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ST. PETER'S CHURCH & GRAVEYARD

Portlaoise

CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT

PLAN

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 *Summary*

This conservation and management plan for St. Peter's graveyard in Portlaoise was commissioned by Laois County Council in 2015. It has been prepared to identify the archaeological and historical significance of the graveyard and to set out a strategy for the management and conservation of those physical attributes of the site that contribute to the archaeological heritage of the town. The graveyard is the earliest surviving ecclesiastical site in Portlaoise and a number of notable personalities are reputed to be interred there. The graveyard (LA013-041004) and the ruins of the church (LA013-041002) are recorded archaeological monuments protected under National Monuments Legislation 1930-2004. The site is located to the west of a number of significant sixteenth century buildings that have shaped the identity of the town including the Fort of Maryborough (LA013-041001), the Castle (LA013-041003) and the town defences (LA013-041006). A request from Laois County Council to prepare a management and conservation plan for St. Peter's graveyard has arisen from its recognition as a resource of enormous educational benefit for the understanding of the town's social history and heritage as well as providing a pleasant and safe recreational space within the centre of the town.

1.2 *The Receiving Environment*

The town of Portlaoise is located in relatively flat low-lying terrain beside the River Triogue, a tributary of the River Barrow. The old St. Peter's graveyard is located in the centre of the town between Church Street and Railway Street (Fig 1, ITM 646980, 698468). Access to the site is via an arched gateway onto Railway Street which has a wrought iron double gate (Plates 1 and 2). The graveyard is sub-rectangular in plan and is enclosed mostly by a roughly coursed stone wall of varying height. The east wall and the east side of the south wall survive to a height of between 3-4m (Plate 3); the north wall is considerably lower (c.1m) and is flanked by a row of mixed mature deciduous trees. Mature sycamore trees are also growing on the north side of the entrance gates (Plate 4). The western boundary is formed mostly by the rear wall of a modern building fronting onto Church St. and the west half of the southern boundary is flanked by the rear wall of the old gaol, now the Dunamais Arts Centre (Plates 5-6). The remains of St. Peter's Church are located in the northwest corner of the graveyard in an area that is extremely overgrown with high grass and uncontrolled shrubbery (Plate 7). Ivy growth is well established on the inside of the boundary walls and dense vegetation on top of the east wall is overhanging onto Railway Street. While the central area of the graveyard is quite accessible the ground is rough and uneven, and high grass is covering collapsed headstones and fragmented stone grave surrounds (Plate 8). Laois County Council commissioned *An Foras Forbatha Teoranta* to prepare a conservation report for the graveyard in 1984 and from the description of the condition of the graveyard at that time it is clear that it has deteriorated considerably since that report was compiled (Webb 1984).

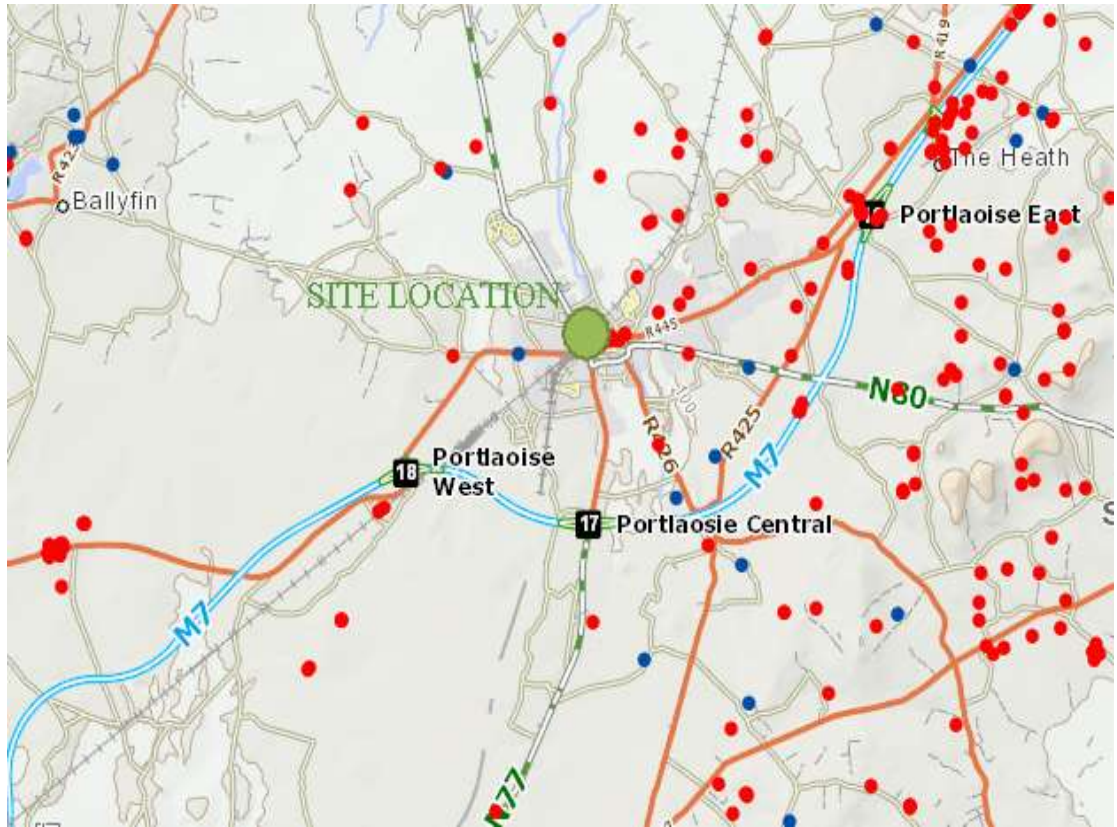


Fig. 1: Site location

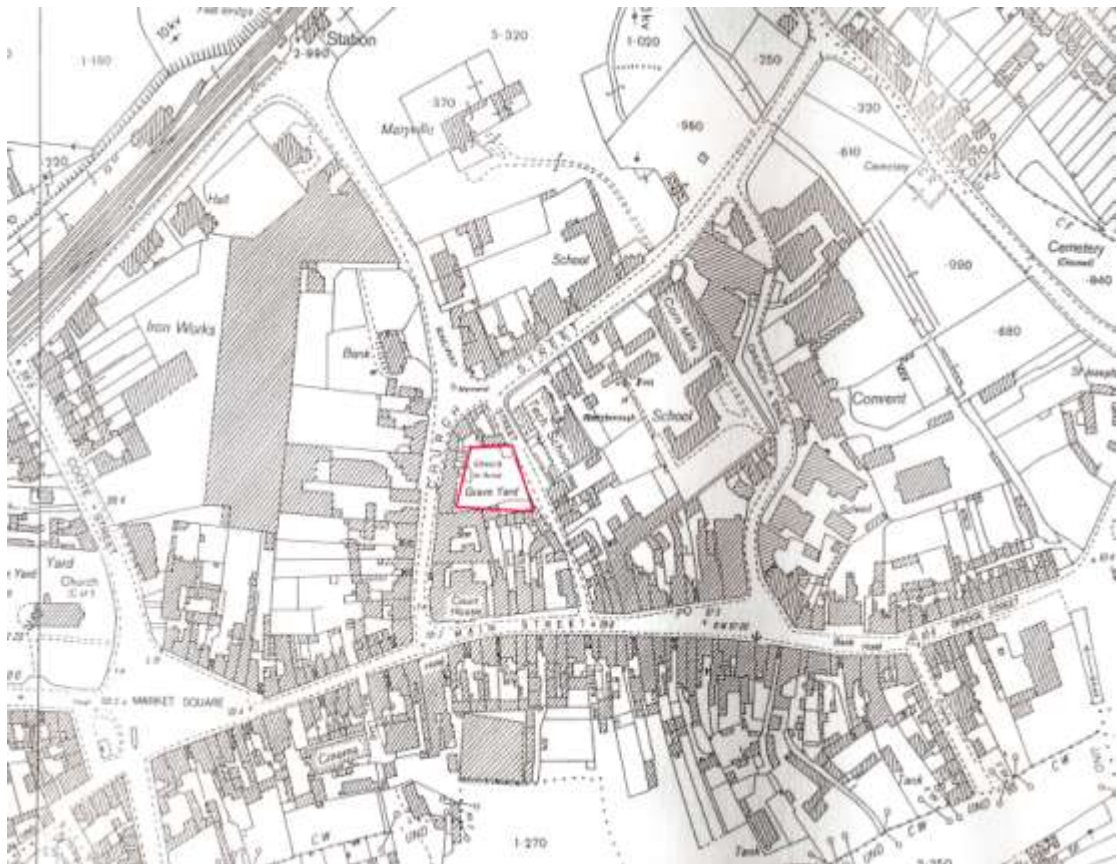


Fig. 2: Site location on 1972 OS street map



Plate 1: East wall of graveyard and entrance gates – looking NNW



Plate 2: Entrance gates



Plate 3: East end of south wall – looking E



Plate 4: Taken from west side of graveyard looking east towards row of mature trees to N of entrance gates



Plate 5: Later buildings forming southwest corner of graveyard



Plate 6: Later building fronting onto Church Street forming southern end of western boundary to graveyard



Plate 7: Church tower at northwest corner of graveyard; northern boundary formed by row of mature deciduous trees and low stone wall – looking WNW



Plate 8: Central area of graveyard taken from northwest corner looking southeast

1.3 *General overview*

A detailed visual site survey has indicated that St. Peter's graveyard and its associated church tower have suffered from a lack of maintenance in recent years and much of its historic fabric is becoming obscured by vegetation. The deterioration of certain sections of the north wall is of concern and is probably being accelerated by uncontrolled tree and other vegetation growth. It would appear that the north wall is also being used to gain access to the graveyard and this is contributing to the deterioration of its fabric. While the graveyard (LA013-041004) and St. Peter's Church (LA013-041002) are now under the care of Laois County Council, both are afforded statutory protection under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 and written permission from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) will be required two months in advance of the commencement of works on a

graveyard. Where a graveyard is in the ownership of local authorities they are legally obliged to give two months written notification to the National Monuments Service in advance of these works. Ministerial consent to carry out conservation works is required, where the graveyard is a national monument. All works should be carried out in consultation with the County Heritage Officer and other suitably qualified personnel and in accordance with best practice, as set out in the guidelines issued by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and available to download on its website, www.archaeology.ie.

A three-phase management plan that it is hoped will involve the local community, Laois County Council and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DEHLG) is outlined in Section 6 of this report. In general, a policy of minimal intervention is recommended in terms of the natural and archaeological heritage of the graveyard. The immediate problem of encroaching vegetation is addressed in the first phase of the plan when a general clean-up involving the local community could be undertaken in consultation with The Heritage Officer in Laois County Council. A suitably qualified archaeologist should also inspect the clean-up works from time to time to ensure that these are being carried out in accordance with the guidelines outlined by the National Monuments Service. The second phase of the conservation plan should involve a full assessment of the condition of the memorials, metalwork and the boundary wall with relevant specialist advice being sought prior to the commencement of any restoration work. A detailed survey of the memorials involving the participation of local volunteers and schoolchildren could also be undertaken at this stage. The final phase of the conservation plan addresses the issues involved with the conservation of the boundary wall and the Church tower and looks at potential options for the future management of the graveyard.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 The conservation and management plan was compiled using the following sources:

- Desk top study
- Field survey

2.1.1 Desk top study

This is a document and cartographic survey utilising a number of sources in order to identify all known archaeological sites and other monuments of historical interest within the area of the graveyard. The principal sources used for identifying the archaeological monuments are listed below.

- Record of Monuments and Places for Co. Laois (RMP)
- Sites and Monuments Record for Co. Laois (SMR)
- County Laois Development Plan 2012-2018 including the Record of Protected Structures
- Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2012-2018
- Laois County Heritage Plan 2002-2006

- Documents and maps in Laois County Library
- National Inventory of Architectural Heritage
- Townland search of the database of Irish Excavation Reports
- 1st, 2nd and 3rd editions of the Ordnance Survey maps

The Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) is a list of archaeological sites known to the National Monuments Service with accompanying RMP maps, based on OS 6" Sheets, which indicate the location of each recorded site. The list is based on the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) files which are kept in the National Monuments Service, DEHLG and are updated on a regular basis. The Sites and Monuments Records (SMR) are lists with accompanying maps and files of all known archaeological sites and monuments mainly dating to before 1700AD. These lists were initially compiled from cartographic, documentary and aerial photographic sources. The Record of Monuments and Places for Co. Laois lists a number of recorded archaeological monuments in the immediate vicinity of St. Peter's Church and graveyard including the Fort of Maryborough (LA013-04101), a castle (LA013-041006) within the fort and the town defences (LA013-041006).

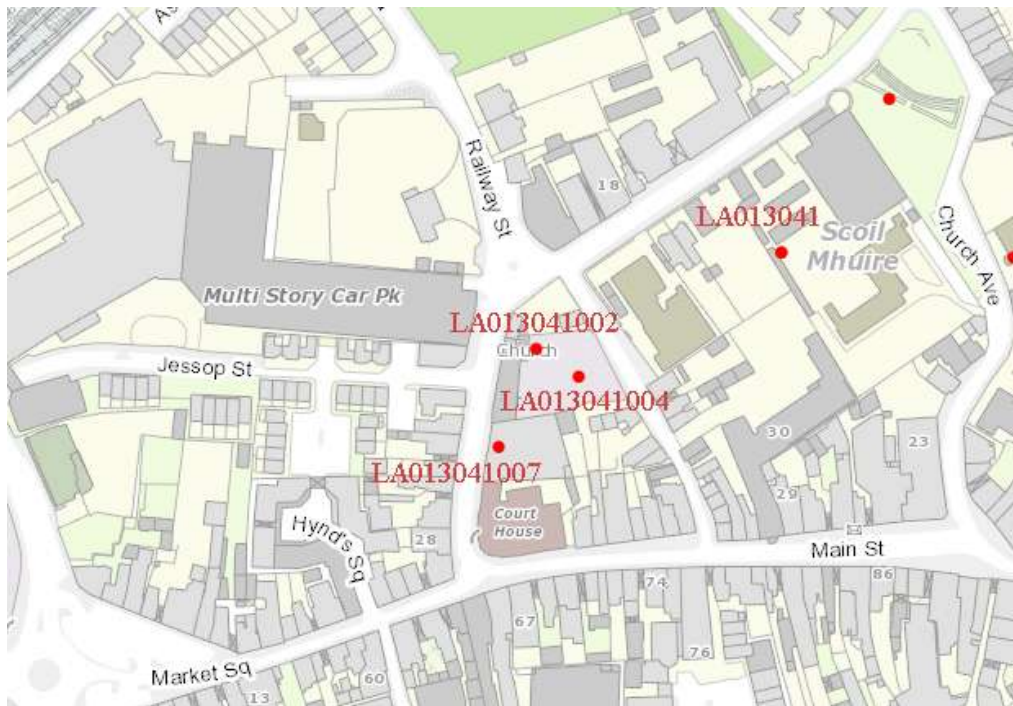


Fig. 3: Recorded archaeological monuments – St. Peter's Church and graveyard, Maryborough Fort and graveyard associated with old gael

County Development Plans are made in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government and are an important source for identifying protected structures. The plans set out each Council's policy for the conservation and enhancement of a county's natural and built environment and lists items of special environmental or archaeological interest. They include a Record of Protected Structures (RPS), which is a list of buildings that may not be altered or demolished without grant of permission under the Local Government (Planning and Development) Acts, 1963-1993. St. Peter's Church and

graveyard (RPS 186a &b), the courthouse (RPS 172) and the old gaol (RPS 173) are listed as Protected Structures in the County Development Plan.

The earliest maps delineating and naming the townlands of Ireland were produced in 1840 by the Ordnance Survey. These were followed by second and third editions in the early part of the twentieth century. St. Peter's graveyard and church are shown on all three editions of the OS maps as well as being indicated on earlier seventeenth and eighteenth century maps of the town.



Fig. 4: 1st Edition OS map (1839) showing St. Peter's Church and graveyard

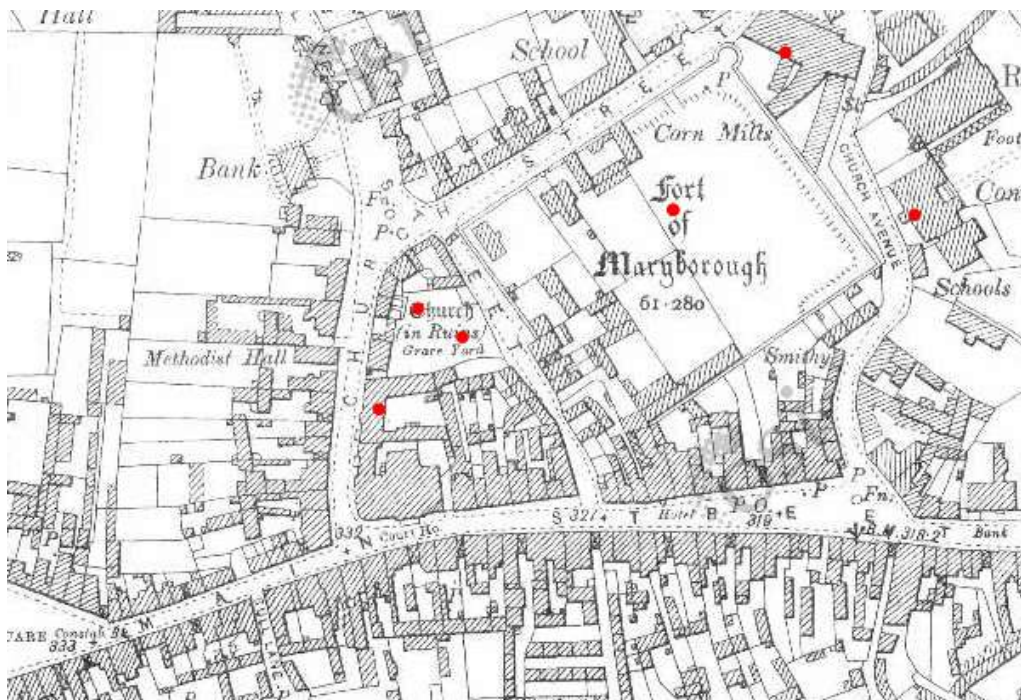


Fig. 5: 2nd Edition OS map (1907) showing St. Peter's Church and graveyard

2.2.2 *Field survey*

The graveyard was inspected on 10 June 2015 in order to assess its overall condition and the monuments and memorial stones within it. The original stone boundary wall survives to the north, east and south and the ruinous Church tower is located in the northwest corner of the graveyard. The east and south walls vary from 3-4m in height and the east wall in particular is heavily ivy-clad with vegetation overhanging onto Railway Street (Plates 9-11). The north wall is a little over 1m in height and is in a relatively poor state of repair through the unrestricted growth of shrubs and sycamore trees and in recent years from being used to provide unauthorised access to the graveyard (Plates 12 and 13). The area around the northwest corner of the graveyard where St. Peter's Church is located is densely overgrown with low trees and self-seeding saplings and the surviving tower is densely ivy-clad (Plates 14-16). Elder, brambles and high grass are almost completely concealing a family grave enclosed by a low stone wall and railing to the immediate south of the tower (Plates 17 and 18).



Plate 9: External E wall of graveyard overgrown with vegetation



Plate 10: Ivy-clad E wall of graveyard overhanging entrance gates



Plate 11: E end of ivy-clad south wall



Plate 12: Ivy-clad north boundary wall with damaged grave surround in foreground



Plate 13: Damage to N wall from mature tree



Plate 14: The Church Tower



Plate 15: Dense vegetation at base of Church Tower



Plate 16: Dense vegetation in NW corner of graveyard close to Church tower



Plate 17: Gate providing access to overgrown enclosed family plot to immediate S of Church Tower



Plate 18: Ivy-clad wall surrounding family plot adjacent to Church Tower

The southwest corner of the graveyard has been somewhat compromised aesthetically by the construction of later buildings including the old gaol which now functions as the Dunamaise Arts Centre (Plate 19). Most of the western boundary is also flanked by modern buildings fronting onto Church Street (Plate 20).



Plate 19: Rear wall of old gaol forming west end of southern boundary to graveyard



Plate 20: Modern building forming western boundary to site

Within the graveyard, there are nineteenth and twentieth century headstones of various design as well as numerous low, un-inscribed memorials which are scattered randomly across the central area of the graveyard (Plates 21-27). Some of the headstones are broken and there are some loose fragments scattered about the graveyard. Most of the low headstones are leaning sideways and a few are lying flat on the ground with the inscription facing downwards. A number of damaged table tombs, chest tombs and one pedestal tomb are also present in the graveyard (Plates 28-32). Many of the low-lying table tombs are obscured by ivy and grass and the covering slabs of some are broken into several fragments. The chest tomb and pedestal tomb in the centre of the graveyard are fine examples of eighteenth century craftsmanship and have remained largely undamaged.



Plate 21: Free-standing memorial in NW corner of graveyard



Plate 22: Eighteenth century free-standing inscribed memorial



Plate 23: Collapsed and upright memorials at E side of graveyard



Plate 24: Family plot in NE corner of graveyard with headstones placed against wall and railing surround



Plate 25: Free standing headstone and deteriorated railing surround in central area of graveyard



Plate 26: Unmarked memorial



Plate 27: Wooden memorial



Plate 28: Damaged and overgrown table tombs in NW corner of graveyard



Plate 29: Overgrown box tombs in NW corner of graveyard close to Church tower



Plate 30: Pedestal tomb



Plate 31: Chest tomb and pedestal tomb close to entrance gates – looking W



Plate 32: Detail on chest tomb

The graveyard is also considerably rich in wrought iron railings; some are reasonably well preserved while others are in bad repair and damaged (Plates 33). Some pieces of railing have been removed from their original location and discarded within the church tower (Plate 34). The entrance gates which are in need of some repair display very fine wrought iron craftsmanship (Plate 35).



Plate 33: Wall and metal railing surrounding family grave



Plate 34: Remnant of metal railing discarded within the Church tower



Plate 35: Decorative motifs on entrance gates

Uncontrolled vegetation growth is of major concern and applies in particular to areas adjacent to the boundary wall. The worst affected areas are in the northwest corner of the graveyard close to the Church tower and along the north and east walls where high grass, uncontrolled shrubbery, brambles, ivy and leaf litter are all combining to conceal collapsed headstones, table tombs and enclosed individual family plots. This unmanaged growth of vegetation will eventually lead to the accelerated deterioration of the fabric of the tower and the enclosing wall, both of which are already in poor condition. While the row of mature trees flanking the north wall contributes to the overall character of the graveyard, they are in need of pruning and management but only following specialist advice from a tree surgeon. In addition, access to the graveyard is currently being gained over the north wall and this is of particular concern as it is being used for waste disposal and unauthorised access. At present, the overgrown vegetation impedes a full assessment of the condition of the memorials, metalwork and boundary wall and a general clean-up would be necessary before a full graveyard survey can be undertaken.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 The History of Portlaoise

Portlaoise has been the principal town of Laois since the formation of Queen's County in 1556. The lands of the O'Mores and O'Conors were granted to Lieutenant Francis Bryan, Marshall of Ireland in the middle of the sixteenth century and he subsequently built two large forts in the county, one in Portlaoise and the other in Dangan, Co. Offaly. The Laois 'Campa' was known as the 'Fort Protector' or 'The Fort of Leix' but was renamed Maryborough in 1556 in honour of Queen Mary (O'Hanlon and O'Leary, 1907, 429-30). It attracted many settlers and by 1560 a small walled town had developed around it (Fig. 6). The town was granted a market in 1567, a borough in 1569 and was incorporated by charter of Elizabeth I in 1570 (Bradley *et al.* 1986, 49; Deigan, 1991). The medieval town consisted of a walled town (LA013-041006) enclosing a large settlement with a plantation castle (LA013-041001) in the centre, a projecting circular tower (LA013-

041003) at the northeast corner, a church (St. Peter's, LA013-041002) and a graveyard (LA013-041004) (Sweetman *et al.* 1995, Fig. 7). The plan also shows a rectangular tower at the southwest corner of the fort, an entrance in the west wall and a range of two-storey buildings in the interior. An external ditch partly filled with water was backfilled at a later period and the owners of properties on Main St. acquired the extra piece of ground adjoining the south wall of the fort (Bradley *et al.*, 1986, 52). Substantial parts of the Fort's defences are intact including the north, east and south walls, a section of the north end of the west wall and the circular tower at the northeast corner survive (*ibid.*).



Fig. 6: Carew's 1563 Map showing Fort of Maryborough (note St. Peter's Church not indicated)

In 1646 the town was obtained by Owen Roe O'Neill but was subsequently taken by Lord Castlehaven (Bradley *et al.* 1986, 49). Although most of the sixteenth century fort and associated buildings still appear on contemporaneous maps, the extent of the town walls at this stage are unclear and were possibly partially dismantled by Cromwellian forces. Historians and

archaeologists suggest that the only extant evidence of the original line of the town's defences is the network of laneways to the south of Main Street (Bradley *et al.* 1986, 53). The destruction of the Fort by Cromwellian forces in 1650 signalled a major change and from then onwards the town functioned primarily as the administrative centre of the county and as a garrison and market centre (Parsons 1982, 3; Feehan 1983, 395).

The layout of the town in the early part of the eighteenth century is shown on a 1721 map and this depicts St. Peter's Church to the west of the Fort (Fig. 7). A manuscript map dated 1766 shows elevations of St. Peter's Church to the west of the Fort and the original Courthouse on the Main Street (Fig. 8). It also indicates the beginnings of the diamond as a westward expansion to the town. The courthouse was built in 1789 and replaced an earlier structure that had been destroyed by fire. The gaol was built around the same time and remained in use until 1830, after which it functioned as an RIC Barracks until the 1860s. It became the public library in the 1950s and was converted into the Dunamais Arts Centre in 1998. The nineteenth century saw a great period of building in the town and one of the earliest developments was the construction of a new Protestant Church in 1803-4 to replace the old St. Peter's Church (Lotts Architecture 2008, 12). A market house, which was later rebuilt as the Town Hall, was constructed in the diamond which had become a public square in the latter half of the nineteenth century (*ibid.*). The infirmary and the infantry barracks were both opened in 1808 and the Presentation Convent in 1824.

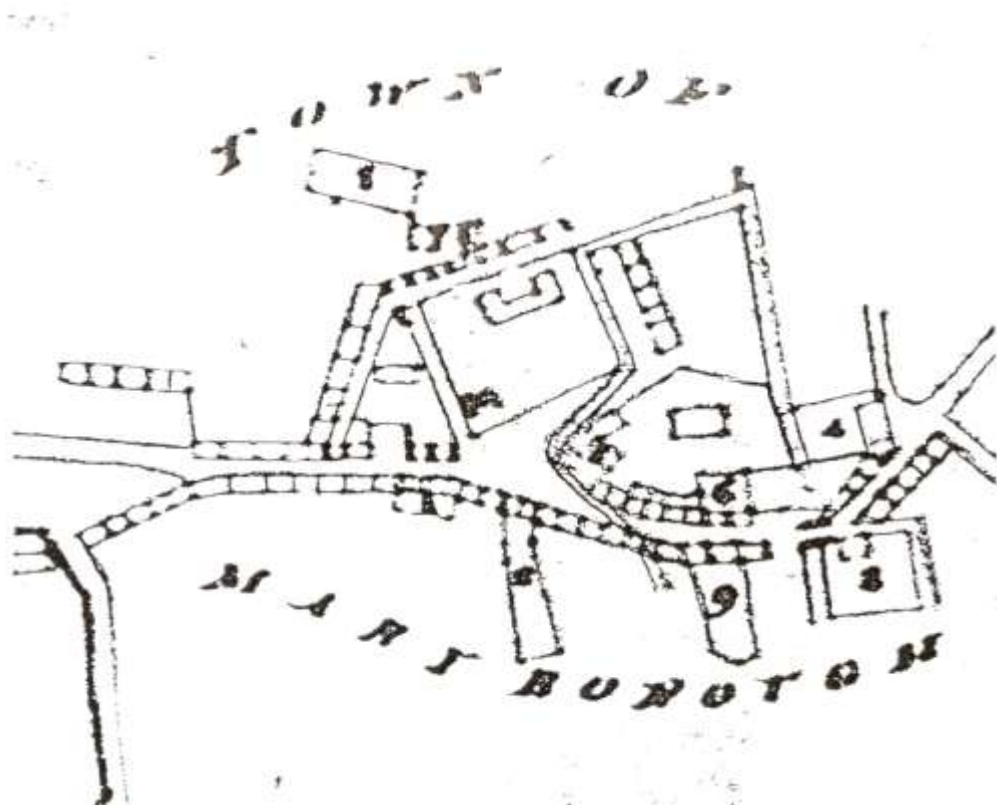


Fig.7: 1721 Map indicating church to west of Fort of Maryborough

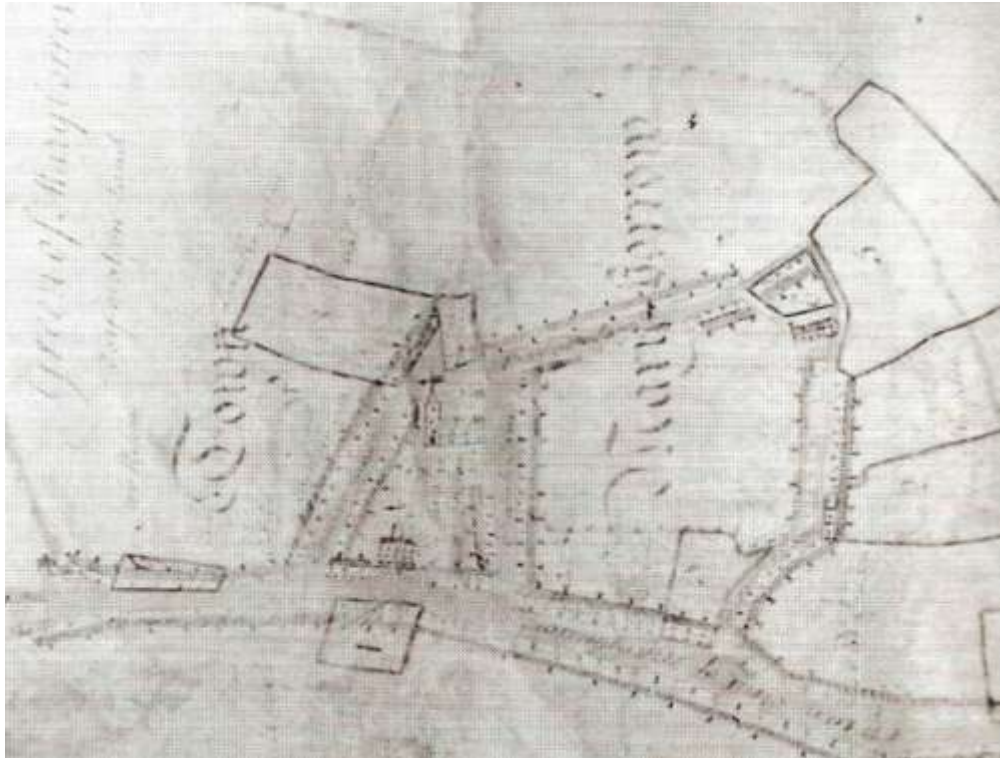


Fig. 8: 1766 Map showing elevations of St. Peter's Church and Courthouse

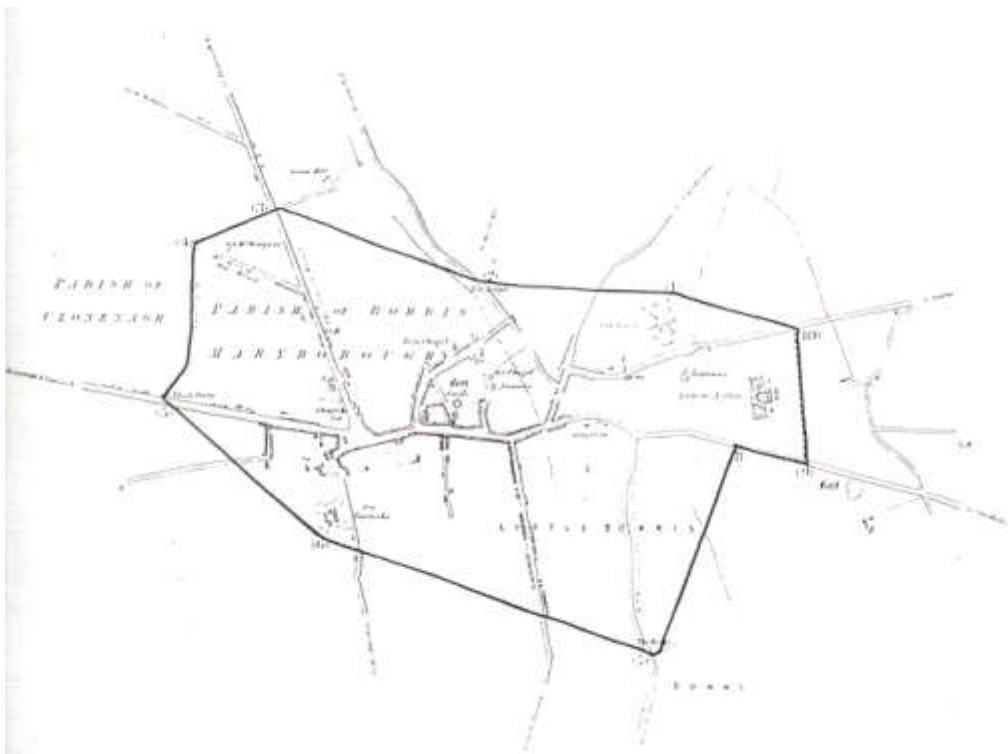


Fig. 9: Sarcom's 1832 map

3.2 St. Peter's Church and graveyard

In the 1556 Plantation of Laois it was ordered that a church be built in every town within three years (O'Hanlon and O'Leary, 1907, vol. 1, 436). The graveyard and church for Portlaoise were located to the immediate west of the plantation fort (LA01304101) although it is unlikely that the church was built at the same time as the fort as it is not shown on the 1563 map of Maryborough. The earliest definitive evidence for a church to the west of the fort is a reference to David Good, vicar of Maryborough in 1598 (Bradley *et al.* 1986, 53). The church and graveyard is depicted on eighteenth and nineteenth century maps of the town (Fig. 10). Little now remains of the church and it consists of just the north wall of the nave and the west tower (Plate 36). Features of the tower include a rectangular ope in the east wall, and a blocked-up ope in the west wall at ground floor level. An external string course indicates the first floor. A flat-topped window is visible in the east wall of the second floor, and there is a round-headed window on each side of the third floor (Sweetman *et al.*, 1995, 86).



Fig. 10: 1839 map showing St. Peter's Church and graveyard to W of Fort

It is said that Cardinal Rinuncini, Papal Legato to the Kilkenny Confederation, said Mass in the church in 1648, assisted by Owen Rua O'Neill (Webb, 1). John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, is also reputed to have preached there in 1798 (Deigan 1991, 37). With the relocation of St. Peter's Church to the west side of Main Street in 1803-4, possibly following the construction of the gaol overlooking the prison and graveyard, the church fell rapidly into disrepair. The belfry tower remains the second oldest building in the town. The original bell of the church was presented by the Earl of Drogheda who lived in O'More Abbey in Monasterevan (ibid.). It was re-sited in the new church in Market Square in 1803.



Plate 36: Church Tower – looking NW

The church's most famous vicar was Thomas Mosse, King William of Orange's chaplain in Ireland, whose son, Bartholemew, founded the Rotunda hospital in Dublin (Parsons 1982, 3). The earliest headstone in the graveyard dates to 1730 and it reads 'Here lyeth the body of Elizabeth Byrn, departed 1730'. Many notable personalities are buried in the graveyard, the most famous being Laois' first martyr, Dr. Robert Lalor, who returned from his studies on the continent in 1576 to become a priest. Shortly after his return, his parents were killed by British forces and Dr. Lalor assumed the bishoprics of Ferns, Kildare and Dublin saying mass in open defiance of the ruling forces. In December 1606 he was captured and imprisoned in Maryborough Fort. In 1607, he was brought for trial and but refused to recognise James 1 as head of the Church. He was found guilty of treason and was hanged and buried beside St. Peter's Church.

The famous Jacobs family are buried on the north side of the graveyard. The family tomb and graves are surrounded by railings and the memorials date from the early nineteenth century. The Jacobs are long associated with the medical history of Portlaoise (Meehan 1928, 144). Dr. John Jacob who died in 1827, founded the New County Infirmary in 1808. A relation, Dr. Arthur Jacob discovered the membrane of the eye in 1891, afterwards called 'Membrana Jacobi'.

Captain Gerard Grant, a notorious Highway Man, and his colleague Miles Whelan from Abbeyleix are buried on the south side of the graveyard. Grant was the last person to be publically hanged in the town of Maryborough (Meehan 1928, 144).

The rear wall of the former gaol, previously the County Library and now the Dunamais Arts Centre, forms the west side of the southern boundary to the graveyard. It is suggested that the construction of the gaol in the late eighteenth century led to the abandonment of the church and graveyard. Archaeological monitoring and testing carried out at the courthouse and old gaol from December 1997 to February 1998 uncovered an extensive cobbled area pre-dating the present courthouse (O'Brien 1999, 62-3) as well as the remains of a graveyard (LA013-041007) in the courtyard of the old gaol. The presence of eighteenth century material finds in the layer into which the burials were placed suggests that the six skeletons exposed represent part of a burial plot attached to the gaol and are not associated with the adjacent graveyard.

4. ECOLOGY

4.1 Summary

Graveyards provide a range of habitats and support a diversity of wildlife for hedgehogs, woodmice, badgers and a variety of birds as well as a range of wildflowers, fungi and lichen. Trees and hedges are important for wildlife providing nesting and roosting sites for birds and food in the form of seeds and fruit. They also support many insects, caterpillars and other smaller living organisms which contribute to the food chain. St. Peter's graveyard, in its current condition, is most likely a haven for a variety of wildlife and the provisions of the Wildlife Act should be taken into consideration when undertaking any clearance work. Managing for wildlife is often a good way of involving local communities in the upkeep of their graveyard and advice should be sought from relevant conservation personnel in Laois County Council on matters relating to the flora and fauna.

Grassland management within the graveyard should be undertaken to benefit wildflowers and insects by cutting either once (June) or twice (June and October) and ensuring that the cuttings are removed and composted. All vegetation management should take place outside the bird-breeding season. The grass should not be cut too close to the ground and it is not necessary to cut to formal lines. Lichens have a role to play in monitoring pollution and in some cases they may also help in estimating the age of a stone feature. Contrary to popular opinion, lichens do not damage inscriptions or the fabric

of walls and their removal should be resisted unless they are covering inscriptions. The use of pesticides, herbicides and other chemicals should be avoided and expert advice should be sought before applying approved herbicides to any plant species. Where shrubs are being removed, the stumps must be left in the ground and the roots not dug up as this may lead to potential serious ground disturbance. The trunks should be cut within 150mm from the ground and treated with an approved herbicide.

In terms of the control of ivy, it is important that a correct balance be achieved. While ivy can be very damaging, particularly on soft thinly bedded sedimentary rocks and buildings, it can be of value to wildlife and can add character to a graveyard if growing on walls that are historically insignificant. The growth of ivy for instance should be encouraged on the walls of the later buildings forming the southwest boundary of the graveyard. Ivy growing on memorials and on the boundary wall should be removed with due care. In the case of well established ivy, a section of the stem should be cut out near root level and an approved herbicide applied to the cut. It should then be allowed to die and rot before being carefully removed from the masonry. To prevent regrowth the root system should be carefully pulled out but only if this can be achieved without major disturbance to the soil. Over-zealous removal of ivy may lead to the dislodgment of stones and immediate repair will then be required to avoid collapse of the wall. Ivy growing on trees should not be removed as it provides a valuable habitat for wildlife.

4.2 Recommendations

The growth of vegetation at St. Peter's graveyard has not been controlled and a number of specific problems have been identified. It is crucial that a correct balance is achieved in terms of the natural heritage and while the graveyard should not be allowed to be overwhelmed with vegetation neither should it be totally manicured. As with the built environment, minimal change is always the best nature conservation policy. The presence of mature trees and small shrubs softens what may otherwise be a harsh environment and adds to the character of the graveyard by creating a varied pattern of light and shade.

- The trees growing adjacent to the north wall are causing some damage to its fabric but there are considerable health and safety issues in terms of pruning large trees, not only to operatives and the public but also to the boundary wall and adjacent headstones. Also, the north wall is shared with private residences and any work here would require the consent of the respective landowners.
- Ash, elder and sycamore saplings are growing in the northwest corner of the graveyard close to the Church tower and are damaging the masonry of the north wall and the tower. Also, there are some obvious self-seeded arrivals and these should be removed as they will eventually accelerate the damage to the tower and the north wall.

5. ASSESSMENT OF CONSERVATION NEEDS

5.1 *Summary*

Neglected site management at St. Peter's graveyard has led to the encroachment of trees and shrubs which are damaging and destabilising the enclosing walls and some memorials. Metal fixtures are rusted and broken, headstones and tombstones are overgrown with ivy while some headstones have collapsed. This section provides practical advice on the basic conservation of the main elements within the graveyard. It should be noted that St. Peter's graveyard and the Church Tower in its northwest corner are recorded archaeological monuments and any proposed works require two months written notice to the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. The priority at all times should be in retaining the historic character of the graveyard while at the same time having a planned programme of maintenance that will both ensure the preservation of the built heritage and provide a pleasant recreational space for the public. The initial clearance of the graveyard must be balanced against supporting its natural heritage by providing a refuge for plant, animal and bird life and as well as giving due consideration to the character of the memorials and their setting.

5.2 *Conservation of stone walling*

A full survey of the boundary wall is an essential first step in the conservation programme. The north wall is damaged in certain locations and this will require some repair work. Professional advice should be sought before any conservation work commences and skilled stonemasons should be employed to carry out the work. The removal of tree saplings, bushes and ivy from the walls should be undertaken with extreme care as the over zealous removal of vegetation may cause further destabilisation and place the wall in immediate need of conservation. The structural repair of the north wall may require digging at its base and there is a possibility of this leading to the disturbance of graves. Any ground disturbance required during the conservation of the north wall should be undertaken carefully and be monitored at all times under licence by a suitably qualified archaeologist. In general, it is recommended that a consulting archaeologist should regularly inspect the site when any repair work on the walls is being considered.

5.3 *Conservation of memorials*

The most common form of memorial in the graveyard is the simple headstone though some quite elaborate chest tombs and a pedestal tomb are also present. The predominant type of material used for memorials is stone although a few simple iron and wooden crosses are also present. Specialist advice should be sought to correctly identify the material from which each memorial is constructed as each material responds differently to the processes of decay. Most lichens, mosses and some small ferns and wildflowers should be left on memorials and walls provided that they do not obscure carved details. The build up of lichen can protect the stone to a certain extent and is in itself an interesting ecological aspect of the graveyard.

While the effects of cleaning headstones may be regarded as beneficial in the short-term, vigorous or inappropriate cleaning will make memorials prone to increased levels of decay. Examples of inappropriate maintenance include inexpertly applied or inappropriate cleaning chemicals and the application of unsuitable paints and surface treatments. Chemical cleaning can have serious adverse effects on gravestones, particularly where porous and permeable sandstone is involved. Cleaning should only be carried out when there are sound conservation reasons for doing so and the process should only be carried out with water and soft brushes possessing natural bristles. Wire brushes should not be used as they can cause severe damage to fragile surfaces and sandblasting should never be considered. Gravestones which are flaking and are at risk of further deterioration should be left untouched. As a general rule, cleaning of headstones is only recommended when there are good conservation reasons for doing so and this will require the assessment of a professional stone conservator.

In general, leaning headstones and memorials should not be re-erected unless they are in danger of falling and causing injury to visitors. Leaning headstones enhance the character of a graveyard and can preserve inscriptions as they are protected from rain and wind. The straightening of headstones disturbs the ground and interferes with burials while chest and table tombs should never be moved or reconstructed without professional advice. Removing grass from around the base of a headstone should never be undertaken as it will undermine the stability of the memorial and may disturb burials. Fragmented stone memorials should not be repaired without first seeking the advice of a professional stone conservator. Memorials should never be repaired with cement-based mortars as these can seriously damage the original headstone. The emphasis should always be on conservation rather than restoration in order to maintain the historic integrity of the graveyard.

Theft and vandalism to memorials should also be added to the list of potential sources of deterioration. Surfaces can be defaced by graffiti and components are often broken off. Entire monuments have also been known to be stolen for resale as ‘architectural salvage’.

5.4 *Conservation of iron work*

In an exposed graveyard environment, rust on railings can only be prevented by ensuring that all iron work is painted. If the rust has already set in, it should not be over-painted before it and any existing paint has been removed by mechanical means such as wire brushing, hand sanding or scraping. On the softer wrought iron, removal can be carried out by flame cleaning, followed by the use of a wire brush. Abrasive cleaning on areas with deep crevices should only be carried out by experienced operatives. The authentic value of the original iron railings should always be considered and every effort should be made to repair and retain rather than replace. Cast iron elements are often brittle and thin and are easily prone to accidental damage. Broken pieces of iron can be welded but this work should only be undertaken by an experienced operative. After repair and painting, the iron work in the graveyard should be regularly inspected and loss of paintwork or rusting locally treated, in line with good conservation practice. A guidance booklet on restoring historic iron

work published by the Architectural Heritage Advisory Unit, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government can be downloaded from the Department's website on www.environ.ie.

6. RECOMMENDED PHASED MANAGEMENT PLAN

6.1 General summary

The best management of a historic graveyard is achieved through co-operation with the various relevant authorities and local interested parties. Such an integrated approach also makes the maximum use of what are often scarce financial resources. Local community groups play a pivotal role in any conservation programme by identifying the major concerns of the community, organising voluntary labour and fund raising.

The following phased plan for St. Peter's graveyard sets out the key issues, problems, and opportunities involved in the conservation of the graveyard. It is a three phased plan outlining priorities for attention in the short, medium and long term. Each stage of the plan can be completed independently, bringing with it hopefully a marked improvement to the graveyard. The plan is also designed to assist the local community in deciding how they can contribute to the conservation of the cemetery. While the proposals are necessary to preserve the cultural and historic significance of the graveyard, they should be seen as a guideline for the conservation and management plan and can be changed accordingly in consultation with the relevant authorities and the local community.

Funding

It is highly advisable to secure adequate funding before embarking on a conservation programme for the graveyard and the Dept. of Environment, Heritage and Local Government will have to be satisfied that sufficient funds are available to complete the programme of works proposed. The graveyard is a recorded archaeological monument and no work should be undertaken without written notification to the National Monuments Service, DEHLG. The amount of funds required will depend on the type of work envisaged and while much of the initial clean-up could be carried out by local volunteers, the expert advice of a conservation archaeologist would need to be sought concerning the conservation of the boundary wall and the Church Tower. The National Monuments Service requires both a pre-conservation and post-conservation archaeological report to be prepared by a suitably qualified archaeologist prior to any work being undertaken on the built environment of a graveyard. Though financial constraints are often cited as reasons for neglect of graveyards, it should not be assumed that large financial resources will be necessary as a policy of minimal intervention is generally recommended in graveyard conservation. Most of the gravestones in St. Peter's graveyard do not require conservation while others need only the minimal preventative treatment such as removal of vegetation and resetting fallen pieces of kerbing. This initial site clearance could be carried out by local volunteers, which in turn would generate local community interest.

No work should be initiated until accurate costs have been established and an appropriate budget allocated to enable the planned repairs to be completed. In the case of the boundary wall, there will be a need to set up consultations with relevant experts, to advise on the extent of the work and on the procedures to be followed. The conservation of the boundary wall and the Church tower is likely to be a costly undertaking and for this reason, it should be deferred to the final phase of the graveyard management plan. The will allow experience to be built up by the voluntary staff during the clean-up of the interior of the graveyard.

Health and Safety

While graveyards are not inherently dangerous places, the potential for injury still remains and an awareness of the risks involved is important. Safety concerns in cemeteries mostly focus on the structural integrity of headstones and the uneven nature of the ground due to subsidence. Poorly preserved walls can also pose a hazard for cemetery workers and visitors. Any potentially dangerous areas should be identified and cordoned-off and repairs can then be carried out safely within these designated areas. A risk assessment should be drafted prior to any work being undertaken and all volunteers should be made aware of the dangers involved.

6.2 *Phase I – Short term urgent issues*

On site

The first phase of the conservation plan for the graveyard should be limited to vegetation clearance in an ecologically sensitive way. Advice should be sought from the Environmental Officer in Laois County Council on the correct procedures to be followed relating to the flora and fauna. As a general rule, the work should commence in the autumn when the flora and fauna in the graveyard will be minimally affected. The 1976 Wildlife Act states that it is an offence to destroy growing vegetation on uncultivated land between 15 April and 31 August in any year.

While some tasks involved in the maintenance of graveyards should be left to professional experts, the initial clean-up phase could be carried out by local volunteers with the advice of the Heritage Officer in Laois County Council. The main aim of the initial maintenance programme is to control vegetation growth while preserving the historic integrity of the graveyard. Maintenance and repair must take into account the various materials and elements that go to make up the graveyard and specialist advice may have to be sought to assess the condition of some of the memorials. Masons and metalworkers will be needed to carry out repair to some broken railings and headstones. A full evaluation of the condition of the memorials and the enclosing wall can only be undertaken when the initial clean-up is completed as many of the monuments are overgrown with vegetation. All works should be carried out in accordance with the guidelines set out in the *Care and Conservation of Graveyards* (OPW 1995) and specific recommendations for St. Peter's graveyard are detailed below.

- Undergrowth should only be removed manually, using scythes, slash-hooks or strimmers.
- No new pathways should be created within the graveyard.
- Trim vegetation around plots, clipping overgrowth near kerbstones by hand to avoid damage
- Designate area for grass cuttings, away from the boundary wall as a build-up of organic material will encourage plant growth
- Small trees and shrubs should be cut to the base and the stump treated with an appropriate herbicide to accelerate the rotting process. The trunk should not be uprooted as it will result in considerable disturbance to nearby burials.
- Existing vegetation growth can mostly be controlled by pruning though extreme care should be taken as falling branches and trees can damage memorials. Overhanging branches of trees growing outside the walls can be removed but care should be taken not to damage the fabric of the wall when doing so.
- Ivy growing around the headstones, tombs and railings should be cut at the base and left to decay before being removed with care. The growth of small bushes and ivy on the boundary walls is of concern as the roots are penetrating between the stones and leading to collapse. Vegetation growth on the east wall should not be removed without seeking expert advice as over-zealous removal of ivy and other shrubs may destabilise the structure, endangering visitors, volunteers and pedestrians on the adjacent footpaths.
- No vegetation should be removed from the walls of the Church Tower, as this is a recorded monument which is currently in a very ruinous condition. In the interests of Health and Safety and the integrity of the monument, it is recommended that fencing be placed around the base of the tower prior to the commencement of the initial clean-up. The tower currently provides a valuable ecological habitat for birds and insects and any works here would impact on this.
- The use of broad-spectrum weedkiller is not recommended as this leads to a noticeable decline in wild plants and wildlife.
- Burning of any vegetation should be avoided.
- Any attempt to realign headstones should be avoided as this will lead to the disturbance of burials as well as adversely affecting the character of the graveyard
- Chest tombs and table tombs should not be moved or reconstructed without professional advice.
- Loose memorial fragments should be collected and placed in an area of the graveyard designated specifically for that purpose.
- The present uneven surface of the ground should not be altered as this adds to the character of the graveyard and many hummocks can mark structural and archaeological features. Small irregularities or hollows should only be filled upwards, if at all.
- Install an appropriately placed litter box in the graveyard.
- The construction of later buildings which now form part of the southern and western boundaries are not sympathetic to the character of the graveyard but visual effect here could be improved with some creative planting of creepers and by not removing the ivy that is already growing profusely on the walls.

- The graveyard is relatively small and it is not considered necessary to lay a pathway as this can lead to the disturbance of underlying features as well as altering the character of the graveyard. If it is intended to construct a pathway, two months written notification of such works must be submitted to the National Monuments Service. Tarmacadam and concrete have a serious negative impact visual impact on the character of a graveyard and it is recommended that their use be avoided.
- Once the graveyard has been cleared it is important to plan for its regular maintenance, otherwise it will revert to dense overgrowth quickly and the hard work of local volunteers will have been wasted.

Off site

Planning

- Future works involving specialist consultations (tree-felling, conservation etc.).
- Liaising with relevant authorities and consultants where necessary (DEHLG, Laois County Council, craftspeople).
- Community use

Meeting with interested groups

- Community involvement should be facilitated at all times and the local community council and historical society should be invited to participate in the maintenance programme. This may require an initial survey of the local residents' views on how they would like to be involved.
- The cemetery is an important record of the social history of Portlaoise and has great potential as an educational resource. The local community council and historical society could assist with the supervising archaeologist in visiting the schools to discuss potential projects which would have an overall benefit for the community. Children should be encouraged to participate in the recording of headstones and to carry out wildlife studies within the graveyard.

6.2 Phase II – Medium term necessary issues

6.2.1 On site

Graveyard survey

The importance of graveyards as repositories of social history is increasingly being recognised by the general public as interest in genealogy and family history grows. Once St. Peter's graveyard has been cleared and before any conservation work is undertaken, a full graveyard survey should be undertaken in consultation with the Heritage Officer and the consulting archaeologist. The minimum recording required is to make a detailed graveyard site plan showing the position of memorials and other structural features of interest. Guidelines on how to carry out this survey are provided by Mytum (2002). A full photographic survey of the gravestones, architectural fragments and enclosing wall should also be made at this stage. Recording forms can be prepared with the involvement of the local community to suit the individual survey. Copies of these are available on the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local

Government's website. Although some specialist advice may be needed for the initial analysis of geology and for surveying the more complex structures, the bulk of the recording can be done by volunteers. The results of the survey will produce information on the archaeology and history of the graveyard, some of which can be used later to display on an information plaque at the entrance to the graveyard for the benefit of visitors. Surveying and recording of headstones could be carried out by local volunteers and schoolchildren while the supervising archaeologist can assist with the recording of the boundary wall.

Maintenance

- The repair and stabilisation of headstones and tombs could be undertaken at this stage following the completion of the survey and having sought professional advice. Headstones should not be straightened or raised if they have collapsed into a recumbent state.
- Dislocated kerbstones should be replaced.
- For the fragmented table tomb slabs, it may be necessary to engage the services of a monumental sculptor to carry out repairs to these memorials.
- Painting and repair of iron railings can be undertaken once professional advice has been obtained.

Off site

- Processing of recorded data from the graveyard survey, perhaps as an IT project of a local secondary school.
- Discussion with local interested groups on the potential to make the cemetery accessible to the local community and the wider public.
- Co-ordinating research efforts effectively by using local libraries and schools, local history and family history groups and wildlife groups.

6.3 *Phase III – Long term desirable issues*

6.3.1 On site

The boundary wall

Recorded monuments are obvious priorities for conservation and the enclosing north wall of St. Peter's Church is in need of repair. Much of the wall is overgrown with a variety of self-seeding trees, bushes and ivy and if left to grow will penetrate the wall and dislodge masonry. Eventually, the entire structure may be held together by vegetation alone and if improperly removed, this may result in the partial or total collapse of the wall. Ivy should be cut at the base and after it has decayed it should be removed by hand taking care to dislodge as little masonry as possible. The major problem with the north wall is that it forms a boundary with existing properties which makes the exterior face inaccessible and difficult to maintain.

The structural repair of the wall may require digging for foundations. As there is a possibility of this leading to the disturbance of graves, any excavations should be undertaken carefully, under the supervision of a licensed archaeologist. A stone mason should be present prior to and during any reconstruction work. If the wall has to be dismantled and rebuilt, it should not

be reduced in height and care should be taken to reuse the stones in a manner that matches the original build. The repair or restoration of the boundary wall should be undertaken only after obtaining professional advice. The wall should be fully recorded and surveyed in advance of the commencement of any conservation work. A full method statement will need to be prepared and consent will be required from the National Monuments Service, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and Laois County Council to ensure that these works are carried out in the appropriate manner.

The Church Tower

Severe vegetation growth around the base of the tower and invasive established ivy on the four walls of the tower are threatening the integrity of the building. The tower is a recorded monument (LA013-041002) and any work both internally and externally will require written approval from the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government. For the short term, it is recommended that the ivy-clad tower be maintained as it now stands due to the costs and the expertise that is required to carry out remedial work on such a building. While established ivy can be destructive, its removal can have serious consequences for the fabric of a structure and should not be undertaken without engaging the services a conservation architect to prepare a programme of conservation. Sycamore saplings are growing on the ground close to the tower and these could be removed before they grow and cause further damage to the tower.

Church towers attract roosting birds and bats and a bat survey may be required before commencing any work in this area of the graveyard.

Ecology

Wildlife could be encouraged by putting up nesting boxes, seeding indigenous flowers for butterflies and other insects etc. This work should be carried out after consultation with the Environmental Officer in Laois County Council.

Off site

- Preparation and subsequent installation of an information board, relating particularly to the history of St. Peter's Church and graveyard. The information board should be designed and placed sensitively so as not to detract from the setting of the graveyard. The board should be well maintained, the glass cleaned regularly and broken glass replaced.
- There is enormous potential to use the cemetery as an educational resource as well as making it accessible to the local community and the wider public.
- Presentation of the information gathered during the graveyard survey to the public through public lectures and a photographic display in the local community centre.

7. GENERAL PRACTICAL GUIDELINES

The following recommendations have been compiled from a number of sources and they provide general guidance aimed at community groups on best practice for graveyard management and conservation.

DO

- Ensure that all necessary consents are obtained before starting work. Seek appropriate professional advice before commencing work. Contact the National Monuments Service, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Wildlife Service, OPW, before the commencement of a scheme. Contact the Conservation/Heritage Office in Laois County Council.
- Plan out the programme of work carefully, beginning with the least difficult tasks.
- Clear the site using only hand strimmers or other hand tools.
- Designate dump sites away from monuments.
- Survey the site, marking in existing buildings and all gravestone memorials.
- Retain healthy trees, and if planting new trees, choose native species.
- Leave all hummocks and other areas of undulating ground undisturbed as they may mark structural and archaeological features.
- Wait until the site is cleared to decide on conservation of structural remains.
- Keep all architectural and sculptural fragments, record their position and report their finding to the DEHLG and the National Museum of Ireland.

DO NOT

- Start without professional advice and a plan to work to.
- Try to demolish or remove any items from the site without approval from Laois County Council and the National Monuments Service, DEHLG.
- Attempt any unlicensed excavation including the removal of rubble from collapsed walls. This is illegal and subject to prosecution.
- Move gravestones unnecessarily or without archaeological advice and supervision
- Use machinery to clear or level the site.

- Burn off vegetation, or use total spectrum weedkillers.
- Uproot ivy, trees, plants or gravestones.
- Pull ivy off buildings or trees.
- Pull ivy off fragile gravestones or composite tombs/memorials.
- Use wire brushes or sandblasters. As a general rule, gravestones should not be cleaned. If, however, cleaning is thought to be essential this should be done only by an experienced conservator. No attempt should be made to realign leaning memorials, unless they are in danger of collapse, as this may disrupt adjacent graves and detract from the character of the graveyard.
- Apply paint to gravestone inscriptions.
- Repoint any masonry without professional advice.
- Use ribbon pointing on old boundary walls or buildings.
- Use graveslabs for paving

8. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

The following webpages contain useful information and guidelines concerning the conservation and management practices of graveyards and related topics:

www.environ.ie An electronic copy of the National Monuments Service booklet on the 'Care and Conservation of graveyards' can be downloaded from the website

www.archaeology.ie Guidance on the care and conservation of graveyards is available to download

www.theheritagecouncil.ie Booklet on the 'Care and Conservation of graveyard' can be downloaded

www.environ.ie Guidance on the repair of wrought and cast ironwork

www.historic-scotland.gov.uk Electronic recording leaflets for graveyards and gravestones can be downloaded free from this website

www.scottishgraveyards.org.uk Advice leaflet on the care and cleaning of memorials

www.ejclark.fsnet.co.uk Useful guide on how to create a graveyard plan

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Appendix 1

National Monuments Legislation

All archaeological sites have the full protection of the National Monuments legislation (Principal Act 1930 and Amendments: 1954 and 1987 and 1994).

In Amendment of Section 2 of the Principal Act in the National Monuments (amendment Act 1987) the definition of a national monument is specified as:

"any artificial or partly artificial building, structure or erection or group of such buildings, structures or erections.

any artificial cave, stone or natural product, whether forming part of the ground, that has been artificially carved, sculptured or worked upon or which (where it does not form part of the place where it is) appears to have been purposely put or arranged in position.

any, or any part of any, prehistoric or ancient -

- (i) tomb, grave or burial deposit, or
- (ii) ritual, industrial or habitation site,

and

any place comprising the remains or traces of any such building, structure or erection, any cave, stone or natural product or any such tomb, grave, burial deposit or ritual, industrial or habitation site..."

Under section 14 of the principal Act (1930):-

"It shall be unlawful to ...

demolish or remove wholly or in part or to disfigure, deface, alter, or in any manner injure or interfere with any such national monument without or otherwise than in accordance with the consent hereinafter mentioned (a licence issued by the Office of Public Works National Monuments Branch),

or

to excavate, dig, plough or otherwise disturb the ground within, around, or in the proximity to any such national monument without or otherwise than in accordance....."

Under Amendment to Section 23 of the Principal act:-

"A person who finds an archaeological object shall, within four days after the finding, make a report of it to a member of the Garda Siochana ... or the Director of the National Museum...."

The latter is of relevance to any finds made during a watching brief.

In the 1994 Amendment of Section 12 of the Principal Act (amendment Act 1994) all the sites and 'places' recorded by the sites and Monuments Record of the Office of Public Works are provided with a new status in law. This new status provides protection to the listed sites which is equivalent to that accorded to 'registered' sites (section 8 - (1), National Monuments amendment Act 1954) as follows:

"The Commissioners shall establish and maintain a record of monuments and places where they believe there are monuments and the record shall be comprised of a list of monuments and such places and a map or maps showing each monument and such place in respect of each county in the State.

The Commissioners shall cause to be exhibited in a prescribed manner in each county the list and map or maps of the county drawn up and publish in a prescribed manner information about when and where the lists and maps may be consulted.

In addition, when the owner or occupier (not being the Commissioners) of a monument or place which has been recorded, or any person proposes to carry out, or to cause or permit the carrying out of, any work at or in relation to such monument or place, he shall give notice in writing of his proposal to carry out the work to the Commissioners and shall not, except in the case of urgent necessity and with the consent of the Commissioners, commence the work for a period of two months after having given the notice."

Section 13 of the same act deals with offences and penalties as follows:

A person who contravenes *section 4 (1), 4 (2), 5 (1), 5 (2), 5 (6), 7 (2), 8 (3), or 12 (3)* of this Act shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a fine not exceeding £1,000 or, at the discretion of the court, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both, or

(*b*) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding £50,000 or, at the discretion of the court, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or to both

