

Two Churches, One Land: A Communities shared Historical and Natural heritage

An Early Christian Site

The site of the present St. Brigid's Church of Ireland has been a place of worship for over 1000 years with early Christian Settlement thought to have been founded at this location sometime between AD 500-900. It was originally dedicated to St. Columba Crossaire before being rededicated to St. Brigid (one of Ireland's three patron saints alongside St. Patrick and St. Columba) in the 13th Century.

At this time the Archbishop Henry de Lourdes of Dublin and other Anglo-Norman Bishops, offered indulgences to Irish Pilgrims, absolving their sins, if they undertook a pilgrimage across the sea to Glastonbury, England (a pilgrimage center associated with St. Brigid. As part of the Journey travelers would have traversed through county Wexford and across the Irish Sea by boat. This decision encouraging pilgrims to journey through Wexford likely influenced the rededication of the Church to St. Brigid. Her feast day which falls on February 1st, marking winters end and the beginning of spring, is celebrated as a public holiday.

Throughout the remainder of the medieval period the site continued to function as a parish church. During the 16th Century reformation it would become part of the established protestant church. According to Bishop Ram (the Protestant Bishop of Ferns) in 1615 John Lacy was Priest and the church and chancel were in repair. The present church building was possibly constructed around the year 1800.

Elements of the first Christian Settlement are still visible today and include the monastic enclosure or 'vallum', a common enclosing element of early church sites; these were circular enclosures consisting of an earthen bank and ditch combination or stone wall which acted as a physical and spiritual divisions for the sacred space. The circular earthen bank enclosing the graveyard, together with a slight road bend preserves the route of the original enclosure that once surrounded the site. Boulders with artificial depressions, known as Bullaun stones, are another common object found at early Christian sites, though to have been used as a mortar for grinding grain, foodstuffs or metallic ores. A large Bullaun stone with two depressions can be found within a nearby field close to the site.

The Graveyard

As you wonder through the Graveyard take note of the various different headstones and the designs scattered throughout. The site contains both Catholic and Protestant burials with the earliest recorded memorial belonging to John Keys, who departed this life on the 17th of October 1725 at 38 years of age. A large mausoleum belonging to the Devereux family of the nearby Ballyrankin House, can be found to the west of the church.



Ordnance Survey Map from 1839 showing Church



Bullaun Stone situated nearby



Red Clover



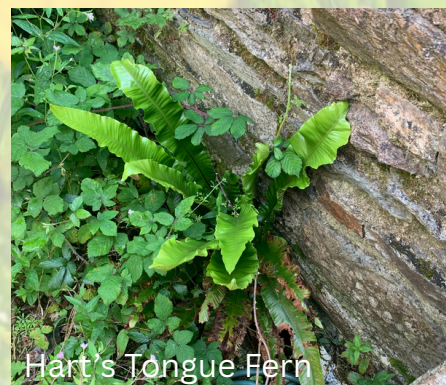
Small Tortoiseshell



Great Tit



Bird's-foot Trefoil



Hart's Tongue Fern

Nature and Biodiversity

This site supports a diversity of native flora and fauna, the lawns are species rich containing species such as crested dog's-tail, ribwort plantain, bird's foot trefoil, lady's bedstraw, cat's ears, and clovers. Old stone walls provide habitat for for ferns such as maidenhair spleenwort, and hart's-tongue, while the surrounding earthen banks support mature trees and shrubs, including ash, holly and elder. These varied habitats provide shelter and food for our native wildlife, including many garden birds, bats, and pollinating insects.



For more information about the graveyard scan the QR code.

Designed by Barry Lacey (Archaeologist) and Patrick Doran (Ecologist)

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History

Following the reformation in the 16th century the medieval parish church of Kilrush in Ballinaberry became part of the newly established protestant church. The first post reformation church for the Catholic community in Kilrush was situated within the townland of Knockaree within what is now the old catholic graveyard. Local tradition states that this was common ground before being bought for a church and school. Similar to many catholic churches at the time this would have been a very modest simple structure of either clay or stone wall construction with a thatched roof. This church was burned on March 15th 1799 in the aftermath of the 1798 rebellion. It was rebuilt in 1802-03 by the then parish priest Fr John French. In 1843 this same priest set about the construction of a new church on the site, however he passed the following year and his brother Fr. James French completed its construction before his own passing in 1854. This church was a large barn type building with a high roof and tall windows. (An image of the building can be seen on the board.) It served the people of the parish until the present church was constructed in 1969. After this the old church was demolished with only the eastern wall and part of the south and north walls visible on the site today. A school situated next to the church at the western end of the graveyard served the local catholic community and was referred to as 'Kingsland'. In 1834 120 boys were recorded in this school and were taught the three Rs, being Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic. In addition to this the students were also taught book keeping, Grammar and measurement. The school continued to serve the local community until about 1885 when new national school was constructed in nearby Ballyroe buck.

The Graveyard

As you explore the graveyard take note of the various different types of memorials and their design with many displaying beautiful iconography and stone carving. Memorials can also be seen affixed to the surviving wall of the ruined church. The oldest grave recorded in the Old Catholic Graveyard is a headstone erected by Stephen Fleming, in memory of his son Thomas Fleming, who died on 24th October 1819 age 22 (No.28). There are also many unmarked graves within the old graveyard with just simple stone markers for which no date is known. Post reformation the site church at Ballinaberry continued to be used as a place of burials for Catholics until at least the early 18th century.



Ordnance Survey Map from 1839 showing Church

A side view of the old Catholic Church



Yarrow



Peacock Butterfly



Blue Tit



Wild Strawberry



Germander Speedwell

Nature and Biodiversity

This site supports a diversity of native flora and fauna, the lawns are species rich containing species such as crested dog's-tail, ribwort plantain, bird's foot trefoil, yarrow, wild strawberry, speedwells, and clovers. Old stone walls provide habitat for ferns such as maidenhair spleenwort, and hart's-tongue, while the bare ground where the church once stood, is home to interesting species not found elsewhere on the site including, Common Centuary, and Scarlet Pimpernel. These varied habitats provide shelter and food for our native wildlife, including many garden birds, bats, and pollinating insects.



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