

Stradbally Road, Portlaoise

Preliminary Heritage Assessment Report

Text



Dr Judith Hill

Architectural Historian and Heritage Consultant

12 Harbour View Terrace

South Circular Road

Limerick

Tel: 00353 87 9240187

hill@elive.ie

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The results and conclusions contained in this document are based on information available at the time it was prepared and written. Every effort was made to collect all relevant data, but the author accepts no responsibility for omissions or inconsistencies that may result from information becoming available subsequently to the completion of this document.

Executive summary

Heritage sensitivities for the site derive from the existence of Portrane House, a protected structure, to the north west corner of the site. A significant part of the site is within the attendant grounds of the protected structure (defined in the report). Laois County Council is committed to protecting the features and setting of protected structures. It is argued in the report that the masterplan could take account of the heritage sensitivities arising by: proposing a buffer zone between the proposed housing development in the former Front Field and the curtilage of the protected structure; by linking this buffer zone with proposals for a path network on the site; by respecting a number of views, which could also be linked to a new path network; and by protecting selected features (both natural and manmade) in the attendant grounds.

Contents

Vol I Text

- 1.0. Introduction
- 1.1. Aim and scope of the report
- 1.2. Client
- 1.3. Copyright
- 1.4. Methodology
- 2.0. Site, situation, ownership (map 1)
- 2.1. Ownership & situation.
- 2.2. Boundaries.
- 2.3. Access and paths.
- 2.4. Location
- 3.0. Outline history of the development site.
- 4.0. Outline history of Portrane House.
- 4.1. Esker ridge.
- 4.2. Maryborough.
- 4.2. Eyre Cootes and the building of Portrane House.
- 4.3. Enlargement of Portrane House
- 4.4. Tyrrells.
- 5.0. Statement of significance
- 6.0. Legislation and policy
- 7.0. Curtilage and attendant grounds
- 7.1. Definitions
- 7.2. Curtilage, attendant grounds and setting of Portane House (map 5)
- 8.0. Discussion and recommendations
- 8.1. Outline proposals for the site
- 8.2. Heritage sensitivities

References

Appendix

Vol 2

Images

Maps

Photographs

1.0. Introduction

1.1. Aim and scope of the report

Portrane House, a protected structure, is situated at the north-west corner of a development site, the lands of which were once part of the Portrane estate. Future changes and development on these lands will have a potential impact of the house and its immediate setting. The objective of this report is to define the significance of Portrane House, and to outline the sensitivities of the site with regard to heritage issues for the masterplan that is to be developed for the development site on Stradbally Road.

1.2. Client

Laois County Council

1.3. Copyright

The use of any written material or original drawings and photographs in this report in published or unpublished work should be acknowledged and the author's name referenced.

1.4. Methodology

A visual and photographic survey of Portrane House and outbuildings and the development site was made on 1 December 2020. The history of the site was investigated using deeds, Valuation Office Records, historic maps, family photographs and secondary sources. The sources are listed in the references section at the end of this report. The data was analysed to construct a building and demesne history and to define the curtilage, attendant grounds and setting of Portrane House. Local authority documents and NIAH were also consulted. The scope of the project and the role of heritage was discussed with the team, and reviewed by local counsellors and officials. The report was written with reference to the Department of the Environment's *Architectural Heritage Protection: Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2nd ed. 2011)

2.0. Site, situation, ownership (map 1)

2.1. Ownership & situation. The development site is in the ownership of Laois County Council. It is situated to the south of Stradbally Road, just beyond the historic town centre of Portlaoise.

2.2. Boundaries. (figs 1–3) (map 1) The site comprises a wooded esker ridge to the west sloping down to low-lying fields. The east boundary is defined by the Derry River, lined with trees and undergrowth, while Maryborough Drain, lined by low hedge, runs through the site. The Stradbally Road forms the northern boundary of the site, giving the site an urban edge, while the presence of schools and associated sports facilities define the character of the southern boundary of the site. Where the Derry River changes direction on the east boundary an aqueduct is marked on the Ordnance Survey maps. (maps 3 & 4) This feature seems to have been misnamed.

2.3. Access and paths. There is a recessed entrance from Stradbally Road in the north east corner of the site, constructed recently, at the time the Stradbally Apartments were built. (fig 4) There are two pedestrian public rights of way to the east which lead into housing estates: Glendowns to the north and Glenlahan to the south. (A & B on map 1) The Ordnance Survey maps reveal a network of paths in what was Portrane House demesne. (see below 3.0) (map 2) There remains an established crossing over Maryborough Drain which is linked to an established path at the south end of the site which crosses the esker and gives access to Downs Lane which runs along the west base of the ridge. (C on map 1) (figs 5 – 7) The path that crosses the Esker is now a muddy track, but appears to have been more important in nineteenth century when it served a house at the foot of the esker which has now gone. (maps 3 & 4)

2.4. Location. The site is located in the townland of Borris Little, (formerly Small Borris) in the barony of Maryborough East.

3.0. Outline history of the development site.

The earliest surviving records of Portrane House describes an estate of just over 15 acres which is shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1838. (Valuation Office Records) (map 1) This map shows that the demesne comprised the house and outbuildings to the north adjacent to the entrance from the road and addressing an area of parkland to the east. To the south was the esker ridge and east-facing slope, wooded in the vicinity of the house, but only the highest part wooded to the south.

Referring to map 1, the 'front field' equates to most of the nineteenth-century park; the house and its immediate gardens comprise part of the wooded area and part of the park on the 1838 map; the esker ridge and sloping field to the east are also shown on the nineteenth-century map. (figs 8 & 9)

In 1960s the owners (see below), who still held 15 acres of land around Portrane House, acquired Kelly's Field (map 1), an area of to the south of what is now the development site, and in 1993 they acquired Egan's Field, situated between Kelly's Field and the Front Field. (Duff) (figs 10 & 11) These three fields, together with the greater part of the esker ridge and field were sold to Laois County Council in 2019. This left an area of 1.75 acres around the house and outbuildings of Portrane House, now situated to the north west of what has become a development site. (map 5)

4.0. Outline history of Portrane House.

4.1. Esker ridge.

The esker ridge on the site is part of the remains of a roughly north-south ridge that runs from Timahoe to beyond Tullamore and is prominent in the area around Portlaoise: it can be found on the site, and to the north of the site where there is an extended burial ground. (map 6) The ridge was largely cleared of woodland in the prehistoric period, when it provided well-drained, easily worked land. (Feehan, p.7) Feehan notes that archaeological features are concentrated on such ridges, although none are recorded on the Ordnance

Survey maps that cover the site. There was an ancient road along the esker ridge, which was still in use in the early nineteenth century, though not in the Coote demesne. (O'Hanlon & O'Leary, vol 1, p. 192) (map 3) It is extremely likely that there was an ancient route along this ridge. The earliest remains that are evident today are in the stretch of ridge to the north of the site with burials and grave markers from the seventeenth century to the late nineteenth century. (map 6)

4.2. Maryborough.

Portlaoise, known as Maryborough until 1920, is a plantation town first established around a garrison – Maryborough Fort – in the sixteenth century.¹ The early planters displaced established Gaelic inhabitants, who periodically attacked the fort in the early years. However, the planter town flourished, being granted borough status in 1569, and by the 1650s it had become the third largest town in what was then Queen's County. (Loeber, p. 398)

The historians of Queen's County, O'Hanlon and O'Leary, write that 302 acres of forfeited land, described in the Down Survey as Burres, was assigned as commons for the Corporation of Maryborough, and that it was later illegally transferred by the burgesses to certain families – De Vesci, Parnell, Coote – who established their own estates. This suggests that Eyre Coote (see below) may have been the beneficiary of such a land transfer, allowing him to create, among other holdings, the small estate around Portrane House. (O'Hanlon and O'Leary vol 1 p. 195.) (map 7)

4.2. Eyre Cootes and the building of Portrane House.

The founder of the Portrane estate was a nabob. Sir Eyre Coote 1 (1726–83), who was born in Ash Hill, Co Limerick and brought up by his uncle, George Evans in Portrane House, Dublin, had an extremely successful career in the British army fighting, from 1754 to 1762 in India against the French, where he made a great deal of money. (Quinn, DIB) He distinguished himself at the Battle of Plassey in 1757, and at Pondicherry in 1761 which saw the destruction of French power in India. When he returned to England in 1762 the directors of the East India Company presented him with a ceremonial sword.

Eyre Coote had an interest in Queen's County from at least 1761, where he was MP for Maryborough from May to December 1761. He acquired substantial estates in the county with an annual rental of £2,000 (Johnston-Liik p. 500) and built Portrane House. (Quinn, DIB) Maryborough was expanding at this time and some mid-late eighteenth-century buildings survive. Eyre Coote's subsequent career suggests that he was not resident in Portrane House, or if he was, not for very long: he was MP for two English boroughs – Leicester (1768–74) and Poole (1774–80) – and continued his army career, promoted to colonel in 1765, returning to India in 1769, dying at sea off the coast of Madras in 1783. He was buried on his English estate at West Park, Hampshire.

¹ Portlaoise is derived from Port Loisghse, which is translated 'the town of Laoighis'. (O'Hanlon and O'Leary, vol 1 p. 102)

The front range of Portrane House is the part that survives from the 1760s. It was five bays and two-stories, terminating in a south-facing bow. (figs 12 & 13) The joinery of this house survives: six-panelled doors and architraves; four-panelled shutters that reflected the divisions of sash windows that have been replaced; and an imperial stair that seems a little grand for the scale of the house. (figs 14–16) A line of outbuildings incorporating stables and a carriage room was constructed parallel to the rear of the house. (map 3) (fig 17) Although altered, the central pediment, carriage arch and round hay loft windows survive, and there are still three stables in the range. The arched entrance to the stable yard was probably constructed at the same time. (fig 18) The remnant stone structure on the ridge may be part of a viewing platform that was constructed at this time, which would have enabled views south-east to the Rock of Dunamase. (fig 19)

Portrane House and estate remained in the possession of the Coote family until 1931 when it was sold to James Peter Tyrrell. From 1784 to 1925 four men named Eyre Coote were the owners: Eyre Coote II (1759–1823), nephew of Eyre Coote I; Eyre Coote III (1806–34) son of Eyre Coote II; Eyre Coote IV (1830–64) son of Eyre Coote III; and Eyre Coote V (1857–1925). His brother, Charles Henry Eyre Coote inherited in 1925 and sold the estate to Tyrrell. It is recorded that Eyre Coote II lived in Portrane House, but that his successors leased the house to tenants, including William Woodruffe (recorded by Samuel Lewis in 1837) who sub-let the house in the mid-nineteenth century until 1874. (Valuation Office Records) The house was inhabited by clergymen from the late nineteenth century to the 1931. (Valuation Office Records)

Eyre Coote II, like his uncle, was an active soldier and politician. He may have lived at Portrane House in the last years of the Union when he was MP for Ballynakill (1790–7) and Maryborough (1797–1800) and was involved in the suppression of the United Irishmen in Cork in 1797. His residence may have continued after the Union when he was MP for Queen's County (1802–1806), a time when Irish MPs were encouraged to be resident in Ireland. However, he had other houses elsewhere: he had inherited West Park in Hampshire, he had a residence of College Green and Forest Lodge Queen's County. (Johnston-Liik, 501)

4.3. Enlargement of Portrane House

Portrane House was extended and altered in the nineteenth century. The house was given a new roof, slightly higher than the older one, with wide eaves; this work may date to the 1830s. (fig 12) An extension with a bay window on the south façade was added in the later nineteenth century. (map 4) (fig 13) The brick chimneys and the plate glass windows date to the later nineteenth century. The nineteenth-century porch, visible on older photographs, was replaced in the 1960s by the current porch. The outbuildings were extended, including a piggery and hen houses added to the front range. (fig 20) The 1911 census lists 14 outbuildings – one of almost every type – which suggests a strong measure of self-sufficiency on the estate, then inhabited by a Church of Ireland clergyman, Rev Edmond Eves, his son, and two servants.

Maryborough extended significantly in the nineteenth century; not only did the core expand with new houses and public buildings, but by 1838 large institutional buildings in extensive grounds had been constructed east of the town to the north of Portrane House: the county hospital, prison and psychiatric hospital. (map 8) Enlarged and modernised Portrane House still stood in its 15-acre estate, a world away from the expanding town. Even by the early twentieth century, when the town boundary was extended to incorporate Portrane House, the estate (map 9)

4.4. Tyrrells.

James Peter Tyrrell, who bought the estate in 1931 died ten years later and the property came into the possession of his son James T. Tyrrell, who ran a veterinary practice from the outbuildings. He and his wife, Joanne, had eight children. His daughter Mary Tyrrell is the current owner with her husband, while two of her brothers continue the veterinary practice.

5.0. Statement of significance

The significance of Portrane House can be found in a number of aspects:

- Its historic roots as a mid-eighteenth century country house, built outside Maryborough, then a small town that was emerging from its role as a fortified planter town.
- Its long association with the Eyre Coote family which, in the latter part of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, produced military men who made significant contributions to British imperial history.
- Its picturesque setting derived from the wooded esker ridge which was such a prominent feature of its relatively small demesne. (fig 21)
- Its continuing character as a country estate as Portlaoise has expanded to the east and south of the site. (map 10) This derived from the demesne and the twentieth-century acquisitions of Egan's and Kelly's Fields. (fig 22)

6.0. Legislation and policy

NIAH: Portrane House is listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage: reg no 12507122; regional rating; categories of special interest: architectural and social.
RPS: Portrane House is a Protected Structure in Laois County Development Plan: RPS 925.
ACA: Portrane House is not in Portlaoise ACA (map 11)
Archaeological Significance Zone: Portrane House is not in Portlaoise Archaeological Significance Zone. (map 12)

Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2018–2014.

Built heritage concerns in the current Portlaoise Local Area Plan are focused on the historic town centre, which, as can be seen above, is to the west of Portrane House. However, the Portrane House is subject to protections as a protected structure.

Objectives – BH 02 Conserve, protect and enhance the built heritage of Portlaoise, including ... all protected structures and attendant grounds ... in accordance with best conservation practice.'

BH 04: 'Ensure all development works on or at the site of protected structures, including any site works necessary, shall be carried out using best heritage practice for the protection and preservation of those aspects or features of the structures/site that render it worthy of protection.'

Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023

Policies relating to built heritage in the current Laois County Development Plan refer to consultation with the relevant government department and express concern that new developments in the vicinity of the protected structure are of a high quality that relate to the existing protected structure.

Objectives – OBJ4 Protect all structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical character or interest in County Laois.

Policy – BH 2 Consult with the DAHG in considering planning applications that may affect protected structures or ACAs.

BH 5 Safeguard protected structures from works that would adversely affect or erode their special character, and where proposals are made to ... site new buildings within the curtilage of a Protected Structure, ensure Protected Structure status is used as a stimulus to the imaginative and considered design of the new elements.

7.0. Curtilage and attendant grounds

7.1. Definitions

Curtilage

Curtilage is not defined by legislation. *The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities* defines curtilage as 'the parcel of land immediately associated with the [protected] structure and which is (or was) in use for the purposes of the structure.' (para 13.1.1, p. 191) It goes on to say; 'The extent of the curtilage will need to be determined on a case-by-case basis'. (para 13.1.4 p. 191) In 13.1.5 it outlines considerations to be taken into account when making a decision as to the extent of the curtilage of a protected structure

'a) Is, or was there a functional connection between the structures?'

'b) Was there a historical relationship between the main structure and the structure(s) within the curtilage which may no longer be obvious?'

Attendant grounds

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities defines the attendant grounds of a protected structure as 'lands outside the curtilage of the structure

but which are associated with the structure and are intrinsic to its function, setting and/or appreciation.' (13.2.1, p. 192.) Features within the curtilage and attendant grounds can, according to *The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities*, (13.2.3 p. 192) be identified as being worthy of protection.

7.2. Curtilage, attendant grounds and setting of Portane House (map 5)

It is considered that the curtilage of Portane House is the area immediately around the house – outbuildings, gardens, entrance and tennis court – which is in the ownership of the Tyrrell family. These structures and landscape features are close to the house and have a continuing functional relationship with it. (fig 23)

It is considered that the attendant grounds are the areas beyond this which were once in the demesne and had a functional relationship with the house and estate, but are now no longer in the possession of the Tyrrell family. This includes Front Field (the former park), the esker ridge and its slopes. (fig 24)

There are several features in these lands which lend character and witness earlier uses. They are:

- Line of mature beech trees and a single beech (the remnants of a longer line) parallel to Stradbally Road. (fig 25)
- A single evergreen tree in Front Field which is all that remains of the parkland trees and which stands out in the landscape. (figs 26 & 27)
- The stone structure on the ridge which may have been a viewing point. (fig 19)

The setting of Portane House is best appreciated from the east and south-east in the former Front Field. (figs 21 & 22) This reveals the house surrounded by the trees of its gardens and the wider setting of the esker ridge. The view of the esker ridge includes the land sloping up to the ridge itself, the trees on the upper slope and the skyline, which is composed of the line of the ridge with intervals of trees. In the foreground is the former park, with its line of beech trees to the right and single evergreen to the left.

8.0. Discussion and recommendations

8.1. Outline proposals for the site

This report is intended to assist with proposals for the site. Land use for the site is zoned by Laois County Council: the former Front Field is zoned residential; former Egan's Field and the Esker ridge and field at its base is zoned open space and amenity and former Kelly's Field is zoned community, educational and institutional. (map 13)

8.2. Heritage sensitivities

Proposed housing development and part of the area for proposed open space and amenity will be situated within the attendant grounds of the protected structure.

The Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines for Planning Authorities outlines issues that should be considered for new development within attendant grounds. (p. 201) They include:

- whether proposals would affect the character of the protected structure
- whether the proposals would affect the relationship between the protected structure to its surroundings and attendant grounds
- whether the protected structure would remain a focus of its setting
- whether the proposals would conserve significant features in the landscape
- whether the proposals would affect significant views to and from the protected structure
- whether distant views of a landmark or a skyline be affected
- the effect of the scale, height, massing, alignment and materials of a proposed construction have on the protected structure.

In the case of Portran House two aspects of its significance are relevant:

- Its picturesque setting
- Its character as a country estate

In order to safeguard these features it is recommended that the following is considered: (map 14)

- A generous buffer zone between the boundary of Portran House and the proposed housing. This zone should include a strip of land adjacent to Stradbally Road where the beech trees grow and it should flow into the area zoned open space at the foot of the esker. (figs 25, 28) (map 14) There is an opportunity to treat this buffer as parkland, and to incorporate a path to link Stradbally Road and the housing development to the rest of the site. (see below) As map 2 shows historically there was a network of paths linking the north end of the demesne where the beech trees are located with the southern part of the demesne. The buffer zone would be reinforced if the housing development was designed in such a way that there was a concentration of gardens or public open space adjacent to the buffer. The single evergreen tree may fall into the buffer zone or be incorporated into landscaping in the housing scheme. This would help to preserve the setting of Portrane House and allow a view of the beech trees from the house and garden.
- One or more open areas/sight lines through the housing development which would enable views of Portrane House in a setting that includes the ridge. This could be associated with a new path system, giving access to the open space amenity and linking with a path in the buffer zone. Important views include figs 21, 22, 11. (map 14)
- A low rise housing scheme that would retain the view of the trees lining the River Derry from Portrane House. (fig 23)
- Retention of existing features of the Esker Ridge including the viewing point and the trees. (figs 2, 5, 9, 10, 19, 21)

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Stradbally Road, Portlaoise

Preliminary Heritage Assessment Report

Images



Dr Judith Hill

Architectural Historian and Heritage Consultant

12 Harbour View Terrace

South Circular Road

Limerick

Tel: 00353 87 9240187

hill@olive.ie

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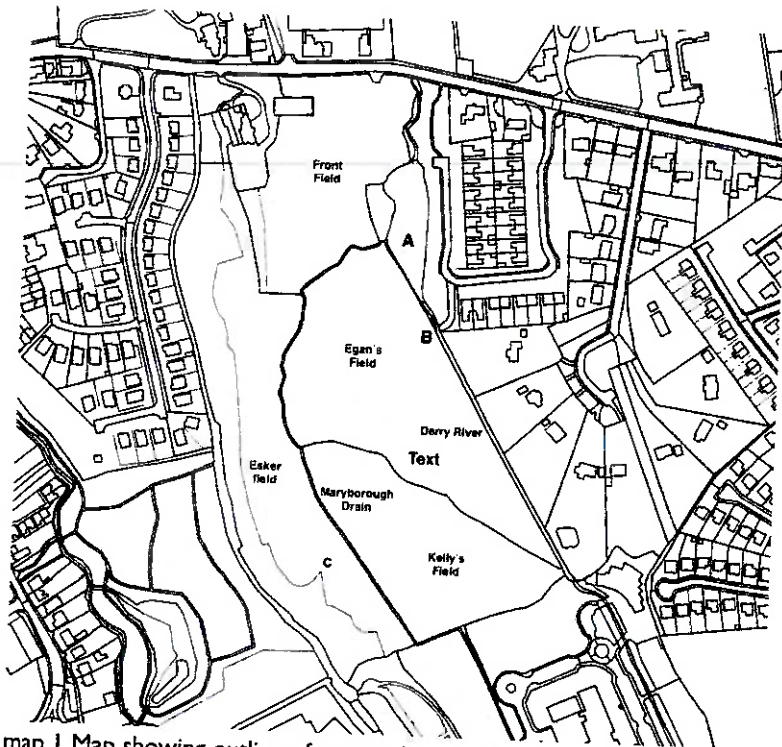
Maps

- map 1 Map showing outline of current land holdings, names and features
- map 2 Map showing historic footpaths.
- map 3 Map showing outline of demesne on 1st edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1838.
- map 4 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1907.
- map 5 Map showing curtilage and attendant grounds.
- map 6 Map showing esker ridge
- map 7 Extract from Down Survey 1656–8.
- map 8 1st edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1838 showing wider area.
- map 9 Last edition Ordnance Survey map mid-twentieth century.
- map 10 Geohive contemporary map of Portlaoise
- map 11 Portlaoise ACA from Portlaoise Local Area Plan
- map 12 Archaeological Significance Zone in Portlaoise from Portlaoise Local Area Plan
- map 13 Zoning from Laois County Development Plan
- map 14 Map showing curtilage, attendant grounds and significant views.

Photographs (taken by Judith Hill unless otherwise stated)

- fig 1 East boundary showing trees along River Derry.
- fig 2 View of Maryborough Drain and hedge.
- fig 3 View of north boundary showing Stradbally Apartments on Stradbally Road.
- fig 4 Access to the site from Stradbally Road.
- fig 5 View across Maryborough Drain towards the esker path.
- fig 6 View of the esker path
- fig 7 View of Downs Lane
- fig 8 View of Front Field.
- fig 9 View of esker ridge and field looking north.
- fig 10 View of Kelly's Field.
- fig 11 View from Egan's Field to Front Field.
- fig 12 Front (east) elevation of Portrane House.
- fig 13 South elevation of Portrane House.
- fig 14 Interior of hall showing door joinery.
- fig 15 Shutters in south bow showing fluted detail.
- fig 16 View of imperial stair in hall.
- fig 17 View of outbuildings directly behind the house.
- fig 18 Entrance arch to rear yard.
- fig 19 Rubble stone structure on esker ridge which may be the remains of a viewing platform
- fig 20 Outbuildings to north of house
- fig 21 View of the house from the east in the setting of the esker ridge.
- fig 22 View of the house from the east set in garden trees.
- fig 23 View of garden to the south of the house.
- fig 24 Historic photograph children playing in the front field with the south part of Portrane House in the background.
- fig 25 View of line of beeches and single beech to left in Front Field.
- fig 26 View of single evergreen and Front Field from the north.
- fig 27 View of single evergreen and Front Field from the north.
- fig 28 View of Front Field from the esker ridge.
- fig 29 Looking north towards Portrane House with the esker on the left
- fig 30 View out from the front of Portrane House through the garden trees towards the beech trees along Stradbally Road.

Maps



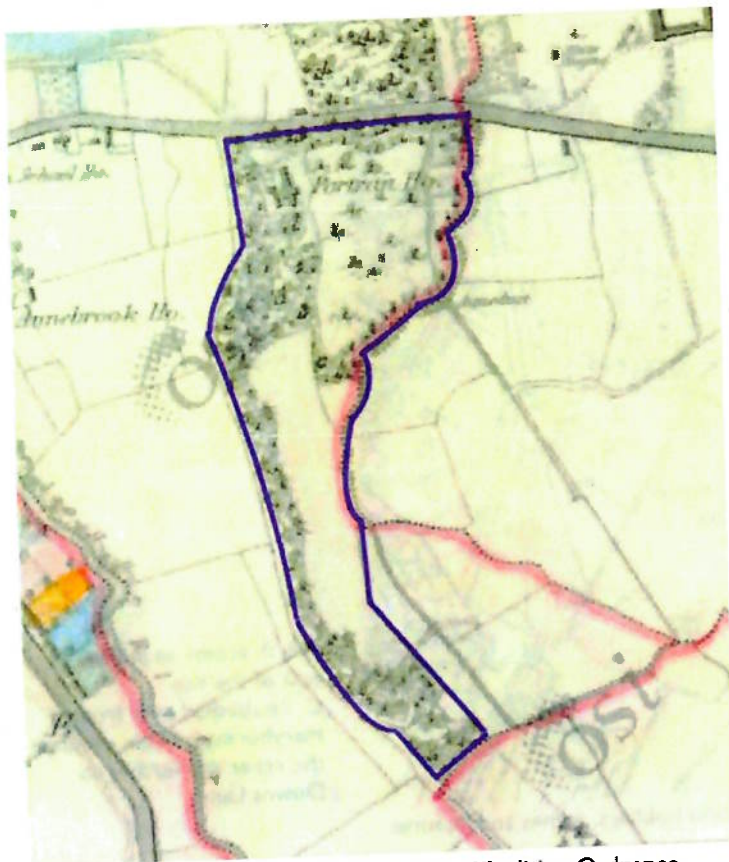
map 1 Map showing outline of current land holdings, names and features.

A & B: access to paths to east of the site
C: Established path from Maryborough Drain crossing the esker and leading to Downs Lane

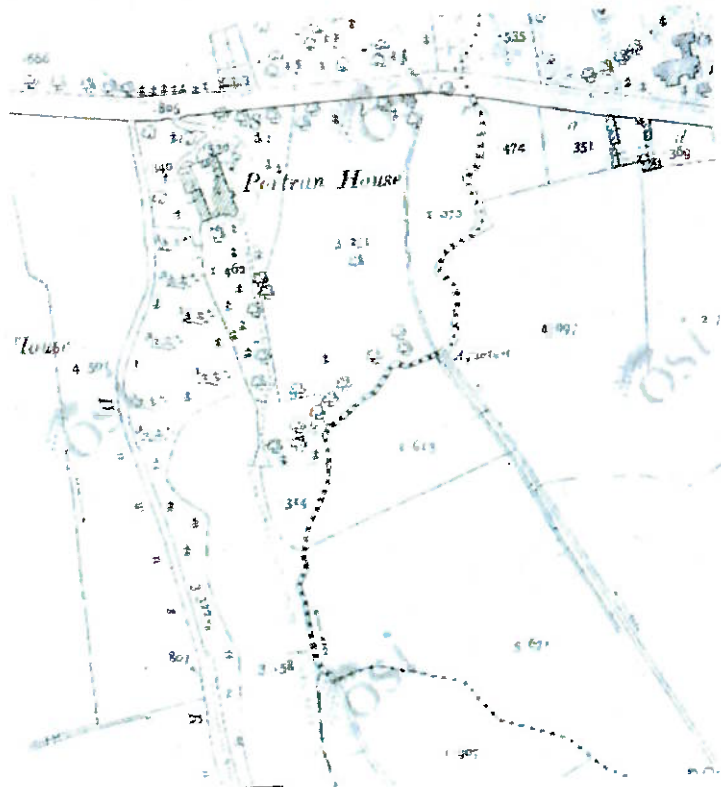


map 2 Map showing historic footpaths.

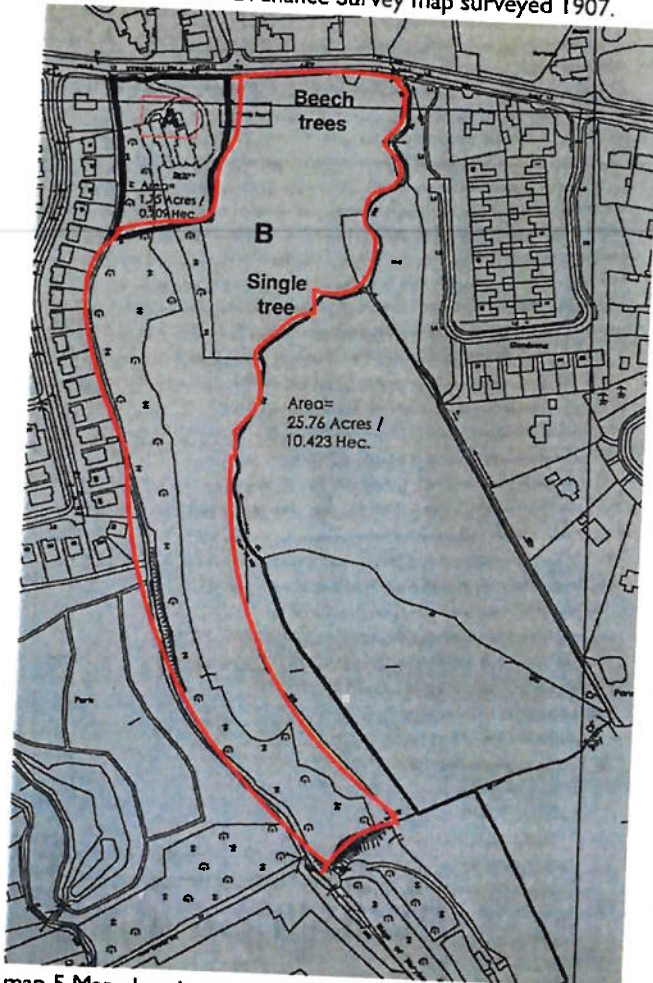
Red line: 1838 OS map
Green line: 1907 OS map
C: see map 1



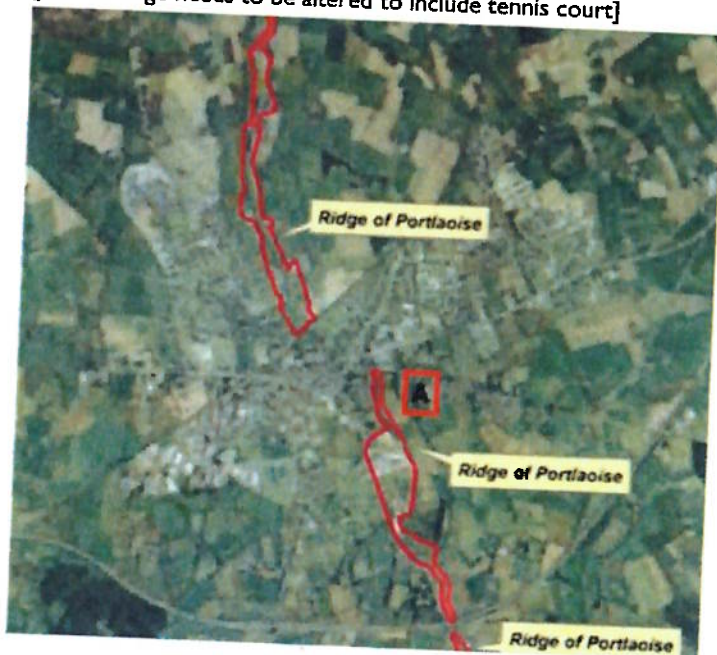
map 3 Map showing outline of demesne on 1st edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1838.



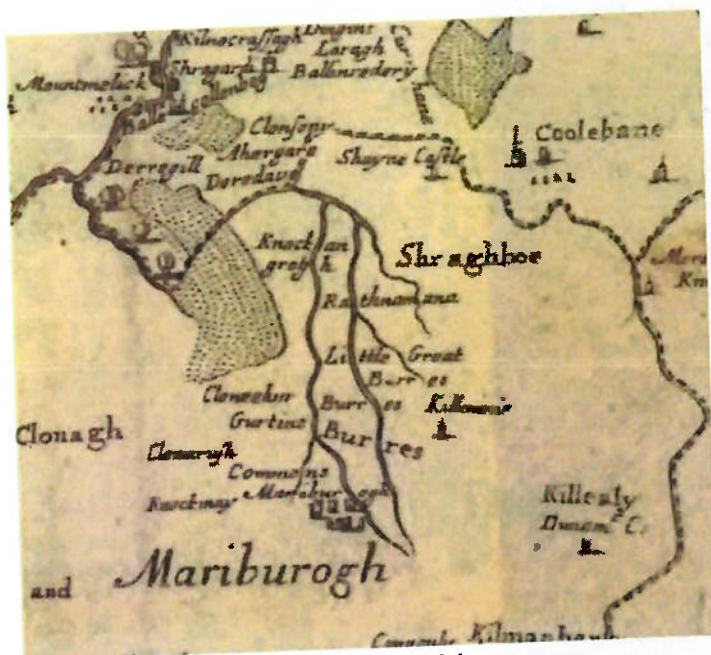
map 4 2nd edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1907.



map 5 Map showing curtilage and attendant grounds. Base map: deed.
A Curtilage. B Attendant Grounds.
[NB curtilage needs to be altered to include tennis court]



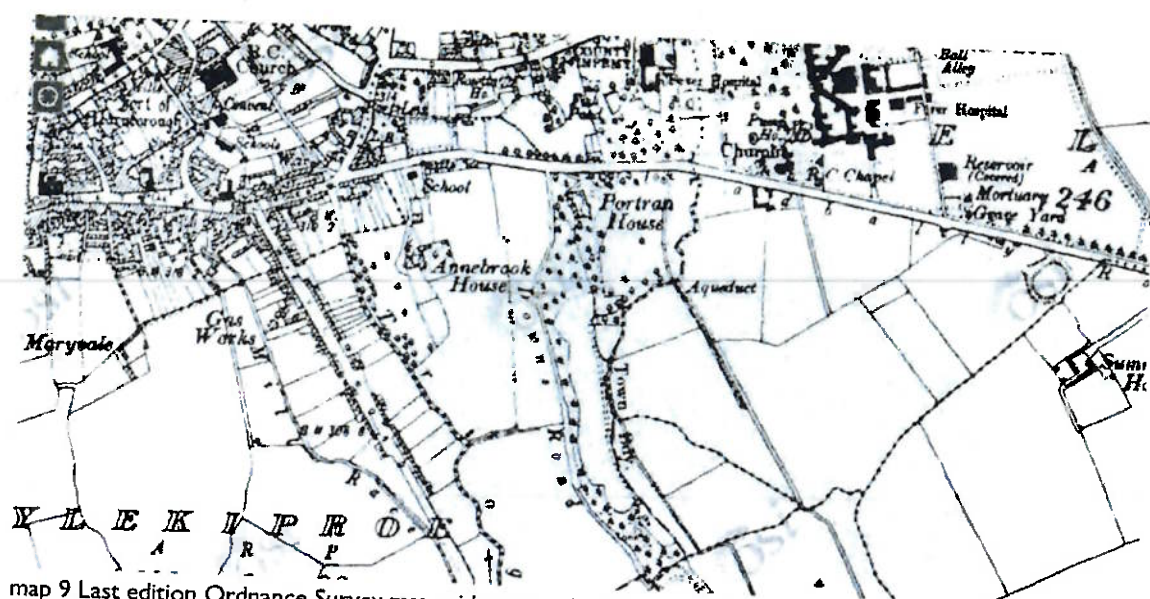
map 6 Map showing esker ridge: position of site: A.

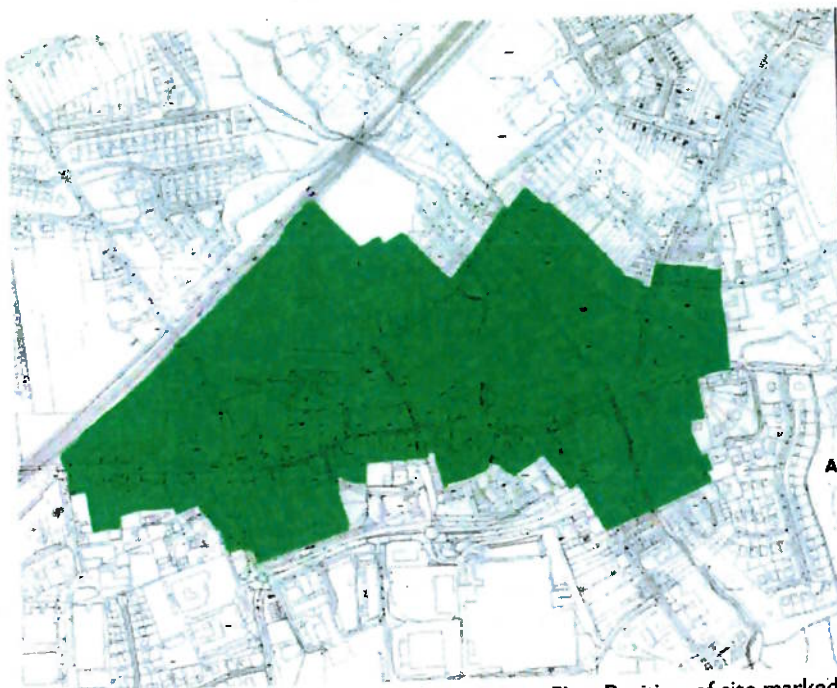


map 7 Extract from Down Survey 1656-8 from
<https://libguides.ucd.ie/findingmaps/mapshistIreland> accessed 02.02.21



map 8 1st edition Ordnance Survey map surveyed 1838 showing wider area.

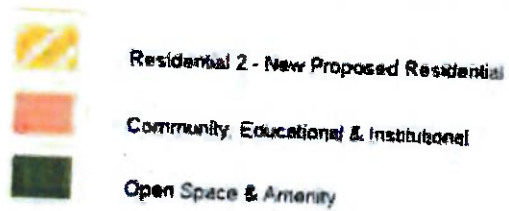
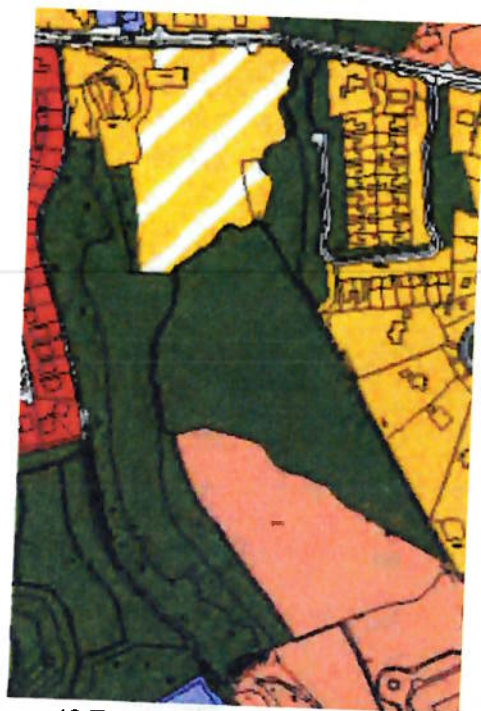




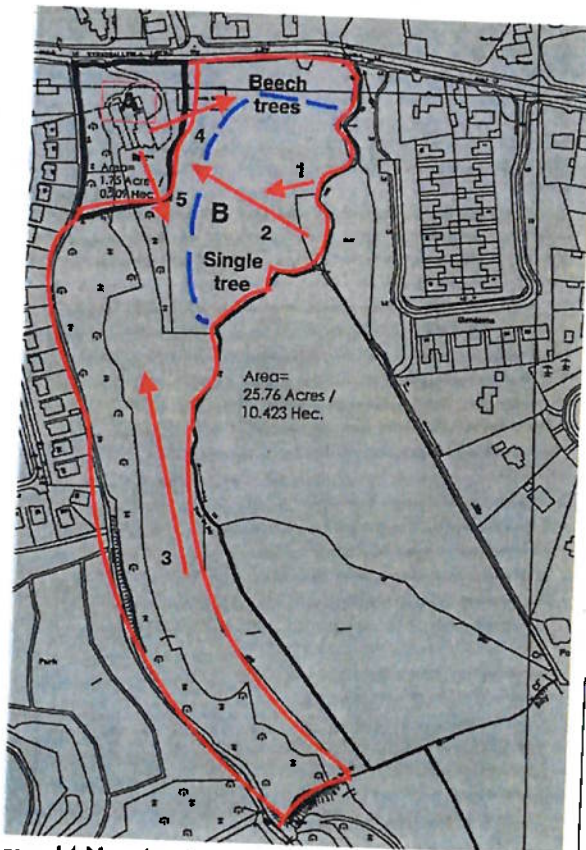
map 11 Portlaoise ACA from Portlaoise Local Area Plan: Position of site marked A



map 12 Archaeological Significance Zone in Portlaoise from Portlaoise Local Area Plan: Position of site marked A.



map 13 Zoning from Laois County Development Plan.



For view 1 see fig 21
For view 2 see fig 22
For view 3 see fig 29
For view 4 see fig 30
For view 5 see fig 23

map 14 Map showing curtilage, attendant grounds (map 5) and significant views. Blue dashed line: suggested boundary of buffer zone.

Photographs (taken by Judith Hill unless otherwise stated)



fig 1 East boundary showing trees along River Derry.



fig 2 View of Maryborough Drain and hedge with esker ridge behind.



fig 3 View from Egan's Field of north boundary showing Stradbally Apartments on Stradbally Road.



fig 4 Entrance to the site from Stradbally Road.



fig 5 View across Maryborough Drain towards the esker path.



fig 6 View of the esker path looking east



fig 7 View of Downs Lane



fig 8 View of Front Field. In distance with esker ridge and field in foreground.



fig 9 View of esker ridge and field looking north.



fig 10 View of Kelly's Field looking west towards the esker ridge

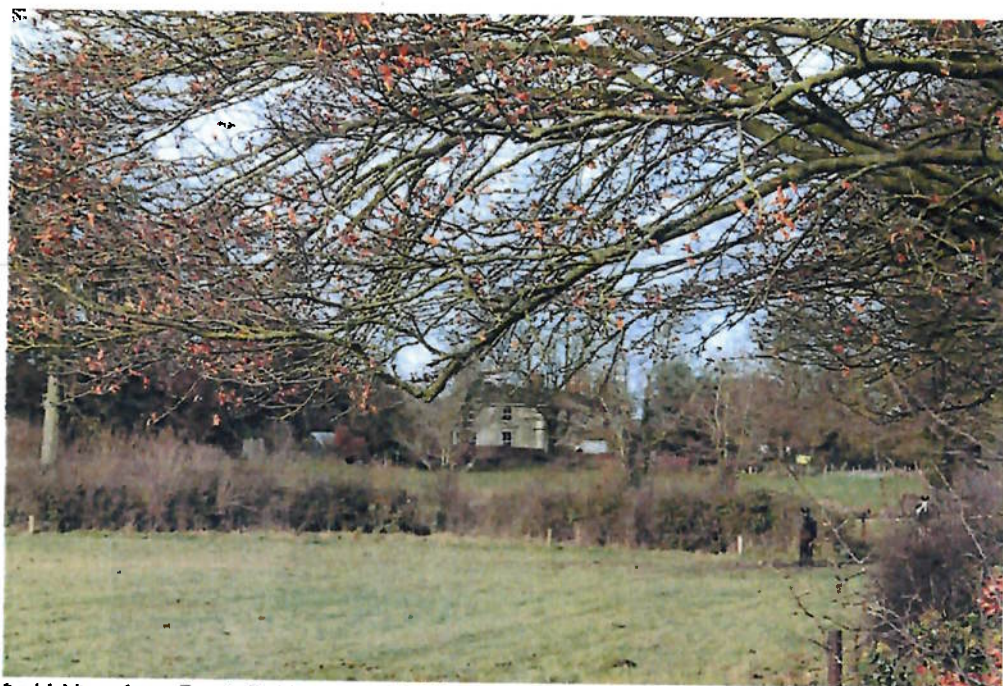


fig 11 View from Egan's Field to Front Field.



fig 12 Front (east) elevation of Portrane House.



fig 13 South elevation of Portrane House.



fig 14 Interior of hall showing door, shutter and staircase joinery.



fig 15 Shutters in south bow showing fluted detail.



fig 16 View of imperial stair in hall.



fig 17 View of outbuildings directly behind the house.



fig 18 Entrance arch to rear yard.



fig 19 Rubble stone structure on esker ridge which may be the remains of a viewing platform



fig 20 Outbuildings to north of house



fig 21 View of the house from the east in the setting of the esker ridge.



fig 22 View of the house from the east set in garden trees.



fig 23 View of garden to the south of the house.



fig 24 Historic photograph children playing in the front field with the south part of Portrane House in the background. (From E Duff Conservation report)



fig 25 View of line of beeches plus single beech to left in Front Field.



fig 26 View of single evergreen and Front Field from the south.



fig 27 View of single evergreen in Front Field from the north.



fig 28 View of Front Field from the esker ridge.



fig 29 Looking north towards Portrane House with the esker on the left



fig 30 View out from the front of Portrane House through the garden trees towards the beech trees along Stradbally Road.