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THE ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE TOWER HOUSE IN IRELAND IN THE LIGHT OF RECENT RESEARCH

A thesis submitted to the University of Dublin in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

by R.G. Budd

October 2004

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DECLARATION

This thesis has not previously been submitted as an exercise for a degree at this or any other university; it is entirely my own work; and it may be lent or copied by the Trinity College Dublin Library on request.

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Research for this thesis was carried out with the support of the Interim (now the Irish) Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences, and of Trinity College Dublin. In the course of that research John Bradley and the late Philomena Connolly were kind enough to make copies of their own work available in advance of publication. The project was supervised, with patience and with a reassuring enthusiasm, by Terry Barry of the Department of Medieval History, Trinity College Dublin.

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SUMMARY

Tower houses are a familiar feature of the Irish countryside, and this investigation considers not only the circumstances in which they came to be built, but also the development of our appreciation of their place in the country's history and archaeology.

The approaches which have been adopted by others to the study of tower houses are described and assessed, and a number of questions arising from this previous work are further explored. Issues of significance which are raised in the course of the thesis include the conventional understanding of the tower house as a lone tower; the restrictive notion that tower houses were built in Ireland only from the second quarter of the fifteenth century (a notion which is intimately related to a particular view of architectural inactivity in the fourteenth century); and the place of Ireland's tower houses in the broader contexts of castle construction in the country and further afield.

These and other questions are addressed by means of a methodology which, while acknowledging the fundamental importance of archaeological survey, asserts that it is for the archaeological discipline to fix and pursue its own agendas beyond that essential base. In doing this it is considered that as broad a range of source material as possible should be explored, and in this respect sections of the thesis deal with information derived from documents of various kinds, including legislation, bardic poetry, and antiquarian material from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, from archaeological survey, from excavation, from architectural assessment of the tower houses themselves, and from geographical and topographical analysis of their sites.

The findings generated through the use of this diversity of source material are of value in themselves, but they also serve to demonstrate not only that each variety of information may contribute to the elucidation of the building type and to the development of the castle in Ireland in more general terms, but also that their collective value is significantly increased when they are considered in connection with one another.

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Gabriel Beranger's illustration of Bullock Castle, county Dublin (after HARBISON, P. (ed) 1998 Gabriel Beranger. Drawings of the Principal Antique Buildings of Ireland. National Library MS 1958 TX. Four Courts Press, Dublin, in association with the National Library of Ireland.)

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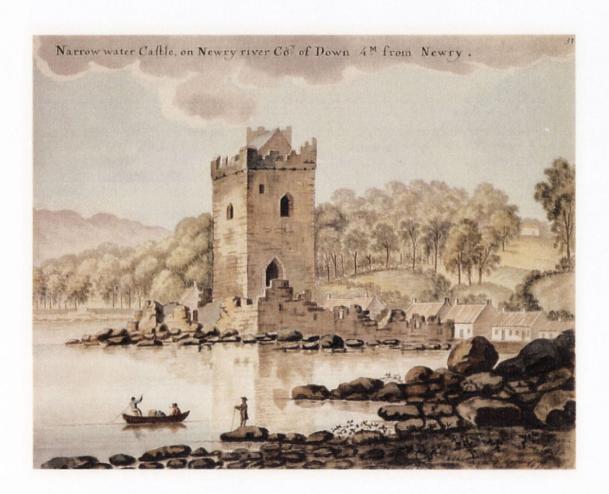
INTRODUCTION

This is a study of a type of castle which is known as a tower house. Tower houses are highly visible monuments, being tall masonry buildings which stand prominently in the Irish countryside (see illustration overleaf). Another factor which contributes to their familiarity is the fact that they are so numerous. Estimates of the number of tower houses in Ireland have been as high as 7,000, but it seems likely that traces of some 2,000 survive today. They are to be found in almost all parts of Ireland, with a particularly high concentration in a band running from county Limerick to the south east through Tipperary and on into southern county Wexford.

Tower houses in Ireland may bear distinctive characteristics, and must of course be intimately associated with the conditions peculiar to their geographical and historical context, but tower houses are not exclusive to Ireland. Indeed Ireland's tower houses should be considered as belonging to building classifications with wider geographical coverage not only on the basis of their form, but also according to our understanding of their function, and of their place in the socio-political system. Residential towers were built in various parts of Europe (and further afield), and the tower house, as a seigneurial residence – and as a symbol of seigneurial power – should be considered in the context of equivalent structures elsewhere.

The tower house was distinguished and named in the Irish context as recently as 1860. Until then people describing the buildings tended to use more general terms, such as 'castle' and 'tower', both of which had been in common use since the time when the tower houses were constructed. The group of buildings now known as tower houses had in fact been identified a few years before 1860, and it was not until the term was used in Harold Leask's book on castles in Ireland, in 1941, that it was generally adopted. In fact even today the majority of tower houses are referred to simply as castles, and it is only among archaeologists and architectural historians that the term is really in common usage.

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Gabriel Beranger's illustration of Narrow Water Castle, county Down

(after HARBISON, P. (ed) 1998 Gabriel Beranger. Drawings of the Principal Antique Buildings of Ireland. National Library MS 1958 TX. Four Courts Press, Dublin, in association with the National Library of Ireland.)

Sweetman wrote recently that 'tower-houses are the most numerous but probably the least understood type of castle in Ireland.' This comment must be read in the context of the survey work carried out by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (and other surveys), and of the numerous theses which have been written on the subject of tower houses in particular areas of the country, and on specific aspects of tower house construction or use, since the early 1980s. It is important to remember also that tower houses were among the monuments investigated by Thomas Westropp at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century and also that, as a result perhaps of their prominent appearance, occasional studies of individual buildings, or of groups of buildings, were carried out through much of the last century.

It is not the object of this thesis to add further to the body of descriptive, survey-based information which has formed the basis of most of the county-based studies of tower houses, and which provides the *raison d'être* of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland. An essential premise of the inquiry is the notion that the archaeological approach must involve an attempt to assemble a range of types of source material, and to afford a means of assessing that source material in an interactive, comparative context. It is not disputed that there is much to be gained from detailed examination of individual buildings according to architectural- and art-historical criteria, and analysis of the results of such descriptive work features explicitly and implicitly in certain aspects of this investigation.

¹ SWEETMAN, D. 2000 *The Origin and Development of the Tower-House in Ireland. The Barryscourt Lectures VIII.* Barryscourt Trust, in association with Cork County Council and Gandon Editions, Kinsale. p.263

² These include ABRAHAM, A.S.K. 1991 Patterns of landholding and architectural patronage in late medieval Meath. A regional study of the landholding classes, tower-houses and parish churches in Ireland, c.1300-c.1540. PhD, QUB; CAIRNS, C.T. 1984 The tower houses of Tipperary. PhD, TCD; COTTER, E. 1994 The tower-houses of North Cork. MA, UCC; DAVIN, A.K. 1982 Tower houses of the Pale. MLitt, TCD; DONNELLY, C.J. 1994 The tower houses of county Limerick. PhD, QUB; DUGGAN, J. 1982 Structural woodwork in 15th and 16th century Irish tower houses. MA, UCC; FENNELLY, N. 1997 An analysis of the tower houses in a county Offaly study area. MA, UCC; FITZPATRICK, M. 1994 A survey of the tower houses in south-west county Galway. MA, UCG; JORDAN, A.J. 1990 The tower houses of county Wexford. PhD, TCD; KEARNS, F.B. 2002 The development of the tower house entry doorway. MA, UCC; LENNON, M-A. 2001 The urban tower houses of county Tipperary. MA, UCC; MCAULIFFE, M. 1991 The tower houses of county Kerry. PhD, TCD; MURTAGH, B. 1982 The fortified town houses of the English Pale in the later Middle Ages. MA, UCD; O'DONOVAN, P.F. 1997 The Castles of County Cavan. MLitt, TCD; SHERLOCK, R. 1997 A study of the fireplaces of later medieval county Cork. MA, UCC; UA CRÓINÍN, R. 1997 The tower houses of north-west Clare. MA, UCG.

The survey database is therefore an essential element of the general archaeological project, providing a support without which most evaluative efforts would be weak, if not unjustifiable. However, archaeological survey must be recognised as a stage in the research process – albeit a stage of fundamental importance – affording a foundation upon which further assessment may be carried out. It provides one of the vehicles used by the researcher in driving an archaeological investigation. It is vital to the health and vigour of the archaeological discipline that it should itself promote the use of its data, in connection with data from other relevant sources, in efforts to elucidate the past.

Even more familiar than survey, perhaps, as a component of the archaeological discipline, is excavation. It is almost certainly the case that our understanding of tower houses in Ireland would be deepened by means of a programme of archaeological investigation, including excavation, focused on a selected sample of sites. It is encouraging that recent excavation work – most often carried out without any structured research-based agenda as regards the monument type as a whole – does seem to have provided information of relevance to general questions regarding tower houses.

What is a tower house?

The term was first used with regard to buildings in Ireland only in the mid nineteenth century in an article on 'the Ancient Domestic Architecture of Ireland' by J.H. Parker.³ The recognition that the term 'tower house' was invented in the mid nineteenth century has several implications. First, it means that before the date of Parker's article nothing was known as a 'tower house' – in a sense, therefore, there was no such thing as a tower house in Ireland before March 1859, when the paper was read.

Next, although Parker may have understood what he intended to describe when he used the title 'tower house', he provided no explicit definition. The perception among more recent authors that much archaeological, art-historical, or antiquarian work carried out in the nineteenth century and earlier was vague and

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³ PARKER, J.H. 1860 'Observations on the Ancient Domestic Architecture of Ireland: in a Letter addressed to the Earl Stanhope, President, by John Henry Parker, Esq., F.S.A.', *Archaeologia* 38, pp.149-176

of limited value has probably contributed to a certain freedom as to what qualifies a building as a 'tower house'.

Since the 1850s there has been considerable development in the understanding of the dating, role, and function of historic buildings. Parker's article was based on 'a fortnight's tour in Ireland in the summer of 1858', but he was among the pioneers of building survey in Britain and Ireland and it is therefore appropriate that his ideas should have been assessed and reassessed in the course of subsequent inquiry.

The adoption of the term seems not to have followed immediately on the publication of Parker's article, and this delay may also have contributed to the development of a body of work in which the term was used in a general way, without the precision of definition demanded by the systems and classifications of later twentieth century research. A need was recognised in some recent studies of the tower house that as a result of the changing perception of the meaning of the term, some kind of definition would be desirable as a way of encouraging consistency and promoting clarity in modern approaches. Davin, in her thesis on tower houses in the Pale, chose to define the tower house and to organise the examples in her study area into classes according to their shape and size. There is clearly a wide range of variables according to which one might classify a building type: it appearance is perhaps the most obvious, but consideration might also be given to its dates of construction and use, its original function, and its geographical situation.

Why did people build tower houses?

The reasons for tower house construction may be divided into two overlapping categories: those related to the practical role of the buildings, and those derived more from their symbolic significance. Further to these two primary categories, the construction will often have been stimulated by factors related to location and function, each of which may, of course, be more or less significant in the practical or symbolic contexts.

PRACTICAL

⁴ *ibid.* at 176

⁵ e.g. DAVIN 1982.

A tower house is, in essence, a defended residence, designed to afford protection to its inhabitants and their associates. However, it is not always clear whether those responsible for the construction of a tower house were an invading army (perhaps for a garrison), the civilian colonists of a wild and untamed land, or the local residents, anxious about threats to their security posed by robbers, cattle raiders, or inter-regional marauders. A possibly distinctive aspect of the final class of potential tower house builders is that they would already have occupied the area in which the tower house was to be erected. The situations of the other groups imply the construction of a tower house at an early stage of the settlement of an area, rather than the development of the architectural character of an existing set of buildings.

SYMBOLIC

If the castle is seen, as in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, as a symbol of dominance over an area, then the tower house, as a castle (if on a smaller scale than many of those of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries), had a clear role as a statement of the prestige and power of its owner. Such an assertion of status and, perhaps, authority, might have been useful on a local scale to counter fears about the instability of the surrounding region. It might have assisted in efforts at subinfeudation, and would certainly have seemed, to those of Anglo-Norman extraction, an appropriate means towards the establishment of control on behalf of the king, as well as serving as an advertisement of their intent in this regard.

LOCATION

Tower houses were built at existing settlements, as well as in more isolated positions in the hinterland. A settlement may actually have grown up around a tower house – with the latter providing, in many senses, a focal point for the local area. The variety in the character of tower house sites seems further to demonstrate the range of purposes for which the original structures may have been built.

FUNCTION

Several primary functions have been identified for different tower houses. Each one may have held distinctive roles for particular periods or simultaneously.

Tower houses have been identified as border posts, or as strongholds in enemy territory; as manor houses, forming the focal point and administrative hub of rural, agricultural estates; as residences for locally-important men, who may have required fortification and protection (of their image as well as their person) while yet desiring a degree of comfort and convenience; as refuges for local people in areas susceptible to violent unrest or raiding; and each was certainly a physical statement of the prestige and significance of its owner or occupier and his estate and authority. In this regard the tower house reminded locals and passers-by alike of the presence and role of the owner or occupier in the area, a function served particularly well by the prominence of its shape in the landscape.

APPEARANCE versus PHYSICAL REALITY

In order to assess the relative significance of the practical and symbolic aspects of the tower house its apparent strengths and weaknesses must be compared with the physical reality which underlies them.

Tower houses are, by definition, tall and narrow. Any windows, at least on the lower storeys, are small; the parapet at the top of the wall is often crenellated, and there may also be other forms of fortification. Some tower houses are on sites which render them more obviously defensible. An elevated position, for example, would not only have been easier to defend, but would also have given the building even greater visual prominence in the landscape. In appearance, therefore, the tower house presents an image of solidity and strength which could very well impose itself as the focal point in the power structure of an area.

Several less obvious aspects of the physical reality of the tower house substantiate this robust image. The thickness of the walls is certainly difficult to deduce from the outside, but most tower houses boast walls which, while tapering towards a thinner top, are of particularly substantial proportions nearer to the ground. The inclusion of defensive features such as drawbars, yetts, and murder holes around the main doors of tower houses endorsed the gravity of the intentions of the builder, although the entrance was only occasionally at first floor level. The staircases, also, are often arranged so as to give the advantage to the person attempting to defend the building against attack. Vaults, likewise, which are usually to be found supporting the first and often at least one other floor –

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probably that which housed the main chamber – are important elements of the defensibility of the structure as a whole. Being stone they are not susceptible to destruction by fire, and they would also, indeed, contribute to the overall strength of the tower. Differences in character between the storeys of a tower house reflect the relative importance given to practical considerations ranging between defence and comfort. The ground floor, in a few cases accessible only through a trap door in the vault above, may in these and other instances have functioned as a dungeon. It would normally have been well suited to the role, as it usually had no windows and extremely thick walls. The number and size of the windows often increased as one approached the top of the building, so that the upper floor would probably have been the brightest and most comfortable.

Tower houses were designed to fulfil a variety of apparently conflicting requirements. While being a strong and secure fortified building, advertising by its form and by its visibility the prestige of its owner or occupier all over the surrounding area, it had also to be a reasonably comfortable residence, with rooms suitable to accommodate expectations of an increasingly luxurious style of living.

TOWER HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

The logistics involved in their construction are relevant to the question of why tower houses were built. The building of a tower house, while obviously not as considerable a project as the building of a larger castle such as that at Trim, or at Carrickfergus, would certainly have required a major investment of resources. Consideration of the equipment and technology available in the medieval period can only serve to emphasise the gravity and scale of the undertaking.

The site for a tower house would inevitably have been selected in the context of the assembling of raw materials: stone cutting and transportation are costly and time-consuming, and the proximity of a supply of stone would almost certainly have been a significant factor in the choice of some tower house sites. Wooden parts – for roofing, doors, floors, furnishings, and, not least, scaffolding,

⁶ Was it simply that the upper storeys were built later, when there was less need for defensive features, so windows could be made bigger than below and walls thinner? Or was it that the whole building was erected at once, with the lower parts being considered to be the most vulnerable and therefore the most in need of robust, forbidding architecture? The location of the lord's private chamber at the top of the building is significant on a practical level, in that it afforded a degree of privacy and comfort which would not have been available elsewhere in the building, but it also carries symbolic value as it emphasises the eminence of the lord as 'top man' in the area.

were also required, but would usually have been rather easier to transport than stone.

The design of the structure, while reflecting the needs and intentions of the owner, would often have been restricted by the availability and cost of resources. The actual construction process might frequently, therefore, have been subject to changes in design imposed while work was in progress, and the resulting building would probably have included at least a few modifications to the original conception as envisaged by its owner or commissioner. Indeed, that conception itself may even have been subject to changes, perhaps prompted by developments in the local political, civil, or military situation.

It is important to observe that many tower houses, as we see them today, are not the result of one single phase of construction work. They have been expanded, heightened, reduced, re-fortified, de-fortified, or otherwise adapted in response to the circumstances through which they have stood. The value and relevance of particular elements of their composition would almost inevitably have varied over time, with changes of ownership and of environment, and the tower house might well have been altered accordingly.

The study of the tower house in Ireland

The article read by Parker to the Society of Antiquaries (of London) in 1859 seems to be the first significant point in the study of the tower house in Ireland. Another major figure in the history of architectural and archaeological scholarship in Ireland is Harold Leask, whose contribution to the study of medieval buildings has shaped all subsequent perceptions of and approaches to the tower house. Leask's identification of a lull in building activity during the fourteenth century in Ireland raises a central question of tremendous relevance for historians, archaeologists, and architectural historians. Leask's work was intended as an overview, and his catalogue of references to actual structures is somewhat restricted. More recent students of the tower house have tended to try

⁷ PARKER 1860.

⁸ See, in particular, LEASK, H.G. 1941 *Irish castles and castellated houses*. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk. While some writers have been more adventurous in attempting explanations of architectural history in Ireland which offer an alternative approach to interpretation from that presented by Leask, others have been happy to accept the general scheme he advocated, simply refining sections of it in the light of their own analyses.

to concentrate on the buildings of a single county or region.¹⁰ This approach has generated more exhaustive lists of sites and structures, but lacks the breadth of geographical perspective which is required for a satisfactory understanding of a supposedly island-wide building type.

Another problem has arisen as a result of the tendency of investigators to attempt the linking of buildings mentioned in documents with structures on the ground to which they supposedly refer. This approach is riven with difficulties. The documentary record for the medieval period in Ireland rarely contains descriptions of buildings. The matching of a building surviving on the ground with a structure alluded to in a medieval document is often further hampered by the ruinous state of the remains. In addition, such ruins usually contain several phases of building subsequent to that which constituted the structure identified in the document. This is particularly probably because buildings which merited documentary mention would almost always have been of some importance or consequence, at least on a local level. An important building, as a focal centre for some administrative, industrial, military, or residential activity, for example, would have been expanded or redeveloped in order to satisfy changing demands on their capacity or function. Tower houses are therefore among the structures which are most likely to have been altered during the time they were in use.

Dating

ARCHITECTURAL

It seems clear from the foregoing that efforts to assign a date to a building, or to a phase of its construction, must be extremely cautious, and especially so in the event that documentary and architectural or structural sources are to be combined. There is no reason why a particular technique, approach, or style, once developed in or brought to an area, should disappear from the repertoire of local designers or builders after a given period. A distinctive detail may therefore provide dating evidence for a building (or for part of a building), but it will usually only be a terminus post quem — a date after which the dateable detail was executed. Building styles do develop over time, but the use of an older style may continue after its original development. In the context of the tower house, although Parker stated that 'there is generally some little bit of ornament in cut stone somewhere,

¹⁰ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; JORDAN 1990; MCAULIFFE 1992; DONNELLY 1994.

just enough to indicate the date', he also acknowledged that distinction between 'the different styles of each century of the Middle Ages' was difficult for Ireland because of 'the extreme plainness and rudeness of the work.'

Buildings, especially those used for residential purposes and those the main function of which has changed over time, will often have been subject to structural alteration at various stages. The lack of medieval documentation describing the appearance of buildings in Ireland means that one is often obliged to refer to comparative material from overseas, particularly from Britain, for chronological indices. Such comparison must, of course, be cautious, as a result of the independent identities of the two distinct geographical areas. Surviving documents are rarely descriptive of buildings, the language used often appears imprecise or unclear, and, in any case, the purpose of the writer was usually something to which the mention of the building was incidental.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL

Tower houses are found in most parts of the country. Where they survive even to half of their original height they remain a highly visible component of the landscape, and as such are a familiar sight: Leask described them as 'quite the most evident ancient features of the Irish countryside.' As they date to the medieval period a certain amount is known (or at least assumed) about their function and significance, and about the manner in which they would have been built. This apparent lack of mystery is among the reasons why few tower houses have been excavated. But there are many questions regarding tower houses which might be resolved through a planned programme of excavation. Information would surely be forthcoming about the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which tower houses were used, but it is also probable that the excavation of a series of tower houses would yield evidence as to their respective dates of construction and occupation.

¹¹ PARKER 1860, 153.

¹² LEASK 1941, 75.

¹³ The degree of public (mis)understanding is perhaps exemplified by the following notice, which was published in The Irish Times of Wednesday, 6th June, 2001: 'Redwood Castle, Lorrha, Co. Tipperary. Ancestral home of the MacEgan Clan, this Tower House was built by the Normans in 1210. The Castle, which was a university and law school in medieval times, was sensitively restored by the Egans of Castlebar in the 1980s. Guided tours daily from 2pm-6pm...' See also FARRELLY, J. & O'BRIEN, C. 2002 *Archaeological Inventory of County Tipperary, Volume I–North Tipperary.* The Stationery Office, Dublin. pp.294 (no.2056), 380 (no.2403)

INDEPENDENT / SCIENTIFIC

There is not yet a reliable scientific method for the dating of mortar. Nonetheless, the analysis of mortar seems to be the most promising independent dating approach for medieval stone buildings. 14 All tower houses contain mortar. The chemical changes which occur in the production of mortar and in its hardening (by which it gradually reverts to limestone) offer a potential line of inquiry for chronological research. It is also possible that fragments of charcoal, or of other durable material of organic origin¹⁵ trapped in the mortar of a wall might be radiocarbon dated. The burning of limestone, part of the mortar production process, was done in lime kilns which would often have been fired with wood. The design of many of these kilns was such that the mixing of fragments of charcoal with the lime might quite easily have taken place. However, it is questionable firstly whether fragments of sufficient size would be present in the mortar; secondly, whether one would be able to detect and extract such fragments in a manner conducive not only to the success of the radiocarbon dating process, but also to the preservation of the building; thirdly, whether one could rely on the notion that the fragment had been carbonised (or had died) at or close to the time of the construction of the wall; and fourthly, and fundamentally, whether one can rely on the accuracy of the radiocarbon dating technique for periods as recent as the medieval.

Wooden components survive in a very few tower houses and some of these have proved suitable for dendrochronological analysis. However, it is not always clear whether a timber is actually associated with the original building of the tower house, or whether it was part of a later replacement, modification, or improvement.

It is clearly difficult to produce a reliable date for the construction (or even for the use) of a tower house. Archaeological and architectural analyses are

¹⁴ See BERGER, R. 1995 'Radiocarbon dating of early medieval Irish monuments', Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 95c, pp.159-174. Efforts at dating the mortar itself (rather than materials of organic origin in the mortar, which was Berger's approach) have been taking place at The Queen's University of Belfast and in Denmark, with limited success. See also PAVIA, S. & BOLTON, J. 2000 Stone, Brick and Mortar: Historical Use, Decay and Conservation of Building Materials in Ireland. Wordwell, Bray; PAVIA, S. & BOLTON, J. 2001 Stone Monuments Decay Study 2000. An assessment of the degree of erosion and degradation of a sample of stone monuments in the Republic of Ireland. The Heritage Council, Kilkenny.

potentially valuable resources, particularly when they are corroborated by specific and descriptive documentary references to construction work. Even with such references it may be difficult to distinguish those elements of the structure in the landscape of today which were actually part of the original building project. However, as it is the structure as we know it now (or as we have known it since the mid nineteenth century) which is described as a tower house, it may actually be unreasonable or illogical to define the tower house in terms of the intentions of the builder who instigated construction on the site. One might argue that the tower house is simply a construction of the nineteenth and twentieth (and twenty-first) century mind, produced out of efforts to categorise and organise the monuments which survive – in various states of decay – in the modern landscape.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is divided into eleven chapters, as well as this introductory section and a chapter of concluding remarks. Each of the chapters deals with a particular body of source material or theme concerned with the tower house. This division reflects the approach which was taken to the investigation insofar as it was considered from the outset that, while certain questions arising from previous research demanded specific treatment, the potential of different forms of evidence as contributors to a more comprehensive understanding of the monument type was also to be emphasised. In most of the sections which focus on particular forms of evidence, material is occasionally drawn from other media in circumstances in which it was thought to clarify or reinforce in an especially apposite manner the point being pursued.

To an extent, therefore, while seeking to present a multi-disciplinary view of its subject, this work explores the potential of interdisciplinary analyses. The word 'explores' should perhaps be stressed. It is clear that communication between those involved in different fields of investigation is crucial to the discovery of means by which mutual assistance might be afforded. Deficiencies in the capacity of archaeology to clarify issues regarding past human activity are unlikely to form the research objects of scientists in other fields unless the

¹⁶ A series of dates has been produced by David Brown at QUB.

problems are outlined and conveyed. Historians investigating literary sources, for example, cannot be expected to appreciate the particular aspects of their material which may assist the advancement of an archaeologist's, or an architectural historian's, inquiry.

The second chapter continues the introduction to the subject, with particular attention being devoted to discussion of the approaches and views taken by previous investigators of the tower house. The roles of thesis authors and of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) in the advancement of the understanding of the monument type are outlined, and the strengths and weaknesses of their respective methods are identified. At least partly on foot of this discussion, possible directions for future research (whether explored in this study or otherwise) are raised, as well as observations regarding such matters as the distribution pattern of tower houses around the country. Part of this section involves mention of problems which arise in the course of several of the theses, some of them identified by the authors themselves.

One of the recurring questions in these county- and regionally-based studies, which also emerges as a fundamental issue on a comparative reading of the theses, is the nature of the tower house, and how it should be described: what is it, in fact, that makes a tower house a tower house. In this context chapter two includes mention of the earliest known use of the term with reference to buildings in Ireland, while also referring to the tower houses of other areas, such as England and, particularly, Scotland. Other problems which are raised include the question of what it was that led to tower house construction, as well as the whole debate surrounding the 'origins' of the building type. This latter area includes such issues as the nature of the 'fortalice' and its relationship to the tower house; the role of the legislation of 1428 and 1430¹⁷ in the initiation of tower house construction in Ireland; and the possibility that building construction might have taken place in the economic, political, and social circumstances of the fourteenth century. Also of relevance on this point is the role of existing Anglo-Norman castles as sources of inspiration for tower house builders, an area which leads to consideration of whether there was in fact a need for specific inspiration at all, at least in the form of a building or group of buildings within or outside the country.

¹⁷ The 1430 legislation has frequently been referred to as having been enacted in 1429.

The notion of existing buildings serving as models, or even merely as sources of ideas, for those responsible for tower house construction is also of significance in discussion of the contrasts which are evident between the tower houses of different areas of Ireland. These distinctions may be observed through comparison of the results of the work of thesis authors, and of the ASI for the various counties. As well as a brief introduction to the work of Harold Leask, particular attention is devoted to the approaches adopted by five writers who produced theses dealing with specific areas of the country, and to analysis of their approaches and findings.

The third chapter returns to the work of Leask, and takes as a starting point his attitude that little if any building activity of any consequence was carried out in Ireland in the fourteenth century. This view is placed in the context of the treatment of the period by earlier writers, and by those working since Leask's major works – notably that of 1941 on castles in Ireland – were published in the mid twentieth century. The influence of Leask's interpretation of the period is demonstrated, and it is placed in contrast with the information gathered by subsequent investigators, notably Gwynn and Hadcock, whose work suggests somewhat different conclusions, at least in relation to some aspects of ecclesiastical architecture. Also of significance in this respect would appear to be the developing historical understanding of the fourteenth century, and thus the evolution of the context in which Leask felt architectural inactivity to fit so comfortably.

The problems associated with different types of documentary evidence are discussed, and references to construction work in Ireland in the fourteenth century are identified in the Irish annals and in the records of central government, notably the *Irish Exchequer Payments*. The limited likelihood that the activities of tower house builders, who would generally have been private individuals, should appear in government records is emphasised, and the value of a proportion of the entries cited lies in the fact that they demonstrate that there was, in the fourteenth century, investment in building works around the country. The documents seem not only to indicate that construction was being carried out, but also that fortifications were valued in the conflicts of the fourteenth century. It certainly indicates that significant investment went towards the manning and maintenance of armed outposts, through the system of wards (at least in Leinster). It would

appear from the evidence of the *Irish Exchequer Payments*, therefore, that construction work was being carried out at castles in fourteenth century Ireland, and it is implied that private individuals were engaged in such work as well as the Crown. Indeed, it seems that most of the references to building at this period to be found in the *Irish Exchequer Payments* relate to building which was being carried out at fortified sites, or building which amounted to the fortification of existing structures or settlements.

Another area in which there is evidence for construction work in fourteenth century Ireland, and work which is also a form of fortification, is that of walled towns. The pattern of building activity connected with the walling of towns is examined, and in the course of this discussion two issues arise which seem to demand additional consideration. The first of these is derived from the suggestion that parallels exist between the form of the walled town and that of the tower house with its bawn. The notion that there may be scope for valid comparison between these two seems to be strengthened by the interpretation of the tower house not as a lone tower, standing isolated in the rural landscape (an image which may perhaps owe much to the focus of Leask, of most of his predecessors, and of many of his successors, on the standing remains alone, to the virtual exclusion of what may originally have surrounded or accompanied them), but as the focal point of a more extensive rural settlement.

The second issue relates to the documented construction in Dublin in 1331 of buildings which seem to incorporate most – if not all – of the characteristics normally expected of a tower house. The relationship between the fortified buildings within towns, and the walls and other fortifications boasted by those towns themselves, forms part of the subject matter of the fourth chapter, which also sees a continuation of the presentation of documentary evidence for construction activity in fourteenth century Ireland. It incorporates further exploration of the division between urban and rural tower houses to which allusion was first made in the previous chapter. The subject has in fact been pursued over an extended period by Murtagh, who prefers to describe the relevant medieval fortified residences in towns as 'fortified town houses', although they are also referred to as 'urban tower houses'. Murtagh's work was initially concentrated on the area of the Pale, but he has also studied examples in other parts of Leinster.

The relationship between tower houses and the types of castle which are considered to have preceded them in Ireland is discussed. Particular attention is paid to the context of the tower house, and to the notion that, like most other castles, it would have formed a constituent element of a more extensive group of buildings. Another hitherto under-appreciated facet of the construction of tower houses seems to be the variety of reasons for which they appear to have been built. This point is covered relatively briefly in this section, although emerging indirectly and by implication at various stages throughout the study.

It is considered important to recognise, especially when examining references to fourteenth and early fifteenth century building work, that there need not have been any independent documentary record of the construction of a specific structure. In addition, if such record ever did exist, the chances that it should have survived are slim, and are very much dependent on the recordkeeping assiduity of the parties involved in the project. A number of references are cited to building activity in which there is no specific indication of the appearance of the edifice in question. This situation is especially relevant to a problem which has emerged in the course of some of the county- or region-based tower house investigations. This problem is concerned with the establishment of a firm connection between documentary references and named structures in the countryside. An aspect of the importance of such references, and others, relates to the fact that a significant proportion are concerned with works of fortification. In this context it would appear that such references diminish, to an extent, the credibility of the perception that the legislative measures enacted in 1428 and 1430 occupy an essential role as instigators of tower house construction.

The importance of the role which the legislation of 1428 and of 1430, in particular, has been accorded by students of castles in Ireland is well illustrated by the long list of works identified by Bradley and Murtagh in which Leask's misreading of 1429 as the date of the latter enactment was repeated. In the fifth chapter an attempt is made to give a broader account of legislation of possible relevance to building activity in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and to the construction of tower houses in particular. This is intended to demonstrate

¹⁸ BRADLEY, J. & MURTAGH, B. 2003 'Brady's Castle, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny: a 14th-century fortified town house' in KENYON, J.R. & O'CONOR, K. (ed) *The Medieval Castle in Ireland and Wales. Essays in honour of Jeremy Knight.* Four Courts Press, Dublin. pp.194-216 at 212

that the significance of the enactments of 1428 and 1430, while perhaps substantial, should be understood in the context of other legislative initiatives, as well as independent schemes which were organised on a similar basis to that of the well-known and much-cited Crown subsidy provisions. When a slightly wider view is taken of the 1428 and 1430 legislation, one must inquire firstly whether the subsidies were ever in fact taken up, and secondly whether the size of the subsidy, £10, would actually have carried any significant motivational weight towards the initiation of the construction of a tower house. It has been suggested that subsequent legislation was enacted (in 1440, for example) to stop the action of the subsidy as a result of problems arising from the popularity of the scheme, but in fact there seems to be no explicit evidence for an instance in which a building was actually constructed on foot of the grant of a £10 subsidy under either of the celebrated enactments.

The fact that there is a paucity of documentary evidence regarding the construction of tower houses and regarding their use has meant that there has been what is perhaps a disproportionate emphasis on evidence of possible significance. In respect of the 1430 legislation, for example, as well as the points already mentioned regarding the relative value of £10 and the large number of works in which the statute has been flagged, there are problems associated with the assignation to the enactment of a motivational role in tower house construction. This is certainly the case in respect of Fitzpatrick's claims concerning buildings in county Galway.

The introduction of the legislation of 1428, but particularly of that of 1430, has often been designated as an important – if not the important – event in the emergence of the tower house in Ireland. A section of this chapter is devoted to the 'pursuit of origins', a subject which has been discussed in several of the county- or area-based studies of tower houses. This section is divided into two parts, and incorporates an assessment of this 'pursuit' in itself, as well as an examination of the issues which have been considered relevant to its realisation.

The chapter includes reference to a number of instruments, of legislative and other type, dating from before 1428 and after 1430, which may be of relevance to the debate surrounding tower house 'origins' as it has been framed. The evidence presented in the course of the section dealing with legislation seems to provoke a challenge to the conventionally-repeated chronology of tower house

construction in Ireland. Even if it is not accompanied with overwhelming or explicit material to support an alternative arrangement, it is contended that the evidence to be found among the documents cited in this chapter constitutes at least as compelling a scenario as that which has traditionally been accepted. Moreover, when considered in the context of the matters presented in other chapters, it would appear that the intentions and implications of the legislation are such as to present a convincing alternative interpretation of the architectural history of the period.

An important element of the debate regarding the 'origins' of the tower house, which was aroused by the work of two of the earlier investigators of the buildings in Ireland, forms the subject matter of the sixth chapter. Davin, writing on the tower houses of the Pale, and then, to an even more substantial extent, Cairns, writing on the tower houses of county Tipperary, seem to have accepted the possibility that the Latin terms which have been translated as 'fortalice' may very well have been used with reference to tower houses. This point is of particular significance in that its appearance in documents dating from the earlier fourteenth century was used as a means of supporting the notion that tower houses may have been in existence at that period. This suggestion has been rejected as unreliable by some subsequent writers on several grounds. Firstly, for example, although in later centuries the word does seem to have been used to refer to tower houses, the terminology of the period – including, of course, the word itself – is insufficiently precise, and is used with too much flexibility, to allow firm connections with a particular form of building to be established. A second reason also concerns the meaning of the word, proposing that it should be understood to mean 'small fortified place', a translation which actually appears inconsistent with other renderings although it does also serve to found an argument against the direct equivalence of 'fortalice' and 'tower house'. 19

In this chapter the issues surrounding the use and interpretation of the word fortalice are discussed, and its relationship with the study of castles generally and tower houses in particular is considered. An effort is made to place the discussion of the word as it relates to tower houses in Ireland into a slightly wider context, acknowledging, for example, that the Latin words which have been

¹⁹ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; MCNEILL 1997; DONNELLY 1994.

translated into English as 'fortalice' (and it should not be forgotten that the translations are far from consistent in this regard) were also used with reference to buildings in other countries which may be of different or even of contrasting character.

In fact the value which is placed on terminological precision is partly related to the struggle to label and understand buildings for which we have only limited information. When one is familiar with or can observe and witness the functions and *modus operandi* of a building, and especially when one can expect a similar level of familiarity, at least in broad terms, among one's audience, then the words actually used to describe that building need not extend beyond the general. To the modern surveyor of medieval structures, however, there is a need for the designation of descriptive labels in order to permit classification and facilitate understanding. The great majority of descriptive work which has so far been undertaken regarding tower houses has, naturally, been concentrated on the appearance of the physical remains standing above the ground.

In the seventh chapter an attempt is made to move beyond this circumstance insofar as it includes assessment of the evidence for tower house organisation and use which has been uncovered by means of archaeological excavation. As well as discussing the results of excavations at and related to tower houses and placing those results in the context of the questions raised through other research media, this section assesses the current approach to archaeological excavation in Ireland. It therefore addresses the issues surrounding the preponderance of 'rescue'-orientated interventions as against the far smaller number of research-motivated investigations, and considers the implications of this situation for tower house studies in particular. Central to this subject is the notion of control, and it is suggested that even a brief look at any of the volumes in the series of annual *Excavations* bulletins (but especially those produced in the 1990s and subsequently) will reveal that although the number of licences to excavate has increased dramatically, the growth in the body of positive archaeological data being generated has been rather more moderate.²⁰

Archaeological activity, it is suggested, is only partly controlled by archaeologists. In fact the overwhelming majority of excavations (and other

²⁰ For details of the series of *Excavations* bulletins, see the note at the start of the bibliography.

activities which have to be carried out under the supervision of the holder of an archaeological licence, issued for that specific purpose) happen as a result of the requirements of other groups, in whose interest it will normally be to minimise the need for archaeological intervention.

There has, nonetheless, been a certain amount of information derived from archaeological excavations around Ireland which contributes to the elucidation of the character of tower houses in the country. Some of these excavations are examined, in the context of the Irish understanding of tower houses, in this section. Then in the eighth chapter, by way of comparison, a sample of the results of investigations of similar monuments in Scotland is discussed. decades of the twentieth century saw excavation at a number of tower houses in Scotland, notably under the direction of Tabraham and Good, and the findings which emerged from these projects appear relevant to the assessment of the rather less-excavated – though probably more numerous – tower houses of Ireland.²¹ That there are many basic characteristics shared by the tower houses of the two countries seems self-evident, and the notion of a connection has probably enjoyed implicit support from a general perception that there are significant points held in common in the historical and cultural heritage of the two areas. The idea that the tower house form may have reached Ireland by means of export or borrowing from Scotland was dismissed by Ó Danachair in the late 1970s, but his arguments have not been accepted by more recent writers, among whom some connection between the tower house-building phenomenon in Scotland and in Ireland is generally acknowledged.²²

There has been more excavation in Scotland than in Ireland, but it should be emphasised that the sample of tower house sites which has been subjected to archaeological examination in Scotland remains small as a proportion of the total number of tower houses. However, the traditional understanding of tower houses in Scotland, as in Ireland, was based on a methodological approach founded on architectural survey and art- and architectural-historical techniques. The impact

²¹ GOOD, G.L. & TABRAHAM, C.J. 1981 'Excavations at Threave Castle, Galloway, 1974-78', *Medieval Archaeology* **25**, pp.90-140; GOOD, G.L. & TABRAHAM, C.J. 1988 'Excavations at Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* **118**, pp.231-266, fiche 3:C1-G29; TABRAHAM, C.J. 1988 'The Scottish medieval towerhouse as lordly residence in the light of recent excavation', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* **118**, pp.267-276.

of the findings of excavations of tower houses in Scotland seems to have been to provoke a revision of the conventional view of the buildings and of the context in which they stood. Perhaps the most substantial reconsideration has been in the image of the tower house – as seems so clear in the countryside of today – as a lone tower, standing stark and isolated in the rural landscape. Excavations in Scotland have generated evidence which suggests that the tower house was often, in fact, merely a prominent (and particularly durable) component of a complex of buildings, the hub of a group of structures which would together have formed a settlement cluster. This view of the context of Scottish tower houses is considered to be of relevance to the way in which we approach the equivalent structures in Ireland, and it certainly raises issues to be examined in the light of existing and future surveys and excavations of tower houses in this country.

It has long been recognised that a proportion of tower houses in Ireland would have been surrounded by a bawn, and that that enclosure might have taken the form of a masonry wall, an earthen bank, a wooden palisade, or even a hedge (or a combination of two or more of the above). Indeed, while it is the masonry elements which tend to survive in prominent form in today's landscape, careful archaeological work seems the most appropriate technique for the investigation of the evidence for the other forms. However, traces of more extensive settlement at tower house sites may be identifiable without recourse to excavation. Survey work may reveal indications suggesting the one-time existence of further structures in the environs of a tower house, perhaps in the form of patterns on the surrounding land surface. This type of evidence is very difficult to date, particularly in absolute terms but also in relation to other structures and features at the site. A clearer notion of the originally-envisaged organisation of some tower houses may be had from examination of the exterior faces of their own walls. On the walls of a number of tower houses there remain, apparently as part of the original construction, protruding stones arranged in such a way as to provide a connection with the roof of an adjacent building or range of buildings. Without thorough survey or perhaps even excavation it may not be clear whether such structure was ever actually built, but the very presence of a roof raggle would appear to demonstrate the intention (at least) of those responsible for the design

²² Ó DANACHAIR, C. 1977-1979 'Irish tower houses and their regional distribution', *Béaloideas* **45-47**, pp.158-163; CAIRNS 1984; MCNEILL 1997; BARRY 1988, 188.

and construction of the tower house that it should have been part of a more extensive group of buildings. At a small number of tower houses there are actually the remains of walls protruding from the corners of the remaining structure, and at others an adjacent hall-type building does in fact survive.

There is therefore already some evidence to suggest that tower houses in Ireland should be understood as elements in a more extensive complex of buildings, rather than as lone, isolated structures. It would appear that a considerable amount of work remains to be done, both in Scotland and in Ireland, to test the suggestions raised by the excavations so far conducted, and by the architectural features which appear to support them. It is clearly for archaeologists to present and promote an understanding of the tower house based on the evidence emerging from their investigations, and thus to provide what must surely be a more comprehensively-based appreciation of the building type than that, based on architectural examination, which has hitherto been so generally accepted.

Comparison of tower houses in Ireland and Scotland does of course lead to questions as to whether comparative material from further afield should not be brought into consideration. The cultural and historical links between Ireland and Scotland may be more obvious, not least as a result of the geographical proximity of the two countries, and the similarities between the two groups of tower houses are, at least in general terms, clear. However, the tower as a form of defensive architecture is extremely widespread, and parallels have been drawn for tower houses in Ireland with similar structures in various parts of Europe and beyond. In chapter nine an attempt is made to present Ireland's fourteenth century in the context of the European continent. It is observed that there has been relatively little work by historians (or, indeed, by archaeologists) of pan-European events in a specifically Irish context, and the place of Ireland as part of Europe - connected to the continent, rather than separated from it, by the sea, more a routeway than an obstacle – is emphasised. On this basis it is suggested that while there must certainly have been some independence of discrete areas as regards the evolution of fortified architecture, a degree of influence between the various regions of Europe seems inevitable.

In the course of chapter nine a series of examples from different parts of Europe is cited and discussed. They are selected in such a way as to illustrate a

European context for the emergence and development of the tower house in Ireland. They include a number of references to major building activity which was taking place in the course of the fourteenth century, for example, as a means of emphasising that while the general view of that period through almost all of Europe is dominated by depression, strife, and crises of various kinds, the situation has not been interpreted as necessarily implying a total collapse in specific sectors, nor of a cessation of construction work in particular.

Another aspect of the European experience which seems to hold potential relevance for the Irish situation relates to a more fundamental element of the development of archaeological methodology. Before the advent of technologically-sophisticated scientific procedures for the independent calculation of dates for organic and other materials from archaeological sites, the relative chronology established by an excavator might have been placed in real time on the basis of the presence or absence of artefactual material of a specific type in a specific stratigraphic position. There was heavy dependence in excavation work, and in the analysis of the artefacts themselves, on typological analysis. Just as artefacts may be grouped together on the basis of their community of features, so monuments in the landscape have normally been classified according to their physical appearance. Organization of the resulting classification has generally been attempted according to a chronological scheme, with different types of structure assigned to different periods. The value of such systems for the purposes of presenting information in a coherent manner which would be susceptible to analysis is clear, but one must be aware that any general classification must involve a loss of focus and precision.

In Denmark, for example, the evidence of excavation seems to have demonstrated that the conventionally-accepted, typologically-based chronology for castles was fundamentally flawed in that it made no allowance for the continuing construction of earthworks after a certain point. Excavation has shown that mottes were being built at a far later date than had previously been conceived.²³

Comparative material regarding fourteenth century building activity, and regarding tower house construction in particular, is available from a wide

²³ ENGBERG, N. 1994 'Borren and Næsholm: two examples of Danish castle-building', *Château Gaillard* XVI (Luxembourg, 1992), pp.155-165

selection of European regions. In the course of this chapter material is examined and discussed from areas as disparate as France, Hungary, and Greece (as well as Ireland), and from a selection of different landscape types. In each area, of course, a particular and distinctive group of circumstances – topographical, social, economic, historical, and political – is to be taken into consideration. However, it seems important that one should appreciate that while the detail of the situations in different areas may vary, there are also significant similarities between the experiences of the various communities, and between the architectural responses developed in each area.

In chapter nine the circumstances of different parts of Europe are considered in relation to fourteenth century architectural activity and in relation to the construction of buildings of tower house type, but in the tenth chapter the focus returns to Ireland. In this chapter attention is paid not to the geographical spread of the tower house form, but to the interest it has provoked among observers over the centuries. The rise of antiquarianism in Britain in the eighteenth century, and the contribution of antiquarianism to an awareness of its past, forms an important background to an ongoing tradition of local interest in the country's cultural heritage. The relationship between Ireland and its past is more complex, but there is nonetheless a significant body of antiquarian writing and illustration dating from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of the value of this antiquarian material is manifested in circumstances in which a building which was described and drawn or painted in the eighteenth century (or whenever) has since deteriorated, disintegrated, or been demolished. The work of antiquaries is also of interest, however, in that it helps to inform us of how the built heritage was regarded by our predecessors. It is true that those responsible for the commission of drawings and descriptions of 'ancient monuments', and those who actually carried out the work (not always the same person) may not be representative of the general view of the contemporary populace, but it is through their output that some insight may be gained into the development of attitudes to the past and to its material remains.

In chapter nine the work of a number of individual antiquaries is discussed, and consideration is given to their respective motivation and choice of subject matter. The organization of antiquarian activity in Ireland is also mentioned, and an attempt is made to present the emergence of the notion of the

tower house through analysis of nineteenth and twentieth accounts of fortified architecture.

The antiquarian approach to the past provides a distinctive element in the overall body of evidence regarding tower houses in Ireland. To an extent, however, antiquaries may be regarded as the forerunners of archaeologists, the focus of their activities having been the investigation and recording of aspects of the built heritage. Chapter eleven, although devoted to the examination of another body of writing about Ireland's past, deals with a contrasting type of source material.

The Gaelic Irish literary medium known as bardic poetry has been the subject of very little attention among archaeologists and architectural historians, but has in recent years begun to attract investigation as a source of historical information. Chapter eleven may be regarded as a tentative or preliminary foray into the field of bardic poetry, and is intended to draw attention to the possibility that evidence of value to inquiries such as this might be derived from such unfamiliar sources. There are of course complications inherent in the treatment of literary compositions for archaeological or historical purposes, and it is very important that these be taken into consideration. For example, the position of the bard and the purpose for which his work was carried out cannot but have influenced the character and content of the resulting poem. The essentially laudatory nature of the majority of bardic poems, a result of the circumstances in which they were commissioned and declaimed, is acknowledged and discussed. However, it has been demonstrated that, once this context is recognised, valuable insights are to be found in bardic poetry regarding the character of the society to which it belongs, and even regarding the character of the architecture associable with that society.

Simms has been to the fore in developing the historical potential of this literary genre, and the group of works which she has designated the 'house poems' provide a convenient starting-point for consideration of the ways in which bardic poetry might contribute to our understanding of tower houses. Works of relevance, for the purposes of this study, include not only those few poems which

Chapter one Introduction

have buildings as their subject matter, but also those in which allusion is made to houses or other structures.²⁴

Two types of evidence are thus to be had from bardic poetry, and both are to be treated carefully, of course, in the context of the literary character of their source material. If a poem includes description of a particular building or type of building, it may provide clues to the appearance of that building, although such apparently straightforward descriptive material will often be affected by the conventions and formulae of the poetic style. Metaphorical allusions to buildings may initially appear to be even more elusive in terms of solid description, but in fact it must be remembered that the poet had to organise his choice of words with reference to the audience for his work. He is therefore unlikely to have strayed far from the familiar in creating images for illustration and comparison within his compositions. He may have had use for ideals, particularly where those were an acknowledged part of the contemporary scheme. In any event it is important to remember that the impact – the sense, even – of a poem would have depended on its power to communicate. It would have been of central importance that the work of the bardic poet could be immediately understood by its audience.

The particular character of bardic poetry is distinctive, but it does have approximate parallels in other traditions. Critical analysis of the poetry of the Mediterranean classical tradition is considered in the context of the assessment of the role and intentions of the poet. In that southern field, as in the Irish bardic situation, it must be emphasised that the priority of the poet must lie in the creation of poetry, and thus in the crafting of language to a particular form rather than in the provision of a chronicle of events or a factually accurate account of people or places.

The bardic poet was a composer of poetry rather than a recorder of history, but there are references in the poems to different aspects of evidence regarding contemporary buildings which seem to be of relevance to this study. A selection of these references has been grouped together into a series of categories. The first category includes allusions to the height of the buildings; the second to the materials used in their construction; the next to their comfort; another to the

²⁴ SIMMS, K. 2001 'Native Sources for Gaelic Settlement: The House Poems' in DUFFY, P.J., EDWARDS, D., & FITZPATRICK, E. (ed) Gaelic Ireland c.1250-c.1650. Land, Lordship and

vocabulary used in their description; and a final group features references on the theme of the castle as a focal point for its community.

These categories all refer to literary allusions to buildings and to aspects of buildings. In the twelfth chapter attention is turned to the characteristics of the buildings themselves, and of their situation. The chapter consists essentially of an attempt to identify groups of tower houses united by some common feature, whether geographical, architectural, or otherwise. Theories have been advanced as to why tower houses were built, and a certain amount of evidence exists as to who was responsible for the construction of particular examples. In this section discussion centres on cylindrical tower houses, a relatively uncommon form of the building which was noted in particular by Craig in his general study of Ireland's architecture. His list of cylindrical tower houses is extended, and suggestions are made regarding the distribution pattern of this architecturally-distinctive sub-set of the tower house group. An effort is made to assess the locations in which the tower houses in this group were built in the context of topographical features and broader settlement patterns. This latter exercise is intimately connected with further comments on the siting of tower houses and discussion of proposals which have been made regarding the building of tower houses as constituent parts of strategic, defensive networks. The military significance of the arrangement of groups of tower houses must also be assessed in relation to the physical geography of the relevant area, and it seems to be of significance (whether for territorial or other reasons) that a proportion of tower houses and of series of tower houses are built along the banks of rivers.²⁵

As becomes clear in the course of the examination of cylindrical tower houses, it is of particular value that groups of tower houses which have been distinguished on one set of grounds should then be assessed by means of other types of analytical approach. One should not be content to state that the individual components of a collection of buildings look the same: one must also consider whether what is essentially a superficial similarity is actually only one manifestation of a more substantial relationship. The choice of a site for a building may reveal much regarding the reasons for its construction and regarding

Settlement. Four Courts Press, Dublin, for the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement. pp.246-267

the way in which it was intended that it should be used. As a result, broader fields of examination cannot but assist in elucidating what it was that lay behind the phenomenon of the tower house in Ireland.

²⁵ CRAIG, M. 1982 *The Architecture of Ireland from the earliest times to 1880.* B.T. Batsford, London, & Eason & Son, Dublin. p.103

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING TOWER HOUSES IN IRELAND

Introduction

The use of the term 'tower house' in Leask's pioneering synthesis, *Irish castles and castellated houses*, ¹ followed by its endorsement in works dealing with medieval castellology and general settlement such as those by Jope, Waterman, Barry, Cairns, McNeill, and Sweetman, has made it familiar to anyone working in Irish castle studies. ² The term appears to have been coined by Parker in the report he made of a tour of 'the Ancient Domestic Architecture of Ireland' to the Society of Antiquaries in London in 1859. ³ Despite this relatively prestigious publication by one of the leading English architectural historians of the day, 'tower house' does not seem to have featured in the lexicon of Thomas Westropp, a prolific worker who was active at the end of the nineteenth century. ⁴ It was used, but only in a limited manner, by Wakeman, who had

¹ LEASK 1941.

² GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND MINISTRY OF FINANCE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NORTHERN IRELAND / JOPE, E.M. (ed) 1966 An Archaeological Survey of County Down. HMSO, Belfast; WATERMAN, D.M. 1967 'A note on Strangford Castle, Co. Down', Ulster Journal of Archaeology 30, pp.83-86; 1967 'Agheeghter Castle, Co. Fermanagh', Ulster Journal of Archaeology 30, pp.87-88; BARRY, T.B. 1988 The Archaeology of Medieval Ireland. Routledge, London; CAIRNS, C.T. 1987 Irish tower houses: a Co. Tipperary case study. (Irish Settlement Studies, Number 2) Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement, Athlone; MCNEILL, T. 1992 'The origins of tower houses', Archaeology Ireland 19, pp.13-14; MCNEILL, T. 1997 Castles in Ireland. Feudal Power in a Gaelic World. Routledge, London; SWEETMAN, D. 1999 The Medieval Castles of Ireland. Collins Press, Cork, in association with Dúchas - The Heritage Service.

³ PARKER 1860.

⁴ For example, WESTROPP, T.J. 1898-1900 'Notes on the lesser castles or "Peel Towers" of the County Clare', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **21c**, pp.348-365; 1904 'On Irish Mottes and Early Norman Castles', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* **34**, pp.313-345; 1966-1907 'The ancient castles of the county Limerick', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **26c**, pp.55-108, 143-200, 201-264; 1907 'The Principal Ancient Castles of the County Limerick', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* **37**, pp.24-40, 153-164; 1909 'The Desmonds' Castle at Newcastle Oconyll, Co. Limerick', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* **39**, pp.42-58, 350-368; 1911 'Cahermurphy Castle and its earthworks, with certain forts near Milltown-Malbay, County Clare', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* **41**, pp.117-137; 1914-1916 'Fortified headlands and castles on the south coast of Munster', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **32c**, pp.89-124, 188-226; 1914-1916 'Fortified headlands and castles in western County Cork', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **32c**, pp.249-286. For a bibliography of Westropp's work see ASHE FITZGERALD, M. 2000 *Thomas Johnson Westropp* (1860-1922): an Irish antiquary. Seandálaíocht Monograph series, volume 1. Department of Archaeology, University College, Dublin.

travelled with Parker during his visit to Ireland,⁵ and it appears only very occasionally in the work of other late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers on Irish antiquities, history, and architecture,⁶ resurfacing in the Irish context only when Leask adopted it in 1941.⁷

Those who constructed tower houses would almost certainly have referred to them as castles (or by the equivalent term in the relevant language), and, indeed, it is as castles that the majority of those which survive in the landscape of today are generally known. The tower house, in the Irish context, is certainly a 'castle' according to the most general definitions, being 'a fortified habitation'. It is clear, therefore, that the tower house forms a subset of the set of buildings known as 'castles'. In order further to establish what defines the tower house in Ireland it is necessary to examine those works in which the term has hitherto been used.

The obvious starting point might seem to be the article in which Parker first used the term with reference to buildings in Ireland. However, there are tower houses in England, Scotland, and elsewhere, although in each place the

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⁵ WAKEMAN, W.F. 1891 *Handbook of Irish Antiquities*. Hodges Figgis and Co., Dublin. (1995 reprint, Bracken Books, London). pp.217-229

⁶ Dix, in the first of nearly fifty articles on the 'lesser castles' of county Dublin, stated that they were 'more correctly known as "Tower Houses", but he used the 'correct' term only very sparingly in the course of the series. The series runs from DIX, E.R.McC. 1896 'Notes on some of the ancient castles in the Co. Dublin', *The Irish Builder* 38, p.235 through to DIX, E.R.McC. 1899 'The lesser castles of the Co. Dublin. Forty-eighth article. Kenure (or Kinnure) Castle', *The Irish Builder* 41, p.60

⁷ Parker does not seem to have used the term in his works on English buildings – cf. RICKMAN, T. 1881 An attempt to discriminate the styles of architecture in England, from the Conquest to the Reformation. (7th edition by PARKER, J.H.) Parker & Co., Oxford & London; PARKER, J.H. 1881 An introduction to the study of Gothic architecture. (6th edition) Parker & Co., Oxford & London; PARKER, J.H. 1882 A.B.C. of Gothic Architecture. Parker & Co., Oxford & London. However, in these three works the author drew mainly on ecclesiastical buildings for examples and illustrations. Even as late as 1937 Leask himself was not using the term 'tower house' to describe Clara castle, in county Kilkenny, the building which was to feature in his 1941 publication as the archetypal tower house. LEASK, H.G. 1937 'Clara Castle, Co. Kilkenny', Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland 67, pp.284-289; LEASK 1941.

⁸ CATHCART KING, D.J. 1988 *The castle in England and Wales*. Routledge, London & New York. p.1

⁹ Reservations have been expressed as to whether the tower house should be considered a 'true castle' – see for example, POWER, D. 1992 *Archaeological Inventory of County Cork. Volume 1: West Cork.* The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.321 – but this issue, dependent as it is on a somewhat outmoded narrowly militaristic notion of the castle, will be addressed later.

¹⁰ PARKER 1860. See DONNELLY, C.J. 1995 'John Henry Parker and his contribution to Irish tower house studies', *Newsletter of the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement* **5**, pp.5-7

implications of the term as well as the details of the appearance of the buildings vary. 11 A survey of the developing body of work on medieval castles would demonstrate that the term is a general one, at least in the broader context of castle studies. A range of structures has been labelled 'tower house'. They are all of residential function and tower form, but may often be distinguished in other respects. 12 Common to all, however, was presumably an appreciation that the construction of a tower is a sensible security measure, and that the prominence of the tower serves to assert the presence of the building, and therefore of its occupants, on the surrounding countryside. McNeill pointed out the lack of uniformity among castles in general, ascribing this not only to variations in the resources – skills and finance – available to the builder, but also, and perhaps primarily, to his desire to build something new and impressive. Tower houses are no exception to this principle, although they have, of course, been distinguished on the basis of their similarities. For McNeill, in fact 'the most obvious feature of the tower-houses of Ireland is that (like every castle, of course) they are not uniform. 13

¹¹ SIMPSON, W.D. 1961 'The Tower-Houses of Scotland' in JOPE, E.M. (ed) Studies in Building History. Odhams Press, London. pp.229-242; SIMPSON, W.D. 1969 Castles in England and Wales. B.T. Batsford Ltd., London. pp.20-21, 126-133; CRUDEN, S. 1981 The Scottish Castle. Spurbooks, Edinburgh. pp.100-143; ALLEN BROWN, R. 1954 English Medieval Castles. B.T. Batsford Ltd., London. See especially p.108; POUNDS, N.J.G. 1990 The medieval castle in England and Wales. A social and political history. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.276-300; WOOD, M. 1965 The English mediaeval house. Phoenix House, London. pp.166-176; BRUNSKILL, R.W. 1982 Houses. Collins, London. pp.38-39; CURNOW, P.E. 1989 'The tower house at Hopton Castle and its affinities' in HARPER-BILL, C., HOLDSWORTH, C.J., & NELSON, J.L. (ed) Studies in medieval history presented to R. Allen Brown. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge. pp.81-102; DIXON, P. 1979 'Towerhouses, Pelehouses and Border Society', The Archaeological Journal 136, pp.240-252; SAÏTAS, Y. (trans by RAMP, P.) 2001 Mani. Melissa, Athens. (Part of Volume 5 in the Greek Traditional Architecture Series); there are very few tower houses in Wales - SMITH, P. 1988 Houses of the Welsh countryside. A study in historical geography. Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments in Wales, HMSO, London. pp.10-12, 32-33, 135-139, and the map of tower houses in Britain and Ireland and associated information on pp.338-339a. See also CAIRNS 1984, 7, 17-20. What early writers meant, and what overseas writers mean by the term 'tower house' is actually of tangential interest only. The current understanding of the term in the Irish context must be the focus of this study. As this seems to be slightly vague, it is important (and perhaps inevitable) that a clear identity for the building type should be established on the basis of the observations which follow.

¹² CAIRNS 1984, 6,7,8,17.

¹³ MCNEILL 1997, 1, 211. The point had in fact been made by Parker. PARKER 1860, 153.

LEASK, H.G. 1941 *Irish castles and castellated houses.* Dundalgan Press, Dundalk.

Leask seems to have adopted the term 'tower house' in his 1941 publication, although he did not explicitly define it, allowing his descriptions of the castles covered by his survey to provide general parameters for its identification. His ideas regarding tower house chronology have recently been subjected to revision by some investigators, though others remain loyal to the scheme he outlined. Despite his architecturally-based classificatory work, his choice of words has led to the inclusion of chronologically-founded guidelines for the definition of the tower house. Leask pointed out that 'from about 1440 onwards there was a great building revival.... It is to this period that by far the greater number of the single towers – fortified residences, tower houses, belong.' This and other related statements have been interpreted in such a way as to attribute to Leask an assertion that tower houses could not have been built before the second quarter of the fifteenth century, or even before 1400. This notion has, in recent decades, been the subject of challenge from certain quarters.

The chronologically-based identity which fell onto the label 'tower house' as a result of Leask's work has been subjected to questioning and exploration since the early 1980s. The investigations conducted by Davin, Cairns, Jordan, and McAuliffe at TCD, by Murtagh at UCD, and by Abraham and Donnelly at QUB, among others, have yielded evidence, for specific parts of the country at least, which may provide for the adoption of a more substantial understanding of the tower house. However, it is not reasonable to imply that the assertion of the existence of tower houses in fourteenth century Ireland defies Leask's ideas. He did propose that there was a considerable reduction in architectural activity as between the late thirteenth century and the fourteenth century, and that the majority of tower houses were

¹⁴ LEASK 1941, 75.

erected in the period after 1440, but he did not exclude the possibility that buildings of tower house form and function might have existed in Ireland before the 1440s.¹⁶

The ascription to Leask, and the subsequent use, of a more severe definition of the fourteenth century than that which he actually intended may be at the root of at least some of the difficulties encountered in works of recent date. In such works the precise identity of the tower house often seems somewhat elusive. This must be attributed at least partly to misinterpretation of Leask's words. This misinterpretation may however have served to stimulate research, including attempts to identify evidence for the existence of tower houses in the so-called 'barren' fourteenth century in Ireland. Potential confusion also lies in the fact that the understanding of the type of structure which has become known as a tower house to the student of Scottish architecture, for example, is not necessarily the same – whether as a result of actual differences, or of differences in the amount and focus of research – as that of the type of building to which the label is applied in Ireland. In Ireland itself, despite the emergence of the term and its apparent application to an identifiable class of structure, terminological consistency has yet to be firmly established.¹⁷ As long as the nature of the tower house is inconsistently understood, the analysis of its origins in chronological terms will remain elusive. However, the process of identifying the nature of a building type must be considered complementary to the clarification of its inspiration. Building styles almost inevitably develop out of those which precede them, often emerging as a result of a change in the materials available, in the environment in which the building took place, or in the mindset of the builders.

Another conventional understanding of the tower house which has grown from the work of Leask is that by which the buildings are considered in isolation, with minimal regard for the surroundings in which they might once

¹⁶ LEASK 1999, 75-77.

¹⁵ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; JORDAN 1990; MCAULIFFE 1991; MURTAGH 1982; ABRAHAM 1991; DONNELLY 1994.

State of knowledge Chapter two

have stood. The presentation of the tower house as a lone tower, perhaps surrounded by a bawn, is derived at least in part from Leask's area of interest as an architectural historian. He, like Parker before him, was concerned almost exclusively with the remains of the buildings as they stood before him in the landscape.

The term 'tower house' is in fact a product of the approach of the architectural historian, implying the self-contained unity of the structure as a defended residence. It is salutary to remark, in the context of the image of the tower house which has been perpetuated, and which owes so much to the reading of Leask's work by subsequent writers, that Leask himself recognised that tower houses - 'that is to say, fortified houses of tower form' incorporated 'appendages of lesser height which have usually vanished because of their lighter construction.'18 The context of the tower house was only briefly alluded to in Leask's main work on Irish castles, when he commented, quite justifiably, that 'many, perhaps the majority, of the towers stand isolated to-day or show but faint traces of surrounding buildings.' It is perhaps the allusive character of this observation, in combination with the fact that his next sentence deals with the existence at most tower houses of 'walled courtyards or bawns', which have obscured the implications conveyed by mention of 'surrounding buildings.' 19

The objectives and methods of the architectural historian are of obvious value in contributing to the understanding of a historic building. However, it is important to recognise that other disciplines may provide complementary information. McNeill described 'the chapters devoted to tower-houses' as 'probably the strongest part of Leask's book', ²⁰ and it may be significant that the discussion of tower houses accounts for a little over one quarter of the entire text. These chapters needed to be strong, however, given that they

¹⁷ See, for example, HALPIN, E. 1994 'Excavations at Enniskillen Castle, Co. Fermanagh', *Ulster*

Journal of Archaeology **57**, pp.119-144 at 123

18 LEASK, H.G. 1946 'The Irish tower-house castle', Proceedings and Reports of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society **2nd Series, Volume 3, Part I**, pp.28-34 at 28 ¹⁹ LEASK 1999, 88-89.

²⁰ MCNEILL 1997, 201.

represented an attempt to establish a relatively unfamiliar term in the common vocabulary of Irish castle studies. It is perhaps a result of their strength that they have been so dominant in the determination of the direction of subsequent work on the subject.

The potential of other fields of study, such as history and archaeology, in particular, to assist in our appreciation of the tower house seems clear. It is important, however, that the lines of investigation pursued in these areas should be organised on the basis of their own criteria, and not merely in response to the questions arising from the architectural historical agenda. Indeed, nuances, or even deficiencies, in the results derived from one investigative medium may be revealed through the exploration of others.

Theses, the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, and the building of castles in Ireland

Several regional and county studies of tower houses, and of aspects of tower house construction, have been produced since the early 1980s, and these have contributed much to the clarification of the notion and nature of the tower house in Ireland. These investigations have tended to identify and describe the tower houses of a particular area and they have thus provided models which are vital to the understanding of the building type in the country as a whole. Furthermore, some of the more substantial studies include theories which have been of considerable influence in the determination of approaches to medieval fortified architecture in Ireland.

The county *Inventory* series which is being produced by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland is a body of work which is in many ways complementary to the theses. By its nature, of course, the *Inventory* series is far less analytical in its aspirations than the theses, although far wider in the

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²¹ These include ABRAHAM 1991; CAIRNS 1984; COTTER 1994; DAVIN 1982; DONNELLY 1994; DUGGAN 1982; FENNELLY 1997; FITZPATRICK 1994; JORDAN 1990; KEARNS 2002; LENNON 2001; MCAULIFFE 1991; MURTAGH 1982; O'DONOVAN 1997; SHERLOCK 1997; UA CRÓINÍN 1997.

range of monuments which it covers.²² It is nonetheless making an extremely significant contribution to the recording of tower houses around the country. Even in the *Inventory* series, however, the identity of the tower house is not uniform.²³ One must be wary, therefore, when considering any writings on the subject, of what exactly is implied by an author when the term 'tower house' is used. In the light of the relatively recent origins of the term in the Irish context, and of the amount of relevant historical, archaeological, and architectural historical work which has been carried out in the last few decades, it is right that our understanding of what is meant by the title should be evolving.

A building type is defined by the nature of the structures which are included within it. The identity of the 'tower house' is thus determined by the character of the buildings to which the label is applied. If tower houses are to be discussed, therefore, surveys of the type carried out by the ASI and in several of the theses are essential. Any verbal definition of the tower house must accommodate the variety of the structures included by the surveyors, but those same surveyors are, in turn, dependent on guidelines of some sort for the organisation of their work. It has become clear that a definition of the 'tower house' must be reasonably broad if it is to be applied to buildings all over the country. Only very few of the tower houses of county Wexford, for example, would qualify for inclusion in either of the larger sections of Davin's classification for the Pale.²⁴ However, while particular features may

²⁴ JORDAN 1990; DAVIN 1982.

²² Inventories have now appeared for Carlow, Cavan, East and South Cork, Mid Cork, North Cork, West Cork, North Galway, West Galway, Laois, Leitrim, Louth, Meath, Monaghan, Offaly, North Tipperary, Waterford, Wexford, and Wicklow. The following surveys were produced independently of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland: LACY, B. 1983 Archaeological Survey of County Donegal. Donegal County Council, Lifford; STOUT, G. 1984 Archaeological survey of the Barony of Ikerrin. Roscrea Heritage Society, Roscrea; CUPPAGE, J. 1986 Archaeological Survey of the Dingle Peninsula. Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne, Ballyferriter; TOAL, C. 1995 North Kerry Archaeological Survey. Brandon Book Publishers Ltd., Dingle; O'SULLIVAN, A. & SHEEHAN, J. 1996 The Iveragh Peninsula. An Archaeological Survey of South Kerry. Cork University Press, Cork.

²³ This situation is, naturally, very much appreciated by the ASI, which recognises the importance of consistency, but also of accuracy, for the value of its county-based publications, especially when they are considered as part of a national project. SWEETMAN, P.D. 1999 pers. comm., referring in particular to the example of Oldcastle, county Wicklow.

distinguish the tower houses of different parts of Ireland, there is also a set of essential characteristics common to all.²⁵ On this basis it seems reasonable to investigate the tower houses of the country as a single *corpus*.

A regionally-based approach, while convenient from the point of view of the collection and organisation of data, may also facilitate the tracing of the emergence and development of the building type in that area. Modern administrative divisions may resemble medieval landholdings and power blocs only vaguely, if at all, but they provide a familiar geographical index, whereas the identification of medieval boundaries would be problematical in many parts of the country.

Each of the regional tower house studies includes consideration of the dating of the buildings, and several also discuss what are often referred to as the 'origins' of the tower house. The point of departure for these discussions has tended to be Leask's suggestion that the fourteenth century was in large measure architecturally barren. Leask's view has been interpreted to mean that the first tower houses were erected in the early fifteenth century, with the vast majority dating to the period after 1430. In 1428 for county Louth, and then in 1430 for counties Louth, Meath, Kildare, and Dublin, the counties of the Pale, the government enacted a statute providing a grant of £10 for the construction of a fortified building to particular dimensions and specifications. The measurements stipulated for entitlement to the grant of this subsidy are close to those of only a very few tower houses which are still standing, although in fact there is considerable variety of size and shape

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²⁵ Davin's summary description is a useful example: 'Generally speaking, tower houses bear a marked similarity to each other, whether they are located in the west of Ireland or just outside the city of Dublin. With few exceptions, tower houses are rectangular in ground plan and three or four storeys in height with narrow windows and small doors. Internal arrangements were invariably simple with windows and fireplaces often providing the only decorative relief.' DAVIN 1982, 39-41.

²⁶ LEASK 1941, 75.

²⁷ As explained elsewhere, the 1430 statute has most often been (incorrectly) described as having been enacted in 1429.

²⁸ See Appendices A(1) and A(2) to chapter 9 for the text of the statutes.

²⁹ e.g. Donore, county Meath, and the residential church tower at Newcastle Lyons, county Dublin. In relation to the latter, see EDWARDS, K.J., HAMOND, F.W., & SIMMS, A. 1983 'The

among buildings which have been classified as tower houses. Some of the buildings now known as tower houses may have been built with the aid of one of these grants, but there seems so far to be no conclusive evidence linking a £10 subsidy with a specific building project.³⁰

The connection between the 1428 and particularly the 1430 legislation and the emergence of tower houses has been persistently promoted in certain quarters.³¹ However, studies of tower houses in the Pale, and in counties Tipperary and Kerry, seem to show that tower houses were being built before the early fifteenth century.³² Evidence has also been produced for counties Carlow, Dublin, and Kildare, and for urban tower houses in the Pale and in county Kilkenny.³³ The 1430 grant may actually have been an official endorsement and encouragement of tower house construction – a recognition that it was a sensible step in the circumstances of the day. The tower house was strong and secure, and, in addition, it served as a prominent advertisement of the power of its builder and proprietor. If its erection had been supported by the royal grant it also symbolised the authority and rule of the Crown.

However, it is clear that the initiation of tower house construction was not the direct result of the grant. In fact, £10 would not have gone far towards the cost of erecting a tower house, even if it were constructed to the basic specifications proposed by the Statute. This means that the availability of a subsidy is very unlikely to have been the chief stimulus of many building projects.³⁴

medieval settlement of Newcastle Lyons, county Dublin. An interdisciplinary approach', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **83c**, pp.351-376 at 363

³⁰ O'Keeffe and Corlett imply the existence of such evidence without providing substantiating evidence. O'KEEFFE, T. 2000 *Medieval Ireland. An Archaeology.* Tempus, Stroud. p.51; CORLETT, C. 1999 *Antiquities of Old Rathdown.* Wordwell, Bray. p.70

³¹ See, for example, the work of Sweetman, whose influence in this respect as Director of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland may perhaps also be detected in the relevant sections of some of the publications in the county *Inventory* series.

³² DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; MCAULIFFE 1991.

³³ O'KEEFFE, T. 1987 'Rathnageeragh and Ballyloo. A study of Stone Castles of probable 14th to early 15th century date in county Carlow', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 117, pp.28-49; EDWARDS, HAMOND, & SIMMS 1983, 363; MURTAGH 1982; BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003.

³⁴ For evidence of the likely cost of castle construction, see ALLEN BROWN 1954, 126; MCNEILL 1997, 202.

Leask has been credited with the initiation of many long-respected ideas regarding Irish architectural history, several of which remain essentially undisturbed. However, his assessment of Ireland's situation in the fourteenth century has also been reconsidered.³⁵ The fourteenth century in Ireland was disrupted by the local effects of the Great European Famine, by the Bruce Invasions, the Gaelic Resurgence, the Black Death, and by an economic decline which was at least partially due to the drain of money, men, and provisions to Scotland to support the military activities of the English king. In this context the interpretation of Leask's work which presents the period as having been devoid of building activity does not seem particularly incongruous. Any of these events could have caused substantial disruption and unrest, and no doubt they each contributed to the unsettled character of the period. However, that unrest and instability need not have restricted building activity absolutely, and in fact the extent to which any of these disruptive factors actually affected particular parts of the country and particular spheres of activity such as building construction has been but little investigated in Ireland. The general conclusions drawn by Leask have been reassessed in recent years, in particular by Davin, Cairns, and McAuliffe. His is not the only plausible account of the consequences of the fourteenth century 'crises'. In fact, Platt has suggested that in some areas of England the reduction in population which came as a result of the Black Death actually led to greater local prosperity, enhanced living conditions, and the creation of higher quality buildings.³⁷

The disruption resulting from the Bruce Invasion would certainly have exacerbated the general insecurity which underlay everyday life in much of fourteenth century Ireland. The impact of the invasion would surely have been felt most severely in particular locations for specific periods, however, but in most places where its effects were felt they would have been in addition to the existing culture of cattle raiding and local rivalries. The demand for tower

³⁵ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; MCAULIFFE 1991.

³⁶ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; MCAULIFFE 1991.

³⁷ PLATT, C. 1996 *King Death. The Black Death and its aftermath in late-medieval England.* University College London Press, London. pp. 137-175.

houses (or other secure dwellings) in such areas would therefore have been even greater.

The economic conditions of fourteenth century Ireland have been seen as restrictions on the potential for building work in the country.³⁸ However, the documentary records on which the economic climate of the fourteenth century is most easily assessed are largely those of the Anglo-Norman government in Dublin. The regime organised from Dublin (and London) under the Crown during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was losing its effectiveness during the early part of the fourteenth century, and the decline in its power may perhaps be detected even earlier.³⁹ This diminution in the level of control exercised by central government is understandable in the light of the distractions affecting the monarch and his resources, especially when coupled with the peripheral situation of Ireland in relation to the headquarters of the Crown.

In the fourteenth century the Gaelic portion of the upper strata of the population was enjoying a resurgence. This recovery of power may, at least partly, be regarded as a response to the diminishing strength of the Dublin government. But it was not merely the Gaelic Irish leaders who gained as a result of this weakening of central authority. There may have been 'two nations' in political terms in later medieval Ireland, but they were not necessarily distinguishable according to their ethnic origins. Power – at least local or regional – was moving into the hands of landowners of Anglo-Norman and Anglo-Irish background as well. Indeed the division was really between the Dublin government, which controlled an ever-decreasing area, ultimately confined to the city itself and the surrounding counties in the 'Pale', and the rest of the country, run independently of Crown control. The fall in revenue at

³⁸ This view has been summarised and challenged by McNeill: MCNEILL 1997, 171-174.

p.111 ⁴⁰ O'NEILL, T. 1987 Merchants and Mariners in Medieval Ireland. Irish Academic Press, Dublin. p.130

³⁹ LYDON, J.F. 1998 *The Making of Ireland. From ancient times to the present.* Routledge, London. pp.84-106; FRAME, R. 1981 *Colonial Ireland, 1169-1369.* Helicon Ltd., Dublin. p.111

Dublin, therefore, need not necessarily be interpreted as indicative of the scale of the overall economic decline.

The revenues of the Dublin government may have fallen, but this is not to say that the economic activity which had brought record income to the capital in the 1290s had ceased. O'Neill has identified what he describes as 'an interdependence of producers and merchants that transcended politics, demonstrating that although politically there were two nations in later medieval Ireland, economically there was only one'. Indeed, according to his analysis, political unrest sometimes provided opportunities for commercial activity: the 'merchants by and large were undeterred by local political strife and sometimes capitalised on it.'41 The devolution of responsibility for government in Ireland, while presumably not an intentional result of the Crown campaigns in Scotland, seems to have been the basis of the misunderstanding regarding the scale of economic change in Ireland. Money may not have reached the Exchequer in Dublin, but this was because it was being collected locally (and possibly even being put to use in local projects) rather than because it did not exist. Those who had come to the fore in the context of local affairs in Ireland outside the Pale may actually have been able to increase their income at the expense of the Crown as a result of its failure to organise the collection of its revenue in the normal way. This being the case, there would have been a group of emergent or re-emergent local leaders scattered over the country who would have had control of funds normally gathered by the Dublin government. Therefore, in an area where a local figure, whatever his ethnic background, had emerged as leader, he might in fact have had access to money with which he might have demonstrated, asserted, and consolidated his position.

As a means of demonstrating his significance a local leader might have assembled a more powerful raiding force with which to impose his position on his neighbours. However, a thoughtful leader would perhaps have sought to create a more lasting and substantial impression on his area, perhaps through the construction of a building of distinction. A building (a tower house, for

41

⁴¹ O'NEILL 1987, 130.

example) would not only have demonstrated the status and comparative wealth of its builder to the local population and to anyone who passed through the area, it would also have provided a secure haven for its builder, his family, and their associates, in the event of raiding by rivals.

The tower house builder had no need for a structure as extensive as the twelfth and thirteenth century stone castles which had been built by Anglo-Normans anxious to assert their own power or that of the Crown over the Lordship of Ireland. The ambitions of the tower house builder were more restricted and this is reflected in the character of the resulting structures. The main point of contrast between the typical castles of the two periods is the obvious one. Both Trim Castle and Roscommon Castle, for example, were designed to act not only as defensive bastions, but also as administrative bases, as the hubs of their communities, and as garrisons in hostile territory. A tower house may actually have filled some or all of these functions, but it was built on a smaller scale. The tower house was usually intended to express the influence of its builder over the surrounding area. Many tower houses are close together, and some are even intervisible, so the area dominated by any single example need not have been vast. They were also designed to provide protection for their owner and his family against the skirmishing and raiding which was not uncommon in the decentralised society of their day.

All builders of tower houses would have been familiar with the appearance of the larger castles which had been built in strategic locations in many parts of the country during the late twelfth century and during the thirteenth century. There does not seem to have been an indigenous Gaelic Irish tradition in the building of stone castles.⁴² As Curtis pointed out, the

⁴² LEASK 1941, 6-7; see also MCNEILL 1997, 7-16 for a discussion of the issues relevant to 'castle' construction in Ireland prior to the advent of Anglo-Norman influence in the later twelfth century; O'Conor indicated that the 'lack of field evidence for conventional castles of pre-tower-house date in Gaelic parts of medieval Ireland is confirmed by statements made by Giraldus Cambrensis in the 1180s and Stephen of Lexington about 40-50 years later that the Irish of their time did not build castles...' Although Giraldus Cambrensis did indeed state as much, there seems to be no obvious reference among the letters of Stephen of Lexington to similar effect. O'CONOR, K.D. 1998 *The Archaeology of Medieval Rural Settlement in Ireland*. Discovery Programme Monograph No.3, Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. pp.75-77, especially at 77, referring to O'MEARA, J.J. (trans) 1982 (revised edition – first edition 1951) *Gerald of Wales: the history*

'Gaels had not been a castle-building race.'⁴³ They were, however, already familiar with the techniques of stone building construction, as is demonstrated most impressively by the ecclesiastical architecture of the pre-Norman period. The ringfort, although obviously not a masonry structure, is normally described as a defended farmstead, ⁴⁴ which may be taken to suggest a recognition among the Gaelic Irish of the relevance of structural defence systems. It should not be forgotten that in pre-Norman Irish society the landscape itself was far more significant to military tactics than any man-made fortification. ⁴⁵ Indeed, this dependence on the landscape for strategic purposes remained a characteristic of Gaelic Irish society into the later medieval period. ⁴⁶

The builders of tower houses may also have travelled abroad and seen the Norman-style military architecture of other parts of Europe. Certainly the trade contacts of Irish coastal towns (which served as the channel for the export of goods from the interior) would have provided routes through which an awareness of military fortification trends could have been conveyed. Ports in Europe would almost always have been defended in some way, being the maritime gateways to and from their hinterlands, regions, and indeed countries. All these potential influences ought to be taken into consideration when considering the possible inspirations for the form of the tower house.

It would not be unreasonable to suggest that there is actually no need for a particular 'inspiration' for the form of the tower house. The very fact that residential towers have emerged as a secure form of dwelling in a variety of

and topography of Ireland. Penguin, Harmondsworth. p.119; and O'DWYER, B.W. (trans & intro) 1982 Stephen of Lexington, Letters from Ireland, 1228-1229. Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo.

⁴³ CURTIS, E. 1938 *A history of mediaeval Ireland from 1086 to 1513*. Methuen & Co. Ltd., London. p.219

⁴⁴ BARRY 1988, 16.

⁴⁵ SIMMS, K. 1975 'Warfare in the Medieval Gaelic Lordships', *The Irish Sword* **12**, pp.98-108. However, the exact purpose of such structures as Staigue Fort, County Kerry, remains to be identified and may yet cast a slightly different light on this assertion. The likely construction date of structures such as that at Staigue is thought to be at least a thousand years before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans, so they might perhaps have presented the twelfth century inhabitants of the country with a dilemma similar to that faced by modern archaeologists.

parts of the world appears to demonstrate that it is an obvious defensive form.⁴⁷ Situations faced by people in different areas are often similar, so it is not inconceivable that, independently, they should have developed similar solutions.

The influence of the Normans over a large part of medieval Europe was considerable, however, and it would be extraordinary to disregard the castlebuilding tradition which was essential to Norman culture. In Ireland the Normans built castles of some description from the time of their arrival. An initial phase during which motte and ringwork castles were built was followed by a period when stone castles were erected, starting towards the end of the twelfth century. Little is known about the building of ringwork castles in Ireland, or of the structures – presumably usually of wood, but perhaps occasionally of stone – which would have been constructed in association with them, 48 but the classic design of the motte involved a mound of earth surmounted by a wooden tower. The motte was thus a tall form of castle, and the significance attached to the height of a fortification is also reflected in the stone castles of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁴⁹ These early stone castles normally included a keep, and such keeps provide an obvious model for the tower house. Support for the link between keep and tower house is to be found in several quarters. For example, Cairns suggested that the cylindrical keep at Nenagh was the model for an otherwise anomalous cluster of cylindrical tower houses in the surrounding area;⁵⁰ Craig identified a series of thirteenth century buildings, described as 'keeps', each of which he considered to be 'rather more like a tower house';⁵¹ and, finally, the fact that confusion remains among some

⁴⁷ CAIRNS 1984, 7, 17-20. See also, for example, SAÏTAS 2001; SIMPSON 1961; PRINGLE, D. 1994 'Towers in Crusader Palestine', *Château Gaillard* **XVI** (Luxembourg, 1992), pp.335-350

⁴⁸ But see BARRY 1988, 45-51, and ORPEN, G.H. (ed and trans) 1892 *The Song of Dermot and the Earl. An Old French Poem from the Carew Manuscript No. 596 in the Archiepiscopal Library at Lambeth Palace.* Clarendon Press, Oxford, especially lines 3222-3225 which contain a description of a fortification which is now generally interpreted as a ringwork castle.

⁴⁹ Curtis alludes to the importance of the height of such buildings when he mentions 'Carrickfergus, with the great keep ninety feet high...' CURTIS 1938, 79.

⁵⁰ CAIRNS 1984, 241.

⁵¹ CRAIG, M. 1982 *The Architecture of Ireland from the earliest times to 1880.* B.T. Batsford, London, & Eason & Son, Dublin. p.96

modern writers as to where and how the distinction between the two should be drawn seems to indicate at least that similarities do exist.⁵²

DAVIN, A.K. 1982 Tower Houses of the Pale. MLitt, TCD.

Davin identified the similarities between the Irish tower house and 'the simpler and earlier Scottish tower houses' which, she reported, MacGibbon and Ross considered to have been built from the fourteenth century. She then observed that the documentary record sheds little light on the construction dates of any but a few of the hundreds of tower houses in and around the Pale. She recognised that 'earlier researchers' assigned the majority of the tower houses in her study area to the fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries on the basis of the scant documentary record and a few 'key architectural features.' She

In spite of her criticism of the evidence, Davin seems to have accepted this proposed dating for the start of tower house construction in the Pale. But she was able to derive even less information from the documentary sources as to the 'place of origin of Irish tower houses'. She proposed alternative hypotheses, pointing out, firstly, that 'towers were an extremely common type of fortified residence in Britain and the Continent' in the Late Middle Ages. This observation led her to suggest the possibility of an origin for the Irish tower house in Scotland, the western part of the Alps, or northern Italy. Simpson, writing about tower houses in Scotland, considered that his subject country 'forms what may be described as the British tower-house province' an area which includes, according to his understanding, 'the three northern counties of England, [and] ... Ireland, where tower-houses had been built by Irish and Anglo-Irish alike since at least the fifteenth century.'55

⁵² HALPIN 1994, 123.

⁵³ DAVIN 1982, 106, referring to MACGIBBON, D. & ROSS, T. 1887-1892 *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland from the twelfth to the eighteenth century.* 5 vols. David Douglas, Edinburgh. See also TABRAHAM, C. 2000 *Scottish castles and fortifications*. Historic Scotland. pp.45-52; SIMPSON 1961, 232, 234, 235, 238; LEASK, H.G. 1961 'Review of *The Scottish Castle* by Stewart Cruden', *JRSAI* 91, pp.232-235 at 234

⁵⁴ DAVIN 1982, 106-7.

⁵⁵ DAVIN 1982, 106-8; SIMPSON 1961, 229.

Davin's second idea, that the tower house was 'an indigenous development from native defensive residences,' appears to suggest that the tower house emerged independent of any influence related to the castle building of the period following the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland in 1169. Rather, it would appear that she considered that the tower house might have evolved from the Gaelic Irish architectural tradition. However, she was forthright in her assertion that much remained to be clarified with regard to the study of the origins of the tower house in Ireland, calling for 'a broader study of Irish tower houses' on the basis of which it might 'be possible to determine...[whether]... they first appeared in Anglo-Irish or Irish dominated areas.'56

The suggestion that there might have been a Gaelic Irish source for tower house construction represented an interesting twist in tower house studies. Some consideration had been given to the possibility that tower houses were built by the Gaelic Irish.⁵⁷ However, this was the first suggestion that an indigenous inspiration rather than one originating in the Anglo-Norman / Norman tradition might have contributed to the genesis of the tower house in Ireland.

Davin challenged Leask's fourteenth century of 'little building activity' by citing documentary references to construction carried out in the 1300s. She considered the document published by Jope and Seaby to be 'strong proof that fortified houses were being constructed, at least in the city of Dublin, by the early fourteenth century.' Furthermore she proposed that they 'may well have been the ancestors of the town tower houses in Carlingford, Co. Louth, Dalkey, Co. Dublin, and Athboy, Co. Meath.' 60

She also drew attention to the references to 'fortalices' which 'appear sporadically throughout the fourteenth century.' She implied that at least some

⁵⁶ DAVIN 1982, 108.

⁵⁷ 'The Gaels had not been a castle-building race and it was not till after the Bruce Invasion that we find them erecting stone-roofed castles for themselves...' CURTIS 1938, 219.

⁵⁸ LEASK 1941, 75.

⁵⁹ JOPE, E.M. & SEABY, W.A. 1959 'A new document in the Public Record Office: defensive houses in medieval towns', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* **22**, pp.115-118

of these may refer to tower houses, though while she considered that 'there are a few indications by the mid-fourteenth century that tower houses were being constructed,' she felt that these amounted to 'nothing really conclusive.' 61

The chief difficulty with these two sets of evidence seems to lie in the ambiguity of the terminology used in the documents. No building was described as a 'tower house' until the nineteenth century, so references to such structures in the medieval documents will never be explicit, and there is a marked lack of descriptive detail regarding buildings of any kind.

Davin believed that tower houses were to be found in Ireland by the end of the fourteenth century, but her search for clues to where the idea for the structures can have come from seems to have yielded little. Despite her own airing of the idea⁶² she criticised Davies' theory that the tower house constituted 'no more than improvements imposed on the native type of residences,'⁶³ drawing comparison with Simpson's ideas regarding the origins of Scottish tower houses as timber hall houses erected atop mottes.⁶⁴ Indeed, she expressed considerable interest in the Scottish situation, pointing out, among the similarities in political and social conditions, the use of the word 'peel' in the records of both countries. She suggested that the appearance of this word in the vocabulary of fifteenth century record keepers may imply that the first tower house builders in Ireland 'were familiar enough with those [buildings] in Scotland to refer to them by the same name.'⁶⁵

Davin considered that the first form of tower house to be built in Ireland was the town tower house, and that it appeared in the early fourteenth century – 'not long after the troops were sent to Scotland.' This did not exclude the thirteenth century castles of the country from influencing the later tower houses, though they were seen as 'stylistic models rather than

⁶⁰ DAVIN 1982, 115-7.

⁶¹ DAVIN 1982, 117.

⁶² DAVIN 1982, 38.

⁶³ DAVIES, O. 1947 'The Castles of County Cavan, Part I', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology* 3rd ser. Vol. 10, pp.73-100 at 89

⁶⁴ DAVIN 1982, 121; SIMPSON, 1961, 232.

⁶⁵ DAVIN 1982, 124.

⁶⁶ DAVIN 1982, 124.

inspirations for tower houses.' She found more tower houses, mainly smaller than the average, in the areas nearest the marches, and she took this to be an indication that fortified residences were particularly necessary in regions of political and economic instability. In her discussion of Leask's proposal of the £10 subsidy as a possible origin for the tower house, Davin commented that she had detected 'no discernible plan on the part of the Dublin government' to place grant-assisted tower houses along the frontier. In fact, tower houses in the Pale seem often to have functioned as manorial residences. Most were built below the 500 foot contour, outside mountainous areas, and on good, fertile soil.

Davin felt that tower houses in the Pale were the defended residences of people attempting to lead an agriculturally-centred lifestyle in potentially vulnerable areas. The idea of the tower house was probably derived from a range of sources, notably the similar structures in Scotland and the larger, earlier castles of Ireland. Davin emphasised, however, the limited scope of her study and the limited extent of work done on tower houses in Ireland by the early 1980s. She felt that much remained to be investigated before more authoritative statements might be made regarding the origins and development of the tower house in Ireland.

CAIRNS, C.T. 1984 The Tower Houses of Tipperary. PhD, TCD.

Cairns pointed out at an early stage the similarity between the tower houses and the earlier castles of Ireland: 'as with many early thirteenth century castles, the chief feature of the tower house is a single keep, usually rectangular.'⁷¹ This link with the first Anglo-Norman stone castles in Ireland is significant not only in that it makes explicit a notion to which Davin had referred somewhat obliquely, ⁷² but also as a precursor of the main hypothesis pursued through his

⁶⁷ DAVIN 1982, 125.

⁶⁸ DAVIN 1982, 198-199.

⁶⁹ LEASK 1941, 76-77; DAVIN 1982, 198-199.

⁷⁰ DAVIN 1982, 200.

⁷¹ CAIRNS 1984, 4.

⁷² DAVIN 1982, 125.

investigation of Tipperary tower houses. He argued that there were 'fortalices' in some parts of Ireland at the beginning of the fourteenth century, and that these represented a 'logical evolution' from the earlier fortifications.⁷³ Essentially, while he acknowledged that there may have been some disruption of the building industry in the course of the fourteenth century – as a result of the Black Death, for example – he identified a continuity in castle construction from the arrival of the Anglo-Normans and the erection of their first stone castles through to the end of the tower house-building period and beyond. This stance obviously constitutes a challenge to Leask's interpretation that 'the fourteenth century in Ireland – after its first two decades, at least – was not a period of much building activity.'⁷⁴

However, Cairns was particularly dependent on the synonymity of 'fortalice' and 'tower house' as the majority of his dating evidence for earlier tower houses is based on documentary references to fortalices. Davin had been less explicit in acknowledging her dependence (at least as regards written evidence from the fourteenth century) on the translation of the word 'fortalice' as 'tower house'.75 But even Cairns recognised that there was an element of doubt: 'contemporary documents suggest that there were probably tower houses in several parts of Ireland from the beginning of the fourteenth century. There were various references to the 'fortalice'; the word was never defined, but by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was probably used to mean tower house.'76 Cairns appears to have been anxious that his reading of 'fortalice' as 'tower house' was, for the early fourteenth century references, not altogether justified. In support of his continuity argument he observed that, according to some of the fortalice references, 'there was already an established procedure for Dublin or local government to aid builders of what may well have been tower houses, over a century before the "£10 castles." 77

⁷³ CAIRNS 1984, 5.

⁷⁴ LEASK 1941, 75.

⁷⁵ DAVIN 1982, 117.

⁷⁶ CAIRNS 1984, 186.

⁷⁷ CAIRNS 1984, 186.

State of knowledge

Cairns also recognised that the fortalice seems to have filled a more military role than the later tower houses, but he attributed this impression to the nature of the sources. All information regarding the fortalice comes from official documents.⁷⁸ His challenge of Leask's later fourteenth century hiatus in building activity, and particularly of the dramatic nature of the impact attributed to the arrival of the Black Death,⁷⁹ was based to a substantial extent on references to the initiation, in 1352, of a castle-building programme in Ulster (though no evidence was tendered to suggest that the project was actually carried through).⁸⁰

Cairns agreed with Davin,⁸¹ and perhaps with Leask,⁸² that the Gaelic Irish were not responsible for the earliest tower houses. He considered that the first tower houses to be built by the Gaelic Irish were probably erected in the fifteenth century, but it is interesting to note that Curtis thought it likely – despite consultation with Leask – that 'the Gaels ... [were] ... erecting stone-roofed castles for themselves' after the Bruce invasion.⁸³

ARCHITECTURE

Architectural assessment of the tower house led Cairns to declare that 'it is easier to plot the decline of the tower house than its rise and its antecedents.'⁸⁴ The lack of tower houses in Ulster, the region in Ireland with the closest contacts with Scotland, together with the probable contemporaneity of tower house development in the two countries, were seen to make it likely that 'the Irish tower house is an architectural type in its own right.' Cairns suggested that it evolved 'more from need than from foreign influences.'⁸⁵

⁷⁸ CAIRNS 1984, 187.

⁷⁹ LEASK, H.G. 1958 *Irish churches and monastic buildings. Volume II. Gothic architecture to AD 1400.* Dundalgan Press, Dundalk. pp.123-4

⁸⁰ GILBERT, J.T. (ed) 1884 Chartularies of St Mary's Abbey, Dublin: with the Register of its House at Dunbrody, and Annals of Ireland. Volume II. HMSO, London. pp.391-392; CAIRNS 1984, 187.

⁸¹ DAVIN 1982, 57-58.

⁸² LEASK 1941, 86.

⁸³ CURTIS 1938, 219.

⁸⁴ CAIRNS 1984, 239.

⁸⁵ CAIRNS 1984, 240-241.

When he identified a group of later fourteenth century keeps – Athenry, county Galway, for example – as possible transitional structures between 'the larger keeps and the tower houses proper,' Cairns was in agreement with an idea which had been propounded by Craig a short time before. En adopting this notion Cairns seems to have overlooked a significant element of his general hypothesis. If tower houses had already been built in early fourteenth century Ireland, why should there have been a need for a 'transitional structure' at a later date? Allowing for the independent development of the building type in different parts of the country, this 'transitional structure' might find a place among the theories regarding the origins of the tower house. If, for the purposes of the evolution of castles, Ireland is to be considered as a whole it would certainly be difficult to deem a structure which appeared for the first time only a significant period after the earlier tower houses to represent a 'transitional' phase in castle development leading up to the emergence of the tower house.

The place of the tower house in a general evolution of castle architecture in Ireland – starting at the arrival of the Anglo-Normans (as proposed at the outset of the thesis⁸⁷) and perhaps continuing to the arrival of cannon – seems slightly uncertain in the light of Cairns' statement that 'it is ... unnecessary to assume that they [tower houses] must have been copied from other castles.' Cairns was probably thinking particularly of the group of cylindrical tower houses in Tipperary which he considers to have followed the model of the cylindrical keep at Nenagh⁸⁹ when he stated that 'earlier castles in Ireland directly inspired a limited number of tower houses.' However, he also felt that 'many features of the tower house cannot be traced back to any source. People built them because it suited their purpose.'

Cairns' attempts at organising the tower houses of Tipperary chronologically revealed a scarcity of documentary evidence up to the

⁸⁶ CRAIG 1982, 96.

⁸⁷ CAIRNS 1984, 5.

⁸⁸ CAIRNS 1984, 243.

⁸⁹ CAIRNS 1984, 241.

seventeenth century.⁹¹ Furthermore, the architectural feature which is considered to be the most reliable dating tool – the appearance of gun loops – serves only to assign a structure in which the loops can be identified as original features to the period after c.1525.92 Simpson cited the siege of Dundarg Castle (Aberdeenshire, Scotland) in 1334 as the earliest British instance of the use of a bombard in attacking a stronghold, noting that small arms - such as might be used in combat inside a building - 'came into general use ... only about the middle of the sixteenth century. 93 It is not, of course, possible to claim that tower houses without gun loops necessarily date to before c.1525. In fact, of Tipperary's stone castles, Cairns managed to produce a date (of even general approximation) for only one in every nine. The dearth of dating evidence (until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at least), and the nature of that which is available, forced Cairns to concede that 'there was perhaps a break in construction for some years following the Black Death, and the bulk of the tower houses were built in the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries'. However, he was able to state that 'a number [of towers] existed in the early fourteenth century., 94

He argued that economic conditions in an area did not have to be positive in order to promote tower house construction. Empey, in his investigation of *The Butler Lordship in Ireland*, identified an economic decline between the 1290s and the late 1300s, with little significant improvement in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. ⁹⁵ Cairns pointed out that it was in the first period that tower house construction started, and during the second that their popularity grew. ⁹⁶ He proposed that 'a certain level of violence was necessary before tower houses were built', but also believed that once a few had appeared

⁹⁰ CAIRNS 1984, 244.

⁹¹ CAIRNS 1984, 178.

⁹² CAIRNS 1984, 180.

⁹³ SIMPSON 1961, 230.

⁹⁴ CAIRNS 1984, 182.

⁹⁵ EMPEY, A. 1970 The Butler Lordship in Ireland. PhD, TCD. pp.133-4, 151, 233-254

⁹⁶ CAIRNS 1984, 183.

these may have provoked further construction – the results of fashion more than of violence. 97

Cairns suggested that Leask's proposal of a lull in building activity in the fourteenth century may be closely related to his work on churches. Indeed, in writing of ecclesiastical buildings Leask proposed that the 'slackening of building activity' of the later thirteenth century was 'still more marked' between 1300 and 1350, while the arrival of the Black Death in Ireland in 1348-1349 'brought building to a standstill, on any considerable scale, for more than half a century.' Leask's suggestion that 'a close search through Ireland's many ivied ruins of small churches might produce some more examples of late fourteenth-century building', seems far from optimistic. 99

URBAN TOWER HOUSES

Cairns discussed the possibility that tower houses may have developed first in the urban context, citing the work of Murtagh on 'fortified town houses.' Murtagh's 'fortified town houses' appeared before the rural tower house but seem to be its urban equivalent. Cairns' assessment of the urban tower house led him to conclude that it and its rural counterpart 'are just slight variations on one form of architecture.' Indeed, he suggested that 'town and country tower houses are basically the same structures,' pointing out that the urban

⁹⁷ CAIRNS 1984, 184.

⁹⁸ CAIRNS 1984, 185.

⁹⁹ LEASK 1958, 123-4, 137; however, in this context see, for example, the following more recent works: GWYNN, A. & HADCOCK, N. 1970 *Medieval religious houses: Ireland*. Longman, London; STALLEY, R.A. 1984 'Irish Gothic and English fashion', in LYDON, J. (ed) *The English in Medieval Ireland*. Proceedings of the first joint meeting of the Royal Irish Academy and the British Academy, Dublin 1982. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. pp.65-86; MCNEILL, T.E. 1985/6 'Church building in 14th century Ireland and the "Gaelic Revival", *Journal of Irish Archaeology* 3, pp.61-64

Naas, Co. Kildare', *Journal of the Kildare Archaeological Society* **16**, pp.470-478; MURTAGH, B. 1988 'The Bridge Castle, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny' in MACNIOCAILL, G. & WALLACE, P.F. (ed) *Keimelia. Studies in Medieval Archaeology and History in memory of Tom Delaney.* Galway University Press, Galway. pp.536-556; MURTAGH, B. 1989 'Hatch's Castle, Ardee, county Louth: a fortified town house of the Pale', *County Louth Archaeological Journal* **21**, pp.36-48; BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003.

¹⁰¹ CAIRNS 1984, 287-292 at 292.

tower houses 'were usually in the same style, presumably built by the same architects, and sometimes owned by the same lords, as those in rural areas.' This absorption of Murtagh's independent group of urban structures into the general 'fortalice' classification certainly assisted Cairns' argument for early fourteenth century tower houses as there are records of the construction of Grant's Castle, county Tipperary, at a date soon after 1318. 103

The treatment of 'urban tower houses' by Cairns betrays further elements of the vagueness and ambiguity of the term 'fortalice', and also of his use of it. Cairns hailed Murtagh's MA thesis as 'a very thorough survey of urban fortalices in the Pale.' He actually pointed out that Murtagh drew distinctions between urban and rural structures on architectural grounds, and stated that Murtagh 'believes that the fortified houses originated earlier than tower houses'. 105 The very fact that Murtagh chose to use the term 'fortified town house' and not 'urban tower house' may demonstrate that he wished to emphasise the distinction between the two types of building. Cairns used the term 'fortalice' to cover both Murtagh's 'fortified town house' and his own 'tower houses.' How, then, are we to view his interpretation of the word 'fortalice' as it appears in the fourteenth century documents? If he considered it to be synonymous with 'tower house' then his treatment of Murtagh's arguments for the distinction between the 'fortified town house' and the 'tower house' was at best dismissive. Admittedly, Cairns did present an argument in defence of his equation of Murtagh's 'fortified town houses' with his 'tower houses' using the nomenclature probably used for both by contemporaries as a starting point ('castles'). However, it does appear that Cairns' understanding of the term 'fortalice' is broader than has often been assumed. 106 Tower houses and fortified town houses appear to be independent, if related, species of the genus 'fortalice', a genus which may – as Cairns was almost certainly aware –

¹⁰² CAIRNS 1984, 306-307.

¹⁰³ CAIRNS 1984, 306. See also, for example, BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003.

¹⁰⁴ CAIRNS 1984, 288, referring to MURTAGH 1982.

¹⁰⁵ CAIRNS 1984, 288.

¹⁰⁶ JORDAN 1990; MCAULIFFE 1991; BARRY 1988.

have included a broader selection of species than has conventionally been understood.

ECCLESIASTICAL BUILDINGS

Cairns devoted a section of his thesis to 'fortified churches and monasteries'. 107

The solidity of Norman ecclesiastical buildings, with their thick walls and square towers, was originally related to the need for defence at the time of their construction. He knew of relatively few church tower houses, and of even fewer, if any, which had been dated to earlier than 1500, although he did cite a documentary account of the erection of a defensive tower at the Cistercian abbey of Maigue, county Limerick, to withstand a siege in 1228. 108

Cairns' treatment of ecclesiastical fortifications also provides instances of the problematic nature of the term 'fortalice' (as well as more general difficulties of terminology). In his assessment of the number of parishes in comparison with the number of fortified churches in county Tipperary he suggested that, as so few of the parish churches seem to have been fortified, 'many of these churches must have been too poor to afford a tower, and as many churches are beside tower houses the priests could have taken refuge with a lay patron', to which a footnote is added as follows: 'in some cases the priest preferred his own private fortalice; the church-castles of Ardmayle, Buolick, and Kiltinan are all beside lay castles.' 109

In defence of Cairns' supposed (and apparently contradictory) use of the term 'fortalice' as a blanket label which actually refers (at least in some cases) only to tower houses two points arise. Firstly, the breadth of the term 'tower house' itself might be expanded to fit the range of structures covered by the word 'fortalice'. But this fails when one encounters attempts to distinguish tower houses from, for example, 'fortified town houses.' Alternatively, the conclusion of Cairns (regarding county Tipperary) that tower houses are to be

¹⁰⁷ CAIRNS 1984, 318-329.

¹⁰⁸ CAIRNS 1984, 323, 319, 320.

¹⁰⁹ CAIRNS 1984, 323.

¹¹⁰ MURTAGH 1982.

found 'in such numbers that they seem to have excluded most other types of stone dwelling'¹¹¹ may be taken to explain the capacity for synonymity. If no (or almost no) stone dwellings existed that were not tower houses then as (almost) all stone dwellings were tower houses then, of course, all stone dwellings were also fortalizes and any apparent distinction between them should be disregarded.

JORDAN, A. 1990 The Tower Houses of County Wexford. PhD, TCD.

Jordan was reluctant to define the term 'tower house', relying instead on the common features emerging from the catalogue of buildings he surveyed in county Wexford to indicate its identity. He certainly favoured a broad guide based on the form and function of the structure. He asserted vehemently that for the tower house 'dates are rarely ascertainable with any degree of precision,' and yet he included a chronological qualifier in his guidelines for identifying examples of the type, proposing that 'to be considered genuine the [tower house] complex should date roughly between the fourteenth and the mid seventeenth centuries. He is a surveyed in country to be considered genuine the proposing that 'to be considered genuine the considered genuine the seventeenth centuries.

A constant element of his argument regarding tower house origins is that the tower house was 'derived from the "castle proper" and is a modified or late form of castle, retaining not merely the name "castle" but many of the functions of its ancestor.' In this context Jordan speculated on the relationship of the tower house and the hall. Firstly, Craig and Leask both postulated that, where a hall and a tower form part of a single complex (*i.e.* as *per* Jordan's 'Coolhull type') the hall is likely to have been added to the tower in response to demand for a more spacious and comfortable set of buildings.

¹¹¹ CAIRNS 1984, 330.

¹¹² JORDAN 1990, 227-229; see especially pp.228-229: 'It is difficult, and it would be unrealistic, to insist on laying down a strict criterion by which we would categorise a structure as a tower house or otherwise. One knows when one is presented with a castle, and by virtue of its having the usual "form" of a tower house and many of the usual or expected features we would class it as a tower house or otherwise.'

¹¹³ JORDAN 1990, 228-229.

¹¹⁴ JORDAN 1990, 225.

¹¹⁵ JORDAN 1990, 229.

¹¹⁶ JORDAN 1990, 5.

O'Callaghan, conversely, considered that the hall might have been built first, with the tower added later for defence. 117

Jordan also used the 'Coolhull type' to illustrate a central idea of his thesis. He pointed out that it was developed at Slade, and that it spread from there around the Hook peninsula. In terms of his evolutionary interpretation of the development of the tower house, and of castles in Ireland in general, it was useful for Jordan to be able to point out that the process identified on the Hook peninsula 'is clearly indicative of the influence one castle had on the style of its neighbours.' 118

REGARDING CAIRNS (1984), DOCUMENTS, AND THE 'FORTALICE'

Jordan was very conscious of the paucity of documents and of their unreliability for the purposes of the student of tower houses. He was not confident of the validity of Cairns' interpretation of the word 'fortalice' as 'tower house', preferring the approach of O'Keeffe, who considered that the term 'probably refers to tower houses', stating that it is a 'likelihood' rather than following Johnson's view that the tower house and the fortalice are one and the same thing.¹¹⁹

Jordan was happy that fifteenth century documentary references to towers should be interpreted as indicative of the existence of tower houses at that period. He was swift to point out, however, that far more documents survive from the mid fifteenth century onwards, so naturally there are more documentary references to castles, towers, and other fortifications which might justifiably be interpreted as tower houses from this later period. But this is not, of course, to say for certain that there were actually more such structures from the mid fifteenth century, as there is no comparable documentary resource for the preceding years.

¹¹⁷ CRAIG 1982, 100; LEASK, H.G. 1964 *Irish castles and castellated houses*. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk. p.133; O'CALLAGHAN, J. 1980-1981 'Fortified Houses of the Sixteenth Century in South Wexford', *Journal of the Old Wexford Society* **8**, pp.1-51 at 40; JORDAN 1990, 232. ¹¹⁸ JORDAN 1990, 234.

O'KEEFFE 1987, 39; NEWMAN JOHNSON, D. undated (1981?) *Irish Castles*. Folens, Dublin. (No. 61 of the Irish Environmental Library Series) p.20

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The potential of architectural styles and features as dating tools was explored by Jordan, and his tabular chronological indices provide a clear and useful summary of the basis of his ideas. His investigations led him to appreciate the complexity of architecturally-based dating. There can be no automatic assumption, for example, that simplicity of design indicates an early date. Indeed, as regards Wexford tower houses, such simplicity seems to suggest a dearth of financial or other resources at the time of the construction of the building rather than anything chronologically related. 120

Architectural styles and features were of little use in the dating of all but the later Wexford tower houses.¹²¹ Jordan recognised the importance of assessing the tower house as a whole, particularly from the point of view of its architectural features, as it is certainly insufficient to attempt to rely on an isolated clue for dating purposes.¹²²

Jordan explored the origins of the architectural form of the tower house in Ireland, discussing and dismissing three ideas. He considered whether the tower house may have had its origin in ecclesiastical towers; ¹²³ in the wooden towers atop mottes; ¹²⁴ or in Scottish tower houses. ¹²⁵ In returning the tower house to its place on his evolutionary thread of castle development in Ireland, Jordan proposed (in accordance with an idea aired by Davin¹²⁶) that the tower house may be a hybrid formed from the union of the twelfth and thirteenth century royal castles with the hall-type castle. He proposed that tower house builders salvaged the simplicity of the design and plan of the hall and the height (and consequent military advantage) of the royal castle. ¹²⁷

¹²⁰ JORDAN 1990, 242-243.

¹²¹ JORDAN 1990, 244.

¹²² JORDAN 1990, 251-252.

¹²³ See also CAIRNS 1987, 1.

¹²⁴ See also SIMPSON 1961, 232-234.

¹²⁵ See also DAVIN 1982, 122; SIMPSON 1961, 229.

¹²⁶ DAVIN 1982, 113.

¹²⁷ JORDAN 1990, 260.

But there is more than a single strand to Jordan's view of the evolution of the tower house: another lies in the medieval town. The tower house did not emerge fully developed in or just after 1429 (*recte* 1430) as a result of the Statute granting £10 towards the building of a fortification to particular specifications (£10 would have covered only a small proportion of the total cost of even the smallest possible structure), it had actually 'been with medieval society in some form for several centuries.' He avoided dependence on Cairns' fortalices by alluding at this point to town wall towers and town tower houses, ¹²⁹ which, he felt, might with only small modifications have been converted into 'standard' tower houses. The relationship between the tower house and the town was elaborated through the suggestion that the bawn of a tower house may echo the town wall. ¹³⁰

Jordan supported Cairns against Leask's fourteenth century hiatus in building¹³¹ but maintained that Cairns' evidence, which depends so heavily on the fortalice references, remained unproven. He suggested that it would be extraordinary for construction to have ceased for the reasons proffered by Leask, as it is 'in times of war and famine [that] there is an even greater need for security,' and a need for security may very easily be interpreted as – indeed it would have found natural expression, at least in the medieval context, in – a need for castles.

Jordan was reluctant to make any but the broadest definition of the tower house, recognising that its essence, identifiable in terms of its features, function, and chronology, may have been captured in distinctive ways in different parts of the country. There are clearly problems with regard to the establishment and use of a chronological index for identification purposes. In Wexford 'only about one in five towers could even be tentatively assigned a date using the documentary evidence alone;' architectural dating was

¹²⁸ JORDAN 1990, 261-262.

¹²⁹ A note of caution is inserted at this point as regards terminology – see MURTAGH 1982.

¹³⁰ JORDAN 1990, 262.

¹³¹ LEASK 1964, 75.

¹³² JORDAN 1990, 265.

¹³³ JORDAN 1990, 230, 270.

considered capable of providing 'only vague general chronological periods;' and archaeology, while remaining 'one of the most potentially yielding areas of chronological information' has yet to be explored to any meaningful extent.¹³⁴

Despite these chronological difficulties, Jordan was confident that the tower house represents 'a link in the evolutionary chain of castles, which began with the Anglo-Norman invasion and ended with the mansion house "castles" of the seventeenth century.' In concluding that the tower house fits onto this 'evolutionary chain' Jordan was actually acknowledging the problems at the root of the dating issue. He recognised the difficulties of Cairns' argument for fourteenth century tower houses, and, although supportive of the notion that building went on in the fourteenth century, he did not manage to prove that it was tower houses (or any other particular type of structure, for that matter) that were being constructed.

MCAULIFFE, M. 1991 The tower houses of County Kerry. PhD, TCD.

McAuliffe was more confident of the place of the tower house in the chronology of castle construction in Ireland. She felt that the fortunes of the Anglo-Norman colony in Ireland peaked in 1300, and that by 1320 they were in decline. This meant that there was no longer a need for castles for military conquest. The Crown, having been a major castle builder for most of the thirteenth century, was obliged to turn its attentions in the fourteenth century to military and economic problems outside Ireland. No big royal castles were built in Ireland in the fourteenth century but 'the incessant petty warfare in the country demanded that the houses of the nobles and chiefs continue to be fortified,' giving rise to the construction of tower houses from the first quarter of the fourteenth century. She identified 'the change from a centralised

¹³⁴ JORDAN 1990, 271-272. The reporters of the excavation of Skiddy's Castle in Cork city, an 'urban tower house', were largely dependent on the evidence provided by documents, especially maps, for the basic dating of the structure: CLEARY, R.M., HURLEY, M.F., & SHEE TWOHIG, E. (ed) 1997 *Skiddy's Castle and Christ Church, Cork. Excavations 1974-77 by D.C. Twohig.* Cork Corporation, Cork.

economy and government to a decentralised one ... [as] ... one of the main factors in the development of the tower house. 136

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McAuliffe emphasised the significance of the economic and political context for the emergence of the tower house, but she also considered the possible architectural antecedents for the building type. She felt that 'as the tower house looks so like the castle it is obvious that the builders were influenced by the pre-existing stone structures.' In discussing the hall she agreed with Simpson who, writing of tower houses in the north of England, regarded them as 'simply the hall-house plan upended for security' which was required 'due to the militarisation of society' which was a consequence of the Scottish wars. However, McAuliffe's apparent enthusiasm for this idea seems peculiar. Not only did she find no surviving examples of the hall house in Kerry, she also believed them to be insufficiently widespread to constitute a 'family of buildings.' This pair of factors prevented her from identifying the hall-house as a 'forerunner' of the tower house.

She maintained that the tower house is, architecturally, a 'direct descendant' of the castle, and she identified a functional relationship between the tower house and the moated site. In county Kerry the role of the Gaelic Irish as castle builders was of greater significance than in other parts of the country where the Anglo-Norman influence was stronger and longer lasting. In tracing the development of the castle in Ireland, therefore, she was particularly concerned to observe the points at which it diverged from its parallel in England. The 'towered keep', a castle type of the first half of the thirteenth century which was isolated by Leask and considered by him to be peculiar to

¹³⁶ MCAULIFFE 1991, 41.

¹³⁷ MCAULIFFE 1991, 46.

¹³⁸ MCAULIFFE 1991, 45; SIMPSON 1961, 232; SIMPSON 1969, 127.

¹³⁹ MCAULIFFE 1991, 46. This theme has since been further explored: BARRY, T. 2003 'The defensive nature of Irish moated sites' in KENYON, J.R. & O'CONOR, K. (ed) *The Medieval Castle in Ireland and Wales. Essays in honour of Jeremy Knight.* Four Courts Press, Dublin. pp.182-193

Ireland,¹⁴⁰ provided McAuliffe with an important illustration of the development of an independent tradition in stone castle building.¹⁴¹ McAuliffe presented the 'towered keep' as a precedent for the appearance of the tower house in Ireland – an appearance which she considered to be rooted in the young stone castle building tradition of Ireland itself. She pointed out, with Stalley, that by the end of the thirteenth century 'the flow of English masons, ideas, and fashions across the Irish sea was beginning to dry up.'¹⁴²

In her efforts to establish an 'Irish' origin for the tower house, McAuliffe went so far as to suggest that it filled the role played by the 'rath' (or ringfort) in the pre-Norman period. Both are seen as defended farmsteads, and it should be acknowledged that the height and strength of the tower house are more a demonstration of the political and cultural context in which they were erected than evidence for substantial innovations in purpose or function.

McAuliffe's study is distinctive not only for the particular character of her survey area, but also as a result of her appreciation of the nature of the fourteenth century 'crisis' in the Irish context. McAuliffe's fourteenth century Ireland was a place where 'warfare ... [was] ... a constant fact of life', but this was 'petty warfare' and raiding. The traditional view of the fourteenth century and early fifteenth century as 'a long period of economic depression' which undoubtedly contributed to Leask's suggestion of an architecturally

¹⁴⁰ LEASK 1999, 47-51 at 47: e.g. Carlow, Ferns.

¹⁴¹ MCAULIFFE 1991, 51; see also WATERMAN, D.M. 1968 'Rectangular keeps of the thirteenth century at Grenan (Kilkenny) and Glanworth (Cork),' *JRSAI* 98, pp.67-73 at 67 MCAULIFFE 1991, 54, citing STALLEY 1984, 66.

¹⁴³ MCAULIFFE 1991, 61-62. It appears that ringforts may not only have continued in use after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans, but also that they were still being built – see BARRY 1988, 18. ¹⁴⁴ MCAULIFFE 1991, 41, 58.

¹⁴⁵ MCAULIFFE 1991, 67, citing CHART, D.A. 1920 *An Economic History of Ireland*. The Talbot Press, Dublin. Chart commented that 'neither commerce nor agriculture can flourish in an atmosphere of unsettlement, such as prevailed from 1318 to 1485. Apart from isolated incidents, which really prove nothing, the whole trend of the documentary evidence lies in the opposite direction.' However, while it was his view that 'it can hardly be maintained that the period 1318-1485 was one of economic advance,' the situation he presented was far from one of complete economic stagnation. Indeed, it might even be suggested that he considered the character of

barren fourteenth century¹⁴⁶ – was dismissed by McAuliffe as 'a false picture'. The period was understood to have been one of economic decline because Crown revenue declined dramatically. However, this plummeting of the amount of money reaching the central Exchequer has been reinterpreted. Research by such historians as O'Neill¹⁴⁸ has revealed that the economy of Ireland was undergoing transformation during the late thirteenth century and for much of the fourteenth century, but that it actually remained reasonably buoyant for most of that time. There was a depression at the end of the thirteenth century and start of the fourteenth century, but for most of the fourteenth century there was what McAuliffe described as 'a booming internal and external trade.' The decline in the influence of the Dublin government was a political change – the economy of the country remained vigorous despite the administrative readjustments.

The economy may have remained productive, but the political instability of the period – 'endemic warfare' which erupted at least in part as a result of the withdrawal of the garrisons from the big castles – meant that merchants and landowners had to protect themselves. McAuliffe proposed that 'a tower house cost less than a great castle and with the local lords benefiting from the booming trade most could afford to build a tower house.' 150

McAuliffe considered but dismissed theories that the inspiration for the tower house may have come from Scotland or from continental Europe. ¹⁵¹ Theories advancing the latter place of origin or inspiration were of particular interest to her as a result of her belief that the Gaelic Irish (whose role in tower house construction was particularly important in county Kerry) would have looked to continental Europe, rather than to England or Scotland, 'for fashion,

commercial activity, and the way in which it was organised, to have changed, rather than proposing its collapse: pp.21-24

¹⁴⁶ LEASK 1964, 75.

¹⁴⁷ MCAULIFFE 1991, 66.

¹⁴⁸ O'NEILL 1987.

¹⁴⁹ MCAULIFFE 1991, 69.

¹⁵⁰ MCAULIFFE 1991, 73.

¹⁵¹ DAVIN 1982, 106-108; Ó DANACHAIR, C. 1977-1979 'Irish tower houses and their regional distribution', *Béaloideas* **45-47**, pp.158-163

ideas, and alliances.' She concluded that 'certain architectural features may have spread from country to country but in Ireland and elsewhere the origin of the tower house lay in the country itself.' 152

McAuliffe clearly respected the general theory propounded by Davin and Cairns and she was keen to generate evidence to support their arguments for fourteenth century tower houses in Ireland. Her discussion of references to 'castles' in county Kerry in the period before 1250 was surely, however, of merely tangential relevance. Indeed, the observation (how it was proven is not clear) that 'many later tower house sites were occupied by some sort of prefourteenth century military structure or "castle" seems rather to undermine the notion that the tower house was built in response to a set of political circumstances particular to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. However, such references do demonstrate 'that there was some building activity in Munster in the fourteenth century.' 154

County Kerry seems to boast a remarkable record of continuity for the use of single defended sites. McAuliffe regretted that she had managed to calculate precise dates for 'only about one third of all tower houses in Kerry.' This is a far higher proportion than was achieved by Davin, Cairns, or Jordan. Most of the dating evidence for Kerry tower houses seems to be document-based, and McAuliffe stated that for tower house dating 'documentary sources are usually the most reliable.' She regarded architecturally-based approaches as capable of providing only general guidelines, if any at all, particularly for those of the buildings which were ruinous or ivy-clad. Despite her statements regarding their reliability, she

¹⁵² MCAULIFFE 1991, 81-82.

¹⁵³ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984; MCAULIFFE 1991, 86.

¹⁵⁴ MCAULIFFE 1991, 92-93, 94.

¹⁵⁵ MCAULIFFE 1991, 103.

¹⁵⁶ Cairns, for example, managed to date about one ninth of all the castles (not only tower houses) in county Tipperary: CAIRNS 1984, 180-181; Jordan wrote that 'without doubt the most definite statement which can be made about the dating of the tower house is that dates are rarely ascertainable with any degree of precision.' JORDAN 1990, 225; but see also pp.270-272; and see DAVIN 1982, 107.

¹⁵⁷ MCAULIFFE 1991, 94.

¹⁵⁸ MCAULIFFE 1991, 95-97.

does seem to have recognised, in her concluding remarks, some of the limitations of the documentary sources which she used. One of the effects of this acknowledgment was, unfortunately, to compromise the impact of those final observations.¹⁵⁹

DONNELLY, C.J. 1994 The Tower Houses of County Limerick. PhD, QUB.

Donnelly was especially conscious that the name 'tower house' is a modern creation and that to their builders, as to almost everyone else through history, including the general population of today, tower houses have actually been known as castles. The origin of the tower house does, therefore, at least terminologically, owe much to Parker, who used the label in his discussion of Irish domestic architecture in *Archaeologia* for 1860. Parker distinguished between tower houses and great keeps, but was of the opinion that they were being built at around the same time, each serving a slightly different set of needs.

In the opinion of Donnelly the work of Parker and of Wakeman¹⁶² in the second half of the nineteenth century demonstrates that an accurate appreciation of the architecture of the tower house had been established by 1890. But, as he himself pointed out, the term did not in fact come into general usage. The nature and identity of the tower house do not seem to have been recognised by the majority of the antiquaries of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Donnelly felt that Westropp's investigations mark 'the advent of tower house studies *proper* in Ireland.' However, it should be noted that Westropp seems not to have used the term 'tower house'. Certainly the title had not entered standard terminology, and although he was describing

¹⁵⁹ MCAULIFFE 1991, 101-103.

¹⁶⁰ DONNELLY 1994, 11.

¹⁶¹ PARKER 1860.

¹⁶² WAKEMAN 1891. As mentioned above, Wakeman travelled with Parker when he was visiting Ireland. As a result, if any Irish writer was going to adopt Parker's terminological innovation, it was probably going to be Wakeman.

the type of building that Parker had referred to as the tower house, Westropp seems to have used such labels as 'lesser castle' and 'peel tower' instead. 164

Donnelly surveyed the evidence for fourteenth century tower houses in Ireland and placed it in its political, social, and economic context. He observed that, for the purposes of deducing whether the tower house was first built in the period around 1400 (*i.e.* in accordance with the ideas of Davin and Cairns 166), the much-discussed hiatus in building activity of the fourteenth century – identified by Leask 167 – is largely irrelevant. Essential to the argument of those favouring an earlier start for tower house construction must be conclusive evidence that 'a building existed somewhere in Ireland which had been definitely constructed in the early fourteenth century and which undeniably belonged to the tower house genre. 168

The theory propounded by Cairns¹⁶⁹ for the existence of fourteenth century tower houses is, of course, dependent on the interpretation of the word 'fortalice' as what we now know as a 'tower house'. Donnelly emphasised that 'fortalice' is never defined in the documents in which it appears (at least not in those for the period in question) and he agrees with McNeill¹⁷⁰ that 'the word simply means a small fortified place.' This definition does not even require that a 'fortalice' be a building. His observation that the first reference to the 'fortalice' in the Irish context is in the late twelfth century *Song of Dermot and the Earl*¹⁷² led Donnelly to conclude that unless tower houses were in existence

¹⁶³ DONNELLY 1994, 18.

¹⁶⁴ See, for example, WESTROPP 1898-1900; 1904; 1906-1907; 1907; 1909; 1911; 1914-1916a; 1914-1916b. For a bibliography of Westropp's work see ASHE FITZGERALD 2000.

¹⁶⁵ DONNELLY 1994, 51-55.

¹⁶⁶ DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984.

¹⁶⁷ LEASK 1964, 75.

¹⁶⁸ DONNELLY 1994, 54.

¹⁶⁹ CAIRNS 1984.

¹⁷⁰ MCNEILL 1992, 13.

¹⁷¹ DONNELLY 1994, 55.

¹⁷² ORPEN 1892. In fact the word which appears in Orpen's transcription of the Old French text (line 3339), and in that by Mullally (line 3337), is *forcelette*. Both translate the word as 'fortress.' Barry and Donnelly seem to have been happy that the Old French *forcelette* was sufficiently close to the Latin versions of fortalice as to make no difference, but it is surely noteworthy that neither Orpen nor Mullally felt a diminutive to be appropriate in translation. MULLALLY, E. (ed) 2002 *The Deeds of the Normans in Ireland. La Geste des Engleis en Yrlande. A new edition of the chronicle formerly known as* The Song of Dermot and the Earl. Four Courts Press, Dublin;

in the late twelfth century then, at that period at least, the term must have been used to describe some other form of fortified structure. He proposed that 'fortalice' was a general term descriptive of defensive structures, perhaps as a diminutive of 'castle'. He proposed that 'fortalice' could actually be shown to refer to an identifiable tower house this need not, in the opinion of Donnelly, mean that fourteenth century – or even other fifteenth century – references to fortalices are necessarily descriptive of tower houses.

He also dismissed Davin's notion that the structures referred to in documents as 'stone houses' might be tower houses. The term 'stone house' is inherently broad and vague, and may not describe any particular building type. Furthermore, it is not clear whether such terms were used with any degree of consistency. It is not even known whether the author of the document would ever have seen the buildings (or places, or other objects) of which they were writing.

Donnelly acknowledged that the early fourteenth century document published by Jope and Seaby¹⁷⁵ supports the possibility that tower houses were being built in the early fourteenth century¹⁷⁶ but he observed, in order to temper any enthusiasm this concession might have provoked among proponents of earlier tower house dates, that 'even Davin does not call the

BARRY, T.B. 1993 'The archaeology of the tower house in late medieval Ireland' in ANDERSSON, H. & WIENBERG, J. (ed) *The Study of Medieval Archaeology.* (*Lund Studies in Medieval Archaeology* 13) Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm. pp.211-217 at 215; DONNELLY 1994, 55.

¹⁷³ DONNELLY 1994, 55; see also BARRY 1993a, 215.

¹⁷⁴ In this he is supported by Cathcart King, who, having stated that 'Fortalice over England in general is used as a diminutive of "castle", and its very frequent use on the Border is so vague and inconsistent that it is impossible to say more than that,' then glossed the term as follows: 'Fortalice, fortalicium, forcelettum, etc. A word used as the diminutive of 'castle.' CATHCART KING, D.J. 1983 Castellarium Anglicanum. An Index and Bibliography of the Castles in England, Wales and the Islands. 2 volumes. Kraus International Publications, New York, London, Liechtenstein. Volume I, p.xlix; Volume II, p.574

¹⁷⁵ JOPE & SEABY 1959. The document is described as an *inspeximus* taken in 1331 of a letter patent of 8th November 1310 (which seems not to have been preserved).

¹⁷⁶ DONNELLY 1994, 56. It may be significant that although the letter patent allowing the construction works to be carried out dated from November 1310, the project had not been completed by the time of the *inspeximus* of 1331. This might be taken to suggest that the motivation behind the building had weakened somewhat, but whether this was a result of changed political circumstances, economic conditions, or other factors is difficult to say.

buildings [mentioned in the Jope and Seaby document] tower houses.' Jope and Seaby described them as 'defensible embattled houses', suggesting that they might be regarded as the 'ancestors' of the later 'town tower-houses such as we see at Carlingford, and taller at Ardglass, and which once stood at Downpatrick.' Not only did Jope and Seaby remove their documentary evidence from the easy grasp of later writers keen to use it to push back the date of origin of the tower house in Ireland by describing the structures it mentions as the possible 'ancestors of the fifteenth century town tower-houses,' (and therefore, of course, not themselves tower houses), they also provided a basis, on which Murtagh later expanded, for the identification and classification, in Ireland, of a type of building called a 'fortified town house.'

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Donnelly considered any attempt to date a tower house on the basis of its architectural style or features to be inherently unreliable. In this respect he was following the attitude of Craig, who wrote that tower house builders were 'so eclectic that they were quite capable of resurrecting (that is to say copying) a 100 or 200 year-old feature because it took their fancy.' On this basis Donnelly justified his dismissal of Davin's suggestion (later repeated by Barry) that the tower house at Kilteel, county Kildare, was built in the fourteenth century. However, even in the light of the obvious difficulties surrounding the combination of documentary and architectural evidence – that is of medieval textual references and structures, usually ruinous, in today's landscape – Donnelly does seem to have been hasty in abandoning the potential of the Kilteel material.

¹⁷⁷ DONNELLY 1994, 56; DAVIN 1982, 116.

¹⁷⁸ DONNELLY 1994, 56.

¹⁷⁹ MURTAGH 1982. ¹⁸⁰ CRAIG 1982, 97.

¹⁸¹ DONNELLY 1994, 56-57; DAVIN 1982, 118; BARRY 1993a, 215.

DOCUMENTS

The reliance of Cairns on the equation of 'fortalice' and 'tower house' has already been discussed, but Donnelly pointed out that some of McAuliffe's early Kerry 'tower houses' were dated using 'non-fortalice' documentary evidence. The principal difficulty that emerges from McAuliffe's dating seems not to be the dates themselves (which are dependent on – among other things the reliability of the documentary sources in which they are recorded) but rather the lack not only of descriptive information regarding the structures mentioned, but also of any form of corroborative evidence. It is obviously unjustifiable to assert, as she seems to have done in the case of Mohaliffe, that a documentary reference to the burning of a castle at a place of that name in 1316 provides evidence that the current Mohaliffe Castle (of which only one corner remains, so covered by ivy that it is impossible to distinguish any architectural features) was built in the fourteenth century. Again, in the case of Beal Castle, to which there seems to have been a documentary reference in 1307, it emerges that there is nothing at the 'site' now except for a moat. 182 Indeed, one must ask whether the 'site' identified is in fact the site of the structure mentioned as present in 1307.

The dangers of attempting to categorise buildings – whether on the basis of form, function, or chronology – as well as the distraction provided by such classifications from the actual study of the structures themselves and their role in the societies in which they functioned are revealed by Donnelly in his analysis of the attitude adopted by O'Keeffe. O'Keeffe stated that we do not know what exactly fortalices were (although he does feel that 'they probably took the form of a tower') and he observed that 'the question of whether or not fortalices were tower-houses is irrelevant: they were stone castles serving the same function from the early fourteenth century as "£10 castles" and other towers did in the fifteenth and sixteenth century Pale.' This may appear, at least in some measure, to bypass the debate regarding tower house origins and

¹⁸⁴ O'KEEFFE 1987, 39.

¹⁸² DONNELLY 1994, 58-60; see also TOAL 1995, 276-277 (entry number 990).

¹⁸³ DONNELLY 1994, 62-65, referring to O'KEEFFE 1987.

perhaps even to render it meaningless. However, for Donnelly it contains a series of flaws. The knowledge that fortalices were stone castles would be a step towards their identification. But not even this much is known about the nature of the fortalice. Documentary references to fortalices yield little information regarding their function, so, while a limited amount is known about the use of tower houses, it is perhaps hasty to conclude that the 'fortalice' and the 'tower house' filled the same role. Indeed, '£10 castles' are themselves difficult to identify – it has not been established how many were erected and it is not known whether they were all intended or used for similar purposes. The basic functions of the tower house – domestic and defensive – may have been near constant, but a degree of variety is inevitable. O'Keeffe considered that Ballyloo, in architectural terms, might be regarded as a tower house. Ballyloo, for which O'Keeffe proposed a date of the fourteenth or early fifteenth century, would fall outside the category. 186

Donnelly did encourage the notion that tower houses might have been built in the fourteenth century. He considered that the grounds for Leask's assessment of the lack of building activity during the period were no longer solid, but he was frustrated by the dearth of evidence for fourteenth century tower houses. Demonstration that it is possible, or even likely, that tower houses were built in the fourteenth century would not be a sufficient basis for the assertion that there was actually tower house construction during that period.¹⁸⁷ Donnelly accepted Barry's idea that 'it is ... illogical to assume that

¹⁸⁵ O'KEEFFE 1987, 39.

¹⁸⁶ McNeill appears sceptical about O'Keeffe's dating of Ballyloo, which he refers to as a tower house. Sweetman, although mentioning Ballyloo under the heading 'Late fourteenth / fifteenth-century fortresses' (in the context of O'Keeffe's proposals), states that 'Ballyloo is clearly a tower house', offering no explicit comment on the chronological question. It may be significant that Brindley and Kilfeather, compilers of the *Inventory* for county Carlow, in a departure from the standard ASI approach, stated that 'Tower houses were constructed in the late medieval period, from the second half of the fourteenth century.' The first tower house in their list is Ballyloo, and their entry includes reference to O'Keeffe's article. MCNEILL 1997, 203; SWEETMAN 1999, 133; BRINDLEY, A. & KILFEATHER, A. 1993 *Archaeological Inventory of County Carlow*. Government of Ireland, Dublin. p.86

... [no tower houses] ... were being built' in the fourteenth century, 188 but he remained of the opinion that 'there has not been one piece of evidence produced to totally convince the skeptic that tower houses ... were being built in Ireland in the fourteenth century. He found the evidence for county Limerick to be as inconclusive as that produced for other parts of the country.

Donnelly felt that the deficiencies of the evidence for fourteenth century tower houses in Ireland were compounded by other factors. The main point which discouraged him from seeking further for fourteenth century tower houses seems to contradict his agreement with Barry, as cited above. 191 He proposed that the stimulus for the development of tower houses lay in the condition of society in the fifteenth century. If the particular conditions of the fifteenth century were so significant a factor, then unless the same circumstances can be identified in the fourteenth century the argument in favour of fourteenth century tower houses would be tenuous in the extreme. Donnelly used the fact that the Gaelic Irish – a group with no significant previous record in the building of such structures as castles or tower houses – began to erect tower houses in the fifteenth century as a strong indicator that the character of the period had much to do with its architectural forms. 192 He was anxious to distinguish between the political and social circumstances of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, proposing, with reference to the fourteenth century, that 'a country which was constantly in a state of civil war would never have had the resources available to build on such a scale.' He felt that 'stability was needed to allow the benefits of a strong pastoral

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¹⁸⁸ BARRY 1993a, 211-212; BARRY 1993b, 108.

¹⁸⁹ DONNELLY 1994, 65.

¹⁹⁰ DONNELLY 1994, 66-68.

¹⁹¹ DONNELLY 1994, 65.

¹⁹² Suggestions that the Gaelic Irish were building castles at earlier periods seem credible in relation to some earthwork structures, and to a very few masonry buildings. The relevant evidence was recently summarised by O'Conor: O'CONOR 1998, 75-77.

¹⁹³ i.e. the construction of tower houses in large numbers in so many parts of the country.

economy to produce the resources needed to invest in tower house construction.' 194

Donnelly's notion that the conditions – social, political, and economic – of fourteenth century Ireland were such as to preclude the development of the tower house seems to depend on the picture of fourteenth century Ireland presented by Chart rather than that of Frame, Cosgrove, or O'Neill. 195 There was certainly unrest and recession during the course of the fourteenth century, but the situation was not as bleak as has traditionally been thought. historians of the last twenty years or so have presented a view of the fourteenth century which would allow the development of the tower house. The hiatus in building activity which seems first to have been identified by Leask 196 may actually be in large measure an illusion symptomatic of the dearth of documentary records for the period (especially in comparison with later centuries); of the supposed wide-ranging, long-term, deep impacts of the wellknown (and certainly disastrous) events which punctuated the first fifty years of the century; of the paucity of the material record for the period; ¹⁹⁷ of the lack of archaeological excavations of tower houses; and of the inadequacy of architecturally-based dating techniques as sources of independent and reliable chronological tags for so plain a set of structures as the tower houses of Ireland.

Donnelly suggested that the advocates of fourteenth century tower houses should consider the social context of tower house construction through a set of three questions: what class of people lived in fourteenth century tower houses? What was the economic and social background of these people?

¹⁹⁴ DONNELLY 1994, 74.

CHART 1920; FRAME 1981; FRAME, R. 1982 English Lordship in Ireland 1318-1361.
 Clarendon Press, Oxford; FRAME, R. 1984 'War and peace in the Medieval Lordship of Ireland' in LYDON, J.F. (ed) The English in Medieval Ireland. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. pp.118-141; COSGROVE, A. 1981 Late Medieval Ireland 1370–1541. Helicon, Dublin; O'NEILL 1987.
 LEASK 1964, 75.

¹⁹⁷ BARRY 1988, 180; HURLEY, M.F. 1997 'General Conclusions' in HURLEY, M.F. & SCULLY, O.M.B., with MCCUTCHEON, S.W.J. *Late Viking Age and Medieval Waterford*. Waterford Corporation, Waterford. pp.894-899 at 894: 'The underrepresentation of the later medieval period in the archaeological record is a feature of many urban excavations in Ireland.'

What factors led these particular people in society to build tower houses?¹⁹⁸ Quite apart from the fact that the first two questions seem almost indistinguishable in essence, it would appear that Donnelly was attempting to emphasise the contrast he saw between conditions in Ireland in the fourteenth century and in the fifteenth century. If the views of the historians of the last few decades are to be respected, it would appear that this contrast was actually rather hazier than Donnelly seems to have assumed. Indeed, the 'rigid' dichotomy which was seen to divide the inhabitants of Ireland in the fourteenth century has been shown to have been flexible, multi-faceted, and even porous.

Donnelly's picture of fourteenth century Irish society (in which tower house construction could only have been carried out for reasons in stark contrast with those which fuelled the tower house building of the fifteenth century) was founded on the notion of a society 'which was constantly in a state of civil war.' Fourteenth century Ireland does not seem to have been a haven of unadulterated peace but there was enough social organisation in place to allow vigorous trade, for example. The revenue generated by this trade would have put at least moderate wealth into new sets of pockets – those of the traders as well as those of the producers. The construction of a tower house seems to be a means by which this new wealth might have found worthwhile expression. Not only would the tower house have served as a residence, it would also have provided security for its occupant and family in case of raiding, and it would have constituted a physical – and highly visible – demonstration of the position of its owner.

¹⁹⁸ DONNELLY 1994, 81.

¹⁹⁹ DONNELLY 1994, 74.

FOURTEENTH CENTURY BUILDING ACTIVITY IN IRELAND

The conventional view regarding large-scale building activity in later medieval Ireland is that little – if any – was carried out during the hundred years following the opening decade of the fourteenth century. This understanding of the 1300s is based in large measure on the views of H.G. Leask, Inspector of National Monuments in Ireland from 1923 until his retirement in 1949, and author of what has been described as the first 'publication of worth about Irish civil architecture of the middle ages' and of 'the first publication dealing with medieval ecclesiastical architecture in Ireland since Champneys wrote in 1910.'

Leask considered the 'great castle building period in Ireland' to have 'extended from the end of the twelfth century for about 130 years' or from '1180 to 1310', stating that 'throughout the fourteenth century and the first half of the following hundred years we hear of no castle building', although he did acknowledge that 'the records of repairs and re-edification are fairly numerous.'
In summary, he felt that the fourteenth century 'was a period of little building activity, on the part of either churchman or layman in Ireland.'²

Sweetman, writing some sixty years later, endorsed Leask's words regarding the dating of the 'period of large stone castle building', which he felt 'broadly covers the years from 1175 to 1310.' There is no doubt,' he wrote, 'about the lack of castle building in Ireland in the second half of the fourteenth century. In support of this assertion he referred to the continuing reliability of Leask on the subject, 'despite extensive fieldwork carried out by the Archaeological Survey over the past twenty years.'

Champneys, writing in the first decade of the twentieth century about ecclesiastical architecture, referred to numerous architectural features and sections of buildings which date, on his reckoning, to the fourteenth century.⁵ He acknowledged the disruptive impact of the Bruce Invasion and the ravages of the Black Death, pointing out that in the light of these it is 'not surprising that but

¹ ROYAL INSTITUTE OF THE ARCHITECTS OF IRELAND 1966 [Obituary of] 'Harold Graham Leask, Honorary Fellow', *RIAI Year Book 1965-1966*, pp.53-54; see also LUCAS, A.T. 1966 'Harold G. Leask, M.Arch., Litt.D., Past President', *JRSAI* 96, pp.1-6

² LEASK 1999, 25.

³ SWEETMAN 1999, 2.

⁴ SWEETMAN 1999, 133, 202, referring to LEASK 1999.

very few new monasteries should have been founded during this period.' This situation seemed to him irritating, as the lack of new projects meant that there was no significant outlet for the demonstration of new architectural styles. Rebuilding and extension works tended to be 'silent' in that they were likely to have echoed, stylistically, the appearance of the existing structures. For Champneys, this situation led to the generation of a 'gap' – at least chronologically – in the development of an architectural style particular to Ireland.

Wakeman does not seem to have attempted to impose a chronological framework on the castles of which he wrote in his *Handbook*. Adams, in a near contemporary publication, although providing only a very brief overview of castle architecture in Ireland generally, did not hesitate to present evidence for fourteenth century construction activity in the body of her publication, which was made up of descriptions and discussions of individual sites. 9

Grose attributed the construction of only a few buildings to the fourteenth century, but in any case his publications on architecture tended to be more descriptive than historical. One might even describe him as the forerunner of Leask and Sweetman because, while he did make reference to some historical details regarding certain sites, his general approach was focused on the buildings themselves, their appearance, and their situation. He seems to have found the dating of many of the buildings of which he wrote difficult, and this appears particularly to have been the case in relation to the castles. He wrote that 'in a country where every person of property was obliged by necessity, or by the state, to erect some fortresses to secure his family or property, it is impossible to trace the original founders of many of our castles.'

Parker, to whose article in Archaeologia has been traced the use of the

⁵ CHAMPNEYS, A. 1910 *Irish ecclesiastical architecture*. G. Bell & Sons Ltd., London; Hodges, Figgis & Co. Ltd., Dublin. pp.165-7, 172

⁶ Gwynn and Hadcock's position on this point is discussed elsewhere. GWYNN & HADCOCK 1970, 9.

⁷ CHAMPNEYS 1910, 166.

⁸ WAKEMAN 1891.

⁹ ADAMS, C.L. 1904 Castles of Ireland. Elliot Stock, London. e.g. pp.4, 16, 28, 45

¹⁰ GROSE, F. 1791 *The Antiquities of Ireland*. 2 volumes. S. Hooper, London. *e.g.* vol.1, pp.44, 57, 69; vol.2, pp.4, 27, 40, 62, 93. It should not be forgotten that the works on Ireland which appeared under Grose's name were in fact published after his death, and were assembled by others, notably Ledwich, to whom we owe much of the text.

¹¹ GROSE 1791, volume 2, 70.

term 'tower house' in the Irish context, 12 observed that 'throughout the Middle Ages every house of any importance was a castle, that is to say, it was built in the form of a tower and fortified; but it was not the less a dwelling-house.' He made further comments which suggest that although in some respects his understanding of the tower house conforms with that of today, his confidence regarding their chronology was insufficient to allow him any greater precision than to propose that these 'square towers ... were the usual habitations of the gentry in Ireland throughout the Middle Ages, whether English or Irish.'13

Parker's general dating scheme for tower houses in Ireland seems therefore to have been rather vague, but he was prepared to state his conclusions regarding whatever dating evidence was available to him in relation to particular buildings. He seems to have found a few castles which were built in the fourteenth century, 14 but he attributed the majority of which he wrote to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Like Grose, Parker was essentially a recorder and describer of architecture, and it is not clear to what extent he attempted to combine documentary research with field investigation. He wrote extensively on English architecture, and he was careful to warn that his *Archaeologia* article was 'the result of a fortnight's tour in Ireland in the summer of 1858.' The brief bibliography appended to the article includes no primary documentary sources; Parker seems to have considered that the value of his 'observations' was likely to lie in their novelty. He felt that they would probably be 'new to the generality of English antiquaries', though he was careful to point out that his 'opinions ... may have been hastily formed.' 15

The views of Leask and of Sweetman appear therefore to have been more extreme regarding the fourteenth century hiatus in building activity than those of most earlier writers. Even Leask, however, did allow that some construction work was carried out between c.1320 and 1400, although he placed 'a great building revival' in the period following c.1440. Arguments propounded in recent years by McNeill and Stalley, the latter particularly in relation to ecclesiastical buildings, seem to favour an interpretation closer to the

¹² DONNELLY 1995, citing PARKER 1860.

¹³ PARKER 1860, 153.

¹⁴ PARKER 1860, e.g. 166, 167.

¹⁵ PARKER 1860, 176.

¹⁶ LEASK 1999, 75.

views of Champneys than to those of Sweetman.

Stalley, in pointing out that Leask 'provided good descriptions of the major sites, but had little opportunity to investigate their documentary background', 17 was echoing an important observation made some years before by Frame in relation to the royal castles of the fourteenth century. Frame wrote in 1971 that 'the castles have never been closely studied from a historical viewpoint', emphasising the distinction between the historical and architectural approaches by stating that 'Leask's *Irish castles* and other writings deal with the castles from an architectural point of view.' 18

McNeill, writing in relation to church architecture, found evidence upon which to found criticism of Leask's treatment of the period. His comment that Leask's assertions may be challenged 'simply by referring to Gwynn and Hadcock's (1970) lists of friaries', in which it is recorded that there were 'some 35 foundations during the fourteenth century' seems especially telling. However, in the light of Stalley's observation regarding Leask's concentration on field work rather than documentary research, it is clearly important to recognise that McNeill's 'simple' reference to Gwynn and Hadcock's invaluable work would not have been possible for Leask, who was writing some thirty years before its publication.

Leask was of course working within the historical understanding of medieval Ireland which was current in the 1930s, and it is important to acknowledge that he aimed in his major publication on secular architecture to produce no more than 'a general survey of six centuries of the military and semimilitary architecture of Ireland.' It may appear strange to preface the description of so broad an ambition with the words 'no more than', but by this it is intended to convey that Leask's aspirations were essentially limited to architectural survey. He placed this survey in the context of the account of Irish medieval history which was at the time accepted, and he was thus adding a dimension to the contemporary understanding of the period. His role was confined to architectural description and classification, and he did not set out to

¹⁷ STALLEY, R.A. 1978 'William of Prene and the Royal Works in Ireland', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* **131**, pp.30-49 at 31

¹⁸ FRAME, R.F. 1971 *The Dublin government and Gaelic Ireland 1272-1361. The making of war and the making of peace in the Irish lordship.* PhD, Dublin University. p.61 ¹⁹ MCNEILL 1985/6, 61, referring to GWYNN & HADCOCK 1970.

use his findings to attempt reinterpretation of medieval Irish history. His *Irish* castles and castellated houses continues to be reprinted and, as a source of descriptive material regarding architectural styles and types, and regarding individual castles, it remains of great relevance.

Sweetman's *Medieval castles of Ireland* is apparently the satisfaction of 'an ambition to update and upgrade' Leask's book²¹ but in fact it stands as a complement to *Irish castles and castellated houses* far more than as its replacement. Indeed it is perhaps an endorsement of the quality of Leask's work, and of the value of the approach he adopted, that so similar a format should have been followed some sixty years later.

An area in which there has been considerable advance in understanding since the 1930s is the history of medieval Ireland, and of the fourteenth century in particular. This advance is surely an underlying factor behind the apparent criticism of Leask's work by Stalley and McNeill. McNeill explicitly cites the work of Frame as contributing to 'a more moderate view of a society where war had become endemic after the end of Anglo-Norman expansion but which is not an unremitting tale of collapse and chaos.' The history around which Leask arranged his architectural study has to a significant extent been revised and rewritten. The historical framework upon which his ideas regarding the development of buildings in Ireland were developed is therefore far less sturdy than it would have appeared in 1941.

Sweetman considers the 'one inescapable historical fact about the origins of the tower house' to be the offer of a £10 subsidy by the Crown in 1430 for the construction of castles of dimensions approximating to those of smaller tower houses, some of which are found in parts of eastern Ireland. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that 'this grant provided the impetus to build the typical tower house of the eastern half of Ireland'. Assertions which carry such substantial implications obviously demand closer examination. ²⁴

Leask also mentioned the 1430 subsidy,²⁵ but was far less clear than Sweetman regarding its significance for the emergence and development of the

²⁰ LEASK 1999, 3.

²¹ SWEETMAN 1999, Preface (unnumbered pages).

²² MCNEILL 1985/6, 61.

²³ SWEETMAN 1999, 137.

²⁴ This issue is to be considered in more detail in the section dealing with legislation.

tower house in Ireland. The clarity of Sweetman's vision seems at least questionable in the light of historical evidence which suggests not only that tower houses were being built before 1430, but also that the 1430 statute seems to have been only one of several instances of government funding for building work in Ireland. Further subsidies were certainly offered in subsequent years, but government support for building work does not seem to have been uncommon in the fourteenth century.²⁶

Simplicity of design and of architectural detail are relied upon by Sweetman as indicators of the 'early' date of his eastern Irish tower house group. However, the identification of an evolutionary progression in the architectural sophistication and size of tower houses is itself surely a simplification. There exists only very limited documentary evidence for tower house construction, admittedly, but the range of potential variables which could have influenced the appearance of any given tower house seems too broad to allow unquestioning acceptance of Sweetman's hypothesis.

The nature of his expertise and experience is such that the basis for Sweetman's assertions is most likely to be his impressions of the remaining structures in the field. In this respect in particular he seems very close to Leask. Even in the context of this reliance on field evidence, however, there should certainly be room for consideration – or at least for acknowledgment – of arguments based on factors other than those related to a straightforward development of size and complexity of design which could have played a role in tower house construction. One must have regard, for example, to the resources of each builder of a tower house; to the particular reasons that individual may have had for building; to the availability of skilled workers; to the time available for the construction project; and to the particular taste of the person or people responsible for carrying out the building work and determining the appearance of the tower house.

Attempts to understand tower houses must thus be concerned not only with the appearance of the buildings themselves, but also with the reasons for which they were built. The tower house, as implied by its name, is conventionally

²⁵ LEASK 1999, 76-7.

²⁶ See also the situation regarding the raising of funds for town walls. THOMAS, A. 1992 *The walled towns of Ireland.* 2 volumes. Irish Academic Press, Dublin.

regarded as a defended dwelling, clearly erected by people of some substance, as a means of protecting themselves and their goods against the dangers which threatened in the unsettled conditions of their day.

One of the consequences of the so-called 'Gaelic resurgence' of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was that the control exerted by central government was of significance in an area of decreasing size. This meant that any security which might once have been assured from Dublin was less and less dependable. The Bruce invasions of 1315-1318 and the contemporaneous arrival of what is now known as the Great European Famine contributed to the According to the traditional view, the situation was further disruption. exacerbated by the Black Death, which reached Ireland at the end of the 1340s. Furthermore, it would appear that these familiar events were merely particular troughs in what was a fairly grim period in Ireland. Stewart recently drew attention to the existence of annalistic entries which appear to constitute evidence for a more insidious deterioration in conditions in Ireland at this period. This deterioration seems to be at least partly attributable to the fall in temperature and general climatic downturn which has been identified in Ireland, as in various parts of Europe, at around the start of the fourteenth century.²⁷

The nature of the immediate impact of events or phenomena such as the Black Death may at first appear self-evident. Starvation, epidemic disease, and war are all justly regarded as 'disruptive', notably because of their high impact on the death rate. A country in which the population lives under a heightened and immediate threat of death from any of a variety of causes is certainly likely to undergo at least some dislocation. At the same time, however, a population faced

²⁷ STEWART, A.T.Q. 2001 *The Shape of Irish History*. The Blackstaff Press, Belfast. pp.64-5; see also O'SULLIVAN, A. 1998 *The Archaeology of Lake Settlement in Ireland*. Discovery Programme Monograph No.4. RIA, Dublin. p.151; FEEHAN, J. 2003 *Farming in Ireland*. *History, Heritage and Environment*. Faculty of Agriculture, University College, Dublin. pp.24-25, 79; MITCHELL, F. & RYAN, M. 1997 *Reading the Irish Landscape*. Town House, Dublin. p.307; MITCHELL, F. 1994 *Where has Ireland come from?* Country House, Dublin. p.55. Baillie's comments on the difficulties experienced in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe in the construction of tree-ring chronologies across the fourteenth century are interesting, particularly in that he cites dendrochronologically-based evidence from Ireland, Britain, Greece, and Germany in support of a reduction in building activity in the second half of the fourteenth century. However, the distinctive character of the wood used in the building projects of the fifteenth century seems to raise additional questions which remain to be discussed fully. BAILLIE, M.G.L. 1995 *A slice through time*. *Dendrochronology and precision dating*. B.T.Batsford Ltd., London. pp.124-125. His earlier comment, that the 'reduction in population [associated with the Black Death] gave rise to a regeneration phase for oak forests' may perhaps be a fairer summary of the situation.

by catastrophe is unlikely to remain passive, quietly accepting and absorbing the impact of the series of disasters. Furthermore, the extreme changes in circumstances which are likely to confront those remaining after an event or series of events with dramatic demographic consequences need not all be negative.

Platt, while commenting that 'building in medieval England would never again be as extravagant as in the half-century preceding the Black Death,' pointed out that the depopulation resulting from the outbreak of plague did actually present some of its survivors with an opportunity for entrepreneurial success and prosperity.²⁸ 'The middle man came into his own' in the years following the Black Death, argues Platt, suggesting that this group in society 'lived much better than they had ever lived before, leaving behind them a remarkable legacy of fine buildings.'²⁹

The particular example selected by Platt to illustrate this situation is an architectural one: he draws attention to the late medieval farmhouses of the Weald of Kent.³⁰ He observed that the architecture of Kent underwent a dramatic improvement in the years following the passage of the Black Death in the late 1340s. The natural resources of the area remained constant through the relevant period, but the number of people drawing upon those resources fell. The population decline, while substantial, was not so great as to render the region incapable of capitalising on its potential and thus unproductive. In fact, it appears that the demographic impact of the Black Death in the area was such as to leave the inhabitants significantly more wealthy *per capita* than before.

During the period after the Black Death there was of course a need for reorganisation and, more specifically, for the reconstruction of communities and their buildings. The houses which were built in the later fourteenth century in the area were of particularly high quality. Some of them survive, which must in itself be evidence of the high standards of materials and workmanship which went into their construction. The construction of houses of this quality was made possible by the relative prosperity of the individuals who paid for them, a prosperity which came at least partly as a result of the Black Death. As Platt put it, 'it was only in

BAILLIE, M. 1991 'Dating the past' in RYAN, M. (ed) *The illustrated archaeology of Ireland*. Country House, Dublin. pp.15-19 at 17

²⁸ PLATT 1996, 137.

²⁹ PLATT 1996, 164.

³⁰ PLATT 1996, 164-166.

the latter part of the fourteenth century - after the Black Death - that the nongentry farmhouses of the central Kentish Weald first reached the size and quality that would ensure their survival until today.'31

Platt considered – still, of course, within the English situation – that monastic building projects would have been halted by the Black Death, and that they would never again have been pursued with the vigour of the earlier fourteenth century.³² The demographic consequences of the Black Death seem also to be identifiable in his analysis of the impact of the plague on castle architecture. The so-called 'fortified' buildings of late fourteenth century England he refers to as 'ostentatious cardboard castles', proposing that they 'had more to do with restraining unruly tenants than with preventing a more professional attack.'33 In a situation where the population had fallen, the labour force would inevitably have been reduced, leaving the tenants and farm workers in a far stronger position vis-à-vis their landlords than before.

These references to Platt's interpretation of the impact of the Black Death on architecture and the building industry in England are included because they present evidence which appears to contrast with the conventional view of general and long-term disruption normally accepted in Ireland.³⁴ There were obviously substantial differences in the structure and stability of society between England and Ireland in the fourteenth century, but it is important to recognise that the impact of such events as invasions and plagues is unlikely to be absolutely destructive. Indeed, in a more general survey of the Black Death in Europe (which is, however, also largely focused on England), Ziegler asserts that architecture is 'another field in which the significance of the Black Death seems more significant (sic) in legend than in reality. 35

Otway-Ruthven pointed out as early as 1968 that the concentration by historians of the Black Death in Ireland on a few years in the middle of the

³¹ PLATT 1996, 164.

³² PLATT 1996, 173. See also the figures gathered by Gwynn and Hadcock for a comparison with the Irish situation, as discussed above. GWYNN & HADCOCK 1970, 9.

³³ PLATT 1996, 169.

³⁴ See KELLY, M. 2001 A history of the Black Death in Ireland. Tempus, Stroud. However, it should be noted that there appears to be but little documentary evidence regarding the impact of the Black Death in Ireland specifically.

³⁵ ZIEGLER, P. 1969 *The Black Death*. Collins, London. (Penguin edition, London, 1982) p.265

fourteenth century was misleading.³⁶ She cited references to severe outbreaks of plague in Ireland into the sixteenth century, which seem to render more complicated the relationship between building activity – or inactivity – and the Black Death, or rather the effect of the plague generally. The mid-fourteenth century outbreak may have been particularly widespread and dramatic of impact, but a re-examination of its effect on architecture in Ireland seems to be under way.

Attention has been drawn in recent years by McNeill and by Stalley to evidence for the construction of – and certainly for construction at – churches and other ecclesiastical buildings in Ireland in the fourteenth century.³⁷ McNeill and O'Keeffe have argued that it is inconceivable that some secular building work was not also carried out in this period.³⁸ Their evidence is mainly for larger structures than tower houses, and tends to come from the opening decades of the century – before, for example, the arrival of the Black Death. It is of course difficult to substantiate comprehensively a link between a documentary reference to a building at a particular named place with a set of structural remains at a similarly named place in today's landscape, but unless the documentary evidence for fourteenth century building work is explored more fully, there can be no hope of investigating any such links which may exist.

In the *Annals of Loch Cé* there are but few references to construction work, but occasional attention appears to have been paid to the fortunes of Sligo castle. 'The castle of Sligech was erected by the Earl' in 1310, only to be 'thrown down by O'Domhnaill' five years later.³⁹ It seems to have been in use to some extent by the late 1360s: although no details are provided as to its condition, it was serving as a gaol.⁴⁰ These entries suggest not only that the castle was built near the start of the fourteenth century, but also that it was rebuilt or at least repaired at some point between 1315, when it was 'thrown down', and the second half of the century, when it was again in use.

Government records are generally of limited value in relation to the gathering of evidence regarding the construction of buildings by private

³⁶ OTWAY-RUTHVEN, A.J. 1968 *A history of medieval Ireland*. Ernest Benn, London, and Barnes & Noble, New York. p.269

³⁷ See, for example, MCNEILL 1985/6, 61-64; STALLEY 1984.

³⁸ MCNEILL 1997, 173-4; O'KEEFFE 2000, 44-5.

HENNESSY, W.M. (ed & trans) 1871 The Annals of Loch Cé. A chronicle of Irish affairs from AD 1014 to AD 1590. 2 volumes. HMSO, Dublin. vol.1, pp.555, 579
 HENNESSY 1871, vol.2, 39-41 [1368]; vol.2, 45 [1371].

individuals or groups not affiliated to the central authority. The resources available to the government would certainly have been far greater than those of such independent parties, and their respective fluctuations would not necessarily have been in proportion. The priorities of the government would also have diverged from those of potential independent castle builders in various ways. However, it is nonetheless significant that there is a considerable number of references to construction work at various Crown sites around Ireland in, for example, the collection of *Irish Exchequer Payments* for the fourteenth century.

The *Irish Exchequer Payments* are of particular value in the context of this investigation not only because they include references to building activity, but also as a result of their continuity. Not only is the fourteenth century poorly represented among the records of Irish history, it was also disrupted by political upheaval, invasion, famine, and plague. This means that the survival even of some of the *Irish Exchequer Payments* for a large proportion of the period is especially significant.

At the time of the outbreak of the Black Death in Ireland, for example, we learn that repairs were paid for at Ferns castle, ⁴¹ assorted works were ongoing at Dublin castle, ⁴² Adam de Carleton was retained as 'chief carpenter of the king's castles, manors and other works in Ireland', ⁴³ and divers other building projects were in progress, such as 'the repair of the tower built beside the bridge at Leighlin for the defence of the king's faithful people' by 'Brother William Hulot, prior of the Carmelites of Leighlin, and of the brothers there', who received a grant by way of a gift from the Crown to help fund the work. ⁴⁴

As this final example demonstrates, it appears from the *Irish Exchequer Payments* that at this period the Crown was on occasion prepared to contribute financially to the upkeep of fortifications which were not in its ownership, but which were controlled by parties which were sympathetic to its cause. This would appear somewhat surprising in the context of the conventional understanding of the period. This view would hold that the Crown received an

⁴¹ CONNOLLY, P. 1998 Irish Exchequer Payments, 1270-1446. IMC, Dublin. p.421 (1346-1348)

⁴² CONNOLLY 1998, 425 (1348-1349); 431 (1349-1350); 431 (1348).

⁴³ CONNOLLY 1998, 425 (1348-1349); 431 (1439-1350).

⁴⁴ CONNOLLY 1998, 427 (1348-1349).

⁴⁵ CONNOLLY 1998, *e.g.* 315 (1326), 346 (1332), 427 (1349), 480 (1358), 517 (1365), 530 (1375), 542-543 (1384).

ever-diminishing level of revenue from Ireland during the fourteenth century, as a result not only of the military disturbances and other disruptive and demographically-significant events, but also of the decreasing influence and power of the central government. In addition - perhaps partly as a result - the royal authorities are considered to have been decreasingly attentive to affairs in Ireland.

However, throughout the fourteenth century a steady level of expenditure is recorded at royal properties around Ireland, with most resources being directed towards repairs and construction at Dublin castle. Money was also directed to other royal castles. For example, repairs, strengthening works, and the addition of military features took place at Roscommon castle between 15 August 1303 and 15 August 1304; and in 1308 John de Stratton, constable of Newcastle McKinegan', received £6 13s 4d 'for repairs to houses and walls there'.

The amount paid out for repairs and construction work in each royal castle varied considerably from year to year. In 1300, for example, £10 was paid to John Boet 'for repairing defects in Dublin castle and the houses in the castle and for repairing and constructing the houses of the Dublin exchequer'; in 1304 a payment of £30 was made to John Matheu for repairing 'the houses of the castle and exchequer of Dublin'; and in 1325 'Luke de Hynckeleye, keeper of the works of Dublin castle' was paid £103 14s. 1d. 'for making and repairing works there.' The nature and extent of the repairs which were required is unknown, although careful suggestion may be possible on the basis of the limited descriptions provided in the accounts and with reference to the amounts paid. Consideration of the figures for the fourteenth and early fifteenth century may however assist in providing a perspective from which to view the value of the much-cited £10 subsidy offered in 1430. 50

The spending power of the Crown, as well as its concern to control at least parts of the country in the early fourteenth century, is indicated by a payment of £834 1s 2½d which was made in the period running from Michaelmas 1308 to Trinity 1309. The size of this payment also serves to place some of the other

⁴⁶ CONNOLLY 1998, *e.g.* 234 (1316), 291 (1323), 396 (1341), 447 (1353), 545 (1388), 548 (1399).

⁴⁷ CONNOLLY 1998, 176.

⁴⁸ CONNOLLY 1998, 202.

⁴⁹ CONNOLLY 1998, 158, 177, 306.

sums in perspective.⁵¹ The payment of £834 1s 2½d was not all destined to fund construction work, however, as it was paid to 'John de Hothum, clerk appointed to pay wages' to the soldiers - and workmen - who went with 'Peter de Gavaston, earl of Cornwall, the king's lieutenant in Ireland, to subdue the Irish felons in the Leinster mountains who were against the king's peace, and to raise and repair the castle of Castlekevin, which had been knocked down and ruined by those Irish.'⁵² It is not clear what proportion of the money was required for the maintenance of the military contingent and how much was designated for the construction works, but the entry seems to bear implications of relevance for the assessment of the possibility that building activity might have taken place throughout the fourteenth century in Ireland.

Firstly, the fact that a castle had been 'knocked down and ruined' by the Irish indicates that such structures were felt to be significant – perhaps physically as well as symbolically - not only by the Anglo-Norman or government-based element, but also by 'the Irish felons in the Leinster mountains who were against the king's peace.' The castle of Castlekevin was evidently considered so important by the government party that they were prepared to go to considerable lengths 'to raise and repair' it. Indeed, the fact that a substantial military operation was mounted with the joint objectives of subduing the 'Irish felons' and repairing the castle demonstrates not only that such castles were strategically significant, but also that what appears to have been extensive reconstruction work had to be carried out in the midst of military campaigning. Thirdly, despite the fact that the castle had, prior to the opening of the account for 1308-1309, 'been knocked down and ruined' by the Irish, the entry seems to confirm that fortifications were considered to be important in the conflicts of the day. Indeed, it seems self-evident that, particularly in the era before the introduction of artillery to the country, those who had the means to do so generally attempted to assure

⁵⁰ LEASK 1999, 76-8; SWEETMAN 1999, 137.

Additional perspective may be obtained through consideration of the cost of some of the castles built by Edward I (though completed, in some cases, by Edward II) in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. The total cost of Harlech castle, built over seven seasons between 1283 and 1289, has been estimated at £9,000 (or a little less than £1,300 per season); that of Beaumaris, built between 1295 and 1323, at £13,000; that of Carnarvon (1283-1323), at £16,000; and that of Conway (1283-1287), at £19,000. 'In all, it has been estimated that Edward I spent upon the building of his eight Welsh castles some £80,000 in twenty-five years.' ALLEN BROWN 1954, 126-127.

⁵² CONNOLLY 1998, 207.

their security by constructing a defended or defensible residence.

Another substantial – if apparently less expensive – expedition into Leinster was mounted in 1332, when £184 18s 1d was paid out in order 'to pay wages to various men at arms, hobelars and foot soldiers going in the company of Anthony de Lucy, justiciar, to suppress, with the help of God, the malice and insolence of various Irishmen, enemies and rebels of the king in Leinster, and to strengthen various castles in those parts against the said enemies and also to repair the castles and supply them with victuals and suitable arms.' The same expedition seems to have attracted further general funding of £15, as well as sums of £182 8s, £2, and £10 which were paid to members of the expedition by way of compensation for expenses incurred in the capture, repair, and strengthening of Clonmore castle, and £38 16s 4d for the same purposes in relation to the castle of Arklow. 54

A significant proportion of the records of expenditure on construction work which are to be found among the *Irish Exchequer Payments* are concerned with Dublin castle and its ancillary buildings, but the engineer responsible for such works was also, on occasion, specifically 'assigned to supervise the king's works in Ireland',⁵⁵ an assignation which clearly implies a sphere of activity which was not limited to Dublin alone. Specific mention is made, for example, of works carried out 'at Roscommon castle and the king's other castles in Connacht',⁵⁶ 'at Newcastle McKinegan',⁵⁷ at the castle of Castlekevin,⁵⁸ at Rinndown castle,⁵⁹ and at the castle of Carmecaneston, which is described as being 'in the marches of Carbury.'⁶⁰

Already the evidence of the *Irish Exchequer Payments* seems to raise questions as to the details of Crown involvement in castles around Ireland. Otway-Ruthven, in her *A history of medieval Ireland*, included a map of 'Ireland in 1300' on which are marked (among other things) royal castles.⁶¹ There seem to

⁵³ CONNOLLY 1998, 346 (1332).

⁵⁴ CONNOLLY 1998, 351-352 (1332-1333).

⁵⁵ CONNOLLY 1998, e.g. 264 (1319-1320).

⁵⁶ CONNOLLY 1998, 175 (1304).

⁵⁷ CONNOLLY 1998, e.g. 202 (1308); 306 (1325); 311 (1325-1326).

⁵⁸ CONNOLLY 1998, 207 (1308-1309).

⁵⁹ CONNOLLY 1998, 281 (1321-1322).

⁶⁰ CONNOLLY 1998, 315 (1326). The barony of Carbury is in county Kildare. Carbury castle itself is relatively well known, and incorporates fortifications ranging from an earthwork castle to an Elizabethan fortified house. See SWEETMAN 1999, 38, 168, 191.

⁶¹ OTWAY-RUTHVEN 1968, map facing 408.

have been eight royal castles in Ireland in 1300, according to Otway-Ruthven's calculation: Drogheda, Dublin, Newcastle (co. Wicklow), Limerick, Roscrea, Athlone, Randown, and Roscommon.⁶² The reference to 'Roscommon castle and the king's other castles in Connacht' would therefore appear to refer to Roscommon, Athlone, and Randown (or Rinndown), and indeed there are records of payments to constables at each of these castles through the fourteenth century. Newcastle may be taken as an abbreviated form of Newcastle McKinegan. But what is to be made of the mentions of Castlekevin, 63 Kildare, 64 Carlow, 65 Killoghtre, ⁶⁶ Kilmartre, ⁶⁷ and Carmecaneston, ⁶⁸ for example?

Reference is made in the Irish Exchequer Payments to several castles which received government funds during the fourteenth century. Some of these castles seem to have been under Crown control - or even ownership - at least for part of the time; ⁶⁹ some, such as Carmecaneston, ⁷⁰ and 'the tower built beside the bridge at Leighlin', 71 seem to have belonged to independent individuals; and the ownership of others, such as Balyteny, 72 and the castle of Gynes, county Cork, 73 is unclear.

Payments were often made from the Exchequer to people who seem to have held responsibility for particular castles - whether as 'keepers', as 'constables', or in another or unspecified role – without any indication regarding the precise purpose for which the money was to be used.⁷⁴ Other payments were

⁶² This list may require some revision, although it would be important to establish what exactly was meant by Otway-Ruthven by the term 'royal castle' before embarking on a new classification. Sweetman, for example, provides a shorter list, stating that 'Dungarvan, Co. Waterford, is one of the few Royal Castles built in Ireland, others being Rindown, Co. Roscommon, Limerick, Dublin and Athlone, Co. Westmeath.' SWEETMAN 1999, 40.

⁶³ CONNOLLY 1998, 207 (1308-1309), 221 (1313-1314).

⁶⁴ CONNOLLY 1998, 153 (1299), 160 (1301-1302), 214 (1311-1312).

⁶⁵ CONNOLLY 1998, 206 (1308-1309); 211 (1309-1310); 214 (1311-1312).

⁶⁶ CONNOLLY 1998, 497 (1359-1360).

⁶⁷ CONNOLLY 1998, 497 (1359-1360).

⁶⁸ CONNOLLY 1998, 315 (1326).

⁶⁹ e.g. Castlekevin, Arklow, Clonmore, Kilbele (in the marches of county Carlow), Ferns, and Wicklow. CONNOLLY 1998, 207 (1308-9); 404 (1341-1343); 347 (1332), 352 (1332-1333); 493 (1358-1359); 482 (1356-1358); 530 (1372-1375). ⁷⁰ CONNOLLY 1998, 315 (1326).

⁷¹ CONNOLLY 1998, 427 (1348-1349).

⁷² CONNOLLY 1998, 385 (1336-1337).

⁷³ CONNOLLY 1998, 453 (1353-1354).

⁷⁴ e.g. CONNOLLY 1998, 234 (1315-1316) (Dublin); 306 (1325) (Newcastle McKinegan); 345 (1332) (Clonmore, Limerick); 385 (1336-1337) (Newcastle McKinegan); 453 (1353-1354) (Gynes).

made to royal staff who appear to have had broader responsibilities.⁷⁵ Monies were thus being disbursed in the fourteenth century for the supply of castles and other fortifications around the countryside, and for their maintenance. Implicit in the disbursements is not only the fact that there was Exchequer support for and involvement in a large number of castles and fortifications of various kinds around the country, but also that those castles actually existed in the fourteenth century.⁷⁶

Otway-Ruthven's list of royal castles in c.1300 was referred to by Frame, who pointed out that 'in addition to the castles permanently on the exchequer's payroll there were others which came into the king's hands from time to time through minority, escheat and forfeiture, and whose garrisons would be supported sometimes directly by the exchequer and sometimes from the revenues of the lordships to which they belonged.'⁷⁷ It appears that Castlekevin was among the castles which fell into this category, but the evidence regarding others is less explicit. Financial involvement by the government in castles around the country seems in some cases to have been organised so as to assist in the maintenance of such strongholds; in others to assist in reconstruction and repairs; occasionally to support original construction projects; and sometimes to provide military support where a castle had been lost, was under attack, or was vulnerable.

The reference to Carmecaneston mentioned above is of special interest because it appears to record that financial support was available from the Exchequer for the repair of castles which were in private hands, as well as for those under Crown control. It demonstrates that while the network of royal castles was considered significant for the maintenance of 'the king's peace' around the country, the government also recognised the importance of castles owned or controlled by its supporters and was prepared to subsidise their upkeep. Here it is recorded that £10 was paid to 'Simon de Geneville, in aid of repairing his castle of Carmecaneston in the marches of Carbury which was recently besieged, captured and burned by the felons of that march, in order that the felons and other malefactors can be repressed and restrained and the king's peace more

⁷⁵ e.g. CONNOLLY 1998, 494, 519, 531.

⁷⁶ There are references to a similarly large (if not larger) number of castles in TRESHAM, E. (ed) 1828 *Rotulorum patentium et clausorum cancellariæ hiberniæ calendarium. Vol. I. Pars. I. Henry II – Henry VII.* Printed by command of HM King George IV in pursuance of an address of the House of Commons of Great Britain and Ireland.

firmly observed there.'78

Disregarding the somewhat irrelevant coincidence as to the amount of money granted to de Geneville, this entry may also be seen as an example of the type of arrangement which was made between the Crown and its supporters. In this way it may even be seen as a precursor of the subsidy offered in 1430 to those who built castles to particular specifications in the Pale. It is of course only a single instance of Crown support for an individual castellan, but it demonstrates that the thinking behind the 1428 and 1430 statutes did not represent a complete innovation in policy. The 1430 subsidy is usually interpreted as an incentive for castle construction, but the principle that the Exchequer should provide encouragement in the form of financial incentives to assist its supporters with the construction or maintenance of fortifications was clearly not new.

A project which seems to have received considerable financial support from the Exchequer during the early to mid 1350s was the 'construction and repair of the castle of Gynes, in Co. Cork.' Not only was 'William Waweyn,' clerk of the works of the castle of Gynes,' paid £42 2s 7d 'for carrying out works there,' £18 5s was paid to 'William, archdeacon of Cork, for 175 crannocks of lime (1s per crannock), taken from him at Cork for the king's use for the construction and repair of the castle of Gynes, in Co. Cork, by Thomas de Rokeby, justiciar, in defence of the faithful people of the king there against the hostile attacks of the Irish, which they frequently suffered before the building and repair of the castle.'

Ferns castle was the subject of work carried out in the 1350s. It must have been somewhat vulnerable, but although 'the Irish enemies held it against the king for a long time and threw down its walls and bridge,' 'William, bishop of Ferns ... recovered it with a large number of armed men at his own expense and stayed in the castle until the walls and bridge had been suitably repaired.' In the course of these operations the loyal bishop apparently 'spent more than £100 to preserve the king's honour,' so it was perhaps a little hard that he should have been granted only £20 by way of recompense or reward for his efforts.⁸⁰

It would appear to be clear to what extent a building may have been

⁷⁷ FRAME 1971, 61.

⁷⁸ CONNOLLY 1998, 315 (1326).

⁷⁹ CONNOLLY 1998, 453, 455 (1353-1354).

damaged when it is reported, for example, that it was 'destroyed and knocked down.' Such language seems explicit, but it must be read with care. The castle of Kilbele, 'in the marches of Co. Carlow ... had been destroyed and knocked down by the Onolans and their accomplices, Irish enemies and rebels of the king.' It was 'rebuilt' by John de Cornwaill, who was to receive a total of £40 from the Exchequer 'in aid of the repair.'

The degree to which Kilbele was damaged was apparently extreme, and there seems to be no reason why one should doubt that it was effectively rebuilt by John de Cornwaill. The relatively small grant that he was due to receive from the Exchequer demonstrates, particularly when read together with the account of the actions and expenditure of William, bishop of Ferns, on Ferns castle in the same decade, for example, that individuals holding positions of responsibility were prepared to draw on their own resources in order to attempt to provide themselves and their people with a degree of security. This is surely not extraordinary. The Exchequer may have recorded the works of men like Bishop William and John de Cornwaill in such a way as to indicate that their intentions were focused towards the maintenance of Crown power, influence, and control, and this may indeed in some instances have formed part of their motivation. But the most immediate concerns of those regarded as the leaders of communities in areas which were subject to attack from hostile Irish people (or others) would surely have been their own safety and that of their property. The construction or reconstruction of castles was seen as a means of enhancing security, and would therefore have been a standard response to threats to the well-being or stability of a community.

There were certainly threats to the security of the 'lordship' in fourteenth century Ireland. Substantial expenditure was made by the Exchequer on the manning, provisioning, and maintenance of castles and 'other fortalizes and wards in the marches of Leinster in Co. Dublin,'82 and it seems inconceivable that the Crown could have been alone in its efforts to maintain some degree of stability through the construction and servicing of fortifications. The absence of documentary records cannot prove the absence of buildings. A dearth of written

⁸⁰ CONNOLLY 1998, 482-483 (1356-1358).

⁸¹ CONNOLLY 1998, 493 (1358-1359).

accounts of the construction activity of the fourteenth century cannot of itself be taken to mean that the period in question was without such activity.

The officials with responsibility for the castle of Limerick were also granted money towards the fulfilment of their duties, and it should be noted that here – as at Dublin and other royal castles – royal expenditure on construction was not restricted to fortification. Among 'the works of the king's castles' carried out in 1327 was 'rebuilding and repairing' at a building in Cork. However, in this instance the works were designed to prevent people from leaving rather than to prevent them from entering, as might usually have been the brief of a castle designer. £50 was paid 'to Walter Kerdyf and Cambinus Donati, keepers of the works of the king's gaol at Cork, for rebuilding and repairing the gaol which is greatly in need of repair, since the king's prisoners cannot be kept or safely detained there until it is rebuilt.

The officials named in relation to the above works at Limerick castle included the mayor as well as the constable, 85 but while there was generally a particular individual with responsibility for building and maintenance work at Dublin castle, at other castles the role seems most often to have been part of the general set of duties assumed by the constable. By 1319 a general overseer of Crown-funded maintenance works seems to have been appointed, and reference was being made to 'Master Robert the engineer, assigned [at a salary of 1s per day] to supervise the king's works in Ireland.'86 By 1333 another office seems to have been created, as payment was recorded for that year of part of the annual fee due to John de Corfe in his role as 'chief keeper, provider and organiser (*ordinator*) of all the king's work in Ireland which pertains to the office of mason.'87 This appointment was certainly in addition to the office with responsibility for the upkeep of the castle at Dublin, as in the same set of payments account is taken of £4 16s 1d which was paid to 'John de Carlton, keeper of the works of Dublin castle, for that office,'88 and similar pairs of

⁸² CONNOLLY 1998, 480 (1356-1358); see also 468 (1355-1356), 492 (1358-1359), 497 (1359-1360), 530 (1372-1375), 531 (1372-1375), 542 (1376-1384).

 $^{^{83}}$ e.g. CONNOLLY 1998, 320 (1326-1327), when a total of £70 was granted 'for repairing and rebuilding the houses and walls of the castle'; also 345 (1332).

⁸⁴ CONNOLLY 1998, 325 (1327).

⁸⁵ CONNOLLY 1998, 320 (1326-1327).

⁸⁶ CONNOLLY 1998, 264 (1319-1320).

⁸⁷ CONNOLLY 1998, 357 (1333).

⁸⁸ CONNOLLY 1998, 357 (1333).

payments continue to appear in parallel in subsequent years.⁸⁹ Thus in 1335-6 fees were paid not only to John de Corfe, in his role as 'chief keeper, provider and organiser of all the king's work which pertains to the office of mason', and to 'Robert the king's engineer', but also to 'John de Mauncestre, keeper of the works of Dublin castle, for the repair of houses of the castle'.⁹⁰

This wealth of apparently senior Crown officers with responsibility for royal castles and building activity implies that there was a substantial amount of work to be done. This is not surprising in the light of the standard view of the unsettled and violent fourteenth century. However, the assignment of these functions may also have been related to the prevention of fraud. It has been noted that money was paid by the Exchequer in the fourteenth century to support a significant number of castles which were not under the direct control of the Crown or of the government in Ireland. It has even been suggested by Frame that 'money was being paid for castles where castles "were not". '91 The response to this, as cited by Frame, is that it was ordered that constables should be resident, 92 but such problems would perhaps also have been addressed by the appointment of reliable men to such positions as those mentioned above.

Among the references to building in the *Irish Exchequer Payments*, most are concerned with fortified structures. It was perhaps a result of the nature of the lordship in the fourteenth century that the Exchequer should have been subsidising fortification. The principal demand in so unsettled a society is likely to have been for 'high-security' buildings, and it is interesting to consider in this context the case of the bridge at Wicklow. Richard de Bury was granted £60 in the late 1350s 'for bulding (*sic*) a new bridge over the river bank of Wicklow, with a crenellated watchtower and a drawbridge in the middle of the said bridge' as well as other security measures such as 'a gate called a portcullis,' all of which were designed as a response to 'the hostile attacks of the Irish of those parts.' ⁹³

Richard de Bury, the leader of this project, was described as a 'carpenter.' The senior craftsmen working on medieval construction projects would in fact

⁸⁹ e.g. CONNOLLY 1998, 363 & 364 (1333-1334), 368 & 369 (1334).

⁹⁰ CONNOLLY 1998, 373 (1335); 377 (1335-1336); and see also, for example, 391 (1337-1339).

⁹¹ FRAME 1971, 66. Corruption was not unknown in the building industry at this period, as seems clear from the scandal surrounding William of Prene. See STALLEY 1978.

FRAME 1971, 66, referring to BERRY, H.F. (ed) 1907 Statutes and Ordinances, and Acts of the Parliament of Ireland. King John to Henry V. HMSO, Dublin. pp.332-363 at 338-339.
 CONNOLLY 1998, 491 (1358-1359).

have acted in roles approximating to those of the designers, architects, or engineers of today, supervising and directing building work generally, rather than restricting themselves to a particular material or speciality. However, one is more likely to encounter explicit references to construction in stone and to the work of the mason than to the role of the carpenter on the medieval building site.

At the start of the final quarter of the fourteenth century a grant was made by the Exchequer towards 'the purchase [and carriage] of lime, stone, and other necessities for the repair and rebuilding of the castle' of Greencastle in Ulster. The castle had apparently become 'broken down and dilapidated' when the earldom of March and Ulster, to which it belonged, had been in the hands of Edward III. £20 was granted to 'William Ptit, mason, for completing the construction of the tower of the castle which was duly repaired, the king considering it a good and necessary place for the faithful people of those parts.'

In fact a series of grants had been made regarding the 'king's work in Ireland that pertains to the office of mason,'95 and there is evidence that a range of craftsmen would have been involved in such projects as those which received Exchequer funding. At the castle of Balyteny, for example, when it was being repaired in the mid 1330s, money was assigned 'to pay wages to various masons, carpenters and other workmen repairing the castle.'96 As discussed by Stalley, while it was certainly the case that the holders of such titles as 'king's carpenter' or 'king's mason' would have been masters of their respective crafts, they would often in fact have been given supervisory control over the entire construction process.⁹⁷ One may therefore assume that works which were carried out under the authority of John de Corfe, for example, the 'chief keeper, provider and organiser of all the king's work in Ireland pertaining to the office of mason,'98 need not all have been exclusively – or even predominantly – of stone. However, the fact that he was a mason must surely have been of some consequence.

In his study of William of Prene, who was appointed carpenter of the king's houses and castles in Ireland in 1284, Stalley observed that carpenters such as William frequently supervised the construction of stone buildings, but he also

⁹⁴ CONNOLLY 1998, 542 (1376-1384).

⁹⁵ e.g. CONNOLLY 1998, 384 (1336-1337), 391 (1337-1339), 396 (1339-1341).

⁹⁶ CONNOLLY 1998, 384 (1336-1337).

⁹⁷ STALLEY 1978, especially 34-35.

⁹⁸ CONNOLLY 1998, 391 (1337-1339).

commented that 'it was apparently fifty years before a mason possessed a general authority [in Ireland] corresponding to that of William of Prene' – John Corff (or John de Corfe), in the mid 1330s.⁹⁹ Did it matter at all that there was a mason rather than a carpenter in charge of royal building projects in Ireland in the 1330s? It would certainly appear to reinforce the notion that stone buildings were being constructed in the country at the time.

This notion is also supported by the copious evidence gathered in relation to walled towns around Ireland by Avril Thomas. In many of the cases she discusses, the key documentary evidence for the walling of a town is a murage grant, or a series of murage grants. While such grants normally describe work which it is intended should be carried out, she observed that, for the medieval period as a whole, 'they do not often indicate the exact nature of the intended work.' It may have been original construction (perhaps in earth or timber rather than stone), or it may have been repair, improvement, extension, or reconstruction. However, it is significant in this context that she considered 'fourteenth century grants ... [to be] ... generally more informative,' in that they often include indication of the building material, location, and nature of the work involved.

Thomas linked the increasing incidence of references to a 'stone wall' (rather than any other, presumably weaker, structure) in the fourteenth century to the pressures of the 'Gaelic Revival', the origins of which she traced to the mid thirteenth century. Indeed, she pointed out that evidence of these pressures manifested itself in the language of murage grants, which included references to the situation of certain towns 'in the march' where they might be vulnerable to attack from 'Irish rebels and other enemies.' 103

The group of murage grants which was made in the last stages of the thirteenth century and in the first half of the fourteenth century is considered to have been the result, in the earlier years particularly, of general prosperity, together with a desire among the townsmen of lesser towns to emulate their counterparts in larger settlements which had been walled for some time, such as

⁹⁹ STALLEY 1978, 33-35.

¹⁰⁰ THOMAS 1992.

¹⁰¹ THOMAS 1992, vol.i, 147.

¹⁰² THOMAS 1992, vol.i, 147.

¹⁰³ THOMAS 1992, vol.i, 158-159.

Waterford and Dublin. Lydon regards 'the building activity which was widespread throughout the colony ... in particular, the enclosing of many towns with walls,' to have been a sign of the commercial prosperity of Anglo-Ireland in the later thirteenth century. 104

It seems to have been accepted that murage grants constitute evidence for the construction of town walls. They do, of course, merely represent the granting of permission to gather funds for such purpose, and although such grant was on condition that the work be done there must have been scope for profiteering and fraud. As has been discussed, dishonest and illegal practices such as these were not unheard of in the medieval Irish building industry. It is significant, then, that although there was a relatively large number of new murage grants made in the final decades of the thirteenth century and the first decades of the fourteenth century, each presumably indicating the initiation of a major construction project, new grants continued to be made in very significant numbers throughout the fourteenth century.

Thomas suggested that one of the other reasons for town wall building came to be more significant as this period progressed. The late thirteenth century had seen unprecedented levels of commercial activity, and the resulting economic vigour had provided a financial basis for urban development. Among the manifestations of this development was town wall construction, and in this context it must be recognised that some such initiatives may have owed a good deal to the pride of the inhabitants of the town, and to their desire for prestige, with the proposed town wall serving as a form of status symbol. However, Thomas considered that in the course of the fourteenth century the construction of a wall became increasingly important to towns for straightforward security reasons.

The economic situation in the fourteenth century may not have been as positive as that of the later thirteenth century, but still the murage grants continued. Murage grants may have been evidence of prosperity in the late thirteenth century and in the opening years of the fourteenth century, but they are, more fundamentally, evidence of building activity. The fact that the grants were

¹⁰⁴ LYDON, J.F. 1972 *The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages.* Gill & Macmillan, Dublin. p. 97

p.97 ¹⁰⁵ See, for example, STALLEY 1978.

made in large numbers throughout the fourteenth century must therefore bolster any argument questioning the notion that the fourteenth century was a period characterised by a hiatus in construction work.

Thomas calculated that 'the accumulated murage pattern shows a marked strengthening in the period 1275-1330,' and picked out in particular a 'flurry of activity [which is] known to have occurred at the Dublin and Drogheda walls during and after the Bruce emergency.' This latter 'flurry of activity' was presumably an instance of security-motivated wall construction, extension, strengthening, or maintenance as referred to above, whereas a substantial proportion of the 'marked strengthening' to which she refers would actually have been the result of the initiation of wall construction projects.

The second half of the fourteenth century seems to have seen growth in (or resumption of) murage grants to established walled towns, together with a diminishing number of new walling projects. The majority of existing towns with aspirations to wall themselves in had presumably, by this stage, been accommodated by a grant or by a series of grants. The length of murage grants seems to have increased in the later fourteenth century, ¹⁰⁷ therefore allowing towns to accumulate a fund from which extensions and repairs might be carried out as required.

Thomas has, however, identified anomalies in her data regarding walled towns. In her discussion of the second half of the fourteenth century and the fifteenth century to 1485 she concluded that 'once again the walled town was seen as a refuge for its area,' serving the security role for which it seems to have been so important in the fourteenth century. However, while walled towns tend to be situated in the 'richest' parts of the country, she observed that 'less extensive areas of good lowland remained apparently unaffected' by the rash of murage grants which had served to fortify towns in other areas. Regions noted by Thomas as being without the benefit of walled towns were the area of the Pale between the Liffey and the Boyne, lowland south-east county Wexford, and the Blackwater valley in county Cork. 108

It may be significant that these naturally-rich areas, though appearing

¹⁰⁶ THOMAS 1992, vol.i, 163.

¹⁰⁷ THOMAS 1992, vol.i, 164.

¹⁰⁸ THOMAS 1992, vol.i, 168.

relatively vulnerable in the context of walled town distribution, are actually among the corners of the country which are most densely covered by tower houses. ¹⁰⁹ In the case of the section of county Cork mentioned by Thomas, for example, Cotter discovered that of the fifty-seven possible tower house sites in his study area (which is centred on a section of the Blackwater valley), thirty-five were on the banks of the main rivers (the Blackwater and two of its tributaries), and seven more were within half a mile of a river. ¹¹⁰ Is it not possible that some suggestions might be made from such an observation regarding a possible interdependence – or at least a link – between the walled towns and the tower houses of later medieval Ireland? The points of similarity are clear: both are manifestations of an effort to assure the security of a group of people; both involve the construction of a building as the means of attaining their aim; and both have left a limited number of vestiges on the landscape – urban and rural, respectively – of modern Ireland.

One could of course go further, by drawing parallels between the bawn which surrounded so many tower houses and the town wall, and between the gate towers, wall towers, and other free-standing towers of medieval walled towns and the tower house itself. Indeed, many authors have written of 'urban tower houses,' thus broadening the definition of the castle type to incorporate structures which were perhaps less dependent on their own strength for their security than were tower houses in rural locations. The isolated ruins of today's countryside which are the material remains of medieval tower houses may actually have been the focal points of more substantial – if less durable – settlements. So few archaeological investigations of the areas surrounding tower houses have taken place that the nature (or existence) of such settlements has yet to be ascertained.

There are several walled towns in Ireland which seem to have been developed and fortified in the fourteenth century and which contain what Thomas refers to as tower houses. If the fourteenth century was the time when the town

¹⁰⁹ See the distribution map published in STOUT, G. & STOUT, M. 1997 'Early landscapes: from prehistory to plantation' in AALEN, F.H.A., WHELAN, K., & STOUT, M. (ed) 1997 *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape*. Cork University Press, Cork. pp.31-63 at 59; also that which was published in Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, facing p.160 (and subsequently republished on numerous occasions, perhaps most recently in BARRY, T.B. 2000 'Rural settlement in medieval Ireland' in BARRY, T.B. (ed) *A History of Medieval Settlement in Ireland*. Routledge, London. pp.110-123 at 120.) The theses which deal with the tower houses of the relevant areas are as follows: DAVIN 1982; JORDAN 1990; COTTER 1994.

¹¹⁰ COTTER 1994, 145.

wall was being built, then it seems possible that the fortified elements within the wall might have been erected at about the same time. The document discussed by Jope and Seaby concerning the construction of fortified houses in Dublin in 1331 is well known. Jope considered it 'reasonable to see in these [buildings] the ancestors of the 15th century town tower-houses' of Carlingford and Ardglass, 'and which once stood at Downpatrick.' He felt that the houses discussed, 'though evidently of stone, need not necessarily have been more than two storeys high,' drawing parallels with similar structures found in English towns as early as the twelfth century. However, the specification for the Dublin houses concerning the inclusion of 'battlementing and crenellation' does not seem to have been evident in relation to 'any surviving town house in the British Isles until the 15th century.' The houses were to include 'other reasonable defences' ('alias defenciones racionabiles'), which Jope suggested might have included 'corbelled-out machicolations over doors, and drop-holes within,' both of which, of course, are features which are often found in tower houses.

The document specifies that Geoffrey de Mortone should be allowed 'to build a tower at the town end of the great bridge of Dublin, and another at the corner of the town wall to the west of the said bridge, and between these towers to build his defensible embattled houses.'113 It seems remarkable that Jope and Seaby should have focused their attention exclusively on the fortified houses which are mentioned. It is of course clear from a reading of the entire document (or even the relevant sentence) that all of the elements of the tower house were present in fourteenth century Dublin, although it is not explicitly stated that they were contained in a single building. Quite apart from the fact that the document provides evidence for building work in fourteenth century Dublin, the towers to which the document refers would presumably – according to the Jope and Seaby reading - have been taller than the couple of storeys (surely a minimum?) probably attained by the houses between them. The towers would themselves have been fortified, and they presumably formed part of a system of fortification for the city as a whole, though they may also have provided living accommodation. Even if this were not the case, it is assumed that the 'defensive

¹¹¹ JOPE & SEABY 1959.

¹¹² JOPE & SEABY 1959, 116, 117.

¹¹³ JOPE & SEABY 1959, 115.

houses' constructed between the towers would have been intended as residences.

There are also references to 'wards' in the context of the defence of the lordship in the fourteenth century. Frame defines the 'ward' as 'a body of men assigned to guard a certain area for a length of time that could be as long as several years or as short as two or three days,'114 but the word seems also to have been used to identify the place – some form of stronghold, perhaps – at which the group was based while it carried out its duty. Wards were funded in some instances by the central administration, but more often it seems that the local community was expected to man and support the defensive mobilization. Wards seem sometimes to have been gathered at existing fortifications, such as Newcastle McKinegan and Morett Castle, in county Laois. The advantages of having some kind of a castle as a defensive focal point for such wards are obvious, and must surely have provoked the instigation of construction projects in places. This appears to have happened at Crumlin, for example, where reference is made to fortalice construction.

The most substantial concerted programme of warding in Leinster seems to have been that of 1355-6, just a few years after the outbreak of plague which has become known as the Black Death. This involved the establishment by the justiciar of 'a ring of permanently maintained defences ... round the border of the Leinster mountains.' In addition, 'the men of counties Kildare and Dublin were organised to man and maintain other wards at their own costs' as a complementary system. Frame's map of the 'Leinster Wards 1355-6' shows seventeen wards. He actually refers to the wards as 'fortresses', and he considered that they would have been 'defended by small forces of some ten to twenty hobelars, foot or archers, occasionally rising to fifty or more. The clerks responsible for paying out the monies which were disbursed for these wards also seem to have 'bought supplies, arms and even stones for construction-work.' Read in combination with the use of the heading 'fortalices and wards' in the accounts, this evidence for the acquisition of building materials was taken by

¹¹⁴ FRAME 1971, 67.

¹¹⁵ FRAME 1971, 67-70.

¹¹⁶ FRAME 1971, 71, referring to GILBERT, J.T. (ed) 1870 Historic and Municipal Documents of Ireland, A.D. 1172-1320. Longmans, Green, & Co., London. p.378

¹¹⁷ FRAME 1971, 72.

¹¹⁸ FRAME 1971, 71, citing TRESHAM 1828, 57, no.132.

¹¹⁹ FRAME 1971, 360. The map is between pages 359 and 360.

Frame to suggest that 'where castles did not already exist [but wards had been set up], rough ramparts may have been specially built.' Indeed, he seems to have accepted the findings made by Price in the 1930s, reporting that 'the remains of such a fortification have been identified at Kilmartin.' 120

The implication drawn by Frame was that where wards were set up and were intended not merely as short-term defensive measures, then fortifications and presumably also accommodation would have been required. establishment of wards, which is an acknowledged feature of fourteenth century Leinster, at least, would thus have necessitated the provision - and therefore perhaps the construction – of fortifications and of accommodation. The example of wards, as used by Frame, seems to elucidate the reality of the situation regarding building activity in the mid-fourteenth century. O'Keeffe has suggested that 'there is no reason why the fourteenth century period should have seen a slump in the construction of new castles.' As demonstrated by Platt, and emphasised by O'Keeffe, 'periods of unrest were sometimes periods of prolific building activity.'121 The gathering of evidence for church construction in fourteenth century Ireland by Stalley and McNeill, and the figures presented for religious houses by Gwynn and Hadcock, seem to have shown that building works were far from stagnation. 122 In times of unrest, violence, and general disorder many people in the medieval period might have turned to God for security; but it would be extraordinary if, while building churches, they had made no more direct effort to protect themselves in the immediate and physical context as well.

¹²⁰ FRAME 1971, 360, referring to PRICE, L. 1936 'The Byrnes' country in county Wicklow in the sixteenth century: and the manor of Arklow', *JRSAI* 66, pp.41-66 at 47. See also the entries for Ballyvolan Lower in the Archaeological Survey of Ireland *Inventory* for county Wicklow: GROGAN, E. & KILFEATHER, A. 1997 *Archaeological Inventory of County Wicklow*. The Stationery Office, Dublin. pp.176 (no.1108 - ringwork) and 184 (no.1130 – castle site). ¹²¹ O'KEEFFE 2000, 44-45; PLATT 1996.

TOWER HOUSES - URBAN AND RURAL

Distinction between 'town tower houses' and their rural – and arguably more familiar – counterparts appears natural in the context of the landscape of today. Murtagh was therefore perhaps reasonable in assigning a separate name to urban towers, describing them as 'fortified town houses.' Indeed at most levels of inquiry the urban / rural separation seems relevant and justifiable, facilitating distinction between the roles for which the buildings were intended and used, and the contexts in which they were built.

If classification is based solely on shape, size, and other aspects of general appearance, however, differentiation between urban and rural tower houses would seem more difficult. There is considerable diversity in the appearance of the tower houses of Ireland – urban and rural – and the creation of categories needs to be more broadly-based if it is to move beyond groupings which are essentially limited to morphological issues.

The vast majority of surviving tower houses now stand isolated, as imposing (though often decomposing) ruins in otherwise open countryside. Their remaining urban equivalents are still surrounded by buildings, streets, and activity, even if they are no longer inhabited or in use themselves, and they are usually, therefore, less striking in visual terms. The obvious exceptions are at such deserted medieval settlements as Clonmines, county Wexford. Here an apparently vigorous town was abandoned at the end of the Middle Ages. The abandonment may have been for reasons connected with mining, but was probably the result of a broader concatenation of circumstances. In any case, all but the most substantial - or at least the most durable - of its buildings have now disappeared.³

¹ The most common image of the tower house is as a highly visible element of the rural landscape. Its dramatic form, coupled with and also accentuated by the fact that it is frequently an isolated building in today's countryside, have done much to shape the standard perception and understanding of the monument type. These characteristics have also led to the choice of photographic representations of tower houses as illustrations for the covers of several publications on Irish history, architectural history, and archaeology, for example BARRY 1988; MCCULLOUGH, N. & MULVIN, V. 1987 *A Lost Tradition. The Nature of Architecture in Ireland.* Gandon Editions, Dublin; STEWART 2001; SWEETMAN 1999.

² MURTAGH 1982; 1985-1986; 1988; 1989.

³ See COLFER, B. 1997 'The Hook, county Wexford' in AALEN, F.H.A., WHELAN, K., & STOUT, M. (ed) 1997 Atlas of the Irish rural landscape. Cork University Press, Cork. pp.262-

Allusion to Clonmines, however, forces the realisation that those components of a medieval settlement which survive in the landscape of the twenty-first century represent only a very small proportion of the structures which made up that settlement as a whole. This perspective is of considerable significance in the context of the contrast between urban and rural tower houses. The rural tower house is immediately visible today as an independent stronghold, and is conventionally viewed as such; it may also in some cases be regarded as having been the base for a military garrison. Its urban equivalent remains in almost every case an integral component of the town in which it is situated, and is thus viewed as a part of the fortification, the residential accommodation, and the general structural composition of the town, occasionally even being associated with commercially-related activity.⁴

In the light of the decay or disappearance of the majority of structures dating from the medieval period, whether as a result of the nature of their building materials, or of the poor quality of their workmanship, or for other reasons, it is important to recognise that the 'isolated' tower house of the Irish countryside may very well once have been part of a more extensive and more complex group of buildings. This point is of significance in relation to the consideration of the reasons why tower houses were built, as well as to the assessment of the uses to which they were put and to their role in the landscape of which they formed an active part.

Appreciation of the castle as a component of a more complex settlement cluster certainly allows for a more coherent interpretation of some of the documentary material relevant to the period. On 9th April 1307, for example,

^{276;} COLFER, B. 2004 The Hook peninsula, county Wexford. Cork University Press, Cork; BARRY 1988, 108.

⁴ For example, several writers have concluded that one of the primary functions of the tower houses in Dalkey, county Dublin (of which there were once seven, apparently) was as secure storage space for cargo brought ashore at the port there, prior to its conveyance to its intended destination. See SMITH, C.V. 1996 *Dalkey. Society and Economy in a Small Medieval Irish Town.* Maynooth Studies in Local History, Number 9. Irish Academic Press, Dublin. pp.28-28, 48; CORLETT 1999, 76-77. Leask identified Lynch's Castle, in Galway, and 'The Mint', in Carlingford, county Louth, as results of 'the rise of a wealthy merchant class within the shelter of the [town] walls, ... [while] ... outside the towns the castle was the normal type of residence for chieftain and gentleman.' LEASK 1999, 148. Craig observed that 'both Galway and Kilmallock were formerly renowned for consisting largely ... of merchants' secure dwellings, of stone, with storage space in their vaulted basements.' A number of towns, such as Dalkey, Carlingford, and Carrickfergus, contained several tower houses, and Craig went so far as to say that 'some towns ... were largely composed of towers, if not quite in the manner of San Gimignano or of Bologna' –

Carlow Castle (not, of course, a tower house) was reported as being 'not well roofed', but it was also stated that 'opposite the castle is a hall in which pleas of the county and assises are held, in which are many defects, as well in roofing as in walls.' Similarly, on the same date it was pleaded that at 'Hervey's Island ... there is one castle unroofed ... one water mill, worth yearly 5 marks; and at Kenmok a ferry, worth yearly 2s. 6d. The prise of ale there is worth yearly 10s. And there is a garden, worth yearly 4s.; and a place by the castle, of which the herbage is worth yearly 6d.; and a place by the church of which the herbage is worth yearly 4d.; and there is a stang of meadow worth yearly 6d.'

As is obvious from these references, it was not only tower houses which formed the focal points of more elaborate and extensive groups of buildings, but also other castles. The archaeological evidence for this image of the castle as part of a vigorous community is scarce in relation to tower houses in Ireland, but this must be considered in the context of the small number of research-motivated excavations which have been undertaken at tower houses and at tower house sites. The recent investigations at Trim castle, county Meath, have of course demonstrated the extent to which the enclosure around that keep was occupied by ancillary buildings, but of the few excavations of tower houses in Ireland, even fewer have ventured much beyond the walls of the bawn. Several interesting excavations have however been carried out at tower houses in Scotland, for example, and their results seem to be of relevance to the assessment of the nature of the equivalent monuments in Ireland.

or, he might have added, of Kita, on the Mani peninsula of Greece. CRAIG 1982, 111; SAÏTAS 2001, 120 (illustrations 246 and 247).

⁵ MILLS, J. (ed) 1914 Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls or Proceedings in the Court of the Justiciar of Ireland preserved in the Public Record Office of Ireland. Edward I. Part 2. xxxiii to xxxv years. HMSO, London. p.345

⁶ MILLS 1914, 349.

⁷ The findings are reflected, to an extent, by the reconstruction drawing published by Sweetman on the back cover of his recent book on Irish castles. SWEETMAN 1999.

⁸ For example, GOOD, G.L. & TABRAHAM, C.J. 1981 'Excavations at Threave Castle, Galloway, 1974-78', *Medieval Archaeology* **25**, pp.90-140; GOOD, G.L. & TABRAHAM, C.J. 1988 'Excavations at Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* **118**, pp.231-266, fiche 3:C1-G29. Further projects are mentioned in TABRAHAM, C.J. 1988 'The Scottish medieval towerhouse as lordly residence in the light of recent excavation', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* **118**, pp.267-276

As Bradley suggested, 'Harold Leask's little book *Irish castles* has long been regarded as the *fons et origo* of modern Irish castle studies.' In planning his 'little book' Leask may well have been inspired by the work which seems to occupy a similar situation in the investigation of castles in Scotland. The intentions of Leask seem to echo those of MacGibbon and Ross, who explained that they wished 'to trace the historical sequence of the various phases of Architecture which have prevailed in the old castles and houses of Scotland, and to try to define and explain the different styles of building adopted at different periods from the twelfth century till the revival of classic architecture in modern times.' 10

Among the legacies of MacGibbon and Ross seems to have been an impression of the tower house¹¹ as having been built as a simple, free-standing tower, perhaps with an enclosing wall around and even attached to it.¹² As Tabraham put it, the Scottish medieval tower house has generally been perceived as 'free-standing and self-contained.' A recent introductory statement by Donnelly seems to illustrate that a similar understanding is current in relation to

⁹ BRADLEY, J. 2001 'Review of *Medieval Castles of Ireland* by David Sweetman', *Ríocht na Midhe (Records of the Meath Archaeological and Historical Society)* **12**, pp.235-239 at 235, referring to LEASK 1999.

¹⁰ MACGIBBON & ROSS 1887-1892, Volume I, 1. They, like Leask, also published a substantial work on the ecclesiastical architecture of their country: MACGIBBON, D. & ROSS, T. 1896-1897 The ecclesiastical architecture of Scotland from the earliest Christian times to the seventeenth century. 3 volumes. David Douglas, Edinburgh. O'Keeffe was clearly conscious of the status of Leask and of his work when he ventured to draw attention to some of the deficiencies of Leask's Irish churches and monastic buildings. It is important to recognise that several of these are perhaps partly the result of expecting more from Leask's work than the author himself had ever aspired to provide. Interestingly, in the context of discussion of Leask's sources of inspiration for his best-known works, O'Keeffe considered that in the field of ecclesiastical architecture Leask was 'far more heavily influenced by the work of Arthur Champneys at the start of the twentieth century than he conceded.' O'KEEFFE, T. 2001 'Form and content in pre-Romanesque Architecture in Ireland' in VALOR, M. & CARMONA, A. (ed) IV European Symposium for teachers of Medieval Archaeology, Sevilla-Cordoba, 29th September – 2nd October 1999. Secretariado de publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla. pp.65-83 at 65-66, referring to LEASK, H.G. 1955-1960 Irish churches and monastic buildings. 3 volumes. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk; CHAMPNEYS 1910.

¹¹ It should be noted that they did not themselves use the term 'tower house', referring to the buildings using the more general terms 'tower', 'castle', and 'pele tower' (all of which do actually appear in the contemporary documents).

MACGIBBON & ROSS 1887-1892, Volume I, 144-146; see, for examples of this legacy, TRANTER, N.G. 1935 The Fortalices and Early Mansions of Southern Scotland 1400-1650.
 The Moray Press, Edinburgh & London. pp.1-5; FENWICK, H. 1974 Scotland's Historic Buildings. Robert Hale, London. pp.81, 100; NICHOLSON, R. 1974 Scotland: The Later Middle Ages. The Edinburgh History of Scotland. Volume II. Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh. p.269
 TABRAHAM, C.J. 1988 'The Scottish medieval towerhouse as lordly residence in the light of recent excavation', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 118, pp.267-276 at 267

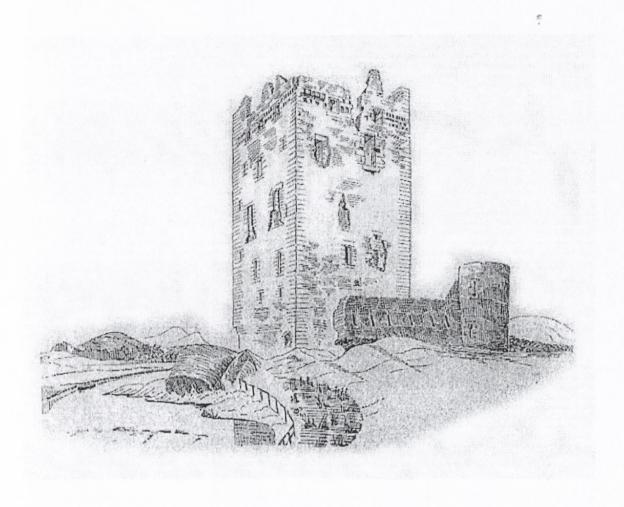
the equivalent buildings on this island.¹⁴ The perception identified by Tabraham is reflected in Nicholson's comments on Threave Castle in Galloway, erected by Archibald 'the Grim' Douglas 'as the headquarters of the lordship of Galloway which he had acquired in 1369.' Nicholson described the building of tower houses as 'the most striking development in baronial architecture' of the period, and offered Threave as an archetypal example: 'free-standing, rectangular in plan, massive and lofty in elevation.'¹⁵

Archaeological investigations were carried out at Threave in the 1970s. Using the evidence of his excavations, Tabraham has shown emphatically how the apparently isolated tower was actually, in the late fourteenth century, merely the most obvious defensive element of a relatively sizeable and diverse settlement centred on a pair of islands in the river Dee (see illustration overleaf). Similar results have been obtained at other tower house sites in Scotland, notably Smailholm Tower, in Roxburghshire. To

As mentioned above, very few research-orientated excavations of tower houses and their surroundings have been carried out in Ireland. The vast majority of excavation licences issued in the context of tower houses relate to areas which might be described as the immediate hinterland of the building, and they have until recently, with relatively few exceptions, yielded little information of direct significance to this study.¹⁸ However, the impression of the tower house as the central element of a more extensive settlement, as proposed for Scotland, is supported in the Irish context by the work of Murtagh at Dysart in county

¹⁴ 'In Ireland a tower house is a fortified medieval residence of stone, normally four or more storeys in height, in which the principal chambers are placed one over the other throughout the building.' DONNELLY, C. 2001 'Decline and adaptation: the medieval Irish tower house in early modern county Limerick' in MALM, G. (ed) *Archaeology and Buildings. Papers from a session held at the European Association of Archaeologists Fifth Annual Meeting in Bournemouth 1999.* BAR International Series 930. Archaeopress, Oxford. pp.7-17 at 7

GOOD, G.L. & TABRAHAM, C.J. 1981 'Excavations at Threave Castle, Galloway, 1974-78', Medieval Archaeology 25, pp.90-140; TABRAHAM, C.J. & GOOD, G.L. 1981 'The Artillery Fortification at Threave Castle, Galloway' in CALDWELL, D.H. (ed) Scottish Weapons and Fortifications 1100-1800. John Donald, Edinburgh. pp.55-72; TABRAHAM 2000, 47-48.
 GOOD, G.L. & TABRAHAM, C.J. 1988 'Excavations at Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 118, pp.231-266, fiche 3:C1-G29; LEWIS, J. 1997 'Excavations at Crichton Castle, Midlothian', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 127, pp.697-705; LEWIS, J. 1998 'Excavations at Newark Castle, Port Glasgow, 1984 and 1997', Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 128, pp.905-921
 See the summary reports of excavations in Ireland edited for the years since 1969 by Delaney for 1969-1976, by an unidentified hand for 1977-1979, by Manning & Hurl for 1980-1984, by Cotter for 1985-1986, and by Bennett for 1987-2001. A full reference to each publication is to be found in the bibliography.



Threave Castle, Galloway, Scotland

(after MACGIBBON, D. & ROSS, T. 1887-1892 The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. 5 volumes. David Douglas, Edinburgh.)



Artist's impression of Threave Island with its castle, as it might have looked c.1400, based on evidence from archaeological excavation

(after TABRAHAM, C. 2000 Scottish castles and fortifications. Historic Scotland.)

Kilkenny. He found that the fifteenth century tower house at Dysart had been built beside a twelfth century church – and thus not in an isolated location – and he traced subsequent additions and modifications to the buildings, which occupy a site for which there is evidence of settlement at least since the medieval period.¹⁹

Pollock's excavations at Barryscourt, county Cork, seem also to have demonstrated the presence of a more extensive group of buildings than had previously been contemplated in the environs of the tower house, as well as a considerably extended period of occupation for the site.²⁰ Recent excavations at Kilcoe, county Cork,²¹ Bremore, county Dublin,²² Pallas, county Galway,²³ Scurlockstown, county Meath,²⁴ Ballytarsna, county Tipperary,²⁵ and Kilkenny West, county Westmeath,²⁶ have all produced evidence which seems to reinforce the notion that the tower house in Ireland may correspond to the image for that of Scotland which has been promoted so convincingly by Tabraham and others.

This archaeological evidence contributes to a broadening of the image of the tower house in Ireland. It necessitates further consideration of the role of the

¹⁹ Indeed, an early Christian cross slab was reused as a lintel in the construction of the tower house. LYONS, W. 1991-1992 'Dysart Castle: George Berkeley's childhood home', *Berkeley Newsletter* 12, pp.11-14 at 11. MURTAGH, B. 1992 'Dysart, county Kilkenny' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations* 1991. Wordwell, Bray. pp.27-28; MURTAGH, B. 1994 'Archaeological Investigations at Dysart, Co. Kilkenny 1989-1994: An Interim Report', *Old Kilkenny Review* 46, pp. 78-94

pp.78-94

POLLOCK, D. 1999 *The Bawn Exposed: Recent Excavations at Barryscourt. The Barryscourt Lectures V.* Barryscourt Trust, in association with Cork County Council and Gandon Editions, Kinsale; POLLOCK, D. 2000 'Barryscourt castle, Carrigtwohill, county Cork' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1998.* Wordwell, Bray. p.15; POLLOCK, D. 2002 'Barryscourt castle, Carrigtwohill, county Cork' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 2000.* Wordwell, Bray. p.41. Pollock's findings would appear to have disrupted conventional thinking on the history of the site. See, for example, the following comment from a review of an earlier work on Barryscourt: 'As to the dating of its original construction, archaeologists now believe what some historians have long suspected, i.e. that Barryscourt was erected on a 'greenfield' site in, or shortly after, the middle of the 16th century.' MACCOTTER, P. 1998 'Review of The Barryscourt Lectures, Numbers 1 &2', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 103, pp.171-173 at 171, referring particularly to O'KEEFFE, T. 1997 *Barryscourt Castle and the Irish Tower-house. The Barryscourt Lectures I.* Barryscourt Trust, in association with Cork County Council and Gandon Editions, Kinsale.

²¹ COTTER, E. 2003 'Kilcoe, county Cork' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 2001*. Wordwell, Bray. p.44

²² O'CARROLL, F. 2003 'Bremore, county Dublin' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 2001*. Wordwell, Bray. pp.78-80

²³ FITZPATRICK, M. 2003 'Pallas, county Galway' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 2001*. Wordwell, Bray. pp.155-156

²⁴ HAYDEN, A. 2003 'Scurlockstown, county Meath' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 2001*. Wordwell, Bray. p.334

²⁵ HODKINSON, B. 2003 'Ballytarsna, county Tipperary' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations* 2001. Wordwell, Bray. p.377

²⁶ CAREY, A. 2003 'Kilkenny West, county Westmeath' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations* 2001. Wordwell, Bray. pp.395-396

tower house, its organisation, and its function. This broader image of the tower house is in fact supported by a series of descriptions of the Irish countryside written at a time when many tower houses were still in use, and when a few were actually being built.

Camden, with his *Britannia* of 1598, had set out to 'restore Britain to Antiquity and Antiquity to Britain.' However, it was the publication in 1695 of Gibson's revision and translation of the work which seems to have had the greater impact. The 1695 edition has been acknowledged as 'a crucial stimulus in awakening interest in British antiquities' and is considered to have been at the heart of the development of antiquarianism in the eighteenth century, while remaining 'a staple work of reference today.'²⁷ As its title suggests, much of *Britannia* was devoted to the identification and description of the traces of Roman activity in Britain. The implications of Ireland's exclusion from the Roman world for the formation of eighteenth century political attitudes is relevant to the history of relations between the two islands, but for the purposes of this study we are fortunate that *Britannia* did contain accounts of Ireland's landscape, monuments, and history. Among these accounts, the following seems of particular relevance:

In the Upper Tir-Oen stands Straban, a noted castle, inhabited since our times by Turlogh Leinigh of the family of the O-Neals; who after the death of Shan O-Neal (as I shall shew by and by) was elected by the people, and raised to the dignity of O-Neal; and some other castles of less note, which, like those in other parts of the Island, are no more than towers, with narrow loop-holes [Foraminibus] rather than windows; to which adjoins a hall, made of turf, and roofed over-head with thatch, and a large yard fenced quite round with a ditch and hedge to defend their cattle from thieves.²⁸

It appears clear that tower houses are being described, and the comment that the examples in the area under discussion are 'like those in other parts of the island' indicates an appreciation of the large numbers and wide distribution of the

²⁷ SWEET, R. 2004 Antiquaries. The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain. Hambledon & London, London & New York. pp.156, 159-160, xviii

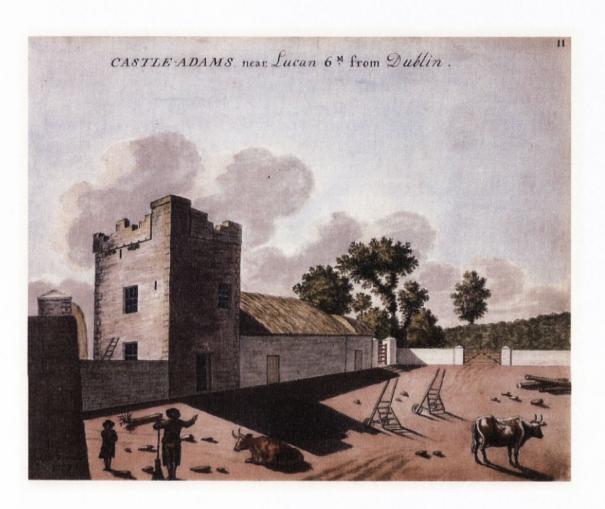
²⁸ CAMDEN, W. 1695 Camden's Britannia, newly translated into English: with large additions and improvements. (A facsimile of the 1695 edition published by Edmund Gibson). David and Charles Reprints, Newton Abbot (1971). p.1020

buildings in Ireland. The towers are considered typically to have been adjoined by a hall, and surrounded by an enclosed yard (compare with illustration overleaf). The traces of the latter are to be found around many tower houses, and the bawn (or cattle enclosure) is reckoned to have been a feature of at least a significant proportion of tower house sites. As is evident from this description, the bawn was not always of masonry, the material in which such enclosures most visibly survive; as well as ditched and hedged examples, some appear to have been in the form of a wooden palisade.²⁹

It is of particular value that Camden informs us not only of the existence of the halls adjoining the towers, but also that he indicates the material from which they were constructed. It is unsurprising that no obvious trace of a turf-walled, thatch-roofed building should survive several centuries of abandonment. Even archaeological excavation would not necessarily reveal clear evidence of the one-time existence of such structures. This is especially the case given the likelihood that the stone tower would have been used and re-used, often for agricultural purposes such as the accommodation of livestock (which would have involved disturbance of the upper layers of earth), during the period since destruction of the hall and of any other associated buildings of similar character.

Richard Stanihurst's description of Ireland in about 1600 is another which includes reference to buildings which may be interpreted as tower houses. His account is also noteworthy for its explicit indication that members of the Gaelic Irish community were in possession of castles. He does not specify who was responsible for the original construction of these castles, but he does describe them and the structures around them:

²⁹ Donnelly reports that he found only fourteen bawns at 174 tower house sites in county Limerick, but it would appear that this figure takes account only of masonry walling, and that it disregards evidence for enclosure which may survive in earthwork or other form. The answers to his questions as to whether all tower houses were surrounded by stone-built bawns, and whether other structures could have performed the role of the bawn would appear to be, respectively, no and yes. DONNELLY, C.J. 2004 'Passage or barrier? Communication between bawn and tower house in late medieval Ireland – the evidence from county Limerick', *Château Gaillard* XXI (Maynooth 2002). pp.57-64. On the nature of tower house bawns, see BARRY 1988, 186; BARRY, T.B. 2004 'Tower Houses and Terror: the Archaeology of Late Medieval Munster' in CLARKE, H.B., PRUNTY, J., & HENNESSY, M. (ed) *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms*. Geography Publications, Dublin. pp.119-128 at 119



Gabriel Beranger's illustration of Castle Adams, near Lucan, county Dublin

(after HARBISON, P. (ed) 1998 Gabriel Beranger. Drawings of the Principal Antique Buildings of Ireland. National Library MS 1958 TX. Four Courts Press, Dublin, in association with the National Library of Ireland)

It must be recorded that among the Irish there are princes who hold sway over many....

With the exception of O'Neill, the ruler of Ulster, who is so inveterately hostile to English authority that he maintains several permanent camps in the fields, these princes possess castles which are strongly constructed and fortified with masses of stone. Adjoining them are reasonably big and spacious palaces made from white clay and mud. They are not roofed with quarried slabs or slates but with thatch. In the palace they hold their banquets but they prefer to sleep in the castle rather than the palace because their enemies can easily apply torches to the roofs which catch fire rapidly if there is but the slightest breeze. Moreover they keep armed guards to prevent violence being done to them while they sleep. To avoid such an occurrence they post sentries atop the castle, as in a watchtower, who frequently call out and remain vigilant throughout the night. They shout repeatedly as a warning to the head of the household against nocturnal thieves and vagrants lest he sleep so soundly that he be unprepared to repel his enemies bravely from his hearth. The guards awaken him whenever they suspect the arrival of foes and if necessary the prince must be ready to fight it out, sword in hand, in close combat.

The princes also have courtyards surrounded by great ramparts and ditches, and hedged around with thorn-bushes and shrubbery. They thrust their cattle into these confined and protected compounds when the need arises to guard them from the attacks and stratagems of robbers.³⁰

As with Camden's account, this extract reports the presence not only of stone buildings, but also of structures adjoining them which were made from less durable materials. Stanihurst also provides information as to the manner in which the different buildings of the complex were used. It may be of significance that the stone castles served as watch towers, with sentries posted to the top of the building, a practice which seems to imply that the stone castles were tall – or at least relatively tall in comparison to the buildings around them.

The description of the buildings adjoining the castles as 'reasonably big and spacious palaces' conveys the notion that these were structures of size and

³⁰ LENNON, C. 1981 Richard Stanihurst the Dubliner 1547-1618. A biography with a Stanihurst text "On Ireland's Past." Irish Academic Press, Dublin. pp.146-147

consequence, important in the context of the site as a whole. Might one go so far as to suggest, in relation to these first two accounts, that they are in fact concentrated on description of the principal edifices to be found at such sites, and that further buildings, smaller and of lower status, may have been overlooked, disregarded, or considered by the authors to have been of insufficient interest for inclusion?

Another description from the period of tower house use comes from a German traveller in Ireland, Ludolf von Münchhausen, who visited Ireland in 1591 and, having 'spent the night in the house of an Irish nobleman or squire', reported that the houses of such noblemen

are built usually in the form of a tower surrounded by a wall. Yet they do not live in those but keep them as a fortress. Nearby they keep a house, badly built unlike our farm-houses, where they light a fire in the middle. Right on top is seated the man of the house with his wife, around them the servants according to their rank. After dinner, everyone looks for a bale of straw to sleep on. Every nobleman is obliged to host and supply with food and drink everybody; otherwise they will burn his dwelling and all he possesses in return. In Ireland everybody is considered a nobleman if he has enough cattle and land to live on, money they don't possess at all.³¹

A very similar impression is conveyed in this third account to those in the first two, and again the author concentrates his attention on the tower and the 'badly built' house nearby. Here it would appear that in von Münchhausen's experience most - if not all – tower houses had a masonry bawn wall.³² We also gain insights into the organisation of the house adjoining the tower house, such as that in some cases, at least, the hearth was in the middle of the main (perhaps the only?) room. Von Münchhausen's account seems further to suggest that the hierarchical structure of contemporary society was central to the determination of

³¹ Ó RIAIN-RAEDEL, D. 1998 'A German visitor to Monaincha in 1591', *Tipperary Historical Journal* [unnumbered], pp.223-233 at 230. See also the comments of O'Keeffe: O'KEEFFE 2000, 46.

³² This may help to determine which buildings he actually saw, or may simply reflect the impression that his informant wished to create. For discussion of the proportion of tower houses which would actually have had a masonry bawn wall, as well as other issues in the tower house – bawn relationship, see DONNELLY 2004.

the disposition of people around the room of the house. He does remark, however, that 'the man of the house ...[and]... his wife' sat down with the servants, who seem to have been allocated places 'according to their rank.'

Luke Gernon's *Discourse of Ireland* is an early seventeenth century description of the country and its people, and it, too, includes occasional information regarding the appearance of buildings, and regarding their use:

In this peregrination you have viewed the country in passing, the villages are distant each from other about two miles. In every village is a castle, and a church, but both in ruyne. The baser cottages are built of underwood, called wattle, and covered some wth thatch and some wth green sedge, of a round forme and wth out chimneys, and to my imaginacon resemble so many hives of bees, about a country farme. In the end of harvest the villages seem as bigg agayne as in the spring, theyre corne being brought into theyr haggards, and layed up in round cockes, in forme of theyr houses. And by the way, there is no meate so daynty as a haggard pigg, a pigg that hath been fedd at the reeke, take him at a quarter old, and use him like a rosting pigg; because his biggness should not be offensive, they serve him up by quarters. Here I would conclude wth our buildings, but when I look about I cannot but bewayle the desolation wch cyvill rebellion hath procured. It lookes like the later end of a feast. Here lyeth an old ruyned castle like the remaynder of a venyson pasty, there a broken forte like a minced py half subjected, and in another place an old abbey wth some turrets standing like the carcase of a goose broken up....

We are come to the castle already. The castles are built very strong, and with narrow stayres, for security. The hall is the uppermost room, lett us go up, you shall not come downe agayne till tomorrow.... The fyre is prepared in the middle of the hall, where you may sollace yorselfe till supper time.... Supper being ended, it is at your liberty to sitt up, or to depart to yor lodgeing, you shall have company in both kind. When you have come to yor chamber, do not expect canopy and curtaynes. It is very well if your bedd content you, and if the company be greate, you may happen to be bodkin in the middle.³³

³³ GERNON, L. 1620 'A Discourse of Ireland, anno 1620.' Stowe MSS. Vol.28 folio 5 (British Museum), printed in LITTON FALKINER, C. 1904 *Illustrations of Irish History and*

This extract may be distinguished from the other three in that Gernon observes the presence of castles as components of a general settlement structure, rather than merely registering their appearance in the countryside. It is perhaps the most persuasive of the four on the question of the physical context in which tower houses should be understood. Whereas Camden, Stanihurst, and von Münchhausen all wrote of structures adjacent to towers, or at least nearby, Gernon related the towers to other elements of the medieval built environment, as well as providing description of their appearance and use, and a notion as to their density of distribution. He suggested that the castle and the church which were to be found in every village were 'both in ruyne', but this was clearly not universally the case as he appears to have had experience of visiting such castles, and implies that similar opportunities remained at the time when he was writing.

According to Gernon the entertaining was done in the hall, which was 'the uppermost room' in the castle, to which access was gained via a 'narrow stairs.' This contrasts with the other three accounts, and it should be noted that Gernon made no reference to a hall ancillary to the stone castle, a point which seems more probably to illustrate a certain variety of design and use between sites and proprietors than an oversight or omission on the part of the reporter.

Gernon's description of the 'baser cottages' in the typical village, and his comparisons of them with hives of bees and haycocks, seem to convey an impression of their appearance in a particularly visual manner. The accuracy of his imagery seems to be confirmed, or at least supported, by contemporary graphic portrayals of such structures. These are to be found, for example, in Richard Bartlett's cartographical decorations of about 1600, and in an illustration of Carrickfergus in about 1560 which also, incidentally, shows the popularity of tower house-type buildings in that town at that date (see illustration overleaf).³⁴

The evidence from archaeological excavation, and that from contemporary accounts and illustrations of buildings and their use, affect the developing notions of how tower houses functioned, and of the various roles they filled in later

Topography, mainly of the seventeenth century. Longmans, Green, & Co., London. pp.345-362 at 355-356, 360-361

³⁴ Relevant sections of Bartlett's illustrations are reproduced in O'CONOR 1998, Plates 28, 31, 33; O'SULLIVAN 1998, Plates 56, 57, 58, 59; the 'View of Carrickfergus, *c.*1560' (BL Cotton



View of Carrickfergus, c.1560 (BL Cotton Augustus I ii 42)

(after MCNEILL, T.E. 1981 Carrickfergus Castle. Northern Ireland Archaeological Monographs: No.1. HMSO, Belfast.)

medieval and early modern life. These developments have significant implications for the understanding of tower houses generally, and must therefore affect the way in which other forms of source material, such as the documentary record, is approached. Given that tower houses were being built in various parts of the country, for a variety of different – if often similar or overlapping – reasons, and in a wide selection of circumstances, it is to be expected that the terms used in recording what are now described as tower houses would have varied.

For example, it is difficult to state with any certainty what exactly would have been the result of the late fourteenth century construction activities of Sir Thomas Walsch. Walsch was bound by a term of his lease in 1372 'to build and maintain a stone house ... within four years, and to surrender it in good condition at the end of the term, under a penalty of double the rent.' It is clear that the building would have been of stone, and that it would have afforded residential accommodation, but greater precision seems elusive.

Similarly, in February 1336 it was provided that Robert son of Henry Cook should face a penalty if he did 'not build and inhabit on the said lands for five years beginning from Easter in the tenth year of Edward III.' In this case the penalty was to be more severe – indeed, he was to have lost his right to the land—if he did 'not build a stone house within the said lands.'³⁶

The term 'house' is of course a broad one, and the possibility that a 'house' – and particularly a 'stone house' - might in fact have taken the form of a 'tower house' seems to be demonstrated by an indenture made 'between Archbishop Thomas [Cranley] and Thomas Locum' regarding a church property in 'Tany by Dondrom' on April 14th, 1417. This indenture required that 'within the first four years Locumbe will build at his own cost a sufficient house of stone, ditched and embattled, 18 feet by 26 feet within the walls, and 40 feet high below the battlement (*tabellamentum*). At the end of the term [of 50 years] he will surrender the whole "stiffe and stanche", and the haggard-place and gardens sufficiently enclosed.' Just as with the earlier deeds, there is a specific clause

Augustus I ii 42) is reproduced as the frontispiece of MCNEILL, T.E. 1981 *Carrickfergus Castle. Northern Ireland Archaeological Monographs: No.1.* HMSO, Belfast.

³⁵ 23rd Report of the Deputy Keeper of Public Records in Ireland. 1891. HMSO, Dublin. p.120, no.717

³⁶ CURTIS, E. (ed) 1932 *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, Volume I, 1172-1350 AD.* The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.285, no.679. Edward III reigned from January 1327 until his death in June 1377.

penalising the lessee if the building is not carried out within the prescribed period. In this case, 'the archbishop may re-enter if the house be not built within four years.'³⁷

The indenture between the Archbishop and Locum (or Locumbe) prescribed the dimensions for the envisaged building, but in the absence of such precise specifications it is obviously even more difficult to identify the exact nature of the intended structure.³⁸ Even in the rare instances in which detail is provided it is frequently the case that only one phase of the project is discussed. In the above example we learn that Locum undertook to build according to the provisions of his lease, but we do not know whether he actually carried the project through to completion, modified its terms at a later stage, or defaulted altogether.

The indenture does not provide conclusive evidence for the construction of a particular building, but it certainly constitutes strong support for some more general statements. Firstly, together with the deeds of 1336 and 1372 quoted above, it provides substantiation for the assertion that construction activity in Ireland was not altogether stagnant in the fourteenth century and early fifteenth century. Each of the three documents includes an undertaking, made against significant penalty clauses, to build on a reasonably substantial scale in stone. The very fact that the transactions were recorded at all would appear to carry implications regarding the scale of the projects which were undertaken in the contracts.

The document of 1417 also provides further evidence to support the notion that the Statutes of 1428 and 1430 were less the instigating element in the history of tower house construction than measures made in recognition of the proven value and success of a particular architectural form. The well-known 1430 Statute provided that 'every liege-man of our lord the king of the said counties³⁹ who chooses to build a castle or a tower sufficiently embattled and [fortified], within ten years next ensuing, to wit, twenty feet in length, sixteen feet in breadth, and forty feet in height, or more, that the commons of the said [counties] wherein such

³⁷ MCNEILL, C. (ed) 1950 Calendar of Archbishop Alen's Register c.1172-1534. RSAI, Dublin. pp 237-238, po 99(258)

pp.237-238, no.99(258)

38 '18 feet by 26 feet within the walls, and 40 feet high below the battlement.' Compare with the specifications in the Statutes of 1428 and 1430: 'in length 20 feet, in breadth 16 feet, in height 40 feet' (1428); 'twenty feet in length, sixteen feet in breadth, and forty feet in height, or more' (1430)

³⁹ Dublin, Meath, Kildare, and Louth, counties of the Pale.

castle or tower shall be built, pay to the said person who desires so to build the said castle or tower ten pounds by way of subsidy, in aid of the building.'40

The party dictating the required dimensions in the 1417 indenture was not the Crown, but the nature and scale of the buildings envisaged, as well as the fact that the authorities in each case (the Archbishop in 1417, the government in 1428 and 1430) were offering an incentive for the construction of a particular size and type of building, together demonstrate unambiguously that the Statutes of 1428 and 1430 amounted to legislation for a system which was already established in both the administrative and the practical, architectural spheres. The 1430 Statute was intended to encourage the building of more tower houses in the Pale in the fifteenth century; it should not be interpreted as the key moment in the development of the form.

Finally, the 1417 indenture demonstrates how important the fortification of buildings was in the early fifteenth century. The battlement is referred to as though it was a standard feature of the stone buildings of the day. The extent to which this may have been the case, and the period during which such an assertion might be valid, are questions without ready answers.

The terminology used with reference to construction projects in the early fourteenth century and subsequently seems frequently to have involved words with connotations of fortification. It should be acknowledged that there is a relative paucity of records (and – perhaps consequently – of references to building) concerning fourteenth century Ireland. However, mention is made in the early fourteenth century of the construction of 'fortalices'. For example, in January 1305, 'David de Caunton knight … was granted … a subsidy to build fortalice in his manor of Moylagh, to resist the malice of the Irish of that march.' 'Fortalice' has been translated variously as 'small fortified site', 'fortress', and even directly interpreted as 'tower house'. The exact meaning of the term

 ⁴⁰ BERRY, H.F. (ed) 1910 Statute Rolls of the Parliament of Ireland, reign of King Henry the Sixth (being Vol.II of the Irish Record Office Series of Early Statutes). HMSO, Dublin. p.33
 ⁴¹ MILLS 1914, 13.

⁴² MCNEILL 1997, 203; Calendar of the Close Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office. Prepared under the superintendence of the Deputy Keeper of the Records. Edward I. Volume IV. AD 1296-1302. HMSO, London. (1906) pp.165 (May 28, 1298), 519 (Feb 23, 1302); BARRY 1988,186; CAIRNS 1984; CAIRNS 1987, 9.

'fortalice' may appear elusive, but it seems undeniably to involve an element of fortification of some kind.⁴³

Thomas has shown that the fourteenth century was a period when many towns in Ireland were fortified by the construction of a wall.⁴⁴ A royal writ dated 1306 provides information as to the way in which the fortification of Drogheda was organised and financed: 'for a fine of 100s. which the burgesses of Drogheda paid to the Exchequer, the King granted that they may receive, to the end of 5 years, certain customs of things brought into the town to be sold; to build a tower within the wall of the town for its defence, and to enclose the town.'⁴⁵

It is interesting to note, in the context of the question of the role of urban tower houses, that this document envisages the construction of a tower 'within the wall of the town for its defence.' Assuming that this means that a tower was to be built inside the area enclosed by the (proposed) wall, rather than along the line of the wall, there is an implication that urban towers played a significant role in the defence of their towns, even in the situation where the town was itself walled.

Other building projects were being carried out in Drogheda at this time. The civic authorities in the town were obviously keen to improve their facilities, both commercial and defensive, and they set up a project which included the installation of a quay on the river Boyne. The quay was to be built together with 'a stone tower next said quay ... for the security of the town and the men of the adjoining parts.' The defensive considerations appear in fact to have carried particular weight in the granting of approval for the project, as it was specifically stated that 'in time of war or disturbance, the town would be much protected by the tower and quay.'46

In 1371 a grant was made to James, Earl of Ormond, by the Crown, so that he might 'build anew and enclose a house of Brothers of Jerusalem of the order of Holy Trinity.'⁴⁷ It is possible that the requirement that he 'enclose' the house may have been related to the architectural or liturgical preferences of the order concerned, but it seems to carry connotations which relate more strongly to

⁴³ See also CATHCART KING 1983, Volume 2, 574; COULSON, C.L.H. 2003 Castles in Medieval Society. Fortresses in England, France, and Ireland in the Central Middle Ages. Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.2, 59-60

⁴⁴ THOMAS 1992.

⁴⁵ MILLS 1914, 335.

⁴⁶ MILLS 1914, 188 (January 27, 1306).

⁴⁷ CURTIS 1934, 344, no.435.

security considerations. Indeed, in 1405 one Janyn Crispyn received a grant towards the fortifying of Ard clone, one of the sites owned by the Earl which had been mooted as a possible location for the religious house.⁴⁸

It is not surprising that details of the proposed or required appearance of structures mentioned in the records are rarely presented. Leeway was presumably left to those responsible for the construction, the patron (who might perhaps have received financial assistance towards the project, leading to the creation of the documentary entry upon which the historian is reliant) and the chief craftsmen, to erect whatever they felt to be appropriate in the particular circumstances. In a period when fortification was the norm for buildings of a certain role, size, or quality, it need not have been set out explicitly in the commission or grant that crenellations, small window-slits, and thick, high walls were anticipated or required. The mention of a battlement in one document should not exclude the possibility of the presence of such a feature (and others of similar character and purpose) on buildings to which reference is made elsewhere without elaboration of defensive or other detail.

There need not, of course, have been any documentary record of the construction of a building. The majority of surviving references to building works in Ireland in the fourteenth century are from government records, with a few preserved in the collections of deeds and other documents accumulated by the more powerful families of the country, and some more in the various *Annals*. It is not clear whether a written agreement was a legal requirement in fourteenth century building contracts in Ireland, or whether the use of such an agreement was the norm. Even if contracts and specifications were written down in the majority of cases, they do not seem to have survived, and it is only exceptionally that we have evidence to suggest that they ever existed.⁴⁹

The record for England is far more extensive, and at most stages of the medieval period royal as well as regional and local record-keeping was more highly developed there than in Ireland. The fire at the Public Record Office in the

⁴⁸ CURTIS 1934, 280, no.388.

⁴⁹ General appreciation of the role of law appears to have been growing in fourteenth century England. As Musson recently observed, 'the acquisition and development of legal consciousness among those who were not themselves lawyers or judges is a significant feature of the political history of the period 1215-1381.' MUSSON, A. 2001 *Medieval law in context. The growth of legal consciousness from Magna Carta to the Peasants' Revolt.* Manchester University Press, Manchester & New York. p.84

Four Courts in 1922 is also of obvious relevance in relation to the extent of the surviving written record for Ireland.⁵⁰ The regional documentary resource for England is thus much more substantial, but the extent and depth of royal reporting seems also to have been much greater. As an example, the following entry from 1364 demonstrates the significance for historians of the royal forests, large areas of England which were under the direct control of the Crown, and for which there are, consequently, detailed royal administrative records. On June 13th 1364 the sheriff of York was ordered 'to survey the chapel, bridge and gate of the fortalice of Hayura in the forest of Knaresburgh, and ... to cause all defects therein to be repaired ... as the king has learned that such defects are many.⁵¹

Of course the entry also provides an insight into the type of structure which might, in the English context, have been referred to as a fortalice. Here it emerges that the fortalice might in fact have been a fairly substantial building, and even that the word may have been used with reference to a complex of buildings. In this instance, the fortalice appears to incorporate a 'chapel, bridge and gate' which required independent examination and assessment of their respective conditions. The action which may have been taken on foot of the survey in order to remedy the 'defects' at the fortalice of Hayura is not specified. However, every building requires maintenance, and it is virtually inevitable that work would have been necessary on an ongoing basis at most castles in the fourteenth century.

To return to Ireland, an account of the manor of Leixlip from 1304 provides information not only about the range of activities carried out at fortified settlements, but also about the building materials used and about their production. Robert Wytlof was allowed money for the construction of a kitchen in the castle of Leixlip, but also for work relating to mills in the area of the manor. Furthermore, it seems that the works on the castle necessitated the construction of a lime kiln. Wytlof was obviously building in stone, and he was provided with funds not only 'to construct a kiln to burn lime,' but also for 'breaking stone and cutting wood,' activities which were of course essential to the operation of such a

⁵⁰ For a brief assessment of the significance of the 1922 fire, and further general comments regarding source materials, see ST JOHN BROOKS, E. 1958 'The sources for Medieval Anglo-Irish History' in WILLIAMS, T.D. (ed) *Historical Studies: I. Papers read before the Second Irish Conference of Historians.* Bowes and Bowes, London. pp.86-92, especially at 86. See also WOOD, H. 1930 'The public records of Ireland before and after 1922', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4th Series, Volume XIII, pp.17-49

kiln. Furthermore, Wytlof was required to burn lime not only for the local works but also for works at Dublin castle.⁵²

Building materials were obviously a valuable resource whenever construction work was taking place, and the availability of wood and limestone in close proximity would certainly have been important to anyone contemplating masonry construction. The actual building stone had also to be brought to the proposed site, of course. Stone, being bulky and heavy, would normally have been sought from the nearest quarry to the construction site, but some transport would generally have been unavoidable. The most direct route would obviously have been desirable, and it was in relation to a right of way connected with the provision of building stone that a dispute arose in 1308. When Henry Yerward was found to be trespassing on the property to Robert de Clahull the said 'Robert attacked Henry and wounded him in the arm with a certain axe, by which wound he is maimed.' Henry took an action against Robert, apparently for the assault, but it seems likely that Robert would have defended himself on the basis that he had found Henry 'walking in his meadow by a certain way which Robert had granted to John de Bonevill for carrying stones for building a fortress.'53 Robert clearly guarded access to his lands jealously, but the fortress-builder, John de Bonevill, had managed to persuade him to grant at least a temporary right of way across the property in order to facilitate the carriage of cumbersome construction materials.

The fact that Robert de Clahull had granted a right of way to John de Bonevill suggests that the passage of the fortress-builder across Robert's land would have been less risky than that of Henry Yerward. John may only have intended to carry stones across the route, but the transportation of lime – as seems to have been contemplated between Leixlip and Dublin in 1304 – can only have been a hazardous business, especially in the damp Irish climate (even without considering the violent tendencies of the local people). However, the problems associated with the transport of raw materials for lime burning, as well as the

⁵¹ Calendar of the Close Rolls, preserved in the Public Record Office. Edward III, volume XII, AD 1364-1368. HMSO. (1910) p.15

⁵² 38th Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records and Keeper of the State Papers in Ireland. HMSO, Dublin. (1906) p.86 – 23 Pipe Roll, a.r. xxxii Edward I

⁵³ WOOD, H., LANGMAN, A.E., & GRIFFITH, M.C. (ed) [undated] *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls or Proceedings in the Court of the Justiciar of Ireland. I to VII Years of Edward II.* The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.41 (19 February 1308)

impracticality of the operation of a lime kiln in Dublin city itself, were obviously considered even less convenient.

Lime was not the only building material to merit specific treatment in the records. The quarrying of limestone (or, indeed, of other types of stone) for building must have been central to any project in which it was envisaged that construction should be in stone. Slate was also of considerable importance. In August 1348 'the prior and convent of St Mary's at Kells in Ossory' was given leave by Matthew, son of Richard fitzOliver, 'to dig for, quarry and take away any "sclatstonis" [slate-stones] whenever necessary for the use of their house in all slate-quarries belonging to him in Melagh and Carrigmokelagh, for a term of forty-nine years, beginning from the date of this grant.'54 The priory had been burned in 1252 and again, by William de Bermingham and the Fitzgeralds, in The grant by fitzOliver may have been a gesture (a belated gesture, perhaps) towards the reconstruction of the house following the fire of 1327, but it may also have been made in recognition of the business which the Augustinians had brought to him and his quarries while rebuilding and maintaining their house during the twenty years between the date of the fire and the date of the grant. The priory was reasonably wealthy at the time of its dissolution in 1540, so it may have been in a position to carry out further building in the fourteenth, fifteenth, and early sixteenth centuries. However, closer investigation of its standing remains might prove fruitful in relation to the assessment of the significance of the 1327 fire and any consequent reconstruction for the ultimate appearance of the priory.55

Leask reported that 'the surviving buildings [of the priory are] very ruinous,' but also that they 'are of various and, in parts, indeterminable but certainly later [than the late twelfth century] date.' His assessment of the state of the buildings (in the 1950s) is hardly encouraging, but his observation that 'the towers, one attached to the south wall of the choir, another beside the inner gateway and four more to the walls of the large outer court, are domestic in purpose and of the tower-house type characteristic of the fifteenth century' is certainly of relevance to this study.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ CURTIS 1932, 340, no.805.

⁵⁵ GWYNN & HADCOCK 1970, 181-182.

⁵⁶ LEASK 1958, 99.

The rebuilding of Kells priory was not the only project which would have generated demand for building materials in the Irish midlands in the mid fourteenth century. According to Clyn, at the end of 1347 O'Kennedy and his allies burned the town of Nenagh as well as the surrounding area, including all the castles of Ormond, although not that of Nenagh itself. O'Kennedy was captured and hanged in spring 1348, and Ormond authority was being reasserted in July and August by Fulk de la Frene, seneschal of Ormond's lands. Among the elements of this reassertion was the reconstruction of the walls which had been broken down by the Irish.⁵⁷

It is not clear to what extent the Ormond rebuilding project may have been affected by the outbreak of the Black Death. The plague reached Ireland in the autumn of 1348 and Clyn, who was based at Kilkenny, not far from Kells, appears to have written his well-known 'final entry' on 6th March 1349.⁵⁸ Otway-Ruthven, in seeking examples of 'impoverishment caused by the plague,' reported the statement of the dean and chapter of the cathedral at Cashel in 1351 that their lands and rents had been 'all but totally destroyed by the king's Irish enemies and by the mortality of their tenants in the last plague.' She also chose to reproduce the claims made in 1354 by the tenants of the king's demesne manors in county Dublin who said that they were 'entirely impoverished by the late pestilence and the excessive prises of the king's ministers.'⁵⁹ At Cashel in 1351, therefore, the first item blamed for the 'destruction' of the wealth of the cathedral was not the plague but rather the activities of the king's Irish enemies; at Dublin in 1354 the financial difficulties faced by the tenants of the king's demesne manors were ascribed to the tax system, at least as much as to the Black Death.

It is clear that the general impact of the Black Death in Ireland, as in Europe generally, was dramatic. Almost every recent account of the plague, whether focused on Ireland, Britain, or elsewhere, refers to the passage from Clyn's *Annals* mentioned above.⁶⁰ The fact that the plague affected Ireland is

⁵⁷ BUTLER, R. (ed) 1849 *The Annals of Ireland. By Friar John Clyn and Thady Dowling.* Irish Archaeological Society, Dublin. pp.34-35. See also discussion of the incident in OTWAY-RUTHVEN 1968, 266-267.

⁵⁸ BUTLER 1849, 37.

⁵⁹ OTWAY-RUTHVEN 1968, 268, citing *CCR* 1349-1354, p.376; *CPR* 1354-1358, p.91; *PRO Dublin, Mem Rolls*, vol.26, pp.17-19.

⁶⁰ BUTLER 1849. Reference is made to the passage in, for example, ZIEGLER 1969 (1982), 202; PLATT 1996, 99; and Kelly points out that it is 'the only first-hand account we have of the plague in Ireland.' KELLY 2001, 12-13, and see also 16, 17, 34, 35.

therefore familiar to many. What is perhaps less widely appreciated is that there are very few other accounts of the impact of the Black Death on the country. ⁶¹

Kelly's assessment of the Black Death in Ireland, published in 2001, seems to distil much from this rather restricted body of material. Hers is the only large-scale work dealing specifically with the Black Death in Ireland, and it includes but little mention of the effects of the epidemic on architecture and the building industry. ⁶²

It has already been stated that documentary references to building activity in fourteenth century Ireland, like documentary references to the Black Death in Ireland (and indeed documents generally), are relatively scarce. However, they are far from non-existent. Projects of the scale of Roscommon Castle, for example, carried out in the economic and political boom time for the 'Anglo-Irish colony' of the late thirteenth century may not have been possible for much of the fourteenth century. The prosperity of the late thirteenth century provided the opportunity for the undertaking of prestigious projects, but it appears that other structures, perhaps of lower profile, may actually have been neglected. In the first decade of the fourteenth century there was consequently demand for remedial work at a series of fortified sites.

In May 1308, for example, 'James the King's gaoler in his castle of Strothir, [was] complaining that the prison there [was] falling to pieces, unroofed and not well shut, so that no prisoners [could] be kept there without the possibility of their escape.' James was as a result to receive 'a writ from the Chancery to the sheriff of Connacht to repair the prison.' About a month later a similar case was made by John de Stratton in respect of 'Newcastle McYnegan', of which he was constable. He reported that 'the house and walls of the castle in divers places are split asunder and ... are greatly in need of being improved and repaired.' 63

These two instances relate merely to repairs and reconstruction at existing buildings, albeit rather substantial repairs and reconstruction. However, although the economic and political conditions may have deteriorated in the fourteenth century from their vigorous and positive late thirteenth century peak, evidence

⁶¹ In fact Gwynn drew attention to this situation some seventy years ago: GWYNN, A. 1935

^{&#}x27;The Black Death in Ireland', Studies 24, pp.25-42 at 25

⁶² KELLY 2001, 69-71.

⁶³ WOOD, LANGMAN, & GRIFFITH [undated], 77, 85.

presented in the foregoing pages suggests that more extensive building projects were indeed undertaken in fourteenth century Ireland.⁶⁴

The vast majority of dates - in the relatively few cases where dating is attempted - proposed for castles and tower houses by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI), for example, would appear to imply otherwise. However, in most instances in which a date is suggested by the ASI it is derived from a documentary reference. The depth of investigation permitted by definition of the 'survey' brief means that archaeologically-based dates are rarely available for the structures described. Where a date is proposed by the ASI it is almost always a terminus ante quem: a date before which the castle in question must have been built. The date is usually the earliest mention of a castle at the relevant site to have been noted by the ASI. The problems concomitant with the connection of documentary references and named castles and structures surviving in locations bearing the corresponding placename in the landscape of today are significant.⁶⁵ Essentially one must observe a very considerable degree of caution when linking documentary and field evidence on the basis of a common placename, particularly in respect of the suggestion that the standing remains (rather than their predecessors, or perhaps merely the site) in the modern landscape correspond to the structure to which reference is made in the document.

The Archaeological Survey of Ireland would appear to have been appropriately cautious in this regard, and it rarely refers to the construction of a particular castle. The documents cited by the ASI are generally merely the earliest mentions of the castle or site in the written record, and thus are of limited value in the assessment of the actual construction date of the buildings.

The search in historical sources for a construction date will in many instances in fact be a somewhat misleading pursuit. For example, at a site which has been recognised as strategically significant for hundreds of years, the approaches adopted over that period by people who wished to try to enhance its natural strengths are themselves likely to have developed, and the form and

⁶⁴ Further references to building activity in the fourteenth century are to be found in GRAVES, J. (ed) 1877 A Roll of the Proceedings of the King's Council in Ireland, for a portion of the sixteenth year of the reign of Richard the Second, AD 1392-93. HMSO, London. e.g. pp.4-5, 8-9, 13-14, 17-18, 24-25 (in which the construction of 'a tower and fortification' at Jordainstown are discussed), and 234-235 (the subjects of which are the completion of a tower at Bennettsbridgeand the further fortification of the bridge itself).

appearance of the resulting structures will consequently have changed with time. However, the basic role and function of the site will probably have remained reasonably constant, and it may even have been the subject of documentary references using similar terms and dealing with similar contexts. In such a situation, unless there were a written indication detailing a specific development in the architecture or organisation of the site, the historical material would, on its own, be of limited value for the purposes of the analysis of the standing remains. It would only be through the corroboration of historical, art historical, architectural, and ultimately archaeological sources of evidence that the construction history of the site might emerge and dates might be assigned to different phases of the development of the building.

A reference from *The Annals of Inisfallen* provides a useful example of the need for corroboration between sources, be the of the same type or different in nature. In 1326 there was 'a great hosting by fitzThomas (*i.e.* Maurice FitzGerald) and by Donnchad MacCarthaig ... [and that] Domnall Cairprech and ... the Uí Chairpri in general [were] to build the castle of (Dún?) Meic Odmainn. The castle was built by them, and the Uí Chairpri joined them and they gave hostages to him [fitzThomas?], and fitzThomas departed with his hosts.'66 Considered in isolation, this entry would appear to imply that a group of people came together in 1326 and built the castle of Dún Meic Odmainn.

However, from the same annalistic source it emerges that in 1310 'the castle of Dún Meic Odmainn was broken down by Domnall Cairprech MacCarthaig.' The annalist actually reports that as early as 1261 the castle had been 'burned by the Desmumu', providing a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of some kind of castle on the site.⁶⁷ The editor of *The Annals of Inisfallen* considered Dún Meic Odmainn to have been 'perhaps in W. Cork', presumably on the basis of the identity of the personnel involved in its successive appearances in the record.⁶⁸ In the absence of clear information as to the whereabouts of the site, archaeological survey or excavation would obviously be difficult, and the tracing of its occupation and building history likewise.

⁶⁶ MACAIRT, S. (ed and trans) 1951 The Annals of Inisfallen. (MS Rawlinson B.503) Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. p.435

⁶⁷ MACAIRT 1951, 403 (1310), 363 (1261).

⁶⁸ MACAIRT 1951, 435.

The ASI is tentative in its mention of Dún Meic Odmainn, being dependent on the work of Ó Murchadha for its information regarding the castle. Ó Murchadha 'locates the castle of Dun Mic Oghmainn in the vicinity of Myross church, probably on [the] seaward side.' However, the ASI found 'no overground remains' and cites Ó Murchadha's suggestion that the castle may 'have crumbled over the cliff long since.' On the basis of the ASI information, derived from the work of Ó Murchadha, an idea as to the possible location of the site has emerged. If the suggestion by Ó Murchadha, which the ASI seems to approve, is to be accepted then further archaeological investigation at the site would be rather complicated. It is clear, however, that the site was of significance for some reason as it was repeatedly built on, attacked, and burned. The latest historical reference to the castle, as cited above, is from the 1320s, but it is not clear what may have taken place at the site since then.

The broad range of meanings attributable to the word 'castle', and the further diversity of implication which may be carried by the term used in the original language of the document, mean that it is not even clear what sort of structures were built at Dún Meic Odmainn on the occasions when building is mentioned or must have taken place. The 'dún' element of the place-name itself conveys an implication of fortification or defence, so the notion that a castle should have been built on the site may mean that existing defensive features were being improved or extended.

The concise wording of the references means that it is not clear what form of castle was being recorded, and it is not even clear what materials were used. However, certain items of information may be extracted. The entry implies that construction work was carried out on at least one occasion in the fourteenth century at Dún Meic Odmainn; that the work involved the construction, reconstruction, enhancement, or alteration of a fortified structure or group of structures; and that the work was of sufficient scale – or the site was of sufficient

⁶⁹ POWER 1992, 320 (no.3053), citing Ó MURCHADHA, D. 1988 'The castle of Dún Mic Oghmainn and the overlordship of Carbery', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* **93**, pp.73-82

⁷⁰ The evidence gathered by the ASI, and the suggestion of its disappearance, are supported by the fact that the castle seems not to have merited the attention of Carroll in his account of the castles of the area. CARROLL, M.J. 2001 *The castles and fortified houses of West Cork.* Bantry Studio Publications, Bantry.

importance, at least to the annalist – for it to be recorded in a set of annals which otherwise pays little attention to building activity.

The various annals tend to be associated with the history of the Gaelic Irish people, and they seem to record building activity only occasionally. However, just as it is important to recognise that the annals include mention of the doings of the broader community, so it should certainly not be assumed – as may be implied from the very title of McNeill's recent publication – that the construction of stone castles of the type which is normally associated with the Norman tradition was actually exclusive to that section of the population in Ireland.⁷¹ If it were possible to draw clear lines of separation between the two communities, it would be apparent that the construction of castles and of other buildings was being carried out by the Gaelic Irish as well as by the Anglo-Norman in the fourteenth century.

Of course, as with other written material, the precise nature of the structures to which the annals refer is rarely stated in explicit terms. However, the common terminology of, for example, the following selection of entries from the *Annals of Loch Cé* appears to suggest that similar buildings were being constructed by those of Anglo-Norman heritage and those of Gaelic Irish background. In 1305 'the New Castle of Inis-Eoghain was erected by the Red Earl' (*i.e.* Greencastle, Inishowen); in 1310 'the castle of Sligech was erected by the Earl'; in 1377 'the castle of Lis-ard-abhla was built by John O'Ferghail'; in 1393 'the monastery of Cill-achaidh in the bishopric of Cill-dara was built for the Brothers of Saint Francis by O'Conchobhair Failghe'; and in 1423 'the castle of Bel-atha-Senaigh was begun by Niall O'Domhnaill.'

The Archaeological Survey of Ireland is, of course, a project driven by field evidence. It has, to an extent, for some of the counties covered so far by its *Inventory* series, incorporated a certain amount of documentary material in its assessment of medieval sites. However, the level of historical research achieved in relation to different counties is far from consistent, and indeed – perhaps appropriately for what is, after all, an archaeological inventory – it is generally

⁷¹ MCNEILL 1997. In fact McNeill devotes a chapter of the book to 'Castles of the Irish' (pp.157-164)

⁷² HENNESSY 1871, Volume I, 533, 555; Volume II, 55, 79, 151.

dependent on secondary source material.⁷³ There remains, for example, with particular significance for the fourteenth century, much analysis to be done of the *Calendar of Patent and Close Rolls* prepared by Tresham and published in 1828.⁷⁴

It may not be possible to identify in the field all or even most of the hundred or so castles named in this collection of documents. Some are already well known, their mention and that of others provides at least a terminus ante quem for their construction. In the light of the list of royal castles presented by Otway-Ruthven and referred to by Frame, this wealth of castle references implies a level of private building activity in the fourteenth century and before which does not seem to have been acknowledged. Furthermore, it raises questions regarding the assignment of castles to particular chronological periods on the basis of shape and size. It seems more than likely that if so many castles were built privately, there would have been considerable variety in the matters of resources – labour, raw materials, finance, and expertise - and of priorities. The inspiration and aspirations of those responsible for castle construction are likely to have been different, as well as their experience of castles elsewhere. But even if there were a common aspiration and a standard model for castle building at which one might aim, the practicalities of location and resources would certainly have tempered the results and introduced variety amongst the emergent structures.

The *Ormond Deeds* also contain mentions of castles which appear to raise questions regarding the conventional understanding of the medieval architectural model. What should be made, for example, of the reference from 1333 to 'the castle of Myloke which is surrounded by a stone wall and pertains to the manor of Loughrea'? The fact that the castle 'pertains to the manor of Loughrea' seems to subordinate it to that manor, implying that it was merely a constituent element of the manor as a whole and not its dominant feature. It was 'surrounded by a stone wall', presumably some kind of enclosure or bawn – a standard feature of castle architecture from the motte (with its bailey) onwards, but which is particularly prevalent at tower houses, sometimes (and most obviously in the

⁷³ This is evident from a glance at the bibliography to be found towards the back of any of the *Inventory* volumes.

⁷⁴ TRESHAM 1828.

⁷⁵ CURTIS 1934, 332.

modern landscape) in the form of a masonry wall, but also sometimes as a palisade, an earthwork, or hedging.⁷⁶

The tradition regarding the lack of building in fourteenth century Ireland may only be challenged to a certain degree by the references in historical documents. However, in 1363, about fifteen years after the outbreak of the Black Death – a time when, it should not be forgotten, further, but usually localised, outbreaks of plague were not uncommon⁷⁷ – new houses were being commissioned in Brounestoun. It was not simply the case that people were reluctant to use houses which had been plague-affected; old houses were to be repaired as well. Indeed, in the 1360s the Earl of Ormond seems to have been concerned at the condition of the buildings of his estate. In an indenture of 1366 it is attested that William Holywod was given a life interest in 140 acres of land in Hayeston on the condition not only that he pay rent, but also that he 'make and repair the houses and edifices and restore them in good condition.'

It is clear that a certain amount of building work was to take place on the Ormond estate in the later fourteenth century, and indeed in 1399 the Earl appears to have negotiated the services of William Archer, 'carpendarius', as a member of his maintenance staff.⁷⁹ Work such as that mentioned above may in fact have been motivated particularly by the results of the Black Death. If, as has been suggested, the population fell by as much as one third as a result of the outbreak of plague in 1348-1349, there would have been a serious shortage of labour and, furthermore, many houses would have been abandoned.⁸⁰ Unoccupied houses

⁷⁶ Stanihurst seems to have been describing the bawn around tower houses when he wrote that 'The princes also have courtyards surrounded by great ramparts and ditches, and hedged around with thorn-bushes and shrubbery. They thrust their cattle into these confined and protected compounds when the need arises to guard them from the attacks and stratagems of robbers.' LENNON 1981, 147.

⁷⁷ Kelly observed that outbreaks of plague continued to occur in Ireland throughout the fourteenth century and afterwards. She identified specific instances in, for example, 1361, 1363, 1365, 1370, 1383, 1390-1393, and 1398, some of which may, however, have merely been local in their effects. KELLY 2001, 39. For England, Hatcher commented that from 1375 onwards outbreaks of plague tended to be local in scale, but he was still able to list at least fifteen outbreaks of plague and / or other epidemic diseases which were of national or extra-regional proportions in the 110 years or so following 1377, some of them of several years' duration. HATCHER, J. 1977 *Plague, population and the English economy, 1348-1530.* Macmillan, London. p.57

⁷⁸ CURTIS 1934, 72, no.91; 93, no.118.

⁷⁹ CURTIS 1934, 242-243, no.343.

⁸⁰ Although observing that 'we have no accurate way of estimating the mortality figures', Duffy reports that 'modern estimates range between a third and a half of the population.' DUFFY, S. 1998 'Black Death' in CONNOLLY, S.J. (ed) *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. pp.47-48. Lydon is concerned to emphasise that 'the Black Death was only one manifestation of a plague that was pandemic, striking with devastating effect every few

will inevitably deteriorate and disintegrate. Is it not possible, then, that the Earl of Ormond, appreciating that he needed to attract people to work on the lands under his control, was trying to make conditions more attractive for them by requiring that the available accommodation be enhanced and extended? The Black Death may thus be seen as a stimulus to building activity, in contradistinction to the generally disruptive and decelerative impact with which it is normally associated.⁸¹

It is clear that the consequences of an event such as the Black Death, with its dramatic demographic impact, must be complex and varied. It may appear unsympathetic, but it would certainly be overly simplistic to view the Black Death as destructive and dislocationary without acknowledging the benefits which may have accrued to society in particular situations and places, not least as concomitants of the very destruction and dislocation which were so negative in their immediate impact.

As has been noted above, there is limited evidence to suggest that construction work was carried out through the second half of the fourteenth century on the Butler lands. Around the end of that century, indeed, particularly ambitious projects seem to have been undertaken. In 1402 the Earl leased an area known as Balyntowche to John Corteys 'to have and to hold for two years freely and quietly without any rent, burden or service, if John during that time build a town of houses suitably after the fashion of lawful towns.' The initiation of such projects as this – which was to run within a fairly tight time schedule – indicates not only that there was labour available (at least in the hands of the Earl of Ormond), and that a demand for housing was present or envisaged in the area, but also that there was expertise in building among the workforce. ⁸³

This should not be surprising in the context of a fourteenth century in which building activity of various kinds had been ongoing. From the records of the Dowdall estates it appears that assorted building projects of significant scale

years.' Of particular relevance to the Ormond activities of the 1360s, perhaps, is his comment that in the 1361 outbreak 'as many as 20% of the population were struck down.' LYDON 1998, 91.

See, in support of this notion of the Black Death as economic stimulus, Hatcher's analysis of the English economy in the 180 years following the Black Death: HATCHER 1977.
 CURTIS 1934, 265, no.366.

Another building project of apparent significance seems to be envisaged in an indenture dated June, 1403. The nature of the structure(s) to be erected is unclear, though agricultural and residential uses seem likely. The grantee was simply required to 'build suitably upon the said site with all the speed possible at his own costs and expenses.' CURTIS 1934, 269, no.374.

were carried out in the fourteenth century. For example, in 1340 a wind-mill was to be constructed in Dundalk and a water-mill (with mill-pond and canals) in Smethestoun; incentives were provided for the construction of buildings – of wood or stone – in the New Town of Dundalk in 1347, in 1350, and in 1382. An undated entry from the late fourteenth century or early fifteenth century provides details of a set of accounts in which it appears that payment was due (or had been made) 'to Leget and Croker for ridge-tiles for the new house', for 'rods for scaffolding', 'to David the carpenter', for 'sheets of latten', and 'to Adam and Hugh Carter going to Dro(ch)da to buy pieces of glass for ... the house.'

McNeill and Otway-Ruthven have pointed out that absentee landowners holding property in Ireland in the fourteenth century found themselves under increasing pressure to make provision for its defence. This situation (and subsequent legislation) seems to have led many absentees to give up their Irish estates. However, the need for fortification and other security measures remained.

⁸⁴ MCNEILL, C. & OTWAY-RUTHVEN, A.J. (ed) 1960 *Dowdall Deeds*. Irish Manuscripts Commission, Dublin. p.57, no.130, no.132; p.69, no.164; p.80, no.193; p.112, no.278; p.138, no.349

⁸⁵ MCNEILL & OTWAY-RUTHVEN 1960, x, citing legislation of 1368 from *CCR* 1364-1368, pp.353-354 and 499-500.

TOWER HOUSES AND LEGISLATION

Much has been made of the legislation of 1428 under which a subsidy was offered towards castle construction in county Louth, together with the similar provision, introduced in 1430,1 which extended the scheme to the other counties of the Pale, Dublin, Meath, and Kildare.² Leask's comments in relation to the significance of this legislation have been revisited repeatedly, as is perhaps evident from the perpetuation of the misdating of the Act, but in this process they seem to have suffered some distortion. Leask used the legislation as a convenient marker symbolising the end of what he had presented as a barren period architecturally in Ireland. According to his interpretation, 'the fourteenth century in Ireland - after its first two decades at least - was not a period of much building activity,' and in particular he saw it as a period to which 'no major [construction] work, in its entirety, can be assigned.' The historians of his day had condemned the fourteenth century as 'a time of gloom,' at least for 'the Anglo-Irish colony.' Curtis considered that 'the Gaels, a scattered and open-air race ... had not been a castle-building' people – indeed, he pointed out that the Irish chiefs 'needed not to build fortresses for themselves when they could take over the magnificent structures raised by the feudal invaders.' In Curtis' fourteenth century, therefore, the Anglo-Irish were not in a position to build castles, and the Gaelic Irish were not inclined to do so.4

Historical understanding of the fourteenth century in Ireland has deepened somewhat since the 1930s and 1940s,⁵ but archaeologists and

¹ The 1430 instrument has by many been mistakenly referred to as having been enacted in 1429. On this matter see BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003. The subject is further discussed below.

² The two enactments are reproduced as Appendix A (1) and (2)

³ LEASK 1941, 75.

⁴ CURTIS 1938, 218-219. It is interesting to note, however, that, for Curtis, the Gaelic Irish nonetheless embarked on castle building, to some extent, at least, in the earlier fourteenth century: 'it was not until after the Bruce invasion that we find them [the Gaels] erecting stone-roofed castles for themselves and wearing armour in battle.' (p.219)

⁵ See, for example, and in relation to one part of the situation, DUFFY, P.J., EDWARDS, D. & FITZPATRICK, E. (ed) 2001 *Gaelic Ireland. Land, Lordship & Settlement c.1250-c.1650.* Four

architectural historians have, for the most part, clung to the framework established by Leask. It is perhaps peculiar that an historical element of Leask's work should continue to command so much respect – he was, after all, an architect, and he stressed that his priority lay in addressing the 'lack of adequate plans and other illustrations,' materials which he considered 'essential to any critical analysis of the buildings.' It was the aspects of his work which were focused on the description and interpretation of buildings to which he gave priority, and it is these which ought to be the most authoritative. Their influence has indeed been very substantial.

It would appear that the essence of Leask's chronological framework for castellated architecture in Ireland is sound. However, his efforts to place his sequence of building types into a broader historical context were limited, and they remain in large measure unchallenged. It is perhaps partly as a result of the fact that he made only occasional use of historical rather than architectural material that his mention of the legislation of 1430 has been almost unquestioningly by subsequent investigators of the architectural history of the country. It seems almost as though its inclusion by Leask constituted an implication of its inherent significance. As it stands there appears to be no explicit evidence to demonstrate that the subsidy provided for in the legislation actually caught the interest of any potential builder, nor that it was ever actually claimed. The has been suggested that the dimensions prescribed in the legislation are similar to those of one particular tower house in the relevant area of the country.8 but no other evidence has been identified which might substantiate the supposed link between the legislation and the building in question, Donore castle, county Meath. Even

Courts Press, Dublin, for the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement, (especially the Introduction, by the editors, at pp.21-76). See also the various works by Frame which deal with the period.

⁶ LEASK 1941, 3.

⁷ O'Keeffe implies that it was (though he provides no references), but regrets that 'none of the buildings for which a grant is actually recorded still survives.' O'KEEFFE 2000, 51. Corlett makes a similar implication, likewise without apparent substantiation. CORLETT 1999, 70.

the suggested connection seems somewhat forced, particularly when one appreciates that it is the <u>internal</u> measurements of the surviving tower house which correspond approximately to the dimensions specified in the Act, and when one acknowledges, with Craig, that Donore is itself 'much smaller than the average tower house.' Furthermore, there was no corresponding legislation for any other counties, and while the renewal of the subsidy in county Louth may be regarded as an indication that it was enjoying success, this 'success' seems difficult to prove.

There is very little documentary evidence for tower house construction and use. As a result, evidence which may be of relevance to the history of the building type is susceptible to an emphasis which is disproportionate to its actual proven value. The body of legislation which survives from the period actually includes a number of references to castles, their construction and maintenance, as well as to the need for and deployment of military resources of other kinds. 10 In the light of these considerations, three suggestions are offered. First, that Leask's mention of the legislation regarding the arrangements by which a subsidy might be available towards the construction of fortified buildings of particular dimensions has meant that the subsidy has automatically formed part of almost every subsequent discussion of later medieval castle construction in Ireland. Second, that the subsidy legislation ought to be considered in the context of the sequence of legislation which preceded and followed it. Third, that the role of the subsidy in the emergence and architectural development of the tower house in Ireland – in the counties of the Pale and on the island as a whole – needs to be reconsidered.

⁸ LEASK 1941, 77; CRAIG 1982, 96; O'KEEFFE 2000, 51, all referring to Donore castle, county Meath.

⁹ CRAIG 1982, 96.

¹⁰ Berry actually went so far as to write in his Preface to the second volume of the *Irish Record Office Series of Early Statutes* that 'Quite a large number of ordinances relate to the erection and repair of castles and towers', though he does continue with the qualifying observations that 'nearly all were in Meath, or that portion of ancient Meath now known as Westmeath, while a few were in Louth or Kildare.' BERRY 1910, xxvi. See also BERRY 1907.

An indication of the extent of the 'automatic' acceptance of the significance of the 1430 enactment as a result of its mention by Leask has been identified by Bradley and Murtagh, who observed that 'Leask ... mistakenly dated the statute 8 Henry VI to 1429, thereby leading generations of scholars astray.' Their list of works in which the misdating appears includes virtually all the major writers on the subject since the 1970s. The only exception to the error which they found was Rae, in his contribution on medieval architecture to the *New History of Ireland* - that is to say a historically-, rather than archaeologically- or architecturally-orientated publication. The error is, in itself, of but small importance; it can only be of limited moment in the context of the difficulties connected with the precise dating of buildings at several hundred years' remove that an Act was passed in one year or the next. It is perhaps more telling - at least of the influence of Leask's work - that the date he adopted in error was followed by so many subsequent authors. The interval is a subsequent authors.

Some attempts have been made at comparing the dimensions for castle construction specified in the 1428 and 1430 legislation with buildings on the ground. Leask pointed out that the 'very simple tower at Donore, near Killyon in County Meath, ... adheres closely in its inside measurements and height to the requirements of the statute'. Donore was also cited as a possible '£10 castle' by Craig and then by O'Keeffe, for example, each of whom observed that it is probably the tower house in the four counties covered by the subsidies which corresponded most nearly to the legislative

¹¹ BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003, 212

¹² RAE, E.C. 1987 'Architecture and sculpture, 1169-1603' in COSGROVE, A. (ed) *A new history of Ireland. Vol.II. Medieval Ireland, 1169-1534.* Clarendon Press, Oxford. pp.737-780 at 768. See also an anonymous contribution, consisting of a recital of the Statute itself, under the heading 'Housing Grants, A.D. 1430,' which appeared in *The Irish Sword* 7 (1965-1966) at p.326 ¹³ The special position which has thus been accorded to the date 1429 in tower house studies is reflected in the wording of interpretative material aimed at the general public and the tourist. For example, the leaflet produced for Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre reads that 'The Heritage Centre is accessed through Goat Castle on Castle Street, Dalkey. This castle is one of the seven original towerhouses of Dalkey which date from 1429.' DALKEY CASTLE AND HERITAGE CENTRE [undated - 2002?] *Discover Dalkey.... A stroll through the centuries.* (no publication details)

specifications.¹⁵ If the legislation did have an impact on construction work, then it seems likely that the dimensions specified were treated as minimums (as was actually specified in the 1430 enactment), and that almost invariably the resulting structure would actually have been significantly larger than the legislative specifications.

A measure of the perceived significance of the legislation in relation to tower house construction is afforded by the fact that Fitzpatrick, in his survey of tower houses in south-western county Galway, used the dimensions of the so-called '£10 castles' (as provided in the 1428 and 1430 legislation) as a basis against which to compare the size and basic shape of the ground plans of the buildings in his study area. 16 There was no equivalent legislation for Galway, but the exercise demonstrated that the surviving south-western Galway tower houses were significantly larger than the structures prescribed for Louth and then also for Dublin, Kildare, and Meath. It is noteworthy, especially in the context of the use by Leask and others of Donore's internal measurements for the purposes of comparison with the dimensions set out in the legislation, that Fitzpatrick's comparative work was based on the external measurements of the ground floor of each of the tower houses in his study area. Furthermore, while the majority of the Galway buildings which he measured were considerably larger than the '£10 castle,' a handful do actually approach it in size. 17 However, while the relevance of Fitzpatrick's comparison is dependent to some degree on the establishment of a hitherto elusive firm connection between the subsidy legislation and the construction of buildings in the areas in which it was effective, and then an assumption that those buildings influenced the design of more in other parts of the country, it may also be presented as demonstrative of the wide geographical popularity of the tower house in Ireland, regardless of any suggested link with legislative provisions.

¹⁴ LEASK 1941, 77.

¹⁵ CRAIG 1982, 96; O'KEEFFE 2000, 51.

¹⁶ FITZPATRICK 1994, 143-144.

The possibility that legislation stimulated tower house construction is actually thrown into question by exercises such as that carried out by Fitzpatrick in county Galway. His juxtaposition of the '£10 castle' and the south west Galway tower houses serves to emphasise not only that there was no such legislative arrangement introduced in county Galway, but also that large numbers of tower houses were nonetheless constructed in that area. How, in this context, can the significance of the 1428 and 1430 legislation for Louth, Dublin, Kildare, and Meath tower house construction be asserted? It appears that defensive residences were built, at least in most parts of Ireland, without subsidy or other statutory incentive. Was the legislation intended to promote a particular design of structure, tall and yet relatively small in ground plan? If this was the case, it was surely intended to encourage the construction of an existing form of building, of proven value, rather than risking the introduction of an innovative design.

In summary, the Statutes of 1428 and 1430 provided a specific package designed to facilitate and encourage a particular activity – the construction of towers – for a named purpose, in a given geographical area. The clear focus of this legislation, and the explicit manner in which it was phrased, has of course attracted the attention of those concerned with castle construction in later medieval Ireland. The impact of the legislation is very difficult to assess. There is no record of any tower house builder claiming or receiving the promised subsidy, nor is there any report of it having been collected. No tower house corresponds precisely to the dimensions specified in the legislation, and, more significantly, it would appear that a structure which did would hardly be large enough to provide residential accommodation. The accommodation afforded by a £10 tower house' might perhaps have been tolerable for those manning a military outpost for short periods at a time. However, although some may have served as

¹⁷ FITZPATRICK 1994, 143, Nos. 17, 19, 20, 23.

¹⁸ Though see O'Keeffe's comments: O'KEEFFE 2000, 51.

outposts and even as garrisons, the tower house is primarily understood as having functioned as the residence of a family unit.²⁰ Essential to the identity of a tower house is its dual function – residential and defensive – and it would surely have been difficult to have fitted adequate facilities for both within such a limited space as that provided for in the 1428 and 1430 enactments.

There are certainly tower houses in the areas which were included in the two Acts, but none has been dated with sufficient precision to the period when the subsidy was active to allow suggestion on the basis of chronology that its construction might have been influenced or assisted by the scheme. It is in any case clear that the amount of money available through the subsidy, £10, would have been but a small proportion of the overall budget for the building of a tower house in the mid fifteenth century. By way of comparison, a grant of £100 was made in 1300 to 'John son of Thomas ... in aid of constructing anew a fortalice against ... [the]... Irish' in county Offaly. ²²

£10 might have been sufficient to pay construction workers for a limited period. An effort was made by Parliament in 1388 to standardise wage levels for persons engaged in various types of employment. According to the resulting scale, a 'master mason of free stone [or] master carpenter of free work' would take, 'for the whole day, 2d.' The same rate was payable to 'master heliers of slate [and] master plasterers of walls,'

¹⁹ Especially if one were to make the logical assumption, as did Fitzpatrick, that the dimensions under consideration were external rather than internal. FITZPATRICK 1994, 143-144.

²⁰ Leask saw them as 'the ordinary and typical residences of the Irish and Anglo-Irish gentry.' LEASK 1999, 76; see also O'KEEFFE 2000, 46.

²¹ MCNEILL 1997, 202; O'KEEFFE 2000, 51; ALLEN BROWN 1954, 126.

MILLS, J. (ed) 1905 Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls or Proceedings in the Court of the Justiciar of Ireland preserved in the Public Record Office of Ireland. XXIII to XXXI years of Edward I. [1295-1303] HMSO, Dublin. pp.362-3, cited in BARRY, T. 1995 'The Last Frontier: Defence and Settlement in Late Medieval Ireland' in BARRY, T.B., FRAME, R., & SIMMS, K. (ed) Colony and Frontier in Medieval Ireland. The Hambledon Press, London & Rio Grande. pp.217-228 at 224. It is interesting to note that careful control was exercised over the disbursement of the money. Later in the entry we learn that 'because John son of Thomas was not able to build it [the fortalice] last summer, it is agreed that Ralph de Stanes collect the money and make necessary

whereas 'coverers of stone, builders of walls, and other labourers, capable of serving the artificers aforesaid' would take 1d. for a day's work.²³ £10 might alternatively have gone towards the purchase of tools or raw materials, but it seems unlikely that it would have covered enough of the costs to have been of more than persuasive significance in the actual decision to build a tower house.

On the basis of this assessment, it is clear that the 1428 and 1430 legislation should not be seen as the initiating instruments of a new phase or style of building, in the areas they affected explicitly, or elsewhere in Ireland. They should rather be regarded as an endorsement and encouragement of an existing approach to the construction of defended residential accommodation. This perspective may appear to abandon a reliable and apparently logical 'origin' for the tower house in Ireland. However, before lamenting this abandonment, it might be instructive to consider firstly whether the pursuit of the 'origins' of a building type is a sensible or reasonable exercise (particularly if one expects to 'find' them or accepts that they may be 'found' - in a pair of legislative enactments); and secondly whether the initial proponent of the notion that those 'origins' might lie in the legislation actually considered this to be the case.

The pursuit of origins (1)

It is of course possible that an individual, having seen an architectural style or feature elsewhere, might instruct his masons to create something similar, and thus start a fashion among his peers in the local area. Alternatively, an immigrant might bring an approach to building specific to his place of origin to his place of settlement. Less likely, perhaps, is that an innovative thinker might commission a building to an original and distinctive design which, having caught the imagination of his neighbours, provokes them to imitate

provision at Kildare and Athy against the time of building.... And John son of Thomas shall not put hand to the money or provision until he begin to build.'

his style. Each of these situations is possible, but it seems more likely that they would operate in relation to particular details than on the scale of an entire structure.²⁴

Chapter five

The movement of communities - most notably, in the medieval period, in the context of military invasions and subsequent colonisations seems to have brought architectural approaches from country to country or region to region. A pertinent example is the arrival of the motte and bailey castle in Ireland with the Anglo-Normans in the later twelfth century. This form of earthwork castle is firmly associated with Norman activity - in Ireland in the twelfth century and in England in the eleventh century. The motte was a feature of the assertion of power by the Normans (and Anglo- or Cambro-Normans) in each of these situations, and the construction of mottes was an essential element of the 'explosion' of fortification which followed the events of 1066 and 1169. Motte castles were built in large numbers as part of the 'unprecedented boom in the construction of private defended residences' which accompanied the arrival of the Normans in England, as in Ireland a century later, and as such they appear to emerge as a symptom of a particular general set of political, social, and military circumstances.²⁵ The structure thus emerged (and re-emerged) at least partly as a response to the prevailing conditions, and it is suggested that trends, fashions, and other patterns in building activity - military and otherwise - can only be understood in the context of their place and time.

It does not appear that any great movement of population took place in later medieval Ireland to which the emergence of the tower house might be ascribed. If any demographic trend may be identified in fourteenth century and the fifteenth century in Ireland it would surely be one of population decline as a result of famine, plague, and unsettled political conditions. Instead, it seems more sensible to regard the appearance of the tower house

²⁴ Ó Danachair has however argued otherwise in relation to tower houses: Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979. His arguments have been considered in more detail elsewhere.

as a stage in the sequence of architectural innovations which ran in parallel with the changing economic, physical, social, and political conditions, from the motte and bailey and ringwork castles through to the fortified houses of the end of the medieval period and then to the artillery forts and mansions of the post-medieval period.²⁶

The technology required for the construction of a tower house was clearly available within Ireland. Much larger stone buildings, many with elaborate architectural details, were built from the twelfth century onwards. The tower house fits into the continuum of fortified and residential architecture as a response to the particular circumstances of its day, drawing on aspects of buildings which were already in existence in Ireland, and yet constituting a distinctive manifestation of the defended residence, complete with variations appropriate to each individual location and situation.

It seems inconceivable, in this context of an organic model for the development of fortified residential architecture in Ireland, that the Statutes of 1428 and 1430 could have played an instigatory role. Far more likely is it that they represent recognition by the Parliament that this increasingly popular building type afforded a means of assisting in the control, defence, and security of the Irish countryside. As will be seen, the legislature was conscious of the need for measures directed in this way, so it would have welcomed the opportunity to encourage the construction of tower houses, but would also have embraced the chance to promote them — with only minimal actual expenditure - as being associated with royal authority.

²⁵ CREIGHTON, O., & HIGHAM, R. 2003 Medieval Castles. Shire, Princes Risborough. pp.12,

²⁶ The assignation of a place in this sequence to the tower house should not, however, be taken to imply that it was a feature solely of the Anglo-Norman settlement pattern. Tower houses were certainly built and used by the Gaelic Irish as well, although inspiration for their construction is more easily found in the Anglo-Norman than in the Gaelic Irish heritage. See, for example, LOEBER, R. 2001 'An Architectural History of Gaelic Castles and Settlements, 1370-1600' in DUFFY, P.J., EDWARDS, D. & FITZPATRICK, E. (ed) 2001 *Gaelic Ireland. Land, Lordship & Settlement c.1250-c.1650.* Four Courts Press, Dublin, for the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement. pp.271-314; DONNELLY, C.J. 2001 'Tower Houses and Late Medieval Secular Settlement in County Limerick' in DUFFY, P.J., EDWARDS, D. & FITZPATRICK, E. (ed) 2001

This last aspect may in fact have been of significance in that the construction of fortifications - whether castles, town walls, or other forms – was almost invariably connected in some way with the assertion of the central authority. Licences were granted 'to crenellate,' and the walling of towns was usually at least part funded by a 'murage grant,' which would have directed locally-generated revenue towards the walling project rather than requiring it to be passed on to the Exchequer. It may be that the legislature felt that the construction of tower houses by private individuals was, while in most cases not actually a threat, then at least an act of independent initiative which ought to be regulated, and which might even, through regulation, be harnessed in the interests of the establishment.

This interpretation of the role and significance of the Acts of 1428 and 1430 contrasts with the position adopted by previous writers in that it requires the legislation to have been in response to, or at least in the context of, a situation in which tower houses were already identifiable, and increasingly numerous, in the landscape. In essence, tower houses must have been built in the period prior to the late 1420s, and the two Acts must be seen as facilitatory rather than instigatory in motivation.

The pursuit of origins (2)

To return now to the second of the two considerations – whether the initial proponent of the notion that tower house 'origins' might lie in the legislation actually felt this to be the case - the focus falls once again on the work of Leask, who seems to have been the first to draw attention to the legislation of 1430, and thus to render it so firmly associated with the appearance of the

Gaelic Ireland. Land, Lordship & Settlement c.1250-c.1650. Four Courts Press, Dublin, for the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement. pp.315-328

²⁷ Just as, in Ireland, those who were in rebellion against the central authority are most often associated with the wilder elements of the landscape. This image is conveyed, for example, in the illustration from Jean Creton's early fifteenth century text which depicts an encounter between Art McMurrough Kavanagh and a party of English knights near Arklow, county Wicklow. Image reproduced in AALEN, F.H.A., WHELAN, K., & STOUT, M. (ed) 1997 *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape*. Cork University Press, Cork. Fig.59

tower house in Ireland.²⁹ He wrote that 'an origin for the Irish towers might be sought in what were called "the £10 castles" ... the fruit of a statute of the 8th year of Henry VI,' part of which he then quotes.³⁰ However, he introduced this proposal with the proviso that 'how or where the tower house type originated is not clear,' and his comments regarding the role of the Statute should thus obviously be considered - as one would assume from his choice of words in referring to the Statute - suggestive rather than definitive.

In fact Leask seems to have seen the tower house as a development of previous fortification types, observing that 'in a sense they are small keeps, thinner walled, less fortress-like than the early examples.' He had already proposed that his architecturally barren fourteenth century was over by about 1440, as that was the date he associated with the start of 'a great building revival, signalized especially by the addition of belfry towers and cloister arcades to the monasteries and the erection of completely new houses for the Friars ... particularly in the western parts of the country.' This 'revival' was not only among the ecclesiastics, however, as 'about the middle of the [fifteenth] century the laymen seem to have begun to build for themselves and for another hundred and fifty years or more they kept the masons hard at work.' The masons were 'hard at work', of course, because Leask felt that it was 'to this period that by far the greater number of the single towers - fortified residences, tower houses, belong.' 32

It appeared convenient, therefore, to Leask's arguments for minimal building activity in the fourteenth century, and for a 'revival' – including tower houses – in the mid-fifteenth century, that there should have been a legislative enactment in 1430 which provided subsidies for the construction

²⁸ See THOMAS 1992.

²⁹ In fact he did not mention the 1428 Act, preferring to concentrate on the more widely-applicable 1430 Statute. LEASK 1941, 75-76.

³⁰ LEASK 1941, 76. See Appendix A(2) for the full text.

³¹ LEASK 1941, 76.

³² LEASK 1941, 75.

of tower house-type structures. Leask himself seems to have been appropriately hesitant regarding the significance of the 1430 legislation, but his use of the word 'origin' in connection with the Act has had repercussions which have overtaken his own view of the situation. He did not write explicitly that the Statutes represented an endorsement of an existing style of building, and indeed he asserted that the majority of tower houses seemed to have been built in the later fifteenth century and in the sixteenth century, but on the other hand he was careful not to exclude pre-1440 or pre-Statute tower house construction.³³ Thus, while he did propose that 'an origin ... might be sought' for tower houses in Ireland in the legislative provisions of 1430, it is clear, on the basis of his choice of words here as well as elsewhere in his treatment of tower houses, and also in his discussion of the tower house at Donore, county Meath, that he himself was not prepared to accept that the Statute was where the 'origin' was actually to be found.

The Statutes of 1428 and 1430 may not be credible as an 'origin' for the tower house in Ireland, but they do reflect, as part of a longer sequence of legislation, a concern for the security of the Irish countryside. In fact the encouragement of castle construction, although it had rarely previously been the subject of a specific enactment, seems to be a consistent element of the general approach of the Irish legislature to the management of the country.

Throughout the early fifteenth century and back into the fourteenth century, statutes of the Irish Parliament were frequently phrased in such a way as to emphasise the difficult conditions, and various remedies were proposed. In 1421, for example, the Parliament addressed the King to the effect that

whereas your said land [Ireland] is for the greater part devastated and destroyed by the Irish enemies and English rebels, alike by their unceasing wars on your said lieges in every county of your said land, as by divers extortions and oppressions, non-payments, and the hateful coignes unceasingly levied and practised on your said lieges by several lieutenants and their deputies, and by the great men and families of your said land, as also from want

³³ LEASK 1941, 75.

of due execution of your laws, whereby your said land has fallen so greatly into decline that your said land will never have relief, nor your said enemies and rebels receive punishment.

On this occasion it was proposed that a possible solution lay in the King's 'most sovereign and most gracious presence within ...[the]... said land.'34

Part of the problem appears to have been corruption, and the Parliament observed that

whereas on several occasions before the present time, the former lieutenants of your said land and their deputies there, who have had of your grant, revenues and profits from your said land to their own use, have committed divers extortions, oppressions, damages and grievances on your said lieges by force and pretence of their power, so that little or nothing was spent on the wars in your said land.

On foot of this it was suggested that firmer royal control of revenues should be ensured, in order that they might be directed to the public purposes for which they were intended.³⁵

It would appear, therefore, that there were at this stage resources available in Ireland, but that they were being inadequately managed, with corrupt officials benefiting in a personal capacity at the expense of the greater public good. An illustration of the depth of corruption in the Irish administration seems to be provided by the fact that legislation was drafted in 1410 in terms which may be rendered as follows:

The Bill requires that if a Sheriff, Seneschal, Justice or Guardian of the peace do receive or succour any person who has burned, robbed or destroyed the king's loyal people or their property that the same Sheriff, Seneschal, Justice or Guardian of the peace shall be adjudged as the principal felons of the same burnings, robberies, or destructions and that the aggrieved party would be entitled to take an action against them etc. ³⁶

The consistency (and perhaps the inadequacy or ineffectiveness) of the Parliamentary position in the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century is illustrated by the enactment and re-enactment of statutes stressing

³⁴ BERRY 1907, 562-563 (9 Henry V; AD 1421).

³⁵ BERRY 1907, 564-565 (9 Henry V; AD 1421).

³⁶ My rendering of the wording in BERRY 1907, 526.

that absentee landowners should return promptly to Ireland. This is illustrated, for example, by the recital, in 1421, of an English Statute of 3 Richard II (1380) by which

it was ordained and agreed that all persons of whatsoever estate and condition they were, having lands, rents, benefices and other possessions whatsoever within the realm of Ireland, should betake themselves to the said land before the feast of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist then next to come, and thenceforward should remain and reside there in aid and strengthening of his faithful lieges, to guard and defend the said land against the rebels and the Irish.

The emphasis on defence and security was heightened even further by the requirement

that all those who then had castles and fortalices within the said land should get them repaired and kept in fit condition, and should place there a good and safe guard, for the protection of those castles and fortalices, on the penalty that thereto attaches.

Failure to fulfil the stipulations of these Acts carried, among its consequences, the channelling of a significant proportion of the proceeds of the property in question directly 'towards the protection and defence of that land.'³⁷ The priority of the legislature was clearly the promotion of stability and the fostering of a more secure environment, at least for those of the population who were prepared to respect parliamentary authority. A selection of legislative provisions were adopted in pursuit of this end, but it is also reflected in aspects of contemporary legislation which was actually primarily directed towards the resolution of other matters.

The Statute of Absentees, 1399,³⁸ reiterates much of what had been enacted in 1380³⁹ and which was to be repeated in 1421.⁴⁰ It stressed that anyone with land in Ireland should go and occupy it,

and from that time, in aid and strengthening of his [the King's] faithful and liege men there, should remain and reside, to guard and defend the said land against the Irish rebels, and that all those who had castles and fortalices in the said land forthwith cause them to be repaired and kept up in a fitting state, and place there good and secure guard for the safety

³⁷ BERRY 1907, 581. The English Statute of 3 Richard II is printed at pp.476-477

³⁸ BERRY 1907, 500-503.

³⁹ 3 Richard II - see BERRY 1907, 476-477.

of the said castles and fortalices under impending danger.

Here, as elsewhere, it is provided that where there is default, two-thirds of the profits of their said lands, rents, offices and possessions ... [should] be levied, and converted to the guarding and defence of the said land.

One of the themes which recur in the legislation of this period is the repatriation of absentees. In 1413, for example, it was enacted that 'for the defence of the land of Ireland,' 'all those Irishmen who have benefices or offices in the land of Ireland, [must] dwell on their benefices and offices, on pain of losing and forfeiting the profits of their benefices and offices.'⁴¹

This principle had been taken even further in an Ordinance of 1368 whereby the Parliament, having outlined the chaotic and violent condition of Ireland, asserted that

the said mischiefs could not in any wise be redressed and amended, nor the said land succoured, except by the coming and continuous residence of the earls, nobles, and others of his realm of England, who have inheritance in the said land of Ireland, in their own persons or by their strong men, sufficient and well equipped for war, upon their lordships, lands, possessions, and inheritances within the said lordship of Ireland, for recovering their inheritances there lost, opposing the said mischiefs, [and for] the preservation of the estate of our lord the king, and of the rights of his crown, and the aid of the lands aforesaid.

An enactment was made accordingly, with a proviso - significantly more forceful than those which were included in subsequent legislation designed to address the same sort of problems - to the effect that defaulters would be 'deprived of their lands, lordships, possessions, and inheritances, situated within his [the King's] said lordship of Ireland.' As with those subsequent enactments, the proceeds of the forfeited lands were to be used for defence-related purposes. They should 'be applied to his [the King's] own [use], to ordain and dispose of them at his free will, and as it shall seem good to him for the preservation, defence, and support of his lordship aforesaid.'⁴²

The Ordinance of 1368 did itself echo previous provisions, however,

⁴⁰ BERRY 1907, 578-581.

⁴¹ BERRY 1907, 560.

⁴² BERRY 1907, 470-471 (42 Edward III).

notably that of 5 Edward III (1331) whereby

all persons having lands and tenements in Ireland, as well religious persons as others, be forewarned that they reside in the same, whether they be in the marches or elsewhere, or that they place sufficient guard for the preservation of the peace in the same, before the feast of St Peter ad vincula next to come, and if they shall not do so, that the King, on their default, take the said lands and tenements into his hand and make order concerning their sufficient keeping.⁴³

Concern for the preservation and promotion of the peace, and for the defence of those who recognised and respected the Parliament but were vulnerable to attack was clearly a strong theme on the parliamentary agenda by the 1420s, and indeed the idea of a subsidy as a means of raising money for the realisation of projects in the common interest was not new in 1428 either. Furthermore, considerations of defence had previously been behind the introduction of such subsidies. In 1380, for example

the prelates and clergy of our land of Ireland ... for the preservation and defence of our said land ... granted a certain subsidy 44

and in the same year

the prelates, clergy, magnates and commons of our land of Ireland ... for the safety and defence of our said land ... granted ... certain small new customs to be levied and taken for three years next to come, of the merchandise and commodities undermentioned.⁴⁵

The state of the country in the later fourteenth century seems to be illustrated by another instance of the raising of a subsidy. In 1377 the Parliament found itself faced with a significant threat, in the form of

Murgh Obryen, who with a great force of Irish of the parts of Munster is now in the parts of Leinster, and meditates making war on the lieges of the lord the King in the parts of Leinster ... and destroying and devastating the said parts of Leinster to the best of his power.

The Parliament obviously needed to decide how Murgh Obryen and his associates

might best and most speedily be put back ... from the said parts of Leinster; so that henceforth as little injury as possible might be inflicted on the said parts of Leinster and on

⁴³ BERRY 1907, 328-329.

⁴⁴ 4 Richard II - BERRY 1907, 480-481.

⁴⁵ BERRY 1907, 478-479.

the lieges of the lord the King there.

The solution, they found, was to buy him off – Murgh was to have 100 marks on condition that he withdraw from Leinster and not behave in a similar manner again. The 100 marks was to be raised by

the clergy, magnates and communities of the counties of Dublin, Kildare, Kilkenny and Wexford. 46

A warlord was thus able to indulge successfully in extortion (on a relatively small scale), extracting money from the clergy and communities of Leinster in exchange for an undertaking that he would not attack them. This particular episode is of relevance to the current argument in two respects. First, it provides an insight into the fragmented and essentially lawless character of late fourteenth century Ireland, in which different factions held power in the various parts of the country, and the supposedly unifying 'central' administration had effectively abandoned any hope of obtaining – much less maintaining – control outside the counties around Dublin. This was an environment in which a landowner could not depend on the rule of law to enforce his claims, or to assure his security. Anyone who wished to maintain property outside the Dublin hinterland would have had to assert his own independent position, while perhaps also aligning himself with whichever group or family held power in the general area - if any actually did.

Second, the manner in which the Parliament dealt with the threat, and in particular the manner in which the 'protection money' was raised, demonstrate that the use of subsidies for defensive ends would have been nothing new to those who introduced the legislation of 1428 and 1430. Indeed, as a means of raising money towards the maintenance of security – and in the absence of direct physical intervention by the Crown – the subsidy seems to have been familiar in Ireland in the later fourteenth century and early fifteenth century.

It has already been established, however, that the amount of money

proposed in the 1428 and 1430 legislation, £10, would not have gone far towards the construction of a tower house. It must be assumed, therefore, that the building of a tower house would have required significant private investment. It is clear that conditions in which the construction of some kind of defended residence would have been very desirable had existed in many parts of Ireland in the later fourteenth century, and probably earlier. Most of the technology necessary to build a tower house had been in use in Ireland as early as the late twelfth century and thirteenth century, and may certainly be seen in ecclesiastical buildings which have been dated to the fourteenth century and early fifteenth century. Why should there have been no tower houses until the 1430s? The proposition inflated from the suggestion made by Leask in 1941 seems, perhaps, to be losing buoyancy.

⁴⁶ BERRY 1907, 472-475.

APPENDIX A(1)

BERRY, H.F. (ed) 1910 Statute Rolls of the Parliament of Ireland, reign of King Henry the Sixth (being Vol.II of the Irish Record Office Series of Early Statutes). HMSO, Dublin. p17

VII Henry VI (1428)

IX Also, forasmuch as the county of Louth and the lieges of our lord the King dwelling therein, for the greater part, are destroyed and wasted [by Irish enemies and English rebels] of our lord the King, for want of castles and towers in the said county, in resistance of the said enemies and rebels, to the great [injury of the said county,] It is agreed and assented that every liegeman of our lord the King within the said county who wishes to build a castle or a tower [sufficiently] ... within five years next to come, that is to say, in length 20 feet, in breadth 16 feet, in height 40 feet, [that the commons of the said county] pay to the person who will so build such castle or tower ten pounds by way of subsidy, in aid of the building [of the same, and that the said subsidy be] assessed and levied of the said commons according to the assessment and the extent of the subsidies heretofore granted to the Lieutenants or [Justices of our lord the King by the commons] of the said county, and that the Chancellor of our lord the King in Ireland cause the requisite writs of our lord the King to be directed [to the sheriff of the said county commanding him] to have the said subsidy assessed and levied of the said commons, and paid to him so making the said castle or tower in the [form aforesaid, To continue] but for six years next to come.

APPENDIX A(2)

BERRY, H.F. (ed) 1910 Statute Rolls of the Parliament of Ireland, reign of King Henry the Sixth (being Vol.II of the Irish Record Office Series of Early Statutes). HMSO, Dublin. p33

VIII Henry VI (1430)

XII [Also for] that the counties of Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth, and the liege people of our lord the King dwelling therein, are for the most part destroyed and wasted by the Irish enemies [and English] rebels of our lord the King, from the want of castles and towers in the said counties, for the resisting of the said enemies and rebels, to the great ruin of the said [counties]; It is agreed and assented that every liege-man of [35] our lord the king of the said counties who chooses to build a castle or a tower sufficiently embattled and [fortified], within ten years next ensuing, to wit, twenty feet in length, sixteen feet in breadth, and forty feet in height, or more, that the commons of the said [counties] wherein such castle or tower shall be built, pay to the said person who desires so to build the said castle or tower ten pounds by way of subsidy, in aid of the building [thereof, and] that the said subsidy be assessed and levied of the said commons according to the assessment and extent of the subsidies heretofore granted to lieutenants or justices of our [lord the King in] Ireland by the commons of the said counties; and that the chancellor of our lord the King in Ireland make the necessary writs of our lord the King directed to the sheriffs of the said [counties], commanding them to cause the said subsidy to be assessed and levied of the said commons, and paid to him so building the said castle or tower in the form aforesaid; [to continue] but for twelve years yet to come, Provided that he find sufficient surety in Chancery to pursue the said work.

THE FORTALICE

Barry has stated that the word 'fortalice' first appears in medieval documents dealing with Ireland in a Norman-French narrative poem dealing with the arrival of the Cambro-Normans in 1169 which was edited and translated by Orpen at the end of the nineteenth century and which has become known by the title he bestowed upon it, *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*.¹ Barry's reference appears to have been an expansion of O'Conor's somewhat vague observation that "Fortelitum" or "fortalice" means fortress and occurs in historical sources as far back as 1180'² (a reasonable estimate, in Orpen's opinion, for the date of the authorship of the *Song*³). It is surprising that O'Conor did not indicate the source for his assertion, but also that he should have gone on to state that 'the related word "forcelettum" means little or small fortress and was in use from the thirteenth century onwards.' This latter point is peculiar because the word which actually appears in the *Song* is *forcelette*, which has consistently been translated as 'fortress.'⁴

Just as it would be difficult to know precisely what the appearance of a 'fortress' might be without closer description, and just as Orpen and Mullally might have considered their choice of the word to carry slightly different connotations, so the exact nature of the structure to which the *Song* refers as a

¹ BARRY 1993a, 215; ORPEN 1892. Another translation of the poem was published in 2002: MULLALLY 2002.

² O'CONOR, K. 1987-1991 'The later construction and use of motte and bailey castles in Ireland: new evidence from Leinster', *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society* 17, pp.13-29 at p.14

³ ORPEN 1892, xx-xxiv.

⁴ Both Orpen and Mullally transcribed the word as 'forcelette', and both translated it as 'fortress'. Orpen's stated aim was to produce 'a thoroughly trustworthy transcript of the MS', and no doubt Mullally held similar aspirations. ORPEN 1892, line 3339 and p.xv; MULLALLY 2002, line 3337. In his glossary Orpen indicated that for forcelette (as in line 3339) one should 'read fortelecce = forteresse' (p.347). Mullally seems to suggest that forcelette (as in her line 3337) should be equated to fortelesce, and she proposes that it means 'stronghold' (p.172). Neither Orpen nor Mullally implies that the word as used in the poem carries connotations of diminutive size or scale. O'Conor's interpretation (also adopted by McNeill and Donnelly, for example) may be based on the reading – from a broader range of sources, of course – by Cathcart King, discussed below. CATHCART KING 1983, Vol.2, 573-576; MCNEILL 1992, 13 (includes reference to the word 'fortalicium'); MCNEILL 1997, 203 (includes reference to the word 'fortalicium'); DONNELLY 1994, 55 (includes reference to the word 'fortalice').

intended to distinguish a particular type of fortified structure through his use of the word forcelette. In the late nineteenth century, when Orpen was working on his translation, castle studies in Ireland had yet to assign definitive labels to specific classes of building. Indeed, as has been seen, even at the outset of the twenty-first century the word 'fortress' conveys an impression of strength and fortification without prescribing restrictions on the detail of the structure by which these functional imperatives are achieved. As a result, it should be easy to accept that in the *Song* the words forcelette, chastel, castel, mot, and even meison seem to have been regarded (at least in Orpen's eyes) as virtually interchangeable, and used to mean 'fortress', 'castle', 'fort', and, in the case of meison, of course also 'house'.⁵

Another approximation of the word fortalice appeared in the Irish context in a royal document of 1204. In this instance, however, its meaning seems closest to the more general English term 'fortifications.' The sense of the text implies that it should be regarded as signifying not only 'a castle of greatest possible strength, with good fosses and strong walls...to control the city...and...to defend it', but also to mean a general 'strengthening' (perhaps even 'fortification') of the city by the citizens themselves.⁶ The Latin word used in this instance is *fortilecia*, but it and other variants seem to have been used from time to time by annalists and chroniclers up into the sixteenth century.

The term fortalice also appears in medieval legislation. A statute of 13 Edward I (AD 1285) provides that 'if any from henceforth take the beasts of another, and cause them to be driven into a castle or fortalice, and there within the close of the castle or fortalice detain them against gage and pledge ... if he ... did not then cause the beasts to be straightway delivered, ... the King, for

⁵ ORPEN 1892, lines 1407, 1428, 1432, 1778, 2502, 3178, 3195, 3291, 3295, 3339.

⁶ Close Roll of England, vi John, Memb.18, in GILBERT 1870, xli, 61. The translation provided by Gilbert is 'fortalice', although the word transcribed for publication as the Latin original is *fortilecia*.

the despite and the trespass, [might] cause the castle or fortalice to be battered down beyond recovery.'⁷

This reference is of interest for a series of reasons. The first group of reasons is related to the fact that the text is taken from a legal document. One may assume that the authors of such documents aspire to some degree of precision and clarity in their choice of words. The document refers to 'a castle or fortalice' and thus seems deliberately to draw a distinction between the two. The castle and the fortalice seem therefore to have been related types of structure, but even if there may have been some overlap of meaning, they were somehow distinguishable from one another by the thirteenth century parliamentary draughtsman (or the contemporary equivalent). Given that it had provoked legislation, one may assume that the offence outlined in the statute - the taking of 'the beasts of another', and the driving of them 'into a castle or fortalice' - was being committed with some degree of frequency. This is a useful insight into the criminal practices and problems of the day, but the description of the offence also seems to hold implications regarding the organisation and layout of the structures mentioned. It refers to the detention of beasts 'within the close of the castle or fortalice', implying the presence of some kind of enclosure or bawn - as survives at many (though certainly not all) tower houses, but which seems, according to Sweetman, to be found only exceptionally in association with hall-houses.⁸/

The gravity of the offence seems clear in the light of the prescribed punishment, but it also appears to imply that the rustling was being carried out by – or at least on behalf of – the proprietors (or occupiers) of the castles or fortalices in question. The date of the document, 1285, means that a distinction was being drawn between castles and fortalices by the late thirteenth century. Previous references to the fortalice, such as that in *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, find the word used in isolation, without direct comparison with or distinction from other terms used to describe fortified

⁷ BERRY 1907, 61-63.

⁸ SWEETMAN 1999, 89.

structures.⁹ They are also generally found in less formal contexts than the wording of a statute. The nature of this type of document means that its inclusion of the terms castle and fortalice together implies a deliberate distinction between the two.

Differentiation between the castle and the fortalice is made again in a legal document of 1342. In this instance the document is addressed to the king, and reference is made to 'your castles of Roscommon, Randon and Athlone, Bunratty [and other castles] and fortalices which ought to be in your hand, and by which all the country [around was wont to be] strengthened and defended', but which were at the time 'in the hands of the Irish enemies'. The document also contains reference to the condition of buildings, stating that 'your castles and fortalices are, some in ruins, some in the hands of the Irish enemies, and others in great danger of being lost.' The problem is attributed at least in some degree to the 'want of good officers', and it is observed that 'certain persons have the custody of castles, who never set foot in them.' 10

Again a distinction seems to be drawn between the castle and the fortalice, although the nature of this distinction is not specified. We learn also that the Crown owned fortalices, a fact which carries with it the implication that they might be mentioned in royal records. This is particularly significant not only because there are but few mentions of fortalices in such records, but also because the conventional view would associate royal ownership (and therefore the provision of maintenance, the organisation of a support network, and a particular role in the countryside) with larger medieval castles. In addition the document points to a significant level of corruption in the royal administration in Ireland, a factor which can only have complicated the organisation of the royal properties (and the royal presence, generally), in Ireland.

In his study of the tower houses of county Tipperary Cairns depended for the validity of part of his argument on the interpretation of fortalice as

⁹ ORPEN 1892; MULLALLY 2002.

tower house. He was of the opinion that references to fortalices (and particularly, of course, to their construction) in the fourteenth century might be regarded as evidence for the emergence of the tower house at that period.¹¹

Cairns' thesis, following that of Davin on the tower houses of the Pale, 12 was perhaps the first attempt on any significant scale since Leask's general survey 13 to impose a coherent structure on the analysis of a particular aspect of later medieval castle construction. Before Leask's very influential publication the terminological situation among historians, archaeologists, and architectural historians regarding fortified architecture in Ireland was too confused to allow any attempt at the identification of terms used in medieval documents with terms current in the historical writing of the day. 14

Leask's work brought a standardisation which has provided a framework for the study of castles in Ireland. However, such standards of terminology and classification are, at least in some respects, unavoidably artificial. The hazards of assigning particular meanings to individual words or phrases used by medieval chroniclers was recognised by Renn in his treatment of the transition from the *burhs*, which were Anglo-Saxon fortifications for communal defence in ninth century England, to the notion of the 'private' castle. He observed that 'contemporary writers use the Latin *castellum* and the Saxon *castel* indiscriminately for all sorts of defences and even for unfortified towns.' ¹⁵

¹¹ CAIRNS 1984, 5, 6, 186, 187, 189, 288, 289, 323, 332, 334, 335, 337.

¹² DAVIN 1982.

¹³ LEASK 1941.

¹⁴ Compare, for example, the work of PARKER with that of WESTROPP, and that of either with any other writer on castles in Ireland who was working in the first half of the twentieth century or before.

¹⁵ RENN, D.F. 1973 Norman Castles in Britain. John Baker, London, and Humanities Press, New York. p.2. The complications surrounding medieval vocabulary and the meanings which can be drawn from particular words have been much discussed. Eales, for example, wrote (with particular reference to the late eleventh century and the twelfth century in England) of 'the fluctuation and interchangeable use of castle terms: castrum, castellum, oppidum and so on ... it is salutary to bear in mind that contemporary vocabulary was fluid, and affords no easy answer to modern worries over what was or was not a castle. EALES, R. 1990 'Royal Power and Castles in Norman England' in HARPER-BILL, C. & HARVEY, R. (ed) The Ideals and Practice of Medieval Knighthood III (Papers from the 4th Strawberry Hill Conference, 1988). pp.49-78 at 55. Barthélemy was similarly frustrated, commenting that 'most vexing is our inability to say precisely what words applied to what physical structures: pairs of terms like turris (tower or donjon) and

Those responsible for the construction of tower houses and other forms of medieval castle may not have contemplated them in the same terms, and they are very unlikely to have attempted to categorise them for reference purposes according to their shape and general appearance. If they did, it seems that the terms they chose were not used consistently in contemporary records, or at least have not survived in a coherent, recognisable form.

The desire to classify structures, to assign specific names to them on the basis of their appearance, is presumably a product of the attempt to study them. To the user of a building – or to the observer of a building which is in use – its function may or may not be obvious, but it is certainly of more immediate significance in any attempt at description than is its shape. The urge to categorise on the basis of appearance – and thus perhaps by assumed function – will therefore hardly arise. It is only when one encounters the remains of buildings – abandoned, or even transformed for modern use - that one needs to assign them to categories on the basis of criteria other than their now more elusive function as a means of attempting to understand them.

/ In most cases the student of the castle in Ireland is left only with the vestigial appearance of the building, and this seems to have limited analysis to a significant degree. For example, Sweetman's investigation of the hall house resulted in a description of the appearance of the building type as identified in the modern landscape. It is a valuable result of his substantial experience at the head of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, and his treatment of tower houses follows the same model. But for the contemporary – the user, observer, or 'witness' – these buildings surely meant far more than may be

domus (house or abode), or, again, camera (chamber) and sala (hall), appear to have been used sometimes as opposites, sometimes as equivalents' and concluding that 'there must have been significant ambiguity in such terms.' BARTHÉLEMY, D. 1988 'Civilizing the Fortress: Eleventh to Thirteenth Century' in DUBY, G. (ed) and GOLDHAMMER, A. (trans) A History of Private Life II Revelations of the Medieval World. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England. pp.397-424 at 399. See also KENYON, J.R. & THOMPSON, M. 1994 'The origin of the word "keep", Medieval Archaeology 38, pp.175-176 The 'sky-scraper' and tower block are perhaps significant and potentially relevant exceptions from the context of today.

extracted from dry description. On the basis of appearance it may be reasonable to separate the hall house and the tower house into independent categories. But if one considers the likely functions of each (and, indeed, of each individual building), and the way in which the building was used to fulfil those functions, it seems that distinctions founded on shape, and even size, become less clear.

In the popular terminology of today the word 'castle' is used with reference to such contrasting structures as Trim Castle and the relatively small Rockfleet Castle; from the neo-Gothic castle – or even the unembattled mansion – to the earthwork castle. McNeill asserts that, after the twelfth century, writers in England and France were not often confronted with the need to identify 'the point below which, socially, a building cannot be considered a castle.' He uses the observation as a means of introducing his comments on 'hall-houses' and on 'polygonal enclosures' in Ireland. It is clear that the observer of today would regard virtually all such structures as 'castles', and they are indeed referred to as such by McNeill. Tower houses are today almost always considered 'castles' in popular parlance, but they have at different periods also been described using other words.

The castellological vocabulary of the medieval period can only be reconstructed to the extent that it is preserved in documentary records, so it is perhaps unreasonable to dismiss altogether such ideas as that of Cairns regarding the possibility that the word fortalize may have been used to refer to what we now describe as tower houses.²² Why should the medieval chronicler have selected a word other than 'castle' (or 'castellum') when remarking on a particular building? Was it perhaps because the chronicler was aware that the building in question did not, for some reason, satisfy the criteria which were

¹⁷ SWEETMAN 1999, 89-104, 137-174. SWEETMAN, D. 2003 'The hall-house in Ireland' in KENYON, J.R. & O'CONOR, K. (ed) *The Medieval Castle in Ireland and Wales. Essays in honour of Jeremy Knight.* Four Courts Press, Dublin. pp.121-132

¹⁸ MCNEILL 1997, 148.

¹⁹ MCNEILL 1997, 149.

²⁰ MCNEILL 1997, 155.

²¹ MCNEILL 1997, 148-155.

²² See, for example, DONNELLY 1994; MCNEILL 1997.

then considered essential to the identity of the castle? Or was it simply that the general impression presented by the structure was such as to suggest the use of a word other than that which might today be translated as 'castle'? If the latter seems more probable, then we should perhaps be cautious about abandoning labels, such as tower house, the application of which to structures with a wide range of specific and often contrasting characteristics may be explained most easily as being the result of a similar sort of 'general impression'.

The majority of recent investigators of castles in Ireland have classified and discussed castles by reference to their shape and size. McNeill is to an extent an exception to this, moving beyond the exercise of categorization by measurable aspects of the buildings' appearance. His approach attempts to navigate among less tangible but obviously fundamental factors by giving more consideration to notions such as social status and political importance. These aspects of the identity of a building may be discussed to an extent through the analysis of its layout and of particular architectural details, and such analysis may of course on occasion be supported by documentary material. However, in the context of a series of buildings which survive for the most part in ruinous condition, and to which only limited reference is made in the documentary record, the approach will yield results in but a few instances.

A 'new' type of fortified medieval building was distinguished (on the basis of its shape, of course) relatively recently in the Irish context by Sweetman, who, following earlier generations of investigators such as Waterman in the northern part of the country, proposed that 'hall-houses' emerged in Ireland in the early thirteenth century.²³ He observed that 'they have a defensive ground floor' but then commented that 'because of their lack of defensive features it is possible that they should not be classified as castles.'²⁴ This pair of observations is clearly in conflict, but this conflict

²³ See the work of Waterman, notably at Greencastle, county Down: WATERMAN, D.M. & COLLINS, A.E.P. 1952 'Excavations at Greencastle, Co. Down, 1951', *UJA* **15**, pp.87-102. ²⁴ SWEETMAN 1999, 89. They were essentially 'new' in the Irish context in the sense that they had not been distinguished as an independent category by Leask, whose 1941 classification has been of such influence in the study of castles in Ireland in the sixty-three years since its publication. McNeill is concerned 'to recall Stell's warnings about drawing too firm lines within the population

seems to demonstrate the difficulty of generalising about the intended function of a building. Emery was perhaps more pragmatic in identifying the features common to medieval houses and castles – 'hall, chamber, and offices, used and developed in intriguingly different ways' – before identifying the distinguishing attributes behind the latter.²⁵

The words 'castle' and 'fortalice' both carry connotations of fortification and military strength for the reader of today, but the intentions of their various medieval users is inevitably more elusive. Was a 'fortalice' necessarily a smaller building? Or was it simply a less strongly fortified building? Or was it a structure of distinctive shape and design? It may be, as McNeill seems to believe, that the word was as broad in its meaning as 'castle' is today. ²⁶ It seems most likely, in fact, that the precise meaning of the word varied according to the context in which it was being used, and according to the intentions and understanding of its user. Furthermore, its meaning would almost certainly have developed over time and with nuances emerging or disappearing as a result of contemporary circumstances.

In his discussion of the fourteenth century Cathcart King appears to regard the fortalice as one category of the selection of 'second-rate castles' which were built in England and Wales. He refers to the need which was felt – particularly in the north of England – for defence, which he considers to have driven 'individuals of relatively slender means to erect minor fortalicia, wooden 'peels', and single towers (the latter in enormous numbers).' The documentary evidence which he uses to support this statement comes from Northumberland in particular, and it seems that the concern with fortification

of castles and exaggerating the special nature of tower-houses as opposed to hall-houses in particular.' In support of his concerns he observed that 'within Ireland there are a number of castles which lie in between the two classifications.' MCNEILL 1997, 203.

²⁵ EMERY, A. 2000 *Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500. Volume II:* East Anglia, central England, and Wales. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.3 ²⁶ 'The word was, of course, used mainly because it was not a precise term to contemporaries, nor did it carry the social and administrative overtones of "castellum". It means simply a small fortified site, no more and no less.' MCNEILL 1997, 203.

²⁷ CATHCART KING 1988, 148.

in this area differed from that which was current in much of the rest of Britain at the time. In fact, the conditions – and results – appear to have been very much closer to those in Ireland and Scotland.

In considering Cathcart King's assessment of the types of 'second-rate castles' to be found in the north of England it is useful to refer to the glossary he provides in his *Castellarium Anglicanum*. Here the 'fortalice, fortalicium, forcelettum, etc.' is described simply as 'a word used as the diminutive of "castle", a definition which does not appear to exclude the possibility that it might have taken a form approximating to that of the buildings now known as tower houses. The 'pele, pelum, peel' was 'primarily a palisade, hence by natural extension a palisaded stronghold', surely the definition which he intended when referring to 'wooden "peels" – although he does explain that the term 'pele tower' is used in the vernacular to describe the fortified buildings – bastles and towers – of the Scottish Borders. ²⁹

Emery, in a more recent discussion of the Northumbrian fortifications, seems to differ from Cathcart King's assessment of the *fortalicia* mentioned in an early fifteenth century list. He proposes that the label 'indicated occupational status as much as structural form', pointing out the various shapes of the buildings which are referred to under the single title. He also specifies that there was a (longer) list of 'turris' structures in the same fifteenth century document, an observation which can only reinforce the notion of functional rather than morphological distinction – especially given that one third of the buildings on the list of *fortalicia* 'would be described today as tower houses.' 30

²⁸ In spite of the contrast, cited above, of 'fortalicia' with 'single towers'.

²⁹ CATHCART KING 1983, Vol.2, 573-576. *Bastle* is defined as 'A semi-fortified farmhouse of the Scottish Border, consisting typically of a living-room over a vaulted ground-floor for the cattle. It is not always clear whether a fragmentary building of this sort, or one which has vanished, was a bastle or a tower.' (p.573) 'Where a fortification is called a *tower*, it is to be understood that it consists of a single rectangular or L-shaped tower, with no dependencies except perhaps a *barmkin* [an enclosure for cattle attached to a building: the equivalent of the *bawn* in Ireland]. Towers are numerous in the North (particularly near the Border) [but] rare in the rest of England, though they are found in small numbers in most districts.' (p.576)

³⁰ EMERY, A. 1996 Greater Medieval Houses of England and Wales, 1300-1500. Volume J. Northern England. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. p.29 n.8, referring to Nomina castrorum et fortaliciorum infra comitatum Northumbrie. British Library Harleian MS 309 fols. 202b-203b.

If there was a specialised castellological vocabulary in medieval Ireland it has not yet been identified in the remaining documentary records. Archaeologists and architectural historians have tended to concentrate on classification systems based on the appearance of buildings, and the issue has not been of particular concern to historians, who remain preoccupied, understandably, with political and other matters. The efforts which have been made to bring documentary and architectural evidence together, such as that of Cairns, have certainly provided considerable material for discussion and debate, although – perhaps inevitably, and perhaps also constructively – also contributing to a clouding of the issues. In any case, it seems at least as likely that if contemporaries recording medieval Ireland drew on an established lexicon of architectural terms for the description of castles, and of different types of castle, that that lexicon should have been based on the function of buildings rather than on their form.

If functional distinctions were made between what are now described as castles, consideration must be given as to whether 'tower houses' would necessarily have fallen so firmly together as their shape appears to dictate. It seems likely that there would at least have been a degree of mixing of forms, with a different combination of structures in each function-based category. There were, after all, other types of building in later medieval Ireland fulfilling some of the wide variety of roles attributed to tower houses.

It is of course true that many of the functions for which the tower house is thought to have been designed may have been carried out simultaneously by an individual building, or at least by an individual building at different stages of its existence. It nevertheless seems likely that many tower houses would have been erected with the original object that they should satisfy a more restricted role or set of roles in particular. The apparent lack of documentary records regarding the planning of individual tower houses means that the techniques of archaeology - the study of standing remains and of their position

³¹ CAIRNS 1984.

in the landscape, as well as actual excavation - may prove to be the richest sources of information in this respect.

Tower houses, like most other castles, served as garrisons, as residences, and as manorial and administrative centres. It is clear that they were also used as bases from which cattle-raiding took place, and yet they seem to have functioned as status symbols; they were often strongholds which dominated strategically important locations, both coastal and inland, and as such, or in some other way, they may have been individual elements of broader defensive networks. Tower houses are considered to have been built as offensive outposts, but also as refuges, as border posts, and as local storage depots. It is possible (although it remains to be explored³²) that the tower houses founded by families or groups closer to the Gaelic Irish heritage may have varied in primary function, or subsequently, or in some subsidiary role, from those built by people more strongly attached to the Anglo-Norman tradition. Such a distinction may appear crude in the context of fourteenth century and later medieval Ireland, but it is certainly conceivable that attitudes to architecture and to the role of masonry fortification at the period may have been influenced by the socio-cultural inheritance of particular individuals and groups in different parts of the country.

Even though Cairns' argument for the identification of fortalices with tower houses seems difficult to sustain in the light not only of the nebulous character of medieval castellological terminology, but also given the range of functions fulfilled by tower houses, McNeill's assertion that 'the word fortalicium... means simply a small fortified site, no more and no less' seems an unduly summary dismissal of the term.³³ If one considers McNeill's statement carefully, however, his interpretation of the fortalice as 'a small fortified site' is actually rather broad in scope, and might certainly embrace not

³² The issue was recently alluded to in LOEBER 2001.

only motte castles and tower houses, but also other varieties of castles and related fortifications.

O'Conor had already shown, by the time McNeill was writing, that the word fortalice may have been used to describe mottes in Leinster.³⁴ O'Conor's findings therefore support McNeill's statement insofar as they suggest that the word was used with reference to several types of 'small fortified site' (including mottes), but this should not be allowed to obscure its potential use in the early fourteenth century to describe tower houses. When O'Conor argued that 'the exact definition of the word "fortalice" is too imprecise to state that it only meant tower house in the fourteenth century' he was in fact stating - in a more positive manner - what McNeill implied some years later. Indeed, although his article was primarily devoted to demonstrating the possibility that mottes may on occasion have been referred to in documents by use of the word fortalice, O'Conor went so far as to point out that stone fortalices 'certainly ... did exist in the early fourteenth century.'35 The fact that fortalice was a generic term – the diminutive of 'castle' in the context of England and Wales, according to Cathcart King³⁶ – rather than a word which was used specifically and exclusively with reference to one castle type, does not preclude the existence of tower houses at this stage.³⁷ It does require that a broader understanding of the word fortalice than that attributed to Cairns be respected, and it certainly means that the direct equation of 'fortalice' with 'tower house' should be treated with extreme caution and assessed according to the evidence available for each individual case.

If the evidence appears to be supporting a revision of the approach to the fortalice – tower house relationship ascribed to Cairns it becomes particularly important to reconsider the substance of the claims which he actually made. How dramatic were Cairns' claims? Have his carefully

³⁴ O'CONOR 1987-91, 14-17.

³⁵ O'CONOR 1987-91, 15, citing WOOD, LANGMAN, & GRIFFITH [undated], 41, 163.

³⁶ CATHCART KING 1983, Vol.2, 574.

³⁷ This argument is of course reinforced by the fact that the castle type in question – the tower house – was only identified as such in the mid nineteenth century, and only came to be generally accepted in the mid twentieth century. PARKER 1860; LEASK 1941.

suggested tentative hypotheses been inflated through adoption and repetition by others? The idea initiated and promoted by Davin and Cairns which posited a link between tower house construction and early fourteenth century references to fortalices broke with an element of the model for castle chronology which pre-dated the work of Leask. Leask is often considered to have placed the emergence of the tower house in about 1430,³⁸ but in fact he might well have been sympathetic to the position which had been proposed by Westropp around 1900, that the first 'pele towers' in Ireland were built in about 1380.³⁹ Westropp considered their most vigorous period of construction to have been the fifteenth century, though he was confident that a few more were built in the first half of the sixteenth and even later.⁴⁰

Newman Johnson's summary of the history of castle architecture in Ireland⁴¹ pre-dates by only a short time the completion of the researches of Davin and Cairns, but the framework he proposed for tower house construction in Ireland echoes very closely that which was being promoted by Westropp some seventy-five or eighty years earlier. For Newman Johnson, as for Westropp, the tower house emerged in the later fourteenth century. Newman Johnson seems comfortable in referring to tower houses as fortalices, a usage which may reflect his experience in Scotland and the north of England, as the term had at that time attracted little attention in Ireland and, furthermore, his publication was aimed at the general rather than the specialist reader. The choice of terminology throughout his publication reflects the influence of Leask, of course, but it must also be assessed in the context of the period prior to the suggestion of a direct (though not necessarily exclusive) correlation

³⁸ e.g. SWEETMAN 2000, 263.

³⁹ Westropp appears to have preferred the term 'pele tower', and does not seem to have adopted Parker's 'tower house.' The structures about which he was writing were indeed those which have subsequently come to be referred to as 'tower houses.' He himself explained his choice of terminology by commenting that 'the name "peel" tower is not in use in Ireland. I merely employ it here to equate these little turrets with those of Great Britain. Pill or Pele is a Welsh and Manx term for a tower.' WESTROPP 1898-1900, 348.

⁴⁰ WESTROPP, T.J. 1906 'The ancient castles of the County of Limerick (north-eastern baronies)', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* **26c**, pp.55-108, at 71; WESTROPP 1898-1900.

⁴¹ NEWMAN JOHNSON undated (1981?).

between the terms fortalice and tower house. As such the word fortalice, in Newman Johnson's use, may be regarded as meaning simply 'small castle'. All tower houses are, in this sense, fortalices, although not all fortalices need be tower houses.

In their theses Davin and Cairns were therefore suggesting that dramatic revision of a long-established (and barely challenged) framework might be required. It is perhaps for this reason that the proposals gained such prominence – or even notoriety – in the field of castle studies in Ireland.

An almost inevitable result of the protracted discussion of a theory of historical interpretation is that it becomes in some way distorted. It is therefore important to return to its original exposition in order to appreciate the actual claims of the author. Where Cairns is seen to have argued for fourteenth century tower houses in Ireland (and his suggestions have clearly aroused a considerable debate), he was actually very cautious in his treatment of the dating evidence which he found. He stated that 'most Tipperary castles were late – there are seven that can be definitely or possibly dated to the 13th c., three to the 14th, eight to the 15th, and 44 to the 16th and 17th centuries'. 42 He claimed only to have identified 'definite or possible' dating evidence for about one ninth of all the castles (all the castles – not merely all the tower houses) in county Tipperary. He cited six documentary references to fortalices from the fourteenth century (not all of them to sites in county Tipperary), hypothesising that such references might constitute evidence for the existence of tower houses at that period. He thus seems to have been making a restrained proposal, presumably founded on the standard and generally-accepted notion that tower houses are (relatively) small castles, and that fortalice may be translated as 'small fortified site.'

In his subsequent development of the argument Cairns pointed out that the word fortalice is not defined in the records on which his ideas depend, but he considered that at least 'by the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was

⁴² CAIRNS 1984, 181.

probably used to mean tower houses.'⁴³ These statements seem rather tentative in comparison with the assertion that they serve to substantiate, that is that 'contemporary documents suggest that there were probably tower houses in several parts of Ireland from the beginning of the fourteenth century.'⁴⁴ However, this is also formulated in suggestive rather than declaratory terms. Cairns appears to have recognised the problems associated with the junction between documentary records and physical evidence in the field. He appreciated the potential significance of the documentary evidence for which his thesis is best known, but his reservations have not always been reflected in the later works which have drawn on his findings.

The vague nature of the vocabulary in use regarding fortified architecture - in the medieval period and since – means that consideration of potential references to early tower houses should not be confined to such words as fortalice and *forcelette* or *forcelettum*. There is in any case a lack of corroborative material identifying the types of structure to which these terms might refer. One should therefore consider all fourteenth century and early fifteenth century references to castles and castle building to see whether there is any scope for the identification of sites (and even site types) in the landscape.

Reference to building or other relevant activity at a particular place which now appears to be identifiable as a tower house site does not show that the tower house was *in situ* at the time when the document in question was compiled. It may demonstrate that people at different periods considered that the site was for some reason appropriate for the installation of a defensive building. They may have felt that the place was in need of protection, or that it was an appropriate location for the construction of a symbol of their local or

⁴³ CAIRNS 1984, 186, citing WHITE, N.B. (ed) 1943 Extents of Irish Monastic Possessions, 1540-1541, from Manuscripts in the Public Record Office, London. The Stationery Office, Dublin; SIMINGTON, R.C. (ed) 1931-1945 The Civil Survey AD 1654-1656. 7 volumes. The Stationery Office, Dublin.

⁴⁴ CAIRNS 1984, 186.

regional power. The area may have been home to a group of people who felt vulnerable or threatened, and the site may have been considered to be strategically important. In any case it was clearly felt at different stages to be a suitable site for a fortification. It may have been continuously occupied by some form of defensive building, or there may merely have been a memory of its significance as a fortified site - but a memory strong enough to lead, as circumstances changed, to the upgrading, modernisation, or reinstatement of the defended structure itself. The social and psychological significance of a site which has traditionally or 'always' been fortified may be important in the continuing use or maintenance of the character of the site. Traditions can grow quickly around particular buildings and the events with which they are associated, thereby transforming the buildings, the memory of the events, and the resulting tradition into key elements of the corporate identity of a group. In such a context the maintenance of a culturally important fortified site as a defensible stronghold could conceivably transcend its basic physical importance.

This is of relevance to the fortalice/tower house relationship in that it illustrates and emphasises the need for caution. Some of the structures referred to as fortalices, in the fourteenth century and subsequently – and the term appears in the *Extents of Irish Monastic Possessions* and the *Civil Survey*, for example – may well have been tower houses. But the existence of a tower house in what appears to be the appropriate place – according to a documentary reference – in the landscape of today cannot, without a substantial amount of additional investigation, be considered to provide more than a possibility that the structure contemplated by the contemporary writer might be the tower house which survives.

EXCAVATIONS

It appears to have been for the year 1969 that the first compilation of summary accounts of archaeological excavations carried out in Ireland was published. The Association of Young Irish Archaeologists was behind the initiative and the list was gathered and edited by Tom Delaney. That first list included information regarding excavation which had been carried out at Dunboy castle – referred to in the 1970 bulletin as Dunboy 'Tower House and Military Fort' – in county Cork, and a total of twenty-seven excavations were summarised. During the three decades since 1969 the idea behind the publication has remained constant, and a list has appeared in some form for most years. The volume dealing with archaeological activity in the year 2001, *Excavations 2001*, appeared in 2003 and contains nearly 1400 entries, of which a substantial proportion relate to sites of medieval date.

The number of excavations being carried out in Ireland has clearly increased dramatically since the end of the 1960s, and indeed most of this growth would appear to have taken place since the start of the 1990s. The first volume produced by the current editor of the *Excavations* series (that for 1989) carried accounts of just over 100 projects. Even allowing for the growing profile of what has become the 'annual report' for excavation in Ireland, and the introduction in 1997 of the requirement with every excavation licence issued that a summary of the work carried out should be submitted for inclusion, an increase which is comfortably greater than tenfold in the course of only a little over a decade is remarkable.

The number of archaeological excavations has clearly been increasing at a dramatic rate, but it is important to consider whether this increase has actually brought a corresponding increase in the amount of useful information

¹ The volume for 1969 is rare, and has yet to be consulted. However, BENNETT, I. (ed) 1999 *Excavations 1998*. Wordwell, Bray, contains an index (prepared by Eoin Bairéad) to the volumes for the years 1969-1997.

² DELANEY, T. (ed) [undated] *Excavations 1970.* The Association of Young Irish Archaeologists. p.5

³ See the index in BENNETT 1999, from 229.

⁴ BENNETT, I. (ed) 2003 Excavations 2001. Wordwell, Bray.

available from excavation. The debate among archaeologists regarding the relative merits or value of rescue as against research excavation appears to have quietened, perhaps as a result of the commercial benefits accruing to archaeologists as a result of the great boom in rescue work which has reached Ireland in the last fifteen years or so. This seems to have come about as a result of economic prosperity and the developments it has facilitated, together with heritage-related legislation and an increasing appreciation of the need for archaeological and other environmental matters to be taken into consideration in the planning process.⁵

The vast majority of excavations carried out in Ireland in the last decades of the twentieth century were thus 'rescue' excavations, funded by developers in accordance with their legal obligations. Many of the sites excavated were in fact discovered in the course of archaeological monitoring of development work, notably the monitoring of large-scale projects such as the laying of gas pipelines and the construction of roads. Bennett's comment that 2000 'seems to have been the year of the *fulacht fiadh*' raises significant issues in relation to the value of such 'rescue' excavation to the broader archaeological scheme.

It might appear that our knowledge of the *fulacht fiadh* ought to have been extended substantially by the large number of the sites which have been investigated and recorded in the course of rescue work. It is probably some time since a *fulacht fiadh*, which usually takes the form of a spread of burnt stones, has been investigated solely for research purposes. The body of data regarding the *fulacht fiadh* is therefore accumulating without any guidance as to what issues remain to be resolved in relation to the site type, as to what is

⁵ See, for example, the documents produced for and by the relevant government departments on the matter, including INTER-DEPARTMENTAL WORKING GROUP 1996 Strengthening the protection of the Architectural Heritage. A report submitted to the Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht and the Minister for the Environment. The Stationery Office, Dublin; DEPARTMENT OF ARTS, HERITAGE, GAELTACHT AND THE ISLANDS 1999 Framework and principles for the protection of the archaeological heritage. The Stationery Office, Dublin. ⁶ e.g. CLEARY, R.M., HURLEY, M.F., & TWOHIG, E.A. (ed) 1987 Archaeological excavations on the Cork-Dublin gas pipeline 1981-2. Department of Archaeology, University College, Cork.

⁷ BENNETT, I. (ed) 2002 Excavations 2000. Wordwell, Bray. p.vi (introduction)

actually known about its distribution, or about its relationship with other archaeological or natural landscape features, and as to what the excavator should be looking out for when approaching similar sites in future.

The *fulacht fiadh* was the subject of a research carried out by O'Kelly in the 1950s, and he wrote in the 1980s that 'the first of these sites to be scientifically excavated in Ireland were two at Ballyvourney in 1952 and three at Killeens in 1953, all in Co. Cork.' O'Kelly pursued his interest by carrying out some experimental reconstruction work as a means of demonstrating the validity of his theories as to the use of the *fulacht fiadh* as a cooking site, but there appears to be no guiding research agenda for the rescue archaeologist faced with a *fulacht fiadh* today.

If the archaeologist does not know what it is that he hopes to achieve by investigating a particular site (or a particular type of site), it must be difficult for him to justify that investigation. There is therefore an ongoing need for the maintenance of research agendas and for the processing of field evidence in such a way that it can easily be assimilated into the existing body of knowledge regarding the relevant area. Until a model is set up against which data emerging from excavations can be compared, the assessment of those data must be difficult and their value limited.

The type of site is, of course, irrelevant. There is a need for a framework of guidance for the approach of the rescue archaeologist to any type of site, and such a framework is essential if excavation results are conveniently to be incorporated in anything more than a site-specific database. In relation to the wealth of information which appears to have been produced through *fulacht fiadh* excavation (for example) it is essential, if future excavations of the site type are to make a significant contribution to archaeological knowledge, that we should assimilate the information which has already been gathered.

'Research' excavations are designed to answer specific questions and to investigate particular areas of interest in relation to individual sites and site

⁸ O'KELLY, M.J 1954 'Excavations and experiments in Irish cooking-places', *JRSAI* 84, 105-155; O'KELLY, M.J. 1989 *Early Ireland*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.223-227

types. The archaeologist with a research agenda will thus approach each site with a view to finding answers to recognised problems, whereas in rescue work the excavator can only set out to record the findings of the investigation in as detailed a manner as possible, and hope that the questions posed by future researchers will be answerable on the basis of the record which has been made. The director of a rescue excavation will rarely have the opportunity to pursue the project according to the needs dictated by gaps in our knowledge of similar sites, and must instead take as the priority the extraction of the maximum possible amount of information from the site, in the course of its destruction, within the time specified in the project brief.

In relation to tower houses the difficulties concerned with the dominance of 'rescue' excavation are even more complex. Tower houses, when they survive to almost any extent above ground level, are sufficiently prominent and substantial monuments to be immediately noticeable in the landscape even to the casual observer. As a result, it is usually only a deliberate and calculated act which leads to their physical damage or destruction. A stone monument of any kind (and particularly a masonry structure) is far less susceptible to inadvertent demolition – as a result of the activities of an over-enthusiastic agriculturalist, for example – than the remains of what may have been a building of similar function and status which happened to be constructed of earth, timber, or other organic materials. Conversely, however, stone does not decay to the same extent as timber, wattle, or thatch, and it is therefore, of course, an eminently recyclable building material. The advantages for the archaeologist accruing from the durability of masonry structures may thus in part be offset by the possibility that the stones of an abandoned building may have been salvaged for reuse in the construction of another. The reuse of stone is found in a wide variety of buildings, but a pertinent example is the seventeenth century plantation castle known as Parkes Castle, at Kilmore, county Leitrim. At Kilmore excavation uncovered the foundations of a tower house adjacent to the seventeenth century castle and the

excavator remarked that the tower house was 'very likely used as a source of stone for the later building.'9

Even with the demolition equipment of today it would usually be easier to avoid a substantial stone structure than to destroy it to make way for some new development. Furthermore, stone buildings - and particularly castles - seem to exert a fascination in the popular imagination and can often maintain symbolic significance for a community (even if only as a landmark and familiar reference point) long after their original functional value has been forgotten or eclipsed.

The growth of the heritage industry and the importance of tourism in the Irish economy ought to have contributed to the preservation (and to the conservation) of archaeological monuments generally, but it is possibly inevitable that the most visually spectacular will attract most attention. The lack of attention paid to tower houses is perhaps surprising in this context, but then official interest in the archaeological heritage has until recent years been concentrated on the periods before 1169. Indeed it is perhaps publications like the Excavations series, along with the work of certain archaeologist whose interests spanned the chronological 'boundaries', and then the various major urban excavations, starting in Ireland with Dublin and Wood Quay, which have demonstrated the wealth of the country's medieval archaeological resource. In recent years the interest of public bodies in medieval Ireland does seem to have been aroused. Good examples are Waterford Corporation, with its sponsorship of the publication of the excavations of the Viking and medieval city and its establishment of a museum to house the finds from those excavations; 10 and the Discovery Programme, with the establishment in the mid-1990s of a major research project on settlement in medieval rural Ireland. 11 A very significant symbolic step towards the recognition of the value of the medieval archaeological heritage was taken when the National Museum of Ireland opened its first exhibition on medieval Ireland in 2001.

⁹ FOLEY, C. [undated] 'Kilmore, county Leitrim' in DELANEY, T. (ed) *Excavations 1972*. [No publication details] pp.19-20

¹⁰ HURLEY, M.F. & SCULLY, O.M.B., with MCCUTCHEON, S.W.J. 1997 Late Viking Age and Medieval Waterford: Excavations 1986-1992. Waterford Corporation, Waterford.

¹¹ O'CONOR 1998.

Excavation work has been carried out since the 1970s on castellated buildings in Ireland, but most of this has been concentrated on structures of larger dimensions and earlier date than tower houses, such as the castles at Adare, Dublin, Ferns, Kilkenny, Limerick, Roscrea, and Trim. The few tower house excavations have yielded but little information in comparison, and their motivation and management has rarely been such as to afford the researcher the opportunity of furthering debate on many of the essential questions of tower house study.

Most frequently, excavation has been carried out in the vicinity of a tower house, perhaps in fulfilment of the conditions of a planning permission. An entry in the *Excavations* bulletin, having implied by its title that it was concerned with a tower house, may actually merely mention the proximity of the tower house as the reason why monitoring (by an archaeologist) of mechanical excavation had to be carried out. There is no doubt that the planning regulations which require that developments which are to take place within a certain distance of a recorded archaeological monument should (at least) be monitored by an archaeologist are a positive aspect of the legislative position regarding archaeology. However, the great increase in excavation licences issued and summary reports submitted to *Excavations* noted in the 1990s must largely be attributed to these 'monitoring' requirements.

The necessarily restricted nature of a monitoring brief - and also of an excavation brief in most 'rescue'-type situations - means that while it may appear that some kind of archaeological excavation is being carried out, in a substantial proportion of cases the only evidence to emerge is negative. The most extreme instance of this is, of course, where no archaeologically-significant stratigraphy is reported at all; but more frustrating, perhaps (or maybe 'promising', for those who subscribe to the longer view of archaeological research), are those brief accounts which do record the presence of material of archaeological relevance but which are unable to relate that material to the monument or feature which was the original reason for the presence of an archaeologist.

In the context of this project, however, even dislocated fragments of archaeological evidence may be of significant value. Even an excavation of the most limited extent may provide evidence for a settlement presence or perhaps for building activity at one period or another. Such information may be of importance in demonstrating the vitality of an area at a particular time, and special attention is of course given to excavation evidence which suggests construction work (or other vigorous activity) taking place in the fourteenth century.

One of the only major research projects centred on a tower house in Ireland is the investigation of Barryscourt Castle, near Carrigtwohill in county Cork. Even this project is actually driven not by an exclusively archaeological research agenda, but rather by the desire that the impressive tower house should be opened to the public. It is, after all, conveniently close to a main road, it is only a few miles from the city of Cork, and it is near a selection of other tourist attractions.

At Barryscourt excavation has been carried out over a series of seasons by Dave Pollock according to the requirements of the National Monuments Service in conjunction with its restoration of the site. Pollock observed in 1999 that 'there is no date for the start of Barryscourt', though commenting that the village of Carrigtwohill, nearby, is known to have been a Barry manor before 1200. He suggested that on the basis of historical material it would appear that the castle was occupied for a relatively short period, from the mid sixteenth century to the early seventeenth. His discussion of the dating of the occupation of the site includes the implication that the archaeological evidence available at that stage provided the basis for a relative chronology only, a situation which seems to have prompted him to comment that 'it is hoped that

¹² POLLOCK 1999, 172.

¹³ The nature of archaeological excavation is such that much chronological orientation is constructed around a relative framework. It is only when the archaeologist obtains an 'absolute' date that he can fit that relative framework into the conventional calendar on the basis of anything more than speculation. 'Absolute' dates may be provided by the discovery of coins, or of a particular type of ceramic, by radiocarbon dating, or by dendrochronology. Other features, objects, or techniques may furnish dating evidence which, provided it comes from a well-stratified context, may assist in the understanding of the development of the site as a whole.

further excavation will recover waterlogged timber from the edge of the moat, and this should provide a dendrochronological date for the early use of the site.'14

Pollock's report on the Barryscourt excavations for 2000 indicates that the hopes he expressed in 1999 were satisfied, at least to the extent that waterlogged wood was found which was suitable for dendrochronological assessment.¹⁵ The dendrochronological analysis of the samples does indeed seem to have provided dates 'for the early use of the site' as anticipated by Pollock. However, it is clear from his account of the activities at Barryscourt in 2000 that Pollock was not expecting that his speculations of 1999 would be proved true to so dramatic a degree, as he reported that 'this year dendrochronological samples wrought havoc with the late dating at Barryscourt.' He remained confident that the tower house itself, together with its bawn wall, 'are undoubtedly late medieval' (a deliberately vague term, perhaps), but he found himself with the task of interpreting the presence of timbers from trees with felling dates of AD 1197+/-9, AD616+/-9, and AD633+/-9 on a site which seems until then to have shown signs of activity and occupation only from the sixteenth century onwards. Indeed, until the three dendrochronological dates were returned, the archaeological evidence appeared to corroborate an interpretation of the date of the site which was essentially based on the rather meagre historical record.

The seventh century timbers were rather neatly recategorised by Pollock from their role as elements of a 'fish trap' (of what had presumably been assumed to be a date contemporary with the later medieval activity at the site) to 'the truncated remains of a seventh century horizontal mill.' Furthermore, the excavator considered that 'the sluice-gate [from which came the twelfth / thirteenth century sample] suggests activity beside the stream at the start of the thirteenth century.' In writing of the relative chronology of the site in the wake of the 1998 season of excavations Pollock felt it to be 'unlikely that any buildings on site pre-date the large tower-house (probably of

¹⁴ POLLOCK 1999.

¹⁵ POLLOCK 2002.

¹⁶ POLLOCK 2002.

sixteenth, perhaps of fifteenth century construction),' although he did consider it possible that one structure might be contemporary.¹⁷ By the time the 2000 season was complete it seemed that 'the second mortared stone building on site, beside the sluice, may considerably pre-date the tower-house,' and the excavator was obliged to report that 'the possibility of continuous occupation of the site from the start of the thirteenth century is currently being debated.'¹⁸

Estimates of the dates of building and settlement activity at Barryscourt have in fact varied. Barryscourt appears in the historical record for the first time in the second half of the sixteenth century. Architectural-historical evidence prompted O'Keeffe's suggestion that the tower house was built in about 1550; others consider a fifteenth century date more likely. Pollock seems keen to reconcile the presence of a moat around the tower house with dating of other 'moated sites' in Ireland to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In support of this earlier date (at least for the moat) Pollock cites the results of Rynne's 1994 excavations at Barryscourt, when pottery recovered from a section of the moat prompted him to attribute it to the late fourteenth century. In this context it appears significant that every sherd of pottery recovered during the excavations carried out in the bawn in 1996 (which was in fact all of the pottery from Pollock's excavations which had been examined at the time he was writing) was dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, 'none to the fifteenth century, and none to the sixteenth century.'

The dating evidence may be explained by suggesting an earlier date for the entire complex than has been proposed on architectural grounds for the standing

¹⁷ POLLOCK 2000.

¹⁸ POLLOCK 2002.

¹⁹ POLLOCK 1999, 172.

²⁰ O'KEEFFE 1997, 16; MONK, J. & TOBIN, R. 1991 Barryscourt Castle: An Architectural Survey. Barryscourt Trust, Cork.

²¹ POLLOCK 1999, 158.

²² POLLOCK 1999, 158, citing RYNNE, C. 1994 A preliminary report on excavations at Barryscourt Castle, Co. Cork, during 1994, excavation report 93E76 (copies with the National Monuments Service and the National Museum)

²³ POLLOCK 1999, 158, citing MCCUTCHEON, C. 1996 'A note on the pottery from Barryscourt Castle', in POLLOCK, D. *Archive report on archaeological investigations at Barryscourt Castle, Carrigtwohill, Co. Cork*, excavation report 96E238 (copies with the National Monuments Service and the National Museum)

masonry, or by suggesting that a moated site of thirteenth or fourteenth century date was improved or altered by the construction of the tower house and other buildings at a later stage. In either case it remains probable that the site was occupied well before its first documentary reference in the later sixteenth century, and it seems likely that there was activity in the area before even the thirteenth century, and certainly before the construction of the tower house.

The example of Barryscourt seems to illustrate some of the problems which may arise in the course of efforts to categorise a site on the basis of limited evidence; it demonstrates the dangers associated with dependence on a historically-based *terminus ante quem* for the construction or occupation of a site; and it shows that in the course of almost any archaeological excavation hypotheses will usually be formed, revised, and further revised in order to accommodate evidence as it emerges. More specifically, however, and of potential relevance to the circumstances of tower house construction, it seems to show that it is likely that there was continuity of settlement of some kind at Barryscourt from the early thirteenth century, and perhaps for some centuries before that. There may not have been uninterrupted occupation at the site from the seventh century, but the presence of the horizontal mill with its dendrochronologically-dated timbers implies at least that there was a semi-permanent human presence in the area at that stage.

The existence of evidence for activity at different periods appears to testify to the attraction of Barryscourt as a settlement site. In the light of this attraction, the possibility of continual (if not continuous) settlement activity at or near the location of the tower house from the early medieval period should not be ruled out. Further evidence for such settlement may or may not survive in the archaeological record, but in any case would only be traceable through further excavation.

The evolving use of a particular site over a protracted period, as appears to have happened at Barryscourt, is not an unusual phenomenon. Indeed, Bintliff's recent discussion of settlement continuity at sites in central Greece includes brief reference to the various theories which have been developed to

explain archaeological evidence for activity at a single location at a series of periods. The activity may not, of course, have been continuous. A specific site may indeed have been occupied uninterruptedly by a single self-perpetuating population over a protracted period, but, alternatively, the attributes of the site – Bintliff refers to 'physical topography, soil types, technological and land use regimes, natural paths of communication, etc.' as being of potential relevance – may make it especially susceptible to settlement, therefore leading to its occupation by a succession of relatively short-lived groups, the presence of which may perhaps give the impression in the archaeological record of longer-term settlement continuity.²⁴

The continuity of activity at Barryscourt was revealed only by archaeological excavation. Likewise, excavation in 1972 at Parkes Castle, Kilmore, county Leitrim, yielded evidence for more protracted settlement at the site of a seventeenth century plantation castle than had hitherto been suspected. The excavation at Kilmore revealed, under an area of cobbled courtyard which was dated to the seventeenth century, 'the foundations of an earlier fortification, probably a fifteenth or sixteenth century tower house, which was very likely used as a source of stone for the later building.'²⁵

Recent results from a number of excavations at tower houses seem to provide evidence supporting a revision of the standard image of the tower house as a tower, perhaps surrounded by a bawn, standing alone in the countryside. The interaction between these archaeological findings (the full implications of which are difficult to judge from the summary reports) and other forms of evidence are discussed elsewhere. However, it would appear that at several sites excavation is providing indications that our understanding

²⁴ BINTLIFF, J. 2001 'Recent developments and new approaches to the archaeology of medieval Greece' in VALOR, M. & CARMONA, A. (ed) *IV European Symposium for teachers of Medieval Archaeology, Sevilla-Cordoba, 29th September – 2nd October 1999.* Secretariado de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Sevilla, Sevilla. pp.33-44 at 36-7

of the organisation and intended function of the buildings which remain visible above ground may have to be re-examined.²⁶

Another example of the discovery through excavation of tower houserelated settlement activity comes from Carrickfergus town. In 1973 excavation which was carried out in the wake of the demolition of a group of Victorian structures uncovered evidence that 'on the High Street frontage the lower courses of a Tower House appear to have been reused as a Victorian cellar.'27

It seems only to have been at the time of the demolition of the residence of the Papal Nuncio (formerly the Under-Secretary's Lodge) in Phoenix Park, Dublin, that the existence of Ashdown Castle, apparently a small tower house, was rediscovered. The castle seems to have been incorporated in the later house and then forgotten until it re-emerged, relatively unscathed by dry rot, the presence of which had occasioned the removal of the structure which had surrounded it.²⁸

The dangers of relying solely on historical documentation in the assessment of tower houses seem clear from the above accounts of archaeological discoveries. Not only is it possible that a tower house may have existed before its first mention in the documentary record, but it is conceivable that it may not actually feature in recognisable form in the surviving documents In the light of this existing uncertainty, summary accounts of excavations such as that for the work done at Kirkistown, county Down, at some stage between 1980 and 1984 seem particularly unsatisfactory.

In the case of Kirkistown the excavator did not even report the location of the investigatory work in relation to the tower house which seems to have been the reason for its execution. One might wonder, for example, whether the excavation took place inside or outside the castle walls. The author of the summary report published in the Excavations bulletin seems so confident in relying on an unspecified historical reference for the construction date that the

²⁶ COTTER 2003; O'CARROLL 2003; FITZPATRICK 2003; HAYDEN 2003; HODKINSON 2003; CAREY 2003

²⁷ DELANEY, T. 1974 'Carrickfergus town' in DELANEY, T. (ed) Excavations 1973. [no publication details] pp.2-3 at 3
 LIDDY, P. 2000 Dublin. A Celebration. Dublin Corporation, Dublin. p.39

site is categorised as a '17th-century tower house' in the title of the brief account.²⁹

It appears that the excavator was able to draw but few conclusions (or even hypotheses) from the apparently limited work which was carried out (though its extent is not specified). Given the uncertain nature of the results of the archaeological investigation and the caution of the excavator regarding those findings, it seems peculiar that such unquestioning reliance should have been placed on the single piece of historical material to which reference is made (albeit without indication as to its source). A hint of the author's appreciation of the potentially unreliable character of this historical evidence may be detected in the reference to the tower house as having been 'reputedly built in 1622.' However, the apparent dependence of the archaeologist – despite the commendable hint of reservation – on this (presumably) documentary date may conveniently reflect an important aspect of the relationship between the medieval history and the medieval archaeology of Ireland.

The history of Ireland in the medieval period, though arousing relatively little interest in Ireland until the twentieth century, is certainly more solidly established and generally mature than the essentially juvenile discipline of medieval archaeology. One of the distinctive attractions of medieval – as opposed to prehistoric - archaeology is the possibility of overlap between the documentary and the material record in relation to a particular site. It is almost certain that an archaeological discovery, if identified and dated, may be placed in at least a broad historical context. The interaction between historical and archaeological evidence can, however, be delicate, and should certainly be assessed carefully in relation to individual sites. At Kirkistown, as at any site for which it appears that a documentary reference exists, the archaeologist must exercise a substantial degree of caution before drawing conclusions regarding

²⁹ BANNON, N. 1989/1990 'Kirkistown, county Down' in MANNING, C. & HURL, D. (ed) 'Excavations Bulletin 1980-1984: Summary Account of Archaeological Excavation in Ireland', *Journal of Irish Archaeology* **5**, pp.65-80 at 73

Chapter seven Excavations

the relationship between the standing remains and the structures described in the document.

There are of course hazards to be confronted even without the complications of documentary material. In works produced since the middle of the twentieth century which deal with medieval architecture in Ireland the influence of the background provided by Harold Leask should always be taken into account. Among the most influential of the shadows cast by Leask was that which fell over the fourteenth century, and over the second half of that century in particular, a period which he is considered to have regarded as essentially devoid of construction activity in Ireland. It is now becoming clear that the 'fourteenth century hiatus' supposedly defined by Leask was not absolute, and also that Leask himself did not actually regard it as being so. The conventional thinking on the subject was for much of the second half of the twentieth century based on what now seems to have been a slightly overdramatic interpretation of Leask's writings, including the principle that virtually nothing was built in the fourteenth century in Ireland.

It seems to be an inevitable consequence of this understanding of Leask's work that archaeologists and architectural historians would have been at least reluctant to attribute structural elements located on archaeological sites to the fourteenth century, and also to date standing remains to this period. Excavation of structures and sites of various kinds has, however, yielded evidence for building activity in the supposedly barren fourteenth century.

Ann Lynch, reporting on 'major excavations carried out in advance of conservation works' at Tintern Abbey, county Wexford, for example, summarised her findings in four paragraphs, each dealing with a distinct period of activity. In the second of these paragraphs she stated that 'the bulk of the

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³⁰ See, for example, LEASK 1958. In the preface Leask commented that 'towards the end of this pause [the second half of the fourteenth century] the first signs of a new [architectural] style were appearing.' It would surely be impossible for even the first signs of an architectural style to emerge if no building was being carried out.

standing remains at Tintern belong to the fourteenth century.'³¹ Claire Walsh's excavation at Patrick Street / Nicholas Street / Winetavern Street in Dublin uncovered an assortment of features of archaeological interest, but of particular significance was the excavation over a period of several weeks of 'the site of a vertical undershot watermill' which 'was built in the mid-thirteenth century ... and rebuilt in the later part of the fourteenth century more or less to the same plan.'³²

An example of work producing nothing but negative information, and fairly sketchy information at that, is the excavation at 'Rathcoffey Castle', county Kildare, the purpose of which 'was to test for any archaeological remains in advance of the construction of a private dwelling.' Excavation of trenches 'between 100m and 130m east of the surviving castle gatehouse' was carried out by the use of a mechanical digger, and virtually 'no archaeological features were uncovered.'³³

At 'Killininny', Oldcourt, county Dublin, fourteen trenches were excavated by machine in advance of the development of a zone at the edge of an area of about one acre surrounding 'a castle or tower house, of which fragmentary remnants are still visible,' which is 'also the supposed site of an early Christian monastery.' Only a very few objects of archaeological interest were found, and the excavator concluded that 'since no trace of medieval activity occurred in the areas investigated, a thorough excavation of the area will now be essential.' It is not clear whether such excavation ever took place, nor whether the development went ahead, but it seems most likely that the archaeological agenda suggested by the excavator would have remained untouched, whereas the proposed development would have proceeded (and

³¹ LYNCH, A. 1989/1990 'Tintern, county Wexford' in MANNING, C. & HURL, D. (ed) 'Excavations Bulletin 1980-1984: Summary Account of Archaeological Excavation in Ireland', *Journal of Irish Archaeology* **5**, pp.65-80 at 80

³² WALSH, C. 1991 'Patrick St. / Nicholas St. / Winetavern St., South City Ward, Dublin' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1990*. Wordwell, Bray. pp.28-29 at 28

³³ BYRNE, G. 1987 'Rathcoffey Castle, Rathcoffey Demesne, county Kildare' in COTTER, C. (ed) *Excavations 1986.* Organisation of Irish Archaeologists, Dublin. p.21

indeed there appears to be no further summary report in *Excavations* of work at the site).³⁴

Entries such as those for Killininny and Rathcoffey, while clearly important insofar as they demonstrate that archaeological deposits have not been affected (or at least not significantly affected) by the development project at issue, also illustrate a dramatic change in the role of the archaeologist. The question of the proper purpose of archaeology is starkly posed by the growing size of the annual *Excavations* bulletin. The essence of this question is to be found in the fact that while the number of entries has grown (tenfold in approximately as many years, as observed above), the content of most of these entries is actually seriously limited. This is only partly a result of the format of the publication itself. The problem, from the perspective of the archaeologist, is that the location, extent, and scale of each excavation are in virtually every case dictated by demands which are almost totally independent of the feature of archaeological interest which is the reason why the excavation is taking place at all.

It is appropriate that archaeologists should be in a position to capitalise on the wide range of developments which have been taking place in Ireland in recent years, and no doubt the intentions of most excavators are oriented towards the maintenance of an archaeological agenda, but it is nonetheless clear that the dramatic growth in excavation activity is essentially illusory in terms of its contribution to the understanding of the country's archaeology. It is undoubtedly important that archaeologists should monitor development in potentially sensitive areas, and that rescue excavation should be carried out where necessary, but the focus of archaeological activity should surely be the pursuit of archaeological interests rather than the accommodation of the interests of others.

³⁴ SWAN, D.L. 1991 'Killininny, Oldcourt, county Dublin' in BENNETT, I. (ed) Excavations 1990. Wordwell, Bray. p.27

TOWER HOUSES IN SCOTLAND

It has already been pointed out that while the number of excavations being carried out – or rather the number of licences to excavate or to monitor earthmoving work being granted – has increased dramatically in Ireland in the course of the last decade, the amount of positive archaeological data emerging from excavation has not increased at the same rate. It is therefore suggested that the apparent boom in archaeological activity, although certainly justifiable in the broader context of the maintenance of an archaeologically vigilant eye on development work, is not a true indicator of the rate of archaeological information acquisition.

Of course, Ireland is not the only place in which this situation has been observed. 'In recent years, in an increasing number of cases, excavations have been dictated by the possibility that sites might be totally destroyed by building works, by drainage, or by modern farming methods. This means that we today have anonymous unlisted sites which are most often excavated. At these excavations only a small area is excavated in each case, either for the purpose of finding the precise location of the site and evaluating the condition of the remains with a view to future preservation, or in order to gather information about the remains and their date of construction before it is too late.' These words were written of Denmark in the early 1990s, but they describe a state of affairs which has taken increasing hold in Ireland during the last decade.

The Irish experience is also echoed to an extent by that of Scotland, where 'the amount of archaeological work carried out on medieval sites ... is far outweighed by that on monuments of a greater antiquity.' However, very significant archaeological investigations have been carried out in several of Ireland's towns and cities as a result of the redevelopment of urban areas, a trend

¹ ENGBERG, N. 1994 'Borren and Næsholm: two examples of Danish castle-building', *Château Gaillard* XVI (1992), pp.155-165 at 155-156

² TABRAHAM 1988, 267.

which started in the final decades of the twentieth century,³ and some of the country's larger medieval castles have been excavated, at least to some extent.⁴

The impression to be gained from a glance at the Excavations bulletins for the last ten years or so is that archaeological work has been carried out at a fairly substantial number of tower houses. The reality of the situation, apparent on a closer reading of the summary reports, is that the overwhelming majority of such investigations took place as a result of the proximity of a development site to a tower house (or to the 'site of' a castle of some, usually still unidentified, kind). The tower house may therefore have been the reason why the presence of an archaeologist was required, but it is only in exceptional cases that it is itself the subject of the work for which the licence was granted. A typical example would be Castle Warren, Barnahely, county Cork, the subject of a report in Excavations 1999 which is entitled 'Tower-house, bawn, etc.' We are told that 'The site at Castle Warren consists of a complex of medieval and post-medieval buildings around a courtyard and includes a tower-house and bawn of probably late 16th-century date and Castle Warren House, which dates to the 18th century. It is currently owned by the Industrial Development Authority, who wished to secure the site by erecting a chain-link fence with an access gate around the tower-house and bawn, at a distance of 10m from the boundary walls.

Five trenches were excavated by machine just inside the line of the fence before the digging of the foundation pits for the fence. No archaeological features relating to the later medieval occupation at the site were uncovered

³ See, for example, the series of publications on the *Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-81* published by the National Museum of Ireland with the Royal Irish Academy and starting with MITCHELL, G.F. 1987 *Archaeology and environment in early Dublin*. Medieval Dublin Excavations 1962-1981. Series C, Volume 1. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, for the National Museum of Ireland and the Royal Irish Academy; HURLEY & SCULLY, with MCCUTCHEON 1997; HURLEY, M.F. & SHEEHAN, C.M. 1995 *Excavations at the Dominican Priory, St Mary's of the Isle, Crosse's Green, Cork*. Cork Corporation, Cork.

⁴ SWEETMAN, P.D. 1978 'Archaeological excavations at Trim Castle, Co. Meath, 1971-74', Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 78c, pp.127-198 (and also HAYDEN, A. forthcoming on Trim Castle); SWEETMAN, P.D. 1979 'Archaeological excavations at Ferns Castle, Co. Wexford', Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy 79c, pp.217-245; WIGGINS, K. 2000 Anatomy of a siege: King John's Castle, Limerick, 1642. Wordwell, Bray; MCNEILL 1981, which brings together earlier work on the castle by archaeologists such as E.M. Jope, B.C.S. Wilson, D.M. Waterman, and T.G. Delaney and includes an appendix on the excavated material.

during excavation of the test-trenches or monitoring of the excavation of the foundation pits.'

The archaeological licence was granted in order to accommodate the demands of the developer. The archaeologists were in fact working to facilitate the security needs of the IDA rather than to advance our knowledge of the archaeology of Castle Warren (or of tower houses, or of county Cork, generally).

There are but a few exceptions to this phenomenon in relation to the purported excavation of tower houses in Ireland, and the results of the work at Barryscourt Castle (also in county Cork) have already been discussed. Excavations have been undertaken at Kilcoe Castle, county Cork, where the owner has organised 'a programme of complete restoration', but their extent appears to have been relatively small so far.⁶ Reports such as that on archaeological work done at Ballytarsna Castle, county Tipperary, a 'towerhouse and bawn', appear to be of very limited interest in that (in this particular case) 'eleven test-trenches were excavated by machine across the lines of the proposed new roadway and service trenches. No features or deposits of archaeological significance were revealed.' However, the mention that 'extensive restoration of the tower and bawn is planned over the next few years' seems to carry the implication that excavation will have to be carried out in areas of greater archaeological potential.⁷

Projects such as that at Ballytarsna promise much for the future, but at the moment there is only a very irregular scatter of isolated pieces of excavation-based information regarding tower houses in Ireland. The significance of this dearth of data is easily appreciated when one turns to the situation in Scotland. Scotland, as a very close neighbour to Ireland in terms not only of geographical proximity, but also in the context of the overlapping heritage of the two countries, presents what is probably the closest parallel to the Irish medieval

⁵ O'DONNELL, M. 2000 'Castle Warren, Barnahely, county Cork' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1999*. Wordwell, Bray. p.22, no.79

⁶ KIELY, J. 2000 'Kilcoe Castle, Kilcoe, county Cork' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1999*. Wordwell, Bray. p.31, no.105

⁷ HODKINSON, B. 2000 'Ballytarsna Castle, county Tipperary' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1999*. Wordwell, Bray. p.283, no.814

secular architectural experience. Scotland, like Ireland, was on the periphery of the Norman (and Anglo-Norman) world, and both are conventionally viewed as having been inhabited by people who were inherently inclined to violence as a means of addressing political differences. The countryside of Scotland, like that of Ireland, is dotted with tower houses, and the general assumptions in each area regarding the reasons behind their construction suggest that they were built to fulfil similar purposes and in response to similar situations. The theory that the idea of tower house construction, and the architectural form itself, were imported from Scotland to Ireland has been given little notice since Ó Danachair presented his notion that their inspiration should rather be sought in continental Europe. Indeed, Leask had already suggested that the 'fashion' for calling the tower houses of Ireland "pele-towers" or "peels", after the borderholds, so misnamed, of Northumbria' was potentially misleading not only because of the confusing title given to the Northumbrian structures, but also because 'the "peles" appear ... to be contemporaneous ... with the Irish towers and can hardly have served as models for them.'9 Most subsequent writers have tended towards the hypothesis that by the later part of the medieval period the concept of the tower did not need to be imported into any part of Europe- not only is it an obvious defensive form, it also seems already to have been widespread, if not universal, in the European architectural canon of the day. 10

It is perhaps inappropriate, therefore, to think in terms of the direct import of the tower house as an architectural form from Scotland to Ireland (or from any part of Europe to any other part). However, the links between the two are too strong to invalidate altogether comparison between the architectural development of the respective areas. Unless one is to regard the tower house as a peculiarly Irish phenomenon, rather than as part of the broader stream of European architecture, it would seem insular in the extreme to shrink from comparison with examples of the type to be found elsewhere. There is

⁸ Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, 162.

⁹ LEASK 1999, 76.

¹⁰ Indeed, Cairns suggested an even wider reach for the idea of the tower: CAIRNS 1984, 17, 20, 21.

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obviously a need for examination of the tower house in the Irish context, and the briefest tour of Ireland would provide the observer with evidence to the effect that while the general form of the tower house is reasonably clear, it contains considerable variety in its detail, whether in terms of size, shape, situation, decoration, or ambition. The very fact that such variety exists among tower houses in Ireland should encourage reference to possible parallels — or inspirations, as some would have it — elsewhere.

One aspect of the traditional understanding of the tower house which appears to be common to Scotland and Ireland is their image as isolated structures (perhaps surrounded by a bawn, or 'barmkin', in the Scottish terminology). There are of course towers in urban situations which fall, according to most categorisations, to be classified as tower houses, and there are also residential towers attached to ecclesiastical institutions which seem to be accepted as part of the same architectural group.

Leask was clearly thinking in terms of the lone tower when, introducing his chapter on tower houses, he referred to the later fifteenth century as the period to which 'by far the greater number of the single towers – fortified residences, tower houses, belong.' O Danachair's conception of the tower house seems to have been similar. McNeill, commenting that 'the chapters devoted to tower-houses are probably the strongest part of Leask's book on Irish castles', also appears to agree with Leask that tower houses 'are square or rectangular towers (occasionally equipped with side turrets), normally with a vault over at least one floor, usually the ground floor, and with the upper floors marked by better windows, fireplaces, etc.; entry was usually through a door on the ground floor. Features associated with the tower-houses include the vault constructed on wickerwork centring, punch-dressed stone for window and door jambs, ogee-headed windows and angle loops; the wall head equipped with box machicolations and battlements with stepped merlons: these are the types of

¹¹ LEASK 1999, 75.

¹² Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, 158.

feature which define the work of the period.'¹³ Barry considers that 'the main element of such a dwelling [a tower house] was a single tower', although he observes (as did Ó Danachair¹⁴) that 'in many cases there would also have been a bawn or a fortified enclosure either surrounding the tower or joined on to the tower itself.'¹⁵

In his recent general publication on medieval Ireland, O'Keeffe seems to go further than earlier writers in stating that 'we must be careful not to forget that [the tower house] was but one building in the typical castle complex of the late middle ages', citing the late sixteenth century account by Ludolf von Münchhausen mentioned above. You Münchhausen describes the tower as being reserved for military or defensive functions, while entertainment and accommodation is provided in a house nearby. This presents a particularly stark contrast with Ó Danachair's assertion that while 'colloquially they [tower houses] are called castles ... although there is some superficial resemblance they differ essentially from the military castles of the time.'

Ó Danachair was adamant that one should, in seeking inspiration for the tower houses of Ireland, look to continental Europe rather than to Scotland, but, while the merits of this argument have been considered elsewhere, it is certainly true to say that several aspects of the study of the medieval architecture of Scotland have close parallels with that of Ireland. Archaeologists were in the final two decades or so of the twentieth century starting to contribute to a field which had until then been (and arguably still is, at least in Ireland) dominated by the publications of architects and architectural historians. In Scotland it appears that the late nineteenth century work of MacGibbon and Ross¹⁸ occupies a place

¹³ MCNEILL 1997, 201.

¹⁴ Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, 158.

¹⁵ BARRY 1988, 186.

¹⁶ O'KEEFFE 2000, 46, citing Ó RIAIN-RAEDEL 1998, 230. See chapter 4.

¹⁷ Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, 158.

¹⁸ MACGIBBON & ROSS 1887-1892; MACGIBBON & ROSS 1896-1897. MacGibbon and Ross were practising architects, whose productivity in the field of medieval architectural history is all the more remarkable for having been the result of their weekend pursuit – the many buildings which emerged from their architectural practice do, admittedly, seem to reflect the influence of their medieval predecessors as building designers, but this would probably not have been extraordinary in the context of the fashions of the period in which they were working. Their interests were not

similar to that of Leask in mid-twentieth century Ireland.¹⁹ In both areas a perception appears to have developed, based presumably in large measure on observation of the buildings in the landscape, but also on the influence of the work of MacGibbon and Ross in Scotland, and of Leask in Ireland, of 'the medieval towerhouse ... as free-standing and self-contained.'²⁰

The amount of excavation which has been done at tower houses in Ireland is clearly insufficient to provide any depth of archaeological evidence to support or to refute this perception. It would appear that the quotation cited by O'Keeffe may be of significance, however, when one considers the results of a series of projects carried out in the later twentieth century at tower houses in Scotland.

At Smailholm Tower, Roxburghshire, for example, 'an archaeological investigation carried out between 1979 and 1981 within and around the barmkin, or courtyard, attached to the medieval towerhouse ... demonstrate[d] that the original residence of the Pringle laird was altogether more complex than the surviving ruined tower would have us believe.' The 'surviving ruined tower' remains, however, 'a dominant feature in the rolling landscape of the Merse' and 'one of the most evocative sights on the Scottish Border', factors which may surely have distracted attention from the possibility that it was actually intended as part (albeit the most visually impressive part) of a more elaborate complex of buildings. It is certainly relevant that in 1559 the 'lands called the Mains of Smailholm were referred to as being 'with the tower, fortalice and manor, husbandlands and cottages (*cum terre, fortalicio, et manerie, terries husbandiis et cotagiis*)'²² since, as Tabraham points out elsewhere, 'prior to excavation, it was widely assumed that the residence of the Pringle laird was confined within

confined exclusively to Scotland, and the influence of MacGibbon's work in southern France is evident in the introductory section to their secular Scottish work. MACGIBBON, D. 1888 *The architecture of Provence and the Riviera*. David Douglas, Edinburgh. On MacGibbon and Ross see WALKER, D. 1984 'The architecture of MacGibbon and Ross: the background to the books' in BREEZE, D.J. (ed) *Studies in Scottish Antiquity presented to Stewart Cruden*. John Donald, Edinburgh. pp.391-449

¹⁹ LEASK 1941; LEASK 1955-1960.

²⁰ TABRAHAM 1988, 267.

²¹ GOOD & TABRAHAM 1988, 231.

²² GOOD & TABRAHAM 1988, 238.

the towerhouse, with service offices – kitchen, bakehouse, brewhouse, stable, etc. – grouped around it in the barmkin enclosure. '23

The assumed arrangement, prior to excavation, would seem to be derived from MacGibbon and Ross,²⁴ but is echoed by the assumptions made by Barry regarding standard tower house layout in Ireland²⁵ – not merely a lone tower, with perhaps a bawn wall, as apparently envisaged by Leask and McNeill, but not so extensive or substantial or significant a set of additional (not merely ancillary) buildings as implied by O'Keeffe.²⁶ Excavation at Smailholm seems to have uncovered an arrangement far closer to O'Keeffe's vision of the tower house, however, revealing that there was 'a second residential unit, comprising probably an outer hall and chamber, standing alongside the towerhouse and very likely contemporary with it.²⁷

Tabraham uses the evidence of excavation not only at Smailholm Tower, but also at Threave Castle, in Galloway, to support his argument 'that the traditional view of the medieval towerhouse as the full extent of a lord's residential needs may be seriously flawed.' His argument is also founded on a comparison of the floor space at three tower houses belonging to a single family, the Douglases, each of which was 'the chief seat in its respective lordship or estate' and is assumed to have been designed to cater for 'a broadly similar accommodation need.'28 He observes that Hermitage Castle, 'a mighty towerhouse' which was completed by William Douglas by the end of the fourteenth century, had a total floor area of some 16,556 square feet (1,539 square metres). Newark Castle is dated to the 'very early' fifteenth century and was 'a simple rectangular block probably five storeys high beneath the battlements' with a total floor area of some 5,726 square feet (531 square metres). The third Douglas seat he considers is Threave Castle, another tower house of the later fourteenth century, which would have had a floor area of 5,510

²³ TABRAHAM 1988, 268.

²⁴ MACGIBBON, D. & ROSS, T. 1887 The castellated and domestic architecture of Scotland from the twelfth to the eighteenth century. Volume I. David Douglas, Edinburgh. pp.144-6. ²⁵ BARRY 1988, 186.

²⁶ O'KEEFFE 2000, 46. ²⁷ TABRAHAM 1988, 268.

square feet (511 square metres). In each of the latter two buildings the ratio of floor space used for residential purposes to that designated for service requirements is estimated at 3:2.

Tabraham considers it peculiar that structures erected by members of the same family, of the same rank and local importance, with similar resources at their disposal and building at around the same time, should have differed so dramatically in terms of the quantity of accommodation they provided. He relates the amount of space in the buildings to the status of the occupant, on the basis that figures on the same level of the social scale would not only have been required to fulfil certain social and administrative functions (for which they would have needed, for example, a hall), but would also have been expected to present a certain impression to the people of the surrounding area. The size and appearance of a building, it is clear, does much to convey the importance of its owner or occupant, and to reinforce his position. Tabraham therefore seeks an explanation for the discrepancy between the size of Hermitage and the size of each of Newark and Threave. His explanation is based on archaeological evidence, and he makes particular reference to the results of excavations carfied out at Threave Castle in the 1970s.²⁹

Excavation showed that the two sets of foundations which had been encountered by the Office of Works in 1923 but which had been assumed to have constituted part of 'an earlier castle of the celtic lords of Galloway which is reputed to have stood on the island and been burnt by The Bruce in 1308' were actually the remains of a pair of buildings which 'had both been erected late in the fourteenth century, probably on or near completion of the adjacent towerhouse.' 30

The castle at Threave, like that at Smailholm, was therefore originally far more extensive than is suggested by the ruins of the tower house now visible on the site. The buildings associated with the tower house may have included assorted ancillary structures, but it would appear that the two buildings

²⁸ TABRAHAM 1988, 269.

uncovered by the excavation at Threave in the early 1970s were part of a single design which included the tower house itself. The two buildings at Threave were interpreted as having been of two storeys each, and together they add some 6,500 square feet (600 square metres) of living space to the castle as a whole, bringing it much closer to the total floor area of Hermitage.

Tabraham has carried out his floor area calculations for Tantallon Castle, East Lothian, another castle built by William Douglas, but slightly before his reconstruction of Hermitage Castle, in about 1350.³¹ It is implied that Tantaflon provides a more direct comparison with Threave than Hermitage, as it too is made up of a group of buildings rather than a single outsize unit. Tabraham's 'conservative estimate' of the floor space at Tantallon is 12,000 square feet (1,100 square metres) but he notes that 'the amount available in the Douglas Tower at Tantallon, identified as the earl's private lodging within the castle, adds up to 450 square metres (5,000 square feet), the same as Threave.'³² Of course the total floor area of Threave, including the tower house and the two recently-excavated buildings, is 12,010 square feet (1,111 square metres), which is remarkably close to the figure obtained by Tabraham for Tantallon.

Of course, Tabraham's comment regarding Newark Castle is that excavation 'might well radically alter our perception of the earl of Douglas's chief seat in his wealthy holding of the Forest of Ettrick.' While in 1988 he was concerned that one should not 'overwork the excavated evidence', being prepared to conclude simply that 'there is more to the medieval towerhouse than immediately meets the eye', 33 by 1997 Tabraham felt sufficiently confident to suggest that 'Threave and the other fourteenth century towers like Hallforest might now be seen in a different light from hitherto – not so much castles in their own right but private lodgings reserved for the lord's own use, and the last resort in times of trouble, set within a much larger complex.' Indeed, he went so

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³⁰ TABRAHAM 1988, 271.

³¹ TABRAHAM, C.J. 1997 *Scotland's Castles*. B.T.Batsford / Historic Scotland, London. p.134 TABRAHAM 1997, 69.

³³ TABRAHAM 1988, 274, 275.

far as to say that 'we might reasonably christen them tower-house castles to distinguish them from the curtain-walled castles of the preceding century.'34

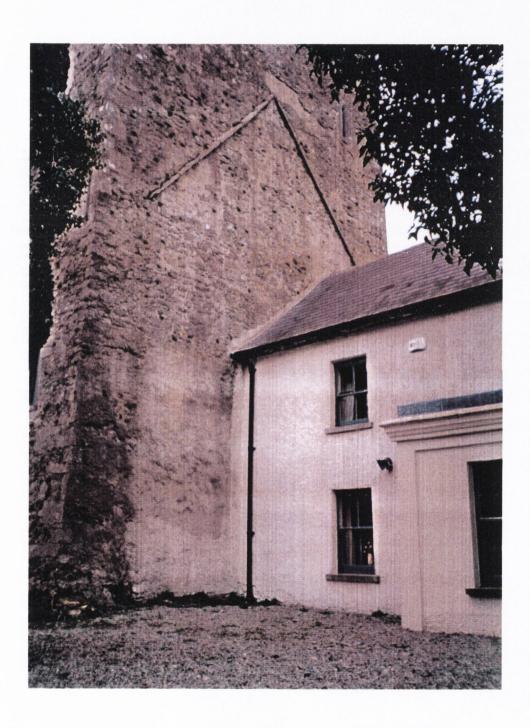
There appears to be a growing body of archaeological evidence from Scotland in support of a move from the traditional image of the tower house as 'a free-standing, largely self-contained entity, lofty and forbidding, "closed-up and inward-looking" as Cruden so tellingly puts it.' It should be pointed out that the majority of the publications propounding this move come from the pen of a single archaeologist, and that the excavation evidence on which those publications draw is mainly also his work. However, it is of considerable interest regarding Tabraham's ideas, as well as in relation to the possibility of comparative work between the tower houses of Scotland and of Ireland, to note that several excavations near tower houses in Ireland have yielded evidence for the one-time presence of substantial structures.

At Jordan's Castle, Ardglass, county Down, admittedly an urban site, excavation demonstrated that 'during the later medieval period a building was constructed next to the tower-house from stone extracted from a quarry dug inside the structure. The limited format of the basic published reporting medium, the *Excavations* bulletin, means that further details of, for example, the relative chronology of the two buildings are not provided and, indeed, it would surely be surprising if construction work were not carried out on what was probably a desirable urban site which had apparently not previously been built over.

More directly relevant to the Scottish parallels referred to above may actually be Clonmantagh Castle, Clonmantagh Lower, county Kilkenny. As a result of the archaeological work carried out at Clonmantagh it became 'clear that there was originally a large rectangular building, a hall or soft house, attached to the east side of the tower.' Not only is the line of the roof of the west gable of the 'hall' visible on the east wall of the tower (see illustration overleaf),

³⁴ TABRAHAM 1997, 71.

³⁵ TABRAHAM 1988, 268, citing CRUDEN, S. 1960 *The Scottish Castle*. Nelson, London. pp.108-9.



Clonmantagh castle, county Kilkenny, showing roof raggle

the north wall of this 'hall', identified on the basis of its thickness and pronounced batter, survives as part of the nineteenth century farmhouse which now adjoins the tower house.³⁷

Roof lines such as that at Clonmantagh Castle are visible on the walls of numerous medieval towers. Other examples include the tower houses at Danes Castle and Clonmines, both in county Wexford (see illustrations overleaf). It must be assumed that they have hitherto been understood as representative of the 'ancillary' buildings which are considered to have existed in association with tower houses. The height of the roof line at Clonmantagh seems to constitute substantial evidence in support of the notion that the structure attached to the side of the tower was of more impressive proportions than a mere 'ancillary' building. Furthermore, the fact that the roof line is present in the fabric of the wall of the tower indicates that the building beside the tower was part of the complex of structures which was envisaged at the time when the tower itself was being built.

Investigations at Kilmurry Castle, Sleiverue, county Kilkenny, a 'small late medieval tower-house, with an adjoining two-storey dwelling-house incorporated a later medieval church or chapel that was attached to, and built at the same time as, the tower house.' There was a door between the tower and the church at ground floor level.³⁸

The fact that Kilmurry Castle had, prior to its identification as part of a set of church buildings, been regarded as a tower house is a strong argument for the inclusion of residential church towers in any consideration of the medieval tower house. Furthermore, the possibility that many tower houses which have hitherto been regarded as lone towers - with perhaps a bawn, and even some 'ancillary buildings' - may actually have been but one constituent element of a more elaborate complex of buildings must affect the view taken of ecclesiastical

³⁶ GARDINER, M. 2000 'Jordan's Castle, Ardglass, county Down' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1999*. Wordwell, Bray. p.43, no.146

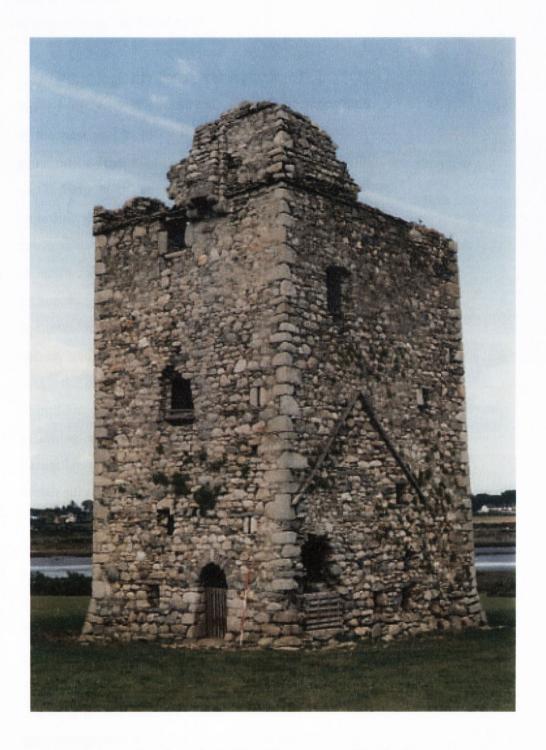
³⁷ DELANY, D. 2000 'Clonmantagh castle, Clonmantagh Lower, county Kilkenny' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1999*. Wordwell, Bray. pp.140-141, no.433

³⁸ MURTAGH, B. 2000 'Kilmurry Castle, Sleiverue, county Kilkenny' in BENNETT, I. (ed) *Excavations 1999*. Wordwell, Bray. pp.151-152, no.461



Roof raggle at Danes Castle, county Wexford

(after JORDAN, A.J. 1990 The tower houses of county Wexford. PhD, Trinity College Dublin.)



Roof raggle at Clonmines, county Wexford

(after JORDAN, A.J. 1990 The tower houses of county Wexford. PhD, Trinity College Dublin.)

towers (which, it was already accepted, would almost invariably have been part of larger groups of buildings).

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Typologically-based conceptions of the 'evolution' of castles have formed the basis of virtually all attempts to understand the fortified architecture of the past and to place it in its historical context. Part of the reason for this situation is the relative youth of medieval archaeology, but also - and particularly - of systematic excavation, with its rigorous approach to the recording of stratigraphic and other details. It is this rigour which allows the construction of chronological sequences against which the development and use of archaeological sites may be assessed. Before the adoption of modern archaeological techniques the understanding of the relationship between the documentary record and the landscape was dependent on the evidence of placenames, tradition, and – perhaps most often in publications on the buildings of the past – the perceived changes in architectural styles and ideas. Actual description of buildings is rare in medieval documents, and one should be especially wary of assuming that a 'castle' referred to in a medieval document as being at a particular named place actually corresponds to a structure (probably ruinous) which survives in the modern landscape.

It seems often to be overlooked that if one is able to identify the arrival or the emergence of a distinctive form of structure or style of architectural detail in a country or region one has merely obtained a *terminus post quem*, a date before which it is almost certain that the relevant feature would not have been built. It is unreasonable, and perhaps even illogical, to assume that appreciation of the attributes of a given feature should disappear with a change in fashion or in the conditions in an area.

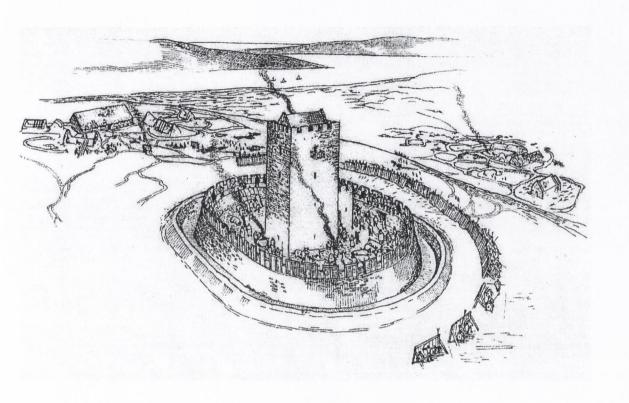
The attributes of certain earthworks, for example, are such that while their design may have been modified at different stages, often to suit the slightly different needs, situations, and identities of their various users, the general result was fairly constant. One has only to think of the debate regarding ringforts. Not only do they seem to have been built over an increasingly long period, but they

also bear striking parallels with other earthen features in the Irish countryside. Archaeologists have since the 1970s been distinguishing more and more moated sites and ringworks around Ireland, and of course it is likely that for the contemporary observer there would have been aspects of each type of enclosure on the basis of which it would have been differentiated. However, the concept of an earthen enclosure defined by a bank and ditch (or by more than one of each) remains constant. Likewise the tower house seems to be part of a larger family of stone castles, in which the residential tower had played a significant role long before the fifteenth (or even the fourteenth) century in Ireland.

It seems clear that the stage of technological innovation, but also fashion, dictated, at least in some degree, the appearance of the most common fortified structures of any period. However, those were of course not the only factors of relevance, and one should not be too surprised to learn, for example, that motte castles were being built in fourteenth century Scotland. Until it was excavated in the 1970s, Roberton motte, in Lanarkshire, had been attributed to a certain Robert the Fleming who was supposed to have built it in the mid twelfth century. Pottery which was found on the old ground surface beneath the motte forced a radical revision of its accepted history, moving the construction date forward by some two hundred years into the first part of the fourteenth century.

The traditional place of the tower house in the development of castle architecture in Scotland has also been jolted by archaeological evidence. Tabraham suggests that 'the building of castles by the Norsemen may seem surprising' but nonetheless he has combined the evidence of *The Orkneyinga Saga*, which was written down in about 1220, with archaeological investigation of surviving sites to support this very proposal. The tower portrayed in the artist's impression of 'Cubbie Roo's castle, on Wyre, Orkney, as it might have looked in 1231' would almost certainly be identified today as a tower house of the fourteenth, fifteenth, or sixteenth century by a viewer without the benefit of the caption and explanation (see illustration overleaf). In fact Kolbein Hruga (of

³⁹ TABRAHAM 1997, 64-65.



Artist's impression of Cubbie Roo's Castle, on Wyre, Orkney, as it might have looked in 1231

(after TABRAHAM, C.J. 1997 Scotland's Castles. B.T.Batsford / Historic Scotland, London.)

which 'Cubbie Roo' is a corruption) is supposed to have built his stone castle on Wyre in about 1150.

The Norsemen were of course widely travelled, and it is suggested that their castle-building ambitions may have been stimulated by structures encountered in (or *en route* to) the Holy Land. The *Saga* includes an account of a successful attack by a Norse group on a castle in Galicia, in north-western Spain. Other twelfth century towers attributed to Norsemen include that at Braal, near Thurso, and that which is known as the 'Old Man of Wick' (both in Caithness), both of which are supposed to have been built by Harald Maddadson, earl of Orkney from 1139 to 1206.⁴¹

Stell pointed out that 'the hall block in stone or timber was a feature of domestic planning throughout the Middle Ages,' and he argued that from this it follows that 'there is no *prima facie* reason for assuming that all stone-built structures of this type that stand independently of other major buildings should necessarily be ascribed on typological grounds to the thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries.' In order to present a coherent account of the fortified buildings of a country or region, categorisation is almost unavoidable. But such classificatory systems as are created should be respected only insofar as they serve as tools for the facilitation of discussion, and one must be wary of historical writing which draws on them as though they were definitive.

The experience of Scottish archaeologists dealing with the material record in the context of historically- and architecturally-based models of castle development seems to emphasize a series of significant points. First, a strictly evolutionary model for architectural development must be treated with caution. Second, general assumptions regarding the place of a particular type of structure in a chronological model should be tested against archaeological evidence from particular sites. Third, the relatively small proportion of the archaeological record which has actually been tested or investigated, combined with the weight

⁴⁰ SIMPSON 1961, 232.

⁴¹ TABRAHAM 1997, 28-30.

⁴² STELL, G. 1981 'Late Medieval Defences in Scotland' in CALDWELL, D.H. (ed) *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications 1100-1800.* John Donald, Edinburgh. pp.21-54 at 23

Chapter eight Tower houses in Scotland

of evidence which that total record may – in the light of the results of the few excavations which have taken place – contain, indicate that if we aspire to advance our understanding of the past, and of the medieval period in particular, a programme of archaeological research should be initiated.

The Scottish experience has shown, in relation to tower houses in particular, that archaeology has the capacity to confirm, question, or disprove assumptions on which historical understanding – not only of the built heritage, but in more general terms – is based. The evidence from only a few excavations has generated new ideas regarding the chronology of tower house construction, but it has also provoked questions in relation to the traditional view of the tower house as the essential element of the later medieval fortified dwelling. It would seem more than a little presumptuous to suggest that historians working on Ireland should have been much more accurate in their comments and interpretations than their colleagues who concerned themselves with Scotland.

TOWER HOUSES IN CONTINENTAL EUROPE

A series of events and circumstances is considered to have contributed to instability in Ireland in the fourteenth century: invasion, famine, and plague, most notably, as well as a general tendency to factional armed struggles. It is significant to note, however, when considering the possible impacts of these phenomena, that all of them in fact affected substantial parts of Europe to greater or lesser degrees at around the same time. Every area was of course affected in its own particular way according to the local circumstances, but the use of the destabilising effects of the events of the fourteenth century as a catch-all support for a loosely-substantiated hypothesis regarding the architectural history of an entire century (or more) on an island the size of Ireland must be considered in a wider context.

A glance across the European continent confirms that Ireland was far from alone, for example, in suffering incursions at this period. Ireland was invaded by the Bruce, but other groups mounted armed attacks elsewhere at various stages of the fourteenth century. Indeed, it was a time in which local rivalries, regional tensions, and 'national' or expansionist aspirations seem not only to have been widespread but also frequently to have manifested themselves in the form of military conflict.

By the time of the Bruce Invasions the Scots had defeated the English at Bannockburn (1314), and in fact Anglo-Scottish rivalry was to find violent expression at several stages in the century or so which followed. The Hundred Years' War opened in the mid-1330s and, while it would be wrong to represent it as a continuous, century-long campaign, it certainly involved extensive military activity in many parts of Europe into the middle of the fifteenth century. The battle of Crécy was in 1346 and in 1347 Calais fell. There was fighting in Spain and Portugal, the Balkans, and elsewhere. In the summer of 1360, for instance, the Danish king Valdemar Atterdag reconquered the province of Scania

in southern Sweden.¹ 1378 saw the start of the Great Papal Schism. The Peasants' Revolt broke out in England in 1381. To extend the century of disturbance slightly, the battle of Agincourt was in 1415. Military disruption and political upheaval were clearly widespread in Europe during the fourteenth century, whether they were connected to invasions between kingdoms and other large territories, or to hostilities on a more local scale.

Almost the whole of Europe was directly affected by the Black Death and, similarly, the continent suffered as a result of the Great European Famine.² It is likely that, as a result of the character and organisation of their resources, several areas experienced harsher conditions in consequence of each than Ireland. There were other, less-known - but nonetheless terrible - famines and plague outbreaks in Ireland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but similar circumstances prevailed in continental Europe, although climatic extremes might have distinguished the experiences of the inhabitants of certain areas from those of the people living in Ireland. In the historiography of none of the other European countries does the emphasis fall so heavily on the adverse consequences of the situation for building. There does seem to have been a general deceleration in building construction, especially in the later fourteenth century, but this should be considered in the context of the boom of the later thirteenth century, when so many large castles, cathedrals, and religious houses were erected.³

¹ ÖDMAN, A. 1994 'Forest castles in northern Scania', *Château Gaillard* **XVI** (Luxembourg, 1992), pp.321-328, at 322

² ZIEGLER 1969; HAY, D. 1966 Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd., London. pp.31-32; GENICOT, L. 1966 'Crisis: from the Middle Ages to Modern Times' in POSTAN, M.M. (ed) The Cambridge Economic History of Europe. Volume I. The agrarian life of the Middle Ages. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.660-741 at 672-674; FREEDMAN, P. 2000 'Rural Society' in JONES, M. (ed) The New Cambridge Medieval History. Volume VI. c.1300-c.1415. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.82-101 at 88-91

³ See, for example, the assessment by Schofield and Stell, writing about Britain: SCHOFIELD, J. & STELL, G. 2000 'The built environment 1300-1540' in PALLISER, D.M. (ed) *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain. Vol. I, 600-1540.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.371-393 at 371-372. But see also Stell's comments regarding the situation in Scotland, where 'from the viewpoint of the architectural historian, there appears to have been a general increase in the total amount of building activity ... during the last quarter of the fourteenth century.' STELL, G. 1977 'Architecture: the changing needs of society' in BROWN, J.M. (ed) *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century.* Edward Arnold, London. pp.153-183 at 153

In some areas it is clear that an outcome very different to that conventionally accepted for Ireland has been identified. In the wake of the high mortality of the Black Death the resources available were concentrated in the hands of fewer people, with the result that certain individuals suddenly found themselves with the capacity to build on a scale to which they could not previously have realistically aspired.⁴

The impact of pan-European phenomena such as the Great European Famine and the Black Death has been more extensively studied for parts of Europe other than Ireland. This may partly be because of the relative youth of the Irish State, and partly because of its modern history. While other considerations may also have been relevant, these factors have contributed to a concentration of historical investigation in Ireland on specific fields. In relation to the study of the medieval period the political conditions have been the dominant subject matter.

In the context of the study of the Great European Famine and the Black Death in Ireland, another issue of significance relates to the relatively limited survival of documentary source material. The character of the written record on which the majority historians have thus far relied most heavily in their assessment of medieval Ireland is such that in comparison with the sources for Britain those for Ireland – even if the destruction of archives in events such as the disasters of 1355 and 1922 were to be disregarded – would seem somewhat scanty. Historical analysis of the impact of the Black Death in Ireland, for example, has generally – and perhaps necessarily - been based on models created from British data. Historians who have followed this approach have

⁴ See, for example, PLATT 1996, 160-175. Platt's views have been outlined and discussed in chapter 3, above.

⁵ WOOD 1930.

⁶ Already in 1935 Gwynn was writing that 'As compared with the chronicles of other European countries, the Irish Annals tell us strangely little about the great pestilence that swept across Europe during the years 1348-49.' He raises the hopes of the optimist by stating that 'If we turn from the Irish to the Anglo-Irish Annals of the Pale, a contrast is at once apparent' but it transpires that this 'contrast' is founded solely on the evidence of what Gwynn refers to as the Annals of Friar Clyn, and he did in fact recognise that 'Friar Clyn is our chief witness for the effects of the Black Death in Ireland.' GWYNN 1935. The most recent – and apparently the only - large-scale work on the

acknowledged its deficiencies, but it remains clear – self-evident, perhaps - that the respective characters of the two islands and their populations were distinctive - certainly to the extent that considerable care would have to be exercised in any comparison between the impact of the Black Death (or the Great European Famine, or any event with so general a set of effects) in Ireland and in England.⁷

The amount of detailed and recent art-historical and archaeological study which has been carried out on the buildings of later medieval Ireland is very limited, especially in relation to secular architecture. This means that developments in the understanding of the political, social, and economic conditions of the period have not yet been reflected in the literature regarding its domestic, administrative, and military architecture. Some of these deficiencies will be further discussed in another section, but for the moment it seems appropriate, perhaps by way of introduction, to offer for comparison the experiences of other parts of Europe.

Was Ireland so very different? Was it, in the fourteenth century, as peripheral architecturally and psychologically as Froissart would have us believe? According to the account of fourteenth century Ireland related in his *Chronicles*, the country was 'one of the most difficult countries in the world to fight against and subdue, for it is a strange, wild place consisting of tall forests, great stretches of water, bogs and uninhabitable regions. It is hard to find a way of making war on the Irish effectively for, unless they choose, there is no one there to fight and there are no towns to be found. The Irish hide in the woods and forests, where they live in holes dug under trees, or in bushes and thickets, like wild animals.'8

Areas of the country may have corresponded to Froissart's description, but Ireland was not all 'wild', and nor were its inhabitants. There was certainly a considerable level of violence in fourteenth century Ireland, but Lydon's

Black Death in Ireland opens with a discussion of the lack of documentary source material on the subject: KELLY 2001, 9-13; see also BARRY 1988, 174, 176; DUFFY 1998.

⁷ See also Brown's comments on the importance of assessing a country's history on its own terms, and on the dangers of depending on comparisons with the different situations of others: BROWN, J.M. 1977 'Introduction' in BROWN, J.M. (ed) *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century*. Edward Arnold, London. pp.1-9

'fierce faction fights', which were perhaps the most substantial contributors to what might even be described as a militarised society, involved the so-called Anglo-Irish families at least as much as the Gaelic Irish (groups which were, in fact, increasingly interconnected). The very fact that some elements of the population of the island felt threatened by (or felt that they needed to 'subdue') others surely supports the notion that defensive elements would have been incorporated in contemporary domestic architecture. It seems reasonable to assume that Froissart's informant did not intend to imply that the Irish made their permanent dwellings in hedges and in holes in the ground, although such places might have served as refuges at times when concealment was necessary.

In his discussion of Scotland, Stell seems to have identified a situation which parallels that which has developed in Ireland's later medieval historiography. He suggests that the conventional view of Scottish society is based on an understanding of the period which is founded on English analogies: 'according to this view, turbulence and civil discord lay never very far from the surface of Scottish social and political life, and frequently erupted into open violence and anarchy.' The perception – and most often it seems to have been, in the Irish as well as the Scottish context, a perception approximating to that described by Stell – of the role of the socio-political infrastructure associated with the Normans (and particularly, in relation to Ireland, with the Anglo-Normans) in the development of the administrative systems of England and in Ireland over the subsequent centuries has surely contributed substantially to the presentation of the medieval period by historians. The modifications developed by historians such as Frame of the traditional presentation of fater medieval Ireland are apparently paralleled in Scotland. There, Stell feels, 'the

⁸ BRERETON, G. (ed and trans) 1978 *Froissart: Chronicles*. Penguin, London. p.410 ⁹ LYDON 1972, 198-9.

¹⁰ STELL 1981, 21.

¹¹ For fuller exploration of this view, see (for example) HARRISON, S.H. 2000 'Re-fighting the battle of Down: Orpen, MacNeill and the Irish nation-state' in BROWN, M. & HARRISON, S.H. (ed) *The Medieval World and the Modern Mind*. Four Courts Press, Dublin. pp.171-182; DUFFY, S. 2000 'Historical revisit: Goddard Henry Orpen, *Ireland under the Normans*, *1169-1333* (1911-20)', *Irish Historical Studies* 32, pp.246-259

¹² In works such as FRAME, R. 1998 *Ireland and Britain, 1170-1450*. The Hambledon Press, London & Rio Grande.

elements of political faction and military conflict appear to have been overemphasised, and this simplistic and misinformed picture of conditions in late medieval Scotland has recently received some much-needed historical correctives.' It is nonetheless true that in Ireland - even more so than in Scotland, perhaps, about which Stell was writing – 'the traditional account continues to exert an influence, either overtly or tacitly, on our interpretation of the design and purpose of the many fine secular buildings ... that date from this period.' It is important to stress that the Scotlish tradition does not include any sort of 'fourteenth century hiatus' in building activity (although a later pause, or deceleration, is discussed despite the acknowledgment of the fourteenth century as 'a period for which clear terms of dating reference have yet to be achieved.' 15

Structures which have been referred to as castles were built in Ireland before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans, ¹⁶ and although the precise nature of these early fortifications is unclear and seems likely to remain so, their essential intended functions seem hard to dispute. The *idea* of castle construction, even if the form in which it was expressed can not be identified with absolute certainty, was thus familiar to at least an element of the Irish population prior to 1169.

There are two basic reasons why this familiarity should not seem surprising. First, the need to provide a secure dwelling for one's family and associates suggests, particularly in times of instability, the construction of some form of physical protection. Second, the Norman tradition of castle building had spread through much of Europe by the mid-twelfth century, and had been developing in Britain at least from 1066.¹⁷ Ireland may be an island, but it was

¹³ STELL 1981, 21.

¹⁴ STELL 1977, 153.

¹⁵ STELL 1981, 49.

¹⁶ See Ó CORRÁIN, D. 1974 'Aspects of early Irish history' in SCOTT, B.G. (ed) Perspectives in Irish Archaeology. Papers presented to the fifth annual seminar of the Association of Young Írish Archaeologists, held in Dublin, November 1973. Association of Young Irish Archaeologists, Belfast. pp.64-75; and see discussion in O'KEEFFE 2000, 26-9; LEASK 1999, 6-7; BARRY 1988, 54-5.

¹⁷ Allen Brown recognised that a few castles did exist in England before this date, listing Hereford, Richard's Castle, and Ewyas Harold, all in Herefordshire, and Clavering in Essex, as having been 'raised by certain Norman favourites of Edward the Confessor in the last few years of the Old

by no means cut off by this geographical circumstance from its European neighbours. One has only to consider the peripatetic tradition in medieval Irish monasticism, ¹⁸ the Scandinavian influence in the development of the country's port cities, ¹⁹ or the substantial quantities of imported pottery in the medieval layers on urban archaeological sites²⁰ to appreciate that the sea around Ireland was in many ways an artery of communication rather than a barrier *to movement. In the late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century particularly, as well as the very significant traffic between the ports of Ireland's east coast and the area of south-western Scotland and north-western England, traders arrived in Ireland from further afield. Natural resources, in the form of food and other supplies, were transported across the North Channel in large quantities to support the royal campaigns. ²¹ The fact that goods were shipped

English kingdom.' He also cited Orderic Vitalis' opinion that 'the lack of castles in England ... [was] ... one reason for the success of the Norman Conquest', a view which might be read as necessarily implying that while there were a few castles in the country, there were not nearly enough to make a significant impact on the invaders. ALLEN BROWN 1954, 23. An additional dimension to the conventional view of castle development in Britain is suggested by Tabraham, who proposes that Scotland saw 'the building of castles by the Norsemen' and provides an artist's impression of one such structure, with documented origins in the mid twelfth century, but which looks very much like a later medieval tower house. TABRAHAM 1997, 28-30 (the illustration appears on p.29).

LYDON 1998, 9-11, 44-45; WADDELL, H. 1934 *The Wandering Scholars*. Constable, London.

to the Gaelic mind until the Scandinavians set up their "cities" in Dublin, Limerick, Waterford and elsewhere. Slowly, indeed unwillingly, the Irish followed their example; but though a few monastic settlements eventually grew into towns, all the larger urban centres are of Norse provenance', BINCHY, D.A. 1962 'The passing of the old order' in Ó CUÍV, B. (ed) *Proceedings of the International Congress of Celtic Studies held in Dublin, 6-10 July, 1959.* Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. pp.119-132 at 122. Part of the above is cited in DOHERTY, C. 2000 'Settlement in early Ireland: a review' in BARRY, T. (ed) *A History of Settlement in Ireland.* Routledge, London & New York. pp.50-80 at 55. See also GRAHAM, B. 2000 'Urbanisation in Ireland during the High Middle Ages c.1100 to c.1350' in BARRY, T. (ed) *A History of Settlement in Ireland.* Routledge, London & New York. pp.124-139 at 124-5, and WALLACE, P.F. 1992 'The archaeological identity of the Hiberno-Norse town', *JRSAI* 122, pp.35-66.

pp.35-66.

²⁰ See, for example, BARRY 1988, 96-100, 123, 126-35, 137; GAHAN, A. & MCCUTCHEON, C., with HURLEY, M.F. & HURST, J.G. 1997 'Medieval pottery' in HURLEY, M.F. & SCULLY, O.M.B., with MCCUTCHEON, S.W.J. *Late Viking Age and Medieval Waterford. Excavations* 1986-1992. Waterford Corporation, Waterford. pp.285-336

²¹ See references in CONNOLLY 1998. For example, during the period 1302-1310 at pp.167, 172, 199, 206, 207, 212. It would appear, however, that not all goods transported to Scotland from Ireland were destined for the royal forces. In an entry dated 14th January 1310-11 it is recorded that 'The King commands the Chancellor and Treasurer of Ireland to cause proclamation to be made in all towns, ports, and other places where vessels touch, prohibiting under the highest

across the sea from Ireland (rather than being brought from other parts of England) indicates in itself how valuable maritime communications actually were.²²

This emphasis on the significance of the sea as a route rather than an obstacle would appear to favour the notion that the tower house form may have reached Ireland from abroad, and the most obvious source of inspiration - if one is to pursue this idea - must surely be Scotland.²³ This idea has not been extensively explored,²⁴ but the fact that (with the exception of rather isolated groups in counties Antrim and Down) there are relatively few tower houses in Ulster has been cited against it.²⁵ In the context of the early fourteenth century intensification of traffic between Ireland and the western part of the border region between England and Scotland (in which a concentration of tower house-type structures is to be found) it is perhaps of value to observe that a significant proportion of the vessels travelled from ports such as Dundalk and Drogheda rather than from others further north along the Irish east coast.²⁶ County Louth

²² It may also contribute to the growing body of evidence indicative that economic and social

conditions in fourteenth century Ireland were not altogether chaotic.

p.124
²⁵ BARRY 1988, 188; 'if Scotland was such an important influence on Irish tower houses, why is the distribution pattern generally so low in Ulster, apart from around Strangford Lough?' BARRY 1995, 223. Similar implications may be drawn from Ó DANACHAIR 1977-79.

penalties all exportation of provisions, horses, armour, or other supplies needful for himself and his forces in Scotland, to the insurgent Scots, which he hears is carried on by merchants in Ireland.' Close, 4 Edw. II. m.14, dorso. In BAIN, J. (ed) 1887 Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office, London. Vol.III A.D. 1307-1357. H.M. General Register House, Edinburgh. p.37, no.190

²³ 'The proliferation of towers in Antrim and Donegal reflects the smallness of the areas of the lordships, but mainly the intrusion of Scots into the region, respectively MacDonalds and MacSweeneys.' MALLORY, J.P. & MCNEILL, T.E. 1991 *The Archaeology of Ulster from Colonization to Plantation.* The Institute of Irish Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast, Belfast. pp.289-292, at 292

²⁴ Barry points out that the '*Archaeological Survey of County Down* emphasised Irish, English or Welsh design influences on these tower houses [the cluster around Strangford Lough referred to in note 25, below], rather than Scottish.' BARRY 1995, 223, referring to GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND MINISTRY OF FINANCE, ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NORTHERN IRELAND 1966 *An Archaeological Survey of County Down*. HMSO, Belfast. p.124

²⁶ See note 21. Other ports south of Drogheda, and even on the south and west coasts, are occasionally mentioned in this context (notably Dublin), but the majority of transactions seem to have taken place through Drogheda and Dundalk. For example, of the series of references cited at note 21, one concerns a merchant associated with Cork, another involves Dublin-based merchants, a third does not specify the source of the goods, but four involve purveyors at Drogheda or Dundalk (and indeed five different local agents engaged in the supply of goods to the royal forces in Scotland are mentioned in those four cases). A reason why the supply of goods to the royal

is of course one of the areas of Ireland in which there is a cluster of tower houses.²⁷ Furthermore, its tower houses have been promoted (admittedly on the somewhat questionable bases of their small size and simplicity of design) as possibly the earliest tower houses in the country.²⁸

This appearance of a link between the tower houses of south west Scotland and those of north east Leinster is rather incidental to the present discussion, however. What is of greater concern is, firstly, that the notion of the construction of some kind of protective building (or perhaps the adaptation or improvement of some existing natural feature: the intention is effectively the same) seems to have occurred to people in separate contexts, but particularly in situations in which they considered themselves to be under threat; and, secondly, the likelihood that news (at least) of architectural developments in Britain and in continental Europe (and perhaps further afield) would have been reaching Ireland throughout the medieval period, even before 1169.

The first point implies that it would be possible for an area to undergo an independent evolution of castle (or at least 'fortified') architecture. The second amounts to an assertion that this sort of independence is improbable, and that the design of castles in Ireland – or anywhere else - would almost inevitably have been influenced by technological developments and architectural fashions in other places. The two may appear, to an extent, contradictory. In fact what they imply is that the need for defensive architecture was broad (if not general) in Europe; that human ingenuity is probably capable of developing the standard tower form as a defensive mechanism without specific prompting; but also that the population of medieval Europe was sufficiently mobile to foster the spread of specific architectural ideas, and even to allow the emergence of trends in the

forces in Scotland was not being organised through ports on the northern and north-eastern coasts may be hinted at by another entry from this period in the *Irish Exchequer Payments* (for Trinity 1307): 'Nigel le Brun, assigned with William de Mandevill, William de Monte Acuto and Thomas de Mandevill, to inquire as to enemies, rebels and felons of the king coming from Scotland to Ireland and received there, as it is said, among the religious and others within the liberty of Ulster and elsewhere, and to capture these enemies and bring them to Dublin castle, for his expenses in doing this: £10.' CONNOLLY 1998, 196.

²⁷ SWEETMAN, D. 1987 Archaeological Survey of County Louth. OPW, Dublin; Ó DANACHAIR 1977-79, map facing p.160; STOUT & STOUT 1997, map on p.59. ²⁸ SWEETMAN 1999, 137, 145.

approach to building design. These latter are likely to be more discernible at local level, but it is of course possible to isolate and identify the spread across broader areas of significant developments in construction technology or conception.

In the paragraphs which follow the experience of different parts of Europe in the fourteenth century is explored by means of a series of examples. These examples serve not only to illustrate the relative condition of various European regions in the period, but also to demonstrate support for the argument that despite the disruptions of the fourteenth century, building projects of significant scale were undertaken throughout the continent. It is proposed that the experience of Ireland in the fourteenth century, while of course as distinctive as that of any other discrete geographical and political entity, was not so extraordinary to have diverged dramatically from the broader trend.

The series of examples which follows demonstrates not only that Europe's construction industry remained active, and even innovative, during the fourteenth century, a period conventionally regarded as a 'hiatus' in architectural output in Ireland, but also that builders and their patrons in various parts of the continent appear to have been favouring structures in which the vertical was emphasised. Most of these are, of course, similar in form to what has become known in Ireland as the tower house, and it is clear that in terms of function (and of design aspiration) there would also have been considerable overlap.

Denmark has already been mentioned in the context of the reconquest of the Swedish province of Scania in 1360, but it was in the mid thirteenth century that rivalry among members of the Danish royal family precipitated a civil war which was complicated by several elements of the land-owning nobility who developed the habit of changing sides. The situation deteriorated even further in the 1320s and 1330s, but in fact the need for protection had been felt so keenly by property-holders over the previous sixty or seventy years that they had in the thirteenth century started to build the first private castles in the area. Many of these castles seem to have been mottes. However, it is relevant to note that, in the Danish context, the 'typological method' of castle classification which was

developed by Vilhelm la Cour²⁹ and used by him to date most of these mottes to the twelfth century has been shown to be deficient through the excavation of a number of sites. An excavation in 1977 showed clearly that the celebrated 'double motte' at Eriksvolde was built in the 1340s, and 'further excavations of typical "mottes" such as Lindshøj on the island of Funen and Kærsgaard in Jutland ... showed that they too are from the fourteenth century.'³⁰

Pottery recovered in the course of archaeological excavation at Batenberg Castle in the Netherlands confirmed the theory, based on building material and techniques, that the construction of the 'new' curtain wall, which has an internal diameter of 50m (and thus a length of some 160m) dated to the fourteenth century. The dating of the wall is supported by circumstantial historical evidence, but the archaeological findings suggest 'that some other buildings in the inner court date from the same period.'³¹

In the small province of Nográd in northern Hungary 42 castles were built in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Of the 42, only five were constructed by order of the king. The remainder was the work of the three or four clans which owned virtually all of the territory of the province.³² This situation appears to offer an interesting opportunity for a study of the influence of patronage on castle siting and design, but it is of course of more direct significance in the current discussion for two particular reasons. First, the majority of the castles in the area were built by independent family groups, rather than by the Crown; and, second, construction appears to have continued through the fourteenth century.

In relation to the first point, Ireland also had seen substantial castle-building projects funded and directed by the Crown (here, of course, the English Crown). The bureaucratic efficiency of the English royal administration was such as to have provided far more information about these projects than exists

²⁹ Vilhelm la Cour was a prominent figure in the study of Danish castles who was active into the 1970s.

³⁰ ENGBERG 1994, 155-6.

³¹ BAUER, T.C. 1994 'Batenburg Castle (The Netherlands)', *Château Gaillard* **XVI** (Luxembourg, 1992), pp.21-32 at 21, 23.

about any other secular architectural undertaking in the country in the medieval period. The few records which survive regarding tower house construction in Ireland are far less systematic than the accounts of the royal works. If a tower house is itself mentioned in the documentary record at all it is usually merely the subject of an incidental comment.³³ As a result partly of their non-appearance in the royal archives, partly of the few references which do exist and of the traditions - far more widespread - which survive regarding tower house ownership and origins, and partly because of their relatively small size (in contrast with most royal castles in Ireland³⁴) the construction of tower houses is frequently attributed to particular individuals or, more often - and more vaguely, of course - to broad family groups.

Closer examination of Szécsény, in the extreme north of Nográd province, in Hungary, yields proof of the building of a fortified residence to the north of the medieval town in the fourteenth century, as well as of the parish church and of a Franciscan monastery at about the same period. Likewise, evidence has emerged in Ireland not only for the construction of ecclesiastical buildings during the fourteenth century, but also for elements of urban settlement such as town walls. The second residual province of the parish church and of a Franciscan monastery at about the same period.

³² CABELLO, J. 1994 'Fouilles archéologiques d'un château féodal en Hongrie', *Château Gaillard* **XVI** (Luxembourg, 1992), pp.81-87 at 81.

³³ See also discussion of the position in Scotland in STELL 1977, 154-155.

³⁴ An extreme example, in terms of size, is of course Trim Castle, in county Meath.

³⁵ CABELLO 1994, 81.

³⁶ STALLEY 1984; MCNEILL 1985/6; GWYNN & HADCOCK 1970. Although their statement that 'During the period 1349 to 1539, not a single new monastery of monks or of regular canons was founded in Ireland' may appear as at least a partial endorsement of the barren fourteenth century hypothesis promoted by Leask and by others since, in fact this may best be understood in the context of ecclesiastical affairs in the country, and of the changing popularity of different types of religious observance. Indeed, Gwynn and Hadcock continue by commenting that 'during this same period, about sixty new houses of the mendicant friars were founded, and in addition some forty-four houses of the brothers of the Franciscan Third Order Regular' (p.9). Furthermore, examination of the information regarding religious houses which was gathered by Gwynn and Hadcock for the fourteenth century reveals references to numerous construction projects at existing foundations of almost all sorts, whether for the purposes of extension, modification, or refurbishment.

³⁷ THOMAS 1992. See the accounts of individual towns in volume 2, but also, in volume 1, the graphs showing the number of active murage grants in Ireland between 1220 and 1485 (set against information from England and Wales for comparison), Figs 5.1 and 5.2 on p.149 and the more detailed table of the Irish data at Fig 5.3 on p.155

The building of a town wall would almost inevitably have been an extremely large-scale undertaking.³⁸ A particularly dramatic example of town wall construction in continental Europe in the fourteenth century is the second of the walls which were built to enclose and protect Luxembourg city. It was started in the second quarter of the fourteenth century and extended the area within the fortified urban limits from some five hectares to 22.74 hectares.³⁹

Defeat for Philippe IV to Edward III and his archers at Crécy in 1346, and then the success of the Black Prince over Jean le Bon at Poitiers in 1356 have been seen as contributors to the concerns which underlay the spate of fortification which took place in France in the fourteenth century. Not only were towns enclosed by walls and castles built, religious houses, villages, and smaller rural settlements were also fortified, with most of the work taking place from 1340 onwards.⁴⁰

A second town wall was built in the fourteenth century at Crémieu in what is now the department of Isère (eastern France). This new wall enclosed the areas into which the settlement had spread and also served as a demonstration and acknowledgment of the growing importance and wealth of the place. Several structures survive in Crémieu which were first built around the time of the construction of the second wall, and the period seems to have seen tremendous prosperity in the town. Privileges granted to Crémieu by the Dauphin during the fifty years following 1300 conferred commercial advantages and seem to have included the establishment of a new market in the heart of the town in 1314. By 1337 a mint was operating, and the continuing vigour of

³⁸ Construction of a town wall may in some instances have taken on the guise of an ongoing municipal project, without immediate prospect of completion. Indeed, there are records of town wall construction initiatives in England which were still under way over a century after they were initiated: CREIGHTON, O. forthcoming 'Castles of communities? New light on later medieval town defences', *Château Gaillard* XXII (Charavines / Voiron, 2004)

³⁹ PAULY, M. 1994 'Une ville en voie d'émancipation: Luxembourg du XIIIe au XVe siècle', *Château Gaillard* XVI (Luxembourg, 1992), pp.329-334 at 333

⁴⁰ See, for example, SALAMAGNE, A. 2002 Les villes fortes au Moyen Age. Editions Jean-Paul Gisserot, Paris. pp.27-42. This work lists fourteenth century fortification of the towns of Besançon (1340), Toulouse (1345), Poitiers (1347), Troyes, Reims, Tours, and Blois (1354), Dijon (1355), Chartres (1358), and Albi (1359), among others; notes the construction of fortresses in large numbers, particularly towards the end of the century; and discusses the similar work which was undertaken in what is now Belgium at about the same time (pp.30-31).

Crémieu through the following century seems to be attested to by the enormous market hall, roofed in stone, which was built in the years following 1433.⁴¹

In describing the European economic climate of the fourteenth century historians have tended to use words like 'decline'. It would appear that such places as Crémieu sit uneasily with this generalisation, and Barry has in fact drawn attention to arguments presented for parts of England and Ireland, too, according to which it is proposed that 'this decline was more apparent than real.'

In spite of the possibility that one might draw parallels between their experiences in the fourteenth century, the situation at Crémieu seems far removed from the tower houses of Ireland. In fact Crémieu is situated only a few kilometres from the river Rhône, which has long formed a natural frontier, and which in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries was the much-disputed border between the territories of the Dauphiné and those of Savoie. This circumstance points towards a more specific field for comparison. Tower houses in Ireland are often considered to have acted as border posts or garrisons, 43 and they are also seen to have functioned as strongholds for the

⁴¹ BORREAU, I. 1998 *Crémieu, sites et édifices. Circuit découverte de la cité médiévale.* Association Musée et Patrimoine, Musée Dauphinois, Grenoble. The date is derived from dendrochronological analysis of surviving roof timbers

⁴² BARRY 1988, 168: Bridbury 'concluded that whereas some of the older established cities such as York were probably decaying, other smaller and possibly more resilient towns were either maintaining their previous levels of economic activity or were, in fact, showing definite signs of expansion. To a certain extent, this case has also been argued by C.A. Empey for the major towns in the Butler lordship in Tipperary and Kilkenny, which sheltered behind their walls and prospered throughout the exigencies of the later middle ages.' The works cited by Barry are: BRIDBURY, A.R. 1962 *Economic Growth. England in the Later Middle Ages.* Allen & Unwin, London; EMPEY 1970.

⁴³ 'Obviously the defensive element in their construction was of primary importance in some cases, such as the 1429 subsidy and the erection of some towers along the Pale, there were even military factors which were of importance. A. Davin's research on the towers of the Pale has revealed that in Counties Kildare, Meath and Louth they were concentrated along the borders of the Pale ... in Co. Dublin ... the towers to the south of the River Liffey were mainly to be found at the base of the Wicklow mountains where the Anglo-Irish settlements were most open to attack.... There is at least one other area where it would appear that the siting of tower-houses was governed by strategic considerations. This was the line erected along the northern borders of the two southernmost baronies of Forth and Bargy in Co. Wexford, probably as a defence against the encroachment of the Mac Murrough Kavanaghs in the fifteenth century.' BARRY 1988, 168; Cotter has identified groups of tower houses situated along territorial boundaries in his north Cork study area. COTTER 1994, 145.

advancement, or maintenance, of a territorial position.⁴⁴ The defence of the area around Crémieu was controlled from the castles constructed by the Dauphin, but throughout the countryside are *maisons fortes*, literally 'strong houses', built in strategically-important positions such as on rocky outcrops, along the banks of the Rhône, and near other communications arteries. Borreau's description of the evolving rôle of these *maisons fortes* of the Isère seems, in the context of later medieval Irish fortified architecture, strangely familiar.⁴⁵

Most of the *maisons fortes* of the area around Crémieu seem to have been centred on a tower, and some of them still feature defensive elements - or at least evidence that defensive elements were once present - such as machicoulis, hourds, and arrow slits. Indeed, the original *maison forte* – and many of them were built in the fourteenth century - seems most often to have consisted of a tower, with perhaps a few ancillary or associated buildings, all enclosed by a wall. Borreau chose ten *maisons fortes* - no doubt for reasons such as the availability of historical information about them, their current condition, and their classificatory status as regards official protection under the local equivalent of the National Monuments legislation - for particular discussion in a publication about the built heritage of the area. The origins of three of the ten are explicitly

⁴⁴ 'even before this [the construction of the Pale in the fifteenth century] there had developed a frontier-like mentality among the Anglo-Irish which had led them to construct tower houses to protect themselves against the lawless Irish. Although there is only limited evidence to show that some tower houses were built in strategic locations, unlike the earlier castles of the Anglo-Normans, each one of them nevertheless represented that frontier-like existence in microcosm.' BARRY 1995, 217.

⁴⁵ 'Conçues au départ pour assurer un rôle d'observation et de défense, la plupart de ces édifices sont réaménagés à partir du XVe siècle et tout au long des siècles suivants, alors que leur rôle militaire s'amoindrit puis disparaît, afin de privilégier l'aspect résidentiel et le confort ou l'activité agricole. Aujourd'hui maisons d'habitation ou bâtiments d'exploitation, ces nombreux édifices médiévaux, construits en pierre calcaire locale, ont été fortement remaniés mais ont conservé en partie leur aspect fortifié.' ['Intended from the outset to serve as observation posts and as defensive structures, most of these buildings were modified in the fifteenth or subsequent centuries as their military role gradually diminished and then disappeared, in such a way as to reflect the increased importance of their residential function, with its accompanying demands for comfort, or their use for agricultural purposes. Many of these medieval buildings survive, albeit often in a somewhat modified state, ,in the landscape of today, and whether they are being used as residential accommodation or as farm buildings they generally still retain some trace of their fortified origins and character.] BORREAU, I. 1999 Patrimoine de l'Isle-Crémieu et du Pays des couleurs. Cantons de Crémieu et de Morestel. Association Musée et Patrimoine, Musée Dauphinois, Grenoble. Document réalisé dans le cadre de la convention patrimoniale établie entre le Conseil Général de l'Isère et la Région Rhône-Alpes.

attributed to the fourteenth century; another three were built at 'the start of the fifteenth century'; two others first appeared in the historical record in 1289 and 1390, respectively; another was the subject of works in the fifteenth century which were intended to make it more comfortable; and the final castle, at Morestel, was first constructed in the eleventh century and came into the hands of the Dauphin in the thirteenth, subsequently undergoing various modifications and reconstructions.⁴⁶

The Greek experience also seems to include strong similarities with the situation in Ireland. First of all, those who investigate the tower houses of Greece are faced, like their counterparts in Ireland, with a dearth of documentary records. The conventional view of the socio-economic conditions of fourteenth century Greece seems very close to that which has dominated historical writing on Ireland for the period. Bintliff commented, for example, that 'three factors are considered significant in the apparent decline of Latin Central Greece in the fourteenth – fifteenth centuries: the bubonic plague epidemics throughout this period, internecine warfare between the Latin powers, and increasing attacks from the Turks. Outbreaks of plague, fighting between local factions, and the possibility of attack from overseas: all seem familiar. Furthermore, at this apparently disrupted period various areas of Greece saw the construction of tower houses.

In Greece, as in Ireland, the study of the medieval landscape had been somewhat neglected until the later decades of the twentieth century. However, tower houses are prominent monuments and have attracted the attention of

⁴⁶ BORREAU 1999.

⁴⁷ HODGETTS, C. & LOCK, P. 1996 'Some village fortifications in the Venetian Peleponnese' in LOCK, P. & SANDERS, G.D.R. (ed) *The Archaeology of Medieval Greece*. Oxbow Monograph 59. Oxbow Books, Oxford. pp.77-90 at 77; LANGDON, M.K. 1995 'The mortared towers of Central Greece: an Attic supplement', *The Annual of the British School at Athens* **90**, pp.475-503 at 496; LOCK, P. 1986 'The Frankish Towers of Central Greece', *The Annual of the British School at Athens* **81**, pp.101-123 at 107

⁴⁸ BINTLIFF, J. 1996 'Frankish countryside in central Greece: the evidence from archaeological field survey' in LOCK, P. & SANDERS, G.D.R. (ed) *The Archaeology of Medieval Greece*. Oxbow Monograph 59. Oxbow Books, Oxford. pp.1-18 at 5

⁴⁹ See, for example, LOCK, P. 1996 'The towers of Euboea: Lombard or Venetian, agrarian or strategic' in LOCK, P. & SANDERS, G.D.R. (ed) *The Archaeology of Medieval Greece*. Oxbow Monograph 59. Oxbow Books, Oxford. pp.107-126; HODGETTS & LOCK 1996.

archaeologists and historians working on some of the islands, as well as on mainland Greece. On the basis of these recent investigations, theories have emerged which seem to echo the ideas of students of tower houses elsewhere. For example, several studies of tower houses in Greece have led to the suggestion that the monument type was not usually intended to constitute part of coherent defensive strategy. In fact the presence of a tower house can usually be explained in the context of the land ownership pattern of the area in which it occurs – a tower house was often at the administrative centre of a landed estate and would have formed its focal point in visual, physical, and psychological terms. Those working in Greece seem, in fact, to have concluded that the majority of tower houses were built for reasons connected with prestige and symbolism, and were certainly not intended exclusively - or even primarily – as defensive structures in the military sense.⁵⁰

Explorations such as this, of an area of Europe which is geographically somewhat remote from Ireland, illustrate the common ground which may be identified within the European architectural tradition, at least in relation to castles. The tower form, as has already been mentioned, is essentially ubiquitous, at least in the European context, and versions also appear elsewhere, notably in the Middle East.

In his discussion of the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem Pringle was, admittedly, working on the promotion of the Lawrence hypothesis regarding western European inspiration – or even models – for local towers. However, his list of functions (assumed functions, presumably) for the buildings would not only fit the eleventh and twelfth century towers of the west - as *per* the Lawrence theory - but would also be appropriate, according to conventional understanding, if applied to the tower houses of later medieval Ireland. Pringle's argument involves rejection of the view 'that the Western medieval tower-keep or *donjon* had developed from Byzantine prototypes', although he did concede

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⁵⁰ BINTLIFF 1996, 5; LOCK 1996, 110; LANGDON 1995, 499-500; LOCK 1986, 102, 104.

that 'the tower houses that were sometimes attached to rural farms and monasteries in Syria in the fifth and sixth centuries ... [and which] ... were evidently self-contained residences' might be contemplated as 'more plausible prototypes for Crusader towers.'52

In the latter group of remarks Pringle is clearly driven by the need or urge, frequently encountered among architectural historians, and especially among students of the various forms of castle, to identify at least the possible inspirations, antecedents, ancestors, or models for the type of structure which he is investigating in the particular location in which it is found. Almost all works which deal with the subject of tower houses in Ireland contain a sub-section and in the case of theses it is often an entire chapter - on a theme approximating to 'the origins of the tower house'. There is no doubt that the question is one of considerable interest, but it must also be emphasised that it does in itself appear to depend on an inherently progressive model for the emergence of building forms, with each developing as an essentially logical step from its predecessor. This model seems to leave little space for more general, broader assimilation of inspirations, for occasional digression from what can now, with hindsight, be identified as a rational and sequential process, or for the expression and reflection of independent architectural ideas.

⁵¹ cf. LAWRENCE, T.E. 1988 *Crusader Castles*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. (first published in 1936, though based on an undergraduate thesis of 1909) and PRINGLE 1994, 335.
⁵² PRINGLE 1994, 335.

⁵³ For example, MCNEILL 1997, 201-205; O'KEEFFE 2000, 51-53; Sweetman only touches on the question (at least in explicit terms) in his major descriptive work – SWEETMAN 1999, 174 – but he recently published a smaller book devoted almost exclusively to the matter of tower house chronology: SWEETMAN 2000.

ANTIQUARIES

Many accounts of the Ireland of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries take the form of tours through the country, the author combining a description of his travels with observation of the monuments and buildings he encountered *en route*. Some of these travellers seem to have been relatively diligent in recording the appearance of places they visited, but their 'historical' information regarding particular areas or sites rarely shows signs of serious research, instead bearing characteristics of oral tradition and local knowledge.

For example, Wright's Ireland illustrated includes mention of Olderfleet Castle, near Larne, in county Antrim. It proposes that the castle was 'erected to keep watch upon the Caledonian intruders, who so frequently visited the north-eastern coasts of Ireland' and that it was built 'precisely at that period when all necessity for such a fortress in such a situation had ceased; that is, after the landing of Edward Bruce ... and after his total discomfiture, ruin, and death.' It is perhaps reasonable to suggest, as did Wright, that a castle on the north-eastern coast of Ireland might have been built in response to a threat from across the water, although it seems unlikely that a single structure would have been of much consequence in its own right in this regard. It follows from such suggestion, that some comment should be made regarding the key incursion from Scotland into Ireland, but no attempt is made to place a date on the construction - it is merely stated that the castle was erected after the Bruce invasion was over and Bruce dead.² The imprecision of this type of writing is such that while it is alleged that relevant records exist, inference is only drawn from them to the extent that the building was erected after the event - and one is left wondering in which of the subsequent centuries it may actually have been carried out.

It is clear that such works were not intended to provide more than a light commentary on the landscape and built environment of Ireland as it was at the time, but they do in fact make a more substantial contribution to tower

¹ WRIGHT, G.N. 1831 *Ireland illustrated, from original drawings, by G. Petrie, RHA, W.H. Bartlett, & T.M. Baynes.* H. Fisher, Son & Jackson, London. p.71

² Wright's mention of the Bruce invasion in the context of Olderfleet castle is presumably the result of an awareness that Edward Bruce and his troops are thought to have landed at Larne on

house study than may thus far have appeared. The learned travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries frequently drew landscapes, buildings, and other monuments, and a substantial proportion of them seem to have been fascinated by antiquity. As a result, many of their illustrations are of ruins, and among their catalogues of places visited or noticed are large numbers of castles.

These features of antiquarian publications are useful for the present purpose for various reasons. The illustrations provide a pictorial record of buildings which were, at the time when they were portrayed, often gradually disintegrating as a result of weathering, or because of the actions of invasive plants, or which were faced with threats from human or other sources. Many of these have by now deteriorated much further, and some have even disappeared.³ More dramatically, tower houses were occasionally destroyed deliberately, for example when a source of building material was required in the area.

In the light of these considerations it is significant to note that the national survey of tower houses is not yet complete, and that antiquarian drawings and accounts may help to identify the character of a building which is no longer standing or of which there is no trace at all.⁴ This point seems particularly important in the context of the very large number of 'castle sites' recorded by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) in recent decades, and by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland in the nineteenth century.⁵

Another diligent recorder of antiquities in the Irish countryside was Austin Cooper (1759-1830), selections of whose works – sketches, notebooks,

^{25&}lt;sup>th</sup> May 1315. Bruce was killed, and his force defeated, at Faughart, just north of Dundalk, county Louth, in October 1318. OTWAY-RUTHVEN 1968, 226, 237.

³ It is interesting in this context that Le Harivel should have considered Du Noyer, a nineteenth century artist who recorded Ireland's geology, archaeology, and natural history, to have been 'unfortunate [in] that he was generally preceded by many other antiquarians at the various sites he visited, and that much more survives of Ireland's early buildings than seemed likely in his day.' LE HARIVEL, A. 1995 'Du Noyer the artist and antiquarian' in CROKE, F. (ed) *George Victor Du Noyer*, 1817-1869. *Hidden Landscapes*. The National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin. pp.29-43 at 34

⁴ In mid 2004 a county *Inventory* had been published for just over half of the 26 counties.
⁵ For example, in West Cork the ASI recorded 39 'sites of castles' and 42 'tower houses and bawns'. The first category was 'largely composed of sites marked as "castle" on the OS maps but where little or no standing masonry survives today', and it is noteworthy that, according to the ASI, 'all the surviving castles in West Cork are tower houses.' POWER 1992, 317-330.

Chapter ten Antiquaries

and diary – have been published by Price, Manning, and Harbison.⁶ As well as his illustrations, Cooper measured some of the structures he visited, and described their appearance and surroundings, often including an account of the lore associated with the site. He travelled through Munster in 1781, taking notes not only about structures which were standing and in good repair, but also regarding the sites and names of castles which were no longer extant.

Harbison has also been behind the recent publication of paintings and drawings of sites and monuments of archaeological interest in Ireland that were produced – whether in the field or from originals by other artists – by Gabriel Beranger in the second half of the eighteenth century. By the time Beranger and his contemporaries were exploring the countryside and depicting the archaeological remains they found – often, in Beranger's case, for example, on behalf of a patron with antiquarian interests — many of the medieval buildings they portrayed were in ruins. A few remained in use, however, and several of Beranger's watercolours, like a number of Cooper's illustrations, show a tower house as the most prominent element in a cluster of buildings, sometimes clearly serving agricultural or residential purposes (see illustration overleaf).

This eighteenth century pictorial material provides an indication of the ways in which the use of tower houses developed, but it can only hint at how the buildings would originally have functioned, and how their surroundings would originally have been organised. However, there is more direct evidence

⁶ PRICE, L. (ed) 1942 An eighteenth century antiquary. The sketches, notes and diaries of Austin Cooper (1759-1830). John Falconer, Dublin; MANNING, C. 1998 'Some unpublished Austin Cooper illustrations', Journal of Irish Archaeology 9, pp.127-134; HARBISON, P. 2000 Cooper's Ireland: drawings and notes from an eighteenth century gentleman. O'Brien Press, in association with the National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

⁷ HARBISON, P. 1991 *Beranger's views of Ireland*. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin; HARBISON, P. (ed) 1998 *Gabriel Beranger*. *Drawings of the Principal Antique Buildings of Ireland*. *National Library MS 1958 TX*. Four Courts Press, Dublin, in association with the National Library of Ireland; HARBISON, P. 2002 'Our Treasure of Antiquities.' *Beranger and Bigari's antiquarian sketching tour of Connacht in 1779*. *Based on material in the National Library of Ireland and the Royal Irish Academy*. Wordwell, Bray, in association with the National Library of Ireland. His efforts to bring the output of antiquarian artists to public attention are also manifested in the illustration of the third edition of his well-known *Guide* with eighteenth and nineteenth century prints and drawings. HARBISON, P. 1992 *Guide to National and Historic Monuments of Ireland*. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. (3rd edition; 1st edition, 1970)

⁸ Beranger and Bigari toured Connacht in 1779 at the initiative of the newly-established Hibernian Antiquarian Society, the moving force behind which seems to have been William Burton (later Conyngham). HARBISON 2002, 1-5.

⁹ *e.g.* HARBISON 1991, 20-21, 66-67; HARBISON 1998, 34-35, 46-47, 56-57, 60-61, 68-69, 72-73, 76-77, 112-113, 120-121, 180-181, 196-197.



Gabriel Beranger's illustration of Bullock Castle, county Dublin

(after HARBISON, P. (ed) 1998 Gabriel Beranger. Drawings of the Principal Antique Buildings of Ireland. National Library MS 1958 TX. Four Courts Press, Dublin, in association with the National Library of Ireland.)

from other sources for the way in which tower houses were envisaged by their builders, and for how they were used. The illustrations should be considered in the context of the written descriptions of tower houses which survive from the period around 1600;¹⁰ of the architectural evidence, such as the presence of roof raggles on tower house walls;¹¹ and of an increasing number of archaeological excavations.¹² All of these contribute to an impression of the tower house as the most substantial and most durable building in a more extensive settlement complex.

The reputation of Francis Grose as an antiquary in Britain had been established by the time he visited Ireland in the 1780s. The first volume of his *Antiquities of Ireland* was published in 1791. It is especially valuable for its illustrations, but it opens with a broad descriptive overview of architectural history in Ireland. Grose was of course dependent on the understanding of Irish history current in his day, and his account moves from brief mention of the 'Firbolgs' and the 'Celtes' (neither of which peoples seems to have produced architecture to excite his interest) to a comparatively reliable discussion based on the work of Giraldus Cambrensis. He seems to have favoured a chronological classification of castles on the basis of their shape, with 'Danish fortifications' or 'Norwegian towers' being of circular form and

¹⁰ LITTON FALKINER, C. (ed) 1904 'Travels of Sir William Brereton in Ireland, 1635' in LITTON FALKINER, C. 1904 *Illustrations of Irish History and Topography, mainly of the seventeenth century.* Longmans, Green, & Co., London. pp.363-407; GERNON 1620; CAMDEN 1695; Ó RIAIN-RAEDEL 1998; LENNON 1981.

¹¹ See, for example, those at Clonmantagh castle, county Kilkenny (illustrated and discussed in DELANY 2000); Danes castle, county Wexford (illustrated in JORDAN 1990, Plate 4.18a). The remains of the continuations of two of the walls of Three Castles tower house (inventory number 1155) beyond the basic tower plan are a prominent feature in the illustration provided by the ASI: GROGAN & KILFEATHER 1997, Plate 10.

For example, POLLOCK 1999; POLLOCK 2000; POLLOCK 2002; COTTER 2003;
 O'CARROLL 2003; FITZPATRICK 2003; HAYDEN 2003; HODKINSON 2003; CAREY 2003.

¹³ A Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (of London) from 1757, a writer, artist, antiquarian, and *bon vivant* who stood five feet tall and weighed twenty-two stone, Grose is perhaps best remembered in Britain for his *Antiquities of England and Wales* (4 volumes, London, 1773-1787). Described by Stalley as 'a marvellous companion', his talent for caricature, which was often used at the expense of himself and his fellow antiquaries, is also worthy of note. He died in Ireland in May 1791, and the actual publication of his Irish volumes owed much to others, notably to Ledwich, who was responsible for much of the text, and to Francis Grose's nephew, Daniel Grose. See SWEET 2004, xvii, 100-101, illustration 5; STALLEY, R. (ed) 1991 *Daniel Grose* (c.1766-1838). *The Antiquities of Ireland. A Supplement to Francis Grose*. The Irish Architectural Archive, Dublin.

¹⁴ GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxiv. Modern editions of the work of Giraldus Cambrensis are O'MEARA 1982; SCOTT, A.B. & MARTIN, F.X. (ed) 1978 *Expugnatio Hibernica. The Conquest of Ireland. By Giraldus Cambrensis.* Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.

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'the old square castles being of a much later date.' Indeed, he cites Ledwich as the source of his information that the Ostmen were responsible for introducing cement to Irish building construction, and considers, on the basis of Giraldus' reports, that the Ostmen, 'after subduing Ireland castellated it throughout', often with fortifications 'of lime and stone.'

NORMANS' to have been of very great significance for Ireland. He stated that 'the Irish neither imitated the Ostmen in making or occupying forts, nor the English in building castles', and he cited Sir John Davies who with some puzzlement had asserted that 'the Irishry ... did never build any houses of brick or stone, some few poor religious houses excepted, before the reign of King Henry II.' Indeed, he continued, 'when they saw us [the English] build castles on their borders, they have only in imitation of us, erected some few piles for the captains of the country.' Grose's assessment of castle-building by Irish families implies that it was only once lands had been surrendered to the Crown and then re-granted under English tenurial arrangements that the Irish 'began to provide for posterity and the honour of their families, by building castles and improving their possessions.' 17

For Grose, the significant result of the reorganisation of the land tenurial arrangement in Ireland was that 'every manor had a castle', and he considered that it was the adoption of the English system which ('of course') led to the construction of castles by the Irish around the country. But this was castle-building activity of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is perhaps indicative of the dependence of Grose on an uneven body of documentary evidence for much of his narrative of Irish architectural history that the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries receive comparatively little obvious or conscious attention.

Grose's works are perhaps most strongly associated with their illustrations, which provide a visual catalogue of the condition and appearance of a substantial number of medieval buildings, secular and ecclesiastical, as

¹⁵ GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxv; LEDWICH, E. 1790 *Antiquities of Ireland*. Dublin. p.144 ¹⁶ The capitals are, of course, his, and seem to give visual expression to his feelings. GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxv.

¹⁷ GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxvi, xxxvi, xxxviii.

they were in the later eighteenth century. The texts accompanying the illustrations usually indicate the location of the structures, as well as providing some impression of their history, or of the traditions associated with them.

In most cases, however, they also include some description of the building at issue. The very inclusion of a castle which has subsequently disappeared is of course a significant source of data, and although Grose's approach to architectural description was discursive rather than systematic, his work does also constitute a considerable body of information regarding the appearance and character of the buildings in question.

Grose's description of Baldungan Castle (Davin's 'Baldongan'), for example, is not clearly expressed, but could be read to conform with more concise and explicit accounts. Grose was often prepared to estimate the date of construction of the buildings he described, but the sources, whether documentary or archaeological, on which he based his speculations are rarely cited. In his opinion, also, it appears that the castle was 'rather the habitation of some proud baron, than a place of defence. Comments of this nature appear to be echoed in more recent studies of castles, which have emphasised the sophistication of so-called fortified architecture, arguing that those responsible for castle construction were frequently concerned more with the impression created by their building than with its strength in cruder, direct, military terms.

In his account of Baggotsrath Castle Grose was less elaborate in describing its overall appearance, depending more heavily, it would appear, on the accompanying illustration. Davin does not seem to have been confident about her classification of this castle, and while the structure portrayed by

¹⁸ GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxxviii. Grose appears to be alluding to the Tudor 'surrender and regrant' initiative.

GROSE 1791, Volume I, 9; compare, for example, with DAVIN 1982, 201.

²⁰ GROSE 1791, Volume I, 9.

²¹ 'The medieval fortress of the castle age proper ... was, in its way, as intentionally evocative and symbolic as any late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century castellated mansion of the Romantic Revival.... Although needing also to be in very varying measure defensible, according to local and personal circumstances, the social purposes of fortresses almost always comprehended and transcended their military functions. Castles were seldom, if ever, in their own day purely functional fortifications; certainly, they were often homes as well... but, above all else, their builder sought to evoke in some manner the *moeurs* of chivalry, the life-style of the great, and the legends of the past.' COULSON, C. 1979 'Structural symbolism in medieval castle architecture', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 132, pp.73-90

Grose may have resembled a tower house, it seems merely to have been a part of what had once been a more substantial and elaborate set of buildings.²² Grose observed that 'the entrenchments' around the remaining section of Baggotsrath Castle could 'easily be traced', thereby rendering somewhat difficult the assessment of his assertion that it had formerly been more extensive.²³

The value of Grose's text as a key to the location of the structures portrayed is demonstrated in his treatment of Brown's Castle, on the wall of the city of Dublin.²⁴ Discussion regarding this 'urban tower house' raises the issues of the status of such buildings, and of how they are to be classified in relation to their rural equivalents. Bradley clearly feels that the urban and rural examples should be considered in parallel. He actually argued briefly but persuasively in 2001 that the tower house form may first have emerged in towns, and since then has produced more substantial evidence on the subject.²⁵

A further distinction should perhaps be drawn, however, between towers (of the appropriate shape and dimensions) which were constructed on, or as part of, the walls of a city or town (as Brown's Castle), and towers which stood within a town, whether walled or unwalled. Murtagh's exploration of the fortified town houses of the Pale, Bradley's *Urban Archaeological Survey*, and studies of such towns as Carlingford and Dalkey, each of which boasts several towers, should be taken into consideration in this regard.²⁶

Among the historical works which would have been available at the time when Grose was investigating Ireland are the writings of James Ware. Ware lived from 1594 to 1666 and should probably be regarded as one of the pioneers of historical writing in Ireland.²⁷ Ware was perhaps more ambitious

at 73-74; see also JOHNSON, M. 2002 *Behind the Castle Gate. From Medieval to Renaissance.* Routledge, London & New York.

²² DAVIN 1982, 201.

²³ GROSE 1791, Volume I, 10.

²⁴ GROSE 1791, Volume I, 19.

²⁵ BRADLEY 2001, 237; BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003.

²⁶ MURTAGH 1982, and Murtagh's subsequent publications on the subject (see bibliography for details); BRADLEY, J., DUNNE, N., KING, H.A., HALPIN, A. 1986-1990 *Urban Archaeological Survey*. (limited distribution) (OPW, Dublin); BUCKLEY, V.M. & SWEETMAN, P.D. 1991 *Archaeological Survey of County Louth*. The Stationery Office, Dublin. pp.352-354; SMITH 1996.

²⁷ Grose actually referred to the work of the twelfth century writer Giraldus Cambrensis, whose account of Ireland at the time of the arrival of the Anglo-Normans is well-known. *e.g.* GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxiv. See O'MEARA 1982; SCOTT & MARTIN 1978.

and methodical in his approach than his predecessors, attempting to organise his material on a thematic basis, and drawing information from various documentary sources as well as his own observation of structures in the landscape. Two Latin editions of his work, The antiquities and history of Ireland, were published in the 1650s, and the first English edition appeared in 1705.²⁸ He also produced a set of *Annals of the Affairs of Ireland* covering the period between the arrival in Ireland of the Anglo-Normans under Henry II and the end of the reign of Oueen Elizabeth.²⁹ In each of these publications Ware described and discussed castles in various parts of the country. It is significant, however, that in his Annals there are relatively few entries for the fourteenth century, a fact which would appear to weaken suggestions regarding the impact of the fire in the Dublin Public Records Office in 1922 on the potential for document-based research into the period. If Ware's investigations in the seventeenth century provided so little material worthy of comment on fourteenth century affairs, one must suggest either that there was little information available by the seventeenth century or that Ware was inconsistent in his coverage of the documentary source material.

In England it was the eighteenth century which saw a great burgeoning of interest in the past, with antiquaries visiting and describing sites, meeting to discuss their discoveries, and publishing the results of their investigations. The Society of Antiquaries was not the first forum for the subject when it was founded in 1717, but it seems to have developed pre-eminence at an early stage. The fashion for antiquarianism was weaker in Ireland, although the Royal Irish Academy and the (earlier) Dublin Society did see discussions of antiquities along with their usual subject matter, which included science, natural history, theology, and literature. A separate society devoted to antiquarian concerns had been set up in Dublin in 1779, the Hibernian Antiquarian Society, but it seems to have petered out by 1784, just before the foundation of the Royal Irish Academy in 1785.

A focus for interest in Ireland's past was organised in a formal manner in the mid nineteenth century, with the foundation of the Kilkenny

WARAEUS 1654 &1658; WARE, J. 1705 The antiquities and history of Ireland. Dublin.
 WARE, J. 1705 The Annals of the Affairs of Ireland, from The First Conquest by the English, in the Reign of King Henry II Unto the End of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth. Dublin.

Archaeological Society, a group devoted specifically to the investigation of the history and archaeology of the country. The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland developed out of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, and its *Journal* has been published under one name or another since 1849. This *Journal* has thus seen long service as a medium for the presentation of the results of historical and archaeological research into Ireland's past, and an examination of the development in style, character, and content of its articles reflects the changing standards in and attitudes towards scholarly investigation during that period. Members of the Society also contributed their findings to other publications, such as *The Irish Builder*, which boasted on its title page in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that architecture, archaeology, engineering, sanitation, arts, and handicrafts all fell within its ambit.³¹

In the 1890s a member of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, E.R.McC. Dix, explored the 'lesser castles, more correctly known as "tower houses" of county Dublin, contributing a column entitled 'The lesser castles in the County Dublin' to *The Irish Builder* from Autumn 1896.³² In most of these columns at least one 'lesser castle' is described, the verbal description occasionally being accompanied by a plan. His objective was 'to put on record, ere they vanish for ever, what remains there still are of these old castles or Tower Houses.' This would appear to be echoed by at least a part of the motivation and intention of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland of today. Although the ASI is clearly also intended to serve as a tool for the formulation of a conservation strategy for the structures, such a notion was not far from Dix's aspirations when he wrote lamenting the loss of some of the castles 'within living memory' and observing that 'others are in like danger, if steps

³⁰ HARBISON 2002, 1-2; SWEET 2004, 11.

³¹ See the sub-title on the cover page of, for example, *The Irish Builder* **40** (1898), p.1 ³² The first and the last in *The Irish Builder* series seem to have been DIX, E.R.McC. 1896 'Notes on some of the ancient castles in the Co. Dublin', *The Irish Builder* **38**, p.235; DIX, E.R.McC. 1899 'The lesser castles of the Co. Dublin. Forty-eighth article. Kenure (or Kinnure) Castle', *The Irish Builder* **41**, p.60. However, an additional article appeared a few years later in a different journal: DIX, E.R.McC. 1902-1903 'The lesser castles in the county of Dublin. On Dubber and Spricklestown', *Dublin Penny Journal* **1**, pp.516A-517A (the page numbering in *DPJ* **1** is faulty – the 'A' signifies that these are the second pages of the volume to bear the numbers 516 and 517). Dix was in fact best known for the bibliographical activities to which he devoted himself after his period of castellological study. He was the founder and first president of the Bibliographical Society of Ireland. See KIRKPATRICK, T.P.C. 1937 *Ernest Reginald McClintock Dix (1857-1936). Irish Bibliographer*. Printed at the University Press by Ponsonby and Gibbs, Dublin.

are not taken to preserve these interesting monuments of our country's history, dumb to the many, yet speaking much to those who have ears to hear and eyes to see.'33

Dix's articles are brief, but they contain information organised according to a reasonably consistent format. The pieces tend to open with a short discussion of the historical and toponymical aspects of the site, citing relevant primary source material before proceeding to a description of the structure itself, often including measurements. Dix comments on the condition of the buildings and provides information regarding the surrounding area. In some cases he reports having photographed the remains of the castle, but the reproduction of such photographs seems to have been beyond the technical capacity (or editorial policy) of the publication. Most importantly, perhaps, the descriptions are based on first-hand observation - Dix seems to have written his articles from notes made in the field by himself or by an assistant. It would appear, therefore, that the series of articles by Dix in The Irish Builder between 1896 and 1899 provides a reasonably reliable account of the appearance and condition of a selection of the tower houses of county Dublin in the 1890s. It is not clear whether Dix carried out much documentary research, but his articles in The Irish Builder depend far more heavily on his field survey work than on historical investigations.

The ASI has yet to publish an Inventory for county Dublin, but the work of Davin on the *Tower houses of the Pale* presents an interesting body of information for comparison with Dix's findings.³⁴ The separation of the two surveys by some eighty years also allows assessment of the deterioration of particular buildings during the interval.

Dix wrote about some thirty-seven castles in county Dublin in his *Irish Builder* series.³⁵ He also mentioned others, such as Malahide and Howth castles, 'which would each require a pamphlet to do justice to it and its history'; Dalkey, which had recently been the subject of articles by Wakeman

³³ DIX 1896, 235.

³⁴ DAVIN 1982.

Lanestown, Naul, Balrothery, Portrane, Adamstown, Grange, Ballyowen, Lucan, Drimnagh, Timon, Simmons Court, Shanganagh, Kilgobbin, Rathmichael (Puck's Castle and Shankill Castle), Malahide (Robswall Castle), Cheeverstown, Dean's Rath, Seatown, Murphystown, Kilsallaghan, Dundrum, Ballymount, Castle Knock, Saggart, Clondalkin, Bremore,

in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* and in the *Illustrograph*; Artane, Bealinstown near Swords, Drumleck on the Howth peninsula, Cappoge, and Cardiff's Bridge (or Pellettstown), all of which, he reported, had 'been obliterated within living memory.' He did not claim to have made an exhaustive survey, merely intending to present a selection of the sites, but he also commented that 'some of the old castles are now represented by modern houses, the ancient building having been improved, sometimes quite away!' ³⁶

In describing the castles, Dix claimed no particular expertise, protesting his 'ignorance and inexperience' at an early stage, but urging readers to add their observations or corrections. He commented that his desire 'to notice every visible feature', and to 'give as full details as possible of each', were based on the lack of illustrations of the structures and on his 'ignorance ... of what are the salient features or real points of interest.'³⁷ His intentions – whether or not they were fulfilled – seem to have been modern, or even 'scientific' in that they were concerned with neutral observation and recording rather than with the subjective use of particular features as vehicles for the communication of theories and the construction of histories.

Dix clearly considered the castles of which he wrote to constitute a group united by common features as well as by geographical location, but he does not seem to have attempted to explain their presence or the reasons behind their similarity. His attention was concentrated on the reporting of the location, appearance, and condition of the structures in the field rather than with any analysis of their purpose or significance.

Dix's series of forty-eight articles provoked a certain amount of correspondence via the pages of *The Irish Builder*. A major contributor to the discussion was F. Elrington Ball, the historian of Dublin, who added historical details to some of Dix's accounts of castles.³⁸ Dix appears to have been

³⁷ DIX, E.R.McC. 1896 'Notes on some of the lesser castles in the Co. Dublin. Second article', *The Irish Builder* **38**, p.244

Colmanstown, Newcastle, Howth (Corr Castle), Monkstown, Irishtown, Little Bray, Baldungan, Tallaght, Ballyfermot, and Kenure.

³⁶ DIX 1896, 235

³⁸ e.g. BALL, F.E. 1897 "Roebuck Castle." [Letter] To the editor of *The Irish Builder*, *The Irish Builder* 39, p.115; Ball is best known for his history of county Dublin: BALL, F.E. 1902-1920 A History of the County Dublin. 6 volumes. Reprinted by Greene's Bookshop, Dublin, 1995.

flattered by Ball's contributions, but he was frustrated by the historian's reluctance to move beyond the written record. An article on Dundrum castle published by Ball in *The Irish Builder* seems to have provoked Dix into writing a letter to the editor in which he urged that Ball should describe 'in detail the *existing* remains' of the castle about which he had discovered so much through documentary research.³⁹ Dix's appreciation of the importance of accurate field survey is significant, but Ball remained with his purely historical and textual approach, apparently protesting that Dix was far more expert at describing the buildings themselves.⁴⁰ Neither seems to have been prepared to explore to any significant degree the potential value of combining documentary research with field survey. However, given that several of the buildings described by Dix have deteriorated or even disappeared altogether since the time when he was writing, his accounts constitute an extremely important record for the investigators of today.

The *Dublin Penny Journal* was another wide-ranging periodical which thrived in the early twentieth century. It presented itself as 'A Magazine of Art, Archaeology, Literature, and Science', and tended to confine itself, at least in the archaeological sphere, to the publication of secondary material rewritten for the general audience. It did however publish the final article in Dix's series, a piece which dealt with the castles of Dubber and Spricklestown.⁴¹

The *Dublin Penny Journal* often featured an illustration on its front cover, and among these illustrations are reproductions of eighteenth and nineteenth century drawings of medieval buildings including tower houses. It would of course be insufficient to depend unquestioningly on such reproductions as evidence for the appearance of medieval buildings at the time when the artist was at work, but the collection of such a series of illustrations may be useful as a catalogue of the original depictions, some of which may not themselves survive. Furthermore, they are also evidence that there was, at the time of the publication of the *Dublin Penny Journal* in the early twentieth century, a significant level of interest in the built heritage of the country. If

⁴¹ DIX 1902-1903, 516A-517A.

³⁹ DIX, E.R.McC. 1897 "Dundrum Castle." [Letter] To the editor of *The Irish Builder'*, *The Irish Builder* 39, p.170

⁴⁰ DIX, E.R.McC. 1897 "Dundrum Castle." [Letter] To the editor of *The Irish Builder*, *The Irish Builder* 39, pp.188-189

there were records of the distribution figures and audience profile of the *Dublin Penny Journal* they would definitely contribute to our understanding of the socio-political attitudes of the early twentieth century in Ireland. However, the frequent portrayal of later medieval buildings on the cover of a publication the title of which was printed with decoration reminiscent of that of an early medieval illuminated manuscript, against a round tower and a rising sun, suggests a broader appreciation of Ireland's later medieval built heritage among Gaelic Revivalists than might sometimes be assumed.

An antiquarian illustration can provide only limited information regarding the origins of the particular structure is portrays, being merely a subjective view taken at a single moment. However, the period since 1800 has seen dramatic development of Irish towns and countryside. Any illustration providing clues to the past appearance of buildings which are no longer extant (or which have been altered) must therefore be of considerable value in elucidating their history. Indeed, just as one might attempt the reconstruction of the content of lost medieval historical documents through detailed study of calendars and secondary publications produced by those who had access to the lost originals, so one might use antiquarian sources as the basis for developing knowledge regarding the building history of existing structures and the appearance of those which do not survive.

The potential of this approach is demonstrated in a basic manner by comparison of illustrations from the *Dublin Penny Journal* with accounts of the remains of the structures depicted as published by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland in its county *Inventory* series. The compilation of the county *Inventories* involves not only a limited documentary search, which is designed to provide an outline of the history of each site insofar as it has been ascertained, but also a site visit which ought to result in a paragraph or so describing the visible remains.

As has already been remarked, the Inventory for county Dublin has yet to be published, but there are no obvious remains of Baggotrath Castle or Brown's Castle ('an old Dublin City wall tower', which apparently served as the Lord Mayor's residence in the early seventeenth century) today. The

illustrations of these two buildings which were reproduced in the Dublin Penny Journal therefore constitute an important record of their appearance.⁴²

At Aghmacart Castle, county Laois, the archaeologists compiling the Inventory found, in 1990, that 'part of N wall and NE angle survive of this two-storey tower house', and while the Ordnance Surveyors of the 1830s or 1840s felt able to describe the structure as a 'Castle' they were obliged to add that it was 'in Ruins'. The illustration reproduced in the Dublin Penny Journal, however, which is 'from a drawing by Barralet in the collection of the Right Hon. William Conyngham' (as well as the description, taken from Grose, which accompanies it), reveals far more about the building than one could possibly deduce from field investigation today. Three walls are seen to survive up to roof level, with one gable virtually intact. The fourth wall is only present to a lower level, but this leaves a cross-section visible through the two side walls which seems to show the existence of mural chambers or passages. The question of the number of storeys is confused by the inconsistency of terminology regarding tower houses in particular which affects much of the ASI *Inventory* series. 43 The illustration also shows what may have been a bawn wall, and / or some ancillary buildings, and part of a ditch to one side of the tower house and its bawn wall.44

The authors of the *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway* made good use of illustrations from Grose when they came to describe Claddagh Castle. When they visited the castle in 1985 they found 'only fragmentary sections' of two walls at the north west corner of the site, with 'grassed-over foundation lines' showing the outline of a rectangular building. The *Dublin Penny Journal* features a view (in elevation)⁴⁶ which corroborates many of the

⁴² Dublin Penny Journal 1 (1902-1903), p.481, an illustration from the works of Grose; Dublin Penny Journal 1 (1902-1903), p.557A, an illustration by T. Cocking, 1791

⁴³ This confusion has actually prompted two of the ASI fieldworkers to present a paper on the matter – in the aftermath of which it became clear that the problem was even more serious than it had to them appeared. FARRELLY, J. & O'BRIEN, C. 2000 'Terminology of tower house description', paper delivered at an Archaeological Survey Seminar entitled *Aspects of medieval masonry castles and related structures* held in the Helen Roe Theatre, RSAI, 63 Merrion Square, Dublin 2.

⁴⁴ Dublin Penny Journal 2 (1903-1904), p.241

⁴⁵ ALCOCK, O., DE hÓRA, K., & GOSLING, P. 1999 *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway. Volume 2: North Galway.* The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.403, no.3928, referring to GROSE 1791, Volume I, 64.

⁴⁶ Dublin Penny Journal 2 (1903-1904), p.273 – 'from a drawing by Bigari, made at the close of the 18th century'

Chapter ten Antiquaries

ASI observations on the Grose illustrations. Grose included not only a view of the building in elevation, however, but also a plan showing the interior layout.

The castle of Castletown survives to a substantial extent and has, because it is in county Louth, been investigated by the ASI to a greater level of detail than monuments in many other parts of the country.⁴⁷ Plans and elevations of the tower house building are included in the *Survey* entry, but the surveyors seem to have been satisfied to report, on the evidence of secondary accounts, that it was 'built c.1472 by Sir Richard Bellew ... probably on the site of an earlier de Verdun castle', and that it was 'once defended by a strong wall and other works of circumvallation', features which the *Survey* considered probably to have enclosed a bawn. Wright, the source of the second piece of information, was writing in the mid eighteenth century, ⁴⁸ but it would appear from Petrie's illustration that in 1820 a substantial wall (and perhaps also a ditch) existed on at least one side of the castle, enclosing some lower buildings with the castle in its precinct.⁴⁹

The dangers inherent in reliance on an individual representation of a building – or indeed in any source taken in isolation and without corroboration – are revealed by consideration of Swords castle, county Dublin. The character of Swords castle seems clear from the illustration, 'from a drawing made in 1790', which was published in the *Dublin Penny Journal* for 1903-1904 – it exhibits several attributes which would make it susceptible to classification as a 'tower house' (see illustration overleaf). However, Swords castle was not included by Davin in her catalogue of tower houses in county Dublin, and Leask's description confirms, as does a visit to the site itself (which has been the subject of conservation / restoration works by the State) that, while it may have incorporated a structure of tower house form, the castle was in fact more extensive and elaborate. ⁵¹

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⁴⁷ Louth is the only county for which the ASI has produced an *Archaeological Survey* (in addition to an *Inventory*): BUCKLEY & SWEETMAN 1991, 308-310, no.1093; BUCKLEY, V.M. 1986 *Archaeological Inventory of County Louth*. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.91, no.1093

⁴⁸ WRIGHT, T. 1758 *Louthiana*. London. The historical item comes from TEMPEST, H.G. 1943 'Bellew's Castle, Castletown-Bellew, or Castletown Castle, Dundalk', *County Louth Archaeological and Historical Journal* **X**, **No.3**, pp.180-195

⁴⁹ Petrie's illustration was reproduced in *Dublin Penny Journal* **2** (1903-1904), p.433

⁵⁰ Dublin Penny Journal **2** (1903-1904), p.625

⁵¹ DAVIN 1982; LEASK 1999, 72. The example of Swords castle actually raises important questions, discussed elsewhere, regarding the possibility of difference between the modern

The writings of those who, in past centuries, took an interest in what we now describe as tower houses are also essential to consideration of the adoption and development of terminology. Dix, for example, referred in the opening article of his series in The Irish Builder to 'lesser castles, more correctly known as "Tower Houses." The term 'lesser castles' seems to have been popular at this period, with Westropp writing on the 'lesser castles' of county Clare in 1899.⁵³ While Dix stated in his introductory comments that the term 'tower house' was more correct, he seems hardly to have used it again in any of his articles, preferring instead the more popular, conventional, familiar, and straightforward 'castle'. Westropp, in contrast, considered that to describe the structures of which he was writing as 'castles' would be 'grandiloquence', and he used the term 'peel towers' in his title. On his own evidence his choice of label seems peculiar, as he observed that 'the name "peel" tower is not in use in Ireland.' However, he explained that he had chosen to use it in this instance 'to equate these little turrets with those of Great Britain.' He further commented, by way of elaboration, that 'Pill or Pele is a Welch and Manx term for a tower. 54

These were not, however, the only terms which were in common use regarding what are now conventionally referred to as tower houses. In the popular (rather than academic) *Dublin Penny Journal* the word 'fortalice' was used. The medieval use of this word has formed the basis of considerable debate in the context of castle studies in Ireland since it was used by Cairns as the foundation of much of his argument for tower house construction in the fourteenth century. The same statement of the same stateme

Wilkinson, writing half a century before Dix or Westropp, in 1845, was already attempting an overview of the development of castle building in

perception of the tower house and the reality of its appearance and organisation at the time when it was built and when it was in use.

⁵² DIX 1896, 235.

⁵³ WESTROPP 1898-1900.

⁵⁴ WESTROPP 1898-1900, 348.

⁵⁵ For example, *Dublin Penny Journal* **1** (1902-1903), p.481, with reference to Baggotrath castle, county Dublin; *Dublin Penny Journal* **3** (1904-1905), p.385, with reference to Athlumney castle, county Meath (its earlier section)

⁵⁶ CAIRNS 1984. See, for example, DAVIN 1982; BARRY 1988; O'CONOR 1987-1991; DONNELLY 1994; MCNEILL 1997, *et al.*

Ireland. He concluded that the circular castle 'was among the earliest forms',57 regarding 'thick walls, narrow windows, and gloomy chambers' as characteristic of castles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, whereas he identified the 'castellated mansions' with their 'large and mullioned windows' as indicators of the 'greater security and progressive enlightenment of the nation' in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁸ He considered the height and staircase arrangement of castles to be a guide to their defensive strength, but also used the latter as a means of distinguishing between 'early' and 'later' structures. For Wilkinson, the stairs in most early castles was narrow, and was housed in passages within the walls. In contrast, later castles, he suggested, 'almost universally have circular winding staircases.' He assumed that 'smaller castellated structures' were erected by less powerful chieftains who would have required less substantial accommodation for their retainers. He also observed that in some of these castles the external walls were thick enough to accommodate a staircase, but that such was not included up to the first floor, presumably as a defensive precaution.⁵⁹

Wilkinson traced the origin of the form of the Norman castle to 'the castellated structures of Italy after the decline of the Roman empire,' perhaps attempting to create a history for architecture in Ireland which included a link with the classical world. His description of a typical 'early Norman' stone castle in Ireland appears to resemble very closely the organisation and design of the tower house. He cited Trim as 'one of the finest examples of these castles', and it would appear that for him the significant difference between such castles and the tower houses was essentially one of size.

In spite of this apparent ambiguity, Wilkinson was actually more specific in his treatment of tower houses (though of course he did not know them by that name), and he included a woodcut of one by way of illustration.

⁵⁷ In this he seems to echo the basic chronological suggestions presented by Grose, for whom 'Danish fortifications' or 'Norwegian towers' were of circular form, as compared with 'the old square towers ... [which were]... of a much later date.' GROSE 1791, Volume I, xxv.

⁵⁸ WILKINSON, G. 1845 *Practical Geology and Ancient Architecture of Ireland.* John Murray, London, & William Curry Jun., & Co., Dublin. pp.114-115. He does not elaborate on his attribution of castles in Ireland to the eleventh century, and the suggestion may be the result of an oversight.

⁵⁹ WILKINSON 1845, 115.

⁶⁰ This aspiration would certainly have been usual among antiquarians in England in the eighteenth century. SWEET 2004.

His assessment of their place in the chronology of castle building in Ireland appears at first sight to have been somewhat at odds with that subsequently proposed by Leask and later developed by others. 61 Wilkinson assigned the appearance of tower houses in large numbers to the period following Henry II's arrival in Ireland, when 'the Anglo-Norman chiefs extended themselves through a great portion of the country, and castellated edifices became extensively prevalent, and in many parts of very uniform character; square in plan, and of several stories or floors in height, with narrow windows, and the best apartments placed in the upper part of the building, in the windows of which the best portions of the architecture were displayed.' However, he subsequently specified that he considered such buildings to be 'intermediate between' later Tudor mansions and earlier, large, fortress-like castles, identifying the combination of improved comfort and a due regard for security as characteristic. He also observed that these structures were often found in groups, and 'particularly amid the best lands of the southern portion of Ireland,' a conclusion which conforms with the results of more recent investigation.62

Wilkinson identified a uniformity of style between domestic, military, and ecclesiastical buildings when describing the battlements which he found on structures intended for each of these classes of activity in Ireland. He considered that the stepped battlements which he felt were characteristic of the architecture of the island would have been simple to build, and well suited to the Irish climate. The fact that they were found on all three types of building prompts two possible explanations. First, that there was a demand for defensive features on the ecclesiastical and domestic buildings on which they appeared; or, second, that their decorative character was so popular as to be regarded as nearly essential, regardless of the intended function of the building. It may be significant that Wilkinson was able to make this observation, writing as he was in the mid nineteenth century. In the later 1800s, the period of the

⁶¹ LEASK 1999; SWEETMAN 1999.

⁶² WILKINSON 1845, 118; for comparison of Wilkinson's assessment of the tower house distribution pattern with modern data, see the map reproduced in, for example, Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, facing p.160; BARRY 1988, 187; BARRY 2000, 120; and also the map published in STOUT & STOUT 1997, 59.

⁶³ WILKINSON 1845, 131. The connection between battlement design and climate seems, for the moment at least, somewhat elusive.

Gothic revival in architecture, the upper courses of several medieval buildings were rescued from disintegration – and, to a degree, from future archaeological analysis – by reconstruction and consolidation works which frequently included the accepted form of stepped battlements.

A building which does not seem to have benefited from nineteenth century consolidation or reconstruction is Scurlockstown castle, county Meath. Wakeman included a drawing of 'Scurloughstown Castle' in his late nineteenth century publication, explaining that it was made 'a few years before the tower, which upon one of its sides exhibited a crack extending from summit to foundation, fell to the ground.' Another illustration of the castle appeared in the *Dublin Penny Journal* in 1904. The entry for Scurlockstown in the *Archaeological Inventory of County Meath* classifies it as 'Tower House (site)', explaining that at the time when it was visited by the Survey in 1969 all that remained of the castle were 'grass-covered stone mounds.' On this basis it would appear that the value of investigating antiquarian illustrations as a means of elucidating the character of medieval buildings which are no longer standing is convincingly demonstrated.

Wakeman clearly made a contribution in this field, publishing descriptions and illustrations of structures as they were in his day. However, in one respect in particular, he seems to have been more discriminating than many subsequent students of the tower house. He distinguished structures erected by the Gaelic Irish inhabitants of the island from those built in areas where the earlier colonies of the English or Anglo-Normans were established. He pointed out that 'it seems to have taken a considerable period to reconcile the native Irish to the use of castles or tower houses as places of every-day abode,' and continued by observing that, eventually, 'the native potentates, petty chieftains, and gentlemen of less degree, followed the example of their invaders, and erected stone dwellings, very similar to those of the strangers with which they had become familiarized.'

67 WAKEMAN 1891, 224.

⁶⁴ WAKEMAN 1891, 227.

⁶⁵ Dublin Penny Journal 3 No.31(1904), cover illustration entitled 'Church and Castle of Scurlogstown, Co. Meath, from a drawing by George Petrie, 1820'

⁶⁶ MOORE, M.J. 1987 Archaeological Inventory of County Meath. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.175, no.1779

Wakeman seems thus to have been of the opinion that the tower house as constructed by the Gaelic Irish element of the population, at any rate - was inspired not only by the more substantial keeps and outworks of the Anglo-Norman castle tradition as represented in Ireland, but also by smaller structures which were already part of the Anglo-Norman architectural canon in Ireland. So taken was Wakeman by the distinctive character and identity of the Gaelie Irish buildings that he referred to them as 'so-called "castles", thereby apparently exhibiting the strength of the influence of Parker, who had coined the title 'tower-house' in his account of a tour in Ireland made in 1858.⁶⁸ It is interesting, however, that Wakeman, while using the term 'medieval Irish tower-houses' as the heading for a section of his chapter on castles, did not in fact use it more than very occasionally in the body of his text. It is possible that in his decision to use the term at all he may have been influenced by his high regard for Parker, with whom he had visited a number of sites around the country.⁶⁹ That he used the term only rarely may have been the result of a desire to present his findings in language which would have been familiar to the majority of his readers, a majority which would probably not have encountered Parker, his article, or the new descriptive term it had introduced.

In Wakeman's work one can therefore find reference to 'our Irish tower-houses', but when he was writing about Scurloughstown castle lie described it as 'as good an example as any which have recently remained of the lesser keep, usually found in those districts wherein the earlier colonies of the English or Anglo-Normans obtained footing.' This avoidance of the term 'tower house' appears to be deliberate, but the distinction it encouraged is blurred in subsequent discussion of Bullock castle and its 'neighbouring castles, or tower-houses, of Dalkey' when it is suggested – on the basis of their architectural features and despite a stated lack of documentary evidence – that 'they were erected by English settlers, not long after the invasion of Ireland, by Strongbow.'71

⁶⁸ WAKEMAN 1891, 225; PARKER 1860.

⁶⁹ WAKEMAN 1891, 225, where he describes Parker as 'the greatest living authority on the subject of domestic architecture of the middle ages.' Wakeman accompanied Parker on at least part of the tour during which the latter was gathering material for his *Archaeologia* article of 1860. PARKER 1860, 176.

⁷⁰ WAKEMAN 1891, 226, 227.

Parker's article in *Archaeologia* is particularly important as the location of the earliest known use of the term tower house to describe the class of buildings in Ireland which is now generally understood to be covered by that label. Parker did describe what he meant when he referred to a 'tower house', but the term was only rarely used again until it was adopted and published by Leask in the 1940s. 73

Leask, like Parker, attempted to classify the buildings of Ireland and then to place the classes within a chronological framework. For Parker, tower houses were built throughout the medieval period after the arrival of the Anglo-Normans, and it would appear that Wakeman would not have disputed this idea. For Leask, on the other hand, the fourteenth century formed a gap in the architectural history of Ireland when very little of note was built, construction activity only returning to any significant level from the 1440s.⁷⁴

Leask, an architect, was certainly an authoritative figure in the Irish archaeological community, publishing reports of investigations into monuments dating from the neolithic up to the medieval period. He was the first person for several decades to devote significant time to the study of the country's medieval buildings, and his well-illustrated works on secular and ecclesiastical architecture deal concisely with the masonry remains from the period. At least partly as a result of the clarity of the chronological and typological framework proposed by Leask for the construction of fortified buildings between the later twelfth century and the seventeenth century, his ideas have gathered increasing authority as an encapsulation of the history of medieval buildings in Ireland.

⁷² PARKER 1860.

⁷³ PARKER 1860, 153-154; LEASK 1941; LEASK 1946. It is significant that in 1937 Leask published an article on Clara castle, county Kilkenny, without using the term 'tower house' at all. Clara castle was to serve as the archetypal tower house in *Irish castles and castellated houses*, which was published only four years later (see pp.79-86). LEASK, H.G. 1937 'Clara Castle, Co. Kilkenny', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 67, pp.284-289. ⁷⁴ LEASK 1941, 75. A less familiar formulation of his position, and one which seems to express more explicitly the views which he reiterated in 1941, is as follows: between *c*.1180

express more explicitly the views which he reiterated in 1941, is as follows: between *c*.1180 and *c*.1310 'many such castles were built but, in the course of the next hundred years, building activity in Ireland – military as well as ecclesiastical – waned greatly and did not revive in any volume till about the middle of the fifteenth century.' LEASK, H.G. 1936 'Irish Castles: 1180 to 1310', *The Archaeological Journal* **93**, pp.143-199 at 143

⁷⁵ ROYAL INSTITUTE OF THE ARCHITECTS OF IRELAND 1966; LEASK, A.K. 1966 'List of published works' appended to LUCAS, A.T. 'Harold G. Leask, M.Arch., Litt.D., Past President', *JRSAI* **96**, pp.1-6 at 3-6

⁷⁶ LEASK 1941; LEASK 1955-1960.

The first work of synthesis to present an alternative approach to the history of medieval fortified architecture since the publication in 1941 of Leask's Irish castles and castellated houses appeared in 1997, nearly sixty years afterwards. However, the writing of Leask is not as absolute on the matter of tower house chronology as some of his successors would appear to imply. One need not (one should not) abandon Leask's model altogether in order to re-examine the architectural history of the period, but in the course of such re-examination the historical and archaeological advances of recent decades should certainly be taken into consideration, perhaps in the context of the ideas of some of those who were working more than a century ago, such as Parker, Wakeman, and Westropp.

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⁷⁷ MCNEILL 1997.

⁷⁸ LEASK 1941, 75-91. See CRAIG 1982, 96; BARRY 1988, 186; O'KEEFFE 2000, 44; SWEETMAN 1999, 137, note 3; SWEETMAN 2000, 263. McNeill's analysis seems to convey a more thorough appreciation of Leask's position: MCNEILL 1997, 173-174.

⁷⁹ For example, STALLEY 1984; MCNEILL 1985/6; BARRY 1988, 9, referring especially to the work of K.W. Nicholls; see also the work of Frame, as cited in the bibliography, for general elucidation of the history of the fourteenth century; and see also the body of archaeological work, as represented by the *Inventory* series produced by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, and by the sequence of *Excavations* bulletins produced for the years since 1969 under the editorship of Delaney, Manning & Hurl, Cotter, and Bennett.

It is difficult

to get the news from poems

yet men die miserably every day

for lack

of what is found there.*

^{*} William Carlos Williams 1963 'Asphodel, That Greeny Flower' in *Pictures from Brueghel and other poems*. MacGibbon & Kee, London. pp.153-182 at 161-162

THE TOWER HOUSE IN BARDIC POETRY

It is perhaps more surprising that archaeologists, with their catholic and scavenging approach to the different types of material with potential to bring focus to our understanding of the past, should have made little or no use of bardic poetry, than that historians should have begun only in the final quarter of the twentieth century to pay it serious attention. The historian of Gaelic Ireland is not well supplied with documentary source material of the type familiar in Britain and elsewhere in Europe, so exploration of the historical potential of what had generally been treated, until then, as a genre of essentially literary and linguistic interest, was overdue.²

Bardic poetry is, of course, a literary medium. However, the connection between the content and the historical context of a bardic poem is generally even stronger than in the case of other literary forms. A poem would usually have been composed for a particular purpose or occasion, the poet working at the request or command of a wealthy patron to whom the poem would have been addressed. The poet might have been employed as a member

¹ Although Kieran O'Conor's interest in Cloonfree may appear to be an exception, it seems likely that it was instigated as part of a more general survey of earthworks in the area, rather than actually being stimulated in the first place by the poetical sources. O'CONOR 1998, 84-88. The existence of poems about Cloonfree does, of course, bring an extra dimension to any investigation of a site which is considered to correspond with that described. Earlier speculation regarding the identity and location of the site is summarised by Quiggin in the introduction to his edition of one of the poems on Cloonfree. QUIGGIN, E.C. 1913 'O'Conor's house at Cloonfree' in QUIGGIN, E.C. (ed) *Essays and studies presented to William Ridgeway on his sixtieth birthday 6 August 1913*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. pp.333-352 at 334

² In an address to the British Academy in 1911 Quiggin observed that it was 'clear that the secular compositions of the later bards furnish a valuable source of evidence for the study of social conditions in Ireland during the period in question', and then stated that 'it may be expected that within a few years the great bulk of bardic verse will have been edited and translated.' Only when this work was done, he felt, would it 'be possible to write a dispassionate history of Ireland from the Norman Invasion to the Reformation.' QUIGGIN, E.C. 1911 'Prolegomena to the study of the later Irish bards 1200-1500', Proceedings of the British Academy 5 (1911-1912), pp.89-143 at 120. Bergin similarly stated as early as 1912 that 'for the social history of Ireland it would be hard to exaggerate ... [the] importance' of bardic poetry, and Meyer, writing at about the same time, seems to have been of the same general view. The apparent delay between the recognition of the potential of bardic poetry as an historical source and the emergence of historical work which exploited that potential may perhaps best be explained by the substantial period of time which proved to be required for the collection, transcription, translation, edition, and then finally analysis of the bardic poetry. BERGIN, O. 1912 'Bardic poetry' in GREENE, D. and KELLY, F. (ed) 1970 Irish bardic poetry. Texts and translations, together with an introductory lecture by Osborn Bergin. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. pp.3-22 at 22; MEYER, K. (ed) 1913 (2nd ed) Selections from Ancient Irish Poetry. Constable & Co., London, especially at pp.xi-xii.

of the patron's household or retinue on a long-term basis, or he might merely have been commissioned to produce a single piece of work by a particular lord or chief. The distinction between these two possible circumstances may be significant from the perspective of the analyst seeking to use the poet's work for the purposes of historical research. A poet who was the full-time employee of an individual patron or patron family might even have inherited his position from his father or other forebear, but whether or not this was the case his knowledge of the history of the individual and of the individual's family, as well as his awareness and appreciation of their particular foibles, strengths, weaknesses, likes, and dislikes, would inevitably have been more extensive and comprehensive than would have been possible for a poet employed on a once-off basis.³ This familiarity would almost certainly have been reflected in the quality and nuances of the poetry, but would surely be very difficult to detect today.

The question of the significance of the relationship between patron and poet will not be resolved here, but the fact that it arises seems to draw attention to the reality that the poetry composed in Ireland between about 1200 and 1650, which has become known as 'bardic poetry', 4 was most often dependent in large measure on the history of a person and his family for its subject matter. Some poems are, of course, more general in their content than others, and some focus on other aspects of contemporary society, on religious themes, and even on buildings. Common to all was a particular style and form, the result of the

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as a way of clarifying what was meant by the more familiar 'bardic poetry', but seem then to have used the two more or less interchangeably. KNOTT, E. & MURPHY, G. 1966 *Early Irish Literature*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London. See, for example, pp.60-62, 68, 74-75, 78,

³ As Simms has put it, 'bardic poems were tailor-made to reflect the individual patron's preoccupations', and the message in the poetry therefore reveals 'the patron's wishes rather than any personal emotions felt by the poets.' SIMMS, K. 1989 'Bards and Barons: The Anglo-Irish Aristocracy and the Native Culture' in BARTLETT, R. & MACKAY, A. (ed) *Medieval Frontier Societies*. Clarendon Press, Oxford. pp.177-197 at 178

⁴ Though see Caerwyn Williams' use of the term 'court poet', as well as Carney's dissatisfaction with this usage. CAERWYN WILLIAMS, J.E. 1971 *The Court Poet in Medieval Ireland*. Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, British Academy. Oxford University Press, London (from the *Proceedings of the British Academy* 57); CARNEY, J. 1973 'Society and the bardic poet', *Studies* 62, pp.233-250, specifically at p.233. Knott and Murphy had referred to 'court poetry' and 'court poet' in 1966. They appear to have introduced the terms

^{82, 84.} Bergin, in contrast, when he commented that 'All court poetry is more or less tainted by the voice of insincerity and formalism', clearly considers 'court poetry' to include the bardic poetry of Ireland as well as cognate literary forms in other languages and cultures. BERGIN 1912, 15.

training of their authors not only in the rules and conventions of composition, but also in the history of the country and its peoples as it was then understood.⁵

The very existence of the bardic tradition, as well as its nature, its longevity, and its consistency of character, tell us much about the society to which it appears to have been so important. The eulogistic - or at least celebratory - intentions which underlie most bardic poetry introduce an obvious bias. In combination with the literary character and linguistic complexity of bardic poetry, this expressly laudatory objective may have discouraged historians from drawing on the content of the poems. This general reluctance to seek historical data among the conventions of the poetic oeuvre is reflected in an assessment of the situation made by Ó Cuív in 1963. In commenting on the progress made between the 1890s and the 1960s in Irish history and literature, he noted that many of what Sir John Rhys had described in 1891 as 'the verities of history' were still 'shrouded in mist'. He ascribed this in part to the lack or loss of documentary records, but he was presumably thinking of bardic poetry (among other literary forms, perhaps) when he further asserted that the situation was 'due in some measure to the nature of the compositions of Irish literary men, both in the far past and in more recent times, and to their proclivity to embroider the simple truth in their efforts to entertain or please their public, or perhaps even for their own amusement.'6

In spite of this, Ó Cuív does seem to have been of the opinion that historical information might somehow be extracted from this most literary and formal of sources, and he explicitly inquired, in the course of his discussion, to what extent statements made by poets should be 'discounted as literary fiction.' In response to this crucial question he commented first of all that 'verse

⁵ BERGIN 1912, 4; Ó CUÍV, B. 1963 'Literary creation and Irish historical tradition', Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy* **49**, pp.233-262 at 234-235
⁶ Ó CUÍV 1963, 233. Simms coined a memorable phrase when she distinguished 'classical poetry' from 'the wealth of undateable and often deliberately misleading literary and genealogical sources with which this nation has been blessed or cursed' (SIMMS, K. 2000
'The dating of two poems on Ulster chieftains' in SMYTH, A.P. (ed) *Seanchas. Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne.* Four Courts Press, Dublin. pp.381-386 at 381), but it appears to have been only in the course of the last hundred years that bardic poetry has been very gradually emerging from this lode of literary and genealogical material – see, for an example of an early and apparently unusually successful attempt at the determination of the dates, locations, and patrons of poems, and for basic details of later (*i.e.* twentieth century) attempts at the cataloguing of particular collections, SIMMS, K. 1996 'Literary sources for the history of Gaelic Ireland in the post-

accounts of supposed historical events ... are likely to have been composed later than the events referred to and ... may well be the product of literary rather than historical activity', and then that 'the compositions of the professional praise-poets' are 'even less closely connected with the historical material.' In conclusion, however, he returned to his underlying concern and emphasised that, ultimately, 'the historian cannot afford to disregard' the literary sources which he had, a few lines before, appeared to consign to a near-ahistorical obscurity.⁷

Robin Flower, in his introduction to O'Rahilly's collection of later medieval and early modern Irish love poetry, cites 'the shanachies', who appear to have ascribed a more refined historical sense at least to one highly regarded poet: Gerald the Rhymer, Fourth Earl of Desmond.⁸ Gerald was described not only as 'A nobleman of wonderful bounty, mirth and cheerfulness in conversation, charitable in his deeds', but also as 'a witty and ingenious composer of Irish poetry and a learned and profound chronicler.'9

These comments present a very positive image of Gerald, but especially noteworthy for our purposes among the attributes ascribed to this aristocratic poet is the announcement that he was 'a learned and profound chronicler.' His role as an historian, or at least as a recorder of the events of his day, was thus acknowledged, though no analysis of this aspect of his accomplishments was offered.

The potential of bardic poetry as a historical source has been acknowledged through its use in recent years by individual historians. Brendan Bradshaw, for example, adopted a distinctive approach when he attempted to elucidate the evolving mentality of the Gaelic Irish in relation to political affairs in the country by means of the analysis of a group of bardic poems. His investigation was not specifically an attempt to analyse the words and terms appearing in the poems as such, but rather concentrated on identifying the

Norman period' in MCCONE, K. & SIMMS, K. (ed) *Progress in Medieval Irish Studies*. The Department of Old Irish, St Patrick's College, Maynooth. pp.207-215 at 210-211 ⁷ Ó CUÍV 1963, 255.

⁸ Gerald is still highly regarded for his various attributes and achievements, but recent scholarship on bardic poetry has seen his literary output described merely as 'amateur verse'. SIMMS 1989, 182

⁹ O'RAHILLY, T.F. (ed) 1925 (1984) Dánta Grádha. An anthology of Irish love poetry (A.D. 1350-1750). Part I. Text. With an introduction by Robin Flower. Cork University Press, Cork. p.xiii

impression conveyed - through explicit reference in the poems and by implication - of the political environment of the day. 10

Since the 1970s, however, Katharine Simms has been demonstrating that there is considerable substance behind Ó Cuív's apparently instinctive concern, made before solid evidence had been produced, that 'the historian cannot afford to disregard' bardic poetry - 'the compositions of the professional praise-poets.' Indeed, she herself has stated that while 'it has long been recognised that small nuggets of factual information can be mined from bardic poems', 12 and that the poems may also 'serve as evidence for ideals, aspirations, and attitudes of mind', 13 she has been concerned to observe that 'bardic poetry has been the one [type of historical source] hitherto most scrupulously avoided by historians.' It is perhaps, therefore, indicative of the success of her own work that she felt able to state, at about the same time, that while 'the study of bardic poetry for its historical content [was] originally undertaken to serve the interests of a wider field of research', it has now for some years been regarded as 'an end in itself.'15

Analysis of the content and context of particular examples of the genre has yielded valuable information regarding the social and political conditions of the time when the poems were composed. Simms has also approached the body of bardic poetry from a thematic perspective, identifying subjects such as specific events (death and marriage, for example) and prized possessions as the focus of individual poems. She has also recognised that more general eulogies, addressed to individual patrons, tend to praise particular aspects of that patron's persona, whether it be his appearance, his piety, his prowess in war, or

¹⁰ BRADSHAW, B. 1978 'Native reaction to the Westward Enterprise: a case-study in Gaelic ideology' in ANDREWS, K.R., CANNY, N.P., & HAIR, P.E.H. (ed) The Westward Enterprise. English activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480-1650. Liverpool University Press, Liverpool. pp.65-80

¹¹ Ó CUÍV 1963, 255; SIMMS, K. 1987 'Bardic Poetry as a Historical Source' in DUNNE, T. (ed) The Writer as Witness: literature as historical evidence. Historical Studies XVI, Cork University Press, Cork. pp.58-75; SIMMS, K. 2000 (first ed. 1987) From Kings to Warlords. The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge; SIMMS, K. 1990 'Images of warfare in bardic poetry', Celtica 21, pp.608-619; SIMMS 1996, especially 210-215 ('never again will historians of medieval and early modern Ireland feel able to ignore literary sources in the Gaelic language' – p.215) ¹² SIMMS 1987, 70.

¹³ SIMMS 2000a, 9.

¹⁴ SIMMS 2000a, 4.

¹⁵ SIMMS 1987, 71.

 perhaps with the intention of attempting to create an obligation – his hospitality and generosity to poets.

It might appear that Simms' exploration of what she has called the 'House Poems' has exhausted the potential of bardic poetry to inform any discussion of later medieval secular architecture in Ireland. This is not the forum for further linguistic analysis of the poems. Indeed, this investigation is heavily dependent on translations of the original poetry. Rather, it is envisaged that an examination of the poems identified by Simms as relevant to the study of later medieval secular domestic architecture (*i.e.* her 'House Poems') from the particular point of view of the student of castles might contribute not only to our appreciation of the place of the tower house – and other structures – in later medieval Irish society, but also, in some minor way, to an understanding of the value and uses of literary source material for historical research.

It seemed surprising, first of all, that when Simms searched 'the 1,380 odd poems' on her computer database for 'the occurrence of "house" as a class of poem or a motif within a poem', a list of only sixty-three poems was produced. Given the nature of bardic poetry, one might reasonably have expected more references to the eulogised chief's palace, stronghold, or other dwelling-place. However, this strikingly low proportion represents, of course, a search not of the texts of the poems themselves, but of their descriptions. It is clear that the poems which are most likely to contain useful information regarding 'houses' are those which actually have a house as their subject matter, or which can be described as containing house-related motifs or themes. The rationale behind the database search upon which Simms' analysis is based is thus perfectly logical. However, it would appear that it may have excluded from consideration a number of references which, while essentially incidental, might nonetheless be of relevance to the investigation of the domestic fortified architecture of the day.

¹⁶ SIMMS, K. 2001 'Native Sources for Gaelic Settlement: The House Poems' in DUFFY, P.J., EDWARDS, D., & FITZPATRICK, E. (ed) *Gaelic Ireland* c.1250-c.1650. *Land, Lordship and Settlement.* Four Courts Press, Dublin, for the Group for the Study of Irish Historic Settlement. pp.246-267 at 246; SIMMS 2000a, 5; SIMMS 1990, 608.
¹⁷ SIMMS 2001.

 $^{^{18}}$ For a summary description of the database, its scope, its content, and its development, see SIMMS 1996, 211.

¹⁹ SIMMS 2001.

Buildings, and particularly more impressive or imposing buildings, are often used metaphorically in literature. As such they would not necessarily qualify as the subject-matter, or even as a theme, of a poem. Indeed, they might merely be mentioned as an aside, or as an apposite comparison or point of reference in a work which was concerned primarily with another subject altogether. It seems likely that mentions such as these would not merit inclusion in the descriptive fields which were apparently the starting-point for Simms' search. The sophistication required of a search-engine which would sift through a database of the texts of some 1,500 or 2,000 poems, in their original language and in translation, searching for uses of particular words, would surely not be beyond the technology of today.

How might such allusive references be of value to our study? As has been observed by Bergin, the poet must communicate his message in terms which can easily be understood by his intended audience. 20 The author of a piece of bardic poetry could not but have used symbols and images which would have been recognizable to his patron and to the others who might have been present at the time of its declamation. The bardic poet had an extensive body of historical and quasi-historical knowledge at his disposal as a result of his education and training, and he would certainly have drawn on this in order to embellish his eulogistic and other poetic works. However, it seems inconceivable that he would have ignored the physical surroundings in which he and his audience were living when he was composing his verse; it is almost certain, in fact, that their familiarity would have been put into service. Not only would such features, structures, or objects have served their literary purpose, whether as comparators or as illustrations, they would also have served to engage and sustain the interest of the listeners. Furthermore, if the poet referred to objects or places which were actually the property of or otherwise connected to the patron, this would have added authenticity to the poem, and would have generated a more comprehensive attachment – perhaps even a sense of belonging or ownership – for the audience to the poem. It would therefore have been in the interest of the poet to include such references; after all, his livelihood depended on the success of his poem among those who

²⁰ BERGIN 1912, 16.

were to hear it and, particularly, with the patron to whom it was addressed and for whom it had been composed.²¹

The potential of bardic poetry as a historical source, which was suspected or anticipated in the early twentieth century, 22 has in large measure been confirmed by Simms and others who have demonstrated through their work that the genre has much to contribute in several historical fields. Nonetheless, the historian must remain vigilant when dealing with any form of source material, and the motives and objectives of the bardic poet were much less related to historical accuracy (as we would now see it) than to the creation of particular impressions through a specific set of literary forms.

Bardic poetry is distinctive in various ways, but it does have approximate parallels in other cultures and from other periods. In any case, the comments and concerns of those working, for example, with the poetry of the classical Greek world are of at least tangential relevance.²⁴ Distinction between the aspirations and intentions of the poets of classical Greece and the historical and geographical assumptions made in relation to their poetry by modern scholars was a particular concern of Stanford, who argued strongly for cautious use of such literary works by scholars from other disciplines, such as history, and championed the celebration of poetry in its own right rather than in the service of others.²⁵

Many of the stories retold in Greek verse are familiar today at least partly because of the fascination they provided for nineteenth century antiquarians and archaeologists who were intent on identifying the physical remains of the sites described. The priority of the poet, Stanford argued, is

²³ BRADSHAW 1978.

²¹ Quiggin was presumably thinking along these lines when he observed that the 'religious poems can scarcely be expected to afford such valuable information as regards the life of the period as the panegyrics. Nevertheless some of the metaphors are of interest in this connexion.' QUIGGIN 1911, 125.

²² See note 2, above.

²⁴ It is emphasised that comparisons are not being explored, at this point, between the poetry of classical Greece and Rome and the bardic poetry of Ireland; rather the views of a classicist regarding the character and role of poetry generally are raised for consideration in the context of Irish bardic poetry. Nonetheless, several writers on early Irish poetry have in fact drawn parallels with the literature and literary environment of the Mediterranean classical world. For example, JACKSON, K.H. 1964 *The oldest Irish tradition: a window on the Iron Age.* The Rede Lecture, 1964, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge; KNOTT & MURPHY 1966 (especially 60-66); CAERWYN WILLIAMS 1971, 12; CAERWYN WILLIAMS, J.E. & FORD, P.K. 1992 *The Irish Literary Tradition.* University of Wales Press, Cardiff. pp.12, 35 STANFORD, W.B. 1980 *Enemies of Poetry.* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

necessarily the composition of fine poetry. The poet must concentrate, ultimately and fundamentally, on the language and form of his work. Of course, this is not to deny that information of value to the historian may be extracted from poetry, and particularly from that kind of poetry which presents a narrative of past or contemporary events (which should ideally be verifiable by means of reference to another source). Schliemann with Homer, like Simms with the Irish bards, would appear to have demonstrated the potential of the poetic medium as a repository of usable historical information.

The information of relevance to the study of tower houses to be taken from bardic poetry seems, therefore, to fall into two categories. The first type is that which actually forms part of a description included by the poet as an element of the narrative. The accounts of Lifford and Enniskillen castles would be unambiguous examples of this variety, but there are others in which the reference may be rather less prominent, and still more in which the identity of the building the subject of the allusion may not be clear at all.

The second type of information is that which is mentioned incidentally by the poet, often as a means of illustrating some particular point or idea arising in the course of the poem. It is references such as this which are less likely, presumably, to have been detected by Simms' database search. It is suggested that they may, nonetheless, constitute a significant source of information regarding the buildings of the day and about contemporary views and aspirations in relation to domestic architecture generally.

An allusion might not be to the character or appearance of an actual building, of course, but might instead be to an ideal. Equally, the allusion might not be to the building as a whole, but rather to a particular element of the building. It would have been created by the poet in such a way as to convey not only the intended meaning but also to satisfy the metric, rhythmic, and stylistic demands of the poetic form.

Religious imagery was used by many of the bardic poets, and it provides one of the circumstances in which allusion is made to buildings, notably through reference to the 'house of God'. The 'house of God' would generally have been understood and presented as a structure of strength in which were to be found sanctuary and security. How should a poet convey an image of a building of strength in which one might find sanctuary and security

but through reference to the castles which served that very purpose in the landscape with which he and his audience were familiar? If this suggestion reflects an aspect of the approach of the bardic poet to composition, and to the communication of ideas, then the mode of inquiry outlined above, which appears to go beyond (or at least beside) Simms' methodology, seems to be justified.

There is perhaps a danger that the use of such religious imagery might lead to the possibility of misinterpretation, particularly in the context of a study of the tower house. It is not coincidental that ecclesiastical architecture tends to the monumental, and that it frequently sets out to draw the eye upwards, towards heaven (or at least towards higher things than earth-bound humanity). References to 'lofty walls' and the like might therefore owe their origins to the notion of the city / house of God and to ecclesiastical architecture (much of which was in fact fortified in the later medieval period in Ireland) more than to the inspiration of secular buildings, such as tower houses. This is an issue which must be borne in mind, but which is perhaps best considered in the context of each individual reference or allusion. It may be that the most reliable statement possible on the matter is that a degree of overlap seems natural and inevitable not only in the raw material used for the creation of imagery, but also in the effects that imagery is intended to evoke. The possible overlap between descriptive imagery and physical reality in the context of poetry dealing with ecclesiastical buildings is clear in such poems as 'The Holy Cross', for example.²⁶

A systematic survey of references to castles (not to mention other types of building) in bardic poetry is beyond the scope of this work. However, it is proposed that, through the use of examples drawn mainly from poems included by Simms in the list appended to her 'house poem' study, suggestions might be made regarding the potential of the poems as a source of information regarding the fortified architecture of later medieval Ireland. In addition, the poems seem

MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1939 Aithdioghluim Dána. Vol. I. Introduction and Text. Educational Company of Ireland, Ltd., Dublin, for the Irish Texts Society. Irish Texts Society Vol. 37. pp.324-328; MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1940 Aithdioghluim Dána. Vol. II. Translation, Notes, Vocabulary, etc. Educational Company of Ireland, Ltd., Dublin, for the Irish Texts Society. Irish Texts Society Vol. 40. pp.201-203

occasionally to reflect the attitudes and expectations of their authors – and thus, presumably, of their contemporaries – towards the buildings occupied by the upper strata of society. It is suggested that study of these attitudes and expectations may further elucidate our understanding of the architecture with which they are concerned.

The information gleaned has been divided according to the aspect of building construction or design to which it appears to relate. Many of the poems emphasise the height of a particular building, or of its walls. The connection between the frequency with which this height observation appears and the most distinctive defining characteristic of the buildings which have become known as tower houses is obvious. It seems very likely that at least some of the structures referred to as 'tall' or 'lofty' by the poets were tower houses. However, the motives which seem to have driven certain people in later medieval Ireland to the construction of tall buildings might not always have been realised in masonry;²⁷ it is often difficult to know whether the poet intended to present an accurate description of an existing structure, or whether he was expressing aspirations, conveying an impression of an ideal which had not actually been built.

The same problems are relevant in relation to the second group of references, which are concerned with the materials from which, the poems tell us, the buildings were constructed. It seems somewhat less likely, however, that a poet would describe as stone a building which was actually of wood when the audience listening to his poem was being entertained in that very building, than that he might exaggerate its size or capacity. The same is perhaps true of the third group of references, which relate to the level of comfort achieved by the furnishings and interior decoration of the building.

The fourth section considers the vocabulary used in references to buildings. Difficulties inevitably arise in relation to the intended meaning of particular words, especially in the context of poetry. This fourth section is of limited ambition in that it (like the rest of the chapter) is essentially confined to consideration of terminology in translation. It is in fact hoped merely to draw attention to the potential of the poems to yield further information on the basis

of their use of words which may have carried specific meanings for the contemporary audience – meanings which may or may not equate precisely with those ascribed to them today.

Finally, the poets occasionally place a prominent building in the context of its surroundings, whether those surroundings be other buildings, the natural landscape, the preparations for a great festival or gathering, or the activities and appearance of the local community. It may be difficult, or even impossible, to gauge the precise character of the building itself, or to deduce its appearance. It would therefore in most cases be hasty to imply that the impression conveyed by the bardic poetry regarding the situation and environment of prestige buildings might be applied to the tower house. It does not seem unreasonable to state, however, that the tower house was intended as a prestige building. As such, suggestions regarding the possible arrangement of the tower house in relation to the population and landscape of its area might reasonably be made on the basis of information taken from bardic poetry.

Height

A recurring theme in the descriptive language used with reference to the lordly residences mentioned in the poems is that their height is stressed. A late twelfth or early thirteenth century poem, for example, mentions 'the tall castle of Limerick'. Indeed, it is not only the buildings themselves which are associated with height. In the same poem we are told of 'the castle of Limerick of the lofty slopes'. A thirteenth century poem mentions 'Scotland of the lofty manors' and the author of the poetic account of 'William Ó Ceallaigh's

²⁷ As a result of the relative durability of their materials, however, it is the masonry examples which have survived.

²⁸ Presumably the building the subject of the reference is the so-called 'King John's Castle' in Limerick city. Sweetman considers that it was probably built in the opening years of the thirteenth century. SWEETMAN 1999, 36. Wiggins suggests that 'work on the construction of a permanent stone castle did not commence until later, when John made his control of the region more effective, possibly as late as the year 1210.' WIGGINS, K. 2001 *Anatomy of a Siege. King John's Castle, Limerick, 1642.* The Boydell Press, Woodbridge. p.18

²⁹ Without analysis of the original language of the poem it is perhaps difficult to determine whether the 'lofty slopes' are connected to Limerick generally, or to the castle of Limerick in particular. MCGEOWN, H. & MURPHY, G. 1953-1955 'Giolla Brighde Albanach's vision of Donnchadh Cairbreach Ó Briaín', *Éigse* 7, pp.80-83, vv.1, 2

³⁰ 'Fada in chabair a Cruacain' [spellings follow those used in sources cited rather than those used in Simms' list] - MURPHY, G. (ed) 1953-1955 'Two Irish poems written from the Mediterranean in the thirteenth century', *Éigse* 7, pp.71-79 at 76 (v.3) [poem no. 3 in SIMMS 2001]

Christmas Feast to the Poets of Ireland, A.D. 1351', wrote of the 'lofty castle' and the 'lofty tower'. The poet Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, who was active in the second half of the fourteenth century until his death in 1387, referred to a building as 'that lofty proud castle'.³¹

Before even suggesting that the terminology used by the poets signifies that at least some of the fortified structures were distinguished by their height, it is important to enter certain provisos. It is difficult to determine whether references to the height of a building (or to the height of its position) relate to the physical reality of the structure in question, or to the connotations of importance which the author wished to convey in relation to it and, by implication, to its owner. Any attempt at the resolution of this question would clearly require careful linguistic analysis, and even then the probability of overlap between the two potential meanings would render it unlikely that a definitive conclusion one way or the other could be achieved. It would appear, in fact (at least from the published translations), that while one would be justified in stating that the bardic poets of the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries seem to have used height-related imagery as a means of expressing and conveying importance and status, conclusions regarding the physical appearance of the structures described must be generally tentative, at least insofar as material corroboration is unavailable.

Building materials

There do seem to be features of the structures to which the poets refer, however, which are elucidated by the terms employed. A number of poems make specific reference, for example, to the materials from which a building has been constructed, and some even describe particular features or elements of its appearance in explicit terms. Again, as seems to be the case with many of the height references discussed above, it is possible that the poets, in deploying this descriptive terminology, were actually engaged in the creation of an ideal rather than in the presentation of even an approximate account of the character of a specific building. It seems likely that some of the references should be

³¹ 'Do tógbhadh meirge Murchaidh' - MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, Poem III', *The Irish Monthly* **47** pp.102-107 at 106 (v.43) [poem no. 16 in SIMMS 2001]

accepted in this context. However, others appear to be sufficiently particular – perhaps recording a feature peculiar to an individual building - that the suggestion that they have a basis in reality does not seem unreasonable.

One would hesitate, for example, to conclude that every building mentioned as 'white', 'white-walled', or 'white-washed' had actually received a coat of paint shortly before the poet's arrival or before the moment of his composition. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that the composition of a poem tended to mark a particular occasion, and that a reference to the white walls of the patron's house might genuinely represent an observation that the buildings were looking smart and well-maintained.

Whiteness seems to have been closely connected in the poetic imagination with quality, refinement, and status. This connection appears to be illustrated in the following verses from a poem which has been dated to 1213, in which the whiteness of the skin of the occupants of the building is clearly an attractive attribute:

'Beautiful was the side of yonder house when last we looked upon it; no eye hath seen, to our knowledge, the side of a house with a larger retinue;-

A house where white hands were longer, a house where white-soled feet were more slender, a house where clustering locks were more brilliant, and where hand-linen was more lustrous.

A house where shoulders and bosoms were whiter, and where ladies were more red-lipped, where locks were more curving, bright and yellow, and blue eyes shaded by darker lashes;-

A house wherein were more golden jewels, a house wherein were more serving men, a house wherein were more spencers of noble birth,that has not been built and will not be built!³²

The white-washing of buildings tells us little, alas, about the materials from which they were actually constructed. White walls may, to us at least, and probably to the contemporary audience as well, convey connotations of purity and cleanliness, of propriety and efficiency, but white-wash in almost every case is of tremendous practical significance as well. One has only to consider the plight of a neglected mud-walled building in the landscape of today (one should perhaps do so quickly, however, before they all disappear or disintegrate) to appreciate the importance of regular white-washing to its survival. The white-wash seals the walls, and effectively protects the structure from the elements, albeit for a limited period. Wooden buildings, whether merely timber-framed or completely wooden, perhaps with wattle walls, would have required some form of protection if they were to survive the Irish climate. Life in a stone building would have been far more damp and draughty without some kind of render on the outside of the walls (and perhaps also on the inside). This would almost certainly have been lime-based, and regular limewashing would have been an important part of the maintenance regime for such a covering.³³

The possibility that a notion of whiteness might have been used, rather than a literal sense denoting the actual appearance of the building at issue, seems to be reinforced in a poem by Giolla Brigdhe Mac Con Midhe in which the whiteness of one major site is contrasted with the 'brightly-coloured' appearance of another. He advised as follows:

'Never let your contention be with Ard Macha of the white-washed wall, even if you go as far as ancient Corcach of the fair beasts among the chief places of the men of Ireland,'

but then continued, creating a coloured image which certainly serves to emphasise the distinction between the two places the subjects of his comparison:

³² 'Créd agaibh aoidhigh a gcéin' in GREENE & KELLY 1970, 88-92 and 252-254 at 253-254 (poem number 20, vv.21-24) [poem no. 2 in SIMMS 2001]

³³ PAVÍA & BOLTON 2000, 231-267.

'Teamhair of the kings, rath of the hostages, was a dwelling-place loveliest in beauty; though it was a fortress brightly-coloured and well-shaped, Ard Macha excels the wall of Teamhair. '34

Of course a closer analysis of the original language would allow a more reliable statement regarding this distinction (if, indeed, any distinction actually exists). It remains the case that both whiteness and brightness evoke an impression of cleanliness, of freshness, of power, sanctity, and authority.

A poet might exaggerate the size of a building in order to convey the notion that it was the home or property of somebody important, or that it could accommodate a large number of guests, but his inclusion of references to the materials from which it was constructed seem more likely to be reliable. It is possible that, again, the poet was creating an image of an ideal, but if this were the case one would expect at least an impression of consistency between descriptions and, furthermore, one would imagine that the audience might be somewhat bemused by what might be interpreted as criticism of the quality of a building.

In the 1213 poem at verse 20 the poet wrote

'Thine is the castle of Mac an Duinn which is named Caislén Uí Chonuing; thine now is the stone fence from which Mac Coise won the first success.' 35

The editor identifies Caislén Uí Chonuing as Castleconnell, county Limerick, which was described by Leask as being in a 'shattered state.' One could debate the question of whether the Caislén Uí Chonuing mentioned in the poem actually corresponds to the structure located by Leask. However, the poet seems to connect the castle with 'the stone fence from which Mac Coise

³⁴ 'Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' in WILLIAMS, N.J.A. (ed) 1980 *The poems of Giolla Brighde Mac Con Midhe*. Irish Texts Society, Dublin, Vol. 51. pp.190-203 at 191 (poem no XVII, v2 and v4) [poem no. 8 in SIMMS 2001]

^{35 &#}x27;Créd agaibh aoidhigh a gcéin' in GREENE & KELLY 1970, 88-92 and 252-254 at 91 and 253 (poem number 20) [poem no. 2 in SIMMS 2001]

³⁶ LEASK 1999, 65. He wrote that the remains of the castle stood upon a rock, but that its shattered state and the luxuriant growth upon its walls prevented a critical examination. It appears to have been rectangular.

won the first success.' The nature and function of this stone fence (wall?) are of potential relevance to the elucidation of the form of the early thirteenth century castle. Might the 'stone fence' have been a form of bawn or enclosure, perhaps providing an additional line of protection for those in the castle? Or was it simply a stone field boundary, which had served Mac Coise as a convenient shelter from which to launch his 'first success'?

One of the poems of Giolla Brighdhe Mac Con Midhe includes an oblique reference to the character of secular buildings of its period. Giolla Brighdhe Mac Con Midhe was active in the mid to later thirteenth century, so his comments regarding the state of Sligo may contribute to our appreciation of its character at that time. He wrote

'Upon my way I found Sligheach broken and disfigured, without timbered dwelling, without door-valves – nothing but utterly empty courts.' 37

A door-valve is presumably the door itself (probably wooden), swung in the door frame (perhaps of stone). The stanza implies that Sligheach had suffered in some way, that the timber elements, including doors, had been destroyed, and that all that had survived was the essential layout – the 'utterly empty courts'. These were presumably of stone, given that Sligheach was by that time 'without timbered dwelling' – the loss of dwellings had presumably contributed to the impression that the place was 'broken and disfigured.'

Much is made in another of Giolla Brighdhe Mac Con Midhe's poems of the church of Ard Macha, which was obviously an impressive building for its day. Not only are we informed that it was large – 'The church of Ard Macha of the towering wall is not smaller than three churches' – we also learn about the materials used in its construction. To start at the bottom, 'The foundation of the wrought, magnificent church is a heavy, stately flag-stone.' Solid foundations would clearly have been necessary to support so substantial a building, the walls of which seem to have been of stone, bound and covered

³⁸ 'Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' in WILLIAMS 1980, 190-203 at 191 (poem no XVII) [poem no. 8 in SIMMS 2001] v.6

³⁷ 'Dearmad do fhágbhas ag Aodh' in WILLIAMS 1980, 162-169 at 169 (poem no XIV) [poem no. 7 in SIMMS 2001]

with lime, and the roof of which was 'of shingles of stout oak'.³⁹ There was glass in the windows, apparently clear, or possibly of a blueish tinge.⁴⁰ Indeed there are several references to colour in this description – while the 'smooth side was made warm with bright, white, swan-like lime',⁴¹ there was 'a golden sheen from its coloured statues' and, perhaps most peculiarly, 'the lime of every stone in the church's wall has been coloured dark-brown.' This last reference seems to throw into question any theories regarding the use of bright whiteness as representative of purity, quality, and prestige, and indeed there is further reference to the colours of the materials – satin, stone, and yew wood – used in the construction and furnishing of the building.⁴²

In Knott's translation of William Ó Ceallaigh's 'Christmas Feast to the Poets of Ireland, A.D. 1351', the focus – as far as reference to buildings is concerned - is of course on O'Kelly's castle, the venue for the actual festivities. However, there is also some account of the accommodation provided for those who travelled to attend the event. 'The fair, generous-hearted host have another spacious avenue of white houses for the bardic companies and the iugglers'43 and 'Each thread of road, bare, smooth, straight, firm is contained within two threads of smooth, conical roofed houses.'44 This reference to the shape of the buildings seems not to be coincidental or haphazard. Earlier in the poem it is observed that while the poets of Ireland were on their way to O'Kelly's place of residence, 'an avenue of peaked hostels [was] ... in readiness for them.'45 We therefore seem to have information as to the shape of the buildings erected to accommodate the visiting poets, but little to tell us of the materials from which they were made. The buildings, arranged along 'avenues', seem altogether more substantial than what must be interpreted as a more basic form of accommodation which was also provided and which took

^{39 &#}x27;Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' vv.7, 8

^{40 &#}x27;Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' v.9

^{41 &#}x27;Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' v.7

^{42 &#}x27;Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' vv.8, 9, 12

⁴³ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' – KNOTT, E. (ed) 1911 'Filidh Éireann go haointeach. William Ó Ceallaigh's Christmas feast to the poets of Ireland, A.D. 1351', *Ériu* 5, pp.50-69 [poem no. 15 in SIMMS 2001] v.23

⁴⁴ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.26

⁴⁵ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.20

the form of 'sleeping booths ... wrought of woven branches, on the bright surface of the pleasant hills.'46

O'Kelly's castle is itself described as 'a capital letter of beauteous stone' among the other buildings - or lower-case letters - which surround it. In the same stanza more is revealed regarding the situation of 'the fortress of fair Gaille's chieftain' when it is stated that 'the fortress is strengthened by the lake which lies behind it.'47 This is a particularly telling remark. Not only does the word 'fortress' appear to imply (we are, of course, dependent on the translator) that a deliberately defensive structure is under discussion, we also learn something about the choice of the site for O'Kelly's castle. We learn that it is beside a lake but, furthermore, we learn that the poet appreciated the strategic significance of this propinquity. It may appear obvious that one would, in choosing a site for the construction of a fortified building, opt for somewhere with as many naturally defensive features as possible, or with as many natural features which might easily be adapted in such a way as to contribute to the defence of the site. It is valuable, however – and rare, at least in the Irish context – to discover explicit recognition by a contemporary of the strategic significance of the location and surrounding features associated with a fortified building.

This verse therefore conveys not only basic information about the material used in the construction of the O'Kelly castle, it also implies that the site was recognised as benefiting, from the defensive point of view, from the juxtaposition of fortress and lake. The poet also appreciated other aspects of the relationship between the lake and the castle, however, which are alluded to in subsequent stanzas. The significance of the appearance and of the visibility of the castle is emphasised in verse 29, for example:

⁴⁶ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.19 The descriptions of 'houses' and 'hostels', as well as that of 'sleeping booths' might be compared with that written by Gernon in the early seventeenth century. He wrote that 'the baser cottages are built of underwood, called wattle, and covered some wth thatch and some wth green sedge, of a round forme and wth out chimneys, and to my imaginacon resemble so many hives of bees, about a country farme. In the end of harvest the villages seem as bigg agayne as in the spring, theyre corne being brought into theyr haggards, and layed up in round cockes, in forme of theyr houses.' GERNON 1620³/₂ 355-356.

⁴⁷ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.28

'Far off is it recognised, the starlike mass of stone above the waters of Loch-na-néigeas, though the fort is lovelier within, its outer smoothness is like vellum.'

It is of course important that any building which is intended to constitute an expression of power should be visible in as much of the area over which that power is purported to be exercised as possible. Recent discussion of castles in the English landscape has emphasised that the designers of such buildings, whose work often included the remodelling of the surrounding landscape, frequently intended to create a psychological impact on the viewer, whether that viewer was a local inhabitant, a traveller, a guest, or an attacker, as much as – if not more than – a structure with military and defensive capabilities which might be measured in purely physical terms. Poetry such as the verse quoted above might be read in the context of such interpretation, seeming as it does to convey a dramatic image of the carefully-built castle rising dominantly above the lake which spread out from the foot of its walls. Presentation of the importance and prestige of the castle, as well as emphasis of its symbolic significance, seem to be continued in the following verse as well, in which the poet proclaims:

'The castle on the brink of the lake is the standard of a mighty chieftain, the scion of Bregia is to be praised on account of the castle; bright is the stone thereof, ruddy its timber. '49

This verse brings us once again to consideration of the materials used in the construction of a castle such as that of O'Kelly. It is clear that it was built of stone and timber, but there is no explicit statement regarding precisely how the two materials were used in the building. There are, however, a few clues.

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⁴⁸ JOHNSON 2002; COULSON 2003; GOODALL, J. 2004 *The great tower in English castle architecture.* Lecture to the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 26th February 2004. Comparison with Bodiam castle, in Sussex, seems obvious. As well as being at the centre of the debate regarding the relative significance of military strategic objectives and symbolic, psychological aspirations to the approach of medieval castle builders, Bodiam is surrounded by what Johnson has described as a 'moat or small lake'. JOHNSON 2002, 21. The place of Bodiam in the debate (in the English context) was emphasised by Stocker. STOCKER, D. 1992 'The shadow of the General's armchair', *The Archaeological Journal* 149, pp.415-420 ⁴⁹ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.30

The poet has already indicated that the castle was (as) 'a capital letter of beauteous stone, on that 'far off is it recognised, the starlike mass of stone above the waters of Loch-na-néigeas. The structure is later described as 'the mighty mass of stone', and these references together convey an impression that, at least from the exterior, the castle appeared to be predominantly stonewalled. Furthermore, the poet implies that the stone structure was massive, visible from afar, and significantly taller than the buildings which surrounded it.

The height and visibility of the building was obviously an aspect of the design which was appreciated by the poet and by his contemporary audience. In verse 36 we read that

'This lofty tower opposite to us is similar to the tower of Breoghan, from which the best of spears were cast; from which Ireland was perceived from Spain.'

This verse seems rather neatly to summarise (and thus, perhaps, to confirm) two of the perceived motivations for the construction of tall buildings (such as tower houses). Firstly, the occupant of a tall building has a direct strategic advantage over anyone who attempts attack, in that gravity allows projectiles to be launched further and with greater effect by those at the top of the building onto those below on the ground. Secondly, a tall building constitutes a statement of authority and power which may be appreciated from afar as a result of its ready visibility. A sub-set of this second attribute is, of course, that an observer looking from the top of a tall building sees far more of that which is taking place in the surrounding countryside than one who is at ground level.

⁵⁰ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.28

⁵¹ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.29

⁵² 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.32

⁵³ A variation on this scenario appears to have developed from about 1600 among feuding neighbours in Greece's Mani peninsula, which is known for its towers. There, rival families, striving for dominance, built ever higher in order to be able to bombard the roofs of their competitors' houses from above. See LEIGH FERMOR, P. 1958 *Mani. Travels in the Southern Peleponnese*. John Murray, London. (Penguin edition, London, 1984). pp.86-99; SAÏTAS 2001.

The poet was clearly keen to draw attention to the shape of the castle, and to the benefits and advantages which this provided. He was also concerned to emphasise the quality of the construction. In verse 31 we read that

'Close is the joining of its timber and its lime-washed stone; there is no gaping where they touch; the work is a triumph of art.'

This statement would appear to contain praise for the skill of the craftsmen responsible for the actual construction of the building as much as for their patron, its owner. However, it also serves as a reminder that while the many castles which survive in today's landscape do so essentially because of the durability of their stone walls, these relics are actually far from representative of the detail of the appearance of the structures they once were. Not only would internal features such as floors, roofs, doors, cupboards, and furniture have been of wood, so also would have been many of the adjacent and surrounding buildings. These structures, clustered around the dominant fortification, would have constituted a community which was in many ways dependent on the central stronghold, fortified residence, or castle. The buildings and building components which were wooden, or of other organic material, have in almost every case disintegrated and disappeared, leaving only the stonework standing, and even that most often only in part.

The craftsmen responsible for the selection and working of the timber used in the construction of the building receive further praise in verses 32, 33, and 34. First of all the beauty of the timber is mentioned,⁵⁴ and then we learn that the beams were of oak.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the workmanship involved in the timber elements is singled out for its quality, and it seems that some of the beams – the purpose of which was presumably structural – were actually decorated:

⁵⁴ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v. 32

^{55 &#}x27;Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' vv. 33, 34

'There is much artistic ironwork (?) upon the shining timber; on the smooth part of each brown oaken beam workmen are carving animal figures. ⁵⁶

It is not clear whether the 'artistic ironwork' referred to in the first phrase was metal which had been formed into decorative patterns and then attached to the wood, or skilful use of iron chisels and other metal tools on the wood itself. In any case, the reference is clearly intended to convey the quality and fine appearance of the craft work which formed a part of the construction of the building.

The O'Kelly castle at which the poets of Ireland gathered in 1351 was clearly a substantial structure of timber and masonry. Other fourteenth century poems are less clear in their occasional incidental references to buildings, at least as regards information as to their appearance and as to the materials from which they were built. One of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's poems, for example, which seems to have been written at some point between 1347 and 1371, makes various mentions of the contents and character of a castle, palace, or fort. One of these seems a little more specific in that it refers to the nature of a wall:

'Each man doing his part
In that lofty proud castle,
Their backs to the fair hurdled wall
Stand youths by the edge of the ale-vats. '57

While the image of youths in close proximity to ale-vats is clear, and certainly rings true across the centuries since the poem's composition, it is less clear whether the wall to which the youths had their backs was actually part of 'that lofty proud castle', or whether it was simply a nearby feature. The description of a castle as 'lofty' and 'proud' implies height and strength, but it

⁵⁶ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v. 34. The question mark appears to have been inserted by the translator.

⁵⁷ 'Do tógbhadh meirge Murchaidh' - MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, Poem III', *The Irish Monthly* 47 pp.102-107 at 106 (v.43) [poem no. 16 in SIMMS 2001]

seems difficult to reconcile that impression with the notion that the walls of the building were merely of hurdles.

It is clear from another poem, however, not only that structures made of woven branches were considered sound and reliable, but also that they might have been worthy of poetic praise. It seems unlikely that they could have been of more than one or possibly two storeys, even if they were built upon a stout timber frame, and it remains improbable that a wicker house would have been described as 'lofty' or 'proud'. Nonetheless, Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh wrote at some point between 1376 and his death in 1387 of wattle buildings as follows:

'Homes strong and fast hath our Sadbh's folk neath her care; each of her fair houses, a bright texture of woven wicker. 58

Of course we know that wicker had been used as a building construction material in Ireland much earlier and much later than the time when Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh was writing.⁵⁹ The implication conveyed by the verse above seems to be that wicker, while perhaps not as prestigious and

58 'Domhnall's daughter hath the wisdom of Ailbhe' - MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, Poem V', *The Irish Monthly* **47** pp.224-228 at 227 (v.34). The Mesolithic structures identified by Woodman at Mount Sandel seem to have been constructed using wooden rods, but the rods may merely have formed a framework which was covered using some other material, possibly sods or skins. WOODMAN, P.C. 1985 Excavations at Mount Sandel 1973-77. Northern Ireland Archaeological Monographs: No.2. HMSO, Belfast. p.132-135. Wattle was being used as a house construction material in the Neolithic, however: see, for example, MITCHELL & RYAN 1997, 180-181, re. Knockadoon, county Limerick. For a later period, but still before the time of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, see, for example, the artist's impressions of houses and property boundaries in late tenth century Dublin in SIMPSON, L. 1999 Director's Findings. Temple Bar West. Temple Bar Archaeological Report No.5, Temple Bar Properties, Dublin. See especially pp. vi, 11, 12, 17, 19, 22-26, 28-29. The excavations uncovered evidence not only for walls and fences made of wattle, but also for wattle-floored buildings. Of a total of 118 house foundations which were recorded in the Waterford city centre excavations, the 'earliest and most common types were the post-and-wattle structures, of which there was a total of 64 houses'; SCULLY, O.M.B. 1997 'Domestic architecture: houses in Waterford from the eleventh century to post-medieval times' in HURLEY, M.F. & SCULLY, O.M.B., with MCCUTCHEON, S.W.J. Late Viking Age and Medieval Waterford: Excavations 1986-1992. Waterford Corporation, Waterford. pp.34-39 at 34; O'SULLIVAN 1998, Plates 56-59, which show extracts from Richard Bartlett's seventeenth century maps or illustrations of Ireland (in the National Library of Ireland). It is interesting to note, however, that the only exposed wickerwork in these pictures

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certainly not as strong a building material as stone, might nevertheless be appropriate in particular circumstances and might actually have been adequate for the construction of higher-status residences.

Comfort

The poems tell us something of the conditions one might have expected to encounter inside a chiefly residence of the period. As well as comment regarding the appearance (or desired appearance) of the inhabitants themselves, ⁶⁰ the poems include information regarding such things as the way in which the dwellings were furnished. For example, in one of his poems, written in the mid to later thirteenth century, Giolla Brighdhe Mac Con Midhe has a character ask

'Do you know who put the rushes from the beds?'61

This inquiry informs us not, unfortunately, about the actual form of bed which was favoured, but rather that whatever beds there were would have been strewn with rushes, which were changed from time to time. The length of time people would have spent sleeping on the same rushes is not clear. No doubt the availability of rushes as opposed to other suitable vegetation would have been significant in relation to the choice of bedding, and one should not rule out the possibility that different materials might have been favoured elsewhere.

The same poet dwells a little on the interior appearance of the church of Ard Macha. He reports that 'there is a golden sheen from its coloured statues', an effect which may in fact be at the root of the otherwise puzzling comment that 'the lime of every stone in the church's wall has been coloured dark-brown. There was 'green satin in the doorway' which may have taken

is that which forms fences or enclosures around white-washed dwelling houses, most of which are roofed with yellow thatch.

^{60 &#}x27;Créd agaibh aoidhigh a gcéin' in GREENE & KELLY 1970, 88-92 and 252-254 at 253-254 (poem number 20, vv.22, 23) [poem no. 2 in SIMMS 2001]

^{61 &#}x27;Dearmad do fhágbhas ag Aodh' in WILLIAMS 1980, 162-169 at v.6 (poem no XIV) [poem no. 7 in SIMMS 2001]

⁶² 'Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' in WILLIAMS 1980, 190-203 (poem no XVII) [poem no. 8 in SIMMS 2001]

^{63 &#}x27;Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' v. 8

the form of a curtain of some sort – in any case it apparently took on a blue tinge as a result of the light cast on it through the glass of the windows.⁶⁴

Blue glass appears, according to one interpretation of another of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's poems, to have been particularly treasured for its quality. He wrote:

'Above thy ruddy cheek, O Domhnall, is a throne of dark wicker (?) an eye bright as blue glass, though flower of Magh Modhuirne. '65

The blue colour given to the green satin may have been a result of the character of the glass used in the window. The most common glass discolorations apparently produce purple or green tinges, ⁶⁶ and although it is not clear when window glass first appeared in Ireland, it seems possible that light shining through an early pane might have thrown a blueish beam. Careful study of the window openings of medieval buildings might yield information as to when and where glass was being used, but in fact it seems likely that it would be very difficult to distinguish, for example, between the fittings and arrangements to hold a wooden shutter (or even a wooden frame containing oiled paper or stretched and treated skin) and those which might have supported a glazed window. As Roche has put it, 'The windows in all types of building were small and glass was rare [in medieval Ireland], used only in Dublin Castle, for example, or the richer cathedrals If glass was used, it was in small diamond panes, soldered together with lengths of lead.'⁶⁷

The reference in Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh's poem may, of course, have been deliberate allusion to the colour of Domhnall's eye, a demonstration

^{64 &#}x27;Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' v.9

⁶⁵ 'Be our guide, O Domhnall' - MC KENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh', poem number VI, *The Irish Monthly* 47, pp.283-286 and 341-344 at 343 (verse 63) – probably composed after 1366 (and certainly, of course, before the death of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh in 1387).

⁶⁶ ROCHE, N. 1999 *The Legacy of Light: a history of Irish windows.* Wordwell, Bray. pp.55,

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&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> ROCHE 1999, 21. Professor Stalley of the Department of the History of Art and Architecture, TCD, reports that window glass has been recovered in significant quantities in the course of archaeological work at Kells Priory, county Kilkenny.

of the poet's attention to the detail of the personal characteristics of his subject (and patron). However, there are other instances in which objects such as buildings are described as being blue in such a way as might suggest that this was a positive and praiseworthy attribute (the poet is unlikely to have mentioned Domhnall's blue eye(s) if the attribute were not considered positive). For example, earlier in the same poem, verse 3 contains the following exhortation:

'Lead us forward to the East,

O Domhnall son of Mág Carthaigh,
to Corc's bright-horned castle-lawn,
the bright famous blue fort. 68

The fourth line seems to connect the blue colour of the fort with the fame and status of the building. However, description of a stone structure as blue may simply reflect the poet's impression of the colour of the limestone which was used in the construction of masonry buildings in many areas of Ireland.

In verse 33 we encounter another description of an object as being blue, but in this instance it is a lance. It seems understandable that the metallic surface of such a weapon might be described as blue, but further analysis of the original language would be required in order to determine whether the word was selected so as to satisfy the demands of the form of the poem, or whether the structure of the line was crafted around the particular word itself. Similar references, in relation to which the same questions seem to arise, appear in a late thirteenth century poem found in the *Book of Magauran*. ⁶⁹

⁶⁸ 'Be our guide, O Domhnall' - MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh', poem number VI, *The Irish Monthly* **47**, pp.283-286 and 341-344 at 343 (verse 3) – probably composed after 1366 (and certainly, of course, before the death of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh in 1387).

^{69 &#}x27;Teach n-óil gach bruighean n-a bhaile' - poem number I in MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1947 *The Book of Magauran*. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. pp.2-7 and 290-291. References at vv.7 (blue spear), 8 (blue helmet), 10 (blue-bladed looped (?) spears). See also 'A model of Cruachain Castle is in Cluain Fraoich' – MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1923 'Poem to Cloonfree Castle', *The Irish Monthly* 51, pp.639-645 at v.19 (blue moat), v.36 (blue-edged gable) (might this last reference be taken to indicate that the building was of masonry?). An instance in which the word seems to be used simply to provide stylistic enhancement and conventional (if confused) imagery appears in 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' – KNOTT, E.

Blue eyes are mentioned in a thirteenth century poem in the course of an account of the attractive characteristics of the people to be found in a house. The latest passage seems to present us with a notion of the contemporary idea of beauty, and the fact that blue eyes are included in the list may inform us as to the inspiration for the poetic use of the colour elsewhere.

The poem discussed above about the Church of Ard Macha is of course concerned with the appearance of a church rather than of a secular, domestic, residential building. The information it provides regarding the materials and techniques used in construction and decoration are nonetheless relevant to investigation of all forms of prestige architecture of the day. For example, we learn that 'weathered yew' seems to have been used in the construction of 'the arch of the white-sided church', and that this yew-wood – which may or may not have filled a structural role – was decorated, as 'carved berries stand out from it like red embers.' As has already been mentioned, the timber used in the construction of the O'Kelly castle, scene of the Christmas Feast to the Poets of Ireland in 1351, was also decorated. The construction of the O'Kelly castle, scene of the Christmas Feast to the Poets of Ireland in 1351, was also decorated.

The bardic poet usually composed a work to mark a particular event, and the resulting poem would almost certainly have been declaimed as a means of entertainment at a banquet or other celebratory occasion. The emphasis on hospitality which is a feature of so many of the poems is therefore generally considered natural and easily understood. It would appear to be implied, for example in the following verses by Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh, that wine-drinking and good cheer were central to the activities of the section of society

⁽ed) 1911 'Filidh Éireann go haointeach. William Ó Ceallaigh's Christmas feast to the poets of Ireland, A.D. 1351', Ériu 5, pp.50-69 [poem no. 15 in SIMMS 2001] v.46: 'Loch Derg – a cause of pride. Loch Ree with its green marshes, these blue bays on which the sun shines brightly are the boundaries of William's land.'

⁷⁰ 'Créd agaibh aoidhigh a gcéin' in GREENE & KELLY 1970, 88-92 and 252-254 at 91 and 254 (poem number 20) [poem no. 2 in SIMMS 2001] v.23. Blue eyes are also mentioned repeatedly as being an attribute of the 'active noble loving distinguished one', the 'gentle and bright yet forceful person, sitting in the champion's seat' seen in the vision recounted in a poem of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. 'Aisling ad-chonnarc ó chianaibh' - MC GEOWN, H. & MURPHY, G. 1953-1955 'Giolla Brighde Albanach's vision of Donnchadh Cairbreach Ó Briaín', Éigse 7, pp.80-83 at vv. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 8.

⁷¹ 'Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' in WILLIAMS 1980, 190-203 (poem no XVII) [poem no. 8 in SIMMS 2001]

⁷² 'Ceannphort Éireann Ard Macha' v.12

⁷³ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' – KNOTT, E. (ed) 1911 'Filidh Éireann go haointeach. William Ó Ceallaigh's Christmas feast to the poets of Ireland, A.D. 1351', *Ériu* 5, pp.50-69 [poem no. 15 in SIMMS 2001] v.34

with which the poets were associated and for which the poems were composed. In the first piece, there is a strong emphasis on the plentiful supply of wine to the patron's castle:

'Men are ever bringing wine to his palace from galleon and horse-troop.

When the sail is lowered on the lake the tun enters his castle on wheels.'74

In the second, although wine is again mentioned, it is the general hospitality of the patron which receives most of the praise:

The left thy hospitable castle,

O head of both the races.

The gaiety in thy castle and thy fine wine filled me with folly and pride.

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Verses like these, as well as constituting evidence for the appreciation and consumption of wine in later fourteenth century Ireland, convey an impression that the castles in question functioned largely as places of entertainment. This social role of the castle for the upper sections of medieval Gaelic Irish society has been little emphasised. It is clear that – whatever may have been the military, residential, and administrative functions of castles for the Anglo-Norman world – a very significant aspect of the castle was its suitability as an entertainment venue.

The prestige of the Gaelic Irish lord / chief / leader was measured, at least in part, on the basis of the scale of hospitality he offered. This might be quantified in terms of the number of people who attended his feasts, and through assessment of the quality of the entertainment offered to them. But the accommodation provided would also have been of considerable importance,

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⁷⁴ 'By their deeds be they judged' - MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh', poem number VII, *The Irish Monthly* **47**, pp.397-403 at 402 (verse 53) – composed before 1368

and this might have influenced the design ambitions of those looking to assert their position. The poem which deals with O'Kelly's mid fourteenth century Christmas gathering seems to provide a good illustration of this notion, but it may be detected in others, too. Ideas related to defence, security, administration, and the provision of residential accommodation were clearly behind the construction of castles, but the value of these fortified dwellings to Gaelic Irish society as social focal points should not be underestimated or disregarded. It is not yet possible to indicate the extent to which the festive function may have influenced the design of later medieval castles in Ireland, but the construction of a hall in which large numbers might have been entertained in comfort must surely have been important to any individual or family group with resources sufficient to allow them to contemplate a large scale building project.

A poem found in the *Book of Magauran* conveys an idea of the appearance of the interior of the 'banquet hall' of a castle at the end of the thirteenth century. The building is referred to variously as 'castle', 'house', 'strong compact stout castle', and 'tall castle', none of which terms provides explicit information as to the materials used in the building, and only general indications as to its appearance, but the poet indicates that the wall against which the occupants were leaning was of 'white hazel-wood.' The general impression conveyed in the poem as to the furnishing and decoration of the interior seems deliberately lavish, with much mention of large numbers of golden goblets, for example. The references to golden goblets serve not only to generate ideas of wealth and luxury on the basis of their abundance and raw material, but also emphasise that the building was a centre for eating and drinking and therefore that its owner, the host, was extremely generous and hospitable.

⁷⁵ 'O Gearóid plead my cause!' - MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1919 'Historical poems of Gofraidh Fionn Ó Dálaigh', poem number IX, *The Irish Monthly* 47, pp.509-514 at 513 (verse 48) – probably written between 1346 and 1356

⁷⁶ 'Teach n-óil gach bruighean n-a bhaile' - poem number I in MC KENNA, L. (ed) 1947 *The Book of Magauran*. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. pp.2-7 and 290-291 ⁷⁷ 'Teach n-óil gach bruighean n-a bhaile' - poem number I in MC KENNA, L. (ed) 1947 *The Book of Magauran*. Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. pp.2-7 and 290-291 at verse 3

Further ideas of luxury and comfort are communicated by the mention that 'plentiful [is] the satin on the castle-wall' – so lavish, it seems, that the poet 'cannot gaze upon it long enough!' Also plentiful are 'the heavy tapestries piled on each other, fresh and green and bright.' How these tapestries were decorated, and how they were distributed or displayed, is not clear. It seems unlikely, on the basis of the description cited above but also if the walls of the buildings were of 'white hazel-wood', that the tapestries would have been hung as wall coverings. They may not rank as decorative elements, but it appears that the weapons of those in attendance were hung up while the festivities took place, ⁷⁸ a practice which would presumably have contributed to the comfort of all present.

Vocabulary

Common to almost all of the poems in which any description of a building is attempted is the use of words in that description which convey ideas of brightness and height. The significance of the 'lofty' character of the buildings has been discussed above, but the implications of the light and bright imagery seem worthy of mention as well. None of the poems contains a sufficiently detailed description to allow reconstruction with any degree of accuracy and without significant speculation and improvisation. The repeated use of words such as 'bright' and 'smooth' in describing the structures may refer to the observer's impression of the exterior. However, the poet would necessarily have been intimately involved – at least for the period of his stay, if he was not a permanent member of the household - in the social group which was to be the audience for his work, and he would therefore have been familiar with the interior as well as the exterior of the most prominent buildings. The sense of some of the poems seems to imply, in fact, that it was the interior that was smooth and light-filled.

⁷⁸ 'Teach n-óil gach bruighean n-a bhaile' - poem number I in MC KENNA, L. (ed) 1947 *The Book of Magauran.* Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin. pp.2-7 and 290-291 at verse 7

⁷⁹ Though see MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1923 'Poem to Cloonfree Castle', *The Irish Monthly* **51**, pp.639-645 at 639. Quiggin seems to have found far less material permitting description in the earlier poem on Cloonfree, confining himself essentially to discussion of the manuscripts in which it appears, comments regarding its authorship, consideration of a possible site for the building the subject of the poem, and a query regarding the intended meaning of a term which clearly refers to an aspect of the structure. QUIGGIN 1913, 333-335.

The approach of medieval builders to the design of windows and other openings seems to have been predicated on warmth and security as the priority, rather than the admission of daylight. The construction of Carrick-on-Suir castle in the 1560s by the Earl of Ormond is considered to have been the first project in which larger windows were favoured, and in which they were arranged according to a regular pattern. The inspiration for this 'manor house' at Carrick surely came directly from England with its builder, who spent nearly a decade at the English court before returning to Ireland aged 22 in 1554. ⁸⁰

If earlier buildings than the 'manor house' element of the Ormond castle at Carrick-on-Suir were more restrictively fenestrated, it seems peculiar that poets should have described them as 'bright' unless the references were simply to their freshly-whitewashed outside walls (even if freshly whitened, the walls of the inside rooms would hardly have been bright). It seems possible, given the nature of most bardic poetry, and given the intention of the poets, that the notion that the interior of a patron's building was bright was carefully-considered praise. It might have implied that the owner of the building had little need – perhaps because of his dominance of the area - to restrict the size and number of openings in his building; certainly it seems today to convey a more positive impression of the interior of what must often have been rather dark and gloomy chambers, lit essentially by fire from a hearth and perhaps also from lamps, candles, and torches.

A more specific point is raised by the translators' use of the term 'solar' or 'sollar' in the English version. The term 'solar' has come to signify an upper, private, residential area of a castle, in contrast with other sections which were used for administrative, defensive, or other public and communal purposes. Sweetman defines 'solar' as 'private accommodation, usually a withdrawing room, on one of the upper floors of a castle. The precise understanding of the meaning of the term by those who used it in their translations would probably be difficult to trace. However, the appropriate classification would presumably by obtainable through re-examination of the language of the original.

⁸² SWEETMAN 1999, 208.

⁸⁰ ROCHE 1999, 21-22; CRAIG 1982, 114.

⁸¹ For further discussion of the solar in the English context, see WOOD 1965, 67-80.

The castle as the focal point for a community

The main object of a poet was generally to produce a work which praised the achievements and attributes of the patron. We should expect that the description of the person and character of that patron, of his possessions, and of his exploits would have been presented in a way such as to be as favourable as possible while remaining credible to him and to others in the audience. This means that a degree of exaggeration is to be expected in some areas. However, it seems unlikely that the poet would have gone so far as to invent features of the landscape, or of the patron's establishment, in order to press them into service as objects of adulation. On this basis, it would appear that certain of the poems provide further evidence for the notion that the castle or stronghold in medieval Ireland would rarely have been an isolated structure (as might appear to observers of the remains of tower houses, for example, in the landscape of today), but would in fact have been the focal point and defensive core of a more substantial and varied settlement. The inhabitants of the castle would have been dependent on the inhabitants of the associated community just as those living in less substantial houses nearby would have been dependent on the castle and its inhabitants for leadership, for administrative coherence and organisation, and for security and defence.

The early fourteenth century poem to Cloonfree Castle edited by McKenna contains a particularly explicit verse in relation to the image of the castle as the hub of a wider settlement:

'In formidableness like Greabhán's castle, the mead-feasts (?) of whose hall no man dare quaff, foes forbear to attack the houses beside it, as though each farm-house were limestone castle.'83

⁸³ 'A model of Cruachain Castle is in Cluain Fraoich' – MCKENNA, L. (ed) 1923 'Poem to Cloonfree Castle', *The Irish Monthly* **51**, pp.639-645 at 640 (v.12) [poem no. 12 in SIMMS 2001]. McKenna considered that this poem might actually have been composed in the later fourteenth or early fifteenth century, a notion apparently dismissed by Simms. SIMMS 2001, 257.

Cloonfree is thus described as having a number of associated houses under its protection. Each of these farmhouses would have been home to a group of people engaged in agricultural activity, so it would appear that Cloonfree Castle was at the heart of a settlement cluster the inhabitants of which were involved in the cultivation or other exploitation of the surrounding countryside. The area being used for farming would presumably have been the minimum area under the protection of Cloonfree Castle. The language of the verse cited seems also to communicate the importance of the appearance of the castle in medieval Ireland, and of its reputation and that of the people associated with it. The traditional objectives of fortified architecture – the securing of the defence and safety of the local inhabitants – would surely have been most effectively and efficiently achieved if, as appears to have been the case here, potential attackers were discouraged from the realisation of planned aggression even before they had started out.

The mid-fourteenth century poem about O'Kelly's feast for the poets of Ireland also includes reference to the existence of buildings associated with the castle itself. Here, however, it would appear that some structures were being built especially for those who were to attend the festivities. For example,

'In preparation for those who come to the house there has been built – it is just to boast of it – according to the desire of the master of the place, a castle fit for apple-treed Emain. *84

The poet does dwell on the construction of accommodation of various kinds for the expected visitors, 85 but he seems also to indicate that this new building work is relatively insignificant in the context of the scale of the existing settlement:

'That is little, considering the number of pleasant streets the people of the warrior of Oirbhealach possess, around O'Kelly's castle." ⁸⁶

86 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.24

⁸⁴ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' – KNOTT, E. (ed) 1911 'Filidh Éireann go haointeach. William Ó Ceallaigh's Christmas feast to the poets of Ireland, A.D. 1351', Ériu 5, pp.50-69 [poem no. 15 in SIMMS 2001] v.18

¹⁵ 'Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' vv.18-23 (some of which have already been quoted)

In any case, the resulting effect is clearly that the castle was the most prominent structure in a relatively extensive settlement, even if some of that settlement may have been temporary. As the poet commented,

'The ridge of the bright-furrowed slope is a plain lined with houses, behind the crowded plain is a fort, as it were a capital letter. '87

The nature of bardic poetry is such that it would be unrealistic to expect it to contain straightforward descriptive accounts of contemporary affairs and conditions. It has been shown, however, that the poems do include material which may help to clarify our understanding of the period in which they were composed. Among the fields which may be elucidated through careful examination of the poetry is that of architecture.

We can deduce not only that there were tall buildings in the Ireland of the bards, but also that the height of these buildings was considered to be a prestigious mark of the status of their builders or proprietors. In later medieval Ireland construction or ownership of a tall building was something to which one might aspire.

Stone buildings appear to be much praised and admired, but one should not overlook the use of timber and wattle in building construction at the same time – each is accorded mention on numerous occasions. The precise ways in which the various materials were combined to produce a building are not described, and indeed such technicalities would be an unlikely choice of subject matter for a bardic poet. However, we are occasionally informed of the materials from which specific elements of a building were made, and this may permit corroboration with other (generally later) descriptive accounts,88 and with the remains of buildings in the landscape of today.

^{87 &#}x27;Filidh Éirionn go haointeach' v.27

⁸⁸ See, for example, the relevant sections of the seventeenth century descriptions of Ireland by Gernon, Brereton, Camden, von Münchhausen, and Stanihurst. GERNON 1620, 352, 355, 360, 361; LITTON FALKINER, C. (ed) 1904 'Travels of Sir William Brereton in Ireland, 1635' in LITTON FALKINER, C. 1904 Illustrations of Irish History and Topography, mainly of the seventeenth century. Longmans, Green, & Co., London. pp.363-407 at 368, 372, 374,

Details of the furnishing and decoration of the interior of a high-status residence in later medieval Ireland are certainly of direct value to the study of the tower house. Regardless of the nature of the structure itself – its size and shape, and the materials from which it was built – it seems very likely that the way in which its occupier would have organised its interior would have been similar to the approach which would have been adopted in other dwellings of the same status at about the same period.

It does not seem unreasonable to consider the tower house as a particularly durable type of later medieval house. It was organised to cope with the demands of its time and circumstances, and it appears to have been a popular design for at least 150 years. The study of documents of the administrative type rarely yields information about tower houses, just as it rarely uncovers mention of other dwellings of similar status. Examination of the surviving evidence in the landscape for the type of residential accommodation favoured in the later medieval period leads to the observation that the Irish countryside contains a very large number of tower houses. The typical understanding of these tower houses as lone towers in a rural environment seems itself to be flawed, and for the same reason one must query the reliability of acceptance of the standing remains as the sole record of later medieval higher status dwellings.

Bardic poetry appears to reinforce the notion that the residences of the leaders of society in later medieval Ireland were anything but isolated strongholds. In fact they were the focal points of their respective communities, with significant populations dependent on their guidance and protection in matters of security, administration, and politics. Furthermore, the evidence of the poems encourages archaeologists to be more imaginative in their interpretation of the later medieval landscape. It would appear that there are far fewer tower houses in the Irish countryside than had at one stage been

376, 385, 387, 389, 402; CAMDEN 1695, 1020; Ó RIAIN-RAEDEL 1998, 230; LENNON 1981, 146-147.

⁸⁹ An impression which may, in fact, have permitted the general acceptance of what appears now, as a result of the work of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, to have been serious overestimation of the total number of tower houses in the country. For examples of the apparent overestimation, see BARRY 1993b, 108; BARRY, T. 2001 'Ireland' in CRABTREE, P.J. (ed) *Medieval Archaeology. An Encyclopaedia*. Garland Publishing Inc., New York & London. pp.176-179 at 178-179

considered reasonable. Bardic poetry suggests that higher status residences in later medieval Ireland need not have been of stone and need not, therefore, have depended on the various attributes of the tower house for their security or prestige. In fact, if we return to the familiar and fundamental question of why tower houses were built, we may be assured that those who were responsible for their construction might equally have chosen to proclaim their status and to defend their interests through less durable architecture.

TOWER HOUSE CLUSTERS

The number of buildings in Ireland which have been classified as tower houses is large, their geographical distribution is wide, and they are reckoned to have been built over a period of at least 250 years. Tower houses vary considerably in size but – perhaps surprisingly given that it would appear that their form is their defining feature – also in shape; they are situated in a wide range of topographical positions; and they were built by a variety of different people, each of whom was operating under a particular set of circumstances. It is certainly convenient to respect the existing classificatory label, but tower houses, although generally distinctive and recognisable for what they are (provided that they survive reasonably intact and visible), may actually differ quite dramatically from one another if compared using specific criteria. In this context it may be more constructive, when identifying a tower house as such, to focus on attributes which are shared by the buildings rather than dwelling on those by which they may be distinguished. There are, nonetheless, significant differences between tower houses, and those differences which seem to unite a group of buildings within the main body of the type seem to be of special importance.

Similarities uniting groups of tower houses are essential in defining the building type as a whole. Characteristics peculiar to an individual structure may be regarded as representative of the views or ideas of the particular patron, designer, mason, or individual craftsman involved, or of the conditions in which they found themselves to be working, but characteristics identifiable in several buildings may mark those buildings as in some way associated. They are therefore of great relevance to the understanding of the tower house generally, and to its appreciation not only as an architectural phenomenon but also as a reflection of the nature of the society in which it developed. If specific characteristics appear in tower houses in more than one area it may be that they represent some kind of connection between the buildings or the designers or the construction workers of those locations. If they do not then

¹ See, for example, the situation encountered by Jordan when considering Davin's classificatory scheme in the context of tower houses in county Wexford. JORDAN 1990, 230; and cf DAVIN 1982.

they may at least be regarded as indicators of possible links among the local group of structures upon which they do actually appear.

Geographical proximity need not necessarily connect a series of buildings which share a specific design feature. There are many reasons why such a characteristic might have been adopted, and even in relation to buildings in a particular area there need not have been a common motivation in the case of every building in which the feature is to be found. Indeed, a feature which was included for a practical reason by one builder may subsequently have been included at other sites by other builders on grounds such as fashion or imitation,² and need not have been because the design was particularly well suited to the prevailing conditions. However, if one accepts that at a specific period a region might have been dominated by or under the control of a particular individual or family, and that at that period he or they wished to make an architectural statement of their power and status, then it seems possible – or even likely - that similarities will exist between the architectural features of the buildings erected as a result of the influence of the common patron.

If one examines the tower houses of a restricted geographical area, therefore, it should not be surprising if a group of characteristics appears more frequently than elsewhere, and if some unity of appearance or style is discernible in the architecture. This unity might be expected to extend across the notional divide between secular and ecclesiastical architecture, especially in situations where a single patron was involved in the sponsorship of the construction of each set of buildings. However, if there was no single patron behind the building projects – ecclesiastical or secular – in which similarities are detected then other means by which styles or designs might have been shared must be considered.

The first explanation for the appearance of the same features in separate buildings – whether as aspects of the overall design or as details – is the circumstance where a single group of craftsmen was involved in a series of construction projects. In this situation the overall design might have been

² Jordan identified Slade castle as the prototype for the distinctive fortified buildings in the area of the Hook peninsula, considering the essential factor in the emergence of the form to be 'the

dictated by an architect, engineer, or patron, but the detail of work by the team of craftsmen – or even by an individual specialist – might betray their identity, thereby allowing suggestion that a particular person or people were at least partly responsible for work on the construction of two or more buildings.

The second explanation for the appearance of common features is where those responsible for the appearance of a building derived inspiration – or even a direct template - from another building, whether in the immediate area or further afield. Manifestations of these two explanatory proposals are unlikely to have existed in absolute independence of one another, and it seems probable that they would often have overlapped.

It is also conceivable that patrons, architects, or builders might produce similar designs by coincidence, and altogether independently. The extent to which contemporaries would have been exposed to and influenced by the same cultural and social trends, however, means that it is likely that some form of common experience will most often be traceable as being at the root of common features which emerge in apparently separate contexts.

The authors of regional and county studies of tower houses have identified several groups of buildings, most often defined on the basis of their shape and size. Cairns mentioned the unusually high proportion of cylindrical tower houses in county Tipperary,³ and also suggested that regional peculiarities might be explained by the existence of 'local schools of architects.'⁴ Jordan recognised that in county Wexford there was a cluster of buildings with hall-like structures appended,⁵ and seems to follow Cairns by proposing that 'a more valid categorisation of tower house "species" than any based on shape or size of ground plan would be 'that of the "local schools" – or

influence one castle had on the style of its neighbours.' JORDAN 1990, 234. See also COLFER 1997; COLFER 2004.

³ CAIRNS 1987, 19.

⁴ CAIRNS 1984, 241, 336, 340. He also stated that of the three round castles (*i.e.* castles dated to an earlier period than that to which tower houses belong) in the county, 'two are no bigger than most tower houses' (p.336).

⁵ Jordan's appreciation of this complication is reflected in his cautious treatment of the classification question: 'It is difficult, and it would be unrealistic, to insist on laying down a strict criterion by which we would categorise a structure as a tower house or otherwise.' It surfaces again in his attempt at definition, by which the tower house is 'a tower, of variable size, (and often variable plan).' JORDAN 1990, 228, 229, and 231-232, where he refers to the group as 'hall type castles', 'Coolhull type', and 'dual castles'.

the regional differences of style or design.'6 Cotter isolated a series of characteristics shared by tower houses in his north Cork study area.⁷ Groups may be identified on the basis of their geographical isolation, such as the knot of tower houses which appears in county Down, with a specific concentration on and around the Ards peninsula, which contrasts with the very sparse distribution of tower houses in the rest of Ulster;8 they may emerge through recognition of common architectural features, whether they are related to the overall shape, size, and general appearance of the building, or to more specific aspects of its design or decoration; and they may be defined through documentary or other evidence which ascribes their construction to a particular person, family, or group.9

The Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) has provided an account of what must be the overwhelming majority of known sites of archaeological interest in the counties for which an Inventory has been published. These inventories are of tremendous value, not least to the archaeologist, but their approach is determinedly descriptive in all but exceptional (and perhaps aberrant) cases; they aspire to nothing further than an account of the location and appearance of surviving elements of the monuments of each county. This descriptive record forms a vital layer in the process by which we may better appreciate the monuments and the landscapes in which they were built and However, the interest of such monuments lies largely in their assessment, and this assessment requires that comparisons be drawn between particular buildings and groups of buildings, and that ideas be aired as to their relationship with one another as well as with their environment. This kind of evaluative approach is one of the methods by which the significance of a ruin

⁶ JORDAN 1990, 230.

⁷ COTTER 1994, 115-139 and 144-154.

⁸ See the distribution map first published by Ó Danachair: Ó DANACHAIR 1977-1979, 160, and republished as recently as 2000 by Barry: BARRY 2000, 120; also MCNEILL 1997, 205; and GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND MINISTRY OF FINANCE, ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF NORTHERN IRELAND 1966 An Archaeological Survey of County Down. HMSO, Belfast.

A valuable analytical approach might be to attempt to establish the extent to which these sets of criteria overlap. Is it the case, for example, that tower houses which are supposed - on the basis of documentary evidence - to have been the work of an individual, or of members of a single family, are recognisably associable on physical inspection as a result of common features of their design or general appearance?

in the countryside may be more fully understood, and by which it may assist our appreciation of the period and physical landscape to which it belongs.

Cylindrical tower houses

The variety which can be seen to exist within the category of buildings now known as tower houses seems to demonstrate not only that there was an ongoing trend for the construction of what were at least intended to appear to be fortified residences, but also that there was a considerable diversity of conditions present around the country at the time when the structures were being erected. Each tower house, in fact, represents the response of an individual builder to a particular set of circumstances, as well as forming the medium for the expression of the specific design ideas of those involved in the construction project.

If one were required to describe the standard design of the tower house, one would almost certainly suggest a structure of essentially square or slightly rectangular ground plan. For example, in the opening sentence of the relevant section of his thesis on tower houses in county Cavan O'Donovan stated that 'tower houses are rectangular keeps of between three and six storeys in height.' There are of course many variations on the baldly rectangular plan, and O'Donovan would undoubtedly have been aware that, for example, many towers have corner turrets, while other buildings which have been labelled tower houses are in fact oblong, perhaps even incorporating two sections – a tower and a long, hall-like structure, perhaps even incorporating two sections – a tower and a long, hall-like structure, perhaps even a desire to create a distinctive building which led to the construction of cylindrical tower houses. However, the cylindrical form of tower house clearly constitutes, at least superficially, an architectural category which is distinguishable from the more common four-sided buildings.

Craig listed sixteen cylindrical tower houses, but the work of the ASI and others has drawn attention to the existence of several more. Craig's total

¹⁰ See, for example, CRAIG 1982, 103. Many writers have actually assumed their readers to be aware of the basic form of the tower house, or have depended on illustrations, or the inclusion of dimensions (reference to the 1430 Statute, perhaps), to demonstrate that most tower houses followed this general pattern at least loosely.

¹¹ O'DONOVAN 1997, 108.

includes Clogh Oughter castle in county Cavan,¹³ a cylindrical castle on an island which has been the subject of more recent investigations by Manning.¹⁴ Davies assigned Clogh Oughter to the early fourteenth century, apparently on the basis of a combination of architectural, archaeological, and historical evidence,¹⁵ and it seems likely that his assessment may be at the root of Craig's treatment of the castle as belonging to that period. Manning's excavations, together with his associated documentary research, however, seem to have demonstrated that Clogh Oughter castle was built in the thirteenth century, probably by the de Lacy family.¹⁶

It may be instructive to consider cylindrical tower houses as a group, as a means of discovering whether there was any common factor which might have led to the choice of the shape for each building, or whether the distinctive shape is the only aspect of the buildings which seems to bring them together. The buildings listed by Craig are as follows:

- Clogh Oughter, county Cavan
- Doonagore, county Clare
- Faunarooska, Burren, county Clare
- Newtown, near Ballyvaughan, county Clare (see illustration overleaf)
- Carrigabrack, east of Fermoy, county Cork
- Newtown, near Gort, county Galway
- Barrow Harbour, county Kerry
- Balief, county Kilkenny
- Grantstown, near Rathdowney, county Laois
- Ballynahow, near Thurles, county Tipperary
- Ballysheeda, near Cappawhite, county Tipperary (see illus. overleaf)
- Crannagh, near Templetuohy, county Tipperary

¹² As identified in county Wexford by Jordan. JORDAN 1990, 231-232.

¹³ 'dubiously claimed for the fourteenth century', felt Craig, for whom chronology seems to have been of no small significance in the definition of the tower house as an architectural type: he stated that buildings which might otherwise have been included in his list but which 'appear to be thirteenth-century' had been omitted because their supposed date meant that they could not be tower houses. CRAIG 1982, 103.

¹⁴ MANNING, C. 1989-1990 'Clogh Oughter Castle, Co Cavan', *Breifne* Vol. VIII No.1, pp.20-61

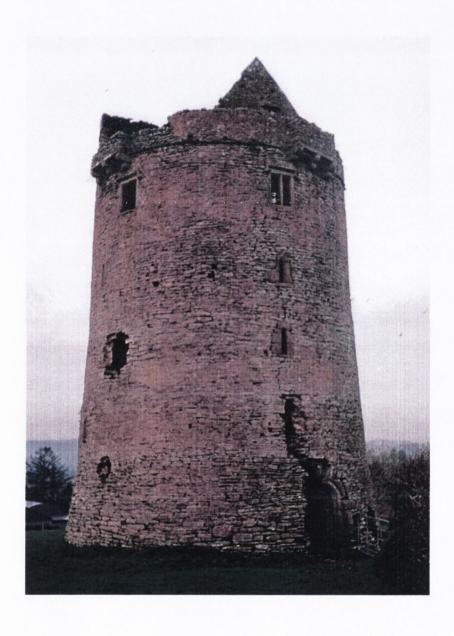
¹⁵ DAVIES 1947, 83-86.

¹⁶ MANNING 1989-1990, and see also O'DONOVAN, P.F. 1995 *Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan.* Government of Ireland, Dublin. p.227; O'DONOVAN 1997, 60-64.



Newtown castle, near Ballyvaughan, county Clare

(after LEASK, H.G. 1999 Irish castles and castellated houses. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk.)



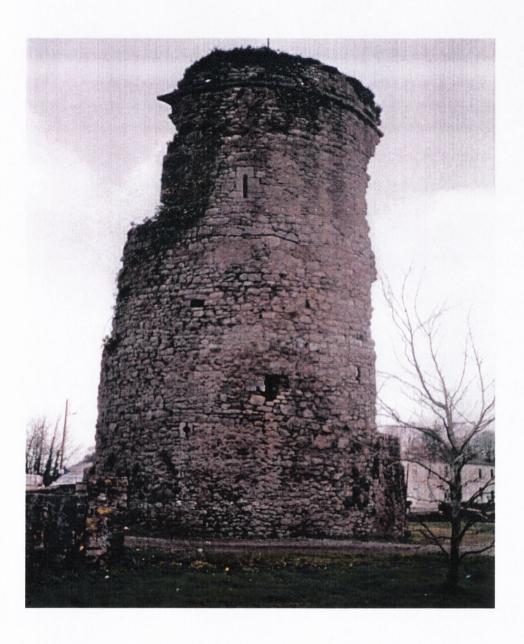
Cylindrical tower house at Ballysheeda, county Tipperary

- Farney, near Thurles, county Tipperary
- Golden, county Tipperary (see illustration overleaf)
- Knockagh, near Templemore, county Tipperary
- Synone, near Thurles, county Tipperary (see illustration overleaf)

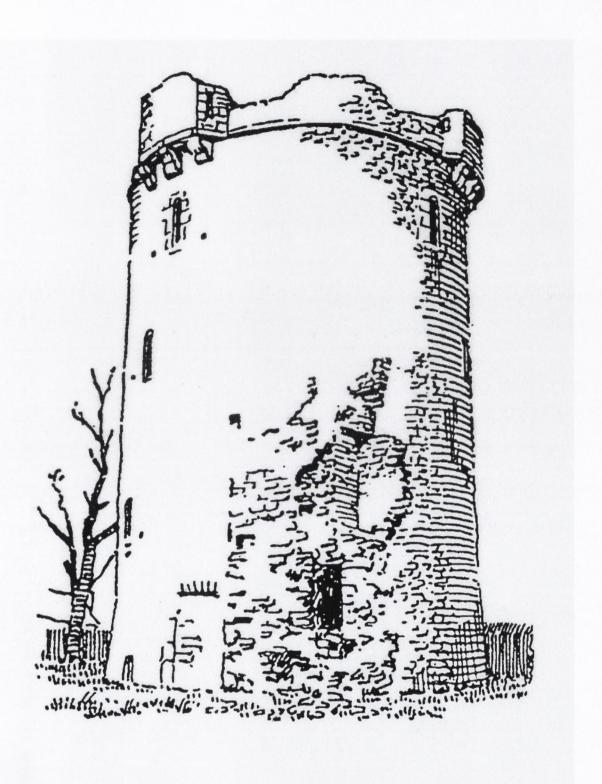
To Craig's list may be added another twelve cylindrical tower houses for which evidence of some kind has been discovered by the ASI or others. The fact that some of the buildings included are no longer standing, surviving perhaps only as the traces of foundations, or have actually disappeared from the landscape altogether, are signals which indicate that the additions are unlikely to represent a comprehensive or exhaustive list. Craig classified sixteen buildings as cylindrical tower houses in 1982, and the figure appears now to be around twenty-seven. No doubt future investigations will reveal the existence of additional examples, whether as standing buildings, through documentary references, in pictorial representations, or in the course of archaeological excavations. For the moment, however, the list may be extended to include the following:

- Mahon, county Cork
- Killoshulan, county Kilkenny
- Seskin, county Kilkenny
- Dungar, county Offaly
- Rath More, county Offaly
- Whigsborough, county Offaly
- Crohane, county Tipperary
- Farrenrory, county Tipperary
- Kilcarren, county Tipperary
- Ballyclohy, county Waterford
- Derrinlaur Lower, county Waterford
- Mayfield / Rocketscastle, county Waterford 17

¹⁷ In addition to this list, it would appear that the lower storeys of a cylindrical tower house survive at Rathurd, county Limerick. According to Donnelly, in the nineteenth century this tower house was demolished to second floor level, the remaining structure was roofed, and a farmhouse was constructed against its south side. DONNELLY, C.J. 2001 'Decline and adaptation: the medieval Irish tower house in early modern county Limerick' in MALM, G. (ed) *Archaeology and Buildings. Papers from a session held at the European Association of*



Fragment of tower house at Golden, county Tipperary



Synone castle, county Tipperary

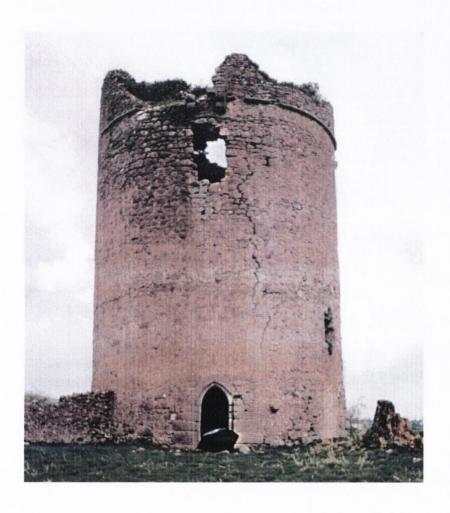
(after LEASK, H.G. 1999 Irish castles and castellated houses. Dundalgan Press, Dundalk.)

The above lists are organised geographically by county, and it appears at once that a large proportion of cylindrical tower houses is to be found in county Tipperary. Seven of the sixteen buildings proposed by Craig are in that county, with three in Clare, and one each in Galway, Cavan, Cork, Kilkenny, Laois, and Kerry. However, if one considers the geography a little more closely, and from a slightly different angle, one discovers not only that the seven tower houses found by Craig in county Tipperary are, broadly speaking, on or near the plain of the river Suir, with several in the area of Thurles and Templemore, but also that the tower houses at Balief, in county Kilkenny (see illustration oveleaf), and Grantstown, in county Laois, effectively form part of this same concentration. In fact the nine are located in an area which approximates to a corridor running north east to south west: from Rathdowney in the north east to Cappagh White and Golden in the south west and south. This core area is close in orientation and dimensions to the lowland plain which follows the river Suir, and only about fifty kilometres separate the two most far-flung buildings (see maps overleaf).

Killoshulan and Seskin, two cylindrical tower houses in county Kilkenny which were not included by Craig, are both within a few miles of Balief. More precisely, Killoshulan castle is on a hill above Clomantagh (Cloghmanty / Cloghmantagh), which is about 1½ miles (2km) to the east of Balief castle, and Seskin tower house, which stood near the road between Cullahill, county Laois, and Johnstown, county Kilkenny (the townland of Seskin is some 6km to the east of Cullahill), had 'quite disappeared' by the mid-nineteenth century. Killoshulan and Seskin may perhaps be associated with the group of cylindrical tower houses in the area of Thurles and the Suir valley, if only by reason of their proximity to Balief tower house, which is itself somewhat on the periphery of the cluster.

Archaeologists Fifth Annual Meeting in Bournemouth 1999. BAR International Series 930. Archaeopress, Oxford. pp.7-17. Another cylindrical tower house is to be found at Drumbane, county Tipperary.

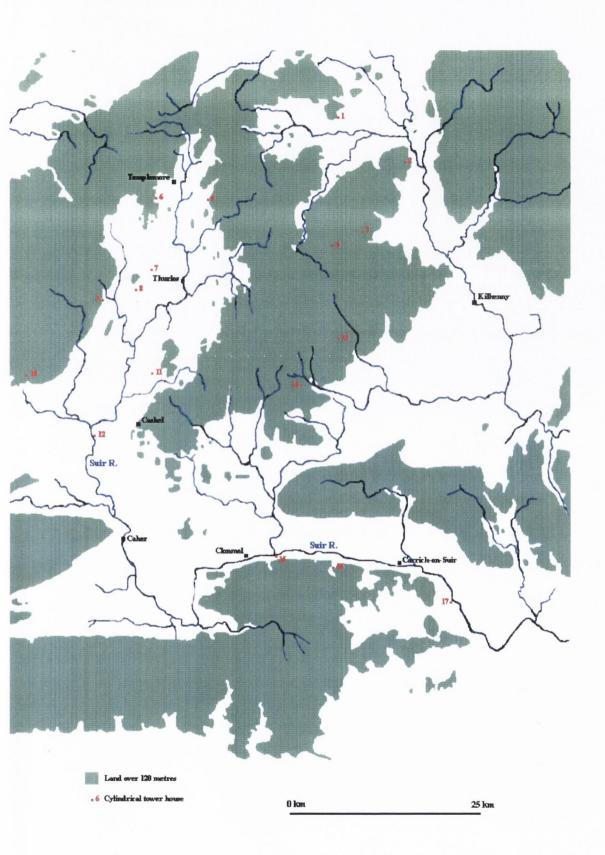
¹⁸ MEASE, J. 1849-1851 'Notes on the castles of the Freshford district', *JRSAI* 1 (i.e. *Transactions of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society*), pp.462-469 at 467; KILLANIN, Lord, & DUIGNAN, M.V. (revised and updated by HARBISON, P.) 1989 *The Shell Guide to Ireland.* Gill and Macmillan, Dublin. p.300 ¹⁹ MEASE 1849-1851, 468.



Cylindrical tower house at Balief, county Kilkenny



Approximate area covered by Suir valley map



Cylindrical tower houses in or near the Suir valley

Cylindrical tower houses in or near the Suir valley

KEY

- 1. Grantstown
- 2. Seskin (site)
- 3. Killoshulan
- 4. Balief
- 5. Crannagh
- 6. Knockagh
- 7. Ballynahow
- 8. Farney
- 9. Drumbane
- 10. Ballysheeda
- 11. Synone
- 12. Golden
- 13. Farrenrory
- 14. Crohane
- 15. Derrinlaur Lower
- 16. Ballyclohy
- 17. Mayfield / Rocketscastle



Cylindrical tower houses, tower house sites, and other relevant structures not covered by the Suir valley map

Cylindrical tower houses, tower house sites, and other relevant structures not covered by the Suir valley map

KEY

- A. Clogh Oughter, county Cavan
- B. Doonagore, county Clare
- C. Faunarooska, county Clare
- D. Newtown, near Ballyvaughan, county Clare
- E. Newtown, near Gort, county Galway
- F. Carrigabrack, county Cork
- G. Mahon, county Cork
- H. Dungar, county Offaly
- I. Rathmore, county Offaly
- J. Whigsborough, county Offaly
- K. Kilcarren, county Tipperary

To the south east of Urlingford (but in county Tipperary) is another pair of cylindrical tower houses, one at Farrenrory and the other at Crohane.²⁰ Although the distance between these two tower houses and those in the Suir valley is not particularly great, and although they are even closer to Balief, Killoshulan, and Seskin, which are all in the area immediately to the east of Urlingford, Farrenrory and Crohane seem rather isolated. They are separated from the areas to their north and west by the Slieveardagh Hills, the high ground which rises between Kilkenny city and Thurles.

The concentration of cylindrical tower houses in the Thurles / Suir valley area can not be coincidental. It seems clear that their proximity is a result of local interaction, but it should not be forgotten that the group is situated in an agriculturally rich area which is among the most densely provided with tower houses – of any shape – in the country. There are other tower houses, of more conventional plan, among the cylinders. The ASI *Inventory* for the north riding of county Tipperary lists some eighty-six tower houses, including six of cylindrical form. The remaining eighty are generally 'slightly rectangular in plan', 22 a description which is presumably intended to mean that they tend nearly to be square.

The tower house at Carrigabrack in county Cork is approximately forty-five kilometres to the south west of Golden, which marks the location of the southernmost tower house in the group, and thus, like Farrenrory would appear not to be associable with the Tipperary / Suir valley tower house concentration in the same way as some of the tower houses in Kilkenny and Laois.

There is another group of cylindrical tower houses associated with the river Suir, but it is situated much further downstream than those already discussed. Derrinlaur Lower and Ballyclohy are between Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir, while Mayfield / Rocketscastle is to the south east of Portlaw, though still on the Waterford side of the river, which forms the boundary with county Kilkenny at that point, and with county Tipperary in the vicinity of Derrinlaur Lower and Ballyclohy. Derrinlaur Lower and Ballyclohy are less

²⁰ See CLUTTERBUCK, R. 1998/1999 'Farrenrory Tower-House, County Tipperary. A Gentleman's Home', *Trowel* **9**, pp.7-9 at 9

²¹ FARRELLY & O'BRIEN 2002, 351-384.

²² FARRELLY & O'BRIEN 2002, 351.

than ten kilometres apart, and while Mayfield / Rocketscastle is rather further away, they do in fact appear to be connected by their proximity to the river.

There is the site of a cylindrical tower house at Kilcarren, county Tipperary, which is some five kilometres to the east of the north eastern tip of Lough Derg. While still in county Tipperary, it is a considerable distance from the Thurles / Suir valley group of cylindrical tower houses. In fact it seems to form part of another cluster, centred on the area around Birr and Roscrea. The Kilcarren site is to the west of three round tower houses in this area: it and the three county Offaly tower houses of Dungar, Rath More, and Whigsborough are within twenty-five kilometres of one another.

Further west again, the cylindrical tower houses of Faunarooska, Newtown, and Doonagore, in county Clare, are all on the edge of the area known as the Burren. Each of the three tower houses is within a few hundred metres of the sea, and although Doonagore is on the west-facing coast of the county and the other two are on or near the north-facing coast to its north east, the terrain in the area is such that most of the settlement activity is in a narrow coastal strip. Again, there is a tower house placed by Craig in a neighbouring county – that of Newtown, near Gort, in county Galway - which actually turns out to be very close to the more northerly pair in Clare, Newtown and Faunarooska.

This leaves a final cylindrical tower house which appears to be completely isolated, that at Barrow Harbour, in county Kerry. However, the very fact that it is on a harbour (just north of Tralee) means that those responsible for its design and construction would almost certainly have had some kind of experience – whether direct or through others – of trends in castle construction in other parts of Ireland and Europe.

The remaining building on Craig's list is Clogh Oughter castle, in county Cavan, the classification of which as a tower house is debatable for various reasons. Craig seems to have justified its inclusion in his list by reference to its form, of course, but also to its probable date of construction.²⁴

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²³ The area which is known as the Burren is slightly more extensive, perhaps, than the Barony of Burren. Neither should be confused with the village of Burren, which is on the northern coast of the larger area, and is the location of Faunarooska tower house.

²⁴ In the compilation of his list of cylindrical tower houses, Craig omitted 'those [buildings] which appear to be thirteenth-century (and hence not tower-houses).' CRAIG 1982, 103.

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Manning's excavations at the castle yielded interesting new information regarding its sequence of building which might even form the basis of an argument for its inclusion as a tower house in spite of the adherence to a more restrictive chronologically-based classification. O'Donovan, following the findings made by Manning, designated Clogh Oughter castle variously as an 'Early Stone Castle', an 'Anglo-Norman Castle', and a 'Medieval Stone Fortress' rather than as a tower house. The discussion of Clogh Oughter castle, of castles generally, and of tower houses in particular, often returns to the question of the date of construction.

Classification by chronology – a reasonable approach?

It may be instructive, at this point (and disregarding for a moment any other factors such as architecture and construction style), to observe the axial significance of the supposed date of the building in its classification. Even if it was built in the same way, and perhaps even (as far as we know) for the same essential purposes, a building may, at least for most analysts, only be a 'tower house' if it was constructed during a particular chronological period. For Craig this period seems to start in the early fourteenth century. In order that a tower house might 'be considered genuine', according to Jordan, it 'should date roughly between the fourteenth and the mid seventeenth centuries. Leask – though the reading of his work by many subsequent authors would suggest otherwise – did not altogether rule out the possibility that tower houses might have been built in the fourteenth century, or at least in its second half. But for Sweetman (for example), who takes the broad thrust of Leask's approach

²⁵ O'DONOVAN 1997, 60, 22; O'DONOVAN 1995, 227.

²⁶ CRAIG 1982, 103.

²⁷ JORDAN 1990, 229. For Jordan the emphasis in this comment was presumably on the word 'roughly', given that he acknowledged, in rather dramatic language, that 'assigning [an] accurate date to all of our structures is about as feasible as listing the names of those who built the pyramids. We can at best hope to arrive at approximations for most structures, and secure dates for a few.' JORDAN 1990, 234.

²⁸ LEASK 1999; for an unusual reading of Leask see MCCARTHY, J. 1989-1990 'The Importance of the Tower House in the Late Medieval Society of Breifne', *Breifne* Vol.VIII No.1, pp.118-135 at 118. McCarthy seems to have interpreted Leask's words in a slightly distinctive manner, stating that Leask's view was 'that tower houses were the dominant form of fortified residence during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.' McCarthy appears to have been influenced by the ideas of Davin and Cairns, specifically those regarding fourteenth century documentary references to *fortalices* - cf DAVIN 1982; CAIRNS 1984.

and treats it as categorical, the tower house must be a creature of the fifteenth century onwards.²⁹

This dependence on chronology as a classification tool requires that certain assumptions be made. The first of these is that a reliable independent chronology may be established for any given building one wishes to classify. Given the character of medieval architecture in Ireland, and particularly of medieval secular architecture, which is distinguished by its lack of decorative or other dateable features, the incorporation of a chronological element as a central constituent of the classificatory process appears problematical.³⁰ McNeill made the telling point that 'no scheme has yet been produced to discriminate within the [architectural] work of the late middle ages, to distinguish work of 1350-1450 from that of 1450-1550, for example.³¹

Another assumption is that the conditions – political, economic, social, cultural, and otherwise – in different parts of the country were developing in a uniform manner and at a similar rate. The dependence on chronology for classificatory purposes requires also that the reception of the changing conditions should have been consistent throughout the country, and that the response to the new circumstances should have found architectural expression throughout the country through the adoption of a near-standard building programme.

²⁹ SWEETMAN 1999, 137-174, especially 137 and 174; SWEETMAN 2000. It is not surprising that the majority of the *Inventories* published by the ASI under the direction of Sweetman should have summarised the chronology of tower house construction according to a scheme approximating to his view. It is significant, however, that a few are vague in assigning the emergence of the tower house to the 'early fifteenth century' or to 'the first half of the fifteenth century' (MOORE, M.J. 1996 Archaeological Inventory of County Wexford. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.165; MOORE, M.J. 1996 Archaeological Inventory of County Leitrim. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.206), while others explicitly state that tower houses were being built in the fourteenth century (BRINDLEY, A. & KILFEATHER, A. 1993 Archaeological Inventory of County Carlow. Government of Ireland, Dublin. p.86; SWEETMAN, P.D., ALCOCK, O. & MORAN, B. 1995 Archaeological Inventory of County Laois. Government of Ireland, Dublin. p.110; O'BRIEN, C. & SWEETMAN, P.D. 1997 Archaeological Inventory of County Offaly. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.139). As will be seen, the chronological certainty expressed in relation to the tower houses of the other counties may not be entirely justified (e.g. O'DONOVAN, P.F. 1995 Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan. Government of Ireland, Dublin).

³⁰ Jordan's comment, cited above at note 26, seems to echo or herald others of similar import. See, for example, Leask: 'For the most part the minor castles find no place in the historic record', LEASK 1999, 76; and Craig: 'Firm dates are hard to come by', CRAIG 1982, 96. McNeill seems similarly pessimistic about the possibility of determining specific dates for the majority of tower houses: MCNEILL 1997, 201-205.

³¹ MCNEILL 1997, 173-174.

It is significant in the context of the chronological model for architectural classification that most surviving medieval castles - and, indeed, almost any building over a certain age – will have been modified periodically in order to satisfy the progression of owners and occupiers making use of them. The essentials of the shape and design of Clogh Oughter castle may be attributable to those who were responsible for the initial construction work, which seems, on a combination of archaeological and historical evidence, to have been carried out in the years around 1220.32 In the light of his investigations. Manning proposed that this first phase of building saw the construction of only the ground and first floor levels of the castle, but the ruin now referred to as Clogh Oughter castle consists of the remains of a four-storey building (as do so many tower houses). The building of the upper two floors of the castle has been 'tentatively dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century occupation of the castle following the expulsion of the de Lacys.'33 The third phase of construction was dated to the years leading up to 1620, and the fourth to the period between 1641 and 1653, but these later campaigns consisted only of internal modifications and minor external demolitions and constructions.

The effect of the building programme undertaken at Clogh Oughter castle in the thirteenth or fourteenth century appears therefore to have been to convert the structure in such a way as to accord more closely with the appearance of the tower houses which, if they had not already started to appear around the country, were shortly to do so. Clogh Oughter castle, however, is in a secluded location. It stands on an island in a lake in the middle of county Cavan. County Cavan itself is an area which seems to have seen the construction of only a very few tower houses, so assessment of the possible inspiration for and influence of Clogh Oughter castle is likely to be difficult if approached exclusively from the archaeological perspective.

In the early to mid 1990s the Archaeological Survey of Ireland could find only three buildings in county Cavan which it felt should be classified as tower houses.³⁴ Of these three, none is particularly close to Clogh Oughter

³² MANNING 1989-1990; O'DONOVAN 1997, 106.

³³ O'DONOVAN 1997, 107, and see MANNING 1989-1990, 54.

³⁴ O'DONOVAN 1995, 234-235. It should be noted that the *Inventory* also contains a section entitled 'Sites of Castles and Bawns' (pp.228-233) and it seems probable that at least some of the castles of which only a site is recorded would have been tower houses.

geographically, and none echoes its cylindrical form. For the moment, therefore, it remains only a possibility that those responsible for the construction of tower houses in county Cavan might have been influenced in some way by their awareness of the presence and appearance of Clogh Oughter castle. Closer analysis of the surviving buildings, and of any evidence which may survive in relation to structures which are no longer upstanding in the landscape, together with examination of the historical resource, would be necessary in order to identify any specific points of contact which may exist.

In form, as Craig seems to have felt, Clogh Oughter castle resembles the cylindrical tower houses found in other parts of Ireland. Current understanding of its chronology and of the chronology of tower houses suggests that its construction (phases 1 and 2) predated the period in which tower houses were being built. To be a source of inspiration for architects a building need be close in neither time nor geography to the location of its successors. While Clogh Oughter castle may appear remote – and particularly remote from any cylindrical tower houses – this need not extinguish the possibility that it might have influenced the designers of later structures. It makes direct connections more difficult to identify and establish, but the potential for their existence remains. As it is it would appear that Cavan's castles have not lasted well, with the county *Inventory* listing some forty-nine 'Sites of Castles and Bawns' as against only two 'Medieval Stone Fortresses' and five 'Tower Houses and Bawns.'

County Cavan tower houses: some classificatory problems

The treatment of the three tower houses listed in the *Archaeological Inventory* of *County Cavan* is separate not only from the entries for the few earlier stone castles in the county, but also from the descriptions of 'castle sites', many of which may well have been occupied by tower houses. However, the descriptive entries for the three tower houses of county Cavan do themselves raise a number of issues of significance in the context of the study of the building type generally.

³⁵ O'DONOVAN 1995, 228-233, 227, 234-235.

The Archaeological Inventory of County Cavan places emphasis on the £10 subsidy of 1429 (1430)³⁶ as representative of the initiation of tower house construction in Ireland. 'In the following 150 years', the Inventory continues, 'many tower houses were constructed throughout Ireland both by Gaelic and Old English families.'³⁷ As one would expect, this statement appears to represent the orthodox approach of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland in the mid 1990s. Even if the distinction between sections of the later medieval community seems unnecessarily stark, it may be accepted as a simplification appropriate to an introductory paragraph in a publication the essential aims of which are the recording of monuments in the landscape rather than historical analysis and interpretation.

The chronological confidence of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland seems to receive something of a shake, however, when one reads the short entry for the castle at Crover. 38 Crover tower house happens to be, like Clogh Oughter castle, on an island in a lake. Crover's island is about 300 metres from the western shore of Lough Sheelin, a lake in the southern part of the county. Cavan is well supplied with lakes, so it is not extraordinary that a few castles were built on lake islands. 39 The surprise in relation to Crover castle actually lies in the report that, although it is classified as a tower house, a type of structure which, we are informed, appeared in Ireland in 1429 (or rather 1430) at the earliest, and even then only in a few eastern counties around and including Dublin, it was 'constructed in the late fourteenth century by Thomas McMahon O'Reilly.'

For the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, therefore, although tower houses were built only after the first thirty years of the fifteenth century, Crover, which was 'constructed in the late fourteenth century', may still be classified as a tower house. The problems concomitant with adherence to rigid definitions in circumstances such as architectural classification are obvious from this example. Crover might be regarded as a rogue exception which happened to surface readily in the small sample found in county Cavan.

³⁶ See BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003, 212 for a clarification of the dating of this instrument, which was in fact passed at the parliament held in Dublin in May 1430.

³⁷ O'DONOVAN 1995, 234.

³⁸ O'DONOVAN 1995, 235 (Inventory number 1849)

However, the chronological anomaly is not the only peculiarity about the Cavan *Inventory* treatment of tower houses.

The tower house is, by definition, a tall structure. The word tower carries unavoidable implications of height, and indeed in the introductory paragraphs dealing with 'Tower Houses and Bawns' this point seems to be acknowledged when it is stated that tower houses are buildings 'of between three and five storeys.' However, having set out as a defining characteristic in the context of county Cavan this three to five storey height range for tower houses, the *Inventory* then informs us in its entries for the individual buildings that two of Cavan's three tower houses were of two storeys and that the third, Tonymore, was only of three. Ballymagauran 'was apparently two stories in height', and there is no suggestion that any evidence was found by the ASI to contradict Davies' description of Crover castle as 'a two-storey rectangular tower. Indeed, the author of the *Inventory* cites Davies' assessment with apparent approval, and may even have found confirmatory evidence to be available, as he notes the presence of intramural staircases: that in the east wall leading to the first floor, and that in the north wall 'leading to roof level.'

In the case of county Cavan, therefore, it would appear that of the three buildings categorised as tower houses, two do not actually qualify according to the stated definition of the type. As for the third, it is only just within the range of one of the essential characteristics, its number of floors, and no evidence is presented as to its situation in relation to another, its date of construction.

This small but revealing sample does not inspire confidence in the classificatory criteria adopted by the Archaeological Survey of Ireland. More generally, it also signals that there are serious difficulties inherent in the invention of categories and the adoption of defining characteristics for the classification of historic buildings. Some degree of classification may be useful – if not strictly necessary – to anyone seeking a better understanding of such a field. However, it would seem more sensible to design typologies in

³⁹ The relationship between the two sites and the crannogs of their respective areas may well be of significance, but is not the subject of this investigation.

⁴⁰ O'DONOVAN 1995, 234.

⁴¹ O'DONOVAN 1995, 235; inventory number 1851

⁴² O'DONOVAN 1995, 234; inventory number 1846

⁴³ DAVIES 1947, 95-96.

⁴⁴ O'DONOVAN 1995, 235; inventory number 1849.

such a way as to unite buildings with similar features, rather than to set up exclusive classes which may remove (or not, if the case of the Cavan 'tower houses' is representative of the normal – if unscientific – approach) from consideration examples of potential relevance.

Conclusion

The tower house is, as has been seen, conventionally understood to be a tall structure of square or rectangular ground plan, in which height would certainly be the largest of the three dimensions. Cylindrical tower houses may therefore be regarded as somewhat anomalous, at least from the perspective of a morphological classification. If the classificatory system were organised on a broader basis, accommodating evidence not only as to the shape of the building but also regarding its function, however, an apparently fundamental difference in shape might actually be demonstrated to be merely superficial.⁴⁵

Tower houses are defended residences, designed to accommodate a family unit (whatever that may have been in the later medieval context) in a situation of reasonable security in what was apparently a relatively hostile environment. After the residential function, which is fundamental to the identity of a building as a castle, it is increasingly appreciated that the object of the castle builder was, most often, to create a structure which would impress – or even overawe – local residents, but also would-be aggressors and other passers-by. The height of the tower house, as well as the defensive features with which it was usually provided, such as machicolations and crenellations, were extremely important aspects of the creation of this impression. They may, of course, actually have served their more explicit physical purpose, too, but in the majority of cases it is almost certain that their presence – menacing and commanding – would have been sufficient to convey the apparent intentions and power of the proprietor, and thereby to discourage any potential attacker. ⁴⁶

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⁴⁵ This would appear to be what Clutterbuck intended when he concluded, somewhat cryptically, that 'Farrenrory tower-house was no different from any other tower house in function, other than the fact that it was cylindrical.' CLUTTERBUCK, R. 1998/1999 'Farrenrory Tower-House, County Tipperary. A Gentleman's Home', *Trowel* **9**, pp.7-9 at 9 ⁴⁶ The military function of the tower house has been stressed by writers including Leask, and actually formed the theme of articles by Cairns and McAuliffe. LEASK 1999, 76; CAIRNS, C. 1991 'The Irish Tower House – A Military View', *Fortress* **11**, pp.3-13; MCAULIFFE, M.

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The shape of the ground plan of the tower house seems to be of relatively minor significance in the context of the purpose for which the building would have been erected. Provided that the tower house was of dimensions such that the relative height of the building might strike the observer, the effect it was intended to have on an intending aggressor is unlikely to have varied whether the building was circular in plan, rectangular, or otherwise. Contemporaries might have been aware of current military theory regarding the optimum arrangement for fortified buildings, but in fact the period when European architectural thought was pitted against weapons technology in an effort to ensure impregnability was virtually over in most of Europe by the time tower house construction was popular or fashionable in Ireland. The tower house would not have been able to withstand an assault made using the arms which were available to larger armies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and it was not designed to do so.

Tower house construction may be seen as a spur branching off from the main stream of castle architecture, if that main stream is considered to have been intimately connected with, or even actually driven by, the evolution of military and strategic considerations. It was perhaps a recognition of this situation which led some commentators to consider the tower house to be 'not a real castle'. However, there is now near-general acceptance in the castle-studies community that the notion of an evolution of castles according to a militarily deterministic model is too narrow. Castles may have been designed

1992-1993 'The tower house and warfare in Ireland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries', *The Irish Sword* **18**, pp.297-302

⁴⁷ Regular polygonal towers are known from other parts of Europe – e.g. the octagonal tower at Ratières, in the Drôme (France), which was built in the fourteenth century - but none seems to have survived in Ireland, and no evidence has yet emerged of any having been built. ⁴⁸ e.g. LACY, B. 1983 Archaeological Survey of County Donegal. Donegal County Council, Lifford. p.350; CUPPAGE, J. 1986 Archaeological Survey of the Dingle Peninsula. Oidhreacht Chorca Dhuibhne, Ballyferriter. p.370; MCCULLOUGH, N. & MULVIN, V. 1987 A Lost Tradition. The Nature of Architecture in Ireland. Gandon Editions, Dublin. p.37; POWER, D. 1992 Archaeological Inventory of County Cork. Volume 1: West Cork. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.317; POWER, D. 1994 Archaeological Inventory of County Cork. Volume 2: East and South Cork. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.218; O'SULLIVAN, A. & SHEEHAN, J. 1996 The Iveragh Peninsula. An Archaeological Survey of South Kerry. Cork University Press, Cork. p.362; POWER, D. 1997 Archaeological Inventory of County Cork. Volume 3: Mid Cork. The Stationery Office, Dublin. p.356; POWER, D. 2000 Archaeological Inventory of County Cork. Volume 4: North Cork (2 Parts). The Stationery Office, Dublin. Part 2, p.522. Echoes of the notion are still detectable in the most recent work of the ASI: MOORE, M.J. 2003 Archaeological Inventory of County Leitrim. The Stationery

with military issues in mind, but their main roles were residential and, perhaps primarily, symbolic.⁴⁹ As was neatly summarised by Coulson in his comments on Bodiam castle, in Sussex, the builder responsible for its construction was motivated by 'pride, not fear'.⁵⁰

Tower houses in Ireland have thus for some time been considered slightly anomalous in the understanding of the castle as an evolving form of military machine, and their residential function has long been acknowledged.⁵¹ Even if the significance of this residential role may not, at least in some cases, have been as great as has generally been thought,⁵² the tower house does seem admirably to fill the symbolic role recently stressed for castles of almost every description.⁵³

The tower house constituted a response to a particular set of circumstances. Reasonably secure buildings, which could serve as residential accommodation, were required. Central government could not be relied upon to maintain order, but most military forces consisted merely of small bands of raiders seeking instant profit, rather than armies intent on the conquest and control of large areas of land.

Why then should there have been so much variety in the design of the tower house? The very fact that society was so fragmented, and that there was no overarching plan to organise stability through architectural or any other form of uniformity, suggests that something approximating to the reverse of the

Office, Dublin. p.206. In contrast, however, see the opening statement in O'KEEFFE 1997:

^{&#}x27;The tower-house is the late medieval Irish castle par excellence.' (at p.7)

⁴⁹ COULSON 1979; STOCKER 1992; COULSON 2003; COULSON, C.L.H. 2004

[&]quot;Orthodoxy" or Opportunity?', Castle Studies Group Bulletin 2003-2004, pp.115-116

⁵⁰ COULSON 2003, 10.

⁵¹ O'CONOR 1998, 26-28.

⁵² See, for example, Stanihurst's observation that the Irish princes of about 1600 held their banquets in the 'reasonably big and spacious palaces made from white clay and mud' which adjoined their castles, although for security reasons they preferred to sleep in the castles. Ludolf von Münchhausen, who visited Ireland in 1591, found that the houses of Irish noblemen 'are built usually in the form of a tower surrounded by a wall' but reported that 'they do not live in those but keep them as a fortress', favouring a more modestly-built house as residential accommodation. Luke Gernon's experience was different, however, in that when he was entertained in a castle he found that 'the hall is the uppermost room, lett us go up, you shall not come downe agayne till tomorrow.' Even in this account, however, it is not clear whether the castle, with its hall, was in use on an everyday basis as a residence, or whether it was being used for special entertainment. LENNON 1981, 146-147; Ó RIAIN-RAEDEL 1998, 230; GERNON 1620, 360-361.

⁵³ McCullough and Mulvin seemed to be hinting at this when they observed that the tower house was 'intended to be seen from a distance'. MCCULLOUGH & MULVIN 1987, 37.

above question might be more appropriate. Why, then, are tower houses so similar?

This question may perhaps best be answered through consideration of three main factors. These may be summarised by the terms architectural history, fashion, and socio-political circumstances. Tower house design clearly owes much to the fortified buildings which stood in the Irish countryside at the time when the tower houses were being constructed, and they in turn were inspired by the castles of other areas of Norman activity in England, Scotland, Wales, France, and beyond. Once a few leading figures in later medieval Irish society had built themselves tall and imposing fortified residences – resembling in many respects the *donjons* of the earlier period, though on a smaller scale and therefore at less expense - it appears that the advantages of height and the feeling of power and authority which it conferred were quickly appreciated. It is almost certain that other forms of fortified residence would have served many of the purposes achieved by the tower house in Ireland, and indeed it is likely that they did, although our appreciation of their appearance and role is as yet undeveloped. The large number of tower houses surviving in the landscape, 54 together with the high visibility which is a corollary of their design, may combine to skew our assessment of their role in the society of their day.

In county Tipperary, where there is a particularly high density of tower houses, Cairns felt justified in stating that they are to be found 'in such numbers that they seem to have excluded most other forms of stone dwelling.' This assessment may seem reasonable in the particular circumstances of Cairns' study area, but it is unlikely that the tower house was completely dominant, even in county Tipperary; certainly in areas of the country less well supplied with tower houses there must have been other architectural forms – perhaps constructed in less durable materials and styles – serving a purpose which would in many respects have been similar to that of

It should not be forgotten not only that the tower house was a durable form of building, but also that many were slighted in the Cromwellian period and may thus have been preserved in their semi-destroyed condition as local symbols of resistance against an unattractive oppressor. Scalrns 1984, 330. In the mid nineteenth century Mease had observed that If we were to go into the County of Tipperary, we would find such a multitude of these castles that their very names would occupy a long paper. It is said that a hundred are visible from the Rock of Cashel

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the tower house. It would *appear* that the tower house was the fortified residential building of choice for the overwhelming majority of people of a certain position and wealth in late medieval Irish society, but it is not clear to what extent they *actually* dominated the architecture of their period.

The tower house does seem, however, to have supplied a need felt by a section of the population of the island for a residence which would not only provide them with some degree of practical defence, but would also serve to project their position, wealth, and status to those living in or passing through the surrounding countryside. The central government was not strong and local power was important for the maintenance of the stability and control which would help to assure a reasonably comfortable and secure existence. The impact of the upheavals of the early to mid fourteenth century on Irish society has not been satisfactorily explained, especially in relation to architectural matters, but if one assumes there to have been a decline in population (as well as a decline in central control and governmental organisation) then the documented instability – resulting at least in part from the redistribution of land and the reorganisation of local and regional power structures – appears virtually inevitable. It is in times of instability that the individual is most likely to feel a need to try to secure his own safety and to assert a degree of control over his surroundings. The tower house seems to have been the most durable result of those efforts.

CONCLUSION

The way in which the tower house in Ireland came to be distinguished and labelled in the nineteenth century, and then defined and studied from the mid-twentieth into the twenty-first century, has brought with it a set of presumptions and limitations. These presumptions and limitations have been central to the progress of our understanding of the tower house. One of the symptoms of the essential consistency of approach which has been adopted towards tower house investigation has been that successive studies have returned to similar questions, and have attempted to address those questions through the use of similar models and resources.

The most prominent of these questions is that concerned with the 'origins' of the tower house: who first built a tower house in Ireland, why, and when. The formulation of this question appears straightforward, but in fact it does itself depend upon a series of assumptions. Before considering the who, why, and when of the tower house in Ireland one must recognise that there are problems with the definition of the building type itself. It is accepted that a large number of relatively tall stone buildings of defensive aspect stood in the landscape of later medieval Ireland, and indeed many of these survive, though often in decayed condition. However, within this group considerable variety exists – as has been noted, for example, between the buildings surveyed by Jordan in county Wexford, and those studied by Davin in the area of the Pale.

Central to the classification of buildings as tower houses has been their general appearance. This basic approach to the definition of a building type certainly seems logical, and the key attribute of the tower house is reflected in the use of the word tower as the first part of its title. Given that these towers are attributed to the medieval period, however, one might consider the possibility that they represent merely the most durable element of a more extensive set of buildings. A proportion of surviving tower houses is to be found in association with other buildings, perhaps in the context of a farm, and a significant number seem to have been built in connection with or close to an existing church (see illustration overleaf). The form of the tower house itself may vary, therefore, but one should also acknowledge, when studying the buildings, that they may have been accompanied by other types of structure.



Clonmantagh, county Kilkenny, showing proximity of tower house and church

This additional consideration emerges in the context of the form of the tower house, but it may be of even greater significance in contemplation of tower house function. It has been demonstrated above that contemporaries found tower houses being used in different ways. The tower house might have served as a place of residential accommodation, as a centre for administration and or entertainment, or merely as a means of providing security. Detailed analysis of the layout and facilities provided in tower houses is required if the intentions of the builders as to the use of the buildings are to be identified. It may be possible, through examination of the standing remains, to discern to what extent a building, or a feature of a building, was actually used for its intended purpose. Such analysis would presumably also assist in the clarification of the extent of the accuracy of the second element of the tower house name.

Attention was drawn to the chronological aspect of tower house definition through the efforts of Cairns, and also of Davin. They were concerned that the tower house had come to be regarded as belonging solely to the period between the mid fifteenth century and the very early seventeenth century. They endeavoured, with limited success, to show that the construction of buildings which may have been tower houses was being carried out in the early 1300s. The associated debate on the 'fortalice', and on its relationship with the tower house, may have clouded over the essential issue which emerged from this chronologically-related analysis. This issue was that a restriction had been imposed as to the period during which a particular type of building – the tower house – could have been built in Ireland. The scarcity of evidence of any sort - now, as in the 1980s and 1990s when the fortalice question was being most vigorously discussed - upon which to base the assignment of a precise date for the construction of more than a handful of the hundreds of surviving tower houses makes the imposition of this chronological qualifier for tower house classification problematical.

In fact, on the basis of the current state of knowledge, the tower house phenomenon is best understood as the manifestation of a fashion. This was a fashion for the construction of tall, defended, residential, castellated structures, each of which formed a focal point for its surrounding area whether or not it

was accompanied by additional buildings. This fashion emerged as a result of a combination of circumstances.

Ireland and its inhabitants had known stone castles at least since the later twelfth century. The technology necessary for tower house construction would also have been familiar as a result of the extensive masonry involved in the building of churches and religious houses. Many of these ecclesiastical structures included towers, some of which were residential in function (see illustration overleaf).

In terms of construction skills and conceptual development the tower house could have emerged in Ireland at an early stage. After about 1200 there would have been no particular need for the importation of skills or ideas in order for the initiation of the trend. It is important to recognise, nonetheless, that there was considerable mobility among certain sectors of medieval society, notably those involved in military matters. Certain people would consequently have been aware of the architectural (and other) styles and ideas current in different parts of Europe. It is likely, for example, that the construction of tower houses in Scotland and the north of England in the later fourteenth century formed part of the movement which saw the building of tower houses in Ireland at around the same time.

Political and economic circumstances in the two areas were similar, and the arms available in each place would also have overlapped. In Ireland the strength of the central authority, which had peaked in the later thirteenth century, was declining, leaving individual landowners with concerns as to their vulnerability. But this decline in central authority might also be regarded as affording an opportunity for the assertion of power on a local level; certainly it required aspiring leaders, as well as those with property, to demonstrate their independence and to provide for their own security.

An important question in relation to the motives and mechanisms behind tower house construction is raised by the recent comments of Colfer, who has identified a group of some twenty tower houses in south-eastern county Wexford which he considers to have been 'built along the line of the Corock river to protect the English Pale in the south-east of the county'. It

¹ COLFER, B. 2004 *The Hook peninsula, county Wexford.* Cork University Press, Cork. p.82



Gabriel Beranger's illustration of Kells Priory, county Kilkenny

(after HARBISON, P. 1991 Beranger's views of Ireland. Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.)

would appear, therefore, that he regards this series of tower houses to be the physical manifestation of a coherent defensive policy, as conceived by a politically- and geographically-defined group.

One or two examples have already been cited of areas in which survey has suggested a degree of coherence in the organisation of the construction of tower houses. Cotter, for example, identified a series of tower houses along the valley of the Blackwater river in north Cork which appeared to have been built by a pair of families, perhaps simply out of concern to assert their territorial boundaries, or perhaps for a more complex set of reasons connected with control of the river itself.² Apart from this, there has until now been only very limited evidence from any part of Ireland to suggest that a sizeable group of tower houses was conceived together and built as part of a unified strategic scheme.

It seems self-evident that in order to formulate the kind of policy required to provide for and carry out the construction of a series of buildings such as Colfer proposes, the community would need to be stable and wellorganised, or at least strongly led. It would also need to be sufficiently wellinformed to identify a particular threat (which may of course have been very real) and to have sufficient resources to permit the development of an appropriate response to that threat. The approach adopted seems to reflect a strong local identity, and a concern to protect an area rather than merely a family and its particular interests. As such it represents a significant variation on the conventional understanding of the motivation behind tower house construction. However, before using it to found a revision of the way in which the tower house in Ireland is perceived, Colfer's proposal must be subjected to closer scrutiny. It is not clear, for example, whether the proposal is based solely on an examination of the distribution of the buildings, or whether he has carried out more comprehensive analysis to demonstrate that it is corroborated by other evidence.

This corroboration would have to address important issues such as whether the construction of the tower houses can be dated to the same particular period; whether there is sufficient similarity between the design or

² COTTER 1994.

organisation of the various buildings to indicate that they were intended to fulfil a uniform (or at least related) purpose; and whether there is evidence that they were in fact built by a specific group of people who were working in response to demands related to their community of interest.

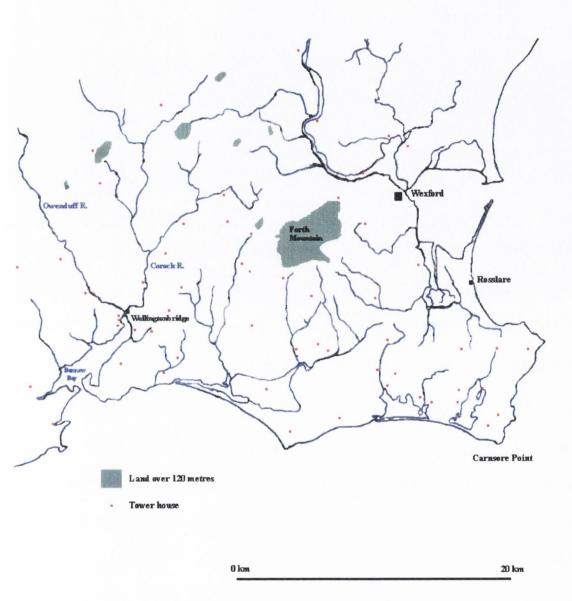
Fundamental to the theory, however, is the distribution itself. The Corock river, together with various tributaries and associated watercourses, runs across the south-eastern tip of county Wexford (and thus of Ireland) from a source to the west of Wexford town in an arc around and down to Bannow Bay. The Owenduff river also runs into Bannow Bay, but along a straightish course from a source to the north north west of Wellingtonbridge where it meets the sea at the head of the bay. The Corock does appear to form an incomplete and irregular natural boundary which isolates the south-eastern corner of county Wexford, and Forth mountain, just south west of Wexford town, provides another natural feature along this notional boundary.

The Corock river is not large, and Forth mountain, while providing the highest point in the area, would also constitute a relatively minor obstacle to anyone moving through the area. Of the tower houses in Colfer's scheme which survive, only one is positioned so as to command a bridging point over the Corock. Most of the others are 500 metres or more from the river. 500 metres might appear to be a reasonably short distance, one which need not dissociate the building from the natural feature. However, the scale of the river, coupled with the fact that the south eastern corner of county Wexford is particularly well provided with tower houses (quite apart from other forms of medieval fortification), suggest that Colfer's twenty tower houses may be best understood as elements of the south-eastern county Wexford cluster rather than as components of a defensive line (see map overleaf).

If Colfer's collection of buildings was deliberately conceived as a defensive measure one might expect greater consistency of appearance, site characteristics, proximity to one another and to the river, and design as between the tower houses. One would also be concerned regarding the value of such a defensive line – and regarding the value placed on it by contemporaries – given that so many more tower houses were built in the area it was supposed to be protecting.



Approximate area covered by south east Wexford map



Tower houses in south east county Wexford

The chronology of the tower houses of south-eastern county Wexford has yet to be fully explored. If it could be demonstrated that a particular group of buildings was erected at or about the same time, perhaps even by the same person or group of people, then suggestions regarding the role of architecture in a coordinated defensive strategy might be more easily sustained.

Ireland was not alone in suffering disruption in the fourteenth century, but in Ireland the disruption may have delayed the development, or even the instigation, of the tower house-building movement. However, efforts to identify a particular moment, or period, of instigation would probably be misguided. In any event, it is not reasonable to depend on a particular documentary reference as a marker before which tower houses were not known. Legislation is neither a likely nor an appropriate vehicle for the initiation of a new approach to building design. The legislative enactments of 1428 and 1430 are documents of special importance for the study of later medieval Ireland and of its architecture, an importance which has itself been magnified through their apparently privileged state in relation to tower house construction. They may well have contributed in some way to the character of the architecture of the mid fifteenth century, but it has proved difficult to demonstrate their input in any specific case. Far more likely, it seems, is that they represent recognition by the legislature of a means by which independent enterprise, directed towards assertion of authority and provision of stability, might be fostered and encouraged. They constitute official endorsement of a type of building – and a means of indirect governance – which was already a familiar constituent of the Irish landscape.

The initial legislation was directed towards the counties of the Pale, but these would of course have made up the area of most immediate relevance and concern to those in the Dublin administrative hub. The fact that equivalent provisions were not enacted in respect of most other counties, including several of those in which tower houses are particularly numerous, demonstrates that the role of the legislature, and the incentives it proposed, was a symptom associated with the tower house phenomenon rather than its cause.

The potential of a variety of types of source material to contribute to our understanding of tower houses in Ireland is unequivocally demonstrated

through the foregoing chapters. Some of these types are familiar and have already served previous investigators of the buildings, whereas others are relatively unexplored. It seems, however, that in the case of the former category – which would include the records of central government, for example – there is also scope for innovation in relation to the way in which the materials are approached. For example, there is clearly a need for more exhaustive analysis of textual material according to an archaeological agenda.

Medieval historians with an awareness of the problems associated with the archaeology of the period will almost inevitably come more easily to address those issues if the opportunity or the evidence should arise. Likewise, an archaeologist immersed in the excavation of a particular site must also – if the maximum is to be obtained from the project – be aware of the place of such a site in the historical context of its time and place, at least as they are generally understood.

History has so far dominated our understanding of medieval Europe, but it seems essential that as the medieval archaeological discipline matures its findings should be incorporated into that understanding. The process of integration must be a gradual one, and the relative merits of the different investigative techniques accommodated and acknowledged.

In this context, while medieval archaeologists would generally aspire to identify the elements of their work which contribute markedly to the appreciation of the period, in this instance the emphasis must remain on the preliminary nature of the exploration. This is not to ignore or disregard the evidence brought to light in the course of the several chapters above, and it would appear that in each of the chapters dealing with specific forms of evidence (as opposed to those which are focused on themes or problems in the study of the tower house) fresh material is discussed which contributes to an enhancement of our understanding of the monument type. Rather, the preliminary nature of the project is emphasised because it is considered that medieval archaeology needs to assert its own agendas, and to provide an impression of its subject matter which can serve as a frame of reference for our view of medieval society.

Tower houses are highly visible elements of the Irish landscape of today. They are a familiar sight in almost every part of the country and,

furthermore, there is at least traditional lore associated with virtually every one of them. Their familiarity has undoubtedly contributed to the generation of a feeling that each one, at the local level at least, can be explained or understood in quasi-historical terms. The popular image of the tower house is, perhaps understandably, very much based on the current appearance of the individual building in question, so there would obviously be a great deal of scope for extending this understanding by way of archaeological investigation. The historical background to only relatively few tower houses has been investigated to any significant degree, and indeed it would appear that there is little by way of documentary record regarding a large proportion of the buildings. In the local imagination a given building might be associated with a particular family or name, but the details of such supposed connections certainly demand more rigorous and exhaustive exploration.

The other areas in which there is clearly scope for research which would contribute to the elucidation of the position of the tower house in the country's medieval history and archaeology are numerous. Some of these have been discussed above, or alluded to, but a few are deserving of specific comment at this point.

In Sweetman's recent publications on castles in Ireland, and in several of the county *Inventories* produced under his general supervision, much has been made of the 'hall house'.³ Hall houses are considered to constitute a category of fortified building additional to those distinguished by Leask, and they have been assigned construction dates in the later thirteenth century and even in the fourteenth century, apparently on architecturally-related evidence. The significance of the hall house for the understanding of the development of fortified architecture in Ireland has been asserted by Sweetman, who, more specifically, 'would strongly contend that the Irish tower-house owes its origin to the hall house, especially those of the 14th century.'⁴

One must assume that the structures 'of the 14th century' to which Sweetman refers are hall houses since he sees 'no reason to assume' – let alone

³ SWEETMAN 1999, 89-104; SWEETMAN 2000; SWEETMAN 2003. Interestingly, the hall house is not mentioned at all in the general, introductory work which he published in 1995: SWEETMAN, D. 1995 *Irish castles and fortified houses*. Town House and Country House, Dublin

⁴ SWEETMAN 2000, 267.

to assert – 'that tower houses were built before the beginning of the fifteenth century.' However, if there was so little building going on in the 1300s it would appear that the 'inspiration' for tower house construction – for the form of the tower house, presumably, as much as for the very fact of the execution of a fortified residential building in stone – is likely to have been somewhat broader than can be explained specifically by reference to the few hall houses which appear to have been built in the fourteenth century. Indeed, it appears important that this dating for the construction of a particular group of hall houses should be subjected to scrutiny.

It seems, in the light of McNeill's observation that 'no scheme has yet been produced to discriminate within the work of the later middle ages, to distinguish work of 1350-1450 from that of 1450-1550, for example', unrealistic to depend on architectural indicators as the basis for the assignation of a class of buildings to a specific chronological window. There is no doubt that Sweetman's exercise in classification is of value for certain purposes, and that it is in fact one of the bases upon which the work of the Archaeological Survey of Ireland has been organised. However, any scheme of generalisation must inevitably have limitations, and these should not be overlooked when a more detailed examination of a specific series of examples is undertaken.

One of the ways in which the understanding of the hall house might be furthered involves a combination of historical, archaeological, and architectural-historical techniques. It is apparent from the evidence presented above that there is a series of documentary references to castles and other fortified structures, and to their construction, from the fourteenth century. Some of these have been discussed, for example, in the context of the debate surrounding the use of the term 'fortalice'. A number of investigators have proposed that a fortalice might have taken the form of a building such as is now referred to as a tower house. Others, while not always explicitly denying this interpretation as a possibility, have stressed that on their reading of the term fortalice no conclusive statements may be made as to a firm connection between the fortalice and the tower house. One of the points of objection, for some writers, at least, to the notion that the fourteenth century uses of the word

⁵ SWEETMAN 1999, 174

fortalice might have referred to tower houses is intimately involved in the premise that no tower houses were built in Ireland before 1400, and probably not before 1430 or thereabouts. In this context it would certainly be of value to examine the evidence for connections between documentary references to fortalices – in the early fourteenth century and at other relevant periods – and the structures which have been identified and classified as hall houses and assigned a place in the chronology of castle construction in Ireland on essentially architectural evidence.

There are of course various problems associated with the combination of documentary evidence and the evidence of buildings surviving in the modern landscape, and these have already been discussed. However, if theories are to be expounded on the relationship between hall houses and tower houses, for example, the various elements of the evidence must be taken into account and subjected to appropriate analysis. It is not sufficient to dismiss a hypothesis on the basis that it has not been conclusively proved and then to insert another which takes no account of the evidence on which the first was founded. Alternative explanations are certainly to be encouraged, and it is clear that the investigation of the medieval castles of Ireland cannot but benefit from contributions founded on evidence derived from different fields of inquiry. However, the theories proposed from the different perspectives of history, archaeology, and architectural analysis should not be treated as definitive except on their own terms (in which respect their relatively limited value must be acknowledged). The understanding of the relationship between the structures which have become known as hall houses and those which are now referred to as tower houses, for example, must be developed through acknowledgment and accommodation of evidence available from every possible form of source with potential relevance to the subject.

Hall houses have been distinguished and grouped together in the Irish context only relatively recently. For a slightly longer period there has been discussion regarding the appropriate way in which to approach the urban tower house, or 'fortified town house', as Murtagh would have it.⁶ As has been considered above, the distinction between urban tower houses and their

⁶ MURTAGH 1982; MURTAGH 1985-1986; MURTAGH 1989.

supposedly rural, isolated equivalents may not be as firm and clear as would immediately appear and as has conventionally been thought. If the tower house is to be understood as the focal point of a settlement which may have extended beyond the confines of the bawn (if there was one), and which would almost certainly have incorporated, in the vast majority of cases, a series of structures, no longer surviving, which would have been built of less durable materials than the masonry tower itself, then the distinction between urban and rural tower houses seems to be reduced to the question of the scale of the settlement in which they were to be found, and of the resulting relative prominence of the tower house as compared with its associated buildings.

This proposal demands that tower house investigation be extended in at least two specific directions. One of these, the detailed topographical survey, and perhaps also the archaeological excavation of tower houses and their surroundings, has seen little work in Ireland but has been explored to a somewhat greater extent at similar sites in Scotland. The need for a programme of research in this field with a focus on tower houses in Ireland is emphatically demonstrated not only by the state of knowledge in this country but also by the results of the Scottish work.

The second focus for investigation is the examination and analysis of surviving castellated structures in towns, and of the evidence for those of which there is no longer any substantial physical trace in the urban streetscape. This project is already being pursued to a limited extent by Murtagh and by Bradley, with the two working in collaboration most recently towards the elucidation of Brady's castle in Thomastown, county Kilkenny. The study of Brady's castle represents part of the continuing extension of Murtagh's work on the subject beyond the area of the Pale, and reflects the development of interests previously expressed by Bradley through his involvement in the Urban Archaeological Survey, for example. As the level of architectural and archaeological survey information for such buildings increases, it will become possible to compare their physical appearance, their layout, and hypotheses as to their precise mode of function with the equivalent aspects of their rural or quasi-rural counterparts. Likewise, as historical understanding of the details of

⁷ BRADLEY & MURTAGH 2003; MURTAGH 1982; MURTAGH 1985-1986; MURTAGH 1988; MURTAGH 1989; BRADLEY *et al.* 1986-1990.

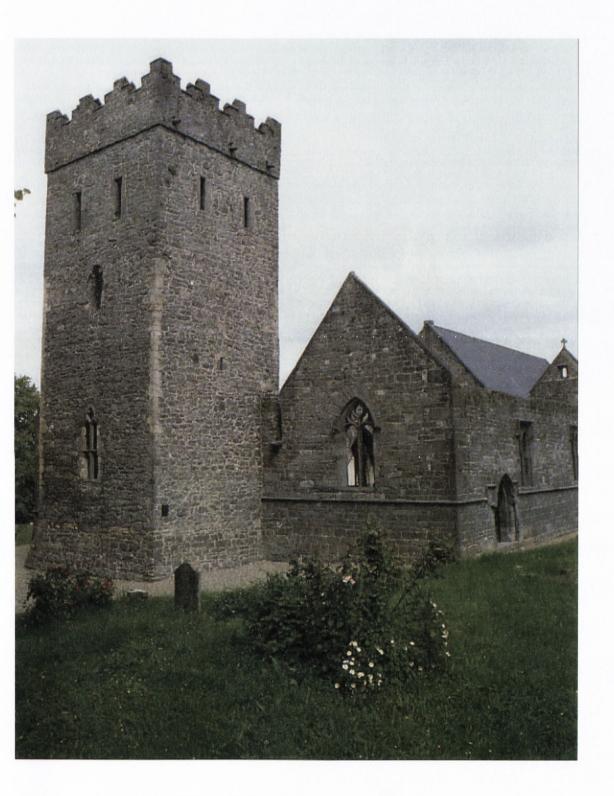
urban and rural life in medieval Ireland deepens, so it is probable that greater accuracy will be attainable in our estimation of the roles played by particular buildings in the societies for and by which they were constructed.

Another variant on the tower house as conventionally understood has been the subject of even less attention in the context of the study of the fortified architecture of the medieval period in Ireland. Residential towers at ecclesiastical sites are by no means uncommon, and some of the larger monasteries – such as Kells Priory, county Kilkenny, for instance – feature several examples. They are not restricted to monastic settlement, however. Medieval parish churches survive at which the tower at the west end of the nave was designed to serve a residential function, and there are also examples where a free-standing tower stands close to the church at which the inhabitant of the tower is thought to have officiated (see illustration overleaf).

The Church was, in the later medieval period, an organisation of great strength, influence, and wealth, and the church building was a central element of any community. Consequently, the priest would have been an important member of local society. The church itself would generally have been a prominent, solid, and substantial stone structure, and a masonry tower may well have been considered by many to be an appropriate form of accommodation for its priest, as well as providing a landmark expressing the presence and significance of church and priest in the area.

Discussion of tower houses in the urban context and as elements of ecclesiastical settlement seems to draw attention from much of the militaristic justification which has been advanced for the construction of the buildings, and to direct it towards the role of the tower house as a residential structure. The name which has been adopted for the type of building the subject of this investigation includes two elements. One – 'tower' – seems to reflect the physical form of the buildings, whereas the other – 'house' – is inherently related to their function.

The dominance of the architectural approach to the assessment of castellated buildings in Ireland has meant that most work on tower houses has dwelt on their form rather than on their function. Where function has been considered, attention has most often been concentrated on the tower house as a species of castle. There has been suggestion to the effect that the tower house



St Mary's Church, Callan, county Kilkenny

(after KILLANIN, Lord, & DUIGNAN, M.V. (revised and updated by HARBISON, P.) 1989 *The Shell Guide to Ireland*. Gill and Macmillan, Dublin.)

does not sit altogether easily when described as a 'castle', and allusion has already been made to this issue. The overtones concomitant with the description of a building as a castle are essentially military and strategic, even though an essential element in most definitions of the word is residential function. The supposed inadequacy of the tower house as a castle seems to stem from notions as to its military and defensive weakness. These are in themselves relative notions and the proposals they are used to support are therefore questionable. However, an area of inquiry which seems, peculiarly, not to have excited much attention on foot of this discussion is that which centres on the adequacy or otherwise of the tower house as a house.

The standard vision of the tower house as a near-isolated structure which served both defensive and residential purposes would appear to require that a family (or extended family) inhabited the masonry tower, with some form of military group also being accommodated. It seems surprising that so small a proportion of the investigations into tower houses at regional and county level should have included consideration of how the tower house might have been organised so as to facilitate its use as a house. Allusion has been made to the unsuitability of the ground floor of the overwhelming majority of tower houses as residential accommodation. This unsuitability is primarily as a result of the fact that this vaulted space is generally unlit (other than by any light which might have been admitted through the doorway, if the doors were left open). There is only limited evidence for the flooring of the ground level in tower houses, and although organic material or merely packed earth would certainly have served in other house types in which the area was in everyday use as a habitation, it is usually suggested that the ground floor of a tower house would have been used as storage space, or as an indoor shelter for domestic animals.

It is rare to find a fireplace in the ground floor of a tower house, and the presence of a fireplace has been interpreted as an indication of the suitability of a chamber for residential use, as well as providing an index of the sophistication, wealth, and prestige of the owner and designer of the building (according to the aesthetics and scale of the fireplace in question). Some tower houses seem to have contained no fireplaces at all. This may imply that they were not actually intended to provide housing on an all-year-round basis. They

might, alternatively, have been designed as outposts to which garrisons could be stationed in times of need. Another explanation is that fires were indeed lit in the building – in metal braziers, for example – but that there was alternative provision for the evacuation of smoke: possibly through a louvred hole in the roof, or in a wall.⁸

The exception to the marked dearth of consideration which has been given to domestic features of the tower house is Sherlock's survey of later medieval fireplaces in county Cork. Even in the case of this study, however, which is devoted to an element of architecture which would have been important to the residential use of a building, the dominant approach is consciously descriptive. Archaeological survey is essential if information is to be obtained from the remains of the medieval built heritage, but it must not be regarded as an end in itself. Even at the earliest stages of survey archaeologists must develop theories and ideas as to how their findings came to be the way they are, and why their designers should have so envisaged them. ¹⁰

The need for an examination of the domestic aspects of the tower house in Ireland should be accepted in the context of a wider trend in castle studies at the European level, but which has been particularly evident in Britain in recent years. This trend involves the proposition that the military determinism which shaped, in large measure, the standard understanding of castle development through the medieval period should be questioned, analysed, and reconsidered. This move for revision would appear itself to be a symptom of an even more general development in our approach to the study of the past whereby historians have become increasingly aware of the traditional focus of their discipline on momentous change, on magnificent achievement, and on political power through time, and have come to devote attention to more gradual trends and movements, to social and economic conditions, and to the everyday existence of the general population of regions, often viewed in comparative terms. The emergence of medieval archaeology, and its acknowledgment as a

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⁸ Of particular interest in this context is the observation of the late sixteenth century traveller Ludolf von Münchhausen, quoted above, to the effect that a fire was lit 'in the middle' of the residential building which adjoined the tower. Ó RIAIN-RAEDEL 1998, 230.

⁹ SHERLOCK, R. 1997 A study of the fireplaces of later medieval county Cork. MA, UCC. ¹⁰ It must be acknowledged that Sherlock's investigation is, to an extent, distinctive in that it does go beyond the level of straightforward survey. The final two sentences of the paragraph

contributor, along with conventional historical approaches, to our understanding of the past, is a phenomenon which forms a part of this broadest trend.

should be read in the context of survey generally, rather than with reference to the particular work cited.

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