



# A Dublin streetscape in 1703: an urban legacy of the Dongan estate

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NEIL CRIMMINS

WILLIAM CONOLLY BOUGHT THE CASTLETOWN ESTATE AFTER HE HAD MADE HIS fortune elsewhere. He purchased it from Thomas Dongan in 1709 to have a base for entertaining near Dublin, one that would impress visitors who made the easy journey westwards along the river Liffey. Since 1588 Castletown had been controlled by the Dongan family, who held land in Kildare, with its great country manors and demesnes, as well as in Dublin's south-western quarter. There, at the west end of James's Street, they owned a block of modest townhouses with associated water-reliant industrial enterprises such as tanneries and breweries. Their dealings with the city council, particularly in respect of the watercourse that ran behind their block of land, led to founding of a workhouse at the block's western end. This eventually became St James's hospital. While the Conolly family benefited from Ireland's complex seventeenth-century history with its great shifts in religious and regal allegiances and their associated impact on Ireland's property mosaic, the Dongans did not. By 1709 the financial security and social position that had enabled the Dongan family to buy and live at Castletown since 1588 had dissipated. The Dongans' spatial legacy lies primarily in their Dublin city block, which still retains much of its seventeenth-century grain and some of its early eighteenth-century houses and their panelled interiors.

There are records of de Donjons or Dongans or Dungans in Ireland since the thirteenth century.<sup>1</sup> A John Dongan (c.1546-1592) was the son of a fishmonger, Edward (Thady) Dongan, from whom John inherited several properties in Dublin, including the family house on Fishamble Street. As a young man John Dongan acted as attorney for Thomas Butler, the Earl of Ormonde, becoming 'the hub of the wheel on which the treasury of Ireland revolved',<sup>2</sup> and also serving on Dublin Corporation as an alderman. These positions, though not well paid, enabled social and financial advancement, and John

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*1 – Detail of map dated 11th June 1703 accompanying 'Agreement between Earl of Limerick and Dublin Corporation dated 20 April 1705' showing the strip elevation of the Dongan block (see Plate 4) (courtesy Dublin City Library & Archive, Ancient Revenue 27)*

Dongan accumulated substantial property both within the city and further afield. Dongan's property dealings were helped by the fact that exchequer officials were exempt from taxation. He, along with Thomas Cotton of England, was granted a twenty-one-year lease of numerous lands within The Pale, including possession of the Abbey of St Thomas the Martyr, Dublin, in 1577. In 1588 Thomas FitzGerald of Lackagh, county Kildare, and Edward FitzGerald, his brother, conveyed the lands and castles of Kildrought, Castletown and Kilmacredock in Kildare, to Thomas Alen, John Davies and Edward Dongan for the use and interest of John Dongan during his life, with the remainder to John's sons Walter, William and Edward and their heirs.<sup>3</sup> In a deed dated 20th December 1598, William Dongan swapped 'houses and other premises in the city of Dublin' for 'lands and tenements in Kildrought and Castletown of Kildrought', although it is not clear whether this included the manor of Castletown. John Dongan died, possibly of plague, in 1592, and in his will left '4 messuages and a domicile and garden called "The Grange" in St. James parish of Dublin' to his eldest son Walter.<sup>4</sup>

Sir Walter Dongan was the first of his family to live at the castle of Castletown. He bought a baronetcy for over £1,000 in 1622 and became Sherriff of Dublin in 1624, dying two years later in 1626.<sup>5</sup> Walter's heir was his eldest son Sir John Dongan, who married Mary, daughter of Sir William Talbot, first Baronet of Carton. The family had supported King Charles I, and as a consequence lost their estates under Cromwell. Sir John's first son, Walter, was a militant Catholic and one of the Irish chieftains who formed the Confederacy of Catholics at Kilkenny in 1646 and who fled to France after the Cromwellian war. On the restoration of Charles II in 1660, he was 'one of the few of the old Irish gentry to be restored to his estates'.<sup>6</sup> William succeeded his brother Walter in the baronetcy, and was created Viscount Dongan of Clane in 1662 and 1st Earl of Limerick in 1686.<sup>7</sup> He fought on the side of James II at the Battle of the Boyne, and following defeat he too retired to France. Outlawed for high treason, his estates were forfeited to King William III, who granted them to his favourite, the successful general de Ginkel, Earl of Athlone on 13th October, 1693.<sup>8</sup> The forfeited estates amounted to '26,480 acres, including the lands of Castletown, the manor of Kildraught, many other lands in the counties of Kildare, Dublin, Carlow, Meath, Kilkenny, Longford, Tipperary and Queen's County [now Laois]' and, significantly for this paper, 'several houses in Dublin and many tithes'.<sup>9</sup> When William Dongan – who had lost his only son, Walter, in the Battle of the Boyne – died in 1698, his younger brother Thomas (1634-1715) inherited the family estates and titles.

Thomas Dongan, 2nd Earl of Limerick was a well-travelled man. In 1667 Charles II gave him a pension of £500 per annum and a position in the army in consideration of his loyalty and associated losses. When Charles II ordered all English soldiers to leave the French Service in 1677, Dongan obediently left his lucrative colonelcy in the Irish Regiment.<sup>10</sup> After a brief and successful spell as deputy governor of Tangier, a 'dower' of his Portuguese wife, he was made governor of New York by James II on 30th September 1682.<sup>11</sup> The first Irish and only Catholic colonial governor of New York, Dongan established manors, 'about half of all those ever granted in New York',<sup>12</sup> and



granted a number of large land patents for which he received substantial fees and bribes. Distinguishing himself as ‘one of the province’s greediest officials,’ he notably gave Albany a charter that enlarged the city’s limits by six miles northwards and included pastures south of the town over which the city’s claims ‘for a valuable consideration’ were questionable.<sup>13</sup> Governor Dongan also made peace with the Five Nations of warlike Indians, and in 1687 took them under his protection in a war with French Canada. By his own account, Dongan was so successful in this role that had he not been dismissed from his post in 1688, he would have sent the Canadians back to France. Eventually usurped by the Dutch Protestant interest in New York, Dongan had his American houses and other property seized, his servants imprisoned, and his estates confiscated (Plate 2).<sup>14</sup>



2 – New York house of Thomas Dongan, 2nd Earl of Limerick

from *THE MEMORIAL HISTORY OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK*,  
VOLUME 1 (New York History Company, 1892) 403

Returning to Ireland after his many sojourns abroad, Thomas Dongan claimed that he was legally entitled to his brother’s estate but could not recover it because the settlement papers had been lost in the war.<sup>15</sup> However, in December 1700 Dongan found the papers and petitioned Parliament for relief in 1701, which they duly granted in 1702 but with punitive conditions: Dongan should not be entitled to any arrears of rent (worth over £6,000) nor should he be restored to the Rectories and Tithes part of the estate (worth £700 per annum); he should pay any people who had purchased parts of the estate under the Earl of Athlone two-thirds of their purchase money (£8,400); and he should not let nor sell his estate to anyone but Protestants. (Dongan claimed that this was abused by the Protestant tenants who would not pay their previous rents and by Protestant purchasers who would not pay the prices they had formerly offered.)<sup>16</sup> He calculated that the losses incurred by these conditions amounted to over £20,000, and that, in addition, he had not been paid his pension since 1688 and had lost over £10,000 in the war against the French Canadians. He was unsuccessful in his petition for compensation. A letter to an unknown addressee, written in this period, illuminated his position:

I have been offering to sell lands since I gott the estate, but the purchasors from my Lord Athlone hindered severall people from purchasing from me, and from giving me money ... Coll Long was so kind, notwithstanding all the endeavours used against me as to lend me ... money ... but I am forced to give my Lord Chief Baron [Robert Rochfort] a lease for Castletown for seven years at his own rate ... I believe you are not of the opinion that it’s fitt for a man to be laying out all he can scrape



3 – John Rocque, *AN EXACT SURVEY OF THE CITY AND SUBURBS OF DUBLIN*, 1757

*detail of the south-western quarter of the city*

*opposite 4 – Map from 1703 accompanying the ‘Agreement between Earl of Limerick and Dublin Corporation’, including strip elevation of the Dongan block (DCLA, Ancient Revenue 27)*

5 – *Diagram of the plots shown in the 1703 map of the Dongan block and the accompanying legend of leaseholders*

6 – John Rocque, *DUBLIN*, 1757

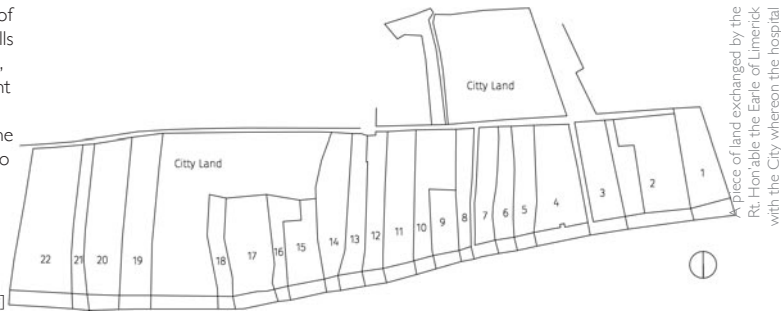
*Detail of St James’s Street showing the city workhouse as built and with the 1703 plot holdings coloured. (This map has been rotated to the same orientation as Plates 4 and 9.)*

out the rotten estate in interest and continuall law suits if possibly he could get a purchasor. I have not gott 200 pounds out of the estate since I gott it and half of that Ms. Betty Cook had. As soon as I gott purchasors which I am labouring to find, she shall be the first creditor I’ll pay, she being more troublesome to me than most...<sup>17</sup>

Dongan also looked to his Dublin city properties for some relief, in particular a block of land lying on the south side of James’s Street and immediately north of the Earl of Meath’s substantial estate that covered much of the city’s south-western quarter (Plate 3). It lay west of the medieval city where James’s Street and Thomas Street formed part of what was the *Slighe Mór*, an ancient route that led to the west of Ireland.<sup>18</sup> At St James’s church the street widened to approximately twenty metres, much wider than usual and similar to its modern dimension. This suggests that it may have been a junction of three roads – James’s Street, Bow Lane and Crocker’s Lane. A medieval ‘metalled’ surface (formed from small ‘sub-rounded’ and angular pebbles beaten in place with sections of cobbles), which has recently been discovered here under a *c.*1700 cobbled road, may have been intended for a marketplace.<sup>19</sup> In the sixteenth century a successful fair was held annually over six days on this widened section of the street between the Dongan block and the church. Beginning on 25th June (St James’s Day), it attracted merchants from England, France and Flanders.<sup>20</sup>



2015 copy by the author of 'A Mapp of Severall parcels of land, houses, outhouses, orchards & gardens in Saint James Streete... parish of the same and suburb of the City of Dublin belonging to the Rt. Hon'able Thomas Earle of Limerick and survey'd by order of said Earle, the eleventh day of June 1703 by me .....'  
 [illegible signature, possibly Duffy]

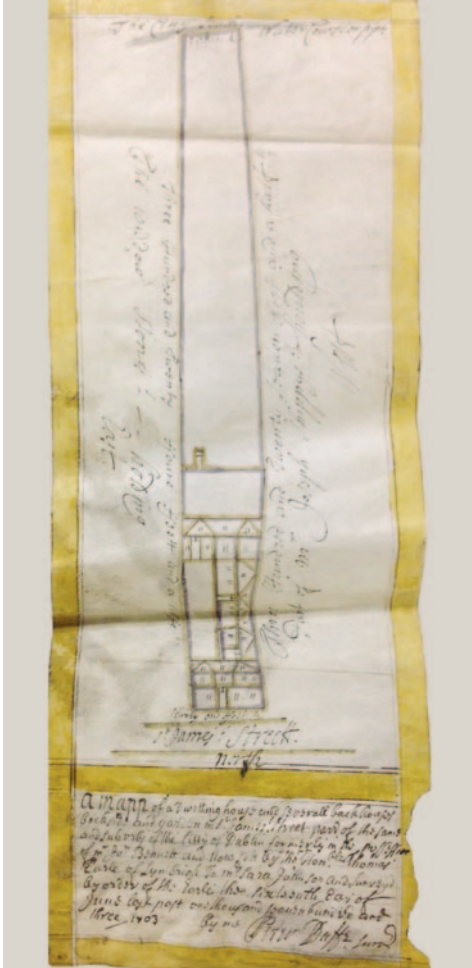


A piece of land exchanged by the Rt. Hon'able the Earle of Limerick with the City whereon the hospital

- |                           |                           |                                |                                |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 Mr Shippy's 1 tenement  | 5 Mr Darcey's 1 tenement  | 9 Mr White's 2 tenements       | 12 Widow Huston's? 2 tenements |
| 2 Mr Howard's 1 tenement  | 6 Mr Duignan's 1 tenement | 10 Widow Hewetson's 1 tenement | 13 Widow .....? 2 tenements    |
| 3 Mr Malone's 3 tenements | 7 Mr Shippy's ground      | 11 Mr Bennett's 2 tenements    | 14 .....? 1 tenement           |
| 4 Mr Cusack's 2 tenements | 8 Mr Jonson's 1 tenement  |                                | 15 Mr Howard's 2 tenements     |







An extraordinary surviving map, dated 11th June 1703, reveals the urban block's architectural and spatial character (Plate 4). Containing also the only known drawing of an early eighteenth-century Dublin street elevation (Plate 1), the map described a well-built-up city block with a virtually unbroken street frontage extending from the site of the city workhouse, 'whereon the hospital is building', to a large piece of 'City ground' (later called the Pigeon Park). With the family embroiled in legal disputes when it was made, the map's primary intention was to record Thomas Dongan, 2nd Earl of Limerick's tenancies (Plate 5). The block's eastern end was bounded to the south by the city watercourse, and a water mill was located behind plots 11 and 12 (now nos 32-33 James's Street). The line of the watercourse corresponded to the boundary of the Earl of Meath's Liberty, with the water continuing west for a few plots before turning south. The line continued westward as 'the Back Lane', and many of the plots fronting onto James's Street also contained smaller buildings that fronted onto this lane. Archaeological investigations have dated the block's burgage plots and a field boundary to the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The map refers to the plots as

7 – 'A Map of a Dwelling House and Sevrall backhouses, backyard and garden in St. James's Street ... 1703 by me Peter Duffe Surveyor'.

This holding corresponds to plot 21 on the 1703 map (Plate 5), and is now part of Guinness Brewery. (courtesy National Archives of Ireland)

8 – St James's Street today

opposite 9 – Wide Street Commissioners 1799 plan of the block (courtesy DCLA, WSC 729)



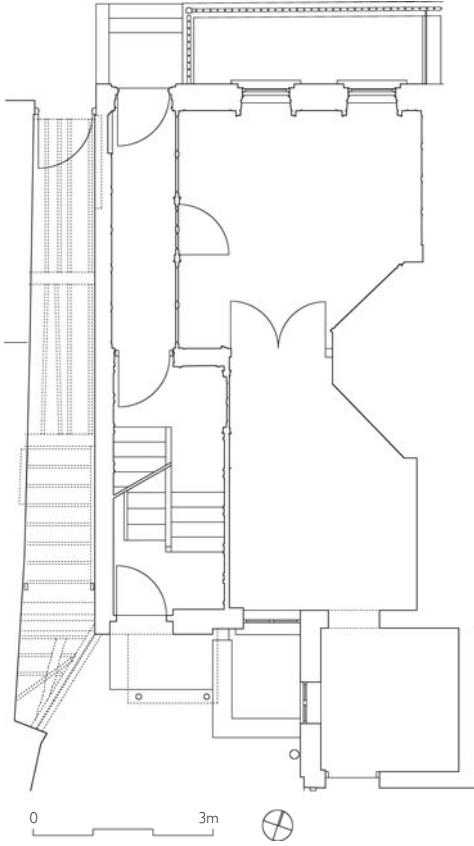
tenements, with many of them containing ‘backsides, backhouses, gardens and yards’. Illegible in parts, the map listed the tenancies and ‘quality’ of each of twenty-two plots as well as its front and rear dimensions and length from front to rear.<sup>22</sup> The drawings of the buildings appear representative of actual structures, with the base of each building drawn at the line of the street (Plates 5, 6). By relating the map to the archways, lanes and streets that appear in later maps, and by comparing deeds of sale and lease (which sometimes list occupiers, their trades and give descriptions of the holdings) with the plots as described and drawn on the map, a picture of this section of James’s Street in 1703 emerges. Contemporary lease maps of some of the properties confirm the general arrangement of the plots with outhouses to the rear, accessed from the street through archways in the gabled fronted houses and long gardens stretching back as far as the watercourse (Plate 7).

Disputes with the city over the Earl of Limerick’s title to lands in Kildrought, county Kildare, had run concurrently with disputes over the St James’s Street water rights since the 1660s. In 1703 a dispute arose between the Corporation and the earl, whose tenants freely drew water for their industries (mainly tanning and malting). The final ceding of the workhouse lands by Limerick formed part of a 1705 agreement whereby the Corporation gave up its counter claim to the Kildrought lands.<sup>23</sup> Although the lease is hard to read, an accompanying letter from the City Hall law agent Ignatius J. Rice to John J. Murphy Esq., Town Clerk, referred to original documents enclosed. One of them, dated 16th October 1703, between the Corporation and the Earl of Limerick,

witnesses that the Corporation conveys to the Earl of Limerick in exchange certain lands in Killdrought and Killdrangan in the county of Kildare in fee simple, and the Earl of Limerick in exchange conveys to the Corporation in fee simple part of the lands enclosed by a stone wall at the upper end of St. James’ St. on the South side of the road leading to Kilmainham, and the land with outside of the said wall







10 – Plan of No. 25 James's Street  
with side passage (drawing: the author)

below 11 – Detail of panelling in No. 25 James's  
Street (photo: the author)

opposite 12 – Detail of the panelling in the Brown  
Study, Castletown House (photo: the author)



on the North end thereof extending from the said wall to pavement, and in breadth equal to the said lands of the said Earl enclosed within the said wall from East to West lying and being in the parish of St. James and City of Dublin, which ground is designed by the city for a public charity.<sup>24</sup>

The 1703 map also related to an agreement by the Earl to cede the watercourse to the Corporation in exchange for perpetual rights to water for his tenants.<sup>25</sup> The lease agreement between the Corporation and Thomas Dongan, Earl of Limerick stated:

whereas several disputes have arisen in relation to part of the city watercourse running from the south part of the Said Earle of Limericks tenements and gardens in St James's Street, Dublin and in relation to that part of the ground whereon the city ... lately built a stone wall for the preservation of the said watercourse ... have mutually agreed that the said Thomas Earle of Limerick should release or convey to the said city for ever all right or title which he pretends to have to that part of the ground whereon the said wall is now built with liberty to build up the same as high as they shall think fitt and to carry on the same in a straight line on the north banks of the said course as far as they shall think fitt without interruption of the said Earle or any claiming under him ... provided the foundation of any wall ... shall take up no more ... than the foundation of the present wall...<sup>26</sup>



The Corporation granted to Limerick and his tenants ‘a proportionable share’ of water to the ‘present tenements forever’, specified as that provided by a pipe of two inches to ‘tan-yards, skinnners yards or in dressing skinns or leather’, a pipe of one and a half inch bore to ‘public brewhouses or malthouses’, and a pipe of three-quarters of an inch bore ‘to every other house ... without paying any rent’.<sup>27</sup>

The origin of Dublin’s modern St James’s Hospital is the ‘hospital’ or workhouse that was built on ‘a piece of land exchanged by the Right Hon’ble the Earle of Limerick with the City’ (Plates 3, 6). William, Earl of Limerick had initially granted the land for the workhouse and was also on the committee to fund the workhouse with a corn toll.<sup>28</sup> The City Assembly rolls of 1669 had noted that the late King James and the Earl of Limerick had each given land near St James’s Street, and that the city joined another parcel on the road to Kilmainham.<sup>29</sup> When William of Orange gave Limerick’s estate to de Ginkel, Earl of Athlone, he was obliged to keep to the earlier agreement and allow the workhouse to be built on this ground. The Dublin Assembly Roll of 1697 described how Dublin city ‘swarm[ed] with beggars, who, for want of learning to get their livelyhood,’ had ‘become a great nuisance’ and would ‘more and more increase if some course be not taken to put them to worke.’ The planned workhouse was ‘built to put idlers to worke in’ observing that ‘the late wars [had] prevented soe good a design.’ It also described the ‘place without St. James Gate, whereof belongs to the right honorable the earle of Athlone and part to this citty, which was intended for that purpose and well enclosed with a stone

wall'. Nothing was wanting 'but a fund to build the same'.<sup>30</sup>

While the eighteenth century saw the successful establishment of St James's Hospital on the site west of the Dongan block, the gable fronts depicted on the 1703 map street elevation were soon replaced with more fashionable parapets. Generally the area's smaller breweries and distilleries were taken over by the larger ones, leading to the eventual total control of this water-dependant industry by the Guinness family, whose brewery now extends into the east end of this block. A Wide Streets Commissioners' map of c.1800 lists No. 28 James's Street as 'Arthur Guinness's dwelling house formerly a distillery and yards' (Plate 9 [plot 10 in 1703 map, Plates 4, 5]). There may be traces of timbers from the earlier cagework houses, and some possible earlier basements hidden within the existing buildings on the block. No. 25 James's Street contains evidence of early timbers in its side passage, a potentially early basement, and a roof which appears to be of a transitional type between the Dutch Billy and the later more common double A-roof with parapet (Plate 10). This house also has early eighteenth-century raised and fielded panelling, which is similar in profile, if not in grandeur, to that of the panelled room in Castletown that dates from the same period (Plates 11, 12).

On 21st September 1709, Thomas Dongan, Earl of Limerick conveyed Castletown to William Conolly for a 'consideration of £15,000'.<sup>31</sup> It was a complex legal transaction as many of Dongan's holdings in Kildare and Dublin continued to be encumbered by numerous debts, mortgages and leases. William Conolly stated that Dongan had

granted, bargained, sold released and confirmed unto me the said William Conolly my Heires and Assignes for Ever All that and those the Mannors Lordships Castles Towns and Lands of Castletowne, Kildraught, Kilmacredock Coolmachthomas, Parts of Donaghmoor Collinstownes Collinblackstowne, Godfriharristowne Moortowne and Possetowne all situate lying and being in the County of Kildare'.<sup>32</sup>

So began the Conolly period at Castletown. Thomas Dongan continued to part with parcels of his estate, selling some of his American properties, including an estate on Staten Island to three great-nephews who had settled there in 1711. He died in London on 14th December 1715 and is buried in St Pancras churchyard.<sup>33</sup>

The Dongan and Conolly influence over areas of Dublin's architectural heritage has not been substantially researched and the legal bargaining and swapping that accounted for the formation (and break-up) of Dublin's urban estates is not well understood. While Dongan's forced sale of Castletown resulted in the building of a great house and estate, the piecemeal selling off of his properties in James's Street resulted in much more modest developments. The fragmented nature of these plots and complicated ownership patterns, as well as the industrial nature of the area, inhibited the type of large-scale development that occurred elsewhere in Dublin later in the eighteenth century. As a result, this area has been substantially overlooked and undervalued as part of Dublin's Georgian history.



## ENDNOTES

The following abbreviations are used:

CARD *The Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin* \*

DCLA Dublin City Library & Archive

\* Sir John Thomas Gilbert (1829-1898) was an Irish archivist, antiquarian and historian who, amongst other works, including *A History of the City of Dublin in three volumes*, transcribed (with his widow, who continued the later volumes) the Assembly Rolls of the City of Dublin 1447-1841. The Rolls record the minutes of the Dublin City Assembly. These transcriptions can be viewed in *The Calendar of Ancient Records of Dublin* (19 vols) which is available for consultation in the reading room of DCLA's Gilbert Library on Pearse Street.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas P. Dungan, 'John Dongan of Dublin, an Elizabethan Gentleman', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 118, 1988, 101-17. See also Lena Boylan, *Castletown and its Owners* (Irish Georgian Society, Dublin, 1978); Frederick Van Wyck, *Ancestry of Governor Dongan* (Boston, 1935).

<sup>2</sup> Dungan, 'John Dongan of Dublin', 101-17  
<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, 114.

<sup>5</sup> Van Wyck, *Ancestry of Governor Dongan*, 1-20

<sup>6</sup> Boylan, *Castletown and its Owners*, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Van Wyck, *Ancestry of Governor Dongan*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Boylan, *Castletown and its Owners*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Patrick Phelan, *Thomas Dongan, Colonial Governor of New York, 1683-1688* (New York, c.1933) 29

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, 31: 'In 1682 James named Thomas Dongan, Vice-Admiral in the Navy and the first Governor of the Colony of New York, a city of four thousand inhabitants, and eighteen languages.'

<sup>12</sup> Peter R. Christoph (ed.), *The Dongan Papers, 1683-1688*, 2 vols (Syracuse, 1993-1996) II, xvi.

<sup>13</sup> Donna Merwick, 'Dutch Townsmen and Land Use: a spatial perspective on seventeenth-century Albany, New York', *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1980, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Phelan, *Thomas Dongan, Colonial Governor of New York*, 134.

<sup>15</sup> James Graves, 'Petition of Thomas, Earl of Limerick to Queen Anne for the recovery of property', *Journal of the Kilkenny & South-East Ireland Archaeological Society*, series 2, III, pt. 1, 1860, 9-11. In 1700 Parliament passed the Act of Resumption of the Irish forfeitures, and vested them in trustees before 10th August that year, but due to the loss of his settlement, he could not claim the estate by that act.

<sup>16</sup> Graves, 'Petition of Thomas, Earl of Limerick', 9-11.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Walsh and A.P.W. Malcomson, *The Conolly Archive* (Dublin, 2010) 71-72, 13th June 1706[?], Letter from [the Earl of] Limerick (Dublin) to Conolly at his lodgings in Dame Street.

<sup>18</sup> Antoine Giacometti and Steve McGlade, 'Archaeological Report, James's and Thomas Street QBC, Dublin 8' (Dublin, 2015) 25.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, 51-54.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, 8.

<sup>22</sup> DCLA has recently had the map professionally conserved.

<sup>23</sup> DCLA, Ancient Revenue 27, Agreement between the Earl of Limerick and Dublin Corporation, dated 20th April 1705, with the accompanying map dated 11th June 1703

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> National Archives, M.6992 (4), Lease from Corporation of Dublin to Thomas Earl of Limerick of Water Course in James's Street, 12th April 1705, between the City and The Right Honourable Thomas Earle of Limerick.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> CARD, V (1671-1692), 457-459

<sup>29</sup> CARD, VI (1692 to 1715-16), 218-219

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Irish Architectural Archive, Castletown Papers, E/3/21, 21st September 1709. See Walsh and Malcomson (eds), *The Conolly Archive*, 70: 'Conveyance of Castletown estate from Thomas Dongan, Earl of Limerick to William Conolly'.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Christoph (ed.), *The Dongan Papers*, II, no. 2, p.xxiii.