

## Baisleac Mór - Baslick

The townland name, later the name of the parish, has its origins in the early Christian foundation Basilica Sanctorum. This 5th century ecclesiastical site is associated with the relics of Saint Peter, Paul Lawrence and St. Stephen - the Basilica of the saints.

The new Basilica Sanctorum can indicate a martyr's tomb and a royal burial site. Scholars like Charles Doherty associate Baslick with the evangelisation of Connacht by St. Peter. Both Joe Fenwick of NUIG and Sam Moore of Sligo Higher Institute of Technology, regard it as having a deliberate strategic and symbolic significance, positioned between the prehistoric Cruachain and the late Iron age site of Rathra.

This foundation had strong associations with the Ciarraige Sept who controlled the plains of Mog nAí Ciarraige power waned and in the 7th century the Uí Briúin Sept replaced the Ciarraige and Basilica Sanctorum lost its ecclesiastical power the church at Armagh. About this time too the important relics were removed to Armagh. In 649 AD Ragallach Mac Uatach - Uí Briúin King of Connacht was buried at Baslick. The tripartite life of St. Patrick states that Aidhniach of Baslick was buried in 742 AD and that Fiachra, son of Fothad, Abbot of Baslick, was buried here in 759 AD. Cormack, son of Muiris Mac Tommaitaig of the Siol Muireadaig - ancestors of the O'Connors, Abbot of Baslick was killed by the Ciarraige in 805 AD. The Annals describe the death of Sedulius, Bishop of Roscommon 816 AD, at Baslick. In 846 AD Baslick was plundered by Norsemen.

A local interpretation of the townland name 'Bais-leac' is that it means 'the flag-stone of death'. A flat-topped boulder outside the cemetery was known locally as 'the Leac' and local folklore suggested that the rock was a sacrificial altar in pre-Christian times. An unfinished table tomb located outside the graveyard entrance at the SW has been the subject of curiosity over a number of years. Dr. Karina Morton conducted a conservation investigation in the summer of 2007. The following is a short excerpt from her report.

The primary aim of the conservation investigation was to reveal details of the grave slabs, in particular the inscription, in the hope that the identity of the deceased could be established. It became clear that several different cement mixes had been applied at different times and this observation was confirmed by Sean Rafferty who indicated that the stone was used as a surface on which to mix sand and cement for the erection of headstones in the graveyard. A variety of hand-tools were used to reduce and remove the overlying sand and cement layers. These included hammers, chisels and a small pneumatic chisel together with fine grades of abrasive wool. The stone was washed intermittently to remove all residues of sand and cement. The inscription was deciphered as follows,

*O great God be Mercifull to the soul of Michl Balfe who departed this life in the 10th March 1777 in the 61st year of his life. He was a loving husband fonder parent, U a faithfull man. May his soul rest in pace*

Centrally located within the graveyard are the remains of a medieval church rectangular in plan, the long axis runs E-W. The remains of the west gable, a short 2.9m stretch of the south side wall near the SW corner and a significant portion of the north wall, 17.4m long, the church is 8.27m in external width. Traces of the foundation course of a further 6.5m portion of the south wall are visible. The walls are 0.85m thick, the west gable stands almost to its full height with three small rectangular apses present in the apex of the gable close to the wall top. The surviving 2.9m stretch of the south side is in poor structural condition. The north wall shorn of its dense coat of ivy has revealed traces of what may have been a robbed window, and has recently undergone a stabilising process. The enigmatic long linear earthworks which run from the north of the site along the length of the Termon river are among a group of archaeological sites including an enclosure and earthwork site to the northwest, two bivallate raths in Corlis townland, a rectangular enclosure in the field across the road from the Baslick field gate and a standing stone to the north north-west.

Baslick featured in the druidic-Christian power struggle in the 5th century and was later involved in the power struggle which involved in the 8th century Irish church and the temporal powers of the time. Baslick was the initial and focal point of the Patrician mission in Connacht. The church was the repository of the important relics of the Roman Church at the zenith of its power and the transfer of these relics led to Armagh's supremacy of the Irish church. The site displays the properties of a multi-period settlement area.

The conservation work here has been part funded by the Heritage council.

Information sourced from plaque outside cemetery entrance.