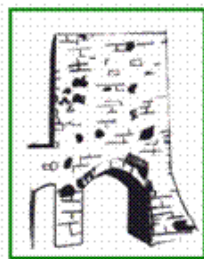


**FINAL REPORT ON  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF  
CONSERVATION WORKS AT MENLOUGH CASTLE,  
COUNTY GALWAY**



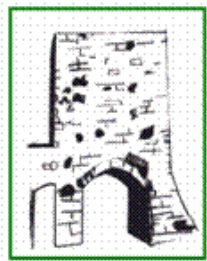
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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING OF  
CONSERVATION WORKS AT MENLOUGH CASTLE,  
COUNTY GALWAY**

**Martin Fitzpatrick  
December 2023**



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## II ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS USED IN TEXT

**Barony, Parish, Townland** These terms refer to land divisions in Ireland. The barony is the largest land division in a county, which is formed from a number of parishes. These parishes are in turn made up of several townlands, which are the smallest land division in the country. The origins of these divisions are believed to be in the Early Medieval/Christian period (AD500-AD1000), or may date earlier in the Iron Age (500BC-AD500).

**First Edition** This relates to editions of the OS 6 inch maps for County Galway. The first edition map completed for the area generally dates to the 1830s or early 1840s and this is referred to in the text as the 'first edition'.

**GA** - This number is the number of the site on the SMR/RMP map (see below). It begins with the county code, here GA for Galway, the 6-inch sheet number, followed by the number of the archaeological site.

**M** Meters, all dimensions are given in meters or part of a meter.

**OS** Ordnance Survey

**RMP** Record of Monuments and Places. A record on which all known archaeological sites are marked and listed in an accompanying inventory. This resource is based on all publicly available material and cartographic sources and is read in conjunction with constraint maps. The RMP records known recorded monuments and the sites of such monuments (if the monument no longer survives).

**Sheet** This relates to the six-inch map for county Galway which is divided into sheets. This project is concerned with sheet 110 for county Galway.

## 1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

This report describes the 2023 programme of archaeological monitoring undertaken intermittently by the author during a conservation programme at Menlough Castle, Menlough, Galway City. The conservation works included the installation of scaffolding, the retrieval of architectural fragments and the repair and repointing of the stonework.

Excavation to retrieve architectural fragments from the 1911 fire were concentrated in the interior and exterior of the east wall of the building. A number of architectural fragments were recovered and are stored on wooden pallets on site for possible re-use. Red brick fragments, slates and ridge tile fragments recovered are also stored on site for possible re-use.

## 2. SITE LOCATION

**Location** The subject site is located in the townland of Menlough, the parish of Oranmore and the barony of Galway, County Galway.

**Townland:** Menlough

**ITM** 528440/727901

**Existing Environment** The subject site is the ruinous remains of Menlough Castle. It was destroyed by fire in 1910 and has remained in a ruinous condition since then.



**Fig. 1:** General Site Location.



Plate 1: Extract from digital globe imagery AP 2012.

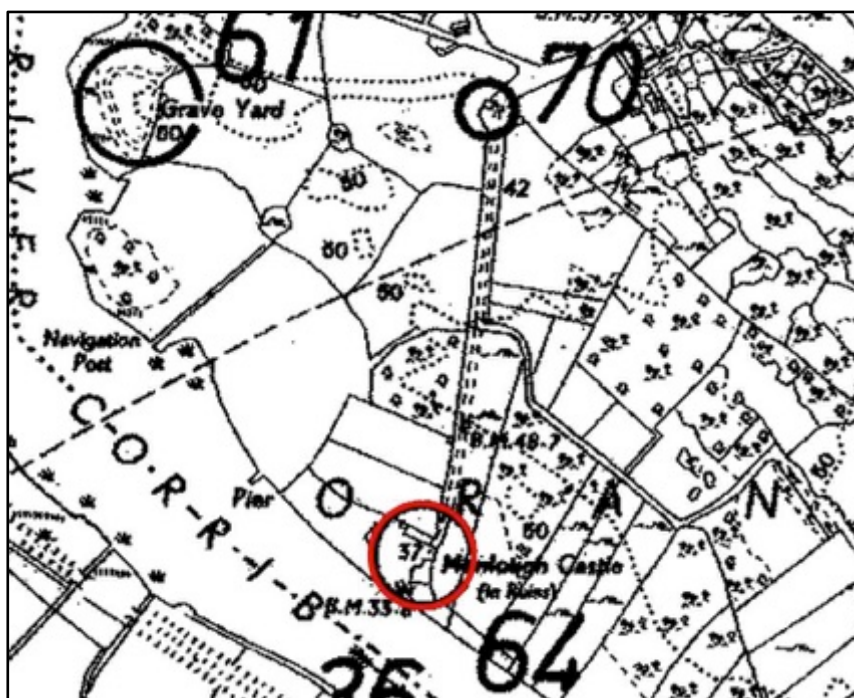


Fig. 2: Extract from SMR Constraint Map (Sheet 94) indicating the castle location.

### **3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The following information has been summarised from a previous Conservation Plan and an impact assessment (Crumlish 2015a; 2015b). Menlough Castle was in the possession of Thomas Colman in 1574 (Nolan, 1901, 11 5). Around 1600 it became the seat of the Blake family through Valentine Blake, later the Mayor of Galway. The Menlo Blakes became baronets in 1622. Little is known of the castle from then until the early 20th century when it was severely damaged in a fire. The fire is described in Burke 's Guide to Country Houses thus, 'Then in 26 July 1910. there was a disastrous fire at the castle. in which. Elanor Blake, daughter of 14th Bt, perished. The entire building was gutted' (Bence-Jones. 1978). The NIAH describes this as a 'ruinous remains of detached multi-period country house, comprising tower house of c. 1550 to eastern half having three-bay ground floor and single-bay first and second floors, and later two-bay four-storey block of c. 1720 to west having square-plan turret to its cast end. Now roofless, ruinous and covered in vegetation. Now roofless, ruinous and covered in vegetation. Crenellations to front of later block, machicolations to three corners of tower house. Triple-gabled elevation to north, having rendered chimneystacks with moulded parapets. Rubble stone walls having remnants of early render and with weather-slating to north elevation gables, and with battered east elevation. Square-headed window openings, some with cut-stone sills. Round-headed door opening set in square-headed recess to south elevation, having cut limestone door surround. Round-headed window opening above door'.

Descriptions of recorded archaeological monuments on the subject site; data from ASI.

#### **GA082-064----**

#### **Castle – unclassified**

#### **MENLOUGH**

On E bank of River Corrib close to a probable crossing point (GA082-089---- ). In existence in 1574 when it was in the possession of 'Thomas Colman' (Nolan 1901, 115). The exact location of the original castle, probably a tower house, is unclear: Athy (1914, 155-60) at first thought that it may have stood within the walled and battlemented square enclosure, 40m to E of the present ruined house. However, in a footnote, she also noted that 'the N wall [of the ruined house] and adjacent parts of the E and W walls, are 2ft [0.6m] thicker than the rest'. These walls form part of a rectangular 17th-C gabled house (GA082-064001-). As Athy indicated, the NNE wall (L c. 8m) and adjoining part of WNW wall (L c. 11.4m) are of much stouter construction (Wth c. 2.2m) than the rest (average Wth 1-1.7m).



The NNE wall also contains a narrow single-light window with round head. These walls may well have been part of the original castle, later incorporated into the 17th-C house.

The above description is derived from the published 'Archaeological Inventory of County Galway Vol. I - West Galway'. Compiled by Paul Gosling (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1993).

**GA082-064001-**

**House - 17th century**

**MENLOUGH**

On E bank of River Corrib 0.6km S of Menlough village. Only the shell of this once fine 17-19th-C house survives, it having been gutted by fire in 1919. The original house was a long, rectangular 17th-C gabled house (L 22.6m, Wth c. 9.2m) of two storeys over a basement. The ESE façade, of six bays, had battered walls, a centrally placed doorway, a gabled parapet with bartizans at each corner, and a tall chimney on each end-wall, only one of which survives. Subsequently extended to W, and much altered, in 18-19th C. Parts of the walls at N end of the house may have been incorporated from an earlier castle on the site (GA082-064----). (Bence-Jones 1978; Athy 1914, 155-60)

The above description is derived from the published 'Archaeological Inventory of County Galway Vol. I - West Galway'. Compiled by Paul Gosling (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1993).

The structure is listed on the Record of Monuments and Places GA082-064---- (Castle - tower house) and GA082-064001- (House - 17th century).

#### **4. PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS**

A search of the licensed archaeological work database [www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie) database did not return any results for licensed archaeological excavations being undertaken on the subject site.

Archaeological monitoring associated with the conservation works at the castle to date have been monitored by Rory Sherlock (C001030 - E005312 - 21R0077).

#### **5. ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING**

The archaeological monitoring was concentrated on the erecting of scaffolding and subsequent repair and conservation works on the western side of building and the recovery of architectural fragments from the eastern side of the building.



**Fig. 3:** Plan of structure indicating area of monitoring for scaffolding (red) and area where stone retrieved (green).

### **Scaffolding**

The scaffolding on the west wall of the building was erected on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2023 with no interference with the existing ground level. Debris from the conservation works, accumulated at the base of the building, was removed under archaeological supervision after the scaffolding was taken down.



**Plate 2:** Scaffolding being erected on exterior of W wall of building.



**Plate 3:** Scaffolding being erected on interior of W wall of building.



**Plate 4:** Removing debris after scaffolding removed. Taken from NW.

### **Repairing and Repointing of stonework**

The repairing and repointing of stonework on the internal and external face of the W wall was intermittently monitored over the course of 6 weeks. The works included the repair and repointing of fireplaces and chimneys, the insertion of new stone lintels above windows and fireplaces, repair of slates on exterior face and repair and re-pointing of joist holes.



**Plates 5 & 6:** Lintels replaced and repointing above window openings.



**Plate 7:** Stitching of stone to above fireplace.



**Plates 8 & 9:** Repointing of joist hole and work on external finish on upper levels of building.



**Plate 10:** Repair works being undertaken on ground floor fireplace.

### **Retrieval of architectural fragments**

Debris from the collapse of the building after the 1911 fire has accumulated predominantly in the interior of the building with some debris on the exterior. A mini digger was used to examine the rubble piles and retrieve architectural fragments. In the SE of the interior some architectural fragments were collected from the surface and stored on wooden pallets. Extensive debris exists in the E and NE of the interior of the building and these areas were not excavated. A test pit 0.5m x 0.5m in the E of the building and 1.5m x 1m in the NE recorded rubble to a depth of c. 1m and 1.4m respectively. In the exterior of the building grass covered any architectural fragments. To avoid digging holes a trench 1.5m wide was excavated along the exterior of the building to remove the sod and topsoil layer only and retrieve architectural fragments. All of the excavations were backfilled and architectural fragments recovered are stored on pallets inside the building for re-use if required. Unworked stone was separated and stored in a separate pile while slate, brick and ridge tile fragments recovered from the site are also stored in the interior of the building and available for re-use.



**Plate 11:** Rubble in SE of interior prior to sorting of stone.



**Plate 12:** View of building rubble from NE.



**Plate 13:** leveling of rubble in SE of site.



**Plates 14 & 15:** Test pit excavated in NE and E of interior.



**Plate 16:** Interior of building from S after sorting stone.



**Plate 17:** Pallets of cut stone and architectural fragments stored on site.



**Plates 18 & 19:** Exterior of E side of building from the S and during works to retrieve architectural fragments.





**Plate 20:** Exterior of building from S after removing architectural fragments and backfilling.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

The 2023 season works were concentrated on the west side of the building for conservation repair and repointing of features and on the east side of the building for the retrieval of architectural fragments. The works established that a depth of 1.4m-1.5m of rubble from the 1911 fire has accumulated in the N end of the building. Architectural fragments recovered from the rubble have been stored on site on wooden pallets for re-use if required.

### ***PLEASE NOTE...***

***Any recommendations contained in this report are subject to the ratification of National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, local Government & Heritage.***