

# Reconstructing the Past: Charting the Destruction of Doonlicka Castle, Co. Clare.

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*Doonlicka Castle, near Carrigaholt in West Clare has been destroyed. Utilising the surviving documentary sources from the past two hundred years, photographs, and drawings the author attempts to recover as much information about the Castle as possible and describes the process of its disintegration.*

It may be argued that castles and fortified buildings occupy an unusual position within Irish archaeology. By this one means that their remains are, generally, sufficiently substantial to possess an immediacy in terms of their functional and structural components which may capture the imagination of archaeologists, tourists and interested individuals. The simple presence of a standing castle allows various forms of response from detailed recording to passing curiosity at a picturesque ruin. When such monuments pass from the landscape, either through wilful destruction or as a result of natural forces, we are often left with some scattered historical references, perhaps some old photographs and the decaying mounds of rubble to mark what was once a formidable stronghold. The purpose of this paper is to examine the various documentary evidence for Doonlicka castle's morphology and design<sup>1</sup>. Using these sources in combination it is hoped to reveal an accurate picture of the site as it once was and to provide a chronology for its destruction.

Doonlicka castle ('the fortified place on the rock') is located in the townland of Moveen West in Carrigaholt parish on the Loop Head peninsula.<sup>2</sup> The site may once been a promontory fort with a single earthen bank and fosse protecting the land access to Castle Point.<sup>3</sup> Westropp describes it as 'a nearly levelled straight mound, 15 feet [4.6m] thick, running across the head ... the fosse is well marked at the north cliff, but was evidently a mere continuation of a deep natural hollow.'<sup>4</sup> He also suggests that the bank may once have been capped by a dry-stone wall for added protection.<sup>5</sup> As with all promontory forts, only the land-ward flank needed protection as the other three sides were shielded by steep cliffs. In the case of Doonlicka the drop from the interior of the fort to the sea is almost 200ft (c. 60m). Although the castle site does not appear to have ever been the principal residence of either the McMahons or the O'Briens it is probable that it would have been inhabited on a daily basis by their retainers. Thus, the remains of an earthen bank running around the majority of the cliff edge may be seen not just as a defensive measure, but also a protective one to stop people, animals or belongings

<sup>1</sup> The name of the castle is variously given as Doonlicka, Dunlicky or Doonlickey *etc.* though as the former is used on the Ordnance Survey 6" maps this appellation is used throughout.

<sup>2</sup> W.S. Mason, *Prospectus and review of the statistical account: or parochial survey of Ireland*, Dublin 1816, p. 442.

<sup>3</sup> Carol Gleeson, The promontory forts of Co. Clare, *The Other Clare*, 15, 1991 pp 57-60.

<sup>4</sup> T.J. Westropp, Promontory Forts in the 'Irrus,' County Clare. Part II. The Loop Head and Cross group, *J. R. S. A. I.*, 38, 1908b, p. 22. While the long axis of the castle lay east-west, both Westropp & Hewson appear to have mistaken the directions by ninety degrees. To avoid unnecessary confusion in comparing the current work with the earlier accounts, the present author has adhered to this convention.

<sup>5</sup> T.J. Westropp, Kilkee (Co. Clare) and its neighbourhood. -Part II. Kilkee to Cross, *J. N. M. A. S.*, 3, No. 1, 1913, p. 40.



being swept away by high winds. However, the question of whether there was an earlier phase of activity on the site, which may be identified with a promontory fort, is far from certain. It is also possible that these remains are wholly Medieval in construction and were erected at the same time as the castle as an added layer of defence.

The oldest surviving historical reference to the site is Edward White's description of Thomond, which includes a list of castles owned by Turlough McMahon in the parish of Moyarta (modern Carrigaholt), and dates to 1574.<sup>6</sup> The list mentions Carrigaholt as the chief McMahon residence along with the castles of Cloughaunsavaun and Moyarta. While Carrigaholt is still standing and in a relatively good state of repair, the other three are destroyed. The final site, Moyarta, has been so thoroughly demolished that no real idea exists as to its former location.<sup>7</sup>

With the death of Turlough McMahon in 1595 the ownership of Doonlicka, along with the other castles in the area, passed to his son Teige 'Caech' (the blind/short-sighted) McMahon. Teige's rebellion against the Crown in 1598 has been recounted many times before and readers are directed to the major sources.<sup>8</sup> Of relevance in this instance is the fact that during his rebellion Teige repossessed the castles of Doonbeg and Doonlicka, which had earlier been mortgaged in lieu of debts. At this time Doonlicka had been in the possession of one Owen Mac Sweeny of Kilkee.<sup>9</sup> It is known that soon after Teige's death in 1602 Daniel O'Brien took possession of Carrigaholt, and presumably Doonlicka also, though Mac Sweeny still held the castle under the old mortgage until as late as 1609.<sup>10</sup> O'Brien's rights to the former McMahon lands were confirmed on his elevation to the peerage in 1604 and re-confirmed in 1622. By the time of the 'Edenvale Survey' in 1675 the castle was described as being in ruins.<sup>11</sup> During the early 18th century it was sold to the Amory family from Cambridge who in turn sold it to John Westropp of Lismehane in 1753.<sup>12</sup> The site finally came into the ownership of the tenants under the Land Acts before 1913. White's 1574 description of Thomond identifies Doonlicka as 'Dunlykil' while a number of maps of similar date give the name as 'Donnellykey.' In the 1622 confirmation of O'Brien's 1604 grant it is noted as 'Donlike alias Moyveene'.<sup>13</sup> Speede's map of Ireland gives the name as 'Downdekey' in 1631 while Mercator's Atlas of 1636 gives 'Doune Likey.'

When examining the antiquarian and archaeological accounts relating to Doonlicka castle one is confronted with a series of written, drawn and photographic records made over the course of two-hundred years. Unfortunately, these descriptions are frequently of uneven detail and value in terms of allowing a reconstruction of the appearance of the castle and charting its rate of destruction. The written sources, which have been examined, are in chronological order: O'Gorman in 1800, Mason in

<sup>6</sup> T.J. Westropp, Carrigaholt (Co. Clare) and its neighbourhood. - Part III: Kilcredaun to Ross, *J. N. M. A. S.*, 2, No. 2, 1912, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> John O'Donovan (Ed.), *The annals of the Kingdom of Ireland (from the earliest times to the year 1616) by the Four Masters*, 3rd edn., 7 Vols, Dublin 1856, p. 1990; I. Murphy, Teigh Caech McMahon and his one man navy, *Iorris*, 4, 1973, p. 5; U. O'Reilly, Carrigaholt's proud past, *The Other Clare*, 3, 1979, pp 12-5; S. Marrinan, The tower houses of south west Clare, *The Other Clare*, 8, 1984, pp 40-44; M. Comber (ed.), *The antiquities of county Clare: letters containing information relative to the antiquities of the county of Clare collected during the Ordnance Survey in 1839; & letters and extracts relative to ancient territories in Thomond, 1841*, Dublin 1997 etc.

<sup>9</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 43.

<sup>10</sup> T.J. Westropp, Promontory forts in the "Irrus," county Clare. Part I.- The Kilkee group *J. R. S. A. I.*, 38, 1908a, pp 28-47; T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a; S. Marrinan, *op. cit.* 1984, 41.

<sup>12</sup> T.J. Westropp *ibid.* 1908a; T.J. Westropp *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 43;

<sup>13</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a, p. 45.



1816, Knott in 1836, Lewis in 1837, the Ordnance Survey letters of 1839, Hewson in 1879 and Westropp from 1875 to 1879.<sup>14</sup>

To the best of the author's knowledge, Chevalier Thomas O'Gorman provides the first modern mention of Doonlicka castle. He examined the castle on Monday, 25 August 1800. His journal notes that:

This castle stands on a narrow neck of land and from the angles of the castle a wall or rampart with a breastwork, extends to the cliffs on both sides. This wall or rampart is about 20 feet high [6.1m] and six broad [1.8m]. There are, at short distances, sights or apertures in the breastwork through which the enemy may be annoyed by the besieged, without exposing themselves to the fire of the assailants. There was about thirty years ago, an iron door to this castle which the country (i.e. country people) were afraid to remove.<sup>15</sup>

He goes on to explain that this iron door, which had been in position for over one hundred and fifty years, had been removed and the metal reused for horseshoes. We cannot be certain that this door was an original feature of the castle. However, one may speculate that it was either a wholly iron covering for a wooden door or perhaps a series of flat iron strips riveted together to form a strengthening grid. It is also feasible that this 'door' was a 'yett' or protective door covering which would have only been pulled into position in times of danger. All of these suggestions are mere conjecture in the absence of concrete evidence. If O'Gorman's dates are to be believed, the door, whatever its exact nature, survived until c. 1770 and may have originally dated to c. 1650, before the final abandonment of the site.

In describing the site, Mason's correspondent, the Rev. J. Graham merely says that:

the accessible part [of the headland] is guarded by an high narrow tower, with a wall on each side. The tower and wall are still standing, though the mortar has been worn away, so as to give the building an appearance of being composed of loose stones.<sup>16</sup>

Knott, unfortunately, adds little to this description only noting that the mortar of the walls appeared to have been made of burnt shells.<sup>17</sup> Westropp notes that the site is located approximately twenty five to thirty miles from the nearest available limestone and, thus, burnt shells were the only available source of lime for mortar.<sup>18</sup> Lewis' description is similarly brief, noting a 'high and narrow tower with a wall on each side.'<sup>19</sup> As Eugene O'Curry was a native of this area, one feels some disappointment at his all too brief description of Doonlicka (of which he states merely that it is 'in good external preservation.'<sup>20</sup> Although he could have been expected to provide more detail, his letters concerning the Loop Head area appear to have been written almost wholly from memory while based in Limerick and elsewhere.

<sup>14</sup>T.S. O'Broin, A journey through west Clare in 1800 AD, *The Other Clare*, 5, 1981, pp 37-41; W.S. Mason, *op. cit.*; M.J. Knott, *Two months at Kilkee (a watering place in the county Clare, near the mouth of the Shannon, with an account of a voyage down that river from Limerick to Kilrush)*, Dublin 1836; S. Lewis, *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, 2 Vols. London 1837; Comber (ed.), *op. cit.*; G.J. Hewson, 'George James Hewson, A. M., exhibited a photograph of Dunlicky castle, and said: -' *J. R. S. A. I.*, 15, 1879, pp 266-8; T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a & b, 1913.

<sup>15</sup>T.S. O'Broin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup>W.S. Mason, *op. cit.*, pp 442-3.

<sup>17</sup>M.J. Knott, *op. cit.*, pp 79-80.

<sup>18</sup>T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.* 1908a, p. 46.

<sup>19</sup>S. Lewis, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 402.

<sup>20</sup>M. Comber (ed.), *op. cit.*, p.122. Westropp raises a similar objection for O'Curry's failure to include more items of local folklore, presuming that he 'was not a collector of legends when living in Clare' (1908a, p. 46; 1913, p. 44).



These descriptions and brief mentions provide insights into the condition of the castle at various intervals and allow the gleaning of certain structural details. However, it is only with the publication of Hewson's 'first careful description' in 1879 that we may begin to reconstruct a measured drawing of the site.<sup>21</sup> His visit during September 1879 recorded the monument as it then stood, after a substantial collapse the previous month, and added his belief that more was soon to fall.<sup>22</sup> As the description is too long to give in full, a synopsis must suffice. He describes the surviving, southern, wall as being approximately 18ft high (5.4m) and 5ft thick (1.5m), the northern portion of the wall having collapsed and the stones removed. The external width of the tower along its north-south axis is given as 17ft (5.2m) and 11ft internally (3.4m). While the large amount of rubble precluded measurement of the tower in the other direction, Hewson remembers it as having been about 7ft internally (2.1m). The internal face of the tower had two doors set one above the other, leading to the presumption that the ground floor was not provided with an internal staircase to allow access to the upper stories. Thus, access to the first floor must have been via an external ladder or stair and using internal means thereafter. Access to the top of the walls from the second floor was through a doorway on either side. He also suggested that the walls may have once had battlements. Although no direct evidence survived for them at that time it is possible that O'Gorman's earlier assessment of the walls being 20ft high (6.1m) could have included battlements on top of the walls. However, as he also states that the curtain walls were 6ft thick (1.8m), 1ft (0.3m) more than Hewson's measurements, some account must be taken for the Chevalier's over estimation. Even if battlements had existed here, a height of c. 2ft (0.6m) would not have provided sufficient protection. Thus, an additional wooden palisade, or 'hoarding,' may have been attached for added defence.

From the measurements given above we may conclude that the north and south walls of the tower were each around 3ft thick (0.9m). They also appear to have maintained their thickness from top to bottom. The west (internal) wall of the tower, however, appears to have been about 2ft 4" thick (0.7m) at the ground and first floors and reduced to c. 1ft 4" (0.4m) in subsequent stories. He also notes that the front wall of the tower was in excess of 2ft 4" thick. The southern reach of the curtain wall still exhibited two corbel stones which may have held some form of defensive structure or machicolation over the door. The corbels were composite features made up of three stones, each projecting out above the one below. Hewson also notes that the mortar used throughout the structure was composed of burnt seashells mixed with sand and very coarse gravel. Some of these gravels were, he notes, as 'large as filberts' (hazelnuts) which resulted in large openings between the stone courses.

From Hewson's description we may also gather the extent of the damage caused the previous month. He explains that approximately one third of the tower's back wall above the curtain walling had collapsed (about one fifth of its total height). He states that the majority of the outer (eastern) face of the tower had fallen at that time. Hewson's account of Doonlicka is of vital importance in reconstructing both the appearance and sequence of the castle's destruction as he not only provided the first accurately measured description but was in a position to observe the site before any further degradation occurred.

Westropp visited the site a number of times from at least 1875 to 1879. He briefly describes the castle as consisting of 'a long, straight rampart of flag-stones set in coarse shell mortar, and pierced at intervals by loop-holes' and again: 'Dún Licé, as its name implied, was built of the small flat flagstones of the coast set in bad shell mortar, and nearly undermined by mischievous persons'.<sup>23</sup> He

<sup>21</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.* 1908a, p. 45.

<sup>22</sup> G.J. Hewson, *op. cit.*, pp 266-8. The collapse was reported in *The Munster News* 10 September 1879 (S. Marrinan, *op. cit.*, p. 41).

<sup>23</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, p. 46; 1913, p. 40.



goes on to blame this degradation of the structure on the builders of the adjacent road along the cliffs and sees this as the major cause of the tower's fall in 1879. This series of events is entirely plausible as the 1st edition Ordnance Survey 6" map does not show a road in this area, though one has obviously been built by the time of the 2nd edition map of 1893.<sup>24</sup>

His measurements of the site are not as numerous as those of Hewson, but where the same features are noted by both authors the dimensions given are the same. With regard to the combination of two doors in the western wall of the tower, he argues that entrance to the ground floor was through an attached house and thus it would have been possible to gain access to the first floor from within the house.<sup>25</sup> Westropp is the only author to mention this 'nearly levelled house' and adds that it was covered in debris in 1868 'as if a wall had recently fallen there.'<sup>26</sup> Examination of the surviving drawings and photographs reveals no evidence of a building having been attached to the north face of the tower.<sup>27</sup> On the available information the question is largely open and may only be resolved by excavation. However, as Hewson notes, the tower possessed evidence of neither a fireplace nor a flue so it would seem reasonable that some form of adjacent structure was used for habitation.<sup>28</sup> Westropp observed that there was no 'westward projection or seam' between the tower and the northern reach of the curtain walling.<sup>29</sup> This statement may be taken to imply two things. Firstly, that the tower and flanking walls were built in one single phase of construction and, secondly, that no additional structures conjoined to the tower were erected at that time. Thus, if a 'house' did exist on the site it must have been of a somewhat later period. Westropp also mentions that the eastern (landward) face of the castle 'was greatly broken' and sees it as having been the cause of the collapse in 1879. Like many preceding authors he mentions the mortar of the structure stating that it is 'washed deeply out of the joints of the flagstones.'<sup>30</sup> In recounting some of the folklore associated with Doonlicka he remarks that the site had 'in modern days acquired a reputation for being full of treasure, hidden by the Danes and other marauders who frequented it' and goes on to list the alleged exploits of two would-be treasure hunters.<sup>31</sup>

Westropp notes that the three loopholes in the southern reach of the wall are each 3" to 5" wide (7.6cm - 12.7cm) 'tall and in deep bays with flagstone heads and relieving arches over the lintel.'<sup>32</sup> He gives each of their locations, and that of the outer door, relative to the end of the wall. He also describes the door as being 4ft wide (1.2m) 'with a pointed arch under a flat relieving arch.' The whole is described as being 78ft 3" long (23.9m) and the wall as 5ft 7" thick (1.7m) at its surviving southern end. Westropp also disputes Hewson's claim that the internal measurements of the tower were 11ft by 7ft, suggesting that the length was instead 13ft 2" (4m). His reasoning is that 'if he [Hewson] is right as to the width, the turret may have been about 19ft [5.8m] each way, but to my recollection it seemed

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, this section of the road is believed locally to have been a 'relief road' built during the 1845-9 famine (R.M. Chapple, *A statistical analysis of ringfort distribution and morphology on the Loop Head peninsula, Co. Clare*. 2 vols. Unpublished MA thesis, National University of Ireland, Galway 1998, pp 258-9).

<sup>25</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a, p. 46.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> For comparison see the southern face of Carrigaholt castle which displays clear evidence of once having had a building attached to its side.

<sup>28</sup> G.J. Hewson, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

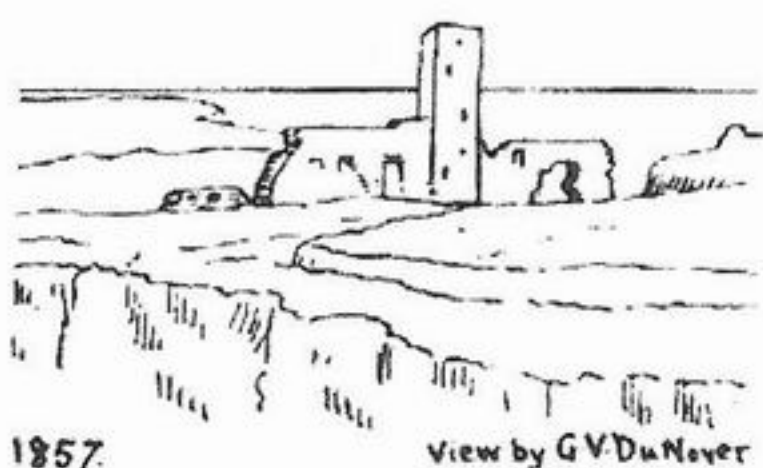
<sup>29</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 41.

<sup>30</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a, p. 47.

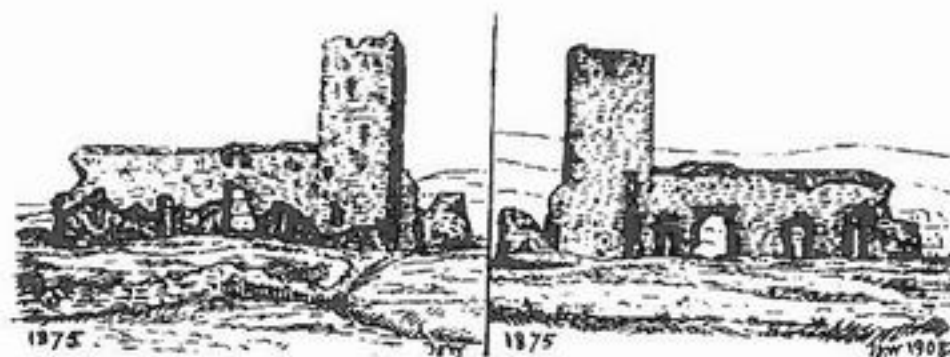
<sup>31</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908b, p.221; 1913, p.45.

<sup>32</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1913, p. 41.

rather oblong than square.’<sup>33</sup> He also records the presence of ‘a curious aumbry’ apparently in the north-eastern corner of the ground floor, but does not give any measurements for it. He interprets the putlog holes above the main entrance as indicators of a lean-to building having been constructed there. While it would not be impossible for such a building to have existed, they may merely have been indicators of the overall construction method.<sup>34</sup> Westropp argued that a gallery would have been required as the wall was too narrow to be effectively defended from above and, thus, these holes may be the remains of an integral wall-walk to allow easy access to the battlements.<sup>35</sup> This interpretation is not inconsistent with the available evidence. Close examination of the surviving photographs indicates that the major concentration of putlog holes was near the top of the south wall’s inner face. One appears to have been located near the top of the north wall, while few, if any, may be discerned on the exterior side or higher up on the tower’s faces. The presence of three putlog holes along the northern edge of the doorways in the ground and first floors raises the possibility that these were part of some form of support for an external stair or other means of communication between the two levels. Westropp notes that a long section of the northern curtain wall, standing in 1854 had collapsed by 1868, but had been in poor repair from before that time. By 1875 only a length of 10ft (3m) remained of this wall showing the possible remains of a loophole, though by 1913 even this had disappeared, to the extent of the foundations having been robbed out.<sup>36</sup> As late as 1875 the tower was still in relatively good condition, though some parts of the top had already fallen.<sup>37</sup> In 1908 the southern reach of the wall was in largely the same state of repair as it had been in 1854.



**Fig.1** Sketch by G.V. Du Noyer made in 1857 showing the outer (eastern) face of the castle.  
From Westropp 1908b, 44.



**Fig.2** Sketches made by T.J. Westropp from his photographs of Doonlicka in 1875. The outer (eastern) face of the castle (left) and inner (western) face (right).  
From Westropp 1908b, 44.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>34</sup>This method, common throughout the medieval period, involves the incorporation of wooden scaffolding into the building as it progresses. When complete the wood is cut off and the end hidden either with plaster or a conveniently shaped stone. When the wood rots this covering often comes loose and falls off and thus providing evidence of the construction technique.

<sup>35</sup>T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a, p.46; 1913, p.42.

<sup>36</sup>T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1913, p.41.

<sup>37</sup>S. Marrinan, *op. cit.*



Of great importance in understanding the castle's chronology of destruction are the various surviving images of Doonlicka. Westropp published a sketch by George V. Du Noyer made in 1854 along with two of his own drawings made from photographs or 'camera sketches' taken in 1875 (Figs. 1 & 2).<sup>38</sup> The Du Noyer sketch is intriguing, as, although sparse in detail, it appears to show the fourth floor as complete, which was not extant in 1875. O'Broin published a sketch of the castle from 1844, but does not cite its source.<sup>39</sup> Westropp also published a photograph by P. Collins showing Doonlicka's condition around 1868/9 (Plate 1). Finally, an undated Lawrence collection photograph depicts the castle before the tower fell in 1879.<sup>40</sup> This photograph is of interest as it was taken from almost the exact angle used by Westropp for his 'camera sketches.' Examination of the two indicates few changes in structural condition and it may be suggested that the Lawrence photograph may also have been taken around 1875.<sup>41</sup> It is unfortunate that no photographs of the castle from around August 1879 appear to have been published. Hewson exhibited a photograph at his report to the R.S.A.I., but this was not included with the published account. Indeed it is uncertain whether the photograph exhibited was even taken during his visit or was older, showing the castle in better condition.<sup>42</sup> By the 1950s only the southern range of the curtain wall still stood, the remainder having completely disintegrated.<sup>43</sup> O'Broin notes that this too collapsed in 1963.<sup>44</sup> Today the casual visitor would be excused for not appreciating that any structure had ever stood there, the surviving remains having dwindled to a few large lumps of stone held together by their decaying mortar (Plate 2).

While this seems a sorry tale of neglect and vandalism there is still much to be learned from the surviving records. To aid this process, photographic copies were made of all the available visual sources. Using basic photogrammic methods the images were adjusted for scale and perspective. These were then combined to produce a series of composite images which recorded the destruction of the castle. At the same time the written records were carefully analysed and their measurements extracted to provide a realistic scale. It is on these combined methods that the reconstruction drawing (Fig. 3) is based. It must be stressed, however, that although the resulting drawing is as accurate as possible, there is still a certain margin of error contained within it. This is due to the nature of the evidence which, lacking on certain points, forced the inclusion of a number of assumptions and speculations to fill in the gaps. The search for evidence has not been exhaustive and inevitably some sources may have been overlooked. The addition of securely dated photographs and drawings would potentially have the result of a more accurate picture of the castle's destruction. The reconstruction drawing takes as its basis the structure as it survived between 1875 and 1879, the period of time where the castle is best documented both in terms of images and written descriptions. Additional information which has proven harder to accurately assess is added in dashed lines.

<sup>38</sup> T.J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, 1908a, p. 44. These three drawings are again reproduced in T.J. Westropp, 1913, p.40.

<sup>39</sup> T.S. O'Broin, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

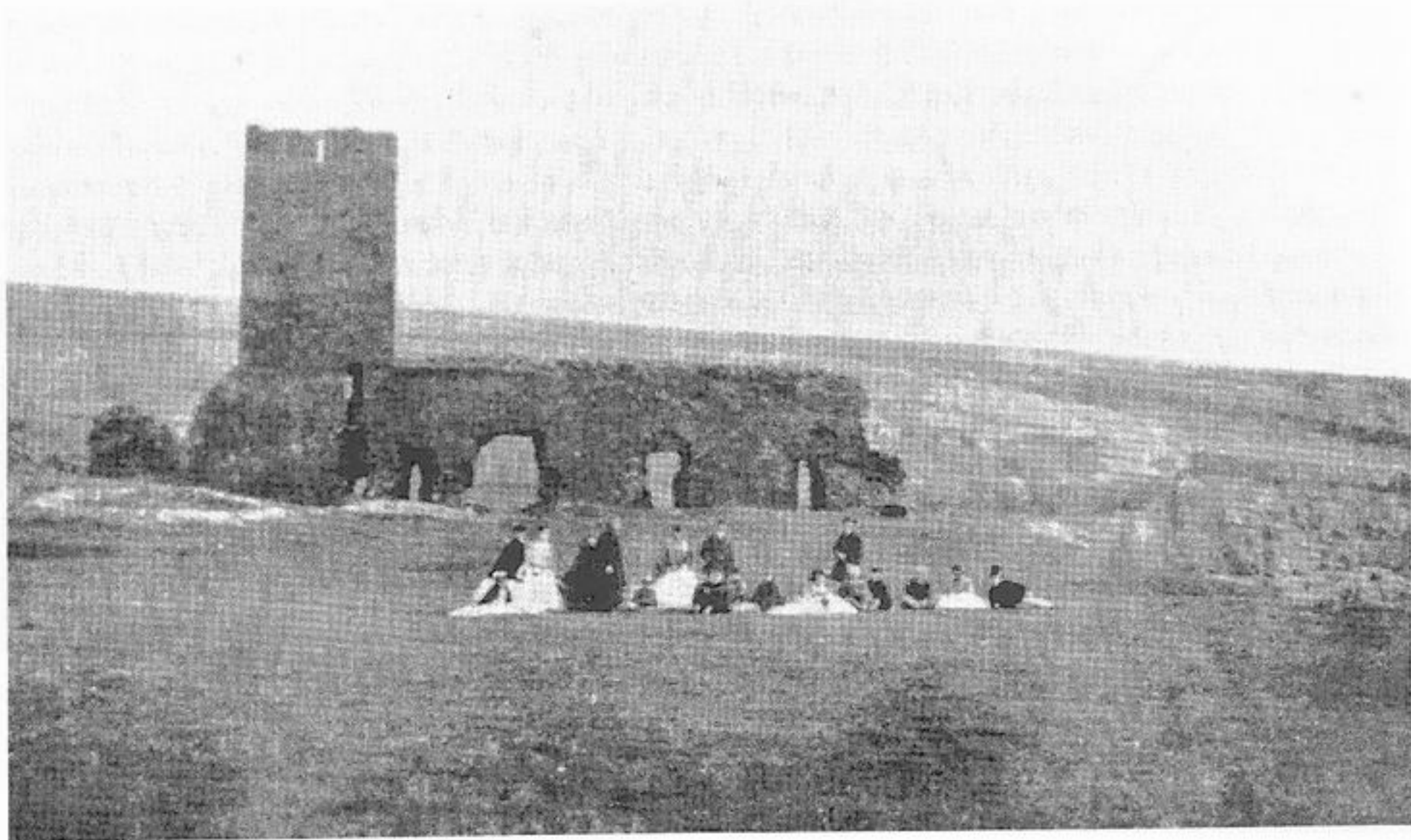
<sup>40</sup> S. Marrinan, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> The Lawrence photograph appears to show a circular-headed opening in the west wall which is not illustrated by Westropp's 'camera sketch.' This opening appears to have had a stone frame/jambs and may have been an actual feature as opposed to a result of stone robbing. As the 1868/69 Collins photograph shows no opening on the internal face of the wall it seems that the feature did not penetrate the wall and was, thus, not a small sally port or drainage opening *etc.* However, it is impossible to state what this may have actually been. An intriguing possibility is that the Lawrence Studio purchased the photograph from Westropp, on which he had based his 'camera sketches.' While it may not be possible to prove this particular assertion, it was certainly common practice for large studios to buy images from individual photographers (Pers. Comm. G. MacLochlainn). M. Ashe-Fitzgerald (Pers. Comm) has suggested that selling his photographs would have been out of character for Westropp. As he was a very wealthy individual he had no need to sell his photographs, though it is known that he frequently swapped prints with other photographers and gave many of his images away as gifts.

<sup>42</sup> The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland retain no record of the photograph exhibited by Hewson, nor is the castle represented in their glass slide collection (Pers. Comm. C. Ellison).

<sup>43</sup> S. Marrinan, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> T.S. O'Broin, *op. cit.*, p. 40.



**Plate 1.** Photograph of a tour (?) group with the internal (western) face of Doonlicka as a backdrop in 1868/69.  
(photo by P. Collins in Westrop 1913, facing p.39)

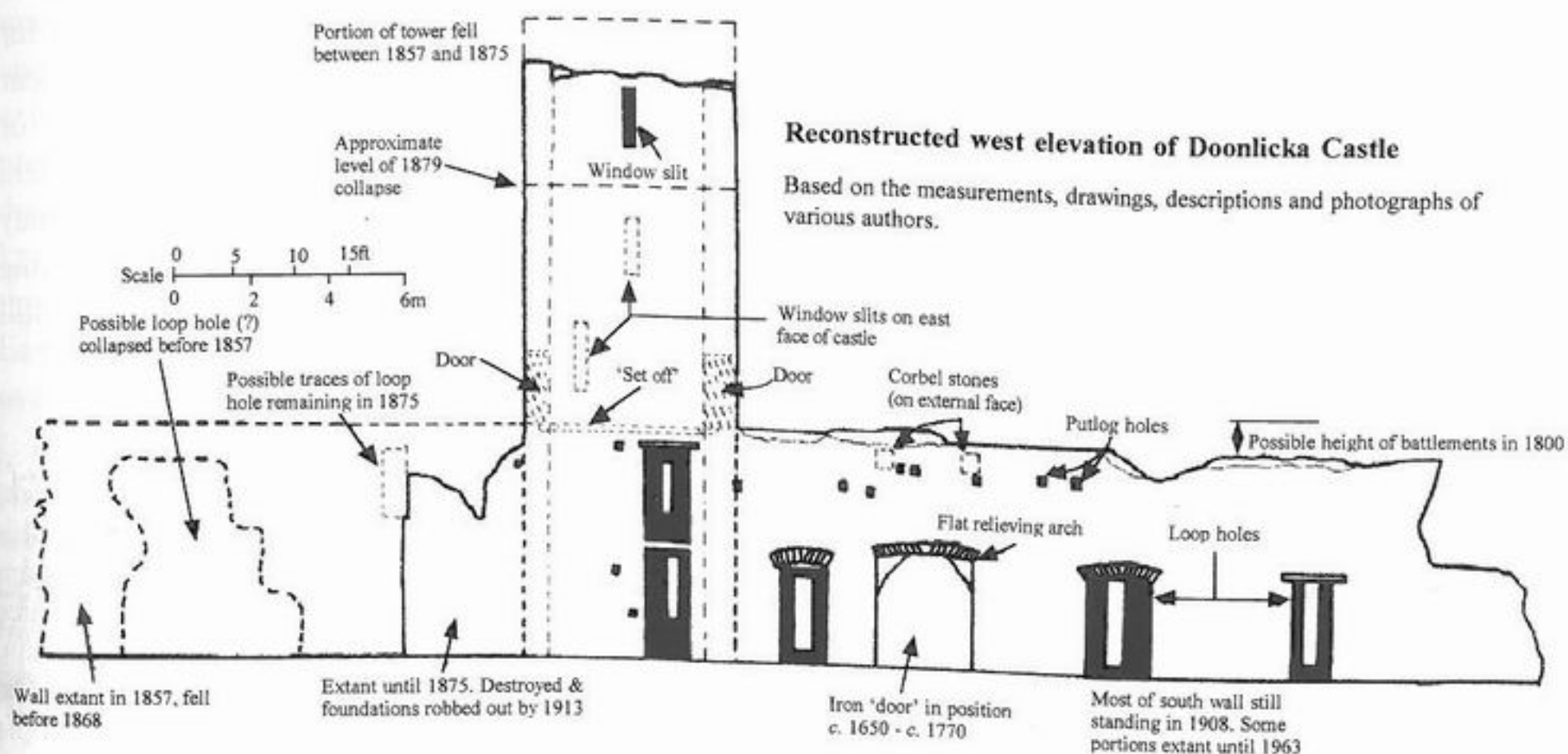


**Plate 2.** The remains of Doonlicka today. Scale 2m ranging rods in 0.5m divisions.



When taken together a basic chronology for the construction, abandonment and eventual deterioration and destruction of Doonlicka may be proposed. The castle was erected as a single unit (*i.e.* both tower and walls together), probably in the later 15th century and using the common 'putlog' method of construction. Whether this was on top of an earlier promontory fort or not is difficult to say, though had this been the case it would have provided a valuable additional defence, thus saving the builders the necessity of constructing a similar ditch and bank. The tower would have been roofed in some manner, probably thatched. Access to the tops of the walls would have been along some form of wooden gallery and protected by battlements. The main access from outside, through the southern portion of the wall, may have some form of iron door, possibly with the added protection of a machicolation above it. At or around the same time an earthen bank could have been thrown up along the cliff edge, possibly surmounted by a wooden palisade, to provide protection for the inhabitants.

As has been recounted by the majority of writers, the roughly coursed shale stones of the castle were held together with a mix of shell-based mortar, sand and large gravels. This is perhaps the single most important factor in understanding the collapse of the structure. The large gravels within the mortar necessitated relatively wide gaps between the stones and while this probably allowed for a somewhat more speedy completion of the building it, at the same time, sowed the seeds of its own destruction. Such gaps, coupled with the wet and windswept location, would have been continually open to harsh weathering, loosening the stones and allowing them either to fall or be easily robbed out. An important contributing factor to the situation must have been that although the site was externally impressive the walls were exceptionally thin, especially in the upper portions of the tower. Thus, once natural weathering had set in the relatively flimsy walls would have quickly become structurally unstable, eventually requiring only a slight additional pressure to bring large portions down.



**Fig. 3** Reconstruction drawing of Doonlicka's western (internal) face based on various accounts.



Once the main phase of construction was complete there is, at least circumstantial, evidence that a secondary structure was appended to the west face of the tower. This structure may, however, have been erected after an intervening period where an external stairway gave access to the first floor. Although unlikely, other secondary buildings may have been placed close to the wall in the area between the doorway and the tower. Certainly some buildings must have been constructed within the enclosed area as the small and cramped nature of the tower could have provided neither practical nor palatable accommodation.

By 1675 the castle is known to have been abandoned and in ruins. The reasons for this are unclear, but we may speculate that such a form of defence had come to be considered unnecessary, indefensible or simply unfashionable. It is also possible that the poor construction had already begun to deteriorate leaving Doonlicka uninhabitable or at least extremely undesirable. Once abandoned, the processes of decay would have increased exponentially. With no one to carry out repairs, the roof would have collapsed, exposing the walls to yet more weathering. Without reiterating all of the details presented above, it seems clear that once local superstitions no longer outweighed the need for accessible building materials the iron door was taken and the process of robbing out the stone and treasure hunting began. The photographs seem to indicate that the removal of stone started on the lower courses of the landward walls leading to their undermining and subsequent collapse. This disintegration appears to have first started on the northern reach of the wall, eventually progressing to the front face of the tower and continuing along the back of the tower and southern section of the curtain walling. What little was not removed continued to be eroded by the weather and inevitably collapsed under its own weight to leave the few shattered remnants we see today. When first surveyed by the author in 1991, it appeared that even these few fragments were in danger of being lost as the south face of the cliff had been undercut by over 8m, leaving these remains precariously perched and awaiting collapse.

It must be stressed that although the chronology presented here is rudimentary, even this would not have been possible in the absence of a broad sequence of published accounts. It is also important to realise that no single image or account of the castle provided such detail as to obviate the need for other sources. Indeed, many of the individual accounts are so sparse and fragmentary as to appear irrelevant. However, when taken together each provides either a new fragment of evidence or confirmation of another account. It is only through the careful piecing together of the various written, drawn and photographic documents that such a reconstructed image and degree of understanding may be achieved. While it is usual for researchers to devote most attention to the sources containing accurate measurements and descriptions, one hopes that this case study illustrates that there is still much to be gained from those brief, sporadic and fragmentary accounts of the past.

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