

Little Island, Cork Harbour, A Possible Promontory Fort, Monastic Cells and an Early Bishop, but what of a souterrain there? [In Progress]

According to logainm.ie the island and civil parish of Little Island in **Cork Harbour** (which overlooks Lough Mahon the one time abode of a legendary giant whose steps were by the village of **Monkstown** opposite), was once separate from the mainland and sloblands before it was connected to the mainland in theIt was originally like **Harper's Island** and **Glountaun** before private owners began to reclaim land and development from marshland / slobland from the late 17th or so to 19th centuries. Some projects were completed, some never so, or so it seems.

Land reclamation from river marshes, or from sloblands by the sea, is a major story of Cork's industrial heritage and the Dutch engineering influence in its history. Not just in the **Little Island**, **Glanmire**, **Dunkettle**, **Harper's Island** and **Little island** areas, reclamation projects elsewhere in County Cork played a major role in the 'improving' development of the topographical character of the Cork landscape; something which also happened as a major development of the medieval walled town of Cork as it became a city in the 17th to 19th centuries.

According to a papal taxation record of 1302-6 AD Little Island was at that time known as **Cellescoplappan** which Prof. Pádraig O Riain (...) gives as **Celles Easpug Lapán** which translates as the Cells of bishop (missionary early bishop or abbot or prior or overseer of a hermitage / monastic community). Saint Lappan, according to Ó *Ríain's* Dictionary of Irish Saints, wasand could be one of a number of early religious persons who held that name.

Celles (*cells* or *Cillíní* in Irish), **EpisCOPus** (*Easpug* in Irish), **Lappan** (*Lapán* in Irish).

So, what is being stated for the years 1302-6 is that an early abbot or 'missionary bishop' named Lappan had cells located somewhere on Little island. The idea of an early bishop with a group of followers (an early monastery / hermitage) associated with a group of cells is no uncommon in the South Munster landscape. On the North Side of **Cork City** leading from **Blackpool** there to **Blarney** is a place known as **Killeens** (or Killeens) which means the Cells and at **Ballyvourney** in **West Cork** there is another such place in proximity to the *Cluain* (early hermitage meadow) where missionary founders of churches in Munster Saint *Abbán* is said to have been buried beside his well site; beyond lies the hermitage of female Saint *Gobnait*, his sister.

How many other examples of **Killeens** place names or placenames in which **Killeens** is an element across **Munster** or indeed across Ireland there are I do not know but it would be interesting to research this and to look at evidence for souterrain discoveries close by e.g. say a number of underground, linked, masonry built, beehive cells with long interconnecting passages joined to an entry passage? Might such sites have been an early reflection of monastic settlements which subsequently became surface structures composed of a number of beehive shaped cells / cubicles (cells known as *clocháns*, occurring in both single and multi-cell forms. It is said of the *Lyra* (Laura?) hermitage / small monastery at Station Island in Lough Derg, County Donegal that the 'purgatory' structure and associated ruined cells each named for the principal early Irish saints, had been moved there in medieval times from another island nearby. The 'purgatory', famous across Europe in Medieval times as a place of pilgrimage, was, based on both early descriptions - which including measurements, and on a 17th century published illustration showing the structure (Thomas Carve), was in my opinion a souterrain of my A2 type i.e. a penitential space which in later medieval times became the 'purgatory'; which involved a one night penitential vigil for the pilgrims placed there by the prior, and where an apocryphal event was supposed to be experienced as a form of penance. Islands either in marsh land or in lakes or off the coastline were a common choice for early Irish hermitages / small monasteries.

So does one see, surviving in to the later medieval period, a remote remnant of a Hiberno-Byzantine laura / lyra monastic settlement, as one also perhaps reflected at Sceilig Michael island off the Kerry coast and perhaps also at *Fán* on the Dingle peninsula, surviving the Lough Derg in Donegal and consisting there of a small cluster of dry masonry constructed cells, a penitential souterrain for daily use or for immurement of an anchorite (a living saint anchoring heaven to the

hermitage), and a chapel or oratory in masonry or wood? Did these three types of structure constitute the elements of such a *laura* / small monastery? Was an early form of cloister or herb garden or vegetable plot associated with / in proximity to such sites e.g. was that what the rectangular enclosure revealed in associations with the small ring enclosures and their souterrains excavated by archaeologist Prof. Sean P. O Riordáin in the 1940s at Cush, County Limerick; a site which would have been within the territorial space of South Munster. Is this scenario close to what one should imagine as having once existed when confronted with a place-name which mentions **Killeens** (*Cillíní* in Irish or in Latin **Celles**)?

Do sites like the early Christian community at **Riask** on the **Dingle** peninsula represent a surface based version of such constructions, ones not constructed below ground because of local geology and because there were no security issues requiring concealment of the cells underground. Was there a time when sites like this were replaced by cenobitic monastic communities, some mixed i.e. of male and female members as like that of **John Cassian** Egyptian style abbey in Provence in the 5th century. Was this a 7th century **Whitby Synod** issue with Hibernians versus Romans and a **Céile Dé** revolt and hermitages abandoned except for **laura communities** such as **Scelig Michael**? Was it those hermitages and **lyra** monasteries abandoned after Viking slaving raids? Or was it something of the 12th century, of Saint Malachy, of Reform and the Cistercians, the Norman Conquest, old bishoprics and hermitages abandoned in favour of a new diocesan and parish geography, a geography again subjected to dismantling in the 16th century, and once again changed in the 17th?

it was not uncommon to enclose such sites either with a **termon** boundary or alternatively if granted a **Rath** or **Lios** or **Dún** by a local ruler for use as a place of residence within which to have a 'sacred space' where hermits or monks could reside together and pray.

Having looked at a number of coastal promontory forts along the Cork coastline over many years, including their representations on cartographic sources, one cannot help seeing the townland called **Carrigrenan** (**Carrigrennan**...meaning the *grianáin* or solarium (sun-room in a medieval manor house) ...something also found connected enclosures such as the *Grianáin* of *Aileach*, a *caiseal* / *cahir* stone built 'ringfort' enclosure in Northern Ireland) as having a pronounced similarity to a promontory fort. This impression is further re-enforced when one learns that there is a placename at the place where **Carrigrenan** townland (a land area which was once a promontory fort???) connects with its adjoining townland of **Ballintrasna** i.e. once a village beside what is called the **clash** road leading to **Clashavodig**.

Clash is interpreted to mean a ravine or glen but some scholars prefer to interpret the word in certain contexts as meaning a ditch or fence e.g. the 'bank and ditch' enclosure of a hillfort, or other ancient territorial boundary marker. If this is what **Clashavodig** once referenced then was it a bank and fosse (ditch) which separate at one time the townland of **Carrigrenan** from **Ballintrasna** (the village at the crossway on the road leading to a settlement site...?)? If so, then to what extent does this (infilled?) land area, with its bullrushes and marsh, as well as the sea inlets either side, represent what was once something which made **Carrigrenan** a promontory fort site its west side overlooking Lough Mahon? If so, then what was **Vodig**? Was it a poor translation of a medieval word for a tenant, or a peasant? Was it a poorly textually transmitted personal name such as a Viking farmer / settlers within the **Ostman cantred** of Cork - which seems to have stretched down along the inner harbour area, who was known as Bodar...*Clash an Bhodaigh*...*Bodar's enclosed settlement*? Or was it a form of the word *gadaí* ...a thief, a robber, a raider e.g. a Viking settler? If there is any grain of truth emerging from these speculations then was **Carrigrenan** a promontory fort of early medieval or late Iron Age times which became occupied in Early Christian times by **Saint Lappan** as the site of a hermitage settlement under his pastoral care, and then from 9th century onwards a place acquired by a Viking settler? However, in that case why is **Cellescoplappan** thought to be associated with St Lappan's burial ground elsewhere on Little Island? Such an association would be very much in context i.e. the words cell (common in place names as Kill i.e. *cill* in Irish) and graveyard (one medieval in origin?). But, does Little Island have a souterrain, or two, and if so where might they be and what might be their architectural form(s)?

Also it is not unknown that rock outcrops were used as shelters or as places in which 'caves', be then natural or artificial, existed and were occupied, some even being linked by a passage to a ringfort souterrain. Also, folklore speaks of the faery queene / *ban sídhe* goddess *Clíodhna* living in a rock outcrop (souterrain and ringfort nearby) and it is interesting given some Scottish references (see MacRitchie's *Underground Life* pamphlet 1890s) to persons living within mounds....or when one reads of the tradition of artificial caves in rocks in the early traditions of the monastic church in the Levant ...or when one hears of person names associated with rock outcrops in the Irish landscape e.g. *Carrig Tuathail*....a souterrain was once discovered nearby? **Then again such suggestions as those above may be nothing more than wishful thinking.**