

Archaeological Find at The Strand, Athlone

Westmeath County Council and the Office of Public Works are progressing the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme on the Strand, Athlone, where works have recently uncovered the possible remains of the town's seventeenth-century defences.

Athlone was a strategically important crossing point on the River Shannon and was first walled in 1251. These walls were repaired and rebuilt in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century when Athlone became the base of the English government for Connaught. Both the west and east parts of Athlone were walled, with the eastern walled area enclosing 14 acres. Substantial additions were made in the middle of the seventeenth century, including bastions. Further modifications to the town defences were made at the end of the seventeenth century. Athlone's defensive walls and its castle played a significant part in the Siege of Athlone in June 1691 as the forces of King William attacked the Irish Jacobite defenders across the River Shannon.

Part of these town defences included a bastion which projected into the River Shannon on what is now The Strand. The remains of this bastion appear to have been substantially demolished for the Shannon Navigation works in the 1840s, when The Strand was created as a street along the east bank of the River Shannon. Now, construction works for the Athlone Flood Alleviation Scheme have uncovered the remains of walls that may have been part of this bastion. Further archaeological assessments will be carried out on The Strand under Ministerial Consent to determine this and in the interim Westmeath County Council in conjunction with the OPW are reopening The Strand between its junction with Griffith Street and Friary Lane for pedestrian use only.

Dr. Richard Clutterbuck of Archaeological Management Solutions (AMS) on Behalf of Westmeath County Council and the Office of Public Works.

