

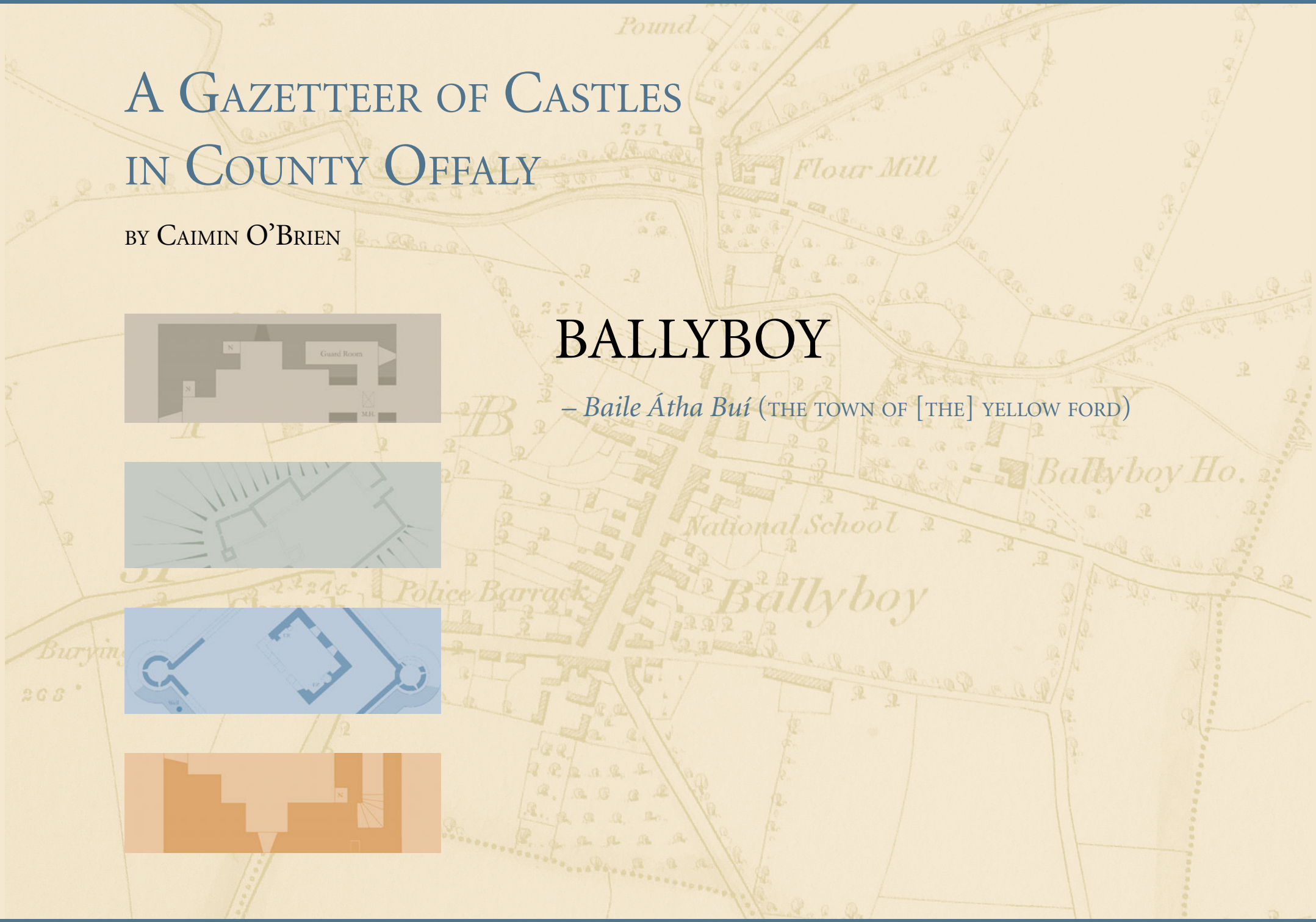
# A GAZETTEER OF CASTLES IN COUNTY OFFALY

BY CAIMIN O'BRIEN



## BALLYBOY

– *Baile Átha Buí* (THE TOWN OF [THE] YELLOW FORD)



# BALLYBOY

– *Baile Átha Buí* (THE TOWN OF [THE] YELLOW FORD)

**NGR:** 220304/213868

**BARONY:** Ballyboy

**CIVIL PARISH:** Ballyboy

**SMR No.** OF031-015001-

**TERRITORY:** O'Molloy's Country [Fir Cheall]

**17TH CENTURY PARISH:** Ballyboy

## BALLYBOY CASTLE



Location of Ballindarra Castle in Offaly and the surrounding counties

## SUMMARY

The remains of a low motte and bailey castle are in a field in Ballyboy village. This earth and timber castle was constructed by the Anglo-Normans close to a fording point over the Silver River c.1180-1200. Ballyboy Castle was initially built as a secure garrison for the Anglo-Norman army as they advanced through this region using the routeways in Fir Cheall.

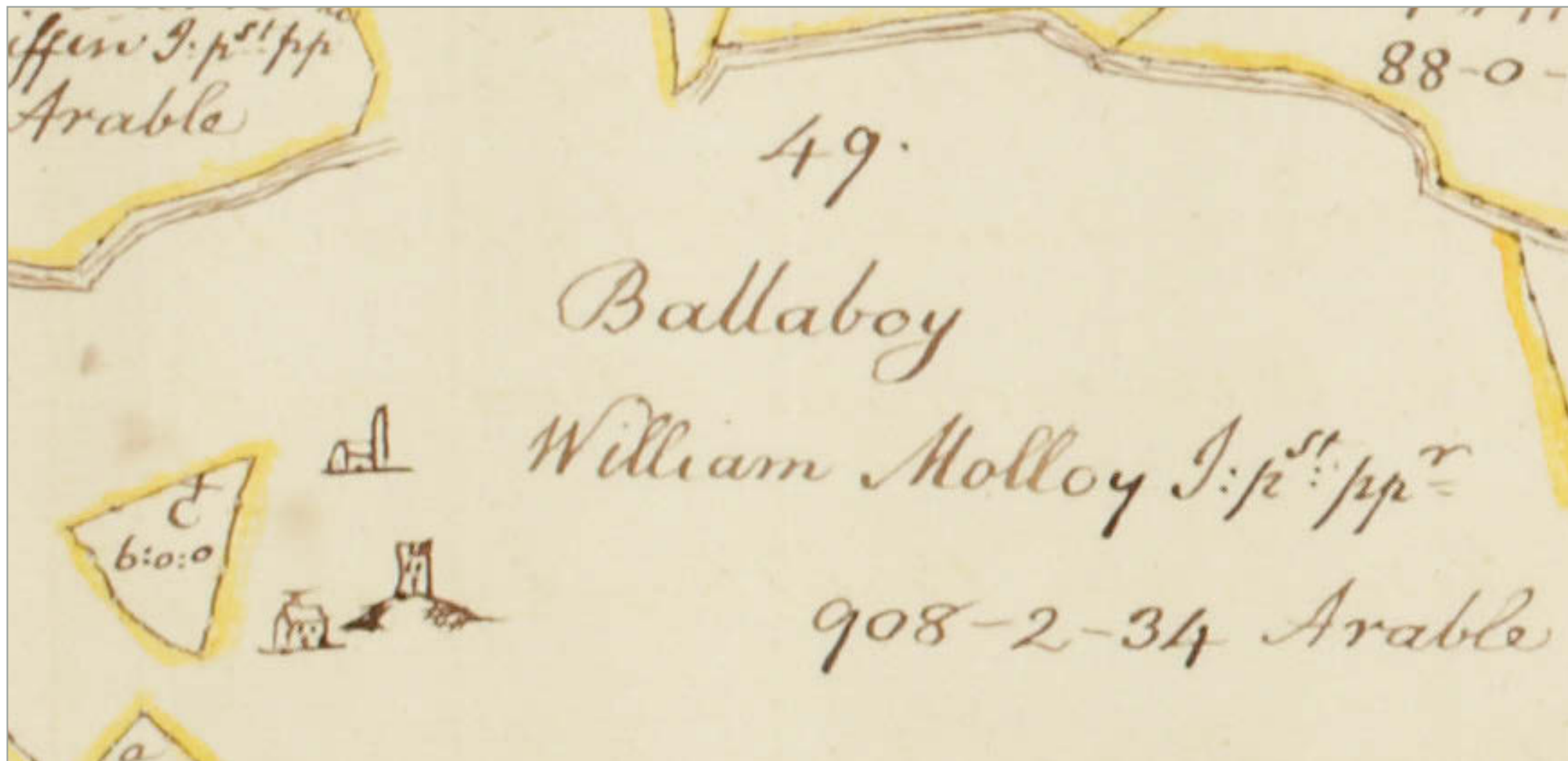


A map showing the location of Anglo-Norman earth and timber castles in County Offaly

Once the region of Fir Cheall had been secured by the Anglo-Normans, the castle acted as a focus for settlement which grew up around and under the protection of the earth and timber castle. The townland of Ballyboy, also known as Athboy [Átha Buí / yellow ford], was situated in the Gaelic territory of Fir Cheall, in the kingdom of Mide. This territory formed part of the medieval cantred [Anglo-Norman administrative subdivision of land] of Ardnurcher [Horseleap, Co. Westmeath] in the Anglo-Norman lordship of Meath. After the successful Anglo-Norman military campaign in Ireland, the Kingdom of Mide was granted to Hugh de Lacy, who granted the cantred of Ardnurcher to one of his knights, Meiler fitz Henry. The lands of the cantred of Ardnurcher extended from the motte and bailey castle at Drumcullen, standing on the banks of the Camcor River, to the barony of Moycashel in Co. Westmeath. Towards the end of the 14th



This photograph shows the motte or mound of the Anglo-Norman earth and timber castle. A later post-medieval wall cuts across the base of the motte which is visible on the left side of the photo. The footings of the stone structure can be seen on the top of the motte. (Photo by James Fraher)



*A section of the 1654 Down Survey map of Ballyboy parish depicting a stone castle on top of the Anglo-Norman motte. A medieval church is marked in the area where the present Church of Ireland ruins are located today. At this time the castle and lands of Ballyboy, amounting to 908 acres of arable land, belonged to William Molloy. (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, Ms 716 (22))*

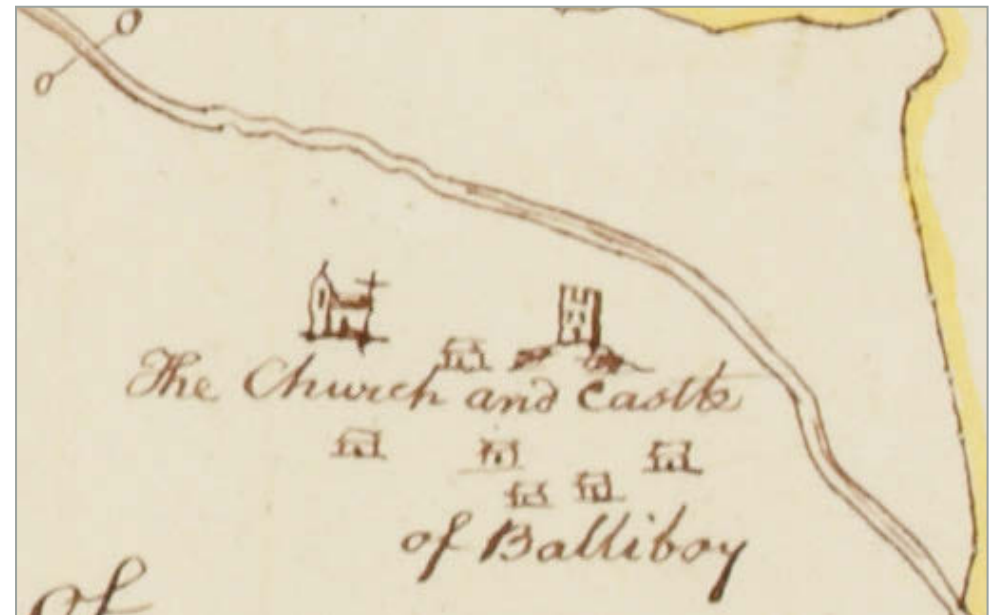
century, the O'Molloys took possession of the Anglo-Norman castle of Ballyboy. The lands and castle of Ballyboy remained in the hands of the O'Molloys until the Irish Wars of 1641-53. After this war the lands and castle of Ballyboy were confiscated by the Commonwealth government and granted to Sir William Petty. During the Williamite Wars in Ireland of 1688-91, the village and castle of Ballyboy became a garrison for Williamite soldiers. In 1690, the Jacobite forces attacked and burnt the town and the Williamite forces took refuge in the castle located on the 'Mount' in the centre of the village.

The archaeological remains of the earth and timber castle consist of a large D-shaped bailey that lies to the southwest of the low motte and survives today as a well-defined curving field boundary. The poorly preserved remains of a wall belonging to a stone structure can be seen standing on the summit of the motte. The interpretation and dating of this feature is impossible without archaeological excavation. This wall may belong to the stone castle depicted standing on the summit of the motte on the 1654 Down Survey map.



*A map of the Gaelic territory of Fir Cheall (O'Molloy's Country) in modern Offaly showing Ballyboy castle in relation to the boundary of Fir Cheall and adjoining Gaelic territories.*

Alternatively the wall may belong to the post-medieval period, when a limekiln was built into the northern side of the motte. In the post-medieval period, the castle was in ruins and the stone from it was probably reused in the construction of the present houses in the village. During this time, a stone wall was constructed along the base of the motte on the southern side. The church and castle with its associated settlement can be seen depicted on the 1654 Down Survey map of Ballyboy Barony. The Church of Ireland ruins are located on the site of the medieval church.



*A section of the 1654 Down Survey map of Ballyboy barony depicting Ballyboy castle and church with a small clustered settlement. The Silver River is shown with a fording point in top left of the image. The Anglo-Norman castle was constructed at this location in order to control this fording point and one of the routeways in Fir Cheall. (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, Ms 716 (23))*

## CASTLE LOCATION

The motte, with the remains of a stone structure, are located in Ballyboy village on flat farm land 230m to the north of the Silver River in the foothills of the Slieve Bloom Mountains. A 19th century corn mill and mill-race are located in the adjoining field to the north of the motte and the site of the medieval church is located 250m to the southwest.

The village and castle of Kilcormac are located 1.8km to the west with Derrydolney Castle 2.1km to the north. Other nearby castles include Killooly Castle 3.9km to the north-northeast, Rathlihen Motte, Church and Castle 4.1km to the northeast and Broughal Castle 4.1km to the northwest. The village of Ballyboy was strategically located on a medieval routeway connecting the town of Birr to Dublin and appears to have been the first day's stop on the journey from Birr.

According to Thomas Lalor Cooke, when Sir Lawrence Parsons was being conveyed to Dublin in the custody of the Sheriff on the 2nd of April 1690, the first day's stop was at Ballyboy.<sup>2</sup> A medieval mill in the adjoining townland of

Ballynacarrig is located 2.3km to the west and is depicted on the 1654 Down Survey parish map of Ballyboy.

<sup>2</sup> Hogan, M. 1980 *The Early History of the Town of Birr or Parsonstown* by Thomas Lalor Cooke with a new introduction by Margaret Hogan, 234.

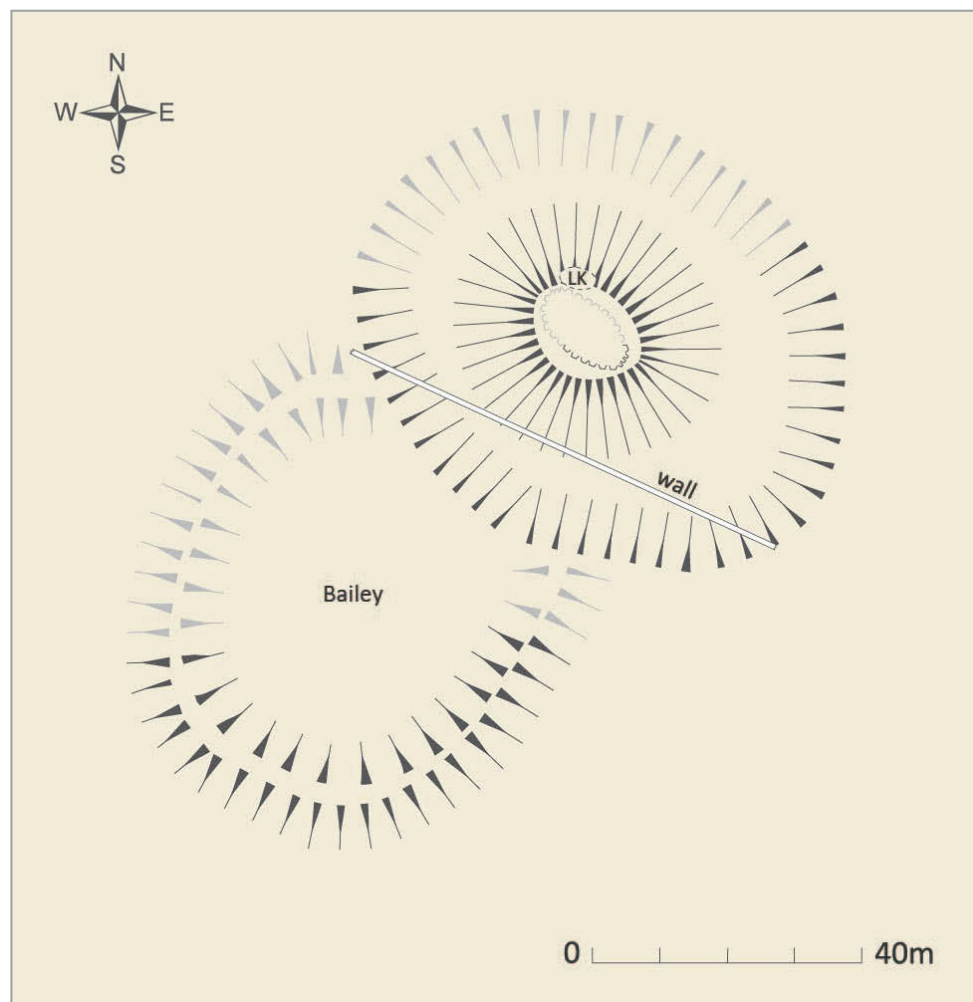


A section of the 1654 Down Survey map of Ballyboy barony depicting Ballyboy castle and the medieval mill at Ballynacarrig. (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, NLI Ms 716 (22))

## CASTLE DESCRIPTION

Today all one can see are the low grass-covered walls of a polygonal-shaped stone structure, measuring externally c. 10.3m, standing on the summit of an Anglo-Norman motte that is 3.5m high and 12m across the summit. Only a short section of this wall facing is visible, standing 0.4m high with a circumference of 13.7m, running around the eastern and southern sides of the motte. The remains

are of a rubble built wall, which appears to be a series of curving sections, joined together to form a polygonal-shaped structure. This type of wall construction is not found on circular tower houses of the 15th century and is more typical of 13th century Anglo-Norman fortifications. Alternatively this stone facing may belong to a structure associated with the limekiln that has been built into the northern face of the motte.



*An earthwork sketch plan of the Anglo-Norman motte and bailey castle at Ballyboy, showing the partially filled in fosse and bailey area. (Taken and modified from G. Cunningham 1987, *The Anglo-Norman advance into the south-west midlands of Ireland.*)*

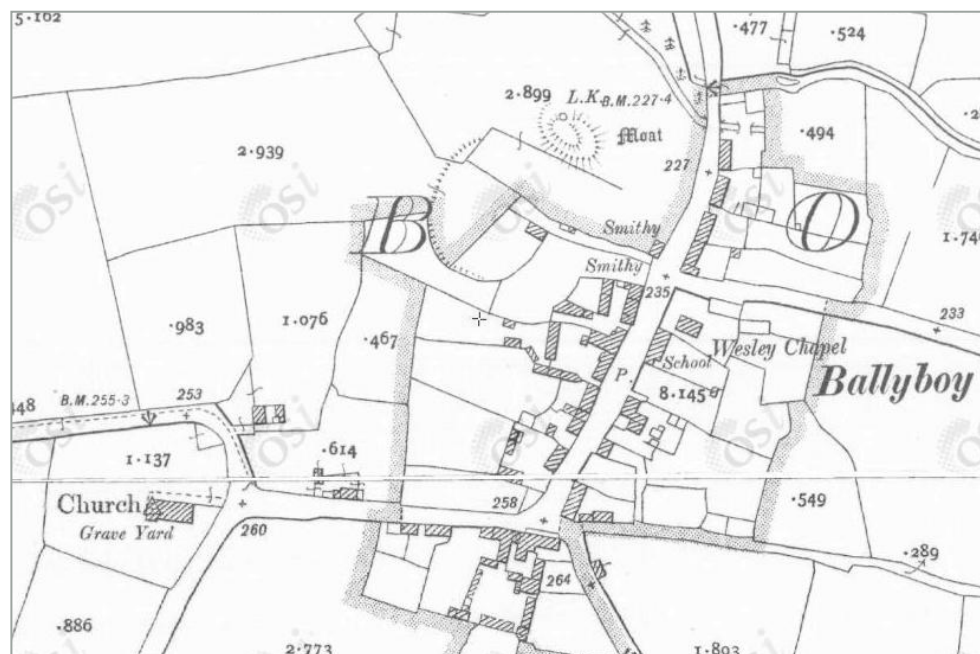
The height of the motte has been exaggerated by the presence of the stone structure on its summit. Originally the motte appears to have been a low natural hillock which was heightened by the excavation of a fosse around the base of the motte that has since been partially filled in. The fosse running around the base of the motte divided the motte from the bailey area.



*The enclosing fosse at the base of the motte is visible as a dip in the ground to the right of the motte. The fosse divided the bailey area from the motte. (Photo by James Fraher)*

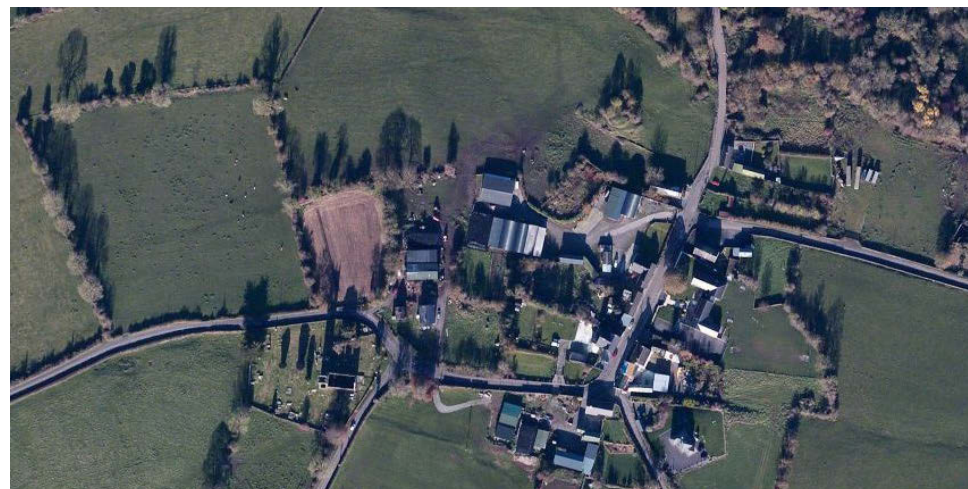
The original summit of the motte was only slightly higher than the surface of the interior of the bailey to the southwest. A limekiln has been built into the northern face of the motte and a post-medieval stone boundary wall runs along the base of the mound on the southern side. However on the 1908 edition of the Ordnance Survey [OS] six-inch map, an oval-shaped area, measuring c. 53m northwest to southeast by 63m from northeast to southwest, is hachured to the southwest of the motte. This area represents the location of the bailey or courtyard of the Anglo-Norman earth & timber castle. Today the curving field boundary of the property to the southwest of the motte clearly follows the curving line of the original enclosing element of the bailey of the Anglo-Norman Castle.

The polygonal-shaped, low, grass-covered walls standing on top of the motte may be the remains of the stone castle depicted on an early 17th century map of the region. This map of the barony of Ballyboy shows one tower and a second large building located in close proximity to the castle which may be the dwelling house mentioned in the 1654 Down Survey.



The 1908 edition of the Ordnance Survey twenty five-inch map depicting the Anglo-Norman motte castle as the 'Moat'. The hachured sub-circular earthwork to the southwest of the 'Moat' represents the enclosing element of the bailey or the courtyard of the Anglo-Norman timber castle. A post-medieval lime kiln has been built into the northern face of the base of the motte and is indicated as a circle with the letters L.K.

On the 1654 Down Survey parish map of Ballyboy, the cartographer depicts a tower house-type castle standing upon a mound with a large building along with church or glebe lands to the west. The terriers of this map also state that there is 'one Ruined Church at balliboy' and that there is a 'Castle on a mounte [motte] at Balliboy with a dwelling house and some Irish Cabbins'. The documentary evidence suggests that the Anglo-Norman timber castle was replaced by a stone castle, possibly of Anglo-Norman date, that was later reused by the O'Molloys. Alternatively this stone castle may have been built originally as an O'Molloy fortification c. 1450-1550 on top of the Anglo-Norman motte. The 1654 Down Survey barony map of Ballyboy shows a church and a large well in the area where the motte is located. Today there is no evidence of this well which may have served as the town well for the tenants of Ballyboy village.



Aerial photograph of Ballyboy castle site. The curving outline of the bailey of the timber castle can be clearly seen in the centre of the photo. The motte or mound of the castle is partially covered in trees located to the northeast. The ruins of the Church of Ireland church and graveyard can be seen in the bottom left of the photo. This church stands on the site of the medieval church depicted on the 1654 Down Survey map. The snaking line of trees to the north of the motte and bailey castle follows the route of the Silver River. (Accessed from Bing Maps on the 8th of February 2013, [www.bingmaps.com/](http://www.bingmaps.com/)).



An early 17th century map of the barony of Ballyboy depicting the medieval church and castle of Ballyboy. The fording point over the river in the townland of Park is also indicated. (Courtesy of The National Archives, London, MPF1/268)





A section of the 1654 Down Survey map of Ballyboy barony depicting a large well with stone surround, located near the medieval church of Ballyboy. This map, which is a copy of the Paris edition of the 1654 Down Survey, does not depict a castle or the motte of the Anglo-Norman earth & timber castle. The well is roughly located in the area where the present motte castle is situated.

The Church of Ireland church, located 230m to the southwest of the motte, was built on the site of the medieval church described in the 1654 Down Survey. There may have been a pre-Norman church at Ballyboy, as indicated by the possible early Christian cross-slab in the graveyard. In the field, immediately to the east of the Church of Ireland church, are the remains of a field system containing cultivation ridges and a linear earthwork running from east to west which may represent the remains of a medieval road. It is possible that these earthworks represent part of the medieval settlement of Ballyboy. During the 19th century, the stone of the castle was quarried and may have been used for buildings in the village of Ballyboy. The carved stone head which is incorporated into the nearby mill may have come from this castle. Alternatively it may have been taken from the medieval church site at Ballyboy.

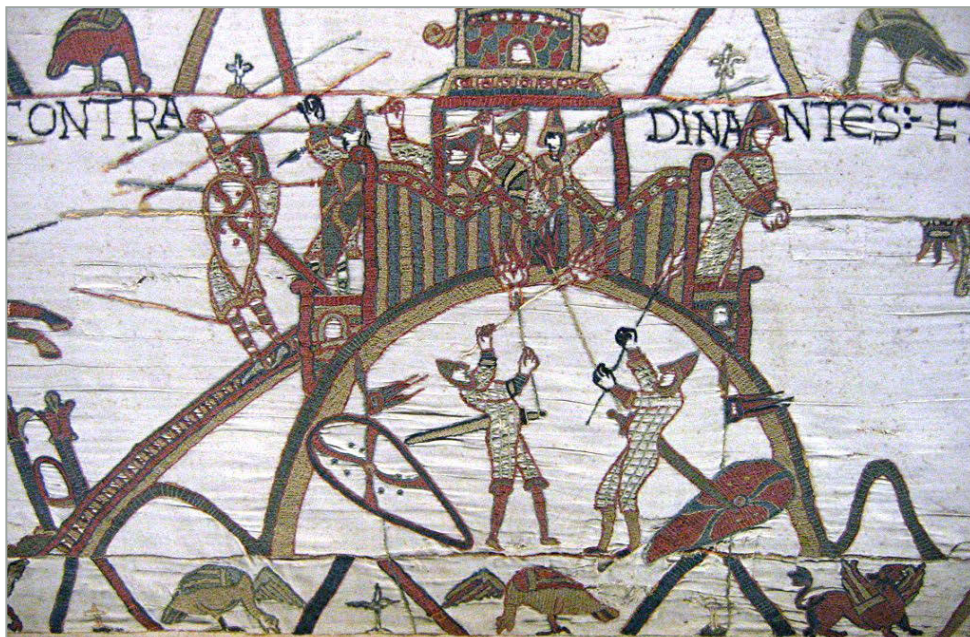


The 1838 edition of the Ordnance Survey six-inch map, showing the dotted outline of the Anglo-Norman motte and bailey castle. The church and 'Burying Ground' are built on the site of the medieval church depicted on the 1654 Down Survey map of Ballyboy parish.



A photograph of the carved head with grooved features now set into the nearby mill wall to the east of the Ballyboy castle. This carved head, with grooving along the side of the cheeks, dates from the medieval period and may have come from Ballyboy Castle. (© National Monuments Service, Dept of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.)

## CASTLE HISTORY



A scene from the 11th century Bayeux Tapestry, showing Norman soldiers under the command of William the Conqueror attacking the motte castle at Dinan, Brittany. The Tapestry shows two Norman soldiers beneath the motte trying to set fire to the timber palisade encircling the summit of the castle. The timber castle, standing inside the palisade, is defended by Breton soldiers who are throwing spears at William's cavalry. The bridge leading onto the summit of the motte is visible in the left of photo. A similar type of timber tower with flying bridge was constructed by the Anglo-Normans at Ballyboy. (Taken from M. J. Lewis 2008, *The real world of the Bayeux Tapestry*).

The Anglo-Norman motte & bailey castle at Ballyboy was built in the late 12th century either by Hugh de Lacy (1140-1186) who in 1172 was granted the lordship of Meath, or by one of his knights. Meiler fitz Henry (c. 1157-1220) was granted the lands of Fir Cheall as part of the sub-infeudation [process of land granting] of this lordship. Hugh de Lacy may have constructed the motte castle at Ballyboy before 1186 as part of the initial Anglo-Norman military campaign in Fir Cheall. On the 25th of July 1186, Hugh de Lacy was killed by a member of the Fox clan while constructing the earth & timber motte castle at Durrow which is also located in the Gaelic region of Fir Cheall.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> McGuire, J. & Quinn, J. (eds.) 2009 *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, volume 5, 262.

The castle building exploits of Hugh de Lacy were described in the Annals as 'he who had conquered the greater part of Ireland for the English, and of whose English castles all Meath, from the Shannon to the sea, was full'.<sup>3</sup> Hugh de Lacy

<sup>3</sup> O'Donovan, J. (ed. & trans.) 1856 *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*, volume 3, 71.



A map showing the earth & timber castles in the lordship of Meath that are located in County Offaly. The lordship of Meath was granted by King Henry II to Hugh de Lacy in 1172. Hugh then sub-granted the lands of this lordship to his knights, one of whom was Meiler fitz Henry who was granted the territory of Fir Cheall in the cantred of Ardnurcher.



An image of Hugh de Lacy taken from *Expugnatio Hibernica*, written by Giraldus Cambrensis c.1200. (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland, Ms. 700, folio 84v)

was the son of Gilbert de Lacy of Ludlow Castle, who possessed lands on the Welsh border.<sup>4</sup> In 1171, he accompanied King Henry II of England on his journey to Ireland. The following year in 1172, King Henry II of England, who was then staying at Wexford, granted his loyal knight, Hugh de Lacy the lordship of Meath for the service of 50 knights.<sup>5</sup>

Meiler fitz Henry, son of Henry fitz Henry [son of Henry I, king of England], was granted a portion of lands in the lordship of Meath as payment for his successes in the Anglo-Norman military campaign in Ireland. Meiler's mother was Nesta, the daughter of Rhys ap Tewdwr, king of Deheubarth [south Wales] and as a result his family possessed lands in Pembrokeshire, Wales.<sup>6</sup> In 1169, he accompanied his uncle, Robert fitz Stephen and other Anglo-Norman soldiers in their Irish military campaign to retrieve the lands lost by Diarmait Mac Murchada, king of Leinster.<sup>7</sup>

Gerald de Barry [Giraldus Cambrensis] described the military prowess of his cousin Meiler fitz Henry as 'a swarthy man with stern black eyes and piercing look. Below the middle height, but very strong for his size. His chest was broad, his waist narrow, his limbs bony and sinewy. A courageous and eager soldier, who shrank from no enterprise, whether to be undertaken alone or in company with others. The first to plunge into battle and the last to leave the field, he knew no alternative but death or victory.'<sup>8</sup>

The lands of Fir Cheall belonged to the parish of Ardnurcher located in the Irish kingdom of Mide. During the life of Hugh de Lacy, Meiler had obtained the lands of Fir Cheall during the sub-infeudation of the lordship of Meath, a process of land granting which was described in *Song of Dermot and the Earl* as 'Of Hugh de Lacy, I shall tell you, How he enfeoffed his barons, Knights, serjeants, and retainers.'<sup>9</sup> The motte castle at Ballyboy may have been constructed shortly after this land granting process. However most of these land grants were not secured immediately as the native landowners had to be removed from their lands before the Anglo-Normans could take possession of these land grants. The granting of this land from Hugh de Lacy to Meiler fitz Henry is recorded in the same song where it states that 'The cantred of Ardnorcher [Ardnurcher] then to Meiler, who was of great worth, Gave Hugh de Lacy - to the good Meiler Fitz Henry.'<sup>10</sup> Meiler had also obtained lands in the barony of Carbury in Co. Kildare, as part of the sub-infeudation of the kingdom of Leinster.<sup>11</sup> In 1182, Hugh de Lacy built an earth & timber castle for Meiler fitz Henry in Timahoe, Co. Laois.<sup>12</sup> If the motte castle at Ballyboy was built by Hugh de Lacy, a similar date for its construction could be proposed. After the death of Hugh de Lacy, his estate passed into the hands of the Crown, as his son Walter was a minor at the time. There followed a short period of time when the lands of Hugh de Lacy were in the hands of the Crown. The ownership of this lordship was claimed by Walter when he came of age which may have occurred around 1189, three years after the death of his father.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Orpen, G. H. 1892 *The Song of Dermot and the Earl*, 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>11</sup> Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 143.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>13</sup> Veach, C. T. 2009 A question of timing: Walter de Lacy's seisin of Meath 1189-94, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, Volume 109C, 181.

<sup>4</sup> McGuire, J. & Quinn, J. (eds.) 2009 *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, volume 5, 261.

<sup>5</sup> Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 103.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>7</sup> McGuire, J. & Quinn, J. (eds.) 2009 *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, volume 3, 943.

An alternative date of 1192 can be put forward for the construction of the earth and timber castle at Ballyboy. In this year, Meiler fitz Henry, who had been granted the cantred of Ardnurcher [Horseleap, Co. Westmeath] in the lordship of Meath, built a motte-castle at Ardnurcher.<sup>14</sup> The earth and timber castle at Ballyboy may have been built at this time by Meiler fitz Henry in an attempt to secure his lands throughout this cantred.

Meiler fitz Henry was appointed Justiciar of Ireland c.1198 and held this post until 1208 when he was replaced by John de Grey, bishop of Norwich.<sup>15</sup> Meiler fitz Henry was married to a niece of Hugh de Lacy and was rewarded for his military prowess with lands in the lordship of Meath.<sup>16</sup> During his time as Lord Justiciar of Ireland, Meiler carried out several successful military campaigns against the Gaelic clans under the leadership of the O'Connors. The *Annals* recorded that in the year 1200 '*Meyler, and the English of Leinster, marched to Clonmacnoise against Cathal Carragh (O'Conor), where they remained two nights: they plundered the town of its cattle and provisions, and attacked its churches*'.<sup>17</sup> However notwithstanding his military successes, Meiler angered several Anglo-Norman lords, including William de Burgh and Walter de Lacy (c.1170-1241), during his time as Justiciar of Ireland by taking control of lands which were in their possession. In 1207 a war broke out between the Anglo-Norman families of the de Lacys and Meiler fitz Henry who had land in Leinster and Meath. The lands of Fir Cheall appear to have been at the centre of this dispute as Meiler fitz Henry was claiming ownership of these lands against Walter de Lacy.<sup>18</sup> This war resulted in the destruction of the lands of Meath which belonged to Meiler fitz Henry. The *Annals* recorded that in 1207 '*A great war broke out among the English of Leinster; i. e. between Meyler, Geoffrey, Mares [de Marisco], and William Mareschal [Marshall]. Leinster and Munster suffered severely from them. Another great war broke out between Hugo de Lacy and Meyler; and the result was, that nearly*

*all Meyler's people were ruined*'.<sup>19</sup> Meiler was defeated by the army under the command of the de Lacy family and this led to the loss of his lands in Fir Cheall. This event was described in the *Annals* which states that in this year the '*sons of Hugo de Lacy and the English of Meath marched to the castle of Athnurcher [now Ardnurcher], and continued to besiege it for five weeks, when it was surrendered to them, as was also the territory of Fircal [Fir Cheall]; and Meyler was banished from the country*'. This decline in the fortunes of Meiler fitz Henry was officially recognised a year later in 1208, when the King of England confirmed Walter de Lacy with a charter for Meath including the lands of Fir Cheall.<sup>20</sup> In 1216, Meiler fitz Henry retired to live in the Augustinian monastery of Greatconnell, Co. Kildare which he had founded.<sup>21</sup> In 1220 Meiler fitz Henry died without a legitimate heir to his lands.<sup>22</sup>

In 1213, Cormac Ó Maelachlainn carried out attacks on the Anglo-Norman motte-castles at Ardnurcher [Horseleap, Co. Westmeath] and Ballyboy on lands which now both belonged to Walter de Lacy. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* recorded that in this year Cormac Ó Maelachlainn '*went to Athboy [Ballyboy] and there devised a stratageme to make the ward to come out of the castle and killed tenn of them immediately, and took all the preyes and spoyles of the towne with him*'.<sup>23</sup> A year later in 1214 the *Annals of Loch Cé* describe a similar attack, if not the same one when it recorded that '*The son of Art [Cormac Ó Maelachlainn] went to the castle of Ath-buidhe [Ballyboy] in Feara-Ceall [Fir Cheall], and burned its bawn [bailey], and slew eight of its inhabitants, and carried off a great number of cattle*'.<sup>24</sup> Conflict between the Gaelic families and the Anglo-Norman settlers continued throughout the second half of the 13th century. In 1261 the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* recorded that '*Carbry O'Melaghlen, a worthy prince for manhood, bounty, and many other good parts was treacherously killed by David Roche in*

14 Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 185.

15 McGuire, J. & Quinn, J. (eds.) 2009 *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, volume 3, 944.

16 *Ibid.*, 943.

17 O'Donovan, J. (ed. & trans.) 1856 *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*, volume 3, 125.

18 Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 237.

19 O'Donovan, J. (ed. & trans.) 1856 *Annala Rioghachta Eireann: Annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*, volume 3, 155.

20 Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 238.

21 Orpen, G. H. 2009 *Ireland under the Normans 1169-1333, with an introduction by Séan Duffy*, 346.

22 *Ibid.*, 176.

23 Murphy, D. (ed.) 1896 *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 227.

24 W. M. Hennessy (ed.) 1871 *Annals of Loch Cé*, volume 1, 251.



A woodcut of a Gaelic chieftain from Donegal, feasting outdoors, at a table with his wife and friars. The woodcut is taken from John Derricke's 'Image of Ireland' that was published in 1581. The bearded chieftain with long hair is depicted sitting in front of the table wearing a decorated quilted jacket. His leather helmet with decorative strap-work and broad-sword are placed on the ground in the front of the table. The handle of his sword and the decorative top of his helmet are visible in the right foreground of the image. His wife and tonsured friars are wearing shaggy-type mantles, which are loose sleeveless garments worn as a cloak over clothes. The wife of the chieftain is sitting on his right side wearing a wide halo-brim hat with open neck laced gown and linen cowl. Similar outdoor feasting would have been held in the bawn of Ballyboy Castle.

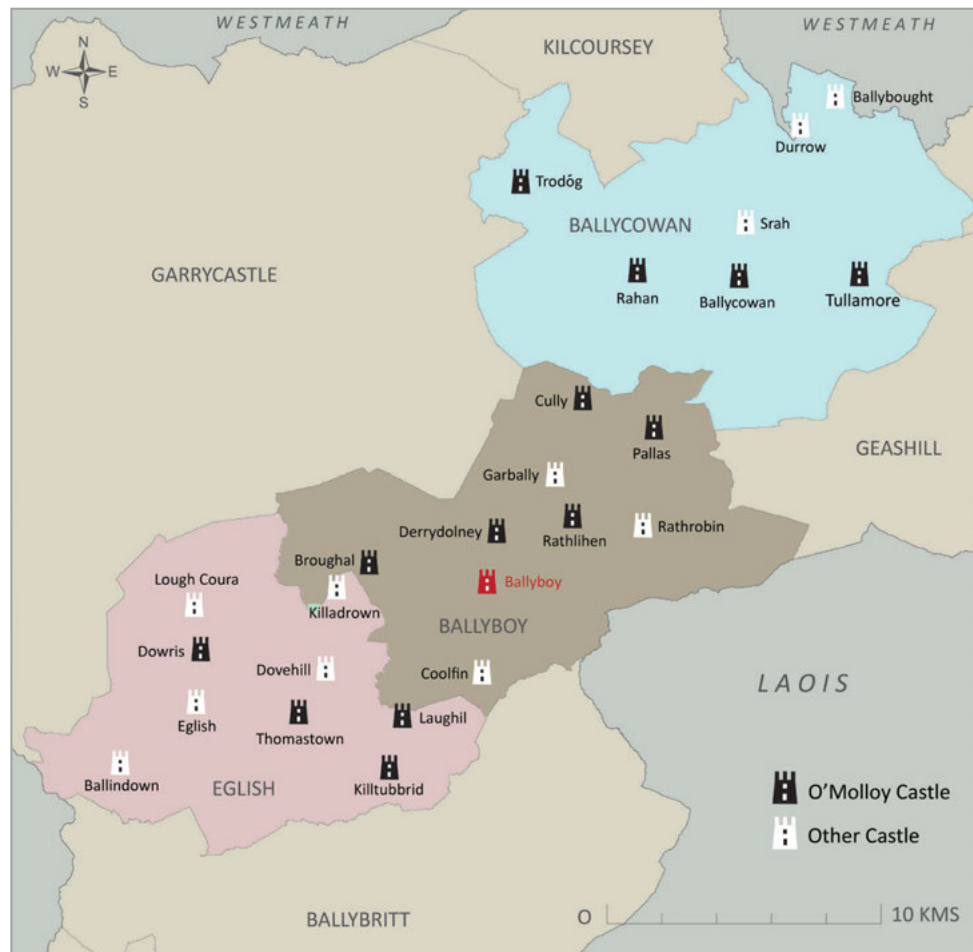
Athboye [Ballyboy] in the territory of ffearkeall [Fir Cheall]:<sup>25</sup> Anglo-Norman control of Ballyboy was maintained until the late 13th or early 14th century. Anglo-Norman power in Ballyboy was still the dominant force in 1268 when the *Annals* recorded that 'fferall [Farrell] O'Molloy, prince of ffearkeall [Fir Chell], was Deseatfully and treacherously slaine by the English [Anglo-Normans] of Athboy [Ballyboy]'.<sup>26</sup> The lands of the lordship of Meath were divided between the granddaughters of Walter de Lacy. The lands of Fir Cheall passed into the hands of the de Verdon family, through marriage between John de Verdon and Margaret, the granddaughter of Walter de Lacy. Elizabeth de Burgo, who was the widow of Theobald de Verdon who died in 1316, was entitled to 'nearly half the scutage [tax paid instead of military service] due from the four and a half fees of Firca!'<sup>27</sup> as part of her dower lands.

By the middle of the 14th century, Anglo-Norman control of this region was replaced by the native O'Molloys. The Anglo-Normans may have built a polygonal-shaped stone castle on top of the motte which was then reused by the O'Molloys after they recovered their lands from the Anglo-Normans. Alternatively the O'Molloys may have built a new stone castle on top of the motte during the 15th century which is the castle depicted on the 1654 Down Survey map. During the 15th and 16th centuries, this castle was one of the chief seats of the O'Molloys of Fir Cheall.

<sup>25</sup> Murphy, D. (ed.) 1896 *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 243.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

<sup>27</sup> Otway-Ruthven, A. J. 1967/68 *The Partition of the De Verdon Lands in Ireland in 1332*, Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Volume 66, 415.



The castles in O'Molloy's Country (Eglis, Ballyboy, Ballycowan baronies) c.1600. The ownership of the castles depicted in white either have not been identified or do not belong to the O'Molloys. Lough Coura castle was an O'Connor stronghold. It was maintained by the O'Molloys for their overlords, the O'Connors.

The O'Molloys of Ballyboy belonged to the branch of the family known as the Sliocht mhic Teabóid [descendant of the sons of Teabóid].<sup>28</sup> The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* recorded the death of 'Dowcouley, Daughter of O'Connor of Affalie [Offaly] & wife to Donell mcTheobald O'Molloy, whoe was the auncestor of the scept [clan] of Balle-ath-boy [Ballyboy]' in 1381.<sup>29</sup> The conflict between the O'Molloys

28 Nicholls, K. W. 1970 'Some Documents on Irish law and Custom in the Sixteenth Century', *Analecta Hibernica*, no. 26, 113.

29 Murphy, D. (ed.) 1896 *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 308.



A engraving of a portrait of Thomas Radclyffe, earl of Sussex, who was Lord Deputy of Ireland from 1556-60. On the 11th of July 1557, he camped in O'Molloy's Country. While he was camping in a plain beside a river, Tadhg O'Molloy's wife sent 12 cattle to Thomas who as the Lord Deputy, represented Crown rule in Ireland. The following day, Thomas Radclyffe passed by Ballyboy Castle on his march to an O'Madden Castle on the banks of the River Shannon known as 'Castau Cloehan [Cloghan Castle]'. (Taken from E. Lodge 1830, *Portraits of illustrious personages of Great Britain*)

and the Anglo-Normans continued into the 15th century. This conflict prevented Donell from becoming the leader of his clan. In 1400, the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* record the death of 'Donell mcTheobald O'Molloy surnamed mcTheobald Tanist & next successor of the principality of ffearkeall [Fir Cheall] (if he had lived) was killed at Allon [Athlone] by the English of Leinster'.<sup>30</sup>

In 1537 the O'Molloys pledged their allegiance to the Crown abandoning their support for their neighbours, the O'Carrolls and for Brian O'Connor, 'captain of his nation', who was waging a war against his brother and the Lord Deputy of Ireland. The O'Molloys helped the Crown by supporting the Lord Deputy in his military campaign through O'Carroll's Country. In this year the Lord Deputy of Ireland wrote to King Henry VIII stating that with 'the aid of Cahir O'Conner, governor of O'Conner's country, O'Maloy [O'Molloy], and McGoghagan [MacGeoghegan] on the other side, we invaded O'Carrell [O'Carroll's Country]'.<sup>31</sup> In 1557, Thomas Radclyffe (c. 1525-83), the earl of Sussex, who was the Lord

30 Ibid., 323.

31 Brewer, J. S. & Bullen, W. (eds.) 1867 *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts 1515-74*, volume 1, 125.

Deputy of Ireland passed by 'O'Molloy's house, called Balleboy'<sup>32</sup> while on a military campaign through the region. In 1558, during the reign of King Philip and Queen Mary, the Crown granted English liberty to 'Fernand otherwise Ferconanym [Fearganainm], son of Donald [macDomhnaill] O Molmoy [O'Molloy], of Athboy [Ballyboy], in Fercayll [Fir Cheall], and Susanna or Saw [Sadbh] nyConnor [O'Connor of Offaly], his wife'.<sup>33</sup> However their support for the Crown was not always guaranteed and in 1575 the Lord Deputy of Ireland wrote that in 'Meath, I find the same curstly scorched on the one side, as well by the incursions of the O'Connors and the O'Molloys, while they were in open rebellion'.<sup>34</sup> In 1585, Conall O'Molloy, Lord of Fir Cheall, attended Queen Elizabeth's Parliament in Dublin and on his death, in 1599, his son Calvach assumed his place 'by power of the Queen'.<sup>35</sup> By the end of the 16th century, Ballyboy Castle acted as a stronghold of Irish forces during the Nine Years War [1594-1603]. During this war, the earl of Essex recorded his defeat of the Irish forces in Offaly in 1599 when he 'beat the rebels in all places, with loss unto them of their forwardest men, and great advantage to her Majesty's service; burnt their towns and all their corn that was ripe: possessed her Majesty of Balliboy, Tirrel's chief castle; burnt Calloughe, McArti's chief house [Ballycowan] in his great fastness, which he thought a sure den'.<sup>36</sup> In 1605, King James I granted a general pardon to William Mac Caher O'Molloy of Ballyboy and Daniel Mac Caher O'Molloy for their participation in the Nine Years War of 1594-1603.<sup>37</sup>

During the Irish Rebellion of 1641 this was the 'camp' of 'Capten Brian Mack William Mulloy of Balliboy'.<sup>38</sup> The 1641 Deposition of Chidley Coote, stated that on 'the first of december 1641 we had notice that Brian Mack William Mulloy of Balliboy, and his rebells had robbed many families of poore english, stripped and absolutely despoiled them. They uppon the verry sudden marched towards him, with the small number of Horse and foote

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholls, K. W. (ed.) 1994 *The Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns*, volume 1, 317.

<sup>34</sup> Brewer, J. S. & Bullen, W. (eds.) 1868 *Calendar of the Carew Manuscripts 1575-88*, volume 2, 31.

<sup>35</sup> Hogan, M. 1980 *The Early History of the Town of Birr or Parsonstown by Thomas Lalor Cooke with a new introduction by Margaret Hogan*, 229.

<sup>36</sup> Anon 1902 *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Marquis of Salisbury*, volume 9, 267-8. Historical Manuscripts Commission.

<sup>37</sup> Griffith, M.C. (ed.) 1966 *Irish Patent Rolls of James I*, 44.

<sup>38</sup> TCD, 1641 Depositions Project, online transcript January 1970  
[<http://1641.tcd.ie/deposition.php?deplD=<?php echo 814204r129?>>] accessed Thursday 31 March 2011



A map showing the lands of Ballyboy Castle which in 1641 was the property of William Molloy, an Irish Papist, whose lands were confiscated by the English government after the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and the subsequent Irish Wars of 1641-53. The townland of Ballyboy as depicted on the 1654 Down Survey map consisted of the present townlands of Ballyboy, Luganiska, Ballindrinan, Kilgolan Upper, Knockhill and Drinagh.

we had, fell uppon his Campe, Tooke five or six prisoners, which we hanged, brought a prey from him of verry neere two Thousande sheepe, one hundred Cowes, and pilladged many houses in the Mulloyes Country'.<sup>39</sup> Captain Brian Molloy of Ballyboy was killed on the 10th of December 1641 by Chidley Coote. At the time Chidley Coote was on his way to relieve Lady Offaly of Geashill Castle who was then under siege from the O'Dempseys. This event was recorded in the 1641 Deposition of Chidley Coote where he states that 'On the tenth of December 1641 my Lady Offalie haveinge given us notice of the greate

<sup>39</sup> TCD, 1641 Depositions Project, online transcript January 1970  
[<http://1641.tcd.ie/deposition.php?deplD=<?php echo 814204r129?>>] accessed Thursday 31 March 2011

*danger she was in; being besieged with two or three hundred of the Dempsies, who had burnt up all her fireinge, and Left her destitute of all manner of fuell, I attempted the goinge thither with fortie Horse, and some fewe foote, but by the way was mett with, by Capten*



*A portrait of Sir William Petty who was granted the confiscated estate of William Molloy of Ballyboy in the second half of the 17th century. In 1654, Sir William Petty carried out a survey of Catholic lands that were to be confiscated by the Commonwealth government, commonly referred to as the Down Survey. (Image from Hiberniae Delineatio, published in 1685).*

*Brian Mack William Mulloy of Balliboy in the Kings County, where we killed him hurt many of his men’.*<sup>40</sup> The terrier of the Down Survey Parish map of Ballyboy lists William Molloy as the owner of the lands in 1641 and describes him as an Irish Papist who owns 908 acres of profitable land in the townland of Ballyboy.

According to the *Books of Survey and Distribution*, these lands were confiscated by the Commonwealth government c.1650 from William Molloy of Ballyboy and granted to Sir William Petty.

The churchlands of Ballyboy are described in this source as containing ‘*Three Cottages an Old Castle Improprate*’. From this account it would appear that the castle was located on land owned by the church. The Commonwealth confiscation of the lands of Ballyboy Castle, once belonging to William MacCahir Molloy, was contested in 1663 by his son Arthur Molloy. In this year, he submitted a claim to the Court of Claims to have the confiscated lands restored to his family. In his submission, he stated that ‘*William [MacCahir Molloy] lived in his own castle of Ballybois [Ballyboy], and defended himself against the Irish, and tendered his castle to Mr Parsons [of Birr Castle] who was governor of the county for the English to put soldiers in it, who had no soldiers to spare but bid him shut his grate [yett] and look to himself. William was assistant to the English to guard their ammunition. This was about three weeks after Allhollontide [1st of November], 1641. He lived in his castle about half a year and then went into Connaught, and came not back till after the cessation’.*<sup>41</sup> Arthur Molloy describes the role his father William and the castle of Ballyboy played in the Irish Wars of 1641-53. In his statement he recorded that, ‘*Mr Parsons came to William’s castle and William desired to have a commission from the king to keep it upon which Mr Parsons desired him to look to it well in the meantime, and that he knew him faithful to the English. He did curse his son that went to the Irish and all those that should assist them, and said that for 300 years they had been faithful to the English, and his son being wounded, he would not suffer him to come in his castle, nor give him any relief, saying he had dishonoured him as soon as he went in to the Irish, whereupon his son died not long after of his wounds. He relieved the English that were stripped with the clothes off from his own back and the stockings and shoes from his feet, and the Irish took away his horse for having done so. All these good deeds are about the latter end of November, 1641. He [William Molloy] was seventy five years old. The plaintiff [Arthur Molloy] is but seventeen year old now. He [William Molloy] went away in May, 1642, from his castle into Connaught. He kept two English and one Protestant in his house. He had no stock abroad after the war’.*<sup>42</sup> However this account by Arthur Molloy about his father’s role in the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and subsequent Irish Wars of 1641-53

<sup>40</sup> TCD, 1641 Depositions Project, online transcript January 1970 [http://1641.tcd.ie/deposition.php?depID<?php echo 814204r129?>] accessed Thursday 31 March 2011

<sup>41</sup> Tallon, G. (ed.) 2006 *Court of Claims Submissions and Evidence*, 1663, 387.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.



was contradicted by a testimony from John Robinson who stated that *'the Moloys from the greatest to the least were in rebellion, the women and children as malicious as the men'*.<sup>43</sup> Other testimonies from Anthony Stockdale and a Mr Hodson also claimed that William MacCahir had carried out attacks and stolen goods from English tenants living in the region during the Irish Rebellion of 1641. An eye witness account by Thomas Taylor paints a similar picture of William MacCahir Molloy and the role he played in the Irish Rebellion of 1641 and the subsequent Irish Wars of 1641-53. In his account he states that *'He saw William [MacCahir Molloy] at the taking of the Burre [Birr Castle] by General Preston. He lived in the castle of Ballibois [Ballyboy]. This was the second year of the war. This witness was in a party of English that was beaten back by a party of the Irish which were said to come out of the castle of Ballybois. He took Ballybois to be of the Irish'*.<sup>44</sup> A statement by Lord Colooney contradicts the account given by Arthur Molloy, especially the detail relating to the wounding of William Molloy's son during the Irish Rebellion of 1641. Lord Colooney stated that, *'The prisoners of the English which were taken were carried to Ballybois and kept there til they were redeemed by exchange. That was about, Christmas, 1641. One of the Moloys, son of William, was wounded then and received by his father into his castle and there died. William, the father, was then at home'*.<sup>45</sup> Another witness statement from William Clarke recorded that, *'the castle of Ballyboy was forfeited. He saw him there in August 1642. He was about sixty years old or more. He hath seen him at some meetings of the country in 1643. The castle was kept for the Irish and they had constantly resort to the castle. This was about Allhollontide, 1642. He had cattle and corn. He [William Molloy] had married a sister of Art. Moly who was commander in chief of three baronies for the Irish. He married her after the war'*.<sup>46</sup> Richard Fleming's account described Ballyboy as *'a castle for the irish and he [Richard Fleming] was there himself. He saw him lead thirty to forty soldiers with muskets, pikes, and swords from the castle to the church. This witness had ammunition out of the castle and William*

*was then at home. This was in harvest the second year of the war [1642]*.<sup>47</sup> Other witness statements from Mary Daly, Charles Conner, Caer Thurlogh, Dan Raly and John Burke contradicted the statements given above by the English settlers and supported the statement given by his son Arthur Molloy. The Court of Claims judged William Molloy of Ballyboy Castle to be *'nocent'* and dismissed the claim of his son Arthur Molloy to be restored to his lands at Ballyboy. A judgement of *'nocent'* was applied to Catholics who had participated in the Irish Rebellion of 1641 but who had submitted to the English and adhered to the peace treaty of 1648.

In the winter of 1690, during the Williamite Wars in Ireland [1688-1691], Colonel Bristow, a Williamite commander of the regiment of Lord Drogheda, moved his men from Broughal Castle to the village of Ballyboy due to the scarcity of food in the Kilcormac region. After a few days in the town, the commander had acquired provisions for his men and for the inhabitants of the town for the winter. He then set up sentries to guard against an attack on the town by Jacobite forces. However Jacobite forces did attack from all sides and drove the Williamite soldiers out of the town towards the hill, in the townland of Kilgolan, where other Jacobites were waiting to attack the fleeing soldiers. A battle ensued on the hill for the whole night while other forces attacked the village and stole the provisions and horses that the Williamite army had amassed.<sup>48</sup> George Story, chaplain to the earl of Drogheda's regiment, wrote an account of the burning of the village in October 1690 by Jacobite forces. At this time the village was garrisoned with *'six companies of the Earl of Drogheda's Regiment, who finding themselves very much outnumbered, and the village no ways tenable, they retired to a mount [Motte] nigh the middle of the same village, which they defended till the Irish were obliged to quit the place, have killed us about 28, themselves leaving 16 dead upon the streets, besides several more that were killed in plundering the houses'*.<sup>49</sup> From this account it is clear that as late as 1690 the motte castle, in the centre of the village of Ballyboy, was still used as a fortification and the defences around the motte may have been rebuilt or strengthened by the Williamite

43 Ibid., 387-8.

44 Ibid., 388.

45 Ibid., 388.

46 Ibid., 388.

47 Ibid., 388.

48 Boyle, J. 1867 *Battlefields of Ireland, from 1688 to 1691*, 215.

49 Story, G. 1693 *An impartial history of the wars of Ireland, with a continuation thereof [electronic resource]: in two parts*, 46.



*A photograph of the wall facing of the stone structure standing on top of the motte.*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This information about Ballyboy castle is one in a series of an on-line gazetteer about castles in Offaly. Please visit [www.offaly.ie/heritage\\_castles](http://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](http://www.archaeology.ie). Email [heritage@offalycoco.ie](mailto:heritage@offalycoco.ie) for permission to reproduce photos or illustrations.

The site of Ballyboy castle is now a private farm and permission should be sought before visiting.

Date posted March 2013. Version 1.

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

Photographs by Caimin O'Brien except where stated.

Field work and surveys by Caimin O'Brien and Amanda Pedlow, Heritage Officer, Offaly County Council.

Maps and plans by Catherine Martin except where stated.

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

Graphic design by Connie Scanlon, Bogfire [www.bogfire.com](http://www.bogfire.com)

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

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

