

Extracts from the Urban Archaeological Survey County Roscommon by John Bradley & Noel Dunne

The origins of the modern town of Roscommon lie in the early Christian founded by **Coman**, a disciple of Finnian of Clonard, and whose obit is given at **549** in the Annals of Ulster. From the **eighth century** onwards it was clearly a monastery of importance and the deaths of its abbots and bishops are regularly recorded in the annals. An indication of its importance is provided by the fact that the law of Coman was promulgated from here over various parts of Connacht in 771, 779 and 792 (AU). It was attacked by the **Vikings** in **807** (AFM: 802; A.Clon.:823) and it was plundered again in **823**. In **1049** both the damhliag and regles of Roscommona were burned (Chron. Scot.) while in **1050** the **round tower** was destroyed (AFM). It was to this monastery that **Toirdelbach O Conchobair** presented the fragment of the **True Cross** which was enshrined in the reliquary now known as the "**Cross of Cong**", and which was made in Roscommon in **1123** (A.Tig.). The possession of a relic of this importance indicates that Roscommon was a **place of pilgrimage**. The annalistic entries relating to a raid on the settlement in **1135** state that it was plundered "both houses and churches" (Misc. Ir.A.:AFM), are suggestive of a lay settlement. Its significance in the **twelfth century** is clear from the fact that it was nominated as a diocesan see at the Synod of Kells (**1152**) and in **1158** a synod of all clergy of Connacht was held there (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 191). It did not hold on to its episcopal status, however, and was replaced by Elphin about **1170**.

Roscommon was in O Conchobair hands for the greater part of the twelfth century although on occasions Anglo-Norman raids were made on the settlement, such as those in **1235** by **Richard de Burgh** and of **1260** by **Walter de Burgh**. The **Dominican Friary** was established in **1253** by **Felimid O Conchobair** and subsequent references indicate that there was a settlement between the friary and St. Coman's church on the ridge to the north. St. Coman's had been transformed in the mid twelfth century into an **Augustinian house** and the documents refer to this settlement as **Augustinia's Irish vill of Roscommon** (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 2008). In **1262**, in response to the participation of Aedh O Conchobair in the battle of Down, there was a "prodigious hosting of the foreigners of Erin" against Felimid and Aedh O Conchobair and in the course of this Roscommon was noted as a suitable site for a castle (Orpen 1910-20, iii, 239). Aedh succeeded to the kingship of Connacht in **1265**, after Felimid's death, and he marked his accession with a series of raids on the Anglo-Norman settlements in the province. The response of the English crown was to confiscate his lands and grant them out to new comers. The crown's determination to pacify Connacht is shown by the fact that construction work began on **Roscommon castle** in **September on 1268** (Orpen 1910-20, iii, 247). The succeeding six years witnessed a regular pattern of the capture of the castle by Aedh O Conchobair followed by refortification but on Aedh's death in 1274 the settlement at Roscommon became more secure.

The settlement history of Roscommon at this time is complicated by the fact that there appear to have been two distinct settlements, the "**Irish vill of Roscommon**", which belonged to the **Augustinians** and the "**king's town of Roscommon**". Knowledge of the Irish vill is very slight but it seems that it was a pre-Norman settlement located between **St. Coman's Church and the Dominican Friary** (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 2008). It is distinguished on a number of occasions from the "king's town" (ibid., iv, 604).

The "king's town" is first referred to **c.1283** when the mayor and community complained that it had just been burnt, that twenty-nine people had been killed and the **town wall** was knocked down (Sayles 1979, no.39). The destruction referred took place before **1281** and it was evidently substantial. The settlement is described as having had a **north gate and a bridge** and that the destruction was so substantial that the **burgesses** (people of political power/privilege) took refuge on land given to them by the Augustinians **outside the castle** (Sayles 1979, no. 39; Mills 1905, 285; Sweetman 1875-86, ii, p. 408). The grant of a market to the Augustinians in **1282** at their Irish vill of Roscommon may have been an attempt to revitalise Roscommon (ibid, no. 2008).

Little is known of the subsequent history of Anglo-Norman Roscommon. In **1299-1302**, however, the burgesses were seriously in arrears with their rent and owed £176 (38 RDKPRI, 54) and in **1307** the settlement was again burned by **Edmund Botiller** (A Conn, MIA, AU, A. Clon.). The **Bruce invasion** provided the opportunity in **1315** for the capture of the castle and the town by **Ruaidhri O Conchobair** (A. Conn.) and after **c.1320** control of the settlement passed out of Anglo-Norman hands. In the process it also passed out of history. The references to Roscommon in the later **middle ages** all relate to the castle and the history of the borough under the **O Conchobair** is unknown. It might be guessed, however, from the fact that there was no settlement here when the English arrived in the late **sixteenth century** that the borough ceased to exist shortly after **1315**.

The modern town owes its origin to the activities of **Sir Nicholas Malbie** who was granted the castle and the dissolved monasteries of the Augustinians and Dominicans in **1578**. In **1581** he sent plans of his proposed town to London for approval (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1574-85, 312). The plans show the town situated immediately east of the castle and protected by defences. It is not clear if the town was built in this position, however, it could well have been and was subsequently moved to its present position after the destruction of the town in **1596** and again in **1599**. The burning of the town in **1596** was particularly severe and the English of Roscommon sent a petition seeking both compensation and the return of their land (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1596-7, 24, 198). This may indicate that the town was abandoned and that the present site was chosen only after **1600**.

In **1611** Roscommon was described as likely to return Protestants to parliament (Cal. S.P. Ire 1610-14, 161) and two years later it was incorporated. In **1659** the population of the town is given as 94 only eight of whom were English (Pender 1939).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY

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1. Streets & Street Pattern

There are no references to streets in the sources and the street pattern, based on Main Street and Market Square is of a type associated with seventeenth century town development. A burgage plot pattern survives on either side of Main Street which is probably of seventeenth century origin.

2. Market Place

In **1282** the Augustinians were granted a market at their Irish vill of Roscommon (Sweetman 1875-86, ii,no.2008). The location of the market place in which this market was held is unknown. The present market place dates from the seventeenth century.

3. Domestic Houses

Nothing is known of the form of housing in the medieval or plantation town. In **1135**, however, houses within the settlement were burned in the course of a raid (AFM). The reference suggests that there were secular dwellings associated with the monastery and that there was a "monastic town" at Roscommon at this time.

4. Industrial Areas

The manufacture of the Cross of Cong at Roscommon in **1123** points to the presence here of the workshop of a fine metalworker. That this was not a one-off piece of metal production is clear from the fact that the relics of St. Coman were enshrined in a reliquary of gold and silver in **1170** (ATM).

There is evidence for a mint at the town in the **1280** (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, p.437) but it has been suggested that this was moved to Waterford since no coins are known from it (Dolley 1972, 11). Milling was carried on in the Anglo-Norman town and is mentioned, for instance, in an account of **1299-1302** (38 RDKPRI, 54).

5. Town Defences

A number of references indicate that the Anglo-Norman town was defended. In **1278-9** money was spent on strengthening the ditch around the town (36 RDKPRI, 49, 53). A **north gate** is referred to in a document of **1299** (Cal

Justice rolls, p.285), and in a document of **c.1283** the walls are described as demolished (Sayles 1979, no. 39). The course of the medieval defences is unknown.

Evidence that the seventeenth century town was also defended is provided by a map of Roscommon, prepared by **Francis Plunkett, 1736** which depicts a **gate at the south end of Main Street**. The Hertfordshire Public Records Office contains a series of eighteenth and nineteenth century deeds relating to a “**messuage** without the gate on the **west** side of Roscommon town”. The deeds probably relate to the same gate but the messuage was located to the west.

6. Roscommon Castle

The site for the castle was selected in **1262** (ALC, AFM, A.Conn.) but building work did not commence until **1269**. It was captured and burned in **1270** by **Aed O Conchobair** (A. Clon., ALC, A, Conn.) who captured it again in **1271** (AU) and **1272** (ALC; A. Conn.). These attacks were followed up by reconstruction work, particularly in **1275-6** after the death of Aed O Conchobair (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, P.235). The castle was captured again in **1277** (ALC, A. Conn.,AFM) and this provoked a massive re-fortification in the years after **1278** (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, 357, 406, 537, 540 and no. 2335; *ibid.*, iii, 75, 80, 36 RDKPRI, 48). These works included the construction of a wall “around the castle” in **1284** by William de Spineto (36 RDKPRI, 75) and accounts for the work of fortification continue until **1290** (Sweetman 1875-86, iii, no. 814).

A document of **1304** is particularly informative on the works being carried out. It accounted for the: “wages of an artilleryman formerly assigned to make and repair warlike engines and quarrels (short heavy square headed bolt or arrow used in a crossbow or arbalest) for Roscommon and other castles in Connacht. Also for strengthening the **wall** with 3ft thick stonework so that it may be 5ft wide and 32ft deep to be completely covered in wood. Repairing and strengthening 3 drawbridges and 2 portcullises of gates and 2 outward bridges and gates added to bridges, to close the postern (a back door/a sideways entrance) with stone and chalk to a thickness of 7 feet. To repair entrance steps to hall and to cover the oriel of the castle. Also the cost of iron, lime and timber for vaulting the tower near the hall towards the south with 2 arches and to make a conduit to carry water from **Bridget’s well** to the lake. Total cost £19 4s. 8d (Sweetman 1875-86, v, pp. 116-17,:no: 306).

In **1305** the castle was badly damaged by **Felimid O Conchobair** and was rebuilt at considerable cost by **de Ufford** (Sweetman 1875-86, v no. 434) and it was probably at this time that repairs were conducted on the bridge and houses of the castle (38 RDKPRI, 103).

The castle was captured and burned in **1315** by **Ruaidhri O Conchobair** (A Clon., A. Conn. AI) and the following year Felimid O Conchobair besieged the town and subsequently withdrew (A.Conn) but A. Clon says that he succeeded in capturing Roscommon Castle down. After **c.1320** Roscommon was in the hands of O Conchobair family and it became a prize to be fought over by rival O Conchobair factions. In **1340** Toirdelbach O Conchobair imprisoned Aed O Conchobair in the castle; in **1360** it was burned (A. Conn., A. Clon.); in **1375** one annalist records it as being captured by Ruaidhri O Conchobair (AU) but another describes this event as a swap between Toirdelbach and Ruaidhri in which Toirdelbach gave up Roscommon Castle and many concessions in return for Ballintober (A. Conn).

In **1394-5** **Richard II** granted to **Toirdelbach O Conchobair** Don the **constablership of Roscommon Castle** and this effectively meant royal recognition of the status quo (Otway Ruthven 1980). The fifteenth century is marked by struggle for control of the castle between **O Conchobair Don** and **O Conchobair Rua** with ownership occasionally alternating between them. In **1499** the castle was taken for the crown by the **Earl of Kildare** who was justiciar (AU; AFM) but it fell back into O Conchobair control, only to be taken again by the earl of Kildare in **1512** (AU; AFM).

In **1544** **Fitzwilliam Burke** sought the castle from the crown by claiming that the O’Connors had usurped it (Cal. Carew Mss. 1515-74, 210) and by **1553** the castle was in **Clanricarde’s** hands (*ibid.*, 238). By the middle of the sixteenth century, when the English crown, was gradually asserting its authority over midland and western Ireland, the control of Roscommon (and other Connacht castles) was viewed as of great strategic importance.

In **1558** **Sussex** was instructed that he must keep “Roscommon and other castles in his hands” (Cal. Carew Mss. 1515-74, 273). The **O’Connors** evidently regained possession of the castle however because in **1562** **Dermot O Conor Don** was pardoned and declared he would hand up Roscommon Castle to the deputy (11 RDKPRI, no. 455). In **1559** **Sir Philip Sidney** arrived and took over the castle on behalf of the crown (AFM).

In **1577** the castle was granted to **Sir Nicholas Malbie** (13 RDKPRI. No. 3134) who was instructed the following year to keep a force of 50 foot there (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1574-85, 139). In **1582** he submitted a series of proposed alterations to

the castle for government attention (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1574-85, 312). After his death in **1585** the castle was held briefly by **Bingham**, the president of Connacht, but it passed back to **Henry Malbie in 1587** (ibid., 475; ibid. 1586-7, 439). The military importance of the castle was revealed in **1596** when it was garrisoned against an expected attack from **O'Donnell** (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1592-6, 537; ibid. 1596-7, 13). When it came the castle held out for four weeks in the course of which 150 men starved to death, eleven were killed and twelve were captured. The town was burned together with all the furnishings of the castle, including its timber stairs, and the garrison's horses and ammunition were lost (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1596-7, 24).

In **1599 O'Donnell** attacked and burned Roscommon again (Cal. S.P. Ire 1597-8, 313) and it was near capture once more in **1600** (ibid. 1599-1600, 463). In **1609 Mabie's widow, Lady Sydeley**, requested money to repair the castle because of the damage which the garrison had caused there during the wars (ibid. 1608-10, 258) and many of the large windows in the east front probably date to after this time. The castle remained the base of a garrison during the **Confederate Wars** when it supported Parliament, as did the town. Constables of the castle were still being appointed in the 1660's and presumably it continued to function as a garrison (Cal. S.P. Ire. 1663-5, 39; ibid., 1666-9, 70).

The remains consist of a quadrilateral enclosure with massive D-shaped towers at the angles, a twin towered gatehouse in the east wall, and a smaller rectangular gatehouse in the west wall. The layout is of a well-established late thirteenth century type and its present form is probably large the result of the work which occurred between **1278** and **1290**. The west gatehouse may be a survival from the **pre-1278** works because it is not aligned to the walls on either side and it seems to be oddly positioned. It has been pointed out by a number of scholars that the plan is closely similar to that of some Welsh castles built during the reign of Edward I and particularly to **Harlech** which was commenced in **1283**. Roscommon accordingly reflects some of the most up to date castle design in the **1270s**.

The courtyard encloses a space 162 by 130 feet. The towers are joined by a curtain wall which survives on the east and west but it has been entirely removed on the south and only a fragment remains of the north wall. The documents suggest that it was enclosed by two external fosses (long narrow trench excavations) and the section which survives outside the site of the north curtain may well belong to the outer of these ditches. The gatehouse is the finest example of its type in Ireland and protects a narrow passage some 3m wide. The appearance of the castle was changed in the **late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries** when the number of floors in the east gatehouse and the northeast tower was increased and the old arrow loops were enlarged to accommodate windows with mullions, transoms and external hood mouldings. As pointed out above, however, many of these later features probably date to the years after **1609**, when there were settled conditions at Roscommon, rather than the years after **1578** as has been previously thought (Leask 1944, 67-9; Harbison 1970, 210-11; Stalley 1978, pl. XVIa). Plans of the castle have been published by Leask (1944, fig. 40) and Stalley (1978, 44: fig. 3).

7. Roscommon Camp

A handful of seventeenth century references to Roscommon Camp (e.g. Cal. S.P. Ire. 1601-3, 39) suggest that there may have been an **earthen fortification** other than the castle. If so it is possible that it may have occupied the position of the later **barracks**, south of the town.

8. St Coman's Early Monastic Site

As outlined in the introductory section Roscommon was the site of a **monastery** established in the **sixth century** by **St. Coman**. In the **twelfth century** this was taken over by the **Augustinians** who established a **priory** on the site. The survival of a number of **Transitional stones** at **St. Coman's (C of I) church** indicate that the site of **pre-Norman monastery** was located on the ridge overlooking the marshy **ground of Loughnanene to the north**. No evidence for a monastic enclosure has been determined. One striking curvilinear boundary, however, is evident on the O.S. first edition maps. It constitutes the eastern and southern boundary of **Ballypheasan townland** and is continued on the north by the eastern boundary of **Cloonbrackna townland** and is carried westwards in a field boundary, north of the castle towards the sites of **Lord's Well and Lady's Well**. On the south west the curve is continued by the southern boundary of **Ardnanagh townland**. This is a large area of land and it may delimit the monastic property at Roscommon rather than the actual boundary of the monastery itself. In this regard it is interesting to note that **Roscommon castle** was built on **Augustinian land** and the Augustinians also gave land to the townsmen near the castle after the destruction of the "king's town" in the raid of **1277** (Sweetman 1875-86, ii, no. 2008; Sayles 1979, no. 80). From the annalistic references it is clear that the monastery contained at least **one church of stone**, in addition **two houses and a round tower** (AFM: 1050, 1135; Chron. Scot.: 1047).

9. Augustinian Priory of SS Mary & Coman

Gwynn and Hadcock (1970, 191) suggest that the old monastery changed to the Augustinian rule in the **1140's** and that the observance of Arrouaise was introduced by **Toirdelbach O Conchobair** at the prompting of St Malachy. There are indications that it was initially a **double monastery** with a convent of nuns in addition to its house of monks but after **1232** the evidence for this fades out (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1790, 191). In **1578** the site, containing a ruined church, a hall and cloister, was granted to Sir Nicholas Malbie (ibid).

The site of the abbey is represented today by the C of I parish church which has a date stone of **1775** on it. The west tower incorporates a number of features, however. A blocked doorway in the south wall of the tower has a number of re-used moulded fragments of the late **twelfth/early thirteenth century date**. These derive from a doorway of at least **two orders**. Four round moulded jambs, on either side, are capped with transitional style capitals from an inner order. The arch with projecting keystone is modern. Similar jambs and capitals from the outer order are re-used for the sides of a window in the north wall of the tower at first floor level. A **fifteenth century** twin-light window with cusped tracery is built into the west wall of the tower at first floor level. Incorporated in the south wall of the tower at first floor level is a **fifteenth century**, single-light, pointed, cinquefoil-headed window. The arch stones have hollow chamfers but were derived from different windows. The stone in all of these reused features is limestone.

About **1917**, according to the Roscommon Directory (Commercial and Historical) of **1920**, workmen uncovered human bones in **Goff Street** while digging house foundations. These were regularly arranged in cemetery fashion and would seem to indicate that the churchyard originally extended further east.

10. Dominican Priory of St. Mary

Founded in **1253** by **Felimid O Conchobair, king of Connacht**, the church was consecrated in **1257** (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 229). It suffered in the conflict between **Aedh O Conchobair** and the incoming **Anglo-Normans** between **1268** and **1280**. It was burned in **1270** and the friars pleaded with Edward I for the restitution of goods and provisions which had been taken from them by the justicar (ibid.). The friary was damaged by lightning in **1308** (AU) but the extent of the damage is unknown. In **1445** it is described as being in disrepair from the effects of war and other causes, and an indulgence was granted in order to help restore the buildings (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 229). In **1577-8** it was granted to **Sir Nicholas Malbie** (ibid).

The friary is located on a slight rise overlooking marshy ground to the NE and SE. Prior to land drainage this would probably have been covered with water for part of the year. The remains consist of the church and the foundations of the cloister. The nave, chancel and north aisle are of the **thirteenth century**; a transept was added in the fifteenth century when a tower was also inserted and the east and west windows were remodelled. The masonry consists of coursed limestone blocks whose outer faces were coarsely dressed.

The east and north walls of the CHANCEL have a battered base externally. The east window originally consisted of three lancets but it was replaced in the fifteenth century by a large tracery window of five lights. The north wall was probably lit by six or seven lancets but the remains of only four survive. In the south wall is a blocked door, which led to the sacristy, and to the east of it a partly reconstructed piscine and sedilla. The sedilla niche has an unsymmetrical pointed arch with the fragmentary remains of triangular sectioned pilasters, capped with moulded finials rising from its east side and centre.

The Tower represented by two short lengths of wall footing extending inwards from the south wall. The tomb of Owen O'Rourke (1837) is constructed over the western footing. Just inside the eastern footing is a blocked door which led to the cloister.

The NORTH TRANSEPT was an addition to the north aisle and incorporated its east wall including a thirteenth century lancet. The extension contains one two-light window in the east wall and it was lit by a three light window in the north wall.

The NAVE was separated from the aisle by an arcade of four arches, represented today by fragments of three cylindrical piers. The western respond is rectangular with chamfered edges and had a moulded capital. The easternmost pier is of two periods. The southern section is semi-circular in plan and has a moulded capital similar to that in the western respond.

The northern section is rectangular with chamfered edges and it has an inner order, also chamfered. The west wall contains a modern pointed door above which the position of three lancets can be determined. These were replaced

in the fifteenth century by a four light traceried window. Internally the south wall has seven pointed niches with six lancets overhead admitting light from above the level of the cloister roof.

Part of the west end of the AISLE survives and it is sufficient to indicate the position of a door in the north wall and of a lancet in the west wall.

Externally in the south wall the barge stones of the CLOISTER'S north and west ranges are present. The wall footing at the east end of the south wall represents the remains of a lime-kiln. South of the church the original extent of the cloister is indicated by a rectangular depression.

Architectural Stones: A large number are stored in the basement of the SW tower of Roscommon Castle. These include fragments from the east and west traceried windows and an isolated base for a cloister pillar. The latter is of limestone, is multi-moulded and would have supported a pillar of paired octagonal shafts with a short joining plate.

Monuments: Effigy said to be that of Felimid O Conchobair Coffin-shaped slab set in a pointed niche wall of the chancel. The figure is clothed in a loose ankle-length robe covering the arms to the elbows. A long mantle reaches from the shoulders to the feet. The figure wears a crown decorated with fleur de lys and holds a sceptre in his right hand. Hunt (1974, 42, 216) has argued on stylistic grounds that the figure was carved c.1290-c.1320. L.215. W. 85-60.

Tomb front with gallowglasses 15th cent. The frontal of the O Conchobair tomb is formed of two slabs, each divided into four niches containing the armed figures. The slabs are not in their original position.

West slab: L. 126. H. 88. T. 19.

East slab: L. 127. H. 86. T. 19

Hunt 1974, 217.

Panel fragment with two niches and part of a figure

From a monument similar to that from which the gallowglass panels derive.

Hunt 1974, 217

Lost fragment

D.C. Grose writing in the Irish Penny Magazine 1 (1833, p.294) noted a carved fragment two feet high in a garde in Roscommon Town which was said to have been taken from the friary. Its whereabouts is unknown.

Fragmentary Coffin-shaped slab. ?13th-14th century limestone, lower portion, lying close to the sedilla. Chamfered edge with a rounded moulding.

Max. L. 55. W. 50-45. T. 28

Fragmentary Coffin-shaped slab. ?13th-14th cent limestone, Lower portion. Lying outside the west wall of the north transept. Chamfered edges with a round moulding. Max. L. 82. W. 52-50. T. 16.

John Verdon. 1656.

Limestone slab set in concrete at the foot of the monument to Felimid O Conchobair. Inscription in false relief:

PRAY FOR THE SOVLE OF/ IOHN VERDON WHOE DIED/ THE 26 OF IVLY 1656

I. 125. W.90

A seventeenth century slab to John Hynde, recorded at the end of the nineteenth century, was not located. Mems Dead ii, 353.

11. Franciscan Friary

The Franciscans established themselves here in 1269 but their house was burned in 1270 and it could not be restored because the founder, whose name is not preserved, had died (Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, 258). The location of the friary is unknown.

12. Miscellaneous

Ardsallagh More. Ringfort.

Located on the crest of a gently sloping hill. Earthen platform with slight traces of an internal bank, external ditch and an outer bank. Diam: 39m

Crannog. Loughnaneane Td.

Roughly oval grassy platform with maximum dimensions of 44m N-S by 42m E-W, and rising 40-50 cm in height above the surrounding reedy fen. It is cut by modern callow drains on the south and east sides. Archaeological deposits containing charcoal, stone and bone (both burnt and unburnt), are evident in the southern drain. Portion of a rotary quern stone was picked up on the surface immediately east of the crannog and was presumably upcast from the drain. It comprises about one-quarter of an upper-stone with an estimated original diameter of 42-44cm.

Possible crannogs. Loughnaneane.

We were informed by Mr. Brian F. O'Carroll of APG International that three crannogs were evident on an aerial photograph of the marsh NW of Roscommon Castle. The photograph could not be found, however, for inspection.

Lord's Well

A square well surrounded on all sides by grassed over dry stone walling. The site is no longer in use. Sharkey 1927, 396.

Lady's well

A fairly square depression bounded by a low bank on three sides and open to the ENE. It is no longer in use. Sharkey 1927, 396.

Sculpted stones, Chapel Lane.

A group of five stones are set in the east face of a garden wall at the east end of Chapel Lane and a sixth lies loose on the ground below. The site is marked "Old R.C. Chapel" on the O.S. first edition. The stones include a **late 17th/early 18th cent.** Crucifixion plaque (Timoney 1980, 142-6), two matching slabs decorated with volutes, part of a lintel or string course, a moulded capital, and a tracery fragment. All are of limestone.

"Small Castle"

In **1418** a **small castle** called **Caislen na mallacht** was built opposite Roscommon Castle (A. Conn.; AU; AFM). There are no standing remains.

St. Coman's Vat

Shown on the O.S. first edition a short distance SSE of the Lanesborough Road the site is marked by a slight depression in the ground within which is a small stand of hawthorn and alder bushes. It was dried up in O'Donovan's time but he records that it was said to be a good spring in winter.

Tobar Iheen

Noticed by O'Donovan who described it as a remarkable well which supplied the town with water and lay "to the back of the church and between it and the abbey" (Sharkey 1927, 395). Its whereabouts is unknown.

13. List of Archaeological Stray Finds

1. Gold twisted wire torc, square-sectioned. UM173-1937. Taylor 1980, Co Rm; Glover 1978, 50.
2. Bronze spearbutt. NMI W.170. Raftery 1983, 121.
3. Bronze ring-mail ornament. Found about 3 feet deep in bog adjoining "the old castle of the O'Conors near the Town of Roscommon. NMI W.1. Wilde 1863, 576-8.
4. Coin hoard of 24 silver coins, the latest being of Elizabeth I (1582). Found on the outskirts of Roscommon Town in 1968. Dispersed.

Archaeological Problems and Potential

Roscommon is an important site in Irish urban development because of the clear documentary evidence for a settlement here prior to the foundation of the Anglo-Normans borough in the **1270's**. It was established as a church site by Coman probably in the early sixth century, and annalistic references in the eighth and ninth centuries indicate that it was already a centre of importance. It rose to considerable prominence during the eleventh and twelfth centuries when it became a focus for secular as well as ecclesiastical activity. An annalistic entry of **1135** mentions the burning of both houses and churches at Roscommon, and it was almost certainly the centre where the **Cross of Cong** was made c.1123. In **1235**, when it was burned by the Anglo-Normans, it was described as a **baile**, a clear indication that it was a nucleated settlement. This baile seems to have survived the coming of the Normans and is probably to be identified with the "Irish vill of Roscommon" mentioned in 1282 and again in 1299.

The presence of a crannog is potentially a significant feature in understanding the growth of Roscommon as an urban site because it is a further indication of the locality's importance in pre-Norman times. There is considerable amount of evidence to show that ecclesiastical sites had urban functions in pre-Norman Irish society and the association of a secular site with a church is an added indication of this. The combination of church and settlement site is best known from the royal crannog of Lagore which is associated with the church of Dunshaughlin, a pattern probably established around the middle of the seventh century. The juxtaposition of crannog and early church site at Roscommon forms a settlement complex similar to the Dunshaughlin model, and suggests that the locale was becoming a central place in pre-Norman times.

The Anglo-Norman borough appears to have been short lived and there is no evidence for its existence after **1320**. The medieval archaeological deposits at Roscommon are likely to cease around this time. The exact location of the Irish vill or the original Anglo-Norman borough is unknown. All that is known of the Irish vill is that it lay between St. Coman's Church and the Dominican Friary. The reference to a bridge at the Anglo-Norman borough suggests that it was close to a stream or river but it is possible that it was a bridge over a dry moat.

In the late sixteenth century Roscommon became one of the main bases in the English conquest of Connacht an importance which was based largely on the presence of the castle. There are suggestions that the late sixteenth century town was quite close to the castle and it would seem that the layout of the present town is due to remodelling which occurred after 1600.

The archaeological and documentary data indicates that Roscommon has been the scene of human activity from Early Christian times. Documentary records of Swords and relatively few, however, and in the future archaeological excavation is likely to be the principal means by which additional knowledge can be obtained.

The major disturbance of archaeological deposits has occurred along the street frontage with the building and rebuilding of houses and shops. It is likely, however, that archaeological deposits survive behind the street frontage.

Area of Archaeological Potential

The shaded portion of the accompanying map delimits the area of archaeological potential within Roscommon. Its extent is based on the size of the seventeenth century borough, the area between Church Street and Circular Road (the potential site of the Irish vill, and an area between Market Square and the Castle. On the south, an area around the Dominican Friary is outlined; on the north-west an area around Loughnaneane crannog; and on the east a area around St. Coman's Vat. In the absence of controlled archaeological excavations within the town nothing can be said about the depth of archaeological deposits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The future of archaeological research in Roscommon is dependent on the monitoring of development and the inclusion of archaeological work as a matter of routine in the planning process. Accordingly the following recommendations are made:

1. That the protection of Roscommon's archaeological heritage be made an objective of its development plan.
2. That the shaded area on map (Fig. 46?) be regarded as an archaeological zone.
3. That the existing archaeological monuments within the town be preserved and maintained.
4. That deep foundation development (1m plus) be discouraged within the archaeological zone.

5. That in those instances where it is not possible to apply recommendation 4, that the developer be required to have a report prepared on the archaeological implications, if any, of the proposed development. Such reports, that may include test excavation, should be obtained at the further information stage of the planning application. The archaeological report should then be considered by the Planning Authority and the Office of Public Works before full planning permission is granted.
6. That all licences for planning permission involving sub-surface excavation should point out the legal obligation to report the discovery of archaeological finds.
7. That the planning authority should notify the Office of Public Works of proposals for any major road works or service schemes involving sub-surface excavation and be guided by the latter body's recommendations.