

Some Rambling Thoughts about the Old Head of Kinsale

Kinsale is a coastal town, an ancient port where the River Bandon, one of the principal rivers of South Munster, meets the sea. The Old Head peninsula is a long strip of landscape projecting southwards into the Atlantic Sea and it is situated on the western side of Kinsale harbour. It is a feature of the southern coastline of the Irish landscape which was known to geographers and navigators in early times and it was noted in a geographical 'atlas' compiled at the great library of Alexandria in ancient Egypt by the Geographer Ptolemy, somewhere circa the year 140 AD; though, if the date for Ptolemy's death is circa 120 AD then it's information content must be earlier, dating perhaps to a time when the late 1st to 2nd century AD Roman historian Tacitus wrote that the ports of Ireland and their approaches were well known to navigators.

His information may have come from his father-in-law Julius Agricola a Roman general who lived in the 1st century AD and who was a major figure in the Roman conquest of Britain. Prior to arriving in Britain he was for a short time based in Roman **Gallia Aquitania** by Biscay Bay; its south west part becoming known as Gascony in later times. He was also someone who had an Irish refugee prince in his company and who boasted that he could conquer Ireland with one legion, and some auxiliaries, if he was to do so.

One might ask who such 'auxiliaries' might have been and if they could have been romanised native Irish, mercenaries or coastal settlers connected to sea trade networks within the Roman world - networks either in Britain or Biscay Bay or both? Was there any form of client relationship, or something even less formal, between the Roman world of Britannia, or Biscay Bay, and the *Corca Laoidhe*, or a branch of them located at the Old Head of Kinsale? They were a tribe, but does that mean that all branches and clans within them favoured or engaged in trade with the world of Rome? Had the Old Head something in common with what has been discovered at Drumanagh by the seacoast in County Dublin i.e. a promontory / headland in the vicinity of Lambay Island.

Significant Roman artefacts have been found at Drumanagh and some view the site as having been an outpost, or a bridgehead, site of the

Roman world in Britannia, of either its military or commercial facets or both. Might the Old Head at Kinsale have been another, or similar, expression of a Roman presence on Irish shorelines facing the Roman world? Why does there appear to be a strong presence of headland names and promontory forts along the south coast and beyond as far as the south side of the Dingle Peninsula? Is this just a substance-less assumption, a naive observation, or is there a topographical rationale to support such an idea?

If there was a rationale to it then why significantly fortify these Irish coastlines / coastal headlands? Would such activity result from a desire to trade and therefore reflect the nature of sea routes and currents and harbour approaches; the rougher nature of the rest of the west coast being less favoured by navigators of the time? Or would it have to do with a response to agreements to allow a territorially defined and restricted presence for Roman Military and Naval activities, resulting in ongoing economic benefits to the local *Corca Laoidhe* aristocracy / elites?

If so was this a fluctuating scenario i.e. promontory fortifications which at one time can be just trade centres but becoming bridgeheads for invasion at other times; if and when deemed necessary as strategically fruitful to Roman administrative and commercial ambitions with consequent campaign investment? Would local administrations, either Roman or native Irish romanised, have supported an invasion, or partial one, to restore to his throne an exiled Gaelic lord favourable to Roman interests and familiar with their cultural, economic, political agendas, as well as their civilities and learning? If so would very early Christianity have found a foothold here, coming either as a cargo cult, or as the practices of some of the settled Roman traders, or an attraction to native Irish aristocratic children eager to follow new trends abroad?

If Agricola built promontory forts along the British coast for fear of raiding from Ireland, thereby building up large garrisons of troops on the west coast of Britain, was he strategically putting in place a defence system against Irish raiding or something more, or alternatively, an invasion force? Or, was it both, depending on further and more long term decision making as well as instructions from Rome? Was it a process which remained 'on pause' for a long time, until the rationale for it no longer made any sense? How large a threat existed from those who

were forced by Rome to leave their hereditary tribe-lands in Britain and went to Ireland either as 'rent tribes' or to join other branches of their own tribe e.g. Brigantes? How many did so? How many generations might it have taken before the desire to return and seek vengeance abated or was forgotten? What memories, what fears, among the Roman and Romanised populations of the wealthy cities, country villas, garrison towns and their vici, military outposts and coastal fortresses of Britannia, had the revolt of Boudica (*Bua Dica!*) left behind in local folklore and the legends of Roman Britons?

Agricola it is said claimed that he could conquer the island of Ireland with a single legion and some auxiliaries. How easy might this have been if there were already Roman garrisons, and strategically fortified, trading posts, interacting with supply routes to Britannia and Biscay Bay, defended coastal trading settlements frequently visited already by Roman naval vessels out of Britannia? Roman troops, or Roman veterans or Roman trained mercenaries or native Irish who had been in the armies or navies of Rome, how easy and how expensive would it have been to draw on them to assist an invasion if needed?

How might one compare a model (models?) encompassing the opportunism of corporate trade entities, the activities of investors, undertakers, settlers and soldiers during the Norman Invasion and Conquest in the 12th century or of the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland in the 17th century AD, with a model for a Roman conquest of Ireland in say the 1st, 2nd or 3rd century AD e.g. the legendary, or mythical, conquest of the southern half of Ireland by *Eoghan Mór*? How different, what similarities if any? What impact, if the momentum to continue to conquer to the end of the western world had not been 'put on pause' leaving emerging circumstances to consign it to becoming a prospect which never materialised, and so, one which gradually faded away?

Some historians will quote an early Irish story about a first century AD exiled prince who was intended to become a High King of Ireland. He was named *Túathal Techtmar* and in his later years he returned to Ireland from Roman Britain leading an army to claim his throne, some say. There are other stories of similar events in these early centuries AD and there is also a story from the genealogies of the *Corca (Corcú) Laoidhe* tribe of West Cork, and into the Iveragh peninsula, which while not referring to an exiled prince does speak of a hostage of their people

being given to some merchants, wine traders perhaps, who brought him back to an area of Roman France on the Bay of Biscay; as a consequence of which, on his return home, he was later known among them as the Gascon. This points to him being held hostage by merchants from the Roman world, in lieu of payment for goods exported, spending perhaps a number of years in Gascony, during which time he learned much about viticulture; viticulture and some such wine to travel in amphorae to Ireland perhaps...and in *Uí Eithirsceol* ships?

This story points to maritime trade and interpersonal connections at this time. How frequent the trade with Biscay Bay and with Roman Britannia, and what coastal trading stations and settlement activity might have been needed; social and structural activities in the landscape coming into being as required, as local wealth was generated, as cultural influences from abroad, influences of many shades, shaped the ambience of daily life, influenced the configuration and built requirements of social activity there, dictated maritime shipping needs such as timber wharfs, jetties or masonry built piers to load and off-load goods, what protected precincts were important to shelter the participants in such places of commerce, what administration and by whom within the protected boundaries of such precincts, what local tax / prisage was charged for docking and importing, what tribute was required for a local lord, from what foreign ports did trade come, what military style security manned the boundaries on sea and land, and from whence did they come, and where trained, what inland route-ways were constructed for goods to ferry to and fro, and to where and why, for whom?

If such a trading settlement came to be on a promontory stretching out into the sea, once known to Atlantic and Mediterranean navigators in the 1st century AD, then how might it have been referenced by the tribes of peoples further inland in Munster? Would they have interacted with it or would the tribal people of the *Fir Maighe*, the *Eoghanacht* and to an extent the *Muscraighe* have all focused instead on the Blackwater River exiting to the sea either at Youghal or Whiting Bay by Ardmore in *Déise* tribe-lands? Would the tribes / clans of north Waterford and south Kilkenny and south Tipperary as well as west Wexford have focussed on the River Suir exiting to the sea at Waterford harbour? If so, then was the story of the Old Head of Kinsale, in the late Iron Age, first to second centuries AD, a story of the *Corca Laoidhe* people and their particular

relationships with the Roman world in Biscay Bay, as well as in the Roman state of Britannia. In this context to what extent was the Old Head a bridgehead, culturally and commercially, and to what extent was it a place which needed to be well defended both on seaward and landward sides? To what extent was it a place apart from the landscape beyond the settlement? One thinks of the Portuguese, and subsequently Dutch, traders at Nagasaki, Japan, in the 16th to 17th centuries AD, being allowed to trade only if they remained on an offshore island; their presence not being permitted on the mainland.

Was the Old Head, and a certain amount of territory surrounding it, of a similar status; at least for a certain period in its Iron Age or early Christian history? If so what place-name or names would come to be attached to such a territory? Place-names tend to last through the centuries because they become points of reference in many contexts i.e. legal, textual, directional and cultural; even if the orthography and pronunciation of the names become corrupted, confused, poorly translated to another language, they are not totally lost to time.

The civil parish i.e. the old pre-Reformation parish, in which the Old Head of Kinsale is situated is known in its English translation as Rinn Roan or Ringrone (Ring is also an anglicisation of *Roinn*). *Rinn* is derived from the Gaelic word *Roinn* which means a territory. I do not think that Roan derives from a personal name such as *Ruáin* i.e. Saint *Ruadhán* (?) of, or the cult of, at, Kilroan parish in which Curtaparteen (*Cúirt an Phoirtín*) is situated; unless a pronunciation of, or, an 'it sounds like', interpretation of *Ruáin* replaced the word *Romháin* thereby attributing an association to a Saint, such an association having no historical substance to it? Would instances of such have been uncommon in the history of the hagiographical accounts of Irish saints?

Alternatively, was someone called *Ruáin* a 'mac', a spiritual 'son' of Patrick, assigned as presbyter to a *Domhnach* founded by Patrick on the Old Head before he left the locality to take his mission northwards in Munster; a *domhnach* built within the precincts of the promontory *dún*, a *dún* where perhaps the first Rome Christianised king of the *Corca Laoidhe* (or in Ireland?) resided; its presence replacing a preaching *lios* initially used by Patrick, situated outside the fortifications and beyond the *dún*?

Was it an early Christian community from here which sought a bishop from Rome rather than someone from another patriarchate in the eastern Mediterranean? Was it that they may not have wished to participate in the Christian traditions of *Ciarán* of Saighir i.e. the *Corca Laoidhe* of Cape Clear suggesting that *Ciarán* built the first church there, his mother being of a branch of the local *Corca Laoidhe*? And was *Declán* of the *Déise* people someone whose Christianity might also have been of a different origin compared to what was sought by those at the Old Head e.g. Byzantine, as reflected further along the west coast and on to Skeilig and the Dingle Peninsula?

Was Patrick his actual name, or was this name a title reflecting his position within the Roman social classes i.e. someone of the Patrician class, someone from a priestly family? When he left on his proselytising journey northwards into Irish pagan lands, to regional places of dense woodland, bog and mountains, where other creeds and religious practices held sway - some very old, some perhaps not unfamiliar as a consequence of Rome's experiences in other lands, to places where a predecessor may have been murdered, who went with him to provide protection for Patrick and his followers, and were these protectors of local or foreign origin?

I'm curious as to who, as a person, such a *Ruáin* might have been and if there is a hagiography for him (see *Ruadháin* in *O Riain* pp.541-43?). Perhaps this name was an attempt to impose or transpose, in Medieval or earlier hagiographies, a saint's name from elsewhere; or was it just co-incidence, sometime after the 12th century AD, based on what was originally the word *Romháin*; thereby erasing traces of a Roman presence and of Saint Patrick?

Was the civil parish of *Kilroan* (*Cill Ruáin* i.e. the cell of *Ruáin*), like Templetrine (Temple of the Trinity) parish, an insertion into what was once a large sweep of territory embedded in the surrounding lands beyond the Old Head and south of the lower reaches of the Bandon River; a territory known in centuries before as the *Roinn Romhánach* (or *Romháinach*) i.e. the territory of the Romans? Did these parishes originate as land parcels given by clan or tribal lords to an emerging church group to support its basic needs?

In such transfers, in the defining and naming of an area of land for the support of a church community as focal point, was a secular function already well established at *Cúirt an Phoirtín* (the port's court) and was this assigned as a specific role to be undertaken by the parish of Kilroan i.e. the collection of the port tax somewhere near the early medieval church there; this at a time when Christianity became dominant as the old world of Roman Britannia gradually faded away, daily commerce and economic activities once secular coming into the province of religious control? If so, then what was the rationale behind the creation of Templetrine as a parish area and why a Holy Trinity dedication; if I understand the place name correctly. Also, one thinks of old stories about Patrick teaching about the 'Trinity'?

As a comment, 'just in passing', considering a journey along the east cliff face of the Old Head peninsula, from *Cúirt an Phoirtín* to Hole Open Bay East, one is reminded of that account of frescoes noticed in a shed in 1887 AD, somewhere near the 'castle' (see piece re this in separate file on this website i.e. that above this one).

Roan, I am inclined to think at this point in time, may have been a contraction of the word *Romhan* i.e. the **MH** which is pronounced as **V** being lost due to a babble of many accents and voices down through the centuries since later Iron Age times. In Gaelic the word for Rome is *Roimh* and for a Roman it is *Romhánach* i.e. the '**ach**' indicating 'characteristic of' or 'coming from' Rome or the Roman world. So, did the meaning of Rinn Roan, as a place name, originate from *Roinn Romhain / Romhán* i.e. the 'territory' of the 'Romans'? If so, then does this place-name define a piece, or remnants, of a territory attached to a headland, one which was known to ancient geographers and mariners as far east as the Mediterranean world of Egyptian / Greek Alexandria in the 1st to 2nd centuries AD?

Roughly speaking, I wonder, did this civil parish stretch, or, might it have at one time stretched, from the eastern side of Kinsale Harbour and the Bandon River, westward toward Timoleague, passing by Ballycatten and Kilbrittain. Timoleague lies at the inner reaches of a large bay known as Courtmacsherry Bay? This bay forms the western side of the Old Head peninsula. A high arched sea tunnel links this side of the Old Head to that of the seascape on its eastern side; useful perhaps for lightering goods from a place of offloading and taxing of cargo from

large ships, a place of deeper water, somewhere by perhaps Sandy Cove and by Curtapurteen (*Cúirt an Puirtín* i.e. Court of the Little Port, a place of port tax and administration where a medieval church lies in ruins and what was those ruins, with a ground collapse beneath a foundation wall corner, in a wooded area between the holy well and the church ruin and graveyard area?)? Such goods and travellers, then brought in small boats southwards to Hole Open Bay East thereby avoid the alternative of rough winds, high seas and fog, of being blown off course and of being wrecked, in an attempt to round the tip of the Old Head by ship? There is a considerable corpus of information available on the subject of shipwrecks from the 18th through to the twentieth centuries AD being wrecked on the coastlines at either side of the Old Head; plus the mention of others from the 17th century. But what of ancient wrecks if this place was a place of much commerce and other connections with the Roman world?

When one considers the history of Ireland's appearance on maritime charts and maps, from the time of the Portuguese Portolan charts, one wonders as to how many unrecorded wrecks took place through the centuries before such charts and piloting sources were available, and subsequent to them due to inaccurate or incomplete information appearing on them or changes in the local environment e.g. wrecks as hazards within shipping lanes, what way-stations and way-markers, what local pilots in shore-line cabins, in shore-line hamlets, what beacon locations on headlands, what fishermen's lore remained for centuries in local folklores, how many of such early coastal piloting information sources gave a more in-depth insight into the older maritime history of the coastline, both its local and international shipping activities?

One wonders therefore if from the time of the Venetii and their ships, from that of Roman Britannia's merchant and naval shipping (Mason, 2003), and subsequently through to the opening years of the 17th century, if there were not many more such events which saw the loss of lives and cargoes; no record now existing or evident in the sands of time beneath the waves?

If one takes the generalised view that coastal promontory forts along the southern Irish coastline originated in Iron Age time (late Iron Age?) then what might the navigator out of Biscay Bay or Britannia have encountered coming towards landfall at say Curtapurteen or Sandy

Cove, along the south east side of Kinsale harbour? How many *Dún* named headlands, how many *dúns* on headlands which were otherwise named, were presented to him as he approached the South Munster coastline and why were they there? Headlands as liminal lands between sea and mainland, a densely forested mainland as some had once noted, headlands as the foothold lands of early settlers stretching back to the Bronze Age and a time of arrivals from a collapsing eastern world, perhaps? A *Dún* can mean a defended residence, a larger piece of defended territory, or just a high status residence defined by an enclosure; being in scale from that of a small wealthy farmer to the residence of a petty clan chieftain, to a much greater place of administration and defence in a territory.

A promontory fort at a bay by Barry's Head, promontory forts by Oysterhaven creek, the 'Sovereign' Islands i.e. a poor anglicisation from *Oileáin Sabhráinn*, the major promontory fort at the Old Head, a promontory fort at Glanavirane within the bowl of Courtmacsherry Bay and, just beyond the western outer tip of the Bay, Dunworley Point where a somewhat smaller version of protective defences compared with the Old Head; a narrowing of the access passage from the mainland / landward side to the promontory fort.

One is reminded of remarks by Rev. Patrick Canon Power, Professor of Archaeology at University College Cork in the early 20th century, in his **opus magnum** *The Placenames of the Déise*, regarding promontories which have such narrow access points some eroding into sea arches before being gradually eroded away to create islands. If for some reason a merchant ship was unable, due to bad weather or due to poor navigation and the lack of a local pilot, to enter the harbour of Kinsale or dock somewhere in the vicinity of Sandy Cove, then if it was unable for reasons such as bad weather and rough seas to enter Courtmacsherry Bay, might it have sought shelter by Dunworley which in Gaelic is *Dún Úrluinge*. (See Blogpost re this site at <https://roaringwaterjournal.com/2022/04/10/dunworley-promontory-fort-a-bit-of-a-stunner/>)

Dunworley, (destroyed possibly by the forces of *Finghin Mac Cárthaigh* in 1260 AD, see Westropp p.115) this place-name has interesting elements to it i.e. *Dún*, *Úr*, *Luinge* (*Lainge*). *Dún* is as explained above. *Úr* as best I can judge is a corruption of the Latin word **Murus** meaning

a wall; or perhaps referencing a masonry quay wall or a pier. *Luinge* is in Gaelic the word for ships or shipping or the genitive of same.

So, what might the name mean or imply? Does it mean a promontory residence, a place of defences, on a cliff situated overlooking the Atlantic Sea? Does this defended residence have a direct association with ships or shipping? Why, is it connected to trade and the acquisition of wealth through merchants from abroad? Does it mean that someone from abroad, a ship merchant, a trader, has acquired a promontory piece of land, has had access to it chiselled away at a point where the promontory becomes part of the mainland proper i.e. has created a narrow passage way with steep, precipice, cliffs on either side, cliffs not easily scaled or assailed, has places, earthen bank and ditch, wooden or masonry defences protecting the *dún* end of the narrow passageway?

What might have been anticipated? Assaults, or raids, from the landward side and / or on other occasions from the seaward? If it is someone engaged in maritime trade then where does shipping from abroad dock in order to collect or deliver goods at the promontory fort? Is some form of seawall required and if so what is the nature of it? Is it a masonry built platform with a quay or slipway beside? Or, is it something less substantial, less permanent made in wood? How are goods transported up to the *Dún*, a route-way of some kind? What is the approach like and do any ships encounter difficulties resulting in damage or wreckage and loss of cargo?

So, was the Old Head a key place of trade, of multifaceted social and cultural interactions, of potential military and / or strategic significance, with the Roman world both of the Bay of Biscay and that of Britannia, this being something which lasted from, say, the first century AD through to the early 5th century AD? If so, then what happened to it afterwards? As the Anglo-Saxon world of Britain replaced Roman Britannia and as a monastery at Tisaxon (*Tí*, or *Teach*, Saxon i.e. Saxon monastic house - two tiles stamped with a rooster or cock recovered from a souterrain creepway in the abutting townland of Dunderrow) came to be in Kinsale harbour, as amphora and recycled Roman glass, in the forms of sticks and beads, arrived and were passed along the highways and byways from the Bandon River, finding their way to Ballycateen and to Garranes ringforts? And as the age of the Western Empire of Rome faded away,

and societal infrastructures changed, changes reflected across landscapes both physical as well as intellectual?

The Old Head at Kinsale consists, geomorphologically, of a peninsular land projection to the south of which is an 'island' which is connected to the peninsula by an isthmus, on the east and west sides of which are two bays. They are known as Hole Open East and Hole Open West. Hole Open is a name derived from the fact that sea caves connects both bays and these are navigable for small craft. The 'island' is an area of land which has been known since time immemorial as *Dún Cearmna*. Tradition relates that *Cearmna* was the name of a chieftain who lived, sometime, perhaps, in the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age. His *Dún* was what is generally known in archaeological parlance as a 'promontory fort'. As a south coast promontory fort how does it compare, in whatever strategic location was chosen for it as well as in its defences, with other promontories as far west as some on the Dingle Peninsula?

The Irish antiquary Thomas Westropp (1914-16, pp.117-118) of the North Munster Antiquarian Society gives details of some of the ancient legends / folktales (from *Eremon* to *Connall Eachluath* (i.e. *Eachluath* i.e. of the fast, swift horse?)) connected with the Old Head's prehistory; including one where a fugitive may, perhaps, have found temporary shelter in a souterrain.

One might presume therefore that what came to be known in early Irish literature as *Dún Cearmna* was the fortified coastal residence of a local clan or tribal chieftain. Whether or not it was his sole residence i.e. *dún*, we do not know. Did he follow an annual progress within his territory? If the name *Cearmna* was a personal name attached to the this *dún*, was it a Gaelic name? Was it a Latin name or a Greek one? What did it mean or reference? Alternatively, if it not a personal name was it instead the name of something else e.g an object, a land feature or an event?

Even if no more than a curiosity, the name *Cearmna* has some resonance with the anglicised name form Carmen or Carman (*Carmen?* ...a corruption or variant of *Cearmna?*) which was a place-name attached to the site of a great annual fair / festival held somewhere in the South of Ireland either in later prehistoric, or early historic, times. It is not known where this place name, anglicised as 'Carman / Carmen' was located, and whether or not it was situated, inland close by a river

connected to the sea coast; or was situated on the coastline e.g. at a coastal creek, somewhere.

In the past scholars have attempted to associate this place-name with County Wexford. Might it have been in proximity to where the rivers known as the Three Sisters meet i.e. the Suir, Nore and Barrow rivers - opening, from the coastline, to direct navigation from Biscay Bay and further down along the Iberian coastline and to trading settlements there; thereby avoiding Britain except for a way-station at Cornwall and as a consequence might some navigators have regarded such an Irish shoreline as closer to southern Europe than the island of Britain; at a time of little if anything in the way of maps or charts, piloting and directional knowledge being solely those perceptions known to Iberian Tartessian and then, later, to Venetii mariners (some in Roman employment), as well as others born of the Atlantic seascape i.e. an Atlantic Sea Province? Early literature speaks of 'Greeks' visiting Carman with 'gold' and 'fine raiments'? What spectacle, what practice, what age, what custom, was being recalled by such words?

Who were these merchants and what ports e.g. an Iberian Atlantic Greek settlement port, a north or eastern shore Mediterranean port or a North African one of Greek influence, did they come from? If so was it a direct crossing from there? If this was happening at a Carman / Carman named place in the south Wexford locality then was it happening elsewhere along the south coastline; given that there were distinct tribes and their clans in control of specific stretches of that coastal landscape, some perhaps favourable to trading, other not so? If it was happening, was *Dún Cearmna* another place of a great annual fair to which foreign merchants came? Was the *dún* the focus of a maritime trading settlement, a settlement trading not only with merchants from abroad, but also a place from which Gaelic merchants travelled to foreign coastlines, to British, European, and perhaps North and West African coastlines, all within the Empire of Rome?

If the answer to this question is yes then was this how the Old Head of Kinsale came to be known to scribes, record compilers and geographers at the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt, in either the late 1st or early 2nd century AD? At what point in time were these Greek merchants trading along the Irish coast? In Roman times or in earlier times? If there was a significant trading settlement at the Old Head, one which

contained both native Irish and settled traders from abroad, then how much archaeological evidence would survive from such activity and its timespan? What might a LIDAR survey of the whole of the Old Head reveal?

The western boundary of the *Corca Laoidhe's* territory has sometimes been defined as the Old Head / Kinsale harbour locality. The full extent of the *Corca Laoidhe's tuatha* landscape stretched westward into south County Kerry i.e. the Iveragh peninsular landscape; before being eventually reduced to what is now roughly the land area of the Diocese of Ross in West Cork as their power and influence went into decline in the 6th century AD.

They claimed that they had the first Christian king in Ireland; meaning that early Christianity spreading across the Roman world had reached them? Had it reached some inhabitants, native and / or settlers from abroad, located on Munster's south coastline by the late first or second centuries AD? Some local folklore in West Cork claims that the early Irish saint known as *Ciaráin*, founder of an early and influential monastic community in the lands of his noble father at *Saighir* in County Offaly, returned from Rome (or was it further afield such as in the lands of the Desert Fathers, perhaps by **Sighir** of Aleppo, of Syria) and landed in his mother's tribe land of Clear Island off the West Cork coastline, where, as some claimed, he founded a 'church' (house church?) or the 'first' 'church', or 'first' Irish community of Christians, in her *Corca Laoidhe* tribe-land; a folklore which some interpret as meaning in Ireland as a whole. But, if so, was this Byzantine rather than of the Western Empire?

It is of note that some Irish traditions regard Saint *Ciaráin* of *Saighir* and Saint *Declán* of Ardmore as saints who had already established Christianity in South Munster prior to the mission of Saint Patrick as a Rome ordained bishop in 432 AD. Some suggest that when he asked these native Irish, and aristocratic, early saints to join their churches (communities) to his they refused and consequently he moved northwards first in Munster and then on to the other provinces. One thinks about early types of groups of monks mentioned in the Rule of Saint Benedict, and also about Rome, and the history of the early patriarchates in the Mediterranean world.

The local folklore record speaks of Sandy Cove Creek beside the Old Head peninsula, on its east side, as a place from which Saint Patrick left Ireland after his escape from captivity. Some suggestion has been made that it may also have been a place to which he subsequently returned later in life (circa 432 AD) as a missionary bishop to preach to those who 'already believed in Christ' in response to a request from them sent to Rome, and also to seek converts in the lands and peoples beyond this place. If it was the Old Head, and at a tribal / trading settlement there, that Patrick began his mission, then where did he do his preaching and what happened after he moved onwards inland with his mission?

Who might those who already believed in Christ have been? Were they native Irish? Had the local Gaelic clan or tribal lord converted to early Christianity? Or were there others present e.g. persons who had served in the armies of Rome, or were present in the role of a Roman garrison to defend and protect the traders at the settlement from raiding by sea and / or land? Did they protect a territory stretching northwards beyond the peninsula? Was a portion of that land subsequently assigned to a parish of the Holy Trinity, a trinity, a reflection of Patrick's teachings?

In Rosscarbery, a *lios* (ringfort) near the well of Saint *Fachtna* was known to local folklore as a 'preaching' *lios* or place inhabited by him, as well as being his place of ministry. A close association, remembered in folklore, between early Irish saints, their 'holy' wells and some ringforts is not uncommon. Often, some such ringforts are known to have had certain types of souterrain architectural forms constructed in them; such to be used as penitential spaces, some as lodgings / night shelters.

On the Old Head peninsula there is a town-land which is known as Lis (*lios*) Patrick. Might such a *lios* have been his initial residence and preaching place? If his mission was locally successful would he, in the course of time, have constructed an oratory nearby? If so then where might this have been situated? Would it have been somewhere close to the *lios*? Or would it have been situated within the precincts of the *dún* and close to the residence of the chieftain? If the oratory was a gathering place, a *láithreach* to which recent converts and those already raised in the fold came, from the immediate vicinity as well as from further afield, for weekend religious services including a meal, then what did this place come to be known as?

Was it called a *Domhnach* i.e. the Sunday place for religious worship and other activities associated with the new faith such as baptism? It is a curiosity that there have been different pronunciations of the Gaelic name for the Old Head peninsula down through the centuries. Some times it is pronounced, or written, 'Down' *Mac Phádraigh* (Downmacpatrick), sometimes it is *Dún Mac Phádraigh* (Dunmacpatrick). Is this just a spelling issue or is it an indication of something else? If the actual *dún* was the *Dún Cearmna* portion of the Old Head, then why is the rest of the peninsula called *Dún Mac Phádraigh*? Do I have this correct? If the connection is with Patrick's preaching *lios*, where followers gathered, then would it not be more logical to have called the locality after Patrick's oratory, the *lios* or *domhnach* i.e. *domhnach Phádraigh*?

What happens when Patrick moves on with his mission, disappointed perhaps that some already established early christian communities in South Munster would not join their churches with his? Would he have left his community and oratory in the care of a trusted friend, either a convert or someone who had come with Patrick from abroad, someone who was his follower i.e. his spiritual 'son', his *mac*? If so, would his oratory have come to be known as the *Domhnach Mac Phádraigh* subsequently, in much later times, anglicised to 'Down Mac Patrick'? On leaving would he have been accompanied by a group of armed and trained protectors as he recited his 'breastplate' along the highways and by-ways into pagan lands and peoples, going northwards? Is there any factual substance to all this or is it just a fictional entertainment, just storytelling by the fireside?

As time moved on and as Christianity embedded itself in the Irish landscape and psyche, and in so doing becoming the story of a Golden Age of learning and spirituality, the winds of change introduced Anglo-Saxon contacts, perhaps as the Age of Rome's Western Empire faded and Anglo-Saxon Britain came into being, and then became Christian. Perhaps from the mid 7th century onwards, perhaps after the Whitby synod, an Anglo-Saxon monastic foundation appears in Kinsale harbour.

Why? What trading activity took place from there along the coast westward with assistance of the *Corca Laoidhe* or those who had overtaken them? What continued trading with the assistance of the *Uí Eidhirsceoil* (*O Drisceoil*)What ships of the great fleet of the lords of

the *Déise* once passed by; some received by them as annual tribute from the High King of Cashel? What cargoes of recycled glass and amphorae from Britannia or Gaul travelled the Bandon river in small boats, cargo offloaded from ships at a deep water harbour jetty to come to tri-vallate ringforts, those in close proximity to the Bandon River, as at Garranes and Ballycatteen - which overlooked Kilmore (*An Cill Mór* the large monastic enclosure i.e. the Big Cell) not very far from Kilbrittain (the *Cill Briotáin* but who was *Briotáin*...as I cannot find him under this word spelling in *Ó Riain* (2011) was he *Breacháin* of *Darinis* (*Dar Inish* i.e. island monastery, Dar / Dair being an Egyptian word for monastery) or of *Thomond* or someone else?) castle of the O'Mahony princes of the ancient *Eoghanacht / Uí Eachach* peoples group; their ships and taxes on visiting ships, by Shanakill (*Seana Cill*, old or 'ancient' cell / hermitage) by Burren townland of the earth shelters, by the creek of Coolmain Bay within that of Courtmacsherry. And who was *Colmán* of Kilcolman (*Cill Colmán* i.e. the cell of Colman) bog, a bog as a 'green desert' wilderness, a not uncommon habitation place for a hermit?

Why a large scattering of glass beads and glass sticks ('cylinders') found along a beach at *Dún Úrluinge* (Dunworley) by Rev. William Chadwick Neligan, Rector of St. Mary Shandon parish in Cork city when on holidays in the locality in the mid 19th century; beads and 'cylinders' some sold to the British Museum (in circa 1851?), whose accessions register described them as Romano-British, a pamphlet by him about this topic appearing in 1858? What wreckage of a cargo, one of what age, being disgorged here by the sea after a storm? Was it one of recent centuries, or was it one from a much earlier point in time?

This timeframe was followed by one of Viking raiders along the southern coastline and then conquest and trading settlements by them from the 9th century AD onwards. There are some suggestions of Viking activity, perhaps implying potentially some degree of settlement, in the Old Head locality but where, and was this at *Dún Cearmna*; it being already a well fortified coastal site and easily defended? Other Viking settlements, and places of raiding, are known from localities in proximity to the course of the Bandon River e.g. Kinneigh and *Laurabhualte* (smashed lora hermitage). According to Westropp (114-16, p.118) its name being Olderness - with Kinsale harbour being Edelfjord, Oysterhaven being Osterhafn. In such circumstances how might *Dún Cearmna* fit into a coastal scenario of Viking settlement stretching

westwards towards say Bear Island and eastwards towards Ballymacotter, Pilmore Harbour and on to Helvick Head by Dungarvan?

Leaving the isthmus and entering the land area which is *Dún Cearmna* one passes through an entranceway which has a large tower-house on its eastern side. From this a length of wall, a curtain wall, with a small projecting tower in it, stretches to the cliff edge. In front of this wall there are the remains of a deep defensive ditch i.e. a fosse. On the western side of the entranceway the fosse and wall continue to the cliff face at that side. There is said to be traces of an earlier ditch a little further inward of this wall. The masonry constructed wall and the large fosse, as defensive features, are said by tradition to have been built by the deCoursey family who occupied the lands in this locality from the time of the Norman Conquest of Ireland in the 12th century AD.

Westropp (1914-16, 119) says that the Norman deCoursey family of Coursey's Barony in which Kinsale is situated originated with a Patrick deCoursey. On the previous page of his article there is a footnote which states 'The old genealogies spent their time in inventing flimsy reasons to condone the wild statements of the pedigree, rather than clearing away the debris.' The 'Patrick' name and its association with Old Head place-names is said in some histories to have derived from an early member of the deCoursey family. However, why does a folklore tradition associated with Saint Patrick exist in the locality? Which one has some truth to it as an explanation for 'down' versus 'dun' mac Patrick? As some local tradition relates did Patrick find a passage homeward by sea from here after escaping captivity in some other part of Ireland? Did he return here as a missionary bishop to serve a nascent Christian community at a Roman or Romanised settlement at Kinsale? Once done, and a *domhnach* chapel, as well as a deacon appointed by him in his role as bishop, to minister to the local community? His father, some say, was a deacon, and his grandfather a 'priest' in Roman Britannia. Having appointed a follower, either as deacon or presbyter, did he then begin his missionary work into the rest of Ireland, bringing the Christianity of Rome and making new converts in pagan lands?

Was the deCoursey explanation a case of seeking an explanation for a pre-existing and well ingrained place-name by someone at a much later period of time who did not know the Saint Patrick story or did not wish to accept it? Was it a way of legitimising ownership, a way of integrating

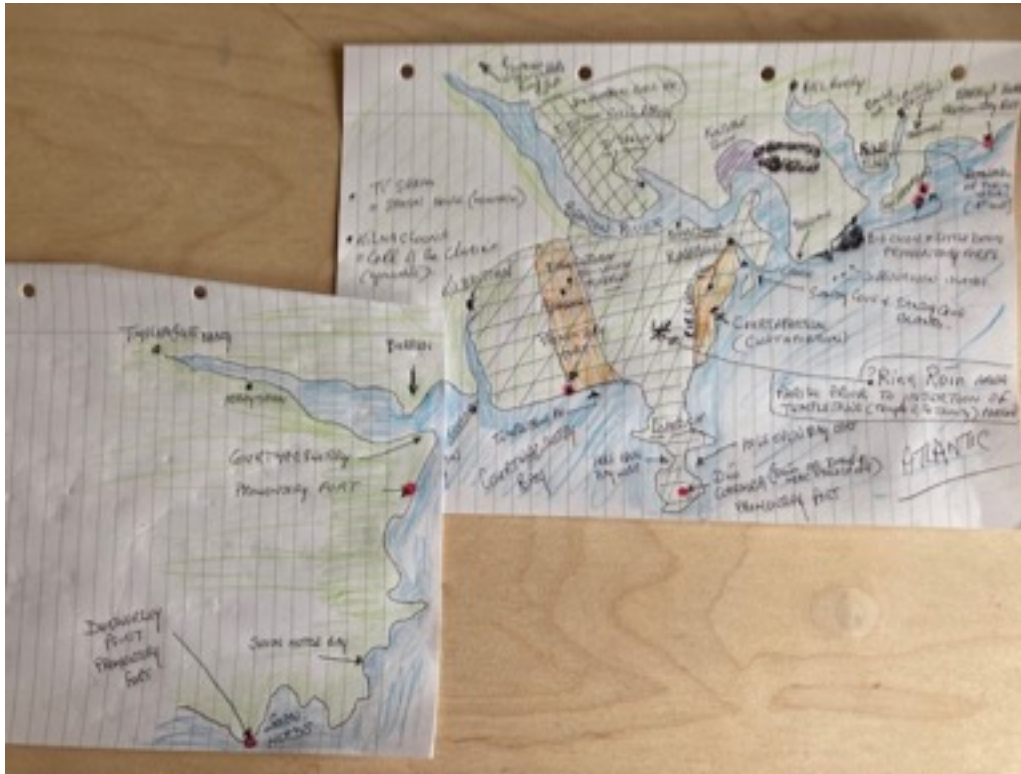
Norman with Gaelic, through creating retrospective 'associations' with the native traditions i.e. imposing a narrative onto a remote past as the foundation for a baronial history? If so then was it another example of the expression of a desire for integration, as the 'new rulers' and settlers, at Dunisky near Macroom if the story of Milo deCogan founder(?) of the settlement travelling to the Celtic monastery of Aghadoe in County Kerry on a pilgrimage with Robert FitzStephens to do penance resulting in a chapel at Dunisky being known as *Teampuill Aghadoe*? Milo deCogan's settlement there was burnt out by the forces of *Finghin Mac Cartháigh* circa 1260 or 1261 AD.

From Norman times through to the time of the Battle of Kinsale in 1601 AD, its aftermath and that subsequent maritime history of English naval vessels, Dutch naval vessels, pirate ships on their annual round to the coast of Barbary in North Africa (once the place of the great port of Carthage and a place of Tertullian the early Church Father who noted, in the second century AD, that Christianity had travelled to the west beyond where Roman arms were carried), there are many stories to be recalled, shanties to be sung, and histories to be told.

Stories such as when Captain Somerville [Castletownsend, County Cork] of the Royal Navy his ship posing as a merchant ship engaged with a French frigate off the Irish coast...

'our Captain was of Ireland, his name was Somerville, with courage bold...the first broadside we gave to them it made them for to wonder, their main mast and their rigging, came a rattling down like thunder, we drove them from their quarter, they could no longer stay, our guns did roar, we made full sure, we showed them warlike play...' [**Warlike Seamen**, from the singing of the Copper family of the British Folk Song Society].

Perhaps there were many earlier stories, stories of visitors, of shipwrecks, stories of sailing vessels and their cargoes, stories of naval battles. Stories of ages long before the Age of Vikings; stories now lost, even to those waifs, in mist, in fog, inhabiting the realm of spectres, lost in fathoms deep beneath sea and memory.



Rough-work sketch of locality, a locality which might be worth investigating in more detail in terms of its early history / prehistory, its folklore, its place-names, its potential archaeology, and also from the perspective of historical geography. Was the above the area of the territory of a Roman Rinn

Róin prior to the insertion of Templetrine and Kilruan medieval (i.e. 'civil') parishes into it; thereby leaving Rinn Róin, in later times, as a fragmented entity of two unattached parish areas, one containing a land strip stretching to the Old Head and the other located to the east of Kilbrittain? Note also, Ringville as Ringnicullinie in 1681 AD (see logainm.ie) meaning?...Rinn na Cúiline?...headland territory of the corner places or Cúile or land patches?

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