

Belonging to Corporation
Fort. &
Curragh.

Esch. part
of Comaght

Fort-fallahon

Fort land.

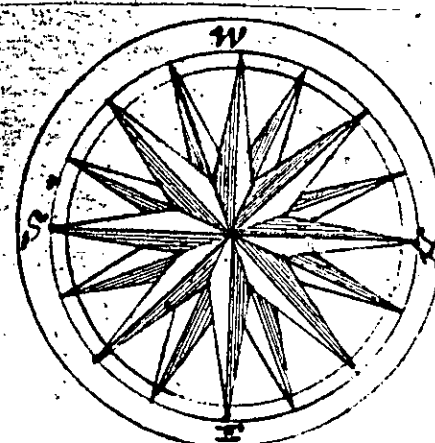
Abbey land

Benagher Towne.

COUNTY OFFALY

Corporation

THE URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY
SURVEY



Curragh

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY SURVEY

PART V

COUNTY OFFALY

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WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

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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. OFFALY

In 1557 a statute was passed creating King's County and Queen's County out of territories that formerly belonged to the O Mordha and O Conchobhar Failge. King's County consisted of the baronies of Warrenstown, Lower Philipstown, Geashill, part of Upper Philipstown and Coolestown. The baronies of Ballycowan, Ballyboy, Eglish and Ballycastle were added in the early 1570s. The barony of Kilcoursey was incorporated by 1591, and the baronies of Ballybritt and Clonlisk (formerly Eile Ua Cerbail) were included in 1605. Accordingly the present boundaries bear no relation to territorial units earlier than the sixteenth century and the area of Offaly conquered by the Anglo-Normans, for instance, formed part of the medieval county of Tipperary.

The urban network which characterises the modern county was effectively formed in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and it is to this period that the major towns of this report, Banagher and Birr belong. Daingean was founded in 1556 but it never developed into a thriving town and although it was originally the county town it was superceeded in 1833 by Tullamore. Tullamore, the largest town within the county falls outside the sphere of this report because it was not established until the eighteenth century.

There is evidence, however, for urban settlement in Offaly prior to the plantation period. During the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries the eastern part of the county was penetrated by the Anglo-Normans. They 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 Offaly but they founded at least two boroughs, Dunkerrin and Seirkieran. There may have been other boroughs but the historical documentation is lacking and we simply do not know. It is interesting to note that both of these boroughs were settlements prior to the coming of the Anglo-Normans. Seirkieran was an important church site and Dunkerrin was a fort, as its name implies. 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.

This report is concerned with the five sites which had urban functions prior to 1700 A.D. These are the Anglo-Norman boroughs of Dunkerrin and Seirkieran, the sixteenth century plantation town of Daingean, and the seventeenth century towns of Banagher and Birr (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 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.

Dunkerrin and Seirkieran are now deserted, Daingean has shrunk in importance, but Banagher and Birr are ripe for urban redevelopment in the near future. Uncontrolled redevelopment at any of these sites will destroy the fragile archaeological heritage of Offaly's historic 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.

BANAGHER

Banagher lies on the east bank of the river Shannon about 7 miles north-west of Birr, in the extreme west of Co. Offaly. The town is a bridging point on the river. The meaning of the name, derived from Ir. Beannchair is uncertain (cf. O'Donovan in O.S. Letters, Offaly, ii, 35-40).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

No prehistoric material is known from the immediate vicinity of the town although a hoard of Later Bronze Age gold, bronze and amber ornaments were found in a bog one and a half miles from Banagher sometime before 1918 (Armstrong 1917-18, 239; cf. Eogan 1983, 115-6). It seems clear, however, that Banagher was the site of an Early Christian foundation, probably the church of Cill Rignaigi (see St. Mary's Church below), and that this church continued in use into the late medieval period. The only other information on Banagher before the seventeenth century is a record of the re-erection of the castle of Beandchor by Tadhg Caech O Cerbaill in 1544 and its destruction four years later to prevent the English gaining control of it (AFM). The use of the term "re-erection" in the annalistic entry indicates that there was a castle at Banagher prior to the mid-sixteenth century but nothing is known of it. A settlement was present here by the early seventeenth century when Sir John McCoghlan was granted a market in 1610 (Russell and Prendergast 1874, 527) but the real development of the town occurred during the 1620s.

A fort was built in 1624 by Sir Arthur Blundell and it was named Fort Falkland after Sir Henry Carey, who had been appointed Lord Deputy in 1622 (Russell and Prendergast 1880, 541). Four years later Banagher received a charter of incorporation from Charles I establishing it as a borough with 200 acres of arable and pasture and 70 acres of wood and moor (Morrin 1863, 360-5). The charter directed that the town be built "in the most convenient part of said lands" and granted the corporation a weekly market and two annual fairs, and lands to be used to support a preaching minister and a schoolmaster. It would appear that a church and school were erected at an early date (Loeber 1980, 133-4). In 1643 Fort Falkland was captured by the Confederates under Preston (Cooke 1875, 318-9). The town also saw action during the Williamite war because of its strategic situation but attempts to break down the bridge failed because it was strongly defended by a castle on the Connacht side of the Shannon.

The town expanded and prospered during the first half of the nineteenth century and became one of the largest corn

market towns in the midlands. The opening of the Grand Canal provided cheap and efficient water transport to Limerick and Dublin. After 1850, however, the importance of the town declined.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE
2. DOMESTIC HOUSES
3. BRIDGE
4. FORT
5. TOWN DEFENCES
6. ST. MARY'S CHURCH
7. MISCELLANEOUS

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE

The street plan of Banagher is linear running downhill in a south-east to north-west direction towards the river Shannon. A planatation map of Banagher prepared in 1629 confirms that this was the original layout of the town, showing the church standing to the west of the street with property plots laid out on either side to the north of the church, and the fort standing at the head of the street, backing onto the river (Pl. 1). The map is rather schematic and its value for precise topographical study is limited. It shows twelve burgage plots, however, six on each side of the street. Good traces of the burgage plot pattern survive on the south-west side of the street and have a common rear boundary. The 1629 map shows that Main Street curved southwards towards the fort and it seems that the present road to Banagher Bridge was built on the line of the original seventeenth century houses.

2. DOMESTIC HOUSES

There is only one clear documentary reference to seventeenth century housing, the house of Sir Arthur Blundell, one of the charter members of 1628, who constructed a town house near the fort (Loeber 1980, 133-4). There are no diagnostic buildings of seventeenth century date surviving within the town but archways survive between some of the houses on the south-west side of Main Street. Such archways are a seventeenth century feature in Galway and Kilkenny but it is impossible to be certain of their date without stripping off the covering plaster.

3. BRIDGE

There is no indication of a bridge at Banagher in the 1629 map although one was present by 1690 which Cooke (1875, 320-2) suggests was built between 1671 and 1690. A new bridge replaced this in the mid-eighteenth century and one arch of it survives on the Connacht side of the river south of the present bridge which was built in the 1840s.

4. THE FORT

In 1621, as part of the plantation of McCoghlan's country it was proposed to erect a fort at Banagher because of its strategic position on the Shannon and "because it is a place which may be easily fortified, having been an ancient plantation of the English" (Russell and Prendergast 1880, 333). The same document notes that there were at Banagher only "the ruins of an old English fort, where he [McCoghlan] has no dwelling at all". This presumably refers to the O Cerbaill castle although it is possible that there was an earlier "English" fort at Banagher of which no record exists. The fort was built in 1624 by Sir Arthur Blundell (Russell and Prendergast 1880, 541) and it was named Fort Falkland after Sir Henry Carey, Viscount Falkland, who was appointed Lord Deputy in 1622 (see Kerrigan 1980-1, 145). A contemporary drawing of the fort, drawn by Nicholas Pynnar in 1624 (Pl. 3), shows it as consisting of a large rectangular enclosure with a circular tower at one corner, beside the river and a twin-bastioned gatehouse on the opposite side. The fort was apparently surrounded by a moat and a drawbridge is shown extending from the gatehouse. The walls of the main enclosure are battered and crenellated, while cruciform gun loops are shown in the walls of the gatehouse and corner-tower. Within the enclosure is a long rectangular building with gabled roof.

Banagher continued to have a strategic importance as a major crossing point until the nineteenth century and its fortifications were revamped during the flurry of defensive preparations that followed on the failed French invasion of 1798. The fort was refortified in 1807, a battery was constructed around the tower known as Cromwell's Castle on the west side of the bridge, a martello tower was constructed on the west bank in 1811, and Fort Eliza, a five-sided battery, was finished by 1817 (Kerrigan 1980, 172, 175-6).

5. TOWN DEFENCES

Evidence for town defences is limited entirely to a map of Banagher, now in the Public Record Office, London (Pl. 2). The map is dated by its cataloguer to the reign of Queen Elizabeth but the features indicate that it was drawn up

c.1630. It shows that the town was defended on three sides by a linear earthwork with a projecting bulwark near the north-east angle. The river-side was open but it was defended by the fort. There was only one gate, where Main Street cut through the east wall.

6. ST. MARY'S CHURCH (alias ST. RYNAGH'S)

O'Connor (O.S. Letters, Offaly, ii, 13-15) suggested that the old church of St. Mary at Banagher was built on the site of the Early Christian church of Cill Rignaighe, named after Regnagh, a sister of Finnian of Clonard, from whom the modern parish of Rynagh derives its name. This identification seems to be correct. Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 402) suggest that the site of Cill Rignaighe is the 'convent' and holy wells marked on the O. S. map in Garrycastle townland, about three miles south-east of Banagher. Little is known of this site, however, whereas the finding of the shaft of a high cross of 8th-10th century date in the churchyard at Banagher (Cooke 1852-3) indicates the existence of an early church of some importance there. At a later date there is documentary evidence to support the identification of Banagher with Cill Rignaighe. In 1436 the Annals of Connacht record that Feidhlim MacCoghlan, king of Dealbhna Ethra "was killed in the church of Cill Rignaigi, at mass on Sunday by the sons of O Matadain". The Annals of the Four Masters reproduce a confused record of the same event sub anno 1539: "MacCoghlan (Felim, son of Meyler) was slain at Beandchor by the sons of O'Madden ... after mass on Sunday". The substitution of "beandchor" for "Cill Rignaigi" in AFM indicates that the two sites were then known to be the same. Further evidence is found in the will of Sir John Coghlan, dated 1590, in which he instructed that his body be buried in the church of the Blessed Virgin of Raonach (= Rignaighe) (O.S. Letters, Offaly, i, 225). He was buried at Banagher where his grave slab can still be seen within the ruined church. These references indicate that the church of Cill Rignaighe continued to function until the end of the medieval period and it is likely that when the borough of Banagher was established in 1628 it was taken over for the use of the town.

Description

The ruined church lies within an overgrown churchyard on the west side of Main Street. The churchyard is delimited on the south by a semi-circular property boundary whose line is continued to the west by the rear boundary of three properties fronting onto Main Street. This may be the remains of an early enclosure. There is a sharp drop in ground level between the ground on which the church is built and the back gardens of the properties fronting Main Street.

The church consists of a small single aisled building with a maximum length of 17.16 m and width of 7.5 m. The masonry consists of poorly-coursed mixed stone, and there is no dressed stone. There are no dateable architectural features but the building almost certainly dates to the seventeenth century. It is divided by a modern wall, between 7 and 8 m high, into two compartments. The eastern one is open while the western example is now a burial vault. The east gable stands to a height of 7-8 m and has a pointed splayed opening, all that remains of the original window. The north and south walls stand to a height of about 4 m and each has one splayed opening denoting a window. The masonry of the western compartment is concealed by plaster internally and there is a modern brick doorway providing access in the north wall. A second entrance has been bricked-up immediately west of this opening. The original entrance was in the west wall but it has been blocked-up also and there is no evidence for dressed jambs.

Monuments

Cross-shaft. c.800 (Pl. 5).

National Museum of Ireland 1929: 1497. First noticed by Cooke (1852-3) who removed it from the churchyard to his house at Birr. According to Cooke it had previously stood "beside a crystal spring in the old market-square adjoining the churchyard". It is not clear where this market square was but the seventeenth century maps show a cross at the junction of Cuba Avenue with Main Street; alternatively it may be the cross shown within the churchyard on the map of c.1630 (Pl. 2). Henry (1964, 65; 1967, 143) has suggested that the cross was brought here from Clonmacnoise, probably in the seventeenth century. It is unnecessary to invoke this explanation, however, in view of the known early christian associations of the site. The cross has been dated to c.800 by Henry who regards it as part of her Clonmacnoise group.

The cross-shaft is damaged near the base where portion of the decoration is missing. There is a groove in each of the narrow sides which probably accommodated the cross-head's ring. There are four panels on faces 1 and 2, three on faces 3 and 4. Face 1 (from the top), a lion rampant, a cleric on horseback holding a crosier, a stag caught in a trap, a broken panel of four interlaced human figures. Face 2: interlace, spiral patterns, ribbon interlace, and animal interlace. Face 3: ribbon interlace, animal with interlaced tail, broken panel of four interlaced human figures.

John Coghlan. 1576-7 (Pl. 6)

Limestone. On the ground at the east end of the church. Coffin shaped slab damaged at the head and foot. Eight armed cross in false relief. The cross has a Knot and a Knop on the shaft; the centre has a rosette and the arms have rectangular expansions. Roman inscription at head and flanking the

cross-shaft:

R[ESVRGAM] H[IC] S[IEPVLTVS] I[ACE]IT IOANNES CO. MILES
QVOND[A SVE GENTIS] FVIT DVX QVI FIERI FECIT BV[ISTVN] ET
AN ELIZAB REG 19 ET AN SVFFVCATIONIS EXACTIONV IMAILEAC

[Here lies buried] John Colghlan], Kinght, sometime
chief of [his people] who caused this to be made ..., in
the 19th year of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the year
of the termination of exactions in Imaileac.

In view of the fact that Coghlan died in 1590 the tomb was
obviously made while he was still alive. See J. Assoc.
Preservation Mems Dead Ireland 2 (1892-4), 158-9.
Dims: H. 160 W. 64-55 D. 13 cm

7. MISCELLANEOUS

Mullaghakaraun. Ringfort.

Triple bank and ditch. Situated atop a low hill affording
extensive views to the west, north and east. The banks are
best preserved on the north side. The entrance was on the
north-west although there is also a gap on the east side.
Internal diameter 103.5 m (north-south), 109 m (east-west).
Internal structures are indicated by low grass covered banks
in the centre, one of which appears to be the foundations of
a rectangular structure. The inner bank is between 1 and 2 m
high on the south and 5.2 m wide at the base. The inner ditch
is 6.5 m wide and 2.5 m deep. The middle bank is 1 m high and
3.4 m wide at the base. The middle ditch is 3.8 m wide and 1
m deep. The outer bank is 75 cm high and 3.7 m wide. The
outer ditch is completely silted up.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

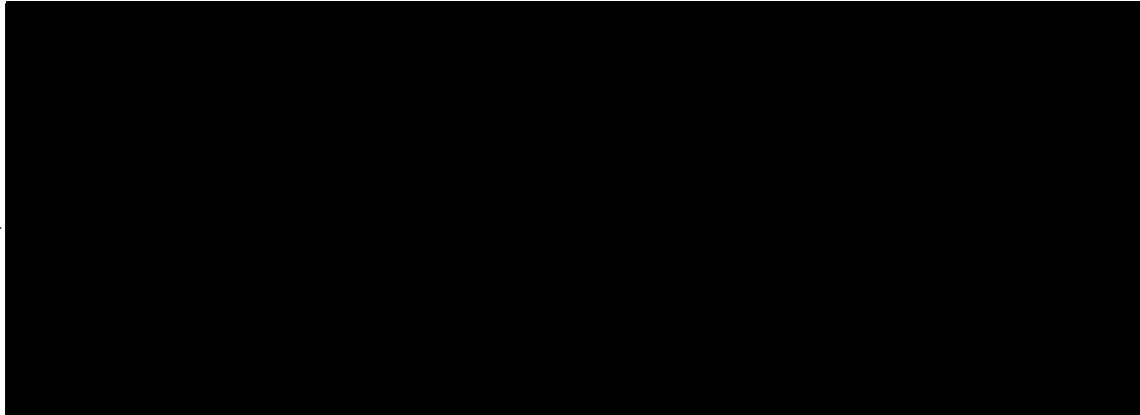

Banagher is important to archaeological research for two
reasons, firstly as an early monastic site, and secondly, as
a seventeenth century town. It is the findspot of one of the
best known cross-shafts of Early Christian date in Ireland
but some scholars have doubted that there was an early
monastic site of sufficient wealth to afford its manufacture.
One aim of excavation then should be to shed light on the
extent and nature of the early monastery. During the
sixteenth century the site of the future town appears to have
been relatively bare except for a church and castle but
during the 1620's Fort Falkland was established and the town
began to develop. Banagher is particularly important as an
example of a seventeenth century plantation town because it
is one of the few established in the midlands. Another

important aim of excavation would be to determine the relationship between the sixteenth century settlements, particularly the church, and the newly founded town. Little is known of the seventeenth century town. The maps suggest that it was small and walled but its precise extent is unknown, and we lack information on the nature of its houses, streets, and defences. The layout and nature of Fort Falkland at this date, also remains something of a mystery. The investigation of these features is also an important aim of excavation in the town.

In summary, the archaeological data indicates that the borough 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.

Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 2) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Banagher. This is based on the extent of the town as shown in the early seventeenth century maps, and includes the area south-east of this where settlement is likely to have occurred during the later seventeenth century. An area south-east of old St. Mary's church is also included because there may be traces of the old monastic site in this vicinity. In the absence of archaeological excavations little can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits. It may be noted, however, that disturbance is likely to have occurred along the street frontage during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and it is probable that archaeological deposits are confined to the gardens and open spaces at the rear of the frontage. Refuse pits, workshops, and house foundations are likely to survive in these areas and accordingly they are particularly important to archaeology.





BIRR

Birr is situated on the south-west border of Co. Offaly about eleven miles north-west of Roscrea. It is not on any major communications route although the main roads from Roscrea and Nenagh to Athlone and Tullamore pass through it. The town is sited on fairly level low-lying ground in the valley of the Little Brosna river and is built on the river Cancor which flows into the Little Brosna just below Birr. The original Irish name Birra means a marshy field. In the 1979 census it had a population of 3675.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

No prehistoric material is known from the immediate vicinity of the town although it is worth noting that the exceptional Dowris hoard of Later Bronze Age artefacts was found five miles to the north-east. The earliest recorded evidence for settlement at Birr is the monastery founded by St Brendan which is first referred to in 664 (AI). Gwynn and Gleeson (1961, 83) list the succession of abbots and bishops of Birr as recorded in the annals from 750 to 1079. The monastery was plundered by the Dublin Norse in 841 (AU; AFM) and was burned in 1167 (AFM). AU record the holding of a synod at Birr in 1174. An important association with the monastery of Birr is the manuscript known as the "Gospels of Mac Regol" (Rushworth Gospels), now in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. This richly ornamented gospel book of late eighth/early ninth century date is the work of a scribe named MacRegol, generally identified as Mac Riaguil Ua Magleni, the scribe, bishop and abbot of Birr who died in 822 (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 84).

The territory of Eile Ui Cerbaill, in which Birr was situated, was granted by Henry II to Philip de Braose in 1177 (Orpen 1911-20, ii, 102, 172; Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 174-6). In 1201 King John granted the territory to Theobald Walter (Curtis 1933-43, i, 11-12) who had probably begun to establish himself there in the closing years of the twelfth century. Precisely when the Normans first came to Birr is not known but, presumably because of the existence of the monastic site, it was chosen as the site of a castle early in the thirteenth century. An Anglo-Norman settlement had been established by 1207 when Murchad Ua Briain 'besieged the castle of Byrre and at last burnt the whole town' (A. Clon.). Cooke (1826, 21) reproduces a charter, said to have been in the possession of the baron of Galtrim in 1620, by which Theobald Walter granted the vill of Birr to Hugh de Huse, ancestor of the barons of Galtrim. The settlement around the castle was burned in 1214 by Cormac, son of Art Ua Maelseachlainn (ALC). Little more is known of its history,

although the 1305 extent of Dunkerrin records the receipt of £4 from Peter de Bermingham which was possibly for the service of Birr (White 1932, 148). The Anglo-Norman settlement at Birr probably collapsed, as it did in Eile Ua Cerbaill as a whole, sometime between 1315 and 1350 (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 348-50).

From the mid-fourteenth century Eile reverted to the control of the Ui Cerbaill and Birr seems to have been the site of their principal castle (Killanin and Duignan 1962, 105; Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 422-5). In 1594 Tadhg O Cerbaill of Birr granted his lands at Birr to James Oge Butler, while in 1601 he granted all his castles, messuages, etc. in Birr and other places to Robert Rothe, Henry Shee and William More Butler (Curtis 1933-43, vi, 76). The effect of these grants is uncertain but Birr certainly passed out of O Cerbaill hands in 1620 as a result of the plantation of Eile Ua Cerbaill.

In 1621 Laurence Parsons was granted the 'castle and fortillage' of Birr, which together with other lands were erected into the manor of Parsonstown, with a weekly market and two annual fairs (Ir Rec Comm 1830, 467; Lewis 1837, ii, 455), and it is to this that the origins of Birr as a town may be traced. In 1627 a further weekly market and two annual fairs at Parsonstown were granted to Sir William Parsons (Morrin 1863, 234). Sir Laurence Parsons took an active interest in the layout and running of the town as is demonstrated by ordinances of his, reproduced by Cooke (1875) relating to the paving of streets in the town, the use of stone chimneys, littering and other matters. The town suffered a setback in 1642 when it was burned by Confederate forces (Girouard 1965) but it recovered after the Restoration when Lewis (1837, ii, 456) notes the number of brass trading tokens issued in the town as an indication of its prosperity. Although no charter of incorporation is known, Sir William Petty's Political Anatomy of Ireland (1672, 125) notes that Parsonstown was sending two members to parliament in 1672, indicating that the borough had been established by that time.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE
2. DOMESTIC HOUSES
3. BRIDGE
4. INDUSTRIAL AREAS
5. TOWN DEFENCES
6. THE CASTLE
7. ST. BRENDAN'S CHURCH AND EARLY MONASTIC SITE
8. MISCELLANEOUS

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE

The town grew up south-east of the castle within a broad loop of the river Camcor, and its seventeenth century layout can be reconstructed from a plan prepared by the engineer Michael Richards in 1691 (Pl. 7). This shows that the town was primarily linear in plan, being based on the present Main Street with a sub-triangular market place, in which there was a rectangular market house, at the south end near the bridge. The market cross, referred to in documents of the 1620s, presumably stood here (Cooke 1875, 48). At its northern end Main Street did not extend beyond the line of the present Church Lane and Connacht Street. Richards' map shows an inturned entrance beyond this, whose line may be preserved in a lane running between Connacht Street and Emmet Street [Duke Street]. Emmet Street and the Square beyond it were not laid out until the mid-eighteenth century (Girouard 1965) and it is possible that the course of Main Street may have been realigned at this time. The map shows a bend in Main Street which is not noticeable today. Richard's map shows that the present Castle Street, running from the Market Square to the Castle, and Mill Lane, running along the north bank of the river east of the Main Street, were in existence by 1691. The map also shows a number of lanes leading to the east and west off Main Street. Two of these still survive on the east side, Shamble Lane and Fayle's Lane. South of the bridge, the map shows a street leading south from the bridge and another, now called Mountsally, to the west. Both are still in use.

2. DOMESTIC HOUSES

Richard's map shows that Main Street, Market Square, Castle Street and Bridge Street were built-up in 1691, and it is likely that a number of these houses survive although concealed by modern plaster. In particular, the houses on Market Sq. and the south end of Main St. are narrow and three storied and probably retain a seventeenth century core.

1679 HOUSE

Two houses face south onto a small lane at the rear of Delahunt's pub, on the corner of Market Sq. and Brendan St. The lane was entered directly from the Square through an archway which has been incorporated into the pub's lounge. Both houses are stone built. The first is two storied with a pitched gable and four narrow windows on the upper floor. It has been incorporated into the public house and its original dimensions and internal arrangements are unknown. The second house is not as high and is built onto the first. It measures 7.9 m by 5.9 m. Originally it may have been one storied with an attic but the front has been altered by the insertion of two recent windows upstairs, a door (now blocked) and a window on the ground floor. The south-east corner is

chamfered. The internal floor-beams are adze-cut but the original arrangement of the rooms is unclear. The ground-floor is cobbled. The house has an unusual dated wooden door frame.

The wooden door frame is supported on two cut stone jambs with chamfered corners and mortices which held the frame in position. The wood has rotted away from these jambs but the upper parts are still in good repair. The top right side is in worse condition than the left. The sides of the door frame are dowelled into triangular pieces which in turn tie in with the lintel. The frame is multi-moulded and has an enlarged V-shape in the centre of the lintel. The date 1679 is carved in relief on the lowest part of the lintel.
Dims: H. 184 W. 93 W. of lintel 150 cm.

OTHER SEVENTEENTH CENTURY HOUSES

Directly to the north are two houses probably of similar date although altered somewhat internally. They have chamfered stone jambs that held a wooden door frame also. These faced north onto a now closed lane which opened between the second and third houses on the east side of Main St. One house was altered in the eighteenth century when a new door was inserted and a moulding over it has an incised inscription: MR SAMUEL ABBOT 1780.

A house on Fayle's Lane, at the rere of the house fronting Main St. may also be seventeenth century. It is similar to those described above, stone built, narrow and has a pitched roof.

The eighth house from the corner of Church Lane, on the west side of Main Street, is another structure probably of seventeenth century date.

3. BRIDGES

There has been a bridge at Birr since 1626 at least. An ordinance of Sir Laurence Parsons, dated 1626, notes that the streets were to be paved "as well beyond the bridge as within the towne" (Cooke 1875, 385). The present bridge is probably of mid-eighteenth century origin and its arch stone are visible below the arches of the modern bridge. The houses shown by the O.S. on the west side of the bridge have been demolished.

Cooke (1875, 45) refers to a second bridge over the river Camcor c.1620. It was situated nearer the castle, roughly opposite St. Brendan's well. It is not shown on Richard's 1691 map although such a bridge may have existed and have been destroyed in the wars of the 1640s or 1690.

4. INDUSTRIAL AREAS

Mill lane led to a seventeenth century mill in the south-east corner of the town beside the Mill race.

5. TOWN DEFENCES

Richard's map of 1691 (Pl. 7) is the basic source for the outline of the town defences. This shows that the town defences had a circuit of about 2 km. The castle and church on the western side of the town were given the added protection of earthen embankments. It is difficult to date the fortifications with any exactitude. Richard's map attributes them to Cromwell but Loeber (1977-9, 288) suggests that they date to the Jacobite wars. It is probable that they were the end-product of building and rebuilding throughout the seventeenth century.

The north wall ran from William Street to the junction of Emmet [Duke] Street and the Square and was fortified with two bastions. The first appears to have stood at the northern tip of Spinner's Lane, but the Kink in The Green could also indicate its position. The second lay at the north-east angle where Emmet Street meets the Square. The line of the defences is preserved in the north line of Spinner's Lane. From the north-east angle the wall ran southwards to an inturned entrance near where Main Street and Connaught Street join. From here the wall ran south along the east side of Mill Street, stepping eastwards slightly at Wood Lane. There was a rectangular bastion between Chapel Lane and the mill race, from where the wall turned westwards. A portion of the south-east corner defences is probably retained in a wall running obtusely from the south-east end of Brendan St. towards the Manor Saw Mill. It is built of roughly coursed masonry with a wider plinth of large undressed blocks. The southern line may be retained in the south side of Mill Lane. West of the bridge there was a stretch of wall terminating in a small bastion.

The fortification protecting the church may have been walled and ditched. It had large bastions on the south, in the Pig Market, and north-east angle, north-west of the Corn and Wool Market. There was a small V-shaped bastion on the east wall close to the church, and a gate where Church Lane penetrated the wall. The line of the east wall is preserved by the modern graveyard wall and the east wall of the Corn and Wool Market. These defences were linked to Birr Castle on the north-west by a semi-rectangular bastion, and on the south-west they adjoined one of the castle's outer towers. There appears to have been an opening in the defences just south of the castle. A second break in the wall is shown by Richards mid-way along Castle St.

6. THE CASTLE

The earliest reference to the existence of a castle at Birr is in 1207 when it was attacked and destroyed by Murchad Ua Briain (A. Clon.). This was presumably a motte as Orpen (1907, 133) has suggested. The precise date of its erection and the identity of its builder are unknown but it may well have been constructed during the expedition of Geoffrey de Marisco to Killaloe in 1207 (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 221). After the destruction of 1207 the castle was rebuilt in 1213 (A. Clon; AFM) but in 1214 Cormac, son of Art Ua Maelsechlainn "went to the castle of Birr and burned its bawn, and burned the entire church, and took all its food out of it, in order that the foreigners in the castle should not get food in it" (ALC). This seems to suggest that the castle of Birr survived the attack but nothing more is known of it until the fifteenth century by which time it was probably the principal stronghold of the Ua Cerbaill. In 1432 AFM record that the earl of Ormond destroyed O Cerbaill's two castles and it has been suggested that Birr was one of these (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 422). This may be the structure later known as the Black Castle. In 1528 (Butler 1949, 35) and 1532 (AFM) the earl of Kildare besieged Birr castle during periods of internecine strife among the Ua Cerbaill.

The acquisition of Birr Castle by Laurence Parsons in 1621 marks a major turning point in its history. It is generally suggested that Parsons erected a large gatehouse which together with two flanking towers forms the core of the modern Birr Castle (Cooke 1875; Girouard 1965; Guinness and Ryan 1971, 271). The documentary evidence is not sufficient, however, to reconstruct the rebuilding process with precision and it is possible that the gatehouse and flanking towers may have been in existence when Parsons acquired the castle. A sketch of the castle in a cook-book of 1668 (Pl. 8) and Richard's plan of 1691 both show the gatehouse as part of an enlarged central block into which the flanking towers had been absorbed as wings. In time this block became the main residence and the Black castle was demolished in 1778 (Girouard 1965). The castle saw action in the wars of the 1640s and 1680s. In 1643 it was besieged and captured by the Confederates under Preston who abandoned and burnt it soon afterwards (Girouard 1965; Lewis 1837, ii, 455-6). In 1690 it was besieged and bombarded by a Jacobite army under the duke of Berwick. The siege was unsuccessful but its scars are still to be seen, particularly in the walls of the north-east flanker which seems to have borne the brunt of the bombardment (Girouard 1965).

Description

The castle is located on top of a ridge north-west of the town. Its core is a seventeenth century gatehouse built to control access to the medieval Black Castle. Two flanking towers were added before 1668 because they are shown in a

drawing of that date preserved in a cookery book written by Dorothy Parsons (Pl. 8). The addition of these flankers gave the castle its curious plan of a central block with two bent wings hooked onto it. These flankers are the only part of the house which preserve any early-seventeenth century detail. In 1778 the Black Castle and the bawns were removed and replaced by lawns and parkland. In 1803 the castle was gothicised and given a limestone gothic facade designed by John Johnson. The central block was heightened by the addition of a storey after a fire in 1832. Vaubanesque fortifications were added in 1846-8 on the north-west and south of the house and none of these earthworks is of seventeenth century date.

The Castle

An image of the early castle can be obtained from the 1668 drawing together with Richards map of 1691. The 1668 sketch depicts it as a central block with angled flankers. The central block had five bays on the front facade and two on the sides. It was three-storied with small dormer windows in the attics of the flankers and tall chimneys in seventeenth century style. The flankers were attached to the main block by extensions of unequal width but which were one bay long. The flankers were angled away from the main block and may have been independent towers originally. The centre block had a pointed and moulded entrance door centrally placed. A second entrance is shown in the western extension. The eastern flanker was the more substantial of the two with two bays on the south and west walls both of which had hood mouldings. The west flanker has only one bay in both walls. Hood mouldings are indicated on all windows except those in the side of the central block.

The core of the castle has been changed outwardly by the addition of L-shaped extensions on the south-east and south-west, the addition of castellations, a porch and two circular turrets to the north facade. There is still a seventeenth century central door on the south facade but instead of being pointed, the arch is round and finely pick-dressed. The second entrance is concealed by the south-west extension. Internally, however, the only clear seventeenth century remnant is the staircase which rises through three stories of the house and was put in between 1660 and 1681 when it was described by Dinely as 'the fairest staircase in Ireland' (Shirley 1864-6, 272). The stair is of yew and was restored after being damaged in the fire of 1832 (Girouard 1965, 6). Girouard (1965, 4) states that the proportions of the present entrance hall are long and narrow because it was the room above the archway of the gatehouse constructed between 1620-7. It is suggested that the line of this arched entrance ran through what is now the basement. Internally at basement level the walls are extremely thick and there is a central passage way between the Kitchens but it is difficult to know whether it once constituted a separate block or not.

The north flanker is the larger of the two and is probably the one referred to in old accounts as the 'storehouse flanker'. It has been substantially rebuilt and an extra floor added but hood mouldings of seventeenth century windows are present on the eastern and southern walls as are the holes caused by the Jacobite bombardment. The remains of a circular stone staircase rises from the ground floor but it is now largely blocked up. The muniments room, on the first floor, has seventeenth century plasterwork consisting of a festooned frieze with bunches of grapes and heads. £10 was spent in wainscoting the first-floor room in the storehouse flanker in 1625-6 and the plasterwork probably dates from that time (Girouard 1965, 5). There are two bartizans but both are of brick and appear to be post-seventeenth century additions. The south flanker is square in plan and although Girouard (1965, 4) regarded its window mullions as original they are not in the same style as those of the north flanker. It is possible that this tower was added before 1668 for the purposes of symmetry.

Among the internal furnishings of the castle are paintings of sixteenth and seventeenth century date. The earliest silver is of the seventeenth century. Most of these furnishings are not original, however, being acquired in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The three sixteenth century pictures, for instance, came into the family in the eighteenth century through marriage (Girouard 1965, 11). The original furniture was dispersed in the nineteenth century and the present furnishings were bought during the past one hundred and fifty years. A stone inkwell in the main hall inscribed: A TOKEN TO MADVM FRANCIS PERSONS, may be of seventeenth century date.

Outbuildings

South of the castle the 1691 map shows a walled garden on two levels. The level closest to the castle was enclosed on the south with an arcaded wall and from it steps led down the hill, which was also enclosed, towards an arched gateway which presumably opened into Castle St. The map shows two circular bastions on the east and west angles of this wall. The north side of the castle was enclosed by a double bawn. In the bawn adjacent to the castle there were five buildings while the outer bawn appears to have been a garden enclosed by walls or a ditch. Two two-storied houses were attached to the east and west ends of the castle in the inner bawn. The Black Castle, indicated as a rectangular structure, was on the west side of this bawn while another tower is indicated on the north side. There was another long building on the north side and a well is indicated in the centre. Girouard (1965) states that these buildings, stables, kitchens, and gatehouse, were erected by Laurence Parsons c.1627 and that he also heightened and added a turret to the Black Castle at the same time.

There is no trace of any of these structures now because of the landscaping of the grounds, the creation of the lawns and park, in 1788. The construction of Vaubanesque fortifications in 1846-8 by Richard Wharton Myddelton removed whatever traces may have survived this landscaping. Traces of the original seventeenth century fortifications may be present, however, in the moat on the south-east of the castle. There is a rotary quern of uncertain date on the drive in front of the castle.

7. ST BRENDAN'S CHURCH, TOWER AND MAUSOLEUM

In view of the reference to a synod here in 1174 (AU) it is probable that the pre-Norman monastic foundation functioned until the establishment of the Anglo-Norman settlement at Birr. This was probably the church burned by Cormac son of Art Ua Maelseachlainn in 1214. Nothing further is heard of the church until the late fourteenth century when references begin to occur in papal documents. It is likely then that the ruined St. Brendan's church stands on the site of the pre-Norman church. The location of the Early Christian monastery at Birr has never been precisely identified but it is likely that it was in the same area as the seventeenth century core of the town and castle.

Little is known of the church in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries but it seems clear that Laurence Parsons rebuilt it at the same time as he was rebuilding the castle. The church acted as a defensive outpost of the castle in the sieges of 1643 and 1690 (Girouard 1965).

Description (Pls. 10-11)

The ruined church is situated east of the castle within a churchyard north of Castle Street. There are no traces of any Early Christian features but it is interesting to note that the defences of the seventeenth century town form a large enclosure around the site.

The church is an almost square building measuring 16.9 by 16.6 m. It consists of a nave, a north aisle, and a tower. The masonry consists of coursed limestone. The quoins and jambs are of weathered sandstone and red conglomerate. The rear arches are of red brick. The nave and tower are of seventeenth century date. The aisle is not shown on Richards' map and was probably added after 1691.

The gabled east wall of the NAVE has a fine pointed window with external hood mould. The window is not flush with the external facing of the wall. There is no trace of an arcade between the nave and the aisle but it is evident from the pitched gables that the both the nave and aisle roofs would have required the support of an arcade. It may have

been wooden.

The AISLE has a pointed window with external hood moulding in the gabled east wall. There are two pointed windows with hood mouldings and glazing bar recesses in the north wall. There is a flat arched opening largely built of red brick in the west wall. A break in the masonry indicates that the aisle is an addition and the quality of the masonry is inferior.

The TOWER is almost square, measuring 6.45 by 6.55 m, and was probably five floored with stepped battlements. Externally there is a string course between the second and third floors, and a drainage course at battlement level. The tower is in good condition except for a bad crack in the east wall. The ground floor has a round arched door with a niche above containing an eroded achievement of arms, considered by Lord Rosse to be a Parsons coat (Pl. 11). The crest appears to be an axe and a demi-lion over a helmet. The door jambs are well finished, tooled and chamfered. There are two smaller round-headed openings in the north and south walls with similar jambs but these are now blocked. The east wall has a large rectangular opening with a wooden lintel but no dressed stone. There are large wooden lintels over all the openings which are adze cut and are probably of seventeenth century date. The first floor has a single-light splayed flat arched narrow window in the north, south and west walls. The southern one is blocked. There is a wider splayed opening in the east wall, now blocked. The second and third floors are featureless but the fourth floor, the belfry stage, has twin light round arched windows in each wall. The centre mullion is missing from each window.

Mausoleum

Incorporated into the south wall is a seventeenth century mausoleum. A rectangular single floored building measuring 7 by 6.4 m. The masonry consists of roughly coursed limestone, similar to that in the tower. The entrance is on the north and has tooled jambs with concave chamfers in seventeenth century style. There is a round-arched single-light window in the east and west walls and a double-light window in the south wall. They all have rectangular hood mouldings similar to those in the north flanker of the castle. The roof is made of thin slabs of slate. The door and windows are blocked.

8. MISCELLANEOUS

Enclosure?

South of the bridge is the arc of a possible enclosure forming the rear boundary of properties fronting onto Moorpark Street. It may possibly be the remains of an Early Historic site.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

The Problems

Birr is important to archaeological research because it is one of the few towns established in the Irish midlands during the seventeenth century. It was developed on the site of an Early Christian monastery dedicated to St. Brendan and it is possible that some features of the monastery were incorporated into the town. In particular, the seventeenth century defences may have utilised some remnants of the original monastic enclosure. Birr was the site of an Ui Cerbaill castle in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and it is possible that there was a wider settlement centred on this fortification.

Much of the street pattern of the seventeenth century town survives and it is likely that many of the houses on Main Street and Castle Street are built on the foundations of their seventeenth century predecessors. Four houses of seventeenth century date have been listed above but there is a strong possibility that many others survive behind modern plaster facades, in particular along Main Street and Castle Street. The proper investigation of these buildings will shed much light on the form of seventeenth century housing within the town. It will reveal information, for instance, on the regions of England from which the initial settlers came. It will also be important in determining their relationship to the housing of the Ulster Plantation.

The course of the town defences, as outlined above, is based on Richards' 1691 map. The course is not known exactly and it needs to be tested by excavation in order to determine whether it is correct or not. The defences appear to have been earthen rather than wooden but excavation is likely to reveal traces because even if the rampart was removed it is likely that a ditch would survive intact.

Archaeological Potential

Archaeology does not consist solely of excavation nor does it stop at ground level. The archaeological evidence for Birr'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 Birr and the collection of papers preserved at Birr Castle are particularly important in this regard. 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 seventeenth century plantation. The only definite standing buildings of pre-1700 date are Birr Castle, the ruined Protestant Church, and four domestic houses. With these exceptions the destruction of buildings above ground has been extensive, but the street pattern of the seventeenth 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 Birr'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 Birr'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 Birr'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. 4) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Birr. This comprises the walled area of the seventeenth century town, together with an area south of the bridge where settlement also occurred in the seventeenth century. An area outside the wall has also been shaded to allow for a possible fosse and potential suburban development. 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.



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



DAINGEAN

Daingean is a small town situated some nine miles north-east of Tullamore on relatively low-lying ground in central Offaly. The Tullamore-Edenderry road and the Grand Canal pass through the town. Formerly Philipstown, it was the county town until supplanted by Tullamore in 1833.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The present name Daingean, a fortress or stronghold, is a revival of the name of an O Conchobhair Failghe fortress which was the earliest settlement on the site. Neither the form nor construction date of this fort are known. The earliest reference to it occurs in 1537 when A. Conn record that the fort of Daingean was destroyed by Lord Leonard Grey. In 1546 the Lord Justice, Sir William Brabazon, erected a fort, named Fort Governor, on the site of Daingean which was strengthened the following year by Sir Edward Bellingham (Hayes McCoy 1976, 70). AFM records that in 1546 'the English entered the castle of Daingean and destroyed the church of Cill O Duirthe and used its materials in the work'. It also records the construction of a large court or mansion at Daingean in 1548. In the Act of 1556 which reduced the territory of Ui Failghe to shireground known as King's County, Daingean was renamed Philipstown in honour of Phillip II of Spain, husband of Queen Mary of England.

Philipstown was granted a market in 1567 and two years later it was incorporated by charter of Elizabeth (Butlin 1976, 162). The charter granted it the same liberties and customs as Naas, with a weekly market and directed the corporation to fortify the town with fosses and stone walls (11 RDKPRI, 225: no. 1500). Fortifications were soon built and a grant of 1570-1 refers to twelve messuages "within the circuit of the walls and foss of the town ... one watermill within the walls excepted" (12 RDKPRI, 40: no. 1759). It is probable that Daingean was a small walled settlement similar to Port Laoise at this time. The town grew slowly and it never really flourished. In 1598 there is a reference to the gaol of Phillipstown (17 RDKPRI, 86: no. 6221). This was probably situated in Gaol Lane. Lewis (1837, ii, 460) notes the granting of additional charters in 1673 and 1688-9. The town was burnt during the Jacobite wars apparently by the O'Conors (Comerford 1885, 303).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE
2. DOMESTIC HOUSES
3. INDUSTRIAL AREAS
4. TOWN DEFENCES
5. THE FORT
6. KILLADERRY CHURCH
7. MISCELLANEOUS

1. STREET PATTERN AND MARKET PLACE

The street plan of the town is linear. It is aligned along Main Street, the only north-south thoroughfare. The burgage plots appear to have been of roughly equal length running back from the street. The Main Street probably functioned as the market place also. The Square has the appearance of being an eighteenth century addition.

2. DOMESTIC HOUSES

There are no remains of houses earlier than the eighteenth century within the town.

3. INDUSTRIAL AREAS

A grant of 1570-1 refers to a watermill within the walls (12 RDKPRI, 40: no. 1759). Its site is unknown.

4. TOWN DEFENCES

The charter of 1569 directed the corporation to fortify the town with fosses and stone walls (11 RDKPRI, 225: no. 1500), and a grant of 1570-1 refers to twelve mesuages 'within the circuit of the walls and foss of the town' (12 RDKPRI, 40: no. 1759). There is no standing evidence for walls but the town is surrounded on the west, south and most of the east sides by a fosse 2 m deep and 3 m wide. The land in the immediate vicinity is criss-crossed by similar water filled drainage ditches, however, and it cannot be said with certainty that they are an ancient feature.

5. THE FORT

Situated at the south-eastern end of the Main St. at the east end of Fort Lane. The remains consist of an artificially

heightened rectangular platform faced and enclosed with a stone wall and surrounded by a moat. The stone walls are now represented in places by low banks 1 m high. Little of the stone facing survives because it was carted away about 50 years ago to build Castlebarnagh House and pave its yard (inf. from Mr S. Mangan). Short sections of the facings are to be seen on the south and north with a section 2.5 m high on the west. The moat is dry and filled up but may have been 2-3 m wide. Access across the moat was on the north and west over stone built round arched bridges. The fort is divided in two by a low bank running north-south which may have been stone faced. The east side of the fort was also divided by a further bank. The west side has the footings, standing to a height of between one and five courses, of a large house with stepped facade which faced the western entrance. It does not appear to be any older than the eighteenth century.

Armorial Plaques

According to Mr Shap Mangan of Castlebarnagh House these were removed from two piers at the entrance to the fort but this was not their original sixteenth-century location, which was unknown. One is the property of Mr. Mangan while the other belongs to the Brady family, Main St. Daingean. Both have been sandblasted and are on display in the local library.

- 1: Rectangular limestone plaque decorated in false relief with an achievement of arms and the date 1566. The date is not as well cut as the rest of the shield and may have been added. The shield is surrounded by the garter inscribed 'HONI SOIT QUI MAL Y PENSE' and surmounted by an earl's coronet. It has eight quarters. First a bend engrailed sable for Ratcliffe. Second a bar between two chevrons. Third a lion rampant. Fourth an engrailed saltire. Fifth three fishes. Sixth three bars. Seventh five ermines/ fleur-de-lis. Eighth small animal on a bar above a wrapped figure. These are the arms of Thomas Ratcliffe, third earl of Sussex, lord deputy of Ireland from 1556 to 1564.
Dims: H.53 W.44 D.14 cm.

- 2: Rectangular limestone plaque decorated in false relief with an achievement of arms. The shield is surrounded by an inscribed garter and surmounted by a royal crown. The motto is identical to plaque 1 but there is an extra gathering around the buckle. The shield is divided quarterly, first and fourth, three fleur-de-lis; second and third, three lions passant guardant. These are the royal arms of Queen Mary (d.1558).

Dims: H.53 W.42 D.14 cm.

See Fear Ceall 1935-45.

6. KILLADERRY CHURCH

In 1546 the church of Cill O Duirthe was destroyed by the English to provide building materials for the new fort at Daingean. In 1564, however, the advowson of the rectory and vicarage of 'Kylladorry' in the King's County was granted to Edward William (11 ROKPRI, 102: no. 623). In 1597 Henry Bouchier was presented to the perpetual rectory of the parish church of Killadorie (Morris 1862, 425) while in 1605-6 William Hiccock was presented (Erck 1846-52, i, 248). These references indicate that a new church was built after 1546 although it is not known whether it was built on the old site or in Philipstown itself. Comerford (1885, 300) notes that 'the site of the old parish church (of Killaderry), about a mile from the town is still used as a place of interment ... The bare outlines of the foundations of the old church can be traced, but none of the walls remain'.

Description

Only the grass covered foundations of a small single aisled church remain in a large rectangular graveyard to the north of Daingean. The building measures 14.2 m by 5 m. There are no pre 1700 memorials.

6. MISCELLANEOUS

Castle Barnagh

The site lies to the north-east of Daingean. Some remains of the castle stood when Lewis visited the site and Mr Mangan of Castlebarnagh House remembers stone being brought from the castle to build the present house. The only remains now are a large rectangular enclosure and a few bumps which have no distinct pattern.

Fulachta Fiadh?

In a corner of the field immediately west of the site of Castle Barnagh is a ring of very green grass which when plough reveals darker soil and large numbers of small stones. It is beside a small stream.

Church site?

- A chapel is reputed to have been in the field north-east of the castle field at Castle Barnagh. It is known as the 'stony field'.

Chalice. 17th cent.

Silver. Inscribed 'GEORGE GRIFFIN 1671'. Incised crucifixion and decorated Knop. Kept in St. Philip Neri's (R.C.) church.


ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

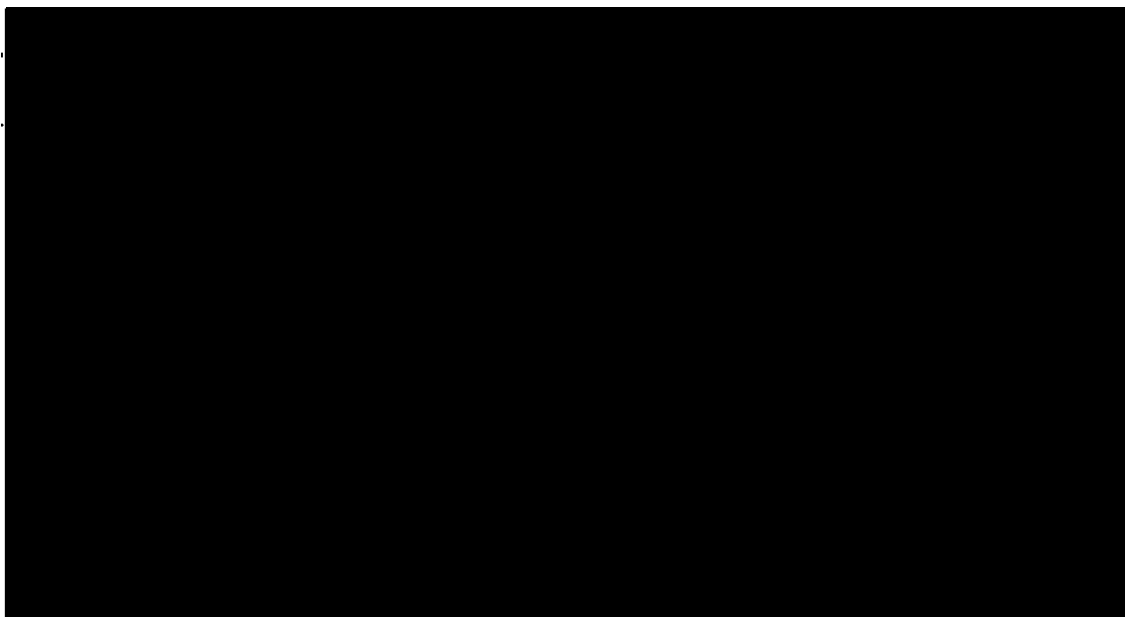
Daingean is important to archaeological because it is one of only two towns established in the Irish midlands during the sixteenth century, the other being Port Laoise. An important aim of excavation would be to determine the nature of the town during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Nothing is known of the form of its houses at this time. The exact course of the town defences is uncertain and excavation on the site of the suggested site of the fosse is important in order to determine whether it is of seventeenth century date or not. The layout and nature of Daingean Fort also remains a mystery.

In summary, the archaeological data indicates that the borough has been the scene of human activity since the sixteenth century. 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.

Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 5) delimits the area of archaeological potential within modern Daingean. This is based on the extent of the burgage plot pattern inherited from the plantation town. In the absence of archaeological excavations little can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits. It may be noted, however, that disturbance is likely to have occurred along the street frontage during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and it is probable that archaeological deposits are confined to the gardens and open spaces at the rear of the frontage. Refuse pits, workshops, and house foundations are likely to survive in these areas and accordingly they are particularly important to archaeology.





DUNKERRIN

Dunkerrin is a small village in the extreme south of the county situated on the Dublin-Limerick road about five miles south-west of Roscrea. The name is generally explained as Dun Cairin, the fort of Cairin, although O'Donovan (O.S. Letters, Co. Offaly, ii, 178) found difficulty in establishing the orthography.

Gwynn and Gleeson (1961, 148, 182) have suggested that Dunkerrin was an important tribal centre of the Clanna Cein of Eile Ua Cerbaill prior to the Anglo-Norman invasion. They note a tradition that the motte was the old inauguration site of the Kings of Eile. The placename suggests a pre-Norman origin.

Dunkerrin was part of the territory of Eile Ua Cerbaill granted to Theobald Walter by Prince John in 1185 and Theobald appears to have obtained possession of these lands by 1200 (Orpen 1911-20, ii, 102; Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 174-6). It is likely then that the motte was constructed about this time. Dunkerrin became the centre of an important Butler manor and an extent drawn up in 1305 survives (White 1932, 147-54). The topographical information which this extent provides is limited to references to a grange, a cowshed, a sheepfold, a kitchen and a mill (White 1932, 148). A record of burgage returns paid by the burgesses indicates the existence of a borough there in 1305 (White 1932, 151). At about this time also the church of Dunkerrin is first referred to, in the ecclesiastical taxation of 1302-6 (Sweetman 1875-86, v).

The Anglo-Norman settlement of Eile Ua Cerbaill probably collapsed under the pressure of the Irish resurgence between c.1316 and 1346 (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 348-50). The parish church of Dunkerrin continued to function, however, and is referred to in 1405 (Twemlow 1904, 33), 1428 (Twemlow 1909, 5), 1563 (11 ROKPRI, 96: no. 562) and in the Down Survey of 1654 (O.S. Letters, Co. Offaly, ii, 178).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. SITE OF BOROUGH
2. MOTTE?
3. CHURCH
4. MISCELLANEOUS

1. SITE OF BOROUGH

There are no surviving earthworks of the borough but it is likely that it was situated between the church and the site of the castle/ ?motte. It is possible that Dunkerrin was a dispersed borough but nonetheless one would expect buildings to have existed in this area.

2. MOTTE?

Dunkerrin was the centre of an important Butler manor but it is difficult to identify a manorial settlement on the ground. The townland of Franckfort is an obvious location for the manor but the only earthwork here is a ringfort. It is possible that the ruined Franckfort House may occupy the site of the older castle but it has no trace of any pre-1700 remains. The most likely site for the manor is the earthwork located 400 m east of St. Mary's (R.C.) Church, Dunkerrin. This earthwork has the location of a motte but the features of a ringwork.

Description

Situated on a natural rise in the townland of Franckfort, a short distance east of Dunkerrin village. It commands good views to the east, south and west but the view to the north is blocked by a ridge.

The monument consists of an oval platform, measuring 26.5 by 22 m, which was formed by scarping the sides of the hill. It is surrounded by a ditch and an external bank is present on the south side. There is a natural platform to the north which may have served as a bailey. There are traces of wall foundations, 5 m long and 1.5 m wide at the east end. There is sloping ground on the north side which may indicate the entrance. The platform is surrounded by a deep ditch 3.3 m wide and 4 m deep with a counter-scarp bank on the west, south and east sides some 3.2 m wide. This bank varies in height from 1 m on the west to 3.5 m near the east side.

3. CHURCH

The present Church of Ireland church probably occupies the site of the medieval parish church but the only remnant of pre-1700 date is a grave slab to the south of the church.

Monuments

John O'Carroll. 1681.

Red conglomerate. Inscription in Roman capitals in false

relief above an incised Iona-style cross with an engrailed shaft:

DOMINVS AN/ THIONIVS oCAR/ ROLL HVnC/ LAPIDEm HIC/
APPONI CURAV/ IT SVPER/ CORPVS PATRIS/ SVI IOANNIS O/
CARROLL DE CULL/ ONVANE/ OVI obIIT ANNO DONI 1681/ DIE
12 MARTIS/ REquleScAT ANI/ MA ejVS IN PAC/ E AMEN.

Sir Anthony O'Carroll placed this stone above the body
of his father John O'Carroll of Cullenwaine who died 12
March 1681. May his soul rest in peace. Amen.

Dims: H. 214 W. 81 T. 30 cm.

J. Assoc. Preservation Mems Dead Ireland 9 (1913-16), 298.

4. MISCELLANEOUS

Ringfort. Franckfort.

Single bank and ditch with counterscarp bank. Situated on the highest ground in the area. Planted with trees but it affords good views in all directions. The bank and ditch have been damaged on the south-west and north sides by cattle. Entrance on the south-east with stone wall footings immediately to the south. Internal diam. 35 by 30 m. The enclosing bank is 5 m wide and 1.5 m high. The ditch is 1.5 m deep and 5.5 m wide. The counterscarp bank is on the south, west and east.

Ringfort. Franckfort/ Castleroan.

Single bank and ditch. Low lying position. The north side is overgrown. Raised interior. Int. diam. 48 m. The enclosing bank is 2 m wide and 1 m high on average. The ditch is 3.4 m wide and 3 m deep from the top of the bank.

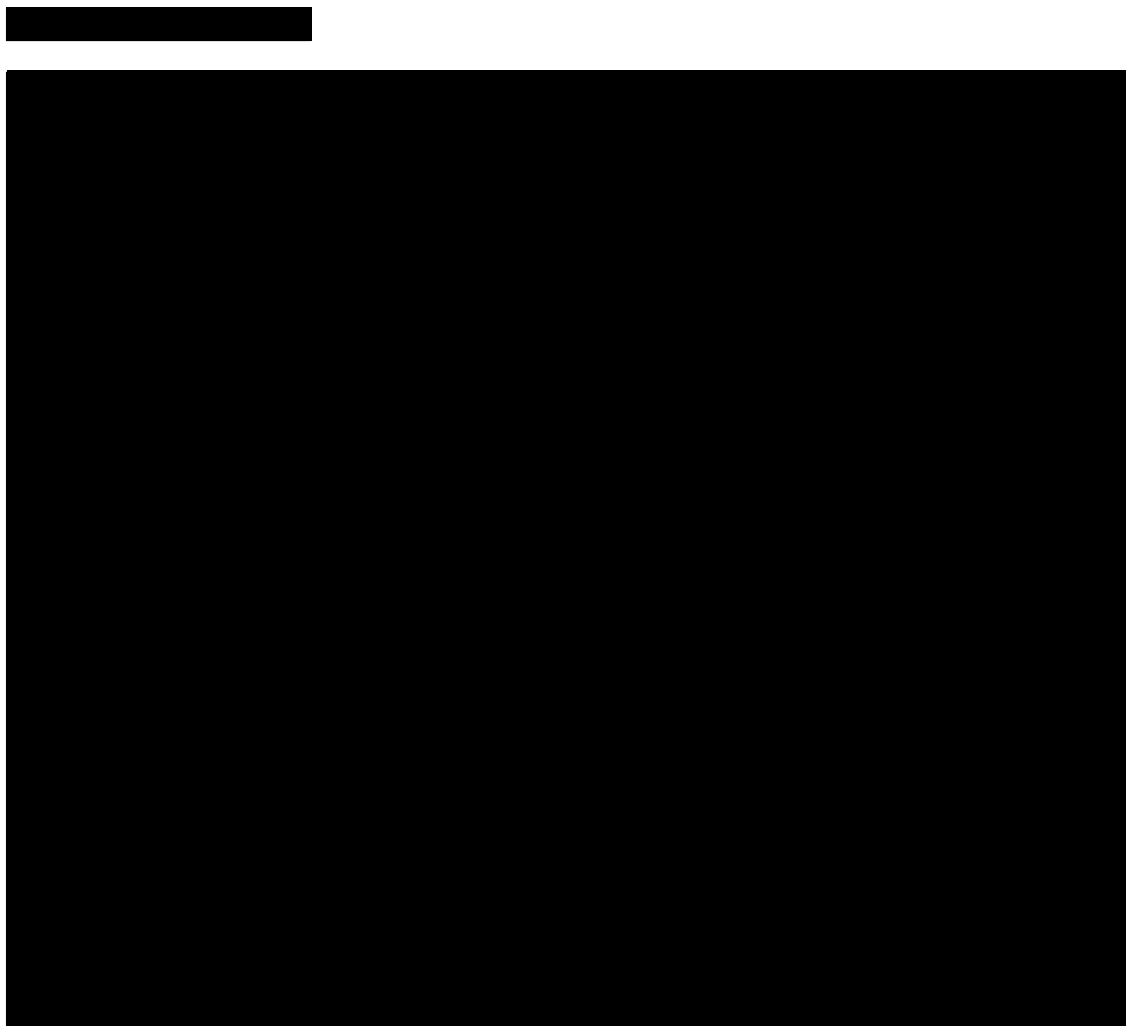
ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

Dunkerrin is a deserted borough. An archaeological problem which needs to be resolved is the exact location of the Anglo-Norman borough. It has been suggested above that it probably lies in the strip of land between the modern church (C of I) and the motte. Within this area, disturbance has been confined to ploughing. The documentary evidence suggests that Dunkerrin was the site of one of the most important Anglo-Norman boroughs in Offaly but nothing is known of its houses, workshops or streets, if any. There are problems also in identifying the motte which marked the medieval manorial centre. The suggested motte is small by comparison with others found at manorial centres and its precise function 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.

In summary, the borough of Dunkerrin 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. 6) delimits the area of archaeological potential. This is based on the suggestion outlined above that the site of the borough lay between the church and the motte. The ringfort of Franckfort/ Castleroan has also been ringed. In the absence of archaeological excavations nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits.



SEIRKIERAN

Sierkieran is situated within the ancient territory of Eile Ua Cerbaill, beside the village of Clareen, about five miles south-east of Birr. The area in which it is situated is one of relatively low-lying ground between the Shannon basin, to the west, and the Slieve Bloom mountains to the east. The name is derived from Saighir Chiarain, Kieran's fresh well.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL & HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Sierkieran was the principal ecclesiastical foundation of St. Ciaran, patron of Ossory, and the his monastery provides the earliest evidence for settlement on the site. Killanin and Duignan (1967, 120) have suggested that it may have been a pagan sanctuary previously because of the tradition of a perpetual fire having been kept there. Sierkieran was the most important church in Ossory until it was supplanted by Aghaboe. At the end of the twelfth century the territory of Eile Ua Cerbaill was taken over by Theobald Walter, to whom it had been granted by Prince John in 1185 (Orpen 1911-20, iii, 102-3; Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 174-6) and it may be that the motte was erected at the end of the twelfth century. For most of the medieval period Sierkieran belonged to the bishop of Ossory. This was presumably because it had been coarb land in the pre-Norman period and consequently it passed directly to the bishops (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 184). Returns for Seirkieran feature in the 1305 extent of the Butler manor of Dunkerrin (White 1932, 152) and Gwynn and Gleeson (1961, 184-5) have suggested that this indicates that the area was seized by Theobald Walter or his successors. Clyn's annals record that Geoffrey St. Leger, bishop of Ossory, acquired the manor of Seirkieran in a duel (Butler 1849, 10) and Carrigan (1905, ii, 4) has interpreted this episode as a trial by combat resorted to by the bishop in order to recover the lands usurped after the Anglo-Norman invasion. Gwynn and Gleeson (1961, 185) also raise the possibility that the Ossory see lands were not the same as those which fell within the manor of Dunkerrin.

A fifteenth century account of the rents of the Bishop of Ossory records that there were then sixty-one burgesses at Seirkieran (Lawlor 1908, 162). The date of the borough's foundation is not known but it may have been established shortly after the recovery of Seirkieran by Geoffrey St. Leger in 1284. In 1288-9 the bishop of Ossory was granted the right to hold a fair at his manor of Seirkieran (Lambeth Palace Ms. 610). The rental evidence in the Red Book of Ossory indicates that the borough was still functioning in

the fifteenth century, a surprising feature in view of the collapse of Anglo-Norman settlement over most of Eile Ua Cerbaill (Gwynn and Gleeson 1961, 348-50). In 1548 AFM records that "Saighir Chiarain and Cill Chormaic were burned and destroyed by the English and O'Carroll". An extent of the priory in 1568 noted "that the vill of Shyre belonged to the said priory but that it now belongs to the Queen, and that in it are six cottages" (Carrigan 1905, ii, 6). After that date the settlement drops out of history.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

1. SITE OF BOROUGH
2. MOTTE?
3. ST. CIARAN'S CHURCH & EARLY MONASTIC SITE
4. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF ST CIARAN/ ST. MARY
5. MISCELLANEOUS

1. SITE OF BOROUGH

There can be little doubt but that the borough was centred on the parish church of St. Ciaran and the range of earthworks within the early monastic enclosure are almost certainly its remains (see below).

2. MOTTE?

A low rectangular mound at the highest point within the south-west perimeter of the monastic enclosure. It utilized the enclosure's inner bank on the south-west. The summit is approximately 20 m square and it is 3 m high; much of the interior has been quarried. The basal dims. are 25.5 by 25 m. The bank of the Early Christian enclosure was cut through on the north and south of the mound, and a ditch 5 m wide and 1 m deep was dug around the motte linking into the ditch of the monastic enclosure on the west.

3. ST. CIARAN'S CHURCH & EARLY MONASTIC SITE

In view of the pre-Patrician traditions associated with St. Ciaran there can be little doubt that Seirkieran is an early foundation. Carrigan (1905, ii, 2) dates the foundation of this church to c.450 while Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 194) favour a date of pre-489. The monastery was the most important church site in early Ossory and it was plundered on at least two occasions. In 841 it was raided by the Norse

(AU; AFM) and in 952 by the Munstermen (Carrigan 1905, iii, 3). Keating records an interesting account of the enclosure of the monastery in 927 by Donnchadh, son of Flann Sionna, King of Midhe, at the instigation of his wife Sadhbh, daughter to Donnchadh, King of Ossory (Carrigan 1905, ii, 7-9). This account also indicates that Seirkieran was the burial place of the Kings of Ossory during the Early Historic period. Seirkieran was eventually supplanted by Aghaboe as the principal monastery of Ossory. Carrigan (1905, ii, 3) suggests that this took place at the Synod of Rath Breasail in 1118 but Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 194) suggest a date of c.1052 which is preferable since Aghaboe itself was replaced by Kilkenny at Rath Breasail.

Description

The remains consist of a churchyard, earthworks, and the monastic enclosure, in addition to the motte already described. Within the churchyard are a ruined church?, turret, round tower, cross, cross-bases, cross-slabs, and architectural fragments. The description begins with the churchyard.

?CHURCH

The present parish church of St. Ciaran is a modern building but west of it lie the remains of a building labelled 'church in ruins' on the OS map. Its north wall is incorporated into the graveyard wall and is built of roughly coursed mixed stone with some patching. A short section of wall and foundations is present on the south and east. The south wall fragment is 70 cm wide and 8.5 m in length, while the overall internal dimensions are 30 by 7.9 m. The angle of the south and east walls is present below ground level in the corner turret (see below). Repairs have been made to the west wall which is entirely modern. A gap in a low platform of stones outside the west wall may indicate the original door.

TURRET (Pl. 24)

At the south-east corner of the church? is a circular turret. It has an internal diameter of 2.2 m and it originally had a conical roof. The roof is largely missing and the structure is now covered in ivy. It survives to a height of 3.5 m above ground level but the interior is 1.5 m below ground level. There was a floor at a height of 1.8 m above internal ground level. Six gun loops are located 80 cm above the floor level. The loops are rectangular, 12 by 5 cm and face north, east, south-east and south-west. The north-west side of the turret opened into the interior of the church?. The opening is 1.40m wide. It is mentioned in an inquisition of 1569 as a 'turreis parva' (Barrow 1979, 176).

ROUND TOWER

Situated immediately outside the north-west angle of the graveyard, abutting the wall of the church. The masonry consists of large dressed blocks of limestone and conglomerate, and is different to any other surviving masonry at Seirkieran. There is an opening on the south-east, and set into the floor of the opening is what a slightly damaged double bullaun stone.

Dims. H. 3 m; Int. diam. 3 m; T. of walls 1.1 m.

Barrow 1979, 174.

CROSS (Pl. 23, left)

Lying against the west wall of the church. Small fine-grained sandstone cross. Short, disc-headed with a tenon. Missing its upper shaft. Edges delimited by rounded mouldings. The broad faces are decorated with recessed circular hollows and raised bosses. The transoms have recessed hollows surrounded by mouldings. An incised circle on one side of the shaft is modern.

Dims: H. 49 + 5 for tenon. W. 37 (across arms). T.9

CROSS BASE 1 (Pls. 17-19)

On a plinth of stone in the west of the graveyard. Cream-coloured sandstone. Stepped pyramidal shape. Decorated on three sides with panels of figure and animal sculpture, the fourth being badly damaged.

West face: Damaged. Perhaps a fret pattern.

South face (Pl. 17): A worn fret pattern. Upper section may have had figures or animals.

East face (Pl. 18): Two tiers of figures and animals. Seated and standing figure, top left, perhaps David presenting the head of Goliath to Saul (Edwards 1983, 22). Two winged horses. Lower tier, seated figure (Edwards suggests a bird), two other standing figures, perhaps the sacrifice of Isaac. Centre: three children in the fiery furnace flanked by three figures on the left and two on the right, perhaps Adam and Eve or Cain and Abel (Henry 1965, 147).

North face (Pl. 19): Top section has five figures with spears/staffs facing an oncoming horseman; Bottom: very worn but appears to have two men on horses.

Dims: Base: H.80 W.106 T.88

Mortice: Depth. 30 L. 50 W.43 cm.

CROSS BASE 2

Cream-coloured granite cross base beside No 1. Top and one side damaged. Each side has rectangular undecorated panels outlined by a rounded moulding.

Dims: H.36 W.47 T.24

Mortice Depth 10 (Min) L.14 W. 10 cm.

- CROSS SLAB 1 (Pl. 20)

- Pink sandstone. Lying on the ground south-west of the church. Possibly intended as a vertical marker because it is roughly pointed at the base. Decorated with a four line incised cross; undecorated cup shaped terminals and a pointed cup shaped terminal at the foot. Fragmentary inscription on the right: OR DO C. read by Macalister (1949, 39) as OR DO CHERBALL (see Carrigan 1905, ii, 13).
Dims: L. 172 W.65 T.13 cm

CROSS SLAB 2 (Pl. 21)

Pink sandstone. At west end of the graveyard in the fourth row from the west boundary wall. Decorated with an incised five line cross with cup shaped terminals; ringed circle in transom centre. Geometric design in the terminals and centre.
Dims: L.167 W.66 D.8
Gilling 1938.

CROSS SLAB 3 (Pl. 22, left)

Fragment lying against the wall of the church. Pink sandstone. Incised pointed cup shaped terminal and the foot of a two line cross.
Dims L.34 W 20 T.7 cm

CROSS SLAB 4 (Pl. 22, right)

Fragment lying against the west wall of the church. Orange granite. Incised pointed cup shaped terminal and the foot of a three line cross.
Dims: L.32 W.25 T.5 cm

CROSS SLAB 5 (Pl. 23, right)

Fragment lying on the ground west of the church. Creamy white granite. Unringed celtic cross in relief, lacking top and base. Chamfered sides but the cross-arms extend beyond the chamfer.
Dims: H.86 W.68 T.8 cm.

ARCHITECTURAL FRAGMENTS

The present C of I church is modern but some sandstone blocks from earlier buildings are reused in it, and its east window is medieval. On the gravel around the church are thirty-four pieces of cut stone. These include double and triple moulded

door and window jambs. The majority are of limestone and indicate a fifteenth century building on the site.

Head (Pl. 16)

Lying on the ground outside the west door of the church. Carved in high relief on a limestone quoin. The head is covered in a close fitting cap, perhaps a bascinet. Damaged face with incised eyes and mouth.

Dims: H.35 (stone) 25 (head) W.35 T.25

Window. 15th cent.

Three light cusped ogee headed window with three quatre-foils above. Pointed hood moulding. The internal mouldings appear to be modern.

OTHER MONUMENTS

Font/ Piscina

Lying on the ground west of the church. Quarter of a red granite vessel with a rectangular basin with a grooved lip.

Dims: H. 28 W.25 T. of basin 13 cm.

Wooden Communion Table. 17th cent.

Beside the altar of the modern church. The top is later than the legs which are very heavy, baluster turned and are braced with pegged stretchers.

Dims: H. 85 W. 95 T.70 cm.

Sheela-na-gig

In National Museum of Ireland (Weir 1980, 62, 69).

Quern stones

Three rotary querns are present on the south side of the church. All are of pink granite.

MISSING MONUMENTS

Lintel

Graves and Prim (1857, 14) mention a stone with a cross within a circle similar to the lintel stone at Fore Abbey.

Cross slab

Graves and Prim illustrate a cross slab (1857, 13: Fig 2) which is damaged but has a seven line cross with cup shaped terminals.

Cross slab

Carrigan (1905, ii, 13) mentions a freestone slab with a small incised cross but without inscription.

Effigy of St. Ciaran.

Killanin and Duignan (1967, 105) mention that a weathered figure of St Kieran was set into the W gable.

Nicholas Herbert. 1672.

Carrigan (11, 14) records a 17th century slab with the following inscription:

HERE LYETH THE BODY OF NICHOLAS HERBERT, SON OF OLIVER
HERBERT OF KILLIEN, WHO DYED THE 8TH DAY OF JANVARY IN
THE YEARE OF OVR LORD GOD 1672

MONASTIC ENCLOSURE

The monastery is sited on sloping ground and was enclosed by earthworks consisting of two co-terminous banks and ditches. There is little trace of the outer ditch but the inner bank, inner ditch and outer bank survive well on the north, west and south. There is no trace of the earthworkd on the east which is now low swampy ground and it is possible that they did not exist here.

On the north-west side the inner bank is between 1.5 and 2 m high, and 6.8 m wide at the base. The inner ditch is 10 m wide and 3 m deep. The outer bank is 1.8 m high, 7 m wide and has traces of stone facing on the interior. The external ditch is 4.8 m wide and 1 m deep. Just outside the north-west sector of the enclosure and running tangentially in a northerly direction are two modern drains. Just north of the modern pathway the inner bank has been diverted into a later bank (see E below) running towards the churchyard while the outer bank is missing. Almost due north of the church the inner bank is turned abruptly inwards and runs south as far as the churchyard (see E+F below). There is a gap, which may be an entrance feature, 25 m wide in the main enclosure at this point.

East of this gap the enclosing banks and ditches continue for a further 40m but beyond this point the only trace of the main enclosure is a small earthen bank, 3 m wide and 75 cm high which may continue the line of the inner bank eastwards as far as the modern field fence after which it turns sharply southwards for 15 m but thereafter becomes untraceable. There is no visible ditch.

The enclosure is missing on the east side but most of the southern sector is present. Due south of the churchyard is a second possible entrance feature, consisting of two parallel banks c.1.5 m high, and 4.1 m wide, running due south from the enclosure for some 30 m. They are 6.3 m apart. The banks and ditches survive particularly well in this area except where the later building of a motte interfered with the inner bank and where there is a 10 m break in the banks just south of the motte. The outer bank continues uninterrupted, however, on the west to the south of the modern pathway.

INTERNAL EARTHWORKS

A: A large rectangular enclosure on the south-east side of the graveyard defined by an earthen bank 1.5 m high and 4 m wide with an external ditch 4 m wide and 1 m deep. There is an external low bank/ platform along the east side. The foundations of a rectangular building, orientated north-south, is indicated on the O.S. map south-east of the graveyard within A. This appears to be part of a larger structure which may have been attached to the south-east corner of the graveyard. It measures 28 by 16.5 m and the wall thickness is 85 cm. There is a hollow way leading around the north/east corner towards a possible entrance on the north from within A.

B: West of A, a sub-rectangular enclosure defined by a low earthen bank 0.5-1 m high, and 3 m wide on the south and west. The north side is enclosed by the graveyard wall and the eastern boundary is the west side of A. The relationship of the south-east corner to A is unclear. There may have been a ditch on the south and west sides.

C: Collapsed stone wall overgrown with grass curving westwards from the west side of B to the inner enclosing bank of the enclosure. It is 80cm high and 1.5-2 m wide.

D+E: From the junction of B and C two arcs of banks, 1 m high and 3 m wide run north-south along the west side of the graveyard. There is an external ditch, 2.5 m wide and 40 cm deep, with a counter scarp bank. D is the more southerly of the two and it runs almost to the north-west corner of the churchyard while E runs from that point northwards to meet the inner bank of the monastic enclosure. There is a short length of bank running east from D to the graveyard wall just south of the modern path. There are also some modern drains to the west and north of D and E.

F: Rectangular enclosure north-west of the graveyard defined by the inner bank of the monastic enclosure on the north, by E on the west and by the northern entrance feature (see above) on the east. There is a short section of a low bank on the south side which may have formed a delimiting feature there.

G: Sub-rectangular enclosure east of the churchyard which runs into the low marshy ground beside the river. Defined by a low bank, 60cm high and 2.5 m wide on the north, west and south sides with five larger sections in the western boundary, 1 m high and 3 m wide. There is no evidence for a boundary on the east.

Graveyard walls

These vary between 2.5 m on the south and 4 m in height on the north. They are all roughly coursed, varying in thickness from 1.35 m on the south-east to 45 cm on the west. There is evidence for several rebuildings and patching. No date is

suggested for their construction (see Graves and Prim 1857, 12-13). There is an arched rectangular opening in the east corner of the south wall. It is now partially blocked but may have been a door with slight internal chamfer. Gilling (1938, 285) records removing ivy from this and he describes it as a window with a curious recess. The north end of the east wall is battered and built on a bank but it would appear to be a fairly modern addition. The ground to the north, however, contains a large number of bones and iron slag.

4. AUGUSTINIAN PRIORY OF ST. CIARAN/ ST. MARY

Carrigan (1905, ii, 3-4) dated the establishment of an Augustinian priory on the site of the earlier church at Seirkieran to c.1200, but Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 195) favour a date before the Anglo-Norman invasion. The priory is variously referred to in Papal documents as dedicated to St. Ciaran or St. Mary (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 195). The date of its dissolution is also a matter of controversy. Carrigan (1905, ii, 5) gives 1540 but Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 195) indicate that the priory survived until 1568. Two leases of the priory site, in 1552 and 1566, suggest that the priory was dissolved at the earlier date (Carrigan 1905, ii, 5). Subsequent to the Dissolution the site of the priory was leased to John Croft in 1552, John O'Keroll in 1566, Sir Lucas Dillon in 1586 and Sir William Taaffe in 1604 (Erck 1846-52, i, 6), who assigned it to James, earl of Roscommon (Carrigan 1905, ii, 5-6). The extent of 1568 noted that 'the site of the said priory contains one acre in which are the stone walls of what had lately been the church of the said priory; one small turret; one large stone house thatched with straw which is now the parish church, as the church aforesaid has been completely ruined; and two other thatched houses in which the Canons used to dwell' (Carrigan 1905, ii, 5-6). The destruction of the priory recorded here may well be due to the burning of 1548.

5. MISCELLANEOUS

St. Ciaran's bush and stone.

South of the enclosure a thorn bush and large boulder are on the side of an old roadway. They were apparently in the middle of the road but the road has been widened and they are now on the side of a small lay-by. The stone appears to be rock outcrop while the bush is still venerated, because there are rags, rosary beads and medals hung on it.

St. Ciaran's well.

Carrigan (1905, ii, 15) demonstrates that this well, locally known as 'the Yewre' (= Uar) and 'the Fawrawn' (=fuaran) almost certainly corresponds to the Saig Uar recorded in the Lebar Brecc. This indicates a very early, possibly

pre-Christian, origin for the veneration of the well. It is situated south-east of the enclosure in swampy ground and has been given a modern concrete surround. Some large boulders in the field fence may have been cleared from the site of the well.

Souterrains

Carrigan (1905, ii, 14) mentions the existence of three souterrains; one outside the graveyard gate, one to the south under Ben Hill and a third in Lisnaskeagh ringfort.

Lisnaskeagh. Ringfort? (Pl. 25)

This was situated on the high ground to the west of the monastic enclosure. The site has been destroyed and no trace of what appears to have been a triple banked enclosure is to be seen. Carrigan (1905, ii, 10) describes it as 100 yards in diameter with 'four concentric rings and the same number of fossae and to cover about two Irish acres'. The O.S. map indicates that this was the site of a 'cave', the souterrain mentioned by Carrigan..

Ballymooney Castle

On the west side of the hill to the west of Seirkieran are the remains of a late medieval tower house.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS AND POTENTIAL

Seirkieran is an example of a deserted borough and is important to archaeological research because of the good preservation of the earthworks there, probably part of the medieval borough. It is particularly important to the study of the transition between Early Historic and Anglo-Norman sites because it was an important Early Christian monastic site and was also an episcopal borough in Anglo-Norman times. The motte provides evidence for its defensive capabilities in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and it is likely that the turret is its successor in the sixteenth century.

In summary, the archaeological data indicates that the borough 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. The borough is not under threat from development.

Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map (Fig. 7)

delimits the area of archaeological potential within Seirkieran. In the absence of archaeological excavations nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits but there is little evidence for disturbance and it is likely that archaeological deposits survive in good condition over the entire site.

[REDACTED]

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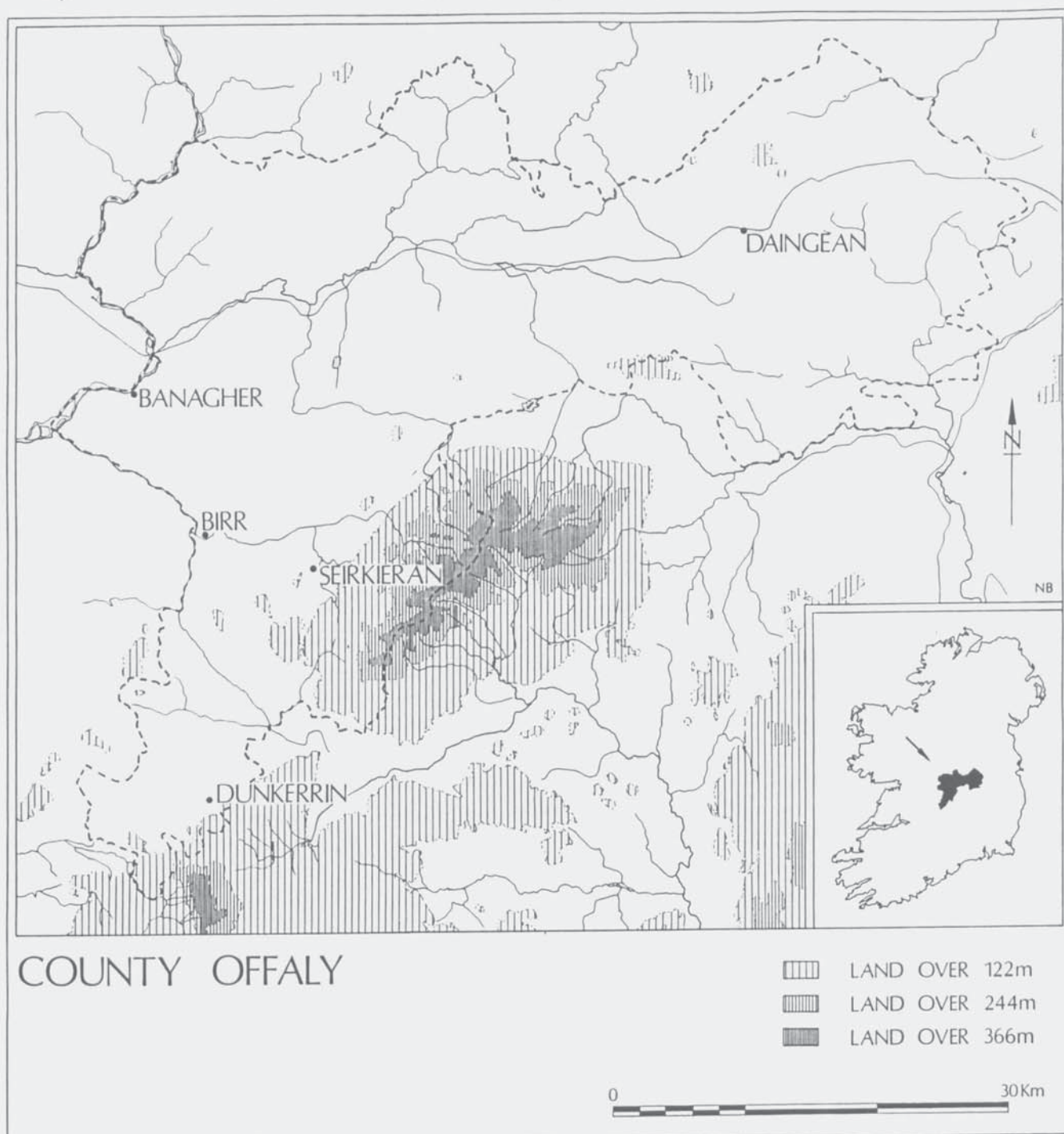


Fig. 1. County Offaly: Location map of boroughs and towns.

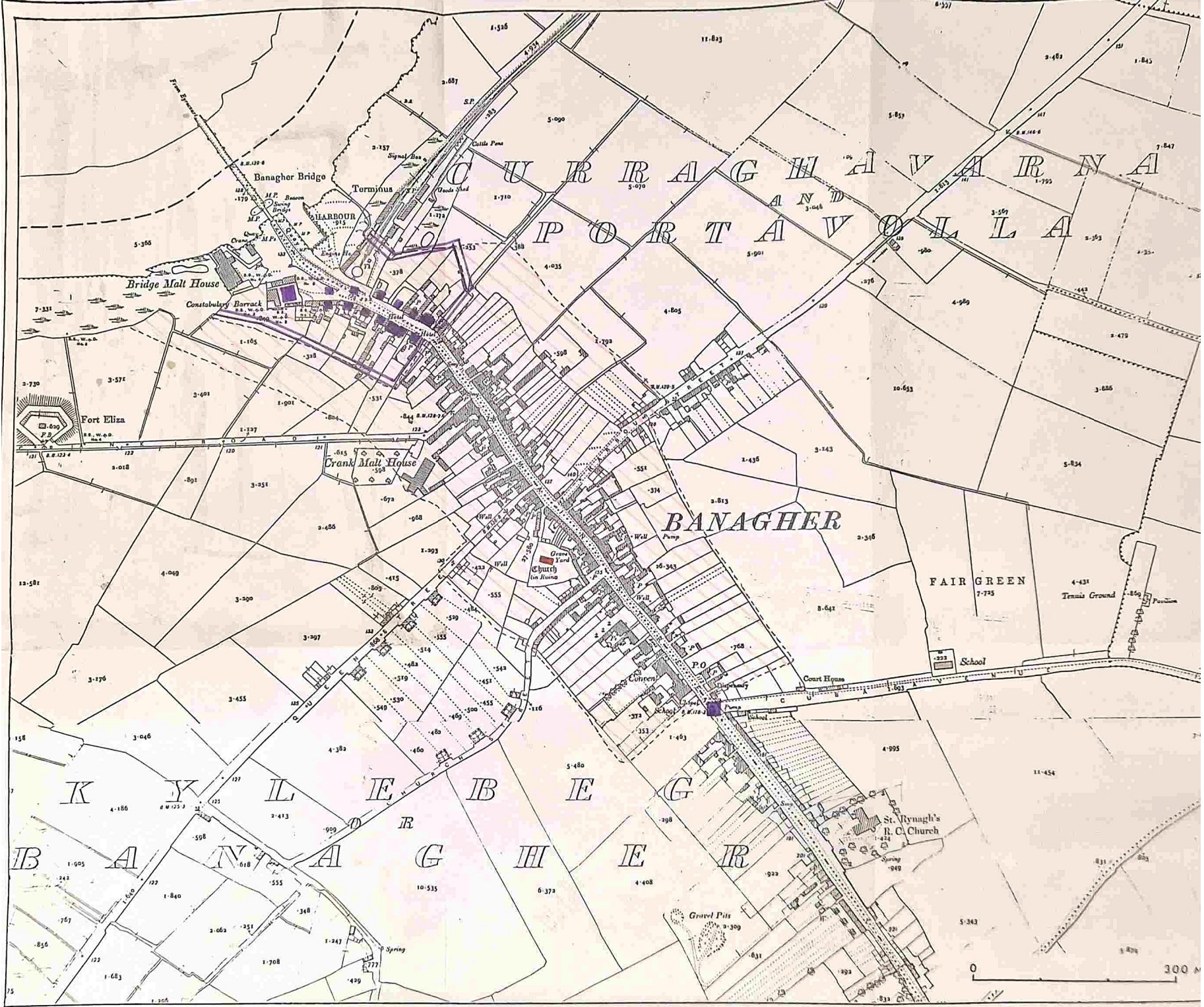
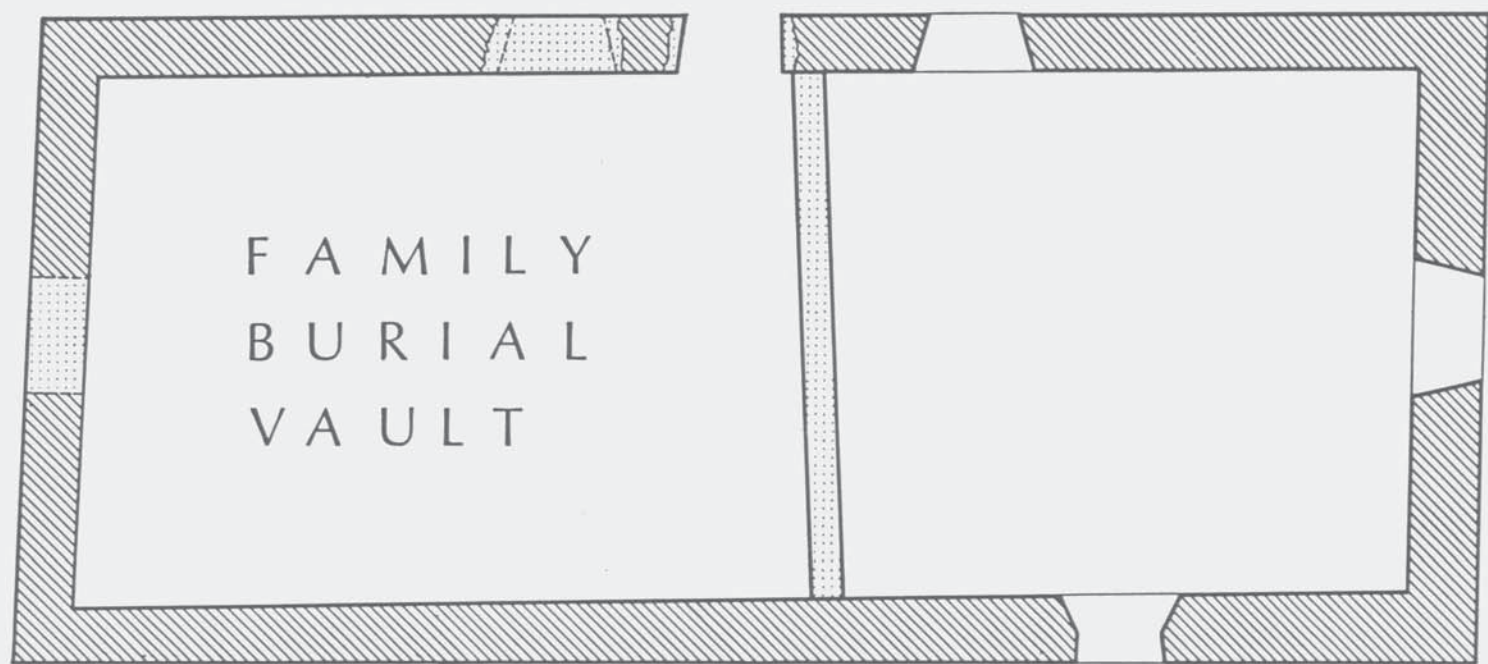


Fig. 2. Banagher: Zone of archaeological potential.



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BANAGHER : ST. MARY'S CHURCH
ALIAS ST. RYNAGH'S CHURCH

Fig. 3. Banagher: St. Mary's Church, ground plan.

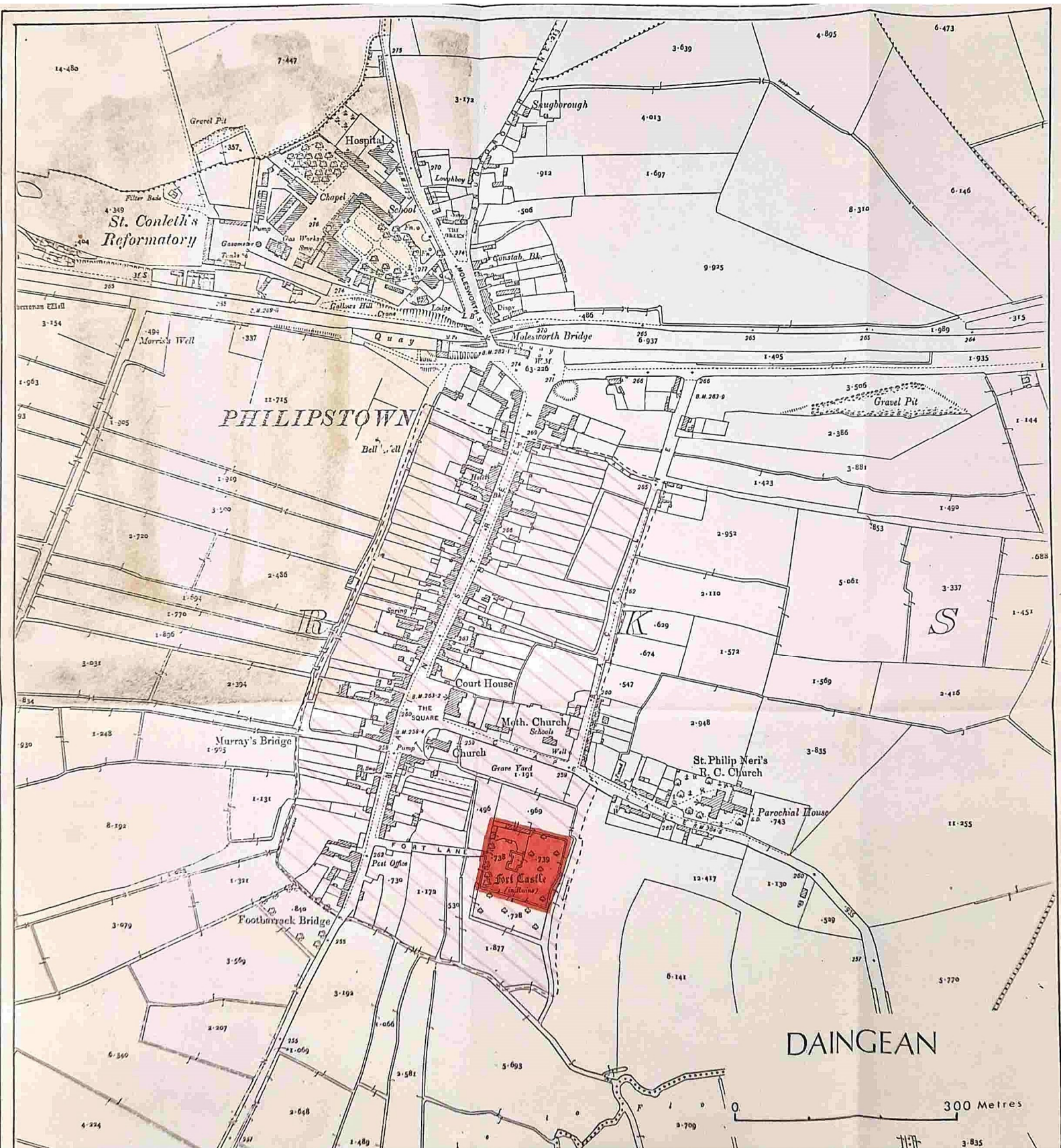


Fig. 5. Daingean: Zone of archaeological potential.

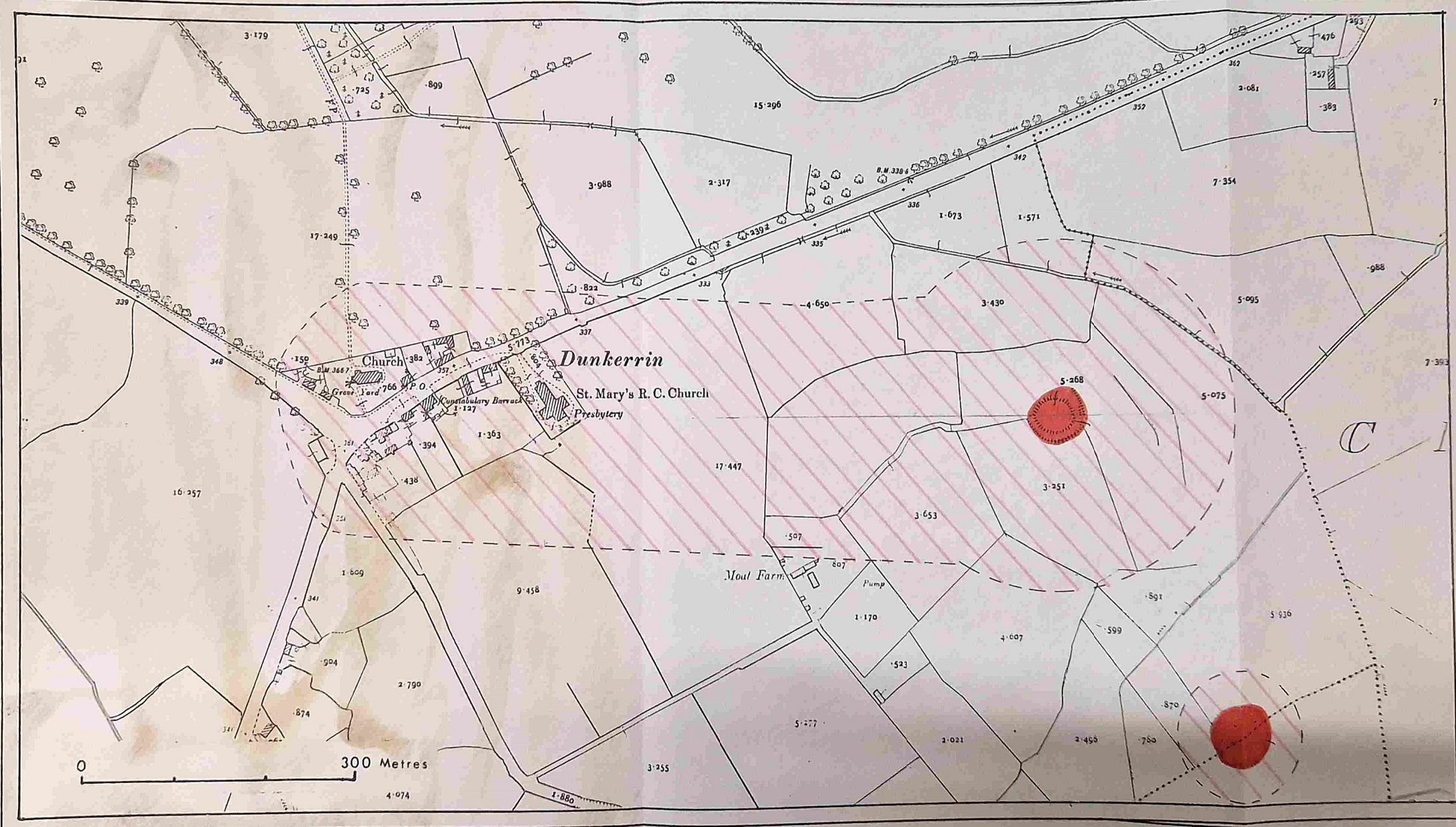
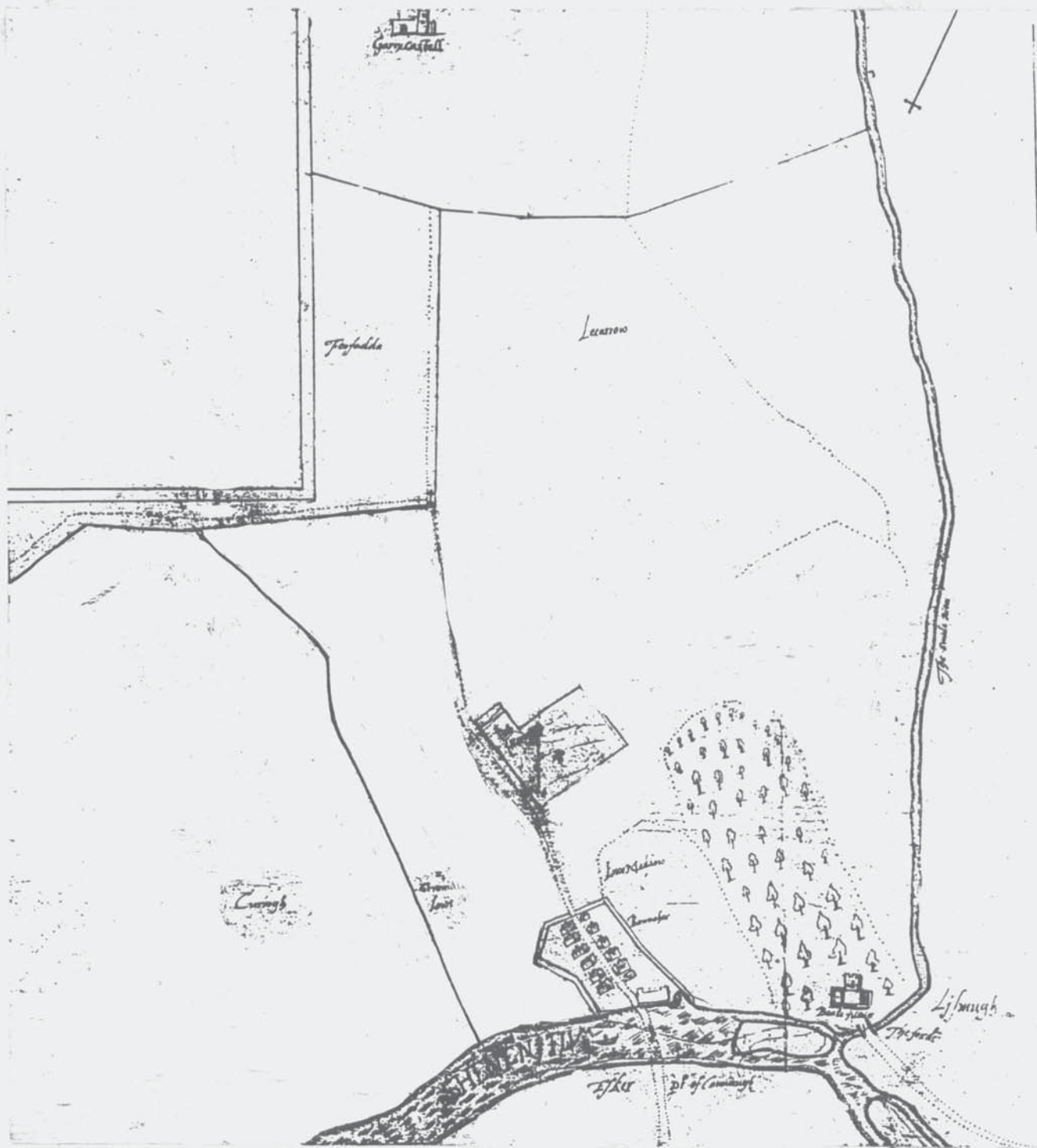
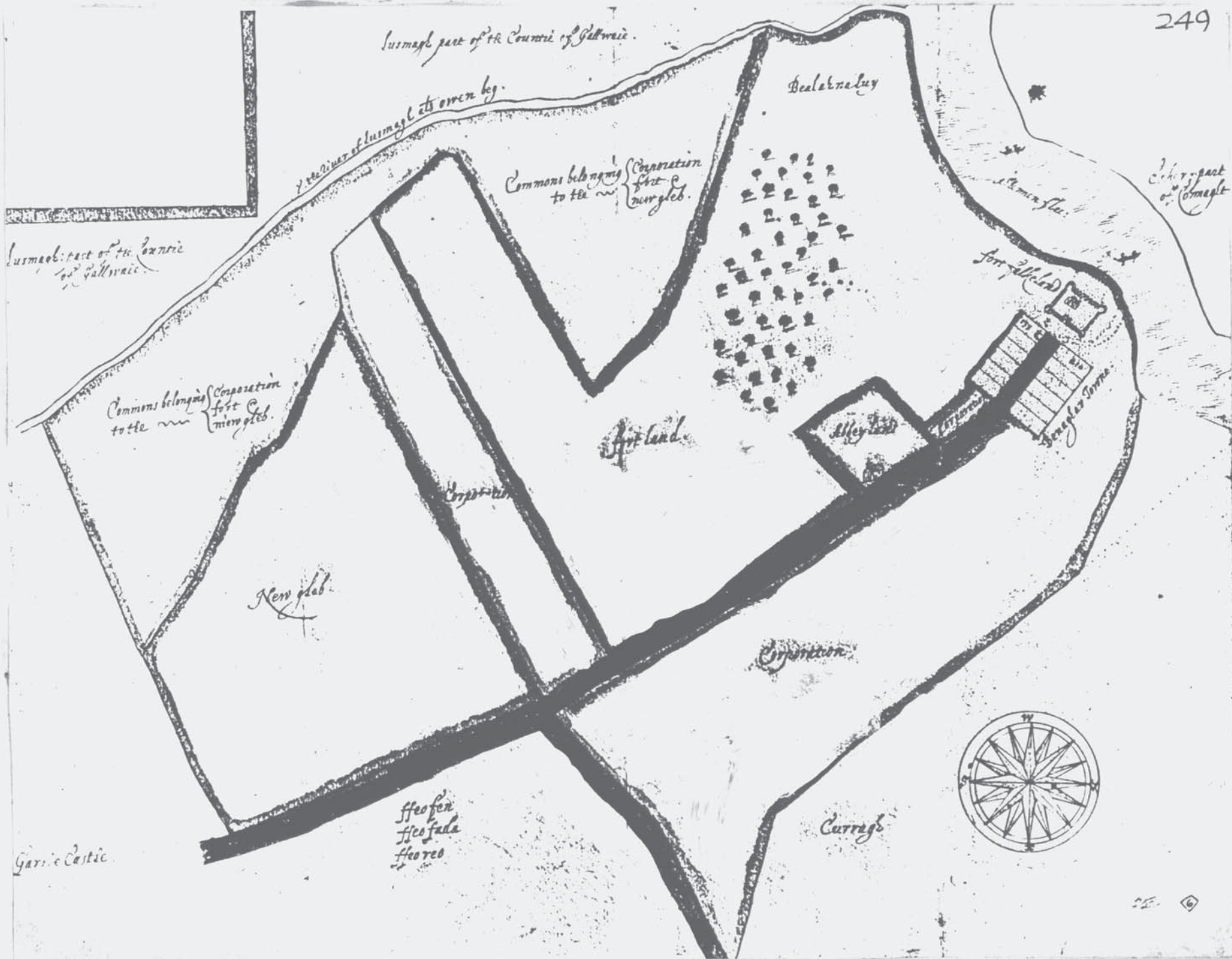


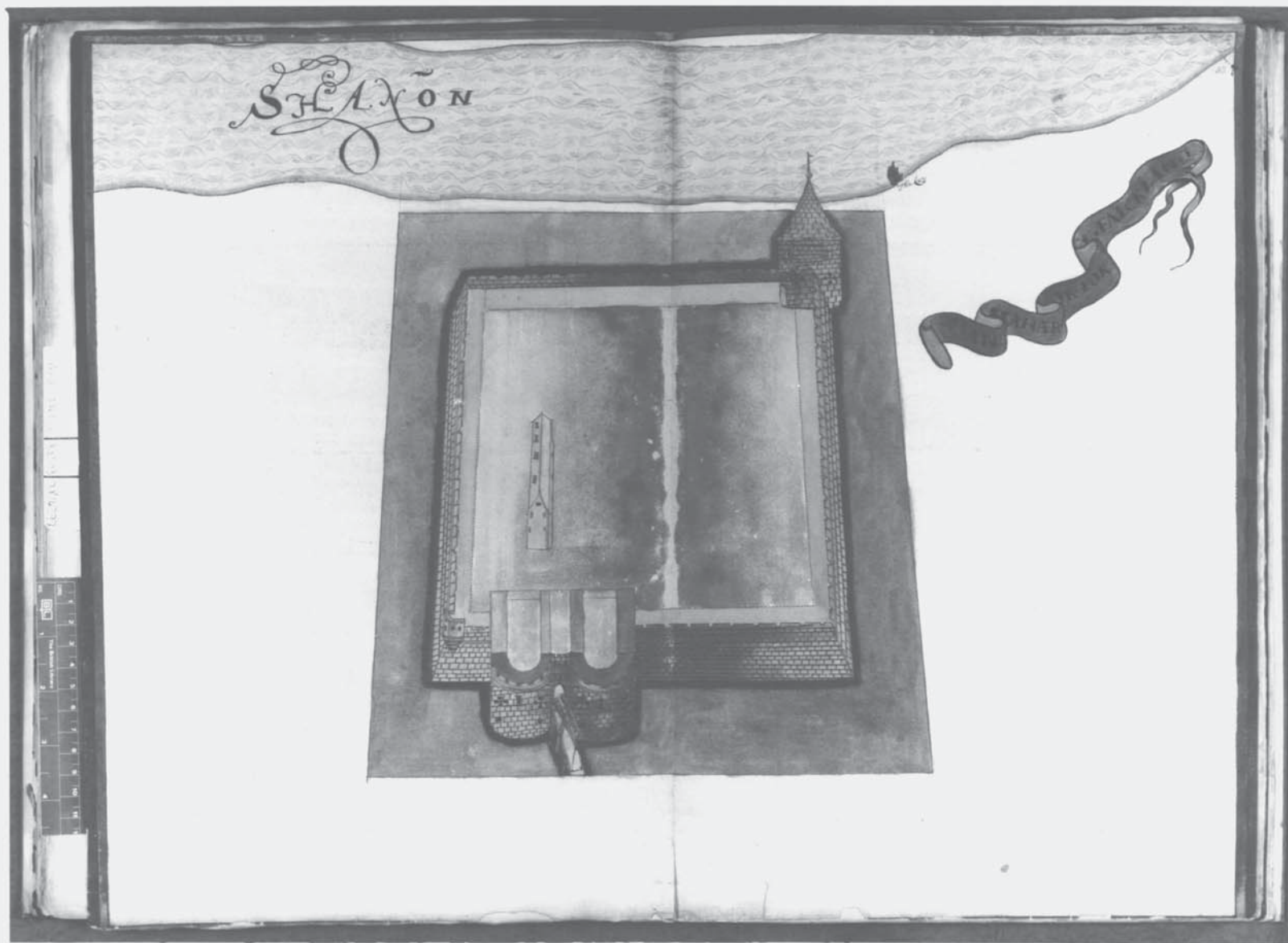
Fig. 6. Dunkerrin: Zone of archaeological potential.



Pl. 1. Banagher: map of 1629 (Public Record Office, London
MPF 268 (no. 3917))



P1. 2. Banagher: map of c.1630 (Public Record Office, London, MPF 102 (no. 3919).



Pl. 3. Banagher: Plan of the fort in 1624 by Nicholas Pynnar (British Library Add. Ms. 24200).



Pl. 4. Banagher: aerial view from north-west (Courtesy Cambridge Aerial Photo Coll.).



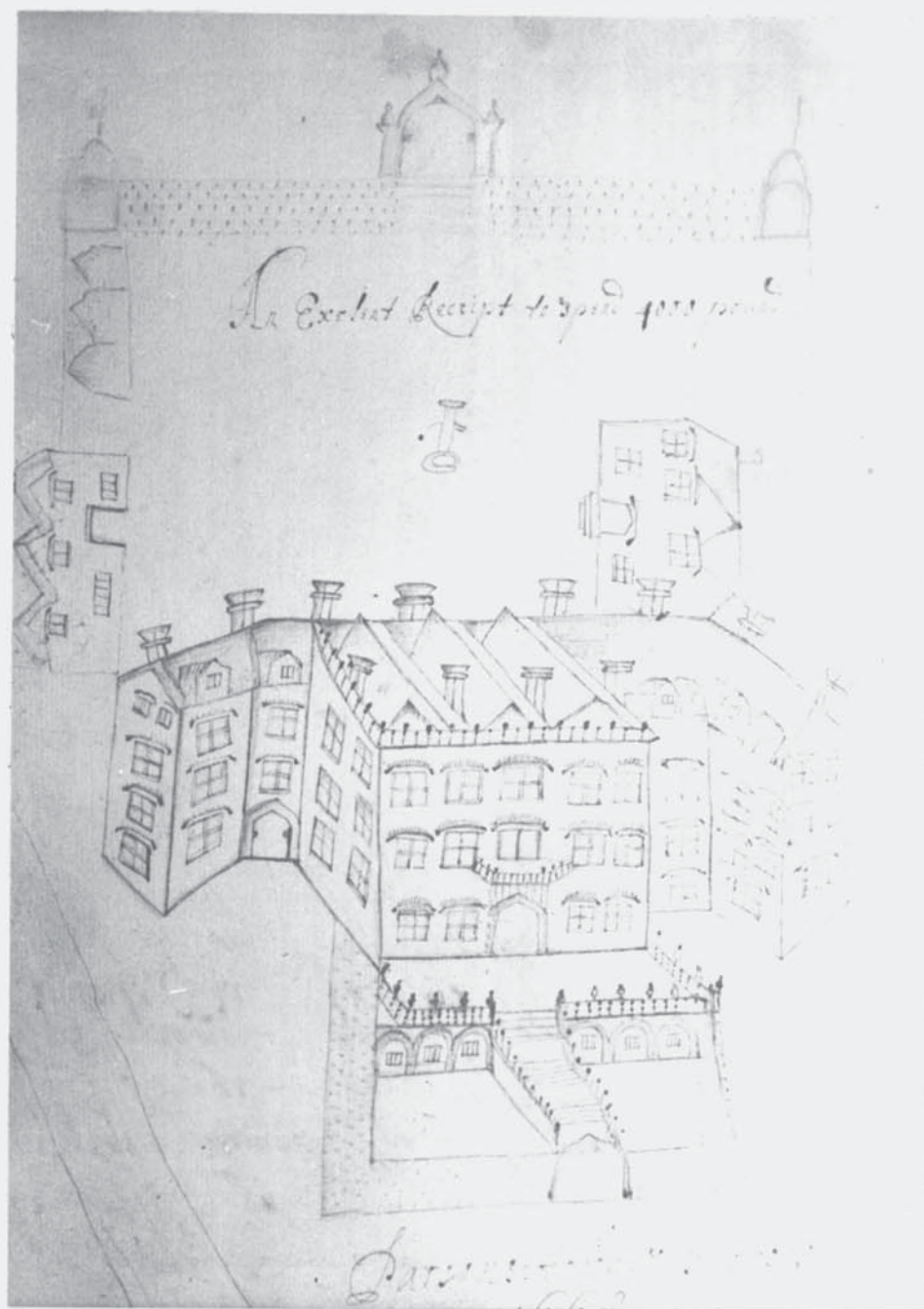
Pl. 5. Banagher cross shaft: (l. to r.) sides 1, 2, 3, 4
(Courtesy National Museum of Ireland).



Pl. 6. Banagher, St. Mary's Church: graveslab of Sir John Coghlan (1576-7).



Pl. 7. Birr in 1691 by Michael Richards (Worcester College
 Oxford, Ms YC 20, ccvi).



Pl. 8. View of Birr Castle (Parsonstown House) in 1660
(Birr Castle Coll.)



Pl. 9. Birr Castle: view from north-west showing the seventeenth century central block and flankers concealed by a Gothic facade added after 1801. The third storey and battlements were added in 1932.



Pl. 10. Birr: St. Brendan's Church (C of I) from north-east.



Pl. 11. Binn: St. Brendan's Church (C of I): heraldic shield
above the tower's west door.



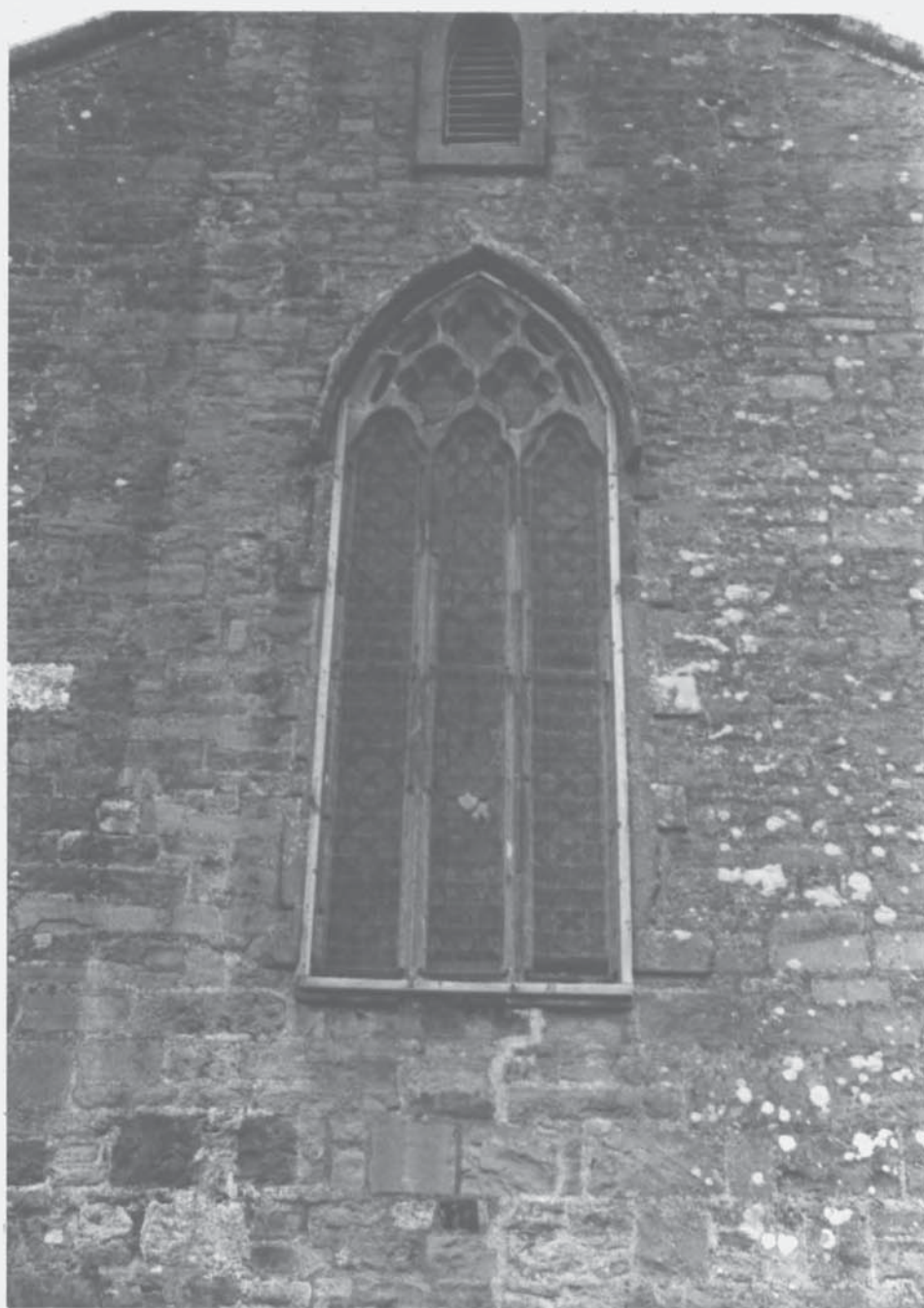
Pl. 12. Daingean Fort: heraldic plaques, now in Daingean
Local Library.



P1. 13. Dunkerrin: St. Mary's church: tombstone of Anthony
O'Carroll (1681).



Pl. 14. Seirkieran: Aerial view from south (Courtesy Cambridge Aerial Coll.).



P1. 15. Seirkieran: reused fifteenth century window in St. Kieran's Church (C of I).



P1. 16. Seirkieran: medieval head outside west door of St.
Kieran's Church.



P1. 17. Seirkieran: St. Kieran's Church, cross base 1, south face.



Pl. 18. Seirkieran: St. Kieran's Church, cross base 1, east face.



Pl. 19. Seirkieran: St. John's Church, cross base 1, north face.



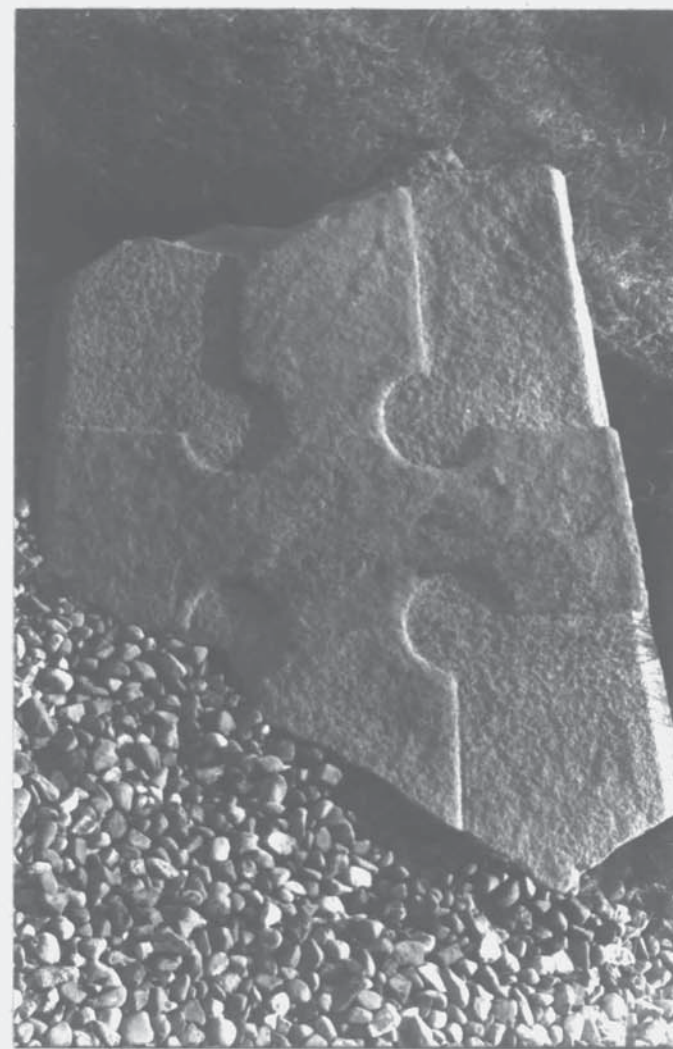
Pl. 20. Seirkieran: St. Kieran's Churchyard, cross-slab said to commemorate Cerball mac Dunlainge, King of Ossory (d. 828)



Pl. 21. Seirkieran: St. Miaran's Churchyard, cross-slab 2.



Pl. 22. Seirkieran: St. Kieran's Churchyard:
Cross-slabs 3 (left) and 4 (right).



Pl. 23. Seirkieran: St. Kieran's Churchyard:
Cross (left) and cross-slab 5 (right).



Pl. 24. Seinkieran: St. Kieran's Churchyard, turret.



Pl. 25. Seirkieran: aerial view of Lishaskeagh ringfort.
(Courtesy Cambridge Aerial Coll.).