



An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



Buildings Survey Report

Commissioned by Sonairte in fulfilment of project “SONAIRTE – Protecting Our Heritage” supported by the Heritage Council under the Community Heritage Grant Scheme 2021 (Grant CH12252).

Architectural assessment

**Sonairte
Ninch
County Meath**

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report is being submitted as a component of a larger study of the historical environment of *Sonairte*, an assemblage of eighteenth-century farm buildings associated with a country residence, *Ninch West*, on lands located along the northern bank of the River Nanny (Figure 1).¹ *Sonairte* is an interactive visitor centre promoting ecological awareness and sustainable living and was established as a charity in 1988. It has developed steadily since it was originally established, in terms of its physical facilities and its standing as an environmental organisation, visitor attraction and educational facility. *Sonairte* occupies some ten acres and is held under long term lease, with the structures under discussion in this report fronting the R150 to the north of the site.

The work has been funded by the Heritage Council under the Community Heritage Grant Scheme 2021.² The project, entitled 'Sonairte — Surveys of Archaeological Heritage 2021', assesses the archaeological and historical significance of the site, including the ME028-004 monument, known locally as 'the Rath'.

The project will generate baseline data to progress ultimately to a full conservation and management plan by undertaking a geophysical survey of one hectare of the site in the vicinity of the recorded monument and a desktop survey of the archaeological heritage within a 3km radius including recorded artefacts, one of which came from the site.

This component of the project offers a baseline architectural assessment and a condition survey to inform on the history, condition and usage of the buildings, with recommendations for future works.

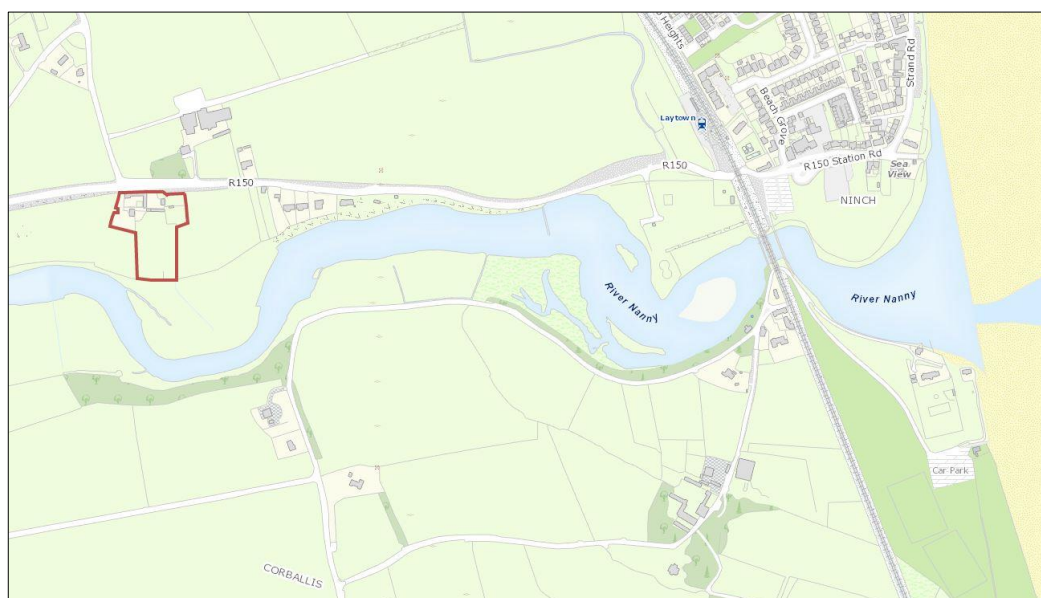


Figure 1 Site location (ASI Historic Environment Viewer)

¹ The present *Ninch West* dates to c. 1864.

² Grant no. CH08557.

- 1.2 Neither *Ninch West* nor the buildings within its historic curtilage are included on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) held by the local authority, and they have not been assessed by the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH). As such they remain unprotected in the legislation, a striking anomaly where the assemblage of buildings is essentially intact, with the earliest structures certainly dating to before 1771 when the footprint of the primary farmyard, the West Courtyard, was mapped by Samuel Bouie.³

The most significant element of the assemblage is **Structure 5**,⁴ the neo-classical red brick northern elevation to this principal open space in *Sonairte*. The builder is most likely to have been Dennis Doran, a successful Dublin barrister originally from Lusk, who in 1753 acquired the lease of the 124 plantation acres comprising the core farm, then referred to as 'Hollywood's part of Ninch'.⁵ It was however his son and heir Edmund who in 1792 bought out the leasehold and acquired further land in the immediate area, possibly sufficient to justify the development of a large farmyard.

- 1.3 Permission was previously granted for a development consisting of *inter alia* 'restoration work to existing derelict buildings to form new demonstration kitchen and café [and] rebuilding of the existing derelict dovecote'.⁶ Phase I was the development of the kitchen within the east wing and a change of use application was subsequently granted to develop the space for educational purposes.⁷ This has now expired.
- 1.4 This report assesses the buildings within the historic curtilage with the exception of *Ninch West* itself. This is not part of the *Sonairte* premises, although it is physically connected through **Structure 5**, which may have been integral to a new house built by Doran after 1753. The assemblage is planned around a farmyard, the West Courtyard, to the rear (north) of the house, accessed from a gateway on the western, unbuilt side, with **Structure 5** occupying the southern elevation of the yard, and more utilitarian, though attractive **Structure 1**, comprising the northern and eastern ranges. Other structures to the east of the West Courtyard were investigated, including **Structure 4**, a tower foundation usually referred to as a dovecot, located along the eastern site boundary.
- 1.5 In a general sense the individual structures are in good order and occupied, with the exception of **Structure 5**, the east wing of which is roofless and the central block disused and missing some of its internal party walls. Where any conservation report would perhaps concentrate on the significance of this structure and this aspect of the site's management, the focus here is on the preparation of a more considered and cost-effective set of proposals for the remainder of the buildings on site.

³ In this regard there is no information on Ninch or associated architects on the database held by the Irish Architectural Archive [dia.ie]. Indeed there is no mention of the assemblage in the most authoritative accounts such as Casey and Rowan (1993) or Craig (1976, 1982 and 2011).

⁴ The structural schema is presented on Figure 9.

⁵ The historical narrative of the farm at Ninch is treated by the present owner of *Ninch West*, Luk Van Doorslaer in an unpublished booklet, *The Dorans of Ninch*, which he kindly loaned to the writer.

⁶ SA/901574.

⁷ SA/120996.

- 1.6 The writer is a licensed archaeologist with a research interest in post-medieval structures and landscapes. The report was commissioned by Finola O'Carroll on behalf of the Board of *Sonairte*.



Figure 2 Study area (ASI Historic Environment Viewer)

2 Historical context

- 2.1 The earliest cartographical representation of the area is from the 1650s, where a watermill can be identified at Ninch within the parish of Julianstown, on the barony map of Duleek (Figure 3). This was possibly located to the southeast of the site along the Nanny and there is no representation of any other buildings in the immediate area.

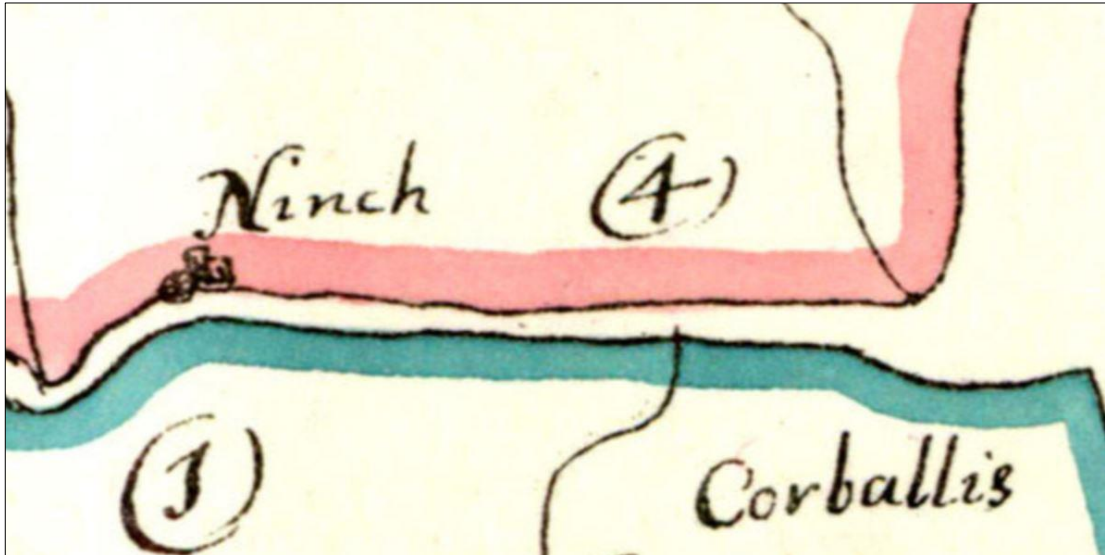


Figure 3 *The Barony of Duleeke in the County of East Meath (detail)*

- 2.2 The more modern occupancy of the lands at Ninch has been traced by Luk Van Doorslaer.⁸ Stephen Ludlow (c. 1650 — 1721), nephew of the Cromwellian general Edmund Ludlow, obtained tracts of land, including the lands at Ninch, in lieu of payment on his appointment to the Court of Chancery. Ludlow was a significant figure in the governance of the island on Cromwell's departure and was in a position to award confiscated lands as payment for services to the administration. The lands passed to Stephen's heir Peter, who is cited on the memorial of 17 and 18 September 1753 when the lease was taken over by Dennis Doran (1708 — 1788).

Certainly from 1695 the lands were farmed by John Hannon, whose son Stephen in 1721 used the farm as security for a loan given by Michael Moore, a Drogheda merchant. Doran thus acquired the lease once Moore had been compensated and the lease was renewed on 13 July 1776 before being purchased outright by Dennis's heir Edmond in 1792.

The Hannon tenancy, which extended from at least 1695 until 1753, would suggest that some development work had taken place on the farm prior to Doran's arrival, which possibly presented as a two-storey farmhouse with an associated haggard or farmyard. There is no indication as to whether tillage or pastoral farming was undertaken, factors which would influence the design and function of farm buildings. It is therefore possible that **Structure 1**, comprising the northern and eastern ranges in the West Courtyard, may date to the Hannon

⁸ *The Dorans of Ninch*, 2019, 3-4. All of the historical references have been gleaned from this valuable work.

occupancy and were retained by Doran, who certainly would have built a new residence on the site, one in keeping with his status in the city.

We do not know the nature of Doran's iteration of *Ninch West*. A façade is hinted at by Samuel Bouie in 1771, and its projection from the southern range of the West Courtyard is evident on the first and revised editions of the 6-inch mapping. The footprint is extended to the south on the 25-inch mapping, work which can be securely dated to c. 1864.

- 2.3 Dennis Doran's biography has been researched by Luk Van Doorslaer, the present owner of *Ninch West*, and where his childhood is obscure, he was admitted to the King's Inns for Hilary term in 1740, having conformed to the established church at Lusk six years previously. He appears to have undertaken land transactions as part of his practice and in his acquisition of Ninch he can be considered a socially-mobile personage from a non-landed, Catholic background, attaining landed status with a country estate within relative proximity to his city chambers on York Street.

Doran was registered as a member of the Royal Dublin Society in 1766 and the landscaped gardens to the south of the house depicted by Samuel Bouie in 1771 are suggestive of an agricultural improver. Where it can be assumed that Doran resided at *Ninch*, the extent to which he personally farmed the estate is unknown. The extent and design of the associated outbuildings discussed below is however suggestive of a large functioning and indeed profitable farm. *Ninch* was referred to in 1778 as Doran's 'beautiful seat' in Wilson's *Post Chaise Companion* and it is possible that by then **Structure 5** had been developed, along with **Structure 4**, the tower foundation referred to as the dovecot. This may have started after the lease was renewed in 1776.

- 2.4 *The Ninch* is carefully depicted in some detail on Bouie's 1771 map of the coastal estates between the Nanny and the mouth of the Boyne (Figures 4 and 5). The depiction of the farmyard in plan is very similar to that as surveyed by the Ordnance Survey some sixty years later, however this depiction of *Ninch West*, Doran's 'beautiful seat' is obviously problematic, and it is likely that Bouie purposely depicted the house to the west and separate to the farmyard as a device to accentuate both. It is likely this slight of pencil was suggested by Doran himself; had **Structure 5** been completed prior to 1771, it is likely to have been represented on the map.

Bouie does however appear to depict the earliest phase of development at the farmyard, the northern and eastern ranges of **Structure 1**, and the open western entrance. The southern range is presented in a similar fashion. It is not clear if an eastward extension of **Structure 5** is depicted, closing off the southern side of what appears to be an orchard.

The southern range of the farmyard is suggested and where it is likely the present arrangement is a secondary one, the bricks used in its construction would nonetheless appear to be eighteenth-century in manufacture. In this regard the tower, **Structure 4**, which is assumed here to be contemporary with **Structure 5**, is not depicted. Where relatively recent photographs suggest this was a tall, singular and very visible structure, the evidence suggests that this,

predominantly brick phase, post-dates 1771, where the tower is certainly depicted on the Ordnance Survey in 1835.

The three bay, two storey *ex situ* façade presented by Bouie is similar if slightly smaller to that of *Ninch East* just to the northeast, a house which is still standing and is obviously that structure depicted in 1771. This may simply be a device of the cartographer to differentiate the two 'big houses' in the area from those of the tenantry. It is nonetheless possible that the primary structure at *Ninch West* approximated its depiction by Bouie, where again **Structure 5** may post-date the house's c. 1753 construction.

The assemblage at Ninch is also depicted by Lawlor in 1812 (not illustrated). The large scale used does not facilitate a secure identification of the buildings or their morphology, beyond there being a general agreement with the Ordnance Survey.



Figure 4 Samuel Bouie, *Map of the Lands of Morningtown ...*, 1771 (detail)



Figure 5 Detail of Figure 4

- 2.5 In 1788 *Ninch West* was inherited by Dennis' son Edmund (d. 1810), who four years later, and for the not inconsiderable sum of £4736, purchased outright the 124 acres of 'Hollywood's part of Ninch and Laytown and also the farms called middle Ninch and Lower Ninch and Laytown known by the name of Netterville's Farm and Preston's Farm ...'.⁹ The Doran estate by now extended over most of the townland, however it is not known if the constituent farms were leased out, or consolidated as a home farm with the farmyard assemblage under discussion at its centre.

Edmund also practiced as an attorney and in 1805 was involved in a case which had significant financial implications, forcing him to dispose of the 290 acres of Middle and Lower Ninch, retaining the 124 acres at Hollywood's, the original estate acquired by his father. The farm remained in the family for several generations, although the house and lands were leased out. A Doran in the personage of a cousin, Richard Lawerenson, occupied the house and farm again in 1839 on the expiry of a lease to a James Tracey. Richard died tragically on a Dublin railway platform in 1846 after alighting from the Laytown train.

⁹ Registry of Deeds, quoted in *The Dorans of Ninch*, 2019, 20.

- 2.6 The first modern depiction of the property was undertaken by the Ordnance Survey in the 1830s (Figure 6). The revision undertaken in the 1850s (not illustrated) does not indicate any changes in the immediate area and annotates the land now under the ownership and occupancy of a second Edmund Doran, who had inherited the farm in 1832. The modern layout of the West Courtyard is immediately evident by 1835, with both maps depicting an extension of the farmyard to the east, beyond the primary eastern range of **Structure 1** mapped by Bouie. Where the northern range was removed by 1910, most of the southern range survives today along with the building terminating the eastern range to the north, **Structure 3**, which stands in isolation. The western range was built against the rear wall of **Structure 1**, and has been removed since the 1940s. Also evident is a pentagonal masonry structure, usually referred to as a dovecot, **Structure 4**, which survives today in a significantly truncated form.

Of particular interest is the treatment of the southern brick range of the West Courtyard, **Structure 5**, which is not depicted with its central advanced section. The projection to the south, representing the footprint of the house, is probably too shallow to represent its true depth and it likely had a rear elevation to the farmyard, with a porch and front door located in a similar position today. In all other respects the footprint of the other structures considered in this survey has remained unchanged.

Given the 6-inch scale, the omission of the central block of the southern range in the farmyard can perhaps be excused; however it obscures the cartographic evidence for the morphology of the assemblage. It is suggested below that the brick southern range and the tower were constructed after the primary house c. 1753 which was remodeled in the 1860s, and this may well be established by means of archaeological investigation undertaken prior to conservation works.

- 2.7 The 25 inch mapping (Figure 7) was undertaken at Ninch in 1909. The footprint of the existing *Ninch West* is evident and the Valuation Books for Ninch suggest that extensive rebuilding took place c. 1864, seven years after the death of Edmund Doran at his Dublin home on Haddington Road. What was more likely a reconfiguration of the primary structure was brought about by the marriage of Doran's heiress, Sarah Letitia to Thomas W. O'Farrall, where the couple had taken up residence at Ninch since 1862.

Although the house has seen more recent interventions, (including what was possibly a lean-to depicted on the 1943 6-inch mapping (Figure 8)), the footprint remains the same today and it has been suggested that as part of this phase, the western section of **Structure 5** was 'turned around', with the space lit by three long window opes benefiting from the vista to the south.



Figure 6 *Ninch West*, Ordnance Survey, County Meath, sheet 28, c. 1835

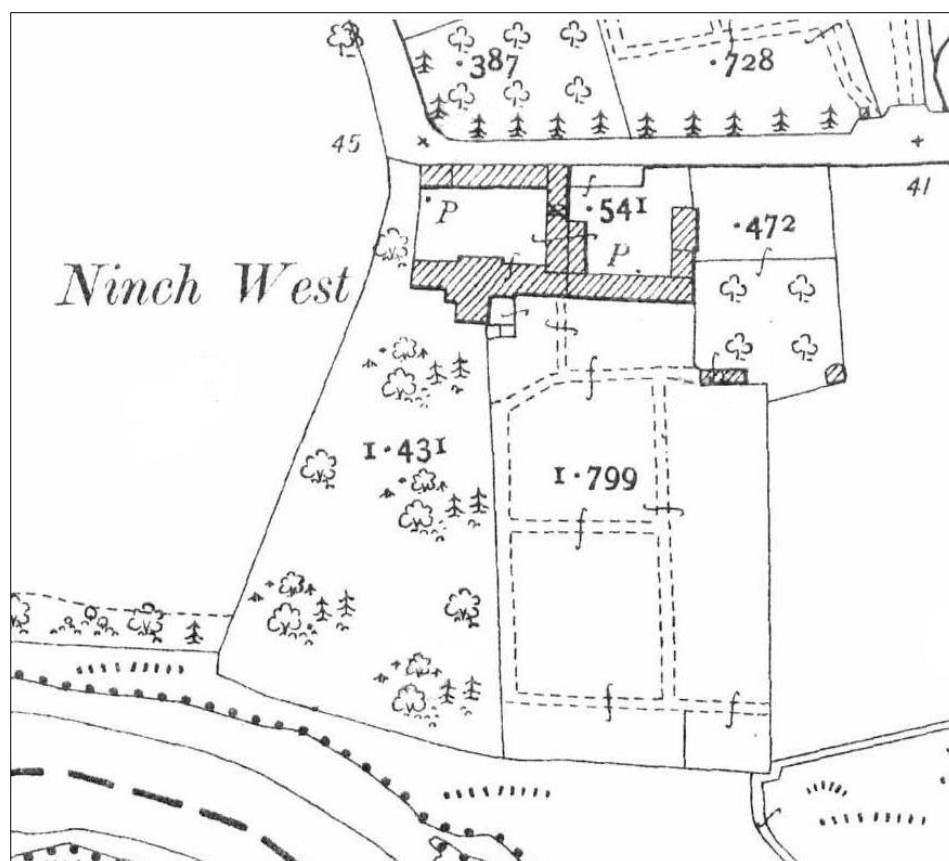


Figure 7 Ninch West, Ordnance Survey, MH028-002, 1910

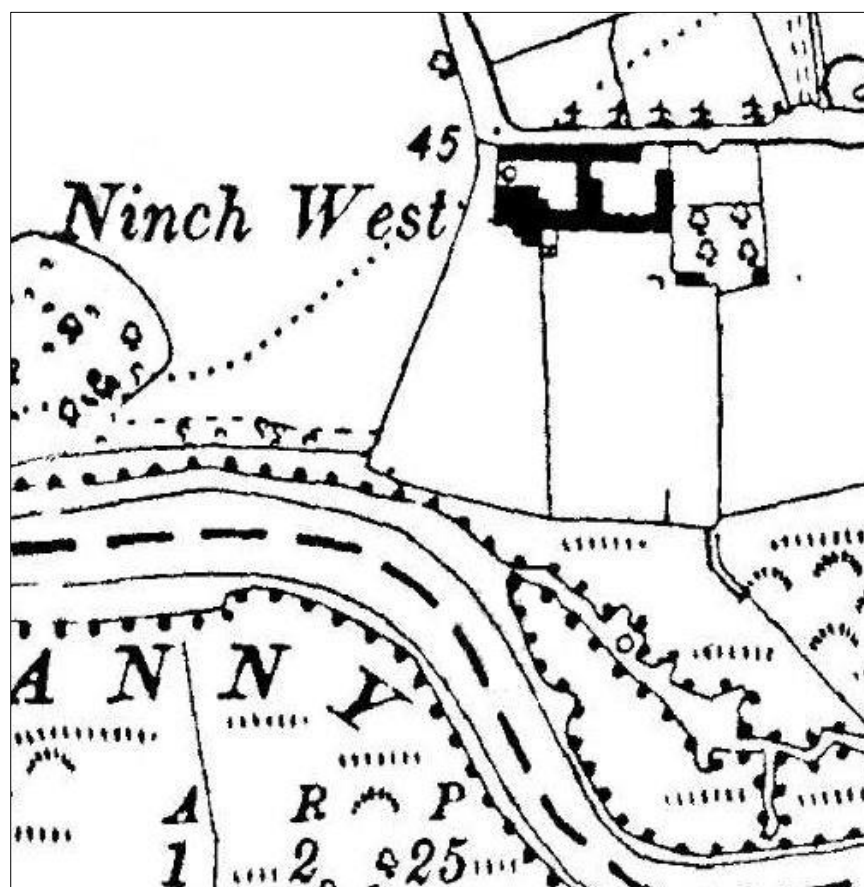


Figure 8 Ninch West, Ordnance Survey, Cassini 6-inch mapping, c. 1943

3 Appraisal

- 3.1 The appraisal of the individual structures on site follows the schema set out on Figure 9. **Structure 1** comprises the northern and eastern ranges of the West Courtyard; **Structure 2** comprises the southern range of the secondary farmyard immediately to the east, with the now detached **Structure 3** forming what remains of the eastern range; **Structure 4** is a much-altered tower, referred to as a dovecot, located further to the southeast again on the site boundary. **Structure 5** is the southern range of the primary farmyard, constructed in brick with a formal neo-classical elevation, and **Structure 6** is the present *Ninch West*, neither of which are part of *Sonairte* per se, although obviously crucial elements of the assemblage as a whole.

There was limited internal access to the buildings, where *Sonairte* was closed over the period of pandemic restrictions; most of the comments below thus relate to the external elevations where render removal has exposed the fabric. With the exception of the central and eastern sections of **Structure 5**, the buildings are all roofed, occupied and in good condition. **Structure 4** has been significantly truncated, although something of its former impact remains.

There have been obvious modern interventions made in recent years, mostly taking the form of new walls and opes, and the replacement of brick structural arches in **Structure 3**. From a conservation perspective the removal of lime renders across most of the masonry elevations was ill-advised; it is a core recommendation of this report that an appropriate lime-based render is applied after the masonry has been inspected and repaired where required.



Figure 9 Buildings at *Sonairte*

3.2 **Structure 1**

Structure 1 comprises the northern and eastern ranges of an open trapezoidal space referred to as the West Courtyard. Both ranges are in uncoursed rubble masonry with brick reveals. The northern range accommodates a café at ground floor level to the west, in what is referred to as the *Herdsmen's Cottage* on an information panel, suggesting a former domestic usage (Plate 1). Other spaces are in use as classrooms, meeting rooms and for temporary exhibitions.

The primary design of the eastern range is evident on Plate 2, where the arched entrance out to the east has been retained. There are exhibition spaces at ground floor level and office accommodation on the floor above.



Plate 1

Herdsmen's Cottage, n.d.



Plate 2

West Courtyard, n.d.

Northern range

The five eastern bays of the northern range at ground floor level are arched openings into what were probably stables in the original scheme. New window opes have been inserted at first floor level which have been fitted with brick reveals (Plate 3). A modern, mostly glazed projection at the western end of the range obscures the domestic arrangement evident on Plate 1 (Plate 4). Here a primary chimney flue has been altered to serve a tall stack further down the roof slope, further interrupted by a glazed section. The masonry has been exposed to weathering by the removal of a protective lime-render.

The northern elevation addressing the R150 is pebble-dashed and the small opes at ground floor level appear to be primary to the structure and may originally have served for ventilation. The western gable has an entrance broken through at first floor level, accessed by a concrete stair with a metal handrail (Plate 5).



Plate 3

Structure 1: eastern end of northern range



Plate 4 Structure 1: western end of northern range



Plate 5 Structure 1: western gable

Eastern range

The eastern range is slightly grander in its conception, featuring a pair of large arched openings extending up both storeys and further expressed in slightly advanced brick sections (Plate 6). The brickwork may be an addition to the façade, undertaken with the construction of Structure 5, the southern range. The first floor is lit on both sides of the roof by modern triangular lights and accommodates several small, interconnected spaces.

New arched openings with modern brick reveals have been broken through under the entrance arch accessing the farmyard to the east (Plate 7), the upper portion of which has been closed off in timber sheeting, with an inserted floor level behind. Where the opposite arch is lower and accommodates the floor level, this may further suggest alterations to the western elevation.

The rear elevation demonstrates modern openings and perhaps older repairs (Plate 8). The now-removed western range of the west courtyard was built against the back wall, which continues to the south in the same build beyond the southern gable. Where the eastern gable of Structure 5 falls short of this wall, there is a strong suggestion here of a primary southern range, which was removed prior to the construction of Structure 5. This is discussed further below.

Condition

Both ranges of Structure 1 appear to be in good repair, although the absence of a protective lime-based render to the elevations is regrettable. The interventions undertaken at the western end of the northern range are not particularly sympathetic to the historic fabric, however they constitute an element of the *Sonairte's* built history and are thus part of the narrative of the site.



Plate 6

Structure 1: eastern range



Plate 7 Structure 1: arch reveal in masonry and interior interventions in modern brick



Plate 8 Structure 1: eastern elevation of eastern range

3.3 **Structure 2**

Structure 2 comprises the southern range of the eastern courtyard and accommodates a shop. With four low, wide arched opes occupying most of the façade, it is possible the building was constructed as an open arcade and it certainly extended in some form westwards where it was built against the southern end of Structure 1. It is in any event better built than the other masonry structures on site, using larger and better coursed masonry. It is quite likely that the building was protected by a lime-based render, although no trace of this survives. The brick in the reveals is of better quality than seen elsewhere, but is possibly a secondary insertion.

The roof profile has undergone a significant alteration, where it now has a modern single-pitch to the front with cement-fibre tiles. Where the eaves course appears to have been rebuilt over a brick stringcourse, it is possible that first floor accommodation was provided above.

The nature of the westward continuation of Structure 2 and its relationship with the missing west range is unknown, where the 25-inch mapping suggests it continued as far as the east wall of Structure 2, but this is possibly an inaccurate depiction of internal spaces. A pile of unsorted masonry lies beside a remnant structure at this corner (Plate 11) and an investigation of the stratigraphy expressed by the masonry would be beneficial to a fuller interpretation of the site's morphology.

Condition

Structure 2 was not accessed but does not appear to have any significant structural issues on external inspection.



Plate 9 Structure 2: detail of arcade



Plate 10 Structure 2: general view of north elevation, with Structure 3 (left)



Plate 11 Remnant structure against eastern wall of

3.4 **Structure 3**

Structure 3 is referred to as *The Barn* on an adjacent information board and it is evident on historic mapping that it terminated the eastern range of the eastern farmyard. Along with Structure 2, *The Barn* was certainly extant by 1835 and was possibly constructed after Edmund Doran who purchased the lease of the farm in 1792, taking leases of neighbouring farms in the process.

Where the Barn is a two-storey structure with a gabled pitched roof, the remainder of the range appears on Plate 12 to have been single storey and was keyed into Structure 2 forming the southern range. A wall extending south is a remnant of this structure and a primary ope has been fitted with a brick arch (Plate 13).

The building functions as a ticket office and information centre and is the first structure encountered by the public as they enter *Sonairte*. The northern gable, through which the ticket office is accessed, has had its brick elements replaced with modern 'distressed' brick, where the uncoursed rubble masonry has been heavily reported in a cement-based mortar (Plate 14). The southern elevation has also seen two double entrances broken through with modern brick reveals. The first floor entrance is accessed by a cast concrete walkway with metal handrails (Plate 15).

Condition

Structure 3 appears from the exterior to be in good condition, although its protective render has been removed, exposing the rubble masonry construction. It is recommended below that the elevations be rendered with a lime-based material, after small areas of cement repair have been raked out and the structure as a whole repointed.



Plate 12 Structure 3, *The Barn*, western elevation, n.d.



Plate 13 Structure 3 from the southwest



Plate 14 Structure 3: northern elevation



Plate 15 Structure 3: southern elevation

3.5 **Structure 4**

Structure 4 is referred to as a dovecot on site; in plan, as represented on the Ordnance Survey, it certainly resembles one. Unfortunately, the structure has been reduced to a level just above the ground floor entrance, and its previous significance can only be appreciated on two photographs on an adjacent information panel.

Plates 16 and 17 show a structure perhaps three times as tall as the truncated remnant, with brick courses rising above the masonry foundation featuring large recessed arches to the two visible elevations with a projecting string course at the springer level and brick keys. Where there is evidence for a render in the arched recesses and over the masonry below, it is unclear as to whether the entire structure was originally rendered. In its truncated form, the original entrance has been rebuilt in modern brick incorporating an arch, where the masonry courses above are capped, also in modern brick (Plate 18).

There is little evidence surviving to suggest that Structure 4 served as a dovecot; the pre-truncation photographs do not show the characteristic external openings and what appear to be recessed lofts on the interior visible on Plate 8 were possibly putlogs supporting an internal structure. It is more likely that the tower supported or accommodated a water tank or reservoir, which must have been accompanied by a system of pipes from the river and throughout the complex. A building c. 20m to the west on the 1835 Ordnance Survey (which survives today as a footprint) is said to have accommodated a pumping system for the formal gardens just to the south, and it is thus likely that both structures are associated. In this regard, there are two

pumps annotated on the 25-inch mapping in the farmyards, with nothing indicating that water is being taken from the river.

Structure 4, prior to its reduction, was significant where it displays a confident use of brick as evident in Structure 5 and it is thus likely they are of the same phase of construction. It is obviously tempting to attribute the work to Dennis Doran, however it may well have been undertaken by his son Edmond, who acquired the leasehold and adjoining farms in 1792, thus consolidating the estate. Where the fortunes of the family were in decline after 1805, there would have been little advantage afterwards of developing such modern facilities for a tenant.

Condition

The tower has been reduced to its rubble masonry at ground floor level, with two capping courses in modern brick affixed with cement. The arched entrance has modern brick reveals and possibly retains a structural function. Ivy has started to take root and will quickly extend across the structure unless checked.



Plate 16

Structure 4, n.d.



Plate 17 Structure 4, n.d.



Plate 18 Structure 4

3.6 Structure 5

The southern range of the East Courtyard, an elevation now expressed in a patchy dark red brick with failing mortar joints, is perhaps the most attractive, if not the most intriguing of all the structures in the assemblage (Plates 19 and 20). Its proportions suggest the hand of an architect in its design, one working in the middle third of the eighteenth century when Palladianism was emergent in grander commissions. The elevation to the farmyard comprises a central two storey, four bay block, advanced between three-bay pedimented wings. The western and central sections have been reroofed in recent years, where the former was probably incorporated into the house c. 1864. The east wing has little surviving behind its façade and has lost its pediment.

The incorporation of ranges of farm buildings in the grand design was certainly advocated by Palladio and the provision of flanking wings provided the space required. Isaac Ware proposed in his 1756 *A Complete Body of Architecture* that

The plan may be made that ... it may appear much more considerable to the eye. The barn may now be a detached building ... and the stable and cart-house, answered by the cow-house, separated from the principal building only by a gate on each side, may stand as two wings; which, with very little decoration from a judicious builder, will have a pretty effect'.¹⁰

If the design was commissioned by Dennis Doran on his acquisition of the property in 1753, he was certainly of advanced tastes. If the work was undertaken by Edmund after 1788 when the lease was acquired and the estate enlarged, there is a relatively tight timeline to 1805, when most of the estate was disposed of. As observed above, the advanced central section of the elevation is not depicted on the 1835 first edition mapping, where Structure 4, most probably of the same phase of development, is. Indeed, the first definitive evidence for Structure 5 does not appear until 1910, where it is highly unlikely was constructed with the present house in the intervening period.

The evidence taken as a whole would suggest that Structure 5 replaced a southern range of outbuildings, similar to Structure 1, and was commissioned by Dennis Doran after 1771, possibly after the lease was extended in July 1776. The relationship, if any, between Structure 5 and a house of c. 1753 remains unclear. The west wing (Plate 21, now incorporated into the main house) may originally have functioned as an arcaded coach house, however the arches may simply have framed windows which were subsequently blocked. It is certainly possible the central block may have formed the rear elevation of the pre-1864 iteration of *Ninch West*, however the present structure is situated somewhat off centre to the rear section and they were not designed to a coherent unified plan. It does appear however that the west facing elevation of the house is an extension in plan of the party wall between the central block and west wing of Structure 5.

¹⁰ Quoted in Craig 1977, 27.

The arched eastern bay of the central block accommodates an entrance directly through the structure through to a similar ope in the southern elevation, and the internal layout of the two eastern bays can be appreciated where the first floor is missing (Plate 23). The space occupying the adjacent bay accommodated a kitchen, with a large fireplace in the centre of the wall with a second fireplace immediately above, with what appear to be granite jambs. Lathe and plaster survives at this level in the alcove created by the chimney breast. The opes in the rear wall have been closed in blockwork, where some of the eastern elevation has been rebuilt in blockwork, the wall at ground floor level is of uncoursed rubble masonry, similar indeed to that in Structure 1. The eastern bay, which communicates directly with the house, has been refenestrated with 3 over 6 pane timber windows, where the remainder remain boarded-up.

It is suggested above that Structure 5 replaced a range of buildings developed with Structure 1, the evidence may survive in the footings of the rear (south) elevation of the east wing. Nothing survives behind the brick façade, which retains the central door ope and flanking windows (Plate 25) and nothing behind apart from blockwork walls constructed as part of a training scheme. The rear elevation is mostly obscured; it survives at a masonry footing along the line of the wall and has been partially rebuilt in blockwork.

Condition

As stated above, both the central block and the west wing have been successfully re-roofed, where the latter is now occupied and integral to the house. The two western bays of the central block also appear to be occupied, however only the western bay has been (beautifully) refenestrated. The window heads at first floor level have been unsympathetically rebuilt as part of a new eaves course under the new roof. The east wing survives in its elevation only, which is in addition missing its pediment.

In a structural sense, the east elevation and elements of the south elevations have been rebuilt in blockwork, presumably when the structure above was being re-roofed. The two eastern bays can be considered derelict where the first floor and staircase are missing, along with the west wall of the passage running through, which may have been vaulted.

The surviving brickwork throughout is in poor condition, with a different brick type used in the upper courses of the central section. This suggests the building was undertaken on a shoestring, initially in a bad-quality brick. Over perhaps 70% of the elevation the brick face has weathered, and the mortar joints have eroded back, although there is little to suggest that the structure is off-plumb or in danger of catastrophic failure.

In any event, it is recommended below that the structure be inspected by a conservation engineer, to generate a document which will inform any further conservation measures to be undertaken.



Plate 19 Northern elevation of Structure 5 and gated entrance to farmyard



Plate 20 Structure 5: northern elevation



Plate 21 Structure 5: northern elevation of west wing



Plate 22 Structure 5: northern elevation of central block



Plate 23

Structure 5: eastern elevation of party wall in central block



Plate 24

Structure 5: eastern wall of central block with surviving ope accessing east wing



Plate 25

Structure 5: northern elevation of east wing

3.7 Structure 6

Ninch West has undergone sympathetic external work which has limewashed the walls, exposing the brick reveals in the southern elevation of the western section of Structure 5 (Plate 26). The fenestration has been especially well considered, where the overall effect suggests a house perhaps 100 years earlier than the present c. 1865 iteration. The original house would appear to survive in the porch and Gibbsian doorcase.



Plate 26 *Ninch West*, with southern elevation of the western section of Structure 5 (left)

4 Statement of significance

The assemblage of structures at *Ninch West* in all likelihood developed from an early eighteenth-century farmyard and survives in a remarkably intact state, despite some dereliction. Of particular significance is the neo-classically inspired southern range of the West Courtyard, the brick elevation of which contrasts with the uncoursed rubble limestone of the earlier buildings on the site.

The assemblage is of possible scientific interest where there would appear to have been an irrigation system in use, fed by the River Nanny, the bank and callows of which define the property to the south. This is presently laid out as a garden with open plots and temporary structures, as it was originally depicted on the 1835 Ordnance Survey.

Ninch West today incorporates the west wing of the southern courtyard range and has had sympathetic façade works undertaken in recent years. The assemblage as a whole is an important survival in the north Meath landscape of a medium-sized farmstead of this period, where many have become derelict or have been redeveloped. The assemblage of buildings at *Ninch* can thus be considered of Regional rating.

5 Recommendations

- 5.1 Where this report will inform a conservation plan for the site, it cannot be considered an in-depth structural survey. It is thus recommended that a full structural survey be undertaken to include a programme of rectified digital photography, which will inform a more considered condition report and record interventions in the historic fabric.

- 5.2 In theory at least, the most important recommendation to be made to protect the future of the assemblage at *Ninch West* is its inclusion on the RPS. As stated in the previous section, the assemblage can be rated of Regional significance, where an eighteenth-century architectural ambience is retained despite more recent interventions.

A second recommendation concerns maintenance and repair of the buildings. This involves a regular inspection and cleaning out of gutters and down pipes and the maintenance of known drains under the existing surface. Vegetative growth is evident on most of the buildings and should be manually removed in small sections, taking care not to remove historic mortar. Any further repair work should proceed with extreme caution, preferably by conservation-trained practitioners, and every opportunity should be taken to rake out modern cement repair, to be replaced by more appropriate materials.

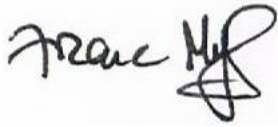
- 5.3 An overarching conservation plan will present a phased approach to conserving individual structures in the medium to long term. In the short term there are measures that can be taken, subject to funding, which will immediately improve the historic environment while in turn protect the fabric of the buildings into the future.

It is a general recommendation that all exposed masonry elevations on Structures 1, 2 and 3 be protected in an approved lime-based render, after small-scale repair work is undertaken at several locations in the underlying fabric. Masonry rubble stacked to the east of Structure 2 and adjacent to Structure 4 should be graded for size and used with a lime-based mortar in any repair work undertaken. The use of modern brick in repair works should be discontinued.

- 5.4 Structure 5 presents its own challenges and urgently requires the attention of a conservation engineer. The conservation of the façade and the return to use of the derelict spaces are obvious targets to meet, however the work required is likely to be expensive and problematic in its execution. Irrespective of there being no legislative protection afforded the assemblage, planning permission will be required for any restoration/conservation works to the east wing.

One immediate recommendation which will not require planning permission concerns the removal of the free-standing blockwork walls within the roofless footprint, where it may be possible to turn the space to a temporary outdoor public use, pending its conservation. It is not however recommended that the east wing be rebuilt, where there is scope to incorporate a contemporary structure behind the conserved brick façade.

- 5.5 Where *Sonairte* has an educational and an environmental remit, the assemblage of buildings and the potential scope of works presents an opportunity to develop a training scheme for the use of historic lime and traditional building techniques.



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