

ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE IMPACT ASSESSMENT



BOUNDARY WALL OF ST. MARY'S, MAIN STREET, MOHILL, CO. LEITRIM

DERMOT NOLAN
CONSERVATION ARCHITECT

14 LOWER BAGGOT STREET, DUBLIN 2
TEL: 01-676 4025 E-MAIL: info@sw.n.ie

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1. INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND.

- 1.1 The church dates from c. 1815. It is described in the NIAH appraisal: *“Board of First Fruits style former Church of Ireland church, built c.1815 on the site of an earlier building. Three-bay nave with single-bay vestry to north side, four-stage entrance tower to west end with pinnacles and half-octagonal chancel to west end. Pitched slate roof with coping and cast-iron rainwater goods and with cross finials to gables. Roughcast render to walls with rendered plinth. Rendered walls with stone string courses and channelled ashlar quoins to tower. Replacement timber double door and overlight to drop-arched opening with tooled stone surround and hood moulding. Traceried and latticed stained glass windows to nave and transepts within tooled drop-arched surrounds with sills and traceried three-light window to chancel. Blind and louvred windows and clock to tower. Church surrounded by graveyard with variety of grave markers. Site bounded by stone wall with squared piers and cast-iron gates.”*
- 1.2 It is, according to the NIAH, of artistic, architectural, archaeological and social interest.

- 1.3 In its appraisal, the NIAH says: *“This Board of First Fruits Church is situated on the site of a former abbey, which is of archaeological significance. The attractively designed church is enhanced by its imposing tower with dressed ashlar. Artistic embellishments include stained glass and traceried windows. The grave markers, which vary in date, are of technical, social and artistic importance.”*
- 1.4 The church is a Protected Structure and is in an ACA. It is noted that the graveyard also features on the record of archaeological features (ref. no. LE032-068).



PIC.1; GENERAL VIEW, LOOKING EAST, OF GRAVEYARD, BOUNDARY WALL TO LEFT.

- 1.5 Sheridan Woods, Architects & Urban Planners Ltd. have been appointed to improve the public realm. They see the church and its grounds as a centre-piece in the proposed Public Realm improvements at this location, identifying its pivotal location (at the

junction of Castle, Hill, Main & Station Streets) in the plan of the village. I concur with this approach.



PIC 2; LOCATION (CHURCH GROUNDS COLOURED PINK, RED VERGE LINE).

Of particular interest to them is north-facing perimeter wall of the church grounds, which abuts Main Street and faces a broad public area under which the river has been culverted.

- 1.6 As part of their proposals, they seek to “open up” the vista from Castle Street (on which are located several non-commercial premises), so as to terminate it at the church itself, rather than its perimeter wall.



PIC. 2; SHERIDAN WOODS PROPOSAL.

It is considered this would be of benefit in that it opens up the church grounds as observed from this public area at the confluence of these streets.

1.7 To achieve this, it is proposed to form openings in the wall; these openings would be protected by metal railings.

1.8 The writer has seen a report, including a method statement, which was prepared for the purposes of obtaining grant aid, in which the wall is said to be in poor condition and “in danger of collapse”. It recommended that it be dismantled and rebuilt.

While well prepared, and well intentioned, this is considered to be an overly pessimistic report on the condition of the wall.

The wall is considered capable of being repaired. Indeed, this should be done for safety reasons.

1.9 The writer is aware of suggestions, from parishioners, that the entrance should be widened to facilitate access for hearses & other vehicles.

1.10 Another suggestion has been to incorporate a seat into any new proposals for renovation of the wall.



PIC. 3; ENTRANCE (FROM WITHIN)

2. DESCRIPTION, CONDITION.

2.1 The wall is a (calp) limestone rubble wall, approximately 50 metres long, running roughly east-west.

There are substantial remnants of a harling material, particularly to the inner face.



PIC. 4; ENTRANCE (FROM WITHIN); HARLING MATERIAL EVIDENT.

2.2 Height of the wall, as observed from the street, varies from approximately 1.6 to 1.9 metres. It is capped with

inclined thin stones/mortar, and is c. 450mm thick.

There is an opening, flanked by 2 no. stone (granite?) piers, close to its west end, approx. 2 metres in width. There is evidence of a former, pedestrian opening next to this, now filled with matching stone.

2.3 Pointing of the wall, including the capping, is of cementitious mortar, which has become dislodged in places, revealing a lime bedding mortar, which is presumed original.

Pointing of the piers appears of relatively recent origin, is also of cementitious mortar.

2.4 There is a glazed forged iron (with cast iron embellishments) lantern over the entrance, supported on the gate piers.



PIC. 5; WROUGHT/CAST IRON LANTERN OVER ENTRANCE.

2.5 Of particular note is that the wall retains earth, on the graveyard side, of (varying) height, approx. 200mm. At

its eastern end, however, earth on the church side is actually lower than on the public side.

- 2.6 Condition of the wall is considered fair. It has moved outwards in places, mostly towards its western end, to varying degrees, where it is distinctly out of plumb.

The cause of this outward movement is thought principally to be lateral pressure caused by the higher level of earth on the church side.

This may be exacerbated by a degree of subsidence in the footing and, perhaps, by (when – c. 20 years ago?) the laying of the footpath, on the public side by the County Council.

- 2.7 Where there has been outward movement in the wall, cracking was evident between the rubble element and the piers.



FIG. 7; OPEN JOINT BETWEEN PIER AND ADJACENT WALL, INDICATING DIFFERENTIAL MOVEMENT.

- 2.8 There are instances where stones have become dislodged, pointing mortar is missing, and growth is established in joints. The piers have also grown out-of-plumb, and have lost their bond with abutting walls, particularly the east one.



FIG. 8; GROWTH TO TOP OF WALL.

- 2.9 It is noted that the ground slopes, on all side, away from the church. This is particularly true on the north side (i.e. towards the subject wall).

Level of graves is stepped accordingly.



FIG. 9; EARTH SLOPES FRPM CHURCH TOWARDS WALL (TO THE NORTH).



FIG. 10; AREA INSIDE ENTRANCE WHICH IS FREE OF GRAVES.

- 2.10 A significant feature of the grounds is that, while graves are widespread throughout the area, there is a small area immediately to the east of the gate which is free of graves.

This corresponds to the position where it is proposed to replace the rubble wall with railings.

- 2.11 Also significant is how close certain graves to the boundary wall, some almost touching it.



FIG. 11; CLOSENESS OF SOME GRAVES TO WALL.

3. CHARACTER.

3.1 The character of the wall is in its simple expression as a solid enclosing element of the church grounds where it meets the public realm.

This is enhanced by the entrance of robust piers, with wrought/cast iron gates and lantern over. This allows a glimpse of the headstones within the grounds.

3.2 The church itself has a commanding presence because of its location and simple form, reinforced by its tower and pinnacles. It is visible from quite a distance away.

4. ASSESSMENT.

4.1 The impact of the proposed works to the wall are considered in terms of how they would, in the writer's opinion, affect the character of (a) the structure, i.e. the subject wall and (b) the grounds and the church itself.

4.2 The boundary wall (especially that section of it fronting the public realm) is an element that contributes to the special interest of the church.

As stated in the NIAH, the areas of special interest are archaeological artistic, architectural, and social.

4.3 As the proposed works affect only the front boundary wall, and its various accessories (piers and lantern), I will concentrate on these.

However, I will comment on how they affect the overall structure.

4.4 The impact of the removal of areas of rubble stone wall, and small areas of render, which are clearly historic fabric, is negative. I would regard this to be of **slight to medium** impact.

4.5 Mitigating factors are as follows:

4.5.1 The remainder of the wall will be restored, using appropriate expertise and conservation practice. These measures will include (a) removal of growth, (b) removal of cement-based material and repointing the wall and piers with lime-based mortar, (c) reinstatement of loose stonework & capping and (d) straightening and securing pier(s).

It is not proposed to reinstate render to the wall.

4.5.2 A technical assessment of the stability of the wall, and adopting measures to

improve same, will have long-term benefits.

4.5.3 The existing cluttered directional signpost will be moved.

4.6 The installation of steel railings where stonework has been removed is considered to be **negligible** in impact.

4.7 Mitigating, and enhancement, factors are as follows:

4.7.1 This will assist in achieving Sheridan Woods' objective of "opening up" the vista southwards, i.e. from Castle Street, so as to reveal more of the church and its tower.

4.7.2 The intervention is confined to a location remote from the immediate presence of graves & headstones, so the likelihood of disturbing these is eliminated.

4.7.3 The railings could be stabilised by means of backstays; this could be utilised, along with straightening the east pier, to improve the stability of the wall and piers.

4.7.4 The removed stone could be retained for re-use in making good the wall or be employed for use elsewhere, subject to detail design.

5. CONCLUSIONS.

5.1 While there are slight disadvantages, the proposal to open up the vista to the church and tower, and grounds, by replacement of some walling with a railings is a good one.

On balance, it will bring benefits to the church/wall and to the public realm.

5.2 As an important element in the overall Public Realm improvements, it can be supported.

5.3 Although I can sympathise with the intentions, I cannot endorse the proposal to widen the entrance by moving one, or both, piers.

The relatively narrow entrance (more especially with its gates and overlight) contributes to the character of such churches. To widen it would be to weaken this character.

5.4 Similarly, I feel the opportunity to fit seating to the wall may not be practicable, (a) because of the restricted width of the footpath and (b) the variation in relative levels of the path and graveyard.

This could be more fully investigated at detail design stage.

6. RESEARCH, & REFERENCES.

6.1 In considering the impact of the proposed works) the following specific publications (inter alia) have been consulted:

- “Architectural Heritage Protection (Guidelines for Planning Authorities)” by DoEHLG,
- Leitrim County Council Development Plan 2015-2021.



Dermot Nolan, Dip. Arch., FRIAI;
Conservation Architect (Grade 2)

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The author is a practicing Architect, qualified since 1975, and principal of Dixon McGaver Nolan. In 2003, He completed the RIAI course leading to accreditation (Grade 3) in conservation. In 2010, he was assessed by an RIAI Board, leading to Grade 2 accreditation.

Dermot Nolan has extensive experience in conservation and has been the principal architect involved in such projects on historic buildings/protected structures as:

- Alterations & refurbishment of The Temperance Hall, Longford (1905) for the Parish of St Michael
- Conservation and repair of metal railings and stone plinths to front of nos. 34 to 39 incl. Parnell Square, Dublin, for the I.N.T.O.
- Major repairs to roof and provision for access for disabled at the Church of the Holy Name (1914), Beechwood Avenue, Ranelagh, Dublin 6
- Conservation, restoration of perimeter walling and the “Gandon Gate” and lodges at Carriglass Estate, Longford.
- Retention and restoration of façade of Strand Cinema, Dublin (1920s), and its integration into apartment scheme.

He has given Conservation advice to Castlebar UDC on planning applications for several protected structures and has prepared a number of Section 57 Declarations for that Authority.

He has made successful applications for grants for Conservation works from various sources including the 2015, 2016, 2017 & 2018 Structures at Risk Fund and the 2019/ 2020 Historic Structures Fund.

He has also prepared dozens of evaluations of historic buildings and sites and prepared a number of Architectural Heritage Impact Assessments for both his own clients and those of third parties.