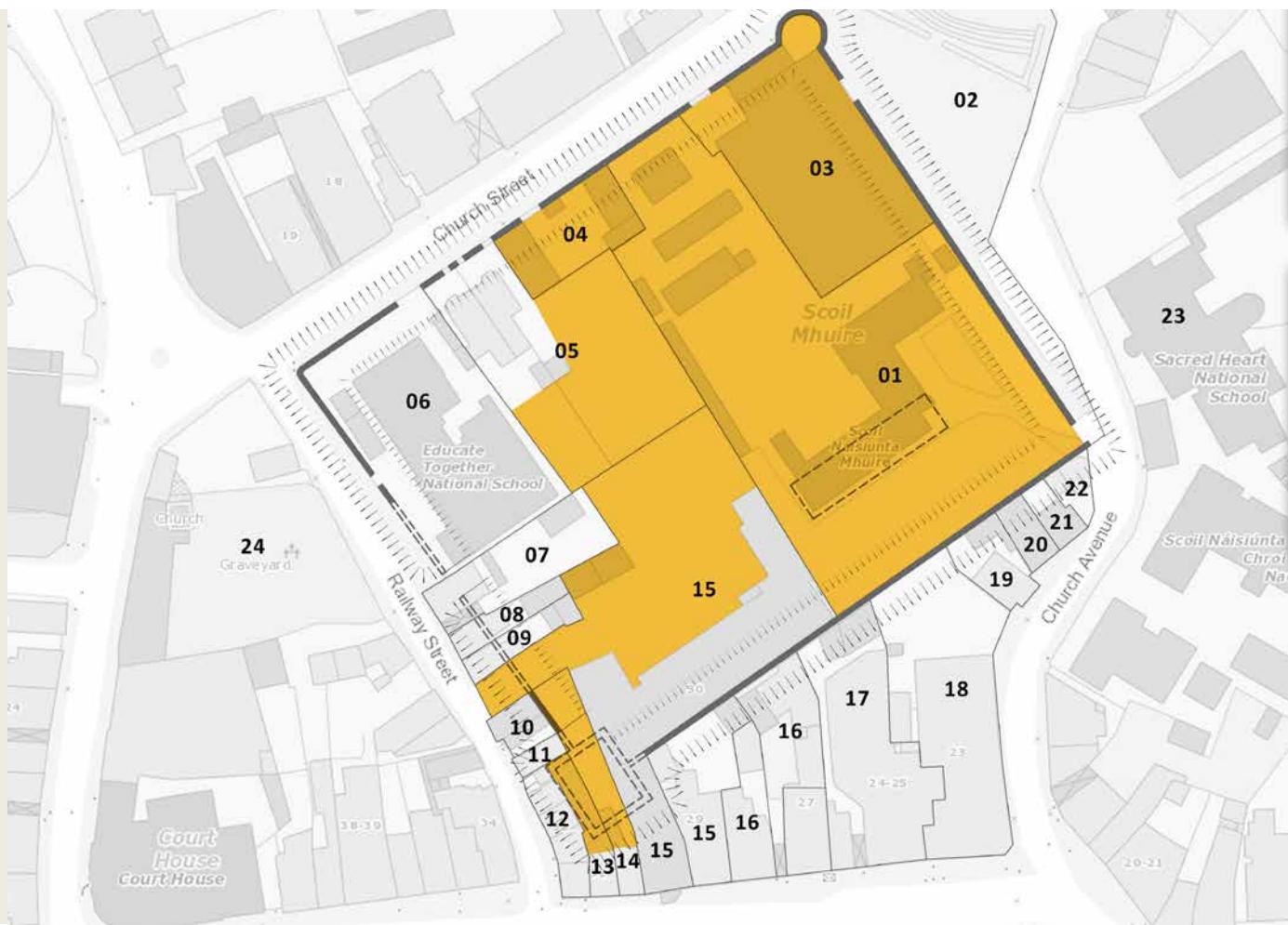
Fig. 114 / 3

With the agreement of the Town Hotel, the hotel car park might be reconfigured to give access to the Fort interior from Railway Street. This entry point adjoins the gate to Old St Peter's and faces the front elevation of the former Presentation convent on the other side. This connection would enhance the understanding of the scale and setting of the Fort.



Fig. 114 / 4

Inclusion by agreement with the owners of the underused car park to the rear of the Victorian houses on Tower Hill would further add to the coherence and regularity of the space within the Fort.



*Fig. 114 / 5*

Largest achievable extent of assembled site within Fort Protector, allowing the foundations of the castle to be uncovered studied and presented to view, with the potential for an entrance from Main Street.

### Presentation of the Fort interior

Inappropriate use of the interior of the Fort, additional buildings, or further subdivision of the spaces can pose a threat to the character and integrity of the historic site. Considered reconfiguration of the Fort interior would enable the scale and character of the Fort to be appreciated. The aim should be to create a continuity of design, which emphasises the unity of the site, and permeability of the site to interlink or connect the various spaces as much as possible.

The interior of the Fort is extensive and uses which allow public access can co-exist on the same site, as long as the integrity of the Fort is respected, both in the scale and in the use of any building. Cultural uses, such as the Laois Music

Centre, will make it possible for visitors to the site to appreciate the historic space. It would allow members of the public to enter the site unaccompanied or to be taken around in formal guided tours.

The landscape design of the Fort interior would require the involvement of expert conservation advice and close consultation with the Laois Heritage Society and other stakeholders. The RIAI Skills Matrix for Conservation Projects would indicate the need for a Grade 1 accredited conservation architect for a site of this importance. Functions which are ancillary to the use of the Laois Music Centre or other suitable users, such as car parking would require careful consideration and impact assessment.

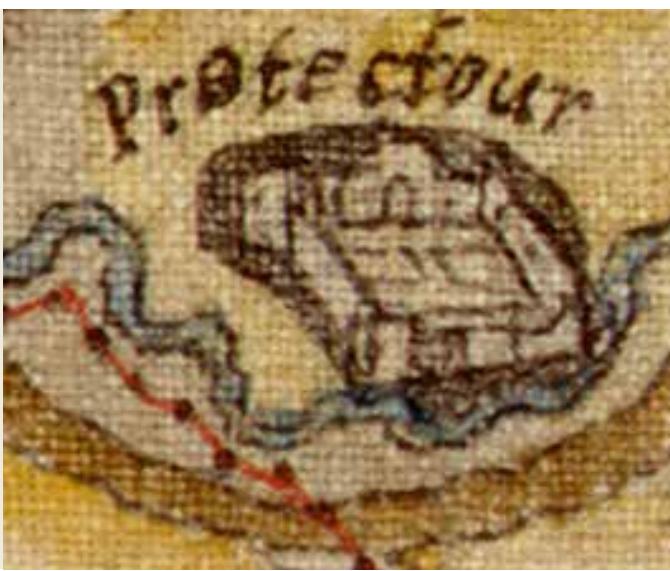


Fig. 115: Fort interior as shown on 'Cotton' map of c. 1563 (courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton Augustus I. ii. 40, 072971)

An understanding of how the interior was originally configured should form the basis for any design. Geophysical archaeological surveys can help to build up a picture of the historic form, including the form of the internal bank, position and nature of the well, etc. Archaeological test excavations would be necessary to investigate any below ground features identified in the geophysical surveys.

Reconstruction of some historic features may be appropriate, in order to convey a better understanding of the historic form and nature of the Tudor plantation Fort.

### Laois Music Centre

Built in the 1954, this former primary-school consists of a main school building, and a number of smaller associated structures. The buildings do not contribute to the significance of the site. However, the former school is a valuable amenity for the town and the wider county and it can easily coexist with a heritage site such as the Fort Protector.

Since the departure of the Scoil Mhuire from the site, a series of prefabs have been removed, and the former schoolyard has been opened up, retaining a hard surface. To the north this space is

bounded by the Fort wall and buildings associated with the Old Barracks. The eastern side is defined by the bulk of the concrete granary building, and to the west by a long concrete-built play shelter. The south is bounded by the double-L shape of the main school building, which defines two further spaces to south and east, both dominated by the grassy bank of the Fort perimeter.

These open spaces belong to Laois County Council and can become valuable amenity spaces to serve the built-up town centre. The design brief for the re-use of these spaces should have as its starting point the presentation of the historic site of the Fort Protector and the protection of its archaeological features. A high level of design should be required.

The play shelter is a particularly long example of the type which OPW-architect Basil Boyd Barrett introduced to the vocabulary of primary schools across Ireland. It is a positive feature which adds some architectural richness to the site and might be retained to support the new use.

Key to the design of the playground space will be the future of the granary building, which occupies a large area, and backs onto the Fort wall. Functions which are ancillary to the use of the Laois Music Centre or other suitable users, would require careful consideration and impact assessment.

### The 'King's House'

A structure referred to in a letter of 1685 as the 'King's House', would appear to be the timber-framed barrack building shown on sixteenth century maps (Fig. 116), known to have measured 8 x 32 contemporary yards. The form and location of this building would be of particular interest to uncover. Preliminary maps analysis suggests that the footprint of the building corresponded to the western wing of the Music School, which would mean little if any underground evidence would survive. Geophysical surveys should be undertaken to confirm if this is so.

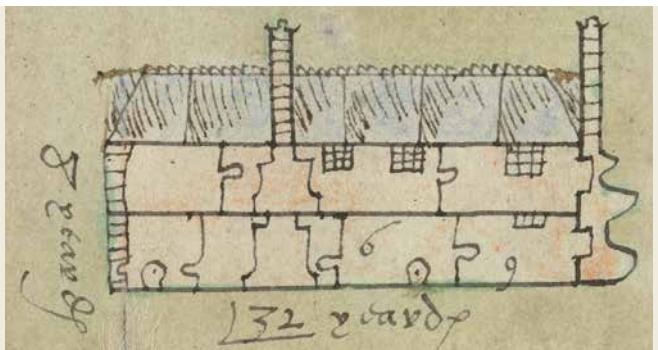


Fig. 116: Timber-framed barrack building or 'King's House' as shown on the Plot of the Forte of Maribrough, c. 1560 (courtesy of Trinity College Dublin, Hardiman Atlas, IE TCD MS 1209/10)

If sufficient archaeological evidence were uncovered, the reconstruction of this building using authentic construction methods of the period could be a very exciting project with the power to convey a direct understanding of the period to visitors.

### The former granary building

The former granary building was built by Odlum's sometime around 1940 causing a major impact on the fabric of the Fort site. The Granary is a massive utilitarian building of in-situ concrete construction, with a corrugated-iron roof on steel trusses. It was built against the historic Fort wall, which has been integrated into the structural wall on the eastern side by casting large piers against the historic masonry to support the roof and by raising the height of the wall in shuttered concrete. The concrete floor is equally massive, having a system of under-floor cavities in which grain appears to have been conveyed to the large industrial mill which stood on Fitzmaurice Place. A number of penetrations were formed through the base of Fort wall as concrete passages which are still in place, and two large doors were formed to connect into the mill. One of these, through the round bastion, was blocked up on both sides in the 1990s, and the second was blocked up in 2018 on the exterior only. Archaeological material is unlikely to survive within the footprint of the Granary, and the raised internal bank was removed to build it.

Demolition of the granary building would also have a significant impact. Fabric would be lost where the concrete is extricated from the historic walls. Cutting or breaking of the concrete would inevitably result in vibrations, which could compromise the structure of the fortification. For this reason, any decision to remove the building would require very a careful risk analysis and a detailed methodology would need to be developed to protect the fabric.

The alternative of retaining the structure must therefore be considered. Removal of the building can remain a longer-term ambition, however, the cost of removal is unlikely to produce sufficient benefit to justify use of limited regeneration funds available for the town centre at this time.

If retained and adapted, the use of the Granary would need to be compatible with the historic site, allowing safe public access to the areas around the building. An amenity, cultural or commercial use would be most likely to suit the form of the building. A high standard of architectural design should be a requirement, in order to resolve the issues of integration into the context of the historic site in a creative manner which enhances the experience of the Fort.

At present the Granary is closed on all sides which face into the Fort interior, as these were formerly separate properties. Access is from a small yard off Tower Hill through an opening in the Fort wall. The small yard also gives access to the corner bastion through an open concrete structure with a flat roof between the Fort wall and the northern end of the Granary. Any new use for the Granary should allow the bastion to be accessible from the interior of the Fort. Ideally, the concrete structure would be removed, the Tower Hill entrance would be closed and access to the Granary would be from inside the Fort.

## The round bastion

The round bastion is the most striking feature of the Fort Protector. Phase II of the Regeneration of Fitzmaurice Place provided for a viewing platform to be inserted into the bastion. The proposal is for a timber structure independent of the bastion walls, which will allow visitors to see the inside walls of the bastion at close quarters, and provide a vantage point to view Fitzmaurice Place, and the surrounding town and landscape.

The proposed access to the viewing platform was by necessity from Tower Hill, as this scheme was devised prior to acquisition of the former Scoil Mhuire site by Laois County Council. The connection between the bastion and the Fort interior is very important to the appreciation of the site. The access route to the platform should therefore be revised to create a direct connection.

## 'Old Barracks' on Tower Hill

A nineteenth-century stable building of good historic character survives on the site of the 'Old Barracks' (Site 04), alongside the walls of a second structure, with an open yard between. If added to the property of Laois County Council, this could provide the key to the creation of a visitor experience.

These modest buildings are distinguished by a layering of fabric and features, which create a physical connection to the former military use of the site. As such they could form an appropriate point of entry where an exhibition of the heritage importance of the site might be interpreted. An independent entrance might be created from Church Street as a base for tours of the site. The stable building might be restored and adapted to house visitor facilities and interpretative material, the setting in a historic structure forming a stronger connection to the past.

The location of these buildings on Tower Hill is close to the Railway Station and is situated in one of the two sides of the Fort which are most evocative of its historic form.

## Castle of Maryborough

The site of the Castle of Maryborough holds the greatest secrets regarding the form of the Tudor fortification but these lie buried beneath functioning businesses, and within historic buildings at the commercial heart of the town. These properties will remain in private ownership for the foreseeable future, and the buildings which now occupy the site make an important contribution to the historic character and heritage value of the town centre.

Nevertheless, speculation into the possible form of the castle is key to a proper understanding of the Fort Protector. With the cooperation of the building owners and occupiers, a deeper understanding of the shape and form of the castle might be achieved. Non-destructive investigations such as measured surveys, lifting of floorboards, or scanning of open yards using ground-penetrating radar (GPR), can help to build a gradual picture over time of what lies beneath the ground.

The site of the castle lies within three plots on Main Street: Virgo (Site 13), Bergin's Jewellers (Site 14) and the Town Hotel (Site 15). The surrounding ditch, and possibly elements of the castle structure, extend into the corner site at Railway Street (Site 12). The castle survived in ruins after its destruction by Cromwell's forces in 1650, until it was eventually cleared away in 1835. Below-ground remains are likely to survive within the narrow plots of Sites 13 and 14. If uncovered and exposed they would enrich the experience of the Fort and its history, as it was in this castle that many of the historic events recorded in historic sources took place.

Site 13 is fronted by a modest two-storey building of good historic character. In the longer term, this historic building could form a direct entry point to the Fort site from the Main Street. This would reinforce the idea of the 'Old Fort Quarter' pioneered by the association of traders in that part of the street. It would highlight the historic position of the castle within the town and would enrich the appreciation of this key location.

opposite Lyster Lane, telling the story of how the Fort became enveloped in the Georgian fabric of the town which grew up around it.

#### **4.3 Fort Exterior and Setting**

##### **Presentation of exterior defences**

The long frontage at Fitzmaurice Place and Church Avenue recalls the defensive ditch, which formed part of the military fortification. This area has been reconfigured as a public amenity space, and the idea was explored to excavate a part of the ditch as a community-archaeology project to expose the full height of the wall as it would have appeared when it was a military site. This proved not to be feasible due to the presence of extensive concrete remains underground and penetrations in the base of the Fort wall.

On other sides of the Fort the historic ditch lies beneath public footpaths, roads, and within private properties. Presentation of the ditch on these sides is therefore not feasible.

##### **Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice Place Enhancement Scheme, 2018-19**

Arising from the interest generated by the Conservation Plan process, Laois County Council made a successful application for funding under the Heritage Council's Historic Towns Initiative (HTI) in 2018 for a 'Fort Protector and Fitzmaurice Place Enhancement Scheme'. Phase I of the project was completed in Spring 2019, which involved creation of a gently sloped and terraced park, planted to promote biodiversity, with a public performance space at its centre. The existing monument entitled 'Etilt' commemorating Col James Fitzmaurice's pioneering transatlantic flight was relocated to the edge of the space at Tower Hill to heighten its impact on the streetscape, and the Fort wall was repaired, blocking a large opening and repointing the wall following conservation best practice.

The new park is a green amenity at the heart of the town and creates a better focus on the Fort. The work was completed with additional funding from the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht as the first measure undertaken from a grant allocation to the town from the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) under Project Ireland 2040.



Fig. 117: New landscape design at Fitzmaurice Place



Fig. 118: Masterplan for the Fort Protector Enhancement Scheme by Lotts Architecture

### **Fort wall to Church Avenue**

The Fort wall to Church Avenue outside the Laois Music Centre was lowered when Scoil Mhuire was built in the early 1950s, and the top of the wall replaced with courses of concrete block and a tubular steel railing with mesh panels. The gateway to the school site at the southern corner of the Fort was also created at that time.

The footpath along this wall was upgraded as part of the Fitzmaurice Place scheme, and the low wall was re-pointed. The blockwork and the modern railing were left in place as the school site was in separate ownership at the time, and therefore not included in the scope of Phase I.

The blockwork and railing cannot be simply removed, as the grassed internal bank inside the Fort rises to the top of the blockwork and the railing forms the necessary guarding to a

considerable change in level. Rebuilding of the Fort wall up to the level of the northern portion would be an acceptable solution, which would reinstate some of the historic impact of the Fort on its surroundings. The new wall would however lack authenticity, and such an approach would need to be clearly distinguished from the actual surviving masonry. The work would use up funds which might be better invested in the protection of those sections of wall which have survived since the plantation period. For this reason, it is recommended to replace the concrete block and to replace the railing with a style in keeping with the historic character of the site. This could be a high railing of square-profile balusters with plain pointed finials.

## **Fort wall to Tower Hill and Railway Street**

The frontage of the Fort to Tower Hill is a powerful demonstration of how the Fort has become integrated with the modern town. The round bastion at the eastern end is the strongest image of the historical Fort. At the former ‘Old Barracks’ the wall has been raised to form the gables of the two buildings. Further west it has formed into a garden wall in front of a pair of Victorian houses, and at the western end it has been reworked as the boundary wall to the former Vocational School, complete with Art-Deco style piers. When viewed from the east, this fascinating variety can be seen together with the tower of Old St Peter’s Church, creating a visual link between the two sites which have a common origin in the 1500s.

The Tower Hill streetscape has great potential, but the rubble-stone sections of the wall bounding Sites 01, 03 and 04 are poorly presented, and marred by overhead wires, telegraph poles and bad public lighting.

Phase II of the Fort Protector Enhancement Scheme will strengthen the connection between Fitzmaurice Place and Old St Peter’s. This will involve continuing the repairs to the Fort wall, a new paving scheme integrating car parking spaces to minimise the black-top width of the carriageway, laying overhead power lines and cables underground, moving public lighting on the other side of Tower Hill away from the Fort wall and relocating parking spaces which detract from the impact of the round bastion.

## **Fort wall facing private properties on Main Street and Church Avenue**

Back yards on Main Street and Church Avenue do not take advantage of the Fort wall. In many cases sheds and other ancillary structures have been built against the wall. These properties would be significantly enhanced if rear yards were reconfigured to highlight the presence and historic quality of the wall. This would work very well for the properties on Main Street in the hospitality industry, but equally for private houses on Church Avenue.

Planning policies for the town centre might encourage such improvements, and support for the conservation of these sections of wall might be offered through conservation grant schemes.

## **Site of new Laois County Library**

The site of the new Laois County Library (formerly Shaw’s department store) connects the ‘Lower Square’ on Main Street back to the southern wall of the Fort. This site has great potential to add to the story of the Fort Protector, as it encompasses the point where the original course of the Triogue River spread out to the walls of the Fort.

## **Connections to the Presentation Convent and Ridge Burial Ground**

The development of the Fort Protector as a heritage attraction could form part of a ‘chain’ of heritage sites across the northern side of the town centre.

The former Presentation Convent is in many ways a sister site to the Fort Protector encompassing the remains of the structure shown as the ‘Store House’ or ‘Brewhouse’ on early maps. A proposal to adapt this historic building as part of a high-quality social-housing redevelopment was granted Part 8 planning approval in 2020, and the scheme is currently in development. The landscape design for this development aims to create continuity between Fitzmaurice Place and the open spaces within the scheme. It also incorporates a through-route to the Triogue River, which runs at the end of the site. In the longer term this should connect into a ‘blueway’ along the Triogue which is proposed under the public realm plan *‘Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond’*.

The Ridge Burial Ground situated on the natural esker to the east is also part of the defensive history of the Fort Protector, and it has been suggested it may represent a church site predating the plantation, possibly associated with the medieval settlement of Newtown Leys (Bradley et al, 1986). The potential of the Ridge Burial Ground as a public amenity was identified in ‘2040 and Beyond’. Future development of the vacant site

between the Triogue and the Ridge Road could incorporate continuation of the route to the Ridge Graveyard.

#### **4.4 Wider Urban Development**

##### **Economic Benefit**

In recent decades, cities and towns have come to recognise the importance of historic settings to their economic well-being. Well-presented urban spaces which have distinctive character add to the vibrancy of towns and generate economic activity, whether through tourism or spending by local people.

Development of the area vacated by the schools and religious foundations of the Presentation Sisters and the Irish Christian Brothers opens exciting possibilities for developments of architectural quality around the Fort, enriched by well conserved historic buildings adapted for appropriate new uses.

The development of the Fort Protector as a visitor attraction has the potential to imbue a cultural dimension on the much-needed redevelopment of the northern part of the town centre. The location of the Railway Station adjacent to these developments would connect this part of the town to the national rail network. This potential new cultural quarter would be the first part of the town encountered by rail-based visitors, and it lies close to the principal hotels in the town centre.

##### **Potential to Regenerate the Main Street**

The restoration of the Fort can become a driver for interesting developments to the rears of properties on Main Street. Three important businesses in the town centre, the Town Hotel, Kavanagh's Bar and Venue and Lilly's Bar have rear sites which face the wall of the Fort. In each case the wall is located within functional service yards, obscured from view or covered over by extensions, which were built in an ad-hoc manner without realisation of the significance of their setting.

Redevelopment of these yards to take advantage of the potential of the wall would help to re-define an 'Old Fort Quarter' in the centre of the town, making the yards into a key character feature of each business.

##### **Former CBS Lands and Railway Station**

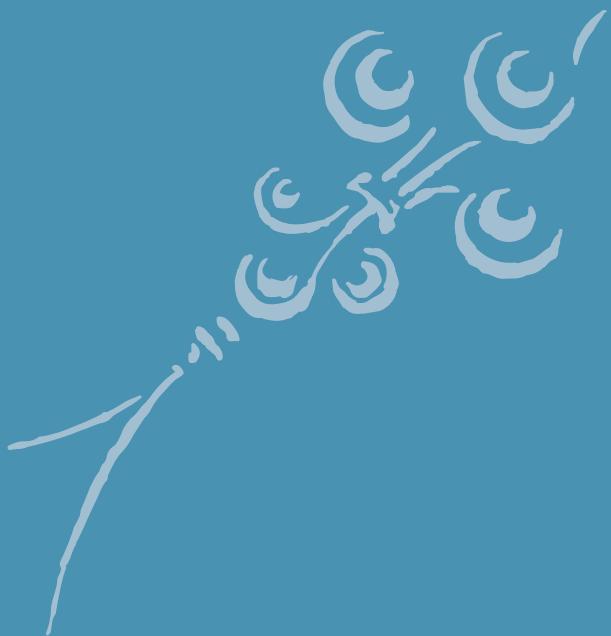
The lands of the former Christian Brothers School provide a key development opportunity for the northern part of the town centre. This swathe of land extends northwards from the former school on Tower Hill on the northern side of the Fort to the Railway Station. This site has the benefit of an hourly train service linking it to the national rail network, and into a commuter service to Dublin.

Development of key sites of this nature can tend to focus on the interests of the development itself, and can miss opportunities for increased connectivity within the town and enhancement of sites such as the Fort Protector which lie outside the bounds of the development.

The development of the CBS lands has the potential to improve the standing and presence of the Fort Protector in a regenerated urban quarter. The public realm plan 'Portlaoise 2040 and Beyond' suggested a pedestrian route through Fitzmaurice Place linking the 'Lower Square' and the Railway Station. This route could cut through the former CBS lands to create a vista of the round bastion when approached from the north. Such a route would enhance the understanding of the Fort and appreciation of its significance.

# Section 5

## Conservation Policies



### 5.1 General policies

#### *Policy 1: Coordinated approach*

A coordinated approach to the conservation of the Fort wall should be adopted in order to reinforce its character as an integrated site, rather than as a disparate collection of fragments.

#### *Policy 2: Conservation principles*

All works should follow internationally accepted Conservation Principles, as defined by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) in the Venice Charter of 1964, and in subsequent charters. These may be summarised as follows:

- Conservation work should be based on an understanding of the site and its historical development and the primary aim should be to retain and recover the significance of the site.
- Any alterations should be carried out in accordance with the principle of ‘minimal intervention’.
- Repairs to original fabric should always be favoured over replacement. Where replacement of an original element is unavoidable, this should be historically accurate in form and materials.
- Where lost elements must be reconstructed, these should aim for historic authenticity and avoid conjecture in as far as possible.
- Modern interventions should be reversible and if appropriate visually identifiable. New work should be recorded.
- Works should be carried out by suitably skilled craftspeople with proven expertise in their trade working with historic buildings.

In addition to the general principles articulated above, specific works should follow the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) Advice Series publications, in particular ‘Ruins, The Conservation of Masonry Ruins’.

#### *Policy 3: Building Dossier*

A Building Dossier to be set up by the Laois Heritage Society, maintained by the Heritage Office of Laois County Council and kept in the Local History Section of the county library as a repository of all information gathered on the history and fabric of the Fort.

Records of all works undertaken to the site of the Fort Protector to be submitted to the Heritage Officer as part of the statutory approvals process, for inclusion in the Building Dossier as a record of works to the site. This should include relevant drawings, surveys and reports prepared as part of applications for planning permission, Part 8 and ministerial approval, specifications, method statements and completion reports prepared under grant schemes, as well as records of materials analysis, measured surveys, archaeological excavations, geophysical surveys and any other record which contributes to the understanding of the Fort as a heritage site.

A condition to provide such documentation on completion of a project should be included in any planning permission for the sites inside and adjoining the Fort.

### 5.2 Policies for awareness and interpretation

#### *Policy 4: Heritage Interpretation Plan*

Implement the Heritage Interpretation Plan in the Fort interior and environs.

#### *Policy 5: Community archaeology*

Explore opportunities to carry out archaeological excavation as a community archaeology project, to enable interested members of the community to partake in the archaeological excavation process.

#### *Policy 6: Community outreach*

During archaeological excavations organise open days and planned site visits for school children and interested groups

#### *Policy 7: Social media*

Establish a dedicated social media platform for the Fort Protector to disseminate information on the Fort and its conservation.

#### *Policy 8: Exchange of experience*

Establish and foster links with interested groups and stakeholders from similar projects (e.g. Enniskillen Castle).

#### *Policy 9: Old Fort Quarter and Old Fort Festival*

Collaboration between Laois County Council and business and heritage interests in the town to promote and continue to develop the 'Old Fort Quarter' brand and the annual Old Fort Festival as a cultural heritage event.

### **5.3 Policies for masonry repairs**

#### *Policy 10: Conservation expertise*

All building work, whether on publicly owned or private properties, to be undertaken by conservation masons with the skill and experience required to work on Recorded Monuments.

All works to be specified and overseen by a conservation professional, accredited at RIAI Grade 1 or equivalent, and having experience of work to Recorded Monuments.

#### *Policy 11: Conservation grant funding*

Repairs to wall sections on private properties should be promoted as applicable works for Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government (DHHLG) conservation grants administered by Laois County Council under the Built Heritage Investment Scheme, Historic Structures Scheme, or for heritage schemes administered by the Heritage Council.

#### *Policy 12: Respect for earlier alterations*

Repairs to the wall should not aim for consistency. The wall has been repaired and

patched throughout its military history, and in later centuries, and this contributes to its special interest. All masonry constructed using lime mortars should be retained as found and repaired using matching stone and lime mix appropriate to that part of the wall. Alterations which have damaged the wall, such as openings formed in concrete, or filled with concrete blocks cannot be seen to add to the significance of the Fort.

Sections of wall which have been reconfigured architecturally, such as at the former Vocational School and adjoining houses, contribute to the historical layering of the site and should be conserved.

#### *Policy 13: Concrete and sand-cement*

Concrete blockwork, shuttered concrete and sand-cement pointing do not contribute to the significance of the wall and should be removed as far as is feasible.

#### *Policy 14: Restoration of lost masonry*

Restoration should not be undertaken unless there is sound evidence of the historic form of the restored masonry. Fallen masonry, openings, breaches, lowered sections may be reinstated to match the style and detail of adjoining sections.

#### *Policy 15: Removal of Vegetation*

The presentation of the wall would benefit from removal of vegetation, such as buddleia, valerian, ivy and Virginia creeper. This should be done in a manner which does not damage the fabric of the wall. Indiscriminate use of biocides should be avoided for reasons of public health, biodiversity conservation and to prevent possible damage to historic mortars.

#### *Policy 16: Cleaning*

Cleaning work may be appropriate in certain circumstances, but should retain the weathered patina of the wall. DOFF steam cleaning is the preferred method. More abrasive methods such

as ‘Torc’ cleaning may be used where there is rust staining, or other unsightly deposits. Chemical cleaning agents to be avoided as far as possible.

#### *Policy 17: Pointing*

Sand-cement pointing should be removed and replaced with lime pointing to match the historic detail. All historic lime pointing should be retained. Missing or failed pointing should be replaced to match the historic detail in adjoining areas.

Close examination during conservation work at Fitzmaurice Place showed that the Fort wall was formerly dashed with a coarse aggregate in that area. Vestiges of render survive in places in the form of a thin coating over the edges of stones at mortar joints. In areas where such vestiges of render are found, any new pointing should match the detail of the render remains in a ‘flared’ detail, extending onto the stones around the joint. This detail has been executed in the pointing work at Fitzmaurice Place.

Aggregates and mixing techniques for pointing mortar should be based on visual analysis and, where appropriate, on laboratory analysis of historic mortars.

Hot-mixed lime mortars should be used in preference to natural hydraulic lime (NHL), where feasible.

Wall coping details should retain the appearance of the wall as it has survived, rather than attempting to recreate a detail based on conjecture.

#### *Policy 18: Rendering*

Restoration of a dash is not desirable as the Fort would lose its patina of age. Aside from vestiges of early renders (see previous item), some sections of wall have been coated with later wet-dash renders, and others with smooth sand-cement.

Renders should only be removed after careful consideration of their significance by the overseeing conservation professional, and in consultation with the National Monuments Service. Render to the lowered sections of the Fort wall outside the former Vocational School and adjoining houses has taken on significance in its own right and should be retained.

Where renders are removed, damage to the underlying masonry should be avoided where possible and minimised where unavoidable.

Any renders applied when the Fort was first built, or within its time as a military fortress should be analysed and recorded to inform conservation work.

#### *Policy 19: Yards behind Main Street, Railway Street and Church Avenue*

Wall sections isolated in rear yards, which have been dislocated from the whole, should be pointed in consistent manner to preserve the coherence of the overall site.

#### *Policy 20: Recording of works*

All works to be documented in the form of a written report setting out the extent, method and specification of the works, noting key decisions made on site, and including images showing the work before commencement, at key progress stages and on completion.

### **5.4 Policies for previous changes to the Fort wall**

#### *Policy 21: Corner entrance to Laois Music Centre (Site 01), Church Avenue*

This opening is not historic, but is a necessary access point for the longer term. Modification should be allowed for, should the opportunity arise. Closing this entrance would restore some of the integrity of the Fort, but would isolate the Fort interior from the town.

#### *Policy 22: Entrance to the access to yard to the granary building (Site 03), Tower Hill*

This opening detracts from the impact of the round bastion. Once Sites 01 and 03 (granary and Laois Music Centre) can be integrated, this opening should be closed to match the detail of the historic Fort wall, both internally and externally.

#### *Policy 23: Entrance to former 'Old Barracks' (Site 04), Tower Hill*

This opening was already in place in 1838 as the entrance to the Old Barracks, and it may be considerably earlier. It is the only access point to Site 04. If this site were to be integrated with Sites 01 and 03 at some point in the future, this gateway would be a suitable entrance point to the Fort interior, as the original gate of 1548 to Railway Avenue is built over and cannot feasibly be reinstated.

#### *Policy 24: Entrance to car park of the Town Hotel (Site 15), Railway Street*

This opening is not historic, but is the closest possible entrance to the Fort gateway of 1548. For that reason, this opening would be a suitable principal entrance to the Fort interior.

The Fort wall can be seen in cross section at the south side of the opening. This feature has the potential to make the Fort more visually identifiable. Removal of paint and appropriate pointing would contribute to a better understanding of the Fort. Future public realm works to Railway Street should extend to the line of the former Fort wall to further reinforce this informative feature.

#### *Policy 25: Lowered sections of wall to the Laois Music Centre (Site 01)*

Two courses of concrete block should be replaced with stonework to match the historic Fort wall, with a simple flush capstone at the level of the top of the grassed internal bank. The tubular steel railing should be replaced with a high railing of

square-profile balusters with plain pointed finials.

Rebuilding of the Fort wall up to the level of the northern portion would also be an acceptable solution, and might be undertaken in the longer term.

#### *Policy 26: Wall in front of former Vocational School and Victorian houses*

The lowered section of Fort wall to Tower Hill and Railway Street in front of the 1934 Vocational School building (Site 07) and the battered wall in front of the Victorian houses on Tower Hill (Sites 05 and 06) constitute an architecturally significant layer, which adds to the interest of the overall site and should be retained unchanged.

The later boundary wall to the extension to the Vocational School is not significant, but the remains of the Fort wall are likely to survive below ground and should be protected.

#### *Policy 27: Openings within sites to the rear of Main Street*

Breaches in the Fort wall behind properties on Main Street should be built up, where this is compatible with current building uses.

### **5.5 Policies for existing buildings within the Fort**

#### *Policy 28: Laois Music Centre (Site 01)*

The former Scoil Mhuire primary school buildings do not contribute to the significance of the Fort Protector as a heritage site. The use of these buildings as the Laois Music Centre is an educational and cultural use which can easily coexist with the heritage site. Any adaptation or improvement work affecting the exterior and surroundings of the buildings should be carried out to enhance the greater understanding and appreciation of the Fort as a heritage site. Any necessary extensions should be designed with due regard to the archaeology of the site.

### *Policy 29: Granary building (Site 03)*

Removal of the granary building could remain a longer-term ambition. However, the cost of removal is unlikely to produce sufficient benefit to justify use of limited regeneration funds available for the town centre at this time.

As an acceptable alternative, the granary should be adapted and upgraded for amenity, cultural or a suitable commercial use. The use must be compatible with the historic site. Industrial uses which require access for larger vehicles should be avoided. The new use should allow safe public access to the adjoining areas within the Fort.

A high standard of architectural design should be required, to raise the quality of this building from its present low-grade appearance. The proposal should overcome level differences to enable the redeveloped granary to open directly into the Fort interior. This may require removal of some or all of the material imported onto the site since the 1950s to create the level playground. Removal of the lean-to section of the granary might provide a solution to the level difference, and should be considered.

Access to the adapted granary building should be from within the Fort and should allow the present access gateway to be closed off. (Compliance with Part B of the Building Regulations (Fire Safety) will, in any event, require more than one entry point).

Adaptation of the granary building should enable direct access from the site of the Laois Music Centre to the interior of the round bastion, overcoming the existing level difference.

### *Policy 30: Concrete undercroft (Site 03)*

The concrete structure against the northern gable of the granary should be removed as it detracts from the approach into the corner bastion. This must be undertaken with great care, as it has been cast against the inner face of the Fort wall. (This work is covered in the Section 57 Declaration for

the Fort Protector Enhancement Scheme).

### *Policy 31: Structures on site of the Old Barracks (Site 04)*

These modest buildings integrate the Fort wall into their northern gables and maintain a physical connection to the former military use of the Fort. The eastern building should be retained and restored to conservation standard for a use compatible with the heritage site. The western building survives only as a ruin. Its remains should be retained and integrated in a meaningful way into any future development of the site.

### *Policy 32: Red-brick houses on Tower Hill (Site 05)*

These houses are protected structures, significant in their own right as good examples of Victorian domestic architecture. The houses should be retained and maintained to conservation standard for uses compatible with the heritage site. Extensions should be permitted only under very special circumstances and where no other alternative can be found.

### *Policy 33: Dunamase College (Site 06)*

The Art-Deco style former Vocational School is a significant building of architectural and social heritage interest and occupies a key position at the north-west corner of the Fort. Any alterations to this building or the extension of c. 1950, or to their open spaces should be designed to enhance the understanding of the Fort.

### *Policy 34: Houses on Railway Street (Sites 08, 09 and 10)*

These houses straddle the line of the Fort wall. The foundations of the Fort wall must be protected in the construction of any extensions to these houses or in any below-ground works within the site.

The outbuilding to the rear of Site 08 dates to before 1823 and should be retained.

### *Policy 35: Structures to rear of the Town Hotel (Site 15)*

Remains of the Fort which survive embedded within the hotel building and its extensions must be the primary consideration if alterations in these parts of the hotel are contemplated. Single-storey modern buildings inside the line of the Fort wall make no contribution to the appreciation of the Fort. If these buildings are removed, openings in the Fort wall should be closed to match the historic construction.

Any replacement buildings on these sites must demonstrate a positive contribution to the significance of the Fort and to the appreciation of its historical form and history. Extensions to the footprint of the existing buildings should be permitted only where a positive contribution to the heritage site can be demonstrated.

## **5.6 Policies for improved presentation of the Fort**

### *Policy 36: Viewing platform in round bastion*

Phase II of the Regeneration of Fitzmaurice Place provides for a viewing platform to be inserted into the bastion as a vantage point to view Fitzmaurice Place, and the surrounding town and landscape. The platform should be a timber structure of architectural design quality independent of the bastion walls. Direct access from the Fort interior should be provided.

### *Policy 37: Castle site*

The remains of the castle at the south-west corner of the Fort should be the primary planning consideration in any proposals for sites in this area. Proposals should set out to uncover and reveal the hidden fabric of the castle.

### *Policy 38: Subdivisions of the Fort interior*

The subdivision of the Fort interior detracts from the proper understanding of its original military purpose. However, subdividing walls which date back to the eighteenth or nineteenth century are

of historic interest in their own right and can contribute to the layered interest of the site. In terms of significance these walls are commonplace in nature and secondary to the overriding importance of the plantation Fort.

### *Policy 39: Ground levels within the Fort*

Understanding of the original ground levels through archaeological testing must be a prerequisite for any future design within the Fort interior.

Especially within the playground area to the north of former Scoil Mhuire, now Laois Music Centre (Site 01), the raised ground level prevents a proper appreciation of the historic form of the Fort. The significant level change between this site and the yard to the granary and round bastion (Site 03) should be resolved through good landscape design to create continuity between these two sites.

### *Policy 40: Open spaces within the Fort*

The open spaces to the north and south of the Laois Music Centre building now belong to Laois County Council. These spaces should be configured to become valuable amenity spaces to serve the built-up town centre. The design brief for the re-use of these spaces should have as its starting point the presentation of the historic site of the Fort Protector and the protection of its archaeological features. A high level of design should be required.

Key to the design of the playground space will be the future of the granary building, which occupies a large area, and backs onto the Fort wall. Functions which are ancillary to the use of the Laois Music Centre or other suitable users, would require careful consideration and impact assessment.

### *Policy 41: Internal bank*

The form of the earthen embankment in the grounds of the Laois Music Centre suggests the survival of military defensive features of the

Fort. This bank should be presented in a manner which enhances the understanding of the internal defences of the Fort, based on archaeological investigation.

#### *Policy 42: The 'Kings House'*

If sufficient archaeological evidence were uncovered, the reconstruction of this building using authentic construction methods of the period could be a very exciting project with the power to convey a direct understanding of the period to visitors.

#### *Policy 43: External ditch*

Opportunities should be sought to uncover parts of the historic ditch to public view, either within the public realm, or within private properties. Such work should be based on and informed by archaeological investigation (see Policies for archaeology).

### **5.7 Policies for archaeology**

#### *Policy 44: Opportunities for archaeological investigation*

Identify opportunities for archaeological research excavations to deepen the understanding of key physical features of the Fort. (See also Policy 5Community archaeology).

Opportunities should be sought for archaeological investigation which would provide better insight into the historic form of the surrounding ditch. Although it is probable in some areas that buried evidence may have been disturbed in later developments, archaeological examination and recording should be undertaken in any new development or in laying of underground services adjoining the outside of the Fort perimeter.

In particular, the rear sections of the plots to the back of buildings on Main Street and Church Avenue, identified by Bradley by the consistent kink in property boundaries, should be subject to such investigation.

#### *Policy 45: Geophysical surveys*

Carry out geophysical surveys in the following locations:

- Grounds of Laois Music Centre (Site 01)
- Church Avenue in front of the Presentation Convent
- Rear yards at former castle site (Site 14)
- Railway Street adjoining former castle site

#### *Policy 46: Exploratory excavations*

- Carry out test excavations in the following areas:
  - Test trench at entrance to the Town Hotel (Site 15)
  - Hand excavation of earthen embankment in school (Site 1)

## **5.8 Policies for Natural Heritage**

#### *Policy 47: Promotion of Biodiversity*

Landscape design for the interior and perimeter of the Fort should be designed to promote biodiversity in flora and fauna in accordance with the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, the National Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021, subsequent updates, and any local biodiversity action plan.

#### *Policy 48: Creation of Habitats*

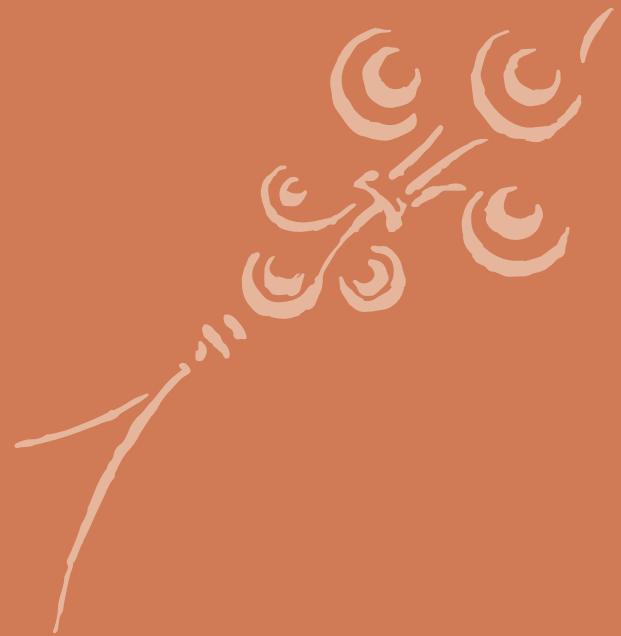
Opportunities should be taken to enhance the Fort site for wildlife by creating roosts for bats and swifts, installing habitats for pollinators, and by any other means possible.

#### *Policy 49: Protection of Wildlife*

Any removal of vegetation should be carried out in compliance with the Wildlife Act.

# Section 6

## Implementation



### 6.1 Context for Planning and Regeneration

#### Adoption of the Conservation Plan

In order to facilitate the implementation of the policies and strategies adopted in the Conservation Plan, it would be important to aim to have its policies adopted by Laois County Council as part of the planning policy for the town and county.

#### Public Realm Strategy

An ambitious public realm strategy has been prepared by Laois County Council for the town centre of Portlaoise, entitled ‘2040 and Beyond – A Vision for Portlaoise’. The Strategy was developed by a multi-disciplinary team led by GVA Planning and Regeneration, and including Lotts Architecture as architectural heritage consultant.

A focus of the plan is to harness the potential of heritage assets as a driver for town-centre rejuvenation, in particular the Fort Protector and associated sites to the north of the main street. This provides an ideal framework for the conservation of the Fort.

The Strategy sees the Fort Protector, Old St Peter’s and the Triogue River as part of a ‘chain’ of sites related to the foundation of Portlaoise in the Plantation period. A further link in this chain is the historic Ridge Burial Ground located on a natural esker to the east, which influenced the choice of site for the Fort and town. The Ridge contains many early burials and monuments of interest, and it is intended to draw it into the story of the town in a future phase by extending a heritage route to the graveyard across the Triogue from Fitzmaurice Place.

#### Portlaoise Local Area Plan

The current Portlaoise Local Area Plan (LAP) for the period 2018 – 2024 emphasises the importance of the Fort Protector as a rare built element of the first significant English Plantation in Ireland, and identifies its potential to become an important heritage site with the capacity to greatly raise the

profile of the town. It will be important to make submissions in the development of the next LAP with the objective of ensuring that the planning policies developed in the Conservation Plan would be adopted into the LAP and thus elevated onto a statutory footing.

#### Laois County Development Plan

Piecemeal development inside the Fort has weakened its integrity as a unified whole, and thereby eroded the significance of the site.

The new County Development Plan might place relevant policies from this Conservation Plan on a statutory footing as local authority planning policies, to guide future development to reinforce the integrity of the historic site and prevent further fragmentation, loss or incremental erosion of its significance.

Policies for development on sites adjoining the walls, or forming part of the urban setting of the Fort should be adopted to enhance the presentation of the Fort within the urban landscape of Portlaoise.

#### Funding for Regeneration

Portlaoise has been identified as a Regeneration and Development Demonstration Project in the National Planning Framework. This has already attracted funding through The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) to show how best quality planning urban design and implementation can create rejuvenated towns.

Over the coming years funding for urban regeneration can be used to reinforce the presence of the Fort as the key heritage site in the town centre. Such funding could be invested in the following areas:

- Adaptation of the granary building to integrate and enhance Sites 01 and 03, which are the property of Laois County Council.
- Reconfigure the site for cultural use, centred on the Laois Music Centre, through a new landscape design which would highlight the

features of the Fort interior.

- Repair and conserve the interior of the Fort wall within the sites in public ownership.
- Outside the Fort, repair and conserve the outer face of the Fort wall facing Tower Hill
- Upgrade paving and lighting in the public realm on Tower Hill and Railway Street as far as the line of the wall at the entrance to the Town Hotel car park, to reinforce the connection to Old St Peter's Church, marking the position of the former Fort entrance.
- Carry out geophysical surveys and targeted archaeological excavations to deepen the understanding of the surviving fabric of the Fort.

## **6.2 *Funding opportunities***

Other funding sources might include Fáilte Ireland or Laois Partnership, the local Leader group. Application for membership in the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) might also be considered.

## **6.3 *Conclusion***

The process is already underway to transform the Fort Protector from an abstract idea into something real - a physical place which connects the town of Portlaoise to its turbulent origins, which inspires pride in the people of the town and which directs the regeneration of the historic town centre.

To create this place from a disparate set of features into a coherent whole will be a process to be undertaken over many years. This Conservation Plan should be the road map which guides that process.

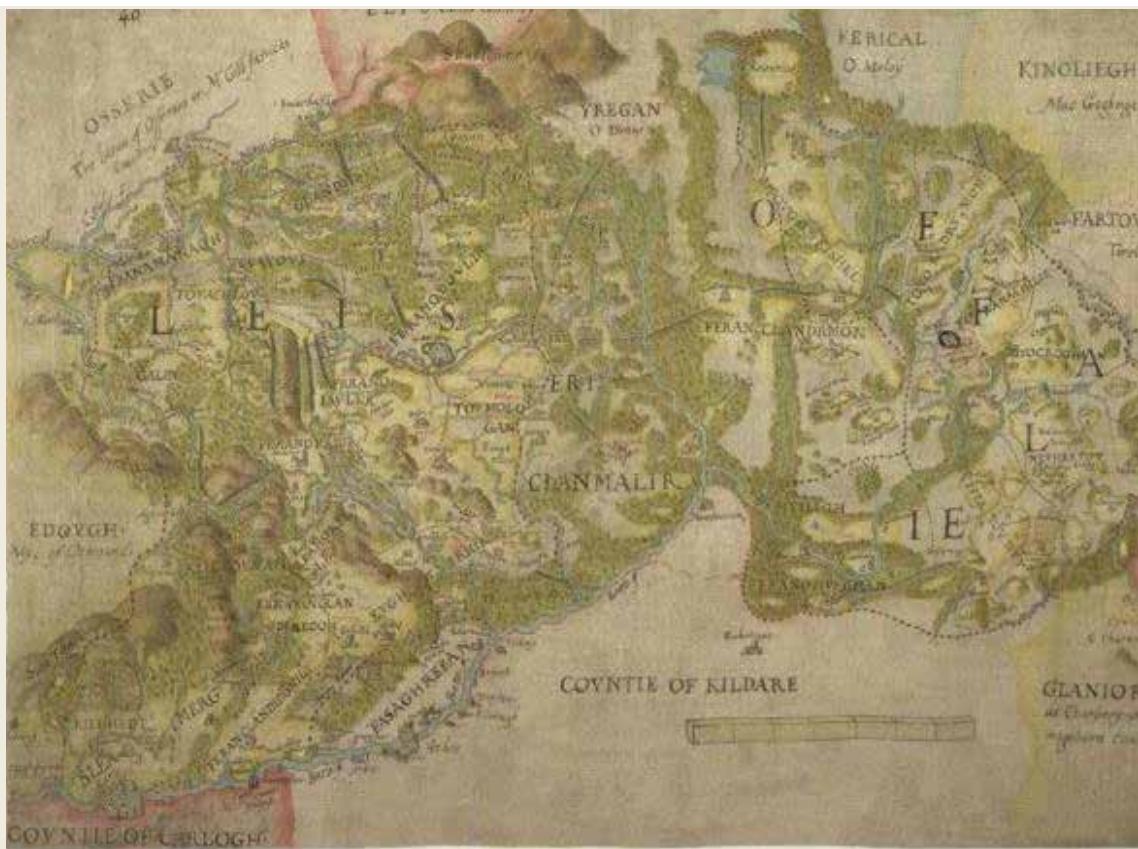
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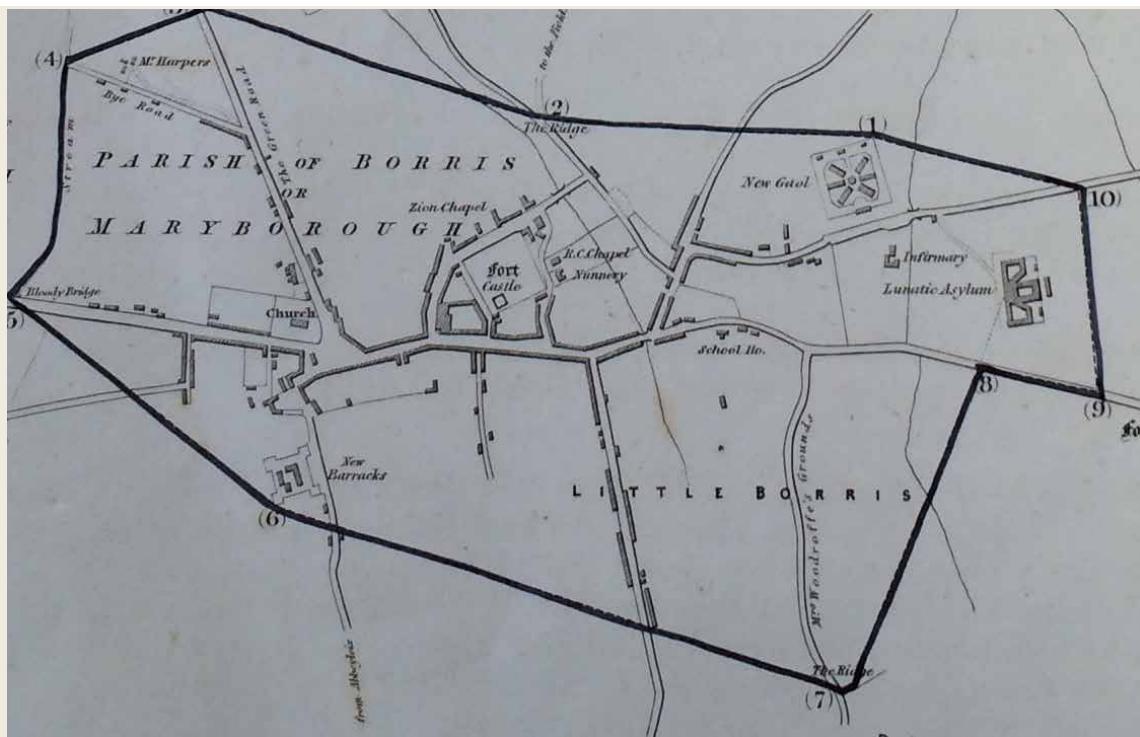
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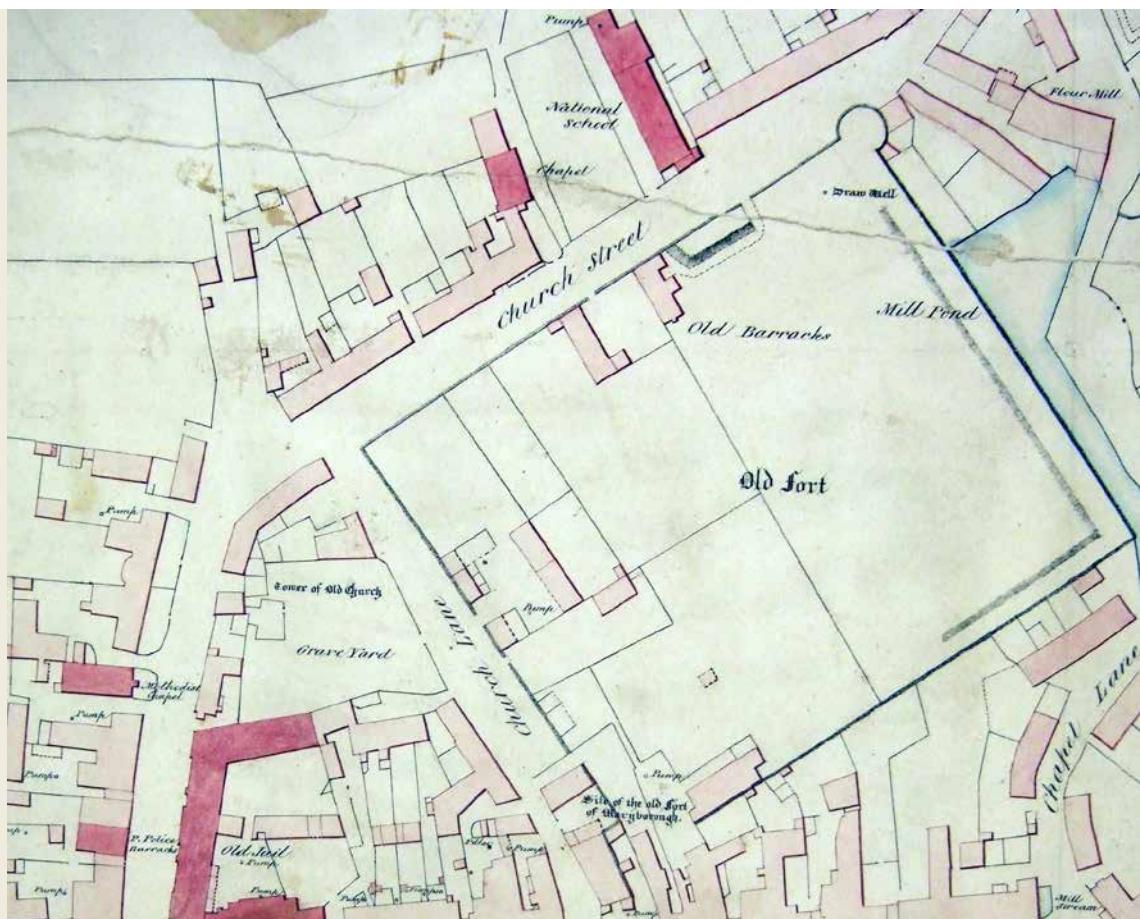
*Fig. 119: Map of Leis and Offalie, c. 1560 courtesy of the British Library Board, Cotton Augustus I. ii. 40, 072971)*



*Fig. 120: Extract from map of the estate of Sir Eyre Coote by William Jones, 1823, showing the Town of Maryborough (courtesy of Hampshire Record Office: Eyre Coote papers: 11M61/737).*



*Fig. 121: Map of Maryborough, 1837, original scale 4 inches to 1 mile, with machine signature of Thomas A Larcom (Image is reproduced courtesy of Laois County Library)*



*Fig. 122: Ordnance Survey unfinished Town Plan of 1839, scale 5' to 1" (National Archives, copy courtesy of Arnold Horner)*



Fig. 123: Valuation Office town plan, 1850 (courtesy of National Library of Ireland)



*Fig. 124: Detail of Valuations Office map in use from 1898 to 1911 (courtesy of the Valuations Office)*



Fig. 125: Queen's County Maryborough Barony East Maryborough (courtesy of Laois County Library)



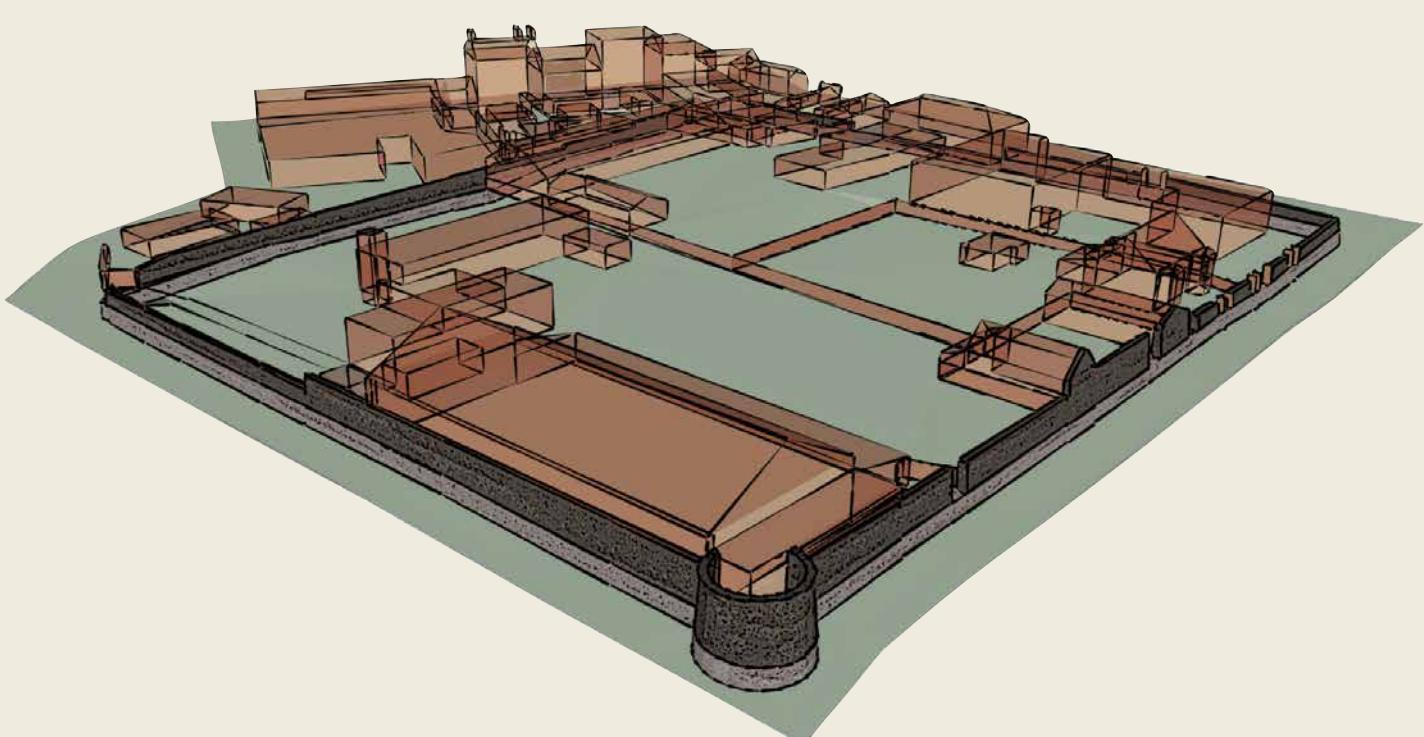
Fig. 126: Ordnance Survey map of 1907, original scale 25" to 1 mile (courtesy of Ordnance Survey of Ireland)



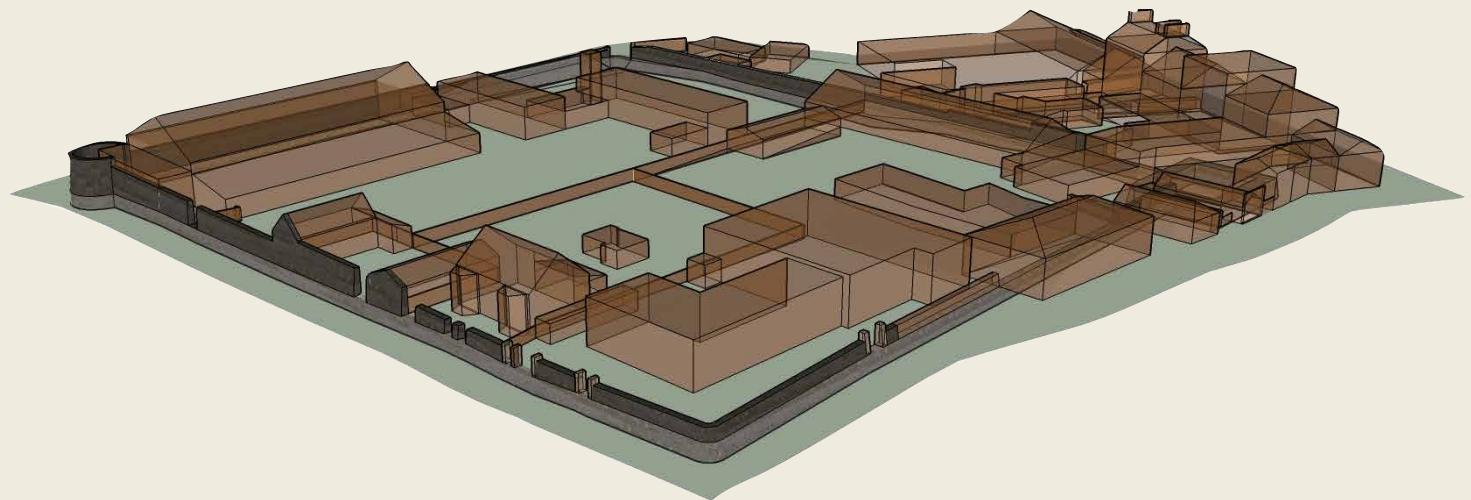
Surviving sections of the Fort wall are isolated from each other within a large number of separate properties. Consequently, it is not possible to gain a coherent appreciation of the perimeter wall, aside from those parts which face the public realm at Tower Hill and Fitzmaurice Place.

A measured survey was commissioned by Laois County Council in 2016 to allow isolated sections of the wall in rear yards and within buildings to be seen together in context. This provides accurate relative levels showing the relationship of all parts of the Fort wall to the profile and gradient of the ground. Levels of the top and base of each part of the wall, on the inner and outer sides, permit a proper understanding of each surviving section of the wall, showing how each part fitted into the whole.

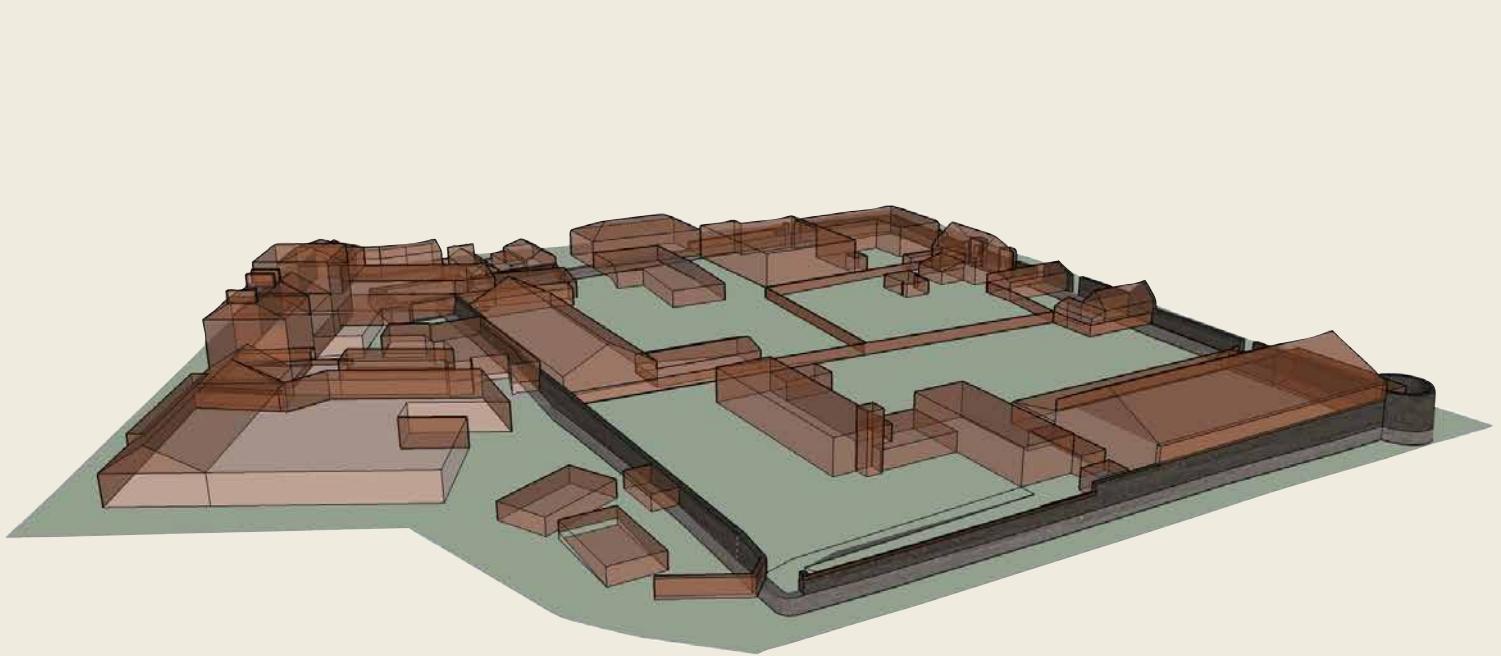
This survey is an essential tool for the proper understanding of the Fort wall. The drawings generated by Apex Surveys were used by Lotts Architecture as the basis for the set of drawings in this appendix.



*Fig. 127: Reconstruction of the Fort wall as it is today, generated from 2016 measured survey.*



*Fig. 128: Reconstruction of the Fort wall as it is today, generated from 2016 measured survey.*



*Fig. 129: Reconstruction of the Fort wall as it is today, generated from 2016 measured survey.*

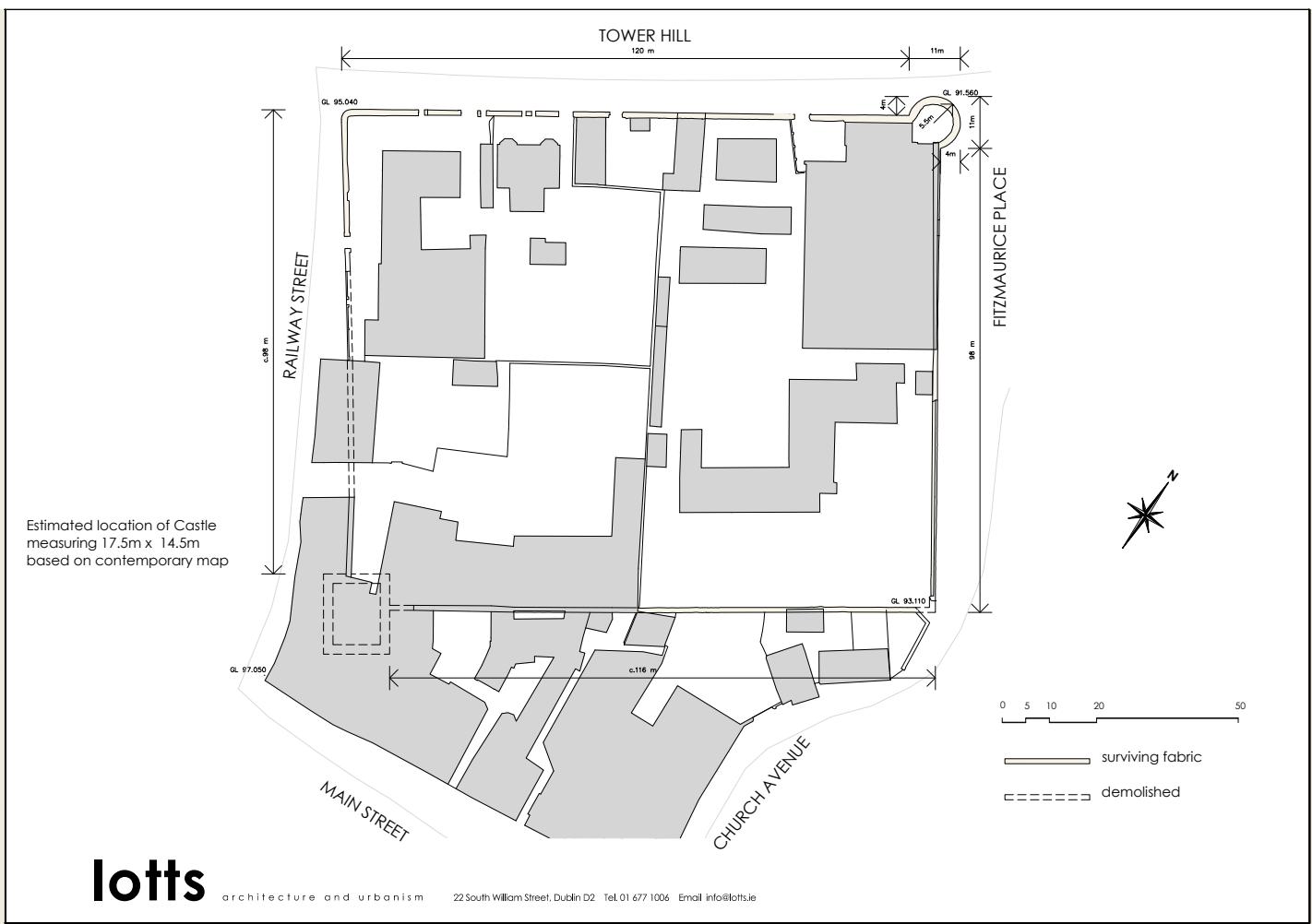


Fig. 130: Survey drawing (overview)

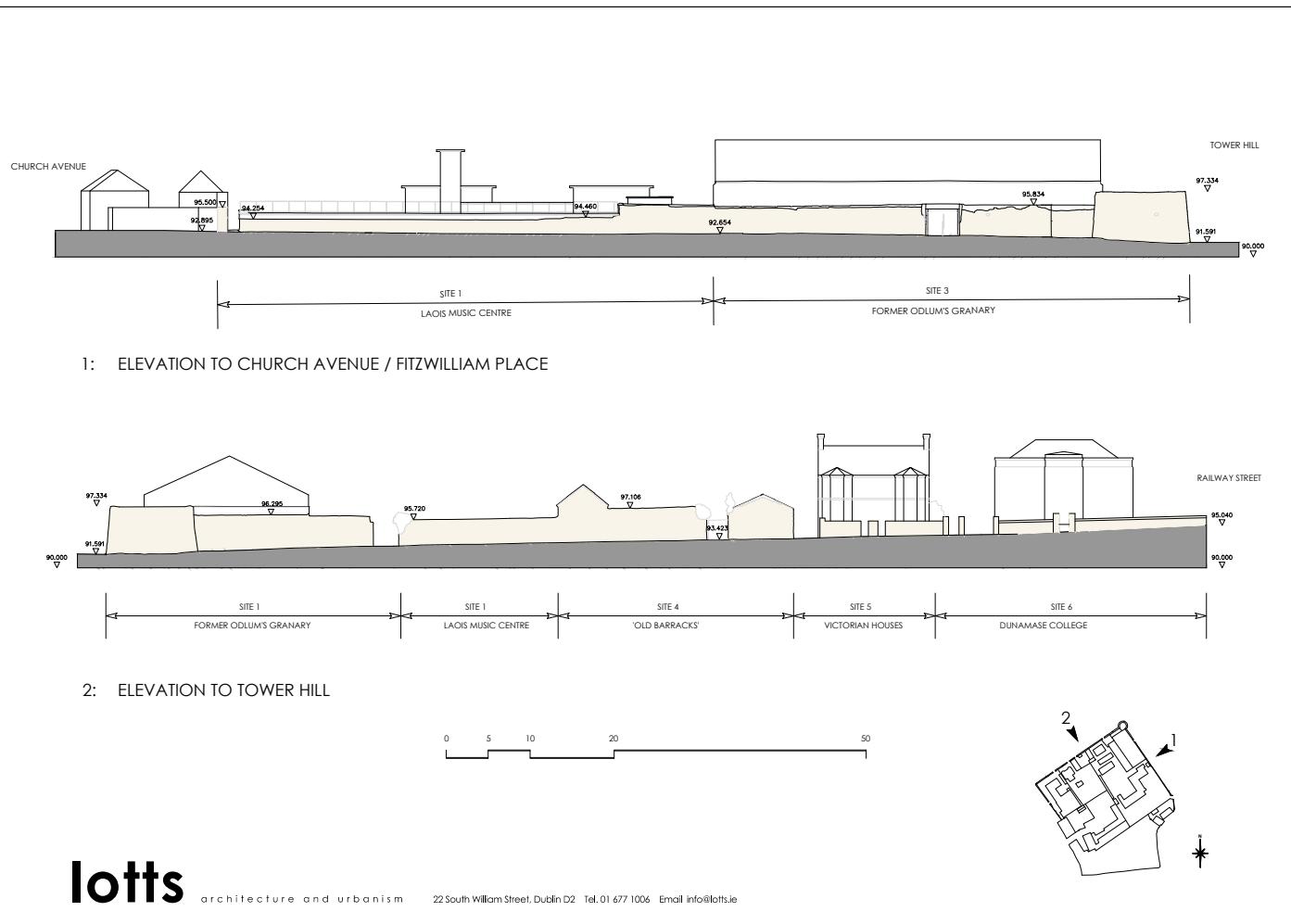
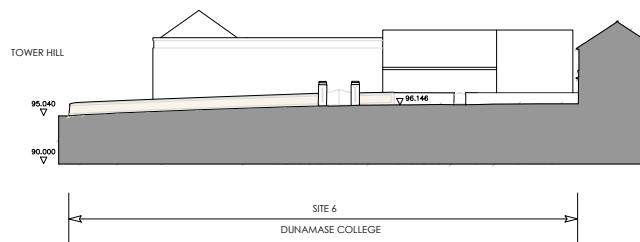
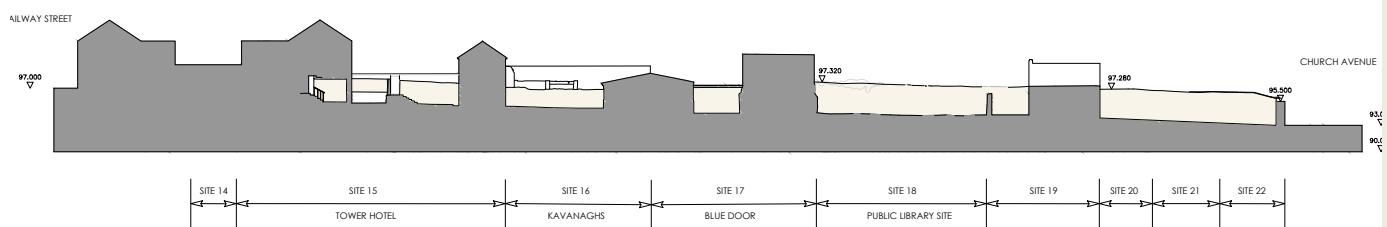


Fig. 131: Survey drawing (elevation to Church Avenue/Fitzwilliam Place and elevation to Tower Hill)

RAILWAY STREET ELEVATION

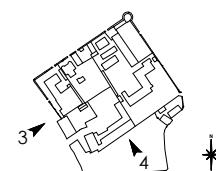


3: ELEVATION TO RAILWAY STREET



4: ELEVATION AT REAR OF MAIN STREET

0 5 10 20 50

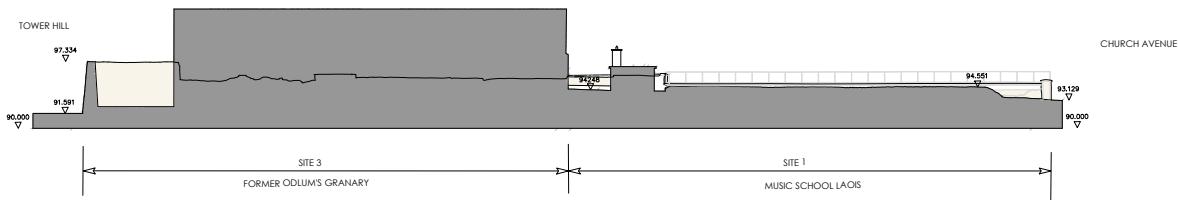


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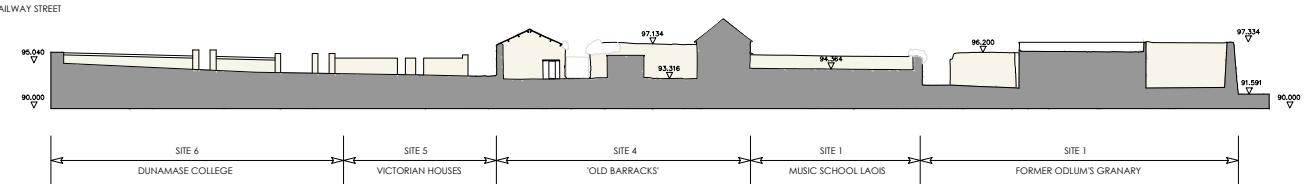
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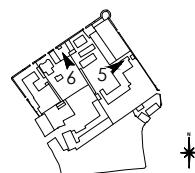
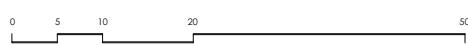
Fig. 132: Survey drawing (elevation to Railway Street and elevation at rear of Main Street)



5: INTERIOR ELEVATION EAST WALL



6: INTERIOR ELEVATION NORTH WALL



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Fig. 133: Survey drawing (interior elevation East Wall and interior elevation North Wall)

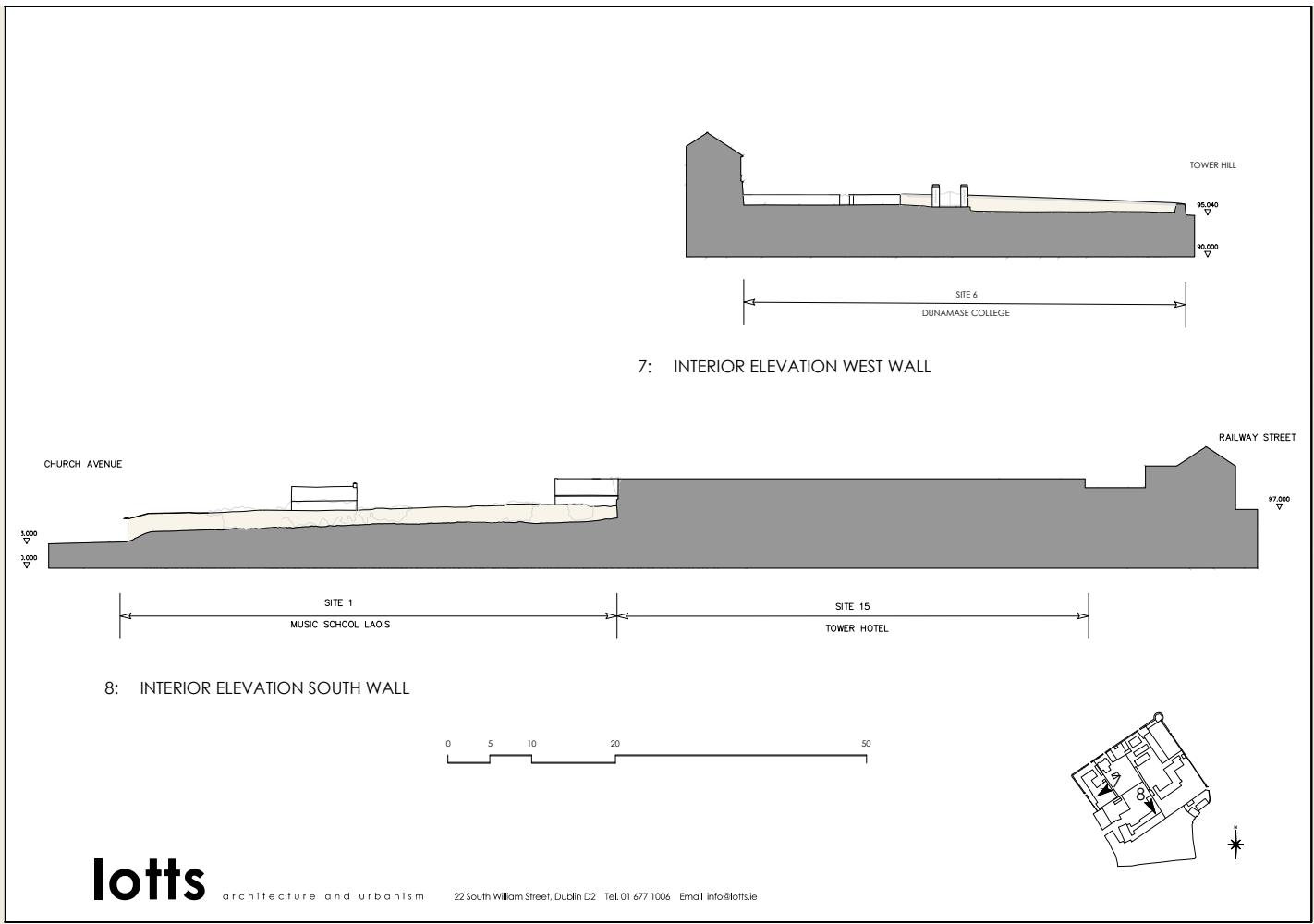


Fig. 134: Survey drawing (interior elevation West Wall and interior elevation South Wall)



Reconstruction of how the Fort may have looked in the 16th century, based on the measured survey of the remaining wall, and views in some of the historic maps of the time (Lotts Architecture)

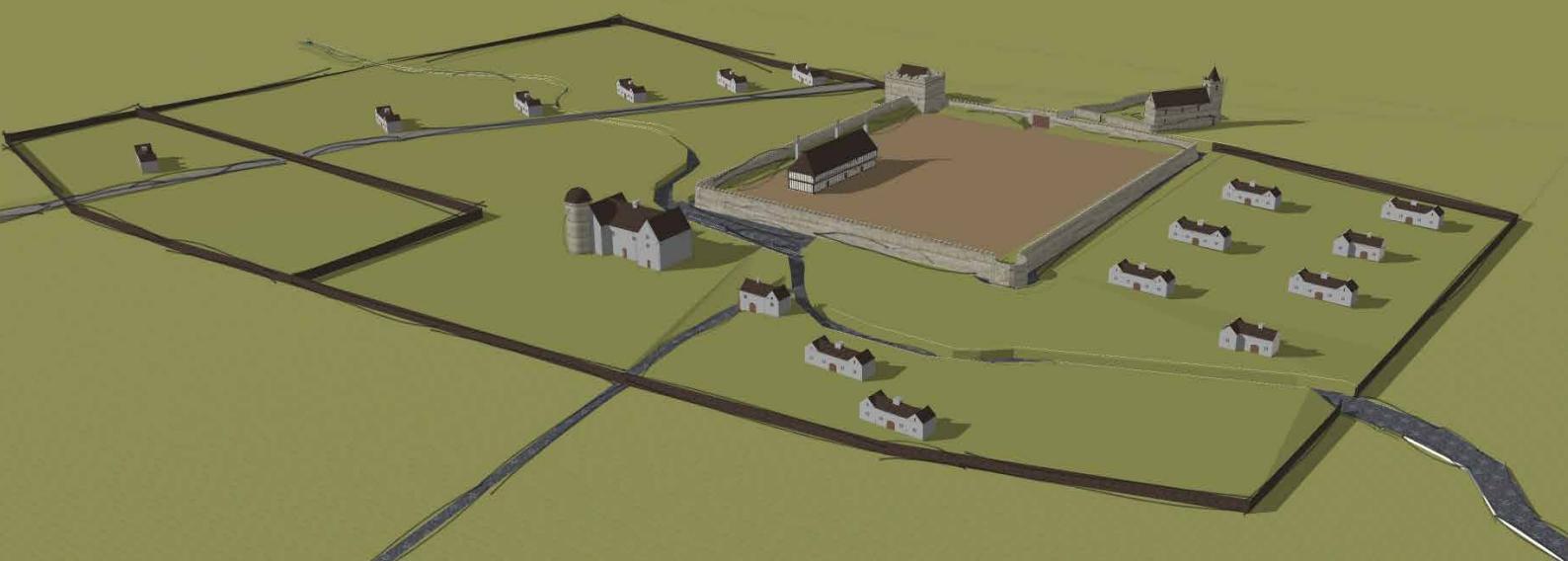


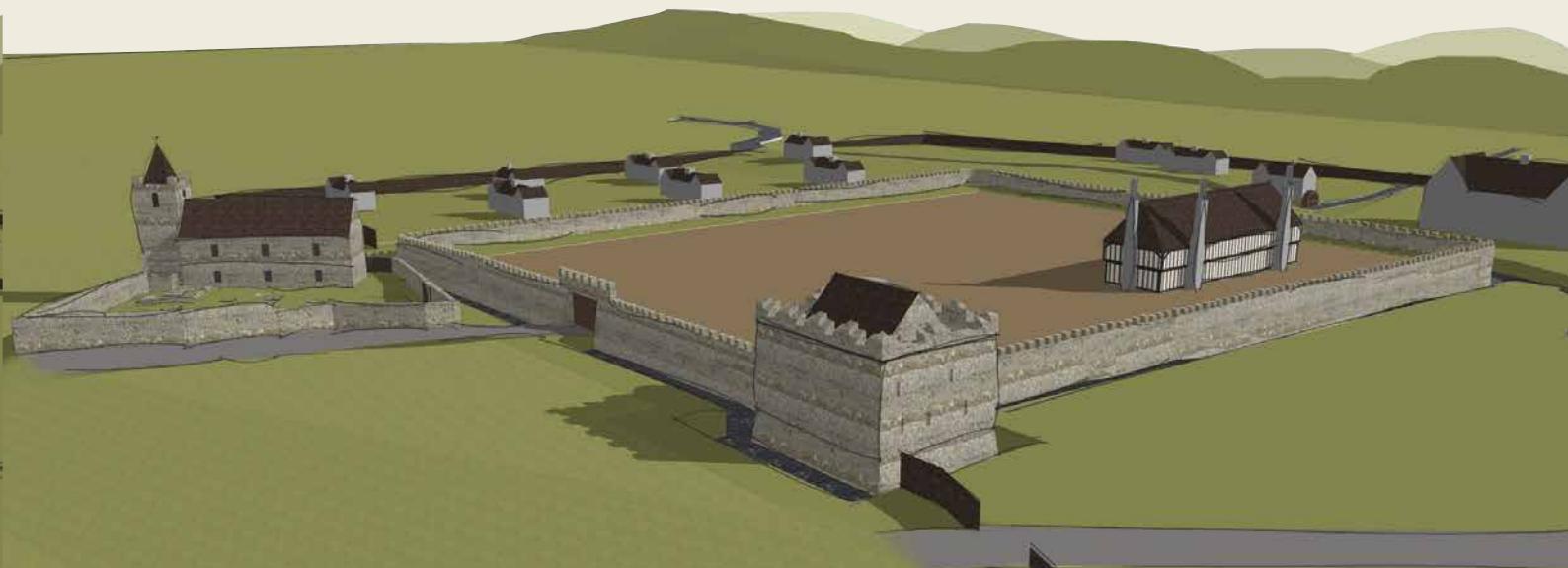
Fig. 135: Conjectural view from the east, with the river and Storehouse in the foreground



Fig. 136: Conjectural view of the Fort and town from the west, showing the entrance to the Fort



*Fig. 137: Conjectural view from the north, with the timber-framed barracks within the Fort*



*Fig. 138: Conjectural view from the south with the Castle and Old St Peter's in the foreground*

Prepared for Laois Heritage Society **lotts** Architecture + Urbanism

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Cumann Sean Dailiochta Conndae Laoise



**Laois County Council**  
Áras an Chontae, Portlaoise, Co. Laois

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council 

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