

Quin Friary: Archaeological Excavation

Call for volunteers



- No experience necessary.
- Full instruction given.
- Any age; young and old.
- Come for the day or longer

Bring weather appropriate clothing and a trowel (some WHS 4 1/2 inch archaeology trowels will be available to buy -€20)

September 24th to 30th 2016

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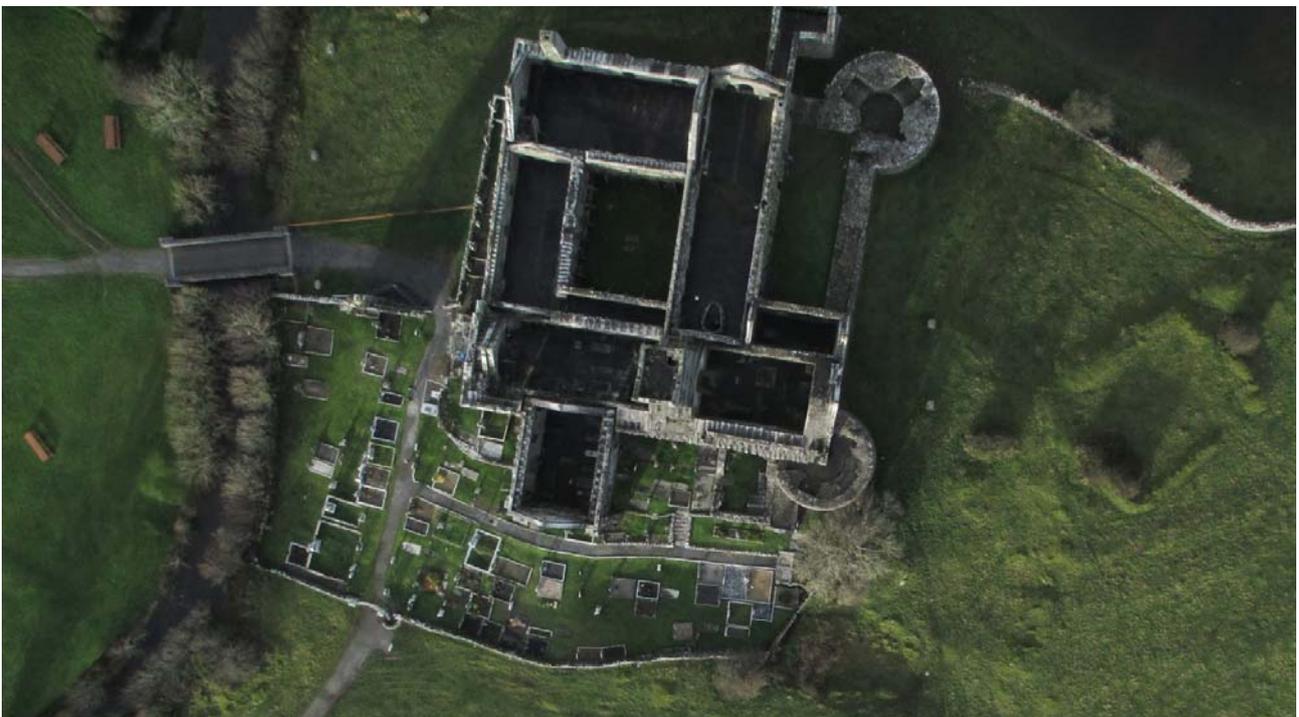
Background

Quin Friary (CL042-027002 and National Monument no. 15) is a well-known visitor destination in Co. Clare. Less well-known perhaps are the earthworks (CL042-027) that are located in the fields to the south, west and east of the medieval friary. These features present as mostly positive and sometimes negative 'humps and bumps'. The majority of these earthworks seemingly represent the remnants of rectangular structures, some larger and some smaller. Other features are indicative of roadways and land boundaries.

The friary is on the site of an earlier monastic or ecclesiastical structure that burned down in 1278. The McNamaras planned to build the friary, not at Quin but at Tulla. The Franciscans knew the importance of the earlier religious sites at Quin that predated De Clare's castle, and persuaded the McNamaras to build here instead.

The castle that now forms a major element of the monument was built soon after and that too was consumed by fire in 1286. The church and friary were founded in 1350. Works started early in the 15th century and a licence was obtained by the McNamaras from Pope Eugene IV in 1433. The Friars at Quin belonged to the new order of the Observance and Quin was the first friary in Ireland to be built especially for them. In 1541 Henry VIII suppressed the friary and leased it to the O'Briens for 21 years. By 1548 the friary was described as 'one great church, now ruinous, covered with slate, and a steeple greatly decayed'. The structure was used as a barracks in the later 16th century. A written record from 1586 may describe the earthworks:

And also saie that the said mcNemarra hath of his own Inherytance in the towne of Qwyne the number of iixx tenements and gardinge plotts wherof nowe many are fallen to ruyne and decay.



The friary was repaired from the 1590s and a short-lived school with 800 students was started in the 1640s by Fr Eugene O'Cahan where philosophy was taught by Friar James Kay. By 1604 it is known that the friars were working on repairing the building and thirteen years later following a visit by the Irish Provisional Fr Donough Mooney it was reported that only the transept was roofed. The friars were back into Quin in 1626 and in 1634 Br Michael O'Leary was making copies of the manuscripts stored at Quin.

The friary was damaged by the Cromwellians in 1651. The buildings were repaired in the 1660s and 1670s but by 1681 the friary was empty. In 1691 the Jacobite cavalry camped in fields around the friary on the way to Limerick following the retreat from Aughrim.

In 1760 the friars were expelled from the friary and in 1880 the buildings and surrounding lands were taken into State care. The monument and lands are now under the care of the Office of Public Works.

A watercolour by Henry Pelham first published in 1791 shows the friary. While some potential earthworks are apparent, no upstanding structures are illustrated to the south of the friary. As always, account should be taken for artistic licence.

Eugene O' Curry visited Quin Friary in 1835 and in a letter noted that 'Quite close to the abbey on the south is a small ruin called *Tig na Saor* [house of the masons]' (Ó Dálaigh 2015). That structure is no longer apparent and almost certainly is now one component of the earthworks.

The Quin earthworks are currently undated and may be associated with any of the construction, occupation or destruction episodes relating to the friary or the town. Some of the earthworks may conceivably predate the friary and castle.

The earthworks at Quin resemble so-called 'Deserted Medieval Villages' of which there are numerous examples in Britain but these are not so well represented in Ireland. Those that have seen archaeological excavation are associated with land reorganisation following war, famine, pestilence, plague, climate change and societal change.

Few deserted village earthworks are known in Ireland and even fewer have been archaeologically examined. There is a pronounced gap in the archaeological knowledge of rural medieval Ireland.

It is therefore proposed, with the consent of the statutory authorities, to increase our understanding of the Quin earthworks by the excavation of two trenches both approximately 1m wide and 5m long. It may be possible to identify burning and destruction from the medieval to post-medieval periods, find evidence of 'soft structures' associated with the friary, locate artefacts and features associated with military occupation and provide evidence of vernacular medieval or post-medieval dwellings.

Trench 1 will be targeted at the rectangular structure to the east of the friary. This structure is known locally as 'the school' and may evidence the late 16th to earlier 17th century school. This structure is marked on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (surveyed 1840) but not on the 2nd edition map (surveyed 1913-18). It is possibly the school mentioned under construction in the Irish Education Enquiry of 1824: *Two grants have been made to Capt. Scott of Knoppogue Castle by Kildare-place Soc. to erect two schools, one at Quin, and the other at Knoppogue, but which schools are now in a state of fowardness, and will be furnished this year.*

Trench 2 will be targeted at one of the rectangular structures to the south of the friary. This large building may be the 'house of the masons'.



Tr1

Tr2