



Chapter 10

Urban design and Conservation

There are many fragments comprising ornamental doorcases, street names, commemorative signs and so forth scattered throughout the city on properties which have become decayed and neglected. It shall be the policy of the Corporation to initiate a study into the best means of protection and conservation of these objects either in their existing surroundings or in some central place.

Urban Design

To achieve the global objectives set out at the beginning of this plan in respect of the development of tourism and the enhancement of the living environment, it is necessary that there be a strong emphasis on the design aspects of the city and on the conservation of our Heritage. This is to be achieved through;

- 1] the elaboration of a 'Design Vision' in terms of studies and Action Area Plans;
- 2] through the conservation of our built environment and
- 3] through the exercise of Development Control.

Generally in relation to development control, the Development Plan tries to give the maximum architectural licence within the parameters of what one commentator has called 'architectural good manners'. Nevertheless, it shall be the policy of the Corporation where it sees fit, to create and issue 'guidance notes' or 'site briefs' to assist applicants in the design and layout of buildings.

Since the first Development Plan in 1967, there has been a number of consistent threads running through the Corporation's policies in relation to urban design and conservation in the city centre. In essence, all of the development plans identified the importance of the Shannon and especially the area around the Curragower falls as the critical organising concept central to the design of the city centre. Compared with the Lee and the Liffey, the Shannon is the largest river in the country and is relatively unpolluted. It is important therefore that spaces and buildings be sited so as to take advantage of views out over the river to the hills beyond. The re-development of the medieval city and the protection of the 'Georgian' character of the eighteenth century city have also been important in previous development plans.

The first key objective of previous plans is the designation of that part of the river front overlooking the Curragower falls as an area of Special Development Control, to be developed for civic and cultural purposes. By creating an area of Special Development Control, and by emphasising the importance of civic and cultural facilities within it, the previous development plans sought to give practical effect to this urban design concept. The guiding principle has been that the city should have a focus at its centre and the centre should reflect, in the architecture of its buildings and the architectural treatment of its spaces, the importance of the city together with a concern for the human scale and an appreciation of the potential of the site. This concept has to a large extent been realised with;

the construction of the Civic Offices,
the refurbishment of the Castle and Alms houses,
the construction of Arthur's Quay Centre & Arthur's Quay park
the development of the Hunt Museum in the Custom House.

All of these developments, important as they are in their own right, gain immeasurably from being linked together along the riverside from Arthurs Quay park, through the development of Custom House park, by bridge to the Potato Market and Merchants Quay and thence through the civic centre site by the Falls to the Castle.

Action Plans, though they have no formal standing in Irish Planning Law, are an excellent method of fleshing out the bones of urban design ideas and sparking debate on means of achievement.

This plan will indicate the carrying out of a number of such studies in areas critical to the future development of the City. The conservation of our heritage (historic, archeological, architectural and environmental), which is important in asserting our self respect as a nation, has an important economic function in attracting tourism and thus must be seen as a positive force which can be harnessed for our future benefit.

THE BUILDINGS;

Arthurs Quay Shopping Centre;

The first new major complex to address the river; it also provides a strong entrance feature element as a focal point to O'Connell Street. A substantial residential content was included as was an envelope of office development at the upper floors to cloak the large 600-space multi-storey car park. The project benefits from the large tree lined pathway on the Arthur's Quay side where existing mature trees were incorporated into the overall site planning.

Civic Park & Tourist Office;

The realisation of this project involved extending what was formerly a surface car park into the Shannon. The extended portion forms a promenade with buffer planting which forms part of the greater riverside walkway. The park contains an amphitheatre, in addition to grassed copses at the park edge. Shannon Development's Tourist Information Office forms a gateway into the Park. Its form refers to the sites history as a harbour.

Custom House;

The original building was constructed in 1768 to a design by Davis Duckart and was used since as a base for the Customs and Excise office. Customs and Excise vacated the building in 1991. The Corporation agreed with the Hunt family that the Art and Archeological Collection created by John Hunt Snr. would be located in the Custom House following its refurbishment and adaptation. The Museum is now an additional significant visitor attraction to the city.

Potato Market & Bridge;

The Potato Market was refurbished and a new foot-bridge (Sylvester O'Halloran Bridge) was constructed by the Limerick Civic Trust. Designed as an open Market, the project provided another important link in the continuous riverside walkway. While it has not operated successfully as a market, its refurbishment has added greatly to the environmental quality of the area.

Civic Offices;

The new City Hall was completed in February 1990 and resulted from a national 'Design / Build' competition. Incorporating a new District Court facility and exhibition spaces, the emphasis in the design was to restrict the height of the buildings and to ensure that they related in a positive way to the river. The complex was to be an inviting multi-purpose-use public area and as such has been particularly successful. The glazed street which provides access to the public offices is used for receptions and exhibitions.

King Johns Castle & Interpretative Centre;

Dating from c.1210, the Norman Castle in its 750 years has witnessed most of Limerick's History. These various historical phases have been expressed by changes in the use and associated buildings in the Castle. From 1932, the courtyard was occupied by 22 Local Authority Houses, and their removal in 1990 allowed for the refurbishment and redevelopment of the castle as a visitor attraction. In association with Shannon Development.

the original walls and towers were restored and a new Interpretative Centre constructed along the line of the demolished east wall. This lightweight suspended structure spans over the extensive area of Archaeological features uncovered during the excavation, making them accessible to the public. The design also facilitates further excavation of the courtyard.

Redevelopment;

Cities are organic entities and it is important in the design of cities that the potential of each part and its contribution to the overall be recognised. It is therefore vital that as much attention be given to parts of the centre which are not so prominent in the public gaze.

Johnsgate;

The redevelopment of the Johnsgate area, which had lain derelict for many years, for a wide variety of mixed uses (retail, wholesale, offices, residential etc.) reflects the vibrancy of the Medieval past. Here again links with our past heritage are maintained through the development of a linear park along by the conserved length of medieval city wall.

The Shaffrey Action Area plan, completed in 1985 had as its principal recommendations:-

- a) Retention of the historic streets and laneways.
- b) An introduction of small scale (traditional) infill commercial projects along Broad St. and John Street.
- c) Substantial 2/3 storey residential development in the area adjacent to the city wall.
- d) The formation of a Linear park abutting the City Wall.

While these recommendations have been substantially adhered to, the extensive refurbishment of the city wall itself remains to be undertaken, and it is hoped to achieve this during the currency of this plan.

Medieval Quarter

The proposed redevelopment of the Englishtown or medieval quarter of Limerick seeks to re-integrate the old medieval core of Limerick, abandoned in the 17th Century, functionally into the city by redevelopment for mixed uses including housing. The provision of the Northern Inner Relief Road, with its intended frontage of houses, will continue the emphasis of an inner urban street.

The area purchased to facilitate the construction of the Northern Inner Relief Road has allowed for the comprehensive development of the lands surrounding the roadway. This roadway will be designed in the form of a traditional 'street' with buildings constructed at the back of the footpath and fronting the new carriageway. Car-parking will be provided parallel with the footpath in the traditional manner. It is the clear objective that this street will be a vibrant focus of redevelopment on the lower Kings Island.

Docks Area

A large portion of the warehousing and Industrial area adjacent to Limerick Docks was designated for Inner City Redevelopment and has been redeveloped almost entirely by private initiative.

Milk Market

The Corporation has assisted the Limerick Market Trustees in the advancement of the Action Plan for the Milk Market and will endeavour to obtain government assistance for the renewal of the considerable area of obsolescence surrounding the market.

Johns Square

An action plan for the refurbishment of the surface of Johns Square has been drafted by the Corporation and will be advanced during the currency of this plan, finances permitting.

Cathedral Place

The Corporation has acquired a substantial area of obsolete and derelict properties at Cathedral Place and this area has now been redeveloped for private housing and some commercial development.

Conservation

Part Two of this plan lists a total of over 400 individual buildings and groups of buildings for various measures of protection and conservation. In the past the Corporation has committed substantial proportions of its resources to the preservation and conservation of Historic and Architecturally important buildings within its ownership. However, resources are not limitless and therefore it shall be the policy of the Corporation, that where it becomes apparent to the Corporation that some buildings of local historical interest have become incapable of continued protection whether by reason of dangerous condition or where road and other developments encroach on sites of archeological / historical interest, it shall be the policy of the Corporation to ensure :-

- a) That such sites or structures are excavated and recorded by the appropriate authorities.
- b) That such locations or sites be recorded by an appropriate commemorative plaque or other suitable marking.
- c) That the structures be recorded by means of architectural / photogrammetric survey, provided that the Corporation shall determine the appropriate action to be taken in each case.

There are many fragments comprising ornamental doorcases, street names, commemorative signs and so forth scattered throughout the city on properties which have become decayed and neglected. It shall be the policy of the Corporation to initiate a study into the best means of protection and conservation of these objects either in their existing surroundings or in some central place.

Buildings & Sites

Without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing, the Corporation lists hereunder sites of major historical and architectural importance which it considers should be conserved as an important part of the city's and the nation's heritage. The following lists describe buildings and sites proposed to be conserved and give some information relating to their importance. Specific objectives relating to all of the items mentioned are given in Part II of the Plan.

List A

1] King John's Castle :

A fine example of Anglo- Norman fortification, built ca. 1210 with the remains of a 17th century Bastion at the south-east corner. Recent excavations have revealed the east curtain wall and the missing section of the bastion, together with evidence of a pre- Norman defence system consisting of rampart, revetment wall, pathway and ditch. Located to the south of these was a row of three sunken structures, the earliest found so far in Limerick. The Castle withstood the Cromwellian siege of 1651 and the Williamite siege of 1690 - 91, but the excavated evidence has produced a system of mines and countermines, some of which are elaborate timber-lined tunnels, the product of the siege of 1642 when the castle was besieged and finally surrendered to the Confederates. While Limerick ceased to be fortified by 1763, the castle continued in use as a military barracks up to the early 20th century. By 1933, the Corporation having secured the site, replaced the extant Barrack buildings with 22 houses as an emergency re-housing scheme within the courtyard. These have recently been demolished as part of the plan to restore and develop the Castle as a major tourist attraction commensurate with its historic importance.

2] The City Exchange :

A colonnade, now incorporated into the Nicholas Street wall of St Mary's graveyard, marks the site of the old Exchange of the City, built originally in 1673 and rebuilt in 1772 and 1777. With the change of the commercial centre of Limerick to Newtown Pery in the 19th century, it was relocated to The Commercial Buildings in Rutland St. in 1805, (subsequently the Town Hall, 1847). The Exchange was demolished sometime between 1870 and 1925.

3] St Mary's Cathedral :

The Cathedral appears to have been established at the Synod of Rathbressail in 1111, but the earliest parts of the present structure date to c. 1180-95. The Romanesque building was essentially a cruciform structure consisting of nave, chancel, transepts and side aisles.

A number of side-chapels were added in the 15th and 16th centuries and these have obscured somewhat the original plan; they have caused considerable alteration to the aisles and a large tower has also been added onto the west end of the nave. There have also been extensive modern restorations, especially in the chancel. The masonry of all medieval phases is roughly coursed rubble limestone, but the original work is distinguished by the use of sandstone quoins and mouldings on contrast to the limestone of the later phases. Currently undergoing a major restoration.

4] Bourke's Castle :

The remains of a fortified town house of late 16th or early 17th century date. Called after Alderman John Bourke who resided there in 1654. Said to have been occupied by four Franciscans in the period 1732 - 1766. The building was mostly removed with the widening of Mary's Lane to form Athlunkard Street in 1824.

5] Fanning's Castle :

The remains of this fortified town house stands at the rear of St Anne's Technical Institute, off Mary Street. Built in the late 16th or early 17th century, it was the home of Dominic Fanning, Mayor of Limerick during the siege of 1651.

6] Kilrush Church :

This small Early Christian church is situated in the grounds of Old Church, near Barrington's Pier on the west side of the Shannon. It is first mentioned in 1201 and is listed in the Papal Taxation of 1302-7. It is a rectangular building with walls and gables almost intact. Inserted in the south wall is rectangular window said to have been taken from the Franciscan Chapel in the City which is inscribed with Gothic lettering in false relief. The building was restored in the 19th century.

7] Villiers Almshouses :

Originally the site of the Bishop's Palace up to 1661. Endowed by Mrs Hannah Villiers in her will established in the Court of the King's Bench in 1815, the almshouses were built in 1825, designed by the Paine Brothers, of Gothic composition. Facing on to their own secluded garden, they form a pleasant and distinctive contribution to the architecture of the city.

8] The County Courthouse :

A somewhat weak essay in Roman Doric by the Limerick architects Nicholas and William Hannon, (1807-09). The interior was reconstructed in 1957.

9] The Customs House :

An elegant Palladian-style building, with its cut stone arcaded wings, Corinthian plasters and heavy entablature, it forms the finest classical building in Limerick, designed by David Ducart, 1765-69. It faces the park and the river and it now houses the Hunt Museum.

10] The Crescent: (with the 1857 statue of O'Connell by John Hogan).

Part of Georgian Limerick, at the south end of its main axis, laid out by Davis Ducart. An unusual neo-classical street plan.

11] Pery Square:

Another area of Georgian Limerick, with the houses dating to the early 1840's. The Tontine Building was completed in 1838 and constitutes a most notable example of Georgian architecture. Adjacent to the People's Park, 1877 with the Spring Rice Memorial, by Alexander Nimmo, 1830. It is the declared objective to ensure the preservation of these two areas of Georgian Limerick. The Corporation will not permit any alterations to or re-constructions of the buildings in the Crescent which would be in material conflict with the architectural treatment of the areas.

12] (Unused)

13] Dominican Priory of St Saviour :

The remains stand in the grounds of the Convent of Mercy, (Barrack Street / Old Dominic Street). Founded in 1227, there is evidence that a Papal University was established here in 1644 and functioned as such for a brief period. The site was subsequently used as a tanyard, a military barracks and a brewery, (18th and 19th centuries).

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- 14] St John's Cathedral :
Cathedral Place. A neo-Gothic revival building, 1856-61, by C.P. Hardwick. Its remarkable spire, by M. and S. Hennessy, is the highest in Ireland, (280 ft).
- 15] St John's Church and Graveyard :
Originally the site of a medieval parish church, the present building was erected in 1843, architect Joseph Welland, and is considered slightly hiberno-romanesque in style. Surrounding the church is the graveyard, which hold the graves and monuments to many people famous for their association with the city.

List 'B'

- 1] St Alphonsus's Church, Upper Henry Street: A Gothic Revival essay, 1858-62 by Hardwick.
- 2] Art Gallery, Pery Square: was formerly the Carnegie Library, 1906, by Sheridan.
- 3] St Saviour's Church, Dominic Street: a romantic Gothic style building by the Paine Brothers, 815-16. Remodelled in 1860.
- 4] Franciscan Church, Henry Street: a neo-classical church by Corbett, 1876.
- 5] Bishop's Lady House, Church Street: A converted medieval town house, possibly by Bindon, in the Palladian Style of Irish architecture. Residence of the Bishop from 1661-1784. Recently restored by the Civic Trust.
- 6] Gerald Griffin Memorial School, Bridge Street: Originally the Old City Court House, (1764), this was a rebuild of the previous Court House dating to 1640. Located on what is said to be the site of an Eremite of St. Augustine foundation but this is questionable and may have become confused with an Augustine Chapel located between Little and Great Creagh Lane, between 1774 and 1823 when they relocated to O'Connell Street.
- 7] Terrace of Houses, Church Street: Late 18th or early 19th century, this row presents a satisfactory frontage, complementing the newly restored Bishops Lady House.
- 8] The Milk Market, Carr Street: Originally, the Corn Market, (1840), this single storey building encloses a cobbled court yard market space, with a fine two-storey market toll house is incorporated into the facade.
- 9] St Michael's Church and Graveyard, Michael Street: Originally the site of a medieval parish church, dismantled after the Siege of 1651, in ruins by 1654. The Graveyard was recently renovated by the Civic Trust.

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- 10] St Munchin's Church and Graveyard, Church Street: The tradition that it was originally a 5th century foundation by St Mainchin is questionable, more likely to be another medieval parish church. The present edifice was built in 1827 by the Paine Brothers. Recently restored by the Civic Trust and used by the Island Theatre Group.
 - 11] Medieval House, Curry Lane: The only surviving example of late medieval, (16th / early 17th century) secular architecture in the Irishtown. This building is in urgent need of restoration and if a suitable site is found, within the Irishtown, it could be rebuilt using the surviving architectural fragments, providing the proportions of the original building are maintained.
 - 12] Undercrofts / Cellars and Bridge, Civic Offices site: The former is a twin-aisled vaulted cellar, separated by an arcade, located with its entrance incorporated into the City Wall. Presently preserved and maintained as an attraction in the landscaped element of the Civic Offices. The latter is an arched bridge, bonded into the City Wall, leading out to what was the site of a mill. It is located under the present Council Chamber.
 - 13] Houses of the Earl of Limerick and the Bishop's Palace: Henry Street. Built in 1784. The former is a five bay, three storey house. Its walls are rendered and its doorway is unique in Limerick. The latter is of red brick and has a plainer doorway.
 - 14 & 15] (Unused)
 - 16] St Michael's Church,: A very pleasant First Fruits Church of romantic Gothic design, consecrated in 1844. Renovated in 1877. Contained a stained glass window taken from St. Mary's Cathedral. Its preservation, apart from its architectural merit is desirable in order to preserve the character and symmetry of this pleasant square.
 - 17] Limerick Savings Bank: A very interesting neo-Greek building by W.H. Owen, ca. 1840. It is the only such example in the city.
 - 18] The Town Hall: Originally the Commercial or Merchantile Building, 1805. Became the Town Hall in 1846, its facade is regarded as a fine example of early 19th century architectural treatment of public buildings.
 - 19] Trinity Church: A reconstruction of the Church of the Blind Asylum. Now the Mid- Western Health Board premises. An exceptional example of 18th century street architecture consisting of an Ionic portico in stone flanked by two brick built houses.
 - 20] The Church of Our Lady of the Rosary: A contemporary wooden church by F.M. Corr and W.H.D. McCormick, 1949. Regarded as a landmark in Church architecture in Ireland. The first notable church erected after the Second World War.
 - 21] Barrington's Hospital: It is desirable to preserve the distinctive stone frontage.

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- 22] St John's Temperance Hall: The facade of this building is considered worthy of preservation. It suitably fills the end of the vista along the end of this street.
- 23] Toll House: An early 19th century romantic Gothic sham castle consisting of a miniature tower house topped with crenellations and an imitation machicolations, built as the Toll House for the new Thomond Bridge. Designed by the Paine Brothers.
- 24] The Parochial House, St Mary's Church: A Georgian style house, of random stone, one of the oldest residential houses in the city still occupied. Said to have been built as a Dower House by the Arthur Family, whose Coat-of-Arms is on a stone over the door leading from the Church. Occupied in the early 19th century, by Mr Carr, famous for his gardens. Now the presbytery for St Mary's.
- 25] St John's Square: Three-sided, of stone-fronted Queen Anne style houses by Davis Ducart in 1751. Restored in the 1970's for European Architectural Heritage Year, 1975.
- 26] Lax Weir: Referred to as the oldest weir in Ireland, definitely Norman, may be Viking in origin.
- 27] Area of Georgian Character: Newtown Pery as such might be said to be Georgian in character; but, as has been stated in Chapter 7 (18) portions of this part of the City are in urgent need of redevelopment and must be regarded as beyond preservation in present form. Moreover, much of the appearance of the central commercial area has radically altered within the past 50 years so that its Georgian character has been eroded. These remarks do not, however, apply with the same force to the area which lies within a line drawn from Henry Street taking buildings on both sides of the streets on the perimeter; this area continues to retain something of its special Georgian character and it is included in Chapter 6 as an area of architectural interest.
- 28] Sarsfield Bridge: Designed by Alexander Nimmo, 1824-27 and modelled on the Pont de Neuilly in Paris, (designed by Peronnet). This bridge has superb engineering and architectural qualities and forms part of the character of the city centre. The parapets were cleaned and extensively repaired during European Architectural Heritage Year, 1975.
- 29] Corporation Widow's Alms Houses : Built in the late 17th century by the Corporation, now part of the Corporation's housing stock .

List 'AF'

- 1] Treaty Stone: Traditionally the stone on which the Treaty of Limerick was signed. Recently moved to a more suitable location on Clancy's Strand near St Munchin's Church.
- 2] The Walls of Limerick : Recent archeological work within the city has defined stretches of wall below the ground and with the help of historical and cartographic research, a new map showing the line of the wall has been prepared. This research has also produced evidence for an inner wall within the King's Island area and has helped to locate numerous Gates and Towers which are no longer visible. The entire area within the walls, together with an area immediately outside, is, under the terms of the National Monuments Legislation, deemed to be a national monument and as such any developments should be archaeologically monitored.

Monuments in the charge of the Corporation which it is proposed to preserve :

- 3] a) O'Connell Monument, The Crescent, (Hogan, 1857).
- 4] b) The Spring Rice Memorial, The People's Park, (Nimmo, 1830).
- 5] c) The Tait Clock, Baker Place, (Corbett, 1867).
- 6] d) Sarsfield Monument, Cathedral Place, (Lawlor, 1881).
- 7] e) The Fountain, St John's Square, (possibly Corbett, 1865).
- 8] f) 1916 Memorial, Sarsfield Bridge, (Power).

Monuments not in the charge of the Corporation which it is proposed to preserve :

- 9] g) The Cenotaph, Pery Square,
- 10] h) The Memorial to the Manchester Martyrs, Blackboy Pike.
- 11] i) Russell Memorial Arch at the entrance to the People's Park.
- 12] Dominican Chapel, Mary Street / Fish Lane: Erected 1730 and occupied up to 1816, when they moved to their present location in Dominic Street. This chapel is described as measuring 60 ft by 30ft, with galleries supported by Corinthian Columns.
- 13] Franciscan Chapel, Mary's Street / Athlunkard Street. Mentioned in the Civil Survey of 1654 as a Chapel and confused with the house, formally Bourke's Castle, occupied between 1732 and 1766 by four Franciscans.
- 14] Priory and Hospital of St. Mary and St. Edward, alias Holy Cross (Fratres Cruciferi) : Located near Sir Harry's Mall, at the end of Little Fish Lane.
- 15] Old County Court House, Long Lane: Built in 1732 adjacent to the site of the Franciscan Abbey.

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- 16] St Francis Abbey and Graveyard, Long Lane: Founded by Wm De Burgo in the early 13th century and dedicated to St Dominic.
 - 17] Old Gaol, Mary Street / Gaol Lane: Erected in 1750 on the site of the Thosel which dates back to 1451.
 - 18] Peter's Cell, Priory of St Peter, (Augustinian nuns) : founded by Donal Mor O'Brien, supposedly ca. 1171. After the suppression it became the property of Lord Milton and was subsequently rented to the dissenters and used as a Presbyterian Meeting House until 1798. Part of the ruined convent was converted into a play house ca, 1760.
 - 19] St Nicholas' Church and Graveyard: A medieval parish church, first mentioned in 1200, destroyed by the siege of 1651. Located to the south of the Castle, the site is now occupied by the Corporation Alms Houses and the Car Park for the Civic Offices.
 - 20] City Court House and Gaol, Merchant's Quay: Gaol dates to 1813 and the Court House to the 1850's. Both are gone to accommodate the Civic Offices.
 - 21] Westfields Td.: Enclosure shown on the 1st edition of the O.S.
 - 22] Ballynanty Beg Td.: Enclosure - no trace of this survives.
 - 23] Ballynanty More Td.: Castle, site of.
 - 24] Ballynanty Beg Td.: Burial Ground.
 - 25] Killeely Td. : Burial Ground, site of a church.
 - 26] Farranshone Td. : Site of a Castle.
 - 27] Site of 'Cromwell's Fort'. King's Island.
 - 28] Corbally Td. : Site of a Mill and Lax Weir.
 - 29] Corbally Td. : Earthwork or enclosure.

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- 30] Corbally Td. : Site of a 'Killeen' or burial ground.
 - 31] Corbally Td. : Site of a weir.
 - 32] Rhebogue Td : Site of an earthwork or enclosure.
 - 33] Killalee Td. : A graveyard and Church site.
 - 34] Singland Td. : Bastion.
 - 35] Singland Td. : Burial ground in which is sited a Church and Round Tower.
 - 36] Singland Td. : Holy Well dedicated to St Patrick.
 - 37] Rathbane North Td.: Site of a ringfort enclosure.
 - 38] Monaclinoe Td. : Holy Well.
 - 39] Spital-land Td. : Gallows.
 - 40] Moylish Td. : Site of possible Castle.
 - 41] Corbally Td.: Site of possible 17th Century House.
 - 42] Monaclinoe Td. : Segment of an enclosure bisected by the Ballysimon Road.
 - 43] Ballinacurra (Weston) Td : Enclosure marked on old OS maps as 'Lissadaha'.