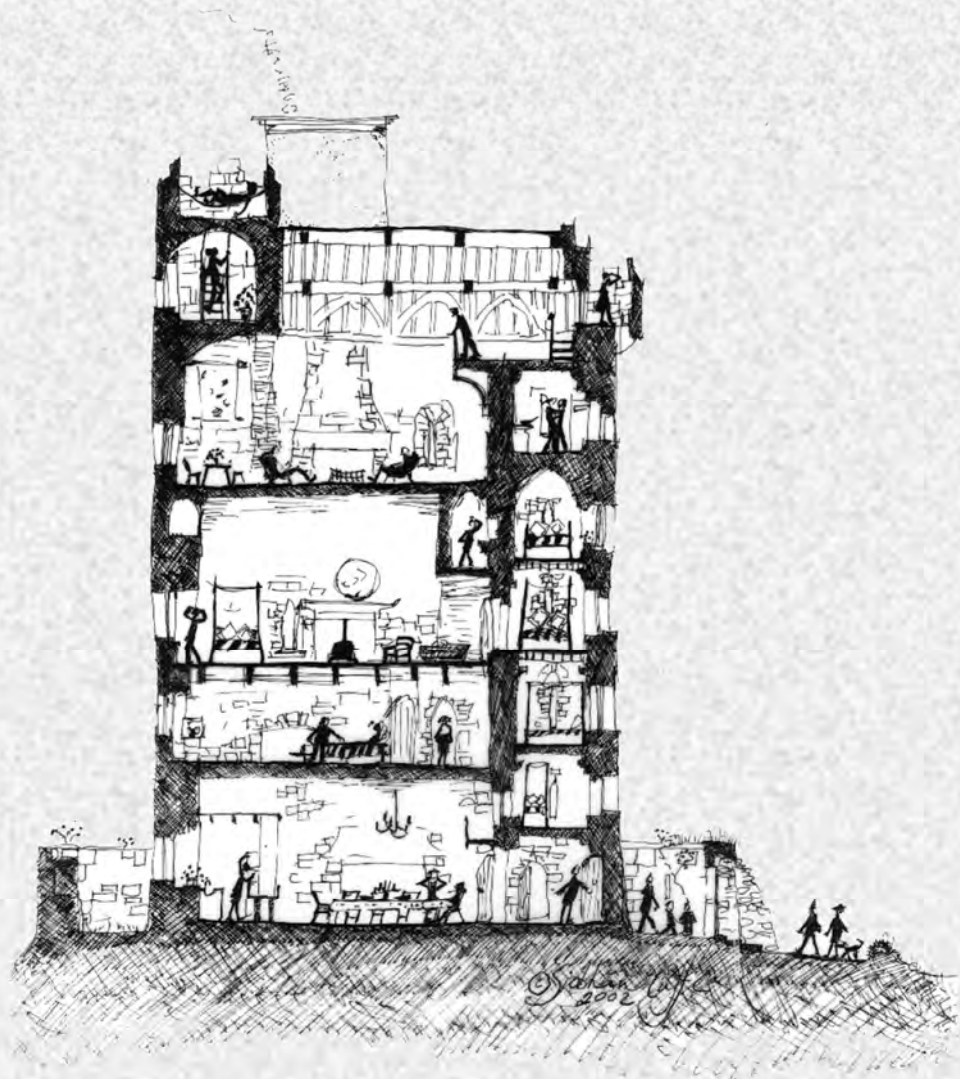


A D A P T I N G T H E IRISH TOWER HOUSE



HOW CAN A 15TH-CENTURY IRISH TOWER HOUSE, CURRENTLY IN A STATE OF NEGLECT, BE ADAPTIVELY REUSED TO MEET CONTEMPORARY SOCIETAL NEEDS WHILE PRESERVING ITS HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL INTEGRITY AND BE USED AS GUIDELINES FOR OTHER TOWER HOUSE PROJECTS?

SELINA MEZZEN KEOGH

MASTER OF INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE (ADAPTIVE REUSE)
2024/2025

MASTER THESIS

SUPERVISOR: DR. CHRIS BESSEMANS



*1- Burnchurch Castle and Turret
Source: Flickr 2017*



2- Ballygriffy Castle, Co. Clare, Ireland
Source: James Atruett



3- Rockfleet Castle, Co. Mayo, Ireland
Source: Tourism Ireland

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Chris Bessemans, for his guidance, support, prompt email replies and thorough feedback throughout these last few months. I truly appreciate the time you have put into the meetings we had and the discussions about architecture, ruins and adapting them appropriately.

I am also grateful to my design tutors in semester two of 2024, Nikolaas Vande Keere, Guillem Pons Ros and Malinde Valee for their thoughtful comments, suggestions, and guidance for the design aspect of this thesis. Designing a distillery into a ruinous building was not simple and I could not have accomplished it without their ideas and knowledge.

A special thank you to my colleagues and friends Izzet, Amna, Sena, Paul and Phan who gave me support during moments of stress and uncertainty. Their encouragement helped me immensely.

Lastly a thank you to my partner Ysmael, my parents Therese, Don, Step parent Richard and aunty Diane for all reading my drafts and giving me feedback and praise.

ABSTRACT

Ireland boasts a rich heritage of medieval artifacts, including approximately 7000 tower houses scattered across its cities, towns, and countryside. These structures, dating from the 15th to 17th centuries, often lie in a state of neglect, with no definitive plans for their preservation. This thesis aims to understand the architectural and historical integrity of the tower house typology and create guidelines with adaptive reuse strategies to aid their preservation in a meaningful way. This objective will be achieved through the conceptual adaptive reuse case study, that was completed on the Burnchurch Castle site located in County Kilkenny, Ireland. Where the existing tower house, turret and bawn is adapted to be a whiskey distillery, barn owl conservation and meeting point for the proposed use.

The thesis reflects on the Burnchurch Castle case study's attempts to preserve the architectural and historical integrity of the said site and overall tower house typology. Through this reflection of the balance between integrity preservation and contemporary use comes guidelines that hope to assist in potential adaptive reuse projects of tower houses in a similar condition. For this thesis, the similar conditions refers to tower houses that are neglected with no modern adaptations yet remain structurally sound.



*4- Burnchurch Castle & Turret Current Day
Source: Office of Public Works Ireland 2024*

GLOSSARY

Alure: A walkway along the top of a wall, behind the parapets.

Ashlar: Smooth squared stones used in the building.

Arrow Loop: A narrow vertical slit in the wall for archers to shoot through.

Bartizan: A small structure projecting from a building and serving as a lookout.

Batter: A sloping part of a curtain wall or in the middle of an outside wall.

Bawn: A wall enclosing a courtyard

Buttress: A structure of stone or brick built against a wall to strengthen or support it.

Corbel: A projection jutting out from a wall to support a structure above it such as a floor.

Crenelations: A notched battlement made up of alternative openings and merlons.

Curtain Wall: Fortified walls which connect towers or halls.

Garderobe: A toilet built into the thickness of the walls or sometimes projected out of it.

Great Hall: The building in the inner ward that housed the main meeting and dining area for the castle's residents.

Joggled Voussoirs: Masonry units that interlock, like puzzle pieces, to form an arch.

Machicolation: A projection in the battlements of a wall with openings on the floor which hot water or rocks can be thrown down to raiders below.

Motte: an earthwork mound on which a castle is built.

Murder Hole: A hole in the building floor that allows guards to drop rocks and hot water down onto oncoming raiders.

Ope: A narrow window, used for firing arrows out of.

Parapet: Protective wall at the top of a fortification, around the outer side of the wall walk.

Portcullis: A strong, heavy grating that can be lowered down grooves on each side of a gateway to block access.

Turret: A small tower located on or near the main tower, usually in circular form and used as a lookout.

Quoins: Corner stones on the castle, usually large pieces of stone

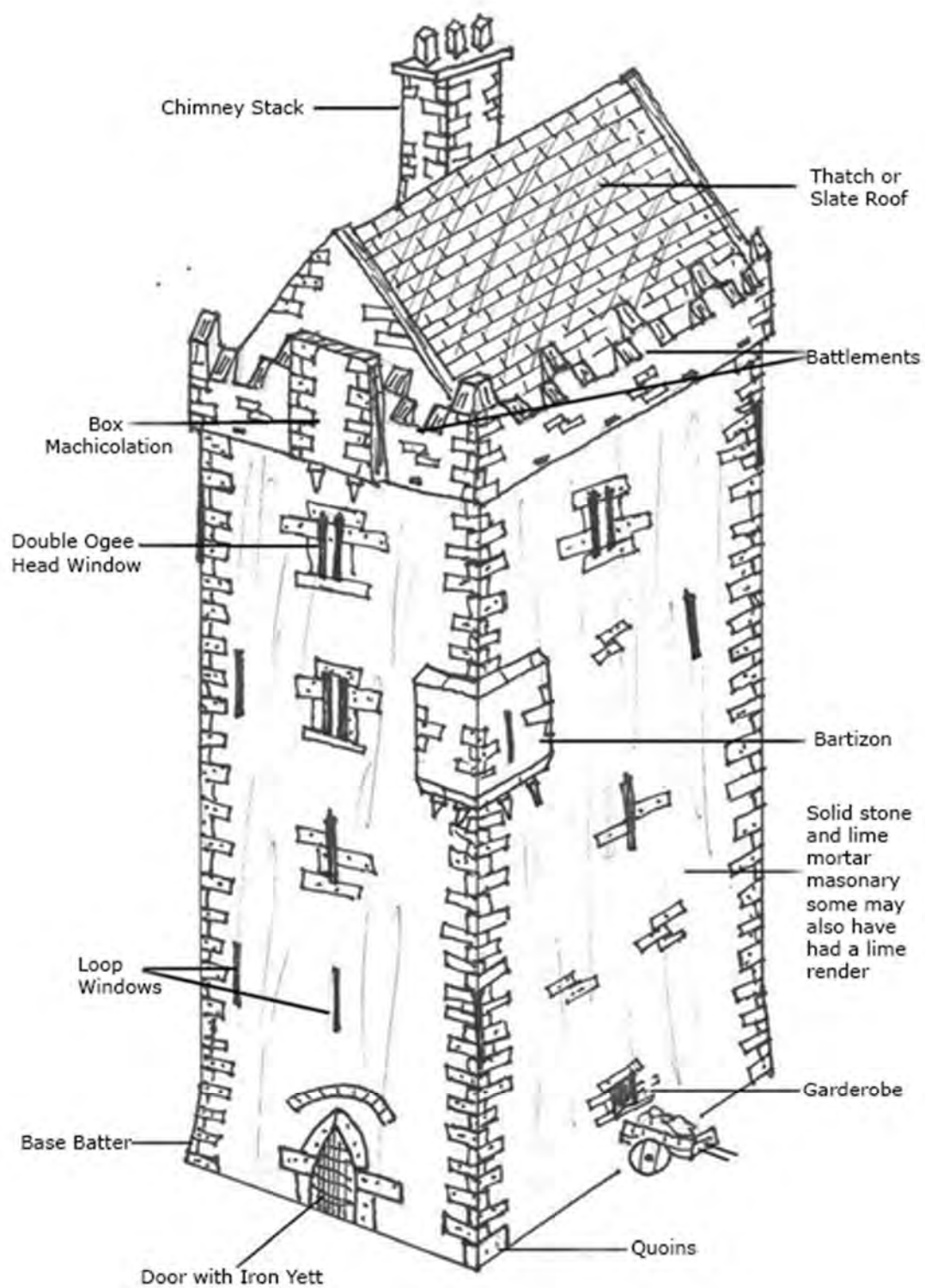
Yett: A gate with latticed wrought iron bars used for defensive purposes.

*These terms were found from a variety of sources in the footnotes.*¹²³

¹ T.J Ray, Castles: The Middle Ages, Castle & Siege Terminology, 2001, <https://home.olemiss.edu/~tjray/medieval/castle.htm>

² Merriam Webster, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>

³ Collins English Dictionary, Collins Dictionary, 2024, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>



5- Tower House Diagram with Labels
 Drawn by Rory O'Shaughnessy 2011

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
GLOSSARY	
INTRODUCTION	4
LITERATURE REVIEW	7
METHODOLOGY	9
Step One: Understanding the Tower House Typology	9
Step Two: Finding a Neglected Irish Tower House to Create a Case Study	10
Step Three: Reviewing the Conceptual Intervention	11
Step Four: Creating Guidelines	11
CHAPTER ONE: Before the Tower House Typology	12
Gaelic Ireland till 1169	12
Ecclesiastical Architecture in Gaelic Ireland	15
Anglo Norman Ireland 1169-1200	17
Anglo Norman Ireland 1200-1300	20
Anglo Norman Ireland 1300- 1400	23
Summary	26
CHAPTER TWO: The Irish Tower House	27
The 1429 Grant	29
Architectural Features	33
Defensive features	37
The Rapid Decline	46
Historical Paintings	48
Current Day Situation	52
CHAPTER THREE: Burnchurch Castle	56
The Chosen Tower House	56
History	58
Historical Architectural Detail	61
Burnchurch Castle 2024	67
Future of Site	71
Potential of Site	71
CHAPTER FOUR: The Burnchurch Castle Case-Study and Reflections	75

Owl's Roost Distillery	75
The Site:	76
The Bawn:	85
The Turret:	89
The Tower House:	92
Ground Floor: Storage	94
Level 1/2/3: The Distillery	99
Level 4: The Hall.....	110
Level Five and Six:	113
CHAPTER FIVE: Guidelines to Preserve the Architectural and Historical Integrity of the Tower House	117
Guidelines for the Adaptive Reuse of Tower Houses.....	117
CONCLUSION	120
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	122



*6- Poulakerry Castle
Source: University of Colorado Boulder*

INTRODUCTION

The tower house is the most common form of castle type in the Irish landscape, serving as one of the primary artifacts of Irish life from the late medieval period.⁴ It is estimated that up to 7,000 tower houses were built between 1400 and 1650, with approximately 2,000 still standing today.* Despite their historical significance and large quantities, the majority of these tower houses have fallen into neglect. There is a small fraction of the typology that have been repurposed as residences or museums, most remain in a deteriorating state letting nature take over with red ivy vines being the catalyst to their demise. The Irish government has no immediate plans to implement adaptive reuse or necessary conservative strategies for the majority of typology's preservation. As these architectural monuments are facing increasing deterioration, this paper aims to answer the question:

"How can a 15th-century Irish tower house, currently in a state of neglect, be adaptively reused to meet contemporary societal needs while preserving its historical and architectural integrity, and serve as guidelines for other tower house projects?"

This paper aims to answer this question by first examining the tower house typology. Understanding its historical context is crucial for effectively translating a building from past to present. Academic, writer and designer Sally Stone emphasizes this aspect is the utmost important part of the remodelling process, stating that a site creates a direct connection with the past and reusing and adapting its fabric is a way that explicitly establishes a relationship with history and the society that constructed it.⁵ In the tower house's case, considering its origins and lifespan and the high level of neglect of the typology, an analysis will be done to compliment Stone's theory. The analysis will span the period before the tower houses were built, the 200 years of inhabitation, the decline of use in the 1600's, the resurgence of popularity the 1800's leading to their present day use. Additionally, this section will explore whether the tower house is loaded architecture* considering how its association with castles may have symbolised invasion in Ireland, shaped by Anglo Irish and Gaelic Irish political dynamics. This perspective will provide insights to how both groups viewed and utilised these structures and therefore add to the integrity of the building.

⁴ Rory Sherlock, Changing Perceptions: Spatial Analysis and the Study of the Irish Tower House (Paris: Publications du CRAHM, 2010) Page 239

*NB: Uncertain, no exact record.

⁵ Sally Stone, UnDoing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse and Cultural Memory. (New York Routledge 2019), page 19

*Loaded Architecture: buildings or structures that carry deep symbolic, political meanings beyond their physical form.

Having a broader idea of what the tower house meant to the users and community of the time will support a meaningful translation into contemporary use, aiding the creation of intervention guidelines for the overall typology. To create these guidelines, a classic tower house in a current state of neglect, with no contemporary or modern interventions, will be selected for a detailed conceptual contemporary case study. As this thesis is written after the completion of the Master Project, the case has already been selected and is the Burnchurch Castle the estimated date of construction being the early 15th Century. This tower house site has been conceptually adapted to barn owl conservation site and whiskey distillery by Selina Keogh. This intervention will be analysed and reflected upon through architectural theories, comparisons to other tower houses and personal reflections to contribute to the formulation of intervention guidelines.

The final guidelines extracted from this process aim to give a balance between preserving the buildings integrity and enabling its contemporary use. It is important to note that these guidelines are not strict rules but rather flexible suggestions for intervening in other tower houses in similar conditions.



7- Ballymarkahan Castle in Ruins, County Clare
Source: Roaring Water Journal 2010



8- Dunbeacon Castle Ruins
Source: Roaring Water Journal 2010



9- Dunbeacon Castle Ruins
Source: Roaring Water Journal 2010

LITERATURE REVIEW

The available material surrounding the Irish tower is somewhat limited in comparison to other late medieval architecture in Europe. Irish academic Tom McNeill states that Ireland is remarkable among the countries of western Europe for its scholarly neglect of its castles after the early years of this century (referring to the 20th Century).⁶ Apart from a few paintings from 19th and 18th centuries, documentation on tower houses remains scarce.

In the 1920's Harold Leask, an Irish architectural historian, archaeologist and the first inspector of National Monuments of the Irish Free State (Ireland's country name from 1922-1937), began researching these monuments despite limited funding and the challenges of Ireland's transition to independence. His work marked a turning point in the study of tower houses and acted as a catalyst for academic interest in recent decades. Below is a timeline outlining the prominent authors and areas related to the tower house.

Timeline:

- 1400-1600's- Economic & political sources
- 1790- Gabriel Beranger (painting)
- 1800- Marie Anne De Bovet, Samuel Spode, Mary Darby (painting)
- 1928- William Butler Yeats (poem)
- 1940- Harold Leask
- 1990- Tom McNeill, Colm Donnelly and Samuel Lewis
- 2000-2010- Rory Sherlock
- 2010-2020- Duncan Berryman, Samantha Morris, Billy Colfer, Dave Swift, Colm Donnelly, Rory Sherlock, John. H Andrews, David Carver, Micheal j. O'Kelly, Victoria McAlister, Tadgh O'Keeffe, Damien Duffy
- 2020-2030- To be continued

The research to date has predominantly focused on architectural features, chronology and local and regional distribution. However, few studies have sought to explore how these buildings functioned as social environments.⁷ Studies have explored the defensive and residential nature of these buildings, questioning the extent of their fortification and whether they were as defensively constructed as medieval castles traditionally were. In 2019, historian and archaeologist Victoria McAlister noted that few studies have looked at Gaelic Irish, Anglo Irish and early modern buildings forms as a unified whole with fewer still have sought to locate tower houses within a wider tradition.⁸

⁶ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 1

⁷ Rory Sherlock, *Changing Perceptions: Spatial Analysis and the Study of the Irish Tower House* (Paris: Publications du CRAHM, 2010) page 239

⁸ Victoria L. McAlister, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 1

These varying approaches to the tower house in general, has in research contexts, led to some disagreements about the exacts of some elements for the tower house. As many of the tower houses are in a very ruinous situation and overgrown with vegetation and debris, often floorless and inaccessible leaving only a few to have been thoroughly surveyed.⁹ This makes it even harder for any commencing studies to get clearer answers. Although it is understood they are indeed a typology through architectural form, there are differences such as natural elements that differ from each county and the different families inhabited that added their own preferences, make it such a complex system to analyse. Despite these difficulties, research is supplemented by information concerning politics, economy and other monumental architecture of the time which helps fill in some gaps when trying to understand the tower house.

Additionally, it is important to note that the gap in literature and academic interest in the earlier 20th century was potentially a consequence of the separating of Ireland to the United Kingdom of Great Britain. In the years following where Ireland worked on being an independent country, some sectors were neglected such as heritage. Furthermore, cultural and preconceived thoughts from nationalists of Ireland in the time, castles of all kinds could be seen as symbols of invasive and therefore unwanted. This attitude contributed to the mass burning of manors and castles in 1922, which to a certain extent could reflect how Irish society, academics and policymakers perceived, researched and preserved medieval structures. Whilst this is not the primary focus of the study, it is important to acknowledge this element.

As the research is working with significant gaps, personal reflections will be used with the help of any available historical sources including painting and poetry. This combination will hopefully be enough to understand and gather relevant information about the historical integrity of the tower house and come to an educated conclusion.

⁹ Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 3

METHODOLOGY

Assessing how can a 15th century Irish tower house, currently in a state of neglect, be adaptively reused to meet contemporary societal needs whilst preserving its historical and architectural integrity and be used as a guideline for other tower house projects, essentially requires four steps.

Step One: Understanding the Tower House Typology

Firstly, an overall understanding of the typology must be done through attempting to comprehend the tower house's historical and social significance of its time. As referred to in the introduction, scholars including architect and writer, Christoph Grafe emphasizes the importance of understanding a building before its adaptive reuse because it ensures that the historical and cultural significance of the structure is respected and preserved. Grafe states that by thoroughly understanding the building's context, history and original purpose, architects and planners can make informed decisions that honour the past while adapting the building for contemporary use.¹⁰ This approach isn't purely contemporary. As according to 19th century poet Thomas Stearns Eliot, historical importance lies in the coexistence of the timeless and the chronological with an understanding that embraces both the eternal and the temporal. Every practice, whether in the present or past, exists within a particular historical moment and context. The significance of the tower house, for example, is partly explained by the conditions from which it emerged.¹¹ With this in mind, the research will be done through the collective information of society and politics before the time of construction. There were significant changes to society and politics just prior to the time of the tower house due to the involvement of the Anglo-Normans in Gaelic Ireland. These changes shouldn't be overlooked as they could provide insights to why and how the tower house became so popular. Through this analysis, it is hoped that this socio-political contextual analysis, though modest, will be able to contribute to delineate whether the tower house was related to vernacular Gaelic architecture and society or more to the new Ireland that began in 1169. Finding out if they were purely an Anglo-Norman influence or if they do indeed have a connection to the Gaelic Ireland that will help understanding how we can sensibly translate these typologies to contemporary society.

Secondly, the period of inhabitation of the tower house will be looked at through architectural features. Finding the design intent, functions, how they were built and used can only add to our understanding and provide insights for preserving the integrity of the tower house in the later adaptive reuse case study.

¹⁰ Christoph Grafe. *Umbaukultur, The Architecture of Altering*. (Berlin: Dom Publishers, 2010) page 39

¹¹ Koenraad Van Cleempoel & Nikolaas Vande Keere, Saidja Heynickx, Bie Plevoets, Nadin Augustiniok. *Trace, Notes on Adaptive Reuse, On Collectivity Vol III* (Faculty of Architecture and Arts: 2020), page 49

Given that these buildings were inhabited for a period of approximately 200 years, it will be interesting to see how their use and their meaning might have changed. Particularly as the typology transitioned from the medieval period to the renaissance, it is hoped to provide an interesting lifespan and we assume that the architecture will reflect this. Considering that the typology has known a significant decline in use to the point where the majority was left abandoned and left to decay, this seems all the more important. Understanding the way the building was used either as a residential or defensive way, or both, will help with the programming of the proposed intervention.

Thirdly, the decline of use in the 1600's will be analysed through the lens of policy changes, internal conflicts and changing preferences in living conditions. This will help us understand why there was such a drastic abandoning of these once popular buildings. This abandoning could point to the typology as being considered as loaded architecture which will in its turn be important for the reflection of the case study. Therefore, this timepoint and history must not be neglected as it provides important insights to the guidelines created at the end of the chapter.

Finally, the brief resurgence of popularity in the 1800's along with the current day situation of tower houses will be analysed and understood in a quantitative way. Focusing on government funding, number of tower houses under this funding and generally how they are being used throughout the country.

Step Two: Finding a Neglected Irish Tower House to Create a Case Study

Choosing an appropriate neglected Irish Tower House for the conceptual adaptive reuse case study has to be done in a way that can reflect the overall typology of the tower houses in order to give any type of guidelines. As a majority of Irish tower houses are neglected and in ruins, with only a small percentage being used for more contemporary ways there must be an effort to choose one that is not already intervened. To find an appropriate tower house for the conceptual intervention, a simple brief was created to keep things realistic and confounded within the limited study scope of this thesis.

The brief:

1. A tower house located in Ireland.
2. Preferably earlier years due to the potential of providing more information of how they were inhabited over the 200 years.
3. Has architectural potential in regards to the structure.
4. Not intervened already in a contemporary sense.
5. Has abundant information available such as plans, history, current owners etc.
6. Located nearby a town or city that allows for more connections to transport, visibility, community etc.
7. Site must be accessible for construction.

This tower house will then be analysed through architectural form and any historical information available to give a sense of the individual tower house alongside the overall typology collected from step one. The understanding of the historical and current day situation of the tower house will be used for the reflection of the adaptive reuse case study in the next step.

Step Three: Reviewing the Conceptual Intervention

Once an appropriate tower house has been selected, a conceptual case study that has already been done within the tower house will be explained and reflected on. This will be done through a personal and theoretical architectural lens. This part of the thesis looks at both the macro aspects of the typology and the micro elements of the selected tower house prior to the conceptual intervention and whether the contemporary reuse makes sense and contributes to their overall potential. For clarity, the macro approach will relate to the tower houses overall meaning found in the first part of the research and the micro will relate to architectural details such as what was originally there, the original builders' intentions, immediate site context, climate, potentiality of site and any other important elements that the site has. If there are any changes or suggestions to the conceptual case study, to benefit the integrity of the selected tower house, they will be mentioned suggested here.

Step Four: Creating Guidelines

From the curated analysis and reflections, guidelines will be made. These guidelines will be in tune with both the macro and micro aspects of the chosen tower house and overall tower house typology. The guidelines will be sensitive to the historical and architectural integrity as a forefront whilst maintaining a balance of meaningful use for contemporary society. The determination for what is meaningful for contemporary society for this thesis will be subjective and will refer to the proposed being community focused, accessible to many, environmentally responsible and thoughtful enhancement to the surrounding site and county and country. The guidelines hope to create a positive reviving experience for adaptive reuse interventions on tower houses in similar conditions and act as a catalyst for preservation of other cases through adaptive reuse. These guidelines of course will serve in a general nature and not a strict rule.

CHAPTER ONE: Before the Tower House Typology

Step one of answering the research question of *how can a 15th century Irish tower house, currently in a state of neglect, be adaptively reused to meet contemporary societal needs while preserving its historical and architectural integrity and be used as a guideline for other tower house projects*, asks for, as mentioned, an understanding of the historical context. Understanding the reason of the boom and decline of the tower house will assist the architectural intervention part of repurposing the typology into a contemporary society. As architecture and politics are deeply interconnected and Ireland went through major societal and political changes in the time before the first tower house was built, a relevant summary of this will be analysed. This will be done through the dominant architecture of the time and significant political events, with the aim of obtaining more information and come to educated conclusions surrounding the reasoning of the boom of the tower house in the 1400s. For the structure and clarity of this chapter pre 1169 will be referred to as Gaelic Ireland and post 1160 to Anglo-Norman Ireland.*

Gaelic Ireland till 1169

Gaelic Ireland operated with a monarchy in a unique way where the power was distributed through several kings and towns. The one High King who held the title, did not obtain the power over the other kings. The position was more of an officer role and the rules were created by the provincial kings for their own clans.¹² The next in line to be king also was not typical, they had a tendency to filio-geniture* for succession, enabling the most appropriate king to take the position in comparison to the feudal system whereas we can see later on in the chapter. This meant that almost anyone was in line for kingship in Ireland and this way of organisation stayed till the late 16th Century.¹³ Having a non-feudal system meant that, unlike French and Britain, there was no inheritance of houses or castles and it is assumed that this system had consequences of handing down buildings as it would disturb the ones already living there quite significantly. Therefore, the architecture of the time is significantly different to the French and British, whom were building very dominant structures such as motte and bailey fortifications with intention to pass down to their children for generations to come.

The prominent type of architecture in Ireland at this time was raths or ringforts and they were in the thousands across the landscape.¹⁴ With some research suggesting there were up to 60,000 ringforts were spread across Ireland with

¹²Art Cosgrove. A New History of Ireland, Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc. 2008), page 6

*NB: Ireland wasn't under English rule legislatively; however they had begun the moving into Ireland on this date.

*NB: Meaning give someone suitable to the title of the king rather than a child or the next in blood line

¹³ Art Cosgrove. A New History of Ireland, Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc. 2008), page 37

¹⁴ Tom McNeill, Castles in Ireland (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 8

some built during the early medieval period of 500-900AD and some dating back to the iron age of 100-500AD.¹⁵



*10- Ringfort, Birds Eye View
Source: Monumental Ireland*

These ringforts were primarily residential structures that also served as fortified farmsteads for cattle from marauding animals and cattle raiders.¹⁶ Within these sites were also structures for shed, workshops and animal shelters allowing owners to be self-contained within their site. The form was circular in shape and ranges in diameter from 30-90 metres. The boundary of these sites were distinguished by a mound or a bank of ditch that provided extra layers of defence. The ditch surrounding the site would constitute as the boundary, and the ringfort would be placed upon the mound. These structures not as defensive or fortified in the terms of Britain and France at the time but provided necessary safety from

¹⁵ Monumental Ireland, Ringforts, viewed on the 12th November 2024. <https://monumentalireland.ie/ringforts/>

¹⁶ Ireland XO, Discover Ireland's Rich Heritage, 2024, viewed on the 20th November 2024, <https://www.Irelandxo.com>

rising water and other raiders.¹⁷ As these structures were not related to feudal power and much of the population would reside in this typology, including lords and kings with their extended families. Often many families would reside here too making it similar to community living.

Other architecture of Gaelic Ireland included monastic towers, which were stone structures that were quite striking in the landscape. They were vertically dominant, slender and provided a place like a cultural centre of the time. They were simple in decorum and form and inscribed with relics and manuscripts that were meaningful to Gaelic Ireland. They have a bell at the top that would warn residents when a raid was about to occur, providing a level of defence.¹⁸ The construction of these monastic towers consisted of uncut rubble in the beginning and then later of neatly joined stonework. The lower portions are solid masonry, with the door always being on the first floor. It is guessed that this reasoning of placing the door on the first floor was related to the structural integrity of the tower and for also defence purposes for the monks and their valuables.¹⁹ On the interior was wooden floors and wooden ladders, which can be seen in the figure below.



11- Sectional Perspective of Monastic Tower & Monastic Tower
Source: CentroidPM

¹⁷ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 66

¹⁸ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 16

¹⁹ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 16

Ecclesiastical Architecture in Gaelic Ireland

Religion was a mix of Christianity and Gaelic elements that were different to the Roman Catholic Church. This was probably due to the geographical location of the island and consequently Ireland remained isolated and unconquered repository of Celtic culture throughout the first centuries of the Christian era.²⁰ The fact they were not part of the wide spread Roman empire added to their independent way of working as a society. The architecture of earlier churches were made of timber and mud due to the available resources and techniques of the time.²¹ The use of timber was important, using oak to create simple structures. Most of these churches were small which would have reflected the needs of the clans that used them. After the Norse invasion in the 800's the timber structures were demolished, and stone was used to replace in the same style and form of the previous timber structures. These structures were usually a proportion of 3:2, with a single chamber and a west way doorway and east window. The roof was aligned to the east and west gables, with either shingles or thatch.²² Sometimes the west gable would be crowned by a cross or splayed finial.²³ The construction was done through corbelling horizontal layers of massive stones, wedged where necessary with small cut stones called swalls with the first of its kind is to be dated back to 798AD.²⁴ These structures had very thick walls, up to 1m, leaving the interior space relatively small.

In summary these stone churches were a response to the Norse invasion to make structure stronger and more resilient. Despite not following a monastic constitution, the churches had a similar aesthetic and form throughout the different clans. By the time of the 1100's, the Irish became more aware of what was happening in continental Europe. However, there was no major attempt to recreate entirely, apart from some stylistic changes. These were additions of decorative mouldings, hood mouldings, and round headed arches shown in the images on the following page.²⁵ For this thesis, it is gathered that ringforts, monastic towers and stone or wooden churches were the vernacular architecture of Ireland leading to 1169. The use of very thick walls, slender modest structures with unmortared stone and limited decorum defined the vernacular way of building.

²⁰ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 7

²¹ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 8

²² Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 9

²³ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 9

²⁴ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 10

²⁵ Brian De Breffny & George Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland* (London: Thames and Hudson 1975), page 23



*12- Clonmacnoise Church with Decorative Features
Source: Roaring Water Journal*



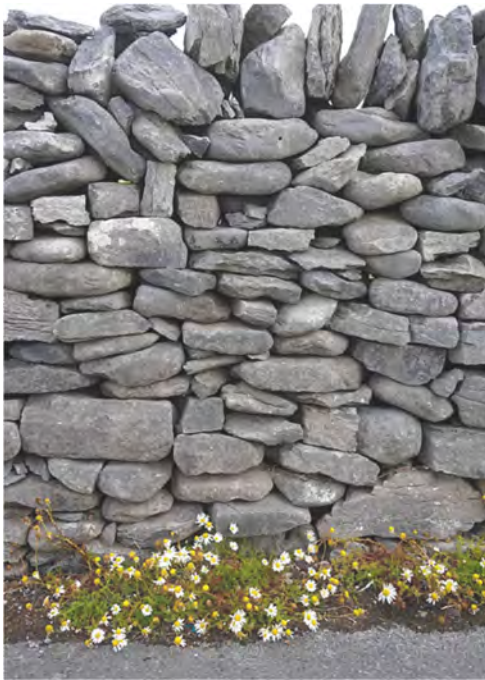
*13- Preserved Stone Church circa. early 12th century at Gallerus, Dingle, Ireland
Source: OPW, Ireland*



*14- Reconstruction Sketch of 5th century Wooden Church
Source: The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland
De Brieffny and Mott page 9*

Anglo Norman Ireland 1169-1200

In 1169, the Anglo-Normans began their encroachment to Ireland, introducing their feudal system which contrasted sharply to Gaelic Ireland's decentralised power structure. Unlike England's central monarchy, Gaelic Ireland as mentioned previously, was governed by multiple kings ruling distinct territories and provinces and this system was reflected in its architectural forms. Over the next 30 years from 1169-2000 marked significant time for the building of castellated structures in Ireland and was the first catalyst for the building of specifically rendered stone structures in the English style.²⁶



15- Stone Without Mortar
Source: DTJ Design Ireland (Left)



16- Mortar and Stone
Source: Pilgrimage Medieval Ireland (Right)

Gaelic Ireland had no singular seat of power, which was reflected in the architecture where there were high numbers of residential ringforts rather than the centralised castle structures typical of Feudal England. Though Gaelic Ireland had many kings and clans, its strong tribal identity hindered the English efforts to modernise Irish society under their feudal framework. This in turn rendered this transition period quite violent.²⁷ During this time there was an ebb and flow of power between the Gaelic society and the Anglo-Normans, with some of the periods being more peaceful than others. In 1177, King Henry II of England established the lordship of Ireland, opening the prospect of an Anglo-Norman

²⁶ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 76

²⁷ Art Cosgrove. *A New History of Ireland, Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*. (New York: Oxford University Press Inc. 2008), page 37

conquest, transforming the loose congeries of tribal kingdoms that constituted Gaelic political system into a strong feudal state.²⁸ During this time, the Anglo-Normans rapidly expanded their control over Ireland. Within 40 years from 1169-1209, they had managed to takeover more land in Ireland than they had in Wales in over a century.²⁹ However, this was not an even process but a disjointed one. The occupation or seizure of an Irish kingdom usually followed internal disputes, such as succession conflicts after the death of a strong king under the filio-geniture system.

During this turbulent period, English lords began building castles in their newly acquired territories using rendered stone instead of the traditional earth, timber and unrendered stone method. Rendered stone construction was neither cheap or quick and these lords were sending a clear message of their intentions to commit themselves to Ireland.³⁰ Initially these castles were not primarily defensive structures such as keeps that came later, but rather centres for feudal power. These castles served as places for administration hubs, residences and symbols of power and dominance.³¹ Some examples from this period include Trim castle 1174, which was unique in design and height. It didn't have major defensive features until later when the curtain wall was built. Despite being built for comfort and symbolism of status, this castle didn't have a great hall. Great halls were often a sign of a community and inviting people in and providing hospitality. The absence of a hall in these initial castles was very telling about the relationship between the Anglo Normans with the outside population at the time. In chapter two, regarding the tower house, we see how critical the hall is to these residences.

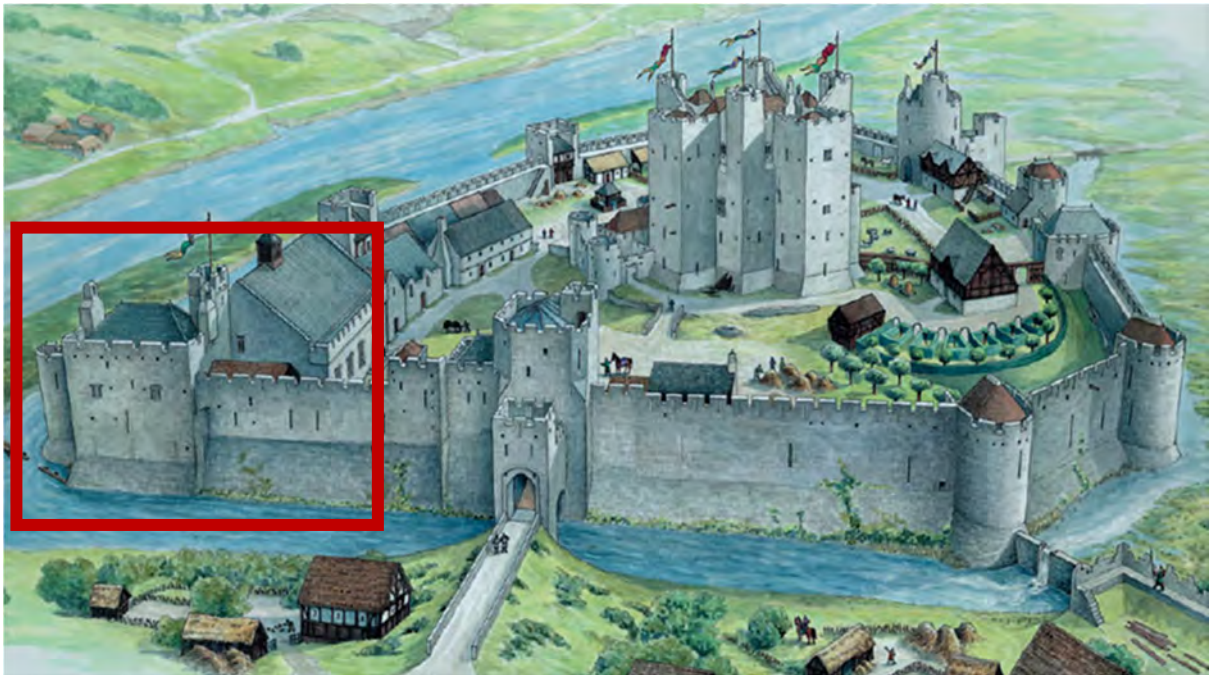
Overall, these new castles were incredibly different from the traditional architecture of Gaelic Ireland. Though their numbers were smaller, their size and dominance made them monumental in the Irish landscape, serving as a lasting imprint of English influence.

²⁸ JC Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), page 1585

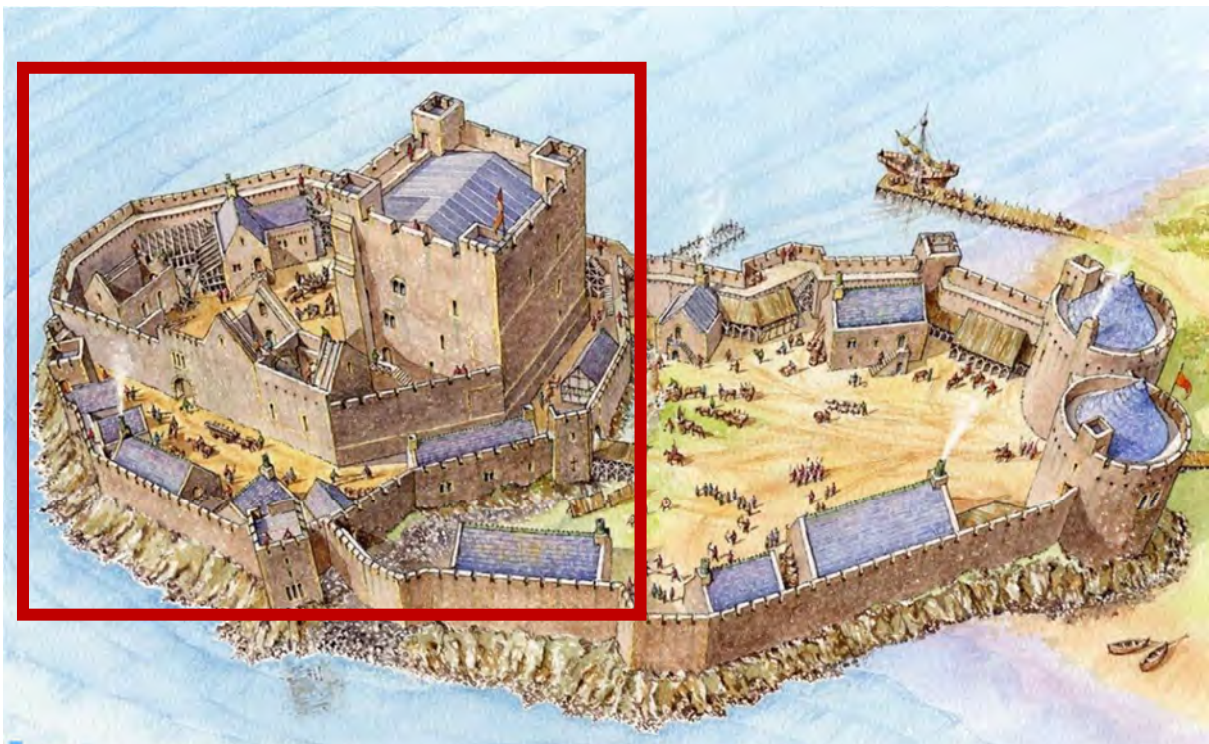
²⁹ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 19

³⁰ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 52

³¹ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 24



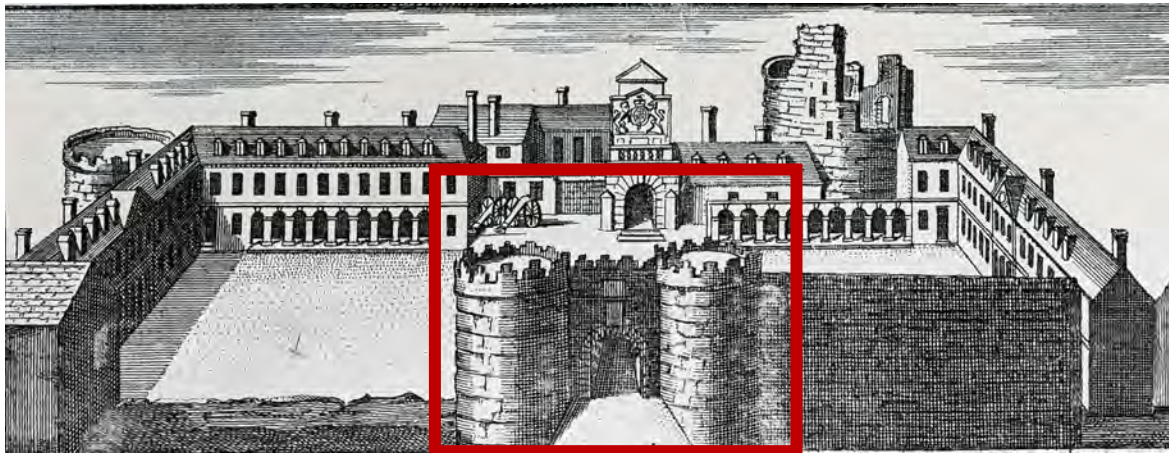
17- Trim Castle, late 12th C build (outlined in red)
Source: Uto Hogerzeil, Boyne Valley Tours



18- Carrickfergus Castle, late 12th C build (outlined in red)
Source: Belfast Entries

Anglo Norman Ireland 1200-1300

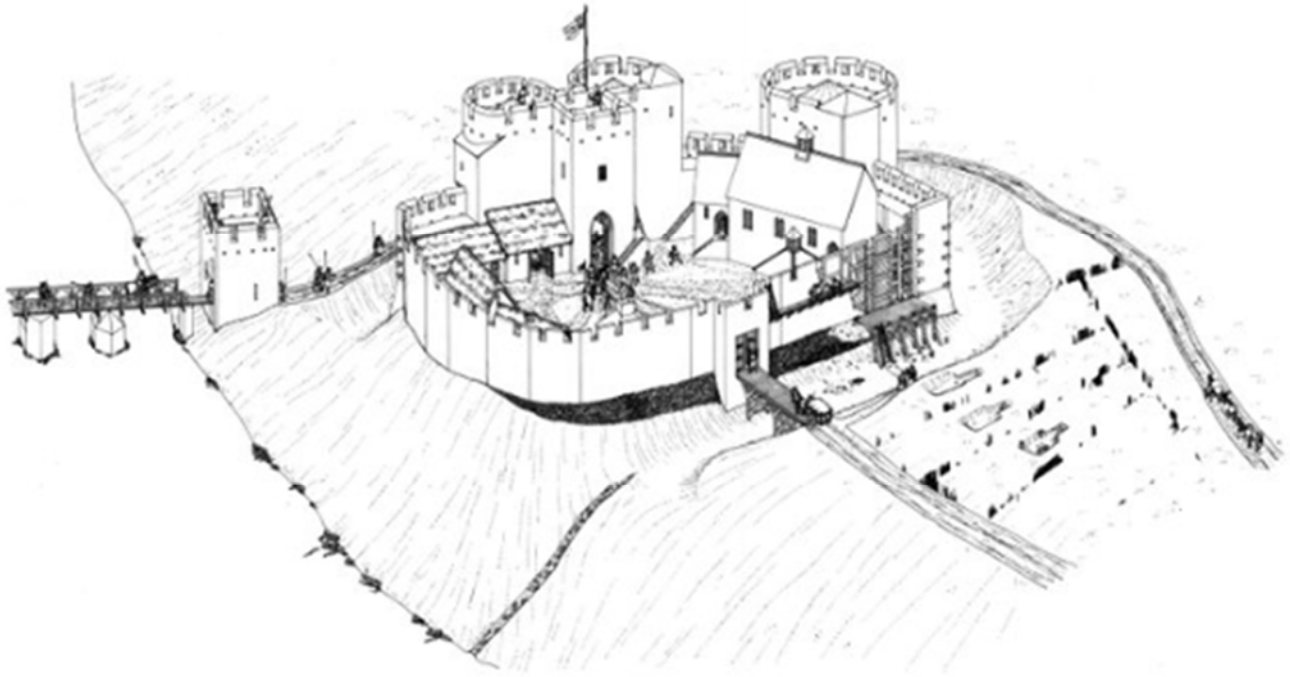
For the first 30 years after the arrival of the Anglo Normans, castles in Ireland were primarily feudal and none were royal. This changed in 1204 this when King John ordered the Justiciar to “construct a strong castle there (at Dublin) with good ditches and strong walls” the reason he gives is that “you have no fit place for the custody of our treasure and for other purposes” (Orpen, Normans, II, 307-8).³² This transition again can indicate that the Anglo Norman power was becoming more predominant actively reshaping the Ireland’s political and architectural landscape. Dublin Castle became the seat of English Rule until 1922, serving both residence purposes for the British monarch’s Irish representative and as a ceremonial and administrative centre.³³ A few years later in 1210, Limerick Castle was completed and served as another royal castle in the west of Ireland which adhered to another key administrative centre. The building of these two royal castles in this more defensive way prompted the earlier castles to build more prominent and expensive defensive features. These features included arrow loops were constructed to control the base of the walls as well as curtain walls to control the boundaries. This was seen at Trim, Carrickfurgus, Nenagh and Dunamase Castle.



19- Dublin Royal Castle: Initial Phase of Construction 13th C (outlined in red)
Source: Dublin Castle

³² Tom McNeill, Castles in Ireland (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 45

³³ The Office of Public Works, Dublin Castle History, Viewed on the 1st November 2024.
<https://dublincastle.ie/history/>



*20- King John's Castle in 1216
Source: Dan Tietzch-Tyler, 2012*

As the Anglo Normans built royal and larger scale defensive castles, Irish Kings began building, assumed by some scholars as a reaction, smaller scale and more defensive castles in nature and often located on manmade island in lakes, but often not close to Anglo-Norman areas.³⁴ This includes Castle on Lough Oughter and Lough Key. These castles in a way could be connected to the previous architecture before the Anglo-Norman arrived through the way they were built. For example, being elevated with a motte or boundary that is a ditch and simpler forms. McDermotts castle for example had curtain like walls in the same form of a ringfort, however it also could be speculated that the builders were taking inspiration of the curtain wall. Furthermore, the isolation of these Gaelic castles could reflect the sense of individualism and self sufficient inherent in Gaelic society, where kings and clans operated independently, each governing their own territories with minimal centralised authority.

³⁴ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 74



21- Lough Oughter Castle for an Irish King, Co. Cavan, early 13th C
Source: Keith O Hara



22- McDermotts Castle, Lough Key, Co. Roscommon, early 13th C (initial castle outlined)
Source: Eunan Sweeny 2020

Anglo Norman Ireland 1300- 1400

The turn of the 14th century marked a time of Gaelic revival as Irish society was functioning similar to its pre 1169 structure once again. The Anglo-Norman presence had weakened, with many Anglo-Irish aristocracy who were descendants of the Normans had adopted Gaelic customs, which added to this revival of the Gaelic way.³⁵ With some families such as the Burkes and Fitzgeralds even following Irish traditions over the English rule. The Pale was shrinking as the centralised power was not as strong as it was in the 13th century. This was possibly due to England's involvement with conflict in France and Scotland. Due to this and additional financial issues in the beginning of the century, building seemed to have cease and was non comparable to before.³⁶ Castles were repaired, but the construction industry was nowhere near thriving as it once did in the 13th century. To add to this, later in the century, King Richard II, who was very young when receiving the throne in 1377, only returned to Ireland in 1399. This combination of a young king, financial problems in the monarchy allowed Gaelic provincial kings to provide a better deal and care for the community, and therefore the system of Gaelic Ireland thrived. This decentralisation is important as it is right before the estimated first tower house was built in the late 13th century, and gives a clue that potentially the tower house has more Gaelic influence than the Anglo-Norman style and way, however that is just speculation.

Despite less construction happening, what is seen architecturally from the early 1300's is a particular typology called the hall house, with the last one being built in 1350.³⁷ These hall houses were smaller in scale and usually on mottes with a proportion of 2:1.³⁸ They followed the same materiality as the castles by the English of rendered stone. This was also arguably the first glimpse of a style that was close to the tower house, as the two are quite similar.

³⁵ JC Beckett, *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923* (London: Faber & Faber, 2011), page 14

³⁶ Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 75

³⁷ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 150

³⁸ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 149



23- Hall House in Ruins

Source: The Standing Stone Dr. Karen Dempsey

Hall houses were never as popular as the tower house as we see in the next chapter, and a big difference is that tower houses were more refined in form. Hall houses also were just single rooms, made of timber framing and simple non defensive windows.³⁹ They would often have an entrance on the first floor that didn't allow ease of access and acted as their main defensive feature.⁴⁰ Not many remain in Ireland, apart from a small number in ruins, and perhaps they had as much significance as their short time period in the 1300's. However, chronologically this was the last style of castles before the boom of the tower house in the following years. It is important to not undermine the relationship between these lesser castles and their relationship to the tower house.⁴¹

³⁹ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 150

⁴⁰ Tadhg O'Keeffe Tadhg, 'Halls, 'Hall-Houses' and Tower-Houses in Medieval Ireland: Disentangling the Needlessly Entangled, (The Castle Studies Group Journal No 27: 2013-14) Page 253

⁴¹ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 150



*24- Schrule Tower House, Co. Mayo
Gaelic Style
Source: Tadgh O'Keeffe*



*25- Annaghkeen Tower House, Co. Galway
Gaelic Style
Source: Tadgh O'Keeffe*

Summary

Gaelic and Anglo-Norman architectural styles were fundamentally different. Before 1169 Gaelic architecture consisted of unmortared ringforts, monastic towers, timber or churches. These structures were numerous but not designed for longevity of time as the nature of the clans moved and lived, change and moving around was inevitable. Decoration was minimal and these elements were only through in-scriptures and a slight influence from later Romanesque styles in the 1200's.

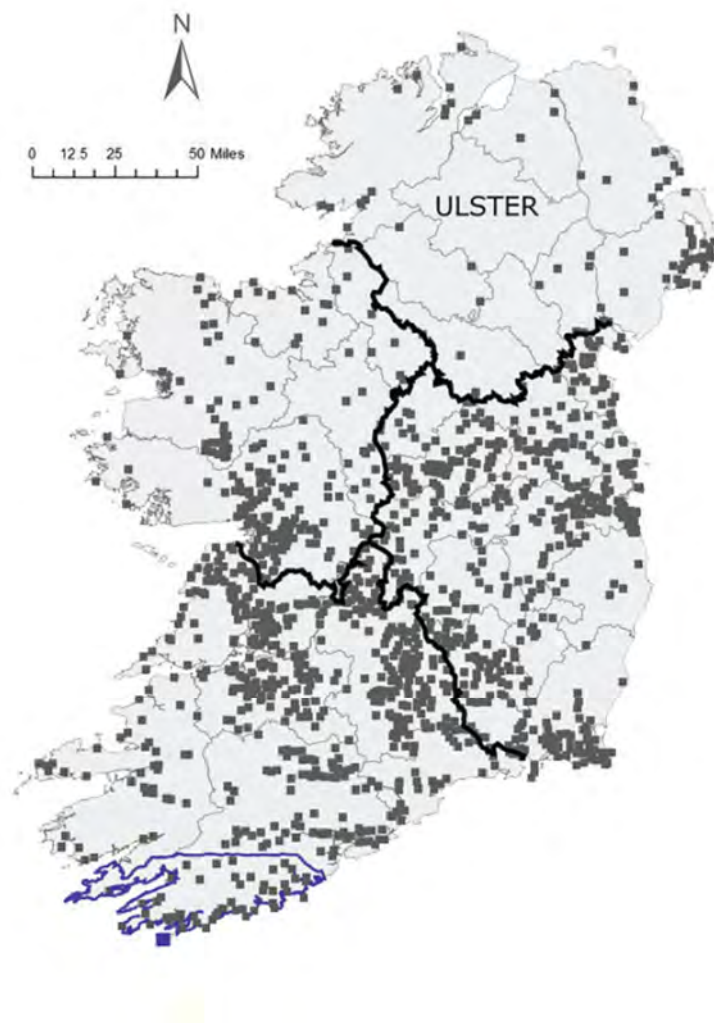
With the arrival of the Anglo Normans, construction shifted towards large fortified castles, signalling their long term presence and intent to establish hereditary control. These castles functioned primarily as residences, incorporating some defensive features that gradually became more pronounced as political tensions between Gaelic Irish and Anglo Normans escalated throughout the 1200's.

By the 1300s, there was a noticeable decline in new castle construction due to economic instability and the weakening of English royal authority. The hall house became the dominant architectural form of this period. Though similar in structure to the tower house, it never achieved the same level of prominence. It is believed that hall houses reflect Gaelic architectural influences, as this period marked the height of the Gaelic revival, during which the central monarchy lost significant ground, allowing Gaelic clans to flourish.

This decentralisation is significant because it suggests that the hall house may have been the first architectural response to Gaelic traditions within a built environment, distinct from Anglo-Norman influences. Understanding this context is important when exploring the construction boom of tower houses in the following century raising the question of whether the tower house evolved primarily from Gaelic traditions, remained influenced by Anglo-Norman design or a mixture of both. This distinction is crucial for preserving the architectural and historical integrity as it can serve an extremely important clue to whether the tower house is inherently Gaelic, Anglo-Norman or perhaps a mixture of both.

CHAPTER TWO: The Irish Tower House

In the early 1400's tower houses were beginning to appear, the first known date has not been agreed upon however the last was built in 1637.⁴² Over the next 240 years an estimated 3000 tower houses were built with some sources suggesting that the number could be closer to 7000.* This high number led to Ireland being one of the most castellated regions in the British Isle by the 17th Century, with the tower house being the main typology within the castle category.⁴³



26- Map of Irish Tower Houses in the 16th Century
Source: Networked Control: Tower Houses in Ireland

⁴² Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 11

* Various sources- NB: However, these numbers are not officially documented and are based on scholarly estimates.

⁴³ Wilde Irishe, *Irish Tower Houses: A Spotter's Guide* 2020, viewed on the 25th November 2024. <https://www.wildeirishe.com/post/irish-tower-houses-a-spotter-s-guide?form=MG0AV3>

To really understand why there was a tower house boom, an important point to reflect on is that the turn of the 15th century found society functioning in a Gaelic Ireland way that was not revolved around the English monarchy. This is sometimes referred to as the Gaelic revival. Although the royal power still did exist in Dublin, and King Richard II did visit in 1399, the English influence operated in a way similar to a high king in the Gaelic world.⁴⁴ This is when the English king's function was more of an officer whilst the territories individual kings had actual power. Moreso, the Anglo monarchy was going through kings of an average of 10 year reigns, and then in 1413, Henry the V was extremely involved in England and France which adds to the evidence that the Gaelic society was indeed thriving at this time.⁴⁵ As a result, the residents of Ireland have increased political freedom through smaller clans, stemming from this decentralisation, that enabled them to build fortifications. Victoria McAlister believes the Irish late medieval building boom went unchecked except by the market (represented by availability and cost of building materials and expertise) and in turn this point in time began the beginning of the many tower houses.⁴⁶ This individualisation of clans and power could be a clue to why so many were built. The "Castle-building" craze arrived in Ireland with the beginning of the tower house, reflecting a new class consciousness among the freeholders that accompanied new-found prosperity.⁴⁷ The English kings had made their mark on the land as seen in the previous chapter and it was probably in their (Gaelic Irish) minds to do the same but at a much smaller and cheaper scale which we seen in the previous chapter in more remote places. John Parker, an artist in the Charlotte and Victorian era, stated that the difference between the tower houses and the larger castles already existing was of resources or class and that the tower house was for the gentry and the larger castles for the magnates.⁴⁸ As the 13th to the 14th century Ireland was a time of political instability, which Victoria McAlister states this time period of the tower house in the 15th century reflects a time of decentralisation of political power. These buildings were constructed in response to previous conflicts, including the open warfare in the Tudor Conquest and in response to rebellion against the English crown.⁴⁹ From this perspective, the tower house could be seen as a constructed response to such conditions.

As the tower house was a defining feature of the late medieval Ireland and transitioned into the early modern period, this aspect is necessary to consider when attempting to retrieve the historical integrity of the tower house. To summarise it can be understood that the small size of tower houses, along with the more distributed wealth and power through clans, meant their construction

⁴⁴Maraget Phelan. King Richards II's Two Visits to KilKenny. (Old Kilkeny Review 1978), page 321

⁴⁵ NA, Kings and Queens of Britain. Historic UK. Accessed January 10, 2025. <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/KingsQueensofBritain/>.

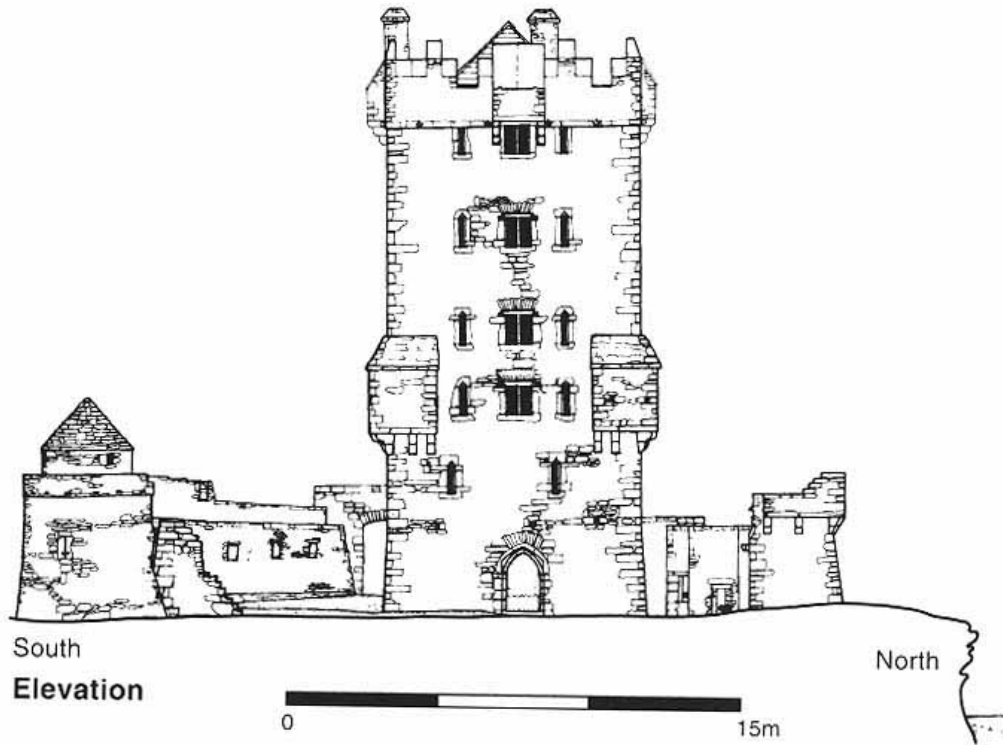
⁴⁶ Victoria L. McAlister, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 9

⁴⁷ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 9

⁴⁸ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), Page 201

⁴⁹ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 12

was within the financial reach of many lords, ecclesiastics and merchants. They were also popular and within the capacity to build within the emerging gentry class.⁵⁰ To add to this popularity and accessibility, in 1429 there was a grant announced for the building of tower houses.



27- Late 15th Aughnacore Castle Elevation
Source: Robert Carney

The 1429 Grant

It could be understood that the tower house's popularity was noticed by King Henry VI and in 1429 Ireland receives perhaps its first ever building grant. However, this was only for people who lived within The Pale which was a smaller percentage of the whole Ireland.

Henry VI 1429 states:

"It is agreed and asserted that every liege-man of our Lord the King of the said counties (The English Pale: counties of Dublin, Meath, Kildare and Louth) who choses to build a castle or tower sufficiently embattled or fortified within the next ten years to wit twenty feet in length sixteen feet in width and forty feet in height or more, that the Commons of the said counties shall pay to the said person to build the said castle or tower ten pounds by way of subsidy."

(Henry VI 1429, Harold Leask, Irish Castles, 1977, page 77)

⁵⁰ Victoria L. McAlister, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 1



28- The Pale (Dark Green)

Source: DoChara 2017

It is important *not* to assume the time of the grant reflected when majority of tower houses were built. Tom McNeill argues that at best this grant swayed a small minority of potential builders.⁵¹ Harold Leask argues that despite the grant, the tower houses outside of the English Pale were more complex and striking.⁵² Dunmore Castle is understood to be a 10 pound castle due to its simple form as it adheres closely in its measurements and height to the requirement of the statute of 1429.⁵³ It has a vault over the two lower storeys as most with the simple towers. Other scholars also label the vault on the lower floors rather than the fourth floor or higher as later tower houses. Compared to Kilclief tower house in County Down, which is more complex in plan, with bold arches underneath the battlements with small turrets at the corners of the building.⁵⁴ It could be understood that the tower houses in the pale were designed more so defensive in nature rather than as primary residences due to their typical simpler structure.⁵⁵ For example here is a contrast of a typical 10 Pound tower house vs. A tower house built outside of the pale.

⁵¹ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), Page 202

⁵² Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 78

⁵³ Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 77

⁵⁴ Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 77

⁵⁵ Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 78



*29- Donmore Castle, Co. Meath
10 Pound Castle Within The Pale
Source: James Allan 2011*

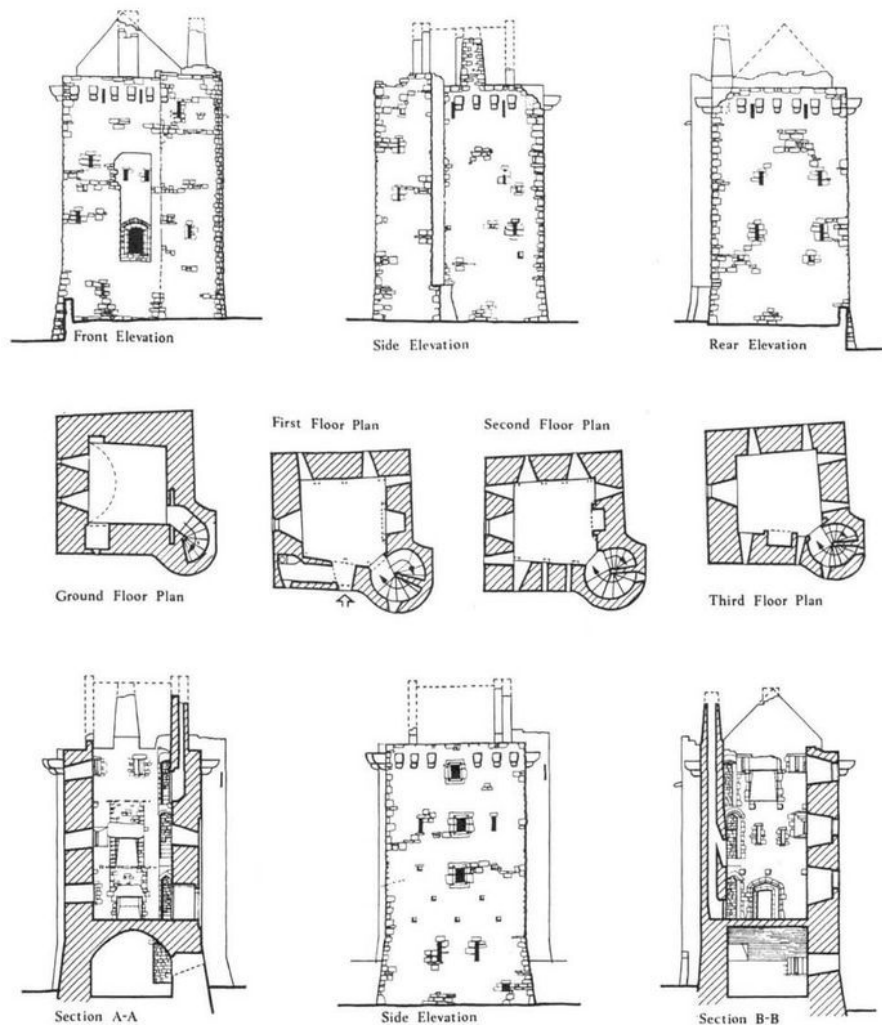


30- Kilcief Castle, County Down
Tower House Outside the Pale
Source: Belfast Entries

Despite differences for a typical grant tower house and outside of the pale tower house, always the exterior of a tower house is always simple oblongs within four walls, subtly batters, rising sheerly from a bold base batter to parapets which are crenelated in an Irish-Fashion.⁵⁶ Therefore, there will not be a distinction between the 10 pound tower house and classic tower house in this thesis.

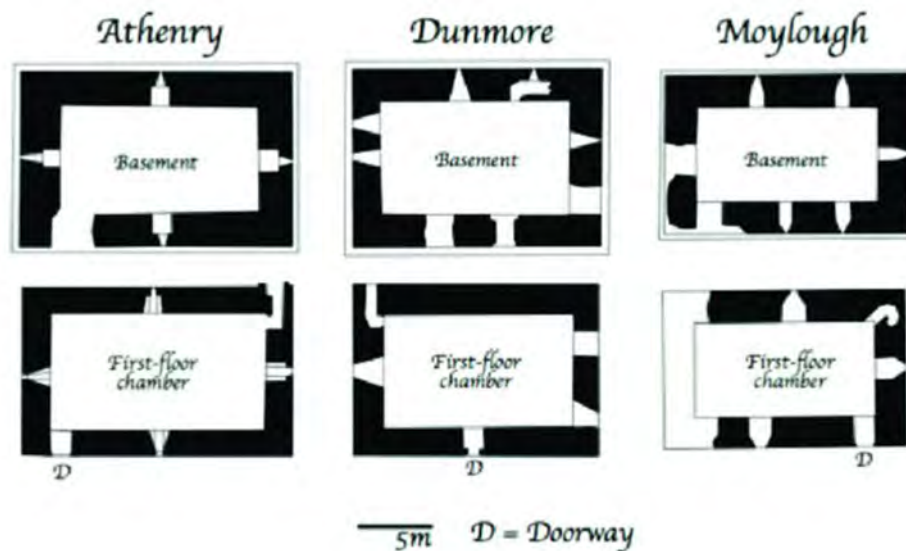
Architectural Features

A tower house was always multiple levels, with a larger room in the centre, with smaller chambers and circulation in the thick walls. The images following show a typical tower house plans and sections.



31- Tower House Example
Source: Robert Carney

⁵⁶ Harold Leask, *Castles and Castellated Houses* (Dundalk: Dundalgan Press Ltd, 1951), page 79



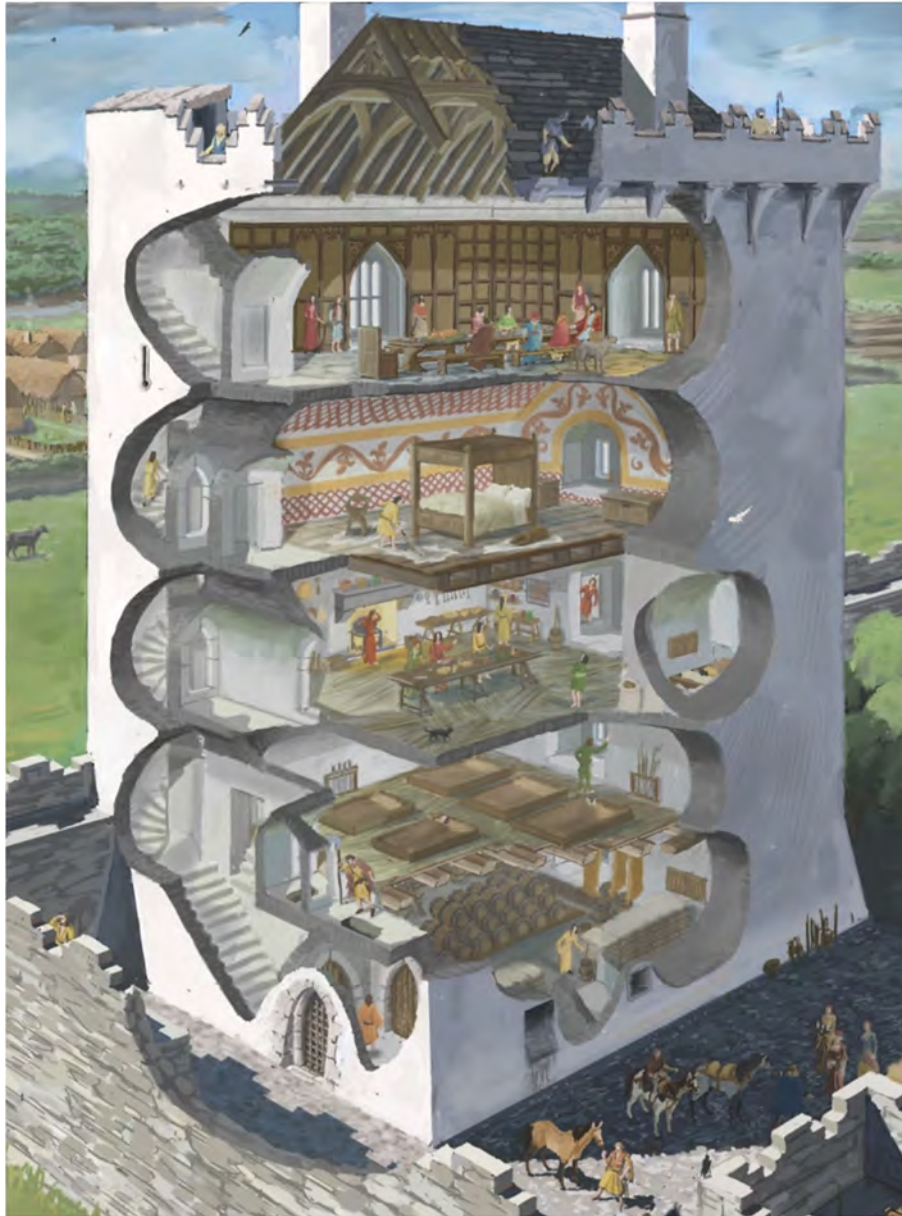
32- Tower House Plans
Source: Tadgh O'Keefe

As mentioned, each tower house is slightly different internally, making the overall typology of tower houses not a homogeneous group in a strict sense.⁵⁷ Despite these differences in layout, the overall form and function has an undeniable connection to one another. This connection is through their vertical form, scale and similar size, use, the locations in which they are built, fortified design elements, simple plan, small windows, materials, historical significance and the period in which they were all built.⁵⁸ Hence, it is possible that we learn in one tower house case, will also have some value in other cases when adaptive reuse is considered.

As for the layout, typically the storage is at the ground floor, usually on the earth as this area was not a liveable space. This is due to nature of the ground floor being a protective layer for the upper residential spaces. On the first floor was usually a kitchen or guard room or more storage, then a hall either on the second or fourth floor depending on where the vault was. Sometimes there would be additional sleeping rooms or more informal areas above or below the hall. Then in the upper floors was wall walks and areas for guards to be. In the tower house the hall was the most important part of the tower house as it determined where majority of the habitants' activities and place to sleep.

⁵⁷ Rory Sherlock, *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2010), page 129

⁵⁸ Wilde Irishe, *Irish Tower Houses: A Spotter's Guide* 2020, viewed on the 25th November 2024. <https://www.wildeirishe.com/post/irish-tower-houses-a-spotter-s-guide?form=MG0AV3>



33- Typical Tower House Layout Based on Kilcrea Castle, Co. Cork
Source: JG O'Donoghue 2011

The tower houses circulation relied on spiralling staircases, that often started in the foyer and would transcend to the hall, passing either a few or more other floors depending on the location of the hall. It is believed that earlier halls were placed on the fourth floor and later tower house halls placed on the second floor. Essentially the staircase will lead to the vaulted floor where the hall is. Then afterward, a secondary vertical circulation is there to proceed to higher or lower spaces. The hall is the primary room for living, eating, sleeping and entertaining and is considered the heart of the tower house. It was considered the safest room due to the location above the vault and distance from the door. Often many defensive features acted as barriers to the hall which will be further explored shortly. Additionally, the hall which is where most research has been done, can help date tower houses depending on their location with higher level located halls

indicates that it is of an older build.⁵⁹ The hall would also be the most elaborately decorated space, with gothic features and wooden furniture. These internal changes can reflect the owner's needs and vernacular ways of living specific to that region.⁶⁰



*34- Bunratty Castle Hall
Earlier Tower House Built c.1500
Source: Travel Signposts Tony*

⁵⁹ Rory Sherlock, *Changing Perceptions: Spatial Analysis and the Study of the Irish Tower House* (Paris: Publications du CRAHM, 2010) Page 241

⁶⁰ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 10

Defensive features

Tower houses were built to be both residential and defensive with their design evolving over time. Rory Sherlock states the earlier tower houses prioritised defence but as they continued to be constructed and inhabited over 200 years, his studies found that the tower house transitioned into more residential spaces. This is seen with the 16th century adaptations of fireplaces and larger windows to the older tower houses.⁶¹ Nonetheless, the defensive features of the tower house remain prominent to the architectural form, regardless of whether they were utilised to the full extent. Even today, they remain a quintessential part of architectural integrity of the tower house as they are often the most striking features from the exterior. Features such as machicolations, bartizans, crenelations, clockwise winding uneven stepped staircases, yetts and murder holes were all prominent aspects and are an important part of the tower house typology. The following images show the defensive architectural features associated with Irish tower houses.



35- Machicolation

Source: The Standing Stone 2001

A machicolation was often placed high above the front entrance. This is where guards could throw stones and boiling water or burning substances like heated sand or pitch upon incoming attackers. What was thrown down would bounce off the base batter striking those nearby and hopefully deterring them.

⁶¹ Rory Sherlock, *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2010), page 126



*36- Dunmore Castle- Base Batter
Source: Heritage Ireland*

The base batter of the tower house is the angled slope at the bottom of the tower house, as seen clearly on the right side of the Dunmore tower house above. The base batter had both structural and defensive qualities. Structurally, it would carry the load of the upper structure helping distribute the weight of the upper structure, increasing the overall stability. Defensively, it would make it extremely difficult for any raiders to scale the walls. It also allowed projectiles from the machicolation or bartizan to bounce off and increase the projectiles spread, striking those nearby.



*37- Bartizan at Aughnacore Castle
Source: Aughnacore Castle Heritage*

Similar to the machicolation, a bartizan serves as a vantage point, typically positioned halfway up the tower house. Accessible from within, it provided guards with a sheltered lookout, protecting them from the elements unlike a machicolation, which was exposed. This space also enabled defenders to fire arrows at approaching invaders through arrow loops, enhancing the tower house's defensive capabilities.



*38- Crenelations at Belvelly Castle Co. Cork
Source: Rachels Ruminations 2025*

At the top of the tower house were crenelations. These architectural details provided both defensive protection and symbolic significance. Guards would take lookout from here which allowed them to fire arrows at any potential trespassers through crenels while taking cover behind the taller merlons to shield themselves from incoming projectiles. The crenelations also added a layer of protection from the potential invasion coming from the roof of the tower house, as the crenelations made it extremely difficult for invaders to scale the castle walls. The symbolism of the crenelations related to authority, power and status and were a clear sign of defiance to anyone who passed by.



*39- Interior Side of an Arrowslit at Kilkenny Castle
Source: OPW*



*40- Arrow Loops or Arrowslits
Source: Roaring Water Journal 2017*

Windows on tower houses were vertical and often narrow. The higher levels of the tower house would have had larger mullioned windows (after adaptations) and the lower levels would have arrow slits or no windows at all. The long, narrow arrowslits allowed guards to fire projectiles at any attackers, whilst remaining protected. The interior side of these windows often splayed out, creating a recessed space for guards to sit or lay, wait and fire. From the outside, attackers would not be able to see guards perched behind the arrowslits, adding a defensive layer of the tower house. The following image shows the interior of an arrowslit.



41- Clockwise Staircase
Source: The Irish Aesthete

The primary means of circulation in a tower house was the staircase, often located in the corner walls of the building. These staircases were typically clockwise and uneven, serving as a natural defensive feature against intruders. Their anticlockwise restriction limited an attacker's ability to strike effectively, as their left arm had minimal space to swing. Additionally, the irregular steps created a tripping hazard for anyone unfamiliar with the layout further reinforcing the tower house's defensive strategy.



*42- Iron Yett at Donore Castle
Source: Geograph Ireland*

Yetts were iron grilles or gates commonly used in castles and tower houses as a defensive measure. Unlike a portcullis, which operated on a mechanical system to be raised and lowered, yetts functioned more like standard doors, hinged and reinforced with bolts or bars embedded in the surrounding walls. They were typically installed behind wooden doors, adding an extra layer of protection so even if attackers managed to burn through the outer door, the yett would remain intact, preventing entry.



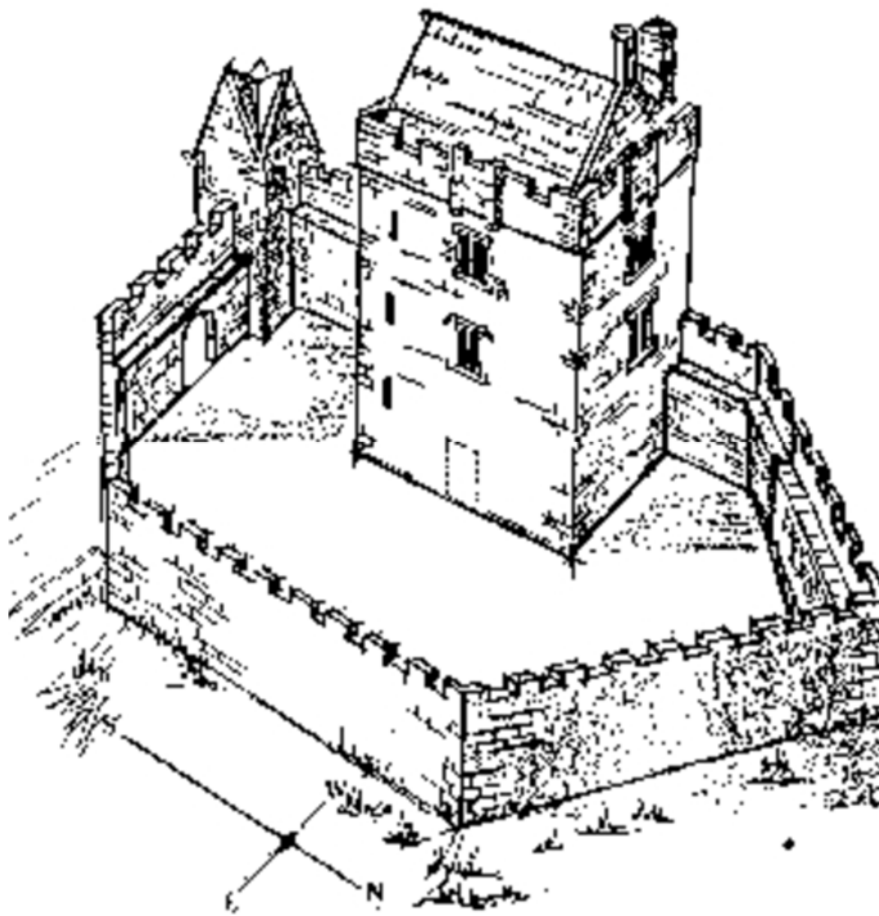
*43- Murder Hole at Kilcrea Castle
Source: Roaring Water Journal*

A murder hole in an Irish tower house was a key defensive element, strategically placed to protect its occupants from intruders. Usually found above the main entrance or within passageways, it was a small ceiling opening that allowed defenders to drop stones, boiling water, or hot oil onto attackers attempting to force their way inside. These openings were particularly effective in narrow entryways, where movement was restricted and invaders would be caught by attacks from above. Some murder holes were also located within internal corridors, ensuring that even if enemies breached the door, they would face additional obstacles.

Looking at these architectural details, is easy for a layperson to assume that tower houses were completely defensive. However, scholar Duncan Berryman delves deeper into the research to assess the degree of defensibility of the tower house. His study recreated a tower house door and testing it by ramming it with a tree and setting it on fire. Both tests revealed that it wasn't as strong as it would have needed to be to keep away experienced raiders and attackers.⁶² Despite this research and noted in the literature review there are still gaps in the understanding

⁶² Duncan Berryman, *The Defensibility of Irish Tower Houses* (Belfast: The Castle Studies Group Journal, 2011), page 266

of the primary function of tower houses. The architectural features seen in this chapter give no doubt that there was a level of defence present, however the exact level cannot be known for sure. To add to this, the extent of their defensive capability wasn't just through said architectural elements, defence was also dependent through the site, typically in three elements. This was the bawn, the entrance and the visibility from the parapet.⁶³ To not get caught up in the debate of whether they were utterly defensive or primarily residential, it is reasonable given their 200 years plus life inhabitation, it is okay to argue for this paper that it served both functions.



44- Bawn Surrounding Dunguaire Castle
Source: *Castles of Galway* 2012

⁶³ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 217

The Rapid Decline

Tower houses were constructed during the period of 1400-1650 with the last known example built around 1629 according to Tom McNeill's research and 1637 according to Victoria McAlister's research.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, the destruction or limited preservation of official records from medieval Ireland due to fire and other factors has left gaps in documentation.⁶⁵ However, there are clues as to why these castles were abandoned and ceased to be built in the early 1600s. Initially, tower houses represented the late medieval period's transition into modern Ireland and the shifting architectural details reflected this. This is evident in the late 1500s with the addition of new halls and renovations such as fireplaces and more comfortable features, suggesting that the functioning of the tower house may have become outdated.⁶⁶ The addition of new halls alongside the tower house shown in the following image of Thoor Ballylee in County Galway, suggests that the primary spaces of the tower house had shifted to a new structure at a lower level. Rory Sherlock suggests this was an evolution of the hall space and the existing upper hall became more privatised.⁶⁷ It is also plausible that inhabitants were constructing more comfortable residences in other locations especially as we see the emergence of fortified manor houses and Georgian style estates. This however does not explain why so many were completely abandoned during this time.



45- Thoor Ballylee Castle with 17th C Extension
Source: *The Irish Aesthete* 2013

⁶⁴ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 210 **and** Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 11

⁶⁵ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 18

⁶⁶ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 149

⁶⁷ Rory Sherlock, *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2010), page 133

Trade and agricultural practices were also going through a significant shift reshaping its economic landscape. Previously towns, and tower houses, that were strategically positioned along trade routes or on coastal inlets operated independently and could sustain their own economies. However as major ports such as Dublin and Belfast became more dominant centres for trade, the smaller communities lost priority.⁶⁸ This led to increased regional disparities in economic opportunities and often merchants had to relocate or find new ways to get ahead. At the same time, Irish agriculture shifted away from a subsistence model that relied on oats, barley and flax to a market oriented model. This meant that wheat and rye was prioritised as they were more expensive. An expansion of large scale livestock farming also became dominant, which was driven by the introduction of English land policies which included enclosure systems and rent based policies.⁶⁹ These changes at the time also ushered in new tillage practices that displaced the traditional Gaelic cattle cantered economy. Some merchants were able to adapt to the significant changes, however most could not. This led to growing frustration and tension between the displaced communities and those in power, as economic opportunities became more unequal.⁷⁰ In this context the tower house that had once symbolised both financial and physical security, now had lost much of its value.

If the situation wasn't hard enough, concurrently, the country was in political turmoil which helps explain the widespread abandonment of tower houses. As mentioned in the previous chapter, there was a Gaelic revival in the late 14th century to 16th century that had reinvigorated native traditions and established local power structures and thriving economies. However, by the late 16th century, these dynamics began to unravel with the outbreak of the Nine Years' War from 1593 to 1603. During this conflict the English crown sought to reassert its authority over a persistently resistant Gaelic Ireland. This desire to reassert English authority over Ireland which was met with much resistance from Gaelic people. The war's outcome led to the defeat of numerous regional chieftains and paved the way for extensive land confiscations. In the uproar that followed, both informal and formal plantations were established across many counties, as the redistribution of land favoured English and Scottish settlers over the traditional Irish elite.⁷¹ As a result, long established lords, merchants, and families who once regarded their tower houses as symbols of physical defence and financial stability found themselves displaced. This upheaval effectively disrupted the network of tower houses owner and occupiers outside the Pale and deepened the fraught relationship between the Gaelic Irish and the increasingly dominant Anglo Norman administration.⁷²

⁶⁸ Charlie Taverner and Susan Flavin, Food and Power in Sixteenth Century Ireland: Studying Household Accounts from Dublin Castle, *The Historical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2023): page 13, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X2200019X>.

⁶⁹ Agriculture: 1500 to 1690, Encyclopedia.com, accessed September, 3, 2024, <https://www.encyclopedia.com>.

⁷⁰ Robert Fitzroy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1500 to 1690*, (London: Penguin Books 1989), page 30

⁷¹ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 22

⁷² Robert Fitzroy Foster, *Modern Ireland: 1500 to 1690*, (London: Penguin Books 1989), page 35

Historical Paintings

After the rapid decline in use during the 17th century, majority of tower houses began their slow process of deterioration. By the 19th century however, the typology experienced a revival of interest with the growing romanticism and heritage preservation movement. To add to the understanding of what these typologies have meant over time, a study of artworks during this period are also used to gather key aspects. These key aspects include architectural features that may not remain today, how the landscape looked at the time, the rate of decay and use at the time, their societal and cultural representation as well as colour and material details.



*46- Burnchurch Castle and Turret
Artist: Samuel Spode 1798-1872*



47- Burnchurch Castle 1863
Artist: Mary Darby



48- Muckinish West Tower County Clare 1889
Artist: Marie Anne Dovet



49- Mamone- King's County 1856 (Now Co. Offaly)
Artist: Unknown



50- Kilgoben Castle County Dublin
Artist: Gabriel Beranger 1829-1917

Despite being created nearly a century after majority of tower houses had fallen into neglect, these artworks provide invaluable insights into the architectural typology of these structures. With all of the five different paintings portray their tower houses within a softer, idyllic context. Often featuring horses, serene landscapes and always people including couples. This implies the tower house as more tranquil or residential in function in contrast to their former role or common assumption as fortified defensive keeps. One notable exception is Gabriel Beranger's piece (fifth painting) in which the tower house appears somewhat disconnected from its site. The tower house appears to stand tall and dominate the landscape as well as the people nearby, they seem to be looking at the tower house with a little bit of sorrow or uncertainty. This may be the artists unique style and preference, and perhaps placing the tower house in the foreground, showing its strength was more important to the artist over harmonious integration with the landscape.

In contrast, the first four paintings portray a strong relationship between the tower house and its environment. This suggests that these structures were originally built in picturesque, vegetatively rich settings. As historical evidence indicates, tower houses were often strategically positioned along main roads or near parishes, reinforcing their importance within medieval communities. In Marie Anne Dovet's (third) painting and the unknown artist (fourth) painting, the tower house remains a distinct vertical feature, yet the surrounding town and nearby structures are portrayed as closely connected, indicating that the tower house remained stagnant and the town moved on without its function whilst keeping it's symbolism. It could be interpreted simply that the tower houses here remained a relic of the past but still held cultural significance within the community.

Furthermore, it is also crucial to consider how some paintings depict tower houses in a state of ruin, reflecting the widespread abandonment of these structures from the 17th century onward. Although this romanticized portrayal of ruins aligns with 19th century artistic trends, where nostalgia and the passage of time were central themes. This stylistic movement, seen across Europe, often highlighted decay as symbolic of transience and historical memory. Artists such as Hubert Robert (France), Ferdinand Knab (Italy), and John Constable (England) embraced this idea, depicting abandoned structures as melancholic and aesthetically captivating. It is likely that the artists of these Irish tower house paintings were influenced by these trends, integrating themes of age and romantic nostalgia into their work. Even if some paintings are depicted more so as a ruin than what state they were actually in, it is safe to assume many had well and truly began their deterioration from the early 17th century and potentially the artists were emphasising these features or painting as they were.

Additionally, the landscape surrounding each tower house is treated as a key visual component. In Mary Darby's painting (second), Burnchurch Castle is immersed in a rich, vibrant landscape, with large trees flourishing around the structure. This framing suggests that the tower house was perceived more as a residential space,

with nature and human activity harmonizing around it, reinforcing a sense of ease and domesticity. This could reflect how the tower houses once were before the introduction of mass agricultural practices on these sites, regardless the theme of rich vegetation compliments the dominance of the tower house in these pieces.

Overall, these 19th century paintings highlight the tower house as both a relic of the past and a subject of aging. While most artists emphasise its integration with the landscape, Beranger's piece stands apart, showcasing its isolated dominance. The presence of ruinous qualities, such as overgrown vines and patina on stone, suggests that the age value of these structures was already well established in the 19th century, further contributing to their romanticised appeal. One striking aspect across all five paintings is the clear depiction of the tower house's defensive architectural details and stone exterior, emphasising their continued importance in defining the typology's integrity. These paintings provide invaluable insight into the historical integrity of Irish tower houses a perspective crucial for considerations of future preservation efforts, as discussed in Chapter Four.

Current Day Situation

Tower houses today are facing weathering, structural instability and funding limitations. Only a very small percentage have been repurposed as museums, private residences or heritage sites whilst majority remain in ruins and continue to deteriorate. Most do stand as registered historical landmarks in the Irish landscape and are extremely visible from roads and paths alike, attracting tourists and curious urban explorers. Despite their emphasis in the landscape and appeal, many are too unsafe to enter.

Ownership lies between private ownership with management by heritage organisations or completely by the Office of Public Works (OPW). The Public Office of works is an Irish government office whose primary function is to support the implantation of government policy.⁷³ If the tower house is owned by the government, they are under state protection which ensure their conservation for public access. In 2024, Ireland allocated €9 million in funding for 676 built heritage projects through the Historic Structures Fund (HSF) and the Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS).⁷⁴ Within this €9 million, €4.5 million is for 114 projects for major conservation works on significant historic buildings. For the quantity of tower houses in need of repair or basic conservation, this funding is simply not enough. Taking County Kilkenny as an example, there are 307 known tower houses here, over a space of approximately 2073 square kilometres. Out of

⁷³ Government of Ireland. "Office of Public Works." Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/office-of-public-works/>.

⁷⁴ GOV IE, "Minister Noonan Announces €9 Million in Funding for 676 Built Heritage Projects Across the Country," Gov.ie, accessed January 3, 2025, <https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-housing-local-government-and-heritage/press-releases/minister-noonan-announces-9-million-in-funding-for-676-built-heritage-projects-across-the-country/>.

these 307 tower houses in an array of decay, only 62 are maintained for.⁷⁵ This maintenance often includes removing vegetation growth on the walls, keeping pathways cleared surrounding the structures, fencing around the property and some receiving more intense weathering prevention such as applying protective coatings, managing moisture levels and reinforcing structure.

In saying this, the government has attempted to focus on one tower house and do an intense restoration, for example at Barryscourt Castle. Closing in 2016 due to serious structural issues of holes forming in the walls. The extensive restoration of the tower house project included extensive regrouting, repointing, leadwork to address the serious water ingress. A completion of a full mechanical and electrical upgrade, an overhaul of heating and fire safety systems, landscape rejuvenation, contemporary visitor facilities and specialists to enhance bat roosting habitats within the castle.



51- Barryscourt Castle During Restoration

Source: Irish Examiner 2023

Other tower houses that are open to the public are Ross Castle, Blarney Castle, Aghnanure Castle, Dunnguaire Castle, Newton Castle, Barryscourt Castle, Clonony Castle, Leamaneh Castle, Malahide Castle and Bunratty Castle. These are either museums of what the tower house once was, restored traditionally to homes or hotels, event spaces for weddings or art studios such as Newtown Castle for Burren College of Art. Although there is an effort to restore some of the tower houses and make them of use, the process is expensive and remains high maintenance for owners and occupiers.

⁷⁵ Government of Ireland. "Office of Public Works." Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/office-of-public-works/>.

Overall, the level of decay of tower houses in Ireland ranges from pristine residential homes with just age and patina, to standing decaying structures to sometimes a pile of stones. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, scholars estimate up to 7000 tower houses being built, with many now have been taken over by nature and will continue to do so without any intervention.



53- Irish Tower House Ruin Ogee Window
& Seating
Source: Blessedwildapplegirl Tumblr



52- Restored Tower House Double Ogee
Head Window & Seating
Source: Airbnb Tubbrid Castle



*54- Burnchurch Castle and Turret
Co. Kilkenny, Ireland
Source: OPW*

CHAPTER THREE: Burnchurch Castle

The previous chapter captures the essence of the tower house through its historical development and spatial variations. When addressing the research question “How can a 15th-century Irish tower house, currently in a state of neglect, be adaptively reused to meet contemporary societal needs while preserving its historical and architectural integrity and be used as a guideline for other tower house projects?” it is crucial to understand that these guidelines are meant as a framework and not a copy and paste type of solution. With that point considered, the architectural intervention section of this paper will focus on one tower house that aligns to the brief created in the methodology. This allows for a detailed analysis of features of the selected tower house to be considered and conceptualised in an adaptive reuse case study. By selecting a single case study, the investigation can offer deeper insight into its individual qualities. This will hopefully provide a respectable insight and meaning that will add to the previous chapter’s overall information about the tower house as an overall typology. The tower house chosen for this part of the paper meets all eight brief criteria and carries the essence a tower house.

The brief:

1. A tower house located in Ireland.
2. Preferably earlier years due to the potential of providing more information of how they were inhabited over the 200 years.
3. Has potential in regards to the structure.
4. Not intervened already in a contemporary sense.
5. Has abundant information available such as plans, history etc.
6. Located nearby a town or city that allows for more connections to transport, visibility, community etc.
7. Site must be accessible for construction.

The Chosen Tower House

The selected tower house is Burnchurch Castle, Bawn and Turret with the build date approximately dating from 1420. It is only approximated to be a part of the earlier builds of the 15th century due to the location of the hall on the fourth floor and evidence of a central hearth, which was often an indication of earlier tower houses.⁷⁶ The tower house is in a small parish of Burnchurch, in Co. Kilkenny. The site is listed as a National Monument of Ireland and resides on surrounding private property, yet has public access and is looked after by the Office of Public Works (OPW).⁷⁷ The structure stands as a ruin, yet in good condition due to governmental

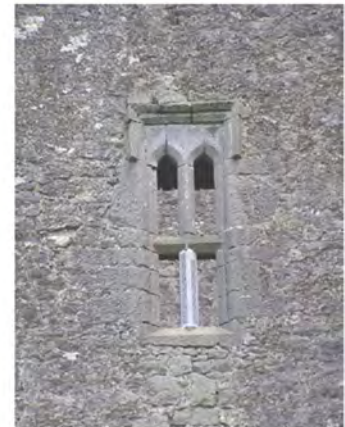
⁷⁶ Rory Sherlock, *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2010), page 126

⁷⁷ Heritage Ireland. "Burnchurch Castle and Turret." Accessed January 1, 2025. <https://heritageireland.ie/unguided-sites/burnchurch-castle-and-turret/>.

maintenance of upkeep of the immediate site.⁷⁸ The exact soundness of the structure is undetermined however speculating from images and the information compiled below, the overall structure appears to be solid. There are definitive signs of wear on the crenelations, machicolation, roof walk, chimney and fireplace however they remain distinctive. Regardless of the exact state of the fabric, entry is not allowed from the general public.



Site View



Window East Elevation



55- Architectural Details

Source: OPW



⁷⁸ Government of Ireland. "Office of Public Works." Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/office-of-public-works/>.



56- Burnchurch Castle and Turret Artist Interpretation
Source: William Robertson and OPW

History

The first inhabitants of Burnchurch Castle were the Fitzgerald family, an Irish nobility family and they continuously occupied the tower house until the early 17th Century when they were forced to leave.⁷⁹ Afterwards the tower house was occupied by the Flood and Swift families until it was abandoned in 1817 and left to neglect.⁸⁰ The artist interpretation above is intended for the Flood family stating “To Robert Flood Esq. Farmley, this view of Burnt Church Castle is very respectfully inscribed by his Ob.t Servant Wm Robertson. Published by Wm Robertson Kilkeny and J Taylor High Holborn London”. Although we are unsure of the date of this etching, we can assume the William Robertson is the Irish architect born in 1770-1850 and was often involved in the commissioning of

⁷⁹ Government of Ireland. "Office of Public Works." Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/office-of-public-works/>.

⁸⁰ IBID

sketches and watercolours of Kilkenny antiquities.⁸¹ Although this tower house was not part of the mass decline in the 17th Century, it still captures the essence of a classic tower house through architectural form, whilst being in a good enough condition structurally speaking to conceptually adapt for this paper.

15th C- Exact date unknown, Castle was built as a Norman Tower House by the Burnchurch Family with a round gate turret and Bawn. Located on farmlands, the family had agricultural interests

1650- Colonel William Warden took over during the Cromwellian invasion and Fitzgerald Family were transplanted to Connaught

1666 granted to Major Francis Flood

Approx. 17th C- Fireplace, chimney and larger upper windows added (assumed after new owners took over)

1817- Revered William Swift died and the castle was left abandoned. This was the last time the tower was lived in.

1993- Burnchurch Castle and Tower became a National Monument and is looked after by the Office of Public Works, but owned by a private land owner. By this time the roof had collapsed and the floors had fallen in.

2024- No interior access, maintenance by Public Office of Works continues to look after the Tower House and Bawn

57- Timeline of Burnchurch Castle
Source: Selina Keogh & Office of Public Works

⁸¹ Conleth Manning, "The Miller/Robertson Collection," *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 147 (2017): page 33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45410653>.

As for the surrounding site, the parish was first founded in the 6th century by Saint Dallan. It was given the name Cill Daillain translated to Church of Dallan in English. The earliest record following this for the naming of the parish is Kiltrani in 1225, and this name remained until 1316.⁸² During this time a Scot's army burned down the parish that consisted of a church and nearby dwellings. It was during this time the parish got the name "Teampall Loiscthe" translated in English as The Incinerated Church.⁸³ This name stayed until Ireland began speaking more commonly in English and this is where the name Burnchurch was first mentioned in the early 16th Century.⁸⁴ The parish currently consists of an early 19th Century church, which is now in ruins, a graveyard that is also a National Monument, a national school in use, residential housing approximately 20 dwellings and sprawling farmland in all directions.⁸⁵



58- Burnchurch Castle Site Plan 2024
Source: Selina Keogh

⁸² Heritage Ireland. "Burnchurch Castle and Turret." Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://heritageireland.ie/unguided-sites/burnchurch-castle-and-turret/>.

⁸³ IBID

⁸⁴ IBID

⁸⁵ Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands, Kilkenny Manual: Record of Monuments and Places (Dublin: National Monuments and Historic Properties Service, 1996), [https://www.archaeology.ie/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Archaeology-RMP-Kilkenny-Manual-\(1996\)-0022.pdf](https://www.archaeology.ie/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Archaeology-RMP-Kilkenny-Manual-(1996)-0022.pdf).

A road follows the perimeter of the site on the west and is approximately 10km from Kilkenny city. This is important as Kilkenny is a smaller Irish city that has a rich history through its landmarks and given it once was the capital of Ireland for a brief period in the mid-17th Century.⁸⁶ Kilkenny was under Norman-Irish control for most of the time the city was big enough to have its own power and influence and sense of identity. We know that the Fitzgeralds, Butlers and Bourkes were families of Anglo Norman descent that later became Anglo-Irish and lived in a more Gaelic way, as mentioned in chapter one. Therefore, it makes sense that the Fitzgerald family that inhabited Burnchurch Castle for centuries was within proximity to an important town and castle such as Kilkenny. They also were most likely self sufficient in their parish agriculturally, as the flat land suggests that the original inhabitants had farm animals and grain. It is likely also there was much more trees, which is depicted in historical artworks and which are seen to the east of the site as we are aware mass clearing of land occurred after the turn of the 17th century.

Historical Architectural Detail

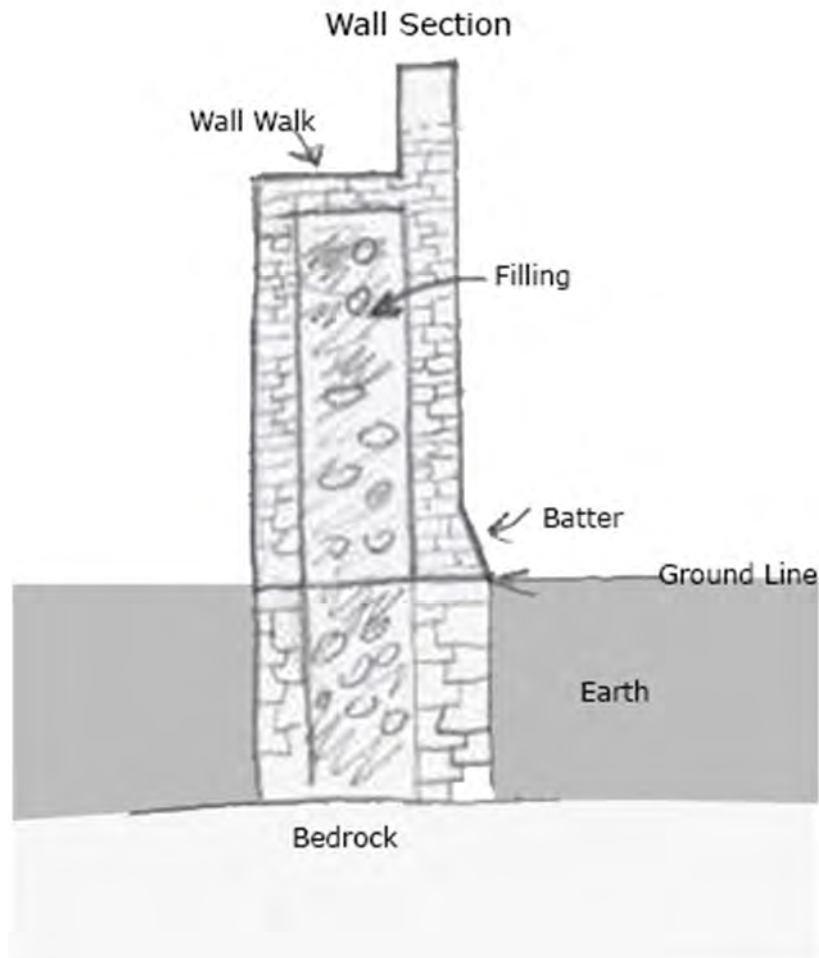
The form of the tower house was classic, with Burnchurch being built six stories high reaching approximately 18m, attached was a bawn and a turret standing approximately 12m high 20m to the north of the tower house. The bawn would have acted as a barrier for farm animal and from raiders trying to access their property. The tower house, bawn and turret are constructed of limestone due to its availability in medieval Ireland as well as rubble and timber. The form of the tower house is rectangular and the turret circular with thick walls of up to 2.6m.⁸⁷ The outer stones which are ashlar stones are large in size, approx. 20cm x 7cm and irregularly shaped and laid horizontally with a thin layer of mortar between the stones giving it a smoother look in comparison to other some other tower houses. On the edges of the façade are quoin stones on the corners of the build that strengthen the structure and provide a decorative element. The base of the castle goes outwards with a base batter giving the structure a solid foundation which was uniform across other tower houses.⁸⁸ The interior walls also had these ashlar stones, giving the interior an exclusive feel. Between the exterior and interior ashlar stones, was rubble. As the walls of Burnchurch Castle are extremely thick, it is assumed there is a thick layer of stones, then rubble. This construction

⁸⁶ Historic Kilkenny. Accessed November 17th, 2024. <https://www.historickilkenny.com/>.

⁸⁷ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 9

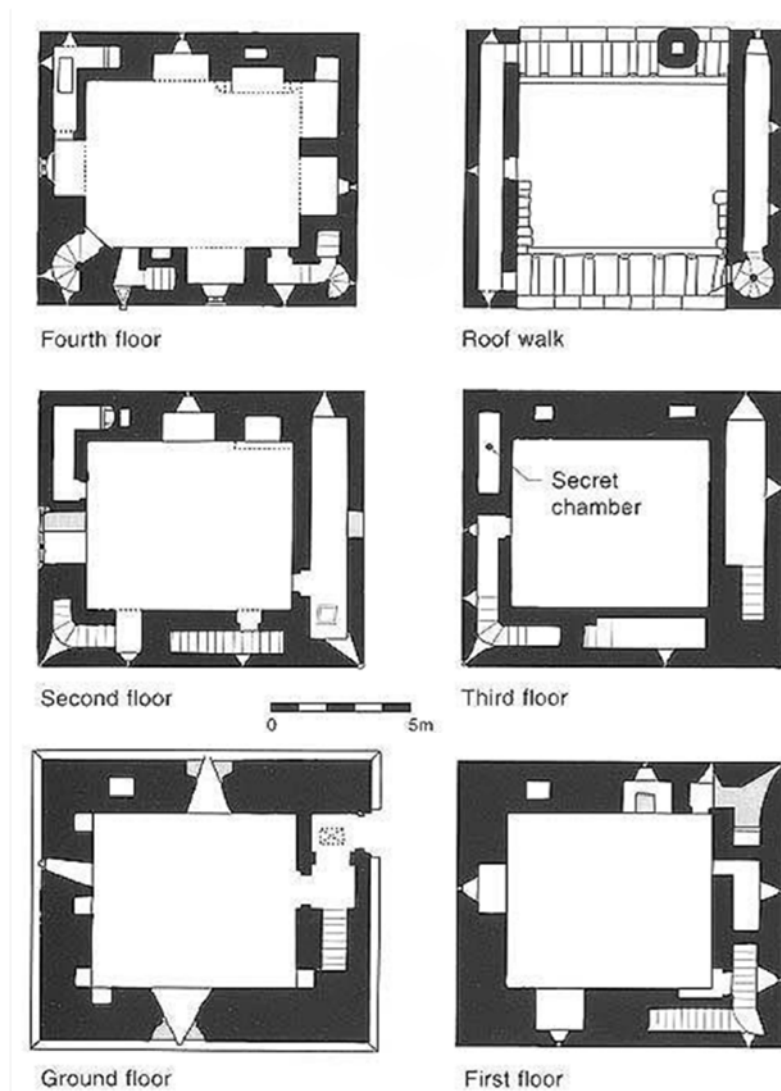
⁸⁸ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 193

method, although typical of the time, meant that the interior spaces were quite damp and difficult to heat.



59- Castle Construction
Source: Lee Farmer

For the interior spaces, the layout historically was that storage was on ground floor, the second floor could have been for sleeping or as the kitchen as there is an existing fireplace and garderobe, the third floor was a secret chamber, the fourth as the primary hall, the fifth as a roof walk and the sixth as the parapets. Each floor had a primary inner room with a dimension of 5.5m x 7m, surrounding there is have a variety of chambers would have let light in from the windows or access via the staircase. The floorplans here depict what the tower house would have been like spatially during inhabitation.

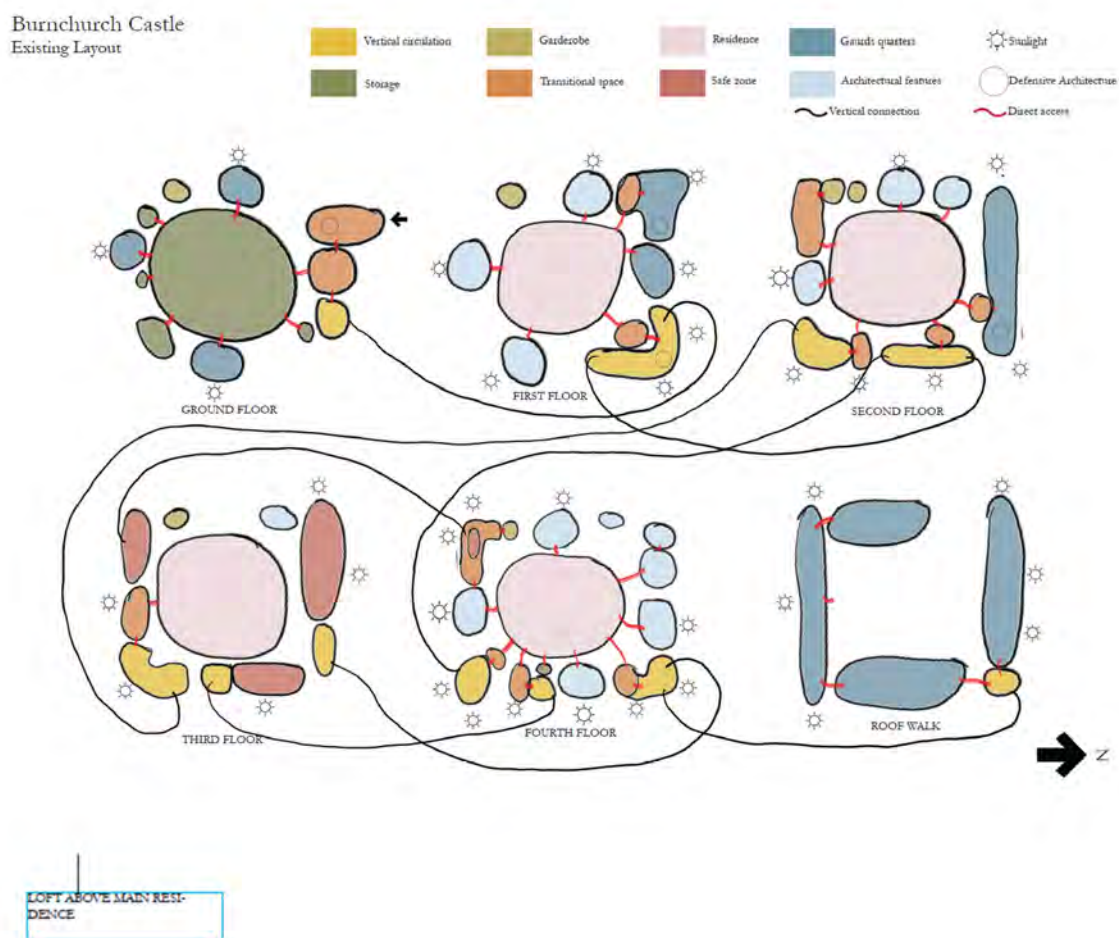


60- Burnchurch Tower Floor Plans
Source: Robert Carney

Burnchurch Castle has a complex series of rooms, with many chambers and staircases that through Rory Sherlock's analysis of spatial diagrams, the more complex the earlier the castle typically is.⁸⁹ The Nolli diagram below shows the complexity of navigation around the tower house, further suggesting Burnchurch

⁸⁹ Rory Sherlock, *Changing Perceptions: Spatial Analysis and the Study of the Irish Tower House* (Paris: Publications du CRAHM, 2010) Page 242

was of an earlier build according to Rory Sherlock's research. As one enters, there is a lobby with a murder hole above, then doors to either stairs or the ground floor inner room. The straight flight of stairs that transcends the thick 2.6m walls with another murder hole over the first-floor staircase. This staircase then opens to the entrance to level one and takes a 90 degree turn and transcends to the second and fourth floor spanning a large percentage of the eastern wall. The fourth floor was the main floor with a stone floor giving level three a vaulted ceiling. Level three is accessed from either a secret staircase on level two or four only. As level four is the primary hall, this rooms had a fireplace with the mantel pieces being a decorative gothic style, the doorways and window rooms were also of the same style. As the primary staircase comes to a halt in the hall for all tower houses,



61 - Diagram of Spatial Layout at Burnchurch Castle
Source: Selina Keogh

within the hall there are internal spiral staircases on the north east and south east corners giving access to the split level crenelated wall walks. These wall walks allowed guards to view and defend the castle to all directions through the crenelations and machicolation. There was a wooden roof in which stairs transcended to the parapets for guards to defend. The organigram shows the complexity of the castle during its historical use.

Additionally, there is evidence of a two storey hall that was built to the tower house on the northern wall, with corbels that would have connected to the first floor of the hall. Typically this addition would have come around the 16th Century due to the popularity of having a secondary hall for lords and the changing and evolving use of the primary hall as mentioned in chapter two.⁹⁰ It is guessed that this extension would have functioned concurrently with the fourth level hall, as there is no evidence in Irish documentation of this however, Rory Sherlock looks at the Scottish context and notes they would use one hall as a common hall and one as a lord's hall.⁹¹ This extension has now been removed or demolished with only little evidence this via the northern wall.



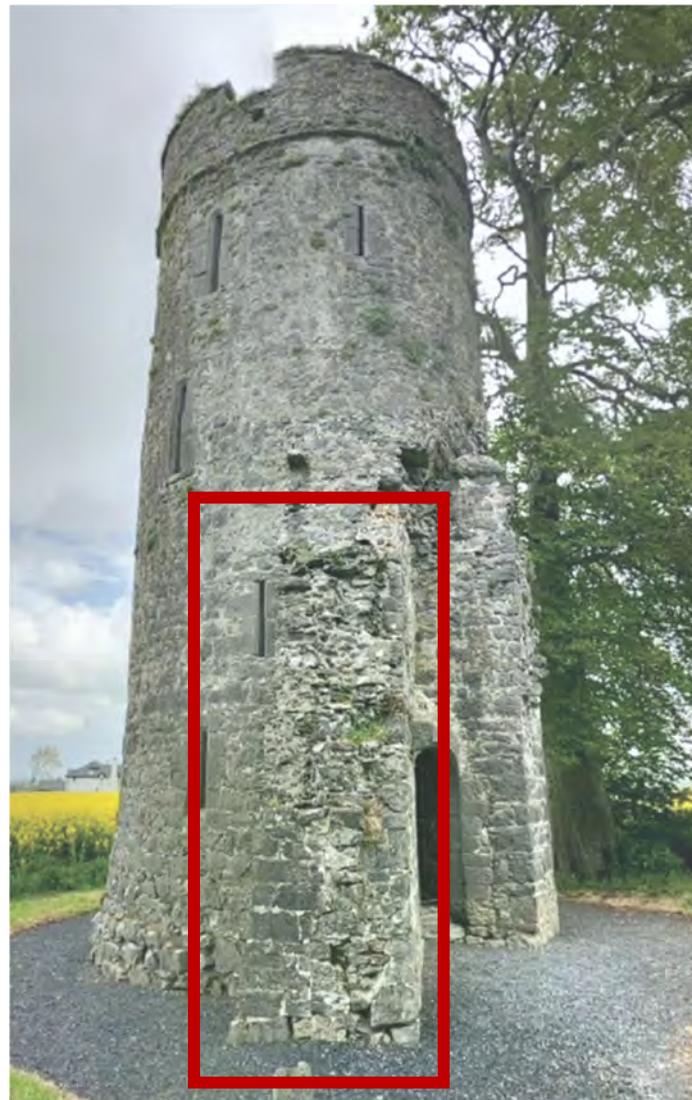
*62- Extension Evidence on Northern Façade
Corbels and Filled in Door (outlined in red)
Source: Wikipedia 2024*

The turret which lies 20m north of the tower house, is a four storey tower with a diameter of 3.9m and a 1.3m thick walls constructed of limestone rubble with a

⁹⁰ Rory Sherlock, *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2010), page 133

⁹¹ Rory Sherlock, *The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space* (Dublin: Royal Irish Academy 2010), page 134

round headed doorway facing south east. The bawn would have connected this doorway to the north facing doorway of the tower house. The bawn connecting the turret and tower house was used most likely as a protection for cattle as the location of the tower house suggests the landlords were involved in the agricultural industry either via crop or animals or both.



63- The Turret and Remainder of Bawn (in red)
Source: Heritage Ireland

Inside the turret, a stair ascends from the south to the first floor. A window facing west at first floor level was later converted to a fireplace with brick. There was a garderobe on the second floor level and a fireplace on the third. The floors here were held by slight offsets and the parapet survives with long merlons and few

crenelations.⁹² From these details it can be assumed that the turret was inhabited and used as a watch tower for guards and or other servicemen. The exact colour of the rendering for Burnchurch is not known, but likely to have been similar to earth colour of red, browns and whites.

Burnchurch Castle 2024

Today, within the immediate surroundings of the tower house, turret and bawn are tall lime trees, a stone wall encompassing the property, an entrance with heritage listed iron gates and a main road running south and east to the castle.⁹³ The tower house can be seen clearly from the road and from afar due to the flat land and sprawling landscape.



*64- Entrance to Burnchurch from Main Road
Source: Google Maps 2023*

⁹² J. Commins, Notes on the Places of Antiquarian Interest Visited by the Society, (Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland 36 1906) page 270

⁹³ Heritage Ireland. "Burnchurch Castle and Turret." Accessed November 7, 2024.
<https://heritageireland.ie/unguided-sites/burnchurch-castle-and-turret/>



65- Burnchurch Castle
Source: Google Maps and Patrick Hogan 2016



66- View from Burnchurch Parish Main Road (Unnamed)
with Sprawling Landscape to West
Source: Google Maps 2024

The structure of the walls and architectural details, as mentioned, are in okay to good condition. The landscape is well maintained and there are no significant vines on the building fabric apart from small amounts of moss growth on the facade. There is significant missing elements from the tower house this includes the roof, floors from level one, two and three and steps to the parapet. The diagram below, in red shows its historical elements that are missing from the tower house. Alongside this, the turrets roof has decayed, along with the wooden floors and staircase. It could be said that this tower is structurally sound, but if left a few more decades the distinctive details may begin to crumble without any intervention. Therefore, it is an ideal case study due to it being at the tipping point of falling to a more ruinous structure.



67- Non-Existent Structure in Red
Source: Selina Keogh & Monuments of Ireland



69- *Burnchurch Castle Close Up*
Source: *The Irish Aesthete*



68- *Turret Interior*
Source: *Dream Time*

Future of Site

As for now, the Office of Public Works maintains the tower house, bawn and turret yet this maintenance is predominantly left to landscaping and the immediate site context. There are no plans listed for the future use of the building listed publicly. The Office of Public Works funding for heritage is just €9 million per year for all heritage in Ireland, so it is safe to say there will be no major interventions in the plans over the next few years for Burnchurch specifically.⁹⁴ Castles that already have tourism activity and located in major cities tend to get the most of the funds for maintenance and renewal as mentioned in chapter two in the current day situation.

Potential of Site

Factual

- No plans to intervene
- Solid structure that can be built into or on
- The historical worth of the site is high as it reflects an earlier tower house which will give more clues on the transition from late medieval Ireland to modern Ireland
- Has visitor potential as location is close to Kilkenny City
- Has potential to involve a community due to being in the centre of Burnchurch parish
- Potential to create a centre to Burnchurch parish as it currently lacks one
- Potential to create a connection to the other church in ruins in the vicinity
- Has an interesting layout that is unique whilst being a classic tower house which can allow for interesting spatial designs and uses in the proposed intervention
- Potential to work with smaller unique spaces

Potential

- Has medieval architectural features still in good condition that in our intervention can be highlighted and revived in an interesting way
- Has potential to be a catalyst for other tower house projects in Ireland
- Can revive and give attention to the interesting history of the tower house and bring awareness to this typology
- Has potential to developers to take on a project like this
- Potential to start saving the tower houses before even more crumble to the ground

⁹⁴ Government of Ireland. "Office of Public Works." Accessed November 1, 2024. <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/office-of-public-works/>.

The opportunities alongside a solid structure allow for the experimentation of more realistic architectural interventions due to the fact it is strong enough to take on contemporary structure. This is extremely important because if the fabric was more in a ruinous state, potentially the architectural integrity would be more difficult to preserve. Another reason why this is a good case study is with the estimation of Burnchurch Castle being an earlier tower house, meaning it has more historical value as the tower house moved from defence fortress to residence which could be an opportunity for an evocative intervention due to this richer historical element.

As for the immediate landscape, there is sprawling views and unique lime trees that can add an additional advantage when finding a programme as it can extend to the views and landscape. The walls of the property are also in the same material as the castle, making it an enclosed, safe space from the road and the gates at the entrance allow for ease of access. The nearby Church, which is also in ruin, could be a part of a masterplan for Burnchurch Parish to give the community a core and perhaps a town centre which they lack. Being so close to Kilkenny City, allows for future possibilities of connecting the existing Medieval Mile to Burnchurch, or the nearby Kells Priory a historical landmark from the 12th C. The roads nearby are in good condition, maybe allowing for a new bike path or additional public transportation. As Kilkenny city grows and becomes the largest employment centre in the state outside the five metropolitan areas⁹⁵, there may be a demand to expand and develop nearby towns.

⁹⁵ Kilkenny City Council, Kilkenny City Continues to be a Major Growth Hub in Southern Region; Sustainable Transport Options Are Needed," Kilkenny City Council, last modified January 1, 2025, https://kilkennycoco.ie/eng/news/council_news/kilkenny-city-continues-to-be-a-major-growth-hub-in-southern-region-sustainable-transport-options-are-needed.html#:~:text=Press%20Release%201%3A-,Kilkenny%20City%20Continues%20to%20be%20a%20Major%20Growth%20Hub%20in,of%20the%20five%20metropolitan%20areas.



*70- Burnchurch Castle seen from the Farmland 2015
Source: Historic Sites of Ireland*



71- Burnchurch Church and Tower House in Background
Source: *The Visions of the Past* 2013



72- Burnchurch Site from Above Looking West
Source: Mark Tyrell Instagram

CHAPTER FOUR: The Burnchurch Castle Case-Study and Reflections

This chapter will reflect on a conceptual architectural intervention within Burnchurch Castle and how it can answer the research question of “How can a 15th century Irish tower house, currently in a state of neglect, be adaptively reused to meet contemporary societal needs while preserving its historical and architectural integrity and be used as a guideline for other tower house projects.” In this chapter there will be some personal reflections as well as reviews in the lens of theorists as well as what could have been done more effectively. From these reflections, guidelines for the preservation of the tower house’s historical and architectural integrity of future tower house interventions will be suggested in chapter five.

Owl’s Roost Distillery

This conceptual architectural intervention named Owl’s Roost Distillery in Burnchurch Castle had a programme was three functions. A whiskey distillery for the tower house, a barn owl conservation for the turret and a reinstated the bawn to connect the two functions and act as a meeting point. The structure to this chapter will begin with the site, bawn, turret and finally the tower house.



73- Proposed Entrance to the Site
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

The Site:

The Burnchurch surrounding site remains relatively untouched in the proposed design as the Public Office of Works maintains the existing surroundings including the lime and yew trees, iron gates, stone walls and car park areas. To the west, the sprawling landscape is maintained by nearby farmers who use the land for agricultural purposes and, therefore, the intervention does not go so far into this space. Given this, the interventions here are subtle and minimal and compliment the existing entrances and landscape.

A new path is proposed, following the original dirt road through the site leading up to the tower house and turret while extending around both structures. This pathway provides a flat, even ground replacing the current dirt road that is prone to erosion from the frequent rain. A sturdier material ensures longevity whilst allowing for the distillery equipment deliveries and all users to access the site easily. This new path is a 45m walk from the car park and from any point, users see the tower house and turret in their full stance due to the minimal number of trees. The exposed stance of the site may give the impression that little has changed. Interventions are subtle and are only seen from the east (image 73 view) and west pop out slightly from the top of the crenelations. Additionally, the reimagined bawn, that connects the two structures through wood, brick and green roof, integrates into the landscape rather than the dominating scene.

While the tower house and turret retain their architectural integrity, this approach overlooks the residential and inviting nature these buildings historically embodied. Evidence suggested by historical paintings and research on the hall show that the tower houses were both fortifications and lived spaces, making this aspect a significant aspect of the typology. The current proposal however shows the tower house and turret without these qualities, instead reinforcing an imposing and dominant presence from the carpark and the whole duration of the pathway for the user. This framing risks evoking associations within the context of Ireland's more turbulent history and as a result, making it less effective for preserving the deeper historical integrity of these structures.

Therefore, this initial visual experience for the user and entrance to the site could be reconsidered. As it stands, the proposed project rapidly unveils the entire project to any user that enters the carpark diminishing the impact of the more nuanced, interior focused interventions. Theorist Perez Gomez suggests that architecture only exists within its context and that it (architecture) should extend beyond just a visual experience.⁹⁶ Applying this perspective to the site, the open presentation of the tower house and turret creates a snapshot effect, offering an immediate view but lacking deeper spatial integration. The site really appears isolated, disconnected from the surrounding landscape or nearby parish, which is

⁹⁶ Alberto Perez Gomez, *The City is Not a Postcard: The Problem of Genius Loci*. (Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts 2013), page 42

what Perez-Gomez refers to in his essay *The City is not a Postcard*. He emphasizes there should be a connection to the site and the surroundings.⁹⁷

The project doesn't wish to risk visitors finding the vertical scale and commanding stance overwhelming and potentially associating it with an unwelcoming atmosphere. While this narrative cannot be definitively confirmed, evidence from chapter one and the literature review suggests that Ireland's outlook and approach to these castles lack a cultural attachment. This is also indicated by the statistics of the current use of over 2000 tower houses and their historical trajectory of first seen as defensive, then accepted as a way to get financial independence then stripped from. The emotional collective memory of these buildings particularly in relation to the Anglo-Norman and Gaelic history, means these structures are not viewed in the same cultural reverence as for example in the United Kingdom or France.

Perhaps a better strategy would be to reframe this initial view, focusing on the strength of the existing ruinous value of the site, which people are often drawn into and endeared by (ruins) as they are known to evoke strong feelings of contemplation and wonder along with feelings of reverence for life and appreciation of the past.⁹⁸ Art historian Georg Simmel theorized between the relationship of architecture and nature suggested that a classic ruin, which in his terms is a ruin that has been overtaken by nature in a balanced way, or an interplay between the finite nature of human constructions and the infinite immortal force of nature.⁹⁹ Simmel emphasizes that the aesthetic value of a ruin lies in its state of decay. So translating that to this project and utilising the existing age value seen on the facades of the tower house and turret, the site could be balanced out with nature, particularly trees to showcase the age value in a different light than what it currently is in. Another alternative would be to have the architectural intervention compete with the strength of the tower house and turret, but that will not be entertained in this paper.

Therefore, the proposed new strategy could focus on framing the intervention through the existing stone walls which appear at first glance to be a ruin. Framing the tower house allows a gradual reveal of the entire project rather than a vertical striking image, that most likely triggers or adds to the memory of these typologies as invasive, or not part of the Irish identity. If the user were to walk through a series of trees on each side, leading them towards the bawn and sprawling landscape, the experience would be somewhat different. It could be done in a series of unravelling could be a progressive unfolding of the overall translation of the tower house from the boom, to neglected to being intervened in a contemporary way. This unravelling could be done with the existing lime trees as well as proposed new trees to stage the intervention. To support this suggestion,

⁹⁷ IBID

⁹⁸ Thordis Arrhenius & Alois Riegl, *The Cult of Age in Mass Society: Alois Riegl's Theory of Conservation*, (Journal of Historic Preservation, History and Criticism, 2004) page 76

⁹⁹ Georg Simmel. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff. New York: Free Press, 1950.

there is evidence, through artworks of Burnchurch Castle that there were plenty more trees surrounding the site. The painting from Mary Darby in 1863, also mentioned in chapter two, that shows the tower house and turret in a very different light. It emphasizes the site and how the tower house and trees are somewhat balanced.



74- Burnchurch Castle by Mary Darby 1863
Source: Mutual Art

Using this as inspiration of what the site would have looked like before the sprawling and cleared landscape of today for agricultural purposes. This painting really emphasizes the nature aspect of the surrounds, which of course was part of the romantic period where there was a deep appreciation for nature and often these artists idealized the past. Despite this, it isn't necessarily unlikely that the tower house surrounds were denser in nature than the current situation. Victoria McAlister writes that tower houses were typically built in areas of good soil and potential for agricultural reason and they were also typically the centre of the parish acting as a token for the community. Often having their features facing the parish.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Victoria L. McAlister and Empey 1981, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 12

The new suggestion mirrors this, includes planting trees along the path creates not only maintain the historical and architectural integrity of the site but create a positive user experience that also benefits for the barn owl conservation located in the turret. These trees will enhance the ecological aspect of the site and adds more space for the barn owls roosting in the turret. This is important for the safety of the owls and the addition encourages other animals to take shelter nearby, and in turn enriches the grounds with more food whilst becoming more of an ecosystem. The proposed framing starting with the entrance could look like something similar to the following three images.



*75- Framing the Tower House with Trees
Carpark*

Source: Selina Keogh 2025

“At the arrival of the site at the iron gates, the user is drawn to the vanishing horizon through the lightly structured, recreated bawn. They can see right through, and at night there is a perfect sunset. Glimpses of the tower house and turret are noticed, but the entirety of the fabric is yet to be seen in fullness. Imagination of what could be is sparked as the user walk through the tall stone walls and iron gates.”

Selina Keogh January 2025



76- Framing the Tower House with Trees

Halfway Point

Source: Selina Keogh 2025

“Halfway down the pathway, the unraveling of the tower house begins as the crenelations that once poked out from above the tree canopies now connect to the base of the tower house. Details of the historical stones become clearer and it is here we get a first glimpse of the architectural intervention and the length of the historical tower house.”

Selina Keogh January 2025



77- Framing the Tower House with Trees

Arrival Point

Source: Selina Keogh 2025

“Towards the end of the pathway, both the turret and tower house are revealed even more so and the user gets a real sense of scale of the monument. The dominating factor that was mentioned above is also revealed, however will be softened due to the sequence in which it is exposed.”

Selina Keogh January 2025

This framing firstly, changes the tower house from a contextless dominating structure to something that can be slowly introduced to and interacted with. Perez Gomez suggests that the recovery of a place is a critical project and that this recovery involves a deep consideration of the phenomenological aspects of architecture, particularly how spaces can be experienced by people.¹⁰¹ In the tower house's case, by having such a dominating structure exposed not only allows for assumptions of what it is or isn't to occur from afar, but also limits the building to be seen from afar as a visual entity or snapshot, which Perez-Gomez believes limits the experience of architecture. If we were to frame it and reconnect to the surrounds, the unveiling would allow the experience for the user to be softer, which is important when we think about the negative associations that may come up for people. Experiencing the phenomenological aspects of the architecture for what it is, rather than any presumptions gathered from walking towards the dominating

¹⁰¹Alberto Perez Gomez, *The City is Not a Postcard: The Problem of Genius Loci*. (Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts 2013), page 44

fortress retains the integrity of the building whilst giving it a contemporary association.

This proposal, on arrival to the bawn, the path wraps around the tower house, bawn and turret, guiding the visitors to observe the intricate stonework, windows, quoins and batter. Despite being nearly 600 years old, they remain in sound condition, this experience allows for its architectural integrity to be admired close up, showing its scars and age, adding to that appreciation of age value mentioned earlier. This approach gives nuance to the historical function, as no one would have wanted to admire this part of the tower house as it was in the firing range of weapons from the guards above and also where wastewater and sewage would splash off of.¹⁰²



78- Admiring the Quoins and Base Batter
Source: Selina Keogh January 2025

¹⁰² Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), Page 220

Although the entrance eliminates the dominating effect, it is important to note that this intervention doesn't try to get rid of the dominating aspect of the tower house entirely as it is also an important element of the tower house as iterated in chapter two. Therefore, to also keep the architectural integrity of its striking vertical form and the connection to their defensive and striking nature as well as to keep the connection to the iconic vertical nature of Gaelic architecture, only some views will show the tower house in its dominating stance. These include the road from the south and from the farmland side. If the user chooses to walk ahead and view back, they can see the tower house, turret and even the ruins of the 1800's church in view, changing the experience again. After walking through the unveiling path of the case study, seeing Burnchurch Castle in another light or perspective only adds to the architectural integrity of what the site once was. If this was flipped, it wouldn't have the same effect on the user as the associations with the turbulent history. Having different frames for the same site could be an interesting way to maintain different parts of the historical integrity in various ways.



*79- View from the Farmland
Turret, Bawn, Tower House and Church
Source: Selina Keogh January 2025*



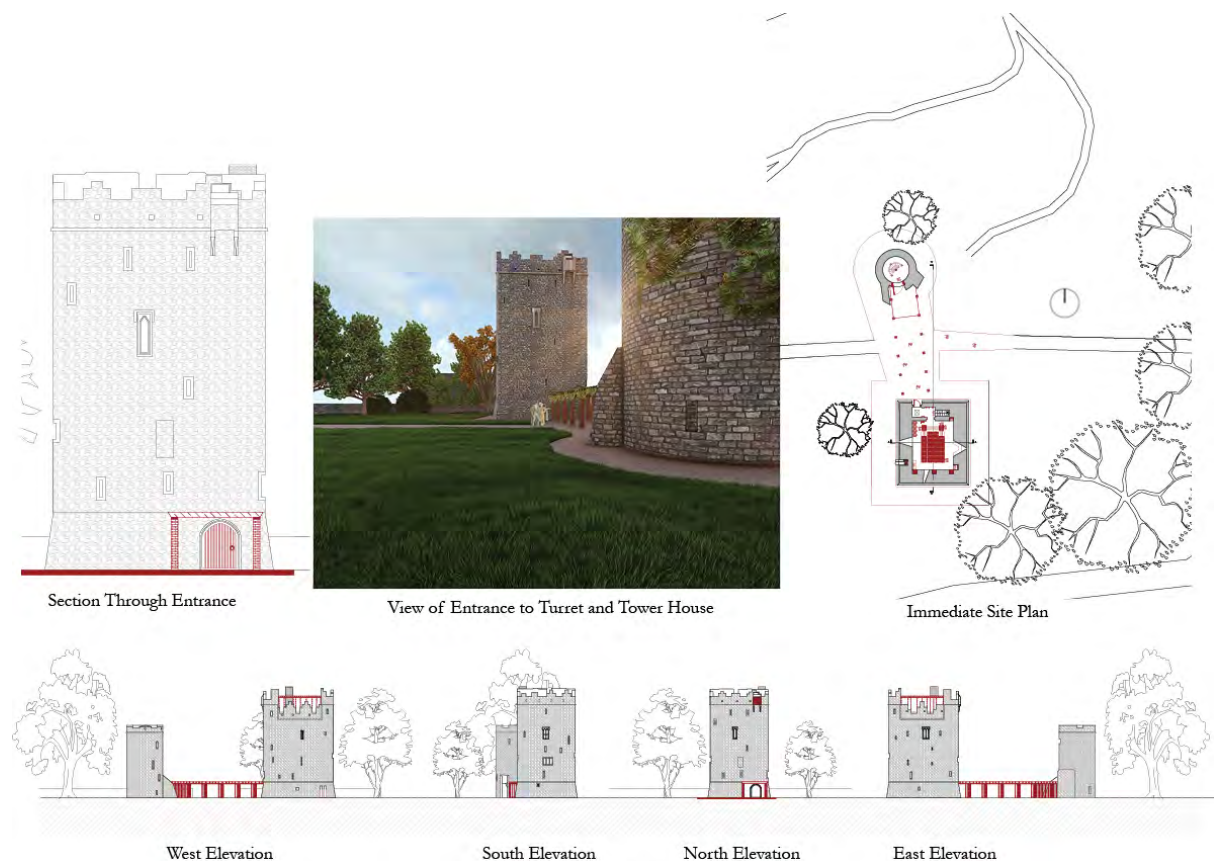
*80- View of Proposed Design from Road
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024*



*81- Proposed Bawn
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024*

The Bawn:

The Bawn is reinstated by following the ruins of the original structure on the existing turret. Constructed from brick, with a wooden roof featuring local vegetation, it extends from the turret door to the tower house door. Historically the bawn's construction would have followed been the same scale however it would have restricted both views and access. In contrast, the proposed open design introduces a sense of spatial freedom, allowing for greater interaction within the site.



82- The Proposed Bawn Drawings and Render
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024



83- Burnchurch Castle Turret with Remnants of Historic Bawn (outlined in red)
Source: Google Maps July 2016

As discussed in chapter two, bawns were often used to create a barrier between raiders and tower house residents and their animals. They were not seriously defensive as their function primarily was a preventative measure of theft.¹⁰³ Whilst in a contemporary sense this is not necessary, it makes sense to take advantage of sprawling landscape to the west which provides lovely views for users. This in turn changes the meaning of the bawn changes from restriction to a meeting point and connection between the turret, tower house and site.

Additionally, bawns are somewhat rare in tower houses, with only a smaller percentage of 20% is known to have used them.¹⁰⁴ With this statistic in mind, it felt necessary to preserve and revive this architectural feature. The proposed intervention seeks to follow the scale, rhythm and form of the historical bawn with new materials in a way that was more complementary to the surrounding site and new use. The proposed distillery was also in need of a meeting point and foyer due to the limitations of the existing tightness of the foyer on the ground floor. As a reminder, below is the artist's interpretation of Burnchurch Castles' turret, bawn and tower house. This is the closest available representation of what we have of the authentic form before the bawn collapsed.

¹⁰³ Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), page 217

¹⁰⁴ Victoria L. McAlister, *The Irish Tower House* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), page 22



84- Artist Interpretation of Burnchurch Castle
Source: W Robertson & OPW Ireland

Architecturally, the bawn incorporates a mix of Eugene Viollet-le-Duc style of restoration, and a more contemporary adaptive reuse practice strategy of *ensemble*, theorised by Bie Plevoets and Koenraad Van Cleempoel. Viollet-le-Duc worked during the 19th C and his restoration style was characterized by a blend of historical accuracy and creative interpretation. In contrast, the ensemble method in adaptive reuse seeks to contain heritage by framing it within a broader architectural context. This approach allows for the traces of decay to remain, serving as markers of authenticity, while guiding the recreation of the proposed form. This dual strategy, clearly distinguishing new elements, while following the original bawn's form of the remaining crumbling wall attached to the turret pays homage to the integrity of the structure. By reviving a structure that majority of it no longer exists the intervention reinterprets it for contemporary use.

As for the architectural and historical integrity of the bawn, Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa argues that the purpose of architecture is to make us see into the past and to summon memories and experiences that we have long forgotten. In the context of Burnchurch Castle, this quote does not imply that current day users will remember exactly what occurred during the time of the inhabitation of these buildings, as quite frankly that collective memory of the tower house inhabitation

has faded. Given the extend of neglect that the tower houses have faced, architecture alone is insufficient to reconstruct their original associations. Therefore, preserving their legacy requires recreation and reinterpretation much like what has been done in this proposed intervention. By transforming the bawn into a contemporary use of an outdoor foyer, the new function seeks to reignite meaning for the bawn and create new memories whilst allowing the imagination to wonder what once was.



*85- Proposed View of the Bawn from The Turret
Source: Selina Keogh June 2025*

The Turret:

The turret's intervention has a more non-intrusive concept and, in a way, remains as is with the walls untouched, the existing windows not restored and the ruin from the outside appears to retain the current day situation. This strategy could be understood through an adaptive reuse strategy of nuance, which means the intervention gives the tower a new meaning and new use through an empathetic and non-destructive way.¹⁰⁵ The meaning of the turret changes through function as what was once a place for guards to keep lookout, now is a barn owl conservation space. The turret, which was an empty shell, has been given the function of a conservation space for barn owls. This allows barn owls to have a safe space to roost and grow in numbers. The intervention consists of placing a steel staircase into the centre of the cylinder like shell with wooden floors on levels one, two and three. This central staircase is purely for animal carers to check on the wellbeing of the owls and not for tourism. The owls have access to these spaces and can roost in the nooks of the existing opes and arrow loops. The entrance to the turret is done with a new door and the entrance to the turret has a secondary space from the proposed bawn to allow an extra level of security for the owls and carers.



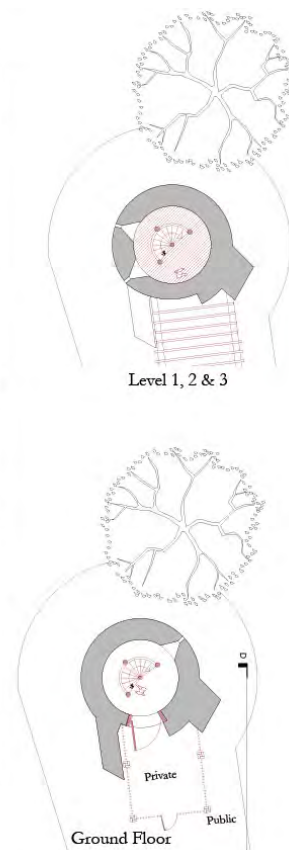
Looking Up



Turret Window



Irish Barn Owl



86- Proposed Turret
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

¹⁰⁵ Sofie Caigny, Hulya Ertas, Bie Plevoets & etal. As Found Experiments in Preservation (Antwerp Flanders Architecture Institute 2023), page 30



87- The Turret Current Day
Source: OPW

This method allows the barn owls to take over and become the prominent users of the keep. This also creates a contrast with the more so intervened bawn and the tower house. Giving the ruin a new use through animals and making them the predominant user and maintainer. This aligns with the proposed ecological aspect of the site and in a way that gives back to nature by letting the two thrive. There is also an element of *façadism*, because it allows the façade to keep its aged stone qualities. The lack of windows on the lower floors, enhances this privacy, allowing this balance of humans and animals to blend nicely. There is irony in this part of the design, as the programme aims to conserve the owls, whilst doing little to

preserve the actual ruinous turret, however the idea is not for the turret to decay even more so rapidly with the owls, but more of an ironic way of conserving the current day integrity of the space. This acceptance of wear and minimal intervention follows an ideology of British theorist John Ruskin. By showing signs of passing time and effects of the elements are presented not as problems but as essential qualities and that this age quality is value within itself.¹⁰⁶ Adding to this Alois Riegl suggest that this will become an object for the contemplation of transcendental notions of time, of the fragile nature of all things human and of human themselves and being the result of both human and natural processes, ruins are seen as emblematic of the cycle of life and death.¹⁰⁷ As this programme allows the turret to be in its ruinous state and allow wear and tear, inducing users contemplation to realise not everything is immortal. It may even awaken a thought that the tower house also will not stand once the natural elements inevitably take over if we don't intervene. The quote below summarizes this effect.

“...there was yet in the old some life, some mysterious suggestion of what has been, and of what it had lost; some sweetness in the gentle lines which rain and sun had wrought. There can be none in the brutal hardness of the new carving. Looking at the animals as an instance of living work and suppose the markings of the scales and hair once worn away, or the wrinkles of the brows, and who shall every restore them.”¹⁰⁸

John Ruskin, The Seven Lamps of Architecture, 1849

By having the turret contrast the more intervened bawn and tower house which will be expanded on soon, users may realise that the tower house is worth saving. If the tower house and turret and bawn were beautifully restored or adapted or conserved, the memory of the fact it was a ruin and neglected becomes vanished and in turn that part of its historical and architectural integrity also gets lost. This mix of strategies (among others façadism, Ruskin's ideology, ruin as art from afar and changing of meaning) gives the turret a new life in a way that is empathetic to both the past meaning and the current day architectural integrity.

¹⁰⁶ Sofie Caigny, Hulya Ertas, Bie Plevoets & etal. As Found Experiments in Preservation (Antwerp Flanders Architecture Institute 2023), page 22

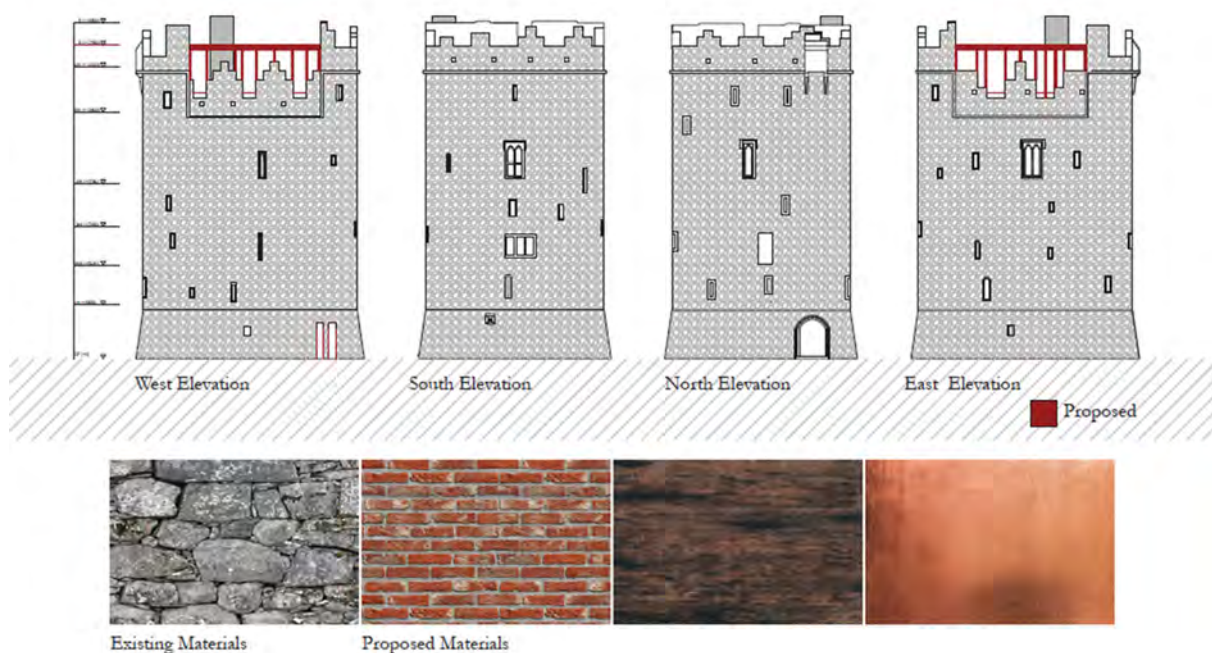
¹⁰⁷ Bie Plevoets, Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) page 42

¹⁰⁸ Bie Plevoets, Koenraad Van Cleempoel, Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage (London and New York: Routledge, 2016) page 42

The Tower House:

The Tower House is designed as a whiskey distillery consisting of industrial and tourism elements throughout the seven levels. These four distinctive spaces include storage (ground floor), industrial area (level one, two, three), the residential bar (level four) and viewing area (level five, six). Despite being a seemingly tight space, there is approximately 300sqm to accommodate the multiple functions, ensuring a long term use of the space. Each programme operates independently allowing different parts of the site to be used at various times.

The industrial process of the whiskey distilling consists of mashing, fermenting, distilling, condensing, maturing and bottling takes place on the lower levels. This part of the intervention cannot be seen from the outside which reflects the authentic element of the tower house, where the interior is not seen or assumed from the exterior. The tourism aspect is concentrated to the upper floors, where historically the residential spaces were. Here the architectural intervention is seen from the exterior on the western and eastern wall, yet only subtly which emphasises, yet again, the historical element of the tower house concealing what is occurring internally. Overall, the proposed materials of the new intervention consists of aged bricks, oak and copper.



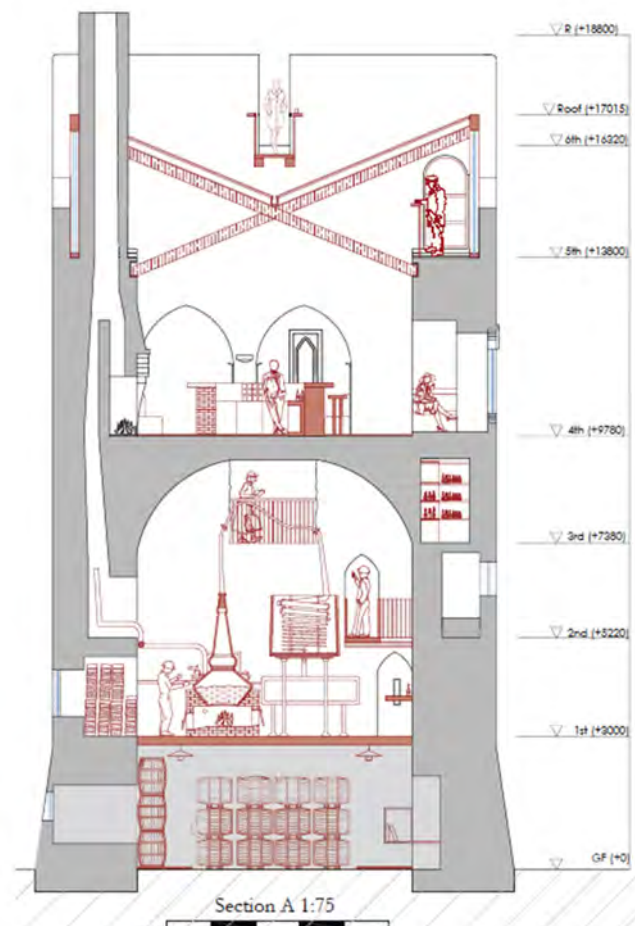
88- Proposed Intervention & Materials
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Historic Functions

- Level 0- Storage
- Level 1- Gaurd Residence
- Level 2- Kitchen
- Level 3- Safe Chamber
- Level 4- Main Residence
- Level 5- Servant Space
- Level 6- Gaurds/Roofwalk

**Owl's Roost Distillery Functions**

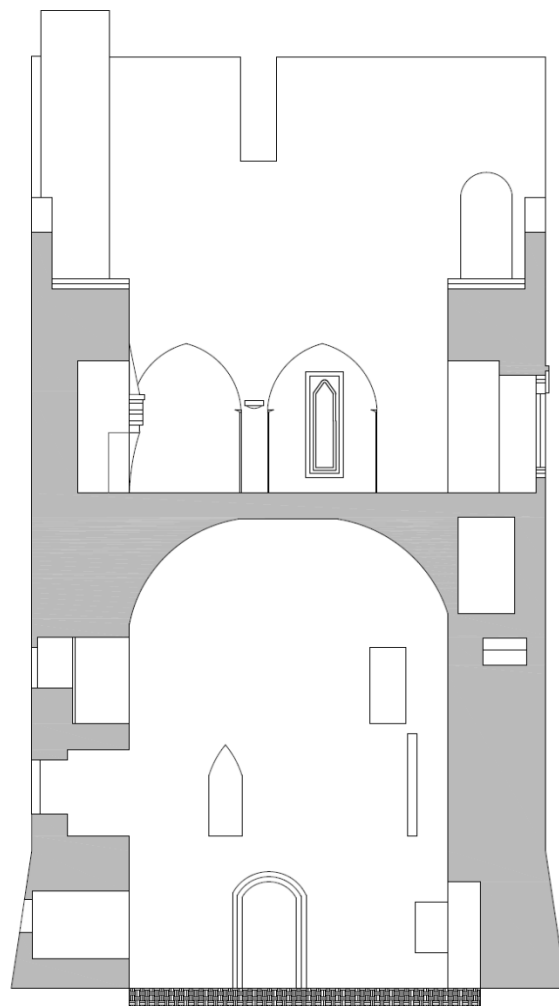
- Level 0- Barrel/Whiskey storage
- Level 1- Distillery: Mashing, Fermenting, Distilling
- Level 2- Condensing, walkway, WC, storage
Industrial/Private
- Level 3- Viewpoint to below/ tour of distillery
- Level 4- Main Bar & Lounge
- Level 5- Museum
- Level 6- Public viewing
Tourism/Public



89- Section Showing Proposed Functions
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

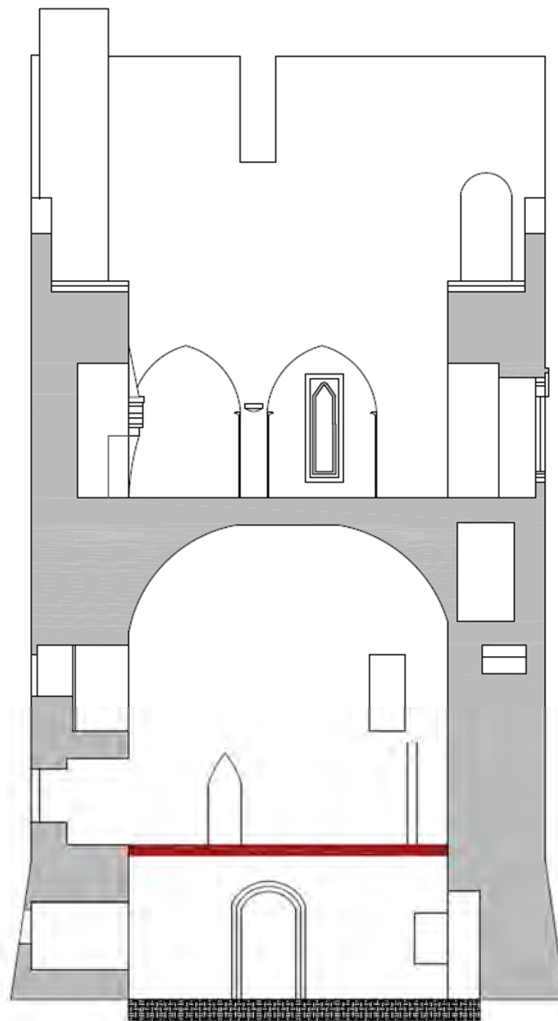
Ground Floor: Storage

Before reflecting on the interventions through each level, an important reminder is that the current state of the ruinous structure is that much of the historical floors and roofs have become non-existent. The existing ground floor had become an atrium in the current ruinous state, that had a clear void to the third floor vaulted roof. This large open space had a height of 9.25m with an opening of the inner floor of 7.4m and 6.2m. Having such a tall, yet somewhat narrow space made it difficult to effectively use the space as it was, it also restricted access to the many chambers within the thick walls as the floors were missing. The drawing here shows what the section looks like now in 2024.



90- Existing Section (A) Through Burnchurch Tower House 2024
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Therefore, to effectively reuse this space in a contemporary sense and to keep the architectural integrity of both past and present in a variety of ways, the first floor is reinstated in reinforced concrete. This intervention has a couple of effects, firstly it separates the ground floor and levels one, two and three and creates two very different spatial qualities with the ground becoming darker and in tune with the historical integrity of the castle. Whereas levels one, two and three maintained the current day atrium space in a more practical way as the ceiling height became a height of 6.25m opposed to the 9.25m beforehand. By separating these spaces, different phases of whiskey distilling can be accommodated within the castle.



*91- Proposed Reinforced Concrete Floor in Red
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024*

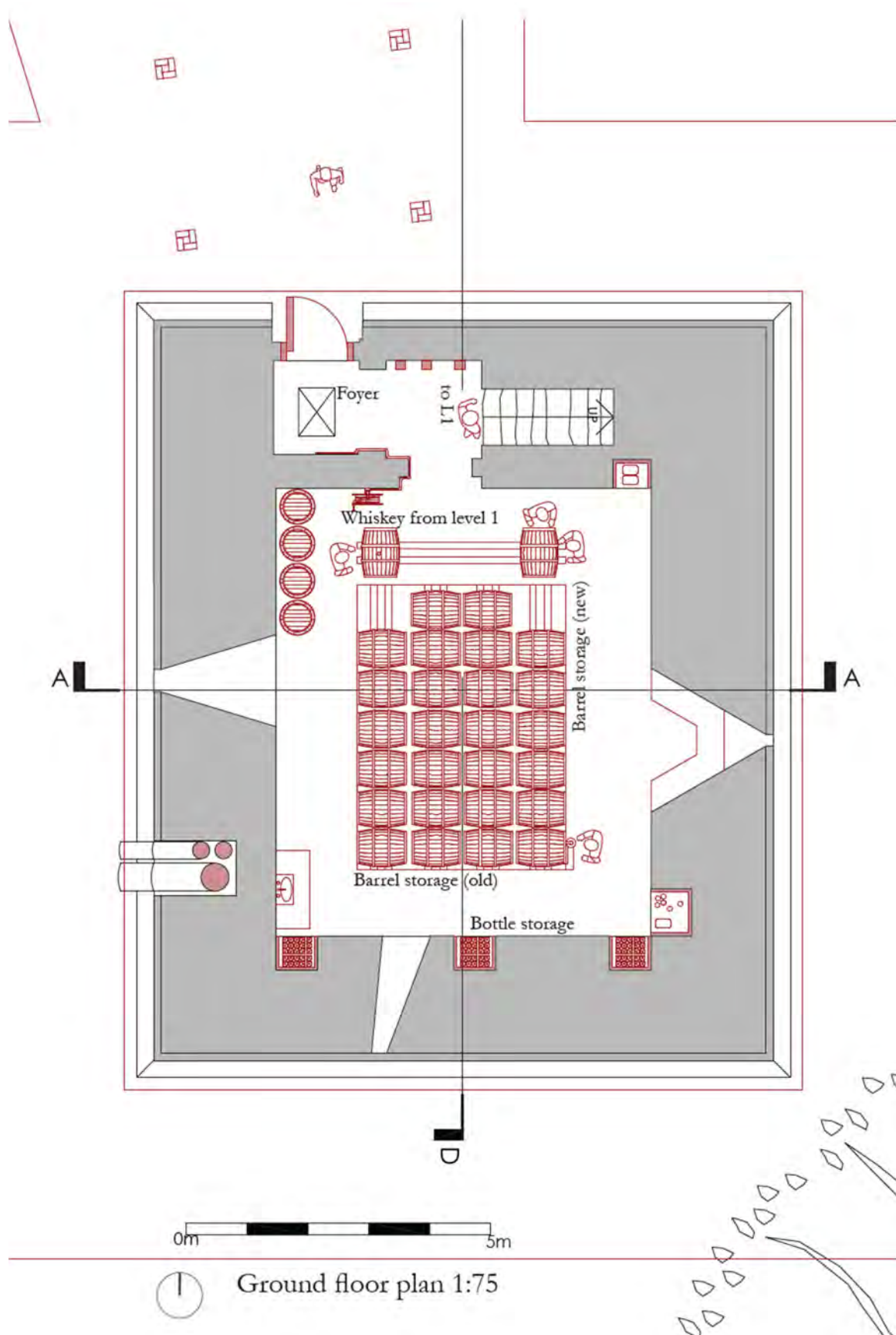
The ground floor proposal is designated for storing whiskey barrels, while levels one, two, and three are used for distilling, fermenting, and mashing. The choice of reinforced concrete on the first floor supports heavier equipment required for these processes. Historically, the ground floor served as storage, and levels one, two, and three were used for cooking, guard quarters, and safe spaces, so the

proposed intervention follows this sequence of storage and working in a nuanced way. Along with this, the narrow staircase that connects these floors would have restricted equipment movement particularly the oak barrels, making the ground floor an even more ideal space for whiskey storage.



92- Whiskey Aging in Barrells
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Historically, the ground floor was directly on soil or grass, which made it dirty and damp, unsuitable for contemporary use. To address this, a concrete and brick-lined floor is installed, eliminating dampness and providing an even, level surface for workers handling the barrels. The recessed part of the floor in the middle is designed to facilitate rolling the barrels, ensuring they remain in place. This new flooring not only benefits the users but also helps regulate the temperature, essential for aging whiskey. The ideal temperature range for whiskey maturation is between 10°C and 18°C and a consistent temperature is crucial to prevent leaks caused by the expansion and contraction of oak barrels. The placement of the barrels in the centre of the room emphasizes the existing stone walls as workers and visitors walk around them, showcasing the building's structural features. This blending of the building's original "bones" with the new program creates a relationship that ties the past to the present. Minimal interventions apart from the new floors on the ground and first levels ensure the additions remain true to the historical character of the tower house.



This approach offers users a tangible connection to the past upon entering. Moving from the open bawn with expansive views of the landscape to a darkened interior, allows visitors to experience a dramatic transition and emphasize the experience of entering the tower house. The glimpses of light filtering through the three small windows on the ground floor, evokes the reality of being inside a medieval castle reinforcing this historical atmosphere. This effect allows the castle not to pretend to be something else, as historically these spaces were dark and atmospheric and bringing that element through to contemporary design reminds us of the way things used to be, giving us a glimpse into the past but in a more practical way.

Additionally, the foyer of the tower house was historically a defensive space. This is seen in Burnchurch Castle as directly above is a murder hole which has been adaptively reused. Rather than utilizing its original purpose of throwing hot stones and water down, it has been transformed into a whiskey conduit. This allows whiskey to flow from the level one distillery down to the whiskey storing area where the oak barrels are stored. This intervention maintains the original flow of movement yet reimagines it in a way that aligns with contemporary use and replacing its destruction, harmful function with something positive and symbolic. This simple change in function uses an adaptive reuse strategy of nuance, where the change alters the meaning and our feelings along with it. This nuance operates as a discovery of existing implicit qualities by emphasizing certain elements to reveal a different meaning of the same space¹⁰⁹. By allowing users to ponder how the original use of the murder hole in the foyer is replaced with whiskey, will preserve the historical integrity of the tower house.

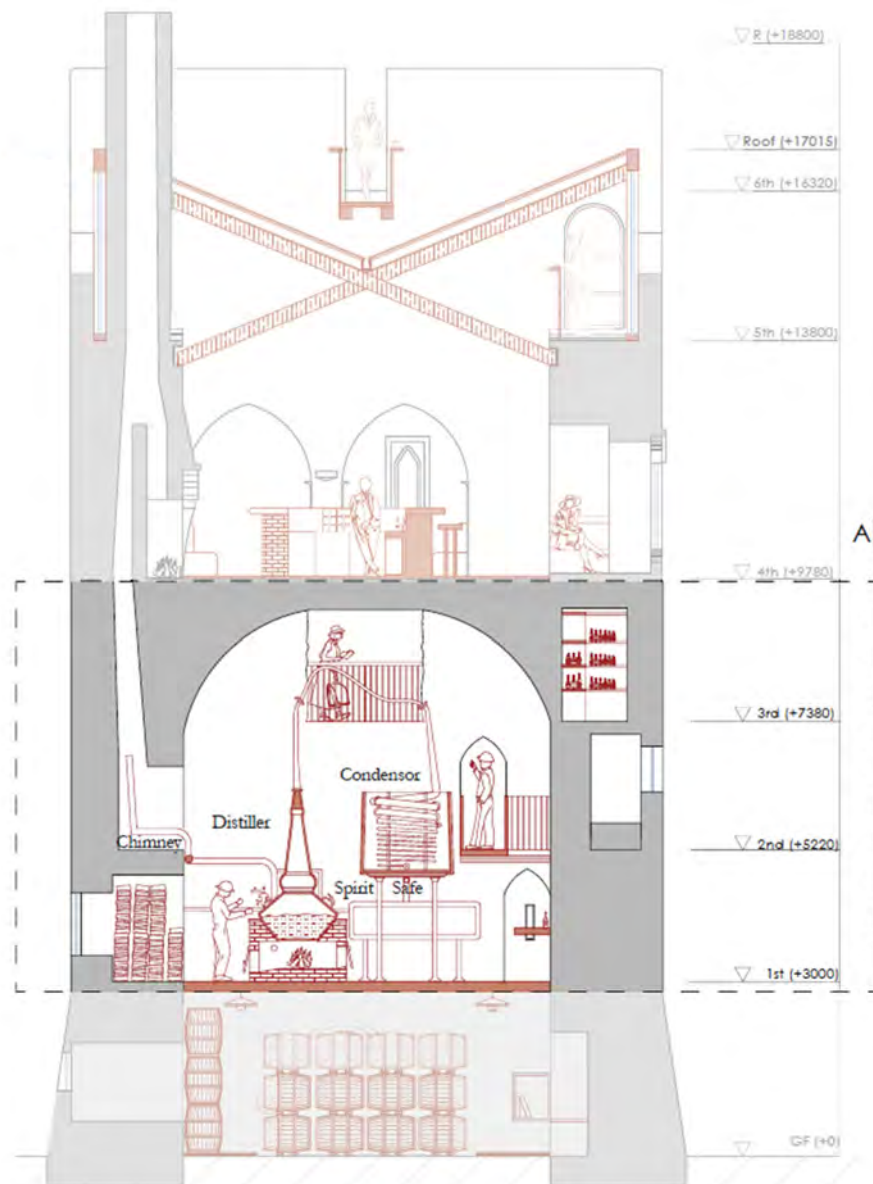
¹⁰⁹ Sofie Caigny, Hulya Ertas, Bie Plevoets & etal. *As Found Experiments in Preservation* (Antwerp Flanders Architecture Institute 2023), page 141

Level 1 / 2 / 3: The Distillery

The challenge in this area of the tower house case study is to balance the connecting of existing chambers to the current day atrium space. What is proposed is more of a minimal intervention approach similar to informal adaptive reuse, where only essential modifications are made. Following the historical floor levels positions, the distillery occupies this space in way that aims to take advantage of the atrium space and the existing chambers. This space accommodates the mashing, fermenting, distilling, and cooling processes of the distillery. This function requires both adequate ventilation and height which the atrium can provide. The atrium layout also allows for equipment of various shapes and sizes, influencing the whiskey's flavour profile and reinforcing the importance of architectural adaptation in shaping the distillery's function. Given that whiskey distilling equipment varies significantly in scale from compact home setups to large industrial configurations this intervention proposes a practical, mid-sized distillery, well-suited for a micro-distilling operation.

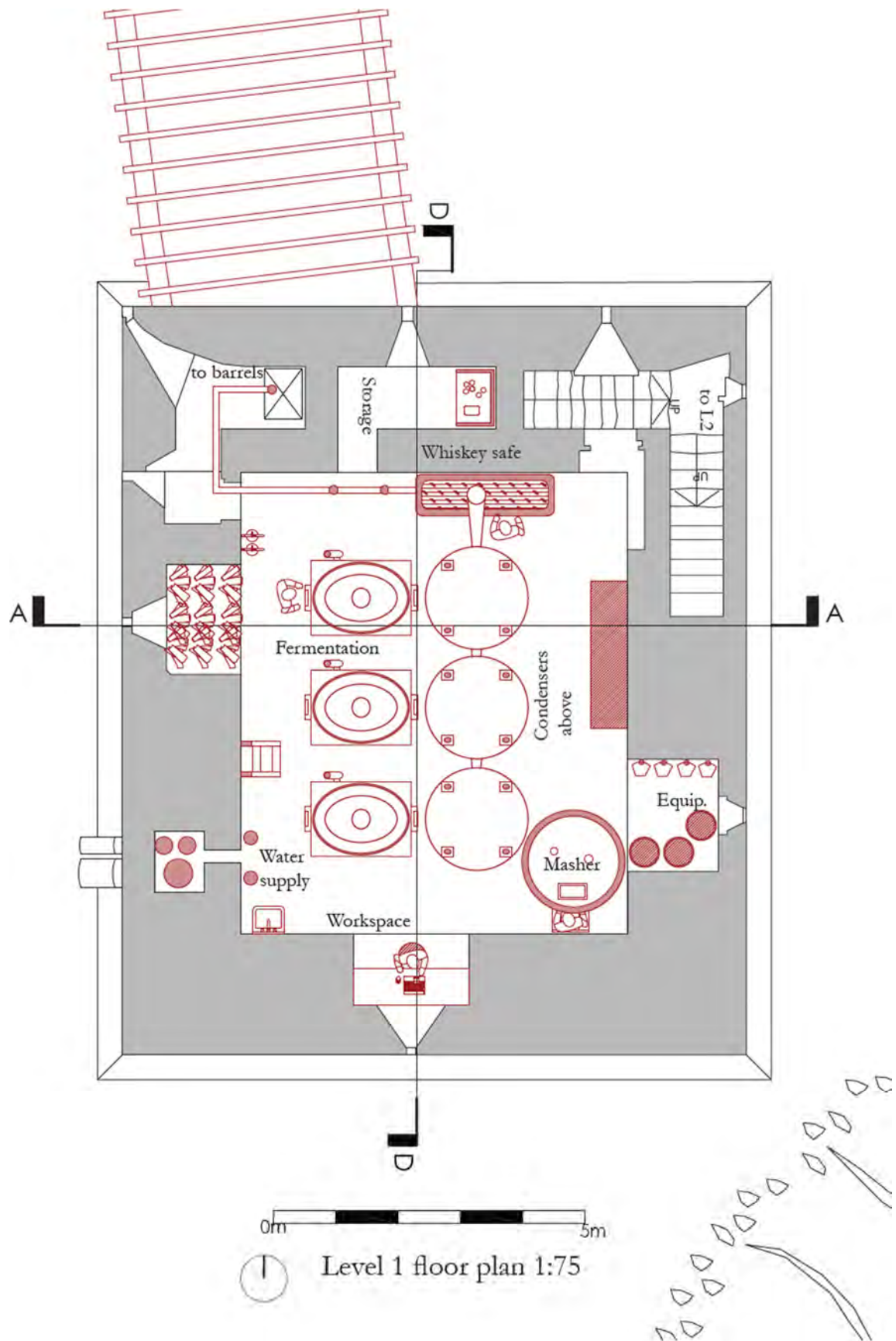
As the intervention is relatively minimal with the aim of this space to remain as is as much as possible, particularly the internal walls. Therefore, the space reflects a strategy of traces, an approach where the history of a building is revealed through visible architectural scars.¹¹⁰ This allows the buildings history to be read through its patina and decay, creating a unique spatial quality through levels one two and three. The design highlights historic layers while acknowledging the effects of time on the structure. The challenge for this space is to take advantage of the atrium whilst creating connection to the various chambers in a way that allows for the distillery to function.

¹¹⁰ Sofie Caigny, Hulya Ertas, Bie Plevoets & etal. *As Found Experiments in Preservation* (Antwerp Flanders Architecture Institute 2023), page 8



Level 1, 2 & 3 in Section

94- The Distillery
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

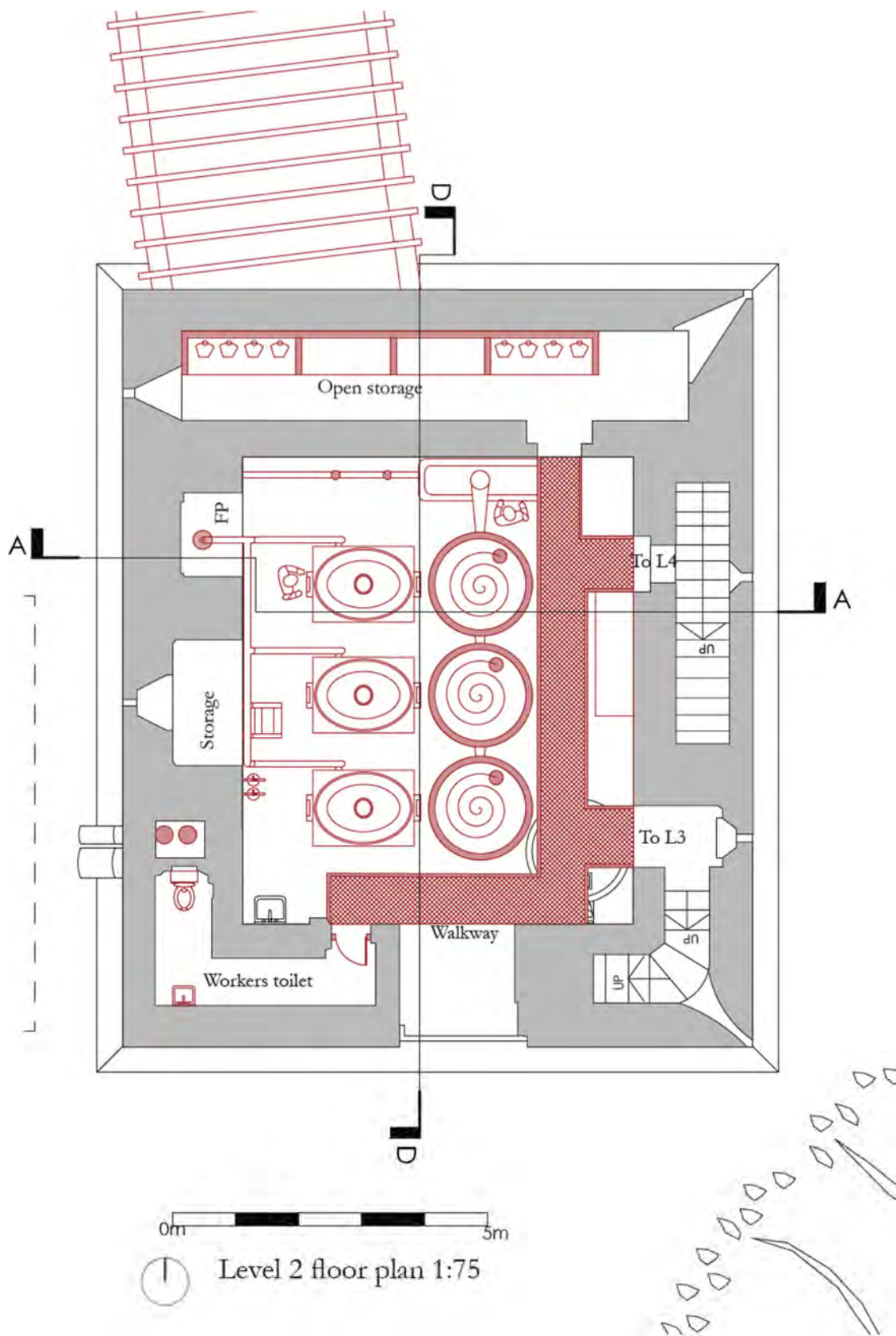


95- Proposed Level One
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Looking at the distillery space more closely, on level one, on the northern wall in the western corner features a whiskey safe, where whiskey flows to the ground floor through the repurposed murder hole. Moving clockwise, the next chamber serves as worker storage, followed by circulation access to level two, an area for distillery machinery, a workspace positioned within a window alcove to benefit from southern sunlight, and finally, an opening for firewood storage. This proposed whiskey distillery embraces traditional whiskey-making methods, using firewood for heating, though contemporary alternatives could also be integrated.

By positioning the equipment at the centre of the room allows users to view the walls and observe how the numerous chambers connect to the interior space. Experiencing the building from this new vantage point offers a fresh perspective on scale and historical depth. The space, with its various openings to chambers, encourages visitors to reflect on the past. While closing off all chambers would not be practical and would compromise the historical integrity of the structure. As discussed in chapter two, the thick walls of a tower house are a quintessential feature, creating secondary spaces that complement the central primary room.¹¹¹ Therefore, their presence enhances the intervention, adding architectural richness despite their narrow and occasionally dark nature.

¹¹¹ Author Unknown. "Walls as Rooms: British Castles and Louis Kahn." Socks Studio, April 6, 2012. <https://socks-studio.com/2012/04/06/walls-as-rooms-british-castles-and-louis-kahn/>.

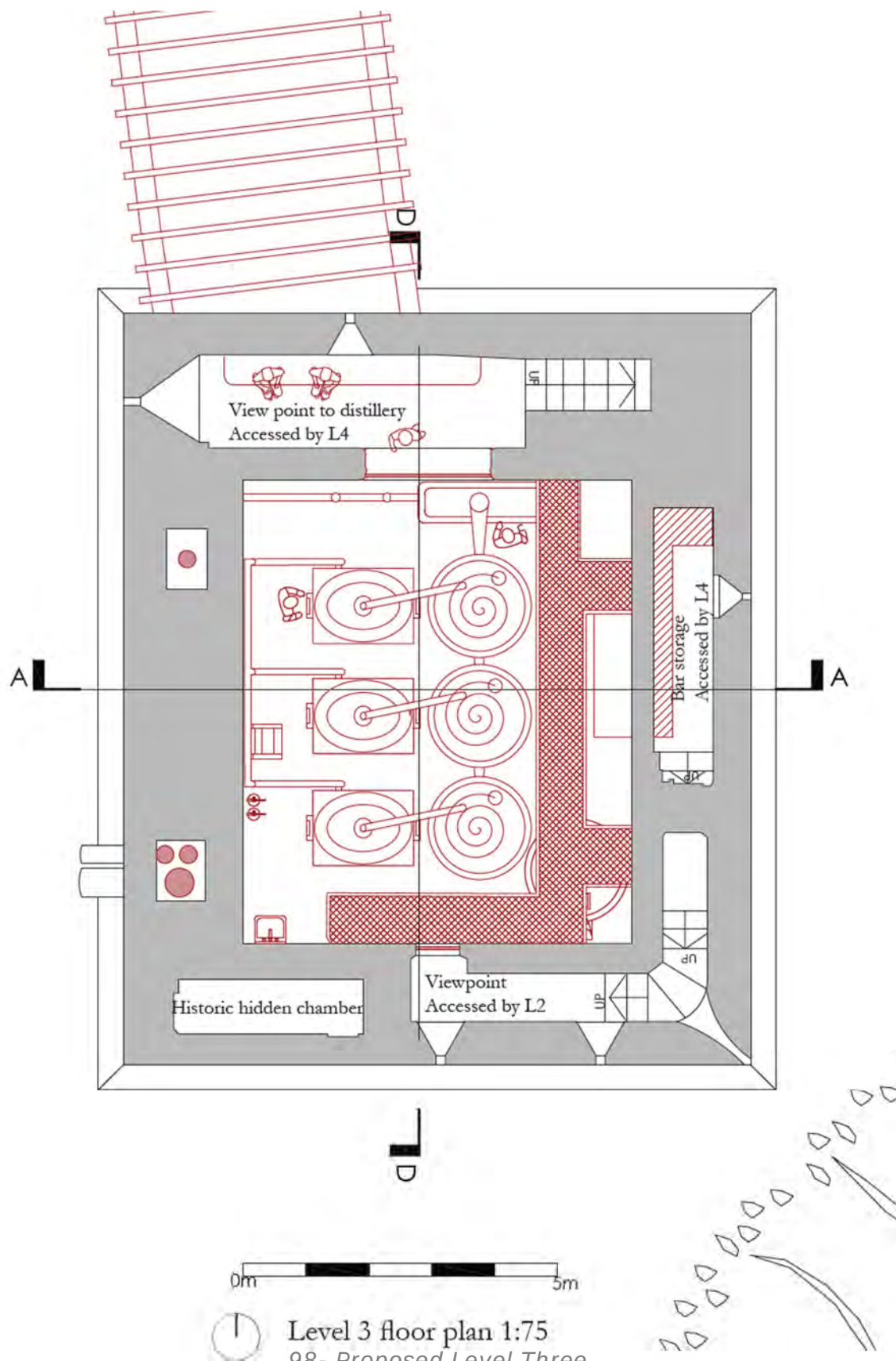


96- Proposed Level Two
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

The fermenters, which operate on the first floor, flow up then down toward the condensers, passing through the open atrium however, the condensers access aligns more closely with level two. To ensure proper access, the intervention follows the existing traces of the historic level two. The steel cantilevered balcony allows workers to navigate the space, ensuring access to the equipment, bathroom, storage, and the secret staircase leading to level three. The balcony is intentionally offset from the walls, preserving the atrium like spatial quality and keeping the walls visually exposed, reinforcing the concept of traces. While the western wall is not structurally connected to this balcony, an existing fireplace remains integrated into the design, serving as the escape point for smoke from the fermentation stoves. This reuse maintains both the practicality and historical integrity of the space.



97- Proposed View from Level One
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024



Level 3 floor plan 1:75
98- Proposed Level Three
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Level three provides a different quality to the space, offering views for workers, private tours, and access from level four. Historically, as mentioned in Chapter Three, this level was uniquely enclosed, with its inner room completely inaccessible, reached only via the secret staircases from levels two and four. Rather than replicating the enclosed historical layout, the intervention introduces a viewing point in the southern wall's existing doorway, allowing users to observe the industrial space below. This opening of the façade is less about restoring the historical constraints of the space and more about creating a contemporary experience through nuance. By removing direct access to the inner chamber, the design reinforces the historical secrecy of the space it was meant to be hidden, safe, and inaccessible to outsiders. Preserving its secretness by keeping it unreachable respects its original purpose and therefore maintains its historical integrity.

On the southern wall, adjacent to the viewing point, lies a secret historic chamber, which remains untouched. Some spaces should not be disturbed, and leaving this chamber untouched respects its authenticity. However, upon reflection, introducing a small peephole could create a poetic link, enhancing the visitor's experience by offering a glimpse into the past. As it stands, the chamber is entirely hidden, but even a small visual connection could revive its presence, allowing its story to be subtly revealed.

The importance of memory in architecture is echoed by theorist Juhani Pallasmaa, who argues that buildings project epic narratives, playing a crucial role in society's attachment to history.¹¹² Similarly, Jeffrey Edward Malpas suggests that memory and space are deeply intertwined. Contemporary visitors may have no awareness of the hidden chamber behind the wall even if a peephole were introduced, its true historical memories would remain elusive, as modern minds are unlikely to assume a hidden space exists behind an otherwise ordinary wall.

Instead of allowing this chamber to fade into nothingness, this discreet visual opening, combined with interpretive signage, could provide visitors with insights into how these spaces were used which could create an experience for contemporary architectural understanding. It could be framed for the contemporary user, who may feel excitement coming into the repurposed tower house that, to be reminded that these spaces were not always pleasant, and the walls of this chamber and level three likely carry the weight of fear and secrecy.

Architect Adam Caruso suggests that, like art, architecture has the capacity to evoke emotional responses, acknowledging the profound historical significance embedded within the built environment.¹¹³ If any space in the tower house holds such charged memory, allowing visitors to glimpse into this hidden room, while leaving it authentically untouched, could prompt reactions. The hope is that through shock, understanding, and knowledge, visitors can better connect with

¹¹² Juhani Pallasmaa, *Memory and Place*. Describing Architecture. Accessed January 3, 2025. <https://www.describingarchitecture.com/memory-and-place/?form=MG0AV3>

¹¹³ Adam Caruso, *The Feeling of Things*, page 15

the historical reality of tower houses and what their inhabitants may have endured when hiding from raids and intruders.

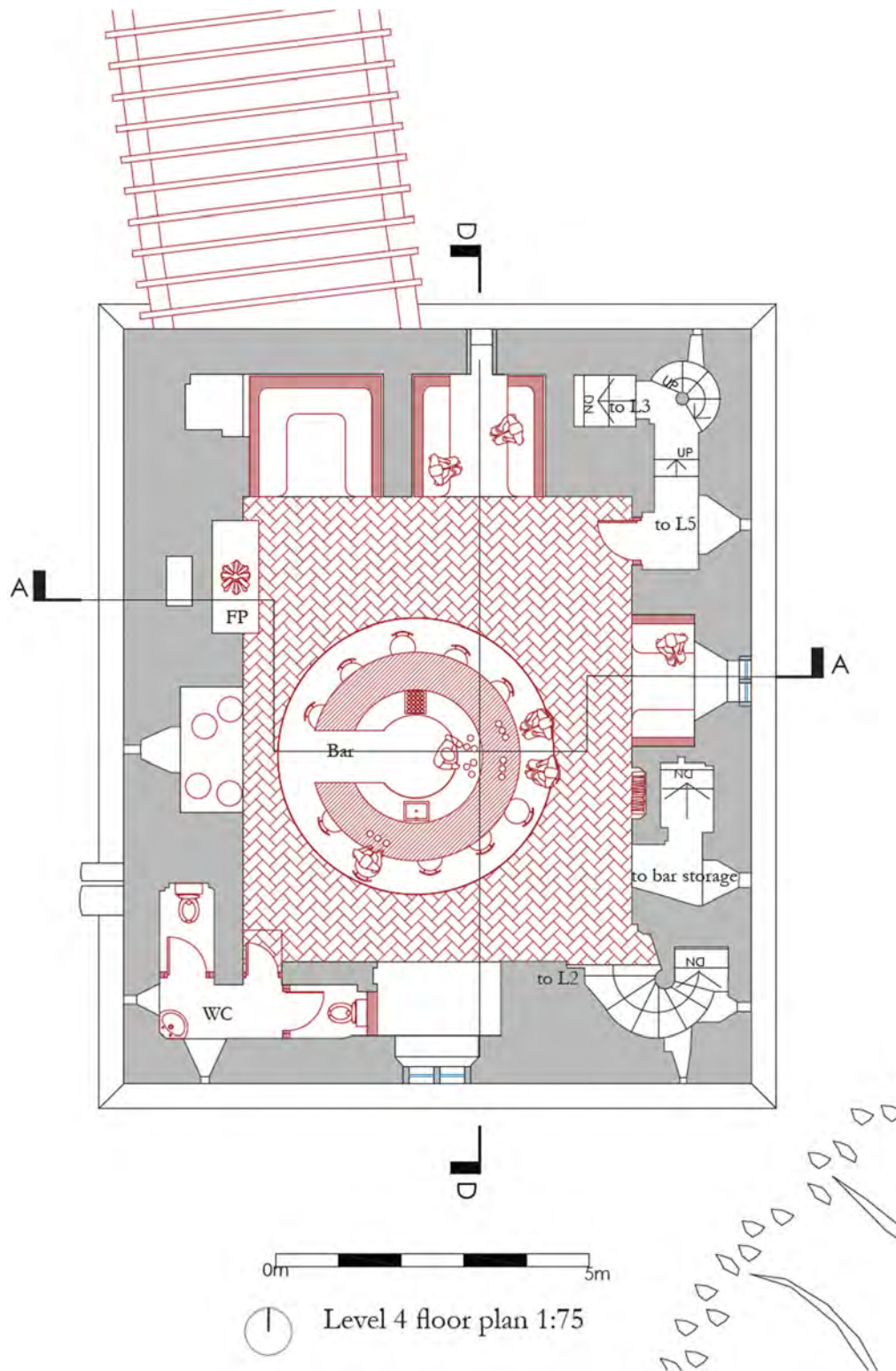
For a successful translation into contemporary society, both architects and users should obtain an understanding of how the building used to function. Without this knowledge, the interpretation and appreciation of these spaces may not be fully possible, and their historical narratives risk fading away. For this paper's sake, the historical integrity is key for the translation of the typology to contemporary society, therefore creating experiences throughout the architecture helps to retain this aspect. Additionally, this can be done through the tours and or a museum space in the tower house, to enrich the overall experience and preserve the historical aspect of the typology.



*99- Proposed View from Opened Chamber Level Three
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024*



100- Proposed Section D
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024



101- Proposed Level Four
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024

Level 4: The Hall

This space's intervention adopts the strategy of ensemble, an adaptive reuse method that integrates historical elements within a contemporary framework. This is done by reinstating the roof in a contemporary way, that enhances the natural qualities of the space. The space is distinctive to the rest of the tower house by the natural light, warmth, and openness, which in turn creates a dramatic contrast to the industrial atmosphere of the lower levels. The integration of the historical element of the hall being the most residential and homey space to now a bar and lounge area transfers the historical integrity of the space to current day users in a respectful way. The staircase leading to the hall, transcends majority of the eastern wall. Having the primary circulation terminate at the hall is also a defining characteristic of pre-1500s halls, reinforcing its importance of this space within the tower house typology.¹¹⁴ In the case study, users follow the historical circulation and finally arrive at the hall where the most significant restoration has been done.

To reinforce this arrival, the juxtaposition of the lower floors to the hall is an essential part of the user's experience. After ascending the narrow steps, passing through intense, heat-filled spaces in the whiskey distillery, they arrive at an unexpectedly bright and comfortable hall, heightening the spatial and sensory impact of the transition. Through this carefully orchestrated progression of atmospheres, the intervention aims to amplify the genius loci of the building, making the arrival at the primary space feel profound and immersive.

Within the repurposed hall details including the 16th century gothic fireplaces are reused, for both the distillery and the heating of the space. Reusing these features allow the distinctive chimney to be both an architectural distinctive from the outside and a sign that there is life within the tower house once again. To make this space comfortable, the existing chambers are used for seating and storage. The secret chambers in level three that have access from level four are predominantly storage, giving the small chambers another meaning allows for extra storage without taking up the primary space in the hall. Additionally, the garderobe is also reinstated, providing contemporary facilities to guests.

The use of oak wood reflects the historical materiality of late medieval architecture, where wooden roofs were common. However, the proposal does not simply replicate the original design. Instead, it introduces an inverted A-frame roof, subtly reducing the vertical volume while maintaining the character and authenticity of the space. This method reflects a strategy that is more playful as it turns the original form upside down.

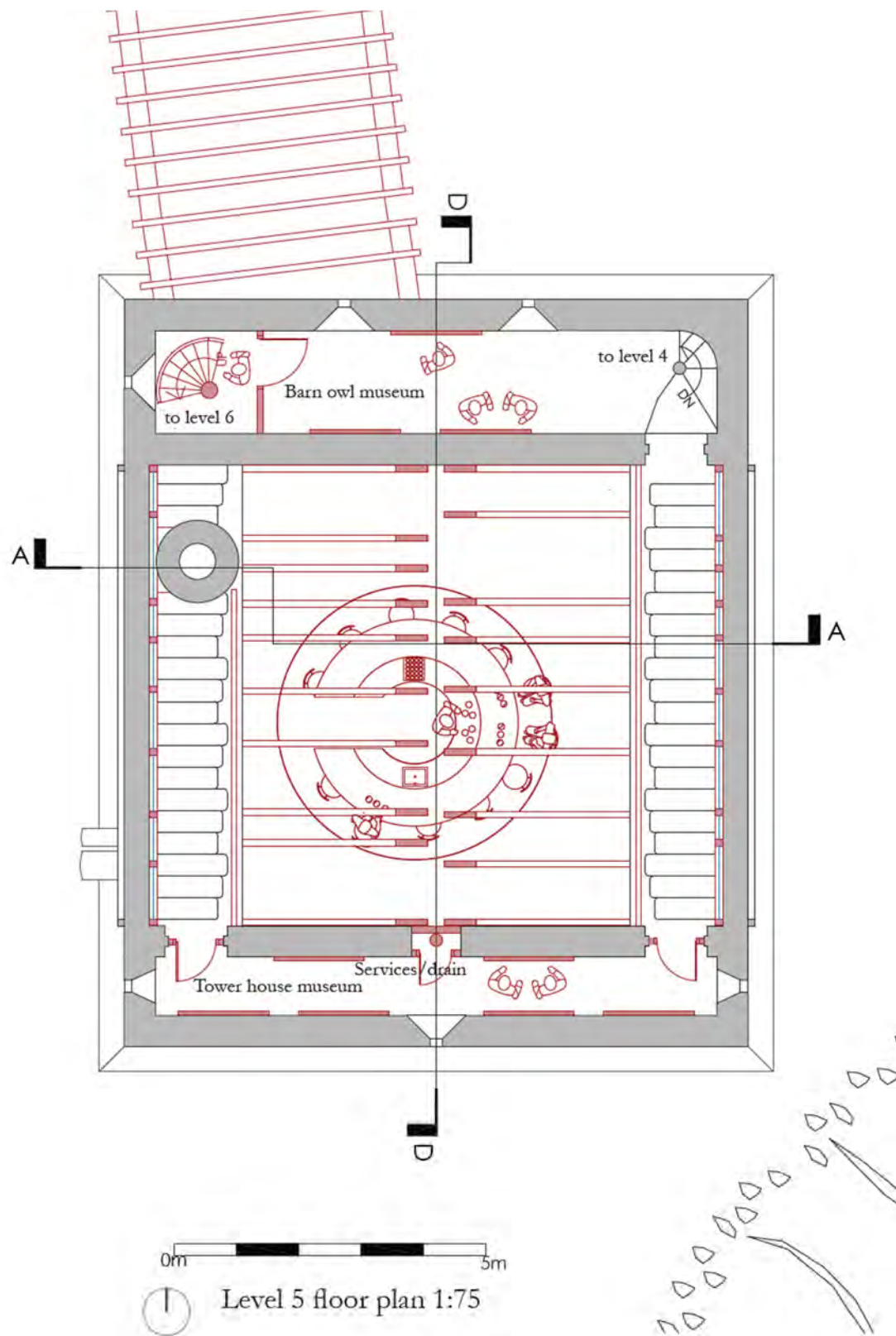
¹¹⁴ Rory Sherlock, *Changing Perceptions: Spatial Analysis and the Study of the Irish Tower House* (Paris: Publications du CRAHM, 2010) page 145



102- Proposed Hall Level Four with Inverted Roof
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024



103- Proposed Hall with Seating in Chambers
Source: Selina Keogh May 2024



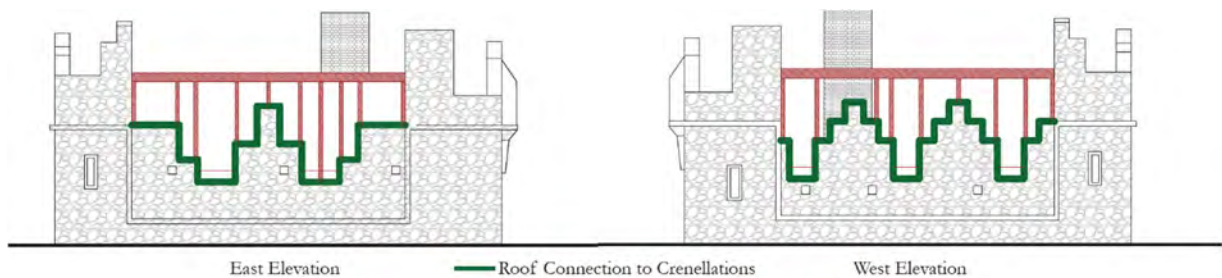
104- Level Five Proposed
Source: Selina Keogh

Level Five and Six:

The inverted roof serves as a defining element of both the hall and the broader architectural intervention, establishing a visual connection between levels four and five and creating a spatial relationship that historically did not exist. This design strategy draws upon the existing crenelations, integrating them into the composition to foster a nuanced dialogue between past and present. Rather than merely preserving these historical elements, the intervention repurposes and reframes them, actively engaging their architectural significance within a contemporary framework. The rhythmic interplay of the crenelations provides a distinctive framing for the inverted A-frame roof, introducing an irregular spatial rhythm that enriches the user's visual and experiential engagement with the space. The asymmetry of this configuration is intended to evoke a heightened sense of excitement and dynamism, particularly as the A-frame structure extends into the hall. By attaching the vertical aspect of the roof to the central sections of the taller crenelations and aligning it with the merlons, incorporating glass for the weatherproofing and natural lighting, the intervention accentuates the crenelations in a manner that reflects their historical function while adapting them for modern use. Historically, crenelations were among the first architectural features visible from a distance, signifying the fortified nature of a structure. By emphasizing their form through the hall space and roof, this intervention ensures their integrity is not only preserved but reinterpreted in a way that resonates with contemporary users, allowing them to engage with the site's historical essence in a meaningful and immersive manner.

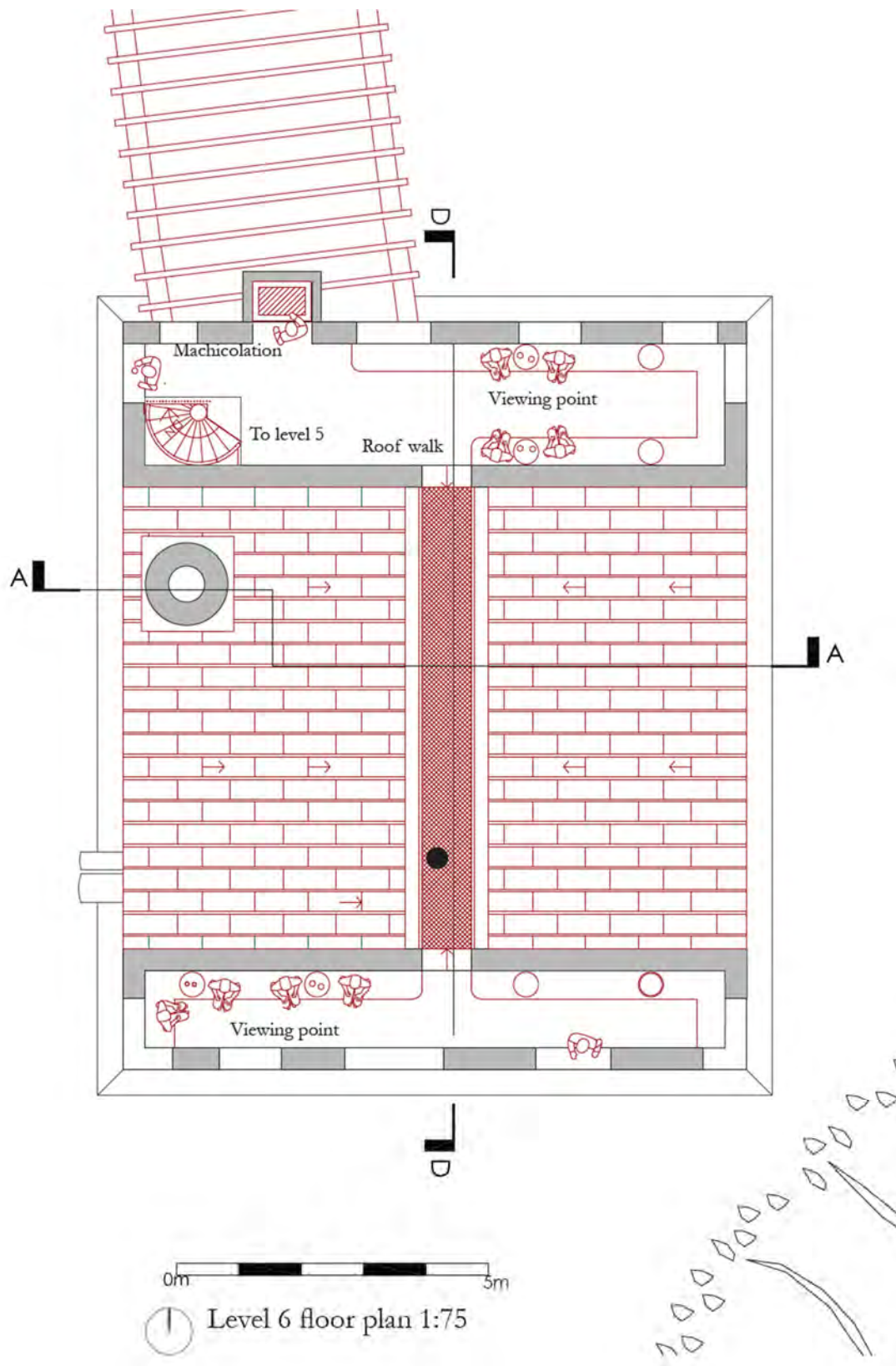


105- Proposed Roof Following Crenellations
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024



Level 5, Eastern Wall

106- Crenellation Rhythm
Source Selina Keogh June 2024



On level six the reinstitution of the roof walk, along with the inclusion of a spiral staircase, restores historical accuracy by reconnecting levels five and six through now deteriorated steps, maintaining the tower house's authentic circulation. This allows visitors with views of the expansive landscape and nearby parish, this elevated vantage point fosters a contemplative experience, allowing users to an end of their journey of the tower house and engage with the multifaceted spatial and historical layers of the tower house.



*108- Proposed Viewing Point Level Six
Source: Selina Keogh June 2024*

CHAPTER FIVE: Guidelines to Preserve the Architectural and Historical Integrity of the Tower House

Based on the reflections in chapter four regarding the conceptual intervention, the following guidelines have been developed for adaptation of structures similar to Burnchurch Castle. These guidelines aim to preserve the historical and architectural integrity of tower houses while incorporating contemporary uses through adaptive reuse strategies. These guidelines aim to honour the tower houses historical essence within the context of the Gaelic Revival, emphasising its role in providing security and community. Additionally, the guidelines also aim to acknowledge the typology as loaded architecture through its ruinous qualities as a lasting reminder of the abandonment resulted from unfair policy changes and wars in the 17th century to this day. While there are still many tower houses remain in a variety of conditions, it should be noted that not all are suitable to be adapted for contemporary use. This strategy is specifically intended for structures that remain structurally sound and are located in well connected areas similar to the Burnchurch site. As each tower house has its own unique qualities, particularly internally, these guidelines are not a rule, but more a flexible suggestion. They provide recommendations for adaption rather than a one size fits all approach, particularly in cases where the goal is to change the function for contemporary use whilst maintaining historical integrity. Applying these adaptive reuse guidelines to other tower houses aims to catalyse their revival in a respectful and thoughtful manner.

Guidelines for the Adaptive Reuse of Tower Houses

1. **Viewpoint:** The overall presence of the tower house site should be less imposing. While tower houses are often perceived as feudal and defensive structures, they also had residential aspects that should be highlighted and harmonised with their defensive features, as discussed in Chapters One and Two. This balance be done through landscaping and strategic framing of the view for incoming users. The experience for users who enter or pass the site should be a feeling of welcoming rather than dominating. This is not to say that every frame should be this way, but the primary entrance should have this consideration.
2. **Preserving Wear and Tear:** The traces of wear and tear are crucial for maintaining the architectural integrity of the site. Long term neglect, which has led to the ruinous state of many tower houses, should not be concealed but rather acknowledged as part of the tower house history. The ruinous

elements are part of the tower house story and therefore should be incorporated into the new function.

3. **Community Connection:** The site should be integrated with its surroundings, reflecting its historical role as an important element of the community centre. The program should encourage community engagement, whether through employment or other means.
4. **Public Access:** Given that many tower houses are government owned, efforts should be made to create public access. There should be an emphasis on opening to the public to experience the tower house whether this is done internally or externally of the tower house depending on the scale of the project. This would raise awareness of the neglected tower houses and their historical significance in late medieval Ireland. Allowing people to experience the tower house in close proximity will hopefully stimulate discourse surrounding the history of the tower house and in turn create awareness to the crumbling situation.
5. **Facade Protection:** The facades, both internal and external, are quintessential to the tower house's character and should be preserved. As tower houses are dark and do not fit contemporary needs, introducing new light sources will be an important part of any project. However, any light sources should ideally come from above, avoiding alterations to the facades and existing windows unless completely necessary. Considerations include opening south facing wall to optimise light source or the façade facing less foot or car traction to maintain the typologies form. The also applies to any stones and quoins as they are a quintessential aspect of the tower house and should not be removed.
6. **Vertical Emphasis:** Any additional square meters should be added vertically over a horizontal extension to maintain historical integrity of the original tower house. Preserving features like crenelations and machicolations is essential for retaining the architectural integrity therefore any extensions should work with the details rather than against. Although, we see extensions in the 16th century of new halls, it is not recommended as it reflects the more English style manors, which the tower house was not. The vertical emphasis also aligns with the vernacular Gaelic architecture of monastery towers style.
7. **Interior Interventions:** Inside the tower house, interventions should emphasise the walls, placing larger furniture and equipment centrally to maximise space use and allow access to chambers. This goes with point number five with the internal façade protection. Any removal of walls to allow extra light in from the chambers, should be done selectively which leads to point number eight.
8. **Chamber Utilisation:** Chambers, which allow sunlight and practical uses like storage, should be preserved. They are vital for the architectural integrity

of the tower house. Finding innovative ways to reuse these small spaces is a challenge when adapting the tower house to contemporary users. Opening walls to these chambers is practical, however it should *not* be done for each chamber.

9. Crenelation Rhythm: Where possible, the rhythm of the crenelations should be utilised in the design. This can provide unique opportunities for contemporary interventions to connect with the existing structure in a subtle yet meaningful way.
10. Multi Program Approach: A multi program approach should be adopted, reflecting the historical multiplicity of activities in and around tower houses. This contemporary interpretation would revive the site's vibrancy. It is not recommended that only a small group can enter and use the tower house for one function.
11. Selective Adaptation: Not all tower houses should be adapted for contemporary use. A healthy percentage should remain as they are, with only basic maintenance to preserve their current state. As this thesis focuses on a tower house with a solid structure with these guidelines focus on similar tower houses and therefore this category can be adapted. Additionally, it makes sense for solid structure tower houses to be adapted to aid their preservation whilst tower houses that are in more of a ruinous state should have other solutions for their preservation.
12. Material Authenticity: The use of materials like oak, stone, and slate is encouraged for their historical accuracy.
13. Sustainability: Environmental sustainability should be integrated into all aspects of the intervention, from program to construction to use. If possible, strategies such as led lighting, solar panel use, rainwater harvesting, low flow fixtures, greywater recycling, permeable surfaces etc. As the structure is difficult to insulate to heat and cool, the addition of other methods is extremely important.
14. Fireplace Reuse: Where possible, existing fireplaces should be retained and reused. Often, these fireplaces have late medieval decorum and where possible should be preserved. Although they are not authentic to the original build, they still provide invaluable insight into later medieval life. Their presence helps illustrate how living conditions evolved from central hearths to more comfortable methods of heating spaces.
15. Minimal Intervention: Interventions should be subtle and considerate, ensuring the tower house's form remains intact. Interventions should compliment rather than dominate through composition, form and architectural style. When possible work within the space rather than extending.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the adaptive reuse of the late medieval tower house for contemporary society requires a deeper understanding of what these structures meant to society both during and after their inhabitation. As the tower house provides a rather complex history transitioning from something that once meant security in many ways to a representation and association to the more turbulent events, makes it all the more necessary to get a historical understanding. Additionally, this paper explores in chapter one that these tower houses could very well have been built during the Gaelic revival and were a representation of Gaelic families getting ahead in times amidst Great Britain encroaching Ireland. Could it be that these typologies were the vernacular architecture of Gaelic Ireland, particularly with the similarities in form and style of the monastic towers and the simplicity of the ringfort. Such connections reinforce the importance of preserving these monuments, not merely as ruins and remnants of the past but as architectural works filled with historical and architectural integrity.

As many tower houses remain in a ruinous state in 2024, with only a fraction functioning as residential homes and just some making an effort to function as semi-public spaces, it makes sense to try and push for the adaption of more that are community use focused. If such meaningful intervention was used, the tower house typology could experience a completely new life with many generations to come. Above all, their preservation should be more than just landscaping of their immediate proximity and address the pressing need for long term conservation efforts. Despite centuries of neglect, a decision must be made: either to preserve these monuments and sustain their narrative or allow them to fade into obscurity. Doing nothing assumes the latter.

If for example and this is purely hypothetical, if tower houses were simply follies from the 19th century, perhaps their preservation might not be as imperative. Unlike tower houses which held vital social and defensive functions, follies were primarily built for aesthetics, status and romanticised ideals rather than practicality. However, this conclusion is not to debate what has more of a hierarchy of preservation with adaptive reuse strategies, rather it underscores the necessity for histories sake to revive and adapt a typology for use that holds both Gaelic, Anglo-Irish and Anglo-Norman cultural merit. Tower houses redefined castle living, providing fortified homes not only for royalty or wealthy aristocratic families, but for many merchants, chieftains and noble families who previously lacked the resources to construct such defensive dwellings. Furthermore, their prevalence contributed to Ireland becoming the most castellated island in the British isle at the time, offering key insights to the sociopolitical landscape of the 15th to 17th centuries.

The conceptual case study demonstrates that, despite a seemingly small scale castle, there is almost 300 square metres of usable space internally. Offering unique composition and architectural qualities which provide opportunity for more experimental preservation for contemporary day users. The architectural qualities alongside the rich history the tower house holds, presents a compelling canvas that demands either preservation or thoughtful reinvention.

If we are to have the tower house survive another six centuries, steps must be taken to prevent further neglect and the inevitable disappearance through time and weathering. Whilst this case study is just one example, the successful adaptation of similarly structured tower houses as Burnchurch Castle could shift attitudes toward preservation of the many castles that have fallen to deterioration in the Irish landscape.

Although the guidelines created in this study may not apply universally to all adaptive reuse projects, they serve as an initial framework for translating the historical and architectural integrity of the tower house into contemporary use. Further case studies could refine and expand upon these principles, fostering a more comprehensive approach to the preservation and revitalisation of these historically significant structures. By exploring conceptual case studies and embracing experimental preservation strategies such as adaptive reuse, these ruins have the chance to extend their legacy whilst reinforcing the idea that history be something that is not static, it is something to be engaged with, lived in and built upon.

This paper serves as a foundation to further discourse, advocating for a shift in attitudes toward architecture that, though currently in ruins and neglected, indeed holds immense historical value and should not be left to decay.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alberto, Perez Gomez. The City is Not a Postcard: The Problem of Genius Loci. *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 2013 Pages 42-46. Accessed via: architecture Norway | "The City is not a Post-Card. The Problem of Genius Loci"

Arrhenius, Thordis. The Cult of Age in Mass-Society: Alois Riegl's Theory of Conservation. *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory and Criticism*, Vol 1, No.1, pages 75-81. University of Minnesota Press 2004.

Author Unknown. "Walls as Rooms: British Castles and Louis Kahn." Socks Studio, April 6, 2012. Accessed via: <https://socks-studio.com/2012/04/06/walls-as-rooms-british-castles-and-louis-kahn/>.

Beckett, JC. *The Making of Modern Ireland 1603-1923*. London: Faber & Faber, 2011.

Berryman, Duncan. The Defensibility of Irish Tower Houses. *Journal no.24*: pg. 260-268, Belfast: The Castle Studies Group Journal, 2011

Brooker Graham and Stone Sally. *ReReadings: Interior Architecture and the Design Principles of Remodelling Existing Buildings*. London: RIBA Enterprises, 2004.

Caigny Sofie, Ertas Hulya, Plevoets Bie & etal. *As Found Experiments in Preservation*. Antwerp Flanders Architecture Institute 2023.

Caruso, Adam. *The Feeling of Things*. Barcelona: Ediciones Polígrafa, 2008

Collins English Dictionary. Collins Dictionary. 2024. Viewed on the 16th November 2024, Accessed via: <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>.

Commins, J. Notes on the Places of Antiquarian Interest Visited by the Society, May, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 36, 1906: pages 265-75.

Cosgrove, Art. *A New History of Ireland, Volume II: Medieval Ireland 1169-1534*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc. 2008.

De Breffny, Brian & Mott, George. *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland*. London: Thames and Hudson: London. 1976.

Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands. *Kilkenny Manual: Record of Monuments and Places*. Dublin: National Monuments and Historic Properties Service, 1996.

Accessed: [https://www.archaeology.ie/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Archaeology-RMP-Kilkenny-Manual-\(1996\)-0022.pdf](https://www.archaeology.ie/sites/default/files/media/pdf/Archaeology-RMP-Kilkenny-Manual-(1996)-0022.pdf).

Foster, R. F. *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972*. London: Penguin Books, 1989.

Encyclopedia.com. Accessed January 3rd, 2025.

Accessed via: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/agriculture-1500-to-1690>

Google Maps. Burnchurch Castle, Accessed November 1st, 2024.

Accessed via: <https://maps.google.com>.

Government of Ireland. Office of Public Works. Accessed November 27th, 2025.

Accessed via: <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/office-of-public-works/>.

Grafe, Christoph. *Umbaukultur, The Architecture of Altering*. Berlin: Dom Publishers, 2010.

Heritage Ireland. Burnchurch Castle and Turret. Accessed November 3rd, 2024.

Accessed via: <https://heritageireland.ie/unguided-sites/burnchurch-castle-and-turret/>.

Ireland XO. Discover Ireland's Rich Heritage. Last modified 2024. Viewed on 1st November 2024.

Accessed via: <https://www.Irelandxo.com>

Karmon, David. *The Ruin of the Eternal City: Antiquity and Preservation in Renaissance Rome*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Kilkenny City Council. "Kilkenny City Continues to be a Major Growth Hub in Southern Region; Sustainable Transport Options Are Needed." *Kilkenny City Council*. Last modified January 1, 2025.

Accessed via :https://kilkennycoco.ie/eng/news/council_news/kilkenny-city-continues-to-be-a-major-growth-hub-in-southern-region-sustainable-transport-options-are-needed.html#:~:text=Press%20Release%201%3A-Kilkenny%20City%20Continues%20to%20be%20a%20Major%20Growth%20Hub%20in,of%20the%20five%20metropolitan%20areas.

Landdirect. PRA Map. Accessed January 1, 2025.

Accessed via <https://www.landdirect.ie/pramap/>

Leask, Harold. *Irish Castles and Castellated Houses*. Dundalk: Dundalgan Press LTD, 1951.

Manning, Conleth. The Miller/Robertson Collection. *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 147 (2017): 29–50.

Accessed via: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45410653>.

McAlister, Victoria, L. *The Irish Tower House: Society, Economy and Environment c. 1300-1650*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.

McNeill, Tom. *Castles In Ireland; Feudal Power in a Gaelic World*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Munoz-Vinas Salvador. *On the Ethics of Cultural Heritage Conservation*. London: Archetype Publications Ltd 2020.

Monumental Ireland. Ringforts. Monumental Ireland. Viewed on the 12th November 2024.

Accessed via: <https://monumentalireland.ie/ringforts/>

McNeill, Tom. *Castles In Ireland; Feudal Power in a Gaelic World*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Munoz-Vinas Salvador. *On the Ethics of Cultural Heritage Conservation*. London: Archetype Publications Ltd 2020.

No Author. Kings and Queens of Britain. Historic UK. Accessed January 1, 2025. <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/KingsQueensofBritain/>.

O'Keeffe Tadhg. Halls, 'Hall-Houses' and Tower-Houses in Medieval Ireland: Disentangling the Needlessly Entangled. *The Castle Studies Group Journal* No 27: 2013-14. Pages 252- 262.

Accessed via: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316225460_Halls_'hall-houses'_and_tower-houses_in_medieval_Ireland_disentangling_the_needlessly_entangled

Otero-Pailos, Jorge, Langdalen Erik and Arrhenius Thordis. *Experimental Preservation*. Zurich: Lars Muller Publishers, 2016.

Pallasmaa, Juhani. *Memory and Place. Describing Architecture*. Accessed January 13, 2025.

Accessed via: <https://www.describingarchitecture.com/memory-and-place/?form=MG0AV3>.

Phelan, Margaret M. King Richard II's Two Visits to Kilkenny. *Old Kilkenny Review* 1978. Viewed on the 29th November 2024

Accessed via: <https://kilkennyarchaeologicalsociety.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/OKR1978-321-Margaret-M-Phelan-King-Richard-II's-Two-Visits-to-Kilkenny-1.pdf>.

Plevoets Bie and Van Cleempoel Koenraad. *Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage: Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019.

Ray, T.J. *Castles: The Middle Ages, Castle & Siege Terminology*. January 2001.

Viewed on 15th November 2024,

Accessed via: <https://home.olemiss.edu/~tjray/medieval/castle.htm>.

Research group TRACE: Van Cleempoel Koenraad, Vande Keere Nikolaas, Heynickx Saidja, Plevoets Bie, Augustiniok Nadin. *Trace, Notes on Adaptive Reuse, On Collectivity Vol III*. Faculty of Architecture and Arts. 2020

Stone, Sally. *UnDoing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse and Cultural Memory*. New York: Routledge, 2019.

Sherlock, Rory. Changing Perceptions: Spatial Analysis and the Study of the Irish Tower House. Chateau Gaillard 24, p. 239-250. Paris: Publications du CRAHM, 2010

Sherlock, Rory. The Evolution of the Irish Tower-House as a Domestic Space. Dublin: Royal Irish Academy Vol.111: pg 115-140, 2010.

Sherlock, Rory. The Later Medieval Fireplaces of County Cork. Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, Cork: Cork Historical Archaeological Society, Vol. 105 pages 207-230. 2017

The Office of Public Works. Dublin Castle History. Viewed on the 1st November 2024.

Accessed via: <https://dublincastle.ie/history/>

Taverner, Charlie, and Susan Flavin. Food and Power in Sixteenth-Century Ireland: Studying Household Accounts from Dublin Castle. *The Historical Journal* 66, no. 1 (2023): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0018246X2200019X>.

Webster, Merriam. Merriam-Webster Dictionary. 2024. Viewed on the 16th November 2024,

Accessed via: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/>.

Wilde Irishe. Irish Tower Houses: A Spotter's Guide, 2020, viewed on the 25th November 2024.

Accessed via <https://www.wildeirishe.com/post/irish-tower-houses-a-spotter-s-guide?form=MG0AV3>