



Famine. Transportation for minor offences was common. The gaol became a focus for activity again during the War of Independence and the Civil War: it was a base for the Cheshire Regiment of the British Army and IRB prisoners were held there. Following this, the gaol fell into disrepair until its regeneration as a tourist attraction, which provides a compelling insight into the architecture and conditions of incarceration as well as the different uses to which it has been put over time. For details of opening hours and tickets, see <https://www.wicklowshistoricgaol.com/>.

Bride's Head

A significant archaeological complex at Bride's Head and Lime Kiln Bay can be accessed by the coastal footpath from Glen Beach. Sites at or near Bride's Head include a holy well and, in the southern side of a small natural ravine, two rock shelters where prehistoric flint tools were found. The lower courses of a nave-and-chancel church (measuring c. 10.2m by 4.5m) stand above Lime Kiln Bay as the ravine opens to the east (Fig. 12). The door is in the northern wall. This is a penal church, used when the practice of Catholicism was prohibited in an attempt to impose the supremacy of the Church of Ireland. East of the church is the limekiln which gives its name to the bay. Limekilns were common features of the landscape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, providing quicklime for buildings or for the improvement of agricultural soils.

Note: the beach here is a seal breeding colony and access is restricted at sensitive times of the year.

Wicklow Gaol

Wicklow's historic gaol is today a major heritage tourist attraction (Fig. 11). Construction began in 1702 in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion. The 1798 rebellion led to another significant increase in prisoner numbers and the gaol was expanded in the early nineteenth century. It held prisoners in very difficult conditions: transportation and summary execution were routine. By the middle of the nineteenth century many men, women and children were incarcerated for crimes of poverty or lifestyle. This was greatly exacerbated by the Great

Above: **Fig. 11—Wicklow Gaol** (© Wicklow Gaol).

Below: **Fig. 12—Bride's Head, looking east, showing approximate outline of church (yellow) and location of limekiln (red).**



Wicklow Head lighthouses and lookout post

South of Bride's Head, and with no official public access, are three lighthouses and a World War II lookout post on Wicklow Head (Fig. 13). The oldest lighthouse, originally one of a pair to distinguish the lights from those on Howth Head and Hook Head, was first used in 1781. Two new lighthouses were commissioned in 1818, the lower on the coastal cliffs and the upper just inland of the summit of Wicklow Head. The lower one is still operative although now automatic. The oldest tower was struck by lightning in 1835. The Irish Youth Hostel Association leased the upper lighthouse and associated cottages from 1935 until 1942.

The older, octagonal lighthouse was a notable landmark during World War II: whitewashed stones (now overgrown) added in August 1943 identified it as EIRE 9 to aid aerial navigation. The distinctive rectangular lookout post on the summit of Wicklow Head now houses radio equipment.

Wicklow's churches

Wicklow has three main churches.

St Patrick's Church is a Victorian Gothic construction that was completed in 1844. It was funded by public subscription and built on land donated by the Fitzwilliam family. It replaced a much more modest Catholic church which had been located to the west, on the other side of St Patrick's Road, and is now a community centre.

St Livinius's Church is located on top of a hill, immediately adjacent to the Round Mound. It is a complex building, dating back to the seventeenth century and with a fifteenth-century Romanesque doorway that may have been brought to the site

from another church. The graveyard contains some notable grave-markers, the oldest dating back to 1679.

Wicklow Methodist church dates from the late nineteenth century and displays an attractive construction palette of yellow and red brick, with Dalkey granite used in the dressings and Bath stone in the rose window.

Other aspects of Wicklow's heritage

These sites are only part of the heritage of Wicklow, which includes many fascinating buildings and features, as well as the story of important residents such as Captain Robert Halpin, who laid the first transatlantic cables. Wicklow's heritage is presented to the public in a range of new information boards and a heritage trail with specially commissioned videos (<https://wicklowtown.ie/heritage-trail>).

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Above: **Fig. 13—Aerial photograph of Wicklow Head dated c. 1950** (MA Vertical Negative Prints Box/Wicklow Folder.© Military Archives IE-MA-ACVN-P2-L10-01088b).

Right: **Location map.**

Cover image: **Photograph from the French collection, showing the gardens** (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).



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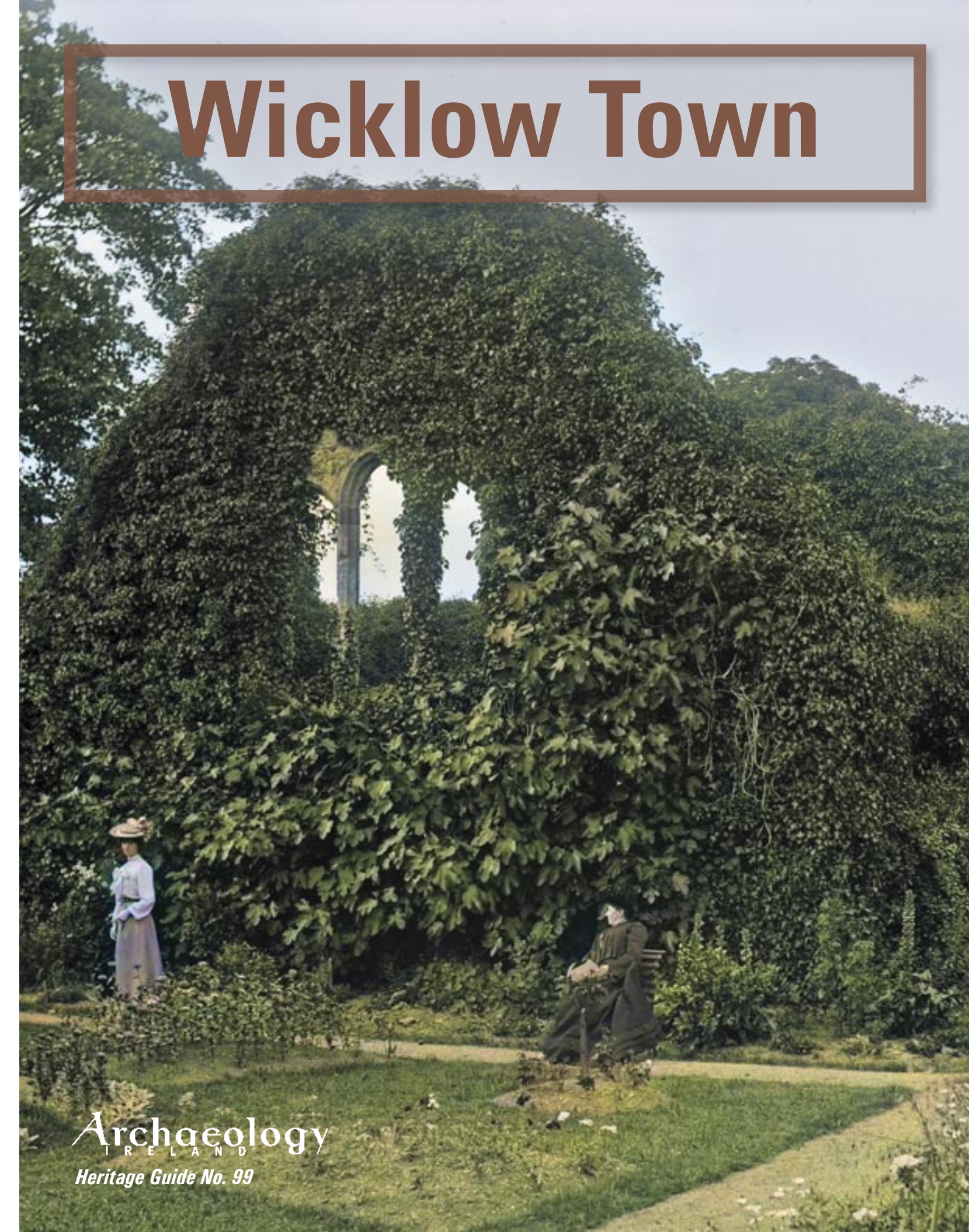
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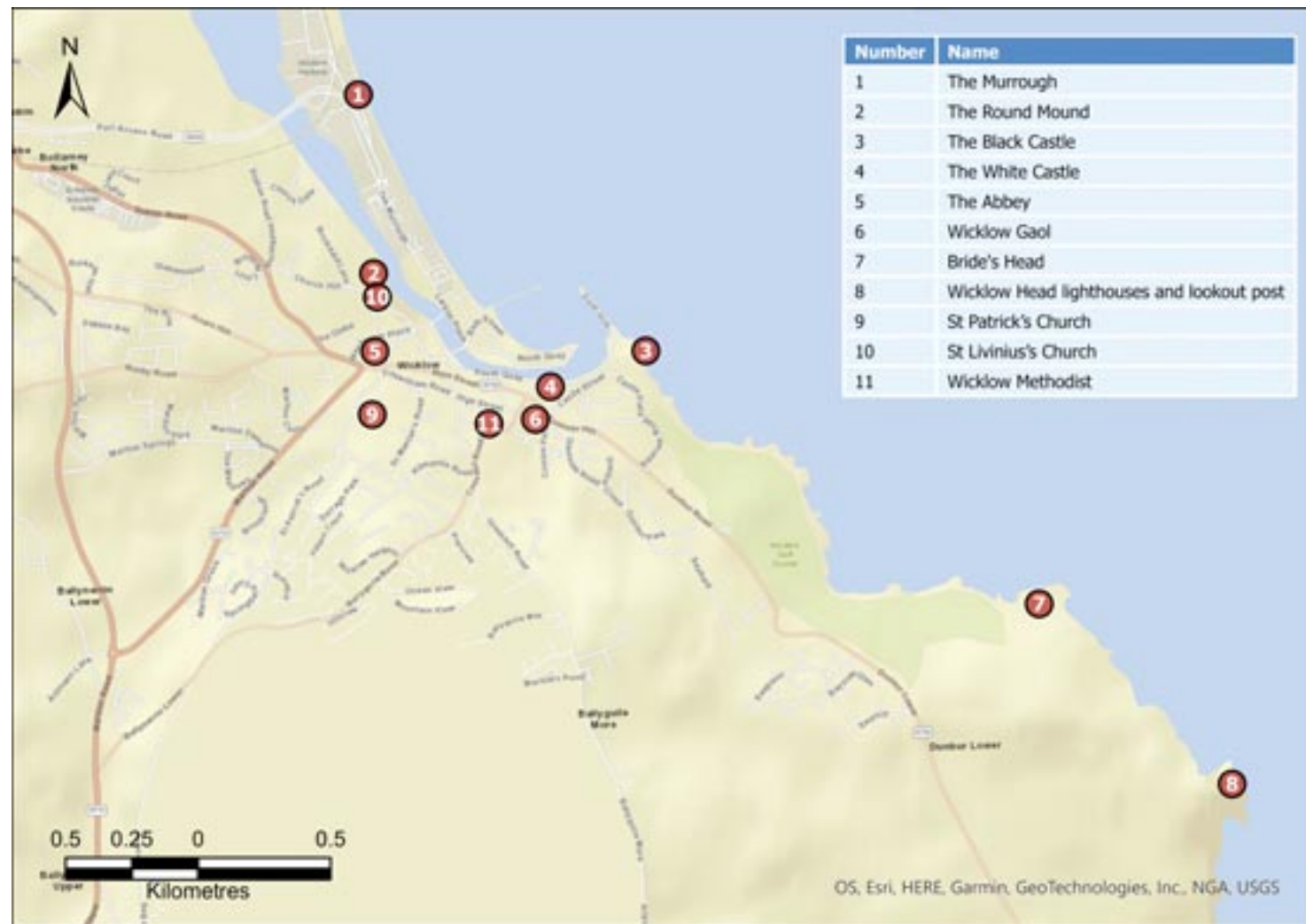
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Introduction

Wicklow lies nearly 50km south of Dublin, where the River Vartry meets the sea. At Wicklow the Vartry takes a sudden turn to the south, blocked by a gravel ridge and forming Broad Lough and associated wetlands running north behind the low grasslands of the Murrugh. The coast to the south is formed by low schist cliffs that run south, interrupted by occasional small pebble or sand beaches. Although many aspects of Wicklow's past are not understood in detail, significant buildings and archaeological sites are found throughout the town.

The prehistoric settlement of Wicklow is poorly understood. A Later Mesolithic flint artefact (Fig. 2) was among a scatter of lithics recovered in the 1980s during construction of the golf-course, and other artefacts, probably of Neolithic or Bronze Age date, have been recorded occasionally along the coast (see Bride's Head,



Top: **Fig. 1—Location map** (courtesy of Wicklow County Council).
 Left: **Fig. 2—Later Mesolithic butt-trimmed flake, Corporation Lands, Wicklow Town** (© johnsunderland.com).
 Above: **Fig. 3—Decorated sword hilt, the Murrugh** (© courtesy of the National Museum of Ireland).

below). A Bronze Age cist containing the cremation of an adult was found in Ballynerrin in 1952, and a *fulacht fiadh* was excavated in advance of road development at Ballynerrin Lower in 2006. A series of promontory forts are claimed along the headlands south of the Black Castle, but these are not always easy to identify on the ground.

The name Wicklow is of Scandinavian origin and derives either from *Vikingalo*, 'meadow of the Vikings', or *Vik-lo*, 'meadow of the bay'. Both names likely refer to the Murrugh. Viking settlements are believed to have been established on the Wicklow coastal plain by c. AD 800–30, with records of raids on Glendalough from 834. A small number of ninth-century Viking artefacts are known from the town and nearby, most notably an elaborate sword, probably deriving from a high-status burial and found somewhere on the Murrugh in the late nineteenth century (Fig. 3).

Henry II gave Wicklow to Earl Richard de Clare (Strongbow) in 1173, and burgages in Wicklow were granted by 1199, but there is little detailed understanding of the development of the town. As well as the key buildings discussed below, there are also references to a Benedictine convent (1448–70) and a leper hospital (1578).

A significant archaeological complex, including a church, graveyard and settlement, was excavated in advance of the construction of the Glebe Primary Health Care Centre on the main Dublin road into Wicklow, west of the town. The graveyard included 191 individuals and dated from c. AD 600–1600. The stone foundations of a church, possibly one known historically as Drumkay, and associated enclosures were identified. Medieval and post-medieval features were located to the east.

A town of three castles?

The first historical reference to a castle in Wicklow is in 1173, when it was granted to Earl Richard by King Henry II. This suggests that a castle or fortified settlement was present prior to the arrival of the Anglo-Normans. It is not clear what this might have been.



The motte/Round Mound
 The Round Mound or Mount is a steep-sided artificial platform, 6–7m high, on a dominant location on a hill above the Vartry (Figs 4 and 5). The mound is poorly understood, inaccessible and heavily covered with vegetation. It is most likely to be a motte and may be the first of the Wicklow castles, established in the late twelfth century and perhaps in use whilst the stone-built Black Castle was under construction. Local folklore suggests that



this was the fortification of local chieftain Naithi McGarron and it is also possible that it was a Viking assembly place. Given that many mottes were constructed on earlier sites, it is conceivable that the Round Mound was the location of the pre-existing fortification at Wicklow, but there is little strong evidence for this.

The Black Castle

The Black Castle rises above the shore on a rocky headland (Figs 6 and 7). It is a triangular keep and surviving architectural features suggest an early thirteenth-century date.

It has been suggested that the deep ravine separating the castle remains from the rest of the area is man-made or artificially deepened, with the site therefore being identified as a later prehistoric promontory fort. The existence of this fort is not clear, however. The earth rampart to the south-west is likely to be broadly contemporary with the castle. Stone-cut steps, the so-called 'Danes' Steps', provide access to the castle from the sea.

Historical accounts suggest that the castle was repeatedly attacked, rebuilt and attacked again up to the seventeenth century, when the garrison was finally disbanded. The accounts include reference to the construction of a gaol and to the



Left: **Fig. 4—Detail of the Round Mound from the Robert French collection, probably from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. The mound and a possible feature on top are clearly visible, as is an apparent slump on the side above the river** (courtesy of the National Library of Ireland).

Top: **Fig. 5—Reconstruction of the motte above the Vartry** (© Aoife Patterson).

Above: **Fig. 6—Aerial photograph of the Black Castle, 2017. Note the 'Danes' Steps' accessing the castle on the right** (© Garrett Kennedy).



burning down of the castle on more than one occasion: one account describes fires at both ends of the castle, which is hard to reconcile with the size of the keep.

Recent geophysical survey at Black Castle was only moderately successful because of large amounts of modern dumping and disturbance.

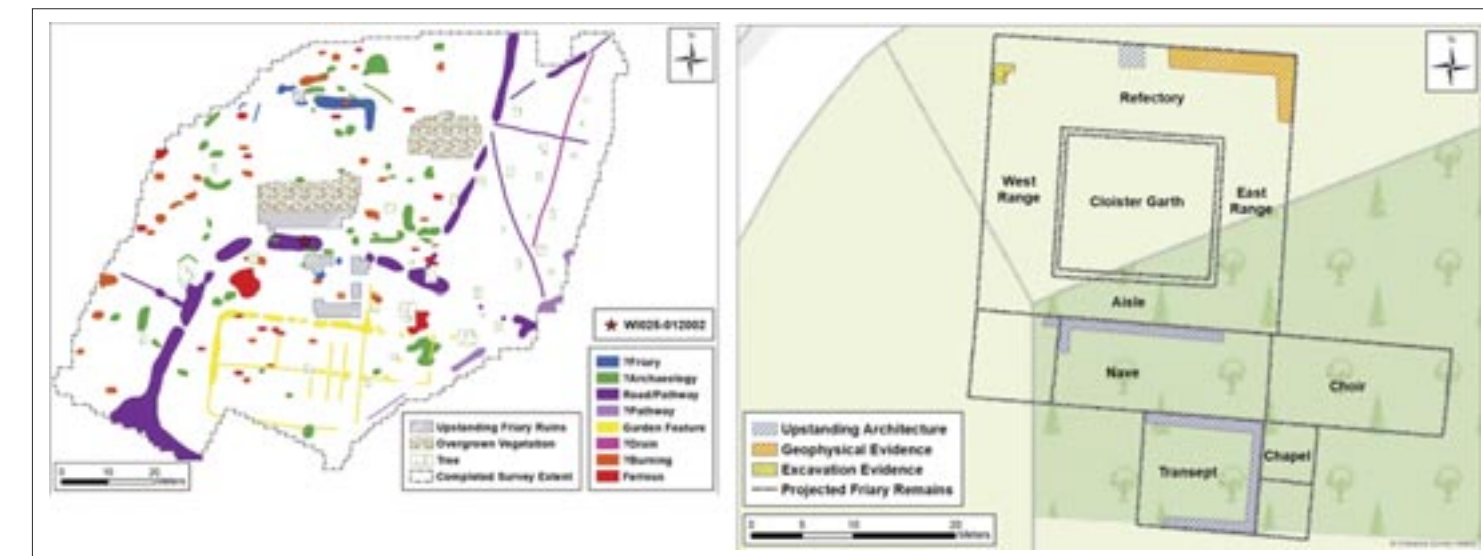
The White Castle

A 'White Castle' at the bend of the river was constructed in the late sixteenth century by Dublin corn merchant Michael Bea, and is also referred to in deeds from the late eighteenth century. By the nineteenth century, this distinctive bend in the Vartry was home to steam and other mills. Given the absence of any remaining evidence of a castle, it has been supposed that the building was not of any significance. Nevertheless, a 1715 Dutch naval chart clearly identifies both the Black Castle and 'Wicklow Castle', with the latter in the location of the White Castle. This suggests that the building had a certain importance. Given its date of construction, the White Castle may have been a tower-house. No surviving features of the Castle are visible today.

Above: **Fig. 7—View of the Black Castle by Gabriel Beranger, c. 1780** (by permission of the Royal Irish Academy © RIA).

Right: **Fig. 8—View of the Abbey, showing interior of south transept (right) and nave (left)** (© Graeme Warren).

Below: **Fig. 9—Left: interpretative plot of geophysical results. Right: conjectural reconstruction of the friary buildings, with surviving masonry in grey.**



The Abbey

The Franciscan friary was founded late in the reign of Henry III (1216–72). In 1552 its lands were seized as part of the dissolution of the monasteries and it subsequently served as an arsenal, a gaol and a court-house before being returned to the clergy in 1799.

Geophysical survey carried out in 2018 helps to elucidate the original plan. To the north of the upstanding church remains, several features allow the reconstruction of aspects of the original friary layout, including the church and the location of the cloister. Excavations in 1991 found a probable section of medieval wall in the north-west of the abbey grounds.

To the south and east, the survey is dominated by formal gardens and a road/path. These gardens date from the late eighteenth century and appear to have been created by one Catherine Eaton, who sought to preserve the ruins. They were called a 'pleasure garden' by Beranger and Barralet during their 1780 sketching tour, and were described as being 'laid out in walks, lawns and flower beds'. Early twentieth-century photographs show the formal gardens very clearly (see cover image).

In 2022 small-scale excavations in advance of potential development identified an area of at least nine human burials south-west of the upstanding remains of the Abbey.

