

**FOUR EXCAVATIONS IN  
KILKENNY CITY (1999-2001):  
SITE REPORTS  
&  
SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

PAUL STEVENS

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## Introduction

In late 2005, The Heritage Council invited license holders who required financial assistance in the completion and publication of significant excavation reports to make application to the Council. As part of its strategy to encourage the collection and dissemination of heritage information, the Heritage Council had identified the dissemination of information from significant archaeological investigations as a continuing priority area. The objective of archaeology is to increase knowledge of the past through the study of material remains and it is not just concerned with generating data, but with creating, organising and diffusing knowledge. The Heritage Council has already assessed the unpublished reports dating to the period 1930 to 1997 (Doyle, 1998) and has identified the most significant examples.

The aim of this series of publications was to bring to publication several small and medium sized excavations which were carried out by the author between 1998 and 2001 in the medieval City of Kilkenny, for Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd.. The results of the excavations were condensed and summarised in a two-part article published in the *Old Kilkenny Review* over two consecutive years, in 2006 and 2007. The article covered the Medieval Findings in part 1 and the Late Medieval / Post medieval findings, in part 2. As publication of any site requires a great deal of technical data and publication print space is limited, the Kilkenny Archaeological Society kindly agreed publish on their web site the detailed excavation reports, as they were submitted to the licensing body to act as supporting data to the article. Each excavation report and accompanying specialists contributions are presented here as four web pages.

The archaeological excavations and investigations in this web site publication were undertaken between 1998 and 2001 in Kilkenny City by the applicant, whilst working for as a licence holder for Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd. Archaeological Consultancy & Project Management, on behalf of the various clients in advance of development and in fulfillment of Planning Conditions (issued by Kilkenny Corporation and the National Monuments Service, *Dúchas*, the Heritage Service). All excavations listed in this publication were undertaken in a commercial context, and undertaken in a rescue or salvage capacity in advance of their destruction by development. In most cases, excavation, and post excavation analysis and reporting was fully funded by the developer in good faith to fulfill contractual and planning obligations. However, under the terms of the planning permissions issued to the developers in each case, no legal obligation was put upon the developer and client to publish the results of the excavation in full. In each case listed in this application the client is unwilling to pay for further work on the archaeological work.

## Excavations Outline

This publication details the results of three medium sized and one small test excavation and building survey together in one or possibly two publication article(s) based in the medieval city of Kilkenny. The site lie within the medieval core of Kilkenny in both Hightown and St. Johns suburb (table 1). These are listed as follows:

<i>Site Name/ Location</i>	<i>Licence(s) No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Excavation Type</i>	<i>Archaeological Significance</i>	<i>Finds</i>
<i>St. John's</i>					
Maudlin Street, Kilkenny	98E 346	1998/ 2000	Full Resolution	Medieval fosse of St. John's suburb	Metal work, pottery, faunal
Evan's Home, Kilkenny	99E 662	1999	Testing + Bldg Survey (military/post-med.)	N tower of St. John's medieval church/location of town wall/ Georgian Inf. Barracks	Decorated floor tiles, Post-med. Pottery
<i>Hightown</i>					
23 James' St, Kilkenny	01E 730	2000/ 2001	Full	Medieval urban garden/sconce & iron smithing	Musket balls, pottery, child inhumation
Friary Street/ Garden Row Kilkenny	97E 087/ 01E 569	2001	Full	Medieval urban burgage plots/ garden/sconce &, crying kiln	Fine metal work, cannon ball, pottery, clay pipes, cereal grains, charcoal, faunal

### Academic Contribution

This collection of sites and excavations forms a broad grouping, which deals with the archaeology of medieval and post-medieval (notably Georgian) Kilkenny. Of particular note are the three major sites' proximity to the perimeter of the towns defences, in both medieval Hightown and St. John's suburb. This provides new information on the actual circuit of the town defences, and gives information on the towns development. In addition, two urban excavations in Hightown (Friary Street and 23 James Street) are both located at the cities western sconce or inner vallum road along the city wall (MAP 2). Both show considerable urban occupation activity associated with dwellings within medieval burgage plots.

*Maudlin Street.* The excavation at Maudlin Street was significant because firstly, it shows precisely the location of the medieval fosse surrounding the suburb but devoid of any trace of an associated townwall and secondly provides important environmental evidence of the late medieval/early post medieval history of the town.

*Evan's Home/Barrack Lane.* This test excavation and assessment of Evan's Home revealed the discovery of an unknown architectural plan of the church, together with a collection of very fine decorative medieval floor tiles. This is significant to the wider study of the medieval town plan, which currently shows the eastern boundary wall of this site to be the line of the medieval defences. However, this assessment clearly disproved this. It is more likely the defences run further west and probably under the present west wall of Evan's Home and Back Lane. The assessment also reveals the plan and elevations of the little known and previously unrecorded infantry barracks, which remains a well preserved example of Georgian architecture.

*23 James Street/Tilbury Place:* excavation produced the medieval features consistent with domestic occupation in burgage plots fronting High Street. No houses were recorded along the northern side of James's Street in the 1654-5 Civil Survey, and this was confirmed by excavation. The medieval assemblage suggests occupation during the 13th

and 14th centuries, following the 1207-31 expansion of High Town beyond James's Street to the south bank of the River Breagagh. A second phase of activity was also noted in the post-medieval period. Pit features and several post-holes produced an assemblage dating to the mid-17th century, and this may also have been the date for the crude iron-smelting furnace. This furnace, which partially extended into Tilbury Place (formerly James's Sconce) and James's Street, would not have been associated with occupation in High Street but may well have been a hastily built smelting furnace for use in the Cromwellian siege of Kilkenny. The discovery of a musket ball within this feature further enhances this interpretation, but is by no means conclusive. As a result of the archaeological discoveries the development was redesigned to accommodate the preservation of most of the archaeological features in situ.

*Friary Street/Garden Row* was located within the 12th-century English Town or Hightown. Friary Street (formerly Walkin Street) was originally one of the main access roads into the medieval walled city. Walkin Gate was marked on Rocque's map of 1758 at the junction of Friary Street and Garden Row, but was demolished in 1788 when Walkin Street was improved. Garden Row was a medieval 'sconce' or vallum road, providing defenders of the city with access to the wall. This excavation provides important environmental and archaeological evidence of medieval burghage plot layout, and street pattern for this arterial route.

Specialist analysis of the sites dateable faunal, charcoal and paleobotanical assemblages has already been undertaken and gives some interesting indications of the cities population dietary practices. Analysis of the pottery assemblage from all the sites as a whole will provide further information on the trade networks in the medieval and post medieval period as well as giving accurate dating to feature and layers. Publication will allow for the inclusion of several interesting and unusual finds from the corpus of artifactual material, such as an assemblage of medieval decorated floor tiles, individual metalwork including a thimble, belt buckle, ring brooch, musket shot, a cache of decorated Gouda clay pipes. It also affords an opportunity to publish for the first time the building recording of Evan's Home, the former mid 18<sup>th</sup> century Infantry Barrack building.

### **Status & Accessibility of Archive**

The archive for each of the sites listed in this application are in good order and have been arranged for long term storage. They are currently located at the offices of Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd., Merrion Row, Dublin, to which the author has full access. All artefacts have been fully conserved and lodged with the National Museum of Ireland as per licence requirement, except in the case of exceptional large items with the express written permission of the National Museum of Ireland, where items are on display *in situ* or reburied. Hard copies of the full site reports including specialist contributions and reports are available for view in the offices of Margaret Gowen & Co. Ltd., and also from the Planning section of Kilkenny Corporation, the archives of the National Monuments Section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Antiquities Division of the National Museum of Ireland.

### Section 3: Excavation Summaries

**Site Location :** MAUDLIN STREET, KILKENNY

**Type:** Urban medieval

**R.M.P. Ref.** KK019:26

**Licence No.** 98E0346

**Project Date:** 1998-2000

**Client:** A. O'Keefe Auctioneers

Archaeological assessment of this site took place in August 1998 in advance of a proposed apartment block development. Following extensive building recording in 1999 and redesign of the proposed building, planning permission was granted for the development and an archaeological excavation was undertaken in April and May 2000.

The site is located at the western corner of Maudlin Street, on the northern side, on the north bank of the River Nore (MAP 1) and lies directly on the line of the medieval town wall defences for the medieval suburb of St John's, close to John's Gate Outer and St John's Priory. (MAP 2)

Excavation of an area measuring 16.5m E/W by 10m, in the south-west corner of the site up against the street frontage, was undertaken for the footprint of the development. The location of the **medieval ditch** was identified, curving across the site and aligned approximately east-west across the excavation area, measuring 6m in width and 1.45m in depth. The ditch contained a number of sandy, redeposited or weathered natural primary fills and dark clays containing medieval pottery, metal artefacts, animal bone and a decorated floor tile. The partially backfilled ditch appeared to have been dry and open for a long period. The ditch was backfilled during the 17th century and sealed by a uniform layer of mid-brown clay containing clay pipe, bone and pottery. This may relate to the **Cromwellian siege of the city** and subsequent partial dismantling of Kilkenny's defences.

The site appeared to have been waste ground for a decade or so after this and was peppered by fourteen medium to large circular or oval rubbish pits, also containing post-medieval assemblages, with a few containing later, early modern assemblages. Around the early 18th century (before 1758), a range of stone-built houses and stables were constructed on the street frontage and to the rear of the site. These were adapted and remodelled as a terrace of houses, which remained in use until the late 20th century, when the site was in use as a painter's yard, with associated prefabricated sheds.

A large faunal assemblage was analysed from this site, artefacts included a bronze belt buckle, thimble, medieval pottery, and a decorated medieval floor tile with parallels to those from St. John's Priory (see below).

**Site Location :** EVAN'S HOME, BARRACK LANE, KILKENNY

**Type:** Urban medieval ecclesiastical/military post-medieval

**R.M.P. Ref.** KK019:26:68

**Licence No.** 99E0662

**Client:** Kilkenny County Council

**Project Date:** 1999

An archaeological assessment; building survey and test trenching was carried out in December 1999 at the rear of Evan's Home, immediately north-west of St John's Priory (MAP 1). The site is on the eastern bank of the River Nore at the northern corner of the medieval suburb of St John's. The remains of the Blessed Lady Chapel of the priory (c. AD 1290) were incorporated into the present Church of Ireland St John's Church in 1817. Evan's Home is a fine, large, two-storey building built c. 1750 as the Infantry Barracks and converted to Evan's Asylum in 1818.

Three test-trenches were opened across the site in an I-shaped pattern parallel to the main axis of the building extending to the east boundary wall of the site. Of these Trench 1, which extended 1.3m from the boundary wall with St John's Priory parallel to Evan's Home, revealed **part of the western arm of medieval priory chapel**. The trench produced stratified medieval layers that contained a number of medieval floor tiles, pottery and bone against a 1m-thick limestone wall, rendered front and rear, containing a protruding, chamfered sandstone door-jamb. The wall had a packing fill of alternating mortar and silt with a large quantity of medieval pottery, iron and animal bone and was sealed by a universal demolition layer of mortar, rich in post-medieval brick and pottery, representing the building level of Evan's Home.

Trenches 2 and 3 were perpendicular to Trench 1 and close to the north and east wings of Evan's Home. Both trenches revealed limestone-mortared walls associated with the barracks building and representing a rear wall between the two rear wings and an internal basement wall. One isolated deposit in Trench 2 produced a single sherd of late 16th- or 17th-century German stoneware, suggesting some truncated activity after the initial medieval phase.

**Site Location :** 23 JAMES'S STREET/TILBURY PLACE, KILKENNY

**Type:** Urban medieval/post-medieval

**R.M.P. Ref.** KK019:26

**Licence No.** 00E 0730

**Client:** Tom Walsh Solicitors

**Project Date:** 2000

No. 23 James's Street is located at the corner of James's Street and Tilbury Place (MAP 1) and lies within the medieval city, adjacent to the line of the medieval defensive wall. The refurbishment of the dwelling and construction of an extension to the rear was halted following the discovery of human remains under the house and archaeological excavation was subsequently required. Excavations on both the interior ground floor of the house (Area 1) and the yard to the rear (Area 2) were carried out in 2000, during the renovation of the site.

Excavation of the interior *Area 1* of the mid-18th-century dwelling revealed an earlier truncated garden soil sealing a substantial number of features, containing medieval and post-medieval pottery, cutting natural boulder clay. Archaeological features were spread across the interior and included an inhumation burial, a crude **iron-working furnace** and flue, a stone-lined well and associated cobbled pathway, several rubbish pits, a linear gully and isolated post-holes.

The furnace pit, which was partially sealed by the gable wall of the house, cut an earlier, medieval rubbish pit and was lined with boulders and backfilled with clay and soot, rich in iron slag, which produced a single musket ball. The isolated burial, although substantially truncated by construction, was an extended **child inhumation**, orientated W/E within a shallow oval grave-cut. It was not complete and appeared to have been re-interred in antiquity.

Partial archaeological excavation of the rear yard *Area 2* down to the depth of construction revealed modern garden soils sealing the remains of early modern outhouses, drains and an original cobbled surface to the yard. This surface partially sealed several archaeological features, including a cobblestone-lined square pit with post-medieval artefacts, a partially exposed pit with medieval pottery (also seen in Area 1) and a third, undated circular pit.

**Site Location :** FRIARY STREET/GARDEN ROW, KILKENNY

**Type:** Urban medieval/post-medieval

**R.M.P. Ref.** KK019:26

**Licence No.** 97E0087 ext. & 01E0569

**Client:** Gerry Flynn/Stephens & Sons Ltd.

**Project Date:** 2001

Monitoring of a proposed mixed residential/commercial apartment block development fronting Friary Street revealed a number of important archaeological features, which were subject to immediate rescue excavation over the entire footprint of the site, measuring 72m in length (E/W along Friary Street) by 29.5m in width. The site was excavated in two parts: Area 1 and Area 2. Testing of this and adjacent plots by E. O'Donovan and by T. Breen, both in 1997, had only revealed 'garden deposits' which had produced medieval pottery.

A large number of medieval, post-medieval and modern features were revealed in both areas. Three phases of archaeological activity were identified from excavation. Phase 1: medieval; features associated with rear burgage plots extending to dwellings fronting Friary Street. Phase 2: late medieval/post-medieval; continued occupation of medieval plots, recorded in the 1654-5 Civil Survey. Phase 3: post-medieval/early modern; improvement of Friary Street, construction of dwellings and associated settlement, recorded on Rocque's map of 1758.

Area 1: across the south-eastern quarter and Friary Street frontage revealed densely concentrated clusters of medieval and post-medieval urban occupation. This was grouped into four east-west **medieval 'burgage' plots**, respected by later post-medieval and modern building. Medieval features (dating from the 13th century onwards) were sealed below a garden soil, whereas post-medieval features (dating from after the mid-16th century) cut the garden soil to the south, east and middle of Area 1. Of these, medieval features included a **corn-drying kiln** lined with flagstones and a clay base containing preserved burnt chaff and a burnt wattle and daub cover. There were also several linear burgage boundary gullies and perpendicular ditches, wicker-lined pits, stone-lined pits or water-troughs, and post-holes, some with in situ burnt or preserved square wooden stakes or posts. Post-medieval features included rectangular pits, linear north-

south gullies and landscaping tree-plantation. No evidence of houses in situ was noted, suggesting that the medieval street was to the south of its present orientation. Property boundary markers or ditches were dug and redug over time, representing a probable continuity of settlement and boundaries.

Finds recovered from this area included a medieval bronze ring-brooch, a medieval iron key, a small cannon ball, medieval and post-medieval pottery (from England and France, as well as Kilkenny-type ware and Leinster ware), animal bone and clay pipes (including a hoard of 17th-century Dutch stamped examples).

Area 2: to the west was undertaken in piecemeal fashion owing to the nature of the development. A number of small of isolated archaeological features occurred across the area. Most of this area was truncated by the terrace of 18th-century buildings that occupied the street frontage and their associated annexes, brick cellars, several large, square refuse-pits and one stone-lined well.

