

Using the *Folach* word as a descriptive term for a souterrain 'house' in County Kerry

In his *The Dictionary of Hiberno-Irish* [published by Gill Books, Dublin, 2020] Dr. Terence Patrick Dolan gives the entry (page 101):

folachán meaning a covering, a place of concealment. From a source in County Kerry he has the use of the word **folachán** to mean **a hidden house under a fence** i.e. 'they lived in a little **folachán** - you'd never see it from the road'.

1. Fr. Dinneen's *Irish-English Dictionary* [*Fólóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla*]. Irish Texts Society, Dublin... reprint 1996 Eo Press, Dublin:

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Folach meaning act of hiding, covering, concealed, to hide myself, latent hidden powers, maintenance, support, 'sick or wounded maintenance' (?), 'developing on the one causing the wound or his tribe' (?), hiding or hiding place, a secret treasure, a cache...

Dinneen also has the word **Folachas** (plural **Folachais**) used for a 'hiding place'.

Should the word **Folachas** or **Folachán** be used as the term in the Irish Language (Gaelige) for the French word Souterrain? If so, what would be the difference between a Folachán and a Bothán? Does it mean one (**Folachán**) is under ground while the other (**Bothán**) is above ground?

Has treasure been found in Irish souterrains? Yes, if you regard a hoard of Anglo-Saxon coins from a souterrain at Castlefreke, County Cork (see McCarthy and Dolley 1977) as treasure and if you bear in mind that depositing valuables including coins in the custody of anchorites for safety in the absence of a banking system was a common practice in Medieval times in Europe. Also Vikings buried their coinage in the ground.

What might be the etymology of Folachán...**fo** from Gaelic (Irish) word **foth** meaning under or beneath...**Lachán** from **Leacht** meaning a capstone or flagstone...????

The original entrances to some souterrains, especially tunnelled souterrains in rock or clay, found in South Munster were closed off at some point in time using a flagstone or capstone. Was the use of the flagstone an act of closing the souterrain entrance permanently and thus covering it with soil to conceal it or was it just a common way of closing the souterrain when it was in use to prevent intruder either human or animal or when the persons using it were temporarily away from the locality for a period of time? An example, among several instances, of the use of such a flagstone was discovered by antiquarian R.R. Brash in the 19th century in Currahaly townland on the opposite bank of the Bride River from Kilcrea monastery in Muskerry, Cork.

In the Gaelic language of Cornwall the word **Fogou** is the traditional word used for souterrains; which are associated with surface structures. What was its etymology? **Fo** from **foth** in Gaelic meaning under or beneath? **Hou** (Anglo-Saxon???) or pronounced as **Gou** in Cornish Gaelic????...from a word like **hous** as pronounced in Scottish Gaelic? If the derivation of **Fogou** as a folk term for a souterrain in Cornish Gaelic, did the term mean, and refer to, an '**under the house**' structure e.g. a cellar beneath a house, or did it refer to an '**underground house**' structure e.g. some form of below habitation for man or beast?

If so what was the 'beehive chamber and passage' at Carn Euny used for, compared with the very different architectural structure at Trellewarren? Were these different architectural structures used for different purposes? In Cork, Ireland there are souterrains whose architectural form is somewhat close to Trellewarren and there are also souterrain architectural forms which are of the 'beehive and passage' type? If Cornwall was a 'way station' for marine traffic in Iron Age times then did early Christianity travel from the Mediterranean or Continental Europe via Gaul e.g. Bordeaux region? Bay of Biscay? to the Irish South Munster coastline via Cornwall? If so how long in time were such sea routes in

use? Did they remain in use through the Pirate Round years of the 16th and 17th centuries leading onwards to the Barbary coast each year where Irish, Welsh, English and Cornish pirate ships roamed and wintered?

In relation to the Irish (Gaeilge) word **folachán** was there an equivalent word in the language of the traditional Traveller People (Travelling People) of Ireland of whom recent DNA research suggests are some of the oldest genetic inhabitants of the country? Their language, a secret language, is called **Shelta** or the **Gammon**...see R.A.S. Macalister's *The Secret Languages of Ireland*, Cambridge University Press 1937. Up to to the 20th century, when seasonally 'on the road', going along and camping beside the roads (**bothair**) and laneways (**bothairini**) of Ireland each year in their brightly coloured 'caravans', was there a traditional route and a set of destinations e.g. fairs and festivals, a 'progress', and were there traditional places of discrete temporary settlement along such routes? If yes, then how old was this practice and how ancient its language and customs, how sub-surface within local folk memory, how hidden in plain sight?

2. Tomás De Bhaldraithe's English-Irish Dictionary. An Gúm, Dublin, 1987:

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Cuirim i bhfolach meaning I concealed...

Folachán would seem to be a derivative of **Folach** and used as a way of referring to something which is either hidden from view or hidden for other reasons.

How illogical is the idea, when expressed in English, of a 'hidden house beneath a fence' ? Is it as illogical as the idea of a tower under the ground (**túr faoi talamh** a term found in Dinneen's dictionary)?

In the case of a 'hidden house under a fence' this makes no sense. But, if the 'house' in question was a certain type of Irish souterrain i.e. a **Tig Faoi Talamh** (meaning house under the ground in Gaelic) it makes perfect sense.

Is there any evidence in the Irish archaeological record for a house under a 'fence' ? Yes, there is. A prime example is the Curraghcrowley souterrain, in West Cork [see the Somerville excavation report for this site at corkhist.ie

Souterrains of the **Tig Faoi Talamh** type (my C3 type) are also found in circular enclosures such as ringforts (*Lios, Rath or Dún*) where some are entered from the base of the inner bank of the ringfort while others run out under the bank and ditch of the ringfort.

In Ireland the English word '**Fence**' can refer to a field fence/ boundary fence which can consist of 'a bank and the ditch from it is made', a drystone built field boundary, an earthen fence with dry masonry faced with masonry or just an earthen fence on its own. Also in Ireland use of the word 'ditch' commonly / often refers to the bank created by digging a ditch (trench) rather than referring to the trench from which the ditch is made. Ringfort enclosures can be either earthworks consisting of a roughly circular bank and ditch, or they can be drystone built or combinations of both techniques.