

Thurles 1755-1953: An Introduction to the Map Evidence of Town Origin

Larry O'Sullivan

This study is an attempt to identify, with the use of maps, the town elements which are most persistent, and also those where there has been significant change over time. Periods covered by this study are the years from 1755 to 1953. The earliest town plan available is that undertaken in 1755 by John Rocque, a French cartographer, mainly for military purposes (figure 1). A map of an 1818 survey by John Leahy of the Earl of Llandaff estate around Thurles is the next most recent map we have of the town (figure 2). I also draw on the Ordnance Survey six inch map of Thurles (1841) published in 1843 (figure 3). The final three maps are: a 1948 reprint of the survey undertaken by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland in 1903 (figure 4), part of Thurles from Chabot estate map of 1859 (figure 5), and one of the 1953 Ordnance Survey (figure 6). These maps extend over a period of almost two hundred years.

John Rocque was a French cartographer who was also considered a competent surveyor and flamboyant artist. He also designed large formal gardens in his home country and elsewhere. His major contribution to Irish cartography were his town plans such as those of Kilkenny (1758) and the estate town of Maynooth (1756). His drawings or cartouches, which accompanied his maps were excellent and told a story of the area and of his landlord benefactors as well as the methods of surveying he used in making the maps. In turn his influence can be detected in the work of other map makers. A local case in point is Leahy's survey of the Earl of Llandaff's estate around Thurles, surveyed in 1819 and produced by John Longfield in map form nine years later. His decorative cover sheet seems to closely resemble the artistic work used earlier by cartographers of the French school, like Rocque. However, this estate plan shows only basic information on the map itself. Houses and other structures are only shown in block plan and some of the property boundaries may well have been omitted. As long as the map served its purpose of indicating which person held the leasehold on any area other information was surplus to requirements. However, it does have a 'Reference and Rental, 1819' to this estate. This shows the numbered locations of estate leaseholders and type of property held by each. This information can be an invaluable social history resource for the period previous to the Ordnance Survey records. It shows that numerous houses and gardens were included in just one plot number. The first proper survey of the whole island of Ireland was undertaken by the Ordnance Survey of Ireland between the years 1833 and 1846. This survey was published on a scale of six inches to a mile or 1 to 10,560 and sheet 41 of County Tipperary contained the urban area but not the full parish of Thurles. These maps were produced with military accuracy by surveyors and draughtsmen who had excellent training and experience. The basis of the survey over the whole island was the exact triangulation of the country. This first survey of the mid-nineteenth century was

the forerunner of all others undertaken by the Ordnance Survey office as both the major and minor triangulation points had been set. These mapmakers paid great attention to detail and show numerous items never before highlighted on countywide maps. However, it did not become an accurate reflection of the amount of dwellings actually located in any area as Thomas Larcom who was director of the survey had instructed his surveyors to record only those buildings which were fixed to the ground and this did not include traveller camps or other mobile settlements, which could have been quite numerous.

Further updated surveys were undertaken locally by the Ordnance Survey in 1903, and 1953, which are reflected in the later maps in this study.

The first map by John Rocque was undertaken on behalf of the Earl of Rothes who had encamped at that time at Cabragh Castle grounds near Thurles. It was basically a plan of a military camp in and around the town. It is unusual in that the legend to the map possibly holds the most information for the reader. It lists the locations of the various military



Figure 1. Copy of part of Rocque map 1755. Not to scale. Original scale 320 perches to an Irish mile. (Source: Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)

divisions of the encampment. Non-military named items are sparse upon the map itself apart from road names and locations of religious houses. The only street named on this map was Garver Clahan Street otherwise known as Garryvicleheen Street or part of present day Friar Street and Abbey Road. The abbey reference is connected with Holycross Abbey some four miles to the south-west, which was founded in the twelfth century. The road to the abbey is referred to in this map but is highlighted on the road known as Stradavoher which extends south, south-west from the west gate area. Roads mentioned are those to Dublin, Mountrath, Roscrea and Holycross. The market house had been built in 1743 and is also mentioned. Two markets and two fairs had been granted to Lady Thurles in 1626. The Norman motte, Black Castle and Croak Castle were also depicted on this map. The motte and Black Castle were the location of the 'faire house and castle' belonging to Lady Thurles, the ruins of the tower house still standing today alongside the public car park connecting Parnell Street and Friar Street. Croak Castle is shown in the vicinity of Friar Street but no castle or tower was marked in that location on any map since. Barry mentions that Thurles had eleven tower houses at one stage and rates of destruction were very high from the early seventeenth century onwards. Furthermore he states that no more than 60% of all known historical monuments were recorded by the Ordnance surveyors in the mid-nineteenth century.¹

The tower house at the river bridge is not named but an outline of a structure is shown in the same location. In Bradleys map of the walled town of Thurles he shows a possible north gate on Parnell Street.² This was formerly known as New Street and was not in existence at the time of the Rocque survey, so I find it unlikely that a gate was in that location but was more likely to have been situated on the road to Roscrea shown on the same map. The Rocque map also shows a road connecting the Dublin and Mountrath roads, which is known as Boheraveroon today. An old urban road but some distance away from what is considered the town centre. Rocque does not show a town wall as he did with Kilkenny a few years later, but that map had a different purpose. It is possible that he thought them unimportant and not deserving of being recorded. However, one would think that a military plan should include fortifications and I am of the opinion that town walls, if ever constructed, were partly removed at that time and would not have formed proper town boundaries.

From the Earl of Llandaff estate map we get a clearer picture of boundaries and street layout at the time of the survey in 1819. New Street (Parnell Street) and Nicholas Street (Cuchulann Road) connecting the Roscrea and Nenagh roads, have been formed at this stage but all others are still as they were in 1755. Laneways to the north and south of Main Street East (Liberty Square) are now more pronounced as more structures have been erected on either side. Outer boundaries of properties strips off the main streets and roads can be distinguished. Some street names are shown but not all. The Moat (anglo-norman motte) is shown, along with the parish 'churtyard' and 'church house plot' on the east side. The market house as shown on Rocques map is called the 'sessions' house. It did have varying uses throughout its history including as a meeting house and place of worship. The main street or square is now more pronounced and uniform in shape from that of 1755. There is a laneway running south from Main Street which meets up at the riverside after taking a 90 degrees turn to the east. The reason for this sharp turn might be that the laneway had reached the town wall at that point. This was obviously its only access to the river. This accessway is still visible on the 1843 map, but direct access to the river would be prevented by the construction of the road known as The Mall. This 1843 OS map begins to show us

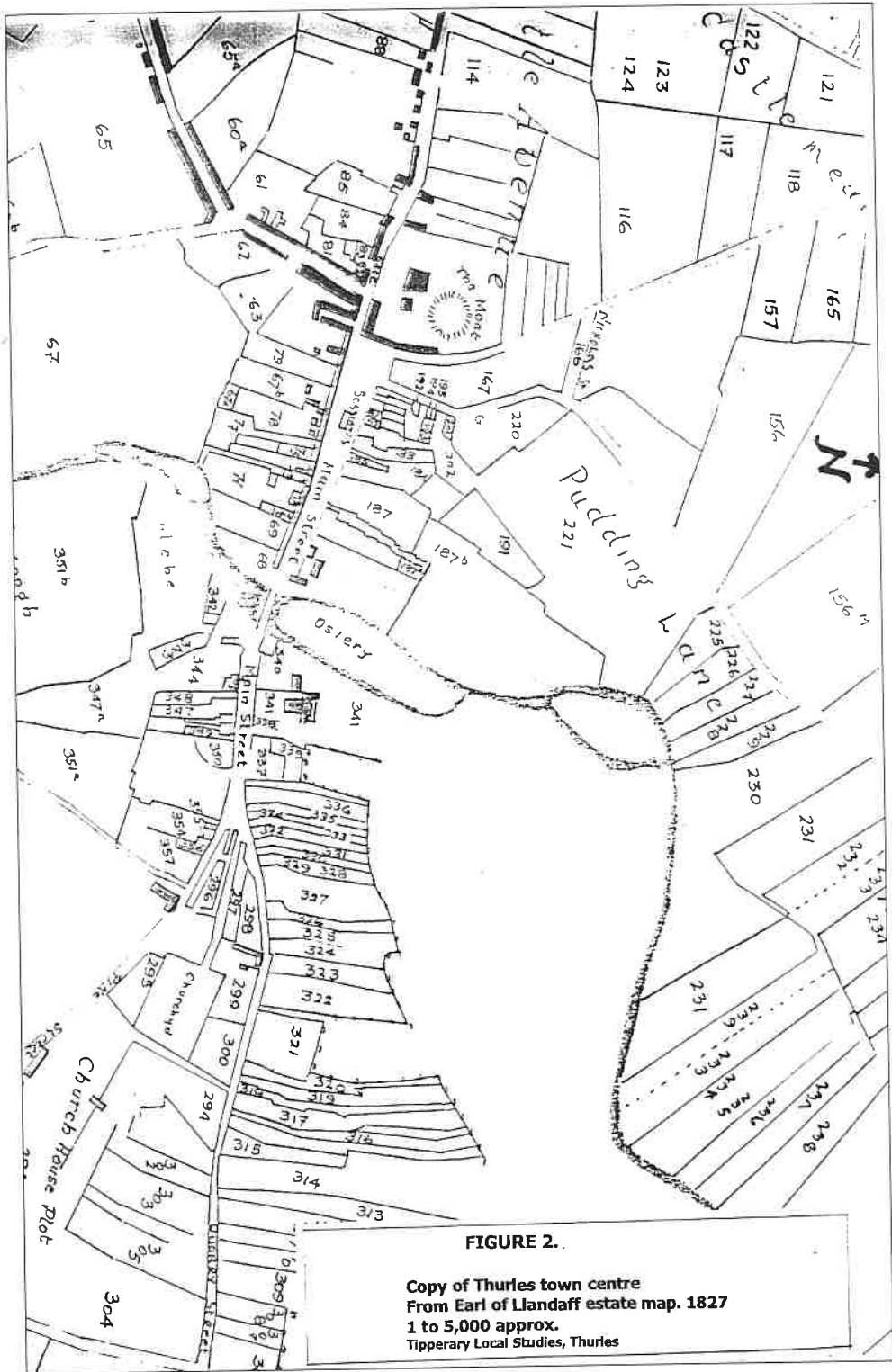


FIGURE 2.

Copy of Thurles town centre
From Earl of Llandaff estate map. 1827
1 to 5,000 approx.
Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles

the many buildings and small plot divisions in the urban area, for the first time. The buildings are hatched or coloured to distinguish them more clearly. It is also the first map to show townland, parish and barony boundaries. Townland boundaries are shown with dotted lines and are shown along Friar Street, Croke Street, Stradavoher and Derheen highlighted in red on the originals as well as that area around the island immediately north of the river bridge. These boundaries are very important in research as they are usually of ancient origin. Many public buildings are named such as the Courthouse and Bridewell along with the Ursuline Convent and Bishops Palace among many more. Bench marks and spot heights are now shown giving the reader a better understanding of the topography of the area. Tree stands are distinguished as to whether they are deciduous or evergreen. The motte is still shown, as are both tower houses. It is noticeably that plot boundaries tend to remain intact the further they are removed from the town centre or Main Street. A new road has been formed running south from the main square which is known as the Turtulla Road (Slievenamon Road) and The Mall (Emmet Street), alongside the west bank of the river, has

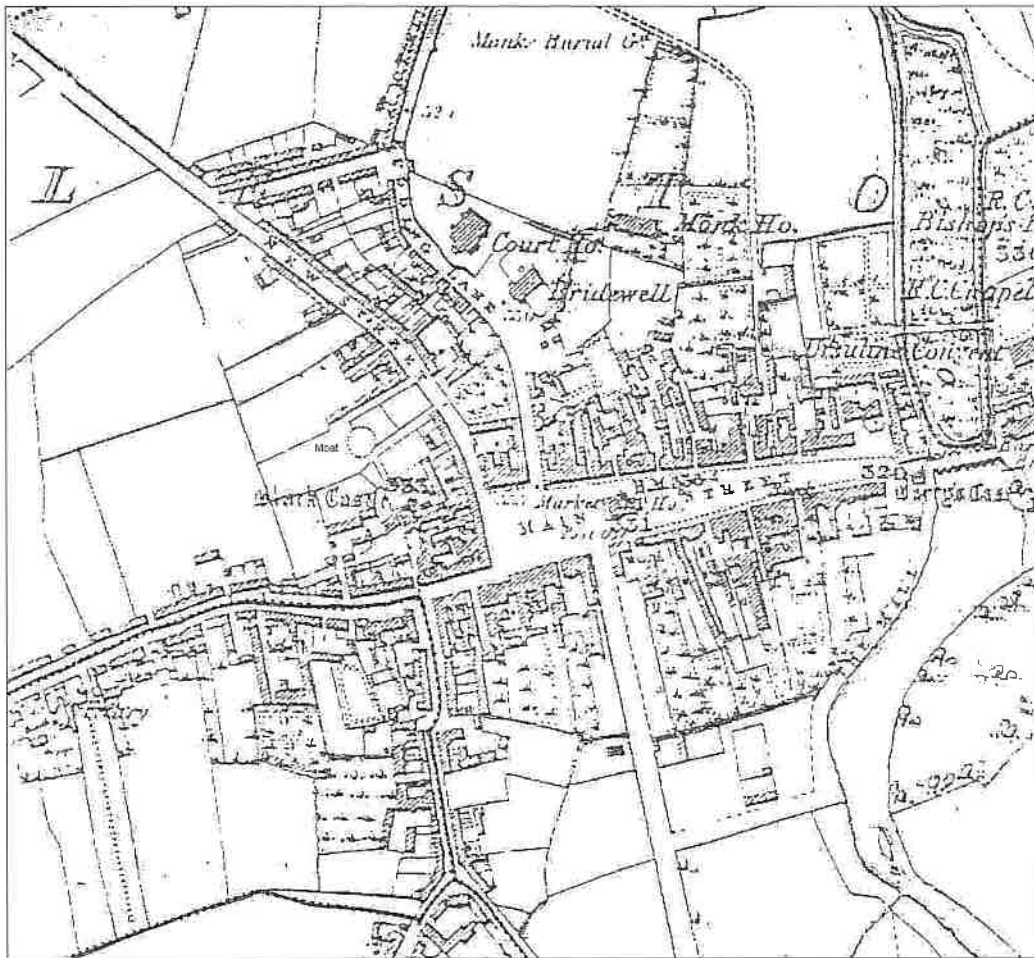


Figure 3. Copy of part of Thurles town from O.S. County Tipperary, sheet 41 1843(1 to 10,60) enlarged to 1 to 4,000. (Source: Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)

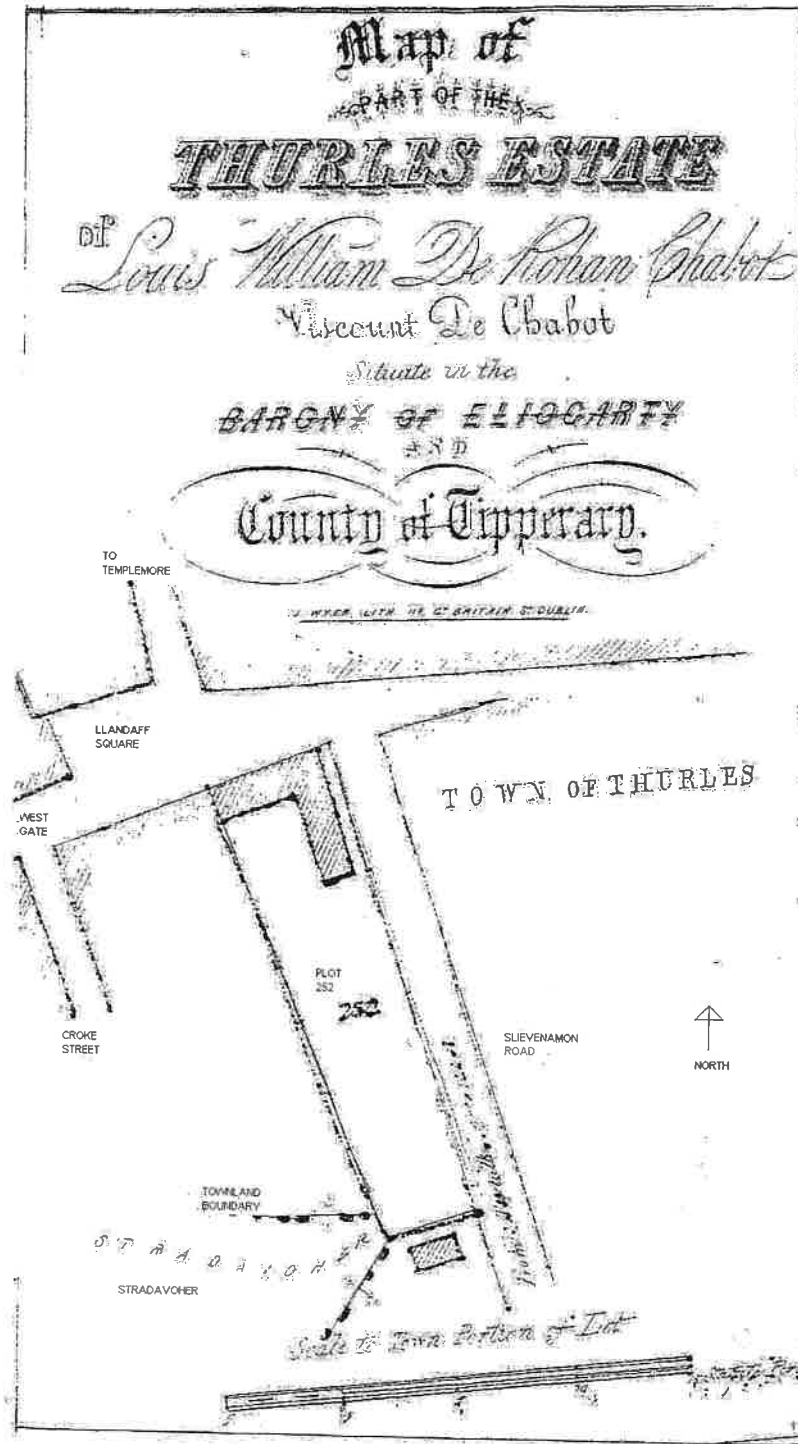


Figure 5. Copy of part of Thurles town (plot 252) from Chabot Estate map 1859 (1 inch to six perches). (Source: Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)

begun to form but is open on one side similar to part of the Turtulla Road. It would seem that no wall exists along the river at this time. The map of the 1903 survey³ shows that very little change has taken place in the layout or amount of buildings in the main town area. Turtulla road has by then, been named Bank Street probably because of the recent location of the Munster and Leinster Bank along this routeway and same has been connected with the river bridge via the North Mall (Thomond Road) and with Stradavoher via the Deerheen Mall (Fianna Road). South Mall (Kavanagh Place) has also been formed by 1903. Main Street (west) has been renamed Cathedral Street. The west gate is mentioned but in a different position to that in the 1819 map. The loss of many inhabitants in the famine of the mid-century would account for the lack of further development in the urban area and the new Urban District Council had only come into being four years previously and had yet to make its mark on the landscape of the town.

According to the town plan analysis by Conzen⁴, Thurles would be in the pre 1500s period. Main evidence for early fortification is that the town received a murage grant in 1356/7.⁵ It is not certain however, whether town walls were ever constructed in part or in whole. Another reference to walling of the town comes from the Hearth Money Roll records from 1655/6 which subdivide Thurles into three units, namely; within the walls, Codagh and Brogmal. And in the following year records the divisions as; town proper, without the gates (Codagh) and the town over the bridge. The term 'town proper' may be relevant here, suggesting that there were arguments ongoing as to the extent of the town. This leads me to believe that a lot more may have been walled than previously thought. Medieval or early stone walls remaining today are difficult to record on the ground as some older parts of the town are inaccessible. William Nolan also mentions that St. Brigid's graveyard served the Irish population outside the western walls.⁶ Furthermore, Johnstone seemed to think that the old parish church of St. Mary's was also within walls⁷, although he may have been referring to the site itself. Avril Thomas and John Bradley have produced modern studies of walled towns and Thurles has been included in both of these. From on-the-ground investigations I have discovered many remnants of early stone walls throughout the town on both sides of the river. I have compared this to where early walls might have stood with reference to the four maps. Firstly, no walls are distinguishable on Rocques map, and only property boundaries are shown on the 1818 map. However, we can try to make out whether any of these boundaries were actually part of the town walling. The town walls would have lost their defensive significance by the end of the seventeenth century. Subsequently all gates in the walls have been removed and only fragments remain of the walls today. The possible town area of eight hectares quoted by Thomas⁸ seems quite small when compared with other smaller towns and villages in that range. Cashel, Clonmel and Tipperary are estimated at almost double that size. Thomas however, points out that the size of the walled area need not be a reflection of the density of settlement within, and thus of the population defended by the town walls. Walls if ever present by the river may have been removed as in Carrick and Clonmel at different stages.⁹ There was no strong castle so a walled town was quite possible. The bridge seems to have been of local importance only because the main route was at the west side of Thurles and crossed the Suir 2kms. South of Thurles.¹⁰ Bradley concludes that the east bank can be viewed as a suburb, and by Thomas as one-half of a twin town. Eleven tower houses were mentioned in the town of Thurles.¹¹ Only two are now evident on the ground and only three in total have been highlighted within the maps referred

to. There is a possible location of a small tower or turret along College Lane as some ruins are evident there today. From the map evidence I believe that the southern and western extent of the Thurles walls was rather different to those on the Bradley map. The town could have developed on the western end firstly as there is a distinct curved boundary showing up on the map from 1755 and later, which spans from the south side of Liberty Square running in a south south-west direction crossing the Derheen (old Cork road) and continuing alongside and almost parallel to Stradavoher. This boundary is also in alignment with O'Donovan Rossa Street coming from Roscrea and Templemore, which was the old road shown on Rocque's map of 1755. This might indicate that the upper west side of the square was the early formation of the town where the motte was situated. Llandaff Square was named in this western end of the Main Street (fig.7) and it was possibly formed by this old routeway crossing the Main street in a north-south direction. The old townland boundary of Stradavoher shows up at part of this line on the Leahy map and is different to the townland boundary as recorded by the Ordnance Survey over twenty years later.¹² The maps of 1819, 1843 and 1903 all show this boundary line. It is not however shown anyway clearly on the 1755 map.

Does the sudden change in direction of Croke, Friar St. and Pudding Lane indicate that gates were at these locations? The lack of concrete information on east, south and north gates is a stumbling block, and the only evidence is a piece of an arch connected to Barry's Castle at the east end and the mention of the west gate on maps.

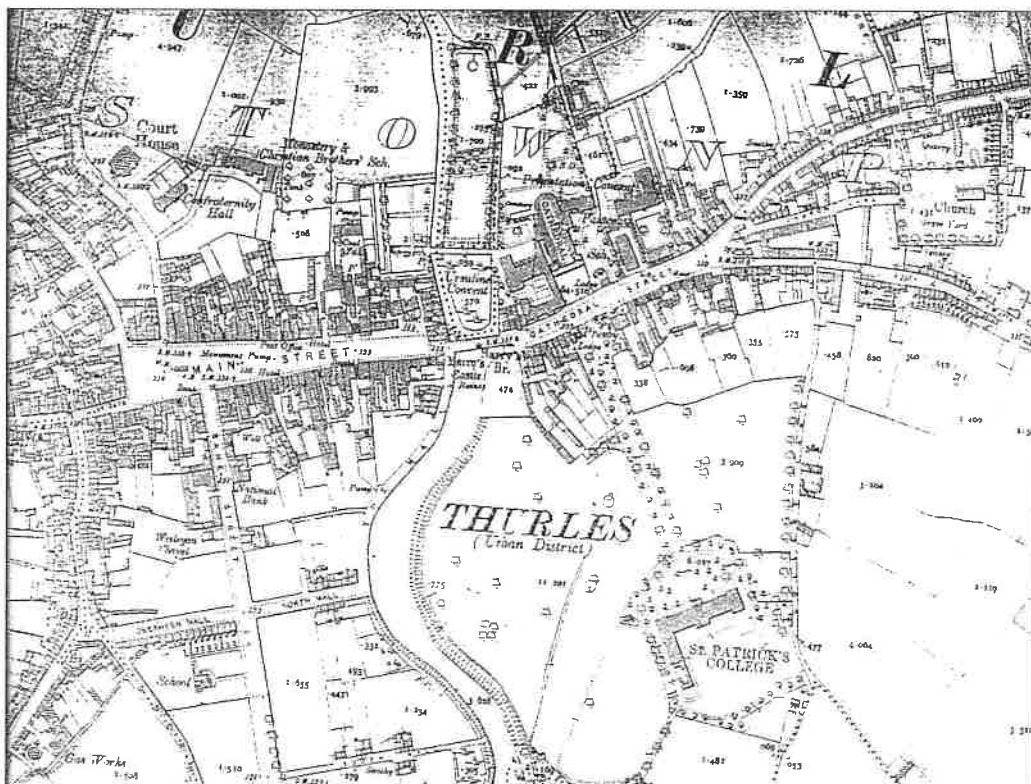


Figure 4. Tipperary O.S. Sheet 41: 1903 Reprint of 1948 (1 to 2,500) Reduced to 1 to 5000. (Source: Own private collection)

Thurles was unusual in that it had no landlord-led urban redesign as in other towns because of the absenteeism of George Matthew to Thomastown from 1740. This may be the reason for the lack of town centre Georgian style buildings associated with landlord led urban design similar to those at Birr (Parsonstown) in County Offaly (Kings County). Although not a landlord town it is interesting to note that the road leading from the Cathedral to St. Patricks College (commenced in 1829) is similar to the layout from the college in Maynooth to Carton House. Did the religious authorities in Thurles copy what the landlords had done elsewhere at an earlier date?

A certain vacuum was filled by Archbishop James Butler when he came to live at Cathedral Street in 1757 or thereabouts. Francis Matthew was created Earl of Llandaff in 1797. He died in 1838 and his wife Eliza only three years later. As there were no children from the marriage, she had willed her property to a French nobleman named de Chabot, who was also her cousin. The power of the Butler family in the locality probably decreased from then on.

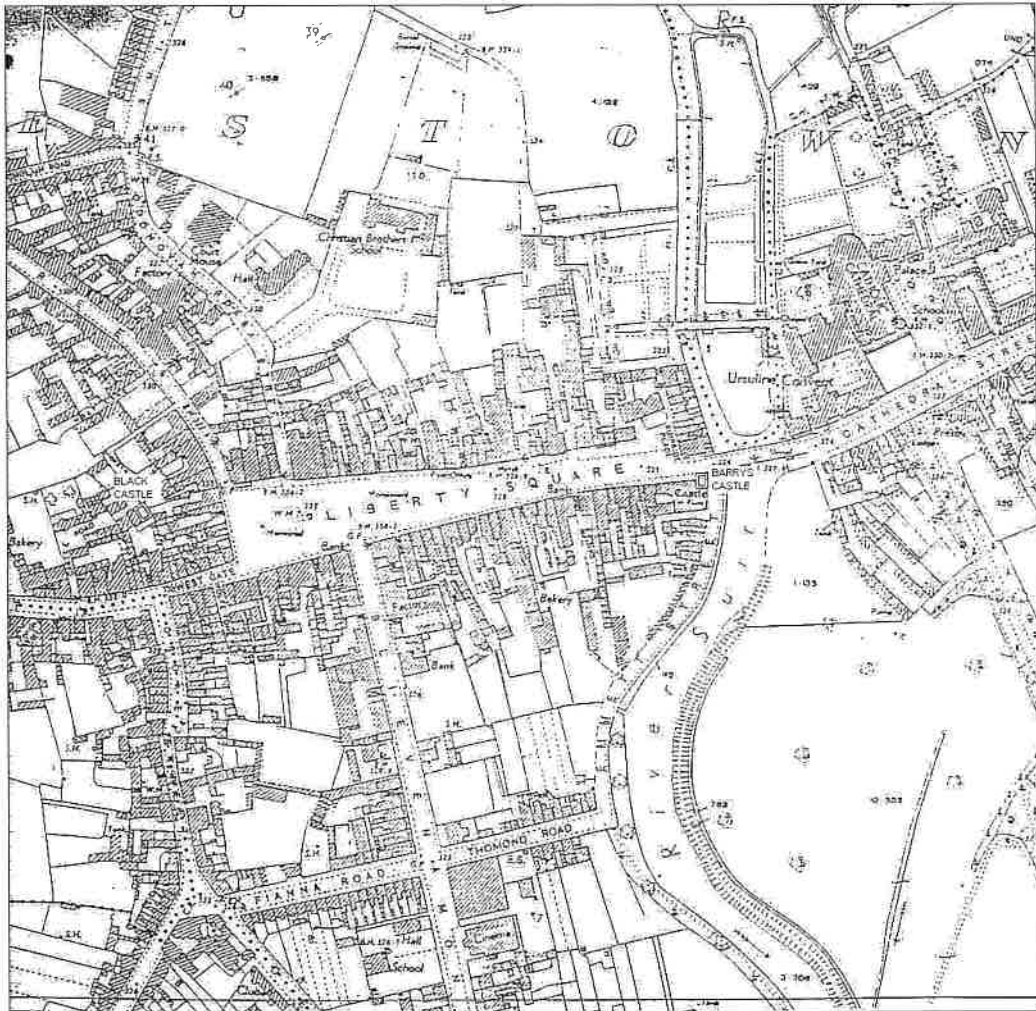


Figure 6. Tipperary O.S. Sheet 41: 1903 Reprint of 1948 (1 to 2,500) Reduced to 1 to 5000. (Source: Own private collection)

She owned a good proportion of lands in Thurles, which is confirmed by the amount of leases held by Chabot and the Earl of Dunsandle in 1815¹³.

Land use has remained more or less constant on the east side of the town, but not on the west. The west today is mainly the urban centre, the east being residential in the great part apart from the religious holdings nearer the river. End boundaries are quite important in determining what might date back to burgage plots. Change in street pattern is another.¹⁴

A towns defences may have the additional role as a hold-up to traffic flow. Changes in direction are quite important here. Thomas says that truly regular shapes were rare in town walling in the medieval period and only about a quarter of castles were tied to the walls.¹⁵

The 1953 OS map shows the newer street names which came into being in 1920 under the Local Government Act. The spirit of freedom prevailing at that time in Ireland was made evident by acts such as this. The maps would change forever and reflect a more nationalistic idealism¹⁶. Thurles Urban district Council had been set up in 1898 when the Town Commissioners were abandoned.

Lanes on north side of Liberty Square have been overtaken and gone from public to private hands. Street or road names have also changed considerably over time. This is mainly due to the strong connection between the Roman Catholic church and nationalist politics. Houses on the square have been adapted to business or mixed use in the majority of cases. The market house decreased in size, was later altered and was removed completely in the 1970's. Many urban elements which persist over the period of these maps can be associated with either religious or educational establishments. Religious houses of many different orders were also a prominent feature of medieval life.¹⁷ Thurles had its own, with the Carmelites and Franciscans present. They can be seen as having reinforced the walled town as they became extramural defences in a way. Other elements are mainly topographic such as the Suir Bridge, the river itself, older streets, south side lanes and tower houses. Townland boundaries and town walls almost certainly coincide in some locations here, and this can be seen as a good indication of boundary longevity.

This introductory study has shown, that through a moderate amount of investigation, we can reveal elements of urban landscape not visible in basic map reading. We must decipher information on maps including language(s), figures, boundary alignment and shape, and orientation to assist in identifying older streets, roads, buildings or boundaries. This knowledge can be cross-referenced with other social, historical and geographical data already available.

Bibliography

Primary sources:

- John Rocque, *Plan of a Camp near Thurles, 1755* (Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)
- John Leahy & John Longfield, *Map of the Thurles Estate of the Earl of Llandaff*, surveyed in 1819, pub.1827 (Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland, *1st. edition map County Tipperary*, sheet 41, scale 1:10,560, 1843 (Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)
- J.Wyer, *Map of part of the Thurles Estate of Louis William De Rohan Chabot*, scale 1 inch to 6 perches or 1 to 1,388. 1859 (Tipperary Local Studies, Thurles)
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland, *County Tipperary, map sheet 41-II*, scale 1:2,500, 1903, reprint of 1948 (collection of the author)
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland, *County Tipperary, map sheet 41-II*, scale 1:2,500, 1903, revision of 1953 (collection of the author)
- Ordnance Survey of Ireland, *County Tipperary, map sheet 41-IIc*, scale 1:1,250, 1953 (collection of the author)

Secondary sources

- Aalen F.H.A, Whelan Kevin and Stout Matthew (eds.) *Atlas of the Irish rural landscape* (Cork, 1997)
- Andrews J.H., *A Paper Landscape. The Ordnance Survey in Nineteenth Century Ireland* (Dublin, 2002)
- Andrews J.H., *History in the Ordnance Map* (Dublin, 1974)
- Bradley John, *Irish Historic Town Atlas*, No.10 Kilkenny (RIA, 2000)
- Bradley John, 'The Medieval Towns of Tipperary', in Nolan.W (ed.) *Tipperary: History and Society* (Dublin, 1985), pp 52-4
- Clarke Howard B., Prunty Jacinta and Hennessy Mark (eds), *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms* (Dublin,2004)
- Corbett William, Nolan William, (eds.) *Thurles, The Cathedral Town, Essays in honour of Archbishop Thomas Morris*, (Dublin, 1989)
- Cullen Louis M, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland 1600-1900* (London, 1981)
- Joyce P.W., *Irish Names of Places* (3 vols, Dublin, 1869-1913)
- Kennedy J.M., *A Chronology of Thurles, revised, updated and with additions by O'Gorman Donal, Long Laurence and Dundon Michael* (*Tipperary Star*, Thurles, 1978)
- Nolan William, *Tipperary History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on an Irish County* (Dublin,1985)
- Nolan William and Simms Anngret (eds.), *Irish Towns: a Guide to Sources* (Dublin, 1998)
- Ó Cearbhaill Pádraig (ed.), *Liostaí Logainneacha Tiobraid Árann* (Baile Átha Cliath, 2004)
- Ó Donovan John, *Ordnance Survey letters*. RIA.
- Ó Drisceoil Proinsias, 'Placenames as Politics: Thurles in 1920'. (*Tipperary Historical Journal*, 1993)
- Power T.P. and Whelan Kevin (Eds.), *Endurance and Emergence, Catholics in Ireland in the Eighteenth Century* (Dublin, 1990)
- Simington R.C., *The Civil Survey AD 1654-1656, vol.2, County of Tipperary Western and Northern Baronies* (Stationary Office, Dublin, 1931-1961)
- Simms Anngret, 'Cartographic representation of diachronic analysis: the example of the origin of towns' in A.R.H.Baker and Mark Billinge (eds), *Period and place: research methods in historical geography* (Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography, 1, Cambridge, 1982), pp 289-300.
- Skehan Walter Rev., *Ecclesiastical History of Thurles*, unpublished manuscript, (*Tipperary Local Studies TL/A/46*)
- Thomas Avril, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, vols. I and II(Dublin, 1992)

References

- ¹Terry Barry, 'Tower Houses and Terror' in *Surveying Ireland's Past: Multidisciplinary Essays in Honour of Anngret Simms* Howard B Clarke., Jacinta Prunty and Mark Hennessy (eds), (Dublin,2004) pp 122/3
- ²John Bradley, 'The Medieval Towns of Tipperary', in W. Nolan. (ed.) *Tipperary: History and Society* (Dublin, 1985), pp 52-54
- ³See Figure 4
- ⁴M.R.G. Conzen, 'The Use of Town Plans in the Study of Urban History' in H.J.Dyos, *The study of urban history* (London, 1968), pp 113-130.
- ⁵Avril Thomas, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, vol. ii (Dublin, 1992)p 193
- ⁶William Nolan, 'Thurles from a distance' in *Thurles, The Cathedral Town, Essays in honour of Archbishop Thomas Morris*, William Corbett, William Nolan, (eds.) (Dublin, 1989) p.6
- ⁷Rev.Harden Johnstone, 'A note on St.Mary's Parish', *Thurles in Thurles, The Cathedral Town, Essays in honour of Archbishop Thomas Morris*, William Corbett, William Nolan, (eds.) (Dublin, 1989) p.187
- ⁸Avril Thomas, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, vol. i (Dublin, 1992)Table 3.2, p 39
- ⁹Avril Thomas, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, vol. i (Dublin, 1992) pp 38/39
- ¹⁰Thomas p 193
- ¹¹Thomas p 123
- ¹²See Figure 5
- ¹³Document held a Tipperary Libraries, Thurles
- ¹⁴Avril Thomas, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, vol. i (Dublin, 1992) p 15
- ¹⁵Thomas p 7
- ¹⁶Ó Drisceoil Proinsias, *Placenames as Politics: Thurles in 1920*. *Tipperary Historical Journal*, 1993. p 59
- ¹⁷Avril Thomas, *The Walled Towns of Ireland*, vol. I (Dublin, 1992) p 100