

RAHAN MONASTIC SITE



*'This is what I compare Rahan to,
To a meadow of the plain of heaven'*

A Conservation Plan prepared by
Howley Hayes Architects



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This is an action of the Offaly Heritage Plan 2007–2011, funded by Offaly County Council, the Heritage Council, and Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society.

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An Chomhairle Oidhreachta
The Heritage Council



'This is what I compare Rahan to,
To a meadow of the plain of heaven'¹





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PLATE 1. Aerial photograph of Rahon monastery showing monastic boundary with church and graveyard in centre. Small church can be seen at top right-hand corner of photograph with the Clodiagh River forming the northern boundary. Low grass-covered earthworks can be seen immediately north of Rahon Church. The linear features visible inside the enclosure are associated with land drainage of the 19th century. (Loughlin Hooper).

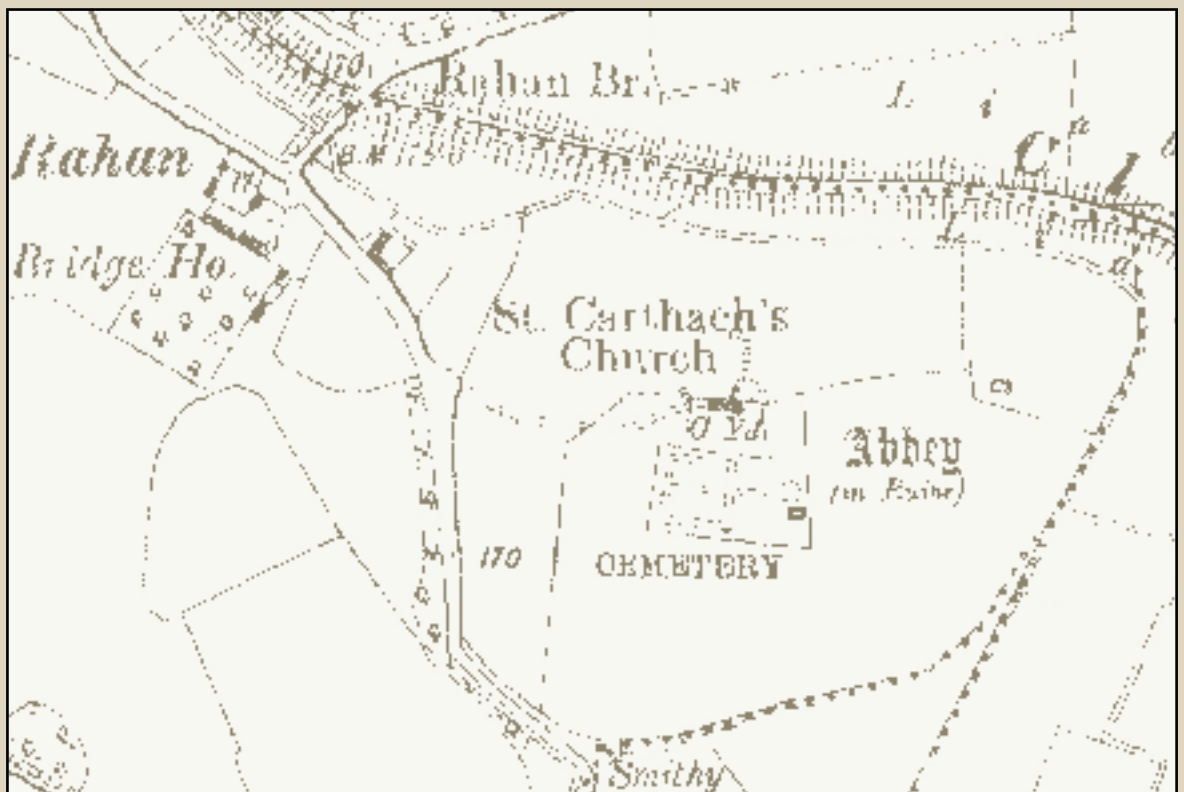


FIGURE 1. Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch map (1912).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Members of the stakeholders group including — Reverend Gerald Field, Reverend Seamus Dunican, local landowner Sean Grennan, the Office of Public Works, Offaly County Council, the local community development group, and the Island Rahan Development Association (IRDA).

Con Manning, senior archaeologist in the National Monuments Service and Jacqueline Donnelly of the Architectural Heritage Advisory Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

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Professor Roger Stalley, Dr Rachel Moss of Trinity College Dublin and Jason Ellis, stone conservator, for their insightful and helpful comments on the Conservation Plan.

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Gary Miley for overseeing the first phase of conservation works on site, which were completed in 2005.

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Connie Scanlon and James Fraher of Bogfire for graphic design and print production.

Photographs included in the text are by: James Fraher, Kevin O'Dwyer, Caimin O'Brien, Labhaoise McKenna, Loughlin Hooper and Howley Hayes Architects.

The aerial photograph of Rahan was kindly given to us by Loughlin Hooper.

All drawings were prepared by Howley Hayes Architects based on stone-by-stone line drawings carried out using rectified photography. Thanks to Catherine O'Brien for her help in preparing the line drawings and location map for publication.



COVER. Side view of capital of chancel arch from Romanesque church (photograph by James Fraher).

INSIDE FRONT COVER. Inner face of Romanesque round window showing chevrons, beading and carved heads.

TITLE PAGE. View of Romanesque round window.

COPYRIGHT PAGE: Photograph of animal interlace on southern terminal of quatrefoil opening on Romanesque round window.

RECTO TO COPYRIGHT PAGE. Landscape setting of Rahan Church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS. West doorway arch of the small church.

BACK COVER. View of Rahan Church and graveyard (photograph by Kevin O'Dwyer).

FOREWORD

For many of us Offaly has a strong association with its monastic past. We are proud of Clonmacnoise, a proposed World Heritage Site, and Durrow, which are both now in the care of the Office of Public Works. We look forward to 2009, when Durrow Visitor Centre will be open to the public. However, there are many other monastic sites in the county which have fascinating pasts but are not as well known. These have been featured in the recent publication *Stories from a Sacred Landscape, Croghan Hill to Clonmacnoise* by Caimin O'Brien, published by Offaly County Council in 2006. Offaly County Council is keen to do whatever it can to support the conservation and presentation of these monastic sites. Over the past six years, conservation work has been ongoing at the wonderful site of Lemanaghan, which is partly owned by the County Council and partly by a number of private landowners, with strong local community involvement. A Conservation Plan for this project has not only helped to understand the site, but also to prioritise work to be done and to assist with funding applications to complete this work. This process was also thought to be appropriate for the Rahan Monastic Site, which has even more of a mix of ownerships and where the Church of Ireland were just beginning the conservation work at the Church of St Carthage. This Plan highlights the key roles of the various owners: The remarkable state of conservation at Rahan is due to the role these owners have played over the generations.

We have been very fortunate with the team who have worked on this Conservation Plan. Howley Hayes Architects have considerable experience in working with historic buildings and compiling conservation plans and they have shown great commitment to the work they are completing for the Church of St Carthage on behalf of the Church of Ireland. This site is a perfect example of where archaeology and architecture meet and where it is essential that there is a clear understanding of the evolution of the site. Therefore we very much appreciate the involvement of Caimin O'Brien, archaeologist with the National Monuments Service, who was involved in the compilation of the plan. Conservation Plans can be factual and analytical by definition, however the involvement of Bogfire Design has made this a document which is appealing to the general public. Our thanks to the Heritage Council who provided funding for the Conservation Plan process and for the printing of it. Thanks are also due to the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society who have contributed to the printing of this publication.

I hope that this Plan assists with the understanding of this fascinating site, and the fundraising for the current works at the Church of St Carthage. It is also our wish that it serves as a record for the condition and understanding of the site in 2008 for future generations.

Eamon Dooley, Cathaoirleach, Offaly County Council



PLATE 2.
Northwest
face of Rahan
Church prior to
conservation.

PREFACE

The completion of this conservation plan for the Church of St Carthage and its well-preserved, early monastic setting fulfils one of the aims of the Offaly Heritage Plan 2007-2011. It was commissioned by Offaly County Council and carried out by Howley Hayes Architects in association with Caimin O'Brien, archaeologist with the Archaeological Survey of Ireland, which is a section of the National Monuments Service. The objective of the Heritage Plan is to assess the cultural significance of the place, to identify threats to this significance and to formulate policies to address these threats to ensure the successful preservation and long-term management of this important cultural landscape. The removal of cement render coatings during a programme of conservation works undertaken in 2006 has uncovered the ancient fabric of the church enabling a level of interpretation not possible for the past fifty years. Stone-by-stone line drawings have been made of the interior and exterior of the Church of St Carthage, and analysis of these together with careful site inspection have provided a better understanding of the chronological development of the building. The most significant discovery confirms the analysis and phasing of the building undertaken by Harold Leask in 1938. Archival research has uncovered extensive records of the early twentieth century restoration by William Edward Martin, revealing much about the ancient history of the church. The setting of the Church of St Carthage is of considerable cultural significance, being the site of the original enclosure to the Monastery of Rahan founded in the fifth century. This survives in a reasonably intact state and includes two other medieval ruins together with the original earthen ramparts. Currently, most of this land is sensitively farmed as low intensive pasture, which does not disturb the underlying sub-surface archaeology. Over the last two years, the area inside the monastic enclosure has been the subject of a comprehensive programme of geophysical surveying, undertaken by Dr Paul Gibson, of the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. This survey has identified the extensive remains of sub-surface archaeology, including a possible sub-rectangular inner enclosure around the church and graveyard and a possible square building to the southeast of the old graveyard. The Church of St Carthage remains in regular use in the summer months by the Church of Ireland congregation, and over the past two years ecumenical services have been held for the wider local community. Two graveyards stand to the south of the church, the older of which is owned by the Church of Ireland and no longer used for burials. The more recent graveyard owned by the Catholic Church is still in use. The different land ownership and uses of the site are numerous and complex and require careful consideration to accommodate the primary needs of the various stakeholders, while protecting the surviving historic fabric and archaeology of this important cultural landscape.

Amanda Pedlow, Heritage Officer, Offaly County Council



PLATE 3.
Northwest
view of Rahan
Church during
conservation.



FIGURE 2. Location map showing Rahan monastery in County Offaly (Drawing by Catherine O'Brien).



PLATE 4. Top: Cherub carved on memorial to John Dunne, 1848.
Middle: Cherub carved on memorial to John Heaton, 1807.
Bottom: Cherub carved on memorial to Martin Hand, 1787.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 THE SITE

The monastic site of Rahan lies in flat pasture land on the south bank of the Clodiagh River, seven miles west of Tullamore, on the road from Rahan to Killina. The Grand Canal passes to the south of the site. In the fifth century Camelacus was appointed by Patrick to establish a monastery at Rahan, later re-founded by St Carthage in the sixth century. The monastery is contained within a large D-shaped enclosure with the Clodiagh River forming the straight section on its northern side. The monastic enclosure originally consisted of two earthen banks with an intervening fosse as described by local antiquarian Thomas Stanley in 1870.² Today the outer enclosing element survives largely intact as an earthen bank with an external fosse or ditch, the form of which is still preserved in the field boundaries to the east, south and west of the churches. The inner bank and intervening fosse have been degraded over the centuries but are still visible as low earth works to the east of the smaller church. The outline of a section of levelled enclosure can still be seen in the field to the south-east of the Bridge House. It is possible that the river may at one time have been diverted to supply water to the fosse, to form a moat around the early Christian monastery of Rahan. There are two churches inside the enclosure, of which the largest, dedicated to St Carthage, is still used as a place of worship by the Church of Ireland community. The second church survives as a ruin in the care of the Office of Public Works. This ruinous building is located to the east of the Church of St Carthage. A smaller ruin, also in the care of the OPW, contained a sheela-na-gig and may have been a tower house, stands to the south of the Church of St Carthage in the graveyard used by the local Catholic community. This latter structure is shown on some maps as a church, but its size, ground plan and barrel-vaulted roof suggests that it was a tower house rather than a place of worship. The levelled wall footings of a possible third church were described by Father Carthage, a Cistercian monk from Mount Melleray Abbey, Co. Waterford as being located close to the small church at Rahan.³ An ancient graveyard, no longer in use, lies to the south and east of the Church of St Carthage.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

In 1988 Rahan monastic site was listed in the *Sites and Monuments Record of County Offaly* published by the Office of Public Works. In 1995 this site was given statutory protection under Section 12 of the National Monument (Amendment) Act 1994 when the Record of Monuments and Places for County Offaly was published by the OPW. In 2002, having identified the importance of its monastic heritage, Offaly Heritage Forum commissioned a report on the care and condition of all the early monastic sites contained within the county. This was completed by Caimin O'Brien in 2003 under the title *Condition and Management Report on the Early Christian Monasteries of County Offaly*. The report highlighted twenty-three significant monastic sites, dating from the Early Christian period, that had been established in the county. Rahan had already been well documented previously, but the report highlighted its importance and the need for further action. In the same year, the Church of Ireland requested assistance from the Heritage Council, and they commissioned Desmond Fitzgerald Architects to prepare a conservation report. Subsequently, a conservation plan was prepared for the monastic site at Lemanaghan, which has proved to be a valuable tool in the management and conservation of this important site. In recognising the constructive role a conservation plan can play in managing a site of different and sometimes complex ownerships and interests, it was considered appropriate to commission a conservation plan to provide similar guidance to the various guardians of the monastic site at Rahan.



FIGURE 3.
Ordnance
Survey Map
6-inch map
(1838).

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This Conservation Plan is drawn up in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the Australian *Burra Charter* published by ICOMOS in 1999, which provides a model for the conservation and management of places of cultural significance (see Appendix 1). The charter sets out standards of practice for those with responsibility for the guardianship of such places. This may include owners, managers and custodians, consultants, statutory advisors, decision makers and contractors. Places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection; to the community; the landscape; to the past and to lived experiences.

A fundamental principle of the *Burra Charter* is that places of cultural significance should be conserved for the benefits of present and future generations. It advocates a cautious approach to change; to do as much as necessary to care for a place and make it useable and understandable, but otherwise to change it as little as possible so that its cultural significance might best be retained.

The general aims of a Conservation Plan are to:

- Provide an accurate historical record of the place
- Understand the significance of the place
- Identify any threats to the significance
- Formulate policies for the future preservation and management of the place
- Recommend proposals for conservation works
- Identify potential funding sources, particularly for grant aid
- Provide accurate documentation of the site to facilitate future decision making

1.4 PROJECT TEAM

This conservation plan was prepared by Howley Hayes Architects, in association with Caimin O'Brien, archaeologist with the Archaeological Survey of Ireland a section of the National Monuments Service. Fiona Devery of the Offaly Heritage Forum provided information on the natural heritage of the site. Kate Crane and Aubrey Fennell, arboricultural consultants provided a report on the graveyard yew and other trees at Rahan. Dr Paul Gibson, Environmental Geophysics Unit, Department of Geography, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, Co. Kildare surveyed the site in 2006 and 2007. Master mason Rory Young for his stone conservation report.

1.5 STAKEHOLDERS

The stakeholders are represented by the following individuals:

Rev Gerard Field	Rector of the Church of Ireland Church of St Carthage
Rev Seamus Dunican	P.P. Catholic Church (responsible for the modern graveyard)
Tom Finnerty	Island Rahan Development Association (IRDA)
Sean Grennan	Landowner and farmer
Ana Dolan	Office of Public Works (OPW)
Amanda Pedlow	Heritage Officer, Offaly County Council
Con Manning	National Monuments Service, Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)
Jacqueline Donnelly	Architectural Heritage Advisory Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG)

1.6 SOURCES

In preparation of this plan, extensive archaeological information was gathered and studied. Detailed drawings of the buildings including stone-by-stone elevation drawings, colour coded ground plans and section drawings of the Church of St Carthage were carried out by Howley Hayes Architects. An integrated geophysical study of the area inside the monastic enclosure at Rahan was carried out in 2006 and 2007 by Dr Paul Gibson.

1.7 CONSULTATION

Each of the stakeholders was consulted during the preparation of the plan, together with the local community through the forum of a public meeting, which also contributed to an improved understanding of the site. A public consultation meeting was held on the 14th of May 2007 after an ecumenical service held in the Church of St Carthage to commemorate the feastday of St Carthage.

1.8 PLACENAMES

The townland of Rahan Demesne, recorded in Irish as *Raithean* in the Ordnance Survey Field Name Books written in 1837 means 'a ferny place'. From the eighth until the thirteenth century, Rahan was known in the Annals of Ireland as Raithin Uí Suanaigh meaning the *Ferny Land of the O'Swanys*.⁴ The O'Swanys were a family who were successors to St Carthage as rulers of the monastery of Rahan from the eighth century onwards. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth century the spelling of Rahan appears as *Raghan* on several maps of the region. In 1838-40 with the surveying and publication of the Ordnance Survey six-inch map the current spelling of Rahan has been used for this area up until the present day. In his 1870 *The Origin and History of Irish Names of Places*, P.W. Joyce supports this interpretation.⁵

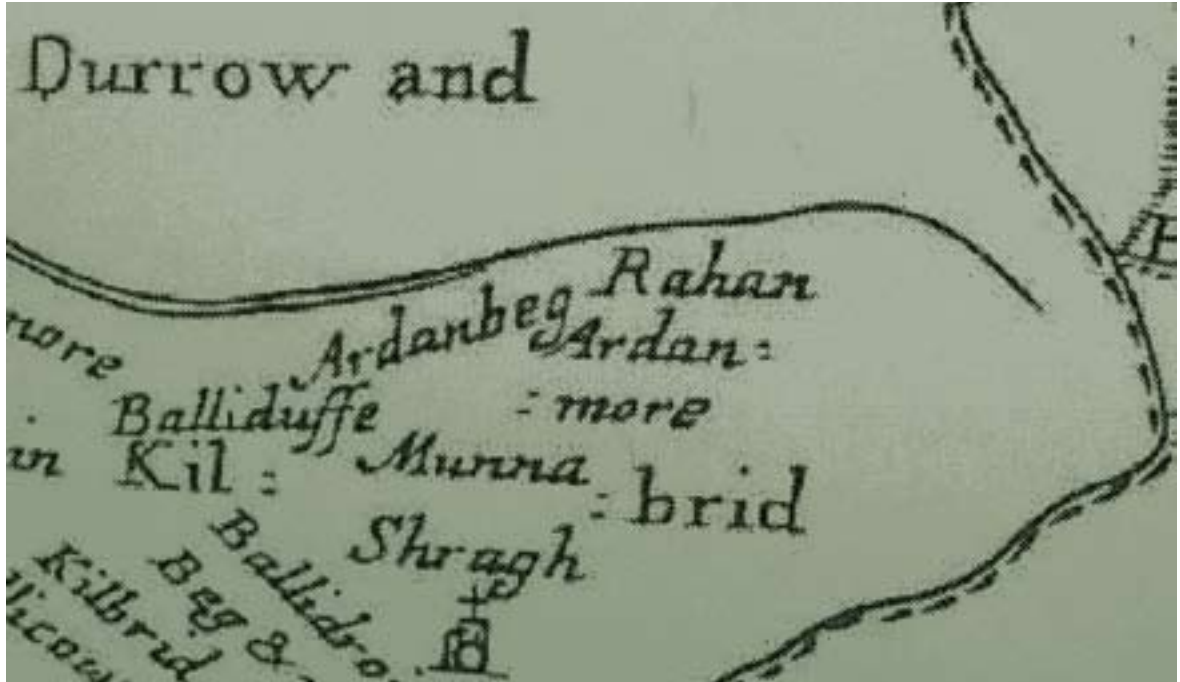


FIGURE 4. William Petty's map *Hiberniae Delineatio* showing Rahan in 1685.



FIGURE 5. Map by Charles Vallancey showing Rahan in 1770.



FIGURE 6. William Larkin's map of King's County 1809.

1.9 ARCHITECTURAL PLANS

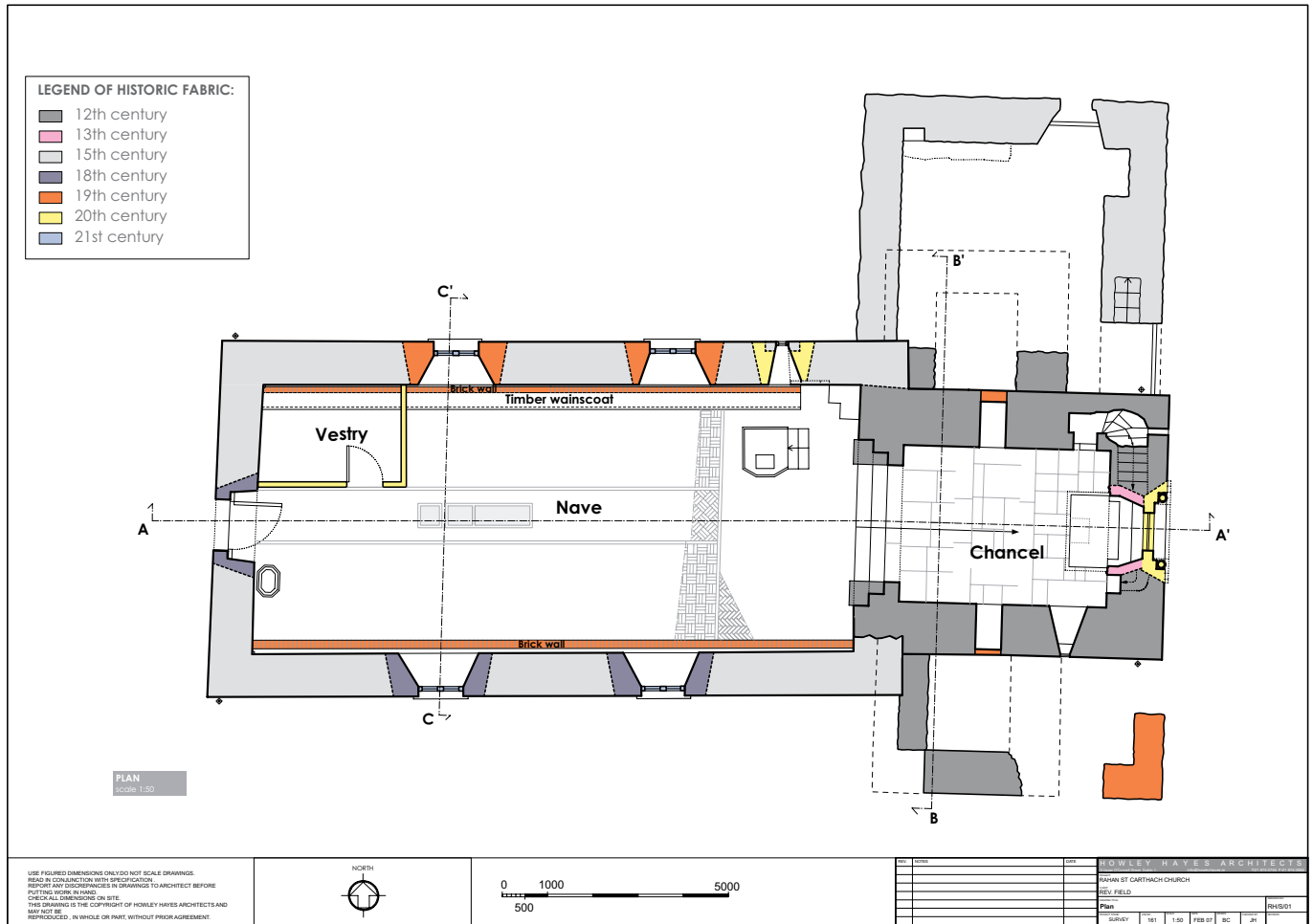
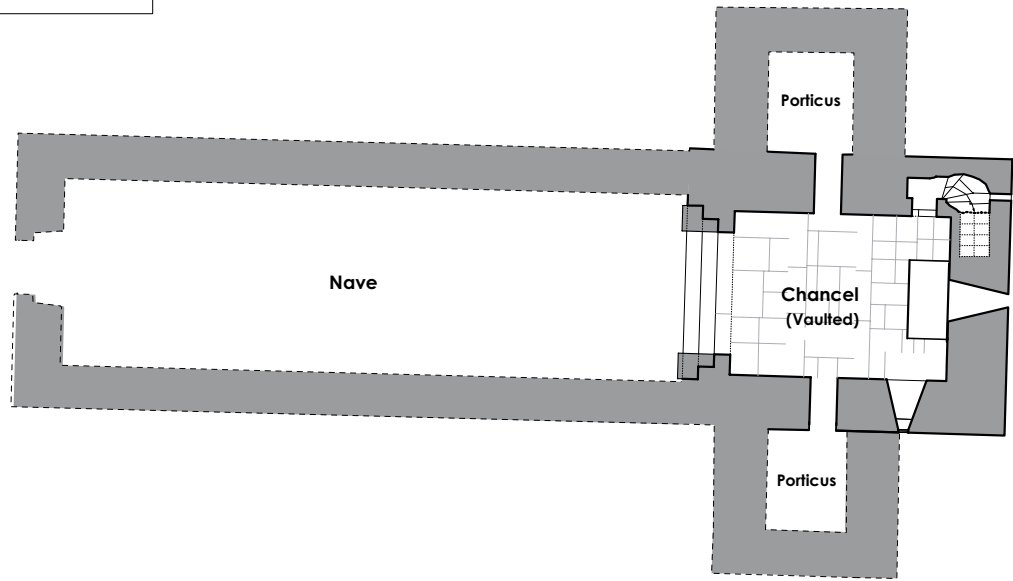


FIGURE 7. Ground plan of Rahan Church showing all the building phases.

LEGEND OF HISTORIC FABRIC:

■	12th century
□	13th century
□	15th century
□	18th century
□	19th century
□	20th century
□	21st century

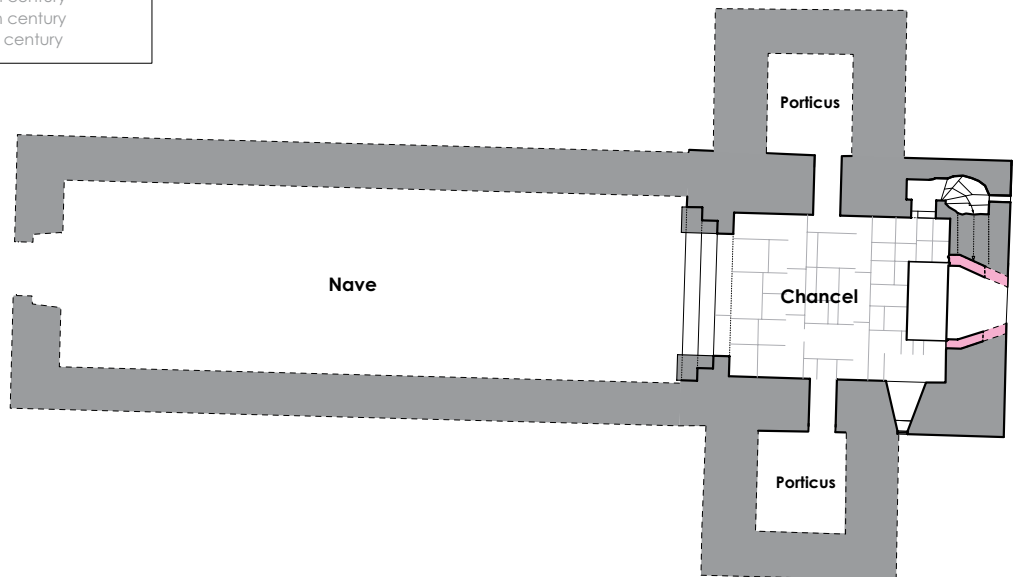


8A



LEGEND OF HISTORIC FABRIC:

■	12th century
■	13th century
□	15th century
□	18th century
□	19th century
□	20th century
□	21st century



8B

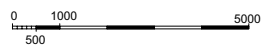
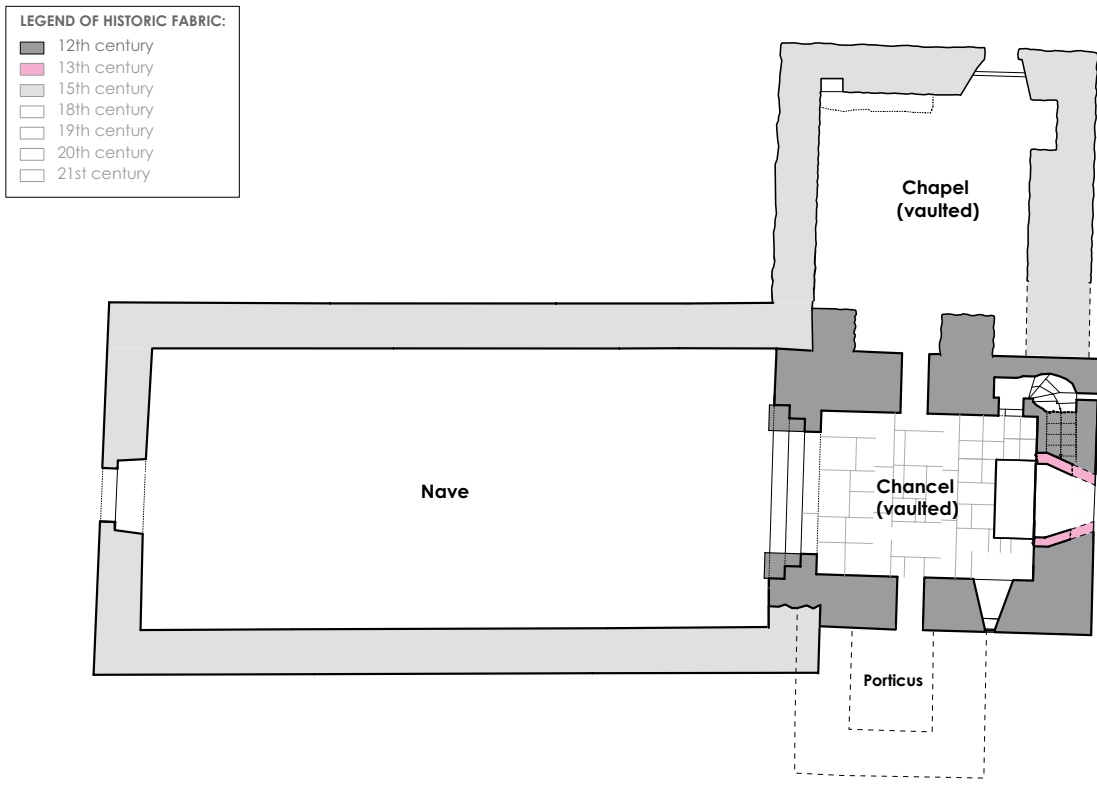
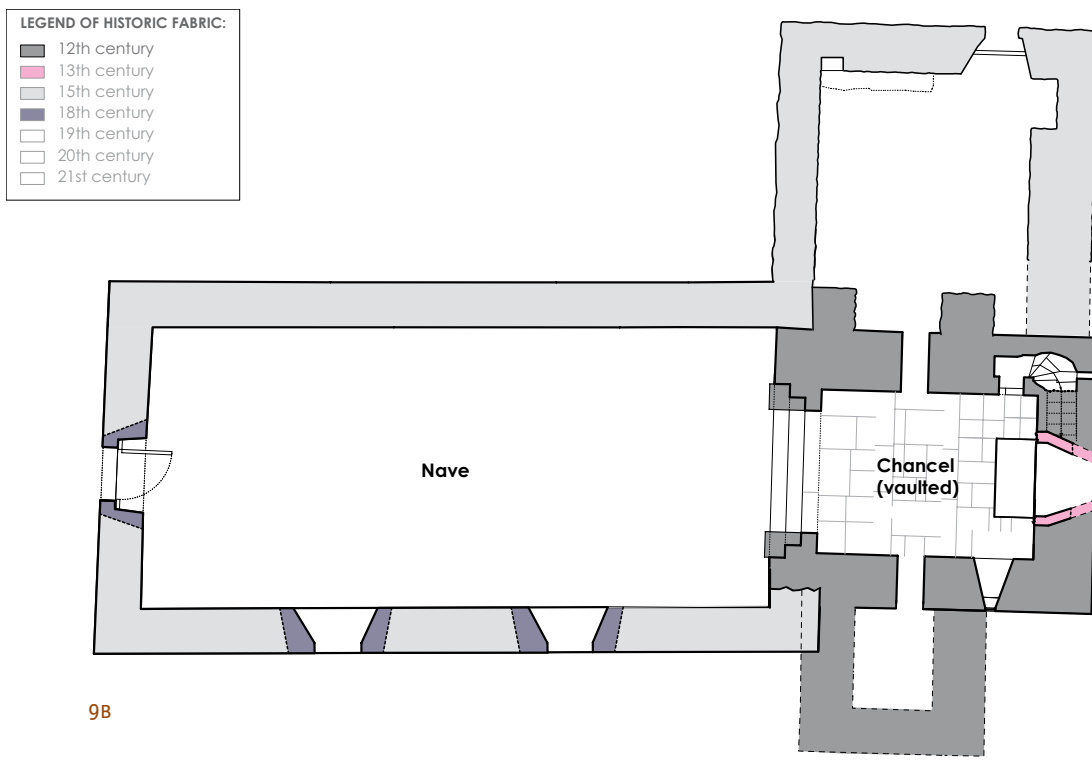
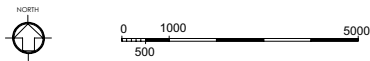


FIGURE 8A. Plan of Rahan Church in the late 12th century.
FIGURE 8B. Plan of Rahan Church in the early 13th century.



9A



9B

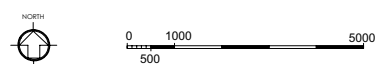


FIGURE 9A. Suggested plan of Rahan Church in the 15th century.

FIGURE 9B. Plan of Rahan Church in the 18th century.

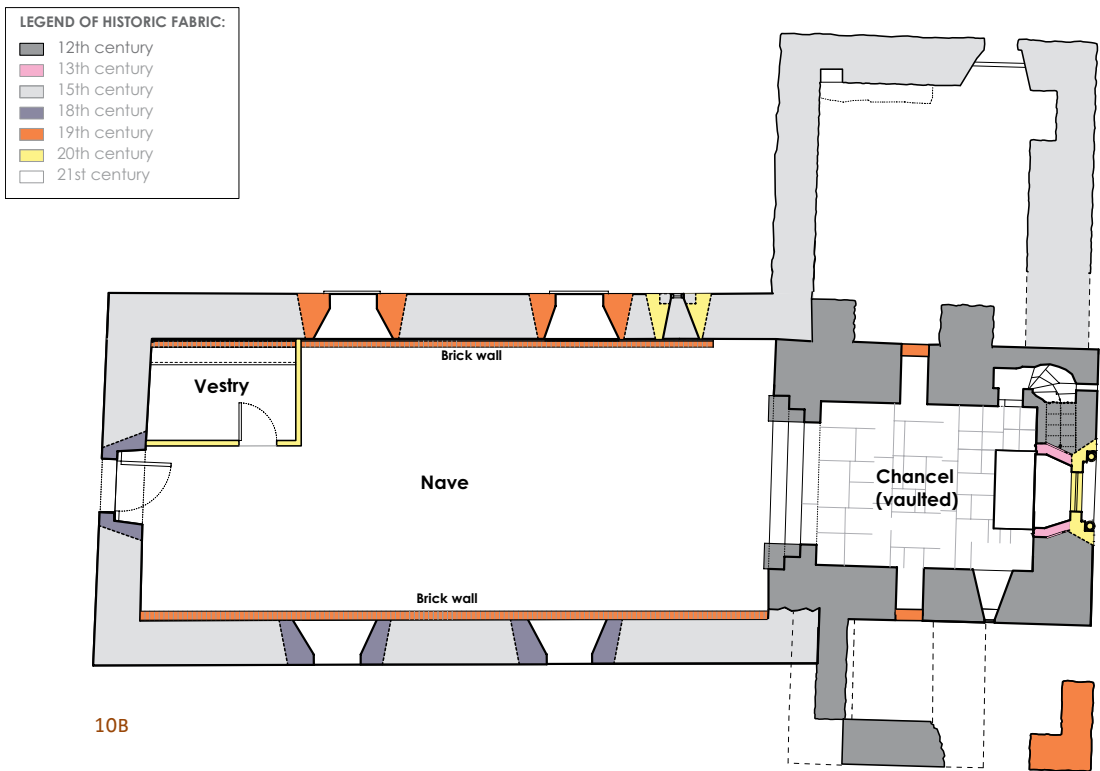
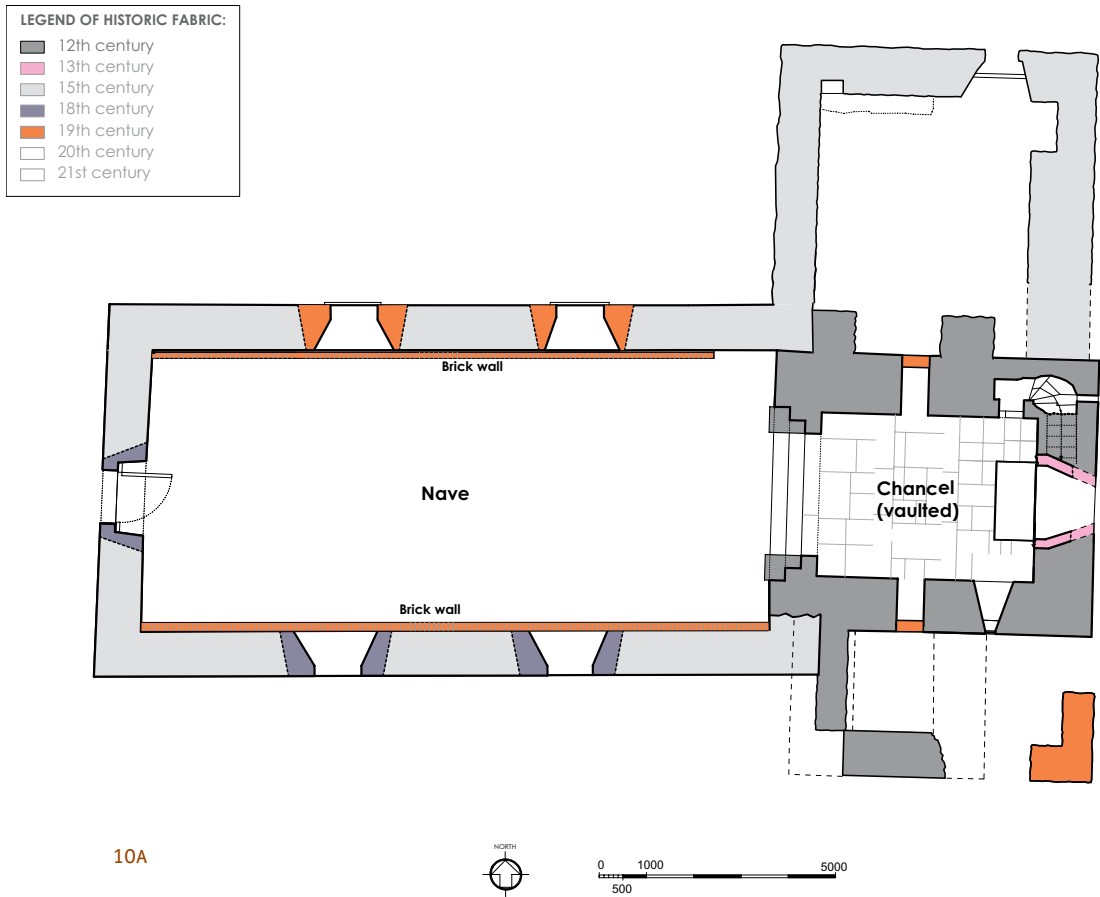
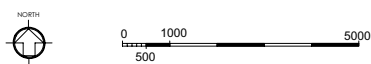


FIGURE 10A. Plan of Rahan Church in the 19th century.

FIGURE 10B. Plan of Rahan Church in the 20th century.



Rahan Church Section AA₁

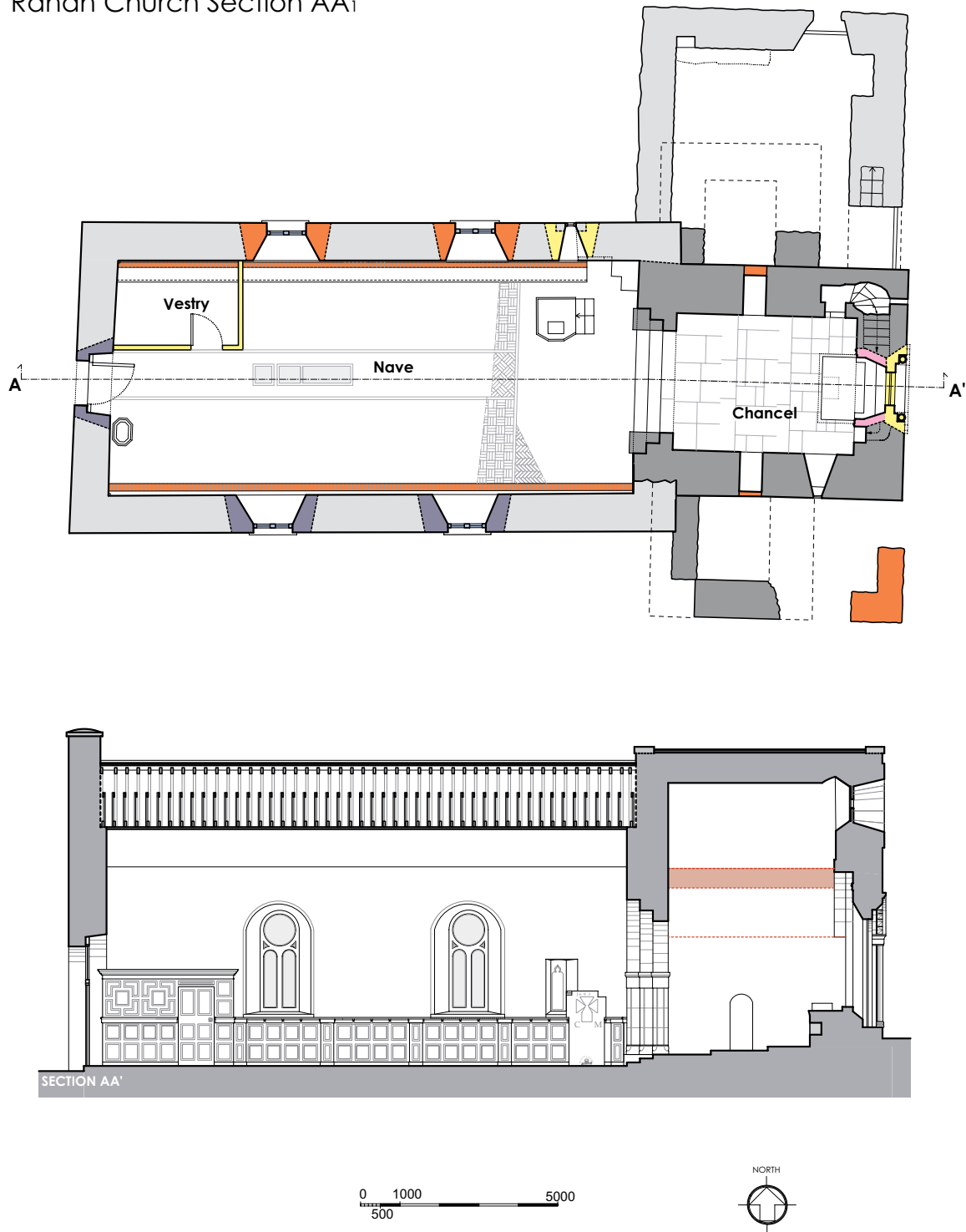


FIGURE 11. Section drawing of Rahan Church showing internal face of north wall of nave and chancel.

Rahan Church Sections BB₁ & CC₁

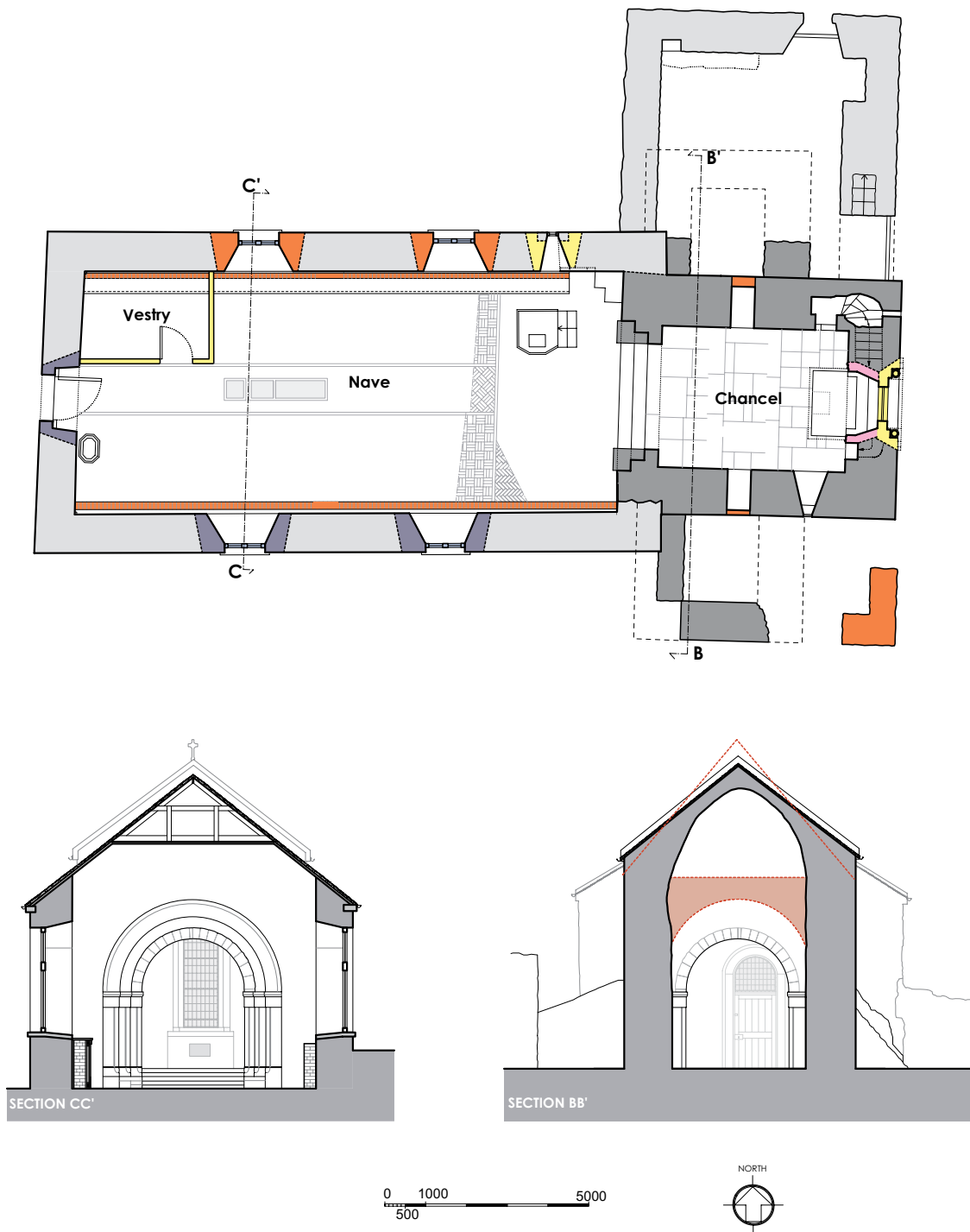


FIGURE 12. Section CC of Rahan Church showing west face of chancel arch. Section BB of Rahan Church showing east face of chancel arch and vaulting over chancel.

Rahan Church External Elevations

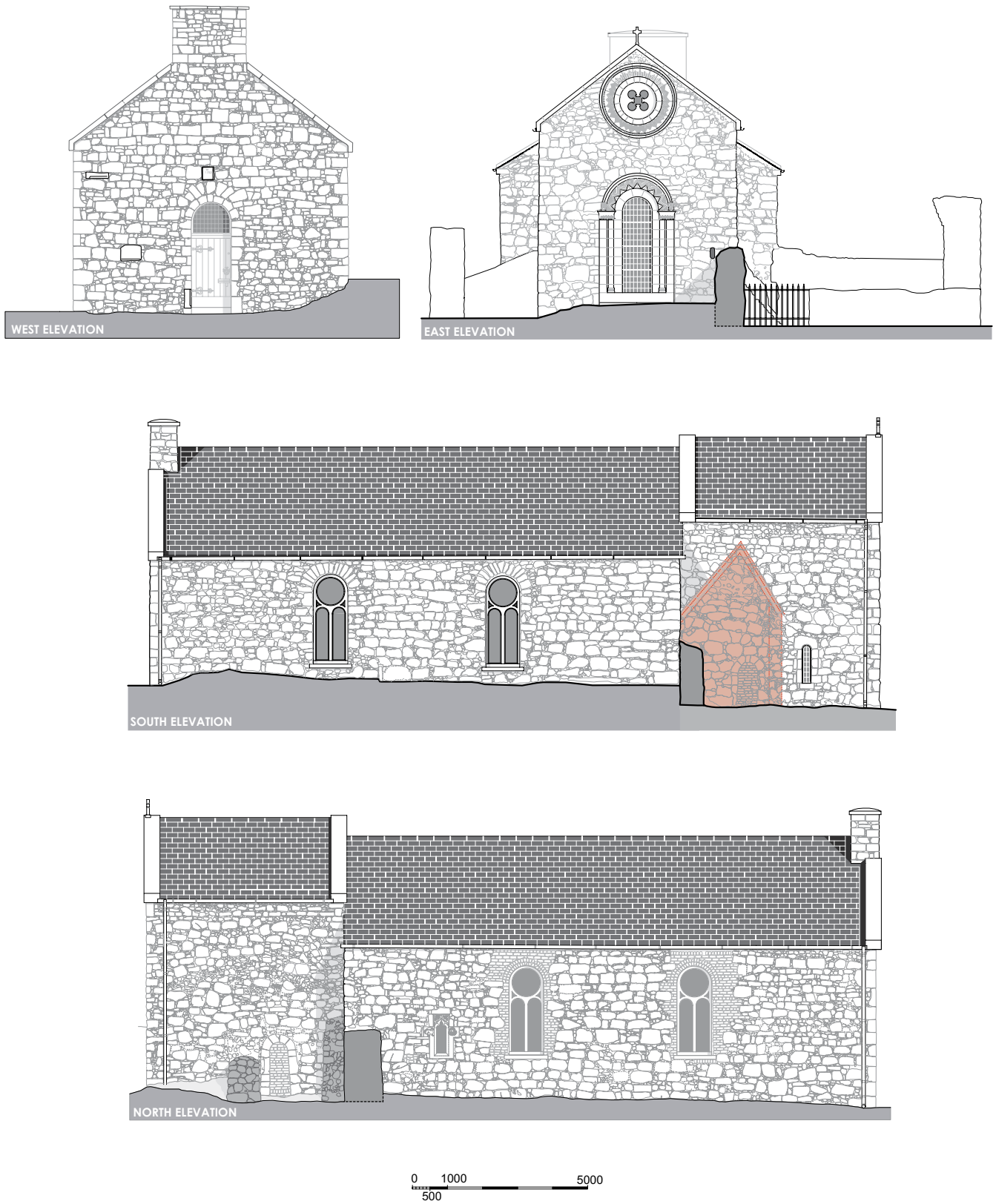


FIGURE 13. West elevation stone-by-stone line drawing illustrating historic fabric of west gable. East elevation stone-by-stone line drawing illustrating historic fabric of east gable with Romanesque round window and 20th century window. South elevation stone-by-stone line drawing illustrating historic fabric of the south wall external face. North elevation stone-by-stone line drawing illustrating historic fabric of the north wall external face.

Rahan Church Internal Chancel Elevations

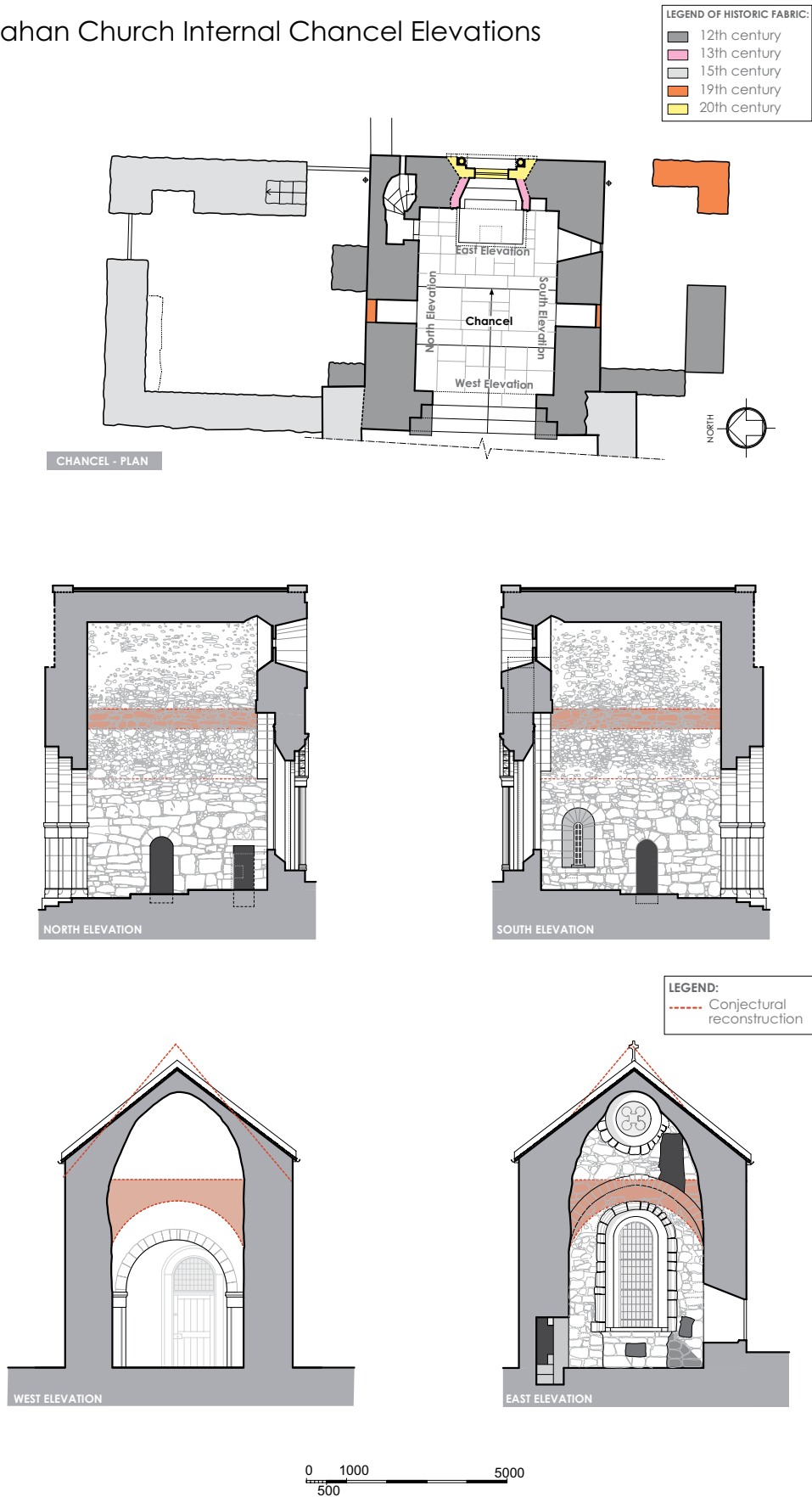


FIGURE 14. Chancel Plan. North elevation stone-by-stone line drawing of chancel wall showing the historic fabric of the internal face and suggested floor line of the vaulted chamber. South elevation stone-by-stone line drawing of chancel wall showing the historic fabric of the internal face and suggested floor line of the vaulted chamber. West elevation showing floor line of vaulted chamber and 15th century barrel-vaulted roof. East elevation illustrating internal face of east gable showing floor line of 12th century chamber and doorway at first floor level with later 15th century barrel-vaulted roof and round Romanesque window.

2.0 UNDERSTANDING THE PLACE

2.1 HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Early History

According to the hagiographer Tirechán, writing around 688–693, Camelacus was appointed by Patrick to establish a monastery at Rahan in the fifth century. In this account we are told that — *he sent Camelacus of the Comienses to Mag Cumi and with his finger pointed out to him the place from the hill of Granard, that is the church of Raithen.*⁶ Tirechán clearly considered Camelacus to be the major saint associated with Rahan, and it was not until the later medieval period that his reputation as the founding father of Rahan was replaced by St Mochuda, also known as St Carthage.⁷

In the time of St Carthage, this region was known as *Cenél Fíachach*, a territory later ruled by the O'Molloys and the Mageoghegans.⁸ After the foundation of the early Christian monasteries within this region, the territory became known as *Fir Chell*, which translated means *Men of the Churches*. At this time, Rahan was located on an important tribal boundary between the kingdoms of *Delbna Ethra* (Mac Coghlan country) and *Fir Chell* (O'Molloy country). The boundary between these two territories is uncertain and may have shifted several times in the early medieval period during the early years of the monastic life at Rahan. According to the *Féilire Oengusso Céili Dé* (Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee), written in the ninth century, the monastery of Rahan was located in *Delbna Ethra* and not *Fir Chell*.⁹ This is supported by a fifteenth century manuscript known as the *Leabhar Breac* or (Speckled Book), although the *Calendar of Papal Letters* of a similar date places Rahan firmly in the territory of *Fir Chell*.

The majority of references in the *Irish Annals* also links the monastery with the O'Molloys, who were the rulers of the portion of *Cenél Fíachach* that later became known as *Fir Chell*. On a national scale, the monastery of Rahan was located in Kingdom of Meath, near the ancient provincial boundary between Munster and Meath. Carthage is the English spelling for the Irish name Carthach, and in the annals this saint is often referred to as Mochuda. As a result the monastery and churches are known variously as the church of St Carthage or St Carthach, and the monastery of Mochuda.



FIGURE 15. 16th century map of East Offaly showing the ancient territory of Fir Chell [Ferial] ruled by the O'Molloy Clan (British Library, Cotton MS Augustus, I, ii, 40)

The Rule of St Carthage or the Rule of Mo-Chuta¹⁰

This rule was edited from six medieval manuscripts and was translated by Mac Eclaise in 1910, providing one of the few documents that offers us an insight into the spiritual life of a ninth century monk. It is possible that this rule was mistakenly associated with St Carthage as it dates from the ninth century. Originally known as the Rule of Mo-Chuta, one of these manuscripts associated the rule with an ecclesiastic known as *Fothad na Canóine* from the monastery of Fathan in Donegal.¹¹ Whatever about its origins, the *Rule of Mo-Chuta* is a spiritual guide for the conduct of the abbot, monk and king, all of whom were followers of Christ and their monastery. Below is a short excerpt that deals with the responsibilities of the abbot of a monastery during the ninth century, and which would have applied to Rahan irrespective of the origins of this document.

Of the Abbot of a Church:

If you be the head man of a Church noble is the power, better for you that you be just who take the heirship of the king.

If you are the head man of a Church noble is the obligation, preservation of the rights of the Church from the small to the great.

What Holy Church commands preach then with diligence; what you order to each one do it yourself.

As you love your own soul love the souls of all. Yours the magnification of every good [and] banishment of every evil.

Be not a candle under a bushel [Luke 11:33]. Your learning without a cloud over it. Yours the healing of every host both strong and weak.

Yours to judge each one according to grade and according to deed; he will advise you at judgement before the king.

Yours to rebuke the foolish, to punish the hosts, turning disorder into order [restraint] of the stubborn, obstinate, wretched.



PLATE 5. 15th century single light ogee-headed window in north wall of nave.

Rahan monastery supported the church of *Cluain da Chraind*, which, according to the *Life of Colman of Lynally*, was first occupied in the sixth century by Duineacha, the son of the king of Fir Chell.¹² A local place-name in the vicinity of Rahan preserves the folk memory of a hermitage that belonged to one of his monks. A field in the grounds of the Jesuit College has long been known locally as the *Crann Field*.¹³

Accounts of the monastery refer to several crosses associated with the community of monks at Rahan. One account of the saint's life tells of how Carthage spoke to the dead in the cemetery of Rahan, saying — *I will come on the Judgement Day with all my monks to the Cross of Constantine in front of the Church*.¹⁴ Another story refers to the Cross of Ua Suanraig¹⁵ that was located in the townland of Roscore near Rahan. According to the *Leabhar Breac* this cross was also known as the *Cross of the Satirists* (poets) and was the scene of a murder carried out by Máel-Bresail, son of Fland Léna, against a band of poets who were under the protection of Húa Suanraig who declared that the land where the murder was carried out in Ross Corr [Roscore] was to become part of the lands of the monastery of St Mochutu.¹⁶ None of the crosses referred to in these accounts survive. Built either of timber or stone, it is clear that they marked important locations within and outside the monastery. The Cross of Ua Suanraig in Roscore may have acted as a boundary marker for the lands of Rahan monastery, while the Cross of the Angels and the Cross of Constantine within the monastery could have been assembly points for the monks within the *City of Refuge*. The *Martyrology of Oengus* lists the 11th of March as the day for commemorating *Constantine King of Rathen*.¹⁷ According to this document, Constantine was the — *successor of Mochutu of Rathen in Delbna Ethra in Meath, a king of Britain, who left his realm and came on his pilgrimage to Rathen in the time of Mochutu*. According to this account, it was Constantine who marked out the church of Rathen, and dug its dyke, and bettered *Cepach Cusantín (Constantine's Plot) to the south of Rathen*.¹⁸

During the twelfth century the monastery of Rahan may have adopted the rule of St Augustine as part of the general reformation of the monasteries in Ireland. Between the years 1200-1400 AD,

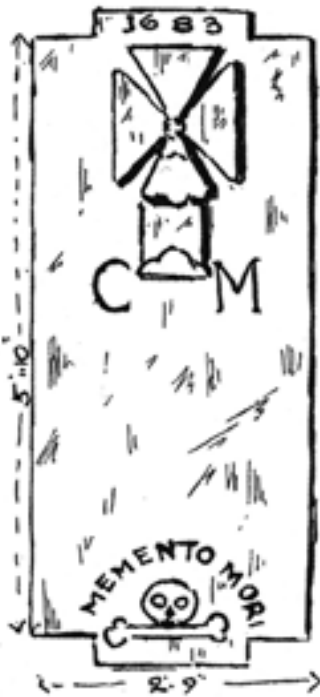


FIGURE 16. Line drawing of 17th century graveslab built into the inner face of the nave's north wall.

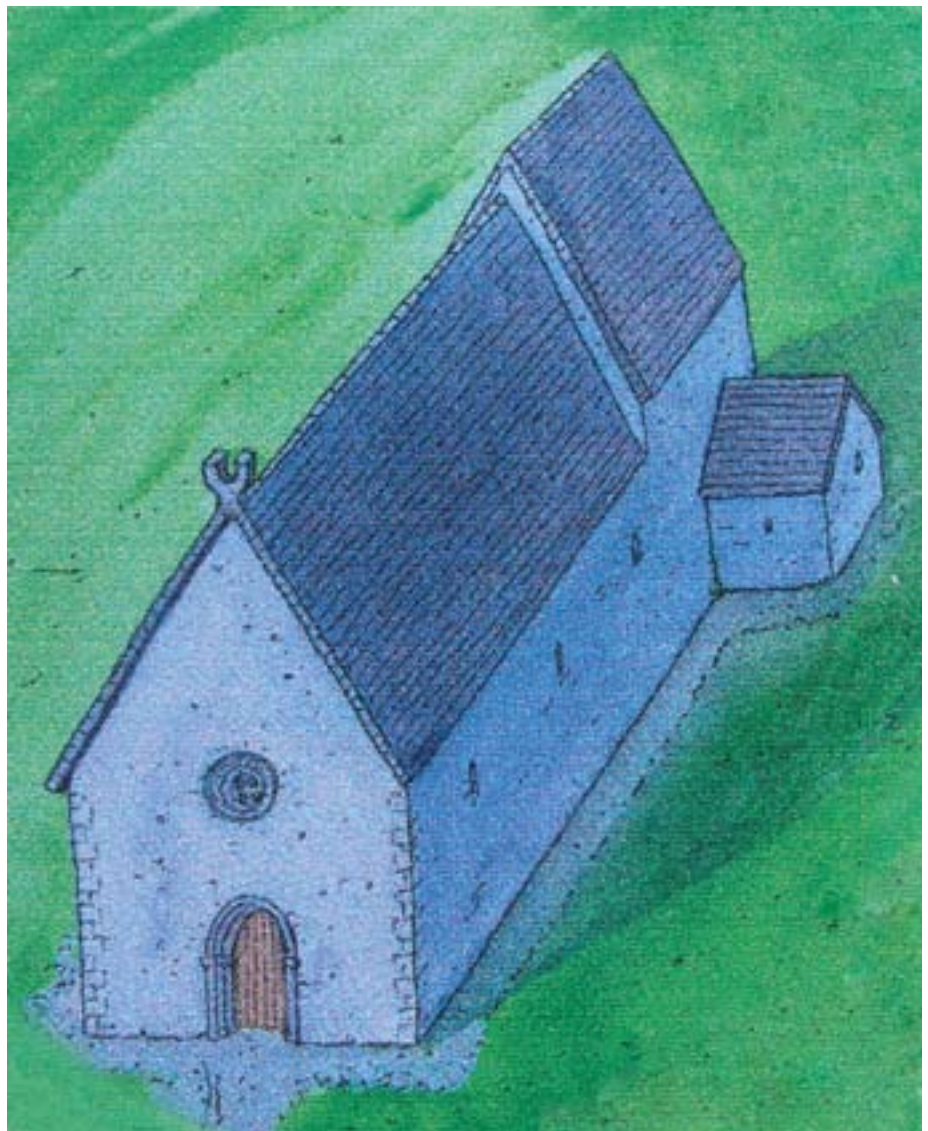


FIGURE 17. Artist's impression of 12th century nave and chancel church (Paul Francis).

the church at Rahan acted as a daughter chapel to the Anglo-Norman parish of St David's at *Ardnurcher* (Horseleap) in Co. Westmeath. In 1400 AD, the people of Fir Chell petitioned the Pope who agreed to establish the parish of Fir Chell and elevated the chapel at Lynally to the status of parish church for the people of Fir Chell. During this period the church at Rahan became a daughter chapel to the parish church of Lynally. The establishment of the parish of Fir Chell, between 1400-1421 AD, may have stimulated the re-building of the nave of the Church of St Carthage at Rahan. This new parish, with its churches, was actively patronised by the O'Molloys who were the ruling Gaelic family of this region. A seventeenth century graveslab inserted into the north wall of the nave commemorating Charles Molloy is testimony to the long patronage of this family to its church at Rahan.

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century

The dissolution of the monasteries in the sixteenth centuries and the reformation of the church resulted in the decline of the churches at Rahan. In 1622 the Bishop of Meath, Dr Ussher, in his *Visitation Account* states that Rahan was a chapel attached to Ardnurcher, with a ruined chapel. By 1677, the monastery and the three churches were described by Charles O'Molloy, chief of Fir Chell as:

there is a very ancient sanctuary, called Rahan, where there was a very celebrated monastery in which 700 monks lived godly lives; and there are three churches there, one parochial, one of Christ and one of the Blessed Virgin, not destroyed but well desolated. Observing, therefore, how the worship of God in the sanctuary has broken down.¹⁹

In 1696, Bishop Dopping noted that the large church at Rahan had a shingle roof. This was taken down and removed to the nearby church of Lynally.



Eighteenth Century

In 1732, the Church of St Carthage at Rahan was repaired by the Church of Ireland community for use as a parish church. An inscribed stone of this date survives in the western gable.



PLATE 7. 1732 datestone over west doorway of church.

PLATE 6. 18th century window inserted into the south wall of the nave.

Nineteenth Century

A Map of the Part of the Bogs of Allen within the King's County in Ireland together with Adjacent County from Actual Survey by William Larkin dated 1809 shows the site with a roofed church and a neighbouring feature identified as 'Church Ruins'.

A brief but valuable reference to Rahan occurs in the *Topographical Dictionary* by Samuel Lewis published in 1837. In this Lewis notes that:

*. . . the land, though varying greatly in quality, is in general good and in a profitable state of cultivation. Limestone is quarried for building and agricultural purposes, and there is an adequate quantity of bog.*²⁰

He went on to comment about the glebe house and church:

*The glebe-house was built in 1817, at an expense of £500, of which £450 was a gift and £50 a loan from the late Board of First Fruits. The Church which is annexed to the curacy, is a small edifice, erected in 1732, and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners have recently granted £166 for its repair.*²¹

This level of expenditure in the building stock of the Church of Ireland during the early nineteenth century represents a significant investment in the Parish of Rahan. Of particular interest are the comparative sums quoted for the construction of a new glebe house and repairing the church. At a cost equating to one third of the price of constructing a new glebe house, the repairs to the church at that time must have been significant. It is also likely that this was the first major programme of work for just over 100 years since the previous works in 1732.

The 1838 Ordnance Survey of Rahan depicts the Church of St Carthach as rectangular in plan with a flanking porticus or side-chapel to the north and south of the chancel. The church is approached from the west by a curved avenue and a graveyard is enclosed to the south. The Abbey in ruins is shown to the east of the church with another rectangular structure shown to the south. The river Clodiagh is depicted with a number of millraces, some of which are within the monastic enclosure. To the north of the river, Rahan Catholic College is depicted within its own grounds and Rahan National School on the western boundary. Rahan Bridge and Bridge House are depicted to the west of the monastic enclosure and a walled garden is depicted to the south of Bridge House.



PLATE 8. 19th century brick window inserted into north wall of nave.



FIGURE 18. William Larkin's map of King's County, 1809.

In his 1845 *Practical Geology and Ancient Architecture of Ireland*, George Wilkinson notes that limestone is the predominant building stone found in Kings County (Offaly) with productive quarries in the vicinity of Tullamore. He also records brick making at Rahan which is supported by the cartographic evidence. The 1st edition 6" map (1838) depicts the *Brick Fields* to the north-west and south-east of the monastic site. He also comments that the lime produced in the county is generally of high quality and that the local sands and gravels available from the ridges and eskers are particularly good. All of which attests to the availability of good building materials for masonry structures in the immediate vicinity of Rahan.



FIGURE 19. Ordnance Survey Map 6-inch map (1838) showing brickfields in top left hand corner and Rahan monastery in bottom right hand corner.

By 1845, the church was described as being able to provide seats for 120 people and had an attendance of between fifteen and fifty people for service.²²

On the 30th October 1880, the ruins of two churches²³ at Rahan were vested in the Office of Public Works by the Church Temporalities Commission.

The 1885 Ordnance Survey map shows a similar church layout as on the 1838 OS map. The millraces are no longer depicted along the River Clodiagh. Rahan Jesuit College to the north is shown annotated as St Stanislaus College. A post office is depicted to the northwest of the monastic site.

A good early photograph by the Earl of Dunraven published in 1877, shows the Romanesque doorway of the small church with extensive ivy growth and most of the front quoins missing.

The 1910 Ordnance Survey map shows the rectangular plan of Rahan Church, with a small side-chapel (flanking porticus) to the north and south of the chancel.

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Church of St Carthage has been studied and examined by some of Ireland's most distinguished antiquarian scholars with the function and form of the church being discussed, and speculation regarding the dates and origins of the features of the church have been put forward.



PLATE 9. Photograph of west doorway in small church (Earl of Dunraven 1877).



FIGURE 20. 19th century drawing of west doorway in small church (Petrie 1845).



PLATE 10. Photograph of communion rail and timber panelling of chancel arch (Henry 1940).

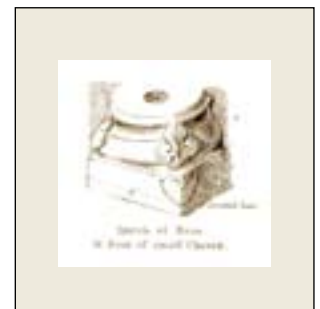


FIGURE 21. 19th century drawing of base from west doorway in small church (Earl of Dunraven 1845).

Twentieth Century Restoration

William Edward Martin — 1912 Repairs

A memorial plaque on the south wall of the nave, in *opus sectile*, commemorates the work of the architect William Edward Martin who was responsible for a major programme of repair and alteration works completed in 1912. Martin was born in Cork in 1843 and after working for the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in the west of Ireland,



FIGURE 22. Drawing of external face of east gable by William Edward Martin (1912).

he moved to England during the 1860s, where he is recorded in various censuses as both an architect and a civil engineer living in Middlesex, Herefordshire and London.²⁴ His work appears to have concentrated on the conservation of churches, and his obituary in the *Irish Builder* claims that he was — *employed at various times in many continental cities including Paris, Rheims and Vienna, in the work of restoration and preservation of continental ecclesiastical edifices.*²⁵ Having retired to Tullamore during the first decade of the twentieth century to live with one of his daughters, he became sufficiently interested in Rahan to take on another project during his retirement. This would appear to have been a labour of love for which he produced delightful measured drawings of twelfth and fifteenth century decorative stonework and wrote articles to help promote the church and raise funds for its repair. The work attracted the interest of *The Building News*, and four separate articles appeared between July and November 1911. These articles were written with reference to the publications of Petrie and Stokes, but appeared before the more analytical and architectural appraisals of Harold Leask.

Perhaps the greatest legacy of Leask to the study of Irish antiquities was his beautiful hand-drawn illustrations. These included measured surveys (plans, sections and elevations) of buildings, together with their architectural detail — all produced with the greatest accuracy. Like Martin, Leask was also an architect, and he was later to praise the work of the older man at Rahan. His only reservation was the sill level of the new east window inserted by Martin.²⁶ This drops down behind the altar, effectively creating the impression of a doorway rather than a window, although from the surviving drawing of the proposal by Martin, the external ground level

is shown a much lower level than occurs today as the adjoining ground has risen significantly. It would appear from the wording on his memorial that like Leask, the congregation also appreciated Martin's work at Rahan:

To the Glory of God and in memory of William Edward Martin Architect in charge of the restoration of this Church AD 1912 he entered into rest April 15th 1915. This tablet is placed here as a Mark of Gratitude for his skilful and unselfish work.



PLATE 11. Memorial plaque to William Edward Martin in south wall of nave.

Building News of 21 July 1911

In the first article to appear in the Building News of 21 July 1911, there is a general description of the church and the site where it claims — *worship has been offered continuously for more than 1300 years.*²⁷ It goes on to note that the parishioners are few in number and unlikely to be able to raise the £180 necessary to match the sum of £180 already raised through grants from the Beresford and Fredericton Funds. This article is very much an introductory fund-raising piece with several addresses listed for readers wishing to make subscriptions to the *Rahan Church Improvement Fund.*²⁸ It uses the exact wording of the appeal document and includes a long quotation from Martin that takes up almost half of the article. In this we learn some valuable information about the state of the church at that time:

The church consists of a nave about 43 feet by 20 feet and a chancel 15 feet by 11 feet; the former is wholly modern, and the latter experts say dates from the eighth century. The nave erected by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners 1737, is practically a barn; the walls and ceilings are covered with ordinary smooth plaster and the floor paved with stone slabs, evidently laid on soil for they are always damp. This part of the building has no interest, but the following peculiarities are noticeable. One diagonal on plan is 4ft longer than the other, so that the walls are much out of square, and the axis of this part of the building does not line with that of the chancel, the former being 36°48" and the latter 42°48" south of east, true bearing. In England tradition records that the axis of a church was directed to that part of the sky in which the sun arose on the Feast of the Patron Saint, but Durandus, Bishop of Mende, writing in the thirteenth century says 'The foundation must be so contrived as that the head of the church may point due east—that is, to that part of the heavens where the sun ariseth at the solstices, which is the practice of some' (Tractatus Gulielmi Durandi de Ecclesia et Ecclesiastical Locis; cap. i. sec 8). The bishop was an authority on symbolism, and from this quotation it is evident that he knew nothing of the English custom. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners are not likely to have troubled about the Feast of St Carthach, or the position of the sun in the horizon on that day, so it may be assumed that they had the new nave built on the old foundations; hence its want of symmetry. There is no trace of old work in the nave except perhaps on some dressed stones which may be seen in the rubble walls, and they show chiselled markings similar to the old surface finishings. The walls of the chancel may be eighth century or older, but the only architectural feature in it and which affords any clue as to date of the building, are clearly interesting examples of Norman work dating from the twelfth century (probably 1150-1160). They consist of a triple recessed chancel arch and piers, with curious carved caps and bases; a large round window and chevron ornament in low relief, high up the chancel east wall; and the inner angle of the old east window jambs and head, the outer jambs and head having been cut away to widen the opening. No trace of the outer dressed stonework of this window can now be found, so that its design is lost, but the profile for the remaining moulding is more like a thirteenth century detail than one of the Norman period. The other features in the chancel are two small priests doors and a small window; these have circular heads and the jambs batter, as in old celtic buildings. The work in these doors, and the windows is quite plain and it affords no clue as to their age, but they are probably very old as they are not insertions after the walls were built, as the other cut stonework may be, including the chancel arch. Like all old Celtic chancels this is of small dimensions and it is square ended, if Norman influence had been paramount here the end would have been circular or polygonal. The roof was of stone in weathered courses about 12 inches deep; these rested on a stone vault; the latter remains perfect, but the former was removed probably when the nave was built. The outer covering is now slate bedded on mortar and without battens or rafters. There are several large wrought squared stones built into the rubble walling of the detached ruined building to the east of this church, and they may be part of the old slate roof, in any case the large stones referred to were never originally in the places where they are now found.²⁹

The quotation contains several inaccuracies such as the eighth century dating of the chancel and the assumption that the nave was built in the eighteenth century. Martin does, however, note that the nave is significantly off square, with one diagonal being a full four feet longer than the other resulting in the irregular plan that is misaligned with the chancel. He speculates that the entrance doors to the wings off the chancel have battered

jambes and are therefore pre-Norman, and that the twelfth century chancel arch may have been a later insertion into the building. The walls and ceilings of the nave are described as being finished in *ordinary smooth plaster*, while the floor of the nave is described as being paved with stone slabs *evidently laid on soil for they are always damp*.³⁰ He also describes the roof of the chancel as being covered with stone laid in mortar and bedded directly onto the stone vault, and notes that the original dressed stone facings had been salvaged and used elsewhere for repairs to this church and the ruined smaller church that stands a short distance to the northeast. Martin describes these roof facings as being *wrought squared stones*³¹ which probably refers to the diagonal pattern of the tool marks left by the stone masons axes.



PLATE 12. West face of chancel arch during conservation works.

Building News of 15 September 1911

In this long and rather rambling article, Martin talks more generally about the construction of early churches in Britain and Ireland while musing on what he considers to be their Danish, Anglo-Saxon, Egyptian and Norman influences. Like his interpretation of the various building phases at Rahan, this article is a mixture of scholarly appraisal and inaccurate generalisation. Sadly it adds little to our understanding of Rahan, other than to remind us that in Ireland the erection of mortared structures evolved relatively late, and that one always had to be wary about the provenance of carved decorative work that is found in Irish ruins. This is particularly relevant to Rahan where the circular Romanesque east window and the fifteenth century single light ogee headed, north window in the Church of St Carthage together with the Romanesque doorway to the smaller church, may have all been moved from other locations, and possibly other buildings.

***Building News of 13 October 1911***

The brief article about Rahan that appears in October 1911 is of particular interest as it describes in detail the discovery and integration of the fifteenth century window in the north wall of the nave. This richly ornamented window contains intricate foliate relief in the spandrels above the single light ogee-head, together with griffen-like creature addressing a bird and a dragon eating its own tail. Included in the article are some fine detailed drawings of the window decoration together with various patterns of interlacing that occur in the Romanesque round window in the east gable. The label, sill and lower jambs of this window were not recovered, although a sill from a window of similar date does appear at high level built into the rubble of the west gable. Perhaps the most valuable evidence revealed has been uncovered with the removal of the cement under coating. The tall single light round-headed south windows are entirely constructed of limestone and differ from the two round headed windows in the north wall that are also later insertions but formed in a locally produced yellow brick. This suggests that the south windows may belong to the 1732 repairs while the north windows predate Martin's work and were possibly part of the early nineteenth century works (c. 1830) referred to in Lewis's Topographical Dictionary of 1838. The salvaged fifteenth century opening now contains a fine stained glass window depicting St Carthage by the English studio of Shrigley and Hunt that was commissioned as part of William Edward Martin's repairs of 1911.

FIGURE 23. Drawing by William Martin of dragon consuming its own tail from single light ogee-headed window in north wall of nave. (1911)



FIGURE 24. Drawing by William Martin of griffen-like creature addressing a bird from single light ogee-headed window in north wall of nave (1911).



FIGURE 25. Drawing by William Martin of head of single light ogee-headed window in north wall of nave with spandrels decorated with vine-leaf carvings (1911).

Building News of 3 November 1911

The final brief article is also illustrated and concentrates solely on the Romanesque entrance door to the second smaller ruined church. Delightful measured drawings, (worthy of Harold Leask), show the doorway viewed from both the exterior and interior. A plan of the jamb detail is superimposed on the inner elevation and there are also several details of the carved enrichments including the wonderful serpents on the bases of the collonettes. The rubble work surrounding the doorway, including the rough stone relieving arch above the head, are also drawn accurately which indicates that this door was moved from another location, probably the Church of St Carthage. During this period, the circular east window may also have been taken from the west gable and inserted into the east gable of the Church of St Carthage.



FIGURE 26. Line drawing by William Martin of west doorway small church (1911).

It is regrettable that despite all the known surviving records of William Edward Martin's work at Rahan, there is no detailed description of the condition of the church as he found it or a full account of the work that he implemented. Some of this we can decipher from the published accounts, some from the fabric that we find; other possible work by his hand must remain conjectural until further archive material comes to light. His work is, however, of great significance as the last extensive programme of works carried out at Rahan that survived relatively intact for almost 100 years. It seems fairly clear that Martin inserted the new external east window, in a Hiberno-Romanesque Revival style, together with the salvaged fifteenth century window in the north wall, with its stained glass depicting St Carthage. The remainder of his work appears to have been more concerned with the interior of the church, aimed at making it more comfortable. New timber windows glazed with leaded lights of coloured and textured glass were inserted. This glass is known as *cathedral glass* and was very popular as a cheap alternative to stained glass, which could simulate the diffused effect of coloured light entering the church without the expense of highly skilled artist/craftsmen to design, paint and fire the glass. From the descriptions, it appears that Martin also designed the timber furnishings of the pulpit, lectern, communion rails and reader, together with the panelled wainscots

and partitioned vestry in the northwest corner. The parquet floor, with its recessed heating duct and cast iron grills were also probably his work along with the present solid fuel stove used to provide the heat source. The fact that the internal walls and ceilings are noted as being plain plaster suggests that the surviving lime plaster coatings to the nave were in place prior to Martin's interventions.

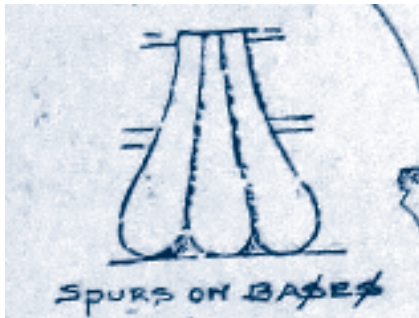


FIGURE 27. Decorative detail from the base of the west doorway of the small church.



FIGURE 28. Decorative detail from the base of the west doorway of the small church.



FIGURE 29. Decorative detail from the base of the west doorway of the small church.

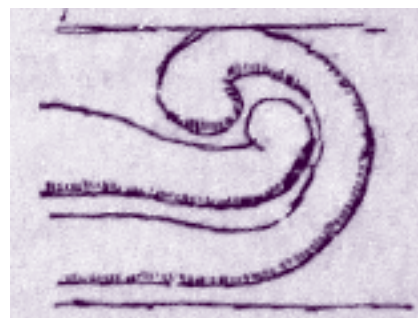


FIGURE 30. Decorative detail from the base of the west doorway of the small church.



PLATE 13. View of the small church west doorway.

Twenty-first Century Repairs

Within the first decade of the twenty-first century, there have been two minor programmes of work. The first, carried out under the direction of Gary Miley Architects, was mainly restricted to the repair of the cathedral glass windows and the installation of new rainwater goods. During these works cement pointing was also removed from the stonework at lower levels of the nave and to the nave wall above the chancel arch. The second programme of works - instigated by Howley Hayes Architects - commenced in November 2006 and was completed in May 2007. This has largely consisted of the removal of hard cement-rich coatings from all of the exterior walls of the chancel

and nave and also from the underside of the stone vault of the chancel. Cement pointing was also removed from the chancel side of the wall between the chancel and the nave. On completion of this work the stonework was pinned and pointed using lime mortar. The stonework on the nave side of this wall was found to be in a very poor condition. The faces of many of these stones, having sheered away, were in danger of falling. These damaged stones have subsequently been repaired and the wall pinned and pointed. As an added precaution this wall should be recoated in sand and lime plaster reinforced with hair.

The most valuable aspects of this work have been two-fold. The first was to remove damaging hard coatings that were not only unattractive visually, but which also trapped moisture within the core of the wall. The second was to reveal the pattern of the ancient stonework, which has provided us with valuable information about the dates of the various phases of building and subsequent interventions carried out to the building. From the pattern of the stonework, it now seems clear that the nave is considerably older than 1732 and is medieval in date. This exciting discovery that the nave is medieval confirms Leask's analysis of the building in 1938. Of the four large, round headed windows in the nave, those on the northern side formed using brick, are most certainly later (c.1830) insertions, while those on the south side formed in limestone, appear to have been insertions from the 1732 period. From the *Building News* we know that the decorated, fifteenth century window was salvaged and inserted during the early twentieth century.



PLATE 14. Internal face of the cathedral glass window in the south wall of the nave.



PLATE 15. View of internal face of the south wall of the chancel (Henry 1940).



PLATE 16. View of internal face of the engaged columns on the north side of the chancel arch (Henry 1970).



PLATE 17. Removal of hard cement-rich coatings from the underside of the stone-vaulted chancel.



PLATE 18. View of the underside of the stone-vaulted chancel showing hard cement-rich coating prior to removal.



PLATE 19. View of the underside of the stone-vaulted chancel with evidence of wicker centring after removal of hard cement-rich coating.

3.0 PHYSICAL EVIDENCE

3.1 SUB-SURFACE ARCHAEOLOGY

Monastic Enclosure and Earthworks (SMR No. OF016-015005/OF016-015004)

The monastic enclosure measures 500m east to west by 325m north to south. Large enclosures of this type are a characteristic feature of the early monastic settlements founded in County Offaly and the neighbouring midland regions. The ecclesiastical enclosure is now utilised as a field boundary to the south, east and west. Traces of the levelled enclosure can still be seen in the field to the southeast of the Bridge House. The Clodiagh River completes the enclosure to the north, and may originally have supplied water to the fosse between the two concentric earthen banks of the enclosure, thus creating a moat around the monastery of Rahan. Inside the enclosure there are traces of a millrace that appears on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey six-inch map. This millrace was lengthened to the east during the nineteenth century when considerable drainage works were carried out inside the enclosure and to the surrounding fields of the former monastery of Rahan. The majority of the earthworks inside the monastic enclosure appear to create small platforms or fields containing cultivation ridges that are surrounded by drainage ditches feeding into a water channel running parallel to the Clodiagh River. These earthworks appear to be an attempt to drain the land inside the enclosure around the latter half of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century. Running parallel to the Clodiagh River, there is a long almost continuous spoil heap which is the result of a river drainage scheme carried out by the state during the 1940s and 1950s.

The geophysical survey carried out by Dr Paul Gibson has revealed that there is substantial sub-surface archaeology inside the monastic enclosure at Rahan. He has identified a possible inner sub-rectangular enclosure around the medieval church and graveyard, with a possible square-shaped building outside this enclosure to the



FIGURE 31. Results of geophysical survey carried out by Dr Paul Gibson inside the monastic enclosure.

southeast of the Church of St Carthage. Other linear features and curving ditches all suggest the survival of a complex sequence of possible archaeological features. The geophysical results show us the survival, the location and the extent of the sub-surface archaeology. This clearly requires protection from any ground disturbance, which could result in the loss of this valuable archaeological resource.

To the north of the Church of St Carthage there is a large rectangular earthwork that appears to be of archaeological significance and may be an enclosing element for a building associated with the large church. Immediately west of the graveyard there is a splendid old hawthorn tree growing on the footings of another building of archaeological significance. The section of graveyard wall that forms the eastern side of this area appears to be the upstanding remains of this building and is of different construction to the rest of the graveyard wall which dates from the nineteenth century.

To the south of the Church of St Carthage, archaeological test trenching was carried out in the area abutting the south wall of the church by Tony Cummins on behalf of Sheila Lane and Associates in September 2004. This test trenching was carried out to explore the option of lowering the ground level in order to alleviate the damp problem inside the church. Human remains were found 20cm below modern ground level. The presence of graves along the length of the south wall ruled out the proposed drainage option.³²

3.2 BUILDINGS ARCHAEOLOGY AND ASSOCIATED FEATURES

Church of St Carthage (SMR No. OF016-015001)

The chancel measures 4.5m x 3.3m internally and has a vaulted stone roof, now covered with natural slate. Originally, over the chancel there was a small loft space or croft that was formed by a lower vault, now removed. The scar for this former vault is still visible on the inner face of the south wall of the chancel. The croft was linked to

the chancel by a mural stairs that rose within the east gable. A rebuilt flat-headed doorway located at the east end of the north wall of the chancel gave access to the mural stairs at ground level, while a similar opening linked the stairs to the croft in the south east corner of the east gable at first floor level. This croft may have been built as a fireproof chamber where the precious relics of the newly consecrated church were kept. The mural stairs would have enabled the clergy to bring the relics down from the croft and place them on display in one of the porticus or side-chapels for visiting pilgrims. Both of these door openings survive along with the upper and lower sections of the mural stairs, the middle section of which was removed during the installation of a tall east window in the thirteenth century. There are fragments of a lime wash undercoat with traces of a reddish colour paint still visible on the surface of the jambstones of these doorways.



PLATE 20. Internal face of 13th century east window.



PLATE 21. External face of east gable showing round Romanesque window and 20th century window inserted by William Martin.



PLATE 22. External face of south wall of the nave and chancel church with roofline of south porticus visible.



PLATE 23. South face of bricked up doorway leading from chancel into south porticus.



PLATE 24. Single light round headed window in south wall of chancel.



PLATE 25. Internal face of doorway leading from chancel into south porticus.

The inner reveal of the tall east window with its keel moulding dates from the early thirteenth century. Originally this window reveal appears to have been painted (there are traces of a lime wash undercoat which may have been covered with a layer of pinkish / reddish coloured paint). The external stone facing of this window was inserted into the east gable by Martin in 1912. Above this window close to the apex of the gable, is a magnificent circular window dating from the twelfth century that may have been moved to this position from the west gable of the church as first suggested by Leask in 1938 (see Appendix 2). However, it is also possible that this window was originally constructed to provide light for the twelfth century croft or could have been used as the main east window providing light for the chancel. The insertion of the thirteenth century window into the east end of the chancel suggests that the stone vaulted floor of the croft was removed at an early date. The insertion of the tall thirteenth century east window made the mural stairs in the east gable redundant and also cut across the lower vaulted ceiling of the chancel which as a result had to be removed.

Until recently, the upper stone vault forming the roof was generally thought to have been of twelfth century date. This upper stone vault appears to be a later replacement dating from the fifteenth century as it contains the impression of wicker centring on the underside of the vault. The circular window was either already in place or was inserted when this fifteenth century vault was constructed as the wicker centred vault has been constructed to accommodate the presence of this window in the apex of the east gable. It has also been suggested that this window may have been inserted in reverse when it was re-set into the east gable of the church.³³ This appears to be incorrect as the fifteenth century vault was clearly built to accommodate the circular window that was in its current location by this date at the latest. During this period the window may have been inserted back to front as has already been suggested. Within the county the pre-Romanesque church at Lynally monastery was extended during the fifteenth century when it became the parochial church of the new parish of Fir Chell.

Inside the church is a well preserved triple-ordered chancel arch with capitals decorated with striking angle heads and interesting bulbous bases with anthemion motif carvings. Small, narrow, round arched doorways on the north and south walls of the chancel originally gave access to the side chapels or porticus with steeply pitched stone roofs that are now in a ruinous state. These small rooms may have been used as a sacristy, a treasury or as a private chapel. During the fifteenth century, the porticus to the north of the chancel was enlarged with the addition of a barrel-vaulted roof. The original roofline of the southern side-chapel is still visible in the external face of the chancel wall. This roofline appears to be cut by the nave wall which suggests that the nave post-dates the side-chapels. At this junction the nave is not knitted into the chancel wall, creating a straight joint between the nave and chancel. It is known from written records, that in 1732 the church underwent considerable renovation and an inscribed stone of this date survives in the western gable. It had been thought that at this time the present nave was rebuilt and the original croft and steep stone roof of the chancel replaced with a roof of a lower pitch.³⁴

The splendid Romanesque circular window, with its quatrefoil opening, was once thought to have been one of just two of its type in Ireland.³⁵ The other, which is of smaller and less flamboyant design, is in the west gable of Freshford Church, Co. Kilkenny. Recent conservation works on this church have suggested that the window at Freshford dates from the nineteenth century.³⁶ Therefore, although this type of window occurs on many Romanesque churches throughout Western Europe, the circular window at Rahan is the only example of its kind in Ireland. The window measures approximately 2.3m in its overall diameter and is constructed from sixteen voussoirs, of which almost its entire surface is richly decorated. The terminals of the limestone quatrefoil openings are decorated with animal interlace in a distinctive Hiberno-Romanesque style. Along the inner edge or soffit of the circular window, the lozenge spaces on the edge of the window (created by the opposing chevrons) are filled with mythical beasts, human heads, possibly an exhibitionist figure, rosettes and plain lozenges. The outer faces of these voussoirs are richly decorated with three rows of lateral chevrons separated by beading with anthemion motifs and chequer patterns filling the triangular space between the outermost row. The inner faces of the voussoirs are decorated with three rows of chevrons separated by fillets with a single row of beading between the outer chevrons. Running around the outer edge of the window, there is a moulding decorated with a foliate pattern on its surface and pellets or small bosses on the underside of the moulding.

PLATE 26. Northwest view of nave and chancel church after removal of hard cement-rich coatings from the external walls.



The recent removal of cement-rich coatings from the walls and vault has revealed new and important information about the construction of the church — confirming Leask’s analysis and chronology. It now appears that the chancel was built in the twelfth century and that the original nave was modified or rebuilt between the twelfth and fifteenth century. The straight joint between the nave and the chancel on the south side of the church and the truncation of the roof-line of the porticus suggests that the nave post-dates the chancel.

The south wall of the nave contains two round-headed windows with limestone voussoirs that were probably inserted during the 1732 works. The two windows of similar shape with brick arched heads on the north side were introduced during a later period (probably around 1830). A fifteenth century ogee-headed single light window was inserted into the north wall of the nave by William Martin in 1912. On the jambstones of this window are carved in high relief a griffin (mythical animal that is half eagle and half lion) facing a bird that appears to be a woodpecker. On the opposite jamb of the window there is a dragon eating its own tail. In medieval Christianity the dragon was a symbol of Satan or evil, and in this instance the image appears to be conveying the message that sin or evil consumes itself. During this time the woodpecker also represented Satan or evil and its juxtaposition with a griffin (symbolising the divine nature of Christ) appears to be a depiction of the battle between good and evil. This battle was central to the belief of Christians in medieval Ireland, where the church offered salvation from the world of Satan and evil.

In addition to the works to the nave during the fifteenth century, the small side-chapel or porticus off the northern side of the chancel was enlarged by the construction of a large barrel-vaulted side-chapel. The 1732 works appear to have included the re-roofing of the chancel, patching or rebuilding of the west gable and rebuilding of sections of the west end of the north and south walls of the nave. There is possible evidence to suggest that the nave may have been extended to the west during this rebuilding phase. The west gable includes carved and dressed reused medieval stones such as the remains of a limestone sill belonging to a single light window. The lowermost jamb of the present west doorway belongs to a fifteenth century limestone doorway. This chamfered jambstone is decorated with a vine-leaf chamfer stop. When the nave was rebuilt in the fifteenth century, the original Romanesque doorway may have been moved to the smaller church and replaced by a limestone doorway. The surviving chimney flue in the west gable dates from the eighteenth century.



SUGGESTED BUILDING WORKS FOR THE CHURCH OF ST CARTHAGE

From a close examination of the surviving building fabric— together with the extensive archive of published and unpublished accounts that exist on the church of St Carthage— a summary of building phases can be conjectured as follows:



PLATE 27. Round Romanesque window

12TH CENTURY

- Chancel constructed with stone roof, croft, mural stairs, chancel wings (flanking porticus / side-chapels), chancel arch and round window. Originally this Romanesque church had a nave which may have been narrower than the present nave. The walls of the nave may date from anytime between the twelfth to the fifteenth century. This stone church may have been built after one of the fires recorded in the annals around 1131 and 1139.



PLATE 28. East window

13TH CENTURY

- Large, internal east window inserted, rendering mural stairs and original stone vault redundant. Vault removed making croft redundant.



PLATE 29. Chamfer stop of west doorway

15TH CENTURY

- North chancel side-chapel enlarged and vault over side-chapel inserted.
- Nave may have been modified.
- Insertion of wicker-centred vault over chancel.
- Possible insertion of circular window in apex of east gable.
- Single light ogee-headed window belongs to fifteenth century nave.

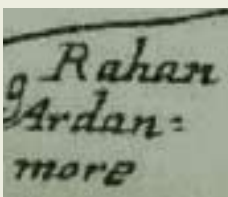


FIGURE 32. 17th century map

17TH CENTURY

- Church briefly abandoned and wasted c. 1640. In 1696, the roof of the nave was removed and reused at the nearby church in Lynally.



PLATE 30. Nave south window

18TH CENTURY (1732)

- Chancel and nave re-covered in natural slate to new pitch.
- Round-headed limestone windows inserted into south wall of nave.
- Fifteenth century doorway rebuilt and replaced with limestone round-headed doorway.
- West gable and west end of north and south walls rebuilt on footings of medieval nave, possible extension of west end of nave.
- 1732 date stone inserted into rebuilt west gable.
- Fireplace and chimney flue built into west gable.



PLATE 31. Nave south window

19TH CENTURY (c. 1830)

- Round-headed yellow brick windows inserted into north wall of nave.
- Nave walls, ceilings, low brick inner wall and cavity in nave plastered.
- Roof repairs constructed, pews installed.
- Cast iron rainwater goods installed.



PLATE 32. External east window

20TH CENTURY (1912)

- External Romanesque Revival east window installed and designed by William Edward Martin.
- Salvaged fifteenth century single light ogee-headed window installed in north wall of nave.
- Stone floor of nave replaced with parquet flooring.

Later 20th century

- Underfloor heating installed.
- Stained glass window depicting St Carthage installed, panelled wainscot and vestry constructed, church furnishings installed, hard cement coatings applied to all external walls and vault of chancel. Leask commented on this work in 1938 when he stated that the 'modern plastering obscures the structure [vault]'.³⁷



PLATE 33. Cathedral glass window

21ST CENTURY (2005-08)

- Four large windows in nave repaired, leaded lights and openers restored, cement pointing removed from part of chancel, ivy removed from exterior of chancel, rainwater goods replaced (2005).
- Hard cement coatings removed from all external walls, chancel arch wall pinned and pointed both sides (2006-2007).



PLATE 34. Southwest view of small church.

Small Church (SMR No. OF016-015010)

To the east of the Church of St Carthage are the remains of a small single-cell church, possibly dating from the later medieval period. Its external dimensions measure 11.8m east to west and 6.95m north to south. This single-cell church retains a fine Romanesque west doorway that appears to have been a later insertion into the gable. It now survives as a single ordered round-headed doorway, but originally was a doorway of three orders, of which the middle order survives (*pers. comm.* Dr Rachel Moss). Of the outer order, only the decorated bases survive. These bases are decorated with leaf-shaped spurs and curling serpent-like motifs. The doorway with its square shaped multi-scalloped capitals and beautiful arch decorated with opposing chevrons, palmettes and other foliate patterns adorning the triangular spaces outside the chevrons is similar in style to the Nuns Chapel at Clonmacnoise. Over this doorway there is a hood moulding with delightful Hiberno-Romanesque style stops in the form of fantastic mythical beasts that is also reminiscent



PLATE 35. Beast-headed terminal of hood moulding over west doorway.

of the west doorway in the Nuns Chapel. These monsters may symbolise evil, and their placement over the entrance into a church to hear the word of God represents salvation from the forces of evil. The doorway may have originated from the larger Church of St Carthage being removed during one of its rebuilding programmes.³⁸ Other features of the church include a rectangular slit window directly over the west door, a round-headed single light window of twelfth century date at the west end of the south wall; and a single light ogee-headed window of fifteenth century date in the east end of the south wall. One of the spandrels of this latter window is decorated with a four-legged animal with a bird sitting on top pecking the animal's head and another pecking the hind leg. The other spandrel is decorated with a vine-leaf motif. In the east gable there is a single light ogee-headed window of



PLATE 36. Overall view of west doorway.

fifteenth century date. The spandrels of this window are also decorated with the vine-leaf motif, and the hood moulding over the window is decorated with a human head carved in relief.

Incorporated into the masonry of this church are several flat chamfered cut limestone flagstones thought to have been salvaged from the stone roof of the twelfth century Church of St Carthage (*pers. comm.* Con Manning). A good early photograph, published in 1877 by the Earl of Dunraven, survives of the west end of this church showing the Romanesque doorway, with extensive growth of ivy and most of the quoins missing.

Site of the Third Church (SMR No. OF016-015017)

In a letter of 1677 from Charles O'Molloy to Pope Innocent XI, is a description of three churches at Rahan - *one parochial, one of Christ and one of the Blessed Virgin, not destroyed but well desolated*. In a later description of Rahan from 1937, Father Carthage, a Cistercian monk from Mount Melleray Abbey, Co. Waterford, describes what may have been the third church - *near the small church with the Romanesque doorway the remains of what may possibly have been a third of these chapels, can be traced in the grass; but as only the bare foundations remain the evidence at present is scarcely satisfactory*.³⁹ A further possibility for the site of what is referred to as the 'third church' is the surviving ruin (which may have been a tower house) in the corner of the Catholic graveyard.

Rahan Castle (SMR No. OF016-015018)

According to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* in 1227, Symon Clifford founded and built the castle of Rahin O'Swanie [Rahan]. According to local tradition, the house marked on the six-inch map as the 'Bridge Ho.' stands on, or near, the site of Rahan castle. No remains of this castle have been uncovered within the vicinity of the monastery or near the site of the Bridge House. According to another local source, Rahan Castle was knocked down when the Grand Canal was constructed in the late 1700s early 1800s as it was on the line of the route of the canal.



PLATE 37. Remains of possible tower house in modern Roman Catholic cemetery.

Tower House (possible) (SMR No. OF016-015009)

The third masonry structure still standing within the Rahan monastic enclosure is situated in the east corner of the modern graveyard used and managed by the Catholic Church. This building has a slight base batter and contains the remains of a barrel-vaulted ground floor; it is in a poor state of preservation with no other significant architectural features visible. A sheela-na-gig was uncovered close to this building in 1971.⁴⁰ These scant architectural remains suggest that this structure may be the ruins of a small tower house of fifteenth or sixteenth century date. John O'Donovan writing in the Ordnance Survey letters of 1838 stated that - *I think that the old vault standing near the old Church of Rathain is a part of this castle*.⁴¹



FIGURE 33. Rubbing of Early Christian cross-slab (Lord Walter Fitzgerald 1913).



PLATE 38. Scalloped capital from Romanesque doorway.



PLATE 39. 17th century graveslab inserted into north wall of nave.



PLATE 40. Blacksmith's memorial from Rahan graveyard.



PLATE 41. 18th century carpenter's memorial from Rahan graveyard.



PLATE 42. Decorated Romanesque stone fragment built into base of graveyard wall.

Early Christian Cross-Slabs (SMR No. OF016-015003; OF016-015013)

An Early Christian cross-slab, which was recorded within the graveyard in the early part of this century, could not be located. It was described as *the lower portion of a slab incised with a two line Latin cross surrounded by a single line ring below which the shaft extended*. Traces of a four-line inscription were visible running across the slab.⁴² There is a second, Early Christian sandstone slab inserted into the inner face of the chancel over the rebuilt doorway to the mural stairs.

Loose Sculpture — Romanesque Scalloped Capital (SMR No. OF016-015015)

Inside the Church of St Carthage, there is a beautifully carved multi-scalloped capital with foliage pattern, some of which has voluted leaves carved on the cones. This capital may have belonged to the outer order of the original Romanesque doorway.

Seventeenth Century Graveslabs (SMR No. OF016-015011; OF016-015012)

Two seventeenth century graveslabs survive at Rahan. During the 1912 restoration works to the Church of St Carthage, a rectangular slab, decorated with a small Maltese cross above a skull and cross bones, was discovered under the floor of the church. It was subsequently built into the north wall of the nave at the back of the pulpit. The slab is inscribed with the date 1683 and the initials 'C.M'. It was apparently common practice among the local gentry to commission their memorials before their death, and it was suggested that this slab might commemorate Charles Molloy of Cartron, who died in 1684 and had the slab made during his lifetime.⁴³

Walter Fitzgerald recorded two portions of what he described as *a plain shaft of a limestone cross located to the right of the west doorway*. Faint traces of an inscription revealed that this cross was carved in 1616 by Cormac O Boghalie.⁴⁴ Two pieces of the upper end of another slab decorated with a floriated cross carved in relief and inscribed with the initials 'O.B' and 'C.B' were also noted by Fitzgerald and have recently been rediscovered in the graveyard.⁴⁵

Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Memorials

The graveyard at Rahan contains some of the finest eighteenth and nineteenth century memorials in County Offaly. These depict important folk art and religious symbolism distinctive to the region. The quality of the stone carving on the memorials is a testimony to the skill of the local stone carvers. Two important memorials, dating from the eighteenth century, depict the tools of a blacksmith and a carpenter. This type of symbolism is rare: not only in County Offaly, but throughout the midland region.

Standing Stone and/or Pillar Stone (SMR No. OF016-015008)

Sometime between 1870 and 1871 a local antiquarian called Thomas Stanley visited the site and recorded that: *A stone stands between the two banks which encircled old Rathan, and beside its Southern entrance, I take it to be monumental. It is a slab and is arranged upon the meridian*.⁴⁶ This possible standing stone may have been the pillar stone referred to in the *Martyrology of Oengus*, wherein the story recounts that on the eve of Constantine's death when he was making his last confession he is reputed to have stated - *that on my conscience there is nothing of the world, save only that I think I should like the flagstone on which thou repeatest thy paternoster to be over my face (when I am buried). It shall be so indeed, says Mochutu. And get thee, O Satan, into the pillar-stone to the south of the cell, and thou shouldst cause no hurt there save no one who shall resist the Church*.⁴⁷ Today there are no traces of this possible prehistoric standing stone or Early Christian pillar stone, which may have marked the entrance to the monastery or marked an important meeting or boundary point within the monastery.

Graveyard and Graveyard Wall (SMR No. 016-015002)

During the nineteenth century, the old medieval graveyard at Rahan was enclosed by a new boundary wall into which fragments of salvaged masonry from the Romanesque church were incorporated. A fragment of a Romanesque hood moulding (SMR No. OF016-015016) (with foliate decoration similar to that from the hood moulding over the doorway and the outer moulding enclosing the circular window) can be seen at low level in the outer face of the south wall. On the west side of the graveyard, the boundary wall incorporates part of an earlier medieval building located to the south of the main entrance into the graveyard. The stone stile built into the boundary wall was also constructed using salvaged medieval worked stone, possibly from the church.

3.3 ARTEFACTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SITE



PLATE 43. Rahan sheela-na-gig now housed in Athlone Castle Museum.

Sheela-na-Gig (SMR No. OF016-015006)

In 1971, gravediggers discovered a sheela-na-gig that may have fallen from the wall of the medieval ruin located in the Catholic cemetery. It may have come from an excavation for a burial north of and immediately adjacent to the northwest angle of the ruin now thought to have been a tower house. This carving, which appears to have been made at the same time as the building, possibly dating from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, is now housed in the Museum of Athlone Castle.⁴⁸

The Book of Rahan

According to Petrie, in his book the *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland* written in 1845, there is a poem written by the celebrated Irish poet Rumann concerning Rahan. Rumann, has been called, by the Irish writers, *the Virgil of Ireland*, and his death is thus entered in the Annals of Tighernach at the year 747: *Ruman Mac Colmain Poeta optimus quievit*. This poem refers to the building of the *duirtheach mór* (great wooden church), or great oratory of Rathain Ua Suanagh, now Rahan, in the King's County; and the original, which is preserved in an ancient vellum manuscript in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, is said to have been copied from the *Book of Rathain Ua Suanagh*. There is no knowledge today of where the *Book of Rahan* is located or if it still exists.



Saxon Coin Hoard

According to Petrie, in the first half of the nineteenth century people discovered *in the immediate vicinity of Rahen, not only an extensive hoard of pennies of the Saxon chief monarchs of the ninth century, but also, subsequently, a considerable number of pennies depicting Egbert who reigned between 801-837.*⁴⁹

Bullaun Stones (SMR No. OF016-015014; OF016-015019)

At the mass rock site in Killina, there is a bullaun stone reputedly from Rahen monastic site. A second possible bullaun stone, of which only half survives, can be seen lying in a ditch to the north of the Church of St Carthage close to the river.

Whetstone, Knife and Copper Mount

In the National Museum of Ireland, there are three artifacts found inside the 'eastern church' or small church, donated by James Loonam in 1950. They are a stone whetstone, an iron knife and a copper alloy mount. The copper alloy mount is currently on public display in the National Museum of Ireland and is labelled as a '*copper alloy mount possibly part of a crozier (?), dating from eleventh or twelfth century*'.

Casts of Circular Window and Columns of Chancel Arch

Around 1853 a cast was made of the circular window and the columns of the chancel arch so that they could go on display in Dublin at the Great Industrial Exhibition of 1853. They were described at the Exhibition as a '*circular window of the eighth century, which lighted a chamber between the chancel and stone roof of Rahen Church, King's County; pillars of the chancel arch of the Church of Rahen, King's County*'.⁵⁰ The following year the Rahen casts were on display at the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace.⁵¹

PLATE 44. Landscape setting of Rahen monastery.



3.4 ECOLOGY

The site mainly consists of closely grazed, damp, unimproved grassland running down to the Clodiagh River. A rocky ridge of dry grassland runs alongside the river.

Both the ruin in the new graveyard and the church to the east of the site have very little vegetation. However, there is a colony of parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*) at the ruin in the new graveyard. The walls of the churchyard have a small colony of rusty-back fern (*Asplenium ceterach*) and some wall rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*). The old graveyard of the Church of Ireland has a woodland component of sycamore trees (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), most of which is not of any great interest.

A common yew (*Taxus baccata*; in Irish, *iúr*) grows within the walls of the graveyard. Even though it looks like an insignificant specimen, it is of great importance for its link with the history and heritage of the site. Common yew was commonly planted in graveyards and “in some instances where an ancient yew is situated alongside the path to the entrance of a Medieval church, it may well be that the yew tree pre-dates the earliest part of the existing building” (The Eternal Yew, Trevor Baxter, 1992). The common yew was planted by early Christians to commemorate the building of churches until the discovery of the Irish Yew (*Taxus baccata* ‘Fastigiata’) in 1767 when this new species became more popular.

Yew trees have a very unusual growth pattern and as a consequence are very hard to age. It is possible for a single trunk to change into a multiple or compound trunk at any stage of its development. If this occurs, multiple trees can form and if hollowing takes place between the trees, it can appear as though they are entirely separate specimens. This being the case, it may be that even though this appears to be an insignificant tree, it may be the peripheral remains of an ancient yew, the heart of the tree having decayed and completely vanished. However, some yews do not attain a remarkable size, as they begin to hollow and then, instead of increasing in girth on the periphery, they become partially filled in with a new secondary trunk in the hollow area. In this case, this could be the entire ancient tree. Whichever the case, it is believed that this tree is more than 250 years old.



PLATE 45. Yew tree.

This tree appears to have been suppressed by adjacent vegetation and extremely dense ivy growth leaving a tree which lacks vigour and aesthetic appeal. Tree surgery would be beneficial in rejuvenating the tree and improving its appearance. By carrying out a crown reduction and repeating the process cyclically, this would avoid the tree affecting the walls or roof of the church.

Yew leaves and seeds contain the poison Taxine which can be fatal to animals if eaten in large quantities. The red berries are not poisonous but the seeds contained within them are extremely poisonous.

This tree does not appear to be having an adverse effect on the adjacent headstones. If one looks across the graveyard, the majority of the headstones are leaning considerably with no trees beside them so it is more likely to be the ground conditions that are affecting them.

A lone hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*; in Irish, *Sceach gheal*) is growing just outside the boundary wall of the church. It is a well-formed specimen that has extremely dense ivy that is causing competition and suppressing it. A second hawthorn stands near the river. Both are suffering from rubbing and soil erosion from stock.

A beech hedge has recently been planted at the entrance to the site in front of an existing young hawthorn hedge. Beech is not a native species, and the management and improvement of the existing native hedge is recommended, as this would be more appropriate to the general character of the site.

Jays and mistle thrushes were present at the site.

3.5 FOLKLORE

There is limited folklore associated with the site compared to the rich historical and physical remains.

The Bell of Mochuda

The bell of Mochuda, which the saint rang against Blathmac, was called the *glassan of Hui Suanaig* in later times.⁵² According to local tradition the *Bell Hole* was located in the Clodiagh River.

Expulsion of St Carthage⁵³

Mochuda, with his following, next visited the cross already mentioned and here, turning to the king, addressed him thus: *Behold the heavens above you and the earth below*. The king looked at them: then Mochuda continued: *Heaven may you not possess and even from your earthly principality may you soon be driven and your brother whom you have reproached, because he would not lay hands on me, shall possess it instead of you, and in your lifetime. You shall be despised by all - so much so that in your brother's house they shall forget to supply you with food. Moreover yourself and your children shall come to an evil end and in a little while there shall not be one of your seed remaining*. Then Mochuda cursed him and he rang his small bell against him and against his family, whence the bell has since been known as *The Bell of Blathmac's Extinguishing*, or *The Bell of Blathmac's Drowning*, because it led to the death of Blathmac and all of his descendents.

Martyrology of Oengus

According to the *Martyrology of Oengus* this expulsion was one of the — *three bad stories of the saints of Erin. The three worst counsels that were done through the counsel of the saints, i.e. cutting short of Ciaran's life, and banishing Colum Cille, and putting Mochutu out of Rathen*.⁵⁴

4.0 ASSESSMENT AND STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

4.1 ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Guidelines to the Burra Charter state that:

Cultural Significance is a concept which helps in estimating the value of places. The places that are likely to be of significance are those which help an understanding of the past or enrich the present, and which will be of value to future generations (see Appendix 1).

There are a variety of categories used to evaluate the level of a place's cultural significance: Archaeological, Historic, Architectural, Aesthetic, Social and Spiritual categories will be used to assess the significance of Rahan.

Overall this archaeological complex, with its unique architectural remains together with the undisturbed sub-surface archaeology and large monastic enclosure, identify Rahan to be a place of international cultural significance.



PLATE 46. Engaged columns of Romanesque chancel arch.

Archaeological Significance

The site has the potential to enlighten future researchers of the monastic movement of Western Europe to discover new ideas and theories which explain the early years of the founding fathers of this great monastery. The conservation and management of the site will ensure that this state of preservation is maintained, thus enabling future generations to enjoy and learn from the monastic remains at Rahan.

The relatively undisturbed monastic enclosure at Rahan is the largest in the county covering an area greater than the monastic enclosures at Clonmacnoise, Durrow, Seir Kieran and Killeigh. Large enclosures of this type are a characteristic feature of the early monastic settlements founded in County Offaly and the neighbouring midland regions. The form and size of these large enclosures differentiates these monasteries from their counterparts with much smaller enclosing elements.

Historical Significance

The wealth of surviving documentary evidence relating to the history and development of the monastic site at Rahan adds to its significance. The continued occupation of the site and the development of the buildings relate the changing political and social situations of the time. Records survive relating to the foundation of the monastery in the fifth century.

The wealth of historical information relating to the site adds to its importance and the nineteenth and twentieth century drawings and photographs recording the building, enhances our understanding of what survives today and what was originally constructed.

Architectural Significance

This Church of St Carthage has been described as - *perhaps the most unusual Irish Romanesque building outside of Cormac's Chapel in terms of its surviving architectural features and sculptural details.*⁵⁵

Writing in 1940, Francoise Henry stated that the Church of St Carthage at Rahan was a building of the *greatest interest.*⁵⁶ She describes the building as possessing two - *small square sacristies. The very wide chancel arch rests on two carved piers, and from the disposition of the walls of the sacristies it appears that the nave was hardly wider than the choir.*⁵⁷ The ground plan at Rahan has its closest comparisons with churches from Anglo-Saxon England, the architecture of which had remarkably little influence on Ireland (*pers. comm.* Dr Rachel Moss). There are seven Anglo-Saxon churches in England with a flanking porticus or side-chapel to the north and south of the chancel.⁵⁸ They all have a doorway leading from the chancel to the porticus resulting in a four-cell ground plan similar to that of Rahan. This may suggest that Rahan was built by masons influenced by the Anglo-Saxon church

or that English clerics were responsible for commissioning this building. Could this link with the English church be associated with the twelfth century reformation of the Irish church under the patronage of the O'Kelly's of Uí Máine, who at that time were abbots of Rahan?

Analysis of the historic fabric, records several phases of development and reveals much about the evolution of the building since the twelfth century. The masonry of the smaller church incorporates some original stone tiles, possibly from the twelfth century stone roof of the Church of St Carthage. The presence of this feature, along with its fine Romanesque doorway and fifteenth century decorated windows, all contribute to the architectural significance of the smaller church at Rahan. A combination of highly unusual and distinctive features suggests that the nave and chancel church at Rahan was an unusual building at the time of its construction and one that was obviously intended to convey the high status of the monastery (*pers. comm.* Dr Rachel Moss).

Artistic Significance

The human faces on the capitals of the chancel arch of the larger church have been described by Françoise Henry in 1940 as - *beautiful pieces of carving, strong, haughty faces, with curling moustache and beard. This is native art at its best.*⁵⁹ The uniqueness, quality and condition of the carving of the chancel arch, together with the circular window and the west doorway of the smaller church makes Rahan one of the most important group of Romanesque churches in Ireland.

The graveyard at Rahan contains some of the finest eighteenth and nineteenth century memorials in County Offaly. These contain important folk art and religious symbolism distinctive to the region. The quality of the stone carving on the memorials is a testimony to the skill of the local stone carvers.

Social and Spiritual Significance

Rahan monastery has been a sacred place of worship for over 1500 years, the lack of development and ground disturbance within the monastic enclosure contributes to the sense of place and enhances the social significance of the monastery. This original function is maintained today through the on-going use as a place of Christian Worship.



PLATE 47. Bulbous bases of engaged columns and decorative floral motif of the chancel arch. The floral motif is only found on the base of the north side of the chancel arch.



PLATE 48. Carved face on the angle of the capital of the chancel arch.



PLATE 49. Carved face on the angle of the capital of the chancel arch.



FIGURE 34. Line drawing of carved face on the angle of the capital of the chancel arch (after Stokes 1878).

4.2 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The monastic complex of Rahan is an historic place of international cultural significance for the following reasons:

- The Church of St Carthage at Rahan is a building that has been a place of Christian worship for the majority of its history from the twelfth century to the present day. The building fabric reveals much about the changes to the church over that time with repairs and alterations undertaken at key periods.
- Rahan Monastery has been a place of sacred worship for over 1500 years. The size of the monastic enclosure suggests that this was a place of high status and a focus for settlement in the region. The lack of development and ground disturbance within the enclosure contributes to the sense of place and enhances the cultural significance of the monastery.
- The plan of the Romanesque church with two small side-chapels or porticus to the north and south of the chancel is unique in Ireland and may contribute to the future understanding of the development of the Christian church in Western Europe. This unique ground plan may demonstrate a link between Rahan and the Anglo-Saxon church.
- The circular Romanesque window with its vivid carvings is unique in Ireland and is of international importance in the corpus of European Romanesque circular windows.
- The quality and condition of the capitals of the chancel arch make them some of the finest Romanesque stone carvings in Ireland.
- The quality of the carving and condition of the west doorway of the smaller church along with its windows makes it one of the most important buildings in the region. Collectively the two churches represent a place of international cultural significance.
- The results of the geophysical survey indicate the survival of a substantial amount of sub-surface archaeology, which is due to the lack of ground disturbance and development within the monastic enclosure of Rahan. This concealed archaeology has the potential to reveal much more about the site than is currently known.



PLATE 50 AND 51. Side views of carved faces on the angles of the capitals of the chancel arch.



PLATE 52. Detail of decorative carving on the capital of the chancel arch.

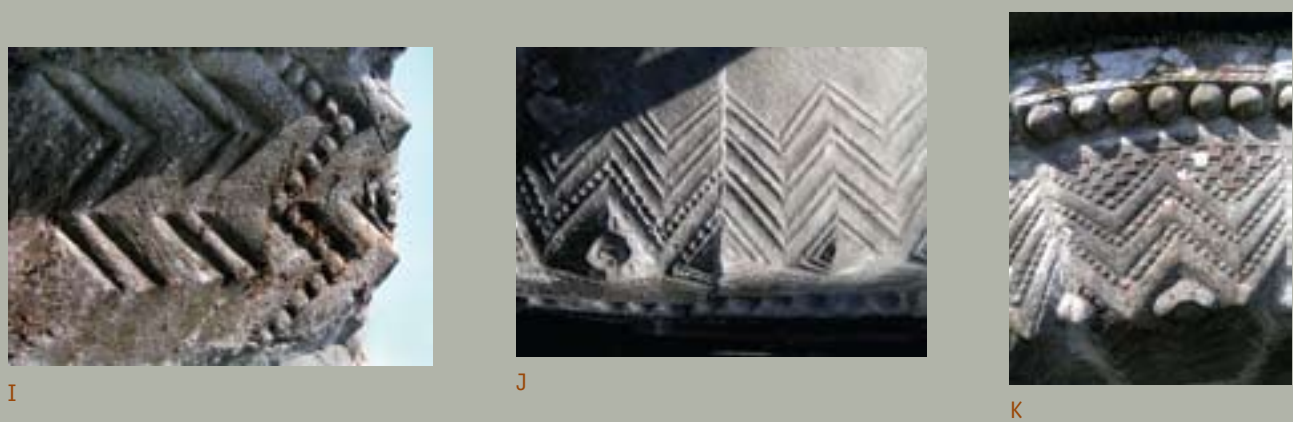


PLATE 53. A: Mythical beast's head. B: Ape-like animal head. C: Ram-like animal head. D: Exhibitionist figure. E: Possible bishop's head. F: Possible monk's head. G: Mythical beast's head. H: Monks' heads. I: Side view of inner face of window surround showing chevrons, beading and profile of possible bishop's head. J: Inner face of bottom voussoirs showing chevrons, beading and floral motif. K: External face of upper voussoirs showing chevrons, beading and chequerboard pattern.

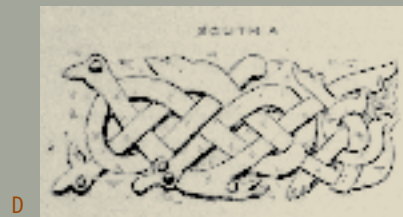
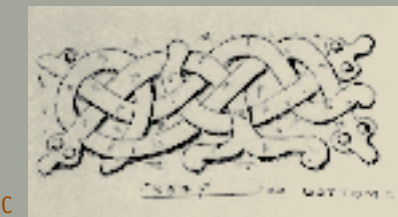


PLATE 54 . A,B,C,D: Line drawing of animal interlace carved on terminals of quatrefoil opening in centre of Romanesque round window (William Martin 1911). E: Photograph of animal interlace on northern terminal.



5.0 DEFINING THE ISSUES AND ASSESSING VULNERABILITY

5.1 OWNERSHIP

The various elements which constitute the former monastic site at Rahan are now in a number of different ownerships.

Church of Ireland

The Church of St Carthage together with its ancient graveyard is owned and cared for by the Church of Ireland. In recent years, the local community has maintained the graveyard that contains a splendid collection of inscribed headstones. The church and its graveyard are located in the centre of the enclosure.

Catholic Church

Immediately to the south of the ancient graveyard lies a second graveyard, which remains open for burials. This graveyard is owned and managed by the Catholic Church.

National Monuments Service

The National Monuments Service, which operates as a section of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, owns the ruins of the Small Church and the remains of a tower house located in the southeast corner of the Catholic graveyard at Rahan. These are managed by the Office of Public Works from their area office based in Trim under the direction of Ana Dolan.

Landowner, Sean Grennan

Sean Grennan, a local farmer, owns all of the remaining land inside the monastic enclosure excluding the graveyards. Access to the churches and graveyards are by a right of way running across Mr Grennan's land.

Landowner, John Mollin

John Mollin, a local farmer, owns the land inside the boundary of the monastic enclosure on the north side of the Rahan to Killina Road.

Local Community

The interest of the local community in the site is represented through the *Island Rahan Development Association*. The association approached the Heritage Officer of Offaly County Council in 2004 with an offer to assist the Church of Ireland in its care of the old graveyard. At that time the old graveyard was heavily overgrown and for the past three years in conjunction with Reverend Field, the graveyard has been maintained to a high standard.

It is important that all the stakeholders and owners identified above agree to manage the site in accordance with the policies outlined in this Conservation Plan.

5.2 STATUTORY PROTECTION

Statutory protection for the monastic site is in place under the following legislation:

- National Monuments Acts, 1930 – 2004
- Record of Monuments and Places, established under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act 1994
- Planning and Development Acts 2000 – 2002

The two ruins at Rahan are in state ownership under the care of the Office of Public Works and have been designated as National Monuments.⁶⁰

The entire enclosure, the smaller church, the ruined tower house, and the Church of Ireland graveyard are all protected on the *Record of Monuments and Places for County Offaly (RMP)* published in 1995. Its component elements are listed in this publication as - OF016-015 to OF016-015019, see Appendix 7 for a full listing of monuments. They are protected under Section 12 of the National Monuments (Amendment) Act, 1994.

As a building in use for ecclesiastical purposes, the Church of St Carthage is not protected under the provisions of the National Monuments Acts. The church is, however, included in the Record of Protected Structures in the Offaly County Development Plan 2003 – 2009 and is therefore a protected structure under the terms of the Planning and Development Act 2000.

The site is designated as a *Zone of Archaeological Potential* in the *Offaly County Development Plan 2003 – 2009*. The areas immediately north and south of the site are zoned for *Open Space*. The northwest corner of the site is bound by *Other Settlement Lands, Residential* and *Public / Community / Educational*.

5.3 CONDITION OF THE HISTORIC FABRIC

Church of St Carthage

The Church of St Carthage survives in a good state of preservation and a reasonably good state of repair. The phase one repairs overseen by Gary Miley included the removal of invasive ivy and concrete pointing on part of the chancel, the repair of natural slate roof coverings and the renewal of the nave windows and all rainwater goods.

External and Internal Masonry

Problems with damp in the building have been alleviated by the removal of hard cement rich coatings from the exterior of the nave and chancel and from the underside of the nave vaulting, in early 2007. The damp penetration was so severe that green algae covered much of the internal wall surfaces of the chancel. Having removed all of the cement coatings and pointing, the historic building fabric has now had the chance to dry out.

Small Church and Tower House

The ruins of the small church and the ruined tower house also survive in a reasonably stable condition, albeit with extensive cement pointing from previous programmes of repair.



PLATE 55. External face of west gable showing historic fabric, main doorway and chimney stack rising from the apex of the gable.

5.4 USE

Church of St Carthage

The Church of St Carthage is currently in use, on a regular basis in the summer months, as a place of divine worship for the Church of Ireland community. In 2006, it was used for an annual ecumenical service during Heritage Week in August and in 2007 for an ecumenical service to celebrate the Feast of St Carthage on the 14th of May. These services have proved to be very popular with the local community, who maintain a strong interest in the church and site. As one of the earliest churches in Ireland, this on-going spiritual use adds greatly to the spiritual and social significance of the building, and could be considered to be the defining feature of the place. Completing the



PLATE 56. Local people leaving church after annual ecumenical service.

conservation works to the exterior and interior of the church and raising the comfort levels within (through the installation of new heating and lighting) will make the building more attractive for regular use for worship and weddings.

Catholic Graveyard

The modern Catholic graveyard remains in regular use, although nearing the end of the number of new grave plots available. Even when all of the new plots have been opened, the graveyard will remain active for many years as existing plots are reopened for additional family burials, while in the long term the graveyard will maintain great importance for graveside visits of surviving family members.

Farmland Grazing

The current and long established pattern of grazing the majority of the lands contained within the original monastic enclosure is an ideal way to preserve the sub-surface archaeology from

disturbance and damage. The current owner and his ancestors deserve credit for the sensitive way they have farmed these lands and a continuation of this practice is to be encouraged. As a working farm with grazing animals, the current farmer has demonstrated a great tolerance of the traffic to the monastic site and graveyards.

5.5 ACCESS

There is a designated parking area for five to six cars at the gate to the site on the Rahan to Killina Road and a hardcore surface leading across the field to the entrance to the Church of St Carthage and the graveyards. In 2006 the Office of Public Works laid a small area of hardcore at the end of the lane to provide a hard standing area for maintenance vehicles. This is also used as a turning point for a hearse. If large congregations attend the church for worship, for weddings or the annual ecumenical service, or for large funerals, parking occurs along the Rahan to Killina Road or in the field inside the gates. The practice of parking on the grass within the enclosure is to be discouraged to avoid damage to the sub-surface archaeology. General access for the public to visit the Church of St Carthage or the ruins owned by the State is through the entrance gate, along the lane to the church through a working farm.

5.6 RESOURCES

Due to the small numbers of Church of Ireland members in the local diocese, there are insufficient numbers to sustain regular weekly worship at the Church of St Carthage. As a result the financial resources of the union of parishes that cares for the church are extremely limited. The wider Church of Ireland community, while recognizing the great importance of this early church, carries responsibility for a vast number of other church buildings around Ireland. The church is therefore dependent on state aid to enable the implementation of important conservation works such as have been commenced during recent years. These have come through grants from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Heritage Council and Offaly County Council. The significance of these grants should not be underestimated, and the specialist advisors overseeing the spending of these funds should adopt an approach that embraces simple, frugal and traditional building practices that represent not only good conservation practice, but also good value for money.

6.0 CONSERVATION POLICIES

6.1 GENERAL APPROACH

Policy 1: General Approach

The conservation and preservation of the Monastic Site at Rahan should take account of and value all layers of its history as part of a unique cultural landscape. There should be no disturbance of the sub-surface archaeology and the potential wealth of information which this may reveal about the site.

6.2 USE

Policy 2a: Worship

The continued use of the place for religious worship is in part responsible for the survival of the site in such a good state of preservation. The centuries-long use of the twelfth century church for worship is a defining characteristic of cultural significance and meaning. It is crucial that this function be maintained in the future.

Policy 2b: Burials

It is of critical importance for the successful management of this site that no further ground disturbance be undertaken within the monastic enclosure. It is also important that there should be no further extension to the modern Catholic graveyard located to the south of the twelfth century church. When the graveyard has reached capacity, burials should cease at Rahan.

Policy 2c: Visitor Access

Visitor access should be encouraged to this internationally significant site, however, guidelines as to the use should be drawn up and displayed on site to inform the public how best to enjoy the site without causing any damage. The vulnerability of the site and the farming activities that occur there need to be respected by all visitors. All members of the public entering the site for the purposes of worship, burial, visiting and tending graves, or simply visiting the buildings and ruins should behave responsibly: making sure to close gates, avoid bringing dogs, and avoiding damaging land or disturbing stock.

Policy 2d: Farming

The survival of the sub-surface archaeology at Rahan in a good state of preservation is due largely to the appropriate and sympathetic use of the land by the owner, Sean Grennan. The continued use of the land for pasture presents no significant threat to the sub-surface archaeology inside the monastic enclosure at Rahan and should be encouraged to continue.

6.3 ACCESS

Policy 3a: Access

There is strong local awareness of the importance of the site and an appreciation for the memory of St Carthage. Access to the site is freely available; however, the Church of St Carthage is locked when not in use. It is important to ensure regular access to the Church of St Carthage through community events such as yearly ecumenical services and to encourage the local schools to incorporate the history of the site into their schoolwork.

Policy 3b: Vehicular Access and Parking

It is important to appreciate the potential damage that can be caused to the sub-surface archaeology by motor vehicles entering the site, particularly in wet periods. It is recommended that cars are parked outside the enclosure to avoid irreversible damage being caused. An official notice should be placed on site advising the public that parking within the site should be avoided to prevent damage to the sub-surface archaeological remains.

6.4 CHURCH OF ST CARTHAGE

During late 2006 and early 2007, damaging and unsightly cement rich coatings previously applied to all of the exterior walls and the internal vault of the chancel of the Church of St Carthage were removed. This action has greatly assisted the conservation of the historic fabric and revealed it for the first time in many decades. It has also enabled the preparation of stone-by-stone line drawings of all of the historic masonry, prior to the reapplication of new soft lime coatings.

Policy 4a: General Approach

The many layers and periods of the development of the Church of St Carthage should be respected in any future repairs of the building. It is not appropriate for the church to be restored to any one period of time, and all surviving fabric should be conserved.

Policy 4b: Exterior

Following the stone-by-stone line drawings of the Church of St Carthage, the external facade of the historic building should be recoated in lime either as a wash or as a plaster. Lime wash will enable the stonework of the building to remain visible but provide the stonework with some degree of valuable protection.

It is important that the lime coatings on the church are maintained in the future. The application of a lime wash shelter coat might be considered for the protection of the Romanesque carvings. Expert advice and in-depth consultation should be sought from various bodies including the National Monuments Service, Architectural Heritage Advisory Unit, academic institutions and from a recognised stone conservator prior to any works being undertaken.

Policy 4c: Internal Masonry

The internal masonry of the chancel will require a lime coating for both conservation and aesthetic reasons: to provide a breathable shelter coat, to consolidate the masonry, to stabilise dust from the joints and to provide a fine rubblework finish to the soffit of the stone vaulting in the chancel. The chancel arch on the nave side has recently been stabilised by pinning and pointing in lime and sand, with several damaged stones repaired. As the remainder of the internal faces of the walls of the nave are coated in a smooth lime and sand plaster, it is recommended that a similar finish be applied to the rubble wall of the nave side of the chancel arch excluding the stone carvings.

The important carved heads on the capitals of the chancel arch survive in a worn and partially damaged state, as would be expected of artwork that has endured for between 800 and 900 years. In some areas, the surface finish of the stone is flaking off, probably due to the high levels of humidity that are to be found in any rarely used and infrequently heated building. This on-going decay is a cause for concern and should be investigated further. A masonry conservator experienced in traditional rather than contemporary chemical repair methods should be consulted to recommend the most appropriate conservation method to be followed. On no account should untried modern surface consolidants be used on the carved stonework of this building whether internally or externally.



PLATE 57. View of barrel-vaulted chancel roof with traces of wicker-centring visible after removal of cement coating.

Policy 4d: Stained Glass Window

The small stained glass window set into the fifteenth century single light ogee headed window in the north side of the nave is in a poor state of repair. This attractive window, depicting an image of St Carthage, contains a crudely executed and inexpert repair to an area of the window damaged in the past.

As the original painting contained in the surviving parts of the window is of a high standard, it would be appropriate to instigate a programme of restoration to be carried out by an experienced stained glass conservator skilled in glass painting. A good colour photograph survives of the window prior to the damage, and from this the missing section can be copied accurately to match the original artwork. As this window is an integral part of the important 1912 refurnishing and restoration of the church by William Edward Martin, this work should be undertaken in the short, rather than the medium term.



PLATES 58-59. Stained glass window before and after restoration work. Image on the left (De Breffny and Mott 1976) depicts St Carthage with his right hand holding the crozier, while the image on the right shows restoration work with the right hand missing.

Policy 4e: Damp Penetration

There is a serious long-term problem with dampness along the south side of the nave. This is due to the high external ground level that has risen significantly as a result of burials over the years. Lowering of this ground level is not appropriate due to the burials directly beneath the top soil. Low brick walls were constructed at some time during the past, possibly in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, to form a cavity between the damp outer wall and the inner leaf, which was subsequently hidden behind a timber panelled wainscot. This system appears to work reasonably well, although the timber wainscot on the south side no longer survives. Careful attention to detail will be necessary when reinstating this joinery element to isolate it from the inner wall and to allow ventilation for the passage of moist air in the cavity.

Policy 4f: Furnishings

Most of the simple and well detailed joinery furnishings installed by William Edward Martin in the 1912 restoration survive, apart from the wainscot to the south wall. This should be reinstated to match the similar detail on the wainscot and vestry that survives on the north side of the church. The timber parquet floor also requires isolated repairs in a number of areas. These should be carried out using hardwood blocks to match the existing floor.

Policy 4g: Services

The previous electrical installation is now redundant and requires full replacement. This should include a limited number of power socket outlets, and a simple lighting scheme for the nave and chancel with an external fitting to light the exterior at the entrance when the church is in use after dark. A new heating scheme should also be installed: an electrical storage heating system is probably the least damaging to the historic fabric and setting, if not the most environmentally sustainable or cost efficient option to run.

A pipe to provide water to the site could be installed below the roadway leading to the church and modern graveyard. This should be undertaken with appropriate archaeological permissions and supervision.

Policy 4h: Decorations

Lime wash coatings should be applied to the walls and ceilings of the nave and chancel. There will be no limewashing to the stone carvings of the chancel arch and windows until expert advice has been sought and agreement reached with the DoEHLG. Although there is clear evidence of previous lime wash coatings to the figure sculpture in the chancel arch no new limewashing will be undertaken. The figure sculpture in the chancel arch should be left as is until further expert advice of a conservator of decorative stonework can be sought.

Policy 4i: Historic Paintwork

An analysis of the traces of paintwork should be undertaken by a specialist historic paint conservator.

Policy 4j: Maintenance

Systematic care based on good maintenance and housekeeping is both cost effective and fundamental to good conservation. Every building needs regular maintenance to keep the wearing and weathering of surfaces in good order and to protect the vulnerable internal fabric from damage. In order to keep the church in good repair, regular use, inspection and maintenance will be necessary.

A comprehensive maintenance regime should be prepared by a suitably qualified person, and formally adopted with sufficient funds found to commission regular annual and quinquennial inspections, consequential repairs and an ongoing maintenance programme.

6.5 SMALL CHURCH AND TOWER HOUSE

Neither of these structures could be considered to be at risk, although it would be prudent to monitor the condition of the small church to assess the impact of cattle rubbing against the fine Romanesque doorway. It will also be desirable in the long term to replace all cement pointing with lime and sand to create a clearer pattern of the masonry units from which their complex building histories could better be interpreted. The small church in particular contains a fascinating collection of cut stone probably salvaged from the Church of St Carthage.

Policy 5a: Smaller Church

Stone-by-stone line drawings of all the wall faces of the small church should be undertaken to record this building as it stands.

Policy 5b: Wall Heads

The OPW should continue to carry out routine maintenance to the small church and ruins of the tower house with particular attention to the wall tops and the protection of the walls.

Policy 5c: Sheela-na-Gig

The Sheela-na-Gig, found on site in 1971, is currently housed in the Museum of Athlone Castle. However, as this is not a designated museum and is not open regularly to visitors, the option of displaying the Sheela-na-Gig within the safety of the Church of St Carthage should be considered. This should be discussed with the appropriate museum authorities and with the Church of Ireland community.

6.6 CHURCH OF IRELAND GRAVEYARD

This graveyard was very overgrown until recently when the Island Rahan Development Association worked with the Church of Ireland to cut back the vegetation and to maintain the graveyard. This important work has brought the graveyard back into an excellent condition, however, the future management and maintenance of the graveyard needs to be addressed.

Policy 6a: Management and Maintenance of the Church of Ireland Graveyard

It is important to keep the grass cut and to stop any growth of ivy and briars within the graveyard. Future options for the long-term management and maintenance of the Church of Ireland graveyard should be explored. This should include grazing by sheep, which would be an ideal solution.

Policy 6b: Recording

While the Offaly Historical and Archaeological Society carried out a recording of names in the graveyard, it would be appropriate to follow up with a more detailed programme which would record the location of each memorial, the full inscription and the memorial type.

Policy 6c: Graveslabs

The two fragments of the seventeenth century graveslabs should be placed inside the Church of St Carthage, and best practice should be followed (no cleaning or spraying) to protect the stone and lichens.

Policy 6d: Boundary planting

There are currently no major concerns with plant growth on the graveyard walls and judicious weeding should keep any potentially damaging woody plants from becoming established.

Policy 6e: Access

Consider the possibility of erecting a stile at the entrance to the churchyard to control animal access.



PLATES 60. View of well-kept graveyard with leaning memorials which enhance the historic character of the graveyard.

6.7 ECOLOGY

Policy 7a: Entrance Hedging

A beech hedge has recently been planted at the entrance to the site. Beech is not a native species and is not in keeping with the character of the site. Native species should be encouraged at the boundary of the site as a more appropriate alternative. The beech hedge at the entrance should be removed and the existing native hawthorn saplings behind it encouraged with pruning and infill planting.

Policy 7b: Graveyard Yew

The Yew tree should be fenced off to prevent compaction and grazing by animals and direct damage by humans. The tree's crown should be reduced back to the healthy inner crown and this process should be repeated every 10-15 years. The dense ivy needs to be removed from the crown and stem of the tree.

Policy 7c: Boundary of Catholic Graveyard

The hedge should be kept breasted and trimmed on a two to three year cycle to encourage density. Any infill planting required should be with native species.

Policy 7c: Sycamore Trees

The sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* to the west of the yew tree needs to be removed. The stump would need to be treated so that it does not coppice. Other sycamore trees within the walls of the graveyard should be removed where they are having a significant direct impact on the walls and gravestones.

Policy 7d: Hawthorn Tree

The ivy needs to be removed from the hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* outside the graveyard wall.

Policy 7e: Boundary of Catholic Graveyard

The hedge should be kept breasted and trimmed on a two to three year cycle to encourage density. Any infill planting required should be with native species.

6.8 MAINTENANCE

Policy 8: Site Maintenance

Essential information about each structure including materials, construction, maintenance and housekeeping procedures, should be recorded and updated regularly for each part of the site. This information should be held by the Church of Ireland for the Church of St Carthage and the OPW for the structures in their care, with copies held by the County Library Service of Offaly County Council.



PLATES 61. Pastoral setting of Rahan monastery showing the small church in foreground with grazing sheep and nave and chancel church in background.

6.9 MONITORING

Policy 9: Monitoring of cracks

The cracks running up the face of the chancel arch need to be monitored and assessed. 3D Laser scanning of the chancel arch will provide baseline data to measure and monitor any changes in the cracks to the stone carvings.

6.10 INTERPRETATION

The present interpretation of the site is limited to on-site display panels.

Policy 10a: Interpretation

On site interpretative material should be updated to reflect the information gathered as part of the Conservation Plan. The understanding about the phasing of the building revealed through analysis of the masonry should be made available to the public. The existing panels should be replaced with updated material. An online resource with information about the monument should be considered as this will make information available without having a negative visual impact on the site. The Romanesque carvings at Rahan are currently being recorded for the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture in Britain and Ireland and will be available on the internet at the website www.crsbi.ac.uk in 2008 (*pers. comm.* Dr Rachel Moss). To encourage further interpretation and dissemination of information on the Romanesque architecture at Rahan an academic conference should be organised within the county with the aim of publishing the seminar papers. This conference would enable modern scholars to place Rahan within its context from a regional, national and international perspective, thereby replacing the valuable but outdated historical analysis of previous generations.

Policy 10b: 3D Documentation of Romanesque Sculpture

The circular window, along with all other stone carvings at Rahan, could be recorded using a high resolution 3D laser scanner in order to produce accurate 3D images of all the stone carvings. The laser scanning will also ensure that there is a valuable accurate record of these fragile carvings, which are continually being eroded due to natural weathering. The 3D models could be uploaded onto the internet creating an interactive virtual gallery of the Romanesque carvings. The interactive gallery will enable the user to measure and manipulate the images in a 3D format.

Policy 10c: Further archaeological research

There is scope to carry out further geophysics and test trenching of the interior of the northern porticus, to establish the extent of the twelfth century chapel wall and potential burials contemporary with it.

Policy 10d: Organise Academic Conference about Rahan

Most of the published material on Rahan is now out of date and is not in keeping with the current academic research that has been carried out by various Art History Departments of Universities in Ireland and abroad. To further the understanding of Rahan it would be desirable to organise a one day conference in Offaly where leading academics in the field of Romanesque architecture could deliver papers on Rahan. These papers could then be published and would form a corpus of modern academic information accessible to the general public.



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PLATES 62. Decorative detail from west doorway arch of small church.

ABBREVIATIONS

A. Clon.	<i>The Annals of Clonmacnoise</i> Murphy, (D.) (ed.), <i>The Annals of Clonmacnoise: being annals of Ireland from the earliest period to A.D. 1408</i> (1896, Reprinted 1993, Llanerch, Felinfach).
AFM	<i>Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland</i> O'Donovan, (J.), (ed.) <i>Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616</i> , 7 volumes, (Dublin, 1856; Reprinted 1990, Edmund Burke Publisher).
AI	<i>The Annals of Inisfallen</i> Mac Airt, (S.), (ed.) <i>The Annals of Inisfallen</i> , (Dublin 1951; Reprinted 1977).
ALC	<i>The Annals of Loch Cé</i> Hennessy, (William M.), (ed. and translator) <i>The Annals of Loch Cé</i> , 2 volumes, (1871, Reprinted 2000).
A Tig.	<i>The Annals of Tigernach</i> Stokes, (W.), (ed.) 'The Annals of Tigernach' in <i>Revue Celtique</i> , xvi-xviii , (1895-7, Reprinted, 2 volumes, Felinfach, 1993).
AU	Annals of Ulster Hennessy, (W.M.) and MacCarthy, (B.), (eds.), <i>Annals of Ulster</i> , 4 volumes, (1887-1901).
CS	<i>Chronicum Scotorum</i> Hennessy (W.M.), (ed.), <i>Chronicum Scotorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs, from the earliest times to A.D. 1135, with a supplement containing the events from 1141 to 1150</i> (1866).
CPR	<i>Calendar of entries in the papal registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: papal letters</i> , 17 volumes, (HMSO and Irish Manuscripts Commission, London and Dublin 1893-1994).
OSFNB	<i>Ordnance Survey Field Name Books</i> (1840, 1904, 1938 Typescript copies, National Library of Ireland).
OSL	<i>Ordnance Survey Letters</i> O'Flanagan, <i>Ordnance Survey Letters</i> (Unpublished, Typescript 1927).
JAPMDI	<i>Journal of the Association for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead in Ireland.</i>
RMP	Record of Monuments and Places.
SMR	Sites and Monuments Record.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Definitions outlined in the Burra Charter

For the purposes of this conservation plan the following definitions provided by the *Burra Charter* have been used:

Conservation means all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance. Conservation is based on a respect for the existing fabric, use, associations and meanings. It requires a cautious approach to change best summed up by the dictum – *do as little as possible but as much as is necessary*. Surviving traces of accretions, alterations and earlier treatments to the original historic fabric of a place represent important evidence of its history and development over time. This evidence often contributes greatly to the significance of a building or place. Conservation action should assist and not impede a clear understanding of such evidence. Conservation may, according to circumstance, include the processes of: retention or reintroduction of a use; retention of associations and meanings; maintenance, preservation, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation and interpretation; and will commonly include a combination of more than one of these. There may be circumstances where no action is required to achieve conservation.

Place means site, area, land, landscape, building or other work, group of buildings or other works, and may include components, contents, spaces and views. The concept of place should be broadly interpreted.

Cultural significance means aesthetic, historic, scientific, social or spiritual value, which may have meaning for past, present or future generations. Cultural significance is embodied in the place itself, its fabric, setting, use, associations, meanings, records, related places and related objects.

Maintenance means the continuous protective care of the fabric and setting of a place, and is to be distinguished from repair. Regular *on-going* maintenance is the most sensible and cost-effective way to care for an historic building or place.

Repair involves the sensitive making good of defects that have occurred to historic fabric, through wear and tear. Within this process, existing fabric is retained and made good using like materials, without recourse to replacement or renewal.

Fabric means all the physical material of the *place* including components, fixtures, contents, and objects. Fabric includes building interiors and sub-surface remains, as well as excavated material.

Preservation means maintaining the fabric of a place in its existing state and preventing deterioration.

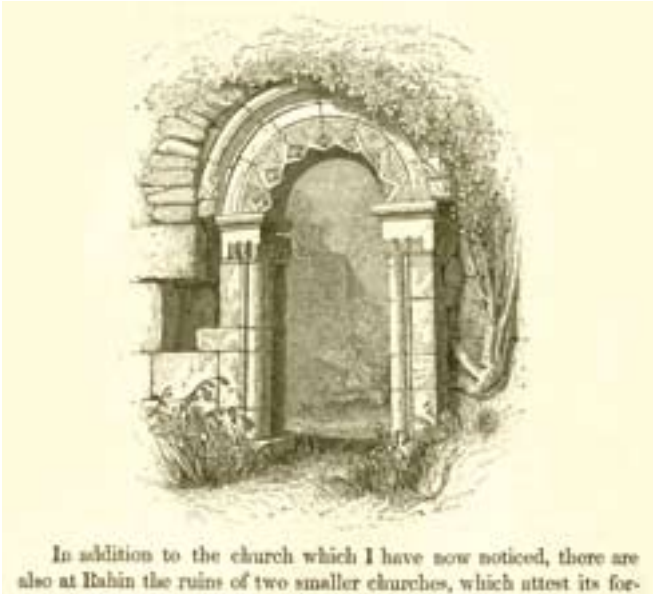
Restoration means returning the existing fabric of a place to a known earlier state by removing accretions or by reassembling existing components without the introduction of new material.

Reconstruction means returning a place to a known earlier state and is distinguished from restoration by the introduction of new material into the fabric. This should not be to the detriment of any place of cultural significance.

APPENDIX 2

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Descriptions of Rahan

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the Church of St Carthage has been studied and examined by some of Ireland's most distinguished scholars of their day. Although some of this information is no longer academically valid it is described here because it shows the historiography of the site and illustrates the thoughts of experts of their day and their ideas about Rahan and how these ideas have changed over the centuries. The first of these was George Petrie, who published his findings in his *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland* published in 1845. In this account Petrie thought that the church dated from as early as the eighth century and described it as:



In addition to the church which I have now noticed, there are also at Rahin the ruins of two smaller churches, which attest its for-

FIGURE 35. 19th century drawing of west doorway of small church (Petrie 1845).

1845 Petrie

... still used as a parish church, the chancel only appears to be ancient, and even this has suffered the loss of its original east window. The chancel arch, however, still remains, as also a circular window richly ornamented, which lighted a chamber placed between the chancel and the roof. The chancel is stone-roofed, as we may well believe the entire church to have been originally. It is in the ornaments of the chancel archway, however, that the similarity in design and execution to those in the Tower of Timahoe [Co. Laois] is chiefly found. This archway, as will be seen from the annexed drawing, consists of three rectangular piers at each side, rounded at their angles into semi-columns, which support three semi-circular arches entirely unornamented, except by a plain architrave on the external one. The capitals, on which the greatest richness of ornament is found, are those on the third, or innermost of these piers at each side; and, like those at Timahoe, these ornaments, though similar in design, are dissimilar in detail, and their bases differ in like manner.⁶¹

1877 Third Earl of Dunraven

Notes on Irish Architecture by the Third Earl of Dunraven 1877

Some of the earliest photographs ever taken of Irish antiquities occur in *Notes on Irish Architecture* by Edwin, Third Earl of Dunraven, edited by Margaret Stokes and published in 1877. Sadly, while this book describes the Church of St Carthage in some detail in word and sketch drawings, the only photograph included of Rahan is of the Romanesque entrance door to the second ruined church. This shows the doorway very much as it appears today with the west gable largely covered by a thick growth of ivy. Also notable is the total absence of any quoin stones to the west gable, all of which are missing. This is a valuable reminder of common practice that existed in Ireland of quarrying stone from ruins for use in other buildings.

1878 Margaret Stokes

In 1878 Margaret Stokes published an account of her work at Rahan, and in this she considered the function of thecroft space over the chancel of the church, which she believed to have been a dwelling house for the clergy. She concludes that:

These buildings are invested with a peculiar interest from the fact that they were not only places of worship, but also dwelling houses, the habitable portion being a chamber over the stone-roofed chancel, to which access was gained from the body of the church by one of three different methods. The first and most primitive, as in St. Kevin's, by a ladder from the body of the church through a hole in the ceiling of the lower story, which hole is afterwards replaced by a doorway over the choir arch, as at Donoughmore, and then a winding staircase, either in the wall, as at St. Saviour's, or

in a side tower or turret which leads to the chamber above, as in Cormac's Chapel. At a later date a small portion of the west of the building has been constructed to answer all the purposes of a dwelling-house, which was evidently separated from the sacred portion of the structure by a wooden partition, or possibly thin wall, and divided by a wooden floor into a basement and upper story. A staircase in the thickness of the wall leads to a doorway opening on the chamber in the upper floor. This peculiarity is to be seen in the church of St. Catherine, in the County of Wexford, and the old church of Castle Gregory, in the County of Kerry, as well as in a fortified church at Clonmines, on the coast of Wexford.⁶²

1894 Margaret Stokes

In 1894 Margaret Stokes described the carvings of the chancel arch at Rahan in the following terms:

The arches or orders of the Irish doorways spring more directly than do the Norman, from the sides or jambs, which incline towards them from the base, the sides of these doorways seeming to be a transition from the jambs and actual shafts of the older square-headed doorway. The angular sides of the three or four orders are rounded off and channelled into groups of bowtels, with merely slight projections at the feet, scarcely to be termed bases; and, instead of separate capitals to each, a single entablature unites the whole, often terminating at the angles with heads of a strikingly archaic character. This archaic character is shown in the accompanying drawings of capitals from churches of Clonaltin and Inchagoile on Lough Corrib.⁶³

1910 Arthur Champney

In his book on *Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture* of 1910, Arthur Champney suggested that Petrie's dating of the Church of St Carthage to the eighth century was incorrect, and that it belonged to the twelfth century.⁶⁴

1938/1955 Harold Leask

In 1938 Harold Leask commented on the complexity of Rahan Church stating that:

The analysis of the building itself, apart from its decorative features, is not easy, but I have formed the opinion that the archway and the North and South walls and part of the east wall of the chancel are coeval and that the whole was vaulted at the level of the inner intrados of the chancel arch.

In his 1938 article he states that the:

nave is modern but the lower parts of the walls are ancient. It is not rectangular and its axis is not the same as that of the chancel. A church with nave and chancel of one date as the original erection here must have been, would not have been so irregular in plan. My view is that the nave is a fifteenth century reconstruction again largely rebuilt in modern times.⁶⁵

He also comments on the upper vault stating that it:

may be original and if so is probably corbelled but the modern plastering obscures the structure and makes analysis impossible. My view, however, is that the vault is late, probably fifteenth century and corresponds with the vaulting, now gone, of the large wing building to the north which is also probably of fifteenth century date.⁶⁶

In 1955 he assigned the chancel of the church at Rahan to Phase 1 of the Romanesque period, dating from the end of the eleventh through to the first decades of the twelfth century. He described Rahan as:

The early phase of the full Romanesque that in which plain, square-sectioned arches are borne by plain shafts or colonnetted jambs, but with the full complement of ornamented base, capital and abacus is not represented by many examples. Foremost amongst these is the chancel archway of the larger church still in use at Rahan. This small but impressive portal is in three orders. The arches are square in section and quite undecorated but the jambs the piers from which they rise with their bases and capitals, exhibit treatment and features, which are to become characteristic of the Irish style. The piers are square in plan but shallowly wrought at each angle into engaged colonettes, bounded by narrow fillets of angular section. As will be seen this shallow modelling was favoured

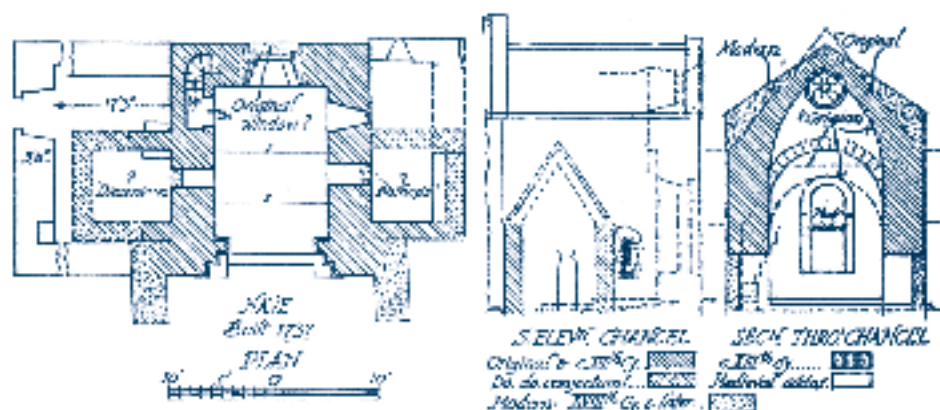
by the Irish masons even in a later phase of the style. The base-blocks of the piers, as in many other examples, project very little. Worked upon them are the curious, bulbous bases of the colonettes, with small, angular upper members. Between the bases the space is filled with a low-relief carving of much stylized foliage (cf. Capitals at St. Caimin's church, Iniscealtra, *infra*). The capitals, some of which have suffered defacement, are, like the base-blocks, deep, square, frieze-like and of very slight projection. They, also, exhibit features found again and again in later Irish work; human faces or masks carved at the angles and united by enrichment of various kinds. The motive in this case is the palmette, with a suggestion of the Greek anthemion or honeysuckle. The relief of the carving of both masks and palmette is low, in the latter hardly more than etching. Above the capitals is the one bold feature, an abacus of several inches projection. On the face this abacus is square above a row of very small pearls or pellets in false relief, and the chamfered lower face is decorated with bold, bud-like bosses. The Rahan archway has been assigned to a very early date, the seventh or eighth century, on the grounds of the classicism of the palmette motive and the curious bulbous form of the colonette bases. Something very like this last, accompanied by shallow engaged shafts, appears in the chapel of the Palace of Ani in Armenia, and datable, it is said, to the early seventh century at the latest. Since Armenian clerics dwelt for a time not very far away from Rahan in the seventh or eighth century, the importation of these motives is attributed directly to them and to that period.⁶⁷

Other writers on the Romanesque period find the arguments advanced for this early dating of the church to be untenable, and the eighth century date is generally not accepted. The chancel arch at Rahan may be an early (and perhaps even one of the earliest) examples of decorated Romanesque chancel arches in Ireland. A date of construction of around 1100-1120 has been put forward for the chancel arch⁶⁸ however more recent claims, based on comparisons with the nearby Nun's Church at Clonmacnoise, have suggested a later date during the latter half of the twelfth century.⁶⁹ The lack of carvings on the chancel archway was to accommodate a wooden rood screen which would have sat into the recessed arches (*pers. comm.* Dr Rachel Moss). The carvings on the circular window and on the west doorway of the smaller church bear close affinities to those on the chancel arch and west doorway of the Nuns' chapel at Clonmacnoise. As suggested by Leask, it appears that the chancel arch may predate the west doorway and circular window — the latter two features dating from c. 1160.

Leask stated that the:

Plan of Rahan presents features unique among Irish churches. It originally had two small chambers flanking the chancel to north and south, and entered from it through two small, round headed doorways with inclined jambs. Arches and jambs are of excellent workmanship. These little rooms may be the porticus known in the Eastern Church as the Diaconicon and Prothesis; the first for use of the clergy as a sacristy, and the second to receive the offerings of the faithful. They were also features of churches of the fifth and sixth centuries in Syria and North Africa and, though not represented in Italy at that period or later, they appear, curiously, in some English churches built in the seventh century. Except for the Rahan examples these features are unknown or, perhaps, have not survived in Ireland. An argument against the use, specifically, for the purposes the names imply is that at Rahan the entrance to the prothesis is from the chancel instead of from the nave, as it should be and as it appears in the English and foreign examples which have been laid bare by excavation.⁷⁰

FIGURE 36. Architectural drawings of nave and chancel church by Harold Leask (1938).



1940 Francoise Henry

Francoise Henry writing in 1940 stated that the Church of St Carthage at Rahan was a building of the *greatest interest*.⁷¹ She describes the building as possessing two *small square sacristies*. *The very wide chancel arch rests on two carved piers, and from the disposition of the walls of the sacristies it appears that the nave was hardly wider than the choir.*⁷²

According to Henry:

*This disposition of pilasters, with engaged columns, animated capitals, and bulbous bases, is found nowhere else in the west. The only place in the Christian world, where it is a constant feature from an early time to the sixteenth century, is Armenia. The chapel of the Palace of Ani, built before the Arab invasion, has piers very similar to those of Rahan.*⁷³ Henry goes on to describe the Church of St Carthage as a — *surprising feature, an Armenian arch and a church of Oriental plan, erected in the heart of Ireland.*⁷⁴ The human faces on the capitals of the chancel arch she describes as — *beautiful pieces of carving, strong, haughty faces, with curling moustache and beard. This is native art at its best.*⁷⁵

1970 Francoise Henry

In 1970 Francoise Henry considered the function of the loft space above the chancel of the church at Rahan and suggested that they may have been used as places of refuge, which could be easily defended.⁷⁶ She also suggested that — *One may wonder also if in some cases these rooms did not constitute a treasury adjoining the church. The 'Staff of Jesus', the most precious relic of Armagh, was kept in the twelfth century in a 'cave' or crypt, which could perfectly well be a vaulted room.*⁷⁷ It is therefore possible that the chamber over the chancel at Rahan, which would have been fireproof, may have acted as a safe room or treasury where the relics of the monastery were kept. These relics could be brought down from this chamber and put on display in one of the private side chapels when pilgrims came to the monastery of Rahan.

1972 Peter Harbison

In his publication *A Guide to the National Monuments of Ireland*, Harbison described Rahan as:

*'The roofed church, now unfortunately pebbledashed, was begun in the twelfth century. It was originally in the shape of a cross but the two transepts have largely disappeared. There is a fine chancel arch decorated with heads, and the north, south and parts of the east wall of the chancel are also Romanesque. The east window was inserted in the thirteenth (though the present window is modern) and the vault above added possibly in the fifteenth century. Near the altar was a small doorway leading to a chamber above the vault; the doors leading to the transepts have now been blocked up. The nave was built in 1732 but the lower parts are probably fifteenth century. The fine window on the north side decorated with a bird, a griffin and a dragon eating its tail, probably belonged to the fifteenth century nave. The most unique feature of the church is the round Romanesque window high up in the exterior wall of the east gable church; it bears excellent Romanesque decoration and once stood in the west gable above the door.'*⁷⁸

1993 Michael Herity

In 1993 Michael Herity suggested that some of these churches with stone roofed buildings may have been built as tomb-shrines, such as St Columba's House at Kells.⁷⁹ It is possible that the A-shaped space over the chancel of the twelfth century church at Rahan acted as a tomb-shrine, housing the remains or relics of the founding fathers of the monastery; it was a safe fireproof place where the relics of the church were kept, acting like a treasury. They would then have been brought down from this space where they were stored and placed on display in the side chapels for visiting pilgrims to view.

Descriptions of the Circular Window

The motifs used on the circular window bear a remarkable resemblance to the decoration on the west doorway and chancel arch of the Nun's Church at Clonmacnoise, suggesting that it is perhaps a product of the same school of masons. On the inner face of the quatrefoil openings there are interlaced animals carved in a typical Hiberno-Scandinavian style.

1845 Petrie

This window was described in 1845 by Petrie as the:

. . . remarkable round window already referred to, and which seems to me to be not only the most curious of its kind remaining in the British Isles, but also, I have little doubt, the most ancient. As the details of this window will be sufficiently seen in the illustration given on next page, it is only necessary to remark, that the ornaments are in very low relief, or, as I might say, inciso, or in hollow; and that it measures about seven feet six inches in the external diameter of the circle, and is placed at the height of about twenty-two feet from the ground. I should add, that the masonry throughout this interesting building is of a very superior character, the stones, which are polygonal, being fitted to each other with the greatest neatness and art, and that the material is the celebrated limestone of the district.⁸⁰

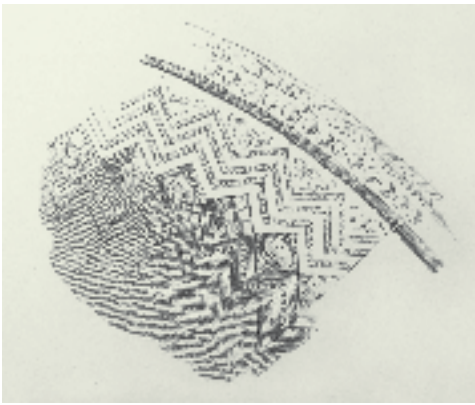


FIGURE 37. Decorative detail of Romanesque round window (Earl of Dunraven 1877).

1878 Stokes

In her book *Early Christian Architecture in Ireland*, Stokes described the decorative patterns on the Romanesque circular window as:

'Then, as in the windows of Annadown and Rahen, borders of chevron, bead, and even foliate patterns are carved in very low relief, as exquisitely felt in their treatment as they are gracefully conceived. Some mouldings which very rarely occur in England and France are more common in Ireland such as the battlement, which is also found at Iffley, and the interrupted chevron, which occurs in the church of Grand Maladrerie, near Caen. The occurrence in Ireland of such mouldings as are common to Romanesque architecture in other parts of Western Europe does not deprive her architecture of any of its archaic and national character.'⁸¹

1938 Leask

In 1938 Leask suggested that the circular window was:

too elaborate for the small upper apartment which existed in the roof. I think that it was in the gable of the church originally and was put in its present position in the thirteenth or fifteenth centuries, probably the former.⁸²

In 1955 Leask suggested that this window dated from phase two of the Romanesque period and was therefore of later date than the chancel arch. He described the circular window in considerable detail stating that these types of windows, which were:

. . . forerunners of the elaborate roses of the Gothic style, are not of very common occurrence in the Romanesque of north-western Europe, and are still rarer in Britain. Ireland has but one Romanesque example that set high in the eastern gable of the larger church at Rahan. It gives a little light to the upper part of the vault over the chancel what was the croft in the original building but it seems altogether too grand a feature for this quite minor purpose. Moreover, the appearance of the surrounding rough walling and the manner in which some of the wrought stones have moved out of position are indications of a rebuilding. The conjecture that it was originally a feature of the west gable of the nave a position more probable than the present one seems not unwarranted. This part of the church was rebuilt on the old foundations in the eighteenth century, the period to which the re-roofing of the chancel at its present low pitch may also be assigned. The round window measures,

externally, seven and a half feet in diameter over all of its five-inches-wide border moulding, which has upon its fascia a very lightly wrought, continuous, fern-like motive and a band of minute beads or pearls. Many bold, hemispherical bosses project from the chamfer. On the faces of the voussoirs and of their splayed returns are thirty-six chevrons, made up of three flattish rolls, separated and bounded by lines of fine beading. The spandrels are filled with anthemion derived and other motives in a great variety of designs. Most of the not very deep notchings of the arris have small, central bosses, flanked by beads, but two, at least, have little human masks instead and in a few others there are floral ornaments. The deep, splayed embrasure is closed by the window proper: flat stonework pierced by a very boldly cusped quatrefoil having four lightly etched zoomorphic ornaments (A, B, C, D) only discernible at close quarters near the re-curved points of the cusps. The delicacy of the over-all enrichment of this little masterpiece, combined with the very slight notching of the arris, suggests a place for it in Phase 2. On the other hand the designs of the spandrel ornaments almost as varied as those in the late twelfth-century window at Annaghdown, Galway and the cusping of the actual window opening, are suggestive of a late date. On balance the end of Phase 2 appears to be an acceptable position.⁸³



FIGURE 38. 19th century drawing of Romanesque round window (Petrie 1845).

Small Church

In 1845 Petrie described the church to the east of the Church of St Carthage and its doorway as being:

. . . nearly entire, [it] is worthy of an ampler notice in this place, on account of its very perfect and beautiful doorway, the ornaments of which, though possibly not of equal age with those of the principal church, already described, indicate at least a very considerable antiquity. The general architectural character of this doorway will be sufficiently understood from the preceding engraving, from which it will also be seen that its jambs have the inclination inwards, so characteristic of the earlier Irish architecture. In height, this doorway measures, externally, five feet four inches from the bases to the tops of the impost, and six feet seven inches to the vertex of the arch; and in width, two feet six inches between the capitals, and two feet nine inches between the bases. In form, the church is a simple oblong, measuring externally thirty-nine feet by twenty-three; and its massive polygonal masonry is of the earliest Christian style. It was lighted by two windows, one, as usual, in the centre of the east wall, and the other at the upper end of the south wall: the former is quite ruined, and the latter is a restoration of the fifteenth century. It is built throughout of the limestone of the district, and the ornaments on its doorway are remarkable for their sharpness and beauty of execution. As is usual in the architecture of this class, the ornaments on the bases of the semi-columns differ in their details, those on the south side being plain mouldings, while those on the north present the figure of a serpent, as shown in the accompanying engraving.⁸⁴

1955 Leask

Leask described the west doorway of the smaller church and considered the Scandinavian influences on the art style of this doorway in the context of other Romanesque churches in Ireland. He states that:

In the west wall of the smaller church at Rahan, a structure apparently rebuilt in the fifteenth century and incorporating materials from an older building, is an interesting doorway. It is made of the hard, blue-grey limestone of the Irish central plain and its details are still sharp and clear. The single arch is deeply notched to express the chevrons of face and soffit but the spandrel ornaments are in the familiar low-relief technique. A hollow-chamfered hood of late style terminates in beast-head stops and the abaci are of the same section but narrower. Scalloped capitals, with low relief ornament on the pleatings, crown the inclined jambs which have engaged columns worked on them. The bases are of small projection and stand on chamfered plinths. To right and left, in the position of an outer order, similar bases project from the wall: they carried or were intended to carry round shafts whose only function would be to support the ends of the hood-moulding. (Shafts with the same function exist at Clonmacnoise, where, however, the hood-moulding of the west door of the Nuns' Church is broader and projects further than at Rahan II). Most notable about this doorway [Kilmore, Co. Cavan] is the markedly Scandinavian character of the decoration on both faces of the innermost arch and the return faces of the jambs. Equally of far northern inspiration are the dragonhead capitals of the three stout, engaged-columns of the outer orders. The inner jamb and arch are square in plan with a slight arris roll, and on the face and soffit of the latter is interlaced ornament of narrow and bifurcating broader strands: the vertebral or chain pattern of Norway, found so much in Viking memorials in the Isle of Man and on Northumbrian crosses. The zoomorphic interlacements in the panels of the inner jamb are also Scandinavian. Kilmore, though showing more of the motives of Viking art than any other single Irish architectural work, is by no means the only example which shows this influence; it has been noted already in a capital at Killeslin and will be met with again at Clonmacnoise and other places.⁸⁵



PLATES 63. West view of small church.

APPENDIX 3

Rahan — Timeline of Historical Events

Below is a list of references to Rahan from the major Annals of Ireland and other historical documentary sources, some of which record the same event in different years, to the present day. It is significant that the main annals of Ireland record the death and expulsion of St Carthage from his monastery.

- 635** The flight of Carthach from Raithin, at Easter-tide.⁸⁶
- 636** St Mochuda, Bishop of Lis Mor and Abbot of Raithin (*Rahen*), dies on the 14th of May.⁸⁷
- 725** Cul Rathain [Rahan] was burned.⁸⁸
- 731** Cul Rathain went on fire.⁸⁹
- 740** The laws and constitutions of O'Swayne of Rahyne [Rahan] were established by the King and subjects.⁹⁰
- 748** The 'Law' of Ua Suanaigh [is enforced] over Leth-Chuinn (the Northern half of Ireland).⁹¹
- 750** Fidhmuine Ua Suanaigh, anchorite of Raithin, died.⁹²
- 756** Rest of Fidhmuine, i.e., Ua Suanaigh, anchorite of Rathin.⁹³
- 787** Cummascach, of Raithen fell asleep.⁹⁴
- 917** A slaughter of foreigners, viz. seven hundred, by the Uí Chonaill and by the Fir Maige Féine at Raithen Mór.⁹⁵
- 1113** Diarmaid Ua Ceallaigh [O'Kelly], successor of Ua Suanaigh, died.⁹⁶
- 1131** Mortagh O'Molloy that succeeded as king of Fearkeall, was burnt by the family of Moyntyr Swanym in the church of Rahin.⁹⁷ He was killed because he *had his bed that night in the church; and his wife was with him in the bed; the church was burnt over his head for his pollution of the church the previous night.*⁹⁸
- 1136** Soirvreach O'Kelly, Cowarb of Rahin O'Swanaye [Rahan].⁹⁹
- 1139** Muirheartach Ua Maelmhuaidh [O'Molloy], the other lord of Feara-Ceall, was burned by the Feara-Ceall, i.e. by the Ui-Luainimh, in the church of Raithin.¹⁰⁰
- 1141** Domhnall, son of Ruaidhri Ua Maelmhuaidh [O'Molloy], lord of Feara-Ceall, was killed by Muintir-Luainimh, at Rathain-Ui-Suanaigh [Rahan].¹⁰¹
- 1156** Aed, son of Donnchad Hua Melsechlainn, king of Fir Cell, was slain by the Muintir Luainim in Rathen.¹⁰²
- 1166** Gilla-na-naemh Ua Ceallaigh, successor of Ua Suanaigh at Rathain, died.¹⁰³
- 1205** Moyle Kieran O'Kelly of Rahine, cowarb of St Suanus in Rahine, died.¹⁰⁴
- 1215** The death of bishop O'Cellaigh [O'Kelly] of Rathan, this bishop may have been bishop of the diocese of Kilmacduagh in Co. Galway.¹⁰⁵
- 1227** Simon Clifford founded and builded the castle of Rahan O'Swaynie [Rahan] this year. This man gave an annuity to the Prior of Durrow and Convent.¹⁰⁶

- 1400 –1421** Creation of the parish of Fercall [Fir Chell] by papal decree at the behest of the inhabitants of Fir Chell.¹⁰⁷
- 1587** Surrender and re-granting of Fir Chell by Conyll O'Molloy, captain of his nation, to the English Crown.¹⁰⁸
- 1639** The parish of Fir Chell is dissolved and five new parishes are created including the parish of Lynally. Rahan is now part of Lynally parish.¹⁰⁹
- 1641** Bishop Dopping recorded that all chapels were in a condition of waste except Lynally and Ballyboy.¹¹⁰
- 1677** Letter from Charles O'Molloy to Pope Innocent XI describes the presence of three churches at Rahan: *one parochial, one of Christ and one of the Blessed Virgin, not destroyed but well desolated.*¹¹¹
- 1696** Visitation of Bishop Dopping in August 1696, who noted that the large church at Rahan had a shingled roof; because Rahan had fallen into disuse, its roof was taken down and removed to the nearby church of Lynally. The roof at Lynally remained intact until 1820.¹¹²
- 1732** Programme of repair works carried out commemorated by inscribed date stone on the west gable of church.
- c. 1830** Yellow brick surround windows inserted in north side of nave. Nave walls and ceilings low brick inner wall and cavity in nave plastered. Roof repairs constructed, pews installed. Cast iron rainwater goods installed.
- 1911** Finely decorated single light ogee headed window surround dating from the fifteenth or sixteenth century, dug up near the Church of St Carthage.¹¹³ This was later built into the north wall of nave and a stained glass window of St Carthage was commissioned to fill the opening.¹¹⁴
- 1912** Martin repairs commemorated by memorial plaque in the interior of the church (quoted in full in main text on page 13).
- 1937** Thirteenth centenary of the death of St Carthage — celebrations held at Rahan, with reports of these celebrations appearing in the local and national press.
- 1910-30** Repairs to the Church of St Carthage's roof and extensive application of cement-rich render coatings to interior and exterior of the church.
- 1960s** OPW carry out drainage works to Clodiagh River as part of the Shannon Drainage Scheme, leaving an almost continuous line of spoil heaps on the south side of the river, which create an unfortunate confusion when viewed with the original earth banked enclosure.
- 2003** Desmond Fitzgerald Architects write a Conservation Report on *St Carthage's Church Rahan, Co. Offaly* commissioned by the Heritage Council for the Church of Ireland.
- 2004** Gary Miley commences repairs to the Church of St Carthage with repairs to stained glass windows, some removal of cement rich render and test trenching along the south wall.
- 2006-07** Dr Paul Gibson carries out geophysical survey of the enclosure.
- 2006-07** Conservation of the Church of St Carthage commenced by Howley Hayes Architects.

APPENDIX 4

New Parish of Fir Chell

1400 A.D. — Petition of the People of Fir Chell

‘To the bishop of Termoli, and the priors of Durriache [Durrow] and Sygyr [Seirkieran] in the dioceses of Meath and Killaloe. Mandate, at the recent petition of the majority of the inhabitants of the [towns and places of the] country (patria) of Ferceall, in the diocese of Meath – containing that by reason of the distance of their said country, eight English miles, as well as of wars, access to their parish church of St. David, Achanurcayr [Horseleap, Co. Westmeath], in the said diocese, for divine offices and the sacraments, baptisms and burials, is very difficult, especially in the winter and rainy season; and that, if to the chapel of St. Colman, Lyndela [Lynally], in the said country, were subjected the chapels, in the same country, of Rachayn [Rahan], Kylleacy [Killoughy], Ralyfey [Rathlihen], Athalvy [Ballyboy], Drumculynd [Drumcullen] and Eglays [Eglish], all daughter chapels of and annexed to St. David’s, it would be fit for erection into a parish church; and that its fruits and those of the said other chapels are sufficient for a rector and a vicar, the latter to have the cure of the said inhabitants and to pay the Episcopal and other dues – to separate from St. David’s all the said chapels, to erect that of St. Colman into a parish church, to subject thereto the others as daughter chapels, notwithstanding that they have the cure, to assign to it the said country as its parish, and to grant that St. Colman’s, even if it or any other of the said chapels be of lay patronage, may have font, cemetery and other parochial insignia’ (CPR 5, (1904), pp 314).

Papal Reply to the Petition of the People of Fir Chell

1421 – St Peter’s Rome – ‘To the prior of St. Mary’s, Deruach [Durrow], in the diocese of Meath. Mandate as below. Lately Boniface IX – at the petition of the majority of inhabitants of the country (patria) of Fercall (de Fearakycall) in the diocese of Meath, containing that by reason of the distance of their said country, six English miles, as well as of wars etc. access to their parish church of St. David, Achanurcyr [Horseleap], in the said diocese, for divine offices and the sacraments, baptisms, burials, was very difficult, especially in the winter and rainy season; and that, if to the chapel of St. Colman, Lynnella [Lynally], in the said country, were subjected the chapels, in the same country, of Rachayn [Rahan], Kylleacy [Killoughy], Raliffen [Rathlihen], Habuge [Ballyboy], Drumculynd [Drumcullen] and Eglays [Eglish], all daughter chapels of an annexed to St. David’s, it would be fit for erection into a parish church; and that its fruits and those of the said other chapels were sufficient for a rector and a vicar, the latter to have the cure of the said inhabitants and to pay the Episcopal and other dues – ordered the bishop of Termoli and the priors of Duruake [Durrow] and Seirkieran in the diocese of Meath and Ossory, to separate from St. David’s all the said chapels, to erect St. Colman into a parish church, to subject thereto the others as daughter chapels, notwithstanding that they had cure, to assign to it the said country as its parish, and to grant that St. Colman’s, even if it or any other of the said chapels were of lay patronage, might have font, cemetery and other parochial insignia. At the recent petition of the said inhabitants the pope orders the above prior to summon the rector of St. David’s and others concerned, and if he find that the statements of the inhabitants be true, and that the rector of St. David’s can be maintained from the rest of the fruits of that church, and pay the Episcopal dues etc., to confirm the separation, erection etc. made by the said bishop.’ (CPR 7, (1906), pp 174).

APPENDIX 5

Explanation of historical documents referred to in the Conservation Plan

The Speckled Book (Leabhar Breac)

The Speckled Book is also known as Leabhar Breac Maic Aedhagain, meaning ‘The Speckled Book of MacEgan’; and as, Leabhar Mór Dúna Doighre or ‘The Great Book of Dun Doighre’.

Reference no.: RIA MS 23 P 16

Probably composed in the late fourteenth century/early fifteenth century, Leabhar Breac (as it is commonly known) is a collection of ecclesiastic writings in both Middle Irish and Latin, compiled by the scribe Murchadh Riabhach O’Cuindlis. It documents several saints’ lives, in particular those of Sts. Patrick, Brigid, and Columba, as well as The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee. It also contains numerous homilies, hymns, and ecclesiastical legends, including what some think is the oldest Marian litany. It was held by the MacEgans, a brehon family, at Dun Doighre in Co. Galway.

Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee

A Martyrology is an official register of Christian martyrs. Originally these were lists of martyrs which, under the date of the festival, merely gave the martyr's name and his place of martyrdom. In this sense they were called Calendars. The martyrology had a liturgical function, and was meant to be read right through, at least the entries for one day.

There are several Irish martyrologies, the best known of which are the Martyrology of Tallaght, Féilire Óengusso (Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee), Féilire hui Gormain (Martyrology of Gorman). Recently Professor Pádraig Ó Riain of University College Cork, has shown that the Martyrology of Tallaght and the Martyrology of Oengus may be dated to about 830.

Martyrology of Donegal

The Martyrology of Donegal (1630) was written in Irish prose in the Franciscan monastery in Donegal and contains names of Irish persons only.

Book of Armagh

This book, now in Trinity College, is almost as beautifully illuminated as the Book of Kells. The accomplished scribe was Ferdomnach of Armagh, who finished the book in 807. It is chiefly in Latin, with a good deal of Old Irish interspersed. It contains a life of St. Patrick; a number of Notes on his life, by Bishop Tirechán; a complete copy of the New Testament; and St. Patrick's Confession, in which the saint gives a brief account, in simple, unaffected Latin, of his mission in Ireland; this Confession was copied by Ferdomnach from the very handwriting of St. Patrick.

In the year 1004, a highly interesting and important entry was made in this book. In that year the great king Brian Boru, arriving at Armagh, made an offering of twenty ounces of gold on the altar of St. Patrick. He confirmed the ancient ecclesiastical supremacy of Armagh, and caused his secretary, Mailsuthain, to enter in the Book of Armagh this decree, which is as plain now as the day it was written.

The Book of Fermoy

Reference no.: RIA MS 23 E 29

The *Book of Fermoy* was written in 1373 by Adam Ó Cianáin on twenty-two folios. The first eight folios are still bound together, while the other fourteen were split off, and now form the "Stowe Fragment" held at the same library. The manuscript contains The Book of Invasions, Fosterage of the Houses of the Two Milk Vessels, The wooing of Emer, The Adventures of Art son of Conn, *The Voyage of Bran*, and many more stories, with numerous variations with those found in other manuscripts.

The Voyage of Bran (Imram Brain)

The *Voyage of Bran (Imram Brain)* was one of the oldest tales in Irish literature. It was said that the narrative was first compiled in the seventh century. However, the present work was preserved in two extant works: the *Book of the Dun Cow* (early eleventh century) and the *Book of Leinster* (mid twelfth century).

Battle of Ros na Rig

A mythological tale from the **Ulster Cycle**, formerly the **Red Branch Cycle**, that is a large body of prose and verse centering around the traditional heroes of the Ulaid in what is now eastern Ulster.

Life of Colum Cille — Betha Choluim Cille

Life of St Columcille compiled by Manus O'Donnell in 1532.

The Book of Ballymote (Leabhar Bhaile an Mhóta)

Reference no.: RIA MS 23 P 12

Written on vellum, probably around 1391, *The Book of Ballymote* was produced by the scribes Manus O'Duignan, Solomon O'Droma, and Robert McSheedy, for Tonnaltagh McDonagh, whose clan kept the manuscript until the early sixteenth century, when it came into the hands of the O'Donnell clan. The first page of the work contains a drawing of Noah's Ark as conceived by the scribe. The first written page is missing and the second opens with a description of the ages of the world. It then contains a history of the Jews; a life of Saint Patrick; a copy of *The Book of Invasions*, "The Instructions of King Cormac, as well as other stories of King Cormac Mac Airt, stories of Fionn Mac Cumhail and Brian Borumha, genealogies of various clans and kings.

Book of Lismore (Leabhar Mac Carthaigh Riabhach)Also known as *Book of McCarthy Reagh*

Reference no.: RIA MS 23 P 2

Believed to have been composed just before 1417, the *Book of Lismore* is a vellum manuscript, prepared at the School of Lismore, in what is now County Waterford. The book contains twelve saints' lives including those of Patrick, Columcille, and Brigid.

Acts of the Saints (Acta Sanctorum)

Acts of the Saints is an encyclopedic text in 68 folio volumes of documents examining the lives of Christian saints, in essence a critical biography, which is organised according to each saint's feast day. It begins with two January volumes, published in 1643, and ended with the *Propylaeum* to December published in 1940.

Bollandists

The Société des Bollandistes named for the Jesuit scholar Jean Bolland ('Bollandus', 1596-1665) has overseen this mammoth undertaking, first in Antwerp and then in Brussels. When the Jesuits were suppressed by the Habsburg governor of the Low Countries in 1788, the 'Bollandistes' continued their work, in the Abbey of Tongerlo. From 1643 to 1794, 53 folio volumes of *Acta Sanctorum* had been published, covering the saints from January 1 to October 14. After the creation of the Kingdom of Belgium, the Bollandistes were permitted to reassemble, working from the Royal Library of Belgium ('Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique') in Brussels.

Lives of the Irish Saints

The many 'Lives of the saints' are essential sources in our knowledge of societies, cultures and civilizations of the Christian world, even secular aspects not directly related to cult or doctrine. A saint is a person of note. The saint exercises an influence on society in civil as well as ecclesiastical affairs. After the saint's death, the communities which the saint has created, institutions he or she has founded, rules drawn up, and even the nature of the cult rendered to the saint, are the raw material of history. The "Lives" of the Irish Saints contain an immense quantity of material of first rate importance for the historian of the Celtic church. Underneath the later concoction of fable is a solid substratum of fact which no serious student can ignore. Even where the narrative is otherwise plainly myth or fiction it sheds many a useful sidelight on ancient manners, customs and laws as well as on the curious and often intricate operations of the Celtic mind.

Codex Salmanticensis

Collection of Latin Lives known as the Codex Salmanticensis, to which are appended brief marginal notes in mixed middle Irish and Latin. These Latin Lives are contained mainly in four great collections. The first and probably the most important of these is in the Royal Library at Brussels, included chiefly in a large manuscript known as 'Codex Salmanticensis' from the fact that it belonged in the seventeenth century to the Irish College of Salamanca.

APPENDIX 6

Martyrology of Rahan

A Martyrology is an official register of Christian martyrs. Originally these were lists of martyrs which, under the date of the festival, merely gave the martyr's name and his place of martyrdom.

- May 14th** Feastday of St Carthage, recorded in the *Martyrology of Oengus* as 'the fair feast of Carthach of Rathen' (Stokes 1905, 124).
- May 16th** *Martyrology of Oengus* records this day as the 'noble feast of Súanach's descendant' (Stokes 1905, 124).
- October 1st** The *Martyrology of Donegal* records that October the 1st was the feastday of Fidairle hua Suanaig, abbot of Rathen whose death is recorded in 762 (AU).

APPENDIX 7

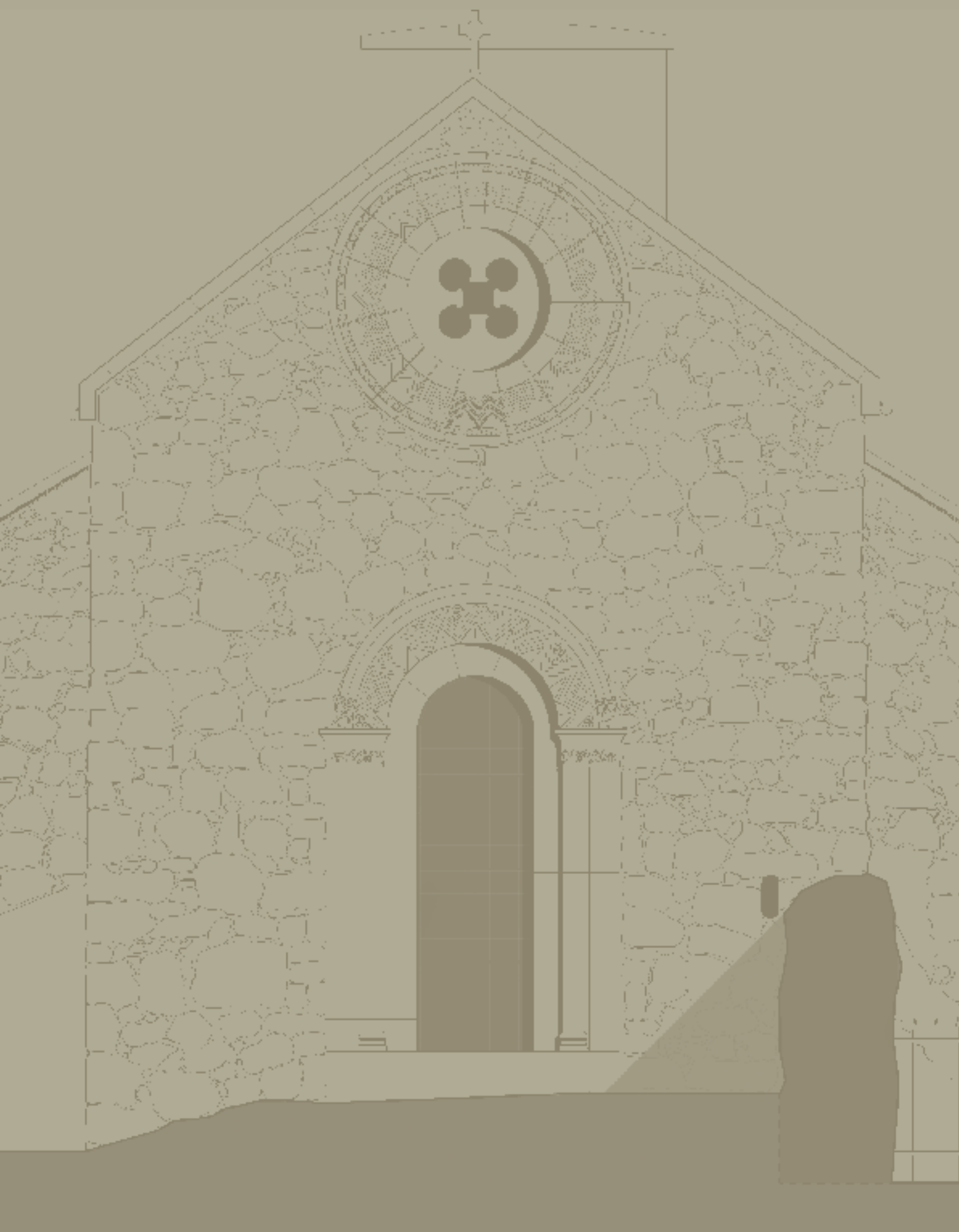
Table of Archaeological Monuments in Rahan and their listing in the Sites and Monuments Record for Co. Offaly (SMR) (This list can be downloaded from the Archaeological Survey of Ireland's website at www.archaeology.ie)

MONUMENT NO.	NAT. GRID E/N	TOWNLAND	CLASSIFICATION
OF016-015----	NPL	RAHAN DEMESNE	Redundant record
OF016-015001-	225898/225456	RAHAN DEMESNE	Church
OF016-015002-	225898/225440	RAHAN DEMESNE	Graveyard
OF016-015003-	225900/225420	RAHAN DEMESNE	Cross-slab
OF016-015004-	225870/225490	RAHAN DEMESNE	Earthwork(s)
OF016-015005-	225920/225550	RAHAN DEMESNE	Ecclesiastical enclosure, possible
OF016-015006-	225936/225389	RAHAN DEMESNE	Sheela-na-gig (original location)
OF016-015007-	226063/225467	RAHAN DEMESNE	Redundant record
OF016-015008-	NPL	RAHAN DEMESNE	Standing stone, possible
OF016-015009-	225939/225389	RAHAN DEMESNE	Castle – tower house, possible
OF016-015010-	226065/225467	RAHAN DEMESNE	Church
OF016-015011-	225890/225457	RAHAN DEMESNE	Graveslab (17th century)
OF016-015012-	225873/225450	RAHAN DEMESNE	Graveslab (17th century)
OF016-015013-	225898/225456	RAHAN DEMESNE	Cross-slab, possible
OF016-015014-	225880/225571	RAHAN DEMESNE	Bullaun stone, possible
OF016-015015-	225898/225456	RAHAN DEMESNE	Architectural fragment (present location, medieval)
OF016-015016-	225889/225427	RAHAN DEMESNE	Architectural fragment (present location, medieval)
OF016-015017-	NPL	RAHAN DEMESNE	Church, possible
OF016-015018-	NPL	RAHAN DEMESNE	Castle – unclassified, possible
OF016-015019-	NPL	RAHAN DEMESNE	Bullaun stone (original location)

NPL = Not Precisely Located

ENDNOTES

- 1 Plummer 1922, **2**, p 304
- 2 JRSAI 1870-1, **2**, pp 27-9
- 3 Fr. Carthage 1937, pp 109-10
- 4 OSFNB 1837, **2**, p 670
- 5 Joyce 1902, **1**, p 77
- 6 Gwynn and Hadcock 1970, p 43
- 7 Kenney 1929, p 451
- 8 Fitzpatrick 1998, p 126
- 9 Fitzpatrick 1998, p 95
- 10 Mac Eclaise 1910, p 497
- 11 Kenny 1997, pp 473-4.
- 12 Plummer 1922, **2**, p 162
- 13 Fr. Carthage 1937, p 89
- 14 Plummer 1922, **2**, p 297
- 15 Plummer 1922, **2**, p 297
- 16 Stokes 1905, p 81
- 17 Stokes 1905, p 81
- 18 Stokes 1905, p 93
- 19 Shaw 1967, pp 24-5
- 20 Lewis 1837, **2**, p 480
- 21 Lewis 1837, **2**, p 481
- 22 Parliamentary Gazetteer 1846, **3**, p 106
- 23 One church referred to here is now considered to be the remains of ruined tower house.
- 24 IAA Biographical Details
- 25 Irish Builder
- 26 Leask 1938, p 114
- 27 Building News 21July 1911
- 28 Building News 21July 1911
- 29 Building News 21July 1911
- 30 Building News 21July 1911
- 31 Building News 21July 1911
- 32 Cummins 2004, pp 6-8.
- 33 Quinlan and Foley 2004, p 24
- 34 Harbison 1972, pp 206-7
- 35 Leask 1955, **1**, p 144.
- 36 Quinlan and Foley 2004, pp 15-16
- 37 Leask 1938, p 114.
- 38 Fitzpatrick and O'Brien 1998, p 61
- 39 Fr. Carthage 1937, pp 109-110
- 40 Newman Johnson 1971, pp 169-70
- 41 OS Letters **2**, p 49.
- 42 Crawford 1916, p 166
- 43 JAPMD **18**, no.6 (1912), p 579
- 44 JAPMD **19**, no.2 (1914), p 106
- 45 Fitzpatrick and O'Brien 1998, p 145
- 46 JRSAI **2**, (1870-1), pp 27-9
- 47 Stokes 1905, p 95
- 48 Newman Johnson 1971, pp 169-70
- 49 Petrie 1845, p 356; O'Muirthuile 1957, pp 55-63
- 50 Sproule 1854, p 478.
- 51 Phillips 1854, p 76.
- 52 Irish life of St Mochuda of Lismore
- 53 Irish life of St Mochuda of Lismore
- 54 Stokes 1905, p 205
- 55 Fitzpatrick and O'Brien 1998, p 57
- 56 Henry 1940, p 94
- 57 Henry 1940
- 58 Taylor 1965-78, **3**, pp 824-5
- 59 Henry 1940
- 60 Reg. No. 82
- 61 Petrie 1845
- 62 Stokes 1878, pp 121-122
- 63 Stokes 1894, p 68
- 64 Champneys 1901, p 118
- 65 Leask 1938, p 114
- 66 Leask 1938, p 114
- 67 Leask 1955, **I**, pp 89-90
- 68 Leask 1955, **I** p 90
- 69 O'Keeffe 2003, p 265
- 70 Leask 1955, **I**, pp 88-92
- 71 Henry 1940, p 94
- 72 Henry 1940, p 94
- 73 Henry 1940, pp 95-6.
- 74 Henry 1940, p 96.
- 75 Henry 1940, p 96.
- 76 Henry 1970, p 152
- 77 Henry 1970, p 152.
- 78 Harbison 1972, p 207
- 79 Herity 1993, p 194
- 80 Petrie 1845, p 243
- 81 Stokes 1878, pp 123-4
- 82 Leask 1938, p 114
- 83 Leask 1955, **I**, pp 142-144
- 84 Petrie 1845, p 247
- 85 Leask 1955, **I**, p 146
- 86 AU
- 87 AFM
- 88 AFM
- 89 A Tig.
- 90 A Clon.
- 91 AU
- 92 AFM
- 93 AU
- 94 AI
- 95 *ibid*
- 96 AFM
- 97 A. Clon
- 98 Plummer 1922, **2**, p 306
- 99 A. Clon
- 100 AFM
- 101 AFM
- 102 A. Tig
- 103 AFM
- 104 A. Clon
- 105 ALC
- 106 A. Clon
- 107 CPR **7**, p 174
- 108 Nicholls 1994, **3**, pp 9-10
- 109 Ellison 1975, pp 5-6
- 110 Ellison 1975, p 6
- 111 Shaw 1967, pp 24-5
- 112 Ellison 1975, p 7
- 113 The Building News, Oct 13th 1911 p 506
- 114 Carthage 1937, p 109





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