



The Orchard Tunnel

Jonathan Cully & The Society for Old Lucan



The **SOCIETY FOR OLD LUCAN (SOL)** works to conserve, research, and promote Lucan's rich local history, heritage, archaeology, and folklore. The society was founded in early 2017 by a group of local history enthusiasts. They made contact on the Facebook page "*Old Lucan*" (set up by Gerard Kelly, from Lucan, with Helen Farrell as co-admin) and the group met to propose several historical ideas for the Participatory Budget for Lucan in 2017. Only one of these proposals was voted through (restoration of King John's Bridge, Esker, Lucan) but the group decided that a historical society was needed for Lucan and began to work on organising the committee and plan for the future.

The Society for Old Lucan (SOL) now has its own dedicated Facebook page. With over 3,500 followers the page has become a wealth of knowledge for the history and heritage of Lucan and the surrounding environs.

This essay is part of a wider project that hopes to preserve the information and knowledge shared on the Society for Old Lucan Facebook page for posterity. It is hoped that a series of short essays and historical observations can be maintained in local and school libraries.

Society for Old Lucan Committee 2023-2024: Helen Farrell (Chair), Elaine Hurley, Darren Tully, Paul Butler, Jonathan Cully, Lesley Blairsdale, & Eugene McGrattan.

The Orchard Tunnel, Lucan Village

When approaching Lucan village from the Leixlip Road the boundary wall of the Lucan Demesne runs along the lefthand side of the road and the high walls of the gated apartment complex, aptly called "*The Orchard*", runs along the righthand side. In between the two walls the road rises over a hump in the road before descending to the village beyond.

The enclosed grounds on which the Orchard estate has been built was once the private walled garden of the Demesne, where gardeners worked year-round to keep the pantries of Lucan House provisioned with fruits, vegetables, and herbs of every variety. Historical maps show that the orchard was once laid out into numerous plots and subdivisions, with trellised walls, greenhouses, a water pond, and even an icehouse. In his book on Lucan House, Desmond Guinness noted that it was highly unfashionable in the 18th century to have an estate's gardens within sight of the main House. As such the bustling gardens were purposely segregated from the tranquil parklands of the Lucan Demesne. To maintain close synergy between the two disconnected grounds a "*subway*" was constructed under the old Dublin to Galway Road (now the Leixlip Road), which would have allowed the servants of Lucan House to come and go for provisions without needing to leave the privacy and security of the Demesne.

Remarkably, many features of the old subterranean passage remain, though the tunnel itself is now blocked, and to some extent partially collapsed. There are three features of the tunnel visible from the Leixlip Road. The first is the hump in the road, which is clearly visible when approaching the tunnel from either direction. The second feature is the large bow-fronted projection in the Orchard boundary wall, which encroaches onto the otherwise wide public path. This projection frames the stairs and archway that lead to the tunnel from the Orchard. The historical Ordnance Survey maps show that this feature was once mirrored on the opposite side of the road in the boundary wall of the Demesne, creating a bottleneck in the road above the tunnel. Having the boundary walls projecting out in a bow on either side of the road was possibly a cost-effective way of reducing the overall length of the tunnel, while also aesthetically framing the entrances on the interior. The projection on the Demesne side, however, has long since been removed, possibly to facilitate the extension of the tram line from Lucan to the Spa Hotel around 1910. Many of the cast-iron posts used to support the trams electrical wires still exist along the Demesne boundary wall. It is also possible that the projection was removed to widen the road and better accommodate ever increasing automobile traffic. Whatever the reason for its removal, the infilled masonry within the section of straightened wall stands in contrast to the older masonry on either side, with straight edges visible at the joints where the bow once was. The bow in the Demesne wall last appears on the 25-inch map of 1897-1913, with subsequent maps showing the Demesne wall as a continuous straight line.

One of the oldest maps of Lucan, Bernard Scalé's 1772 map, makes no direct reference to the passage, though the elements that comprised it are clear to see, with projections in the boundary walls visible on either side of the Leixlip Road. Trails within the Demesne can

be seen leading to the location of the tunnel, only to disappear into the boundary wall and re-emerge on the far side within the orchard. This trait is continued on all subsequent maps; with only some maps making a direct reference to the tunnel. The First Edition 6-Inch map of 1829-41 references a "*passage under the road*", while the Last Edition 6-Inch map of the 1930's simply notes "*Subway*". Ordnance Survey maps used by the Dublin County Council water inspector still referenced the presence of the "*Subway*" as late as the 1970's-80's; it is likely that this remains the case on current issue Ordnance Survey maps.

Less visible to the public are the two archways that once granted access to the tunnel, with one in the foundation of the Demesne boundary wall and the other within the bow-fronted projection of the orchard wall. The Demesne archway, like many other features found throughout the estate grounds, is adorned with a naturally rusticated, limestone keystone and voussoirs. Access to the tunnel from the Demesne is now entirely blocked off, with only the top of the arch visible above ground level. The 1897-1913 25-inch map shows steps leading down to the entrance, which was once located within a bowed projection. It appears that the tunnel was extended accordingly when the projection in the boundary wall was removed, with the original masonry of the archway being relocated into its present location within the new section of straightened wall. Desmond Guinness noted that the tunnel was blocked-up on the Demesne side during the 1930's after the grounds of the orchard were sold.

The archway in the Orchard on the other hand, remains completely intact. The wide archway measures several feet across, and now features added brickwork with an inset metal door that covers yet another wooden door within. The vibrancy of the later orange brickwork contrasts strikingly with the older 18th century brickwork found in the wall surrounding the cut stone arch. It is plain to see that the Orchard end of the tunnel features a more utilitarian aesthetic, lacking the decorative potholed limestone used to dress its peer across the road. The tunnel still exists to some extent on this side, though it is reliably reported to be in very poor condition and partially collapsed. At most the tunnel cannot extend beyond the intersection of the Sewage system and Telecommunication lines which run along the centre of the Leixlip Road. Indeed, the telecommunications appear to have taken advantage of the void beneath the road as their maintenance access covers are located directly at the intersection with the tunnel.

Though the tunnel no longer exists in full, what remains provides a great insight into the close connection that once existed between Lucan House and the walled garden. The break in the link between the two highlights the societal shift away from self-sufficiency that occurred during the early to mid-20th Century.



Figure 1 Looking towards Lucan village, the hump in the Leixlip Road as it passes over the tunnel is evident. Lucan Demesne is located on the left, while its walled garden, now the Orchard Estate, is on the right. The bow-fronted projection that houses the stairs to the tunnel from the orchard is visible on the background. This was once mirrored on the far side of the road.



Figure 2 The line of the tunnel is highlighted in red. the road noticeably slopes down towards Lucan Village after passing the location of the tunnel.



Figure 3 The boundary wall of the Demesne once had a bow-fronted projection like the one in the Orchard wall, however it was removed, and the boundary wall straightened. Telecommunication services now occupy a section of the tunnel, the access points to which can be seen at the crown of the hump in the middle of the of the road. A manhole to the right shows that the modern sewer system also runs down the middle of the road, cutting through the tunnel.



Figure 4 The section of infilled wall that replaced the original bow-fronted projection in the Demesne boundary wall is indicated by the red lines. The composition of the masonry is noticeably different. Without referencing old maps to see that a projection once existed, one would think that the wall was simply repaired.



Figure 5 The seams between the original sections of the Demesne boundary wall on either side of the infilled section can clearly be seen on closer inspection. The random rubble masonry of the original boundary on the left, with the neater blockwork of the infill on the right.



Figure 6 The random rubble masonry of the original boundary on the right, with the neater blockwork of the infilled section on the left. The seam between the two runs in a straight line down the middle of the wall.



Figure 7 View of the hump over the tunnel looking away from Lucan Village. The bow-fronted projection in the Orchard wall has been incorporated into the entrance of the walled estate, with a new section of wall with railings following the curve of the original projection. This entrance is new, with the original entrance (hidden from view behind the projection) being blocked up.



Figure 8 The hump in the road becomes more evident the closer you are to the Village. The wall of the Orchard on the left are also noticeably higher than that of the Demesne across the road, a deterrent for any would-be orchard thieves.



Figure 9 The original archway to the tunnel, located within the projection of the Orchard wall. Originally a wide, open archway, it was later bricked up with a doorway being inserted to prevent access. The flight of stone steps that lead down to the archway have been preserved. The arch is formed by plain cut stone voussoirs.



Figure 10 The archway set within the boundary wall of the Demesne was almost completely obscured, being half buried and covered by overgrowth. Originally set within a bow-fronted projection similar the one on the orchard side, the arch was relocated to its current location when the wall of the Demesne was straightened. This archway was blocked up in the 1930's when the lands of the walled garden where sold, breaking the link which had joined the two for centuries. The use of the tunnel to house telecommunications is highlighted by the thick cable exiting through the top of the tunnel.



Figure 11 Since the acquisition of Lucan House by South Dublin County Council, the overgrowth along the inside face of the Demesne boundary wall has been cleared, revealing the tunnel entrance once more. Photograph taken on the 7th of September 2024.



Figure 12 A photograph of the Demesne archway in Desmond Guinness' book on Lucan House shows the top section of the blocked-up archway free of overgrowth. The keystone and two of the Voussoirs are cut from naturally rusticated limestone, a feature which is found throughout the grounds of the Demesne and dating to the 18th century. Source: Lucan House by Desmond Guinness.



Figure 13 Bernard Scalé's 1772 Map of Lucan clearly shows projections in the walls of the Demesne and Orchard on either side of the road. Scalé's map represents the first recorded indication that a tunnel between the Demesne and the Walled Garden may exist. A trail can be seen branching off from the main path in the Demesne and leading towards the projection in the Demesne boundary. On the top right the original, and then principal, gateway to Lucan Castle can be seen, with the stable and coach house just inside the gate. Source: South Dublin Libraries.



Figure 14 The projections in both boundary walls can be seen on the First Edition 6-Inch Ordnance Survey map of 1829-41. The tunnel is referenced for the first time with "Passage under the Road" noted just below. The trail from the grounds of the Demesne clearly continues through from the tunnel into the Orchard. The gateway noted in the map above is now a secondary entrance to the grounds of the Demesne with the original lodge noticeably extended to accommodate new servant quarters. Source: Ordnance Survey Ireland.



Figure 15 Turnpike map of the road from Lucan to Leixlip, with the protrusions in the boundary walls highlighted. The Lucan turnpike gate can be seen on the road just below the point of the tunnel. While it might have seemed more practical to have the turnpike gate located at the bottleneck created by the tunnel protrusions, it would have caused great disruption to have fully laden carts stop at the top of the hill created by the tunnel, as horses would have found it difficult to start on such a hill once the toll had been paid and the gate opened.



Figure 16 The 1830's Ordnance Survey Map of the Parish of Lucan clearly shows the protrusions in the boundary walls, as well as the nearby Turnpike noted on the above map. No evidence of the turnpike structure now remains. Source: South Dublin Libraries.



Figure 17 1897-1913 25-Inch Ordnance Survey Map clearly shows the paths leading to and from the tunnel, along with the protrusions of both boundary walls. The entrance to the tunnel from the grounds of the Demesne is shown to have had steps like the ones that remain on the Orchard side. Source: Ordnance Survey Ireland.

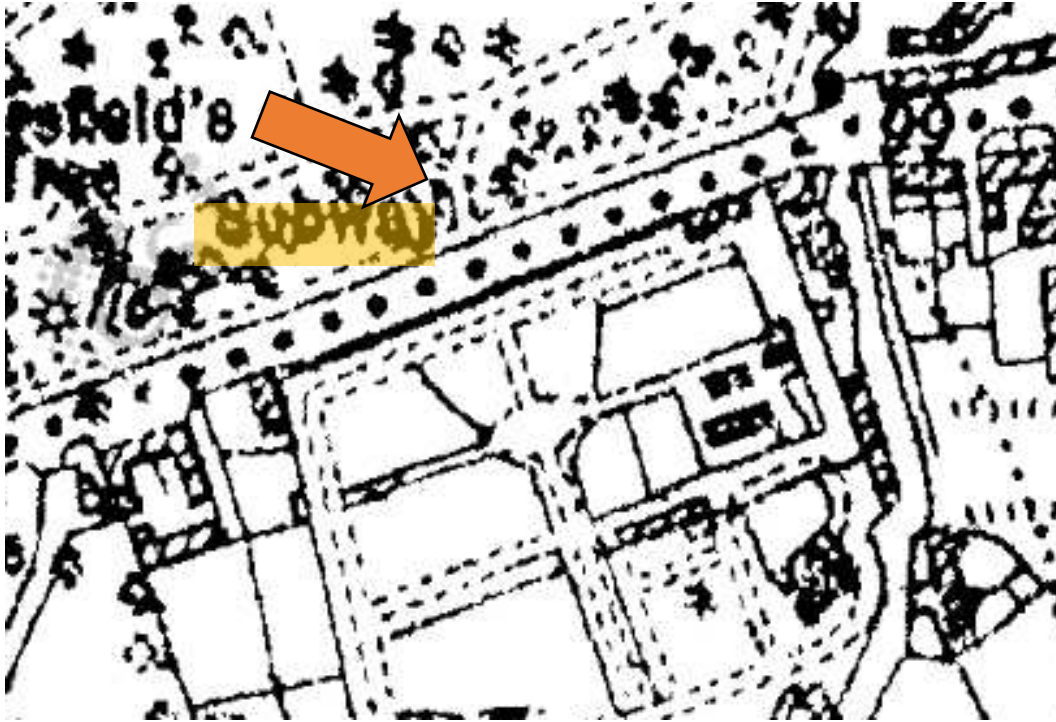


Figure 18 1930's Last Edition 6-Inch Ordnance Survey Map. Neither of the two boundary wall protrusions are shown due to the scale of the map, however the trails from the Demesne are still shown to lead to the location of the tunnel. The tunnel is also referenced with "Subway" being noted beside its location.

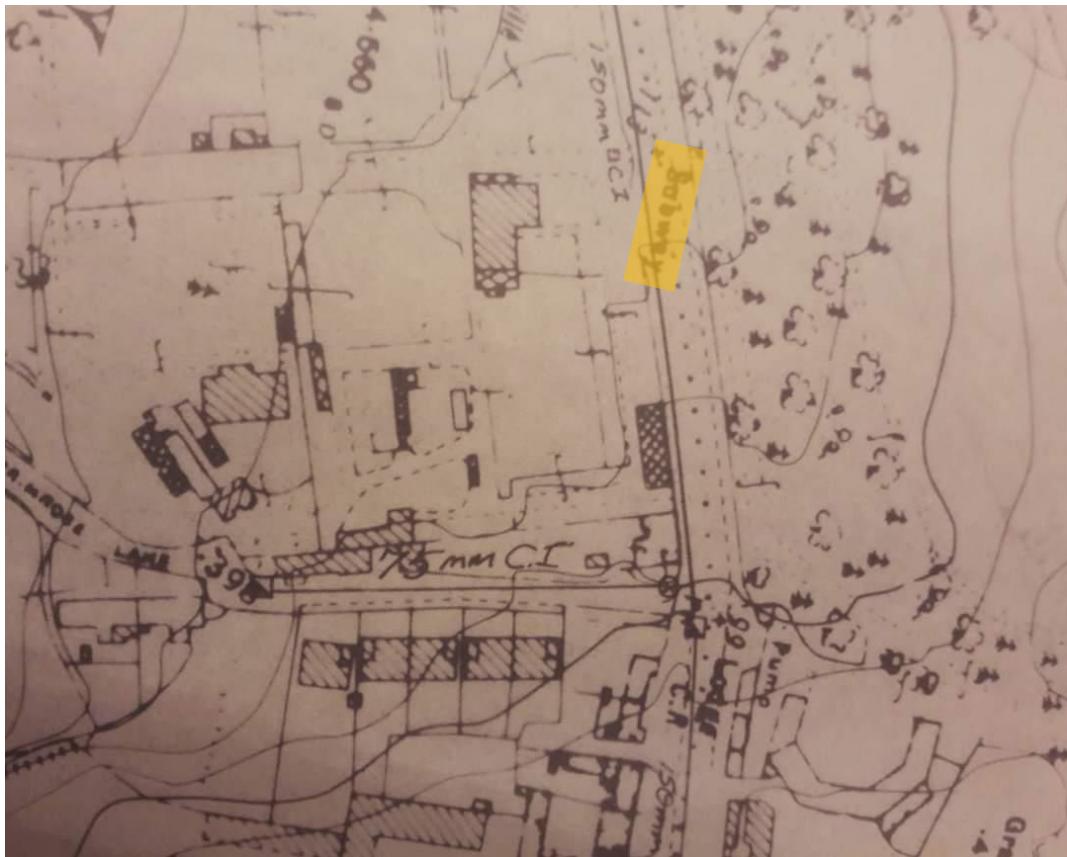


Figure 19 Late 1970's Ordnance Survey Map noting "Subway" on the Leixlip Road. The arrow highlights a slight indication of the protrusion in the boundary wall of the Orchard, there is no such protrusion in the Demesne boundary wall, which is shown to be straight.

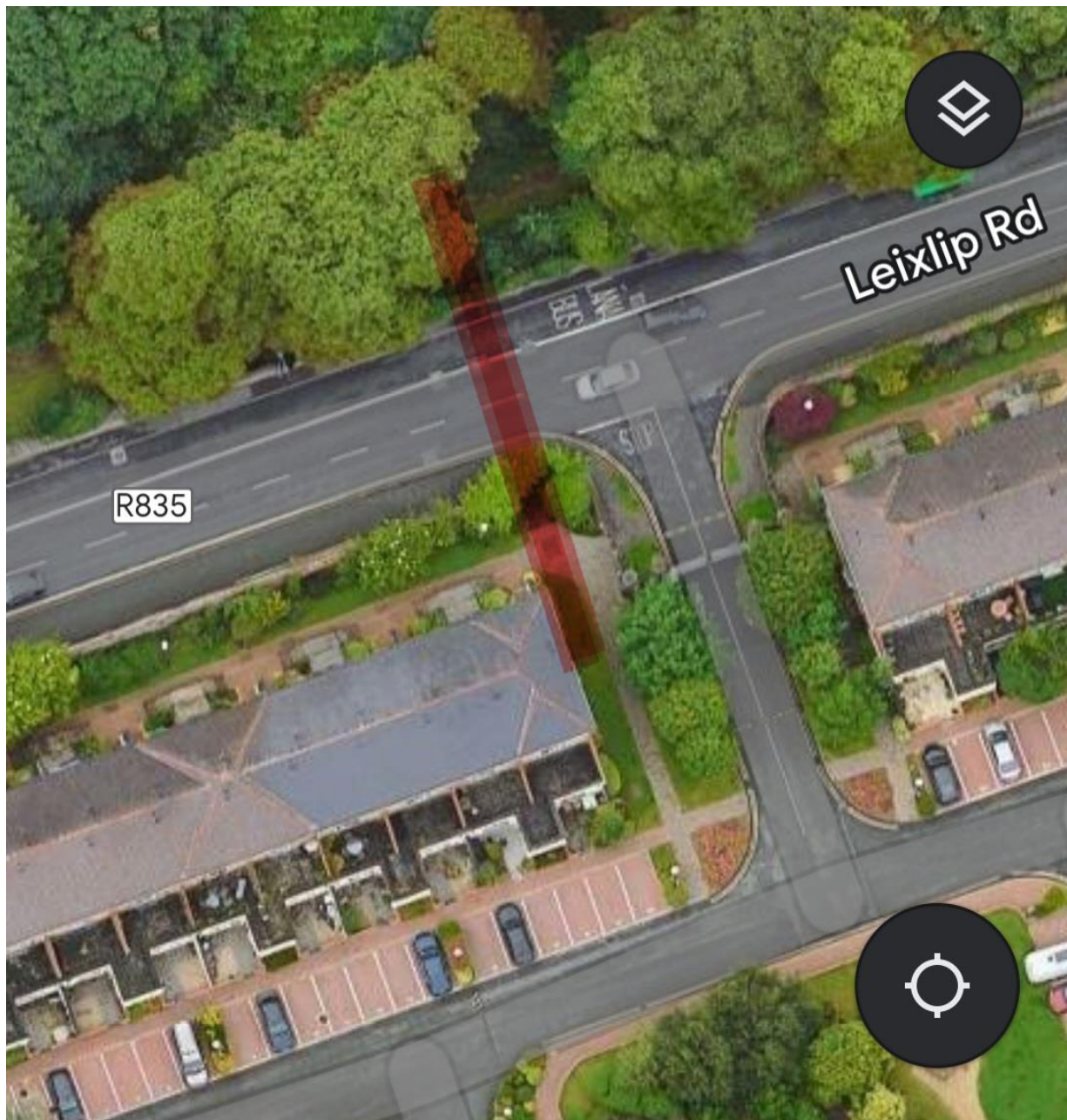


Figure 20 Satellite view of the Demesne and Orchard, with the course of the tunnel highlighted in red. The new entrance of the Orchard Estate is located beside the protrusion in the orchard boundary wall, making use of the existing curve to make a sweeping entry to the walled estate, while maintaining the features of the stairs and archways as a feature within.