



# THE ATHY MEDIEVAL WALLS WALKING TOUR

The Athy we see today is only the current face of an ancient place. The town always was important on the Barrow river, first as a ford, then as a place of religious houses and in one part of its story, as a walled town. Athy was on the Irish frontier and so, vulnerable. Historical documents show monies being granted for walls and repairs of defences. The walls were erected in the 1400s and improved in the 1500s. By the 1800s they were all gone.

However, through careful research and the use of modern archaeological techniques we have today a hypothesis, which is an educated guess, at where at least one phase of Athy's defences once stood. This phase stood on the east bank of the Barrow encircling what is now the Town Square and Leinster Street.

This is a short guide to where the walls may have been.

**Caution!** *Athy is a busy town with heavy traffic. Keep an eye to the traffic at all times. A high colour visibility vest is recommended.*

# From South to North the sites are:

## Preston's Gate

Preston's gate was named after Thomas Preston, who took the gate in 1648 after attacking the "old Ruins" of the Dominican Abbey, just within the walls at this gate. When the gate was demolished in 1860 as a result of a fatal carriage accident it was observed to be of two phase construction with "the earlier being of better quality". The gate, like all entrances and the wall around the town, had a large ditch outside of it which added to the defensive power of the town.

## Meeting Lane/ Chapel Lane

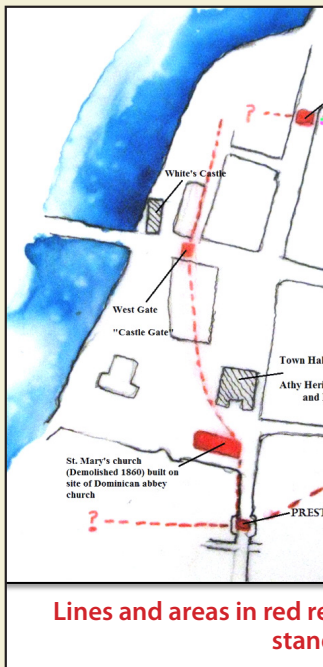
These lanes are named for the two town religious houses that stood there. They mark out the east circuit of the town. Where they meet at Leinster Street, between the pharmacy and butcher's, there once stood a large gate, here called "St. Michael's Gate".

When Henry VIII gave grants throughout Ireland for market towns, as he did with Athy, many large gates with public proclamation of the grants were erected. Athy was most likely no different.

Chapel Lane gets a special mention as there is a record of a portion of the town wall still standing there in 1849.

## Stanhope Place/ Parish Priest's Garden

Stanhope Place marks the north circuit of Athy's defences. Stanhope place also gets special attention



in our walk because in 2013, volunteer consultants to the Athy Heritage Centre and Museum, commissioned a geophysical study of the garden at the Parish Priest's residence. The use of ground penetrating techniques revealed that a length of the town wall, bank and external ditch lies beneath the garden!

This result is in keeping with historical studies that determined where the north defences were. We will follow those studies to proposed that the "Tober Moneen Gate", "the road of the Moneen River" Gate stood just west of the area of wall discovered, under Stanhope Street. It is worth

noting how the level of the road drops lower just north of that point in Stanhope Street. It is like something ends there. Something like a walled town. Is this evidence that Modern Athy lays above Medieval Athy?



represent sites no longer standing

## White's Castle/ Castle Gate

In the early days of the Norman settlement, Athy was very vulnerable. During the 1300's Athy was burned three times. In the early 1400's a castle was built to protect the bridge and town. This building was the first built on the multi-dated site called White's Castle. The Castle is actually a Tower House

on the south side, (the side facing the street) and dates to the 1400's. The north side (away from the street) is a prison that dates to the late 1700's.

White's castle was garrisoned with soldiers in violent times. Is it possible that it stood outside of the town on its own island? It is a fact that of all of medieval defences of Athy, only the castle and the hall house of Woodstock Castle, remain standing. The 1849 account has the town wall on this side running well to the east of White's Castle so a gate out towards the castle would have been required and is named after this function.

# St. Mary's

Though difficult to imagine now, at one time a church stood in the Back Square of Athy. It was demolished in 1860 and replaced with St. Michael's Church of Ireland on Offaly Street. It is written that the church in the Back Square was raised on the lower portions of the walls from the Dominican Abbey mentioned above. That abbey was of such status that nobles killed in the battle of Ardsclull 1315, were buried within it. Being so close to walled Athy, the abbey was garrisoned with soldiers separately from the castle and can be said to be part of the town's defences.

## “?”

There are portions of Athy's defences that are difficult to match to the modern landscape. The North West portion of the walls from the “Tober Moneen Gate” to White's Castle is difficult to figure out as the land drops down to the river level. Did the walls drop as well? Was there a postern gate, or water gate here?

Also a wall running west from Preston's gate is mentioned in 1849. If it was there how long was it and did it end in a tower?

**Theses are questions for the Future to answer! Check in with us at the Athy Heritage Centre Museum to find out if we have!!!**

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