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Excavation of a Cottier’s Cabin at Cookstown, Co. Meath by Richard Clutterbuck

During the course of excavations in advance of the N2 Finglas-Ashbourne Road Scheme at Cookstown, Co. Meath, to the west of Ashbourne town, a single-roomed stone structure was discovered built into a modern ditch bounding an old road running through the excavation area (Site 25 Licence Number 03E1252). The structure measured 7.3 meters by 4.1 meters externally and appears to have been built in the following fashion: a partially silted-up ditch on the margin of a road was chosen for a site; the builders constructed three low walls of stone c. 0.5m thick – two short walls following the contours of the profile of the ditch and a long wall along the brow of the ditch; the inside of the structure was then deepened, with some of the cast-out material banked up against the...
outside of the walls for extra support or insulation. A gap in the short wall at the lowest point of the ditch served as an entrance. The roof, none of which survived, was supported on one side of the ditch. There appears to have been a beaten earth floor and hearths set in scooped-out hollows, both in the middle of the cabin and against one of the walls. A drain ran down along the middle of the cabin. The occupants of the house may have been engaged in cultivation behind the cabin, where the ground was cut by parallel furrows and shallow open drains in use during the 18th and 19th centuries, probably for growing potatoes.

The marginal location and the small size of this structure all point to this being a cottier’s cabin. The glass and ceramic finds from the underlying ditch point to an 18th or possibly early 19th century date, although an analysis of the Ordnance Survey Field Content Books indicate the structure was destroyed by 1835 (Ordnance Survey of Ireland 1835). Arthur Young in his A Tour in Ireland, published in London in 1780, described “… a great many cabins, usually by the roadside or in a ditch… (where) a wandering family will fix themselves under a dry bank and with a few sticks, furze, fern, etc. make up a hovel much worse than an English pigstye, support themselves how they can, by work, begging and stealing “ (Young 1983, 183-184).

Similar conditions were observed by Robert Thompson in his Statistical Survey of the County of Meath (Dublin 1802): the cabins were “...wretched beyond description... often not sufficiently covered in to keep out rain;” these cabins were constructed from clay “… taken to build the walls from the spot, on which they are raised, leaving the surface of the floor, and the ground immediately about the walls, the lowest part”; the family slept on the damp floor shared with their pigs or fowl (Thompson 1802, 71). Cottiers in 18th and 19th century Ireland worked on farms and sub-let small patches of ground for raising potatoes. They are commonly perceived as enduring abject material poverty, and nothing from the excavation of the cabin in Cookstown contradicts this characterisation. A cottier’s tenure was fixed by verbal agreement on a yearly basis, which in many cases dictated the size and permanence of their dwellings. The cabin found in the ditch at Cookstown appears to have taken advantage of a relatively marginal part of the countryside, situated on the side of a road that was subsequently converted to a semi-private avenue. This road ran past a relatively prosperous farmstead – perhaps a source of employment for the cabin’s tenants.

Despite, or perhaps because of, its marginal location, the cabin did not survive for very long. Some time in the later 18th or early 19th century – perhaps only a matter of months after it was constructed - the walls were thrown down and the interior of the cabin was filled in during the construction of a substantial new field boundary bank, thus ensuring that no similar dwelling could be rebuilt in the same location. Post-excavation analysis is ongoing. Further work on the very few finds from the cabin, and the environmental samples, will all hopefully add an archaeological dimension to an already grim historical picture.

Young, Arthur. 1780 A Tour in Ireland Selected & Edited by Constantia Maxwell. Belfast: Blackstaff 1983
Thompson, Robert. 1802 Statistical survey of the County of Meath. Dublin: Graisberry & Campbell.

Archaeological Assessment at Lisburn Castle Gardens by Ruairí Ó Baoill

Licensed archaeological investigations were carried out by Ruairí Ó Baoill of Archaeological Development Services Ltd on the terraces of Lisburn Castle Gardens between July- October 2003. The excavations are part of an archaeological assessment of the potential buried historic garden remains, and constitute the first phase of a five-year Heritage Lottery Fund/ Lisburn City Council financed restoration of the gardens. The site is a Scheduled Monument and is entered into the Northern Ireland Sites and
Lisburn, eight miles southwest of Belfast, was the centre of a large Plantation land grant made to Sir Fulke Conway in 1611. In the 17th century, the Castle Gardens were part of a large formal garden attached to a manor house that no longer exists. Layout was initiated by Fulke, but substantially developed from the 1650s onwards by George Rawdon, the Conway family’s agent in Ireland. The original gardens now cover a much reduced area and currently constitute Castle Gardens Public Park. The Bowling Green and four terraces that were archaeologically investigated are the southern limits of this park. The investigations took the form of manually excavated trenches to look for presence or absence of garden features and to help inform the restoration of the various walls that separate each terrace and enclose the gardens as a whole. No features or artefacts dating earlier than the 17th century were found. Excavation showed that there were two main phases of garden usage— that initiated by Sir Fulke Conway in the early 17th century and Rawdon’s formal walled garden, laid out in the latter half of the 17th century. In 1707, after an accidental fire destroyed the town of Lisburn and the manor house, the grounds became a recreation place for the citizens and, after 1901, a public park.

The most exciting discoveries include (on Terrace 1) a virtually intact 17th-century perron (an external platform constructed over vaulted chambers and ascended by stone steps) and (on the Bowling Green) a 17th-century gazebo or summerhouse. Both structures are unique survivals in the Irish archaeological record.
gazebo, which survived at basement level, had rendered walls, shelf slots and an oven.

Other garden features uncovered included flowerbeds, gravel paths, brick-edged paths, field drains and a possible fishpond. Artefacts recovered include 17th-century English, German and Dutch pottery; decorated Dutch tiles; clay pipe bowls; goblet, window and flowerpot glass; buckles, a brooch, pins and other metalwork; and fragments of cut sandstone and glazed roof tile probably derived from the manor house.

Immediately outside the walled garden a small portion of a pit containing human bones was excavated, perhaps relating to the 1641 battle at Lisburn. The tantalising suggestion is that the site may also contain battlefield archaeology. The 2003 season of excavations proved beyond doubt that significant remains of an important and high status garden survive at Lisburn. It is hoped that a further season of excavation and conservation will take place in 2005.

**Excavations at Ardee Street, Dublin**

by Franc Myles

The excavation and monitoring of a development site on the corner of Ardee Street and Cork Street at the southern end of the Liberties of Dublin was undertaken between October 2003 and June 2004 by Margaret Gowan, Limited. The site was bounded to the east by the culverted course of the Abbey Stream, an artificially-created watercourse constructed for the abbey of St. Thomas the Martyr after 1185. Bisecting the site from east to west was the Commons Water, a natural stream culverted by Dublin Corporation in the 1870s. The stream constituted the southern boundary of the medieval Liberty of St. Thomas Court, later part of the city boundary and thus along the *Riding of the Franchises*. The Liberty of Donore, owned by the abbey, extended to the south outside the city’s jurisdiction. The excavation recorded evidence for the ponding of the Commons Water to power mills, while medieval flood channels of the Abbey Stream were recorded on the eastern periphery. Sealing this activity was evidence for a defensive bank erected by troops loyal to the Duke of Ormond in the 1640s. Extensive post-medieval industrial development in the Liberties was marked by the remains of two breweries and three tanneries.

Unfortunately, no finds were recovered from the silted-up medieval pond fill, despite documentary evidence for a drowning in the 15th century. The pond followed the natural contour of the valley and was up to 2.75m deep when flooded. The pond is first documented between 1181 and 1212, but may have existed prior to the foundation of the abbey in 1177. There may be a rise in the subsoil to the west of the site (underneath a protected structure), which would have assisted the pond creation process. Local topography suggests that it was unnecessary to raise the watercourse above the ground, so it is unlikely that it was brought along a raised embankment. Linzi Simpson’s suggestion that the Abbey Stream was created shortly after 1185, in a major feat of engineering, suggests that the construction of the new watercourse had the secondary benefit of damming the Commons Water, thus controlling the supply of water down the Coombe and toward the mills situated along the Poddle downstream. These mills were outside the direct control of the abbey, yet the abbey could exercise control over the waterpower. There are no known documentary sources identifying the pond as a bone of contention, although there were extensive problems with the abbey’s perceived interference with other watercourses.

Six millstones were recovered from secondary contexts. Considering that millstones were (and indeed are) difficult to move, it is likely that there was a mill in the vicinity. Documentary sources locate a Malt Mill, first referred to in 1544, situated along the Abbey Stream. A late 17th-century reference to Joseph Thomas, a miller who leased the Double Mill at Warrenmount and the Wood Mill at Harold’s Cross, suggests that the mill, if one existed, would have been located north of the Commons Water. The millstones recovered on site, however, came from the properties south of the watercourse. They may
relate to an unknown post-medieval mill.

The route of the Commons Water formed part of the tri-yearly procession around the bounds of the city by the mayor, sheriffs, aldermen and guilds known as the Riding of the Franchises. This was a major event in the civic life of the city and is accordingly well-documented in J.T. Gilbert’s Calendar of ancient records of Dublin. The route of the procession through the monastic liberties went to arbitration in 1527. In previous years, damage was caused to the abbot’s meadow west of the pond, so the abbey petitioned for a rerouting. The court found in favour of the city, confirming the traditional route with some concessions. The mayor, bailiffs and commons were permitted to proceed provided “that they leave Waxamys gate and the whole Monastery of St. Thomas Court upon their right hand, and the aforesaid Abbot and Convent… upon a reasonable submission… to make and prepare a way over the millpond by Waxamys gate…” However, only the mayor, bailiffs, aldermen, sword bearer and macebearers could proceed across the pond and through the meadow, and only then on foot, “doing as little prejudice or hurt unto the said meadow as they can.”

This account suggests that the pond had silted up, confirmed by the 1603 account of the Riding when planks were laid down by the earl’s men for the procession to pass over the marshy ground. The Commons Water continued to flow through the valley and was brought underneath the Abbey Stream, where it then ran counter-topographically before returning to its original course down the Coombe.

Northeast of the site area stood Wycesthames Gate, the southern entrance to the abbey precinct. Peter Walsh’s suggestion that the variant names Washams, Waxhams or Whiteschams may be corruptions of withershins, meaning counter-clockwise, may relate to the two watercourses running in opposite directions at this location. The post-medieval culverted Abbey Stream was exposed and recorded on the southeast boundary of the site. To the west, four intercutting channels represent frequent episodes of flooding. A small quantity of local medieval pottery was found, and Alan Hayden, who excavated the same features to the south, also recovered several late medieval shoes from the silts.

Sealing the flood channels was an earthen bank that survived to a height of 1.14m over a distance of 5.8m. The bank may be part of a defensive system of earthworks located around the outskirts of the city and depicted on the 1655 Down Survey map. The defences have presented as negative archaeological features to the east, so the survival of a bank on Ardee Street is particularly fortuitous as the site was heavily developed from c.1680. The lack of evidence for a ditch suggests that one was considered unnecessary because of the silted-up millpond, which could have been re-flooded to improve defences. A pit located on the top of the truncated bank may have been a make-shift latrine, although there was no evidence for an associated temporary structure and the troops guarding the defences should have had a formalised latrine system in operation. Analysis of recovered remains should clarify the pit’s function.

Prior to the construction of a brewery over the millpond, small scale tanning and localised dumping occurred in the area between the bank and the silted-up pond, representing an opportunistic use of the area which was not formally developed until the 1680s. Evidence was recovered for more formalised tanning on both sides of the Commons Water. To the west, an extensive tannery was excavated. Its earlier phase constitutes a large shallow pit dug out of the silted-up pond material that was abandoned as a more formalised operation began to the north. Here, both timber and stone-lined pits were excavated, with a drain discharging into the Commons Water. If the contents of the drain were at least as malodorous as the contents of the pits, it is worth noting that the drain began at the heads of two latrines belonging to domestic properties on the Cork Street frontage to the south!

The tannery is depicted on Rocque’s map of 1756 and on a 1793 lease map by John Brownrigg. The tannery appears to have closed down early
in the 19th century. The pits were backfilled with substantial quantities of pearlware, which may indicate the concomitant clearing of a local tavern or substantial house. The truncated remains of a second tannery were located north of the Commons Water. In August 1684, this tannery was leased to John Brookes, formerly of Athy, for a period of seventy two years at an annual rent of £10.7s.

The back ends and plots of three early 18th-century houses were excavated at the southwestern corner of the site area. Evidence was also recorded for earlier structures and domestic dumping located well away from the Cork Street frontage. These houses were probably ‘Dutch Billys,’ narrow gable-fronted structures common in the area until the early 20th-century. There is evidence that rebuilding occurred on the plots twice between the early 18th century and the early 19th century, before the lots were cleared for an early 20th-century terrace of artisans’ dwellings. The 18th-century houses were unusual in having indoor latrines, discharged through the tannery into the Commons Water. A more usual solution to the problem of human waste was the provision of a dung house, or ‘ash pit’, slowly discharging the waste out into the soil through holes in the masonry or brick.

Two breweries were also investigated. The least well-preserved was situated on the northern bank of the Commons Water on the site of Brookes’ tannery and incorporating some of its fabric. The recent demolition of the brewery buildings unfortunately damaged much subsurface archaeological evidence. The brewery on the southern side of the watercourse survived in better condition. A sequence of water cisterns (with water taken directly from the Abbey Stream) and malting kilns dating from the 1680s through to the late eighteenth century were excavated, and evidence of a major mid-18th-century rebuild was recorded.

In the early 18th-century, the Dublin brew of choice was a brown ale similar to that produced by English craft breweries today. The introduction of porter from London fundamentally changed the city’s drinking habits and brought the domestic brewing industry to crisis, evident in contemporary revenue returns. In the period 1762-1773, revenue decreased by £51,463 10s.6d. per annum while English porter imports rose from 28,935 barrels to 58,675 barrels. The root of the problem lay with excise duties. Dublin brewers were obliged to source their raw materials in England at inflated prices. Price increases trickled down to the customers, who began drinking the cheaper imported porter. Publicans thus took a greater profit from the sale of porter and consequently ordered more. Favourable tariffs also meant that English brewers could sell porter cheaper in Ireland than in England and cheaper than the cost of brewing it in Dublin. The ensuing crisis led to a petition from the Brewers’ Guild to the Irish House of Commons, which established a committee of inquiry in 1773.

One of the witnesses was George Thwaite[s] who operated the brewery under discussion. He was the Master of the Corporation of Brewers and had been a Dublin brewer for 34 years. He recalled a time when there were 70 breweries in Dublin, since reduced to thirty. He alleged that a quarter of the breweries had failed over the last ten years due to the increased price of raw materials, energy (‘fire’), and labour. Rather than raise prices, brewers lessened the quality of the malt and hops, producing an inferior brew that ultimately encouraged consumers to buy cheaper imported porter. The obvious solution was for Dublin brewers to start brewing porter. According to one commentator, the first porter brewery was established in 1778. However, in 1746 George Thwaite began to donate six barrels of porter annually to the Lying-In Hospital on George’s Lane, possibly as a marketing ruse to publicise his brewery and its new product. Therefore, the brewery in Ardee Street was one of the first, if not the first, Dublin brewery to produce porter. The new phase of building in the malt house may represent this shift. Porter production soon dominated the Irish market to such an extent that by the early 19th century, the importation of English porter virtually ceased. By 1816 it was estimated that 300,000 barrels
of porter had been produced by Dublin’s 35 breweries since 1811; of these 269,000 were consumed in Dublin, 30,000 were consumed within Ireland, and 1,000 were exported.

In summary, the Ardee Street excavation uncovered the origins for the dog-leg of the city on the Coombe-Cork Street route by locating the former presence of a significant body of water. Interpreted as a mill pond or reservoir, this medieval feature probably discharged down the slope at the western end of the Coombe. Reference to the pond below St. Thomas Court notes its existence between 1181 and 1212. The post-medieval industrial development of the site echoes the archaeology of the Liberties as a whole, with both tanning and brewing represented. The recovery of a section of the defensive bank erected around the city during the Cromwellian wars adds to our understanding of the military history of the city and it is hoped that further sections of the bank will be located on other sites in the future.

Excavation of a Limekiln at Danescastle, Carrick-on-Bannow, Co. Wexford by Cóilín Ó Drisceoil

Archaeological monitoring for a sewage pipeline at Danescastle, Co. Wexford by Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd. uncovered the buried remains of a limekiln and flue that was subsequently excavated by the author in June 2004.

The section of the kiln that was investigated was semi-circular in plan and measured 3.48m by 1.02m by 1.64m D. It was lined with a clay and crushed red sandstone mix, which had baked rock-hard in the heat of the kiln. The base was partly covered with a slab of shale and partly with baked substratum. Overlying the eastern side of the base was the only ‘in-situ’ deposit within the kiln: a 0.18m deep deposit of some twenty large burnt angular stones of limestone and granite in a matrix of burnt soil, ash and culm. The deposit is a portion of the material left in the kiln after its final use. Overlying it were five deposits, three of which were secondary kiln-waste—and two that were dumps of redeposited substratum. The fills had been deposited from the east of the kiln, to judge by the tip-lines.

The flue of the kiln was of roughly triangular plan measuring 5.04m in length by 4.35m wide at its widest point and tapering to 1.35m wide at the stokehole in the north. It had a maximum depth of 1.20m. A modern sewage pipe truncated

Plan view of kiln.
the south-eastern side and a ramp of redeposited substratum gave access to the base. Much of the base of the flue was covered in a thin (20mm) deposit of ash and culm, which is probably the remains of rake-out from the kiln. Ten dumped deposits, of secondary kiln waste and redeposited substratum, filled the flue. Patches of burnt lime were most frequent in contexts. The only two artefacts recovered during the excavations were found in the flue-fills: a body-sherd of brown-glazed red earthenware (18th-19th century date) and a clay-pipe stem fragment.

In the south wall of the kiln was a stoke-hole. This was a 0.66m high by 0.63m wide by 0.51m long arched gap in the wall of the kiln, leading to the flue. The base of the stoke-hole was lined with the shale slab noted above. This would have allowed material within the interior to be drawn out smoothly through the stoke-hole. On either side of the exterior (south side) of were two vertical semi-circular niches cut into the sides of the flue. These originally held an iron bar that supported a barrier that acted to stop material collapsing from the kiln interior.

The Danescastle limekiln falls into the draw kiln variety and has been categorised as a ‘Type C – cylindrical (short) shaft kiln.’ As the name suggests, the shaft is usually cylindrical although square varieties have been recorded. A superstructure, probably of stone, was constructed over the shaft and limestone was placed inside the kiln over a grate under which fuel was burned (the grate no longer survive at Danescastle). The fuel took the form principally of culm, which Lewis records was imported from Wales via Newtown on the west side of Bannow Bay. The fuel was lit at the base and the kiln was refuelled until the lime was produced. There is a single draw-hole at the base of the kiln from which the calcined limestone was removed. The ash and associated burnt material was evidently dumped quite close to the kiln as it was reused to infill it after decommissioning.

The construction and use-life chronology of the Danescastle kiln is not readily determinable. No finds were associated with the ‘in-situ’ deposits inside the kiln and flue, and the one sherd of pottery and clay-pipe stem recovered from the dumped secondary kiln-waste deposits merely provide termini post quem of c.1700 for the layers in which they were found.

A field-boundary bank which covers the uppermost fill of the kiln 005 would provide a
terminus ante quem in the 18th century for the limekiln (it is marked on the 1841 OS map and was presumably built as a consequence of the 18th century Enclosure Acts) if it were certain the kiln was not dug into the side of the bank, as was often the case. Unfortunately it was not possible to determine whether or not this had occurred due to the limited section of the kiln available for excavation.

Likewise the morphology of the Danescastle kiln does not lend itself to easy dating. This form of limekiln is of a type that was used in Ireland from the 13th century – excavated examples include Ballymount east, Dublin, Lower Abbey Street, Sligo and Flood Street/Courthouse Lane, Galway – and it is not clear when or even if, it was replaced by the ubiquitous 18th-19th century masonry kilns.

As has been noted above, the rocks that were found at the base of the kiln were of granite and limestone. The solid-geology beneath it, however is not of limestone or granite but of the Booley Bay Formation (grey to black mudstones with siltstones) that was unsuitable for firing (GSI map sheet 23). The nearest limestone bedrock is situated 7km to the east. It seems unlikely that the raw-material was transported from such a distance and it would have been more economical to convey the finished lime from the nearest source (the first edition OS map marks fifteen limekilns on the Hook promontory alone). It is also possible that the limestone was sourced locally from demolished buildings.

The 2004-2005 IPMAG committee is comprised of chairperson Ruairí Ó Baoill, Secretary Audrey Horning, Treasurer Paul Logue, Website Manager Wes Forsythe, and members Nick Brannon, Tracy Collins, Frank Coyne, Abi Cryerhall, Richard Clutterbuck, James Lyttleton, Rosanne Meenan, and Franc Myles.

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