



History of Carriganass Castle

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Brief History of O'Sullivan Beres



Donal Cam O'Sullivan Beres

The history of the castle records the fortunes of the O'Sullivan Beare Chieftains and traces the decline of the old Gaelic aristocracy through the Desmond Rebellion, The Munster Plantation, The Battle of Kinsale and the Flight of the Earls. The main character is Donal Cam O'Sullivan whose portrait as a titled "Spanish Nobleman" hangs today in Maynooth College.

Carriganass tower house was built by the O'Sullivan Beare Chieftain, Dermot O'Sullivan around 1540. It was located at the eastern end of the Sullivan Beare territory, the main castle being at Dunboy. Following his death in 1548 there was a struggle for leadership within the clan resulting eventually in a division of the clan territory between Owen O'Sullivan who accepted a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth and Donal Cam. Each of them would have occupied Carriganass Castle at different periods. At the time, Munster was in bloody turmoil with the Desmond Rebellion being put down by Henry VIII and later by Elizabeth I. King Philip III of Spain sent military help to the Irish clans and this led to the Battle of Kinsale between the English forces under Mountjoy and the combined army of the Spanish forces and the soldiers of the Munster and Ulster chieftain clans. Donal Cam was in command of the Munster soldiers having sworn allegiance to King Philip. His cousin, Owen O'Sullivan was on the English side which won the battle decisively on December 24th 1601.

After the Battle of Kinsale Donal Cam abducted the wife of his cousin Owen O'Sullivan and she was held captive on the Island of Dursey. The Island was attacked by the English and the entire population was butchered. In June 1602 Dunboy Castle was captured by the English forces and Carriganass Castle also surrendered. Donal Cam and his followers were declared outlaws and he decided to retreat to Leitrim to try and link up with his northern allies. With a thousand followers he left Glengarriff on December 31st 1602 passing north of Carriganass Castle and on through Ballingearry. For the entire journey, the fugitive group was attacked by both English forces and Irish clans loyal to Elizabeth. Only thirty five reached the Leitrim destination in mid-January 1603.

After making contact with the Ulster leaders, Donal Cam realised that there was no hope of the Irish Chieftain clans continuing the military struggle. He went into exile in Spain where King Philip III gave him the title of Count of Bearehaven and Knight of Santiago. He was murdered in Madrid in 1618. His younger son, Dermot, became a very influential figure in the Spanish Court.

Folk History

Carriganass Castle has a very strong presence in the folk-memory of the local community down the years. It is said that the building stone for the castle came from a quarry in nearby Ahilmore called Poc an Tairbh and that the cut stone was brought from this quarry to Carriganass by way of a human chain of workers. Much more dramatic and legendary is the story of Donal Cam avenging the murder of his wife, Aoife. According to this story, St. Leger, a commander in the English army discovered Aoife in hiding in Gougane Barra and killed her.



*I tore her from Finbarr's Shrine
Amid her tears and she was mine.
I wooed her like a lovesick swain
I threatened - would have forced - in vain.
She proudly scorned my fond embrace,
She cursed my hand and all my race.*

These words are from the poem The Revenge of Donal Cam which graphically records how the chieftain, hunted and desperate after the Battle of Kinsale, managed to get admission to Carriganass Castle disguised as a monk and pretending that he had information on the outlawed chief. That very night, the wedding of St. Leger to the daughter of a local McCarthy chieftain was being celebrated. But St. Leger was uneasy .

*Some demon haunts me since my pride
Urged me to stab that outlaw's bride.
Each form I see, each sound I hear
Her dying threat assails my ear.*

When the festivities were over St. Leger questioned the monk about the whereabouts of Donal Cam. He told the disguised chieftain how he had murdered Aoife, whereupon Cam grabbed him and hurled him into the rocky Ouvane Falls from an upper room in the castle-tower.

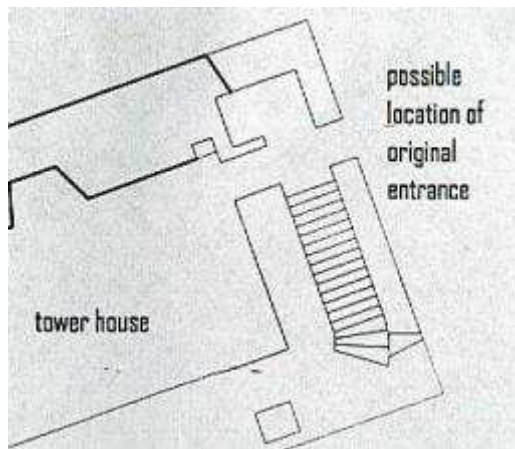
*"Saxon, 'tis Aoife gives this grave"
He said, and plunged him in the wave.
One piercing shriek was heard, no more
Up flashed the billows dyed with gore.*

The poem concludes with Donal Cam's escape by jumping from the tower across the river to the south bank.

Local tradition also maintains strong associations with the Retreat to Leitrim route passing over the Ahil hills and through the Borlin valley.

Archaeology

Carriganass Castle-Tower House



Carriganass Castle is the best preserved of the tower houses of the O'Sullivan Beare Clan. The tower itself is a 5 storey rectangular structure with its western side standing to its original height. All of the eastern section of the tower is now gone so we are left with a spatially biased section of the structure in which to interpret its space and layout. The ground floor was probably originally entered from an entrance in the now destroyed eastern wall and had an estimated area of 45 square metres. 2

embrasured windows light this level on the south and west walls. A third blocked up arch in the north wall may represent a third light.

These are the only surviving architectural features at this level with no recesses or entrance features now visible or surviving. The first floor level was originally vaulted and has 2 surviving windows again in the west and south wall. 2 mural chambers are contained either side of the west window, both lit by narrow lintelled windows while a third mural chamber is present on the north wall. Each of these chambers is accessed through a lintelled doorway. A small number of rectangular (storage?) recesses are also present at waste level on the north wall. The combination of these architectural features would suggest that this level was a private space, constituting the private quarters of the residence. The second floor level is lit by 3 windows in the west, south and north walls. These are finely built windows with some internal stone surrounds surviving. Projecting stone corbels marked the position of the ceiling. No mural chambers survived and there does not appear to be any attempt at the creation of private spaces at this level. This could then be a public space within the tower house, a space where guests were greeted and possibly entertained and where business was conducted.

The third floor level would also have originally been covered with a barrel vault and although only the springing for this now remains. Lighting does not appear to have been such an overt concern at this level as it is only lit by a single ogee-headed window on the west wall, centrally placed within the west wall. The south wall of this level also contains a mural chamber. The combination of the low lighting at this level and the presence of private chambers would again suggest that this was a private space constituting the sleeping or bedroom quarters of the primary residence. Finally the fourth floor level has a narrow wall walk giving access to the 2 surviving bartizans in the north-west and south-west corners. The confined access and wide drop holes in the base of the features constitute a thoughtful investment in defence. They had the potential to operate as security features in the event of a short term attack.

The presence of the bawns and their architectural form clearly demonstrates a concern for security and defence. The absence of a bawn from Carriganass Castle but the presence of such a wall on the fore-coastal side would suggest that this perceived threat or need for defence came from the sea. Given that much of the interaction between the O'Sullivans and the outside world was with fishing fleets it is likely that

the bawns were constructed with this contact in mind. It may be that the bawn enclosure served as administrative areas for this interaction and that a variety of activities associated with this contact were carried out within their confines. It is also likely that they had a function associated with the administration and operation of the demesne and agricultural lands associated with the tower house sites. The sheer size and strength of the wall at Ardea is indicative of a more overt need for defence so this interaction must also have had its dangers.

University of Ulster Archaeologist Report

In June 2002 a team of archaeologists from the University of Ulster at Coleraine carried out a short research trial excavation at the site castle. The excavation was carried out as a preliminary assessment of the archaeology on the site with a view to undertaking much more extensive archaeological work in the area. Over the last seven years the University at Coleraine has been involved in a research programme in Bantry Bay, examining the history and archaeology of the O'Sullivan Beare lordship and the recent excavation was undertaken as part of a training programme for post-graduate maritime archaeological students. To date excavations have been carried out in the grounds of Bantry House, Newtown House, on Beare Island and on shipwrecks in Allihies and on the French wreck, La Surveillante lost in Bantry Bay in January 1797.

The Carriganass excavation produced some exciting results. It has shown that the site was attacked and abandoned in 1602 immediately prior to the siege of Dunboy. Donal Cam attacked the castle from the north with a number of cannon and succeeded in knocking down a substantial section of the northern bawn wall as well as portions of the town house. Evidence of this attack comes in the form of the collapsed masonry and violently destroyed stone work from the wall. Fragments of clay pipes are evidence of the last defenders protecting the site from attack. A quantity of animal and sheep bone, all of which had been butchered, was also found which gives an indication of the diet of the castle defenders and occupants. Following this destruction Owen O'Sullivan left Carriganass Castle and built the fortified house at Reendessert. The castle was then left abandoned for over 100 years before it was reoccupied or reused in the latter part of the 18th century. At this time the owner levelled the interior and lay down a cobbled surface that probably served as the interior of a farmyard building. Since the 18th century the site has been continuously used as part of a farm complex.

The University of Ulster team will return to the site again to carry out a programme of excavations in the interior of the castle tower. It is also hoped that a programme of geophysical and topographic surveys can take place in a field adjacent to the tower. It is thought that there are remains of a later medieval Gaelic village contained within this field that would originally have been associated with the castle.

Tower House Functions

The role and function of the tower houses in the study area needs to be examined on 2 levels. First on a micro or personal level where the role of the tower house needs to be analysed from the perspective of the occupant while on a macro level the sites need to be examined externally in terms of how the tower house was meant to be perceived within the surrounding landscape.

On a micro level tower-houses within the area clearly had a domestic and private function offering a living space to the leading family members of the O'Sullivan Beares. Features such as latrines and private mural chambers are indicative of these spaces. They also offered public enclosed spaces with which these people could deal with guests, business acquaintances, and other arrivals. In the creation of these public rooms the individuals were drawing external people into their internal environment and in doing so were asserting a sense of authority and control over whatever proceedings or interactions they were engaged in. The presence of a tower in the landscape was a physical expression of this same sense of power. These overt architectural expressions were dominant features on the landscape and highly visible expressions of power and control. It is often difficult from a modern perspective to visualise how much of a dominant cultural expression these monuments were. Their setting and very prominent coastal positions ensured that this sense of control was felt both by land and on sea.

In particular the sighting of the tower houses at the main points of terrestrial and maritime entry into the territory and the positioning at sites of natural anchorage and landing enhanced this feeling of centrality. Each is strategically placed in terms of access to communications, resource availability, shelter and socio-political centrality. These were multifaceted monuments designed with living, defence, trade, and communications all in mind. They are suggestive of a sense of permanence and dominance in the landscape. They are built primarily as local monuments functioning primarily as the central socio-economic nodes in the localised landscape but they also served an external function. They were locations where the visiting fishing fleets and visiting military or political figures identified with. Their external outlook is best exemplified in the later medieval artefactual evidence recovered from Dunboy. The pottery assemblage for the 15th and 16th centuries is dominated by imported continental European pottery. It is unlikely that tower-houses stood by themselves in isolation. It is likely that they would have been the focal point of a larger complex of buildings all related to and interdependent on the central.

Bawns are an integral part of these complexes as are the buildings that are contained both within them and surrounding them. Surrounding buildings could serve a variety of functions including defence, storage and domestic functions. It is apparent that a number of these buildings were present at Ardea and at Dunboy, exemplified by the towers that are attached to the bawn walls of both complexes. The historical sources also testify to a range of buildings at these complexes in Ireland. A German Traveller in Ireland in 1591 records that the Irish normally build their houses in the form of a tower surrounded by a wall. Yet they do not live in them but keep them as fortresses. Nearby they keep a house badly built unlike our farmhouses where they lit a fire in the middle. In this second house the Lord, his wife and his servants feast and eat. Similarly Richard Stanihurst records that tower houses were used for family security while big and spatial palaces of white clay and mud roofed with thatch were used for feasting.

The 16th century map of the bay would indicate that similar structures were present at the tower houses of the area. A large structure is illustrated standing immediately adjacent to the tower at Carriganass. This is apparently shown with a thatched roof but has no windows or doors shown. This may be a feasting hall next to the tower. The presence of such a building should not be surprising given the absence of a fireplace or any apparent cooking area in the surviving section of the tower. Excavations carried out by the author up against the north wall found no traces of such a building. However if such a structure was present then it was likely to have been positioned in the green field directly north of the river. The tower itself is constructed on an exposed bedrock ridge and the adjacent field is more suited to the construction of a "Feasting Hall". Indeed there are a variety of earthworks in this field, including a possible holloway which may testify to its cultural usage in the later medieval period. The fact that this windowless building is shown associated with a settlement cluster is further evidence of its usage.



Carriganass Bawn

Refortification of existing buildings and construction of new fortified structures in the later part of the 16th century is a recurring theme in the study area. This process is most evident in the surviving architectural remains at Carriganass Castle. While the tower house here is clearly 15th century in date with later 16th century refurbishment. Its surrounding bawn wall is later. The bawn has been used as a farmyard over the last 150 years and has witnessed a significant amount of change and redevelopment. It has a substantial structure with an internal east west length of 42 metres and a north south width of 21 metres. This gives an overall internal space of 882 square metres which provides a useable area of about 730 square metres when you subtract the estimated 150 square metres that the tower house occupies. The bawn is roughly rectangular in shape and is positioned on an exposed east/west



oriented bedrock ledge which runs directly adjacent to the Ovane River and its northern bank. It is a well built structure, constructed using an uncoursed rubble sandstone in a lime based mortar. In general this type of mortar was produced using sand and gravel from the local area in combination with lime putty. The putty was produced through the firing of limestone and later addition of water. The western wall is the best preserved running roughly north south for a distance of 13 metres between the south west and north west corner bastions and is 80 cm thick. It stands to a height of 4m above present ground level internally and displays 5 gun-loops with linteled embrasures. Its northern wall is best preserved at its western end where much of the original masonry still stands. This 27 metre long section sits directly on top of underlined bedrock with a substantial sandstone plinth visible externally. 7 gun-loops are visible in this section, each has well lintelled splayed embrasures with varying dimensions with averaging 50 cm by 50 cm in width and depth. The loops are now positioned at 1 metre above present ground level due to a build up of debris in the fort's interior but would have originally been positioned at shoulder level. There is a modern break in this wall towards its eastern end where the site owner has created an entrance. Most of its eastern sections is obscured by the presence of a modern farm building but traces of a chimney stack with what seems to be the springing of a small vault at its lower level can be seen. This may have been a bread oven incorporated into the chimney breast. The eastern wall is relatively featureless and stands at 4 to 5 metres high. It has a wide 3.2 metre break towards its northern end which is now blocked up but may originally have been the entrance into the bawn. An underlined plinth projects from beneath the structure for 20 to 30 cm at the north of the wall. A series of projecting stones can also be seen running up the wall on the southern side of the entrance which constitute the remains of a stairwell leading to a walled walk. Finally, the southern wall is the least well preserved with much of its western half now destroyed. It follows the natural line of the edge of the river cliff that it stands on

so it is not as linear as the other 3 walls. 3 large splayed windows which were originally lintelled are visible at ground level on the wall with traces of a fort blocked up example. These appear to be original windows which face southwards. The wider and more elaborate nature of these windows in comparison with the pistol loops which are present on the north and west wall indicate the greater sense of security that the occupants felt on this side overlooking the river. They must also represent the former presence of a domestic/administrative building abutting the wall at this position within the bawn. The presence of a vault which may have been part of a chimney stack at the western end of this section of a wall is further evidence of this. Indeed both stacks are clear indicators of the presence of a range of internal buildings that would have formally occupied the interior.

The bawn has 4 projecting spear shaped bastions or flanking towers. Each is stone built and consists of a ground and first floor level. While each of the bastions is broadly similar in shape and size each having an approximate internal area of 22 to 24 square metres, they differ in some respects. The south-east bastion has a very clear defensive function as exemplified by the presence of 6 pistol loops at ground floor level and 4 further examples on the east wall at first floor level but it does not simply serve this function. The presence of a large ground floor fireplace in the south-west corner of the building which was originally lintelled gives a sense of permanence about the occupation of the structure. It may have served as the main duty room for the soldiers in the bawn. A more domestic or utilitarian function is unlikely given the absence of other domestic fittings. The presence of a large splayed window on the south wall at first floor level is a further indication of the more utilitarian nature of this bastion. It continues the trend of placing walls in this wall in line with the 4 previously mentioned wall windows on ground level in the south wall.

The north-east bastion has been refurbished in recent years by the site's owner and all of the walls have been plastered and the first floor has been substantially rebuilt. This has masked the original character of the feature and makes any interpretation impossible. A number of gun-loops can however be identified on the exterior at ground floor level. Both of the western bastions are slightly smaller than the eastern examples having a rough internal area of 20 square metres and a more regularly shaped squared internal area. The north-west example is probably the most defensive of the 4 bastions. It is solidly built on 2 levels. Much of the ground is obscured by a build up of soil, rubble and farmyard debris. External examination reveals 2 pistol loops on either side of a narrow slit window on the northern face and 3 further loops on its western face. The south-western bastion has a regular squared interior with 3 pistol loops at ground level on its western face. The south facing wall is featureless. Interestingly the upper floor of this feature is covered with 4 tiers of small rectangular niches which would originally have served as nesting boxes. The niches are present on all 4 internal first floor walls and this level clearly served as a dovecote. The presence of the *côte* provides an indication of the diet of the inhabitants.

The bawn is clearly a late 16th century in date. While there is no documentary evidence to support this assertion there is clear cartographic and archaeological evidence. The mid 16th century map of Bantry and Beara previously mentioned shows the 5 tower houses in the bay, all shown with enclosing bawn walls with the exception of Carriganass. The accuracy of this source is already been attested to and the omission of a bawn is clearly indicative of the absence of such a feature at this date. Secondly the presence of gun-loops is a clear chronological indicator of a later 16th century build. The Cork survey has noted that the introduction of gun-loops is a later 16th century phenomenon on West Cork tower houses and castles. The

numerous gun-loops on the bawn then support this assignation of a later date. Finally, the spear shaped bastions are probably the most convincing indicator of a later build. The fashion of star shaped construction was developing rapidly across Europe by the end of the 16th century and the adoption of this architectural development of Carriganass demonstrates the contemporary approach to defence that Owen O'Sullivan was adopting. However the bawn was built without provision for large guns/cannon. There are no breaks in the wall which would have acted as gun positions and the bastions have no visible emplacements for guns. This indicated O'Sullivan did not own or have access to this type of artillery. It is also indicative of the limited role this type of equipment played in conflict in the region during the preceding century. This limited association with cannon is further demonstrated by the use Donal Cam made of European military experts and their cannon during the course of the 1602 siege. It appears from both of these examples that the Gaelic lordship simply had nothing to do with cannon until 1601-1602.

But why extensively model your defences at this stage? Carriganass was the principle residence of Owen O'Sullivan Uncle to Donal Cam. Owen had assumed leadership of the lordship in the 1570's following the death of his brother as Donal Cam was too young. This of course ended in the bitter O'Sullivan Beare family dispute which split the family in the 1580's. It is suggested here that this internal dispute provided the primary impetus for the bawn erection. Owen viewed the ambition and surge in power of Donal Cam as the greatest threat to his position of political and social/economical authority. It is clear that while he was fighting for the retention of this authority through the official channels of the English crown and administration, he was also developing local means of resistance to his family member.

Traditional perspective would be that the defences were constructed to protect against the increased English presence in the area but this simply does not hold up to historical analysis. It is clear that Owen O'Sullivan quickly aligned himself with the English. He is repeatedly listed as being loyal to the crown and is later involved in a large number of financial deals with the settlers and administration. An English presence was then clearly financially beneficial to him and not something he needed physical protection from. A structural analysis of the defences also appears to confirm this interpretation. The vast majority of the gun-loops and strongest defences are clearly situated on the north and western walls. These are of course facing in the direction of the territory owned and dominated by the other parts of the O'Sullivan Beare family grouping, more specifically those territories which were under Donal Cam's control. The defences which face south on the other hand are clearly the weakest as exemplified by the presence of 5 to 6 large square windows on the south facing walls. These seem to indicate a lack of trepidation in relation to any possible threat that may come from this direction, an area which was extensively colonised by English settlers from the 1580's onwards. Indeed there does not even appear to have been a bawn wall for a section of this southern wall immediately adjacent to the tower structure. The writings of Don Philip O'Sullivan in the early part of the 17th century would also indirectly support the assertion of the need for defence against the Irish. He's repeatedly scornful of Owen's siding with the English and records that Donal Cam had "reduced it by raising a rampart, partly by towers, mantlets, sows and gabions, and partly battering it with brass cannon" in 1601-1602.