



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	Lea Castle: the story so far
Author(s)	Dempsey, Karen
Publication Date	2016
Publication Information	Dempsey, Karen (2016-2017). Lea Castle: the story so far. Castle Studies Group Journal, 30, 237-253.
Publisher	Castle Studies Group
Link to publisher's version	<a href="http://www.castlestudiesgroup.org.uk/page146.html">http://www.castlestudiesgroup.org.uk/page146.html</a>
Item record	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/15523">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/15523</a>

Downloaded 2024-04-23T11:41:18Z

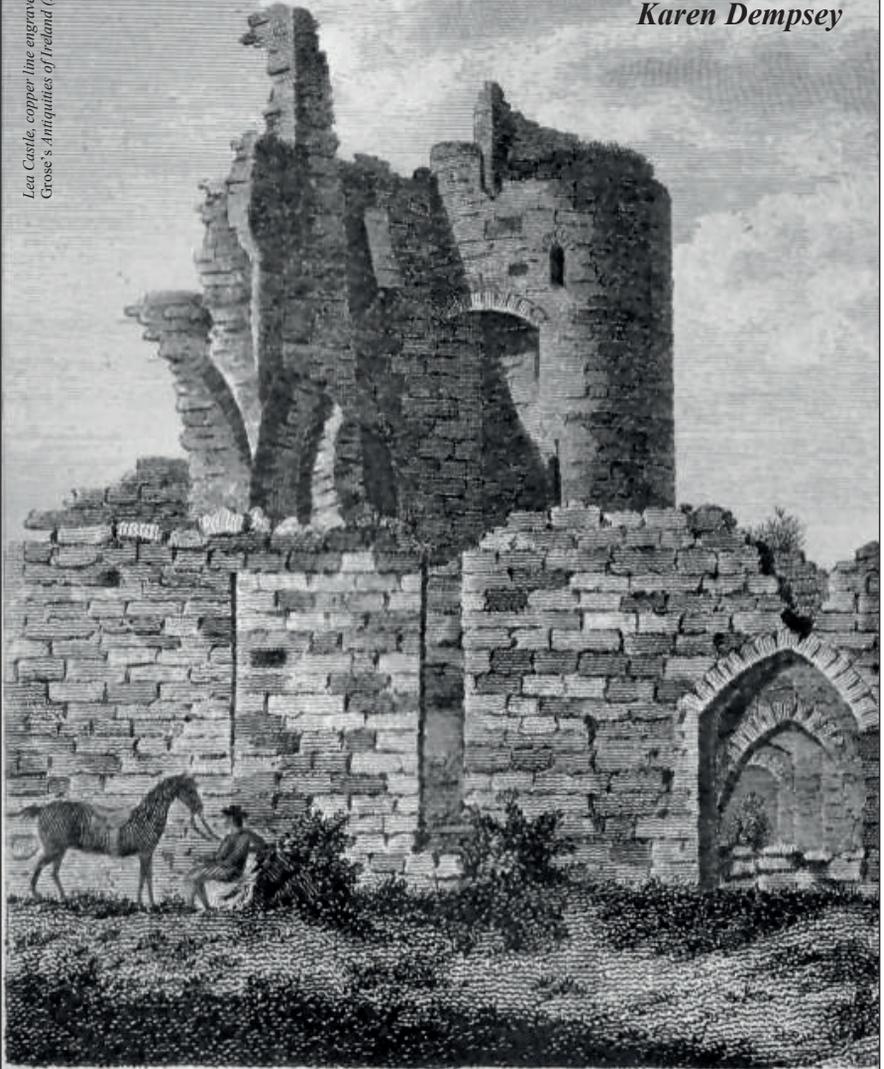
Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



**Lea Castle, Co. Laois:  
the story so far**

*Karen Dempsey*

*Lea Castle, copper-line engraved print for Francis  
Grose's *Antiquities of Ireland* (2 vols., 1st in 1791/2).*



## Lea Castle, Co. Laois: the story so far

Karen Dempsey

### Abstract:

*You could almost be forgiven for not knowing about Lea Castle: it is not located off an 'important' modern road, it is not set in an urban environment and it is not open to the public. Lea is possibly one of Ireland's most overlooked Anglo-Norman castle-complexes. Yet, it is of national importance and is of immense value in terms of appreciating our Anglo-Norman heritage. One of the main problems - outside of being very overgrown and neglected - is that little research has been completed on the castle. The limited work that has been achieved reaches various unsatisfactory conclusions (McNeill 1997, Sweetman 1999, O'Connor 1999). There is no consensus in the opinions of these various scholars in relation to its architecture, chronology or patronage therefore this paper represents the first examination of the story of Lea.*

### Lea Castle: an introduction

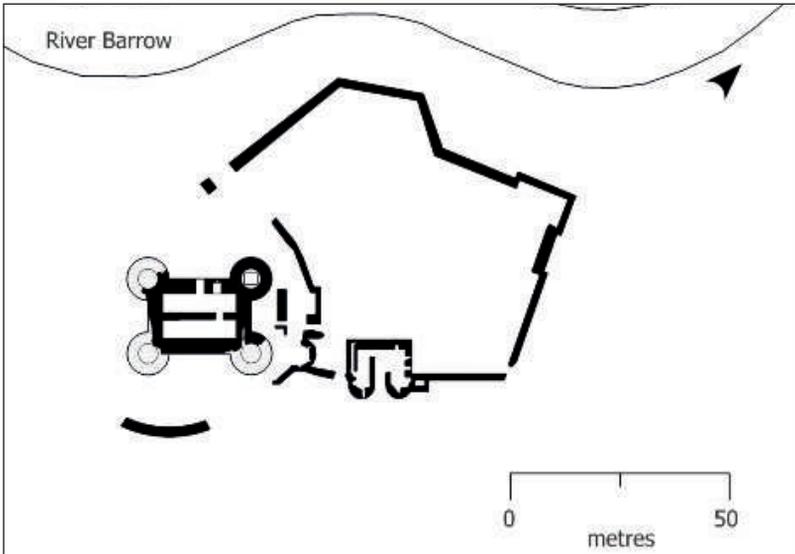
Lea Castle, Co. Laois, is located on the banks of the River Barrow, close to the boundaries of the modern counties of Kildare and Offaly. During the medieval period the castle was the baronial caput of the cantred of Leys, one part of the northern territory of the Lordship of Leinster (*contra* O'Connor 1999; Bradley 1999).

The remains of the castle complex that we see today comprise an oval earthwork surmounted by a large four-storeyed tower – the 'keep' or, as I favour in this paper, *donjon* – with a possible forebuilding set within an inner bailey. Adjacent to this is an outer bailey of irregular form that was entered through a twin-towered gatehouse (figs. 1 & 2). Unfortunately the *donjon* was partially destroyed by gunpowder during the seventeenth century; only the northern tower and the north-east and north-west wall remain standing. The complex appears to have been mostly thirteenth-century in date; indeed, late-medieval fabric is conspicuously absent.

The immediate landscape surrounding the castle has a number of features from the middle ages, presumably also thirteenth-century in date. The first edition Ordnance Survey recorded a small settlement south-east of the castle which may indicate the former presence of a medieval settlement perhaps the *vill* of Leys, first recorded in 1232 (CDI i, 289). Today this area contains a modern farmyard which masks much of the putative medieval remains; however, traces of possible occupation debris including some tentative housing plots were identified during recent geophysical survey (Bonsall & Gibson 2015). However, only targeted excavation would confirm this. Further south-east of this putative *vill* are fragmentary remains of a medieval parish church of 'Leghe' (Lea) that was first mentioned in the Papal Taxation of 1302 (CDI iv, 250).

The castle was the centrepiece of a very complex landscape including an elaborate waterscape. An inner moat fed by the River Barrow encircled the castle complex. Recent evidence suggests that this was one part of a double moat the second part of which enclosed a wider area around the castle (Myles 2015, 11-21). Within this area demarcated by the outer enclosing moat there is evidence to suggest the presence of smaller ponds which could have stocked fish. It is likely that a raised walkway provided access through this double-moated watery landscape between the twin-towered gatehouse of the castle complex to the medieval *vill*. Indeed, a route-way of this nature has been depicted in antiquarian drawings. (See fig. 3 for a schematic representation). There are further earthworks to the north-east of the castle that were also fed by the river Barrow. These features may have had a number of functions; mill ponds, fishponds or water features which had both a practical and aesthetic value (Creighton 2002, Liddiard 2004).

A castle complex of this magnitude has many stories to tell. For the purpose of this paper it is only possible to tell *some* parts of the story of Lea. This paper considers the castle's architecture and its architectural-historical context, reviews the evidence of its sequence of



ABOVE: Fig. 1. Sketch plan of Lea Castle-Complex

BELOW: Fig. 2. Aerial view of Lea Castle and associated landscape features..



construction and new perspectives are offered where needed. Further research is currently being completed on the castle's landscape in tandem with an ongoing community project 'Lea Castle Conservation Group' which is funded by the Heritage Council of Ireland.

### Historiography

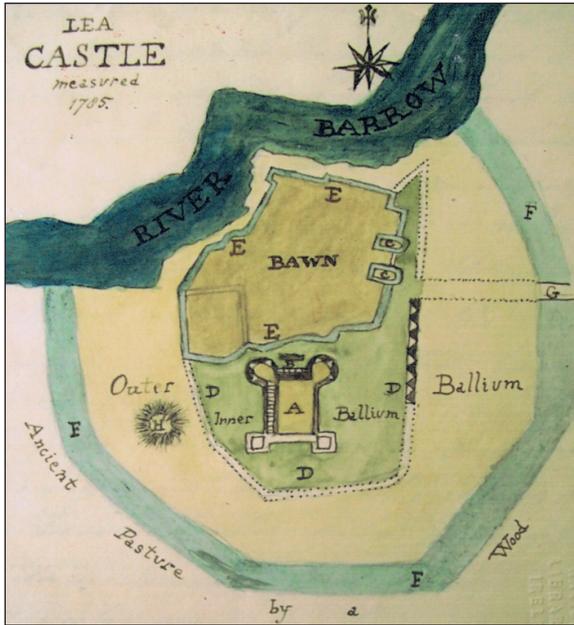
Although Lea Castle has escaped detailed study, it has been commented on in the major publications on castles in Ireland. Most of the discussion has concentrated on its *donjon*. Harold Leask included it in his 'towered-keep' category alongside Carlow, Terryglass, Ferns, the destroyed castle of Wexford and what he regarded as the same-plan precursor of the late medieval tower in Enniscorthy. This category was first outlined in his paper 'Irish Castles 1180-1310' (1937). His view was that the *donjon* dated to 1250, a date he argued on the basis of a single window at third-floor level. Tom McNeill (1997) did not explicitly endorse Leask's 'towered-keep' category as a specific group but still grouped the castles and referred to them as *donjons*. He suggested that Lea Castle was "built in two stages, with different windows and a change in the stair between first and second floor, but to one plan" (1997, 120). He regarded Lea as a Geraldine castle – discussed below – and simply referred to it as thirteenth-century. Kieran O'Connor (1999, 187-89) addressed the castle's history more specifically, attributing to either Robert de Bermingham (d. 1197) or Gerald fitz Maurice (d.1204) the earthwork – which he described as a 'ringwork' – under the *donjon*. Like McNeill, he noted evidence for two phases in the *donjon*, assigning the later phase, represented by the top floor of the tower, to "after 1225-1230" (1999, 187) on the basis of its windows, and the earlier phase to "possibly around 1220". His reasoning for the latter date was that the tower is most likely to have been built by Maurice fitz Gerald (d. 1254) "as a direct copy of his lord's castle at Carlow at some stage after he gets seisin of his lands in 1216" (1999, 189). It is not clear if he regarded the upper part of the *donjon* as Maurice's work as well but suggested that the "fourth storey was added

onto this keep at some later date" (1999, 189). O'Connor, unlike McNeill, retained the term 'towered-keep'. David Sweetman closely followed O'Connor in his *Medieval Castles of Ireland* (1999, 78 and footnotes 46-48 p. 201).

It is clear from these studies that the dates (and therefore the patronage) of both alleged phases of Lea's *donjon* have been, and might still be, contested. The problems of determining date and patronage at Lea actually begin at the earthwork; if we accept two phases for the *donjon* we must be looking at a castle with at least three thirteenth-century phases, and this raises the question: who is responsible for them? One aim of this paper is to answer that question, and in so doing establish the baseline for future work at the castle. A secondary aim of the paper – a short postscript – is to consider the integrity of the 'towered keep' category to which Lea's *donjon* was originally assigned. A separate question again, not addressed here, is the function of the *donjon* of Lea. There has been a debate in recent years about the use of space inside thirteenth-century towers, with increasing numbers of writers asserting that halls, always understood contemporaneously as relatively 'public' spaces in castles, were contained within focal buildings. One cannot always be certain of the arrangement of space in a castle of somewhat unusual plan, as Lea is, but suffice it to say here, following my doctoral research and that of O'Keefe on the use of space, that the likelihood is that Lea's hall, used for estate-administration and dining, was outside the *donjon*, though its location (as a timber building perhaps?) is not known (Dempsey 2016, 113-119).

### Noting Lea Castle's architecture

The architecture of Lea Castle has been extensively described elsewhere (Dempsey 2015, 7-11) so for the purpose of this paper only a brief outline of the *donjon* and its key features are discussed. The building does not correspond neatly to the cardinal points of the compass; however, the surviving tower is aligned almost north and therefore discussed in this paper as north and its adjoining walls are identified as north-west and north-east respectively (fig. 4).



ABOVE: Fig. 3 Antiquarian schematic representation of Lea by William Beauford. Image courtesy & © National Library of Ireland (RP 16/615). William Beauford (1735-1819) was an amateur artist and antiquarian who had a great interest in architecture and its history. He was one of the founders of the Antiquarian Society, the predecessor of the Royal Irish Academy, along with Rev. Edward Ledwich. Together, they subsequently made many 'tours' of Ireland; one of which likely resulted in this image of Lea. This particular drawing of Lea Castle has also survived as a plain pencil sketch; both were annotated with the date 1785. The colour image was published by Beauford c. 1810. A great deal of Beauford's drawings of old castles and monasteries were included in Ledwich's 'Antiquities of Ireland' published in 1790.

Beauford's map - 'Explanation': A - The castle or keep 46 feet by 30 Walls were seven feet thick; B - Bastions with a portcullis; C - Gate with apartments; D - Walls of inner Ballium; E - Walls of Bawn; F - Moat or Fosse 25 feet broad now filled up; G - Ancient Draw Bridge; H - Watch Mount; The castle had three storeys with cellars and appears to have been dismantled by gunpowder.

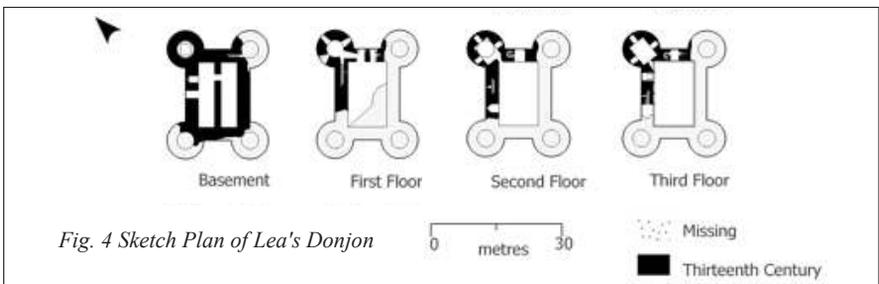


Fig. 4 Sketch Plan of Lea's Donjon

The *donjon* was a four-storeyed rectangular block with four circular corner towers that had five storeys; the fifth was a turret. At basement level the *donjon* has a pair of longitudinal vaults carried on a spine wall. The vaults seem, *contra* McNeill (1995), inserted, as they visibly rise above the original first-floor level. Unlike other such inserted vaults, however, they are certainly of thirteenth-century date as they have well-preserved plank centring. No original direct access from basement to first-floor level is obvious in either in the main block of the *donjon* or the surviving corner tower.

At first-floor level only two openings are now visible; both are located in the north-east wall, with the one nearest the north tower being considered - by some - as the *primary* entrance of the castle (McNeill 1997; Sweetman 1999; O'Connor 1999) (fig. 5). However, this seems unlikely to be the formal access route as will be discussed later. This opening provided access to the first floor of the remaining north tower via a short mural passage from which, after turning left, a straight mural stair in the north-west wall rising in a south-westerly direction climbs to third-floor level, completely bypassing the second floor.

This mural stair is very interesting in terms of the two-phase debate outlined above. It climbs continuously from first to third floor, but its roofing composition alters three times in that ascent. Initially the stair is barrel-vaulted with plank centering. Just over mid-way the roof changes to flat lintels. At this point a small curve or arch joins the barrel vault and lintels together so that they are seamlessly bonded. While not part of this architectural join it is interesting to note that a large window embrasure is present at this point overlooking the western landscape. Towards the top of the stairs a single light at eye level provides a second view. The stair roof changes again here and it is finished with two round arches, allowing for standing space. The stairs communicated important locations and architectural junctions within the castle. There appears to have been a conscious or deliberate effort to ensure that the person climbing the stairs was very much aware of their location within and journey through the castle and its landscape.

Fenestration at second-floor level of the *donjon* may never have been elaborate; today only two openings are apparent: a large stepped embrasure with window seats along the north-western wall and a large opening in the north-east wall which we will return to below (figs. 5, 6 & 8). The northern tower contained a private chapel accessed from the main space at second floor-level. This putative chapel appears to contain a sedilia and east-facing window (fig. 7). This floor was clearly important. Although the mural stairs by-passed the second floor there was a conscious acknowledgement of its existence. As well as this, the presence of a chapel typically indicates a high-status space; it is found at a number of other high-ranking baronial castles such as the *donjons* of Trim, Co. Meath, Maynooth, Co. Kildare and Ferns, Co. Wexford.

Continuing with the architectural importance of the second floor we return to the large opening that dominates the north-east wall (fig. 8). This has been identified by the author as the *formal access route* or *primary entrance* of the *donjon*. It is important to say that this is an alternative suggestion for the location of the *primary entrance*; contrary to other interpretations of a lower-level entrance by McNeill (1997), O'Connor (1999) and Sweetman (1999) therefore a more detailed account of its architecture is required. Internally it is a straight-sided opening, with large jambs that are recessed slightly but contain a number of bar holes that are too large to suggest window supports. It is possible that they indicate the hinges of a now lost large wooden double-door (fig. 8). Externally the doorway contains a segmental arch surrounded with worked stone. Above the arch, five square apertures or sockets surround the top of this opening; two above each other on the right and left with a corbel below and the fifth aperture is centred above the doorway (fig. 9). It is possible that a sixth socket above this is missing. It is likely that these apertures once held a suspension apparatus for a timber bridge or walk-way that was accessed via the forebuilding that is now represented by the large block of masonry that is situated between the *donjon* and the inner bailey (fig. 4); (see Dempsey 2015 for a detailed architectural description of the castle-complex).



*Fig. 5. Lea Castle. The interior face of the north-east facade looking from the south.*



*ABOVE: Fig. 6. Lea Castle. The interior of the north-west wall.*

*BELOW: Fig. 7 North tower featuring chapel: possible sedilia framed by plank-centred arch.*





*ABOVE: Fig. 8. Second-floor doorway with door hinges visible. Looking toward the north-east.*

*LEFT: Fig. 9. Facing south; view of north-eastern wall of castle from the exterior, with the north tower to the right.*

This forebuilding likely provided access to both the first and second floor of the castle through a series of internal wooden stairs that allowed the lord and lady to climb unseen to first-floor level. At first-floor level, the informal access route was through the northern-most doorway in the north-east wall that led via a short mural passage under the chapel in the north tower and up the mural stair in the north-west wall to third-floor level - the most private space. However, this was not the formal entrance. If a ceremonial entrance was required, the lord and lady continued past first-floor level where they emerged at second-floor level, and crossed the timber bridge and into their grand chamber, beneath third-floor level. This processional entrance would have ensured firstly their visibility to their extended *familia* which in turn highlighted their invisibility and inaccessibility once they entered the 'private' second-floor space.

The third floor forms a key part of the argument for two phases as per McNeill (1997), Sweetman (1999) and O'Connor (1999), because it is different to the floors below for two primary reasons. Firstly, its floor level was supported by an offset in the wall (figs. 4 & 6). Secondly, the windows are twin-light and are framed by segmental arches; these differ from the narrow lit, round-arched window below. The most impressive example is a double trefoil pointed example in the north-west wall with high-quality cut stone which has been typically used to date the building (fig. 10) (Leask 1937; Stalley 1971).

So overall what does the architecture of this castle tell us? We now know that the vaults were inserted at some point in the thirteenth-century. It seems that there was a private chapel located at second-floor level. This level also appears to have acted as the primary formal chamber accessed via the primary formal entrance. The castle certainly had intricate patterns of access demonstrated most obviously by formal and informal entrances but also by the mural stairs which signifies important junctions in the castle. We can acknowledge that the third floor is different from those below; but what does this mean in terms of understanding the dating and ownership of the castle?

## Chronology and Patronage

Past understandings of the date and construction of Lea concentrated on the idea of the *donjon* as having two distinct thirteenth-century phases or, as McNeill prefers, stages. As outlined above, this was based on the change to segmental arches for window embrasures at third-floor level and the difference in roofing of the mural stair. The insertion of the vault at ground-floor level has not formed part of the argument for two phases but is very obviously a thirteenth-century event.

While the two-phase case is strong it is not entirely unproblematic. The main issue is that there are no obvious joins in the *donjon*'s external stonework: the character of the fabric is continuous from bottom to top. Also, the mural stairs in the north-west wall continue without interruption from first to third floor, allowing us to suggest a break in building sequence but not in intention as per McNeill (120, 1997). This is an important point, and it reinforces McNeill's reading over O'Connor's and Sweetman's: the construction may have been in stages rather than phases. It is significant because it removes the possibility of a long gap between the lower and upper parts of the tower, and brings the date of the trefoil-headed window - very unlikely to be pre-1250 (see Stalley 1971) - into play for establishing the chronology of the entire building. O'Connor's suggestion of a date "possibly after 1220" is over-cautious.

It is likely that were a number of thirteenth-century construction events; the castle was constructed to *one plan* in a series of uninterrupted *stages*. The changes to the architecture between floors do not represent gaps in the building of the castle but rather illustrate construction sequences of one plan.

We can now turn our attention to Lea's patrons. Richard de Clare granted Offaly to Robert de Bermingham (d.1197). After de Bermingham's death the lordship subsequently passed to his daughter Eve and her husband Gerald fitz Maurice who died c. 1204 (Orpen 1914, 100). It is likely they are responsible for the earthwork - the 'ringwork' - under the *donjon*. The lands

were supposed to return to tenant-in-chief Richard Marshall but were held for a time by Meiler fitz Henry. Richard Marshall eventually regained the lands from fitz Henry in 1208 (CDI i, 375 & 378). The early masonry walling that outlines the earthwork and is characterised by plunging loops can probably be attributed to Meiler rather than Richard. Although this raises the question of access during the later construction of the *donjon*; it may be that the masonry walling simply never fully encircled the earthwork. The northern side positioned along the river which maybe was free from an enclosing wall may have been used as an access point for deliveries of stone for construction.

Returning to the patrons, Eve remarried twice; first to Geoffrey fitz Robert and then to Geoffrey de Marisco with whom she had children. On Eve's death c. 1226 Geoffrey retained Lea in accordance with the law (Orpen 1914, 100). De Marisco, an ally of Richard Marshall who was in dispute with the crown, was exiled in 1238 for his apparent role in a notorious murder of a royal official (and Lea was subsequently returned to Gerald fitz Maurice (d.1254) (Powicke 1941). The suggestion by O'Connor and Sweetman that the *donjon* at Lea, whatever its date, is a 'copy' of Marshall's castle at Carlow seems very unlikely given that the Geraldines stood with the crown against the Marshall family in their dispute. It is possible, therefore, that once he received the property Gerald fitz Maurice, the second baron of Offaly, began the construction of the *donjon* inside the original Meiler fitz Henry enclosure and even perhaps the building of the outer bailey. But was this work completed at his death in 1257?

On his death a legal battle ensued for ownership of Lea, the lands reverted to Margaret, Countess of Lincoln who was the widow of Walter Marshall, the youngest of the Marshall sons. The lands passed promptly c. 1257 to Maurice fitz Gerald's (d.1257) grandson, also Maurice (CDI ii, 92 & 141). This Maurice (d. 1268), the third baron of Offaly, and his wife, Agnes de Valence are the most plausible patrons for the completion phase of Lea's *donjon* to the design

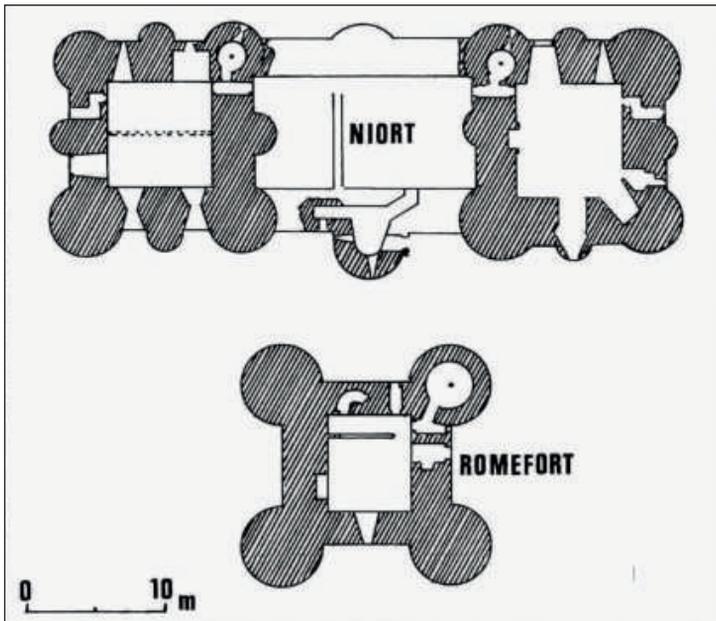
started for it. A date range of 1257-68 would be acceptable for the trefoil-headed window (fig. 10). Their son, another Maurice, was a minor until at least the early 1280s (Orpen 1914, 110) so he is unlikely to have been involved in its building. In fact after Maurice's (d. 1268) death, William de Valence, Agnes' father, bought the right to his lands as well as the custody and marriage of his heir – who was not Agnes' son – from Thomas de Clare (another Geraldine) c. 1270. The castle at Lea or 'Lege' is specifically mentioned in this transaction (CDI ii, 122 & 124). Later Lea – it is not clear if it refers to the castle or settlement – was burned in 1284 (Ann. St. Mary's ii, 319) but it is unlikely that the structure we see today post-dated that event.

Another possibility, of course, is that Maurice and Agnes were sole builders of the *donjon*, although it is more difficult to find an explanation for the two-stage construction in this scenario. One suggestion may be that Maurice (d. 1268) had begun the castle before his marriage to Agnes in 1266. Is it possible that subsequent to his death she finished it in her personal style but to his original plan? In support of this argument we know that William de Valence, Agnes's father, was a French noble from Poitiers who moved to England at the request of his half-brother King Henry III after the French re-captured Poitou c. 1247. William was 'in favour' with the King and was awarded an arranged marriage with a great heiress – Joan de Munchensi – a granddaughter of William Marshall, the former lord of Leinster. This marriage gave William extensive lands in Ireland, including Ferns where there is *donjon* of the same plan-type as that at Lea (O'Keefe & Coughlan 2003), in other words it is a large rectangular *donjon* with four corner towers. Is it possible to infer that Ferns, a structure dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth-century was based on the design at Lea, with knowledge of that design mediated through Agnes who had encountered it at Lea Castle? Can Lea's final stage be attributed to this female noblewoman? It is likely. Perhaps even most likely that Maurice and Agnes were the sole-builders after all.



*ABOVE: Fig. 10. Double trefoil pointed window, from the exterior (inset) and interior, in the north-west wall.*

*BELOW: Fig. 11. Romefort and Niort, France (after Jean Mesqui, 1987)*



### **Postscript: Leask's 'towered-keeps' reconsidered**

Leask organised castles into groups based on their shared architectural plans or building style (Leask 1937). 'Towered-keeps' – which Lea was considered as part of along with Ferns, Terryglass, Carlow, Wexford (now destroyed) as well as the later Enniscorthy formed one such group. The main feature of this classification was that all of these buildings contained four corner towers. This classification remains today, McNeill's work notwithstanding; Sweetman and O'Connor have used it, as do Archaeological Survey of Ireland.

Carlow, the earliest castle within the 'group', has similarities with castles in France, including Nemours (Seine-et-Marne), Romefort (Indre) and Château de Niort (Dux-Sèvres (fig. 11) (Mesqui 1987, 87). This link was first identified by O'Keefe over twenty years ago (O'Keefe 1990, 22) although it remains unremarked upon by other writers who still treat the castles as peculiar to Ireland for their date. William Marshal, patron of Carlow, had of course had spent considerable time in France.

But how coherent is this group? Table 1 demonstrates that there are patterns, although it is difficult to assess the significance of these, especially when all the buildings are so ruined (see Table 1). Several categories in the table suggest that while Ferns (fig. 12) and Lea, clustered together in date, are obviously comparable, neither Carlow (much earlier than them) nor Terryglass have enough in common with them or with each other to convince that this is a coherent group. Moreover, other castles which also have loosely comparative features might deserve to be mentioned in the same context as these four (Table 1).

Tullowmacjames, Co. Tipperary (fig. 13) is a substantial castle set within an irregularly shaped terraced enclosure that is no longer extant; however, some indications of its former composition are evident at ground-level and as returns on the external fabric of the castle. The masonry remains of the castle today comprise a large rectangular two-storeyed chamber (10.8m

x 8.9m) bonded with a large corner tower at the north-west corner using a squinch similar to one at Lea (Dempsey 2015). This corner tower also has single loops with oillets, a feature of both Ferns and Lea. A domed vault remains at ground-floor level in the corner tower at Tullowmacjames although it is not as fine as the example that is found within the eastern tower at Ferns Castle (O'Keefe & Coughlan 2003). Furthermore, a newel found in the corner tower at first-floor level is of incredibly high quality.

Interestingly, despite these fine features Tullowmacjames is not a well-documented manor. It was located on the eastern edge of the medieval cantred of Eliogharthy, one of the large territories bestowed on Theobald Walter by Prince John (Lord of Ireland) c. 1185. According to Empey (1985, 84) this cantred was held of 6 ¼ knights fees. The name 'Tullowmacjames' is not expressly mentioned in the historical sources; however, 'Tulathnerine' and 'Tillaghnerine' are possible alternative names for the castle (RBO 1303). Further historical notes from the same sources show that Tullowmacjames once earned only 10/ per annum which was not an enormous sum; this poor income is in direct contrast to the architecture of the castle which is of a very high standard but not quite equal to that of Lea or Ferns. Perhaps the status of this castle can be attributed to its patron rather than its income.

There are several other castles that could also relate to the 'towered-keeps' in architectural design such as Quin, Co. Clare, a later enclosure castle of Thomas de Clare. Two circular corner towers are visible in its plan which would have formed part of four ranges set around a central courtyard although this example would have been somewhat larger than the 'towered-keeps'. Quin Castle was never finished; however we could imagine that its central courtyard may have been somewhat similar to Ferns despite the difference in scale.

A second example in Tipperary, Castle Grace - another enclosure castle of later thirteenth-century date - shared the 'towered-keeps' emphasis on corner towers as well as the elaborate fenestration evident at Ferns and Lea's (fig. 14). Castle Grace appears to have prioritised domes-

*Lea Castle, Co. Laois: the story so far*



*ABOVE: Fig. 12. Ferns Castle, Co. Wexford. Note similarity to Lea and Tullowmacjames.*

*BELOW: Fig. 13. Tullowmacjames, Tipperary, from the south.*





*Fig. 14. Castle Grace, Co. Tipperary, from the south.*



*Fig. 15. Ballyboy, Tipperary. The chamber tower, facing north-west.*

	Carlow	Terryglass	Lea	Ferns
<b>Family</b>	Marshal	Butler	Fitz Gerald	De Valence
<b>Date</b>	Pre-1225	?	Post- 1250	Post-1260
<b>No. of Floors</b>	3	2?	4	3
<b>Evidence of a forebuilding</b>	X	X	√	?
<b>North-side entrance</b>	√	√	√	?
<b>Entrance at second floor</b>	X	X	√	?
<b>Chapel</b>	X	X	√	√
<b>Equal size towers</b>	√	X	√	X
<b>Original main-space vaults</b>	X	X	√	√
<b>Mural stairs</b>	√	X	√	X
<b>Spiral stairs</b>	X	√	X	√
<b>Trefoils</b>	X	X	√	√
<b>Use of oiletts</b>	X	X	√	√
<b>Squinch</b>	X	X	√	X

*Table 1: Features of ‘Towered-keeps’*

tic space similar to Ferns and Lea. Much further down the social hierarchy is Ballyboy, Co. Tipperary, a chamber-tower that had a very similar plan to the 'towered-keep' but on a smaller scale with somewhat recessed towers. (fig. 15).

It is not my intention here to suggest that all of these castles have a direct relationship to the 'towered-keeps', but rather to highlight that it is possible to discuss other castles in terms of their similarities to the 'group', thereby demonstrating that the original classification is beyond rigid. It is imperative that we endeavour to broaden our understandings of castles rather than trying to push them into uncompromising frameworks based solely on architectural design that have no appreciation for how people may have used these buildings in the past.

### **Bibliography**

Bradley, J. 1999. 'Early Urban Development in Laois', in G. Lane (ed). *Laois: history and society*. Dublin.

Calendar of Documents Relating to Ireland, ed H. S. Sweetman. 5 vols. (London, 1867-73).

Dempsey, K. 2016. 'Free-standing rectangular halls and chamber-towers in thirteenth century Ireland', in *Château Gaillard 27* (2016), Publication du CRAHM – Presses Universitaires de Caen. pp. 113-119.

Dempsey, K. 2015. 'Lea Castle: an architectural description', in *Lea Castle: a Preliminary Report*. Portarlinton Arts and Heritage Committee.

Empey, 1985, 'The Norman Period, 1185-1500', in Nolan (ed.), *Tipperary: History and Society*, 71-91. Geography Publications: Dublin

Leask, H. G. 1937 'Irish Castles. 1180-1310. *Archaeological Journal* 93, 143-99.

Leask, H. G. 1941. *Irish Castles*. Dundalk: Dundalgan Press.

McNeill, T. 1992. The origins of tower-houses. *Archaeology Ireland*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Spring, 1992), pp. 13-14. Wordwell: Dublin.

McNeill, T. 1997. *Castles in Ireland: Feudal Power in a Gaelic World*. London: Routledge.

Mesqui, J. 1987. 'Le château de Romefort à Ciron', In *Congrès archéologique de France*. 142e session. Bas-Berry: France.

Myles, F. 2015. 'Historic Landscape Assessment', in *Lea Castle: A Preliminary Report*. Portarlinton Arts and Heritage Committee.

O'Connor, K. 2001. 'Anglo-Norman castles in Co. Laois' in G. Lane (ed). *Laois: history and society*. Dublin.

O'Keefe, T. 1990. The Archaeology of Norman Castles in Ireland Part 2: Stone Castles. *Archaeology Ireland*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Winter, 1990), pp. 20-2.

O'Keefe, T. & Coughlan M.; 2003, '*The chronology and formal affinities of the Ferns donjon, Co. Wexford*'. Available as pdf: [https://www.academia.edu/6313575/T.\\_O'Keefe\\_and\\_M.\\_Coughlan\\_2003\\_The\\_chronology\\_and\\_formal\\_affinities\\_of\\_the\\_Ferns\\_donjon\\_Co.\\_Wexford](https://www.academia.edu/6313575/T._O'Keefe_and_M._Coughlan_2003_The_chronology_and_formal_affinities_of_the_Ferns_donjon_Co._Wexford)

O'Keefe, T. 2013. 'Halls, 'hall-houses' and tower-houses: disentangling the needlessly entangled', in the *Castle Studies Group Journal*, 27: 298-307.

Orpen, G. H. 1911-20. *Ireland under the Normans*, 5 vols. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Stalley, R. A. 1971. *Architecture and Sculpture in Ireland*. Gill & Macmillan: Dublin.

Sweetman, D. 1995. *Irish Castles & Fortified Houses*. Dublin: Country House.

Sweetman, D. 1995. *Archaeological Inventory of Co. Laois*. Office of Public Works: Dublin.

### **Acknowledgements**

My thanks to Dr Kieran O'Connor and Professor Tadhg O'Keefe for their support. I wish to extend my gratitude to local historian P. J. Goode for alerting me to the existence of the wonderful antiquarian drawing of Lea Castle. Thanks also to the Heritage Council of Ireland for their support of the Lea Castle Conservation Group in their aim to enhance the understanding of this underappreciated castle and landscape.