

# DURROW ABBEY, CO. OFFALY

## CONSERVATION PLAN



September 2005



# DURROW ABBEY CO. OFFALY CONSERVATION PLAN



by

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In association with

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CRDS Ltd &  
Dr Christopher Moriarty

This conservation plan was commissioned by the Office of Public Works for Durrow Abbey and the surrounding thirty-one hectares of land acquired by the state in 2003. Durrow Abbey, Co. Offaly is located eight kilometers to the north of Tullamore on the N52 road to Kilbeggan.

The site was occupied in the early medieval period by a monastery, founded by St. Columcille in the sixth century. An Augustinian priory and Anglo-Norman castle were subsequently established during the twelfth century. After the dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth century the lands of the monastery went into private ownership. Much of the historic fabric that survives today in the designed landscape dates from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries focused on the Gothic Revival mansion of Durrow Abbey House. The evidence of so many layers of occupation on the site from the sixth century to the present day has created an historic place of exceptional cultural significance.

The study boundary for the purposes of this plan is the land acquired by the Irish state in December 2003, however, the wider historical demesne has also been analysed to provide a more complete context for the archaeology and landscape design. The conservation plan was undertaken between November 2004 and May 2005 and provides a series of policies to inform the future conservation and management of the site.

The conservation plan team was led by Howley Harrington Architects with input from Cunnane Stratton Reynolds, landscape and planning consultants, Cultural Resource Development Services Ltd, archaeologists and Dr. Christopher Moriarty, natural historian.

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# INTRODUCTION

## AIMS & OBJECTIVES

The conservation plan is a document which sets out what is significant about a building or place and establishes appropriate policies to enable that significance to be retained in its future use and development.

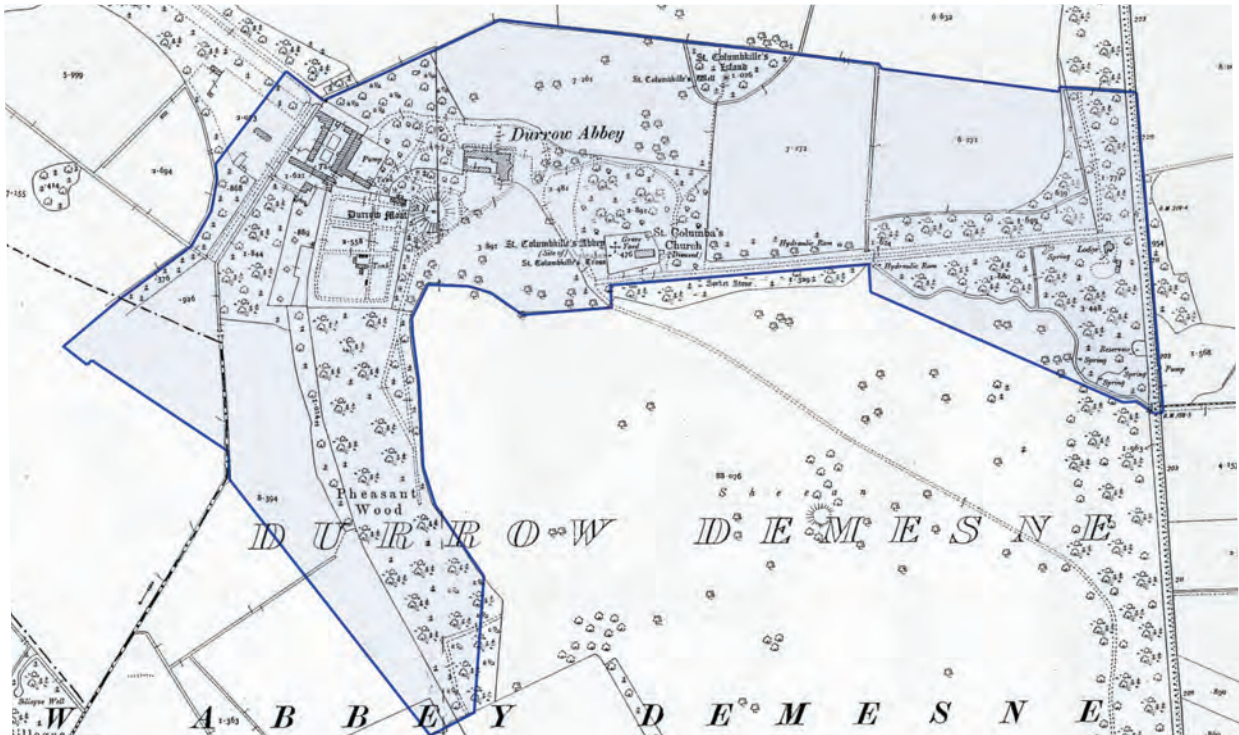
The objective of the conservation plan is to provide as definitive an examination of all relevant data as is practicable. It is a dynamic document, capable of being developed and amended as further evidence comes to light or circumstances change.

The first part of the plan includes written and graphic material that presents an assessment and statement of cultural significance. The term cultural significance is intended as an assessment of the attributes which make a building, monument, or landscape of value to us and our society. Once the significance of a building, monument, or landscape is understood, informed policy decisions can be made which will enable that significance to be retained, revealed or, at the very least, impaired as little as possible.

The development of a range of conservation policies forms the second part of this report to inform and guide future decision making. A clear understanding of the nature and degree of significance will not only suggest constraints on future action, but will also introduce flexibility by identifying areas which can be adapted or developed with greater freedom. In addition to the conservation policies, if any actions are required to avert threats to the fabric from structural instability or inadequate security, appropriate repair works will be recommended.

Expert advice from the following consultants is listed in the appendices and is available on request from the OPW:

- Howley Harrington Architects - Description and Condition Assessment of the Built Structures
- Dr. Christopher Moriarty - Wildlife Report
- Cunnane Stratton Reynolds - Landscape and Planning Report
- CRDS Ltd. - Durrow Abbey Early History Report



Durrow Abbey, lands in state ownership



# I.0 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

## EARLY HISTORY

Situated within Durrow Abbey Demesne are the remains of the monastery of Durrow founded by St. Columcille in about 587<sup>1</sup>. The Irish name for the site Dermaig is translated as 'the Plain of the Oaks'. The Esker Riada and the Slí Mhór, which run approximately 600 meters north of the site, may have played an important role in the sites location.

By the eighth century Durrow was an important monastic house of the Paruchia Columbae (Columban Federation). The settlement, which remained under royal patronage, would have been a place of considerable wealth and influence supporting a substantial population by medieval standards. The annals record that Durrow lost 200 men in a battle with Clonmacnoise in 764 suggesting a total population between 1500 and 2000 inhabitants<sup>2</sup>. The relative wealth made it a target for raids and the monastery was burnt and plundered on over twelve occasions between the ninth and twelfth centuries.

The site was used as a burial place for bishops, abbots and the nobles of the midlands and Munster including Áed mac Brénainn, king of Tethba who was buried there in the sixth century, Domhnaill of Clann Colmáin who was buried there in the eighth century and Murchadh Ua Briain a grandson of Brian Borumha who was interred there in the early eleventh century<sup>3</sup>.

It is likely that the earliest church buildings at the site were constructed of timber and were later replaced with buildings of stone. The first reference to a stone church at the site is in 1019 when 'the stone-church of Dermagh was broken open by Muirchertach, grandson of Carrach'<sup>4</sup>. While no evidence of the early medieval churches and domestic buildings survive above ground at the site there are a number of early medieval stone antiquities that confirm the existence of a significant monastic centre.

### High Cross

The most elaborate feature at the site is the mid-ninth century high cross. The cross, which formerly stood at the west end of the graveyard, now stands



Durrow High Cross, east face

in the nave of the St. Columba's Church. The head, arms and shaft of the cross, measuring over three meters tall, are carved from a single block of sandstone. The cross is carved with a number of biblical themes and geometric motifs. The base of the cross bears a number of plain panels. An inscription on the north face of the cross has been tentatively interpreted as mentioning Máelsechnaill, the Uí Néill high-king of Ireland, who succeeded to the kingship of Tara in about 846. In addition to the principal high cross, there are three stone fragments representing the remains of a number of other crosses. One of these, the head of a small sandstone cross, was re-used as a finial on St. Columba's Church, and has since been removed to the National Museum of Ireland. Another fragment, a cross base known as the 'Headache Stone' on the



Ordnance Survey twenty five inch map of 1910-1912, is situated to the south of the avenue leading to the church<sup>5</sup>.

The remains of five cross inscribed slabs previously set into the western wall of the graveyard are now in St. Columba's Church. Four of the slabs are inscribed with dedications. One reads 'OR DO CHATHALAN' or 'Pray for Chathalan' which may commemorate a former abbot of the monastery. Another reads 'OR DO AIGIDIU' or 'Pray for Aigidiu' and probably relates to Aed mac Aicidi, lord of Tethba whose death is recorded in the Annals of 954 or 955. The legible portion of another reads 'DOM' and the dedication may relate to Domhnaill of Clann Cholmáin who died in about 758<sup>6</sup>. The fourth has a long inscription which is now only partly legible and has not been related to a specific historical figure.<sup>7</sup>

### Book of Durrow

The Book of Durrow is a cultural artefact of outstanding quality from the early medieval period and was produced in the late seventh century. Its provenance is debatable but the manuscript was at Durrow by the end of the ninth or early tenth century when it was enshrined by Flann mac Maelsechnaill, King of Ireland<sup>8</sup>. The manufacture of the book shrine along with the presence of the high cross and decorated cross slabs points to the existence of a well-developed craft centre at Durrow in the early medieval period. The manuscript is again recorded as being in the possession of the monastery in the late eleventh or early twelfth century. By the early seventeenth century it was in local hands<sup>9</sup>. The manuscript later passed to Henry Jones, the Bishop of Meath, from 1661 to 1682, who had previously served as Scoutmaster General to Cromwell's army in Ireland. Jones presented the manuscript, along with the Book of Kells, to Trinity College, Dublin.

### Monastic Enclosure

A feature of many early medieval monastic sites is an enclosure, usually of circular or oval shape, delimited by an earthen bank and fosse or sometimes a stone wall<sup>10</sup>. Discernible on aerial photographs of the site (GSIAP, N 536-6) the enclosure at Durrow consists of a large double ditch delimiting an area about 500 meters in diameter. The construction of the enclosure is recorded in a tale in *Betha Colaim Chille* (the Life of Columcille) in which Columcille requested that Comac Ó Liatháin encourage Laisrén, the abbot of Durrow, to 'set the monastery in order and enclose it well'. Herbert dates *Betha Colaim Chille* to about 1150 – 1169<sup>11</sup>. A poem attributed to the saint, but written sev-



The Book of Durrow

eral centuries after his death, provides additional detail. Laisrén and over 150 workers set about the construction of the enclosure so that it might not have any breaches. The forest around Durrow was cut down to make stakes which were used to protect each side of the monastery<sup>12</sup>. Geophysical surveys undertaken at the site in 2000 and 2001 have revealed the line of the enclosure which runs in a wide arc through the fields to the south of the church and graveyard (GSB 2000; GSB 2001). The centre of the enclosure, the inner sanctum, would have contained the core monastic buildings. It is possible that the present graveyard has roughly the same boundary as this inner sanctum and its edge may have been further defined by the position of the high cross which may have acted as a *termon* cross<sup>13</sup>. The inner sanctum was surrounded by an outer area, also enclosed, containing associated habitation, craft and agricultural activities.

### St. Columcille's Island

St. Columcille's Island, located at the north-east of the site, is a D-shaped, wooded, marshy area. The island is bounded on the north side by a low wall

and stream and on the south, southeast and southwest sides by a very low bank and stream. A holy well dedicated to St. Columcille is located in the centre of the island. The small spring, which is accessed by stone steps, is covered by a barrel vault of small boulders. Despite its relatively modern appearance it is possible that the well was a place of devotion from the early medieval period. The well is venerated every year on the pattern day, June ninth. The first record of the pattern was in 1463, when an archery contest took place between the O'Catharnachs of Durrow and the McGeoghigans of Westmeath<sup>14</sup>.



St Columcille's Well

### Augustinian Priory and Nunnery

In the twelfth century efforts were made to reform the Irish church. The reform movement in Ireland was spearheaded by St. Malachy of Armagh whose strategy included the introduction of new religious orders, most noticeably the Augustinians, into pre-existing monastic communities<sup>15</sup>. At St. Malachy's instigation, Murchad O'Melaghlin, king of Mide, founded Augustinian houses of regular canons and nuns at Durrow about 1144<sup>16</sup>. Murchad is recorded as having a house at Durrow and was buried at the site in 1153. Following his death the Augustinians were subjected to a number of attacks recorded in the annals and the adjacent country was laid waste by the Anglo-Normans in 1175. There is no trace of either the nunnery or priory above ground at the site<sup>17</sup>, nor are the exact locations of these buildings known.

### Anglo-Norman Occupation

An Anglo-Norman manorial centre was established at Durrow because it was a major ecclesiastical centre with a large population. Hugh de Lacy

erected a large earthen motte at the site in the late twelfth century. There is no surviving evidence for a bretesche or wooden tower on the summit of the motte. The annals record that Hugh de Lacy, while reviewing his completed fortification at Durrow in 1186, was murdered by the foster son of Ó Catharnaigh of Munterhagen:

Hugo de Lacy....after having finished the castle of Durrow, set out, accompanied by three Englishmen to view it. One of the men of Teffia, a youth name Gilla-gan-inathar O'Meyey, approached him, and drawing out an axe, which he had kept concealed, he, with one blow of it, severed his head from his body; and both head and trunk fell into the ditch of the castle. This was in revenge of Columbkille.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequent annalistic entries refer to the completion or re-building of the castle at Durrow by the English about 1213:

The English army came from thence to Delvin McCoghlan, and soe to Clonvicknose where they built a castle, also they finished and made the castles of Dorow (Durrow), Byrr (Birr), and Kinnety (Kinnity) on that voyage.<sup>19</sup>

The castle at Durrow is recorded as being in a much ruined state by the sixteenth century and it is possible that a new structure was built at this time<sup>20</sup>.

### Dissolution of the Monastery

Following the dissolution of the monastery in the 1540s it was immediately re-granted to the prior, a member of the local O'Molloy sept on a 21-year lease. The land was subsequently leased to Nicholas Herbert (Harbarte)<sup>21</sup> at a rent of £10 per annum payable to the Crown and military service when required<sup>22</sup>. An inquisition of 1569 records the continued presence of canons and a prior at Durrow and it contained 'the site of the abbey, being half an acre, on which was a church, hall, and other buildings, annual value, besides reprises, 40s; that in the said town were seven messuages and forty cottages'<sup>23</sup>.

Its continued wealth is reflected in the foundation's ownership of over 1,000 acres of land valued at over £18. Herbert was afforded a second lease at Durrow in 1574 on condition that he built two stone fortresses on the site within four years<sup>24</sup>.

## SEVENTEENTH & EIGHTEENTH CENTURY HISTORY

The parish church of Durrow was recorded as being in reasonable repair in the late seventeenth century. The roof was shingled, there were two glazed windows, a clay floor, a reading desk, a pulpit and an unrailed communion table. On site is a finely carved late medieval graveslab commemorating Francis de Renzi of Tinnycross, a New English settler, who died in 1665<sup>25</sup>.

In 1712 George Herbert, Third Baronet died and was succeeded to the estate by his sister Frances Herbert, who was married to Major Patrick Fox.

### St. Columba's Church

It was under Frances Herbert that the church at Durrow was rebuilt. An account of the Diocese of 1733 made by Bishop Mant, states that the Church at Durrow was out of repair 'but ye said Mrs Fox pulled it down and rebuilt it at her own expense.'<sup>26</sup>

### Durrow Park

In the eighteenth-century the house was known as Durrow Park according to a survey drawing sur-



St Columba's Church, from south-west

iving in the Irish Architectural Archive. At this time the house was a seven bay, three storey plain structure built in the classical style with regularly spaced window openings and a centrally positioned entrance with portico.<sup>27</sup>

The exact location of the eighteenth century house is not known, however it is thought to have been located on the site of the service wing of the current building.

### Geology

Durrow Abbey demesne lies on the border between Counties Offaly and Westmeath within the bogland and moraine area of Ireland's Central Lowland. The landscape is underlain mainly by carboniferous limestone formed by the deposits of a warm ocean floor some 300 million years ago, covered by a layer of relatively recent glacial deposits some 12,000 years old.

These glacial deposits in the form of drumlins and eskers (formed by the sand and gravel deposits of glacial meltwater) largely define the landform of Durrow and the surrounding landscape. Between the elevated, relatively well-drained drumlin hills and esker ridges the low-lying areas have a tendency to become waterlogged and peaty, requiring artificial drainage for agricultural exploitation.

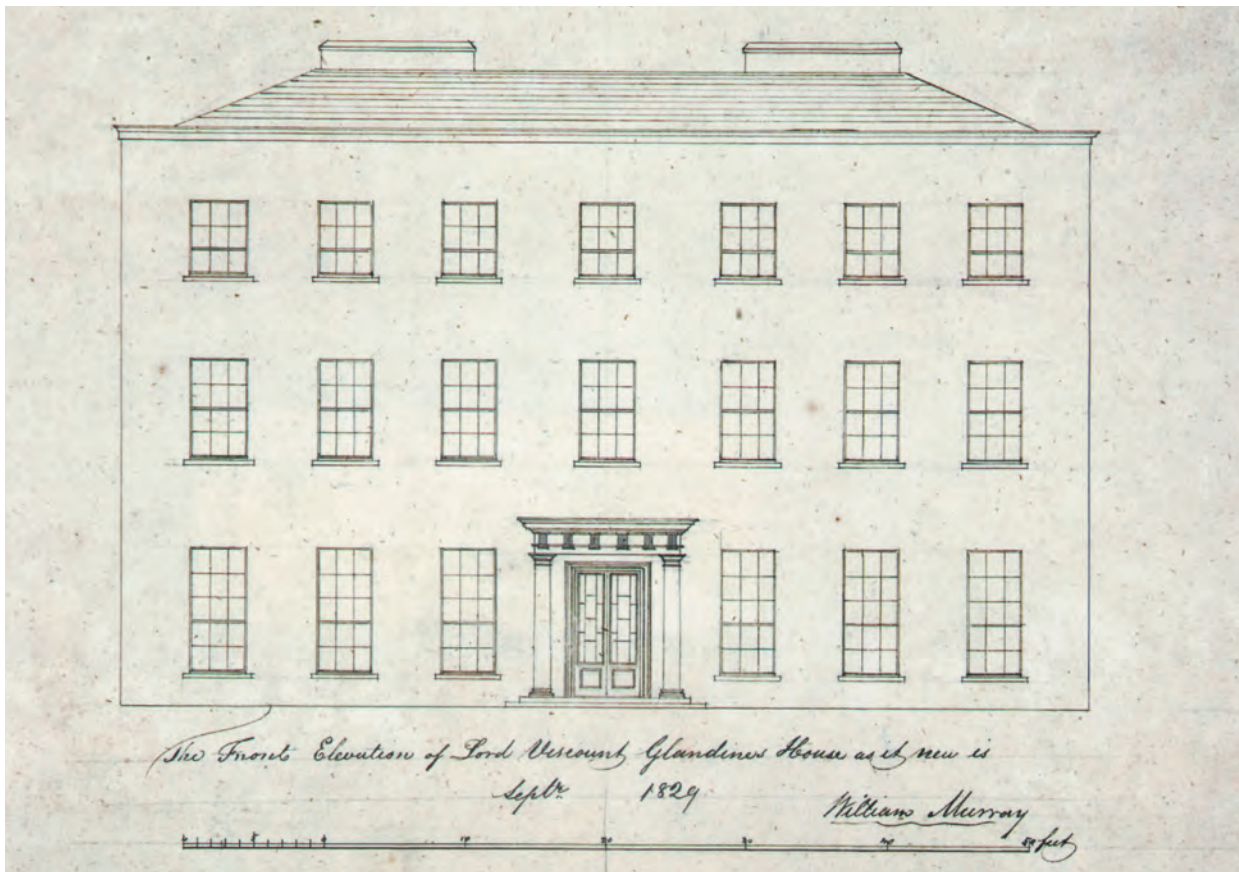
### Demense

The Durrow Abbey demesne was most likely conceived in the eighteenth century to provide a setting for this imposing seven bay classical house. It is a fine example of an historic designed landscape in the natural style, which sought to respect and enhance natural features, rather than forcing nature into a rigid formality of clipped hedges and geometric parterres.

The rolling hills to the south of Durrow Abbey provided an ideal southerly parkland prospect, fringed with woodland and dotted with clumps or individual broad-leaved trees. To the north an equally impressive natural feature in the form of the Esker Riada, was also planted to provide a striking raised backdrop along the northern boundary.

Natural style demesnes generally consist of a series of serpentine walks or rides, in the form of circuits, through woodland, across and around the fringes of parkland, and along or around water courses. These walks or rides were created for the purpose of exercise and aesthetic enjoyment. To provide a structure for these circuitous routes, ornamental features were often created in the form of follies and garden buildings. In some instances surviving





Durrow Park survey drawing, 1829, Irish Architectural Archive, Murray Collection.

antiquities were incorporated into these routes, to provide stopping off points of interest along the way. The above ground antiquities at Durrow were used in this manner and were as significant as the natural landforms in influencing the layout of the demesne. These included an ancient graveyard containing an impressive high cross, the site of an ancient church and a holy well. In addition, the Norman Motte was incorporated into the garden design and subsequently embellished with planting and an ornamental structure.

To complement the historic landmarks and points of interest within the demesne several ornamental buildings and functional structures were created during the eighteenth century, including a walled garden.

## NINETEENTH-CENTURY HISTORY

### Ownership

By 1802 ownership of Durrow had passed to Herbert Rawson Stepney and in 1815 John Toler, First Lord Norbury, purchased Durrow. John Toler was succeeded in 1831 by Hector John Toler who held the estate until 1839, when he was assassinated.

The estate remained in the ownership of the Toler family until the 1950s.

### Church

The eighteenth century church was repaired in 1802 with a gift of £450 and a loan of £50 from the Board of First Fruits<sup>28</sup>, and contains monuments to the Stepney and Armstrong families.

In about 1896 Rev. Sterling De Courcy Williams of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland described the area above the west door of the church as having "some imitations of loaves of bread and co. in stone, which, however, are too Georgian in their appearance to allow us to attribute any great age to them"<sup>29</sup>.

### Durrow Demesne

The first edition Ordnance Survey map of 1837-8 shows a mature and well planted demesne at Durrow Abbey. Throughout the nineteenth century additional buildings and features were incorporated into the demesne design. These included gate lodges, cottages and an interesting octagonal ended structure in the walled garden. On top of the motte a rusticated stone structure was built using grotesque river worn limestone.

Griffith's Valuation of 1854 indicates the total area of the Durrow Demesne to be approximately 605 acres at that time.

### Durrow Abbey House

The architect William Murray was employed by John Toler after he acquired the estate in 1815, to produce drawings for the extension and remodeling of Durrow Abbey House. Proposal drawings dating from 1829 survive in the Irish Architectural Archive. These show proposals for an enlargement of the existing eighteenth century house with the addition of classical motifs on the main façade. There is also a series of drawings for the erection of extensive farm buildings.

It is thought that the proposals for the house were never implemented although a revised version of the scheme for the stable and courtyard was built. Following his succession to the estate in 1831 it is thought that Hector John Toler carried out work to the house at Durrow. A new house was under construction by 1837 as reference is made in Lewis's Topographical Dictionary published in that year. Construction at Durrow continued until 1839 when Hector John Toler was assassinated. A eulogy given by Lord Oxmantown of Birr stated that:

"He was in the act of building a splendid residence, to be permanent residence of his family, and consequently the center of a great expenditure..."<sup>30</sup>



1837-8 Ordnance Survey map of Durrow Demense





Lands in state ownership and historic demense boundary

Hector John Toler was succeeded by his wife at Durrow and the construction of the house



William Murray proposal drawing for Durrow Abbey, 1829

continued until 1843 when it was recorded that a fire destroyed the eighteenth century house. However, the recently built house for Hector John Toler survived intact. A contemporary newspaper article described the events as follows:

"This magnificent abbey is nearly destroyed. On Saturday evening last, it took fire, and before assistance could be procured to arrest the progress of the flames the abbey was almost reduced to ruin. This noble structure remained in an unfinished state as the entire works were stopped immediately after the murder of the late munificent proprietor, Lord Norbury. The new building which was not completed, joined the old one, which it was intended to adopt as a wing by facing it with stone; in this portion all the valuable furniture was stored and this part of the extensive building is totally destroyed."<sup>31</sup>

The house was eventually completed in the second half of the nineteenth century with a grandly scaled Gothic Revival front, facing east, consisting of three



storeys over a sunken basement, with an off-center three-storey entrance porch. The simple massing of the house was richly ornamented with gable end bay windows, tall chimney stacks and corner turrets, all carved from the same Irish limestone used in the ashlar facings of the external walls. The materials and craftsmanship evident in its construction are of the highest quality. Behind the house was a more simply detailed three storey service range. This wing faced a sunken courtyard to the south, two sides of which were bounded by a single storey range of stores, providing a peaceful and secluded court. A porte-cochere was added to the front at the end of the nineteenth-century.



Durrow Abbey following fire of 1923

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY HISTORY

Durrow Abbey House was gutted by fire during the Civil War in 1923. Ralph Byrne of William H Byrne and Son, the Dublin based architects, was employed to oversee the repair and reconstruction of Durrow Abbey House for Ottoway Graham Toler in 1926.

### Survey Drawings

A series of undated survey drawings, illustrate the layout of the building prior to the fire. The house was roughly L-shaped in plan with the main block facing east and a service block extending to the west<sup>32</sup>.

The servant's hall, cellar and billiard room were located at basement level with a double height kitchen in the western wing and self-contained servant's quarters beyond. The main public and reception rooms of the house were located at ground

floor level. Flanking the main entrance hall and stair is a large dining room to the south and library to the north. A stone service stair was located to the rear of the main block beyond which stood the west wing containing a study and several bedrooms. At first floor level Mrs Toler's room occupied the large southern bay windowed room with a boudoir projecting to the east front. A landing and secondary stair led to the second floor. Mr Toler's bedroom was located to the north of the main block. A series of five bedrooms occupied the west wing. A room described as Mrs Gunnell's room and three additional bedrooms were located on the second floor.

### 1926 Proposals

Between January and February 1926, William H Byrne and Son produced a set of drawings for the 'Proposed Reconstruction of Durrow Abbey for



Durrow Abbey House c. 1900, from south-east

Ottoway Graham Toler Esq.' The proposals saw an ambitious re-use of the nineteenth-century building after the fire of 1923. A series of photographs exist in the William H Byrne Collection showing the building after the fire in a roofless condition. Byrne proposed new windows at basement level to the east elevation and an additional staircase located in the servant's hall. The former kitchen space was to be subdivided to form a room at basement and ground floor level.

The main block was also to be extended westwards by an additional bay providing a drawing room and morning room at ground floor and bedroom and dressing room at first floor level. A sketch for the entrance hall shows a double height Arts and Crafts



William H. Byrne, proposal drawing for library

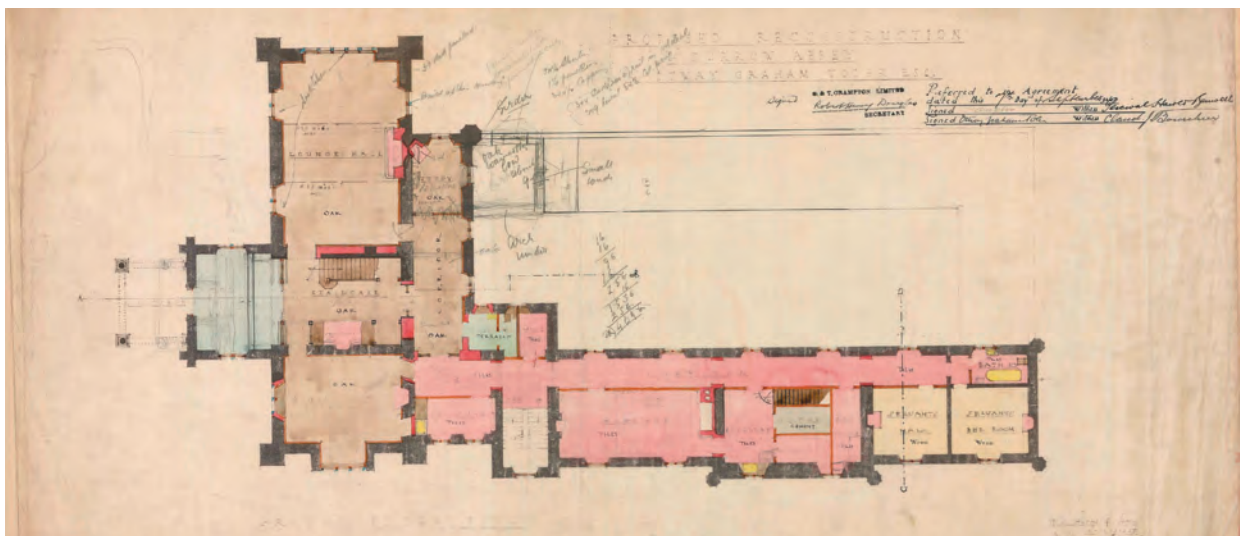
style panelled room with inglenook built around the existing fireplace and gallery above. The main staircase was relocated to the south with a panelled library beyond. The library is depicted in a sketch with a moulded plaster ceiling and timber dado paneling with glass fronted bookshelves above. The dining room was relocated to the north of the entrance hall with kitchen in the west range.



William H. Byrne, proposal drawing for entrance hall

At first floor level it was intended to locate four bedrooms within the main block around the void of the double height entrance hall and new stair. The west block was to be re-orientated with the corridor located to the north. Servant's bedrooms were to be located on the second floor of the west block.

Two proposals survive for the reconstruction of the house. Both involved the reduction in height



Contract drawings for Durrow Abbey prepared by William H Byrne and Sons in 1926





Durrow Abbey House, from south-east

of the building from three storeys to two, although each scheme differs significantly in character.

The first scheme is an Arts and Crafts style interpretation. The eaves of the steeply pitched roof overhang the building and the height of the first floor windows has been reduced. A further revision of this scheme survives from March 1926 showing timber boarded gables above the bay windows on the east and southern elevations.

The second scheme for the exterior is similar to the surviving Tudor Gothic shell. The windows of the first floor retain their full height and the wall head extends above.

### **Contract Drawings - September 1926**

The contract drawings for the project, dated 7<sup>th</sup> September 1926 indicate the scaled down project which was subsequently implemented at Durrow.<sup>33</sup> At basement level the only intervention implemented was the subdivision of the double height kitchen space and the introduction of a stair to ground floor.

On the ground floor the layout remained largely as the pre-fire arrangement. An additional bay window to the south was not constructed and the main stair remained in the central entrance hall. The bay windows of the rooms to the south were not re-constructed at ground or first floor. The junction with the service block was resolved more satisfactorily than previously with the introduction of a spine corridor to the south at ground floor and a similar stair to the north at first floor.

A simple Arts and Crafts style was adopted for the interior. The elaborate detail indicated in the sketch drawings was not realised.

### **Twentieth-Century Ownership**

St. Columba's Church was in use until about 1888 when the new Church of Ireland church was built in Durrow village. The cemetery was closed by Order of the Local Government Board in 1913, however, access to the graveyard was maintained for the public. In the 1950s the state took guardianship of the High Cross and of three early Medieval grave slabs.

Ownership of Durrow Abbey estate passed out of the Toler family in the 1950s. A sale of furniture and effects was held in 1950. The 1950 sales catalogue is held at the Irish Architectural Archive and provides a full description of the service yards at this time. The house was subsequently owned and occupied by Mr and Mrs Ralph Slazenger and then by Mr and Mrs M.M. Williams before being bought by Mr and Mrs Patrick O'Brien.

In 2000 a planning application was submitted to Offaly County Council by Radleigh Developments for a Hotel and mixed use development at Durrow Abbey. Following great local pressure for the conservation of the site the state purchased Durrow Abbey House along with thirty one hectares of the surrounding demesne from Mrs. O'Brien in December 2003.

## 2.0 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

### ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

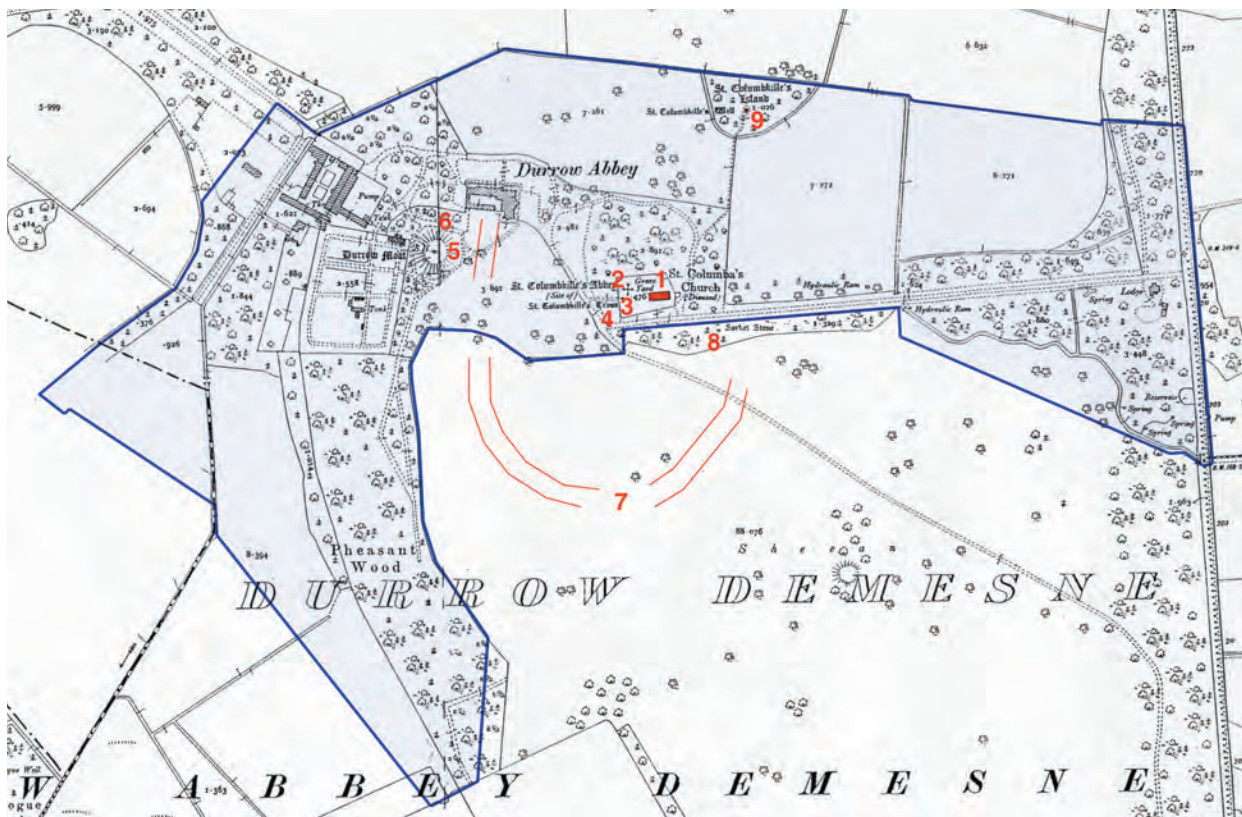
A field assessment of the state owned area of the site and surrounding area was undertaken on January 24<sup>th</sup> 2005, to assess the nature and condition of known and potential archaeological features.

#### St. Columba's Church and Graveyard

The graveyard (OF009:00509) is located in a densely wooded area to the south-east of the house and contains the core monastic monuments within the site. The graveyard is bounded by a modern wall of random rubble limestone and the interior of the graveyard is overgrown and contains a small number of mature trees. There are two openings in the graveyard wall, one in the west wall which provides views of the west face of the High cross and one in the east end of the south wall which acts as an entrance. The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century graveslabs within the graveyard

are partially covered by long grass and many are no longer stand vertically.

The present church, located at the east end of the graveyard, is of simple rectangular plan and dates to the early eighteenth century. Its relatively plain exterior is ornamented by the western entrance which is surmounted by carved limestone urns and a flat pediment. A carved head positioned over the church doorway is possibly of medieval date. The head of a small stone cross, which formerly stood on the gable of the church, is now in the National Museum of Ireland. The east face depicts David as a shepherd surrounded by interlace in the arms of the cross while the west face illustrates the Crucifixion of Christ with busts of Stephaton and Longinus.



1. St. Columba's Church and Graveyard (OF 009:00509) 2. Durrrow High Cross (OF 009:00510) 3. Early Medieval Graveslabs (OF 009:00511) 4. Cross fragment (OF 009:00501) 5. Motte (OF 009:00501) 6. Site of Castle (OF 009:00502) 7. Remains of monastic enclosure (OF 009:00503) 8. Socket stone (OF 009:00507) 9. St. Columcille's Well (OF 009:00505)



St Columba's Church, from west

Features of archaeological interest within the church include a graveslab commemorating Francis de Renzi of Tinnycross (1665). Detailed investigation of the fabric of the church could not be undertaken due to ongoing repair and conservation works being undertaken by the Office of Public Works.

### Durrow High Cross

The high cross (OF009:00510) formerly stood immediately within the opening at the west end of the graveyard but has recently been relocated to the interior of the church. It is currently covered in protective timber shuttering while repair works are ongoing at the church. The head, arms and shaft are carved with biblical scenes and geometric motifs and the shaft is surmounted by a cap in the shape of a church or house-shaped shrine. A number of panels on the base of the cross are plain.

### Early Medieval Graveslabs

The early medieval graveslabs (OF009:00511) which were located along the western wall of the graveyard have been relocated within St. Columba's Church. Four of these graveslabs are inscribed, however, these inscriptions are now difficult to read due to the severe weathering.

The largest slab at the site measures 2m x 1.5m. A rectangular frame running around the outer edge of the slab is ornamented with running spiral scrolls and knotwork. The cross, which has a circular centre and roundels at the terminals of the shafts and arms, divides the frame into four smaller panels. The slab has suffered damage and weathering and the original inscription is now only partly legible<sup>34</sup>.

Another slab measures 0.9m x 0.65m and has a simple rectangular frame around the edges of the slab. A ringed cross, with a circular centre and rectangular terminals, divides the slab into four smaller panels. The cross ring, centre and terminals are ornamented with simple interlace decoration. An inscription which runs along the base of the slab, includes a simple cross and reads 'OR DO CHATHALAN' or 'Pray for Chathalan'.

The third measures 1.1m x 0.55m though the upper part of the slab is missing. It has a simple rectangular frame running around three sides of the slab. A ringed cross, the arms and upper shaft of which are interlaced, divides the frame into four rectangular panels. An upper panel bears an eroded inscription which is now only partly legible. The legible portion reads 'DOM' and may be part of Domhnaill of Clann Colmáin who died in the mid-eighth century.

The final slab has a ringed cross with a rectangular centre. The arms and shaft of the cross have expanded rectangular and D-shaped terminals with interlace decoration. An inscription on the cross reads 'OR DO AIGIDIU' or 'Pray for Aigidu'. This slab has a lightly incised ringed cross with expanded rectangular terminals.

There is a small stone fragment cemented into the south end of the west wall of the graveyard (OF009:00506). The visible side of the fragment is decorated with interlace and appears to have formed part of the shaft of a high cross. There are no other definite earthworks or archaeological features in the vicinity which might be associated with the early monastery.

### Motte

The motte (OF009:00501) is located south-west of the house and north-west of the graveyard. Its tall, steep-sided mound is heavily overgrown by a variety of large and small trees, shrubs and undergrowth. The base of the motte is truncated on the west side by the wall of the walled garden and on the north side by a wide path running between the motte and the house. A modern path leads up the south side of the motte with two sets of stone steps at the top. The summit is enclosed by a stone wall with a rustic arch on the east side and is partially taken up by a large rectangular depression. There is no clear evidence of an associated bailey though it is possible that a semi-circular area of raised ground between the motte and the house may have served this function. Hugh de Lacy was killed here after building his earth and timber fortifications.



### Remains of Monastic Enclosure

To the south of the church is a gently undulating field currently in pasture. The remains of the monastic enclosure (OF009:00503), which are discernible in aerial photographs and on geophysical surveys, are just visible above ground. Located in the trees which line the access road to the church is the base of a high cross (OF009:00507). Within this field and located further to the southeast are the remains of the mound known as 'Sheeon'. Archaeological remains were discovered at the site during ground levelling in 1985. The site was subsequently excavated by Raghnaill Ó Flionn and Elizabeth O'Brien and revealed successive burials.

### St. Columcille's Island and Well

St. Columcille's Island is a roughly semicircular area at the northern boundary of the site. It is accessed by a modern metalled pathway which leads from a small tree-lined avenue running from the north side of the house to the east side of the church. The 'island' is almost entirely surrounded by two small streams, one running along the northern boundary and one on the southern boundary. The ground is waterlogged and marshy, especially in winter when it is almost completely cut off from the surrounding land. It supports a number of mature oak trees, some smaller trees and is covered by heavy undergrowth.

St. Columcille's Well (OF009:00505) is located at the centre of the island. The well is covered by small boulders of granite and limestone and measures 4.3m long, 1.6m wide and 3m high. A number of pieces of carved masonry are visible within the covering of the well. During dry weather the water is accessed by stone steps at the front of the well above which is a stone plaque inscribed with the following words:



St Columcille's Well

'St. Columba used this well when he preached the gospel and built an abbey near it AD500. The angels shall enjoy my sacred cell, my sloe, my nut, mine apple, and my well'.

The fields to the immediate south-west, south and south-east of the 'island' fall within the state owned lands and are presently in pasture. A deep wet ditch runs in a north-south direction between the main avenue and the site boundary to the immediate east of the 'island'. Outside the boundary of the site the ground slopes up to the north to the line of the Esker Riada. The fields are presently in pasture with occasional mature trees. The esker is covered in mature trees and forms the northern boundary of the demesne.

## DEMESNE & LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The lands purchased by the state in 2003, the primary subject of this conservation plan, constitute a portion of the historic Durrow Abbey Demesne. The designed landscape provides a setting and context for the state-owned lands and for this reason the demesne as a whole, is included in the following description.

### Enclosing Woodland

The demesne was originally enclosed to the north, east and south by a continuous belt of woodlands dominated by oak and beech. Other species planted include horse chestnut, pine, ash, field maple, sycamore, crab apple and holly. The western / south western boundary woodlands were less well developed.

The enclosing woodlands remained largely unchanged throughout the nineteenth century but were substantially reduced and thoroughly removed in places during the twentieth century when the remaining areas became neglected.

The only enclosing woodland remaining close to its original form occurs on Esker Riada (High Wood) and along the eastern boundary north of the entrance avenue. The High Wood is characterised by a strong beech fringe, a stand of mature sitka spruce shown first on the 1910-12 map and very little encroachment of scrub species.

The eastern boundary woodland is characterised by lime, oak, horse chestnut, sycamore and an understorey of holly and hazel. An unkempt hedge of mostly hawthorn divides this woodland from



the adjacent fields in places. In the vicinity of the entrance avenue the understorey is being colonised by Laurel.

Despite their lower species diversity (relative to the other remaining woodlands) these areas provide important habitat for birds and animals including badger, fox and deer.

Immediately south of the entrance, between the road and the stream, an area of woodland maintained as an ornamental garden in the twentieth century (adjacent to the gate lodge) is scarcely penetrable due to the abundant growth of bramble and other understorey species. Three natural springs occur in this area. The woodland here has been subject to substantial encroachment of scrub species favouring waterlogged conditions, including birch, spindle tree, hazel, goat willow and alder. Laurel planted in the late twentieth century as an ornamental addition to the entrance avenue has colonised the undergrowth.

South of the stream all that remains of the boundary woodland is a few groups and single mature trees, mostly beech, oak, horse chestnut and lime.

The south-western portion of the demesne is now in the ownership of Coillte and any original demesne woodland has been incorporated into the primarily coniferous plantations.

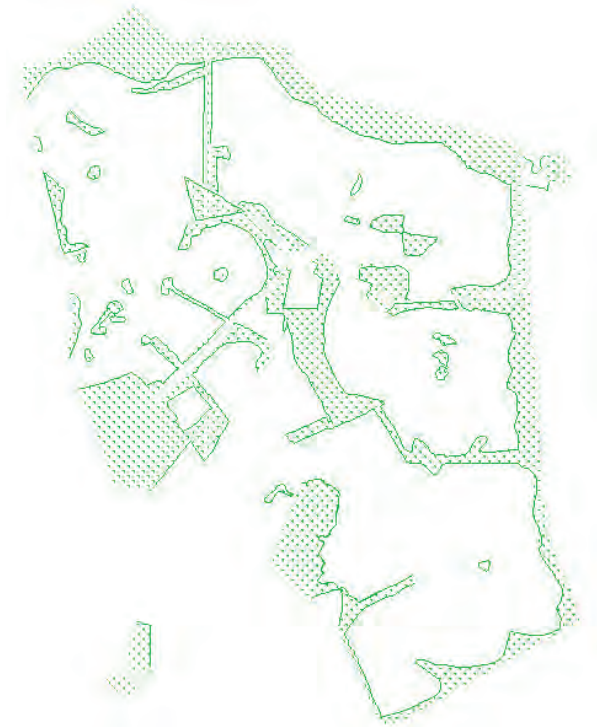
### Internal Woodland

A network of woodland copses and corridors were developed within the demesne, for aesthetic enhancement and wildlife habitat. The effect, as shown on the nineteenth century maps, is a landscape structure comprising a central woodland area in the vicinity of the house, with corridors radiating outwards and connecting to the woodland belt enclosing the demesne.

Most notable amongst these in the present day is the woodland corridor along the entrance road, and the Pheasant Wood.

The entrance corridor would have had a similar composition to the boundary woodlands described above, although an avenue of Norway maples and laurel shrubs were planted in the twentieth century.

The Pheasant Wood is some ten hectares in extent, lying to the south of the house. The woodland was composed of mainly beech and horse chestnut, as well as a scrub layer to provide bird habitat. Having remained largely intact (spatially) to the present day the wood is in a state of neglect, dominated by a



Woodland structure of Durrow Abbey Demense 1837-8

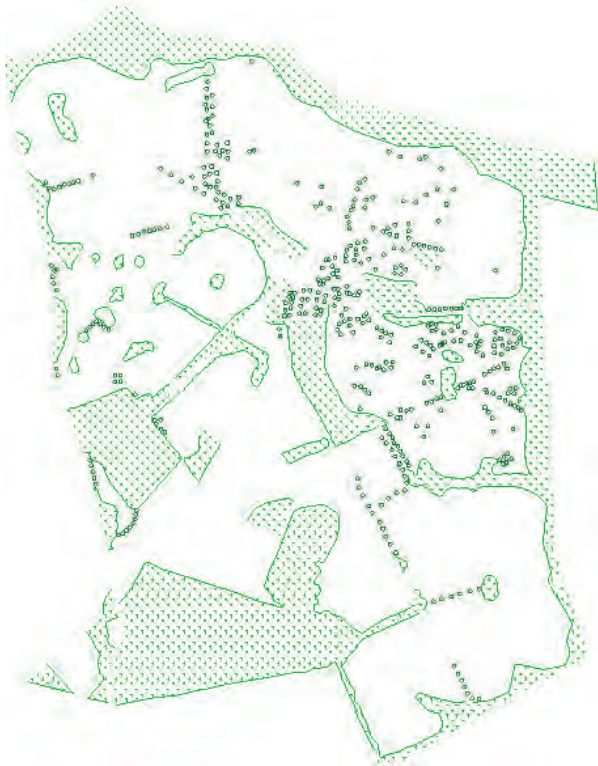
dense cover of primarily elder, birch and sycamore scrub. Saplings of the original woodland species are stunted as a result of the dense scrub cover. The scrub does, however, provide habitat for significant numbers of birds and for deer.

### Parkland and Agricultural Fields

The internal demesne landscape, given spatial structure by the woodlands, consisted of naturalistic parkland areas and agricultural fields.

The north-eastern part of the demesne, the lands most visible from Durrow Abbey House and from the entrance roads, was developed as parkland. This area is clearly defined by the woodland structure on the 1837-38 map.

The parklands comprised improved grassland interspersed with 'random' clumps and specimens of mainly oak and beech trees, as well as distinct single rows of trees, remnant from the pre-demesne landscape. In field investigations undertaken for the 2000 Environmental Impact Statement the environmental consultant noted that certain of the oak present within the parkland area may be remnant of the original native plantation that would have covered the area up to the early eighteenth century. These would have been retained and the other specimens planted specifically to frame and compose views of the house from the approach along the entrance roads, and to provide views of a 'romantic' landscape from the house.



Parkland tree cover at Durrow 1875-84

The remaining internal lands served agricultural purposes. The north-western and south-eastern portions of the demesne in particular, were used for cultivation.

In the latter part of the twentieth century the parkland south of the entrance road was returned to primarily agricultural use, resulting in a further decrease in tree numbers.

The parkland area immediately north of the entrance road, surrounding St. Columcille's Island, is lower-lying. Due to siltation of the stream which drained the area it now displays the characteristics of a true fen, characterised by numerous willows.

The parkland north of the stream and St. Columcille's Island has been converted for tillage agriculture.

### Circulation / Access Roads

At the time of establishment of the demesne, a road to St. Columba's church already existed giving access from the public road forming the eastern demesne boundary (now the N52). The 1837-38 map shows that this route was extended to give access to the house just beyond (west of) the church (hereafter referred to as Route A).

An additional demesne entrance with gate lodge was constructed further south along the public road, from which two further access roads (Routes B and C) were developed. Route B, running north-

west from this entrance to bypass the church, was the primary demesne entrance. The road alignment would have been selected for the aesthetic effect of the approach to the house through the woodland and parkland areas. Route C followed a westerly path through a woodland corridor leading through Pheasant Wood to arrive at the farm buildings to the rear (west) of the house.

A road (Route D) gave access to the house from the western demesne boundary where a third gate lodge was built. On the 1837-38 map this lodge is labelled 'school house'. On the 1875-84 map it is labelled 'gate lodge'.

Various other internal routes were retained or developed within the demesne to give access to the lands.

A stretch of road shown on the historic maps leading from the southern demesne boundary (but cut off by the belt of enclosing woodland) is conspicuous. Its extension would lead to the apparent avenue of trees approaching the farm buildings (west of Pheasant Wood and the walled garden) from the south. This may indicate a pre nineteenth-century demesne entrance to a pre nineteenth-century demesne house.



Access roads to Durrow 1837-8

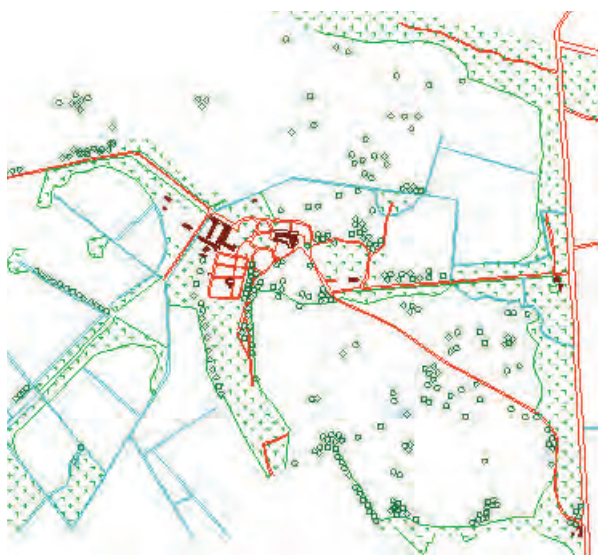
## Drainage

An unnamed stream rising in the adjacent townland of Aghancaran traverses the demesne. Entering the demesne beneath the N52 on the eastern boundary it flows north-west through the boundary woodland towards the main avenue, is then channelled northwards and westwards through the agricultural fields and then southwards past the farm buildings and through the Coillte lands. It is fed by several springs including St. Columcille's and Sillogue Wells, in addition to ditches draining the low-lying areas of the demesne. The stream has a confluence with the Silver River approximately three kilometres south west of the demesne.

It is possible that the drainage system predates the demesne landscape by considerable time. Monastic settlements such as that at Durrow would have employed sophisticated agricultural methods in which water power would have often played an important part.

There is evidence of manipulation / employment of the stream for agricultural and possibly industrial purposes on the demesne lands. The stream channel is stone-lined in places. The maps show a walled reservoir on the eastern boundary and two pump houses labelled 'hydraulic rams' on the 1910-12 maps. It is possible that the stream was used to drive a mill wheel located at the north-western corner of the farm buildings, in a building more recently used as a residence.

Analysis of the historic mapping reveals little evidence of alteration of the drainage pattern on the demesne since 1837-38. The stream channel is presently silted up, resulting in the emergence of a fen surrounding St. Columcille's Island and



Drainage system at Durrow 1910-12

to the north west of the house. These lands are indicated as dry agricultural fields and parkland on the historic maps.

## LANDSCAPE FEATURES

The demesne landscape structure is punctuated by a number of features, natural, archaeological and man made.

### Domestic Landscape

The domestic landscape refers to the lands immediately surrounding Durrow Abbey House, the farm buildings and the walled garden.

The areas immediately to the north, east and south of the house, within the encircling circulation routes, were maintained as terraced lawns / amenity grasslands, free from trees or ornamental vegetation cover. This would have preserved views of the house from the entrance roads and from the house to the surrounding parkland landscape. This feature remained as such at least until the 1910-12 survey. Some time after 1910-12 (indicated by the historic maps) an ornamental garden of *taxus baccata*, *cupressus* spp, *cryptomaria japonica*, *chamaecyparis lawsoniana* varieties, *berberis* spp, box and small flowering trees was introduced immediately to the north of the west wing of the house. This now very mature, mostly evergreen vegetation closes views to and from the house. The lawn areas have been managed intensively to produce a dominant cover of ryegrass and white clove.<sup>35</sup>

To the west of the house a woodland was planted to screen the farm buildings and walled garden (the main working parts of the demesne), and thereby contribute to the romantic, apparently uncultivated landscape. A network of paths and roads led away from the house to these features and to the primarily agricultural landscape occupying the western portion of the demesne. This woodland contains some particularly fine specimen trees.

Yew trees (*taxus baccata*) were introduced throughout the domestic landscape along the paths to the walled garden and Pheasant Wood, and notably beside the gate between the church and house. These have grown to large proportions, contributing to the visual enclosure now experienced in and around the house, *Rhus typhina* is also planted throughout the domestic landscape, and features prominently in the walled garden.

Boston ivy (*parthenocissus tricuspidata*) was planted beside the house in the twentieth century and now covers large expanses of the walls. However, the





Boston ivy covering east facade of Durrow Abbey House

spectacular autumn display may be contrary to the original architectural and landscape design intent.

A dense clump of Japanese knotweed is growing adjacent to the eastern wall of the farm building complex. This is a highly invasive species, potentially damaging to structures and to the demesne vegetation.

### Walled Garden

A walled garden is a typical feature of demesne landscapes. Within the walls fruit, vegetables, herbs and roses were cultivated in a sheltered environment that protects the plants from extremes of weather and from animals. The walls also created distinctive micro-climates for the cultivation of exotic fruit on south facing warm walls and often provided support for glasshouses.

The two and a half hectare walled garden at Durrow is situated to the south-west of the house, abutting the farm building complex. It is roughly rectangular in shape, the longer north-south walls approximately 100-120m and the east-west walls measuring 70-85m. Its construction of mostly uncoursed limestone rubble suggests that it predates the other demesne buildings.

The main entrance to the garden is through a gate to the east of the centreline of the northern wall adjacent to the farm buildings. The typically geometric layout of the garden is depicted on the nineteenth century maps. This shows a perimeter pathway several metres wide inside the wall with the garden divided into four parts (two larger, two smaller) by the extension of the entrance path across the space and another path crossing east to west.

The four central areas were outlined with single rows of small fruit trees or shrubs, which the two

larger, western areas contained larger trees at the corners. There is a circular form in the middle of the north western area shown on the 1837-38 map, which was possibly a water feature. The south-western area contained by a building, possibly a greenhouse close to the centre of the garden, and several parallel rows of planting. The two eastern areas were each depicted to contain two large trees. The area between the perimeter path and wall also contained crops of some form. This depiction of the walled garden layout remained largely the same on the 1875-84 O.S. map.

On the 1910-12 O.S. map the layout has changed. A further east-west path has been added along with a second entrance to the garden through the east wall. This path divided the two northern areas inside the garden into four. Additional structures are located in the vicinity of the central, single building and one of these is labeled 'tank'. Two further structures are shown inside the garden abutting the northern wall east of the entrance. No detail of the planting layout is shown.



Maintained eastern portion of walled garden

The garden appears to be in a state of relative neglect. The path layout remains in place, as do the walls. The north-eastern portion is maintained as a formal garden, characterised by low box hedges, lawn and rhus typhina specimens. Flower beds are also maintained, containing hybrid tea roses and lawns<sup>36</sup>. The larger western portion has been used in the twentieth century for sheep grazing and more recently as a nursery. Large numbers of nursery beech and sitka spruce trees remain in the western and southern areas of the garden, surrounding remnants of an apple orchard which still produces substantial quantities of fruit. There are remains of several structures (possibly potting sheds and glass houses)<sup>37</sup> in the centre of the garden on the site of buildings depicted on the historic maps, and also against the north wall.

### St. Columba's Church and Graveyard

St. Columba's Church is located within an area of woodland. The 1910-12 map shows the area surrounded by a roughly circular pathway leading to and from the house to the west. This woodland area remains north of the graveyard to the present day, encircled by a pathway from which access is gained to St. Columcille's Island.

### The Motte

Following the establishment of the demesne landscape the historic maps show the motte enclosed within the domestic woodland throughout the nineteenth century but cleared of vegetation by 1910-12. A rustic stone structure was built at the summit at the turn of the nineteenth century.

The motte is a steep sided, flat topped earthen mound some forty meters in diameter at the base, thirty meters diameter at the top and approximately five meters in height. It is densely overgrown which severely restricts views to and from the feature.

Stone steps and a rough 'banister' probably from the early twentieth century, lead up the southern slope to an entrance feature comprising two sets of steps leading to the left and right onto the summit. A stone archway also exists on the summit, appearing to form an entrance to a basin or depression, possibly the site of the structure.



Stone archway at summit of Motte

### St. Columcille's Island and Well

The feature known as St. Columcille's island comprises a low-lying, marshy area of roughly 0.63 hectares, surrounded by a ditch (a portion of the boundary is formed by the stream). It is densely wooded with horse chestnut, five mature oaks,



St Columba's Graveyard

alder, crab apple, beech, ash, hawthorn-dominated scrub and a prolific growth of common reed. Within the Island is St. Columcille's Well.

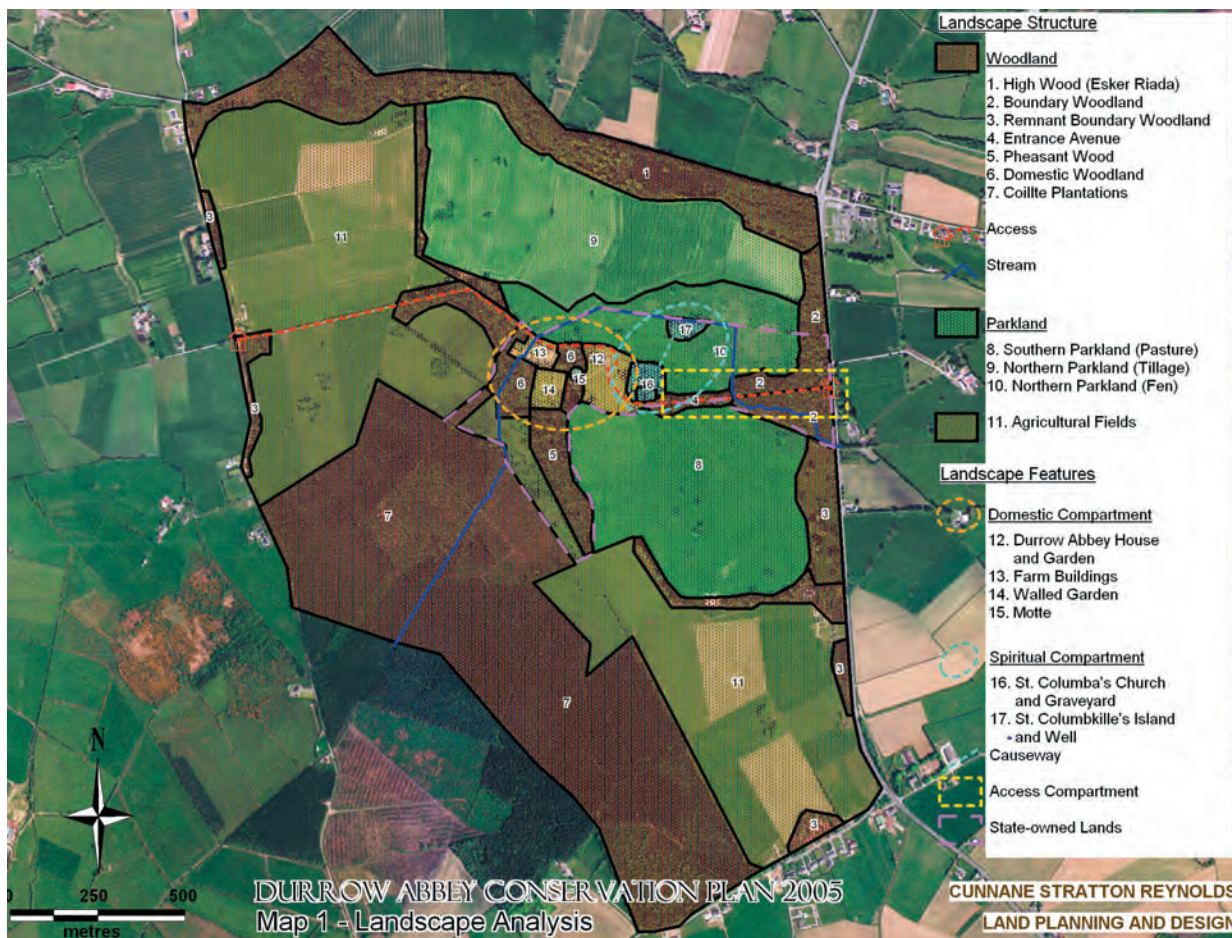
The approach to the island is via a mostly grass-covered tarmac footpath leading from St. Columba's church. A gate and rudimentary signage has recently been installed. The landscape at the causeway onto the island is unkempt, littered with deadwood and the path flooded.

### Esker Riada

A roughly two kilometre stretch of Esker Riada, the largest esker in Ireland, forms the northern boundary of the demesne. With the establishment of the demesne landscape the esker was planted as boundary woodland, the dominant species being beech as well as sycamore, crab apple and oak. Known as the High Wood, its steep sides rising above the low-lying parkland and agricultural fields adjacent to the south contribute greatly to the enclosure and sense of remoteness experienced within the demesne.



## LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS



## CHARACTER AREAS

### The Domestic Compartment

This area includes Durrow Abbey house, the domestic landscape, the farm buildings, the walled garden and motte.

These man made features form a distinctive grouping created for a definite and integrated purpose with the main house forming a focal point for the surrounding landscape. The most recent structures – the house, outbuildings and farm buildings – along with the older walled garden would have been the focus of life and activity for the demesne.

The Motte is a much older feature within this compartment and adds an important sense of "depth in time" representing 800 years of secular habitation of the site. In terms of the gardens and environs of the house it provides an opportunity to create another more ancient focal point as well as being a viewing point for the wider landscape and features.

### The Spiritual / Monastic Compartment

This area consists of St Columba's Church and Graveyard, St Columcille's Island and Well including the causeway and the adjacent woods and fen. More than any other area within the demesne this one represents the origins and spiritual associations of the site.

### Access Compartment

This area consists of the gate entrance off the N52 including the road, the gate lodge and surrounding woodland and the avenue leading into the demesne.

As the primary public access point to the demesne this is primarily a functional area. Its future management and development will have to facilitate improved access to the monuments, and possibly to the broader demesne landscape, without undue impact to its component parts.



## MAN MADE FEATURES

### Durrow Abbey House

Durrow Abbey is a large country house, L-shaped in plan, built around two sides of a sunken courtyard, combining original mid nineteenth-century Gothic Revival elements with early-twentieth century Arts and Crafts interventions and alterations.

#### Roofs

The roof of the house is covered with Welsh slate which generally appears to be sound. Some flat roofs are lined with a torch-on roofing membrane. There are a number of significant leaks at the bases of chimney stacks to the north facade, that require early attention.

Cast iron gutters and downpipes were installed in the 1920s, most of which are now badly rusted and in need of attention. Some have been replaced with uPVC alternatives.

The massive stone chimney stacks and corner turrets survive from the nineteenth-century house although reset at lower heights after the reduction in height of the building. These elements appear to

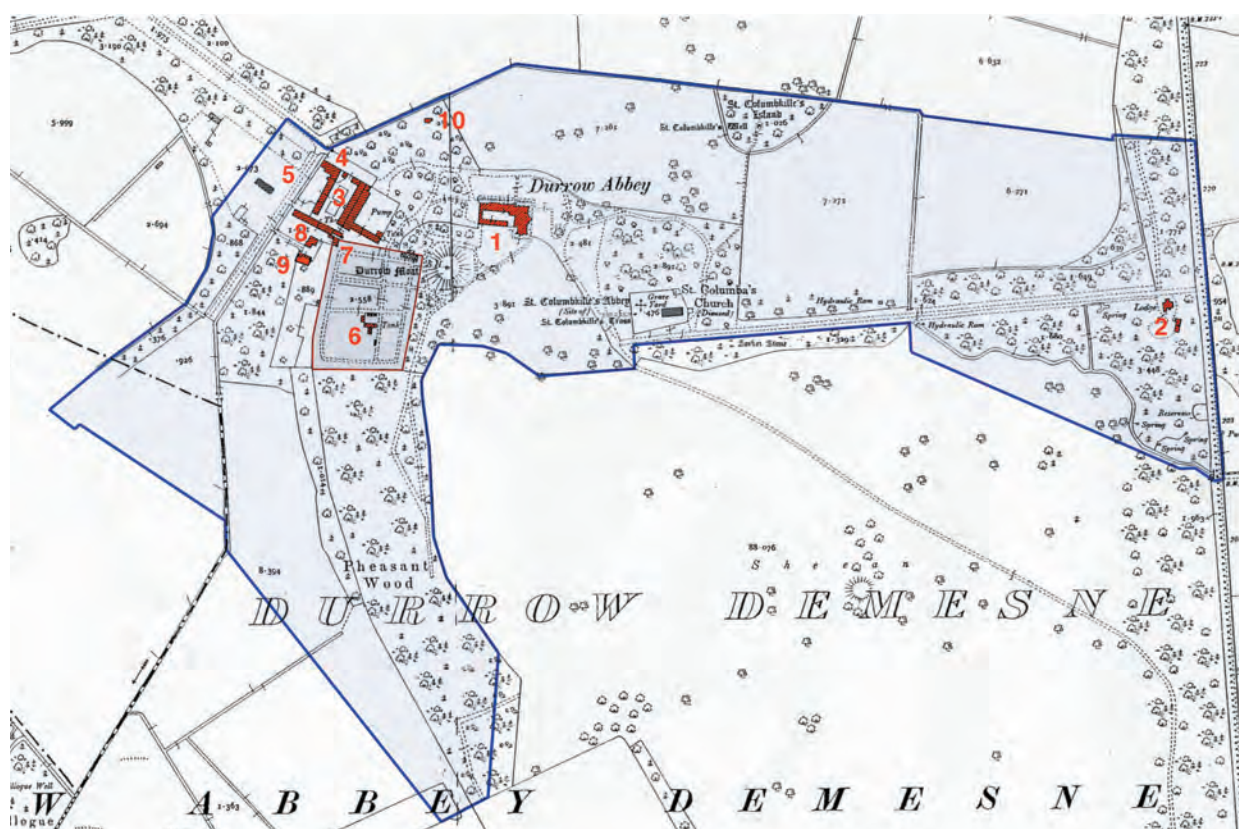


Durrow Abbey House, from north-east

be generally plumb and sound, however a structural engineer experienced in the care and repair of historic buildings should carry out a more detailed inspection.

#### Walls

All of the external walls are faced with finely jointed limestone ashlar blocks. The stone has weathered well and the thin mortar joints appear



1. Durrow Abbey House
2. Gate Lodge and Entrance Gates
3. Service yards
4. Farm Manager's House
5. Millrace and Bridge
6. Walled Garden
7. Octagonal Gardener's Cottage
8. Two-storey Gardener's Cottage
9. Modern Farmhand's House
10. Ornamental Closet

tight and sound. A very old growth of boston ivy (*parthenocissus tricuspidata*) has been allowed to cover the south, east and north walls to the house, the long-term effects of this growth are likely to be destructive to the fabric of the building and removal should be considered. All of the pinnacles and stone enrichments should be inspected at close quarters to identify open mortar joints or rusting iron bars.

#### External doors & windows

A small number of timber-framed windows were noted in the house, mostly in the north-west service range. Elsewhere most of the windows consist of side-hung steel casements, which for the most part, require only regular cleaning and oiling. Defective windows, which have allowed moisture to penetrate into the internal plaster and joinery, causing staining and decay should be repaired or replaced.

#### Internal features

The principal rooms are all to be found on the ground floor of the main house. These include the east entry vestibule and main stairwell, the sitting room to the south, the dining room to the north and a relatively small chamber adjacent to the sitting room, facing into the sunken court. All of these rooms were similarly finished, with plain lime-plastered walls and ceilings, simple oak joinery and polished oak floors. The simplicity of the internal architectural treatments is in stark contrast to the richness of the external masonry enrichments.

#### Chimney pieces

A number of chimney pieces were noted in the house including a large stone fireplace in the sitting room, a pair of large oak mantelpieces with carved Celtic decoration in the ground floor stairwell,

and in the first floor east bedroom, an interesting carved limestone fire surround in the ground floor study and an early nineteenth-century cast iron coal grate in the basement. The carved limestone arches over the massive 1830s kitchen fireplaces remain in place, although a 1920s partition left them standing in separate rooms.

#### Stairs

The main staircase, rising from the central stairwell to the first floor, dates from the post-1922 rebuilding. This occupies the same location as the original stair, but was executed in a very simple form with a gallery supported by plain oak posts and lintels.

Located at the junction of the main house with the service range is an old hanging staircase. It is constructed of carved stone "cantilevered" steps and cast iron balusters and appears to date from the first half of the nineteenth century. There is also a plain timber stair at the west end of the service range.

#### External drainage

The house was originally built with a complex drainage system, designed to keep moisture out of the basement. A deep drain was dug out around the base of the walls, and covered by a sloping, vaulted brick cover. The remaining face of the basement walls was then left exposed, and the earth sloped up to the external ground level. At the eastern side of the house, during the twentieth century, the lower brick cover was removed and the entire basement area was covered by a concrete slab.

#### Sunken courtyard

The main house and its service range form two sides of a basement level sunken courtyard, the remaining sides of which are bounded by single



Roof detail, from north-east



Sitting room c. 1990, from north





Courtyard, from south-east

storey ranges. Several doors lead from the basement of the house and service range directly into the courtyard from which a gate leads to the farmyard. The south and west sides of the court are mostly arcaded. The west and south ranges are set within high crenellated stone walls that act as retaining walls. The single-pitch roofs are covered with slates, many of which have begun to slip and require attention. The floors to the arcaded ranges are paved with smooth stone flags.

### Gate Lodge and Entrance Gates

Access into the Durrow Abbey property from the east is through an early nineteenth-century gateway with curved wrought iron railings. The wrought iron gates are hung from elaborate wrought iron piers. The ironwork remains well preserved, but requires thorough cleaning and repainting. Some of the more delicate floral elements to the gates and railings have been damaged by heavy corrosion and should be repaired.

The gate lodge is a single-storey structure, with simple Gothic Revival details. A single chimney with grouped stacks rises from the apex of the slated hipped roof. The external walls are faced with the same finely tooled limestone ashlar that was used in the house. The doors and windows are set within plain openings, topped with simple label mouldings.

The internal rooms include an entry vestibule, sitting room, kitchen, scullery and toilet. A large bedroom retains a carved stone fire surround and an interesting paneled cupboard that appears to have been a sleeping alcove.

### Service Yards

Extensive service yards are located to the west of the house. These yards, now largely derelict, include structures from several distinct phases of construction, built mostly from the same finely crafted limestone masonry as the house. There are two separate yards and a long arcaded structure, all of which appear on the 1837-38 historic map.

#### East yard

An inscribed date of 1833 on the centre of the south range shows that the east yard pre-dates the work to the house. A close examination of the two-storey yard suggests that it was originally intended to include east, south and west ranges. The east range was never built, however the limestone ashlar stones were left projecting from the wall of the south range, in preparation for the construction of the missing range.



Gate Lodge, from north-east

The ranges were built in a plain, astylar fashion. The external walls were faced with finely jointed limestone ashlar blocks. Exceptional workmanship is particularly evident in the arched door surrounds, with their finely carved voussoirs. Timber windows survive in many of the openings, probably dating from the 1830s. Internally, a fine stable room remains with boarded stalls, patterned brick paving, and good quality plaster cornices.

The masonry shell of the east yard appears to be stable and in reasonable condition. The failure of the slate roofing has led to widespread decay to the timber roof and floor framing. Many of the windows survive reasonably intact, however, some of the lights have been broken by vandals.

The east side of the yard is currently occupied by a crudely built structure dating from the middle of the twentieth century, built with concrete block walls and covered with corrugated fibre-cement roofing. This structure detracts from an otherwise fair collection of buildings.

A single storey carriage house stands attached to the north end of the west range. This structure has a single arched gateway. A pair of limestone gate piers remain at the northern entrance to the yard, intact but with moderate damage and opening onto the farm lane that runs from the house to the farm yards.

### West yard

The west yard stands immediately adjacent to the east yard and includes a more complicated assembly of structures. Two-storey ranges line the east and west sides of the yard. A pair of single-storey offices flank the north gateway into the yard, now partly blocked by a stone wall, under which runs an underground millrace.

The external walls to most of the structures in the west range were faced with ashlar limestone blocks, however the quality of the masonry is somewhat inferior to the work found in the east yard. Instead of being laid in regular courses, the walls to many structures in the west range are sneaked, giving a slightly rougher appearance, possibly reflecting a lower status accorded to that yard.

### Mill or grain dryer

Standing approximately at the centre of the western yard is a gable-fronted mill. No structure is shown in this location on the 1837-38 map. The mill differs from the majority of the yard structures in several respects. Its gabled roof contrasts strongly with



East yard, south range

the low-pitched hipped roofs used throughout the yard. A cast in-situ concrete bell cote stands at the apex of the north gable giving the structure the appearance of a chapel. The mill walls consists of rubble masonry and include a number of roughly carved semi-circular stones appearing to be salvaged coping stones. There are few windows or doors compared to the numerous regular openings on the surrounding ranges. An underground millrace runs beneath the building and contains the substantial remains of a water powered grain mill.

The mill was powered by a stream of water that was diverted to run under the courtyard. This water course can be seen to run under an arch beneath the northern gateway to the west yard.

### South range

Running along the south side of the west yard is a long single-storey arcaded structure. This struc-



South range, limestone projections to east



South range, date stone of 1833





West yard, from north

ture is simpler than the other buildings in the yard, but its stone arches display excellent craftsmanship. The timber roof structure appears to have spread, putting lateral stresses on the wall heads, causing an outward lean to the arcade. A door through the south wall of this building leads to an area to the west of the walled garden.

### Farm Manager's House

Standing at the western edge of the farm yard is a rendered two-storey house, most likely intended as the residence of the farm manager. Facing north onto the farm lane, the house is a three-bay gable ended structure with end chimneys. The stone-walled millrace runs along the base of the west gable wall. This does not appear to be causing any problems but should none the less be investigated by a structural engineer.

### Millrace and Bridges

A swiftly flowing millrace runs along the western edge of the farmyard, through a stone walled channel. This water course is crossed at several points by stone arched bridges. The race appears to be in relatively sound condition.

### Walled Garden

The sizeable walled garden stands south-west of the house, on a gently sloping west-facing hillside. The high rubble stone walls are generally intact, the presence of stone buttresses at the north-east corner suggest a history of structural movement, at least in that location. The main gate, at the centre of the east side near the Norman motte, has simple carved stone jambs, and retains a wrought iron gate, in very poor condition. Another gate, at the centre of the north side, gives access to the garden from the farmyard, which stands immediately adjacent, although at a much lower level.



Farm manager's house, from north-east

There are several small structures built into the north and west walls of the walled garden, of which only the masonry walls survive. A timber framed greenhouse stands near the centre of the garden in an advanced state of deterioration. At the north end of the greenhouse a masonry headhouse survives which has also deteriorated badly.

The garden paths are generally poorly maintained, and there are remnants of the garden's historical plantings, including box borders and old apple trees.

### Octagonal Gardener's Cottage

A small cottage was built into the wall at the north-west corner of the walled garden. Faced in pale yellow brick, with a slated hipped roof, the asymmetrical cottage was designed in a vernacular Tudor Revival style. A simple stone cornice is supported by simple brick frets. At the apex of the roof is a small octagonal chimney stack. Internally the structure has two small rooms. The room to



Octagonal Gardener's Cottage, from south-east

the south is a later intervention which creates a delightful octagonal space with lancet windows. The ceiling is coved and decorated with plaster mouldings. The north room contains a small domestic fireplace and has a door on its south side leading to the grounds outside of the walled garden. It is unclear what this structure was originally used for, a dairy is one possibility, however, it has more recently been used as an apple store.



Two-storey gardener's cottage, from west

### Two-Storey Gardener's Cottage

Standing to the west of the walled garden, is a gardener's cottage of similar style to the octagonal structure in the walled garden. The two-storey house contains a central stair hall and three rooms to each floor. A small kitchen was located in a small shed-roofed east return.



Farmhand's house, from north-west



Ornamental closet, from south

### Modern Farmhand's House

A short distance to the south of the two-storey cottage is another two-storey house, probably dating from the 1960s. Built of rendered concrete block, with timber framed windows and doors, this house has been severely vandalized, but remains structurally sound.

### Ornamental Closet

North of the farm lane that connects the house to the farmyard is a rustic gazebo which may have originally functioned as an earth closet. It is built of rubble limestone, with dressed stone door and window surrounds and coxcomb coping to the wallhead. This small but unusual structure faces south towards the rear of the house. A building of this type is relatively rare in Ireland.



## 3.0 CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

### ASSESSMENT

The Guidelines to the Burra Charter: Cultural Significance state that:

'Cultural Significance is a concept which helps in estimating the value of places. The places that are likely to be of significance are those which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations'.

There are a variety of categories used to evaluate the level of cultural significance. Archaeological, architectural, aesthetic, landscape, historic, social, spiritual and natural will be used in the assessment of significance of Durrow Abbey.

#### Archaeological Significance

The cultural significance of the archaeology found at Durrow must be considered to be of international importance, being an undisturbed monastic site founded by St. Columcille in the sixth century. Its later designed landscape provides a unique setting for the ecclesiastical and secular archaeology which remain at the site.

A range of medieval monuments survive at Durrow. Durrow Abbey is the only complex of this type and importance, to remain largely undisturbed within the islands of Ireland and Great Britain.

Durrow is one of the few monastic houses known to have been founded directly by Columcille and would have been one of the principal monastic houses of his paruchia or federation (included Kells, Iona and Derry). The settlement would have been supported by a substantial population during the early medieval period. The importance of the site is further reflected in its use as a burial place for bishops, abbots and the nobles of the Midlands and Munster. Áed mac Brénainn king of Tethba, Domhnaill of Clann Colmain and Murchadh ua Briain, a grandson of Brian Borumha, and Bishop Eochaid O'Kelly are possibly interred at the site.

Durrow was the only major monastery in Ireland mentioned by Bede, an Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical

writer of great standing who referred to it as 'monasterium nobile'<sup>38</sup>.

Early Irish monastic sites played an important role in the safeguarding of Christianity in western Europe, a fact acknowledged by Kenneth Clark in his publication *Civilization*. Sites such as Durrow provided a foothold for Christianity in Europe and through the production of illustrated manuscripts ensured its dissemination and survival.

The site is also significant due to the presence of a number of later medieval archaeological monuments. An Anglo-Norman settlement grew up at Durrow in the late twelfth century following on from the earlier monastic settlement.

The foundation of the Augustinian Priory of St. Mary of Durrow can be dated to 1144 and was one of the first Augustinian Priors founded as part of the twelfth-century church reform. The foundation was dissolved in the mid-sixteenth century and is recorded as containing "the site of the abbey, a church, a hall, two rectories, a ruined castle, several messuages and cottages"<sup>39</sup> The continued wealth is reflected in the foundation's ownership of over 1,000 acres of land.

#### Architectural Significance

Durrow Abbey House is of regional architectural significance as an early twentieth-century remodeling of a mid nineteenth-century mansion that was destroyed by fire in 1923.

Neither the exterior nor the interior of Durrow Abbey House reflect the original architectural intentions for the building. The house was reduced by a storey after the fire in 1923 altering radically the mid nineteenth-century design for the building. Internally the full designs for the house by Ralph Byrne were not implemented as originally intended, although a scaled-down version of the architect's proposals was carried out. The quality of the original materials used and the high standard of the craftsmanship contribute to the significance of the building.

Stylistically the house is not an outstanding example of its type. The choice of a Gothic Revival style for the re-modelling of the house was popular with Irish landlords at this time.

The location of the house as a central feature within the designed landscape contributes to its importance. Views to and from the building are critical to the landscape design and the house is integral to its setting. This combined with the social significance of the house outweighs its architectural merits.

The house is a relatively rare and interesting example of a house rebuilt following its destruction in the Irish Civil War. In total it is estimated that over 300 houses were burned during the revolutionary period in Ireland following the first world war. The compensation paid to victims was rarely enough to enable them to re-build their houses to their former splendor. It was the exception rather than the rule that the houses were re-built. Approximately one fifth of all houses destroyed by arson attacks were re-built.<sup>40</sup>

The Arts and Crafts interior is not of high quality. The 1880s and 1890s saw the beginning of the Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland, and the early 1900s to 1920s represented its heyday, but the 1920s also saw the beginnings of the decline. Beyond the work of the leading artists and studios, arts and crafts in Ireland in the 1920s and 1930s seems to have once again, as it had been when the society was founded, been to some extent a matter of quantity rather than quality.<sup>41</sup>

The stable and service yards may have been executed to the design of William Murray. The formal layout and classical planning of this series of buildings contribute to its significance.

The walled garden dates from the late eighteenth century to early nineteenth century. Its simple architectural treatment makes it of moderate significance.

The location of the eighteenth-century church is important, being the site of an earlier church. It is typical of the style and character of the Georgian period in which it was remodeled.

### **Aesthetic Significance**

Durrow High Cross is a fine example of a ninth-century High Cross surviving in good condition.

There remain about thirty to thirty-five crosses or fragments of crosses with figured scenes throughout Ireland. They are found mostly in the major ecclesiastical sites including , Armagh, Kells,



Durrow High Cross, detail of east face

Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Clones, Monasterboise and Drumcliff.<sup>42</sup>

Despite being moved recently from its original location, in order to protect the carving from the elements and the risk of falling trees, the understanding of the cross is enhanced by associations with what is possibly its original setting.

The Durrow High Cross is of added significance due to the iconography and inscriptions which give an insight into its date.

The site is associated with the Book of Durrow which is an artefact of outstanding quality from the early medieval period and was produced in the late seventh century.

### **Landscape Significance**

Durrow Abbey is a very good example of an historic designed landscape in the Natural Style. The ideas conceived in England and enthusiastically promoted by the leading figures such as Alexander Pope and Thomas Addison were embraced at Durrow. Inspired by the romantic ruin-strewn landscapes of antiquity as painted by Nicholas Poussin, Pope urged the creators of these new landscapes to "paint as you plant", the inference being to adopt a picturesque approach with the original landscape being the canvas. Another of Pope's basic tenets was that in designing a landscape one should always seek the genius loci, which in a literal translation means - "the spirit of the place". While Ireland may have lacked any classical ruins in the eighteenth century the romantic and picturesque qualities of the surviving Gothic and Romanesque ruins were often employed to great effect.

The rich source of history and antiquity, situated in a beautiful natural setting became the “canvas” at Durrow, on which an impressive designed landscape was created.

Durrow Abbey is a very complete and well-laid out example of a country house demesne. While it may not be as accomplished as its two county neighbours, Charleville and Birr, both of which are designed landscapes of international cultural significance, the demesne at Durrow Abbey could certainly be considered to be of national significance. Indeed the ambition of the landscaping at Durrow may have resulted directly from the impressive examples set by these two neighbours. The essence of the significance of Durrow lies in the completeness of the collection of buildings and structures that survive, through which the fascinating history of a great country house demesne can be interpreted and understood. It is essential that the importance of these more recent layers of the settlement history of Durrow Abbey be respected and the overall structure of the demesne be protected into the future. Durrow Abbey represents not only a fine, intact country house demesne, it is also the principal reason why the even more significant archaeological remains of the monastic settlement have survived in such a good state of preservation.

While almost every aspect of a designed landscape was created with careful consideration of its visual impact, the functional aspect of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century demesnes should not be overlooked. A great country demesne provided not only the setting for a large country mansion, but also an income from direct or tenant farming. It also produced copious amounts of food for the landowners and their extensive service staff. Extensive out buildings in the form of stables, farmyards and walled gardens housed staff and animals and assisted in the production of a vast range of foodstuffs creating a state of almost self-sufficiency. At Durrow Abbey, impressive examples of all of these building types survive probably dating from the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, along with a mill and an impressive estate manager's house, all of which contribute to the importance of the demesne.

### **Historic Significance**

The various components of the site dating from early Medieval times to the present day reflect the changing fortunes of the site and act as a microcosm of Irish history. Few sites offer such an insight into the changing fortunes of the country over such an extended period. The layering and survival of the different historic periods at Durrow contribute to its significance.

The association with significant historic figures including St. Columcille, Hugh de Lacy and Lord Norbury further enhance the historic significance of the site .

### **Social & Spiritual Significance**

Despite the fact that few cultural bonds existed between the vast majority of Irish landlords and their tenants<sup>43</sup> this ancient site has always held a central place within the community since its foundations as a monastery in the sixth century. Local access to the church and graveyard has been an integral part of the history of the site.

The closure of the graveyard in 1913 caused much concern locally. More recently the activities of local community groups and an increased interest generally in the site have led to pressure for its future preservation.

A local pattern is still held at Durrow on the ninth of June every year. The first documented reference to the pattern is to 1463 when an archery contest took place. In more recent time the pattern typically consists of the celebration of mass and a procession to St Columcille's Well. The popularity of this event reinforces the significance of the site to the local community.

### **Natural & Ecological Significance**

The woodlands of the Durrow Abbey Demesne preserve a landscape which was planned and executed prior to the 1837-38 Ordnance Survey, this shows mature timber with a distribution which has scarcely changed in over two hundred years. The landscape is both an important aesthetic creation and a place of great cultural significance.

While the distribution of the woods is significant, their content is of relatively little interest, due to depredations both of storms and of unregulated human intervention or neglect. There are few surviving specimen trees at Durrow and a paucity of rare and unusual flora and fauna or habitat.

The exception to this is the pocket of woodland to the north of the gate lodge which is an attractive area of mature and young trees with a rich variety of flowers and birds. It is a habitat for badger, fox, bats and pygmy shrew in addition to introduced species of mammals including fallow deer, rabbit and grey squirrel. The area is of considerable interest as an excellent example of how trees, shrubs and flowers survive and develop when left to themselves. Its educational value is considerable.

The location of the Esker Riada is of great importance to the site. This is one of the largest sections



of surviving esker in Ireland and is of international significance.

## GRADING

### Primary Significance

The primary significance of Durrow Abbey is the wealth of archaeological material which lies beneath the largely eighteenth and nineteenth century landscape visible today.

The archaeological remains survive as testament to an important monastery founded by St. Columcille and plot the changing fortunes of the site from the sixth century to the present day. There are surviving features on the site which contribute to an understanding of this history and which illustrate the quality and importance of the monastery and medieval settlement:

St Columba's Church and graveyard  
Durrow High Cross  
Early Medieval Graveslabs  
St Columcille's Island and Well  
Monastic enclosure and related sub-surface archaeology  
Motte

The incorporation of the archaeological features into the layout of the designed landscape at Durrow enhances the importance of both. The unique nature of the landscape makes it of national importance and the structure of the designed landscape is of exceptional significance. The designed landscape consists of:

Parkland and Woodland Planting  
Ornamental and Functional Structures, including the walled garden, St Columba's Graveyard, the Motte and St Columcille's Island and Well.

### Secondary Significance

The eighteenth- and nineteenth-century periods of development define the character of the site as viewed today. The architectural merit of the buildings and the less important historical associations makes these elements of secondary importance:

Durrow Abbey House and terraces  
Gate Lodge and Entrance Gates  
Service Yards  
Farm Manager's House  
Two Storey Gardener's Cottage  
Octagonal Gardener's Cottage  
Ornamental Earth Closet  
Mill Race and Bridges  
Hydraulic drainage system

### Neutral

The elements which neither contribute to the importance of the site nor do they detract from its significance are:

Modern Farm worker's House

### Intrusive

The intrusive elements on the site are:

The Eastern Block of the East Service Yard  
Planting to North of House

## STATEMENT

Durrow Abbey is a site of great historical and cultural importance on a national and international level. There is rare surviving evidence of occupation of the site from the sixth century to the present day.

As it survives today Durrow Abbey reveals little of the significant early medieval origins of the site. Extensive remains survive beneath the subsequent layers of history. It is these earlier layers which are of greatest importance in terms of the potential wealth of information which they hold. This surviving archaeological evidence provides great potential to reveal more about the earlier periods of occupation of the site, the origins of Christianity in Ireland and early medieval society as a whole.

The demesne landscape, which dates from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, characterises the site as seen today. This landscape is important as a well preserved example of a natural style designed landscape. The incorporation of many surviving archaeological features into the landscape design enhances its importance.

Durrow Abbey House is however a key feature in the designed landscape and many of the views and vistas are directed to it. The house is an interesting but an unexceptional, example of the Tudor Gothic style, re-modelled in the early twentieth century. The significance of the house lies more in its historic and social interest than its architectural merit.

The site is much cherished by the local community and has for many centuries held strong spiritual associations in the following of patterns.

Durrow Abbey is recognised as a sacred site within an order of magnitude in archaeological terms of category I under the UNESCO protocol. This rating renders it suitable for application for a World Heritage Site designation.

## 4.0 DEFINING ISSUES & VULNERABILITY

### OWNERSHIP

In December 2003 the state acquired Durrow Abbey House and thirty-one hectares of surrounding demesne lands. This land includes the core of the former demesne and is the site of many of the principal man made features.

The neighbouring lands are in the ownership of Coillte, Golden Vale Co-op and Mrs Sheila O'Brien, the former owner of Durrow Abbey House. Archaeological and architectural features relating to the various periods of development at Durrow can still be identified in parts on these lands.

### REQUIREMENTS & RESOURCES

The state is keen to ensure the survival of all elements identified as being of significance to the site. Objectives for the site are for the conservation and presentation of the monuments and promotion of educational benefits, delivered within the existing resources of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Office of Public Works.

### USES FOR SITE

A balance must be struck between the requirement for public access to the key features of the site, their continued preservation and any future use. Public access is a requirement to the monastic core of the site including St. Columba's Church, St. Columcille's graveyard and well. While a level of public access to Durrow Abbey House would be desirable, it is unlikely that a future use for the house will be found which will guarantee public access at all times of the year. The house is not of sufficient architectural merit to attract the necessary visitor numbers in its own right.

### EXTERNAL REQUIREMENTS

Durrow Abbey is located off the N52 National Secondary Route in the townland of Durrow Demesne, Co. Offaly, approximately eight kilometres north of Tullamore and six kilometres south of Kilbeggan, County Westmeath. Durrow Abbey is located six kilometers south of the N6, the principal thoroughfare for traffic between

Dublin and Galway. The N6 is an established tourist route, channelling visitor flows to and from the western seaboard.

The central location of Durrow in the country and its proximity to principal roads such as the N52, N6 and N7 (located 25 kilometres to the south) means that it is readily accessible to most parts of the country.

The area surrounding the demesne lands is in predominantly agricultural use, as is much of the demesne itself. Dairy and livestock farming are the principal occupations in the area. The demesne lands are not under any regional, national or European environmental designations.

Durrow Abbey is affected by four tiers of planning and development policy - national, regional, county and local. The status of the relevant documents and the existing policy is outlined briefly below.

#### **National Framework**

The National Spatial Strategy ("NSS") is a twenty year planning framework designed to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development and population growth between the regions. Durrow is located in the Midlands region of the National Spatial Strategy. It is situated within the linked gateway of Mullingar, Tullamore and Athlone. The objective of this gateway is to combine the complementary strengths of the three towns to boost the regions overall economic strength. Durrow Abbey's strategic location within the triangular gateway suggests a potentially important role in the provision of recreational amenity and cultural tourism development as the midlands gateway emerges.

The N52 National Secondary Route forms the eastern boundary of the site and links the towns of Tullamore and Mullingar. The N52 with its intersection of the Dublin / Galway N6 at Kilbeggan, also links the towns of Tullamore and Mullingar with Athlone. The N52 is identified in the National Spatial Strategy as a Strategic National Transport Corridor. Offaly County Council and Westmeath County Council, in collaboration with

the National Roads Authority, are developing various schemes for upgrade of the N52 in both counties. In this regard the N52 bypass of Mullingar is approved and further upgrade of the road in the vicinity of Belvedere House in Westmeath is also in preparation. In County Offaly the CPO and EIS for the N52 Tullamore Bypass has recently been approved by An Bord Pleanála. Offaly County Council in collaboration with the National Roads Authority are commencing the land negotiation phase of the project. Work has also commenced on the selection of a new route which will link the N52 bypass at Tullamore with the new N6 interchange south of Kilbeggan. Upgrading of the N52 between Tullamore and Mullingar is considered by both counties to be of urgent strategic importance in the underpinning and development of the National Spatial Strategy Linked Gateway (comprising the towns of Athlone, Tullamore and Mullingar).

The National Development Plan is designed to underpin the development of a dynamic economy over the period 2000-2006. An investment of 51.465 billion of public, European Union and private funds is planned over this period in the two regions-Border West and Midlands (BMW) Region and the South & East Region. Tourism, culture, recreation and sports are recognised as having a significant role to play in the development of the region.

### **Regional Context**

The Regional Planning Guidelines RPPGDA were produced to give regional effect to the provisions of the NSS. These guidelines for the Midlands Region sets a population target of 325,000 by 2020. This amounts to an additional 100,000 resident population.

The Offaly County Development Plan 2003-2009 landscape classification identifies the Durrow monastic site as a Monuments and/or Places of Archaeological Interest. This area and the esker fall into Class 1 – High Landscape Sensitivity. The remainder of the demesne is classified Rural and Agricultural Areas, and Forested Areas, both Class 3 – Low Sensitivity. In addition the esker is classified as an Area of High Amenity.

### **Local Context**

Durrow Draft Local Area Plan, initiated by the County Council in 2000 to facilitate the commercial development of Durrow Abbey, was withdrawn following widespread local objection.

### **Local Development Pressure**

There is a great deal of pressure for development in close proximity to Durrow Abbey as indicated

by the number of planning applications submitted within the last three years. The vast majority of these applications was for 'one-off houses', consistent with the area's classification as being under high pressure for residential development.

The County Development Plan identifies the potential to build on the existing facilities, services and the critical mass (of population) in Durrow Village to support its retention and expansion and to reinforce the existing village core.

## **COMMUNITY ATTITUDES & EXPECTATIONS**

A public meeting was held at Durrow Abbey House on the 10<sup>th</sup> February 2005. Over 200 people visited the house and around 90 people attended a presentation of the conservation plan.

One of the main issues concerning those who attended the meeting was improving access to the site. At present pedestrian access is provided by a side gate at the main entrance, while the main gates remain closed. There is no provision for parking and there are no toilet facilities at the site. The local community would like these facilities to be provided for their continued access to the site. There is also a desire for a level of public access to the house, be this at certain times of the year or ideally on a more regular basis. The local community would like to see a facility at Durrow, which will be of benefit to the area and contribute in economic and social terms.

Offaly County Council was also consulted during the preparation of the conservation plan. The following views were expressed in a letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> April 2005 from the County Manager:

The site should remain open to the public all year. A replica of the cross should be placed on the site of the original.

The acquisition of additional lands around the monastic core should be considered by the state. Suitable walking routes around the monastic site, the woodlands and the Esker Riada should be provided.

A level of interpretation or visitor facilities should be located on site and available to all with the option of guided tours being available for six months of the year.

Visitor facilities including parking, bathrooms, shelter, information and refreshments should be provided.



## 5.0 CONSERVATION POLICIES

### BASIS OF APPROACH

The purpose of a Conservation Plan is to help identify how best to maintain or enhance the cultural significance of a building or place. To achieve this it will generally conform to the current principles of good conservation thinking by promoting, wherever possible, the retention and sensitive treatment of all significant elements and building fabric.

One of the fundamental principles of good conservation is the need to keep buildings “alive” – particularly those threatened with redundancy or decline – by identifying, promoting and, wherever possible, accommodating compatible and viable new uses. It is likely therefore, that changes to the building fabric will be necessary and in some instances compromise may be inevitable in balancing conservation with viability in order to achieve the long-term survival of the building as a whole.

Provided such changes are sensitively handled and carefully managed, there is no reason why their overall effect should not make a positive contribution to the conservation of the building. Indeed, in some instances sensitive and well designed interventions may be actively encouraged in order to stimulate beneficial change to the way the building is occupied or operated and to add interesting new layers. The successful conservation of old buildings should be seen as a positive and creative process rather than a negative and reactionary one<sup>44</sup>.

This philosophy, together with all the other issues covered in this conservation plan, have influenced the preparation of a number of policies which are laid out below.

The cultural significance of Durrow Abbey lies in the surviving evidence of many layers of human habitation on the site from the sixth century to the twenty-first century. Some of these layers when viewed in isolation may be considered to be of greater importance than others, however, all are significant, interdependent and mutually enriching as part of a greater whole.

#### **Policy 1. Approach to site**

(a.) The conservation and preservation of Durrow Abbey should take account of, and value, all layers of its history as part of a unique cultural landscape.

#### **Policy 2. Elements identified as being of ‘primary significance’**

(a.) Elements identified as being of ‘primary significance’ to the site should be carefully conserved, repaired or restored, and subsequently maintained to the highest internationally recognised standards. Alterations or adaptations to the historic fabric will generally be discouraged, however, limited changes or interventions may be considered if a convincing case is presented and the proposed work is sensitively designed, with no detrimental visual or physical impact on the historic fabric. The preservation and conservation of all existing historic fabric and the removal of intrusive elements in areas of ‘primary significance’ will be encouraged.

#### **Policy 3. Spaces or elements identified as being of ‘secondary significance’**

(a.) Spaces or elements identified as being of ‘secondary significance’ should be treated similarly to those of ‘primary significance’, but with greater latitude given with regard to the extent and impact of necessary alterations and adaptations. Even so, the existing building fabric and architectural features should be treated with respect and retained wherever possible. Any changes or interventions should take due account of the existing historic fabric, and not diminish the significance of the buildings and site as a whole.

#### **Policy 4. Spaces or elements identified as being of ‘neutral significance’**

(a.) Spaces or elements identified as being of ‘neutral significance’ are able to accommodate more extensive and radical alterations or adaptations, provided any resultant changes or interventions take due account of the underlying or uncovered historic fabric and do not diminish the significance of the buildings and site as a whole.

#### **Policy 5. Spaces or elements identified as being ‘intrusive’**

(a.) Spaces or elements identified as being ‘intrusive’ may be altered or adapted without undue restriction. The removal of intrusive spaces, or of intrusive elements in otherwise significant areas, will be encouraged in order to eliminate

or diminish their negative effect. Any resultant changes or interventions should take due account of underlying or uncovered historic fabric and should not diminish the significance of the buildings and site as a whole

## PUBLIC ACCESS

### Policy 6. Access

The importance of public access to the monuments has always been integral to the site and is a defining characteristic of Durrow. The recent acquisition of the site by the state has protected and formalised this right.

(a.) In any future use of the site public access will be assured to the eighteenth-century St. Columba's Church, Graveyard, High Cross and St. Columcille's Island and Well. Restricted public access to the motte should also be provided.

## ARCHAEOLOGY

### Policy 7. Archaeology

The archaeology of Durrow Abbey is extensive and offers an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the site during the occupation by the early monastery, the Augustinian priory and nunnery, and the Anglo-Norman settlement.

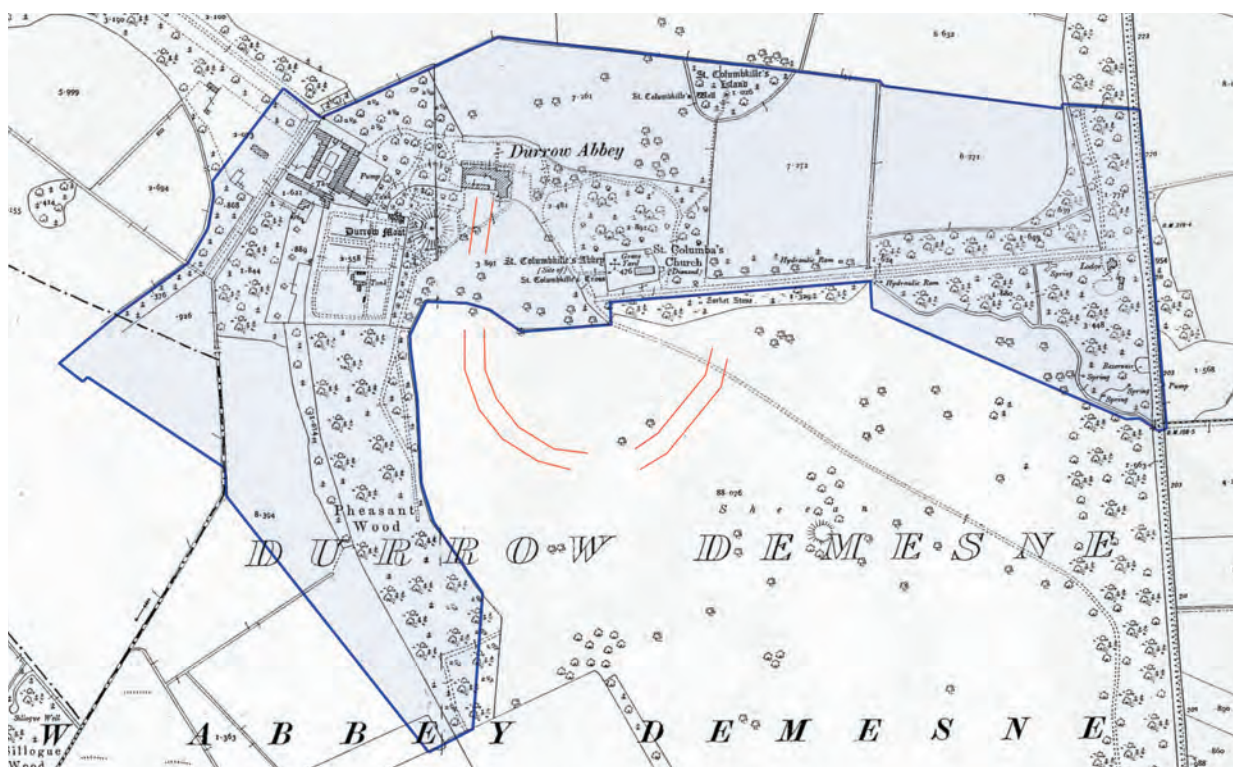
At present limited archaeological investigation has been carried out at Durrow and several areas within the state's ownership, which are highly sensitive in archaeological terms, should not be disturbed without further investigation.

Geophysical surveys carried out by Margaret Gowan and Company in 2000 have identified the location of the monastic enclosure to the south of the state owned lands. It is assumed that this enclosure continues to the north encircling the former monastic settlement with the church and graveyard at its core.

(a.) There should be no development within the area of the monastic enclosure.

(b.) The archaeological importance of this site as a whole has been clearly demonstrated both through the existence of upstanding archaeological remains and also of subsurface features identified in previous studies. Non-invasive methods of archaeological investigation should be undertaken to assess the nature and extent of any sub-surface archaeological features within the state owned lands.

(c.) Given the rich archaeological potential of the site as a whole, geophysical surveys and/or archaeological testing should be undertaken prior to consideration of any development outside of the monastic enclosure (excluding existing buildings).



location of monastic enclosure identified in Geophysical surveys highlighted in red

(d.) A monitoring programme of the extant stone monuments on the site including the early medieval cross-slabs, the high cross, the fragment of the cross shaft and cross base should be put in place.

(e.) A programme should be put in place to monitor the effects of any increase in visitor numbers or traffic on the archaeological monuments within the site.

## DEMENSE AND LANDSCAPE

The designed landscape at Durrow is significant for its aesthetic and cultural importance. The conservation plan should seek to preserve this.

There is scope at Durrow Abbey to enhance the ecological integrity and value of the landscape by giving greater emphasis to native vegetation and natural processes (and thus habitat) while retaining the architectural structure of the demesne. This will require the controlled alteration of the vegetative composition of the demesne, to allow native species to replace certain exotics, without undue dilution of the overall architectural composition.

The composition of Durrow Demesne as shown on the 1837-38 six inch OS map constitutes the blueprint of the conservation policy generally, opportunities are identified to reinstate certain natural species and processes to enhance the ecological value of the landscape.

### Policy 8. Setting

*The thirty-one hectares of state owned lands, the primary subject of this conservation plan, constitutes only a portion of the historic Durrow Abbey Demesne. The broader demesne landscape, which is currently in private ownership, provides the setting and context for the landscape and archaeological features situated within the state owned lands. It is vital that the future management of the surrounding privately owned demesne landscape is complementary to the conservation objectives for the monuments.*

(a.) The agreement and co-operation of all other owners and managers of lands within the historic Durrow Demesne boundary should be sought to encourage the preservation and conservation of the historic designed landscape.

(b.) Compatible farming activities on lands adjacent to the site should be encouraged.

(c.) Offaly and Westmeath County Councils should be encouraged to assist in the achievement of the conservation objectives in their capacity as local planning authorities by applying appropriate

development control policy for the historic demesne lands.

(d.) The designation of the Durrow Demesne lands as a Landscape of High Sensitivity and / or a Landscape of High Amenity Value (or similar as appropriate to the plan in question) should be encouraged in future county development plans, to ensure the preservation of the demesne landscape integrity and thereby the setting and context of the state owned lands and monuments.

### Policy 9. Woodland

(a.) The boundary and internal woodlands formed (and continue to form) the fundamental structure of the demesne landscape, as well as the wildlife habitat which lends it ecological significance.

(b.) No development should take place which reduces the spatial extent or otherwise impacts negatively upon the extent of, or valued individual trees within, the remaining demesne woodlands.

(c.) Any additional planting to preserve the woodland should seek to enhance its ecological value. Except for the replacement of over-mature beech trees therefore, only native woodland species such as oak, birch, alder and elder should be planted (beech is recognised as the fundamental building block of the demesne woodland structure and as such is irreplaceable).

(d.) A qualified horticulturalist / tree surgeon should make an inspection of all remaining demesne woodland trees, and propose measures to maximise their lifespan. Their recommendations should include the removal of overmature trees posing a threat to humans and the planting of replacement trees adjacent to overmature specimens.

Policies for specific areas of woodland are included in the full landscape report prepared by Cunnane Stratton Reynolds.

### Policy 10. Parkland and Agricultural Fields

(a.) The parklands originally contained improved grassland interspersed with 'random' clumps and specimens of mainly oak and beech trees as well as distinct single rows of trees. Their primary function was to enhance views to and from the house and provide shelter for visitors.

(b.) No development / alteration should take place which impacts negatively upon any remaining trees in the demesne parklands.

(c.) As well as the planting of replacement trees adjacent to over-mature specimens remaining, a



programme of planting to restore the nineteenth century parkland tree cover should be implemented.

(d.) Any additional planting to preserve the parkland should seek to enhance its ecological value. Except for the replacement of over-mature beech trees therefore, only native species such as oak, and ash should be planted.

(e.) A qualified horticulturalist or tree surgeon should make an inspection of all remaining demesne parkland trees, and propose measures to maximise their lifespan. Their recommendations should include the removal of overmature trees posing a threat to humans and the planting of replacement trees adjacent to overmature specimens (in the 2000 Environmental Impact Statement the environmental consultant suggested that certain oaks in the parkland may be remnants of the pre-demesne native plantation).

(a.) The stream should be maintained in its present condition and further investigation should be undertaken to assess the possibility of encouraging the emergence of a fen surrounding St. Columcille's Island.

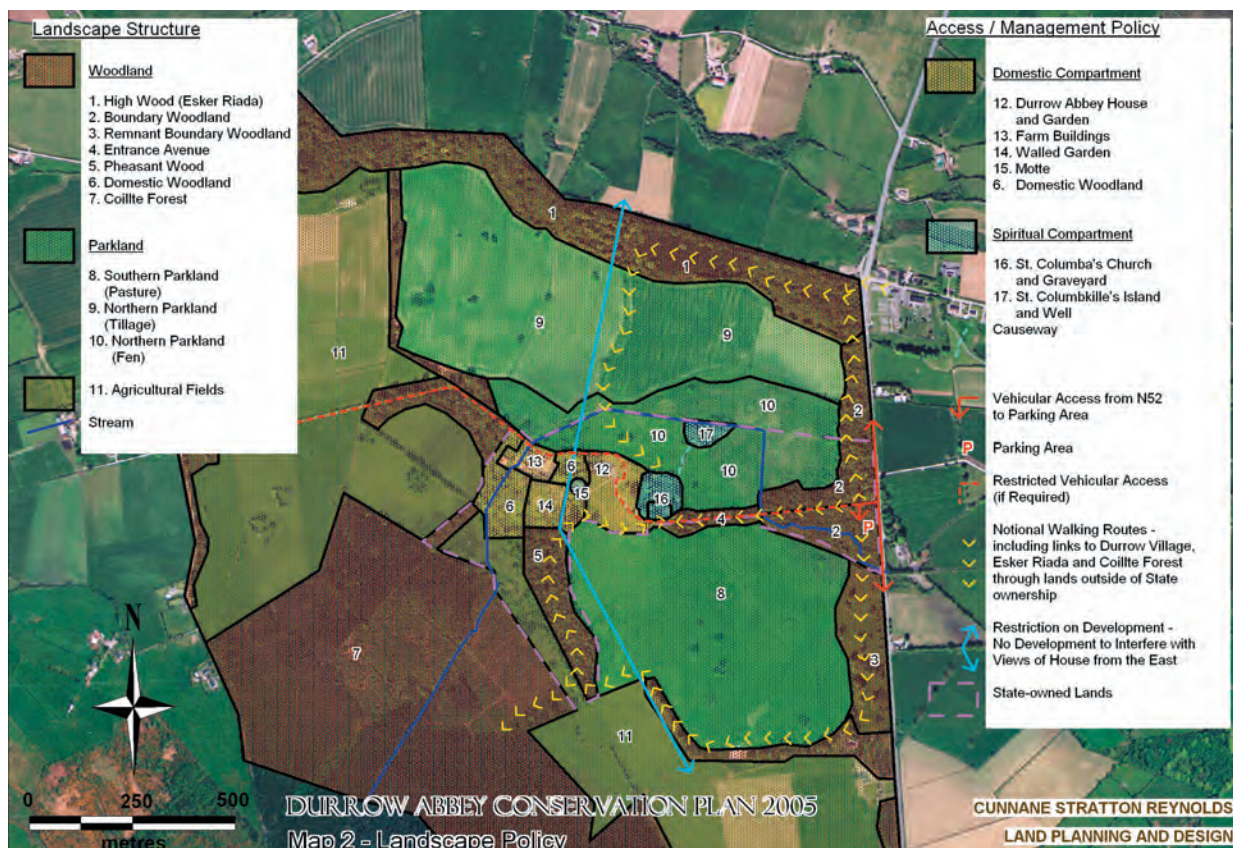
(b.) In field investigations undertaken for the 2000 Environmental Impact Statement the environmental consultant noted the presence of an unexplained film of oil on the surface of the water in certain places within the demesne. A hydrological assessment carried out for the 2002 Statement of Cultural Significance identified that pollution of the stream emanates from agricultural practices and septic tanks.

(c.) The management of the lands should be in accordance with all relevant environmental legislation protecting water quality. The neighbouring land owners should be encouraged to apply similar practices.

(d.) The remaining drainage-related infrastructure should be maintained at least in its present condition. The alignment of walking routes through the landscape should seek to give visual access to the reservoir and hydraulic ram sites.

### Policy II. Drainage

The local drainage pattern consists of the stream (stone lined in places), several natural springs, a network of ditches and dykes draining the low-lying areas, a stone walled reservoir on the eastern demesne boundary and two derelict hydraulic rams.



Landscape policy

## LANDSCAPE FEATURES

### **Policy 12. Domestic Landscape**

*The domestic landscape refers to the lands immediately surrounding Durrow Abbey House, the farm buildings and the walled garden.*

(a.) The terraced lawns immediately to the north, east and south of the house should be restored to amenity grasslands or hay meadow, free from any tree or ornamental vegetation cover, to preserve views to and from the house. The ornamental garden of *Taxus baccata*, *cupressus* spp., *cryptomeria japonica*, *chamaecyparis lawsoniana* varieties, *berberis* spp., box and small flowering trees north of the west wing of the house should thus be removed.

(b.) The row of yew trees adjacent to the gate on the road between the church and the house should be removed.

(c.) The Boston Ivy (*parthenocissus tricuspidata*) planted beside the house in the twentieth century and now covering large expanses of the walls should be removed.

(d.) The woodland (excluding the motte) to the west of the house, interplanted in the twentieth century most notably with numerous yew trees and *rhus typhina*, should be maintained until the future use of the house, farm buildings and walled garden is determined.

(e.) The dense clump of Japanese knotweed growing adjacent to the eastern wall of the farm building complex should be removed. The demesne should be inspected to identify any further traces of this and other invasive species, and measures taken to eradicate them as necessary.

### **Policy 13. Walled Garden**

(a.) Any future use of the walled garden should guarantee the restoration and maintenance of the historic structures (any indicated on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century maps), the general spatial / circulation layout and the continued productivity of the garden.

(b.) Additional structures may be accommodated in the garden, if required for its productive use. The height of such structures should not exceed the height of the garden walls.

(c.) Use should be sought within the demesne for the large numbers of nursery beech trees growing in the garden.

(d.) The maintenance of the apple orchard in the walled garden is desirable.

### **Policy 14. St. Columba's Graveyard**

*The graveyard is in a neglected condition, the stone walls are covered in ivy and the headstones mostly displaced and also overgrown. The graveyard boundary has been planted with a combination of yew and beech trees.*

(a.) Maintenance of the graveyard should be in accordance with The Care and Conservation of Graveyards<sup>45</sup>, which states:

As a general rule, you should endeavour to alter the site as little as possible, indeed in the majority of cases, it is recommended that graveyard schemes limit themselves to vegetation clearance in an ecologically sensitive way.

(b.) A tree survey for the surrounding area of the graveyard has been undertaken. Except for overmature specimens constituting a danger to people and structures the trees planted around the graveyard boundary should be maintained.

(c.) The locations of all gravestones and the legible inscriptions should be recorded. An appropriate / interesting quantity of information (determined in consultation with the local parish) regarding names and dates recorded in the graveyard should be displayed discreetly at the site.

### **Policy 15. Ecclesiastical Wood**

*On all of the historic maps the church and graveyard are located within an area of woodland. This woodland area remains to the north of the graveyard in the present day, encircled by a pathway from which access is gained to St. Columcille's Island.*

(a.) The ecclesiastic wood should be maintained and restored where necessary. Where gaps in the canopy cover occur these should be filled with native woodland species.

(b.) The existing under-storey should be encouraged, as well as any patches of woodland grasses, ferns and herbs. A path through the wood, aligned according to the 1910-12 OS map, should be indicated by cutting back the under-storey.

### **Policy 16. The Motte**

(a.) The motte should be cleared of woody vegetation to preserve views of the surrounding landscape, and thereafter managed as grass, if possible, rather than scrub. Vegetation clearance

should be undertaken in a manner that preserves the integrity of the earthen mound and no vegetation should be removed which would threaten the stability of the mound. Any vegetation clearance work should be subject to an archaeological impact assessment.

(b.) The early twentieth century stone archway and other access structures (stone 'banister' and steps) should be maintained and repaired as necessary. No ivy should be removed from these structures except where necessary for structural repairs.

**Policy 17. St. Columcille's Island and Well**

(a.) A degree of vegetation clearance should be undertaken to preserve appropriate access to St. Columcille's Island and Well. Exotic tree species and under-storey should be removed.

(b.) The substantial quantity of deadwood on and adjacent to the island should be removed.

(c.) A few large native woodland trees such as oak and ash should be planted to enhance the 'grove' landscape and the island's habitat value. The development of willow groves in the poorly drained areas should be encouraged.

(d.) With the possible emergence of a surrounding fen the causeway should be raised and surfaced as necessary to ensure appropriate access to the island.

**MAN MADE FEATURES**

**Policy 18. Existing Building Fabric**

*In general, work should be carried out in accordance with the best conservation practice, BS 7913 Guide to the Principles of the Conservation of Historic Buildings.*

(a.) Existing building fabric, particularly surviving historical fabric, should always be treated with respect, and should be retained and repaired wherever possible.

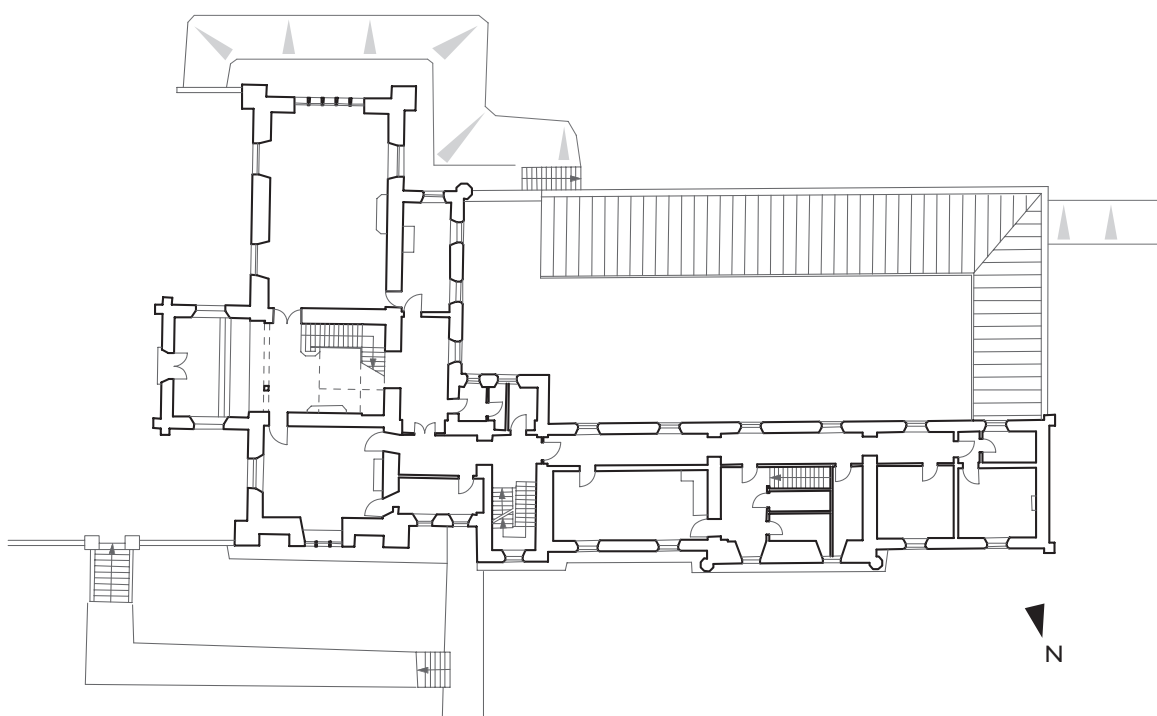
(b.) There should be a general presumption against the loss of existing fabric, unless a compelling and beneficial case is argued.

**Policy 19. Repair**

(a.) Repairs to the historic building fabric should be conservative in nature – to avoid the appearance of over restoration – but should be carried out to the highest conservation standards using materials of suitable or matching quality.

**Policy 20. Restoration**

(a.) Restoration of certain missing or damaged elements should be encouraged where the result fills a gap in an otherwise coherent design, thereby enhancing the understanding and appreciation of the historical asset. This may involve reinstating balusters of the terrace, iron work of the railings or gates. Any proposal for restoration work will



Durrow Abbey House, ground floor plan



only be supported if there is no significant secondary work which would have to be destroyed, and if there is sufficient evidence – in the surviving fabric or documentary records – to establish the original design beyond reasonable doubt.

### Policy 21. Alterations and Interventions

(a.) Alterations and interventions should be strictly controlled, particularly to the most significant elements, and should respect the architectural composition and integrity of the original building. However, it should be recognised that important financial, design, legislative and operational constraints will have to be addressed in any proposals developed for the buildings and their surroundings. Bearing this in mind it would not be reasonable (or necessarily desirable), to insist, for instance, that every room in Durrow Abbey House is restored to its original state; nor would it be practical or beneficial to prohibit alterations to the fabric, layout or use of the house which may be required to satisfy modern standards and operational needs.

### Policy 22. Additions

(a.) Where it is necessary for additions to be made to existing fabric these should be respectful in character, scale and materials. They should not imitate the original building.

### Policy 23. New Services

(a.) Where it is necessary for new services to be introduced in an existing building a policy of minimal intervention to the original fabric should be followed.

### Policy 24. Recording

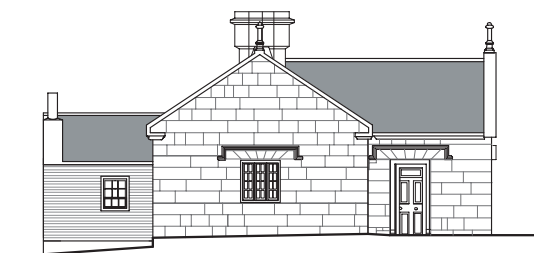
(a.) Prior to any major changes being undertaken to the built features at Durrow a full photographic record should be undertaken.

### Policy 25. Durrow Abbey House

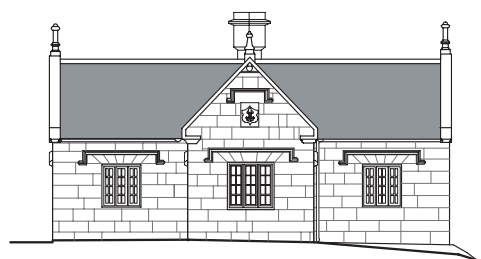
(a.) The exterior of Durrow Abbey House should be repaired with no alteration or extension to the exterior north, south or east elevations. There is scope for alteration to the western elevation fronting the sunken courtyard, however the contemplative character of the cloistered courtyard to the rear of the house should be retained.

(b.) There is scope for alteration to the interior of Durrow Abbey House. The layout of the building relates to the 1926 reconfiguration of the building by Ralph Byrne.

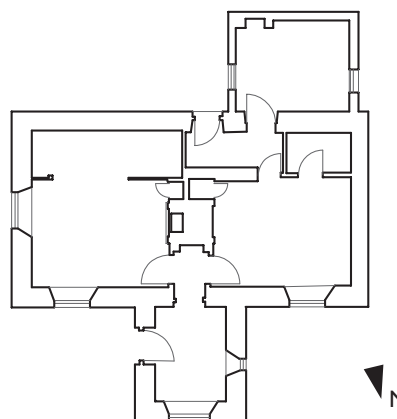
(c.) Signatures of tradesmen and contractors of the 1927 work survive on the plaster ceiling of the room providing the access hatch to the roof. These



Gate Lodge, east elevation



Gate Lodge, north elevation



Gate Lodge, ground floor plan

are important records of the social history of the building and should be preserved.

### Policy 26. Gate Lodge

*The gate lodge provides the first point of contact for a visitor to Durrow Abbey. It is a good example of the Tudor Gothic style, although modest in size and simple in design, it is an important component of the Durrow estate. It is the only gate lodge to remain in the same ownership as the house, and stands adjacent to the main entry gate to the estate.*

(a.) The gate lodge should be repaired, re-used and maintained. The interior has decayed greatly due to water ingress. The lodge could serve a number of uses including residential use, holiday accommodation or as a visitor interpretation center for the rest of the site. The brick extension on the south



Service yards, block plan

elevation should be removed. There is scope for re-building a single storey extension on the south elevation should additional accommodation be required in the future use of the building.

#### **Policy 27. Entrance Gates and Railings**

(a.) The wrought iron gates and railings are of high quality in their design and craftsmanship and should be carefully repaired using traditional forged techniques. Missing elements should be restored based on surviving evidence.

#### **Policy 28. Service yards**

*The service yards pre-date the current Durrow Abbey House and are a good example of the extent and type of service court required by big houses. The classical style of the buildings and the completeness of design adds to their interest. Fine materials and skilled craftsmanship are in evidence throughout. The east yard, containing the stables, was designed with some refinement, but remained incomplete without its east range. The many variations to the quality and regularity of the masonry found in the west yard suggests either numerous alterations or, more likely, a tightening of financial resources during the construction.*

(a.) In its current form, the service yard complex remains relatively intact and retains its architectural significance. While the roofs have largely failed, leading to advanced internal decay and dilapidation,

the masonry shells would appear to be sound and capable of reuse with relatively minor repair.

(b.) There is evidence for an intended east wing to the east yard which was never constructed. Should additional accommodation be required in any future use of the courtyards there is scope for building an additional wing to enclose this courtyard.

#### **Policy 29. Other man made features of secondary significance**

(a.) It is desirable for the retention and re-use of all man made features on the site including, the Two Storey Farm Manager's House, Octagonal Gardener's Cottage, Two Storey Gardener's Cottage and Ornamental Closet.

### **FUTURE USE OF THE SITE**

#### **Policy 30. Access and circulation routes**

(a.) The entry to the site from the road and exit from the site onto the road should be in accordance with the appropriate road safety standards (in terms of sight lines, passing lanes etc.).

(b.) Once adequate road access is in place, Route A should continue to provide the main public access to the site.

(c.) Any provision of additional access to the state owned lands depending on future use requirements should follow the historic circulation pattern of the demesne, so as to respect and preserve the original views and vistas.

### **Policy 31. Circulation**

(a.) Pedestrian access should be provided to St. Columba's Church, graveyard and well, based on existing routes. The existing pattern of paths and circulation routes should be used as a basis to inform the future use of the site.

(b.) Where new walking routes are required they should be made by cutting back the under-storey in the woodland areas and mowing a path through the grassland areas. These should be located to have minimal impact on the historic demesne and should be sensitively designed.

(c.) Direct vehicular access to the church and graveyard should only be provided for the disabled and for maintenance and emergency vehicles.

(d.) National Monuments visitor facilities and car parking should be located near the main entrance gate.

(e.) The co-operation of the neighbouring landowners in providing public access to the demense lands outside of state ownership should be sought. In particular, access should be sought to facilitate a walking route through the boundary woodland to the north of the entrance road and the High Wood (Esker Riada), and through the parkland south of the entrance road to the Coillte forest.

(f.) Department should consider seeking the cooperation of the neighbouring landowners in providing public access to the demesne lands outside of state ownership. In particular, access should be sought to facilitate a walking route through the boundary woodland north of the entrance road and the High Wood (Esker Riada), and through the parkland south of the entrance road to the Coillte forest.

(g.) In consultation with Offaly County Council and the local stakeholders the possibility of facilitating a pedestrian link between the site and the village of Durrow (specifically the parish car park) should be investigated. This would require the provision of a safe pedestrian crossing over the N52 at the Durrow crossroads as well as a walking route through the boundary woodland north of the entrance road to the site entrance.

### **Policy 32. Interpretation**

*Orientation and interpretation of the site should be provided for visitors to enhance their understanding of the importance and cultural significance of the site.*

(a.) Good quality information about the site should be made available all year round.

(b.) A link between the high cross and its original position should be made by either placing a replica structure on the site or making a visual link between the original location and the high cross.

### **Policy 33. New Development**

*In any future re-use of the site it may be necessary to provide additional accommodation or facilities in the form of carparking. Such interventions should be sited so as to have minimal visual and physical impact on the significant archaeological, demesne and man made elements of the site.*

(a.) The landscape and archaeological importance of the site will be respected in the siting of any future buildings or the provision of additional facilities.

(b.) There are few locations within the state ownership where a new building would be permissible due to the archaeological sensitivity of the site and its landscape value.

### **Policy 34. Management and Maintenance**

*Systematic care based on good maintenance and housekeeping is both cost effective and fundamental to good conservation. Every building needs regular maintenance to keep the wearing and weathering surfaces in good order, to protect the vulnerable internal fabric from damage, or to ensure that all service installations are operating effectively and to good purpose.*

(a.) A comprehensive maintenance regime should be prepared by a suitably qualified person, and formally adopted, with sufficient funds put aside for regular inspections and consequential works.

(b.) Essential information about each building, including materials, construction, services, maintenance and housekeeping procedures, should be recorded and updated regularly.



## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Herbert 1996, 32-3

<sup>2</sup>Ó Corráin 1972, 72

<sup>3</sup> FitzPatrick 1994, 27

<sup>4</sup>Annals of Loch Cé, Vol. II, 19

<sup>5</sup>Henry 1963, 83-4

<sup>6</sup> FitzPatrick, 1994, 28

<sup>7</sup> De Paor 1998, 203-5

<sup>8</sup> Meehan 1996, 13

<sup>9</sup> Meehan 1996, 14

<sup>10</sup> Manning 1995, 42

<sup>11</sup> Herbert 1996, 192-3

<sup>12</sup> FitzPatrick and O'Brien 1998, 30

<sup>13</sup> FitzPatrick 1994, 26

<sup>14</sup> Walsh and Geoghegan 1994, 95

<sup>15</sup> FitzPatrick 1994, 35

<sup>16</sup> FitzPatrick and O'Brien 1998, 98

<sup>17</sup> Bradshaw 1994, 198

<sup>18</sup> Annals of the Four Masters, 71-75

<sup>19</sup> Annals of Clonmacnoise, 227

<sup>20</sup> FitzPatrick 1994, 38

<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick and O'Brien 1998, 99-101

<sup>22</sup> Byrne 1994, 133

<sup>23</sup> Byrne 1994, 130

<sup>24</sup> Fitzpatrick and O'Brien 1998, 101

<sup>25</sup> Ellison 1995, 4-5

<sup>26</sup> Byrne 1994, 76

<sup>27</sup> The architect William Murray was employed by John Toler after he acquired the estate in 1815, to produce drawings for the extension and remodeling of Durrow Abbey House. A survey drawing of the existing eighteenth century house is included in this collection held at the Irish Architectural Archive.

<sup>28</sup> Lewis's Topographical dictionary of Ireland, London, 1837

<sup>29</sup> Michael Byrne notes that these circular loaves of bread in stone were still intact until the 1970s when they were stolen from the site.

<sup>30</sup> Byrne 1994, 78

<sup>31</sup> The Nation. 4<sup>th</sup> February 1843

<sup>32</sup> Drawings relating to Durrow Abbey are held by William H. Byrne and Sons, Suffolk Street, Dublin

<sup>33</sup> Drawings relating to Durrow Abbey are held by William H. Byrne and Sons, Suffolk Street, Dublin

<sup>34</sup> De Paor 1998, 203-5

<sup>35</sup> Environmental Impact statement, 2000

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*

<sup>37</sup> *ibid*

<sup>38</sup> Durrow Offaly, Extract from the Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland, Dublin, 1845

<sup>39</sup> Byrne 1994, 130

<sup>40</sup> Discussion with Dr Terence Dooley, 12<sup>th</sup> January 2005

<sup>41</sup> The Arts and Crafts Movement in Ireland, Paul Lamour

<sup>42</sup> Henry, Françoise Irish Art during the Viking invasions (800AD – 1020AD), London, 1967

<sup>43</sup> Terence Dooley, The Decline of the Big House in Ireland

<sup>44</sup> Simpson & Brown Architects, Conservation Plan for Donaldson's Hospital, Edinburgh, July 2004

<sup>45</sup> The Heritage Service of the Government of Ireland published The Care and Conservation of Graveyards in 1995 and 1997. The booklet provides advice on the planning and undertaking of graveyard clean-up projects.

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**AU** = Mac Airt, S. & Mac Niocaill, G. (ed & trans) 1983 *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, Dublin

**JRSAI** = *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*

**PRIA** = *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Definitions have been taken from the British Standard Guide to the Principles of Conservation BS7913:1988.

### ALTERATION

Work the object of which is to change or improve the function of a building or artefact or to modify its appearance.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

Scientific study and interpretation of the past, based on the uncovering, retrieval, recording and interpretation of information from physical evidence.

### CONSERVATION

Action to secure the survival or preservation of buildings, cultural artefacts, natural resources, energy or any other thing of acknowledged value for the future.

### CONVERSION

Alteration, the object of which is the change of use of a building or artefact, from one use or type to another.

### DESIGN

Abstract concept of a building or artefact. It can exist in the mind or on paper and if realised, it can be represented in the building or artefact itself.

### HISTORIC FABRIC

Physical material of which a building or artefact is made

### INTERVENTION

Any action which has a physical effect on the fabric of a building or artefact.

### MAINTENANCE

Routine work necessary to keep the fabric of a building, the moving parts of machinery, grounds, gardens or any artefact, in good order.

### PRESERVATION

State of survival of a building or artefact, whether by historical accident or through a combination of protection and active conservation.



#### REBUILDING

Remaking, on the basis of a recorded or reconstructed design, a building or part of a building or artefact which has been irretrievably damaged or destroyed.

#### RECONSTRUCTION

Re-establishment of what occurred or what existed in the past, on the basis of documentary or physical evidence.

#### REPAIR

Work beyond the scope of regular maintenance to remedy defects, significant decay or damage caused deliberately or by accident, neglect, normal weathering or wear and tear; the object of which is to return the building or artefact to good order, without alteration or restoration.

#### REPLICATION

Making an exact copy or copies of a building or artefact.

#### RESTORATION

Alteration of a building, part of a building or artefact which has decayed, been lost or damaged or is thought to have been inappropriately repaired or altered in the past, the objective of which is to make it conform again to its design or appearance at a previous date.

#### REVERSIBILITY

Concept of work to a building, part of a building or artefact being carried out in such a way that it can be reversed at some future time, without any significant damage having been done to the original fabric.

## SITE CHRONOLOGY

585 – 597AD	Foundation of monastery at Durrow by St. Columcille
Seventh century	Book of Durrow was written
Ninth century	High Cross of Durrow was created
Twelfth century	Foundation of Augustinian priory of St. Mary
c.1186	Construction of motte at Durrow by Hugh de Lacy
c. 1213/1214	Re-construction of castle at Durrow by the English
1570	Monastery of Durrow was dissolved by Henry VIII.
1540s	The lands of Durrow were regranted to the prior of the now dissolved monastery, Contan O'Molloy, on a 21 year lease.
1553	Contan O'Molloy was killed. (Obits of Kilcormac)
c.1561	The lands of Durrow were leased to Nicholas Herbert
1574	Nicholas Herbert received full grant of the property, succeeded by Richard and in turn by George, the Third Baronet.
1712	George Herbert, Third Baronet died. His sister Frances Herbert, married to Major Patrick Fox, succeeded to estate.
1733	According to the account of the diocese made by Bishop Mant, the church was out of repair 'but ye said Mrs Fox pulled it down and rebuilt it at her own expense.'
1802	"The estate of Durrow Abbey passed to Herbert Rawson Stepney. The church a venerable structure, was repaired in 1802, by a gift of £450, and a loan of £50, from the Board of First Fruits; and contains monuments to the Stepney and Armstrong families". (Lewis' Topographical Dictionary, 1837)
1815	Property sold to John Toler, First Lord Norbury.
1829	Drawings prepared by architect, William Murray for embellishing and extending Durrow House.
1831	Hector John Toler succeeded as Earl of Norbury.
1832	Barony of Norbury passed to Hector John Norbury.
	Plans for a larger country house in a Gothic Revival style prepared.
1837	"A new mansion house being built at Durrow Abbey house similar in style to Pain's Castle Bernard (Kinnitty Castle) built a few years earlier but not as grand". (Lewis' Topographical Dictionary, 1837) Following completion of the new building in 1837 the house (Durrow Park) was renamed Durrow Abbey.
1839, January	Hector John Toler assassinated. Work to house probably stopped. Eulogy given by Lord Oxmantown of Birr stated that 'He was in he act of building a splendid residence, to be permanent residence of his family, and consequently the center of a great expenditure...'
1843, January	Durrow House was burnt and demolished
1854	The Countess of Norbury owned the abbey by 1854. At the time there were two gatehouses occupied by Mary Reilly and William Lyons. Total acreage of the demesne was 605 acres 1rd. 16per. Remains of a row of houses in the high wood.
Nineteenth century	Estate passed to Hector Robert Toler.
1888	Durrow abbey church abandoned and new church built on another site.
1899	Hector Robert Toler died. Otway Scarlett Toler succeeded to Estate.
1899-1922	House completed with a four storey gabled break front, with entrance hall at ground level. Doric porte cochere built at front.
1913	Cemetery closed by order of the local government board.
1914	Reference to new avenue and new terraces being built by Toler at Durrow.
1923, May	Durrow Abbey house burned down.

c.1926	Reconstruction of house begun. Work undertaken by Messrs Crampton with Ralph Byrne as architect.
1950s	OPW took 'guardianship' of the High Cross and of three early Christian graveslabs.
1950, February	Durrow Abbey Sale of furniture and effects of Mrs Graham Toler.
1950s	House passes out of the Toler family. Durrow Abbey became the home of Mr and Mrs Ralph Slazenger. Subsequently purchased by Mr and Mrs M.M. Williams. Owned by Mr and Mrs Patrick O'Brien of Navan, Co Meath before the OPW.
2000, July	Unsuccessful planning application submitted for mixed use development of Durrow Abbey. Proposals included an hotel, golf course, sporting leisure, retail and residential development.
2003, December	The Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government purchased Durrow Abbey House and thirty one hectares of land.



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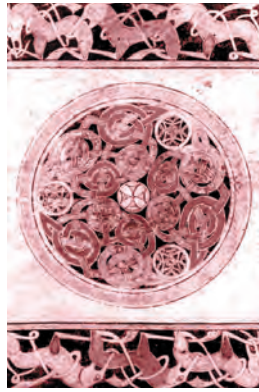
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