

VIRTUS

21 | 2014



Tadhg O’Keeffe

Aula and camera

The architecture of public and private lives in medieval Irish castles

11

‘Hall’ and ‘chamber’ stand as respective metonyms for ‘public’ and ‘private’ in the literature on elite domestic architecture in medieval and early modern Europe, but not without some qualification. It is well established by now that modern ideas of ‘public’ and ‘private’ cannot be imported into the medieval and early modern worlds, and that the halls and chambers which are documented in medieval castles and Renaissance mansions are best conceived of as contradistinctive social constructs and architectural concepts on a sliding spatial scale. Halls tended to be open, communal and revelatory, chambers closed, personal and discrete, but neither were exclusively so, and changes in the functioning of one was inevitably choreographed with changes in the other. William Rufus’s comment on the hall at Westminster, that it was ‘too big for a chamber, not big enough for a hall’,¹ reminds us that the choreography involved size as well as function. There can therefore be no study of ‘hall’ that does not account for the ‘chamber’, or *vice versa*, at least until well into the modern period.

This paper explores that conceptual choreography in Ireland across a period of four-and-a-half centuries. Its start-date of 1169-1170 marks the arrival in Ireland of ‘Anglo-Norman’ settlers (English and Welsh settlers of Norman descent), a cohort of Angevin aristocrats and soldiers which, by the middle of the thirteenth century, effectively constituted an Anglo-Irish nobility, tied to English culture by memory and

¹ R. Allen Brown, H.M. Colvin and A.J. Taylor Brown, eds, *The history of the King’s Works* (6 vols; London, 1963-1982), I, 45.

to the English crown by political allegiance, but otherwise in charge of its own insular (Irish) identity and destiny. The paper's end-date is set just over four centuries later, as the first great mansions of Elizabethan and Jacobean Ireland were appearing. Many of them were built by a new cohort of settlers from England (and, to a lesser degree, Scotland). This was a population more firmly anchored to their homeland by memory and political allegiance than were their twelfth-century predecessors. It is the population described in Irish scholarly literature as 'New English'.

12 The motivation for this paper is that, after many years of neglect, Irish halls and chambers have come into focus in recent Irish castellological scholarship, although neither systematically nor with much cognisance of what we know of their relationships in castle-building cultures elsewhere, especially in England. Two publications in particular explain the timing and content of this paper. First, David Sweetman's widely-read *Castles of Ireland* from 1999 contains an extensive discussion of a purported type of thirteenth-century castle-building which he, in common now with other Irish writers, describes as a 'hall-house'.² While 1999 is too long ago to be regarded as 'recent', in the years since then the influence of Sweetman's thinking has become clear: the number of buildings identified as 'hall-houses' has increased year-on-year as the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, of which Sweetman is a former director, has conducted fieldwork, and even archaeologists outside the Survey now attach the label to buildings with an uncritical nonchalance.³ The legitimacy of the type, however, was never subjected to a critical appraisal back in the late 1990s, not least in the context of what we know of traditions of elite or incastellated domestic architecture outside Ireland. This paper offers that appraisal. The second publication to provoke the writing of this paper is more recent: Rory Sherlock's 2010 study of domestic planning in Irish tower-houses (late medieval turriform castles), sanctified by its publication in the (peer-reviewed) *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*.⁴ Sherlock offers an interpretation of the hall-chamber relationship in later medieval (fifteenth- and sixteenth-century) Irish architecture which may well become the new consensus. It is an interpretation which demands a challenge, but no challenge has been forthcoming in the few years since its publication.

Although I have foregrounded the need to critique these two earlier studies, this paper is not a review article but a stand-alone study of domestic planning in medieval

2 D. Sweetman, *The medieval castles of Ireland* (Cork 1999), chapter 3; idem, 'The hall-house in Ireland', in: J.R. Kenyon and K. O'Connor, eds, *The medieval castle in Ireland and Wales* (Dublin, 2003) 121-132. The term entered the vocabulary of Irish castellologists in the 1990s when Tom McNeill used it to describe the thirteenth-century buildings which Patrick Holland had identified at a number of manorial centres in Galway; P. Holland, 'The Anglo-Normans in Co. Galway: the process of colonisation', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, XLI (1987-1988) 73-89; T. McNeill, *Castles in Ireland* (London, 1997) 149-155.

3 T. Finan, 'The hall house at Kiltasheen, Co. Roscommon, Ireland', *Château Gaillard*, XXIV (2010) 5-8.

4 R. Sherlock, 'The evolution of the Irish tower-house as a domestic space', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, CXI, section C (2010) 115-140.

Ireland. The corpus of architecture discussed here should be of interest to students of castle-design elsewhere. Aside from the intrinsic interest of the buildings under review, a study of the corpus of medieval hall and chamber architecture in Ireland is of value because it allows us view a *process* of cross-cultural concern. First, it permits us monitor how the concept of the chamber evolved, driven by the increasing privatisation of the domestic sphere. Second, it allows us monitor how the ebb-and-flow of political ties to England and their impact on self-identity in Ireland between the high medieval and early modern periods help to explain the *appearance, disappearance* and *re-appearance* in turn of the hall over a period of many centuries.

Trim and Portumna

Two great buildings, both the subjects of recent archaeological and architectural-historical investigations, bookend this paper: Trim Castle, Co. Meath, and Portumna, Co. Galway. They are attractive touchstones for a study of this type because both can be dated with greater accuracy than is normally possible in Ireland.

13

The *donjon* of Trim Castle, Co. Meath (Fig. 1), was built by Hugh de Lacy, who was among the main recipients of substantial land grants from Henry II after the Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland in 1169-1170. It is a building of international interest. Although it stands at or near the start of the stone-castle building tradition in Ireland – its ground plan was laid out between 1174 and, at the latest, 1180⁵ – it also stands near the end of the Norman and Angevin tradition of building great stone *donjons* containing halls and chambers. Originally only two storeys high, the first-floor level was partitioned to create two parallel longitudinal spaces, that nearest the entrance identifiable as the hall, and that beyond the partition being identified as the chamber (Fig. 2). These are not contentious identifications: the genealogy of the design and its functional parts can be traced back to later eleventh-century Norman architecture. The scheme of a parallel hall-and-chamber at first-floor level within a single tower continued in English castle-building through the 1100s but was slipping from fashion by the time Trim was built. Only one other Irish castle *donjon* has the same scheme: Maynooth, Co. Kildare, also from the 1170s.⁶ Thereafter, as I will argue below, the hall and chamber generally separated in Ireland, each to its own building, and they generally remained separate up to the end of the middle ages.

The end of the middle ages itself is ably represented by Portumna, Co. Galway (Fig. 3), a building which stands near the start of a new architectural tradition. It was built just before 1617 by Richard Burke, fourth earl of Clanricard, and his wife, Fran-

5 A.R. Hayden, *Trim Castle, Co. Meath. Excavations 1995-8* (Dublin, 2011); T. O’Keeffe, ‘Trim Castle uncovered: some thoughts’, *Riocht na Midhe*, XXIV (2013) 160-168.

6 T. O’Keeffe, ‘Trim’s first cousin. The twelfth-century *donjon* of Maynooth Castle’, *Archaeology Ireland*, XXVII (2013) 26-31.



FIG. 1 Trim Castle, Co. Meath: donjon (photo by author)



FIG. 2 The partitioned interior of Trim donjon, viewed from an upper storey level: the hall was on the right below the modern bridge, the chamber on the left (photo by author)



FIG. 3 Portumna Castle, Co. Galway: façade (photo by author)

15

ces Walsingham, countess of Essex. It was one of the first of a new breed of Renaissance-inspired (if not actually Renaissance-style) symmetrically-planned seigneurial residence in Ireland. Just as Trim was an exceptional building in its age – one might even describe it as a one-off – so too was Portumna, for while it shared elements of its external appearance with other grand elite residences in Ireland, its internal plan is unique. It has what is described as a triple-pile plan: its interior is partitioned lengthways by two closely-set spine walls, the space between them being a narrow corridor connecting sets of stairs at either end. There has been much discussion of this plan, especially in a fine collection of essays which has recently been published,⁷ and exemplars have been suggested and, in some cases, rejected. Eighteenth-century plans survive of all of Portumna's floor levels except the first, as does an early nineteenth-century description of the interior, and together they allow a reconstruction of how the interior was used. For our purpose here, of special interest is the combination of a hall and a great chamber *inside* the building: at ground-floor level on one side of the central spine were the hall and a buttery/pantry area, divided by a passage leading in from the main door, while directly above the hall at first-floor level was the great chamber (Fig. 4), with a withdrawing chamber and the 'state' bedchamber directly above the buttery/pantry. The date of the evidence raises an obvious question: does it give us the early seventeenth-century room functions? It surely does; the arrangement attested to in the eighteenth-century sources is much less likely to be of that century than of the seventeenth century.

Thinking about the plans of the two buildings in tandem creates the impression that halls and chambers in Irish castles simply evolved to the point at which the later

7 J. Fenlon, ed., *Clanricard's Castle. Portumna House, Co. Galway* (Dublin, 2012).

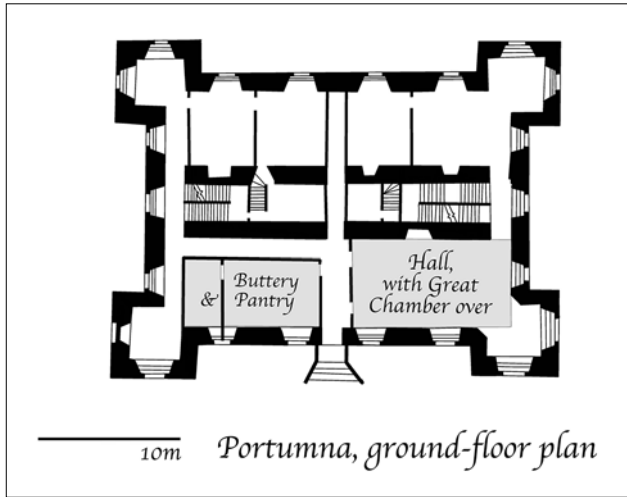


FIG. 4 Portumna Castle, early seventeenth-century ground-floor plan, based on an eighteenth-century survey

came to dominate the former within the same spatial framework of a single large building. Of course, we know that the centuries separating the two buildings saw considerable change, and that the change was not entirely insular but was keyed into what happened in the development of the hall-chamber relationship in architecture outside Ireland. I want to show in this paper that the principal spatial/structural changes in Ireland between the periods of Trim and Portumna were in the functional value and spatial positioning of the hall on the one hand, and in the physical elevation of the chamber on the other.

Halls and chambers in Ireland pre-1350

Despite the number of new stone castles built in the 1200s as Anglo-Norman lordship was established in Ireland, documentary references to 'domestic' arrangements – the phrase alludes to halls and chambers, and to the rooms and structures which served them⁸ – are rare, at least until the end of the thirteenth century and the start of the fourteenth, the period when fiscal surveys were made of many manors or estates. The physical evidence suggests that the normal arrangement was for the halls and chambers to be detached from each other, the former at ground-floor level (though sometimes above demi-basements) in purpose-built structures, and the latter at first-floor level in low towers. This was not an unusual pattern in an Angevin context. A good example is Adare, Co. Limerick (Fig. 5). Here, an early Anglo-Norman tower containing

⁸ P. Faulkner, 'Domestic planning from the 12th to the 14th centuries', *Archaeological Journal*, CXV (1958) 150-183.

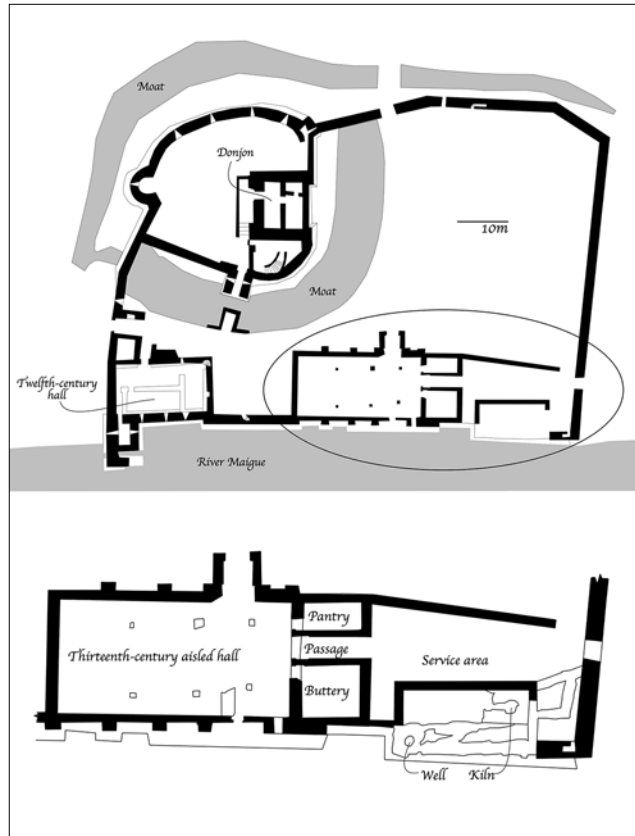


FIG. 5 Adare Castle, Co. Limerick: ground-plan, drawn in the nineteenth century; the thirteenth-century hall with a buttery and pantry is the aisled building in the bottom-centre

a chamber at first-floor level stands in an inner enclosure or ward. A pre-Norman hall stands to the south-west, and a mid-thirteenth-century Anglo-Norman hall, originally aisled, stands to its east.

The very rare survival at one end of the later hall at Adare of two small rooms, identifiably a buttery (for wine) and pantry (for bread), indicates that this was a building for dining. It presumably served also as a space in which some of the actions and events in the administration of the estate took place too; the older hall to its west was smaller and relatively dark inside, so was unsuited to such functions. It is likely that the halls of most castles in Ireland, certainly in the thirteenth century, accommodated both of the functions of dining and administration. This was certainly the case with the greatest of all Irish castle-halls, unfortunately no longer extant: the hall built in Dublin Castle in 1243. Henry III ordered that it be constructed '120 feet in length and 80 feet in breadth, with glazed windows, after the manner of the hall of Canterbury', that it was to have 'beyond the dais' both a round window ('30 feet in diameter') in the gable, and, either on the gable wall or more likely on a wooden panel behind the high table, a painting of 'the King and Queen sitting with their baronage'. Its entrance was to

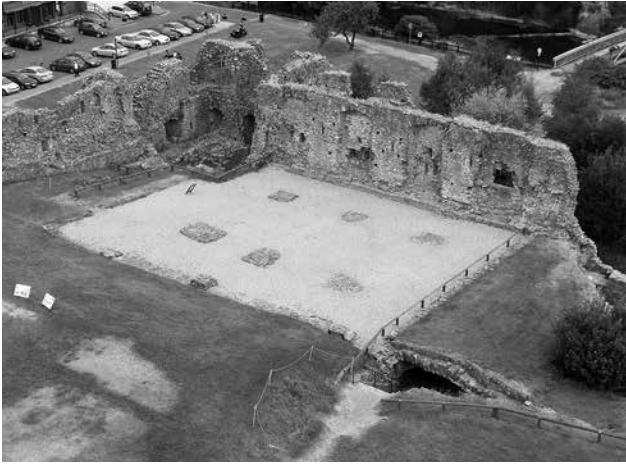


FIG. 6 The thirteenth-century aisled hall of Trim Castle, viewed from the top of the donjon (photo by author)

18

be provided with ‘a great portal’.⁹ Foundations of a smaller version – a replica? – of the Dublin Castle hall can be seen at Trim (Fig. 6); this was almost certainly built by Geoffrey de Geneville, a close friend of Henry, to replace the original hall inside the *donjon*.

Whereas many chamber-towers remain, as we will see below, relatively few castle-halls of the 1200s survive in Ireland. Among the best survivals are perhaps those which were *not* detached from chamber towers, as were the three discussed already, but which formed parts of what we might describe as hall-and-chamber blocks. These are suites of buildings in which the chambers are placed at the ends of the halls, often in distinctive but physically connected structures. There is considerable variety in the architecture of these blocks. One remarkable variant can be seen in Castleroché, Co. Louth (Fig. 7), built in the 1230s. Here, the chamber was inside (and was to a degree disguised by) a large gate building, with the hall attached to one side of it. Another variant can be seen at Ballymoon, Co. Carlow (Fig. 8), built in the later 1200s. Here, the hall and chamber were properly adjacent spaces, equal in width and (probably) in height originally.

The disappearance from the modern landscape of so many detached castle-halls of the 1200s may be explained by the material in which they were built. Documentary references to building-materials are late thirteenth century and early fourteenth century in date, and refer as often to manorial residences below the level of ‘castle’ as they do to castles, but they reveal a striking pattern nonetheless. In the manor of Inch, Co. Kerry, for example, there was in 1298-1299 a hall ‘of pales [timber planks or beams] with an earthen wall and thatched’ and a chamber ‘with a cellar[,] built of

⁹ H.S. Sweetman, ed., *Calendar of documents relating to Ireland 1171-1307* (5 vols; London, 1875-1886), I, 389, 417.



FIG. 7 The gate building containing the chamber and adjacent hall of Castleroché, Co. Louth (*photo by author*)



FIG. 8 The west side of the interior of Ballymoon Castle, Co. Carlow: the chamber was the room on the left, its precise position indicated by a horizontal chase for floor timbers, and the hall was the long room, heated by a double fireplace, that takes up the right-hand-side two-thirds of the wall (*photo by author*)

stone and thatched', while in 1307 in Callan Castle, Co. Kilkenny, there was 'a hall constructed of wood covered with wooden shingles' and 'a stone chamber'.¹⁰ Convincing as the references of c.1300 are to the differences of material between halls and chambers, the references of the late middle ages are even more convincing; we will discuss them below but it is important to make the point here that the pattern which we observe around 1300, when we have our first cluster of references, is sustained when we look at the later documentary record.

The chambers of Anglo-Norman castles were invariably housed in buildings detached from the halls. This meant an open-air journey between the places of eating and personal repose for a lord and his wife; to illustrate the point, it might be noted that the image of the hall at Trim (Fig. 6) was taken from the top of the *donjon* (Fig. 1) which, by the mid-thirteenth century, was entirely given over to the chamber functions. The chamber-buildings were often towers, and appear always, as was noted above, to have been stone-built. Plenty of examples survive. They were built

¹⁰ Sweetman, ed., *Calendar of documents*, IV, 255; idem, *Calendar of documents*, V, 190.



FIG. 9 Mocollop Castle, Co. Waterford: cylindrical donjon (*photo by author*)



FIG. 10 Tomdeely Castle, Co. Limerick: chamber-block (*photo by author*)

in a variety of plan-types, and although there was a tendency towards near-square (as at Adare) or rectangular plans, other shapes were used: cylindrical chamber towers, for example, were popular between 1200 and 1230 or thereabouts (Fig. 9). The buildings containing the chambers rarely exceeded two main floors in height, although very high screen walls often disguised this from the outside. Many of those chamber-buildings erected between, say, 1225 and 1275, compensated for their lack of height by being somewhat elongated in plan. A classic example of this is the mid-thirteenth-century (?) building at Tomdeely, Co. Limerick (Fig. 10). Entry into buildings of this type was directly into their first-floor rooms, which were the actual places of 'private' repose.

Elongated chamber-buildings like Tomdeely are now generally described by Irish scholars as 'hall-houses'. It is an entirely misleading and unnecessary nomenclature, since it suggests that the upper rooms were actual halls. They were not.¹¹ The upper rooms of these particular chamber-buildings were in the 'private' spectrum. When they were built, the fashion for dining in chambers rather than halls was still at least several decades away: by the mid-fourteenth century dining in chambers was still so novel in England, not to mention Ireland, that in William Langland's poem, *Piers Ploughman*, there is a lament that the lord and lady no longer liked to sit in the 'chief' hall which 'was made for meals' but preferred to eat by themselves 'in a privy parlour (...) or in a chamber with a chimney'.¹² The upper rooms of supposed 'hall-houses' such as Tomdeely do not have the sense of 'order' that one recognizes repeatedly in indisputable castle-halls in England and France: many of the putative 'hall-houses' have small windows, often asymmetrically-placed and few in number; the interiors of these rooms would have been fairly dark. Moreover, in a hall, as that term was understood in the thirteenth century, one's eye should really be drawn consistently, and with help from the regularity of the fenestration, towards the gable wall that is most distant from the point of entry, and yet this is rarely the case in any of these buildings.

Tomdeely stands alone, abutted by no other buildings. If we identify it as a chamber we might expect to find a hall associated with it. But there is no such building, even reduced to foundations, beside it, nor is there any evidence of a hall at the majority of the other 'hall-house' sites. This absence has allowed scholars to imply that the functions of chambers and halls were conflated in the upper rooms of the 'hall-houses', but this view is not sustainable. One hesitates to solve problems of identification and interpretation by suggesting missing buildings, but we might note that many of the small, two-storeyed, stone-built manorial buildings of twelfth- and thirteenth-century England which had hitherto been regarded as hall-buildings, precise-

11 T. O'Keefe, 'Halls, "hall-houses" and tower-houses. Disentangling the needlessly entangled', *The Castle Studies Group Journal*, XXVII (2013-2014) 300-309.

12 J.M. Dent and E.P. Dutton, eds, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* [by] William Langland (London-New York, 1978), passus 10, lines 96-101; my thanks to prof. Alan Fletcher, UCD, for drawing my attention to this reference.

ly because they had big upstairs rooms, are now reclassified as ‘chamber-blocks’ on the basis of archaeological investigations which have yielded evidence that they were originally accompanied by single-storey *timber-built* halls.¹³ I have no doubt that excavations at Tomdeely and other ‘hall-house’ sites like it would produce evidence for timber halls.

So, to conclude. When the building of new castles slowed to a virtual stop around 1300, for reasons not yet fully understood, there was a well-established pattern. The separation of the ‘private’ and ‘public’ lives of noble families was facilitated, maybe even effected entirely, by the physical separation of their associated architectural spaces. The separation was underscored by the axes of those spaces: halls stretched along the horizontal axis, while chambers stretched, albeit little in many cases, along the vertical axis. It was also underscored by the materialities of those spaces: the halls tended to be of timber, except in the wealthiest castles, and chambers tended to be contained in stone buildings, either of tower form or elongated as in the manner of Tomdeely. When castle-building resumed in earnest in Ireland in the late 1300s and early 1400s, this was the template; the new builders, as we will see next, picked up where their predecessors left off.

22

The rise of the chamber tower, 1350-1590

We know very little about the building industry in the middle decades of the fourteenth century in Ireland, a period of economic stagnation, and can only presume that few major works were built, so 1350 is offered here as a median rather than fixed date. The presumption that activity picks up again at the start of the fifteenth century, with the appearance of the tower-house as the classic form of incastellated residence for the nobility (Fig. 11), is not unreasonable,¹⁴ but it is a presumption: although we are hampered by inadequate documentation of castle-building before the middle or later fifteenth century, dates of c.1400 for some Co. Clare castles of quite sophisticated design suggest that the 1300s was a period of some stylistic innovation.¹⁵ If the approximate start-date of this second phase is poorly anchored, the approximate end-date is not. Mallow Castle, built in the last decade of the sixteenth century, is the earliest ‘new’ castle to survive from the Munster Plantation (the settle-

13 R. Harris and E. Impey, ‘Boothby Pagnell revisited’, in: G. Meirion-Jones et al., eds, *The Seigneurial Residence in Western Europe, AD c. 800-1600* (Oxford, 2002) 245-269.

14 T.B. Barry, ‘The archaeology of the tower house in late medieval Ireland’, in: H. Andersson and J. Weinberg, ed., *The Study of Medieval Archaeology* (Stockholm, 1993) 211-218. Although it entered scholarly discourse in the nineteenth century, the term ‘tower-house’ was used in the middle ages: a *torshous* at Rathcoffey, Co. Kildare, was assigned in the dower of Anastasia de Stanton in 1417; *Rotulorum patenti-um et clausorum cancellariae Hiberniae calendarium, Henry II-Henry VII*, ed. Edward Tresham (London, 1828) 222.

15 T.J. Westropp, ‘Notes on the lesser castles or “peel towers” of the county Clare’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, third series, V (1899) 348-365.

FIG. 11 Conna Castle, Co. Cork: an early sixteenth-century (?) tower-house
(photo by author)



23

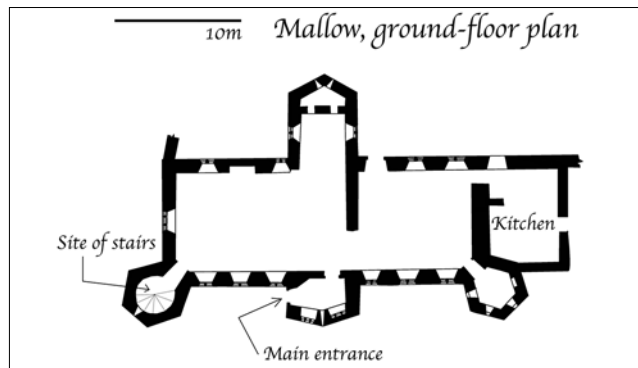


FIG. 12 Mallow 'Castle', Co. Cork: a Planter castle of the 1590s

ment by the English crown of lands in southern Ireland following a failed rebellion in 1585). It is not necessarily the earliest example of the new elite domestic architecture of the era of Plantation, but it is certainly an early indicator of new thinking about architecture (Fig. 12).

24 There were at least two significant changes in castle-culture between the end of the 1200s and the early 1400s in Ireland. First, the right to own a castle appears to have trickled lower down the social hierarchy in the 1400s than it had previously, meaning that people (or, rather, social classes) invisible to us in the historical or archaeological records of the 1200s are visible to us as castle-owners in the fifteenth century. Inevitably, many of their castles are small, perhaps reflecting the fact that their money was relatively new money, however it was earned. Second, the ‘castle’, both as a concept of lordly authority and as a physical entity, was demonstrably for the first time as central to elite Gaelic-Irish culture as it was to contemporary ‘Anglo-Irish’ and ‘English’ culture. Our understanding of the dynamics of these two specific changes is handicapped somewhat by an insufficiently detailed knowledge of social and cultural changes in general during the fourteenth century, but not to an insurmountable degree: the principal changes during the fourteenth century were political and economic, and so, with no influx of new settlers into Ireland during the 1300s, those people of English descent who built new castles in the late middle ages were armed with an inherited knowledge of both the physical forms that castles could take and the ways in which they were used. The same inherited knowledge actually transferred to the Gaelic-Irish: despite their political opposition to the ‘English’, the native population adopted conventions of English architecture, suggesting that there was greater cultural than political proximity between the populations.¹⁶

One could argue, then, that there was essentially continuity rather than discontinuity in castle architecture across the divide of the fourteenth century. The outward appearance of buildings changed in many ways – new window types, new types of crenellation, a new interest in dressed stonework on quoins, for example – but the thirteenth-century template for halls and chambers discussed above seems never to have been abandoned, as I will now show.

The late medieval hall

The halls of the later middle ages, first of all, tended still to be of perishable, organic material. The fact that so few survive testifies to that. So too does the documentary evidence. Richard Stanihurst noted in 1584 that halls were ‘reasonably big and spacious palaces made from white clay and mud. They are not roofed with quarried slabs or slates but with thatch. [There] they [the castle-owners] hold their banquets

16 T. O’Keeffe, “Concepts of castle” and the construction of identity in medieval and post-medieval Ireland’, *Irish Geography*, XXXIV (2001) 69-88.



FIG. 13 Srah Castle, Co. Offaly: a later sixteenth-century tower-house with an adjoining hall/house of the early seventeenth century (*photo by author*)



FIG. 14 Togher Castle, Doon, Co. Offaly: the base of a late fifteenth-century (?) tower-house, showing the twin-vaulted basement and the low surviving walls of the first-floor room above; a second tower-house is visible in the background on the right-hand-side (*photo by author*)

but they prefer to sleep in the castle [i.e. the chamber] rather than the palace because their enemies can easily apply torches to the roofs which catch fire rapidly if there is but the slightest breeze.¹⁷ Similarly, William Camden, writing in 1586, noted that to a [chamber]-tower ‘adjoins [normally] a hall made of turf, and roofed over with thatch, and a large yard fenced quite round with a ditch and hedge to defend their cattle from thieves’.¹⁸ Three years later, a German visitor to Ireland, Von Munchhausen, noted that the residence of ‘an Irish nobleman or squire’ was usually ‘in the form of a tower surrounded by a wall’, which was not lived-in but was kept as a fortress, while the actual ‘house’ or residence was ‘nearby’ to the tower, and was a badly-built structure with a central hearth.¹⁹ None of this is to say that halls – or houses, as they seem sometimes to have been called – were never of stone, and castles in Co. Limerick (such as Askeaton and Newcastle West, where the halls were detached from

17 J. Barry and H. Morgan, eds, *Great deeds in Ireland. Richard Stanihurst's De Rebus in Hibernia Gestis* (Cork, 2013) 113.

18 W. Camden, *Camden's Britannia Abridg'd. With Improvements, and Continuations, to this Present Time* (2 vols; London, 1701), I.

19 D. Ó Riain-Raedel, ‘A German visitor to Monaincha in 1591’, *Tipperary Historical Journal* (1998) 223-233.

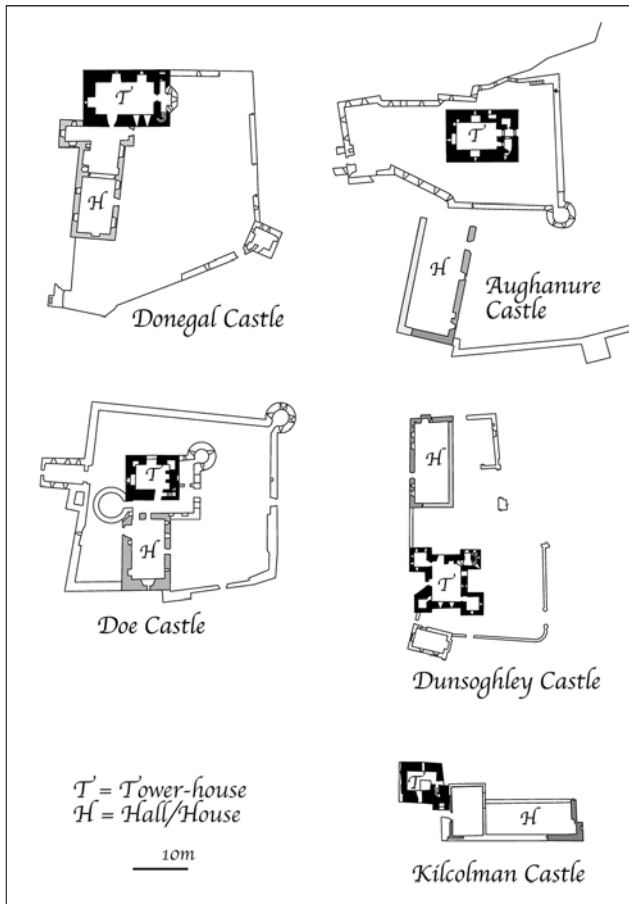


FIG. 15 Ground-plans of tower-houses with associated stone-built halls/houses: Donegal Castle; Aughanure Castle, Co. Galway; Doe Castle, Co. Donegal; Dunsoghley Castle, Co. Dublin; Kilcolman Castle, Co. Cork

chamber-towers) and Co. Wexford (such as Coolhull and Slade, where the halls were attached to chamber-towers) attest to that. But it is noticeable that where we do have stone houses/halls associated with chamber-towers (tower-houses), they are often later than the towers, presumably because they are stone replacements of original halls of organic material (Figs. 13, 14).

This latter interpretation – the replacement of timber halls in stone – differs fundamentally from Rory Sherlock’s interpretation of the same evidence. Citing a 1639 inventory of the contents of Bunratty Castle, Co. Clare, he asserts that there is historical evidence to suggest that, in some cases, ‘the hall within the tower-house had largely fallen out of use by the early seventeenth century’. He further asserts, citing Aughanure Castle, Co. Galway, as an example (see Fig. 15 for it and three comparanda, one of which, Donegal, had a Planter’s house), that ‘the surviving evidence suggests that the hall within the tower-house was [in some instances] eventually privatised and an external hall was created within the bawn to take over the role formerly



FIG. 16 Graystown Castle, Co. Tipperary: a fifteenth-century tower-house and late sixteenth-century (?) stone hall/house (*photo by author*)

held by the topmost room within the tower'.²⁰ Acceptance or rejection of Sherlock's interpretation of 'external' halls like that at Aughanure depends entirely on whether one accepts or not his assertion that a hall could sometimes occupy the topmost room in a tower. Others may accept this assertion, but I prefer to reject it, as I argue below in the context of an analysis of a famous text from c.1620.

Before we turn to the chamber-towers, there are two obvious, interlinked questions arising from my analysis above. First, why was the flimsy external hall retained in the later middle ages in Ireland? Second, why were some halls built (or rebuilt,

²⁰ Sherlock, 'The evolution of the Irish tower-house', 133; for Bunratty, see B. Ó Dálaigh, 'An inventory of the contents of Bunratty Castle and the will of Henry, fifth earl of Thomond, 1639', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, XXXVI (1995) 139-165.

from flimsy predecessors) in stone? One would imagine that, in an age in which the elaborate stone-built tower-house was appearing almost everywhere in the Irish countryside, the associated hall would never be left as an unassuming external building, regardless of its material, but would instead be accommodated either within the sophisticated design of its associated tower-house or in an elaborate external building of its own. The answer to both questions might reside in the *legal* role of the hall. Two stories suggest as much. In 1288 a gravely-ill Thomas Leon was carried to the door of the hall in his manorial complex at Culmullen, and he grabbed its handle in order to bequeath his estate to his son.²¹ The transfer of ownership was legitimised through an action that engaged with the physical entity of the hall. Three and a half centuries later, in 1631, an attorney 'entered into a dwelling house wthin the bawne of Castlepook' to witness a quitclaim.²² One would imagine that the attorney's business would have been better conducted in the privacy of the tower's interior, and yet the quitclaim was administered in the house (hall). In both cases, the house or hall appears as a necessary adjunct to the chamber(-tower), if only as a 'public space' wherein legal procedures pertaining to land-tenure are deemed public themselves, and are therefore deemed legitimate.

Chamber-towers

The chambers, by contrast, remained stone-built into the late middle ages. The big change between the thirteenth-century chambers and those of the late middle ages was that, whereas in the 1200s a single chamber (albeit sometimes partitioned perhaps by a screen or curtain into outer and inner parts) occupied the upper room in a building of two storeys, in the 1400s and 1500s the chamber was no longer a single partitionable space but was reconstituted as a suite of spaces occupying several floors of a tower-house, immediately above the basement or lower floor-level (Fig. 16). Tower-houses were, in other words, elaborate chamber towers of wholly private character.²³ A consideration of the types and arrangements of stairs in tower-houses generally reinforces this conclusion. Straight stairs ascend from the main doorways of the towers to first-floor levels, at which point they continue upwards, to second and upper-floor levels, as spiral stairs. Straight stairs hold no element of surprise, as they simply connect one floor level with another, but they do allow visibility along their length, whereas with spiral stairs there is little visibility of what is ahead, and so each half-turn allows a moment of privacy and accommodates an element of the unknown, either for a person on the stairs or for a person in a room off the stairs. Spiral stairs were

²¹ Sweetman, ed., *Calendar of documents*, III, 198.

²² J. Ainsworth and E. MacLysaght, 'Survey of documents in private keeping, second series', *Analecta Hibernica*, XX (1958) 66; the house in question has been identified by Eamonn Cotter, who kindly shared his knowledge of the site with me.

²³ See also G. Eadie, 'Detecting privacy and private space in the Irish tower house', *Château Gaillard*, XXIV (2010) 69-75.

thus inappropriate to any public prosecutions of affairs: if tower-houses had ‘public’ spaces they would have been at ground-floor (basement) or first-floor levels, the two levels below the spiral, and yet these are often the darkest spaces inside tower-houses.

The written sources pertaining to the chamber-functions of the tower-houses tend to be quite late – there is a cluster of late sixteenth-century references – but that only serves to underline the continuity of the template from Anglo-Norman times. A relatively early reference comes from Ballynagappagh, Co. Kildare, in 1465: Roger Penkeston is recorded as having ‘made a tower of the height of one storey above the vault,’²⁴ which suggests a chamber with a stone cellar like that at Inch, mentioned above. There is no reference to an accompanying hall. Nor is there a mention of a hall in the following building account from 1547 of a tower in Bretasse, Co. Tipperary.

[T]he same castell to be of thre loftes besides the rofe, and the same substancially builded; the first loft to be with a vault and to be xiiii fote hy, and the other ii lofts to be every of them x fote hy; and the rofe to be substancially covered with slate and the gutters with gutterstone well embatelde; and to be furnisshed with a chymney in both of the ii over loftes and a substanciall persoum with drawghtes accordinge; the same castell to have a goode substanciall berbikan of stone as is at Pollywherie [Poulakerry], and to the neither gate of the castell to have a goode grate of iron; and the said castell to be substancially buylded with goode lyme and stone, the walls to be vi fote thick undre the vault and iiiii fote above, and furnisshed with dores and wyndowes and all other things necessarie to a castell, as shalbe thought goode by the iudgement of Mr. Derby Ryan and the tresoror of Lismore, calling to them one mason and one carpenter.²⁵

29

Although there is no reference here to room function, the presence of a stone vault over the lower part and of chimneys in the two upper ‘lofts’ (ceilinged rooms) suggests a functional separation at first-floor level consistent with the thirteenth-century pattern: the private space was above a basement, in other words, and was accessible by spiral stairs. It is safe to assume, based on those later sixteenth-century references cited above, that a hall accompanied this tower, that it was modest in its materials, and that it was used for communal eating.

Luke Gernon’s account of a castle, 1620

The most recent thinking by Rory Sherlock on the most famous description of the functionings of a tower-house, that written by Luke Gernon in 1620, offers a challenge to the view, articulated above, that tower-houses were chamber towers. Gernon’s description is so remarkable that it is worth citing in full, and Sherlock’s interpretation of it merits a response.

²⁴ J.F. Morrissey, ed., *Statute rolls of the Parliament of Ireland. Edward IV* (Dublin, 1939) 397.

²⁵ E. Curtis, ed., *Calendar of Ormond Deeds, 1172-1603* (5 vols; Dublin, 1932-1943), V, 1547-1584, 22-23.

We are come to the castle already. The castles are built very strong, and with narrow stayres, for security. The hall is the uppermost room, lett us go up, you shall not come downe agayne till tomorrow. Take no care of your horses, they shall be sessed among the tenants. The lady of the house meets you with her trayne. I have instructed you before how to accost them. Salutations paste, you shall be presented with all the drinkes in the house, first the ordinary beere, then aquavitae, then sacke, then olde-ale, the lady tastes it, you must not refuse it. The fyre is prepared in the middle of the hall, where you may sollace yourselfe till supper time, you shall not want sacke and tobacco. By this time the table is spread and plentifully furnished with variety of meates, but ill cooked, and with out sauce. Neyther shall there be wanting a pasty or two of redd deare (that is more common with us then the fallow). The dishe which I make choyce of is the swelled mutton, and it is prepared thus. They take a principall weather, and before they kill him, it is fitt that he be shorne, being killed they singe him in his woolly skynne like a bacon, and rost him by ioynts with the skynne on, and so serve it to the table. They say that it makes the flesh more firme, and preserves the fatt. I make choyce of it to avoyd uncleanly dressing. They feast together with great iollyty and healths around; towards the middle of supper, the harper beginns to tune and singeth Irish rymes of auncient making. If he be a good rymer, he will make one song to the present occasion. Supper being ended, it is at your liberty to sitt up, or to depart to your lodgeing, you shall have company in both kind. When you come to your chamber, do not expect canopy and curtaynes. It is very well if your bedd content you, and if the company be greate, you may happen to be bodkin in the middle. In the morning there will be brought unto you a cupp of aquavitae. The aquavitae or usquebath of Ireland is not such an extraction, as is made in England, but farre more qualified, and sweetened with licoriss. It is made potable, and is of the colour of Muscadine. It is a very wholesome drinke, and naturall to digest the crudities of the Irish feeding. You may drink a knaggin without offence, that is the fourth parte of a pynte. Breakfast is but the repetitions of supper. When you are disposing of yourself to depart, they call for Dogh a dores, that is, to drink at the doore, there you are presented agayne with all the drinkes in the house, as at your first entrance. Smacke them over, and lett us departe.²⁶

This passage seems to contradict *all* other accounts of later medieval castles and castle-halls in Ireland in one key regard. Gernon seems to describe an upmarket version of the ‘house’ in which Von Munchhausen was entertained two decades earlier, and he specifically calls it ‘the hall’. However, it is the topmost room in the tower. Given this particular castle’s location in southern Ireland, we can easily imagine this ‘hall’ as a rather typical stone-floored room above a vault, a room which would probably have had an arcuated end-wall with a central window (Fig. 17), and which was probably open to the rafters. Sherlock puts great faith in this passage, and concludes that ‘examples of tower-houses which had halls within them, in the style of Gernon’s castle, and which had halls alongside them, in the style of that described by Stanihurst, existed side-by-side in late medieval Ireland’. He further claims evidence that halls

²⁶ See www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E620001 (last visited 6 March 2014).



FIG. 17 Lackeen Castle, Co. Tipperary: the upper-floor room of the early sixteenth-century tower-house (photo by author)

in tower-houses were sometimes the upper rooms, perched *above* the more private chambers, and at other times the middle-rooms *below* a chamber or two.²⁷

I interpret Gernon's account differently. While a hall as conventionally understood in the medieval tradition might very occasionally be accommodated in the structure of a massive and regionally-operative tower-house, as at Bunratty, Gernon was not hosted in such a hall, his choice of term notwithstanding. The dining function of the hall had clearly been moved up to the top of this particular chamber-tower, and this upward migration of the dining space was probably not unusual by c.1600.²⁸ But moving feasting rituals into the upper rooms of tower-houses did not convert those rooms into halls. Were one to insist that these later medieval upper rooms were indeed halls, as

²⁷ Sherlock, 'The evolution of the Irish tower-house', 117.

²⁸ At Clonmullen, Co. Wexford, in 1635, for example, according to the testimony of Sir William Brereton, the 'dining-room', accessed by 'narrow and steep's stairs, was '[a]mid[st?] chambers' in the castle of Sir Morgan Kavanagh, 'an old, high, narrow, and inconvenient building'; www.ucc.ie/celt/published/E630001 (last visited 6 March 2014).

Sherlock does, I think that one would also have to argue that (*and explain why*) there was a reconceptualisation of ‘hall’ around the fifteenth century, because one could *not* argue that these later medieval ‘upper halls’ were descended from thirteenth-century halls. The suggestion that these upper rooms were indeed halls depends to a large measure on the argument that the so-called ‘hall-houses’ had upper halls.²⁹ But once we reclassify the ‘hall-houses’ as chamber-buildings and postulate that there were originally ground-floor halls external to them, it becomes harder – to the point of impossible, I would suggest – to justify the identification of rooms in tower-houses as halls. Ironically, the link between the so-called ‘hall-houses’ and the tower-houses loses its contentiousness when we reclassify the upper rooms in each as private chambers.

32 Gernon, who wrote his account two decades into the seventeenth century, may have described the upper room in which he was hosted as a hall because he experienced therein activities associated with halls, but it is unlikely that Gernon’s hosts themselves understood their upper-room to be the equivalent of the detached ‘house’ wherein Von Munchhausen was entertained; indeed, they probably had such a house or hall themselves at the foot of their tower. It is worth quoting at this point the important 1584 description of a ‘house and castle’ at Mallow, Co. Cork. Here, the hall and tower were attached to each other and each seems to have had a vaulted basement, but the important point is that the tower had a stone-floored upper room of the type in which Gernon was hosted, and it was *not* described as a hall but simply as the uppermost room in a tower containing lodgings:

One castle containing in itself two small courts and one great barbican, namely, where the howse standeth, the entrance in is on the north side ffyrste into one of the said courts, and then turninge one the lefte hande ye enter by a doore, beinge in a highe wall, into the Balne or Barbican, which is reasonable and large, and then goinge a little way, turninge one to lefte hande, have ye an entrance by an other stone wale, wher as the castell or howse standeth, the lower rooms whereof ar sellors vaulted over. And in the wall one the lefte hande there be stayres of stone of XII. stepps in heyght that leadeth one the right hande into the Hall, which is about LX. foote longe and XXVI. foot wyde, within the howse, and is deepe, with a highe roofe, the Tymber whereof seemeth to be sounde, and is covered with thacke, somethinge decayed at the north ende; towards the west corner there is a square buylding vaulted as the other is but not so broade, and riseth somewhat higher than the roofe of the hall in which, over the sellor, ar fower strong rooms that may be made meete for lodgings; *the uppermost, savinge one, is vaulted.*³⁰

29 Sherlock, ‘The evolution of the Irish tower-house’, 130: ‘The impressive first-floor hall found in the late thirteenth-century hall-house was elevated (...) in the fifteenth century as the building which provided the framework for the hall was transformed from the simple hall-house to the more complex tower-house.’

30 H.F. Berry, ‘The manor and castle of Mallow in the days of the Tudors’, *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, XI (1893) 21-25; emphasis added.



FIG. 18 Lisfinny Castle, Co. Waterford, a late fifteenth-century tower-house (*photo by author*)



FIG. 19 Kilduff, Castle, Co. Limerick: a late sixteenth-century tower-house (*photo by author*)

Tower-houses constitute a very significant element in our stock of medieval buildings. They are our most tangible archaeological links with later medieval society. Understanding them requires us to recognise the tendency in domestic architecture in these islands, right back to the twelfth century, towards the placement of the chamber on a higher elevation than the hall whenever it was necessary for them to share space in the one building; we need also to recognise that there was a clear preference for them to be housed in separate buildings. The tendency was not to put the hall higher than it had ever been – it did not go to the top floor of a multi-floored tower – even if there was a tendency to move some of its functions into the uppermost chamber. The key point is this: the notion that some towers could have a ‘private’ chamber *below* a ‘public’ hall in the vertical stacking of rooms, or that the positioning of such halls and chambers relative to each other on the vertical axis was in any sense optional, is hugely problematic. Nowhere in medieval north-western Europe, to my know-



FIG. 20 Loughmoe Castle, Co. Tipperary: a later fifteenth-century tower-house on the right-hand-side with an early seventeenth-century house attached (*photo by author*)

ledge, did this happen, and I cannot imagine that it happened in Ireland. I would suggest, then, that Gernon was a guest in a tower-house no different from others. His account is testimony to the extent to which the later medieval Irish household was retreating upwards and inwards, sometimes allowing into their private realm a range of functions – receiving special guests, eating – which had previously, and normally still was, exclusively reserved to the hall. Jane Fenlon has remarked that in Ireland, as in England and other countries, ‘halls had, by the end of the sixteenth century, been reduced in status within the hierarchy of rooms. No longer would they have been used by the lord for his meals, instead parlours would serve for informal meals and the

great chamber for ceremonial dining.’³¹ The tower-house Gernon visited may have been decades old, and its upper room might not have been intended for the function to which it was being put in 1620 (Fig. 18). The new tower-houses of the later 1500s (Fig. 19) were probably designed specifically to house the dining functions which were previously the preserve of the hall.

Coda and conclusion

By the time Gernon was so splendidly entertained in the upper room of a now anonymous tower-house somewhere in southern Ireland, the great mansion at Portumna was completed. The presence in it of a hall, accompanied at the same floor level by a buttery and pantry, with a great chamber above it, shows just how little this great building owes to architectural developments in Ireland over the previous four centuries. One could not say that the hall and chamber were reunited in Portumna; rather, Portumna’s hall and chamber were descended directly from the English architectural tradition, wherein pantries and butteries, separated from halls by screen passages, remained in vogue into the late middle ages. Portumna’s interior owed absolutely nothing to the trajectory along which Irish castle architecture had developed in previous centuries.

35

The Irish tradition, in which the hall and chamber separated into different buildings, one flourishing and the other declining as the middle ages unfolded, did not end when houses of Portumna-style appeared at the start of the modern era, but it soon petered out. There was actually relatively little that the builders of the post-1600 mansions and the final-generation builders of the tower-house tradition could borrow from each other, beyond small-scale architectural motifs (such as doorway forms and modes of stone-dressing). Nowhere is the disconnect or rupture between the traditions more in evidence than at Loughmoe, Co. Tipperary (Fig. 20). It is an appropriate building on which to finish. Here, a tower-house of the fifteenth century was incorporated in the façade of a new mansion (containing a hall, not unlike that at Portumna) of the early 1600s. The antiquity of the tower was valued sufficiently for it to be imitated in a corresponding tower (or wing, more accurately) at the opposite end of the façade. At the same time, though, string-courses were used on the early seventeenth-century parts of the composition to make clear to its viewers what part was old and what part was new.

31 J. Fenlon, ‘Moving towards the formal house. Room usage in early modern Ireland’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, CXI, section C (2010) 144.

Tadhg O’Keeffe

Aula and camera

The architecture of public and private lives in medieval Irish castles

The functional and spatial relationships between halls and chambers in Irish castles have never been studied in any detail. Indeed, Irish castle-scholars have tended to assume that any well-appointed room of rectangular plan in a castle must have served as a hall, and this assumption has led to interpretations of castles which are hugely problematic when viewed in the European context. It is argued in this paper that halls and chambers were generally kept apart in Irish castles, the latter eventually finding a home in the late medieval tower-house while the former gradually reduced in size and practical value.

Professor Tadhg O’Keeffe, teaches in University College of Dublin, School of Archaeology. He has written and lectured extensively on medieval Irish and European architecture, and is widely recognised as one of Europe’s leading experts in the fields of Romanesque studies and castellology. His latest book is *Medieval Irish buildings, 1100-1600* (2015).

University College of Dublin, School of Archaeology, Newman Building, Belfield, Dublin 4, Ireland – tadhg.okeeffe@ucd.ie



9 789087 045203