

# TALBOT'S TOWER

Kilkenny

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## Final Report on Conservation Works

2011



Prepared by



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Dublin 2

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## 1. Introduction

This report addresses the conservation works proposed to be carried out to Talbot's Tower in August-November 2011.

Talbot's Tower, also known as Talbot's Castle, is the only surviving complete defensive tower of Kilkenny City Walls.

The building is part of a Recorded Monument (Kilkenny City) and forms part of the city wall circuit, which is contained within the Zone of Archaeological Potential RMP KK19:26 *Historic Town* and is included in the Urban Archaeological Survey. The site is therefore protected under the National Monuments Act 1930-2004.

The tower is listed in the Development Plan for Kilkenny City and Environs 2002 as a Protected Structure and is within the Patrick's Street Designated Architectural Conservation Area.

All works are being carried out in accordance with: Ministerial Consent No C240 (updated 08/08/11) and Part 8 Permission, received 14/04/2009.

The team consisted of the following:

Client: Kilkenny Borough Council, City Hall, Kilkenny  
Dept of A/H/G: Maeve O'Callaghan, Government Offices, The Glen, Waterford  
Nessa Roche, Government Offices, Customs House, Dublin 1  
Conservation Architect: Consarc Conservation, 1-3 Westmorland Street, Dublin 2  
Conservation Engineer: Ivor McElveen, Corrageen, Rathnure, Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford  
Building Archaeologist: Ben Murtagh, Primrose Hill, Threecastles, Co. Kilkenny  
Archaeologist: C  il  n    Drisceoil, Kilkenny Archaeology, Unit 11 Abbey Business Centre, Abbey Street, Kilkenny City  
Main Contractor: Stone Mad Ltd,   rd na Gr  ine, Railway Road, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick

## 2. Conservation works August – November 2011

Works started on site 25<sup>th</sup> August and were practically complete 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011.

The works went out to public procurement, through e-tenders. Four tenders were returned and a contractor was selected. After a period of 16 working days, the contractor commenced work on site 25<sup>th</sup> August.

The works included:

1. Rebuilding the stairs to the top of the tower, taken down in 2007. This work is essential to the understanding and interpretation of the site and is Policy 18 of the *Kilkenny City Walls Conservation Plan*;
2. Take down and rebuild a small section of curtain wall that was leaning out and in danger of collapse;
3. New timber entrance door and gravel floor to the interior of the tower.

The details and approach to the proposed works were discussed at length and in detail with Kilkenny Borough Council and members of the Kilkenny City Walls Steering Committee. The east wall (inner face) was taken down in 2007, after it was photographed and recorded. All of the stone was on site and sorted into batches before being rebuilt.

The east wall was rebuilt to exactly match existing, reusing existing numbered stone and other stone on site.

The west wall (outer face) had already collapsed and there is no survey drawing of this prior to its collapse, except for a small area at parapet level that remained in-situ after the collapse. However, most of the stone was on site, where it fell.

The west wall was rebuilt using existing stone from site. Additional rubble limestone, salvaged from sites around the city, and stored in a council depot on the Hebron Road, was sorted through and used in addition to the stone on site.

Because the same level of survey information was not available for the west wall, it was originally proposed to finish this wall in a shelter coat of lime render, except for the small section at the top of the wall that will be left without render. However, the workmanship is very high on the finished wall and the Steering Committee decided not to proceed with the shelter coat, as the monument may read clearer without it.

Between these two walls a set of stone steps was built. The new limestone steps exactly match rake and size of the existing steps. A flame finish was chosen and approved prior to this element of the work commencing. A new timber gate at the bottom of the steps has been manufactured in Irish oak.

A small section of North Curtain Wall, rebuilt in 18<sup>th</sup> Century, was leaning heavily outwards and supported temporarily for safety. In relatively recent years an archway was created to provide access from the adjacent VEC College. The wall was recorded and taken down. A new foundation was dug. Prior to this an excavation was carried out by Kilkenny archaeology. The wall was rebuilt and a new arched opening provided.

A gravel bed was laid over a *geotextile* membrane on the tower floor to protect the existing floor. A new Irish oak entrance door has been manufactured.

Principles of good heritage practice in building conservation have been adhered to throughout the project. The main contractor is a very accomplished stone mason and his employees are well trained.

All materials were stored on pallets and protected under a marquee to prevent damp penetration and protect against frost. Samples of sand and lime were inspected and agreed before works began. Samples of mortar and pointing were approved in advance and a sample left in-situ as an exemplar of best practice.

The works were well protected against the elements during the course of the project. A covered scaffold protected the newly built stonework from rain and also sheltered the new lime work. In addition, all new lime work was protected with hessian, insulation and plastic. This was removed during daylight and reinstated at night. The works will continue to be protected over the winter months.

The conservation architect visited the site once a week and formal site meeting were held once a fortnight. Minutes of meetings were circulated and dates of all site meetings were circulated to ensure all interested parties were kept informed, could inspect samples and welcomed to the site. Ben Murtagh, archaeologist, was on site for much of the duration of the works.

### East Wall Reconstruction



Sample of stonework and mortar approved before works commenced.



Numbered stones set out in preparation for reinstatement.



East wall under construction with numbered stones being reinstated exactly in accordance with the survey drawing, and the wall is further advanced below.



Covered scaffolding allowed for working in inclement weather and protecting the work on completion. Below two corbel stones were reinstated.





Limestone steps up to the landing level



The completed steps. The new steps marry into existing steps, with a steep rake at the upper level.



Two images of the completed east elevation



A close up of the east elevation, with corbel stones, which once may have supported a timber wall walk. The numbered stones have been rebuilt in the correct location. Compare it to the rectified photograph below dating to before the wall was taken down in 2007.



## West Wall Reconstruction



Two views of the base batter repaired and built up to its original height.



Two views of the corner of the base batter, under construction and completed



The covered scaffolding viewed from the west. The size and scale of the building allowed for a ramped access rather than the traditional method of ladder access. This was a more efficient way of carrying stone and wheelbarrows of lime mortar.



Close up of the stonework to the west wall



The completed west wall





The completed west wall, with the protection still on the base batter. Note that the top section was the only extant section of the wall.

### North Curtain Wall



The section of north curtain wall was in imminent danger of collapse.



The wall was surveyed, carefully taken down. A new foundation was poured after the site was excavated by an archaeologist and the remainder of the wall has been supported with a temporary buttress.



Rebuilding of section of north curtain wall under construction.



The completed section of north curtain wall, with new arch built to match the arch of the tower. The Irish oak gate has been manufactured and will be fitted when all scaffolding has been removed

## Tower



Gravel base to tower interior laid over a geotextile membrane



New lime capping to the wall walk