

glenullin

Gleann An Iolair 'the eagle's glen'

Errigal Old Church Graveyard & Souterrain

Errigal Old Church was founded by St. Adamnan in the mid 7th Century. Adamnan (c625 - 704) was Abbot of Iona after St. Colmcille (Colomba) and wrote a biography of the Saint.

Before the church was built it is believed this site may have been used as a pagan ritual site during the Iron Age. The presence of a ballaun stone, souterrain and nearby inauguration stone would support this theory. The site now consists of the following elements:

- ☉ the ruined remains of an early church in the centre of a walled graveyard (the church is rectangular, approx. 16m x 5.5m)
- ☉ an adjoining structure which may have been a burial vault, mortuary house or watch house, used when body snatching was big business
- ☉ a rock-cut souterrain in the field outside the walled graveyard
- ☉ a ballaun stone in a field to the south of the graveyard

According to tradition, during the Ulster Plantation the church was taken over by the Church of England and destroyed in the rebellion of 1641.



Artist's impression of Errigal Old Church

Most of the headstones in the graveyard date to the 19th Century. One of the most recent

burials was in 1962, that of Mr. Hart Buck who resided in nearby Ballintemple House.

According to local legend this church was not meant to be built on this site.

It had been planned for the townland of Lisnascreeaghog, approximately two miles away. When work started the builders discovered that the walls of the new church kept falling down. While praying about this problem St. Adamnan fell asleep. He was awakened by an eagle which flew off with his prayer book. The eagle dropped the prayer book on this site and St. Adamnan believed that this should be the site for the new church.



This ballaun stone is located in the field to the rear of the site (No public access). A ballaun stone is a large stone with a hollow depression carved in it. They were often found at Irish Iron Age sites and used as cursing stones. It is thought many such stones were reused as fonts although nearly all are found outside church sites.



Souterrain

The souterrain may have been used either as a place for storage or a place in which to hide when the church was under attack.



The souterrain was excavated in 1933 by Messrs A McL. May and D.C. Cooper. They found

The souterrain is roughly cruciform, 50ft long by 24ft wide, with six chambers and two passages called crawls or creeps, approximately 8ft below the ground surface. The structure has been dug out of basalt. The entrances from the passages to the chambers are very small. This meant that invaders had to crawl along on their bellies, leaving them very vulnerable to attack.

evidence that the chambers were probably last used in 1641 when part of a shoe from that period was found. Other items included an object for sharpening blades and a wooden club.

These hints at its probable use as a refuge in times of danger - indeed it is believed the church was attacked by Norse raiders in the 9th Century. (No public access).