

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED BURIAL GROUND EXTENSION AT CREAGH,  
BALLINASLOE, CO. GALWAY**

*Pre-Planning Report*



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## CONTENTS

### Tables, Figures and Plates

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Archaeological and Historical Background
  - 3.1 *Recorded Monuments*
  - 3.2 *Cartographic Sources*
    - 3.2.1 *Ordnance survey map 1838*
    - 3.2.2 *Ordnance survey map c. 1900*
    - 3.2.3 *Cassini map c. 1930*
  - 3.3 *Aerial Images*
  - 3.4 *Topographical Files*
  - 3.5 *Previous Archaeological Investigations*
4. Site Inspection
5. Proposed Development
6. Impact Assessment
7. Mitigation

## Tables, Figures and Plates

### Tables

Table 1	Recorded monuments in the vicinity of the proposed development
Table 2	Previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity of the proposed development

### Figures

Figure 1	Aerial Image 2011-2013 showing proposed development site and recorded monuments in vicinity
Figure 2	Ordnance survey map 1838-9
Figure 3	Ordnance survey map c. 1900
Figure 4	Cassini map c. 1930
Figure 5	Aerial image 2011-2013 showing proposed development site
Figure 6	Site location map showing proposed development site

### Plates

Plate 1	Looking north at existing entrance from the R442 to the site of the proposed burial ground extension
Plate 2	Looking north along existing access to site of proposed burial ground extension
Plate 3	Looking south along existing access to site of proposed burial ground extension
Plate 4	East boundary wall of 19 <sup>th</sup> century cemetery forming west boundary of proposed burial ground extension
Plate 5	Looking east across site of proposed burial ground extension
Plate 6	Looking west across site of proposed burial ground extension
Plate 7	Looking northwest across Recorded Monument GA088-006001 (Graveyard) with GA088-006 (Church) in background
Plate 8	Looking northwest across Recorded Monument GA088-008 (Graveyard) with GA088-008001 (Church) in background
Plate 9	Looking northeast showing Recorded Monument GA088-008001 (Church)
Plate 10	Looking northeast showing Recorded Monument GA088-008002 (Church)
Plate 11	Font within Recorded Monument GA088-008002 (Church)
Plate 12	Looking east across Recorded Monument GA088-008003 (Burial ground)

## 1. Introduction

This report is an assessment of the potential archaeological impact of a proposed extension to a Burial Ground at Creagh, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The report was prepared at the request of Galway County Council in advance of planning. The site of the proposed burial ground extension lies immediately adjacent to the existing burial ground on the east side of the town. There are a number of recorded monuments located in the immediate vicinity of the existing burial ground, including the ruins of three churches dating from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. One of the churches (GA088-006) is believed to occupy the site of a medieval parish church.

## 2. Methodology

This assessment is based on a desk study and site inspection. The desk study included a search of the following sources:

*Record of Monuments and Places (RMP):* All recorded monuments in the state have been given a unique number. The monuments are indicated on the archaeological constraint maps (based on the six inch series and recorded on a county basis) and listed in the accompanying index. All recorded monuments are afforded protection under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004.

*Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI):* A file on each monument is kept by the archive unit of the National Monuments Service, Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht, Custom House, Dublin 1. The file contains any relevant details about the site. The digital database of the archaeological survey can be accessed at [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie)

*Archaeological Investigations:* The excavations bulletin is an annual account of all licensed archaeological investigations carried out on the island of Ireland. The database is available online at [www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie) and includes summary accounts of investigations from 1969 to the present. This database was consulted to establish if any archaeological excavations had been carried out within or in the immediate vicinity of the proposed development site.

*Cartographic Sources:* A number of early maps of Ballinasloe including the first and second edition ordnance survey maps were examined.

*Aerial Images:* A series of aerial images of the site were examined on the ordnance survey website [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie).

*Topographic Files:* The topographical files in the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) were consulted to establish if any stray finds are recorded in the vicinity of the development site. Any finds would be an indication of human activity and may highlight the importance of the area in the archaeological record.

### **3. Archaeological and Historical Background**

Ballinasloe is located on a fording point on the River Suck, and is the principal market town of East County Galway. The Irish name for the town is *Béal Atha na Sluaighe* meaning ‘The ford of the mouth of the gathering/hosting’. The nature of the gathering that took place here remains unclear, but it may have been a precursor for the annual October livestock fair which is reputedly the largest such fair in Europe.

The town is divided by the River Suck into two unequal portions. The larger section is on the west side of the river and includes the townland of Dunlo which derives its name from the Irish *Dún leodha* meaning ‘the fort of Leodha’. There is a strong local tradition that the present RC Church occupies the site of the fort on the west bank of the river. According to the annals Turlough O’Connor built a castle close to the fording point on the river in 1124. This castle is recorded as having been burned in 1131. A small urban settlement developed around the castle and bridge, which was built in 1130, but the settlement did not develop substantially until the sixteenth century.

The existing castle ruins are late medieval in date. They are strategically located on the east bank of the River Suck commanding the ancient fording point on the river. It is possible that the present ruins stand on or close to the ‘castle’ built by Turlough O’Conor in 1124 and the ‘castle of Suicin’ built by the Anglo Normans in 1245. According to Egan the present castle was built by the O’Kellys in the fourteenth century. There are documentary references to a settlement belonging to the O’Kelly clan near the site of this castle, but these sources are unclear regarding the size and exact location. In 1572 the castle was held by the Earl of Clanricarde but it was taken over by the crown in 1579.

Though there are the remains of medieval buildings in the town, Ballinasloe appears to be largely an 18th century foundation of the local landowners the Trench family who became the Earls of Clancarty. The Trench Family succeeded the Spencers, Brabazons and Kellys as the major land holding family in the area. Frederick Trench purchased the lands and castle of Garbally in 1631. Garbally became the family seat of the Trenches. The present Garbally House was designed by Thomas Cundy and was built sometime after 1798 when an older house on the site was burned.

Although the great cattle fairs of Ballinasloe were held from a very early period the earliest record of them dates from the 8th of June 1757 when Richard Trench obtained a patent for holding two fairs on the 15th of May and the 13th of July each year. Richard, his father, and his son were the principal architects in the development and growth of the eighteenth century town.

The church and graveyard sites at Creagh are located at the east edge of the old town, approximately 750m west of the Galway-Roscommon county border. The townland takes its name from the Irish *An Chríoch* meaning 'limit or boundary'.

### 3.1 Recorded Monuments

Recorded monuments in the vicinity of the proposed burial ground extension comprise four churches, two graveyards and a burial ground (see table 1, figure 1).

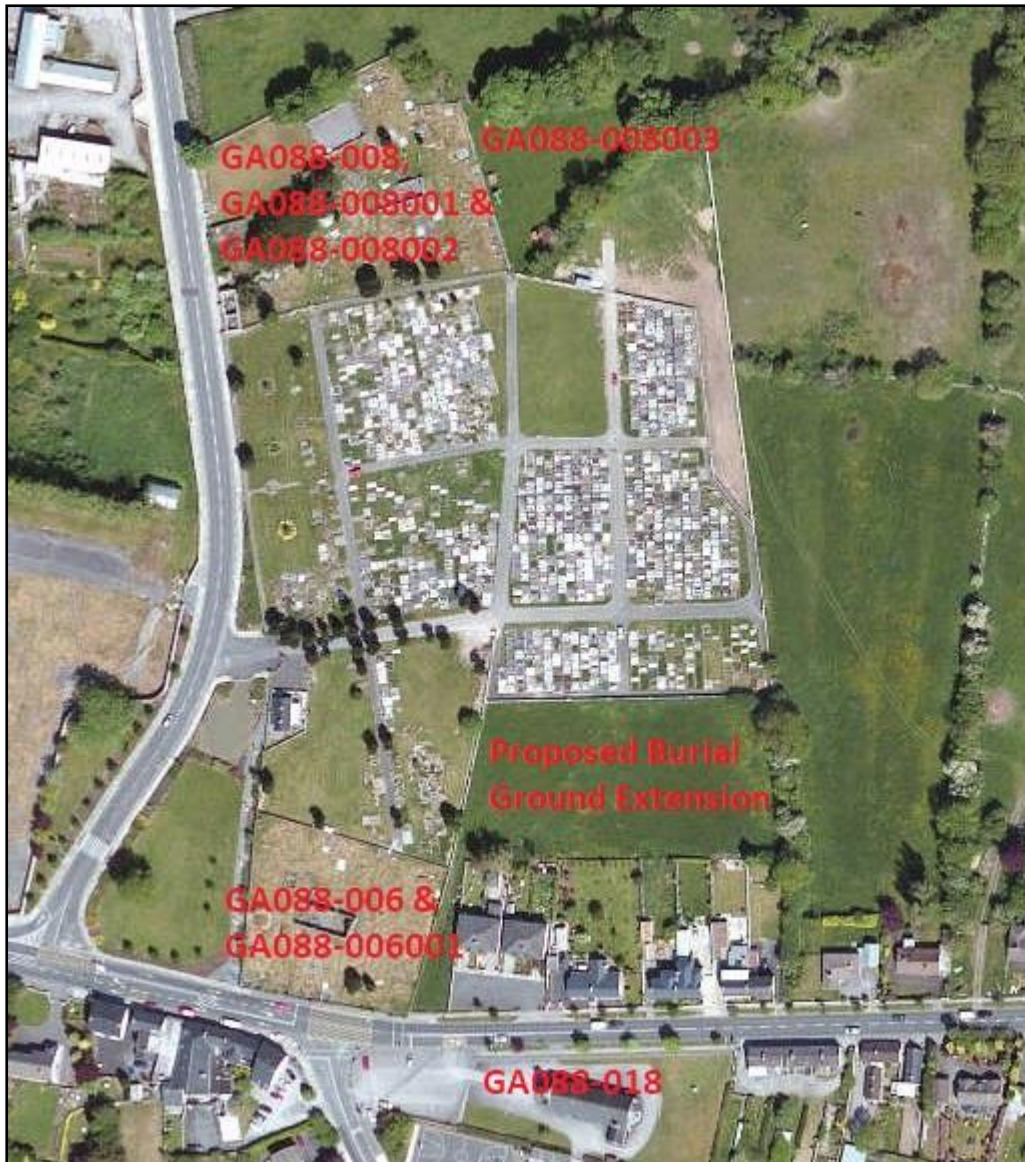
Table 1 Recorded Monuments in the vicinity of the proposed development

RMP/SMR No.	ITM Ref	Townland	Classification	Distance
GA088-006	586522, 730990	Creagh	Church	30m SW
GA088-006001	586527, 730991	Creagh	Graveyard	Adjoining
GA088-008	586534, 731228	Creagh	Graveyard	140m N
GA088-008001	584546, 731224	Creagh	Church	165m NNE
GA088-008002	586527, 731252	Creagh	Church	190m NNE
GA088-008003	586604, 731249	Creagh	Burial ground	140m N
GA088-018	586612, 730928	Kilgarve	Church	120m S

Recorded Monuments GA088-006 (Church) and GA088-006001 (Graveyard) are located immediately southwest of the proposed development site. The church ruin within this graveyard is that of an early 18<sup>th</sup> century Protestant church but it is believed to occupy the site of a medieval parish church.

Recorded Monuments GA088-008 (Graveyard), GA088-008001 (Church) and GA088002 (Church) are located 140-190m north of the proposed development site. The graveyard here contain two church ruins, an early 18<sup>th</sup> century mass house (GA088-008001) and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century church which replaced it (GA088-008002). To the immediate east of the graveyard there is a separate burial ground (GA088-008003), which was associated with the nearby Ballinasloe and District Lunatic Asylum.

Recorded Monument GA088-018 (Church) is a Roman Catholic Gothic Revival church built in 1931 to replace the early 19<sup>th</sup> century church (GA088-008002).



**Figure 1** Aerial Image 2011-2013 showing proposed development site and recorded monuments in vicinity  
OSI Licence No. EN 0076821

The digital database of the Archaeology Survey of Ireland (ASI) records the following details for recorded monuments in the vicinity of the proposed development site:

*Recorded Monument Number GA088-006 (Church)*

In a rectangular graveyard on E outskirts of Ballinasloe Town. The standing remains are those of an ivy-mantled rectangular church (17.7m E-W, 6.8m N-S) in fair condition. Apart from W gable, all the walls stand to full height. There is a rectangular doorway towards W end of S wall, to E of which are three plain rectangular windows. A large round-headed window graces E gable and there is also a window in N wall. As Egan (1960, 27) surmises, this is a Protestant church of 18<sup>th</sup> century date, though it probably stands on the site of the medieval parish church.

*Recorded Monument Number GA088-008001 (Church)*

At the N end of a larger rectilinear graveyard, 250m N of a church (GA086-006). According to Egan (1960, 118-19, also 116), this is the site of an early 18<sup>th</sup> century mass house which was in use until 1824 when it was replaced by another church (GA088-008002). Egan (ibid.) describes it as rectangular in plan (c. 20m E-W; 5.5m N-S), 'the walls....scarcely higher than those of a cabin'. The doorway was at W end of S wall. It was lit by a small window in S wall near the altar and by a series of 'unglazed loops in the side walls'. A 'larger pointed window' was later inserted in E gable over altar. A holy water font originally located here is now in the later church.

*Recorded Monument Number GA088-008002 (Church)*

Immediately NW of a chapel (GA088-008001). This church was built in 1824 to replace the earlier chapel and was itself abandoned in 1914 (Egan 1960, 172-3, 119). The visible remains consist of the lower courses of the walls (H c. 1m) of a rectangular building (17m E-W, 12.5m N-S), now much overgrown. It appears to have been deliberately levelled since Egan (ibid., 172-3) wrote, as he was able to provide a full description of the church. The surviving architectural features a doorway in W wall, immediately to S of which is the inscribed holy water font from the earlier chapel. A number of window opes, some blocked, are also visible in N and S walls, and in E gable.

*Recorded Monument Number GA088-008003 (Burial ground)*

Immediately to the E of the graveyard (GA088-008). This trapezoidal-shaped graveyard widens towards its WSW end and is bounded on three sides by much collapsed stone walls. A field fence delimits the NNW side. Access is gained through a gateway at NW. The interior is divided into four sections by two sunken pathways that dissect one another in the centre. Graves are in lines running ENW-WSW and consist of rectangular sunken depressions (L 2m; Wth 0.8m; D 0.4m) marked by small, uninscribed, iron, ringed crosses (H 0.4m). The burial ground probably dates from the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

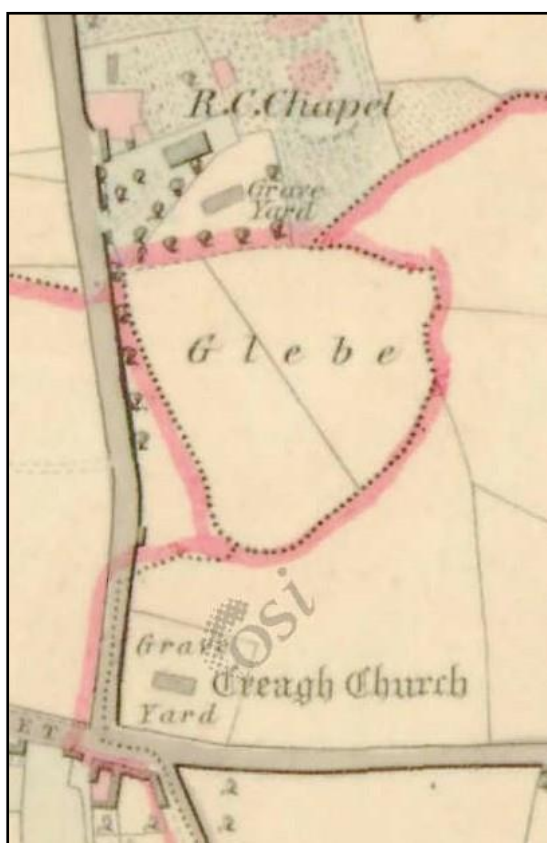
The digital database does not record any details for Recorded Monument Numbers GA088-006001 (Graveyard), GA088-008 (Graveyard) and GA088-018 (Church). The Archaeology Survey paper files for all monuments were also examined. Recorded Monument Number GA088-006001 (Graveyard) is described as a roughly square graveyard measuring approximately 55m<sup>2</sup> and containing a couple of gravestones dating from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century although most are of 20<sup>th</sup> century date; Recorded Monument Number GA088-008 (Graveyard) is described as an overgrown, roughly rectangular graveyard containing gravestones dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century; and Recorded Monument Number GA088-018 (Church) is described as a modern Catholic church of 20<sup>th</sup> century date.



### 3.2 Cartographic Sources

#### 3.2.1 Ordnance Survey map 1838 (figure 2)

The first edition Ordnance Survey six inch map shows 'Creagh Church and Grave Yard' at the junction of the Ballinasloe-Athlone and Ballinasloe-Roscommon roads. The 'R.C. Chapel and Grave Yard' is located to the north on the Roscommon Road. The two church and graveyard sites are divided by the small townland of Glebe, the name indicating that this was also church-owned land. The site of the proposed burial ground extension is in open field immediately northeast of 'Creagh Church and Grave Yard' and, like the church and graveyard, it is situated within the townland of Kilgarve.



**Figure 2** Ordnance survey map 1838 (OSI Licence No. EN 0076821)

#### 3.2.2 Ordnance Survey map c. 1900 (figure 3)

The first edition Ordnance Survey twenty-five inch map c. 1900 shows a change in the townland boundaries. The small townland of Glebe no longer exists with the west part incorporated into the townland of Creagh and the east part in Kilgarve. The old 'Creagh Church and Grave Yard' has been incorporated into Creagh townland with the graveyards east boundary wall forming part of the new townland boundary. The stretch of land bordering the Roscommon Road between the two church and graveyard sites, is laid out as a 'Cemetery'. The proposed development site remains in green field, within the townland of Kilgarve.

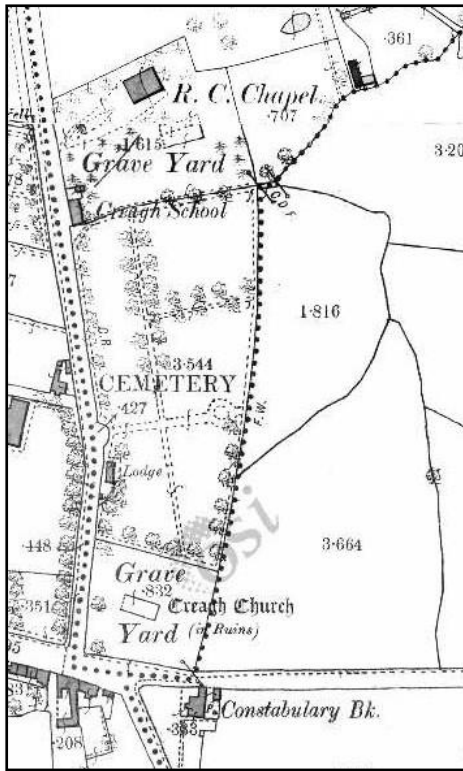


Figure 3 Ordnance survey map c. 1900 (OSI Licence No. EN 0076821)

3.2.3 Cassini map c. 1930 (figure 4)

On the Cassini map c.1930 the old Catholic Church on the Roscommon Road is marked as ‘In Ruins’ and there is a new Catholic Church on the Athlone Road to the south. The proposed development site has assumed its existing boundaries, and consists of a rectangular field bounded by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘Cemetery’ to the west, housing to the south and green field to the north and east.

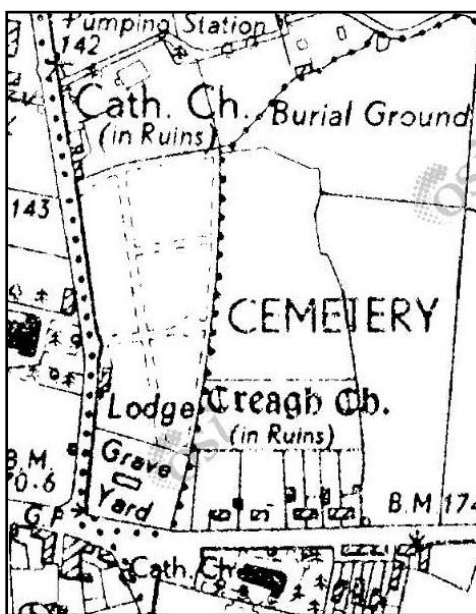


Figure 4 Cassini map c. 1930 (OSI Licence No. EN 0076821)

### 3.3 Aerial Images

A series of aerial images of the site dating from 1995 to 2018 were examined on the Ordnance Survey Ireland website [www.osi.ie](http://www.osi.ie). The sequence of images shows the rapid expansion of the existing burial ground to the north of the site of the proposed burial ground extension. The site of the proposed extension is in green field throughout this period.



**Figure 5** Aerial image 2011-2013 showing proposed development site (*OSI Licence No. EN 0076821*)

### 3.4 Topographical Files

The topographical files in the National Museum of Ireland (NMI) were consulted to establish if any stray finds are recorded in the vicinity of the development site. Any finds would be an indication of human activity and may highlight the importance of the area in the archaeological record. There are a total of thirteen finds recorded for the Ballinasloe area, with many of these registered as having been found in the River Suck and a few from bogs in the vicinity of the town. There are no finds recorded from the vicinity of the development site.

### 3.5 Previous Archaeological Investigations

The Excavations Bulletin is an annual account of all archaeological investigations carried out under licence on the island of Ireland. The database is available online at [www.excavations.ie](http://www.excavations.ie) and includes summary reports for excavations from 1985 to the present. This database was consulted to establish if any investigations had been carried out in the vicinity of the development site. The townlands of Creagh, Townparks and Kilgarve were searched in the database. The following entries are recorded for sites in the vicinity of the proposal:

Table 2 Previous archaeological investigations in the vicinity of the proposed development

Excavations.ie Ref. No.	ITM Ref.	Townland	Site Type	Excavation Licence No.
1999:287	586586, 730960	Creagh	No archaeology found	99E0509
2001:488	618645, 855909	Townparks	Possible 19 <sup>th</sup> century graveyard	01E1180
2002:0708	715826, 734698	Townparks	Burial ground	01E1180 ext
2004:0694	563003, 722090	Kilgarve	No archaeology found	03E0695
2019:326	563341, 722085	Kilgarve	No archaeology found	19E0509
2020:136	586494, 731274	Creagh	No archaeology found	20E0368

1999:287: Monitoring of topsoil stripping was carried out on the site of four proposed houses at Creagh, immediately south and east of the proposed development site, in 1999. No archaeology was found.

2001:488 & 2002:0708: Pre-development testing was carried out in the southeast extent of the grounds of St. Brigid's Hospital (formerly the Ballinasloe and District Lunatic Asylum) in advance of proposed road improvements at Creagh Junction in November/December 2001. The site lies immediately west of Creagh Church and Graveyard (GA088-006 & GA088-006001). A total of 77 grave-cuts and possible grave-cuts, and 5 possible inhumations, were identified during testing (Ref. 2001:488). The road improvement scheme was redesigned in order to avoid the known burials but further grave-cuts and inhumations were subsequently uncovered during development works to the west of the previously tested area in August 2002. Full excavation was carried out and 12 skeletons in varying states of preservation were excavated at the site (2002:0708). The graves formed two regular north-south rows and only one phase of burials was apparent. This carefully laid out graveyard concurs

with the findings from the test trenches opened in December 2001, where several distinct rows were distinguished. In contrast the trenches opened at the east extent of the site, close to the hospital boundary wall, revealed cross-cutting graves at different levels, implying that more than one phase was present. It was suggested that the excavated skeletons were those of residents of the asylum, buried in the later 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, while the skeletons uncovered during testing in the east extent of the site are earlier and may be associated with Creagh Church.

2004:0694: Monitoring of topsoil stripping was carried out in advance of a housing development in the vicinity of Recorded Monument GA088-018 (Church) at Kilgarve, to the south of the proposed development site, in May/June 2003 and January 2004 (Ref. 2004:0694). No archaeology was found.

2019:326: Monitoring of topsoil stripping was carried out in advance of a housing development at Kilgarve, to the south of the proposed development site, in August and September 2019. No archaeology was found.

2020:136: Monitoring of groundworks was carried out on the site of a proposed new dwelling at Creagh in July and August 2020. The development site is located immediately north of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Catholic Church (GA088-008). No archaeology was found.

#### **4. Site Inspection**

The proposed development site and the recorded monuments in its vicinity were inspected on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021. The development site comprises a rectangular field measuring approximately 100m E-W and 50m N-S. The site is bordered by the existing burial ground to the north, the 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery to the west, housing to the south, and green field to the east. The boundary wall of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery forms the west boundary of the development site. It is a well-built wall, constructed of coursed limestone blocks capped with large irregular boulders (plate 4). A modern concrete wall, delimiting the southern extent of the existing burial ground, forms the north boundary of the development site. This wall contains a field gate which gives access from the existing burial ground to the site of the proposed extension. The property boundaries of houses fronting onto the R446 Athlone Road form the south boundary and a mature hedgerow forms the west boundary.

The development site is accessed from a field gate on the R446 Athlone Road (plate 1) and from here a narrow strip of land, located between the old Creagh Church and Graveyard site to the west and a property boundary to the east, leads into field of the proposed burial ground extension (plates 2 & 3). The ground level along this narrow strip of land is approximately 0.5m lower than the ground level within the graveyard to the west. The west part of the field of the proposed burial ground extension is relatively flat but the ground rises in the east with the highest point occurring in the southeast corner

of the field (plates 5 & 6). No potential archaeological features were identified on the field surface during site inspection.

## **5. Proposed Development**

The proposed development comprises an extension to the existing burial ground at Creagh, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The layout of the proposed burial ground shall be similar to that of the existing burial ground located to the immediate north of the proposed development site. Access to the proposed burial ground extension shall be from the existing burial ground to the north. No access is proposed from the R446 Athlone Road to the south.

## **6. Impact Assessment**

There are no recorded monuments within the proposed development site and no previously unrecorded archaeology or potential archaeology was identified on the site during field inspection. However the site is located partly within the area of archaeological constraint for Recorded Monuments GA088-006 (Church) & GA088-006001 (Graveyard), which is considered to be the site of a medieval church. Moreover a number of burials, which may be associated with the medieval church, were discovered during construction works at Creagh Junction to the west of the graveyard in 2001 and 2002 (see Section 3.5). If these burials are associated with the medieval church this would indicate that the burial area associated with the medieval site extended beyond the limits of the existing church and graveyard. Consequently it has to be considered that there is a potential for the discovery of burials or other archaeological material outside the bounds of the existing graveyard. Nothing was found during monitoring of topsoil removal on the site of four houses located immediately east of the graveyard in 1999 and it is considered unlikely that the site of the proposed burial ground extension ever formed part of a medieval church site.

## **7. Mitigation**

Given the developments proximity to Recorded Monuments GA088-006 (Church) & GA088-006001 (Graveyard) and the discovery of burials to the west of these monuments in 2001 & 2002, mitigation to assess the archaeological potential of the site in advance of development is recommended.

It is recommended that a programme of archaeological pre-development testing should be carried out on the site of the proposed burial ground extension.

***Recommendations subject to ratification by the National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage***



**Figure 6** Site location map showing proposed development site



**Plate 1** Looking north at existing entrance from the R446 to the site of the proposed burial ground extension



**Plate 2** Looking north along existing access to site of proposed burial ground extension





**Plate 3** Looking south along existing access to site of proposed burial ground extension



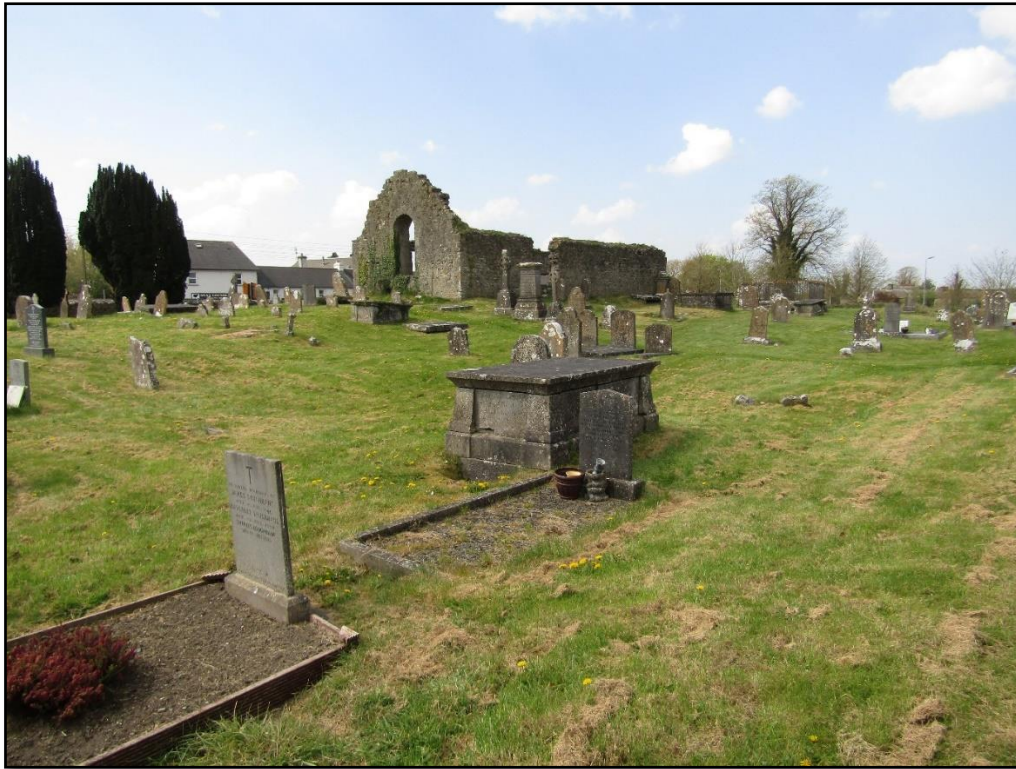
**Plate 4** East boundary wall of 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery forming west boundary of proposed burial ground extension



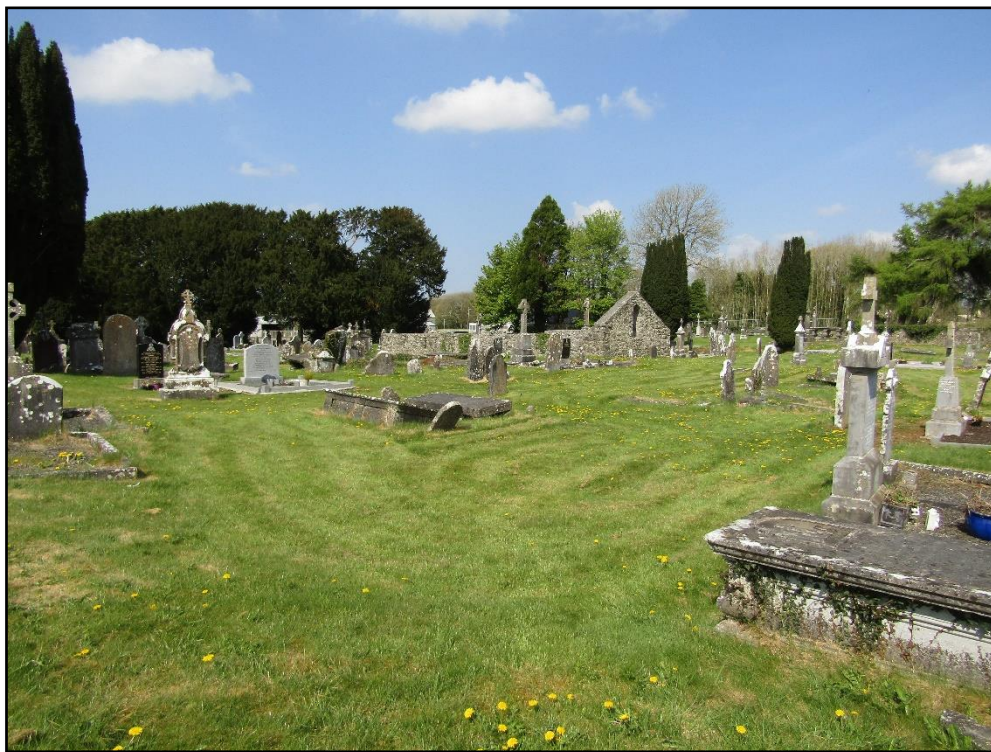
**Plate 5** Looking east across site of proposed burial ground extension



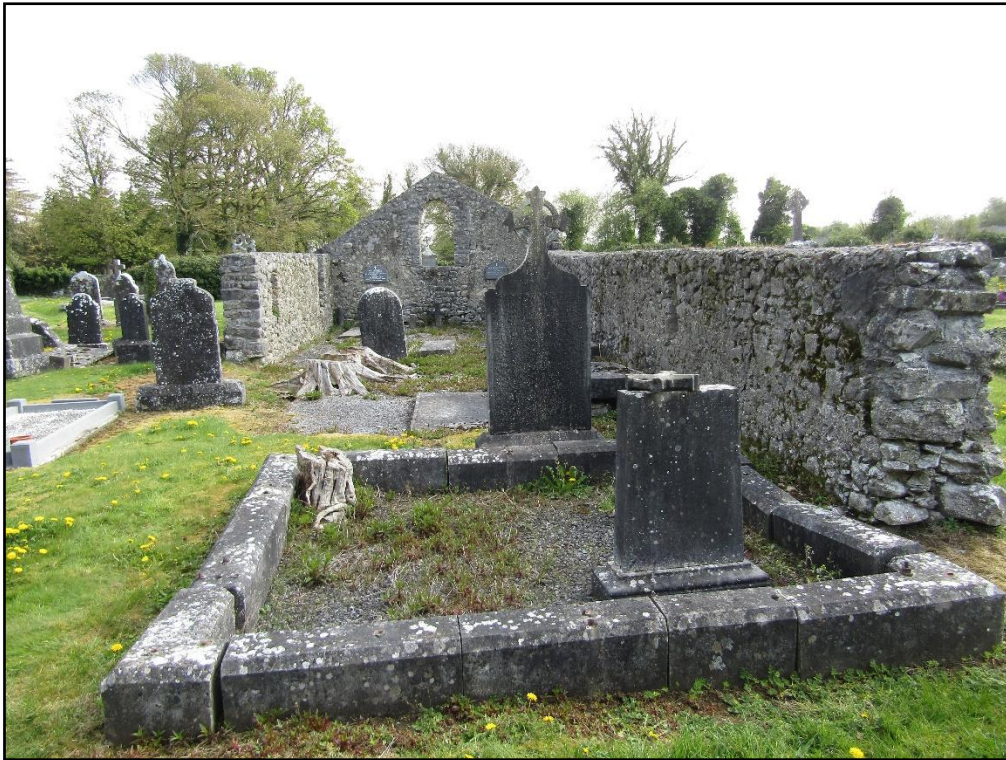
**Plate 6** Looking west across site of proposed burial ground extension



**Plate 7** Looking northwest across Recorded Monument GA088-006 (Graveyard) with GA088-006001 (Church) in background



**Plate 8** Looking northwest across Recorded Monument GA088-008 (Graveyard) with GA088-008001 (Church) in background



**Plate 9** Looking northeast showing Recorded Monument GA088-008001 (Church)



**Plate 10** Looking northeast showing Recorded Monument GA088-008002 (Church)



**Plate 11** Font within Recorded Monument GA088-008002 (Church)



**Plate 12** Looking east across Recorded Monument GA088-008003 (Burial ground)