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Hore Abbey, Cashel: the archaeological record

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Background

Hore Abbey is located on a plain west of the Rock of Cashel, about one kilometre north of Cashel town. It was founded by archbishop MacCarwill (Wyse-Jackson 1957, 18) in 1272 and was the last Cistercian monastery to be established in Ireland (Killanin and Duignan 1962, 137). It was a daughter house of Mellifont, county Louth (Harbison 1991, 302). A leper hospital was already present at the site and the abbey was probably attached to it in order to benefit from its revenues.

As with many Cistercian monasteries in Ireland, Hore was dedicated to Saint Mary and was locally known as "St Mary's of the Rock" (Lewis 1837, 284). Its Latin name is *Rupes*, literally meaning "the rock" (Stalley 1987, 239).

At the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1540s the abbey was described as having six hundred acres of land, two granges (Grangegerry and Little Grange), several messuages and cottages, unmeasured gardens, rectories, the abbey itself – church, belfry, cemetery, hall, dormitory – four chambers, a kitchen and a store, as well as two affiliated rectories at Rayleston and Lismalin (Gwynn and Hadcock 1988, 129). After the dissolution Hore became a parish church with three priests allowed to remain (Stalley 1987, 28). In 1561 the abbey was demensed to Sir Henry Radcliffe, then to James Butler, Earl of Ormond, and later to Thomas Sinclair (Gleeson 1927, 281).

The remains of the abbey comprise an aisled cruciform church with chapels and a tower over the crossing. The cloister garth is intact, as is the east range. Only the foundations of the north and west ranges are visible. There are no remains of the leper hospital surviving. However, there is a series of earthworks to the south of the abbey which may be the remains of the structure.

The extant remains of Hore are constructed predominantly of roughly coursed limestone rubble, with moulded features in both sandstone, or possibly oolitic limestone such as Dundry stone or limestone. As with other medieval structures, the earliest mouldings tend to be in softer sandstone, while fifteenth century additions are usually in limestone. Putlogs, or scaffolding holes, can be noted throughout the structure (Fig. 1).

Church Description

The **chancel** measures 9.25m by 7.33m (Fig. 1: A). It is lit by three graded lancets with chamfered limestone arches, rebated jambs and splayed embrasures. These were later replaced with smaller traceried lights, of which two remain. Both are of limestone, chamfered and rebated, with lintelled rear arches, splayed embrasures and hoodmouldings with returned stops. The northern light is pointed. Most of its tracery is missing, though a quatrefoil with pointed foils survives in the upper portion of the window.

The southern example is rectangular in shape, ogee-headed, with three leaves in its southern spandrel. The south wall has two windows, one large single light, with splayed embrasure and relieving arch remaining and a smaller lintelled light now blocked. The north wall has two



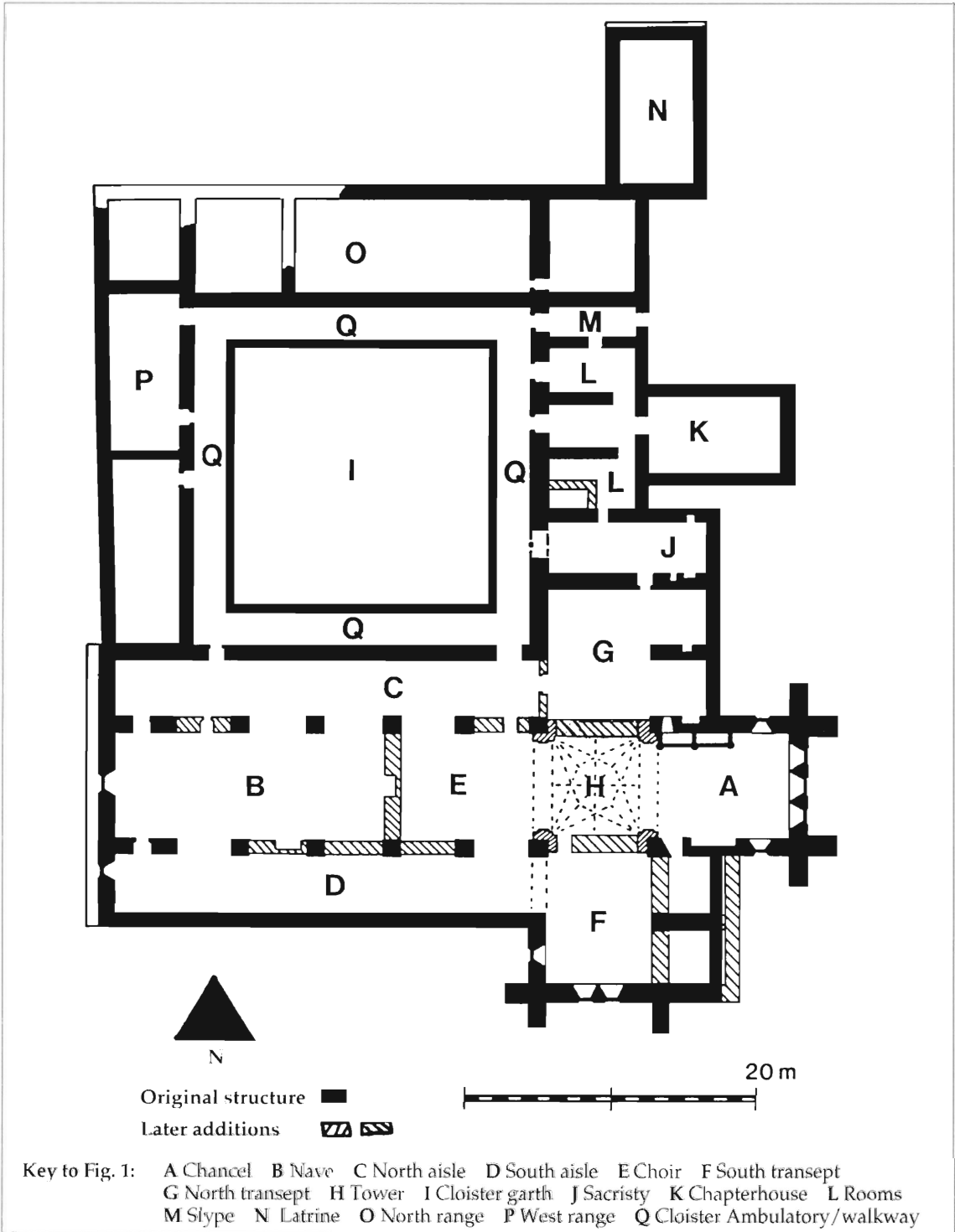


Fig. 1 (after Stalley 1987, with additions).

windows: one is a segmental-headed example with splayed embrasures and a small blocked ogee, rebated with a slightly splayed embrasure.

The chancel has two doorways. The first is in the west end of the north wall, the second in the west end of the south wall. The latter is an elliptical-headed arch with splayed embrasure and rebate. It exits into the south transept. The first is a segmental arch of wedge-shaped voussoirs. It exits into the north transept.

The north wall has evidence for two gabled tomb niches which once projected into the chancel. The base of one of their column shafts survives. A square aumbry is located east of these. In the east end of the south wall is a trefoil-headed aumbry, rebated for a door and complete with a credence. On the eastern inside of the aumbry there is an incised Greek cross, which is possibly a mason's mark (see discussion in Hourihane 1979). Placed centrally on the south wall is an elaborate fenestella.

Fragments of the canopy survive, as does one of the stiff leaf capitals and shallow "waterholding" base. It is fitted with a chamfered credence and two piscinas, one of which is fluted. The sedilia is located in this wall also. Three bases of the columns survive, two of which are "waterholding" examples, the third with stiff leaf foliage. Around the chancel sections of a moulded and filleted stringcourse remain. Two angular buttresses project from the chancel at its northeast and southeast corners.

The nave is 18.30m in length and 19.94m in maximum width. The exterior of the west wall of the nave shows a prominent base batter. (Fig. 1: B). There is arcading on the north and south walls of the nave. It comprises five bays of pointed arches, which are chamfered. The piers are square in plan, also chamfered, and have elaborate chamfer stops.

The nave was originally lit by a large lancet in the west gable, later divided into twin trefoil-headed lights with transom and half mullions and a roundheaded light. Two rectangular lights exist at either side of the lancet embrasure. In the clerestorey there are a series of quatrefoil windows with deep embrasures and rebated. Much of the arcading has now been infilled. A later niche was inserted into the south wall.

There is a **north and south aisle** measuring 29.20m by 3.95m and 28.70m by 4.40m, respectively (Fig. 1: C and D). They would have been lit from the nave through the arcading. The south aisle has the remains of a splayed window in its west wall, most probably a narrow lancet. At the west end of the north wall a flat arched doorway exits into the nave. The aisle is connected to the south transept by a pointed arch of the same type as the nave arcade. The east wall of the south aisle has coping stones of the aisle roof still in position with three large corbels, while the gable line may be noted on the east wall, indicating that the roof was quite steeply pitched.

The north aisle has five doorways. Two are in the south wall, one in the east end exiting into the nave proper, the other in the east end exiting into the choir. The latter has wickerwork centring on the soffit. Both are flat-arched and rectangular in shape. The east wall door allows passage into the north transept. The chamfered jambs, rebates and diagonal tooling on the stone remain.

The west end of the north wall of this aisle bears the remains of a sandstone door with chamfered jambs and pointed stops on the exterior. On its east side, on the chamfer, is a head of a monk carved in high relief (Fig. 2). At the east end of this wall lie the remains of an elaborate processional doorway with roll mouldings of sandstone on the exterior and plain dressed jambs on the interior. Both these doors exit from the nave into the cloister. The northern aisle of the nave was lit both from the nave and two small rectangular rebated windows in the north wall which look out on to the northern walkway of the cloister.

The choir was a later renovation to the church (Fig. 1: E). It measures 9.37m in length by 7.50m in width. A wall was built in the upper part of the nave to form the choir and one bay of the nave arcading was blocked. This wall has the remnants of a central pointed and chamfered doorway with a narrow splayed rectangular light above. Harbison refers to this as a “rood-screen” (Harbison 1991, 302).

The **south transept** is 9.10m by 7.46m internally (Fig. 1: F). It is lit by three splayed lancets, two in the south wall and one in the west. The latter was subsequently reduced to two smaller rectangular lights, while the former became a twin-light mullioned cusped-ogee. The east wall has a trefoil-headed window with chamfered jambs and elaborate stops. The transept is entered by a door in the north wall which is flat-arched, with evidence of plank centring on the soffit. Externally, the transept has two angular buttresses at its southeast and southwest comers, ornamented with three moulded and filleted stringcourses. The two chapels are no longer extant.

The **north transept** is of similar dimensions to the south (Fig. 1: G). It has two chapels remaining, in the east wall. Both have an aumbry and a piscina in their south walls; a rebuilt altar and a chamfered jamb of their east windows show diagonal tooling. The north chapel shows the springing stones of a pointed barrel vault in its north wall. Both chapels were possibly vaulted like the sacristy (see below). The pier between the chapels bears the escutcheon of the Earls of Ormond (the Butlers), a chief indented and charged with three darts, mounted with a Greek cross.

The **tower** measures 6.48m north-south by 6.14m east-west internally and stands to a height of 16.86m (Fig 1: H). It has three orders of chamfered arches in limestone. The first two spring from the ground while the inner third order is supported by an elaborate corbel, on each pier. The tower is vaulted with a lierne vault. Six different types of mason’s marks are to be noted on the various voussoirs of the tower (Hourihane 1979). On the northwest pier of the tower is carved another Earl of Ormond escutcheon and on the northeast pier is an IHS monogram.

The tower has two upper floors. These are lit by a series of rectangular chamfered lights above and below the gable line of the roof of the church. A small light is located beneath the vault in the south wall, while a large round-arched window is in the west face below the gable. The floors of the tower were reached through a chamfered and pointed limestone doorway in the north face of the tower, entered from the upper storey of the east range. On the tower’s east face are located two doorways that would have given access to the alure around the chancel roof. Corbels which once held the floor are still in position. The top of the tower has a stringcourse and a series of drainage holes. There is no extant evidence for a crenallated parapet.

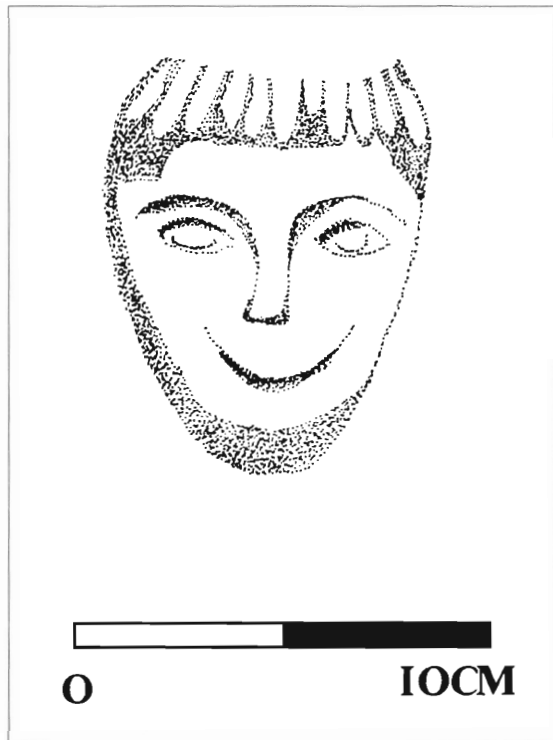


Fig. 2. Monk's head on north aisle doorway.

Cloister Description

The cloister is located to the north of the church. The east range survives though with much modification. Only the foundations of the north and west ranges survive (Fig 1: O and P). The cloister garth measures 17.65m by 17.30m internally; almost a perfect square (Fig. 1: I). Some of the fifteenth century arcading has been reconstructed in the southeast corner of the cloister. It is round-arched with moulded capitals and “dumbbell” piers (Stalley 1987, 157).

The east range comprises a sacristy, chapter house, two rooms of unknown function and a latrine or reredorter. The **sacristy** is roofed by a pointed barrel vault and lit by an east window, though only the embrasure now remains (Fig 1: J). In the south wall is an elaborate trefoil-headed aumbry with a piscina. It is entered from the north transept. The chamfered jambs with pointed stops of a limestone door remain in the west wall of the sacristy, marking the entrance from the cloister walkway.

The **chapter house** is an elaborate room which projects at a right angle east of this range and appears to be a later insertion (Fig 1: K). It was lit by a series of lancets in its east wall with roll mouldings, stiff-leaf capitals and a low, moulded and filleted stringcourse. Later this arrangement was replaced by a twin-cusped ogee-headed light and a lower lintelled rectangular light. The location of the chapter house doorway in the cloister is marked by large chamfered sandstone jambs. The doorway is not centrally placed into the room, which again suggests that the room has been renovated.

The function of the remaining rooms of the range is uncertain (Fig 1: L). One has chamfered jambs and pointed stops on its doorway. If its position is taken into account, it is possible to suggest that it is the parlour. Another doorway at the north end of range gives access to a slype or passage which connects the cloister to the outside of the abbey (Fig 1: M). Finally there is a pointed limestone window at the end of this range. It is an internal window, looking from the east range into the north range, and the site of the refectory. Originally it may have been a doorway. The latrine of the monastery projects out of the northeast corner of the cloister (Fig 1: N).

The only remains of the upper floor of the east range are a series of steps between the dormitory and the room above the sacristy. They exit through a pointed and chamfered limestone doorway.

Discussion

Hore Abbey is unusual as a Cistercian foundation, firstly due to its proximity to a prosperous medieval town (Collins 1995), and secondly because of the siting of the cloister to the north of the church. In the typical Cistercian layout the church is sited to the north of the cloister.

Its location near the town must be due to the importance of the Rock of Cashel as an ecclesiastical centre and the seat of an archbishop. The northern arrangement of the cloister is more difficult to explain. Stalley suggests that at other Cistercian sites water was a primary factor in their location. This does not seem to have been the case at Hore, however, as a stream runs from a spring at the base of the Rock, across the plain about 100m to the north of the abbey.

It may be possible that the cloister was built on the north side of the church out of the sight of the town, which lies to the south, simply for privacy. It has also been stated that it was the Benedictine Order who built Hore and so did not keep to Cistercian rules on building (Power 1938, 1). Leask maintains, however, that it is an original Cistercian structure and that the Benedictines remained confined to the Rock itself (Leask 1960, vol. II, 115).

Having said this, Hore is similar in plan to many Cistercian abbeys throughout Ireland and the Continent. Its arcading parallels that at Tintern, county Wexford and Bective, county Meath. Hore lacks a west doorway as at Graignamanagh Abbey, county Kilkenny. The plan of the nave, with the last bay "omitted", is the same as that at Fontenay, France. Indeed, Stalley believes that Hore abbey was built with Fontenay in mind. It has a distinct French influence seen, for instance, in the pointed-barrel vaults of the sacristy and chapels, which are typically Burgundian in style (Stalley 1987, 57, 246).

Three major construction phases can be seen at Hore. The first marks the initial construction phase, c. 1272-80, in which the church (chancel, nave and transepts) and the cloister were built. Phase two was undertaken in the fifteenth century, which saw the building of the tower and probably the modification of the church and cloister roofs to accommodate it. The renovation of the chapter-house probably took place at this time. The third phase would have seen the church reduced in size and social position into a parish church. This manifested itself in the addition of a wall, forming the choir and the infilling of the nave arcading. The chancel lancets were blocked and small traceried windows inserted.

After the dissolution, much of the abbey was leased. The western end of the nave, the south transept and the chapter house became dwellings. The nave's west lancet was blocked and replaced with smaller windows. The south transept also had its windows modified. The chapter-house had large graded lancets replaced with smaller lights. Window seats were even added when an upper floor was inserted. Many of the rooms of the abbey had upper floors added and numerous corbels for support are still *in situ*.

These physical changes, which can now be noted in the architectural record, highlight the history of the building, and its transition from a religious function in the thirteenth century into a secular structure in the late sixteenth century.

GLOSSARY

Alure: wall walk, usually around the outside of a roof.

Aumbry: recess in wall of church.

Chamfered: surface produced by bevelling square edge or corner equally on both sides.

Clerestorey: upper part of wall in nave of church, above arcading.

Credence: small shelf on which Eucharistic elements are placed.

Crenellated parapet: battlemented low wall, usually around roof.

Cusped: projecting point between arcs in tracery windows.

Embrasure: space in which a door or window is set.

Fenestella: small wall niche containing piscina and credence.

Garth: open space within cloister of monastery.

Lancet: high narrow pointed window.

Lierne vault: arched structure, with short ribs connecting bosses and larger ribs, producing decoration.

Messuage: dwelling house plus its outbuildings and land.

Mullion: Vertical shaft, usually of stone, dividing lights in a window.

Ogee-headed: window with two "S" curves meeting at the top, to form head.

Oolithic: type of gritty yellowish limestone, commonly called "Dundry" from southwest Britain.

Piscina: perforated stone basin for carrying away water used in rinsing chalice, etc.

Sedilia: series of canopied seats set in the south wall of the chancel.

Soffit: underside of arch.

Spandrel: space between shoulders of arches (i.e., the curved parts).

Stringcourse: raised horizontal band or moulding running around the wall of a room or building.

Transom: horizontal beam across a window.

Vousoir: each of the wedge-shaped stones forming an arch.



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