King John’s Castle: Staged Development, Imperfect Realization

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In this article the writer traces the development of this important national monument, illustrated by his reconstruction drawings, and discusses aspects of its original design in the light of wider European castle development, its place in Limerick’s English town and, finally, its imperfect realization. In particular, this included the castle gatehouse, which is the most impressive element of that part of the castle that can be ascribed to King John in the early thirteenth century.

Introduction
In King John’s Castle, Limerick can boast one of the finest and best-preserved castles of the early Anglo-Norman period in Ireland, one that retains some outstanding features of the most modern castle-building techniques of the first decades of the thirteenth century. The stone castle has been in more or less continuous occupation for just over 800 years. The present structure was begun in 1211–12 as a royal English castle but was not completed in stone until a century later. From the sixteenth century until Irish independence it served as an English barracks except for a decade in the seventeenth century when the Irish Confederacy held it in opposition to the English parliament and in support of the English king. During its time as a barracks the east curtain of the castle was demolished to open up a large parade ground, three towers were lowered and their second storey filled in to support cannon, and the medieval battlements were replaced with simple walls. On independence the castle came under the jurisdiction of the city corporation, which demolished and replaced two of three barricak blocks with terraced housing (Fig. 1). These and the remaining barricak block were finally cleared away in 1990 when the castle was restored and opened as a tourist attraction.

Unfortunately, the association of the castle with a foreign government from its beginnings in 1211 until independence 700 years later means that for many Limerick people, King John’s Castle is a foreign place that fosters little sense of ownership. Indeed, it is often misnamed as St John’s Castle! The summer of 2013 saw the castle reopened to the public after a period of conservation of its exposed archaeology, provision of wider public access to the medieval structure, and a revitalised interpretation of the castle in its city and river context. This seems a good time to revisit the castle, to reflect on its gradual completion, and to appreciate its international significance. In 2012 this writer produced a series of four large reconstruction drawings to show what the castle might have looked like at four milestones in its development (Figs 8, 17, 20 and 22). That work was part-funded by a Heritage Council grant, which is gratefully acknowledged.

1 S. Friar, The Sutton Companion to Castles (Stroud, 2003) pp 86-7: ‘the term … used to describe a wall that fills the space between a pair of towers’.
The Castle in Britain and Ireland

Stone castles are the most obvious reminders of the High and Later Medieval Periods in the Irish countryside, and there are a great many of them. In England and Wales, the High Medieval period is generally taken to begin with the Norman invasion in 1066. This is not to say that there were not already political and cultural developments in late Anglo-Saxon England that could be taken as typical of the Norman period that followed the invasion. The construction of castles is one of these. The Medieval period is usually taken to end in England and Wales with the death in 1485 of King Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth and the start of the Tudor dynasty of monarchs, itself ending with the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603. The start and end of the Medieval Period are less well defined in Scotland and Ireland.

In Ireland the High Medieval Period arguably begins also with the arrival of Normans in 1169-70, though this time they came from England and Wales and at the invitation of Diarmait Mac Murchada, temporarily deposed King of Leinster. The invited guests were

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2 See for example discussion by T. O’Keefe, *Medieval Ireland: An Archaeology* (Stroud, 2000) p. 34.
by this time the product of much intermarriage between Normans, English and Welsh and have become popularly termed Anglo-Normans. However, as in England, cultural introductions typical of the High Medieval Period were already established in Ireland. One notable example was the Rome-orientated Cistercian monastic order, quite different from traditionally independent Gaelic-Irish monasticism. The Cistercians established themselves at Mellifont (Co. Louth) in 1142 and already had eleven Irish houses by the time the Anglo-Normans arrived — the ‘Roman invasion’ began a quarter century before that of the Normans. There is much less certainty about whether castles were present in Ireland prior to the arrival of the Normans. The end of the Medieval Period is more difficult to define in Ireland. The battle of Bosworth changed little in the governance or culture of this island, which continued much as before until close to a century later. In terms of culture and, in the case of this article, of architecture in particular, many historians extend the Medieval Period in Ireland up to 1600 or even 1650.

There has been much debate in castle studies over the last couple of decades about what constitutes a castle. Interpretations of castles in Britain and Ireland until the later twentieth century were dominated by British military thinking and stressed their military character in terms of defensive features and aggressive potential. Their role as centres of administration and justice by the king and the lords of these castles was also recognised. More recently, closer attention has been paid to their residential nature as the homes of their lords and greater emphasis has been placed on their importance as status symbols. Thus the tall keeps that the Normans built represent what we today know of as a ‘shock and awe’ tactic — a potentially menacing symbol of new lordship, visible from both near and far. External doorways on higher floors are believed to have been display features, from which the lord could appear before his subjects gathered below or survey his lordship. Reinforcing this view is growing evidence that as residences these towers were uncomfortable living spaces, poorly heated and with difficult communication between hall and kitchen. Day-to-day living probably took place in separate buildings outside the keep and the keep reserved for those whose the lord wished either to impress or intimidate.

Stone castles were preceded in most places by earth and timber castles, either the well-known motte and bailey type or ringwork castles. Motte and bailey castles were characterised by a high man-made mound, the motte, crowned with a timber fence or palisade that protected a timber tower within it. Wrapped around the motte at ground level were one or more baileys, also defended by palisades, which contained the domestic and service buildings necessary to sustain a castle community. Occasionally mottes came without baileys. Ringwork castles could be described as baileys without a motte, usually sub-circular in shape. Deep ditches, the earth from which was used to raise a bank into which the outer palisades were set, surrounded both types of timber castle and it is these and the eroded motte mounds that survive to a lesser or greater extent in the Irish landscape.

Evolution of Stone Castles
Stone castles of the High and Late Medieval periods in Britain and Ireland can be grouped generally into three more or less sequential phases, though with considerable

overlap. In very general terms these are as follows. First came high stone keeps, today
more usually called Great Towers, which, together with a stone-walled enclosure, domi-
ninated the surrounding landscape. These came to England with the Normans a century
before their descendants arrived in Ireland and were already passing out of fashion. Most
commonly they were square or rectangular in plan, with fine examples at Carrickfergus
(Antrim) (Fig. 2a), Trim (Meath) and Maynooth (Kildare). A later variation on this type
was what is commonly referred to as the hall-house, essentially a thick-walled, elongate
hall over a stone-vaulted basement, with only limited defensive capability (Fig. 2b). By
the end of the twelfth century many Normans in Wales were following the latest French
fashion and building great round keeps, exemplified by that of William Marshal at
Pembroke, begun about 1200, and they brought this fashion to Ireland too, for example
at Nenagh (Tipperary) (Figs 2c and 3).

The round keep reflects the characteristic feature of the second phase of castle
building: the introduction and rapid domination of round as opposed to square towers
(Fig. 3). Although the round tower or its D-shaped variation was known in antiquity and
characterises several late Roman fortifications in England, King Richard I is often
credited with its first full deployment at his innovative Chateau Gaillard in Normandy
(Ain), built between 1196 and 1198. The first systematic use of both round keep and
round towers should properly be ascribed to Philip Augustus, King of France from 1180
to 1223. His Paris castle at the Louvre, built in the 1190s, included a round keep at the
centre of a square enclosure with round towers at each angle and either one or two closely
spaced D-shaped towers mid-way between them, the paired towers flanking gate
passages (Fig. 3). During the thirteenth century round towers became almost ubiquitous
in new castle building, projecting at close intervals from a castle’s curtain walls to permit
flanking fire. They also deflected catapult projectiles and were more difficult to under-
mine than square towers. Paired round or D-shaped towers flanking a gate passage
evolved over half a century to provide substantial accommodation above the gate passage
that rivalled and eventually replaced that traditionally provided by a keep. These
developments culminated in the two decades on either side of 1300 in the great, engi-
neered castles of King Edward I in Wales: Flint (Flintshire), Rhuddlan (Denbighshire),
Conwy (Conwy), Harlech (Gwynedd) and Beaumaris (Anglesey), characterised by round
towers and massive twin-towered gatehouses. Roscommon Castle (Roscommon), built
between 1269 and 1285, probably best represents this zenith of castle building in Ireland (Figs 3 and 4).

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries brought relative peace and prosperity to
England, largely because English wars were being fought mostly abroad by then, and
also to Wales and the Welsh borders except during Owain Glyn Dŵr’s revolt of 1400-9.

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6 I shall refer to the Great Towers of the early Norman and Anglo-Norman castles as keeps in this article because the term is
likely to be better understood by the average reader.

7 The terms square, rectangular, round, circular or D-shaped throughout this article refer to the ground plans of castle towers;
obviously round keeps and towers were cylindrical in three dimensions, the latter also often termed drum towers.

8 R. Avent, ‘William Marshal’s castle at Chepstow & its place in military architecture’ in R. Turner and A. Johnson (eds),
Chepstow Castle, its history & buildings (Little Logaston, 2006) p. 84.

9 Described as the finest example of a round keep in Ireland by McNell, Castles in Ireland, p. 28.

10 The battered lower walls of perhaps fifty per cent of the castle are still visible as part of a medieval archaeology exhibition
space beneath the latter Louvre Palace, including the stone plinth for one drawbridge.

11 M. Murphy and K. O’Connor, Roscommon Castle: A Visitor’s Guide (Roscommon, 2008) pp 7-28; also D. Tietzsch-Tyler,
‘Roscommon Castle: Staged Construction, Unrealised Vision’ in: B. Martagh and J. Bradley (eds), Castles and Defences
in Ireland and Abroad: Essays in Honour of David Newman Johnson (Bray, in press).
The Wars of the Roses in the second half of the fifteenth century were battlefield affairs, largely ignoring castles. Consequently, the third phase of castle development in England and Wales saw defensive features take second place to greater residential comfort. Major building programmes at older castles such as Kenilworth (Warwickshire), Middleham (Yorkshire), Windsor (Berkshire) and Warwick (Warwickshire) transformed them into palatial residences, sometimes, as at Warwick, with impressive new towered façades that were status symbols rather than anything else. New castles, such as Raglan (Monmouthshire), combined the latest styles in defensive towers and gatehouses with more extensive and more comfortable living accommodation into which towers and gateways were integrated. Others, such as Bolton and Sheriff Hutton (both Yorkshire) saw sophisticated accommodation blocks arranged around rectangular courtyards with integrated
Fig. 3  Scaled ground plans of late twelfth and early thirteenth century castles, all Irish except for the Louvre in Paris, and Roscommon Castle included for late thirteenth century reference.
massive square corner towers, each on a scale similar to smaller Norman keeps and not unlike the Irish tower-houses described below. At the same time landscape settings were manipulated to produce extensive gardens, parks and water features, such as at Bodiam (Sussex), where they were designed to show off the castle to its best aesthetic advantage. Great Towers also made a comeback in the late fourteenth century, with outstanding examples at Raglan, Warkworth (Northumberland) and Tattershall (Lincolnshire), the latter constructed mostly in brick.

Scotland and Ireland did not achieve the same peace as England. Indeed, they remained at war with the English throughout the following century, until a Scottish king ascended the English throne in 1603—a king whose ancestry also had resonance for the Gaelic and Catholic Irish. In Scotland, older royal castles such as Edinburgh and Stirling were transformed into palaces over time. In Ireland there are few new English-style castles from this period, presumably because Ireland lacked the hugely rich aristocracy of England. Some castles were redeveloped into comfortable mansions by the great Anglo-Irish earls, examples being Kilkenny (Kilkenny) and Carrick-on-Suir (Tipperary) by the Butler earls of Ormond, and Askeaton and Newcastle West13 (both Limerick) by the Fitzgerald earls of Desmond. English Planters also converted older castles into spacious mansions in the later sixteenth century, Sir Nicholas Malby’s transformation of Roscommon Castle14 being one of the best examples (Fig. 4). However, Scotland and Ireland share the development of a new type of castle from the late fourteenth century. This is the tower-house (Fig. 2d). These were built by both Anglo-Irish and Gaelic lords—often a first stone residence for the latter—and by both senior and junior family branches, hence their ubiquity in the Irish landscape. How and why they evolved is still a matter for

14 Murphy and O’Connor, Roscommon Castle, pp 29-35.
debate, but they may simply have been an upward development of the hall-house, in which the hall was pushed up one or more floors to permit the inclusion of other accommodation between basement and hall within a single defensible structure. This type of castle continued to be built in a variety of forms well into the seventeenth century in both jurisdictions.

King John’s Castle
Where does King John’s Castle fit into this evolutionary pattern? The castle dates back to the first years after the Anglo-Normans arrived in Ireland in 1168-99 at the invitation of Diarmait Mac Murchada, temporarily deposed as King of Leinster. By agreement with Domnall Mór Ó Briain, King of Thomond, the Anglo-Normans had a garrison in Ostman (Viking) Limerick by 1172. When Ó Briain reneged on the agreement and seized Limerick in 1175, Anglo-Norman forces moved swiftly under the leadership of Raymond le Gros to recapture the town. To secure their reoccupation, the Anglo-Normans built an earth and timber castle on the site of the Ostman thingplas, an administrative and judicial meeting place 150 metres north of the Ostman walled town (Fig. 21). Despite this level of security, the Anglo-Normans evacuated Limerick when Strongbow died the following year. Ó Briain had the ringwork dismantled and its ditch filled in so that Ostman occupation extended across the site.

King John’s Castle as we see it today takes the form of an irregular, open, nearly square enclosure about 95 metres across, orientated just anti-clockwise of north-south with its west curtain lapped by the passing River Shannon (Fig. 5). Principal entry was through a narrow gate passage in the north curtain between two lofty, closely spaced D-shaped towers, but there was also a smaller gate in the west curtain that provided access directly from the river. Round towers punctuate the northeast, northwest and southwest angles of the curtain, but not the southeast angle, which was defended eventually in the seventeenth century by a projecting square artillery bastion that was partially restored in the 1990s. The curtain walls and towers are constructed almost wholly of irregularly coursed, blocky local limestone rubble. This is interspersed locally by dressed softer red sandstone, forming the quoins of early angles and framing early door and window openings. In most cases, some at least of the sandstone has been replaced by limestone during later repairs. The east curtain was demolished in the nineteenth century to create a large parade ground for the castle barracks that by then had been established in the castle courtyard. Extensive archaeological excavation of the castle under the direction of Ken Wiggins over several years in the 1990s, in advance of developing the castle for tourists, revealed the foundations of most of the east curtain, of the original southeast angle and of the remainder of the southeast bastion that later enclosed it. It also revealed the undercroft of a hall built onto the west curtain, filled in and buried after the hall itself was demolished at the end of the eighteenth century to make way for a new barracks square.

15 The top-floor hall in Irish tower-houses was often heated by a central fire that vented through the open roof, retaining the feel of a traditional Gaelic ground-floor timber hall, but with a view over the estate; Scottish tower-houses tended to leave the hall on the second storey, with additional accommodation above it.
16 K. Wiggins, King John’s Castle: bridging the centuries (Bray, 2000) p. 5.
19 Ken Wiggins’ excavations are summarised separately for each year on the http://www.excavations.ie website; in K. Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, pp 31-44; Wiggins, King Johns Castle; and on the website of The Heritage Council: http://heritagecouncil.ie/unpublished_excavations/section18.html.
20 The basement level beneath a first-floor hall or chamber, often vaulted and commonly used for storage.
Fig. 5  Ground plan of King John’s Castle, colour-coded for successive stages of its development. Adapted from Figs 12, 13, 21, 42 and 47 in K. Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege: King John’s Castle, Limerick, 1642 (Bray, 2000) and other sources.

Archaeological excavation also uncovered parts of the earth and timber castle that predated the stone castle, which proved to be a ringwork castle.\(^{22}\) This was a simple oval structure measuring externally approximately 75 metres along an ENE-WSW axis by 55 metres along a NNW-SSE axis. A much smaller internal space measured something over

\(^{21}\) Wiggins, King John’s Castle, p. 17.

\(^{22}\) Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, pp 31-44.
52 metres by 29 metres within a broad earth bank that was revetted externally by a dry-stone wall. A timber palisade presumably capped the bank,\textsuperscript{23} It is likely that the palisade was crenelated like its stone equivalents, and that it was also rendered and whitewashed to protect it from the weather and to give the semblance of a more substantial stone wall from outside\textsuperscript{24} (Fig. 6). The bank was surrounded on at least three sides by a broad, deep ditch that presumably opened out into the steep slope down to the river. Timber, wattle and thatched accommodation, stables and storage serving the garrison would all have stood within the ringwork. Parts of this structure continued in use well into the thirteenth century, after rebuilding in stone had commenced.

**The Stone Castle: A Beginning**

Over £2,500 is recorded as being spent on the construction of the medieval King John’s Castle. However, this money was not expended in one go, but was provided in four substantial sums over the course of a century and spanning the reigns of three kings. Though many people would like to see the castle lose its description as King John’s Castle – preferring Limerick Castle in deference to some antipathy to its English connections – the castle was clearly commissioned by King John during or soon after his expedition to Ireland in 1210, with £733 16s 11d\textsuperscript{25} provided from exchequer funds for its construction in 1211-12. Only Scarborough Castle (Yorkshire) saw John spend a similar sum in one calendar year, indeed, the same year.\textsuperscript{26} But, how much of King John’s Castle can be attributed to John?

\textsuperscript{23} Friar, *Companion to Castles*, p. 223: ‘a stockade or protective fence, often painted white in imitation of stone’.

\textsuperscript{24} The first assertion is based on new evidence from various sites in Britain and elsewhere – see, for example, M. Redknap, *Re-Creations: Visualizing Our Past* (Cardiff, 2002) figure caption at the base of p. 30; the second assertion is similarly based – see, for example, E. Culeton, ‘The origin and role of the Irish National Heritage Park’ in P.G. Stone and P.G. Planck (eds), *The Constructed Past: Experimental archaeology, education and the public* (London, 1999) pp 85-6 – and was confirmed in personal communications from Roger Stalley (19 and 20 March 2008).

\textsuperscript{25} For those who cannot remember or who have no knowledge of pre-decimal currency, this is 733 pounds, 16 shillings and 11 pence or pennies, where 20 shillings equal one pound and 12 pennies equal one shilling.

\textsuperscript{26} McNeill, *Castles in Ireland*, p. 46.
Fig. 7 The north façade of King John’s Castle with the early thirteenth century northeast and twin gatehouse towers in the foreground and part of the original curtain between them, and beyond, the mid-thirteenth century northwest tower built by King Henry III.

In the past, it was assumed that such a massive sum – equivalent to about £11.5 million in modern wage terms27 – was sufficient to build the whole castle.28 However, it seems that only part of the ringwork castle was replaced in stone for this sum: the twin-towered gatehouse, the northeast tower and short stretches of curtain between and on either side of them (Figs 5 and 7). The initial stretch of curtain west of the gatehouse extended only as far as the second angle in its face, the first angle turning inwards to the south and the second reversing this at some later date to continue to the future northwest tower (Fig. 5). The curtain between the gatehouse and the northeast tower also turns through an angle close to the gatehouse, and the planar internal face of the northeast tower itself truncates the obtuse angle made by the north and east stretches of curtain. Finally, internally at least, the excavated foundations of the early stretch of east curtain also turn through a shallow angle midway. This early stretch of curtain and intervening towers thus defines a polygonal arc that corresponds to half the perimeter of the original ringwork. This suggests in turn that the original plan was for a much more modest castle, comprising a polygonal enclosure with a gatehouse and towers at intervals that would correspond closely to the footprint of the earlier ringwork.29 The curtain of William Marshal’s Kilkenny Castle, reconstructed in stone soon after 1207,30 was similarly built directly over the truncated outer bank of an earlier ringwork, and the inner face of the surrounding

29 Myles, ‘Archaeological Assessment’, p. 11, includes the northwest tower and the whole curtain between this tower and the gatehouse in the first stage of building (and excludes the gatehouse for reasons discussed later in the text); this writer believes that the consistent polygonal arc of the curtain and towers described here, following closely the line of the earlier ringwork, strongly supports the assertion that the westernmost segment of the north curtain is later; for the intended scale of the early castle, compare Wiggins, King John’s Castle, p. 7.
Fig. 8  King John’s Castle reconstructed as it might have appeared in about 1216, the partial circuit of stone walls and towers completed with a timber palisade along the line of the remaining earlier ringwork. © Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, 2012.
ditch cased in stone. King John’s Castle in Limerick would have been comparable with the early work on that other King John’s Castle in Carlingford (Louth). Limerick’s castle, though, would have been slightly larger and was to have the most up-to-date gatehouse and round towers whereas Carlingford, built a decade or so earlier, had old-fashioned rectangular towers (Fig. 3).

To complete the castle as a defensible structure, the remaining earth and timber elements of the former ringwork enclosure were probably repaired in what was intended to be a temporary measure. This work is shown in progress in the first of the reconstruction drawings (Fig. 8). For three decades following 1212 King John’s Castle presented a strong stone façade towards any O Briain threat from Thomond to the north, but was only an earth and timber castle behind that. Completion of the stone castle, with some redesign, had to await the attentions of Henry III and then Edward I over the course of the next century.

King John’s Gatehouse
By far the most impressive element of the work commissioned by King John is the gatehouse in the north façade. It is also of considerable archaeological, architectural and historical significance, both nationally and internationally. This is partly because of its excellent state of preservation as a result of the continued occupation of the castle into the twentieth century, with no apparent need to make any drastic changes to it. But it is also because it is almost certainly one of the earliest gatehouses of its type in Britain and Ireland, and was still a highly innovative structure when it was built.

The gatehouse comprises two tall D-shaped towers, closely spaced on either side of a narrow gate passage. The towers each contain three storeys, the lowest corresponding to the gate passage. A clear horizontal break in the exterior masonry of the towers between the second and third storeys indicates that the gatehouse probably only had two storeys when first built (Fig. 9a). Similarly, blocked arrow loops in the curtain west of the gatehouse (and less clearly in the curtain east of the gatehouse) indicate that the wall-walk on the curtain was itself originally probably two metres below where it is today (Fig. 9c). However, the towers must have been raised to their full height by the middle of the thirteenth century because the original third storey window loops are also framed in red sandstone, a practice that died out soon after 1260 when masons had learned how to dress the local limestone more easily. Internally, the towers have round chambers at each level, despite being truncated externally to present a uniformly flat face to the castle courtyard (Fig. 10a) for their full width so that we see today has a B-shaped ground plan (Fig. 11a). A later date for the top storey of the gatehouse is supported by a change in building style, with much thinner walls adding over a metre to the diameter of the two top storey chambers. The chambers in all three storeys were originally lit by between one and three short loops, those facing the gate passage at entry level being offset to provide a deeper killing zone. The modern exit from the west tower onto the curtain towards the northwest tower passes through the remains of what was once a machicolus, a roofed


32 Only one tower survives substantially at Carlingford, its rectangular ground plan transforming upwards into a semi-octagonal form, comparable to the redesigned Trim Gate at Trim Castle (Co. Meath), which was completed around 1200: A.R. Hayden, Trim Castle, Co. Meath: Excavations 1985-8 (Dublin, 2011) p. 303.

33 H.G. Leask, Irish Castles and Castellated Houses (Dundalk, 1986) p. 34; the existing tower battlements are restorations of battlements belonging to later periods.
Fig. 9  (a) King John’s gatehouse illustrating the masonry break below the uppermost windows and the exit onto the wall-walk through what was once a machicoulis; (b) the defences at the entrance with the groove for the portcullis just in front of the gates; (c) the curtain just west of the gatehouse, the arrow indicating a blocked arrow loop at the level of the original battlements.
Fig. 10 (a) The inner face of King John's gatehouse, the arrow indicating the trace of the original second-storey entrance (the courtyard doors are post-medieval); (b) and (c) two reconstructions of the extension of the gatehouse passage and chamber above: (b) as it might have appeared soon after it was built, and (c) as it might have appeared when another storey was added to the main gatehouse, © Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, 2012.
Fig. 11 (a) Scaled floor plans of three comparable early twin-towered gatehouses with round or D-shaped towers, each with the lowest floor at the top: King John’s Castle, Chepstow Castle and Carrickfergus Castle; (b) scaled ground plans and one set of floor plans (Beeston, the lowest floor at the top) of several more thirteenth century gatehouses discussed in the text.
box supported by stone corbels that projected out over the castle ditch\textsuperscript{34} (Fig. 22). This probably housed a garderobe\textsuperscript{35} that emptied into the ditch in the angle between the tower and the curtain. The gate passage was protected at its outer end by a slot machicolation high overhead, a portcullis and a set of gates (Fig. 9b). There is no sign today of provision for a drawbridge,\textsuperscript{36} but there could once have been a pit at the outer end of the gate passage to accommodate the weighted inner end of a counterpoise bridge when it was in the raised position\textsuperscript{37} (as suggested in Fig. 20).

The gate passage originally extended several metres into the castle courtyard beyond the rear of the surviving gatehouse structure. The sars of its passage walls and the stone vault over the passage are still evident today on the inner face of the gatehouse (Fig. 10a), and much or all of their length was revealed in archaeological excavation in 1993.\textsuperscript{38} The rear face of the gatehouse has been altered and repaired over the centuries, but it is still possible to see that this nearly square projection extended up to a second storey, but with much thinner walls. Access from the second storey to the third storey and the battlements of the gatehouse towers was via a spiral stairway within the southeast corner of the east tower, but there was no access originally into the lowest storey from ground level. The ground level chambers must have been entered from above, probably by ladder through a trapdoor in the floor above. So how was the gatehouse entered from outside? The answer lies in a dressed sandstone rebate at second storey level in the rear face of the east tower, in line with the east wall of the extended passage (arrowed in Fig. 10a). This is the one remaining side of the doorway into the gatehouse. It demonstrates that the gatehouse was entered from an external stairs of stone or timber that, because of the height of the entrance, must have ascended from beside the inner end of the extended gate passage and turned around the southeast corner of the extension before continuing up to the doorway (Fig. 10b).

The two-storey extension of the gatehouse passage into the castle courtyard makes the gatehouse plan quite unlike any others that the writer knows of from this period. Most early twin-towered gatehouses either terminated flush with the inside of the curtain or extended back into a full-width chamber block at the rear, as became the norm later in the thirteenth century, with the possible exception of King John’s gatehouse at Dover, discussed further below (Fig. 11b). This style of gatehouse with a narrow rearward extension became popular only in the fourteenth century. As well as entry into the gatehouse itself, the extension provided an additional room above the gate passage – a sizeable chamber five metres wide from east to west and perhaps six metres deep (Fig. 11a). This might have accommodated the castle’s chief custodian, but another possibility presents itself. We know that the castle had a chaplain, William de Kardym, who served a chapel dedicated to St Andrew.\textsuperscript{39} Ken Wiggins speculated that the chapel was in the northeast tower.\textsuperscript{40} The absence of any external evidence for windows suited to a chapel in what would then probably have been the two-storey tower we see today makes this unlikely in

\textsuperscript{34} Leask, \textit{Irish Castles}, p. 19, defines and illustrates these; also known as box machicolations: Friar \textit{Companion to Castles}, p. 184.

\textsuperscript{35} Friar, \textit{Companion to Castles}, p. 184: ‘a latrine or privy, usually a single cell at the end of a short, crooked passage’.

\textsuperscript{36} There is evidence that there was a drawbridge in the early seventeenth century, though it appears from contemporary drawings accompanying the 1633 Pacata Hibernia and Nicholas Pynnar’s 1624 survey report to have been separate from and in front of the gatehouse.

\textsuperscript{37} Wiggins, \textit{Anatomy of a Siege}, pp 79-80: a pit was dug by the defenders of the castle in advance of the 1642 siege, but this was further back from the outer gates, within the extended passage at the rear of the surviving gatehouse structure.

\textsuperscript{38} Wiggins, \textit{Anatomy of a Siege}, pp 38-9.

\textsuperscript{39} Wiggins, \textit{King John’s Castle}, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid.
this writer’s opinion. However, a chapel could easily have been accommodated in the chamber over the inner gatehouse passage. Even with the northern end of the chamber with the outside entrance and the portcullis winding mechanism screened off, the remainder would still have measured five metres from east to west and up to three metres deep, with an east wall capable of accommodating a large east window to illuminate an altar (Figs 10b and c).

The Significance of King John’s Gatehouse
In 1991 Frane Myles suggested that the gatehouse was not part of the first stage of castle building, but that it might have replaced a simpler structure a decade or so later.41 His observation was based on the then current understanding that twin, round or D-shaped towered gatehouses did not appear in Britain or Ireland before the 1220s. Ranulph de Blundeville’s Beeston Castle (Cheshire) and the royal castle at Montgomery (Powys)42 include good examples of gatehouses of this date, while another at Criccieth (Caernarvonshire) dates from the 1230s (Fig. 11b).

We now know that William Marshal built the outer gatehouse at Chepstow Castle (Monmouthshire) in the 1190s, if not a little earlier43 (Fig. 12). Chepstow’s gatehouse comprises two towers of disparate size that are fully round at ground level but are

![Fig. 12](image)

William Marshal’s gatehouse at Chepstow Castle.

Photograph courtesy of Cadw. Crown copyright.

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41 Myles, *Archaeological Assessment*, p. 11.
42 Both cited by Frank Myles in support of his conclusion: ibid., p. 14.
truncated at the rear in the upper two storeys to permit two long narrow suites of chambers across the rear of both towers (Fig. 11a). Based on two eighteenth-century maps as well as views of Kilkenny Castle made in 1698 by Francis Place, 44 this writer has argued that Marshal’s gatehouse at Kilkenny Castle, built 1207-13, was a duplicate of that at Chepstow and recent archaeological geophysical survey results seem to support this view. 45 Another early gatehouse with twin, D-shaped towers was built by King John at Dover (Kent) soon after 1204. 46 That gatehouse suffered partial collapse during an unsuccessful siege by Prince Louis of France in 1216-17, after which it was radically redesigned (Fig. 11b). What survives of the original gatehouse is embedded in its replacement and conjectural reconstructions of its plan may vary, but it is possible that, like Limerick, it had an inward-projecting gate passage, perhaps with a chamber above. On this evidence, it is quite possible to conclude that King John’s Castle gatehouse — its lower two storeys, anyway — was built during the initial building stage in 1211-12.

Who might have influenced the design of King John’s gatehouse at Limerick? Towers began to be paired on either side of castle gates in England in the later twelfth century. King Henry II’s Inner Bailey at Dover, built in the 1180s, has two such gates, but with rectangular, open-backed towers comparable with those that punctuate the bailey curtain (Fig. 13a). Projecting square towers were the norm then, seen also at Henry’s slightly earlier castle at Orford (Essex) and at Roger Bigod, earl of Norfolk’s slightly later castle at Framlingham (Suffolk), though entry in both of these was through a gate in one of the mural towers. Irish examples include those already mentioned at Trim and Carlingford. King Richard I spent so little time in England that little castle building can be ascribed to him, though he did commission the polygonal Bell Tower at the Tower of London and perhaps the sophisticated polygonal Avranches Tower at Dover. 47 The gatehouse at Pevensey (Sussex) has also been attributed to Richard, 48 but its deep D-shaped towers have a later feel to them, and the arrangement of their architectural details are much more resonant of 1230s work at Chepstow by Gilbert Marshal, who also held Pevensey at about the same time. Richard’s innovative Chateau Gaillard, with its many round towers, had no sophisticated gatehouse, but the inner bailey curtain has a corrugated external face made up of seventeen shallowly-projecting buttresses with curved outer faces, two of which frame the entry gate. In a clear development of this, the inner bailey of William de Warren, earl of Surrey’s early-thirteenth-century castle at Conisborough (Yorkshire) has shallow, solid D-shaped towers spaced along its curtain, two of which flank an otherwise simple gateway. King John’s early work at Scarborough, dating to 1202-6, 49 also employed shallow, solid D-shaped towers spaced at intervals along the curtain of the inner bailey. By contrast, John’s work at Scarborough between 1207 and 1212 saw the curtain of the outer bailey broken by several hollow, open-backed D-shaped (and two polygonal) towers. 50 At Dover between 1204 and 1215, John completed the square-towered curtain of the outer ward begun by his father, punctuating it with hollow, mostly D-shaped towers and his gatehouse with D-shaped towers.

44 Tietzsch-Tyler, ‘William Marshal’s Castle at Kilkenny’ (in press).
46 J. Coad, Dover Castle (London, 2007) p. 44.
47 Though Goodall, The English Castle, p. 147, asserts Richard’s responsibility for Avranches Tower, Coad, Dover Castle, p. 21, ascribes it to his father, Henry II.
50 Ibid., p. 15.
The Design of King John's Gatehouse

In his recent book on English castles, John Goodall argues the case that much innovative castle development originated in royal works. For example, he argues that Richard de Clare, earl of Gloucester's 1250s gatehouse at Tonbridge (Kent), long considered the model for the gatehouses at Caerphilly (Glamorgan) and Roscommon, and subsequently for Edward I's Welsh gatehouses, was itself modelled on a gatehouse built by King Henry III at the Tower of London in 1238-9. However, the earliest royal twin-towered gatehouse with round or D-shaped towers, that of King John at Dover, was anticipated at least a decade before by William Marshal's Chepstow gatehouse. Thus Marshal appears to have stolen a march on John when it came to sophisticated gatehouse design. Marshal spent much of his long life in France, where he also held extensive lands. When he came to Ireland in 1207, where he built Kilkenny Castle with its copy of the Chepstow gatehouse, he had just fallen out with John after disobeying him and paying homage for his French lands to Philip Augustus. So, while it may not be English royal precedent that influenced Marshal's gatehouse building, it may well have been French royal precedent, as seen at Philip's contemporary Paris castle at the Louvre (Fig. 3). In fact, the towers of the Marshal's gatehouse and of the middle bailey at Chepstow have completely round interior chambers in the French style, in contrast to the English preference for open-backs or D-shaped interiors (compare Figs 11a and b). Hubert de Burgh, who succeeded Marshal as regent of England during the minority of King Henry III following Marshal’s death in 1219 (and who had successfully

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51 Goodall, *The English Castle*.
52 Ibid., p. 192; the gatehouse, on the site of Beauchamp Tower, which replaced it, collapsed in 1240 and the walls subsequently put up around it also collapsed one year later: E. Impey and G. Parnell, *The Tower of London: The Official Illustrated History* (London, 2006) p. 29.
54 Goodall, *The English Castle*, p. 147.
defended Dover Castle in 1216-17), was also a veteran of many years in France and built a gatehouse and towers at White Castle (Gwent) two decades later that are almost identical in plan to those of Limerick (Fig. 11b).

The twin gatehouse towers and the northeast tower at King John’s Castle in Limerick also have completely round cores, following Chepstow’s example rather than almost anywhere else in Britain and Ireland at this early date. We know that William Marshal was in Ireland in 1211-12,59 and that he was actively building his own principal castle at Kilkenny at about this time.56 In 1213, Marshal returned to England with 500 Irish knights to assist the king against the imminent threat of a French invasion.57 With him, he once again carried King John’s favour, confirmed in a letter from John thanking Marshal for his support in Ireland. The letter refers also to frequent letters to John from the king’s justiciar in Ireland, Bishop John de Grey of Norwich, which praised Marshal for his ‘loyal counsel and assistance’.58 Is it possible, then, that Marshal, assisting the justiciar, had a hand in the design of King John’s Castle in 1211-12,59 accounting for the similarity in design between King John’s gatehouse and those at Chepstow and Kilkenny?

Two other early castles in Ireland have twin-towered gatehouses with round towers that have completely round cores: Carrickfergus and Nenagh. The gatehouse at Carrickfergus – the inner walls of its towers truncated at some later date – is generally believed to have been built between 1226 and 124260 (Fig. 11a). However, Tom McNeill has suggested recently that it might date back to around 1200, built in isolation – as may have been the case at Chepstow – and only connected to the core of the castle by stone curtains a couple of decades later.61 Perhaps there is another possibility. Could this gatehouse too have been commissioned a decade or so later, when the castle was in royal hands and while Marshal was acting on behalf of the king’s justiciar in Ireland? Perhaps the gatehouse at Nenagh, to the rear of which a large hall was added a decade or two later (Fig. 11b), might also reflect Marshal’s influence if it were to date to the period when the castle was in royal hands during the long minority of Theobald Walter II following his father’s death in 1206.

The Northeast Tower
The other interesting element of King John’s Castle is the northeast tower (Figs 7 and 15) – not so much the tower itself, but some of its features and for what they might say about other arrangements in the early castle. The tower today probably stands to the same height that it did when first built if, like the gatehouse, it only had two storeys originally. However, if it had particular significance it might have had three storeys from the start.62 Access to the upper storeys and the battlements was by a stairway on the south side of the tower (Fig. 5). Like the gatehouse towers, the tower is nearly round with its courtyard side truncated to provide a flat face to the courtyard. The second storey is now filled in

55 Crouch, William Marshal, pp 100-18.
57 Crouch, William Marshal, p. 94.
58 Ibid., pp 116-7.
59 He may also have been engaged in some military campaigning in the west of Ireland at around that time: Ibid., p. 114.
61 Tietzsch-Tyler, ‘Conferences’, p. 166.
62 A third storey was taken down at the end of the eighteenth century when the second storeys of the three corner towers were filled in to support heavy artillery. Wiggins, King John’s Castle, p. 17.
Fig. 14  (a) and (b) Blocked arrow loops in the second storey of King John's northeast tower; (c) the double loop opening from a single interior embrasure in the lower storey of the tower (cf. Fig. 7).

but appears to have had no windows looking onto the courtyard, and only two arrow loops on the outside — still identifiable by their sandstone jambs (Fig. 14a and b). The lower storey is lit by one single loop and one double loop opening from a single interior embrasure (Figs 7 and 14c), comparable to slightly earlier loops in the inner bailey towers at Dover (Fig. 13b) and in the south curtain at Framlingham.

Free-standing circular keeps continued to be built through and just beyond the first quarter of the thirteenth century, for example by Hubert de Burgh at Skenfrith (Monmouthshire), but they were already falling out of fashion. King John's commission for Dublin Castle in 1204 specifically included a requirement to start with a tower, suggesting a structure of some significance. This tower was probably built soon after 1204, but the rest of the castle was not begun before 1213. There has been much debate as to which of Dublin's towers was that built in 1204, with Con Manning coming down in favour of Bermingham Tower at the southwest angle of the castle. William Marshal's Kilkenny Castle also has a particularly formidable tower, White Tower, at its southern angle. What is interesting to note is the exact similarity in scale of Kilkenny's White Tower and Record Tower at the southeast angle of Dublin Castle with slightly earlier round keeps at Nenagh, Pembroke and the Louvre (Fig. 3). For the writer, this suggests that Record Tower rather than Bermingham Tower was the early tower at Dublin. Bermingham Tower is somewhat smaller but is thinner-walled than Record Tower and so has larger chambers within. It was described as having four storeys in 1585, with a kitchen on the second storey, and it has a square tower adjoining it. In all these details it resembles the north tower at Kilkenny, which is slightly smaller than White Tower and has an adjoining rectangular tower. In both castles, these towers are more likely to have provided

66 Ibid., p. 90.
67 Ibid., p. 72, Fig. 1, and p. 90.
Fig. 15 (a) The inner face of King John's northeast tower illustrating the doorways raised above the courtyard and the embrasure in the adjacent curtain at the same height as the left-hand door into the tower; (b) a reconstruction of the proposed timber-framed hall and chamber that these might have accommodated, © Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, 2012.
accommodation and associated services than to have served as particular strongpoints. The northeast tower at Limerick has none of the scale of Record and White Towers, nor even of Kilkenny’s north tower or Dublin’s Bermingham Tower (Fig. 3), so it was probably never intended to be any more than one of several mural towers punctuating the castle curtain.

The early towers at King John’s Castle were almost certainly deliberately truncated to present flat faces to the courtyard so that timber-framed structures – in the absence of stone buildings – could be constructed against them. This situation is seen in castles elsewhere. For example, at Montgomery, a timber chapel was constructed on stilts against the rear wall of the gatehouse,68 and a timber-framed gatehouse was built inside and against the short west wall containing the main gate of Edward I’s Conwy Castle (Gwynedd).69 Something similar to the latter, enclosing the early stone extension of the gate passage, is suggested at King John’s Castle in the third reconstruction drawing (Fig. 20).

Particularly interesting, however, is the arrangement of doors on the flat, courtyard face of the northeast tower. The base of the door into the stairwell is 1.6 metres above courtyard level. The door into the lower storey of the tower is higher, at 1.8 metres above the courtyard, the same as the arrow loop embrasure in the north curtain a few metres west of the tower (Fig. 15a). The position of the various doorways into the northeast tower and the adjacent embrasure suggests the presence of an early timber-framed hall constructed against the first phase of the east curtain, its raised floor at the level of and extending to just beyond the entry into the tower stairwell, but stepping up 20 centimetres to a raised dais at its northern end. From the dais one could then walk directly into the lower chamber in the northeast tower and perhaps into a timber-framed chamber floored at the same level further north again that also gave access to the arrow loop in the north curtain (Fig. 15b). In 1227, during King Henry III’s reign, 50 Marks70 were spent renovating houses within the castle courtyard, presumably these timber-framed structures or something very similar.71

The Cost of King John’s Castle
Did King John’s half-stone castle represent value for such a large spend? King John spent a fortune on castle-building during his reign, mostly in the first ten years before he became embroiled in his political and consequent financial problems.72 His greatest spending was on Scarborough Castle, amounting to just under £2,300 over two building campaigns between 1202 and 1212.73 For this sum John built about 400 metres of curtain with three or more solid D-shaped towers (little more than broad, curved buttresses), and five D-shaped and two polygonal towers with space for chambers. In addition, he built a domestic range comprising a stone hall, a kitchen and a chamber block. At Dover Castle, John spent about £1,400 between 1199 and 1216 on more than 200 metres of curtain, at least four chambered D-shaped and polygonal towers, and two gatehouses, one with twin D-shaped towers. At Corfe Castle (Dorset) between 1200 and 1204, John spent a similar sum on over 300 metres of curtain, and at least six D-shaped and polygonal towers. Here again, John also built a substantial residential complex, the ‘Gloriette’.74 On this basis,

68 L. Butler and J.K. Knight, Dolforwyn Castle, Montgomery Castle (Cardiff, 2004) p. 43.
69 J.A. Ashbee, Conwy Castle (Cardiff, 2007) p. 27.
70 £3 6s 8d.
71 Myles, Archaeological Assessment, p. 2.
72 Goodall, The English Castle, p. 158.
73 Ibid., p. 158 puts the total spend at £2,289, but Goodall, Scarborough Castle, pp 26 puts it at £2,291.
74 Goodall, The English Castle, p. 159; The National Trust, Corfe Castle (London, 1985), p. 38.
over £733 on no more than 30 metres of curtain, one D-shaped tower and one twin-towered gatehouse seems at first sight like poor value for money. So, where else might John’s money have been spent?

One source of spending was probably the first stage of the old Thomond Bridge over the River Shannon. There has been some debate as to when the first stone bridge between Anglo-Norman Limerick and the Ó Briain kingdom of Thomond was built. O’Keeffe and Simington argued that the stone bridge can be credited in its entirety to King John’s reign, on the basis of mention of a bridge – unspecified – at Limerick in 1199 and their assertion that it would not have been possible to construct a wooden bridge on the rock shelf that forms the river bed at that point. Brian Hodkinson, on the other hand, states that the wicker centring used to construct the arches can be no earlier than the fourteenth century, but he goes on to make a good case for an earlier timber trestle bridge resting on stone piers that could date back to King John’s reign (Figs 8, 17 and 20). O’Keeffe and Simington further suggested that the cost of a fully-arched stone old Thomond Bridge would have cost about £200 to build in King John’s time. It is possible then, that something between £100 and £200 of the £733 spent at Limerick in 1211-12 went into bridging the Shannon in a combination of stone and timber. It also is interesting to note that Thomas Phillips’s view of Limerick across the Shannon shows a composite gate tower at the Limerick end of Thomond Bridge that comprises a small rectangular tower at the end of the bridge and, beside it, a larger rectangular tower with a raised turret along the side facing the castle (reconstructed in Fig. 22). Perhaps the smaller tower was first built in King John’s day to defend his new bridge, thus accounting for another slice of the royal expenditure.

If we subtract £200 for the cost of the bridge plus any associated structures, we are left with just over £500 to account for. How does this figure compare to King John’s spending on Scarborough, Dover and Corfe? £500 is about one fifth of John’s spend on Scarborough and might therefore account for about 80 metres of curtain, just over two towers and a small portion of his domestic range. At both Dover and Corfe it is about one third of John’s full spend, so might account for about 70 and 100 metres of curtain respectively, plus a gatehouse and one tower at Dover or two towers and a fraction of the ‘Gloriette’ at Corfe. Assuming that towers were far more expensive to build than the curtain walls between them, the Limerick figure is no longer greatly at variance with John’s expenditure elsewhere. We must also remember that John’s expenditure would probably have included the costs of a new ditch around the northern stone façade of the castle and a bridge to cross it, as well as renewal of the older earthworks relating to the ringwork and some reconstruction of the remaining timber palisade.

King John’s Unfinished Castle
No further work of any significance is recorded for the castle over the next 23 years, leaving King John’s Castle unfinished, half in stone and half in timber for that period. Why did John not continue rebuilding the castle in stone after 2011-2? We know that

77 Ib., p. 3.
79 Kenneth Hodges’s website, *Medieval England: Price List* (Luminarium: Anthology of English Literature, last updated 2009), which can be found at www.luminarium.org/medi/medprice.htm (accessed 6 August 2013) quotes the cost of a tower in a castle’s curtain in the later 14th century at £333.
some royal expenditure was required in 1213 to build a castle at Roscrea, but this was an earth and timber structure, and remained so until 1278-85 when over £875 was finally spent to rebuild it in stone.\(^8\) It seems that the bulk of royal expenditure on Irish castles— an unknown sum— was diverted into the completion of Dublin Castle between 1213 and 1230.\(^9\) John’s reign was in crisis by then. Perhaps the threat to John’s kingship persuaded him to shift his limited resources to safeguarding the capital of his Irish dominion, and priorities seem to have remained the same during the minority of his son Henry III. When completed, Dublin Castle was much larger than Limerick, reaching twice the size even after Limerick was subsequently redesigned. Laid out on a roughly rectangular plan as was becoming standard by then, Dublin boasted a twin-towered gatehouse, four round towers, including the one built around 1204, one square tower and one D-shaped tower. Inside, the large hall evident in later surveys probably already dominated significant other accommodation. Work only resumed on the castle in Limerick after Dublin Castle was completed.

**After King John: Phased But Imperfect Completion**

Work on the castle begun by King John only resumed in 1235 when King Henry III spent a further £563 2s 4d on it.\(^2\) This sum was most likely used to complete the north curtain of the castle down to the river, entailing a change in direction, and to construct the riverside west curtain, now much reduced in height, and start the towers at each end of it (Fig. 16). While the northwest tower may have been completed to three storeys as planned, the southwest tower appears not to have been completed above basement level\(^3\) (Fig. 17).

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**Fig. 16** The much reduced west curtain of King John’s Castle, rising above the River Shannon, with the northwest tower on the left, the southwest tower on the right and the rectangular garderobe tower in between. The gatehouse, northeast tower and modern visitor centre are visible over it.

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\(^9\) Manning, ‘The Record Tower, Dublin Castle’, p. 73.

\(^2\) Myles, *Archaeological Assessment*, p. 2.

\(^3\) Dressed red sandstone characterises many of the architectural details of what remains of the northwest tower and of the west curtain, and thus probably dates it to sometime before 1260, but the northwest tower is characterised by limestone detailing above the outward sloping batter at its base, with the exception of the stair turret which has a sandstone framed loop several metres higher.
Fig. 17 King John’s Castle reconstructed as it might have appeared in about 1250, after Henry III had built the northwest tower, the west curtain (with windows for a planned hall) and the lower part of the southwest tower. A timber palisade is shown defining the rest of the revised castle perimeter, with an overhanging timber turrett at the southeast angle. The original ringwork is shown acting as an inner bailey. © Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, 2012
Like King John's towers, the new northwest tower is also almost round in plan, but its truncated courtyard face also steps in from its full diameter. The lowest storey is set well below the courtyard and is entered today down a dozen steps from a seventeenth-century porch. Originally, even though it was probably close to ground level at the bottom of the slope down to the river, it was probably reached from the floors above via the spiral stairs built into the junction between the tower and the north curtain (Fig. 5). The second storey was entered directly from outside through a sandstone-dressed doorway set high up on the courtyard face of the tower (Fig. 18). This door must have been accessed from an external timber gallery reached from the courtyard by a timber staircase (Fig. 17). With these works, the castle plan was also changed from polygonal to rectangular, and it became much larger. Four sandstone-framed rectangular windows in the riverside curtain suggest that a hall was envisaged at this stage, if not built (Fig. 19a).

The hall was finally built by Henry's son, Edward I, around 1280, when another £549. 17s. 5½d. was spent on the castle. This money probably also saw completion of the southwest tower. Thinner-walled and more spacious inside than the earlier towers, this newest tower must have provided much better accommodation than the older ones ever.

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84 Myles, *Archaeological Assessment*, p. 2.
did, and at three storeys over a basement, it corresponds more closely to Edward I's work elsewhere. It is likely that the foundations for the south curtain of the castle and the east curtain left unfinished in 1212 were also completed at this time. Earlier, in 1272, the much smaller sum of just £72 4s 3d was spent on the castle and the bridge, presumably Thomond Bridge. The Great Hall and a private chamber, built over an undercroft lit by Henry III’s riverside windows, would have been similar to contemporary halls in Edward’s Welsh castles and thus was the most impressive part of this building stage (Fig. 20). Only the undercroft survives, exposed during the 1990s excavation (Fig. 19b and c). A rectangular garderobe tower was also built onto the riverside wall, its waste emptying directly into the Shannon (Fig. 22). In addition to these, there must have been a kitchen and perhaps other accommodation.

The hall and its undercroft were down beside the river, with a steep and awkward climb up to the crest of the ridge on which the castle, and the ringwork before it, had originally been sited, so Edward I expended another £596 1s 6d in 1297 to correct this. He had a retaining wall constructed to permit continued access down a ramp to the undercroft and to the riverside Watergate beyond it (Fig. 19c), after which he raised the whole castle courtyard to the level of the main gate passage in the north wall. This work must have included completion of the castle curtain on the south and east sides. Excavation has shown that the castle was probably never completed as planned, perhaps because royal funding dried up. It would have been normal for a rectangular castle such as this to have a tower at each angle but the fourth, southeast, tower was never built. The excavations confirmed what engineer Sir Josias Bodley had reported back in 1608. A slightly earlier map, commissioned by Sir George Carew in 1600, indicates that a small turret overhung the top of the castle wall at this angle (Fig. 20). Additionally, a lengthy southern stretch of the east curtain had no subsurface foundation, an omission that would affect a later generation of castle occupants! King Edward II added turrets and battlements to the castle towers in 1313, finally completing the medieval castle. King Henry’s and King Edward’s total spend on the castle of just over £1781 compares well with the cost of the inner ward of Roscommon Castle at £3200 in 1277-8 for what was little more than half a castle at Limerick.

85 Ibid.
86 Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, p. 27.
87 And at Roscommon, though now lost: Murphy and O’Conor, Roscommon Castle, pp 10 and 25.
88 Myles, Archaeological Assessment, p 2.
89 Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, pp 39-40; Wiggins, King John’s Castle, p. 9.
90 Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, p. 34; Wiggins, King John’s Castle, p. 9.
91 Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, p. 23 and p. 24, Fig. 5.
93 Wiggins, Anatomy of a Siege, p. 35.
94 Myles, Archaeological Assessment, p 2.
95 McNeill, Castles in Ireland, p 96.

Fig. 19 (a) The southern half of the west curtain of King John’s Castle illustrating the four windows of the hall undercroft; (b) a view over the castle courtyard, raised by King Edward I, with the undercroft window embrasures visible in the west curtain; (c) the undercroft viewed from the south, divided by a later wall along its length. The retaining wall built when the courtyard was levelled in 1297 is on the right and the ramp down the Watergate is between the wall and the undercroft.
Fig. 20 King John’s Castle reconstructed as it might have appeared when finally completed in about 1316-7. The garrison is shown preparing for a threatened assault by the Scottish army of Edward and Robert Bruce. © Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, 2012
Castle and Town

King John’s Castle is integrated into the walls of Limerick’s Engrishtown on King’s Island (Fig. 21), but it was not always so. Limerick had begun as a Viking settlement in the early tenth century. There had been an earlier fortified encampment – a *longphort* – on the north bank of the River Shannon at Athlunkard (*ait longphort*: the ford of the longphort)\(^6\) opposite St Thomas’ Island, some three and a half kilometres upstream of Thomond Bridge (Fig. 21). From there, early Viking raids reached as far as Armagh.

Fig. 21  Map showing the proposed growth of medieval Limerick’s Engrishtown (as it became known), from the first Ostman (Viking) settlement through the phased growth and walling of the High Medieval town. The inset shows the location of the original Viking longphort in relation to Limerick. Adapted from Figs 1 to 4 in E. O’Flaherty, *Irish Historic Towns Atlas no. 21, Limerick* (Dublin, 2010) and other sources.

before the *longphort* was reported destroyed in A.D. 887. A more permanent settlement, suitable for over-wintering and as a base for trading rather than raiding, had been established on King’s Island by 922.

The form of the town established by the Vikings, or Ostmen as they became known in Ireland, is generally regarded to correspond to the lines of the walled town that is believed to have existed when the Anglo-Normans arrived there in the late 12th century. These define an irregular enclosure open to the River Shannon, corresponding roughly to the medieval parish of St Mary and enclosed by a more or less curving wall that cuts down sharply to the river at both ends (Fig. 21). Reflecting the importance of the river to the Ostmen, the main street of their town is interpreted to have run from the ford later replaced by Baal’s Bridge, between the eleventh century St Mary’s cathedral and the riverfront, and along Crosbie Row towards the site of the later castle. The Ostman established their *thingplas* on open ground 150 metres north of the walled town. However, the curved trajectory of the landward town wall suggests at least the possibility that the original earthwork Viking enclosure at Limerick was fully semi-elliptical in shape and enclosed the site of the castle, comparable with Viking settlements elsewhere in northern Europe (Fig. 21).

The Anglo-Normans who retook Limerick in 1175 built their ringwork castle on the site of the Ostman *thingplas*. Despite this additional security, the Anglo-Normans evacuated Limerick when Strongbow died the following year. Ó Briain had the ringwork dismantled and its ditch filled in, and the area of Ostman extramural urban occupation was extended across the site. The Anglo-Normans only returned to Limerick in 1194-5, on the death of Domnall Ó Briain, to establish what became the thriving Anglo-Norman port-town of Limerick. While the land surrounding the town was parcelled out to various Anglo-Norman barons, the English king retained the governance of Limerick for himself and had the earlier ringwork reconstructed by 1200 when there is a record of it being attacked, and the site – still outside the walled town – was retained by King John for his castle ten years later. By that time, because of the castle, the main street of the town had to be repositioned to Nicholas Street and Mary Street along the crest of the ridge, and a new gate – Newgate – created in the old Ostman north wall to facilitate this new street. The road swung round the north façade of the castle and descended to John’s new bridge across the Shannon.

By 1267 a broad strip of land on the landward side of the town had been enclosed by a succession of religious foundations. This began before the Anglo-Norman arrival with the foundation of St Peter’s Cell of Augustinian nuns by Ó Briain in 1171. There followed the Holy Cross *Frates Cruciferi* priory hospital beside Baal’s Bridge by 1210, the

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100 Ibid.
102 Hodkinson, ‘The Topography of Pre-Norman Limerick’, p. 34.
103 Hodkinson, ‘The Medieval City of Limerick’, p. 37; the *Frates Cruciferi* are the Crucified Friars and the full title of their house was the Priory of the Hospital of Sts Mary and Edward, King and Martyr, Known as Holy Cross.
Dominican friary of St Saviour's next to St Peter's Cell and across from the castle in 1227, and finally the Franciscan friary filling the gap between St Peter's Cell and Holy Cross in about 1267\(^{104}\) (Fig. 21). Together these undoubtedly walled religious communities provided a buffer zone around a town that was expanding northwards up to and beyond the castle in an otherwise undefended northern suburb. Only a relatively narrow opening would have remained at the northern end of the suburb, between St Saviour's and the precinct of the Limerick bishop's palace, between Dominick Street and the Shannon, formerly perhaps the Ó Briain palace in Limerick\(^{105}\) and presumably also enclosed by a wall (Fig. 21).

In 1237 the town received a royal grant of murage, which permitted the Corporation to raise revenue over a six-year period for the building of a town wall.\(^{106}\) This follows closely on the next major spend on King John's Castle by King Henry III in 1235. Brian Hodkinson has suggested that the murage grant went into the core walls of the town\(^{107}\) – presumably meaning the repair and rebuilding of the old Ostman walls, but the temporal connection with major work on the castle would suggest that the integration of the castle into the town walls took place at this time. This would mean that the 1237-43 murage grant was employed to close off the town on the river side, in line with the newly constructed west curtain of the castle, and to fill the gap between the bishop's palace and St Saviour's (Fig. 21). This brought King John's Castle into the walled town for the first time. A later grant from Edward II in 1311 was probably used to rebuild and strengthen the east-facing walls enclosing the religious precincts and thus to complete the defensive walling of Englishtown.\(^{108}\) About the same time, the last spending on the castle saw its final completion with crenelations and turrets added to the towers.\(^{109}\) Finally two new harbour walls with terminal towers were built by 1500,\(^{110}\) completing the medieval defences of Limerick's Englishtown.

**Seventeenth Century Renewal, But Still Imperfect**

The castle gets little mention over the following century. Though essentially complete by 1313 – with a full circuit of stone walls and towers raised to their full, turreted height – the castle still presented a vulnerable southeast angle towards the town. Following the English plantation of Munster at the end of the sixteenth century the town was home to a majority population that was increasingly hostile to English governance.\(^{111}\) The royal castle was repaired and modified by Sir Josias Bodley in 1608-11 to meet new military needs, but perhaps also to reflect the more hostile town environment. As part of these works, the absence of a fourth tower was addressed and a modern angular artillery bastion (or 'bulwarke' as Bodley called it) was constructed at the southeast angle of the

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104 Ibid.
105 On the site now occupied by the Villiers almshouses and perhaps also St Munchin's church and churchyard; see B. Hodkinson, 'The Topography of Pre-Norman Limerick' in *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 52 (2012), p. 10, and Hodkinson's article 'St Munchin's and the Archbishop's Palace' in this volume.
108 Ibid.
Fig. 22  King John’s Castle reconstructed as it might have appeared in the winter of 1641-2, on the eve of the four-week siege that eventually saw the undermining and collapse of part of the east curtain and the new artillery bastion before the garrison surrendered to Confederate insurgents. © Dan Tietzsch-Tyler, 2012
Fig. 23 The remains of Sir Josias Bodley’s artillery bastion (or ‘bulwarke’), which replaced the simple southeast angle of the castle in 1608-11, the partial collapse of which brought the 1642 siege to an end.

curtain, facing into the town (Figs 5 and 23). Nicholas Pynnar, then in charge of Irish fortifications, also made recommendations for improvements to the tower battlements in 1621.

Over the winter and spring of 1641-2 the castle was made ready to withstand a siege by insurgent forces of the Catholic Irish Confederacy that opposed English Protestant parliamentary rule but asserted allegiance to an English King also in opposition to his parliament (Fig. 22). When the town opened its gates to the Confederate forces in Munster, Protestant townspeople fled into the castle and the protection of its small garrison. The castle was besieged for four weeks, in the course of which mining would eventually cause part of the new bastion and the unfounded part of the east curtain alongside it to collapse. Thus an ancient siege technique brought down a castle that once represented some of the most advanced and innovative castle design elements of King John’s reign.

112 Ibid., pp 24-5.
113 Ibid., p. 27: Nicholas Pynnar’s survey of the castle in 1621 found that the tower parapets had been reduced to just two feet, presumably to facilitate the traversing of cannon on low carriages.
114 Ibid., pp 70.
115 Ibid., pp 170-2.