

ULSTER ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY



Survey Report: No. 26

**Survey of West Yard, Bishop's Palace, Downhill,
County Londonderry
UAS/10/04**



In association with



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1. Summary

1.1 Location

A site survey was undertaken at the West 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 fourth in a series of planned surveys undertaken by members of the Ulster Archaeological Society during 2010 and also the twenty-sixth survey undertaken by the UAS members, since the inception of the survey group in 2006.

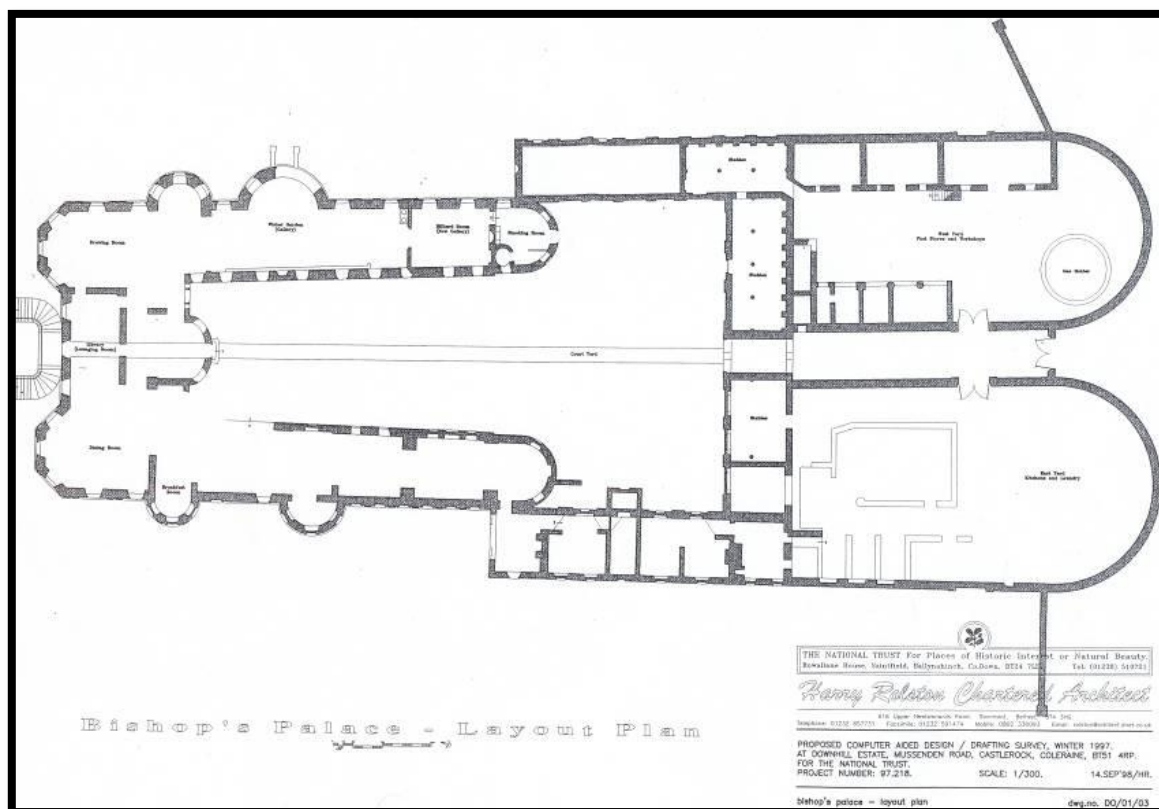


Figure 1: Layout Plan of Bishop's Palace, Downhill, County Londonderry, *National Trust*

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 2: UAS survey team members at work within the West Yard, *National Trust*

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

The initial survey of the West Yard was undertaken on 31 July 2010, followed by further surveys on 18 June 2011, 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 West Yard was subsequently chosen to be the twenty-sixth of these.

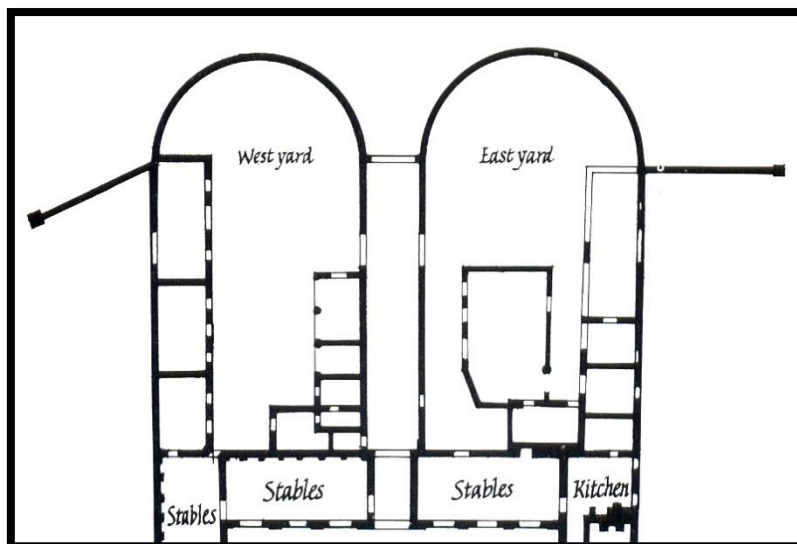


Figure 3: Plan of West and East Yards at Bishop's Palace, Downhill, *National Trust*



Figure 4: View of West Yard during excavation, *National Trust*

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 West and East Yards and hopefully, provide public access to these parts of the site in the future. Twenty volunteers took part in 2010, when the focus of this second season of excavation was the West Yard. Their work was supported by professional archaeologists.

It seems that the West Yard was strongly associated with the maintenance of the house, as it contained a fuel store and one of the buildings was most likely a carpenter's workshop. A doorway was also found, leading to the main stables and coach house. Large amounts of soil and grass were cleared by the returning volunteers, aided by a number of new recruits. Many of these volunteers were members of the Ulster Archaeological Society.

A large circular feature was identified in the north of the West Yard, which proved to be the upper rim of a gas holder. This had been installed in the 1870s, when John Lanyon was employed to repair the house after the fire of 1851.



Figure 5: Gas holder uncovered within the West Yard, *National Trust*

Throughout the 2012 season, it was necessary to backfill the gas holder, in the interests of safety within the West Yard. A team of masons also worked on the fuel stores within the West Yard, as the arches of this structure had become unsafe. The masons also had to dismantle and rebuild the north wall of the West Yard.

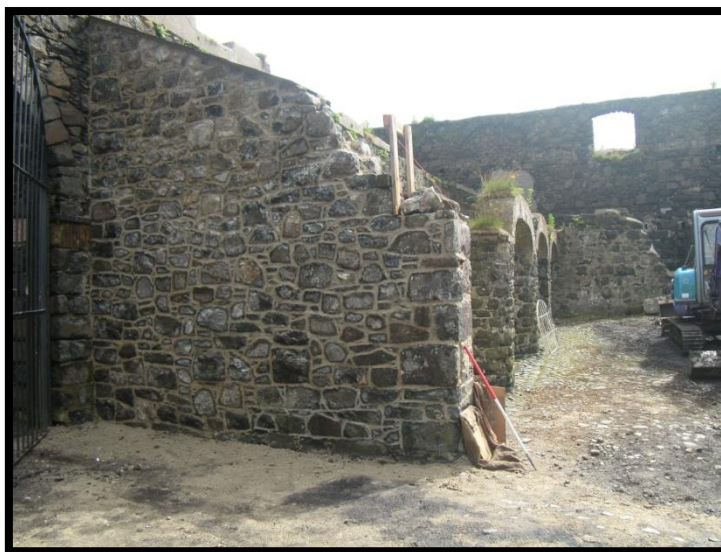


Figure 6: North wall of the West Yard rebuilt



Figure 7: Arches of the West Yard before excavation, *National Trust*



Figure 8: Arches of the West Yard during excavation, *National Trust*

One of the outstanding achievements of the excavations was the recovery of a large collection of architectural fragments, including decorative pilasters and cornice from the exterior of the building.



Figure 9: Decorative stonework from exterior of Bishop's Palace

It is hoped to catalogue this material and re-use it in future repair and restoration of the palace. Small finds included ironwork, glass and pottery. Some of those pottery fragments were plates and cups bearing the stamp 'RAF 1942'.



Figure 10: Pottery fragment from the West Yard, *National Trust*



Figure 11: Ceramic finds from the West Yard, *National Trust*



Figure 12: Ceramic plate from the West Yard, *National Trust*



Figure 13: Wenlock-type oolitic limestone from the West Yard, *National Trust*

It is interesting to note that the above fragments of oolitic limestone closely resemble another find from the Queen Anne House at Castle Ward in County Down during excavation in 2008. These rich landowners clearly had access to materials from various parts of the country, as this particular limestone was identified as being from Shropshire or Wales.



Figure 14: Wenlock-type oolitic limestone from the Queen Anne House at Castle Ward



Figure 15: Fragments from a Bronze Age Irish Bowl, *National Trust*

Waddell (1998, Pages 143-144) suggests that the Bowl Tradition was a parallel development in Ireland to the Beaker phenomenon (as found in Britain), presumably with a similar funerary purpose and social significance. He states that the comb-impressed ornament and the custom of placing a pot near the head of the crouched unburnt corpse were probably inspired by fashions in northern Britain.

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 such features as the domestic gas works located within the West Yard.

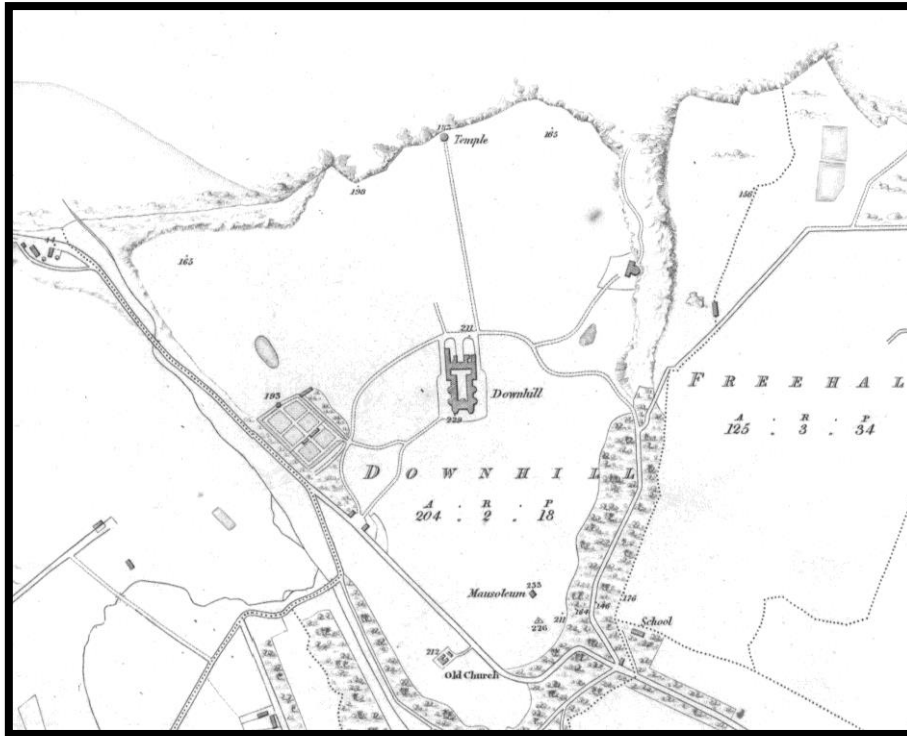


Figure 16: OS County Series, Sheet 2, 1832

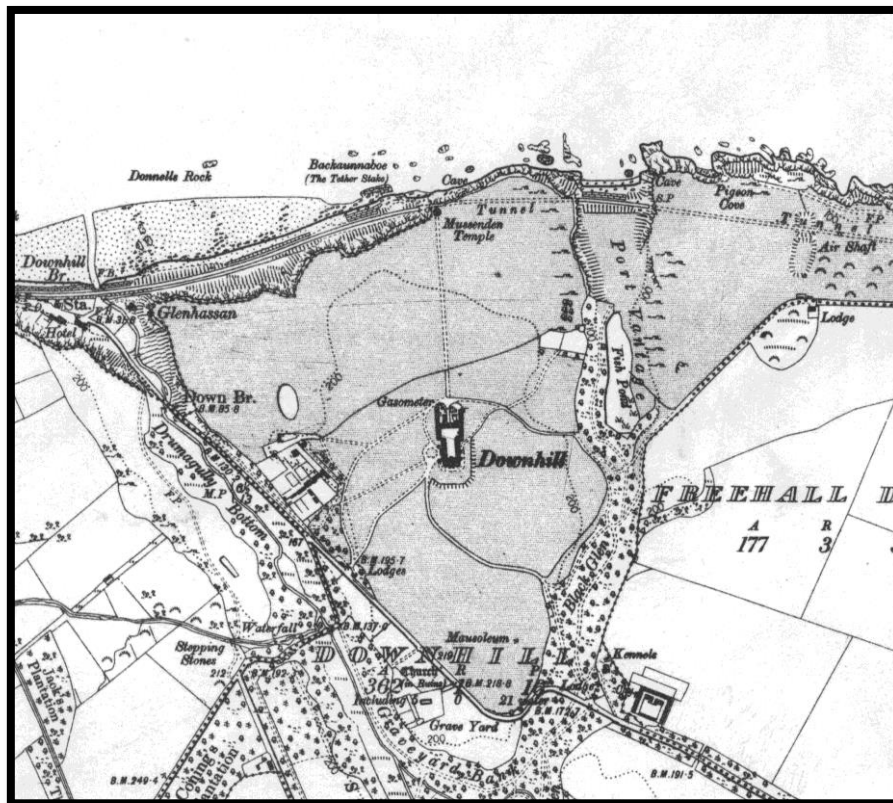


Figure 17: OS County Series, Sheet 2, 1906

The 1906 OS map clearly denotes more detail within the West and East Yards and of particular note is the Gasometer, actually named on the map.

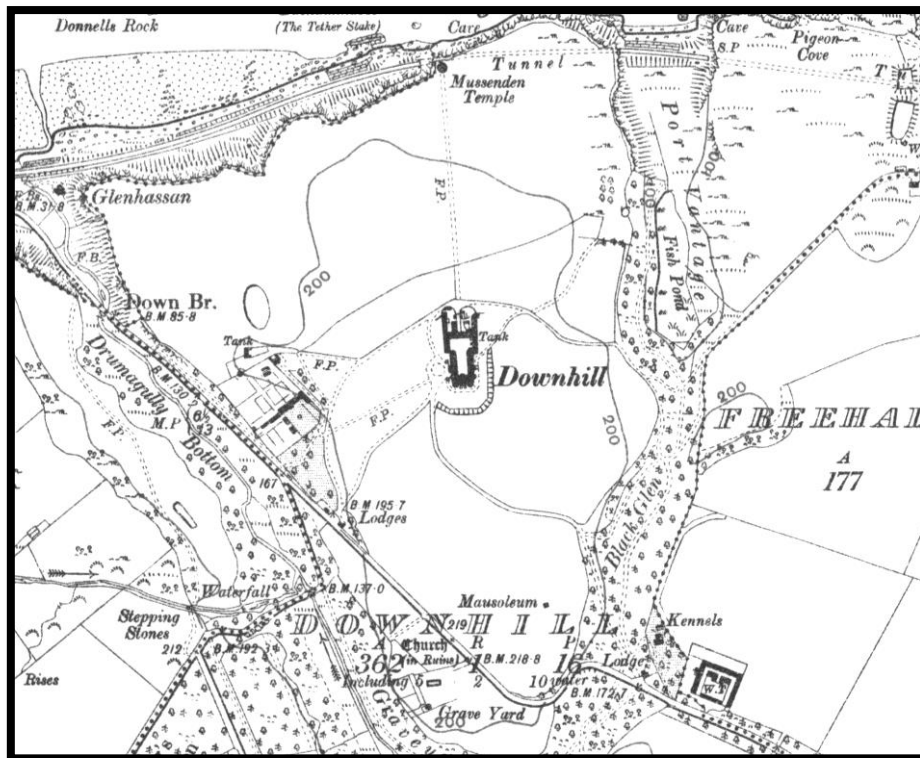


Figure 18: OS County Series, Sheet 2, 1926

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 and elevations, 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 and elevations 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 and elevations at 1:50 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.

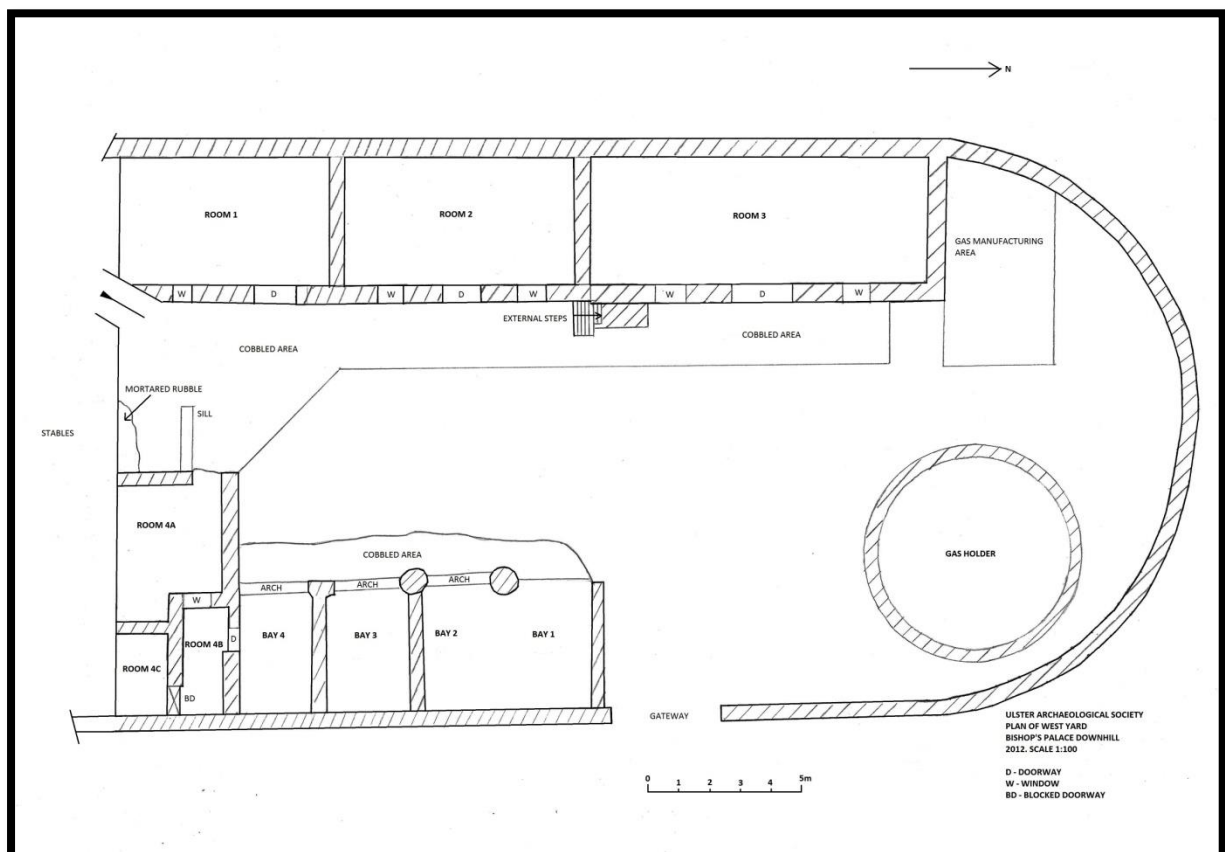


Figure 19: Plan drawing of the West Yard

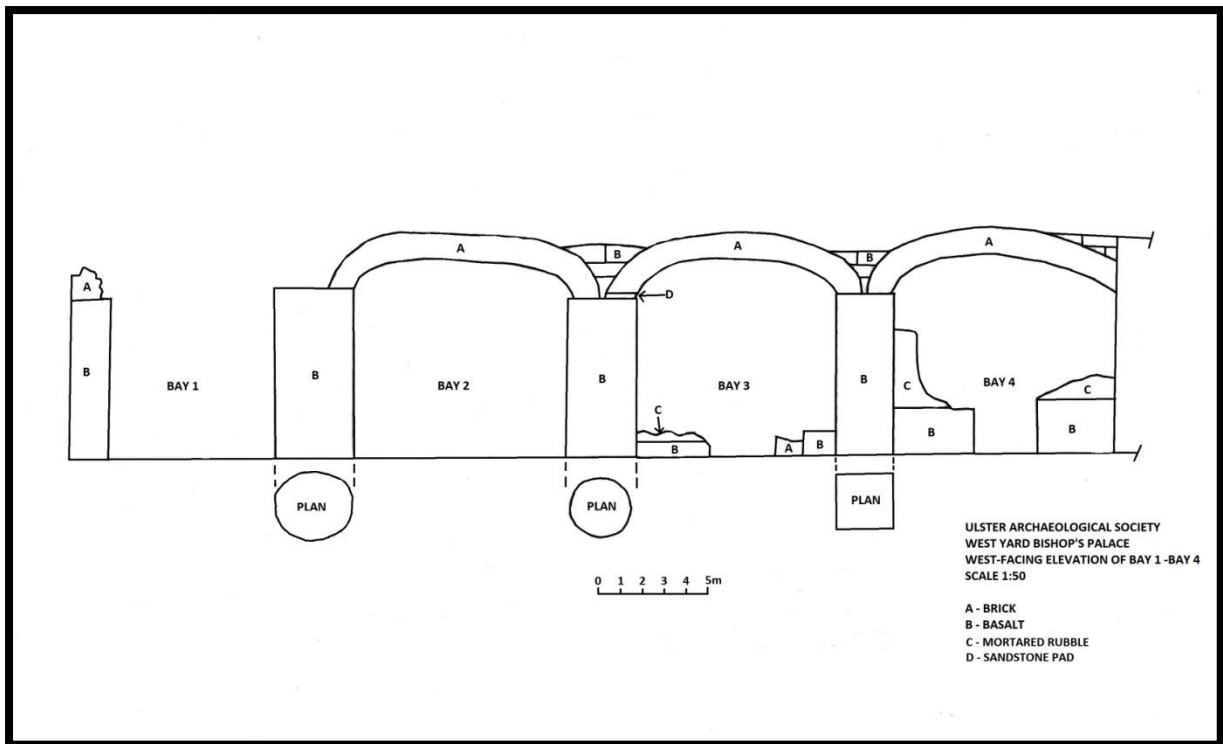


Figure 20: West-facing elevation of Bays 1-4

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 4th 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.

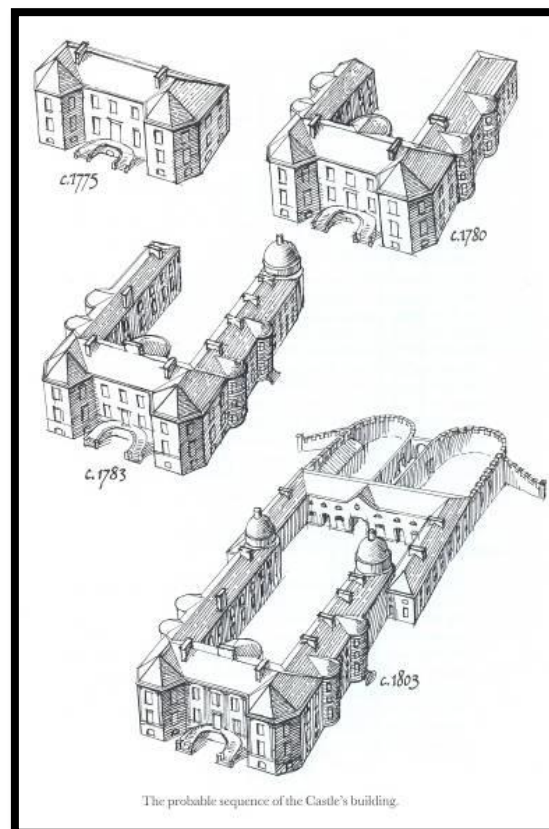


Figure 21: Developmental stages of Bishop's Palace at Downhill 1775-1803, *National Trust*

It was recorded that Downhill escaped serious damage during a fierce storm in 1839, but 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

As can be seen from the plan drawings, individual rooms or bays have been allocated numbers to enable greater clarity in differentiating between the many buildings within the West Yard.

Room 1

This 2-storey building was built as an extension to the main house and like Rooms 2 and 3 it had been constructed as a lean-to. It measures 7m in length and approximately 4.25m in width. Wall thickness is 0.6m. The upper room of this 2-storey building also had a ceiling and above this was a roof space, which travels the length of Rooms 1, 2 and 3. This is not a third storey. A doorway was cut through between Room 1 and the stables. The slope of cobbles outside evidently came later, explaining the lower level of the window, with its red brick arch.



Figure 22: Doorway into stables and lower level of red brick arched window

The main material for all three buildings is natural stone, with red brick edging around the windows and doors. The bonding material is mortar, which is full of sand and shells. A circular vent in the back wall may indicate that this room had possibly been used as an animal shelter. The original stable wall had five large arches. The internal floor had been raised, but at present, it consists of loose stones.



Figure 23: Circular vent and evidence for original arches

The main doorway for Room 1 measures 1.3m wide externally and 1.27m wide internally. On the first floor level, a tall doorway exists between Rooms 1 and 2. It is 0.96m wide. From ground floor level to the bottom of this door is approximately 2m. A small hatch is found at one side of this doorway and is also common to Rooms 1 and 2. This hatch is approximately 0.4m tall and 0.35m wide.



Figure 24: Doorway and hatch common to Rooms 1 and 2

Room 2

It measures 7.5m in length and 4.25m in width. There are substantial floors and windows and this building appears to have two distinctive rooms. One area is cobbled and the other has concrete ribbed paving, which may possibly have enabled animals to grip more easily. One metal ring remains on the back wall, which perhaps had been used for tethering animals. Red brick lintels are found above the door and the windows. The upper windows have brick edging on the inside but natural stone on the outside. Concrete beams have been inserted above the doorway. Perhaps, this is a modern feature used to strengthen the structure. At the bottom of the ground floor door jamb, there is a decorative edging on both sides at floor level.



Figure 25: Decorative edging at front step of Room 2



Figure 26: Evidence for two distinctive areas within Room 2 and the connecting doorway

A partition is evident between the two distinctive rooms/areas within Room 2 and there appears to be a doorstep also. The doorstep has holes drilled into it and the distance between the two holes measures 0.95m.

A doorway exists on the first floor, leading to Room 3. This door measures 1.04m in width and is approximately 2.6m above ground floor level from within Room 2. When viewed from Room 3 side, the doorway measures 1.12m wide and 2.82m from ground floor level to the doorway sill. The main entrance to Room 2 has an unusually wide doorway, measuring 1.26m from the inside and 1.22m from the outside. This doorway is 2.02m tall. The windows are quite symmetrical with two small windows at ground level and two larger windows on the first floor. The two ground floor windows measure 0.78m wide/1.34m high

and 0.75m wide/1.29m high respectively. The upper windows are 1m wide on the outside of the building and 1.1m from the inside. These upper windows have concrete sills.



Figure 27: Interior of Room 2

Room 3

This 2-storey building is more impressive in every way, with an ornate frontage of three substantial red brick arches and several windows. The overall length of the building is 10.8m and its width is 4.25m. It is possible that this was indeed the site manager's residence or the gas manager's residence, as the actual domestic gas works are close by. The three red brick arches are identical in size, but the two outer arches have later been blocked with stonework and decorative brick edged windows. On the left hand side of the doorway, the blocked-up stone/brickwork is not perfectly keyed into the main structure, but on the right hand side it is perfectly keyed into the main structure, as illustrated below. The upper floor had three windows directly above the three arches. Once again, the walls are 0.60m thick.



Figure 28: East-facing elevation of Room 3

Outside steps lead to the loft, which runs the entire length of Rooms 1, 2 and 3. At present only 7 steps survive, each approximately 1.2m wide. This flight of steps does respect the window and it is thought that a platform was built up like a landing to enter the door.

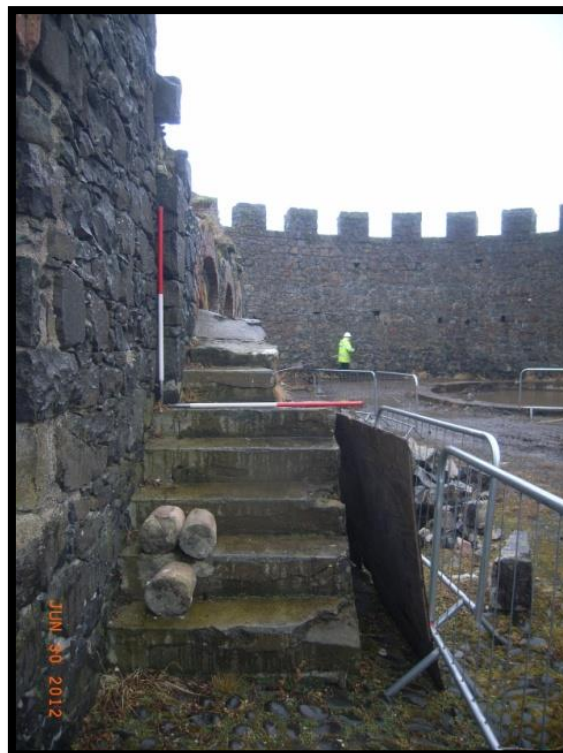


Figure 29: External steps leading to loft area

The walls are plastered and substantial concrete skirting is found on three walls of one room on the first floor. Perhaps this concrete skirting was designed as an attempt to mouse-proof the building. There is evidence for a chimney, which is now bricked up. In one corner of the ground floor there is red brick corbelling, which perhaps was intended as additional support.



Figure 30: Concrete skirting above and red brick corbelling below

To the left of the doorway of Room 3 and set into the west wall, a huge original stone-edged arch starts at the dividing wall and it follows through this building, matching the exterior perfectly. This arch is 3.3m wide.



Figure 31: Original stone-edged arch within the west wall of the West Yard

On the right hand wall of Room 3, close to where this wall meets the back wall, there is a blocked-up window with a rough brick arch. From the outside, this same feature resembles a tall doorway with brick edging at its top. There is evidence of corrugated roofing at this wall, which is probably modern.

At this point, there is a row of large, what appears to be parallel arches from West Yard to East Yard, marking the gateway into the West Yard, the gateway into the East Yard and a gateway in the east wall of the East Yard.



Figure 32: Evidence for parallel archways, travelling through West and East Yards

Rooms 4a, 4b and 4c

The doorway at one corner appears to be at a height, but the floor level is matched on the other side. The walls in this part of the building are 0.50m wide. One floor in 4b has large flagstones, each approximately 0.5m square. A window, which was originally a doorway, measuring 0.8m wide, is evident between Rooms 4a and 4b. The wall on the left hand side of this window measures 0.41m wide and on the right hand side, the wall measures 0.3m wide.

There is a blocked doorway between 4b and 4c. This originally measured 1.3m wide, but as it is now blocked on one side by red brick, its width has been reduced to 1m. The internal width of the doorway is 0.9m. A ledge along the wall measures 0.25m wide and stands 0.42m high. This ledge or footing appears to be the actual foundation for the main stone wall.



Figure 33: Rooms 4a, 4b and 4c, with Bay 4 arch visible on the left

Bays 1, 2, 3 and 4

These bays are currently referred to by the National Trust as fuel stores. It is highly probable that this fuel included coal and coke, which were both associated with gas-making. Coal, logs and peat were all likely to have been used within the mansion for domestic purposes.



Figure 34: Bay 4 with its red brick arch, adjoined to Room 4b



Figure 35: Bay 3 with a well-preserved area of cobbling adjacent to the entrance



Figure 36: Well-constructed red brick arches identified in Bays 1-4

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 visitors' experience. The 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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PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD FORM

Site: West Yard, Bishop's Palace, Downhill, County Londonderry

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

Make and model of camera...*Ricoh G600W*

Frame no.	Viewed from	Details
RIMG 0045	NW	North wall of the West Yard rebuilt
DISC 0193	NW	Decorative stonework from exterior of Bishop's Palace
RIMG 0002	W	Doorway into stables and lower level of red brick arched window
RIMG 0007	E	Circular vent and evidence for original arches
RIMG 0003	S	Doorway and hatch common to Rooms 1 and 2
RIMG 0012	NE	Decorative edging at front step of Room 2
RIMG 0021	E	Evidence for two distinctive areas within Room 2 and connecting doorway
RIMG 0019	SW	Interior of Room 2
RIMG 0018	E	East-facing elevation of Room 3
RIMG 0022	S	External steps leading to loft area
RIMG 0031	S	Concrete skirting above and red brick corbelling below
RIMG 0027	E	Original stone-edged arch within the west wall of the West Yard
RIMG 0028 (2)	W	Evidence for parallel archways travelling through West and East Yards
RIMG 0028	W	Rooms 4a, 4b and 4c, with Bay 4 arch visible on the left
RIMG 0005	W	Bay 4 with its red brick arch, adjoined to Room 4b
RIMG 0004	W	Bay 3 with a well-preserved area of cobbling adjacent to the entrance
RIMG 0007	W	Well-constructed red brick arches for Bays 1-4