

Short Background on Kilbegley Graveyard and Recording Project

The area around the church has the most densely concentrated graves, with several inscriptions dating back to 1700s. The earliest inscription recorded was headstone No. 295, namely 'Thomas Kegovan, his son John Kegovan and Kathrin Keny his wife 1716'. The craftsmanship and ornate detail on some of the headstones is in itself a separate course of study but suffice it to say we have noted on the website several features found on the Kilbegley memorials. Some of the more ornate memorials are: Fr Walter McEvilly (plot ref. 109); Greene, Society Street (plot ref 184); John Greene (plot ref. 183); O'Flynn (plot ref. 265) and the Duffy/Kelly memorials inside the railings at the church (plot ref. 191, 192, 193). One table slab (plot ref. 105) lies to the west of the church ruins, with inscription Elinor Lynch (1795).

Some headstones have interesting symbols hewn by skilled craftsmen: a ship on memorial number 236 dedicated to William O'Flynn (1810), erected by his son John O' Flynn in 1844 after 'his return from sea'; a plough on Kenney/Murphy (1759) memorial number 230; tradesman tools on Mannion/Brock (1768) memorial number 319 and Guirighty memorial (1753) has a hand symbol at the base (plot ref. 216). Similarly, some grave memorials include initials of stone masons. Several ornate memorials erected in the late 1800s-early 1900s are attributed to the craftsmanship of Beegan stonemasons, Ballinasloe.

Several priests are commemorated in Kilbegley: Fr Bryan Kelly 1753 in plot 244; an unnamed priest in plot ref. 243 with a distinctive carving of 'a pair of eyes'; a marker stone in plot ref. 240 with the initials F.P.C. assumed from local folklore to be a memorial to Fr. Paul Kane (1772); Rev William Harte who died in 1816 and interred in plot ref. 190; Fr. Redmond Duffy who died in 1800 and his nephew Fr. Redmond Duffy who died in 1825 interred in plot ref. 191.

A synopsis on archaeology of Kilbegley .

Gearoid Conroy, Archaeological Services Unit UCG (1993), identified that the Ecclesiastical site at Kilbegley has three elements - An Early Christian Enclosure, a Medieval church and a Graveyard. Specifically, Kilbegley graveyard and chapel ruins lie within "an Early Christian Enclosure that is defined by a substantial grass-covered earthen bank within which lies graveyard and the ruins of a Medieval Church. The latter is sited on a hillock just S of the centre." (Conroy: 1993).

In the aforementioned archaeological report, the ruins of the church in Kilbegley was described as: “A poorly preserved Medieval parish church orientated E-W (L: 12.4 m: Wth: 4.9 m) built of random coursed undressed limestone blocks and boulders which face a heavily mortared rubble core clearly visible at the N end and the W gable”. The report suggested that the variations between the lower and upper masonry of the walls may represent the last vestiges of an Older Early Christian church that was later enlarged to form the present church, which is now in ruins.

The graveyard enclosure, as it is now, comprises a mortared wall to the front and a drystone wall around the sides. We do not know when this graveyard was enclosed but we do know that the issue was raised by local member of the Ballinasloe Board of Guardians in 1875 which suggests that Kilbegley Graveyard was enclosed around this time. This was reported in the Roscommon Journal (30th January 1875): “A Report was read from Messrs. O’Shaughnessy and Duffy, regarding the enclosure of Kilbegley graveyard – the cost of doing which they estimated at £60. It was ordered that application be made to the Board of Public Works, to know on what terms the money can be borrowed under the Public Health Act for walling in the burial grounds of the Union.”.

Due to its proximity to the largescale archaeological work at Kilbegley during the building of the motorway, Kilbegley graveyard was included for in the NRA publication *The Mill at Kilbegley, an Archaeological Investigation on the M6 Ballinasloe to Athlone National Road Scheme (2013)*. This book (authored by Neil Jackman, Cathriona Moore and Colin Rynne) includes a chapter exploring the various historical origins of the church ruins and the large curvilinear embankment that lies about 500 metres east of the Kilbegley Mill site. Just one of the several explanations offered as to the origins of Kilbegley, is the suggestion that it operated as a place of retreat or night prayer attached to the monastery at Clonmacnoise across the Shannon. However, for more discussion as to the origins of Kilbegley, readers are advised to consult the NRA publication.

Moore History Group