

(1)

The Oldcouth Handbell: Some thoughts.

A penitential bell (clogh) ringing in
a loo in an underground cell... prayer pit.
Daily prayer and penance at Oldcouth by
Skiberken, a deep water quay side... cargo's
ships unloaded...

- Other side of the river, of currents, a monastery
of learning, of knowledge, of persons of knowing,
of an earlier foundation perhaps... Abbeystrawry.
- In later times penitential becomes purgatorial
and a handbell keeps ringing in a 'cave'
... Deus meus... at Oldcouth closed to the sea's river,
... opening to small islands where 'saints' live.
- A wind upon the sea breaths roughly tonight
as the tide by the quay rises high, and I
gaze into darkness, dim candle light from a
scribe's window close by at the corner of my
eye... outwards towards the open sea being
mindfull of the collapse of Rome's antiquity.

(2)

- Castlehaven Civil Parish: originally Gleann Bearchain i.e. Berrehan's glen. A coastal location. On a ridge overlooking the bay is Knockdrum a stone Caher with a souterrain and a rectangular floor space connected to it. A cross carved slab at the entrance to the Caher (Caher). Was this site a hermitage / small monastery beside a sea cave? Knockdrum excavated by a member of Somerville family.
- The Saint of the Castlehaven Bay district:

Bearchain ... a hermit but was he alone or
affiliated a group of six?

Local tradition had it that he came from
Spain (O'Riain's Dictionary of Irish Saints
p. 96)

His holy well close to Castletownsend House.
Was Bearchain connected with the Caher at
Knockdrum?

* See Don Dorovay's Sketches in Caher
for an account of this excavation during the
19th century.

The Broader Context of the Archaeology of a Souterrain:

Castlehaven civil (medieval) parish is abutted by Creeagh parish, Caheragh parish and Abbeystrawry parish. Creeagh and Abbeystrawry are part of Skibereen town. The river Glen flows to the sea via the town and at its outer limits the river has a deep water quay at Oldcourt. In a ring fort in this townland an earthen souterrain of unusual design had a handbell wrapped in woss beneath a flagstone in the cell chamber of the souterrain. This ring fort and souterrain were excavated in the mid 20th century [see JCHAS report].

• Castlehaven parish abuts Killyacabee (cell of the Macabee?) parish.

• This locality is dominated on its coastal side by small islands and coves as well as the great island-laden stretch of Roanmpointer Bay; once a haven for many a pirate during their annual 'Round'.

• Abbeystrawry lies on the opposite side of the river from Oldcourt Quay? What was the origin of the abbey? Did it develop from or occupy the site of a much earlier monastic presence as happened at Timoleague (House of St. Molagga) east along the coastline? In Irish Abbeystrawry is Maínecht na Southrach (monastery of the Currents, River?? See Fr. Dinneen!)

(4)

It is interesting to note in the context of place naming and ecclesiastical associations the following words in these parishes:

Castlehaven has Knockdrum plus

Killangal and Killadomy. How close are their cell (mill) named townlands to the Knockdrum corner? This parish also has a drishane (thorny place) and some 'gorts' (orchard or garden places). There are some small islands as the locality is coastal... early yonastries liked this either by the sea or in boglands.

Creagh has a drishaneyone, a Knockataggart (Cnoc an Saorait the priest(s)/monks(?) hill) as well as some gorts and islands.

Abbeysteady has a dangan [a ruffit with souterrains and cellars, a strong safe storage place with multiple ramparts?? Like Ballycraheen?]

a drishane, a feran gort, lisheens, a Tooreen, a mill, a cúile, a 'gerane, and a Kilnaclasha (all of the ramparts/ditches).

Saint Barrahanne (Saint Bearcháin) - of the ship-haven cove of Castlehaven (Castletownsend), a cove opening to the Atlantic Sea looking south to Biscay Bay - was 'of Spain' , some would say?

711 AD North African and Berber Moors invade Hispania and conquer a very large portion of this landscape. They remain in control up to the 1492 AD. How did early Spanish monasticism respond during this time and how accommodating was Muslim Spain towards Christianity and Judaism? How great was its learning - its schools and its intellectualism, its scholars, its libraries and its silver tongued poets -, its trade in the Atlantic Sea province (e.g. in post- medieval times Spanish merchant ships by Timoleague Abbey), and its open-ness to South Munster's traditional Gaelic society / world of pre-12th century, pre-16th century and monastic dissolution, and subsequently pre- 17th century South Munster?

9th Century Benedictine monastery of **San Salvador of LEYRE** (lyre, lyra?) ...Navarre, Pamplona...Spain's northern coastline and Biscay Bay...annual French lobster fishermen off the Sheep's Head peninsula waving to the **Cailíní** along the shoreline...**Corcú Laoidhe** tribe of West Cork and South Kerry...*lyre, lyra* place-naming in **Corcú Laoidhe** lands...Did any influences cultural, economic, literary (e.g a conference / colloquy of birds), from Moorish Spain follow maritime connections between Biscay Bay, the **Corcú Laoidhe** or any other South Munster coastal tribeland (**Déise?**); its sons and daughters seeking learning in Francia (Merovingian, Carolingian) and elsewhere ?

How strong and influential was the Rule of Saint Benedict and a Benedictine presence in the South Munster of Hiberno-Christian times...what students, teachers, pilgrims, travellers, merchants and artisans as well as monks and clerics travelled to the coastal demesne lands of its great monasteries and their schools? How many remained at secluded coves developing a Christian presence and community for the rest of their days? How many returned to their lands of origin or went to do their work at the palaces and courts of princes in Western Europe? How many were princes of such houses? What relationships if any existed between Irish monastic houses and such royal houses of Europe?

