

# 18th CENTURY MILITARY BARRACKS IN MANORHAMILTON & LURGANBOY

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*This article traces the history of two impressive military barracks constructed in prominent locations in Manorhamilton and Lurganboy at the beginning of the 18th century. Their life span however was relatively short and Church of Ireland churches were later constructed on both sites.*

## Background

A scheme of extensive military barrack building throughout the island was set in motion by the Irish Parliament in 1696. Its principal purpose was to maintain and strengthen the security of the country after the Treaty of Limerick. There were still periodic fears of foreign invasion and also landlords felt more secure in their estates when there was a military presence not too far away. Over one hundred new barracks had been built by 1710 of which one third were cavalry and two thirds infantry. Among the earliest barracks constructed were Athlone (1697), Cork (1698) and Ballyshannon (1700).

Seaports and the more important towns were seen as the natural locations for barracks, but they were also built in many of the smaller inland towns and even in more isolated places frequented by outlaws and rapparees. Some of the barracks were built on the side of the street, but many were enclosed by a high perimeter wall and where necessary

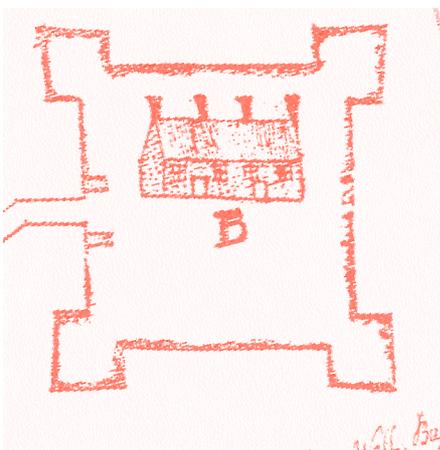
by stronger defensive fortifications.

The design and construction of these barracks was the responsibility of the Surveyor General although a Barrack Board was set up in 1701 to maintain and repair them. This Board appointed inspectors to report on the condition of the barrack buildings and barrack masters to oversee the necessary repairs.

## Manorhamilton Barrack

More barracks were needed by 1715 and this time the government canvassed the support of landowners. Realising the economic as well as the security advantages of having a barrack located on their estates many landlords offered land, or volunteered to build the barrack themselves and then rent it to the government. One of these landlords was Sir Ralph Gore of Ballymacmanus on the Donegal/Fermanagh

*Detail from James Leonard's Plan of Manorhamilton, 1749 showing Barrack & walled enclosure*



border. He later became M.P. for Donegal, Chancellor of the Exchequer and eventually Speaker of the Irish House of Commons. Through his mother Hannah, who was Sir Frederick Hamilton's grand-daughter, he had inherited half of the Hamilton estate in North Leitrim, and now undertook to build a barrack in Manorhamilton and then lease it back to the government. The contract was signed on 20th March 1716. The time allocated for its construction was nine months with a finishing date of Christmas Day 1716. The costs involved were £923.10s. Od.

The barrack was constructed on the site of an earlier fort which consisted of a rectangular walled enclosure with angled bastions at each corner. Such forts were first constructed during the Cromwellian Protectorate (1650s), while others such as Belurbet in Co. Cavan date from the early Restoration period (1660s). They would have been used as military posts especially at times of political unrest in the area. It is also possible though that the Manorhamilton fort wasn't constructed until after the Williamite Revolution (1688-1691) when once again Manorhamilton would have been seen by the authorities as a location which needed a resident military presence to maintain its security. We know for example that







*Church of Ireland Parish Church, Manorhamilton with walled enclosure & bastions.*

assume that Manorhamilton barrack was still functioning at the time it appears in James Leonard's Plan of Manorhamilton in December 1749. However neither it nor Lurganboy figure in the Barrack Inquiry Report of 1752. So both barracks were probably closed and the military companies withdrawn sometime between these two dates. In an appendix in the Journals of the Irish House of Commons in 1758 thirty-seven barracks, including both North Leitrim ones, were described as 'cast' which probably means abandoned. However a nominal rent of one shilling was

still being paid to Sir Ralph Gore, nephew and namesake of the builder of Manorhamilton barrack, and the sum of £9. 2s. 6d. was given annually to a caretaker to keep the building secure. No rent was then being paid for Lurganboy but the caretaker there was earning £18. 5. 0d.

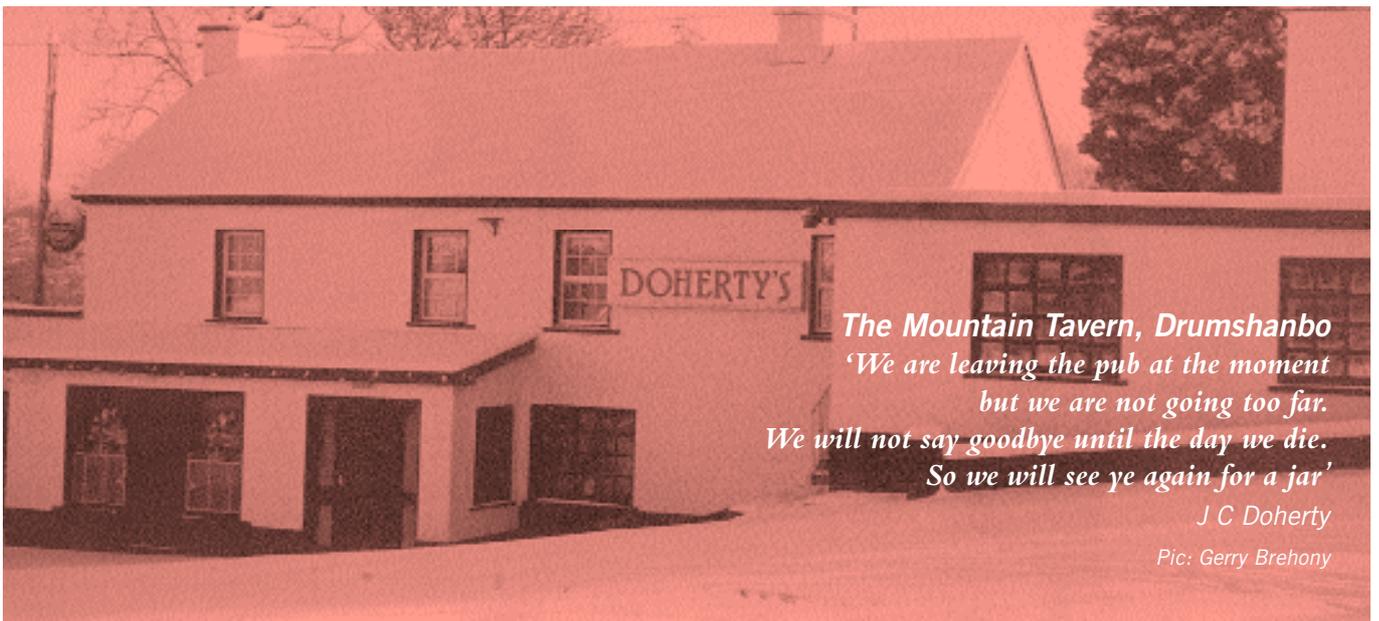
#### Aftermath

Both barracks were later demolished and no traces remain of either building. In Manorhamilton the Church of Ireland parish church which was erected in 1783 now occupies the

site. In Lurganboy a Church of Ireland chapel of ease was built in 1862 on the spot where the barrack once stood.

The enclosure wall and bastions which pre-dated the military barracks in Manorhamilton by as much as perhaps fifty or sixty years still survive largely intact today, measuring 220 by 200 feet from one bastion corner to another. In Lurganboy however only the outline of some of the bastion foundations remain visible. These then are the only reminders we have left of a more turbulent period in our local history and of the impressive military barracks around which they stood guard.

***Finally I would like to acknowledge the assistance I got from Edward McParland of TCD and Francis Kelly of Manorhamilton when researching material for this article.***



***The Mountain Tavern, Drumshanbo  
'We are leaving the pub at the moment  
but we are not going too far.  
We will not say goodbye until the day we die.  
So we will see ye again for a jar'***

*J C Doherty*

*Pic: Gerry Brehony*