

Lord Waterford visits remains of Leper Hospital



Dermot Power, Lord Waterford and Michael O'Sullivan.

Paul Dower reports

Since March of this year the Waterford Civic Trust has taken on the project of cleaning up and investigating the "Leper Hospital" and St Stephen's Church at Stephens Street in the city. With help from volunteers and the Waterford History Group the whole site was cleaned up by removing years of growth such as briars and weeds from the whole site. Great care is being taken to conserve the Leper Hospital site while undertaking a programme of defoliation. Advice and support has been provided by a Horticulturalist, Archaeologist, Architect and Master Stonemason.

History abounds on the site and as the story goes the site dates back to King John and 13th century with a date of 1632 found to tell us that the present buildings date back to this time. From the records it was found that the last leper in Ireland was here in Waterford and is probably buried in the graveyard of the church. One of the benefactors of the Leper Hospital was Lord Waterford or Lord Tyrone and he was also known, who donated over £3,000 back in 1745. A lot of money for the time! It was at this time and the period up to 1788 that the hospital was known as Lord Tyrone Infirmary.

Nearly 300 years later the current Lord Waterford, Henry Nicholas de la Poer Beresford, the 9th Marquis of Waterford, visited the site through an invitation from the group of volunteers.

Dermot Power one of the volunteers and local historian said: "It's so important to embrace our history and we have so much here in Waterford. We were delighted to have Lord Waterford here with us today, how often can you invite a family member nearly 300 years after their family made such a huge contribution to the people of Waterford? This is living history and we are part of it". He continued: "All the work being carried out here is done so by volunteers and we are all passionate about our history. We are after compiling so many stories and unearthing so many fact about a time long forgotten. We have to remember we live in a city that is a living breathing thing and it's something that has been growing and evolving for well over a 1,000 years. We are simply telling that story."

We all know that Waterford is full of history and there are so many people involved in research and preserving our heritage. It is this involvement that is unearthing long lost fact and stories that are an integral part of our history and culture. It is so important that we retain and embrace our history and indeed it is up to all of us to make sure that we take pride in this preservation for generations to come.