

The Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Kildare.

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An emergency excavation was carried out at the construction site of the new Medical Centre, Dublin Road, Kildare in 2014 when human bones were found while preparing the site. A total of 36 burials were found there. Sherds of glazed medieval local ware were recovered in topsoil and may suggest a 13th-14th-century date for these remains.¹

The site of the church of St. Mary Magdalene in or near Kildare Town has not been identified to date.² The discovery of burials at the site of the new Medical Centre in Kildare Town may shed some light on its location. Magdalenes or Maudlins were often associated with leper hospitals in the 13th and 14th centuries.³

An entry in the Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls of Ireland may give a clue to the general location of the church.⁴

PLEAS OF THE CROWN AT KILDARE BEFORE JOHN WOGAN, JUSTICIAR ON FRIDAY AFTER THE PURIFICATION OF S. MARY, A.R. XXXV [3FEB 1307].

12 Jurors present that a contention being moved between David Barbedor and William son of Gilbert, when David, drawing his bow shot at William, and gave him a wound. On which hue and cry being raised. David was taken by the four nearest towns which came to the hue, to wit, the town of Westreton, Balycutlan, Yagoeston and Breynokston. And because they believed William to be in danger of death, they led him towards the castle of Kildare to commit him [to the prison] of the King there. And when they came opposite the church of S. Mary Magdalen, which is in the entry of [said] town, David escaped from them, and fled to that church, and kept himself there for 15 days and more.

The "towns" mentioned, with the exception of Westreton (location unknown), are all in the immediate vicinity of Ballymore Eustace, Co. Kildare. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the accused and his captors would have approached Kildare from that area, in other words from the east. Therefore, the church was likely to have been at or near the eastern entry to the town.

An entry in the *Rental Book of Gerald, Ninth Earl of Kildare* for 1518⁵ gives us a further clue as it mentions a **Magdalen Hill**:

Maurice Fitzgerald, Senior, held Magdalen Hill, on the highway to the Curragh, being and old windmill head, the stone walls of an old ruined house.

The windmill head mentioned ties in with the old name of **Windmill Hill** - the hill which is now the site of the new Medical Centre.

¹ www.excavations.ie/report/2014/Kildare/0024091/, accessed 25 July, 2016

² J.H. Andrews and Anngret Simms (eds), *Irish Historic Towns Atlas: No.1, Kildare* (Dublin, 1986), p.9

³ <https://historicingland.org.uk/research/inclusive-heritage/disability-history/1050-1485/time-of-leprosy/>, accessed 25 July, 2016

⁴ James Mills ed., *Calendar of the Justiciary Rolls Ireland*, Part 2 (London, 1914)

⁵ Herbert Francis Hore, *The Rental Book of Gerald, Ninth Earl of Kildare, A. D. 1518 (Continued)*, in *The Journal of the Kilkenny and South-East of Ireland Archaeological Society, New Series, Vol. 5, No. 3 (1866)*, p. 536, footnote 1.

The descriptions of plots surveyed by Thomas Emerson in 1674⁶ also contain references to **Windmill Hill** and **Magdelonsland** in the same general area.

No. 26 (in part)

The land now set to James Heatherinton which lieth betwixt the Curragh lane and Brownestowne lane in the acute [?] point towards the **Windmill hill**, 15a. 2r. Op.

The west park in Farrinacarraland next Blindwell & near **windmill hill**, 8a. 2[?]r. Op.

Magdelonsland, Farrincapoge & other names [?] in Brackan's holding, 39a. 3r. Op.

There is no reference to Magdalene, or any of its variations, on any of the old maps of Kildare that I can find. However Noble & Keenans' map of Kildare (1752)⁷ shows a tower, possibly an old windmill, on the hill on the opposite side of the road to the burial site.



An examination of the bones excavated might show evidence of leprosy⁸. Such a finding would serve to confirm the location of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene in Kildare.

⁶ A. Horner, Thomas Emerson's Kildare Estate Surveys 1674-1697 in *The Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society Vol XVIII, Part III, 1996-97, p. 410*

⁷ Map of county Kildare, J.Noble & J.Keenan; 2 sheets (D.Pomarede, Dublin, 1752)

⁸ Professor Charlotte Roberts, Durham University: Leprosy in the Past - the Story in the Bones.
<http://www.thenakedscientists.com/HTML/interviews/interview/1548/> accessed 25 July 2016