



# Medieval Monasteries.

## Parish of Graigcullen

CARA DÉ

Volume 2, Issue 3

**Killeshin**

Killeshin (CILL OIRÍN NO CILL UIRÍN)

This ruined church is situated at a point where the road pierces the girdle of limestone which surrounds the Leinster coalfield. It is renowned for its fine 12<sup>th</sup> c Romanesque doorway consisting of four concentric archways with elaborate carved ornamentation. Sadly much of the finer detail has been eroded away due to weathering. A modern R.C parish church is nearby.

The OPW Plaque inside the ruin reads as follows; St Comgan founded a monastery here towards the end of the 5th century. It was burned by Mac-Mael-na mbo in 1042 when 100 men were slain and it was burned again in 1077. Although the last historical reference to the monastery is in 1082 the existing church was built after this date and probably in the 12th century. The doorway which is one of the finest examples of Irish Romanesque architecture bears the inscription "A prayer for Diarmid King of Leinster" but the Diarmid named has not been positively identified. The church was altered in the 16th and again in the 18th century. A Round Tower which stood nearby was removed in 1703.

Our survey of the church ruins and churchyard was carried out in the Summer of 2001 and again in late 2003. The font to left of entrance door is believed to be the oldest decorated font in Ireland and probably dates from the 1st millennium. All of the earlier monastic buildings (of which no trace remains) would have been timber framed, clay/wattle walls and thatched with pond or river reeds. The present ruined 12th c church is probably the first stone walled building on the site.



The internal width of the 12th c church as measured is 24'-6" (7.47m). The length however has been a matter of conjecture. Fr Comerford's history mentions a total length of 66' for the North wall with an additional 24' added for the 16<sup>th</sup> c Church of Ireland building to give a total length of 90' (27.4m) between the gables. The wording on the OPW plaque also implies that the old and new churches were combined.

*Early Irish medieval churches generally have a length/width ratio of 1.5:1 ie about 36' would be the expected length if width is 24'.*

*Another church of 12th c date at Ullard Co Kilkenny (which is in a better state of preservation) has many features in common with Killeshin.*

Our survey indicated that the C of I church is entirely separate from the 12<sup>th</sup> c church. Quite probably the original church was no longer in use by the 16<sup>th</sup> c and much of the stone work was transferred to the new building.

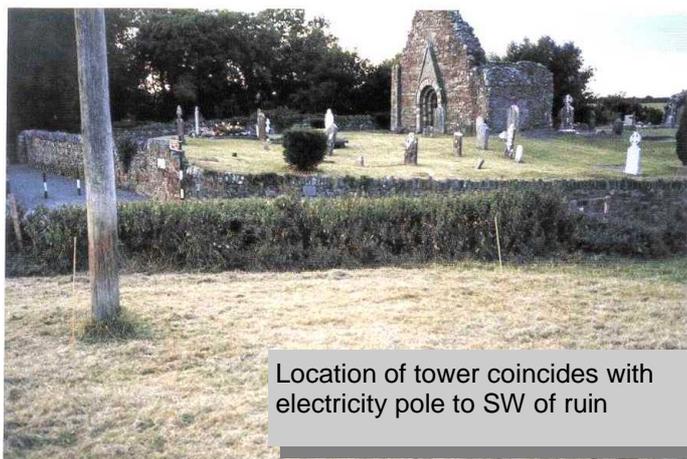
In our view the 12th c church was 40' long internally x 24'-6" wide ( 12.2m x 7.47m). It had two windows on each side wall (one of which survives). Side wall height 18' (5.5m) to eaves with walls 40" (1m) thick. The main East window was in three sections with rounded tops in the Romanesque style. Estimated dimensions 6' wide x 9' high (1.83 x 2.74m). At about 23' from the entrance door was a chancel arch 14' wide x 12' high (4.27 x 3.66m).

The C of I church had internal dimensions of 38'-0" long x 20'-6" wide (11.6 x 6.25m), with three windows on the South side and with a door and two windows on the North side. A small porch was built over this entrance door in the 18th c. Incidentally the present 16th/17th c window visible at the gable end does not fit the ope and may have been inserted later.



Tower: According to historical records a round tower once stood adjacent to the church, of which there is now no trace. In the year 1703 the then landowner a Capt Wolseley ordered the round tower or steeple to be demolished "lest it should fall on his cattle".

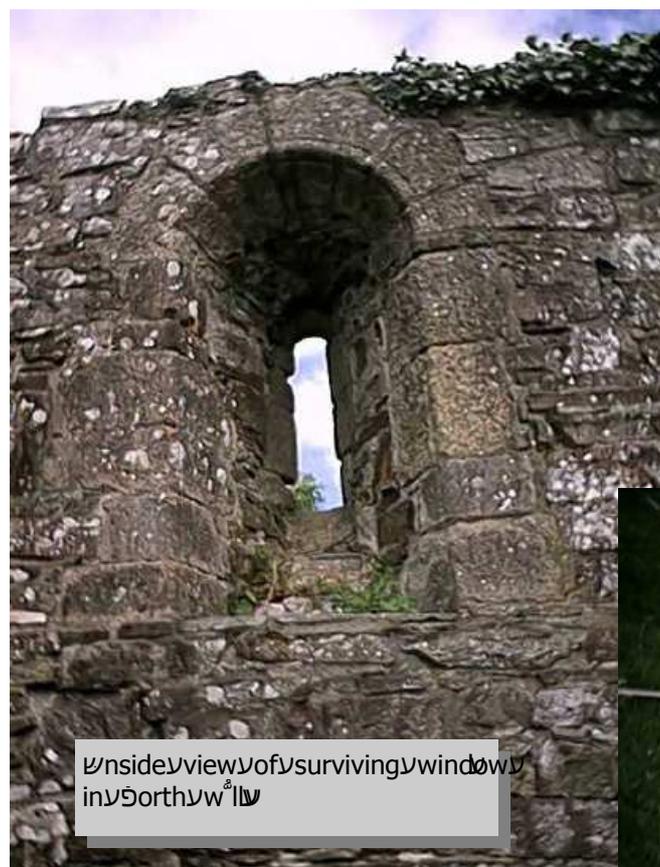
Our survey located the site of the round tower opposite the entrance gate to the churchyard in the field across the road. Coincidentally the site is now marked with an electricity pole. The tower was 50' in circumference at the base and stood 105' tall.



Location of tower coincides with electricity pole to SW of ruin



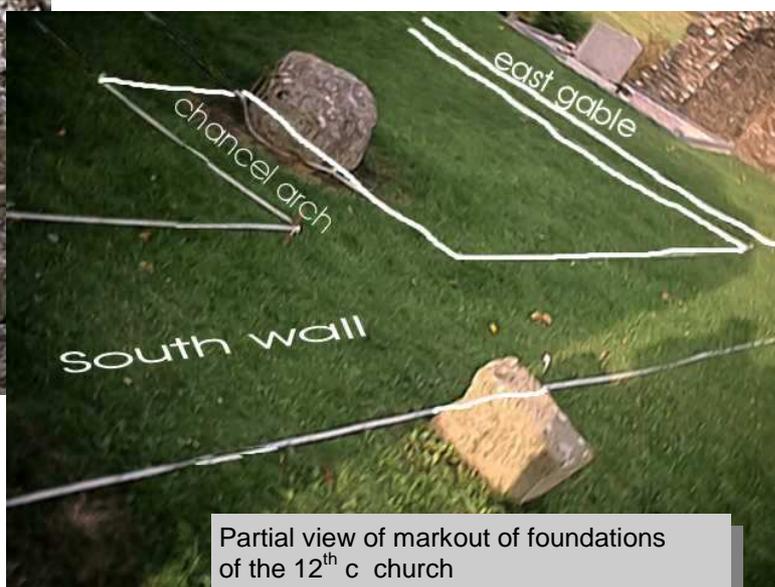
East window of 16th c church



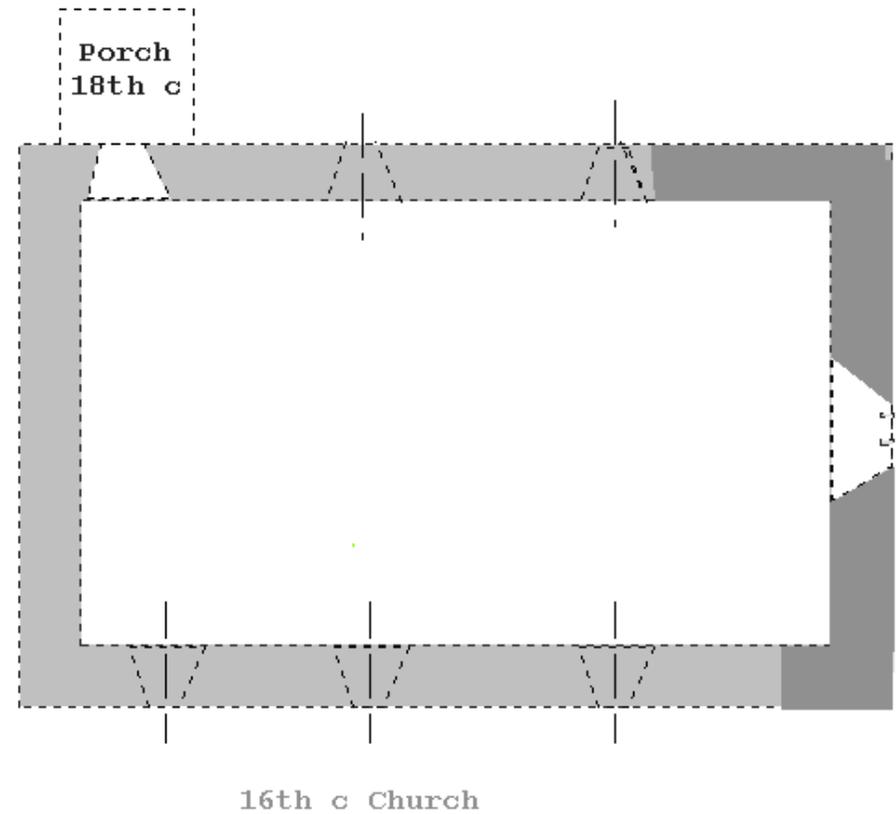
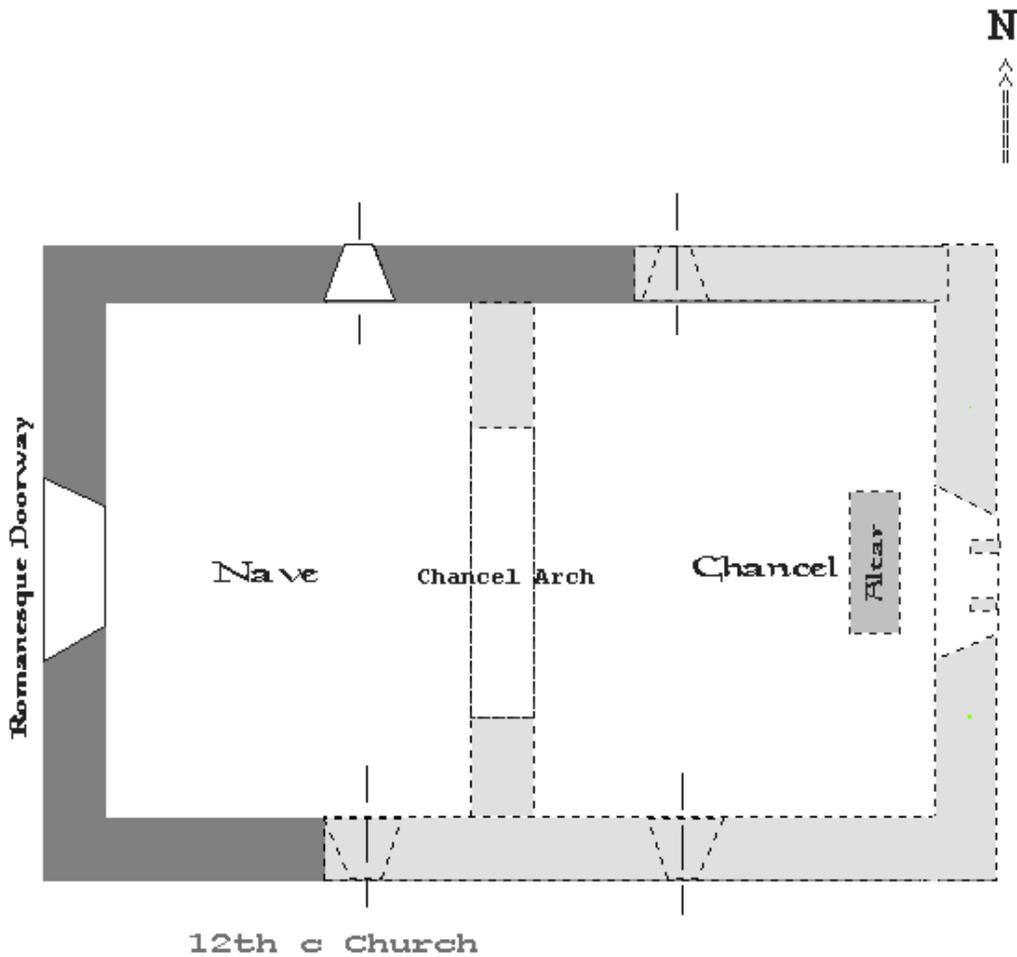
Inside view of surviving window in north wall



Markout of foundations of 16th c C of I church



Partial view of markout of foundations of the 12th c church



Scale 1:100