

Enniscorthy Castle, County Wexford

Report on 'The Halberdier Wall Painting'

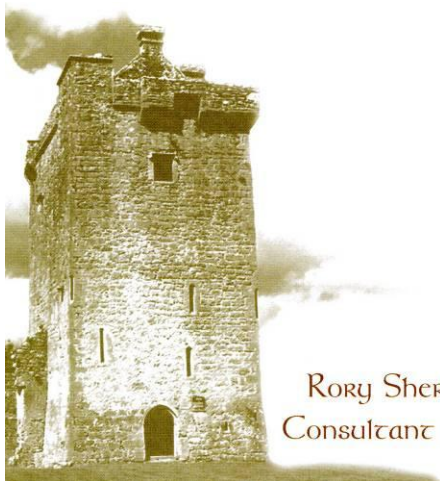
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Table of Contents

List of Figures and Plates.....	ii
Figures	ii
Plates	ii
1 Introduction	1
1.1 General	1
1.2 Site Location.....	1
1.3 Legislative Status	1
2 History	2
3 'The Enniscorthy Halberdier'	6
3.1 Introduction	6
3.2 Technique	7
3.3 The Figure	8
3.5 The other features.....	11
4 Discussion.....	14
4.1 The Enniscorthy Figure	14
4.2 The Context of the Figure - Wall Paintings and Graffiti in Irish Castles	14
5 Conservation and Presentation	17
5.1 Conservation.....	17
5.2 Presentation	19
6 Conclusions & Recommendations.....	20
6.1 Conclusions	20
6.2 Recommendations	20
Bibliography.....	22

List of Figures and Plates

Figures

Figure 1: Plan of Enniscorthy Castle from the second volume of Grose's <i>Antiquities</i>	3
Figure 2: Barralet's drawing of Enniscorthy Castle.....	3

Plates

Plate 1: Enniscorthy Castle from the south	4
Plate 2: Enniscorthy Castle doorway with hood moulding, yett hinges and flanking loops.	4
Plate 3: The 'Enniscorthy Halberdier' in the inner chamber of the basement.....	7
Plate 4: The 'Enniscorthy Halberdier'	8
Plate 5: The head of the figure	9
Plate 6: The torso of the figure	10
Plate 7: The fine lines at top of the figure's torso	10
Plate 8: The legs of the figure and the right arm of the figure.....	11
Plate 9: The scabbard or long sword	12
Plate 10: The short sword of dagger in the figure's left hand	12
Plate 11: The 'M' to the left of the figure.....	13
Plate 12: <i>Two Peers of the Realm and a Halberdier</i>	14
Plate 13: St Thomas Beckett at Ballyportry Castle, Co. Clare	15
Plate 14: Ship graffiti at Duluca Castle (left) and prisoner graffiti at Edinburgh Castle.....	16
Plate 15: Handheld laser scanner in use in survey of medieval graffiti.....	18

1 Introduction

1.1 General

Enniscorthy Castle stands within Enniscorthy town and has, for many centuries, played a key role in the life of the town. The building housed the Wexford County Museum from 1962 to 2006 and then re-opened as a tourist destination in 2011 after extensive renovations. A figure on the wall of a basement room within the castle has been referred to as 'The Halberdier' for many years, though the origins of the figure are quite unclear. This report, which seeks to explore the origins, form and preservation of the figure, has been compiled at the request of the management team at Enniscorthy Castle and has been funded by The Heritage Council under their Heritage Research Scheme 2012. This report was prepared in October 2012 by Dr Rory Sherlock MIAI following a site visit and a programme of contextual and comparative research.

1.2 Site Location

Enniscorthy Castle stands on Castle Hill within the town of Enniscorthy and so occupies an elevated position overlooking the River Slaney at National Grid Co-ordinate 29732, 13982.

1.3 Legislative Status

- 1.3.1 Enniscorthy Castle is listed on the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) under Reference Number WX020-031003 and so is protected under the National Monuments Act 1930, as amended.
- 1.3.2 Enniscorthy Castle is listed within the Record of Protected Structures of the Enniscorthy Town and Environs Development Plan 2008-14 as a structure of National Importance and so is protected under the Planning and Development Act 2000.

2 History

The earliest castle at Enniscorthy is likely to have been founded in the early thirteenth century, possibly by de Prendergast, though early references to the structure are difficult to find. Leask (1951, 47-51) discussed Enniscorthy Castle in conjunction with five other castles of similar plan and referred to them collectively as 'towered keeps' - this group includes the ruined castles of Carlow, Ferns, Lea and Terryglass together with the lost castle of Wexford - and while he acknowledges that most of these date to the thirteenth century, he suggests Enniscorthy is 'most probably a rebuilding of *circa* 1586 on the lines of a similar towered keep'.

McNeill (1997, 118) objects to Leask's inclusion of Enniscorthy and Wexford in this group of thirteenth-century donjons, as he suggests they should be called, since the former dates to the sixteenth century and the later cannot be dated accurately as it no longer exists, and suggests that Enniscorthy is more closely comparable to Dunmoe, Co. Meath, and Delvin, Co. Westmeath, on chronological grounds.

Both Sweetman (1999, 77) and Moore (1996, 154) also agree that Enniscorthy Castle dates to the sixteenth century, so here we appear to have consensus - most of the existing structure was built in the 1580s, though it was extensively remodelled in the early modern period when it was extended and converted to a comfortable residence in 1898 and later developed as a museum in the 1960s. Some records of the building from before this time do survive, most notably in the form of antiquarian accounts of the structure, and foremost amongst these are those which derive from a tour of Wicklow and Wexford made by the artists John James Barralet and Gabriel Beranger in 1780 (Harbison 2004). A plan of the building (Fig. 1), together with a description in Beranger's Catalogue (NLI MS4162, 34 in Harbison 2004, 144), shows it to consist of a rectangular block with a full-height cylindrical turret at each of three corners and an unusual turret at the fourth, in that it is supported on corbels at mid-height and so does not extend downwards to ground level. Moore (1996, 154) notes that the building has no vault within it, not an unusual arrangement for a late sixteenth-century structure, and that the existing cross-wall is a later insertion, so few of the internal features, other than a large ground-floor fireplace, are likely to be original. Many authors, including Colfer (2002, 148), note that the current castle may have

been built upon the footprint of an earlier castle, but this is impossible to prove without excavation.

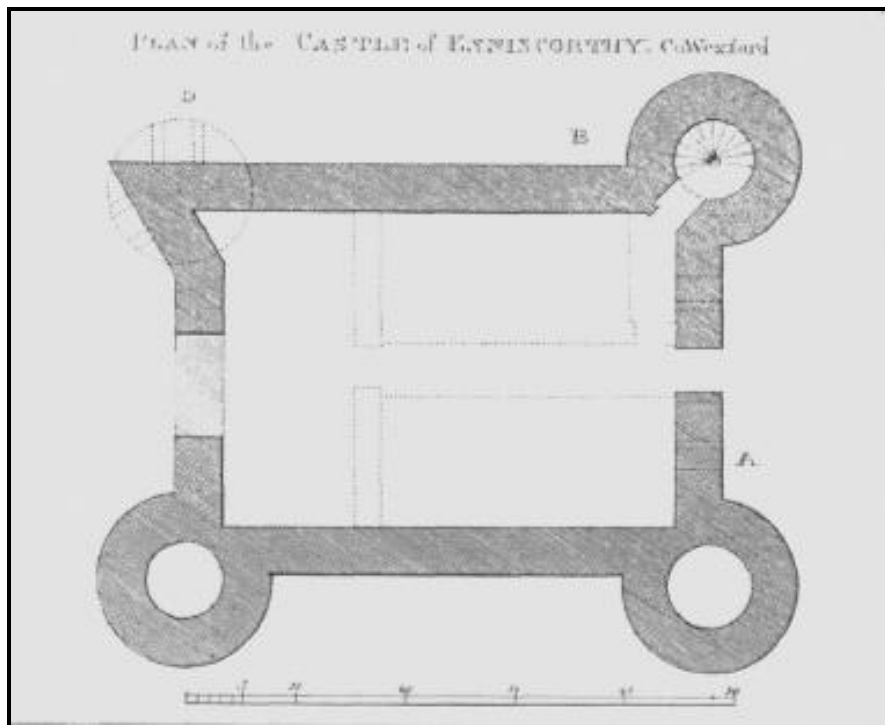


Figure 1: Plan of Enniscorthy Castle from the second volume of Grose's *Antiquities*, probably based on an original by Beranger (after Harbison 2004, 141).

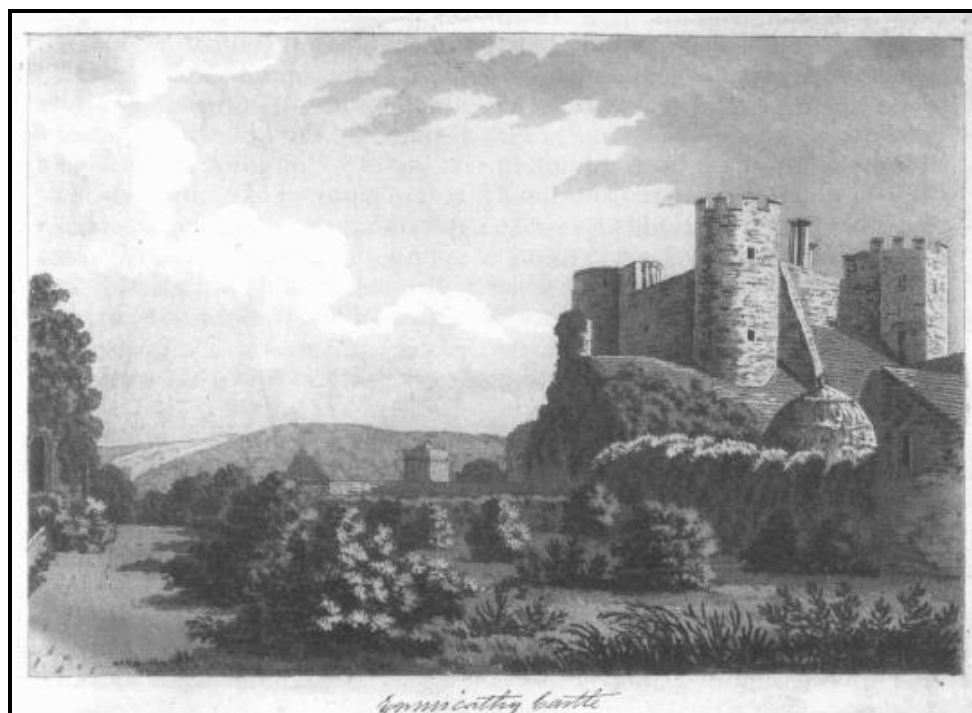


Figure 2: Barralet's drawing of Enniscorthy Castle (NLI 2122TX(4) after Harbison 2004, 145).



Plate 1: Enniscorthy Castle from the south

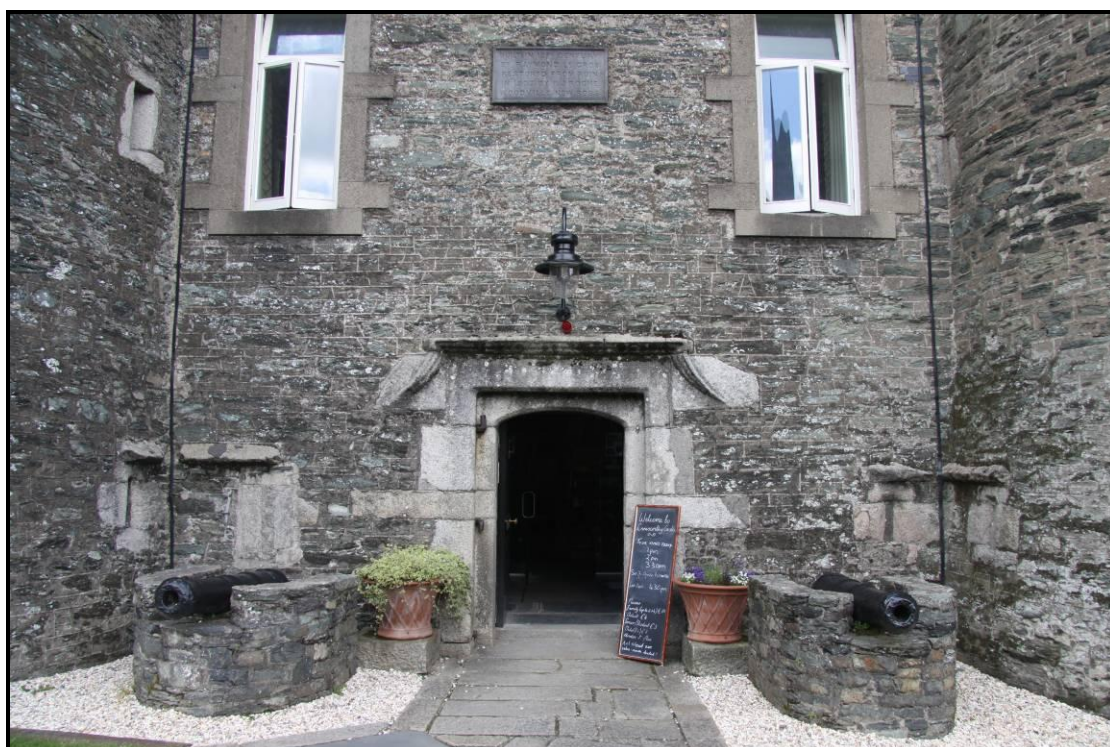


Plate 2: Enniscorthy Castle doorway with hood moulding, yett hinges and flanking loops.

The precise history of the castle in the early modern period is difficult to establish, but Adams (1904, 171) recorded that it was repaired by the first Earl of Portsmouth who then leased it to Adam Colclough in 1745; it was then used as a prison by the insurgents in 1798 before being repaired and restored as an agent's residence by the Earl of Portsmouth between 1806 and 1812. It was subsequently used as an estate office and printing works before becoming dilapidated in 1863, though it was also used as a temporary barracks for police officers during the Fenian rising in 1867, before being later sold to P.J. Roche of New Ross in 1898.

The earlier history of Enniscorthy Castle seems to have been a topic of much debate in the early years of the twentieth century since, in addition to Adams' work noted above, a public debate on the building ensued between William H. Grattan Flood and Philip H. Hore in the pages of the *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*. Grattan Flood opened the discussion in 1904 with a paper entitled 'Enniscorthy in the Thirteenth Century - Who Built the Castle?', in which he rejected traditional suggestions that the castle had been built by Raymond le Gros, argued that it was constructed by Gerald Prendergast between 1232 and 1240 and went on to describe the later works as restorations rather than complete re-constructions. Hore replied in 1905 and stated that Grattan Flood's assignation of the building to Gerald Prendergast was based 'only on presumptive evidence' and, furthermore, that the current structure was 'clearly Elizabethan' in date and was built by Sir Henry Wallop in the early 1590s on the site of the earlier, ruined castle. Grattan Flood replied to reiterate his assertion that the majority of the existing structure was dateable to the thirteenth century and presented a series of sixteenth-century references to the site in support of his argument that the structure was merely repaired, rather than rebuilt, by Wallop.

In short, the surviving architectural details in the building, including the entrance doorway (Plate 2), the windows and the ground-floor fireplace all appear likely to date to the sixteenth century and since none are clearly inserted into an earlier structure, then one must conclude that the building is generally dateable to the sixteenth century, though it is possible that it was built on the site of, and perhaps on the footprint of, the earlier castle.

3 'The Enniscorthy Halberdier'

3.1 *Introduction*

Enniscorthy Castle features a small basement composed of two chambers which are now accessed via a modern flight of steps from the main ground-floor chamber of the building. These steps provide access, though a door-less ope in the floor, to a low sub-rectangular chamber which in turn provides access to a circular inner chamber under the south-western turret of the castle. The walls of the basement chambers are partially formed with bedrock and so the basement clearly sits in a rock-cut void, though it is unclear if this void was created in the late sixteenth century or if it was pre-existing at that time and thus used for a basement in an opportunistic manner.

The inner chamber, according to local information, held a large heating boiler when the building was in use as a residence in the twentieth century and a doorway provided access to the exterior via a short flight of steps, though this feature was blocked up some years ago. The outer chamber appears to have served, at least in part, as a coal bunker at some period, but the original purpose of the basement is unclear. The ceiling of the inner chamber is now formed with modern concrete and the loss of the original ceiling does little to aid our understanding of the nature and function of this space. The obvious purposes for which the basement may have been created include a storage cellar and a prison, and it is quite possible that, over time, it served either or both functions as needs arose.

The removal of the large heating boiler in recent years led to the 're-discovery' of a figure on the wall of the inner basement room (Plate 3) which had been recorded by Herbert Hore (1817-1865) in the nineteenth century and later described in print when Hore's son, Philip Hore, published his father's research in the *History of the Town and County of Wexford* in six volumes between 1900 and 1911.

Hore described the figure as follows: '*Incised in the plaster of the wall of the circular chamber under the south-west tower is an interesting graffito. It is three feet four inches high, and represents a young (unbearded) man in, apparently, the dress of a halberdier of the sixteenth century. His doublet is full above shoulders and body,*

fastened in at the waist, and ends above the elbows. He wears a ruff, or large collar. His hosen are tied in above the knee. With his left hand he flourishes a sword over his head, the scabbard of which sticks out at nearly right angles to his body... Even if he be not a halberdier, the dress is undoubtedly Elizabethan, and the graffito may be ascribed with much probability to the time shortly after 1585...”



Plate 3: The 'Enniscorthy Halberdier' in the inner chamber of the basement; note the bedrock below the figure to the right and the modern concrete ceiling above it.

3.2 *Technique*

The figure has clearly suffered somewhat since Hore recorded it and the insertion of the concrete ceiling in modern times appears to have truncated the uppermost portion of his head and may have caused two deep marks in the facial area also. The figure is deeply incised into the lime render on the wall, but some small repairs have been made in modern times using gypsum-based materials. The room has also been painted relatively recently, but a square area around the figure was left untouched by this work and so the older whitewash is visible in this area, though this whitewash in turn was not applied to the figure itself. This process has caused the figure to appear to be a wall painting, since it stands out as beige/brown/red figure against a white 'background', but on closer inspection this is found to be false - the figure was clearly

created by using a sharp implement to cut lines into the existing plasterwork and no clear evidence for figurative painting has been noted.



Plate 4: The 'Enniscorthy Halberdier'

The nature of the figure makes recording difficult, in that normal photographic processes using in-line light sources (E.g.: built-in flash) cause the image to 'flatten' and sharp definition of the details can be difficult to achieve. However, more advanced processes using multiple off-camera light courses, reflective and shoot-through umbrellas and tripods can produce good results and allow the detail of the figure to be examined fully.

3.3 *The Figure*

The figure appears to represent a frontal view of a swordsman, who either holds a short sword aloft in his left hand and cradles an indeterminate object in the crook of his right arm, or who holds a short sword or dagger aloft in this left hand and reaches to his right hip to draw a long sword from his scabbard with his right hand. Both his

clothes and his scabbard are defined with incised outlines and diagonal hatching internally and his feet both point to his right, an unusual posture which may simply derive from the efforts of an untrained artist to fully represent the feet in a frontal depiction.



Plate 5: The head of the figure

The head of the figure is crudely represented, though the nose and the left eye are clearly visible. The right-hand side of the face appears to have suffered some damage, possibly during the insertion of the concrete ceiling above, and the top of the head has been truncated so it is now unclear if the figure was wearing a hat.

The torso of the figure appears to be clothed in a jacket or doublet which features a central line of buttons and is defined by a series of vertical panels filled with diagonal hatching. A series of very fine vertical lines in the clavicle area at the top of the doublet are notable since they are quite different to the deeper, coarser incisions used in the remainder of the figure. They may represent a collar or other decorative element of the doublet, but are somewhat difficult to interpret and suffer from damage on the figure's left-hand side.



Plate 6: The torso of the figure



Plate 7: The fine lines at top of the figure's torso (centre)

The limbs of the figure are represented quite simply, though the legs are defined more clearly than the arms. The arms simply bend in continuous arcs with no attempt being made to represent the elbows (Plate 9), while the legs are more carefully represented with broader thighs giving way to slender knees and calves (Fig. 8). This may be a representation of trousers which are loose fitting above the knee and close fitting below it, but this is difficult to establish with certainty.



Plate 8: The legs of the figure (left) and the right arm of the figure (right)

In addition to the figure itself, one should also note the presence of other features such as the scabbard and the short sword or dagger held aloft in the figure's left hand. The scabbard (or perhaps an unsheathed sword) is depicted simply with an incised outline and hatched interior; the upper and lower edges run parallel to each other for most of the object's length before the lower edge turns upwards to meet the upper edge at the tip. The short sword or dagger held in the figure's left hand is not depicted with any detail and so is difficult to discuss, though it is interesting to note that the figure's left hand is depicted as being open instead of closed around the handle.



Plate 9: The scabbard or long sword



Plate 10: The short sword of dagger in the figure's left hand

To the left of the figure is an incised motif which appears to be composed of two interlocking arrows or triangles and so resembles a letter 'M'. It is unclear if this motif forms part of the same composition as the figure of the swordsman, but a specialist on medieval graffiti in England, Matthew Champion, in communications with Kieran Costello of Enniscorthy Castle, described it as an apotropaic motif (i.e. designed to ward off evil) associated with the Virgin Mary and noted that hundreds had been found in England (pers. comm. K. Costello).



Plate 11: The 'M' to the left of the figure

4 Discussion

4.1 *The Enniscorthy Figure*

- 4.1.1 In short, the figure within the basement of Enniscorthy Castle may be described as an incised representation of a swordsman. There is little or no evidence to support the suggestion that the figure represents a halberdier, or indeed to support the idea that the representation is a wall painting.

A halberd is a form of pole-arm which features a three-part head mounted on a long handle, the head being composed of an axe-like blade on the leading edge, a hook on the rearward edge and a spike on the top. The weapon was generally five to six feet in length and was used by foot soldiers against mounted opponents in many European armies in the late medieval and post-medieval periods. In his published description of the figure, Hore cast doubt on his own suggestion that it was a representation of a halberdier and this was, perhaps, a prudent assessment of the evidence. The

Enniscorthy figure is best described as a swordsman, though the possible existence of an ill-defined object in the angle of his right arm, which also appears to taper downwards below the arm, makes the true role of the figure difficult to assess.



Plate 12: *Two Peers of the Realm and a Halberdier*
(© British Library)

4.2 *The Context of the Figure - Wall Paintings and Graffiti in Irish Castles*

- 4.2.1 A brief examination of the wider context of figurative imagery in Irish castles will serve to place the Enniscorthy figure in its appropriate context. The foremost expert on Irish medieval wall paintings, Dr Karena Morton, has noted that 80 medieval Irish buildings have, or lately had, evidence for wall paintings and while the majority of

these are ecclesiastical foundations, a total of nine castles are also included in this group (Morton 2010, 98). Morton describes the imagery at two castles as follows: *'The extensive paintings in Ardamullivan Castle ... depict scenes from the Passion of Christ together with images of St Michael Weighing the Souls, St Christopher and the Christ Child and an ecclesiast, probably Bishop Colman, while those in Ballyportry Castle ... depict the Martyrdom of St Sebastian and St Thomas Beckett among other imagery'* (Morton 2010, 98).



Plate 13: St Thomas Beckett at Ballyportry Castle, Co. Clare (after Morton 2012, Fig 6, 99)

To these two examples, from Co. Galway and Co. Clare respectively, we may add Barryscourt, Co. Cork, and Urlanmore, Co. Clare, the latter structure having collapsed a few decades ago, sometime after a hunting scene was recorded in one of the upper chambers. One may suggest that many Irish castles and tower houses originally had wall paintings within them and while we are now left with chance survivals only, these few remnants do, at least, give some indication that a more extensive range of wall paintings may once have existed. Painted decoration is not likely to have been limited to mural locations either, since the survival of some very

important late medieval painted wooden ceilings in Scotland (Murray 2009) may indicate that similar features once existed in Ireland, though the extremely poor survival rate of timberwork in Irish castles makes this difficult to establish with certainty. One of the key points to be made about wall paintings within medieval castles is that of location - they are, by and large, located in high-status rooms on the upper floors and served to decorate both public and private spaces.

4.2.2 Graffiti in Irish castles has received less attention in academic research than wall paintings, and the full extent of pre-modern graffiti in these buildings is unknown. Ship graffiti is, perhaps, the best known form of graffiti in medieval buildings and the example from Dunluce, Co. Antrim (Farrell 1978) has been documented by a number of authors. Ship graffiti are known also from ecclesiastical contexts and the Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey has recorded numerous incised ship motifs in parish churches at Blakeney and Wiveton, amongst others (Norfolk Medieval Graffiti Survey 2012).

Prisoner graffiti is another area that has received some academic attention in recent years, most notably at Edinburgh Castle, Scotland, where extensive traces of prisoner graffiti were discovered, recorded and made accessible to the public. Dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this graffiti is incised into both wood and stone, though it is largely composed of inscriptions or small motifs and large, figurative representations are not present.



Plate 14: Ship graffiti at Duluce Castle (left) and prisoner graffiti at Edinburgh Castle (right) (photo: Canmore ©RCAHMS)

5 Conservation and Presentation

5.1 Conservation

- 5.1.1 The incised representation of the swordsman in the basement of Enniscorthy Castle has survived for well over one hundred years and may be up to four hundred years old. Though it has clearly deteriorated to some degree since it was first created, it has nevertheless survived periods in which the building was in a poor state of repair and periods in which it shared a small space with a large heating boiler. Given the fact that the representation is essentially a negative image, in that it was created by removing material by cutting lines into the wall render, it only comes under significant threat when the lime-based render into which it has been cut itself comes under threat, most obviously through damp or impact damage.

Given the fact that the basement wall is built with rubble stone and lime mortar, it is obvious that standard precautions for the preservation of medieval masonry structures should be adhered to, since the use of cement-based render, for example, would have a detrimental effect on the moisture levels in the structure. Fluctuating environmental conditions within the building could also have negative impacts on the preservation of lime-based renders and so care should be taken to maintain relatively stable levels of temperature and humidity.

- 5.1.2 While the photographic survey compiled in advance of the creation of this report has provided a very useful archive of high-resolution images, consideration should be given to further recording strategies which have the potential to produce a high-resolution, three-dimensional survey of the figure. Foremost amongst these is laser scanning, a process now used across a wide variety of scales in landscape analysis, excavation and monument and artefact conservation. A relatively early example of the usefulness of laser scanning in the recording and replication of medieval graffiti comes from the Tower of London, where intricate graffiti incorporating heraldic emblems was scanned using non-contact technology in 2003, since more traditional techniques involving the creation of mouldings of the feature under examination could not be used (English Heritage 2007, 23-4). The data generated by the laser scanning programme firstly provided a highly accurate record of the graffiti, but was also used to guide robotic CNC milling machines in the creation of three-dimensional

full-scale replicas. These replicas were then installed in the on-site visitor centre and visitors were encouraged to touch the replicas in order to interact with them at a tactile level, while the original carvings were secured behind glass. Since 2003, the techniques associated with aircraft-deployed landscape surveys and hand-held artefact surveys has developed considerably and Ireland has been to the forefront of many new applications in this area through the

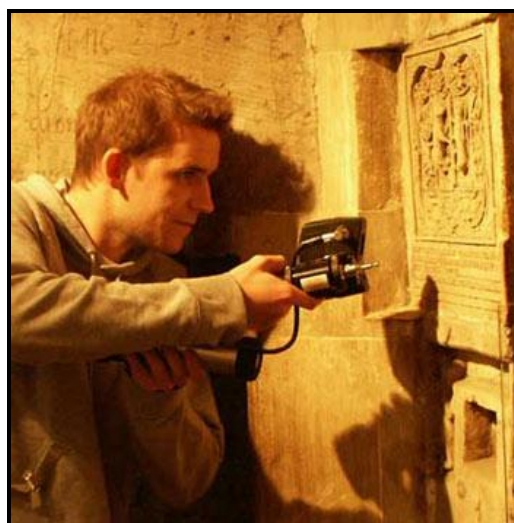


Plate 15: Handheld laser scanner in use in survey of medieval graffiti in the Tower of London (www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk)

work of The Discovery Programme. Laser scanning is now a commercial service and is becoming more affordable due to the development of new equipment and software. The early medieval High Crosses are Ahenny, Co. Tipperary, were recently surveyed by Coastway Ltd. in order to document their condition (Coastway 2012) for the Office of Public Works and a project currently underway in the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies (2012) seeks to create 3D laser scans of approximately four hundred ogham stones across the country.

- 5.1.3 While managing the environmental conditions in the basement of Enniscorthy Castle will probably go a long way towards securing the medium-term future of the figure incised into the lime-based wall render, it is clear that high moisture levels in the walls have the potential to damage the figure. If such damaging levels are found to be present at any stage, an inspection should be made of the exterior of the building and, in particular, of the roof, since leaking roofs, gutters, downpipes and drains are one of the primary causes of water ingress in old buildings, but can often be easily eliminated by routine maintenance. In addition, the high ground level on the exterior of the building may mask a build-up of damp soil and debris against the external facade, though this would clearly present a more complicated problem, since an archaeological excavation would be required to expose the external facade of the

structure before the insertion of a suitable void, drain or water barrier. The advice of a conservation architect would be required for such works.

5.2 *Presentation*

- 5.2.1 The figure of the swordsman in the basement of Enniscorthy Castle is clearly a point of interest for visitors and so it is important that the general public should have an opportunity to appreciate the figure, either directly or indirectly. In the past, the figure was protected by a clear Perspex screen which allowed visitors to see, but not touch, the figure and careful consideration should be given to the insertion of a new screen for the same purpose.
- 5.2.2 However, before this occurs, consideration should first be given to the commissioning of a high-resolution laser scan of the figure in order to create a highly accurate record of it. Such a scan has a number of benefits, in that it creates a record of the figure before the works commence to install the screen (in case the figure is inadvertently damaged in the process), but it also creates a visual representation of the figure which can be used in a display on the ground-floor of the castle to (i) allow persons of impaired mobility to see the figure and (ii) allow all visitors to see an accurate image of the figure if a decision is made to close the basement to general access.
- 5.2.3 Consideration could also be given, if funding becomes available, to the commissioning of a three-dimensional, full-scale replica of the figure for display on the ground floor of the castle. Such a replica, derived from the laser-scan survey, could be used by tour guides and touched by visitors on a daily basis and so, though essentially a proposal which relates to the presentation of the figure, this would also have long-term conservation benefits.

6 Conclusions & Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

- 6.1.1 The incised figure of a swordsman at Enniscorthy Castle appears to be a graffito, since it is not a wall painting and is not located in one of the upper rooms of the building. It is very difficult to date such figures and this example may date to anytime between the construction or rebuilding of the castle in the late sixteenth century and the recording of the figure by Hore in the mid-nineteenth century.
- 6.1.2 There exists a strong possibility that the figure is an example of prisoner graffiti and so it may date to 1798 when the building was used as a prison. However, many castles had prisons within them and so the figure may also date to the seventeenth or early eighteenth centuries. The dress of the figure is not distinctive enough to assist in dating the graffito and, in any case, it is quite possible that the artist may have deliberately created a figure in 'antique' dress rather than in contemporary garb.
- 6.1.3 The original context of the figure is difficult to establish, since it was located in a basement room which may have served as a cellar or a prison, or perhaps both. The creation of the figure clearly took time, but it is unlikely to be the work of a trained artist. Other motifs or inscriptions may once have existed in the cellar, but none of note were recorded during the course of this survey.

6.2 Recommendations

- 6.2.1 It is recommended that efforts should be made to acquire the necessary funding to commission a high-resolution 3D laser-scan survey of the graffito in the basement of Enniscorthy Castle.
- 6.2.2 It is recommended that the data generated from the aforementioned survey should be used to create a visitor information display in the ground-floor area of the castle and that the basement should be closed to general access, though occasional access by interested parties under close supervision should be permitted.

- 6.2.3 It is recommended that the environmental conditions in the basement should be kept as stable as possible and a programme of regular monitoring should be established to ensure the figure does not deteriorate. Consideration may be given to replacing the Perspex screen in front of the figure, though this may not be necessary if the basement is closed to general access.
- 6.2.4 It is recommended that consideration may be given to the creation of a three-dimensional, full-scale replica of the figure for display in the visitor centre, though this is not a time-critical element of the overall proposal and may be undertaken if and when suitable funding becomes available.

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