

## Clonmel Excavations – 3

### *South-east corner of medieval walled town: test investigations*

---

By Orla Scully

#### Introduction

These test excavations were carried out in August 1992 and March 1993 under licence No. 92E132 from the Office of Public Works. The investigation was funded by the developer, Mr. Brian O'Connell of Concre Development Company Ltd., Crecora, Co. Limerick and took place at Nos. 5-7 New Quay, Clonmel (See Fig. 1).

The proposed development was to include a basement car park with an associated hydraulic lift. Clonmel Corporation requested that an archaeological testing be carried out prior to granting permission.

The testing was largely carried out by mechanical excavator, except where walls were exposed. These were exposed and cleaned by hand.

#### Trenches A-F1

**Trench A** (see Fig. 2) was dug east/west for a distance of 6.40 m. The town wall was located at the western end of this cutting. The wall (Town Wall) was just below modern ground level and stood to a height of *circa* 2.50 m. The base of the wall was only briefly exposed as the bottom of the trench rapidly filled with water. The wall exhibited a slight batter (*circa* 0.20 m from top to base).

No footing or construction trench for the wall was evident. The wall was 0.80 m in width, built to large undressed stones bonded with a hard greyish mortar, and having a rubble core. The wall was well faced with random coursing. In places a thick render survived on the wall, particularly on the upper levels. The wall was built on a gravel substratum.

**Trench B** was excavated at right angles to Trench A in order to expose the north/south line of the town wall. The town wall continued southwards for 5.33 m. At this point there was a break in the wall, 1 m in width, which was faced on both sides. This had been backfilled with a mortar rich rubble. This break may have functioned as a small gateway or as an aid to drainage, as similar sluices were found in the Cork City wall (Maurice Hurley, pers. comm.) South of the faced break the town wall continued, but at a much reduced level.

A later wall was built on top of the remains of the town wall (Wall 3). This later wall (Wall 2) continued south for *circa* 5.5 m, where it turned to the east. *Circa* 2.30 m further east it returned to the south. Where the wall began its southern return, it was abutted at the east by another wall (Wall 4), which continued eastwards to the property boundary. Beneath this arrangement

---

\*For Clonmel Excavations 1 and 2, see *THJ* 1995, pp. 152-174. For Introduction (by Patrick Holland) to series, see *THJ* 1995, p. 151. Editor, *THJ*.

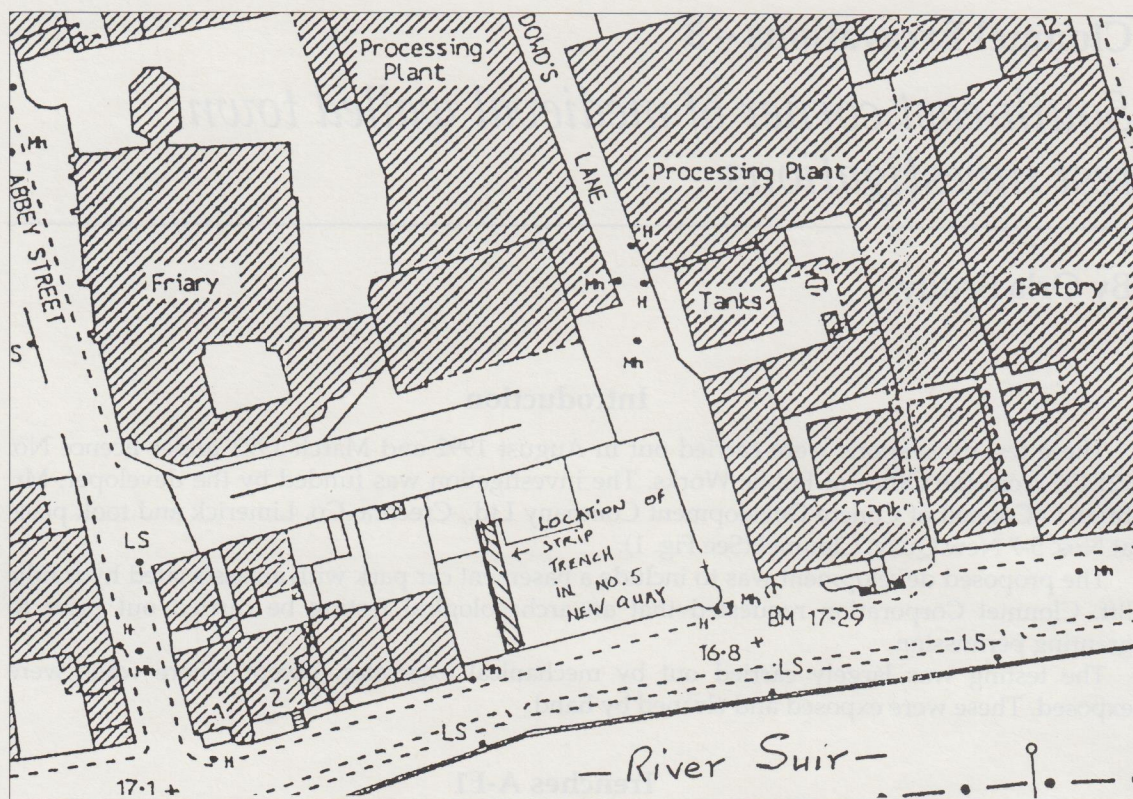


Fig. 1 – location map at 1:1000.

of later walls the base of the town wall survived. It continued on the same alignment as the northern section (Town Wall 1).

**Trench B1** was located 8.70 m south of, and parallel to, Trench A. At the western end of this trench the semi-circular base of a mural tower was uncovered. The tower had been demolished before Walls 2 and 4 were built, and several footing stones were laid under Wall 4 to consolidate its foundations where the wall passed over the edge of the remains of the tower.

**Trench E** was excavated north/south from the southern face of Wall 4 to the property boundary at the south. No evidence for the tower remained, though the trench was excavated to a depth of *circa* 1.65 m; this was below the depth where the tower was located elsewhere. The stratigraphy of the section exposed consisted of a rubble overburden for the upper 1.10 m. This overlay a band of reddish brown silty clay (*circa* 0.20 m in depth), which in turn overlay a layer of dark brown humic silt with a high gravel content. The base of the trench exposed a yellowish brown gravelly clay.

**Trench F** was located 1.60 m west of Trench B and was roughly parallel to it, but extended further south. A substantial section of the western arc of the tower base was revealed in this trench. Contrary to expectations, no trace of the western return of the town wall was found. To the south the tower had suffered damage, and the curve of the wall became indistinct in a general rubble fill.

**Trench F1** was a continuation of Trench F to trace the outline of the tower at the south. No

further evidence remained and the rubble layers of Trenches F and F1 were contaminated with a strong-smelling diesel or petrol, suggesting that the area may have been disturbed by tanks.

### Other Stratigraphy

Other stratigraphy recorded included the section exposed in Trench A, i.e. the layers abutting the town wall in the area where the ditch would have been located. The overburden was a pale brown sandy soil which had a high mortar content, with frequent red brick inclusions. This layer was 1.10 m thick and appeared to be deliberate backfilling possibly for levelling prior to later building. Post medieval pottery (Buckley ware), clay pipes and modern glass were the only finds recovered.

Beneath this layer was a level cobbled surface. This extended over the entire area of Trench A. The stones were irregular in size, but were densely packed. Removal of the cobbles revealed a rubble layer in a matrix of light brown sandy soil which contained red brick fragments and mortar.

The depth of this layer varied between 0.10 m and 0.35 m. Below this was an organic silt, blackish in colour, which was *circa* 0.10 m deep. This layer had a high charcoal content, animal bones, crushed red brick fragments and mortar. The layer extended from the town wall at the west for *circa* 4 m, to where it abutted a thick layer of silty clay – presumably derived from flooding and subsequent silt deposition of the river. This was at least 0.50 m thick and overlay a stony layer which contained mortar. Below this the rising water levels prevented examination. The trench was dug to a depth of 2.50 m.

### Intra Mural Layers

**Trenches C and D:** No traces of archaeological features were unearthed in these trenches. In summary, the layers exposed were dark brown “garden” soil with flecks of mortar, charcoal and some modern ceramic pipe. This A horizon overlay a lighter brown subsoil which had a high stone content. Both layers were devoid of any dateable finds and appeared to be undisturbed.

**Trench G** was located in property No. 5, New Quay. A substantial trench running north/south extended from the street frontage for 16.30 m northwards. (See Fig. 1). This trench was opened to investigate the intra mural layers and to locate any remains of the western return of the town wall.

As was the case in Trenches C and D in property No. 7, the layers exposed in this trench consisted of a homogeneous brown garden soil which overlay natural boulder clay – a lighter brown/orange clay. No trace of the southern town wall was found.

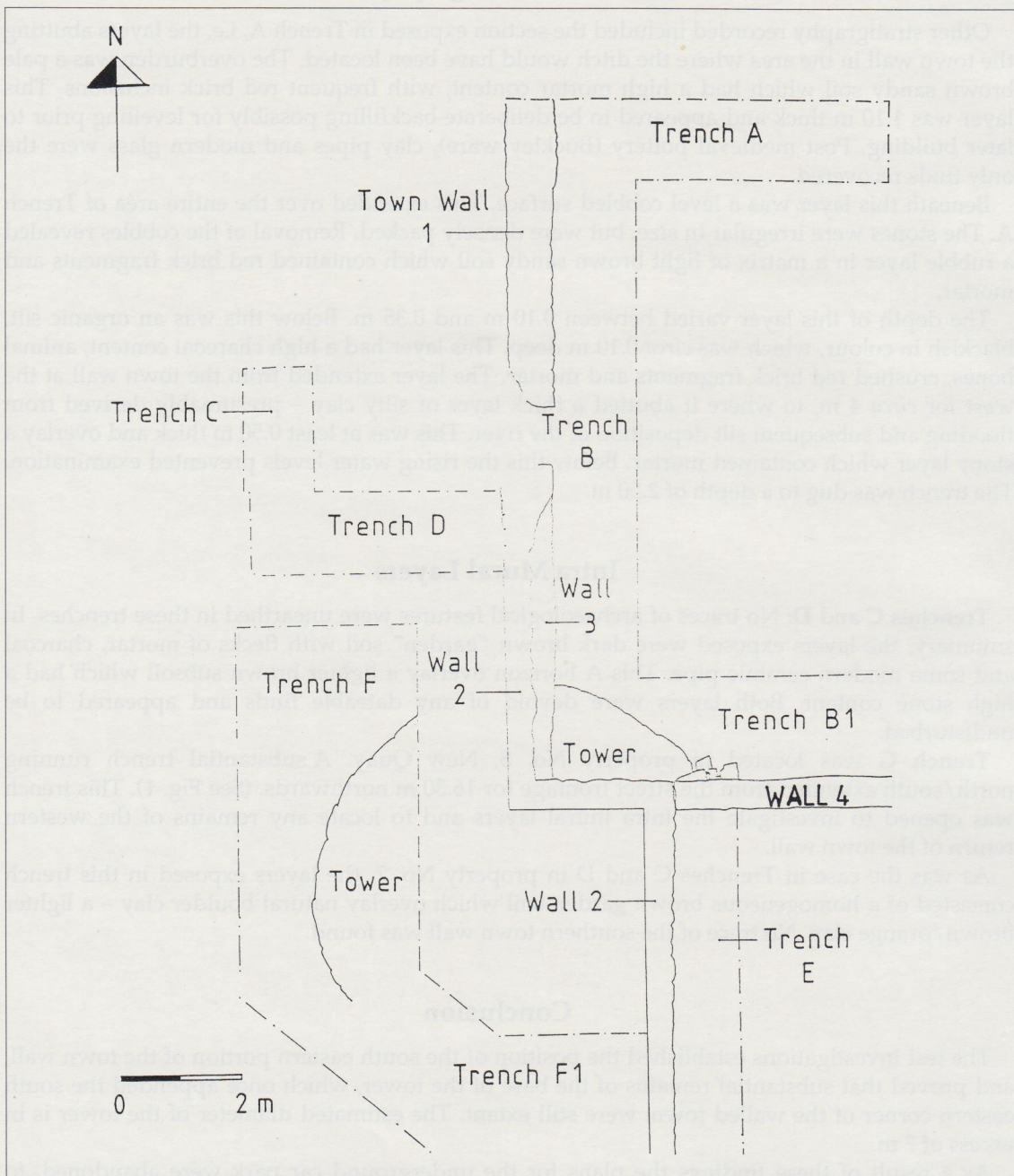
### Conclusion

The test investigations established the position of the south eastern portion of the town wall, and proved that substantial remains of the base of the tower, which once appended the south eastern corner of the walled town, were still extant. The estimated diameter of the tower is in excess of 7 m.

As a result of these findings the plans for the underground car park were abandoned, to avoid disturbance of these important archaeological features.

# **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

My thanks are due to Ms. Sarah McCutcheon for her assistance in the testing, and to Dr. Brendan Ó Riordáin for his co-operation and advice when visiting the site during the test investigation.



**Fig. 2** – location of test pits at No. 7, New Quay, Clonmel.