

**Archaeological Impact Assessment of the Proposed  
Construction of Housing at Ladyswell,  
Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.**

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<b>Site Type:</b>	Urban
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## **1. Introduction**

This report outlines the findings from an archaeological desktop assessment of the proposed construction of social housing within lands owned by Kilkenny County Council at Ladyswell, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny. It was commissioned by Kilkenny County Council who require an assessment of the site from an archaeological perspective as part of advance preparatory works and to determine the need or extent of a full Archaeological Impact Assessment (AIA) before proceeding with the housing project.

The proposed development site (PDS) is not within the confines of a recorded archaeological monument in the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Kilkenny (*Fig.1*). However it is at close proximity to one recorded site in the RMP; a holy well (KK028-039 [*Fig.1*]).

## **2. Siting**

The Study Area incorporating the PDS is located at the north western edge of Thomastown, *circa* 1.2m to the north of the town's centre (*Fig.2*). The site fronts the Thomastown/Kilkenny city regional road (R700), one of the main approach roads leading from the northern hinterlands into the town. Located on the outskirts of the town, the site is bounded by Grennan College to the south and its playing grounds to the west. A third class road extends through the northern part of the study area.

This Study Area is in the townland of Newtown, the parish of Thomastown and within the barony of Gowran. Newtown is a large townland, to the northwest of Thomastown covering 500 acres, but not incorporating the historic town of Thomastown.

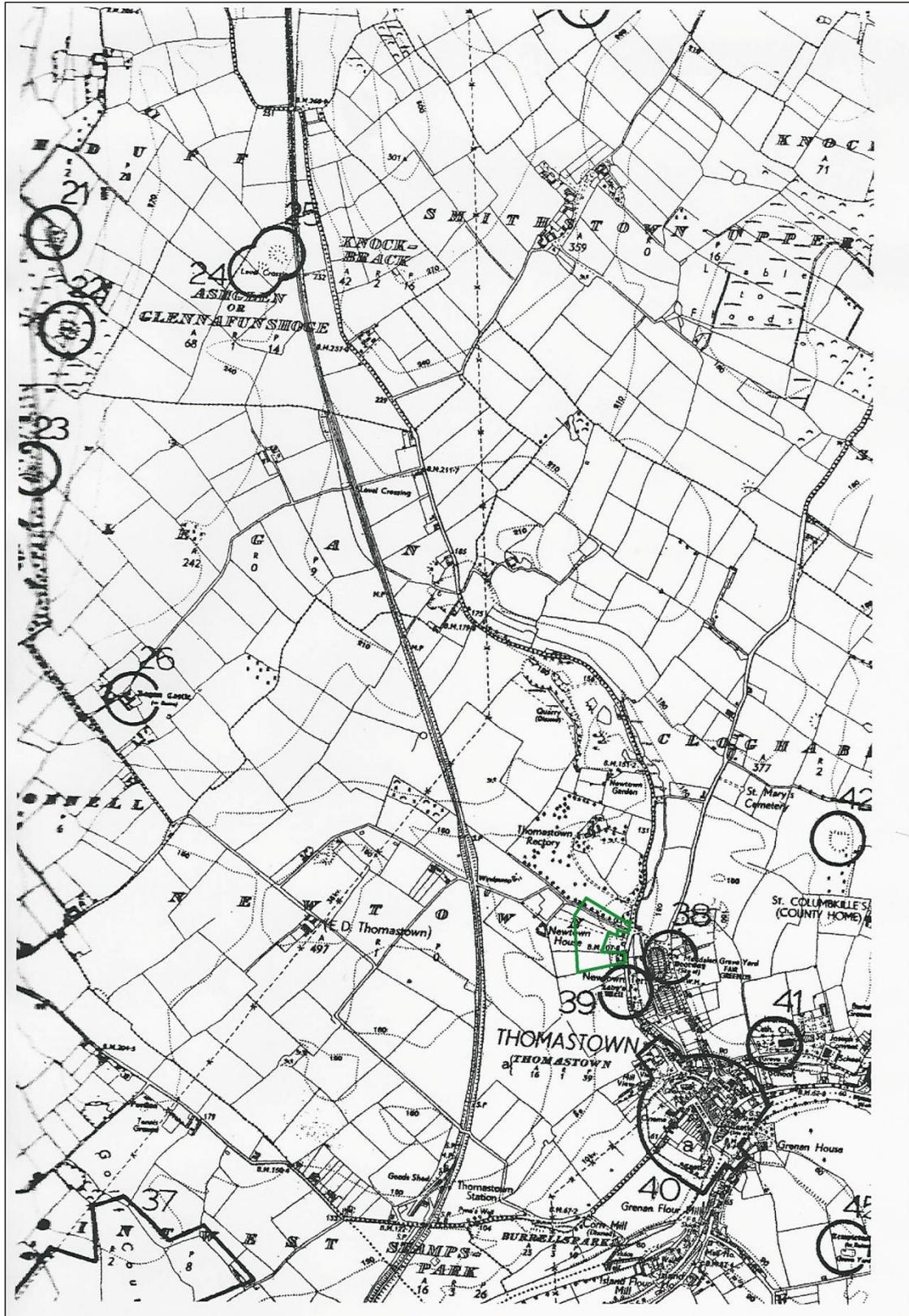


Figure 1 RMP Sheet No. 28. Study Area Highlighted in Green.

Archaeological Impact Assessment of a Proposed Housing Development at Ladyswell, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny.



**Figure 2 Study Area Highlighted in Yellow and Proposed Development Site in Red.**

### 3. Method

This AIA comprised two components: a desk-based study; and a walkover inspection of the proposed development site.

The desk study entailed an examination of documentary, cartographic and aerial photographic sources. Sources examined included the following:

- Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) for County Kilkenny.
- Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) for County Kilkenny.
- Urban Archaeological Survey (Office of Public Works, 1993).
- Examination of Database on relevant monuments held by the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht.
- Topographical Files and Finds Register in the National Museum of Ireland (Appendix One)
- Ordnance Survey series of published maps.
- Review of Aerial Photographs.
- Documentary Sources. Primary and Secondary Sources.
- Kilkenny County Development Plan, 2014-2020.
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.
- Results from archaeological investigative works and/or excavations in the environs of the site (Excavations Bulletin).

The walkover inspection entailed an examination of the site for known and potential archaeological sites, surface features and anomalies. This was to gain an overall understanding of the terrain, archaeological environment, land-use and topographical patterns

#### 4. Historical and Archaeological Background of Thomastown

Much of Thomastown is within the zone of archaeological potential as defined by the Urban Archaeological Survey (UAS) and is a recorded monument (Kk028-040) in the Record of Monuments and Places for Kilkenny (RMP). The PDS is outside the archaeological zone, *circa* 240m to its north.

Thomastown derives its name from the Irish *Baile Mhic Anndai*, which translates as the Town of the son of Anthony, who was its founder in *circa* 1210<sup>1</sup>. Thomas fitzAnthony, an Anglo-Norman seneschal of Leinster, received a large tract of land from William Marshall in the late twelfth century and became lord of all the country around Thomastown and Inistioge. On the opposite side of the riverbank, 1km to the southeast of Thomastown, fitzAnthony built his castle in Grenan townland. Grenan castle, which was also the original name for Thomastown, is derived from a Celtic fort<sup>2</sup>.

In 1307 the town had 215 burgesses, a population of *circa* 1000, two mills, a town oven worth 10/- per year and fourteen waste houses<sup>3</sup>. It was to become an important commercial centre by virtue of its strategic location at the head of the navigation point on the river Nore, linking the largest mainland medieval town in Ireland – Kilkenny - to the sea (New Ross). Its founding charter permitted merchants' guilds and a trade monopoly<sup>4</sup>. The town was granted several charters, grants and rights from the Crown during the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Documentary records, and to a lesser extent physical evidence, clearly confirm the town was walled. The murage evidence refers to the intent to erect a defensive wall around the town as early as the mid thirteenth century<sup>5</sup>. In addition there are a number of references in the documentary sources to its subsequent repair during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. W. Carrigan. History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory. Vol. IV. 1905.

<sup>2</sup> A. Thomas. The Walled Towns of Ireland. Vol. II. 1992.

<sup>3</sup> W.J. Pilsworth. History of Thomastown and District (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). 1953.

<sup>4</sup> M. Silverman & P.H. Gulliver. In the Valley of the Nore. A Social History of Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny, 1840-1983. 1986.

<sup>5</sup> A. Thomas. The Walled Towns of Ireland. Vol. II. 1992.

<sup>6</sup> J. Farrelly, B. O'Reilly & A. Loughran. Urban Archaeological Survey, Co. Kilkenny. 1993.

Sections of the wall still survive on the southwestern side of the town - between the river and Mill View House. The walled town appears to have coincided in shape with the small, semi-circular townland of Thomastown<sup>7</sup>. A relatively small town, it covered an area of *circa* 17 acres, sweeping around in an arc on the northwest bank of the river Nore. In common with other medieval towns, it had the typical characteristics that can be associated with Anglo-Norman towns in Ireland. It had a fortified town wall with gates and towers, a bridge across the river Nore, a parish church, a Magdalen hospital, mills, market cross and a market place. The streets and plots were regimentally laid out in the thirteenth century in order to maximise the number of properties fronting the streets; whilst the medieval core of the town, on the northwest bank of the river, was a compact block comprising the Quays, Low St. and Pipe St.; as well as Market St. and Logan St.

Regarding the town wall, its circuit extended along the southwest, west, north and east sides of the town. It would appear the river acted as the defensive line along its southeastern side<sup>8</sup>. Thomas is of the view that the town was fortified with three to four gates and at least two towers along its circuit. These gates were positioned at the Maudlin St./Pipe St. junction (Kilkenny/North Gate); the southwest end of Marsh's St. (Marches St. Gate); a possible gate on Lady's Well St. (Northwest Gate); and there may have been a gate at the medieval bridge end of Market St. There was also the possibility of water gates at the harbour and along the riverside<sup>9</sup>. Added to this are references to fourteen castles on the walls of Thomastown<sup>10</sup>. Stretches of the town wall still survive above ground level in the southwestern side of the town, where it extends to a maximum height of 1.45m high and almost 1.15m wide. There is a fosse, 1.5m and 3000mm deep, between the river and Marsh's St.<sup>11</sup>.

Its street pattern was based on a grid formed by two streets, which extended parallel to the river, Marsh's/Pipe St. and Low St., linked by three streets at right angles: Market St., Logan St. and the now demised Guter Lane. The main thoroughfare in the medieval period was Market St. which led indirectly from the church to the present bridge that replaced the

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<sup>7</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. 1992.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Rev. W. Carrigan. *History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory*. Vol. IV.

<sup>11</sup> J. Farrelly, B. O'Reilly & A. Loughran. *Urban Archaeological Survey, County Kilkenny*. 1993.

original structure swept away in 1763<sup>12</sup>. Guter Lane was also destroyed at the same time. In common with other Anglo-Norman towns it had a market, which was located on Market St., the widest and most prominent street in the town. The right to hold a market was conferred by Queen Mary, who granted permission in 1553 to hold a weekly market on a Monday and an annual fair from the 3<sup>rd</sup> April to 15<sup>th</sup> May.

Following the capture of Inistioge in 1649, the Cromwellian soldiers marched on Thomastown and succeeded in its capture in 1650. Cromwell noted in a letter in 1649 to the Parliament “...*Thomastown, a pretty large walled town upon the Noer, on the north side thereof having a bridge over the river...*”<sup>13</sup>.

The strategic location of Thomastown on the river Nore was very important in the medieval period. It was an important medieval river port, acting as a fortified inland entry point for medieval Kilkenny city and a staging post between the city and New Ross. The medieval harbour was located close to the site of the present bridge<sup>14</sup>. Regarding the medieval bridge, it dated to 1346 when Edward II granted the townsmen certain customs and tolls for the erection and repair of a bridge. It is believed its original siting was away from the present bridge, some 20m to the southwest<sup>15</sup>. An examination of the Down Survey map, 1655-58, shows a bridge to the east of the town. This may have been associated with Cody’s Castle, a castle in the vicinity of the bridge<sup>16</sup>.

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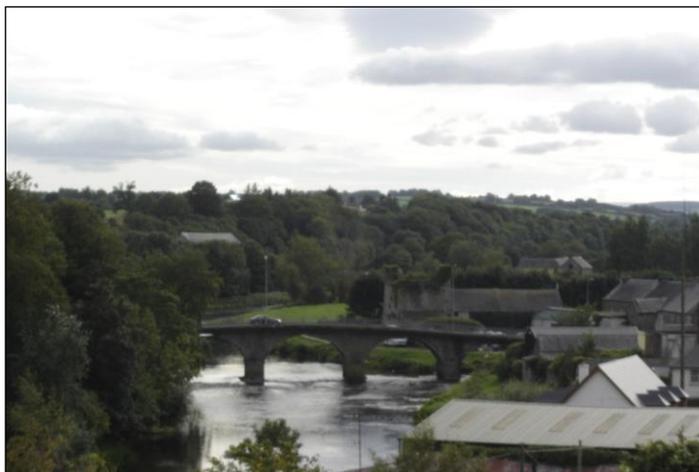
<sup>12</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. W. Carrigan. *History and Antiquities of the Diocese of Ossory*. Vol. IV.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> J. Farrelly, B. O’Reilly & A. Loughran. *Urban Archaeological Survey, County Kilkenny*. 1993.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*



**Pl. 1 Thomastown Bridge.**

The medieval parish church, St. Mary's, was located in the northwest part of the town and under the control of the Priory of Inistioge, which was a major FitzAnthony foundation 5km downstream<sup>17</sup>. This church, dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, dates to *circa* 1270 and originally comprised an aisled nave with a tower and a chancel with a detached chapel. Following the Reformation, only the chancel remained in use for Protestant worship. In 1809 much of the old church – south wall, south aisle and chancel - was removed to make way for the new Protestant church<sup>18</sup>.

In addition to the town's commercial centre, was the development of the river as an industrial base. Tighe, in his Survey of Kilkenny (1802) notes "... *Thomastown has about 350 houses, and in 1793 had 300; it is mentioned by Stanihurst as a town of consideration in his time...Its trade is increasing, it has a distillery, brewery and some large stores...*"<sup>19</sup>. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the town developed a substantial milling and storehouse base. Several large mills were built along the riverbanks. It was noted in Griffith's Valuation of 1849 there were twelve mills in Thomastown. The town's commercial demise was precipitated by the silting of the river Nore, with navigation between Thomastown and Inistioge lost during the 1830s and no longer able to function as a port for Kilkenny city.

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<sup>17</sup> A. Thomas. *The Walled Towns of Ireland*. 1992.

<sup>18</sup> J. Farrelly, B. O'Reilly & A. Loughran. *Urban Archaeological Survey, County Kilkenny*. 1993.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Two other recorded archaeological monuments are at close proximity to the Study Area and are classified as ecclesiastical remains (KK028-038) and a holy well (KK028-039). The ecclesiastical remains are located *circa* 120m to the east of the Study Area. This monument comprises an enclosure, church (site), hospital (site), graveyard (Magdalen) and architectural fragment (KK028-038001 - KK028-038005). Located on the east side of Newtown Terrace, *circa* 400m north of the town centre, there are now no visible remains of this church and the leper hospital. An area of raised ground in the east part of the graveyard, which still survives, may be the remnants of a building foundation. A doorway, possibly of medieval date, had been a feature of the graveyard wall until it was removed in *circa* 1870 and replaced with a new wall<sup>20</sup>. Archaeological investigations in 1998 on the site of the Garda Station, which is just to the south of the church, graveyard and hospital site, revealed no archaeological features on the site. Site stratigraphy was consistent across the site, with a cobbled layer overlying an orange, a yellow and regolith layers. The orange layer contained modern inclusions<sup>21</sup>.



**Pl.2 Internal View of Graveyard (KK028-038002).**

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<sup>20</sup> J. Farrelly, B. O'Reilly & A. Loughran. Urban Archaeological Survey, County Kilkenny. 1993.

<sup>21</sup> I. Bennett (Ed.). Archaeological Investigations at Maudlin St. Thomastown in 1998. Excavations Bulletin, 1998.

The holy well (KK028-039), located on Lady's Well St., is sited *circa* 75m to the south of the Study Area. The well is at the roadside, built into a wall located on the east side of the carriageway. It was originally sited in a field to the west of the street, with the water subsequently being piped to its present location but the appears to have dried up<sup>22</sup>. It is remarked in the Ordnance Survey Letters (OSL) of 1839 that there was an old well in the townland of Newtown called Lady's Well. However, it is noted it held no particular veneration nor is it remembered to have been so held<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Farrelly, B. O'Reilly & A. Loughran. Urban Archaeological Survey, County Kilkenny. 1993.

<sup>23</sup> Rev. M. O'Flanagan (Ed., 1930). Letters Containing Information Relative to the Antiquities of the County of Kilkenny Collected during the Progress of the Ordnance Survey in 1839, Vol. II.

## 5. Historical and Archaeological Background of the PDS

The Study Area assessed incorporated grounds associated with the former Thomastown Rectory and Newtown House. The northeast corner of Newtown townland is occupied by the former Glebe House (Thomastown Rectory) and grounds. Bounding the Thomastown/Kilkenny Rd. (R700) to the east, and a third class road to the south, Glebe House is now privately owned, having been renovated in the latter half of the twentieth century. Comprising a large three-bay, two-storey over basement glebe house, it was built in 1806. Sponsored by the Board of First Fruits, the house served as an ecclesiastical residence for the nearby Church of Ireland church located at the northern end of Market St., until 1948-49<sup>24</sup>. Associated with the Rectory were ornate grounds, gardens and orchards.

On the opposite side of the third class road, and also fronting the Thomastown/Kilkenny Rd., is Newtown House and former demesne. The PDS, itself, occupies the former demesne associated with Newtown House. Denoted on both the 1839 First Edition Ordnance Survey (OS) and 1900 25- inch series map, Newtown House and grounds, approached via the third class road, incorporated substantial grounds to the northwest of Thomastown. Remains of this house and outbuildings still survive to the west of the PDS.

An examination of the 1839 First Edition (OS) map indicated the PDS (*Fig.3*) formerly comprised one narrow rectangular-shaped field, still preserved, and one much larger field. Dwelling houses extended along the east boundary of the larger field fronting the Thomastown/Kilkenny road. By the time of compiling the 1900 OS map (*Fig.4*), the northern end of the large field was sub-divided into another narrow rectangular-shaped field and fewer houses present than on the 1839 edition. There has been little change in the layout of the fields since 1900, with both narrow rectangular fields still surviving. An examination of the 1948-49 OS edition (6-inch series) revealed little change from the 1900 25 inch series.

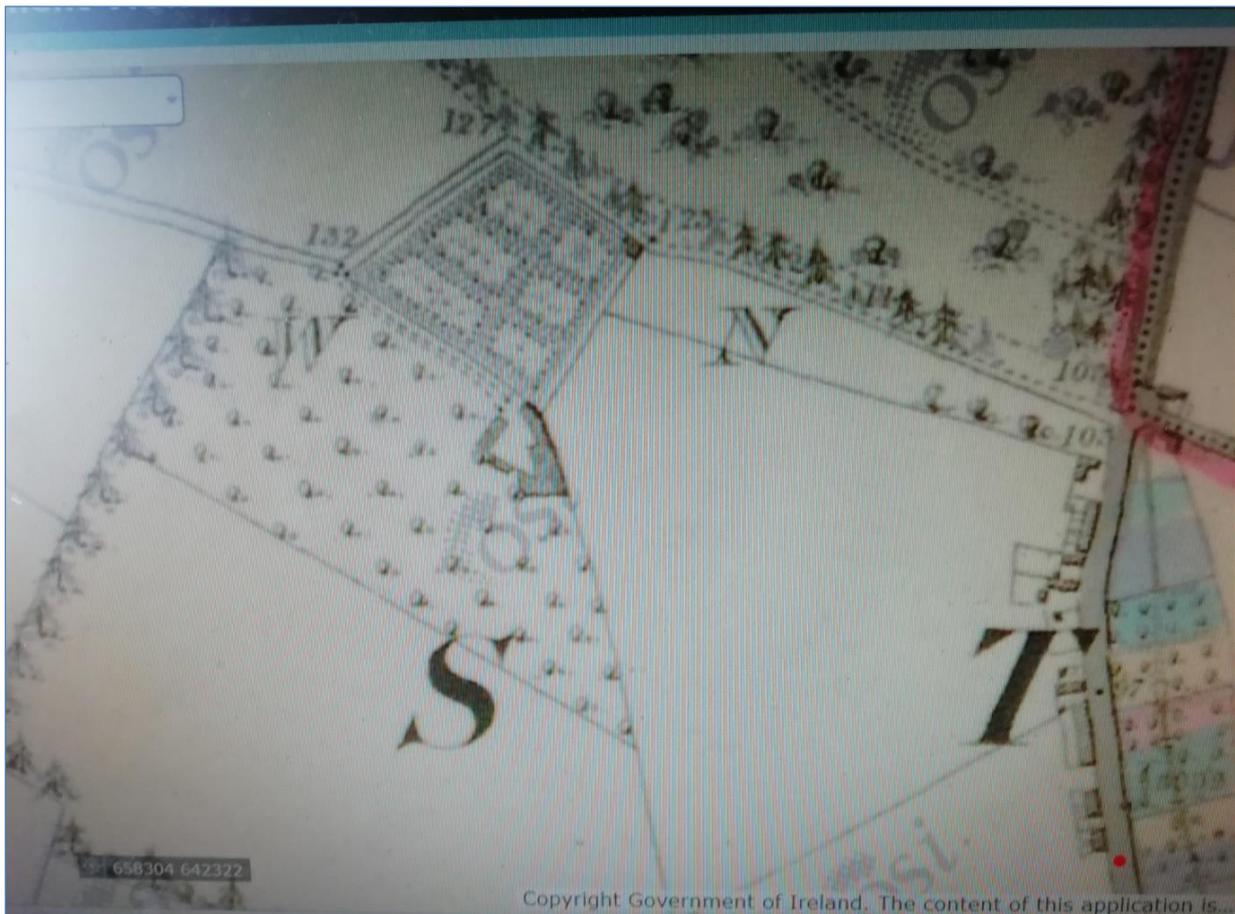
A review of the 1839 OS map (*Fig.3*) indicated the narrower portion of the Study Area, to the north of the third class road (*Fig.2*), occupied a large field associated with Thomastown Rectory. This field was densely planted with trees on the 1839 edition, although by 1900

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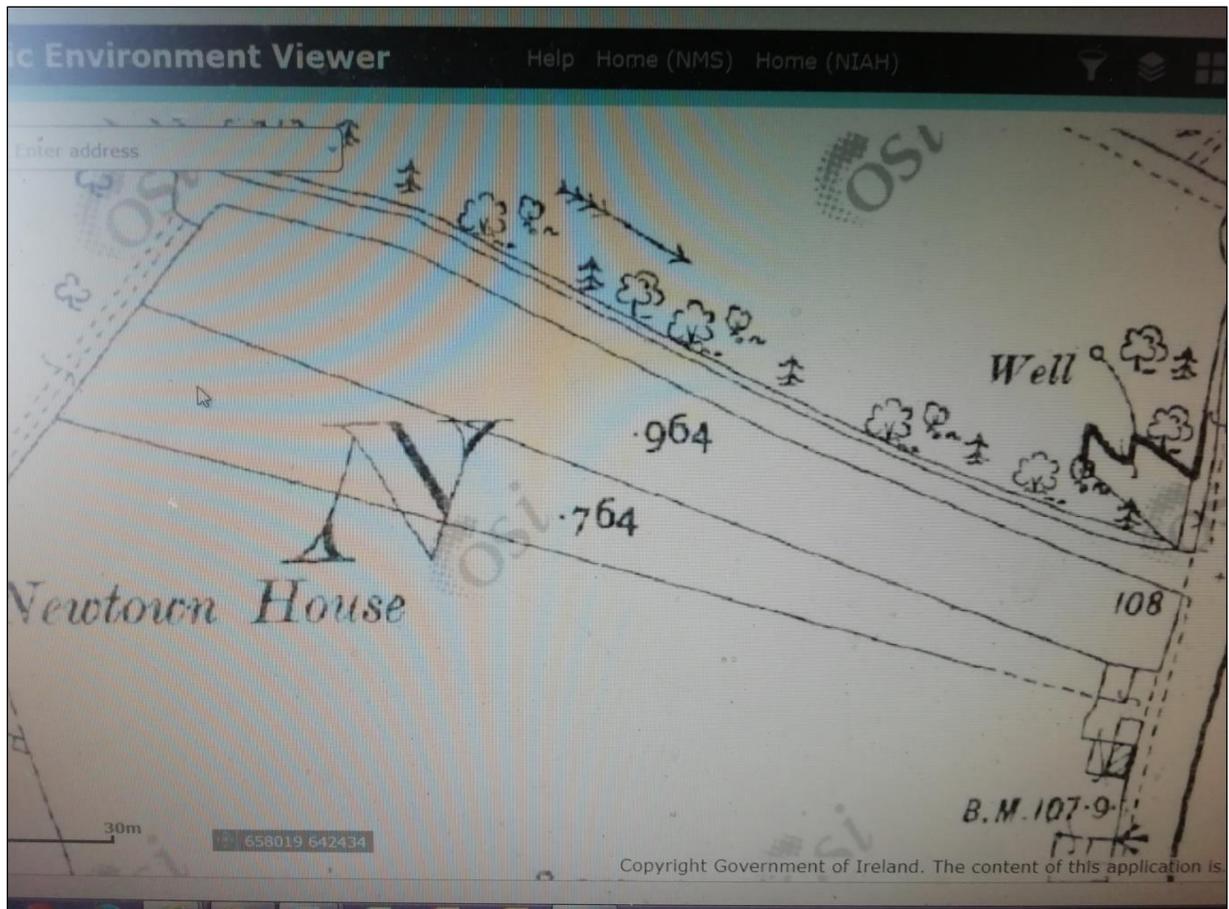
<sup>24</sup> Buildings of Ireland: Thomastown Rectory, Thomastown, County Kilkenny.

(Fig.4) their number had diminished, although they were still evident along the front and both road-side boundaries. A well is denoted as occupying the southeast corner of this field on the 1900 edition, although not denoted on the 1948-49 OS map.

Water from this well has been piped for domestic purposes with an outlet apparent on the Thomastown/Kilkenny road and still used by Thomastown residents.



**Figure 3 First Edition OS Map (1839). 6-Inch Series.**



**Figure 4 Second Edition OS Map, (1900). 25-Inch Series.**

## 6. Site Inspection

A walkover survey of the PDS was undertaken in late September 2019. Weather conditions were very favourable, with suitable visibility. The PDS, situated to the northwest of Thomastown, occupies a green belt of land bounded by two public roads. Grennan College bounds the site to the south whilst a playing field associated with the college bounds much of its western side. A narrow third class road, on an approximate east/west alignment, bounds its northern boundary (*Fig.2 & Pl.3*).

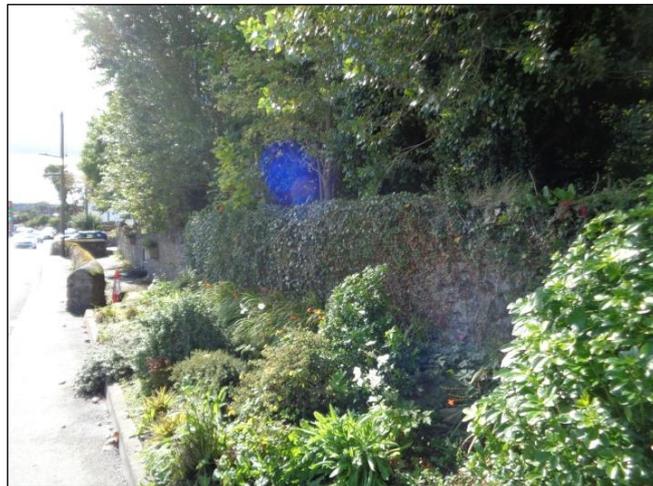
The northern part of the Study Area, which was not field-walked, occupies a narrow, rectangular shaped piece of ground in the southeast area of a large pasture field. This field slopes gently towards the Thomastown/Kilkenny road, with a small tree copse, a well and small pond in its southeast corner (*Pl.4*). It is bounded with a stone wall along its southern and east sides (road-sides); and natural hedgerows elsewhere. The wall extending along its south side had an average height of 1.2m (*Pl.3*) whilst the wall on the east side extended to a height of 2m (*Pl.5*). Both walls were bonded with a hard lime mortar and in a good state of preservation, although the south wall was very overgrown with brambles and ivy. These walls form the boundary with Thomastown Rectory grounds.



**Pl. 3 Looking East along third Class Road.**



**Pl. 4 Looking East at Northern Portion of Study Area**



**Pl.5 Wall along East Boundary of Northern End of Study Area.**

Approximately 85% of the Study Area is located to the south side of the third class road (*Pl.3*). Overall this part of the site slopes downwards from west to east, falling away towards the Thomastown/Kilkenny road. The site showed no evidence of recent agricultural activity. Its interior is rough, overgrown with high grasses and patches of thistle colonies, with no indication of land improvement works in recent years. It is bordered to the west by Grennan College playing field as well as Newtown House and associated outbuildings; a stone wall along the third class road to the north; dwelling houses, one of which is derelict, and

associated gardens to the east. Surviving boundaries comprise dense native hedges with planted hedge rows at the rear of the gardens bounding the site's east side.

Internally the site is sub-divided into four fields: two narrow rectangular (*Pls.6-7*); and two larger and irregular (*Pls.8-9*). Boundaries consist dense and high natural hedgerows. Traces of collapsed wooden post and rail fencing survives within some of these boundaries. Occupied dwelling houses and gardens occur to the east of three of the fields, whilst at the eastern end of the most southern field a derelict two-storey house and outbuilding is located. This southern field drops sharply to the site of the derelict house, which is just set back from the Thomastown/Kilkenny Rd. It is stone built and rendered, with the partial remains of a slate roof and in a poor state of repair (*Pl.10*). A derelict outbuilding (*Pl.11*) is located inside the entrance to the plot. Also stone built with ivy clad walls, this structure is roofed with galvanised sheet iron. Both structures are denoted on the earlier OS maps (1839 & 1900 editions).



**Pl. 6 Looking East at Most Northerly  
Narrow Rectangular Field.**



**Pl. 7 Looking West at Second  
Narrow Rectangular Field.**



**Pl. 8 Looking East at Most  
Northern Large Field.**



**Pl. 9 Looking East at Most  
Southern Large Field.**



**Pl. 10 Derelict House.**



**Pl. 11 Derelict Outbuilding.**

## **7. Impact Assessment and Mitigation Measures**

A desk top study and walkover survey of the PDS indicated no known recorded archaeological monument within the Study Area. An examination of OS maps, aerial photographs and documentary sources provided no indication that the site might retain archaeological remains/features. An examination of the earlier OS maps indicated that the Study Area belonged to substantial and well-endowed properties: Newtown House and Thomastown Rectory. Both properties had been subject to extensive landscaping and alteration works with extensive tree planting and ornate grounds (*Fig.3*).

The Study Area is sufficient distance away from the recorded monuments of Thomastown (KK028-040) and the holy well (KK028-039). Accordingly any sub-surface works associated with the development should not impact on either monument. The walkover survey of the PDS, although hindered by high and dense grass cover, revealed no obvious surface anomalies that could have archaeological potential.

Overall it is considered the proposed construction of housing on this site will have no adverse archaeological impact and warrants no further archaeological appraisal or full Impact Assessment.

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**Mary Henry.**

**Mary Henry Archaeological Services Ltd.**

**7th October 2019**

## **Appendix One**

### **List of Artefacts Recorded in the National Museum of Ireland Topographical Files and Finds Registers from Thomastown and its Environs**

Thomastown Townland :

A stone hand anvil. Stored in Cork Museum.

CloghabrodyTownland:

Ogham stone. Found buried in a bank or stream. Now stored at Thomastown church.