

Title: Coppinger's Court: a document in stone

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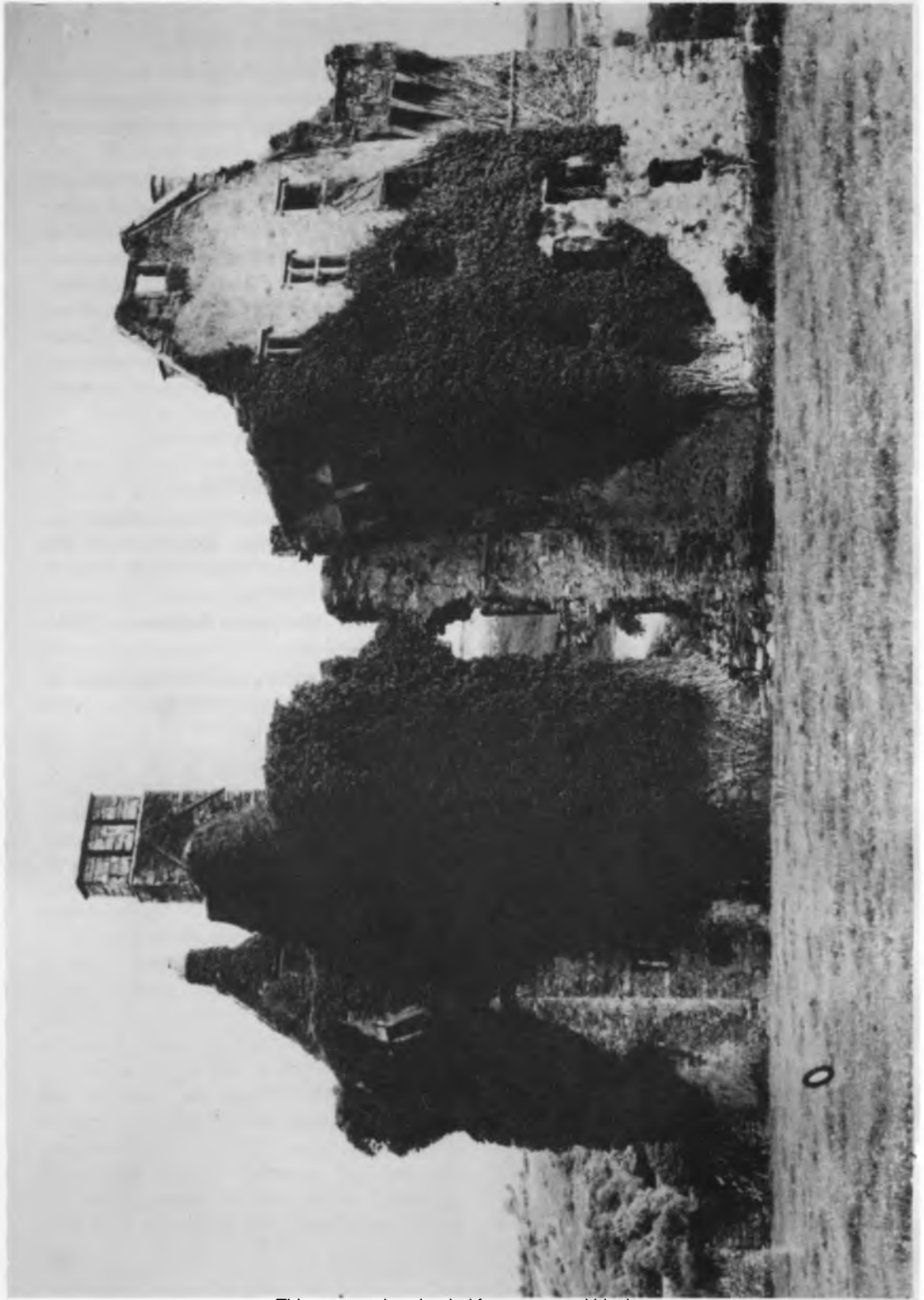
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III. 1: Coppinger's Court

Coppinger's Court: A Document in Stone

By MARK SAMUEL

INTRODUCTION

West of Rosscarbery, in the deep Ballyverine Valley, stands Coppinger's Court; from far around it can be seen, a centrepiece to the landscape. The ragged silhouette over tall hedges changes as the alignment of gable and chimney shifts. By day, rooks caw among the pinnacles; by night, barn owls and bats drift and flit silently through it. Cows graze in building and courtyard penned in by thorny branches.

In the summer, hundreds visit this local curio out of a sense of obligation; children play hide and seek and the elders gaze around awed and uncomprehending, some sitting on a field wall to sketch it.

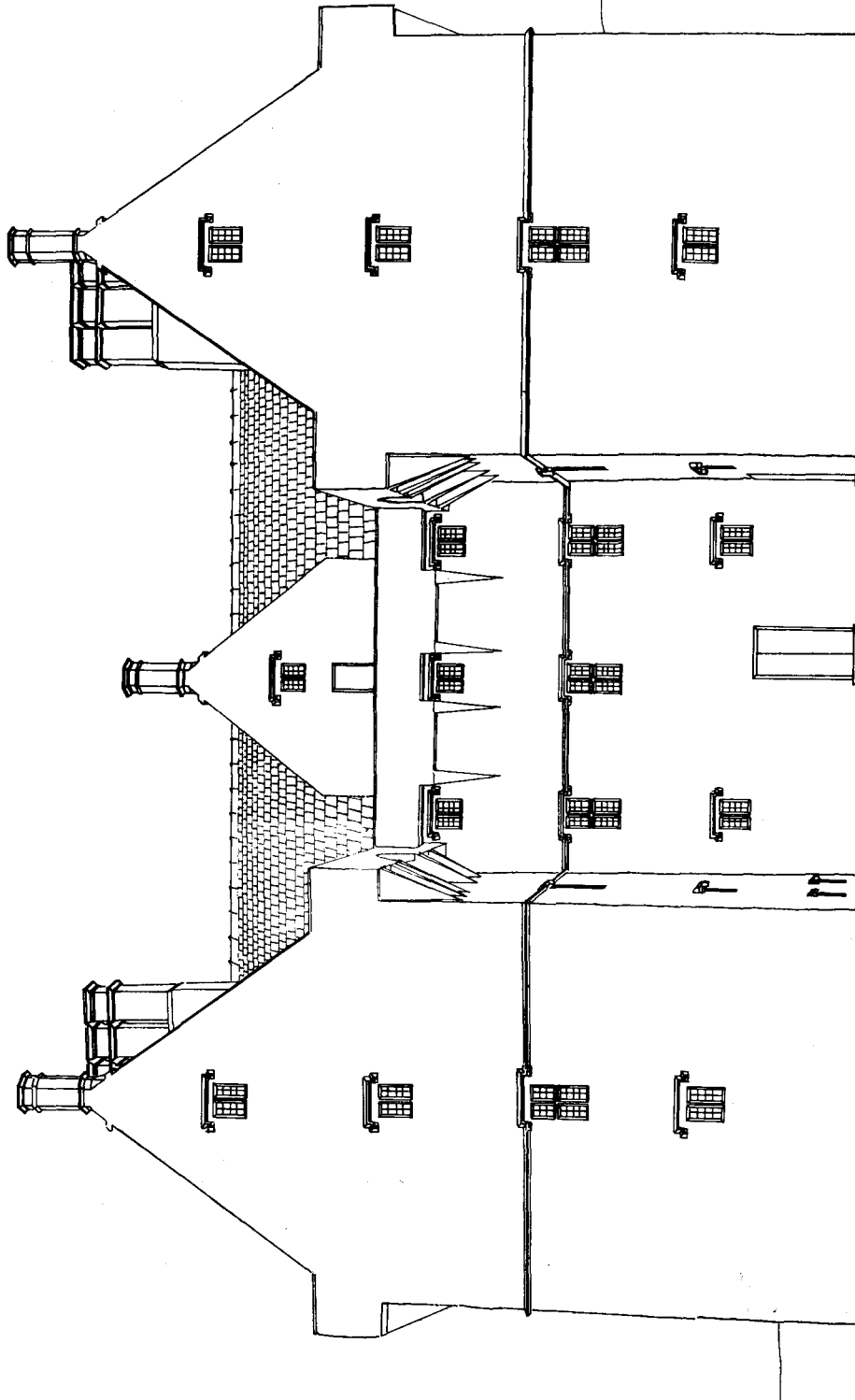
This ruin is generally mentioned in glossy books on the antiquities of Ireland, but no real effort has been made to define its cultural role or position in architectural tradition, nor has its surviving fabric been recorded, let alone understood. This article therefore is intended to cover all these aspects but does not pretend to be the last word on any of them. Rather, it is hoped that it will stimulate interest in the house and show what a significant monument it is in the history of Cork.

This article is an expanded refinement of an undergraduate dissertation submitted to the University of London in 1980. In archaeologist's jargon it is an 'Interim Report', presenting conclusions based on an incomplete survey; in the interests of readability, the supporting arguments are largely omitted as are the survey techniques. It is hoped to eventually produce a final report (Comprehensive Survey and Reconstruction) when circumstance permits.

Completely neglected by the Government, the building retains an eighteenth century air of 'Romantick Decay', a mixed blessing as it continues to crumble. Insensitive 'consolidation', however, would be a worse fate as some Cork 'National Monuments' bear witness. One alternative, full scale reconstruction, merely lacks a multi-millionaire sponsor. In the circumstances, this article may be the only record of those parts of the building doomed to imminent collapse, in itself good reason for this account. Much thanks are due to the Rev. J. Coombes who showed interest and encouraged publication.

THE CULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE COPPINGERS

The Coppinger family had been a merchant family in Cork city and, it is said, came originally from Denmark. They were unconnected with Irish tradition or tanistry, a form of law attacked by the Tudors and their Stuart successors, the Irish nobility being encouraged to adopt titles that could be integrated with English law. One method was an understanding whereby the Irish chief surrendered his estate to the crown so that it would be immediately re-granted to him and to his 'heirs and assigns'. As a tanistry chieftain, he had no right to bequeath in this manner, the succession going to any member of the leading family of the clan who could assert his claim, — a frequent cause of civil strife. Sir Walter Coppinger obviously thought of himself as part of the new order and regarded the Irish law as a tiresome anachronism. He did not hesitate to enrich himself at the cost of chiefs who lacked



COPPINGER'S COURT
CONJECTURAL RESTORATION OF NORTH FRONT BASED ON PHOTOGRAPH. SURROUNDING STRUCTURES
OMITTED FOR CLARITY
M.A.S. 1979

Fig. 1

the necessary new documents. He seems to have been a man of extraordinary vigour and despatch who, alongside a straightforward lust for power and wealth, also had a burning desire to develop his estates, boost productivity and indirectly modernize the whole of south-west Cork. Hardly suprisingly, stories were told in the last century of a tyrant ('No Russian nobleman lorded it over his serfs with such despotic sway') in the habit of hanging anyone who disagreed with him.

It is quite probable that Sir Walter travelled and, because of this, was dissatisfied by the contrast between the wild lands he owned and the rich peaceful estates of England. Perhaps he chose to build where he did for utilitarian reasons only. One suspects, however, that the sheltered and fertile valley pleasingly resembled England. This valley was to be the hub of his empire and the house was propaganda as well as his home, a headquarters of modernization. The 'Wylde Iryshhe' were to learn that an up-to-date Stuart magnate was not to be trifled with. Surely the stupendous and alien new house furnished, regardless of cost, with unheard-of luxuries, was enough to show he was of a finer clay. He was using wealth in a new way.

THE ARCHITECTURAL TRADITION

Many ruins of the early seventeenth century survive in County Cork. They owe nothing to the Irish tower-house tradition, indeed are entirely English in conception although able to resist skirmishing parties, if not investment and ordnance. Their builders do not seem to have been old-fashioned Irish chieftains but 'new men', adventurers English and Irish, who had regularized their estates with the Crown.

The manner of building is almost modern, wood being used for structures earlier built in stone. Walls were thinner without intra-mural chambers and stairs, vaults and arches vanished. Regularity appeared and attempts at symmetry were made, at this date very fashion-

able. For the first time rudimentary designs seem to have been used. Until this date, the tower-house had been the most sophisticated form of secular building; these seem to have been built by 'rule of thumb', their form was dictated entirely by functional requirements. Always similar, never identical, they reflect a received wisdom modified by the whim of the mason and his client. With time, the masons slowly became bolder in their use of stone, later examples therefore being weaker than their predecessors. An example is Raheen Castle (facing Castletownshend Bay) which was as riddled with intra-mural passages as a termite's nest; some of these had to be built up when worrying cracks appeared. Even so, one wall has collapsed. In contrast, Kilcoe Castle (on Roaring Water Bay) has survived substantially intact, though it is perhaps a hundred years older.

The tower-houses seem to have been built slowly according to the money available; at Kilcoe Castle the windows are all subtly different, caused perhaps by a lapse of years between the completion of each floor. In this way, a small but steady income could have financed the building. In contrast, it is likely that Coppinger's Court was built rapidly, drawing on a huge lump sum of cash. The fast building would have required a large specialist workforce with a clerk of works to deal with the reams of documentation. As a practicality, the regular architecture would greatly speed construction; in order for materials to be at hand in advance of construction, a clear idea of the intended building was needed. It would probably be very much more familiar to us than the piecemeal building of a tower-house.

A traditional Irish chieftain enjoyed little extra comfort for all his prestige. He had widespread responsibilities to the many relatives and retainers of his huge household, there being no clear line between his family and servants. In contrast, the very design of Coppinger's Court shows a polarization of the

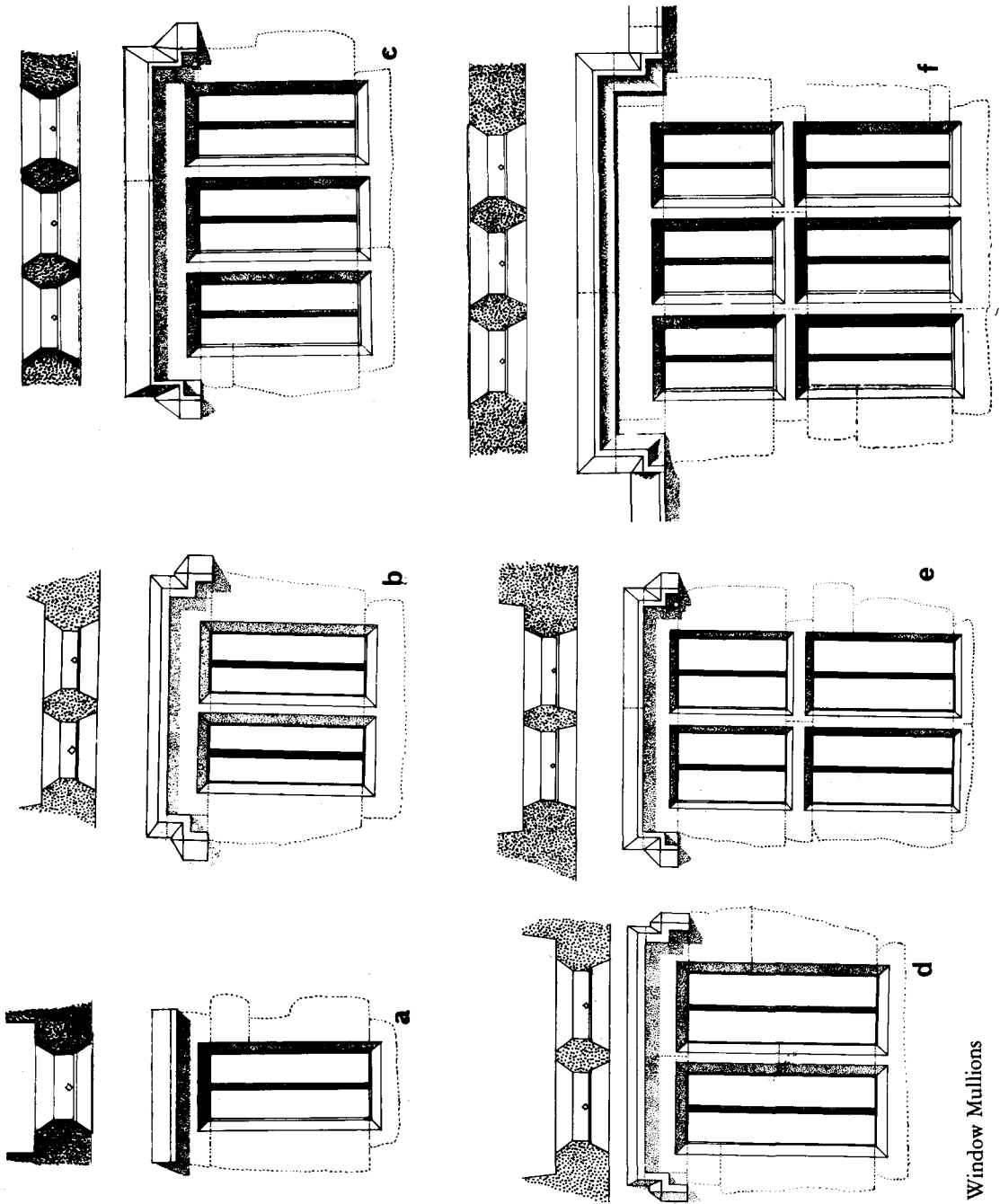


Fig.2: Window Mullions

household between family and servants, the latter becoming a professional and servile class. There are no garderobes at Coppinger's Court; the 'close stool' was now taken for granted as was the servant who cleaned and emptied it.

The Entrance Forecourt

Before reconstructing the remainder of the building on paper, it is necessary to start with the partially destroyed northern forecourt. Part of the wall has fallen, the parapets and corbels are robbed on both sides but these were probably very similar to surviving machicolations on the outer faces of the north wings. Less easy to understand is the broken north wall of the central block. Its face steps back behind the foot of the parapet presumably to increase standing room and above this level, it is clearly part of a gable, half having fallen with the rest of the wall. It split through a window and a door below which gave access to the parapet, and the surviving sides can be seen high in the air. The probable form of the north facade can be seen in Fig. 1.

Reconstructing the Windows

It is said that the house had a window for every day of the year, a chimney for every week and a door for every month. Allowing for poetic licence there were a great many windows, with six standard forms, examples surviving of five (Fig. 2). By 1842 (the date of the earliest illustration known to the author) most of the windows had been knocked out, the freestone being bought by cutlers and toolmakers who used it for sharpening, (according to the owner, Tom Flavin). Fortunately, the economic incentives did not last out all the windows and enough remains to restore the entirely destroyed form with some confidence. Nothing brings home more vividly the terrible poverty of Cork in the eighteenth and nineteenth century than the suicidal danger undergone by the stone-robber in return for a few shillings' worth of sharpening stone.

With one exception, the surviving windows all have a standard light of 0.23m (9") by 0.61m (2') arranged singly, in pairs and threes (Fig. 2a,b,c,d), a four light window being made by combining the two-light window with a pair of shorter lights (Fig. 2e). In Fig. 1 the visible first floor windows are all of this type, but on the south, west and east of the central block they were all three lights across; at first floor level, they probably had six lights (Fig. 2f) combining the four-light windows elsewhere on that floor with the three-light windows above and below them. Fig. 2f is a combination of Fig. 2c,e. On the basis of a surviving piece, the hood moulding can be confidently restored.

The glazed casements were made of separate glass quarries held in leaden cames. The edge of the casement was set in the groove that can still be seen carved in the stonework and it was attached to vertical iron astragals let in the square holes at head and sill; these too survive. By analogy with English houses of this period, stained glass may have existed. It is tempting to picture the six-light windows as plain glass below, but with colours and bright heraldry in the upper lights. Among the heraldic achievements of the Coppinger family, there might have been those of neighbouring gentry, nobles, prominent statesmen and of course the Royal Arms. The rooms they lit were the tallest in the house; here might have been the 'Best Chamber' and 'Withdrawing Roome'.

Ground Floor Reconstruction

Having hinted at the existence of certain chambers, it is a fascinating task to try and identify them where possible. Large houses of this date that survive in England tend to possess a succession of rooms that varies only in detail. By analogy with these, it is possible to reconstruct the ground plan of Coppinger's Court.

The wooden partitions in Fig. 3 are guesswork of this form. In Elizabethan houses,

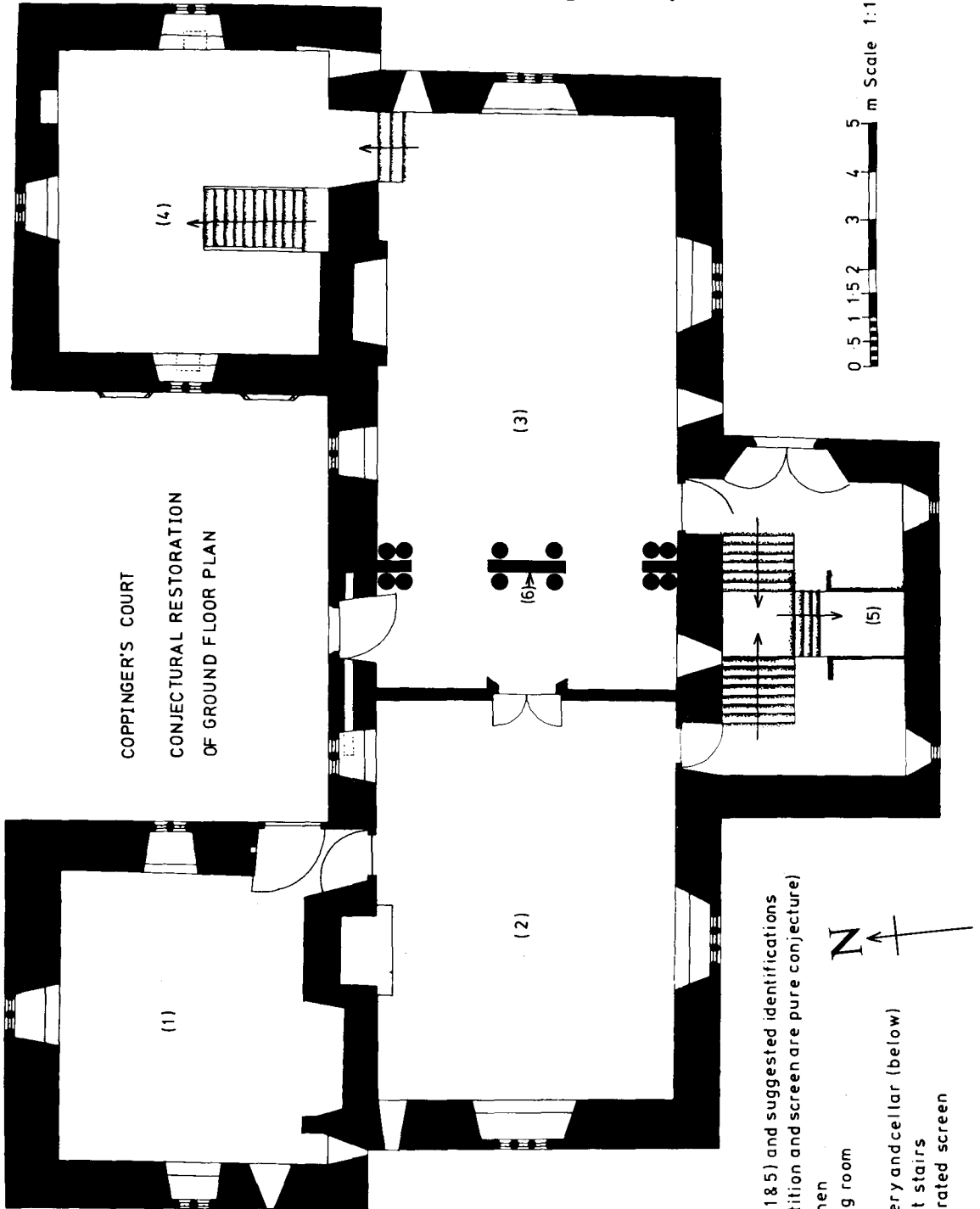


Fig. 3

Known (1 & 5) and suggested identifications
(The partition and screen are pure conjecture)

- 1) Kitchen
- 2) Dining room
- 3) Hall
- 4) Buttery and cellar (below)
- 5) Great stairs
- 6) Decorated screen

the front door opened into the 'screens passage' dividing the house into hall and dining-room, an arrangement inherited from the medieval era. Between hall and dining-room, this partition was pierced by arches. On which side were the hall and dining-room? The hall would display an imposing fireplace; of the two, the west is larger, standing out from floor to ceiling, a basis for the densely ornamented panelling of Jacobean fireplaces.

By implication, the dining-room was to the east; evidence surviving is the direct connection with a kitchen in the north-west wing, identifiable by a fireplace 2.3m (7' 5½") across (capable of roasting an ox). To avoid moving provisions through screens, passage and dining-room, it was provided with its own outside door, delicacy having priority over security.

In the north-east wing is a semi-basement; to provide headroom the floor of the chamber above was raised above the general level of the ground floor, being reached by a short flight of steps. The basement can only have been reached from the chamber above. Strongly resembling the 'buttery and cellar' surviving in English houses, wine and beer might have here been dispensed by the butler under the supervision of the clerk of the kitchen.

The Assymetry of the Ground Plan

Originally, the intention seems to have been to build symmetrically with a south wing c. 8.42m (27' 4½") wide, but the east wall appears to have been built c. 0.56m (1' 10") to the west of the position it would have stood in were the building perfectly symmetrical. This peculiarity could be linked with the equally odd positioning of the main entrance on the opposite side of the house; this door is exactly between the two doors leading into the south wing, an arrangement assumed to have been caused by a screens passage. The south wing, (as built) forced a westward shift of the screens passage to keep it halfway between the two

doors of the south wing and so the main entrance had to be moved too. This theory does at least explain the strangely asymmetrical position of the main door, which must have affected the entire appearance of the north facade. At the risk of circular argument, it is also strongly indicative of the existence of a screens passage!

Reconstructing the Roof

Reconstruction of the external form of the roof is seen to be comparatively straightforward, although the internal structure is at this stage quite unknown. The gables and the copings on the chimney stacks give a very exact idea of the roofs they supported, the main area of doubt being the precise relationship between the eaves and 'machicolations'. The minor gables, too, are almost entirely destroyed and their exact form can only be guessed at.

The machicolations have been described as powerful defensive features¹ but is this what they were actually used for? In no way were they accessible to each other or to the inside of the house. Only the machicolation over the main entrance shows any evidence of a wall-walk and the parapet, on the south wing, has a gap between it and the gable that would have been a tight squeeze for a midget. There is evidence that the bottom of these machicolations was floored with thick timbers, further impeding their defensive role. An alternative role is suggested in Fig. 7. It can be seen how any rain landing on the roof would be channelled into these 'machicolations' which must have acted as rainwater heads. It is possible that some acted as cisterns; similar attempts to supply tall buildings with water are documented elsewhere. In south-west Ireland, one could be sure of a constant supply. In the two places where the water did not flow into a machicolation, it instead discharged through gargoyles, presumably of lead; the hole provided at the foot of a gable can still be seen.

In the reconstruction, small gables can be

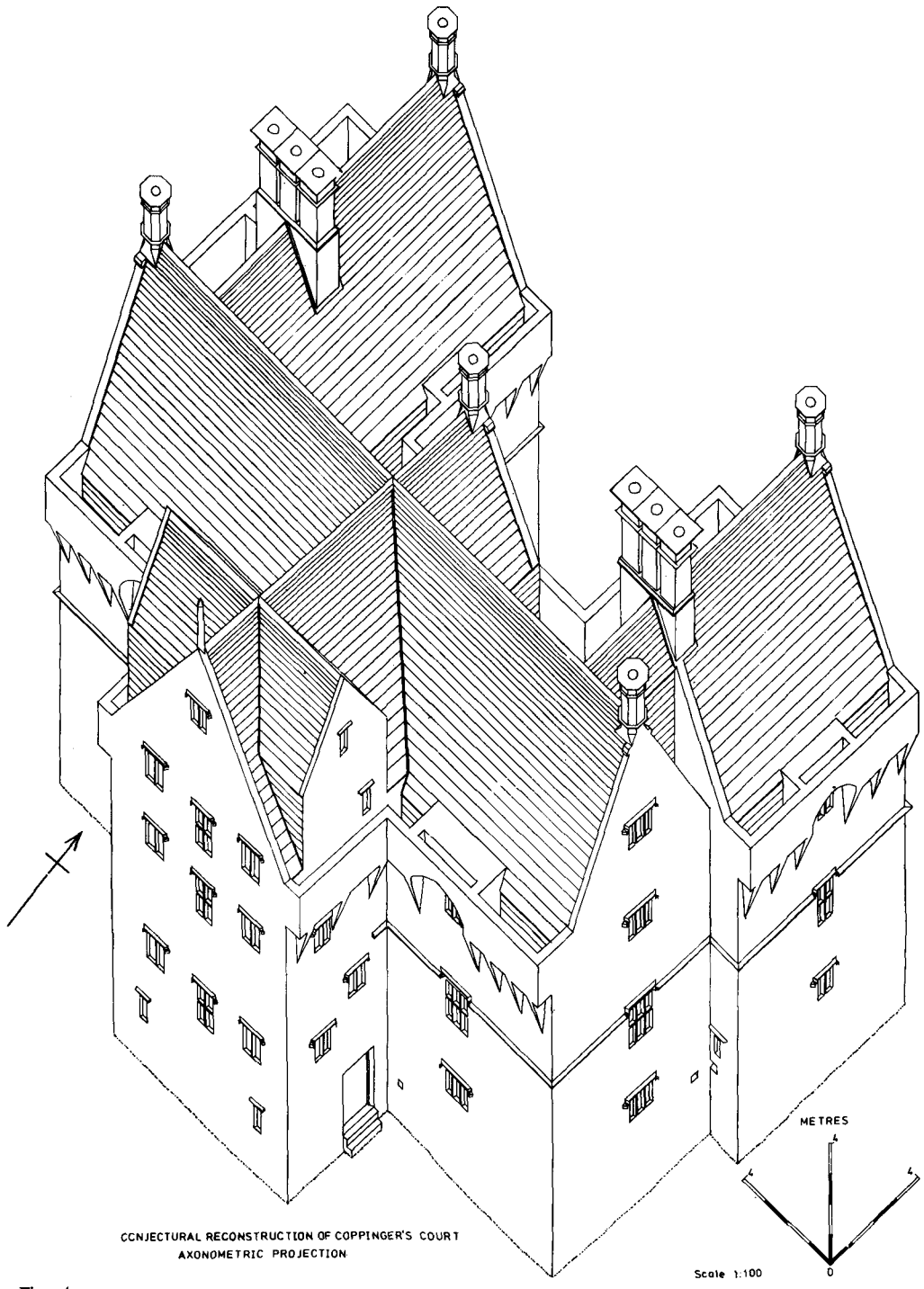


Fig. 4

seen containing dormer windows for the third floor which rose up behind the small flying arches connecting the corbelled machicolations. While none of these have survived, those on the south face of the central block were evidently of the same form as the surviving gable on the east side of the south wing. The four on the north wings, being very much narrower, were probably lower; their wholesale destruction is due to the decay of the lintels of the second floor windows on which they rested.

The Axonometric Projection

In Fig. 4 the house is reconstructed in its most basic form without the dormer windows. The form of the roof is more clearly apparent. The dominance of the first floor is more visible than today and it can be appreciated how dark and gloomy the ground floor must have been, as the windows were small and high to hinder attackers. In contrast the south wing, with its many windows, was light and airy. This was because it contained that architectural show-piece, the stairs. The rather inadequate musket loops on the ground floor make an attempt to enfilade those weak points such as the door in the south wing. The cistern-like form of the machicolations can be seen quite clearly.

The Wilkinson engraving² (not shown) shows a ruin rather more complete than today's. From this has been derived the finial on the south gable and the second entablature on the multiple flue stacks. It is hoped that older depictions of the house may come to light.

The steps serving the south wing door are doubtful. It is equally probably that the ground level has lowered locally through the action of ploughing over the centuries. Equally uncertain is the fifth (central) chimney stack.

The understanding of this ruin has been made easier through its regularity, which means that the 'vital statistics' remain constant on all floors. The survival of a window will reflect the position of a lost one with precision.

The Great Stairs

Inside the south wing can be seen an enigmatic pattern of slots, grooves and beamholes. This is the ghost of a magnificent timber staircase quite in keeping with the rest of the house (fig. 5). The general layout can be readily understood by imagining timbers in these holes. The stairs are an 'open well newel half-turn stair'. This fits in quite well with the architectural tradition: 'This kind of stair was a development of the circular newel staircase of medieval days; the Elizabethans used it very widely for their more important stairs. At the very end of the century, the wooden staircase, with an open well in the middle, was introduced and rapidly superseded the solid-centre design'³

While the general nature of the stairs is clear, the detail requires considerable conjecture. As construction techniques seem to have altered very little, a recent building manual helped considerably to cure this problem.⁴ In circumstances where no direct evidence existed, it was necessary to ask oneself 'What would be the most logical solution to this problem?', (an example being the third floor central landing).

There are of course difficulties such as a pervasive irregularity; it has therefore seemed least misleading to prepare a reconstruction (fig. 6) which follows the surviving evidence without in any way stretching it to provide more tidy reconstruction. In spite of this, it seems unlikely that there is a fundamental error in interpretation. Admittedly, there are some holes which do not fit into this interpretation, but they could have been caused by a temporary scaffolding used during construction. There can be seen a set of slight corbels and grooves above the first floor landings which may have supported the upper cornice of wooden paneling.

The people of Ross must have been awed by these stairs, having seen nothing like it before — elaborately carved and painted and

COPPINGER'S COURT

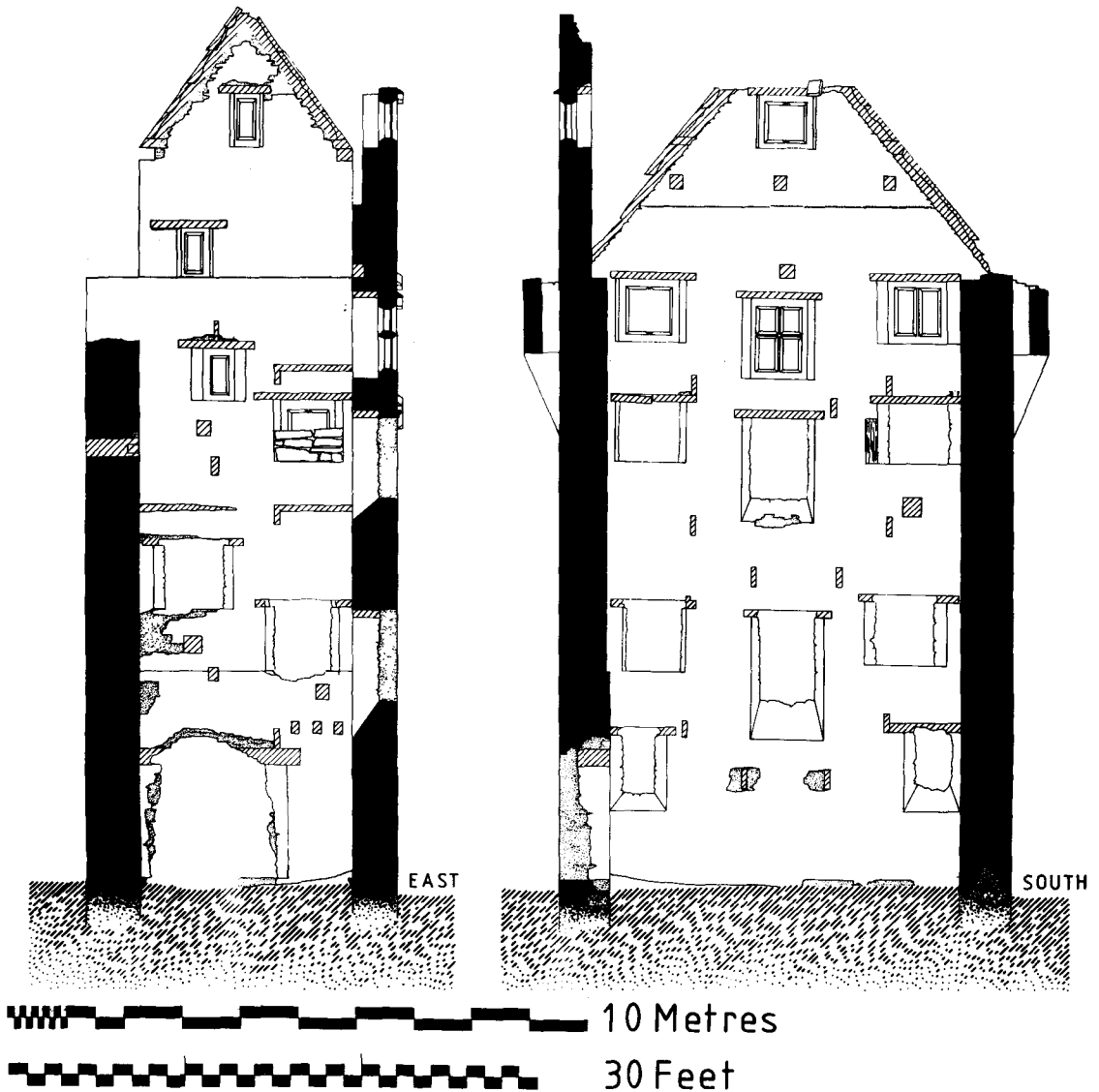
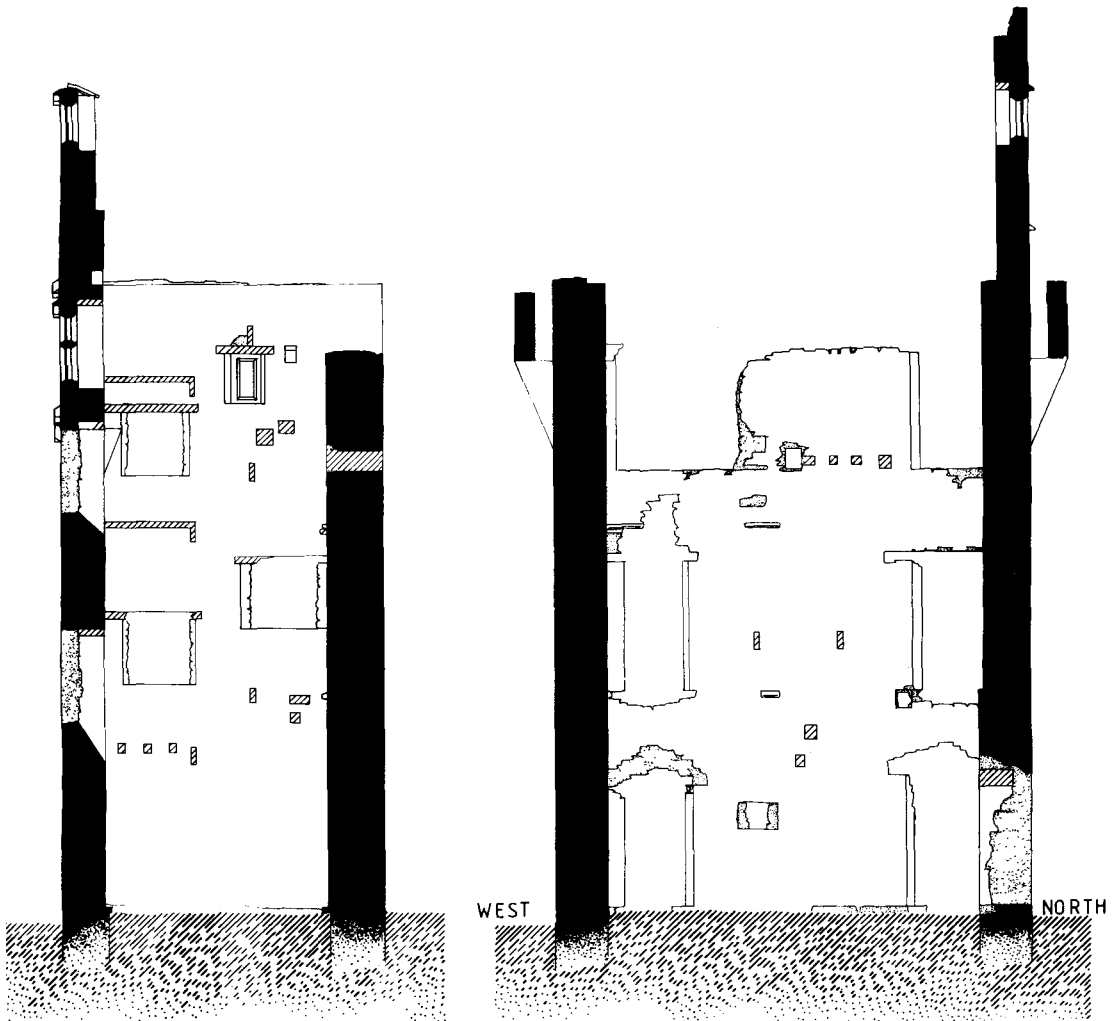


Fig. 5



THE SOUTH WING TODAY

The evidence on which reconstruction was based

COPPINGER'S COURT

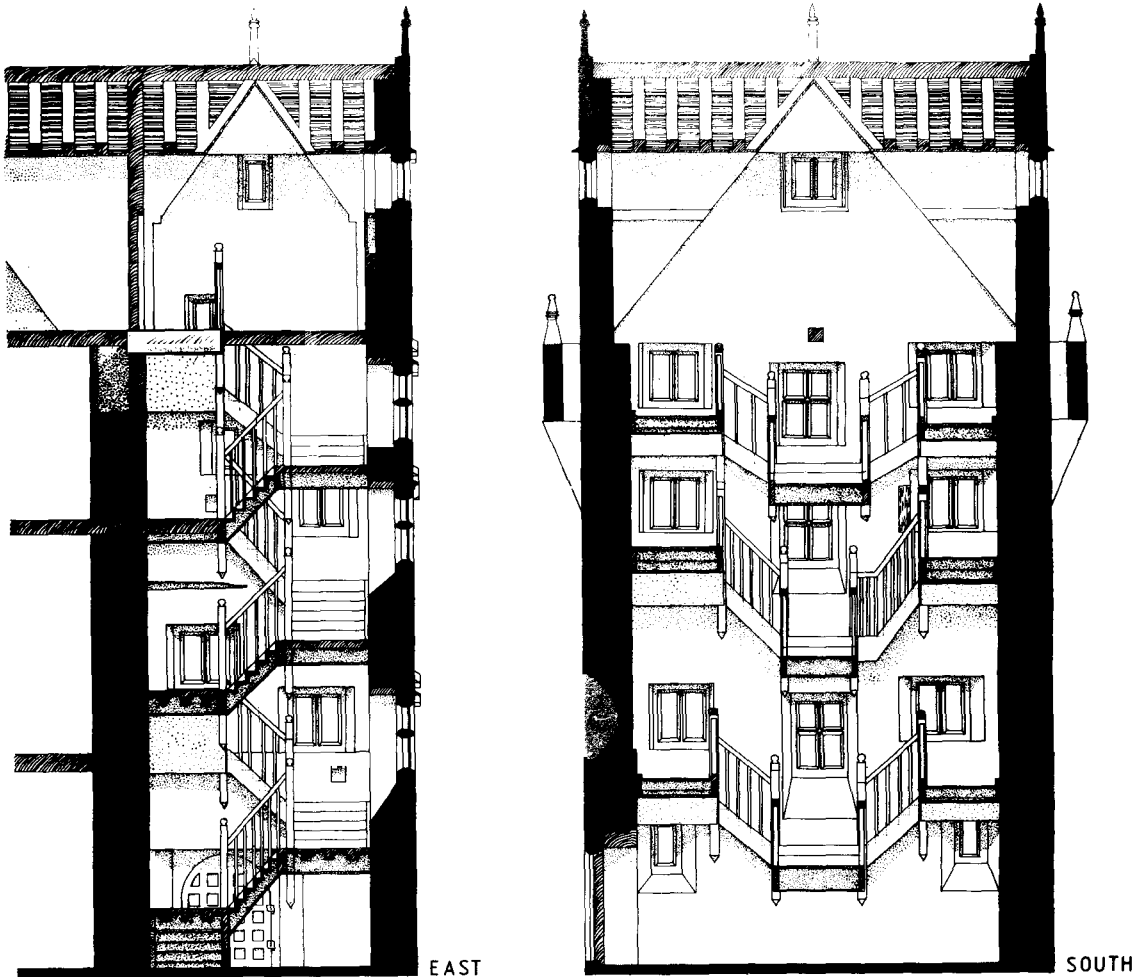
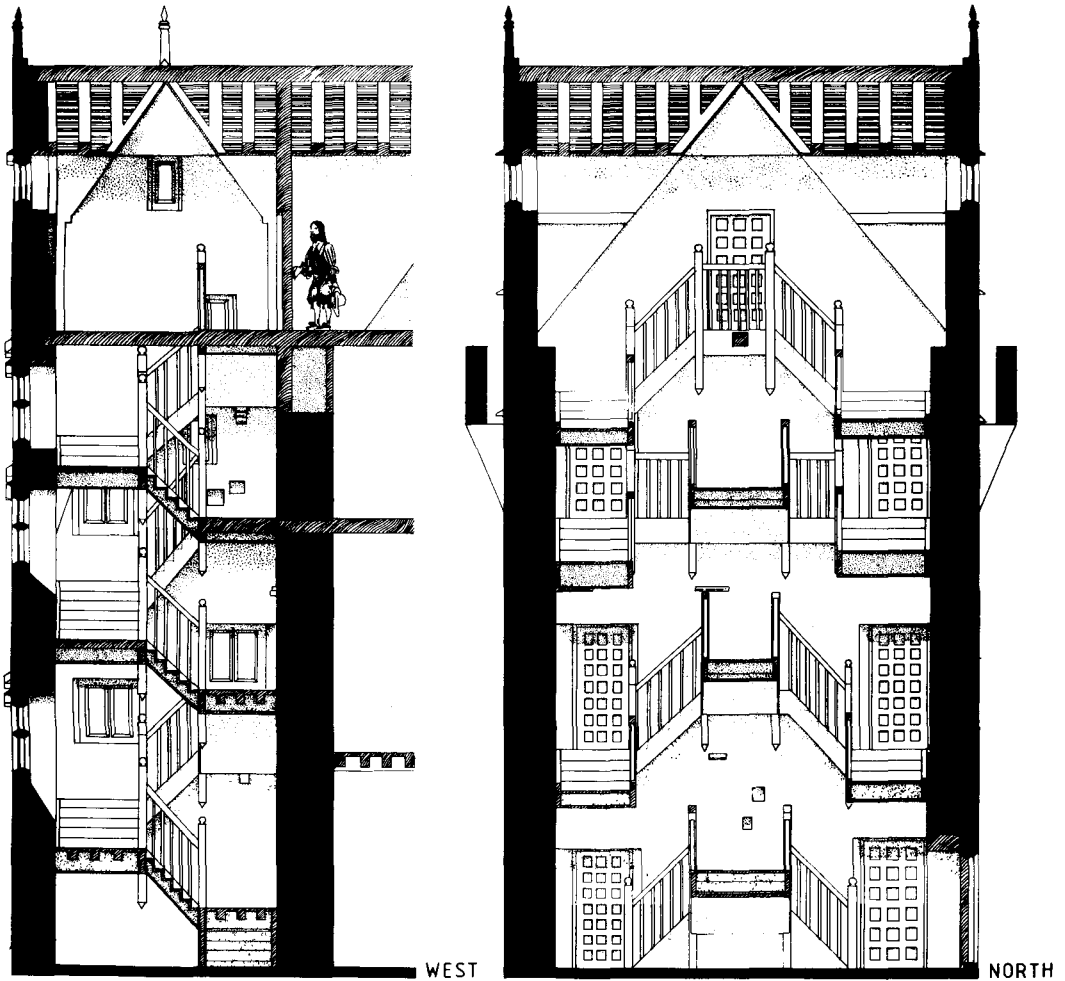


Fig. 6



THE OPEN WELL NEWEL HALF-TURN STAIR A conjectural reconstruction

brilliantly lit by its many windows. Anyone seeking audience with Sir Walter in his 'Great Chamber' on the first floor would be put in his place (The size of that chamber can be seen in fig. 6). The presence of a doorway leading directly onto the stairs is perhaps significant as it has the air of an afterthought in the main design. It would have given direct access to the great chamber to complete outsiders.

On a more factual basis, it may be of interest to point out how the stairs were built out of ready-sawn boards and beams of standard dimensions, the pitching pieces were 0.09m × 0.30 - 0.34m (3½ inches × approximately 1 foot). The beams were 0.16m × 0.16m (6 inches square); they were also used in the main floors. The window lintels were 0.13m (5 inches) thick.

One suspects that the carpenters were specially imported from England and already skilled in building 'newel' staircases (the newels are the posts at the corners). Unlike later stairs, the banisters had an active structural role; they and the newel posts braced it so that the arrangement was self-supporting.

This reconstruction is the only exercise of this sort that the author is aware of and it is arguably a pointless exercise, but it should be said in support that the correct identification provides, stylistically, independent dating for this ruin which fits in well with the historical dating. It serves also to show how full recording and interpretation made it possible to rediscover a fragment of the past otherwise lost for good.

The Potential of Excavation

A 'dirt' Archaeologist would criticize this article for the way in which it concentrates purely upon study of the standing structure without in any way discussing its relationship to the surrounding landscape with its buried palimpsest of cultural remains. No attempt has been made to reconstruct the landscape in which the house existed except in the most cursory and

intuitive manner, drawing on the scraps of history, the lie of the land and analogy with English records.

The reasons for this are obvious enough and the author is well aware of the potential that cannot be tapped. A rough idea of this can be gathered by looking at Ill. 1. Excavation would certainly reveal the plan of the outhouses integral with the wall of the bawn; the problem is that they and the houses are very much of a piece and reflect the existing situation and its requirements only in the most arbitrary manner.

Meticulous excavation of the courtyard may reveal something more than this, but one suspects that the best evidence exists outside the courtyard altogether. It is between the house and the river Rowry that one would expect evidence for the sort of unplanned activity and organic settlement that would throw light on how Coppinger's Court actually worked.

THE COPPINGERS IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

The historical notes that follow were garnered from a variety of modern sources; they consist, in part, of snippets of history in modern travelogues and books dealing with subjects of more general interest. These are contradictory and invariably fail to give the original source. However, where they mention an incident not covered elsewhere, they have been included and attempts made to reconcile their differences. The other part comes from more reliable sources such as Smith's *History of Cork* and W. Copinger's *History of the Coppingers*. The latter work drew directly from contemporary documents, although there is a tantalizing lack of direct reference to the house. It is hard to believe that this information does not survive. If it does, it would probably throw only indirect light on the house itself, as it would be much more likely to deal with the legal matters of the Coppinger estates in the vicinity of Rosscarbery.

Therefore the account given here should be tolerated for what it is worth, the chance discoveries of someone very inexperienced as a local historian. A full history would require considerable research in sources such as the annals, the state papers, deeds, letters, patent grants etc. It is hoped that someone may consider the subject of sufficient interest to carry out further research.

The Coppingers had lived in Ireland since the invasion of the Normans and were a family of Cork merchants believed to be descended from the Danes. Although this could readily be established by proper research, it is by no means clear when the Rosscarbery estates were obtained. O'Donovan throws light on Sir Walter Coppinger who . . . 'was a man of rather obscure origin and during his youth was supposed to have been a servant to Fineen O'Driscoll, the Chieftain of Baltimore and Cape Clear . . .'. *Pacata Hibernia* relates how he guided an English force, commanded by Sir Richard Percy, from Kinsale to Kilcoe Castle, north of Baltimore, in September 1601 after the Spaniards had occupied Kinsale. O'Donovan takes up the story:

. . . all the western chieftains joined them, amongst others Sir Fineen O'Driscoll. After the overthrow of the Spaniards Sir Fineen's territories were forfeited to the Crown, but before this event took place, being a clever diplomatist, he contrived to recover the good graces of the Queen (as already related) by entertaining the English fleet at Baltimore.

"When the Queen, being informed of it," says Smith, "pardoned his joining the Spaniards, and sent for him to court, but before he arrived the Queen died, and during his absence the greater part of his possessions were intruded into by Sir Walter Coppinger, which caused this ancient family (the O'Driscolls) to fall to decay".

Sir Fineen is said to have died in England just as he was about to start for home. His death is however shrouded in mystery.

To recapitulate somewhat, in order to explain matters thoroughly.

After O'Driscoll's death Coppinger prosecuted

his title to the estate, and by clever management and the production of legal documents of a very questionable value, however, he contrived, by reference, to get an order out of Chancery against the heirs of Sir Fineen O'Driscoll.

But Coleman points out how the information in 'The History of the Coppingers'⁷ puts ' . . . Sir Walter's conduct in a very different light to what it has commonly been regarded'; it also shows that Sir Fineen was alive and litigating in 1629.

The story in *Sketches in Carbery* runs: 'O'Driscoll, some years before his death, had granted a lease of Baltimore for twenty-one years to Sir Thomas Crook, who planted an English colony there, and procured a charter of incorporation from King James I. Coppinger was not allowed to remain quietly in possession.' The other account, transcribed from *The History of the Coppingers* by Coleman, runs: ' . . . The property on which the settlers planted themselves no doubt originally belonged to Sir Fynin O'Driscoll (But) as early as 1608, part of the property . . . included in the lease, was mortgaged to Sir Walter Coppinger by Donogh O'Driscoll (a son of Sir Fineen). Sir Thomas Crook never took a lease for 21 years . . . He obtained a grant from the Crown and (he) appears in 1610 to have joined Sir Fineen and Sir Walter in demising the property to Mr T. Bennet for 21 years.'

This legal term 'demise' implies an agreement on the part of the grantor to protect and preserve the estate, so the lessee can claim 'quiet enjoyment' as one condition of the lease. Where several demise jointly (as in this case) the covenant for title is joint but the covenant for quiet enjoyment is several, so each lessor can be sued individually by the lessee, should the former disturb the latter.

The History of the Coppingers continues: 'Two years later, Sir Walter Coppinger obtained from Sir Thomas Crook a grant of the reversion in fee expectant on Bennet's demise.' This seems to mean that Sir Thomas Crooke

granted his share in the demised estate to Sir Walter, so that the latter would gain that share in the estate when the lease expired (or should Bennet die?). 'The dispute was undoubtedly to the right of the land, but was fomented by the objection which the mere Irish have to being improved out of their estates.'

In *Sketches in Carbery* Sir Walter was alleged to have handed Baltimore back to Sir Thomas Croke, after a Governmental commission decided the case in the latter's favour, but in *The History of the Copingers* Sir Walter retained the town until 1636. The 'Release of reversion in Baltimore Castle and other property in Carbery to Sir Walter' is dated 1610.

Sir Walter surrendered his estates to James I in 1616 and had them re-granted the next day. The 'History of the Copingers' states that Sir Walter '. . . had liens or mortgages not only on Baltimore castle and lands, but on Clogher castle and lands, formerly MacCarthy's; on O'Callaghan's castle and lands at Dromaneen, on Barret's castle and lands of Ballincollig, on O'Driscoll's castle and lands at Oldcourt and other lands besides.' In the late sixteenth century, Irish chieftains were encouraged by the Crown to surrender the lands they held by tanistry, so that they could be regranted to them, their heirs and assigns. It may be that Coppinger carried out this act to have his possession of lands, some dubiously acquired, regularized and approved.

The dispute at Baltimore was clearly a major grievance to the Irish. A simplified version of events may have survived orally into the eighteenth century to be recorded by Smith. In one account Coppinger wins, in another he loses. A possible explanation is that he retained some properties in Baltimore until 1636, but others were obtained by Sir Thomas Croke. It is a suitable subject for further research.

'The History of the Copingers' described a Deed of Defeasance, dated 1629, 14th April. This was the outcome of a dispute in which Sir Walter was successfully opposed by the aged

Sir Fineen. An outline of the dispute follows. Sir Fineen claimed to have mortgaged a deed of feoffment to Sir Walter, who contended that he had full ownership of the estate for which he had paid £1,693 0s. 1d. The five gentlemen to whom the case was referred knew Sir Fineen was 'Decrepid' (sic) and suffered 'want of means'; this must have swayed them to his favour, so they made an award where Sir Walter was to accept £1,300 from Sir Fineen and in return make a deed of defeasance to Sir Fineen and his heirs. But they said Sir Fineen had to testify to the Lord Chancellor that his agent, his son Donogh, had unjustly slandered Sir Walter.

A defeasance is a collateral deed made at the same time with a feoffment (literally 'obligation') that contained certain conditions, upon the performance of which, the estate created may be 'defeated' or totally undone. In this case, on paying Sir Walter £1,300, Sir Fineen would then enfeoff the mortgagee (Sir Walter). Sir Fineen would execute a deed of defeasance, whereby the feoffment was rendered void when Sir Walter completed paying for the Estate.

Two years later, in 1631, Baltimore was plundered by Algerine pirates and much of the population enslaved.⁸ On 30 June 1636, by indenture of lease Sir Walter granted the castle, village and town of Baltimore to Mr Thomas Bennet of Bandon Bridge as well as three carucates of land. He is then supposed to have left Baltimore to spend his last days in destitution in Cloghan Castle. Which Cloghan Castle this is cannot be told; it is either the one on Lough Hyne, or the Mac Carthy tower whose very site is lost.

There is one documentary source that connects the house with the Coppingers. It was supplied to the author by the Rev. Coombes and may be found among the Depositions in TCD: 'On May eve I came from Cork to my own House in Rosscarbery where I met with Dominick Coppinger Esq., who came to

entreat me to dine with him the morrow after at his house in Ballinvreine, and desired my man might bring a musket to help bring home the May and set up a May Pole at his new intended plantation by the Rowry Bridge, where he had begun the foundation of a market House, a mile from Ross.'

The Coppingers made the decision to join the 1641 rebellion. *Sketches in Carbery* says: 'All his plans were upset by the wars of 1641 when the house was attacked by an armed force, ransacked and partially burnt down'. It is tempting to suggest that the English army would have had no scruples about looting the house of a wealthy rebel.

The Coppinger estates were forfeit to the Commonwealth; James Coppinger, perhaps Dominick's son, succeeded in getting them restored in 1652, being judged 'an innocent Papist'. The *History of the Coppingers* records a decree of innocence dated 1663 '... restoring to him various other lands and property'. The estate seems to have passed to James' brother, Walter, in 1666. This Walter was involved in the war of 1690 and he was outlawed and attainted for high treason in 1691. The estate was again forfeited, and like most of the noble Irish families of the time, The Coppingers were entirely ruined. *Sketches in Carbery* states that the estate passed in fragments to several new owners: 'The Kilfinane and Rowry portion was purchased by Mr Thomas Becher of Sherkin in 1698 . . . another portion was held by a Mr James Somerville in right of his wife.'

In *Sketches in Carbery* traditions were recorded about the Coppinger who resided at Ballyverine. Apparently, he was chiefly famed, during his residence there, for his tyrannical qualities. He ruled as a local despot, with power of life and death over the locals. It was related how he extended a yard-arm from the gable ends of his mansion, which he used as a gallows. He is supposed to have died when one Sunday he vowed in a rage that he would hang a certain man the moment he returned from prayers. Because it was Sunday, he would not

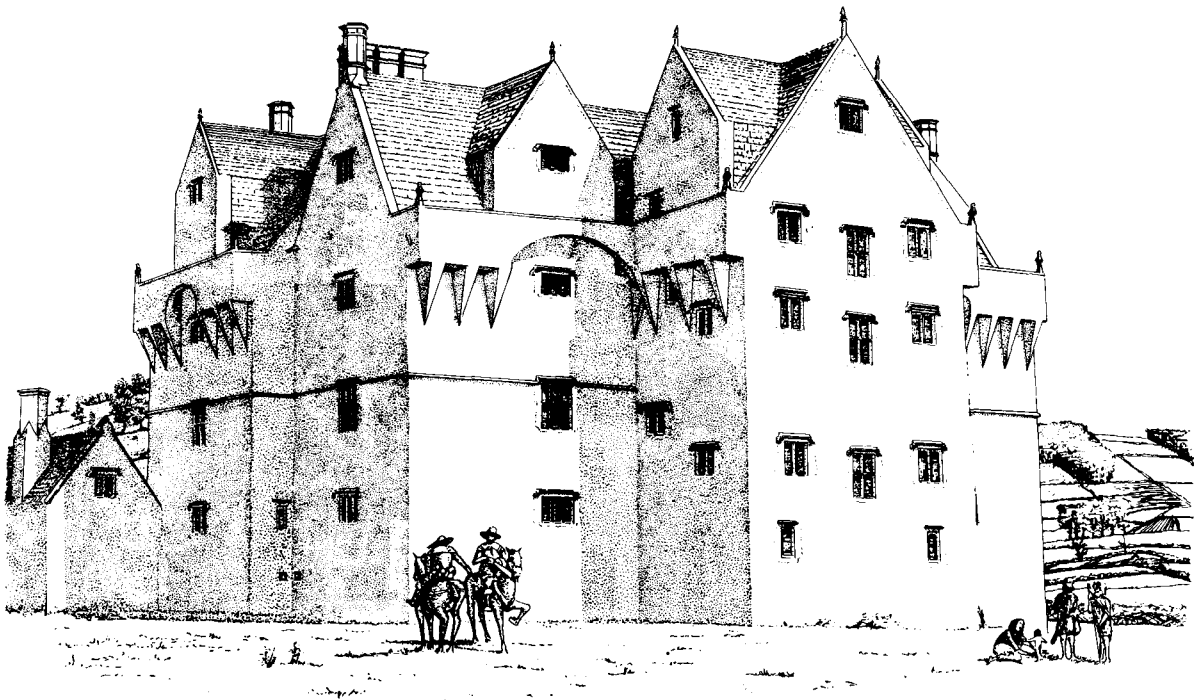
carry out the sentence without first attending to his devotions, so religious was he. When he left the church he dropped down dead in a fit; the people believed that it was the hand of God that had cut him off in the midst of his designs.

CHRONOLOGICAL SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

- 1594. First mention of Sir Walter (acquiring land confiscated from a McCarthy).
- 1601. September. Walter Coppinger guides English to Kilcoe Castle.
- 1608. Donogh O Driscoll mortgages property to Sir Walter.
- 1610. Sir Walter and others demise Baltimore to T. Bennet for 21 years.
- 1612. Sir Walter obtained from Sir Thomas Crooke his share in the estate when lease expires.
- 1612. 22nd October. Sir Walter obtains a mortgage on Oldcourt castle from Murtagh O Driscoll.
- 1616. Sir Walter allegedly surrenders his estates to the Crown and has them re-granted on the same day.
- 1629. 14th April. Outcome of legal dispute between Sir Fineen O Driscoll and Sir Walter.
- 1631. 20th June. Algerines plunder Baltimore.
- 1636. 30th June. Sir Walter grants the castle, village and town of Baltimore to Mr Thomas Bennet. Subsequently dies at Cloghan Castle.
- 1641. May. Dominick Coppinger brings home the May at Coppinger's Court.
- 1641. Coppinger's Court attacked, ransacked and partially burnt down.
- 1652. James Coppinger succeeds in getting estates restored to him.
- 1666. Estates pass to his brother Walter.
- 1691. Walter attainted for high treason, declared outlaw and estates forfeited.
- 1698. Rowry estate and house purchased by Mr Thomas Becher.
- 1758. Coppinger's Court long since ruined.

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COPPINGER'S COURT as it may have been

Fig. 7