

The Cill and the Cluain in Cork

Cill (Kil, Kill, Keel) as a place name element in Ireland usually refers to a cell, a religious person's cell most often. Cluain refers to a meadow though meadows are often the site of a religious cell be it that of a solitary, a hermitage group or a great monastic foundation in the Celtic style such as Clonmacnoise. In Irish place names its anglicised form creates word elements such as Clon, Cloon, Cloyne.

Bearing in mind the reference in early Irish literature to 'Eithne, her cell, her cluain' (Todd 1868,48) I examined a townland list for County Cork to see if there was any evidence for cill townlands bordering cluain townlands. The results of this exercise are below. The exercise was not comprehensive. It was just a method of sampling to see if a bordering relationship existed or had survived from earlier times. It is important to bear in mind that townlands once consisted of smaller named units and that what came to be the name of a townland, as we know it today, may have been a random choice from several smaller unit names. An example would be Kilnacluanna (Cill na Cluaine) in Aghlish Civil Parish by the River Lee in Cork. The townland Ballineadig had a subdivision in the 17th century which was called Kilnacluanna. It is shown on the Downe Survey map of the locality.

According to tradition Kilnacluanna was where Saint Finnbar, Cork's patron saint died and from whence his body was brought to his Cork (city) monastery at Gill Abbey for burial by a great funeral procession circa 620 AD. At his death-bed Finnbar was attended to by his old friend Fiama (Bolster1972,19) of Desertmore i.e the big desert. Desertmore parish borders Aghlish parish on its south east side and stretched into the Bishopstown boglands.

The word desert refers to the origins of early Christian monasticism in the Egyptian, Syrian and Palestinian deserts and to the lives of the early saints (the Desert Fathers and Mothers).

Saint John Cassian (360 - 435 AD) brought Egyptian style monasticism to Western Europe (south east France) and the concept of a desert i.e. wilderness in the eastern tradition became that of a 'green desert' in the West. A green desert could be a rough patch of land, a thorny place, a fenland, bog or marsh, a high place in a mountain landscape, an island. To such places followers of early Christianity retreated; some remaining solitary, others becoming hermitages and monasteries. Skelig Michael or Church Island off the County Kerry coastline come to mind among many others. One should bear in mind that the earliest form of monastery was a single monk and his 'cell' habitation (Chitty 1966, 53). Cluain seems to refer to a community group such as a hermitage or community version of a monastery whereas desert seems to refer to a place of solitary ascetics i.e. the 'third order' of monastic life.

If a geography of South Munster's cills and cluains could be determined it would be interesting to know what density of souterrains lies in their vicinities. But this is a difficult question to ask in so far as we do not know how many souterrains lie beneath the South Munster landscape. All we know are those which have been found largely by accident. One example of a souterrain connected to a desert place name which I surveyed at one time is at Caherdesert (the caher - meaning an enclosure, of the desert place) near Rathcormac in north east Cork. An example of a souterrain connected to a cluain was found at Cloonkirgeen in north west Cork (Twohig 1976, 28-31).

Some other Cork Cluain townlands - and an example of a parish, which have produced souterrains

Townland	Placename meaning	Civil Parish	Placename meaning
Brackcloon	Speckled Cluain	Kilnamanagh	Cell of the Monks
Cloan	Cluain	Kilnamanagh	Cell of the Monks
Clondrohid	Cluain by the Bridge	Clondrohid	Cluain by the Bridge
Clonfadda	Long Cluain	Clondrohid	Cluain of the Bridge
Clonleigh	The Grey Cluain	Kinsale	Chorráin Headland
Clonmoyle	Abandoned Cluain	Aghabulloge	Field of the Bullóge
Clonmoyle	Abandoned Cluain	Kilmichael	Michael's Cell
Clonpriest Parish at Ballykilty townland i.e. homeplace of the cell house.	Cluain of the pruchóg i.e. a hole or hovel? At the hompleace of the cell house (cill tí).	Clonpriest	Cluain Pruachais
Cloonmore	Big Cluain	Shandrum	Old Ridge
Cloyne	Cluain	Cloyne	Cluain

Townland name replications across monastic and secular demesnes

It is also worth noting that some baronies in Cork may contain parish and town land names which are the same or sound the same. I think that this is because some functional land unit names were replicated across independent monastic demesnes.

It is unfortunate that a comprehensive listing of all town land sub-denomination names are not on record and that such a list was not made and locations recorded during the 19th century Ordnance Survey of Ireland when the town land became the smallest administrative land division in Ireland.

The survey

Eighteen Cork baronies were chosen as 5 others did not appear, after a cursory glance, to have any relevant information. Further enquiry may contradict this. In defining barony divisions into East, West, East Division, West Division were accepted rather than regarding for example Carberry as just one barony rather than 4 unit areas. Muskerry divides into east and West. However in the case of townland names divisions such as Esat, West, Upper, Lower, Beg and More were ignored on the assumption that they are divisions of a single place name.

44 % out of a total of 51 **Cill** townland names have a border with a **Cluain** townland. 18 % of these have more than one cill bordering the cluain. So what did Cill na Cluanna (cell of the Cluains) mean is an interesting question. Were the **cluains** 'of the cell' or were the **cells** 'of the cluain'?