

## **Marionvale Mother and Baby Home Redevelopment:**

17th November 2025

Dear Nick,

Thank you for your correspondence with regard to the redevelopment of the old Marionvale Mother and Baby Home in Newry. There are a number of issues worth considering, but let me give you a quick timeline for the investigation to date.

My team and I conducted the first phase of the investigation into the Marionvale site in 2017, the purpose of which was to locate and identify any evidence of marginalised infant or adult burial within the site. This work was initiated by the '*Birth Mothers and their Children for Justice Group*'

For this first phase of investigation, no evidence of burial was found however, what the work did prove was that there was insufficient depth of soil over solid rock for the site to that point to bury anything. (Approximately seven to thirty centimetres across this phase - Pictures provided).

At this stage, one member of the group of campaigners became frustrated that I was not finding the evidence he required and which he believed was present, yet he could not provide any ethnographic or documentary evidence forward. He was focused on the recent discoveries at Tuam, believing that babies from Marionvale were buried in the same way in tunnels and sewers across the site.

[REDACTED]

At this point I discussed with the company representing [REDACTED] that perhaps in the best interests of the integrity of the research, it would be prudent for me to step away from the second phase of the site investigation and allow another archaeologist to officially conduct the research.

The area covered by the second phase on the investigation was in fact the best option for any potential burials, as it had a much better depth on soil extending eastwards towards the river. To this end, [REDACTED] (Archaeologist) was contracted to complete the work and subsequently submitted his report, that no evidence of burial had been found.

However, there was an area of interest close to the site to the south-east. An old, abandoned spade mill with a tall chimney, stone walls and most importantly, an earth

floor inside the building which would have been ideal for shallow infant burials. This location had a strong sense of liminality and monumentality within the landscape, making it a contender for the establishment for a 'Cillín'(Children's Graveyard) by the local population, a site which could have been utilised by the convent for any babies either miscarried or stillborn and returned to the convent for burial. I would stress at this point that there would have been no criminality attached with this type of burial, it was a well established cultural practice within Irish folklore tradition.

It is perfectly feasible that babies who died at Daisy Hill Hospital and were handed back to the convent, could have been interred at such a location. The mill's proximity to the convent which would have been viewed as 'Sacred Ground' further highlighted its potential as a possible burial ground for babies. This building however, was not part of the Marionvale site. During my investigation I did access the building and was promptly informed by the woman living in the house beside it, that this was private land and to leave. I could not investigate this location further.

The main factor for no evidence of infant burial at Marionvale, was that the home was not established until the 1950's, by which time in Northern Ireland maternity services had been conducted at local hospitals from 1948, so it is likely that Marionvale never would have had a maternity unit. I believe that the babies we are looking for may well have been born at, and buried by Daisy Hill Hospital. All local hospital authorities in Northern Ireland had their own graves in local cemeteries for this purpose.

The hospital records for Marionvale at Daisy Hill are known as the [REDACTED] While I could not access these to complete the research, I did inform the Commission of this earlier this year. Carrickcruppen Cemetery also has a large multiple grave in the name of the convent and had a baptism register for babies born through Marionvale which does record some instances of death, however the records possible held by Daisy Hill Hospital could hold the information needed and remove any ambiguity for the survivors and family members as to where any babies who died are buried.

As far as the redevelopment of the Marionvale site is concerned, I visited the site in 2024 and there was yet another team of archaeologists conducting a 'Watching Brief' for the current development. I personally recommended a geophysics survey for part of the site, but the church would not agree because it was expensive. I would point out that the presence of an electrical station and overhead cables, coupled with the extensive disturbance of the site, would have interfered with the effectiveness of the survey, nevertheless, I always caution the '*Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence*' and any contractor needs to be informed of the potential for shallow burials as their work progresses.

In my opinion, any redevelopment should be halted until the missing information with regard to the Daisy Hill records and those held by Carrickcruppen are examined further.

It is also worth mentioning that the Baptism Book for Marionvale mentioned to the Commission is apparently no longer available to them (However I do have a copy).

I am attaching a number of photographs of the work at Marionvale conducted by myself, my team, and [REDACTED] If you need any further clarification on any aspect of this site, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

(Archaeologist/Anthropologist)

The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, Article 82

**Consent to carry out Excavations near a road**

**Applicant's details**

Consent No. **5987**  
Receipt No. **941665**

Name

Address

Postcode

Associated Planning Application Ref. No.

The Department for Regional Development (hereinafter called "the Department") **HEREBY GRANTS THIS CONSENT** under the provisions of Article 82 of the Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993 in accordance with your application for a consent to carry out excavations near a road in accordance with Drawing No. [redacted] issued with the Department's Road Service

at **123 Old Armagh Road @ Cuan Mhuire**  
The CONSENT relates to **Test trench at front wall**

in the position indicated on the said Drawing No.

**Failure to comply with any of the following conditions is an offence under Article 82 and the offender is liable on summary conviction to a fine.**

The Consent is given subject to the following conditions.

**Conditions of Consent**

1. **Period**  
The works shall be completed within a period of months from the date of the Consent. **(Six months)**
2. **Execution** The works shall be executed in accordance with these conditions, specification and Drawing No. attached hereto.
3. **Safety and Delays**  
In carrying out the approved work no unnecessary obstruction or delay shall be caused to traffic, either vehicular or pedestrian using the Public Road. You shall pay due regard to the safety and control of all Public Road users and the additional particular needs of disabled and visually impaired persons.  
**Traffic Signs**  
Where appropriate to the safety and convenience of traffic using the road all obstructions and excavations shall be marked, signed and guarded and during the hours of darkness shall be lighted and guarded throughout the duration of the works in accordance with HMSO publication Traffic Signs Manual Chapter 8 "Traffic Safety Measures for Road Works".
5. **Barriers**  
No excavation shall be carried out or materials deposited on the road before the site has been adequately protected with signs and barriers as required by the said Traffic Signs Manual and by hoardings where necessary.
6. **Protection of existing surfaces**  
All necessary steps shall be taken to ensure that no unnecessary damage is caused to the carriageway, kerbstones or footways either by you or any other person, and if such damage does occur you shall be liable for the cost of the reinstatement.

PTO

Design Group 8/97



**7. Cash Deposit**

You shall lodge with the Department the sum of £200 - deposit prior to the work commencing, as security for the completion of the excavation to which the consent relates and of any works which are required by any condition subject to which the consent is given.

**8. Additional Costs**

You shall be liable to pay any additional costs as may be incurred by the Department over and above the amount of the deposit in carrying out such works as are necessary to obviate any danger to persons using the road.

**9. Maintenance**

You shall maintain the works in a safe and satisfactory condition until such time as you shall receive from the Department a Certificate of Satisfactory Completion and refund of any monies which may be due to you.

**10. Indemnity**

You shall indemnify the Department against any claim in respect of injury, damage or loss arising out of the carrying out of the works, other than a claim in respect of injury, damage or loss which is attributable to the negligence of the Department.

**11. Insurances**

a. Without prejudice to your liability to indemnify the Department under Condition 10 you shall maintain such insurances as are necessary to cover your liability in respect of injury, damage or loss arising out of :-

- (1) the carrying out by any person of the works authorised by this consent;
- (2) the presence of the excavation to which this consent relates.

b. As and when you are reasonably required so to do by the Department you shall produce for inspection by the Department documentary evidence that the insurances required by Condition 11 a. are properly maintained and on any occasion the Department may require to have produced for inspection the policy or policies and premium receipts in question.

c. The insurance cover shall not be less than £5,000,000 for any one occurrence or series of occurrences arising out of one event.

**12. Loading and Unloading**

Adequate accommodation adjoining the road shall be provided for vehicles waiting to load and unload or otherwise using the road in connection with the alteration and which might otherwise obstruct road traffic.

**13. Notification of Completion**

On completion of the work you shall notify the Section Engineer at the address shown below by sending to him the Restoration Order attached.

Any person aggrieved by any of the above conditions may within 21 days of receiving this consent, appeal to the Planning Appeals Commission by notice in writing under Article 84 (1) of the Roads (NI) Order 1993.

The above conditions are without prejudice to the obligations imposed by Article 82 of the Roads (NI) Order 1993 on applicants or any right or remedy which the Department may now or hereafter possess.

Name and Address of  
Divisional Headquarters / Section Office

Dated this 8<sup>th</sup> day of March 2017

Signed

(Authorised Officer)

DEPT. FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
ROADS SERVICE - SOUTHERN DIV.  
NEWRY SECTION OFFICE  
1 CECIL STREET  
NEWRY  
BT35 6AU  
Tele: 02830 253333

The Roads (Northern Ireland) Order 1993, Article 72

Application for Consent to erect scaffolding,  
hoardings, etc on a Road

● Please read the notes overleaf before completing this form

Applicant's details

Name .....

Address .....

Telephone No. ....

Agent's details

Name .....

Address .....

Postcode .....

Telephone No. ....

Location of proposed works

139-123 Old Armagh Road @ Cuan Mhuire

Brief details of proposed works

E Digging into verge, Test trench/Pit x2  
to identify a feature at front wall

Proposed date to commence installation of works .....

8/3/17

Time required to install .....

1 day

Proposed date for removal of works .....

Time required to remove .....

Ref. No. of attached drawing (2 copies) .....

Additional comments

I hereby apply for a licence to carry out the above works.

Date .....

8/03/17

an Organisation or Company

Archaeologist

ARCHAEOLOGIST

Design Group 8/97

Department for Regional Development

Official Receipt

Name and Address of Office DEL Nenuy Section Office

Received from [REDACTED]

the sum of (including VAT) Two hundred

£ 200

**p**

pounds only

by (tick appropriate box)

Cheque ☐

Postal Order ☐

Cash ☒

in respect of

digging Vege/ Test trench @ 'Cuan Mhuire' Armagh Rd

Amount of VAT included

£ Nil

**p**

Signature

R Kane

Date

8/3/17

VAT REGISTRATION NO. GD080





The demolished pig-pens were scattered across the area of potential infant burial at Marian vale This. Material had to be carefully removed under constant supervision.



**Watching brief.** The excavation work must meticulously remove small layers of soil to check for both cross-cutting of the land by a grave or any evidence of human skeletal remains.





Clearance for testing of the image above - Note an archaeologist was constantly walking with the digger.



The underlying geology of the Marian vale site, there was no more than 20cm of soil over solid rock.- Burial was not possible.



On 13 Jun 2024, at 00:33, [REDACTED] wrote:

<Report for the Commonwealth Graves Commission 2012.docx>



**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 17 November 2025 11:38  
**Subject:** Marionvale Mother and Baby Home Response



Geology of Marionvale Phase One





Geology of Marionvale Phase one



My team marking out a grid for testing in the garden of Marionvale





Marionvale grave at Carrickcruppen Cemetery





New wall and entrance around the post-Mother and Baby cemetery for Marionvale.



The abandoned Spade Mill close to Marionvale Site





We tested the grass verge outside the boundary wall. We had found wood under the surface and applied for a permit to excavate this location. The wood was a railway sleeper from when the train ran across the front of the site.

This is an account from a mother who had her baby in Marionvale in 1983. Please treat this account as confidential and for the eyes of the Executive Committee only.



Investigative Meeting with

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

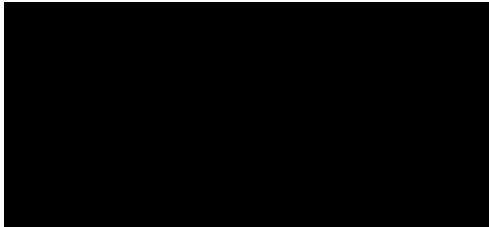
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

**Committee for the Executive Office**



14 November 2025

Dear 

**Marianvale site redevelopment**

At its meeting on Wednesday 12 November 2025, the Committee for The Executive Office considered correspondence and photographs received from an individual regarding the graveyard at the Marianvale site and the demolition of the building.

Previously, at its meeting on Wednesday 22 October 2025, the Committee wrote to the Department to ask officials within the Truth Recovery Team what engagement or discussions have taken place in relation to the Marianvale site, and whether any plans exist for potential memorialisation. The Committee is currently awaiting a response from the Department.

The Committee also wrote to Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to ask whether it has received any briefings on the Marianvale site and to ask whether the Council have conducted any surveys on the site. Again, the Committee is currently awaiting a response from the Council.

After considering the individual's correspondence at our most recent meeting, the Committee agreed to write to yourselves, having previously attended the Committee on 19 June 2024 in relation to the disposal of bodies from mother

**Committee for the Executive Office**

**Room 247, Parliament Buildings, Ballymiscaw, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3XX**

**Telephone: (028) 9052 1928**

**E-mail: [Committee.Executive@niassembly.gov.uk](mailto:Committee.Executive@niassembly.gov.uk)**



and baby institutions, to seek your views on the redevelopment of the Marianvale site.

I would appreciate a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

**Nick Mitford**  
**Clerk Committee for the Executive Office**