

An Archaeological Impact Assessment of Proposed Works at the Site of the extension to Drumcliff Cemetery, Ennis, Co. Clare.

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The Church and Round Tower, Drumcliff, Ennis. Photo: Archaeology.ie

Proposed Development Works:

In accordance with Part XI, Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and Part VIII, Articles 80 and 81 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended), Clare County Council proposes to carry out the following development / improvement works to Section G of the proposed extension to the existing Burial Ground at Drumcliff, Ennis, Co. Clare.

The development will include the provision of addition of circa 350 burial plots including provision for ash plots, a Columbarium, a reflective garden, landscaping, drainage, footpaths, limited car-parking, decorative planting and associated site works.

Access road improvements will include lay-bys, turning circles and traffic calming measures.

Townland: Drumcliff, Co. Clare.

NGR Coordinates: 533049 679954 (centre).

Ordnance Datum: 130 feet.

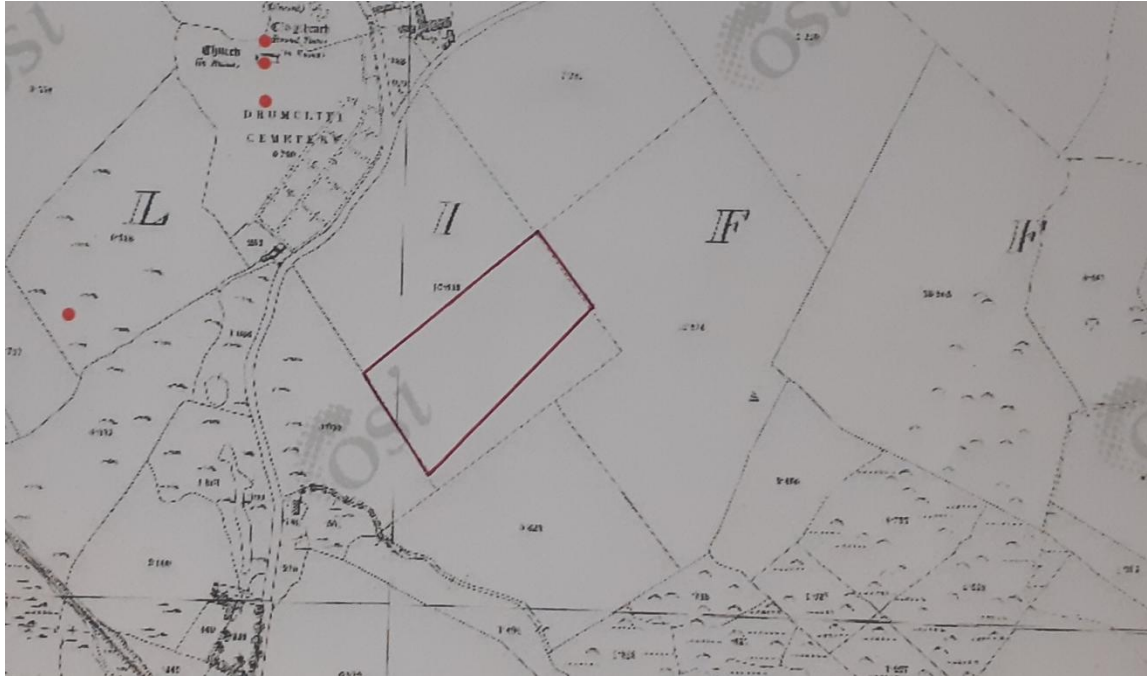
Area: c.1.8 hectares.



The site of the proposed extension at Drumcliff, from the south, between the existing cemetery, in the foreground and the Ennis Water Treatment Plant in the background. Photo: R UaCroinin. Sept. 2022



2010 OS Digital Map of site. Area proposed for development outlined in red.



2nd Edition OS Map c. 1900 showing the adjacent Recorded Monuments and site outlined in red.



OS Aerial Photograph showing the site outlined in red and Water Treatment Plant to the right.

1. A Summary Description of the heritage associations with the site and its vicinity.

Drumcliff – Gaelic - Drom Cléibh (*The Hill of The Wicker-Work*) is located c. three Kilometers north west of Ennis town, at the centre of an area of County Clare rich in history, archaeology, built heritage and folklore. It is also exceptional from the point of view of the survival of its historic structures including castles, ecclesiastical sites, mediaeval homesteads and much more.

The area around Drumcliff is particularly rich in archaeological remains dating, particularly, from the Late Mediaeval period. There are seven Recorded Monuments within a one Km radius of the site in question. There is no doubt that many subsurface remains of archaeological significance and historic artifacts are yet to be discovered in this area. Most of the recorded monuments appear to date from the mediaeval period indicating that the area was extensively populated, farmed and tilled while the churches and enclosures were in use.



Drumcliffe Mediaeval Church, photo NMS website.

Recent Archaeological Excavations.

Over the past three decades, only three archaeological excavations have been carried out, under license from The National Monuments Service, in the vicinity of Drumcliff, Ennis, driven by individual developments, the Ennis Greenway and ESB installations. These have revealed no archaeological remains. The following summaries, taken from “Archaeology.ie” document the archaeological activity:

1998 License No. 98E0455 Townland: Drumcliff, C. O’Rahilly SMR CL033-146
Fulacht Fiadh No archaeology noted.

2015 License No. 15E0282 Townland: Drumcliff. G. Hull SMR CL033-082
No archaeology found.

2015 License No. 15E0126 Townland: Drumcliff. M FitzPatrick. River Fergus embankment.
No archaeology found.

Recorded Monuments within one Km. of the Drumcliff site.

CL033-033001- , Church. Townland – Drumcliff, Ruined, Mediaeval church attributed to St. Conal. 11th to 15th century remains. In use as Parish church until at least 1622. Some features of interest. National Monument No. 204.

CL033-033003-, Round Tower. Townland – Drumcliff, Ruined, Mediaeval Round Tower, standing c.11 metres high, c.10m north of the above church. In 1808 it contained a doorway c. 6 metres above ground and three windows. National Monument No. 204.

CL033-033002-, Graveyard. Townland – Drumcliff, Extensive, oval-shaped graveyard, bounded by a 19th century rubble stone wall, with mature Irish yew trees. Contains many 18th and 19th century memorials. Mass grave plots of the victims of Cholera 1830s and The Great Famine 1840s.

CL033-034001- Ecclesiastical Enclosure. Townland – Drumcliff, “D” shaped earthen bank c.700m. ENE of Drumcliffe Church CL033-033001-.

CL033-034002- Church. Townland – Drumcliff, within enclosure CL033-034001- named Temple Varaghan, marked on 1st Edition OS Map 1841 c. 700m ENE of Drumcliffe Church CL033-033001-.

National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH)

Ballymacquiggan Bridge. NIAH No. 20403315, Double-arched, hump-backed rubble-stone bridge, c.1830 c.500m north of Drumcliff churchyard. This stone bridge is **Protected Structure No. 184.**

Significant Archaeological Finds:

In 2020 an important mediaeval clerical seal was discovered in a field c.150m. to the west of Drumcliff ruined church (CL033-033001-). It is an ecclesiastical seal matrix, which appears to be 14th century, related to the O Midhir (O’Meere) family who were the hereditary coarbs (patrons) of Drumcliff church and its lands. The seal is now in the National Museum.



The O Midhir, Drumcliff Seal Matrix from the 14th century.

A brief history of the Drumcliff area.

Drumcliff was an important ecclesiastical “tearman” (church land) from mediaeval times, consisting of 787 acres in the ancient territory of Uí Chormaic. The coarbs / patrons were the O’Meere (O Midhir / O Maoir) and O’Griffey (O Griobhtha) families who remained here into the 17th century. The surname O Maoir means descended from the steward, indicating an occupational surname from earlier times. The O’Griffeys were living in nearby Ballygriffey Castle and also occasionally supplied clerics to the church, e.g. Matthew O’Griffa, Bishop of Killaloe 1463 – 1483.

In the Papal Taxation Lists, Drumcliff is valued at 7 marks, reflecting its importance as an ecclesiastical site, as most other parishes were valued at 2 to 4 marks. In 1608 Donogh O’Meere rented the church lands of Drumcliff for 13 shillings and 9 pence from the See of Killaloe and in 1636 Patrick O’Meere took a law suit against Lewis Jones, Bishop of Killaloe, claiming that Drumcliff was his ancient hereditament.

Soon after this, the old church fell into ruins and the churchyard and surrounding lands became the Parish burial ground for the town of Ennis.

A field walk of the site:

On Friday, September 16th 2022, the author visited Drumcliff and walked the site in question. That is the area on the NW slope of the hill between the cemetery and the Ennis Water Treatment Plant. The day was dry and calm. The site consists of an almost level pasture, free of any vegetation apart from grass. The surface was devoid of any significant hollows, ridges or raised areas which might indicate previous earthworks or human construction activity, in the past.

Much of the surface of this area may have been disturbed in the past, during the construction of the treatment plant and its surrounding berm, but nothing was obvious, on the day.



A View of the site from the NE. The raised area in the background is the Water Treatment Plant.

Previous Investigations on this Site:

On the 13th of April 2022 GII (Ground Investigation Ireland) carried out five trial pits on this site to determine the depth of soil and the levels of water penetration. The dimensions of the pits were 2.3m X 0.35m to a depth of 1.9m. The locations of the five pits are indicated as follows: (a) 533038 679989 (b) 532998 679951 (c) 533071 679973 (d) 533014 679862 (e) 532983 679895.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The site area is c. 1.8 hectares, which is required to be archaeologically investigated, if subject to subsurface development, due to its extent. Within one Kilometre radius of the site are seven Recorded Monuments including 2 churches, a round tower, graveyard and mediaeval enclosures.

The site in question is more than 150m. removed from any recorded monument. Apart from some 18th and 19th century field walls no structure of any significance is shown, on the site, on the historic maps i.e. The 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Map 1841 or the 2nd Edition OS map of c. 1900. A field walk, recently, revealed no obvious anomalies suggesting evidence of construction or earthworks in the past.

However, due to the extent of the proposed development site, archaeological investigation will be required. It is recommended that a series of archaeological trial trenching be conducted on the site, supervised by a qualified and experienced archaeologist, prior to development works commencing. A comprehensive report on the results of these investigations should be submitted to both The Local Authority and The National Monuments Service. The extent and location of the trial trenching should be determined by The National Monuments Service.

Archaeological Impact Assessment:

The proposed revised works in Section G of the extension to the new (south cemetery) at Drumcliff, Ennis will, it appears have no archaeological impact on the area due to the fact that:

- (a) There is no obvious archaeology within 200m of the site.
- (b) The site of the proposed development is divided from the old churchyard by the public road and new (1950s) graveyard.
- (c) The design of the reflective garden, columbarium and associated landscaping is well designed in a subtle, respectful and dignified manner and
- (d) The material of the footpaths, columbarium, kerbing, steps etc is proposed to be of natural stone and mostly local limestone.

Sources:

Logainm.ie

Excavations.ie

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