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# 'The Munster Hotel', Cathedral Street, Thurles: Archaeological Excavations 1998-1999

By Paul Stevens

## Introduction

Archaeological excavations (EO98000) were carried out in late 1998 and early 1999, in advance of the redevelopment of the Munster Hotel and garden. The site measured 52m north-south by 24-28m in width and is situated opposite the cathedral in Cathedral Street, on the east/left bank of the River Suir, in the town of Thurles (Fig. 1). Development included the demolition of the existing hotel building, and construction of a larger three-storey over-basement building, car park and entrance to the rear. Excavation was carried out in the area of the proposed basement and revealed medieval and post-medieval settlement dating from the thirteenth century onwards. The earliest features were heavily-truncated structures including houses, rubbish pits, wells, postholes and drainage ditches. Analysis of the contents of the pits revealed a differential disposal of household, agricultural and building waste. The site was also redeveloped in the early eighteenth century. All work was carried out by Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd. (Archaeological Consultants), and funded by the developer Clancy Construction Ltd.

## Background History

The earliest reference to Thurles comes in AD 844, when St. Ciarán visited Dúrlas to punish *Feidhlimid mac Crimthainn* for his raid on Clonmacnoise (Carey & Farrelly, 1985, 85). The place-name Thurles is an anglicisation of the Irish *Dúrlas Éile Uí Fhógartaigh*, meaning the strong fort of the O'Fogarty's of Éile. Thurles is again mentioned in 1174, when the Anglo-Norman army was defeated by an Irish army at Thurles, although there is no reference to a castle or town. The first castle in Thurles was an earthen motte, probably established between 1185 and 1195 (on the site of the present market place) by Walter Theobald. Subsequently, a fledgling town developed along one axial road, Main Street, later Liberty Square & Cathedral Street (Empey, 1989, 32). By 1300, the community of Thurles is referred to as a corporate settlement (Thomas, 1992, 192) and Thurles received a murage grant in 1356-57.<sup>1</sup> The town wall enclosed the town on the right (west) bank of the River Suir from the west castle motte and Nag's Gate to the river (Fig. 2).

Outside the walls two distinct suburbs developed, an eastern suburb, later referred to as 'Brogmal-over the bridge' and 'Codrath-outside the walls' to the west (Laffan, 1911, 141). Significantly, the eastern suburb was larger than the walled town by 1667, and also contained two kilns and one forge (*ibid*). This eastern suburb also contained the parish church, first mentioned in 1294, either at St. Mary's or the Carmelite Friary (site of the present Cathedral) (Nolan, 1989, 4). The Carmelite Friary was established, opposite the site, between 1291 - 1300 (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1988, 23). Therefore, it is likely that the establishment of this eastern suburb was also in the later thirteenth century.



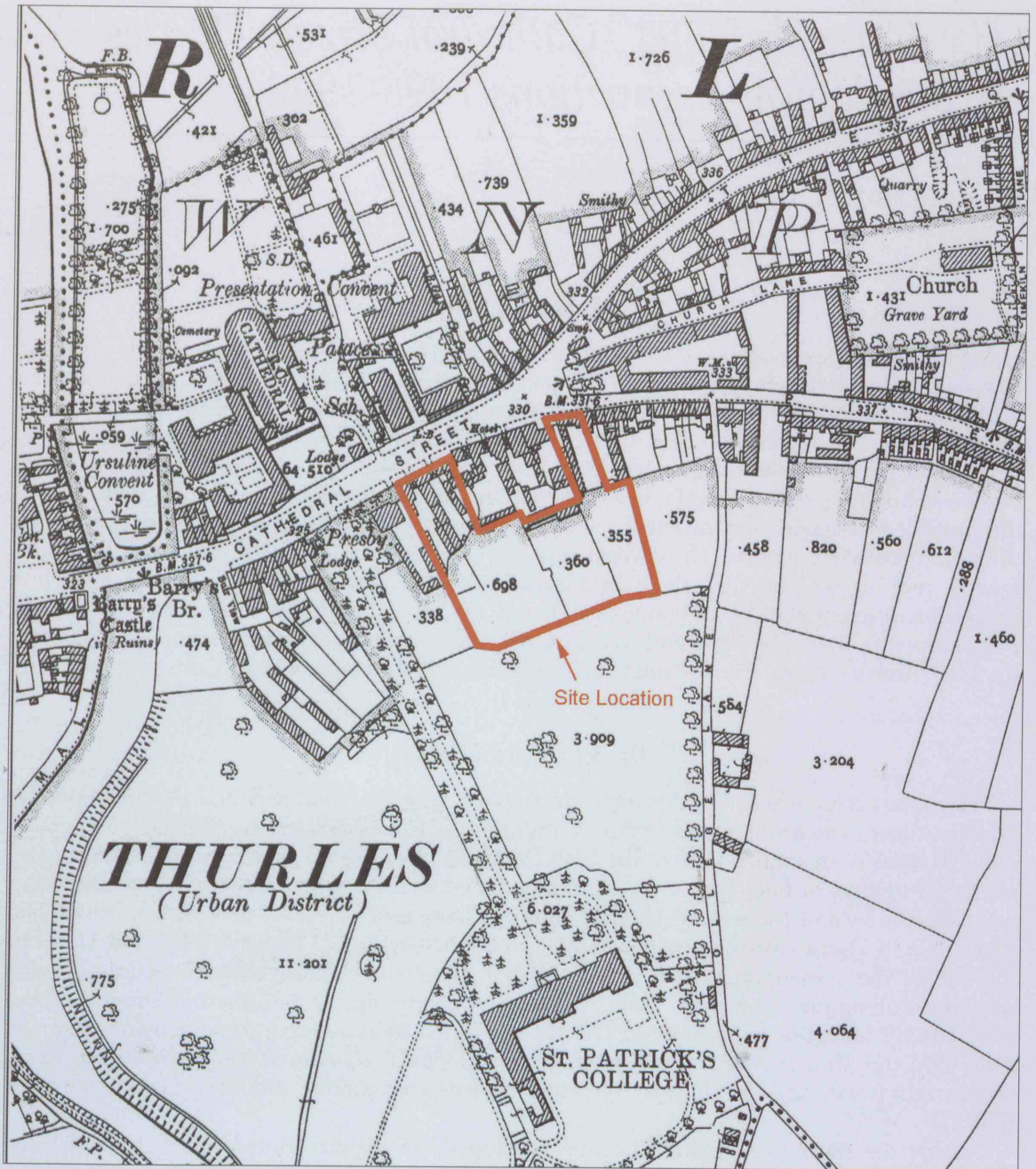


Fig. 1: Location Map (based on 2nd Ed. O.S.).

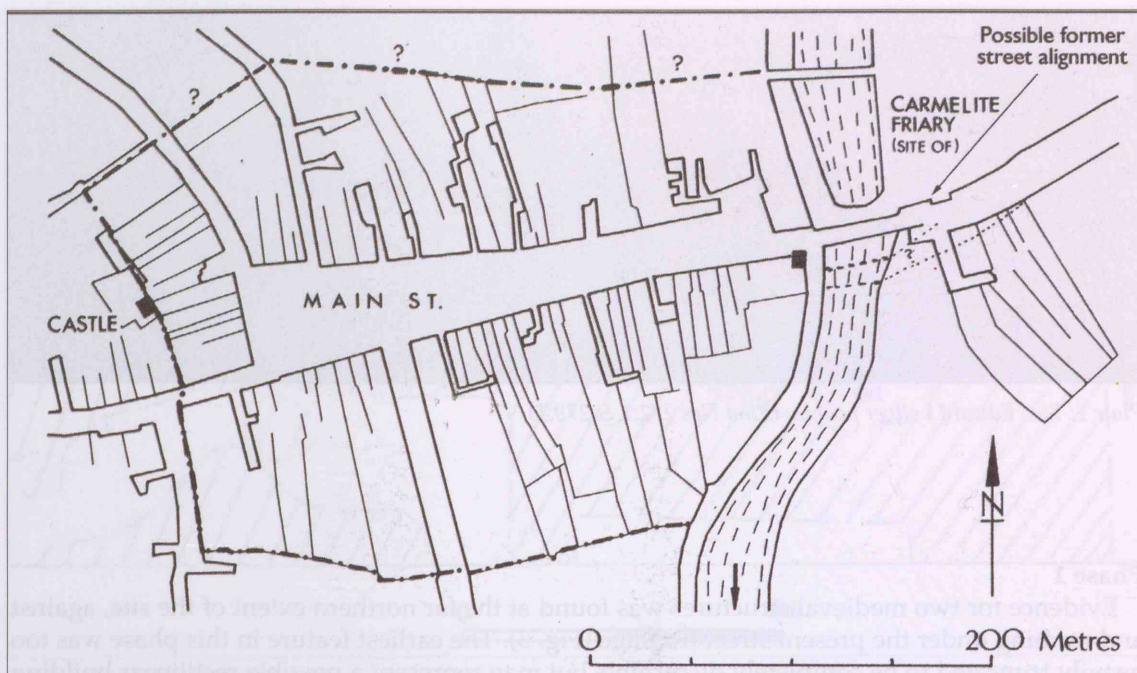


Fig. 2: Plan of Medieval Thurles (after Bradley).

## The Excavations

### Topography

The natural topography of the site is that of a flood plain, within the midland carboniferous limestone lowlands. Natural glacial boulder clay subsoil overlying river gravels, slopes gently southwards to the River Suir, where a fording point was formed between several natural islands within the river.

### Medieval Settlement

The earliest archaeological activity on the site dated to the later twelfth/early thirteenth century as attested by two coins<sup>2</sup> dated to the reign of Edward I (Plate 1), and Redcliffe, Saintonge, Leinster and Thurles-type wares, dated to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup> Medieval occupation evidence consisted of two phases of heavily truncated buildings fronting the street (Plate 2) and long strip gardens (burgage plots) to the rear. Phase 1 consisted of a timber building, which survived as a slot and post-holes cluster, and iron-working activity fronting the street. Phase 2 replaced this on a slightly different alignment and was represented by two houses, delineated by a series of interconnecting east-west linear drainage ditches or gullies. Several isolated refuse pits also survived towards the centre and rear of the site, some of which pre-dated the linear plot boundaries, which appeared to be formalised in Phase 2. These phases are described in more detail below.





Plate 1: Two Edward I silver pennies (Find Nos 282:1 & 279:1).

### Phase 1

Evidence for two medieval structures was found at the far northern extent of the site, against and running under the present street frontage (Fig. 3). The earliest feature in this phase was too heavily truncated to be completely discernible but may represent a possible rectilinear building (Structure A), measuring 6.5m+ by 4m+ in width, orientated northeast-southwest, and made up of two surviving truncated sides: a southwest beam slot wall (Feature No. 054), and a series of post holes making up the perpendicular southeastern wall (091, 092, 158 & 159). Within this arrangement was the partial remains of an informal hearth (107). A third wall may be represented by two further post-holes (160 & 105), that continued into the northern corner of the site. However, these were both subject to diesel-contamination. Cutting the north end of this structure was a short linear gully (120), possibly representing a beam slot for a replacement building.

To the west of Structure A were the disturbed remains of an iron-working feature, possibly the remains of a furnace (071 & 072); an irregular linear east-west flue, over 3.65m long, 0.88m wide and 0.45m deep containing iron slag, vitrified clay and charcoal but with an irregular profile and fire-reddened flat base.

### Phase 2

Structure A and Slot 120 were truncated by a large linear feature (086), probably representing the southern wall of a much more substantial sill-beam type timber-frame building extending under the present street (Structure B, Fig. 4). However, no trace of a return survived. This linear feature was orientated east-northeast west-northwest, and measured over 11m long, continuing eastwards into the baulk. It had a U-profile and a fire-reddened base and contained two charcoal-flecked silty fills with both local and Minety ware type pottery inclusions.

A third rectilinear building (Structure C, Fig. 4) was located in the far northeast corner of the site, running into the baulk and under the modern street frontage. The structure was oriented northwest-southeast and measured 7m+ long by 4.4m wide. The building was evidenced by three linear beam-slots with either concave profile or U-shaped profile containing a sandy or silty fill and a single sherd of local type glazed ware. The southwest slot also contained packing stones from a sill-beam.

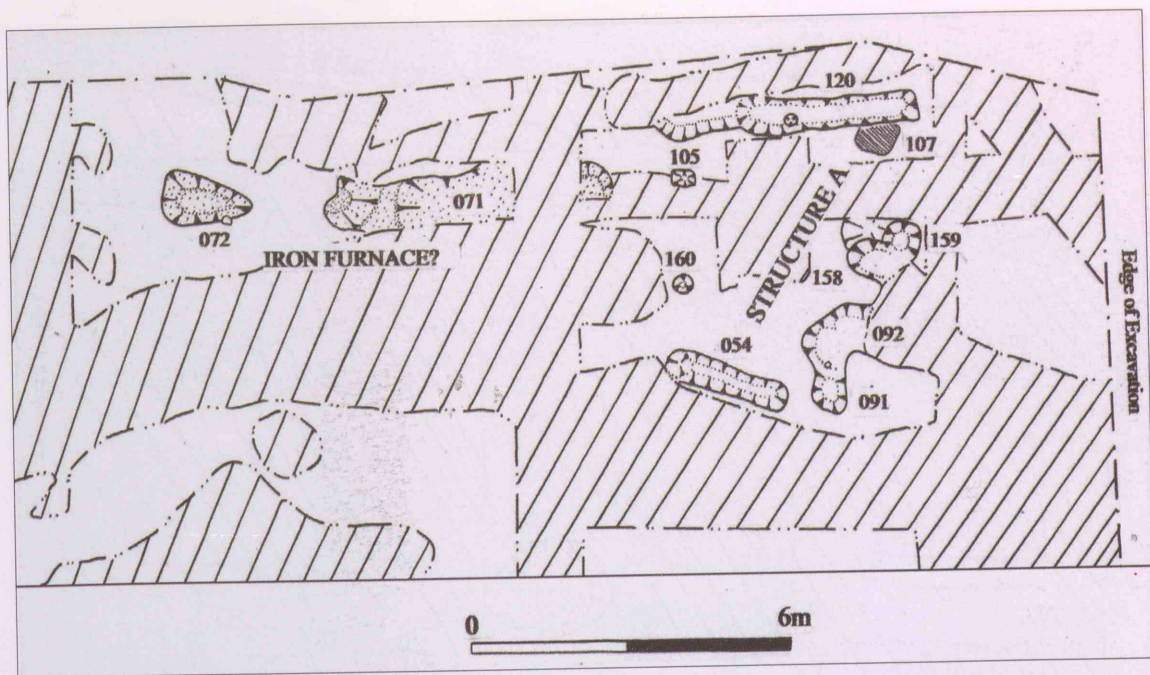


Fig. 3: Phase 1: Medieval Street Frontage.

To the rear of Structures B & C were a number of inter-cutting drainage ditches, suggesting both structures were contemporary. The earliest of these (124) measured 13m+ long, 1.28m wide, ran roughly parallel to the street frontage into the east baulk and cut Structure A and the iron-working activity (072). This was itself cut by an overlapping large drainage ditch (Feature No. 085, Plate 2 and Figure 4), measuring 13.7m long x 2.1m wide x 1m deep, which also cut the furnace and extended southwest, parallel to and respecting the rear wall of Structure C, terminating in line with Structure C and marked by a posthole. The line of this ditch is continued by a further ditch (103), extending into the west baulk, at considerable variance to the modern street line.

### Phase 3

The alignment of Structures A, B & C and the accompanying ditches show that the road these structures fronted probably differed from the present street alignment, veering away to the southwest. If the medieval road continued east on this alignment it would lead to a river crossing or ford some way downstream of the existing bridge (Figs 1, 2). As the present bridge is thought to date to the fourteenth or fifteenth century at the latest, its construction may have necessitated a road realignment.

It may also be the case that the eastern suburb was formally planned out at this point with individual narrow burgage plots, following an initial but short phase of less planned occupation. At least two medieval burgage plot boundary gullies (236 & 252, Fig. 5) were revealed in excavation as narrow parallel gullies stretching back from the road, a uniform width of around 6.1m apart. However, the rest of the site was similarly sub-divided by later



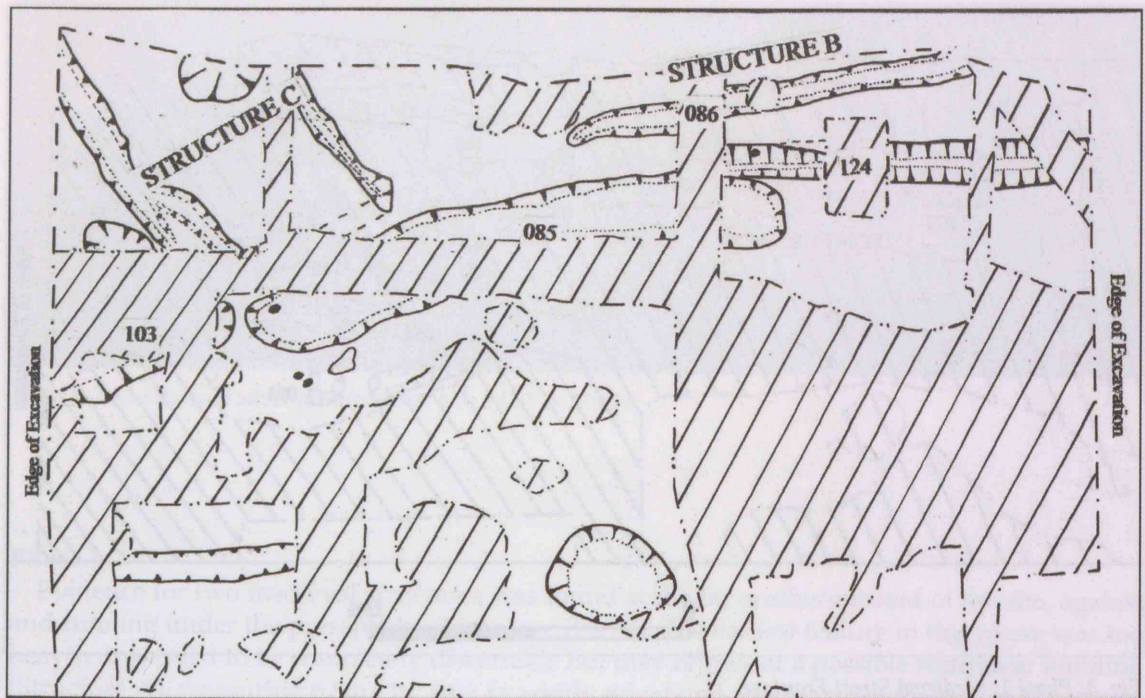


Fig. 4: Phase 2: Medieval Street Frontage.

gullies, possibly representing re-cuts. Boundaries superimposed on the landscape in the medieval period were maintained and preserved through the post-medieval period and survived to the mid 1900s in some cases. These plots do not match with Structures A, B or C and therefore represent a third phase of the site, although no associated structures were revealed.

Gully (252) survived for over 28.3m in length, measuring 0.5m wide and over 0.4m deep and containing three gravelly silt fills, containing two bone artefacts and several sherds of 13/14th century cooking ware. To the east a second gully (C236) ran parallel and measured over 10m long, 0.3m wide and 0.15m deep, containing a silty fill. A third undated ditch ran parallel to feature 236 (making a plot width of 5.5m), measuring 0.2m wide and 0.07m deep, and contained a sandy fill. However, it is possible that this (and other boundary features) date to a later phase.

### Domestic Evidence

On an urban site such as this one, the survival of cut features outweighs that of upstanding features such as houses by virtue of the levels of later truncation that occurred. Therefore, disposal of household, foul, agricultural waste is often the only archaeological legacy of an urban settlement. Pits of varying sizes and function were revealed from this excavation, some lined quite carefully with stone, moss, or wicker and some cut by plot boundary gullies, others lying within the burgage plots. Palaeo-environmental analysis of the contents of these pits revealed a large variation in the usage of the pit-type features, not apparent from excavation





*Plate 2: Medieval features by street frontage, from east.*

alone. Pits were used to dispose of industrial waste, household food waste, builders waste, agricultural waste, and one pit was in fact shown to be a well. Pits were often left open for some time, and regularly cleared out and re-used, so very few contained their original contents. Significantly, no evidence of cess-pits was noted from the site. The practice of digging cesspits was abandoned after the Black Death (c.1348) and the plagues of the fifteenth century.

One pit (409, Fig. 5), located in the east of the site, produced evidence of crop processing. This was a large, circular pit (2.2m in diameter, 1m deep) with a U-shaped profile. It contained three fills, a humic basal deposit, a fibrous peat and an upper silty fill. The primary fill contained a sherd of 13th/14th century Saintonge pottery.<sup>4</sup> The organic fill contained seven identifiable insect remains, typical of an urban environment.<sup>5</sup> The upper dark and silty fill contained preserved seeds of the dock family,<sup>6</sup> and many seeds of cultivation weed.<sup>7</sup> The seeds were also very well preserved, suggesting primary deposition.<sup>8</sup> One grain of wheat was also found and several fragments of grass and straw suggesting waste from crop processing that was discarded into the pit.

Two medieval 'stepped' pits (316 & 254, Fig. 5) located at the southern end of the site, contained domestic refuse or compost. Both were circular and had a concave profile, measuring 2.8m in average diameter and 2.8m & 2.35m deep, with a step or shelf halfway down. Pit 316 was obviously used for the disposal of household refuse. It contained a black organic basal fill with 11 sherds of local glazed cooking ware, animal bone, wood fragments, an iron nail and a fragment of timber joinery, possibly from a wall frame, sealed by a stony sandy clay with large



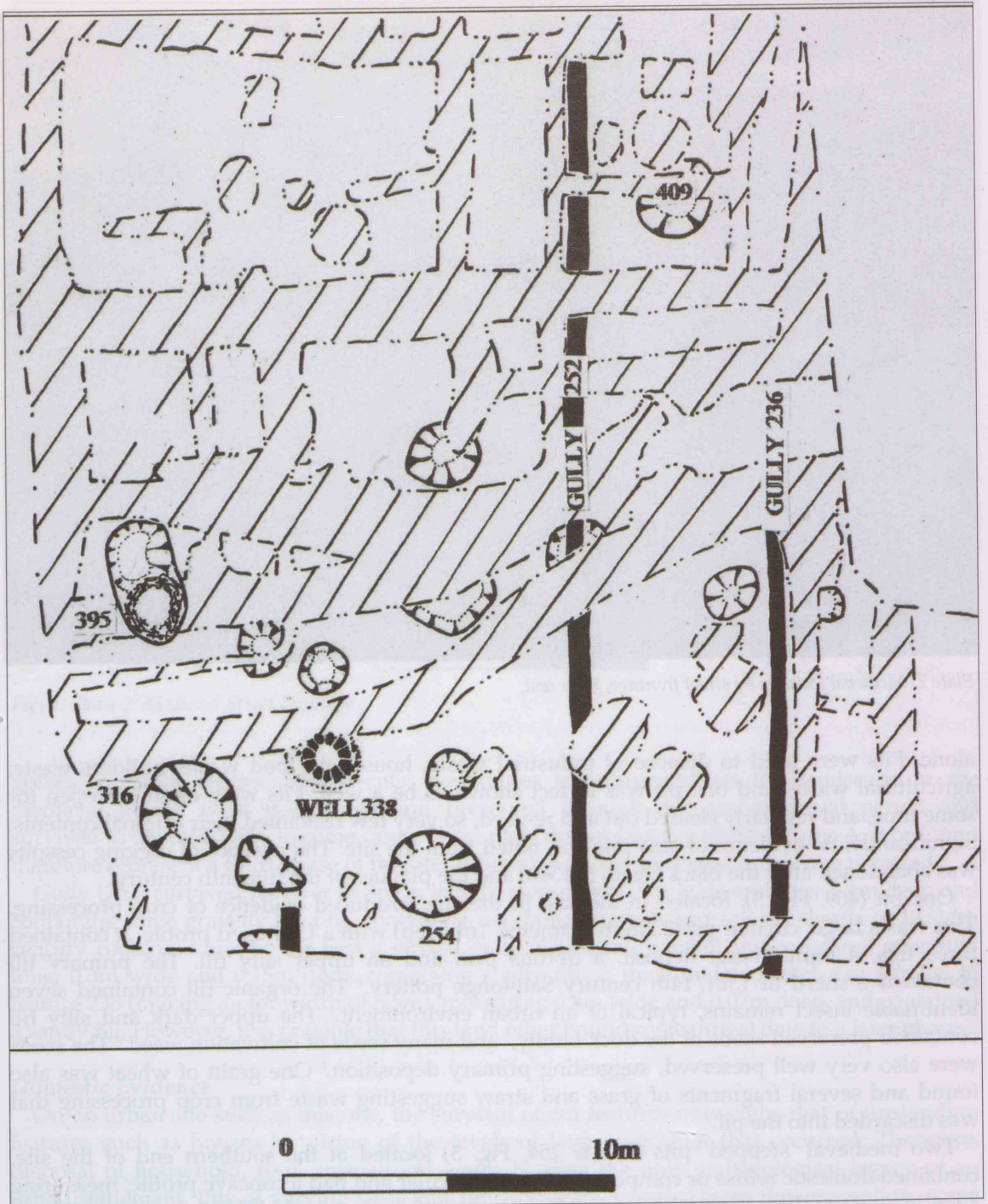


Fig. 5: Medieval Garden Plots.



Plate 3: Wicker-lined well (C395).

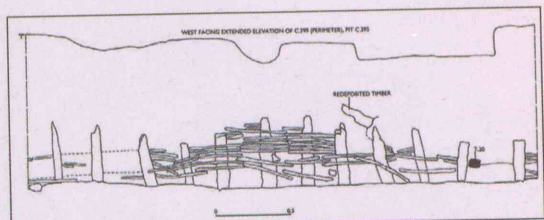


Fig. 6: Detail of wicker lining (395).

stones. The organic fill contained charred plant remains, including cereals, cultivated pea and hazelnut shell fragments, the condition of which indicated charred waste from a swept-up floor layer deposited in the pit.<sup>9</sup> This fill also produced two identifiable insect fragments. However, this sample merely indicated that the fill may have dried out or completely decomposed in antiquity.<sup>10</sup>

Analysis of an unusual medieval pit-like feature (395, Fig. 5, Plate 3) produced evidence to suggest that it was in fact a well. The circular feature was 1.5m in diameter, 1m deep, and had straight sides, lined with boulder clay and wicker-work, and had a flat unlined base. The wicker was constructed of interwoven rods around regularly spaced upright sails and clay, forming a water-tight double skin (Fig. 6). The rods were primarily of hazel.<sup>11</sup> The hazel used was very uniform in diameter and mostly two or three years of age, indicating selection from a carefully managed underwood. The split or roundwood sails or uprights were almost entirely of ash and very occasionally hazel, and were also gathered from a managed woodland.<sup>12</sup> The main backfill was a highly-humified organic peat that contained sherds of 13th/14th century pottery, loose wickerwork, oak plank and roundwood fragments. The seed remains from this fill were mostly damp-loving plant seeds, easily blown into the pit.<sup>13</sup> However, the limited number indicated that the pit may have been covered or sealed rapidly.<sup>14</sup> A small but significant assemblage of insects was also recovered from this primary pit fill. Most were from the decomposer and 'outdoor' group of beetles, but there was also a small number of foul decomposers present. The pit primarily contained wet decomposing plant material. While some of the species present could have occupied a cesspit<sup>15</sup> the numbers are too small to say that this was definitely its function. However, no 'house' fauna elements were found and the number of ground beetles present would suggest that the pit was open to the elements. Whatever its original function, the material which the sample represents does not have an indoor origin and was unlikely to have been dumped household rubbish.<sup>16</sup> From all this data, Feature 395 was carefully constructed from selected timber, to make a water-tight receptacle, possibly covered from the wind (though not completely sealed). Its fill contained no evidence of cess or indoor refuse, except some pottery, and instead contained wet outdoor material, some possibly growing within the fill. Therefore, the most likely use of this pit was as a well, or water store, although the original contents may have been cleaned out. When the pit was full, it was completely sealed by a re-deposited natural clay capping.





Plate 4: Stone lined well (C388).

An undated, possibly medieval, stone-lined well (Feature 338, Fig. 5, Plate 4) was located in the southwest of the site. The partly truncated well was circular with a maximum external diameter of 1.6m and an internal diameter of 0.8m, dry-stone built with courses of uncut limestone blocks which also contained a fragment of an undressed quern stone. The well could only be safely excavated to a depth of 2m, but revealed a lower humic peat fill, sealed by a stony silty clay backfill. The lower fill revealed animal bone, wood, plant inclusions, and a small but interesting assemblage of beetles. The character of the beetle assemblage revealed a number of habitat groups, the most significant group of which was an 'outdoor' or background group of taxa, made up primarily of ground beetles. This is unsurprising given that a well would be open and act as a pit-fall trap for species that crawl on the ground surface. A number of these species are found in cultivated and disturbed ground<sup>17</sup> and give some indication of the surrounding environment. Others<sup>18</sup> are thought to have come to Britain and Ireland in wine-caskets (Lindroth, 1974), and may have been brought on site with other materials and ended up in the well as *ejectema*. It is clear that the well was either deliberately filled in with rubbish or was gradually filled with ejected and accumulating material after going out of use. The diversity of beetles in this sample was very high and indicated an extremely mixed origin, perhaps indicating the well may have stood open for a long time, allowing a gradual infilling with surrounding surface rubbish, colonisation by plants and the fauna that this would produce.<sup>19</sup>

#### Phase 4: Post-medieval Occupation

The lack of datable archaeological evidence from the 15th & 16th centuries suggests that settlement ceased on this site and structures were not built during the late medieval period. However, two things may contest this conclusion. Firstly, the bulk of the datable material recovered from the medieval features was pottery, and from this later period was aceramic.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, truncation on the same alignment may have removed all trace of an earlier building, leaving only the earlier medieval structures, due to their alignment. However, evidence of seventeenth century occupation was observed from three dated features (98, 131 & 104, Fig 7).

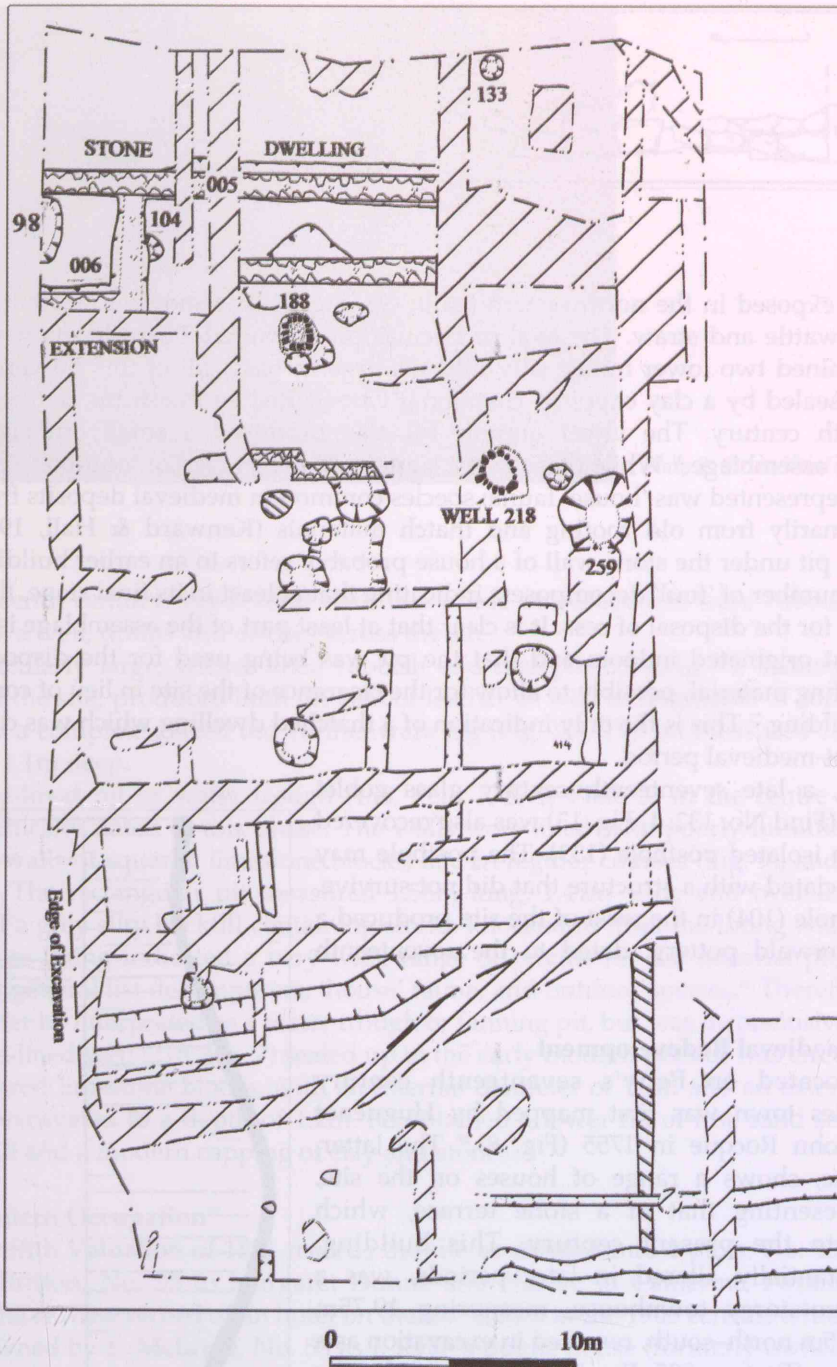


Fig. 7: Post-medieval features.



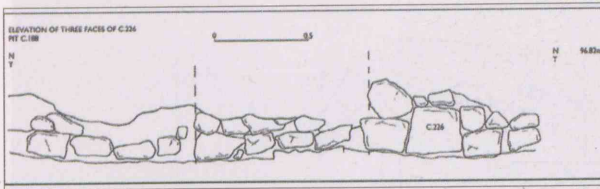


Fig. 8: Detail of stone lining (188).

A pit partly exposed in the northwestern baulk (98, Fig. 7) was shown to contain building waste, thatch, wattle and straw. The oval or circular pit measured 2.84m in diameter, 0.49m deep and contained two lower humic silty fills; the organic basal fill of this pit contained no finds but was sealed by a clay capping, containing Glazed Red earthenware, dating from the mid-seventeenth century. The lower organic fill also produced a small but significantly different beetle assemblage.<sup>21</sup> While there was a significant percentage of 'outdoor' species, the largest group represented was 'house' fauna; species common in medieval deposits from house floors but primarily from old roofing and thatch materials (Kenward & Hall, 1995).<sup>22</sup> The location of this pit under the stone wall of a house probably refers to an earlier building. There is also a small number of 'foul' decomposers indicating that at least in its final stage, the pit was not being used for the disposal of cess. It is clear that at least part of the assemblage is made up of material that originated indoors and that the pit was being used for the disposal of old flooring or roofing material, possibly to allow for the clearance of the site in lieu of construction of the stone building.<sup>23</sup> This is the only indication of a thatched dwelling which was dismantled in the early post-medieval period.

Furthermore, a late seventeenth century glass goblet stem fragment (Find No. 132: 1, Fig. 13) was also recovered from within an isolated posthole (133). The posthole may have been associated with a structure that did not survive. A second posthole (104) in the west of the site produced a sherd of Westerwald pottery, dated to the seventeenth century.<sup>24</sup>

### Phase 5: Post-medieval Redevelopment

Although located on Petty's seventeenth century surveys, Thurles town was first mapped by Huguenot cartographer John Rocque in 1755 (Fig. 8).<sup>25</sup> The latter, although vague, shows a range of houses on the site, probably representing that of a stone terrace, which survived up to the present century. This building, although substantially altered in later periods, was a rectangular two-storey townhouse, measuring 19.75m east-west by 7.5m north-south, revealed in excavation as a rear wall-footing (Feature 005, Fig. 7), 1.2m in width. The building was later extended to the rear (006), and as both buildings sealed pit 098 and postholes 104 and 133, this gave a construction date for this range of between 1650 and 1755, and, architecturally, most likely to date within

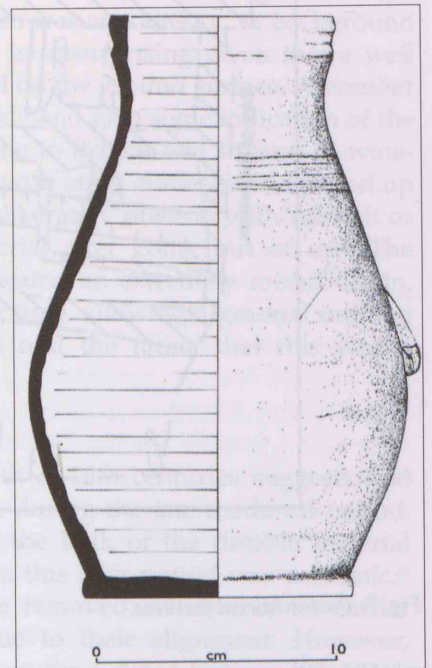


Fig. 10: Glazed red earthenware jug.

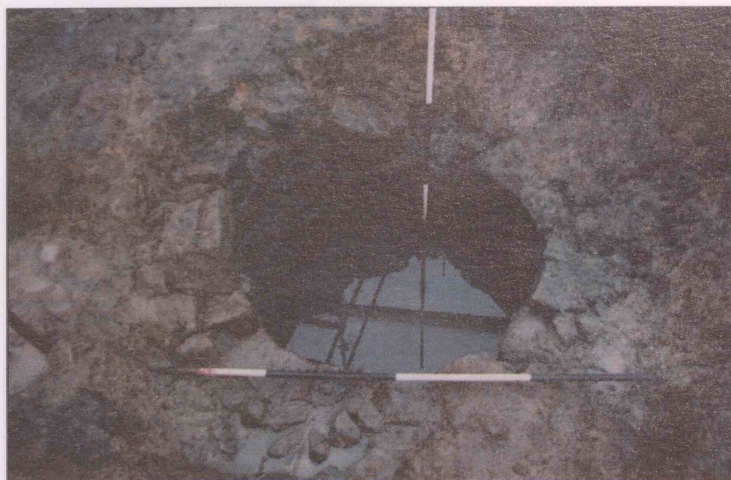


Plate 5: Stone-lined pit (C288).

the eighteenth century. Associated with this phase of occupation were rubbish and cesspits, buildings, a well, drains and ditches across the site.

A particularly large, wicker-lined rubbish and cess pit (257, Fig. 7), located in the eastern section of the site, produced both off-cuts of leather as well as fragments of rope, a slash hook, china and a complete glazed red earthenware jug (Fig. 10). The pit measured 2.2m in diameter and over 1.1m deep.

A stone-lined pit or water trough (188, Figs. 7 & 9, Plate 5) in the centre of the site was stratigraphically dated to this phase. The walls were lined with poorly humified moss behind drystone walls of squared limestone blocks, laid in regular courses (Fig. 9), and a cobbled base (Plate 5). The rectangular pit measured 1.56m long, 1.41m wide and over 0.43m deep, and contained a grey silty backfill containing stones knocked in from the lining wall. Beetles found in the moss lining indicated a very wide range of origins for the material present in the pit, including general list decomposers, 'house' fauna, and outdoor species.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, this feature could either be interpreted as a water trough or tanning pit, but was inconclusive.

A stone-lined well (218: Fig. 7) sealed up in the early modern period, was circular, stone lined with squared limestone blocks, with an internal diameter of 1.3m and an external diameter of 2m, was excavated to a depth of 1.2m. It contained a lower fill of fine sand sealed by a black organic fill and a modern capping of clay and stones.

### Early Modern Occupation<sup>27</sup>

The Griffith Valuation of 1851 records the site as divided into 4 plots: No. 53 was registered to Alice Britton, No. 55 to Margaret Dunne and No. 56 to Catherine Twomey; No. 54 was vacant. The earliest record of an hotel on the site comes in the 1903 census, which lists No. 54 as a hotel owned by P. McBride, No. 53 as J. Ryan's public house (formerly owned by J. Stokes in 1889), No. 55 to Bridget Twomey, also a pub and No. 56 to Edward Murphy as a thatched pub. (2 plots) (Griffiths 1851; after Condon 1989). The Hotel Munster was referred to by name in 1915 (Cork & Munster Trades Directory). Following the acquisition of the properties owned by Mullhall and Callaghan in the 1960s, the hotel was enlarged. However, the current phase of expansion represents the most substantial and total transformation of the site.





Fig. 9: Rocque 1755.



## The Finds

### Precious Metal

A medieval silver ring brooch (Find No. 337:1, Fig. 11, Plate 6), recovered from an isolated deposit, represented the finest artefact from the excavation. The brooch measured 19mm in diameter, 1.5mm high, 1.5mm thick and weighed 1.41g. The silver frame was square in cross section, decorated with gilding and cable decoration along the inner and outer edges (Class 3b after Deevy, 1998). The plano-convex pin was a simple flanged loop. Other local Class 3b examples are known from Kilkenny, Waterford and a figure of a male is recorded on a building at Burke's land Cashel wearing a possible ring brooch. Ring brooches are common to the medieval period and are found on many urban excavations. They were worn at the lapel by men and women alike to fasten cloaks.

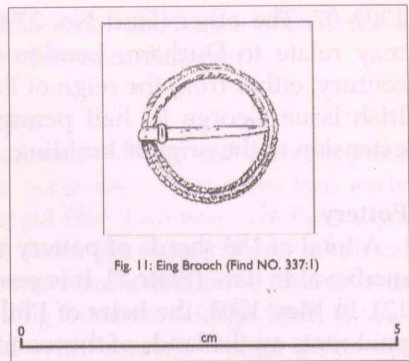


Fig. 11: Ring Brooch (Find NO. 337:1)

Fig. 11: Ring brooch (Find No. 337:1).

### Coins

Three coins were recovered from the excavation site, two silver English sterling pennies<sup>28</sup> the best-preserved example of which (Find No. 282:1, Plate 1) was a silver Class X English sterling penny, minted in Durham at the end of the reign of Edward I (1272–1307), dated from AD



Plate 7: Medieval pottery.



1302–07. The other (Find No. 279:5, Plate 1) was more corroded and read (Civi)tas 'L' which may relate to Durham, London or Lincoln. However, it is also dated from the early 14th century, either from the reign of Edward I or Edward II (AD 1302–1327). The third coin, was an Irish issue George III half penny, dated to 1782, probably placed in the foundations of an extension to the original building.

### Pottery

A total of 186 sherds of pottery were analysed by Clare McCutcheon, of these 96 (51.6%) were medieval in date (Plate 7). It is possible that medieval pottery was made in or near Thurles (Fig. 12). In May 1303, the heirs of Phillip le Croker, David Croker, and William and Agnes Croker paid rents on the lands of the manor of Thurles (White, 1932, 79-80). At that time, surnames were not fixed and a second name could give a good indication of a person's trade (Pine 1965, 12).

TABLE 1  
Pottery Identifications by Clare McCutcheon

Fabric Type	No. of Sherds	Min No. Individuals/Form	Date Range
?Leinster Cooking Ware	1	1 cooking pot	L.12th–14th
Thurles-type glazed ware	85	2 jugs, 1 baking dish	13th–14th
Local cooking ware	4	1 cooking pot, /storage jar	13th–14th
?Minety-type	1	1 tripod pitcher	12th–M.13th
?Redcliffe	1	1 Jug	M.13th–14th
?Saintonge mottled green glazed	2	Jug	13th–14th
Saintonge painted green	1	1 Jug	L.13th–E.14th
North Devon gravel free	2	Jug	17th
North Devon gravel tempered	1	?bowl/jar	17th
North Devon sgraffito	1	Plate	17th
Tin glazed earthenware	1	?bowl	17th
Westerwald	2	Jug	17th
North Devon slipware	1	Plate	18th
Black glazed ware	2	Jars	18th–19th
Mottled ware	11	Cup	18th
White salt glazed stoneware	1	?plate	18th
Creamware	3	Plate	18th
Glazed red earthenware	61	handled bowl	18th–19th
Unglazed red earthenware	4	Plate	18th–19th
Chinaware	(8)	Cup, plate	19th–20th
Stoneware	(3)	Jar	19th–20th

### Glass

A single stem fragment of a late 17th century fluted soda-glass drinking glass or *Façon de Venise* (Find No. 132:1, Fig. 13) was recovered from an isolated post-hole. This clear stem fragment measured 60mm long and 30–14mm in diameter and was broken at the oval foot.

### Stone

Two stone objects were recovered; a medieval quernstone fragment (Find 313:1), measuring 125mm in depth with an estimated total diameter of 570mm, was from an undressed bedstone of coarse-grained Namurian sandstone, probably from a source in the Slieve Ardagh or Slieve Felim mountains. A medieval spud-stone or door hinge socket (Find 407: 1) was also recovered

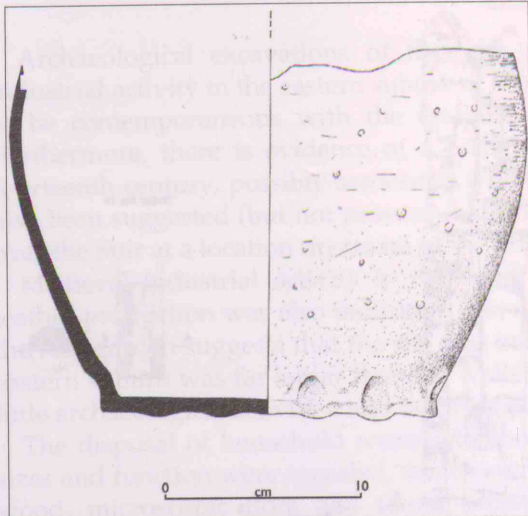


Fig. 12: Locally made medieval jug.

cut to pencil point and the top (epiphysial) end un-worked.

### Timber Joinery

One heavily charred joinery fragment with two dowel pegs (Find No. 430:1 Fig. 14) was recovered from the basal fill of a medieval pit 316. The rectangular ash (*Fraxinus*)<sup>29</sup> timber measured 430mm x 60mm x 60mm, was tangentially spilt and squared, and coarsely finished with diagonal saw marks traversing one side. The blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)<sup>30</sup> and hazel (*Corylus*)<sup>31</sup> brushwood dowels or tree-nails, were set at 90° to each other. Each measured 60mm x 20/30mm diameter, with pencil points. The piece was broken at both ends and its function is unclear. It appears to have been finished quite well but subsequently was crudely sawn, suggesting it was broken up for fire-wood and then discarded.

of grey-blue limestone, used as a socket for a door pivot shaft; 25mm in diameter.

### Organic Artefacts

Four pieces of scrap leather and a single piece of fibrous rope were recovered from two early modern organic pit fills. Two bone artefacts were also recovered, from the same linear medieval gully 252. A bone needle (Find No. 363:4) was made from a long bone of a large bird. It was highly polished with a sawn wedge point tip, but broken at the eye (along the epiphysis), and measured 60mm long, 10mm wide, with a shaft diameter of 4mm. A bone pin fragment (Find No. 363:5.) was recovered from fill of medieval boundary gully 252. This was also a bird's long bone. The pin measured 45mm long, 5mm wide and had a shaft diameter of 2mm. It was heavily burnt and broken along the shaft with the point

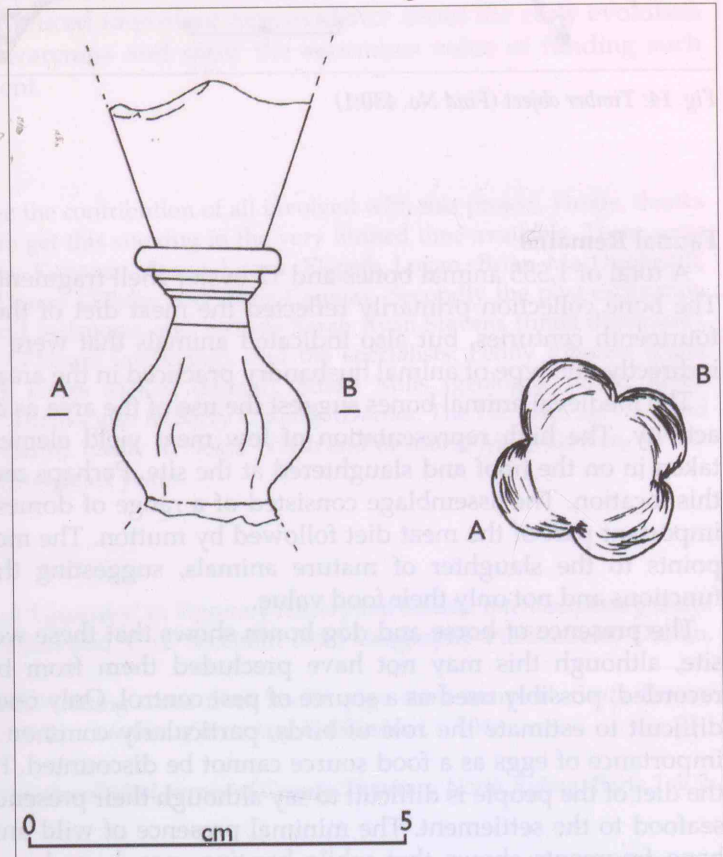


Fig. 13: Glass vessel fragment (Find No. 132:1).



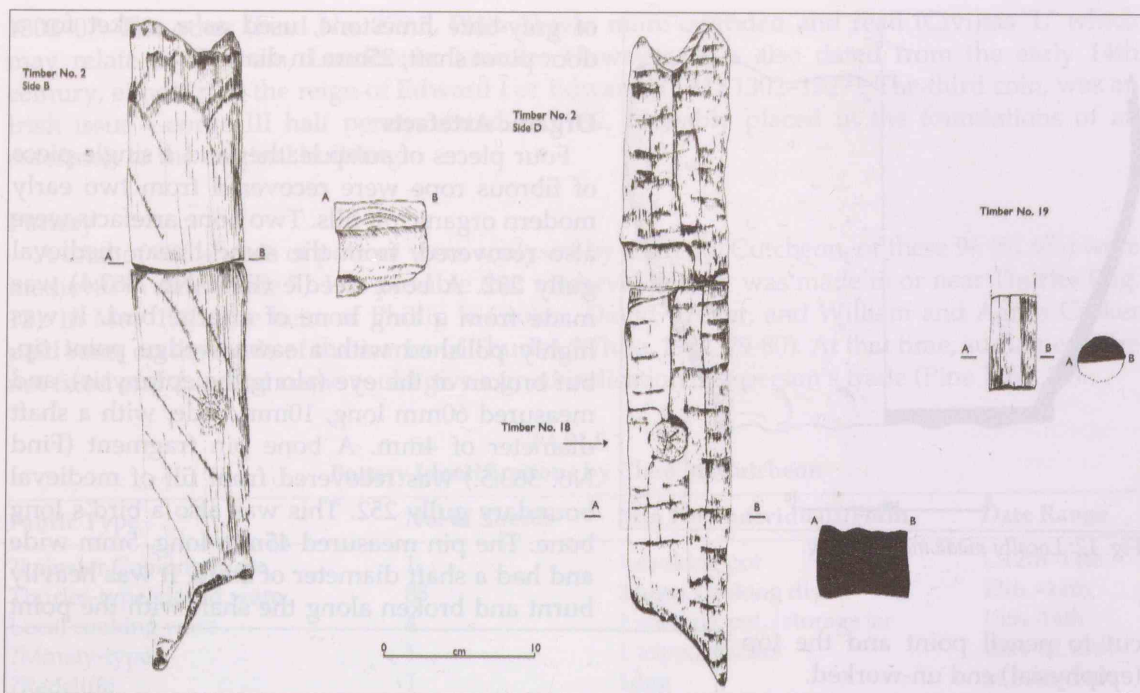


Fig. 14: Timber object (Find No. 430:1)

### Faunal Remains

A total of 1,555 animal bones and 12 oyster shell fragments were examined by Paul McKee.<sup>32</sup> The bone collection primarily reflected the meat diet of the population in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but also indicated animals that were available to the local market and, indirectly, the type of animal husbandry practiced in the area.

The medieval animal bones suggest the use of the area as a place of residential and industrial activity. The high representation of low meat yield elements indicated animals were being taken in on the hoof and slaughtered at the site. Perhaps meat was then being marketed from this location. The assemblage consisted of a range of domestic species, but beef was the most important part of the meat diet followed by mutton. The mortality profile for cattle and sheep points to the slaughter of mature animals, suggesting the importance of their secondary functions and not only their food value.

The presence of horse and dog bones shows that these working animals were valued at the site, although this may not have precluded them from being eaten. Cat bones were also recorded, possibly used as a source of pest control. Only one bird bone was identified and it is difficult to estimate the role of birds, particularly common poultry, in the diet, although the importance of eggs as a food source cannot be discounted. How large a part oysters played in the diet of the people is difficult to say although their presence at the site does show a supply of seafood to the settlement. The minimal presence of wild animals in the form of two red deer bone fragments shows that while hunting may have been enjoyed by some of the town's population, game was not an important part of the diet.

## Discussion

Archaeological excavations of this site revealed evidence of medieval settlement and industrial activity in the eastern suburb of Thurles from the thirteenth century. Activity appears to be contemporaneous with the establishment of the Carmelite Friary opposite the site. Furthermore, there is evidence of a realignment of Main Street, dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth century, possibly associated with the establishment of burgage sub-divisions. It has also been suggested (but not proven) that this may be related to the construction of the bridge over the Suir at a location upstream of the original crossing.

Medieval industrial activity in the form of iron-working, grain processing, and bone or leather production was also indicated. The discovery of a fine ring brooch and two coins from the rear garden suggests that the site was once home to a person of some standing. The artisan eastern suburb was far larger than the walled town in the seventeenth century. However, very little archaeological activity could be assigned to this period.

The disposal of household waste was the greatest indication of settlement. Pits of varying sizes and function were revealed, some carefully lined. Analysis of the preserved water-logged wood, microscopic flora and fauna contents of these pits and wells revealed important functional information not otherwise possible from excavation alone.

This relatively limited excavation, the first major excavation of medieval Thurles, serves to show the huge archaeological potential of this town about which we still know comparatively little of its early story. The results produced important new evidence about the early evolution of this medieval town. They raise awareness and show the enormous value of funding such excavations in advance of development.

## Acknowledgements

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#### Footnotes

1. *Calendar of Patents and Close Rolls Henry II–VII* 65 no. 39.
2. Identification by Michael Kenny, N.M.I..
3. Identifications by Clare McCutcheon.
4. Identifications by Clare McCutcheon.
5. Analysis and identification by Eileen Reilly.
6. *Polygonaceae*.
7. *Agrostemma githago*.
8. Identification and analysis by Penny Johnson.
9. Identification and analysis by Penny Johnson.
10. Identification and analysis by Eileen Reilly.
11. *Corylus* 98% (hazel), *Fraxinus* (ash) 1% and *Prunus/Malus* (cherry / apple) 1%.
12. Identification and analysis by Dr. Ingelise Stuijts.
13. *Polygonum lapathifolium/persicaria*, *Ranunculus spp.* and *Scirpus spp.*, Plus wind-dispersed seeds: *Lapsana communis* and possibly *Umbelliferae indet.* and indeterminate *Graminae* and *Caryophyllaceae indet.* The former may have grown nearby or even in the pit.
14. Identification and analysis by Penny Johnson.
15. *i.e. Cercyon haemorrhoidalis*, *Megasternum obscurum* and *C. analis*.
16. Identification and analysis by Eileen Reilly.
17. e.g. *Clivina fossor*, *Trechus quadristriatus*.
18. Such as *Trechus subnotatus*.
19. Identification and analysis by Eileen Reilly.
20. Clare McCutcheon pers comm..
21. Identification and analysis by Eileen Reilly.
22. The most frequently occurring taxon of this group is *Tipnus unicolor* or spider beetle.. Other

members of this group include *Mycetaea hirta* and the woodworm beetle *Anobium punctatum*. Another woodborer *Grynobius planus*, while not significantly synanthropic (i.e. associated with humans) is often found with *A. punctatum* in medieval deposits and it is likely that its presence in this sample means that they originated from the same source.

23. Identification and analysis by Eileen Reilly.
24. Identification by Clare McCutcheon.
25. NLI 16 I 3/9.
26. *Megasternum obscurum*, *Cercyon* sp. and *Clivina fossor*. Identification and analysis by Eileen Reilly.
27. Although, Cardinal Newman, described the town of Thurles in the nineteenth century as a "forlorn waste and a squalid town" (Nolan, 1989: 13), during the preceding century James Butler I (1711–73), Archbishop of Cashel, had provided an investment of £1,000 to develop Thurles as a Catholic town. Butler established a 'Catholic Suburb' of Thurles, on the west bank of the Suir, culminating in the founding of St. Patrick's College, built in 1829 on the next plot to this site, and subsequently the Catholic Cathedral across the road from the site.
28. Identified by Michael Kenny N.M.I..
29. Identification by Dr. Ingelise Stuijts.
30. Identification by Dr. Ingelise Stuijts.
31. Identification by Dr. Ingelise Stuijts.
32. Identification and analysis by Paul McKee.