

# A Settlement of the Uí hUiginn Poets and its Landscape Setting

Kilcloony, County Galway

Cill Chluaine, Conmhaicne Mac Fheóruis



Kilcloony Castle, from the oak tree.

A report by Elizabeth FitzPatrick, School of Geography, Archaeology and Irish Studies, NUI Galway, for the Milltown Heritage Group, with plans by Noel McCarthy.

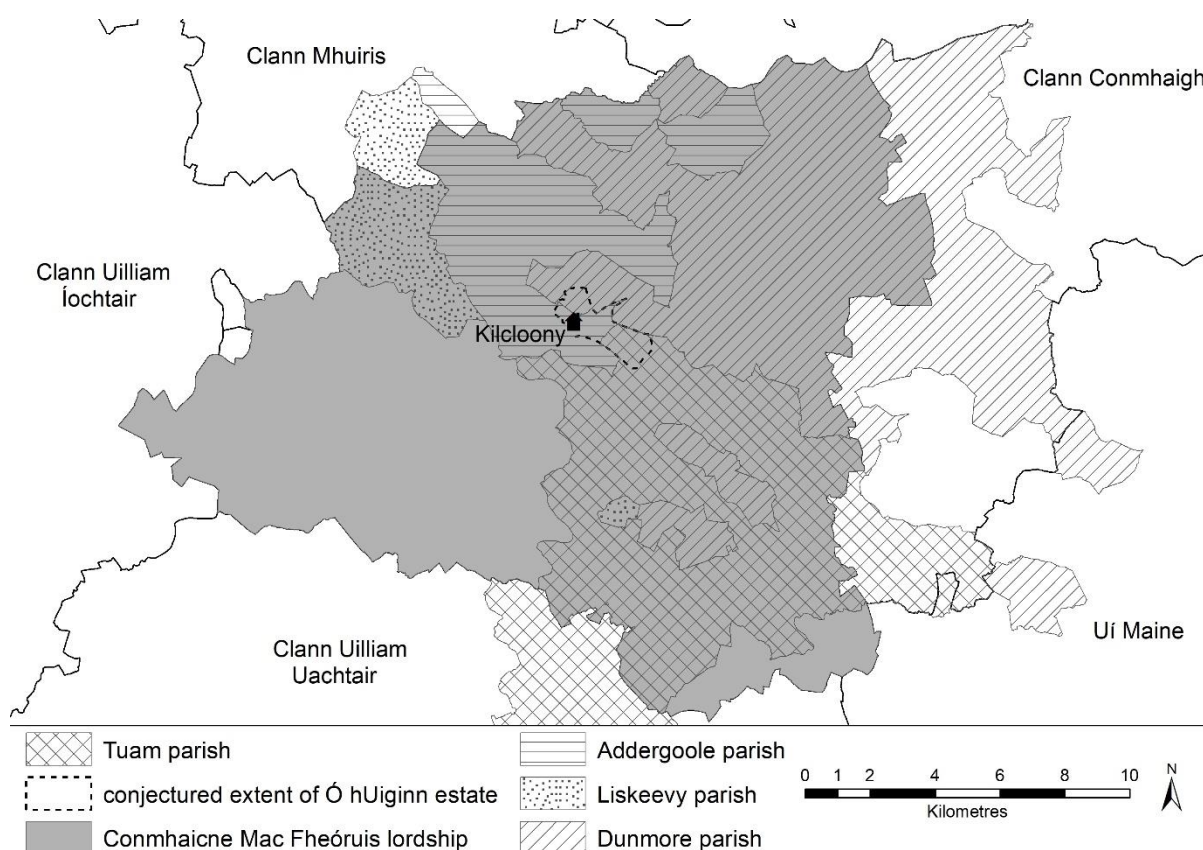
# Kilcloony – A Settlement of the Uí hUiginn Poets and its Landscape Setting

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## Introduction

This report, commissioned by the Milltown Heritage Group, contains a survey of the settlement archaeology at Kilcloony, Co. Galway and its association with the Uí hUiginn learned family of poets who lived at Kilcloony during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It also aims to establish when the Uí hUiginn first settled at Kilcloony and how the settlement complex and its landscape setting reflect their role as a learned family in the de Bermingham lordship of Conmhaicne Mac Fheóruis (the later barony of Dunmore).

The upstanding archaeology of Kilcloony was recorded during the summer and autumn of 2019 by Professor Liz FitzPatrick and Dr Noel McCarthy, Archaeology, NUI Galway. The work included walkover survey, detailed descriptive and photographic survey, and planning of the tower house and bawn and of the building that was designated ‘Kilcloony Church’ by the first Ordnance Survey of the 1840s. Aerial images, in particular LiDAR of different parts of the townland, was also used to distinguish the visible extent of the settlement archaeology.



*Fig. 1. Map showing Kilcloony in the context of the lordship of Conmhaicne Mac Fheóruis, its constituent medieval parishes and surrounding lordships (Map: Noel McCarthy; © E.FitzPatrick).*

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Kilcloony was situated in the central area of the de Bermingham lordship of Conmhaicne Mac Fheóruis (Fig. 1), also known as Conmhaicne Dúna Móir and earlier as Conmaicne Cenél Dubáin.<sup>2</sup> The earliest known documentary record of the Uí hUiginn poets at Kilcloony is for the sixteenth century when Domnall Ó hUiginn was listed in 1574 as the owner-occupant of a castle at 'Kilclune'.<sup>3</sup> He is again described as being of 'Kilcluny' in the 'Indenture of Dunmore' compiled during the Tudor Composition of Connacht in 1585.<sup>4</sup> The lands of Kilcloony lay at the junction of the three medieval or civil parishes of Addergoole, Tuam and Dunmore.

The original extent of the lands of the Uí hUiginn poets at Kilcloony is not recorded, but it is likely to have included more than the townland of Kilcloony and, since many learned family landholdings were incorporated into later country house demesnes,<sup>5</sup> it was perhaps coterminous with the later Kilcloony Estate granted in 1759 to Edward Bodkin by James Daly and Francis Bermingham, 21st Baron Athenry.<sup>6</sup> The townlands of Kilcloony, Ardnagall and Quarrymount were part of the Kilcloony Estate. The first Bodkin family home is believed to have been in the townland of Ardnagall immediately joining Kilcloony townland on its east side. Quarrymount House, built in the 1830s, in the townland of Quarrymount<sup>7</sup> immediately north of Kilcloony townland was their home in the second half of the nineteenth century. It was subsequently leased to Edward O'Kelly in 1881 and came into the possession of the Congested Districts' Board in the early twentieth century. Eventually, the house and its 220 acres was sold by the Land Commission to the Gordon family. By 1971 when the Gordons sold the house there were just twenty acres attached to it.<sup>8</sup>

### **Place-name, Topography and Settlement**

In both literary and historical sources, the Irish language place-name of Kilcloony is given as Cill Chluaine and Cill Chlunaigh and is generally translated as 'church of the lawn or meadow'.<sup>9</sup> Cluain can also mean a water meadow, which may be the more correct reading of the place-name considering the marshlands that dominate much of the lower ground of Kilcloony.

The townland of Kilcloony is dominated by a ridge running northwest–southeast, which rises to c. 60m above sea level and descends (c. 42m OD) to large tracts of low-lying wet grassland to the east, south and west. The marshy land with its good summer growth supports grazing

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<sup>2</sup> MacCotter, P. 2008 *Medieval Ireland: territorial, political and economic divisions*, 135-6. Four Courts Press. Dublin.

<sup>3</sup> Nolan, J.P. 1901 Galway castles and owners in 1574. *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society* 1:2, 109-23: 117; The list is drawn from *Carew MSS*, vol. 611, folios 239-46.

<sup>4</sup> Freeman, A.M. 1936 *The Compossicion Booke of Conought*, 65.

<sup>5</sup> FitzPatrick, E. 2015 *Ollamh, biatach, comharba: lifeways of Gaelic learned families in medieval and early modern Ireland. Proceedings of the xivth international Celtic congress, Maynooth*, 165-89: 173-8. Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies.

<sup>6</sup> <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/estate-show.jsp?id=954>

<sup>7</sup> The Irish for Quarrymount as recorded in 1792 is Poll an Choiléir (quarry hole). <https://www.logainm.ie/en/21577>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=1047>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.logainm.ie/en/s?txt=Kilcloony>

cattle and horses. Copses of deciduous trees with a scattering of oaks in the townland are relicts of Kilcloony demesne.

The settlement at Kilcloony is a complex of buildings and earthworks extending over the greater part of the townland (Fig. 2). The central focus of that settlement is a tower house with an accompanying bawn wall and courtyard building (Fig. 3).<sup>10</sup> It looks out towards the great expanse of flat land that runs southwest to the prominent hill of Knockmaa or Cnoc Meádha Siúil,<sup>11</sup> the most important landmark of the early medieval kingdom of Mag Seola, which lay immediately west of Conmaicne Cenél Dubáin (Fig. 4).

What may be the site of a horizontal mill, mill-pond and mill-race, upon which there is a modern pump-house, lies 200m to the south, on the townland boundary (Fig. 2). A small rectangular building situated 275m north of the tower house was recorded by the Ordnance Survey as 'Kilcloony Church',<sup>12</sup> a burial ground lies 450m to the southeast of the tower house<sup>13</sup> and there are three ringforts in the north-western and north-eastern areas of the townland.

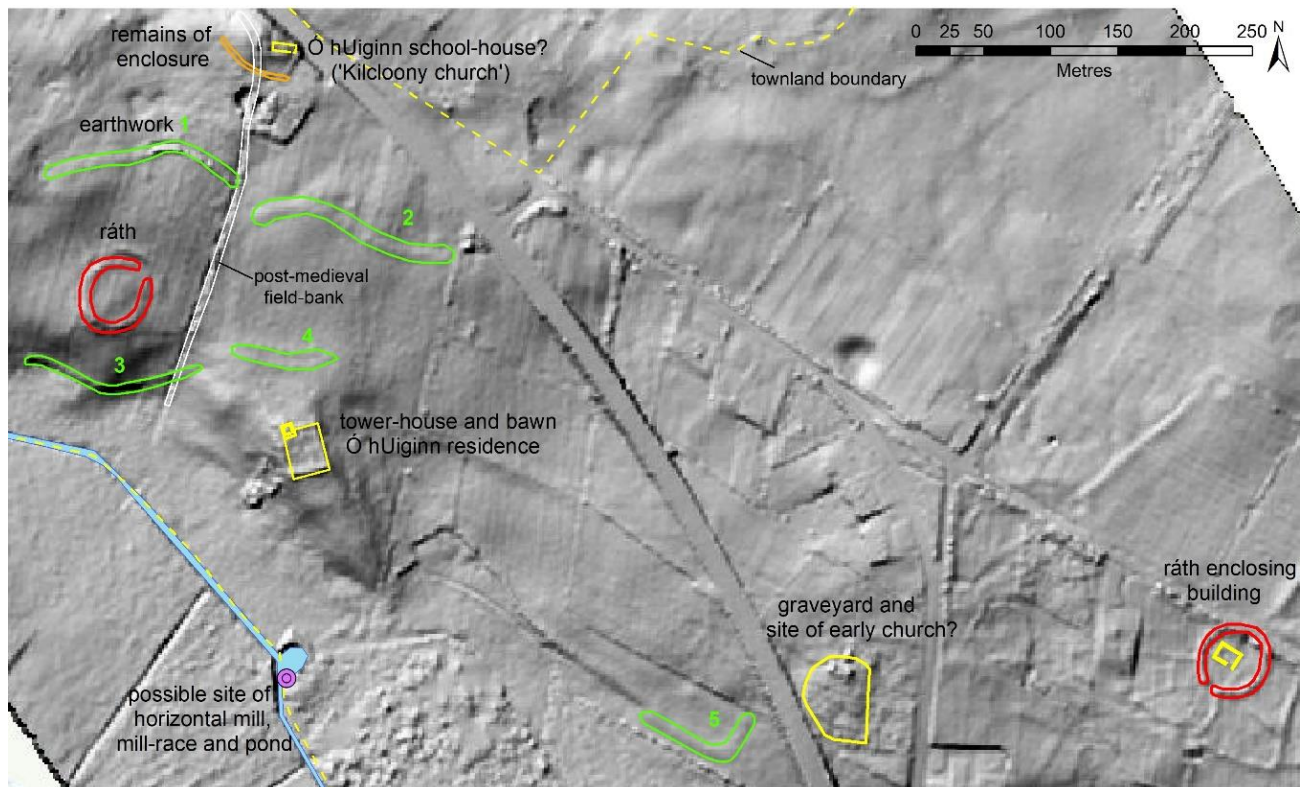


Fig. 2. LiDAR image showing some of the key settlement features of the Kilcloony landscape. The ráth (GA016-060) and an associated souterrain (GA016-060001) are outside this image, to the northwest (map: N. McCarthy based on LiDAR courtesy of TII).

<sup>10</sup> Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI), RMP GA016-062001

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.logainm.ie/en/1415856?s=Knockmaa>

<sup>12</sup> ASI, RMP GA016-061

<sup>13</sup> ASI, RMP GA016-063001

LiDAR imagery of the area (Fig. 2) immediately to the north and south of the tower house shows four lengths of substantial linear earthworks that are new to the archaeological record for the townland.<sup>14</sup>

### Tower House and Bawn

The tower house and bawn at Kilcloony stand on a prominent spur of land (Fig. 5), a natural promontory (c. 60m OD) that descends southwards into the marshy ground of the south of the townland. The west side of the promontory is particularly straight-sided and steep, with a deep quarry below. The tower house was perhaps purposely situated there to take advantage of the steep slope.



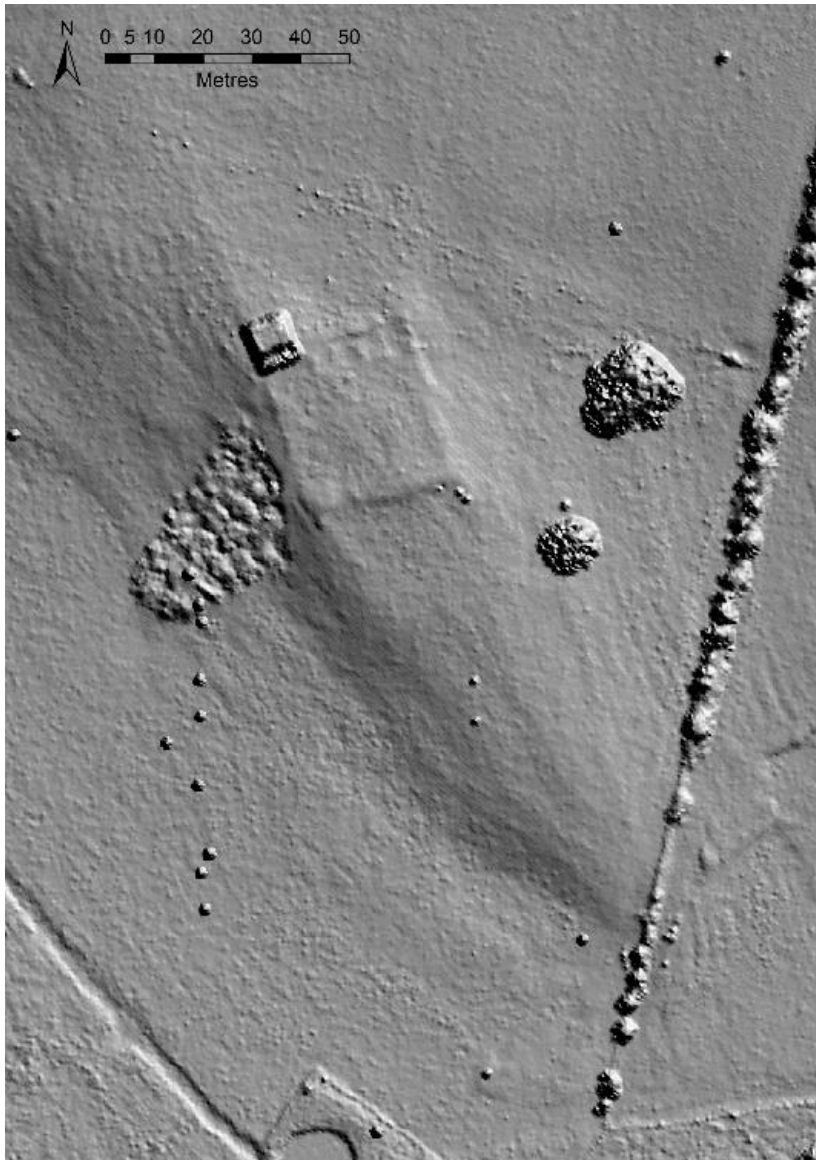
*Fig. 3. Kilcloony Castle viewed from the east.*



*Fig.4. View looking south to Knockmaa from Kilcloony Castle.*

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<sup>14</sup> Courtesy of Transport Infrastructure Ireland.



*Fig. 5. The tower house and bawn situated on the flat summit of a spur of land projecting into wet grassland (LiDAR courtesy of TII).*

Kilcloony Castle is a vulnerable building that survives up to first-floor level only. This small tower house is rectangular in plan with overall external dimensions of 10.2m north-south by 9.5m east-west (Fig. 6). A vertical cross-wall separates the main rooms of the building from the narrow chambers on the south side. The north, east and west walls (Fig. 7-9) are 2m thick towards the base, and the masonry of large squared-off limestone facing stones, on the exterior and interior, are quite evenly bedded as a result of flat levelling stones placed between courses. The core of the wall is mortared

rubble. Above the 2m high base batter, the building stones are smaller and more rectangular and laid down in even courses. A gritty lime mortar was used as the bonding agent. Except for the west face where the building fabric has been spared, a great deal of the facing stones and architectural details of the tower house have been robbed out over time (see Condition, p. 23).

The key remaining architectural features of the tower house include the barrel vault that supports the first floor, the garderobe chute at the north end of the east wall, the surviving window embrasures that preserve substantial traces of wickerwork centering and the fragmentary decorative window heads on the south wall of the first floor and on the route of the former mural staircase. Fortunate survivals also include some rounded quoin-stones at the southeast and southwest corners of the tower house, and doorway fixtures that include door-bar holes, a yett-hole and musket loop that reflect a concern with controlling access to the tower house and protecting its occupants and contents (Fig. 12-14).

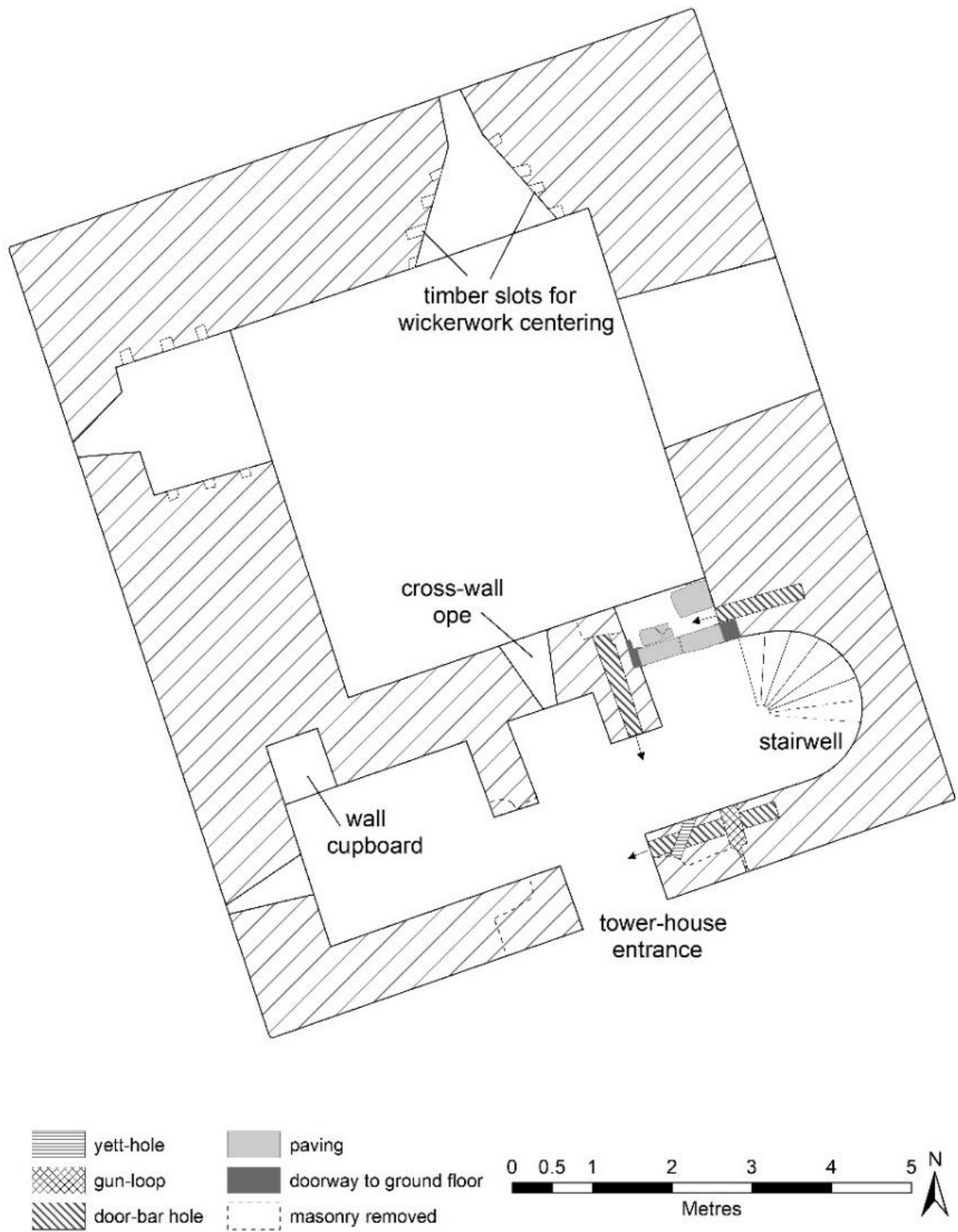


Fig. 6. Ground floor plan of Kilcloony tower house (drawing: N. McCarthy; © E.FitzPatrick).



*Fig. 7. North wall with extensively robbed out masonry above ground floor level.*



*Fig. 8. East wall showing robbed-out masonry, window embrasure and garderobe chute.*



*Fig. 9. The west wall of the tower house with breach indicating position of former window embrasure on first floor above the vault.*



*Fig. 10. South wall showing breached entrance, mezzanine chamber window and tiny loop on stairwell in southeast corner.*

## Date

The construction of the tower house may be attributed to the fifteenth century, based on features such as the rounded quoins (Fig. 11) that are found in other tower houses securely dated to that period. Four alternating long and short, punch-dressed quoin-stones survive on the southwest corner of the building and two towards the base of the southwest corner. All those on the corresponding northeast and northwest corners have been robbed out. This style of quoin, with a half-round section, is found elsewhere in Co. Galway tower houses, such as Claregalway Castle of the Clanrickard Burke family, which has been assigned to the first half of the fifteenth century through radiocarbon dating of hazel twigs used as wickerwork centering during the construction of the vault of the tower house.<sup>15</sup>



*Fig. 11. Rounded quoin-stones on the southwest corner of Kilcloony tower house.*

## Ground Floor

The ground floor of the tower house is divided on its east–west axis by a cross-wall c. 1m thick (Fig. 6). The area south of the cross-wall is quite narrow at 7m x 2m internally and it is further subdivided into three discrete spaces – an entrance lobby, a western chamber and an eastern chamber that contains the fragmentary remains of a spiral staircase in the southeast corner. The tower house was entered from the south wall (Fig. 10). The doorway has been removed

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<sup>15</sup> Sherlock, R. 2011 The evolution of the Irish tower-house as a domestic space. In E. FitzPatrick and J. Kelly (eds), *Domestic life in Ireland. Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature* 111C, Special Issue, 115-140: 121 and fn. 12.

and much of the masonry around it breached. There is no earlier documentary or visual record of the doorway and no loose architectural fragments from it on the site.

Typical of late medieval tower house entrances, it probably had a semi-pointed arch. What does survive, however, are security fixtures flanking the east side of the former doorway (Fig. 12-14). These include – a yett-hole (Fig. 14a) angled northeast-southwest and running 0.33m deep into the wall on the east side of the doorway. This hole was for a chain attached to a yett or iron grid, which could be pulled against the tower house doorway, from the inside, for protection. There would have been a corresponding yett-hole on the west side of the doorway. Beneath it there is a square (0.20m x 0.20m) aperture (Fig. 14a) for a door-bar running 1.10m deep into the wall. This held a stout timber bar that could be shot across the inside of the doorway for additional protection.



*Fig. 12. The south wall showing the breached entrance, gun-loop to the right, a single-light ogee-headed window on the first floor above the doorway and a narrow round-headed loop lighting the staircase.*



Fig. 13. The breached entrance in the south wall showing the lobby with its vaulted roof.

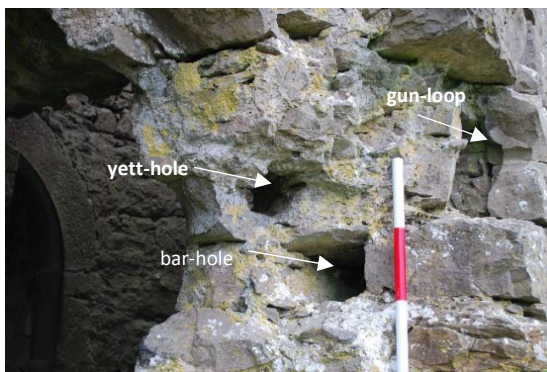


Fig. 14a and 14b. Security fixtures, south doorway.

A third security feature is positioned east of the yett-hole. It is a circular gun loop (Fig. 14b; diameter 0.06m), its lethal purpose masked externally by a neatly cut and dressed ogee-headed ope (the western half is missing). It is set into a rectangular aperture 0.3m x 0.25m angled south-southwest towards the entrance and running 0.85m deep through the wall. This was where a shooter placed a weapon to fire on intruders at the doorway of the tower house.

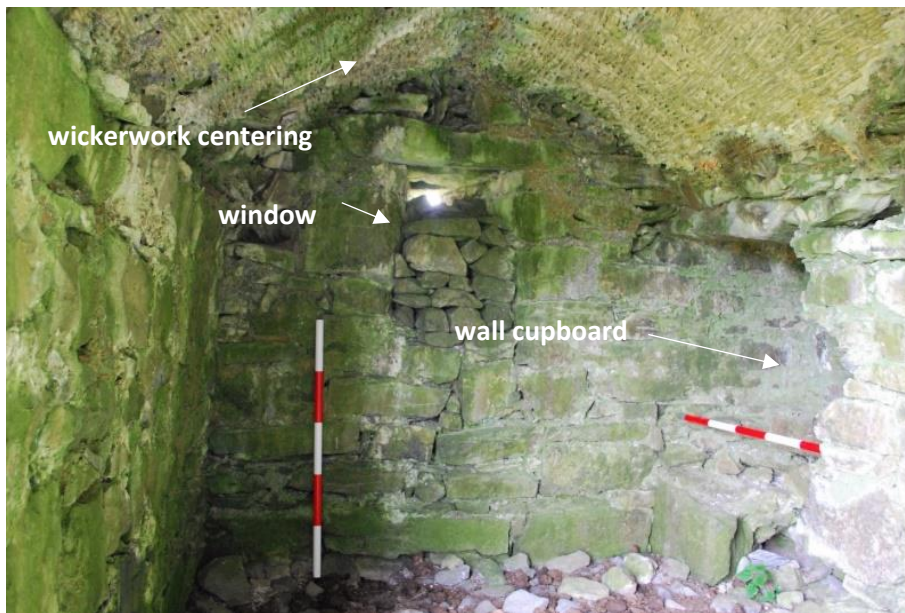
The main doorway leads into a small lobby (2.25m N-S x 2m E-W) in the north wall of which there is a rectangular squint, now partly blocked up (Fig. 15). The embrasure (0.54m x 0.42m) of the squint has a neatly lintelled head and splays outward into the interior of the main ground floor room. This would have allowed some light into the lobby and would have enabled a view of anyone entering through the tower house entrance. This squint is quite low



down in the wall notwithstanding the build-up of the floor with rubble. It is oddly low and may alternatively have been used for passing something through to, or out of, the ground floor from the lobby. The roof of the lobby is vaulted and carries traces of wickerwork centering.

*Fig. 15. Lobby with vaulted roof looking north towards partially block-up squint in cross-wall.*

Turning west, the lobby yields to a small barrel-vaulted space (c. 2.3m E-W x 1.9m N-S) formerly entered through a cut-stone doorway which has been robbed out (Fig. 16). It is lit from the west wall by a crude, single-light rectangular ope (0.28 x 0.12m) set into a splayed embrasure with a lintelled head.



There are substantial remains of wickerwork centering on the soffit of the vault. A wall cupboard (0.67m<sup>2</sup>; 0.7m deep) is positioned at the west end of the north wall. Much of the masonry, with the exception of the two lintel stones of the head of the cupboard, is broken away.

*Fig. 16. Barrel-vaulted west chamber with wicker-work centering, partially blocked window and wall cupboard.*



Turning east from the lobby, one enters the space (c. 2.20m E-W x 2m N-S) in which the stairwell is housed and from which the main ground floor room of the tower house was reached (Fig. 17). It is also in this space that security features of the main doorway in the south wall were accessed. The doorway in the west wall of the stairwell space has been robbed. Just the embrasure with wickerwork centering overhead, and a deep bar-hole that once held a stout timber bar that ran 1.15m deep into the north side of the embrasure of the doorway, remain in place.

*Fig. 17. Looking through the embrasure of the west doorway to the stairwell space at southeast.*

The spiral staircase (c. 2m in diameter) was situated in the southeast corner of the tower house and its steps have been hacked out from ground to first-floor level (Fig. 17, 18, 19).

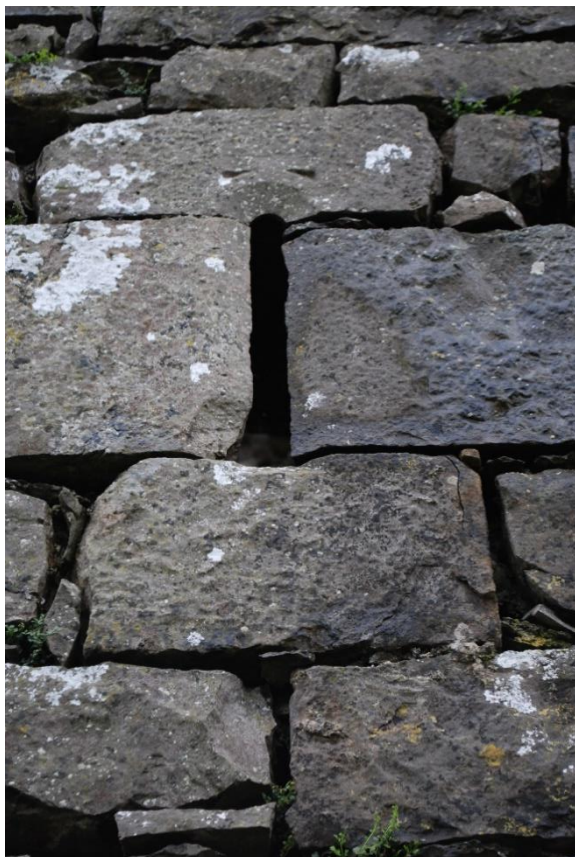
*Fig. 18 View of the robbed-out staircase through the doorway of the main ground floor room.*





*Fig. 19. Stairwell in southeast corner of the tower house.*

The stairwell was lit between ground and first floor by small rectangular opes at east and southeast. Externally, the southeast-facing ope has a neatly cut and dressed round head (Fig. 20).



*Fig. 20a (above) and 20b (left). Cut and dressed round-headed ope lighting the route of the tower house staircase at southeast.*



The main ground floor of the tower house is entered through a semi-pointed cut-stone doorway at the east end of the cross-wall (Fig. 21). The doorway, which is nicely punch dressed, is the only cut-stone feature of the tower house that is fully intact. It is 1.65m in height from soffit to threshold and 1.02m wide. The doorway embrasure on the east side contains a door-bar hole that runs 1.23m deep into the wall. The head of the embrasure carries remains of wickerwork centering. The floor immediately north of the threshold and within the embrasure retains parts of flat paving stones.

*Fig. 21 Cut-stone, semi-pointed doorway leading from the stairwell space into the ground floor room.*

The main ground floor (4.87m N-S by 4.80m E-W) room of the tower house lies on the north side of the cross-wall (Fig. 6).

It was lit by windows in the west, north and east walls, with the squint in the south wall admitting some light too. The west wall (Fig. 22) retains the cut and punch-dressed head and northern side-stones of a narrow rectangular loop. It sits in a straight-sided deep embrasure, 1.65m wide, which has a depressed arch retaining substantial traces of wickerwork centering on its soffit. The top of the sides of the embrasure, at their junction with the soffit, contain small rectangular holes that carried flat timbers for supporting wickerwork frames when the heads of the embrasures were being constructed. These are present in all of the surviving window embrasures of the ground floor.

The window positioned at the east end of the north wall (Fig. 23) has a more widely splayed embrasure, 1.83m wide internally and 2.35m in height from soffit to base. It has neatly dressed quoins and a depressed arch of rough wedge-shaped voussoirs set on edge, the soffit of which also carries remains of wickerwork centering. With the exception of the window head, the rest of the window has been broken out.

The largest window embrasure, 2m wide and 1.75m in height from soffit to base, is situated midway along the east wall of the ground floor (Fig. 24). The ope and much of the wall fabric around it has been robbed out leaving just the embrasure arch with traces of wickerwork centering on the soffit. The low light levels in the ground floor room of the tower house suggests that it was a service area and probably used for storage.



*Fig. 22 Ground floor west wall with window embrasure.*



*Fig. 23 Ground floor north wall with remains of single-light window and embrasure.*

## Mezzanine Level

There was a mezzanine beneath the barrel vault of the tower house (Fig. 25) reached from the stairwell in the southeast corner through a cut-stone doorway in a deep embrasure. Just



a single cut- and punch-dressed stone from the frame, and a fragment of the pivot stone on which the door swung, remains.

*Fig. 24 Mezzanine beneath the vault reached from stairwell in southeast corner. Corbels for mezzanine floor beams can be seen in the east wall.*

Some of the corbels that carried the beams for the mezzanine floor remain in place c. 2m above ground level (Fig. 24). Fragments of two corbels can be seen on the west wall (Fig. 26). Holes positioned at the extreme east and west ends of the north wall once carried two corbels. Two well-preserved cut and punch-dressed corbels flank either side of the window embrasure in the east wall and another survives in the south or cross-wall.



*Fig. 26 West wall with blocked window and fragmentary corbels for mezzanine floor beams.*

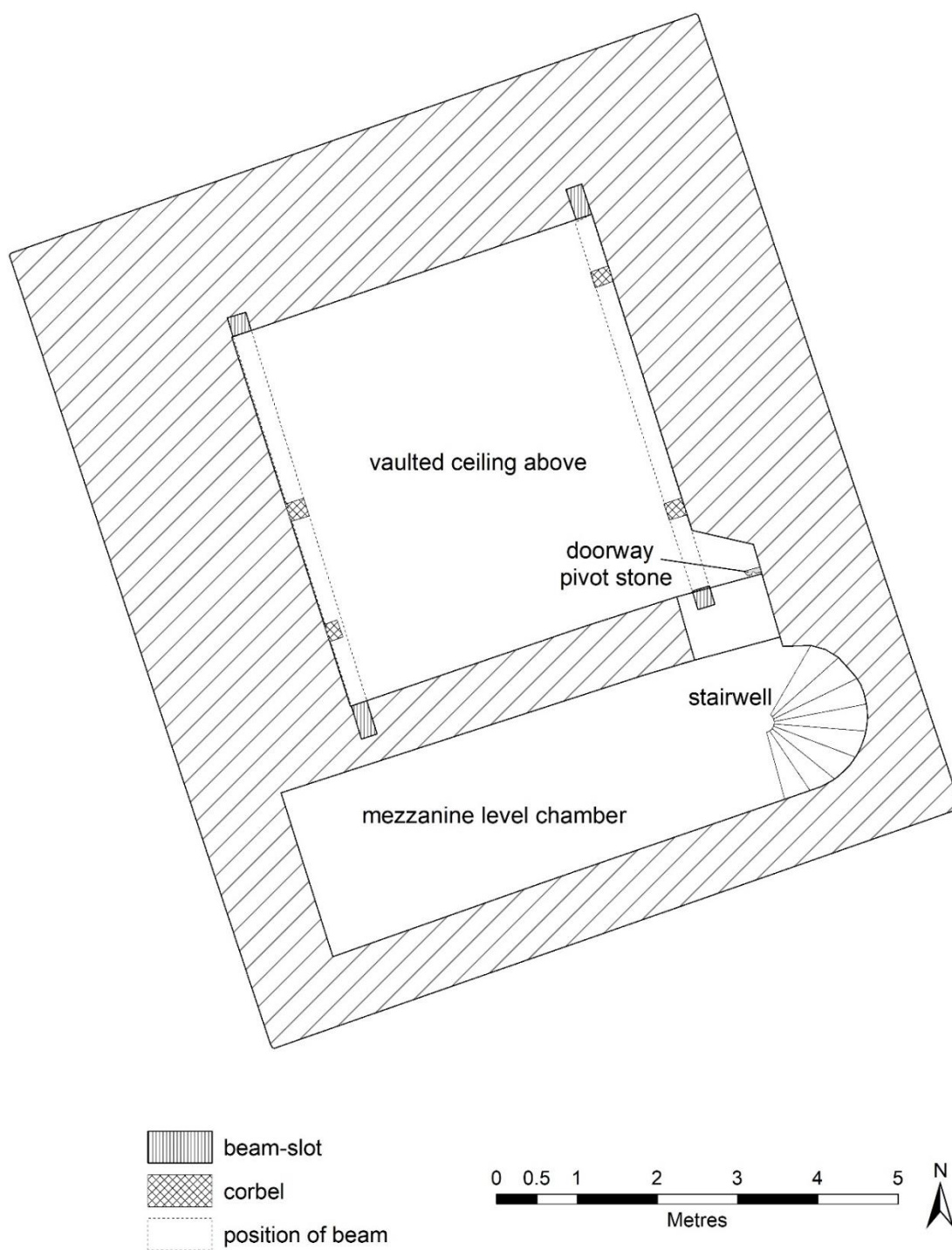


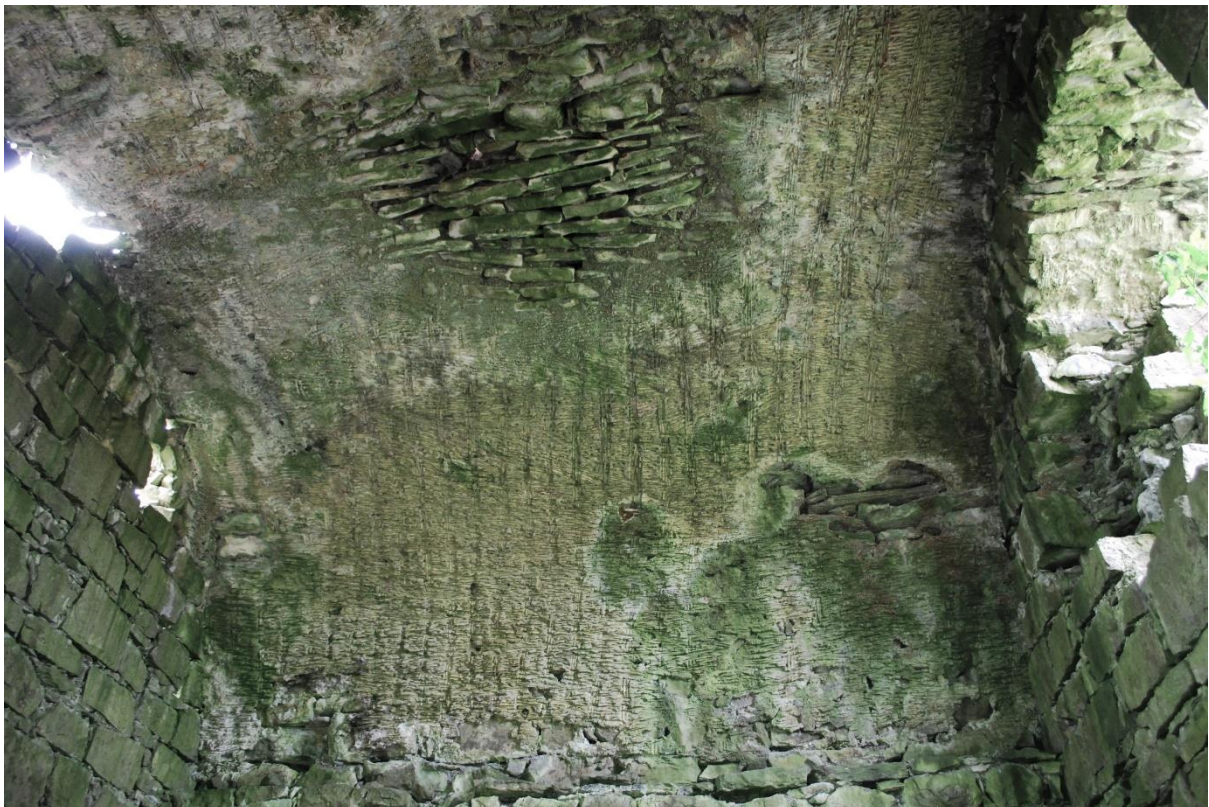
Fig. 25 The mezzanine level of the tower house beneath the first-floor vault (drawing: N. McCarthy; © E. FitzPatrick).



The large breach in the masonry of the north wall (Fig. 27), just beneath the vault suggests that the mezzanine was lit by what must have been a centrally placed two-light window. This was the only window at mezzanine level. It has been robbed out. The window embrasure is straight-sided with a depressed arch which carries patches of wickerwork centering. The sides of the embrasure were finished with alternating long and short, cut and punch-dressed, quoins that survive on the east side. The depth of the embrasure suggests that it may have contained a window-seat.

*Fig. 27 The centrally placed mezzanine window and eccentrically positioned ground floor window in the north wall of the tower house.*

The striking feature above the mezzanine is the well-preserved barrel vault (Fig. 28) that supported the first floor of the tower house. It carries extensive remains of wickerwork centering.



*Fig. 28 Some stonework at the centre of the vault has become loose and is in danger of collapsing the structure.*

On the south side of the cross-wall, on the same level as the mezzanine, there is a narrow chamber lit from the south wall by a single-light ogee-headed cut- and punch-dressed window with cusped spandrels (Fig. 29). Just the head and the chamfered upper side-stones of the frame remain in place. Internally, what survives of the window embrasure indicates that it had a wide splay and a lintelled head. Much of the masonry on the west side and all of that at the base of the window has been robbed out. This chamber was reached from the spiral staircase in the southeast corner of the tower house.



*Fig. 29 Remains of ogee-headed window in south wall lighting the mezzanine chamber on the south side of the cross-wall.*

### First Floor

Little of the wall fabric of the tower house survives above the vault at first-floor level. A breach at the south end of the west wall indicates the former position of a first-floor window and its embrasure. The first-floor room was provided with a garderobe that was positioned in a mural chamber at the north end of the east wall. Remains of the garderobe chute are now visible as a result of its exposure through the robbing out of the facing stones from the entire façade of the wall (Fig. 30).



*Fig. 30 The exposed garderobe chute at the north end of the east wall.*

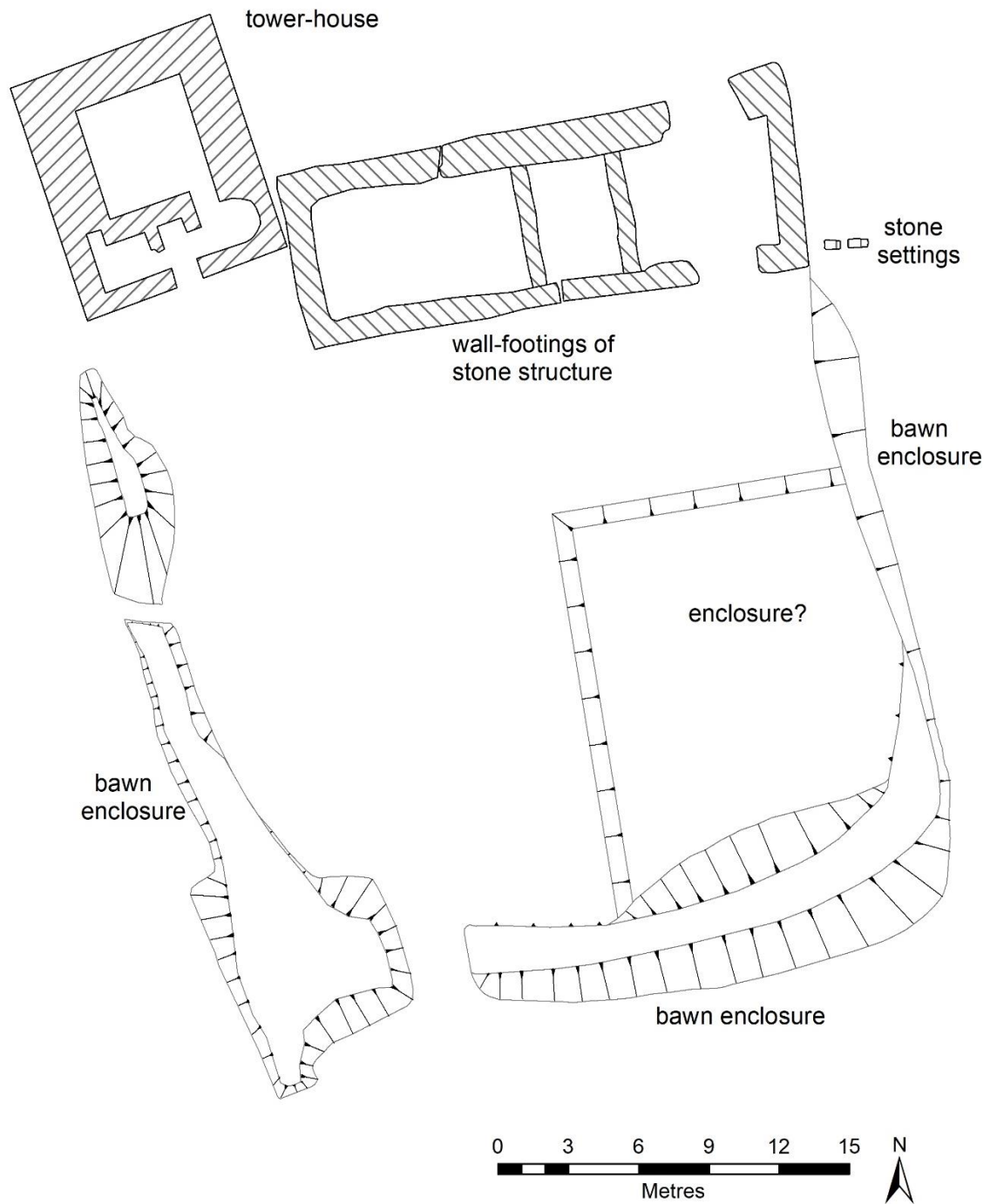
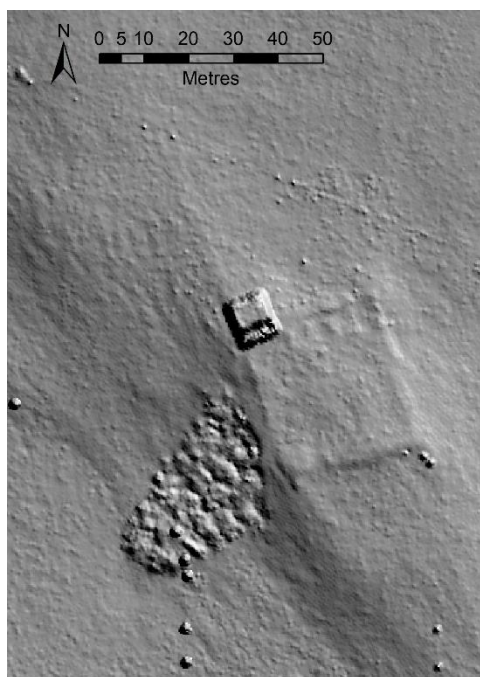


Fig. 31 The tower house, bawn and associated structures at Kilcloony (drawing: N. McCarthy; © E.FitzPatrick).

### Bawn

On the ground, the bawn and its relationship with the tower house is not well defined (Fig. 31). The bawn consists of fragmentary and grassed-over wall-footings and, in some places, banks, of a rectangular enclosure that sits on the level summit of a spur of land (Fig. 5). However, a LiDAR image of the tower house and bawn (Fig. 32) reveals its true extent (37m N-S x 32m E-W). The south façade of the tower house projects into the northwest corner of the bawn, with the entrance facing into and protected by the bawn. The bawn wall is c. 1m thick, where visible, and a possible entrance to it is suggested by a break towards the west end of the south wall. A building with two internal partitions appears to have been built up against the internal face of the bawn wall and immediately east of the tower house. There are also traces of a square enclosure occupying the southeast corner (Fig. 31). Without excavation it is not possible to say whether these features are contemporary with the tower house or post-date it.



*Fig. 32 Kilcloony tower house and bawn (LiDAR courtesy of TII).*

### Condition

Kilcloony Castle is a highly vulnerable late medieval building. Above the line of the base batter on the north wall, all of the facing stones have been removed, as well as the cut stones of the ground floor window. The east wall has suffered the worst of the vandalism, with most of the façade ripped out, leaving just a few quoin-stones in place on the northeast and southeast corners. Most of the facing stones up to the level of the vault have survived on the south wall, but the entrance to the tower house was broken out and most of the quoins at southeast and southwest have been removed. Masonry at the centre of the vault that supported the first floor has become loose and threatens to collapse the entire structure. The bawn wall has been reduced to its footings, which are discernible on the ground along the north end of its eastern route only.

### **Other Settlement Features at Kilcloony**

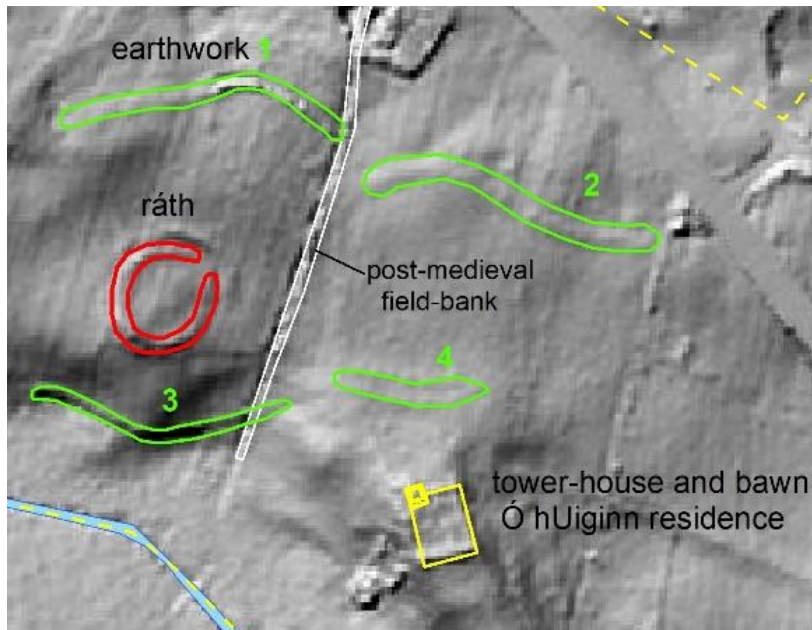
The estates of learned families in late medieval Ireland were working farms. Their residences were situated in farmland and, therefore, other settlement features related to agricultural practices are to be expected on the lands around them.<sup>16</sup> Kilcloony conforms to this pattern. The tower house was the principal building of the Uí hUiginn landholding, but there are several other settlement features around it, some or all of which may have been constructed

<sup>16</sup> FitzPatrick, E. 2015 *Ollamh, biatach, comharba*, 173-8.

and/or in use during the lifetime of their estate. Through a combination of walkover survey and LiDAR imagery, some additional buildings and especially earthworks were identified across the townland.

### Early Medieval Settlement Enclosures

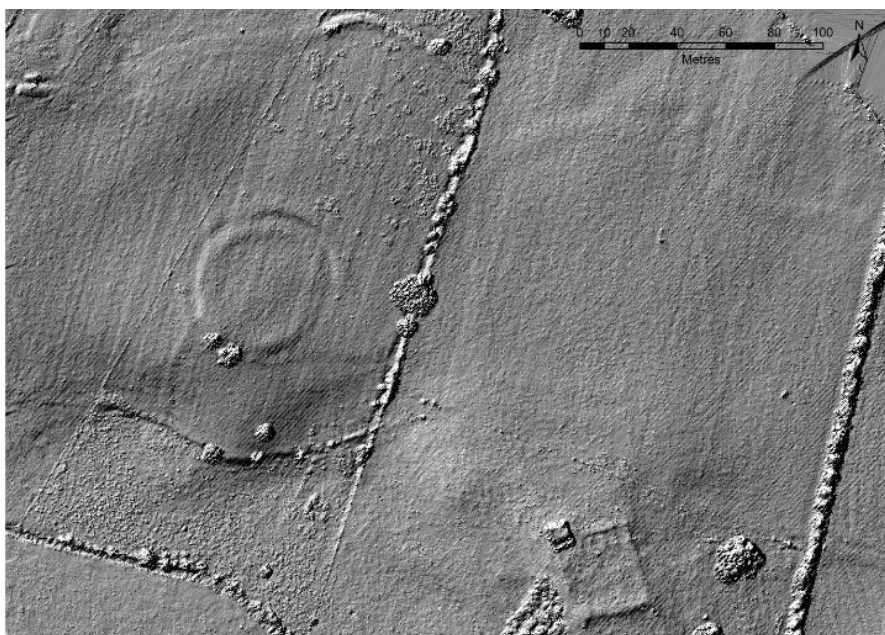
The degraded remains of a bivallate *ráth* (GA016-064) lie c. 150m west-northwest of the tower house (Fig. 33a & b). The *ráth* is large at c.57m in diameter and enclosed by two banks



separated by a fosse. On the ground, there are just partial remains of both of the banks and the fosse which, combined, are c.8m wide. The full extent of the monument is visible on the LiDAR imagery that covers part of the townland. There are four segments of broad earthen field banks to the north and south of the *ráth* (labelled 1-4 on Fig. 33a). Portions of embankments 1 and 3 are visible at ground level, but embankments 2 and 4 are visible only on the LiDAR.

The size of these banks and their curvilinear rather than rectilinear form suggests that they are not field boundaries related to post-medieval improvement activities, but probably medieval, and possibly even early medieval, and associated with the *ráth*.

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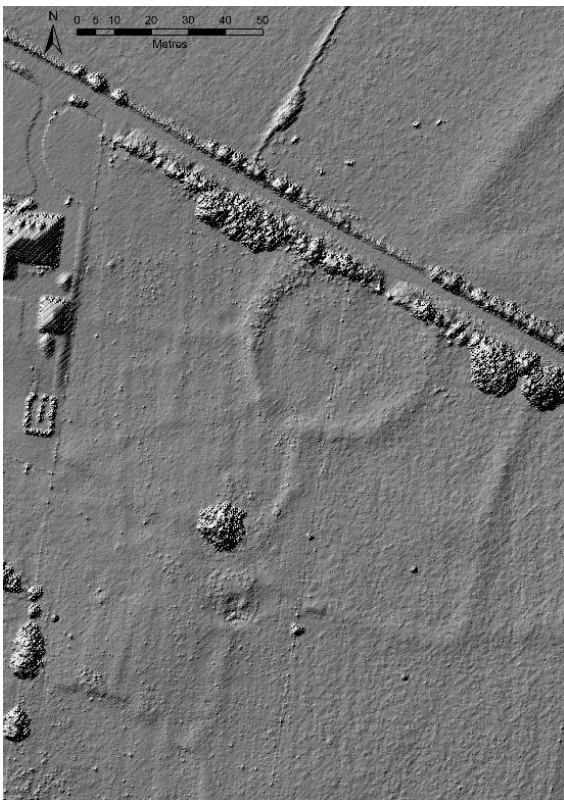


*Fig. 33a (above) and 33b (left). A large ráth and segments of embankments visible on the LiDAR image of Kilcloony townland (LiDAR courtesy of TII).*

A second univallate *ráth* (GA016-060) and an associated souterrain (GA016-060001) are situated near the northwestern boundary of Kilcloony townland and c. 400m northwest of the bivallate *ráth*. The *ráth* is c. 47m in diameter internally and defined by a bank of earth and stone outside of which there is a fosse. A gap at northeast may represent the former entrance to the interior of the *ráth*. On the ground, the bank and fosse are discernible from north-northwest through north to east-southeast only.

The median internal diameter of ringforts (of both *ráth* and *caiseal* type) is 30m. Ringforts with diameters substantially larger than that may have served as livestock enclosures, especially for milking cows. Both of the large ringforts in Kilcloony fall in to that category. Aerial views including LiDAR do not show any evidence of buildings within these large ringforts, which may support the view that they had agricultural rather than residential use. Such large ringforts and concentrations of *caiseal* and *ráth* enclosures with souterrains are noticeably common on learned family estates (souterrains were ideal cool and secure places to keep dairy produce). While ringforts, large and small, are generally viewed as monuments of the early medieval settlement landscape, they are likely to have continued to have had uses related to pastoral farming on learned family estates.

A third settlement enclosure, which is new to the archaeological record for Kilcloony townland, is situated 670m east-southeast of the tower house and 200m east of Kilcloony



burial ground (Fig. 34). An arc of the enclosing bank in the northwest quadrant contains a high content of stone and what survives of the monument on the ground suggests that it is best classified as a *caiseal*. The full extent of the enclosure is visible only on the LiDAR imagery for the townland. It is c. 30m in diameter internally. The northern arc of the enclosure was truncated by a minor road aligned west-northwest–east-southeast. The LiDAR image shows the remains of a small rectangular building in the western half of the interior and what appears to be an internal wall dividing the interior of the *caiseal* on its north–south axis.

Fig. 34 The remains of a *caiseal* enclosure containing a house, with associated fields and plots. (LiDAR courtesy of TII).

Rectangular houses are a feature of the later medieval landscape and where, for instance, they are found in *caiseal* enclosures, in the Burren, Co. Clare, they have proven to be late medieval additions to early medieval enclosures, some of which had use into the seventeenth

century.<sup>17</sup> There is a nest of fields and plots immediately surrounding the *caiseal*. Their small and organic form, and the fact that some of their boundaries adjoin the external face of the *caiseal*, suggest that they are probably contemporary with the lifetime of the rectangular house/building.

### Ecclesiastical Sites

A building recorded by the first Ordnance Survey as 'Kilcloony Church in ruins' (GA016-061) lies immediately south of the N17 and c. 250m north of the tower house (Fig. 35, 36). It is a rectangular structure (c. 15m x 4.7m internally), the long axis of which is aligned east-west. The walls have been reduced to grassed-over wall-footings, c. 0.80m thick. A break at the east end of the north wall may indicate the position of a doorway. It is enclosed to the south by an earthen bank, while a broader linear bank marching south, which cuts through the enclosed area of the building, can probably be attributed to agricultural improvement on the Kilcloony Estate during the late eighteenth or the nineteenth century (Fig. 36).



*Fig. 35 Wall-footings of the building known as 'Kilcloony Church' viewed from east end.*

During the course of road improvement on the Milltown to Tuam Road (N17) in 1997, the removal of topsoil was monitored along a section (128m x 4-13m) of the route that came within 1.8m of the northeast corner of the building. The stratigraphy encountered consisted

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<sup>17</sup> FitzPatrick, E. 2009 Native enclosed settlement and the problem of the Irish 'ring-fort'. *Medieval Archaeology* 53, 271-307: 298-302; Comber, M. and Hull, G. 2010 Excavations at Caherconnel cashel, the Burren, Co. Clare: implications for cashel chronology and Gaelic settlement. *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 110C, 133-71: 145-50.

of topsoil, below which was natural subsoil. Five sherds of modern pottery were the only artefacts recovered from the site.<sup>18</sup> No burials were found.

Since one of the prerequisites of parish church status in medieval Ireland was a graveyard,<sup>19</sup> the lack of any grave-markers on the site of the building and the fact that no burials came to light during road development within 1.8m of it, suggests that it is not the site of a medieval church. Considering, also, its close proximity to the tower house, it may have had an alternative role as the school house of the Ó hUiginn *ollamh* in poetry. School houses of non-clerical learned families were based on church plans, including the tendency to have an east–west orientation.<sup>20</sup>

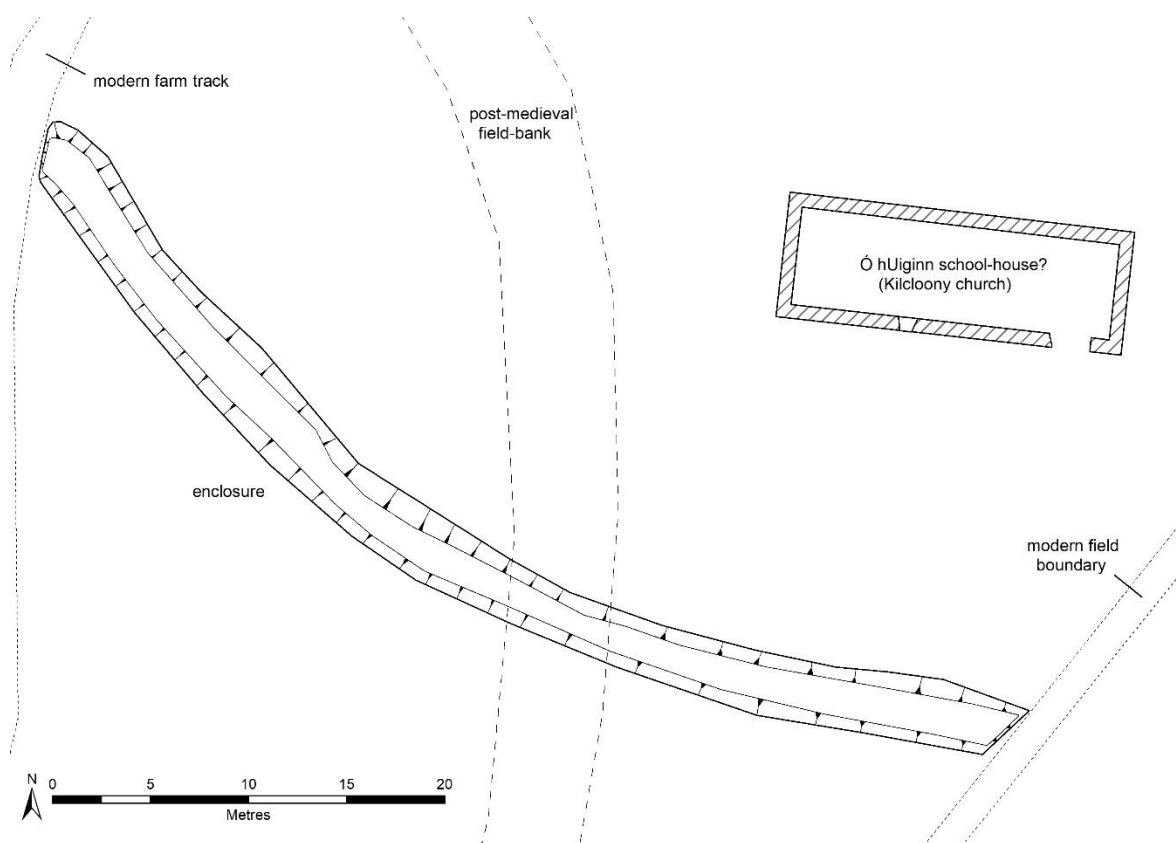


Fig. 36 'Kilcloony Church' and embankments (drawing: N. McCarthy; © E.FitzPatrick).

<sup>18</sup> <https://excavations.ie/report/1997/Galway/0002759/>. Accessed 21/3/2020

<sup>19</sup> FitzPatrick, E. and Gillespie, E. (eds) 2006 *The parish in medieval and early modern Ireland: community, territory and building*, 63. Dublin.

<sup>20</sup> FitzPatrick, E. 2013 The landscape and settlements of the Uí Dhálaigh poets of Muintir Bháire. In S. Duffy (ed.), *Princes, prelates and poets in medieval Ireland: essays in honour of Katharine Simms*, 460-80: 479. Dublin.

A graveyard (GA016-063001) designated as a 'Burial Ground' (c. 45m x 40m) on the first edition Ordnance Survey six-inch map is situated on a southwest-facing slope 425m southeast of the tower house (Fig. 2). It has been extended eastward over time. Wall footings of a possible building were noted in the higher and older western area of the graveyard during walkover survey for this report in 2019 (Fig. 37). In the same area, two crosses (GA016-063003; GA016-063004), both interpreted as early medieval and described as crudely cut, were recorded in 1984, but they were not found when the graveyard was inspected in 2019 for this report. The first of the crosses (GA016-063003) was recorded as being 0.56m high and 0.05m thick, 0.21m wide across the arms, narrowing to 0.23m at the base and set loosely in the ground in a secondary position.<sup>21</sup> It has been described as 'a thin plain cruciform-shaped stone with an almost semi-circular top, short stubby arms and a narrow shaft which splays outwards near the bottom'.<sup>22</sup> The second cross (GA016-063004) was recorded as being 0.8m high and 0.4m wide. The record of two early crosses on the higher ground of the western area of Kilcloony graveyard intimates that this, and not the building south of the tower house, which the nineteenth-century Ordnance Survey designated 'Kilcloony Church', could be the site of a medieval church at Kilcloony and specifically a pre-Norman monastic church.



*Fig. 37 The higher western area of Kilcloony burial ground showing remains of a stone structure and grave-markers.*

### Possible Mill Site and Water Supply

In the wet grassland and marsh to the south of the tower house there is a natural spring with a pond and canalised stream (Fig. 2) that collectively indicate the possible site of a former horizontal mill, mill-stream and mill-pond. At the very least, this site must have been the

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<sup>21</sup> Higgins, J. 1987 *The early Christian cross slabs, pillar stones, and related monuments of County Galway, Ireland*, ii, 392, no. 112. BAR International Series 375. Oxford.

<sup>22</sup> Higgins 1987, *The early Christian cross slabs*, ii, 392, no. 112.

source of the water supply for the tower house. Today, a small pump-house is positioned there.

### Conclusion

The earliest known documentary record of the Uí hUiginn poets at Kilcloony is for 1574, at which time the *ollamh*, Domnall Ó hUiginn, was listed as the owner-occupier of the tower house on his Kilcloony landholding in the lordship of Conmhaicne Mac Fheóruis.<sup>23</sup> It is not known when the Uí hUiginn were granted the lands at Kilcloony. The survey of the tower house in 2019 confirmed that it contains architectural features, such as rounded quoins, datable to the fifteenth century. A closer reading of the date of the tower house might be obtained in the future through radio-carbon dating of a sample of the wood from the many patches of wickerwork centering that survive in the building. It is possible that the tower house was built as a de Bermingham castle in the fifteenth century and granted, along with the lands of Kilcloony, by de Bermingham, to the Uí hUiginn in the sixteenth century. By the sixteenth century, elsewhere in Ireland, several leading learned families were living in tower houses granted to them by the lords that they served.<sup>24</sup>

The tower house had uninterrupted views southwest across the old kingdom of Mag Seola to its iconic landmark – Knockmaa (Fig. 4). The setting of the tower house on a spur of land with precipitous drops on the west and south flanks was perhaps intended to impede approaches to the building from those sides. The architecture of the tower house expresses a concern with controlling access to the building too, with security features at the main entrance in the south wall and at the entrance to the eastern chamber that led into the main ground floor chamber and to the staircase. Despite the security consciousness of the south façade, the surviving windows and opes, including the gun-loop, facing into the bawn, were finished with very fine cut-stone details. The level of protection suggests that during the time it was built in the fifteenth century there was a threat to life and property. For the sixteenth-century learned occupants of Kilcloony Castle, the security devices including door-bars, a gun loop and yett-holes would have made their residence a secure place for keeping important items, such as manuscripts, for instance.

The key role of Kilcloony in the sixteenth century, as a school conducted by the Ó hUiginn *ollamh* in poetry, is communicated in a poem dated 1550-91 by Tadhg Dall Ó hUiginn, the Sligo kinsman of the Kilcloony branch of this learned family. In that poem, Tadhg refers to seventeen poets from Ulster having studied their art at Kilcloony.<sup>25</sup> During the sixteenth century the school house (*sgoilteagh* or *tighe na sgoile*), based on the plan and orientation of medieval parish churches, emerged in Ireland as a response to the need for non-clerical learned families to have dedicated space for schooling. The Ó hUiginn *ollamh* would have had a school house separate from his tower house residence. It has been argued in this report

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<sup>23</sup> Nolan, Galway castles and owners in 1574, 117; The list is drawn from *Carew MSS*, vol. 611, folios 239-46.

<sup>24</sup> FitzPatrick 2015 *Ollamh, biatach, comharba*, 182.

<sup>25</sup> Knott, E. 1926 *The bardic poems of Tadhg Dall Ó Huiginn (1550-1591): translation, notes, etc.*, ii, 54. Irish Texts Society 23. London.

that the building known as ‘Kilcloony Church’, north of the tower house, is possibly the school house and that an early medieval church may have been located where Kilcloony graveyard is situated. That graveyard may also have been the burial place of the Uí hUiginn.

The extent of the Uí hUiginn landholding at Kilcloony is not known, but it has been suggested in this report that it is perhaps represented by the eighteenth-century Kilcloony Estate of the Bodkin family, which included the townlands of Ardnagall, Kilcloony and Quarrymount, crossing into the medieval parishes of Tuam, Addergoole and Dunmore.

The settlement archaeology of Kilcloony townland, on which this report has focussed, has a strong medieval profile. There is an early medieval settlement landscape represented by ringforts and possible contemporary field banks, and what appears to be the site of an early church foundation at Kilcloony graveyard. It has been proposed that ringforts with large internal diameters may have continued to have had a role as livestock enclosures on the farmland of the Uí hUiginn. Late medieval settlement on their lands consists of their tower house residence, the possible school house and what appears to be a small later medieval house in a degraded *caiseal*, with associated small fields and plots. It has also been suggested that the stream and pond in the wet grassland to the south could have been the location of the domestic water supply for the settlement and perhaps the site of a mill.

#### Future Directions

The people of Milltown have a long-standing interest in researching, protecting and conserving the archaeology and history of Kilcloony for future generations of their community. This report is a step towards recovering that past. Other steps that could be taken to further the community’s understanding of Kilcloony and to communicate knowledge of the site more widely might include the following, all of which would require funding:

- Obtain a sample of wood from wickerwork centering in the tower house for radiocarbon dating, in order to try to more precisely date the construction period of the tower house. This would require an archaeologist to apply for a collection licence from the National Monuments Service and to send the sample to QUB for C14 dating.
- Conduct a photogrammetric survey of the interior of the tower house, in order to make a scaled visual record of the internal walls and surviving architectural features of the building.
- Carry out a small archaeological excavation of the building proposed as the Uí hUiginn school house.
- Make a digital interactive 3D model of Kilcloony landscape and its monuments, which could be used by a broad, socially inclusive audience to experience the landholding and settlement of the Uí hUiginn poets.
- Make a case to the National Monuments Service to give Kilcloony Castle and its immediate landscape the status of a national monument.

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