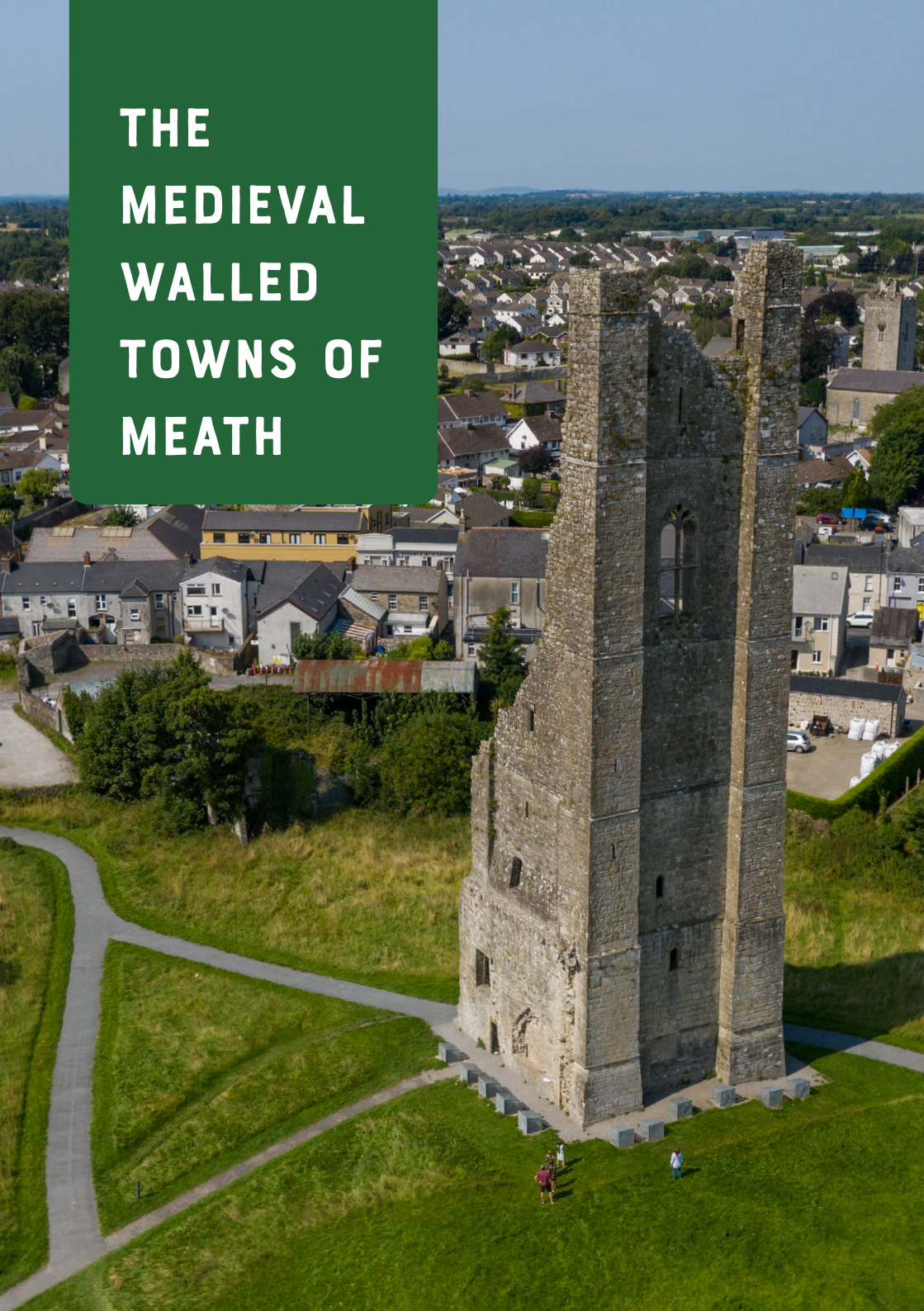
THE MEDIEVAL WALLED TOWNS OF MEATH



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Cover image: The Yellow Steeple, Trim. (Credit: Oliver Hegarty)

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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to announce the publication of *The Medieval Walled Towns of Meath*, which has been supported by the Heritage Council. The County Meath Heritage Strategy aims to identify priorities for action, establish a framework for the management of heritage at local level, and increase awareness, appreciation and enjoyment of the built, natural and cultural heritage of Meath for all. This publication supports that goal by highlighting the heritage of our medieval walled towns.

In County Meath, there are four documented medieval walled towns, all of which are affiliated with the Irish Walled Towns Network. The establishment of the Irish Walled Towns Network nearly two decades ago by the Heritage Council has been instrumental in uniting and coordinating the strategic endeavours of local authorities and community groups engaged in the management, conservation and enhancement of historic walled towns.

Meath has gained significant benefits from its membership in the Irish Walled Towns Network. These advantages encompass financial support for the formulation of Conservation Management Plans and the phased execution of conservation works. Additionally, the towns have received funding for diverse interpretative projects and events, leading to enhancements in the cultural, social and economic dimensions of the towns. Membership also includes access to training and guidance on managing and interpreting historic towns. The network provides opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and collaboration for thirty-two member towns across the island of Ireland.

This document represents a significant milestone in raising awareness of Meath's walled towns of Navan, Trim, Kells and Athboy. It encourages further exploration of their enduring historical significance and fosters a deeper understanding of their role in our medieval heritage.

Kieran Kehoe
Chief Executive, Meath County Council

WHAT IS A WALLED TOWN?

The walled towns of Meath encapsulate the story of our past, from the modern day right back to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in the 12th-century – in some cases even further.

At the end of the 12th-century, when the Anglo-Normans arrived, most Irish settlement was rural with the exception of the Viking port towns like Dublin, Waterford and Limerick. This was a time that saw unprecedented urban growth across Europe, and Ireland was no exception. The colonising lords and the king quickly began to establish manors and towns in the Irish countryside, often placing settlers from England and elsewhere as residents. Many of them were French speaking but over time English became the main spoken language and the residents identified as 'English'. In later centuries, an 'Irish' settlement sometimes sprang up close to the town that would be known as 'Irishtown'.

Medieval towns were issued charters granting them borough status. Defence was a primary concern and in many cases the town was surrounded initially by a large ditch and earthen bank with a wooden palisade on top. As time went on, murage grants were sought from the king. These allowed the townspeople to collect tolls or taxes from those entering the town to pay for the construction and maintenance of large stone walls. Toll agents were usually based at the gates of which there were rarely more than four. As well as gate houses, the wall circuit could be punctuated by towers where lookouts and archers would be posted.

Town walls were an impressive display of wealth and power, while also forming a distinct boundary between the town 'within' and everything else 'without'. Part of the security it provided was not just military, but an economic security that came from a protected market place and an easy method of collecting tolls. The most important function of walled towns was as a market centre for trading goods from the town and its agricultural hinterland.

The kind of trades recorded both in historical records and archaeological evidence include brewing, woodworking, shoemaking, smithing, tanning and pottery making. Both locally made pottery and vessels from elsewhere in Ireland and abroad have been found in excavations, giving us clues as to the extent of the trade network at the time.

Trim Castle and the River Boyne (Credit: Alan Russell)

Meath's medieval towns received permission to hold fairs and markets. The larger annual fairs took place outside the walls and markets were held weekly in an open area within the town. The fairs would have been attended by merchants from further afield, even overseas, selling luxury goods like spices, wine and fine cloth.

Most buildings within the town would have been built of wood with stone reserved for higher status buildings such as the lord's residence or castle, the parish church and the one or more religious houses usually located just outside the town gates. Parish churches were generally located in a corner of the walled circuit, and sometimes the wall circuit took a slight detour to enclose an older church and graveyard that predated the foundation of the town.

The head of each household within the town was known as a burgess and the piece of property they were granted was known as a burgage plot. These plots were long and narrow with a house at the front, facing onto the street, and a long back garden that might contain outhouses, workshops and animal pens. In some towns, the pattern of burgage plots can still be traced in property boundaries.

Town walls bore the brunt of many attacks over the centuries but it was the age of gunpowder and cannon and a prohibition on the fortification of Irish towns in 1700 that saw the beginning of the end of medieval town walls. From then they began to suffer from neglect and even demolition to make way for new developments.

Today our walled towns are recognised as important national heritage assets. They provide a connection between the current communities and the townspeople of the past, while shaping the current and future form and fabric of our modern towns. When effectively conserved, managed and promoted, surviving walls or their former circuits contribute to a unique sense of place, belonging and identity. They are an important long-term source of civic pride and a focus for tourism and cultural and economic development. Conservation and management of historic walls contributes to an enhanced quality of life and wellbeing for residents and visitors alike, so they should be treasured long into the future.

WHERE ARE MEATH'S WALLED TOWNS?

There are four medieval walled towns recorded in County Meath all of which are members of the Irish Walled Towns Network. Some of these have survived to be busy urban centres today, such as Navan and Trim, while Athboy was destined for a more modest existence. There are many possible reasons for this including the continued importance of the route on which they were located and the impacts of the Black Death or the changing fates of their overlords.

In the wake of the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland, Henry II of England granted the former Gaelic kingdom of Mide to one of his barons, Hugh de Lacy, making it the lordship of Meath. De Lacy was a powerful knight from the border region of England and Wales, known as the Welsh Marches. The king was wary of the growing power of one of his other knights, Richard de Clare (also known as Strongbow) in Leinster, and it is likely that Hugh was granted the vast area of Meath (which included present-day Meath and Westmeath as well as parts of Offaly and Longford) to counter de Clare's power.

Meath's walled towns owe their existence directly to de Lacy and his descendants. Kells was already an important monastic centre, but the others were relatively small settlements prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. In the case of Trim and Kells, Hugh kept the towns as manors for himself, or in the case of Athboy and Navan, granted them to loyal knights. The other major factor influencing the growth of Meath's walled towns was the river Boyne; Trim and Navan were built directly on the banks of the river, while Kells and Athboy were located on nearby trade routes. De Lacy also established a town and port at Drogheda at the mouth of the Boyne, which gave access to and from ports in western England and northern France. The Gaelic Irish made occasional raids into the region, and these walled towns provided a network of secure positions for Anglo-Norman control in Meath, especially in the 15th century when English control shrank to an area known as the Pale, comprising Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth.

Map of Walled Towns in County Meath

Reconstruction illustration of medieval Trim by Kevin O'Brien

TRIM

EARLY MEDIEVAL TRIM

The town of Trim has its origins in the early medieval period and its name comes from its location on a ford of the river Boyne, Baile Átha Troim ('town at the ford of the elder tree). According to the 'Book of Armagh', Trim was the site of a monastery founded by St Lomán, supposedly a nephew of St Patrick, in AD 432. Lomán was given the site by a local chief called Fedelmid, indicating there was a secular settlement before the ecclesiastical one. The location of this early monastery was debated until archaeological excavations on the present-day Loman Street and Church Lane, near the later medieval church (and now cathedral) of St Patrick, discovered human remains that were dated to the mid to late first millennium AD. This confirms the early monastery was on the northern banks of the Boyne. The curving layout of Haggard Street today may reflect the characteristic boundary of monastic enclosures.

The monastery at Trim does not seem to have been a particularly important one when compared to nearby sites such as Clonard, Duleek, Ardbraccan and others in the pre-Norman period. A secular settlement grew on the south side of the river, traces of which were discovered when the later Norman castle was excavated. Excavations in advance of the new road, Finnegan's Way, uncovered evidence for houses dating to the 12th-century, predating the arrival of the Anglo Normans.

Aerial view of Trim Castle (Credit: Oliver Hegarty)

TRIM CASTLE

The impressive ruins of Trim Castle are the most immediate and striking remains of Hugh de Lacy's impact on Trim and Meath, but it is not the first castle he built. According to "The Song of Dermot and the Earl", Hugh fortified a house in Trim, which may suggest that he strengthened an existing Gaelic dún (fort). This wooden ringwork castle was attacked and burned by Gaelic forces under the high king Ruaidri Ua Conchobhair while Hugh was absent, but de Lacy quickly repaired it, before replacing it with the current stone one. He was no stranger to the use of castles to control areas of land; he already owned seven castles when he arrived in Ireland and he built many castles of various size around Meath and Ireland to help secure Anglo-Norman rule. These castles protected not only against Gaelic raids but also rebellious knights and barons.

The first phase of the stone castle was built between 1175 and 1180, according to timber putlogs (remains of medieval scaffolding) that were recovered from walls and dated using dendrochronology. Archaeological excavations showed how the new stone castle was built on the site of the earlier ringwork castle. It had a large three storey keep, with a somewhat unusual cruciform plan that gave it twenty sides. Two further phases of construction from the 1190s to c.1200 were initiated by Hugh's son Walter de Lacy, who inherited Meath after Hugh was killed at the building site of another castle in Durrow,

in 1186. Walter increased the internal heights and tower heights, as well as constructing the curtain walls, barbican gate and mural towers.

Walter remained loyal to King Richard during the rebellion of Prince John, which led to tensions when John succeeded Richard as king. John, who came to Ireland in 1210, stayed at Trim from 2-3 July, encamped outside the castle. Walter was eventually reconciled to the king, but when he died in 1241, he had been predeceased by his only son, Gilbert. The lordship of Meath was divided between his two granddaughters, Margaret and Matilda (also known as Maud). Matilda inherited the part of Meath that included Trim and its castle, and this also passed to her second husband, Geoffrey de Geneville. Geoffrey was a French knight from Champagne, who had first come to England in 1247 with Peter of Savoy, uncle of Eleanor of Provence, wife of Henry III of England. Geoffrey and Matilda added a more comfortable great hall in the grounds of Trim Castle, to the northeast of the original stone keep.

Trim Castle (Credit: Oliver Hegarty)

The Yellow Steeple overlooking the medieval town (Credit: Finola O'Carroll)

Trim Castle is the largest Anglo-Norman castle in Ireland, an imposing symbol of the power of the Anglo-Normans. While the castle is the largest and most visible part of medieval Trim, the town still boasts many impressive ruins including a parish church, monasteries and surviving sections of the town wall. The town developed on both banks of the river, with the ford and later a bridge linking the two sides.

ST MARY'S ABBEY

On the opposite bank of the river from the castle stand the ruins of St Mary's Abbey. This Augustinian foundation may have been established by St Malachy in the 1140s, and likely refounded by Hugh de Lacy in c.1180. The abbey grew in wealth, in particular as a site of pilgrimage in the 14th-century as it was home to a miraculous statue, the Blessed Virgin Mary of Trim. Various statutes were issued in the 1400s to protect both English and Gaelic pilgrims visiting the shrine. The abbey was damaged in a fire in 1368 and when rebuilt, an impressive new 38.5 metres belltower was added, the tallest structure in medieval Ireland. This is now known as the Yellow Steeple, possibly due to its colour at sunset.

When the abbey was dissolved in 1539 the buildings were divided up into private houses. The southern range was dismantled and rebuilt as what is now known as Talbot's Castle, but the other buildings no longer survive. The statue of Our Lady of Trim appears to have been burned around this time. In 1584 the parson of Trim suggested that a university could be established in these former buildings, or one of the other former friaries.

TRIM BRIDGE

Trim's location at a ford of the Boyne, and at the highest point upriver that was navigable, gave the town its importance. A bridge is recorded as early as 1194 but this structure was destroyed in the great floods that occurred in the winter of 1330. The current stone bridge, with four pointed arches, was built to replace it soon after in the mid-14th century. It has only received some minor alterations since then, and it is likely to be the oldest medieval bridge in Ireland still in operation.

Trim Bridge (Credit: Gail Connaughton)

ST PATRICK'S CHURCH

The present St Patrick's Church of Ireland church was built in 1802 on the site of the medieval parish church, the chancel of which survives as a ruin immediately east of the modern church. The bell tower is also medieval, and impressive memorial slabs and a stone font can be found in the church. It became a cathedral in 1955.

THE BLACKFRIARY

A Dominican friary was founded to the north of the town by Geoffrey de Geneville in 1263. The location allowed the Order of Preachers to minister both to the townspeople and to those of the countryside. The Blackfriary Archaeology Field School has been carrying out excavations of this site since 2010. They have uncovered an extensive site, consisting of a large church and

monastic ranges, richly decorated with stained and painted glass, slate roofs and expensive Purbeck marble cloister columns, arches and silstone, imported from Purbeck in Dorset. An extensive burial ground in and around the church has also been uncovered. The friary was the location of parliaments held in 1446 and 1491, before it was dissolved in 1540.

FRANCISCAN FRIARY

A Franciscan friary was also founded in the town c.1260, at the east end of Market Street, between the castle and the bridge. It was damaged in 1330 in the same floods that destroyed the nearby bridge. The later courthouse was built on the site, although excavations around Castle Street have identified the burial ground of the friary. Stone faces built into the gable walls of the Boyne Cottages are likely to have come from the friary too.

TOWN WALLS

Trim received its first murage grant under Geoffrey de Geneville in 1289/90 for seven years for enclosing 'the vil and the greater security of Ireland'. This may have been a bank and ditch, the first murage grant to mention a stone wall being issued to de Geneville's grandson-in-law, Roger Mortimer, in 1308. Like de Lacy, Mortimer was a powerful Marcher lord and would become infamous for plotting with Queen Isabella of France to usurp her extremely unpopular husband, Edward II of England. Further grants were issued in 1315/16,1393 and 1417. As English control contracted around the Pale, Trim became a frontier town. Tolls were collected in Athboy, Skreen and Navan for the defences of Trim. The walls were again required during the turbulent wars of the 17th-century; in the wars of the 1640s the town changed hands three times, and the Yellow Steeple was partially knocked at this time. In 1689 the town's inhabitants were ordered to work for six days to repair the walls.

Trim's walls are bisected by the river and may be traced along several sections, while street names indicate the name and position of the gates: Navan Gate, Athboy Gate, Water Gate and Dublin Gate. One gate survives, the Sheep Gate, which is located on the north bank of the river, along the eastern line of the town wall. This building consists of a stone archway leading from the lands of St Mary's Abbey into the large area of commonage known as the Porchfields. The town wall survives as a low stone wall c.2 metres in height running northwards to where it meets Navan Gate, which has been identified in archaeological investigations. Crossing the Navan Road the path becomes less clear due to modern developments, but a

probable northern town boundary has been investigated at the Blackfriary, along its southern boundary with the town. This consisted of a wide ditch and possible postern gate leading to the friary church.

From the Blackfriary the wall turns southwest towards Athboy Gate, also identified through excavation, and then south towards the river. Sections of this wall survive, including as a boundary with St Patrick's National School. It is possible that an earlier and smaller phase of the walls only went north a bit beyond Navan Gate before turning west immediately and turning south at the church.

On the south bank of the river the wall begins again at the site of the Water Gate, which may be the stone wall that can be seen along the east side of Watergate Street. Remains of the gate's lower courses were found across the road on the west side during archaeological monitoring of pipe-laying. Photos show this gate survived into the late 19th-century. The wall then continues southwest, now only reflected in property outlines, but it reappears in stone form as the western boundary of burgage plots that run from Watergate Street and Emmet Street. Much of this section is either overgrown, damaged or removed, although the lower courses of a mural tower at the northwest corner can be seen, while the first edition Ordnance Survey map shows a similar tower, now gone, at the southwest corner. A section of the wall at the southwest has been conserved and is visible in a new sensory garden.

The southern circuit of the wall formed the boundary of what is now a hardware shop before crossing the road at Dublin Gate and under what is now a pub.

The Sheep Gate (Credit: Alan Russell)

It remerges for an impressive section at the Finnegan's Way carpark, c.35 metres in length and over 4 metres in height in places. From there it ran east through the cottages of Castle Street to the moat that ran outside the curtain walls of the castle.

The town walls of Trim cover an area of 23 hectares with a circuit of 1,775 metres. This is the maximum extent of the walls, and there may have been smaller walled areas that later expanded to this. Excavations on Market Street and just off Emmet Street identified a ditch from the early Norman period running north-south, which may be an earlier and smaller settlement on the southern bank.

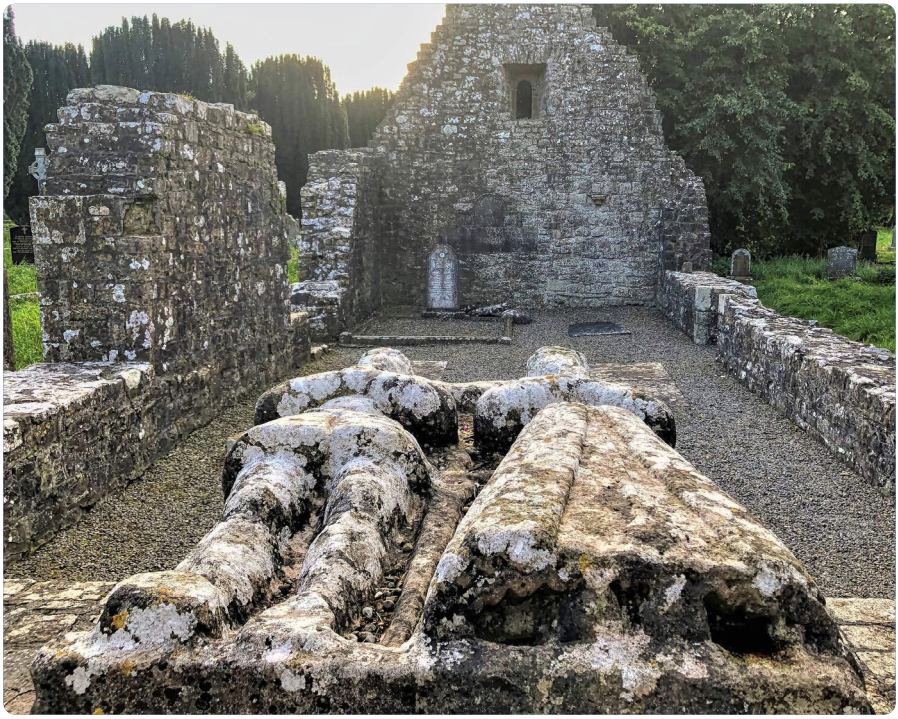
BEYOND THE WALLS

To the east of Trim on the northern bank of the river is the Porchfields. The Sheep Gate gave entrance to this extensive commonage and a sunken trackway, still faintly visible, runs eastwards through the Porchfields until it meets the boundary of the nearby borough of Newtown Trim. As the name suggests this was a new settlement that was established in 1202 by Simon de Rochford, the first Anglo-Norman bishop of Meath. He moved the diocesan see from the old monastery of St Finian at Clonard in the west of Meath, where it had come under Gaelic attack, to his new town east of Trim, in the heart of Anglo-Norman power. An Augustinian priory, following the Victorine rule, was founded in 1206 and its church, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, acted as a cathedral, although never officially. Within the same settlement one finds the small parish church of Newtown Clonbun, with its impressive effigy tomb of Sir Lucas Dillon (1530–1593) and his wife Lady Jane Bathe, of Athcarne and Drunmconrath.

On the south side of the river, across St Peter's Bridge, another priory was founded, possibly also by de Rochford before his death in 1224. This Priory of St John the Baptist was run by Crutched Friars (Fratres Cruciferi), who took their name from the crosses on their robes, and they provided a hospital for travellers and the sick and poor.

To the south of Trim another hospital was established, dedicated to Mary Magdalene. It was owned by the Knights of St John (the Hospitallers) of Kilmainham in the 1300s but passed to the Franciscans in Trim. Now only a small church remains, on the Dublin Road leaving Trim.

It was to the south of Trim that much of the postmedieval development of Trim took place, with a modern Catholic church, jail, schools, workhouse and barracks all built beyond the medieval confines of the town. The spire of St. Patrick's Catholic church dominates the skyline of this area, alongside the Corinthian column built in 1817 and surmounted by a statue of the Anglo-Irish general and statesman Arthur Wellesley, 1st Duke of Wellington. He had grown up in nearby Dangan Castle and was elected an MP for Trim. The column commemorates his command of the allied army that defeated Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo in 1815. Trim continued as a busy market town through the 19th and into the 20th centuries, but to this day retains much of its medieval character.



Effigy of Sir Lucas Dillon and Lady Jane Bathe, also known as the tomb of the jealous man and woman (Credit: Gail Connaughton)

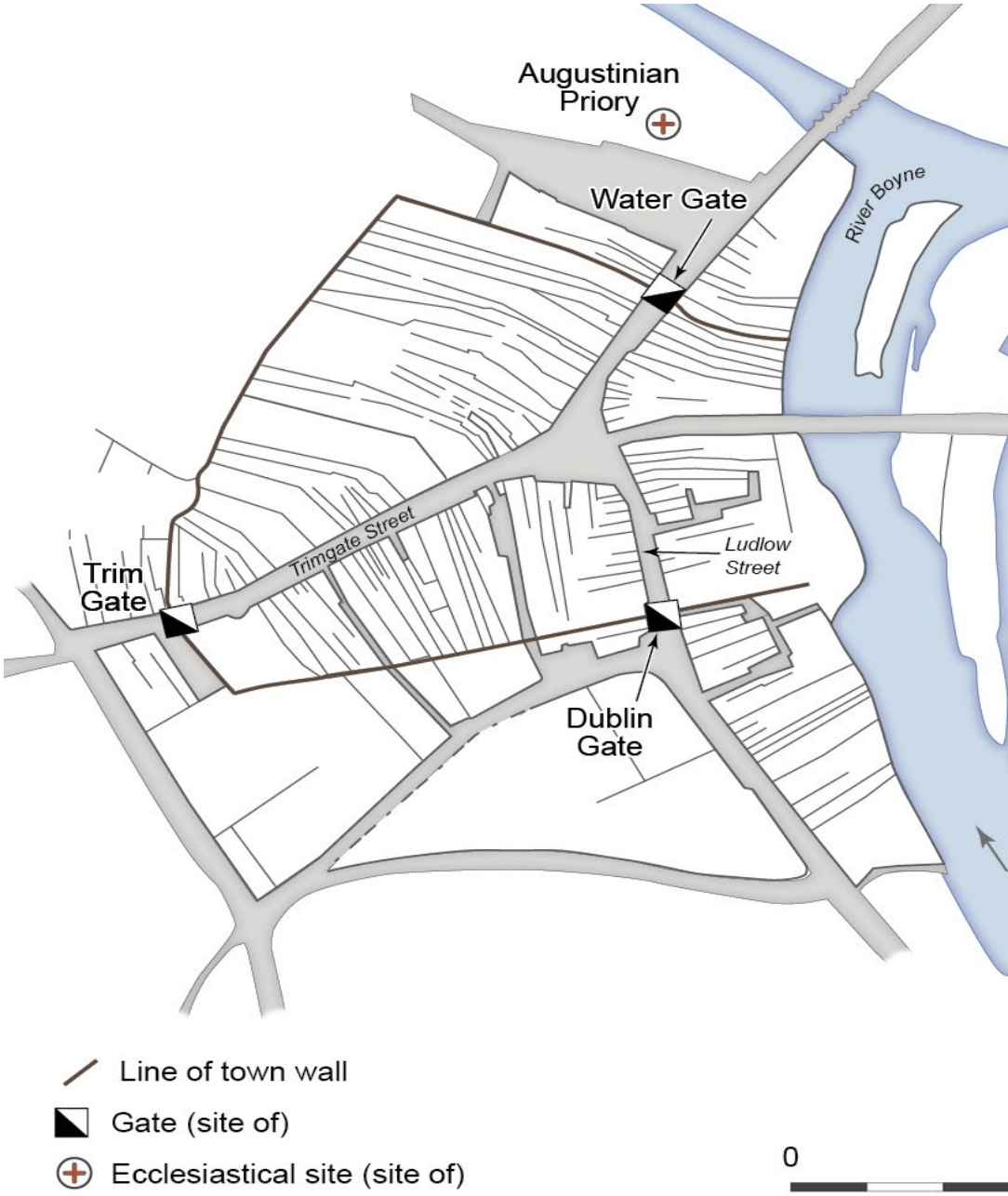


Illustration of Navan Town Wall

NAVAN

The town of Navan is situated at the confluence of the River Boyne and its main tributary, the River Blackwater. To the east of Navan, in the townland of Alexander Reid, evidence of settlement activity has been uncovered, including early Iron Age activity (700BC-400BC), as well as a multi-phased early medieval ringfort which was in use from the 5th century to the 8th century.

While the town is predominantly an Anglo-Norman settlement, evidence exists for the occupation and use of the area in the preceding centuries. Ardbraccan, an important monastic site 4 kilometres west of Navan, was founded in the 7th-century, while other monastic sites can be found close by along the Boyne, upriver at Ardsallagh, and downriver at Donaghmore.

The origins for the Irish name for Navan, An Uaimh, remains obscure. Commonly translated as 'the Cave', it has also been suggested it comes from Nuachongbhail, the 'New Holding' or na h-aibhne, 'the Rivers'.

EARLY MEDIEVAL NAVAN

Archaeological evidence of early medieval Navan was uncovered when the IDA Business Park was built on the eastern bank of the Boyne, on a high ridge overlooking the river. Souterrains, settlements and burial grounds were discovered, and demonstrate the importance of the river for fishing, trade and movement. Further archaeological investigations to the west of Navan, in the townland of Moathill, detected further early-medieval settlements which predate the later Anglo-Norman motte that was built there, giving the townland its name.

The existence of numerous rich monasteries along the Boyne and Blackwater unsurprisingly attracted the attention of Viking raiders when they arrived in Ireland. An interesting burial was discovered in the 19th-century by workmen building the eastern part of the railway bridge crossing the river at Athlumney. The remains of one to three humans, alongside Viking-style artefacts of the 8th/9th-century and a horse skull were unearthed. This suggests a possible Viking camp that would have been used while raiding and trading with the locals. Earthworks detected in the vicinity of a later motte at Athlumney may be the remains of a Viking longphort (defended settlement) or larger dún (fort).

NAVAN UNDER THE ANGLO-NORMANS

The Anglo-Norman town of Navan was founded by one of Hugh de Lacy's barons, Jocelin de Angulo, or his son Philip de Augulo, who was confirmed in its ownership by King John in 1215. Mottes were built to defend a ford over the Blackwater at Moathill, and another at the ford over the Boyne at Athlumney. The motte at Athlumney was not part of de Angelo land, it was part of the barony of Skreen that was given to the de Feipo family. The de Angelos chose to site their main castle at nearby Ardsallagh rather than in the town centre.

ST MARY'S ABBEY

St Mary's Abbey was founded before the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland, but its precise date remains unclear. it has been suggested that it was the site of an earlier monastery founded by St Féchín of Fore in the 7th-century, but some have claimed that the monastery mentioned was located in present-day Westmeath. An abbey did exist in Navan in 1169 as Tigernán Ua Ruairc, King Of Bréifne, granted lands to the abbey of Navan in that year. It may have been reestablished when the Anglo-Normans arrived, as an Augustinian foundation, following the Arrouaisian rule. The abbey was located north of the town, between it and the south bank of the Blackwater. However, its land stretched out on both sides of the river, and over the centuries more land was donated to the monks. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539-40 the abbey and its 700 acres of land passed into private ownership. The buildings decayed and the abbey was later converted into a cavalry barracks in the 18th-century, then a school in the 20th-century, before finally being demolished when the Inner Relief Road was built through the town in the 1970s.

Possible town wall in churchyard of St Mary's Catholic church (Credit: Clare Ryan)

Traces of the abbey still survive, however. An early Romanesque-style font, possibly from the pre-Anglo-Norman abbey, is located in the oratory of St Patrick's Classical School, while a later 15th-century font can be found in the present St Mary's Church of Ireland church in the town. Architectural fragments of the abbey discovered during building work are now decorative features in the Millenium Garden of the nearby St Mary's Catholic church. The Apostle's Stone, a 14th/15th-century, coffin-shaped block of sandstone with carved figures that give it its name, is now at St Erc's Hermitage, in the grounds of the Slane Castle estate. The top of the tomb, identified as the carved effigy of Abbot John Bole, is set into the courtyard wall of Slane Castle. The tomb was rescued from destruction at the hands of the soldiers in the Navan barracks in the late 18th-century by Reverend Mervyn Archdall (Rector of Slane) and antiquarian William Burton Conyngham of Slane Castle.

THE TOWN WALLS OF NAVAN

The layout of medieval Navan is similar to that of other Anglo-Norman towns such as Fethard or Thurles in County Tipperary, with long streets meeting in a Y-shape to form a market square. The presence of the town walls and gates is evidenced in the names of the medieval streets: Trimgate Street to the southwest of Market Square, Watergate Street to the northeast, and

Dublingate Street (now Ludlow Street) to the south of the square. A fragment of the Market Cross of Navan, bearing the arms of the de Augulo (or Nangle) family, was later discovered in the wall of a house and is now on display in Navan's Solstice Arts Centre. The town still retains several medieval laneways, with names such as Bakery Lane and Old Cornmarket pointing to their original functions. In a lane off Dublingate Street a well known as Tubberorum provided water for the townspeople.

With no large castle in the centre of Navan, secure town defences would have been important to the town. The earliest defences were earthen banks and ditches, traces of which were detected by archaeological testing during building work in and around Navan Shopping Centre and its associated carparks at Abbey Road. These would have formed the northern corner of the town defences. The line of the town walls (whether ditches or later stone walls) can be seen in aerial photos, with many of the house plots and their long gardens reflecting the medieval burgage plots that ran from the street back to the town walls. The area enclosed came to about 10 hectares.

Navan was granted its first charter by Edward IV in 1462, and it was around this time that stone walls began to be built. The earliest recorded murage grant can be dated to 1469-70, but evidence suggests earlier grants were being collected between the 1420s and 1460s. As a frontier town of the Pale, Navan was vulnerable to Gaelic attack, as happened in 1539 when Con Bacach O'Neill, Lord of Tyrone, and Manus O'Donnell, Lord of Tír Conaill, attacked Navan and left the town 'not walled nor defensible'. This resulted in a 1543 Act that was passed, which imposed a tax on every ploughland in the whole of Meath for four years to rebuild the walls of Navan.

As the centuries progressed the need for stone walled defences lessened. Yet they remained useful for town authorities, in particular for the collection of tolls on marketgoers. In 1746 repairs were ordered for part of the town wall that had fallen into disrepair off Watergate Street, and in 1796 the western part of the town wall at Trimgate was repaired, and possibly moved further west from its original location. The two other town gates were also widened by local merchants around this time to allow for better traffic flow; John Fay, a Catholic miller, paid for the widening of Dublingate by 3 metres in 1786, while John Cusack paid for the widening of Watergate by 2 metres in 1788. Both men were subsequently exempted from tolls in recognition of their work.

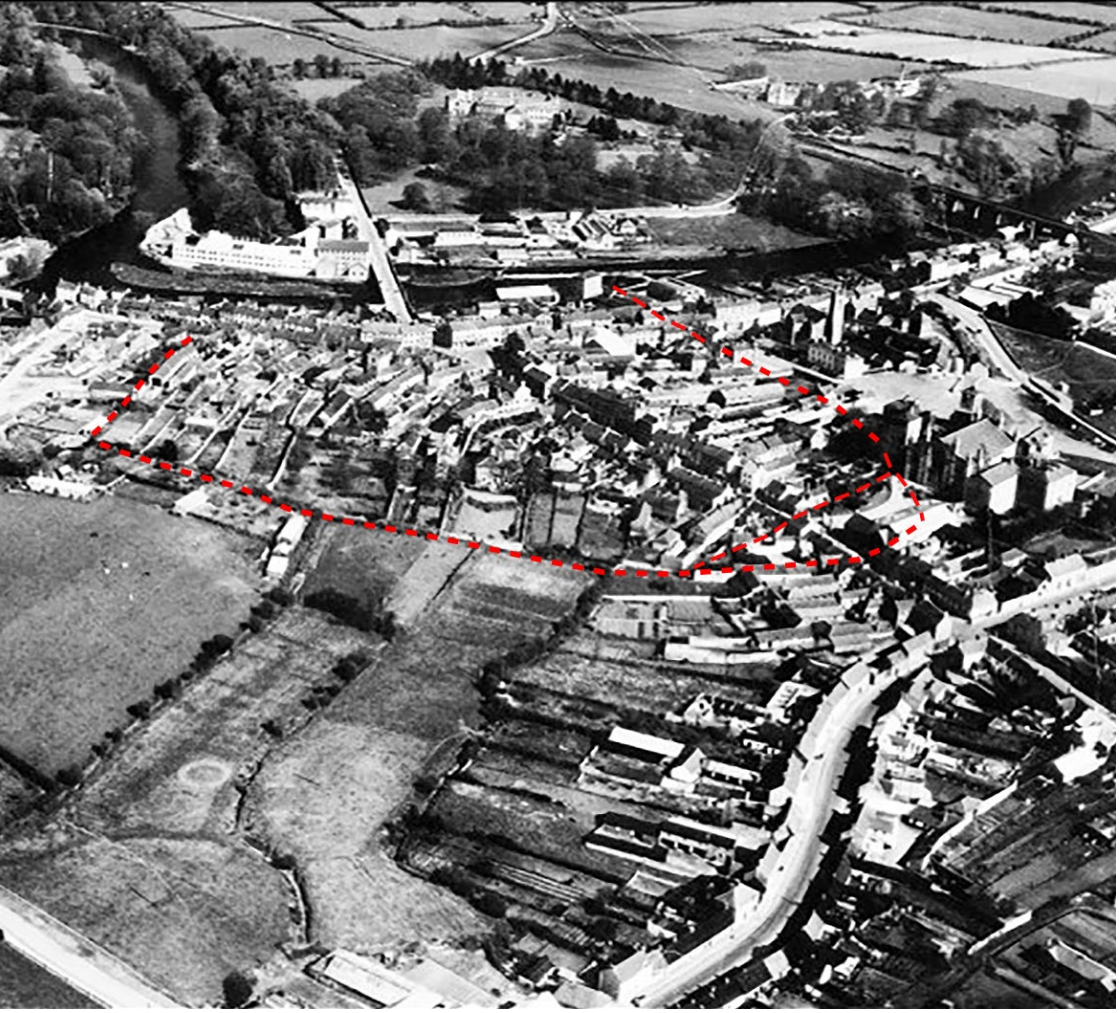
The town may have had a riverside wall but its location is unclear, if it ever existed. The land from Market Square slopes steadily down to the river at

Navan's medieval town wall (Credit: Morgan Flanagan)

Watergate Street and at Ludlow Street. Traces of a possible riverine wall were detected during excavations on the later Timmons Hill Street, set back from the riverbank. The southern wall that bounded the town and included Dublingate may be traced through the buildings and boundary walls that still exist in the town today. Monitoring of various building projects has shown the existence of this wall, with 13th- and 14th- century pottery confirming its origin in the earliest phases of the town defences. To the south of the wall was the Fair Green.

A large stone wall can be seen inside MacDermott's Bakery and this continues through the garden of the parochial house and into the churchyard of St Mary's Catholic church. Here it curves northwards, and this may be the original western line of the medieval wall before it was extended in 1796. This extension was made as far as what is now Ryan's Public House, as attested by a carved plaque on the wall. The stone wall may also be viewed inside the pub, behind the bar.

Unfortunately, the town wall north of Trimgate Street has now been largely lost to modern developments, in particular the construction of the shopping centre, on Kennedy Road and various carparks. Small traces of the early



An image of Navan in the 1950s. The red line marks the possible location of the medieval town walls. (Credit: Navan & District Historical Society)

ditches were discovered at Kennedy Plaza, similar to those found at Abbey Road. The clearest and most impressive surviving section of Navan's town walls can be found at its northeastern side. A 15-metre section of the town wall with an attached bastion can be found in what is currently the Navan Municipal District council yard. Both are 5.5 metres in height; the bastion may originally have been taller and therefore a mural tower. The monument has recently been conserved, thanks to the efforts of Navan and District Historical Society and Meath County Council and funding from the Community Monuments Fund (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage).

POST-MEDIEVAL NAVAN

Until the modern period Navan remained a modest-sized market town, with a layout that had largely unchanged since the medieval period. However, the town walls did not completely restrict development: Canon Row developed during the medieval period as a street outside the walls and further settlement took place across the river at Flower Hill, aided by the construction of Poolboy Bridge in the 1300s. 'New Bridge' was built in the 18th-century, linking Navan to Athlumney and this was followed by the canal that ran parallel to the river down to Drogheda in 1789. The river provided the means for growth, with the various medieval mills being replaced by newer timber and corn mills that spurred on Navan's development as an industrial town in the 19th and 20th century centuries. This was further aided by the coming of the railways to Navan in 1850, linking the town to both Dublin and Drogheda. The poor condition of dwelling houses within the medieval core of Navan promoted the building of modern social housing at the start of the 20th century, located outside the constricted space of the town centre. Navan is now a busy modern town, but the layout and street names clearly point to its medieval origins.

Aerial view of Kells (Credit: Oliver Hegarty)

KELLS

PREHISTORIC ORIGINS

Kells is located is in north Meath, close to the river Blackwater that flows southeast to join the Boyne at Navan. While the town is best known for its early medieval monastery, there are obvious signs of its prehistoric importance in the area. Near to Kells is the Hill of Lloyd, which offers commanding views of the plains of Meath to the south and the uplands of Cavan and Ulster to the north. The hill was the site of an important prehistoric settlement; recent geophysical surveys show a massive hillfort of concentric ditches ringing the summit of the hill. It is mentioned in Ireland's great epic, 'the Táin Bó Cúailnge', where the story recounts how Queen Medbh and her army camped on the hill of Mullach Aiti during their march to Ulster.

EARLY MEDIEVAL KELLS, 'THE SPLENDOUR OF IRELAND'

The name of Kells was originally recorded in the late 7th-century as Cenannus, which derives from the Irish for 'white-headed'. In the 6th-century high king Diarmait Mac Cerbaill had his dún (fort) at Kells and he is recorded as having met with St Colmcille (Columba). The actual donation to the Columban monks came in the early 9th-century after their main monastery of Iona came under Viking attack. A new church was completed in Kells in A.D. 814. The monastery grew quickly in importance and was referred to as Áinius Érenn,

Round Tower & High Cross, Kells. (Credit: Fáilte Ireland)

'the splendour of Ireland'. By the mid-10th-century Kells had replaced Iona as the centre of the Columban network.

The Book of Kells dates to the 8th/9th-century and is arguably the greatest illuminated manuscript from early medieval Ireland. It was likely begun in Iona and completed in Kells, where an important scriptorium produced many holy texts. The monastery was built on the summit of high ground at Kells, with a round tower dominating the view. Three elaborately carved high crosses and the remains of a fourth can be found in the modern churchyard. The sole remaining building of the monastery is a stone oratory, which can be found just north of the churchyard and is commonly known as St Colmcille's House. Markets were held outside the east end of the monastery, marked by the Market Cross that stood at the intersection of Market Street, Castle Street, Cross Street and John Street.

The layout of the monastery can still be traced in the street plan of Kells. The walls of the modern Church of Ireland churchyard reflect the inner enclosure, or sanctum, of the monastery while the curving line of Carrick Street, Castle Street and Cross Street reflect the outer enclosure. The western and southern side of the outer enclosure likely ran along the later medieval walls behind Cannon Street and to the east of the Fair Green.

The wealth of Kells drew the attention of Viking raiders when they arrived in Ireland. Sailing up the Boyne and Blackwater, they attacked Kells numerous times in the 10th-century; the most devastating attack came in 951 when it was said that 3,000 captives were taken from Kells and the surrounding area.

Important church reforms took place in Ireland in the 12th-century, and after the Synod of Rathbrassil in 1111 Kells became the see of the new Diocese of Bréifne. The old Celtic monasticism gave way to this new diocesan structure, with no new abbots of the Columban monastery appointed after 1154. New monastic orders were arriving from Europe; in the 1140s an Augustinian abbey of St Mary was established in Kells, to the south of the town in the area now known as the Frontlands. Nothing remains of this building.

ANGLO-NORMAN KELLS

The arrival of the Anglo-Normans had a significant impact on Kells. The Diocese of Bréifne was pushed further north and the Church of St Colmcille became a simple parish church. All that remains of the medieval church is a later bell tower, to the north of the modern church. Kells became a frontier town of the lordship of Meath and its first lord, Hugh de Lacy, built a motte and bailey castle there in 1176. As at Trim, it was quickly attacked and destroyed by Irish raiders but rebuilt soon after. This castle was itself replaced by a later tower house. The tower house, located on Castle Street, also acted as a tholsel (market house) until it was demolished in the early 19th century.

When Hugh was succeeded by his son Walter, Kells was granted borough status. Following the same pattern elsewhere, Hugh had reestablished the Augustinian abbey, allowing Hugh and his successors to import loyal English or French monks to replace native men. In 1189 Walter de Lacy founded another abbey, the Priory of the Crutched Friars of St John the Baptist, to the east of Kells on the road to Navan. Only a small graveyard now remains. In 1204 King John I granted Kells the right to hold annual fairs.

After the death of Walter de Lacy, his lordship was divided between his granddaughters and their husbands. Most of Kells passed to Margaret de Lacy and John de Verdon. During the following centuries Kells came under attack from Gaelic raiders. When Edward Bruce was sent to Ireland by his brother Robert I of Scotland to open a new front against his English enemies, Edward led an army down through Ulster and defeated Roger Mortimer, Lord of Trim, at the Battle of Kells in 1315.

Conservation works taking place at the mural tower of Kells town walls (Credit: Meath County Council)

THE WALLS OF KELLS

Given the turbulent events of the early 14th-century, it is unsurprising that the first known murage grant for walling the town is recorded in 1326. It is possible that it was walled even earlier than this date, given its frontier location and the fact that nearby Trim received its first murage grant in 1290. Another grant was issued in 1388, to last for twenty years. Repairs were carried out at various points in the 1400s due to its position as a key border town in the area of English control known as the Pale.

The medieval walls of Kells follow the same shape, if not the exact same footprint, as the enclosure of the earlier monastic town. Five gates allowed entry to the town: Cannon Gate, Carrick Gate, Maudlin Gate, Dublin Gate and Trim Gate. The western walls reflected the location of the earlier enclosure,

George Victor du Noyer's view of 1865 showing the mural tower and town wall with the spire and round tower from the monastic site in the background

running along what is now the Fair Green area. Moving northwards, the walls extended to the back of the burgage plots that were laid down on the north side of Carrick Street, running eastwards to Maudlin Street. The line of the walls may be seen in the present-day back walls of the Carrick Street properties.

The northeastern line of the walls is more difficult to detect due to later developments, but long walls running north-south in the grounds of the Meath County Council carpark may be linked to the eastern wall that ran down to Dublin Gate. A more definite medieval boundary can be seen in the southeastern section of the circuit, now known as the Backlands, where an earthen bank, occasionally stone-faced, runs for c.250 metres at the back of properties along Kenlis Place and Farrel Street, before it reaches the site of Trim Gate.

The one remaining section of the medieval walls of Kells can be found at the back of the properties on the south side of Cannon Street. Around 200 metres of stone wall may be seen, albeit with various rebuilds and modern in-fills at points along it. The wall is up to 4 metres in height and contains an impressive mural tower which rises to almost 8 metres in height, complete with a parapet and arrow loop. This tower has recently been conserved. Overall, the circuit of the walls came to 1.6 kilometres , covering an area of roughly 21 hectares.

MODERN KELLS

The medieval town walls were still in use into the 17th-century. Kells was attacked in 1647 during the Irish Confederate Wars, when Catholic troops were 'sent in over the walls' and the government forces were defeated and captured. In 1654, during the Cromwellian resettlement of land, Kells was awarded to Lieutenant Colonel Richard Stephens, who later sold the town to Thomas Taylor, who had come to Ireland to work on the Down Survey with William Petty. The Taylor family remained as resident landlords in Kells for over two centuries, firstly at a townhouse in Headfort Place and later at the stately mansion Headfort House, to the east of the town.

The Taylors modernised Kells during the 18th-century, introducing fashionable Georgian architecture, as seen at Headfort Place in the east of the town. A new courthouse designed by noted architect Francis Johnston was also built there, while the impressive inland lighthouse known as the Spire of Lloyd was erected by Thomas Taylour,1st Earl of Bective, in memory of his father (also Sir Thomas Taylor) in 1791.

Many changes came to Kells during the 19th and 20th centuries, and traces of medieval Kells have survived to this day. The most visible of these are the round tower, St Colmcille's House, the magnificent high crosses and bell tower in the churchyard, and the Market Cross (now relocated to the Courthouse). While the town walls of Kells are not that obvious, they still exist in the pattern of old property boundaries, as well as the substantial bank in the southeast, and the stone walls and imposing mural tower behind Cannon Street.

Kells today (Credit: Alan Russell)

Aerial photo of Athboy (Courtesy Athboy 100)

ATHBOY

Athboy takes its name from Áth Buidhe, the Yellow Ford. The Athboy river, which bisects the town, flows south where it joins the Boyne near Trim. Before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans it derived its importance from its proximity to the assembly site of Tlachtga, which is located east of Athboy on a hilltop. It consists of a quadrivallate enclosure or ringfort, and recent archaeological investigations have shown activity on the site from the Bronze Age through to the early medieval period, where it was a site of gatherings (óenachs). It was also associated with the lighting of ritual fires during the harvest festival of Samhain.

In 1022 Máel-sechlainn II of Mide defeated a Norse Dublin army here, and in 1167 Ruaidrí Ua Conchobair of Connaught held a great synod of lay and ecclesiastical leaders at Tlachtga. When the Anglo-Normans arrived and took over Meath, the king of Bréifne, Tigernán Ua Ruairc, was killed on the site during a meeting with Hugh de Lacy and his men in 1172.

De Lacy made Athboy the centre or *caput* of the barony of Lune and gave it to William de Muset in 1171. When de Muset died in 1213 it passed to the Tuites, and then to William de Loundres. In 1386 it passed from the de Loundres and was divided between the Prestons (of Gormanstown) and the Browns. A castle was built at Athboy c.1212 but its precise

Athboy medieval town walls (Credit: David Gilroy)

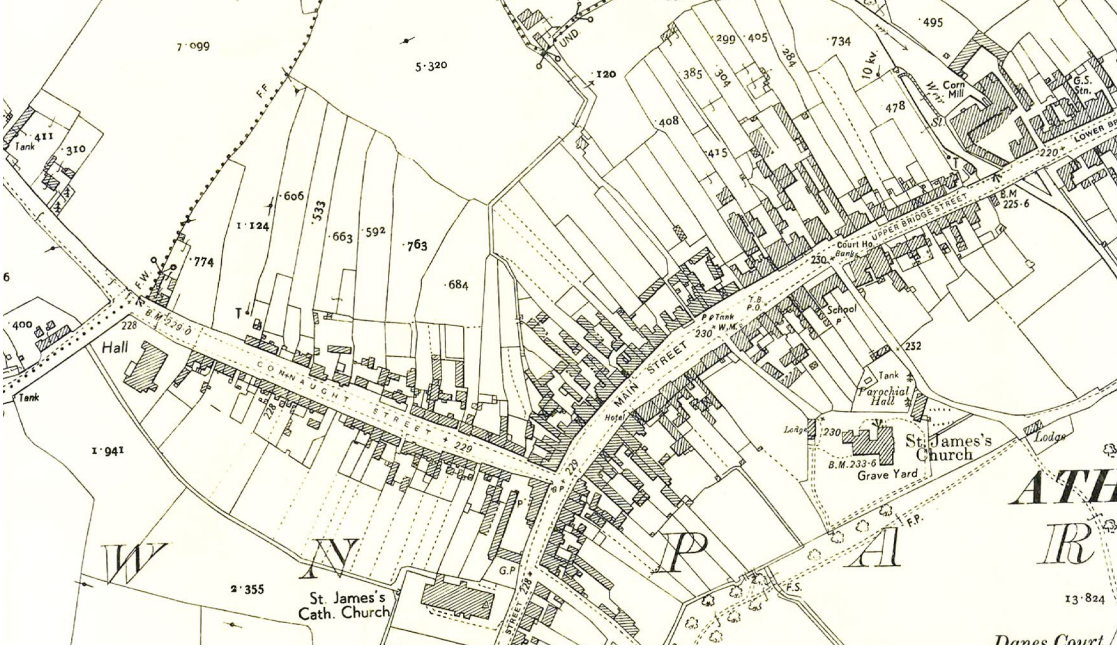
location is not known; it may have been the castle of Castletown Athboy just southwest of the town, or it may have been located at Tlachtga.

The town followed a linear pattern with its main street running southwest from the river crossing, branching in two at its western end. A church dedicated to St James was built in the town c.1200, southeast of the main street. The present Church of Ireland church, built in 1772, almost certainly uses elements from its medieval predecessor. A 16th-century effigy tomb was moved into the church, while 17th-century grave slabs and an early 18th-century chest tomb can be found in the graveyard.

Athboy grew in importance due to its position at the border of Anglo-Norman and Gaelic territory, with trade opportunities on the routes westward. A charter of 1407 from Henry IV included the right to form a guild of merchants. In 1534 the local merchants imported more than £700 worth of goods from England, through Drogheda, to Athboy.

Given its important location as a trading and market town, Athboy received its first murage grant in 1306. In 1408 the town was granted permission to tax foreign merchants to pay for the upkeep of its defences. The sum of £200 was collected in 1423 for the defences, which proved to be necessary in 1443 when Ó Conchobhair Failghe, King of Offaly, attacked Athboy and burned it. Further murage grants were issued in 1446 and 1463 to repair and maintain the walls.

The town was again attacked by Owen Roe O'Neill in 1643.



Ordnance Survey Map of Athboy. (Credit: Meath Library Services)

TOWN WALLS

The line of the town walls may be traced through the property boundaries off Main Street and Upper Bridge Street. The eastern bank may have been walled too, although the burgage plots on this side are shorter. Overall, the walled area would have covered c.15 hectares, with a circuit of 1,825 metres, if the eastern side is included. One section of the town walls survives, along the southern boundary of the town, forming the modern southern boundary of the churchyard and the hotel to its west. The wall extends to c.100 metres in length, varying from 2-3 metres in height and contains one surviving open-backed mural tower.

ATHBOY'S CARMELITE FRIARY

Athboy's Carmelite friary was founded in 1317 but its precise location is not known. While documentary evidence suggests a location on the eastern bank, but archaeological investigations just outside the surviving section of the town walls uncovered medieval features including walls, pottery and a burial that may indicate the location of the friary in this area.

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