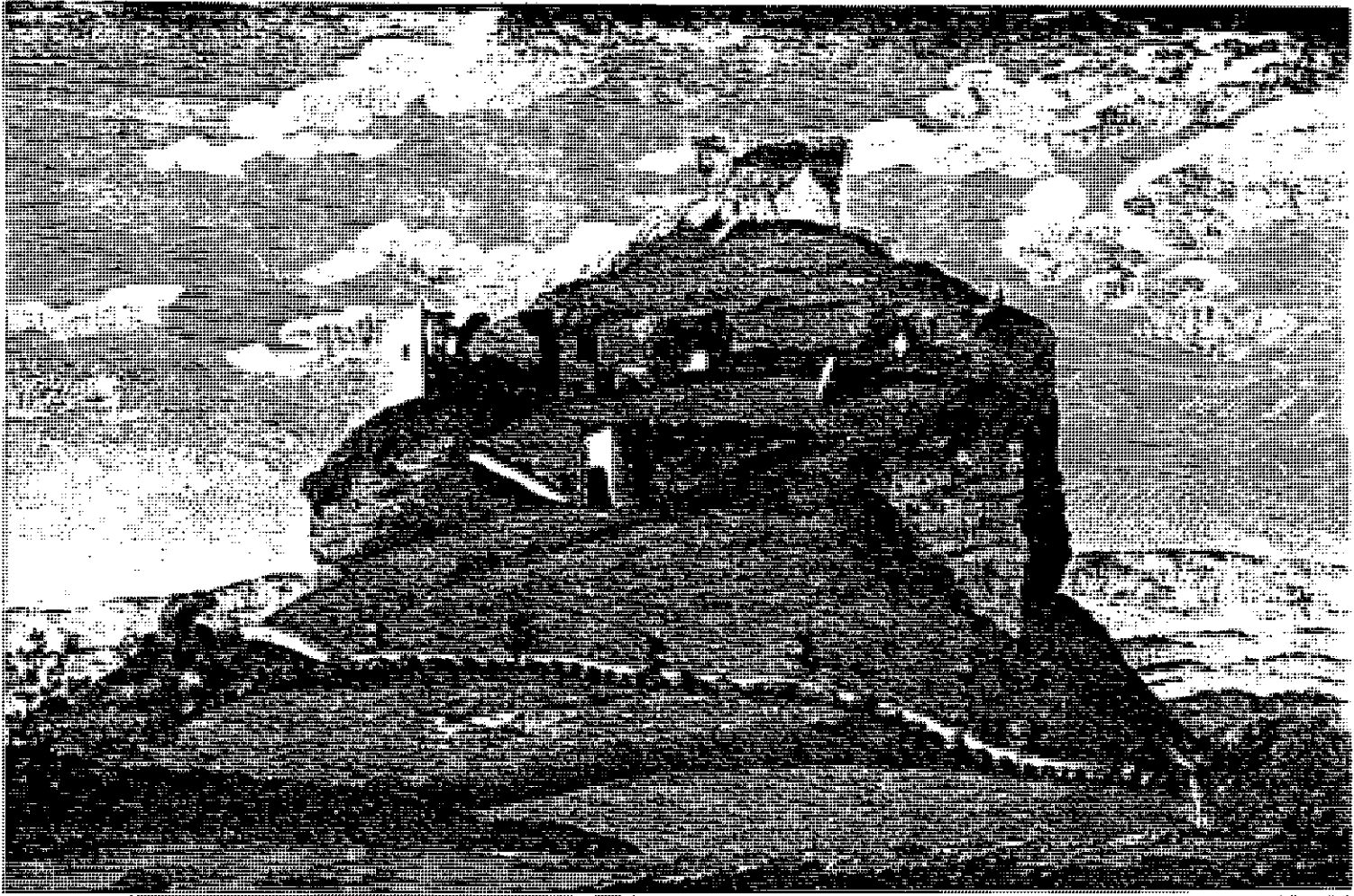


# CO. LAOIS



CASTLE of DUNAMASE in the QUEEN'S COUNTY.  
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## THE URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY SURVEY

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY SURVEY

PART VI

COUNTY LAOIS

JOHN BRADLEY

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

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AND

HEATHER A. KING

A REPORT COMMISSIONED BY THE OFFICE OF PUBLIC WORKS

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Towns pose one of the most formidable problems faced by archaeology today. Lived in and occupied over long periods of time, and often covering quite large areas, they are the most complex form of human settlement that we know of. Deep archaeological deposits have accumulated in most towns as a result of the long period of occupation and, accordingly, towns are among the most important areas of our heritage. However, towns are also the homes of modern communities, and are the centres of present-day business, industry and cultural life. The requirements of modern life has brought considerable change to many towns with extensive road widening, building schemes, housing estates and industrial development. The demolition of buildings and the digging of deep foundations has brought about irrevocable change in the appearance of towns, and change, in this century, means more thorough destruction than anything that has gone before. The problem for archaeology is not one of preservation, although this may be desirable, but of recording standing buildings and archaeological levels before they are destroyed. The unfortunate truth is that what is not recorded now has little chance of ever being recorded later.

By its nature archaeology is concerned with the past of ordinary people. The fragmentary building remains, pottery sherds and scraps of worked stone or wood which the archaeologist discovers cannot be used to reconstruct political movements or great administrative changes. These parts of our past can only be glimpsed from documents, from what people who were alive at the time have observed themselves or heard related. Archaeological data, however, can tell us a great deal about the everyday life of ordinary people and the quality of that life in terms of the technological and economic resources of the particular time and place in question.

Urban archaeology may be defined as the study of the evolution and changing character of urban communities from their earliest origins until modern times; more especially it is concerned with the reconstruction of the natural and human environment within which and as part of which human actions take place. A methodical definition such as this, however, should not obscure the fact that urban archaeology is fundamentally concerned with the past of ordinary citizens, of the form of their houses and streets, of the business of their markets and workshops, of the style and arrangement of their churches, of health and disease, of the variety of cultural, religious and economic activity; in short, it is concerned with the life and death of communities ancestral to our own.

## Development of Urban Archaeology

For long the study of the urban past has largely been the preserve of historians, sociologists and geographers and it is only recently that the potential of archaeology to uncover the past has been realised. Part of the reason for this is the general lack of awareness that almost all towns have archaeological deposits. This stems in part from the incomprehension of the ordinary man-in-the-street that a town which is lived-in can have archaeological deposits at all: purely because it is lived in, one tends to think that everything of past ages, unless it is visibly standing has been swept away. In part it also stems from the fact that the construction on a vast scale of buildings requiring deep foundations has only occurred recently, and it is only as a consequence that archaeological deposits have come to light. It is also due to the fact that, in previous centuries, archaeological methods and techniques were not advanced enough to take advantage of opportunities even if they did arise. Until relatively modern times the buildings of one generation have been constructed upon the foundations of the last. As structure replaced structure the ground level rose slightly and over the centuries, in cities such as Dublin, considerable depths of archaeological deposits have accumulated.

It was at Novgorod in Russia that the potential of urban archaeology was first revealed. There, organic remains were found in large quantities and it became possible to reconstruct entire streetscapes and to chronicle the changes which happened in them as one generation succeeded the next (Thompson 1967). Gradually as excavation took place in England and Germany it became apparent that the rich archaeological material in towns was not just a side-light on urban life but it could contribute greatly to our understanding of the archaeology of entire periods and regions. In Ireland the first scientific excavations were commenced at Dublin Castle in 1961 and excavations were to continue in Dublin for the next twenty years. The interest aroused by the High Street and, later, the Wood Quay excavations was widespread and it created an interest in the archaeology of other towns. To date, excavations have taken place in about twenty Irish towns.

Urban sites are important to the archaeologist for a number of reasons. Firstly, in all towns archaeological deposits form the earliest archive. Only a handful of Irish towns are referred to prior to 1200 AD and it is only during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that references become anyway common. Yet the urban life of many towns has continued unbroken since the twelfth or early thirteenth century, while the origins of others lie in the Viking, Early Christian and Prehistoric periods. Even when references occur they rarely throw much light on daily life and tend to be more concerned with political and administrative events. Indeed, most individual properties within towns have no



documentation relating directly to them until the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century. To all intents and purposes, then, individual sites within towns may have remained completely prehistoric, in so far as they have no documentation, until the seventeenth century or later. Accordingly, archaeological excavation is important if one is to gain any knowledge of the initial period of a town's foundation or of how a particular area evolved and was used.

Secondly, towns usually possess a much greater depth of stratigraphy than any other type of archaeological site. Stratified deposits are important because they preserve the sequence of developments on a particular site and the wealth of finds associated with urban sites means that it is usually possible to date both structures and layers quite closely. This is particularly important because it makes it possible to establish tight chronologies for artefacts.

Thirdly, the archaeology of a region cannot be understood without knowing what happened to the towns within it. Each town is a unique expression of the history of its area and the destruction of its archaeology would leave an irreplaceable gap in knowledge of the evolution of the region.

The recovery of this information is threatened, however, by the increasing redevelopment and gradual expansion of our cities and towns. It is very difficult to foresee the effects of this redevelopment when the extent of archaeological deposits is generally not known to the Planning Authority and it has happened in the past that the archaeological significance of a site has only become apparent when building work was about to commence. It is important then that the areas containing archaeological deposits should be identified if the potential of this important part of our heritage is to be realised.

#### Purpose and Aim of the Present Survey

The Urban Archaeology Survey was established with monies allocated for the purpose by the Minister for Finance in 1982. Its purpose was to compile a corpus of archaeological information on Ireland's towns and to present it in such a way that it could be used effectively by the archaeologist, urban planner, property developer, or interested layman. In this regard the survey has been guided by a submission prepared by the Royal Irish Academy on Urban Archaeology which recommended that the report should have four aims:

1. "To evaluate critically the archaeological potential, both above and below ground of the listed towns".
2. "To emphasise areas where the archaeological deposits could be preserved by the judicious use of new building

techniques and the presentation of open spaces, etc."

3. "To assess the level of destruction of the original townscape".

4. "To measure the effects of urban expansion on originally rural archaeological sites".

The chronological cut-off point beyond which material would not be included was 1700 AD.

The identification of sites which were urban centres before 1700 AD is not without difficulties. In many cases such an identification is dependent on the survival of documentary evidence. However, it was felt that it was better to follow the existing work of Graham (1977) and Martin (1981) rather than impose new criteria. Accordingly the sites which are included here are those for which there is evidence of their status as boroughs prior to 1700 AD.

In the reports the material is presented as follows: the situation of the site is outlined and a brief account of its archaeological and historical background is provided. This is followed by an archaeological inventory which endeavours to catalogue both extant sites and those which are known from documentary sources. Although the amount of information on each town may vary the catalogue follows the same format for each entry, firstly detailing the information on streets and street pattern, and following this with an account of the domestic buildings, market places and economic features such as quays and industrial areas. The seigneurial castle and town defences are described next together with the religious buildings of the town. The evidence for suburbs and activity outside the walls is then outlined and the inventory concludes with a summary of the archaeological excavations and a list of the stray finds. The inventory is followed by an assessment of the archaeological potential of the site.

## INTRODUCTION TO CO. LAOIS

The county of Laois was a direct result of the sixteenth century plantation of the lands occupied by the O Mordha and O Conchobhar Failge. It was first shired in 1556 when it was termed Queen's County. It then consisted of the barony of Portnahinch, ruled by the O'Kellys of Ui Failge, and ancient Loiges which was ruled by the O Mordha and was roughly equivalent to that part of the county within the diocese of Leighlin. In 1572 the barony of Tinnahinch was added and in 1602 Upper Ossory, the baronies of Clandonagh, Clarmallagh and Upperwoods, were included. The present boundaries bear no relation to territorial units earlier than the sixteenth century and Anglo-Norman Laois, for instance, was divided between the medieval counties of Kildare, Carlow and KilKenny.

The urban network which characterises the modern county was effectively formed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it is to this period that its two major towns, Port Laoise and Portarlinton belong. There is evidence, however, for urban settlement in Laois before this time. During the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries it was penetrated by the Anglo-Normans who settled in the east and south of the county. The Anglo-Normans founded towns more for economic than defensive reasons. They were intended to be market-places for the produce of the newly conquered soil and their function as strongholds only came later. They also established boroughs, settlements which had the legal privileges of towns but seem to have functioned as large villages. The Anglo-Normans established no towns in Laois but they founded at least three boroughs, Castletown, Dunamase and Killabban, all in the east of the county. There may have been other boroughs, such as Aghaboe, Durrow, Killeslin and Timahoe, but the historical documentation is lacking and we simply do not know. It is interesting to note that two of the Laois boroughs were settlements prior to the coming of the Anglo-Normans. Killabban was a church site and Dunamase a secular fortress. The fact that the Anglo-Normans chose these locations for their boroughs may indicate that there were village-like settlements here at the time of their arrival. The Laois borough of which we know most is the Newtown of Leys. This is somewhat frustrating because the exact location of the borough remains a mystery. It has been variously identified with Abbeylax, Dunamase, Lea, Port Laoise and Stradbally. In this report its history is considered under Dunamase, the most traditional of the identifications, but the strong possibility that it was the medieval predecessor of Port Laoise is also emphasised. Ultimately this is a question which can be answered only by archaeological excavation.

The fourteenth century was a period of economic decline in Ireland and this was particularly apparent in Anglo-Norman Laois exposed as it was to attacks from the O Mordha. All of the Laois boroughs declined and were abandoned and the available evidence suggests that there were no urban settlements in Laois between the mid-fourteenth and the mid-sixteenth centuries. Aghaboe and Stradbally are particularly interesting in this regard, however, insofar as they appear to have been native Irish market-places in the early sixteenth century and may have had some of the functions of towns. Both fall outside the scope of this report, however.

The resurgence of English interest in midland Ireland during the sixteenth century brought a wave of plantation to Laois. The town of Port Laoise (Maryborough) was established to accommodate the new settlers and despite many vicissitudes it survived to become the county town of Laois. The seventeenth century, despite its wars, was a century of economic improvement. Two towns, Ballinakill and Portarlinton, were incorporated while many market and industrial centres were formed. Ballinakill was established between 1606 and 1613 by Sir Thomas Ridgeway, later earl of Londonderry, a speculation on the prosperity of the nearby ironworks. Portarlinton was founded in 1666 by Sir Henry Bennet and was developed in order to accommodate Huguenot refugees fleeing from France. Other seventeenth century developments include Mountrath, founded by Sir Charles Coote, and Rathdowney which grew commercially in the nineteenth-century's Brewery.

New estate villages, many of which form the basis of today's urban network, were founded in the eighteenth century. Abbeyleix was developed by the de Vescis, Durrow by the Flowers, and Stradbally was laid out by the Cosbys. Mountmellick is also an eighteenth century development, an important example of an industrial town developed by the Quaker merchant community.

This report is concerned with the six sites which had urban functions prior to 1700 A.D. These are the Anglo-Norman boroughs of Castletown, Dunamase and Killabban, the sixteenth century plantation town of Port Laoise, and the seventeenth century towns of Ballinakill and Portarlinton (Fig. 1). The report provides an account of the archaeological remains at each of these sites and an assessment of the town or borough's importance to archaeological research. It outlines the areas within the towns where archaeological deposits are likely to survive and highlights the great potential of these sites to increase our knowledge of the development of urban life in Ireland. Finally, recommendations are made as to how this potential can be best realised. Each town is provided with a map outlining its zone of archaeological potential in which the following colour code is used:

Pink: the zone of archaeological potential.

Red: extant archaeological monuments.  
Purple: sites of Known monuments.

Castletown, Dunamase and Killabban are now deserted, Ballinakill has shrunk in importance, but Port Laoise and Portarlinton are expanding towns ripe for urban redevelopment in the near future. Uncontrolled redevelopment at any of these sites will destroy the fragile archaeological heritage of Laois' towns and it is the hope of this report that the recommended steps will be taken in order to ensure that urban development and archaeological research may go forward together hand in hand.

## BALLINAKILL

BallinaKill is situated in the extreme south centre of County Laois, three miles south-west of Abbeyleix. The placename has been explained as an anglicisation of Baile na Cille, "town of the church", but the absence of an early church in the immediate vicinity favours the alternative derivation from Baile na Coille, "town of the wood" (O.S. Letters, Laois ii, 267). The latter form is also supported by seventeenth century accounts which describe the area as wooded.

The earliest evidence for settlement in the area occurs during the Early Bronze Age. Cist burials are known from Haywood Demense, Knockardagur and Ironmills (Waddell 1970, 122), and stone circles from Cluainach and Knockbawn (O'Shea and Feehan n.d. 5). These sites indicate that the area was known to man in the second millenium b.c. but the succeeding 2500 years is a blank as regards human settlement. The earliest documentary references to BallinaKill occur in the late sixteenth century. In 1570 the lands of 'BalleneKyll' were granted to Alexander Cosby and his wife Dorcas Sydney (12 RDKPRI, 19: no. 1623), a grant which was renewed in 1593 (16 RDKPRI, 238: no. 5825).

The urban history of BallinaKill, however, begins in 1606 when Sir T. Coatch was granted the right to hold a market and fair there (Erck 1846-52, ii, 307). An English colony was established soon after by Sir Thomas Ridgeway (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14, 234) and in 1613 the town was incorporated by a charter of James I (Ir Rec Comm 1830, 236). The borough owed its development primarily to the proximity of the ironworks at Kilrush 1.3 Klm south-east of BallinaKill itself (Feehan 1983, 378). On his death in 1631 Ridgeway, then earl of Londonderry, was described as holding the manor of Gallenridgeway alias BalineKill, containing a large mansion or castle, one hundred messuages, a dovecot, two watermills, a fulling-mill, an iron-mill, courts leet and baron, three fairs and two markets in the town (Ir Rec Comm 1826, Com. regine: 16 Car I). In 1642 it was described as:

"seated among woods in a place soe watered with srpings as afforded the Earle convenience to make many fish ponds neare the Castle hee built there; which hee likewise fortified with a strong wall, and that with turrets and flankers; besides that the towne since it had been planted was well inhabited, the iron mill there kept many lustie men at work" (Feehan 1983, 377)

- The town suffered during the wars of the Confederation but in 1659 it was still the third most populous town within Laois, with a population of 204, one-quarter of which were English (Pender 1939). In the eighteenth century BallinaKill was one of the most important fair towns within county Laois and much

of its present layout belongs to that period. In 1801 it was also a major tanning centre with a brewery and several small woolen businesses (Feehan 1983, 378). The corporation and borough of Ballinakill were dissolved at the Act of Union in 1800.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE
2. DOMESTIC HOUSES AND BURGAGE PLOTS
3. CASTLE
4. ALL SAINTS' CHURCH
5. MISCELLANEOUS

### 1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE

The present settlement at Ballinakill is arranged around a rectangular square, on which three streets converge. Church Street lies to the north, Bride Street to the west and Stanhope Street to the south. The present configuration of streets, however, is largely the result of eighteenth century activity. The seventeenth century borough was laid out along the long axis formed by Graveyard Street and Stanhope Street, with Chapel Lane and Castle Lane running perpendicularly to the east. The Square, Church Street and Bride Street represent an eighteenth century addition.

### 2. DOMESTIC HOUSES AND BURGAGE PLOTS

There is a well defined burgage plot pattern on the east side of Stanhope Street and the Square but elsewhere it is not so apparent. There are some stone built houses and sheds on the street front of these plots but they do not have any dateable features. Part of their fabric may be of seventeenth century date but it is impossible to be certain.

### 3. CASTLE (Pl. 1)

Ballinakill Castle was built by Sir Thomas Ridgeway between 1606 and 1613 according to O'Hanlon and O'Leary (1907-14, 234). In 1642 it was described as "fortified with a strong wall, and that with turrets and flankers" (Feehan 1983, 377). It was captured by the Confederate forces under Preston in 1642 (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14, 519-20) but was recaptured after heavy bombardment by Cromwellian forces under General Fairfax (Lewis 1837, i, 109). According to O'Hanlon and O'Leary (1907-14, 234) the castle was then destroyed and the present ruins are those of a castle built by the Dunnes in 1680, but never inhabited.

#### Description (Pls. 1-3)

The north gable survives in a farmyard on the east side of Market Square. Only three floors can be distinguished but it is evident from a late nineteenth century photograph (Pl. 2) that there were five floors originally. The masonry consists of roughly coursed pink shaley stone with dressed limestone quoins. The ground and first floors are featureless except for two small gunloops with internal splay whose outer jambs are missing. There is a large window on the second floor with a rounded rear-arch, but the details are not clear because it is covered in ivy. There are short returns on the east and west sides. The west return, 1.5 m long, is curved internally and has a splayed gunloop. The base of a battered wall runs westwards for 4.30m from this point. H. 10-12 m. Ext. L. 5.3 m. Int. L. 3.65 m. A round arch survives on the immediate north-west, perhaps the gateway into the bawn (Pl. 3).

#### 4. ALL SAINTS' CHURCH (C. of I.)

The nineteenth century building appears to occupy the site of the seventeenth century church. There is no graveyard attached to the church and burials are carried out at Kilcronan and Dysart Gallen, outside the village.

#### 5. MISCELLANEOUS

Font. 15th/16th cents. (Pl. 4)

Partly buried under bushes in the south-west corner of St. Brigid's (R.C.) churchyard. Octagonal straight sided bowl, undecorated. Pink conglomerate. Three panels are damaged. The basin is circular but filled with debris and it could not be ascertained whether a central drainage hole was present or not.

Dims: H. 42 (min) Ext. diam. 62 Int. diam. 46

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

Ballinakill is a fine example of a seventeenth century market town. Its particularly archaeological importance lies in the fact that it is one of only four towns established in the midlands during the seventeenth century, the others being Banagher, Kilbeggan and Portarlinton. There is no evidence of any prior occupation on the site of Ballinakill, and accordingly it provides an opportunity of examining the layout of a seventeenth century town on virgin ground, unaffected by anything that went before. Our knowledge of the fabric of the seventeenth century town is non-existent. The form of its houses, for instance, whether they were timber-framed or stone-built is unknown. The foundations of the castle must lie beneath the ground and could tell us what

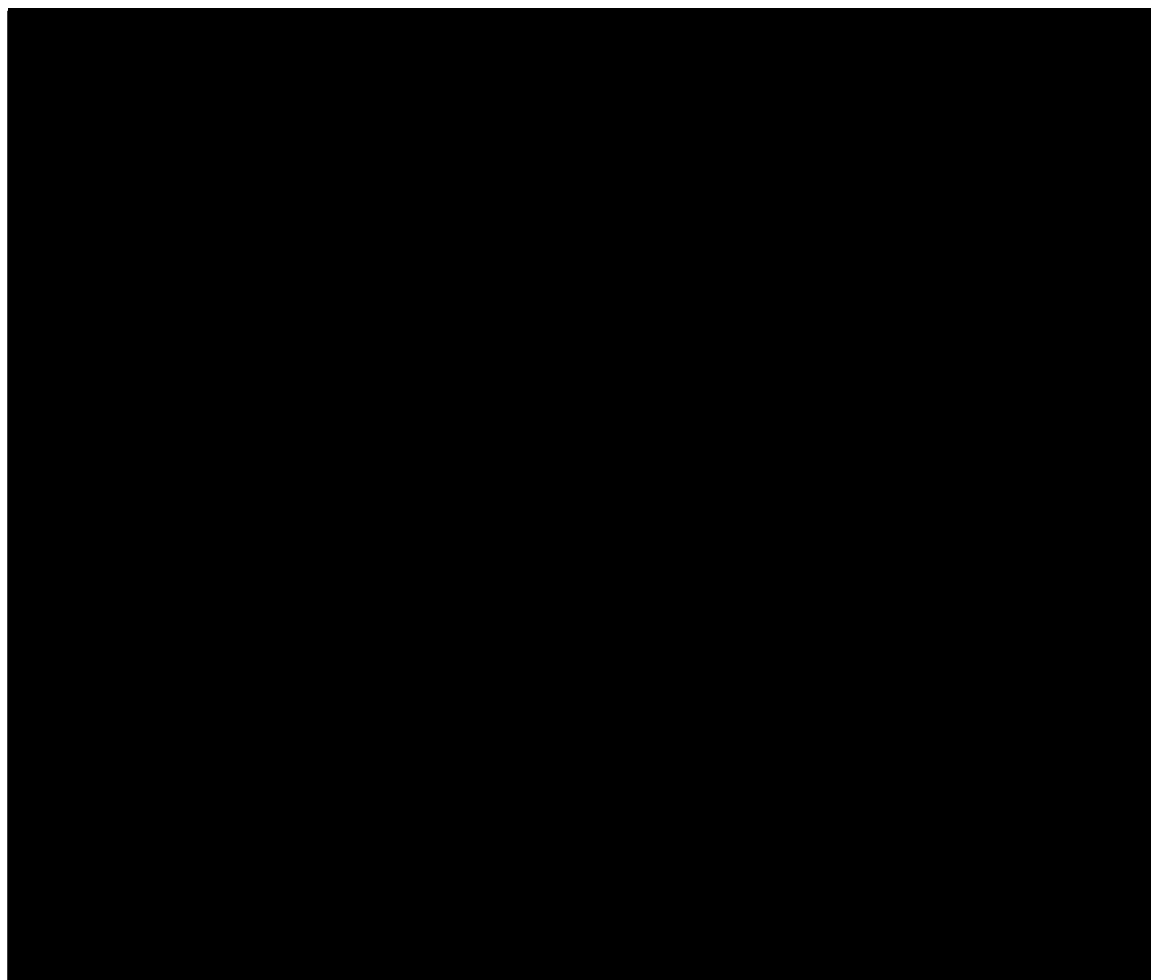


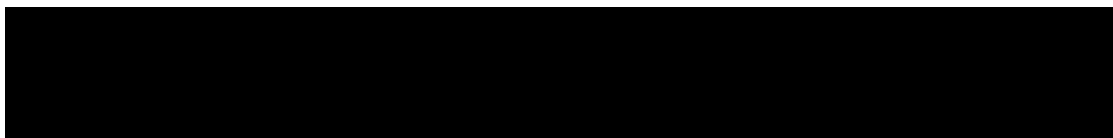
nature of castle it was. There is no mention of town defences in any of the seventeenth century sources but it is unlikely that Ballinakill risked the troubled decade of the 1640's without some form of earthen defence. The nature of these and their course also remains unknown.

#### Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 2) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Ballinakill. This is based on the extent of the seventeenth century town together with an extension to the seventeenth century parish church. In the absence of archaeological excavations nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits. Apart from cellars along the street frontage, however, there is little evidence of disturbance and it is likely that archaeological deposits are intact over much of the town.

[REDACTED]





## CASTLETOWN

The borough of Castletown is situated in the south-east corner of county Laois just off the main road between Portlaoise and Carlow, on relatively low-lying ground overlooking the Barrow valley to the east. It has been mistakenly identified on occasion with the modern village of Castletown in Upper Ossory but the documentary evidence makes it clear that the borough was in the medieval county of Kildare. The name derives from the motte which probably indicates the establishment of an Anglo-Norman colony here in the late twelfth century. The borough is first referred to in 1348 (PRO 1916, 148).

Orpen (1911-20, iii, 105) has suggested that Castletown was the manorial centre of Ui Buidhe (Oboy), the pre-Norman territory which was granted by Strongbow to Robert de Bigarz before 1176 (Brooks 1950, 85). Prior to 1245 the manor of Oboy had reverted to the lord of Leinster and in the partition of Leinster between William Marshall's five daughters, Castletown went to William de Cantilupe, husband of Eva the youngest daughter (Orpen 1911-20, iii, 105). In 1273 De Cantilupe's son, George, died and four years later the custody of the manor of Oboy was given to Milo of Down until George de Cantilupe's heirs came of age (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 1401). In 1283 John de Hastings, De Cantilupe's nephew, obtained seisin of the manor (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 2107) and retained it until at least 1300 when his tenants paid a subsidy of 4 marks towards Edward I's Scottish wars (Berry 1907, 235). Sometime between 1300 and 1318 De Hastings granted the manor of 'Castro Obewy' to William de Werrewyk because in 1318 De Werrewyk obtained royal permission to re-enfeoff De Hastings of the manor (Tresham 1828, 27 no. 40). In 1348, on the death of Laurence de Hastings, earl of Pembroke (grandson of John de Hastings), it was recorded that the burgesses of Castletown rendered 30s. yearly to the earl for their burgage and the returns from the hundred of the town are also mentioned (PRO 1916, 128). The same document records that the borough was given as dower to De Hastings' widow, Agnes, but nothing further is heard of Castletown until the late sixteenth century, which would suggest that Castletown declined or collapsed after the mid-fourteenth century. In 1570-1 the land of 'Ballycashlan Omoye' was granted to John Barnyse (12 RDKPRI, 31: no. 1697); in 1587 it was granted to John Baskerfield (16 RDKPRI, 64: no. 5147), and in 1590 it was leased to Edward Sutton (16 RDKPRI, 118: no. 5424).

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

### 1. SITE OF BOROUGH

2. MOTTE AND BAILEY CASTLE
3. CHURCH
4. MISCELLANEOUS

#### 1. SITE OF BOROUGH

The most likely position for the borough site is the area between the motte and the church. There are no earthworks or surface indications, however, and the possibility needs to be borne in mind that this was a dispersed borough.

#### 2. MOTTE AND BAILEY CASTLE

Giraldus Cambrensis records that Hugh de Lacy built a castle in 1182 for Robert de Bigarz at Oboy, close to Timahoe (Scott and Martin 1978, 195). There is no general agreement on the site of this castle. Orpen (1911-20, i, 384) and Scott and Martin (1978, 340 n.370) suggest that it was at either Tullomoy or Kilmoroney. There is no motte at Tullomoy but that at Kilmoroney is strategically sited above the Barrow, 2 km south of Athy. Although the situation of Kilmoroney motte is impressive, Castletown was the manorial centre of Oboy and it is more likely to have been the site of Bigarz's castle.

In 1298 William, bailliff of 'Castro Oboy' was acquitted of charges of robbing the prior of Athy (Mills 1905, 199). This reference almost certainly relates to Castletown. Evidence for this is afforded by comparison of two fourteenth century documents. In a licence of 1318 William de Werrewyk was allowed to return the manors of Killaban and 'Castro Oboy' to John de Hastings (Tresham 1828, 27), while in 1348, in the account of Laurence de Hastings's holdings, the manors are described as Killaban and 'Castleton'. The implication is that 'Castro Oboy' had become 'Castleton'. After 1348 both the manor and the motte slip out of history and nothing further is heard of them.

#### Description

Round conical mound 10-12 m high, overgrown with bushes and shrubs. It tapers from the base, ranging in diameter from 27 to 34 m, to a flat summit, 6.5 m across, which is enclosed by a low gapped bank. It is particularly steep-sided on the west, north and east sides but the south-east section is more gradual largely because of a series of stone steps set into the mound during the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries. A stone-built seat is also built into the mound about 2 m above the ground on this side. Disturbance has been caused on the south side by a cottage whose ruins are set against the base of the motte, and on the south west by a group of farm buildings, also cut into the lower part of the motte. There are slight traces of a ditch with an external bank on the

north side where the modern road skirts the motte.

South-east of the motte the ground is raised some 1-2 m above the level of the surrounding fields. This area is enclosed by fences and at present forms the garden of Castletown house. It may be the remains of a landscaped bailey.

### 3. CHURCH

There is no documentary evidence for an early church here. The present building is post 1700 and is set within a rectangular graveyard. There are no monuments or features of pre-1700 date.

### 4. MISCELLANEOUS

#### Possible burial ground

Mr Kent, Castletown House, informed us of a tradition that there was a burial ground in the field south of the church and that bones had been found there. A large patch of dark earth is visible in the eastern side of the field where it had just recently been ploughed at the time of visiting.

#### Oval enclosure

Shown on the O.S. 6" sheet south of Castletown House. It has now been ploughed out and nothing is visible.

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

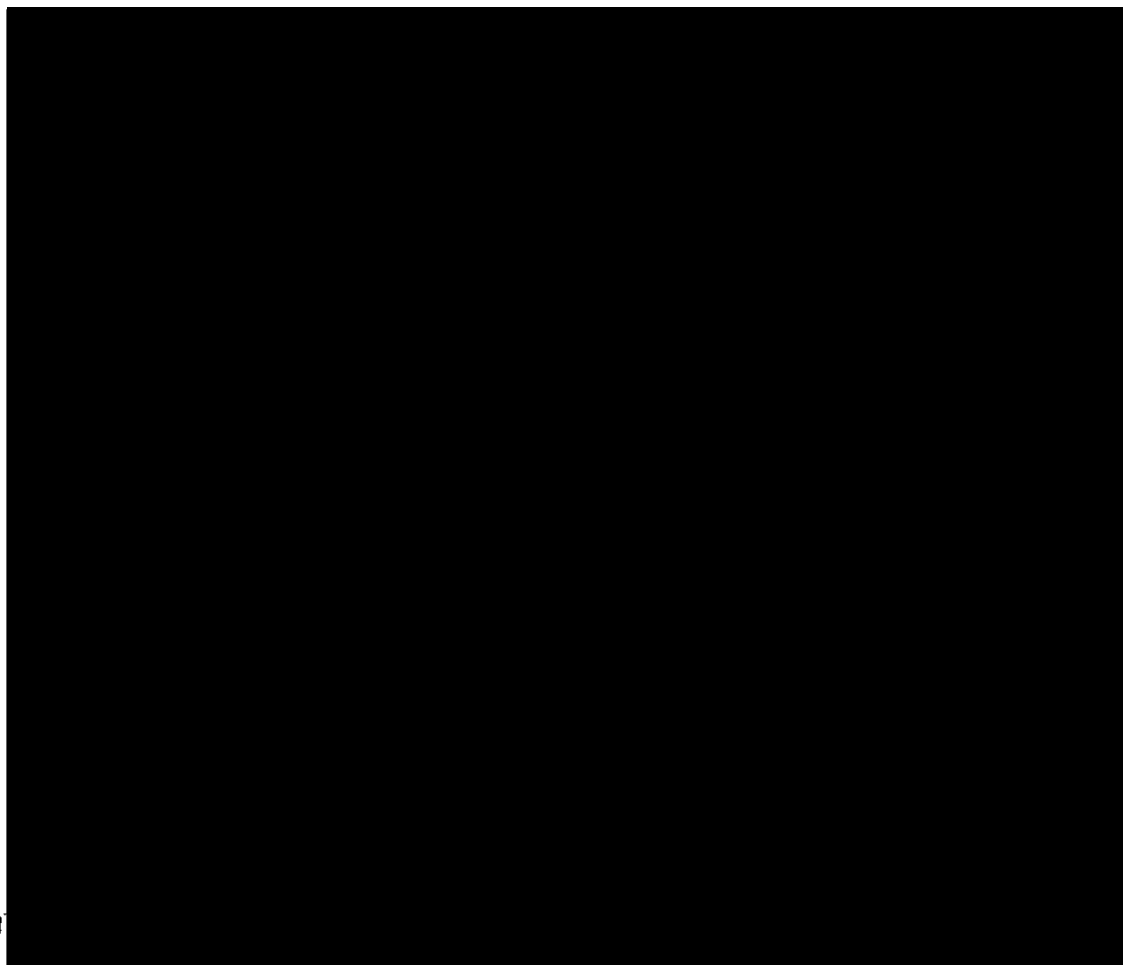
Castletown is a good example of a deserted borough. With the exception of Castletown House and the intrusive buildings at the base of the motte, disturbance has been confined to ploughing. It is likely that archaeological deposits are intact in the immediate vicinity of the motte. The documentary evidence suggests that Castletown was the site of one of the most important Anglo-Norman boroughs in Laois but its extent is not known, nor is the nature of its houses, streets, and defences, if any. It is unclear whether the motte had a bailey or not, and the true nature of the dark soil, south of the modern churchyard, remains to be determined. The historical evidence suggests a decline in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries but the nature of this decline and the pattern of the Irish take-over remain unknown. The surviving archaeological evidence indicates that the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries was a period of prosperity and it is likely to be well represented in archaeological deposits.

In summary, the archaeological data indicates the borough was important in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Documentary records of the site are few and in the future archaeological excavation is likely to be the principal means by which additional knowledge can be obtained. The borough is not under direct threat from commercial development at present.

#### Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 3) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Castletown. This is based on the extant monuments, the motte, church, and possible bailey site. In the absence of archaeological excavations nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits.

[REDACTED]



## DUNAMASE

The deserted borough of Dunamase is situated in rising ground about four miles east of Portlaoise, just north of the Portlaoise-Stradbally road, in central Laois. The placename is derived from Dun Masc, "fort of Masc", said to have been built by Cainen Masc (Hogan 1910, 386). The site is best known for the great Anglo-Norman castle which crowns the rock of Dunamase.

Evidence for human activity at Dunamase begins during the Early Bronze Age. About 1845 a cist-burial was discovered in the bank of a rath about 150 yards south of the rock of Dunamase. Wilde (1850, 231-2) mentions a single 'cinerary urn' found with the inhumed burial but the National Museum of Ireland preserves two Food Vessels in its collection, said to have come from this burial. In or before 1850 another cist burial was discovered at Grange townland, just south of Dunamase (Feehan 1983, 230). It consisted of a cist-like structure 6.4 m long and between 45 and 60 cm wide, containing charcoal, ashes and bone, as well as evidence for cremation. The prominent position of the rock of Dunamase suggests that it was probably a focus for settlement throughout prehistory but the earliest definite evidence occurs during the Early Historic period. In 843-4 Dun Masc was plundered by the Vikings, resulting in the death of Aedh, abbot of Terryglass and Clonenagh (AU; Chron. Scot. sub 845; AI sub 844; AFM). Shortly before 1758 a large hoard of Hiberno-Norse coins, deposited c.1095, was found at Dunamase (Dolley 1966, 72-4).

Dunamase was apparently granted to Strongbow by Diarmait Mac Murchada as part of the dower of his daughter Aoife. It became the most important Anglo-Norman manor in Laois and was retained as demesne land by Strongbow's heirs. For a time after Strongbow's death and prior to William Marshall's arrival in Ireland the manor was held by Meiler FitzHenry (Orpen 1911-20, i, 381). In the partition of Leinster in 1247, Dunamase went to Roger de Mortimer, husband of Maud, William Marshall's grand-daughter (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 933). In 1302 Edmund de Mortimer was given licence to grant the castle and manor of Dunamase to Theobald de Verdon on his marriage with Edmund's daughter, Matilda (Sweetman 1875-86, v, no. 67). The grant never took effect, however, because subsequent references indicate that Dunamase remained in De Mortimer hands (cf. Sweetman 1875-86, v, nos. 339, 411). Orpen (1911-20, iii, 104-5) states that Dunamase escheated to the crown on the execution of Roger Mortimer in 1330 but the account of the escheator of Ireland for 1323-5 indicates that Roger Mortimer's lands at Dunamase had already been forfeited to the king (42 RDKPRI, 57). Subsequently the lands were delivered to Thomas FitzGerald, earl of Kildare. From the mid fourteenth century, however, Dunamase was in Irish hands, and the borough probably declined rapidly.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. SITE OF BOROUGH
2. CASTLE
3. KILTEALE CHURCH
4. MISCELLANEOUS

### 1. SITE OF BOROUGH

It has long been suggested that the borough of Dunamase is to be identified with the Newtown of Leys, frequently mentioned in thirteenth and fourteenth century documents (Orpen 1911-20, iii, 104; Feehan 1983, 370; cf. Otway-Ruthven 1968, 252; Glasscock 1971, 296). The identification is not certain, however. Sweetman (1875-86, ii, index) suggested that it should be identified with the townland of Newtown immediately beside Stradbally, a suggestion which found some support from Otway-Ruthven (1959, 183). Roe (pers. comm.) has suggested that it should be identified with the townlands of Borris Great and Borris Little, immediately east of Port Laoise, while Lea Castle in northern Laois has been proposed by others (O'Leary 1909-11, 164). The identification with Dunamase rests upon comparison of the documents concerning the partition of 1247 with the extents of De Mortimer's lands in 1283. In the partition of 1247 Roger de Mortimer received the borough of Dunamase (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 933) but in the extent made on his death in 1283 there are no burgage returns for Dunamase. Instead, the extent notes that 'the burgesses of the New Town of Leys hold 127 free burgages in that vill' (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 2028). From both this extent and the grant of Maud de Mortimer to her son Edmund (Wood 1931-2, 335-6), it appears that Dunamase and the Newtown of Leys are closely associated, and it is to be expected, perhaps, that the largest borough in Anglo-Norman Laois should also be associated with the most important manor. The difficulty in identifying Dunamase with the Newtown of Leys rests in the mention of two watermills in the 1283 extent. There is no river, stream or flow of water in the immediate vicinity of the borough site, where the only water source consists of pools.

The earliest reference to the Newtown of Leys as a borough occurs in 1232 when it was listed as part of the dower offered by Earl Richard Marshall to the countess of Pembroke (Sweetman 1875-86, i, no. 1950). By 1282 the borough had 127 free burgages and two watermills (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, p. 468). A range of trades and professions including blacksmiths, millers, bakers, butchers, carpenters, masons, and wine merchants are documented in the late thirteenth century borough (Feehan 1983, 369). In the ecclesiastical taxation of 1302-6 the church of the Newtown of Leys was valued at 12 marks (Sweetman 1875-86, v, p. 250). In 1315 the Newtown of Leys was attacked by Bruce and its church bells



burnt according to the Book of Howth (Brewer and Bullen 1871, 134). An inquisition of 1323 recorded that the manor of Dunamase was waste and only a few burgages remained in the Newtown of Leys (Otway-Ruthven 1968, 252). No further references to the borough are known indicating that it declined soon after this date.

#### Description

The earthworks of the borough lie on raised ground west of the rock of Dunamase. The views are restricted except on the north where there is a view stretching towards Monasterevan and Kildare. The castle is concealed from the borough by a low forested hill on the south. The earthworks are aligned to a north-south hollow way. There are four large rectangular enclosures or 'tofts' on the south of the hollow-way, and at least two on the north. The oval enclosure known as Sally's Bower is a tree-ring. Three of these 'tofts' are shown on the O.S. 1st edition.

## 2. DUNAMASE CASTLE

The rock of Dunamase is a natural fortress having precipitous sides on the north, west and south, and only one gradual approach route, from the east. The limestone outcrop, or hum, affords commanding views across the plains of Laois towards the Devil's Bit (Co. Tipperary) on the south-west, the Slieve Bloom mountains on the west, the Hill of Allen on the north, and towards Kildare town on the north-east. The view is restricted on the east and south by the Dysert Hills, but the castle controls the gap through these hills from the Stradbally valley. This gap is important topographically because it connects the Barrow valley to the central lowlands of Laois.

#### Historical Background

The rock of Dunamase was the site of an important fortress before the coming of the Normans and, after their arrival, it became the most important Anglo-Norman fortification in Laois. The site was granted to Strongbow in 1170 by Diarmait Mac Murchada as part of his daughter Aoife's dowry. In 1189 the castle passed to William Marshall but in practice it was held by Meiler FitzHenry until 1208 despite Marshall's repeated attempts to gain possession (Orpen 1911-20, ii, 375, 382; ii, 217). It was taken into royal hands in 1210 by King John but returned to Marshall in 1215 (Orpen 1911-20, ii, 265; Sweetman 1875-86, i, nos. 644, 647, 664). The form of the late twelfth century castle is unknown. Orpen 1911-20, i 375) has suggested that it was a motte-and-bailey but this is an unlikely monument type on a rock outcrop.

The history of the construction and development of the castle is obscure. Leask (1951, 64; following O'Leary 1909-11) states that the castle was rebuilt c.1250 by William de Braose. There is no source for this statement, however, and it may be noted that de Braose was dead by 1247, when the Marshall lordship was partitioned. In this partition Dunamase went to Roger de Mortimer through his wife Maud de Braose and it remained in Mortimer hands until the mid-fourteenth century. An inquisition of De Mortimer's lands in 1323 found that the castle had been burned by the Irish (Otway-Ruthven 1968, 252), and in 1342, on the death of Laoighseach O Mordha it was recorded that he had destroyed the castrum nobile de Dunmaske and usurped De Mortimer's power (Butler 1849, 30). It has been suggested that the De Mortimers recovered and refortified Dunamase after O Mordha's death but there is no evidence to support this (O'Leary 1909-11, 165). Dunamase castle is specifically named in the 1538 submission of Piers Mac Maolsheachlainn O Mordha which he made as part of the policy of surrender and regrant. In 1609 the castle was granted to Donat O'Brien, earl of Thomond (Erck 1846-52, ii, 735). In 1641 it was captured from the insurgent O Mordha by Sir Charles Coote for the parliamentarians. In 1646 it was recaptured for the Confederates by Eoin Rua O'Neill but in 1650 it was destroyed by the Cromwellian generals Hewson and Reynolds. The site was visited in 1790 by the antiquarian Edward Ledwich who published a useful description together with a ground plan and view. Two further views, showing the castle in much the same state as it is today, were published by Grose (1791). In 1795 Sir John Parnell erected banqueting halls and other buildings on the site and planted it with trees but these fell into decay in the early nineteenth century (O'Leary 1909-11, 168).

#### Description (Fig. 5; Pls. 5-11)

The castle is co-extensive with the rock outcrop and it consists of a Keep with an inner ward, a middle ward, an outer ward, and an external bailey. Architecturally the earliest feature is the Keep which is unlikely to be later than 1220 and is possibly as early as 1180. The castle appears to have developed in a number of stages. The initial defences consisted of the Keep and the inner ward which fortified the summit of the rock. The middle ward was added to this and subsequently the outer ward, both of which were constructed in the thirteenth century. It is difficult to ascertain the date of the external bailey. It is conceivable that it is the remains of a twelfth century fortification controlling access to the rock but it is equally likely that it represents a further extension of defences in the thirteenth or fourteenth century. There is no evidence for late medieval work in any part of the castle and it is possible that once it was captured by Laoighseach O Mordha it was abandoned. The Keep was substantially modified about 1600 but it was the only part of the castle that was rehabilitated in the seventeenth century. The masonry throughout the castle

consists of coarsed limestone with limestone quoins and jambs. The destruction of the castle in the seventeenth century left large amounts of collapsed rubble in the interior making it difficult to distinguish the original masonry. Parts of the curtain wall are overgrown.

#### The Inner Ward

The D-shaped summit of the rock was isolated with a stretch of curtain wall which linked the Keep to the edge of the rock, forming an inner ward. The entrance to the ward appears to have been on the north side of the Keep. There the curtain wall is built directly onto the Keep's batter and it survives best for a stretch of about 4 m north of it. The wall is 90 cm wide on average and survives to a maximum height of 2.20 m. Beyond this only foundations survive. There is a gap of 2.1 m in the foundations which probably indicates the site of the gate. The rock is precipitous around the summit but its defensive character was increased by the addition of a curtain wall, only the gapped foundations of which now survive. On the south side of the Keep only the barest foundations of the curtain wall are present linking it to the sallyport of the middle ward. The northern tip of this stretch of wall is hidden beneath collapse, and accordingly it is impossible to gauge the exact extent of the former Keep.

#### The Keep (Pls. 9-11)

The building is a two-period structure commenced in the thirteenth century and added to substantially in the seventeenth. The seventeenth century masonry is distinguished by its use of red brick and small limestones.

#### The Thirteenth Century Keep

Three walls survive of a rectangular Keep measuring 19.8 m east-west and over 21.5 m north-south. The north-south measurement is uncertain because the west wall is incomplete. The presence of collapse, however, indicates that it continued southwards for at least another 3-4 m. The Keep was of two floors and had an external batter. Both the ground and first floors were divided internally by an east-west cross-wall whose thirteenth century foundation is apparent beneath the seventeenth century rebuilding. The present features of the ground floor are of seventeenth century date. At first floor level there is one large window embrasure with rounded rear-arch in the north and east walls. The north window was blocked externally in the seventeenth century while the east window is lacking its jambs. Traces of plaster are present on the internal splay of the north window. The west wall was featureless except for a row of rectangular slots immediately below the level of the wall-plate. These

may have functioned to hold roof supports. The entrance to the Keep was probably at first floor level, in common with that of other thirteenth century Keeps. Insofar as evidence can be deduced from the present building it is likely that the entrance was at the north-west angle. This angle was substantially rebuilt in the seventeenth century when a vaulted passage was built and the present entrance into the first floor was formed. An opening, roughly in the middle of the west wall, may have provided access to the ground floor chambers. At present it provides access to a small rectangular chamber on the west of the Keep. The opening is straight-sided to a height of 1.5 m where the stonework commences to curve inwardly slightly suggesting the former presence of an arch. A narrow blocking wall was inserted at a later stage. Immediately north of this opening is a fragment of a spiral stair at first floor level giving access to a passage in the thickness of the west wall; it may be a thirteenth century feature. The north splay of a window embrasure survives at the southern extremity of the west wall; the remainder of the wall has collapsed.

#### The Western Annex

This rectangular structure is an addition to the Keep. It was lit by two arrow embrasures in the west wall, one in the north wall and possibly one in the south wall. All are missing their jambs. The western wall is the best preserved. Here the embrasures have rounded rear-arches with traces of plank centering; the base of the southern window survives showing that it was a long narrow loop. It is difficult to date this structure with certainty. It is clearly an addition to the Keep and the use of plank centering in the rear-arch suggests that it is an addition of thirteenth or fourteenth century date.

#### The Seventeenth Century Keep

A series of major alterations were carried out on the Keep c.1600. These consisted of the insertion of brick arches and windows on the ground floor, and the addition of a brick vaulted area on the north-west.

The entrance to the Keep during the seventeenth century was on the north-west, through a door with a depressed arch, moulded externally. This led into a brick-vaulted passage but the vault has collapsed at this point. The passage gave access on the south to a brick-vaulted rectangular chamber, probably a guard room. On the north it gave access to the stair leading to the first floor.

On the east the entrance passage led into a large rectangular chamber, divided about midway by a north-south cross wall, whose foundations alone survive. This chamber was lit by two windows in the north wall. Both have a steep

internal splay with a depressed brick-vaulted rear-arch. The window jambs are missing but the base of a chamfered sill survives in the westernmost window. Externally the windows have a pointed arch with an outward splay, and are cut through the thirteenth century base batter. Immediately east of the easternmost recess is a round-arched recess; the remains of its counterpart are present in the south wall. The east wall is lit by a chamfered twin-light mullioned window with external hood-mould, but the mullion is missing. The window is set at the head of a narrow brick-vaulted passage with depressed rear-arch. On the north side of the passage is a small recess with a similar brick vault. The south wall is largely demolished but parts survive to a height of 2 m. The internal splay of a window is present and the large opening between the east and west ends of the south wall may indicate a former door. Traces of the springers of the brick-built vault are present on the east side of this opening. The western end of the south wall appears to be of relatively recent date.

Access to the first floor was had via a brick-vaulted stair passage on the north of the entrance door in the west wall. This passage is lit on the west by a tall rectangular chamfered window with two barholes in its lintel and sill. The rear-arch is brick-vaulted and rounded. A similar window in the north wall lit the stair at a slightly higher point. The stair was of timber and a stepped line in the plaster on the east wall of the passage indicates its actual line. At first floor level the top of the vault is lit at the north-west angle by an angle-loop whose sill alone remains externally. Internally the loop had a rounded rear-arch of brick.

The first floor was entered from this passage through a door in the north-west corner. The door has a depressed rear-arch of brick and only one jamb, of plain rectangular section, survives. The north wall is featureless except for the thirteenth century window embrasure which was now blocked externally and functioned instead as a recess. The thirteenth century east window was retained in the new structure and its internal north jamb was partly rebuilt with red brick. Only fragments of the south wall survive at this level and these are of thirteenth century style. The west wall was entirely rebuilt in the seventeenth century and contained a passage within the thickness of the wall, to which access was gained from the first floor of the Keep through a straight sided door in its west wall. The passage was brick-vaulted and lit by a window with a depressed rear-arch of brick in the external west wall. The window jambs are missing but it was probably rectangular.

#### The Western Turret

Ledwich's (1790, fig. opp. p. 200) plan indicates that the inner ward was protected by three mural towers, but only the

foundations of one survive, on the west. This is a small rectangular turret 2.4 by 2.3 m, projecting westwards from the curtain wall. It overhangs the base of the rock and commands any scaling of the rock from this side.

#### Other Features within the Inner Ward

There is a large oval depression in the rock outcrop, north-west of the Keep, which is revetted on the south-east and east by a wall of ancient masonry, probably of thirteenth century date. The base is now filled with debris. Its function is unclear. It is unlikely to be a well because the rock is too high to have had a supply of natural water other than rain. Immediately to the south is a second similar but smaller depression.

#### The Middle Ward

This enclosed a somewhat sub-rectangular area on the sloping rock below the summit. It was entered on the east through a twin-bastioned gatehouse and its major features consist of a sallyport, the south-east angle tower, a rectangular building immediately north of the gatehouse, and the curtain wall which is strongest on the east side.

#### The Gatehouse (Pl. 7)

This consists of an entrance passage flanked by two towers. The shape of the towers is uncertain because their front wall has been demolished. They could have been either D-shaped or rectangular. The towers have two floors and probably had a parapet level above.

The passage is 2.3 m wide on the exterior and it leads along a straight-sided passageway to a broken groove, which appears to mark the line of the portcullis. West of this groove the passage widens to 2.6 m. The front of the passage was roofed with the timber beams of the first floor but immediately west of the portcullis-groove traces of the gate arch's springers survive in the north tower.

The ground floor of the south tower is entered from a small round-vaulted chamber fronting onto the entrance passage. A lintelled passage, 53 cm wide, leads from here to the ground floor chamber which is entered down a short flight of steps. The room appears to have been rectangular originally but only three sides of it now survive. It has a pointed vault with traces of plank centering. A straight loop with slight internal splay is present in the north and south walls. The northern example defends the passage but that on the south has been blocked by fallen masonry. The north tower was entered similarly to that on the south but it has largely

collapsed. A barrel-vaulted passage, 60 cm wide, leads from its site into the rectangular ground floor chamber roofed with a pointed vault. One loop with internal splay, similar to those in the south tower, is present in the north and south walls.

Immediately inside the gate there was a large rectangular chamber on the north and south side of the passage. Each chamber had a single round-vaulted arrow embrasure in the east wall. That on the north has been broken open but the southern example still retains its plunging loop and has traces of plank centering in its vault. The east wall is high enough in both chambers to have permitted a first floor but the only evidence for a first floor is the plain rectangular door-jamb in the south tower with a worn bar-hole on the interior. This door permitted access to a large domestic room, linking both towers above the passage, which probably functioned as the portcullis chamber. There is a segmental arched fireplace in the north wall and the west splay of a window embrasure is present in the south wall. It is likely that there was a parapeted wall-walk above this level although no trace survives.

#### Curtain Wall south of the Gatehouse (Pl. 8)

A stretch of wall 22.3 m long and averaging 2 m in thickness links the gatehouse to the south-east angle tower. The wall has a slight external batter and rises directly from the bedrock. The remains of a crenellated parapet survive near the angle tower. There is one complete arrow embrasure and the remains of two others at internal ground level. The embrasures are round arched with traces of plank centering surviving but their loops have been broken. On the north side of the angle tower there are indications of the presence of a small side chamber which was lit by a small straight loop in its east wall.

#### South-East Angle Tower (Pl. 8)

Rectangular, open-backed tower of two floors, projecting from the curtain wall. The ground floor has a round vault with traces of plank centering. There is a broken loop in the east wall whose internal splay survives on the south side; it appears to have been lintelled. There is a round arched embrasure on the north side with clear traces of its plank centering surviving. The base of a plunging loop 12 cm wide is present. The first floor was at parapet level and was reached from the wall-walk. The base of a narrow straight loop is present in the north and south walls at this level.

#### Curtian Wall between South-East Angle Tower and Sallyport

The base of the wall survives to a maximum internal

height of 1.5 m and it is 1.6 m thick on average. Externally the wall is higher but its base has been undermined and removed.

#### Sallyport

J-shaped area flanked by a narrow wall 70 cm thick. The ground slopes down to a gate 1.58 m wide. Immediately inside the gate are four steps which appear to be deliberately cut into the rock. North-west of the sallyport is a rectangular area with two round arched arrow embrasures at ground level. These had narrow loops with an internal splay but both are now filled with debris. There are rectangular recesses in the wall immediately above the embrasures which would have held beams to support a timber wall-walk. Four merlons of the parapet survive. The rock outcrop on the north side is revetted by masonry and it probably supported the curtain wall of the inner ward originally.

#### Curtain Wall North of the Gatehouse

The northern section of the east curtain is the best preserved. There is one complete and one broken round vaulted embrasure both of which lack their loops. Fragments of the wall-walk survive in this section also. Rectangular recesses are visible at wall-walk level externally and these would have held the supports for a wooden machicolation. Elsewhere only low gapped wall foundations are discernable.

#### Rectangular Structure

The foundations of a long rectangular structure whose east wall was formed by the curtain wall are discernible immediately north of the gatehouse. Its position is also shown by Ledwich (1790, fig. opp. p. 200).

#### The Outer Ward

This is a triangular area beneath the middle ward. Its features consist of a gatehouse, curtain wall, and an external rock-cut ditch.

#### The Gatehouse

This is approached from the south-east along a causeway bridging the rock-cut ditch defending the exterior. The causeway is evidently not an original feature, however, because there is a recess to accommodate the drawbridge in the external face of the gate. The gatehouse is D-shaped in plan



and had two floors. The front is curved but internally it is rectangular in plan. The entrance has a round segmental arch with a centrally placed murder-hole. Barholes indicate that a wooden gate was positioned immediately inside this arch which led into a short passage 2.6 m wide. There is a round arched embrasure with traces of plank centering in the south wall, but it is damaged. The first floor was reached from the wall walk of the curtain wall; the base of a plunging loop is present on the east, south-east and west sides at this level.

### Curtain Wall

The curtain wall north of the gatehouse survives in two stretches. The first of these is a line of wall, 11 m long and 1.75 m wide, running north-west from the gatehouse. It has three round-vaulted arrow embrasures with cross-loops. The wall-walk is visible on top but the merlons are obscured by ivy and cannot be seen. The second section abuts the curtain wall of the middle ward and survives on the steep-sided slope of the rock. The wall is 80 cm thick at this point.

A continuous stretch of wall survives on the west side of the gatehouse linking it with the precipitous rock beneath the south-east angle tower of the middle ward. The wall is much overgrown but four round arched arrow embrasures are present. Two of these, with straight loops, are intact and two have had the loops removed.

### The Ditch

The outer ward is protected on the south by a broad flat-bottomed ditch 43 m long, 9.1 m wide on average, and 2 m deep. It stops on the south-western end at a point where the natural fall of the slope becomes sheer. On the north-east side of the gatehouse the ditch continues for a length of only 4 m and it is 7 m in width. Beyond this point the ditch is not needed because of the naturally steep slope of the ground. South of the ditch, immediately below the south-east angle tower, is a masonry wall built on the natural rock and running in a south-easterly direction for a distance of 5 m.

### The Bailey

— This is a triangular area having maximum dimensions of 80 by 60 by 50 m, which slopes downward from west to east. It is delimited by an external bank and ditch on the south and part of the east sides.

The entrance consists of an undug causeway, 3.5 m wide, on the east side. On the west side the bailey is separated from the ditch of the outer ward by a low denuded bank. The

southern side of the bailey is overgrown and difficult to examine. There is no clear evidence for an internal bank. The inner ditch is flat-bottomed and U-shaped, 7 m wide on average, with the bailey interior some 10 m above the base of the ditch in places. The outer bank has a basal width of 8 m rising to a summit 2 m across. There is no trace of an outer ditch.

There is no evidence for a bank or ditch on the north side of the bailey but its defences take account of the naturally steep slope. The edge of the bailey's defences form a ridge on the north-west but as they curve southwards a bank and ditch appear. The ditch is flat-bottomed, 20 m long, 5 m wide and 3 m deep. A sketch plan by Leask shows a second outer ditch east of this which appears to follow the line of the modern road. It is possible that the road is set within a former ditch but it is impossible to be certain.

### 3. KILTEALE CHURCH

If Dunamase is to be identified with the Newtown of Leys then its church was at Kiltale. The earliest direct reference to the church of the Newtown of Leys is in the taxation of 1302-6 (Sweetman 1875-86, v, p. 468) when it was taxed at 12 marks. The existence of the church, however, is implied by the reference in 1297 to John, vicar of the Newtown of Leys (Mills 1905, 192).

#### Description

Only the east wall and partial returns of the north and south walls remain of this badly damaged church. It is difficult to date and there are no pre-1700 monuments.

### 4. MISCELLANEOUS

#### Monuments in the Vicinity

##### Aghnahilly. Ringfort.

Single bank and ditch. Appears to have been destroyed when the road here was widened.

##### Aghnahilly. Cist burial.

A cist burial with two Food Vessels was found about 1845, 150 yards south of the rock of Dunamase (Wilde 1850, 231-2; Waddell 1970, 122). It was stated at the time that it was found in a "Danish rath". The Food Vessels are now in the National Museum of Ireland: WK. 84 (P.1) and WK. 85 (P.2).

##### Ballycarroll. Ringfort "Cromwell's Lines".

Triple banked and ditched ringfort situated on Slievebaun

hill immediately south-east of the rock. Now ploughed out. The outline of its ditches is visible, however, in the colouring of the grass.

Ballycarroll. Ringfort.

Single bank and ditch. Situated on Slievebaun Hill, east of Cromwell's Lines. The roughly circular interior measures 39 by 36.2 m. The enclosing bank is 1 m high and 3.4 m wide with an entrance on the south. The external ditch is 2.7 m wide.

Dunamase. "Sally's Bower".

This is a tree-ring.

Grange. Prehistoric Burial.

A stone cist, 6.4 m long and 45-60 cm wide, containing bones together with oak charcoal and ashes, was found here in 1850 (Feehan 1983, 230).

#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

Dunamase is a good example of a deserted borough. The earthworks of the borough are well preserved and show little sign of disturbance. No change has occurred since 1841 and the latest evidence for disturbance is the tree-ring probably constructed c.1795. It is likely that archaeological deposits are intact over a large area of the borough site. The fabric of the castle is deteriorating, however, and there has been sizeable collapse from the curtain wall on the south and south-west sides. The historical references indicate that the castle was a place of importance from the Early Historic Period until the seventeenth century but the borough was a settlement of shorter duration, having been established in the thirteenth and abandoned in the fourteenth century.

The borough site is the most important urban earthwork of Anglo-Norman date in Laois and it is imperative for the future of urban studies in the county that it is properly safeguarded. The present owners use the site only for grazing and are aware of the significance of the site. Although there is no threat to the site within the short term, steps to protect the site should not be delayed. If the land were to change hands the earthworks could be obliterated by a new owner ignorant of their importance, as has happened at Kiltinan in Co. Tipperary.

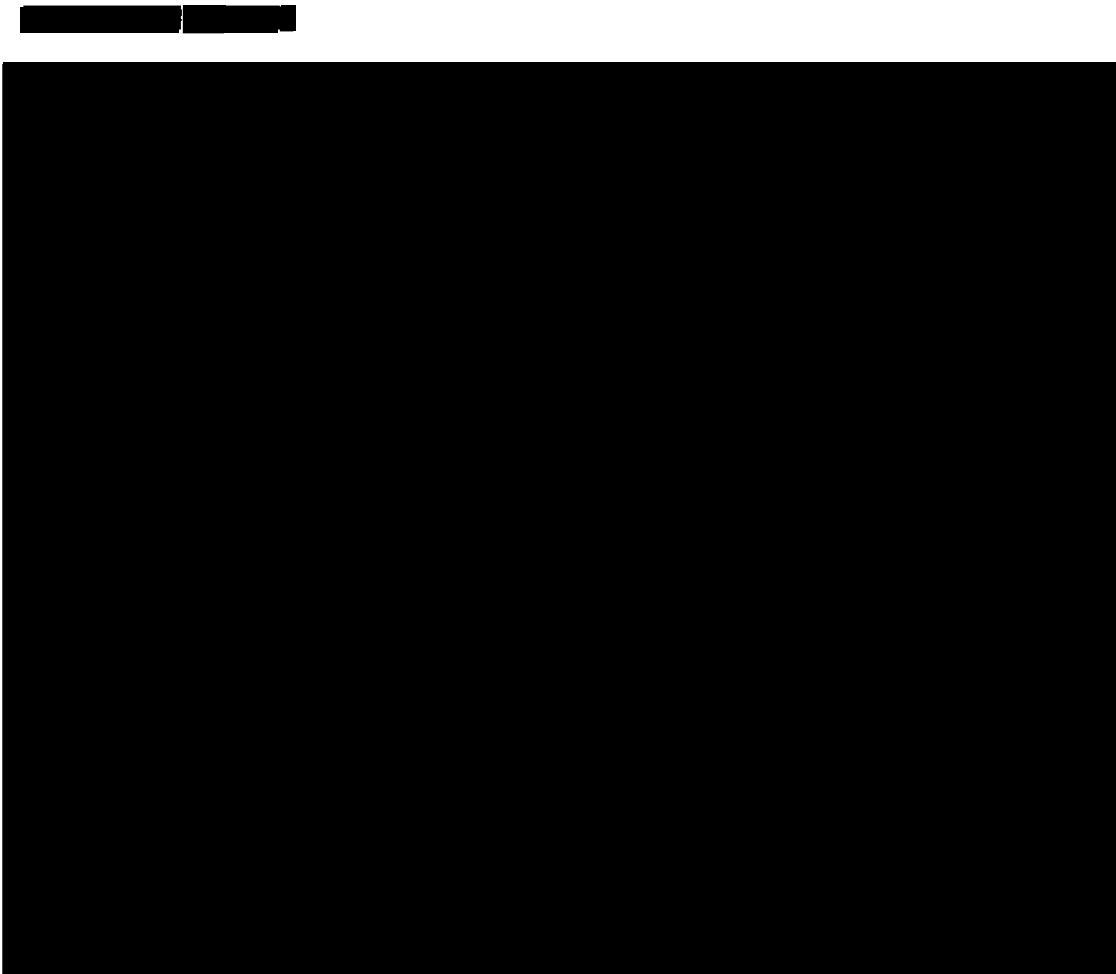
The impressive defences of the castle suggest that the borough of Dunamase was an important Anglo-Norman settlement but its extent is not known, nor is the nature of its houses, streets, and defences, if any. The castle itself is also important to archaeological research particularly because of the problems which it poses to students of thirteenth century castles. It has no statutory protection, however. The density of ringforts in the immediate vicinity of the rock is

important. It suggests that it was an important focal point in Early Historic times. Two of the three ringforts have now been ploughed out and it is important that the surviving example should be maintained if the question of the relationship between the forts and the rock is ever to be solved.

In summary, Dunamase has been the scene of human activity in Early Historic, Medieval and post-medieval times. Documentary records of the site are few and in the future archaeological excavation is likely to be the principal means by which additional knowledge can be obtained. Accordingly it is important that the archaeological remains be protected.

### Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 4) delimits the area of archaeological potential within Dunamase. This is based on the area occupied by existing monuments and sites within the immediate environs of Dunamase. In the absence of archaeological excavations nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits.



[REDACTED]

## KILLABBAN

Killabban is a deserted borough situated on the edge of the Barrow valley in the south-east corner of county Laois, about six miles north of Carlow town. The name Cill Abbain, i.e. Abban's church, is derived from a monastic foundation established by St. Abban about the middle of the seventh century (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 391).

Killabban was an important manor in the Anglo-Norman period although no details of its history survive prior to 1318. In that year William de Warrewyk received royal permission to re-enfeoff John de Hastings of the manor which De Hastings had formerly granted to him (Tresham 1828, 27: no. 40). On the death of Laurence de Hastings, earl of Pembroke, in 1348 it was recorded that the burgesses of Killabban rendered 60s. yearly for their burgage (P.R.O. 1916, 128). In 1358 the king ordered the sheriff of Carlow to see that Maurice, earl of Kildare, was paid 60s. owed to him for defending Killabban during recent wars against the O Mordha of Slemargy (Tresham 1828, 69: no. 64). This is the latest direct reference to the borough as a functioning unit and its decline would appear to have set in during the later fourteenth century.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. SITE OF BOROUGH
2. MOTTE
3. ST. ABBAN'S CHURCH AND EARLY MONASTIC SITE

### 1. SITE OF BOROUGH

The most likely site for the borough is in the field connecting the church with the motte. No earthworks survive, however, and it is possible that the site was a dispersed borough.

### 2. MOTTE

No details of the history of the manor are known prior to 1318 when William de Warrewyk returned the manor of Killeban to John de Hastings (Tresham 1828, 27: no. 40). It is probable, however, that Killabban formed part of Robert de Bigar's grant of Oboy and that, like Castletown, it had passed to John de Hastings in 1283 from the De Cantilupes who had

inherited it from the Marshalls in 1247.

#### Description

Round conical mound 6 m high. It tapers from a rounded base, measuring 18 by 16 m, to a flat summit 5 m across. The mound was badly damaged by cattle at the time of visiting but since then it has been completely removed as a result of farm clearance. Slight traces of an encircling ditch were noticeable.

### 3. ST. ABBAN'S CHURCH AND EARLY MONASTIC SITE

Nothing is known of the early monastic foundation but it is probable that it was still functioning during the late twelfth century when it provided the focus for Anglo-Norman settlement. The earliest direct reference to the medieval church of Killabban occurs in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1302-6 (Sweetman 1875-86, v, p. 249) but a reference to John, clerk of Killabban indicates its existence at that time. In 1335 Philip, vicar of Killabban, was a collector of the grant to the king for the Scottish wars (45 RDKPRI, 51). In 1402 Adam Taillon, cleric, was presented to the church of Killabban (Tresham 1828, 165: no. 211) and in 1412 Richard Leaclor was presented (Tresham 1828, 256: no. 14). It is likely that the church continued to function throughout the Later Middle Ages because in 1537-40 David Omor was presented to the church as perpetual vicar (Morrin 1861, 53) while in 1560 John Owenton was presented (Morrin 1861, 441).

#### Description (Fig. 7; Pls. 12-14)

There are no surface indications of the location of the early monastic site but the monastic boundary is apparent from aerial photographs (Pl. 12). A broad arc is outlined by a cropmark in the field immediately north of the graveyard which appears to be a continuation of the western boundary of the churchyard. This would permit the reconstruction of an oval enclosure about 135 m across. Alternately, it may have been a larger enclosure linked into the arced depression with slight traces of an internal bank, 35 m south of the graveyard.

The present remains (Pl. 13) are those of a nave and chancel structure built of coursed limestone rubble. Two phases are apparent from the jambs of the east window. The earlier jambs are of granite and are of thirteenth century date; the later jambs are of limestone and date to the fifteenth century. The chancel is an addition to the nave but both appear to date to the thirteenth century. The walls of the nave are now ivy clad and details may be obscured. There are about a dozen pieces of cut stone in the graveyard which are derived from door and window jambs. These provide added

support for alterations to the fabric of the church in the fifteenth century and indicate that there was further work carried out in the sixteenth.

The chancel has an external batter on the east side and the east gable survives to a height of between 7 and 8 m. The original east window had granite jambs chamfered externally and was probably of two lights. Subsequently it was narrowed when a single light with wave moulded and chamfered limestone jambs was inserted. The head of the window does not survive but glazing bar holes are present. Internally the wall narrows in thickness above the line of the window-head and there is a blocked-up round opening, probably a former window, which gave light into the roof space. The north wall survives to a maximum height of 4 m at its east end but elsewhere it averages 1.5 m. The south wall is between 4 and 5 m high and it has the remains of two windows, both of which lack their jambs. The easternmost example is blocked up and only the eastern splay of the other is present. The chancel measures 10.45m by 8.32 m internally and its ground level is raised about 1 m above that of the nave. The chancel arch is a segmental flattened round arch 4 m high which springs from an abacus consisting of a thin slab of slate. The arch is plain and lacks capitals and mouldings.

The nave measures 15.3 by 9 m and its walls are 6 m high on average. The original entrance was through a door in the south wall but subsequently a door was inserted in the west wall. The north wall has a possible window towards its east end and a centrally placed broken pointed recess. The west door has a segmentally pointed arch externally with a flat rear-arch. It is now blocked by a memorial. The south wall is in poor condition but it would appear to have had two windows. It is 5 m high at the east and west ends but the remainder only stands to 2 m. The entrance door was located near the west end but only one partial splay survives.

#### Architectural fragments

Fifteen pieces of cut stone are scattered around the graveyard. Some are used as gravemarkers.

Door jamb with figural representation. 15th cent. (Pl. 14)  
Limestone. Partly buried under a nineteenth century table tomb. Decorated in relief on one face with a small male figure wearing an over-tunic to the knees, belted at the waist by a wide belt, and bordered at the V-neck and probably at the end of the sleeves by fur. The sleeves may have been fairly full but are now damaged as are the out-turned feet. The hat has a rolled brim. The face has very full cheeks and the hands clasp the belt. It is most likely derived from the inner order of the south door (see King in press).  
Dims: H. 33 W. 21 T. 21 cm

#### Hood moulding



Rectangular. Sandstone. Forming part of the surround for the Cody grave plot, south of the church. Partly buried in the ground but one right angle is present while the long side is decorated with a small female head with long hair falling onto the shoulders and a six-petalled rosette.

Dims: W. 11 L. 44 cm.

Decorated pilaster or finial.

Pink sandstone. Also used as part of the Cody grave surround. Rectangular. Decorated on one side and on part of the two narrow sides with a formalised foliage design placed above an ogee arch in false relief. The remainder of the stone is uncut and it was intended for use in a wall as the pilaster of a table tomb or the finial of a hood moulding.

Dims: H. 58 W. 24 D. 18

Other pieces.

Twelve pieces of cut stone derived from window or door mouldings are present in the graveyard.

#### Monuments

Sarcophagus. 13th/14th cent.

Five large pieces of stone lying in the chancel are derived from a broken sarcophagus. They display a tooled outer surface. One has half of the recess for the head. Another is split along the drainage hole. Unfortunately the pieces are too fragmentary to gain an adequate idea of the form of the interior (see Bradley in press).

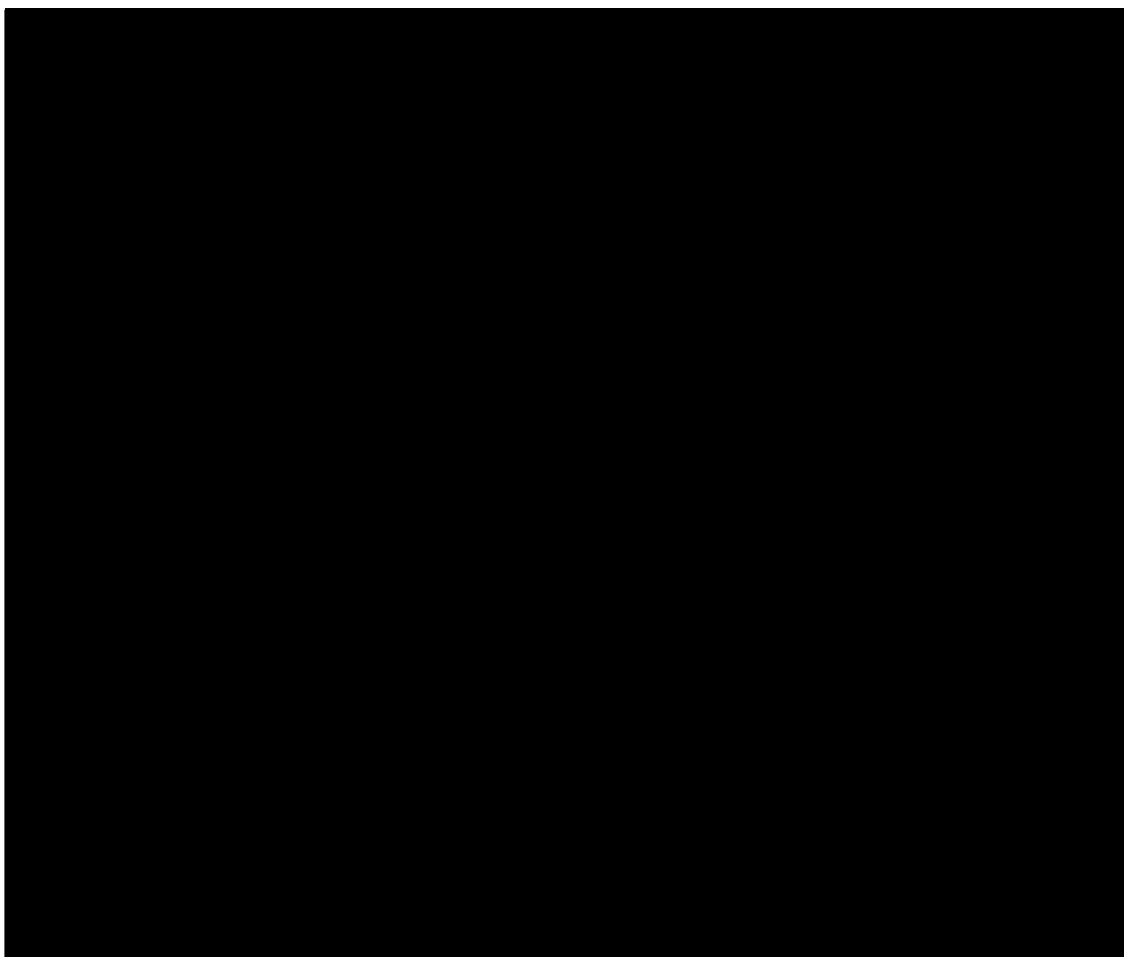
#### ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

Killabban is a deserted medieval borough whose probable site lies between the church and the motte, a field which is now used for grazing. The historical references indicate that Killabban was a pre-Norman monastic site and it was a focus for settlement in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The nature of the transition from monastery to Anglo-Norman manor is unknown but evidence may survive in the archaeological deposits. The date of desertion is similarly unknown and if it was deserted it is difficult to explain how Killabban could have afforded such fine alterations to the church in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Documentary records of the site are few and in the future archaeological excavation is likely to be the principal means by which additional knowledge can be obtained. The borough is not under direct threat from commercial development but it may be threatened from other quarters. The motte, for instance, was removed by the landowner as part of land clearance in March 1986.

#### Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 6) delimits the area of archaeological potential within Killabban. This is based on the area occupied by the extant monuments, and the assumption that the site of the borough lies between the church and the motte; an area north of the church is included in order to allow for possible features outside the terminus of the early monastery. In the absence of archaeological excavations nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits.

████████████████████



## PORTARLINGTON

Portarlinton is situated beside the river Barrow on relatively low lying flat ground in the extreme north-east corner of Laois. It lies on the Tullamore-Kildare road about ten miles north-east of Port Laoise. The town is named after its founder Sir Henry Bennet, lord Arlington. Borrowes (1855, 62) suggests that the first part of the name is derived from 'Port na h-Innse', the Irish name for Lea Castle which was applied in time to the surrounding district.

The origins of the town date to 1666 when Charles II granted large areas of O'Dempsey land in the area of the modern town to Sir Henry Bennet forming the manor of Portarlinton and created the borough with a corporation, weekly market and two yearly fairs (Cal. State Papers Ireland 1666-9, 220-2). Bennet had the town laid out by George Rawdon in 1667 and presumably planted settlers there soon afterwards (Cal. State Papers Ireland 1666-9, 318). The town was built within a bend of the river Barrow on a site previously known as 'Beladrite', i.e. Beal Atha an Droichead, the mouth of the bridge ford, and Cuil an tSuidaire, the woody rook (Borrowes 1855, 62). The town grew quickly and its basic layout was established by 1678 when it is shown in a map, now in the National Library of Ireland (Feehan 1983, Fig. 12:16).

About 1686 Portarlinton was sold by Bennet to Sir Patrick Trant who forfeited it by attainter at the end of the Jacobite wars. Thereupon the town was granted to Henry de Massue, Marquis de Rouvigny who was created Baron Portarlinton about 1691 (Borrowes 1855, 63-4; Lewis 1837 ii, 425). Rouvigny transformed the character of Portarlinton by establishing shortly thereafter a colony of French Huguenot settlers, mainly drawn from the officers and soldiers of William III's army (Borrowes 1855, 65-6; Feehan 1983, 392). Around 1696 he established two churches, St. Michael's and St. Paul's, for the English and French settlers respectively, and also two schools (Borrowes 1858, 328). Rouvigny later sold his interest in the town and it passed via the London Hollow Sword-blade Company to the Dawson family who were closely connected with the town until the nineteenth century.

The original layout of the town is shown in a manuscript map drawn-up in 1678 (Feehan 1983, Fig. 12.16). It lay in a bend of the Barrow which acted as a natural moat on the north, east and west sides. A canal was dug on the south completing the encirclement of the town. The roughly rectangular area thus enclosed was fortified with earthworks having a bastion at each corner. In the centre of the town was a large square with a market house from which four principal streets radiated in a cruciform pattern: Bennet Street (Spa Street) to the north, James' Street (Church Lane) to the east, Queene Street (now part of Main Street) to the south, and King Street (French Church Street) to the west.

The town expanded beyond these boundaries in the eighteenth century, across the Barrow into Offaly, and southwards along the present Main Street.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. STREET PLAN AND MARKET PLACE
2. DOMESTIC HOUSES
3. BRIDGE
4. TOWN DEFENCES
5. ST. MICHAEL'S or THE ENGLISH CHURCH
6. ST. PAUL'S or THE FRENCH CHURCH
7. MISCELLANEOUS

### 1. STREET PLAN AND MARKET PLACE

The cruciform axis of the seventeenth century town still survives in Spa Street, Church Lane, French Church Street and the northern portion of Main Street. The market place was a square at the intersection of these streets in which there was a centrally placed Market House. The present building of c.1800 is used as a garage. The north-east quadrant is now an open field used for grazing. A printed memorandum of c.1666 refers to the intention of building houses south of the town. This is probably to be identified with Foxcroft Street and the section of Main Street between its junction with Foxcroft Street and the line of the defences.

### 2. DOMESTIC HOUSES

A printed memorandum of c.1666, clearly used as an advertisement to attract settlers to the town, describes the layout in great detail and notes that:

'every house to be built within the fortification is to be built at least fifty feet in front, the walls to be made of good lime and stone or mortar and stone, rough cast, and every house to be one story and a half high at least, and every storey to be nine foot deep from floor to floor, the houses to be roofed with shingles, tiles or slates, and to have dormant windows to the streets' (Cal. State Papers Ireland 1666-9, 259-61)

'It was also intended for houses to be built 'without the fortification on the East side, which shall front towards the new channel', 'on either sides of the way leading from New Channel Bridge to Katherine's tower', and 'on either side of the road leading from the great bridge to Charlestown'. These houses were to be:

'at least forty feet in front, the walls to be of stone and lime or mortar and stone, and to be ten feet high from the ground to the eaves at least; and the house to have a good stone chimney' (Cal. State Papers Ireland 1666-9, 259-61)

None of the surviving houses of the town are diagnostically seventeenth century and Portarlington's typical Huguenot houses belong to the early eighteenth century.

### 3. BRIDGE

A wooden bridge over the Barrow is shown on the 1678 map. The river has changed its course somewhat and the foundations of the seventeenth century bridge probably lie immediately east of the present Barrow Bridge.

### 4. TOWN DEFENCES

The 1678 plan shows that the town was protected by bastioned defences enclosing an area of approximately 8 hectares (20 acres) and having a circumference of 1100 m. No positively identifiable remains survive. There are some irregular features on the north-west side, however, which may have formed part of the defences.

The bridge in the east wall was protected on the south by a redoubt. On the north side of French Church Street two stone walls 3 m high are set at an acute angle to one another. The western wall is broken by equidistant gaps, now filled with cement, about 2 m above ground level. The area within these walls is some two metres higher than the ground beside the river. The feature may be a remnant of the defences but it is impossible to be certain. The course of the defences north of the bridge is obscured by mounds of earth removed from the Barrow during drainage and it is possible that some remains may be incorporated in the spoil. There was a bastion at the north-west angle where the wall turned eastwards and continued without interruption to the north-east angle bastion. Here the wall turned south-east to a bastion located east of Church Lane, and from there it continued southwards to the south-east angle bastion. The south wall was given added defence by the construction of a channel whose line is still indicated by a long property boundary on the west side of Main Street. A short section, some five metres wide, still filled with water survives on the west side of the town. This is probably to be identified with the 'new channel' referred to in the printed memorandum of c.1666 (Cal. State Papers Ireland 1666-9, 259-61). The south wall was also protected by a redoubt, located slightly

west of Main Street and by a bastion at the south-west angle. From here the defences continued to the bridge.

##### 5. ST MICHAEL'S or THE ENGLISH CHURCH

This building now functions as a badminton hall and is located on Church Lane at the north-east angle of the square. Originally constructed in 1694 it was rebuilt in 1832 (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14, 286). It has since lost its spire. The church was intended to accomodate the English speaking settlers of Portarlinton. There is no associated churchyard because the parishioners used the older graveyard at Lea (FitzGerald 1903-5, 222).

##### 6. ST. PAUL'S or THE FRENCH CHURCH (C of I)

Located within its own churchyard in the south-west angle of the Market Square. The first church was built here to accommodate French speaking Huguenot parishioners in 1696 but the present building dates to 1857 (FitzGerald 1903-5, 222). The earliest memorial is one of 1737.

##### 7. MISCELLANEOUS

Earthwork. 'Derrycosh'.

Located south-east of the town in low swampy ground north of Bracklone Street. Marked 'Mote (site of)' on O.S. 6" plan. It consists of a slightly raised dry area of rounded plan, 10 m across.

Hartpole Effigy. 1594. (Pl. 15).

In the grounds of Kilnacourt House. Removed from St Mary's church, Carlow. Armoured Knight resting on a rectangular slab of limestone. In two pieces. The legs and hands are badly damaged, and the head is missing. The figure is wearing plate armour, pointed over the chest. The sword is suspended from a belt around the waist. The hands were originally joined in prayer on his chest. The feet rest on a dog which lacks its head. Incised inscription on the dexter side in a mixture of Roman and Gothic lettering:

hic Jacet roBARTUS HARTPOOLE ConESTabularius de  
catherLAGH SEPTUAGENARIO MAIOR interiit III DIE OCTOBRIS  
1594

Translation: Here lies Robert Hartpole, constable of Carlow, more than a septuagenarian; he died on the 3rd day of October 1594.

The missing letters are supplied from FitzGerald (1903-5,

223-6).

Dims: L.220 W.75 H. above ground 52 H. of effigy 39 cm.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

### The Problems

Portarlington is important to archaeological research as a fine example of a seventeenth century town founded on virgin soil. Despite the fact that it was established in the second half of the seventeenth century little is known of the appearance of the town prior to 1700. The form of its housing at this period remains uncertain. Were its houses built along the lines of the memorandum of c.1666? If so why were they replaced so quickly in the early eighteenth century? The course of the town defences needs to be checked by excavation to determine its exact course.

### Archaeological Potential

Archaeology does not consist solely of excavation nor does it stop at ground level. The archaeological evidence for Portarlington's past comprises all the physical remains of man's activities on the site of the town, from its seventeenth century beginnings to the present day. The surviving street pattern, property boundaries and standing buildings constitute the uppermost levels of the archaeological stratigraphy, and all are relevant to the study of the town's past. Documentary evidence also plays a role in reconstructing the history of early Portarlington, but for the wide range of human activity omitted from the written accounts archaeology is our only source of information.

## ARCHAEOLOGY, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The protection of buried archaeological evidence presents serious problems for not only is there the pressure of redevelopment and the high value of urban properties with which to contend, but the sites themselves are often difficult to define or evaluate; their full archaeological potential may only become apparent when an excavation is undertaken in advance of development or by observations made while development is in progress. It is crucial, therefore, that a concerted effort should be made to safeguard its archaeological heritage and that adequate provision is made for investigation in advance of any redevelopment. This is best achieved by making the realisation of Portarlington's

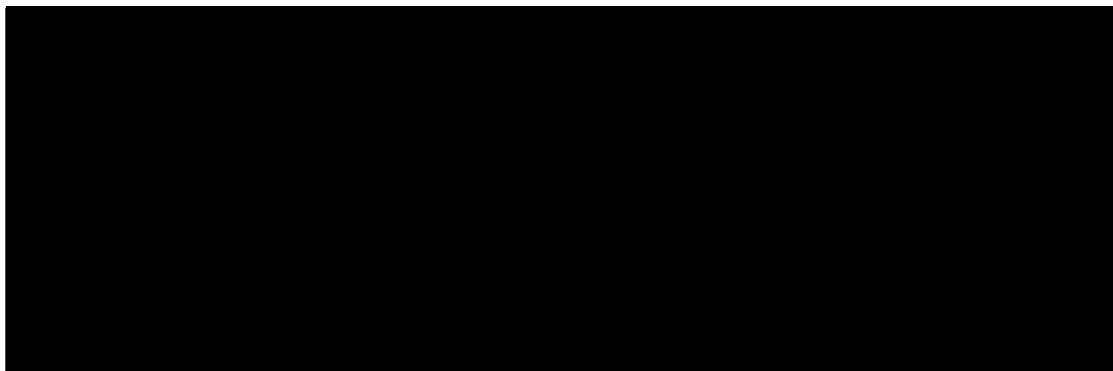
archaeological potential one of the objectives of its development plan. The objective may then be achieved by judicious use of planning constraints and by conditions attached to planning consents.

#### Area of Archaeological Potential

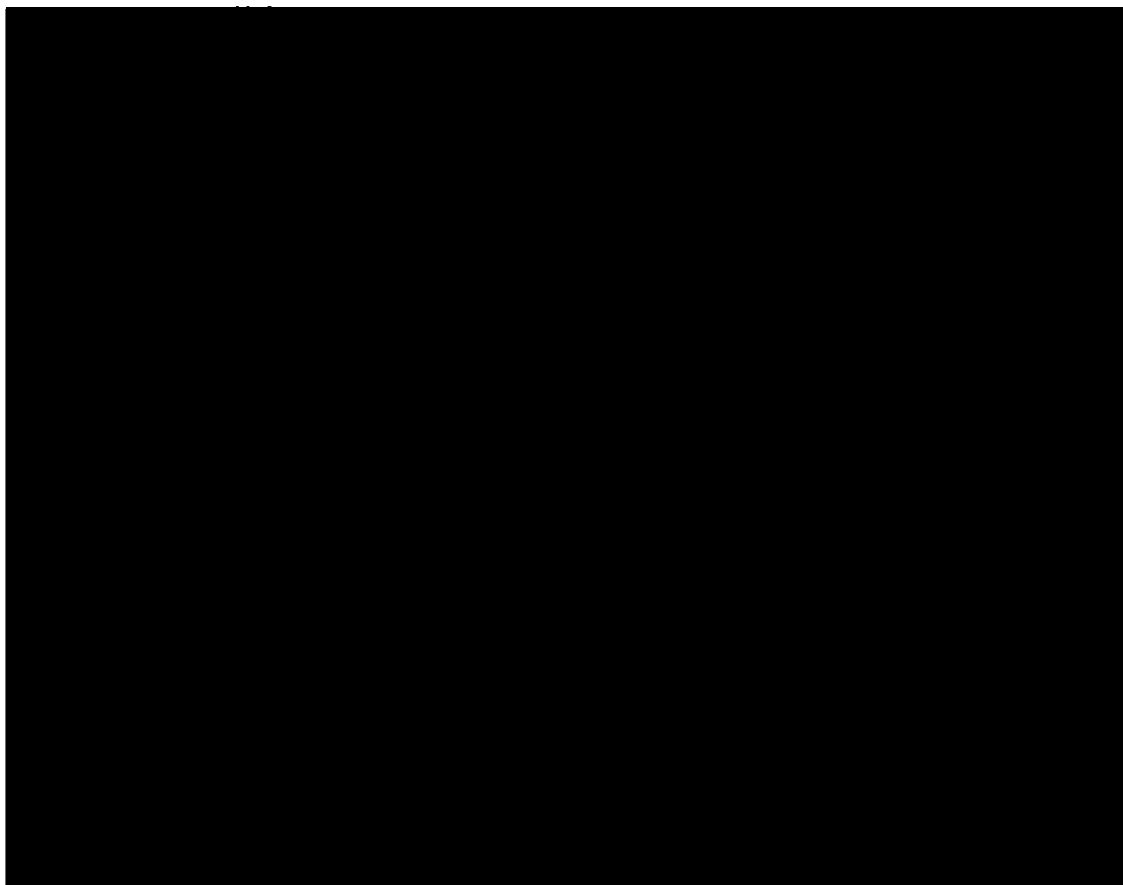
The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 8) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Portarlinton. In the absence of archaeological excavations within this area, little can be said of the extent and depth of archaeological deposits. Archaeological deposits are likely to have been completely removed along the street frontage with the construction of houses there in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and they probably survive only at the rear of the street frontage. The waterlogged areas of the former channel or 'canal' on the south side of the town constitute one area where archaeological deposits are likely to survive. Similarly deposits are likely to be present on the site of the seventeenth century bridge, immediately east of Barrow Bridge. On present evidence there is little likelihood of recovering house foundations on the street front, but the remains of seventeenth century refuse pits, industrial areas, workshops and perhaps houses should survive at the rear of the present day street frontage. One area of particular importance in this regard is the open ground immediately north of Church Lane. This has not been built up and is potentially the best location for the survival of archaeological remains of seventeenth century housing.

The area shaded pink on Fig. 8 comprises the walled seventeenth century town together with the extension along Main Street and the north side of Foxcroft Street which appears to be of seventeenth century date also. The extent has been continued outside the walls in order to allow for a possible fosse. South-east of the town an area has been delimited around the earthwork at Derrycosh, marked note (site of) by the O.S.

■■■■■ ■■■■■







## PORT LAOISE

Centrally located within the county, Port Laoise is the principal town of Laois. It is situated on relatively flat low-lying ground beside the river Triogue, a tributary of the Barrow. Both the main road and railway connecting Dublin with Cork and Limerick pass through the town. The name Port Laoise is a revival of the Irish name for the sixteenth century fort to which the town owes its existence, but until the second quarter of the twentieth century the town was known as Maryborough.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Port Laoise originated as a fort erected in the mid-sixteenth century as part of the English attempts to subdue the territories of the O'Mores and O'Conors during the reign of Edward VI (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14, i, 429-30; Hayes McCoy 1976, 70). In 1548, according to the Annals of the Four Masters, O'Connor and O'More were taken to England and their lands were granted to the lieutenant, Francis Bryan, marshall of Ireland. Bryan built two large 'campa', one at Port Laoise the other at Daingean in Offaly. In 1556 the Laois 'campa', known to the English as 'Fort Protector' or 'the Fort of Leix' was renamed Maryborough in honour of Queen Mary (Feehan 1983, 223-4). The fort attracted settlers and a map of about 1560 (Pl. 16) shows a small walled town around the fort at that date. Maryborough was granted a market in 1567, borough status in 1569 (Hayes McCoy 1976, 162), and was incorporated by charter of Elizabeth I in 1570 (Morris 1862, 219-23). Many settlers moved into the town at this time and the Fiants record a particularly high number of property grants in Maryborough between 1569 and 1571 (11 RDKPRI, nos. 1325, 1327, 1334, 1348, 1351, 1396, 1406, 1544; 12 RDKPRI, nos. 1624, 1649, 1689, 1774, 1802). In 1580 the town was plundered by John, son of the earl of Desmond (AFM). In 1597 it was burned by Onie M'Rory O Mordha (Atkinson 1893, 467, 470) and it appears to have been burned again the following year (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14, ii, 476-8). In 1635 the town obtained a grant of two fairs from Charles I (Lewis 1837, ii, 307). In 1646 it was captured for the Confederation by Owen Roe O'Neill but it was subsequently retaken by Lord Castlehaven (Feehan 1983, 395).

It is difficult to understand why Port Laoise was chosen in 1556 as the principal town of the new shire. One possibility is that it was built on the site of the Newtown of Leys (see above under Dunamase) and that some sort of hamlet might have lingered into the sixteenth century. This

would explain the name of the parish, which is Borris almost certainly derived from a medieval borough.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE
2. DOMESTIC HOUSES
3. INDUSTRIAL FEATURES
4. FORT
5. TOWN DEFENCES
6. CHURCH
7. MISCELLANEOUS
8. LIST OF STRAY FINDS

### 1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE

It is difficult to reconstruct the sixteenth century street pattern because it is not clearly shown on the map of c.1560 (Pl. 16). The position of the fort and the course of the stream can be identified without difficulty but the alignment of the houses bears no relation to the present layout of property boundaries. This apparent lack of consistency is due in part to the schematic nature of the map but it may also have been effected by the burnings of Port Laoise in the later sixteenth century.

The map shows only one definite street, that entering from the west immediately south of the fort's rectangular tower and exiting through the east wall. This can be tentatively identified with Bridge Street and the eastern section of Main Street. The map also shows a break in the west wall immediately north of the fort. This also appears to signify a street which curved southwards around the fort's circular tower. Today, this can be identified with the eastern portion of Church Street, and perhaps with the southern part of Church Avenue. The present junction of Church Avenue and Church Street is unlikely to be original because it is too far east of the line of the stream, which is culverted in this area, but can be seen on the north and south sides of the town. The street plan displays no regularity, a surprising feature which is difficult to explain in a plantation town of this period. The original market place was probably in Main Street in the area between the south side of the street and the fort if one is to judge from the map of 1721 (Feehan 1983, Fig. 12:22). Farm produce was still exposed for sale here on market day at the beginning of the twentieth century (H. M. Roe, pers. comm.). The present Market Square is of eighteenth century date (Feehan 1983, 397) but it is clear from the location of the seventeenth century church outside the fort that the town began to expand westwards in the seventeenth century. Railway Street and the

western parts of Main and Church Streets probably belong to that time.

## 2. DOMESTIC HOUSES

The map of c.1560 shows fourteen houses (Pl. 16). These are portrayed as gabled single floor structures with a loft on the first floor; all have a central hearth. Nothing remains of these houses today although some of the narrow lanes opening southwards from Main St. have tall narrow houses built over them, parts of which may be of seventeenth century date.

## 3. INDUSTRIAL FEATURES

### Mill

Shown on the map of c.1560 east of the stream from the fort's circular tower (Pl. 16). Its site is occupied today by Ranks' Mills.

## 4. THE FORT

The 'court' or 'mansion' at the Campa built in 1548 (AFM) marks the first construction of a fort at Port Laoise, but precise details of its constructional history are not known. Henry Wyse is described as captain of the Fort of Leix in 1552 (Morris 1861, 280), while in 1565-6 when Francis Cosbie was made constable of the fort, its garrison consisted of 'one porter, one drummer, one ensign, one surgeon and thirty-nine arquebusiers (11 RDKPRI, 119: no. 819). The fort was captured and burned in 1597 by Tirrell and Onie M'Rory O Mordha (Atkinson 1893, 467, 470). The fort was demolished by the Cromwellians under Hewson and Reynolds in 1650 (Feehan 1983, 395). Within the fort was a rectangular building demolished about 1835 (O.S. Letters, Laois, i, 74). It received little antiquarian attention but Grose (1791, ii, pl. opp. p. 45) illustrates part of the remains, probably the rectangular tower, as it was in his day.

### Description (Pls. 16-17; Fig. 10)

Situated on rising ground south-west of the Triogue river. The groundplan of the fort is preserved in a map of c.1560 (Pl. 16) and in another of late sixteenth century date, now in Trinity College Dublin (Pl. 17). These plans show a rectangular enclosure, described as measuring 1120 by 1110 yards, with a projecting circular tower at the north-east corner and a rectangular tower, described as 17 by 14 yards, at the south-west corner. The only entrance was in

the west wall, and a two-storied range of buildings, described as 132 yards long, appear in the south of the enclosure. An external ditch partly filled with water is shown on the plan of c.1560. This was subsequently backfilled and the owners of properties on Main St. acquired the extra piece of ground adjoining the wall of the fort. The line of this ditch is preserved in the Kink which a number of these allotments have near the fort. Miss Helen M. Roe informs us that a separate ground rent was paid for this extra stretch of land.

The remains consist of the north, south and east walls, a circular tower at the north-east angle, and a portion of the west wall. Sections are now concealed by later buildings and are inaccessible. The entrance was in the west wall in the portion which is now missing and the fort was protected by two towers, a rectangular example at the south-west angle and a circular one on the north-east. The rectangular tower is missing.

The north-west corner forms the boundary wall of the Technical School. The gapped lower section of the wall survives to a height of 2.5 m high and has an external batter. The north-west corner is rounded and from here the wall continues eastwards along Church St. where it forms the garden wall of two houses. The remainder of the Church St. section is between 5 and 6 m high but it is punctuated by entrances. The CIRCULAR TOWER at the north-east angle has an internal diameter of 8.2 m and walls 1.5 m thick. Internally two floor ledges are present indicating that the tower was a three floored structure. The tower and the eastern section of the wall adjoining it is incorporated into the modern flour mill. The southern end of the east wall borders Church Ave. where it has an external height of 3 m but the interior is built-up by landscaped school grounds. The south wall also borders the school grounds and survives to a height of 3.8 m. The remaining short sections are present behind the outbuildings and backyards of the houses fronting onto Main St.

## 5. TOWN DEFENCES

The c.1560 map of Maryborough (Pl. 16) shows that the small township around the fort was enclosed by a wall delimiting a rectangular area. No mural towers or gatehouse are indicated but two openings in the west wall, immediately north and south of the fort, and a probable opening in the east wall, are shown. A lease of 1569-71 mentions the 'east gate' of Maryborough (11 RDKPRI, 210: no. 1406). The town's charter of 1570 empowered the corporation to 'fortify the borough with ditches and stone walls' which may indicate that the defences shown in the map of c.1560 were considered inadequate by then. There is no definite evidence, however, for the fortification of Maryborough after 1570.

## Description

There are no surviving remains of the defences and it is difficult to gauge their exact route. The east side of the town was bounded by a natural gravel ridge. There is no obvious boundary on the north where the ground tends to become swampy in the vicinity of the railway line. The eastern boundary of the town is probably preserved in the modern course of the Triogue but it is possible that it may have extended to the western side of Ridge Road. The southern wall was probably close to the townland boundary, while the western edge is most likely preserved in the line of Railway St. and Lyster Lane. The 16th century map shows two openings in the west wall, which may represent gatehouses. These lay immediately north and south of the fort controlling entry to Main Street and Church Street. There is a similar opening in the east wall in Bridge Street. An unusual feature depicted on the map of c.1560 is the presence of an intra-mural walled enclosure in the south-east angle. Its function is unknown.

## 6. CHURCH (Pl. 18)

In the 1556 plantation of Laois it was ordered that a church be built in every town within three years (O'Hanlon and O'Leary 1907-14, i, 436). This may have been the occasion of the building of the church at Maryborough but the earliest definite evidence for its existence is a reference to David Good, vicar of Maryborough, in 1598 (Atkinson 1895, 409).

## Description

Situated within its own churchyard, west of the fort, outside the sixteenth century defences. The remains consist of the west tower and north wall of the nave. The churchyard is heavily overgrown.

The featureless north wall of the NAVE is 18 m long, 92 cm wide, 3 m high internally and 1.5 m high externally. The TOWER is a four-floored rectangular structure built of roughly coursed mixed stone. No dressed stones are present. Internally it measures 5.3 by 5.2 m. The ground floor is entered through a rectangular opening in the east wall. There is a high round-arched opening in the west wall, now blocked-up and forming the back wall of a house in Church St. There is a blocked splayed opening in the north wall above the level of the entrance. The first floor is marked externally by a string course above which the tower is stepped back slightly. The weathering for the sloping roof-line of the nave is visible in the east wall and indicates that the tower stood slightly north-west of the church. Internally it is featureless and access would appear to have been via a ladder. The second floor is also featureless with the exception of an inserted flat-topped

window in the east wall. The third floor was the belfry stage and has round arched windows in each wall.

## 7. MISCELLANEOUS

Old cemetery.

On the north side of the road from the modern Catholic church is a disused graveyard which overlooks the main Dublin-Cork road. The date of the cemetery is unknown. It is possible that it represents a pre-plantation church site, perhaps even the church of the Newtown of Leys.

Ringfort. Ballyroan.

Ploughed out. Two E.S.B. poles mark the site which has a new bungalow placed right beside it.

## 8. LIST OF STRAY FINDS

1. Polished stone axe. From the ridge. Property of Miss Mahoney in Laois County Collection (Inf. from Miss Roe).

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

### The Problems

Port Laoise is important to archaeological research because it is one of only towns established in the Irish midlands during the sixteenth century, the other being at Daingean in Co. Offaly. It is not clear why this particular site was chosen as the principal town of the new Queen's County. It is possible as Helen Roe has suggested that the town was sited at the location of the medieval Newtown of Leys and that this explains the presence of the names Borris Great and Borris Little on the immediate east of the town. If so, the Port Laoise may have an unexpected medieval ancestry.

The street pattern of the sixteenth century town is quite unusual and difficult to explain. It could be due to the presence of earlier features, as yet unrecognised. The form of sixteenth and seventeenth century housing within the town remains unknown. Excavation of houses of this period could shed important light on the regions of England from which the initial settlers came. It would also be important to determine if it is similar to the housing of the Ulster Plantation or different from it.

Substantial parts of the Fort's defences are intact and the foundations of its internal buildings are also likely to survive beneath ground level. Apart from the outline of a

rectangular structure on the sixteenth century maps nothing is known of the internal layout of this fort or of how it fared during the seventeenth century wars. Excavation is likely to reveal not only information regarding the arrangement of buildings within the fort but also evidence on alterations or new defences constructed in the seventeenth century.

The course of the town defences is very speculative and the outline suggested above needs to be tested by excavation in order to determine whether it is correct or not. The possibility that mural towers and gatehouses were present needs to be borne in mind as does the likelihood that the defences were strengthened by the addition of earthen ramparts in the seventeenth century. Excavation is likely to reveal traces of these because even if the wall has been removed it is likely that a ditch would survive intact.

The old cemetery immediately east of the sixteenth century town is an unusual feature and may represent the remains of an earlier settlement. Excavation within its vicinity would be particularly important because it would determine whether Port Laoise is the site of the Newtown of Leys or not.

#### Archaeological Potential

Archaeology does not consist solely of excavation nor does it stop at ground level. The archaeological evidence for Port Laoise's past comprises all the physical remains of man's activities on the site of the town, from the sixteenth century until the present day. The surviving street pattern, property boundaries and standing buildings constitute the uppermost levels of the archaeological stratigraphy, and all are relevant to the study of the town's past. Documentary evidence also plays a role in reconstructing the history of early Port Laoise, but for the wide range of human activity omitted from the written accounts and for the early periods when documentation is slight archaeology is our only source of information. The evidence of archaeology and topography, of architecture and of documents, is complementary; each gains from the existence of the others and the unrecorded destruction of one form of evidence not only removes part of a town's archive but also diminishes the usefulness of those which are preserved.

The survey of its archaeology indicates that the town is particularly important as an example of a sixteenth century plantation. The only standing buildings of pre-1700 date are the Fort and the ruined Protestant Church. With these exceptions the destruction of buildings above ground has been total, but the street pattern of the sixteenth century town is largely intact and archaeological deposits are likely to survive behind the street frontages.



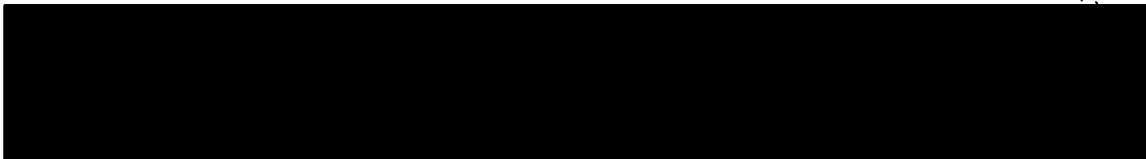

## ARCHAEOLOGY, PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

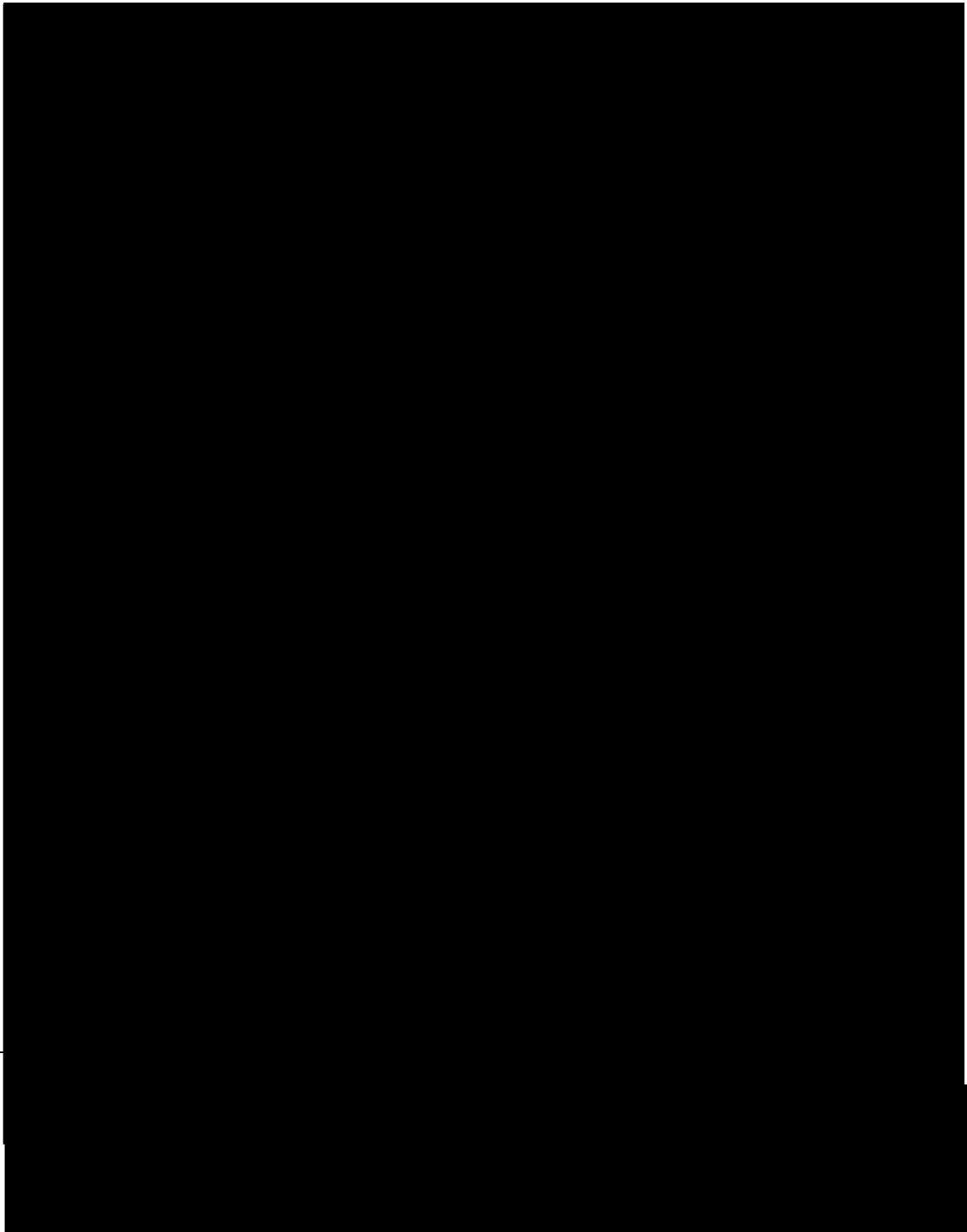
It is evident from the foregoing that archaeology is an important means of learning about Port Laoise's past and of understanding the character and detailed form of the town today. This is more than just an academic pursuit because without an appreciation of the factors which have shaped Port Laoise's present character, steps taken to conserve that character will not be wholly effective, or worse, features basic to its unique identity may be unwittingly destroyed.

The protection of buried archaeological evidence presents serious problems for not only is there the pressure of redevelopment and the high value of urban properties with which to contend, but the sites themselves are often difficult to define or evaluate; their full archaeological potential may only become apparent when an excavation is undertaken in advance of development or by observations made while development is in progress. It is crucial, therefore, that a concerted effort should be made to safeguard its archaeological heritage and that adequate provision is made for investigation in advance of any redevelopment. This is best achieved by making the realisation of Port Laoise's archaeological potential one of the objectives of its development plan. The objective may then be achieved by judicious use of planning constraints and by conditions attached to planning consents.

### Area of Archaeological Potential

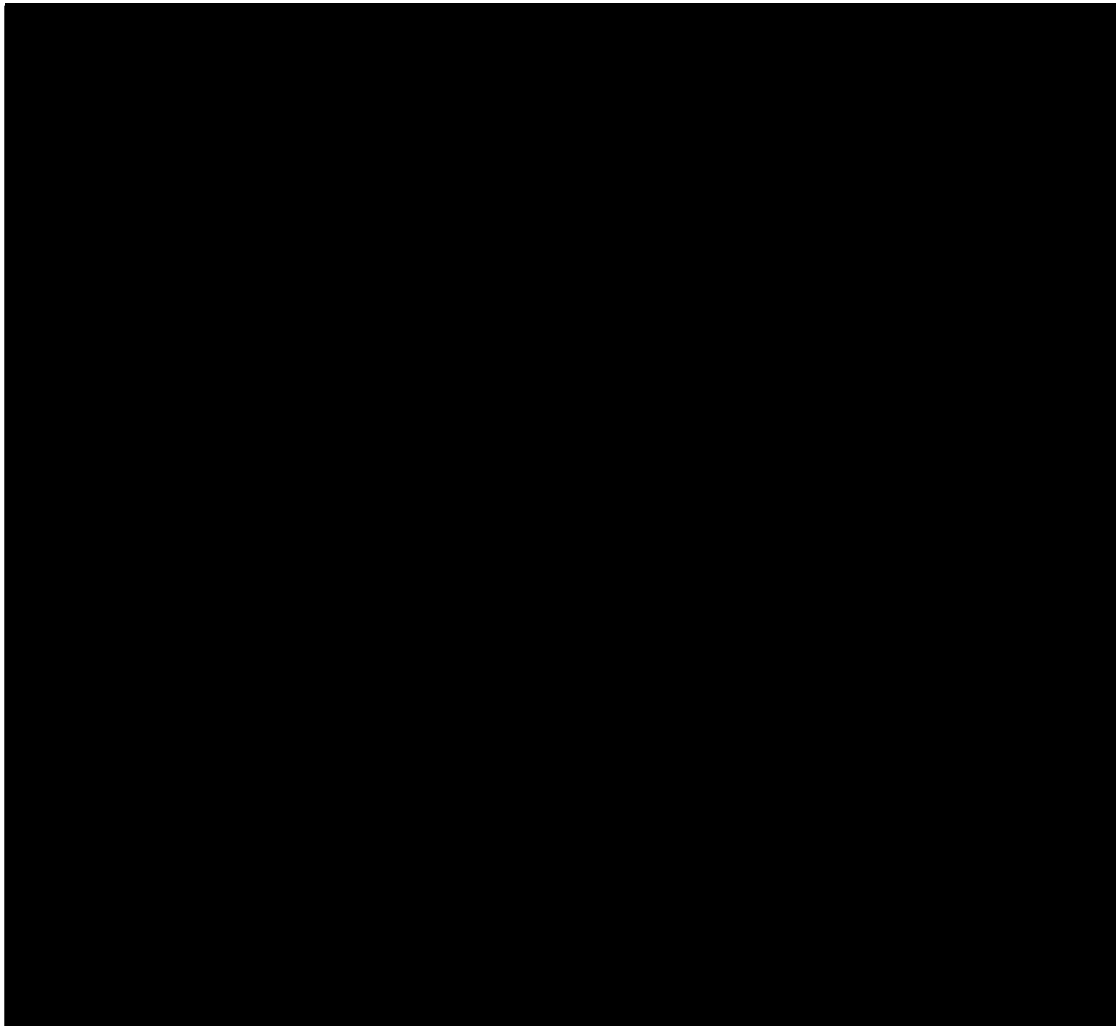
The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 9) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Port Laoise. This comprises the suggested walled area of the sixteenth century town, the area west of this around Church Street and Main Street where development occurred in the seventeenth century and an area outside the proposed wall line, in the event that the enclosed area was larger than that proposed above. Within this area the main disturbance to archaeological deposits has occurred along the street front as a result of the rebuilding of houses here in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Elsewhere, however, deposits are likely to survive and there is the strong likelihood of recovering house foundations, refuse pits, industrial areas, and workshops of sixteenth and seventeenth century date.





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- AI: Annals of Inishfallen, ed. S. MacAirt. Dublin, 1951.

AU: Annals of Ulster, ed. W. M. Hennessy and B. MacCarthy,  
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Chron. Scot.: Chronicon Scotorum, ed. W. M. Hennessy, London  
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Ireland.

PRIA Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy.

RDKPRI Report of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records,  
Ireland

UJA Ulster Journal of Archaeology.

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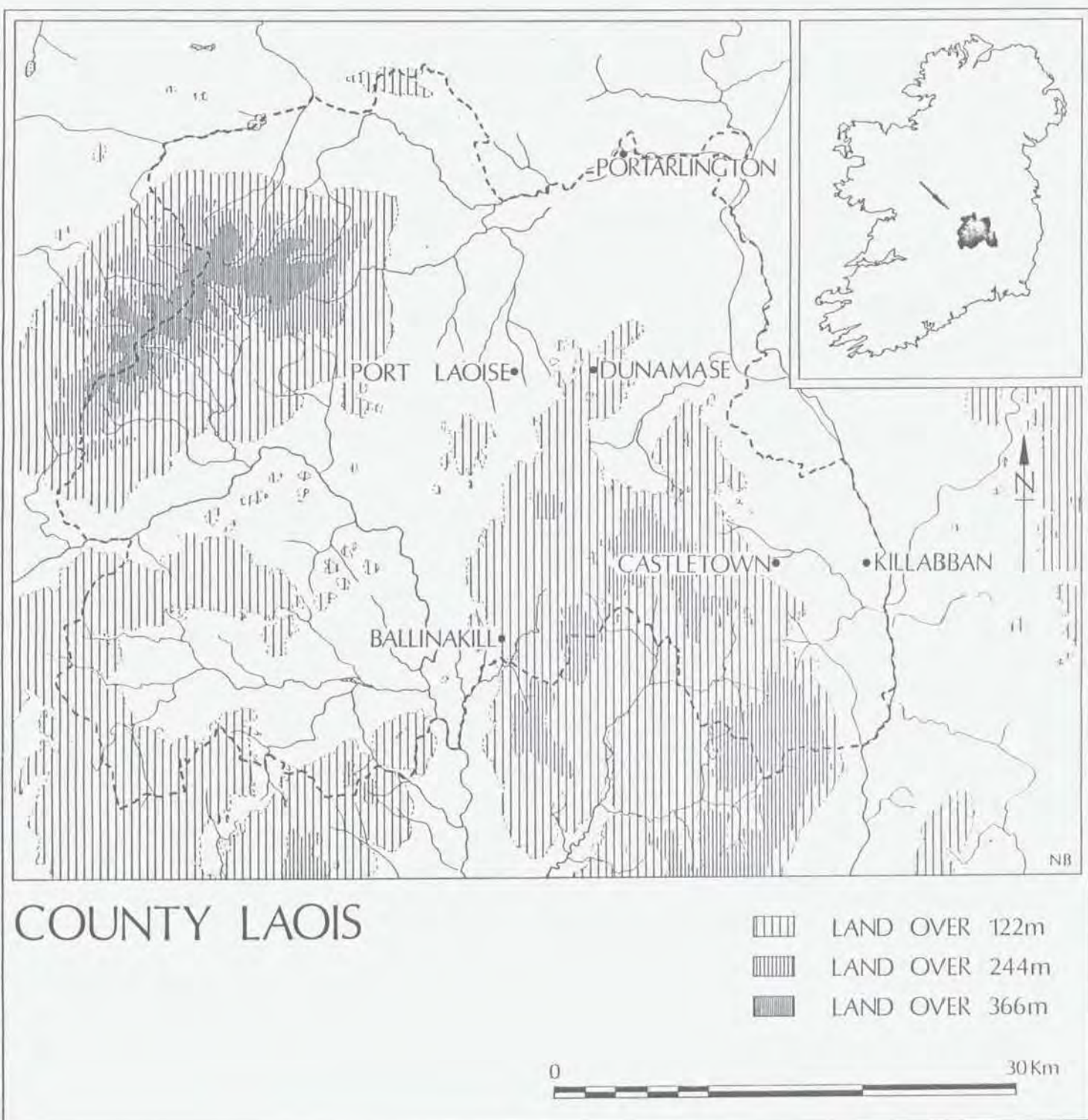


Fig. 1. County Laois: Location map of boroughs and towns.





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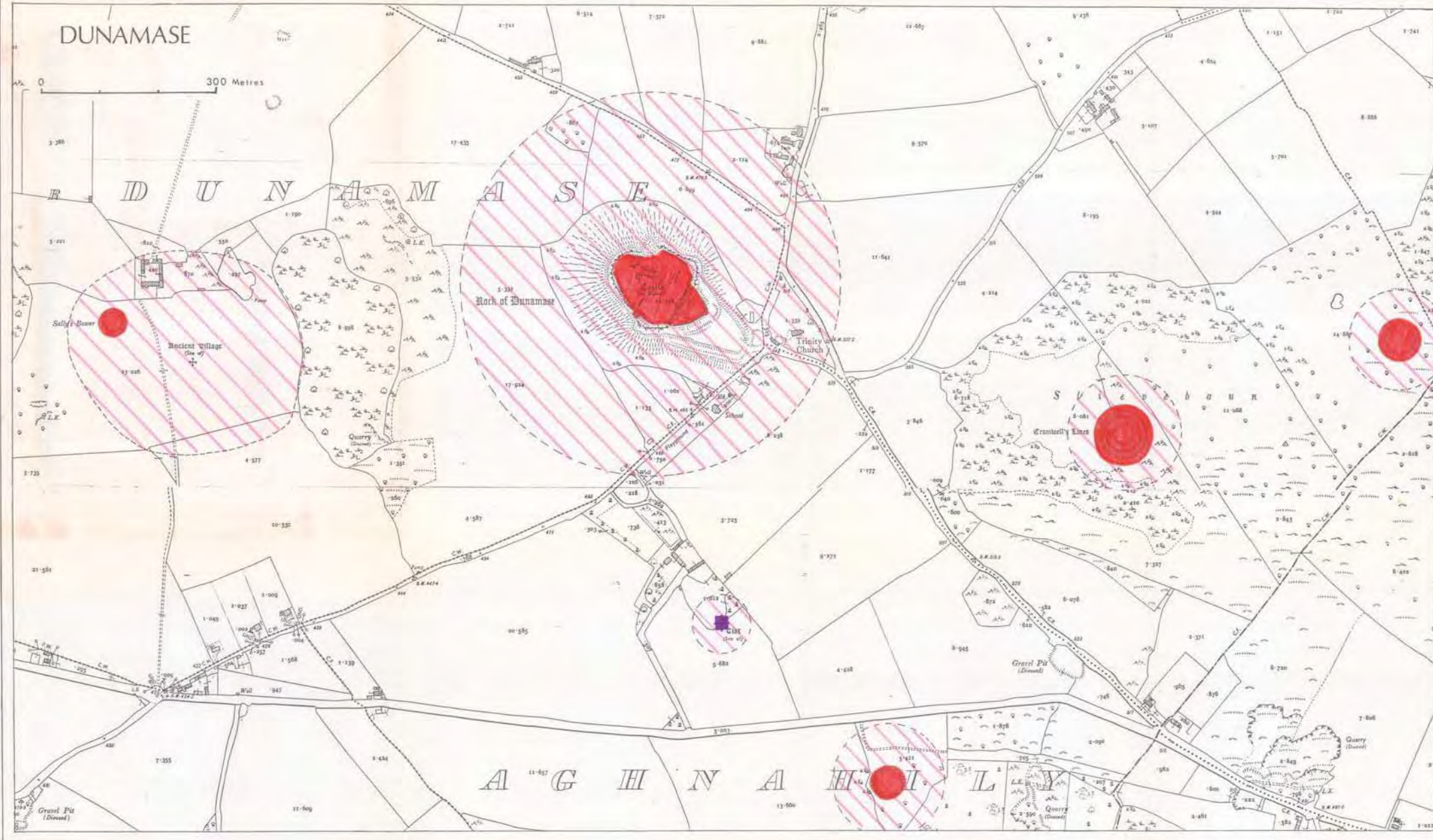


Fig. 4. Dunamase: Zone of archaeological potential.



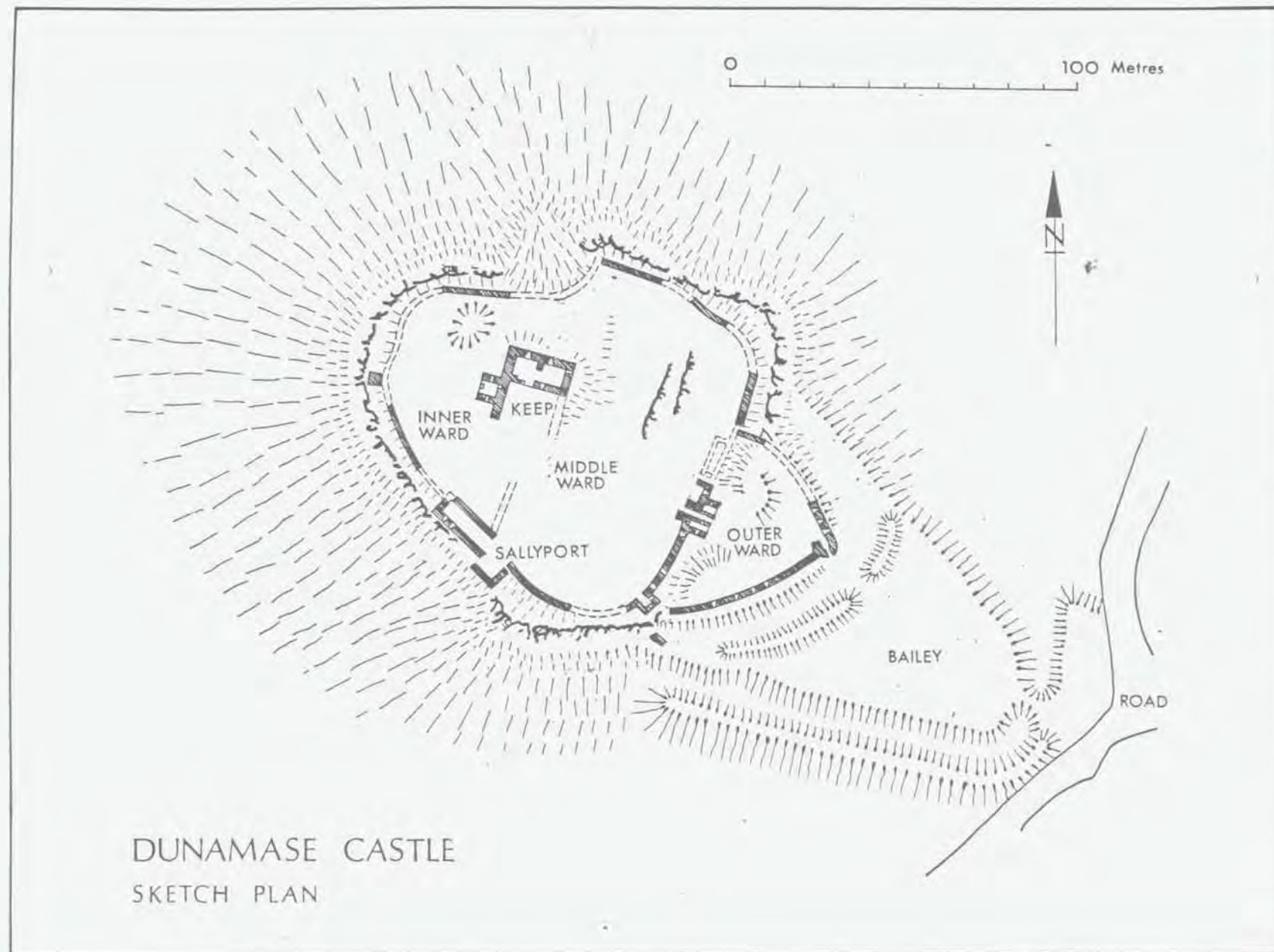
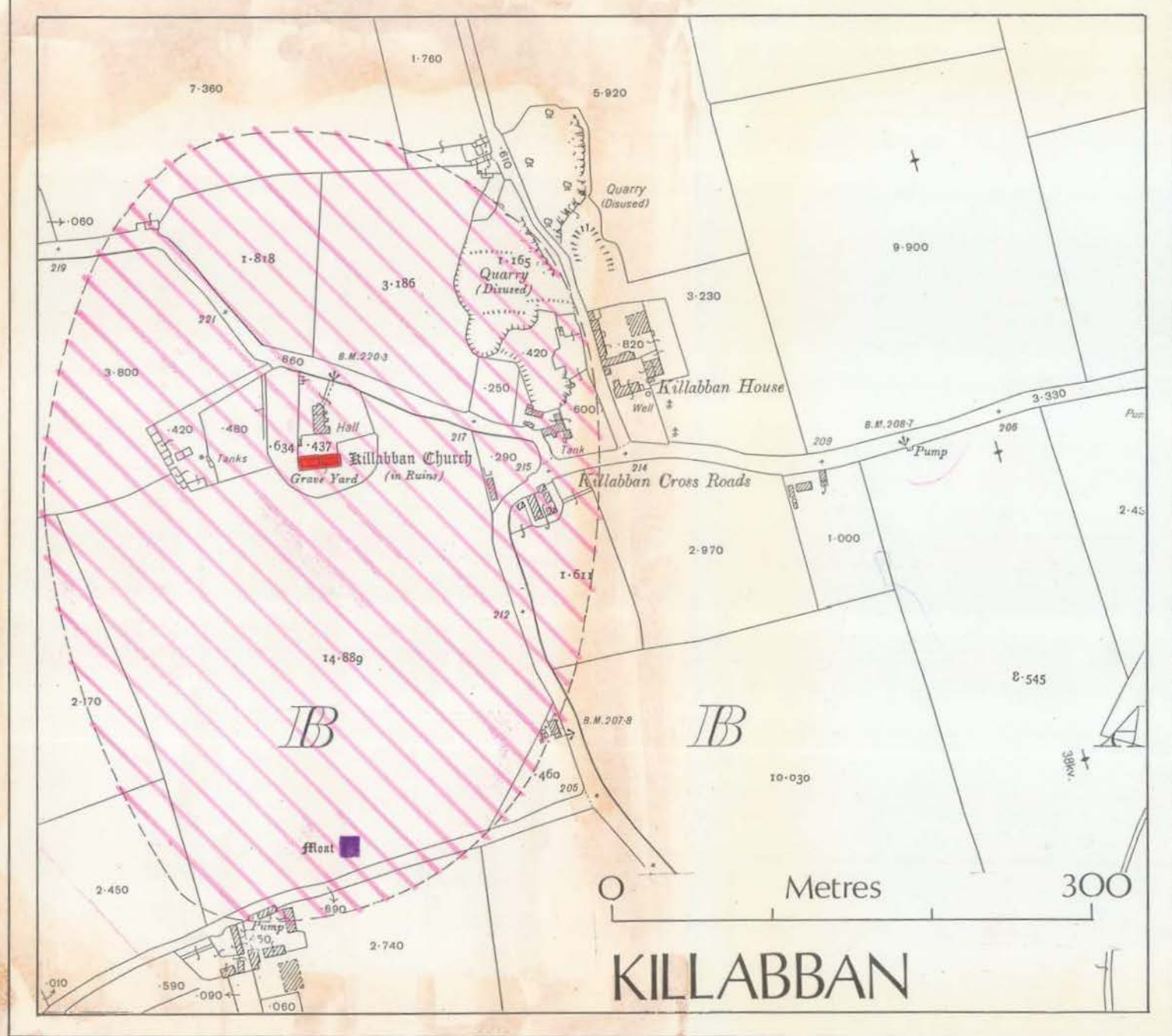
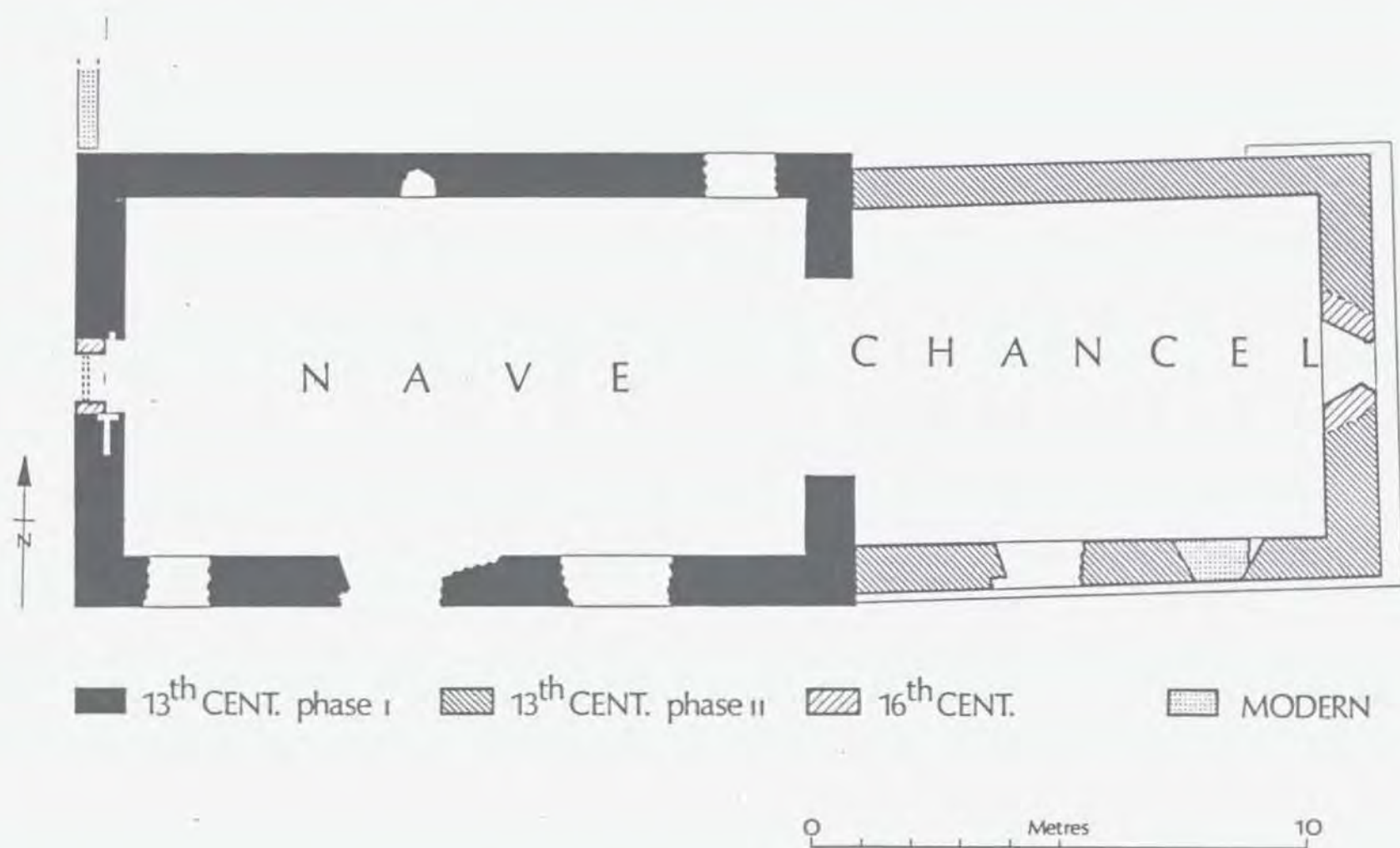


Fig. 5. Dunamase: Castle sketch plan.







## KILLABBAN : CHURCH



Fig. 8. Portarlinton: Zone of archaeological potential.



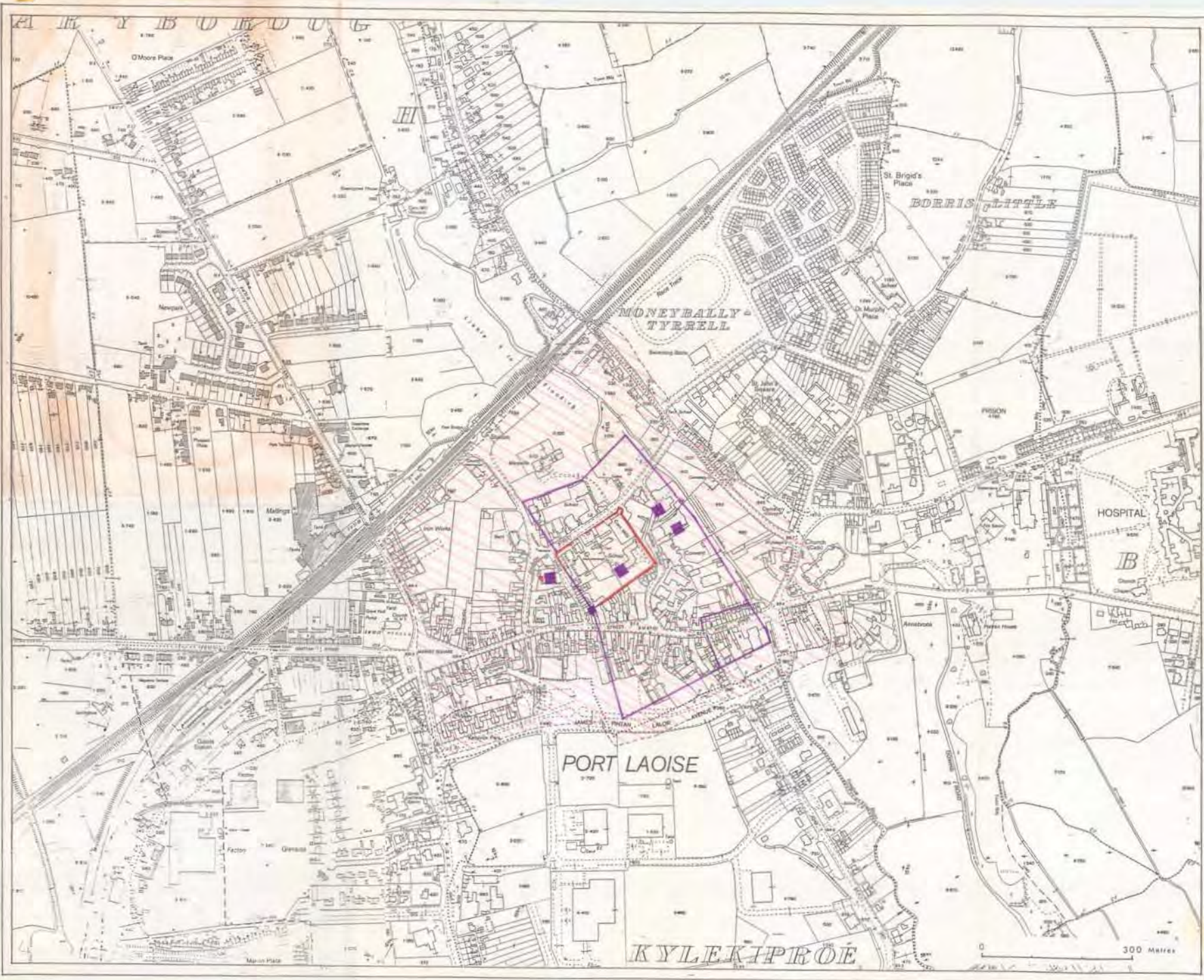
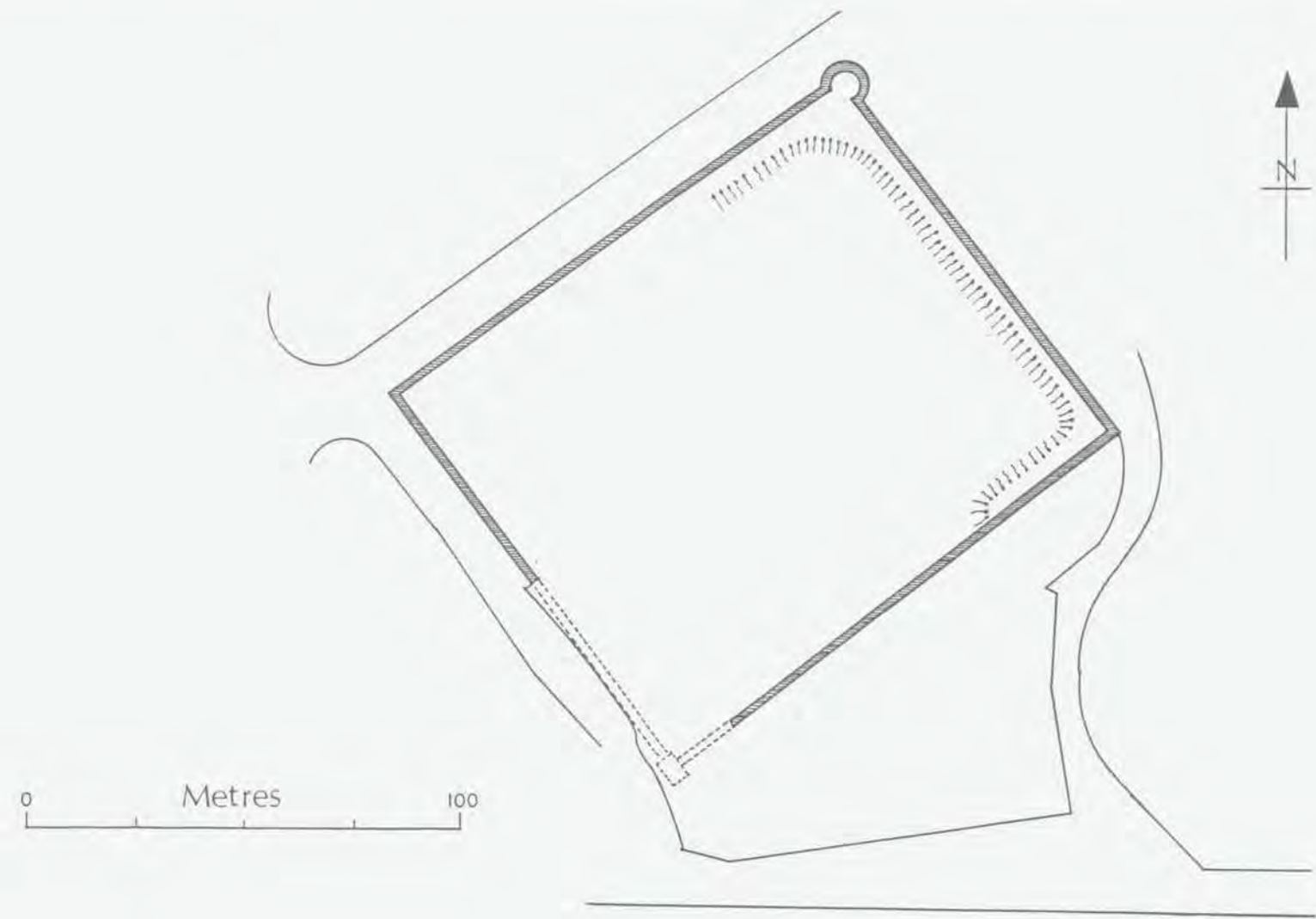


Fig. 9. Portlaoise: Zone of archaeological potential.



Fig. 10. Port Laoise: Ground Plan of the fort in 1909.



PORT LAOISE FORT REMAINS IN 1909



Pl. 1. Ballinakill Castle: north gable from south-west c. 1890.



Pl. 2. Ballinakill Castle: north gable from south c. 1915.



Pl. 3. Ballinakill Castle: possible bawn gate from south.



Pl. 4. Ballinakill: Font in St. Birigd's churchyard.



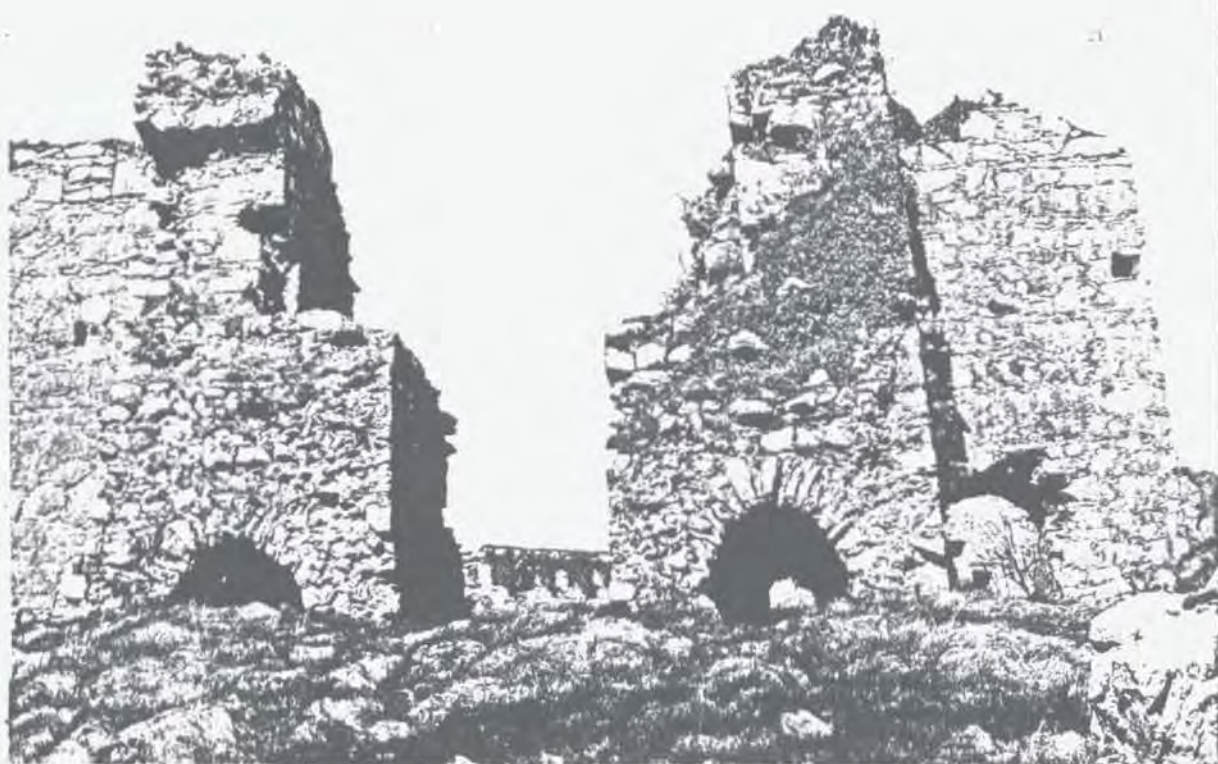


Pl. 5. Dunamase castle: aerial view from east (Courtesy of Cambridge University Coll.).





P1. 6. Dunamase castle: gatehouse to outer ward, from east.



Pl. 7. Dunamase castle: gatehouse to middle ward, from east.





Pl. 2. Dunamase castle: south-east angle tower and curtain wall of the middle ward, from north-east.

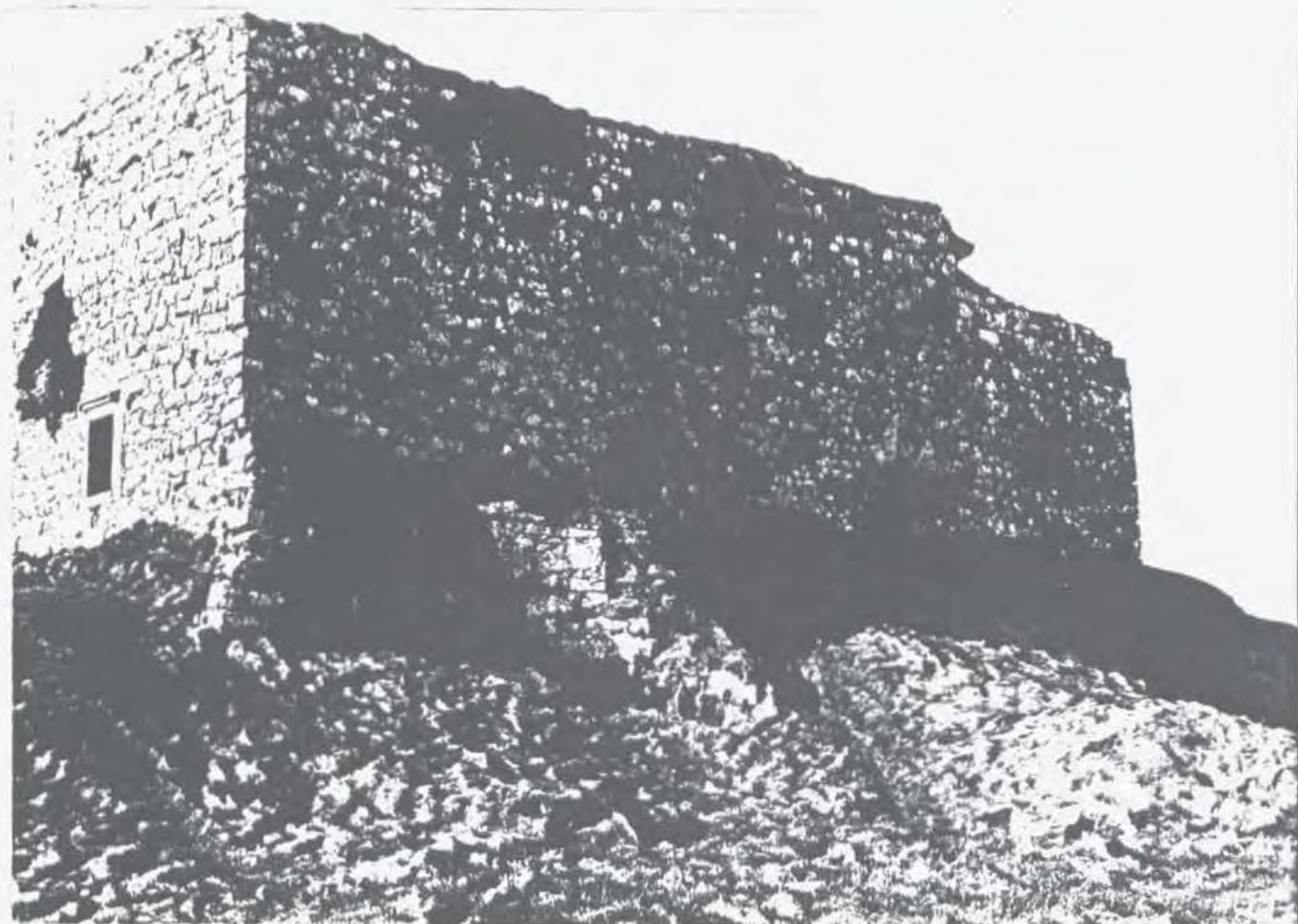


Pl: 9. Dunamase castle: the Keep from west. Note the  
revetment wall in the foreground.





Pl. 10. Dunamase castle: the keep from east.



Pl. 11. Dunamase castle: the Keep from north-east showing the remains of the inner ward's curtain wall abutting the base batter of the Keep.





P1. 12. Killabban: aerial view from north showing the former  
monastic boundary as a cropmark on the left.  
(courtesy Cambridge Aerial Coll.)



Pl. 13. Killabban: St. Abban's church, from south-west.

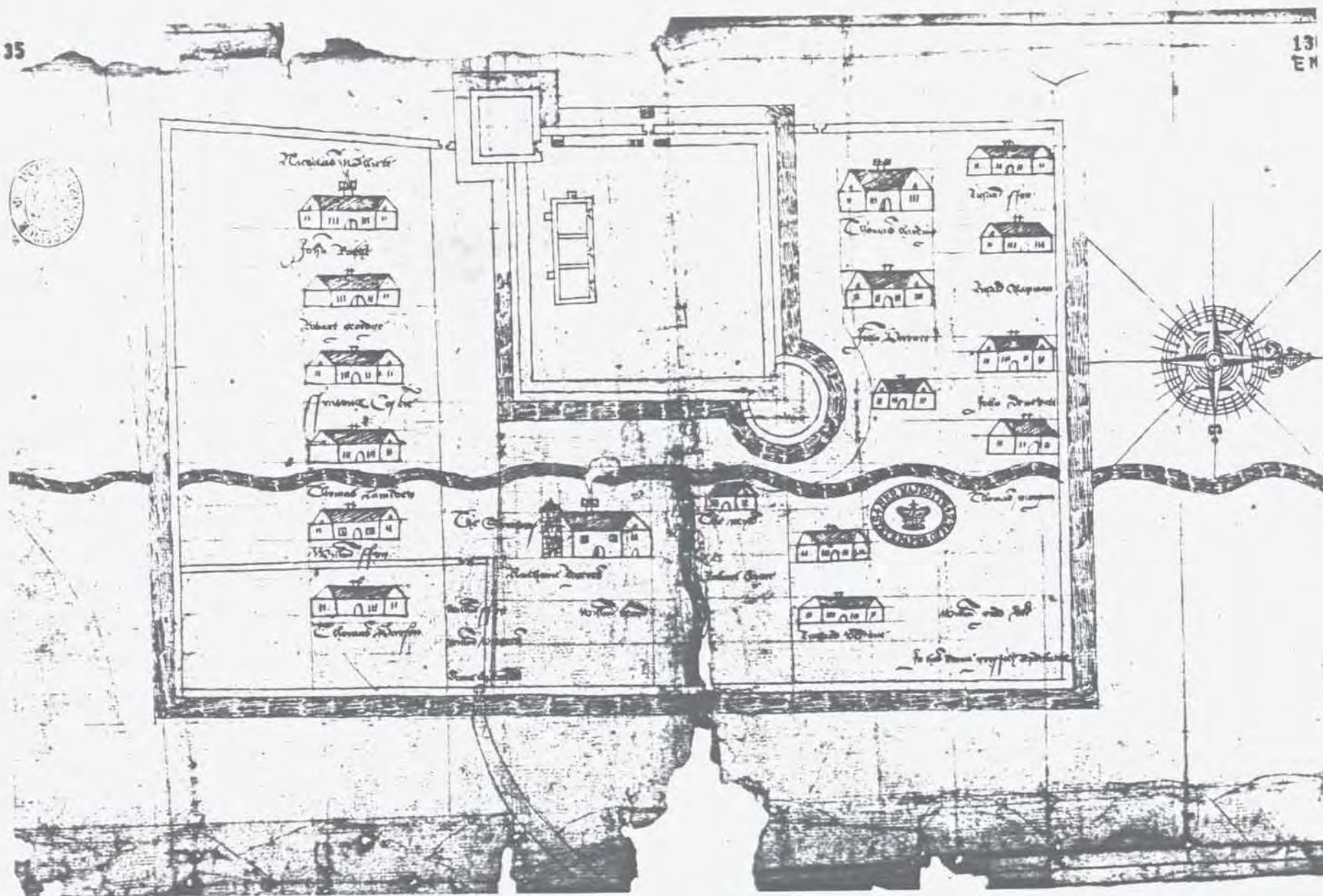


Pl. 14. Killabban: St. Abban's church: 15th century door jamb decorated with human figure.

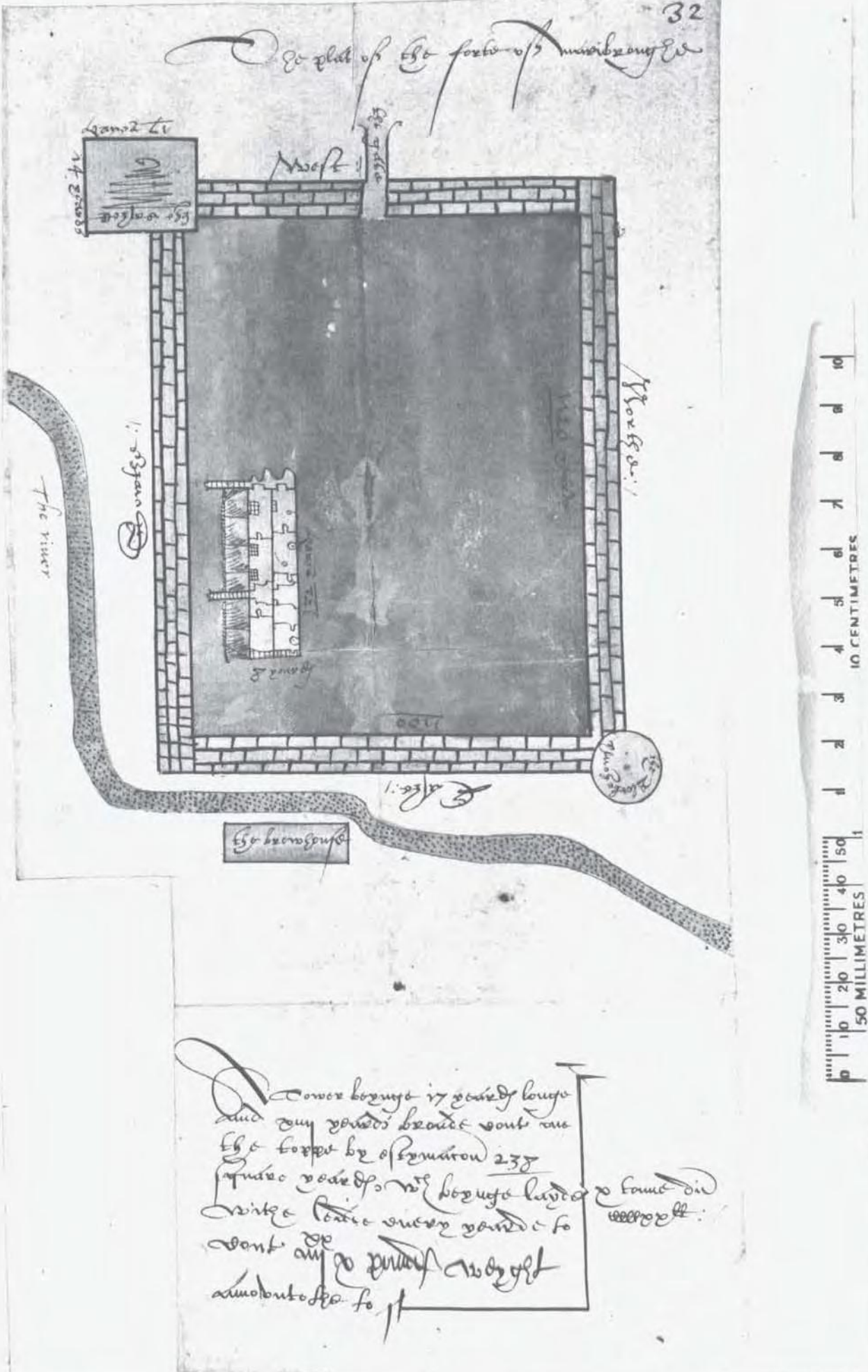


Pl. 15. Portarlington: effigy of Robert Hartpole, 1594.





P1. 16. Portlaoise: map of Maryborough, c.1560 (Public Record Office, London: MPF 277).



Pl. 17. Portlaoise: The plot of the forte of Mareibroughe, late sixteenth century (Trinity College Dublin: Ms. 1209, 10).





Pl. 18. Portlaoise: C. of I. Church: west tower from east