

Reference: Proposed Addition to RPS of County Offaly

Building of note: Banagher Corporation 1628 plantation workers' cottage

Building Location: Queen Street or Puckagh Row, Banagher

This submission concerns the proposal that this pre 1700's property is added to the Record of Protected structures for County Offaly on account of its historic, archaeological, architectural and social significance. A brief argument for its inclusion to the RPS is as follows:

The Conservation, Interpretation and Management Plan, titled 'Historic Banagher' prepared in 2018 by Howley Hayes Architects in conjunction with The Heritage Council and Offaly County Council identified the property as the only surviving corporation worker's cottage associated with the Corporation of Banagher Borough 1628.

The cartographic study undertaken as part of the conservation plan identified that the current urban layout of Banagher is founded upon two former settlements: the early walled urban settlement of Banagher and the ecclesiastical settlement associated with Saint Rynagh. These settlements were consolidated into one town as part of the Corporation of Banagher Borough in 1628, through the designation of corporation lands, which extended along Banagher's Main Street to the hill of Banagher, and also involved the creation of two new streets, that of 1. Puckagh Row [Queen Street] and 2. Harbour Street. This finding by HHA was significant, as it greatly expanded our understanding of the extent and nature of the seventeenth-century plantation town, indicating that it was more extensive in scale than previously understood. Further cartographic studies (Logan Map 1828 and First Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1838-39) undertaken in the conservation plan identified that these corporation lands were developed by the corporation authorities with terraces of corporation workers' cottages, composed of unusually small single-storey dwellings fronting onto Main Street, Puckagh Row and Harbour Street, without individual land holdings, but rather sharing a commonage, which extended to the rear of the terraces.

It was noted in the HHA conservation plan that these terraces of corporation houses appear to be a unique feature to Banagher and is possibly of national significance for its special interest as a unique feature of Irish Tudor plantation settlement. Further studies have since identified that these worker's cottages are most likely attributable to Sir Mathew De Renzy Kt (1577-1634) the German-born cloth merchant, who fled from England to Ireland after he was declared bankrupt and settled in the area c.1613 where he aspired to establish himself as a plantation landowner by petitioning the then Lord Deputy to plant Banagher. In his letters to the Lord Deputy, held at The National Archive UK (TNA UK), De Renzi recommends the Lord Deputy to employ the local population in the cloth industry, which most likely explains the extensive development of workers' cottages and how Banagher subsequently came to benefit from a flourishing woollen trade during the brief periods of peace in the seventeenth century, and again in 1780 when the British Parliament withdrew all trade restrictions.

The HHA conservation plan identified that one corporation worker's cottage has survived in the town and is located on the south aspect of Queen Street or Puckagh Row approximately 80m from Main Street but is currently without statutory protections as a recorded monument or protected structure. The seventeenth-century plantation maps indicate that Puckagh Row was strategically developed by the corporation and cut through the historic ecclesiastical settlement associated with St. Rynagh. In the HHA conservation plan, this property was documented on Pg. 38, under B6: Corporation Lands and Workers' Cottage where it is noted:

B6: Corporation Lands and Workers' Cottages: The cartographic study identified that the corporation of Banagher borough 1628, included corporation lands which extended along the eastern side of Main Street from the old town to the hill of Banagher and along Harbour Street and Puckagh Row, as noted on the conjectural map (Fig. 35). The Logan map and First Edition OS map, indicate these areas to be occupied with long terraces of unusually small dwelling houses which are possibly workers' cottages relating to the 1628 corporation. What is most unusual about these properties, aside from their modest size, is that they do not appear to have had individual land holdings but rather shared a commonage, located to the rear of the terraces. A possible surviving example of a seventeenth-century workers' cottage, can be found on the south aspect of Queen Street (Puckagh Row) approximately 80m from Main Street. It is consistent with the Logan map, First and Second Edition OS maps and is situated very close to the roadside. It is a modest single storey cottage structure of random rubble, with traditional half door, and two window openings, the smallest of which appears to be original. It stands alone today, however the rubble stonewall of the front elevation is jagged in profile, suggesting it was formerly part of a terrace. The gable wall is of rubble stone to the eaves level, and has been built up in concrete blockwork to enclose the attic gable. The pitched roof is of modern concrete tiles, which most likely replaced traditional thatch.

The property is also identified on the 'Built Heritage' drawing P.79 as a 'building of note' and also on the 'Public Realm Improvements Projects & Heritage Walking Trail' of the HHA plan as a key heritage point of interest along the proposed heritage walk.

The Urban Archaeological Survey of County Offaly (1986), John Bradley identified Banagher as an important archaeological centre and recommended the need for further studies on the town's heritage. It was out of this recommendation that the town was included in the statutory Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) as a 'historic town'. In his survey Bradley was of the opinion that no above ground remains of the seventeenth-century town have survived, however this has been called into question by the conservation plan findings, and supports the significance of the surviving cottage.

In consideration of the historic, archaeological, architectural and social significance of the cottage, and its special interest association with the following:

- The Corporation of Banagher Borough 1628
- Sir Mathew De Renzi Kt (1577-1634)
- Banagher's seventeenth-century woollen trade
- The development of an Irish Tudor plantation town, influenced by European ideas on plantation settlement
- A unique feature of Irish Tudor plantation settlement

I strongly recommend that it is added to the Record of Protected structures for County Offaly.

As the only known surviving early seventeenth-century worker's cottage of the Banagher corporation, I would ask that Offaly County Council strongly consider this proposal, in the interest of preserving this important aspect of the town's cultural significance and as a means of enhancing public appreciation and understanding of Banagher as a historic town, and to help safeguard its preservation for future generations to enjoy.

Please note: This proposal is supported by the building owner, who was consulted prior to making this submission.



Fig. 59: Extract from Logan's Map c1828 showing Puckagh Row

B6: Corporation Lands and Workers' Cottages

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Fig. 60: Photograph of surviving cottage on Queen Street/ Puckagh Row (image taken from Google Streetview)

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It stands alone today, however the rubble stonewall of the front elevation is jagged in profile, suggesting it was formerly part of a terrace. The gable wall is of rubble stone to the eaves level, and has been built up in concrete blockwork to enclose the attic gable. The pitched roof is of modern concrete tiles, which most likely replaced traditional thatch.



Fig. 61: Photograph of J.J. Hough's Singing Pub historic roof and chimney with doorway (photograph by E. Broderick)

The archeological record concerning works to properties along Main Street suggests that as the town expanded, these cottages were either demolished to make way for larger townhouses or were modified and incorporated into larger structures. One property on Main Street which appears to be a composite of older structures and may retain fabric of the original workers' cottages is J.J. Hough's Singing Pub (Fig. 56). The double-pile layout of the ground floor appears to be an amalgamation of older structures. A significant phase of its alteration c.1800, involved the rebuilding and widening of the chimney stacks to carry the ridge beams of an 'M-shaped roof', which cleverly spans over the entire property thus consolidating the older structures under one roof. A false chimney stack was constructed on the north gable, which supports the roof over the north gable with archway at ground level.

There are a number of archways along Banagher's Main Street. In the UAS of Co. Offaly, Bradley identifies these as potentially significant, as such archways are often a feature of seventeenth-century towns. In the case of Banagher, these archways would have provided access to the commonage behind the workers cottages. Identifying their date is challenging, as many are coated in render which conceals the masonry.