Archaeological Report on Trial Trenching at Gubalaun townland, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim.

Licence No. 19E0042
Pre-Planning
January, 2019

Client: Fr. Pat Farrelly, Parochial House, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim.
Consultant: CST Group, Chartered Consulting Engineers, 1 O’Connell Street, Sligo.
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**General Introduction**

This report was prepared by the writer at the request Fr. Pat Farrelly, owner and developer of the site, Parochial House, Rossinver, through CST Group, Consulting Engineers, Sligo. It concerns the archaeological assessment of the site of a proposed development at Gubalaun townland, Rossinver, Co. Leitrim (Illus. 1). The proposed development involves extending an existing modern burial ground into a greenfield site to the north.

The proposed burial ground lies to the south-east of and partly within the Zone of Notification for a ruined medieval church (Gubalaun Abbey/St. Mogue’s Church, RMP No. LE005:003001). The church is a ruined medieval masonry building currently undergoing conservation works. It is located on the north-eastern side of a graveyard (RMP LE005-002) which has a number of cross slabs of Early Christian date (RMP LE005-005 and -006), a re-used slab bearing rock art (RMP LE005-007) and a fragment of trefoil-headed arcading (RMP LE005-009) among the much later burial monuments of the eighteenth to twenty-first centuries.

Archaeological pre-development testing was requested by the developer as part of the submission for a Part 8 application for the burial ground to Leitrim County Council.

The archaeological work was carried out on 10th January, 2019 and funding was provided by the developer.

**Archaeological Brief**

Archaeological pre-development testing was requested as part of the pre-planning process. The archaeological brief comprises the preparation of an archaeological assessment, which consisted of the following:

- Excavation of trial trenches at the site. The excavation of test trenches was carried out under license to the Department of the Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Licence No. 19E0042) to determine locations, nature and extent of any archaeological features/deposits on site.
- Archaeological impact assessment.
- Recommended migratory procedures to avoid/lessen the impact of the development on such features.
Locational Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Townland</th>
<th>Gubalaun</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Leitrim</th>
</tr>
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<td>Rossinver</td>
<td>OS 6’Map</td>
<td>LE005</td>
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<td>RMP No.</td>
<td>Near LE005-003001 (medieval church)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Siting and Access

The site of the proposed development is located on the southern shore of Lough Melvin in the townland of Gubalaun (Illus. 1). The proposed burial ground extension is located to the north of an existing modern burial ground (Plate 2) and to the south-east of the medieval church (Plate 1) and graveyard (RMP No. LE005-003001 and 002). The modern burial ground and the site of the proposed new burial ground are located to the east of a narrow roadway that provides access to the medieval church and graveyard from the public road to the south. The ecclesiastical remains are located to the west of this roadway. The proposed development site is accessed by a double gate that currently serves the modern burial ground on the eastern side of the small access road.

Illus. 1 Site Location Map. © Government of Ireland.
Archaeological Pre-development Testing

Plate 1  Gubalaun Abbey.

Existing modern burial ground

Location of pre-development testing in 2018 (18E0055)


Historical Information

Gubalaun townland is located in the parish of Rossinver and the barony of Rosclogher, Co. Leitrim. The name Gubaluan derives from the Irish ‘*Ghob an láin*’ which has been translated as ‘the full point’ or ‘the full mouth’. The area surrounding Gubalaun townland is rich in archaeological remains, particularly on the shores of Lough Melvin and on its islands. In the immediate vicinity of Gubalaun Abbey, some 150m to the north-east, is the site of a holy well (SMR No. LE005-003003). According to O’Donovan a second well called *St. Caillin’s Well* was situated within a few perches of it (SMR No. LE005-003004) of which there is now no trace. A well called *Tobercallain* appears on a seventeenth century list of holy places in North Leitrim and it may refer to this site. A site known as the *Whiskey Ditch* (SMR No. LE005-003010) is located close to the holy wells. This site is an S-shaped earthen bank used to provide shelter from the element to the visitors to the Gubalaun Abbey and well.

The extant ruined church in Gubalaun townland (RMP No. LE005-003001) dates to the 12th – 13th century, with evidence of modifications to the building in the 15th century. The church is
variously known as Gubalaun Abbey and St. Mogue’s Church. The latter name is derived from associations the site had the Early Christian saint Mogue or Máedoc. St. Mogue, who was also known as St. Áedan or St. Aidan, was born in Inisbrefny in Co. Cavan to Setna and Eithne. He is reputed to have founded thirty churches and a number of monasteries and he is most notably associated with Ferns Abbey, Co. Wexford. He died on 31st January, 632. The graveyard to the south and south-west of the church (RMP No. LE005-003002) has two Early Christian cross slabs, a 16th century fragment of trefoil arcading and a re-used memorial bearing rock art. The majority of the memorials in the graveyard and within the ruined church date from the eighteenth to twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Pre-development testing at a previous proposed burial ground extension location was undertaken by the writer in March, 2018 (Licence No. 18E0055) on a site immediately to the south of the existing modern burial ground (Plate 2). Nothing of archaeological significance was found during these works.


Site Description

The site of the proposed development is located to the north of an existing modern burial ground, situated to the east of the small access road leading to Gubalaun Abbey (Illus. 1, Plate 2). The site comprises an irregular-shaped field that is flat and under grass. Aerial photographs (www.osi.ie) show the site of the proposed development before (2000) and after (2005) the development of the existing modern burial ground and there is evidence that some landscaping was undertaken at the proposed development site at that time.

![Aerial photographs from 2000 and 2005, showing development of the modern graveyard at Gubalaun.](image)

Plate 3 Aerial photographs from 2000 and 2005, showing development of the modern graveyard at Gubalaun.

![Site of the proposed burial ground, prior to pre-development testing, from north-west.](image)

Plate 4 Site of the proposed burial ground, prior to pre-development testing, from north-west.
Programme of Trial Trenching

The brief for the archaeological assessment was that trial trenching was to be undertaken by a licenced archaeologist and a report on the testing was to be submitted to the Planning Authority and the Department of the Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. Following a request from CST, Consulting Engineers, for the project, five engineering trial holes were also excavated to establish the level of the water table across the site.

Five trenches were excavated at the site.

**Trench 1** measured 15m in length and 1m in width.

**Trench 2** measured 15m in length and 1m in width.

**Trench 3** measured 18m in length and 1m in width.

**Trench 4** measured 22m in length and 1m in width.

**Trench 5** measured 22m in length and 1m in width.
Archaeological Pre-development Testing

**Trench 1**  
Trench 1 was excavated to a depth of 1.6m (Illus. 4, Plate 5). A thin sod overlay the trench. Underlying topsoil was a highly disturbed fill, with a depth of 1.4m, comprising lenses of re-deposited material including sand, clay and silt. There were finds plastic interspersed in the fill but no finds of archaeological or historic interest. Underlying the re-deposited fill was a gritty sand, which was excavated for a depth of 200mm. This trench did not contain archaeological features of any kind.

**Trial Holes 1 and 2**  
(Illus. 4, Plates 10-11) were excavated through the gritty sand under the fill for a further depth of 600mm at the northern and southern ends of the trench respectively, giving the trench a total depth of 2.2m at these points. Water was evident at 2.1m.

**Trench 2**  
Trench 2 was excavated to a minimum depth of 2.2m (Illus. 4, Plate 6). A thin sod overlay the trench. Underlying sod was a highly disturbed fill, with a depth of 2.1m, comprising lenses of re-deposited material including sand, clay and silt. There were finds plastic interspersed in the fill but no finds of archaeological or historic interest. Underlying the re-deposited fill was a gritty sand, which was excavated for a depth of 100mm. Water was evident at 2.1m.

**Trench 3**  
Trench 3 was excavated to a maximum depth of 2.2m, rising to a minimum depth of 1.4m at the southern end of the trench (Illus. 4, Plate 7). A thin sod overlay the trench. Underlying sod was a highly disturbed fill, with a depth at the northern end of the trench of 1.9m and a depth at the southern end of the trench of 1.1m, comprising lenses of re-deposited material including sand, clay and silt. There were finds plastic interspersed in the fill but no finds of archaeological or historic interest. Due to the loose nature of the fill, the eastern face of the trench, under the spoil heap, collapsed as the trench was being excavated. Underlying the re-deposited fill was a gritty sand, which was excavated for a depth of 300mm. This trench did not contain archaeological features of any kind.

**Trial Hole 3**  
(Illus. 4, Plate 12) As water was already evident in the trench in the proposed location of Trial Hole 3, further excavation in this location was not needed. Water was evident at 2.1m and the trench was excavated to a depth of 2.2m in this location. The trench collapsed during the excavations.
Archaeological Pre-development Testing

Plate 5  Trench 1, fully excavated, from s.
Plate 6  Trench 2, fully excavated, from s.
Plate 7  Trench 3, fully excavated, from s.
Plate 8  Trench 4, fully excavated, from s.

19E0042 Gubalaun townland, Co. Leitrim
Plate 9  Trench 5, fully excavated, from s.

**Trench 4**  Trench 4 was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.7m at the northern end and a minimum depth of 1.3m at the southern end of the trench (Illus. 4, Plate 8). A thin sod overlay the trench. Underlying sod was a highly disturbed fill, with a depth of between 1m and 1.6m. It fill comprised re-deposited material including sand, clay and silt. There were finds plastic interspersed in the fill but no finds of archaeological or historic interest. Underlying the redeposited fill was a gritty sand, which was excavated for a depth of 100mm.

**Trench 5**  Trench 5 was excavated to a depth of 1.6m (Illus. 4, Plate 5). A thin sod overlay the trench. Underlying topsoil, in contrast to Trenches 1-4, was a light orange sand, with a depth of 800mm. A dark gritty sand, with a depth of 500mm, underlay the light orange sand. Underlying this dark gritty sand was a light creamy white gritty sand, which was excavated for a depth of 300mm. There were no finds from this trench and the trench did not contain archaeological features of any kind.

**Trial Holes 4 and 5** (Illus. 4, Plates 13-14) were excavated through the creamy white gritty sand for a further depth of 400mm at the northern and southern ends of the trench respectively, giving the trench a total depth of 2m at these points. Water was evident at 1.9m in Trial Hole 4 and 1.8m in Trial Hole 5.
Plate 10  a. Trial Hole 1, northern end of Trench 1, and b. excavated material.

Plate 11  a. Trial Hole 2, southern end of Trench 1, and b. excavated material.
Plate 12  a. Trial Hole 3, mid-point Trench 3, and b. excavated material.

Plate 13  a. Trial Hole 4, northern end of Trench 4, and b. excavated material.
Archaeological Impact Assessment

The excavation of five trenches at the site of the proposed development did not yield any heretofore unknown archaeological features or material. The highly mixed fills noted in four of the five trenches (Trenches 1-4) represent a modern and most-likely mechanical disturbance within this area. The fills contained only modern finds, mainly plastic. Natural ground within this field was seen in Trench 5, comprising layers of sand. This indicates that the fill in Trenches 1-4 was re-deposited on the site and mixed with the existing material to form a loose, stoneless and unstable fill. The stratigraphy in Trench 5 comprised natural undisturbed sand and gravel layers under sod. The natural layers of sand and gravel did not contain any finds or features and nothing of archaeological interest was revealed.

Plate 14  a. Trial Hole 5, southern end of Trench 5, and b. excavated material.
Conclusions and Recommendations

Archaeological testing at the site of the proposed burial ground extension did not result in the discovery of heretofore unknown or unrecorded archaeological features. The site was seen to be highly disturbed, with four trenches excavated to between 1.6m and 2.2m, having deep re-deposited fill under sod. One trench, Trench 5, was composed of naturally occurring sand and gravel. The disturbance at the site appears to be modern in date and mechanical in nature, with fragments of plastic featured in the deep fills of Trenches 1-4.

Based on the results of the archaeological testing, it appears that the proposed burial ground extension will not impact on sub-surface archaeological remains.

All recommendations are subject to the final approval of the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht.

Anne Carey