

# DUNLOE CASTLE



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Contractor: Conservation & Restoration



## An Illustrated Guide



Written, designed and produced by Howley Hayes Architects

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Front cover: View over River Laune towards castle from north east

Back cover: Commemorative plaque

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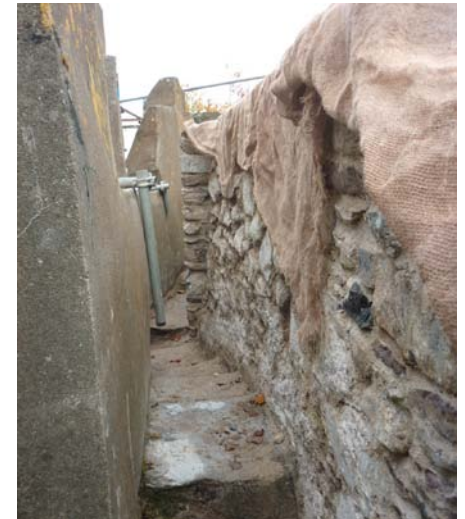
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Arna Pháirt-Mhaoiniú ag Fáilte Ireland

## CONSERVATION WORKS

Howley Hayes Architects were appointed as conservation architects to the castle to oversee necessary repairs and to design measures to improve access for maintenance, public safety and to reinstate the structure's use as a prospect tower.

The building was in a very poor structural state, with many areas of unstable masonry at high level. The battlements had been rendered with hard cement which was now cracking badly. This was caused by frost action and damage by tree and ivy roots. All of the window lintels were in poor condition and in danger of collapse, and the timber windows were beyond repair. A new eighteenth-century style front door and a replica window were installed in the south facade.

The repair works involved the removal of the ivy, repair of the stonework to the battlements, fireplaces, window openings and the installation of a lightweight steel gangway and staircase. All of the repair work was carried out using traditional techniques including the use of lime



View along wall walk under repair

mortars. These are softer than the cement mortars used to repair the building since the middle of the twentieth century, which led to cracking and damage to the original stonework. The installation of the new staircase involved considerable precision and ingenuity, demonstrating the need for the best traditional and modern techniques in the successful conservation of historic buildings.

Change, often slow, is the essence of nature and actually adds a dimension of interest to any building or landscape. The wall walks have been restored to their former prominence as a principal vantage point and tourist attraction in Killarney, providing access to one of the most interesting cultural and aesthetic landscapes to be found anywhere in Ireland. This is an impressive new attraction for the region in the preservation of an important part of our built heritage. The repairs were carried out by Killarney Hotels with the financial support from Fáilte Ireland in 2013.



Parapet being rebuilt by Conservation & Restoration



View up the mural staircase prior to conservation repairs

The walls extend up to form stepped battlements on the south, west and north facades within which there are machicolations on the south and west sides. These probably dated from the rebuilding and upward extension of the lower, Anglo-Norman structure at some time between the late fifteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Lines of dripstones project on the north and south sides, the corner bartizan features three arrow or pistol loops for the purposes of defence.

The external walls consist of random rubble stonework on the north, south and west facades and a combination of rubble stonework and brick on the rebuilt east façade. The east façade was rebuilt to incorporate nine large new window openings, thus making the building usable as a residence when the defenses were no longer necessary. A significant portion of the main walls are still coated with their original sand and lime dash.

The inner faces of the external walls appear to have been altered significantly over time, with the addition of chimney flues, fireplace openings and internal staircases, scars of which are visible on the north wall. In some areas heavy timber posts remain embedded into the masonry, and in the scars of the former floor plates are found the remains of floorboards and several floor beams.

Like the various changes to the fireplaces within the building, the windows also provide interesting evidence of the evolution of the building. The windows in the early Anglo-Norman castle would have been small and narrow permitting, little light and air. The only early opening



Detail of carved stone fireplace prior to repair

to survive is the narrow slit window in the mural staircase. Fragments of the later medieval windows survive in the north façade that take the form of well-dressed limestone surrounds, with mullions and hood mouldings. There are also several large fragments that were most likely salvaged during the eighteenth-century modernisations, that have been reused in the construction of the parapets to the seats beside the entrance door. The east facade windows are interesting examples of late eighteenth-century joinery.

Dunloe Castle was built around 800 years ago by the Anglo-Normans. It was attacked, damaged, repaired and altered many times during the 700 years it was lived in. Having fallen into a state of dereliction during the twentieth-century and was saved from collapse in 2013 by Killarney Hotels Ltd. with support from Fáilte Ireland. The new access stairway to the wall walk along the parapet makes accessible the beautiful views over the Laune river that have been enjoyed for centuries before it fell into disuse.

Every care has been taken to ensure that the access to and within the castle is hazard free but care must be taken due to the ruined condition of the structure, confined spaces and uneven walking surfaces. Visitors enter the castle and wall walk at their own risk. Stout walking shoes are recommended to access the castle and care should be taken at all times. Those responsible for children should be particularly vigilant and they should only enter the structure when accompanied by an adult.

Please stay on the walkway and in designated areas of the structure and refrain from dropping litter. We hope you enjoy your visit and the chance to see one of Ireland's most celebrated views.



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took place with each major building programme. Why this small, inflexible structure remained as a dwelling for such a long period is unclear. The normal pattern for occupied tower houses and small castles, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was for the addition of significant wings or extensions, sometimes larger than the original structure; or abandonment and construction of a new dwelling on a nearby site. Demolition of such massive structures was rarely a consideration as this would have involved considerable labour and expense. The answer may simply lie in a lack of funds, or in the very beautiful location and its wonderful prospects that the owners were reluctant to forfeit.



Detail view of curved bartizan to SE corner



View of the parapet prior to conservation repairs



Detail view of drip stones & machicolations to south parapet

The roof has not survived, however its original form can be determined from numerous drawings and photographs that survive and from the detail of the wall heads. It consisted of a steeply pitched, hipped structure the ridge of which ran along the shorter north-south axis of the building. The steep pitch would have allowed for some accommodation in the roof space, together with access onto the wall walk; both a defensive feature, and later a vantage from which to enjoy the views.

The chimney flues were not built into the original external walls. When the castle was extended upwards in height, it appears that the walls were thickened internally and flues added. These sixteenth- or seventeenth-century flues, were then later adapted to incorporate eighteenth-century fireplaces when an additional level was created along with the new east façade. The changing of internal storey and the covering up of the old fireplaces creates a complex but fascinating history of change to the building carried out over centuries. There is even one late nineteenth-century fireplace in the ground floor/basement area, which appears to have been constructed to accommodate a cooking range.

## DESCRIPTION

The castle has a rectangular plan measuring approximately eleven meters north to south and eight meters east to west. Both the north and south walls measure 1.8m thick at their base and the original entrance appears to have been on the north side at



View of the south facade and main entrance

first floor level. Probably created during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, the current entrance on the south side is approached by a broad flight of stone steps. A *bartizan* on the south east corner together with *machicolations* on the parapet suggest a typical Irish tower house from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. However, the masonry pattern of the lower two storeys, together with the steep mural staircase contained within the west wall rising from beside the original first floor entrance, suggest that significant portions of the thirteenth-century structure remain.

The almost total lack of any fifteenth- or sixteenth-century window detail in the structure, is due to the late eighteenth-century modifications that included the complete rebuilding of the east façade, and the insertion of large windows into the north and south facades. Two small fragments of sixteenth-century window detail survive in the north façade while some small fragments of hood moulding remain above the enlarged first floor window, that was most likely the original entrance door. Substantial fragments of other two- and three-light window surrounds of this same period survive and have been used as copings to the low walls forming the backs of stone seats on the landing of the staircase leading up to the entrance door.

The most significant intervention is undoubtedly the new east façade, which probably dates from the early eighteenth century. This contains nine large ogee-headed Gothick window openings, arranged symmetrically in three bays rising to three stories over a ground floor level that contained a least two more windows, now blocked. Such a radical intervention was necessary to provide sufficient daylight and ventilation to make this ancient structure habitable by the standards of that time, with the original narrow windows recycled to form parapets at the new entrance.

The well-documented social history of Dunloe provides a full record of the families who have lived there over its history, while the various military attacks it suffered provide important clues as to the cause for the often radical changes that took

## INTRODUCTION

The ruined structure of Dunloe Castle adorns one of the most romantic and picturesque sites in Ireland. It stands on an elevated ridge overlooking a bend in the River Laune, beyond which there is a distant view of the Lough Leane commonly referred to in Killarney as the *Lower Lake*. To the south lies the striking prospect of the Gap of Dunloe. Commanding as it does, two such important strategic locations, it is not surprising that the site has been fortified for many centuries, probably dating back to before the Norman invasion of Ireland, which occurred during the late twelfth century. The surviving ruin contains fabric from many different historic periods, together with physical evidence of numerous programmes of repair and alteration, all of which are substantiated by an extensive collection of published and archival descriptions of the castle and its history. Accounts that appear in the many guide books to Ireland and Killarney, published during

the eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries, indicate that Dunloe was a major beauty spot and an essential stopping off point on a tour of Killarney. The castle stands in a designed landscape dating back to the mid eighteenth century, which has been well maintained and enriched by new planting right up to the present day.

What makes Dunloe Castle so remarkable is the survival of so many different layers of building history from the thirteenth to the twentieth century. These present an entire history, both social and architectural, of residential building by the landed classes in Ireland over a period of some 700 years. Many of these changes were obscured by later interventions but have been uncovered again, initially as the building fell into a state of dereliction; and laterally as the structure was consolidated and saved from collapse. During this process many layers have been peeled back to be revealed within the ruin.



View over River Laune from wall walk looking north east towards Killarney



## HISTORY

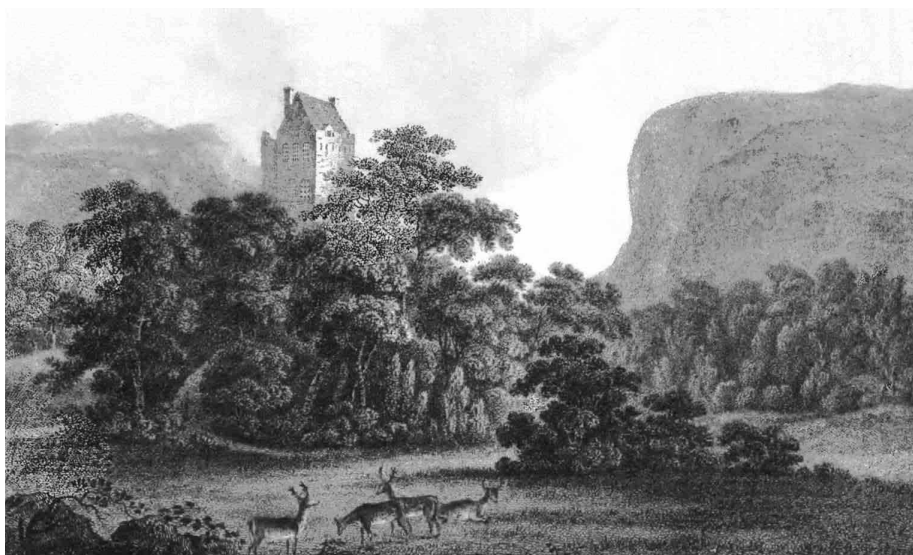
Dunloe Castle stands in, and gives its name to, the townland of *Dun Loich* which in Irish translates as - *the fort of the Loe*. The Irish place name suggests the site may have been a fortification, probably gaelic chieftains from the O'Sullivan family, before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans who are first recorded at Dunloe in 1215. Since that early record there followed seven hundred years of occupancy, albeit interrupted on a number of occasions following damage caused by military engagement.

### Early History

Several accounts of a castle at Dunloe survive from the thirteenth century, the first of which notes the rebuilding of a castle, in 1215, by the son of Thomas Fitzgerald, from the prominent Anglo-Norman family that dominated the area at that time. The castle is mentioned again in 1261 in the *Annals of Innisfallen* and in

the *Annals of the Four Masters*, as having been destroyed by the Irish chieftains. The *Annals of Innisfallen* also record a further slighting by Irish chieftains in 1281, while *The Annals of the Four Masters* records a later attack on the castle in 1570 by the Earl of Ormond.

In 1603 the Catholic King James I returned Dunloe to Donal O'Sullivan Mór, head of the O'Sullivan family. Following the execution of James I and the parliamentary campaigns in Ireland by Cromwell and his generals, Dunloe was acquired by Sir William Petty in 1656. Petty was a well educated medical doctor, surveyor and author who was given the task of measuring and mapping the estates that had been confiscated under Cromwell. This important information was produced in map form, which Petty later expanded to produce the first Atlas of Ireland.



Engraving of Dunloe Castle dated 1812

Harrington also planted many beautiful native species, and with the exception of some ancient yews and an oak he was responsible for almost all of the mature trees that survive today.

Mr Harrington's important horticultural legacy was maintained enthusiastically by his successors, the first of which was Ms Agnes Petitt who made further improvements between 1937 and 1960 when the demesne was sold to the German industrialist Hans Liebherr. That the demesne and its collection of trees survives in such a splendid state today is due to his careful tenure, and he used the historic demesne as the setting for a new luxury hotel which he constructed and opened in 1965.

Mr Liebherr, who had a keen love of plants and in particular trees, was sensitive to both the horticultural and aesthetic value of the demesne and great care was taken in the siting of the new hotel to ensure that it capitalised on views of the Gap, without threatening any of the mature trees. He also sought expert advice from leading horticulturalists and botanists in Germany and England about how he should protect



Photograph of the south entrance dated 1891

and enhance the existing planting and its rare collection of exotic and unusual species. This work continues to this day under the guidance of Mr Liebherr's family and company.

### Conclusion

The history of Dunloe Castle is quite exceptional, having served as a dwelling throughout a period of some seven hundred years, albeit with some interruptions due to damage caused by various military actions. It is one of the most interesting and romantic ruins, and one of the most famous beauty spots in Ireland.



View of approach to the tower from the hotel

By the early nineteenth century, Killarney had become a major tourist attraction and the view from the battlements of Dunloe Castle, was one of the major attractions. Some thirty years later, in 1843, the celebrated travel writer Mrs S. C. Hall also eulogised the beauties of Dunloe. In her book entitled *A Week in Killarney*, she included the following enthusiastic and picturesque description.

*Let no one leave Killarney without rowing a mile or two down the Laune, and visiting Dunloe Castle by water; as we did in the "gloaming" of a summer evening, when the lake was calm, the grey fly floating on its surface, and the salmon and the trout springing from its surface.....and then - here stands the castle on its bold promontory above the river - a firm, fearless-looking keep, approached by a steep hill road, recalling, both by its shape and situation, one of the Rhine towers.*

## Twentieth Century

The Mahony family continued to occupy Dunloe into the twentieth century, albeit in reduced numbers. Marcella Mahony then aged forty and described as a single



View over the river from close to the base of the tower

woman of independent means, is noted as being the head of the family in the 1901 census. Other occupants at that time included a parlour maid, a cook and a visitor from England. At that time the castle was described as being a second class dwelling, containing five or six rooms, although four other inhabited properties are noted as being in Marcella's possession, which were probably occupied offices. The other out-buildings noted in this census included – three stables, two cow houses, two piggeries, a store and laundry. By the time of the 1911 census, a widow called Mrs Ada Elisabeth Mahony was living in the castle as head of the household with a



View of encircling walls and mature trees

single servant. The number of rooms was noted as thirteen or more, which probably included the inhabited outbuildings. Also recorded are a number of ancillary buildings including – three stables, two fowl houses, one potato house, one turf house and four sheds. Dunloe was subsequently sold in the early 1920s to the American Howard Harrington. He was an elderly man when he obtained Dunloe and his tenure lasted until 1936 when ill health forced his return to the United States. His legacy to Dunloe is immense, as he planted the wonderful arboretum that contains a collection of rare trees of international acclaim.

The O'Mahony family owned and lived in Dunloe for over two hundred years throughout the entire eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first *tourist* account of Dunloe appears in 1756 in Charles Smith's book entitled *The Ancient and Present State of the County of Kerry*.

*...a mile more west on the river Laune, is Dunlow (sic) Castle, boldly seated upon an eminence; to the south of which is a very craggy, deep, and romantic chasm in the mountain. (The Gap) It commands an extensive view of the lake from the west end, with the meandering course of the river above mentioned, down to the harbour at Castlemain. The floors of this castle and the adjacent house, .....are formed of very fine planks of the yew tree.*

The rebuilding of the east wall was part of a major upgrade in the late eighteenth century to make the castle more habitable by introducing better light and ventilation. The nine windows are set out symmetrically on the upper three floors of the east façade, with ogival arches, a style commonly referred to as *Georgian Gothick*. Other major changes were also made during this period to construct a new entrance door on the south side and to insert new large windows in the south and north facades.



Aquatint by Ballantyne dated 1856



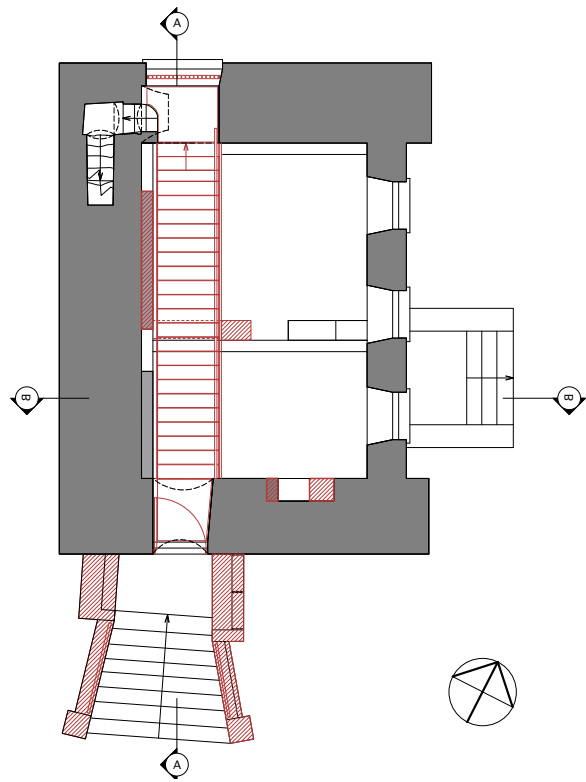
Photograph of castle dated 1891

## Nineteenth Century

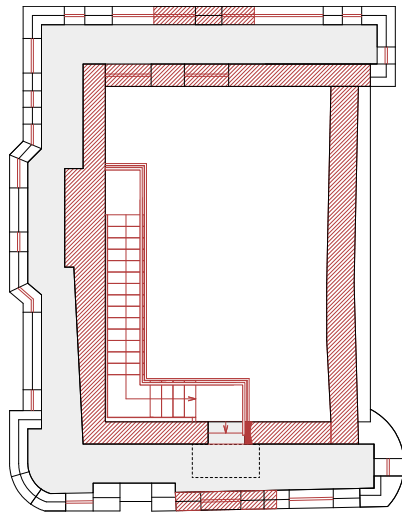
In 1805, another visitor and author John Carr, left a further detailed description of a visit to Dunloe. In his book *The Stranger in Ireland, or A Tour in the Southern and Western Parts of that Country*, Carr described a picturesque journey by boat from the Lower Lake, along the River Laune to Dunloe.

*Upon our arrival at the castle, we found our horses ready saddled, and we immediately proceeded to a frightful scene of desolation, called the Gap, about three miles distant.... I felt no indisposition to quit this desolate region and return to Dunloe Castle, where we found an excellent dinner, and an Irish welcome, waiting our arrival. In the woods near the castle, we passed by some of its towers and apartments, which the canon of Cromwell and the rending hand of time, had laid prostrate. The part that retains its perpendicularity still preserves the dignified name of a castle, although it has only one room on a floor, and many of the family are obliged to be accommodated in the out offices.*

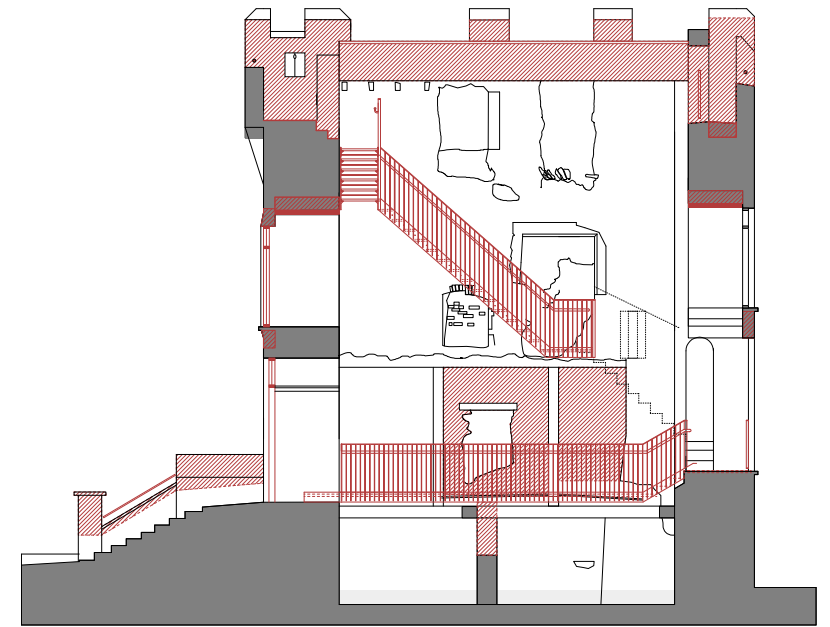
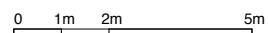




GROUND PLAN

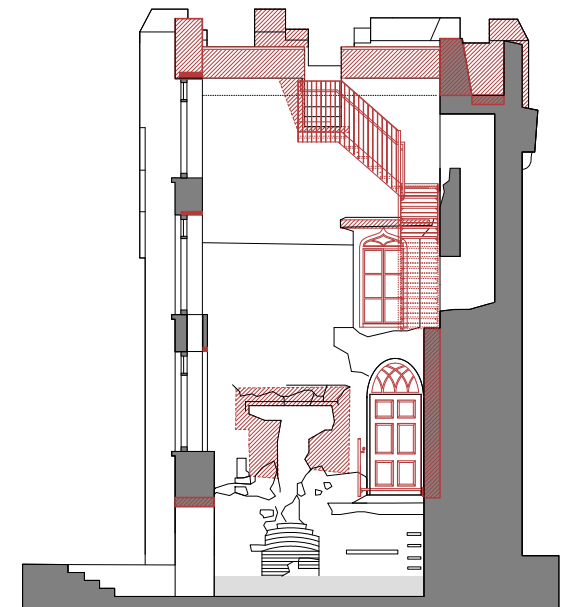


WALL WALK PLAN



SECTION A-A

Repairs and access  
improvements  
shown in red



SECTION B-B