



For seven hundred years the Town Walls have been an ever present feature for countless generations of Athenry natives. They subtly influence how we get around our streets and roads, how our community grows and develops and they make our town unique.

While the robustness of the walls is obvious and a testament to the skill of their builders, after seven hundred years it was time to ensure that the walls got the necessary care to last at least seven centuries more. As a result, the work over the past seven years has stabilized and conserved its most vulnerable sections.

The conservation project has been a real journey of rediscovery for many in the community. The total co-operation of the many landowners both inside and outside the walls has been heartening in its generosity and vital to the project's success. The involvement of Athenry heritage interests has been hugely valuable in terms of the local knowledge and contacts. The local schools have used the project as a practical tool in day to day education. In the case of Scoil Chroí Naofa having the wall and tower in the school yard gave it a unique perspective! Most of all for the general community it showed that there is real interest and concern shown for the future of our heritage legacy by the powers that be.

The Heritage Council has generously supported the project over the last seven financially difficult years. Galway County

Council has matched that funding every step of the way and has led the project through the tireless efforts of its Heritage Officer, Marie Mannion. Walled Towns Day has become an important date in our summer calendar in Athenry. This year, 2014, over four thousand people gathered in the shadow of the castle to enjoy the day. The celebration has been spearheaded by Athenry Heritage Centre and groups like Athenry Tidy Towns and Athenry Community Council have become central to the wider heritage movement which has received a welcome boost from the project.

In Athenry, we hope that the past seven years have been a huge first step towards creating a wonderfully conserved medieval town which will be properly integrated and accessible by the community and hopefully by the many visitors who will come to see it. We are ready to continue the journey and excited at where it will take us.

On behalf of the Walled Towns Committee and the Athenry Community I would like to thank all those involved with the Conservation Project over the past seven years and look forward to continued progress in years to come.

Cllr Peter Feeney

Chairperson

Athenry Walled Town Committee





THE IRISH WALLED TOWNS NETWORK

The Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) was founded by the Heritage Council of Ireland in 2005 in order to unite and co-ordinate local authorities involved in the management, conservation and enhancement of 27 historic walled towns in Ireland, both north and south. The network is not a top-down organisation, rather, it exists to help its members. The IWTN's activities are controlled by a steering committee. The committee is made up of representatives from the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the Heritage Council, and several member towns.

Walled towns and cities are an important national heritage asset. They link communities to their past, while continuing to shape the form of our modern settlements. The remaining walls, or their former sites and routes, help to create a unique sense of place, belonging, and identity. They are also an important focus for tourism, cultural, and economic development. The Irish government's own National Policy on Town Defences states that 'old walls, towers and gates are an asset [and] a valuable part of the character of the towns they have shaped and protected for hundreds of years.' Such assets, however, must be effectively conserved, managed, and promoted. Since 2007, the IWTN has provided €617,000 for the conservation of Athlone's town walls. Nationally, we have provided over €6 million to save the country's remaining sections of town wall.

Liam Mannix

*Irish Walled Towns Network Project Manager
Heritage Council*





ATHENRY CHRONOLOGY

- 1178 Title Baron of Athenry created for Piers de Bermingham
- 1227 Richard de Burgh (aka de Burgo, later Burke) awarded lordship of Connacht
- c.1237-1240 Construction begins on Athenry Castle
- c.1240 St. Mary's Collegiate Church founded
- 1241 Dominican Priory of SS. Peter and Paul founded; thought to be finished in 1271
- 1244 Right to hold a fair granted to Athenry
- 1249 Athenry attacked by the O'Conors
- 1310 Murage charter granted for 3 years – funds for maintenance and repair of town walls
- 1316 Battle of Athenry – 10th August, William de Burgo and Richard de Bermingham's forces defeat King of Connacht Felim O'Connor
- 1324 De Burgo family fund rebuild of priory church
- 1380 Athenry one of eleven towns represented at parliament
- 15th cen. Market cross – only example in Ireland of late medieval Gothic cross of 'tabernacle' or 'lantern' type
- 1400 Pope Boniface IX granted bull of indulgence to those who visited priory in Athenry and contributed to its upkeep

1423	Priory burnt accidentally. Pope Martin V granted bull of indulgence to those who contributed to repair of Athenry priory	1629	Sir William Parsons grants Athenry a regular market and October fair
1484	St Mary's Church made collegiate by Archbishop Donat O'Murray of Tuam	1643	Garrison placed in town by General Burke
1574	Sons of Earl of Clanricard capture and burn town/destroy St Mary's Church. Sir Henry Sidney, Lord Deputy, begins repairs, including North Gate. Queen Elizabeth I gave priory/lands to provost and burgesses of Athenry for 26s 6d a year	1644	Priory a university for Dominican order by decree of general order from Rome
1576	Henry Sidney proposes construction of inner wall to reduce town size	1652	Cromwells' soldiers destroy much of the Priory
1577	Town captured and burnt again by sons of Earl of Clanricard – proposed inner wall abandoned	1685	Dominicans return to Priory
1583	Map of town shows dividing wall less than half finished	1698	Priory formally closed by penal laws
1597	Red Hugh O'Donnell attacked and destroyed Athenry	18th cen.	Openings added to west side of Spittle Gate - possibly by English military. Similar openings in curtain wall to east of castle entrance
17th cen.+	Possible guardhouse by North-West Tower	1750s	English soldiers build barracks inside Priory, demolishing several buildings
1622	Dominicans evicted	19th cen.	Rebuilding/repointing of sections of wall
1627	Charles I granted the Priory to four Galway merchants to hold it for the King but the Dominicans were allowed to re-establish in 1638	1819	Police militia, later RIC, replace soldiers in Priory
		1828	Church of Ireland built in chancel of St Mary's Collegiate Church
		1829	Athenry House built 1830
		1840	Town loses corporation status
		1845	Priory bell tower collapses – beneath which lies a roodscreen (one of 4 in Ireland)
		1847	Castle moat filled as part of drainage scheme that created mill course

1851	Midland Great Western Railway reaches Athenry	1993	Athenry gets 24-hour water supply
1874	Smallpox epidemic. River Clarin diverted to make mill race	1995	Removal of part of north wall to create a new opening by St Mary's Catholic Church
1884/ 1885	Patrick Kelly forms Athenry GAA club	1997	Athenry GAA club wins its first All-Ireland Senior Hurling Club
1892	Priory given state protection as National Monument	1999	Athenry Heritage Centre opened. 14th century mace and seal given by Anthony Blishen to Athenry. Lady Well Millennium Park opened
1916	Larry Lardner takes over Athenry under the command of Liam Mellows, commander of the Western Division of the IRA Easter Rising	2005	Athenry a member of the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN)
1938	Athenry joined to national electricity grid	2006	Athenry Walled Towns Day held during the month of August
1943	US Airforce Flying Fortress bomber crash lands in Mellows College with top US generals on board	2007	Loro Gate foundations discovered during road development works
1953	Kenny Park GAA ground opened	2008	Athenry Town Walls Conservation and Management Plan
1976	Rebuilding of sections of the top of the Town Walls with concrete and stone settings	2007 – 2014	Athenry Town Walls Conservation Works undertaken by Galway County Council and funded by Galway County Council and the Heritage Council
1977	North Gate restored by Galway County Council		
1982	Section of Town Walls demolished and rebuilt beside River Clarin and Spitle Gate during construction of town sewer		
1986	Church of Ireland building used by scouts		
1989-1990	Castle and ground excavated and restored by OPW		

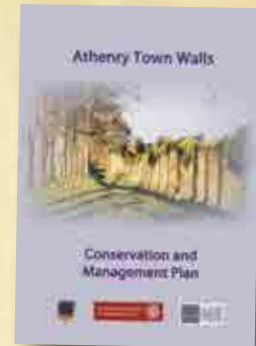


ATHENRY TOWN WALLS - CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT PLAN

In March 2008 a conservation and management plan for the town walls of Athenry was completed on behalf of Galway County Council by Gifford in association with PLB and Donald Insall Associates.

The town walls were built in the 14th century and have been fundamental in maintaining the plan of the town. Indeed it is the combination of the town walls and the medieval streetscape within the walled circuit that gives Athenry a strong sense of

times long past. Allied to this are the other surviving legacies of the medieval period in the town – the Castle, Priory, Collegiate Church and Market Square with Cross – which further add to the rich heritage of this fascinating town.



Recognising that the walls were an under-exploited resource for Athenry, Galway County Council provided funding, in partnership with the Heritage Council, for the conservation and management plan, which has been prepared in consultation with many organisations and the community in order to present as broad a consensus on the way forward as possible.

The conservation and management plan provides a framework to guide all stakeholders involved with the town walls in developing a long term management strategy for the walls. An Action Plan for the implementation of the policies proposed to manage, preserve and enhance the walls was produced, outlining short, medium and long-term actions.

Athenry Town Walls: Conservation & Management Plan has underpinned all the conservation works done on the walls of Athenry over the past seven years.



ATHENRY WALLED TOWNS DAY

Athenry Walled Towns Day has been in existence since 2006. It is a family focused heritage and educational fun day where all sectors of the community can gain a greater awareness, appreciation and knowledge of the Medieval Town Walls and the town of Athenry. The events are programmed to suit all age groups and have a strong educational and awareness building theme.

The overall aim of Athenry Walled Towns Day is to increase awareness, knowledge and understanding of the medieval town of Athenry and its walls and it is hoped that this will thereby lead to its better management and ultimately its protection. Walled Towns Day showcases the town and its walls as a great heritage, educational and community resource.

In addition to this, Athenry Walled Towns Day is an important tourism festival that engages with all sectors of the local community in the management and delivery of this important heritage initiative. It also creates a greater awareness of the Irish Walled Towns Network and its work in the various towns across the country.

Walled Towns Day builds and fosters strong links with the local community and local schools, property owners, businesses and heritage networks within the town. It also fosters good link with heritage organisations such as Athenry Heritage Centre, Athenry Castle (OPW), Athenry Tidy Towns, Athenry Tourism Group, Galway County Council, Galway County Heritage Forum, Monument Services, DAHG and The Heritage Council.





ATHENRY **HISTORY**

ATHENRY

Although prehistoric objects have been found in the area, the story of Athenry begins in the 13th century, when Athenry became an important Anglo-Norman walled town in Connacht. The construction of Athenry Castle commenced between 1237 and 1240, and in 1241, the Dominican Abbey was founded. Both buildings are now national monuments. The first and only historical reference to the walls being built is the murage grant of 1310.

Athenry today lies on the junction between the Galway–Dublin main line of the Irish rail network and the Western Rail Corridor; the section from Athenry to Ennis having re-opened in 2009. The M6 and M17/18, presently under construction, meet at Athenry, making the town the crossroads of the West, mirroring its role at the town's foundation 800 years ago.

‘The Fields of Athenry’ – a folk song about the mid-19th century Irish famine – seems like a traditional ballad but was composed in the 1970s and is associated with Irish rugby and GAA sports teams.

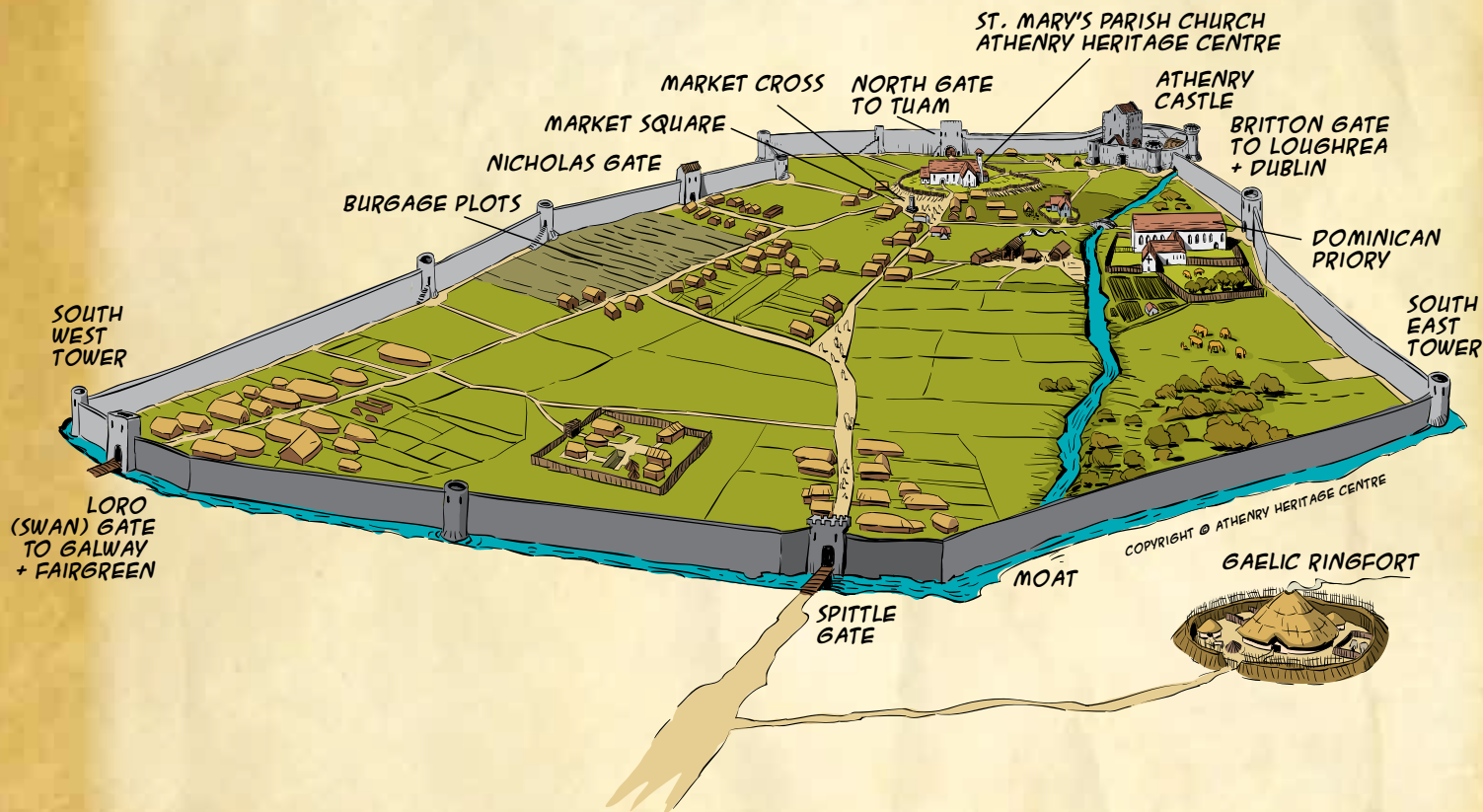
THE SETTING

Athenry is a thriving agricultural centre in County Galway, 24km/15 miles east of Galway city. Although the setting seems an undistinguished flat plain with a minor river – the Clareen – (which becomes the Clarinbridge river downstream on its way to Galway Bay), it is the fording place of that river which gives Athenry its name. The location was considered of strategic importance well before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. It lies on a long, east-west ridge of gravel and sediment (Esker Riada) that was deposited by the last retreating glacier and stretches across the middle of the island, forming an easy land route linking Galway to the midlands and Dublin beyond. Athenry is also on the most westerly north-south route in the country. It was a regional crossroads between Limerick and Sligo.

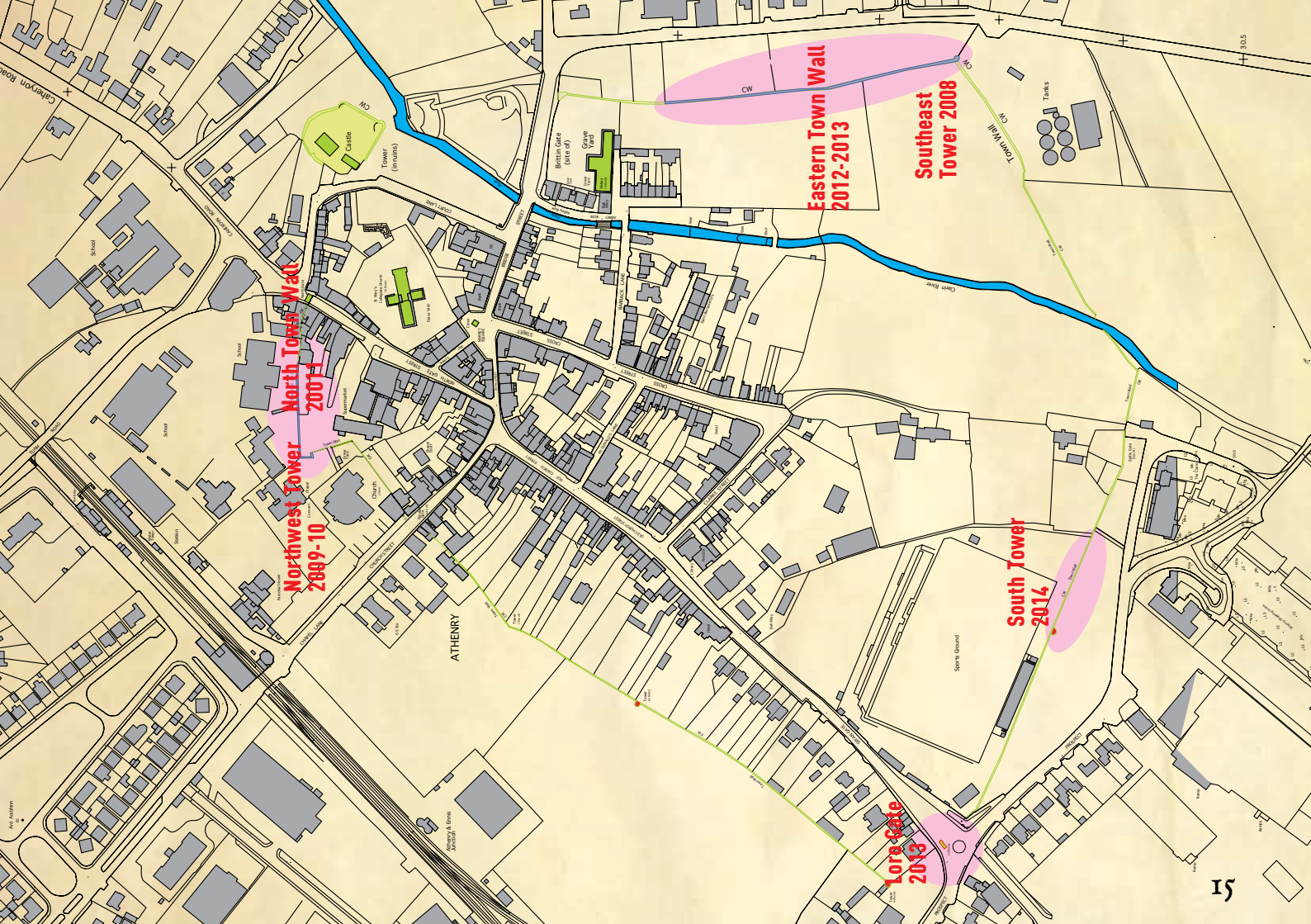
Athenry or Baile Átha an Rí derives its name from the ford or Áth, a crossing of the river Clarin, just east of the settlement. As three kingdoms met at that point, it was called ‘Áth na Ríogh’, or ‘the Ford of the Kings’. The kingdoms were Hymany to the north-east, east and south-east; Aidhne to the south and south-west; Maigh Seola to the west and north-west. It is also thought that the name could also just mean ‘town of the river ford’, as well as ‘town of the king’s ford’.

ATHENRY MEDIEVAL TOWN, CO. GALWAY.

Circa. 1316AD







THE ANGLO-NORMAN TOWN

The Kingdom of Connacht was awarded to Richard de Burgh (aka de Burgo, and later anglicised to Burke) in 1227; and after a series of local wars against Gaelic Irish chieftains, his lordship was confirmed in 1234. De Burgh's vassal Meiler de Bermingham founded Athenry and built his castle by the fording place on the River Clareen between 1237-1240. Given the strategic nature of the site, it seems certain there would have been some kind of Irish settlement there already, although little is known about it. Probably the Anglo-Normans established themselves at Athenry less because of the intrinsic value of the place than as an act of defensive appropriation: they wanted to deny it to existing and anticipated enemies. Athenry thus began as an Anglo-Norman frontier outpost in what would long remain a turbulent area; and by the first decades of the 14th century, the medieval town was already surrounded with a curtain wall and a wide moat.

The castle had its own bailey of curtain wall with mural towers and moat. In 1989/1990 the castle was restored to its present state by the Office of Public Works as a reminder of Athenry's medieval past. Athenry is also proud of a rare 15th century market cross in the town square. The cross is called a 'Tabernacle' or 'Lantern' cross. It survives as a fragment that originally would have been near the top of a decorated stone pillar, and its form follows a pattern of late medieval crosses found in eastern Ireland.

ST. MARY'S COLLEGIATE CHURCH

St. Mary's Collegiate Church, the former parish church of Athenry, was founded in about 1240. It was destroyed in 1574 by the sons of the Earl of Clanricard as a demonstration of their implacable hostility to the government in Dublin. St. Mary's was their family church, containing the tomb of their mother, and its destruction was proof that they would go to any extreme in order to maintain their hereditary lands and privileges.

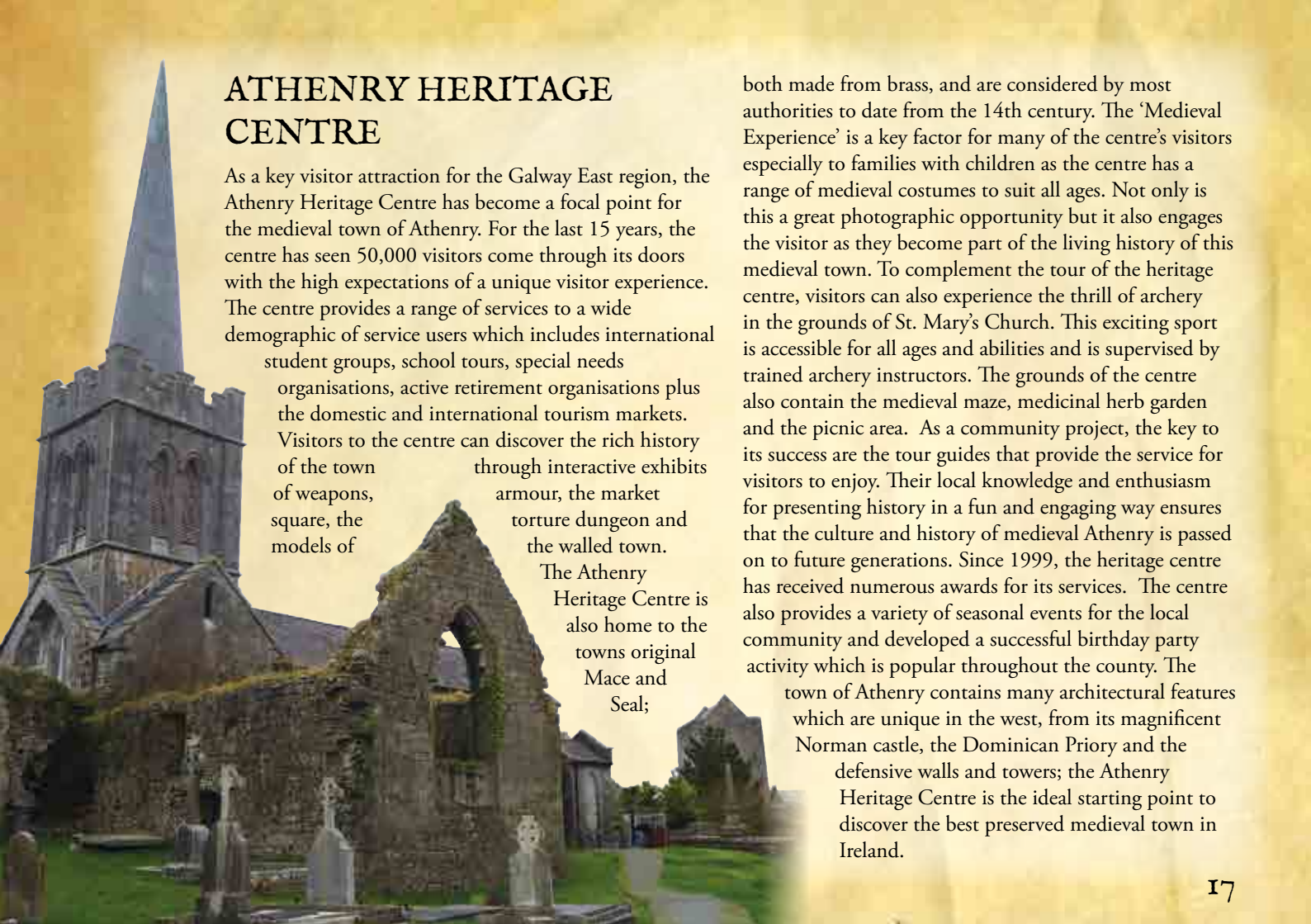
When? Built about 1240.

Who? Built by Meiler de Bermingham, an Anglo-Norman lord.

Why? All Anglo-Norman towns had a parish church. They were essentially built for the same reasons that churches are built today; to provide spiritual welfare to the townspeople and performing services to the parish:

• Teaching the word of God • Weddings • Baptisms • Holy Communion • Funerals • Burial grounds

What? Today St Mary's Parish Church consists of two different parts. The original, 13th-century church survives in the form of ruins – the remains of the Nave (where the lay congregation stood) and two transepts (additional rooms that probably served as private chapels). These ruins abut a later, 19th-century Protestant church that now contains Athenry Heritage Centre. Athenry's town seal and mace are now kept securely in the centre.



ATHENRY HERITAGE CENTRE

As a key visitor attraction for the Galway East region, the Athenry Heritage Centre has become a focal point for the medieval town of Athenry. For the last 15 years, the centre has seen 50,000 visitors come through its doors with the high expectations of a unique visitor experience. The centre provides a range of services to a wide demographic of service users which includes international

student groups, school tours, special needs organisations, active retirement organisations plus the domestic and international tourism markets. Visitors to the centre can discover the rich history of the town through interactive exhibits of weapons, armour, the market square, the torture dungeon and the walled town. models of

The Athenry Heritage Centre is also home to the towns original Mace and Seal;

both made from brass, and are considered by most authorities to date from the 14th century. The 'Medieval Experience' is a key factor for many of the centre's visitors especially to families with children as the centre has a range of medieval costumes to suit all ages. Not only is this a great photographic opportunity but it also engages the visitor as they become part of the living history of this medieval town. To complement the tour of the heritage centre, visitors can also experience the thrill of archery in the grounds of St. Mary's Church. This exciting sport is accessible for all ages and abilities and is supervised by trained archery instructors. The grounds of the centre also contain the medieval maze, medicinal herb garden and the picnic area. As a community project, the key to its success are the tour guides that provide the service for visitors to enjoy. Their local knowledge and enthusiasm for presenting history in a fun and engaging way ensures that the culture and history of medieval Athenry is passed on to future generations. Since 1999, the heritage centre has received numerous awards for its services. The centre also provides a variety of seasonal events for the local community and developed a successful birthday party activity which is popular throughout the county. The town of Athenry contains many architectural features which are unique in the west, from its magnificent Norman castle, the Dominican Priory and the defensive walls and towers; the Athenry Heritage Centre is the ideal starting point to discover the best preserved medieval town in Ireland.

ATHENRY CASTLE

The castle is the oldest structure in the town, with the base building probably completed between 1237 and 1240. It was sited on a slight rise as a defence of the fording place, and it is separated from the town by its own wall and a moat, indicating that its elite occupants sought protection from both hostile external forces and the townspeople alike.

The finished castle was enclosed by a D-shaped wall with round towers at the corners. Construction of the keep itself is credited to Meiler de Bermingham.

Life in the castle would have been fairly bleak. The first floor level would have had some light from the door and windows, but the upper levels must have been dark. There seem to have been no fireplaces anywhere inside the castle. It's possible that an open fire could have been maintained on the top floor of the building, with the smoke escaping out through a vent in the roof. In any case, the de Berminghams left the castle in the 15th century and took up residence in a townhouse near the market cross.

When? Built between AD 1237 and 1240

Who? Built by Meiler de Bermingham, an Anglo-Norman lord

Why?

- To defend the lord and the townspeople
- For the lord and his family to live in
- To act as a court house
- To contain a prison
- As a place for feasting and entertaining guests
- As a symbol of Anglo-Norman dominance over the native Irish

What?

Athenry Castle is a 'hall keep castle', consisting of a large, free-standing building (keep) which originally had a large first-floor hall open to the roof and a viewing gallery. This building has a first-floor entrance, a projecting latrine/garderobe (toilet), crenellated (up & down) battlements and a battered (projecting) base. The keep is surrounded by a strong stone wall with two towers, arrow-slits and a battered base. The most unusual and important features of Athenry Castle are the highly decorated doorway and windows; these are carved in a style more commonly found in churches and abbeys, particularly those built by Irish, rather than Anglo-Norman lords.



THE DOMINICAN PRIORY OF SAINTS PETER & PAUL

The Dominican Priory of SS. Peter and Paul was founded by Meiler de Bermingham for the benefit of the townspeople of Athenry, and he himself is buried there. The Priory was begun in c.1241 and finished some twenty years later. It seems to have been supported by both the Gaelic Irish and the Anglo-Norman colonisers, for Felim O'Connor, king of Connacht, built the refectory. In 1324, the de Burgh family funded an extensive rebuilding of the front of the church, now largely destroyed; they also lengthened the choir of the building by extending it eastwards. The north aisle and transept were probably constructed during this period.

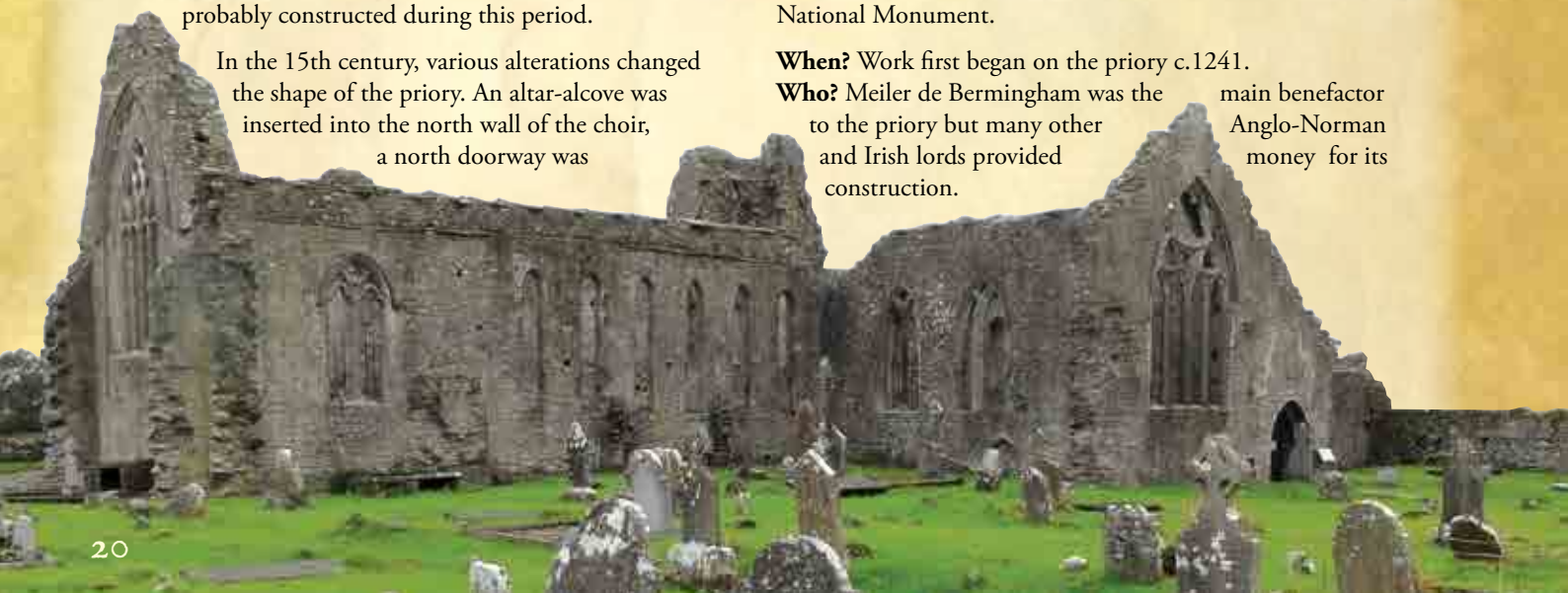
In the 15th century, various alterations changed the shape of the priory. An altar-alcove was inserted into the north wall of the choir, a north doorway was

added to the transept, the roof of the cloistral ambulatory was raised, and a central tower was constructed although it collapsed in the mid-19th century. The priory was not affected by King Henry VIII's order dissolving monastic establishments and seizing their revenues, but it did begin a period of decline during the reign of Elizabeth I.

The priory has suffered assaults, fires and restorations during its long history and various architectural and sculptural styles can be identified. There are a number of 17th century grave slabs and wall-mounted plaques inside the priory, many of which bear interesting motifs and designs while other memorials are decorated with various tradesmen's tools or farming implements. Today, the Priory of St Peter and Paul is a National Monument.

When? Work first began on the priory c.1241.

Who? Meiler de Bermingham was the main benefactor to the priory but many other Anglo-Norman and Irish lords provided money for its construction.



Why? The Dominican Priors are what are termed a 'mendicant' order, which in very simple terms means a preaching and begging order. The main reason for building the priory was to bring the word of God to as many people as possible, while having a large population to beg from; this is why mendicant orders were attracted to towns. The priory at Athenry also served as an important burial place for rich and important members of society throughout the medieval period.

What? The ruins of the large priory church survive today, comprising a long (over 45 metres) chancel and nave, a transept and an aisled arcade. This church was originally the focus of a much bigger priory complex with numerous other buildings. The priory includes some of the most ornately carved stone-work in all of Galway's medieval towns and was clearly a very wealthy and important institution in the middle ages. Among its many treasures are numerous carved grave-slabs and burial tombs dating from the 13th century to the early modern period.

THE TOWN WALLS

When? The first historical reference to the stone walls tells us that they were begun in 1310, but the original, 13th-century town was probably enclosed by earth-and-timber defences.

Who? The building of the stone walls was financed by a special tax (murage) lasting three years that had to be paid by anyone entering the town. Tradition also states that after the 1316 Battle of Athenry, weapons and armour were taken from the dead and sold to pay for the walls.

Why? Defence was the main reason for building Athenry's town walls, but there were other reasons as well:

- To display the wealth and power of the town's rulers
- To control access into and out of the town through the gates
- To tax/toll merchants bringing goods into town through the gates
- To legally separate the town from the countryside (different laws applied)
- To display community pride
- Possibly to symbolise God's protection of the townspeople.

What?

Athenry's town walls are among the best preserved in Ireland, with over 70% surviving. They form a circuit roughly 2km in length and enclose an area of about 28.5 hectares, making Athenry one of the largest medieval towns in Ireland (over twice the size of Galway and Dublin!). The walls originally had at least 6 towers (5 survive) and 5 entrance gates (but only the restored North Gate still stands).

Large sections of Athenry's town walls remain (1.25km survive of a 2km circuit), including five towers and a town entrance known as the North Gate, making Athenry one of the more complete medieval walled towns in Ireland. The circuit enclosed an area of over 28 hectares, which is comparatively large and similar in scope to Kilkenny Hightown. The walls are slightly more than a metre in thickness, and four to five metres in height. They were surrounded by a wide, water-filled fosse that would have made them seem more formidable, and there were inner ramparts rather than a wall walk. A low outer rampart probably also existed. There is a 1310 murage grant, which suggests that funds were needed for maintenance or repair of the town walls.

The walls exist in a continuous stretch along the west, south and south-eastern portions of the circuit. Stretches of it have become somewhat reduced or overgrown with vegetation, but the sense of a medieval town surrounded by walls can still be experienced. Gaps exist in the eastern portion of the circuit although fragments can be detected at the backs of houses south of the castle.

There are five towers on the existing walls and there may have been two others on the portion of the eastern wall which is now lost. Round towers reinforced the three corners, with the castle occupying that role on the north-eastern corner. The best preserved of the surviving mural-towers is the one at the south-eastern corner of the town. It is about ten metres tall and is somewhat external rather than being within the wall. There were entrances on each of the adjoining walls so that defenders





could pass through the tower, and a short stairway leads to a room with loop-holes allowed those inside to defend the outer faces of both adjoining walls and also the area in front of the tower itself. The other towers are ruined structures now. The mid-mural towers project from the walls like half-moon structures.

There were probably six gates in the walls; only the North Gate survives as an isolated structure. Known locally as 'The Arch', it's a two-storey rectangular structure with a slightly splayed base and might be a later addition. The North Gate's archway

has been restored; it once had a rectangular tower which is now in ruins. The other gates exist only in their names. The Spittle Gate (or 'Spittle Gate') at the far south of the town got its name from a hospital that would have been located there, far from the main part of the town, thus segregating the sick from the populace in an effort to avoid the spread of contagious diseases. The Loro Gate is also called the Swan Gate, a name it apparently got from a nearby pub. The foundations of the Loro Gate was discovered a number of years ago and have been recently preserved.



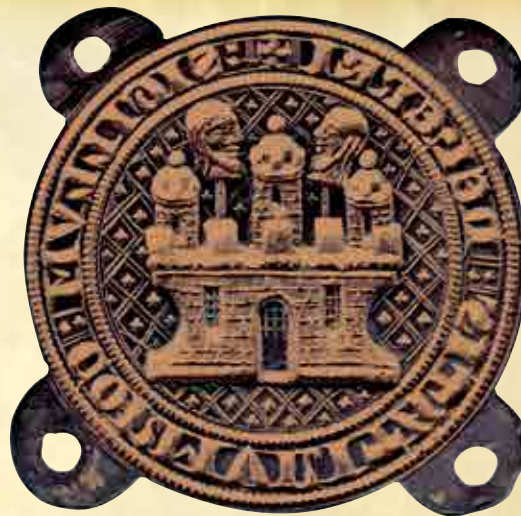
THE BATTLE OF ATHENRY

In 1315, Edward Bruce led an army of Scots into Ulster, and during a year's campaign, captured Dundalk and Carrickfergus. His father, Robert Bruce, King of Scotland, landed in Ireland, setting off two more years of turmoil and stimulating the repair of the walls and gates of Anglo-Norman strongholds throughout Ireland.

Athenry had been granted a three-year murage grant in 1310, perhaps to repair or otherwise fortify the 14th-century walls; and the Battle of Athenry may have stimulated further improvement of existing defences.

On August 10th, 1316, an Anglo-Norman force under the command of William de Burgh and Richard de Bermingham defeated an Irish Gaelic army led by the King of Connacht, Felim O'Connor, who had the support of other local Irish chieftains. O'Connor was killed, as were other local Irish nobles. The destruction of an army of fellow Gaels was also a set-back to the Scots; their incursion continued for another couple of years only to end in defeat at the Battle of Faughart in 1318 and the death of Edward Bruce.

Medieval Athenry was twice the size of medieval Galway, and its unusually large circuit may have been the result of undue optimism or perhaps a reflection of the competition which existed between de Bermingham and his overlord, de Burgh. Probably the town didn't grow sufficiently to warrant such a large enclosure.



The seal of Athenry, commemorating the townspeople's victory over the Irish Chieftains in the Battle of Athenry, 1316.

In the 1570s, the sons of the Earl of Clanricard – a family descended from the original de Burghs – attacked Athenry and ultimately prevented the construction of an inner wall that would have reduced the size of the walled town by about a half, a strategic response that would have made it easier to defend with the garrison that was available.

And better defences was certainly required. Because in 1596, Athenry was sacked and burnt by the Gaelic Irish chieftain, Red Hugh O'Donnell. This time the destruction was so complete that the town never really recovered until the modern era.







CONSERVATION **WORKS**

CONSERVATION WORKS 2007 - 2014

The fourteenth-century town walls of Athenry are of exceptional archaeological and architectural interest, and are among the best preserved medieval town walls surviving in Ireland. They enclose an area of 28.5 hectares, making it among the largest of the fifty known walled towns in Ireland. Over one kilometre of the original wall remains, and it once extended to two kilometres in length and its defensive towers provide some of its most important landmarks. The town wall is only one of a number of significant medieval structures still standing in Athenry. The town's medieval fabric includes the castle and its bawn, the Dominican Priory, St. Mary's Parish Church and the Market Cross.

Over the last seven years, the conservation of the medieval town walls has progressed through small-scale but strategic projects. This work is being carried out in accordance with the Conservation & Heritage Management Plan prepared by Gifford Consulting; with funding from Galway County Council and the Heritage Council and in collaboration with a steering Group. Howley Hayes Architects were first appointed in 2007 to carry out emergency works to the southeast tower. Galway County Council carried out six subsequent phases of works around the walled circuit with grant assistance from The Heritage Council and from their own resources. This work was overseen by Howley Hayes Architects and managed by Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer on behalf of Galway

County Council. Each phase of works commenced with a review of the priorities set out in the plan, as well as field studies to identify the areas in most need of intervention. Altogether, almost 500 metres of town wall and three towers have been repaired to date.

CONSERVATION OF RUINS

When first inspected, the towers and walls were laden down with ivy, which masked their condition, as well as putting the stability of the structures and public safety at risk. There were considerable challenges in drawing and photographing structures extensively covered in thick ivy. To begin, the ivy was cut right back to the walls so the overall form and extent of the feature could be discerned. A cherry picker was used to closely observe the upper levels of the structures without having to step onto the unguarded floors that were clearly in a vulnerable structural state. In some areas, in order to remove the ivy roots, the stones would have had to be taken down, which would risk its partial collapse. While 3D laser scanning was used, it was of limited value as it was unable to record through the thick roots of ivy. Rectified photography was the most effective way to record the walls and to prepare drawings that showed the extent of the ivy after it was cut back to its roots. Stone accurate drawings were prepared for exposed areas of facing stone, or to locate and record important architectural details on the towers.

Works were prioritised in the following order: health and safety, integrity of the monument, weathering and protection.





This translated in the works programme to - treat and remove embedded roots; then consolidate loose or unstable medieval masonry, and improve its weathering.

The first operation was to treat the ivy growth, by spraying herbicide and leaving for two weeks; this being the most efficient way to feed the poison into the root system. After removal of the plant growth by hand, the walls were sprayed with a biocide to remove all small surface growth and all soil from the joints. In order to kill all embedded root systems deep in the fabric of the masonry, the larger roots would be tapped with copper tubes filled with root killer, that were topped up regularly. Over time, these roots would shrink, allowing them to be removed and the voids filled with grout.

Conservation works consisted of repointing and consolidating the existing fabric with lime mortar while carefully selecting stones identified on the site. As the extent of the damage to the wall due to the ivy was not possible to quantify accurately prior to its removal, judgement was made on site at each inspection as to how much of the wall should be re-pointed. Recovered stone was set aside for consolidation work, with smaller stones and shards re-used for the pinning and pointing works. Scant evidence of lime dash render was identified on both walls and towers, valuable evidence that they were not always bare stone, but once had a protective coat and would have looked quite different to today.

A strategy was developed for pinning and pointing the wall with the masons and this was agreed with the National Monuments Service, Department of Arts, Heritage & The Gaeltacht. during their site visits. There was need to ensure that the wall was weathered without the introduction of fabric that was not authentic, or changed its appearance as a ruin. The masonry repairs included raking-out and re-pointing of stonework, grouting of voids, rebuilding and consolidation of the walls and parapet, and the infilling of large unstable voids. Cement cappings that prevailed around the wall circuit were removed, and the wall heads flaunched with small stones and lime mortar. This provided a weathered surface that sheds rainwater off the wall heads without changing the profile of the ruined wall, and stopping rainwater from penetrating into the centre of the wall. Loose lime and hard cement mortar joints were raked out and these areas re-pointed using lime mortar following agreement of samples and suitable mortar mixes.

The condition of the stonework as found meant that a variety of approaches needed to be taken in their repair. Where facing stone remained, it was enough to carefully cut out cement joints, fill voids and re-point in lime and sand mortar. Where found, areas of the original lime mortar or render were left in place. Natural hydraulic lime with beach pebbles was used as they were best suited to the thick joints and were similar to the mortar found in the walls. It was important in the short period of time available that the materials used were readily available and relatively user-friendly. There were regular discussions about the lime mortar with the masons when on site to ensure that the mix used was correct and also to agree any adjustments due to exposure or any workability issues.

All new works were carried out in a way that while sensitive, were unambiguously new. While salvaged stone was used to consolidate unstable stonework, where facing stone was eroded it was simply weathered and kept in its state as found. Where collapsed sections of wall were found in situ, these were reassembled, but they could be clearly distinguishable from the older masonry. The lime mortars did not attempt to match the original mortar exactly, in this way specialist assessment could determine the extent of the repairs in future. But the mortar was not so different so as to disfigure the monument, and was soft enough to behave just as the original work that has stood for so long.

The present flora of the town walls is interesting as an example of the propensity for wild plants to establish themselves on man-made structures. Ecology and biodiversity was an

essential consideration in planning the conservation of the town walls. Ivy obliterated plants that may have grown on its surfaces before it took hold. Besides common lichens, some Polypodium ferns and flowering plants were also found in isolated areas. Two species of flowering plant were identified, Pellitory-on-the-wall and Saxifraga sempervivum. The former is a long-established alien with a wide but very localised distribution in Ireland. In addition to these, Pennywort is abundant, Brambles are frequent and Red Fescue grass is present. In those areas where work has been completed, the species have already begun to re-establish themselves. It is important to ensure that ivy does not take hold to such an extent that roots become embedded again.





THE TOWERS

The southeast tower is an untypical teardrop shape with a stone circular staircase. It is situated on an open site at the edge of the present town away from the main centre of activity, and is the most complete of the six towers erected along the town walls. While in reasonable condition, it was under threat due to vandalism and lack of maintenance. Replacement limestone steps were inserted into the stone staircase, the entrance door and roof parapet were consolidated and a new stainless steel gate fitted to improve access for repair and security. The southeast tower's prominent position is opportune, as it is the best example of a defensive mural tower still standing.

While the works to the southeast tower were being completed, the assessment and survey of the northwest tower commenced. This tower has an adjoining seventeenth-century guard house, which along with the attached town wall, was in a ruined state in far worse condition than the other tower. It stands on top of a relatively accessible section of the town wall at the convergence of three separate properties; a school yard, a convent garden and a supermarket carpark. It is a landmark on the northern side of the town, forming an impressive and valuable example of standing archaeology. As the most complex conservation project, there were three phases of work (2009-2011) undertaken to the tower,









guard house and the town walls stretching as far as the north gate. Health and safety considerations were more urgent here, and unfortunately, it was found that it was in need of far more consolidation than was initially thought.

The northwest tower was originally circular in plan with a solid base rising to approximately seven meters with a tower chamber, staircase, roof and parapet rising a further five to six meters. From an examination of the masonry junctions between the town walls and the base of the tower, it was concluded that the tower was built onto the town walls some time after they were completed. A doorway enters the tower with a flight of stairs cut into the solid lower section that once led off directly from the wall walk of the town walls. After several steps there is a half-landing that also serves another

staircase descending in a southerly direction to the remains of the guard house. The upper level of the tower is divided by a central spine wall that forms a chamber to the north with the staircases contained in the southern half. The outer faces of the south and especially the west sides of the tower corbelled outwards dramatically to create a spectacular overhang above the convent garden, the collapse exposing the interior of the tower. A vaulted room had become a huge overhanging corbel and this rough surface was completely covered in thick ivy







roots to form a sort of basket holding the stonework in place. It was determined that the ivy could not be removed without seriously destabilising the structure unless some method of propping it could be devised to ensure that the stones could be safely consolidated.

To achieve this, the architects designed a free-standing steel framework consisting of slender columns and curved ring beams placed beside the tower, but not bearing on it. This props the structure and provides access to the corbels so that they could be safely consolidated. The architects designed an elegant screen of stainless steel cables to the framework that reinstate the cylindrical form of the tower in a sensitive way, while maintaining a clear distinction between new and old fabric. The framework was designed to be lightweight, a shadow to complete the oval form of the tower before it collapsed. This would allow access to the tower for inspections and maintenance and had the potential to provide platforms to allow visitors to the tower. Stones that fell from the corbel would not fall to the ground and could be retrieved. If desired, the steel rope screen could carry creepers to mask the impact of the modern framework while creating an interesting garden feature and return the tower to its former silhouette. The framework was used in the painstaking consolidation of the masonry, a new gate and two new steps were added, along with the range of masonry repairs that were carried out on the previous phase.

In 2014, it was decided to repair the south tower situated on the town wall along its southeastern face, visible across a



field along Prospect road. This tower was just over five metres in height, having lost much of its height over the centuries. The rear of the tower is located in the GAA grounds, and it had been fitted with barbed wire and the top of the walls studded with glass shards to deter access. As at the northwest tower, it is proposed that an elegant guarding be erected

to inhibit unauthorised access, but also to allow guided groups to visit the top to appreciate the views. The tower was undermined by two mature trees, and these were removed as part of the works, creating a new landmark on this side for visiting supporters to Kenny Park.



THE TOWN WALLS

The section of town wall to the east side of the northwest tower was in poor condition and also in need of urgent repair. The wall was at risk due to its proximity to traffic and from encroaching development. The north face of the wall was originally much higher and it would have been possible to access the tower from the wall-walk. The scar showing its full extent is visible on the east face of the tower. The wall heads were uneven due to erosion or partial demolition over time, with the south face fallen away to expose the rubble core. This had been pointed with hard cement mortars that were stronger than the masonry leading to trapped moisture and frost damage and further erosion. The bottom two and a half metres of the wall to the south side have been buttressed with shaped,

random coursed stonework using hard cement mortars, added when the carpark was built. The stonework to the external face of the wall is very similar to the facing stonework on the towers, and has been repaired in areas using hard cement mortars.

The north side of the wall facing onto the school yard (Scoil Chroí Naofa) was the first section to be addressed, as this was the side in best condition and the most accessible. The 30m long section of wall consisted of facing stone that was pointed up where the original lime mortar had eroded away or other areas where hard cement mortars had been used in the relatively recent past. As soon as the ivy removal commenced on the town wall section located in the carpark, it was clear that the wall was very vulnerable and would collapse without first stabilising it along its length. Sections of the wall had eroded so far that only the facing stones remained and would not have survived the removal of the ivy. The wall heads had been undermined by the ivy roots to the extent that the top section of the wall mostly consisted of soil and roots with isolated stones. A cost effective solution using timber shores and scaffolding was devised by the structural engineer. This allowed the skilled masons to work alongside the workers removing the ivy, setting aside recovered stones for re-use and methodically moving along both sides of the wall. In 2011, the works involved the conservation of the wall section that runs along the remaining area of the schoolyard. It is located in a garden belonging to one of the townhouses adjacent to the north gate. This wall is a continuation of the previous section of wall, and the same methodologies were used in its repair.



In 2012-2013, the eastern town wall was repaired. The eastern town wall is 400m long, and links the southeast tower to the ruins of the priory. It is situated in fields close to the town centre and is highly visible on the approach road from the new motorway. It appears that approximately 250 metres of this wall was re-built in a new alignment behind the original wall after the priory fell into disuse in the seventeenth century. The remnants of the original wall remain below the fields to the east side of the thinner rebuilt wall, they remain visible as parallel banks in the adjacent field to the east. In large sections, the wall is no thicker than a traditional dry stone field wall, and loose

random rubble masonry survives in many places. From the surveys undertaken previously, sections of mortared wall were identified and scheduled for pinning, pointing and flaunching of the wall heads. Alongside mortared wall sections were drystone sections that had been taken down in order to treat ivy. These were rebuilt so that no stones were left at the base of the wall. These works continued to the southeastern section in 2014, when the walls to either side of the south tower were repaired, including one of the tallest sections of the town wall still standing.

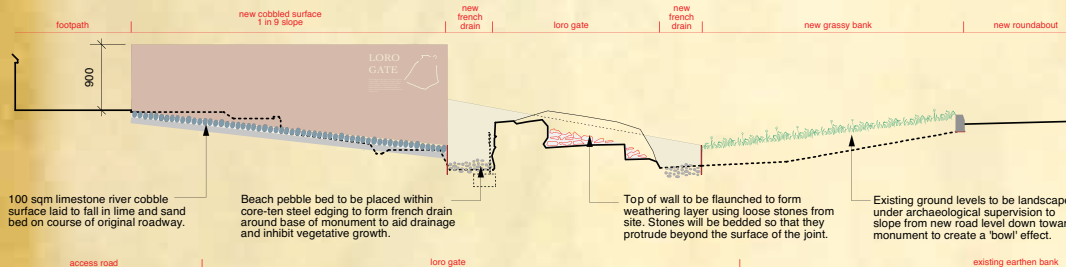
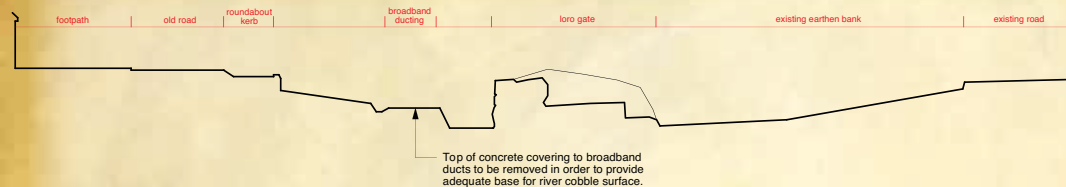


SWANGATE - LORO GATE - GEATA LÁRACH

A portion of the Loro Gate or Swan Gate was uncovered in 2007, by workers who were preparing the ground for a new roundabout on the main Galway road. It was excavated by archaeologist Ronan Jones. The approximate site of the Loro Gate, was known, but its exact position was uncertain up to this point. The portion of the Loro Gate that was uncovered is 7 metres in length, 2 metres thick at its base and 2 feet high. It is part of the eastern wall of the gate tower, which would have formed an arch over the main roadway into the town. Prior to undertaking conservation works in 2013, the ruins of the Loro Gate had been left unprotected from the elements from 2007

until 2013. The adjacent temporary road junction was quite busy, with passing motorists finding it difficult to identify the monument. A spud stone (stone with a socket, or hole, to hold the lower part of a gate hinge) was removed from the site at the onset of the conservation works and was housed for safe-keeping in Athenry Heritage Centre until the works were completed.

The condition of the gate fragment and its long-term presentation was of keen interest in the locality, with the reported consensus being to keep the monument visible, rather than burying it, as was proposed previously. To that end, Galway County Council, upon taking over the completion of the project from the developer, re-designed the roundabout junction so that it would no longer pass over the gate fragment.



River cobbles used in Athenry



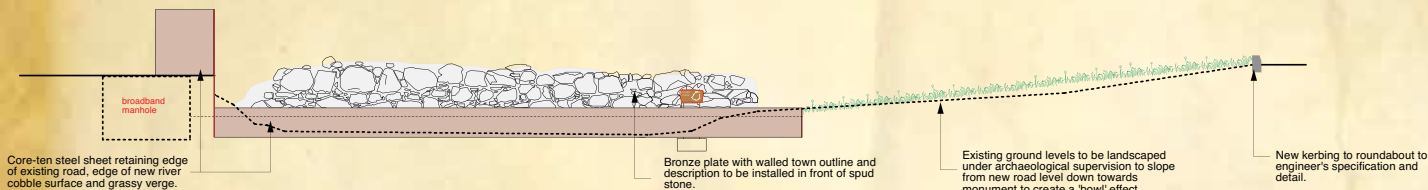
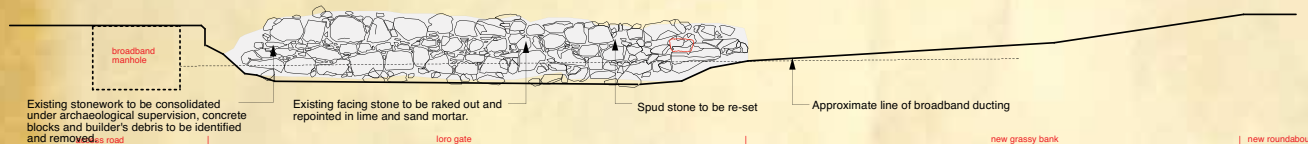
Wall head flaunching

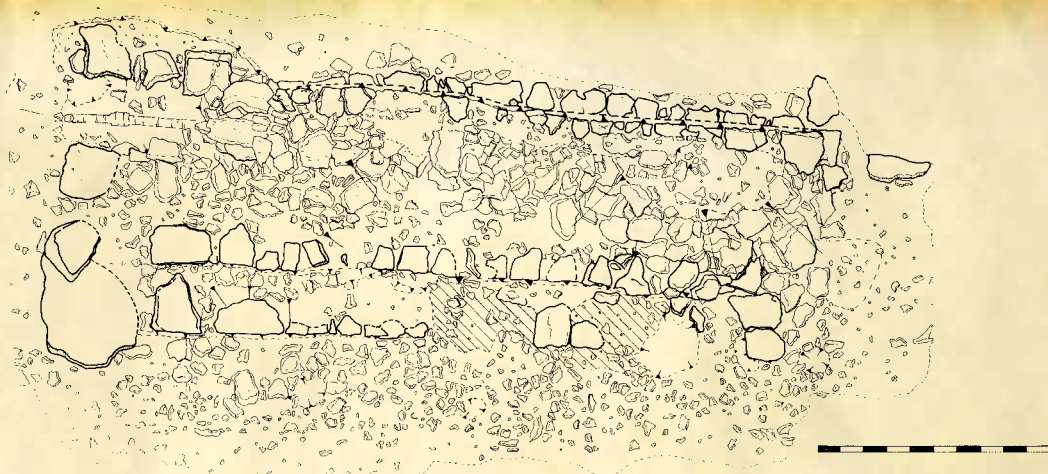


Spud stone to be re-set



Pinned & pointed facing stone





The proposal created a gently sloping grass bowl to surround the fragment, supplemented with a river-cobble strip to the west side, relating to the original location of the road passing under the gate. Core-ten steel retains and guards the edge of the footpath, and the immediate surrounds of the gate fragment. This creates an edge for mowing the lawn, and a gravel bed to the base of the ruin that will also make the monument easy to maintain to prevent vegetative growth in the future. Given the need to guard the edge of the hole surrounding the monument, this single vertical element draws attention to the low-lying and relatively small fragment. A short inscription is placed on the guarding along with the outline of the walled town, with the location of the gate indicated. It is important that the signage, while giving some explanation of the monument, would not be so large as to dominate the setting.

The stonework was first cleaned down and treated with a biocide to remove the encroaching vegetation on the wall. Loose stones identified as being archaeological material were placed onto the structure under supervision of the archaeologist, and loose fragments used in the lime mortar re-pointing of the joints and flaunching of the wall head. The flaunching made the top surface run to fall, stopping water from pooling leading to freeze-thaw action and further erosion. It also made the gate fragment an undesirable place to sit for passersby so that stones would not be dislodged over time. The spud stone was reset close to its original location as evidence of its previous use as a gateway.



LORO GATE PROJECT

Galway County Council: Fran McEvoy; A/Senior Executive Engineer, Road Design and Liam Gavin; Director of Services, Roads, Transportation, Marine & General Services

Architect: Fergal McNamara; Howley Hayes Architects

RPS Consulting Engineers: Sue Meade & Declan Collins

Archaeologist: Dominic Delaney

Main Contractor: NRS Group Limited



CONCLUSION

Following seven phases of work from 2007 to 2014, it is important to acknowledge the achievements, undertaken with public funds in difficult economic circumstances.

The structures that have been repaired enhance the appearance of the town walls as well as the surrounding town, enhancing pride and a sense of ownership and also maximising the tourism potential especially now that the motorway passes close by. We have also improved access to the towers and the walls, by making them safer, but also by installing steps and frames, that when circumstances allow could be excellent places for visitors to appreciate the walls and the town from above. The walls, together with the information we have gathered in their repair, are a useful educational tool as an example of good conservation practice and hopefully would be of interest to both locals and tourists alike.

Cllr. Peter Feeney; Chairperson,
Athenry Walled Town Committee.

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Galway County Council (Project Manager Athenry Walls Project, Galway County Council).

Liam Mannix; Irish Walled Town Networks,
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James Howley & Fergal McNamara;
Howley Hayes Architects.