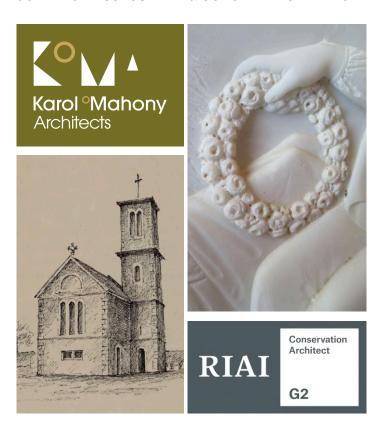


# BIANCONI CHAPEL BOHERLAHAN TIPPERARY CONDITION ASSESSMENT & CONSERVATION REPORT



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#### 1 - Introduction

The Bianconi Chapel as it is commonly known is an intriguing landmark at the centre of Boherlahan Village, grabbing the attention of the passer-by with its tall bell tower. Out of concern for its care and conservation The Friends of Bianconi Society have commissioned this Conservation Report, the aims of which are to research the building and its site, identify its significance, assess its current condition and plan for its future conservation and repair. The Conservation Plan and associated works are being generously funded by The Heritage Council under their Community Heritage Grant Scheme 2024.

This Conservation Plan will act as a living document to be updated as investigations, research and repair works supplement the relevant information and inform the advice. In parallel with the report preparation, on site investigations and opening up have taken place to reveal materials and condition of the building fabric.

#### These have included:

- Access to and survey of the attic space
- Investigation of roof & valley failure externally and temporary repair
- Opening of the basement vaults to assess condition as well as layout to inform safe propping locations on the chapel floor.
- Removal of modern dry-lining from the South wall internally
- Localised opening up thru dry-lining at various wall locations to check masonry behind.
- Investigation and stabilisation/ propping of the funerary monuments on the South wall.

The chapel and its site have been fully surveyed, drawn and extensive high quality information is now available to inform any pending works. This includes a 3d scan of the exterior and a bank of high resolution drone images showing all areas of the structure.

The Chapel is a protected structure as well as being listed on the NIAH where it is noted to be of Regional Importance.

St Catherine's Catholic Chapel RPS. No: TRPS1056 NIAH Ref: 22205305

#### **NIAH Description**

Detached square-plan single-bay double-height mortuary chapel, erected 1857, with four-stage tower to north-west and with apse to west, altar, end. Pitched slate roof to chapel, hipped slate roof to tower, spired slate roof to apse. Cut sandstone copings and eaves course, and carved sandstone cross finial to chapel, cast-iron rainwater goods and cast-iron cross finial to tower. Snecked dressed limestone walls with cut sandstone quoins and cut sandstone string courses, carved limestone date plaque with cut sandstone surrounds to openings. Round-headed window openings with leaded glazing to first floor front and apse of chapel, tripled and having carved sandstone imposts and keystones to front elevation. Round-headed single- and two-light windows to tower, with louvred timber fittings. Square-headed window opening to lower level of chapel with timber casement window. Round-headed door openings to chapel and tower having timber battened doors. Interior has ornate cast-iron gallery to north side, with opening to tower, above sculpted marble Celtic cross set into wall, and with sculpted marble memorial bas-relief to south wall. Cut limestone wall with sandstone coping to site boundary, render stations of the cross to south boundary, steel gates to entrance.

#### NIAH Appraisal

Commissioned and designed by Charles Bianconi on the death of his daughter, the Italianate style of this memorial chapel is appropriate to his nationality. The triple window is like that on the Market House in Cashel. The chapel's form is simple yet architecturally effective, enhanced and emphasised by the sandstone quoins and string courses. Artistic interest is added by the bas-reliefs to the interior, carved in Italy by Benzoni. It forms an interesting group with the outdoor stations of the cross in its grounds, and the church and grotto to the north.

Our focus has been firstly the Mortuary Chapel and its curtilage but we should acknowledge the adjoining sites which are very much part of the history and story. The local Catholic chapel sits immediately to the North, predating and influencing Bianconi's choice of site. The current church is a 1960s design which

replaced the original church from c.1830s. To the South on a large site sits the parochial house still fulfilling its original purpose. At its gateway there is a former gate lodge, directly adjoining the wall of the Mortuary chapel site. Neither of these are protected structures but nonetheless are undoubtedly part of the historic landscape of Boherlahan. Charles Bianconi also built this as the parish priest's house, setting up an interdependence between use of that house and the saying of regular masses for deceased Bianconi's in their chapel. Boherlahans story of Bianconi and the built heritage which he left goes beyond the boundaries of St. Catherines. Our report at this time has not studied the neighbouring related structures.

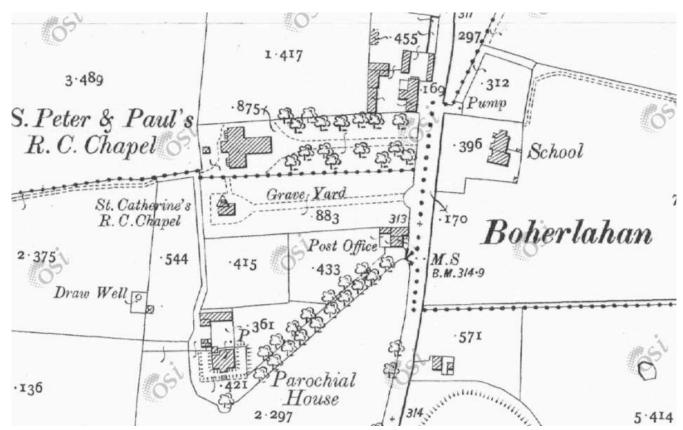


Fig. 1 - Ordnance Survey Map 25" inch, surveyed 1903, showing the ecclesiastical landscape of Boherlahan village. The original Catholic church sits to the North, to it's South across the townland boundary the Mortuary Chapel dedicated to St. Catherine. Adjoining this to it's South is the site laid out by Bianconi in 1869 including a Gate Lodge (became Post Office), avenue, parochial house and outbuildings.

#### 2 - Statement of Significance

St. Catherines is a special example of an uncommon building type in this country. As an Irish Mortuary Chapel, its architecture is perhaps unique due to the ambition and Italian influences of its creator. Particular features of note include the metal windows and the use for detailing of local Drumbane sandstone, not least for the impressive floor slab arrangement.

As well as being their final resting place, this is the foremost memorial to the Bianconi family. It is the only building that Charles created for private family use. The scale and design of the mortuary chapel as well as the space of the garden appropriately represent a man whose influence on the social history of our country was immense.

While the chapel was largely private, its garden, intended as a cemetery, was for the local people. Its generous layout was a considered design including Stations of the Cross as original features.

The connection between two friends, Daniel O'Connell, The Liberator and Bianconi, the car-man, brings another dimension to the social interest. The families joined via two marriages and this is represented in the chapel with overlapping Bianconi and O'Connell crests.

The marble monument to Kate Henrietta, by Giovanni Maria Benzoni is a significant aesthetic creation in its scale, design and quality. Benzoni is renowned for carving veiled womens faces, most famously 'The Veiled Rebecca' in 1863. The lower relief carved panel at Boherlahan contains on its left a smaller scale veiled female representing 'Trust'. This can be considered as a precursor (1858) as he developed his veiled creations.

This monument also indirectly links the viewer back to O'Connell and his demise on a journey to Rome. It is a sister monument to the O'Connell memorial in the Irish College, also the work of Benzoni and funded by Bianconi.

The individual character of the Bianconi chapel and cemetery, its significant work of sculpture and the multitude of closely associated histories make this a site of architectural, artistic and social importance. Part of Ireland's story is contained here with Bianconi, King of the Irish Roads, with his friend, The Liberator, being a secondary player on this occasion. In this context, we feel that St. Catherines is of national heritage importance.

#### 3 - Outline History

The eldest daughter of Charles Bianconi was described as a kind and gentle girl who's concern for the family's tenant's led to her to run a soup kitchen from the basement of the family home, Longfield House, during Famine times. Her health suffered and despite the family relocating to Italy for a warmer climate, 'Kate' died in May 1854 at the young age of 24. She was interred at the Campo Santo in Pisa but her father desired ultimately to bring her back to his adopted home of Tipperary.

In January 1857, construction of the Mortuary Chapel was in progress and reports expected it to be completed by the first of May. Charles Bianconi was himself the architect and was assisted by Bob Noble, his carpenter.

During his time in Italy, due to Kate's illness, Charles visited Rome where the heart of his friend Daniel O'Connell had been deposited. A letter of August 1852 signifies the beginning of his desire to see a memorial created. He reports that there is no shrine to enshrine the worthy heart of The Liberator. He will erect one himself if nobody else will and he estimated that it will cost about £200. The work was entrusted to Benzoni at Rome, being completed and erected in early 1856.

It was written that Bianconi must have been very satisfied with the creation "for he has entrusted to Benzoni a monument for his beloved daughter lately deceased".<sup>2</sup> It would be three years before the newspapers could report that "A white marble monument, of exquisite design and beauty of finish executed by Benzoni, for Charles Bianconi, J.P Longfield, is about to be erected in the new chapel built on the Longfield estate, to the memory of Miss Bianconi, who died at Pisa".<sup>3</sup> The monument at Boherlahan is a recreation of the O'Connell example in its overall design but with individually designed relief carvings.

The church, dedicated to St. Catherine of Siena, was consecrated by Dr. Patrick Leahy, Archbishop of Cashel and Emly on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1861. Shortly after, the body of Kate Henrietta, which had been returned from Italy and rested briefly at Glasnevin, was interred in the central vault immediately under Benzoni's monument.

This was the first of the Bianconi interments which would be followed by family members throughout the next century until the last in 1968. Charles would see his own son and son in law laid in the vaults before his own death in 1875.

Visual information depicting the early characteristics of Bianconi's creation are limited; it was only firstly mapped in 1903, some four decades after its construction. We are however very lucky to have the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Charles Bianconi at 'La Casa' to Rev'd Dr. Kirby, Irish College Rome. 26th August 1852

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Dundalk Democrat. 29th March 1856.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Belfast Newsletter, 23rd April 1859.

native locality were created from memory during his time in America. The Mortuary Chapel and Cemetery drawings were created circa 1892 when he was about 30. They confirm the chapel architecture to be as we find it today, though we have to allow him artistic licence due to the difficult task of memorising the unusual front facade. The record of the site's landscaping design is important, showing generous trees, the original path and carriage approach layout, the high walls and gate including its two side wickets is carefully depicted. This feature is unfortunately now lost and the location of the gates unknown.

The belfry or campanile served the adjoining parish church as that building never had a bell. This arrangement continues up until the present time.

The site became overgrown and ruinous by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century but a significant renovation was completed in the 1960's. Notable site changes at this time include, lowering of the wall height between the chapel and church, as well as the removal of the formal entrance.



Fig. 2 - Catherine Henreitta Bianconi by Edward Hayes Circa 1857-1864

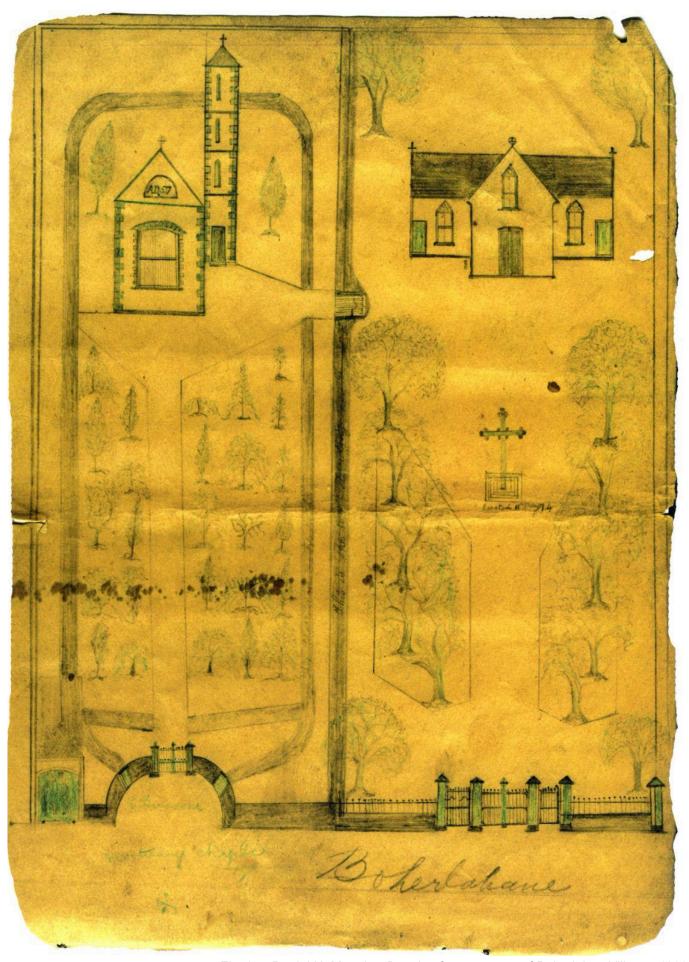


Fig. 3 – Daniel H. Meagher Drawing from memory of Boherlahan Village c1892

#### 4 - Assessment and Analysis of Conservation Needs

#### Roof

The pitched roof over the chapel space is a cut timber roof triangulated via flat ceiling joists. Rafters are 125x35mm at 370mm c/c and ceiling joists are of the same cross section. The natural slate covering is lime parged underneath.

This extant roof structure and covering are not the original. The roof has been entirely replaced in a very different format to Bianconi's design. As would be expected in this tall architectural space, the original roof would have been visible and open internally up to the pitch line.

The building shows ample evidence of the original roof arrangement. Two trusses sat on the protruding dressed stone corbels, still visible high on the side walls. Masonry infills on the gables within the current attic suggest that two purlins per slope spanned end to end across the trusses giving two intermediate support points to each rafter. Where rafters abutted the tower wall their recesses are still visible, indicating wider timbers but at similar spacing to the replacements. A description from 1875 supports our understanding of the original roof; "Within, the vaulted chamber is lighted by three narrow windows or openings filled in with ruby glass." <sup>4</sup>

In the attic the existence of lined plaster on the upper gables, showing multiple paint colours confirms that these were part of the chapel interior. Holes and timber plugs on these gable walls suggest that an inner lining existed or was intended at some point.

The later roof structure dispensed with the truss and purlin design, instead introducing a flat ceiling on joists which tie the roof laterally. This is an unfortunate loss of character from the chapel space as it was intended. It can be easily deduced by most observers that the flat ceiling is a more modern move. However, this major change has to be accepted as part of the building's history. The roof is in good overall condition, therefore the idea of reverting or restoring to Bianconi's original design, while very attractive, is certainly not an essential conservation priority.

The timing of the roof replacement is unclear. A legal letter of 1930 states: 'the church has been allowed to get into a state of gross repair.' <sup>5</sup> The 'mortuary and belfry' have been recalled as being 'in a state of ruin and the adjoining ground were overgrown' in 1951.<sup>6</sup>

A detailed written estimate from circa 1967, in advance of major renovations, makes no mention of any roof works so it is assumed that the current roof was in situ at that juncture. That estimate mentions taking down and replacing the ceiling while incorporating ventilation grills. This appears to relate to the flat ceiling, the current plasterboard and vent grills of which align with that description. The existence of lime parging under the slates also suggests an earlier slate for the roof replacement. I estimate that the roof dates from the 1920's to 1950's.

Over all of the South slope and for the Eastern half of the North slope, the structure and slating are in a very good condition with only minimal instances of slippage/breakage. The lime parging in these areas is largely intact.

In contrast, the Western half of the North slope, in the shadow of the tower, is in poor condition, having various repairs with inappropriate materials. The lead valley between this slope and the tower wall has failed and water is actively flowing into the building. It appears, subject to pending closer inspection, that a portion of the lead valley has sagged, thereby refraining and diverting water into the roofspace.

This leak has been ongoing for some time and considerable damage has occurred to roof timbers, to the ceiling below where a hole has formed and to the timber deck of the balcony. A timber beam supporting the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The Clonmel Chronicle, Tipperary Express and Advertiser. 29<sup>th</sup> September 1875.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Private Diocesan Legal Correspondence, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1930.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Philip F. Ryan, 'Relationships between the Bianconi Family and the Parish Priests of Boharlahan-Dualla' in *Boharlahan-Dualla Historical Journal Vol 17*, 2014, p123.

roof structure at the tower abutment has failed, as have rafter and ceiling joist ends. Joist and rafter ends appear damp at eaves level well beyond the leak area at the Northern wall top.

The separate half conical roof over the Western apse appears to be in good condition, requiring minor maintenance only. It consists of natural slate, concrete hips and lead flashings where it abuts the gable.

The campanile roof is also slated, with lead flashed hips. It also appears from remote survey to be in good condition generally.

The rainwater goods consist of cast iron downpipes while the gutters appear from remote survey to be of the same material. Corrosion is showing on all parts and there are open joints, breakages and evidence of poor drainage. A downpipe on the Southern wall of the campanile drains its upper roof and on its journey steps out awkwardly around a string course before discharging onto the valley between tower and chapel roof. The gutters of the campanile roof appear to be fixed to a timber fascia which is in poor condition. We note that the historic photo from circa 1930 does not appear to show gutters at the tower top.

The lower lead valley, now leaking, discharges Eastwards around the tower corner and downslope to enter the eaves gutters. The associated leadwork is poorly worked in places and it appears that the gutter cannot adequately receive the flow from the roof. A long running overflow has caused considerable staining and water ingress to the stonework is ongoing.

The apse roof at the West does not have gutters, this would be difficult given its geometry.

Restoration of the leaking valley and damaged roof is an urgent priority to stop ongoing water ingress to the building and its masonry. Full restoration of the rainwater goods are also required. The specification should consider increased rainfall intensity due to climate change and incorporate improved but sensitive solutions where the current arrangement is inadequate. A functional system is essential to stop excess water entering and damaging the building's fabric.

#### **Walls**

The chapel is constructed of solid stone masonry finished in dressed limestone externally and having sandstone detailing. Internally, a modern dry-lining hides a seemingly historic but hard plaster.

Opening up works and partial dry lining removal have recently been completed for investigation and stabilisation purposes. The initial advice and analysis here will be reviewed and updated in due course as seasonal wall conditions and material qualities are further revealed. The wall buildup will be described below from inside to out.

#### Internal Lining

The current dry-lining is known to have been fitted c.1967. It is a modern intervention which is showing moisture related damage at locations. It does not allow visibility or assessment of the solid masonry behind. It was recently removed entirely from the South wall to allow understanding of wall condition and moisture behaviour. Critically it was judged that this dry-lining was damaging and endangering the precious Benzoni monument because it directly abuts its sides without a movement joint. The dry lining, present on all internal walls, consists of a skim, on plaster, on plasterboard, on timber battens having DPC backing and which are screwed into stainless steel wall plugs.

The wall finish behind the modern dry-lining is a hard plaster, which is lined to give the impression of ashlar bricks. This appears to be a sand cement plaster and based on limited opening on other walls, appears to cover all areas. Somewhat surprisingly, it also appears to be historic, at least pre 1950's. It is not part of the 1960's renovation but is far earlier. Evidence within the attic shows that this hard plaster existed before the roof was changed and shows several different layers of colour wash or paint. It is also evident from wall holes in the attic and patch repairs below, that a wall lining probably existed outside this plaster at some point. This is shown by timber plugs inserted in regular holes as fixing points for timber substructure holding another wall finish, perhaps laith/plaster or some wall panelling. Further investigation is required to reveal, if possible, the historic wall details.

The hard wall plaster has two slightly different appearances, one is taken to be later repairs or infill, From the southern area revealed, it appears to be in fair condition, largely dry and stable. We are aware that this plaster will be of limited breathability and perhaps not ideal for a wall unrendered externally. We are also however well aware of the difficulty of removing such hard materials and the damage caused. Its existence will rightly force wall conservation measures to focus firstly on the outside face. Testing of the internal plaster should be undertaken to provide a full understanding of its properties, likely age and limitations.



Fig. 4 - Portrait of Charles Bianconi circa 1830-1850. National Library of Ireland.

#### External Facades

It is presumed, based for now on appearance only, that the external stonework was raked out and repointed as part of the 1960's renovation. The joints have been finished as raised ribbons in a hard mortar, appearing to be sand cement. Testing of this mortar should be carried out to confirm its properties.

This hard non-original pointing will be limiting the walls breathability and drying efficiency. Though desirable, removal of such pointing can be difficult and would need to be tested for feasibility in advance. Hopefully the stone arrises have not been damaged during previous raking out. It would be invaluable should an area of original pointing be found on the building. Some areas high on the campanile North and West faces may not have been repointed and should be checked at close quarters.

A judgement on the value and necessity of external repointing could only be made in due course when a comprehensive understanding of wall condition and moisture is available.

Architectural detailing externally is of sandstone brought from Drumbane, about 9 miles away. These include corner quoins, string courses, eaves course, barges, window/door surrounds and mullions. Generally the sandstone is in good condition. There are however several individual units where the nature (or bedding) of

the particular stone has led to failures and delamination. Some corner quoins have lost their faces, others are actively separating. Between the campanile 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors, at its NE corner, large parts of the wide string course have fallen leaving unsupported sandstone. Some of the mullion detailing at the large East window is eroded and losing material. The lower opening below has a badly split cill. Its lintol previously failed and is repaired in concrete and sand cement.

Such failures, while not widespread, are extensive enough to be concerning. The sandstone will continue to degrade without intervention. It is important to note that due to the hard pointing on the general limestone walling, the joints can be considered closed and therefore the softer sandstone is being forced to do more work in moisture movement. Protection of the sandstone features may well necessitate removal of the adjoining sand cement pointing. This would restore more general wall breathability. The sandstone features in themselves need to be repointed with an appropriate soft lime based mortar so as to reduce water ingress.

No signs of significant structural concern were noted from visual surveys. There are however movement cracks visible on the South wall, externally, perhaps also related to cracks which were on the now removed internal dry-lining. There are also crack lines visible high on the western apse walls.

There are clear indications of dampness at low level within the walls especially at the North side. Moisture levels must be managed at the wall bases, within the basement walls and within the adjoining sub soil. A downpipe is discharging at the chapel/campanile inner corner where the water is clearly being retained and flooding. All downpipes must be piped away from the building to disperse to the ground at a suitable location. In addition, the hardstanding / tarmacadam surround should be removed from the area immediately adjoining the wall and a permeable finish such as gravel provided. Despite the tar finish, the ground is soaking considerable water which cannot then dry out as it is sealed in. This will be causing permanently high ground moisture levels adjoining the chapels substructure and basement vaults.

The chapel's external masonry is of high quality, impressive in nature and includes a variety of details and conditions across the building. In order to work towards a specification for conservation and repair works, a comprehensive survey will be required at height from a hoist. A historic masonry specialist and the conservation architect should inspect and record all conditions in detail so as to inform the scope and nature of works needed.

The exterior includes two lettered stone slabs. The largest, prominently positioned as a distinctive semi circle and on the front facade reads: "This Church Dedicated to St Catherine Was Erected By Chares Bianconi A.D. 1857 As a burial place for himself and his descendants". This is followed by a biblical verse. This sizable limestone panel and its carving are in excellent condition, indicating successful skill in stone selection.

In contrast, a separate small slab at first floor on the campanile East face is extensively split and has lost part of its face, with its inscription only partly discernible. The original dedication was recorded as: "Erected by Charles Bianconi and with the bell herein placed, dedicated by him to the Roman Catholic inhabitants of Ardmoyle, A.D 1858 - Rev. William Kirwan P.P".7

The damaged panel should be scanned at high resolution to record the remaining fragile detail. It will need to be entirely recreated to match the original. The existing stone should be removed and a newly carved copy inserted.

A number of separate references mention that the lettering of the inscriptions was painted gold; "Two tablets inserted in the wall record in golden letters".8 As both panels are set up high, painted letters would have assisted legibility while raising visual interest. This characteristic should be restored.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Tipperary Vindicator and Limerick Reporter, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1861.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid



Fig. 5 – Daniel H. Meagher, a second drawing of the Chapel c1892, here his memory adds an extra stage to the campanile height (Extract)

#### Campanile

The Campanile is a four stage bell tower circa 17 metres high to its ridge and surmounted by an iron cross. Its interior is of circular plan and contained a spiral stairs leading firstly to the chapel gallery through an arched opening in the shred wall. Secondly it led to a platform at the top storey. This stairs has been entirely lost but its previous line is visible in the wall along with some metal fixing remnants.

The stairs were fundamental to the functioning of the building. The side gallery provides an important aspect, allowing one to view the space from mid height and to view the space from above. The current loss of access to the gallery greatly reduces the spatial experience.

Additionally, a campanile needs its stairs for access to the bell platform for maintenance and inspection. No less important, people desire to experience a tower by climbing to the top and viewing its surrounds. This was the stated intention from the time of construction, "a square tower of fifty feet in height will arise through which a spiral ascent of perforated metal steps will allow persons to ascend to the platform on the top and enjoy the splendid landscape spread beneath them" <sup>9</sup>

After completion Bianconi in his own words lauded this experience; "The steeple which is 60 feet high & from which we can see six countys & in which we have a bell that is heared 12 miles away". 10

Allowing engagement with the architecture facilitates interest and in turn care for a place. Restoration of the chapel and campaniles vertical circulation is critical, allowing it to perform as intended, while broadening it's spatial experiences and functionality. Conservation and ongoing viability are mutually dependent, it follows that a new stairway is a key requirement.

The tower interior requires repair and conservation to plaster wall finishes, timber lintols and the upper timber platform. Access inside at height has not been possible to date but the bell can be seen to be in place. It is not currently in use, instead the chimes are being provided by electronic means. It should be an ambition of restoration work to ensure that Boherlahan hears Bianconi's bell once again. This can be facilitated by adding an electronic gong to the original bell.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> The Freemans Journal, 31st January 1857.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Charles Bianconi at 3 Fitzwilliam Place, Dublin to Very Rev'd Dr. Kirby at Irish College Rome.

The tower's first floor level has two narrow openings, facing East and West. These contain a modern unsightly though functional mesh. In the one available historic photo, the Eastern ope appears to have a timber framed window. Such windows should be re-inserted at this level.

The second floor has three arched openings, North, East, and West. The third stage platform level has high twin openings with arched heads to each side. The second and third floor openings contain timber louvred panels which appear very similar to these in the historic photo. A detailed inspection at height will be required to ascertain the age/originality of fittings and to inform conservation repairs. We note a potential clash between the concept of viewing from the tower and the relatively closed louvres.

The campanile has lightning protection connected to the apex cross. However, it is poorly fixed and loose at places on the West wall. Electric cable runs should also be tidied and routed inconspicuously as part of repair works.

#### Openings - Doors

The two exterior doors appear to be non original, renewed in teak during the c.1967 renovations. Thankfully the older ironmongery has been kept in place and in use, including the hinging and a box lock on the chapel door.

The entrance door is a particular point of folklore: "Bianconi was particularly proud of the cut stonework of the arched doorway; but it was scarcely finished when Bob Noble calculated that, when the door was hung, there would be just insufficient room for a coffin to pass through it. Rather than ruin all his precious stonework, Bianconi offered a prize of £5 to any workman who could solve the problem by the next day. One of them sat up all night with pencil and paper, and duly won the award by designing the present door which opens inwards on hinges fixed high up in the arch, thus gaining the little extra width that was needed." <sup>11</sup>

The hinging arrangement is such that when open, the door sits recessed behind and does not encroach on the clear width. In addition, the stone reveals have an indented area at mid height giving extra width to pass through. The identical door surround at the campanile alongside does not have this feature.

The clear width at the straight stone reveals of the chapel door is 775mm. The coffin of Charles Bianconi himself is 740mm at the shoulders, a tight fit but possible with the door recessed out of the way. Most other coffins would typically be narrower. Mrs. Bianconi being 640mm shoulder width.

On Charles' final passage through this doorway on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1875, his grandson John Charles O'Connell (later Bianconi) was only approaching his fourth birthday, but was destined to be a large man. His impressive coffin, interred here in October 1929 measures 780mm at its shoulders. This could not pass between the straight sandstone door posts. It is possible that only at this point the further indents were carved, thereby increasing the clear width to 815mm.

An internal door, if one existed, between the upper gallery and the campanile stairs is not extant. The opening is currently boarded up and a new historically appropriate door will be required.

#### Openings - Windows

During a visit to the Chapel building site, a newspaper correspondent was told that the three lancet windows above the altar will shed a "dim religious light". <sup>12</sup> Several historic descriptions confirm that this design intention translated to the red glass that we see today. At the chapel's consecration on 31st October 1861, we hear that over the altar, "three stained-glass windows throw their crimson light". <sup>13</sup> On the occasion of Bianconi's interment the chapel was said to be "lighted with three narrow windows filled in with ruby glass". <sup>14</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Bianconi, M.C and Whelan, S.J. *Bianconi King of the Irish Roads*, 1962, p165.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> The Freemans Journal, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1857.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> The Tipperary Vindicator and Limerick Reporter, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1861.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> The Clonmel Chronicle, Tippery Express and Advertiser, 29th September 1875.

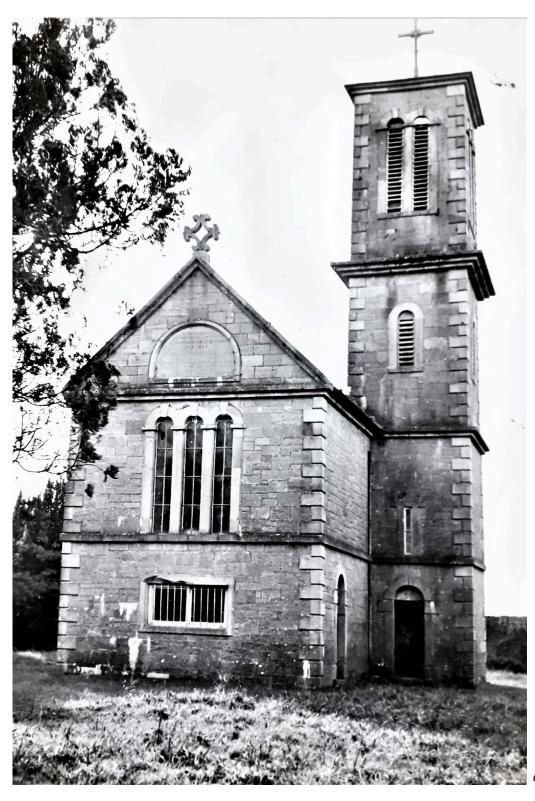


Fig. 6 - Bianconi Chapel, c.1930s. Capuchin Archives

These substantiating references give us confidence that the distinctive red glazing, a strong feature of the interior, is a genuine aspect of the original design. Coloured rays of light projected from these windows are particularly special when they fall on the sandstone floor.

The condition of these windows is poor, the metal frames have extensive corrosion while there is mixed and broken glass. A detailed survey at height will be required by a historic glass specialist including ascertaining which panes and glass type are the original.

The high tripartite window feature of the Eastern front elevation contains the same slim iron frames, albeit at a different scale and configuration. Each window here is divided into nine panes.

Most of its current glass has a fluted or reeded pattern in two different line widths. There are also a few more non decorative random panes. While the fluted glass has the appearance of a mid 20<sup>th</sup> century installation, no assumptions shall be made without a detailed survey and research. It could be the case that some panes are an early type of reeded glass. As above, a survey at height and analysis of the glass is required.

Desktop research to date has not provided clarity in relation to glass as originally installed at this window. During construction it was said that the eastern window "in three sections, will be beautifully stained". This however does not seem to have been required. There are no later references to the eastern glazing. Whatever its particular nature was, the fact it did not claim comment in various chapel descriptions shows that it was secondary in interest to the smaller but coloured West windows.

The lower horizontal window, unusual in it's elevational proportions is a very interesting feature, though one which cannot be understood as currently presented. This opening was a means of sharing a small private family chapel with the broader catholic inhabitants and tenants. When building commenced the intention was stated thus; "at an elevation of four feet from the ground, an open iron railing, nine feet in breadth and about four feet in height, will permit all those who cannot be accommodated in the little church to witness the holy offices performed within, and to view the beautiful monuments". On the day of consecration, the chapels East elevation was described; "The front as you enter from the gate entrance is very striking - there are these windows above, and beneath an oblong open space, spanned by gilded railed, which enables any one at any time to see the interior of the church". On that occasion the most Rev, Dr. Leahy, Archbishop of Cashel celebrated mass, at which the assembled clergy, the Bianconi family, and their friends "attended in the church and which the immense concourse of people heard from the outside". The low opening enclosed by only the grill allowed for the sound of such ceremonies to emanate to the grounds outside. The 'iron railing' as it was termed is not an aesthetic alien to a mortuary chapel or tomb context. Here it is recorded that it was painted in gold. This, alongside at least some other gold detailing which we are aware of on the building, brings a level of decoration. Such aspects, now lost, should be restored as specific known original features.

The iron grill only serves as a remnant in its frame and one upright bar. It is fully in place in the c.1930's historic photo.

It appears from the descriptions noted above and from its design, that the timber casement window is a later addition in order to provide enclosure. Its design and frame type are not as fine in quality and execution as the original fenestration. The timber window is also in situ in the historic photo.

This window should be investigated in closer detail to ascertain its materials, the extent and quality of more recent repairs and it's overall contribution to the reading of history. It is a later and heavier insertion, its existence as part of the chronology needs to be considered alongside the value of presenting Bianconi's original design. That said, it is unlikely that returning this to be a permanent unglazed frill scenario would be desirable. The possibility of inerting a modern minimalist steel frame which would appear closer to the original arrangement should also be considered.

The current situation with no visible 'iron railing' and instead a heavy timber window is out of kilter with both Bianconi's design and the character of the chapel. The railing should be recreated and the inner later window given careful conservation led consideration once its quality and age are clear.

#### **Interior Features**

The chapel interior, despite the change of ceiling profile, is a beautiful space which benefits from the generous height. Of the extant fixtures and fittings, the primary feature undoubtedly is the Benzoni Monument. The works on site to date have concentrated on safeguarding this precious artwork by removing surrounding drylining and propping the monument which displays signs of movement.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> The Freemans Journal, 31st January 1857.

<sup>16</sup> Ibrid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The Tipperary Vindicator and Limerick Reporter, 4<sup>th</sup> October 1861.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Ibrid

The original altar was described as being of black marble. A large black limestone slab fills the apse or altar space and is closed off underneath with modern studwork. It is likely that this is part of the original altar arrangement, though an expert opinion is being sought on the stone saw cuts to see if it can be dated. In any event it is a quality piece of stone, probably from Kilkenny which adds to the character but needs a more appropriate supporting structure.

The side gallery is an attractive feature, of decorative cast iron with a timber deck. We are very lucky that we can enjoy it and have the privilege of restoring it, a 1960s estimate for works included £30 for its removal.

#### Floor

The Drumbane sandstone floor is an impressive display of stonemasonry and its light colour is particularly attractive. We note that it is stained in places with modern hardwall plaster from the 1960s works. A gentle cleaning by a stone specialist will restore its full beauty.



Fig.7 - Impression of the breastplate of Catherine Hennrietta Bianconi using photograph and pencil rubbing information

#### Vaults

There are three vaults, each spanning the chapel's width. These are divided with solid cross walls. An inspection of Vault 1 at the altar end and the central Vault found them to be in very good condition and generally dry. Some surface moisture was noted on the Northern wall plaster in both vaults, but more pronounced in the central vault. This is not surprising given the drainage issues at ground level at the Northern side, noted elsewhere. Improvement of drainage and allowing the subsoil to dry would be expected to minimise any vault dampness.

The floors are of stone slabs. The walls appear to be a hard plaster but this is expected to be historic. It appears to contain some dark additives, possibly ash. The plaster is finished with a white skim, again expected to be historic, perhaps a lime putty as it is soft under a blade. There are some limited repairs in later sand cement.

There are iron bars under the floor slabs, of historic appearance but often having modern sand cement where they enter the wall. Their originality or otherwise was difficult to judge. In any case they would have to be removed to allow lowering of a coffin.

Vault 3 at the East end is empty and its walls are rougher, not smoothly finished.

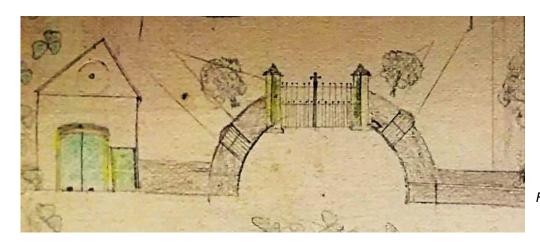


Fig. 8 – Daniel H. Meagher, the Entrance Gates drawn c1892 (Extract)

#### Chapel Curtilage

The generous green area was initially intended to be a cemetery, but general parish burials never took place here. Burials are located only to the West of the chapel and include members of the Longfield staff as well as persons who bought graves in the 1960s, the funds from which were invested in the chapel works at that time.

It was clearly Bianconi's intent that this ground was for the local people and the descriptions of events and ceremonies at St Catherines are inclusive and varied. Bianconi took the opportunity to display large artworks on the grounds alongside religious events. This enclosed area must be valued and protected as the direct gift which it was, all of 167 years ago.

#### 5 - Action Plan

Decisions on future conservation repairs or any works on the site must be guided by this Conservation Plan. The proposed actions have been summarised in tabular form for ease of reference, see Appendix A. The individual proposals have been assigned a priority level.

Planning permission and/or Declarations will be required in advance to facilitate future works.

An ecologist should be engaged once large scale external works or roofworks are being considered. On the limited attic survey to date no evidence of bats was noted. One bird nest was seen in the space but it did not appear to be recently active as there is no current access for birds. There may be opportunities in the building to incorporate bat and/or swift measures.

Once any ground works are being planned a licensed archaeologist should be engaged. The site is close to but not in the zone of influence of a monument. Works close to a graveyard will require archaeological advice.

#### 6 - Appendices

Appendix A - Conservation Plan Summary

Appendix B - Survey Photographs incl. Sample of available Drone photographs.

Appendix C - Survey Drawings

Appendix D - Site Survey

Appendix E - Bianconi Letter to Rome

Appendix F - Armorial Monuments in the Bianconi Chapel

### 7 - Bibliography & Image Credits

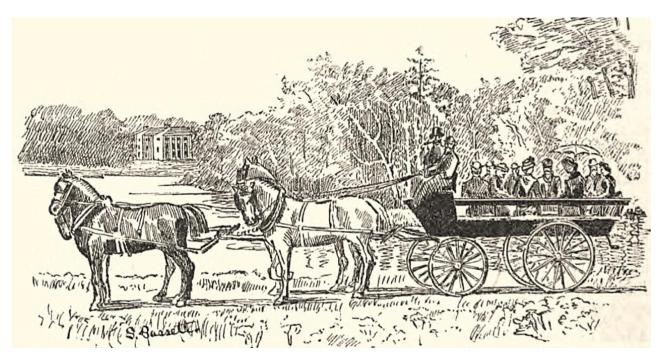
Bianconi, M.O'C & Watson, S.J. (1962) 'Bianconi King of the Irish Roads', Allen Figgis & Co Ltd. Publishers Lacy, T. (1863) 'Sights and Scenes in our Fatherland', Simpkin, Marshall & Company O'Connell, Mrs. Morgan John. (1878) 'Charles Bianconi', Chapman and Hall. London

Ryan, T. & Ryan M. (2007) 'Bianconi - A Boy With A Dream - The Pioneer of Irish Transport', Ryan Publications

(2007) 'Boherlahan - Dualla Historical Journal Supplement', Boherlahan - Dualla Historical Journal Society
(2014) 'Boherlahan - Dualla Historical Journal', Boherlahan - Dualla Historical Journal Society

Cover Page Sketch of Bianconi Chapel is by Mai Osawa, from I never knew that about Ireland, 2006.

Below: Sketch from The Book of County Tipperary, George Henry Bassett. 1889



# **CONSERVATION PLAN SUMMARY**

for proposed works to Bianconi Chapel, Boherlahan, Co. Tipperary

20/12/2024

Prepared: Karol O'Mahony M.RIAI, Grade 2 Conservation Architect

### **Priority Timescale Targets**

Immediate: Within 6 months or sooner

Short Term: Within a year or 18 months

Medium Term: From 18 months to 3 years

Long Term: From 3 to 5 years



Building Area	Item	Existing Description	Proposed Action	Timing	Priority
ROOF					
	Structure	Cut timber roof structure non original but likely earlier 20th C, including flat ceiling joists which form an attic space.	Repair roof structure at leak damage adjoining tower/valley. Replace and restore damaged timbers, splicing damaged areas where feasible rather than full member replacements. Repair/ splice decayed timber & joist ends along South wall top.	This major roof damage should be restored within a year. Any localised temporary fix to stop water ingress does not remove the need for larger scale roofworks here.	Short Term
	Ceiling	Plaster boarded ceiling, skimmed and painted c1967, fixed to earlier joists.	Repair ceiling to match at leak location adjoining tower. Further opening up of ceiling plasterboard will be allowed here to facilitate roof/valley repair works.	This should happen alongside completion of the roof work.	Short Term
	Lead Valley	Flat lead valley at Campanile/Chapel roof junction, flows Eastwards dispersing onto roof slope. Valley is leaking, support timbers have failed creating a backfall which is holding water and allowing flow into the building.	Fully strip lead valley, abutment flashings around tower wall. Rebuild valley and renew all leadwork to conform to The Lead Sheet Assoc Manual.	Alongside essential roofworks, the valley should be renewed within a year. Any interim temporary fix should not change this timescale.	Short Term
	Slating	Natural slate generally including lime parging internally in good condition. Circa 50% of North slope contains mixed and poor previous repairs including artificial slate. Some slipped and broken noted on North slope also.	Allow full reslating of the North slope in conjunction with repairs to leak damage. Modern felt to be removed from repair areas. Lime parging to match existing to be applied to slates internally. No roofing membrane to be used.	The roofworks should be carried out within the next year.	Short Term
	Apse Roof	Half conical roof, natural slate with concrete hips. Appears in good condition.	Carry out detailed inspection at height and complete any maintenance required.	Ideally align with other essential roofworks.	Medium Term
	Campanile Roof	Natural slate hipped roof having lead flashing hips. From remote survey, some maintenance is likely to be required.	Inspect in person at height. Carry out repairs to any broken slate, check quality and condition of hip clips on lead.	Ideally align with other essential roofworks.	Medium Term
	Rainwater Goods	Generally cast iron rainwater goods but some steel items appear to be present also. Poor condition with corrosion, breakages, open joints and overflows.	Full restoration of all rainwater goods to include change of detail where appropriate to prevent problems of overflow or lack of capacity. Consider need for and originality of campanile roof gutters when access at height available. If they are currently steel, replace with cast iron. Consider a detail for fixing to allow removal of the modern timber fascia.	Ideally align with other essential roofworks of higher priority.	Short Term
WALLS			Tan	Ta	
	Monitoring	Modern dry lining has been removed from inside the South Wall as part of investigations for this Conservation Plan.	Client to closely monitor the exposed wall in all seasons, weather and wind directions. Record areas of damp, colour changes and/or leaks.	Systematic review of the behaviour of the exposed wall in various conditions is essential up front to inform pending decisions about wall and masonry conservation.	Immediate
	Dry Lining	Modern dry lining remains in situ at all internal walls except for the South wall. The dry lining shows damage due to limiting moisture movement. It is inappropriate alongside the funerary monuments and has already caused damage because it directly abuts the marbles without an expansion gap.	Remove all modern dry lining to reveal the solid wall finish behind.	Final decision on dry lining to be confirmed only after seasonal monitoring of newly exposed South wall, see above.	Medium Term
	Internal Plaster	Internal plaster partially revealed is a hard plaster but historic.	The nature and generally intact condition of the plaster means that it should be kept in situ. For now only testing is required to clarify the materials and properties.	Accurate information on all masonry material will facilitate more informed decisions on conservation repair specifications.	Short Term
	Wall Finishes	Prior to the current modern dry lining, there is evidence that the chapel at some point had some type of wall lining. The hard plaster was also the exposed finish at a certain point in time, it shows in places various point/colour wash layers.	Research the former interior finishes in more detail via on site evidence and documentary research. Any consideration of interior finishes is premature until wall and moisture behaviour is fully understood.	Progress investigations of wall finish history within a year so that it can inform wall work decisions.	Short Term
	External Pointing	The 'ribbon' pointing is thought to be modern and sand cement based.	Carry out a pointing removal and repointing test, to inform the feasibility of wholescale removal of the modern material. Test to be conducted by an experienced conservation mason in a non conspicuous location on the facade and of a size to be agreed with the conservation architect. Test samples of the modern mortar and its earlier inner mortars to check properties and contents.	Early information of the practicality of repointing the external limestone facades and on current material properties is essential to pending decisions of larger scale conservation of walls.	Short Term
	External Facades	Exposed limestone facade generally with Drumbane sandstone detailing to quoins, string courses, barges, eaves, window/door surrounds. There are various failures and delamination of sandstone units.	Carry out specialist masonry conservation survey at height to include all external facades.	Masonry repair works cannot be planned without detailed survey information.	Medium Term

# **CONSERVATION PLAN SUMMARY**

for proposed works to Bianconi Chapel, Boherlahan, Co. Tipperary

20/12/2024

Prepared: Karol O'Mahony M.RIAI, Grade 2 Conservation Architect

### **Priority Timescale Targets**

Immediate: Within 6 months or sooner

Short Term: Within a year or 18 months

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Long Term: From 3 to 5 years



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Building Area	Item	Existing Description	Proposed Action	Timing	Priority
	Ground Drainage	There are clear signs of dampness within low level and basement/ vault walls. Downpipes are draining locally to the ground immediately adjoining the walls. A lot of the surface alongside the external walls are non permeable which slows evaporation.	Gullies at foot of downpipes should be piped away from the building to a suitable soakage location. Existing tarmacadam should be cut back alongside the walls and replaced with a permeable ground finish.	Taking excess water away from the walls is a priority. By reducing wall moisture levels early, the scale of the required interventions may be reduced.	Short Term
	Lettered Panel Gable	Large semi circular panel at East gable recording building date and purpose. Carving is in good condition.	Restore lettering to have a gold/gilded infill based on the historic written evidence.	These works should be timed to use access at height arrangement in place for other repairs.	Long Term
		Small panel at Campanile 1st Floor recording bell date and dedication. Panel in very poor condition.	Scan panel at high resolution to record extant lettering and style. Recreate a new panel with the original wording and replace in the wall. Lettering to have a gold/gilded infill based on the historic written evidence.	Scanning to record should happen within a year to maximise available detail. Carving and insertion of the new panel is of lesser priority once the vulnerable details are recorded to inform the remaking.	Short Term
CAMPANILE					
	Spiral Stairs	Not extant, historically described as of perforated metal steps. Its line is visible in the wall. Its function was to provide access to the first floor chapel gallery and access to the platform at the top of the campanile.	Design and install a new metal spiral stairs so as to restore the original circulation and functioning of the building including the use of the gallery, access to the bell platform and an ability to view from the tower.	It is considered that the stairs is essential to allow use and experience of the protected structure. It is central to restoration and use.	Medium Term
	Bell	A bell is in place but out of use. It is expected, subject to survey in person at height that this is the original bell from 1858.	Survey, maintain/repair and restore use of the bell so that its sound is heard in the village. This can include adding a new electronically operated gong, to be specified by specialist.	Such work should be included when access at height is available for other works.	Long Term
	1	First floor has mesh to two openings. All upper openings contain hardwood louvers.	Reinsert simple timber windows to two first floor opes as per historic evidence. Restore existing louvers at all other openings.	Such work is likely to be more efficient if included when access at height is provided for other items.	Long Term
OPENINGS					
	Doors	Remade doors including original fittings to chapel and campanile. No door extant between gallery and campanile stairs.	Design and remake historically appropriate door for gallery/stairway opening.	To align with restoration of vertical circulation via new stairs.	Medium Term
		Large tripartite window to East gable, three arched windows to Western Apse, all iron frames, Red glass to apse, reeded glass to East, including breakages, replacements, mixed replacement glazing in both cases.	A survey at height should be carried out by a window and historic glass specialist. Full restoration of all windows to be carried out, specification to be informed by the survey findings.	Window restoration can use its own access at height arrangement, however consideration shall be be required to check timing relative to adjoining masonry restoration. There may be interdependencies.	Survey - Short Term Restoration - Medium Term
		An iron grill existed as part of the original design at the lower East window. Now extant only as a remnant.	Restore the appearance and elevation by remaking to the historic detail and painted gold or gilded as per historic evidence.	Consider its timing verses masonry repairs required to the head and cill here.	Long Term
	Low East Window	The timber sash window, behind the original grill position, is a later insertion not part of the original design.	Carry out a detailed survey of the timber window to clarify its historic interest. Restoration or replacement decisions only to be only with that information.	Detailed window survey to be carried out as soon as possible to inform approach.	Short Term
INTERIOR FEATURE	S				
	Benzoni Monument	The primary feature of the interior and a significant historic artwork. The monument has cracked panels, shows signs of movement, shows dampness damage and has been poorly repaired previously.	Stage 1 Stabilisation is complete; dry lining has been removed from sides and it is propped. Stage 2 pending, Open up cracked panel and areas of movement to ascertain fixing methods, fixing spike condition and wall substrate condition. If stability of monument can be confirmed, repair and replace panels and parts using original pieces only. All work by a conservation stone specialist.	Given the signs of movement displayed and the cracking, the monument has to be further investigated by partial disassembly so that it can be left exposed and unpropped.	Immediate
		A black polished limestone slab filling the apse recess and supported on modern studwork. The slab itself is thought to be original to the chapel.	Maintain the slab in situ, design a historically appropriate support framework for underneath which does not have to be closed off.	n/a	Long Term
		First floor gallery to North side of chapel interior, of cast iron decorative balustrade and support brackets, with timber deck. Good condition generally expect for the deck which is damaged locally due to the roof leak above. The gallery was part of the original functioning of the chapel design.	Restore gallery deck with like for like timber boards while maintaining the maximum amount of original material possible.	In conjunction with restoration of vertical circulation.	Medium Term
	Floors	Slabbed floor of Drumbane sandstone including large scale spanning slabs for vaults access. The floor is marked in places from modern plaster and would benefit from a general sensitive cleaning.	Clean floor, to be carried out by a stone cleaning specialist only.	n/a	Long Term

## **ROOF - RAINWATER GOODS**



















## **ROOF - ATTIC**



















**ROOF - ATTIC** 

















## **WALLS - EXTERIOR**



















# **WALLS** - INTERIOR



































## **CAMPANILE - EXTERIOR**

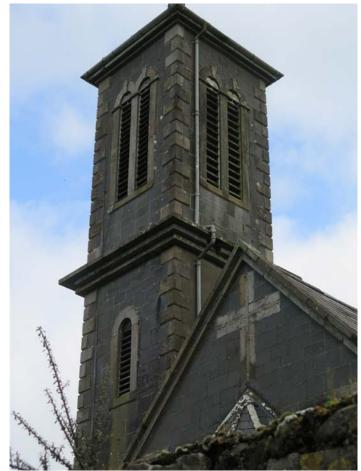
















# **OPENINGS - DOORS**

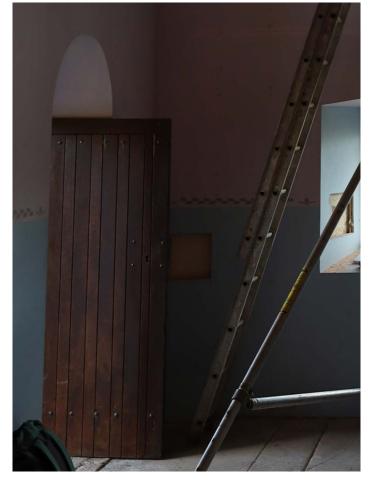
















# **OPENINGS - WINDOWS EXTERIOR**

















## **OPENINGS - WINDOWS EXTERIOR**



















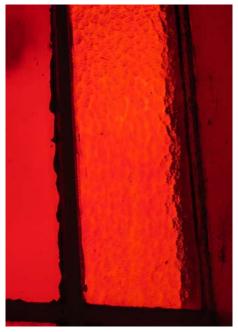
# **OPENINGS - WINDOWS INTERIOR**



















# **INTERIOR FEATURES - BALCONY**



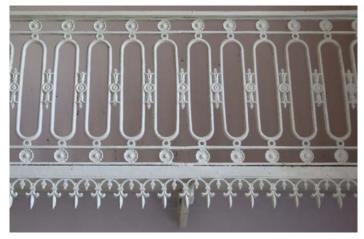














# **INTERIOR FEATURES - BENZONI MONUMENT**































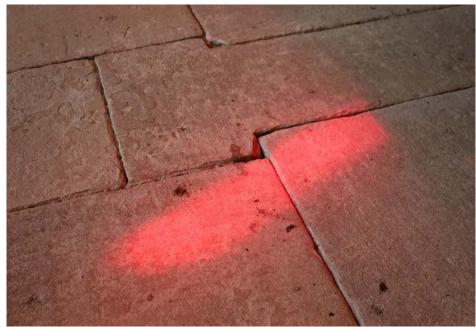


# <u>FLOORS</u>















**FLOORS** 



















# **WESTERN VAULT**

# **WESTERN VAULT**

**CENTRAL VAULT** 

**CENTRAL VAULT** 

## **EXTERIOR DRONE SURVEY**



















## **EXTERIOR DRONE SURVEY**



















# **EXTERIOR DRONE SURVEY**



































# **WORKS - BOXING OFF MONUMENTS**













# **ROOF INVESTIGATIONS**



















# **FUNERARY MONUMENT INVESTIGATIONS**









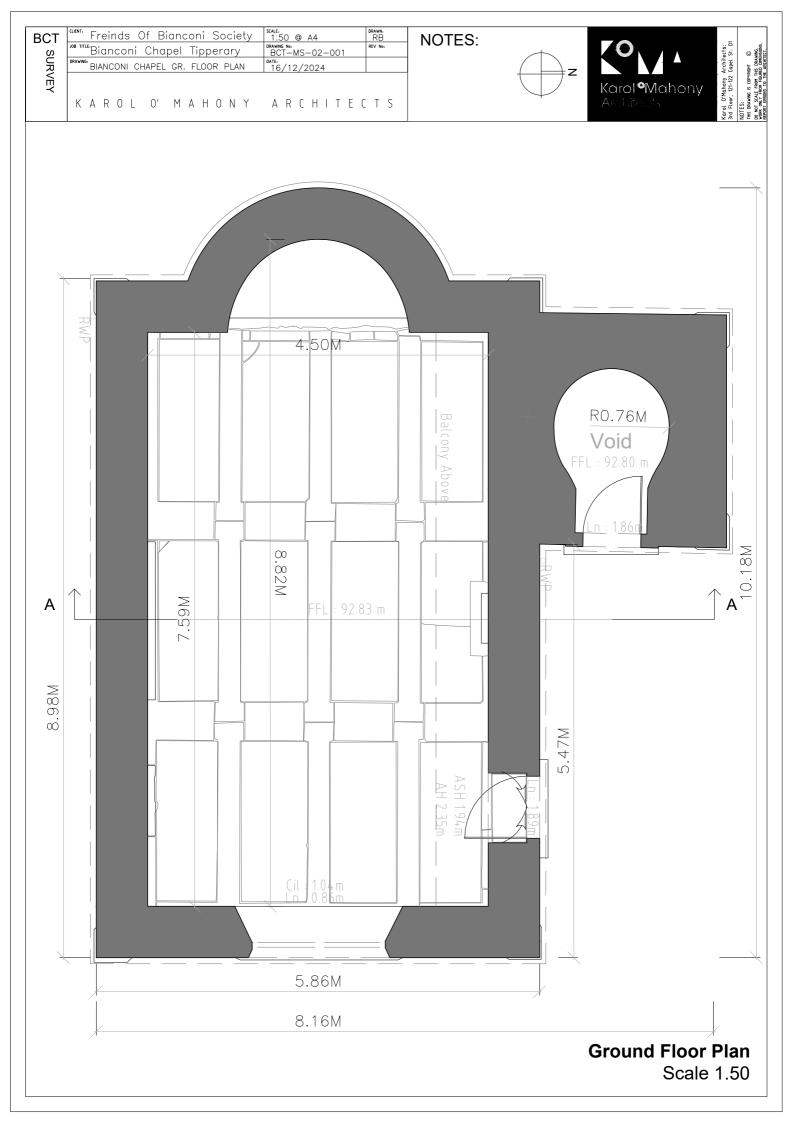


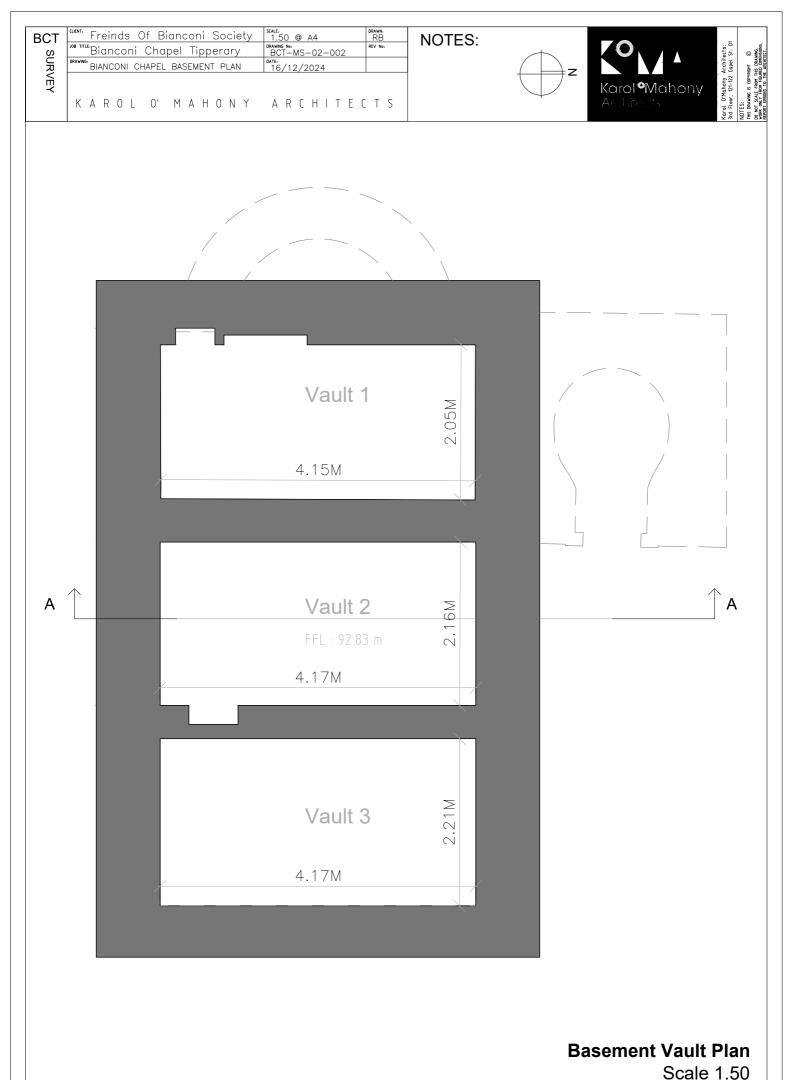


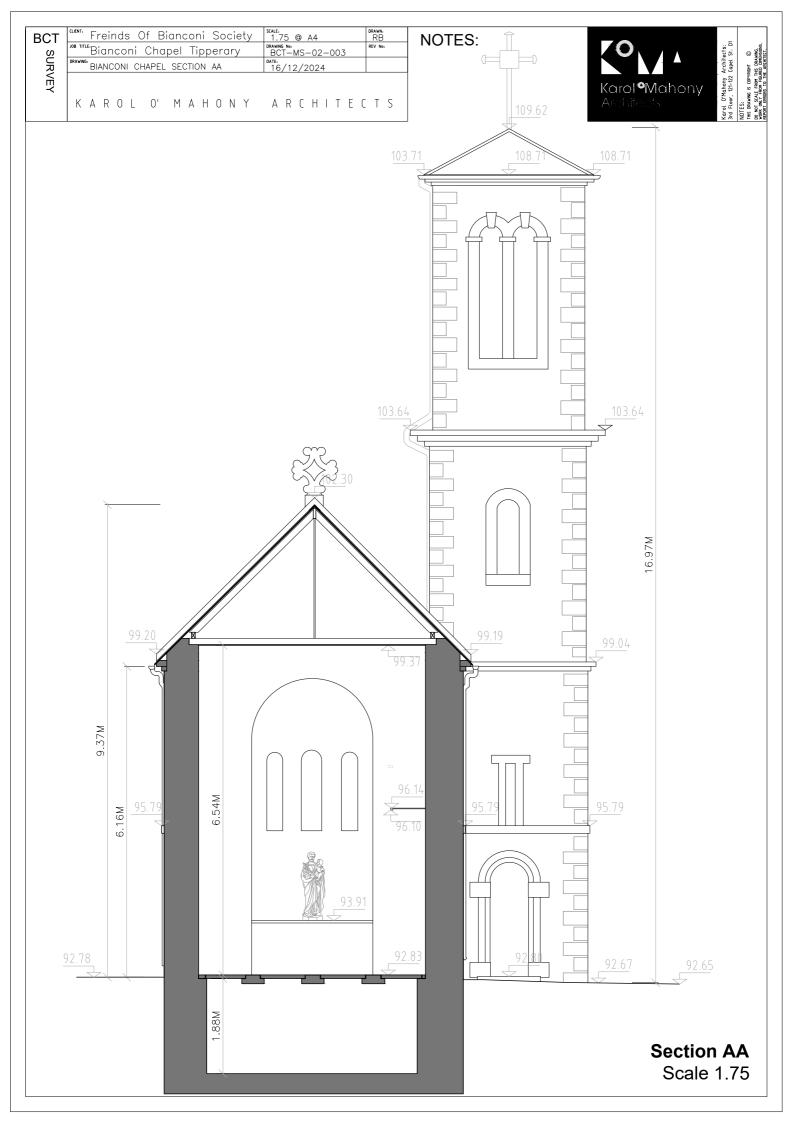
















Elevation 1 Datum: 90.00m



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KGSS

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Karol O'Mahony Architects	MBS			KG24345	Bianconi Chapel, Boher
Horizontal Datum:	Level Datum:	Scale:	A3	Surveyed By:	Survey Finish Date:
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Drafted By:

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Issue Date: 16/09/2024



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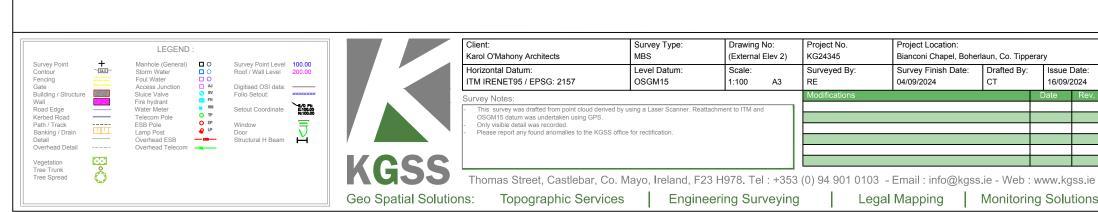
Issue Date:

16/09/2024

Monitoring Solutions



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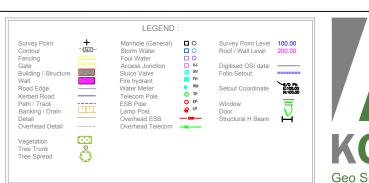




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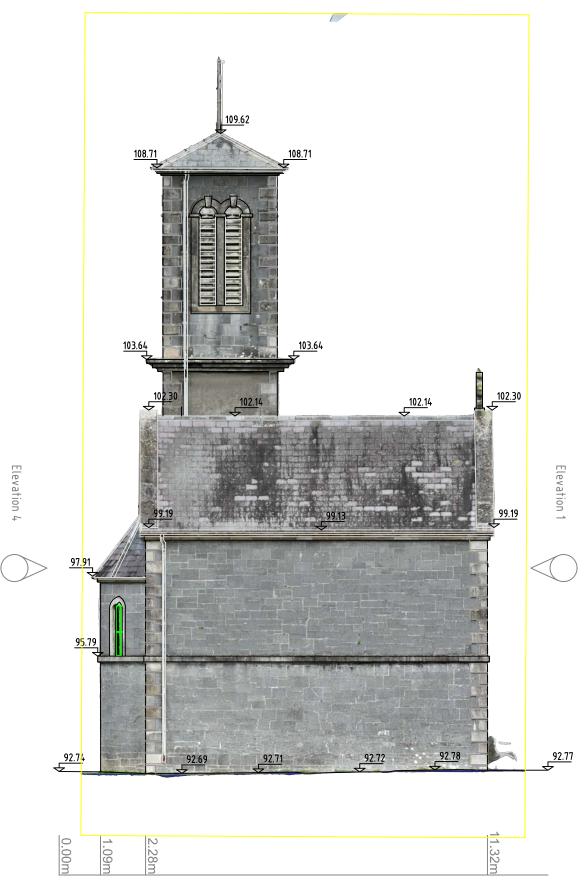




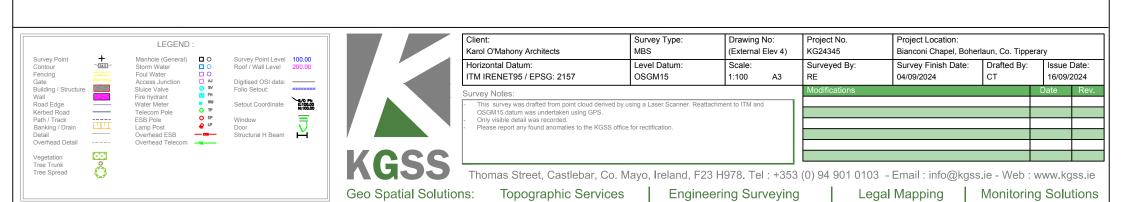
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N 646740

Geo Spatial Solutions:

N 646730 LEGEND : Manhole (General) Storm Water Foul Water Access Junction Sluice Valve Fire hydrant Water Meter Telecom Pole ESB Pole Lamp Post Overhead ESB Overhead Telecom Survey Point Contour Fencing Gate Building / Structure Wall Road Edge Kerbed Road Path / Track Banking / Drain Detail Overhead Detail S/0 Pt E:100.00 N:100.00 ů

Vegetation Tree Trunk Tree Spread

N 646750

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	Karol O'Mahony Architects	MBS	(GFP)
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nas Street, Castlebar, Co. Mayo, Ireland, F23 H978. Tel: +353 (0) 94 901 0103 - Email: info@kgss.ie - Web: www.kgss.ie Monitoring Solutions **Engineering Surveying** Legal Mapping Topographic Services

Project No.

KG24345

RE

Surveyed By:

Project Location:

04/09/2024

Survey Finish Date:

Bianconi Chapel, Boherlaun, Co. Tipperary

Drafted By:

СТ

Issue Date:

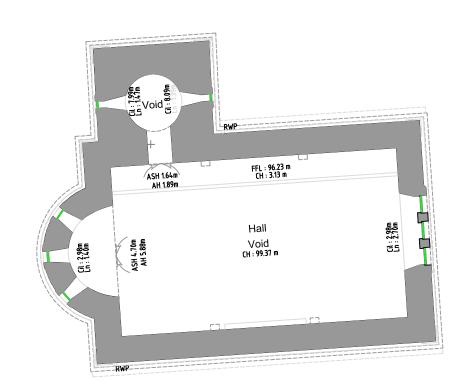
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Legal Mapping

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Surveyed By: RE	Survey Finish Date: 04/09/2024	Drafted By: CT		16/09/2	
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Monitoring Solutions

Project Location: Bianconi Chapel, Boherlaun, Co. Tipperary

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**Engineering Surveying** 

Project No. KG24345

LEGEND : Manhole (General) Storm Water Foul Water Access Junction Stuice Valve Fire hydrant Water Meter Telecom Pole ESB Pole Lamp Post Overhead ESB Overhead Telecom S/0 Pt E:100.00 N:100.00 Vegetation Tree Trunk Tree Spread



Geo Spatial Solutions:

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Project Location:

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Bianconi Chapel, Bohe



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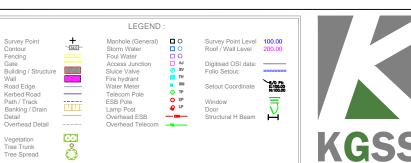
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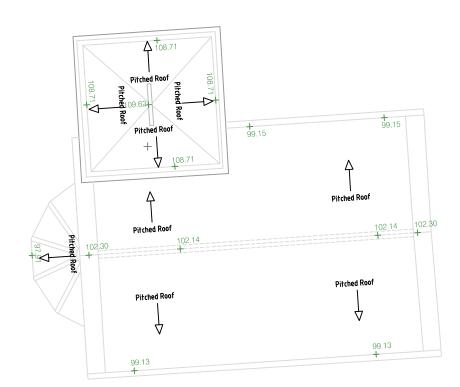
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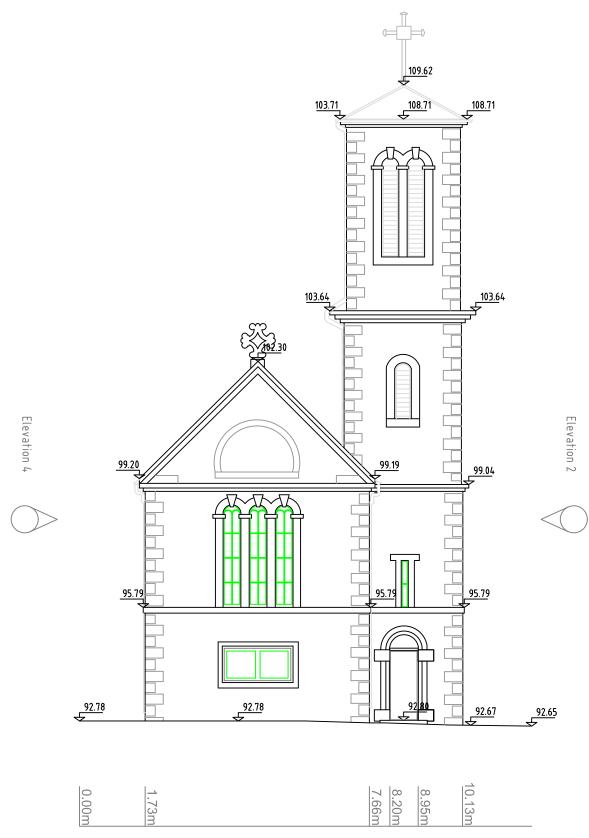
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**Topographic Services** 

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**Engineering Surveying** 





Elevation 1 Datum: 90.00m





Client: Karol O'Mahony Architects	Survey Type: MBS	Drawing N (External B		Project No. KG24345	Project Location: Bianconi Chapel, Bohe	Bianconi Chapel, Boherlaun, Co. Tipperary		
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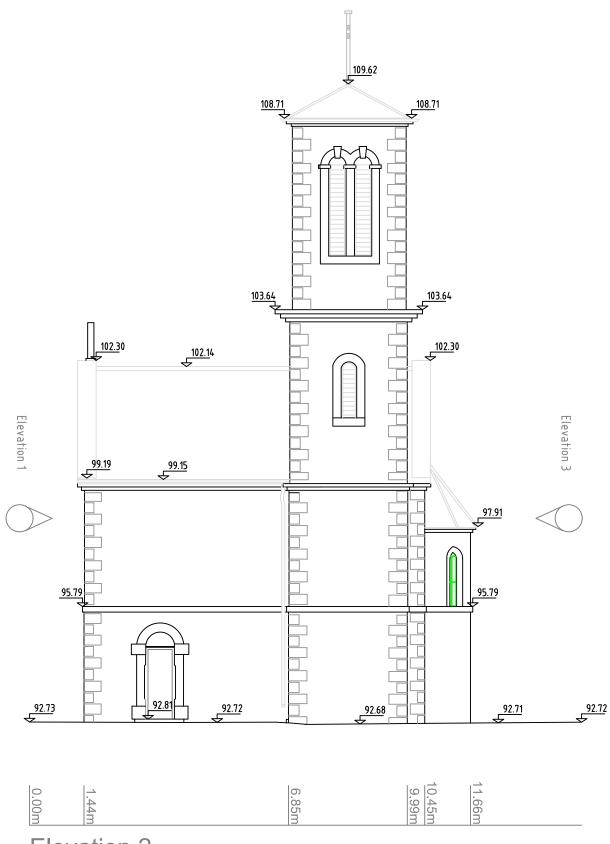
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Issue Date:

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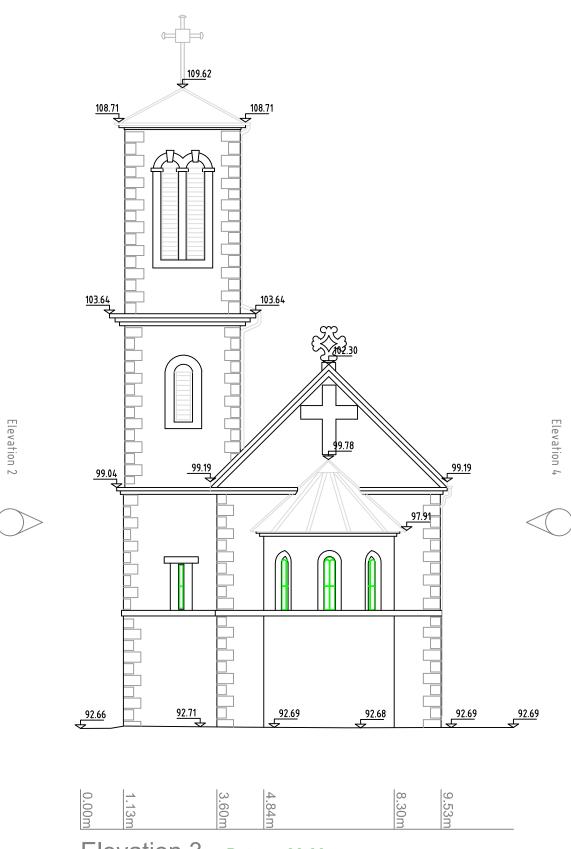
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Elevation 2 Datum : 90.00m







Elevation 3 Datum: 90.00m





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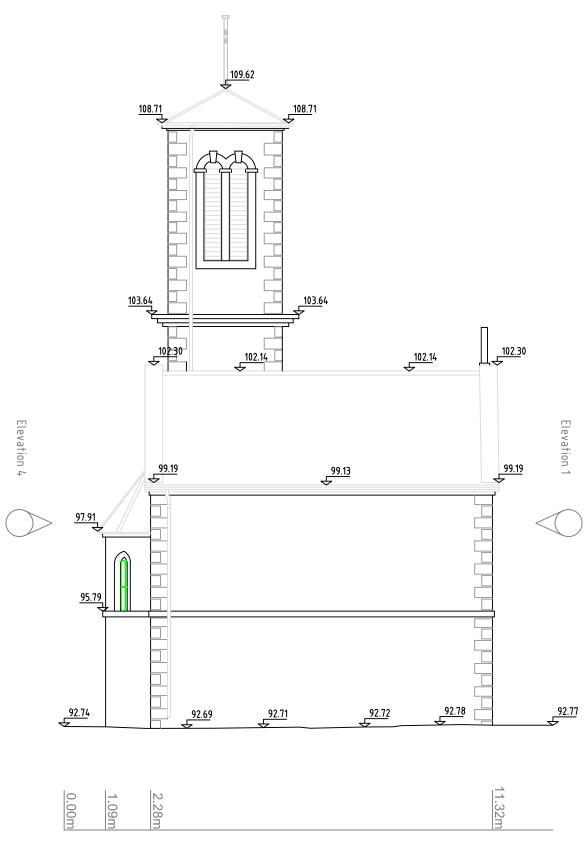
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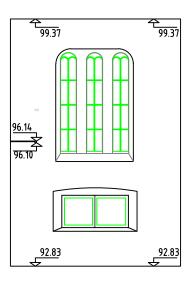
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Elevation 4 Datum : 90.00m



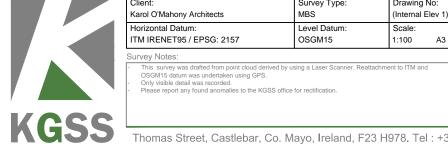






Internal Elevation 1 Datum: 90.00m





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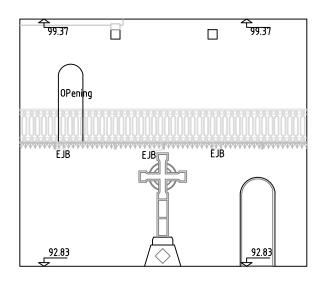
Bianconi Chapel, Boherlaun, Co. Tipperary

Monitoring Solutions

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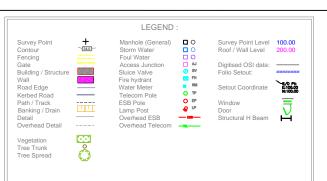
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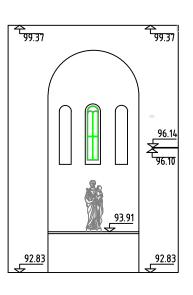
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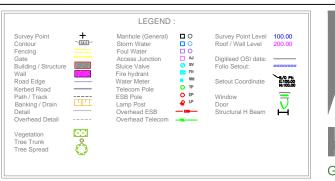
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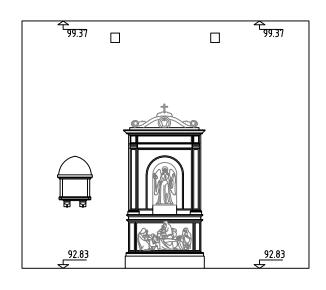
Internal Elevation 3 Datum: 90.00m





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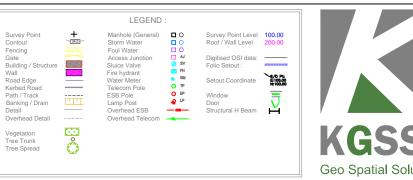




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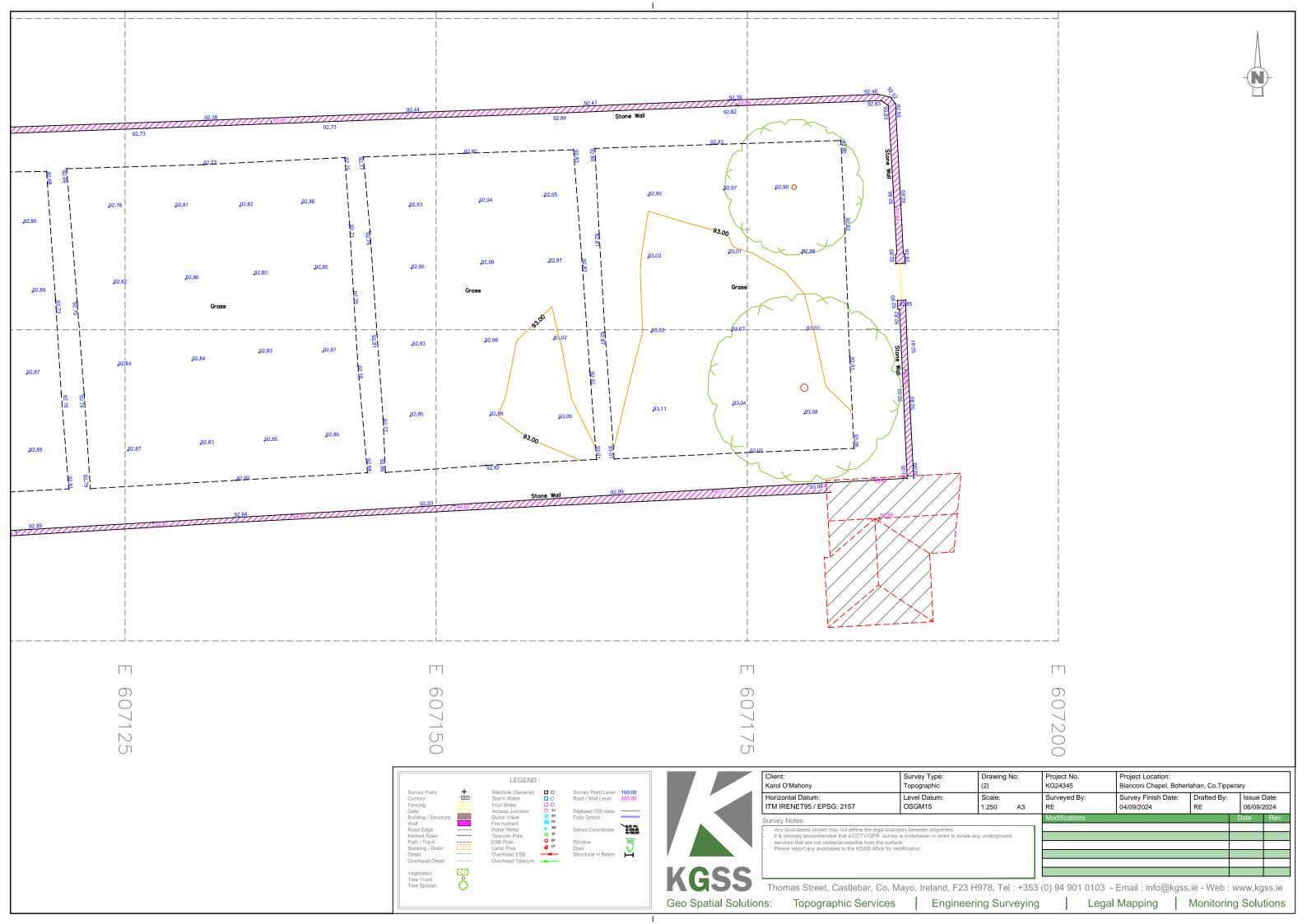


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-Kerley

3 Filiwilliam Polace Declar I ty 2340 [Chas Bianconi.] 3/4/1859 My Dear Bostor Kerley I know it will give your pleasure to learn that my ron is to be moried to the Grand Quugther of the hiberator daughter of the love Me titelimon who alsterna Archivistico Nafionale of a this yanny hady way along with los Mother 3000 with him at the time Matters were not fully arranged to be marico before heat I would not willer The Morioge destring bent & her Mathen hus a Religious lower not to hewthom Maried in Many to it omerged that they Thate be marid in Clarendon of Church on the 27th Int there been come whether in the way of those been Maried in the way wortondraw ) napulor a many of our litzour ray that the son of hemion Vary this De Korty

I The Grand Doughter of the liberator ougth not to be monied in a Consentical Church So Switte your to get for our fram His Grace the good archbishop of Walch Proce to be morried cater in 14 anden or of he desoins it the Molnopoliton this don't onit to read them from the also His Bendiction say also when you Attitude Areningsticon Varionale / haw neralwed to have & from comportable of my Mostery Gunt & Churchy and Which are just complete & one bealfed I'm The streame The church which it 25 feel long 15 Wite a 20 high is all beacht of x al plone & the course one of Growing grandle or greath or will or the Heaple Which it bo feethigh 2 from which we can be Pichenty a in Which we have co Part thistir heaved 12 Mly awy The Check good it 3/15 Ted ful long (of ad for every day in the year) + 100 Jest with & Swond Center a aland

gottes of it gives me pleasure to say I awa much of its briefly to your ley the fyeelion you gave me Whom fort i'm Fromme of puting up the Motion of the Cross Which are intradeed in to the Wale which somewinds At i's 8. Feet higher a land ologny Measure of it to proceed for all the line of Coolet & call his frogens & all the Circumpotere here expressed afree anxaietty the present & Ineed not Tay thow delighted I want be to be in you person so ot som estimable a primit also a mongetus as acidorings on that day with form a new Egroch and for the form of Nothings Over food archbirtop y welf & Inout faller me very Pircody

[Chas Bianconi.]

3/4/1859

## My Dear Doctor Kirby

I know it will give you pleasure to learn that my son is to be married to the grand daughter of the Liberator & daughter of the late Mr. Fitzsimon who died near Rome a year ago & this young lady was along with her Mother with him at the time

Matters were not fully arranged to be married before lent I would not allow the Marriage during lent & her Mother has a Religious \_\_\_\_\_ not to have them married in May so its arranged that they shall be married in Clarendon St Church on the 27th Inst there been some obsticles in the way of (there been married in St Andrew Western row)

This Marriage is most popular & many of our citizens say that the son of Bianconi & the grand daughter of the Liberator ought not to be married in a conventional church so I write you to get for us from His Grace the good Archbishop of Dublin leave to be married eater in St Andrews or if he desires in the the Metropolitan Church on the 27th Inst & in transmitting this dont omit to send them also His Benediction say also when you think he will return for I have perclued to have ground consecration of my Mortuary Church & churchyard which are just complete & are beautiful in the extreme The church which is 25 feet long 15 wide & 20 high is all built of \_\_\_\_ cut stone & the \_\_\_\_ are of grey granate or \_\_ as wide as the steeple which is 60 feet high & from which we can see six countys & in which we have a Bell that is heared 12 miles away. The Church yard is 365 feet feet long (a foot for every day in the year) & 100 feet wide with a grand central & 2 side Gates & it gives me pleasure to say I owe much of its beauty to you by the sugestion you gave me

when last in Rome of puting up the station of the cross which are introduced into the walls which surrounds it & is 8 feet high & I am delaying the consecration til his Grace retires that he may have the pleasure of being the consecrant The Archbishop of Cashel & all his \_\_\_\_\_ & all the other Bishops I have mention the & have expressed & agreed anxaiety to be present & I need not say how delighted I would be to see in your person so old & so able a friend also amongst us as our doings on that day with form a new \_\_\_\_\_ in Ireland having dedicated the church yard for the Burial of our catholics\_\_\_\_ can lend our prayers without as King \_\_\_\_ leave will you be so good as to hand the inclosed duly notes of £20 with my comments to my friend \_\_\_\_\_ & with my \_\_\_\_\_ love & \_\_\_ \_ \_\_ Holliness \_\_\_\_\_ archbishop yearly & friends also I am very Sincerly Charles Bianconi

# ARMORIAL MONUMENTS IN THE BIANCONI CHAPEL

### **Gerard Crotty**

The funerary chapel erected by Charles Bianconi<sup>1</sup> for himself and his family beside the Catholic church at Boherlahan contains three monuments, each carrying a coat of arms. They show beautifully the value of heraldry, not only as a means of commemoration, but also in illustrating family relationships.

The largest and finest memorial is that of Kate Henrietta, the eldest of Charles Banconi's three children, set in the centre of the south wall. Its central feature is the relief figure of a haloed angel holding in the right hand a lily-stalk which bears bads and flowers, and pointing heavenward with the left. This is set in an arched space between two Tuscan pilasters, their shafts hollowed except for a peripheral moulding, supporting an entablature with a roundel of the Bianconi arms. At the base is a second relief carving showing Kate reclining on her deathbed, with a cross in her right hand while beholding, perhaps at the very moment of death, a sion of the Virgin and Child carried on clouds before her. The Christ child raises His right hand in blessing.

At either end of the bed is a seated female figure. That on the left holds a chalice, with the Sacred Host above it, in her right hand. Her other hand rests on the pillow of the bed. The face of the figure is entirely shrouded by a veil. The other figure, wearing a long gown and a full-length veil, holds her left hand at her breast, and in her right a chaplet of roses, as though she were just about to place it on the feet of the corpse. Above her forehead is a tongue of flame.

The inscription, in finely carved Roman lettering, is on a plain rectangular panel just below the angel and reads:

ERECTED
BY CHARLES BIANCONI,
TO THE MEMORY OF HIS BELOVED DAUGHTER
KATE HENRIETTA,
WHOSE REMAINS REPOSE BENEATH.
SHE WAS BORN AT CLONMEL 4<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 1828;
AND DIED AT PISA ON THE 27<sup>TH</sup> MAY 1854.
MAY SHE REST IN ETERNAL PEACE.
AMEN.

The sculptor's signature, in the lower right corner, reads: G.M. BENZONI, F. ROMA. A. 1858. Expanding 'F' to Fecit and 'A' to 'Anno', we may translate this as 'G.M. Benzoni made (this) at Rome in the year 1858'. The monument itself is of grey, veined marble with the angel, relief panel, armorial roundel and inscription in white Carrara marble.

Kate's death followed a long illness, no doubt consumption, which had developed as the eventual result of a severe chill contracted in the winter of 1848 while distributing food during the Great Famine.<sup>2</sup> Because of her illness, she had spent the last years of her life in the warmer climate of Italy.

The two allegorical figures may perhaps represent Faith and Charity, two of the three 'theological virtues'. A chalice is an attribute of Faith<sup>3</sup> when that virtue is depicted in personified form. The shrouded face of the figure no doubt conveys the idea that faith is 'blind' and does not depend upon the senses. Charity is often represented holding a flame<sup>4</sup>, usually in a vase or other vessel, though sometimes she holds a candle. In the present instance the flame is at her brow. Another aspect of Charity, though more usually seen in art of the gothic period, is that she was often shown performing one of the corporal works of mercy. This usually took the form of clothing the naked<sup>5</sup>. Here, placing a wreath at the feet of Kate Henrietta, she is symbolically burying the dead. However, the gesture of her other hand, held at her breast, is characteristically associated with Faith rather than Charity<sup>6</sup>.

The third theological virtue, Hope is probably signified by the angel, whose upward-pointing gesture reminds us of the promise of Heaven. The flowering lily-wand may also be seen as an attribute of Hope, since flowers imply the hope of the fruit to come, just as the buds promise more flowers. Indeed, were it not for the presence of the halo, I would be tempted to identify the figure as an allegory of hope and not as an angel at all. We may note that, of the three figures by Christian Daniel Rauch representing Faith, Hope and Charity as children in the Town Church at Arolsen in Germany, the figure of Hope, carved in 1852, is winged. Both his arms are raised skyward<sup>7</sup>.

The pediment is of gracefully curving form, terminating at each side in an upturned scroll enclosing a stylised flower with two whorls of eight petals. In each angle of the scrollwork is a sprig of Greek plant ornament of honeysuckle form, a motif which is repeated as a support for the cross at the top of the pediment.

The roundel at the centre of the pediment shows the full achievement of the Bianconi arms – shield, helmet and motto. The shield is of special interest as an example of the typical 'horsehead' shape so common in Italian heraldry. It is thought that this is derived from the chanfron, a piece of plate armour protecting the front of a horse's head. This shield shape is by no means unfamiliar, being often seen in the arms of the popes, but the present example is the only one which I have come across on a family monument in this country. The helmet is of the barred type, shown full-face with a medallion suspended from a chain around the neck, as used by noble families in several countries on the Continent. It carries no crest and we might suppose that the only reason for its inclusion was to assert the noble status of the family, though it does give extra point to the motto, Cassis Tutissima Virtus (Virtue is the safest helm). While this is not an

Right: Arms of Bianconi

Middle left: Angel representing hope on monument to Kate Henrietta Bianconi.

Middle right: Arms of O'Connell and Bianconi

Bottom: Relief carving on monument to Kate Henrietta Bianconi









uncommon motto, being borne by families of Armour, Charrington, Cholmondeley, Delamere and Helme<sup>8</sup>, it is interesting to observe that all of these families bear helmets in their arms (i.e. as actual charges in the shield) while the Bianconi arms show mens heads without armour, perhaps more in keeping with the sentiment of the motto.

The arms consist of five fusils or slightly elongated 'diamond' shapes conjoined to form a bend or diagonal band, between two heads. The fusils would be silver, and the heads naturalistically painted, on a blue field in a coloured representation of the arms<sup>9</sup>, but the monument is unpainted. We may note that the heads here are shown as beardless and of quite youthful appearance, while those on the other two monuments are bearded. This is an example of the flexibility allowed to artists in interpreting the blazon or technical description of a coat of arms, and reflects the fact that bearded heads are more common in English and Irish heraldry than in that of Italy. The Bianconi arms may be blazoned as Azure five fusils conjoined in bend argent between two mens heads couped proper.

But was Charles Bianconi entitled to this coat? Mary Anne O'Connell Bianconi and S.J. Watson, in their book, Bianconi, King of the Irish Roads state that when he was a boy in Italy, 'his grandmother would show him above the fireplace a carving of the Bianconi coat of arms granted in the 14th century to his ancestors, who then figured among the nobility of the Milanese State<sup>10</sup>. We are given to understand that this armorial fireplace was in the ancestral home known as the Casa Bianconi, which is stated to survive in the mountain hamlet of Caglio<sup>11</sup>. The family, we are told, emigrated in the thirteenth century from Bavaria to Umbria, and settled in the hill valley of Bevagnia, one branch eventually going to Caglio<sup>12</sup>. However, the Italian heraldist, Goffredo Crollalanza, in his Dizionario Storico-Blasonico<sup>13</sup>, gives an entirely different coat for 'Bianconi di Bevagna e di Bettona (Umbria)', and ascribes the arms which occur on the Boherlahan monuments to 'Bianconi di Milano', a family which he states to have become extinct in 1731. Matters are certainly confused. The histories of two distinct families appear to have been conflated at some point. It is quite possible that Charles Bianconi, on achieving the lifestyle of a country gentleman, decided that he ought to have a coat of arms and assumed that of the extinct Milanese family, even though he may have been entitled to a different ancestral coat.

A narrow gallery runs the entire length of the north wall of the chapel at the upper level. Beneath this is a tall Celtic cross, set into the wall and decorated with interlaced patterns with an IHS monogram, the Greek abbreviation for the name of Jesus, at the centre. The base of the cross is in two sections, projecting slightly from the wall. The upper section carries all but the last two lines of the inscription:

PRAY FOR MORGAN JOHN O'CONNELL, OF BALLYLEAN, Co. CLARE BORN AT GRENAGH KILLARNEY 1811. ENTED KERRY 1835 – 1852. DIED AT LONGFIELD 1875.

REPRESENTED KERRY 1835 – 1852. DIED AT LONGFIELD 1875. HE WAS THE NEPHEW & FAITHFUL ADHERENT OF THE LIBERATOR.

ERECTED IN LOVING REMEMBRANCE, OF TEN YEARS WEDDED HAPPINESS,

BY HIS WIDOW MARY ANNE, DAUGHTER OF CHARLES BIANCONI.

The lower section of the base, which carries the last two lines, is very much the larger of the two and is of widely splayed trapezoidal form, projecting more boldly from the wall. It carries a lozenge-shaped panel of white marble, carved with the shields of O'Connell and Bianconi, each couched towards the other with the Bianconi shield overlapped by that of O'Connell. Above is the stag's head crest of O'Connell<sup>14</sup>, and the two shields are enclosed in an unusually large penannular motto-scroll bearing the O'Connell motto, Ciall agus Neairt (Reason and Strength) in a passable attempt at Irish lettering which, if anything, adds to the charm of the naïve spelling. This is clearly the marital achievement of the couple, the O'Connell arms appearing on the dexter or husband's side, with Bianconi on the sinister for Mary Anne.

The O'Connell shield is quartered to show three different coats. In the first and fourth quarters are the arms of O'Connell of Derrynane. The field is divided horizontally into silver, represented by a plain surface, and green, conventionally indicated by diagonal hatching from upper left to lower right. On this background is a stag between three trefoils. The stag would be naturalistically coloured ('proper') in a coloured version, and the trefoils counterchanged – green on the silver portion of the field and silver on the green 15. At the top is a crescent, the difference mark of a second son. Since heraldry is a system of personal identificatory symbols which in medieval times were used in warfare, no two men may (in theory at any rate) bear the same coat. Consequently, the younger sons in each generation are required to add a mark of difference to their shields.

In the second quarter are the arms of Coppinger, a bull's head between three mullets<sup>16</sup> on a blue field. The blue colour is indicated by horizontal hatching, and the bull's head and mullets, shown without hatching, are understood to be silver. The three lions passant gardant (i.e. walking with their heads turned towards the viewer) in the third quarter are for MacMahon<sup>17</sup>. If coloured, the lions would be red on a silver field.

The combination of these three coats of arms in one shield is not just a casual selection of the arms of O'Connell with those of some allied families. The right to combine arms by quartering depends on descent from heraldic heiresses. Since the O'Connells became entitled to add two quarterings to their own coat, two heiresses must have been involved. These were Elizabeth Coppinger and her

mother, Jane McMahon.

Morgan John O'Connell's father, John O'Connell of Grenagh, Killarney married Elizabeth, daughter of William Coppinger of Ballyvolane, County Cork and Barryscourt in the same county<sup>18</sup>. The Coppingers were an old family, long settled in County Cork and traditionally believed to be of Danish (i.e. Viking) origin. Their staunchly Catholic traditions are exemplified by two of William's first cousins who achieved prominence in different areas of the eighteenth century Catholic world - William Coppinger who was consecrated Bishop of Cloyne and Ross in 1788 and died in 183119, and Marian or Mary Anne, daughter of John Coppinger of Ballyvolane, who married Charles Howard, later eleventh Duke of Norfolk<sup>20</sup>. However, Marian never became a duchess as she died in childbirth in 1769, long before Charles, or even his father the tenth duke, succeeded to the highest title in the English peerage. We may wonder what her reaction would have been, had she survived, to her husband's decision in 1780 to conform to the Established Church<sup>21</sup>.

William Coppinger and his wife, Jane McMahon were third cousins by descent from Richard Butler of Kilcash, who was a lieutenant-general and Governor of Wexford on the Confederate side in 1641. Richard was the younger brother of the great Duke of Ormond. William and Jane are said to have first met when William was staying with some of his Butler cousins in Clonmel<sup>22</sup>. Some time later, when some of his relatives were visiting the McMahons at Clenagh, their home in County Clare, one of Jane's kinsmen, the notoriously fiery Francis McMahon of Creeva, attempted to abduct her. While carrying her through a bog to a waiting coach, he and his accomplices were beaten off by Mr Galway, one of William's relatives, assisted by some of the local people<sup>23</sup>.

The McMahons of Clenagh were descended from Donogh na Glaice, lord of Corcobaiscin, who divided his territory between his three sons towards the end of the fifteenth century. Teige, the third son, was the founder of the Clenagh family. Through Lady Eleanor de Burgh, daughter of the Earl of Clanrickarde, who married Turlogh McMahon of Clenagh, the family inherited the famous harp generally supposed to have belonged to Brian Boru<sup>24</sup>, which had been presented to an earlier earl by King Henry VIII. According to Sir William Butler, the harp, passed from the McMahons to the McNamara family and then to the Cunninghams, one of whom presented it to Trinity College in Dublin<sup>25</sup>.

No account of the McMahon family would be complete without some mention of its most famous member, Marie Edme Patrick Maurice, Marshal of France and first Duke of Magenta, who was President of the French Republic from 1873 to 1879. He was also a descendant of Donogh na Glaice<sup>26</sup>.

The great estates of the McMahons became heavily encumbered with debt, and the greater part, including Clenagh itself, had to be sold off<sup>27</sup>. The Ballylean portion was retained and passed through the Coppingers to Morgan John O'Connell, as may be inferred from the inscription on his monument.

The third monument, set high in the left-hand side of the south wall, commemorates John Coppinger O'Connell Bianconi, son of Morgan John O'Connell. He had adopted the name of Bianconi by deed poll on 23rd April 1908<sup>28</sup> in accordance with the terms of the will of his grandfather, Charles Bianconi. The inscription reads:

> IN LOVING MEMORY OF JOHN COPPINGER O'CONNELL BIANCONI **BORN AT LONGFIELD** 19th OCTOBER 1871 DIED AT LACKNASHANAGH, Co. CLARE · 14th OCTOBER 1929. R.I.P. **ERECTED BY HIS LOVING DAUGHTERS**

MOLLY AND UNA.

The arms displayed are identical to those on the monument to his parents, except for the very inferior standard of the stone-carving. This arrangement is illogical from the heraldic point of view, though it may have been intended to indicate his change of name. In such circumstances the normal thing would be to show the Bianconi coat alone, or to quarter it with the O'Connell arms, though the procedure for acquiring the right to do this used to entail the necessity of obtaining a royal warrant to change the hereditary destination of the assumed arms. Taken all together, however, these three monuments are a gem of family history, preserving the memory of a great man and the story of his immediate descendants.

#### NOTES

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- Bianconi and Watson, op. cit., 154.
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- ibid., 64.
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- ibid., 119.
- Toman, R. (ed.), Neoclassicism and Romanticism: Architecture, Sculpture, Painting, Drawings 1750 - 1848, 282. Cologne 2000.
- Elvin, C.N., Handbook of Mottoes (1860), revised by R. Pinches, 26. London, 1971.
- Crollalanza, G.B. di, Dizionario Storico-Blasonico delle Famiglie Nobili e Notabili Italiane Estinte e Fiorenti, I, 132. Pisa, 1886. The blason is: D'azzurro, alla banda di fusi d'argento accompagnata in capo e in punta da
- Bianconi and Watson, op. cit., 7-8.

due teste al naturale.

- 11. ibid., 4.
- 12. ibid., 7.
- 13. See note 9 above.
- 14. The full description of this crest is 'A stag's head erased proper charged with a trefoil slipped vert'. In simple language, this means that the head is torn off (erased) leaving a jagged edge, naturalistically coloured (proper) and charged on the neck with an heraldic shamrock. On the monument, there is also a collar around the stag's neck. Fox-Davies, A.C., Armorial Families, II, 1456. 1929 edn., reprinted Newton Abbot, 1970. Burke's Irish Family Records, 899. London, 1976.
- Fox-Davies, ut supra and Burke, ut supra.
- The mullet of heraldry resembles a star and usually has five points.
- The lions in the McMahon arms are often depicted 'regardant', with their heads turned backwards.
- Burke's Irish Family Records, 897.
- Copinger, W.A. (ed.), History of the Copingers or Coppingers of the County of Cork, Ireland and the Counties of Suffolk and Kent, England, fold out pedigree of Ballyvolane branch. Manchester and London, 1884.
- ibid., 204-6.
- 21. Robinson, J.M., The Dukes of Norfolk: A Quincentennial History, 172. Oxford, 1983.
- Copinger, op. cit., 216. The account of the Ballyvolane branch of the Coppinger family in this work was contributed by Mary Anne, wife of Morgan John O'Connell and daughter of Charles Bianconi.
- ibid., 221-2.
- The late Sir lain Moncreiffe, Ablany Herald believed that this harp had in fact belonged to Brian Catha an Dúin O'Neill, the last Gaelic High King of Ireland, killed at the Battle of Down in 1260. (Moncreiffe of that Ilk, Sir I., Royal Highness, 15. London, 1982). However, the harp is more likely to date from the fifteenth century. See the description by G. Frank Mitchell in Cone, P. (ed.), Treasures of Early Irish Art 1500 B.C. to 1500 A.D., 218-9. New York, 1977.
- Butler, Col. W.F., in the Contemporary Review, (n.d.), quoted in a footnote in Copinger op. cit., 220-1.
- 26. MacMahon, N., Here I Am, Here I Stay! Marshal MacMahon 1808-1893, Appendix 11, Charts B and C, Whitegate, County Clare, 1993.
- Copinger, op. cit., 217, 221.
- Fox-Davies, ut supra.





#### Photographed at Ballyroe early 1960's

L/R: Carmel Mahony, Clonoulty; Margaret O'Dwyer, Ballyroe, Kathleen Egan, Bawnmore; Bridget Egan, Bawnmore; Gerry Barry, Freighduff.

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# Pioneer Outing Tramore, 31st July, 1955.



Front: Dan Delaney, Sruhane, Ardmayle Road; Kitty Barry, Clerihan; Lilly Lawrence, Synone (Gaile); Kit Tuohy, Gaile; Peg Kevin, Nodstown; Ann Ryan, Castlemoyle; Philip Ryan, Castlemoyle; Pat Ryan, Drombane.

Back: Sean Frawley, Ballinree, Lar Devane, Nodstown; Jack Bryant, Ballinree.

# Enjoying a drink at Gooldscross Inn - it looks like Gerry Barry is paying!



Paddy Egan, Bawnmore & London; Mary Egan, London, (formerly Duggan, Gortnahoe); Gerry Barry, Freighduff; Tom Burke, Freighduff; Jimmy Ryan (M), Ballyroe.