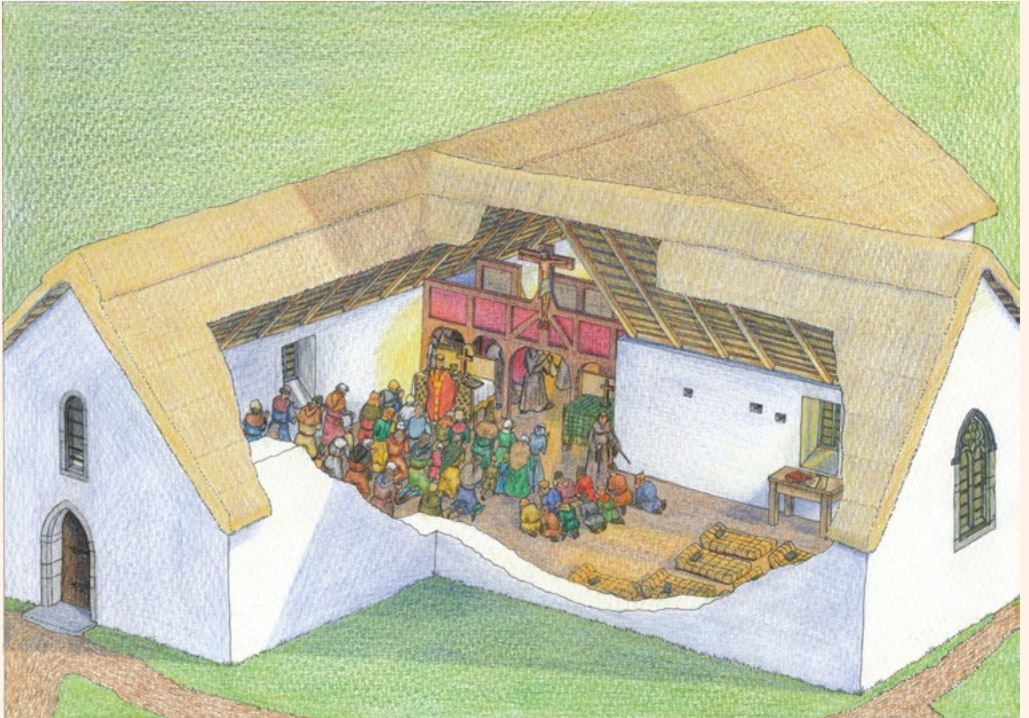
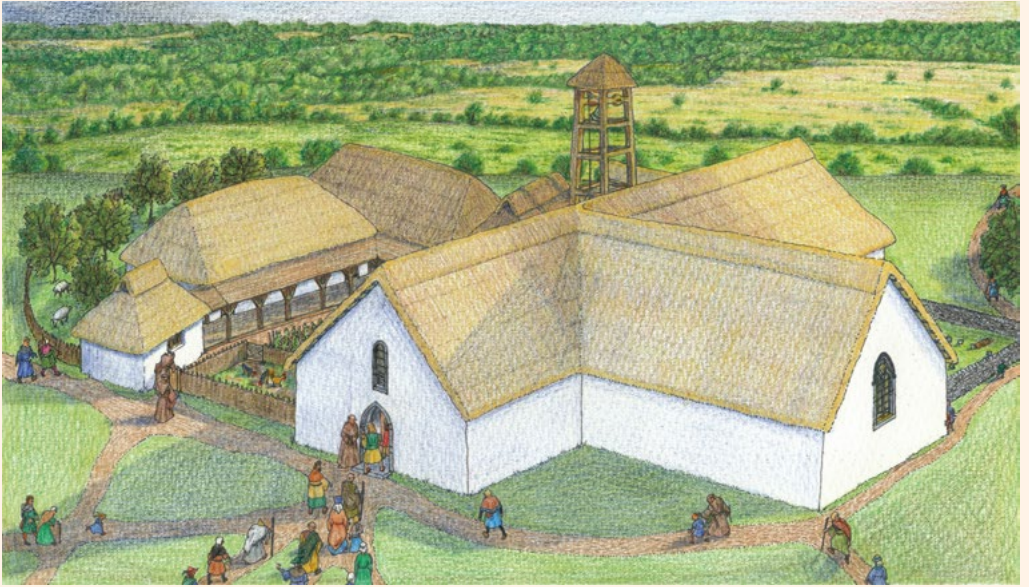


KILBOGHT

Church of the Poor

Peggy Monahan



Illustrations by Daniel Tietzsch-Tyler

KILBOGHT

Church of the Poor

By Peggy Monahan

on behalf of Kilboght Graveyard Restoration Group

October 2025

Kilbogh: Church of the Poor

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Left: Western gable of Kilboght Church.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)





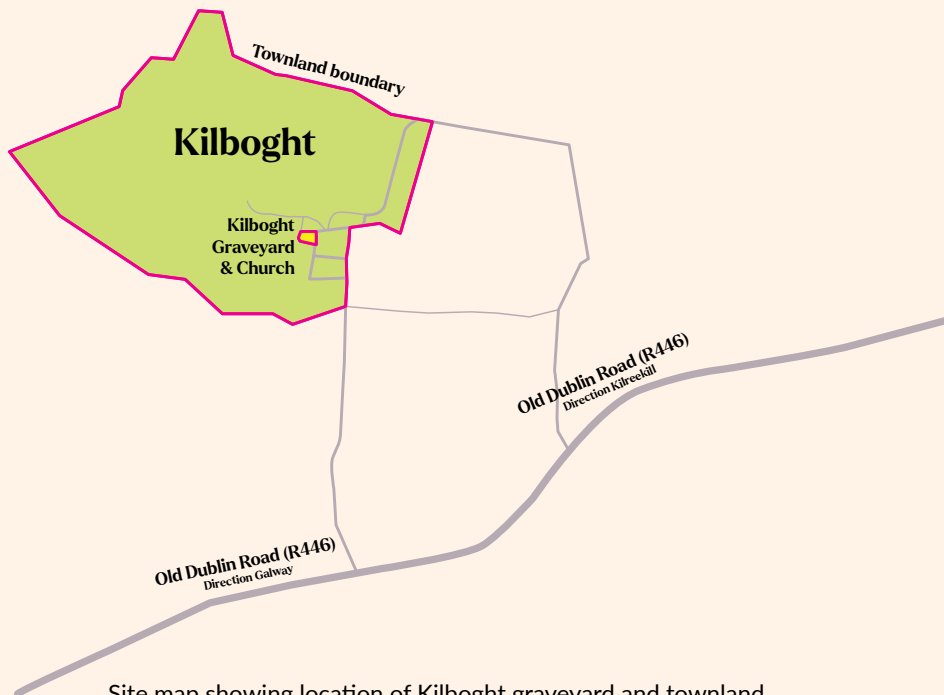
View of Kilboght from the eastern section.
(Photo credit: Hany Marzouk)

Kilboght – Church of the Poor

This booklet tells the story of a medieval church, known as Kilboght Abbey or Kilboght Convent, located in East Galway between the town of Loughrea and the village of Kilreekil. Kilboght is the site of a Franciscan Third Order Regular friary believed to have been built in the 15th and 16th centuries around an earlier structure. Kilboght is a significant site due to its surviving church ruins and late medieval grave slabs.

Sharing its name with a townland of just over 217 acres, the ruined church of Kilboght sits on high boggy ground, overlooking farmland. The townland takes its name from the Irish *Cill Bhocht*, meaning poor church.

Kilbogh: Church of the Poor



Site map showing location of Kilbogh graveyard and townland (outlined in purple) and their setting.

Connection with St Patrick's Sister

According to tradition, a nunnery was founded near Kilbogh by St Patrick for his sister St Richella, from whom Killeekil derives its name. Spelled either Killeekil or Kilrickle from the Irish Cill Ríicill, the name means Richella's Church. According to some sources, the church founded for Richella was located on the site of the present church in the nearby village of Killeekil, but there is no evidence to support this. Kilbogh, with its extensive medieval ecclesiastical remains, seems a more likely location for the setting of the early church. Early maps show Kilbogh Convent, alluding to the possibility that her nunnery was founded in the same vicinity.

Kilboght's Medieval History

Archaeological and written evidence tells us that the church ruins at Kilboght date from medieval times. Between the 12th and the 15th centuries, approximately 400 abbeys, priories and friaries were built in Ireland. The friary at Kilboght was a Franciscan Third Order Regular friary, which was founded by Hugo de Wall. He was from a prominent Anglo-Norman family and owned vast amounts of land in the area. It is believed that an older structure was extended, possibly during several phases of development in the 15th and 16th centuries. Although extended, it is not large in comparison to other religious houses in the region.



Annotated drone survey image showing suggested building phases at Kilboght Church. (Photo credit: Paul Naessens)

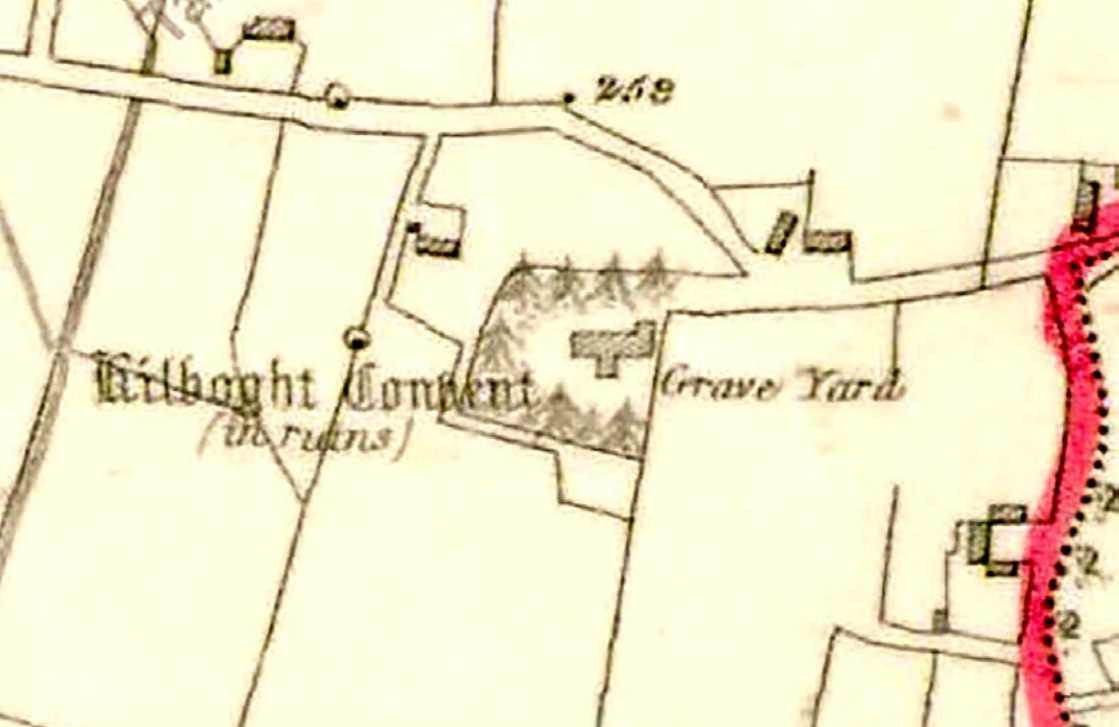


Detail of Down Survey County Map (1656) showing Killbou located between Lough Reagh to the west and Abbeygormagan (Abbeygormican) to the east (The Down Survey of Ireland, Trinity College Dublin).

By 1441, the Franciscan Third Order Regular were established in the west of Ireland at religious houses such as Clonfert and Tuam in County Galway. By the 15th century, there were about forty friaries of the Third Order Regular in Ireland, comprising small communities of clerics and lay people. Most of these were established by prominent Gaelic families, such as the de Walls in East Galway.

In 1562, as part of the Dissolution of the Monasteries under King Henry VIII, Kilbought was granted, along with several other religious houses, to the Earl of Clanricarde. At that time, the Franciscan Third Order Regular was still in possession of the friary.

Kilbought continued to be in use through the 17th century. The Down Survey map of Ireland of 1656 shows “Kilbou Abey” and on the County map, it is shown as “Kilbou Abby”. (Undertaken during the years 1656-1658, the Down Survey of Ireland is the first ever detailed land survey on a national scale anywhere in the world.)



Extract from the First Edition Ordnance Survey Map of Galway (sheet 98) © National Mapping Division of Tailte Éireann. All rights reserved. Licence number CYAL50333446.

The Life of Friars

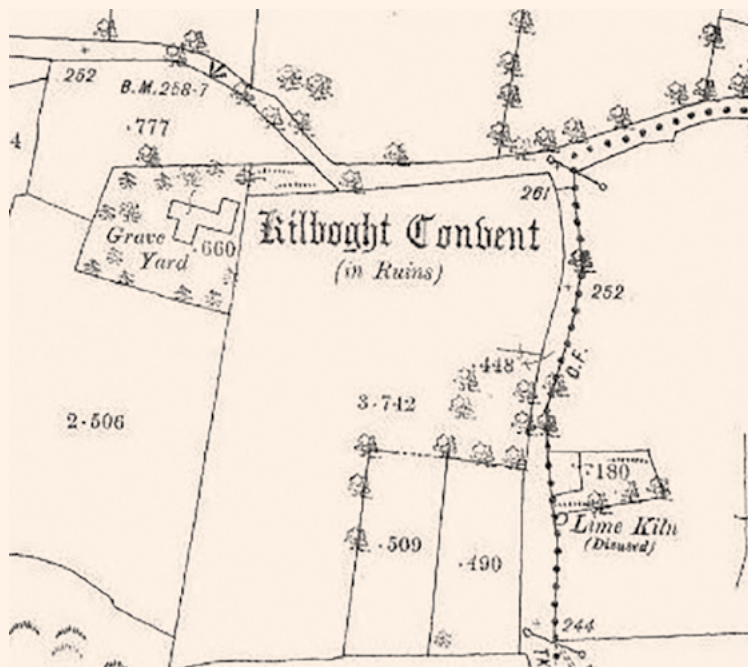
The name *Cill Bhoicht*, or poor church, may refer to the earlier church that was expanded, or it may refer to the Franciscans themselves, who were also known as “the poor friars”. The friars wore a simple habit and served the spiritual and educational needs of the local people. According to Dr Christy Cunniffe, former Community Archaeologist for Co Galway, the friars were mendicants, meaning that they were dependent on the alms and gifts of wealthy benefactors and donors. One of the main ways that they earned a living was by providing burial plots for the dead and by saying masses for the souls of the dead. They also tended to the sick in their friaries and churches and in the surrounding parishes.

There is no evidence at Kilboght of a cloister or any other stone-built structures that may have been used by the community of friars. However, Kilboght must have had a reasonably high status in the diocese, because the Bishop of Clonfert, Matthew MacCraith, died at the friary in 1507. It could be assumed that he left Clonfert to be tended by the friars in Kilboght when he became ill. However, Bishop Macraith is likely not buried in Kilboght as W. M. Brady notes in *The Episcopal Succession in England, Scotland and Ireland* (1876) his place of burial to be a place called Kilcommaun, an unidentified graveyard.

Detail from south-facing window.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)



Kilbogh: Church of the Poor



Extract from Last Edition of Ordnance Survey Map of Galway (sheet 98) © National Mapping Division of Tailte Éireann. All rights reserved. Licence number CYAL50333446.

The 18th and 19th Centuries

By the 18th century, it appears that Kilbogh was abandoned. It fell into disuse as a religious house and place of worship, but it is likely that the graveyard continued to be used for occasional burials, providing sacred ground for locals.

The First Edition Ordnance Survey Map from the 1840s shows Kilbogh Convent and Graveyard as “in ruins”. Likewise, Samuel Lewis, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* of 1837, mentions “the remains of an ancient chapel”.

By the next edition of the Ordnance Survey Map in the late 19th century, the layout of the ruins hasn't changed. And, although indicated on both OSI maps as there being a "Grave Yard", there are very few headstones dating from the 18th or early 19th century to be found. However, it is likely that families could not afford them and used architectural fragments instead.

In addition to the church ruins at Kilboght, there is the Blake Mausoleum. The Blakes were landlords who owned the nearby Dartfield Estate. The mausoleum is dedicated to the memory of James Henry Blake, who died in 1841, by his wife Maria Louisa Blake.



The Blake Mausoleum, photographed in 2021, prior to conservation works.

(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)



The Mausoleum
photographed in 2023,
following reconstruction
work by Galway Stone
and funded by the
Community Monuments
Fund.

(Photo credit:
Fergal McNamara)

Inscription in memory of James
Henry Blake.
(Photo credit: Peggy Monahan)



Inscribed above the
door leading to the
burial chamber are
the words:

*IHS
Sacred to
the Memory of
James Henry Blake
late of St Stephens Green
Dublin Barrister at Law
who departed this life on the 4th
of August 18 [space] in the year of his age
Talents of a varied and transcendent
order combined with a mild and amiable
disposition and inflexible integrity of character
raised him to the highest estimation in his profefsion
[sic]
This mausoleum has been erected by his afflicted
widow as a resting place for his honoured remains
and as a
melancholy tribute of affectionate respect to his
beloved memory
Scio enim quod Redemptor meus vivit Job XIX.xxv.
[For I know that my Redeemer lives Job 19:25]
Requiescat in pace [May he rest in peace]*

Kilboght: Church of the Poor

Maria's remains are contained in the mausoleum along with those of her husband. Two members of the Hardy family are also buried in the mausoleum: Joseph Hardy and his son James. Joseph Hardy, a grazier, was living at Dartfield which by 1873 was an estate of 1,304 acres. By 1880, he was grazing some 6,000 acres for five landlords, a practice that flourished in post-Famine Ireland, whereby landlords, frustrated by low yields from small farms and difficult tenants, found it to their advantage to let out large parts of their estates to be grazed with cattle. The Hardys eventually acquired Dartfield estate, which is how Joseph and his son came to be buried here.

Architectural Features of the Church

There are several fine architectural features from the late medieval period to note at Kilboght, such as a pointed-arch doorway in the western extension of the medieval church, a stone-carved piscina, the west-facing gable window, grave slabs and a holy water font/stoup.

Kilboght door before works.
(Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)



Doorway in 2022 prior to conservation works: Looking west showing the pointed arch doorway and medieval font. (Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)



Doorway after conservation works in 2023. Today, the door is supported by a new lintel. (Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)





A medieval-designed font/stoup is built within the interior wall.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)

A piscina within the north-facing chancel wall would have been used to wash the chalices or hands of the friar or priest. The water used was recognised as holy water, staying within the church for redistribution.



Piscina prior to conservation works.
(Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)



Piscina after conservation works.
(Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)



The western gable with off-centre window.
(Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)

A south-facing gable window brought light into the building. This is within the transept/chapel. A transept is an arm or extension (usually north and south) from the nave creating a cross shape in plan. Here in Kilbought we only see a southern transept. It is possible that another extension may have been planned for the north.



South gable before conservation works.
(Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)



South gable after conservation works.
(Photo credit: Bernie Doherty)



South-facing window.
(Photo credit: Peggy Monahan)

Grave Markers

Kilboght continued to be used as a burial ground after the church fell into ruin. It contains many grave markers which are architectural fragments from the ruins of the church. This was a common practice on ancient ecclesiastical burial grounds. Some of these include decorative fragments such as sections of a former stone window. It suggests that there was a relatively small population over the centuries, with only a few people who could afford a headstone. The actual number of interments in the graveyard is not known but it is likely to contain a large number of unmarked graves.



Late medieval grave slab.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)



17th century grave slab.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)

Kilbought: Church of the Poor

In what used to be the interior of the church, there are two grave slabs from the late medieval period that are listed in the National Monuments files. One is rounded at the top and has the form of a cross engraved in it. Also visible is the christogram IHS [Jesus Hominem Salvator, Jesus Saviour of Mankind], but with no further inscription.

A few metres away is a grave slab dated 1642 with a dedication to a priest running along its edges. This slab is broken into two large pieces.

Both of these slabs for prominent individuals may be in their original locations, having been set into the church while it was still in use.



Detail from 17th century grave slab.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)



Dr. Christy Cunniffe with archaeologist Dominic Delany and visitor on the International Day for Monuments and Sites in 2024.

(Photo credit: Hany Marzouk)

Conservation Works at Kilboght

With the burial ground falling into disuse, Kilboght became very overgrown. The rare burials required extensive clearance to gain access to family plots. Local woman Katie Duane instigated works to clear the graveyard. To improve access and parking, she sought the donation of a parcel of land at the entrance to the graveyard from Jimmy Dervin, who lives beside Kilboght. In 1999, she arranged for a FÁS scheme to rebuild the graveyard enclosing wall, which is believed to have been first constructed by the Board of Works in the 1950s. Next, she obtained a grant from Galway County Council to purchase a lawn mower and to provide a stipend to Jimmy Dervin to cut the grass.



Peggy Monahan greeting bus tour at Kilboght on the International Day for Monuments and Sites in 2024.

(Photo credit: Hany Marzouk)

Following on from Katie's work, Kilboght Graveyard Restoration Group was established in 2021. We applied for funding through Galway County Council to the Community Monuments Fund, the National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. We were then awarded funding, which resulted in the preparation of a multi-disciplinary *Conservation & Management Plan*. Based on its recommendations, funding was again applied for. In 2023, over €100,000 was granted to enable conservation work to proceed on the medieval abbey and the Blake Mausoleum.

Since then, the Heritage Office of Galway County Council has helped to highlight the group's successful efforts by including Kilboght in a Story Map – Galway County Community Monuments. This includes a podcast and video incorporating Kilboght's history and archaeological significance. Interviews with group members Katie Duane, Mona Monahan and Peggy Monahan are included.

Kilboght also featured in a bus tour hosted by Galway Community Archaeology as part of the International Day for Monuments and Sites in 2024. Galway Community Archaeologist Bernie Doherty, accompanied by Heritage Officer Marie Mannion and Dr Christy Cunniffe brought a group to Kilboght, Abbeygormican, and St Kerrills, Gurteen, all of which received funding through The Community Monuments Fund, administered by Galway County Council on behalf of The National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.



Bus tour at Kilboght on the International Day for Monuments and Sites in 2024.

(Photo credit: Hany Marzouk)

Kilboght: Church of the Poor



Dr Christy Cunniffe, former Community Archaeologist for Co Galway, pictured with Katie Duane, winner of the 2025 Cathaoirleach Award for Best Contribution to Heritage, following the award ceremony held in the Raheen Woods Hotel on Friday, 16th May 2025.

(Photo credit: Peggy Monahan)

Award for Kilboght

In 2025, Kilboght was shortlisted under the Heritage and Conservation Project of the Year category by the Irish Building and Design Awards. The IBDA recognise and reward the amazing skills and expertise within the building and design sectors in Ireland. Later that year, Katie Duane was recognized for her “work in pursuit of the maintenance and restoration of the abbey and mausoleum at Kilboght Graveyard” when she won the Cathaoirleach’s Award for Best Contribution to Heritage.



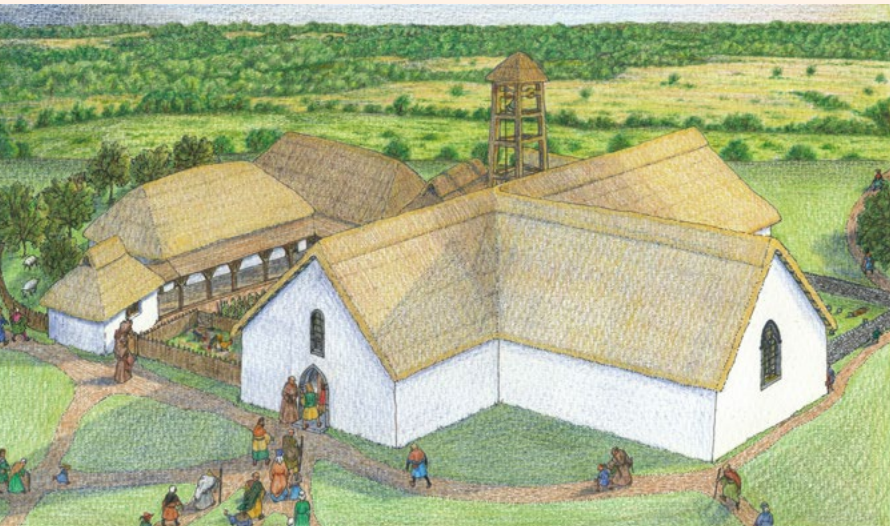
Above left to right: Peggy Monahan, Marie Mannion, Katie Duane, Bernie Doherty and Mona Monahan at the Cathaoirleach's Awards 2025. (Photo credit: Christy Cunniffe)

Below: The western gable with the off-centre window after conservation works.

(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)



Kilbogh: Church of the Poor



Friary complex: a reconstruction drawing of Kilbogh friary as it might have looked around 1500. (Illustration by Daniel Tietzsch-Tyler)

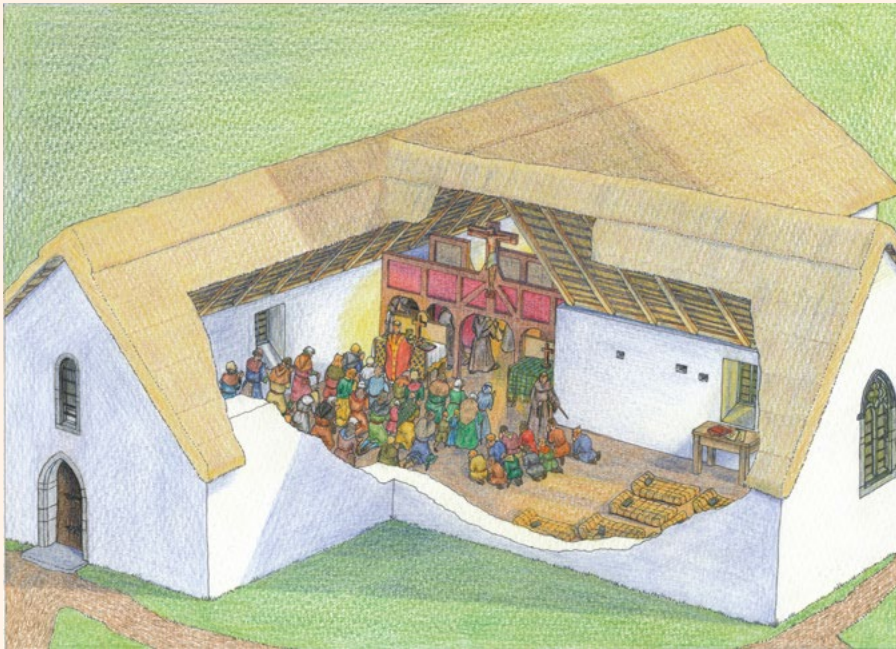
Reconstruction Drawings of Kilbogh Friary

Thanks to the Community Monuments Fund 2025, Kilbogh Graveyard Restoration Group were awarded funding to create an information panel to display at Kilbogh. Archaeologist and illustrator Daniel Tietzsch-Tyler was commissioned to create two illustrations of Kilbogh Friary as it would have existed in the early 1500s to be included on the panel. Following careful examination of the archaeological remains and based on available evidence regarding the life of friars, Daniel created both exterior and interior interpretations of Kilbogh. He illustrated it from a southwestern viewpoint to show the most complete surviving elements of the church with its west-facing door and window above it.

Kilboght was a small and simple church. There is no evidence of a cloister but it is likely that some type of enclosure and accommodation for the friars existed. The friary complex shows a group of buildings around a small courtyard, close to the church for the friars' regular daily religious offices.

A chapter house immediately to the east of the church chancel is where the friars would have met daily to discuss their business. Beyond the chapter house is the friars' dormitory and would have possibly had a space partitioned off as an infirmary for the sick.

With no tower on the church, and no sign of a bellcote on the west gable, a simple, separate, timber-framed belfry



Interior view depicting congregation assembled for Mass.
(Illustration by Daniel Tietzsch-Tyler)

Kilbogh: Church of the Poor

tower, capped with a thatched roof, is also depicted. This would have been used to summon the surrounding population to service.

A small kitchen, with openings in the thatch for smoke to escape, is shown alongside a refectory, which is where the friars would have eaten their meals. An orchard is shown behind the refectory. A simple wattle fence encloses a small pen for chickens and other livestock and a small vegetable garden.

The second drawing is an interpretation of the layout and possible activity inside the church around 1500. The church is divided into two sections with the western nave reserved for the local congregation and the eastern chancel for the friars, separated by a timber-screened passage.

Altars are placed on either side of the central opening to serve the lay congregation. In the drawing, a friar in full vestments is preparing the mass at the north altar for the kneeling congregation. The rood loft above and between the screens, with its red-painted panels is accessed by a steep stair in the chancel, as was common, and would have served as a pulpit. A simple east-facing table beneath the east window of the south chapel altar could also serve as an additional altar.

One of the functions of the Franciscan friars was to educate young men. This may have taken place in a separate building, but it is possible that the south chapel may have been used as a schoolhouse. An account of a Gaelic Irish schoolroom in 1571 describes ten young men lying on couches of straw, reading their books, and reciting their lessons together, and this has been illustrated here.

The Future

In its 'Statement of Significance', the *Conservation & Management Plan* states:

Kilboght is a historic place of regional significance due to its surviving medieval church ruins, grave slabs and fine mausolea. Although there is no visible evidence of an ecclesiastical enclosure or residential buildings, further research and investigation may provide additional evidence of this community which formed an important role in the tapestry of religious houses in Connacht. Its potential as the site of a monastic foundation associated with St Richella, the "nunnery" mentioned on maps and the source of the placename of Kilreekil, could be further explored and would enhance the significance of this site.

As a relatively undeveloped setting, there remains an opportunity to better understand the lives of the religious community and parishioners over five hundred years, and possibly further back in time. At the turn of the millennium, a number of initiatives were undertaken by the community that prevented further degradation of the ruins and graveyard. By conserving these ruins and continuing to maintain the graveyard, a valuable cultural resource will be safeguarded for future generations.

It is hoped that with careful management, Kilboght will continue to be well-kept and its story as a medieval friary kept alive. It can only be imagined how developments in technology may lead to further investigations, helping more of its story to unfold for future generations.

Kilboght: Church of the Poor

Additional Information

Kilboght Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100069147834400>

Conservation & Management Plan:

<https://field-monuments.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/community-archaeology/cmf21-galway-county/kilboght-church-and-graveyard>

Galway Community Archaeology:

Kilboght Church and Graveyard:

<https://field-monuments.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/community-archaeology/cmf21-galway-county/kilboght-church-and-graveyard>

Kilboght Story Map:

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/8ef529b34852438b9dbd4e20cf74dc81>

Kilboght Graveyard Restoration Group

Podcast:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ie/podcast/ep-01-kilboght/id1647257234?i=1000673753611>

Kilboght Graveyard Restoration Group Video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnDFG_oUNWo



**Piscina after conservation works.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)**



**South gable after conservation works.
(Photo credit: Dominic Delany)**



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