# THE FORTIFIED HOUSE: A REVIEW

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This paper aims to identify the developments that have taken place over the past 60 years in the understanding of a specific late medieval building type unique to Ireland, referred to as the 'fortified house'. A number of these structures have been subject to archaeological and building surveys including those located in the following regions: Munster, the Midlands, Ulster, Dublin county and Connacht. Most of the research regarding such structures has emanated from a handful of academics, geographers and archaeologists. The archaeological and building surveys undertaken to date provide a good introduction to this architectural form.

What is a fortified house? Dennis Power (1992) describes them as a shift in an architectural style that could be detected in Munster from the end of the sixteenth century. New ideas were coming in with the Elizabethan settlers and the opening up of the country to external influences. The tower house gave way to a better-lit, more comfortable fortified house. These retained defensive features, but incorporated new innovations including wooden stairs and a far greater provision for private rooms.

The groundwork to present studies was comprehensively mapped by H.G. Leask in his Irish Castles and Castellated Houses, (1941). Leask identified most architecturally significant buildings in Munster including Burntcourt county Tipperary, Mallow Castle, Kanturk Castle, Monkstown and Coppingers' Court in county Cork. In his work, he collated a lot of primary evidence which made the subsequent study of such buildings possible. Leask (1941) was mainly interested in form and fabric and he gives an excellent overall description of the basic lay out of an Irish fortified house. He proposed that the fortified house consists of an oblong central block of three or more storeys, furnished with corner-towers. The central building consists of large gables at each end and a number of smaller ones on its longer walls. The whole layout is symmetrical, balanced about a central doorway.
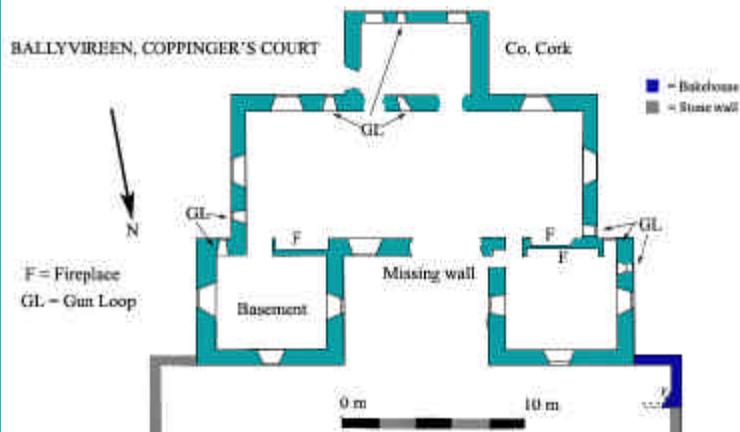
Plan of Coppinger's Court by Joe Nunan
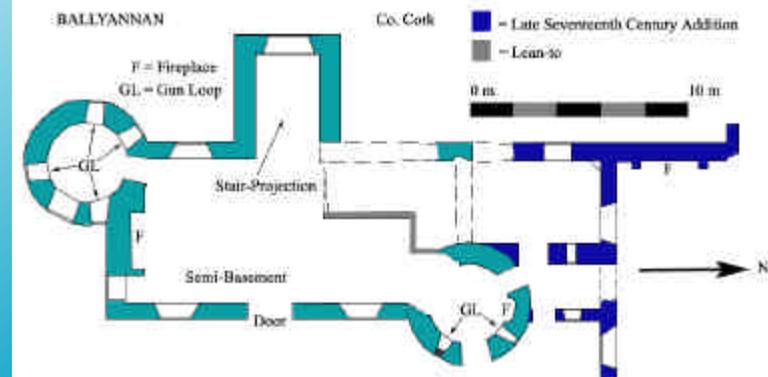

Plan of Ballyannan by Joe Nunan

Two distinct types of houses were identified by Leask, the tower and gabled houses or southern houses and the Plantation castle or northern houses. Leask concerned himself with the development of the southern house while in the north of Ireland Jope (1960) addressed the origin of Plantation fortification and design. Both recognised the fortified house as an example of a new architectural genre particular to Ireland. Addressing the origin of these houses, both agreed there were internal and external influences at work. Internally, there appeared to be a continuity of building style carried over from tower-house tradition. The external influence originated from the Munster and Ulster Plantations of Ireland in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Both Leask and Jope concluded that the regional variation in building form between the North of the country and those of the southern and midland counties were directly related to the process of New English Settlement.

The Munster Plantations were established by English settlers from the English West Country. Later, in the early decades of the seventeenth century, parts of the north of Ireland were settled by colonists mainly from the Scottish Lowlands. Both ethnic groups had an influence on the architectural style of the built environment within their areas of settlement. Jope and Leask restricted their study and analysis of the development of the fortified house to particular regions. Leask has concerned himself with the most significant architectural detail found on the more prestigious buildings in Munster, while Jope confined his study and analysis to Ulster. Both give very thorough descriptions of plan type, defence, decorative detail and classical features found on the buildings of the period. W. D. Waterman (1961) surveyed and detailed fortified houses of county Sligo, and he discussed the origin of the Irish fortified house in greater detail than either Leask or Jope. He adopted a more inclusive appraisal, by studying these buildings on an all-island basis and giving equal consideration to the source of design for houses in the south of Ireland c. 1560-1650, and for those in the Munster area. He discusses the design and origin of the 'Plantation house' detailing the Scottish, English and The London Companies influences on their style. Waterman, like Jope and Leask, is primarily concerned with fabric, form and function describing features and Classical ornamental detail, but he also addresses origin and functionality in greater detail than his contemporaries.

The above elements of the fortified houses are discussed in one form or another by Jope, Leask and James Stephen Curl. Curl is regional in his analysis. He is particularly interested in the development of specific architectural forms including fortified residences found in Ulster, having their origins in the London Companies'. He further develops a subject area addressed by Waterman, (1961) in his Houses of the London Companies Plantation. The former provides an inclusive and detailed analysis of such structures. He examines the history, architecture and planning of the Ulster Plantation, specific to certain Ulster localities. Curl provides an informative account offering valuable information and insight into the organisation and administration or mis-administration of the Plantation project in seventeenth-century Ulster. Regardless of his politically outdated language, when making reference to the seventeenth-century Irish, he touches on a number of areas from building requirements to workmen and craftsmen, to the requirements and need for defence.

To what degree were the fortified elements of the houses functionally practical? According to Eric Klingelhofer (1997), the defensive features of fortified houses are military not chivalric, their gun loops are as functional as those found at Fort Mountjoy in Ulster, which were built as field headquarters for Robert Blount, Lord Mountjoy, Elizabeth's victorious commander. Klingelhofer also touches briefly on the functional aspect of the defences. His interest, though primarily military, is the identification of a mind set, self-fashioned by a new Tudor courtier class. Their houses had some Renaissance ornamentation, but the overall format remained late medieval. This he refers to as 'Spenserian Architecture'. Looking to Ireland he wanted to identify the relationship between a continued tradition of the defended residence and the 'chivalric revival' in English architecture. This was represented by the fortified residence or Irish 'Spenserian Architecture'. Klingelhofer points to the Plantation of Munster

as the moment English 'Spenserian/chivalric Architecture' adopted a functional military persona. The aesthetic defensive features became functional within an Irish context. He concludes that Elizabethan and Jacobean architecture in Ireland conveyed a message of continuity, modernisation and strength. Their houses were the seats of their power and wealth, yet these houses would be fortified - unsuitable against a modern army, but not against a sudden raid. Klingelhofer analyses the ideals the English colonists introduced with their architectural forms in Ireland, which directly contributed towards the development of the Munster fortified house.
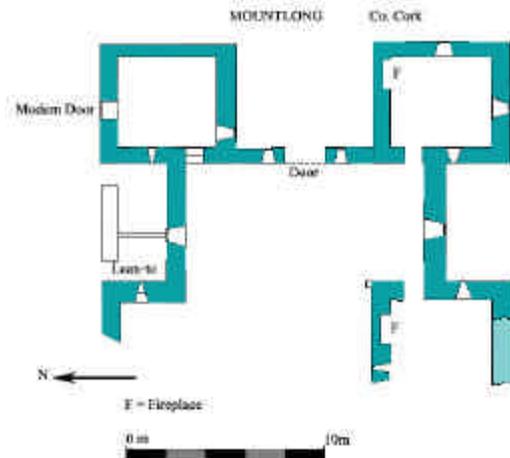
Plan of Mountlong by Joe Nunan
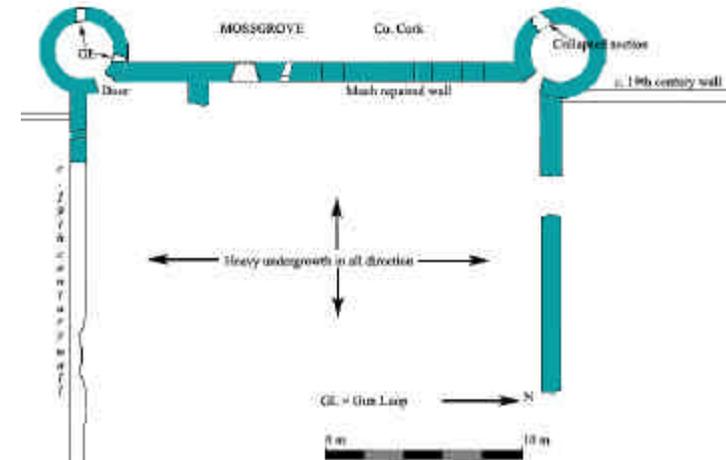
Plan of Mossgrove by Joe Nunan

Research into advances in Irish warfare in the sixteenth and seventeenth century contributes further to our understanding of the practical application of the defensive nature of the fortified house. P.M. Kerrigan (1998) investigates the changing nature of warfare in county Offaly and concludes that the military features incorporated into the design template of the fortified house would have been sufficient defence in times of attack given certain circumstances and conditions. Rolf Loeber (1999) largely concurs with this view, through his analysis of the historical sources on seventeenth-century warfare and architecture in county Laois. Both sought to investigate and analyse how gun powder and artillery changed warfare, and how defences which were once satisfactory became inadequate by the mid seventeenth-century. As yet, there has been little investigation as to how the fortified house sites performed as battle sites. This type of analysis would require archaeological investigation similar to that undertaken in the United States in the study of battlefield investigation. There are numerous fortified houses in Ireland situated in isolated rural locations where military engagement took place prior to their abandonment or destruction. The excavation of such sites could open new avenues into existing knowledge and understanding of Irish warfare and the role the fortified house played. It was on the fortified house that the wealthy lavished most money and effort, not only in relation to the construction and fortification of the structure, but in terms of decoration and furnishings. The examination of specific documents can further enhance our knowledge of these buildings. Materials like household inventories, ordinance and account books play a significant role in the development of existing knowledge of the Irish fortified house and their owners/builders.

Jane Fenlon suggests that household inventories can play a vital part in expanding our knowledge by yielding valuable information about houses of this period, along with their content. Inventories, on occasion, serve as crucial documentary records for buildings no longer occupied or which have fallen into a state of dereliction. Fenlon (2003) also believes inventories should not be seen as just records of house furnishing but should rather be treated as valuable research resources, rich in information that may prove useful to archaeologists, architectural historians, art historians and those working in associated fields. The household inventories provide detailed accounts relating to houses of the period, their owners/builders and their contents. Fenlon has sampled a range of inventories from an elite section of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Irish society ensuring that all levels of this elite group of owners/builders are represented. She has examined the inventories of Merchant families such as Robert Fitzsymons, Old English such as the Ormond Butlers and the Fitz Geralds, New English families such as the Boyles, Earls of Cork, and some Old Irish families. Fenlon compensates for the lack of inventories surviving from the 'Old Irish' families by using two eighteenth-century inventories belonging to the O'Briens of Dromoland and Corofin Castle as very little information about the latter group survives (Fenlon 2003). Lindsay Boynton (1971) undertook similar work in England and published the Hardwick Hall inventory of 1601. The inventory can provide information for a long term analysis, if the procedure of inventory has been repeated within a household at intervals over a period of time. The accumulated information can contain valuable insight concerning floor plans, architectural detail, room usage, taste and changing fashion (Fenlon 2003).

Mark Girouard (1978) analysed the household ordinance of the English manor houses of the Tudor period. The inventories and ordinance inform us of a social system which was aspired to at the time. Kenneth Marshall and Jennifer Ward (1972) demonstrated that excavation combined with inventories on Old Thorndon Hall, Essex, England, resulted in the recovery of the house plan and the room usage. In Ireland, the information gained from seventeenth-century inventories and ordinance can be used in conjunction with building survey to identify similar details.

Of equal importance are the builders/owners and craftsmen. Their money, knowledge and skill ensured that the concept of the fortified houses became a reality. The interplay between owners/builders, administrator, craftsmen and labours is the subject of Jane Fenlon's (1998) research. The sample of two account books c.1620-1630s may seem insignificant, however, this serves as a background to the seventeenth-century building process and details the methods used in Ireland by the New and Old English. Fenlon's research highlights the construction process: costs of materials, sourcing and acquisition of materials, the transportation and supply of materials, the craftsmen their skills and possible ethnic origin (British or Irish) and finally the method of employment. Fenlon, in investigating this much neglected area, succeeds in establishing herself as the vanguard in this field of research as both Airs and Girouard did before her with English Tudor and Jacobean buildings. This is a topic of research that has been extensively analysed by Malcolm Airs (1995). Airs, very skilfully pieces together the design and production process involved in the construction of the English Tudor and Jacobean manors. He provides a detailed account about the building process, the materials used, the workmen and their relations with the owner/builder along with the terms and conditions of employment. The picture presented by him is a vivid image of the process involved in the construction of the English Tudor and Jacobean manor.

Ralph Loeber (1973) gives an excellent overview of the builders, the style, and the various developments in Irish architecture during the latter half of the seventeenth century. The defensive elements of the later period houses moved away from the main building out onto the courtyard / bawn wall as in Burton house county Cork and Ballyclough Castle county Clare. The aesthetic character of the fortified house was central to its purpose. Entering the domain of a fortified house is a metaphor for entering into the presence of a well-to-do individual. The house is a form of expressive power, a form of beauty and strength.

Finally, some of the latest material published on form, fabric and function comes from David Sweetman (1999) and gives a good basic overview of the Irish fortified house. As with Leask and Waterman before him he focuses on houses in the southern counties of Ireland. He has the advantage of drawing on the works of all the above and the added benefit of using the information from the published archaeological inventories (Power et al. 1992, 1994 and 2000). Overall, Sweetman work is very informative covering the same basic ground as Leask.

Conclusion

Leask, Jope and Waterman collated evidence which made the study of fortified houses possible their primary interest being the buildings origin, fabric and function. They identified the fortified house as a shift in Irish architectural style that bridged the gap between the late medieval tower-house and the country manor house. It served a dual function of comfort with defence. Its development was influenced by the influx of New English settlers with first hand knowledge of Tudor architecture styles and the introduction of fashionable classical building forms from continental Europe. It was a building style embraced by the Irish elite and displayed their desire to modernise and Anglicize. Individual house-styles and plans varied within and between regions. The most obvious distinction was between the north and the south of Ireland. The difference in building style was a resulted of the plantation of two distinct ethic groups within those regions. The Scots settled in the north of Ireland while the English immigrated to the south. Ultimately, the fortified houses had an Irish architectural quality and it was this Irishness that gives them their unique style. The use of local materials in their construction and the incorporation of architectural detail from the tower-house add to the domestic nature of the buildings. They are monuments to their builders' aspirations for an English and Continental house style adapted to Irish conditions and constructed by Irish builders. The fashionable chivalric and quasi-military elements of corner-towers and bastions incorporated into the designs of many Continental and English houses became functional military features on the Irish houses.
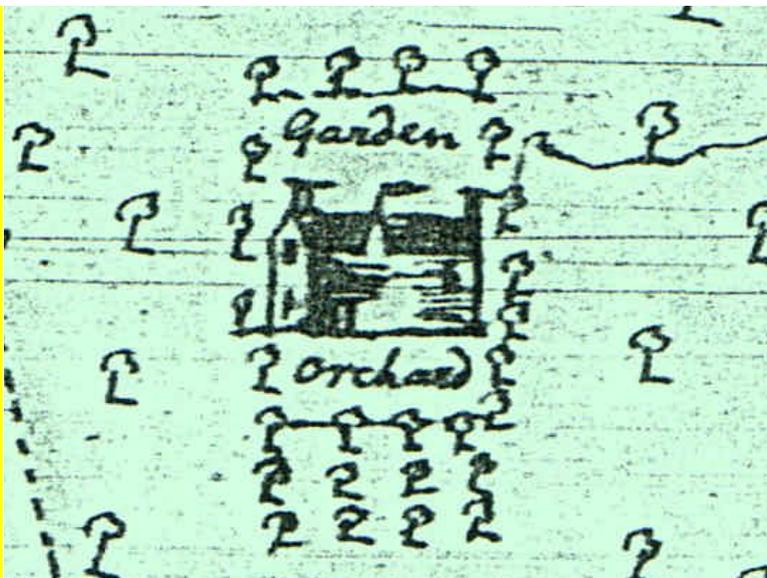
Petty's map (c.1655)

Photograph by Joe Nunan

The military features incorporated into the fortified house were taken directly from the tower-house. They were clearly successful on the tower house and so were directly transferred to the fortified houses. Typical fortified houses were symmetrical in plan, had many large windows, were very well ventilated and heated with many fireplaces on every floor, and were generally comfortable. The elites lavished their wealth on house decoration and furniture, as set out by Jane Fenlon who provides much needed information from inventories and account books, which detail the type of goods owned and acquired by these new elites of Irish society. She also provides valuable insights into some of the building methods and practices employed by builders in seventeenth-century Ireland. Overall, the study of the fortified house has been an analysis of their origins, form, fabric, function and use of space. It has identified their distribution and typology. A study of seventeenth-century inventories and account books open up a window into work practices, construction methods and the ethic origins/trades of some workers. Nevertheless, there remains a task to be done in continuing and developing further the excellent work so far undertaken on the Irish fortified house.

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