lies an old church yard dedicated to St. Bridget in which probably in the 18th century but between it and the castle the potential whose secrets remain to be realised. 

The recent addition of the geophysical data highlights archaeological study of Ballintober has been minimal. 

Elements indicate the location of an earlier settlement associated earthwork features. It is possible that such elements of the medieval borough associated with the castle that suggest the axis of older settlement, which may indicate elements of the medieval borough associated with the castle.

Ballintober Castle does not stand in isolation. The village today is a planned settlement laid out probably in the 16th century but between it and the castle lies an old church yard dedicated to St. Bridget in which is a series of tombs, including that of Charles O’Conor Don, died 1634. A holy well is located on the slopeing ground to the west and attests to an early foundation, while a market cross, which alone does not survive today, is indicated on the early Ordnance Survey maps to the north of the church yard and may suggest where the fairs and markets occurred within the medieval settlement.

Aerial photography indicates a sequence of earthwork features lying to the east of the castle and north of the church, highlighting a now dismantled roadway and associated earthwork features. It is possible that such elements indicate the location of an earlier settlement associated with the castle:

Despite the remarkable sequence of remains, archaeological study of Ballintober has been minimal. The standing remains alone warrant detailed study but the recent addition of the geophysical data highlights the potential whose secrets remain to be realised.

Further Reading


O’Conor, K., ‘English settlement and change in Roscommon during the late 13th to mid-14th centuries’, in J. C. O’Conor, K. O’Conor, C. Donnelly, J. Logue (eds), The Post-Medieval Archaeology of County Roscommon. A visitor’s guide (The Printworks, Roscommon, 2008).


O’Conor, K., ‘Ballintober Castle, County Roscommon’, Archaeological Journal of Ireland, 86a (1986), 37-93.

O’Conor, K., ‘Ballintober Castle, County Roscommon’, Archaeological Journal of Ireland, 86a (1986), 37-93.

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The Anglo-Norman castles in Roscommon were designed to contain the Gaelic lordships in the north of the county. The construction of Ballintober castle is not documented and it has been suggested that it was built by the O’Conors, but current thinking is that the great earl of Ulster, Richard de Burgh, whose family was closely connected to the court of King Edward I, is responsible for its construction. As the most northerly of the great castles in the county, Ballintober was built to impose a presence on the O’Conor lands. The 13th century was a time of expansion in Ireland and across Europe, but this trend was not continued into the 14th century, and during this time de Burgh interests were curtailed with the result that the O’Conors took possession of Ballintober Castle by 1362.

The northwest tower was substantially reworked in the 17th century. Its four-floor structure is described as a seven-room fortified house. Large mulioned windows and stairs are finished in elegant ashlar stonework, and the principal fireplace, located on the third floor, has an inscription of 1627. The eastern corner towers are more rainous today but that on the northeast angle was also a chamber tower.

The O’Conors now had significant landowners in the early modern period, and their investment in such building is a testimony to their growing wealth. The O’Conors were now significant and their investment in such building is a testimony to their growing wealth. As the most northerly of the great castles in the county, Ballintober was built to impose a presence on the O’Conor lands. The construction of Ballintober castle is not documented and it has been suggested that it was built by the O’Conors, but current thinking is that the great earl of Ulster, Richard de Burgh, whose family was closely connected to the court of King Edward I, is responsible for its construction. As the most northerly of the great castles in the county, Ballintober was built to impose a presence on the O’Conor lands. The 13th century was a time of expansion in Ireland and across Europe, but this trend was not continued into the 14th century, and during this time de Burgh interests were curtailed with the result that the O’Conors took possession of Ballintober Castle by 1362.

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After the O’Conors split into two distinct lines in 1385, Ballintober became the principal place for the O’Conor Don, while nearby Tulsk was the centre for the O’Conor Roe. The castle remained a setting for political intrigue, between O’Conor factions, and between Gaelic and English interests.

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The resistance survey in turn revealed a series of clearly defined buildings arranged around a central courtyard. The structure in the northwest measures c. 12 by 8 m in size and appears to have battlements, suggesting it is a church. The building in the southwest is much more substantial, and measures c. 36.35 m long and 15.5 m wide. Subsequent survey identified that the foundations are not continuous, and seem to represent a series of piers, and these may have supported a timber-framed structure. It is tempting to see here the sequence of buildings referred to in the Inquisition of 1333, which included a hall, chamber and kitchen.

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