The Bevir Trust

Burriscarra Medieval Ecclesiastical Complex

Fiona White and

Yvonne McDermott

The Bevir Trust Archaeological Fund

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Abstract

This research assesses the ecclesiastical complex at Castlecarra near the shores of Lough Carra, County Mayo. On this site are located the ruins of Burriscarra friary and Burriscarra medieval parish church. As part of this study, a detailed survey of these two national monuments was undertaken and to prospect for possible new sites and archaeological features in their immediate environs. The fieldwork involved recording and interpreting the standing remains of these medieval buildings, and undertaking plans of the buildings in AutoCAD. In addition, desk research was also undertaken to contextualise the survey's findings. The study found that the interpretation of the remains at this site was hindered by the poor state of survival of the friary buildings and especially those of the parish church. Nonetheless, the friary was found to include many features typical of the late Irish Gothic style, housed within a somewhat unusual friary layout. The parish church was of simple plan and shows evidence of subsequent alterations after the original phase of construction. Both these buildings have received little scholarly attention, a situation which this report proposes to redress.

Introduction

Burriscarra friary was at different times home to two different houses of the mendicant orders. There are four mendicant orders, the Franciscan, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites. Members of these orders were expected to live a life of poverty, supported by begging. These orders first arrived in Ireland in the thirteenth century. Burriscarra friary was founded by Adam de Staunton as a Carmelite house in 1298 and continued in this capacity until the late fourteenth century. A community of Augustinians established themselves at the site in 1413. This was part of the second phase in the expansion of the mendicant orders which occurred in late medieval Ireland. The friary church is predominantly of late medieval date. It consists of a long, undivided church with an additional aisle to the south. There is a well-preserved tracery window in the east wall of the side aisle, while parts of other tracery windows survive. The east window has been partially blocked up with a later window insertion.

A number of rooms of the domestic ranges survive at the site, while there is no surviving cloister arcade. A number of fireplaces survive in the conventual ranges in addition to a variety of window types, including some ogee-headed windows. The friary is constructed in the late Irish Gothic style. The construction of buildings in this style was indicative of the revival in the Gaelic and Gaelicised communities in late medieval Ireland.

To the east of the friary is located Burriscarra parish church. This is a small single-chambered church. Numerous changes and additions to the fabric of the medieval church are evident.

The local landscape

Burriscarra friary (Figure 1) and Parish Church (Figure 2) are located close to the picturesque shores of Lough Carra, Co. Mayo. The friary is situated within a significant cultural and natural landscape that can demonstrate possibly five millennia of human habitation. The rich archaeological evidence is exhibited in the diverse categories of monument in the locality, which include promontory forts, cists, ringforts, crannogs, enclosures, field systems, ecclesiastical sites, causeways and tower houses.

Lough Carra is situated in the barony of Carra. The original barony name, Burrestker, is recorded in the Division of Connaught in 1570. The name Carra or Cear/Cera is recorded in the *Lebor Gabhala Eren*. The name may have been taken

from one Cera daughter-in-law of Nemed. Nemed supposedly led one of the pre-Goidelic invasions. The meaning of the word Cera may be attributed to two explanations, meaning either tribute or blood/red.

Lough Carra, which covers an area of approximately 4,500 acres, lies just within the northern boundary of the limestone region which stretches from the Burren in County Clare to just beyond north Mayo. The region can be described as 'a frontier' region, as the rock type changes further north and loses the rich calcium base. Lough Carra is an example of a marl lake, which gives the water a unique green or turquoise colour. The area between Castlebar and Lough Carra consists of a drumlin belt, which makes the land around the lake very fertile. It is not surprising then that the lake and its surrounding landscape provided a secure base and livelihood to native inhabitants and colonists alike.

Despite the advantageous location of the lake, no evidence for the Mesolithic or the Neolithic periods is evident, as yet, from the Lough Carra environs. However, the position of megalithic tombs south of Lough Carra, close to Lough Mask, may allow us to speculate that both lakes were used for fishing and collecting other vital resources. The connecting River Keel may have brought the tomb builders as far as Lough Carra to investigate its potential for food and land. What is certain is that the metal producers of the Bronze Age did leave their mark on the region, with evidence of barrows, cists, standing stones, *fulachta fiadh*, and the man-made causeways. Timbers from one of the causeways gave a date of 1539 BC (Lavelle, 1994: 16). An Iron Age promontory fort exists near the friary site (known locally as Doon Wood). The fort is constructed of dry-stone masonry and is of a type common along the western coast. These are complex sites with debatable uses, but the fort demonstrates continuity of habitation at Lough Carra.

The early medieval period demonstrated a wealth of human habitation at Lough Carra in the form of ringforts, souterrains, crannogs and cashels. Early ecclesiastical sites are peppered throughout the region, illustrating that the inhabitants were attracted to the tranquillity and isolation offered by the lake. Churches, timber dwellings, holy wells and rotary querns have been discovered. The occurrence of early ecclesiastical settlement on the islands in Lough Carra (Church Island) provides evidence of eremitical monasticism whereby hermits withdrew to places of solitude, away from the temptations of the world.

The tradition of church building continued at Lough Carra throughout the medieval period. Many of these churches were parish churches and were in disuse by the 17th century. The extant examples are much-ruined and very few of their original features survive.

The Anglo-Normans had a clear impact on the Lough Carra region, as is evidenced by the fortifications they constructed. Fortification was not limited to the Anglo-Normans as there is evidence of a Gaelic-Irish occupied tower-house. Amongst the masonry castles in the area are Castlecarra, which was built between AD1238 and AD1300 by the de Stauntons, and Castleburke. The latter is associated with the Mac Evillys and was owned in the sixteenth century by Tibbot-na-long Bourke, son of Granuaile. A tower house is situated on Castlehag Island on the eastern shore of Lough Carra and is in a very ruinous state. The Castle is associated with Mac Tybbot Burke in 1574 and was known as Castlecally.

Early in the fourteenth century, an Augustinian friary was established in Ballinrobe. This friary later became associated with the Abbey of Annies and Burriscarra friary. The Augustinian Annies abbey, which is situated south of Burriscarra, was founded in 1440 by Walter de Burgo. This abbey was made subject to Kilcreevanty (a nunnery near Ballinasloe, Co. Galway) and became a house of nuns. The Franciscans were recorded here in 1587 and may have occupied the site after the suppression of Kilcreevanty (1543) and its associated houses, whose land was given to the Earl of Clanricarde in 1570 (Lavelle, 1994: 91).

Ballintubber abbey is situated north of Burriscarra and was originally founded in 1216 by Cathal Crovderg O'Connor for the Augustinian Canons. Ballintubber abbey was suppressed in 1542. Incidentally, both Burriscarra friary and Ballintubber abbey were held by John King in 1605. The Augustinian friars were granted possession of Ballintubber in the mid 17th century (Lavelle, 1994, p.91).

By the 18th century, the land around Lough Carra came under the ownership of the Moore family, who were based at Moore Hall. The Moores were popular locally and George Henry Moore proved a humane landlord during the famine. His son, the noted writer George Augustus Moore, lived for a short period of his life at Moore Hall and the lake is mentioned in a number of his works. The naturalist Robert Lloyd Praeger also carried out surveys on the lake's orchid species during the early 20th century. Today, the region of Lough Carra contains a vibrant farming community and is an important tourist attraction and angler's haven.

Figure 1: Burriscarra friary seen from the north east

Figure 2: West elevation of Burriscarra Parish Church

Methodology

A historical survey of the buildings in question and their context in medieval Ireland was firstly undertaken. This involved consulting secondary sources in order to establish the historical context in which these buildings were constructed and occupied. A survey of primary sources was also undertaken in order to locate any references to these buildings. Sources including the various Irish *Annals* and the *Calendar of Papal Registers* were consulted. A dearth of documentary evidence pertaining to either the parish church or friary was discovered.

For both the friary and the parish church, detailed architectural surveys were undertaken. This facilitated the interpretation of the standing remains, which forms part of this report. In addition, these surveys also contributed to the development of an AutoCAD plan for each of these two buildings. A detailed photographic survey was undertaken to record these buildings as they currently stand.

Justification of the research undertaken

The medieval ecclesiastical buildings at Castlecarra have not hitherto been studied in great depth. In his *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings (Volume III)*, Harold Leask (1960) briefly discusses the friary and makes fleeting reference to the parish church. The *Ballinrobe and District Survey* (1994) briefly discussed both buildings, relying to an extent on a previous OPW survey. The friary is unusual by virtue of its rural location. In the first phase of activity of the mendicant orders in Ireland when this friary was built, the friars tended to favour urban locations. A minority of sites were constructed in rural locations and this study offers to opportunity to study one of these. The friary also forms part of the revival of the mendicant orders in the fifteenth century, characterised by the eclectic late Irish Gothic style. Neither the Augustinian or Carmelite orders have received the scholarly attention that the Franciscans and Dominicans have. Therefore, it is worth taking the opportunity to study a house that accommodated both of these orders at different times.

Historical Context

The mendicant orders

There are four mendicant orders – the Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians and Carmelites. The mendicant orders emerged in contrast to the earlier monastic orders, such as the Cistercians, who lived enclosed lives in rural locations. The mendicant friars committed themselves to individual and corporate poverty and aimed to imitate the apostolic life. The Augustinians and Carmelites have received much less scholarly attention than their Franciscan and Dominican counterparts. This may be in part a reflection of the strength of numbers of the Franciscans and Dominicans and also of the larger amount of documentary sources for these orders generally.

Under their original rules, the mendicant orders committed themselves to a life of poverty, supported by alms. They acted as preachers and confessors, preaching in public places in the language of the people. The growth of towns is a key feature of the medieval period. The disparities between rich and poor came into sharper focus in the towns and were accompanied by an increased materialism on the part of the newly ascendant urban aristocracy. The existing structures of the Church were ill-equipped to deal with the expanding urban populations and associated problems. The monastic orders, such as the Cistercians, located their convents in rural areas away from worldly temptations. A new form of religious life based in the towns was required to address this issue. The mendicant friars with their commitment to preaching and austerity were well placed to tackle the rise of urban materialism.

The Carmelite and Augustinian orders have a more obscure early history than the Franciscans and Dominicans. The latter two orders have identifiable founder saints and the history of their establishment is well known. Both the Carmelites and Augustinians began as groups of hermits and subsequently adopted the mendicant way of life (Lawrence, 1989: 226). The Carmelite order is also known as the Order of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel and appears to have been founded *c*. 1150 on Mount Carmel in the Holy Land (Howard, 2008). However, Lawrence (1989: 266) describes the order as 'emerging from legend into history towards the end of the twelfth century'. Initially, the Carmelites were contemplative hermits who lived an austere existence. Fleeing from Saracen invaders *c*. 1240, they re-established themselves as a mendicant order. As part of this development, the eremitical life was largely replaced by a coenobitical or community-based existence. They adopted an active life of preaching and study. A commission established by Innocent IV authorised living in any convenient place in addition to coenobitical practices such as

eating as a community. They became known as the White Friars due to the white hooded habits that they wore (Howard, 2008). As the character of the Carmelite order began to become more like that of the mendicant friars, the Carmelites looked to the Dominicans as an example, imitating their structure and scholastic organisation (Lawrence, 1989: 266-7).

The Augustinian order is also known as the Order of Hermits of St Augustine and began its life as a group of semi-eremitical communities in Italy. The work of uniting these groups into a coherent movement was begun by Pope Innocent IV in 1243, at which time they adopted the Rule of St Augustine (Watt, 1998: 86). However despite the adoption of his Rule, the establishment of the Augustinian Friars is not believed to be due to Saint Augustine's direct personal influence. The order was placed in the charge of Cardinal Richard Annibaldi who was to have a decisive influence on the order's development. The mendicant way of life was adopted by the Augustinians in 1256 as a result of a papal decree of Alexander IV entitled the 'Great Union. The order committed itself to the ministry of souls, pursuit of learning and to formulating Church policy (Gill, 2008). Having become mendicants, they were also known as the Austin Friars. The Augustinian Friars should not be confused with the Augustinian Canons, a different religious order who followed the Rule of St Augustine. Priories of the Augustinian Canons were established in towns where their canons served in churches and cathedrals. In some cases, the Augustinian Canons lived a contemplative existence, living in enclosed monasteries.

The mendicant orders in Ireland

1224 saw the arrival of the first of the mendicant orders in Ireland (Gwynn and Hadcock, 1988: 220), followed by the Franciscans in 1234 (Watt, 1998: 47). The first Carmelite foundation in Ireland dates from 1272 (Watt, 1998: 85), while the Augustinians were the last of the four mendicant orders to reach Ireland, arriving *c*. 1282. The friaries established by the mendicant orders in Ireland during their initial phase of expansion were primarily located in the towns, in keeping with the practice elsewhere in Europe. The patrons of the mendicant orders in Ireland in the high middle ages were mostly Anglo-Irish. Some Gaelic-Irish foundations were also known, especially amongst the Dominicans.

By the time the Carmelite friars arrived in Ireland, they had already established 13 houses in England, including those at Oxford and Cambridge,

enhancing their reputation for scholarship (Watt, 1998: 85; Howard, 2008). Between 1272 and 1334, the Carmelites established 16 houses in Ireland, of which six were in Connacht. All the known names of founders and patrons are Anglo-Irish, but some Gaelic involvement is suspected (Watt, 1998: 85). The history of the Carmelite order in Ireland is more obscure than that of the other mendicant orders and thus its early development and late medieval expansion remain obscure.

The Augustinian friars came to Ireland from England, by which time they had 12 convents in England. They established their first Irish friary in Dublin and from there spread to other, mainly urban locations. In contrast to the Carmelites, they did not have a significant presence in Connacht at this time. Martin (1961: 233) notes that up to the mid-fourteenth century, the Augustinian order in Ireland was mostly Anglo-Irish in character and looked to England for direction as the Irish Augustinians were part of the English province.

The fourteenth century in Ireland saw turmoil from sources such as the Bruce Invasion (1315-18) and the Black Death (1348-9). Considerable instability was caused as a result of these, creating a climate unsuited to the establishment of new friaries. In any case, the enthusiasm which had once characterised the mendicant orders had Ireland had faded and with it the desire to expand and found new houses declined. . In addition, there was a slackening of the austere discipline and poverty for which the mendicant orders were known. Ó Clabaigh (2002) remarks that the mendicant orders became victims of their own success. Well-meaning patrons who admired their commitment to poverty gave them donations and left them generous bequests. This caused them to stray from the original tenets which had distinguished the mendicant orders.

The late medieval period in Ireland witnessed a second phase of expansion in the mendicant orders. A number of factors, both within and outside the orders combined to fuel this development. These include the revival in the Gaelic and Gaelicised communities, who experienced an upturn in their fortunes at this time. Members of these communities were eager to become patrons of friaries. Ninety new mendicant houses were founded in Ireland between 1400 and 1508 (Watt, 1989: 193). The Carmelites don't appear to have played a major role in this expansion with only four new houses founded in this period, of which one friary was in the archdiocese of Tuam. The Augustinians founded nine new friaries between these years. One was located in the archdiocese of Dublin, while the remaining eight were concentrated in

the archdiocese of Tuam (Watt, 1998: 193). Having been established as an Augustinian friary in the fifteenth century, Burriscarra is part of this significant development in late medieval religious life. The new friaries are located mainly in rural areas. This is in contrast to the earlier phase of expansion in Ireland and standard practice on the Continent. The construction of new friaries was driven by the revival in the Gaelic and Gaelicised communities. Murrisk friary, for example, was founded by the Gaelic O'Malley on the shores of Clew Bay for the Austin Friars.

The Observant Reform of the mendicant orders was a crucial factor in the efflorescence of these orders in late medieval Ireland. This movement arose due to discontent in the mendicant orders over the trajectory the orders had taken, departing from their original stringent regulations and becoming more materialistic. The aim of the reform was to more strictly observe the original rules upon which the orders had been founded. Martin (1961: 237) asserts that there was nothing revolutionary about the reform as the ideas behind it were not new to the orders, they just needed to be put back into practice. As part of the reform, the mendicant friars again became cognisant of the importance of attending to the spiritual requirements of the laity, which no doubt caused renewed interest in the friars on the part of potential patrons. The reform was to prove divisive within the Franciscan order, with a group known as the Conventuals unwilling to accept the changes. The Conventuals argued that St Francis' Rule was unrealistic and that some compromises to the original austerity were required for practical reasons (Moorman, 1988: 582-3). The Franciscan Order was officially split in two by Pope Leo X in 1517 as a result of these differences.

The Augustinian and Dominican orders adopted the reform independently and it proved much less controversial than it had amongst the Franciscans. The Observant reform amongst the Irish Augustinians received its impetus from Italy, with the encouragement of Agostino Favaroni, Prior General of the Order. The Observance took strong root amongst the Augustinian communities in Italy, Spain, Germany and Ireland, but the Augustinian Observants did not establish themselves in pre-Reformation England (Martin, 1961: 241-2). Banada in County Sligo was the first Irish Augustinian Observant house.

History of Burriscarra friary

Information regarding the history of Burriscarra tends to be sparse and irregular in nature. In the fourteenth century, an Augustinian friary (Friars' Quarter West) was established in Ballinrobe by Elizabeth de Clare, and was the first Augustinian house in Connaught. This house later became associated with Burriscarra friary and its neighbouring abbey, Annies (Lavelle, 1994: 91).

Burriscarra was originally a house of Carmelite Friars and was founded in 1298, probably by Adam de Staunton (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1988, p.287). De Staunton, formerly from Warrickshire, had been given permission by de Burgo, Chief of Connaught, to build the neighbouring fortification at Castlecarra. The friary was, however, abandoned some time before 1383. In 1413, the friary, by that time in ruins, was handed over to the Augustinian friars of Ballinrobe at the insistence of Edmund and Richard Staunton, descendents of the founder, and with the consent of Maurice, Archbishop of Tuam. It is also recorded that "in 1430 an indulgence was granted to the faithful who visited and gave alms for the repair of the church which had been burnt" (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1988: 297).

The reoccupation of the friary by the Augustinians is contemporary with the second phase of expansion of the mendicant orders in late medieval Ireland. Burriscarra Friary is not unique in having been home to two different religious orders in its history. This was also the case in Strade friary, which was founded as a Franciscan friary in the thirteenth century in the initial phase of the expansion of the religious orders in Ireland. It was subsequently transferred to the Dominicans at the insistence of the patron's wife (Flanagan, 1992). The transfer of Burriscarra friary to the Augustinians was not, it appears, a transaction without controversy. Evidently, a dispute arose in 1438 between the Carmelites and the Augustinians in regard to the occupation of this friary. However, it seems the Augustinians remained in possession until the friary was suppressed (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1988: 297). The suppression date of the friary not recorded. Indeed, the friaries of the west of Ireland proved difficult targets for suppression during the Henrician Dissolution, being located as they were beyond the bounds of Crown control in Ireland.

The friary was later granted to John King (of Dublin) in 1607, and then to Sir Henry Lynch during the time of King Charles II. The Lynches held the friary until the nineteenth century. The Office of Public Works carried out a conservation project on the friary in 1962 (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1988: 297).

The medieval church situated next to Burriscarra friary is recorded as a 14th century parish church (Lavelle, 1994). There is a dearth of information about this church, which is in a ruinous condition. A reference to Edmund and Richard Staunton receiving consent from Henry, rector of the parish church of St. Mary and the Holy Cross, to allow the Augustinian friars from Ballinrobe to occupy Burriscarra friary may be an indication of the parish church's name (Gwynn & Hadcock, 1988: 297).

Architectural investigation of Burriscarra friary and Parish Church

Burriscarra friary

Architecture of the friary

Two principal friary layouts are evident in late medieval Ireland. Large friaries were laid out using the claustral plan, which featured a central courtyard with the church located to the south and the conventual buildings arranged in an integrated order around the three remaining sides of the cloister. This layout occurs most commonly in Franciscan First Order houses and is evident at Moyne and Ross Errilly, which accommodated populations of perhaps fifty friars and novices. Smaller friaries were often based on an L-shaped plan, in which a single range of conventual buildings were constructed at a right angle to the church. This plan was well suited to smaller religious communities and offered potential for expansion, if necessary. Murrisk Augustinian friary is laid out in this manner, which was widely used in houses of the Franciscan Third Order and Dominicans. Given that friaries were reliant on the beneficence of patrons for their survival, many mendicant friaries show evidence of piecemeal construction with additions being made as necessity demanded and resources dictated. The extent of the current remains at Burriscarra suggests a small to medium sized community occupied this friary (Figure 3).

Burriscarra friary is built in the late Irish Gothic style. This was the last phase in the development of Gothic architecture in Ireland and was characterised by the late medieval divergence of the Gothic style from English exemplars. By this time, the Crown wielded limited influence in Ireland, confined mainly to the area in the east known as the Pale. Late Irish Gothic is an eclectic style incorporating the use of pointed and round arches in addition to seemingly random schemes of ornamentation. Its development was facilitated by the revival of the mendicant orders in late medieval Ireland, as this style was employed in the construction of new friaries. In addition to constructing new friaries in late medieval Ireland, the mendicant orders also undertook programmes of renovation at older friaries. As is the case at Burriscarra, the late Irish Gothic style was also employed in the case of such developments.

The church of Burriscarra friary consists of two principal sections. The nave and choir are combined to form a single hall or unicameral church. Adjoining the south wall of this area is a long narrow side aisle. This layout is in contrast to the typical division of friary churches in the nave and choir by means of a chancel arch beneath the crossing of the tower. The significance of this division was that it provided specific areas in which the friars and the laity worshipped. The friars would

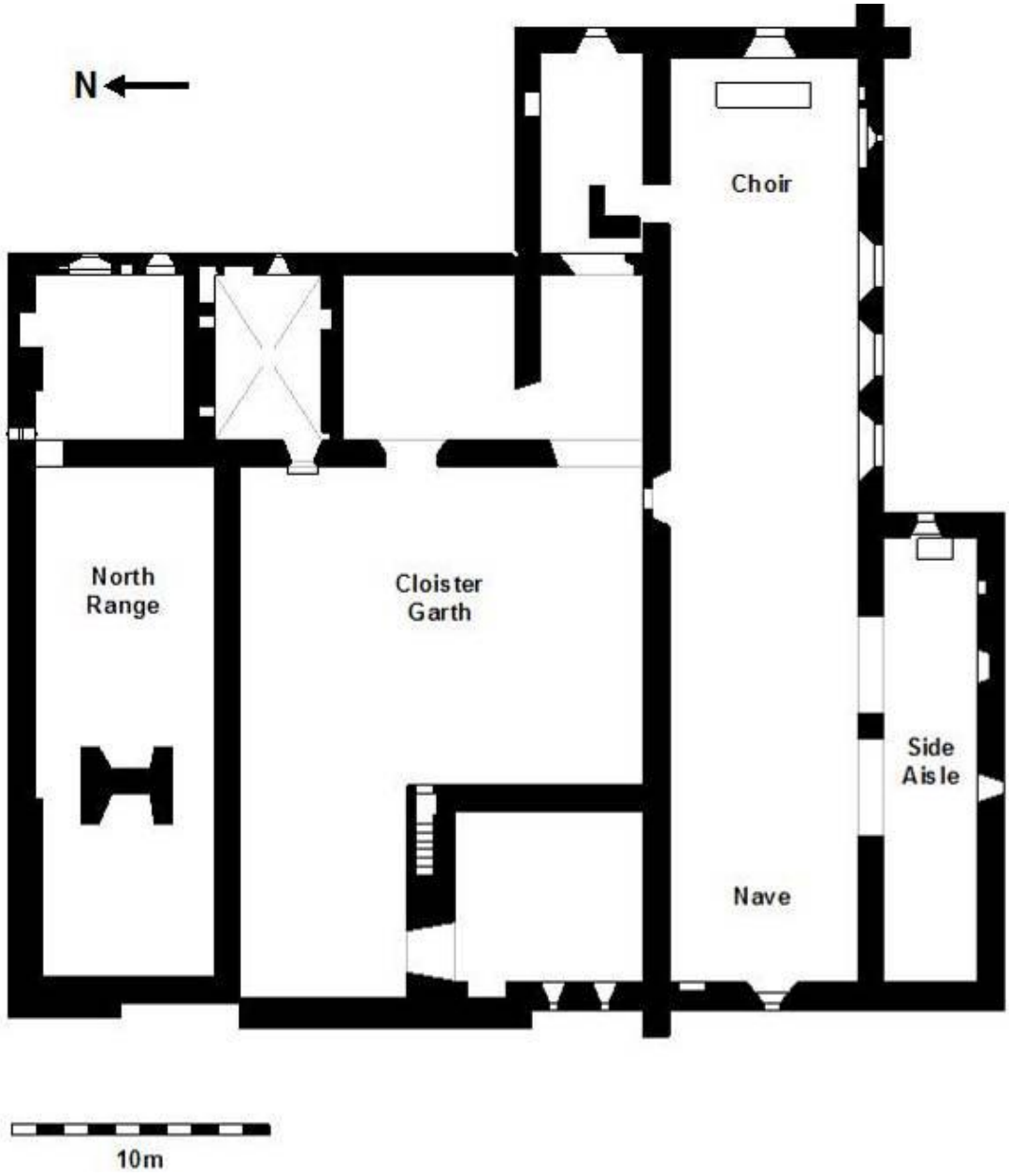

Figure 3: Plan of Burriscarra friary (after Lavelle, 1994)

be accommodated in the choir, closest to the altar, while the lay congregation would occupy the nave at the western end of the friary church. While Burriscarra friary is unusual in not being divided thus, it is not unique. Murrisk friary, a late medieval Augustinian house, also has a single-chambered church. Friary churches generally exhibit a lop-sided plan with a transept adjoining the south side of the friary church. This was another area in which the congregation might be accommodated and often housed altars endowed by patrons. Burriscarra friary lacks a transept, as does its Augustinian counterpart at Murrisk; however, it does boast a side aisle.

Today, the remains of Burriscarra friary do not include a tower, nor is there any discernable evidence that the friary once had one. The presence or absence of towers at friary sites is dependent on a number of factors. Many friaries did not originally have towers. An 1157 edict forbade the Cistercians from building stone towers on their abbeys (Stalley, 1987) and Franciscan friaries did not originally have towers. The mendicant orders were established to pursue lives of poverty and initially the construction of church towers was not considered necessary or even appropriate. The friary towers that survive today tend to be later additions. In some instances, the friary tower no longer survives, at other sites there may never have been a tower at all. Strade friary dates to the thirteenth century but saw significant renovations in the fifteenth century. This included the construction of a tower over the crossing between nave and choir. The tower at Strade friary has not survived.

Nave and choir

The remains at Burriscarra do not exhibit the quality of preservation that is evident at other friary sites in the west of Ireland such as Burrishoole, Ross Errilly and Murrisk. At Burriscarra, a number of the windows appear to have suffered particularly badly with several windows, including a row of three windows in the south wall of the eastern portion of the church, now bereft of their tracery. In some cases, small traces of the stone bars which once adorned these windows remain around the periphery. In the case of the east window, usually the crowning glory of any friary, an attempt was made to fill an earlier window aperture with a small window opening. However, even the smaller substitute window does not survive intact (Figure 4).

The west doorway of a friary was the main entrance to the church for members of the laity attending mass. The west portal of Burriscarra (Figure 5) features a round-headed arch in keeping with the trend in late medieval Irish architecture for

Figure 4: The east window of Burriscarra friary

Figure 5: The west doorway of Burriscarra friary

reviving this older style. The use of the round arch is also a feature of late medieval architecture in Scotland, occurring in windows, doorways and arcades, in addition to the use of cylindrical columns and piers. Campbell (1995: 302-308) argues that in the case of Scotland, this revival of the round arch forms part of an attempt to distance Scottish architecture from contemporary English influences and to assert Scottish identity by focussing on earlier forms. He insists that although masons are looking back to the work of earlier generations at this time, this should not be considered a retrograde or backward step. Rather it is a conscious attempt to associate with an earlier age. The revival of the round arch occurs to varying extents in late medieval religious houses in Ireland. A pair of pointed arches leads from the nave into the side aisle of the church.

There are three windows along the choir which are of similar size and style. All three were originally tracery windows; however, the tracery no longer survives intact in any of them. This leaves the windows bereft of their stone mullions with only peripheral vestiges of tracery remaining on two of the windows. Only one tracery window survives intact in the friary and this was on a smaller scale than either the south choir windows or the east window.

Also inserted in the south wall of the friary church are two standard pieces of medieval church furniture, namely the *sedilia* and *piscina*. The *sedilia* is the larger of the two and is used as seating for the clergy saying mass (Figure 7). In this instance, a low ledge sits beneath a trefoil arch with a single light window in the background. In keeping with the nature of late Irish Gothic, the capitals on either side are slightly different from each other. Whereas the example on the east side is ornamented with roll moulding, that on the western side is more ornate, featuring decoration involving triangles and dots. The upper portion of the moulding has been damaged. The bases of both columns feature roll mouldings (Figure 8 & 9). From the exterior, the window can be observed as a single-light ogee-headed window contained beneath a simple hood moulding with tapered ends.

A hood moulding encompasses the whole *sedilia* and features a carved head on either end. These heads have also sustained damage with the example on the west side now devoid of part of the left hand side of its head and also its nose. The elongated head has long hair and may be wearing some manner of headwear. The example on the east side has a clearly defined nose (although missing its lower portion), eyes and hairstyle. Much of the bottom portion of this face is now absent,

Figure 6: Three windows along the south wall of Burriscarra friary

Figure 7: The *sedilia* in Burriscarra friary

Figure 8: Eastern capital of the *sedilia*

Figure 9: Western capital of the *sedilia*

Figure 10: Carved head from the west side of the *sedilia*

Figure 11: Carved head from the east side of the *sedilia*

from just above the tip of the nose downwards. The use of carved stone heads is a common feature of the late Irish Gothic style in Ireland. In keeping with the overall theme of this style, such ornamentation may occur in a sparse and seemingly random fashion. For example, a window may have a head carving on its label moulding on one side but none on the other. In some instances, such heads may occur on an otherwise uninterrupted stretch of wall. The Romanesque style featured the use of carved heads, particularly on church portals. However, in this style they tended to occur in greater numbers and as part of a higher density of ornamentation, in contrast to late Irish Gothic heads which often occur singly. Who, then, was represented in such heads? In some instances, the location and the features of the heads can be illuminating. It is conceivable that a mason could carve his likeness in stone and include it in the edifice he had constructed. They could also represent saints, perhaps the founder of the religious order or a particular saint to whom the founder or friars were dedicated. In some instances, such as Rosserk friary, these carvings sport elaborate headdresses and jewellery around their necks, leading Hourihane (2003) to suggest that they represent the upper echelons of society, perhaps friary patrons.

To the eastern side of the *sedilia* lies the *piscina* (Figure 12). This is a stone basin set in a recess and would have been used for washing sacramental vessels. Until the thirteenth century, *piscinae* were required to have two drain holes. However, after this time, changing practices meant that only one drain was needed (Greening Lamborn, 1993). The example in Burriscarra is topped by a pointed arch which rests on two columns. Both columns have roll-moulded capitals but the base survives only on the western side and not on the east. There is an eight-lobed depression at the bottom of the *piscina*.

Friary churches were orientated eastwards to face Jerusalem and also to face the rising sun. This would allow the morning light to flood in the large east window and illuminate the choir where the friars worshipped. Thus the east window of a friary generally tends to be the largest. The east window of Burriscarra friary and subsequent alterations to it have been discussed above. A string course runs along the east wall of the friary church. String-coursing was also used on the exterior of the eastern wall and carries on to either side of the choir wall. It continues to the south and onto the buttress at the south east corner of the church. It also extends across the outside of the building at the north east corner of the church. Considering its location and proximity to the church and the existence of a connecting doorway to the choir,

Figure 12: *Piscina* in the choir of Burriscarra friary.

this was most likely the sacristy. The continuation of the string coursing onto this structure may be intended to emphasise its importance.

The side aisle

The side of the friary church is entered by means of the twin arches which separate it from the nave. It boasts the only remaining intact tracery window in Burriscarra and a second *piscina* (Figure 13). Although designated as a side aisle on the friary plan, this segment of the friary may well have served as a chapel. The presence of a *piscina* here indicates that this was the location of an altar used for celebrating masses. Endowing Lady Chapels and chantry chapels was a feature of late medieval religion that proved popular with patrons. Altars were constructed at which masses would be said for the donor's intentions. The *piscina* in the side aisle in Burriscarra is simpler than that in the choir. It consists of a single drain within a lobed depression beneath a pointed arch. There are no columns in this instance.

The tracery window is located at the eastern end of the side aisle (Figure 14). A central mullion divides this window into two, branching off to create two round-headed sections towards the top of the window. There are three open work sections at the head of the window. On the exterior of the building, the window is topped by a hood-moulding which has tapering terminals and no label stops. The window which was once located at the western end of the aisle does not survive, while another window, which is partially blocked up, survives in the south wall.

The domestic ranges

The domestic ranges or conventual buildings of Burriscarra friary survive in varying states of repair. This hinders the task of attempting to interpret these remains. In addition, later interference with the building presents further challenges. While the layout of this friary is not typical, many of the features contained within it are. A number of single light ogee-headed windows survive which are typical of fifteenth century friary architecture in Ireland. In some instances, twin-light windows survive, such as the example in the western range. This window encompasses two lights with pointed heads within a round arch. Only a small upper portion of the mullion of this window survives. Other windows sit within square-headed recesses.

The friary has a vaulted room in its eastern range which is now used as the stone store. Many late medieval friaries feature vaulted rooms with some featuring

Figure 13: *Piscina* in the side aisle

Figure 14: Tracery window at the eastern end of the side aisle

entire vaulted ranges, as seen at Moyne and Rosserk. This room also contains a fireplace. This was the characteristic method used to heat friaries in Ireland. This is in contrast to houses of the Cistercians, for example, where calefactories or warming rooms were used. Friary fireplaces ranged in size and typically a number of them would be scattered throughout the friary. Some, such as those at Ross Errilly Franciscan friary, are very large indeed. One would also expect to find a fireplace in the friary kitchen for cooking purposes. A number of fireplaces are evident in the ruins of Burriscarra.

Figure 15: West range of Burriscarra friary

Burriscarra Parish Church

The remains of the parish church at Burriscarra appear to have been subject to numerous phases of intervention and alteration, which presents difficulties in attempting to interpret the remains. The church is a single chambered structure with no clear division between nave and choir (Figure 16). It is rectangular in plan and does not feature any transepts, aisles or chapels. The east window would have been the principal window of the parish church but as at the adjacent friary, the east window has been subject to a later insertion which blocks off part of the southern portion of the window. This resulted in a smaller east window and also one which was off-centre. The current state of the window is such that it is not possible to surmise how the east window of the parish church would originally have looked. On the exterior of the building, it is evident that there is a pronounced batter towards the base.

As is the case with friary churches, parish churches also tend to have their main entrance located to the west. This is not the case at Burriscarra parish church. This church has two doorways, both of which are located in the north wall (Figure 18). It may perhaps be the case that the topography of the area did not lend itself to having a west doorway. The terrain falls away to the west of the church and would have provided more of an incline than is evident at the north side of the church. There was possibly a third doorway in the south wall of the church, which has since been partially blocked up.

The smaller windows in the parish church enjoy the best state of survival. There are a number of small square-headed windows, some of which are partially blocked up. Two larger windows are extant in the south wall of the church, towards the eastern end. These would have contributed to illuminating the altar during the morning hours. The upper portions of these windows do not survive and are blocked up towards their bases. The west wall contains a single small square-headed window.

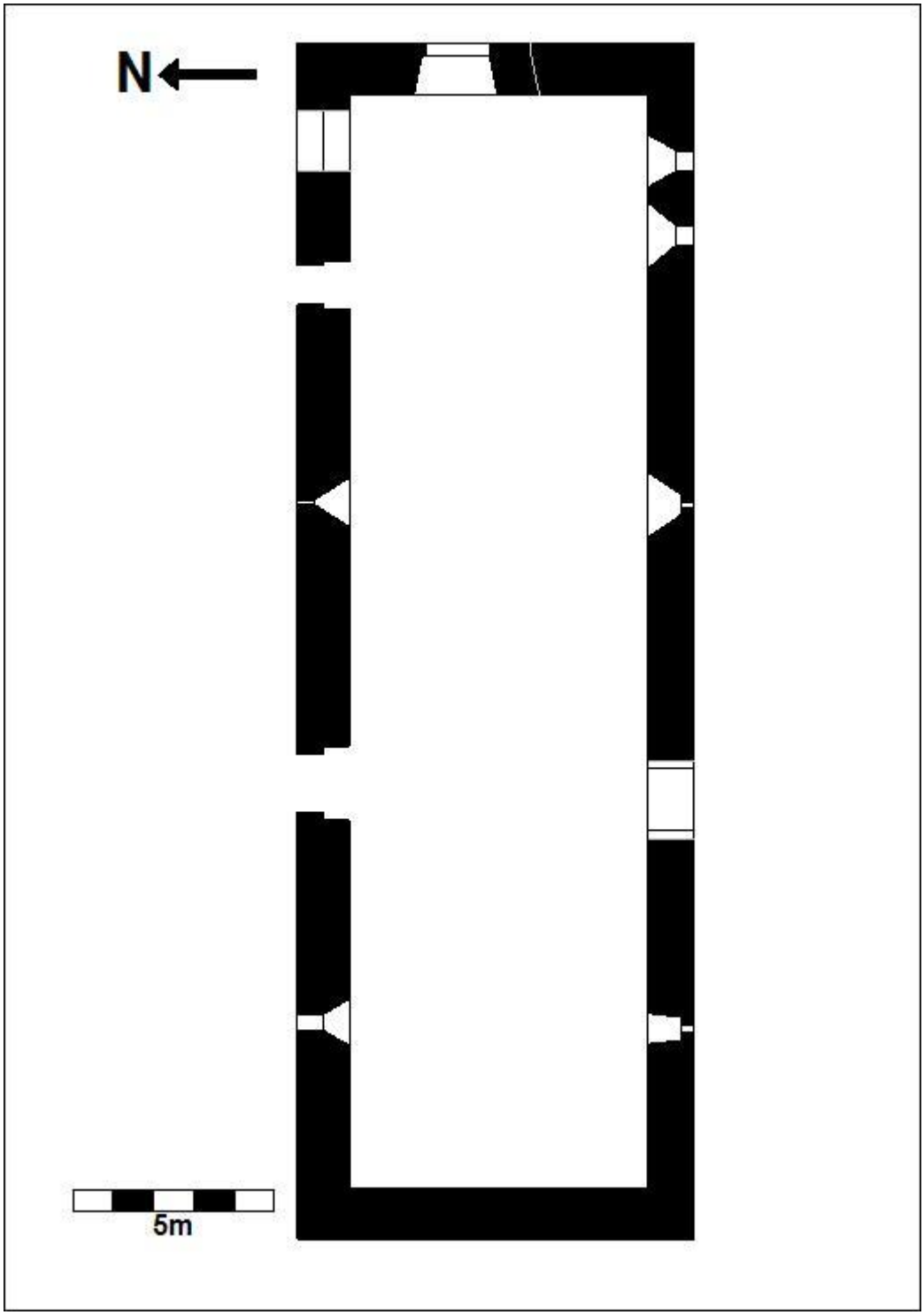

Figure 16: Burriscarra Parish Church

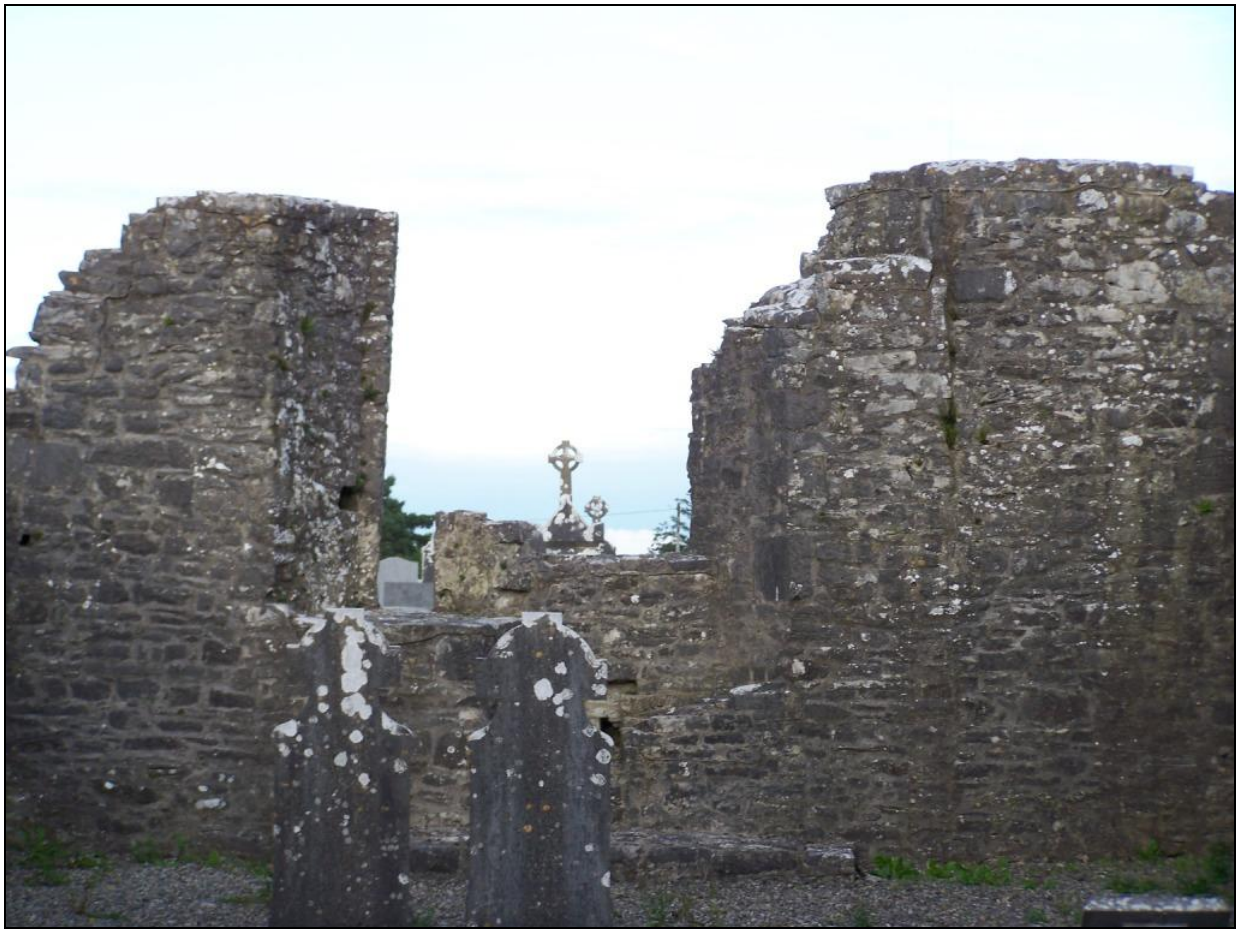

Figure 17: East window of Burriscarra Parish Church

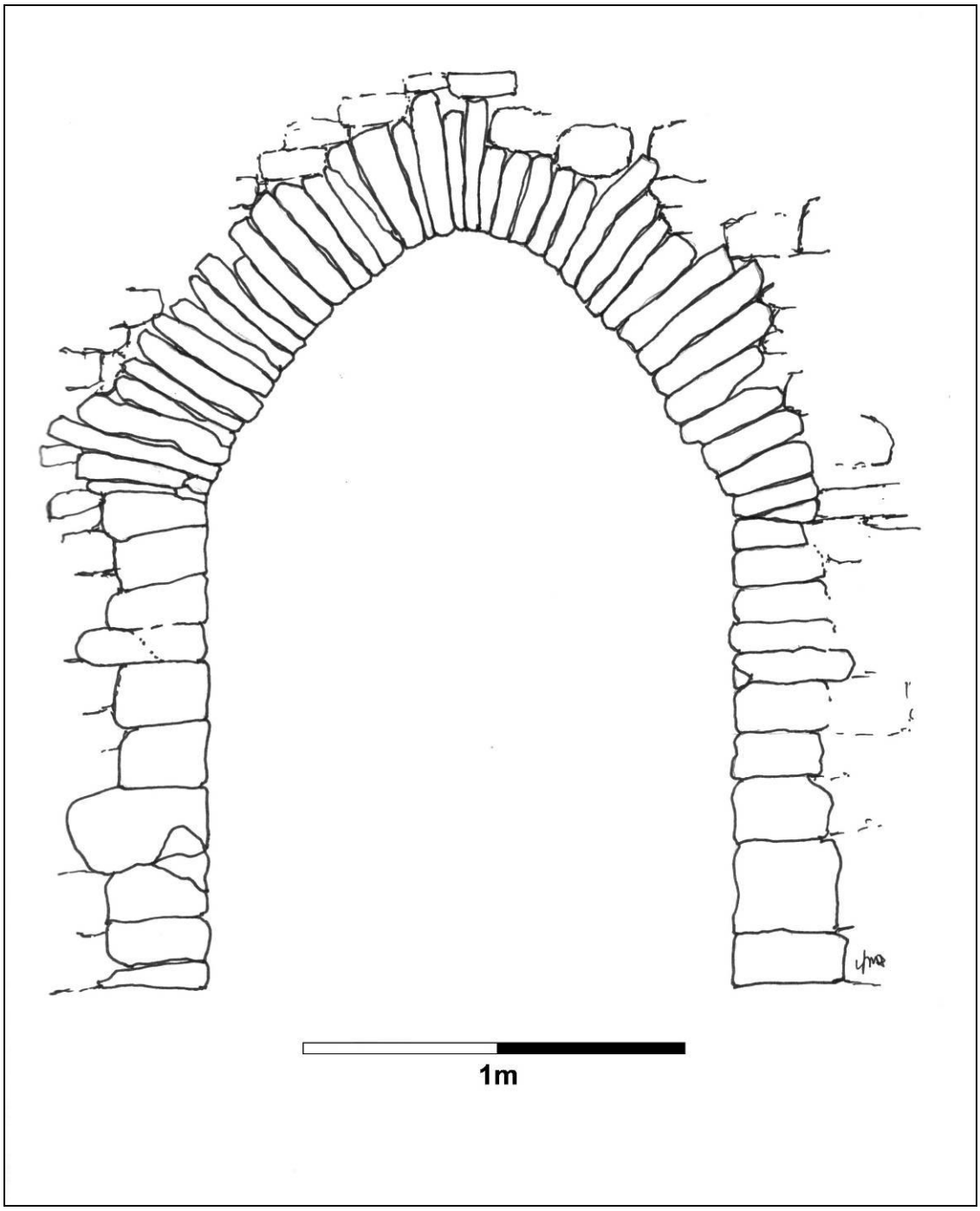

Figure 18: Western doorway in the north wall of Burriscarra Parish Church

Appendices

Appendix No. 1: Land Registry Compliant Map showing Burriscarra Ecclesiastical Complex

Appendix No. 2: Orthophotography showing Burriscarra Ecclesiastical Complex

Appendix No. 3: Ordnance Survey Historic 6-inch map

Appendix No. 4: Ordnance Survey Historic 25-inch map

Appendix No. 5: Photographs

Burriscarra friary

Figure 19: Archway leading to side aisle

Figure 20: Doorway leading from friary church to central courtyard

Figure 21: Post-Medieval grave stone in the choir of Burriscarra friary

Figure 22: Fireplace in the vaulted room of Burriscarra friary

Figure 23: Part of the east range of Burriscarra friary

Figure 24: West doorway from the interior

Figure 25: Single light window at rear of *sedilia* as seen from the exterior of the building

Figure 26: South east corner of friary church

Figure 27: Architectural fragments in Burriscarra friary

Figure 28: External view of the east range

Figure 29: Twin-light ogee-headed window in east range

Burriscarra Parish Church

Figure 30: West window of Burriscarra Parish Church

Figure 31: Windows in south wall

Figure 32: Partially blocked up doorway in south wall

Figure 33: Window in south wall

Figure 34: Windows in south wall, towards eastern end of church

Figure 35: Window in north wall

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