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Statutory Bodies: **National Monuments Division, Department of
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II ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS USED IN TEXT

Barony, Parish, Townland *These terms refer to land divisions in Ireland. The barony is the largest land division in a county, which is formed from a number of parishes. These parishes are in turn made up of several townlands, which are the smallest land division in the country. The origins of these divisions are believed to be in the Early Medieval/Christian period (AD500-AD1000), or may date earlier in the Iron Age (500BC-AD500).*

First Edition *This relates to editions of the OS 6 inch maps for County Galway. The first edition map completed for the area dates to the early 1840s and this is referred to in the text as the 'first edition'.*

GA - *This number is the number of the site on the SMR/RMP map (see below). It begins with the county code, here GA for Galway, the 6-inch sheet number, followed by the number of the archaeological site.*

M *Metres, all dimensions are given in metres or part of a metre*

OS *Ordnance Survey*

RMP *Record of Monuments and Places. A record on which all known archaeological sites are marked and listed in an accompanying inventory. This resource is based on all publicly available material and cartographic sources and is read in conjunction with constraint maps. The RMP records known recorded monuments and the sites of such monuments (if the monument no longer survives).*

Sheet *This relates to the six-inch map for county Galway, which are divided into sheets. This project is concerned with sheet number 105.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The following report was compiled at the request of John Britton Consulting Engineers on behalf of Galway County Council. It concerns an archaeological assessment of the existing Town Hall building in Loughrea, County Galway. Planning permission is being sought for the refurbishment of the town hall and conversion for use as a heritage/tourism facility and incubator offices. The archaeological assessment involved a desk based survey and site visit to assess the archaeological significance of the area in general and the specifically the site of the proposed development. It should be stressed that this is an assessment of the archaeological potential of the site. Conservation architect Ms Geraldine McManus is compiling a separate report on the architectural significance of the building.

2. LOCATIONAL DETAILS

Townland	Loughrea	Parish	Loughrea
Barony	Loughrea	OS 6" Sheet No.	105
Street	Barrack Street/Church Street		

The site is located in the S of the town at the intersection of Barrack Street and church Street.



Fig. 1: Extract from urban place map indicating the site location

3. GENERAL HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The name Loughrea is derived from ‘*Baile Locha Riach*’, the ‘*town of the grey lake*’. The lake from which the town derives its name contains at least three crannogs-or lake dwellings. Loughrea was and still is strategically positioned between the Sliabh Aughty Mountains and the Williamstown-Kilreekil ridge and it is not surprising that this position was exploited over the centuries. While there are no documentary references for Loughrea prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans in 1169, the existence of a number of crannogs, an early ecclesiastical site in the vicinity of St. Brigid’s church to the east of the town and a possible early church at St Brendan’s within the town all attest to early settlement in the area. It was not until Richard de Burgo, Lord of Connacht constructed a castle at Loughrea as his principal manor in 1236, that Loughrea is mentioned in the documentary sources (Bradley and Dunne 1992, 137, 147; Spellissy 1999, 401). The town developed around the castle and was considered of such importance that it was fortified at an early stage. By 1360 the MacWilliam Uachtair de Burgos had seized control of the manor at Loughrea, retaining it as their principal seat throughout the medieval period (Spellissy 1999, 401). Loughrea is a good example of an Anglo-Norman town, with its linear street layout, castle, parish church, town defences and friary.

Street Pattern

The medieval town consisted of two main E-W streets, Main Street and Barrack Street, with a number of N-S lanes connecting the two. A 1791 map of Loughrea indicates that Barrack Street originally ran W to Castle Street and has since been extended further W. It appears that the S side of the town was replanned in the early 19th century with the widening of Barrack Street and by-passing of the medieval town gate. Main Street was until 1821 known as Market Street and was most likely the location of the medieval market.

Town Defences

It is a little puzzling that no documentary references to a town defence are recorded before 1574 when the town is described as well trenched and having an unfinished wall. The defence enclosed a rectangular area still defined today by a watercourse, which is the remains of a medieval water filled-fosse.. The wall mirrored the fosse and existed on three sides with the lake forming a natural barrier in the S. It originally had three gates- one at the W end of Dunkellin Street, one at the E end of Main Street and the third, which still survives, on Barrack Street.

Castle

The position of the castle, which is referred to in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* has not been determined, but it is conjectured that it was on the south side of Barrack Street (Bradley and Dunne 1992, 143). This conjecture is based on references to ‘Castle Garden’ and ‘Castle Lane’ in the 1791 Map of Loughrea. In 1585 a county gaol was established in part of the castle and remained in use until the construction of a gaol in Galway in 1686.

Church

The medieval Parish church was located within a rectangular churchyard between Main Street and Market Street. Only two medieval grave-slabs and two window fragments are all that survive of the original building. The present church was built in 1821 and is now in use as a library.

Friary

St Mary’s Carmelite Friary was founded by Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster c. 1300. The construction of a religious house at this time suggests that Loughrea’s expansion in the thirteenth century was slow (Bradley and Dunne 1992, 137). In 1437 the building was in need of repair and an indulgence was granted to assist in raising the finance required. In 1562 it was granted to the earl of Clanricard but the friars stayed on in the town until the seventeenth century. The surviving remains consist of the nave, chancel, tower, south transept and a small chapel projecting from the south-west end of the nave. The chancel comprises the earliest phase of the remains. It retains a line of five twin lancet windows in the south wall and probably dates to 1300. The east window has four lights with switchline tracery above and was inserted in the fifteenth century. The nave is probably fifteenth century in date. The west

gable retains a pointed doorway, with a pointed window of twin cusped lights with mouchettes above. The rectangular tower was inserted in the fifteenth century and rises in two stages above the roof line of the nave and chancel. The belfry is lit by a twin-light window in the east and west walls. The south transept is also a fifteenth-century addition and is lit by a three-light window with switchline tracery above, in the south wall (Bradley and Dunne 1992, 144-45). The phases of refurbishment, which were undertaken during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, are identifiable in the fabric of the surviving building. The Carmelite friars continued to inhabit the priory after the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century, but from the middle of the seventeenth century it was occupied by Discalced Carmelites.

In 1574 the town was described as being well ditched and trenched, with the town walls begun, but not completed. The town had three gates made 'like three castles' and the streets were well divided and cut. Inside the walls was built-up with houses of stone work, which were partly destroyed and ruinous by the end of the sixteenth century.. By the 1550s the borough of Loughrea was in ruin and both the town and castle had declined in importance.

In the 19th century Lewis Topographical Guide describes Loughrea as a flourishing town with 1,299 houses and 7,876 inhabitants. A large brewery and extensive quarries were also named as existing within the town. In 1893 a parliamentary report into the condition of agricultural labourers in Loughrea Union was undertaken by Roger Richards. Richards description of living conditions within the town indicates that accommodation in Loughrea was in a very poor with the majority built of stone and mud, which were thatched. The first edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 2) compiled during the 1840s indicates buildings on the site of the Town Hall prior to its construction in the 1860s. The nature of the building on the site is not known but may be similar to those surviving elsewhere in the town that are 19th century in date.



Fig. 2: Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey Map 1842.

4. RECORDED MONUMENTS IN THE AREA OF THE DEVELOPMENT

Figure 3 depicts the zone of archaeological potential around the town of Loughrea. It is clear from this map that the town hall building is located within this zone of archaeological potential. The existing building is located immediately N of the medieval street layout and in the general vicinity of where the original castle may have been located. While the proposed planning application is concerned only with refurbishment of the existing structure **any disturbance to ground level inside or outside the building should be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist.**



Fig. 3: Extract from Sites and Monuments Map, Sheet 105 indicating the zone of archaeological potential (highlighted in red).

The following map (Fig. 4) and table (Fig. 5) highlight the recorded archaeological monuments in the area of the proposed development. It should be emphasised that none of these monuments will be directly impacted by the development. The development site is located on the N side of Barrack Street at the intersection between Barrack Street and Church Street. Located within the medieval town of Loughrea (GA105:150), as detailed in Section 3, there are a number of monuments in the general environs. South of the development site, in the N fringes of the lake there are five lake dwellings or Crannogs (GA105:19800-198003, GA105:224). The tradition of building these lake dwellings dates back to the Neolithic and they are defined as predominantly wooden enclosures, constructed on natural or artificial islands. Brushwood, peat and stone were used in their construction and they functioned as habitation sites of permanent or seasonal use. Ecclesiastical features/sites in the area include St. Brendan's Cathedral (GA105:150014) to the SE, a church and graveslab (105:150017) to the N and a church (GA105:150013) further N. A holy well (GA105:150007) is indicated c. 130m to the S while a cross (GA105:152003) is located 400m to the NW. A mill (GA105:015) located 250m to the NE is the only Industrial site in the vicinity.



Fig. 4: Map indicating recorded archaeological monuments in the area.

Townland	Site Type	RMP Number	Distance from site
Loughrea	Stone Head	GA105:078	50m
Loughrea	Town defence	GA105:150001	250m
Loughrea	Holy Well	GA105:150007	130m
Loughrea	Chapel	GA105:150013	280m
Loughrea	Cathedral	GA105:150014	100m
Loughrea	Mill	GA105:150015	250m
Loughrea	Grave Slab	GA105:150017	100m
Loughrea	Graveyard	GA105:151002	400m
Loughrea	Cross	GA105:152003	400m
Loughrea	Crannog	GA105:198001	300m
Loughrea	Crannog	GA105:198002	325m
Loughrea	Crannog	GA105:198003	280m
Loughrea	Crannog	GA105:198	400m
Loughrea	Crannog	GA105:224	500m

Fig. 5: Table giving details of monuments in the area.

5. ARCHITECTURAL SITES IN THE AREA OF THE DEVELOPMENT.

The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage was consulted to evaluate the number of sites in the area that were considered to be of architectural significance. Figures 6 and 7 highlight the results of this search. The majority of recorded buildings in the area are houses dating from to the 19th and 20th centuries.



Fig. 6: Recorded Architectural sites in the area.

Site Number	Building	Date
1	St.Brendan's Cathedral	1895-1905
2	Bishops Palace	1895-1905
3	House	1770-1810
4	Barracks	1925-1930
5	House	1930-1940
6	House	1870-1890
7	House	1920-1940
8	AIB Building	1920-1940
9	Church	1820-1830
10	Convent	1870-1890

Fig. 7: Buildings recorded in National Inventory of Architectural Heritage

6. RECORDED ARTEFACTS IN THE AREA OF THE DEVELOPMENT

The following archaeological artefacts are included to highlight the type of archaeological activity in the area and the importance of archaeological monitoring as stray finds are frequently found in the course of monitoring of groundworks.

List of archaeological stray finds:

- Flat bronze axehead of Ballyvalley type. From Loughrea.
- Flanged bronze axehead of Derryniggin type. From Loughrea. Blackmore Museum, Salisbury.
- Flanged bronze axehead. Found in Lough Rea, 1850. NMI 1968:298
- Bronze palstave. From Loughrea. NMI 1968:329.
- Bronze ring brooch. From Loughrea. BM 1868. 7-9.29
- Fragment of a stone cross with the crucifixion carved in relief. Found in the river bed at Loughrea.

In the townland of Cosmona a polished stone axehead (NMI Reg. No. 1958:93) was found in sub-soil in a garden at a depth of approximately 4ft. The axehead is damaged at the butt and sides, mainly on the face, and has an incomplete butt. The sides have a flat face. The cutting edge is deeply curved. The section is approximately a flattened oval. The stone appears to be a limestone or shale and the surface is somewhat scratched and pitted (length 13cm; max. width 6.4cm; max. thickness 1.8cm).

7. SITE DESCRIPTION

The site of the proposed development is located within the medieval town of Loughrea, situated at the junction of Barrack Street and Church Street and adjoining a public house to the W. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage records the building as being of Regional importance (Reg. 30337027) while the building is listed as a protected structure by Galway County Council (Reg. 315). The building comprises of an attached two-storey seven-bay structure with a pitched roof and overhanging eaves with arcade details on the lower floor (Plate 1). Built as a town hall in c. 1860 the building was subsequently a cinema and ballroom and is currently unused and falling into disrepair. The dressed limestone walls of the ground floor have a dressed limestone plinth course and there is a render string coursing between floors. The first floor has roughcast rendered walls. There are square headed window openings throughout with the ground floor doorway openings also squared and set in segmental-arched recesses. All of doorway and window openings are presently boarded up and entrance is only gained off Church Street where an iron gateway gives access via a narrow passageway to the building (Fig. 9). The ground floor level consists of one large rectangular room which was used as a cinema with a ticket booth and lobby at the E end, two rooms along the N wall (one



Plate 1: View of building from the SE.

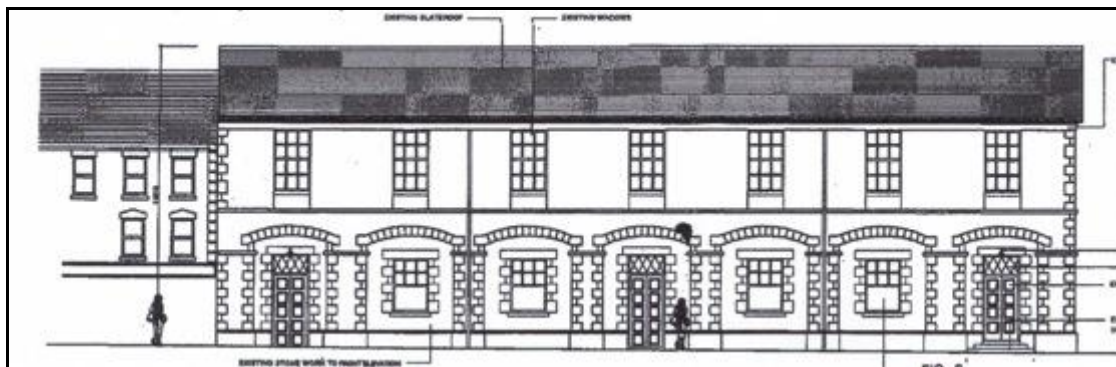


Fig. 8: Elevation of S wall of building.



Plates 2 & 3: E elevation and yard in N of building.

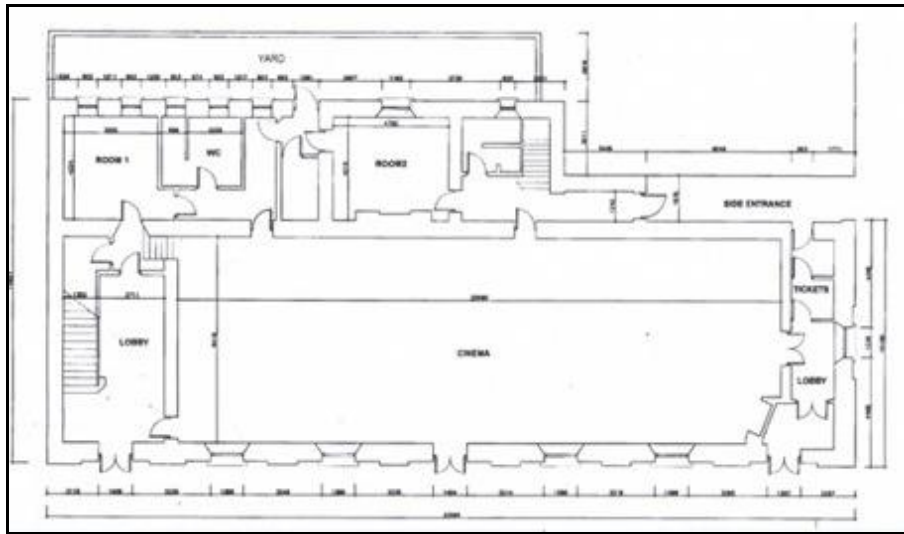


Fig. 9: Ground floor plan of existing building.

with toilet facilities the other a stairway) and the main lobby and stairway at the E end of the building.

The first floor plan is similar to that of the ground floor with one large room, that functioned in the last century as a ball room, a stage at the E end and a number of rooms and toilet facilities in the NE. The building retains the furniture and fittings dating to its use as a cinema and ballroom. The six-over-six pane timber sliding slash windows to the front elevation have been removed and are lying against the S wall of the interior. A narrow yard in the N of the building (Fig. 9, Plate 3) has an iron gate in the E

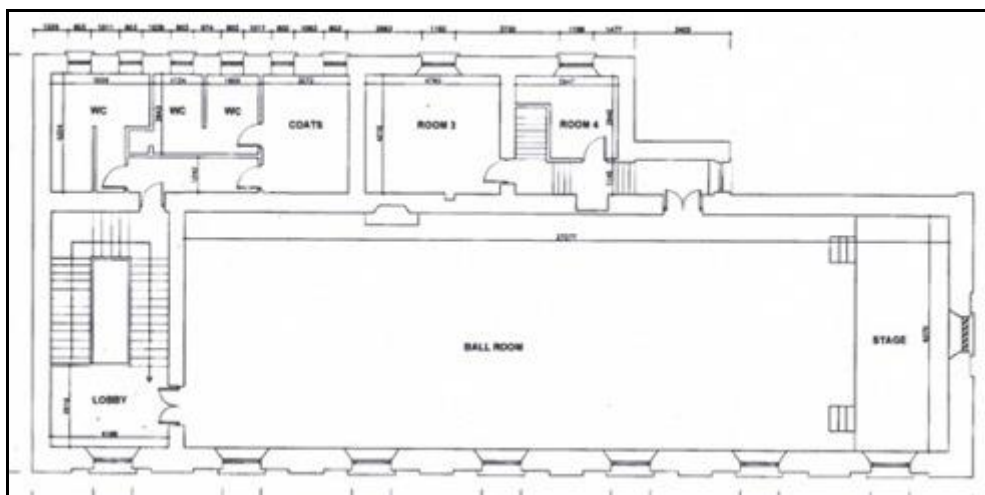


Fig. 10: First Floor Plan of existing building.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The town hall building in Loughrea is a protected structure (Reg. 315) and recorded in the Inventory of Architectural Heritage (Reg. 30337027). It is located in the S of the town of Loughrea within the medieval town confines and the zone of archaeological potential. The proposed development involves the renovation of the existing structure for use as a tourism/heritage facility and incubator offices. A conservation architect is compiling a separate report on the proposed development and as such this report is concerned with the potential archaeological implications only. Due to the location of the building it is proposed that any ground disturbance associated with the development should be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist working under license from National Monuments and The National Museum of Ireland.

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