

KELLS TOWN WALLS

CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT PLAN

NOVEMBER 2020



7L ARCHITECTS
30 Wicklow Street, Dublin 2 D02 Y037
01 524 0527 : www.7Larchitects.ie
RIAI Conservation Grade 1

R+D Research + Dig
Urban Regeneration & Heritage



CONTENTS

1.0	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
2.0	INTRODUCTION	10
3.0	UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE	13
4.0	PHYSICAL EVIDENCE	20
5.0	STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	33
6.0	DEFINING ISSUES & VULNERABILITY	37
7.0	CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT POLICIES	42
8.0	CONSERVATION & ACCESS STRATEGIES	48

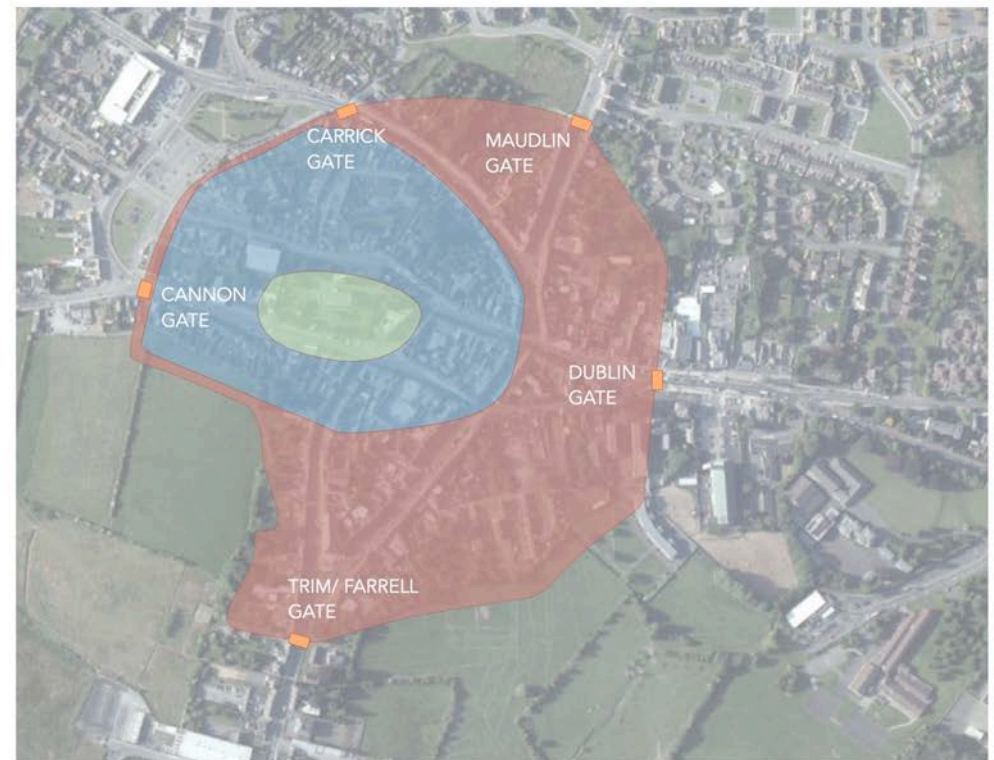
SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 PREAMBLE

This conservation and management plan for the town walls of Kells was commissioned by Meath County Council, with funding provided by the Irish Walled Towns Network. Prepared by 7L Architects in collaboration with Research + Dig, the purpose of the plan is to assess the history, cultural significance and current condition of the walled town – in terms of its known standing remains, buried archaeology, layout and associated buildings. It assesses the threats to its significance; outlines a conservation strategy and makes recommendations for enhancement, improved management and interpretation. Field surveys were carried out in June 2020.

Location	Kells, Co. Meath
Grid Coordinates	673827, 775847
Local Authority	Meath County Council
Zoning	Commercial/ Town Centre
Statutory Protection	SMR ref: ME017-044-004-
Rating	Regional
Special Interest	Architectural, Archaeological, Social
Principal Dimensions	21 hectares; 165m length
Inspection Date	June 2020
Prepared by	Fergal Mc Namara & Liam Mannix
Report Issued	November 2020



1.2 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

- Kells was founded by St. Columba (Colmcille) in the sixth century, on the site of an earlier *dún*. It remained an important ecclesiastical site until the second half of the twelfth century when it was settled by the Anglo-Normans.
- Later, it became an important frontier town on the northwest boundary of the Pale, evolving into a prosperous estate town in the early modern period. Its inner monastic enclosure is thought to encompass the walls of the present church precinct, while its outer enclosure was adapted and extended to form a larger town wall circuit in the Anglo-Norman period.
- Although a sizeable settlement with a rich legacy artistic and built heritage from the monastic period, along with many other towns in Ireland, little of its former town defences have survived.
- Kells is an interesting example of an Anglo-Norman town founded on early medieval or even pre-historic foundations, containing evidence of over eleven centuries of continuous occupation.
- The impact of the town walls is still evident in the urban morphology of Kells. It still defines plot boundaries, with only minor adjustments outside along the streets that led to the five gates.

1.3 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

- Today, all that remains of the medieval defences are found in two areas of farmland directly to the south of the historic core that have remained undeveloped up until now – the stone walls to the *Frontlands* to the west of the town to the rear of Cannon Street overlooked by the mural tower, and the earthen bank of the *Backlands* to the east of the town behind Farrell Street.
- Several phases of construction, addition and repair can be seen along the surviving wall fragments and the mural tower. Ivy has colonised the wall to varying degrees; and has rooted into the wall tops and centre of the walls.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE

- Kells is one of the longest continuously occupied urban centres in the country. There were at least four main phases in its development - from its origins as a royal residence in pre-history; an important monastic centre, Anglo-Norman market town; an estate town during the Ascendancy up until the modern era.
- Dating from the eleventh century, the round tower is a highly visible landmark in the town, and the most tangible evidence of the defences of the monastic settlement. Their prime use was likely to have been a belfry, or a prospect to warn of attack, or as a refuge or place to keep treasures secure.

- The town walls and Anglo-Norman heritage of Kells as a frontier town of the Pale deserves to be better known by locals, and more vividly presented to visitors. It makes a valuable contribution to a place that is arguably of international cultural significance.

1.5 THREATS

- The condition of the mural tower is of most concern. Strategic tree removal and careful sequencing of specialist repair works will be required to ensure that the risks to the safety of the public, and preservation of this survival of the town defences are addressed.
- While the lack of knowledge about the precise location and condition of the wall circuit is a significant threat to its preservation, statutory protections and planning policies already in place create a robust legal framework facilitating the protection of the surviving sections of town wall and its probable alignment.

1.6 POLICIES

- Repairs to historic fabric should be carried out using conservation methodologies that conform to the guiding principles set out in the ICOMOS charters, using appropriate details and materials.
- Whenever possible, inappropriate interventions along the town wall alignment should be removed. The integrity of the town wall should be reinforced where necessary, replacing later additions such as fencing or blockwork with stonework that minimizes impact

on the archaeological heritage and enhance, rather than detract from, their settings.

1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- Future development of the Frontlands and Backlands sites is an opportunity to present the walled town heritage of Kells in a coherent way, as part of the public realm.
- The protection and maintenance of existing built heritage of the former town defences, especially the mural tower, should take priority. In this way, the gradual process of decay is arrested, allowing this historic place to be maintained in perpetuity.
- Increasing knowledge and understanding of the town walls among the local community will assist in its preservation. In time, the development of the Frontlands and Backlands as new precincts close to the centre of historic Kells should retain the surviving southern flanks of the town walls/bank as part of the public realm, accessible to the community and conserved to international best practice.
- A key project is to conserve the mural tower and improve access and its setting. A new link to Cannon Street would bring the mural tower and the round tower closer together, and allows them to be appreciated more easily, improve permeability and enhance connectivity between the new developments and the historic core.

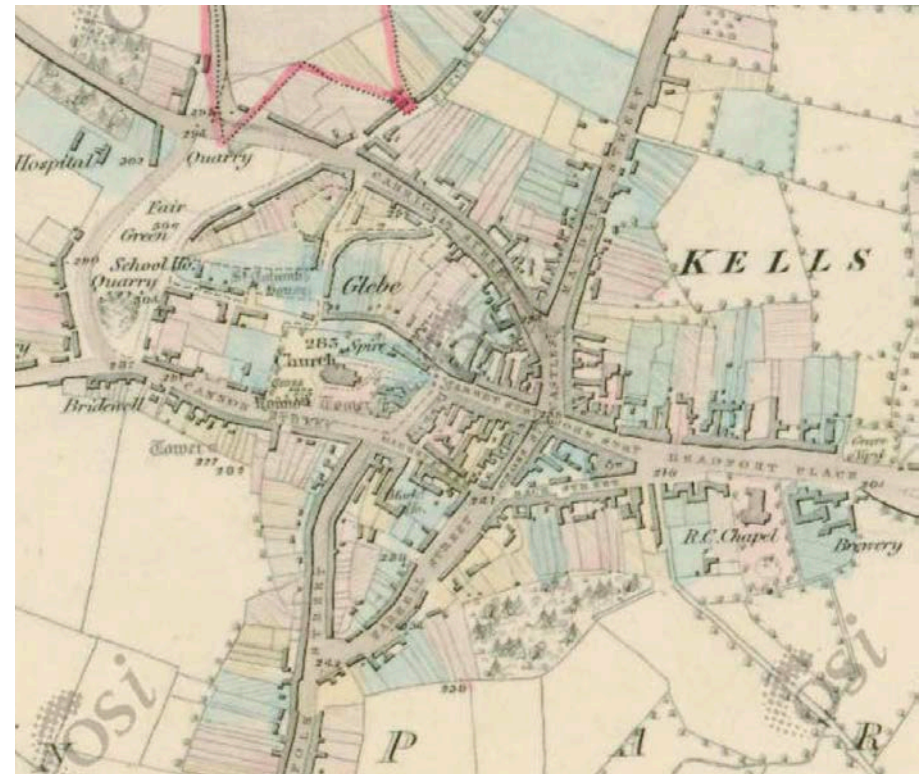
2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 THE PLACE

The historic town of Kells is located approximately fifty kilometres northwest of Dublin, situated on a ridge that rises above its rural hinterland. Common to other Anglo-Norman towns it has prehistoric and Early Christian phases, recognising its strategic location linking the east of the country with the north west. By the fifteenth century, it was a stronghold at the edge of the Pale, and a bustling market town into the modern period. It is its early medieval monastic phase that Kells is most closely associated. The sacred enclosure occupies high ground in the centre of the town, and given more prominence by its round tower and in its street layout. It is also renowned for its collection of high crosses, and the world-famous Book of Kells which kept safe in the monastery for many centuries.

Evidence of Early Medieval, Anglo-Norman and late eighteenth/ early nineteenth century phases of development can be found at Kells. Annalistic references to an ancient hillfort predate the founding of a monastery by St Columba in the sixth century. Since the construction of the nearby M3 motorway, the main streets are less frequently visited by those on the way northwest or east. The principal attractions of the town - the round tower, high crosses, St Columba's House, and the fine streetscapes of the market town are best enjoyed walking around its dense historic core, once enclosed by a medieval town wall. Although most of the town wall has been

lost, the existing settlement pattern retains its influence. Later developments in the historic core and its suburbs have obscured much of what has survived from the medieval period from the casual visitor. While behind the fine traditional shopfronts or below their floors, further evidence of the medieval town may remain to be discovered.



2. Extract from first edition OS map (ca. 1840) showing plan of Kells.

2.2 NATIONAL & EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The few existing remains of town-wall fortifications, which formerly enclosed and protected every important town in Ireland, and which yearly diminish in number, are, as a class, undeservedly overlooked by writers on the antiquities of such towns as they describe.

Writing in 1914, J.S. Fleming commenced his study on the most prominent of the Irish walled towns by lamenting the poor appreciation of this essential component of urban development which emphasized the prominent buildings. In 1992, Avril Thomas, listed fifty-six Irish towns which were certain to have had town defences, thirty-five where some evidence (if only documentary) exists, and twenty other settlements for which only the tentative or indirect evidence has been found.

Walled settlements range in size from the most populous cities down to abandoned villages. Defences were installed around farmsteads during the Neolithic period, and were also installed to protect early-Christian monasteries and by the Norse. Gaelic settlements usually used earthworks; but stone was also used to protect larger settlements or 'Dún', creating a place of refuge and control. Such a structure may once have commanded the hill at Kells prior to the founding of the monastery, but no physical evidence has been identified.

As part of the colonization of the island of Ireland by the Anglo-Normans, existing defensive enclosures to settlements were fortified or enlarged with stone-built walls. These became towns and were defensive strongpoints of the colony, important in the formation of new trading networks. Town walls

reflect their setting - topography, geology, economic, political and temporal, and are an essential component in the development of our towns and cities.

Irish walled towns characterize political and economic developments on the island in relation to Britain and the continent. Ireland is located on the periphery of Europe, being remote from the Roman Empire it was relatively late in developing an urban culture. Starting with the monasteries, Hiberno-Norse ports, and prominent Gaelic settlements, the Anglo-Normans established a hold on the majority of the island over three centuries until retreating to the confines of the Pale by the early fifteenth century. The Tudor and Stuart plantations also relied on town defences. In the early modern era, defences erected during the Cromwellian and Jacobite/Williamite conflicts quickly became redundant. This led to their gradual but widespread removal starting in the eighteenth century, so that there are few intact examples of an Irish walled town, most survive only in part.

The European Walled Towns, previously called the Walled Town Friendship Circle (WTFC), is the international association for the sustainable development of fortified historic towns and cities. The Piran Declaration, which outlines the reasons for maintaining historic walled towns, was presented at the WTFC AGM in Piran, Slovenia in 1998.

Walled Towns are unique inheritances from times long past and should be treasured, maintained and safeguarded from neglect, damage and destruction and passed on into perpetuity as irreplaceable 'Timestones of History'.



3. View of round tower and high cross in graveyard at monastic site.

In 2005, the Heritage Council established the Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN) to link into the activities of the WTFC. The IWTN, of which Kells is a member, coordinates the management and conservation of historic walled towns through local authorities on the island.

2.3 AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Essentially, the aim of conservation is to *retain the cultural significance of a place*. Published by ICOMOS in 2013, the revised Burra Charter provides a

model for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance; setting out standards and guidelines for its guardians. This group might include owners, managers and custodians, consultants, statutory advisers, opinion-formers, decision makers and contractors. Places of cultural significance enrich the lives of people, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to – family and the community; the landscape; to the past and to lived experiences. A fundamental principle of the Burra Charter is that places of cultural significance should be conserved for the benefit of both present and future generations. The charter defines conservation as - *all of the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance*.

Following publication of the Burra Charter, the Ename Charter was adopted by ICOMOS in 2008 and deals specifically with the interpretation and presentation of cultural heritage. This charter provides a framework for the communication of the cultural significance of a place to the public. Its objectives are to facilitate understanding and appreciation of the site; communicate its meaning, safeguard the tangible and intangible values and respect its authenticity. This is particularly relevant for Kells, where its Anglo-Norman heritage is less-well appreciated than the early modern and the monastic; and where the physical evidence is fragmentary and not readily visible.

As such, the aims of this Conservation Plan are to:

- provide an accurate record of the walled town, through field studies and research of available sources;



4. Detail of displaced building stone in field close to town wall.

- understand the significance of its cultural heritage both tangible and intangible,
- identify any threats to this significance;
- formulate policies to address the threats, and to inform and guide the future preservation and management of the walled town and its associated cultural heritage;
- manage change by proposing a sustainable vision for the future of the historic place, to act as a guide for future decision-making;
- assess the impacts of possible future development within the setting of the town wall, and devise strategies to mitigate any impacts;

- identify priorities for the conservation of the walled town for capital works and ongoing maintenance.

2.4 LIMITATIONS

Areas that were not inspected included those that required special access at high level, were fenced off or locked, buried, obscured by ivy or vegetation. Specific limitations are noted within the text. An ecological assessment of natural heritage associated with the medieval defences was outside the scope of this study.

2.4 NOMENCLATURE

The sixth-century founder of the monastery at Kells is known as St Columba, St Columb, or St Columcille, with some placenames taking a preference. We have adopted the common usage in relation to the name of the feature throughout. We have used the term Frontlands and Backlands as used in planning policy documents.

2.5 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Robert Miles, Architectural Conservation Officer for his guidance in the preparation of this plan, and to Robert Flanagan in allowing access and providing valuable insight and background on the town walls.

3.0 UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

3.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Kells is known as one of the foremost historic towns in Ireland, with its founding as an Early Christian proto-town. However, human occupation in this area has been recorded throughout Irish pre-history. Where the modern town now stands is the historic site of a *dún* that lay on the route between the east coast and the pre-historic royal site of Rathcroghan in Co. Roscommon. The foundation of the Columban monastery from the sixth century and its subsequent development possibly destroyed archaeological remains of the *dún*. Its importance continued through the medieval period, as a trading post to Drogheda to the north-east of the country, and to Dublin to the east.

The earliest evidence of its name *Ceanannas* appears is from the late-seventh century onwards. A medieval title of *Ceanannas na rig, Kells of the Kings*, can most likely be attributed to a reference from a twelfth-century version of the *Life of Columba*. This describes Kells as a stronghold of the high-king Diarmait mac Cerbaill who died c.565, while other sources refer to an earlier period (ca. second century BCE) when high-king Cormac Mac Airt relocated from the royal site at Tara.



5. Detail of stained-glass window featuring St Colmcille by Harry Clarke.

Referred by contemporaries as *the splendour of Ireland*, Kells became an epicentre of monastic life on the island. The monastic settlement was founded in the early ninth-century by monks fleeing Viking attacks on the Scottish Island of Iona and by 814 the building of the church had been completed. The wealth of the early Irish monastic church is perhaps best shown in the form of the Book of Kells. Thought to have been produced on the island of Iona in Scotland, its patronage is inextricably linked to the settlement at Kells. The highly illuminated book contains the texts of the

four gospels but also Gaelic-Irish charters written into the book at a later date. They record land grants to the monastery from 1031 to 1161, which prove the existence of an important and largely secularized monastery typical of the period immediately prior to the major reform of the Irish church in the twelfth century¹.

The great treasures of Kells are not the only evidence that exist to show its wealth. An entry in the Annals of Ulster from 951 illustrates the great depth of manpower that Kells had and the ever-present threat posed by the Vikings – *at least three thousand men are said to have been taken captive and a great spoil of cattle, horses, gold and silver taken in raids on Kells and the surrounding area*². The Market cross dating from the mid-ninth century is another example of the wealth that Kells had at this time.

The monastery benefitted greatly from land grants throughout the country, however agriculture was not the only employment available for the population. Stonemasons and silversmiths were employed to create the monastic treasures, while education, perhaps using the famed-book as a resource, also played a major part in the life of the monastery.

The charters also mention the *margad Cenannsalbis*³; the function of Kells diversifying to include commerce. One of the charters tells us that cattle were sold in the market in Kells. By the eleventh century Kells can be described as a proto town, a vibrant trading post lacking the clear definition

of urbanization. However, this phase does not appear on the archaeological record and is purely based on documentary sources such as the Annals of the Four Masters. An entry dated from the mid-twelfth century mentions that Kells was burned *from the cross at the door of the air dam [portico] to Siofoic*. The word *Siofoic* is generally thought to refer to an area around the outer boundary of the monastic proto-town, Simms suggest⁴ that this could be the origin of the name of Suffolk Street.



6. View of model of monastic Kells in heritage hub.

¹ Simms, A. Kells: Irish Historic Towns Atlas, Royal Irish Academy, p. 1, 1990.

² <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/T100001A/>

³ Ibid, P.1.

⁴ Ibid, P.1



7. Laurence Collection photograph (ca. 1900) of the high cross and round tower dating to the monastic period.

The reorganization of the Irish Church in the twelfth century had a major impact on Kells. At this point Ireland was moving away from the traditional monastic style of life that had endured since the sixth century and the church was starting to align, in some ways at least, with the European diocesan model. At the synod of Rathbrasil in 1111, Kells initially became the episcopal see for the new diocese of Breifne (at the synod of Rathbrasil in 1111). However, when the Anglo-Normans arrived they pushed the boundary of the kingdom of Breifne back and established the episcopal see at Kilmore in Co. Cavan. This change in style is perhaps best represented by Kells not having an abbot after the year 1154. The church of Columba at this point ceased to be monastic.

The lands associated with the monastery now passed into the hands of the Augustinians; who founded an abbey in the town in the 1150s. The abbey was brought under the patronage of Huger de Lacy after the Anglo-Norman arrival and continued to prosper. It suffered greatly as a result of frontier warfare between the Gaelic Irish and the Anglo-Normans; so much so that by the time of the dissolution of the monasteries in 1539, the church building was been used as a granary.

By 1211 the cathedral of Columba was under the auspices of the diocese of Meath, and the building itself served as a parish church.

For a century or so after their arrival around 1170, the Anglo-Normans were the primary drivers of urban growth in Ireland. They colonised Hiberno-Norse towns (e.g. Cork, Dublin, Limerick), expanded important church settlements (e.g. Kells, Kildare, Kilkenny and founded new towns on green-

*field sites or at places with just a small existing population (e.g. Drogheda, Navan, New Ross). Almost all of Ireland's fifty largest twenty-first-century towns and cities were created or expanded by the Anglo-Normans in the period 1170–1280.*⁵

The arrival of the Anglo-Normans had a profound effect on Irish society. The prosperity of Kells attracted the Anglo-Norman Lord Hugh de Lacy to choose it as a manorial site. One of the first actions at Kells, as with most Norman settlements, was to build a motte and castle, which was destroyed in 1176⁶ but subsequently rebuilt. The development of the modern town continued apace from here and it was granted borough status under Walter de Lacy. It was during this period that the economy of the town also started to prosper. In 1204 King John granted the town the right to hold annual fairs, while in 1231 manorial mills are mentioned in Kells for the first time. Throughout the Middle Ages, Kells was a frontier town and target of the native Irish. It was burnt in 1203 and again in 1315 when Edward Bruce defeated an army under Roger de Mortimer outside the town. After Walter de Lacy (son of Hugh) died in 1241, his lands in Meath were subdivided among his heirs. The de Verdon family now gained control of most of the manor land in the town, while Geoffrey de Greneville gained a smaller portion.

The arrival of the Anglo-Normans in Ireland is perhaps best illustrated in the east and north-east of Ireland, with major trading towns established at

⁵ <https://www.ria.ie/news/irish-historic-towns-atlas/michael-potterton-anglo-norman-town>

⁶ Thomas, A, *The Walled Towns of Ireland* Vol. 2, Irish Academic Press, p. 122

Drogheda, Trim, Carrickfergus, Dundalk, Ardee and Carlingford. Bradley⁷ has suggested that the walls of Kells can be attributed to Hugh de Lacy (d.1186) or his son Walter (d.1241), although the earliest documentary evidence is a murage grant of 1326. Thomas⁸ suggests that the earliest phase of the wall may have taken the form of an earthen bank with stone walls being built in the thirteenth century.

The town walls served many purposes - most notably taxation, trade as well as defense. The walls at Kells were almost circular except for the south west corner, and encompassed an area of 21 hectares, over 1650m in length. There were five gates associated with the walls - Canon Gate; Carrick Gate; Maudlin Gate; Dublin Gate; and Trim (or Farrell) Gate. A gate at Maudlin Street was the last surviving of the five, being demolished sometime after 1817.

The morphology of the Anglo-Norman town emerged with the walls, linking through the gates to the five ancient routes to the town. The town appears to have followed a familiar pattern of adopting the outer enclosure of the monastic proto-town into its street plan. As the town developed the need for strong walls and secure gates increased. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Kells withstood attacks from the Gaelic Irish. Murage customs granted in 1468 led to repair of the town walls, while

⁷ Bradley, J.

⁸ Op. cit, p. 123

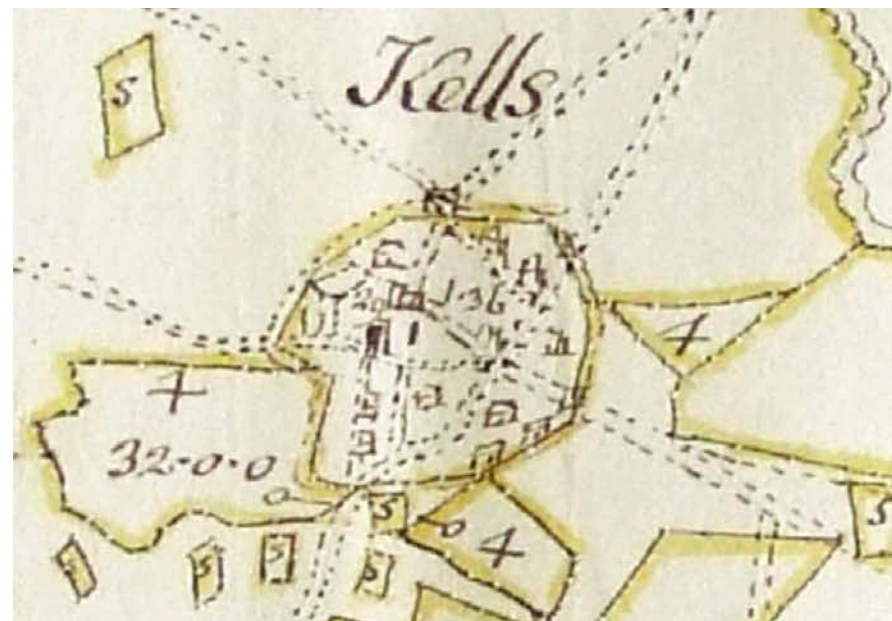
Thomas⁹ mentions a description from 1472 of *land occupied by the King's walls*. Noted items traded at this point were, *grain, salt, livestock, skins and hides, tallow, English and Irish woolen cloth, linen, coarse thread, hemp, dyes, timber, nails, brass, copper and miscellaneous foodstuffs*.¹⁰ Allied to this trade, we hear pleas from the burgesses of Kells about the rampant poverty within the town, directly linked to their position on the borders of the colony with Gaelic Irish territory. The colonial policy in Ireland in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century was one of disinterest; this in turn led to many leaving the town before the establishment of the Pale later in the fifteenth century. A petition of 1472 emphasizes that the town was -

on the borders of the march of the county of Meath adjoining to the Orayllyes [O'Reillys], Irish enemies of our sovereign lord the king, and is the safeguard, defence and relief to all his faithful liege people dwelling in that part' (Berry 1914, 743).

The petition goes on to relate that many of the townspeople were deserting Kells because of the high levels of taxation caused by the maintenance of the town walls, suggesting that there may have been a decline in its population during the later fifteenth century.

The economic life of the town suffered further decline with the onset of the Confederate Wars (1641-1653). The threat posed to the town is suggested by a description of 1647 they *sent infantry over the town walls*¹¹ thus

suggesting a town under attack and one whose walls were intact. The fact that Kells was a fully fortified town it was deemed suitable for settlement by English Protestant settlers. In 1654, the town was awarded to Cromwellian Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Stephens at a lottery held in London. Stephens successfully petitioned the English government to confirm this grant him the town in 1658, the basis of his argument was that



8. Extract from Down Survey map of Kells from 1655. Note street layout with Dublin, Maudlin and Carrick gates shown

⁹ Thomas, A. *The Walled Towns of Ireland Vol. 2*, Irish Academic Press, p. 121

¹⁰ Op. cit, Simms, p.3

¹¹ Op. cit, Thomas, p.121.



8. Kells from the East (up John Street) dating to 1803 shows the medieval castle still existing along with the market cross and church steeple.

the town was in a ruined state before the rebellion and he had now turned it into a prosperous plantation town.

The Confederate wars destroyed the economy of Kells, while also altering its demography. In a 1642 census, 32 proprietors within the town were families of Gaelic Irish stock and noted as *papists*. In the 1663 valuation people of Gaelic origin lived in houses of low value on the periphery, while

in the centre of the town the names of the tenants reflect the new policy of attracting protestant settlers. The primary function of the town was for markets; held weekly for the sale of cattle and corn, while the economy was boosted by two annual fairs.

By the end of the seventeenth century, the town was in possession of the Taylor family. At the same time there seems to have been an upgrade in the town wall defences with the building of earthen gun ramparts¹². Thomas Taylor, who bought interests in the town from Lieutenant Stephens, originally came to Ireland with William Petty and assisted him with the Down Survey, of which the map of Kells is instructive as regards the street layout and surviving gates. He established a sizeable demesne known as Headfort on the outskirts of Kells, the first reference to which is seen in corporation records from 1698¹³, over time its designed landscape dwarfed the town in scale, today it is used as a School. The Taylor family would dominate Kells for the coming centuries.

In 1688 King James II granted the town a new charter, in this it was stated that the town should be a free borough with a sovereign and burgesses; the sovereign was always a member of the Taylor family. The newly established corporation actively tried to improve the town in 1694 they asked Thomas Taylor for money to convert the castle into a market house and courthouse¹⁴. The cleanliness of the town was also tackled at this point. The use of horse and donkeys for transport, together with animals grazing

¹² Op. cit. Thomas, p.122

¹³ KTCM, 1.10.1698

¹⁴ Ibid, 26.03.1694

along the plot lanes was common; resulted in large quantities of dung. This problem was exacerbated by people dumping rubbish into the streets¹⁵.

In 1708¹⁶ a civic ban was placed on geese, ducks and *unringed swine* from roaming within the walls of the town. Pig sties were also banned within the town boundaries. Further measures introduced by the corporation included – cleaning of dung from water-courses; attempting to get the inhabitants of the town to pave the streets;¹⁷ and the removal of thatched chimneyless cottages and furze stacks (for firewood). The final measure was taken to reduce the risk of fire to the town¹⁸.

A property advertisement from 1769 gives a good idea of the changes that ensued in the mid-to-late eighteenth century - *A new slated well-finished dwelling house, two storeys high, with an attic story, convenient offices, and a good garden*¹⁹. Tree-lined roadways now appeared, a new courthouse was built, while Market Street was rebuilt in the Georgian style. The addition of a fair green appears on the 1817 map of the town, saving the town streets from animal spoil during any of the four fairs held each year. As Kells was modernized into the form we recognize today, the town walls and gates fell into disuse; an entry from 1835 states – *'one tower and small portion of wall is all that remains'*²⁰.

¹⁵ Ibid, 7.6.1705 & 11.10.1716

¹⁶ Ibid, 10.10.1716, 15.7.1712 & 2.10.1719

¹⁷ Ibid 21.10.1708



9. View along Castle St showing the juxtaposition of monastic high cross, medieval streets and market place, Georgian & Victorian shopfronts.

It appears that in Kells, just like elsewhere in Ireland, town walls were deemed surplus to requirements at the beginning of the eighteenth century. At the conclusion of the Williamite Wars the country was fully pacified, consequently, the walls served no military function and were therefore perceived as a constraint to economic development. Hence, the

¹⁸ Ibid, 4.4.1702

¹⁹ *Faulkner's Dublin Journal*, 11.4.1769

²⁰ Op. Cit, Thomas, p.121

walls were removed with the stone recycled as material for new buildings. The nineteenth-century brought huge changes to Kells when it was declared a poor law union centre in 1839 and a workhouse was built on its outskirts. The market in the town was in rapid decline and emigration was rife. The coming of the railway in 1853 allowed the residents to obtain goods directly from major urban centres. Its indigenous industry suffered as breweries, tanneries and the lace factory shut.

The social and economic demographics of Kells in the mid- to late-nineteenth century show wide disparities. Areas with a sizeable protestant population such as Headfort Place (24%), Castle Street (15%), Market Street and John Street (20%) and Cannon Street (38%), had properties more than four times the value of Fair Green and Gooseberry Lane where only about (8%) were protestant, or Climber Hall where no protestants lived²¹.

The commissioners (established in 1854 by the Town Improvement Act) in charge of the town tried many schemes throughout the nineteenth century to improve living and sanitary conditions for the inhabitants. On the recommendation of one sanitary official the towns poorer cottages were whitewashed to try and quell disease, while in 1860 the Kells Gas Company was established to give light to the town. Water was eventually pumped into the town in the late nineteenth century, directly from the Blackwater, however the lack of a reservoir meant that areas on higher ground did not benefit.

²¹ Ibid. p. 6

3.2 THE WALLED TOWN TODAY

The impact of the town walls is still evident in the urban morphology of Kells. It still defines plot boundaries, with only minor adjustments outside along the streets that led to the five gates. In recent decades, Kells has expanded to the north and south of the historic town centre along the ancient routes outside the town walls. Today, all that remains of the medieval defences are found in two areas of farmland directly to the south of the historic core that have remained undeveloped up until now – the stone walls to the *Frontlands* to the west of the town to the rear of Cannon Street which is overlooked by the mural tower, and the earthen bank of the *Backlands* to the east of the town behind Farrell Street.

The completion of the M3 motorway in 2010 to the south of the town meant that Kells was by-passed by traffic between Dublin and the north of the country. This is an opportunity to enhance the public realm, making it more pleasant for pedestrians, visitors with improved access and settings to its built heritage, along with new workplaces, public services and shops. For the last fifteen years, the *Frontlands* and *Backlands* have been identified as key areas for expansion and development for the town centre of Kells. It is interesting to note that as for the Fairgreen and Headfort Place being the most important sites for extra-mural development in early-modern Kells, its further expansion in the twenty-first century remains defined by the location of the medieval town walls.



10.. GV Du Noyer view of 1865 showing the mural tower and town wall with the spire and round tower from the monastic site in the background. Note breakfront wall to LHS and vegetation, infill wall to 14 & 15 Cannon Street, machicolation and parapet to tower.

4.0 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

The descriptions below are based on a survey carried out in July 2020. It concentrates on the condition of the fabric of the monument, associated stone walls, defensive banks and other historic features found around the walled town. The purpose of the survey is to identify defects and recommend outline repairs and remedial works to improve the condition and presentation of the town wall structures as found.

4.1 SETTING

The town walls of Kells are best described in *The Walled Towns of Ireland* (1992), by Avril Thomas, and Bradley (1987). In summary, the defences consisted of a stone wall, five gates and at least one mural tower, enclosing an area some twenty-one hectares in extent. Today, roughly 200m of the 1650m-long enclosure survives above ground (albeit almost all likely rebuilt), up to four metres in height, with a sole mural tower left standing. There is also 230-250m of likely defensive earthen bank. In area, it is larger than the walled cities of Dublin, Cork or Galway, but smaller than either Drogheda or Kilkenny which have survived in a far more intact state.

The physical evidence for the walled town of Kells is not confined to standing walls, fragments or defensive banks, but also the impact of its alignment in the street layout. Along the west, east and northern sections of the alignment, the streetscape and plot boundaries link between the locations of the former gates; while much of the standing remains are lost, the space that was once occupied by the town defences is possible to read.

A walk along the alignment involves isolated encounters with fragments - stone rubble walls, thick gables to townhouses, ditches and old stone re-used as facings to newer buildings, some of which may survive from the town walls, but which await further research and investigation. In the areas known as the 'Frontlands' and the 'Backlands' along the southern section of the walled town circuit to either side of the former Trim Gate is the best setting to view what remains of the town defences of Kells.



11. View of town wall and mural tower in the Frontlands.



12. Detail of stone wall and concrete block infill.

4.2 SOUTH WALL - CANNON STREET 'FRONTLANDS'

The surviving south western flank of the town wall is to be found to the rear boundaries of the plots to the south side of Cannon Street, an area known as the *Frontlands* in the townland of Townparks. This street leads directly

from the walls to the St Columba's churchyard westwards along the natural ridge and then onwards to Oldcastle.

The section of wall is accessed through back gardens or from a field in private ownership accessed from the car park to the former Abbey House pub. The field is thought to be the site of former St Mary's Abbey, and the ground falls steeply away from the base of the wall to marshy ground either side of a stream, fed by a well dedicated to St Columba.

A section of wall, 83m in length to the rear of ten properties to the south side of Cannon Street terminates at a mural tower. Concrete block infills are found in two sections, one 7m long, the other 16m. Of most concern is a 13m wide breach where fill material from the rear of the former bridewell has fallen over the boundary into the field. The stone walling is built primarily of limestone and sandstone rubble, not dissimilar to the stone used on the mural tower. However, it is uncertain whether these sections belong to the town walls or whether they were erected in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, perhaps by re-using more ancient stones.

The walls to the western end are capped with stone rubble on edge and brickwork, and do not have the appearance of walls with a defensive function. An outbuilding to the rear of 6-7 Cannon Street is built directly on top of the wall alignment, reduced to a height of 1.3m. The next section of wall survives to a height of 4.5m, and has a fieldstone *cock and hen* capping, faced with some dimensioned stone and rubble with large cracks evident.



13. View along wall alignment to rear of Cannon Street.

Next door is the boundary wall of the former bridewell at 8 Cannon Street. At the site visit, this was buried by soil and debris spilling out over the rear boundary and into the field so we were unable to review what survives of the town wall alignment in this location, or whether it has been breached. A short wall section, 2.5m wide is visible at the east end of the plot.

The next section is set approximately 1m in front of the wall alignment to either side, and appears in the foreground of the 1865 view by Du Noyer. It is 25m long encompassing parts of three plots (8-10 Cannon St) is also rubble stone built, with cock and hen capping, and what appears to be an infilled opening, likely a gate with piers to either side. To the rear of 9 Cannon St is blockwork infill. A 3.5m high section forms the rear boundary of 10 Cannon Street, again it is built of stone rubble that includes some better-quality building stone. It appears that much of this wall have been re-built where the SE corner may have survived in its original state. There are extensive areas of mortar loss and cracking, no doubt caused by encroaching tree roots.

Along the next fifteen metres are three plots, with a stone rubble wall almost three metres in height that also appears to have been rebuilt, with a straight joint at the boundary between 12 and 13 Cannon Street. The remaining sixteen metres as far as the mural tower is a low concrete block retaining wall up to 1.3m high. Some building stone can be found in piles in the field below the walls and in the ditches along the rear plots of Suffolk Street. Some of these may once have belonged to the town walls.



14. View of south (external) face of the mural tower in agricultural field.



15. View of north (internal) face of mural tower in private back garden.

4.3 MURAL TOWER

The most prominent and impressive survival of the town walls of Kells is the mural tower, which is located in the rear garden of 16 Cannon Street. It stands to a height of just under eight metres, complete albeit with its parapet eroded. Over half of its external wall surfaces are covered in a thick covering of ivy, although those facing the Frontlands are relatively clear. It has a regular cylindrical form with a slight tapering from base to top. A small mass concrete shed is built on top of the low wall to the east side of the tower, while a lane with fine limestone gate posts is filled with weeds and gives access to the rear of 16 Cannon Street, with a low wall separating it from the garden.

Facing south is an arrow loop at first floor level with a larger opening directly above. The walls are built of relatively flat rubble bedded in courses with wide joints that have lost their mortar almost entirely. There are large voids in the wall, but there is no visible evidence of large cracks or serious structural damage. A machicolation has survived, set over the west side directly over the wall alignment, with an arrow loop (hidden by ivy) below. These features are shown clearly on Du Noyer's sketch. No wall scar indicating the height and width of the former town wall on the western or eastern sides was identified during the inspection, but may be revealed by ivy clearance.

The interior can only be accessed from the rear garden, under a dense covering of ivy from base to parapet. Internally, the extent of debris makes it difficult to assess the condition of the lower levels, or ascertain the floor



16: Detail of arrow loop embrasure to the mural tower.



17. Record of field survey of walled circuit in July 2020. Note possible evidence observed but would require further testing and research.

level. As for the exterior, there is extensive mortar loss, but the walls (1m thick approximately) and their openings have survived albeit in need of consolidation and repair. Some voids and holes could include those that once held floor beams.



18. Detail of arrow loop embrasure to mural tower.

4.4 SOUTH WALL - FARRELL STREET 'BACKLANDS'

While identified by Avril Thomas (1992) as part of the conjectural town wall circuit, the section of town defences forming the boundary to properties on Farrell Street is not described as having any surviving town wall fabric in Thomas, Bradley or Simms. From the field study undertaken in July 2020, the rear of the plots along Farrell Street that overlook the *Backlands* of Kells have features that suggest they were built for defensive purposes.

The bank is a large earthen rampart, c.230-250m long, running roughly south-west to north east, forming the northern boundary of the Backlands. Its maximum height is approximately 2.5m, but it is of unknown width while appearing to be substantial. We were unable to gain access to the other side of the bank. There were indications of a ditch, which due to its large scale is likely to have formed part of the medieval defences. In certain areas the bank is stone-faced, it is unknown if this is medieval or a later rebuilding – possibly a combination of both. The composition of the stone facing is random limestone rubble, not dissimilar to the mural tower.

The bank is heavily overgrown, and a large section close to Bective Street appears to have been removed to enable access to the Backlands. Along with other smaller breaches in the line, there is fencing driven into the bank and areas of rubble strewn about. In some areas the remaining stone facing appears in good condition, while elsewhere it has collapsed. Where the core of the bank has been exposed, it provides evidence of simple earthen composition, much of which is significantly denuded.



19: Likely defensive bank near to Bective Street entrance.



20. a: Indications of a ditch in the Backlands.



21: View looking west along bank in Backlands.



22: View of stone facing in bank with heavy vegetation growth.

5.0 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Guidelines to the Burra Charter state that:

Cultural Significance is a concept which helps in estimating the value of places. The places that are likely to be of significance are those which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations.

There are a variety of categories used to evaluate the level of a place's cultural significance. *Archaeological, Historical, Architectural, Social* and *Artistic* interest categories will be used to assess the significance of the walled town of Kells, Co Meath.

5.1 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST

- Kells is one of the longest continuously occupied urban centres in the country. There were at least four main phases in its development - from its origins as a royal residence in pre-history; an important monastic centre, Anglo-Norman market town; an estate town during the Ascendancy up until the modern era.
- Dating from the eleventh century, the round tower is a highly visible landmark in the town, and the most tangible evidence of the defences of the monastic settlement. Their prime use was likely to have been a belfry, or a prospect to warn of attack, or as a refuge or place to keep treasures secure.



23. Protected view of mural tower, round tower and church steeple.

- Instead of four windows at the cardinal points, its five windows are thought to relate to the five ancient roads into the town that were once guarded by the five former gates.
- The inner monastic enclosure is thought to conform to the high walls to the churchyard of St Columba along Cannon Street and Church Lane. An outer oval-shaped defensive enclosure included present day Fairgreen, Carrick Street and Cross Street continuing on the south side of the plots to Cannon Street.



24. View of the market cross in its original location in ca. 1900.

- The Anglo-Norman walled town of Kells covers an area of twenty-one hectares, which places it among the larger Irish walled towns of that period. It is thought that it encompassed the outer monastic enclosure while extending further to the north east, east and south east to include John Street, Maudlin Street, Farrell Street and Suffolk Street and gates to each of the five roads.
- The medieval street pattern has largely been retained, although later developments and clearances including the loss of all of its gates have made the medieval layout more difficult to interpret on the ground, while appreciating the Georgian streetscape.
- Although Kells has lost most of the standing sections of the former town defences, excavations and research have contributed to our understanding of their design and extent. However, much remains to be discovered.
- The fact that few standing sections of the town wall remain, enhances the significance of surviving remnants, and any that may be discovered in future. It is hoped that they will provide vital information as to the design and original scale of the town defences.
- The sole remaining mural tower, is a fine example of its type and as such, is of national importance.
- The large defensive bank located in the Backlands, if indeed medieval, is rare in an urban Irish context. As a result, the bank and any associated ditch are of national importance.
- The monastery of Columba (Colmille) and its associations with wider Irish and European monasticism is of international importance. In 2010, it was included along with five other sites (Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Glendalough, Inis Cealtra and Monasterboice) on the tentative list of sites for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The high crosses in the town are of international importance. Owing to the significance of the monastery, the section/alignment of the town wall that is on the same footprint as the early medieval monastic boundary is of international importance.



25. Lawrence Collection photo of St Columbn's House ca. 1900.

5.2 HISTORICAL INTEREST

- Kells is one of the longest continuously occupied urban centres in the country. There were at least four main phases in its development from its origins as a royal residence in pre-history; an important monastic centre, Anglo-Norman market town; an estate town during the Ascendancy up until the modern era.
- Kells, in an early medieval context, stands at the forefront of historical importance, both nationally and internationally. The close connection with St. Columba, Iona and the Book of Kells places the town as an exemplar of the wealth, power and artistic value of early medieval monasticism
- Along with nearby historic walled towns of Trim, Navan, Ardee, Athboy and Drogheda - they make a valuable cluster with similarities and differences that provide rich evidence of the medieval period in Ireland, especially frontier towns of the Pale.
- The walls played an important part in the history of Kells, and were essential in its development from a monastic settlement into an Anglo-Norman market town. The mentions of the walls in historical documents align with some of the most important national events in medieval and early modern Ireland.

5.3 ARCHITECTURAL INTEREST

- The former town defences of Kells were a key phase in the development of the town at which time its present urban form was laid down, allowing it to trade and flourish during the late Medieval period.
- The outline of the defences as formed is key to understanding the urban morphology of the town. They define the pattern of the medieval layout of the streets and burgage plots, that have remained largely unaltered despite the walls being mostly removed, and the outskirts being developed in the modern period.
- The mural tower is a well-preserved example of its type, its scale and location suggests that there may have once been several other towers along the circuit, adding to its interest.
- At other walled towns such as Athenry, Youghal, Kilmallock and Fethard, long sections of their walls still stand to this day. Although Kells does not have the same impressive extent of mural remains, it retains evidence of a relatively large town in the Anglo Norman period that was once endowed with five gates, a castle and perhaps several other mural towers.
- Kells has an interesting collection of buildings dating from the early medieval monastic period up to the present, that form a repository of information on evolving styles of Irish architecture and town planning.

- The streets, lanes and historic buildings such as the round tower and St Columb's house give visitors a vivid sense of the historical continuity of the place over fifteen centuries, from the monastic period to the present day.
- Along with Kildare, Kilkenny and Downpatrick, it forms a subset of Irish walled towns where enclosed early medieval ecclesiastical settlements were incorporated into market towns during the Anglo-Norman colonization.
- Its interest and importance to the study of Irish towns is attested by it forming the subject of the Irish Historic Towns Atlas No.4 published in 1990.



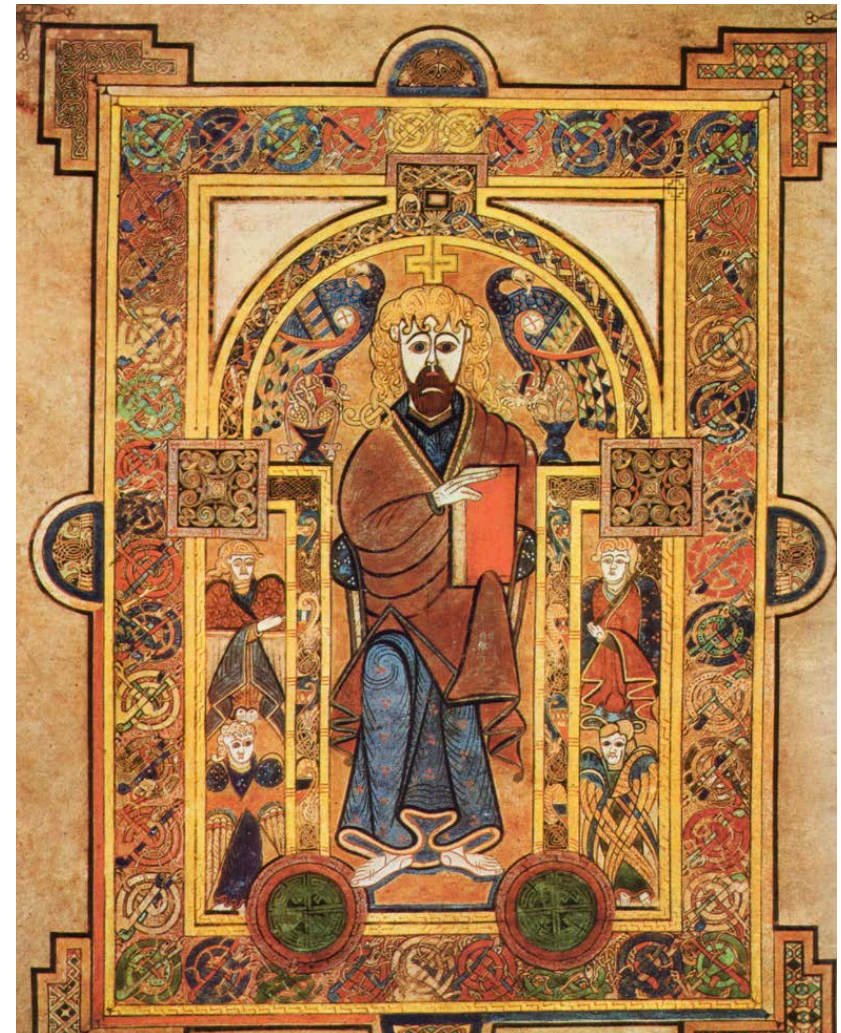
26. View along Cannon Street ca. 1900. Note arched access to mural tower.

5.4 SOCIAL INTEREST

- The former town defences provide evidence of how Irish society was organised from the early medieval period to the present; as well as the ebb and flow of administrative rule.
- The former defensive walls enhance our understanding of Irish society during the medieval period, built to protect an Anglo-Norman market town that grew from a monastery.
- Although the extent and outline of the town walls may not be well understood by the general public, there is a demonstrable sense of pride in Kells medieval heritage as illustrated by the vibrant heritage group and the several initiatives to promote understanding of the heritage of the town.
- The removal of the walls is also of interest, attesting to both developments in warfare technology as well as and social change.

5.5 ARTISTIC INTEREST

- Kells, through its famed illuminated manuscript and collection of five high crosses, represents some of the highest artistic achievements of the early medieval period in Ireland. The Book of Kells is one of the great treasures of medieval Europe.
- George Victor Du Noyer, painter, antiquarian and geologist with the Geological Survey and Ordnance Survey, sketched the view of the mural tower in 1865. The view is instructive as to the condition and extent of the south wall at that time, as well as capturing a picturesque setting that survives relatively unchanged to this day.



27: Illustration of seated Christ from the Book of Kells.

5.6 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Kells was founded by St. Columba (Colmcille) in the sixth century, on the site of an earlier *dún*. It remained an important ecclesiastical site until the second half of the twelfth century when it was settled by the Anglo-Normans. Later, it became an important frontier town on the northwest boundary of the Pale, evolving into a prosperous estate town in the early modern period. Its inner monastic enclosure is thought to encompass the walls of the present church precinct, while its outer enclosure was adapted and extended to form a larger town wall circuit in the Anglo-Norman period.

Although a sizeable settlement with a rich legacy artistic and built heritage from the monastic period, along with many other towns in Ireland, little of its former town defences have survived. Evolving knowledge of the medieval heritage of the walled town will remain a subject of interest and debate. Kells is an interesting example of an Anglo-Norman town founded on early medieval or even pre-historic foundations, containing evidence of over eleven centuries of continuous occupation. The town walls and Anglo-Norman heritage of Kells as a frontier town of the Pale deserves to be better known by locals, and more vividly presented to visitors. It makes a valuable contribution to a place that is arguably of international cultural significance.

6.0 DEFINING ISSUES & ASSESSING VULNERABILITY

6.1 HERITAGE PLANNING CONTEXT

The town walls of Kells are protected under national legislation and statutory guidance. These include the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004, the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2013 and the Kells Development Plan 2013-2020. Other state and local government initiatives such as the National Policy on Town Defences, the County Meath Heritage Plan 2015-2020 and the Kells Community Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2020 also have a bearing on any proposed policies and actions in this conservation management plan. Consideration is also required of the following directives and acts dealing with natural heritage: the European Birds (1979) and Habitats (1992) directives, Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011, the Wildlife Acts 1976, and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000-2010.

6.1.1 NATIONAL MONUMENTS ACTS 1930-2004

The town defences of Kells are listed in the Record of Monuments and Places (ME017-044-004-). As a result, the property is protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004. When the owner or occupier of a property, or any other person, proposes to carry out any work at, or in relation to, a recorded monument, they are required to give notice in

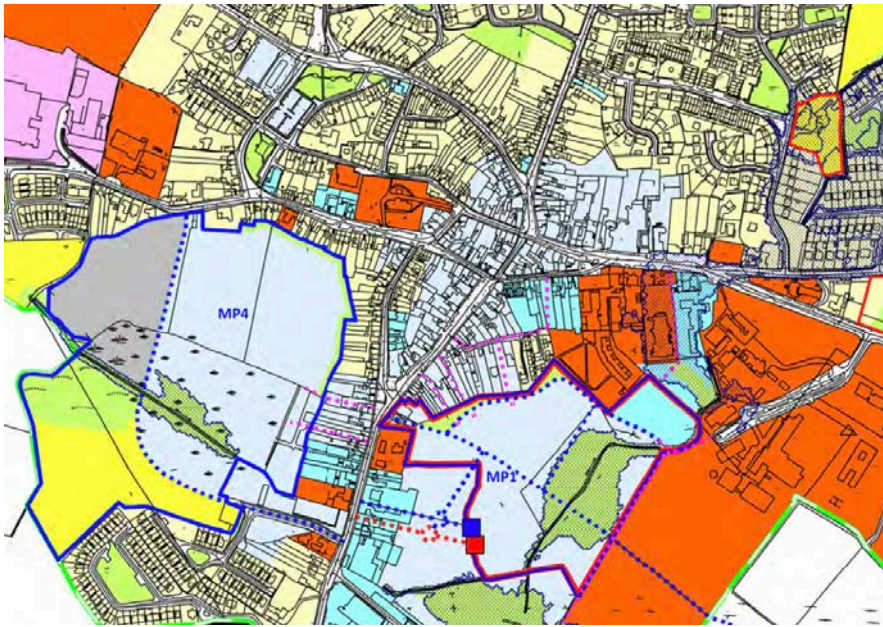
writing to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage two months before commencing any work. For a national monument in the ownership or guardianship of a local authority, the written consent of the Minister is required for any works at the monument. The full course of the town wall is located within the Zone of Archaeological Potential. Any proposed works to the town walls would require the consent of the Minister.

6.1.2 PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACTS 2000-2013

The surviving mural tower is listed as a protected structure (KT017-020). The line of the town walls lies fully within two Architectural Conservation Areas (ACA). The vast majority of the town walls is located in the Kells Historic Core Architectural Conservation Area. A small section lies within the Headfort Place Architectural Conservation Area. Any development that would materially affect the character of an Architectural Conservation Area will require planning permission as set out in Section 82 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2013.

6.1.3 KELLS DEVELOPMENT PLAN

In the adopted maps included in the Kells Development Plan 2013-2019, the Frontlands and Backlands sites are zoned B1 Commercial/ Town Centre (MP1 & MP4), and being open, green field sites are important to the strategy for growth of the urban core of Kells. The zoning indicates a green buffer along the alignment which will help protect and conserve the natural and built heritage. This buffer zone is also indicated on the Green



28. Extract from development plan map.

Infrastructure Map No. 4. New distributor routes are indicated for both MP1 and MP4, which will need to take cognizance of both visible and buried archaeology, including that of St Mary's Abbey. It should be noted that on the basemap used for the town, the mural tower is incorrectly referred to as a ruin associated with St Mary's Abbey.

The written statement of the development plan recognises the importance of the town walls. The plan states that where works are planned that will affect the fabric of the defences, or any ground disturbance in proximity to

the defences, early consultation with the Architectural Conservation Officer of Meath County Council is advisable and both the National Monuments Service and Architectural Heritage Advisory Unit at the Department of Heritage. There are two distinct policies dealing with the defences and one objective focusing on the protection of the town wall alignment:

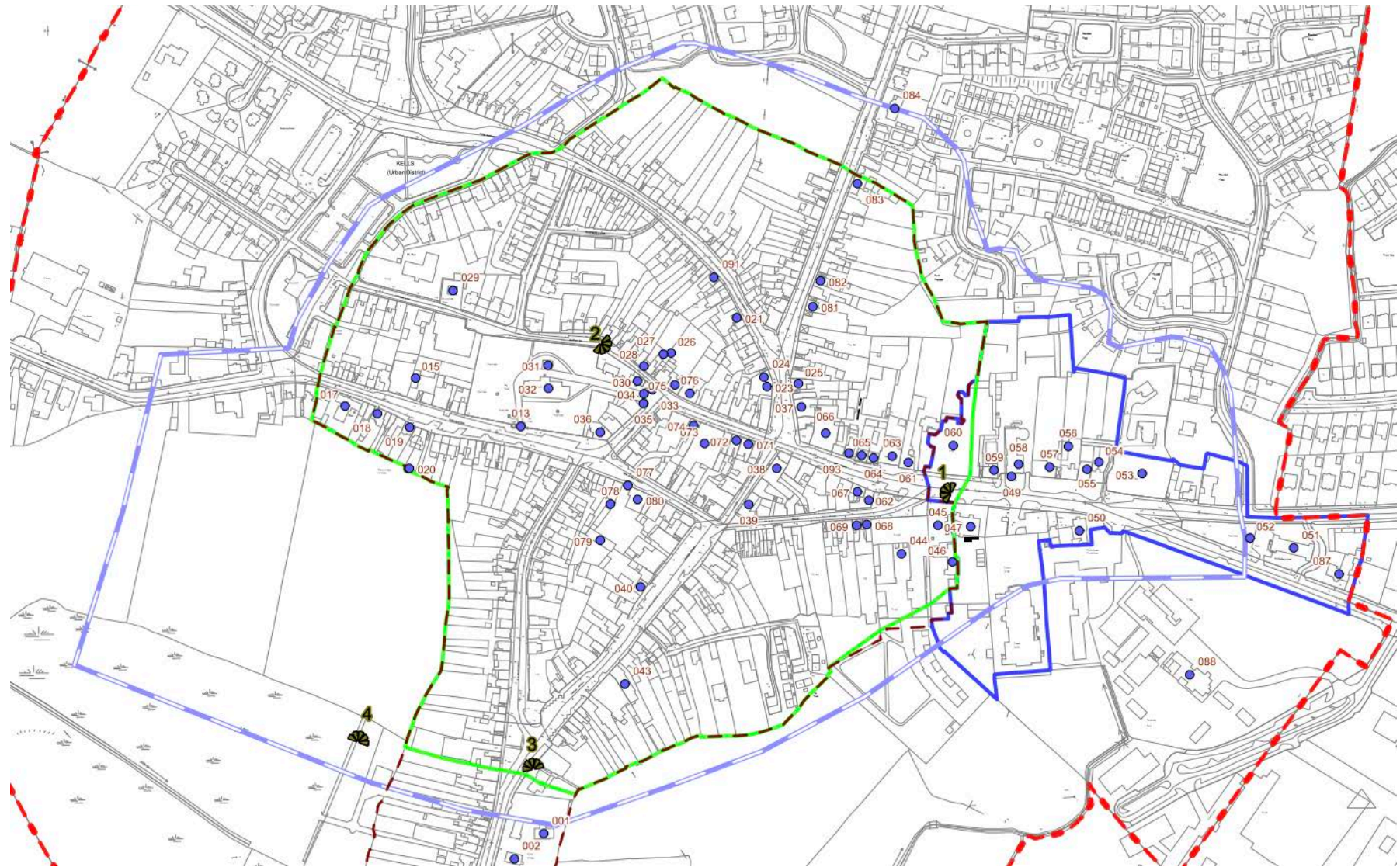
HER POL 15 *To protect the integrity and setting of the Kells town wall defences to include all walls (whether ancient or on the line of ancient walls), gates, towers, earthen banks, fosses (ditches), bastions, outworks and other features.*

HER POL 16 *To encourage the enhancement of the setting of town defences and the improvement of signage and public utilities structures, etc. where these affect the visual amenity of the defences.*

HER OBJ 10 *To protect the site of the medieval town wall alignment as an area of high archaeological sensitivity from new development through the implementation of a buffer zone which will be assessed site by site.*

The town walls are also part of a protected view in the town (View No. 4). The context for most of the views, including the one involving the town walls revolves around protecting the integrity of the setting of the Round Tower and Monastic Site which is on Ireland's tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

HER OBJ 3 *View No. 4: View from proposed town centre expansion in the Frontlands towards the Mural Tower of the Kells Town Wall, the Round Tower and St. Columba's Church. The manner in which this view shall be framed and protected shall be indicated in the agreed Framework Plan.*



29. Kells Development Plan map showing wealth of built and archaeological heritage; green dotted line – conjectural town wall; dashed maroon line – ACA; purple line – Zone of Archaeological Potential; blue line – ACA; blue dots- protected structures; yellow fans – protected views.

The Kells Development Plan 2013-2019 is explicit in its position on the protection of Kells' archaeological heritage.

HER POL 6 *To protect (in-situ where practicable or as a minimum, preservation by record) all monuments included in the Record of Monuments and Places (including those newly discovered).*

To seek to protect, where practicable, the setting of and access to sites and in securing such protection Meath County Council will have regard to advice and recommendations of the Department of the Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

To require archaeological assessment where it is considered a development could have an effect on a recorded monument, zone of archaeological potential or as yet undefined element of archaeological heritage or their setting.

HER OBJ 11 *To promote archaeological heritage as a resource for educational and tourism purposes and to increase public awareness about Kells archaeological heritage.*

The Kells Development Plan 2013-2019 is explicit in its position on the protection of Kells architectural heritage, in particular protected structures.

HER POL 7. *To conserve, protect and enhance the architectural heritage of Kells and to enhance that new development makes a positive contribution to the historic character of Kells.*

HER POL 14

- *To resist demolition of protected structures, in whole or in part;*
- *To resist removal or modification of features of architectural importance;*
- *To resist interventions that would negatively affect the character of a structure, either externally or internally, and;*
- *To resist development that would adversely affect the setting of a protected structure.*

It is a policy of the Kells Development Plan 2013-2019 to preserve the character of Architectural Conservation Areas. As previously noted, the line of the town walls lies fully within the Historic Core and Headfort Place ACAs.

HER POL 8. *To preserve the character of the following Architectural Conservation Areas in Kells:*

- *Historic Core ACA;*
- *Headfort Place ACA*

The early medieval monastic site in Kells has been nominated by the Irish Government in the draft new Tentative List for UNESCO World Heritage Status. It is grouped in a category of six settlements of Early Medieval Monastic Sites. As much of the northwest line of the town wall is thought to follow the line of the early medieval monastic enclosure, this conservation management plan will have to allow for the possible inscription of the monastic site and the creation of a buffer zone into its policies and actions. There are two policies in the development plan concerning the inscription of Kells on the UNESCO list of world heritage sites is of relevance to the management of the town walls.

HER POL 12 *To support, promote and encourage the nomination of the Columban Monastic Site in Kells for designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site status.*

HER POL 13 *To protect the tentative World Heritage Site in Kells from inappropriate development.*

The Kells Development Plan 2013-2019 has a particularly strong set of policies and objectives concerning the protection and enhancement of the town's natural heritage. These include:

HER POL 3 *To protect and enhance the quality of the natural heritage of Kells and to safeguard it as a resource in its own right and ensure that future generations can understand and appreciate their heritage.*

HER OBJ 5 *To provide protection to all legally protected plant and animal species.*

HER OBJ 6 *To protect, and where possible, minimise the impact of new development on habitats of biodiversity value that are features of the town's ecological network. These features include tree lines, groups of trees and veteran trees, old walls, parkland, hedgerows, intertidal areas, rivers, streams and wetlands.*

HER OBJ 7 *In association with HER OBJ 2 - 5, the respective Planning Authority will; ...ii) Carry out appropriate level of ecological/environmental assessment for all proposed plans and projects to ensure the implementation of the policies set out above.*

HER OBJ 8 *Meath County Council will consult with the prescribed bodies and appropriate government agencies, when considering, undertaking or authorising developments or other activities which are likely to affect protected sites or species.*

Other relevant policies and objectives in the Kells Development Plan 2013-2019 (2013) include:

HER POL 1 *To protect and enhance the quality of the natural and built heritage of Kells, to safeguard it as a resource in its own right and ensure that future generations can understand and appreciate their heritage.*

HER POL 2 *To interpret and promote the importance and cultural significance of natural and built environment and its potential in the promotion of tourism and enhancing the image of Kells as a place to live and visit.*

6.1.4 NATIONAL POLICY ON TOWN DEFENCES

This document provides clarity concerning the management of a large monument type that may have over time become fractured. It states that:

The known and expected circuits of the defences (both upstanding and buried, whether of stone or embankment construction) and associated features of all town defences are to be considered a single national monument and treated as a unit for policy and management purposes.

Town defences are *monuments* as defined in the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 and are protected under the provisions of this legislation. Town defences are also protected under the Planning and Development Act 2000

where listed as protected structures or within architectural conservation areas.

6.1.5 COUNTY MEATH HERITAGE PLAN 2015-2020

Although there is no specific action in the heritage plan relating to the town walls, the conservation and presentation of the defences are in keeping with themes three, four and five of that document:

- Strategic theme 3: Promote best practice in the conservation and management of heritage assets in Co Meath.
- Strategic theme 4: Work in partnership with local communities and other key stakeholders to actively engage with, enjoy and care for our heritage.
- Strategic theme 5: Promote heritage as resource to contribute to quality of life, and cultural and economic development in Meath.

6.1.6 KELLS COMMUNITY BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN 2016-2020

Although the plan does not specifically address the town walls, any conservation work to the walls should be in keeping with the ethos of the plan to protect and enhance biodiversity within the town.

6.1.7 WILDLIFE PROTECTION

Protection to a number of species and designated landscapes is provided under the European Birds (1979) and Habitats (1992) directives, Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2011, the Wildlife Acts 1976 and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000-2010. Where development is proposed that impacts upon a protected species or place, a derogation license must be sought from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. Although there are no designated sites in the line of the town walls, protected species (e.g. bats) may be impacted by proposed works.

6.2 OWNERSHIP & USE

The conjectural wall circuit passes through lands such as public roads and open space which are the responsibility of the local authority. There are numerous private landowners of dwellings, commercial properties, farmland, around the circuit where the conjectural line of the wall forms boundaries, on both the internal and external sides, or passes underneath their property. This makes access to the walls and responsibility for their care complex, involving negotiation and collaboration between all of the stakeholders. Parts of the line fall within areas that are scheduled for future development, known as the Frontlands and the Backlands in the Kells Development Plan 2013-2019, and will require ministerial consent as they are located within the Zone of Archaeological Potential (ZAP).

6.3 BUILT HERITAGE

6.3.1 MURAL TOWER

Of most concern in relation to the conservation of the town walls is the condition of the mural tower. The stonework joints are extensively washed out, with large voids evident to the exterior and erosion of the embrasures internally. The parapets are uneven and require closer inspection to determine the extent of loss and necessary repairs. Encroaching ivy and trees will need to be addressed as a matter of urgency to prevent further losses, both externally and internally.

6.3.2 FRONTLANDS (CANNON STREET) WALL SECTION

The masonry retaining along the properties to the rear of Cannon Street to either side shows wide variation. Other than the mural tower it is unlikely that any of the visible masonry sections have survived from the medieval period. However, they sit along the line of the defensive circuit, and provide a context for the tower. The material used is also very likely to have been taken from the original medieval town wall, being rebuilt to fortify the alignment or later to re-establish a property boundary.

Along their entire length there is damage caused by general neglect and invasive vegetation including ivy, trees and shrubs. There are also sections where gaps have been infilled with concrete blocks, and a wide plot has subsided to the rear of the former Garda station (RIC barracks/ bridewell). Areas of wall are unstable and at risk of further collapse, or loss of masonry.



30: Detail showing exposed side with no visible evidence of wall scar.

While these walls may not be medieval, many are nonetheless of historic importance and require assessment by conservation experts and consolidation by skilled masons trained in the use of lime mortar and traditional techniques. In order to repair the walls, extensive clearance, treatment of ivy and encroachment of trees, immediately followed by consolidation and repair of the masonry will be necessary.

Consideration should be given to reinstating rubble masonry along the alignment, replacing breaches and concrete block infill, in order to improve the setting of the mural tower and reinforcing the alignment.



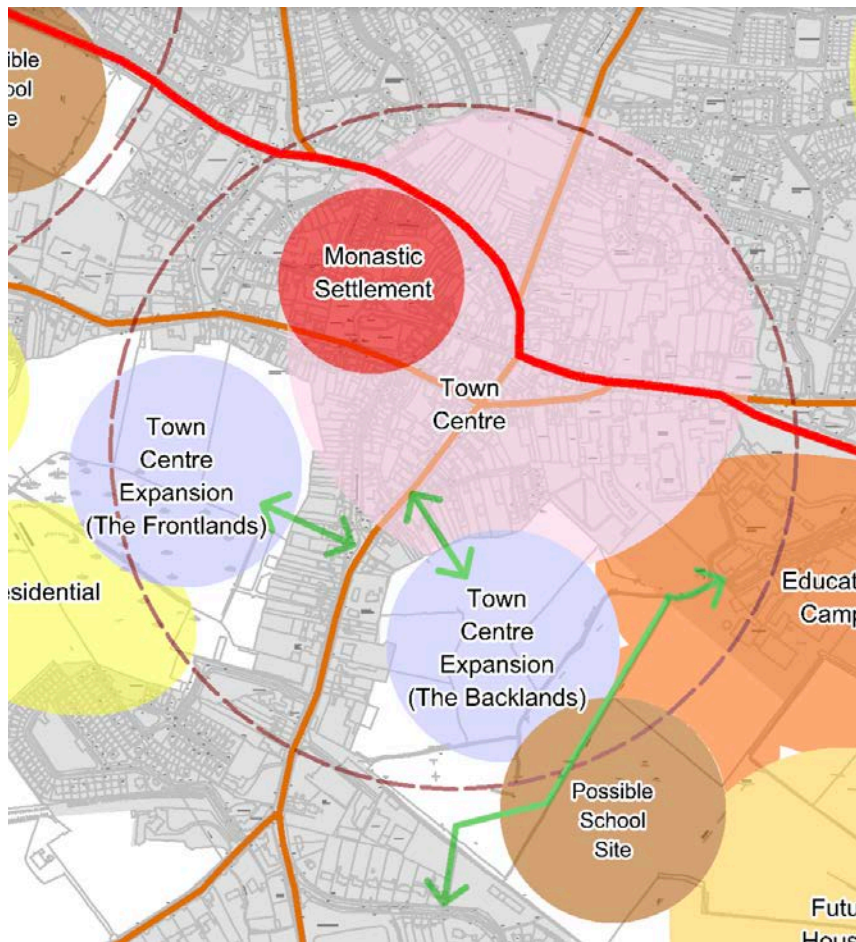
31. Carrying out survey along the wall circuit.

6.3.3 BACKLANDS MEDIEVAL TOWN BANK

During fieldwork we encountered a large bank forming the northern boundary of the Backlands, along with indications of a ditch. Due to its large scale it is likely that this formed part of medieval defences of Kells. In certain areas the bank is stone-faced. It is unknown if this stone facing is medieval or later rebuild – possibly a combination of both. A large section of the bank close to Bective Street appears to have been removed to enable access to the Backlands.

The bank is heavily overgrown. In addition to the probable medieval material removed to facilitate access to Bective Street, there are other smaller breaches in the line. There are several fence posts driven into the bank and areas of rubble both beside and over the bank. In some areas the remaining stone facing appears in good condition. In other areas the stone facing is mostly collapsed. Where the core of the bank has been exposed, it provides evidence of simple earthen composition. Most of the bank is significantly denuded.

In order to protect this probable medieval bank, existing breaches should be infilled where possible, and any additional damage prevented, along with fly-tipping. To allow this to happen the relevant property owners must be notified as to their responsibilities under the statutory protections provided to the monument. It is vital that any development planned for the Backlands is designed to protect both the fabric and setting of the monument.



32. Extract from zoning strategy map in development plan.

6.4 ACCESS & SETTINGS

Issues such as access, health and safety and rights-of-way present challenges to the interpretation of the former wall circuit. These can be overcome to some extent in a number of ways by means of interpretation and presentation, and by proper management and consultation. Parking is available in many places around the town, including close to the monastic site, which is a natural place to start and finish a walled town tour. Restrictions on access to different sections of the wall outline should be made clear to those undertaking the tour to avoid disappointment, as well as to manage expectations on the extent of the walls surviving. Establishing a route that follows the wall circuit as close as is possible will be an important strategic initiative that will enhance the experience of the heritage of Kells and assist in the protection and conservation of the walls into the future. It will also both enhance and protect the distinctiveness of the medieval town core of Kells. This will involve extensive consultation and the cooperation of the various stakeholders.

6.5 HEALTH & SAFETY

Given the current setting and condition of the town defences, health and safety are an important consideration to ensure that locals and visitors are made aware of the risks, and that adequate management procedures are in place, and steps taken to address areas of concern. In the Frontlands, the recent breach demonstrates that the retaining walls and infill sections have considerable structural issues. Aside from its condition, the mural

tower is filled with debris and not safe for visitors. The Frontlands consist of private farmland used for grazing cattle,

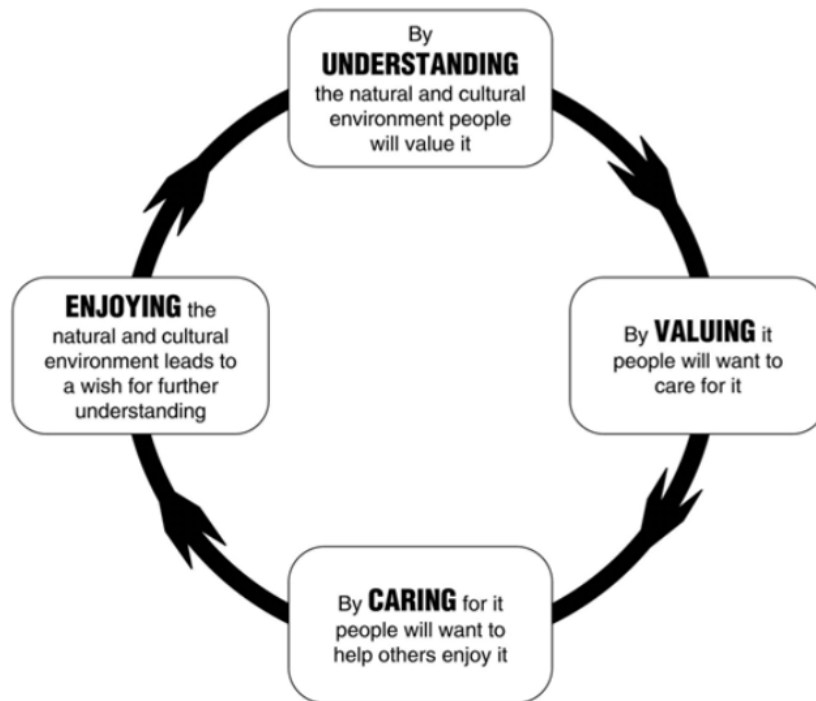
6.6 INTERPRETATION

The town walls of Kells are of national importance. Indeed, where the walls follow the alignment of the early medieval settlement, they are of

international importance as part of a possible UNESCO World Heritage Site. Unfortunately, its status as such is under threat from a pattern of development that has demolished most of the medieval defences and obscured much of the route over the last three centuries. Within this, the promotion of heritage and its interpretation have essential roles to play. Strong, incisive interpretation has the ability to allow people to make meaningful connections to the story of the walls and the medieval town. This in turn leads to an increase in the level of interest in its management and advocacy for its protection, while enhancing its enjoyment.

The key objective of the interpretation strategy within this document is to improve the breadth and depth of understanding of the medieval heritage of Kells, especially concerning the town walls. The most important audience are the locals as custodians of the medieval heritage. Although overall awareness from locals of historic Kells appears high, greater knowledge would lead to a more resilient cultural landscape.

The next audience of importance are visitors to Kells. In order to provide an economic return from the town walls and other medieval fabric, adequate heritage interpretation actions are required to help connect visitors with the medieval past of Kells and enhance their enjoyment of the town. This will increase both the quantity of sightseers and their dwell time.



33. Cultural Heritage Virtuous Circle diagram Godden Mackay Logan Ltd., 2008)



34. Historic trail map showing former locations of town gates but not mural tower or surviving wall sections,

The lack of visibility and the alterations to their setting makes the walls difficult to interpret. The numerous historic sites and buildings that are contained within its boundary have complex development histories that need to be presented in a coherent way. Future development of the Frontlands and Backlands sites is an opportunity to present the walled town heritage of Kells in a coherent way, as part of the public realm.

Design of high-quality interpretative material is essential for greater public understanding of the Kells. The current provision of interpretation on the towns walls is very limited, and enhanced displays could be hosted within the existing tourism and cultural hub in the former courthouse. An exhibit at the hub could be supplemented with information panels or markers erected at key locations around the circuit. While built heritage from the monastic period such as the round tower, high crosses, and the elegant buildings from the Georgian period are impressive, the town walls have the potential to tell the story of Kells as a frontier town, a theme presented in *Ireland's Ancient East* interpretive material.

Kells benefits from its position among numerous sites of historic interest in County Meath representing different periods. Kells forms an important hub on the Boyne Valley Drive which includes the UNESCO World Heritage Site at Brú na Bóinne, and several important Anglo Norman walled towns at Navan, Trim, Drogheda. Interpretive resources available such as the Kells App and the Kells Historic Trail initiatives could be adjusted to include more information on the town walls. While the theme of Kells as a frontier town is presented in texts, the surviving town walls are not represented on the heritage trail, most likely due to a lack of access. Conjectural locations for

the former town gates are shown on the map, where little visual evidence remains, which may be confusing to visitors if the context is not explained.

6.7 VULNERABILITIES & THREATS

In relation to the issues outlined above, the vulnerability of the archaeological heritage can be summarised as set out below:

Preservation

- Interventions may be necessary to provide improved access, or to repair or stabilise surviving sections of the town defences. This work needs to be informed by current best practice, be reversible and should not detract from the setting of the monument.
- The complex ownership of the walls can make it difficult to assign responsibilities for their maintenance, as well as obtaining access for their inspection and presentation. It also makes it difficult to carry out archaeological investigations, even using non-invasive methodologies, on private properties in built-up areas.
- Where sections do survive, some parts of the town wall walls are in a vulnerable state, and will require significant repairs and consolidation.
- Defects when left unchecked can bring about rapid deterioration, resulting in considerable financial loss that can be avoided by a regime of routine maintenance.

- As presented in the Kells Town Development Plan, any future development must be carefully designed to protect the surviving fabric of the town walls, its alignment and setting.

Understanding

- At present, the focus on the monastic and eighteenth-century aspects of Kells built heritage is understandable, being the most prevalent and visible. The period in between, following the colonization of the Anglo Normans, is best represented by the street layout and town walls. However, this important aspect is less well-understood due to the lack of upstanding remains, as well as precise knowledge of the location of the walls.
- The remains along the wall circuit may be located under current ground levels on private properties or along boundaries, so our knowledge is confined to evidence gleaned from historic maps and documentary records, or where archaeological testing follows development of sites.
- While the lack of knowledge about the precise location and condition of the wall circuit is a significant threat to its preservation, statutory protections and planning policies already in place create a robust legal framework facilitating the protection of the surviving sections of town wall and its probable alignment.

7.0 CONSERVATION & MANAGEMENT POLICIES

7.1 APPROACH & OBJECTIVES

All conservation works are guided by the principle of *minimum intervention* as set out in the Burra Charter – or *as little as possible, but as much as is necessary*.

The conservation and management objectives for Kells Walled Town can be summarised as follows:

- to provide guidance on best conservation practice for the preservation of the built heritage; the mural tower, surviving wall sections, the conjectural alignment, and all associated earthworks and buried archaeology
- to provide for the effective management of the flora and fauna, including timely treatment of invasive species, and assessment of the impact of the natural heritage on the cultural heritage to find the correct balance
- to set out an approach as to how to improve access to the town walls to locals and visitors, as well as the presentation of the cultural heritage
- to increase knowledge, awareness and understanding of the town walls, including its several phases; Gaelic; monastic; Anglo Norman and Georgian era; and their importance to the development of Kells
- identify key messages and themes to be communicated to visitors

- ensure that interpretations of the built and cultural heritage of the walled town are well-researched and engaging
- to provide for the use of the settings of the town walls as a cultural, amenity and educational resource
- ensure that the town walls are accessible to as many people as possible, but not to the detriment of its built heritage or to the safety and health of the public
- to maintain the town walls, seeking capital funding for repairs and the enhancement of its setting
- to promote the town walls as a heritage asset for Kells, making links and forming networks with the many other heritage sites in the county and region in *Ireland's Ancient East*

7.2 CONSERVATION POLICIES

7.2.1 PROTECTION OF BUILT HERITAGE

Ensure the protection of the built heritage through its maintenance and repair and the preservation and improvement of its settings. Repair works are to be prioritised in terms of urgency (physical stability, public safety), and informed by regular inspection and expert advice. Views towards nearby landmarks such as the round tower, church steeple and St Columb's House should be preserved.

7.2.2 PROTECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE (BURIED)

Non-intrusive methods of archaeological investigation should predominate, combined with traditional excavation only where justified by a comprehensive research and best conservation practice. A research framework should be created and piecemeal impacts to the buried archaeology are to be avoided. Any proposed excavation should have a strong rationale and be designed to contribute to the understanding and interpretation of medieval Kells.

7.2.3 PROTECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE (BURIED)

The buried archaeology should be disturbed as little as possible so that it can be preserved intact. Provide physical protection where appropriate.

7.2.4 PROTECTION OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL HERITAGE (ABOVE GROUND)

As a protected structure within an ACA, and national monuments, the mural tower and wall alignments in the Frontlands and Backlands should be conserved by implementing urgent programmes of repair and maintenance, together with the preservation of their settings. The opportunity should be taken during the works to determine whether they contain medieval masonry or sit on the foundations of the former town wall. Ensure that any actions, or any other works proposed in the vicinity of the monument, do not cause damage to the walls and the defensive bank.

7.2.5 PROTECTION OF NATURAL HERITAGE

An ecology study is required for the defensive bank at the Backlands. Carry out a habitat study for the town wall settings, with an aim to increase

species diversity. Avoid the use of herbicides, seeking to maintain the planting on a seasonal rather than a weekly/monthly basis. Ensure that any works proposals for the walls are informed by an arboricultural impact assessment.

7.2.6 REPAIR & MAINTENANCE

Provide regular on-going maintenance as the most effective way to preserve historic structures and landscapes. Repairs to historic fabric should be carried out using conservation methodologies that conform to the guiding principles as set out in the ICOMOS charters, using appropriate details and materials of matching quality. Conservation should proceed to an overall strategy for repair and maintenance of built and natural heritage.

7.2.7 URGENT WORKS

The condition of the mural tower is of most concern. Strategic tree removal and careful sequencing of specialist repair works will be required to ensure that the risks to the safety of the public, and preservation of this survival of the town defences are addressed.

7.2.8 INTERVENTION

Where interventions are found to be necessary to improve access, or to conserve a structure, they are to be designed to the highest conservation standards and should not detract from the interpretation of the built heritage. Future projects should be focussed on conserving and improving access to historic features such as the mural tower and the wall alignments in the Frontlands and Backlands, with each initiative seen as a learning

opportunity in order to come to a fuller understanding of the cultural heritage of the walled town.

7.2.9 USE

The preservation of sections of town defences and settings at the Frontlands and Backlands is likely due to their continued use as farmland up until the present day. Suitable uses should be identified for the settings of the surviving town defences in order to ensure their preservation.

7.2.10 REVERSIBILITY

All interventions should follow the principle of the reversibility, so that a structure or site can be returned to its former state where possible.

7.2.11 EXPERT ADVICE & SKILLS

Continue to ensure that all conservation works are carried out under the direction of suitably qualified professionals (specialist conservators, conservation architects and structural engineers) and undertaken only by suitably skilled and experienced artisans and tradesmen.

7.2.12 CONSULTATION

Consultation with stakeholders regarding proposed interventions to the town walls and mural tower is important given their private ownership.

7.2.13 SETTINGS & KEY VIEWS

Protect and enhance the settings of the built heritage including the protected view (no. 4) from the Frontlands towards the mural tower with the round tower and steeple tower in the background. New developments

should not negatively impact on existing monuments and settings through their placement, scale and design.

7.2.14 FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

As the Frontlands and Backlands are included in the Kells Development Plan zoned as suitable for 'town centre' development, it is essential that the town wall alignment is maintained, and the surviving historic fabric conserved and presented as part of the new public realm.

7.2.15 ENCROACHMENT & INVASIVE SPECIES

In their present context being secluded and at a remove from the town's streets, the surviving wall sections and mural tower is at risk of encroachment by trees, shrubs and ivy, along with invasive plant species establishing in quiet corners unseen. Monitoring and treatment should be undertaken, using best practice by avoiding the use of herbicides and reducing potential impacts on the environment and built heritage. Buddleia proliferates on adjacent vacant properties, and this can cause extensive damage to structures if not treated and removed promptly.

7.3 MANAGEMENT POLICIES

7.3.1 CONSERVATION PLAN REVIEW

Review this Plan at agreed intervals (every 6-years to coincide with Development Plans or Local Area Plans) to benchmark progress in

implementation, re-assess priorities, assimilate new information or changes in legislation or methodologies. This overview reduces the risk of cumulative impacts due to incremental change without an agreed plan.

7.3.2 LICENSING & APPROVALS

Any archaeological investigation will need to be licensed, notice for works will need to be sent to the National Monuments Services two months in advance of works commencing in accordance with the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004.

7.3.3 INSPECTIONS

Set in place procedures for on-going monitoring of the condition of the walls to ensure their long-term preservation.

7.3.4 DEPTH IN TIME

Ensure that the conservation and preservation of the built and cultural heritage of Kells Walled Town requires that all the aspects that contribute to its cultural significance be valued.

7.3.5 RESEARCH & KNOWLEDGE GAPS

Ensure that on-site archaeological research is governed by an approved research strategy that seeks to answer specific questions, using non-invasive methodologies followed by targeted excavation, when opportunities and resources allow.

Ensure that the dissemination of research findings, in a variety of media involving the community where possible, is made accessible to the public.

Seek to develop a research framework addressing gaps in the current knowledge of the town defences of Kells. Undertake archaeological assessments to determine the extent of the walled circuit and its gates.

7.3.6 WIDER ASSOCIATIONS

Historic places and sites should not be considered in isolation, but rather as parts of a wider cultural landscape, where each element relates to the other. This is particularly important in Kells and County Meath which are rich repositories of built heritage with strong associations between sites through each period of history.

7.3.7 AUTHENTICITY

Ensure that the importance of continuity and change in the proper understanding of the built heritage is communicated to the general public. This is particularly important for Kells, given its ancient origins and where its Anglo-Norman town walls have been reduced to remnants.

7.3.8 OWNERSHIP

Consider rights of private owners in relation to the access, conservation and presentation of the archaeological heritage. Public access and preservation of the town walls will require the cooperation and understanding of landowners in partnership with the local authority.

7.3.9 PUBLIC SAFETY

Prioritise public safety in relation to the seclusion of the sites, overhanging branches, uneven ground, the close proximity and condition of the

monuments. However, the present condition of the mural tower is of primary concern, and will require a programme of specialist works.

7.3.10 LEAVE NO TRACE

Visitors to the walled town sections and mural tower are to be informed of their shared responsibility for its conservation by avoiding activities or behaviour that put it at risk. This would include but not limited to littering, vandalism, graffiti, unauthorised access, lighting fires, ground disturbance or anything that would cause disturbance to other visitors or the local community.

7.3.11 INTERPRETIVE FACILITIES

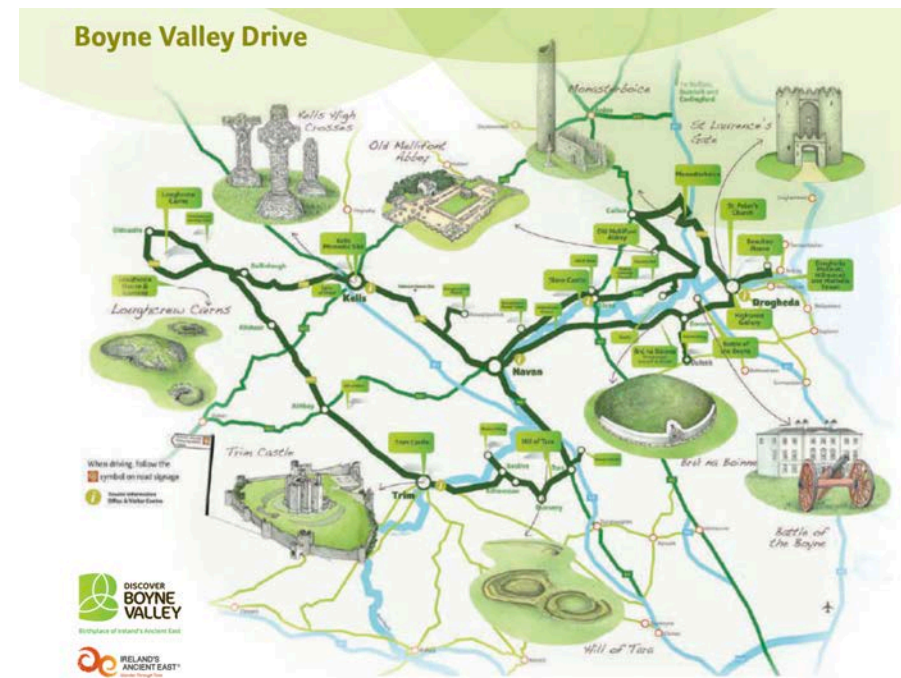
Update interpretative signage, designed in accordance with an overall masterplan, so that the general public can more meaningfully interpret the cultural heritage represented by the town defences. Signs should be well-designed and located so as not to detract from their setting. The current heritage trail could be updated to show the conjectural town wall layout as well as the surviving sections, along with the gate sites that are shown at present.

7.3.12 MARKING THE ALIGNMENT

Where the conjectural wall circuit is located in the public realm, the line of the wall should be marked with stone paving or lighting. This would be particularly effective at the gate locations to mark the outer limits of the medieval town to the public, or for those following the heritage trail. A paving stone could be inscribed with a description of the feature and a location map identifying its location along the wall circuit.

7.3.13 ACCESS TO NATURAL & LANDSCAPE HERITAGE

Suitable signage and infrastructure to encourage biodiversity, should be provided. A planting scheme and management plan should be prepared for inclusion in an overall masterplan, to enhance the settings of the town walls at such time they are made accessible and part of the public realm.



35: Boyne Valley Drive map with Kells represented as collection of high crosses..

7.3.14 FORMAL & INFORMAL LEARNING

Ensure that the presentation of the cultural heritage of Kells Walled Town is aimed at as broad an audience as possible, the primary audience being the residents of Kells.

7.3.15 ON-GOING INTERPRETATION

As knowledge and understanding of the town defences grows and changes through further research and investigations, ensure that interpretation media are updated accordingly.

7.3.16 INAPPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS

Whenever possible, inappropriate interventions along the town wall alignment should be removed. The integrity of the town wall should be reinforced where necessary, replacing later additions such as fencing or blockwork with stonework that minimizes impact on the archaeological heritage and enhance, rather than detract from, their settings.

7.3.17 DEVELOPMENT PLAN OR LOCAL AREA PLAN MAPS

Include the conjectural outline of the wall in future development plan maps (in addition to the Zone of Archaeological Potential) and other local authority publications to reinforce understanding of the extent and location of the walls to the general public and to aid forward planning for service providers and building professionals.

7.3.18 SETTINGS & KEY VIEWS

Protect and enhance the settings of the monuments and key views through planning policies and development plans. This is required for both standing

monuments and buried archaeology, and is especially relevant to the Frontlands and Backlands.

7.3.19 SUSTAINABILITY

Ensure that all events and initiatives in relation to the cultural and natural heritage of the walled town of Kells are carried out in accordance with sustainable practices.

7.3.20 OUTREACH & PARTICIPATION

Support initiatives that promote understanding of the archaeological heritage and that communicate its cultural significance. The stakeholders will seek to participate in and promote the aims of the Irish Walled Towns Network and the Walled Towns Friendship Circle.

Encourage local schools to use the walled town as a teaching resource. Field trips could be managed by appointment and would have relevance to history and civics subjects.

8.0 CONSERVATION & ACCESS STRATEGIES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to conserve the historic town walls of Kells, the local authority has an essential role as guardians of the National Monument on behalf of the state. This includes - arranging for their maintenance and repair; applying for grant assistance and statutory approvals; procuring expert advice and skills; continuing robust and informed planning and statutory protection policies; promoting improved knowledge of the town walls; ensuring that policies are implemented and enforced where necessary.

This Plan is intended to provide a framework for future initiatives, for conserving the built heritage and improving access and interpretation of the town walls are presented. It makes recommendations on how change is to be managed in the best interests of the monument; outlining ideas for how the town defences could better be understood and presented, with initiatives proposed at key sites around the town that address different aspects of the town walls. The promotion of the medieval heritage should seek to be inclusive and authentic, while also being imaginative and playful so that the living heritage can be presented alongside the preserved remnants of the past.

From a Gaelic royal site; monastery; a town on the Anglo-Norman frontier; an eighteenth-century estate town; a dormitory town experiencing

significant growth in recent decades - the boundaries of a settlement, either physical or administrative, remain a defining feature.

In places such as Kells, where much of the former defensive walls have been removed, buried, embedded or altered; their proper interpretation can be challenging. Interpretation can take many forms - transient activities such as research, education programmes and public events, or through permanent initiatives that provide up-to-date information and analysis and improve understanding and access to the place for the enjoyment of all.



36. Interpretive signage showing medieval motte and bailey in Callan.

8.2 AUDIENCES

The conservation of complex sites involves input from many different sources, each with their particular expertise or areas of responsibility. These stakeholders are the intended audience of the Conservation Management Plan. Their understanding and adoption of the conservation and interpretation policies are crucial to the preservation of the town defences of Kells as a valuable cultural place for the benefit of the whole community.

8.2.1 STATE BODIES

Meath County Council are guardians of the town walls with responsibility for their maintenance and also for implementation of planning policy in its environs and ensuring its statutory protection. The National Monuments Service in the Department of Heritage also oversee the statutory protection of the town walls, being a national monument.

8.2.2 LOCAL COMMUNITY

Improving understanding and appreciation of the town walls among the local community will enhance local pride in their cultural heritage, and assist motivated residents to become active stakeholders in preserving the monument in its separate, but linked, settings that form part of private land holdings.

8.2.3 SCHOOLS/ UNIVERSITIES

The best way to foster interest and appreciation of the cultural heritage among the local community is to include education programmes for schools. It would be a valuable teaching aid for students in subjects such

as archaeology, religion, architecture, as well as tourism and heritage protection, flora and fauna.

8.2.4 CULTURAL HERITAGE & HISTORICAL GROUPS

Local groups with interest in heritage, or groups with specialist interest, should be encouraged to engage with the cultural heritage that the town walls represent and communicate this to both neighbours and visitors.

8.3 KEY MESSAGES/ THEMES

According to Fáilte Ireland only a small percentage of the population have learning as a primary objective when visiting attractions. It is a secondary motivation to experience something authentic and enriching. The presentation of archaeological or historical facts on lectern units is a niche or specialist interest. This approach fails to 'people the place' and give visitors a visceral sense of medieval Kells. All heritage interpretation should be interesting, informative and accessible. It should seek to enhance the experience or both visitors and locals. This is accomplished by using the key messages and stories of the site. These messages and stories should emerge from the principal themes of the medieval past of Kells.

Historic maps, written sources and site visits have provided much information about how medieval Kells developed. These are the key ingredients when considering the stories through which medieval Kells, in particular the town walls, will be interpreted. The main story is - *A place on the edge* – Kells as a late-medieval trading town on the edge of the Pale.



37: Inscribed paving marking the line of Kilkenny city wall across a footpath.

Sub-stories could include; the interaction between the Anglo-Normans and Gaelic Irish; the shifting need and relevance of the town walls

8.3.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Further research is necessary to understand the historic development of medieval and early modern Kells and how this relates to the town walls. Kells is fortunate to have been the subject of a fascicle prepared by Anngret and Katherine Simms for the Royal Irish Academy as part of its Irish Historic Town Atlas series. It is important that existing knowledge is accurately conveyed and further research questions outlined and presented in ways that make visits to the town walls interesting.

8.3.2 CONSERVATION & MAINTENANCE

While further development of the Frontlands and Backlands site is awaited, it is essential that Meath County Council continue the process of conserving the town walls, where identified, and their settings.

8.4 PRESENTATION & MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

8.4.1 STATUTORY PROTECTION

While the town walls are a national monument, it is important that the description of its extent and identification of possible fragments is kept up-to-date. This will provide an additional level of oversight and protection for any proposed interventions, or developments adjacent to the sites. Meath County Council will continue to consult with the National Monuments Service whenever development is proposed that has potential impacts.

8.4.2 IMPROVED LINKAGES

Online resources, such as discoverboynevalley.ie, introduce Kells to a wide audience. The theme of *Kells: Frontier Town* should be further developed using the surviving fabric of the town walls as settings to tell these stories. Providing spaces for information to be shared can help to enrich our knowledge of Kells in the Anglo-Norman period and its wider associations with towns in the region and elsewhere on the island.

8.4.3 COMMUNITY USE

Increasing knowledge and understanding of the town walls among the local community will assist in its preservation. In time, the development of the Frontlands and Backlands as new precincts close to the centre of historic Kells should retain the surviving southern flanks of the town walls/bank as part of the public realm, accessible to the community and conserved to international best practice.



38: This piece in Temple Bar, Dublin, interprets the use of stars by the Vikings

8.4.4 INTERPRETATIVE MEDIA

The role of all onsite heritage interpretation actions should be to develop the connection that both locals and visitors have with medieval Kells, especially the town walls. Through the use of story, the interpretation of the medieval Kells and the town walls should provide clarity about its development, encourage awareness and offer insight.



39: *Paleys upon Pilers* is an interpretation of medieval timber frame houses commemorating Geoffrey Chaucer in central London.

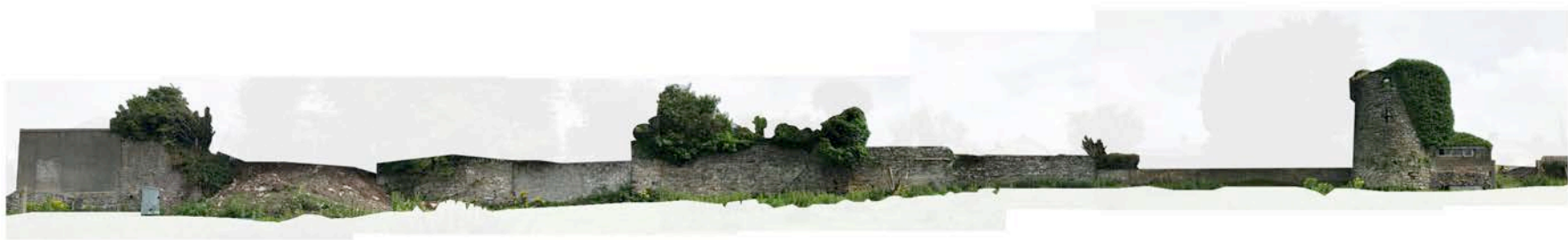
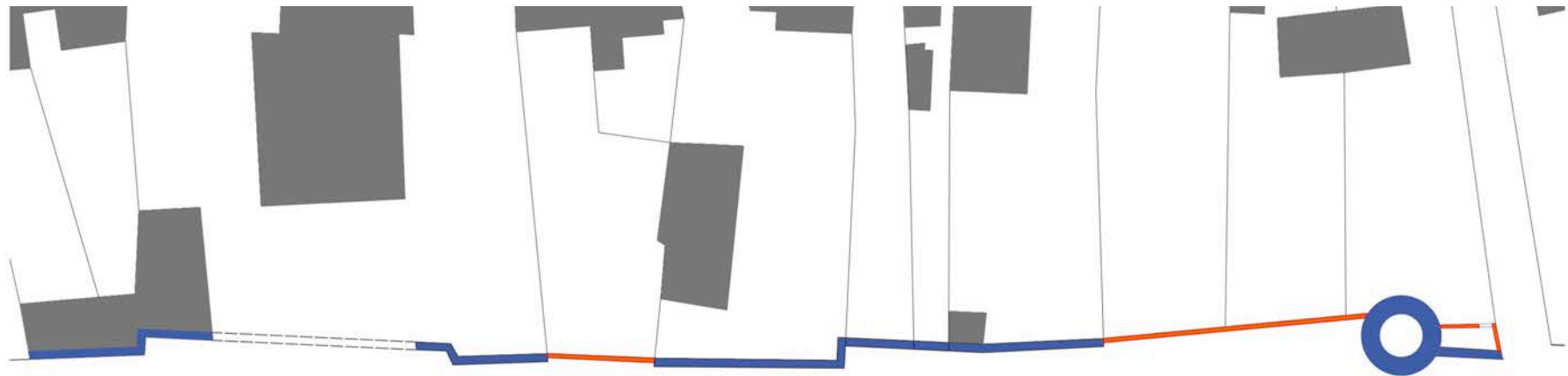
8.6.2 WALLED TOWN SETTINGS

All installations should be designed to cause the minimal disturbance to the cultural landscape. Proper adherence to the National Monuments Act (1930-2004), Planning and Development Acts (2000-2013) and various wildlife protection acts should be followed at all times.

The interpretation actions suggested in this chapter are not exhaustive, and are open to engagement with the stakeholders. Accordingly, any ideas that are in keeping with the principles set out in this plan are to be welcomed.

8.4.5 GENERAL HERITAGE INTERPRETATION GUIDELINES

- All interpretation actions should be tied in with the key stories described in section 8.3.
- All interpretation actions should be based on sound scholarly research.
- When interpreting places or periods of conflict, commemorate do not celebrate. Do not use emotive or bombastic language.
- In general, do not use technical terms or complex words where simple ones will do.
- Do not presume that people know about certain personalities or time periods. Interpretation should be aimed at the general audience.
- The word length of panels and audio guides should be kept to a minimum.
- Interpretation should be interesting and relevant.
- Interpretation should not damage the setting or the physical fabric of the place it is addressing.



-  RUBBLE STONE WALL
-  BLOCKWORK INFILL
-  BREACH/ MISSING

40: Plan and elevation of Cannon Street (Frontlands) wall section.

8.5 CONSERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS

The conservation of the masonry walls associated with the town defences of Kells is affected by our lack of knowledge regarding their extent and location. Buried remains that remain undisturbed are not at significant risk; statutory protections within the town such as the Zone of Archaeological Protection should assist in their preservation into the future. There may be sections of walling located within the fabric of upstanding buildings. If such small sections are situated in protected structures, the risk of their removal is likely to be low. However, should small sections of town wall be located in buildings not listed as protected structures, the risk of their inadvertent removal during renovations and/or demolition is significantly higher.

While it is accepted that the walls that overlook the Frontlands belong to the town defences, those along the Backlands have not been included in studies of Kells before now. This large defensive bank requires urgent attention. However, before conservation works can be specified, an ecological assessment is required. For both the defences at the Backlands and Frontlands, access will need to be provided from private properties to allow both sides of walls/bank to be conserved.

41. Talbot's Tower in Kilkenny was conserved and a pocket park with interpretive panels created around it. Used as a venue for Kilkenny Arts Festival.

42. Archaeological excavations informed the creation of a Renaissance garden in Rothe House, Kilkenny. The largest section is given over to an apple orchard composed of varieties that existed in early 17th century Ireland.



8.5.1 MAINTENANCE & REPAIR OF BUILT HERITAGE

- The protection and maintenance of existing built heritage of the former town defences, especially the mural tower, should take priority. In this way, the gradual process of decay is arrested, allowing this historic place to be maintained in perpetuity.
- All repairs are to undertaken using traditional building techniques and materials and be carried out in accordance with best conservation practice.
- The cultural heritage value of the town walls would be enhanced by improving accessibility, in a way that respects the sensitivity of the sites. This should be a key objective of any proposals to develop the Frontlands and Backlands for town centre use in the future.
- Proposals for the development of these settings should be considered in relation to the management and preservation of the town walls and mural tower, providing funding for their repair and maintenance.
- A full ecological survey of the probable medieval bank at the Backlands is required before a detailed set of conservation policies for the bank is possible. In the meantime, additional breaches, dumping and other human interventions are to be halted. All relevant property owners were to be made aware of the site's legal protections under the National Monuments Act (1930-2004).

- Once an ecological survey is undertaken of the defensive bank, appropriate vegetation control measures need to be implemented.
- Both the bank and mural tower should be protected from damage caused by livestock.
- Refuse deposits should be removed from the bank and ditch under archaeological supervision. Archaeological consent for this action may be required.
- Emergency repairs to the walls and management of vegetation will be required to assist in their preservation as well as the security of the site and safety of the public. This work is to be carried out by conservation specialists, and be implemented outside the nesting season in accordance with an arboriculture impact assessment.

8.5.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS

A full inventory of all archaeological excavations provided little additional information on the town walls. This report was limited in its primary research scope to a visual inspection of likely routes of the medieval town wall. Even in this, our survey was restricted to areas publicly accessible. Accordingly, focused archaeological research ascertaining the exact route is welcome. Of addition interest would be geophysical and LiDAR investigations of the areas adjacent to the supposed route of the town wall.



43: View of defects to mural tower.



44: Map showing proposals for Cannon Street link, buffer zone and mural tower prospect along with gates.



45: Locations of Roman city walls as marked in Carlisle, UK.

8.6 WORKS PROJECTS

8.6.1 WALLED TOWN WALK

Walking along the town wall circuit is an interesting way of seeing Kells, but sections of the conjectural alignment are difficult to access and hard to visualise. In time, linkages along the town walls could be enhanced whenever sites are proposed for re-development.

Awareness and appreciation of the town walls could be enhanced by helping locals and visitors interpret the five town gates. This could form part of a general public realm enhancement scheme to link different sites of interest around Kells. Using quality contrasting materials such as stone setts, a platform crossing could be installed to allow pedestrians to cross safely at these locations, where interpretive material would allow them to imagine the setting when the gates were still intact. This would allow them to appreciate the scale of the medieval town and also locate themselves along the circuit. Guided walking tours of the town would emphasize these locations to discuss the history of the town. For those entering the town by vehicle, the ramps recreate a *threshold* at the entries to the historic core that was been lost with the removal of the gates. Additional stone paving markers denoting the route of the wall across paths and roads would further enhance the ability of locals and visitors to appreciate the medieval townscape.

In order to present the earlier monastic *city*, the thresholds between the conjectural outer and inner enclosures could also be marked using stone paving, lighting or signs. Along the route of the medieval town wall and inner early medieval monastic enclosure, high quality artwork inspired by Kells' medieval past would greatly enhance the public realm and promote awareness of its heritage. Finally, a suite of well-designed directional signage for pedestrians is required to permit easy navigation along the route of the town wall and to points of interest within the medieval core. Complementing this action could be an education pack for school children.

Future development on the outskirts of the historic core, and to infill sites along the circuit are important opportunities to enhance the conservation and presentation of the walled town heritage. Projects to conserve sections of wall or improve access and settings may be implemented over time as part of proposals for redevelopment of sites.

For example, should the Frontlands and Backlands be developed in future as an expansion of the town centre as the current zoning allows, planning policy should ensure that a green buffer zone is maintained to the front of the town wall alignment, and that new entrances and shopfronts are placed parallel to the town wall, where they overlook the green space with the stone walls as a backdrop. Embedding the town walls into developments makes them difficult to access for maintenance or to enjoy their setting. In this way, the protected view of the mural tower, round tower and steeple is not only retained, it can be enjoyed along these new streets or avenues, creating a visual link to the built heritage of Kells.

As space is provided for town wall linear parks, the opportunity should be taken to create a planting regime that will both tell the story of medieval Kells and enhance biodiversity. The creation of an edible landscape using plants present in Ireland during the medieval period offers the possibility of not only supporting pollinators but also of providing another avenue to tell the story of medieval Kells through food.



46: The Kilmallock town wall walk is an community amenity, a conduit for tourists and a safe walking route for children going to school. It is also a corridor for the promotion of biodiversity.

8.6.3 MURAL TOWER ACCESS & SETTING

A key project is to conserve the mural tower and improve access and its setting. It is presently accessed from a private back garden, and the privacy of the occupants and property rights of its owners are an important consideration. Part of the back garden and the side access land could be purchased or leased by the local authority in order to create a suitable setting to the mural tower.

Ideally, the arched opening onto Cannon Street would be acquired, which would allow direct access to the tower, with the rest of the back garden screened off. This new link to Cannon Street brings the mural tower and the round tower closer together, and allows them to be appreciated more easily together. A large build out to the existing footpath is already located opposite the arched entrance, with parking bays along the street. The existing stone gate posts into the field would be fitted with new farm gates so that the livestock could be kept securely. In time, this link could form a pedestrian route between the developed Frontlands and Cannon Street which would improve permeability and enhance connectivity between the new streets and the historic core.

The existing shed would be removed to create a viewing platform at ground level, with an access route provided from the street and out onto the Frontlands. A spiral stairs, sensitively installed into the tower, would assist with its maintenance and also reinstate a prospect from which to view the surrounding landscape. Carefully designed screens attached to the top landing could ensure the privacy of the residents, fitted with interpretive panels telling the story of Kells, frontier town on the Pale.



47 & 48: Sketches of how the mural tower could be conserved, made accessible and form part of the public realm.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

County Meath Heritage Plan 2015-2020. 2015. Meath County Council

Bradley, J. & Dunne, N. 1987 *Urban Archaeological Survey, County Meath*.
OPW

D'Arcy, D. 2016. *Kells Community Biodiversity Action Plan 2016-2020*.
Deborah Darcy

<https://celt.ucc.ie//published/T100001A/>

Kells Development Plan 2013-2020. 2013. Meath County Council

Potterton, M. n/d. <https://www.ria.ie/news/irish-historic-towns-atlas/michael-potterton-anglo-norman-town>

National Policy on Town Defences. 2008. Department of Environment,
Heritage and Local Government

Simms, A. 1990. *Kells: Irish Historic Towns Atlas*, Royal Irish Academy,
Dublin

Thomas, A, 1992. *The Walled Towns of Ireland Vol. 2*, Irish Academic Press,
Dublin

Veale. S. & Burke, S. 2008, *Castle Hill Heritage Park interpretation plan,*
stage 1 strategic overview, GML, Sydney