

Historic Landscape Assessment Report: Westcourt Demesne, Callan, County Kilkenny



Client
Camphill Communities, Callan, County Kilkenny

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All recommendations and contents of this report are subject to the approval of the National Monuments Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht and the National Museum of Ireland.

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

This report was commissioned by Camphill Communities Callan to inform the future conservation of the historic landscape of Westcourt demesne. The report outlines the historical development of the demesne, the significance of the surviving elements of its designed landscape and recommendations for the future conservation and restoration of these features. Although the Westcourt demesne encompasses the 'Moat field' this forms the subject of a separate study and is not therefore included in this document.

On the first edition 1842 Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1839) West Court house is marked and Westcourt Demesne is shown as comprising a total of 164 acres and takes in the townlands of Westcourt Demesne, Westcourt South and Mullaunglass. The demesne is bounded on the south by the King's River and on the east by the Callan by-pass and the town of Callan. To the north the R695 local road forms the boundary and on the west the demesne is bordered by field boundaries.

Statutory protections

West Court house, described as 'ruin of a seven bay, two story house, 18th century' is included in the record of protected structures in the 2014-2019 Kilkenny County Development Plan (ref. C393).¹ Under the planning act the curtilage of the house may also be considered for protection. Westcourt demesne is also identified as an historic garden and designed landscape in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage.² The recorded monument RMP KK026-002 *Castle unclassified* is also situated inside the demesne and the 'Moat field' to the south-east of the demesne contains RMP KK 26-01009 *motte* and 26-01011 *mound*. The zone of archaeological protection for Callan RMP KK26-010 *Historic Town* extends as far as the Callan by-pass within the demesne.

Historical and archaeological background

Following the establishment of the manor and borough of Callan in the late-twelfth century the lands that now form Westcourt demesne were retained for the lord of the town (ie. in demesne) and this is where William Marshal, earl of Pembroke and lord of Leinster between 1190 and 1219 built a large motte and bailey castle over a prehistoric ring-barrow cemetery. The ground to the west of the castle was farmed and cut through by a mill-race; the low-lying watermeadows along the King's river were probably rented to the burgesses of the town.

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http://www.kilkennycoco.ie/resources/eng/Services/Planning/DevelopmentPlans/KILKENNY_COUNTY_RECORD_OF_PROTECTED_STRUCTURES.pdf

² <http://www.buildingsofireland.ie/cgi-bin/viewsite.cgi?siteid=1707>

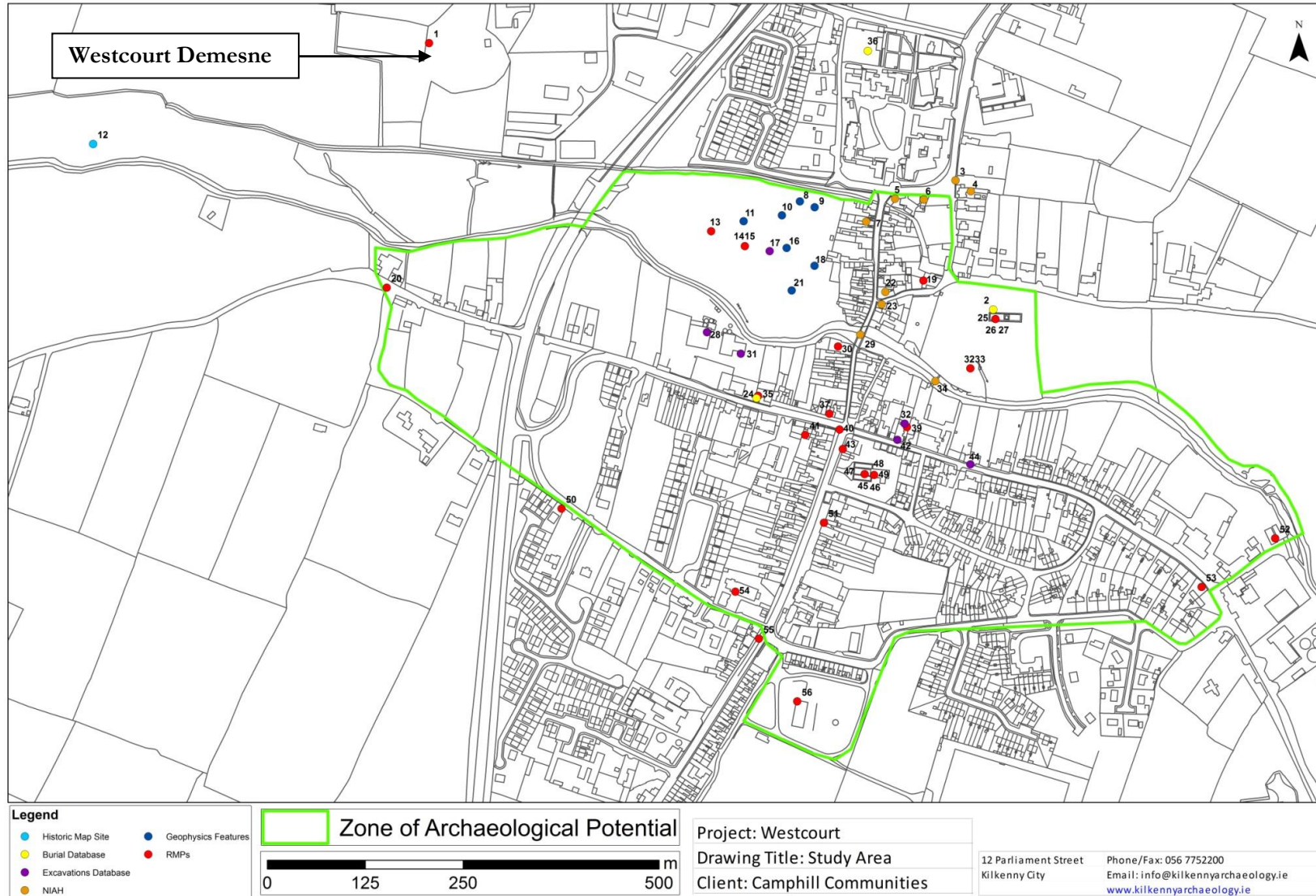


Figure 1: Archaeological sites in the environs of Westcourt Demesne. Numbers refer to Table 1 below.

Site Number	Reference number	Source	Easting	Northing	Description
1	KK026-002----	SMRS	240890	144310	Castle - Unclassified
2	NA	Burial Database	241450	144300	Callan
3	02E0950	Excavations.ie	241599	144203	No archaeological significance
4	KK026-010011-	SMRS	241250	144070	Mound possible
5	07:09	UAS	241258	144069	Motte and Bailey
6	KK026-010009-	SMRS	241293	144051	Castle - Motte And Bailey
7	KK026-010010-	SMRS	241293	144051	Castle - Unclassified
8	00E0786	Excavations.ie	241324	144044	Medieval/post-medieval
9	07:14	UAS	241527	144007	Water Mill
10	KK026-010021-	SMRS	241521	144007	Water Mill - Unclassified possible
11	KK026-010028-	SMRS	240836	143998	Town Defences - Town Gate
12	NA	Burial Database	241610	143970	Augustinian Friary
13	07:11	UAS	241622	143969	Augustinian Friary
14	KK026-010016-	SMRS	241613	143958	Religious House - Augustinian Friars
15	KK026-010017-	SMRS	241613	143958	Graveslab
16	KK026-010020-	SMRS	241613	143958	Graveslab
17	09E426	Excavations.ie	241244	143941	Urban
18	07:02	UAS	241407	143930	Fortified Town House
19	KK026-010002-	SMRS	241412	143923	House - Fortified House
20	04E0832	Excavations.ie	241287	143913	Urban
21	KK026-010019-	SMRS	241581	143895	Architectural Fragment
22	KK026-010018-	SMRS	241581	143895	Ritual Site - Holy Well
23	04E1570	Excavations.ie	241329	143875	No archaeological significance
24	07:12	UAS	241611	143867	Holy Well
25	KK026-010008-	SMRS	241310	143860	Castle - Tower House
26	NA	Burial Database	241308	143857	Skerry's Castle
27	07:08	UAS	241320	143854	Tower House
28	03E1303	Excavations.ie	241568	143841	No archaeological significance
29	KK026-010003-	SMRS	241401	143837	House - Fortified House
30	07:03	UAS	241414	143830	Fortified Town House
31	02E1550	Excavations.ie	241497	143824	Urban
32	KK026-010----	SMRS	241500	143820	Town
33	07:06	UAS	241420	143819	Market Cross (Site of)
34	KK026-010006-	SMRS	241414	143817	Market Cross
35	KK026-010004-	SMRS	241370	143810	House - Fortified House
36	99E0232	Excavations.ie	241487	143803	Urban medieval
37	07:05	UAS	241428	143801	Fortified Town House
38	KK026-010005-	SMRS	241418	143792	House - Fortified House
39	07:04	UAS	241383	143789	Fortified Town House
40	04E1518	Excavations.ie	241581	143772	Medieval burgage plot
41	KK026-010012-	SMRS	241446	143760	Church
42	KK026-010013-	SMRS	241446	143760	Font
43	KK026-010014-	SMRS	241446	143760	Graveslab(s)
44	KK026-010015-	SMRS	241446	143760	Architectural Fragment(s)
45	KK026-010031-	SMRS	241458	143759	Graveyard
46	04E0166	Excavations.ie	241125	143756	No archaeological significance
47	NA	Burial Database	241468	143737	St. Mary's
48	07:10	UAS	241470	143736	Church - St. Mary's
49	07:01	UAS	241396	143721	Fortified Town House
50	KK026-010007-	SMRS	241059	143716	Town Defences possible
51	KK026-010027-	SMRS	241394	143698	House - Fortified House

52	7:7a	UAS	241137	143680	Town Defences
53	KK026-010022-	SMRS	241970	143678	Water Mill - Unclassified possible
54	07:15	UAS	241966	143671	Water Mill
55	7.7c	UAS	241931	143649	Town Defences
56	KK026-010030-	SMRS	241876	143616	Town Defences - Town Gate
57	KK026-010032-	SMRS	241281	143610	Redundant Record
58	NA	Burial Database	241300	143600	St. Mary's
59	7:7b	UAS	241634	143578	Town Defences
60	08E0038	Excavations.ie	241533	143573	Urban
61	KK026-010029-	SMRS	241311	143550	Town Defences - Town Gate
62	98E0280	Excavations.ie	241483	143531	Urban medieval and post-medieval
63	05E0758	Excavations.ie	241555	143496	Urban
64	KK026-010001-	SMRS	241360	143470	Mound possible
65	07:13	UAS	241366	143469	Mound
66	06E0961	Excavations.ie	241872	143370	Urban, medieval
67	02E1778	Excavations.ie	241502	143314	Post-medieval ditch
68	99E0232	Excavations.ie	241507	143233	Urban medieval and post-medieval

Table 1: Table of archaeological sites in the immediate environs of Westcourt

There has been very little published on West Court castle - it is not mentioned in O'Donovan's Ordnance Survey letters for instance - but Carrigan was probably correct in stating that the castle was the manor house for the borough of Callan (Carrigan 1905 iii, 317). When exactly the manorial centre moved the 500m from the motte to Westcourt is not known for certain but may have occurred following the division of the manor and town of Callan and their subsequent sale to the Butlers in 1391 (Empey 1990, 84; Clutterbuck, Elliot and Shanahan 2006; Empey 2007, 21-2). It was the Butlers who had a castle built at the new manorial *caput* at Westcourt, then called Whitescourte/Whytes court, but nothing now survives of this building and little is known of it (Carrigan 1905 iii, 317; Edwards 2003, 56). Carrigan records that the house that replaced the castle in the late eighteenth century incorporated 'traces' of the earlier structure and test-excavations by Dave Pollock on the site in 2000 revealed burnt slab flooring (trench 9) that he suggested may have been associated with the building (Carrigan 1905 iii, 317; Pollock 2000).

Although the Civil Survey for Callan has been recently rediscovered it does not record any of the Butler properties in and around the town and therefore does not refer to Westcourt (Manning 1998, 50). The 1655-8 Down Survey map does however show a substantial three-bay building with steep-gables and large chimneys on the site. At this time the castle was the residence of Edward Comerford, M.P. and estate manager of the Butlers and one of the most prominent members of Callan society the time (Carrigan 1905 iii, 304-5). It is interesting to speculate that this may represent a large fortified Renaissance house at this point in time rather than a standard tower house. However, the accuracy of the vignette on the Down Survey map is open to question. Westcourt was confiscated by the Cromwellians in 1650 and never recovered by the Comerford family.



Figure 2: Whitescourte castle depicted on the Down Survey map (1655-8) of the Callan liberties (Barony of Callan)

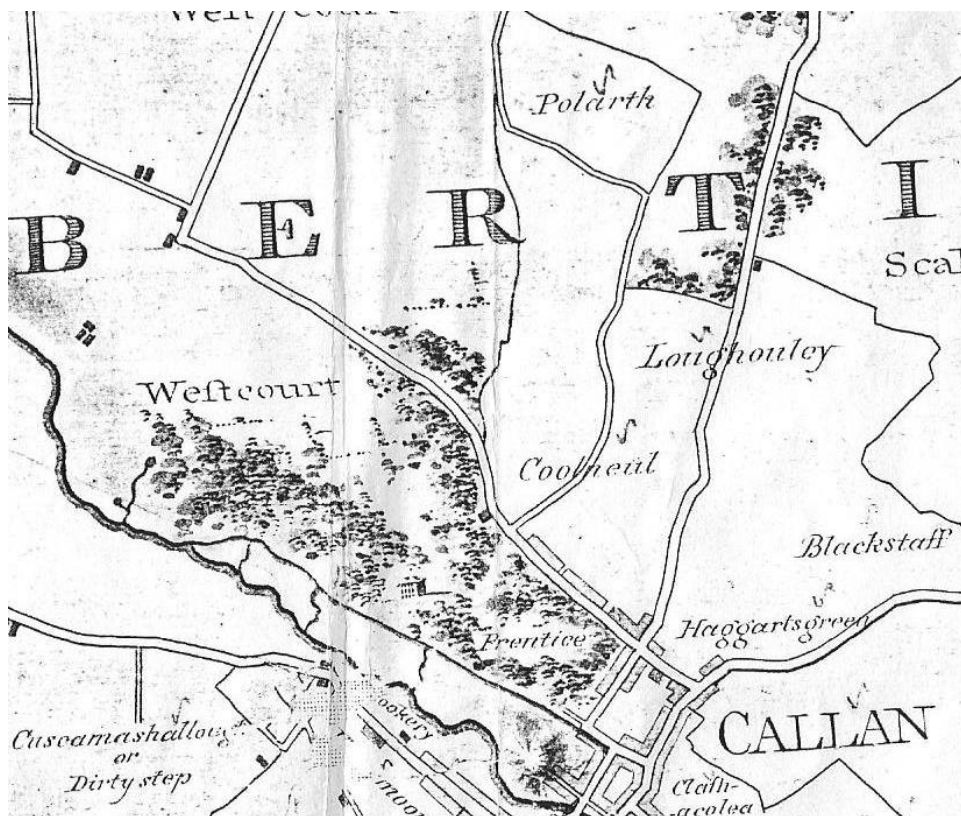


Figure 3: West Court house and demesne shown on the 1817 Grand Jury map of Callan. The house is shown as a typical Palladian country house of the period, though it is not certain how accurate this depiction is.

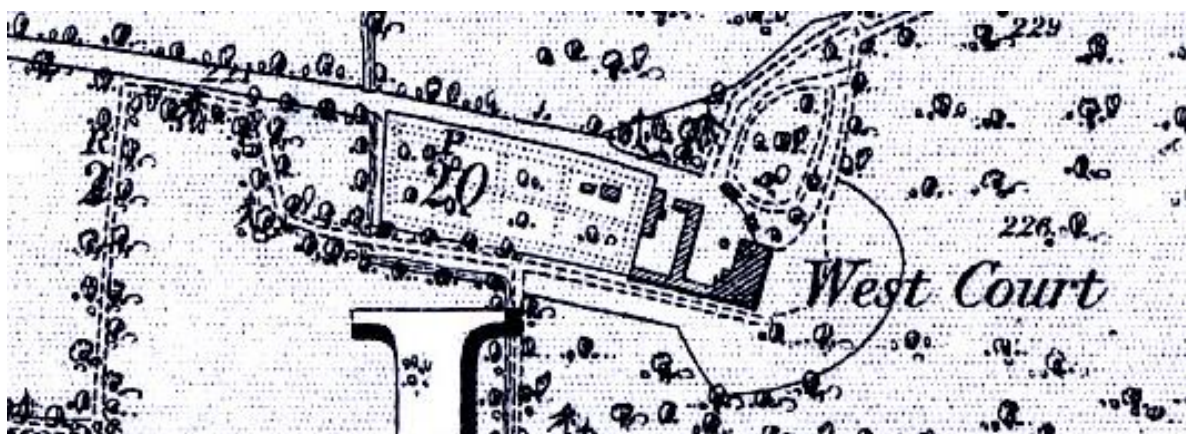


Figure 4: West Court House and walled garden as depicted on the 1842 Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1839).

Westcourt was recovered by the Ormonde estate in 1661 and remained in the occupation of the Butlers during the rest of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century. It was used as a residence by Dr. Christopher Butler, archbishop of Cashel until his death in 1757 (Carrigan 1905 iii, 318, iv, 340). Either the castle or the building that replaced it was thrown down in 1793 and replaced by West Court House by the then owner, Lord Callan (Carrigan 1905 iii, 318). This is the house shown on the first edition Ordnance Survey map and described by Samuel Lewis (1837) as being 'situated in a very neat demesne and surrounded by trees of stately growth, is the residence of the Rev. C. Butler Stephenson, the rector; it formerly belonged to Lord Callan, and prior to that was the property of the Earl of Desart'. Stephenson is also recorded as the occupier of the house and most of the demesne in Griffith's valuation 1850.³ In c.1940 there was a catastrophic fire at West Court house and the house was abandoned and later knocked. The rubble heap to the west of the walled garden marks the location of the house. Its foundations, perhaps cellars, and related structures probably survive below ground level.

³ <http://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/index.xml?action=doNameSearch&PlaceID=652053&county=Kilkenny&barony=Callan&parish=Callan&townland=Westcourt%20demesne>

Westcourt Demesne designed landscape

The agricultural revolution of the 1700s led to a large increase in the population which in turn brought about a ten-fold increase in tenant rents between 1660 and 1800. Much of the resultant wealth went to a small cohort of landlords, like the Butlers of Westcourt, who invested heavily in building new Palladian grand houses. The houses were set within impressive demesne landscapes that exhibited common themes that were heavily influenced by the landscape movement and in particular the renowned garden architect Capability Brown (1716-1783). The first edition Ordnance Survey map shades the extent of the demesne and shows many of the aforementioned 'designed landscape' features: a shelter-belt around the north and south, park trees set as standards, a tree-lined avenue, an ornamental pond in the south, a walled garden to the west of the house and a deerpark/open parkland between the house and the town of Callan. The top of the motte was probably planted with Scots Pine at this time to act as a focal point, an 'eye-catcher', in the landscape. The demesne may also have been surrounded by a stone wall, but none of this survives. The layout of the demesne seems to have been influenced by views of the natural topography and so the walled garden is neatly framed from the entrances by Slievenamon in the background, and likewise the house overlooked the King's river and the millrace.

A comparison between the first edition Ordnance Survey map and the modern aerial photography shows that much of the designed landscape has been lost. West Court house has been leveled and the parkland to its east has been built over by an industrial estate, the Callan bypass and a housing estate. Likewise, many of the field boundaries to the west have been grubbed out and the vast majority of the park trees have been felled. What still survives is the walled garden (see below), the main east-west avenue through the demesne and the access to the main road to the north. The ornamental pond is still in place, though heavily overgrown and holding an exotic-looking tree. At least some of the trees around the pond probably originated in the nineteenth century plantings. In the 'Moat field' the trees on top of the motte remain.



Figure 5: Comparison between the Westcourt Demesne on the 1842 Ordnance Survey map and the 2010 aerial photograph (Bing aerial photograph 2010).



Figure 6: West Court walled garden and site of house as shown in Bing aerial image 2010.



Figure 7: The walled garden may have been deliberately sited to take advantage of this view from the main entrance into West Court house towards Slievenamon in the background.

The Walled Garden

Walled gardens were attached to virtually every demesne and most date from the mid-eighteenth century to throughout the nineteenth century. Their purpose was to grow fruit, vegetables and flowers and they were symbolic of the standing of the household in society. When exactly the West Court house walled garden was built is not known but it is likely to have formed part of the rebuilding programme of 1793. The walled garden measures 111m x 42m and was situated to the west of the house complex. It is not an exact rectangle but slightly L-shaped, perhaps indicating it was built in two separate phases, the eastern sector before the western sector. As with most walled gardens it was situated near the stables for manure and near a stream for water.

The 3.5m high walls provided shelter and protection to the planting and must have been built on substantial foundations. Trees to the south shown on the historic maps provided additional shelter. The 0.6m thick walls are built of local limestone rubble jointed with mortar and capped. Extensive use is also made on all the walls of brick lining to assist with heat retention which assisted growing. The base courses of the walls are of stone, the remainder are of brick. During the winter months the cold air would have drained to the bottom (east) of the garden where the wall would have acted as a dam, creating a frost pocket. However, frost arches were built into the wall (two are visible in the north wall, one in the east) so allowing the cold frosty air to drain out and away. When the soil levels rose in the garden through constant manuring these were later used to plant fruit trees - the roots of two such trees are visible today. Whilst there is no definite evidence for glass houses they were most probably used and the building shown in the north-east of the walled enclosure on the 1842 and 1902 maps may be such a structure. Glass houses were primarily used to grow peaches and vines. The walled garden provided much of the food for the household and its output had to be maximised and outside the enclosure extra ground may have been cultivated in areas known as 'slips'.

The first edition map shows the walled garden divided geometrically by paths into eight grids, each of which would have had a specific purpose. The paths, just one of which still exists, were of conventional layout, with perimeter paths running inside each of the walls, a pedestrian entrance at the south-east and south-west (now blocked) and a cart entrance at the north east. The entrances would have had stout wooden doors and the hanging eyes for these are evidence in the north-east entrance. Trees, presumably fruit trees, are shown at the centres of each grid and it is likely that these areas contained flower beds or similar. By 1902 the path arrangement had changed and another cart entrance seems to have been broken through in the middle of the south wall.

Another structure associated with walled gardens usually included a house for the head gardener, which may explain the cottage near the north-east entrance (this is not marked on the 1842 map but is on the 1902 map). Their houses were generally built close to the garden so they could supervise the many

gardeners who tended the place. Ancillary buildings would have included potting sheds and a bothy for the gardeners, and these were probably accommodated in the range immediately to the east of the walled garden. A summer house, marked 'S.H.' on the 1902 map was an added pleasure at West Court. One of its walls still stands at the south-west side of the walled garden.



Figure 8: Aerial photograph taken c.2007 of the West Court house walled garden (courtesy Patrick Lydon).



Figure 9: Aerial photograph taken c.2007 of the West Court house walled garden (courtesy Patrick Lydon).



Figure 10: First edition 1842 (above) and 1902 (below) Ordnance Survey maps of the West Court house walled garden



Figure 11: View over the walled garden from east.



Figure 12: Remnant of earlier wall abutted by walled garden walls, for south-west range of former house complex, from east.



Figure 13: Remnant of earlier wall with quoins abutted by walled garden walls, for south-west range of former house complex, from south.



Figure 14: Frost arch at the base of the east wall exterior.



Figure 15: Modern joist holes in the east garden wall exterior.



Figure 16: Cart entrance to the walled garden, from east.



Figure 17: Remains of brick arch to cart entrance



Figure 18: Wrought iron gate to former avenue to north of walled garden, now blocked with growth.



Figure 19: Probable late medieval window mullion reused in east garden wall exterior.



Figure 20: Off-set and spud stone for timber gate at main cart entrance



Figure 21: Spud stone for gate to cart entrance



Figure 22: Lamp hanger beside cart entrance, east wall interior.



Figure 23: Large crack in south pier of cart entrance.



Figure 24: East wall interior, from west.



Figure 25: Brick lining above stone courses at base, east wall interior.



Figure 26: All of the brick is 8 inch x 2.5 inch hand-built, almost certainly of late 18th century date.



Figure 27: Planting within the brick wall east wall interior.



Figure 28: Planting alongside the east wall interior.



Figure 29: Pedestrian entrance through south wall, at east side.



Figure 30: South wall exterior, from south-east.



Figure 31: Large ope broken through south wall.



Figure 32: Blocked pedestrian entrance to walled garden at south -west of south wall.



Figure 33: South wall exterior, west end.



Figure 34: Remains of former summer house (marked on 1902 map) inserted into the south walled garden wall.



Figure 35: Former path to the western exterior of walled garden blocked by stone wall.



Figure 36: Extensive ivy growth on top of south wall.



Figure 37: Blocked pedestrian entrance door south wall interior. Note stone repair to brick wall.



Figure 38: South wall, interior.



Figure 39: Joint between stone repair and summer house wall, south wall interior.



Figure 40: Brick summer house with window opes looking into the walled garden, south wall interior.



Figure 41: West wall interior, from east.



Figure 42: Loss of stone and brick from wall head, west wall.



Figure 43: Crack in west wall, probably caused by tree growth on opposite side of wall.



Figure 44: North wall interior from south-west.



Figure 45: Growth on top of wall head, south wall.



Figure 46: Planting nails on interior of south wall.

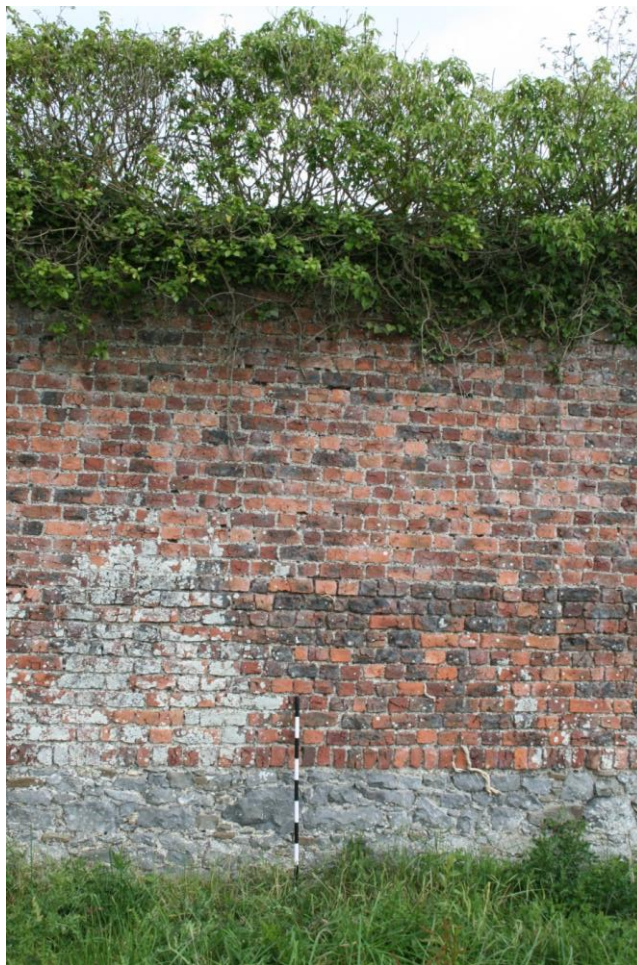


Figure 47: Stone basal courses below brick lining south garden wall, interior.



Figure 48: Frost arch in south wall interior, note root from later planting.

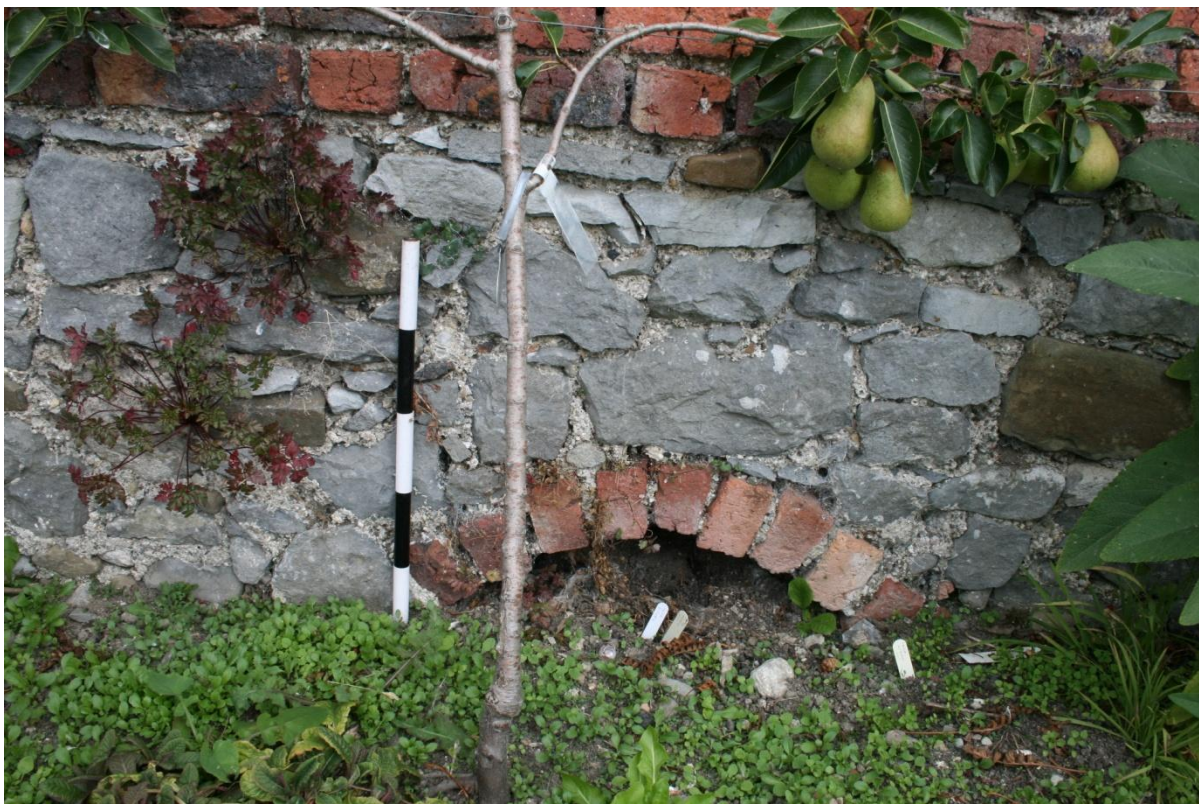


Figure 49: Frost arch in south wall interior, east side.



Figure 50: South wall interior, west side..



Figure 51: Current planting in the interior of walled garden.



Figure 52: Perimeter planting north side of walled garden.



Figure 53: Joist holes from former lean-to, south wall interior, east side.



Figure 54: Possible gardener's house to north east of the walled garden.

Conservation Recommendations

The walled garden of West Court house is an important part of Kilkenny's heritage and is an integral part of the historic environment of the much-denuded demesne. It is currently being well cared for by the Camphill Communities and the following recommendations are made with a view to its long term conservation and enhancement. These recommendations can be implemented on a phased basis and at moderate cost.

It should be noted that where alterations are made to the fabric of the walled garden full drawn and photographic records must be made in advance of works. In addition, a detailed plan, at a scale of 1:100, should be made of the walled garden as it currently is, to record its layout and fabric. It is recommended that at the end of the project all records relating to the conservation works should be lodged with the local authority and the Irish Architectural Archive.

East wall

- Make good open joints at south-east corner (remnant of earlier phase of building), consolidate wall fragment.
- Further investigate wall fragment to determine age.
- Remove OPC spot repairs and repoint with lime mortar.
- Fill modern joist holes.
- Remove OPC wall head and consolidate, form coping with lime mortar.
- Restore brick arch with salvage brick to cart entrance.
- Restore timber gate to cart entrance using original hanging stones.
- Pin crack in south pier cart entrance and consolidate.
- Treat invasive growth and remove in consultation with ecologist, archaeologist.
- Rake out and repoint where necessary.
- Reopen former avenue to north of walled garden and conserve wrought iron gates.
- Fill holes with salvage brick.
- Reveal original path and resurface in consultation with archaeologist.

South wall

- Remove invasive growth along wall head.
- Remove OPC wall head and consolidate, form coping with lime mortar.
- Treat invasive growth and remove in consultation with ecologist, archaeologist.
- Rake out and repoint where necessary.
- Restore large ope broken through wall.

- Summer house: remove growth, rake out and repoint, consolidate opes.
- Remove ivy at south end of south wall exterior.
- Reveal buried perimeter path and resurface in consultation with archaeologist.

West wall

- Investigate removal of certain trees from exterior, in consultation with ecologist and archaeologist.
- Remove OPC wall head and consolidate, form coping with lime mortar.
- Reveal buried perimeter path and resurface in consultation with archaeologist.
- Make good crack in wall following removal of tree from exterior.
- Treat invasive growth and remove in consultation with ecologist, archaeologist.
- Rake out and repoint where necessary.

North wall

- Investigate removal of certain trees, growth from exterior, in consultation with ecologist and archaeologist.
- Remove OPC wall head and consolidate, form coping with lime mortar.
- Reveal buried perimeter path and resurface in consultation with archaeologist.
- Reveal fully two frost arches as points of interest.
- Reveal buried perimeter path and resurface in consultation with archaeologist.
- Treat invasive growth and remove in consultation with ecologist, archaeologist.
- Rake out and repoint where necessary.

Ancillary buildings

- Remove prefab building from entrance area.
- Remove growth from gardener's cottage and maintain.

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