Dunluce Castle: History and Archaeology

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Four Courts Press, Portland, OR, 2012. 246 pp., color illus., 6 tables, glossary, bibliog., index. €19.95 cloth.

Breen's book on Dunluce Castle is a beautifully illustrated example of how to present archaeological information in a substantive manner to both specialist and nonspecialist audiences. Filled with full-color images of the castle, Breen also provides photographic and cartographic evidence for comparative sites nearby to ensure that readers will gain a solid understanding of the importance of Dunluce Castle and its place in the broader physical and cultural context. Dunluce is the most visited archaeological site in Ulster, and this book is the first of a planned series to bring more information to a wider public. The dramatic setting of the castle contributes to the aesthetic impact of the volume, but the history and archaeology of the site are the real value to be found in this book.

Dunluce Castle, on the north coast of Northern Ireland, may have had an early promontory fort during the time of the Kingdom of Dal Riada, but the only early medieval evidence is a *souterrain*, the much-discussed subterranean chambers found across Ireland. Even the later medieval evidence has been mostly lost to later construction, with the castle dating from the late 15th century and substantially rebuilt in the 17th century. It is this latter period that makes the site, and the book, of greatest interest to American historical archaeologists. The expansion of Jacobean England and Scotland into Ireland and the Americas constituted parallel and intertwined enterprises, and the events at Dunluce are a useful comparison to the sequence of colonization in North America.

Breen's book on Dunluce Castle is organized into nine chapters, with a timeline preceding the first chapter. The first chapter is an introduction, and provides information on geology, topography, and the history of research at the site. Chapter 2 examines the background of the site, with a very short introduction to the early medieval history of the region, and then the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ulster. Chapters 3 and 4 explore the MacQuillans and the MacDonnells, the noble families who owned the castle from A.D. 1300 onward. Chapter 5 focuses on one lord, Randall MacDonnell, and the early 17th-century plantations. Chapter 6 explores the town, which has a good discussion but will be the focus of a later volume in the planned series. This chapter has an excellent set of illustrations, including aerial photographs, drawings and photographs from the excavations conducted in the town area, and a reconstruction drawing of what the town was believed to have looked like based on the research described in the chapter. Chapter 7 covers the Irish Rebellion of 1641, a conflict often given little attention in North America, but central to understanding both the English Civil War and the modern division of the island into Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It was after this rebellion that the castle was abandoned. Chapter 8 discusses the two centuries of tourism and modern conservation and development beginning in 1800. Chapter 9 is the shortest chapter, only 6 pages, and presents the chronology of the castle including a drawing of the various components and their timeframe. The timeline and the chronology serve as bookends

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to the volume. There is one appendix, the 1928 conservation report, written when the site passed into state control.

In addition to being a good book about an interesting site, Breen's treatment of Dunluce Castle brings some valuable points and ideas forward. One issue that has been discussed in American historical archaeology is the status and identity of the Scots-Irish as a population. The social history discussed in the book reveals exactly how important that social category is to an understanding of ethnic groups in the British Isles. From the early Middle Ages, and probably before, the northern part of Ireland was part of a maritime-focused region that included the Western Isles of Scotland via the northern Irish Sea. Scottish setters were brought into Ulster in great numbers (along with English settlers), as part of both official and unofficial plantations, during the 16th and 17th centuries. Sometimes the settlers and the local Irish population would be in conflict with each other, such as during the 1641 rebellion that had such a powerful impact on Dunluce itself; sometimes the groups would mingle and interact peacefully. The presence of ethnic Scots in Ireland created a different culture group, and that culture group was one that did, eventually, migrate to North America. Breen's book gives specific evidence about the process that created that population.

Another aspect of Breen's book that is fascinating to read is the excerpts and compilation of the legal testimony regarding the 1641 rebellion, taken during the 1650s. Mainly found in chapter 7, these accounts show a rare insight into the social practices of early modern society. For example, the testimony of Gilduff O'Cahan says that he came to Dunluce to hear mass, but as no service was available he went to the home of James Stewart to drink wine. This is not the expected option when we think about attending religious services today.

The archaeological work described in the book is top notch and with sufficient detail to give an understanding without the cascade of technical details that can sometimes overwhelm the substance of a project's discoveries. The work in the castle and town show the distinct social hierarchy in the community. The work also shows the range of community-based specialist workshops, such as the blacksmith and the brew house. The brew house, particularly, was unknown prior to archaeological excavation, and a dedicated brew house was a development of the 16th century in Britain and Ireland. The presence of the brew house at Dunluce Castle shows the industrial developments of postmedieval society as sponsored by the MacDonnell family.

One dispute I have with a point of presentation in the book is the form of houses in the town. An early 17th-century plan shows several central-chimney, hall-and-parlor style houses like those found in both England and North America. The description of the houses does not include this type of house, but instead describes the "most common" house as double gabled with a chimney in each gable. This type of house was typical of more elite residences in the English tradition during the 17th century. The house discovered in Trench 5, illustrated with drawings and photographs, does clearly have at least one end chimney, and was the house of a Scottish merchant with high standing in the community. The other house, from Trench 7, did not have evidence for a fireplace in the gable, and was associated with the blacksmith shop. Breen does not offer the possibility of it being a central chimney house, nor is the evidence presented showing why it could not be one. There is contemporary evidence, presented within the book itself, that there were houses built in the same region at the same time that had a central chimney rather than a gable-end chimney. This differential organization of space

was part of English society, and that differential organization was central to the production of status and identity within communities. It seems likely that not all the houses would have gable-end chimneys. While only a small part of the book's discussion, as the treatment of the town is intended for a later volume, this contradiction could use resolution.

Other discussions of the social aspect of architecture are excellent. An example is the use of corner turrets on the gate tower to show the Scottish ancestry of the MacDonnell family; another is the insertion of a loggia or columned gallery during the later 16th century to reflect contemporary fashion even though it was entirely out of place at Dunluce.

Breen very effectively ties together the complex social and political history of the region with the architectural and archaeological elements revealed during the study presented in this book. Within a few pages, you can read about the reuse of an earlier part of the castle as storage and the political relationships between the rising Scottish elites and the challenges they faced to both the Irish and the English overlords. The composition of the book is such that these do not seem out of place, but a reasonable and fascinating exploration of the material and documentary evidence that is the forte of historical archaeology.

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