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Survey Report

Reference: **Survey No. 60**

Author: **C Stevenson & R Scott**

Location: **Early Ecclesiastical Site at
Drumgath.
County Down
Northern Ireland**

In association with:

Drumgath Ladies Group



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Cover illustration: View of site, showing scattered headstones and church ruins.

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All of the used and unused photographs have been saved to a CD, and archived with the Drumgath Ladies Group and the Ulster Archaeological Society.

1. Summary

1.1 Location: The Old Drumgath Church and graveyard are situated on private land (owned by Mr. Brendon Keenan) and are located 5km southwest of Rathfriland, County Down, Northern Ireland, on the B7 road to Mayobridge at Irish Grid reference J16720 29590. It is scheduled under the terms of the Historic Monuments and Archaeological Objects (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and is recorded as 'Church (site of) and Graveyard' in the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) as DOW 047:042.

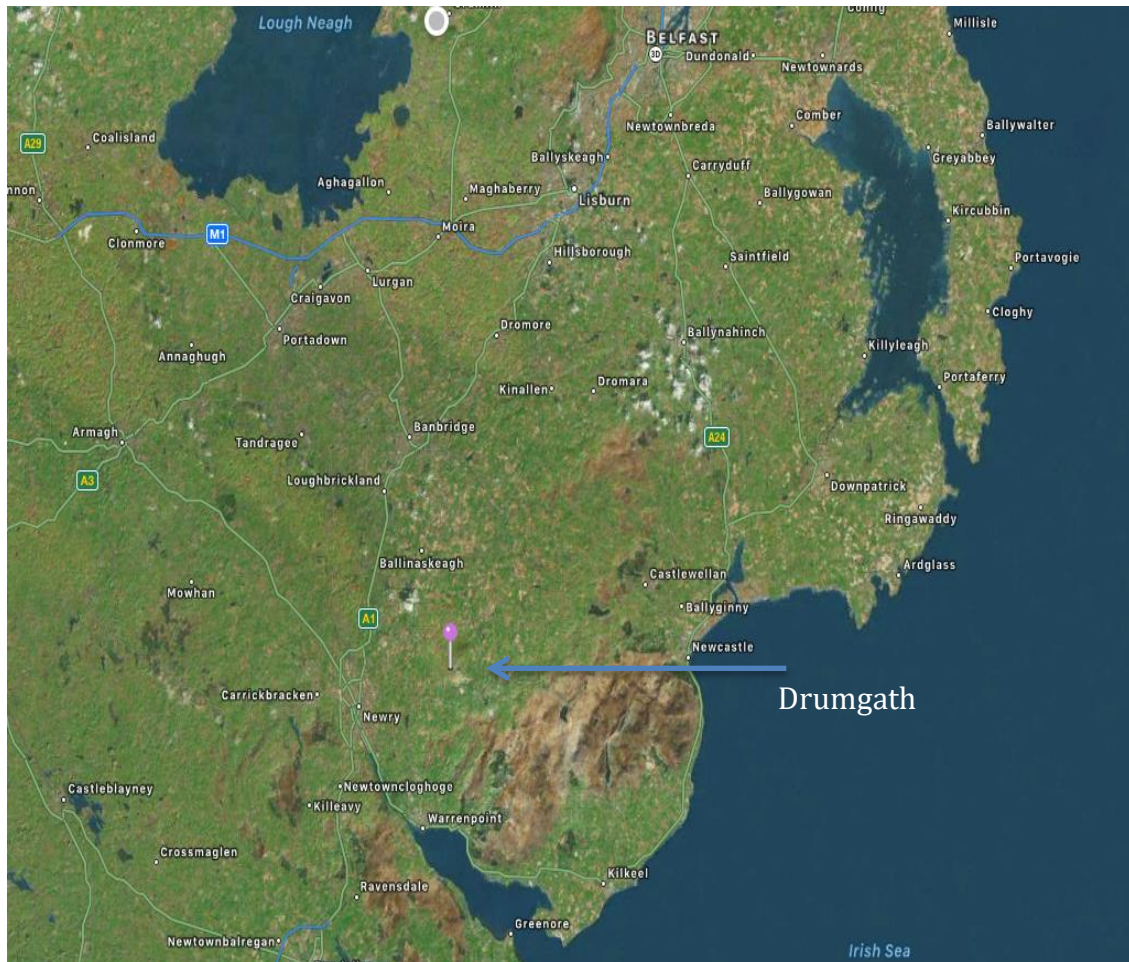


Figure 1: General Location of Drumgath Old Church and Graveyard. (Google Maps)

1.2 The Site. The site comprises of a large, almost circular enclosure approximately 70 metres in diameter and is surrounded on three sides by the B7 road and a farm track, and by a private garden on the fourth side. The foundations of the church (7.7 metres by 5.1 metres) can be seen in the southern corner of the site, with the remains of a barrel vaulted structure close by. This is described as a possible mortuary house in the SMR. Drumgath (or Druim an ghaith) loosely translates as the *Hill of Spears* and is said to refer to St Patrick ordering a spear to be thrown from off nearby Tamary Hill in order to choose a site for a new church. Irrespective of its origins, the site appears to be an early Christian church or monastery strategically placed on a pilgrim way, possibly connecting the early medieval sites of Kilbroney and Maghera. (Evans 1951). The accompanying graveyard contains numerous graves, with some grave markers appearing to be reused ecclesiastical window mullions. (UAS Report No 62 details the comprehensive survey of the graveyard.)



Figure 2: Aerial View of the site looking South.

2. Introduction. On 28th May 2016 a survey was carried out by 13 members of the UAS Survey Team, at the request of Drumgath Ladies Group, and with the full support of Mr Brendan Keenan (landowner).

2.1 Background. The Ladies Group had previously cleared the extensive vegetation, with the assistance and oversight of Newry, Mourne & Down District Council (NM&DDC) and Historic Environment Division (HED). It was soon determined that the site was so extensive that two UAS reports would be written; one concentrating on the structures known as the church and mortuary house, and the other on the Graveyard. (UAS Reports 60 and 62 respectively.) Prior to the survey there was very little known about the site other than:

2.1a. The Drumgath Bell: In 1764, a local woman named Peggy McGivern found an ancient hand-bell, possibly 9th or 10th century, (Bourke 1980), somewhere in the hedge near the graveyard. It is similar in appearance to Saint Bronagh's Bell, which can be seen in the parish church in Rostrevor. The Drumgath Bell is made of cast bronze with an iron clapper and is approximately 20 mm high (8 inches). The only decorations are three grooves along the handle, and there is a hole to one side of the bell, presumably to improve the tone. For many years it was used on the altar at Barnmeen Church and was given away in 1820 by the parish priest, Friar Polin, to a local antiquarian, Isaac Glenny of Glenvale. The Glenny collection was bequeathed to the Belfast Museum after his death in 1853, aged 71. *The bell is of a style and construction typical of the design of bells common in Irish monasteries with a suggested date range from 700 to 900.* During this time a bell, together with a crozier was the symbol of an abbot's



Figure 3: Drumgath Bell.

authority; bells were also used for indicating the passing of hours in early monasteries. (Hamlin, A. 1997, 60.) The Drumgath Bell is now displayed in the Down County Museum, in Downpatrick.

2.1b. The Barnmeen Martyrs: In 1820, 12 men were tried at Downpatrick Courthouse for the murder of a Rathfriland man – Samuel Duncan. Subsequently five accused were hanged and eventually buried surreptitiously in Drumgath Graveyard. – A detailed account is contained in UAS Report 62.

2.2 Documentary Material.

2.2a. The Drumgath site has been noted by Ann Hamlin (1997) and included in the map below. The bell (see 2.1a above) was a significant archaeological find.

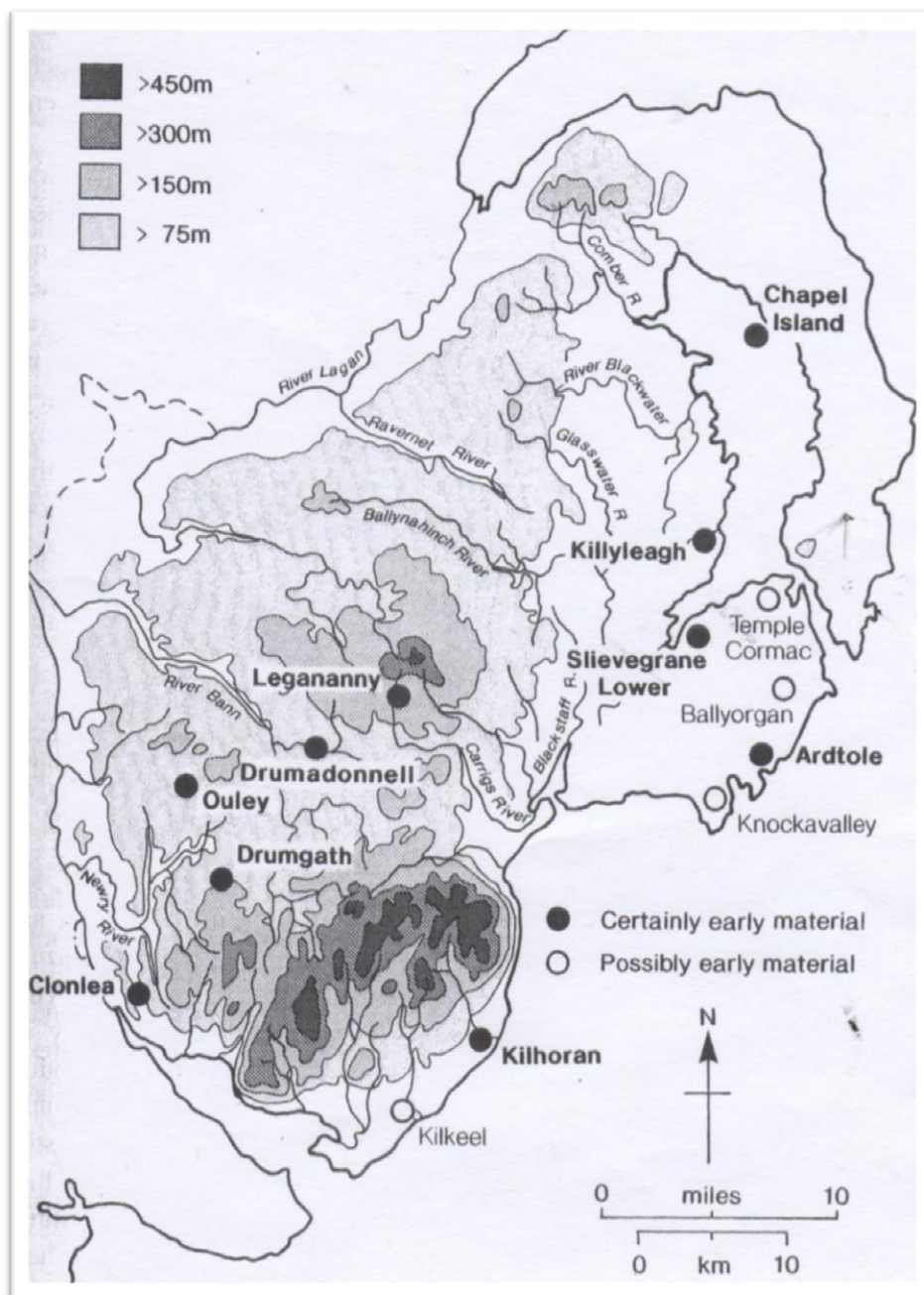


Figure 4: Map showing undocumented sites with archaeological evidence for early Christian religious activity. (After Hamlin 1997, p 60).

2.2b. The map below shows the churches of Drumgath, and nearby Clonduff, as they were in 1422. (Jefferies 1997).

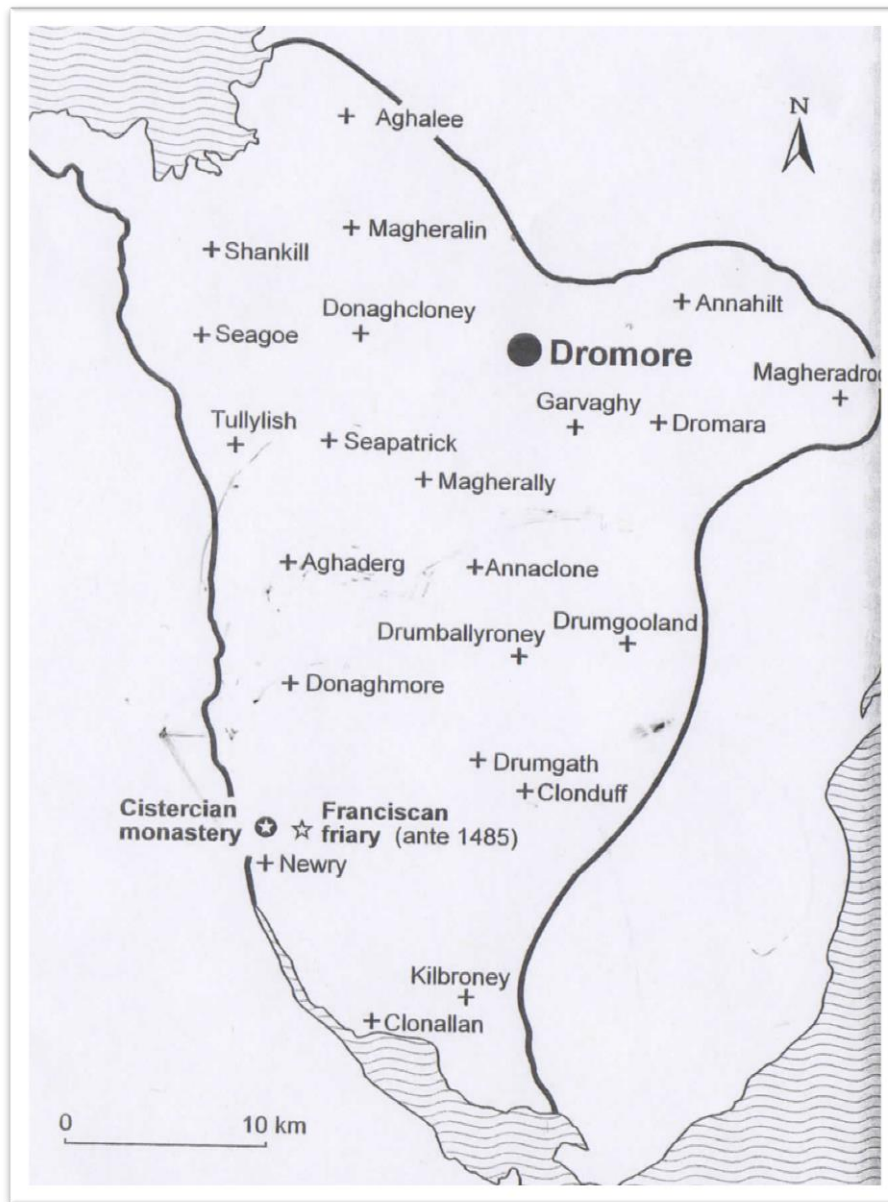


Figure 5: Map showing churches of Dromore Diocese in 1422. (After Jefferies 1997, p 126)

2.2c. Reeves, 1847, Page 115. Reeves records the 1306/07 Taxation of Pope Nicholas. The following sites and valuations are noted:

- The church of Clondalan (now Clonallan) – 4 marc – Tenth, 5s, 4d.
- The church of Clondyne (now Clonduff) – 2 marc – Tenth, 2s, 9d.
- The church of Glentegys (now Kilbroney) – 1 marc – Tenth, 16d.

Drumgath is not mentioned anywhere in the list, but nearby Clonduff is, indicating that the Drumgath area is covered by the taxation list.

2.2d. Reeves, 1847, Page 318. Benefice values in the diocese of Dromore, 1422. This record, originally produced under Primate Swayne in 1422 was copied into Primate Dowdell's taxation register of 1546. It is the 1546 version that is recorded by Reeves. The vicarage of Drumgath is valued at 3 marc.

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Præbenda de Drummerrach [<i>Dromara</i>],	7 marc.
Vicarius ibidem,	3 marc.
Vicarius de Garvagh [<i>Garvagh</i>],	3 marc.
Præbenda de Clondallan [<i>Clonallan</i>],	9 marc.
Vicarius ibidem,	4 marc.
— Vicarius de Drumga [<i>Drumgath</i>],	3 marc.
Rector de Donnaghmore [<i>Donaghmore</i>],	5 marc.
Vicarius ibidem,	3 marc.
Unio de Enaghluan [<i>Annaclone</i>],	6 marc.
Rector de Tulaglys [<i>Tullylish</i>],	3 marc.
Vicarius ibidem,	3 marc.
Rector de Killmyleon [<i>Shankhill</i>],	3 marc.
Rector et Vicarius de Achalead [<i>Aghalee</i>],	4 marc.
Rector de Clonduffe [<i>Clonduff</i>],	6 marc.
Vicarius ibidem,	4 marc.
Rector de Drumgwalyne [<i>Drumgooland</i>],	5 marc.
Vicarius ibidem,	4 marc.
Rector de Maccharedruall [<i>Magheradrool</i>],	4 marc.
Rector de Enaghally [<i>Annahilt</i>],	1 marc.
Rector de Awall et Vicarius ibidem [<i>Magherally</i>],	3 marc.
Vicarius de Killbronagh ^f [<i>Kilbroney</i>],	2 marc.
Vicarius de Viridi Ligno [<i>Newery</i>],	1 marc.

“Quia Procuraciones domini Primatis in diocesi Drummorensi debent levare anno Metropolitico, Vide in antiquo libro domini Johannis [Swayne] Primatis 1422; viz. 2s. de qualibet marca, et 2d., juxta taxam”.

Figure 6: Taxation for Dromore Diocese in 1422 (After Reeves 1847, p 318).

2.2e. Reeves, 1847, Page 314. Reeves reproduces a Charter of King James I of 1609, that alters the name and constitutional body for Dromore Cathedral diocese and records Drumgath in its area.

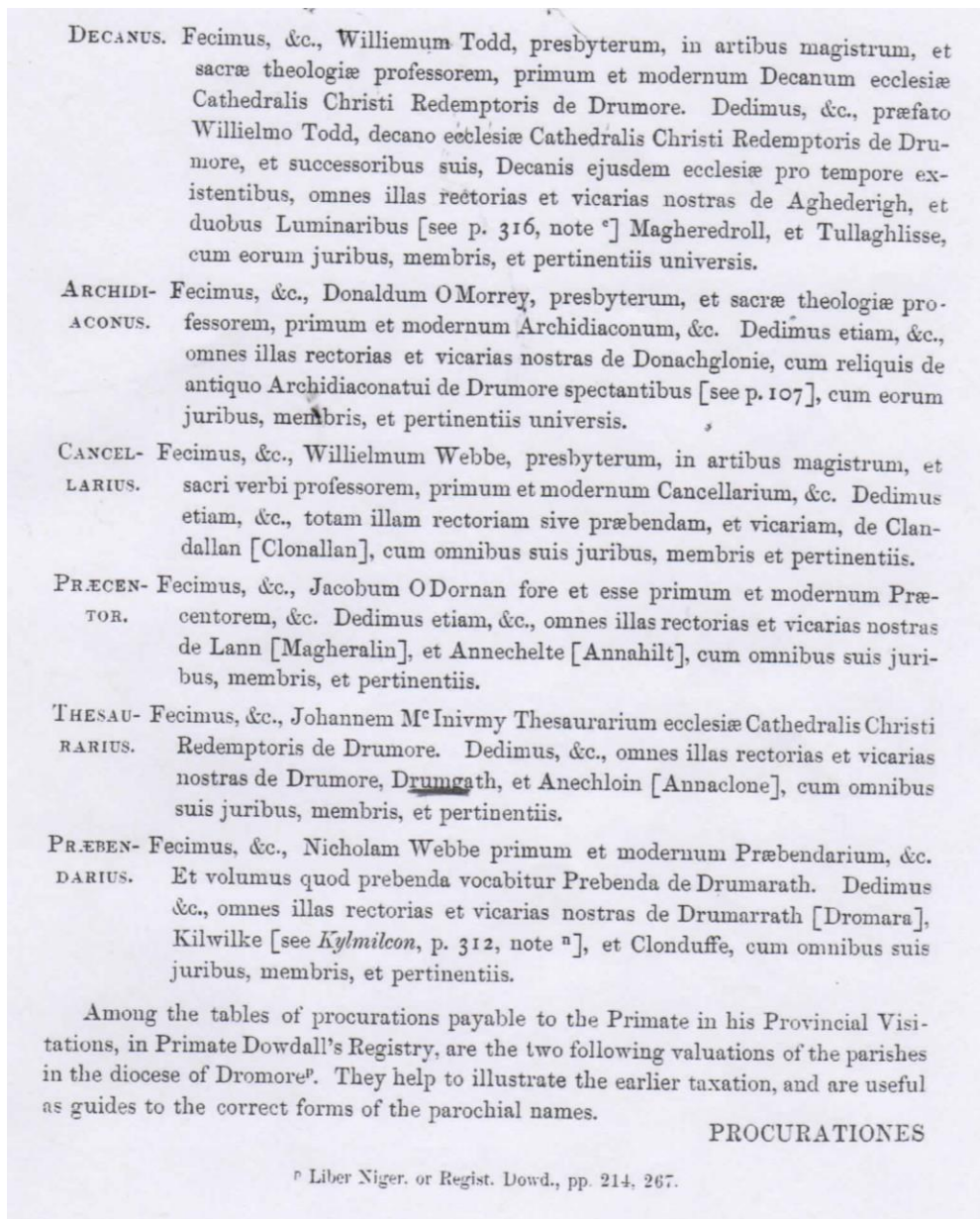


Figure 7: Extract from King James' Charter of 1609. (After Reeves 1847, p 314)

2.3. Credits and Acknowledgements. The following members of the Ulster Archaeological Society Survey Group took part in the survey on 28th May 2016:

Philip Baxter; Malachy Conway; Sarah McCalmont; Olive Campbell; David Craig; Kate Crane; Lee Gordon; Anne MacDermott; Jo Magill; Randal Scott; Janna McDonald; Ken Pullin; Chris Stevenson; Harry Welsh; June Welsh; Ian Gillespie; Yvonne Gillespie.

The Survey Group would like to acknowledge the kind assistance and support given by Barbara Dickson and the Drumgath Ladies Group as well as the land owner – Brendan Keenan.

3. Survey. An initial survey of the site, including digital photography from a drone, confirmed that there were traces of a number of structures in and around the site that may have archaeological interest. The main, obviously visible, areas of interest are provisionally known as the 'church' and the 'mortuary house'. However, analysis of the drone images revealed a previously unknown structure, described in this report as 'ecclesiastical building'.



Figure 8: Overhead View looking North (Google Earth) .

3.1. The Church: The Church lies at the southern end of the enclosure, basically rectangular in shape and appeared to be constructed of un-mortared stone. It measured 7.7m in length and 5.1m at its widest. Parts of the building's footprint can easily be seen, with some walls 0.5m high and is aligned north/south. There is a large amount of stone piled up inside the structure. It stands on a well-defined raised platform approximately 16m long with a 0.5m high retaining wall on the eastern side constructed of un-mortared stone.



Figure 9: Remains of church and mortuary building looking South.



Figure 10: Outline of church walls looking North.

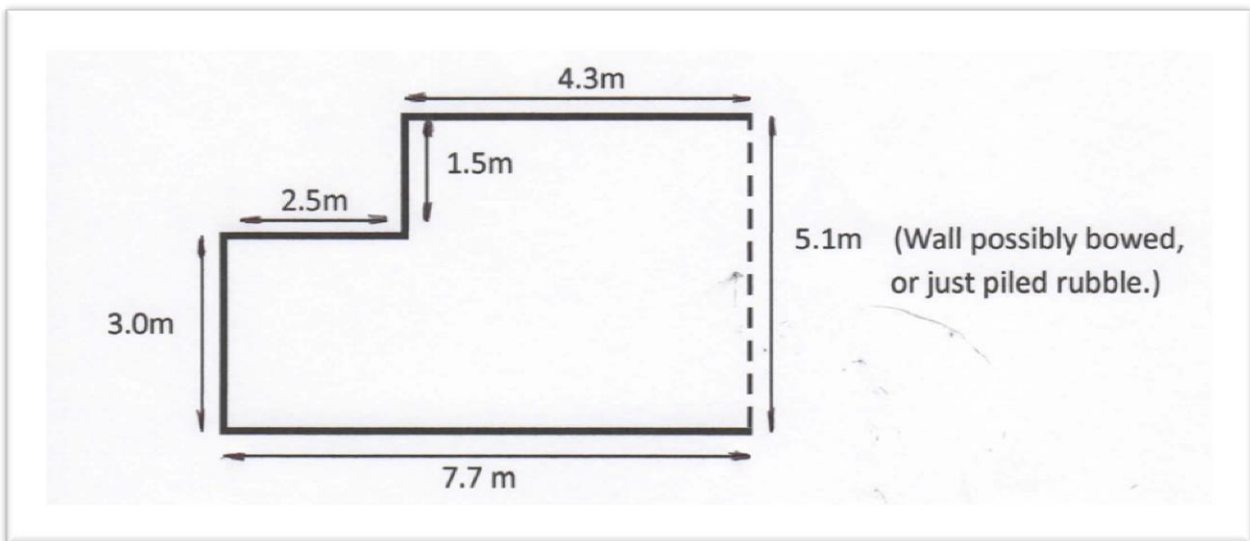


Figure 11: Sketch of church floor plan.

3.2 The Mortuary House: The structure currently measures 3.4m east/west by 3m north/south, but there is evidence to indicate that it may have extended a further 2m in length. The interior height is 1.9m above a slightly sunken floor. The wall width at its base is 1m at the south and 0.53m at the north. It is positioned adjacent to the south side of the church, aligned east/west. It has a barrel-vaulted roof in design, open at both ends and constructed of rough mortared stone. There is evidence of the re-use of dressed stone, possible from an earlier ecclesiastical building. There is also clear, but extremely fragile, remains of wicker work being used in the construction of the barreled ceiling. The exterior surface of the roof is covered in moss and grass.



Figure 12: The mortuary house looking west.



Figure 13: Mortar in mortuary house showing traces of wickerwork.



Figure 14: Members of the Survey Team examining re-used dressed stone.



Figure 15: Mortuary house in situ with graveyard and church foundations in foreground.



Figure 16: Wall of possible building.

3.3 The Ecclesiastical Building: The drone images revealed the outline of a large rectangular building that was invisible when 'on the ground'. It measures about 56.7m by 17.7m and is aligned east/west. Several carved stone architectural fragments, (doorjambes, windowsills and window tracery) were found scattered around the site, some were used as grave markers and some were used in the construction of the mortuary house. The presence of these fragments, together with the east/west alignment, suggests the footprint of a significant ecclesiastical building. An example of a photograph and a drone image of the building outline are in Figures 17 and 18 below.



Figure 17: Drone photograph of building outline (Irishsights.com).

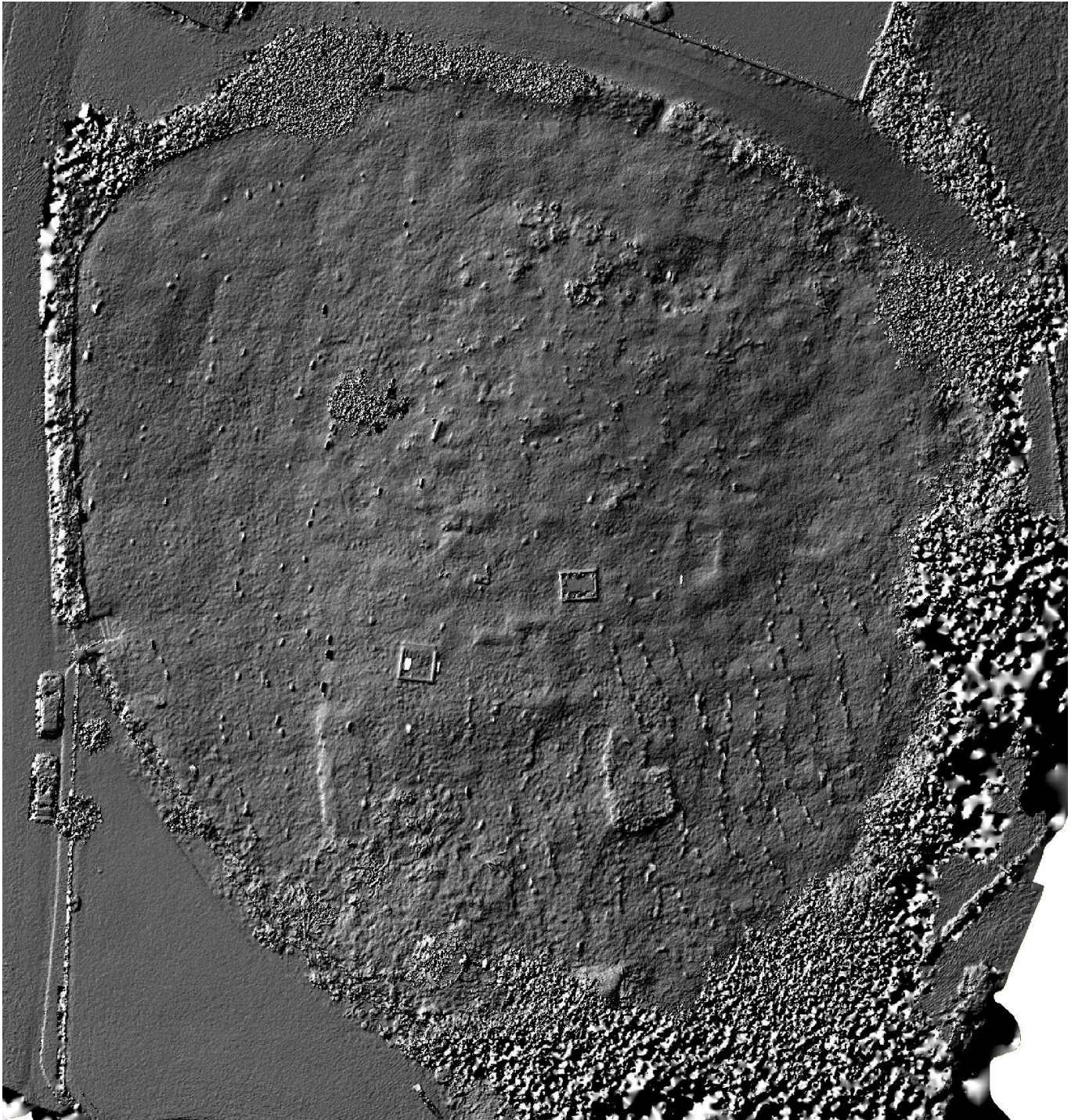


Figure 18: Drone image showing large rectangular anomaly

4. Site History: The site appears to have a long history, with various periods of use and abandonment. The circular construction of the enclosure and its position on a possible early pilgrim's way, coupled with the find of the Drumgath Bell, gives strength to the argument that it originated as a small monastic site. There is also a view that the site may have had a defensive role. *The old graveyard, which appears to have been a fort, is at the southern end of the parish in the townland of Drumgath.* (O.S. Memoirs of Ireland, Parishes of Down 1834-6, South Down.)

In 1152, *Drumgath Parish was established by the Synod of Kells, when all the parishes in Ireland were first created. Prior to the Synod of Kells, the district had been ministered by monks.* (Sands P. and A.)

In the 1306/7 Taxation List (see 2.2c) there is no entry for Drumgath, therefore we can assume that by this date the church was no longer functioning and serving the parish. Although

Drumgath is missing from the 1306/07 Taxation List, the nearby Clonduff is recorded (See 2.2c and Map 2.2b).

This leaves the question as to what might have caused a decline in fortune of Drumgath? As a monastic site it could have suffered during the two periods of Viking raiding in Ulster, in approximately 820 – 860 and 920 – 940. (Bardon pp 26 – 28). Drumgath lay in the Irish Echach Cobo (Iveagh) territory. It is well known that there was raiding and rivalry between Iveagh and the Tyrone O'Neills, during the later Middle Ages, leading to further instability in the area. Or it simply could be that the recorded church at Clonduff served the needs of the local populace at that time.

By 1407, the church was back in use, because on 2 January 1407, a Letter of Excommunication and Interdict was issued by The Archbishop of Dromore informing Sir Milo, Vicar of Drumgo, (amongst others) in the diocese of Dromore against Odo Magynassa, captain of his nation, for making hostile entry into the archbishop's lands and taking a prisoner for ransom. (Lawlor 1912/1913).

34. 2 January, 1407. Letter of excommunication and interdict. The archbishop, guardian of the spirituality and temporality of the bishopric of Dromore, sede vacante, informs Masters T. Omestead, Arch deacon, and Patrick Okellaid, canon of Dromore, and Sir Milo, vicar of Drumgo in the diocese of Dromore, that Odo Magynassa (in title Mcgenessa), captain of his nation, had made hostile entry into the archbishop's lands and the city of Armagh, and among other crimes had taken Philip Mc [space in MS.], citizen and native of Armagh, prisoner, and detained him till he paid ransom ; and commands them (1) to warn Magynassa that within 10 days he is to make due amends to the archbishop and Philip, or come to reasonable agreement with the former in the matter ; (2) if this warning is unheeded, to denounce him as excommunicate in the principal places of the diocese of Dromore, and warn him that he must give satisfaction for his crimes to the archbishop and Philip, within the 40 days following the said 10 days ; (3) if this warning is ineffective, at the end of the 40 days to place all his lands under an interdict.

Figure 19: Letter of Excommunication. (after Lawlor 1912/1913).

Also in 1407 the burial ground was recorded as serving the congregations of St John's Rathfriland and Drumgath, and was in use until a new Catholic cemetery was opened sometime after the building of a new church in 1833. (Sands P. and A.)

In 1422 Drumgath is recorded on a map as a church in the Dromore diocese (see 2.2b and Fig. 5) and in a taxation record of the same year (see Reeves in 2.2d). This establishment (or re-establishment) of the church at Drumgath by the early 15th century may be associated with the rise of the Magennis clan to become overlords of Iveagh. During the Norman period in Ulster (1177 to mid 15th century) the Echach Cobo (men of Iveagh), while recognizing Norman overlordship, retained a degree of independence and control of their own territory. The Magennis clan increased their influence from about the mid 14th century, eventually appearing to have taken over the Norman earl's castle at Dundrum after the Normans were ousted (McNeill 1997, 119). One branch of the Magennis clan established a base, and later a castle, at nearby Rathfriland and may have 'sponsored,' or founded, a medieval church at Drumgath. Could this church be the ecclesiastical building described in 3.3 above? It appears to be a building of some status and could reflect the growing influence of the Magennis family at that time.

In 1526, Father Eugene Magennis was appointed in charge of Drumgath Parish; he was followed by Father John McGennity and in 1530, Father Neil McKay was appointed in charge. (Treanor 1960). At that time there were approximately 400 religious houses in Ireland. The Act of Supremacy was signed in 1534, making King Henry VIII head of the Church of England and heralded

in the Reformation. In 1537 Henry introduced legislation in the Irish Parliament to close Irish religious houses, and by 1541 he had succeeded in closing half of them, with the rest resisting until well into the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. The church seems to have gone into decline again until 1691. *After the Reformation the earliest record of priest of the parish is in the year 1691.* (Treanor 1960, page 17).

However, (see 2.2e, Reeves) the church at Drumgath is recorded in a Charter of King James 1 in 1609 suggesting that it was in use at that time.

Did the church survive the Reformation period or was it re-established sometime in the early 17th century? It could well have gone into decline between about 1641 and 1691 as a consequence of the 1641 rebellion. The Megennis overlords of Iveagh took part in the 1641 rebellion and, as a result, lost the family lands and influence.

5. Summary and Recommendations

5.1. Summary. There is strong circumstantial evidence to suggest that the site at the old church and graveyard at Drumgath had its roots as a monastic settlement on an old pilgrim way. By 1152 it had developed into a medieval church that served the community for about another 100 years, but by 1306 the church had ceased to pay taxes and appears to be defunct. However, by 1407 the church had become active again until at least 1546. The ecclesiastical building, unknown until identified by drone photography during this survey, may be this church (see 3.3). Other, probably later structures (church and mortuary house) are visible and were recorded by the Survey Group (see 3.1 and 3.2). The Reformation and/or the aftermath of the 1641 rebellion may have resulted in further periods of abandonment and revival up to 1691 when records show a priest back in charge of the Parish. It remained a centre of religious activity until a new church was built on a different site in 1833. Further work is needed to establish which structures were in use on the site during the various stages of its existence.

5.2. Recommendations. The survey day (and more importantly) the aerial photography have provided tantalizing clues to other structures (notably the ecclesiastical building) within the complex and its immediate surroundings. A number of test pits would have to be dug (with the full knowledge, cooperation and assistance of NM&DDC, HED and the landowner, Mr Brendan Keenan), if these are ever to be fully understood and recorded for posterity.

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