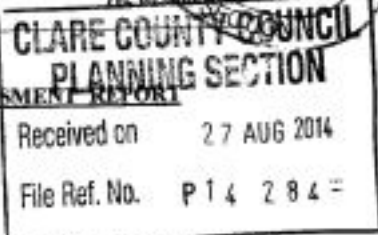


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ARCHAEOLOGIST**

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TRABANE, LISHEENCRONY, KILKEE, CO CLARE.



**ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT REPORT**

Ref. No P14/284

**Introductory**

At the request of Mr John Lynch, Secretary to the Kileasheen Graveyard Committee I visited the site of the proposed development in his company and inspected the areas referred to in the application for Planning Permission. The land on which the proposed development is situated is at present laid out in meadowing and the fact that it had been newly mown facilitated examination of the ground surface in the environs of the graveyard, but not the graveyard itself and a surrounding strip which was so overgrown that only the most superficial examination was possible. At my request Mr Lynch undertook to arrange for the cutting and clearance by hand of the vegetable cover from the surface of the area to be enclosed. This was carried out a few days later through the good offices and assistance of Mr Pat Talty of Tals and as a result, a full examination of both monument area and its environs was possible.

In order to respond fully to the specific matters requested at 2(b) of Council's letter of July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I discussed the various aspects of the work with Messrs Lynch and Talty and in particular the aims and objectives of the proposed development. According to Mr Lynch the sole aim is the preservation of Kileasheen Graveyard as a Famine Site. He informed me that it was to this purpose that the landowner had consented to donate an area of his land comprising the site of the graveyard, a roadside halting space and a pedestrian way to the graveyard as depicted in the drawings already submitted to the Planning Authority. When I raised the matter of a *closing order* or whether *burial rights* existed he (Mr Lynch) was quite adamant that there would be no more burials and that the sole object of this Committee was the presentation of the graveyard as a *Historic Monument*. The fact that the owner of the land was willing to hand over the necessary ground at this time made this the most opportune moment to proceed. He also confirmed that it was not their intention to carry out any works to the graveyard or to alter its present appearance.

**THE KNOWN and PREDICTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL INTEREST**

**1. The Graveyard**

On the first and subsequent editions of the OS maps (Clare Sheet 65) this graveyard is depicted as being unenclosed (broken lines) a fact which, of itself, may be taken to indicate that it was considered to have gone out of use when enclosure of graveyards in the area was being contemplated in the 19<sup>th</sup> C. A number of reasons can be cited as contributing to such a cessation of use and it would appear that the process was

gradual at first and likely to have begun with the significant changes both in the ownership and tenantry of land after the Williamite Confiscation of the local O'Brien estates. These changes had a cataclysmic effect on local society, causing widespread destruction and clearance of many of the old 'clochan-type' settlements and the concomitant dispersal of their occupants. It is significant that only five 'table' graves are to be found in this graveyard, all without inscription or date, but belonging to a type of grave favoured by newly introduced tenantry in neighbouring graveyards.

The most telling reason for the cessation of burial at Kilcasheen is contained in the oft-quoted story recorded by Eugene Curry which tells of his Grandfather Malachy Curry (who had come to Lislanahan, Kilkee from East Clare as part of the new tenantry of West Clare?) "burying the bodies of those who had died in the pestilence of 1739" in Kilcasheen graveyard, "bringing the bodies thither on sledges". If these were not the bodies of the people recently dispersed, now being returned to their homeland, why bring them to Kilcasheen for burial? And was it not the terror of the plague that caused the new tenantry to cease burial at Kilcasheen?

The foregoing historical assessment would lead to the hypothesis that this graveyard had gone out of use when the Great Famine, which the Famine Sites programme was designed to commemorate, took place.

## 2. The Structural Remains

The graveyard area appears as a slightly raised platform or prominence surrounded at the E and S by broad depressions. In the centre of the platform there is a low alignment of flagstones set on end resembling the foundation courses of the N and E walls of what appears to have been a small rectangular structure the extent or purpose of which is now uncertain but judged on its situation, orientation, and construction it is likely to be the remains of a small church or oratory commonly found at ecclesiastic sites until the 12<sup>th</sup> C. In his paper "The Churches of County Clare" read to the Royal Irish Academy on June 25<sup>th</sup>, 1900, Westropp includes Kilcasheen as Number 166 in a list of nearly 250 sites, of which 104 existed as ruins, 13 as mere foundations, 30 certain sites and 43 possible sites in graveyards. In addition to the five 'table' type graves mentioned above there are a number of small boulder stones randomly protruding through the top soil and probably originally intended as grave markers.

At the W side a row of large flat-faced boulders forming a facing to the boundary fence was revealed by the removal of vegetation. These boulders are set close together to form a broad curving line as if part of the circumference of a large circular enclosure. A noticeable deviation in the line of the fence at this point would suggest that its builders through either expediency or respect incorporated an existing line of fencing in the their new field fence even at the expense of causing this important fence (it is a townland boundary) to deviate from line. Peculiar alignments to the field fence depicted on the first edition O S map at the N of the graveyard suggests that a similar incorporation of a pre-existing feature had also occurred here. This led me to re-examine the ground surface at the E and S sides (after the hay had been baled), and I am now of opinion that there is evidence for the existence of a former earthwork enclosure with associated features.

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PLANNING SECTION  
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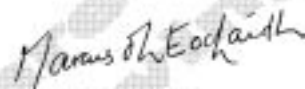
Further evidence came to light, in support of such an enclosure, during the 1950s works carried out under a Land Project Scheme in the adjoining field to the W of the graveyard. Here the discovery of a setting of flagstones and boulders exposed during bulldozing led to the inspection of the Site by the Archaeological Officer, the late Henry A Wheeler, who reported that the features exposed probably had an association with the adjoining burial ground which he referred to as a "calluragh" (a former graveyard only used for the burial of infants and stillborn children). The destruction having by then reached an advanced state he did not consider that the surviving archaeological interest was sufficient to merit further action and the work was permitted to proceed.

On the basis of the evidence described above it would appear that Kilcasheen graveyard had its beginning around a church located within a circular ringfort-like enclosure which brings to mind Westropp's reference to *the Dalcassians of the Churches,* "for there was a church for every 10 forts in the district"

#### Recommendation

The fact that it is free of recent burial makes this site especially suitable for future archaeological investigation and in my opinion great care should be taken that it remains so. Although the protection which it now enjoys under the 1994 Amendment to the National Monuments Acts has, until now, stood up quite well to threats of damage from interference elsewhere, I would not be so sure that protection under Section 12 could be relied upon against claims of right of burial likely to arise should permission to the proposed development be granted, due to the severe shortage of burial plots in the area.

In the circumstances, consideration should be given to the possibility of having the Land now on offer vested in the State under the National Monuments Acts. At least such a solution would afford a greater degree of permanency to the survival and preservation into the future of this important *Historical and Archaeological* Monument.

  
Marcus O hEochaidh

21.08.2014

