

Kilkenny Central Access Scheme

Summary of preliminary findings to date at 21 & 22 Vicar Street

Historical background to site

Writings available to date

The manse house belonging to the prebendary of Tascoffin is known to have been somewhere in the vicinity of these houses. The precise location has been suggested in historical writings over the past two centuries, and is summarised as follows:

- Edward Ledwich, writing in 1786, quoted a survey (or “visitation”) carried out by Bishop Otway of the property belonging to St. Canice’s Cathedral in 1672. He placed the manse house on a street called King Street, somewhere in the vicinity of the present site in Vicar Street.
- John Hogan, in 1884 took this further and says that the extensive premises of the manse house were shown on a map of 1758, running from Mill Lane to the Breaghagh. He said that the pub at the corner (now 22 Vicar Street) was a remnant of this. He gave no sources for his information.
- The map of 1758 does not show the property as being a manse house – such church houses were shown in a different shading to buildings in general on the map. The map also does not show ownerships or boundaries.
- Rev William Carrigan, in 1905, quoted Ledwich’s writings. He concluded that King Street ran from the corner of Vicar Street in a straight line to the Breaghagh, where it crossed to join as street that ran up to where the courthouse is now. He agreed with Hogan that the manse was on the site of number 22 Vicar Street, stating that Hogan had made the identification “with every show of reason”.
- Hogan had shown no reason at all.
- In 1953 Dr W J Phelan and J S Gibb gave the location of the manse as 22 Vicar Street, giving Carrigan and Hogan as the sources of their information.

Research carried out for this project

- Bishop Otway’s survey, on which all of the authors base their findings, was checked for this project. This showed that Ledwich made a number of significant errors in his short quotation, the first being the date, which was actually 1679. Secondly, the survey does not mention a street called King Street, but “the king’s street”, which is an urban equivalent of “the king’s highway” – a description and not a name. It is notable that no other source has suggested that there was a street in that location called King Street.
- Hogan drew conclusions from the map of 1758 that sounded authoritative, but which were only his conclusions and the map does not show this at all.
- Carrigan followed Hogan uncritically and interpreted the existence of King Street.
- Phelan and Gibb offered no new light, merely repeating Hogan and Carrigan.

- None of these authors cites the extensive works by the most prolific writers on the history and antiquities of Kilkenny, Rev James Graves and John G Augustus Prim, who appear to have left no record of this building in Vicar Street or the manse house of the prebendary of Tascoffin. In their book on the history, architecture and antiquities of St Canice's there is no mention of such a manse house. Graves made no reference to it in his paper on the ancient street architecture of Kilkenny, which discussed a number of older buildings that survived in Kilkenny at time he was writing, in 1857.
- The prebendary of Tascoffin did have land in the area, but research has found the following.
 - The survey of 1679 refers to “a piece of waste ground in Irishtown where formerly the manse house stood ... on which there is now a thatched house built.”
 - A deed of 1732 describes the land as the prebendary of Tascoffin’s glebe land “with the cabins houses and tenements built thereon”.
 - In 1824 the prebendary of Tascoffin granted a lease of three cabins in Vicar Street and these were on the site now occupied by 20, 21 and 22 Vicar Street.
 - Number 20 Vicar Street was rebuilt as two houses by the 1840s and those houses, together with number 21 were rebuilt as shops in 1881.
 - Number 22 Vicar Street was rebuilt in 1908.

Survey results

- The removal of the plaster has confirmed that the front, rear and internal walls of numbers 21 and 22 Vicar Street were rebuilt. Some earlier portions of wall remain, but these are of 18th or 19th century date.
- The gable end of 22 Vicar Street facing the Diageo car park is part of an earlier building, or buildings, that stood on the car park site.
- The gable does not coincide with the building shown on the 1758 map, suggesting that either the map was wrong, or the gable is from a different building.
- There is a small opening in the gable wall and this is lined with cut stone. Which building this belonged to is uncertain at present.

Findings so far

- The manse house of the prebendary of Tascoffin had gone before 1679 and hence none of the present buildings incorporate its remains.
- As the prebendary of Tascoffin’s land did not include the Diageo car park this earlier building cannot be a remnant of the manse house.

What is next?

- In order to more fully understand the buildings, including the origins of the gable end wall, we will continue with our process of investigation of the archaeological and architectural heritage, under the direction of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.