



Bremore Castle

Balbriggan



Introduction

Located near the King's Strand to the north of Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, Bremore Castle can now be seen for miles around. Once the manorial centre of the powerful Anglo-Norman Barnwell family its fortunes have veered from a single storey ruin within a farmyard to the imposing edifice rebuilt over the past decades. Bremore Castle is a reconstructed fortified house that with the ruins of St Mologa's church and graveyard, together with its boundary walls, garden and farm structures form the Bremore Castle complex. The upstanding elements are protected both as archaeological Recorded Monuments (RMPs DU002-002001-006) and as Protected Structures (RPS Nos. 13, 14).



A. Cooper's drawing of Bremore 1783.

*A W View of Bremore Castle Par. of Balbriggan
Lann beecher, i.e. lann beacante. 1 fine d'le.*

History

Bremore is traditionally the site where St Molaga founded a church in the seventh century. Lann Beachaire or the Church of the Bee Keeper was associated with two different saints, Mo-laga and Mo-Domnóc both of whom were students of St David in Wales. Legend has it that St Molaga introduced bee-keeping into Ireland from Wales and there is a strong tradition associated with bees in the locality. Churches of this period were laid out according to a specific schema, defined by large ditches. However geophysical survey did not indicate the presence of such ditches in the surrounds of the castle and nothing to indicate early medieval occupation has been identified to date.

Medieval Bremore is tied to the prominent Anglo-Norman family, of the Barnewalls. Reginald de Barnewall acquired lands in Bremore in the early fourteenth century and by the close of that century the Barnewalls were described as the lords of Bremore, Balrothery and Balbriggan. Although there is evidence for land management at Bremore during the medieval period no structural evidence denoting a castle of this period survives.

The 16th century was an expansive period in the history of Bremore Castle. The owners were James Barnewall and his wife Margaret St Laurence of Howth. They were granted to build a 'quay or harbour and fisher town' at nearby Newhaven in 1562. A few years later the estate is described in an inquisition as consisting of a

'castle, 8 messuages or buidlings, a dovecote and 132 acres'.

The Barnewalls were Confederate Catholics during the Cromwellian wars and the castle appears to have been subject to attack. A cannon ball was recovered during excavation in the field north of the castle and the Civil Survey of 1654 refers to Bremore as containing 'one burnt castle'. Following the restoration of the monarchy, the Barnewalls regained the estate and the castle was refurbished.

Bremore was finally lost to the Barnewalls when the male line in this branch of the family died out in the early eighteenth century. It was sold to Henry the Earl of Shelbourne, from whom it passed to the Marquis of Lansdowne. It would appear that prior to 1736 the castle was occupied by Richard Cadell who

*In fair Bremore
he worshiped God
and cared his
flocks & bees...
And prayed for
blessings on the
land, Molaga of
Bremore”*

William Day, 1935, www.duchas.ie

also farmed the land. In that same year there was a dispute over the tenancy of the castle when Captain McCullough and his dependants who occupied the castle were besieged in the castle. There was an exchange of shots to and from the castle and later to an outhouse, before the Sherriff took the garrison prisoner.

The castle was ruinous in the late 1770s. However the occupant at Bremore Castle in 1833 was John King and the castle lands were farmed by the King family into the next century. The walled garden was laid out in the nineteenth century when the castle had been 'taken down' so the Kings must have lived in one of the other buildings. Local knowledge is that the walled garden was used for cattle and livestock prior to its acquisition by Dublin County Council in 1984.



Bremore Big Dig 2017 participants fill Trench 3

Bremore Castle Big Dig 2017

A community archaeology excavation took place in July 2017. It was designed to engage the local community with Bremore Castle and to inform future restoration works. Five trenches were excavated in the walled garden by over 96 volunteers working with a team of archaeologists. The results showed that what became a walled garden was actually a yard in the 1600s.

No evidence of burning or attack and no architectural evidence for rebuilding was uncovered. Instead the dig showed that the foundation of the southern wall of Bremore Castle sits just one course below the present ground surface. Nearby is a previously unknown ditch. The mix of material recovered from the fill of this ditch feature included window glass and came indicating that the window in the south wall of the Castle was reglazed at least twice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; iron nails associated with carpentry and flooring; and a range of pottery dating from both the medieval period and the 1650s to the 1730s. It also contained a wide range of animal bone indicative of domestic consumption of beef and

pork, goose, chicken and duck. A radiocarbon date taken from a single wheat grain returned a date range of AD 1483–1641 indicating that the ditch was in use during a similar period to the construction and early occupation of the fortified house at Bremore.

Bremore Castle and lands seem to have been predominantly used as a rural farm and orchard but there were glimpses of the wealth and status of the Barnewall family in the 1500s and 1600s evident in the artefacts and animal bones recovered—a house with decorated mantelpieces, floor tile of red porphyry and a tiled green roof, the occupants drinking tea from Chinese porcelain and eating roast boar.



Bremore Castle

Castle

In the late sixteenth century there was move from the compact, tall vertical tower house to the larger better lit fortified house.

Usually three storeys high, each storey was carried on a wooden floor, and each chamber generally had a fireplace. The roofs of fortified houses were distinctive with many small gables and large numbers of chimneys. However defensive elements such as gun loops, projecting towers and angle turrets were incorporated to guard against attack in turbulent late sixteenth/early

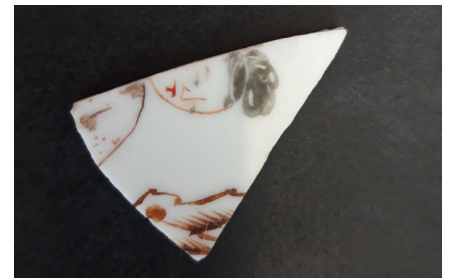
seventeenth century Ireland. The fortified house at Bremore is thought to have been under construction by 1546 since a bridal mantelpiece, part of the hall chimney piece, which announces the marriage of James Barnewall to Margaret Lawrence, took place around that year. The window loop in the south wall has also been identified as sixteenth century in date.

Architectural Fragments

Fragments of decorated seventeenth century stonework were identified within the Bremore complex.

Two highly decorated window heads depict curly-headed angels, tulips and rosettes. A stylistically similar lintel dated 1689 has a carving of St Mologa holding a bee skep while a

plain lintel was also recovered. A late medieval carving of the Crucifixion was brought from St Mologa's Church to Ardgillan Castle in 2009 for safe-keeping.



Chinese Porcelain, mid-17th-mid 18th century



Decorated double headed window

St Mologas

The present remains comprise a late medieval church which was the manorial chapel for Bremore and had a continued dedication to St. Mologa.

It is not known how long this chapel continued in use. There is reference to Rev. John Corcoran, the parish priest of Balbriggan from 1700-25 who said mass there. The rectangular church structure (13.1m E-W, 7m N-S, max. wall H 3m) was built of limestone masonry. It is currently extensively overgrown with only southern church wall discernible.



Bremore Big Dig team uncovering the yard surface and modern disturbance



Saint with bee skep, depicted on 1689 lintel



South wall of the fortified house prior to reconstruction. Paddy Healy Collection

Walled Garden

Archaeological and cartographic evidence shows that the walled garden located south of the castle is a nineteenth century construction.

It was a 'cabbage garden' or 'potager' whose layout was changed to that of a typical Victorian walled garden and orchard. Night soil, animal dung and waste, including diseased fowl, rotten meat and carcasses were recycled, often directly, into the garden as valuable organic manure and buried animal carcasses were a feature of old orchard sites. The 2017 excavation uncovered a number of animal burials and the remains of the Victorian garden path made of compacted lime mortar, brick, shell and gravel.

Rebuilding

Rebuilding of Bremore Castle has been ongoing since the mid-1990s as the work experience element of a Local Training Initiative funded in part and managed by Fingal County Council in partnership originally with FÁS, the state training organisation and more recently with the Education and Training Board

Support has also been provided by the local Balbriggan Historical Society. As the original building only survived to first floor level the remaining reconstructed elements are conjectural, based on designs by the consultant architect, David Newman Johnson, former inspector with the Office of Public Works. Elements of earlier tower houses

and a variety of architectural styles have been included. The Castle as reconstructed consists of a rectangular tower containing four stories of accommodation (c. 20.5m long and 9.5m wide) aligned north to south; there is a single storey kitchen wing attached at the north-eastern corner and running in an east-west direction, reflecting a later addition.

The Future

The rebuilt Bremore Castle dominates the coastal landscape and seascape of northern Balbriggan.

It will act as a landmark building within the Bremore Regional Park that is currently being developed

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