



Cover Photo: Headfort Aerofilms, from IAA photographic archive

## Headfort Demesne, Co. Meath

Architectural Conservation Area  
Statement of Character  
December 2009

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# Headfort Demesne, Co. Meath Architectural Conservation Area Statement of Character

Lotts Architecture and Urbanism

with Michael O'Neill

On behalf of  
Meath County Council and  
County Meath Heritage Forum

An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



## Foreword

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In 2007 Meath County Council adopted the County Meath Heritage Plan 2007-2011, prepared by the County Heritage Forum, following extensive consultation with stakeholders and the public. The Heritage Forum is a partnership between local and central government, state agencies, heritage and community groups, NGOs local business and development, the farming sector, educational institutions and heritage professionals. The Heritage plan is a cross-agency strategic plan which aims to identify, promote, enhance and conservation Meath's rich heritage. It is an action of the Heritage Plan to evaluate the character of Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) in the county.

It is an objective of the county Meath Development Plan 2007-2013 to carry out an appraisal of existing and proposed Architectural Conservation Areas (ACAs) during the lifetime of the plan. This publication describes the special character of Headfort Demesne ACA and will be a useful guide for the public and local authority. We would sincerely like to thank all those who contributed to this project and to the Heritage Council for providing funding.

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# Introduction

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## 1.0 Introduction

The landscape of County Meath, its towns and villages contain areas of architectural, historical and cultural interest, which have a distinct character and inherent qualities. Their character is derived from the typology of buildings within the area and their setting in the landscape. These areas may develop and change with time but their special character is considered of great value and worthy of protection. Current planning legislation allows a planning authority to include objectives in the County Development Plan to preserve the character of a place, area, group of structures or townscapes (taking account of building lines and heights) that are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest or value, or contribute to the appreciation of protected structures, and whose character it is an objective of a development plan to preserve. These places form *Architectural Conservation Areas* or as here abbreviated, *ACAs*. The legislation governing ACAs is used to protect the following:

- groups of structures of distinctiveness or visual richness or historical importance.
- the setting and exterior appearance of structures that are of special interest, but the interiors of which do not merit special protection.
- the setting of a protected structure where this is more extensive than its curtilage.
- designed landscapes where these contain groups of structures as in, for example, urban parks, the former demesnes of country houses and groupings of archaeological or industrial remains.
- groups of structures which form dispersed but unified entities but which are not within the curtilage of a single dominant protected structure.

The primary objective of Meath County Council in the designation of this ACA is to preserve the

character of the demesne, its designed landscape and built features, by limiting the extent of new development permitted within the demesne and requiring that any such development, both within the demesne and in the surrounding area, should not have an adverse affect on the special qualities of the demesne.

The carrying out of works to the exterior of a structure in an ACA shall only be considered as exempted development as long as the works do not affect the character of the exterior of the structure or that of neighbouring structures or areas. Alterations, extensions and new build are allowed within an ACA but any new development should respect or enhance the special character of the area and should be carried out in consultation with the Planning Department of Meath County Council and the Conservation Officer, following the usual planning application process.

There are currently eighteen ACAs designated in County Meath. This document is one in a series which identifies the special character of individual ACAs and gives advice and guidance to those seeking planning permission, such as homeowners, developers and planning professionals, on the type of works that would be acceptable within that particular ACA to avoid loss or negative impact to its special character.

# Location & Boundary of the Architectural Conservation Area

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## 2.0 Location & Boundary of the Architectural Conservation Area

Headfort Demesne is located near Kells Co. Meath, to the east of the town, some 15km north-west of Navan and 50km north-west of Dublin city.

### 2.1 ACA Boundary

The ACA is bounded on the south by the R163 road from Kells to Slane. On all other sides the ACA boundary follows the historic boundary of the demesne, as shown on the 1838 first edition map of the Ordnance Survey. An area to the south of Kells to the Slane road, which lies outside the ACA, was formerly part of the historic demesne but has been used since 1928 as a parkland golf course. It has been extensively remodelled and ceded from the demesne in 1987.

In every other respect the ACA boundary follows that outlined on the first edition Ordnance Survey map, and is largely defined by a boundary wall, except north of the Maudlin bridge on the Kells to Carlanstown road where a minor road and lower walls act as the boundaries. The west flank of the demesne is screened from the town by Heronry Wood and Mausoleum Wood. The demesne is now subdivided, and is the property of several owners. The boundaries of the ACA are delineated in Figure 1.

## Location & Boundary of the Architectural Conservation Area

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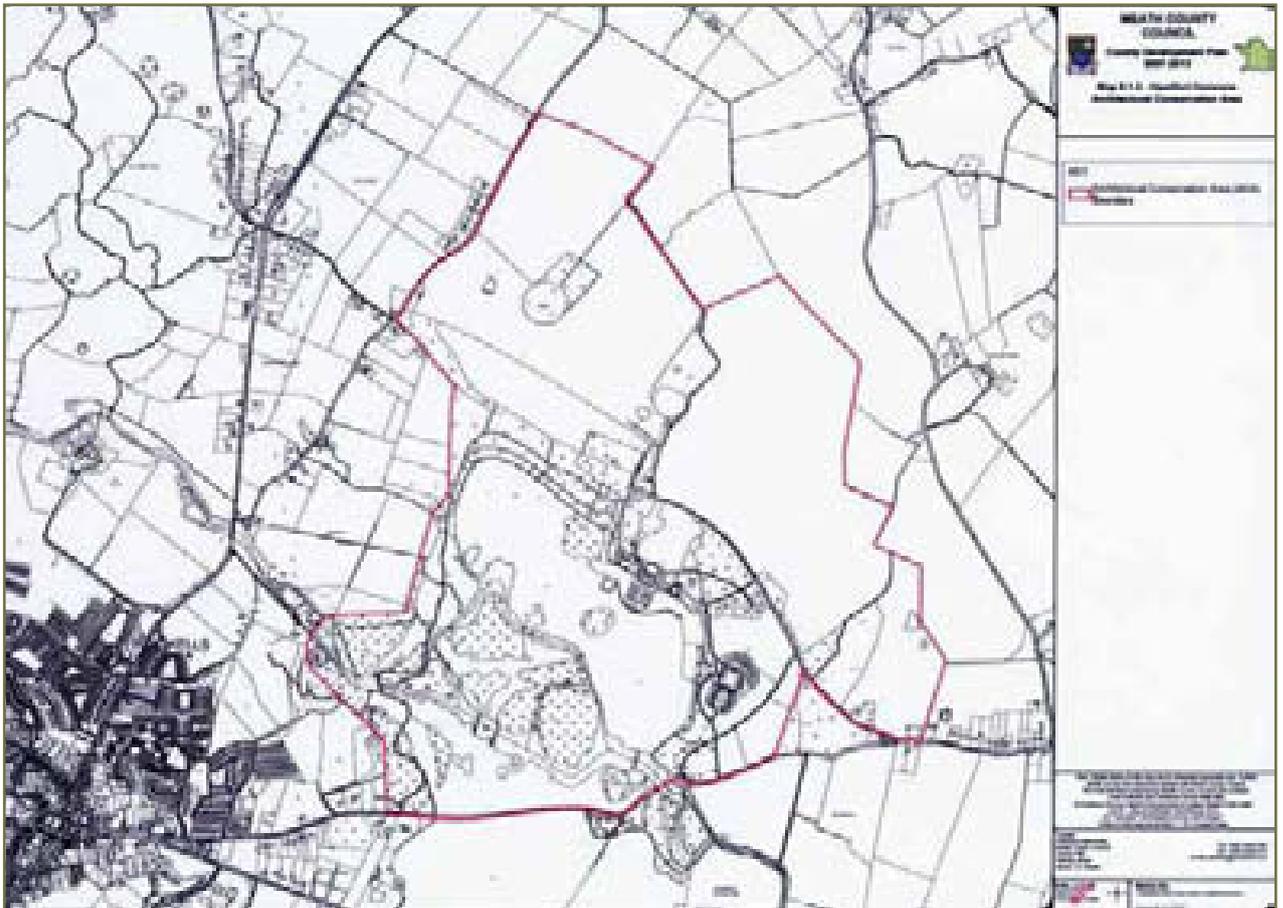


Fig.1: Boundary of Headfort Demesne ACA.

# Schedule of Protected Structures & Recorded Monuments

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## 3.0 Schedule of Protected Structures & Recorded Monuments

There are a number of protected structures within the boundaries of the Headfort Demesne ACA that are protected under Part IV of the Planning & Development Act 2000. A protected structure is a structure or part of a structure that a Planning Authority considers to be of special interest from an architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical point of view. The full extent of a protected structure includes the land lying within the curtilage of the protected structure, and other structures within that curtilage and their interiors. The concept of curtilage is not defined by legislation, but is understood to be the parcel of land immediately associated with that structure, and which is or was in use for the purposes of the structure. The Record of Protected Structures (RPS) is contained in the Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013, Appendix V.

The Record of Monuments and Places lists structures and sites of archaeological heritage, which are protected under the National Monuments Acts. The schedule is available to the public at the Planning Office of Meath County Council, Teagasc Offices and Town Councils and on the internet on the website of the National Monuments Service, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government ([www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie)).

# Schedule of Protected Structures & Recorded Monuments

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## 3.1 Protected Structures

Within the boundary of the Headfort Demesne ACA there are ten protected structures.

RPS ID No:	Structure:	NIAH Reg. No:
• MH017-110:	Headfort Mausoleum	
• MH017-112:	Newbridge	14401711.
• MH017-113:	Gates	14401712.
• MH017-114:	Outbuilding	14401709.
• MH017-115:	Estate workers house	14401708.
• MH017-116:	Headfort House	14401713.
• MH017-117:	Headfort Bridge/Sedenrath Bridge	
• MH017-118:	Stables	14401710.
• MH017-119:	Gates	14401707.
• MH017-120:	Stables	14401706.

## 3.2 Recorded Monuments

The following archaeological sites, features and artefacts within the Headfort Demesne ACA are protected by National Monument legislation as Recorded Monuments included in the Record of Monuments and places:

RMP No:	Monument:
• ME017-007:	Mound

# Development Plan Zoning & Objectives

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## 4.0 Development Plan Zoning & Objectives

The Meath County Development Plan 2007-2013 identified Headfort Demesne as an ACA. It also designates the River Blackwater as a Landscape Character Area (LCA 20), defining its value as Very High and regionally important.

Heritage Policy HER POL 33 undertakes to “discourage development that would lead to loss of, or cause damage to the character, the principal components of, or the setting of parks and gardens of special historic interest.”

Headfort Demesne lies within view VP32 identified on Map 8.6 and listed in Table 27: Views and Prospects to be Protected. Heritage Policy HER POL 113 in the Development Plan undertakes to “*protect from inappropriate development the views identified on the Landscape Character Map 05: Visual Amenity, and the views and prospects as indicated on Map 8.6.*”

# Historical Background

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## 5.0 Historical Background

### 5.1 The Taylor Family

The Headfort demesne was assembled by purchase by Thomas Taylor, who was born in 1631 in Ringmere, Sussex. A surveyor by profession, he accompanied Sir William Petty to Ireland to undertake the Down Survey of 1653. This map survey was prepared for Oliver Cromwell to identify lands owned by Catholics and non-sympathisers of the Commonwealth which were liable for confiscation. These lands were transferable to adventurers who financed the war, to pay ex-soldiers and reward others in favour. Taylor, not an adventurer, did however purchase unwanted lands following redistribution. By 1660 he had secured up to 21,000 acres of land in Ireland; this included 7,443 acres at Kells, Co. Meath and over 14,000 acres in County Cavan. The townlands that were to make up the demesne at Headfort can be traced at least roughly on the Down Survey map of the Civil Parish of Kells. Of great interest is the fact that a fortified house or tower house is recorded on that map, probably on or near the site of the present house. Thomas Taylor also acquired the walled town of Kells, granted to Colonel Richard Stephens at the Restoration, which he quickly sold on.

# Historical Background

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Fig. 2: Extract from first edition OS Map of 1838 showing Kells and Headfort Demesne. (Map courtesy of the RIA. The ACA is outlined in red).

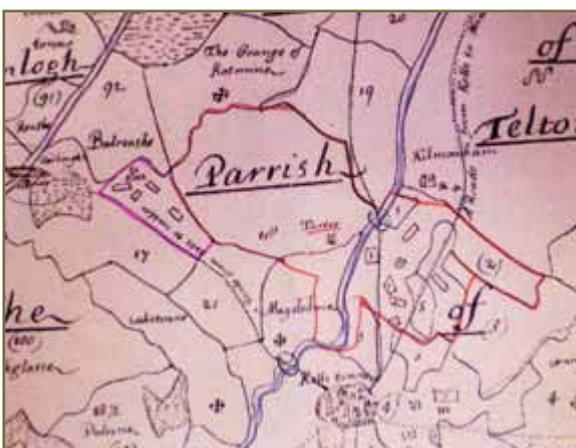


Fig. 3: Down Survey map suggesting the outline of Headfort Demesne, rotated to show north at the top of the image. (Map courtesy of RIA).

## Historical Background

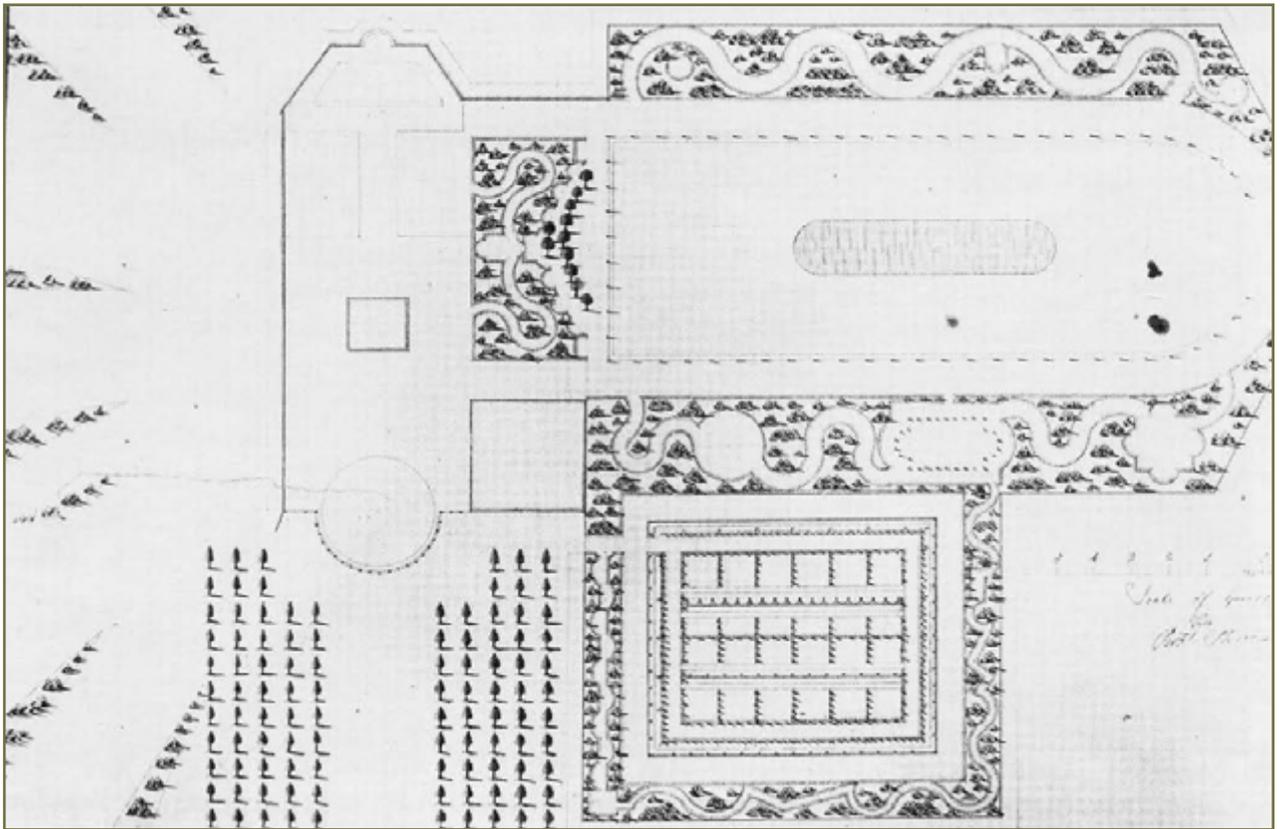


Fig. 4: Plan of gardens c.1720 by Robert Stephenson. (From E. Mallins and the Knight of Glin, Lost Demesnes).

Taylor remained in favour after the Restoration of Charles II, rising to the position of treasurer-of-war in 1660. He died in 1682. His son, also Thomas, consolidated his father's wealth and standing in society. He was created a Baron, with the title Lord Headfort in 1704, and was appointed to the Privy Council in 1726.

## Historical Background

### 5.2 Headfort House and Demesne

The house recorded on the Down Survey map or its successor may explain the existence of the c. 1720 plan by Robert Stevenson for formal gardens, some fifty years before the present house was built. It is unclear as to whether this elaborate garden plan, consisting of rectangular and radiating yew trees, was executed. What does survive is an arcaded avenue of clipped yews, with the various specimens trimmed into fantastic shapes and chess pieces (see fig. 5). This avenue was later enclosed within an extensive kitchen garden, which is now very overgrown. A fine Gibbsian surround door in the west wing of the house, on the garden front, may be a remnant of the earlier house contemporary with the yew avenue.

present Headfort House between 1769 and 1771. Plans had been solicited from a variety of leading architects over the previous twenty years. These included Richard Castle, who designed Taylor's Dublin town house Bective House, as well as John Ensor and William Chambers. Ultimately, the architect chosen was George Semple (fl. 1748, d. 1782), who designed St. Patrick's Hospital, Dublin (1749), and was an important architect and designer of bridges.

Lavish interiors were inserted into the house between 1772 and 1775 by Robert Adam. Regarded as the greatest British architect of the later 18th century, and particularly renowned as an interior designer, Adam gave his name to the Adam style. This style championed a delicate neo-classical form of decoration which was

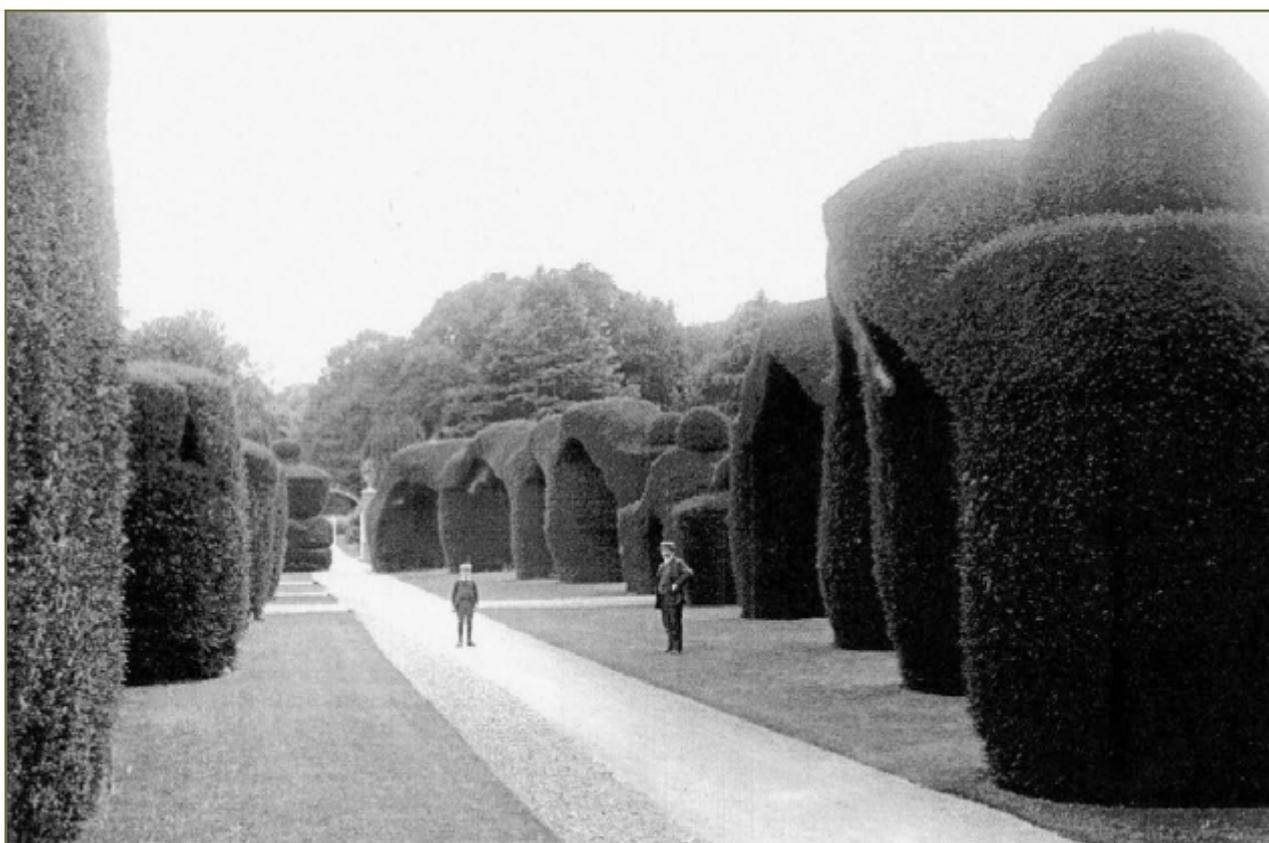


Fig. 5: Yew Tree Avenue, c.1895. (IAA Photographic Archive).

Lord Headfort died in 1736. His son, also Thomas Taylor, became Viscount Headfort in 1762. He was elevated to Earl of Bective in 1766, and built the

highly fashionable in the latter part of the 18th century, and formed the perfect complement to the picturesque garden. The Headfort interiors are the only significant work by Adam to survive in Ireland.

## Historical Background

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### 5.3 The English Landscape Style

The grounds of the new house were laid out in the romantic naturalistic manner of the picturesque English Landscape Garden.

This style emerged in England in the first part of the 18th century as a reaction to the rigid symmetry of 17th century gardens, and was further developed and popularised by landscape designers such as Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton. This new style was derived from an idealised conception of 'natural' landscapes as portrayed in paintings of idyllic Italian landscapes by artists such as Claude Lorraine and Nicholas Poussin.

The style was enthusiastically adopted throughout Ireland from 1760 to 1840. Country houses were set in wide expanses of park dotted with noble clumps of trees, generally secluded from the outside world by plantation belts and perimeter walls. Essential features of the landscape style were curving naturalistic forms and the creation of uninterrupted views from and to the house by means of sunken fences, called ha-has. Other signature features included the creation of winding circuit walks and rides leading through orchestrated pastoral scenes with winding streams, woodlands and bodies of water reflecting the landscape and sky. The views created were embellished with picturesque classical or Gothic follies, with flocks and herds grazing placidly to complete the idealised pastoral scenery.

The style worked with, rather than against, nature but nevertheless involved considerable remodelling of the topography, transplanting of mature trees and damming of rivers to form new lakes and streams. Naturalistic parkland provided ideal conditions for the integration of pre-existing landscape features, and small ringforts and other archaeological features were often incorporated. Productive gardens were banished out of view to walled gardens.

# Historical Background

## 5.3 The 18th Century Landscape at Headfort



Fig. 6: Extract from William Larkin's 1812 Map of County Meath showing the relationship of Headfort Demesne to Kells and the Tower of Lloyd (Meath County Library website).



Fig. 7: Headfort in an extract from the OS first edition of 1837, showing extensive woodland within the demesne (from the NIAH Database of Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes).

## Historical Background

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The writer and traveller Arthur Young visited Headfort in July 1776.

*Reached Lord Bective's in the evening, through a very fine country, particularly that part of it from which is a prospect of his extensive woods. The improvements at Headfort must be astonishing to those who knew this place seventeen years ago; for then there were neither building, walling, nor plantations.'*

*His Lordship transplants oaks 20 feet high without any danger, and they appear to thrive perfectly well; but he takes a large ball of earth up with the roots... Besides these numerous plantations, considerable mansion, and an incredible quantity of walling, his lordship has walled in 26 acres for a garden and nursery, and built six or seven pineries, 90 feet long each.*

Young's visit to Headfort captures the process of creating a designed landscape on a large scale in addition to building a large country house. The demesne had few natural features, the main one being the River Blackwater, and it appears that it was soon widened artificially to form a small lake around two islands. The larger of these, the ten-acre island known as Great Island, lay to the south of the house. As Young remarked:

*The grounds fall agreeably in front of the house to a winding narrow vale which is filled with wood where also is a river which Lord Bective intends to enlarge; and on the other side, the lawn spreads over a large extent and is everywhere bounded by very fine plantations.*

In a landscape that had been generally denuded of its tree cover by the close of the Tudor period, the planting of woods within an estate marked the demesne or home farm off from the surrounding landscape.

*his Lordship's idea is not that of farming, but improving the land about the house for beauty; for if let, they would be destroyed and ploughed.*

Young's remark that 'the plantations are very numerous, more thriving I have nowhere seen' is reinforced by the names of the woods recorded in a nineteenth-century inventory of trees: Swing Gate Wood and Front Lawn; Backlawn and Backlawn Wood; Avenue Wood; Farm Yard and Steward's House Wood; Breadland Wood; Angle Wood and Breadland Field; Carrickmonk Wood and Fields; Limekilnfield and Roundwood; Icehouse Wood; Windmill Field and Wood; Boxhill Wood; Garden Wood; Burrowfield Wood; Burrowfield; Big Island Wood; Little Island Wood; Bleach and New Garden Wood; Ballyreilly Wood and Field; Oak Wood; Navigation Wood; Kilmainham nutgrove and orchard; Bullockfield; Lower Lisland Wood and Field; Upper Lisland Wood and Field; Long Wood and Newton's Meadow. The inventory enumerated a staggering total of over 32,600 trees within the demesne.

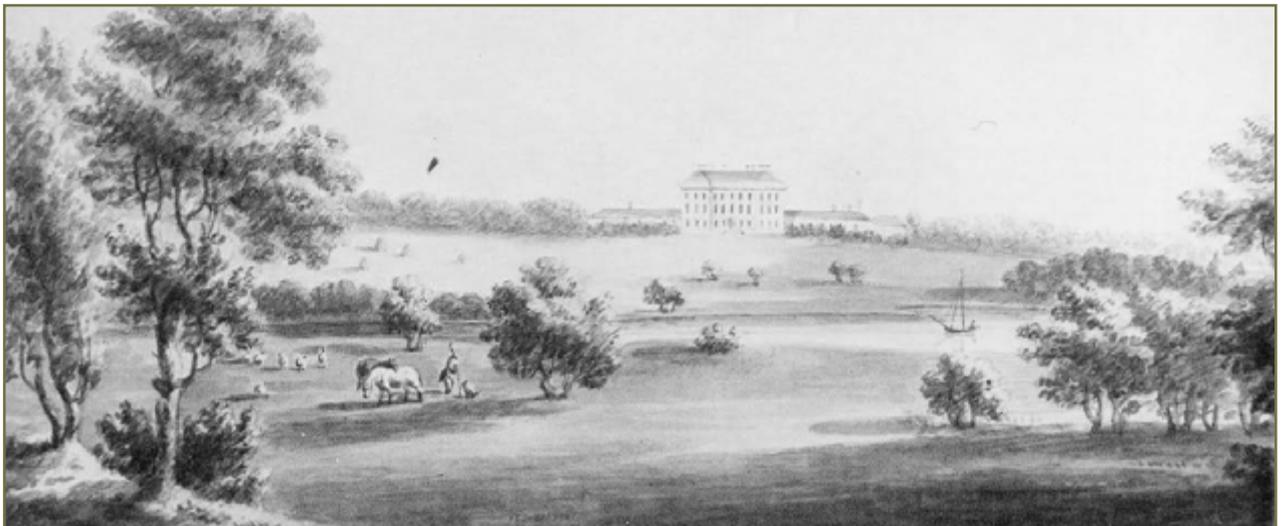


Fig. 8: Headfort in a watercolour of c. 1790 by George Holmes. (From E. Mallins and the Knight of Glin, Lost Demesnes).

## Historical Background

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### 5.4 Later Developments

The successor of the builder of Headfort House, another Thomas, became Marquis of Headfort following the Act of Union in 1800. The second Marquis commissioned the striking octagonal mausoleum, built in 1869 to designs of James Franklin Fuller. His son built additional ranges to the farmyard and the stable yard to the west of the house.

The fourth Marquis, president of the Royal Horticultural Society from 1915-45, established a pinetum on Great Island in 1913, and planted specimen rhododendrons in other parts of the gardens and bordering avenues and walks.

In 1959 Headfort House opened as a boarding school for boys between the ages of eight and thirteen. The Marquis moved to a self-contained house in the east wing. The estate was sold in 1982 to B.J. Kruger who extended the lease for the school for another thirty five years. A consortium was formed to purchase the entire estate. The school now owns the main building, excluding the east wing which is in private ownership, and approximately 66 acres of woodland, gardens and playing fields. In 1998 The Headfort Golf Club purchased the parkland south of the house along with both islands in the River Blackwater and have established a new golf course.

# Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

## 6.0 Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

This section describes the character of the designed landscape and its built features, dividing the demesne into sectors for clarity. Views and vistas, integral elements essential to the understanding of the historic landscape in its larger setting are described separately in Section 7.



Fig. 9: Aerial view (from the NIAH Inventory of Historic Gardens).

### 6.1 Definition

The term 'demesne' refers to that part of a landed estate held for the use of the manor for its own use and occupation. Although dependent on the surrounding tenanted estate, the demesnes evolved as separate social and economic areas whose distinctive layouts, incorporating farmland, gardens, woods, and buildings, constitute a dominant man-made component of the landscape.

(Source: Terence Reeves Smyth, 'Demesnes' in Aalen, Whelan Stout in *Atlas of the Rural Irish Landscape*, Cork University Press 1997, pp 197-205).

### 6.2 Setting

Headfort Demesne is set in the Blackwater valley to the east of Kells. The topography is largely flat, bisected by the River Blackwater, and is without spectacular natural features. However, it affords a view to the ancient settlement of Kells set on higher ground nearby, and of the Tower of Lloyd, set on a hill beyond the town to the west.

This natural setting was moulded by the creators of the landscape park to create a pair of islands and a wider expanse of water with a secondary channel brought closer to the house. The house was sited at the top of the slope of the river valley to heighten its impact and to maximise views over the romantic naturalistic landscape.

### 6.3 Layout of the Demesne

The ACA of Headfort Demesne centres on Headfort House, flanked by low wings and with an axially situated formal garden to the south. The historic landscape on the north-east and south-west of the house was formed into two stretches of open parkland in curved forms interspersed by isolated trees, the serpentine edges delineated by woodland belts.

The entrance front faces north, rotated slightly to the east, the belts opening to allow vistas over a wide expanse of open landscape. The definition of the kidney-shaped expanse to the north-east has now disappeared due to clearance of hedgerows, but the vista remains essentially unimpaired. To the north-west lies the botanically significant American Garden with a collection of important specimen trees. North of this the overgrown Walled Garden enclosed an impressive Yew Walk, which predates the present house and landscape park. A rare Ice House lies in a woodland belt further to the north, and to the east of this open farmland surrounds the large Windmill Wood. This is a smaller clump with a ruined windmill and several clumps of trees each set in a raised position. They are now surrounded by arable land, retaining the historic field pattern to a certain degree. The wooded areas incorporate circular features, possibly of archaeological value.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

The garden front faces south over the river valley. On this side panoramic views out of the park are possible over the trees due to the fall of the ground away from the house. The town of Kells is prominent in the distance to the south-west and the Tower of Lloyd catches the eye on a distant hill to the west. The southern section of the park, now a golf course, is bisected by the river separating into meandering channels to surround two wooded islands. This part of the demesne contains eventful circuit walks punctuated by several picturesque structures, notably the Gothic grotto, the Cooley Bridge and the Mausoleum.

The demesne contains a number of significant specimen and champion trees, listed in the Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI), and referred to in Mary Forrest's *Trees and Shrubs Cultivated in Ireland*. The Tree Council of Ireland lists the following:

*Cupressocyparis leylandii* 'Haggerston Grey', (Leyland Cypress) 2nd tallest of its kind in Ireland; Irish girth champion.

*Populus alba* 'Britzensis' Irish Height and Girth Champion.

*Liriodendron chinense*, ( Chinese Tulip Tree ) Irish Girth Champion.

*Abies firma*, ( Momi Fir ) 2nd greatest girthed of its kind in Ireland.

*Aesculus turbinata*, (Japanese Horse chestnut) Irish Height and Girth champion.

*Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, (Dawn Redwood) 2nd greatest girthed of its kind in Ireland.

*Aesculus indica*, (Indian Horse Chestnut) 2nd tallest of its kind in Ireland, Irish girth champion.

*Davidia involucrate* (Handkerchief Tree) Irish Height champion

*Tetracentron sinense* (Spur-Leaf) Irish Height and girth champion.

A few oaks and some magnificent hornbeams predate the house and the landscape park.

### 6.4 Boundaries and Access Routes

An intact demesne wall runs along the southern and western sides of the ACA, defining the character of the rural roads which they face. The Kells to Slane road, which runs through the

original extent of the demesne, is bounded on both sides by demesne walls. The demesne wall on the south side borders the older Headfort Golf Club which lies outside the ACA. Nonetheless, the walls on both sides form the perimeter context of the ACA, and gates on the southern side, set at an angled to the road, are strong defining feature of the rural context.



Fig 10: Main entrance gates.

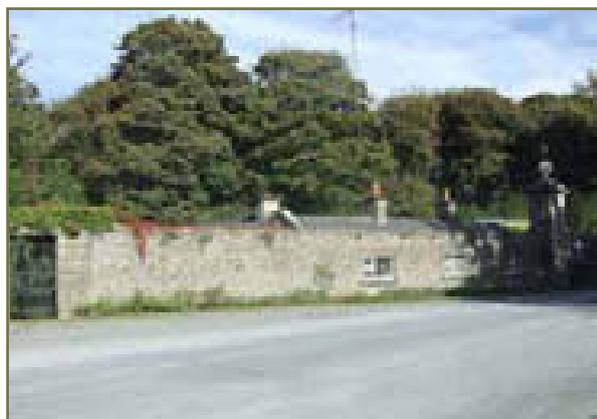


Fig. 11: Gate lodge with modern windows.

Two entrances into the ACA have striking gateways, both of architectural and artistic significance. The flanking wall of the main entrance screens a gate lodge, in which modern horizontal windows have been inserted, upsetting the historic character of the entrance situation.

The main entrance lies close to a multi-arched bridge, the Sedanrath Bridge, which enriches the character of the perimeter of the demesne and provides views into the park and Great

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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Island over a wide section of the river. The main entrance route runs through the wooded area to the south-east of the house, and passes the farmyard complex to approach the house from the north-east.

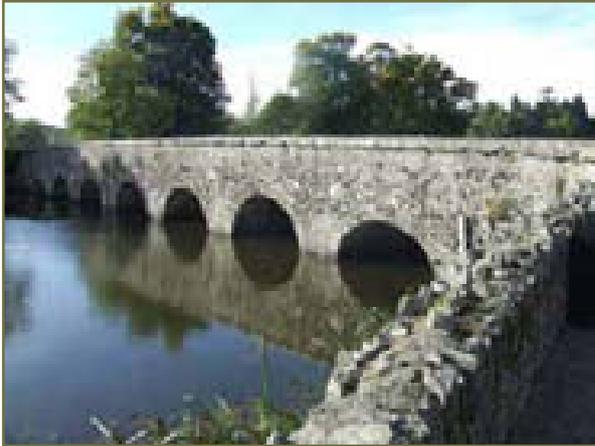


Fig 12: Sedenrath Bridge.



Fig 13: Disused gates to southern side of Kells to Slane road.



Fig. 14: Entrance gateway to north-west.

A second entrance to the demesne lies on the north-western perimeter on the Kells to Carlanstown road, and forms a simple segmental triumphal arch composition, angled to face the road from Kells.

### 6.5 Headfort House and Wings

Built of grey Ardbraccan stone, Headfort House is a stately eleven-bay block of austere design, three storeys over basement. It is crowned by a heavy cornice and tall blocking course, with a slight break forward at the outer bays of the front elevation and the three centre bays of both fronts. While the front entrance to the north is almost at ground level, the garden front is raised a flight of steps above the formal garden, and so overlooks the landscape park below. Both doors have plain Tuscan surrounds with triangular pediments. There are lugged architraves around the ground floor windows and plain architraves on the upper floors. Fitted into this unadorned exterior are exquisite neo-classical interiors designed by Robert Adam. His designs decorate the entrance hall, the main staircase, the Eating Parlour (or Ballroom), The Saloon (or Green Drawing Room) and the Chinese Drawing Room. The interior of international significance has been described in detail by Christine Casey and Alistair Rowan, and by Michael Bolton.

Long straight ranges of out-office buildings, one storey over basement having rendered walls with round-headed windows, flank the house opening to the rear onto the former kitchen and stable courts.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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Figs. 15 and 16: Entrance Front and Eating Parlour by Robert Adam, 1772-75.



Fig. 17: Gibbsian door surround in the east wing, possibly from an earlier house.

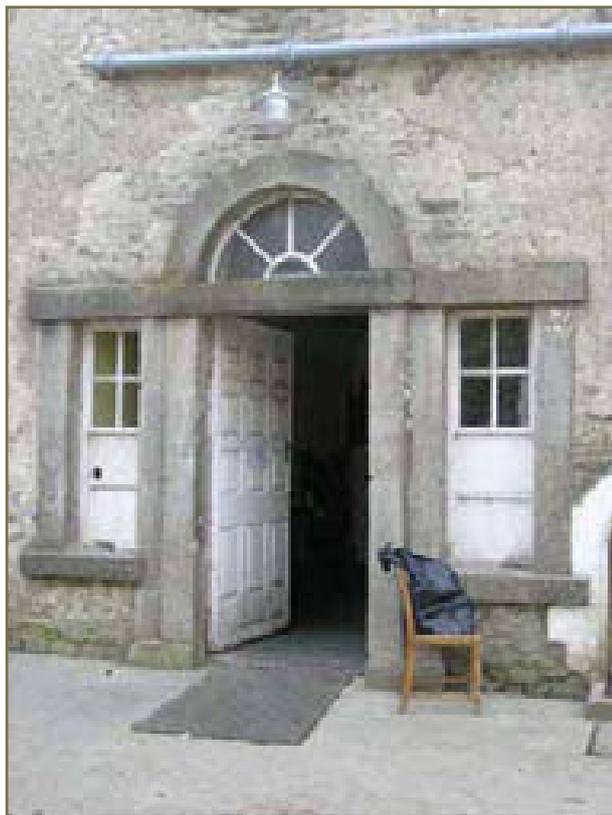
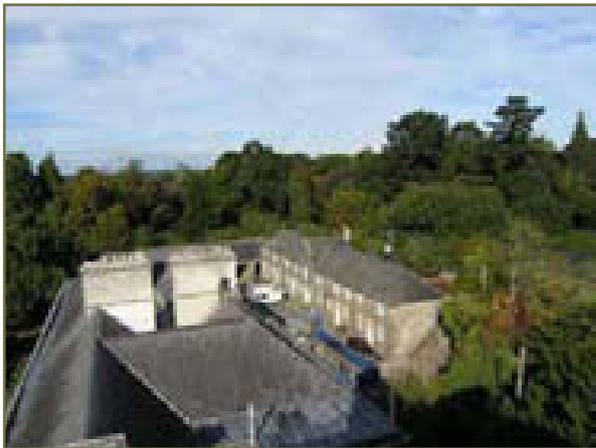


Fig. 18: Doorway to rear of east wing.

# Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne



Figs. 19: East Wing and stable court.

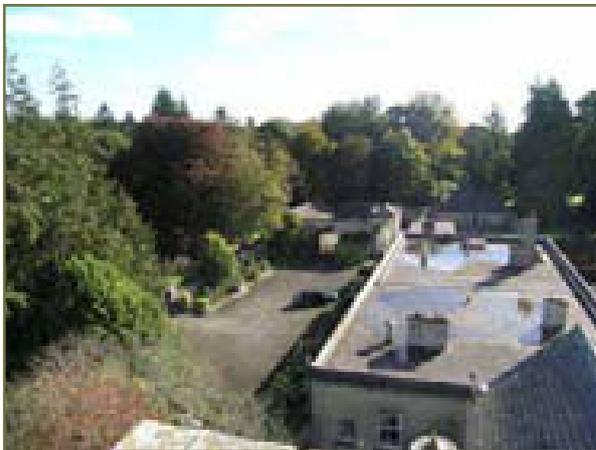


Fig.20: West wing and former kitchen court.

The house stands in a dominant position at the centre of the demesne and is therefore a defining feature of the overall character of the ACA. Fire escape stairs have been inserted in the side elevations which detract from its presentation.

The wings and courts encompass finely made buildings of good architectural quality, and the roof of the west wing has been regrettably replaced with a flat roof.

## 6.6 Landscape to the North of the House

### 6.6.1 Lawn to the Front

The front of the house overlooks a wide lawn containing two large and important trees, included in the Tree Register of the British Isles (TROBI, check numbers).



Figs. 21 and 22: View to the front of the house.

The lawn quality of the space is somewhat diminished by the intrusion of fenced and gravelled paddocks on the west, randomly placed goalposts and parking around the circular drive.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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### 6.6.2 Farmland to the North

The views from the entrance front of the house are unobstructed by development. However, the historic field pattern, characterised by a sweeping curve forming a designed naturalistic element, has been obliterated by removal of hedgerows. This curve formed part of the 18th century landscape design composition, balanced to the south of the house by the curving forms of the islands and open sweep of parkland. Its loss alters the design intention of the view from the house.

The intensive use of the land for arable farming disturbs the intention of the romantic rural landscape, conceived as pastureland populated by livestock.

### 6.6.3 The American Garden

Located to the north-west of the house beside the Walled Garden, the American Garden is of great botanical significance, planted with *Catalpa bignonioides* (Indian Bean Tree), *Araucaria imbricate* (Monkey Puzzle) and *Cedrus deodara* (Himalayan Cedar), all products of horticultural discovery during the eighteenth century.



Figs. 23 and 24: The American Garden.

### 6.6.4 Walled Garden

An extensive garden, measuring some 50 metres wide and 130 metres long and bounded by an unusually high stone wall, is to be found in a secluded location in Boxhill Wood. It is parallel to the American Garden and adjoins it to the north. The garden is no longer in use for productive purposes. It contains derelict glasshouses and is now badly overgrown.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

Imposing entrance gates of decorative ironwork in brick piers lead from the American Garden through the middle of the long south wall and into the old Yew Walk (see fig. 21). The old Yew Walk contains trees dating to c.1720, preceding the house by some seventy years. This avenue is a survivor from an earlier formal garden, which was enclosed by the wall when the landscape park was laid out. The formal approach, flanked by a formal pair of urns, demonstrates that the avenue remained part of the walk around the 18th century landscape.



Figs. 25 and 26: Entrance gates to Walled Garden and perimeter wall.

### 6.6.5 Icehouse

A rare intact example of an ice house is located close to the walled garden. This underground structure illustrates the functioning of the 18th and 19th century country house and is of considerable architectural and social significance, contributing to the understanding of the historic demesne on the practical as well as the ornamental level.



Fig 27: Ice House interior. Fig.28: Base of windmill.

# Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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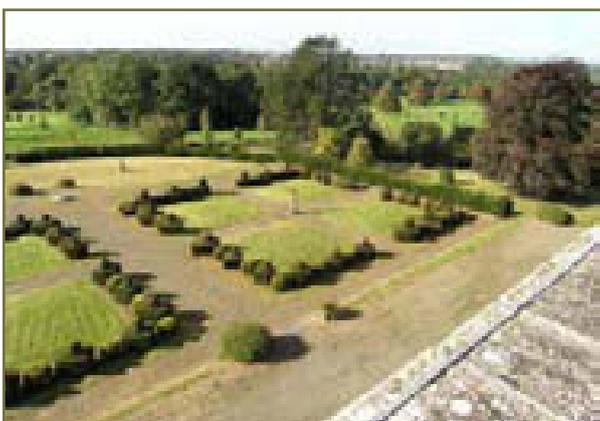
## 6.6.6 Windmill

A ruinous windmill stands in a small wooded enclave within the farmland to the north-west of the park. Conceived as a picturesque element to evoke an idyllic rural landscape, more than for purely functional purposes, this structure would historically have had revolving wind vanes to form an eye-catcher in the distance when viewed from the park. The windmill is therefore an important feature of the designed landscape but is at considerable risk.

## 6.7 Landscape to the South of the House

### 6.7.1 Parterre

A formal parterre planted with topiary yews bows out into the park on the south side. It was laid out in the mid 19th century, following the prevalent fashion to insert formal gardens close to the house to overlook the landscape parkland.



Figs. 29 and 30: Garden Front and formal parterre.

## 6.7.2 Golf Course to the South

A golf course now occupies the main part of the landscape park lying between the house and the River Blackwater, and includes the picturesque islands, Great Island and Little Island, created in the river. This landscape is a modern composition overlaid on the 18th century park. The contours of the ground have been altered and new paths and inappropriate surfaces and closely cut manicured greens introduced. New concrete bridges create several new connections across the Blackwater and to the islands, altering the experience of the river, an integral element of the 18th century design.

The greatest impact has been the introduction across the open stretches of parkland of undifferentiated tree-planting, which upsets the historic definition of the landscape. The historic design of open areas of park, punctuated by isolated stands of trees, and surrounded by shelter belts to frame intentional vistas and provide glimpses of ornamental structures and of the house, has suffered from this planting. Concentrations of young trees weaken the unity of the historic landscape design. The new planting is as yet young, and its impact is still contained. However, the growth of these trees towards maturity will interfere with the perception of the garden, both from the house and, crucially, from within the designed landscape itself.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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Figure 31: Tree planting will eventually block the view of the river



Figure 32: Tree planting closing an intended vista to the house

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

### 6.7.3 Pinetum

The pinetum laid out by the 4th Marquis of Headfort (1878-1943) on Great Island, the 10-acre island in the Blackwater, is a hugely important aspect of the twentieth-century demesne. The arboretum contains (or contained in 1980) 250 species and varieties including huge Douglas firs, wellingtonias and redwoods. The islands are now part of the new Headfort golf course.

Other elements within the demesne are the rhododendron-lined walks and the gardens, including the Pleasure Garden and the Forrest Garden with dwarf rhododendrons.

### 6.7.4 Grotto

A small Gothic-style grotto overlooks the River Blackwater from the north-west corner of the former parkland. Built in the form of a pointed alcove of cut and rubble stone with rendered inner walls, this structure has deteriorated to a partially ruinous state and is now at serious risk. Placed along the circuitous route around the garden to allow a resting spot to enjoy views of the Blackwater valley and wooded islands, this folly would also have been glimpsed from the water adding to the experience of the picturesque landscape.

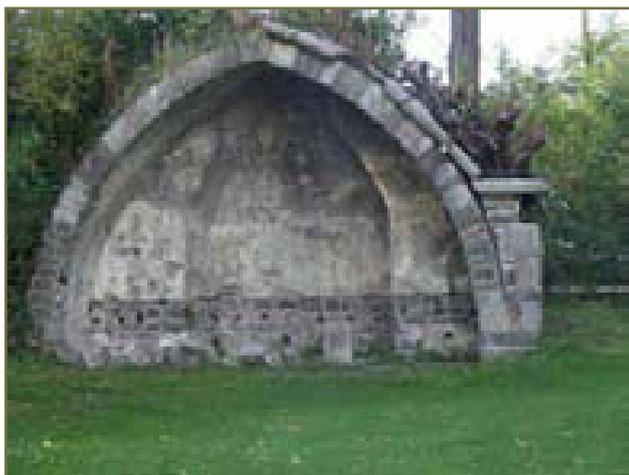


Fig 33: Grotto facing the river.

### 6.7.5 The Cooley Bridge

The walk to the west of the park leads along the river bank facing the Little Island to the bridge built by Thomas Cooley in 1776, one of the finest pieces of architecture in the demesne. Comprising of a three-span composition of semi-elliptical arches with dressed stone details, the bridge is a key element in the sequence of landscape and architectural experiences which characterised the 18th century Landscape Garden, its picturesque qualities heightened by its relationship to the water.

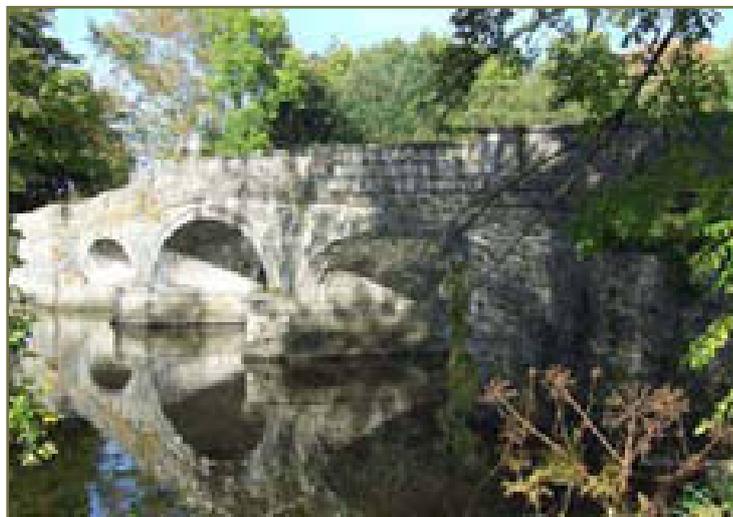


Fig 34: Bridge built by Thomas Cooley in 1776.

### 6.7.6 The Mausoleum

A tree-lined way continues from the Cooley Bridge along the River Blackwater to the mausoleum of the Taylor family, set in an atmospheric clearing in what is now called the Mausoleum Wood. The Mausoleum, built by James Franklin Fuller in 1869, is an octagonal shrine in English Gothic style, with a steeply sloping stone roof rising to an octagonal lantern and a high spire. The secluded setting of the Mausoleum in the landscape park enriches the experience of discovery when strolling through the garden in the original spirit of the 18th century park. The spire forms an eye-catcher in the designed landscape and is the focus of several vistas. The monumental structure has a powerful funerary character, heightened by its wooded surroundings.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

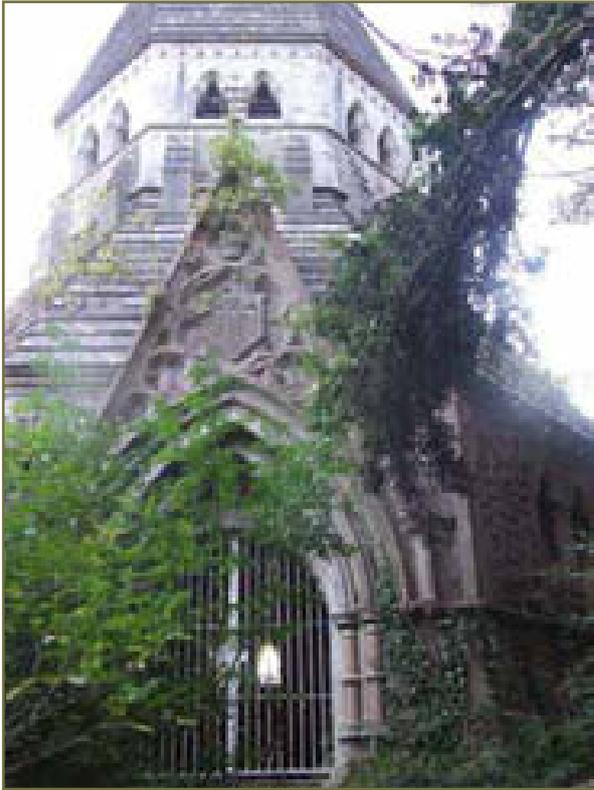


Fig 35: Mausoleum, built for the second Marquis of Headfort in 1869



Fig 36: Mausoleum in a historic photograph (Irish Architectural Archive).

### 6.8 Farmyard and Woods to the East

The large farmyard, a court of two-storey buildings some 85 metres square is located south-east of the house in Avenue Wood. The central area is walled and contains two stone drinking troughs. The later wings enclosing the court are by James Franklin Fuller and were built in 1874-5. The older wings were built for the 1st Earl and date to the later eighteenth century. Fuller was also the architect for the stable yards added to the west range of the house.

The farmyard court has been converted to apartments and a private housing scheme has been built around it. Although this development is concealed from general view, it introduces a suburban character that is unsuitable within a historic demesne.



Figs. 37 and 38: Farmyard Courtyard.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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A disused cottage at the end of a secondary service approach road on the eastern extremity of the demesne contributes to the authentic historic character of the ACA. The sensitive conversion of this house should be encouraged.



Fig. 39: Cottage at the south-eastern corner of the demesne.

# Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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## 7.0 Summary of Significant Views & Vistas

Located on a low ridge overlooking the River Blackwater to the south, there are significant views from bridges crossing the Blackwater into the woods forming part of the Headfort Demesne ACA. The routes from Kells to Carlanstown and to Slane, skirting and bisecting the demesne respectively, also afford views into and of the perimeter.

Within the demesne there are important internal views of parkland to the north of the entrance front framed by woods, the avenue and woodland walks. From the parterre there are views south over parkland (now a golf course) to the River Blackwater.

Looking out of the demesne, the town of Kells, and particularly the spire on the church, forms a focal point. A second deliberate eye-catcher, looking out, is the Tower of Lloyd, north-west of the town.

## 7.1 View from the road from Kells to Carlanstown

Looking into the demesne the tilled home farm land is framed to the north by a small copse and to the east by Windmill Wood.



Fig 40: Views North and north-east to Windmill Wood.

# Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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## 7.2 View from Maudlin Bridge

Maudlin Bridge provides important views to the east along the river to Mausoleum Wood and the spire of the octagonal mausoleum, now partially concealed by the mature trees.

A further view from Maudlin Bridge, to the north across the Maudlin fields, shows the demesne wall following the contour of the ridge with woodland behind.



Fig. 41: View down river towards Mausoleum Wood and the spire of the Mausoleum.



Fig 42: View from Maudlin Bridge north-east, showing the estate boundary wall and woods.

## Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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### 7.3 Views on road from Kells to Slane (R163)

The road to Slane via Kilberry bisects the demesne with boundary walls and gates occasionally providing glimpses into the demesne. Headfort or Sedenrath Bridge is also a significant aspect of the demesne architecture.

### 7.4 Views From Headfort House

The house provides a focal point for panoramic views within the demesne and for the major views out of the demesne to the west and north-west. The Church of Ireland steeple and the round tower of Kells form the focus of one vista.

The view to the Tower of Lloyd, on a bare hilltop beyond the town, forms a spectacular external relationship from the demesne. The vista served to direct attention towards the Virginia estate of the Taylor family in Co. Cavan to the north-west beyond, but also draws the town of Kells into the foreground. The saw-tooth arrays of modern housing at the northern outskirts of Kells below the hill mar this view to some degree, an effect which could be mitigated by planting trees in the foreground to partially screen the view of the houses.



Fig.43: View of Kells. The spire of the church is a deliberately built eye-catcher.



Fig. 44: View north-west to the Tower of Lloyd.

# Character Assessment of the Historic Demesne

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## 8.0 Summary of Special Character

The historic demesne of Headfort House is a highly complex landscape site of enormous cultural significance. The site encompasses a major country house of international architectural and artistic value containing hugely important Robert Adam interiors, the only work of this influential 18th century architect to survive in this country.

The house is set within an expertly conceived and well-preserved designed landscape of harmoniously overlaid layers, and is one of the most notable examples of the picturesque English Landscape Garden in Ireland. The designed landscape is punctuated with ornamental and functional structures of artistic and social significance, including the strikingly elegant 18th century bridge by Thomas Cooley, the atmospheric and intricately detailed Gothic-Revival Mausoleum, the Gothic viewing grotto, outbuildings of fine architectural quality and a rare example of an underground ice house. The planting is of great botanical significance and includes features of great interest and rarity, such as the Yew Avenue, the American Garden and the early 20th century Pinetum.

A special feature of the demesne is the sense that the outside world is not cut-off. The demesne enjoys a direct visual relationship to the historic town of Kells, with which it is historically and culturally linked. The steeple of the medieval church tower, built by the 1st Earl of Bective in 1783, reinforces the link between town and demesne, as does the spectacular view of the Tower of Lloyd beyond. The house and town are set in an unspoilt rural landscape of great beauty, and together form a historic cultural landscape of great richness.

Historic demesnes, of which Headfort is an excellent example, provide insight into the transformation of the Irish landscape during the eighteenth century. Alongside the patchwork of ditch-enclosed fields, which are another legacy of this period, planned demesnes are an essential ingredient in the evolution of the distinctively Irish rural landscape.

In common with other Irish demesnes, the historic character of the Headfort Demesne ACA has suffered from neglect of its landscape features. In addition, its internal continuity and integrity has suffered from subdivision of the property and development within the historic confines of the demesne. This can damage the character of the designed landscape if not managed in a unified way which is sensitive to the historic spirit and essence of the whole.

# Implications for Planning and Development

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## 9.0 Implications for Planning and Development

The objective of Architectural Conservation Area designation is to preserve the special character of an area through rigorous control and positive management of any changes made to the built environment. Under the Planning & Development Act 2000 there is a requirement to obtain planning permission for all development works which do not constitute exempted development. Section 4 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 lists developments which are constituted as exempt, for the purposes of the Act. With regard to Architectural Conservation Areas, it is important to take into account Section 4(1)(h) of the Act, which states that the following shall be exempted development:

*“Development consisting of the carrying out of works for the maintenance, improvement or other alteration of any structure, being works which affect only the interior of the structure or which do not materially affect the external appearance of the structure so as to render the appearance inconsistent with the character of the structure or of the neighbouring structures.”*

### **Protected structures:**

Planning permission is required for all works that would materially affect the character of a protected structure, or any element of the structure including its curtilage, which contributes to its special character. Under Section 57 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 an owner/occupier may request a declaration from Meath County Council as to whether any works they propose require planning permission. A declaration issued under this section sets out the type of works the Planning Authority considers would or would not affect the character of a structure or any elements thereof, which contributes to its special interest.

### **Non-protected structures:**

Buildings within the Architectural Conservation Area, which are not specifically referenced in

the RPS, nonetheless enjoy the same level of protection as protected structures themselves if they are considered to lie within the curtilage of other structures which are protected. This protection will normally extend to all structures within Headfort Demesne. However, by virtue of their position within an ACA works to the exteriors of all non-protected structures, which in the opinion of the Planning Authority would materially affect the character of the Architectural Conservation Area, will require specific grant of planning permission under Section 82(1) of the Planning & Development Act 2000.

## 9.1 Works requiring planning permission

### 9.1.1. Exteriors of Buildings

Repairs and works to the exterior of the main house, wings, outbuildings or to any garden or estate structures within the ACA of Headfort Demesne will require planning permission unless considered by the Conservation Officer to be of an urgency that requires immediate action. In such a case there must be full consultation of all details with the Conservation Officer and approval must be granted for all such repairs.

Render should never be removed from façades to expose rubblework or brickwork. This practice not only significantly alters the architectural character of a historic structure, but also exposes the building to decay and damage by removing a protective outer layer. Where renders have been removed, restoration of suitable render will be encouraged.

Repointing in a style or manner other than that which already exists would be deemed unacceptable by the Planning Authority. Other works to external walls which require planning permission include the painting of natural stone, brick or unpainted render finished structures (particularly with modern paints which can be detrimental to the building's fabric). Planning permission is also required to carry out sand blasting of external surfaces, which may lead to porosity and water ingress.

## Implications for Planning and Development

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### 9.1.2. Roofs

The roofs of buildings within the ACA are important in defining the special character of the demesne. Original elements should be retained where possible, and repaired and reused rather than replaced. The following works require planning permission:

- The removal of the original roofing material such as natural slate and ridge tiles. Their replacement with modern materials like fibre-cement tiles will not be deemed suitable by the local authority.
- The removal of existing chimney-stacks and early terra-cotta or clay pots or other features of the roofscape such as cast-iron gutters and down-pipes.
- The removal of timber bargeboards and other eaves details and their replacement in a material other than the existing.
- The installation of roof lights or dormer windows on the front or prominent elevation of a structure, visible from the public realm. There is no tradition of dormer windows within the Headfort Demesne ACA, and their installation will not be deemed appropriate by the local authority.
- The erection of, or alterations to, externally mounted signs and advertisements at roof level, including banners.
- The provision of awnings, canopies, flags and flagpoles.
- The erection of solar panels, TV satellite dishes, communication antennae or support structures for same. These are considered to have a highly negative impact on the character of the demesne and should be avoided when visible from any area within the landscape. Where existing aerials have become redundant they should be removed.

### 9.1.3. Window and door openings

The house and ancillary buildings within the Headfort Demesne ACA mostly retain original window and doors. Original window in all buildings, whether exposed to view from the gardens, on hidden sides or in secondary buildings should be retained. Where timber or metal windows are decayed or corroded these can generally be repaired and reused, and decay will not be a valid reason for replacement. Where windows have been replaced with modern materials or historic ones enlarged, reinstatement of the historic design will be encouraged, or made a condition in planning permissions for related works. The following works to windows require planning permission:

- The alteration or enlargement of original openings.
- The removal of original timber and metal windows, and their replacement with modern, artificial materials such as uPVC and aluminium.
- The removal of fanlights or timber doors, and their replacement with modern, artificial materials such as uPVC and aluminium.
- The fitting of awnings, shutters, security grilles or any other fixture to the outside of windows. For permission to be granted materials used must be traditional in appearance and must not compromise the special character of the window.

### 9.1.4. New build

A considerable level of housing development has already been permitted in the ACA. No further development is seen to be possible without negatively impacting on the special character of the ACA.

New development, however small, within the Headfort Demesne ACA should not be permitted

## Implications for Planning and Development

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if it lies within any of the areas assessed as being of special character within the demesne. No development inside or adjacent to the ACA should be permitted where any of the views or vistas, which contribute to its special character, would be compromised or altered in any way.

### 9.1.5. New Planting

New tree planting, hedge-laying or shrubs within the ACA requires planning permission as it can seriously affect the special character of the ACA. Any proposal should be in keeping with the design intention of the historic design, and should have regard for the principles embodied in the ICOMOS Florence Charter on the Conservation of Historic Gardens. Proposed designs should be prepared by a suitably qualified historic landscape consultant.

The Planning Authority will seek to reverse the adverse damage caused to the definition of the southern expanse of parkland by tree planting within the golf course. This may be achieved by relocating or removing trees in the interests of preserving the original landscape design intention.

### 9.1.6. Hedgerow Clearance or Felling of Trees

Further erosion of the field pattern within the home farm area of the demesne, or any tree-felling, would require planning permission as this affects the special landscape character of the ACA. The Planning Authority will seek to reinstate features lost in earlier clearances.

### 9.1.7. Erection of Fences or Other Items

The integrity of the landscape is compromised by fences and insertions into the landscape. Such interventions will therefore require planning permission, and the Planning Authority will seek to remove or replace features erected prior to the designation of the demesne as an ACA.

### 9.1.8. Carparking

The Planning Authority will encourage the

provision of a suitable car park for Headfort House, and once this is in place it will seek to restrict parking at the front of the house.

### 9.1.9. Extensions to Buildings

Designation as an ACA puts an obligation on the applicant to produce a very high standard of design, which should contribute to the visual enhancement of the demesne while respecting its physical character. Extensions and all new builds which impact on the external elevations of buildings, which are visible from any area within the park, and which impact on the curtilage of any of the protected structures, will require planning permission. Extensions and external alterations to existing buildings, historic or modern, are only acceptable if:

- They can be justified by their contribution to the suitable and sustainable long-term use of a historic building of the demesne.
- It can be demonstrated that the impact on the historic appearance and fabric of the buildings has been kept to an absolute minimum.
- They are not visible from any area within the park and are subordinate to the building they extend. Extensions and external alterations to existing buildings are also only acceptable if they are appropriate in scale, and built with suitable materials and finishes of high quality.

The concept of the direct imitation of earlier styles is not always appropriate, but if this model is to be followed then the elevational treatment of the new development should be well-proportioned and built with respect for its context. Materials should be of good visual quality and durability. Features which are not found amongst the historic buildings of the demesne should be avoided. These include projecting eaves, fascia and soffit boards, dormer windows and roof windows, standard-issue concrete cills or copings, top-hung casement windows, pressed aluminium gutters or uPVC features of any kind. Roofs should be

## Implications for Planning and Development

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covered with natural slate, lead or other roofing which enhances the character of the ACA.

High quality contemporary architectural design that is complimentary to the character of the demesne ACA may be acceptable, but any development will require a very sensitive design approach and should positively contribute to the character of the demesne. A design impact statement providing justification for the proposal in terms of design concept, scale, materials and proportions should accompany any application within or adjoining the ACA.

### 9.1.10. Amalgamation of structures, properties and sites

The amalgamation of structures requires planning permission regardless of whether they are located in an ACA or not. However, in the case of the ACA, permission for such a measure will depend on whether it is deemed to have an adverse impact on the special character or unity of the historic demesne. A design impact statement providing justification for the proposal should accompany such applications.

### 9.1.11. Demolition works

Proposals to demolish structures of architectural merit within the ACA, whether protected structures or not, will always require planning permission. Demolition will normally only be permitted where the structure makes no material contribution to the character or appearance of the area. There will be a presumption in favour of retaining structures that make a positive contribution to the character of the area. Where permission is sought for demolition on the grounds of structural defects or failure, a report containing annotated photographs and drawings will be required. The report is to be produced by a suitably qualified and experienced professional regarding the existing condition. As part of the justification for any demolition within the ACA on structural grounds, details will be required of repairs and remedial works usually carried out in similar circumstances, and details of why they are not deemed suitable in this case.

### 9.1.12. Boundary Treatments

Removal of boundary walls, railings, gates or gate piers will require planning permission whether visible from areas within the landscape or not. Where historic boundaries still exist they should be retained.

### 9.1.13. External Lighting

Proposals for the illumination during night-time hours of certain buildings and landmark features within Headfort Demesne ACA should be agreed beforehand with Meath County Council. The method of lighting, (i.e. type of fitting, fixing method and type of light) would need to be specified by the applicant in seeking permission, and should be designed so that it does not result in light pollution or negatively impact on other structures in the ACA.

### 9.1.14. Preservation of views

It is vital to the special character of the demesne that the significant views outlined in this document are preserved and any works within the ACA should not adversely impact on these views in any way.

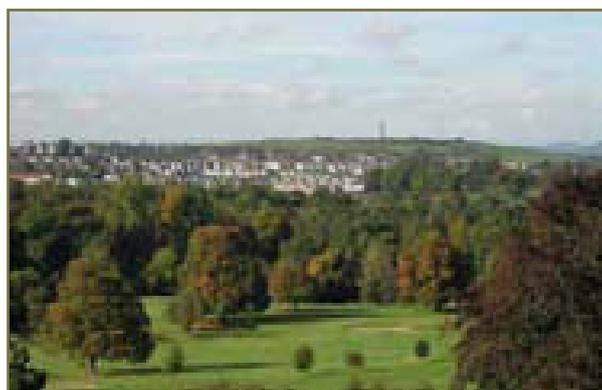


Fig 45: South-West over Kells and the Tower of Lloyd.

Communications antennae or masts which would compete with the dominant historic landmarks of the Kells Round Tower, the steeple of the Church of Ireland or the Tower of Lloyd, will not be permitted.

The Planning Authority will aim to improve these

## Implications for Planning and Development

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vistas by encouraging screening measures which would restore the balance of impaired prospects to their original state.

### 9.2 Works not requiring planning permission

#### 9.2.1 Renewal of Historic Planting

Considerable damage can be done to the balance of the historic planting if this does not have regard for the historic intention of the design. This can be seen in the obtrusive golf course planting throughout the southern parkland of the demesne.

All infill planting within the ACA must have regard to the principles embodied in the ICOMOS Florence Charter on the Conservation of Historic Gardens. Such planting must serve to renew and reinforce existing planting, and be of a species found in the relevant part of the historic landscape. Replanting should be carried out in consultation with the Conservation Officer, or with professional advice from a suitably qualified historic landscape consultant.

#### 9.2.2 Internal Alterations

The ACA designation does not prevent internal changes or re-arrangements to structures which are not listed as protected structures within the ACA, unless these are deemed to lie within the curtilage of a protected structure, and provided that these changes do not impact on the exterior of the structure. However, all internal changes must comply with current building regulations.

#### 9.2.3 Maintenance & Repairs

Planning permission is not required for regular maintenance works and genuine repairs to buildings within Headfort Demesne ACA (such as roof, rainwater goods or window repairs) as long as original materials are retained where they exist, or, where replacement is necessary, that it is on a like-for like basis.

#### **Please note:**

Please note that some of the works listed in Section 9.0 and all its subsections above require planning permission irrespective of whether the area is protected or not. They are included to highlight the need for careful consideration of the design of the proposed works. This is to ensure that they do not impact negatively on the special character of the ACA. The list is not in itself a comprehensive list of all works, or of all circumstances that require planning permission, but identifies those works that would impact on the character of the ACA. Development works would still have to adhere to the general provisions contained in the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006 and in the Planning Regulations. The Area Planner and Conservation Officer of Meath County Council can be consulted if there is any doubt as to whether planning permission is required or not.



## Notes

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta  
The Heritage Council



**comhairle chontae na mí**  
*meath county council*