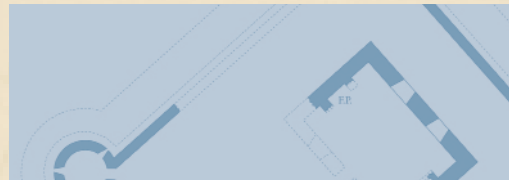


A GAZETTEER OF CASTLES IN COUNTY OFFALY

BY CAIMIN O'BRIEN



BALLINDARRA

– *Béal Átha na Darach* (THE FORD-MOUTH OF THE OAK)

NGR: 205309/203554

SMR No. OFO35-021----

BARONY: Ballybritt

TERRITORY: O'CARROLL'S COUNTRY

[ÉILE UÍ CHEARBHAILL / ELY O'CARROLL]

CIVIL PARISH: Birr

17TH CENTURY PARISH: Birr

BALLINDARRA CASTLE



Location of Ballindarra Castle in Offaly and the surrounding counties

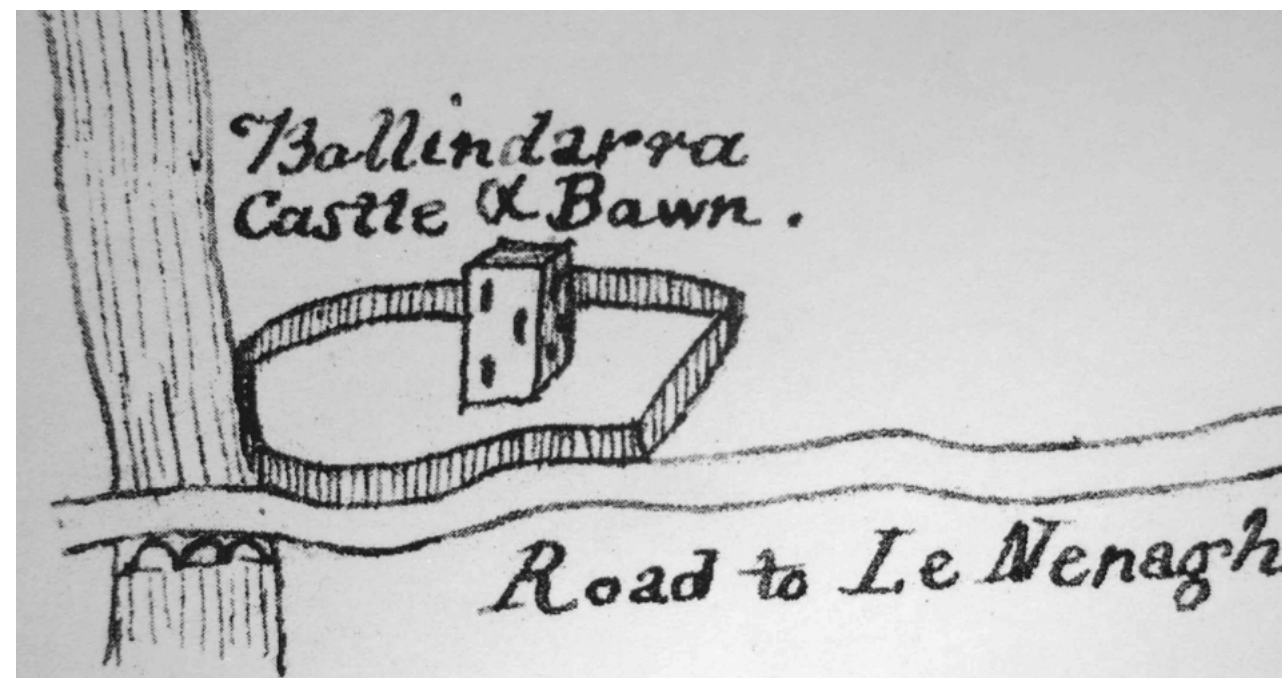
SUMMARY

Today a modern bungalow stands inside the area of the bawn of the levelled O'Carroll castle. The castle was situated beside the medieval routeway connecting the medieval castles of Nenagh and Birr. It was strategically located to guard and control the fording point and bridge over the Little Brosna River which was the gateway to O'Carroll's Country from the neighbouring lands of Ormond and the Gaelic territory of the O'Kennedys which now forms part of North Tipperary.

Ballindarra Castle was a multi-storeyed tower house probably built in the late 15th or early 16th century by the O'Carrolls and was defended by a polygonal-shaped bawn wall. A short section of the upstanding wall, running parallel to the eastern bank of the river, may belong to the original bawn wall.



Ballindarra Bridge known today as Riverstown Bridge crossing the Little Brosna River was protected by Ballindarra Castle, the site of which is marked by the white gable of the bungalow. (Photo by James Fraher)



Drawing c.1800, of Ballindarra Castle and Bawn from the Birr Castle archives (A/24) inspired by an account of the 1690 Siege of Birr. This drawing is an artist's impression of a three storey roofless tower house standing inside an irregular-shaped bawn. It stands guarding the important pass or crossing point over the Little Brosna River which connected the medieval castles of Nenagh and Birr.



Section of possible bawn wall running parallel to the Little Brosna River, which in the medieval period marked the western boundary of O'Carroll's Country.



Map showing the location of Ballindarra Castle in O'Carroll's Country and the surrounding Gaelic families

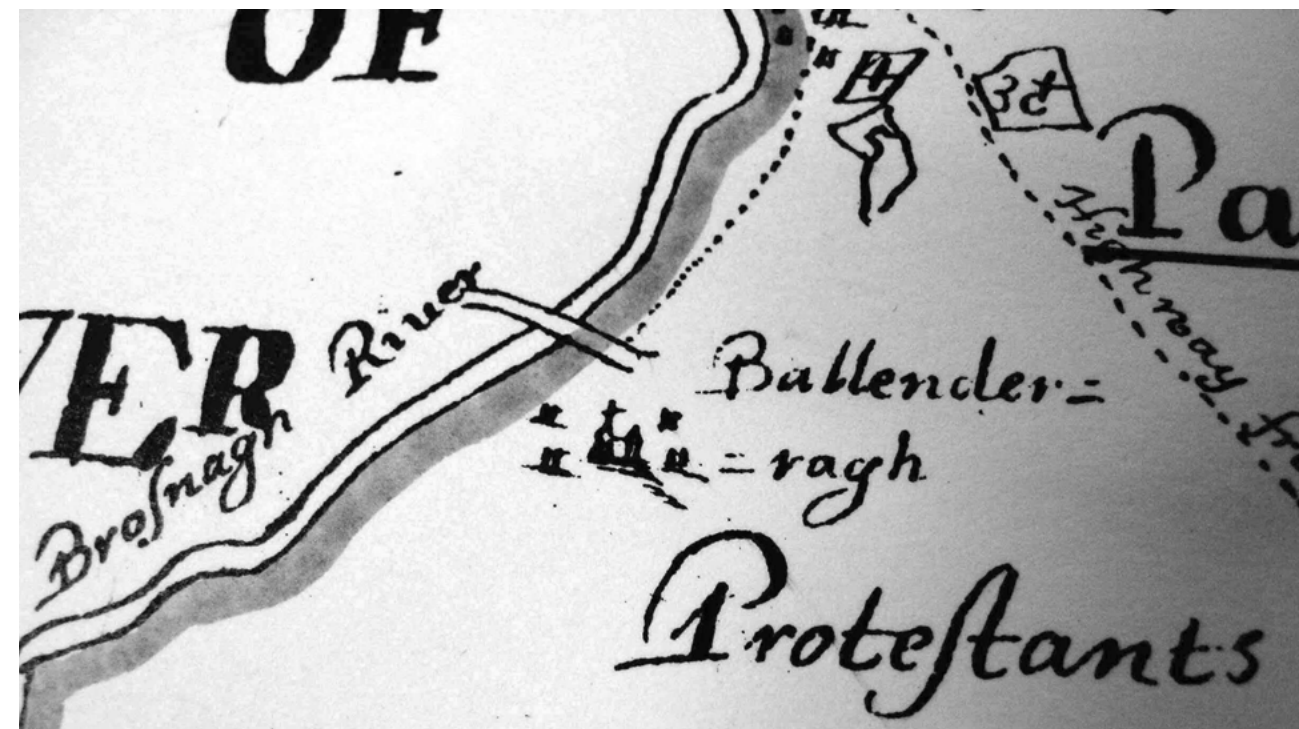
William O'Carroll, the leader of O'Carroll's Country.¹ In 1595 Charles O'Carroll mortgaged the estate lands of Birr Castle to the earl of Ormond.

In 1620, the O'Carrolls lost possession of the castle when 250 acres of land including Ballindarra Castle were granted to Captain Francis Ackland as part of the Crown Plantation of Ely O'Carroll. Shortly after this land grant, an 'English house', possibly a fortified house, was built by Francis Ackland either abutting the medieval castle or within the bawn of the castle. In 1626, the English Crown paid compensation to John Carroll, brother of Charles O'Carroll, for the English plantation of his lands around Ballindarra Castle. In 1632, a year after the death of Francis Ackland, the Parsons family of Birr Castle purchased Ballindarra Castle and its estate, which now amounted to 651 acres of land, from the daughter and heir of Francis Ackland. Shortly after this date, the castle was leased by the Parsons family to Philip Bigoe, a French Huguenot glassmaker who later resided at Newtown Castle close to his glassworks that

¹ Venning, T. 1998 The O'Carrolls of Offaly and their relationship with the Dublin authorities in the sixteenth century in Nolan, W. & O'Neill, T. P. (eds.), *Offaly History & Society*, 196.

In the 16th century Ballindarra Castle was one of the O'Carroll castles protecting the western border of O'Carroll's Country. This castle and bawn was located north of a church that is depicted on the 1654 Down Survey Barony map of Ballybritt and on Sir William Petty's map, *Hiberniae Delineatio*, dating from 1685. The exact location of this church has not been identified but it appears to have been located in close proximity to the 'Old Malt Mill' depicted on the 1838 edition of the Ordnance Survey [OS] six-inch map.

By the late 16th century, there was a dispute over the inheritance of Ballindarra Castle and its lands between Charles O'Carroll of Birr Castle and his brother John Carroll. In 1582, this castle was in the hands of Charles [Calvach/Callogh] O'Carroll who was the illegitimate son and heir of Sir



The 1654 Down Survey map of Ballybritt Barony depicting Ballindarra Bridge with church and cluster of dwellings to south of bridge. The location of this church is unknown today. The dotted line running parallel to the Little Brosna River marks the routeway connecting the medieval castles of Birr and Nenagh, Co. Tipperary. The castle is not depicted on this map as these lands were owned by Protestants and were therefore excluded from the land confiscations of the mid 17th century.

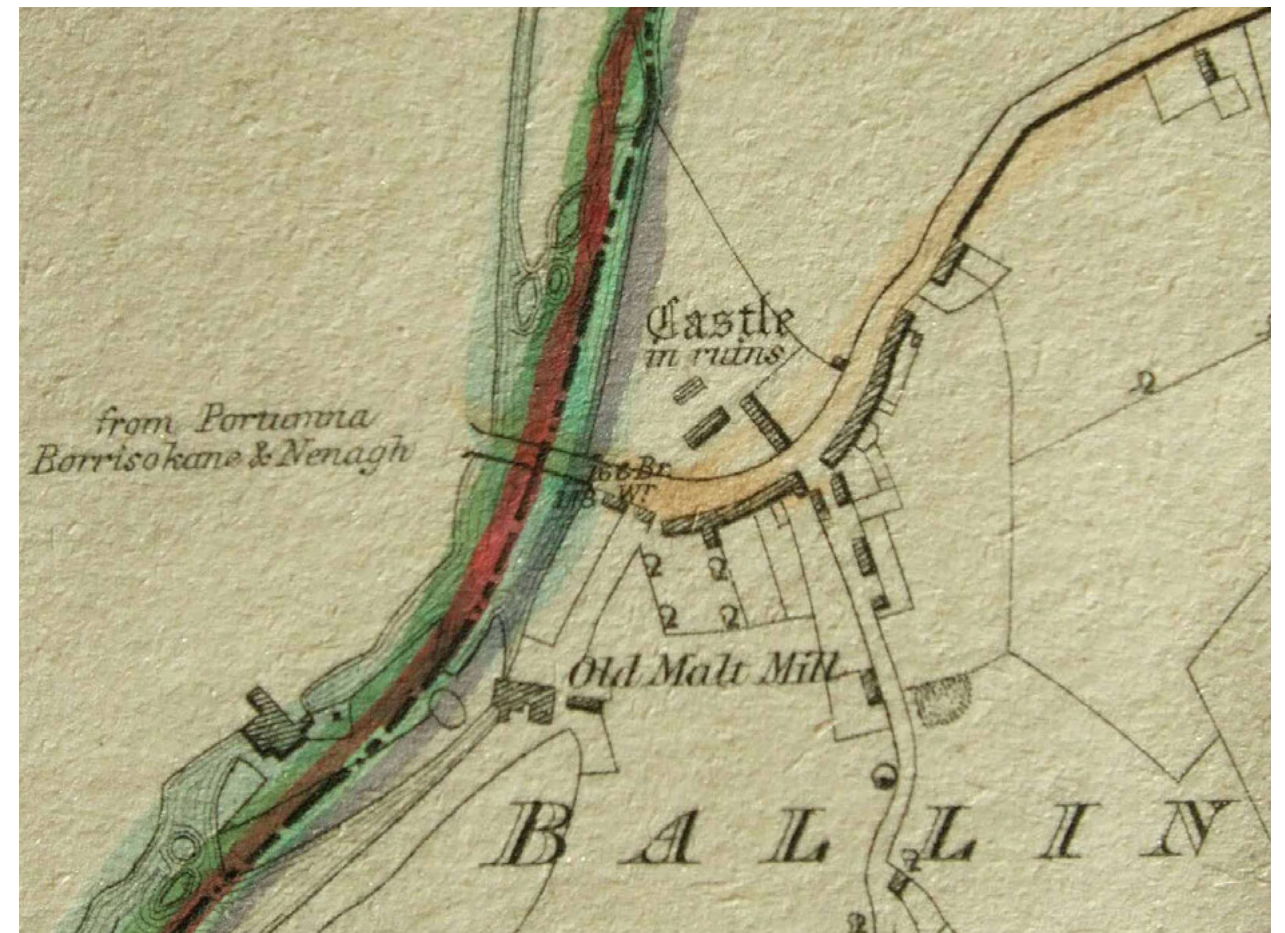
were located near the village of Lusmagh. Ballindarra Castle and its enclosing bawn were attacked several times during the Irish Rebellion of 1641-3. At the outbreak of the Irish Rebellion in 1641, Captain William Parsons of Birr Castle stationed a garrison of men inside the bawn at Ballindarra. The castle was attacked by the local Gaelic families during the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and the subsequent Irish Wars of 1641-53, which probably resulted in leaving the castle uninhabitable and it may have been abandoned as a residence shortly after the end of the Irish Wars in 1653. In the Birr Castle archives there is a drawing c.1800 of the 1690 Siege of Birr which depicts Ballindarra tower house as a

roofless structure standing in the centre of an intact bawn. This drawing may be an illustration of the condition of the castle at the start of the 19th century.

The following centuries witnessed the slow decline in the condition of this tower house and eventually the walls of this medieval castle collapsed on the 10th of January in 1848. Today only a short section of the possible bawn wall of the castle survives facing on to the Little Brosna River. The masonry of this collapsed tower house was drawn away and was probably used in the building of nearby cottages.

CASTLE LOCATION

The site of Ballindarra Castle is situated on the southern outskirts of the present town of Birr and its castle which are 1.4km to the north. Other nearby castles include the O'Carroll castle of Clonoghil 2.5km to the northeast, Cree Castle 3.8km to the southeast, Castletown Castle, Co. Tipperary 3.3km to the southwest, and the Anglo-Norman motte and bailey castle of Killeen 4km to the northwest. The castle was located on the east bank of the Little Brosna River beside the late medieval stone bridge described in the Civil Survey of 1654-56 as the 'old Bridge of Beallanadaragh'.² The 1654 Down Survey map of Ballybritt barony depicts a church and a cluster of cabins at 'Ballenderragh' to the south of the bridge and crossing point over the Little Brosna River which is the medieval border between the Gaelic territories of the O'Carrolls and the earls of Ormond and the O'Kennedys. The castle is not depicted on this map as these lands were owned by Protestants and were therefore excluded from the land confiscations of the mid 17th century. The Little Brosna River forms the boundary between the medieval territories of O'Carroll's Country ruled by the O'Carrolls and Lower Ormond or Muscraige Tíre ruled by the Butler family (Ormond) and the O'Kennedys. Up until the 17th century the territory of O'Carroll's Country was located in the province of Munster therefore in some historical documents Birr and Ballindarra Castle are

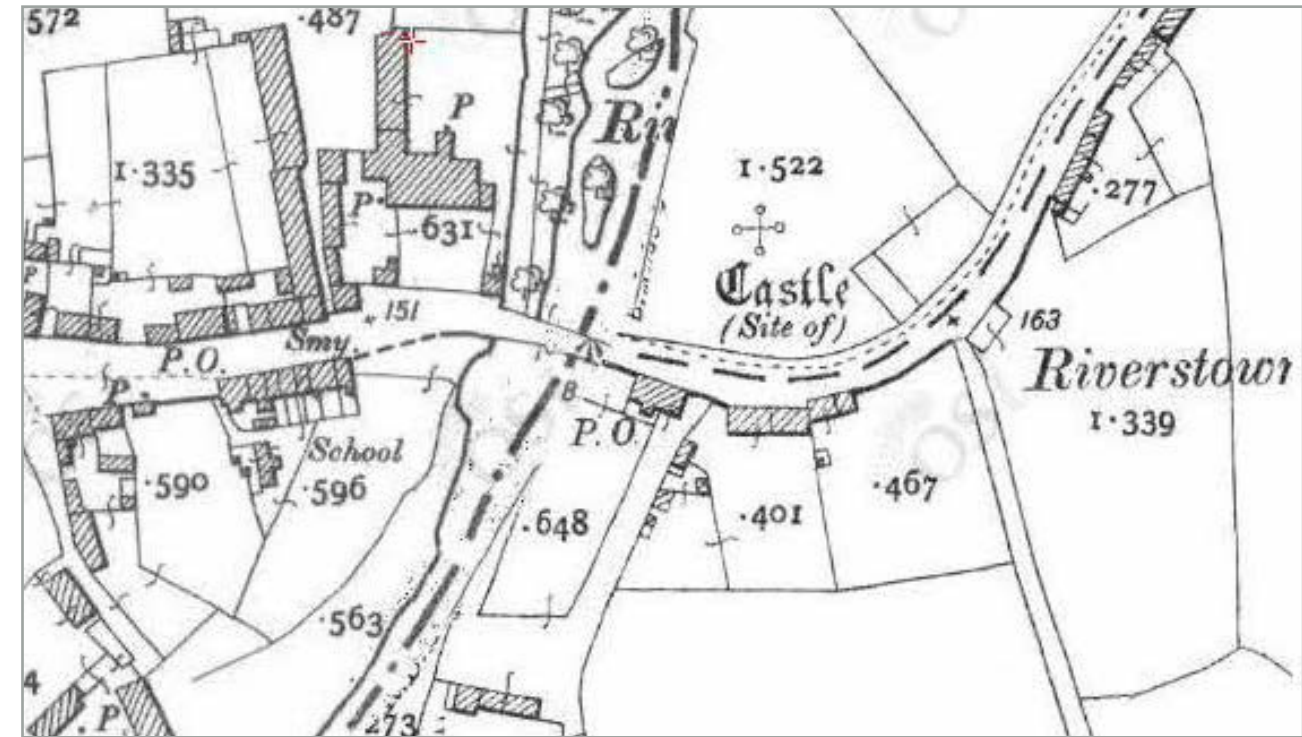


1838 edition of the Ordnance Survey six-inch map, showing the outline of the upstanding ruins of Ballindarra Castle prior to its collapse ten years later in 1848. The castle building is depicted as a narrow rectangular structure beneath the text 'in ruins'.

² Simington, R. C. (ed.) 1934 *The Civil Survey A.D. 1654-56 of County Tipperary* 2, 278.

described as being located in County Tipperary. Ballindarra Castle was built to protect the western border of O'Carroll's Country and guard the medieval bridge or crossing point over the Little Brosna River, known today as Riverstown Bridge. In medieval times the village of Riverstown was known as Ballyloughnane which was situated in the parish of Loughkeene.³ In 1641 the lands on the Tipperary side of Riverstown Bridge were listed as Protestant lands that belonged to the Countess of Ormond. Today, Riverstown Bridge marks the crossing point between Counties Offaly and Tipperary and between the provinces of Leinster and Munster.

³ Hogan, M. 1980 *The Early History of the Town of Birr or Parsonstown* by Thomas Lalor Cooke with a new introduction by Margaret Hogan, 269-72.



1908 edition of the Ordnance Survey twenty five-inch map showing the castle building no longer survives above ground. (Ordnance Survey maps, license no. 2010/32/CCMA/OffalyCountyCouncil)

CASTLE DESCRIPTION

The masonry remains of Ballindarra Castle collapsed on the 10th of January 1848. This event was recorded by the Birr historian, Thomas Lalor Cooke, who wrote that *'the walls of this castle fell with a loud crash. It had been rent from top to bottom for many years, and the fissure was observed to have greatly increased some time before the castle fell. On the day mentioned to use the words of a person who had been looking on, the two sides gradually and slowly opened asunder, and each fell out prostrate from the centre. The walls were some minutes separating before the two masses of masonry overbalanced their respective centres of gravity, but then the whole was precipitated to the ground. The lateral pressure of the massive stone arches which formed the ceilings and floors of the buildings, seem to have been the immediate cause of forcing the walls asunder.'*⁴ The castle is shown as 'Castle in Ruins' on the 1838 edition of the OS six-inch map. On this map the castle is depicted as a rectangular building aligned on a northeast-southwest axis.

⁴ Ibid., 271.

The revised 1908 edition of the OS twenty five-inch map shows that the castle tower no longer survives upstanding and is now depicted as 'Castle (Site of)'.

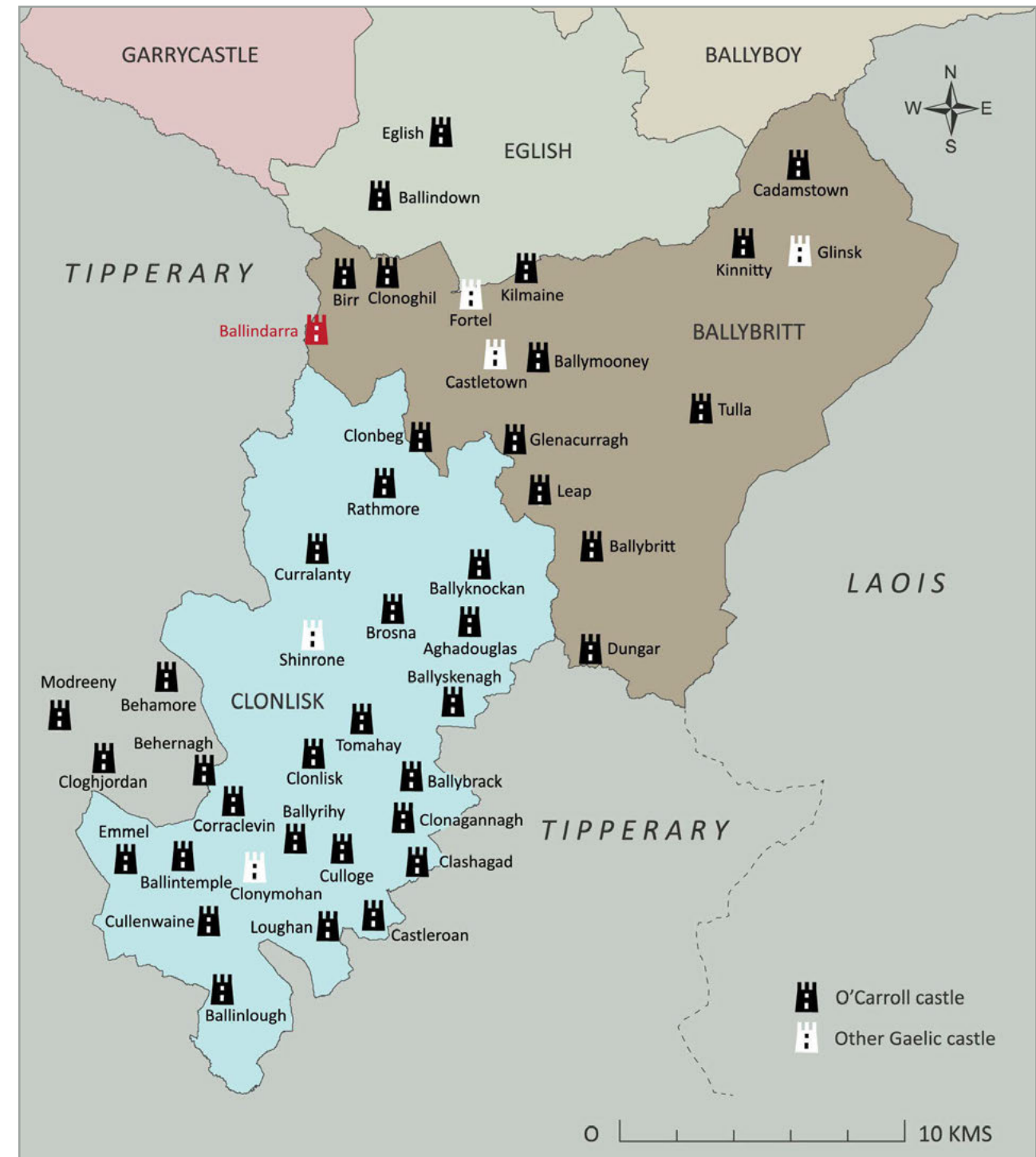
The present upstanding remains consist of a short stretch of the west wall of the possible bawn which stands c.3m high. This wall may have belonged to the bawn or courtyard wall of this border castle and survives today running parallel to the Little Brosna River. There are several large square-headed windows that have been subsequently blocked-up. There are no other architectural features visible in this wall. A modern bungalow and its garden are located inside the bawn of this castle. There are no visible surface remains of the O'Carroll castle. A 17th century fortified house may have been built onto the side of the medieval tower house or inside the bawn of the castle by Francis Ackland shortly after he was granted these lands in 1620. An entry in the diary of Captain William Parsons of Birr Castle dated the 16th September 1642 records that after taking Clonoghil Castle the Irish rebels *'assaulted Ballindarra Castle and the English house under the wall of the Castle.'*⁵

⁵ Rosse Papers Ms. A/9, Diary of Captain William Parsons.

A drawing of a map c.1800 from the Birr Castle Archives depicts the castle of Ballindarra as a three storey high tower house without a roof, standing in the centre of a large irregular-shaped bawn, the southern wall of which runs parallel with the road leading from Birr to Nenagh. On this illustration the west wall of the bawn runs parallel to the river in the same fashion as the upstanding wall which can still be seen today. No 17th century fortified house or 'English house' is depicted in the vicinity of the medieval castle and bawn. The description of the castle given by Thomas Lalor Cooke in the 19th century would suggest that this was the site of a multi-storey tower house with at least two barrel-vaulted floors. The 1838 edition of the OS six-inch map shows the remains of a rectangular building orientated on a northeast/southwest axis, standing in the centre of a large irregular-shaped plot to the north of two larger buildings which fronted onto the public road. The castle is shown standing in the centre of a sub-triangular plot of land measuring 70m east-west by 66m north-south. The west wall of this plot of land which runs parallel to the river appears to be the remains of the original bawn wall of Ballindarra Castle. Elsewhere there are no surface remains visible of the bawn wall.

CASTLE HISTORY

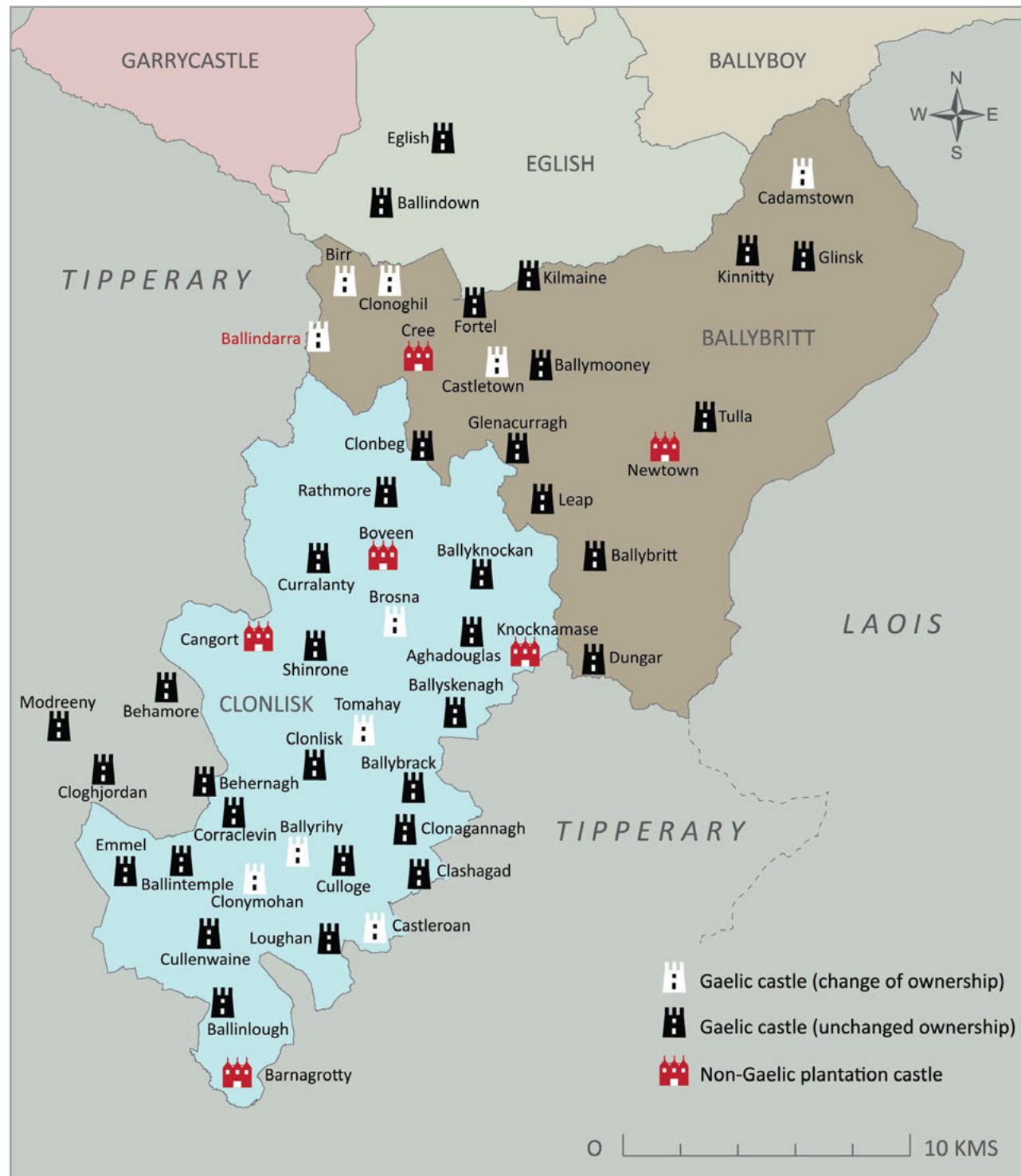
During the 16th century this castle was in the hands of the O'Carrolls. On the 2nd of June, 1582 the Lord Deputy of Ireland and the Privy Council passed a decree between two brothers, Callogh [Calbhach/Charles] O'Carroll and John O'Carroll, 'concerning their inheritance, allotting to said Callogh the said castle and lands appurtenant of Ballanydarany [Ballindarra] so long as he shall continue a good and faithful brother to said John.'⁶ In June of 1583 the Lord Deputy and his council ordered Callogh [Charles] O'Carroll to send '100 kine [cattle], to be sent in equal portions, to the forts of Philipstown [Daingean] and Maryboro [Portlaoise], but reduced, because of the distressed condition of the county, to 59 beeves [cattle].'⁷ On the 16th of June 1583, the Lord Deputy of Ireland recognised



The castles of O'Carroll's Country (Clonlisk & Ballybritt baronies), c. 1600. There are two O'Carroll castles (Ballindown & Eglisk) located in part of O'Molloy's Country (Eglisk barony) and three in north Tipperary (Claghjordan, Modreeny & Behamore). This distribution illustrates that their territory extended beyond the present boundaries of Clonlisk & Ballybritt baronies.

⁶ Prendergast, J. P. & Quinn, D. B. 1967 Calendar of the Irish Council Book. *Analecta Hibernica* 24, 130.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 140-1.



Map showing the impact of the 1620 crown plantation on the ownership of the medieval Gaelic castles in O'Carroll's Country and the construction of new plantation style castles by non-Gaelic families at locations where there was no pre-existing medieval castle.

Callogh O'Carroll as 'chief of his nation'.⁸ By the late 16th century, the O'Carrolls mortgaged their lands of Birr, Crinkill and Ballindarra to the earl of Ormond. It is not clear if these lands included the castle at Ballindarra. A deed dating from the 18th of March 1595, records that 'Teig [Tadhg] O'Carroll of Byrre [Birr] in Ely O'Carroll in the county and liberty of Tipperary, son and heir of Callough [Charles] More O'Carroll of the same, deceased, and Rory O'Carroll of the same, son and heir of Teig O'Carroll, deceased, viz., that in consideration of a sum of money paid to them by the Earl of Ormond, they have granted to James Oge Butler of Lismalin, Co. Tipperary, the town and lands of Byrre, Krynekill [Crinkill], Clonlackagh and Byalanedarragh [Ballindarra] in Ely O'Carroll. To have and to hold the premises to said James, his heirs and assigns, to the use of the said Earl for ever.'⁹ A second land grant dating from 1601 recorded that, 'Teige O'Carroll of Birre in Ely O'Carroll, Co. Tipperary, son and heir of Callagh More O'Carroll of the same, deceased, for a sum of money paid to him by Thomas, Earl of Ormond, grants to Robert Rothe, Henry Shee and Walter More Butler of Drehednefeary [Farney Castle, North Tipperary] all his castles, messuages, rents, etc. in Birre, Krynekill [Crinkill], Conlackaghe and Bealanedarragh [Ballindarra] in Ely O'Carroll. To hold to said Robert, etc., their heirs and assigns, to the use of the said Earl, his heirs and assigns, for ever. William O'Meary [O'Meara] of Lisenoisky [Lissanisky, North Tipperary] to deliver seisin'.¹⁰

A portion of the present townland of Ballindarra appears to have formed part of the estate of Birr Castle and this estate had been mortgaged by the O'Carrolls to the earls of Ormond. A title deed in the Rosse Papers from c.1604 for a fine or rent of the lands in Ballindarra and Crinkill suggests that they were collecting rent from these lands in the early years of the 17th century.¹¹ Initially the estate of Birr Castle which was acquired by the Parsons family did not include the lands attached to the estate of Ballindarra Castle. In 1620 the land granted to Lawrence Parsons under the commission for the plantation of King's county included a portion of lands in Ballindarra but excluded the 'castle and bawn of Ballindarragh'.¹²

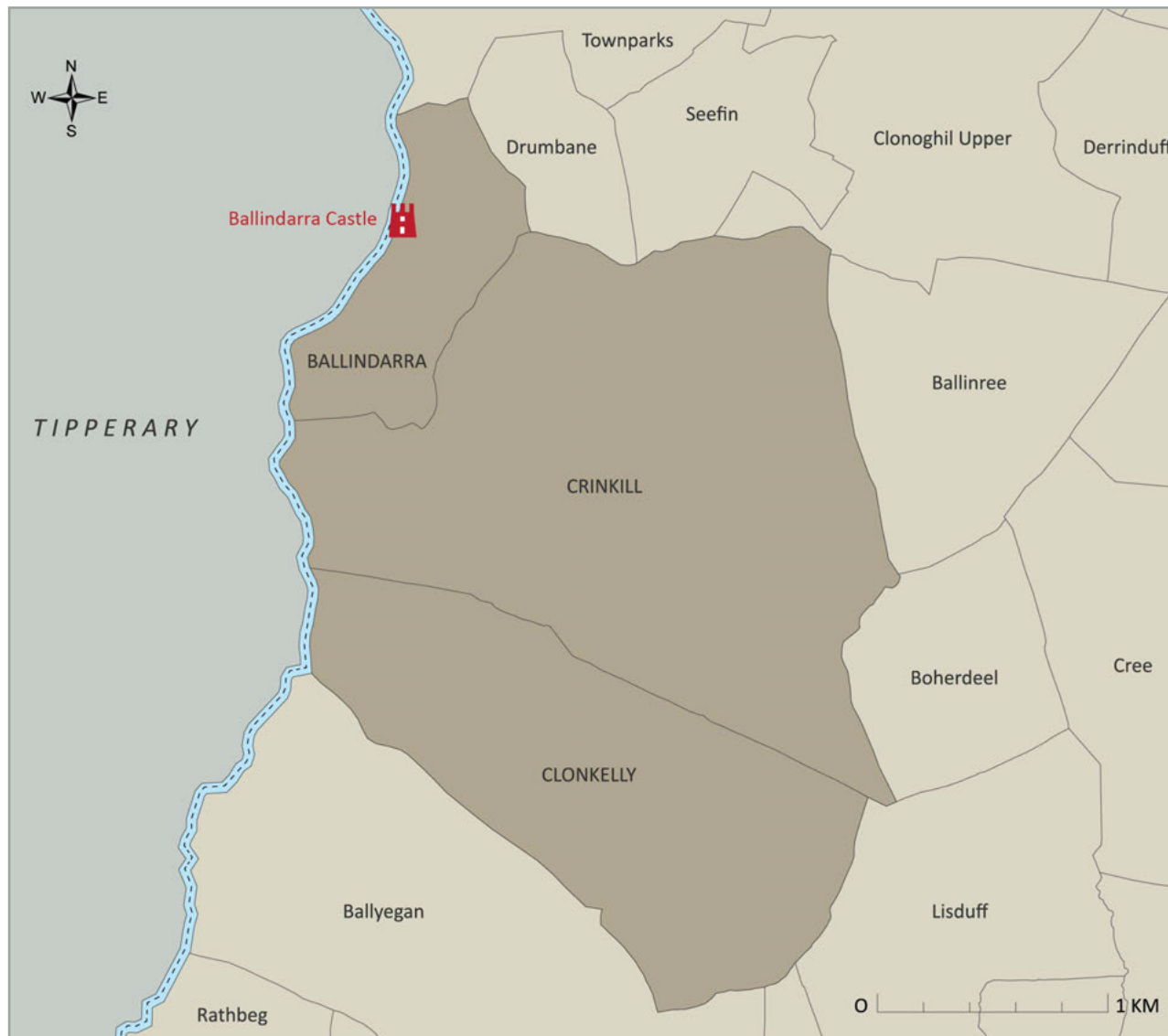
⁸ Ibid., 141.

⁹ Curtis, E. (ed.) 1932-43 *Calendar of Ormond Deeds* 6, 76.

¹⁰ Ibid., 114-5.

¹¹ Malcomson, A. P. W. 2008 *Calendar of the Rosse Papers*, 518.

¹² Griffith, M.C. (ed.) 1966 *Irish Patent Rolls of James I*, 467.



Map showing the present townlands, portions of which formed the lands granted to Captain Francis Ackland in the 1620 Crown plantation of Ely O'Carroll. The grant included 250 acres of land which consisted of 120 acres of pasture, 100 acres of bog and wood and a further 30 acres immediately enclosing the castle and bawn of Ballindarra.

In the same year the commission for the plantation of King's County granted Captain Francis Ackland, High Sheriff of the county '120a [acres] pasture and 100a bog and wood, in the town and lands of Crinkill, Clonkela [Clonkelly], Kilenfadda [part of Clonkelly/Crinkill], Clondagh [?] and Clonlegagh [?]; the castle and bawn of Ballindarragh cont[ainin]g. 30a [acres], extending from the Brosna river to the lands of Sessarabrack; rent for the pasture land £2 12s 1d. Engl.[ish], and for the bog and wood 4s 2d.- To hold in free and common soccage.¹³

This 1620 grant suggests that the demesne lands of Ballindarra Castle consisted of 30 acres of land which probably surrounded the immediate environs of the bawn and castle, with the remaining lands of the castle estate located in the adjoining townlands of Crinkill and Clonkelly. Francis Ackland had been involved in the administration of English law in Offaly prior to this land grant. Two years earlier in 1618, Matthew De Renzy of Clonony Castle wrote to the sheriff of King's County and to Captain Francis Ackland concerning a land dispute between him and the MacCoghlan.¹⁴ In 1622 the Commission for the Plantation of Ely O'Carroll described Captain Francis Ackland as one of the 'natives in Ely O Carroll' who participated as an undertaker in this Plantation.¹⁵ In 1625 Francis Ackland was created a Knight Bachelor by Viscount Falkland.¹⁶

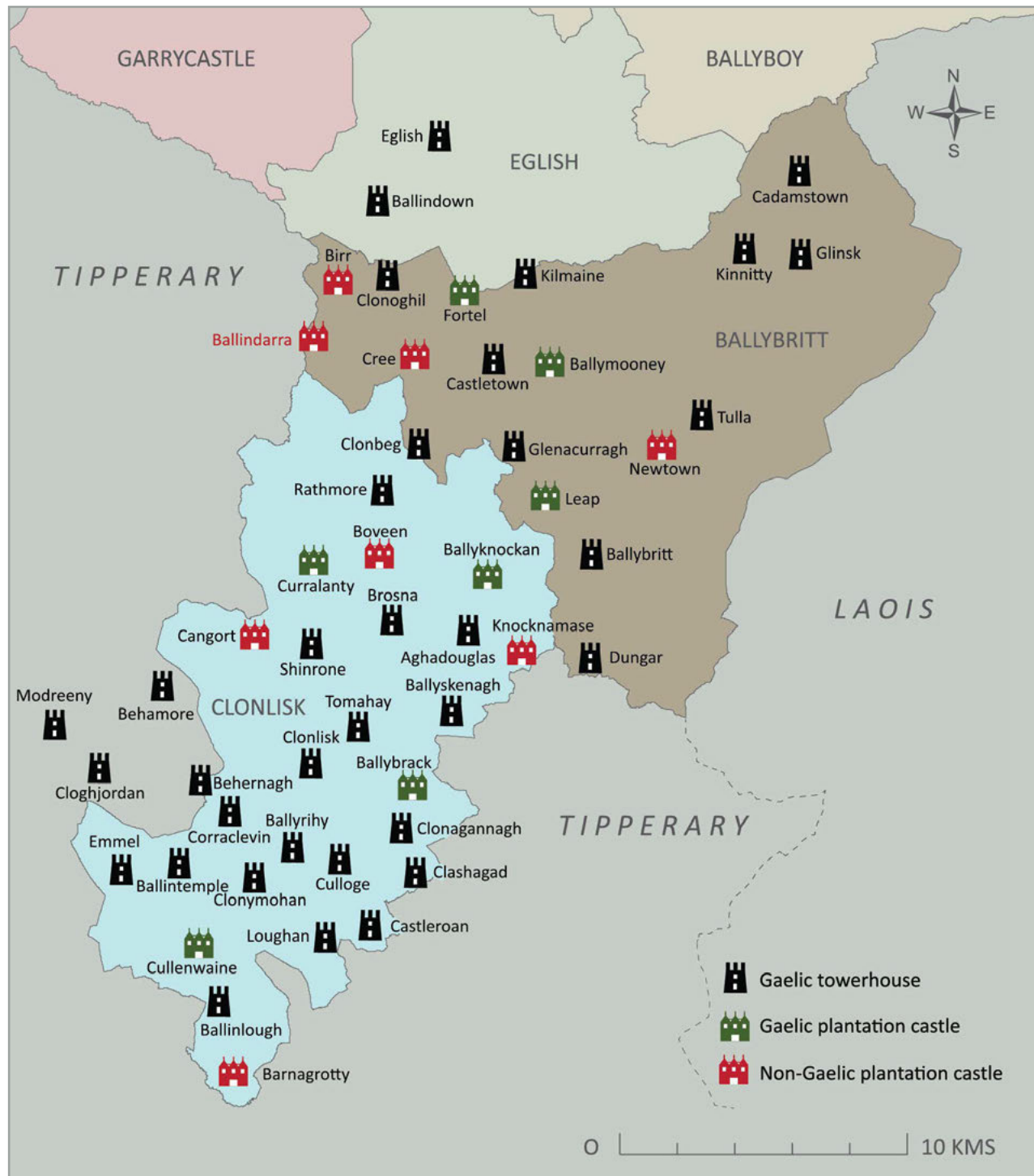
During the reign of Charles I [1625-49], the O'Carrolls sought compensation for the loss of some of their lands to the English undertakers of the Plantation of Ely O'Carroll. In 1626, the English Crown paid compensation to John Carroll for the English plantation of his lands around Ballindarra Castle. In this year a letter to Lord Viscount Falkland and to the Lord Chancellor of Ireland from the English Crown states that 'Forasmuch as our trusty and well-beloved subject, John Carroll, esquire, hath humbly submitted to the plantation of the country of Ely O'Carroll, in the King's country, in that our realm of Ireland, in the time of our late dear father, of blessed memory, is of good merit and well-affected in religion, we are graciously pleased, and do hereby require and authorize you to make an effectual grant in due form of law, with the advice of our learned counsel there, by letters under the great

¹³ Ibid., 468.

¹⁴ MacCuarta, B. 1998/9 A Settler's Land Disputes in a Gaelic Lordship: Matthew De Renzy in Delvin Mac Coghlan, 1613-18. *Studia Hibernica* 30, 88.

¹⁵ British Library Ms. Add 4756 f.125, MILLES COLLECTION - Entry Book of reports of the Commissioners for Ireland, appointed by James I in 1622.

¹⁶ Shaw, W. A. & Burtchaell, G. D. 1906 *The Knights of England: a complete record from the earliest time to the present day of the knights of all the orders of chivalry in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of knights bachelors* II, 189.



Map showing the construction of new plantation style castles by Gaelic and non-Gaelic families as part of the 1620 Crown plantation of Ely O'Carroll.

seal of that our realm of Ireland, from us, our heirs and successors, unto the said John Carroll, his heirs and assigns, in consideration of his faithful service done unto us and our Crown, of all such castles, manors, lands, tenements, courts, markets, fairs, liberties, privileges, benefits, and heriditaments whatsoever, as are mentioned in a fiant made in that our realm for a patent to be passed unto the said John Carroll and his heirs in our late dear father's time; To be holden of us, our heirs and successors, by and under such tenures, rents, services, conditions, and covenants as in the fiant are expressed; excepting that it shall be lawful for John Carroll to purchase lands to him and his heirs of his kindred and others in the county, not exceeding in the whole 2,000 acres; and also that John Carroll and his heirs be exempted from sowing of hemp his lands being found unapt for it. And likewise, we are graciously pleased, by the letters patent to be made by virtue hereof, to grant unto John Carroll and his heirs, £15 8s. 2d., English money, of the rents payable to us out of the lands of Fercall [O'Molloy's Country], in the said county, which are passed by patent unto others in fee-farm by the said John Carroll, his allowance, in satisfaction of the remaine of the £75 yearly which was intended to be given to John Carroll and his heirs in lieu of his chiefries; and that John Carroll may have such recompense as you shall think fit for the castle of Ballenedarragh [Ballindarra], and fourscore acres of profitable lands, which were passed from him for making up of an undertaker's portion, if it shall not appear unto you and our Commissioners of the Plantation there that he hath had satisfaction for the same already. And lastly, whereas there hath been received to the use of our said dear father and of us £15 8s. 2d. yearly, these five years last, out of the lands of Fercall [O'Molloy's Country], amounting to £77 0s. 10d., our pleasure is, and we do hereby require you to take present order that our Vice-Treasurer and Receiver-General there shall make an abatement and give allowance unto John Carroll of the £40 due by him unto us for surveying and measuring of the lands, out of the £77 0s. 10d., and that the said John Carroll may have such recompense for the remaine of the said £77 0s. 10d., as to you shall be thought good; which favours done by us unto the said John Carroll for the causes aforesaid, and upon the special recommendation of our Commissioners for the affairs of that our kingdom, we will shall not be made a precedent for others for the castle of Ballenedaragh [Ballinadarra], and fourscore [80] acres of profitable lands, which were passed from him for making up of an undertakers portion, if it shall not appear unto you and our commissioners

of the plantation there that he hath had satisfaction for the same already.¹⁷

After the 1620 land grant the O'Carrolls never regained ownership of Ballindarra Castle. Although the initial 1620 grant of lands to Francis Ackland consisted of 250 acres of land, by the time of his death in 1631 the estate had grown to include 651 acres of land. An Inquisition into the estate of Francis Ackland after his death, dating from 1631, recorded the extent of his estate which then included, '421 acres of arable and pasture land, 200 acres of wood and moor in Crinkill, Clonekily-killenfadda [Clonkelly], Cloudagh [?] & Clonelegaghe [?], portion of Ballindarraghe & Sesserabrack [?] including one castle and the bawne and 30 acres of arable and pasture land in the townland of Ballindarra.'¹⁸ A year after his death in



Richard Boyle (1566-1643) 1st earl of Cork who purchased the castle and lands of Ballindarra in 1632 from the daughter of Sir Francis Ackland for his cousin Lady Anne Parsons of Birr Castle. (This image is reproduced courtesy of the National Library of Ireland No. EP CORK-RI (1) I <http://catalogue.nli.ie/Record/vtIs000183966>).

1632, the lands of Crinkill and Ballindarragh were purchased by the Parsons family of Birr Castle from Henry and Francis Sachevel [Sacheverell of Ballintaggart, Co. Armagh], the latter being the daughter of Francis Ackland. The parchment deed of this sale dates from 27th August 1632.¹⁹ An entry in the diary of Richard Boyle, earl of Cork and a cousin of Lawrence Parsons, under the date 11th of August 1632 records that 'I this day purchased for my cozen the Lady An [ne] parsons, widdo[w] of Mr Henry Sacheverell, and ffrances his wife, the daughter and heir of Sir ffrances Ackland, 600 acres of plantacon land near Parsonstown [Birr] in the Kings County [Offaly], for which I paid them of my own moneis ccviii li. [£208] ster. [sterling]; and to Mr Sacheverels brother to compass the purchace v li. x s. [£5 10s].'²⁰ A second entry in the diary on the 3rd of October 1633 states the earl of Cork

lent 'Mr Sacheverell x li. [£10] ster.; and is in payment for 200 li [£200] ster: which the Lady An Parsons is to make up for the mortgage of Garrandarragh [Ballindarra] near Parsonstown [Birr], which 200li [£200] I have promised to lend her La[dy], repaiable next Michas tearm.'²¹ An indenture of 1639, states that this castle and bawn was then leased by the Parsons family to Philip Bagot [Bigo], a French Huguenot glassmaker, for a period of twelve years. This Philip Bigo later moved to Newtown Castle, near the village of Lusmagh where he had set up a glassworks.

The *Books of Survey and Distribution* list Captain William Parsons of Birr Castle as the owner of the lands of Ballindarra in 1641. Following the Irish Rebellion of 1641, William Parsons was appointed Governor of the territory of O'Carroll's Country and was responsible for the protection of its borders.²² Garrisons were placed in the castles of Birr, Clonoghil and Ballindarra in order to defend this region from attacks by local Gaelic families such as the O'Carrolls, the O'Molloys, the MacCoghlanes, the O'Kennedys and the Ormonders. The Gaelic families who took part in the 1641 Rebellion were described by the English administration in Dublin Castle as 'most disloyal and malignant persons within this kingdom have traitorously conspired against his Majesty's peace, crown and dignity, and many of them in prosecution of their conspiracy are traitorously assembled together in warlike manner, and have most inhumanly made destruction and devastation of the persons and estates of divers of his majesty's good people and loyal subjects of this kingdom, and taken, slain, and imprisoned good people here.'²³ On the 2nd of November 1641 William Parsons received his commission from Dublin Castle which authorised him to 'levy raise and assemble all, every, or any the forces, as well footmen, as horsemen, within the country of Ely O'Carroll, and the borders thereof, giving you hereby the command in chief of all the said forces.'²⁴ The Commission also stated that William Parsons was authorised to proceed against those who participated in the Rebellion and that he was 'to take, waste, and spoil their or any of their castles, holds, forts, houses, goods, and territories.'²⁵ He was also authorised to 'receive them [the rebels] or any of them into his Majesty's favour and mercy, and to forbear the devastation of

²¹ Ibid., 212.

²² Cooke, T. L. 1826 *The Picture of Parsonstown*, 65.

²³ Ibid., 67.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷ Morrin, J. 1863 *Calendar of the Patent Rolls of Charles 1*, 163.

¹⁸ Anon 1826 *Inquisitionum in Officio Rotulorum Cancellariae Hiberniae Asservatarum Repertorium* 1.

¹⁹ Malcomson, A. P. W. 2008 *Calendar of the Rosse Papers*, 519.

²⁰ Grosart, B. A. (Rev.) 1886 *The Lismore Papers* 3, 155.

their or any of their castles, holds, forts, houses, goods, and territories aforementioned according to your discretion.²⁶ The Rosse Papers show that William Parsons of Birr Castle paid out money for the upkeep of garrisons at the castles of Birr, Ballindarra and Clonoghil from 1641-43. William Parsons appointed a John Carroll as one of his captains in his local army. In 1642 the Rosse Papers recorded a 'note of what moneys hath beene laid out by me, William Parsons, to the souldiers under the command of Capt. Carroll, and of other moneys layd out for the use of the garrisons lying at Parsonstowne alias Byrre [Birr], Ballyndarrow [Ballindara], and Cloynakill [Clonoghil], from the 26th of November 1641 until ye 20th of January 1643.²⁷

Ballindarra Castle and its garrison of troops were attacked several times by the O'Molloys and the O'Carrolls between 1641 and 1643. There are several references to the bawn of Ballindarra Castle being attacked in the diary of Captain William Parsons of Birr Castle. He records that on the 29th of January 1642, 'I sent out part of my horse and foot and tooke 2 prisoners and pilladged a house at Ballindarragh where the Campe of the enemy lay the night before, and stole away the same night 3 oxen out of the Bawne of Ballindarragh of my Tennante where my Guard shooting at them kille some of them.²⁸ Ballindarra Castle was attacked once more by the O'Molloys in September of the same year when 'all the houses about it were burned, and many of the assailants were killed by fire of musketry, and by stones and firebrands cast at them over the surrounding walls; and finally, the attacking party went away after having set fire to the door of the castle which the warders had walled up on the inside.²⁹ Ballindarra Castle was also attacked by the O'Carrolls during this rebellion. A 1641 Deposition states that after their attack on Clonoghil Castle on the 15th of September 1642, 'that John Carroll of Leape esquire John Carroll of Clonliske esquire & Teig Carroll of Rathmore esquire were there present with many other prime Gentleman & ffreeholders and the same day & night following they assaulted the Castle of Ballindarragh.³⁰

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Malcomson, A. P. W. 2008 *Calendar of the Rosse Papers*, 206.

²⁸ Rosse Papers Ms. A/9, Diary of Captain William Parsons.

²⁹ Hogan, M. 1980 *The Early History of the Town of Birr or Parsonstown by Thomas Lalor Cooke with a new introduction by Margaret Hogan*, 271.

³⁰ TCD, 1641 Depositions Project, online transcript January 1970 [<http://1641.tcd.ie/deposition.php?deplD=<?php echo 814254r157?>>, accessed Thursday 31 March 2011]



Sir William Petty's map of 1685 depicting the church building and bridge at Ballindarra. The churches at Birr and Ballindarra are shown in the same style indicating that the building at Ballindarra is that of a church rather than a castle. Castles on the map include Birr and Cree but no fortification at Ballindarra. Taken from Andrews, J. H. 1969 *Hiberniae Delineatio*. [London 1685.] (Facsimile reprint of *Hiberniae Delineatio Atlas of Ireland*, with an introduction by J.H. Andrews. Shannon. Irish University Press)

A further entry in the diary of Captain William Parsons dated the 16th of September 1642 records that after taking Clonoghil Castle the Irish rebels 'assaulted Ballindarragh Castle and the English house under the wall of the Castle.³¹ The defence of this castle and the methods of warfare undertaken by the defenders and its attackers are described in some detail by Thomas Lalor Cooke in the 'Picture of Parsonstown'. According to Cooke, during this attack the warders within Ballindarra Castle 'killed many of the assailants with the fire of musketry, and by casting stones and fire brands at them over the

³¹ Rosse Papers Ms. A/9, Diary of Captain William Parsons.

surrounding wall. Seeing that they could not succeed the enemy went off, but previously set fire to the door which the warders had walled up on the inside. In coming to this attack the assailants brought planks to set up against the door of the Castle, but were compelled to leave them behind in their retreat. They also brought hither one of the prisoners which they had made at Clonahill [Clonoghil Castle], and compelled him to speak to the guard to induce them to yield, but 'twas all to no purpose'.³² The Irish rebels were not successful in their attack and two days later on the 18th September Captain Parsons writes in his diary that his forces have 'relieved Ballindarra Castle with provision and powder.'³³

The will of Captain William Parsons of Birr Castle dated 17th April 1650, which was proved on the 14th of April 1653, states that all the 'lands, castles, manors, messuages, tenements, and hereditaments mentioned in the indentures of 18 Jul[y]. 1636, and 28-29 May, 1639, with the castle and bawn of Ballindarragh and 30a arable and pasture, to go to Phillip Begot [Bigo] and Damian Hutchinson, and their assigns for 12 years after my death: they paying the following annuities and portions: to my eldest son Laurence Parsons, 40 a year until the age of 18; 60 a year from 18 to 21; and 100 a year from 21 to 24.'³⁴ In 1663, the English Crown awarded William Parsons, the sum of '£1,112 10s.7d., as payment for arrears of pay during his service when he was Captain of a troop of horse from 21st of November 1641, to the 14th September 1643.'³⁵ The *Books of Survey and Distribution* record, that the Parsons family of Birr Castle had retained ownership of the lands of Ballindarra after the Irish Wars of 1641-53. This castle does not appear to have been occupied during the second half of the 17th century and does not feature in the historical accounts of the Williamite Wars in Ireland of 1688-91. The townland of Ballindarra remained in the ownership of the Parsons family of Birr Castle throughout the 18th century. 🏰

³² Cooke, T. L. 1826 *The Picture of Parsonstown*, 87-8.

³³ Birr Castle Archives, Ms A/9, diary of Capt. William Parsons from 18th October 1641 to 20th January 1643, recording daily events in King's county, during the civil war. Transcribed by R. Loeber in unpublished typescript, 'A Geographical Calendar of Landownership in O'Carroll's Country in the 16th and 17th Centuries', 47. Copy of this typescript is kept in Birr Castle Archives.

³⁴ Ainsworth, J. 1948 Abstracts of 17th century Irish wills in the perogative court of Canterbury. *JRSAI* 78, 33.

³⁵ Malcomson, A. P. W. 2008 *Calendar of the Rosse Papers*, 213-4.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This information about Ballindarra castle is one in a series of an on-line gazetteer about castles in Offaly. Please visit www.offaly.ie/heritage_castles for any revised editions and for information on other castles in Offaly. For information about all archaeological sites in Offaly see www.archaeology.ie.

The site of Ballindarra Castle is now a private residence.

Date posted February 2013. Version 1.

Text © Caimin O'Brien, Archaeological Survey of Ireland, National Monuments Service, Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht.

Facilitated by Amanda Pedlow, Heritage Officer, Offaly County Council.

Photographs by Caimin O'Brien except where stated.

Maps by Catherine Martin.

Designed by Connie Scanlon, Bogfire www.bogfire.com

Our thanks to the Earl and Countess of Rosse for access to the archive at Birr Castle and permission to use the image from the c1800 map.

Ordnance Survey maps, license no. 2010/32/CCMA/OffalyCountyCouncil.

This project is an action of the Offaly Heritage Plan 2012 – 2016.

