Conclusion: The social, economic and environmental contexts of the Irish tower house

This book, the first to ever be published focusing solely on the tower house, has spent little time describing its architecture or attempting a typology. This may cause consternation among some, but an overarching aim has been to broaden the relevance and appeal of the tower house outside of a narrow group of castle enthusiasts. Tower houses are a remarkable monument type; their number and distribution enables us to study the worldview and agency of medieval and early modern people from a variety of social backgrounds. We have been able to catch an elusive glimpse of the lives of lordly elites, merchants, peasants and fishermen. A multiplicity of functions could be encompassed by the tower house, affecting both its residents and those around it. It is crucial that we contemplate all of these possible functions alongside one another and consider how they overlap, otherwise we miss what makes tower houses fascinating buildings. They served diverse roles in their contemporary societies, and this multiplicity is believed to be the reason behind their success.

Tower houses are present in all settlement types from both late medieval and early modern Ireland. They have been most studied in rural settlement, and could be well adapted to such a context. We find them being constructed by Gaelic-Irish, Anglo-Irish and early modern settler. This might reflect similarity in usage not just of the building form, but also the economic basis. It is possible that there was little difference between the agricultural practices of the Gaelic-Irish and Anglo-Irish by the later Middle Ages, when we consider the types of exports leaving the country, as discussed in chapter 6, alongside the prevalence of water mills, considered in chapter 2. Combined, this evidence suggests the continuation of a mixed agricultural economy rather than a wholesale switch to pastoralism. It was tentatively proposed that three-field crop rotation was not practised as part of this mixed agriculture, but instead the rundale system was more common, based on

the importation of legumes. Perhaps further study through palynology will provide a clearer answer to this question. This was a kind of adapted manorial economy, evolving from Anglo-Irish areas in the high Middle Ages. However, tower houses are known from places where emphasis was on pastoral agriculture and fishing. A diversified agricultural base may have provided the income necessary to build in stone. The rural context for the tower house therefore seems to be as basic and as general as anywhere with sufficient economic activity to produce surplus. This reflects the same flexibility in purpose of the tower house that was expressed in their sheer numbers.

As well as this long-established relationship with rural settlement and agriculture, the social context to tower houses benefited from the governmental laxity of the later Middle Ages, though not the open warfare of the Tudor Conquest. There was more than simple, low-level endemic violence, characterised by raiding, in this era. Instability from a lack of authoritative central government meant that there was no supervision of what were usually Crown rights in other places. Tower house inhabitants made significant income from seemingly inconsequential enterprise that is under-represented in both the archaeological and historical records. In particular, attractive levels of income could come from control of the fishing industry and from the imposition of tolls wherever movement was restricted. There is also the distinct possibility that smuggling between continental Europe and Ireland, based at the tower houses, was lucrative. Control of these water resources was often in the hands of lords, not just religious landowners as has been emphasised in other European-based studies. Another peculiarity is that commercial networks were not controlled solely by merchants, or even at the local level by artisans. Instead, participation may have been wider, with gentry and nobility alike holding an income base much more diverse than their high medieval castle-building contemporaries. Unlike at high medieval elite castle sites outside Ireland, tower house dwellers maintained fish weirs and fish traps rather than fishponds. The traps and weirs served much the same symbolism as the ponds, but were cheaper and easier to manage and produced enough fish to sell or lease out the rights. Defensive concerns have been over-valued when discussing the interaction between tower houses and water. The best examples of this are the tower houses following the Pale boundary. This alignment with the stated extent of the Pale has led to the interpretation that they were located for protection. What has been largely ignored is that much of the Pale follows important medieval rivers like the Boyne and Liffey. As is showcased here, rivers were major generators of wealth and power in medieval Ireland, therefore we cannot simply equate the locations of

these sites to defence of the remnants of the Anglo-Irish colony. Their contexts are far more complex.

Alongside the more numerous rural tower houses, this book has also discussed urban tower houses. One of the issues surrounding the study of these buildings has been the early dates attributed to them (Bradley and Murtagh, 2003), which are in advance of the established tower house chronology. This has led to scholars categorising these early examples as other than tower houses, using terms including 'town houses'. Many are listed in the ASI as 'house – fortified house'. They have fallen foul of the same enthusiasm for categorisation held by many archaeologists and architectural historians. It is contended here that the functions of these early urban examples were the same as the later tower houses universally recognised as such. Several scholars have debated the origins of tower houses, and while there is largely agreement as to the likelihood of their existence prior to the early fifteenth century, proof of this has been frustratingly elusive. It is suggested here that we turn to the towns for an answer. The functionality of mural towers could have been residential and overall very similar to tower houses, as was illustrated by the usage of the Quay Tower in Youghal. We have been willing to concede that tower houses were inspired by gatehouses in high medieval masonry castles, but are reluctant to accord the status of 'castle' to more modest forms of fortification. This raises yet another issue – that we tend to view castles as inherently private in nature, and do not attribute the term to communal defences. Rather than seeing these two roles as dichotomous, we should view them as points along a spectrum that reflects real-life use. Social status may have accompanied a contribution to a town's communal defence, in that it reflected a commitment to the good of the town. Such a perception may have been especially relevant to those involved in town government, or those looking for favour from the town, as merchants would have been.

McNeill (1997) has commented that it appeared unlikely that there was sufficient wealth in small Irish towns to warrant as many tower houses as there were, giving the specific examples of Ardee and Carlingford, both in County Louth. Yet this study has shown that income was generated from a multiplicity of sources, and might have been sufficient to support tower house construction even in what appear to be unfavourable circumstances. These tower houses in small towns were part of the web of interconnections between rural and urban Ireland. Goods were transported along riverine, maritime and terrestrial routeways, and tower houses were located all along these to control and assist movement. In all tower house locations, defended storage areas could be provided, either interior or exterior but within the castle complex.

Commercial spaces, too, could be supplied at many. This enabled the control of trade goods along their entire journey, beginning with their exploitation through farming or fishing, through to their being bulked for ship cargo. Throughout this process, the tower house had connections with the outside world; such connections could be distant and indirect, but contact was filtered through these routes.

Tower houses, therefore, are visual manifestations of economic confidence among all ethnicities in Ireland. As well as controlling the landscape they exploited, they display a belief in the ability to master this control and this landscape. We might go so far as to state that they are overt signs of conspicuous consumption, and that this consumption was common across the rural–urban ‘divide’. Chapter 6 looked at what items were leaving and entering Ireland, and highlighted some of the ways these affected the inhabitants of tower houses. Irish imports were dominated by manufactured and luxury goods. Their purchasers must have been numerous among the tower house class, for they represent the wealthiest across the country and it is logical to conclude that the wealthiest purchased the most. This consumption was not limited to townspeople; merchants were located inland, too, and had well-established relationships with ports. Consequently, luxury goods made their way across the island, and may even have reflected a shared material culture (Flavin, 2011). Small items would have been displayed within tower houses and upon their occupants, again making a visual statement of those occupants’ belonging in the world and among the community of tower house builders. There again does not seem to have been an ethnic distinction, with suggestions that a typically ‘Irish’ style was dominant even towards the end of the sixteenth century, when we might anticipate changes in material culture accompanying warfare and colonisation (*ibid.*). Tower houses can be included in this visible statement of an Irish style of consumption and display.

Most of the documented goods reached Ireland, and the tower houses, from England. But this is reflective of a documentary bias rather than reality on the ground. Conclusive evidence for extensive economic connections outside the Irish Sea zone is minimal, but there are some tantalising hints. These indicate that there was contact with France and Iberia in particular, and with Italy and Flanders possibly to a lesser degree. Later in the tower house era, Ireland increasingly became part of an Atlantic World, with a role in supporting transatlantic travel, but also sharing colonisers with the New World. Despite being geographically on the western periphery of Europe, it is not accurate to describe late medieval and early modern Ireland as socially, economically or environmentally peripheral. Instead, it was well integrated within the Irish Sea region in particular, but also with economic powerhouses located

further away. Tower houses provide a fantastic example of the 'glocal', a theme increasingly of interest to academics of the Middle Ages.

A number of hypotheses were presented in the Introduction that the rest of the book aimed to address. It remains to assess how successful that goal has been. Perhaps foremost was the contention that a multi-disciplinary methodology could illuminate an under-documented period of history. Historical documents and the archaeological record, particularly fieldwork at over two hundred individual tower house sites, were primarily utilised. Methods and theories from geography, especially historical geography, and art history were also employed to a lesser extent. The destruction of historical records has led to an emphasis among historians of medieval Ireland on religion and politics. However, it has been possible to develop more information on economic activity using the few surviving trade materials in conjunction with assessment adapted from landscape archaeology. Likewise, a combination of tools can tell us about agricultural practices. However, in this area we come across one of the biggest obstacles to interdisciplinarity – when the sources contradict one another. With careful reasoning and assessment of the benefits and limitations of each, it is usually possible to forge a median path. Indeed, often the bias of one source type complements the other. The further upside of using tower houses to conduct this methodological assessment is that they provide concrete points upon which to focus efforts. They also enable precision in making conclusions, since specifics and examples can be called upon. Despite the successes in this regard presented here, it is imperative that the methodology be developed and tested by other scholars working in fields with similar limitations. They might feel inspired by the confidence of tower house builders to engage in forms of economic participation not previously their remit in tackling historical data sources or archaeological sites usually outside their purview.

Turning to the building form itself, it was initially proposed that tower houses were physical manifestations of a more diverse society in the era following the Black Death. This more complex society, not simply the three estates never leaving their narrow occupational remits, also had more money than before. People chose to make statements through building projects that would be immediately understood by their contemporaries. There may have been few restrictions on this desire for monumentality, aside from potentially the will of a more powerful lord, or the size of a pre-existing urban land plot, as discussed in chapter 5. In the countryside, the only physical limitation may have been the location of a parish church and perhaps an earlier castle. The placement of these two earlier features might explain possible site migration, whereby a tower house was situated closer to peasant settlement, as presented in chapter 1. These tower houses were built by anyone who

could afford the outlay, whether they were local lord, churchman or merchant. Furthermore, the outlay may only have been temporary, if the building were positioned so as to generate some continued income, such as through tolls.

In this way, a tower house was also an investment. It was frequently a real investment, but it could also be one figuratively, such as in the form of conspicuous consumption. A theme running throughout this book has been the eagerness with which those who participated in the Irish economy, regardless of their ethnicity or social background, viewed the natural environment as something to be exploited for profit. Tower houses are distributed across the country in places where they were proximal to the most valuable raw materials. As many have pointed out before, castles in Ireland are very rarely located more than five hundred metres above sea level, beyond which the productivity of the land was low. It could well be, too, that with population decline after the Black Death, previously marginal uplands could be largely abandoned. Tower houses located at lower altitudes and in more fertile landscapes reflect mixed agriculture, owing to less demographic pressure to retain land suitable for crop growing exclusively for that purpose.

Location aside, the building itself could be used in many different ways. This was particularly true of the ground floor, even if there were not two entrances indicating split usage in function. The placement and orientation of the more ornamental features also reflect both literal and figurative investment. We often find the largest and most impressive windows overlooking the places where control could be exerted, including ferry crossing points and navigable river stretches, but also from where these architectural features could be best viewed by those outside the castle. Often this control of view incorporated an aesthetically pleasing landscape, pleasant for the residents and their guests looking out from the hall at a height. Proposing that tower houses were used as statements of social belonging and status acquisition is nothing new. Both material culture and the built environment have been seized as means of displaying social prominence and the holder's view of their position in the world throughout time and place.

These displays of social and economic confidence are closely interlinked, therefore. Not always have such actions have been taken as representative of the Middle Ages. Instead, there is usually more willingness to view these in association with colonisation in the early modern globe. The argument presented here that they do represent confidence can consequently be interpreted in several ways. Tower houses could represent a transition from medieval to modern. Even removing the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century colonists from the equation, the buildings do reflect new landholders and landholding patterns. They

might also reflect a new post-plague reality of breakdown between the social estates that had characterised the feudal era. Maybe that description was always inaccurate when applied to medieval Ireland. Certainly, when we look at the tower house, the activity of the medieval ‘those who work’ is well represented. The display of confidence could be a trend peculiar to Ireland. Ireland, after all, was colonised in the high Middle Ages by the Anglo-Normans, an event not experienced in most other parts of Europe. Among academics today, some refer to Ireland’s modern socio-political landscape as ‘post-colonial’, which is more in common with other colonised parts of the early modern globe than Europe.

There is also evidence weighing against the dominance of modern features during this transition. It is evident that much of what we have considered ‘high medieval’ in character continued in use well into the later Middle Ages. The most overt manifestation of this is, of course, in the use of an accepted vocabulary of castle architecture in new buildings (i.e. the tower house itself). This is in a period past the time when much of England and continental Europe had moved beyond castle building, and instead their elites were constructing undefended mansion houses. To continue utilising a medieval architectural form indicates a medieval outlook and view of oneself in the world. The economy of Ireland also remained distinctively medieval, with raw materials and partly worked goods dominating exports, arguably until the second half of the seventeenth century, though that was changing in certain places before this date.

The modern legacy of the tower house

Tower houses were constructed in decreasing numbers after the first decade of the seventeenth century. Few are known to have been constructed in the 1630s (for a discussion of the decline in popularity see McAlister (2015)). Of course, just because tower houses were no longer being built by the mid-seventeenth century does not automatically mean that they were also no longer occupied. Instead, it is extremely likely that many tower houses continued to be inhabited and, in many cases, updated for years after. Of course, there is the oft-heard story that Cromwell’s forces obliterated this or that castle. While documented in some cases, most of this is folklore and reflects the low opinion held of the man across Ireland.

Determining dates of eventual abandonment is difficult and these seem to have varied widely. Presumably, many tower houses were abandoned even in the era during which they were constructed. The later history of most is not documented, though for a few it is, and we

can estimate longevity if a tower house was built into another, later building. The antiquarian writers have provided much of the historical evidence for tower house occupation in the modern period, as they tended to comment if a family was still using its tower house as this fell within their sphere of interest. For example, William Wilde wrote in 1849 that Liscartan Castle in County Meath was still partially occupied, and even sketched a picture of how it looked. Based on Smith's description of Kilclief Castle, County Down, in 1744 as being 'entire' and roofed with thatch, it would appear that this tower house was still in use in the mid-eighteenth century (1744: 24). The same author wrote that Portaferry Castle in County Down was 'inhabited by Andrew Savage' (*ibid.*: 46). Other written sources might testify to occupation. In the case of Quoile Castle, County Down, a wall tablet located in the church at nearby Saul was erected in memory of John West, who died 16 February 1866, the 'son of John West, born in Quoile castle, 1727, died 1787' (Jope, 1966: 248). Thus it appears that the West family occupied Quoile Castle at least into the eighteenth century.

We can also easily look for architectural evidence of post-medieval occupation. As an example, Walshestown Castle in County Down is both confirmed by the antiquarian writer Samuel Lewis as being the residence of one R. F. Anderson at the time of his writing in 1837 and has architectural remnants of this inhabitation. The windows in Walshestown Castle were expanded from their medieval appearance and sash windows were inserted, presumably around the time that it was occupied by Anderson. Based on site survey, Walshestown Castle formed a feature within the once-impressive Victorian gardens attached to Myra House. It appears likely that the tower house was used recreationally by the occupants of the later 'big house'. The extensive modernisation undertaken at some point in the 1800s at Kirkistown Castle, again in County Down, likewise implies later occupation. This modernisation was presumably to allow for continued occupation, as in 1744 it was the residence of Mrs Lucy Magil, 'the Widow Savage' (Smith, 1744: 67). Modern comforts were added to this tower house, coincidentally also one of the last dateable tower houses as it was constructed in 1622, including inserting sash windows and fireplaces, redecoration in pseudo-Gothic style, removal of spiral stairs for straight stairways, a new porch, new room subdivision, and ill-fated attempts to buttress the tower against subsidence (Jope, 1966).

An interesting future project, perhaps well suited for postgraduate research, would be to examine occupation patterns of castles and tower houses in the modern era. From a handful of references to widows living in tower houses, while the rest of the family lived in the proximal 'big house', they may have found particular usage as dower houses. This

C.1 Leamaneh Castle in County Clare is one of many tower houses with a later building attached. In this case, part of the tower house has been rebuilt into the early modern fortified house to the left of the image. Leamaneh commanded a designed landscape, including fishponds.

repurposing might be evident countrywide, as it was observed in County Down during doctoral research by this author and also in the barony of Shanid, County Limerick, by Mac Curtain (1988).

A sizeable cohort of tower houses have an early-modern-period building attached to them, whether simply as an add-on with entrances knocked through (as at Ballinlaw Castle, County Kilkenny) or with a more concerted effort at integration (as at Leamaneh Castle, County Clare; see figure C.1). This enabled the tower house to readily adapt to more modern living standards and conveniences, while still providing an image of a long-standing connection and claim to the land. This claim of longevity was especially important in Gaelic-Irish society, where ‘having demonstrable connections through time with the place where you lived was an essential social value’ (FitzPatrick, 2009). Another fascinating study would be to examine the use of later building additions by the New English as opposed to the Gaelic-Irish, to determine to what extent these changes reflect ethnicity. Distribution across the country would also be an enlightening investigation. In County Meath, for instance, there is a noteworthy element of site continuity both from the high to later Middle Ages, and from then on into the early modern

period. Several tower houses in Meath are located near earlier medieval earthwork castles. In the case of Rathmore, the tower house is built into the north side of a motte and is entered from it at first-floor level. A number of tower houses are attached to later stone houses, most of these being of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century date. Examples include Athlumney and Carrickdexter, which were expanded in these later centuries with larger stone houses built onto the original tower houses.

It is very difficult to enumerate the instances where a later building contains small remnants of an earlier tower house as part of its fabric. It is entirely possible that most people living in such houses have no idea that some elements are medieval in date, especially if no recognisable features are visible. In some cases there is awareness thanks to continued family occupation or particular interest in house history, such as at Ballyduff in County Kilkenny and Ballymaloe in County Cork. The best means of identifying these sites might be through building survey, but this would be hard to implement and ascribe a particular direction to.

At several points in this book the high level of tower house destruction has been raised. This destruction was particularly far-reaching in urban contexts and in counties like Meath and Kildare, which have both excellent farmland and proximity to Dublin. The appeal of dismantling tower houses will have been their excellent building stone. Carved and designed features may have been removed for display inside modern 'big houses', a complaint heard with frequency during fieldwork from farmers with tower houses on their land.

Of those still standing, the largest number of tower houses today are within agricultural communities and often within farmyards. In this way, their original rural context has not altered much. These farmyard tower houses are in varying states of preservation. They are regularly used as agricultural out-buildings. Throughout the course of fieldwork, farmers expressed frustration over their attempts to 'improve' the buildings. Much of this was well intentioned on both sides: the farmers wished to restore something of the old impressiveness of the building, while the Monuments Service needs to ensure that damage is not inflicted unwittingly. It is fortunate that most landowners have an interest in their built heritage, but less so that they are unsure as to what actions they can take. Perhaps an educational-outreach campaign would be beneficial, focusing on what protective measures could be taken by landowners with minimal effort and expense. The National Monuments Service already maintains a presence at major agricultural events, and published a series on monuments in the *Farmer's Journal* (National Monuments Service, 2012). This included a one-page article on tower houses, though unfortunately there was little on good management

practices ('Ireland's Tower Houses'). Preservation is a worthy goal, though restoration is problematic. It is difficult to ensure the careful inclusion of original features while also inserting modern conveniences, and to enact this precise balance requires enormous financial investment.

Funding for archaeological sites is also currently limited, and it remains to be seen how effective it is. The Green, low-carbon, agri-environment (GLAS) scheme is the current agri-environment scheme that is part of the Rural Development Programme 2014–20. The overall goal of the programme is to 'address the cross-cutting objectives of climate change, water quality, and biodiversity' (*GLAS – proposed new agri-environment scheme*). Within this framework, archaeological sites have low priority, and only rank at all if the farm fits the environmental criteria. Obviously, the number of tower houses that can benefit from this scheme will be small. The financial recompense for those participating is also minimal, with payments of around €120 to €146. Regardless, it would be illuminating for future preservation efforts to accurately gauge the effectiveness of the GLAS scheme.

Future research directions

Castles, and tower houses as part of the castle grouping, loom large in the public imagination. This is especially true in Ireland today, as so many of them are easily visible from major routeways, whether that be motorway or train line. Tower houses could therefore provide an excellent educational tool for the public, and this element of ensuring their preservation should form a priority of future research efforts. It would be especially beneficial and effective if this could be accomplished in conjunction with state organisations.

Another extremely worthwhile future project would be to examine the Irish tower house within its European and worldwide context. Tower houses have suffered too long from a type of Irish exceptionalism, whereas we know that similar small towers were built across Europe and in other global regions. The intention of chapter 6 is to assist in setting the stage for such an expanded study. The possibilities of international comparison have been highlighted by recent conferences, and resulting publications like Oram's edited volume based on two of the Tower Studies conferences (2015). A start could be readily made by first undertaking nuanced comparison with the already well-studied towers from Scotland and the north of England, before expanding the remit geographically further. In particular, this scholar posits that if we take a maritime and economic perspective across these tower distributions, some extremely insightful conclusions could be made about shared lived experience across the European Middle Ages and beyond.

This leads well into a theory proposed above that deserves rigorous testing: that tower houses display economic confidence more characteristic of the colonial early modern globe than the medieval. This could indicate that social structures in late medieval Europe were drastically shaken by demographic shifts following the Black Death, perhaps even more so than currently recognised. More work could examine the impact on landholding patterns and standards of living, particularly from an archaeological-science perspective. Pollen analysis and isotope studies more overtly focussing on identifying landscape alteration in the later Middle Ages could remove a lot of ambiguity among historians over economic transformations. Similarly, osteological and isotopic studies of late medieval skeletal remains seeking to identify changes in lifestyle could transform our long-held beliefs regarding the lived experience. It would be even more insightful were these conclusions made with comparison to other parts of Europe, since Ireland had an established history of colonisation by the end of the Middle Ages. In 1988, Annegret Simms attempted a comparison between high medieval Irish colonisation and that in the Baltic and Eastern Europe (1988a). It is unfortunate that this study has not been much advanced in the last thirty years. It is suggested that tower houses could prove an enlightening vehicle to extend this work, since, as has been witnessed here, they provide a focal point upon which to focus investigations and make precise observations of change in their vicinity.

Many readers will no doubt have noticed the lack of detailed consideration of the use of tower houses by members of the church and other religious personages and institutions. To include this would have made the book simply too broad in scope, as a significant minority within the examined corpus of tower houses were located in association with a religious foundation. A complication arises in that landholdings were not consistently in either religious or secular hands throughout the period of tower house construction. Even leaving the major event of the Dissolution of the Monasteries aside, which brought significant previously religious lands into lay possession, the primary-source research conducted here has indicated that land was frequently leased by religious houses to local lords or merchants, and granted in reverse. In consequence, Irish landholding of the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries was fluid, and it was predominantly undocumented. Reactions to the Henrician Reformation could be ably assessed using tower houses. Liddiard (2005) observed in England that church control of extensive tracts of land tended to lower castle numbers. This may be the pattern in Ireland, too, but unlike in most parts of England castles were still being constructed past the mid-sixteenth century. It seems reasonable to suggest that the

Dissolution of the Monasteries might have encouraged tower house building, since it brought new land to the secular market.

There are a number of examples of tower houses built on formerly monastic land that we already are aware of, such as Bective in County Meath, subject of recent excavation and publication by Geraldine and Matthew Stout, and Annamult in County Kilkenny. Annamult Castle was constructed on the monastic lands of Graiguenamanagh Cistercian house, though not in the best location within that property. An issue here would be securely dating the tower houses to either before or after the mid-sixteenth century. The benefit of the Stouts' work has been that the evidence from excavation has been brought to bear (Stout and Stout, 2016). We also need to acknowledge that many religious men will have desired to have a tower house, if their position brought them sufficient status and wealth. Good examples of this are Kilclief in County Down, built by the bishop of Down, and Mountgarrett in County Wexford, constructed by the bishop of Ferns. This probably explains the tower-house-type structures attached to the end of a few churches, or found within mere metres of them. Cross East in County Mayo is a residential church tower attached to a medieval church which has been ascribed as a tower house in the ASI, while Cashelboy Castle in County Sligo is located only just over five metres from the wall enclosing a graveyard and ruined medieval church. A study of religious tower houses would consequently be a valuable contribution to the literature. Religious and secular architectural styles might hugely overlap in the later Middle Ages, and there has even been some confusion of church towers with tower houses in the past. Bonde (1994) has written of fortified churches, and has argued that much that is accepted as castle architecture – for example, machicolations – had an earlier use in religious architecture.

Again, more recognised outside of Ireland are deliberately designed landscapes around castles. To date, few apart from O'Keeffe have attempted to identify designed landscapes at Irish castles, and even less attention has been paid to their possible existence at tower houses. Yet, as we have seen here, tower house occupants were exceptionally canny when it came to controlling their surrounding landscapes and at siting their buildings so as to maximise profits. It is no great stretch of the imagination, therefore, to suggest that designed landscapes existed at tower houses. Indeed, one possible designed landscape has been identified by this author at Kilcrea Castle in County Cork, in association with the Franciscan friary, and will be the subject of a forthcoming article. One possibility to be explored in this work is the role of buildings as displays of patronage: Kilcrea, like Claregalway Castle in County Galway, is located next to a Franciscan house, and so the foundation of a mendicant

order in tandem with the tower house may be conveying a dual social and religious message.

The tower house was a remarkable building. Surviving examples may not look like much today, in their various ruined conditions, and indeed their architectural plainness and small size can encourage their dismissal. Instead, this volume has showcased the variety of functions this simple building could perform within late medieval Irish society. Tower houses were both rural and urban, occupied by lords and merchants, and utilised by both Anglo-Irish and Gaelic-Irish. Not only did they transcend ethnicity and socio-economic status, they played a formidable role in connecting medieval Ireland to its place in the world.