

OLD CONNAUGHT MEDIEVAL CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD

THE MEDIEVAL BRAY PROJECT
SHARING INFORMATION

WHAT IS HAPPENING AT THE GRAVEYARD NOW

Groups supporting work at the graveyard include:

- Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Cemeteries and Heritage (DLR)
- Wicklow Heritage (WH)
- Roaringwater Journal (RJ)
- The Medieval Bray Project (TMBP)

Under the guidance and care of DLR Cemeteries, TMBP has, after consulting with others and accessing the publication of 'The Guidance for the Care and Conservation and Recording of Historic Graveyards', worked to control weeds and provide access to this historic site.

To view Tom Curtis's survey of the flora of this graveyard online, please log into:

themedievalbrayproject.wicklowheritage.org

Then put 'OLD CONNAUGHT' into the search box.



Photograph after initial strimming of graveyard by Dun Laoghaire - Rathdown Cemeteries in 2019. By: The Medieval Bray Project.



It is hoped that this graveyard can be prepared for limited ongoing access either by way of a key holder arrangement or working towards having an interested local group agreeing to operate as a 'friends of' to put this historical site on a sustainable maintenance footing going forward.

Currently Robert Harris from RJ is in the process of physically surveying the headstones in this graveyard using field work and records available from Cantwell from his survey of the graveyard in 1975. (Fig 1)

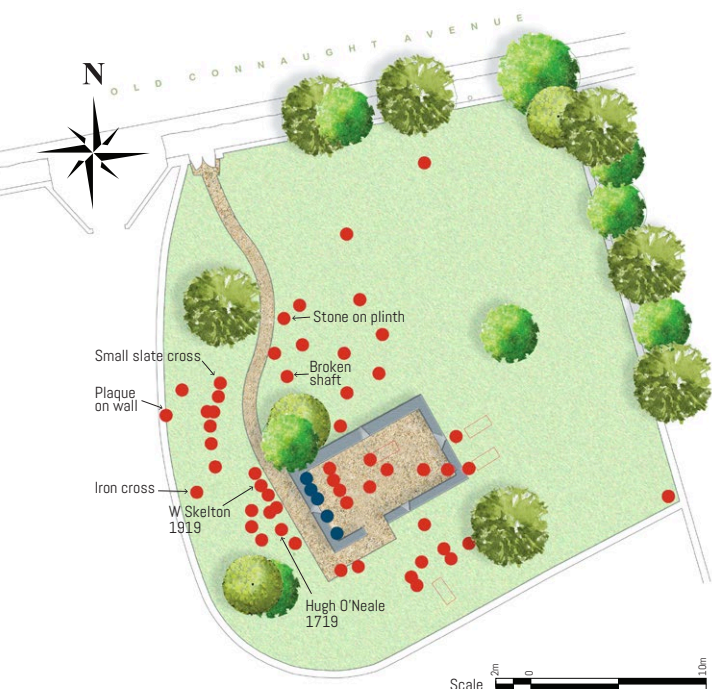


Fig: 1 - Grave survey - work in progress by Robert Harris.

EXTRACTS FROM SURVEY OF OLD CONNAUGHT CHURCH AND GRAVEYARD

Entitled: Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown
closed burial grounds.

Closed by Ministerial Order in 1948.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The site at Old Connaught is not associated with an early medieval saint and the ruin of the church is typical of later medieval buildings. The first definitive documentary record of the church is in a Regal Visitation of 1615 when it is recorded as being in good repair (Corlett 1999, 138-9). It is mentioned again in Archbishop Bulkeley's report of 1630 when it was a ruinous state and only attended by 14 poor labourers. Later the church became unroofed and does not appear to have been used again for services (Ball 1905, 108-109).

THE CHURCH

The church is located in the south-western portion of the graveyard and is covered in vegetation. The walls of the church stand to full height and are constructed of randomly coursed granite and sandstone masonry with dressed granite quoins. It is a simple rectangular building with no division between the nave and chancel. The entrance is in the west end of the south wall. Nineteenth century sources describe a round-arched opening which has since collapsed. One of the lintels can still be found lying in the church ruins. The interior is lit by a lancet window in the east gable, a single slit opening in the west wall and plain square-headed openings in the north and south walls. A single bellcote starts above the west gable. There are two ambries (recesses) in the south wall and splayed windows in the east end of the north and south walls (Corlett 1999, 138-9).



*Before photograph of part of inside of Old Connaught Church.
By: The Medieval Bray Project.*

THE GRAVEYARD

Old Connaught graveyard is located to the south of Old Connaught Avenue. It is sub-circular in plan and is bounded by a stone-wall and accessed by an entrance in the north wall.



*After photograph of part of inside of Old Connaught Church.
By: The Medieval Bray Project.*

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST

Details in the Bulkeley's earlier mentioned 1630 report include the fact that the local Catholic landowners, the Walshes, were well-known for aiding and abetting priests and allowing them to say Mass in their house. The Walshes also maintained one Garrett Warren, a 'popishe schoolmaster', in the 'town' of 'Connagh' to teach the principles of Catholicism (Ronan, 1941a, p. 85). This illustrates the religious tensions of the 1600s and the fact that the Reformation (the creation of Protestantism) was not making headway in the area at that time.

The church succumbed to the religious struggles of the times, with Church of Ireland records showing that the last curate of Old Connaught was Ralph Foxwith, who was appointed in 1647, in succession to Thomas Davis (or Davys), the curate at the time of the 1630 report. These are the only two names of clergy available from the church records, which also show that Old Connaught merged with Bray following Ralph Foxwith's tenure. This and evidence from the Civil Survey of 1654-6 suggests that the church has not been used for worship since the mid-1600s.

COMPLICATIONS

It seems that the church at Old Connaught was built sometime in the late medieval period as it appears to have been fully functioning in the early 1600s but records show that it did not survive as a place of worship past the mid-1600s.

How old the church was in the early 1600s is difficult to assess. Sources suggest that a church was in existence around 1533, also it is possible that parts of the structure date to 1349 (Archbishop Alen's document) as reference is made to the rector of "Konagh". The site could be older and may have had an earlier church of some sort on it but, this is difficult to establish.

HEADSTONES

The graveyard contains a variety of memorials including chest tombs, free-standing crosses, grave slabs, headstones and undecorated stone markers. Evidence remains of a significant collection of cast-iron work including simple plot railings and free-standing cast-iron crosses. Memorials from 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th centuries are contained within Old Connaught.

Among the notable headstones are, a well-executed slate headstone of mid 18th century date. It has a curved top decorated with abstract foliate patterns, an IHS cipher and a simple inscription beginning 'Here lieth the body'. Similar headstones have been recorded at Kill O' The Grange and Rathmichael and they may represent a regional style or the work of related masons. The oldest date is upside down on the O'Neale headstone, the date is 1661, this part of the inscription is now visible as the stone has been reset. The O'Neales evidently have reused an older headstone (Fig. 2).

There are two First World War graves in the graveyard which have limestone headstones of standard military design and commemorate Sapper W. Skelton (W.R. 269250) of the Royal Engineers who died on the 3rd March 1919 aged 27 and P. Kavanagh who served as Private P. Ashford (8-25292) of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers who died on the 1st March 1918 aged 25.

FOR THE ONLINE VERSION OF THE FULL ARTICLE ABOVE PLEASE ACCESS: themedievalbrayproject.wicklowheritage.org AND PUT 'OLD CONNAUGHT' INTO THE SEARCH BOX

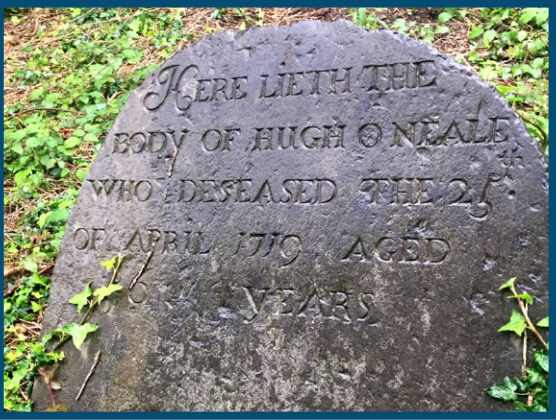
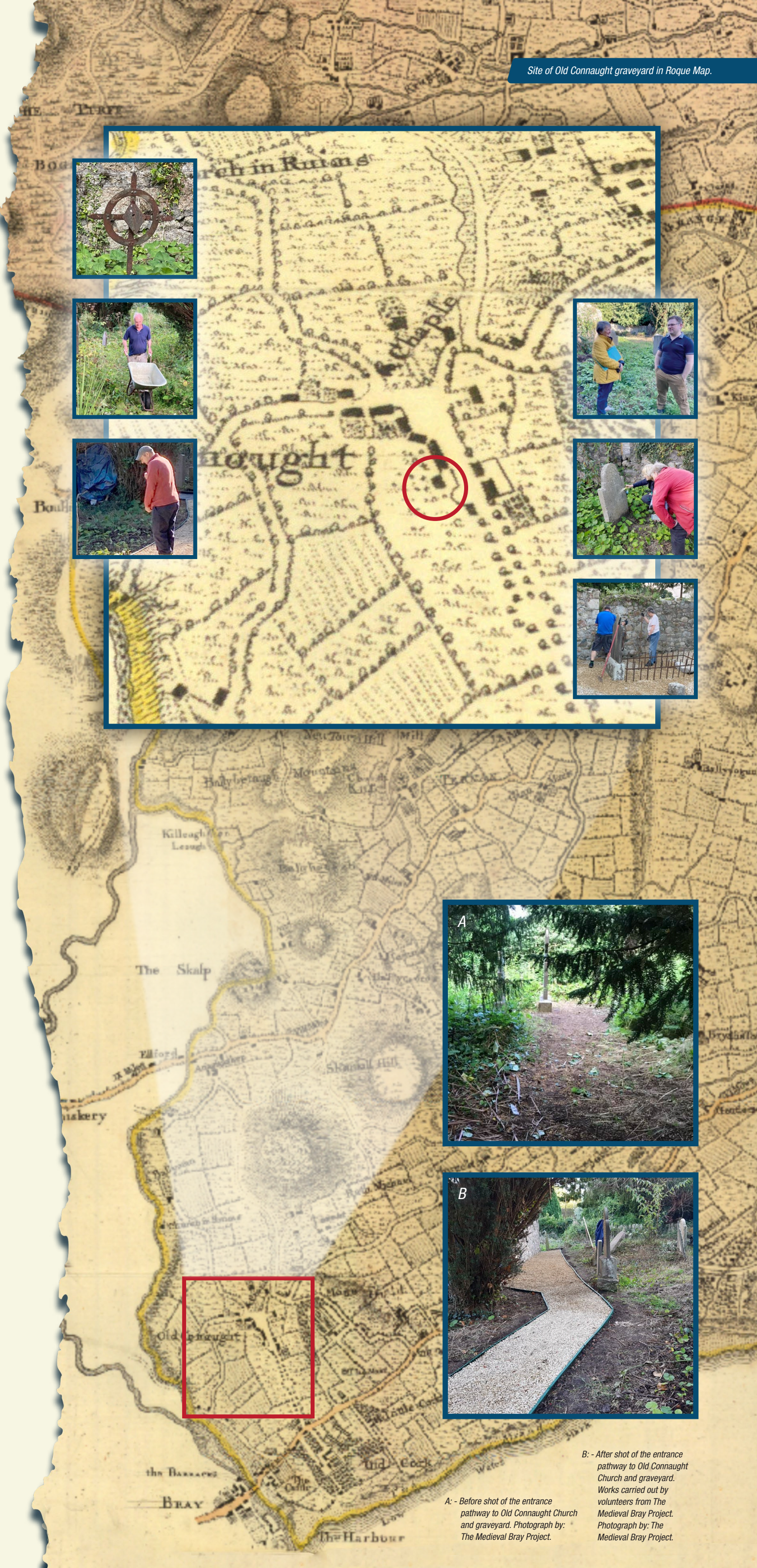
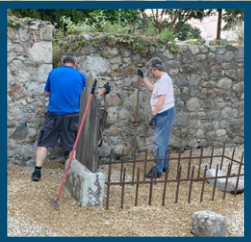


Fig. 2 - O'Neale headstone.
Photograph by: The Medieval Bray Project.



Site of Old Connaught graveyard in Roque Map.



A: - Before shot of the entrance pathway to Old Connaught Church and graveyard. Photograph by: The Medieval Bray Project.

B: - After shot of the entrance pathway to Old Connaught Church and graveyard. Works carried out by volunteers from The Medieval Bray Project. Photograph by: The Medieval Bray Project.

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Aerial photograph DLR

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