Medieval remains find halts work on Castle walkway

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Work on a new pedestrian walkway linking the river to King John's Castle was this week halted for several days following the discovery of ancient human remains.

Contractors employed by Limerick City Council discovered human and animal bones while they were removing a wall at the Widows' Alms houses on Nicholas Street, which date back to around 1690.

According to archaeologists the skeletal remains included a number of skulls and arm and leg bones and could date back to either the 1300s or 1800s.

Frank Coyne of Aegis Archaeology told the Limerick Post: "The bones could date from any time from the 1800s to medieval times. It's highly possible that they're from some time around the 1800s as they're buried quite high."

Mr Coyne said it will be some weeks before radio-carbon dating can determine the true age of the remains.

He continued: "Right beside the site is where the graveyard of St Nicholas parish church would have been. We found some stray bones, a lot of them were animal bones but we also found what we call disarticulated bones which are not attached to a skeleton."

Mr Coyne added: "There are about six skeletons there. If we searched deeper we would surely find more. The general policy, known as preservation in situ, is to leave the remains in the ground and disturb them as little as possible. We don't want to leave them exposed for too long."

It is expected that work on the site will resume this week, supervised by osteo-archaeologist Linda Lynch from Glin.

Limerick City Council administrative officer Mary Hayes said that the National Monument section of the Department of the Environment had advised that the wall was not the original structure built before the Siege of Limerick and that it was only reconstructed in the 1970s or 80s.

She added that the discovery "should contribute to the archaeological assessment that is currently underway in King's Island as part of a developmental archaeological strategy for the area".

Ms Hayes said the purpose of the strategy is to take "a holistic view" regarding the redevelopment of the King's Island area from an archaeological perspective.

A number of traders in Nicholas Street had expressed their objection to the new walkway as they believe it would draw potential passing trade away from their businesses.

Members of the public were also concerned regarding what they saw as the demolition of an historic medieval structure.