County graveyards project uncovering buried history

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A HISTORIC graveyards survey is underway in West Limerick with work already completed by trained volunteers in Abbeyfeale, Adare, Ardagh, Askeaton, Broadford, Castlemahon, Feenagh, Knockaderry, Rathkeale and Shanagolden.

According to West Limerick Resources (WLR) project officer Suzanne Rowley, the work completed to date is only "the tip of the iceberg".

"This is slow, detailed work and we have completed 12 graveyards with the details fully uploaded on the historicgraves.com website. Work continues at a further 12 graveyards and we hope that these results will be fully uploaded by early Spring. From there, we plan to work with local volunteers to carry out surveys at other local graveyards.

"It took a lot of time to ensure the surveys are complete and accurate. It is essential work as important genealogical and local history information is gradually being lost as gravestone inscriptions fade over time.

"Over the past two years, WLR has run a variety of heritage related training initiatives and our next step is to develop a local heritage

Trained volunteers helping to preserve a vanishing historical resource by recording details of tombstones and memorials

network that can help drive activities forward", Ms Rowley explained.

Eachtra Archaeological Projects are also involved in the project and progress was outlined at a seminar in Newcastle West which highlighted some of the more interesting headstones, iconography and stories which had been identified to date.

Volunteer trainer John Tierney hopes that the surveys will not only record inscriptions on headstones, but also the stories behind the craftspeople who created the headstones and the life stories of those buried there.

The dedication of volunteers working on the project has been

acknowledged by WLR as has the contribution of Michael Quille, a Heritage Project Support worker under the TUS work placement scheme who has helped out with surveys in communities and transcribing records to the historical graves website.