INCULTUM

Visiting the Margins.

INnovative CULtural ToUrisM in European peripheries

Historic Graves of Ireland

EACHTRA ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECTS LTD

INNOVATION FACTSHEET

V1.0 - 2023/03

Ireland has a rich history, culture, and identity, to which the Irish and people of Irish descent have strong attachment. Traditions and stories maintained and told throughout generations are what Eachtra focuses on with the Historic Graves project which commenced in 2010. This project aims to identify, record, and map historic gravestones through accessible surveys, GIS technology, and to publish the information onto their web platform to connect Irish descendants and diaspora with their ancestors digitally and also to encourage visits to graveyards through storytelling. Over 800 graveyards have been registered, with over 200,000 names, dating back 500 years, inscribed on 120,000 geolocated graves, and counting.

The Historic Graves website has been highly successful in connecting the Irish diaspora with the burial grounds of their ancestors (see here). Counties Limerick (focus on Ballyhoura) and Mayo (focus on Achill Island) are the focus areas to develop tourism and hold good potential for the development of the touristic activity. Rural Ireland has a lot of geographical space with low population density, as well as enthusiastic and hard-working local rural communities eager to work with Eachtra. They welcome tourism as a way to boost the economy and to share their stories, history and culture. They thereby have the appropriate basis for the creation of engaging content to boost sustainable touristic activity and cultural heritage developments to educate locals and tourists.

In this factsheet we propose to explore the main innovations developed in the framework of this pilot, based on those identified in the Midterm reporting for INCULTUM Pilots: progress and innovation.

1. The constitution of a heritage resource as a common (good)

Irish heritage statutory bodies have long identified historic graveyards as key sites for care, conservation and their 2011 publication[1] on historic graveyard conservation (Anon, 2011) clarified 20 years of local authority and local community engagement with graveyard heritage. The Historic Graves project commenced in 2010, as a grassroots collaboration between archaeologists and local communities in West Waterford, and soon came to build its overall aims and objectives on the 2011 Heritage Council publication. This initially led to a broader acceptance by other grassroots local entities of our proposed approach of survey and rapid digital publication. Within a few years, the resulting heritage dataset was being viewed and searched and added to by a global audience. Members of the Irish diaspora based in England, Scotland and Wales began to use the database in equal numbers to the Irish users and soon the broader Irish diaspora in North America and Australasia became significant users and participants in our project.

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[1]

https://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/guidance_care_conservation_recording_historic_graveyards_2011_7mb.pdf.

Community engagement at Kilgobnet graveyard, West Waterford August 2023. (Eachtra Incultum co-funded project)

The Historic Graves project has contributed to widening the perception of local graveyards as a common heritage resource, both with the local fieldwork carried on with the communities and showcasing this resource worldwide, to the large audience of Irish diaspora descendants and potential visitors. The availability of the common heritage resource of geolocated genealogical data developed into a tourism planning tool as a result has facilitated us in conversing with our audience to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the project and our partner groups.

We are also contributing in the creation of a digital common heritage resource, publishing and distributing our work, as well as the work of our community of contributors, under the terms of a BY-NC-ND 4.0 Creative Commons licence, following the FAIR principle of as open as possible as closed as necessary, in order to keep our business model sustainable in the medium run.

2. The involvement of the community in the management of the heritage resource

Approximately 20% of Irish historic graveyards (3000-4000 sites) are completely closed for use ie. no longer accepting new burials. Which means 80% of this heritage resource, often dating back 1500 years, have management challenges inherent in the clash between the use of modern burial memorial types and materials in ancient sites. Historic graveyards are a key site of living heritage in Ireland and consequently modern usage has to be negotiated with the heritage authorities to ensure the maintenance of historical character. The Historic Graves team are generally brought into graveyard projects in two ways. Firstly, by invite from a local group to guide them through survey as a first step and subsequently in building

practical management and conservation plans for care and maintenance. Secondly, by invite from a local authority to assist a local group who may have previously made errors in their graveyard management actions and needed training in the full spectrum of historic graveyard conservation.

The Incultum project has allowed our team to engage more specifically with co-funded management projects since 2021. Our tried and tested field survey system continued but Incultum allowed us to test and improve our use of drone survey and the generation of Structure from Motion (photogrammetry) ground modelling. This significant development allowed us to expand our system to scientifically map and record unmarked grave plots. The resulting monument and grave surveys then form the foundation plan for identifying numbered conservation tasks and communicating key issues with professionals and local communities alike. This methodology has also been adopted for use in professional-only surveys since 2021 particularly in conjunction with the jobs stimulus funding Covid Pandemic fund administered by the Dept of Housing in Ireland (Community Monument Fund).

Community group in Colligan, West Waterford, in August 2022 participating in the process of graveyard survey and management plan development. (Eachtra Incultum co-funded project)

Using the techniques tested and honed in Incultum, we have improved the quality of our engagements with community groups and the value of the resulting surveys and assessments. As local communities often become the team who implement the resulting conservation actions we have found that improved buy-in before commencement results in more effective implementation. Prioritised task lists are agreed and scheduled and groups are less likely to be overwhelmed by the challenge whilst focussing on the key agreed tasks, usually within a three year plan. This is particularly the case in biodiversity management tasks and while still challenging it is interesting to see graveyards as developing as an important means of communicating about vegetation management & biodiversity enhancement versus the often prevalent desire for extreme tidiness in burial grounds.

3. The creation of new visitors itineraries

Prior to Incultum we were aware of the need to display connections between networks of sites and related stories within a territory but the solution proved elusive. We often received requests to develop tours and trails based on graveyard heritage but the digital ecosystems were not mature enough for our purposes.

With the Incultum project one of the main innovations developed by the pilot in the framework of the Historic Graves web platform is the creation of tourism-oriented microsites, promoted as Destinations. These microsites are tourism-oriented sub-sections of the whole platform, presenting data and content related to a specific location (i.e. Achill island and Ballyhoura in the context of the INCULTUM project). They are built to be managed locally, together with the Historic Graves team, becoming effectively co-created and co-managed digital spaces. They are much more than standard websites, because they will use the leverage of the platform and of its active community of worldwide users (over 30,000 registered users and over 10,000 monthly active users), plus the possibility to fully integrate with existing content for a seamless user experience.

How would you value the creation of new sections of the Historic Graves website dedicated to genealogical and social history (called Destination)?
902 responses
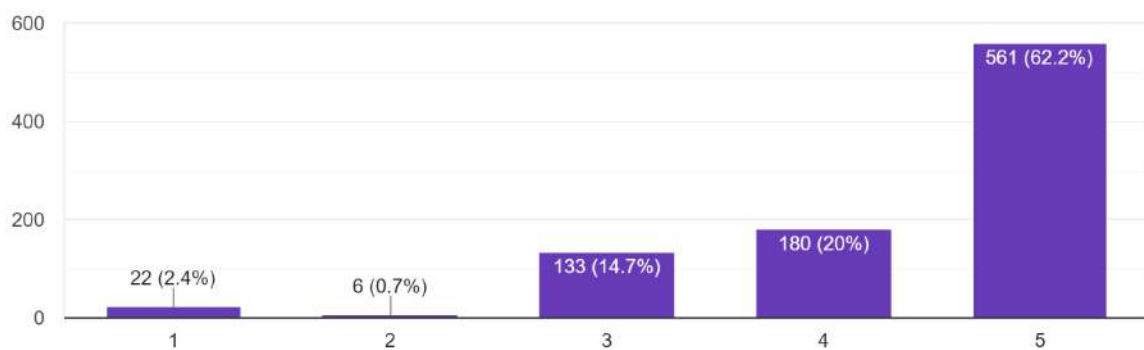
Results from an online survey launched in summer 2022 which confirmed that out visitors very much approve the creation of these Destinations sections.

The first destination microsite has been recently launched and is available at: https://historicgraves.com/destination/ballyhoura. From a content perspective, they are dedicated to genealogical and social history, combining the platform content with external Point of Interests (POI), taking advantage of the strengths of other platforms (GMaps, YouTube, Wikipedia, …) to present new visitors itineraries, like the Ballyhoura Palatine Trail, connecting graveyards with other touristic activities linked with their beautiful landscapes, high-quality food, localised production, pub, and music culture. Each destination is a single MVP, measurable, replicable and scalable in other areas.

Ten years after we first desired to build a sensitive tourism toolset Incultum allowed us to implement our solution. With the trails in development combining different geographical scales (walk, cycle, drive) but with common themes eg. Great Famine (1845-1852) burials and social impacts.

Frontpage of the online trail briowsable as a story on a map, available at https://historicgraves.com/destination/ballyhoura/famine-trail.

4. The design of an attractive narrative of the itineraries

The general offer of cultural tourism websites is overcrowded and very competitive. The rural and remote heritage is less exploited, but that focus was not enough to distinguish our offer so, in order to design an attractive narrative of the new itineraries, dark tourism has been identified as our USP, able to combine our strengths with the current trends in social interest and the market fit. Within the dark tourism phenomenon, the focus is on history from the early to the mid-19th century and the Great Famine in Ireland, on top of the most obvious genealogical tourism. We identify European Dark History as a strong topic for engaging stories, to be published within Destinations (explained in point 3) and to be used to develop media content (explained in point 8). For example, our Irish graveyards allow us to trace historic migrations such as 16th & 18th century Huguenot & Palatine populations into and around Ireland right up to the present day[2] sometimes showing strong links between very specific localities in Germany/France with specific locations down to the smallest landholding unit of townland in Ireland.

This topic is also being exploited to design and test an innovative GIS methodology to identify and analyse famine burial grounds. As field archaeologists the Historic Graves team identified the need to build the Dark History narrative based on scientific systems. Within Incultum and co-funded projects we have tested drone survey and lidar survey (pre-existing and new data collection) for unmarked Famine grave identification with very promising results. A series of public lectures is planned for March and August 2023 on this topic and it will have broader European impacts as the methodology is transferable.

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[2] https://historicgraves.com/story/ballyhoura-palatines-german-colony-south-limerick

GIS ground model generation from TII LIDAR (2m, 2011) dataset identifying mid-19th century institutional mass common graves in Cork District Hospital, Co. Cork. Rows of graves of various sizes and date are identifiable as dark blue depressions. Lidar processing by Dr Steve Davis (UCD), (lidar dataset courtesy of Transport infrastructure Ireland).

5. The mobilisation of artists to strengthen the attachment of communities to their heritage

Having previously worked with visual artists[3] as part of historic graveyard public engagement projects the Historic Graves team can see the benefits of this approach. Community surveys in counties Roscommon and Sligo had shown us the value of having visual artists from the local community contributing to project design and implementation and their resulting visualisations of heritage on a parish level were stimulating.

For Incultum, our survey of St. Mary's graveyard in Ballinrobe[4] in Co. Mayo was designed to build on the research and creative writing of local historian Averil Staunton. Ms. Staunton's deep and long running engagement with her hometown heritage has resulted in one of the richest local heritage resources for any Irish town[5]. Working with students of the local secondary school stories of the graveyard were researched primarily using Ms Staunton's writings. This resulted in a series of training videos made by the students and also one overarching video placing St. Mary's in its urban context[6]. Work continues on this in 2023.

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[3] https://www.thememorytrail.com/group/croghan-co-roscommon-our-townlands-our-history
[4] https://historicgraves.com/graveyard/st-mary-s-church-ireland/mo-smci
[5] http://www.historicalballinrobe.com/index.aspx
[6] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX5n6EcZpNs&

A co-funded project in Leitrim for the summer of 2023 has been codesigned with visual artist Aideen Connolly and we expect previous Incultum learnings to be implemented in this forthcoming fieldwork project.

6. The participatory heritage inventory and the participatory design of itineraries

The creation of a participatory heritage inventory is at the core of the Historic Graves initiative scope. Within Incultum we enlarged the inventory itself, mapping a completely untouched area in Mayo, with no existing partners, local communities or previously published content, and deepening the coverage of Ballyhoura, one of the areas with more previous work done, with strong relationships with public administration and local communities. In parallel, we also enlarged the range of partners and stakeholders involved locally, including some of them in the participatory design of tourism-oriented itineraries (described in section 3).
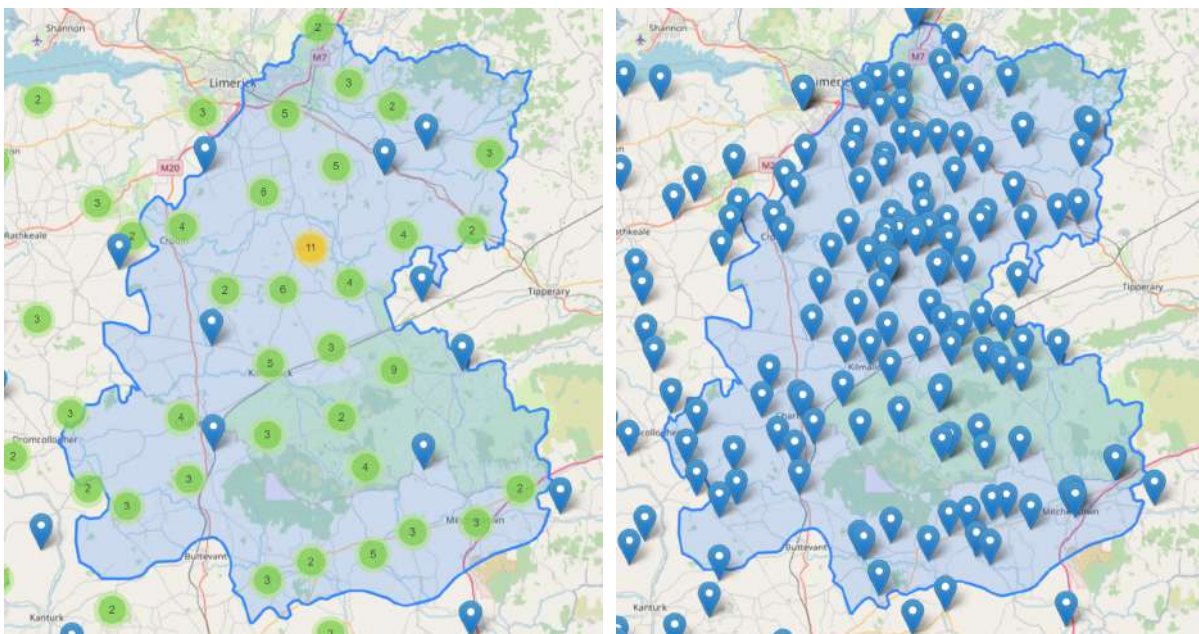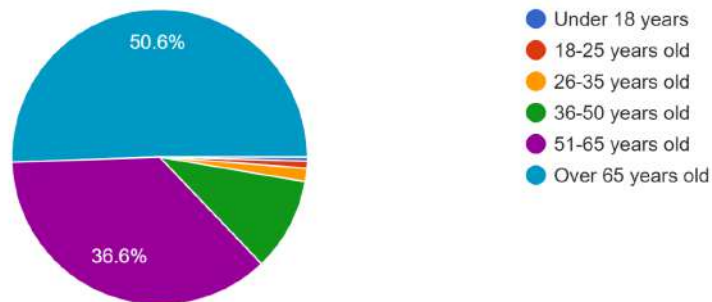

Coverage of the Historic Graves participatory heritage inventory within the pilot area of Ballyhoura, clustered on the left and not clustered on the right.

7. Territorial touristic intelligence

We are using two tools to get and analyse visitors' visiting practices: Google Analytics and visitors' surveys. Google Analytics lets us measure, mostly quantitatively, the traffic to the website, the landing and exit pages, the average time spent and the geographical provenance of the visitors. In terms of visitors' surveys, so far we launched a successful online survey on the general HGs platform, which got nearly 1,000 visitors, and a few local surveys linked to individual graveyards, using QR codes. The online survey got us valuable feedback on the tourism potential of the platform and of the surveyed areas, along with important demographic data to better profile our visitors and potential tourists (i.e. over 50% of respondent are over 65, married with no dependent offspring, retired people, with good education, located abroad, mainly in the US, Australia, and UK), most of which use the platform quite often, also for tourist purposes.
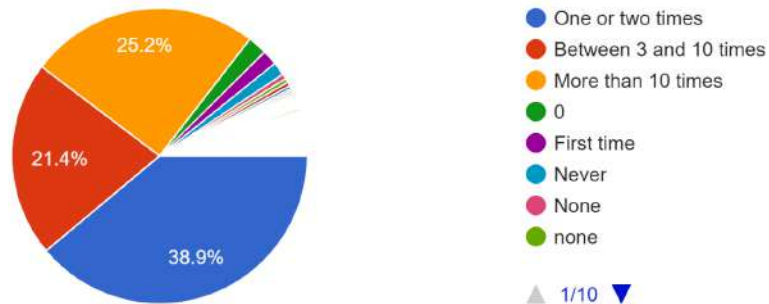
What is your age?
902 responses

- Under 18 years
- 18-25 years old
- 26-35 years old
- 36-50 years old
- 51-65 years old
- Over 65 years old

50.6%
36.6%

How often have you visited the Historic Graves website in the past couple of years?
902 responses

- One or two times
- Between 3 and 10 times
- More than 10 times
- 0
- First time
- Never
- None
- none

25.2%
21.4%
38.9%

▲ 1/10 ▼

Have you ever used (or plan to use) the Historic Graves website to plan a trip to a specific location?
902 responses

- Yes
- Maybe
- No

39.9%
30.5%
29.6%
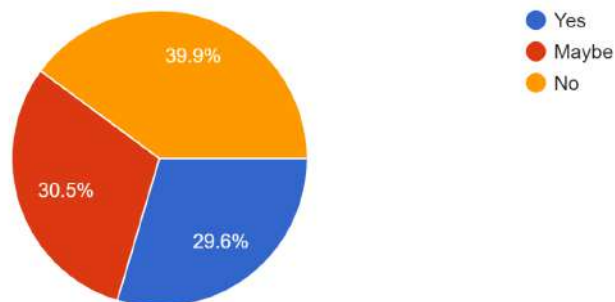
Sharing this information with some key local partners in order to improve the management of heritage resources is a worthwhile path to explore. This has been an exciting aspect of Incultum for the Historic Graves team. Providing our local community partners with measured tourism data is an important addition to our toolset as it opens doors for us in our communications with the more specialised tourism bodies such as Fáilte Ireland.

In the Ballyhoura pilot project we focused on an historic emigration project whereby thousands of people from 239 families were moved from the province of Munster in southern Ireland to the district of Peterborough, Ontario, Canada in the mid 1820s. Our tourism partner, Ballyhoura Development CLG, had built up a database of related families from genealogical tourism queries and this database has introduced us to over 200 researchers tracing their family trees and building links between families in North America and Ireland. We find this an interesting model to develop and expect to use the learning from its current practice to be applicable to other areas.

8. Promotional and visit tools

Even though our project was originally designed to be an archaeological survey, post-2011 codesign with community groups has seen the project switch to geolocated genealogical tourism as its main focus. Incultum's focus on heritage tourism has subsequently allowed us to develop further our ideas on market development on a national and local level. Our primary aim in Incultum has been to stimulate community engagement by training them to register graves and to take and post online video stories taken with cell phones of community members telling family and community stories about the graves' histories.

Extensive testing of livestream methods and technologies in Irish and Spanish contexts has taken place and now variant methods are being assessed. The 'No-edit' video recording approach is being developed as one of our Incultum teaching resources. Over 100 Youtube videos (https://www.youtube.com/@HistoricGraves/videos) have been made and uploaded in the course of Incultum and the process has been, to us, surprisingly difficult to finalise. However, we are in the late stages of finalising a pragmatic heritage video recording methodology based on community input and also our own internal discussions. As many of our community participants are over 60 we've been aiming to develop methods to suit that 'silver' generation. It turned out paying attention to how a small number of local communities currently use their smartphones to communicate with Facebook groups in particular helped us refine our approach.