

St. Nicholas Church and Graveyard/ Teampull na Plaighe

The church and graveyard of St. Nicholas also known as Old Bridge cemetery is located on the south side of the river Suir, 250m outside of the medieval walled town of Clonmel in county Tipperary. The church is a recorded monument on the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (archaeology.ie): TS083-020, as is the graveyard: TS083-020001.

The church of St. Nicholas is believed to date from the 13th century. The old church measures 7.85m in length and 4.47m in width. It was built using sandstone rubble and once had a pointed doorway in the north wall which parishioners and priests used to enter. There are two small single-light windows in the east and west walls and a bell-cote (structural shelter for bells) on top of the west wall. Inside the building are two small ambries (small cupboards once used to hold sacred vessels and clothes).

St. Nicholas's church was one of only two Catholic Churches used for worship in Clonmel after the Reformation (1517-1648). Although the church was no longer in use by 1699, the graveyard still was. The adjoining graveyard measures 29m by 25m and is surrounded by a low stone wall. Some headstones from the 19th century still stand and one of the earliest headstones found in the graveyard is dated to the 18th century. This graveyard along with St. Stephens graveyard in Clonmel was used for the burial of the towns plague victims between the 14th and 17th centuries. The choice to bury plague victims in these two sites may be because both churches were located outside of the medieval town walls or it might be because of the saints names. Both St. Stephen and St. Nicholas are associated with medieval churches and hospitals that fight against plague and leprosy.

One of the main plagues Clonmel suffered from was the Black Death, which arrived in 1349. Large pits were dug to bury the victims quickly in the churches of St. Stephens and St. Nicholas. The ravages of the plague were economic as well, the town of Clonmel had to petition for tax relief and aid in 1351. Plagues, war and pestilence continued throughout the following centuries, in one document it was recorded that by 1608 Clonmel had suffered two years of plague and some of the townspeople had to burn their houses and were now living in poverty.

Efforts have been made to clear up St. Nicholas's church and graveyard by Tús workers, Tipperary County Council and the Old Bridge Residents as the site had become quite

overgrown. Due to their efforts the church and headstones stand a better chance of survival.