3 & 4 Mill Lane, Leixlip, Co. Kildare.
Archaeological Testing

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1. **Introduction**

Archaeological testing, in addition to an archaeological assessment, was a request for Further Information issued by Kildare County Council with respect to an application for planning permission for the site at 3 & 4 Mill Lane, Leixlip, Co. Kildare. Planning permission is sought to demolish a modern workshop on the site and to reconstruct two cottages in the location, incorporating existing façades which are listed for protection in the Leixlip Local Area Plan 2002 (Ref IP 53). An archaeological assessment was conducted in December 2004 and this revealed that no *in situ* archaeological features were visible above ground on the site (Elliott 2004). Archaeological testing was conducted on the 29th of January 2005 and this report comprises the results.

2. **Archaeological and Historical Background**

Historical Leixlip, northeast within county Kildare, occupies a narrow strip of land defined topographically by a high ridge on the north, the River Liffey on the south and the Rye Water on the west. Leixlip is the only inland Irish town with a Norse name, *Laxhlaup* meaning ‘Salmon Leap’ and this refers to a waterfall that existed on the Liffey south of the town, prior to the construction of a hydroelectric power station in the location. Giraldus Cambrensis used the latin, *Saltus Salmonis* to refer to the area in the 12th century and it is from this term that the baronies of North and South Salt derive. Although medieval documents generally referred to the town as *Saltus Salmonum, le Lexlep* occurred as early as 1399-1400 (Bradley, Halpin & King, 304; Curran 2001, 1).

The Scandinavian placename suggests there may have been a Viking settlement at Leixlip and indeed it has been proposed that the adjacent townland of Confey may have represented *Ceannfuait*, a longphort established by Sitric in 915 (Bradley, Halpin & King, 304). Alternately, it has been suggested that a mound at Cooldrinagh, in the bow of the Liffey on the Dublin side of the river, may be the site of an original Viking settlement. Leixlip is thought to have been the westernmost point of the *Dyflinarskiri*, the 9th century Viking territory that stretched from modern day Skerries to Arklow (Curran 2001, 1-4).
During the late 12th and early 13th centuries Leixlip was also known by the name Ernia or Hernie, possibly derived from An Urnaidhe or The Oratory, which may indicate a pre-Norman ecclesiastical site. However, the earliest definite settlement evidence for Leixlip occurs in the late 12th century (Bradley, Halpin & King, 305).

Giraldus Cambrensis accounted that the ‘the cantred of Offelan nearest to Dublin’, formerly held by Robert FitzStephen, was granted by Strongbow to Adam de Hereford prior to 1212 (Killanin & Duignan, 1967). Adam divided the lands of Cloncurry, Oughterard, Kill and Downings with his brothers but retained Leixlip for himself where he established a borough and erected a castle at an early date. The castle was located on a promontory southwest of the village overlooking the junction of the Rye Water with the River Liffey and the earliest structure was probably a late 12th century motte (Bradley, Halpin & King, 305 & 309).

In the mid 13th century, the manor of Leixlip was passed from Stephen de Hereford (Adam’s son) to the Pippard family. Ralph Pippard granted all of his Irish castles and manors to his son John in 1294, who returned Leixlip to his father three years later. In 1302 Ralph granted his manors in Ireland to the King and over the following thirty years both construction work and repairs were carried out on Leixlip castle. Custody of manor and castle were given to John de Grauntsete in 1331 for a period of ten years but were passed to Roger Outlaw, Prior of Kilmainham in 1336. Further works were carried out on the castle over the following decade and for over a century after, it remained in the keeping of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem (ibid. 309).

In 1479/80 Leixlip was passed to Thomas Daniel, Lord of Rathwire and in 1496 Henry VII granted it to Gearóid Mór Fitzgerald, the eighth Earl of Kildare. The FitzGeralds had to forfeit the land in 1536 after the rebellion of Silken Thomas. Subsequently it passed through the hands of Matthew King, John Alen and William Vernon (ibid. 310), until in 1569 it was granted to Sir Nicholas White, Master of the Rolls, whose family held it up to the 18th century. In 1731 it was sold to Rt. Hon. William Conolly, the nephew and heir of Speaker Conolly, and it remained in the Conolly family until 1914 (Bence-Jones 1978, 183).
There were two churches in Leixlip at the time of the Normal invasion, the church of St. Columba in Confey (adjacent to the ruins of Confey Castle) and the church of the Salmon Leap (The church of Blessed Mary or St. Mary of Hernie). It is thought that both lay on the sites of earlier fortifications (Curran 2001, 3). St. Mary’s was granted by Adam de Hereford, along with a burgage within the town, to the Abbey of St. Thomas at some stage prior to 1212. This grant did not include the chapel of St. Patrick in Leixlip Castle, which continued to function throughout the Middle Ages. In 1310-11 Edward II granted the chapel to Andrew of Kent, it was granted to Henry Poule in 1406 and Thomas Darcas in 1480. Adam de Hereford also granted a burgage in Leixlip to St. Mary’s Abbey in Dublin, which they still held at the time of the Dissolution. This suggests that Leixlip, although burned by Edward Bruce’s army in 1317, was relatively undisturbed throughout the Middle Ages (Bradley, Halpin & King, 312).

There were two priories in Leixlip, both founded by canons of the order of St. Victor. St. Wolstan’s was established in 1202 by Adam de Hereford and St. Katherine’s in 1219 by de Hereford and Warrisius de Peche, the Lord of Lucan (Curran 2001, 4). The latter was sited on a low plateau above the River Liffey northeast of the village. In 1236 it was subordinated to St. Thomas’ Abbey in Dublin and united as a conventual dependancy in 1287. In 1323, due to its impoverished state, it was appropriated to St. Thomas’ as a non-conventual cell. In 1539 it was granted rent-free, with attached lands, to a former canon of St. Thomas’, Patrick Fynne, on condition that he maintain the abbey buildings. The surrender of St. Thomas’ Abbey listed ‘the church of St. Ketherine, near the Salmon Leap’ and its site was granted to Sir Nicholas White in 1569. St. Catherine’s well, situated on the top of the hill north of the priory site, is covered by two grotto shaped structures. The site of the church is occupied by a roofless house, built of uncoursed limestone and brick (Bradley, Halpin & King, 320). This was originally a residence designed by Francis Johnston in 1798 (Killanin & Duignan, 1967).

During the Counter Reformation, the local people were said to have attended mass at an altar built of turf sods in St. Shaughlin’s Glen. A small church, ‘the Penal Church’ was built there in the mid 18th century and this served the catholic community until the
emancipation in 1829, at which stage a larger church was built at Castletown (Curran 2001, 13).

The Black Castle, located at the eastern end of the town on Mill Lane, is first referred to in 1562 when it was granted to William Vernan. In 1570 it was passed to Nicholas White and an inquisition of 1621 stated that the Earl of Kildare held a castle at Leixlip. This may have been the Black Castle, as the Civil Survey of 1654 recorded that it was situated on the lands of the Earl of Kildare (Bradley, Halpin & King, 307). Cartographic evidence suggests that the structure had fallen into ruin by 1760 and, although its form is indistinct on Taylor’s 1783 map, it must have been rebuilt shortly after as it was occupied by the military in 1798 and a gallows erected near it (Fitzgerald 1899-1902, 340). The long avenue running east from Mill Lane has been known as the ‘Black Avenue’ since this period (Curran 2001, 15). At the beginning of the 20th century the site was described as ‘a residence so modernised as to be indistinguishable except to one well acquainted with the locality’ and now lacks any diagnostic medieval features (Fitzgerald 1899-1902, 341). It is thought that a vaulted cellar may lie closed up under the upstanding house (An Foras Forbartha 1985).

Records tell that in 1455 Thomas Bath, receiver of the manor of Leixlip for the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, was discharged due to negligence. One of the reasons was allowing a watermill at Leixlip to be wasted and destroyed. The records of Leixlip frequently mention mills throughout the Middle Ages and, with the rivers Liffey and Rye providing a constant supply of fast flowing water, milling was an important part of the town’s economy. The earliest reference to a mill is a grant by Adam de Hereford before 1212 of a burgage ‘near the burgage of St. Thomas, by one facing the mill’. In 1303 25s 6d were spent repairing mills and bringing a millstone to Leixlip. There are records of more expenditure on mills between 1325 and 1327. A mill on the Liffey was mentioned in grants to William Vernon in 1562 and Nicholas White in 1570. (Bradley, Halpin and King, 308-309). The Civil Survey of 1654 made reference to a corn and cloth mill on the lands of Lady Alen of St. Wolstans. The mid 18th century saw an iron works, corn mill and fabric printing industry located in Leixlip. The iron works, closed in 1856, were
replaced by a corn mill nearby in 1862. There was later a woollen mill and flour mill in Leixlip in the 19th century (Curran 2001, 16-20).

The most famous industry established in Leixlip was that of Guinness’ brewery. Local tradition tells that Archbishop Price, who died in 1752, left £100 to his servant Richard Guinness and a similar sum to his son, Arthur. Price is also said to have left a secret recipe for brewing a very dark beer (I.C.A. 1989, 6). Guinness’ Brewery was established in 1756 on the Main Street by Richard and Arthur Guinness. Leixlip was also the home of Rye Vale Distillery which was producing up to 20,000 gallons of whiskey per year by the 1830s (Curran 2001, 21).

A Mesolithic core axe found in a garden at Leixlip is the only prehistoric evidence so far uncovered in the town. (Bradley, Halpin & King, 320).
3. **Summary of Archaeological Assessment**

The site, examined on the 13th of December 2004, lies at the western end of Mill Lane, adjacent to the Black Castle. Only the façades of 3 & 4 Mill Lane have survived and these front a modern, concrete built workshop which lies in the garden of the Black Castle. The road fronting façades are those of single-storey, rubble-built cottages. A set of large wooden gates divide two further sets of preserved, free-standing cottage façades, which now act as a wall for the Black Castle’s garden.

The Black Castle is a three-storey, pebble-dashed house with Georgian style windows and a semi-circular Georgian bay at the rear. Although predominantly of 19th century construction, it is known to incorporate the fabric of a medieval tower house. Cartographic evidence suggests that the tower house had fallen into ruin by 1760 and it is uncertain how much of it had survived at that stage to be incorporated. It must have been rebuilt by 1798 as it was occupied by the military in that year and a gallows erected nearby. The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH) suggest that there may have originally been a 12th century structure on the site although no other documentary reference to this has been found.

The site is accessed through the large wooden gates, which lead to a gravelled car parking area with the workshop to the left and Black Castle to the right. A concrete pavement running along the rear of the workshop is flanked by the remains of a low stone wall, roughly 15m long, 1m in average height and 1.87m in maximum height. It is uncoursed and comprised of loosely cemented limestone rubble. With a severe overhang, this retains the soil of the terraced back garden (Pl. 1). The garden area has dimensions of approximately 14 by 14m and is mostly covered by lawn, although various garden features such as flower beds, pathways and a pond are present (Cover Pl.). The garden is bordered at the rear by a high granite wall which may date to the first property boundaries after 1837 and before 1908.

The original façades at 3 & 4 Mill Lane represent mill worker’s cottages that, according to cartographic research, date to a period of construction after 1837 and before 1908.
They differ slightly in style from Nos. 6, 7 and 8 which are dated to *circa* 1775 by the NIAH. The row of cottages are representative of a tradition that was very significant in Leixlip town throughout history, milling. From the 13th century onwards, mills played an important part in the town’s economy and a mill has existed at the end of Mill Lane from at least 1752. Five of the ten cottages have been restored to their original appearance and are currently lived in. The façades of a further four have been preserved and remain upstanding. Restoration of 3 & 4 Mill Lane, if undertaken with care and reference to original character, will certainly be a positive contribution to the historical town of Leixlip.

The site examination did not reveal any *in situ* archaeological features above ground on the site. Two rounded masonry blocks with a medieval appearance were found flanking the garden pond. They were not original to the site, however, and had been salvaged by the owner from a previous development, possibly at Moynalvey, Co. Meath. These blocks are utilised as garden features and will not be damaged during the proposed development. Although archaeological testing at nearby Silleachain Lane did not produce any material of archaeological significance, it is a possibility that material relating to 12th and 16th century structures may be uncovered during excavations on the site at Mill Lane. The original site of the 18th century gallows is uncertain and evidence pertaining to this historical period could plausibly exist on the site.
4. **Archaeological Testing**

Archaeological testing was carried out on the 29\textsuperscript{th} of January 2005. One test trench was excavated across the existing garden area at the rear of the modern workshop, running roughly north to south. Limited space, due to an upstanding garden shed and various garden features, meant that the mechanical excavator was not able to excavate the test trench exactly perpendicular to the low retaining wall that runs parallel to the workshop (Pl. 2). The excavated trench was 5.7m long and up to 1.06m deep (Fig. 3).

The stratigraphy within the trench was as follows (Fig. 4). Natural gravels (G) were revealed at a consistent depth of 0.7m below the existing ground level on the site (Pl. 3). Adjacent and possibly parallel to the retaining wall, a feature (H) was cut into this layer (Pl. 4). This lay at a distance of 1.2m from the wall, with steep sides and a flat base at a depth of up to 0.32m. It was filled by 0.18m of mid yellow silty clay with occasional mortar inclusions (F) underlying a brownish yellow silty clay with occasional mortar and charcoal inclusions (E). A sherd of Staffordshire slipware pottery was found within the primary fill (F) of this feature, placing it firmly in the post-medieval period. The feature may represent the remains of a field boundary first illustrated on the 1910 edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 2).

Directly overlying the natural gravel on the site was a layer of mid brown silty clay with a maximum depth of 0.3m (D). This underlay a dark brown silty clay with occasional inclusions of red brick and mortar fragments, 0.2m deep (C). Overlying this layer, 4.45m south within the trench, was a thin layer of mortar and gravel, 0.8m in width and up to 0.07m deep (B). This probably represented the remains of a former path running east to west through the garden. The uppermost layer was an organic garden soil comprised of dark brown sandy clay (A). Sherds of post medieval and modern pottery were recovered from the lowest layers within the trench (C and D).
5. **Archaeological Impact Statement.**

Following an examination of the stratigraphy revealed in the test trench, the major aspects of the proposed development and the resultant archaeological implications are discussed below:

- Demolition of the existing modern workshop. If this is undertaken with care, it will not adversely affect the original cottage façades. Natural gravels were uncovered during testing at a level of approximately 0.3m above the floor level of the existing workshop. This suggests that subsurface features are not likely to have survived underneath the foundations of this building and its demolition will not impact upon archaeological material.

- Demolition of the low retaining wall at the rear of the workshop. This wall is not considered of archaeological significance and its surviving remains do not appear structurally sound.

- Excavation of the garden soil at the rear of the workshop to create a patio 12.5m in maximum length and 5m in maximum width and to install services for the proposed cottages. The results of testing suggest that archaeological material will not be impacted upon by this work. However, testing was carried out in a limited area only and it cannot be guaranteed that archaeological material will not be uncovered elsewhere on the site during groundworks.

- Construction of two cottages in the location of the existing workshop covering a combined area of 12.5 by 7m. It is proposed to retain the existing façades and restore numbers 3 & 4 to have the appearance and character of the original cottages. Although a mezzanine level is planned, this will not be visible from the road frontage. The development as proposed will therefore have a positive visual impact upon the historical town of Leixlip. Masonry from the wall at the back will be re-used to build a new retaining wall around the border of the proposed patio. This suggests a positive re-use of original masonry elements.
6. Conclusions and Recommended Mitigatory Measures¹

Archaeological testing at 3 & 4 Mill Lane revealed natural gravels at a depth of approximately 0.7m below the existing ground level in the area to the rear of the modern workshop (Fig. 4). These gravels were overlain by layers of garden soil containing post-medieval and modern pottery (Pl. 3). Adjacent to the low retaining wall that runs parallel to the workshop, a steep sided, flat based feature was uncovered cutting the gravel layer (Pl. 4). This had a maximum visible depth of 0.32m and a sherd of Staffordshire slipware pottery confirmed it was post-medieval in date. It is possible that this represents the remains of a ditch from a field boundary, absent from the first edition Ordnance Survey map (Fig. 1) but illustrated on the 1910 edition (Fig. 2).

As natural gravels were revealed at a height of at least 0.3m above the floor level of the existing workshop, it is not considered that archaeological monitoring will be necessary during demolition of the building. However, as it remains a possibility that archaeological features may be uncovered in the garden area of the site, it is recommended that groundworks extending into this area be monitored by a suitably qualified archaeologist.

¹All recommendations are subject to the approval of the relevant heritage authorities, the DoEHLG and National Museum of Ireland.
7. References

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Figure 1. Extract from 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, 1837 (published 1838).

Figure 2. Extract from Ordnance Survey map, 1908 (published 1910).
Figure 3. Site Plan showing location of test trench. 
After Kevin Roche, Drg. No. PPL-02.

Figure 4. Stratigraphy within test trench.
Plate 1. Path between workshop and retaining wall.

Plate 2. Positioning machine prior to excavation of test trench.

Plate 3. Test trench viewed from the north.

Plate 4. Feature viewed from the southeast.