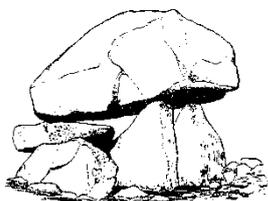


# ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Survey Report: No. 33

Survey of East Yard, Bishop's Palace, Downhill,

County Londonderry

UAS/11/06



**In association with**



June Welsh and Randal Scott

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First published 2013

Ulster Archaeological Society

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## 1. Summary

### 1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at the East Yard of Bishop's Palace, in the Townland of Downhill and in the County of Londonderry. The Irish Grid Reference is C 7585 3588. The building was listed on 22 June 1977 and given the reference code HB 03/12/015. It was awarded the grade B+, because it is of significant architectural and historic interest. This area formed part of the extensive ruins of the mansion house, set dramatically on the coast amidst a stunning landscape. This survey took place during a series of excavations by the National Trust between 2009 and 2012 to record the function of the East and West Yards and open public access to this part of the site. The survey was the sixth in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society during 2011 and also the thirty-third survey undertaken by the UAS members, since the inception of the survey group in 2005.

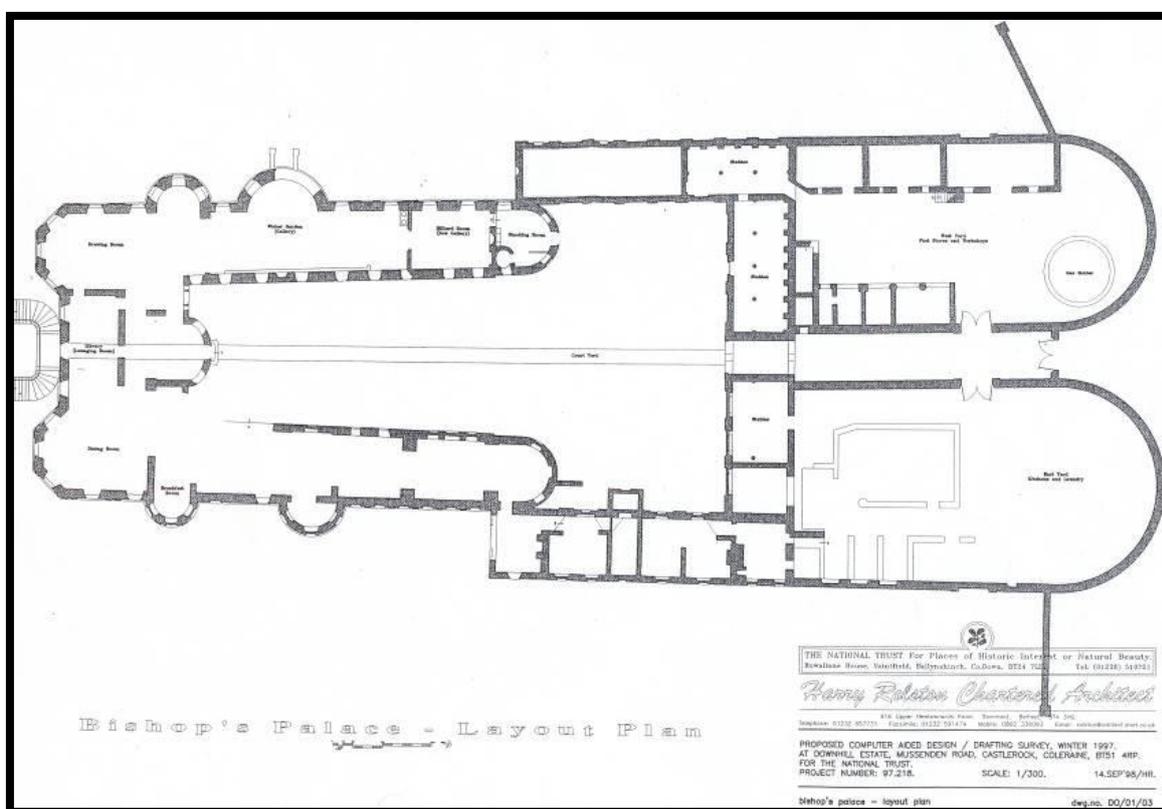


Figure 01: Plan of Bishop's Palace, Downhill, County Londonderry, *National Trust*

### 1.2 Aims

In order to enhance the archaeological record of this site, the aims of this survey were to produce accurate plan drawings of the monument and carry out a photographic survey. This information was compiled into a report and copies submitted to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, to the National Trust and to the archives of the Ulster Archaeological Society.



Figure 02: UAS survey team members at work within the East Yard

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 Background

The first visit by the UAS survey group to Bishop's Palace at Downhill took place on 31 July 2010, when the main focus was the West Yard. The initial survey of the East Yard was undertaken on 18 June 2011, with subsequent surveys on 30 June 2012 and 28 July 2012. The surveys were carried out by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society, in response to a decision taken by the committee of the society to extend an opportunity to members to participate in practical surveys of archaeological monuments that had not previously been recorded. This followed a bequest to the society from the late Dr Ann Hamlin, from which the items of survey equipment were purchased. During discussions with Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust in Northern Ireland, it was noted that many archaeological sites on National Trust property had not been subject to a detailed archaeological survey. It was therefore agreed that members of the society would commence a programme to survey these sites and the East Yard was subsequently chosen to be the thirty-third of these.



Figure 03: Aerial view of Bishop's Palace, Downhill, *National Trust*

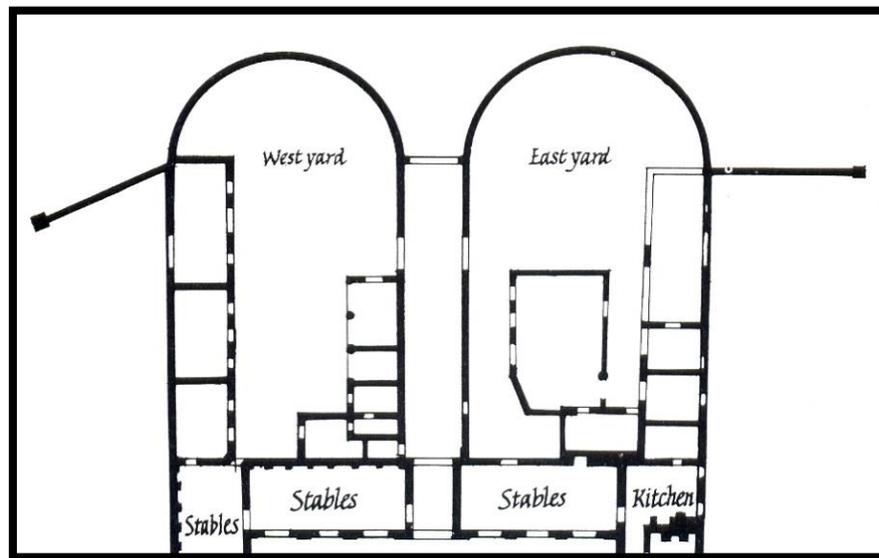


Figure 04: Plan of East and West Yards at Bishop's Palace, Downhill, *National Trust*



Figure 05: View of East Yard during excavation, *National Trust*

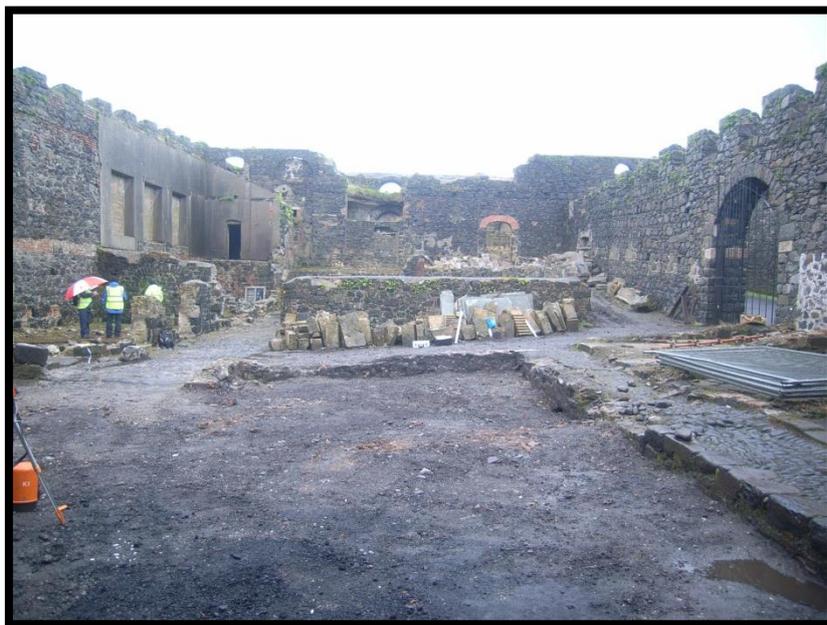


Figure 06: View of East Yard mid-excavation, looking south

## 2.2 Previous archaeological surveys

As far as it is known, there has been no previous archaeological survey at this site, until the National Trust undertook a series of excavations between 2009 and 2012. The aim was to identify the function of both East and West Yards and hopefully, provide public access to these parts of the site in the future. Fourteen volunteers took part in August 2009, when the focus of this first season of excavation was the East Yard. Their work was supported by professional archaeologists.

Work began in the East Yard, known as the Poultry Yard, in August 2009. Since the 1980s, when the National Trust first acquired the building, this area had been closed to the public. When the volunteers began, the East Yard was heavily overgrown and filled with rubble. Soon the yard became an architectural store, holding large quantities of masonry and architectural fragments.

At Downhill in 2009, almost 75% of the East Yard was cleared of rubble and prepared for detailed recording. The strategy was to fully catalogue the many architectural fragments recovered from the site and hopefully re-use some of these in future restoration or repair work at the Bishop's Palace.



Figure 07: Large quantities of decorative stonework within the East Yard



Figure 08: One example of beautiful, decorative stonework found within the East Yard

Excavation revealed original cobbled surfaces lying intact below the rubble. A walled enclosure, partly cobbled and lying to the south, was also revealed and may have been a piggery. This building appeared to overlie an earlier structure, which may have been the original poultry house. Excavation also cleared out four compartments or buildings arranged along the south and eastern wall of the yard. All of these were found to retain their original cobbled floors.



Figure 09: Original cobbled surfaces within buildings in the East Yard



Figure 10: Original cobbled surfaces in the East Yard

In addition to masonry fragments, other interesting finds included metalwork. One large cast iron fence post was obviously detailed in design and in remarkably good condition.



Figure 11: Cast iron fence post

One unusual masonry find within the East Yard was individual stone pieces, which would have combined to form a spiral staircase. Where in the palace or yards did such a staircase exist?



Figure 12: Individual stone steps of a spiral staircase

The most striking and perhaps the most important single discovery made was of a sculptured stone head, which appears to be a Roman portrait of AD 161-196 of either the Emperor Marcus Aurelius or his son Commodus. Undoubtedly, this was purchased by the Earl Bishop in Italy, while on one of his grand European tours. It is a tangible reminder of the opulence, which once graced the interior of this palace.



Figure 13: Sculptured stone head of a Roman Emperor, *National Trust*

### 2.3 Cartographic Evidence

There is little by way of surviving architectural plans of the house or maps of the demesne from the late eighteenth century or early nineteenth century to help document its growth and development. However, there are nineteenth century Ordnance Survey maps, which provide valuable cartographic information on the growth and development of the house and its yards during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These maps reveal subtle changes to both layout and organisation of the buildings and can help date the appearance of certain features.

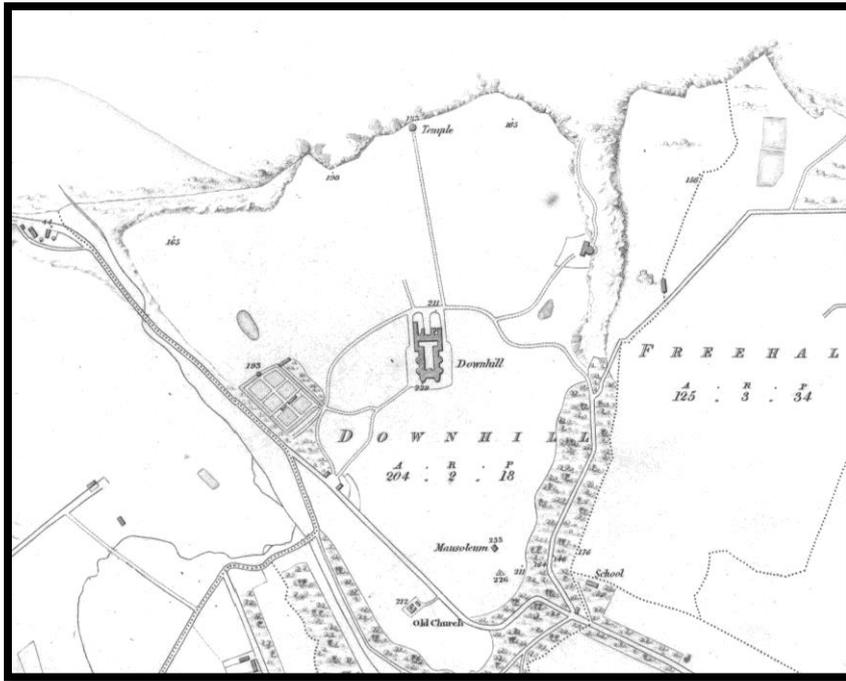


Figure 14: OS First Edition 1832, County Series, Sheet 2 (part of)

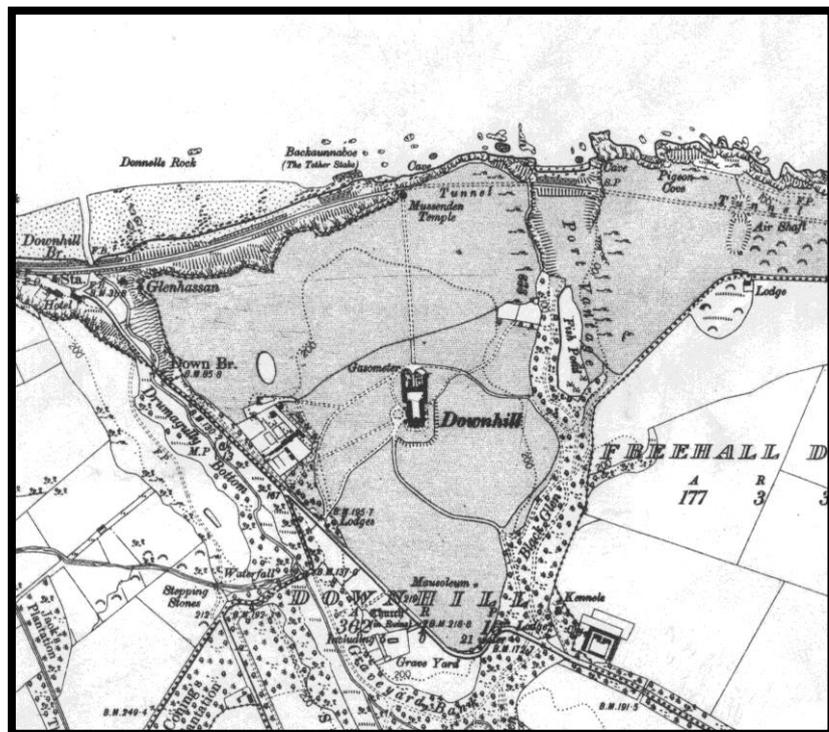


Figure 15: OS Third Edition 1906, County Series, Sheet 2 (part of)

The 1906 OS map clearly denotes more detail within the East and West Yards and of particular note are the Mussenden Temple and also the Gasometer from the West Yard, both now named on the map.

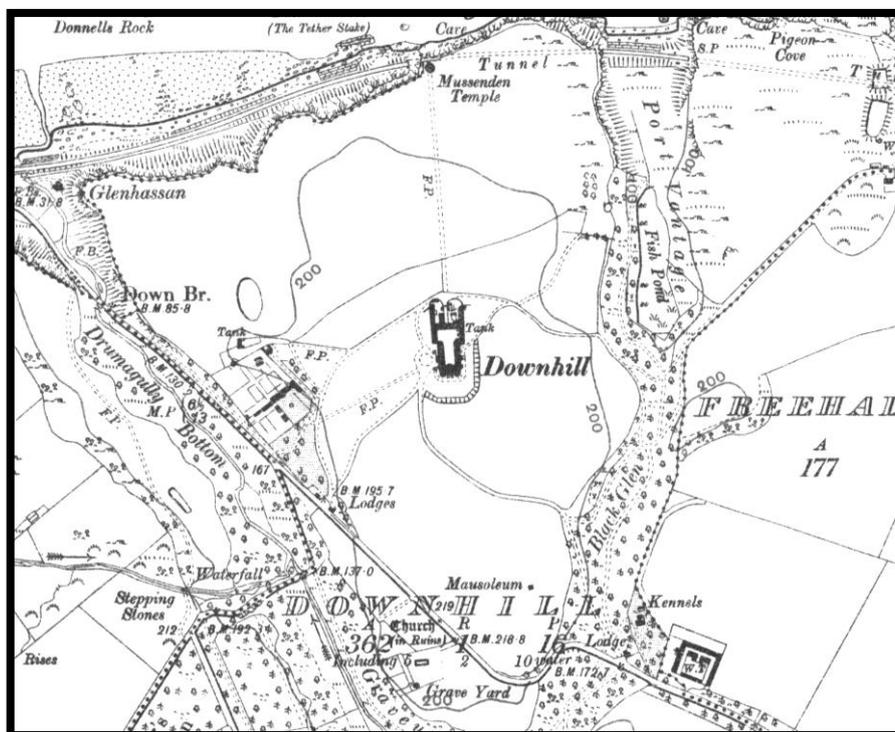


Figure 16: OS Fourth Edition 1926, County Series, Sheet 2 (part of)

## 2.4 Archiving

Copies of this report have been deposited with the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, the National Trust and the Ulster Archaeological Society. All site records have been archived by the National Trust at Rowallane, Saintfield, County Down.

## 2.5 Credits and Acknowledgements

The survey was led by Harry Welsh and the survey team included Chris Ayers, Duncan Berryman, Colin Boyd, Hilary Boyd, Michael Catney, Carly Cooper, Billy Dunlop, Ian Forsythe, Ian Gillespie, Lee Gordon, Anne MacDermott, Grace McAlister, Janna McDonald, Liz McShane, Jamie Magee, Heather Montgomery, Noel Mulholland, Sapphire Mussen, Pat O'Neill, Ken Pullin, George Rutherford, Randal Scott, Rosamund Scott, Janey Sproule and June Welsh. The Ulster Archaeological Society is particularly grateful to Malachy Conway, Archaeologist of the National Trust, who worked closely with the survey team in choosing the site and facilitating access.

### 3. The UAS Surveys of 31 July 2010, 18 June 2011, 30 June 2012 and 28 July 2012

#### 3.1 Methodology

It was decided that the survey would take the form of the production of plan drawings, to be accompanied by a photographic survey. This report was compiled using the information obtained from these sources, in addition to background documentary material

#### 3.2 Production of plan drawings

Plan drawings were completed, using data obtained from the field survey. Measurements were obtained by using the society's *Leica Sprinter 100* electronic measuring device. Sketch plans at 1:100 scale were completed on site by recording these measurements on drafting film secured to a plane table and backing up the data on a field notebook for subsequent reference. Field plans were later transferred to a computer-based format for printing.

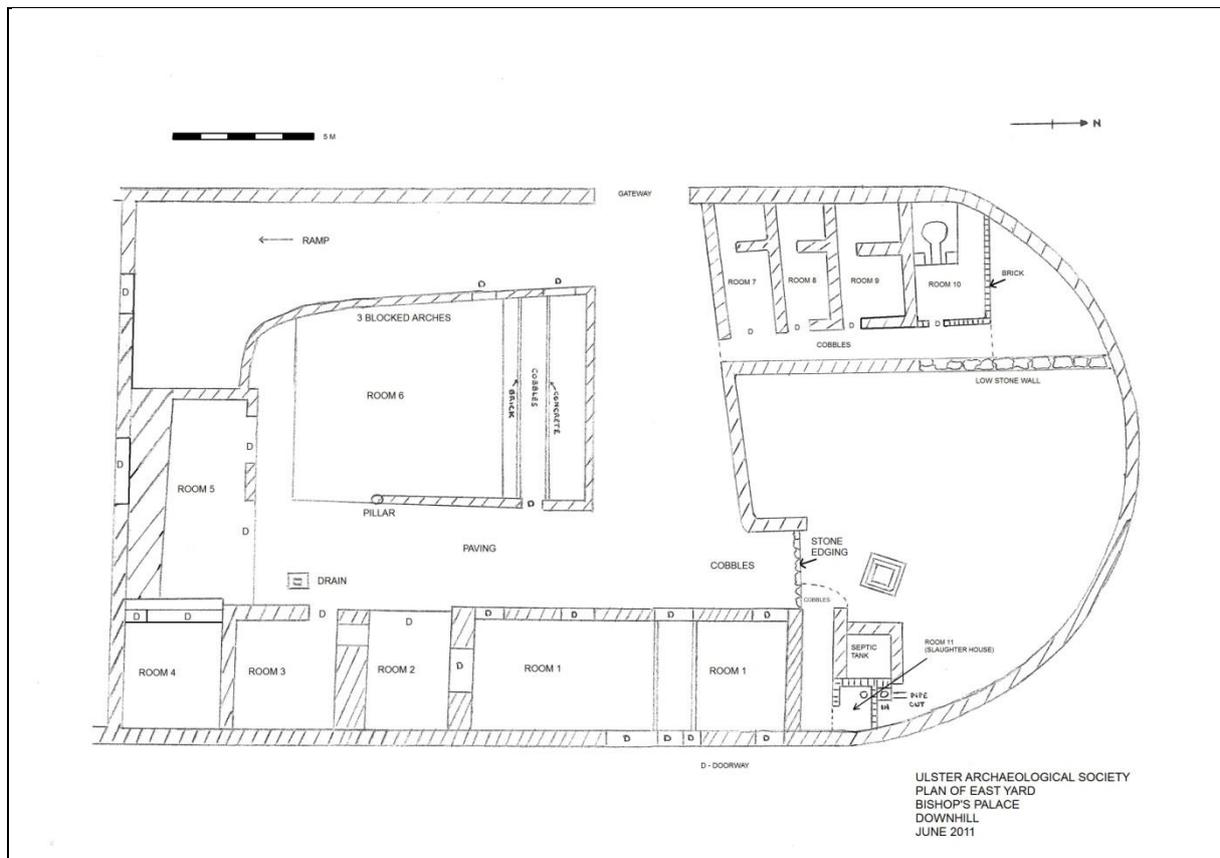


Figure 17: Plan drawing of the East Yard, Bishop's Palace, Downhill

### 3.3 Photographic archive

A photographic record of the site was taken by using a *Ricoh G600* 8 megapixel digital camera and other cameras. A photographic record sheet was employed, corresponding to photographs taken during the site survey on 31 July 2010, 18 June 2011, 30 June and 28 July 2012. The archive has been compiled in jpeg format and saved to compact disc.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Background Information

After he was made the Bishop of Derry in 1768, Frederick Hervey, later to become the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bristol, commissioned the building of a grand country house at Downhill Demesne near the village of Castlerock, overlooking Downhill Strand and Benone on the north coast of Ireland. His industrial and cultural legacy to the northwest is immense and remains apparent to this day. He built the first bridge across the River Foyle, planted a magnificent forest at Ballykelly and restored St Columb's Cathedral. Many other churches also benefitted from his financial benevolence. He developed agriculture and coal-mining within the county and established a new road network outside the walled city of Londonderry.

The Earl Bishop's grandiose aspirations resulted in him seeking out famous architects to create designs for the building of his grand house and also the interiors. The house was filled with paintings, statues and other works of art, which the Earl Bishop had collected on his many travels in Italy and elsewhere. His gallery at Downhill contained works by Raphael, Titian and Rembrandt. Even the Vatican gave the Earl Bishop special permission to make moulds of their statues. The Cork architect Michael Shanahan is believed to have designed most of the garden buildings, which included the famous Mussenden Temple. This monument had been created as a memorial for Frideswide Mussenden, sister to Reverend Henry Bruce, the Earl Bishop's cousin, who had acted as steward of the Estate during the Earl Bishop's many absences and who in 1803 inherited the Irish Estates following the death of the Earl Bishop in Italy. He subsequently took the name Hervey-Bruce and was created a Baronet in 1804.

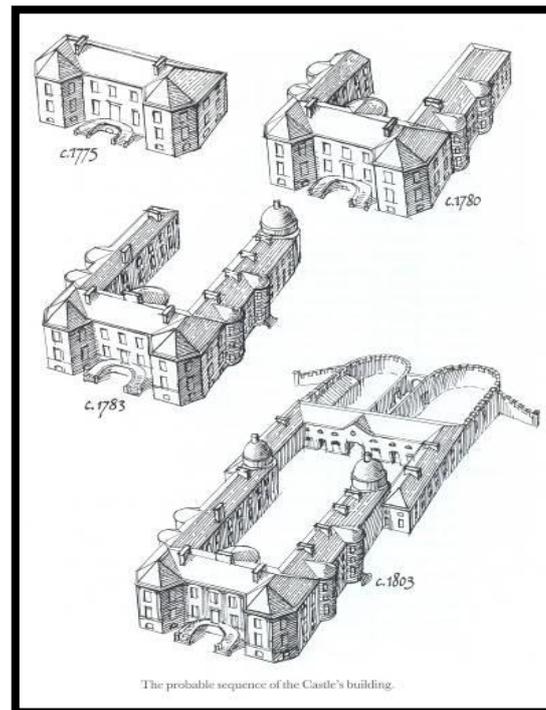


Figure 18: Developmental stages of Bishop's Palace at Downhill 1775-1803, *National Trust*

It was recorded that Downhill escaped serious damage during a fierce storm in 1839, but unfortunately in 1851 fire destroyed significant parts of the house, including the Library. The restoration of the house began in 1870 and continued until 1874, under the direction of John Lanyon, the son of the well-known architect Charles Lanyon. Many original features were maintained, but some changes were made to the layout.

The house finally became too much for the Bruce family, who had lived there continuously since the Earl-Bishop's time until 1922. During the Second World War, it was billeted by servicemen and women of the Royal Air Force. By that time some of the contents had been dispersed by auction, with the house itself sold in 1946. By 1950, the final stage was reached with the removal of the roof and the sale of surrounding lands. This marked a spiralling decline in the property and soon it became a dilapidated ruin. The National Trust acquired the property during the 1980s.

## 4.2 Survey Findings

The East Yard consists of an enclosed collection of the remains of buildings and other features, within the estate of the Bishop's Palace. The Yard itself measures 35.5m north/south by 19m east/west. It is semi-circular in design at the north. There are impressive crenellations/battlements on top of the walls at the north, east and west, which create the illusion of a fortress rather than a stately home or mansion, especially when viewed from the sea. This was a deliberate construction at the time of the Napoleonic Wars, when such protection was deemed necessary.



Figure 19: View of the crenellations within the East Yard, looking north

As can be seen from the detailed plan drawings, individual rooms or bays were allocated numbers by the Survey Group to ensure greater clarity, when differentiating between the many compartments/buildings within the East Yard.

#### 4.2.1 Room 1

Room 1 measures 9.12m in length overall north/south, with a width of approximately 4.2m east/west. It appears to have been subdivided into four smaller rooms. The eastern wall is well built of stone and has a very large (3.02m) filled-in archway, which extends to the exterior of the building. This main archway is in-filled with stone and displays a later brick horizontal insert, which may have proved useful for roof joints.

The south wall of Room 1 displays a blocked archway into Room2. The west wall has a series of four openings with four large sandstone sills into the sub-divided rooms. Some of these openings are brick-edged and are invariably 1m wide. The three cross walls are very low and measure 4.2m from east to west. The floor has a series of cobbled areas and drains. The three drains running east-west are lined with quarry tiles, with a precise stone kerb on the north side and small, round cobbles on the south side.

From the survey, there appears to be **three** distinct phases:

1. An original exterior wall, with arched entrances internally on the west side
2. Insertion of the cross walls, from east to west
3. Blocking up of the archways and construction of the byres



Figure 20: Room 1, with blocked-up arches and red brickwork at roof level, looking south



Figure 21: Evidence for large blocked-up arch, precise stone kerbing and cobbles, looking east



Figure 22: Blocked-up arch in the south wall of Room 1, looking south

#### 4.2.2 Room 2

This room, to the south of Room 1, may originally have been one large room, incorporating Rooms 2, 3 and 4, which has been subdivided. The interior of the north wall is constructed of stone rubble and has a 1.76m wide filled-in opening into Room 1. It appears to be original. Above this arch is a protruding stone which appears to match the one in Room 3 and may function as a corbel to support a beam for the first floor.



Figure 23: Blocked-up arch in the north wall of Room 2, looking north



Figure 24: South wall of Room 2 within the East Yard, looking south

The interior of this south wall is constructed of stone rubble and brick, but does not appear to be tied in and could be a later division. The opening into Room 3 is revealed and also the whole room is slightly lower due to sloping ground.

The floor is mostly cobbled, with a distinct stone drain running east/west. This would be in keeping with usage for domestic animals such as cattle or pigs. The drain has dressed stones along the south side and neat cobbles on the north side.



Figure 25: Room 2 from the west, showing drainage channel



Figure 26: Room 2 as a whole, looking east

#### 4.2.3 Room 3

This room is in the south-east corner of the East Yard and is accessible from the main part of the yard. The interior of the south wall measures 4.2m long and 2.03m high. The remains of an archway, 0.64m wide and 2.2m high, can be found in the south-west corner. It is built of brick and in-filled with dressed stone and appears to have been a narrow doorway between Rooms 3 and 4. The wall does not appear to be tied into the east and west walls, suggesting that this later feature divided one larger room into what is now Rooms 2, 3 and 4. Another larger archway, 1.64m wide and 2.2m high, along this east wall is also built of brick and in-filled with rubble stone. A protruding stone may have supported a beam for a first floor.



Figure 27: View of Rooms 1, 2 and 3 along the east wall, looking east

The east wall is 4.07m long and at ground level it is mostly well built with stone, but it appears that brick has been used to fill gaps from some features, which have been removed. At 2.3m high the brick bonding is in a pattern of one vertical brick followed by a pair of horizontal bricks and this appears to be the junction between the ground floor and the first floor. The first floor wall has been concreted over and two large windows have been filled in with bricks. At the top corners of these windows, there appears to be what once might have been slots for beams/rafters. The crenellations/battlements remain intact at the top of this wall.

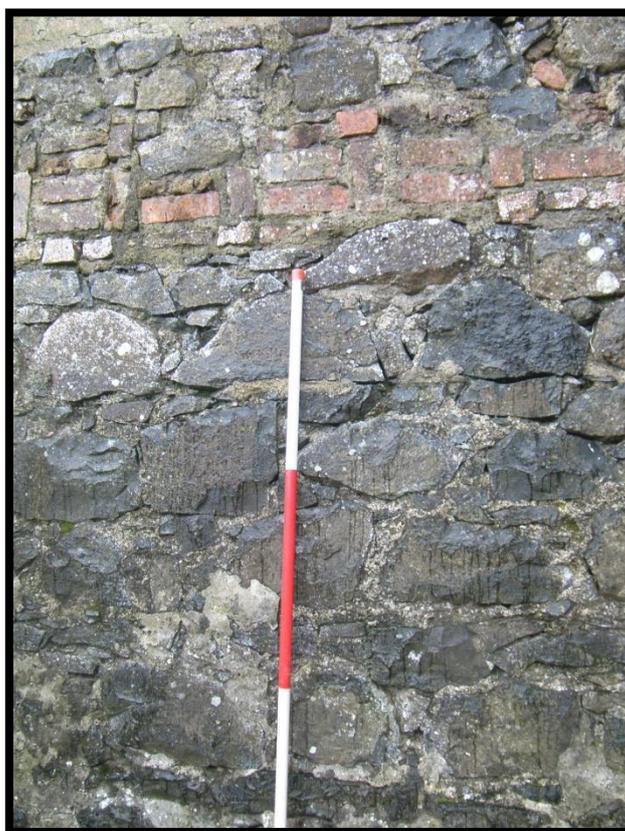


Figure 28: East wall of Room 3, looking east



Figure 29: Possible window and sill in north wall of Room 3, looking east

The interior of the north wall is 4.7m long and 45cm wide, but its height ranges from 0.7m to 2.05m. The wall is a mixture of stone rubble and brick and does not appear to be tied into the east or west walls. There is a filled in opening, perhaps a doorway, into Room 2 at a height of 0.5m, which may have been re-used as a window.

The interior of the west wall is 3.1m long and 0.6m wide, but only 0.45m high remains. The base course of stone appears to be original and above this may once have been part of an original archway, 1.76m wide. A doorway opening, 1.3m wide, is situated close to the north wall, with a metal door pin remaining on the south side. The floor is roughly cobbled, with cobbles measuring approximately 0.2m by 0.15m.



Figure 30: Archway span, 1.76m, in the west wall of Room 3, looking west



Figure 31: Inspection hatch to main drain situated outside Room 3 in the East Yard, looking east

#### 4.2.4 Room 4

It was impossible to gain safe access to Room 4, so measurements could only be approximate. Internally, its length is 2.7m and the width is 2.5m. The walls are approximately 0.5m thick. Two of the intact walls of Room 4 have been concreted over and a door opening is visible at first floor level, between Rooms 4 and 5.



Figure 32: Doorway at first floor level between Rooms 4 and 5, looking west

#### 4.2.5 Room 5

Internally, it measures 5m in length east/west, with its width ranging from 1.8m to 2.3m north/south. Along the south wall is a well-built retaining wall, possibly offering support for buildings to the south of this room. Another doorway, which on this occasion has been bricked up, is visible where Room 5 meets Room 4 at first floor level. The flooring appears once to have been tiled, but concreted over at a later date.



Figure 33: South wall of Room 5, with its retaining wall, looking east



Figure 34: Room 5 viewed from north-west

#### 4.2.6 Room 6

Internally, it measures 7.2m in length north-south and its width tapers from 5.1m to 4.5m east-west. The doorway measures 0.95m in width and marks the entrance of what appears to be animal pens. Whether the pens are designed for shelter or whether for dairying purposes remains unclear. The entrance corridor is cobbled and the stalls are also cobbled, with a 30cm concrete edging on one side and red bricks on the other side. Where the red bricks are found appears to be the footing of a wall, which has since been demolished. On the back wall three arches remain and all have been blocked-up. Behind this wall there is a steep ramp. With cobbling in one area, as indicated, the rest of the floor consists of loose stones.

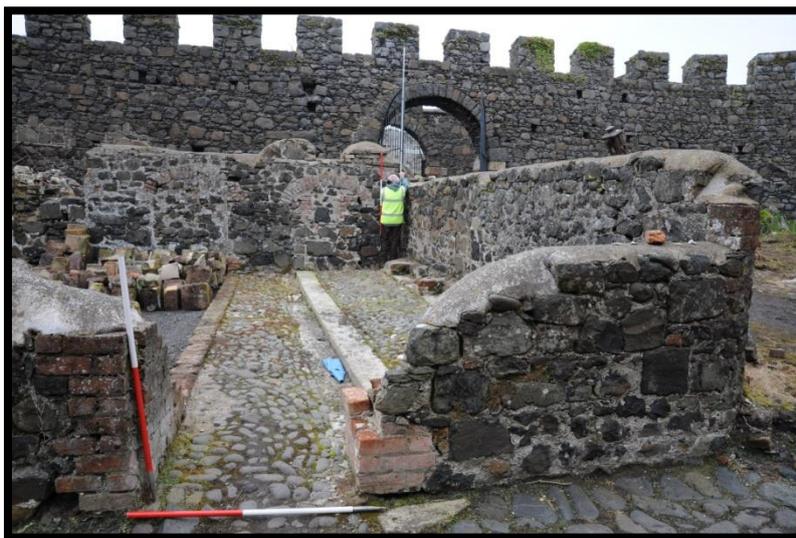


Figure 35: Doorway of Room 6, looking west



Figure 36: Back wall of animal pens, looking north

On this northern wall, there seems to be 8 individual animal stalls, each 0.78m wide and 1.8m deep. This area of animal stalls has a drop of 0.1m to the corridor cobbled floor. It was observed that a cart axle had been re-used as a door or gate hinge on the circular pillar of Room 6. At a distance of 2.9m, the rounded remains of a second circular gate post were found outside Room 5. These circular pillars each had a diameter of 0.96m.



Figure 37: Room 6 with view of animal pens, looking north



Figure 38: Room 6 with circular pillar and its metal hinge, looking north-west

#### 4.2.7 Rooms 7, 8 and 9

Internally, both Room 7 and Room 8 measure approximately 5m east-west and 1.5m north-south. Room 9 measures 4.5m east-west and 2.25m north-south. The internal dividing walls of all three rooms are of similar construction, which consists of brick, slate and mortar. The west wall, which forms the back wall for all three rooms, is made of natural stone, most probably basalt.



Figure 39: Rooms 7 and 8, looking west

The floors appear to be concrete, which have been worked to look like tiles. Separate cubicles are visible, suggesting that these rooms may well have been shower blocks, constructed during the Second World War, at the time of occupation by the Royal Air Force.



Figure 40: Rooms 7, 8 and 9, looking west



Figure 41: Rooms 7, 8, 9 and 10, looking north

#### 4.2.8 Room 10

Internally, Room 10 measures approximately 4.25m east-west and 2.5m north-south. Brick walls are to be found on the north and east sides and the floor surface appears to be bitumen. In one corner there is a well-built red brick fireplace structure, which may have supplied the means of heating water for the shower block close-by.



Figure 42: Room 10, looking west



Figure 43: Fireplace structure within Room 10, looking west

#### 4.2.9 Room 11

Adjoining Room 1 there is evidence for what may have been a very small slaughter house, complete with an underground septic tank, allowing sewage to decompose through the action of bacteria, before draining away into the ground.



Figure 44: Room 11, looking south



Figure 45: Room 11 with slaughter house and septic tank, looking south



Figure 46: Tiled floor surface of slaughter house, looking north

As already stated above, this was indeed a very small slaughter house and could not have been used for large animals such as horses, cattle or sheep. It is therefore very likely that as the East Yard has been described as the poultry yard, this area was indeed used for dealing with all manner of poultry: chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations for further work

The National Trust appears to have a clear strategy for the future of Bishop's Palace at Downhill. This includes cataloguing the great number of finds, especially those pertaining to the highly decorative building materials. It would be rewarding if even some of these can be used to enhance the structure of the building, especially in those areas where the public will have future access. The demesne is stunning in its location and accordingly, attracts a large number of visitors. A tea room and gift shop would be welcome additions. Information/story boards strategically placed around the site would further enhance the experience for visitors. The various activities of the eccentric Earl Bishop is a fascinating tale worth telling and as most visitors to any part of Ireland relish a great story, this provides us with a wonderful opportunity here at Downhill to capture people's interest and imagination.

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## APPENDIX - PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD FORM

**Site:** East Yard, Bishop's Palace, Downhill, County Londonderry

**Date:** 31 July 2010, 18 June 2011, 30 June and 28 July 2012

**Make and model of cameras...** *Ricoh G600W* 8 megapixel and *Nikon D700* 12.1 megapixel

Frame no.	Viewed from	Details
RIMG0440		UAS Survey Group members at work within the East Yard
		View of East Yard during excavation <i>National Trust</i>
RIMG0021		Mid-excavation view of East Yard
RIMG0030		Large quantities of decorative stonework within the East Yard
DSC0194		One example of beautiful decorative stonework found within the East Yard
RIMG0027		Original cobbled surfaces within buildings in the East Yard
RIMG0029		Original cobbled surfaces within buildings in the East Yard
RIMG0034		Cast Iron fence post
RIMG0046		Individual stone steps of a spiral staircase
		Sculpted stone head of a Roman Emperor <i>National Trust</i>
RIMG0033	S	View of the crenellations within the East Yard
DSC0159		Room 1, with blocked-up arches and red brickwork at roof level
DSC0160		Evidence for large blocked-up arch, precise stone kerbing and cobbles
103	N	Blocked-up arch in the south wall of Room 1
104		Blocked-up arch in the north wall of Room 2
102		South wall of Room 2, within the East Yard
101	W	Room 2, showing drainage channel
DSC0164	W	Room 2 as a whole, looking East
RIMG0441		View of Rooms 1, 2 and 3, along the East Wall
106		East wall of Room 3
107		Possible window and sill in north wall of Room 3
105		Archway span, 1.76m, in the west wall of Room 3
RIMG0043		Inspection hatch to main drain situated outside Room 3 in the East Yard

DSC0165		Doorway at first floor level between Rooms 4 and 5
DSC0182		South wall of Room 5, with its retaining wall
DSC0166	NW	Room 5, viewed from the north-west
DSC0173	E	Doorway of Room 6, looking west
DSC0171	S	Back wall of animal pens, looking north
RIMG0442	S	Room 6, with view of animal pens, looking north
RIMG4046		Room 6, with circular pillar and its metal hinge
RIMG0013	E	Rooms 7 and 8, looking west
RIMG0015	E	Rooms 7, 8 and 9, looking west
RIMG0014	S	Rooms 7,8,9 and 10, looking north
RIMG0016	E	Room 10, looking west
RIMG0017		Fireplace structure within Room 10
RIMG0004	N	Room 11, looking south
RIMG0006	N	Room 11, with slaughter house and septic tank
RIMG0009		Tiled floor surface of slaughter house