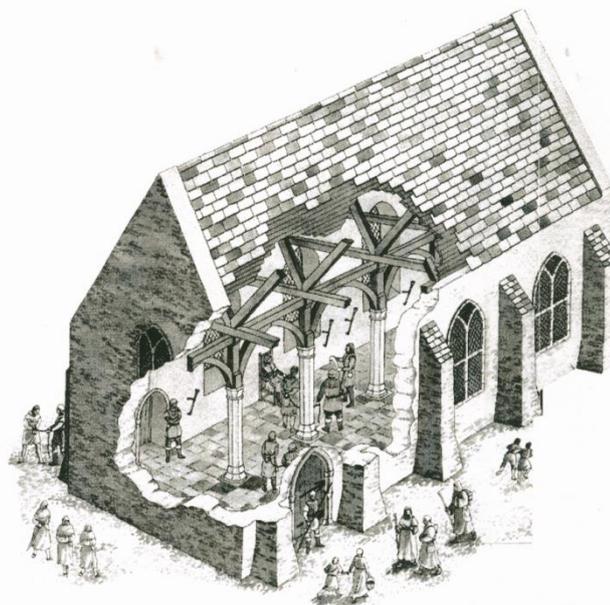
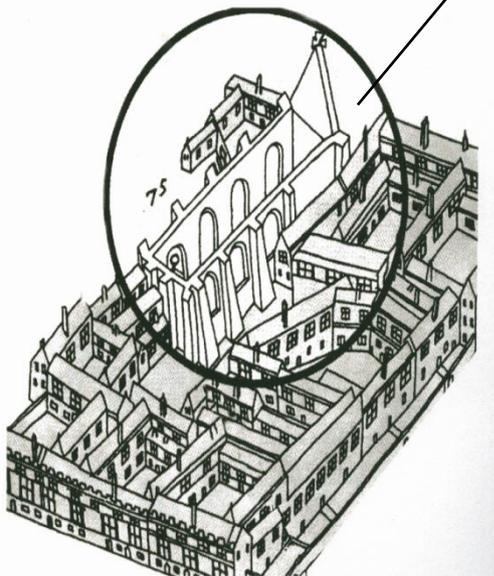
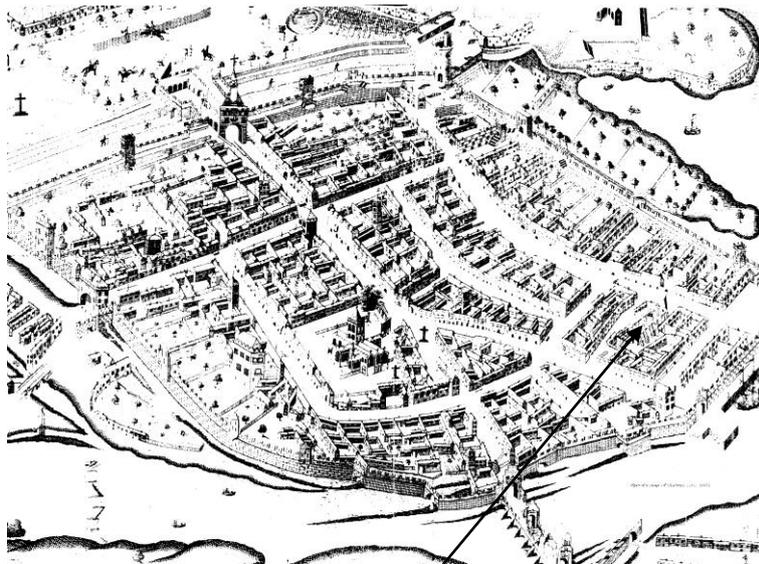


The Hall of the Red Earl



Timelines:

1169: Anglo-Norman forces arrive in Ireland to support Dermot Macmorrough's bid for kingship of Ireland

1170-1270: Period of Anglo Norman colonization and settlement of Ireland

1230: Richard de Burgo comes to Galway in a bid to control Connacht which had been granted to him. He is repelled by native O'Flaherty and O'Connor clans.

1232: Richard de Burgo returns and seizes control of the river-crossing point which would become the town of Galway. He builds a castle on the site of a captured *dún* or fort.

1233: Castle is retaken by Felim O'Connor

1235: Richard de Burgo returns with large army and defeats O'Connors.

1270: Richard's son Walter (created earl of Ulster in 1263) embarks on a process of wall-building to secure the early town of Galway

1271: Walter dies in castle and is succeeded by his son Richard, known as the Red Earl. It is likely that the Hall of the Red Earl was built around this time to replace the castle. A key municipal building, the hall was used to collect taxes and dues as well as to dispense justice and host banquets.

14 /15th century: Refurbishments take place at hall. New roof is supported by decorated stone columns and buttresses are re-inforced.

1484: De Burgo power in Galway is eradicated as town is granted mayoral status. Hall is likely to have been abandoned around this time.

1556: Report that hall is in ruinous state.

16th century: Iron smelting works take place in hall. Cruciform anvil base constructed as are pits and external cobbled laneway.

1651: Building referred to as 'The old buildings of the illustrious Lord Richard de Burgo' depicted in ruinous state on Pictorial Map.

18th century: Old County Courthouse was built on site of hall

1820: Courthouse replaced by Custom House (Revenue) building

1940s Present Custom House built

1997: Archaeological excavations linked to a proposed extension to the Custom House uncovers 'Hall of the Red Earl' and associated castle

2001: Extension incorporating archaeological remains of 'Hall of the Red Earl' is opened

The Hall of the Red Earl

The Hall of the Red Earl is one of Galway's most significant archaeological landmarks. The remains of the building were unearthed by Office of Public Works archaeologists in 1997 when plans to extend the adjacent Revenue Commissioners offices onto this site were proposed. The hall's importance stems from its association with the establishment of the town of Galway by Anglo-Norman colonizers in the 13th century, thus making it one of the oldest buildings in the city.

Having been recruited by the exiled king of Leinster Dermot MacMurrough, Anglo-Norman mercenaries first arrived in Ireland from Britain in the latter half of the 12th century with the express aim of helping Dermot recover lands lost during his failed bid for the high kingship of Ireland to Rory O'Connor in 1166. Their subsequent military success led to a period of colonization and settlement in the east of Ireland. The Anglo-Norman powerbase under the de Burgo clan eventually spread westward across the river Shannon into the western province of Connaught. In 1230 Richard de Burgo was repelled by the native O'Connor and O'Flaherty clans when he tried to take a significant crossing point on the river Corrib. Two years later he returned and managed to seize the location including an associated *dún* or fort upon which he built a castle. This castle was in turn taken from him a year later in 1233 by Felim O'Connor. In 1235, however, Richard de Burgo returned with substantial forces to crush O'Connor resistance and take decisive control of the settlement and castle. Control over the river crossing as well as the fact that the area conquered could be easily defended given that it was surrounded by water in 3 sides, gave the location an important strategic benefit. The potential for sea-trade was another distinct advantage. This Norman settlement would develop over time into the city of Galway.

10 other settlements or boroughs were established in the Galway County area by the De Burgo's and their supporters around this time. Some of these such as Athenry and Loughrea also thrived and survive to this day, while others simply failed to flourish and disappeared over time. In Galway, around 1270, Richard de Burgo's son Walter, (who had been granted the title of Earl of Ulster in 1263) instigated a phase of wallbuilding designed to further enclose and fortify the town. Parts of these defences are still evident close to the nearby Spanish Arch. Walter de Burgo died in the castle in 1271. His eldest son, Richard de Burgo, the 'Red Earl', however, continued this process of wallbuilding and it is likely that with the town secure that he instigated the construction of an imposing stone hall or house to replace the castle built by his grandfather. One of the most powerful Anglo-Norman magnates of his generation, this Richard de Burgo accrued vast wealth through his service to English kings Henry I and II and it is the remains of that hall – 'The Hall of the Red Earl' – which were famously unearthed in recent times and have been preserved for public exhibition today. A section of the de Burgo castle was also excavated around this time.

The hall was to act as a key municipal building. The building was used to collect taxes and dues as well as to dispense justice in the newly established urban settlement. It is also thought that banquets would have been held in the hall. In essence it would have been the modern equivalent of a revenue office, courthouse, and town-hall rolled into one. The hall had various phases of life with the original building being built of migmatite and sandstone to a simple rectangular plan. Archaeologists believe that the original roof - which was probably carried by a central row of wooden supports – collapsed at some stage. In rebuilding the roof, these supports were then replaced with

decorated octogonal limestone columns, 3 of which are still clearly evident today. The punch-dressing decoration on these supports suggests that they were installed in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. It is likely that the large external buttresses, which are also still clearly evident, were also strengthened during this phase of the hall's renovation.

A petition by Sir Henry Sydney to the English Privy Council tells us that the hall had fallen into disrepair by 1556, and a century later it is most prominently still depicted as a roofless ruin in the famous 1651 pictorial map of Galway. Referred to as 'The old buildings of the illustrious Lord Richard de Burgo' this map clearly illustrates the hall as a substantial church-like structure with large, round-headed windows and opposing doorways in its south-eastern end. The exact date of the abandonment of the hall is not certain but it is likely to have coincided with the decline of de Burgo power in Galway to the so-called 14 Anglo-Norman 'tribe' families who had followed westward in the footsteps of the town's founding dynasty. This erosion of this de Burgo influence culminated in the town being granted mayoral status in 1484, thus ending the automatic authority of the family.

Following the abandonment of the hall by the de Burgos, it took on a new role as the location for an iron smelting works in the late medieval period. This is attested to by the presence of a cruciform anvil base which remains as one of the most noticeable features of the building. Furnace and storage pits as well as artefacts associated with smelting were also uncovered on site while an area of cobbled paving complete with stone-lined drain, dated too to late medieval period was excavated outside the south-western wall of the hall. In total over 11,000 artefacts were uncovered during excavations of the hall and part of the castle. While many of these such as bone and pottery related to the medieval use of the buildings, others, both pre and post date this period. Some of the more interesting finds unearthed included, a wine bottle, a gold cufflink and even an incomplete human skull!

The discovery of the Red Earl's Hall by archaeologists in 1997 led the proposed extension to the Revenue Commissioners offices being completely redesigned to allow for the preservation of the archaeological site. Realising the immense importance of the hall, the offices were instead constructed by the OPW in bridge-like fashion overhead. Concrete and lead were utilised to imitate the stature of the archaeological site while the prominent buttresses of the hall were also replicated in the tasteful office design. Added to this, the hall was housed within glass panelling and a viewing gangway complete with flood-lighting was erected around it. Interpretive panels now explain the significance of the site and artefact replicas are prominently displayed. Three works of art were also specially commissioned by the OPW to reflect the importance and interest of the excavation. These are evident on site today and number, a grand reproduction of the wine bottle uncovered and a large 'shield-style' model of a pottery sherd also discovered during excavations. A stylised overlay of the entire site was also produced by the commissioned artist.

To-day Galway Civic Trust are delighted to be operating from within the offices of the Revenue Commissioners and look forward to presenting the site of 'The Hall of the Red Earl' to the general public.