

DUNLO HILL, BALLINASLOE, CO. GALWAY - ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



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June 2024

CONTENTS

Tables, Figures and Plates

1. Introduction
2. Archaeological and Historical Background
 - 2.1 *Recorded Monuments*
 - 2.2 *Record of Protected Structures*
 - 2.3 *Cartographic Sources*
 - 2.3.1 *Down survey map 1656-58*
 - 2.3.2 *Ordnance survey map 1838-9*
 - 2.3.3 *Ordnance survey map c.1900*
 - 2.4 *Aerial Images*
 - 2.5 *Previous Archaeological Investigations*
 - 2.6 *Topographical Files*
3. Site Description
4. Impact Assessment
5. Mitigation

Tables, Figures and Plates

Tables

Table 1	Recorded Monuments within 250m of development site
Table 2	National Museum of Ireland Topographical files – Ballinasloe & Dunlo

Figures

Figure 1	Down Survey map of Galway 1656-58 showing bridge and settlement at Ballinasloe
Figure 2	Ordnance survey map 1838-39 showing site location
Figure 3	Ordnance survey map c. 1900 showing site location
Figure 4	Aerial Image 2011-2013 showing proposed development site
Figure 5	Site location map
Figure 6	Aerial image showing development site
Figure 7	Orthographic image of site
Figure 8	Site layout plan

Plates

Plate 1	Facing NW showing site façade at the junction of Dunlo Hill and Dunlo Street
Plate 2	Facing NW showing site façade at Dunlo Hill
Plate 3	Facing SE showing west part of internal boundary wall (and rear of terraced houses)
Plate 4	Facing NW showing E part of internal boundary wall
Plate 5	Facing NW showing gate pillar at east extent of internal boundary wall
Plate 6	Facing SW showing gate pillar at east extent of internal boundary wall
Plate 7	Facing E showing outbuildings abutting N boundary wall
Plate 8	Facing W showing outbuildings abutting N boundary wall
Plate 9	Facing N showing outbuilding abutting N boundary wall
Plate 10	Facing W showing outbuilding abutting W boundary wall
Plate 11	Facing W showing blocked opes in W boundary wall
Plate 12	Facing E showing rear of terraced dwellings
Plate 13	Facing ENW showing extensions to rear of terraced dwellings
Plate 14	Interior of whitewashed extension abutting rear wall of dwelling
Plate 15	Facing E showing extensions to rear of terraced dwellings
Plate 16	Interior of extension (seen in plate 15) showing rubble-built walls
Plate 17	Facing N showing archway in the SE extent of site
Plate 18	Test pit N of boundary wall in centre of site
Plate 19	Test pit S of boundary wall in centre of site
Plate 20	Test pit in SW of site

1. Introduction

This report is an archaeological assessment of a proposed development at Dunlo Hill, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The proposed development comprises the renovation and extension of existing terraced buildings at Dunlo Hill, including Dooloey's Pub (a protected structure), to create a new residential development with an integrated community centre. The assessment is based on a desktop study and site inspection. The report is prepared at the request of O'Brien Finucane Architects on behalf of Galway County Council.

2. Archaeological and Historical Background

Ballinasloe takes its name from the Irish *Béal Átha na Sluaighe* meaning 'ford-mouth of the gathering'. The nature of the gathering that took place here is unclear, but it was possibly a precursor to the annual October livestock fair which in 1804 was described as one of the largest fairs of its kind in Europe. The ford was a strategically important crossing point on the River Suck and it appears to have been defended from an early period. According to the annals the first castle at Ballinasloe was built in 1124 and subsequently 'burned by casual fire' in 1131 (Leask, 1986, 6). It is said that this castle, which was almost certainly a wooden fortification, was built by Turlough Mór O'Connor, King of Connacht 1106-1156 and High King of Ireland 1120-1156. It is one of only seven 'castles' recorded in the Irish annals before the coming of the Anglo-Normans in 1169.

The Anglo-Normans built the 'castle of Suicin' at Ballinasloe in 1245 (Egan 1960, 32-3), and Tadhg O'Kelly, Chief of Ui Máine, is also credited with building a castle here in the fourteenth century (Egan 1967, 118). The existing castle ruins at Ballinasloe comprise a 16th century rectangular bawn, which probably stands on or close to the site of the Anglo-Norman castle. A small settlement grew up around the castle and bridge at Ballinasloe but it did not develop substantially until the sixteenth century. The Down Survey Map of 1656-58 shows what appears to be a sizeable settlement at Ballinasloe (figure 1) but the modern town is largely an 18th century foundation of the local landowners, the Trench Family. The Trenches arrived here in the 1650's and became Earls of Clancarty in the early nineteenth century.

Dunlo takes its name from the Irish *dún Leodha* meaning 'Leodha's fort'. According to Egan (1960, 161-163) the existing St. Michael's Church occupies the site of the *Dún Leodha*, which is said to have been built by Toirdhealbhach O'Connor, King of Connacht in 1124. Writing in 1837, O'Donovan states that 'parts of its ramparts may still be traced ... within and without the enclosure (of) the R.C. Chapel' (Egan 1960, 161). O'Donovan also relates that, prior to the construction of the chapel, c. 1807, it presented the appearance of a truncated cone and that many oak coffins were found' when levelling it (Alcock et. al. 1999, 256). The site is located on the west bank of the Suckeen, close to the ancient ford on the river.

2.1 Recorded Monuments

There are no recorded monuments in the immediate vicinity of the development site. There are eight recorded monuments within 250m of the site (Table 1). Six of these monuments are churches, or sites of churches, all of which are of 19th century date. The monumental structure (GA087-066) is a limestone monument erected in 1840 in honour of Charles Le Poer Trench, Archdeacon of Ardagh and a member of the Trench Family of Garbally House. The earthwork monument (GA088-028) relates to the presumed site of *Dún Leodha*, upon which the existing St. Michael's Catholic Church (GA088-028001) is built. The digital database of the Archaeology Survey of Ireland (www.archaeology.ie) record the monuments as follows:

Table 1 Recorded Monuments within 250m of development site

RMP No.	ITM Ref.	Townland	Classification	Distance
GA087-066	584808, 730965	Dunlo	Monumental structure	235m W
GA088-028	585333, 730962	Townparks	Earthwork	230m ENE
GA088-028001	585333, 730962	Townparks	Church (Catholic)	230m ENE
GA088-028002	585333, 730962	Townparks	Church (Catholic)	230m ENE
GA088-029	585105, 731047	Townparks	Church (Church of Ireland)	150m N
GA088-030	585280, 730984	Townparks	Church (Methodist)	200m ENE
GA088-032	585109, 731062	Townparks	Church (Presbyterian)	125m N
GA088-037	585082, 731158	Townparks	Church (Methodist)	200m N

2.2 Record of Protected Structures

A protected structure is a structure that a planning authority considers to be of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical point of view. The record of protected structures (RPS) is published as Appendix 6 to the Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028. The large building on the corner of Dunlo Street and Dunlo Hill is included in the record, and recorded as follows:

RPS No. 2730 P. Dooley, Dunlo Street/Dunlo Hill, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway

‘End of terrace, three-story house, c. 1850 with chamfered corner. Pub front inserted c. 1960’s.’

The Conservation Report records a date stone on the chimney inscribed ‘M C AD 1828’ (O’BFA, February 2024). This is the likely date of construction for the building.

2.3 Cartographic Sources

2.3.1 Down Survey map 1656-58

The Down Survey map of Galway shows a bridge over the River Suck at Ballinasloe, and settlements on both banks of the river. A church is shown on the east bank, most likely the medieval parish church of Creagh.



Figure 1 Down Survey map of Galway 1656-58 showing bridge and settlement at Ballinasloe

2.3.2 Ordnance Survey map 1838-39

The first edition Ordnance Survey 6-inch map 1838-9 shows the proposed development site at the south end of the early 19th century town. The site is developed with buildings, which occupy a similar footprint to the existing buildings. The building line continues around the corner from the terrace on Dunlo Hill, opposite the Glebe House. There is no road or access lane from Dunlo Hill and it is considered likely that these buildings are associated with the Glebe House rather than the housing terrace.

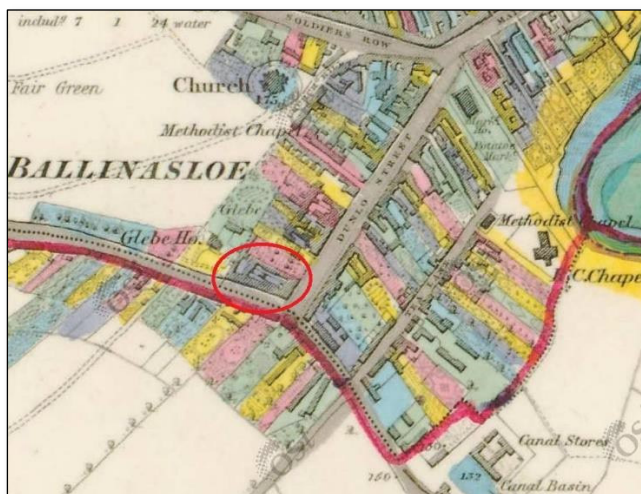


Figure 2 Ordnance survey map 1838-9 showing site location (*Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0076824*)

2.3.3 Ordnance survey map c. 1900

The ordnance survey 25-inch map c. 1900 shows the detail of the individual buildings and it is clear that most if not all of these buildings are the same ones we see today. The terrace of houses on Dunlo Hill have very small backyards, some of which are partly-developed with extensions. The elongated plots to the rear of the backyards appear to be associated with the corner site on Dunlo Hill/Dunlo Street and the adjoining three-storey dwellings on Dunlo Street. The large plot in the west appears to be associated with the building opposite the Glebe House.



Figure 3 Ordnance survey map c. 1900 showing site location (Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0076824)

2.4 Aerial Images

Examination of the series of aerial images (1995-2018) on the Ordnance Survey Ireland website www.osi.ie shows the site much as it was in the early 20th century. One noticeable change is that the elongated plots to the rear of the houses on Dunlo Street now extend the full length of the site (figure 4). The rear wall of the former building opposite the Glebe House now forms the site's west boundary.



Figure 4 Aerial image 2011-2013 showing proposed development site (OSI No. EN 0076824)

2.5 Previous Archaeological Investigations

The Excavations Bulletin is an annual account of all archaeological investigations carried out under licence on the island of Ireland. The database is available online at www.excavations.ie and includes summary reports of investigations from 1985 to the present. This database was consulted to establish if any investigations had been carried out in the vicinity of the development site. There are sixteen entries for Ballinasloe and three for Dunlo, but there is no record of any excavation in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site.

2.6 Topographical Files

The topographical files in the National Museum of Ireland were consulted to see if any stray finds are recorded in the vicinity of the proposed development. The files for Ballinasloe and the townlands of Garbally Demesne, Townparks and Dunlo were searched in the database. There are thirteen entries for the general Ballinasloe area but most of these relate to finds from the River Suck, at Correen Ford and Meelick some distance to the south of the town, and from bogs in the general Ballinasloe area. The only find from the town would appear to be a stone mortar (NMI Reg. No. 2001:20) recorded as being found in the vicinity of Lancaster House, which stands close to the bridge at the northeast end of Main Street. Seven artefacts are recorded for the townland of Garbally Demesne and it is known that at least three of these artefacts (1955:29, 1955:30 & 1955:31) were found during construction works on the St. Joseph's Place housing development in 1955. The other four finds from Garbally bear the same registration date of 1955 suggesting these may have been found at same location.

Table 2 Topographical files – Ballinasloe & Dunlo

NMI Reg. No.	Name	Component	Townland
1955:29	Ringed pin	Bronze	Garbally Demesne
1955:30	Harp peg	Copper alloy	Garbally Demesne
1955:31	Spike	Iron	Garbally Demesne
1955:131	Axehead	Stone	Garbally Demesne
1955:132	Spindle whorl	Bone	Garbally Demesne
1955:133	Spindle whorl	Stone	Garbally Demesne
1955:134	pebble	Stone	Garbally Demesne
2001:20	Mortar	Stone	Vicinity of Lancaster House near Ballinasloe

3. Site Description

The site was inspected on 22nd March 2022 and 28th May 2024. The property comprises of a terrace of 7 no. two-storey houses on Dunlo Hill, a large three-storey building on the corner of Dunlo Hill/Dunlo Street (with a two-storey extension on Dunlo Hill), and a three-storey dwelling on Dunlo Street. The terrace of housing on Dunlo Hill is built in two blocks, with five houses in the west block and two in the east (plate 2). Three of the houses in the west block have small outdoor toilet extensions to the rear, while there are a series of extensions to the rear of two houses in the east block. The three-storey building on the corner of Dunlo Street/Dunlo Hill is listed in the record of protected structures in the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 (see Section 2.2 above). The select removal of plaster has revealed an impressive façade built of worked limestone blocks (plate 1). The building includes a two-storey extension on Dunlo Hill, which has a fine Georgian-style door and an archway giving access to the rear of the property. All of the existing buildings are marked on the ordnance survey twenty-five-inch map c. 1900, and the same building footprint is shown on the first edition six-inch map 1838.

An old boundary wall extends east-west across the centre of the development site (plate 3). The ordnance survey map c. 1900 shows this boundary terminating at a building located west of centre in the site (figure 2). The east part of the boundary is a high stone wall built of rubble masonry (plates 4-6). This wall formed the boundary between the corner site at Dunlo Hill/Dunlo Street and the three-storey dwelling on Dunlo Street. The east extent of the wall terminates at a gate pillar, indicating a direct link between the two properties (plates 5 & 6). The gate pillar incorporates a reused pivot stone in the lower part of its south face (plate 5). The west part of the boundary wall is a lower wall built of large irregular blocks (plate 3), perhaps re-used from the former building that stood west of centre in the site.

The site's west boundary wall is the rear wall of a former building that stood directly opposite the Glebe House, and may have been associated with it. The wall contains a number of blocked door and window openings (plates 10 & 11). The north boundary wall is abutted by two outbuildings, built of rubble stone with roughly worked limestone quoins and jambs (plates 7-9). These buildings are clearly marked on early ordnance survey maps and formed part of a line of buildings to the rear of a three-storey dwelling on Dunlo Street.

There were six open test pits visible on the site at the time of inspection on 22nd March 2022. These were examined and the general stratigraphy was found to consist of 0.5-0.7m of rubble and garden soil deposits over yellow/brown clay subsoil (plates 18-20).

4. Impact Assessment

There are no recorded monuments in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site, and no previously unrecorded archaeology was observed during site inspection. It would appear that all existing buildings, outbuildings and boundary walls within the site are of late 18th and/or early 19th century date. These buildings are the subject of a Conservation Report prepared by O’Brien Finucane Architects (*OBFA Conservation Report*, February 2024). It is proposed to retain and restore all buildings fronting onto Dunlo Hill and Dunlo Street. The outbuildings, sheds and internal boundary walls located to the rear of the buildings are scheduled for demolition.

5. Mitigation

It is recommended that archaeological testing take place in the rear of the property following the completion of scheduled demolition works.

Recommendations contained in this report are subject to approval by the National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

References

Alcock, O., de hOra, K. and Gosling, P., 1999, *Archaeological Inventory of County Galway, Vol II - North Galway*

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Lewis, S., 1837, *A topographical dictionary of Ireland*

O’Flanagan, M., 1927, Letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the County of Galway collected during the progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1839

www.archaeology.ie

www.excavations.ie

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www.osi.ie



Figure 5 Site location map

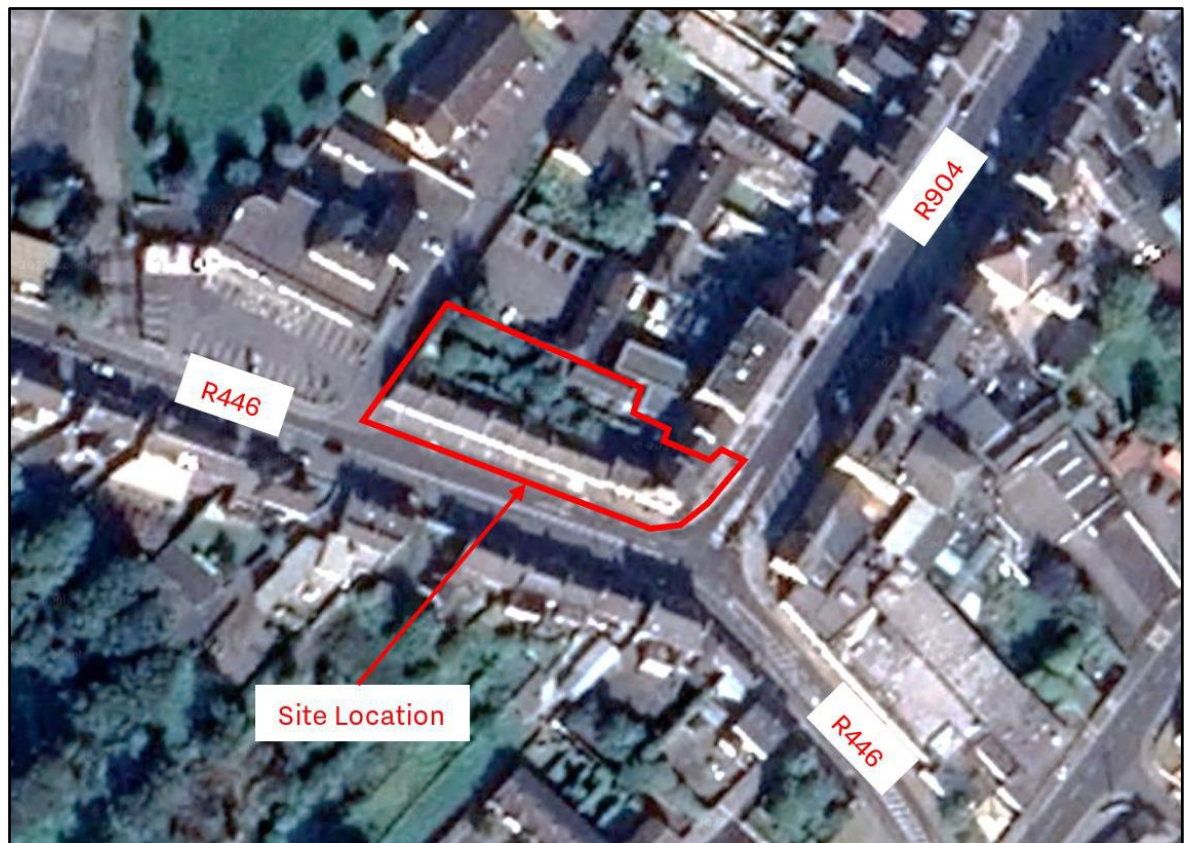


Figure 6 Aerial image showing development site



Figure 7 Orthographic image of site



Figure 8 Site layout plan



Plate 1 Facing NW showing site façade at the junction of Dunlo Hill and Dunlo Street



Plate 2 Facing NE showing site façade at Dunlo Hill



Plate 3 Facing SE showing west part of internal boundary wall (and rear of terraced houses)



Plate 4 Facing NW showing E part of internal boundary wall



Plate 5 Facing NW showing gate pillar at east extent of internal boundary wall



Plate 6 Facing SW showing gate pillar at east extent of internal boundary wall



Plate 7 Facing E showing outbuildings abutting N boundary wall



Plate 8 Facing W showing outbuildings abutting N boundary wall



Plate 9 Facing N showing outbuilding abutting N boundary wall



Plate 10 Facing W showing outbuilding abutting W boundary wall



Plate 11 Facing W showing blocked opes in W boundary wall



Plate 12 Facing E showing rear of terraced dwellings



Plate 13 Facing W showing extensions to rear of terraced dwellings



Plate 14 Interior of whitewashed extension (see plate 13) abutting rear wall of dwelling



Plate 15 Facing E showing extensions to rear of terraced dwellings



Plate 16 Interior of extension (seen in plate 15) showing rubble-built walls



Plate 17 Facing N showing archway in the SE extent of site



Plate 18 Test pit N of boundary wall in centre of site



Plate 19 Test pit S of boundary wall in centre of site



Plate 20 Test pit in SW of site