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Sacred Space.

A Study of the Mass Rocks of the Diocese  
of Cork and Ross, County Cork.

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## **Abstract**

### **Sacred Space.**

#### **A Study of the Mass Rocks of the diocese of Cork and Ross, county Cork.**

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The history of Catholicism is an essential component in the history of modern Ireland. As locations of a distinctively Catholic faith, Mass Rocks are important historical, ritual and counter-cultural sites. Their continued use reflects, and helps reconstruct and legitimise, contemporary Irish identity whilst providing a tangible and experiential connection to Irish heritage and tradition.

The mythology surrounding Mass Rocks tends to symbolise the worst excesses of the 'Penal Laws'. Yet, as Elliott (2000) has pointed out, the impact of the Penal Laws was short-lived and the worst was over by 1730 (Elliott 2000:170). Since the 1990s, most historians have rejected this traditional 'penal' paradigm with its subtext of a heroic but silenced Catholic nation (Dickson 2004:38). Yet, the Irish countryside remains littered with the Mass Rocks that were used throughout this period and they are still considered to be special and sacred places.

Using a framework of sacred space this research provides an original and important vista on this topic. An examination of their geographical distribution has yielded some surprising concentrations and absences in certain areas. The actual locations of these sites have proved equally intriguing since few appear to conform to the mythical, secluded, upland sanctuaries depicted in early and mid-twentieth century history textbooks and more recently on 'republican' murals.

This research does not attempt to assess the implementation, success or failure of the Penal Laws. However, it does provide one of the most thorough syntheses of available information in respect to Mass Rocks at a diocesan level and therefore provides a valuable resource that will help widen knowledge of this emotive and often misunderstood period. Research has been based in the diocese of Cork and Ross, county Cork. The parish of *Uibh Laoghaire* or Iveleary, the county of *Cineal Laoghaire* or O'Leary, is located within this diocese and is relatively rich in Mass Rock sites. The parish of '*Inshiguilah*' or Inchigeelagh is referenced within the Report on the State of Popery of 1731 along with adjoining parishes. Its sound pedigree in terms of its historical, geographical and cultural background made it an excellent candidate for a case study. It offered a valuable opportunity to apply the conceptual framework of sacred space to a specific parish within the research area in order to evaluate the validity of the research findings.

Although much has been written about the Penal era, the study of Mass Rocks is a neglected area of study and it is hoped that these results will help to frame Eighteenth-century Irish Catholicism within a broader economic, social, cultural and political context.

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# 1

## Introduction

*'What a pity we have not more interest in our Mass-Rocks. If it be true that there are 'sermons in stones', no preacher could be more eloquent than they'*

*Ryan (1957)*

The history of Catholicism is an essential component in the history of modern Ireland and the Penal Laws remain an emotive and complex subject. New areas of research are needed to complement existing studies and build upon our understanding of this multifaceted topic. As locations of a distinctively Catholic faith, Mass Rocks are important historical, ritual and counter-cultural sites that present a tangible connection to Ireland's rich heritage for contemporary society. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to offer some insight into the aims and objectives of this research project and give an overview of its structure.

There are many different opinions but no general consensus concerning the severity of persecution resulting from Penal legislation or the myths which have become associated with the Penal era. The dawn of the new Millennium seemed to spark a renewed interest in the period with a range of publications from a plethora of historians including renowned academics such as Barnard (2004a; 2004b), Dickson (2007), Elliott (2000; 2009), Gillespie (2006) and Hayton (2004). It also heralded the publication of Bergin *et al* (2011) edited edition of contemporary papers entitled *New Perspectives on the Penal Laws* which included works by key authors such as Ian McBride. The stage was not the sole domain of the historian and leading archaeologists such as Breen (2007) and Horning (2007) as well as geographers including Graham (2005) and Smyth (2004; 2005; 2006) have all contributed relatively recently to an emerging script. An increasing number of recent studies have focussed specifically at a county level (Breen 2007; Butler 2006; Lynch and Nugent 2008) and subject specific publications (Fletcher and Gillespie 2001; Horning *et al* 2007; Lyttleton and Rynne 2009) have provided a rich and

varied patchwork of multi-disciplinary sources. This research does not attempt to assess the implementation, success or failure of the Penal Laws. However, it does provide one of the most thorough syntheses of available information in respect to Mass Rocks at a diocesan level.

But, what exactly is a Mass Rock? Within the Archaeological Survey Database of the National Monuments Service for Ireland (ASD) Mass Rocks are classified as ‘a rock or earthfast boulder used as an altar or a stone built altar used when Mass was being celebrated during Penal times (1690s to 1750s AD), though there are some examples which appear to have been used during the Cromwellian period (1650s AD). Some of these rocks/boulders may bear an inscribed cross’ (ASD 2010 internet source). This one general classification appears inadequate and appears to lack any engagement with the sacredness of such sites.

It was clear from the very beginning of the research that Mass Rock sites had not merely been selected randomly but were chosen because the site already possessed or was imbued with some aspect of sacredness. Given that this one common feature is shared by every site, despite differences in their location, nature and history, this was a logical conceptual framework within which to place the research undertaken. Subsequent chapters have therefore been structured around this framework and will explore the location, nature, language, memory and ritual use of sacred space with specific reference to the Mass Rock sites of the diocese of Cork and Ross.

Whilst much has been written about the Penal era, there has been little research undertaken in respect to Mass Rock sites. Historiographical and archaeological surveys of such sites are very rare indeed. This research project aimed to assess the geographical distribution of Mass Rock sites across the island of Ireland and to focus specifically upon their distribution within in the Diocese of Cork and Ross, county Cork. At the outset it was assumed that Mass Rock sites in the diocese would conform to the mythical, secluded, upland sanctuaries depicted in early and mid-twentieth century history textbooks and more recently on ‘republican’ murals. However, this has not been the case.

Research was also intended to test current academic hypotheses about the nature, use and significance of Mass Rocks in the retention of Catholic identity and practice before, during and after the Penal era. Leading historians (Whelan 1995; Wall 1960; Elliott 2009) argue that Mass Rock sites were confined to areas of extreme Catholic poverty, where no parish chapel existed or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism. Both Whelan (1995) and Elliott (2009) argue that the prevalence of Mass Rock sites is a result of poverty rather than persecution. Research suggested that county Cork had a density of Mass Rock sites far greater than any other county. Yet, in 1731, the *Report on the State of Popery* confirmed that there were 'wealthy papists' in the city who had 'private Chappels in the Houses' where Mass was 'often celebrated' and that Cork City also possessed two new Mass houses; one 'slated' and the other 'built in a large sumptuous manner of fine eminence' (Catholic Historical Society of Ireland 1913:131). Academic opinion appeared to contradict initial findings therefore inviting further enquiry.

One further aim of this research was to assess the validity and necessity of Mass Rocks as alternative places of Catholic worship during the Penal era. Many authors (Dickson 2007; Elliott 2009; McBride 2009) have tended to dismiss the religious aspect of Penal legislation as something of a 'side-line' to the main intention thus discounting vital dimensions of the Penal Laws such as faith and belief. They argue that, in the eighteenth century, religion was viewed primarily as a system of politics rather than a system of faith and morals. They suggest that it was the political danger posed by Catholicism, rather than its religious, cultural and intellectual failings, that provided the main justification for its suppression. Admittedly, there appears to have been a 'notable tendency for research to concentrate on secular aspects of society' (Donnelly 2004:119). Donnelly argues that this has resulted in a lack of awareness of contemporary religion despite its tendency to permeate 'all aspects of society, the economy and politics during the period in question' (Donnelly 2004:120). It was hoped that this research would contribute towards building a more sound understanding of religion from the early modern period to more contemporary times.

It was also evident from the outset that an interdisciplinary approach would be needed in order to achieve the aims and objectives of the research project and to complement existing studies in framing Irish Catholicism within a broader economic, social, cultural and political context. The over-riding discipline has been that of cultural geography although this has been strongly aligned with other disciplines including history, archaeology, folklore and language.

Whelan (1983) points out that whilst 'the theme of Catholicism has seldom been far from the centre of discourse on the nature of Irish life', the seemingly monolithic nature of Irish Catholicism obscures very significant temporal, social and regional variations (Whelan 1983:1). He believes that, for both the historical and cultural geographer, 'an emphasis on the uneven impact of Catholicism in its evolution in the modern period throws light on many aspects of Irish geography' (Whelan 1983:1). His views have certainly resonated throughout this study which has engaged with the full spectrum of Irish prehistory and history, contrasting the rich and poor as well as upper and lower classes in areas of differing cultural influence.

In order to fully understand the complexities of the historical process in the Munster region during the seventeenth century Breen (2007) argues that researchers need to reflect on the closing decades of the previous century. He advises that during these years a number of significant nationwide upheavals occurred that resulted in significant economic and political change in Ireland. He identifies the end of the Cromwellian government and the restoration of Royal power as the dawning of modernity, particularly in Cork which had undergone profound landscape and architectural change. He recognises that 1570 onwards marked the beginnings of increasing English interest in Munster as well as an emergent period of revolt by a number of Gaelic lords. He acknowledges that the following century witnessed 'a number of highly significant events including plantation, famine, large scale war in the 1590s, the gradual erosion of Gaelic power and an intensification of trade and communications within a north Atlantic sphere' (Breen 2007:15).

An Act of Settlement was published in July 1662 which resulted in the partial recovery of some Catholic landholding. However, the landscape of the area had already changed significantly. After Cromwell's death, Catholics enjoyed a brief period of relative religious tolerance which came to an abrupt end with the defeat of James II during the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 (Zucchelli 2009:158). Just prior to the first Williamite parliament, which met in 1692, McBride (2009) quotes the then Lord Lieutenant who warned of 'the violence that there will be against the Papists, for they do hate and despise them to the greatest degree imaginable' (Viscount Sidney (1692) cited in McBride 2009:202). It is against this background that Chapter 2 reviews literature that both informs and contextualises the conceptual framework of sacredness used within this thesis and places the research within the historical period of the Penal Laws.

How the aims and objectives of this research were achieved is fully discussed in chapter 3 which details the methodology employed in undertaking the research and the relevant sources that have been accessed. As this research is multidisciplinary in approach this chapter discusses each relevant discipline individually whilst subsequent chapters are intended to offer a synthesis of these disciplines in order to effectively place research within a broader context.

The chosen framework of 'sacred places' is applied in chapters 4-9. Chapters 4 to 6 map the distribution of Mass Rocks in the diocese and assess the location and nature of sacred space. These chapters answer basic questions such as where are Mass Rocks found and what do they look like? In exploring the distribution and topography of sites it aims to assess the validity of a number of the current hypotheses identified within the methodology. These chapters also aim to categorise the apparent differences in appearance between Mass Rocks through new and innovative typologies developed by the author.

Chapter 7 engages with the language of sacred space. Smyth (2006) describes Irish language sources as sadly neglected by Irish geographers and argues that they should be explored and examined. Research has shown that the location of Mass

Rock sites can often be identified through language sources which can be indicative of the location and nature of sacred space.

Chapter 8 explores the memory of sacred space. Characterised as superstition by modern society, folklore has governed relationships with the land down through the centuries in Ireland (Duffy 2007:65). Primarily a community activity, Beiner (2004) describes folk history-telling as an expression of historical discourse which recalls the experience of 'common' people narrated through their descendants (Beiner 2004:3). The myths which have developed concerning the Penal era and Mass Rock sites cannot be fully understood in isolation and require placement within this broader context. By analysing relevant historical, geographical and folklore sources alongside incidental interviews with local landowners, this chapter attempts to rationalise the myths which have become associated with Mass Rocks.

Ritual space provides a crucial link between religious practice and the concept of sacred space. Whilst there can be significant cultural variations in terms of ritual, it is still possible to identify some basic tenets that appear to underlie many ways of ritualising sacred space. These tenets are applied to the sacred space of the Mass Rock in Chapter 9.

Research has been based in the diocese of Cork and Ross, county Cork. The parish of *Uíbh Laoghaire* or Iveleary, the county of *Cineal Laoghaire* or O'Leary, is located within this diocese and is relatively rich in Mass Rock sites. The parish of 'Inshiguilah' or Inchigeelagh is referenced within the *Report on the State of Popery* of 1731 along with adjoining parishes. Its sound pedigree in terms of its historical, geographical and cultural background made it an excellent case study candidate. Chapter 10 offers an opportunity to apply the conceptual framework of sacred space to a specific parish within the research area in order to evaluate the validity of the research findings from previous chapters.

To assist with the location of potential Mass Rock sites and relevant field work in the areas of study, a letter of recommendation was provided by the Bishop of Cork's Secretary Rev. Dr. Tom Deenihan. It is acknowledged that many of the sites visited and subsequently recorded, along with much of the information obtained

from local landowners, would not have been accessible without this letter of recommendation. My grateful thanks must go to Rev. Dr. Tom Deenihan and a number of his diocesan clergy for their support, interest and help whilst undertaking this research.

The final chapter of this thesis revisits previous chapters in order to synthesize the findings and offer concluding comments in respect to the significance of this research. It also highlights the potential for future study in what Smyth (1992) has described as a 'poorly researched period in Irish social history' (Smyth 1992:237).

This introductory chapter has outlined the contextual framework within which the research has been placed and identified the basic structure of the thesis. Mass Rocks continue to be an important, significant and intimate part of the Irish landscape today. So pervasive was the Mass Rock in the image of past persecution that Pope John Paul II spoke of it during his 1979 visit to Ireland. Mass Rock sites hold vital clues in appraising the severity and application of the Penal Laws and in assessing the 'myths' that surround this complex and emotive topic.

## 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.0 The Context of Sacred Space

##### 2.1 The Geography of Religion

In a relatively short space of time the geography of religion has exploded on to the world stage. Whilst geographers have repeatedly reflected on geography's ancient Greek roots to demonstrate that the relationship between religion and geography is an ancient one (Kong 1990:356), it is the mid-decades of the twentieth century before any real academic platform was built for future studies. According to Stump (2008) religion represents an essential element of culture. He argues that for some individuals, religion represents the most important facet of their culture especially in terms of the breadth and depth of its articulation within their lives (Stump 2008:372).

Kong is an invaluable source when tracing the emergence of the geography of religion, having compiled three consecutive literature reviews each decade since the 1990s (Kong 1990; 2001; 2010). In the first of her reviews she discusses the work of Hultkrantz (1966), Isaac (1959) and Eliade (1959). Hultkrantz's ecological approach to religion attempts to show the 'indirect and complicated' way in which environment influences religion. He argues that the environment provides the materials needed for religious actions and religious conceptions with rites, beliefs and myths making use of natural environmental settings in different ways (Hultkrantz cited in Kong 1990:358). Isaac's (1959-60) definition is more succinct. He proposes that the geography of religion is 'the study of the part played by the religious motive in man's transformation of the landscape' (Isaac cited in Kong 1990:358).

Alongside Hultkrantz (1966) and Isaac (1959-60) Mircea Eliade (1959) was one of the early pioneers of religious theory. Despite attracting criticism, it must be acknowledged that his theories continue to invite much debate today (Burge

2009:221). Rather than concentrating on materials or motives, Eliade explores how ordinary (profane) space is transformed into holy (sacred) space. He proposes that this is brought about by a symbolic process. This symbolic process reflects the spiritual characteristics that are associated with the physical features of a place thus revealing the 'sacred' through the very structures of the world (Eliade 1959:117). Cusack (2011) describes Eliade's approach as 'romantic' (Cusack 2011:7) but Kong (1990) maintains that Eliade's multifarious writings have been vital in shaping the thinking of students of religion right up to the present day (Kong 1990:355).

A decade later Kong reported that, whilst the geography of religion had generated much literature, it continued to be misunderstood and unpopular amongst geographers (Kong 2001:211). Despite this she emphasised the geographic significance of examining religion, not least in the intersection of sacred and secular forces in the making of place. Her passionate appeal that religion should be acknowledged fully and in like manner alongside race, class and gender in geographical analysis (Kong 2001:212) did not go unheard. Her 2010 publication *Global shifts, theoretical shifts: Changing geographies of religion* evaluates the subsequent explosion in geographical research on religion in recent years (Kong 2010:755). Citing Peach (2006), Kong argues that religion's central importance within society, community, politics and international affairs suggests that this new area of geographical research may now be a more important variable than race or ethnicity in socio-geographic investigation (Kong 2010:756).

## **2.2 Seeking a Definition for Sacred Space**

The 'essential character' of religious space, assumed to be sacred space, has long drawn research attention from scholars of religion (Kong 2001:218). However, as Della Dora (2011) admits, it is apparent that 'sacred space is no easy concept to define' (Della Dora 2011:165). For the past half century historians of religions, theologians, anthropologists and, increasingly, geographers have attempted to theorize sacred space in a number of different and often contrasting ways (Della

Dora 2011:165). Yet it has remained a complex and elusive concept (Della Dora 2011:181).

Whilst sacred space may be easy to identify, its actual definition is more difficult to qualify. Della Dora (2011) explains that our traditional binary distinctions prove problematic in trying to define whether such space is spiritual or material, invisible or visible, eternal or contingent. She asks whether sacred space is a portion of territory or the product of a set of embodied performances or whether it is permanent or ephemeral (Della Dora 2011:165). In doing so she presents an immediate obstacle in respect to the analysis of Mass Rock sites. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate such sites can be all of these things simultaneously.

In attempting to define the concept of 'sacred space' Kong (2001) points to Eliade's (1959) early work in which he contends that, in certain places, the 'sacred' results in 'powerful centres of meaningful worlds' being set apart from ordinary, homogenous space (Eliade (1959) cited in Kong 2001:218). Whilst the English word 'sacred' has become an accepted term, Hubert (2008) argues that it is evident that wide variations continue to exist in the concept itself and what the word actually includes and excludes (Hubert 2008:10). The author explains that the concept implies restrictions and prohibitions on human behaviour so that, if something is sacred, then certain rules must be observed in relation to it. Echoing Eliade's early work Hubert argues that whether it is a sacred site, sacred object or sacred person, it must be placed apart from everyday things or places. This enables its special significance to be recognised and any rules regarding it to be obeyed. These attendant concepts of separateness, respect and rules of behaviour appear to be common to sacred sites in different cultures despite any difficulties in the translation or concept of the actual word itself (Hubert 2008:11).

Saunders (2008) believes that any analysis of sacred space must be undertaken in reverence to how individual cultures conceptualise and classify the sacredness of landscape and place. This is because each culture ultimately brings its own ideas to bear on the land it inhabits by populating a geographical area with a distinctive array of mythical, religious or spiritual beings or essences. Their attitudes towards

this landscape or place are partly dependent on culture-specific perceptions of what constitutes the animated natural world (Saunders 2008:172). Animist views hold that objects such as rocks, stones, mountain, rivers and other such natural features have spirit. As a result they can create and inscribe meaning to any given place (Wallis and Blain 2003:4). Park (1994) endorses the importance of the 'supernatural'. He argues that the 'supernatural' affects people and their behaviour in many different ways and that its exclusion neglects some of the most deeply rooted triggers of human behaviour and attitudes (Park 1994:1).

Chidester and Linenthal (1995) identify ritual as an integral part of sacralisation. They assert that sacred space is ritual space; a location of 'formalized, repeatable symbolic performances' (Chidester and Linenthal 1995:9). Whilst it must be acknowledged that ritual certainly plays a significant part in the initial sacralisation of sites, many Mass Rock sites have remained 'sacred' places despite an absence of such on-going ritual. This would suggest that ritual alone is not sufficient to differentiate sacred space from profane space.

Despite various attempts to define sacred space, Blain and Wallis (2004) argue that, whilst it is important to theorise, contest and negotiate the term 'sacred', it is vital that a single meaning should not be 'set in stone' (Blain and Wallis 2004:257). Reflecting on the various theories and definitions proposed throughout the years, Burge (2009) summarises that the concepts of religious or sacred space have focused on four main areas:

- the idea that there is a divine archetype of the sacred site. This will be explored in the following discussion on the location of sacred space
- the notion of the *axis mundi*: a central point or pole around which the spiritual world is focused. The axis mundi also marks a point of intersection between the divine and the earthly worlds, as well as a point of contact between the two. This will be explored in the following discussion on the nature of sacred space
- that ritual plays an important part in the articulation of sacred space

- the role of mythology in the sacralising of place: a site is given sacred history, placing it in a wider spiritual context

## **2.3 A Divine Archetype of the Sacred Site: The Location of Sacred Space**

### **2.3.1 Sacred Landscape**

As discussed, Isaac's (1959-60) definition of the geography of religion involves the study of the part played by the religious motive in man's transformation of the landscape (Kong 1990:358). Cooney (2008) argues that there is a clear differentiation between secular and sacred landscapes resulting from this transformation of the landscape. He explains that secular landscapes are normally concerned with everyday life such as the home, a farm or perhaps a field. In contrast, sacred landscapes are those which contain special places (Cooney 2008:33). Whilst every sacred landscape is also a physical landscape, not all physical landscapes are sacred (Saunders 2008:172).

According to Kearney and Bradley (2009) the term landscape is now generally accepted as reflective of a western epistemological view of the world. It is a historically defined way of viewing the world that creates a separation between nature and culture (Kearney and Bradley 2009:79). Yet landscapes result from the interaction between these natural and cultural environments and are believed to contribute to a people's sense of place and identity (Natural England 2008). Landscapes not only provide the physical settings for everyday life but are also an important expression of the relationship that exists between people and place. Meinig (1979) argues that, as the environment sustains us as creatures, so the landscape displays us as cultures encompassing an ensemble of ordinary features which constitute an extra-ordinarily rich exhibit of both the course and character of any given society. Mass Rocks have been, and continue to be, an intimate part of the Irish landscape.

### **2.3.2 The Cultural Landscape**

Whilst landscapes can be physical, iconological and ideological, Robertson and Richards (2003) argue that the most important meaning attached to a landscape is

cultural (Robertson and Richards 2003:2). Landscapes are, in fact, cultural images which hide behind a placid and familiar surface the social, political, economic and spiritual processes that have formed them (Robertson and Richards 2003:4). Whelan (2004) adds that the cultural landscape 'operates as an archive of material practices, symbolic forms, embedded and attached narratives' (Whelan 2004:315). However, as Brace (2006) points out, seeing a landscape always involves an imaginative response to it and this imaginative response helps to explain why different people have such different responses to places and landscapes (Brace 2006:230). According to Halfacree (2003) the rural landscape assumes a special place within many cultures due to its symbolic importance in relation to identity and nationhood (Halfacree 2003:142). Such landscapes provide a visible shape in which the nation can be pictured (Daniels 1993:5) and identifying a prototypical landscape, as a representative of the collective identity, can tie a nation to its territory (Agnew 2008:233).

Kneafsey (1995) also recognises that landscape is an intrinsic part of the identity of a place. The author argues that it is given symbolic meanings and is closely associated with historic events, myths and legends as well as more contemporary events. These symbolic meanings, she suggests, are imposed on the landscape in different ways by both people who live on the land and by people from 'outside' such as writers, intellectuals, poets and others (Kneafsey 1995:136). Park (1994) eloquently describes landscape as a 'manuscript' upon which successive texts are written and erased by subsequent communities. He argues that the amount erased varies from place to place meaning that some landscapes preserve more of their past than others. He believes that the interpretation of landscape as a product of culture calls for some understanding of how people translate their values and beliefs into architectural forms. It also calls for an understanding of how their values and beliefs inform their use of space (Park 1994:198).

In Park's opinion, some landscapes preserve cultural artefacts from the past that are as enigmatic as they are informative (Park 1994:198). Cooney (2008) helps to put Park's opinion into perspective in an Irish context by explaining that it is the landscapes of the Neolithic era (4000BC to 2500BC) that form the visible foundation

of all subsequent cultural landscapes in Ireland (Cooney 2008:33). The sacred features of such landscapes were 'baptised' into the new religion during the coming of Christianity to Ireland (Nolan 1983:422). Bradshaw (1989) echoes this view, arguing that the cultural distinctiveness of Early Christian Ireland reflects the success of Gaelic society in 'adopting a Christian mould without abandoning the native culture' (Bradshaw 1989:18).

Through the use of distinctive styles of architecture, Park (1994) argues that religion is strongly imprinted on the cultural landscape. Whilst he points out that the most obvious imprints are centres of religious worship, such as churches, other religious symbols may include shrines and statues (Park 1994:2). Bradley (2000) argues that the construction of monuments in places that already have an established significance 'transforms the entire way in which these locations are experienced' (Bradley 2000:104). He maintains that monumental architecture can invest significant natural places with additional layers of symbolism (Bradley 2000:107). Walsham (2011) develops this idea further and argues that Catholics maintained a deep attachment towards the sacred spaces that were part of the enigmatic Irish cultural landscape. Alive with shrines and redundant churches along with the natural landscape she proposes that this cultural landscape provided a powerful arena for future devotion (Walsham 2011:155).

As a type of monumental architecture Mass Rocks remain an enigmatic part of the cultural landscape today. These informative cultural artefacts have invested a significant number of natural places in Ireland with additional layers of symbolism. Additionally, the re-use and re-interpretation of older monuments together with their location within the natural landscape provides an important tangible link to Ireland's ancient past.

### **2.3.3 The Natural Landscape**

The veneration of nature is, according to Park (1994), the most tangible expression of religious ecology and different features of the world may be designated as 'sacred' by various religions. He highlights the fact that such religious ecology is founded on the belief that the natural world is believed to be part of the deity or

deities that have created it rather than being separate from them (Park 1994:246). Obvious examples include the river Ganges in Hindu religion (Park 1994:247) and mountain pilgrimages which occur in many parts of the world such as India, Japan, South America and the Middle East. Mountain peaks like Mount Fuji or Fujiyama, sacred in Japanese Shintoism, form part of an ancient and continuing tradition (Low 1996:39). In Scandinavia the Saami *sejddes* may be distinguished from their surrounding landscape by their striking topography and include hills and mountains, lakes, peninsulas, caves, islands, waterfalls and springs (Bradley 2000:6). Wessman (2009) reveals that Finnish *hiisi* sites are often described as stony places situated on top of steep mountains or small moraines and are often found close to water sources (Wessman 2009:7).

Irish traditions pertaining to landscape have an ancient pedigree. *Dindshenchas Érenn*, more commonly known as *dinnseanchas*, represents a large body of medieval toponymic lore. The *dinnseanchas* was in metrical verse and in prose and constituted what can be termed as something of a national topographic dictionary of Ireland (Beiner 2007:209). Low (1996) further identifies that Early Irish literature is littered with encounters of Otherworld beings within the natural landscape. He explains that some of the more developed examples can be located within the Finn Cycle which is a collection of stories about the warrior-seer *Finn mac Cumail*. Others include saints such as St. Patrick. Within his autobiographical *Confession*, written around the fifth century, St. Patrick reflects on his spiritual awakening in Ireland as a youth highlighting that his primary place of prayer was the natural landscape including fields, forests and mountains (Low 1996:41).

Stump (2008) argues that the sanctification of natural features is a practice that is more common in religions with strong animistic or polytheistic character than in the revealed, historic religions. However, Walsham (2011; 2012) investigates the world of trees, woods, springs, rocky outcrops, caves, mountain peaks, and other remarkable topographical features in Ireland. In addition to the remnants of ancient civilisations that littered the rural landscape, she uses these to analyse the role that the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played in forming the landscape of the early modern period (Walsham 2012:32). Whilst

Stump argues that historic religions, of which Catholicism is an example, tend to focus less on natural sacred spaces and more on specific historical events (Stump 2008:312) Walsham's research seems to refute this argument.

Whilst it must be acknowledged that there is a difference between institutional and popular religion, Walsham (2011; 2012) maintains that both the cultural and the natural landscape were a focus for Catholic communities in Ireland. Closely examining the connection between religion and the landscape in early modern Britain and Ireland she explains how religious assumptions influenced contemporary perceptions of the physical environment. She demonstrates how this environment subsequently shaped 'the profound theological, liturgical, and cultural transformations that marked the era between c.1500 and 1750' (Walsham 2011:3). She concludes that most scholars of this period have tended to view the landscape as 'an inert and passive backdrop to the momentous events that accompanied the advent of Protestantism and the energetic attempts of the Roman Catholic faith to resist annihilation' (Walsham 2011:4).

#### 2.3.4 Sacred Space

Jackson and Henrie (1983) identify sacred space as 'that portion of the earth's surface which is recognised by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem'. Sharply discriminated from the non-sacred or profane world around it, they advise that sacred space does not exist naturally, but is rather 'assigned sanctity as man defines, limits and characterises it through his culture, experience and goals' (Jackson and Henrie 1983:94). As discussed, sacred space may be considered as space that is understood in explicitly religious terms by those who recognise and use it. However, the designation of a space as sacred can also result from its association with events in the sacred history of a particular religious group or may be defined primarily through their ritual contexts (Stump 2008:26).

A sacred space can vary in size from a very small place covering a few square metres to a large area covering several hectares of land. They may be in the open air or hidden away in rock shelters, caves and forests (Mutoro 2008:132).

Additionally, as Cooney (2008) points out, sacred landscapes can often be made more permanent by the building of a monument (Cooney 2008:35).

Park (1994) proposes that the notion of sacred space is very important since it imbues certain spaces with some particular religious association thus setting them apart from the rest of geographical space (Park 1994:258). People can become attached to certain spaces in the landscape as a result of their memories and feelings for such places. Over time, these spaces can acquire deeper meanings. Such spaces are held in high regard and much loved and this can result in their being used time and time again. In this way they become layered with feeling (Tuan (1974) cited in Wessman 2009:8).

There is much evidence that points to the fact that the notion of sacred space is deep rooted and long-lived. Park (1994) discusses early pagan cultures which clearly had their own definition of sacred space that controlled where people went, what they did and how they did it (Park 1994:249). Cooney (2000) was one of the first authors to investigate such concepts in an Irish context with his seminal publication *Landscapes of Neolithic Ireland*. But how are sacred sites selected? Park believes that there 'is no clear answer' since different religions select their sacred sites using different criteria, and that criteria can even vary over time within the same religion (Park 1994:251). Stump (2008) agrees and argues that geographical forms of sacred space can differ greatly in their character and extent. He asserts that they can range in scope 'from imagined conceptions of the structure of the cosmos to locally constituted places of worship and even to the body of the individual adherents' (Stump 2008:305).

Carmichael *et al* (2008) highlight the fact that sacred spaces across the world are often connected with, or are themselves, natural features of the landscape such as mountain peaks, springs, rivers, woods and caves (Carmichael *et al* 2008:1). Theodoratus and LaPena (2008) discuss specific types of features, including mountains, rock out crops, caves and pools which possess important qualities for the Native American Wintu in California (Theodoratus and LaPena 2008:20). Similarly, Radimilahy (2008) talks of springs, lakes, caves, upright stones and the

roots of trees considered sacred in Madagascar. He additionally, highlights the use of altars as an integral part of these 'sacred places' (Radimilahy 2008:83). In effect sacred space helps to ground supernatural meanings in specific spatial contexts, whether real or imagined (Stump 2008:329). In the following section the supernatural meanings that are imbued in these specific spatial contexts are investigated within the concept of the *axis mundi*.

#### **2.4 The Nature of Sacred Space: The notion of the *axis mundi***

Animist views hold that rocks, trees, rivers, and other topographical features have spirit which may create or inscribe meaning in certain places (Wallis and Blain 2003:4). Ancient peoples worshipped the very substance of nature, lending it 'spirit' and 'soul'. For the Nenets in the Arctic the most important elements were earth, water, fire, stone and wood which became objects of veneration (Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin 2008:58). In Madagascar, springs, lakes, caves, upright stones and the roots of trees such as Tamarinds and other ficus along with altars, where people came to pray, sacrifice or give offerings, formed an integral part of their sacred spaces (Radimilahy 2008:83).

In Kenya too, along the coast, sites were either naturally or artificially created. Here the most common types of sites found were forests, caves, open-air sites, rock shelters, monumental tombs, abandoned and ruined mosques and large trees. Reserved for religious and ceremonial functions, the sacred space was an area set apart or dedicated for the use of the supernatural (Okello Abungu 2008:152). Topography was equally essential for the maintenance of Native American Wintu identity and cultural continuity in California (Theodoratus and LaPena 2008:20) where specific features, such as mountains, rock outcroppings, caves and pools, give expression to conceptual life and cultural identity (Theodoratus and LaPena 2008:22).

Similarly, for the Saami society of Norway, their choice of sacrificial location was primarily governed by topographical conditions. The majority of their sacrificial sacred spaces are dictated by the presence of outstanding formations in the landscape and may be found on or close to hills or mountains, places in lakes, close

to rapids or waterfalls or on meadows or heaths. Most of their sacrificial ceremonies were undertaken at places where there were existing sacrificial stones. Many of these stones were naturally shaped and, where no stone already existed, they were transported to the site (Mulk 2008:125). There are a number of similarities between the pre-Christian Saami religion in Norway and Catholicism in Ireland. The history of the Saami includes colonial control and systematic attacks upon their culture, languages and religion (Kraft 2010:54). In Norway, the pre-Christian Saami religion survived until the seventeenth century when Mulk (2008) advises that the Swedish church intensified the mission among the Saami and oppression and persecution led to the concealment of old rites and ceremonies in fear of reprisals. As a consequence, he reports that the Saami people went 'underground' with their activities (Mulk 2008:130). Just as the sacrificial places and *seite* stones of the Saami society carry a strong emotional significance in Norway so the Mass Rock is an important historical, ritual and counter-cultural site that presents a tangible connection to Ireland's rich heritage for contemporary society. Driven underground, like the Saami, Catholics hid their Mass Rocks in secret locations throughout the country. Mass continued to be said at these sacred places, keeping the Catholic faith alive.

#### 2.4.1 **Sacred Water**

The symbolism reflected by the element of water occupies a most important place amongst the sacred spaces of many nations (Radimilahy 2008:86). As Eliade (1959) argues 'waters symbolise the universal sum of virtualities; they are "spring and origin" the reservoir of all the possibilities of existence. They precede every form and support every creation' (Eliade 1959:130). In Irish mythology water was seen as a regenerative force and individuals drank the water, were immersed within it or carried out specific rituals at it (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:22).

Regardless of the religious context in which we find water, Eliade suggests that it is at once purifying and regenerating and retains its ability to 'wash away sins' (Eliade 1959:131). Walsham (2012) identifies that, in Ireland, Holy Wells were widely regarded as locations where supernatural power was especially potent. In keeping

with Eliade's (1959) views concerning the power of water to wash away sins, she confirms that many wells in Ireland became destinations for pilgrims who were 'anxious to atone for their sins, earn merit in the eyes of God, and secure miraculous relief from crippling illnesses and painful conditions' (Walsham 2012:35).

The position of many wells in Ireland reflects the potential diversity of the topography of sacred space. Ó Giolláin (2005) reveals a range of geographical contexts for wells. He advises that, besides those found situated near to medieval parish churches, most wells are either situated on a height or by the seashore. They are found in three specific contexts (Ó Giolláin 2005:13). The majority may be found at the centre of a bowl like formation in a meadow or boggy area. Others are found in rocky or mountainous areas, regularly on mountain passes or, alternatively, they may be found coastally. These coastal wells are often situated where fresh water and salt water periodically merge (Ó Giolláin 2005:31). Mass Rock sites may also be found in similar contexts to these.

In exploring a multitude of wells in Ireland, Brenneman and Brenneman (1995) argue that the foundation of venerated springs lies in the mutability of water and in its earthly source (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:9). They discuss several wells where the water is changeable including St Brigid's (Brideswell), Cliffony, County Sligo and St Molua's Well in Skirk, County Leix which are examples of wells that have moved from their original location but still remain sacred (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:4). Further research undertaken by Connolly and Moroney (1998) identifies wells in county Louth that have also been transferred to alternative locations. An eighteenth-century legend explains that *Tobar an tSolais* in Killineer townland was once situated in Balgatheran townland in the parish of Mellifont. Polluted by a local butcher the well, together with a huge ash tree adorned by hundreds of lighted candles, was seen to move through the air and across a little stream to its new location (Connolly and Moroney 1998:33). Brenneman and Brenneman also discuss the cross-cultural and trans-historical ritual practice that takes place at some Holy Wells. They highlight the healing incantations, kingship

rights, druidic rounds and Catholic rites that can be performed at a well either serially or simultaneously (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:4).

There is written evidence to substantiate Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin's (2008) claims that ancient peoples worshipped the very substance of nature, lending it 'spirit' and 'soul' linking such practices to sacred sites in Ireland. In his seventh-century *Life of Patrick*, *Tírechán* mentions pre-Christian worship at a well in Ireland. He reveals that 'Patrick came to the well of Findmag, which is called Slán, because he had been told that the druids honoured the well, which they called the 'king of waters', and offered gifts to it 'as a god''. Whilst St. Patrick expected to find sacrificial offerings of gold and silver in the well, he found nothing except water when the capstone was lifted (cited in Low 1996:61). Clearly, water and its symbolism, as Brenneman and Brenneman (1995) argue, played a central role as creative forces in the cosmic religiousness of the pre-Christian Irish (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:22).

Brenneman and Brenneman (1995) also reveal that water is often spoken of as 'the source, the healer, and the essence of plant life'. They believe that the regenerative ability of water, its power to fertilize and bring about new birth, reflects the pattern of life itself. They argue that, governed by the moon, the patterns of the tides are imitative of the cycles of the earth itself. They also acknowledge that there has been continuity in the symbolism of water from the earliest times with water lending a spiritual quality to certain sacred places (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:16). In the natural realm various other water formations are believed to hold great sacred power (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:21) such as rivers and lakes. The miraculous Well of Segais from Irish mythology is believed to reside at the centre of the Otherworld. This sacred spring is characterised in several Irish texts as the source of all wisdom and the source of the most sacred rivers in Ireland, the Boyne and the Shannon (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:26). Acknowledging the sacred power of such rivers, the *Tales from the Ulster Cycle* reveal that Conchobor, son of Fachtna, was duly named after the river Conchobor after falling in as a child (Carey 2000:62).

### 2.4.2 Sacred Stone

Eliade (1959) reveals that the specific mode of existence of stone makes known to man 'the nature of an absolute existence, beyond time, invulnerable to becoming' (Eliade 1959:155). For the Native American Wintu in California, a 'guide rock' was an important topographical feature that indicated the direction to particular sacred spaces (Theodoratus and LaPena 2008:26). For the Saami society in Norway, sacred places consisted of naturally shaped stones, rocks or caves (Mulk 2008:125) with *sejddes* often characterised by rock formations that bore a certain resemblance to humans, animals or birds (Bradley 2000:6). In Ireland today, pilgrims visiting Croagh Patrick bring a stone and a piece of heather in honour of St Patrick (Hastings 2009:90) and the sacredness of stone is clearly evident in its primary use at Mass Rock sites.

Pennick (1996) further identifies stone as 'the fabric of the earth' and argues that, as such, it is a symbol of the everlasting with stones and rocks seen as the bones of Mother Earth (Pennick 1996:39). In Ireland, *Emain Macha* was traditionally believed to be the capital of the ancient province of Ulster and it is generally accepted that the great earthwork, today referred to as Navan Fort, is the *Emain Macha* of history and tradition (Raftery 1994:74). Initially occupied on a small scale in the Neolithic period, Raftery (1994) explains that the site continued to be used from the later Bronze Age to the Iron Age changing completely from its humble Neolithic beginnings. Raftery advises that during the Iron Age a single large and elaborate circular structure was erected (Raftery 1994:75). One of the primary activities carried out at this royal site would have been the enactment of an elaborate inauguration ceremony which the author compares to a fertility cult. During the inauguration the king would have been married to the earth in order to ensure the fertility of the crops and the animals (Raftery 1994:80). It is during the Iron Age in Ireland that we begin to see an overlap between language and *La Tène* material remains of Celts who settled across vast areas of Europe. Raftery argues that this overlap justifies the use of the term 'Celtic' as a convenient cultural label (Raftery 1994:12).

There is clear evidence within research of a link between the sacredness of water and the sacred space of Royal sites such as *Emain Macha*. In 1981, Brenneman and Brenneman (1995) undertook a field survey of the major remaining inaugural sites of Celtic Ireland. They discovered that located at or near almost every inauguration complex was a spring. Of further interest is the fact that these springs are often still ritually used by Irish Catholics today (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:36). Several authors (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995; Connolly and Moroney 1998; Zucchelli 2009) discuss the presence of specific sacred trees at such sacred sites.

### 2.4.3 Sacred Trees

Eliade (1959) discusses a number of trees recorded throughout the history of religions. These include trees of life, immortality and knowledge. Such trees, he argues, 'come to express everything that religious man regards as pre-eminently real and sacred' (Eliade 1959:149). In the Arctic, Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin (2008) found that trees within certain groves were considered to be sacred (Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin 2008:66). Similarly Laime (2009) identifies three holy groves associated with the seven *Ḳoniņi* villages of the *Kuldīga* area of Latvia. The author demonstrates how the ancient name of the sacred Elka Grove in *Ḳoniņi* has been preserved right up to the present day (Laime 2009:69).

Cusack (2011) explains that the power of a tree is principally derived from the fact that trees can operate as homologues of both humans and of the physical universe. He argues that this is particularly pertinent for the Pagan religions of the ancient world where the tree is a 'fundamental symbol'. He states that 'the tree's resemblance to the human form and its multivalent symbolic possibilities, which encompass the mapping of kinship systems, the bridging of multiple worlds, and the embodiment of the totality of the cosmos, results in its centrality in polytheistic religious, political and social organisation' (Cusack 2011:1).

Pennick (1996) identifies that in Celtic religion the veneration of trees is derived from dual sources. Firstly, demonstrating the close similarities between Celtic and Greek traditions and emphasising the essential unity of European polytheism, it has resulted from Graeco-Etruscan influences on central Europe during the *Halstatt* and

*La Tène* periods. Secondly, it has grown from archaic animistic beliefs and the author explains that in both Greek and Celtic religion each ancient deity was assigned their own specific type of holy tree (Pennick 1996:27). Pennick explains that Pagan Celts worshipped in sacred groves called *memtoi* which were dedicated to specific deities. At Vaison in Vaucluse a Gallo-Roman inscription was discovered commemorating the establishment of a nemeton in honour of Belesama. Others were more generally dedicated to the goddesses Arnemetia and Nemetona. Linking this more specifically to Ireland, he advises that the old Irish name for a sacred wood is *Fidnemet*. As centres of native loyalty, Pennick reveals that they were often subject to destruction. In the eleventh century, for example, the Irish high king Brian Boru reportedly spent a month destroying the sacred grove of Thor near Dublin (Pennick 1996:25).

Celtic beliefs suggest that a tree can be regarded either as a deity in its own right or as the seat of a deity. It can serve as a receptacle for an external spirit and, just as a human being has a soul, it is believed that trees also have personal souls. These souls are displayed as special qualities, strengths and medicinal values (Pennick 1996:24).

The power of a tree can be enhanced through other elements of the natural landscape in Irish lore. Pennick (1996) explains that a single thorn tree growing in the middle of a stony field or on a hillside is protected or inhabited by the fairies. However, it is made especially sacred if it grows close to a large boulder or Holy Well (Pennick 1996:32). This is further demonstrated in the story of *Cú Chulainn and Senbecc* as discussed by Carey (2000). The nuts of nine fair-bearing hazel trees were believed to contain supernatural enlightenment or *imbas*. These nuts dropped into the miraculous Well of Segais believed to be the source of the sacred rivers of the Boyne and Shannon. Thus enlightenment was carried from the hazel trees via the well to the Boyne where it was sought by Senbecc (Carey 2000:67).

Whilst the nature of sacred space has been discussed in respect to the individual elements of water, stones and trees in the notion of the *axis mundi*, there is a close bond between these individual elements that can enhance the *axis mundi* of a

particular sacred space. Park (1994) argues that all cultures throughout history have divided the world into a known realm and an unknown realm. Located in the mythical world, these specific real world features root the unknown world within the known world and act as a bridge between the two realms (Park 1994:246). In other words they fulfil the notion of the *axis mundi* which Burge (2009) proposes is a vital component of sacred space. This is particularly relevant at Mass Rock sites in Ireland where there appears to be a close relationship between the natural sacred elements of water, wood and stone.

## **2.5 Ritual and the Articulation of Sacred Space**

Muir (1997) identifies the early modern period as the most crucial moment in history for ritual theory. The author argues that the generalised concept of 'ritual' as a distinct kind of activity came in to being during the Reformation. He proposes a revolution in ritual theory between c.1400 and 1700 that utterly transformed concepts about time, the body, and the presence of spiritual forces in the world. He argues that the practice that would become recognised as 'rites' had, in fact, always been an essential component of Western culture. In support of this he identifies that Medieval Latin employed the term *ritus* for the liturgical practices of the church. Tracing its origins to the sixteenth century, he explains that the invention of the idea of 'ritual' was originally employed in a pejorative sense to describe the disreputable practices of somebody else; 'what I do was ordained by God and is "true religion"; what you do is "mere ritual", at best useless at worst profoundly evil'. He further argues that the introduction of the word 'ritual' indicates a major intellectual shift in the understanding of the relationship between human behaviour and meaning (Muir 1997:7).

Douglas (1996) argues that, today, the word 'ritual' has come to signifying empty conformity. For many sociologists the term is considered to reflect someone who performs external gestures but has no inner commitment to the values or ideas being expressed (Douglas 1996:1). Bell (1997) advises that among the best known examples of religious ritual is when an individual or group makes an offering to

their god or gods with a pragmatic expectation of receiving something in return (Bell 1997:108).

According to Muir (1997) the touchstone of the modern day analysis of ritual was the critical distinction between the profane and sacred in Emile Durkheim's (1912) *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology* (Muir 1997:3). It is clear that Durkheim's work significantly influenced Eliade's (1959) exploration of how ordinary (profane) space is transformed into holy (sacred) space as discussed earlier within this chapter. However, it is also apparent that Durkheim's work continues to influence the ideas of more recent scholars such as Smith (1987) and Kraft (2008). Smith (1987) argues that it is only through ritual that something or someone can be made sacred (Smith 1987 cited in Kraft 2010:59). Kraft (2010) acknowledges that ritual remains an important theme in the construction of sacredness among current scholars on sacred space and further introduces the idea of ritual rules and regulations that he believes must exist in order for this sacredness to be both expressed and maintained (Kraft 2010:59).

Ritual space provides a crucial link between religious practice and the concept of sacred space although the causal link between ritual and the sacredness of a place can be complex. As Stump (2008) explains, whilst a space can acquire sanctity from repeated ritual use, a space can also become used as a ritual centre because of the sanctity already attributed to that location by believers (Stump 2008:304). This is particularly pertinent to the study of Mass Rock sites in Ireland.

Whilst Bell (1997) acknowledges the potential for significant cultural variations in terms of ritual, he argues that it is still possible to identify some tenets that appear to underlie many ways of ritualising sacred space. Bell (1997) explains that since the earliest studies of ritual, scholars have attempted to impose some order by setting up categories through which they distinguish dissimilar types of ritual activities. Whilst he acknowledges that a great deal of variety has emerged due to each theorist's particular perspective, he proposes that there is some amount of consensus in terms of basic categories (Bell 1997:91). He argues that these include rites of passage, calendrical or commemorative rites, rites of exchange or

communication, rites of affiliation or feasting, fasting and festivals and finally political rituals (Bell 1997:94).

Stump (2008) concurs, acknowledging that the ways in which people interact with sacred space are as varied in character as sacred space itself (Stump 2008:329). Whilst acknowledging significant overlap can exist, he categorises such interactions in four broad categories:

- the ordinary worship practices of everyday life
- worship practices associated with specific life transitions or rites of passage
- practices associated with the afterlife or reincarnation
- exceptional worship events associated with various forms of pilgrimage (Stump 2008:330).

#### **2.5.1 Ordinary Worship Practices of Everyday Life**

Bell (1997) argues that in modern Western society ritual is thought of as a special activity that is inherently different from daily routine action. As a result it can be regarded as somewhat antiquated and, consequently, at odds with modernity. Ritual, he identifies, is often considered to have more to do with other times and places than with daily life as we know it in post-industrial Europe and America (Bell 1997:138). Bell's arguments would appear to be misplaced when viewed within an Irish context. Interviews undertaken by the author for a research Masters in 2009 show that ritual has remained an integral part of daily life in many parts of Ireland. One farmer interviewed discussed some of the rituals that are still scrupulously observed on the eve of *Bealtine*. Primroses are collected and left on the threshold of the home for protection. A cloth is also left outside the door. Imbued with special powers from the blessing of the Virgin Mary the cloth can be given to those who are sick to restore their strength (Bishop 2009).

Stump (2008) argues that, in ordinary worship, religious traditions have commonly incorporated active expressions of interactions with sacred spaces. He points to the fact that an action can often simply involve a physical expression of reverence or veneration toward the sacred. One example of this would be the Catholic practice

of making the sign of the cross in various contexts such as entering the sanctuary of a church or before praying. He also claims that specific religious rituals frequently focus on bodily involvement in sacred space and that these rituals can be crucial in the believer's assimilation of ritual knowledge or power. Again he offers an example within the Catholic faith where he argues that the practice of receiving Holy Communion reflects this pattern at various levels. He states that by ingesting the Eucharist bread and wine 'adherents are bodily linked to the divine space of the bread and wine itself, the sanctity of the local altar or Lord's table, and the imagined sacred spaces associated with the Christian doctrines of salvation and resurrection' (Stump 2008:331). This ritual represents the central sacrament in Catholic tradition.

#### **2.5.2 Worship Practices Associated with Specific Life Transitions or Rites of Passage**

Stump (2008) maintains that the sacraments discussed above have deep roots in archaic Hebrew and early Christian rites. In Medieval times additional 'sacramentals' provided a repertoire of rituals that supplemented the seven official sacraments. Muir (1997) explains that these 'sacramentals' consisted of minor rites and benedictions, actions associated with protective possessions and exorcisms as well as numerous blessed objects. These sacramentals borrowed prayers or gestures from existing church rituals and provided objects that could be taken away and used in daily life. Muir cites candles that had been blessed on the feast of the Purification of the Virgin, as an example. These were believed to drive away bad storms when lit. Muir identifies Holy water as being particularly efficacious (Muir 1997:156) thus further demonstrating the sacred properties of water.

#### **2.5.3 Practices Associated with the Afterlife or Reincarnation**

Parker Pearson (2003) argues that 'archaeologists have concentrated on looking for early treatment of the dead to shed light on the origins of symbolism, ritual and religion' with the evidence of grave goods often considered as evidence of the concept of an afterlife (Parker Pearson 2003:147). In Ireland, there is considerable evidence of a continued relationship with the dead among living communities

throughout the pre-historic era and through to the historic period. Parker Pearson maintains that for this to occur certain features are necessary:

- an awareness of - and expression given to – the permanence of death which can be contrasted with the transitory nature of life
- the existence of a set of beliefs relating to the supernatural presence and powers of the ancestors (Parker Pearson 2003:158).

According to Parker Pearson both the living and dead are subordinate to greater divine forces within most ancestor religions. These divine sources may consist of the sun and moon or more abstract entities such as fertility or the elements (Parker Pearson 2003:158). As discussed previously, the *axis mundi* may be represented by trees, hills, earth, stones and other natural features marking a point of intersection between these divine and earthly worlds as well as a point of contact between the two. Cooney (2008) identifies that sacred landscapes can often be made more permanent by the building of a monument. Such monuments are often built to the glory of the dead and ritual practices associated with the afterlife or reincarnation, such as funerary rites and rituals, may be performed by certain individuals who have the ability to contact the spirit world of the ancestors at particular times and in particular places (Parker Pearson 2003:158).

The great megalithic monuments built by Neolithic and Bronze Age communities provide some of the most prominent remains in Ireland's rich cultural landscape. Often referred to as druid's altars or *Leaba Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne* (Grainne and Dermot's bed) they have been carried into popular memory through folklore and other traditional sources. Waddell (2005) discusses the cult of the dead and associated ritual practices at the great Neolithic passage tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth in the Boyne Valley. Relevant evidence comes from burial rituals, grave goods and other finds at such sites. Of further significance is the discovery of the ritual deposition of a range of human bones in the form of un-burnt fragments as well as cremations (Waddell 2005:83).

Evidence suggests that familial burial grounds were still being used in the late seventh and eighth centuries. This practice was denounced by the church

authorities who insisted that burial in ecclesiastical cemeteries was essential for salvation. O'Brien (1992) convincingly argues that it was in this period that 'burial near the bones of the saint became a substitute for burial near the bones of the ancestors' (O'Brien 1992 cited in Ó Carragáin 2003:147).

Ó Duinn (2000) proposes an unbroken stream of tradition from Neolithic times to the present day within the Catholic Church (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:51). He suggests the cremated remains found at the Bronze Age stone circles of Drombeg, Bohanagh and Reanascreena, in county Cork, as well as Cashelkeelty in county Kerry, were dedications in the same manner (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:50). Continuing to the early church, he advises that churches were often built on the burial sites of martyrs (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:50). Then, as Christianity spread to areas with an absence of martyrs, he reflects that it became customary to collect pieces of the bones of the martyrs and insert them in the altar of the local church (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:51). Further evidence that older ritual traditions associated with the veneration of bones continued to more recent centuries is provided by Nolan (1983). At the shrine of St Gobnait in Ballyvourney Parish, county Cork, the bones of a 'saintly' seventeenth-century priest were kept in a box under his tomb slab. Used for cures, the bones are believed to have disappeared a decade or two ago, although dirt from the grave is still thought to have curative value. In the parish church at Boher, county Offaly, the bone filled reliquary of St Manchen, a seventh-century local holy man apparently managed to remain near its original site of veneration throughout the Penal era (Nolan 1983:429).

Burial at non-ecclesiastical sites has continued to recent times. Research undertaken by Nugent (2008) in county Clare demonstrates that even by the nineteenth century a significant number of such sites remained the focus for the burial of infants (Nugent 2008:89). Ireland has a long tradition of separate burial for unbaptized children. The provision of separate burial grounds was well established from the medieval period onwards and has continued into recent memory. Research by Finlay (2000) highlights that unbaptized children, who were ineligible for burial within the consecrated ground of a churchyard, demanded an alternative marginal burial locality that reflected their own liminal state (Finlay 2000:408).

Research (Finlay 2000; Nugent 2008) demonstrates a definite link between ringforts and child burial. Often known as a *cillín*/Killeen, *ceallúnach* or *lishleen* (Finlay 2000:409) these sites are often associated with ringforts (O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996) and lie 'at the intersection of diverging worlds of symbolic imaginings that encompass a wide variety of interacting social and cultural identities' (Ní Cheallaigh 2006: 105). This is particularly pertinent to research as a number of ritual archaeological monuments continued to be selected for the celebration of Mass throughout the Penal era.

#### **2.5.4 Exceptional Worship Events Associated with Various Forms of Pilgrimage**

Adair (1978) believes that the pilgrim instinct is found deep within the human heart but acknowledges that it finds 'different expressions according to time, place and culture' (Adair 1978:15). He points out that, even in our more secular century, individuals still make pilgrimages. He argues that, through such devotion, individuals attempt to bridge the gap between the present and the past just as their predecessors did in medieval times (Adair 1978:15).

From its inception in the fifth century A.D., Nolan (1983) demonstrates that Christian pilgrimage in Ireland differed significantly from traditions established elsewhere on the continent. She argues that the early Irish church was such a unique institution that, when compared to many other parts of Europe, it was far more open to the syncretism of old and new religious traditions. Often in remote areas and characterised by sacred site features such as heights, insularity, or the presence of holy water sources, trees or stones, old holy places became 'baptised' into the new religion or were given new meaning through their historical and legendary associations with Irish saints (Nolan 1983:422). This latter aspect will be subsequently discussed within this chapter in the context of mythology, folklore and oral tradition.

John Richardson's *The Great Folly of Pilgrimage*, published in 1727, identifies exceptional worship events associated with pilgrimage in Ireland. He describes a ten-day pilgrimage routine which included pilgrims removing their shoes and

uncovering their heads before arriving at St. Patrick's purgatory in Lough Derg where they were greeted by the prior. After reciting their *Paters, Aves and Credos* they kissed stones and walked around various altars, chapels and penitential beds. This was followed by their walking into the water and performing further rituals there (cited in Cunningham and Gillespie 2001:173).

Both Adair (1978) and Mac Cana (2011) draw attention to the Irish ritual tradition of walking round sacred spaces such as Holy Wells in a clockwise direction. Adair claims that such ritual practice dates back to the days of sun-worship when pagan worshippers walked in the direction of the sun around a stone or circle (Adair 1978:197). Mac Cana traces its roots from the mythical genres recorded in medieval manuscript texts and medieval hagiography to its continuation as a feature of traditional domestic rites as well as popular pilgrimage (Mac Cana 2011:123). He argues that the sun-wise circuit remains a familiar feature of numerous national, regional and local pilgrimages in Ireland. He identifies that in popular usage and tradition recorded in more recent times such instances of circumambulation, both formal and informal, remain numerous (Mac Cana 2011:132).

It is traditionally believed that circumambulation should be performed *deiseal* or turning to the right. There is one exception to this and that is the turning of a plough-team at the end of a furrow which should always be performed *tuathal* or leftwards. Mac Cana further points out that on St John's Eve (Midsummer) a coal lit from the bonfire was carried three times *deiseal* round the house to bring good luck to the household (Mac Cana 2011:132). At some Holy wells in Ireland there is a carved stone at which the pilgrim may pray or walk around (Logan 1980:21). At Saint Brigid's well in Faughart Upper townland, in county Louth, pilgrims still walk *deiseal* or sun wise around the well. Whilst Mac Cana (2011) links such ritual to Ireland's ancient Celtic pagan roots, it could be argued that such ritual activity stretches beyond this date. Stout and Stout (2008) argue that the preponderance of art on the kerbstones of the Neolithic Newgrange passage tomb indicate that ritual practices included a procession around the circular mound (Stout and Stout 2008:58).

Walsham (2011) believes that religious historians have often argued that ‘the piety of pilgrimage and holy places had little in common with the movement for the spiritual renewal of the Church of Rome’ in early modern Ireland. She disagrees and asserts that pilgrimage and piety reflected the stable rhythms of a religion that revolved around the habitual performance of ritual. As such, she states that it was at odds with the ‘doctrinally self-conscious and morally rigorous brand of Catholicism’ that was increasingly being introduced from the continent to Ireland during this period. She further argues that this ‘archaic and unreconstructed’ aspect of Catholicism was so rooted in the rituals of the Celtic past that it exerted a powerful and long lasting reactionary influence. Walsham proposes that, in embracing features of both the cultural and natural landscape, sacred spaces such as dismantled shrines, Holy Wells and redundant churches, that had been violently defaced in the course of the long Reformation, became an arena for continued individual devotion and collective worship (Walsham 2011:155).

Brenneman and Brenneman (1995) find further evidence of a connection between sacred rituals in the prehistoric and more contemporary times. They believe that objects incorporated into ritual practice or ‘patterns’ performed at or near Holy Wells today is a continuation of the ancient ritual of votive offerings evident within the pre-historic period (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:17).

#### **2.5.5 Votive Offerings at Sacred Spaces**

The range of votive offerings deposited at sacred spaces can vary enormously. It can range from ‘ritual litter’ such as flowers, coins, candles, tea light holders and other such objects to the deposition of objects already considered sacred such as stones and crystals. Additionally, a sacred space or object may be deliberately ‘tagged’ with symbols such as spirals and pentacles (Blain and Wallis 2004:241). Evans (1966) confirms that, in Ireland, the ritual of ‘paying rounds’ at a well commonly includes tracing the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles on a stone covering the well (Evans 1966:298).

Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin (2008) provide details of some of the votive offerings left at sacred trees in the holy groves of Kozmin Copse in the arctic. Ribbons, straps

and cords were found tied to trees along with small bells, a mirror, rings, ornamental discs and other objects made of bronze which had been deposited nearby. Both bronze and copper were considered to be holy and possess supernatural qualities and properties (Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin 2008:70). In Ireland the votive offering of rags remains the most common way to honour a sacred tree in order to effect a cure or to have a wish granted (Zucchelli 2009:74). Rags and rosary beads can still be seen today hanging on tree branches by *Tobar Domhnaigh* (Sunday's Well) in Toberdoney, county Louth (Connolly and Moroney 1998:57). Beside Saint Brigid's well in the same county rags, threads, rosary beads, pieces of lace and scented hearts adorn a large laurel bush (Connolly and Moroney 1998:65). This ritual practice of votive offerings and 'tagging' continues today at a number of Mass Rock sites.

## **2.6 The Role of Mythology in the Sacralising of Place**

Whilst it was discussed earlier that Chidester and Linenthal (1995) believed sacred space to be ritual space, identifying ritual as an integral part of sacralisation, Park (1994) disagrees. He explores how the selection of sacred sites can sometimes simply result from an association with earlier myths and legends. He maintains that not all sacred sites are sacred in the sense that people pray or perform rituals there and he draws evidence from the incorporation of pre-historic and pagan monuments into newer faiths. He demonstrates that, in Brittany, many megalithic monuments were incorporated into early Christian churches. These included parts of the standing stone alignments of Carnac. Similarly, many early British churches were located on or adjoining pre-historic or pagan monuments. Park maintains that it was the re-use of existing sacred places that significantly aided the early spread of Christianity amongst non-believers. He also points out that this recycling of earlier monuments ensured their continued survival as sacred spaces (Park 1994:252).

Both 'ritual', as previously discussed, and 'myth' are among the basic tenets for the understanding of religion amongst scholars (Bell 1997:5). Anthropologist Edward B Tylor (1832 – 1917) argued that it was vital to interpret myths as a deliberate philosophical attempt to explain and understand the world (cited in Bell

1997:4). In support of this view Brenneman and Brenneman (1995) emphasise that myths establish a world that is a coherent whole in which humans dwell together in relationship to the sacred (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:25).

Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Cusack 2011:2). Such traditions and knowledge are often handed down orally and Andrews *et al* (2006) advocate the potential of these oral histories, especially for geographical enquiry. They suggest that 'they clearly demonstrate unique insights into the history of places', providing 'recollection about self, about relationships with others and a place' which are insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods (cited in Riley and Harvey 2007:348). Place memory and place identity have become important themes in recent geographical research (Riley and Harvey 2007:349).

Burge (2009) introduces the notion that myths and legends often provide explanations for the location, size, form and function of sacred sites and can furnish them with authenticity (Burge 2009:225). There is certainly evidence to support these views within an Irish context. In *Map-making, Landscapes and Memory*, Smyth (2006) explores how Gaelic territories and peoples were governed and organised 'mainly by the words and the living images associated with manuscripts, memory, local lore and myth' (Smyth 2006:58). He explains that the detailed naming of landscape features in Ireland and the stories associated with them were passed down from generation to generation. He identifies how the human creation of Ireland's mountains, rivers, lakes and plains is described in the stories of both the *Lebor Gabála* and the *Dindshenchas* and acknowledges how these have become embedded in Irish memory (Smyth 2006:3). Highlighting that the primary focus of the *dindshenchas* (place-lore) favours the preservation of memories, Toner (2005) advises that the *dindshenchas* was rendered into verse between the ninth and twelfth centuries (Toner 2005:61). A collection of Old and Middle Irish stories, Hicks (2011) maintains they are 'a sacred geography for the pre-Christian sites in Ireland' (Hicks 2011:41).

In support of Burge's claim that myths and legends often furnish sacred sites with authenticity, Toner (2005) also turns to the *dindshenchas*. He argues that the regular assertions by the poets of the metrical *dindshenchas* that they are telling the truth reveals their belief in a single and correct origin for the names they present (Toner 2005:74). He maintains that verse was undoubtedly held in high esteem in the literate environment of Irish monastic scriptoria and further explains that verse was cited more frequently than books. He believes that this was in order to substantiate or authenticate historical material. He concludes that not only were memorized metrical accounts more readily available to writers than written texts but also that 'poems frequently carried authority because they were attributed to particular renowned historians, a feature not always present in the manuscripts' (Toner 2005:83).

Further evidence of the explanations for the location, size, form and function of sacred sites in Irish mythology comes from Mac Cana (1975). He discusses the 'pre-history' of *Immram Brain* which the author believes may well preserve a good deal of older oral tradition (Mac Cana 1975:34). Mac Cana argues that the *poetic Immram* consciously endeavoured to show the story of *Mongán's* birth as a particular form of myth and drew upon earlier traditional sources for some of the basic elements of his composition (Mac Cana 1975:33). *Mongán* was the son of the King of Ulster but is often associated with the 'otherworld' and had much knowledge of the many hidden lands and islands of the world. The story tells of many islands lying to the west of Ireland with each island described as being three times the size of Ireland itself (Mac Cana 1975:35).

Nowhere is the relationship between the mythology and the memory of landscape more vivid than within Carey's (2000a) discussion of the route taken by the horsemen in *The Intoxication of the Ulstermen* from the *Ulster Cycle*:

Into the green of Dún Dá Bend, to Cathir Osrin, to Lí Thúaga, to Dún Rígáin to Olarbi, and by the edge of Olarbi into the Plain of Macha, into Sliab Fuait and Áth na Forari, to Port Nóth Con Culainn, into the Plain of Muirthemne, into the land of Saithi, across Dubid, across the stream of the Boyne, into the Plain of

Brega and Meath, into Senmag Léna in Mucceda, into Claithar Cell, across the Brosnachai Bladma; with their left to the Pass of Mera daughter of Trega (called Bernán Éle today), to their right to Slíb Éblinni ingini Guaire (the Mountain of Éblenn daughter of Guaire), across Findsruth, which is called the River of the Descendants of Cathbad, into Machaire Mór na mMuman (the Great Plain of Munster), across Lár Martini (the Lowland of Martin) and into Smertaini. Their right was before the white rocks of Loch Gair, across the stream of Lind Mági, to Clíu Máil Meic Úgaine, into the borders of Little Dési in the land of Cú Roí mac Dári. Every hillock over which they went, they would level it so that they left it as valleys. Every wood they crossed through, the iron wheels of the chariots would chop the roots of the enormous trees so that it was a country of plains after them. Every stream, every ford, and every river-mouth they crossed over were fully dry, bare stone slabs afterwards for a long time and long distances, because of the quantity that the horses carried away before their knees from the water which made up the cascades, and the fords and the river mouths

(Carey 2000a:111)

Routes such as this are still remembered and can be identified today. The Tain Trail runs from county Roscommon to the Cooley Peninsula in county Louth and traces the route followed by the rampaging armies of the legendary Queen Maeve detailed in the *Tain Bo Cuailgne* or the Cattle Raid of Cooley (Longford 2013 internet source).

At sacred sites such as *Emain Macha* Raftery (1994) describes 'a convoluted world of myth and legend'. He argues that they represent worlds 'where the distinctions between fact, fantasy and fabrication tend to be blurred and often unrecognizable' (Raftery 1994:81). Pennick (1996) provides one such example of this. In the first century AD, Maximus of Tyre wrote that 'the Celts devote a cult to Zeus, but the Celtic image of Zeus is a great oak' (cited in Raftery 1994:78). A venerated single tree known as a *bile* was part of any such sacred place where Gaelic kings were inaugurated. Pennick explains that in ancient Ireland there were five such sacred trees each representative of a different province. These were the trees of Ross and Mugna, *Tortu* and *Datha*, and the branching ash tree of *Uisnech*. Alongside the

branching ash of *Uisnech* stood the Stone of Divisions believed to be the naval of the land. Mugna's tree is described as 'an evergreen oak which bore three varieties of fruit'. Mugna's oak was said to produce apples and nuts in addition to acorns (Pennick 1996:28).

Here the convoluted worlds of history, myth and legend blur the distinction between fact, fantasy and fabrication to provide evidence of the relationship between the various *axis mundi* of trees, stone and water. The presence of sacred springs at inauguration sites such as *Emain Macha* has already been discussed and Pennick provides further evidence that trees were also part of any sacred space where Gaelic kings were inaugurated. Further, the mythological branching ash of *Uisnech* stood alongside the Stone of Divisions. Demonstrating the ritual aspect of such sacred sites, Pennick further explains that offerings and the remains of ceremonies were hung upon *bile* trees (Pennick 1996:28).

Cooney (2008) believes that such mythic landscape provides an ideal medium for the symbolism, manipulation and transformation of the past. He points to a number of Neolithic sites which are represented in different ways within mythology. He maintains that these were part of 'a complex system of folk belief into which places were incorporated and explained in a way that had continuing meaning for people' (Cooney 2008:39). Hubert (2008) explores how some pre-historic sites continue to exhibit 'ancestral' links today through their re-use. He believes that such 'living sites' that remain in contemporary use, or even sites that are no longer used, remain important symbols of a distant past (Hubert 2008:9). This is particularly relevant to the re-use of archaeological monuments as Mass Rocks during the Penal era.

As demonstrated, Ireland's landscape remains a vital component of Irish mythology. Low (1996) believes that the legends of gods, goddesses and Otherworld beings said to have inhabited the landscape are a vital component in the memory of sacred space. He further argues that such stories remain present to the imagination today in Ireland not only through the myths and legends themselves but also through present day festivals, pilgrimages and other customs

(Low 1996:23). Low explains that such myths 'enshrined values and world-views which could not simply be discarded without threatening all that held the community together. Instead they were collected, modified, and re-invented in an on-going myth-making process' (Low 1996:25).

## **2.7 The Language of Sacred Space**

Park (1994) observes that one of the most enduring ways in which religion can influence landscape is through place-names (Park 1994:241). In many countries such as Ireland it is common to find religious names for towns and topographical features. For example, there is a plethora of local place-names in Ireland which are pre-fixed with *cill* meaning church demonstrating a strong ecclesiastical presence in the landscape. With respect to older religious traditions, Walsham (2011) discusses that Armagh or *Ard Macha* (the height of Macha) incorporates the name of a Celtic pagan goddess (Walsham 2011:26).

Radimilahy (2008) demonstrates how place names can also include a term that indicates the sacred nature of a particular space. Drawing on place-names in Madagascar he discusses the term *Ambohimasina* referring to sacred hills, *Ambatosikidiana* to sacred rocks and *Ankazomasina* meaning the sacred tree (Radimilahy 2008:85). In Ireland, Movilla in county Down is purported to be the derivation of *Magh Bile* or the 'plain of the sacred tree' (Walsham 2011:26). Smyth (2004) explains that such place-names can be of great assistance to a geographer in that they constitute 'distinctive and integral components of a country's symbolic universe' with the perpetuation of names providing 'a powerful memory bank for, and of, a culture' (Smyth 2004:243). He further argues that names can provide 'very important clues to questions of colonisation, conflict, conquest, accommodation and assimilation' (Smyth 2004:244).

Hughes (1991) argues that whilst place-names can hold extensive clues in respect to the Gaelic language (Hughes 1991:116), those studying place-names must exercise caution. He advises that place-name scholars must consider not only the local pronunciation in spoken dialects but also the pervasive element of folk etymology when dealing with names (Hughes 1991:128). This is due to the fact that

place-names can change dramatically, within the boundaries of a single language, over a period of time and, thus, can often disguise the original form of the name (Hughes 1991:122).

Of particular significance to this research is Hughes' assertion that modern place-names in Ireland do not differ to any significant degree from their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century forms (Hughes 1991:122). Beiner (2007) argues that the Irish vernacular landscape can be mapped through a micro-toponymic study of place-names. He maintains that, together with the folk history narratives associated with them, place-names in Ireland have functioned as an everyday mode of commemorating past events that were of local significance (Beiner 2007:210). He demonstrates this through his research of the events of 1798 showing that the French invasion left a string of place-names in its wake through which the events of 1798 were remembered (Beiner 2007:212). The language aspect of sacred space is particularly pertinent to the study of Mass Rock sites and will be discussed within a dedicated chapter.

## **2.8 Sacred Space, Contested Space**

Kong (2001) believes that just as the sacred is a 'contested category' so sacred space is 'contested' space (Kong 2001:213). As previously stated, Smyth (2004) argues that names can provide 'important clues to questions of colonisation, conflict, conquest, accommodation and assimilation' (Smyth 2004:244). This is because many countries are characterised by complicated settlement histories alongside highly irregular, stratified and contested symbolic landscapes (Smyth 2004:243). This is particularly pertinent within an Irish context given the country's history of conquest and colonisation. Reflecting this view, Chidester and Linenthal (1995) propose that the most significant aspects of sacred space consist of 'hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession' (Chidester and Linenthal 1995:17).

Delle (1999) concurs and suggests that space is not merely a natural phenomenon but, rather, is produced and manipulated by human beings for specific purposes (Delle 1999:16). He argues that it can be used to manipulate human behaviour and

can, therefore, be used as a vector to analyse the negotiation of social power in colonial contexts (Delle 1999:15). The author further argues that this is especially significant in colonial situations like sixteenth-century Munster where particular material spaces were designed to elicit specific behaviours from the colonized by the colonizing (Delle 1999:16). More importantly, and of particular relevance to this study, Delle argues that there can be more than one experience or interpretation of any space. It is likely that those resisting colonisation will create new spaces or endeavour to reconstruct or consolidate existing forms and definitions of space (Delle 1999:17).

Schramm (2011) argues that the memory of violence is inscribed onto sacred spaces in a variety of settings including memorials, religious shrines and the natural environment (Schramm 2011:5). He insists that places and landscapes do not simply act as containers for memory but, rather, severely shape, and are also shaped by, the ways in which violence is experienced and performed as well as remembered (Schramm 2011:6). His views on the sacralisation of space may help to explain what Elliott (2000; 2009) has referred to as the Penal myth of the priest murdered at the Mass Rock and this will be discussed within a later chapter.

## **2.9 Concluding Remarks**

This literature review has explored the context of sacred space. It has engaged with relevant debate concerning the location and nature of sacred space from a global perspective. In focussing on the specific elements of water, wood and stone it has placed such academic work within an Irish context. The review acknowledges the importance of myth and ritual in the making of sacred space but also recognises the importance of language in the identification of sacred places. Finally, it has reflected on the contested nature of sacred space which is particularly pertinent to the study of Mass Rock sites given the historical background of conquest and colonisation in Ireland and the introduction of legislation against Catholics throughout the Penal era.

### 3

## Methodology and Sources

This research project aimed to assess the geographical distribution of Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross, county Cork, in order to test current hypotheses about their nature, use and significance in the retention of Catholic identity and practice.

The overall aims and objectives of this thesis were to:

- Map the distribution of Mass rock sites in Ireland using the Archaeological Survey Database of the National Monuments Service for the Republic of Ireland (ASD) and the Sites and Monuments Record for Northern Ireland (SMR).
- Map the distribution of potential Mass Rock sites within the diocese of Cork and Ross using a synthesis of historical, geographical, archaeological, language and folklore sources in order to provide a comprehensive resource that would highlight any anomalies in distribution and density.
- Conduct relevant field research at a number of Mass Rock sites in order to produce a reliable data set for analysis.
- Develop a set of typologies for Mass Rocks that expanded and further defined the original description within the Archaeological Survey Database of the National Monuments Service for Ireland (ASD).
- Locate Mass Rock sites within their historical and geographical context to test existing and emerging hypotheses as follows:

Current hypotheses:

- Until further evidence emerges, priests murdered at Mass Rocks is a Penal myth (Elliott 2000; 2009)
- Mass Rocks are in areas of extreme poverty or where the landlord was hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism (Elliott 2009; Whelan 1995)

- Mass Rocks are in secluded upland settings as depicted in mid nineteenth-century history text books and on modern day Republican Murals.
- Mass Rocks served primarily as landmarks for the community to identify the designated place at which to assemble for Mass (Zucchelli 2009:160).

Emergent hypotheses:

- There are distinct differences between types of Mass Rocks used and it is possible to categorise these using a new and innovative typology
- The location and distribution of Mass Rocks may be indicative of a strand of Catholicism imbued with older pre-Christian traditions

These aims and objectives have been achieved through field research undertaken in the diocese of Cork and Ross, county Cork, Republic of Ireland together with a desk top study of both primary and secondary sources. This has enabled data collected to be set within a broader context of study. Data for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland was exported from the online resources provided by the Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) and the Archaeological Survey Database of the National Monuments Service for Ireland (ASD) respectively. Both sites are flawed as an ultimate authority in that the information recorded is constantly changing and being updated to include new or additional information. The Mass Rock site at Derrynafinchin, near Bantry, is one such example. Identified during early research in 2009 and visited in July 2012, the site was subsequently added to the Archaeological Survey of Ireland later that same month. This resulted from research undertaken by local archaeologist Tony Miller who had visited the site the previous month. However, research of the digital data base, undertaken by the Heritage Council, shows that there are only marginal differences between this and the published paper database (Heritage Council 2006:22). Therefore, the data used for the purposes of this research is considered adequate.

### **3.1 Area of Study**

It was clear from a very early stage that an interdisciplinary approach would be needed in order to explore relevant data, methodologies, perspectives and

concepts that test current academic hypotheses about the nature, use and significance of Mass Rock sites and to complement existing studies in framing Irish Catholicism within a broader economic, social, cultural and political context. The over-riding discipline is that of Human Geography. Research is located within the subfield of Cultural Geography and specifically focusses upon the Geography of Religion. It has been presented within a framework of sacred space as outlined within the introduction.

However, both geography and archaeology, as disciplines, help to provide an understanding of the landscape and aid an appreciation of how the past evolved (Darvill 1987:164). Meinig (1979) argues that, as the environment sustains us as human beings, so the landscape displays us as cultures (Meinig 1979:3) encompassing an ensemble of ordinary features which constitute an extraordinarily rich exhibit of both the course and character of any given society (Meinig 1979:2). This research attempted to set the archaeological context of Mass Rock sites against their historical background whilst simultaneously considering geographical settlement patterns and topography. However, folklorist and Irish Language sources have also informed this research.

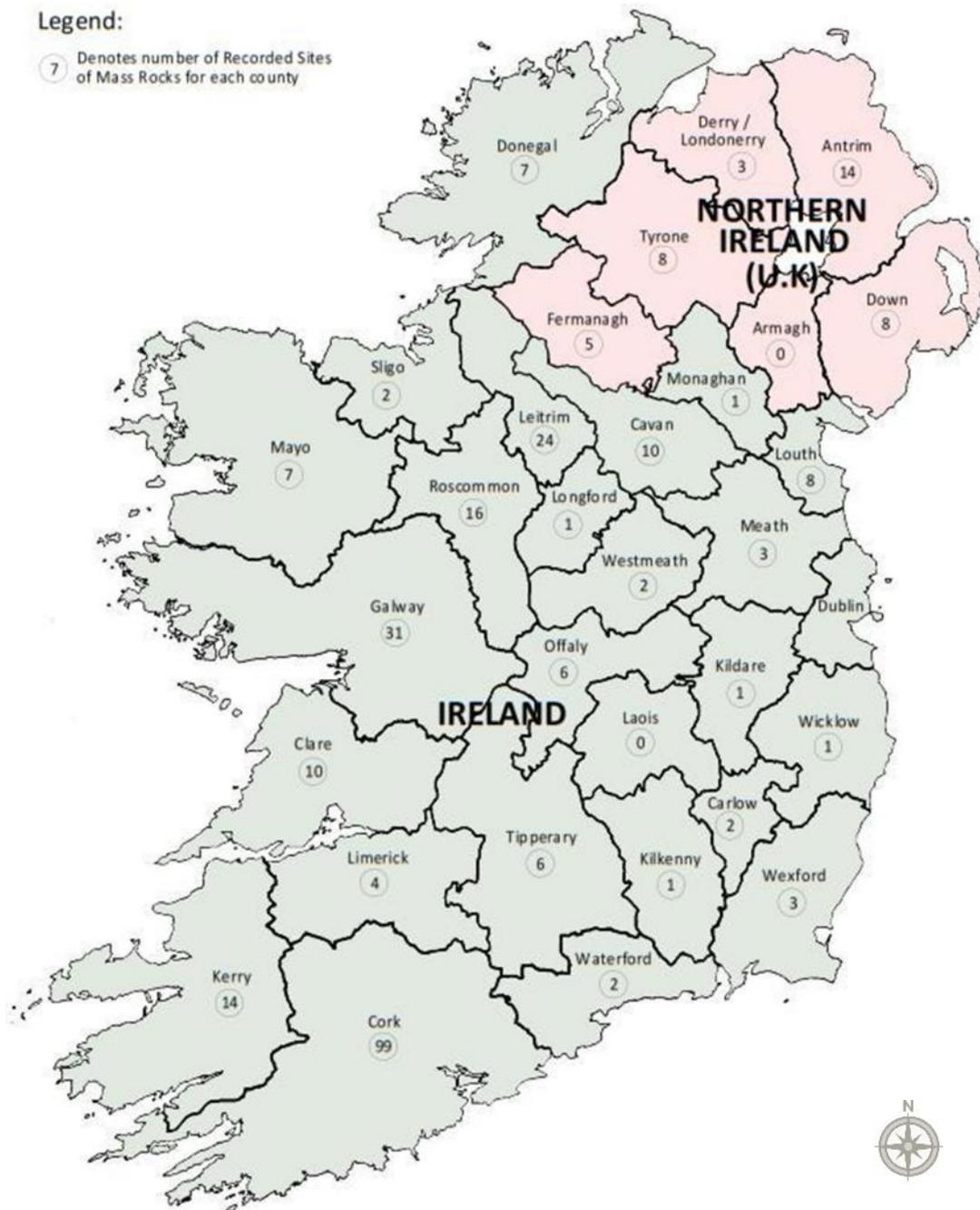
Research has been hindered by considerable changes in parish and diocesan boundaries which are no longer representative of past divisions. Murphy (1991) experienced similar difficulties within his own research, highlighting the fact that 'during the eighteenth century there was a good deal of fluctuation in the composition of parochial units as smaller parishes in particular drifted from one combination to another. In addition, dual parishes were sometimes broken up, probably as additional priests became available. In 1704 the pre-reformation parishes, either singly or in combinations, were still the reference point in forming parochial units' (Murphy 1991:141). As Bolster (1972) points out, the Penal era was predominantly the era of parish amalgamation. This was due to the decreasing availability of clergy with five or even six parishes often grouped together under a single priest (Bolster 1972:275).

During the eighteenth century, and the first half of the nineteenth century, frequent changes took place which involved territorial adjustments 'breaking the integrity of the older units' (Murphy 1991:141). In order to gather data it was necessary to identify the modern day parish and townland for each Mass Rock site. A number of townlands were visited within the same parish as well as several areas within each individual townland. Given the enormity of the task and the inherent difficulties discussed it has been impossible to visit all potential sites. However, the number of sites visited provides a sufficient data set for analysis.

As Murphy (1993) argues, historical geographies have made major contributions to our understanding of urban settlement and of the patterns of social history generally throughout Ireland (Murphy 1993:12) and Cork is no exception. Secondary sources, including Smyth (1988) evaluating the 1659 Census, Canny (1993) examining the 1641 depositions and Ó Murchadha (1993) analysing the Civil Survey and the Down Survey, have provided excellent evidence of settlement patterns for the area of study. Historical sources too have been invaluable, particularly in respect to the case study which has been used to test hypotheses that have emerged during research.

Whilst it was essential to frame the results of the research within an island-wide context, it was impossible to cover all counties equally and it was, therefore, necessary to define an area of study that was both manageable and meaningful. Initial investigation using on-line resources for both the ASD and SMR revealed that there were a total number of 261 Mass Rocks for all counties within the Republic and a further 37 recorded Mass Rock sites in Northern Ireland (Fig.1). This exploratory examination of the distribution of known/potential Mass Rock sites revealed some surprising concentrations and absences with county Cork experiencing a density of Mass Rock sites far greater than any other area and therefore providing an obvious focus for research. In order to keep the study area to a manageable size, the diocese of Cork and Ross was chosen as approximately 75% of known/potential recorded sites in the county are located within this particular diocese. This very localised study allows for a deep analysis of the data gathered that will enable the researcher to question the validity of assumptions

based on information at a national level and also to place the collected data and conclusions within a wider context.



Distribution of Mass Rocks - Ireland & Northern Ireland (U.K.)

Figure 1 – Map Indicating Number of Mass Rocks Recorded by County

### 3.3 Archaeological Sources

Like most historical archaeology this aspect of the research has been based on the analysis of both documentary and material records whilst simultaneously focussing on the material evidence that remains visible within the Irish landscape. One advantage of research in county Cork is that the area has enjoyed something of an extensive and systematic study of its archaeological and historical sites by the Cork Archaeological Survey team based in UCC (Murphy 1993:11). It also benefits from the publication of *An Archaeological Inventory of West Cork* (Power *et al* 1992) and the well-established *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*.

It has been necessary to be cautious when using some archaeological resources as there are inherent dangers in an over-reliance of the data produced within them. As Cooney *et al* (2000) point out, the Record of Monuments and Places, which forms the foundation of the list of all historical sites in the Republic of Ireland, predominantly consists of built structures which pre-date 1700AD (Cooney *et al* 2000:26). Rynne (2000) acknowledges that subsequent legislation, in the form of the 1987 amendment to the National Monuments Act, grants discretion where post-1700AD sites of national importance are concerned (Rynne 2000:53). However, given that many historians believe that Mass Rock sites were used predominantly as a result of Penal legislation passed between 1695 and 1756, there is a potential for many sites to be excluded from the record.

Carmichael *et al* (2008) argue that there is a general lack of considered concern regarding ritual and religious sites. They believe that this results in a significant weakness within archaeological theory that requires addressing. They argue that this lack of consideration has been accompanied by a lack of discussion about the nature of any special consideration which should be afforded to such sites, whether in reports about their existence or in legislation (Carmichael *et al* 2008: xiv). The archaeological excavation of sites associated with the Penal period has been severely limited in extent. Publications include the suspected location of a Penal Altar at Tullaher, Co. Clare (Cotter 1990), the possible location of a Mass House at Garrans in Co, Laois (Delaney 1994) and Donnelly's (2004) case studies of Araboy

Meeting House and Monea Old Mass House in county Fermanagh. There is little evidence of such excavations or studies for county Cork.

### 3.3.1 Locating Mass Rocks

By their very nature, Mass Rock sites are well hidden from sight and very difficult to find. Although some information can be gained from existing descriptions of sites, where available, it has only been possible to draw up a provisional list of Mass Rock sites within the diocese rather than a definitive one. Alternative sources have proved essential and a list of sites compiled by McCarthy (1989/90) and published in the *Journal of the Ballincollig Community School Local History Society* has proved invaluable. Each Mass Rock site visited has been fully recorded and a new typology has been developed by the author in order to divide the data in to a number of 'types' defined according to the same set of criteria and yet mutually exclusive. Typologies have been categorised according to physical appearance and consist of Natural Geological Rock Formations, Earth Fast Boulders, Man-Made Mass Rocks and Archaeological Monuments.

Where an archaeological record already exists for a Mass Rock site, the details have been verified and any variations or additions noted. All sites have been measured, where possible, photographed and descriptive details noted. In addition a 360° panoramic view of the surrounding topography has been recorded digitally although, given the constraints of publication, this has not been included within this thesis. Accurate OS co-ordinates for each Mass Rock have been recorded using a Garmin eTrex H Personal Navigator. This has been undertaken because the National Grid Reference provided for some sites did not appear to be completely accurate. Where it was not possible to access a site, co-ordinates have been recorded in the vicinity of the suspected location of the Mass Rock. It is hoped that these details will eventually be available on a dedicated website as a permanent digital archive accessible within the public domain with the exception of relevant co-ordinates. The decision to omit relevant co-ordinates has been taken in order to preserve the privacy of landowners for those sites that are not currently in the public domain.

### 3.4 Geographical Sources

There were limitations as to the number of sites that could be visited given the constraint of time and accessibility. Sites have been selected from a number of parishes within the diocese to give a broad overview of the distribution and types of sites that exist but, by their very nature, many sites are in remote or inaccessible places, on private land or simply overgrown and impossible to locate or access. In some cases the Mass Rocks have been removed or buried and Mass Huts, Mass Shelters or Penal Chapels left to decay. This was the case for several sites visited such as Cornahahilly where the Mass Rock was removed by the Forestry Commission. To date, it has been possible to tentatively identify 181 potential sites across the diocese of Cork and Ross using field research, diocesan and local histories and folklore archives (Appendix 1). 39 Mass Rock sites have been recorded to develop an understanding of their distribution and significance (Appendix 2). Attempts to visit a number of other sites, including several within the case study area, proved unsuccessful. Maps have been prepared using ArcGIS software under a relevant licencing agreement and, where it was not possible to locate the exact location of a Mass Rock the location of the townland in which it is situated has been used as the point of reference.

To capture the meanings, beliefs and experiences surrounding Mass Rocks a number of methods were undertaken. These included the collection of primary data through field research, the research of primary and secondary archival materials as well as discussions with locals within various counties in Ireland. Some Ordnance Survey Manuscripts and Memoirs, Ordnance Survey Maps and historical maps and charts have proved useful in assessing the topography of a given area. However, Ordnance Survey Memoirs and letters are regrettably deficient for Cork (Cadogan in Lewis 1837:1). Additionally, early cartographers had no cause to publicise Catholic chapels or other places of worship, by putting them on maps, for fear that this might have been misunderstood as a gesture of legitimisation. As a result many Government Officials paid little attention to them (Andrews 1997:19).

### 3.5 Historical Sources

*Uíbh Laoghaire* was chosen as a case study area due to its high preponderance of Mass Rocks. This case study has enabled a more thorough analysis of Mass Rock sites and has provided a solid context in which to test both current and emerging hypotheses. Additionally, it has provided a good comparative study with the *Report of the State of Popery 1731* which returned figures for Catholic priests, friars, nuns, churches, chapels, friaries, convents and schools in each parish within Ireland. The Cork report appears in the returns for the Dioceses of Cork, Cloyne and Ross which were included in the Munster returns reproduced in *Archivum Hibernicum* or Irish Historical Records, vol. 2, 1913, pp.108-156 and details places where Mass was celebrated throughout the diocese in the open air at Huts, Sheds and Rocks or in the open fields (Catholic Historical Society 1913). This report has been used as a baseline for modern day comparisons.

Historians are in agreement that, due to Ireland's turbulent past, historical and other sources are often limited. In her review of tradition and confessionism in Ireland between 1400-1690, Meigs (1997) points to the fact that many conventional sources used by Continental and English historians are lacking for Irish history. She explains that historians must, instead, often rely on foreign archives, particularly those of London, Belgium and Rome (Meigs 1997:4). Irish Catholic documentation, Barnard (2008) writes, is 'more about the history of ideas and high politics than about popular Catholic practices or beliefs' (Barnard 2008:185). Harris (2008) further stresses that later sources also tend to be dominated by Protestants (Harris 2008:5) for, as Barnard (2005) explains, they alone possessed the resources and leisure. Whilst they sometimes consulted learned Catholics who had preserved documents, objects and traditions, little about the circumstances of the lives of contemporary Catholics interested them (Barnard 2005:80).

In documenting Irish martyrs, Corish (1993) turns to the State Papers to provide a rich source 'in an area where other sources are scarce and scattered'. However, he too acknowledges limitations. He advises that this correspondence between the lord deputy in Dublin and the privy council in London was more concerned with the

problems of royal government in Ireland and their difficulties in raising taxes than the problem of religious recusancy. Whilst this correspondence would once have been underpinned by more 'grass-roots' material from across the country, a vast amount of this material was lost when the Irish Public Records office was destroyed in 1922 (Corish 1993:90). Elliott's (2000) sentiments echo those of Barnard (2005) in accepting that the resultant 'chaos' in which the seventeenth century is shrouded reveals little about the ordinary people (Elliott 2000:84).

### **3.6 Irish Language Sources**

As Dickson (2004) points out, there is one major problem common to nearly all new work on eighteenth century Ireland - it was based on English-language evidence (Dickson 2004:38). For the Gaelic Irish, a key aspect of this research, the difficulties are further complicated by the fact that particular biases have created a document base that either ignores them or presents them solely in the context of foreign institutional policies (Meigs 1997:4). Lyttleton (2009) believes that the exploration of early modern religious practice in an Irish context is truly hindered by the nature of documentary sources that are available and that native areas of the country are represented by little surviving documentation other than the annals or poetic eulogies (Lyttleton 2009:186). Smyth (2006) describes Irish language sources as 'sadly neglected by Irish geographers' and argues that they should be explored and examined in order that they might 'provide some insight into how the submerged Irish speaking community lived and responded to the pressures of the new political and colonial order' (Smyth 2006:18). Poetry texts, place-name studies and other Irish language sources have provided a range of information about the location and context of Mass Rock sites during research.

One of the most enduring ways in which religion can influence landscape is through the language of place-names (Park 1994:241). These can often include a term that is indicative of the sacred nature of a particular space (Radimilahy 2008:85). Beiner (2007) believes that it is possible to map Irish vernacular landscape through a micro-toponymic study of these place-names which have functioned as an everyday mode of commemorating past events of local significance (Beiner

2007:210). However, Power (1921) and Hughes (1991) highlight a number of difficulties in using place names as an ultimate source of reference. These are fully discussed within the chapter on the Language of Sacred Space.

### 3.7 Folklore Sources

Understanding folklore is an essential requirement for the interpretation of contemporary reactions to particular historical events (Hopkin 2001:3). Renowned for its vibrant oral traditions, Ireland is an ideal candidate for a case study of the relationship between folklore, memory and history (Beiner 2007:5).

The Irish Folklore Commission is the largest single resource available for the study of popular culture in Ireland's recent past (Ó Giolláin 2005:11). The use of Ó Súilleabháin's (1942) practical guide as to the type of material to be recorded from oral sources in Ireland has been invaluable. Ó Súilleabháin recommended that information and popular traditions associated with stones, Mass-rocks, altars, Mass-paths, *scáláin* (oratories) and other remains popularly associated with Penal times should be collected (Ó Súilleabháin 1942:17). Much of this information was gathered through the Schools' Folklore Scheme (1937-38). Now known as the Schools' Manuscript Collection, the scheme resulted in more than half a million manuscript pages of valuable material (UCD 2012 internet source) and the archives are available to the public at University College Dublin. Pupil attendance in the national school system was overwhelmingly Catholic and pupils who participated principally collected folklore from family members resulting in a pronounced partiality towards Catholic traditions (Beiner 2007:55).

Ó Súilleabháin (1942) stated that enquiries to be made, concerning the Penal days, were to include traditions found in particular districts, particularly whether popular tradition distinguished between the religious persecution of Cromwell's time and that which began forty years later after the Treaty of Limerick in order to ascertain which of these periods people were referring to when they spoke of the 'Penal Days' (The Bad Times *an Droch-shaoghal*). He called for the location of Mass-paths, Mass-stones or altars, mountain hollows, caves, bushes or other land marks popularly associated with the saying of Mass or some other religious exercise

during penal times, specifically suggesting that names and traditions connected with such places should be recorded. He recommended that accounts of how Mass was heard and any name that may have been applied locally to temporary churches or buildings (e.g. *scáláin*) used for the celebration of Mass during Penal times and afterwards to be recorded. He encouraged the collection of information concerning where the clergy lived during Penal times and how the people could get in touch with their priest.

Sufferings and ordeals endured by priests and people in Penal times were to be recorded including incidents of priest hunting, betrayal, capture, punishment or the murder of priests together with stories of unusual powers displayed by priests during Penal times and any known escapes of priests from pursuers. He called for information concerning help and shelter given to priests by persons of a different religious persuasion to be recorded as well as stories of individual priests who won popularity and fame during Penal times. Damage or destruction done to church property was also important as were the experiences of the laity during the Penal times (Ó Súilleabháin 1942:530). Volume numbers 281 – 282, 303 – 306, 339 – 340 of the Schools' Manuscript Collection were accessed. A number of manuscripts were written in Irish and were accordingly translated to inform research within this thesis. Whilst it is acknowledged that the Penal era was clearly afforded some priority and that the questions asked appear to be designed in order to elicit specific responses this has proved to be a valuable resource.

It must be acknowledged that many of the stories in the Schools' Manuscript Collection come from older generations and have been passed down orally from parents to children and grandchildren. However, as Taylor (1992) suggests, such folk versions are an indication of the way in which local people have 'appropriated events to form an ideology that to some extent both defined and framed their perception of local reality' (Taylor 1992:151). As such, entries are relevant in understanding the local experience and the complex relationship that existed between local religious practice and more 'official' forms of devotion (Taylor 1992:145).

This chapter has outlined the methods that have been employed in order to identify the remaining Mass Rocks in county Cork. It has defined the aims and objectives of the research and discussed the sources that have been utilised in respect to each appropriate discipline. It has summarised their strengths and weaknesses in informing the data and information collected. A table summarising the data sources used, together with access details, may be found below. The following chapters are dedicated to analysing the quantitative data that has been collected and to assessing the qualitative data in order to evaluate findings and test current and emerging hypotheses.

**Table 1 Summary of Main Primary and Secondary Sources**

| <b>Primary Sources</b>   | <b>Place</b>  | <b>Date of access/visit</b>  |
|--|---|------------------------------|
| Field Trip   | Kilworth, county Cork   | October 2010                 |
| Field Trip   | Dunmanway, county Cork  | April 2011                   |
| Field Trip   | Clonakilty, county Cork   | July 2011                    |
| Field Trip   | Inchigeelagh, county Cork   | August 2012                  |
| Ordnance Survey Maps   | County Cork   | 2010 - 2012                  |
| Northern Ireland Sites and Monuments Record (SMR)                                  | <a href="http://apps.ehsni.gov.uk">http://apps.ehsni.gov.uk</a>   | 24/11/2010 and<br>05/07/2012 |
| Archaeological Survey Database of the National Monuments Service for Ireland (ASD) | <a href="http://www.archaeology.ie">http://www.archaeology.ie</a> | 24/11/2010 and<br>05/07/2012 |
| Schools' Manuscript Collection (S) numbers 281 – 282, 303 – 306, 339 – 340         | National Folklore Collection<br>University College Dublin         | 01-03/09/2011                |

**Table 2 Summary of Printed Primary Sources**

| <b>Printed Primary Sources</b>                         | <b>Author</b>   |
|--|---|
| Report of the State of Popery 1731                     | <i>Archivum Hibernicum</i> Irish Historical Records, vol. 2, 1913, pp.108-156                               |
| 1659 Census  | Smyth (1988)  |
| 1641 depositions                                       | Canny (1993)  |
| Civil Survey and the Down Survey                       | Ó Murchadha (1993)  |
| Mass-Rocks and Altar Sites of County Cork, 1640 - 1800 | McCarthy (1989/90) <i>Journal of the Ballincollig Community School Local History Society</i> , 6, pp. 25-37 |

## 4

### Location of Sacred Space

*'Encrusted with signposts to the tangled religious histories of the nations that comprised it, the landscape helped early modern people to understand who they were and where they had come from – to comprehend the past that shaped them, to come to terms with the challenges of the present, and to find a compass and anchor as they sailed into an uncertain future'*

*Walsham (2011)*

#### 4.0 Distribution of Mass Rock sites in Ireland

Isaac's (1959-60) definition of the geography of religion involves the study of the part that religious motive plays in man's transformation of the landscape (cited in Kong 1990:358). Landscapes not only provide the physical settings for everyday life but are also an important expression of the relationship that exists between people and place (Meinig 1979:3). Temporally and spatially the 'sacred' results in certain places in the landscape being set apart from the ordinary or profane (Eliade 1959; Hubert 2008). Spatial patterns have traditionally captured the imagination of the geographer and the distribution of religion is perhaps the most logical link that exists between geography and religion. Whilst it is an area largely neglected by other disciplines, it is a most appropriate tool for geographical analysis and interpretation (Park 1994:56) and has therefore been employed in respect to the sacred space of Mass Rock sites.

In July 2012 the ASD recorded a total number of 261 Mass Rocks (ASD (2012) online source). This substantial figure excluded those situated in the six counties belonging to Northern Ireland where historian Marianne Elliott (2000) believes that the Ulster Plantation came nearer than any other province to fitting the stereotypical image of the Penal era (Elliott 2000:164). Despite such assertions, the SMR recorded details of just 37 Mass Rock sites (SMR (2012) online source). In total the number of recorded sites for the whole of the island of Ireland was 298 (Fig. 1).

#### **4.1 Distribution of Mass Rock sites in the Diocese of Cork and Ross**

The ASD listed a total of 99 Mass Rock sites in county Cork. Approximately 75% of these were situated within the diocese of Cork and Ross. Using a synthesis of historical, geographical, archaeological, folklore and oral sources it has been possible to expand the potential number of Mass Rock sites in this diocese to 181 (Fig. 2). In order to produce a reliable data set for analysis, relevant field research was undertaken at 39 Mass Rock sites and a small number of Mass Huts/Penal Chapels. A concise list of sites visited may be found within Appendix 2.

It is clear from the Report on the State of Popery 1731 that some Mass sites remained in their original location for a considerable period of time whilst others were frequently moved or rebuilt. In the parishes of Dromaleague and Caheragh there were two reported sites described as ‘small huts or Cabbins covering an altar’. The incumbent reports that the Mass House in the parish of Domaleague was ‘often removed from place to place ..... the one now in being is scarceley of six months standing’. The movable celebration of Mass was also a feature in Desert Surges parish where it was reported that ‘Mass is often said in several places in this parish, it was not very long ago near to the Parish Church’ (CHSI 1913:136). Yet in Skull parish, whilst frequently rebuilt the two ‘thatch’d cabbins’ were ‘fixed places for celebrating Mass’ (CHSI 1913:140).

The fact that Mass Rocks were temporally and spatially mutable may go some way in explaining the significant number of Mass Rock sites that have been identified during research. Further, Walsham (2011) argues that the emergence of new hallowed places can often be closely linked to the presence of charismatic priests who were accorded enhanced respect by laity as a result of the extreme danger they faced (Walsham 2011:221). Whilst Walsham discusses pilgrimage sites in Ireland, her arguments may equally be applied to Mass Rock sites. The overall numbers of Mass Rock sites listed must therefore be treated with some caution. However, it does provide one of the most thorough syntheses of available sources made to date for this diocese and identifies a number of previously undiscovered and unrecorded Mass Rock sites.

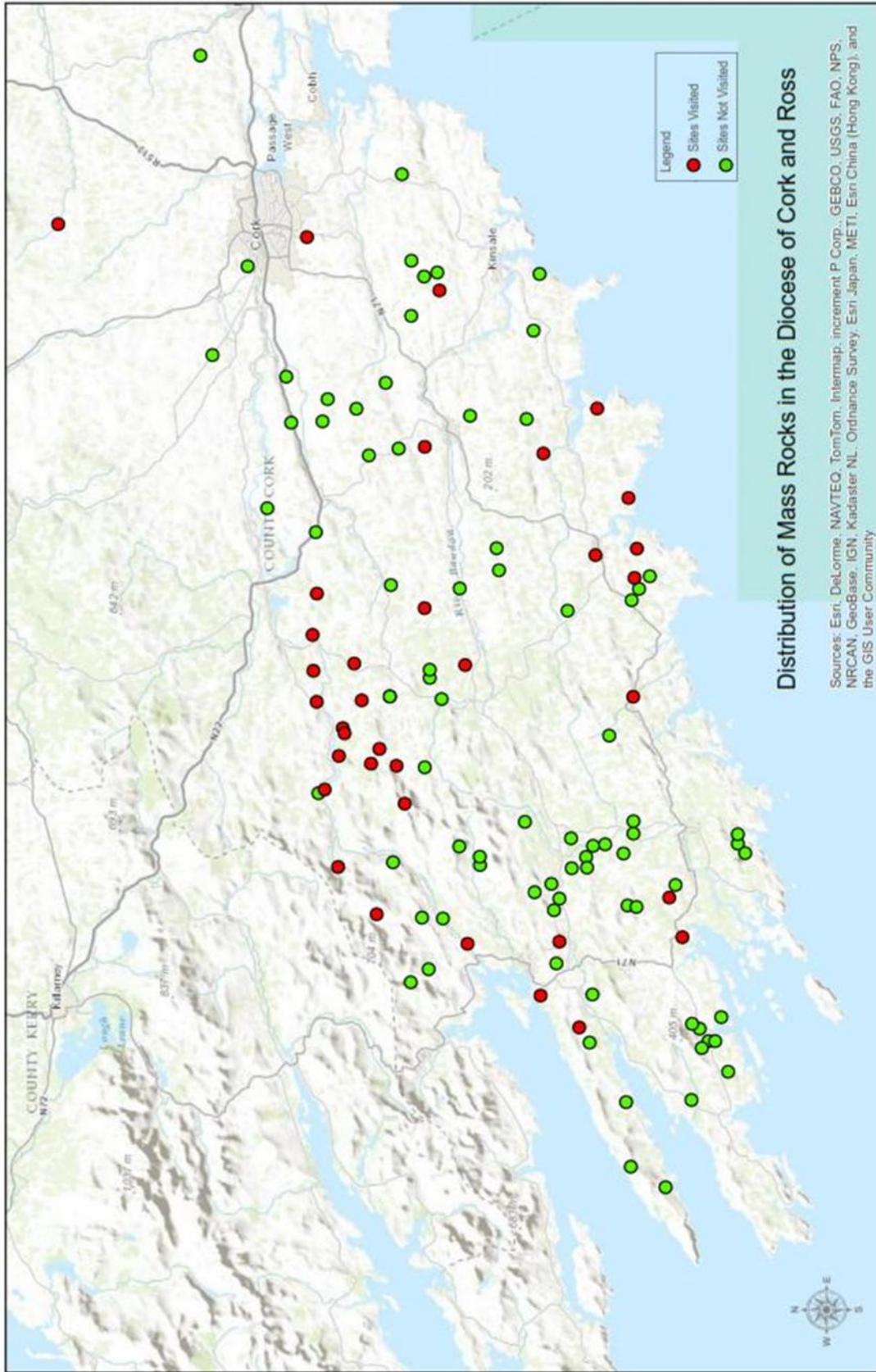


Figure 2 - Map of Potential Mass Rock Sites in the Diocese of Cork and Ross

Familiar tranquil landscapes are cultural images that can often mask the social, political, economic and spiritual processes from which they were formed (Robertson and Richards 2003:4). In Ireland, Smyth (2006) highlights the enormous importance of the period 1530-1750, which witnessed major changes in the organisation of Irish society and reflected significant 'discontinuities, dislocations and traumata' (Smyth 2006:346). Rather than being simply an inert backdrop to the momentous events that accompanied the advent of Protestantism and the energetic attempts of the Roman Catholic faith to resist annihilation, Walsham (2011) argues that this landscape provided a powerful arena for future devotion that shaped the profound theological, liturgical, and cultural transformations marking this crucial period (Walsham 2011:3).

#### **4.2. Locating Mass Rock Sites Within Their Historical Context**

In order to fully appreciate the location and nature of Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross it is essential to have some understanding of the legislation which impacted upon Catholic religion and landholding prior to and during the Penal era. Throughout the 1650s, under Cromwell, huge land confiscations had taken place and few landed Catholics had emerged unscathed (Bartlett 1992:10). By the early 1660s the fruits of Cromwellian expulsion policies were evident in Cork city which had been stripped of its Catholic majority (Smyth 2006:358). In the south west, O'Sullivan Beare had lost his lands and power during this period marking the end of the lordship. Many land grants were purchased by English Protestants such as Sir William Petty who acquired large tracts of land throughout Kerry and west Cork including all the lands of the *Mac Finn Duibh* (Breen 2007:48). Breen (2007) maintains that it is this later period that marks the true collapse of Gaelic influence in the south west regions (Breen 2007:50).

Whilst an Act of Settlement was published in July 1662, which resulted in the partial recovery of some Catholic landholding, the Irish landscape had changed significantly. After Cromwell's death, Catholics enjoyed a brief period of relative religious tolerance which came to an abrupt end with the defeat of James II during the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 (Zucchelli 2009:158). Just prior to the first

Williamite parliament, which met in 1692, McBride quotes the then Lord Lieutenant who warned of 'the violence that there will be against the Papists, for they do hate and despise them to the greatest degree imaginable' (Viscount Sidney (1692) cited in McBride 2009:202).

#### **4.2.1 The Penal Laws (1695 – 1756)**

The Williamite revolution of 1690-1691 ensured the dominance of the Protestant minority in Ireland (Hill 1988:99) and both Williamite and Jacobite forces had seen themselves engaged in a war of religion fighting for constitutional principles. It was the climax of the Reformation and of the long struggle between Protestant and Catholic political, social and economic rivalry for supremacy in Ireland (Hayton 2004:10). The Treaty of Limerick marked the end of the revolution but Protestants believed its terms to be much too favourable towards the Catholics (Bartlett 1990:1). They were deeply suspicious of the articles and believed that, whilst the Stuart Pretender continued to be recognised by the Vatican and Versailles, their position in Ireland would remain threatened (Bartlett 1992:17).

The Penal Laws were passed between 1695 and 1756 (Elliott 2009:163) although it may be argued that Ireland's Roman Catholics had remained in a state of suppression from Tudor and Stuart times. The degrading and dividing influence of the Penal Laws, enacted in defiance of a Treaty guaranteeing Catholics freedom from oppression on account of their religion, and without the provocation of rebellion, extended to every field of Catholic political, professional, social, intellectual and domestic life (Lecky 1891:52).

It is asserted that the landed Catholic share in the country's acreage declined from 14% in 1702 down to a mere 5% in 1776 although these figures exclude Catholic converts (Cullen 1986:27). However, if these converts were included in the figures there would appear to be no actual decline in the pattern of Catholic land ownership resulting directly from the Penal Laws (Cullen 1986:29). Cullen (1986) therefore argues that whilst an undeniably drastic redistribution of property was achieved, mostly through confiscations after rebellion, in fact little property was

actually transferred from existing Catholic families to new owners in peacetime (Cullen 1986:24) - a view shared by both James (1995) and Connolly (1992).

James asserts that, whilst it may be valid to conclude that land in Ireland did indeed change hands in the eighteenth-century, it must also be remembered that during the same century many of the landlords changed religion (James 1995:52). Connolly concurs, believing that much of the fall in Catholic land ownership after 1704 was due solely to the conformity of its proprietors (Connolly 1992:147). As McBride (2009) acknowledges, the bulk of Catholic estates had already been confiscated before 1704 and the pattern of landholding 'determined by seventeenth-century conquest rather than eighteenth-century legislation' (McBride 2009:240). As Cullen (1986) points out, even in Ulster, where there was no surviving Catholic landed interest, its disappearance was more the result of plantation in the preceding century than as a consequence of the Penal Laws in the eighteenth-century (Cullen 1986:33).

Restrictions, inadequacies and loopholes in the initial Penal land legislation of 1703-4 were quickly identified and subsequent amendments, to address these shortcomings, enacted in 1709. The subsequent establishment of a national registry of deeds, requiring all property conveyances to be recorded for public inspection, was largely successful in changing the nominal religious affiliation of many Catholic gentry (Dickson 2007:64). This enabled them to become fully integrated into the Protestant élite. By the close of the eighteenth-century many of the great Gaelic and Anglo-Norman names such as O'Brien, MacNamara, Kavanagh, Butler and O'Neill were clearly discernible among the Protestant gentry. By conforming they not only protected their estates against division but were also able to take their rightful place in society (McDowell 1979:179).

But to what extent did such conformers or even sympathisers (so called crypto-Catholics) contribute to the level of support that was available for the sustenance and growth of Catholicism during the Penal era? The laws which restricted Catholic involvement in the purchase or lease of land drove many to seek a living through trade (Wall 1958:76). By 1718 Archbishop King remarked 'the papists being made

incapable to purchase lands, have turned themselves to trade, and are already engrossed almost all the trade of the kingdom' (King 1718 cited in Wall 1958:76). The mercantile class was derived not only from the landed gentry but also from the gradual rise of Catholics from the lower to middle-classes. The younger sons of the élite, who had emigrated to various continental countries and in doing so had built up strong Catholic interests both at home and abroad, were particularly strongly represented (Wall 1958:79). Proof of Catholic merchant wealth lies in the fact that the laws against them were modified in the latter half of the eighteenth-century to ensure that their wealth was available for the economic advancement of the country as a whole (Wall 1958:74).

However, the political loyalty of any Catholic with continental links remained a lingering suspicion amongst government and local authorities. When fears of invasion spread among Protestants, as in 1708, 1715 and the early 1740s, such Catholics were subjected to open harassment and remained vulnerable to charges of Jacobite connections, regardless of how unfounded such accusations were (Dickson 1990:91). Whilst academic opinion may remain divided in respect to the reasons behind their introduction there is little division concerning the severity of the Penal Laws.

#### **4.2.2 The Penal Laws and Religion**

Connolly (1992) believes that it was the political danger posed by Catholicism, rather than its religious, cultural and intellectual failings, which provided the main justification for the introduction of legislation (Connolly 1992:156). Such historians appear to provide an academic discourse of a somewhat secular nature and few attempt to discuss the link between persecution and the retention of Catholicism. This is perhaps due to the inherent difficulties of attempting to do so in an objective manner. However, Donnelly (2004) points out that there is a danger in dismissing the religious aspect of Penal legislation because, in reality, religion permeated every aspect of society, the economy and politics during this period (2004:120).

The introduction of the Banishment Act of 1697 required all regular clergy, bishops and those exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction to leave the country and their

expulsion was carried out in a highly efficient manner. Those regulars such as the Jesuits and Franciscans that remained, or filtered back into the country, found refuge amongst wealthy Catholic families or remained under the guise of secular clergy, eventually registering under the subsequent act of 1704 (Fagan 1993:34). These wealthy Catholic families that now sheltered the clergy had been critical to the geography of religion and settlement in Ireland. During the previous century their power status and extensive information networks had remained emphatically Catholic in ethos and key Old English cities such as Cork had become the centres of what came to be termed the 'recusant church' (Smyth 2006:363).

Wall (1961) argues that, whilst this Registration Act of 1704 ordered all popish priests in the country to register in court, it merely served to grant legal recognition to the Catholic diocesan clergy who thereafter remained free to say Mass, administer the sacraments and carry out the daily functions of a parish priest (Wall 1961:13). Yet the Cork county assizes show that this was not the case. Dickson (2004) reports that sixty priests in the county were named at the assizes in April 1714. Of these, he identifies that three were already in custody for not having taken the oath and that twenty-six priests had refused altogether to take the oath; the status of a further twenty-six priests was ambiguous (Dickson 2004:55).

The 1709 Act requiring all registered priests to take the oath of abjuration, accepting the Queen as de jure and de facto sovereign, and denying the right of James III to the throne, was in part a response to an invasion scare in 1708 (Connolly 1992:275). Only thirty-three priests came forward to take the oath whilst the remainder forfeited any legal status which the Registration Act of 1704 had afforded them. Despite this resulting in a temporary disruption to religious services, with priests going into hiding and Mass Houses closing their doors, such precautionary measures were only short-lived as the law proved impossible to enforce (Connolly 1992:276).

The Penal Laws did not ensure the elimination of Catholicism nor did they result in the mass conversion of Catholics (Bartlett 1990:2). It is argued (Elliott 2009; McBride 2009) that the Penal Laws were not applied as fiercely as legend would

suggest, in fact becoming gradually inoperative as a system of religious repression. McBride cites Anthony Foster (1705-79), Chief Baron of the Court of the Exchequer who stated the Penal Laws 'were severe in the letter, but they were never executed' (McBride 2009:239-240). He asserts that in the ecclesiastical sphere they achieved only a temporary and partial success (McBride 2009:245).

Yet, the Penal Laws were successful to some degree, according to McBride, as they managed to limit the public expression of Catholicism. Elliott (2009) acknowledges that there were some parts of the country, such as Munster and Ulster, where the Penal Laws were utilised by 'a particularly bigoted element in Protestant society' (Elliott 2009:166). She believes that the impact of the Penal Laws upon the Catholic Church and religious practice has come to define the period (Elliott 2009:165).

### **4.3 The Religious Landscape of the Penal Era in Cork**

#### **4.3.1 An Older Tradition: The use of open air altars**

When this research began it was never the intention to challenge the longstanding assumption that the majority of Mass Rocks belonged to any other period than that of the Penal era 1695 and 1756. Whilst it is acknowledged that some sites date back to the Cromwellian era, such as that identified at Curraheen in Inchigeelagh, there appears to be historical and anecdotal evidence that the use of outdoor altars was already a feature of the Elizabethan Reformation. This fact may help to understand why portable or outdoor altars were acceptable features of future worship during the Cromwellian and Penal eras.

In July 1564, concerned with adherence to newly introduced enactments aimed at a general re-organisation of current church practice, the legatine commission issued instructions jointly to Archbishop Creagh of Armagh and David Wolfe. As nuncio in Cork, David Wolfe was to 'authorise the use of portable altars on which mass could be celebrated with due solemnity and reverence in suitable places outside the churches'. With reference to David Wolfe alone, he was 'to consider and report as to the transfer .... Of cathedrals oppressed by heretics or otherwise deserted by Catholics, to neighbouring towns or other places where mass and other divine

offices may be more conveniently celebrated' (Bolster 1982:62). Bolster (1982) further writes that, by apostolic brief dated 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1581, faculties to use such portable altars were extended to reliable and trustworthy priests in the diocese of Cork and Cloyne (Bolster 1982:92) allowing them to administer all the sacraments except orders and confirmation. These faculties were restated in a second brief issued by Sixtus V in July 1589 (Bolster 1982:93).

Cunningham (2001) highlights the survival of certain seventeenth century records of the English administration which describe the activities of Catholic preachers and their role in encouraging the laity to disobey secular authority. On 11<sup>th</sup> October 1613 a Franciscan friar named Turlogh McCrodyn is reported to have delivered a sermon in the woods in county Londonderry to more than 1000 people including fourteen other priests (Cunningham 2001:125). In 1614 there is further evidence of Mass in the open air. The Synod of Kilkenny confirms that, due to there being few chapels available to Catholic congregations, Sunday Mass was celebrated not only in private houses, generally those of the landed gentry or merchants, but also in barns or outhouses and in the open air. In Kilbonane there is a tradition of a cow-house being given to the Catholics of the area in 1691 to use as a Mass House (Diocese of Cork and Ross 2011 Kilmurry ID41 Internet Source).

This was to remain a feature of Penal times as recorded in the *Report on the State of Popery* in 1731. In Kilroan Parish Mass had been celebrated in a malt house belonging to a private gentleman but, at the time of the report, this had lately been converted to a chapel (CHSI 1913:141). Worship in private houses was a feature of a number of Cork parishes including Christ Church, St Pauls, Kinsale, Kilruane and Rosse as well as in Cork city itself (CHSI 1913:131-141).

Celebrating Mass in profane places appears to have been justified by 'the calamity' of the times (Moran (1864) and Forrestal (1998) cited in Walsham 2011:178). However, Ó Fearghail (1990) demonstrates that such celebration clearly worried the Synod. They called for a canopy to be placed over the altar to ensure the dignified celebration of the Eucharist and instructed priests to use silver and not pewter chalices (Ó Fearghail 1990:206). The placing of a shelter over the altar was

to continue in later Penal times. Clearly echoing the concerns of this 1614 Synod, the Synod of the province of Armagh decreed in February the same year:

‘Let nobody dare to celebrate Mass in any place that is not above reproach, that is smokey or fetid, that contains the stalls of animals or is otherwise dirty; nor in places that are too dark and without enough light; but not in the open unless the number of the congregation demands it or persecutions compel it. Then care must be taken that the altar is safe from wind and rain, and from any dirt that is liable to fall on it....Moreover it must be secure, firm, large enough, not tilting, unsteady or too narrow’ (quoted in McKavanagh 1974:15-18).

Walsham (2011) maintains that Irish Catholics retained a deep attachment towards spaces and sites that had been violently defaced in the course of the long Reformation. She believes that persecution and proscription compelled Catholics to embrace not only the natural environment (Walsham 2011:155) but also dismantled shrines and redundant churches. Thus the landscape became an arena for individual devotion and collective worship (Walsham 2011:156). Given this strong symbolic attachment it was anticipated that there would be a prevalence of Mass Rock sites located within the grounds of ancient ecclesiastical sites. This does not appear to be the case. The only Mass Rocks which appear to be in close proximity to ancient ecclesiastical sites are those at Carriganeelagh and Kilmore in *Uíbh Laoghair*.

#### **4.3.2 Ireland Under Cromwell (1649 – 1653)**

Elliott (2000) explains that Catholicism in Ireland did not in actuality experience major persecution in the first half of the seventeenth century (Elliott 2000:143). There is some evidence of this in the writing of Bishop Roche in 1631. He advises that ‘the parochial districts are everywhere well defined, and pastors are assigned to each of them, who since the confiscation of their own houses, wander about, residing here and there in some spot known to the faithful, and where they may be readily found for the administration of the Sacraments, and the exercise of ecclesiastical functions’ (Roche (1631) cited in O Suilleabhain 1948:84).

Elliott maintains that the practice of Catholicism was in fact tolerated for most of the century (Elliott 2000:144) and states that the only time the laws against priests were actually enforced was in the early years of the eighteenth century (Elliott 2009:160). She proposes that it was only in the initial stages of Cromwell's military campaign, during the years 1649-50, that active persecution returned and a number of priests and regulars were executed. She further suggests that persecution duly receded after 1654 when official policy was relaxed and a number of priests returned from exile. Yet whilst this persecution was 'short lived', she argues that it helped to 'establish the emotive tradition of the mass rock and the hunted priest' which she believes, until recent times, 'deterred dispassionate enquiry' (Elliott 2000:143).

The New Model Army under Cromwell arrived in August 1649 (Breen 2007:44) and the destruction of churches and monasteries followed with pilgrimage sites such as Lough Derg destroyed (Elliott 2000:184). Sullivan (1909) discusses the public proclamation that was made throughout the 1650s whereby any priest found in Ireland would be found guilty of high treason and liable to be hanged, drawn and quartered with anyone found harbouring such clergymen liable to the penalty of death. Severe penalties were also levied on those who simply knew the place of concealment and did not disclose it (Sullivan 1909:391). The impact, as Gillespie (2006) concludes, was dramatic and thrust the Catholic parish system into chaos. By around 1660 he advises that the number of priests had been reduced to half with no more than 500-600 Catholic priests across the whole of Ireland (Gillespie 2006:206). Those that remained reported that they lived 'generally in the mountains, forests and inaccessible bogs, where the Cromwellian trooper at least cannot reach us'. There they advise that 'the crowds of the poor Catholics flock to see us, whom we refresh by the word of God and the consolation of the sacraments; here, in these wild and mountain tracts, we preach to them constancy in faith ....' (Archives of the Irish Jesuit Province (AIJP) Documents (Translations) 1:111 cited in Meigs 1997:135).

#### 4.3.3 Cork Under Cromwell (1649 – 1653)

Even before the banishment legislation of 1652-3, Bolster (1982) reports that churches, oratories and monasteries in Cork had been despoiled and bishops, friars and diocesan clergy put to death (Bolster 1982:223). She writes that within the city the Augustinians had been forced to leave their house near the South Gate. In the scramble for refuge, Father William Tirry was arrested, charged and subsequently executed in Clonmel for having officiated in Priestly vestments on Ash Wednesday and having a manuscript denouncing heresy (Bolster 1982:229). Folklore sources too tell of priests finding refuge in *Cléire* after the sack of Timoleague Abbey by Cromwell's forces in 1650 (Lankford 1999:81) and the sacking of a Franciscan monastery in *Árd na mbrathar*, about a mile to the west of Bantry (S281: 53). Burke (1914) records that a body of priests, in 1662, spoke of their 'grievous persecution ..... many of them confined in the several public gaols, marshal seas and prisons in this kingdom ..... others flitting and roaming to hide themselves in mountains, woods, bogs, rocks, in caves and horrid wildernesses and searched for day and night yea hunted like wild beasts' (Burke 1914:10). Despite this, many diocesan and regular clergy did not shrink from the dangers involved in administering the sacraments and attending to the spiritual welfare of the people (Bolster 1982:219).

The Cromwellian conquest also opened up a new phase of plantation. Although the primary phase of Cromwellian activity in the Bantry/Beara area had already begun in 1641/2 with the confiscation of the O'Sullivan Beare lands (Breen 2007:133), the ensuing period witnessed fundamental changes in the nature of landholding. This was achieved through the large scale displacement and upheaval of Catholic gentry. In contrast, many of the old Protestant estates survived (Breen 2007:46) with many of the Catholic lower classes left in place to work the land and to continue the operation of these estates (Breen 2007:46). Whilst most Catholics were to be transplanted to Connaught, a special court held in Mallow in 1656 permitted Cork Catholics within the city, as well as in Youghal and Kinsale, to be exempt from this specific fate. Instead, as an anguished letter from Clement Roche to his cousin Coppinger in 1660 reveals, they were 'to have lands in Barrymore and

Muskerry' (McCarthy 2000:41). Other destinations included Macroom, west Cork and south Kerry (Murphy 1964:129 cited in McCarthy 2000:41).

At the Curraheen Mass Rock site in Inchigeelagh a plaque reads "Altar of Penal Times - Mass was said here 1640-1800" reflecting outdoor worship at the site from the Cromwellian period to later times (Plate 1). Few Mass Rock sites have such plaques and those that do often attribute the monument simply to 'Penal times' or 'Penal days'. It is therefore difficult to comment on their temporal use with any certainty.



**Plate 1 - Plaque at Curraheen Mass Rock, Inchigeelagh**

However, one historical source does indicate the continued use of outdoor worship after the Restoration. Touring Ireland in 1666 Jouvaine de Rocheford comments 'there are even in Dublin more than twenty houses where mass is said, and above a thousand places, and subterraneous vaults and retired spots in the woods, where peasants assemble to hear Mass celebrated by some priest they secretly maintain' (Jrevin (Jouvain) de Rocheford cited in Meigs 1997:129). There is

also historical evidence to show that open-air worship remained a feature in the Munster area beyond this date. At a provincial synod in Thurles, held in October 1685, Archbishop Brennan suggested that priests in Munster should no longer celebrate mass in the open air (Butler 2006:139).

#### 4.4 Sacred Space, Contested Space

Smyth argues that many countries are characterised by complicated settlement histories alongside highly irregular, stratified and contested symbolic landscapes (Smyth 2004:243). As noted within the literature review, this is particularly pertinent within an Irish context given the country's history of conquest and colonisation. Delle (1999) suggests that space is manipulated by human beings for



Plate 2 - Ballinacarriga Tower House

specific purposes (Delle 1999:16). It is likely that those resisting colonisation will create new spaces or endeavour to reconstruct or consolidate existing forms and definitions of space (Delle 1999:17). Such activity is clearly demonstrated at Ballinacarriga tower house, county Cork (Plate 2), where religious scenes and iconography were carved in to the stone frames of several of the windows (Delle 1999:31). This was the home of the O'Hurley's and was a late fifteenth or early sixteenth century tower house which underwent significant refurbishment in the 1580s (Breen 2007:112). There are contrasting opinions

concerning these religious scenes and iconography. Donnelly (2005) argues that such images merely represent a continuation of a Medieval tradition which consisted of adorning secular houses with devotional images (Donnelly 2005:37). However, in contrast, Delle (1999) believes that the scenes are clear evidence of Catholic Gaelic resistance in the face of English colonisation (Delle 1999:11). Whilst Breen (2007) considers both arguments to have validity, he acknowledges that the survival of these carvings at Ballinacarriga is 'important in a regional and

iconographical context' representing 'the continuation of tradition in difficult and changing times' (Breen 2007:112).

It may be argued that there are clear parallels between Smyth's (2006) discussion of the process of domination, resistance and collusion in a colonial context and the established faith in Ireland during the Penal era. In a similar vein, the use and conception of space and an intimate knowledge of the material landscape, helped Catholic communities, using the words of Smyth, to 'out flank, neutralise or even outwit' the authorities. When Ballinacarriga eventually fell to ruin, it continued to be used for Mass until a new church was built in 1819. Evidence comes from a Confirmation ceremony held in St Patrick's church in Dunmanway in 1843. Bishop John Murphy remarked 'I remember the time when mass was said in the ruined castle of Beal-na-carriga, that three pounds could not be collected to keep out the rain' (Murphy cited in O'Donovan 2004:13).

#### **4.5 Settlement Patterns and Ethnicity in Munster**

Despite an early English presence in Munster from the twelfth century, much of the province, particularly in the south and west, remained under the control of Gaelic chieftains. By the sixteenth century, the leaders of many of these Gaelic clans were politically allied with the descendants of the original twelfth-century Anglo-Norman colonists, the so-called 'Old English' (Delle 1999:17). However, as Breen (2007) recognises, 1570 onwards marked the beginnings of increasing English interest in Munster as well as an emergent period of revolt by a number of Gaelic lords. Smyth (2006) draws attention to the major changes in the organisation of Irish society that began to take place at this time (Smyth 2006:346).

In mapping society and settlement in seventeenth-century Ireland, Smyth (1988) uses poll tax listings to assess the relative distribution of Gaelic and Old English names in county Cork. He identifies a strength of Gaelic tradition close to Cork city and further reports that the Gaelic hearthland of the south-west was as clear and extensive in 1660 as it had been in 1260 (Smyth 1988:62). However, by 1660, the power bases of all the lordships had been smashed and the Gaelic or Gaelicised lands of *na Déise*, west Cork, reveal a dispersed population and a scattering of

communities (Smyth 1988:67). In west Cork, both Bandon and Kinsale showed a Protestant majority (O'Flanagan 1988:126) and, by 1660, Carbery also revealed a strong planter elite.

With the exception of Bandon the New English settlers moved into Cork areas where Gaelic and Old English communities were already mixed (O'Flanagan 1988:126). Despite this the class power of the older Gaelic communities remained and many 'still held on to powerful hinge positions in urban and rural social hierarchies and ensured the relative success of the new landlord-inspired economy would both depend on and be mediated by them' (Smyth 1988:72). Of additional interest, and reflected in the figures from the 1659 census, is the regional diversity, demographic power and resilience of the Old English which Smyth maintains persisted into the first half of seventeenth century Ireland (Smyth 2004:247).

Mapping first and second names Smyth (2004) clearly identifies a Gaelic zone of continuity extending into west and south-west Cork. With the exception of a south-western core of planter names, pivoting around Cork city and the Munster plantation precincts, Smyth finds that Old Irish family names predominated (Smyth 2004:265). Further, he identifies that despite more than a century of war and plantation 'most of the ancient Irish names and their family bearers persisted strongly in their ancestral localities' and he specifically highlights the O'Sullivan and MacCarthys in south west Munster as examples within this category (Smyth 2006:395). This is of key importance in respect to the distribution of Mass Rock sites in Cork given that at least 75% of sites listed in the archaeological record are situated within the diocese of Cork and Ross which incorporates much of this area.

Given these clear settlement patterns and the Mass Rock data collected during research, one of the hypotheses that emerged was the possibility that Mass Rock sites may represent a type of sacred space that was more acceptable to one particular shade of Catholicism in Ireland.

#### 4.6 One Faith - United but Divided Identities

Using language sources Smyth (2006) identifies that from Reformation times to the mid-seventeenth century there was a shift in the use of ethnic terminology relating to the Old English, new English and Gaelic Irish. He identifies a clear shift in the more exclusive term *Gaedhill* which was used to distinguish the Old English from the New English or *Nua-Ghaill* (Smyth 2006:60). The term 'Old English' was generally used to denote the descendants of those who had colonised Ireland from the period of the Norman invasion to around the time of the Reformation. This Catholic community founded their own religious houses in Cork and elsewhere soon after their arrival. This was despite the survival of Benedictine houses at Cashel and Rosscarbery. The religious houses of the Old English excluded the Gaelic Irish and remained distinct from those of purely Gaelic origin throughout the medieval period and they were located primarily in Anglo Norman port towns (Meigs 1997:45). Jefferies' (2010) analysis of diocesan possessions between 1485 and 1535 highlights this division with 30 of the 79 Irish born bishops bearing surnames that indicate English ancestry whilst the remaining 49 had Irish surnames (Jefferies 2010:41). Old English participation within the European reform movement (Lennon 2003: 81) helped them to articulate their very separate identity (Lennon 1986:89) and the Gaelic Irish continued to harbour a strong hostility towards them (Kelly 1985:433).

By the seventeenth century, the Gaelic Irish and Old English had evolved into very definable groups (Meigs 1997:90). However, by the end of the century, the Old English found themselves merged with the mass of the Catholic population (Beckett 1976:43) and Beckett (1976) advises that the words 'Irishmen' and 'papists' began to be used as interchangeable terms (Beckett 1976:36). In acknowledgement of the growing convergence of Gaelic Irish and Old English into a single Catholic political culture, Smyth identifies the gradual emergence of the term *Éireannach*. However, Smyth argues that the country still remained 'highly fragmented' and that there were 'clearly varying and multiple shades of identities' (Smyth 2006:61).

This appears to be reflected in the data collected for the diocese of Cork and Ross. Mass was celebrated at a number of venues during the Penal era including open air sites, Mass Houses, Huts or Cabins as well as in private homes. Bossy (1983) points out that the medieval Mass was a composite of two ritual traditions inherited from early Christianity: the tradition of the public worship, practiced by whole communities, and that of the private, family, domestic cult (Bossy 1983:51). Control of church buildings remained firmly in the hands of the state (Lennon 1986:88) demanding a variety of ritual space that reflected both private and communal worship. The varying and multiple shades of Catholic identity to which Smyth refers certainly appear to be discernible in the spatial distribution of the various types of sacred space.

#### 4.6.1 The Sacred Landscape of the Private Chapel

In respect to private worship, the *Report on the State of Popery* of 1731 records private worship in a number of parishes throughout the diocese of Cork. Private chapels are recorded in city centre locations in Cork as well as in the parishes of Christ Church and St. Pauls (Appendix 3). A number are also noted in Kinsale as well as one further chapel in Kilruane parish situated approximately three miles from Kinsale. The use of private houses is only recorded at one other place outside the diocese of Cork and that is in the parish of Rosse, in the diocese of Ross, where Mass is described as taking place in ‘private houses’ although there is no mention of private chapels. The Schools’ Manuscript Collection further records that ‘in Inchafune ..... in the Penal Days the Mass was said in the houses’ (S303:298).

In his analysis of settlement implications upon ecclesiastical structures between c.1550 – 1730, Smyth (2000) identifies that the port towns and cities remained ‘core anchors’ of the counter-Reformation church. He highlights their strong support for its rich liturgical traditions and reports that there were greater concentrations of, and support for, both secular and regular religious (Smyth 2000:176). Both patronage and protection were offered by wealthy and literate Catholic merchants (Smyth 2006:371). Significant numbers of Old English remained in the port towns and cities such as Cork, Youghal and Kinsale. Both McCarthy

(2000) and Dickson (2004) show that, despite previous expulsions, the population of Old English descent living within the walls of Cork city remained significant. McCarthy records that at least a quarter of the Titulades were descended from Cork city's Old Catholic merchant oligarchy. This included Old English families such as the Goolds, Skiddys and Ronanes (McCarthy 2000:46) as well as the Galweys and McNamaras (Dickson 2004:40). In Youghal the Coppingers and Terrys were among the families of Old English (McCarthy 2000:45). Bolster (1972) reports that they were also powerful in places like Bandon, Innishannon and Kinsale (Bolster 1972:109).

The Jesuits had played a vital role in the Counter-Reformation and their mission strategy often targeted affluent and influential members of society (Jones 1995:145). Their schools and colleges promoted a positive Catholic image and classrooms became powerful instruments of the Counter-Reformation cause (Jones 1995:145). Lennon (1986) advises that it was the gentry and mercantile families who often retained clergy in their homes, providing both financial support and protection (Lennon 1986:82). The Report of 1731 acknowledged that 'most of the wealthy Papists' had 'private Chappels in their Houses, where Mass is often celebrated' (CHSI 1913:131). It would appear that the location of private chapels strongly mirrors the settlement patterns of the Old English as identified by McCarthy (2000), Dickson (2004) and Smyth (2006). It is also suggested that the use of such private chapels reflects a strand of Catholicism that was influenced by Jesuit teaching. The Mass House tradition also appears to be more dominant within this specific context.

#### **4.6.2 The Sacred Landscape of the Mass House**

Research has revealed that former Old English domination within the port towns and cities appears to be reflected in the existence of established and substantial Mass Houses. In more rural parishes the *Report on the State of Popery 1731* generally describes Mass Houses as 'mean thatched Cabbins' with 'many, or most of them, open at one end' (CHSI 1913:127). Those located within port towns and

cities are by contrast described as being well established, large and, occasionally, sumptuous.

The *Report on the State of Popery, 1731*, records that the Parish of Christ Church in the City of Cork had 'a public mass house' which had been 'considerably enlarged and beautified within five or six years last past' (CHSI 1913:135). The Report mentions that there were also two new Mass houses in Cork city. One of these was slated and built in 1728. The other was built in 1730 'on a fine eminence, in a Large sumptuous manner in the north suburbs on a new foundation' despite the fact that they already 'had a Large Convenient mass house before, near the place where the said new mass house is built'. Another Mass house or Chapel existed in the centre of the city and this had been recently enlarged (CHSI 1913:131). In Kinsale there was 'one Mass house' and '.... another house now building which we suspect to be designed for a Mass House' (CHSI 1913:140).

In county Tipperary Butler (2006) confirms the widespread existence of Mass Houses as early as 1670. In a similar vein to Cork and Kinsale, he emphasises the relationship between these Mass Houses and a safe-house support network of Roman Catholic gentry households. He draws upon a report written to the Vatican, in 1684, highlighting these close links. Of great significance is the fact that the report emphasises that gentry desired private masses in or near their own houses in order to avoid being associated with open-air masses and other indignities (Butler 2006:142). The same safe-house support network certainly existed in Cork as authors (Burke 1914; Lennon 1986) have shown. The Old English formed a core area of settlement within port towns and cities such as Cork, Youghal and Kinsale (Smyth 1988; Bolster 1982).

It is evident from the *Report on the State of Popery 1731* that, as the enquiries radiate outwards from Cork and Kinsale to more rural parishes, the nature of the construction of Mass Houses changes considerably. In more rural parts of the dioceses they are mostly described as huts or cabins covering altars or as structures open at one end (CHSI 1913:136-142). The support for the rich liturgical traditions of the Counter-Reformation church graduated outwards from the towns and cities

towards more rural areas and the 'still quasi-Christian communities' (Smyth 2000:176). Whilst Old English families such as the Roches, Condons and Barrys had possessed lands in Cork, the Gaelic lordships had controlled much of the coastal territories of west Cork (Breen 2007:21). Such areas appear to reflect a high preponderance of Mass Rock sites, supporting the hypothesis that these particular sacred spaces are reflective of a more traditional strand or Gaelic strand of Catholicism.

#### **4.6.3 The Sacred Landscape of the Mass Rock**

The *Report on the State of Popery* of 1731 identifies an absence of Mass Houses in 33 of the parishes for which returns were made. Many of these parishes lay within the rural areas of Cork, including 'Inshiguilah' or Inchigeelagh, in areas described by Smyth as 'still quasi-Christian' (Smyth 2000:176). This was O'Leary territory and the subject of a case study later within this thesis.

In the majority of parishes in the diocese of Cork and Ross there appears to have been a preponderance of open air sites. Generally, where Mass Houses are recorded these consisted of little more than shade over the priest or the occasional 'thatch'd Cabbins' or 'Hutts open at one end'. In Dromaleague, Caheragh, Tullagh and Creagh they are described as 'small Hutts or Cabbins' covering Altars. In the parishes of Fflanlobis and Drynagh these huts are 'open at one end' and in the parish of Skull and Killmoe they consist of 'thatch'd Cabbins'. Such sites generally pre-date the beginning of the reign of George I in 1714 reflecting their great age. Indeed, those in the parishes of Killmoe and Skull are described as being 'frequently rebuilt yet fixed in place' (CHSI 1913:135-142).

A presence of Mass Rock sites and an absence of Mass Houses in parishes such as Clonakilty, Dunmanway and Bantry seem reflective of a core area of Gaelic continuity that Smyth (2006) identifies extending into west and south-west Cork.

#### **Mass Rocks in the Modern Day Parish of Clonakilty**

When Lewis completed his topographical survey of Cork, in 1837, Clonakilty was described as 'an incorporated seaport, market and post-town ... in the parish of

Kilgarriffe .... situated on the Gorar or Farla river, which falls into the bay close to the principle street, and in a pleasant fertile valley environment by hills of moderate elevation, which descend to the harbour' (Lewis 1837:111-112). Today Clonakilty extends from Ballinglanna, on the coast, inland to Lyre and from the townland of Kilbree on the west to the townland of Ballinroher on the east (Cork and Ross Clonakilty ID 21 (2011) internet source).

Clonakilty has had a long and turbulent past. The area was once part of the *Tuath Ó nDúngalaig*, a territorial division belonging to the *Corcu Loígde* (Ó Corráin 1993:71). A strip of their territory, extending from Ballincarriga to Clonakilty, belonged to the O'Hurleys who were tributaries of the McCarthy Reaghs (O'Leary 1975:32). Originally known as *Tuath-na-Coillte* (or *gcoillte*) meaning the 'tuath of the woods' (Holland 1949:158), it appears that these lands had passed to the powerful Anglo-French Barry family around the time of Henry II. However, these lands were lost to the MacCarthys of Duhallow, in the northwest, and to the Desmonds, in the east (Nicholls 1993:176).

The area was heavily settled as a result of the Munster Plantation and not the Anglo-Norman colonisation. The town itself did not come into existence until 1620 when these lands, having been originally granted to Sir Walter Raleigh (Buchanan 1986:89), passed to Richard Boyle, Earl of Cork. Boyle had already secured a charter of incorporation from James I for *Clochan-na-gCoilte* in 1605 (Holland 1949:158). In addition to Clonakilty, Robert Boyle also assisted in the establishment of additional settlements at Enniskeane and Ballydehob (Breen 2007:120). The town is first highlighted in the wars of 1641 when Lewis (1837) reports that the town's charter was carried by the English inhabitants as they fled to Bandon to protect themselves (Lewis 1837:111-112). Work on the 1641 depositions by Canny (1993) identifies that 26 of the deponents who came forward from the parish of Kilgarriff generally belonged to the town of Clonakilty suggesting a sizeable English settlement there (Canny 1993:256).

In 1691 the town was again attacked as Irish troops rallied in support of James II (Lewis 1837:111-112). This is perhaps evidence of a core of established resistance

within this area. Its absence from the 1731 *Report on the State of Popery* would suggest that authorities were not aware of the presence of any Mass Rocks in the parish. However, the existence of Mass Rocks at Drombeg, Dungannon, Councambeg, Knockatlowig and Tawnies Lower is testament to the tenacity of Catholics living within the area and reflective of the core area of Gaelic continuity identified by Smyth (2006). It is important to note that the Drombeg Mass Rock sits within an established ritual landscape indicating that the area remained an important local symbol of Gaelic Ireland's past.

#### Mass Rocks in the Modern Day Parish of Dunmanway

East of Drimoleague, Dunmanway parish is a union of the ancient parish of Fanlobbus and certain townlands from Ballymone. It is situated between Ballineen, Coppeen and Rossmore. The area has a very ancient parochial history as Fanlobbus is mentioned among the churches of the diocese as early as 1199 (Cork and Ross Dunmanway ID 27 (2011) Diocesan website). O'Donovan (2004) believes that the valley in which the town now sits may have been known previously as *Dun-Maonmuige* or the 'Fort of the Noble Valley' (O'Donovan 2004:1). In tracing the history of the area O'Donovan (2004) refers to an entry within the *Annals of the Four Masters* referring to the McCarthy Reagh of Kilbrittain. Their castle of *Dun-nambean* was built on the banks of the *Abhainn Sallaigh* or the Sally River but was subsequently forfeited in Cromwellian times (O'Donovan 2004:2).

The modern day town was not founded until around 1700 when Sir Richard Cox, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, built a mansion there for his residence. He also obtained the grant of a market and fairs in the area (Lewis 1837:231-2). By 1738, the area had not yet blossomed into the flourishing mill town it was to become and Richard Hedges, a new settler in Macroom, reported that 'from Dunmanway to Canturk which is 40 miles of barbarous country there is not an English gentleman of note that lives there, except Wm. Browne, minister of Macromp' (Hedges (1738) cited in Whelan 1995:13).

Data shows that the landscape is relatively rich in sites. The parish website records a Mass Rock site at Ardcahan with two further sites listed in Behagullane. A further

site at Kealiriheen, *Cumainán na hAltárach*, is described as being in a secluded hollow. A Mass Rock at Ballyhalwick is reported as the most picturesque of all the Penal sites within the district. In addition a further site is identified in Gurteensownee near Gearannbawn Rock close to *Ath an Aifrinn* or the 'Ford of the Mass'. Other sites are present in both Ballinacarriga and Togher. At Togher sites may be found at Kinrath, Shiplock and Cooranig and at Ballinacarriga in Lisheenlish, Upper Thoam, Gortnamuckla and Clashnacrona. The name of the Clashnacrona site being derived from the Irish *Clais na Coroineach* or Fence of the Rosary (Cork and Ross Dunmanway ID 27 (2011) Diocesan website).

The Schools' Manuscript Collection has a number of entries concerning the area which highlight several potential additional sites. These include 'a big stone called the 'Mass Rock' in the townland of Nedineagh and 'a field called the 'priest's field' in the townland of Moreigh where Mass was also said in the open'. The record advises that there 'is no altar to be seen there but it is said that the altar was made of timber and it rotted after a time' (S303:299).

It is believed that in the post Penal era the Catholics of Dunmanway worshiped at a small roadside thatched cabin located at the western end of the Long Bridge near the town (Dunmanway Historical Society 2009:7). The *Report on the State of Popery* records the presence of 'several Hutts open at one end, where Mass is celebrated' in the ancient parish of Fanlobbus which became part of the Dunmanway union (CHSI 1913:137). There has clearly been a strong continued Gaelic presence in this area and this appears to be reflected in a preponderance of Mass Rock sites. Those Mass Houses identified are rudimentary structures that probably provided just a simple shelter for the Mass Rock altar and priest.

#### Mass Rocks in the Modern Day Parish of Bantry

Bantry, otherwise known as West Land and comprising the (later) parishes of Kilmow, Soole (Schull), Kilcrohane, Durrus, Kilmacomoge (Bantry) and Caheragh was originally part of the territory belonging to the O'Mahoneys (Bolster 1972:1). Bolster (1972) identifies that three districts of Iffanloe were tuath lands belonging to the O Mahoneys. It is unusual for early tuath parishes to survive intact down to

modern times but the parish of Bantry is a good example of such continuity. Bantry evolved from the *tuath* of the *Beanntraigh* into the barony of Bantry. This in turn became the basis for the ancient parish of Bantry and Kilmocogue (Bolster 1972:262). Such continuity is also reflected in the parish of Iveleary or *Uíbh Laoghaire*, the subject of a case study later in this thesis.

The Bantry area was eventually settled by the New English during the Munster Plantation. Breen (2007) has undertaken considerable research in respect to the west Cork landscape and is an invaluable source in understanding the settlement history of the Bantry/Beara region. He advises that Bantry witnessed two primary waves of planters in the seventeenth century; the first in the very early part of the century associated with the pilchard entrepreneurs and a second group that arrived during the period of the Commonwealth and the initial years of the Restoration in the 1650s and early 1660s (Breen 2007:47).

Other phases of plantation were to prove more successful. A further wave of New English settlement was encouraged after 1608-9 when Owen O'Sullivan Beare began leasing out his lands. Breen (2007) confirms that entrepreneurs such as Thomas Roper obtained leases in the area. Roper obtained the Castle Island seignory in 1605 and established fishery stations at Crookhaven, Schull and Bantry between 1610 and 1620. It appears that much of the west Cork coastline witnessed similar ventures with fishing stations and small ports regularly established in order to exploit the extensive fishery resources in this area (Breen 2007:34).

Once a Gaelic hearthland, the decline of status and power among the Irish is reflected here in Bantry. The O'Sullivan Beare tower houses, once central features of the west Cork landscape, were replaced by mansions. These were built at Reenadisert outside Bantry overlooking a small shallow sheltered inlet (Breen 2007:131). The lands of the O'Sullivan Beare were to suffer further. During the primary phase of Cromwellian activity in the Bantry/Beara area all O'Sullivan Beare lands were confiscated and never returned (Breen 2007:133). Important in terms of settlement patterns is the fact that some family members, however, survived as chief tenants under the new Protestant elite (Breen 2007:48).

Many of the land grants were bought by Protestants in order to create very large estates. The lands of the *Mac Fínn Duibh* are one such example. These passed to Sir William Petty (Breen 2007:48). In 1671 Arthur Earl of Anglesey obtained a grant of the forfeited estates of the baronies of Bere and Bantry under the Act of Settlement. These estates included Arnagashell, Ardneturrish, Comeholly (Coomhola), Kilcaskan, Glangarrufe and Island, Berehaven, Derehin, RossMcOwne, Loughanbegg, Argroome, Coulagh, Ballydonogane and Abbey Land. As Breen (2007) identifies, the earl had essentially received all of the lands of the former O'Sullivan lordship and was in fact to hold them for the next century (Breen 2007:135). By the onset of the Penal Laws it is clear that the area retained a Protestant presence. Visiting in 1700, Bishop Dive Downes travelled by hooker from Bantry to Berehaven and reported divine Protestant service in Bantry (Webster 1936:xxviii).

The *Report on the State of Popery 1731* reports three 'Mass-houses or thatch'd cabbins' one in Kilmoe and two in Skull. These can only have been rudimentary shelters because the report further advises that, whilst their position remained fixed and Mass was celebrated in them, they were 'frequently rebuilt'. There was a further hut or cabin covering an altar in Caheragh which is reported as having been fixed in the same place for many years (CHSI 1913:130-141). Research has identified a plethora of Mass Rock sites in the parish reflecting the remnants of a strong Gaelic presence within the area as discussed by Breen (2007). Indeed, Father Henchy records a total of 21 sites in Caheragh in *The Fold* ecclesiastical magazine (cited in Carey 1957:99).

#### **4.7 An Acceptable Middle Ground**

Despite the differences that existed between the two Catholic communities, the role of the Franciscans in promoting a middle ground between the more 'traditional' strand of Gaelic Catholicism and the Jesuit style counter-Reformation Catholicism needs to be addressed. Munster had always been an area where the Franciscans were strong (Bolster 1972:432). Prior to the Reformation there had been thirty Franciscan Observant Friaries in the province, far outstripping numbers of Augustinian and Dominican houses (Bolster 1972:447). Research undertaken by

Gillespie (2009) demonstrates that the Franciscan order in Ireland had undergone a dramatic transformation by the end of the seventeenth century. Whilst it had shrunk to a small fragmented organisation by 1600, a century later Gillespie reports that it was a 'well-established' body with almost 600 members by 1700 (Gillespie 2009:75).

Gillespie believes that their success was due not only to their vision of themselves as distinctively Irish and distinctively Franciscan but also to the fact that many were trained in Europe (Gillespie 2009:75). Gillespie writes that 'the genius of the Franciscan order in seventeenth-century Ireland was ..... its ability to recognise the changing needs of successive generations of seventeenth-century Irish people and to maintain support from the ethnically diverse groups that the order served in that changing world' (Gillespie 2009:76).

There is both temporal and spatial evidence to show that the use of Mass Houses and Mass Rocks was not mutually exclusive. As discussed, there was a high preponderance of Mass Houses in Cork city which is expected given the strength of Old English settlement there. However, in the *Report on the State of Popery 1731*, the curate reports on his enquiries within his own parish of 'St. Finbarr's Corke' that priests officiate in 'private houses' and 'open fields' close to the city (CHSI 1913:134).

Bolster (1972) has identified a strong Old English presence in Kinsale but it is evident from the Landed Estates Database that Gaelic families such as the O'Driscolls and O'Mahoneys lived in juxtaposition alongside families such as the de Courcys and Galweys (Landed Estates Database NUI Galway Galway/Galwey Estate 2011). As discussed, the *Report on the State of Popery* details one Mass House in Kinsale in addition to two houses that had 'private Chappells in them' where 'Priests do often celebrate Mass'. Another building was being erected in the town that the writer John Jephson believed to be a further Mass House. However, the report also details 'two other places where the Papists assemble but have not any house or walls' (CHSI 1913:140). This demonstrates that the use of Mass Rocks and

Mass Houses was not mutually exclusive and supports the hypothesis that different shades of the same faith had certain preferences in respect to sacred space.

#### **4.8 Traditional Assumptions Concerning the Location of Mass Rock Sites**

##### **4.8.1 Mass Rock sites are confined to areas of extreme Catholic poverty, where no parish chapel existed or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism**

It has been repeatedly argued by leading historians (Elliott 2009; Whelan 1995; Wall 1961) that Mass Rock sites were confined to areas of extreme Catholic poverty, where no parish chapel existed or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism. The historical evidence for this viewpoint would seem to lie in the words of the Archbishop of Cashel. Whilst writing to the Vatican, in July 1684, he declared that, in Cashel, Roman Catholics still held land where mass-houses were erected. However, in a few unspecified upland parishes and due to a combination of poverty and opposition of 'heretics' to providing mass-house sites on their estate, he reported that pastors celebrated mass on movable altars in the open air (cited in Butler 2006:142). Yet, McBride believes that this customary image of Catholicism throughout the Penal era, as a religion of the poor, requires adjustment (McBride 2009:230). There is certainly evidence within the data to support an alternative view.

##### **Poverty in the Modern Day Parish of Bandon**

The parish of Bandon is a union of Ballymodan, Kilbrogan and a few townlands from the ancient parish of Desertserges, including Bandon Town. In Irish the parish is known as *Droichead Uí Mathuna*. This name refers to the O'Mahony sept (Cork and Ross Bandon ID 10 (2011) Diocesan website) who took the land from the O'Driscoll's, *Uí Drisceoil*, at the Battle of Morrahin, near Kilcoe, in 747AD. The O'Mahonys settled around Bandon and subsequently obtained lands throughout the Mizen and Sheep's Head peninsulas (Daly2004:6).

As Smyth (1988) reports, the heritage of south-west Munster was a mixed one which underpinned the most innovative and wealthiest overseas English settlement anywhere in the seventeenth century. Towns such as Bandon, described as 'Munster's most shining example of a successful plantation town' (O'Flanagan 1988:125) became pivotal to future colonisation within the area (Smyth 1988:76).

When Cromwell arrived 1649 he declared Bandon to be 'a fine sweet town and an entire English plantation without any admixture of Irish' (cited in Bolster 1982:218). By 1685 Protestant control of head leases in Bandon was virtually total (O'Flanagan 1988:127). Even Gaelic owned lands were often leased to the new English settlers. This process slowly diluted Gaelic control in the area (Breen 2007:36). Dominated by the New English, the Established church became pre-eminent in Bandon during the early decades of the seventeenth century. Two churches were built in the area; Christ Church in 1610 (Breen 2007:82) and Ballymodan in 1614 (Breen 2007:84). The strength of Protestantism in the town is demonstrated through the words of the Earl of Cork:

'My town of Bandon-Bridge is more in compass than Londonderry. My walls are stronger and thicker and higher than theirs .... There is no comparison between their ports and mine. The buildings of my town, both for the number of houses and goodness of buildings, are far beyond theirs .... The churches of my town are so filled every Sabbath-day with neat, orderly and religious people, as it would comfort any good heart to see and behold such assemblies – no popish recusant or unconforming 'novelist' being admitted to live in all the town. This place where Bandon-Bridge is built was a mere waste wood and bog 24 years ago but now, God be praised for it, it is as civil a plantation as most in England and for 5 miles around planted with English Protestants' (Earl of Cork (1633) cited in Holland 1949:94). In 1642 in a letter to Lord Goring the Earl of Cork emphasised his satisfaction 'I thank God I have so planted the town that there is neither an Irishman nor a papist within the walls and so can no (other) town or corporation say' (Earl of Cork (1642) cited in Holland 1949:94).

Research by O'Flanagan (1988) shows that the town remained predominantly Anglican from 1659 until the mid-1770s (O'Flanagan 1988:128). Even after this date, Bandon retained its exclusive Protestant character with Catholic residences almost totally absent within the old walled sector of the town. O'Flanagan (1988) observes that there were no Catholic institutions present within a one mile radius of the town's walls (O'Flanagan 1988:131). Canny's (1993) work in respect to the 1641 depositions also reveals an English presence in a contiguous line of relatively dense settlement in the valleys of the rivers Blackwater, Lee and Bandon (Canny 1993:254). The largest cluster of deponents in the depositions came from the parishes of Ballymodan and Kilbrogan including the town of Bandon. Canny highlights another cluster of 18 deponents from the nearby parish of Kinneigh suggesting that such areas 'were more densely settled with migrants from Britain than any area of comparable size in the province of Ulster' (Canny 1993:256).

By the onset of the Penal Laws, O'Flanagan (1988) confirms that those Catholics living in Bandon were 'invariably marginal' living, for the most part, in lowly cabin dwellings (O'Flanagan 1988:127). This was clearly an area of relative poverty. Further evidence of marginalization of Catholics in Bandon comes from a visitor to the area. During his circuit of west Cork in 1752, Richard Pococke visited Bandon and reported that it was 'entirely a Protestant town and they will not suffer a papist to live in it' (Pococke 1752 cited in McVeagh 1995:100). If historians are correct in their assumptions that Mass Rock sites are situated in areas of poverty then one would expect a significant number of Mass Rock sites in this parish.

The *Report on the State of Popery* in 1731 records 'no reputed Mass house or popish Chapel. The reputed priest ..... when he says mass it is only in some private Cabbin' (CHSI 1913:139). Research has identified a total of five potential Mass Rock sites in the modern day parish of Bandon. Cappaknockane is located in the ancient parish of Desertserges and Kilbrogan where the Mishells Mass Rock is located, and formed part of the union of Bandon in relatively recent times. These sites would have originally been situated outside the parish of Bandon. It is impossible to say with any certainty that there were Mass Rocks in the fields identified as *Pairc an Aifrinn* and *Pairc a' tSagairt*. Indeed, *Pairc an tSagairt*, in Kilhassen, could

potentially refer to a site obtained by the local priest, Father Daniel O'Hurley, for the building of a post-penal chapel (Cork and Ross Bandon ID 10 (2011) Diocesan website). That leaves only one confirmed Mass Rock site in Bandon, that of Corravreeda East where a stone known locally as a Mass Rock was broken up and buried in the 1970s (ASD 2012 internet source).

It is possible that Bandon parish is simply an anomaly but such evidence would certainly seem to contradict the assumption that Mass Rock sites are more likely to be located in areas of extreme Catholic poverty or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism.

#### Wealth in the Modern Day Parish of Kinsale

In contrast to the Catholics in Bandon, those living in or near Kinsale appear relatively affluent. The Catholic community was sufficiently affluent to be in the process of building a second Mass House in 1731, having already built the existing Mass House in the town. If traditional assumptions are correct one would not expect to find Mass Rocks in an area that was so affluent. However this is not the case. Research has shown that the use of Mass Rocks and Mass Houses was mutually exclusive here.

A further reason put forward by historians for a preponderance of Mass Rocks is the absence of a suitable place for worship. Again, this does not appear relevant to Kinsale. A Mass House already existed in the town prior to 1714 and had recently been repaired in 1731. Further, it was suspected that another Mass House was being built in the town.

#### **4.8.2 Mass Rocks Are Found in Secluded Upland Settings**

It is perhaps in the writing of *Diarmaid Mac Seáin Bhuidhe Mhic Cárthaigh* of the *cúirt* that we find some validity for the myth that Mass Rock sites are mainly in secluded upland settings. Old and in poor health, he writes of the death of his horse and states that because of this terrible misfortune he will no longer be able to 'traverse the mountains' and go to Mass (Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:227).

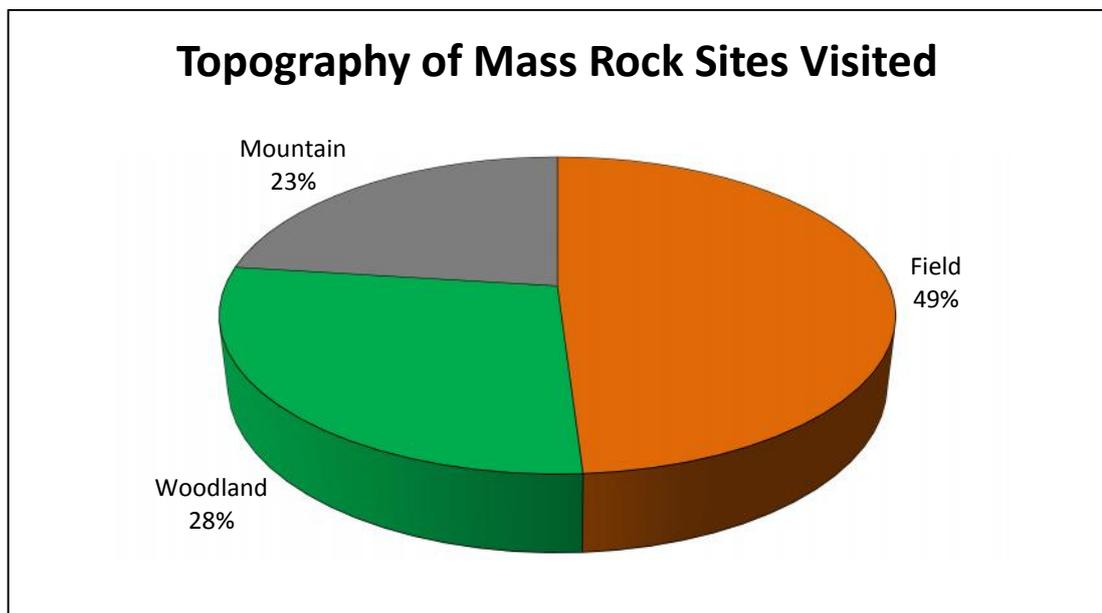
The actual locations of Mass Rock sites are intriguing. Less than a quarter of sites visited appear to conform to the mythical, upland sanctuaries depicted in this ancient text and appearing in early and mid-twentieth century history text books. The image of an upland scene depicting worship at a Mass Rock was one of the earlier images to appear on more cultural murals introduced after the ceasefires of the 1990s (Plate 3). It can be found on the gable end of a house on the Ardoyne Road in Belfast. The painted image is almost a carbon copy of that painted by Reigh (1884) entitled *A Christmas Mass in the Penal Days – The Alarm!* which appeared as a free Christmas supplement to the *United Ireland* newspaper of 20<sup>th</sup> December 1884 (United Ireland 1884). The painting by Reigh (1884) was possibly the influence for an article by McGuinness (1932) which appeared in *The Irish Monthly*. McGuinness describes the moonlit scene with the priest at the Mass Rock and his congregation on the mountain side in the snow. Their secret location discovered, they are surrounded by soldiers. A shot rings out to the cry of ‘shoot the papist dog’ (McGuinness 1932 242-245). In 1933 a further painting was completed by a Dublin Fireman, James Conway, and entitled *The Mass Rock*. A photograph of the artist and his work was published in the July issue of the *Irish Independent* and, similarly, depicts a priest celebrating Mass with a small congregation in an upland setting (*Irish Independent* (1905) internet).



Plate 3 - Mural, Ardoyne Road, Belfast

There is certainly no shortage of upland scenes in history text books and older publications. Richard Pococke, in his circuit of Ireland in 1752, describes Mass being celebrated under a rock, on an altar made of loose stones and confirms that ‘in all this country for sixty miles west and south as far as Connaught, they celebrate in the open air, in the fields or on the mountain’ (Pococke (1752) cited in McVeagh 1995:63). In 1916, a writer identified simply by the initials S.M. describes the secret place at which Mass was celebrated on a sandstone altar ‘at some distance up the hill’ (S.M. 1916:66-67). Subsequently, in 1921, Lockington records a Mass site in Cork on ‘the rocky crest of the heights that tower above the grey beach of Tramore, high on the sloping cliff’ (Lockington 1921:48).

Despite such pre-conceptions, in the diocese of Cork and Ross only 23% of Mass Rock sites are found in upland mountain settings or at high elevation. The majority of sites are found within fields or pastureland accounting for 49% of all researched sites and the remainder within a woodland setting (Figure 3).



**Figure 3 - Percentage Location of Mass Rock Sites in the Diocese of Cork and Ross**

In support of these findings, reports within the Schools’ Manuscript Collection provide evidence for a variety of settings within the diocese. Some accounts clearly reflect the long established assumption that sites are located in mythical upland settings. One child records that their grandmother recalled ‘that two priests were passing through the land near Drinagh to say Mass in a hidden place in the

mountain called 'Conacán na Holórac's' (S303:195). Another entry advises that 'I have heard of a Mass Rock which is on Round Hill mountain in the parish of Dunmanway' (S303:298). Further entries record that 'in the Penal times Mass was said on the side of Cnoc Buide in west Cork' (S281:133) and that 'Long ago a priest was giving Mass on the top of a hill near Bantry' (S281:165). Mass was also reported 'on the hills' (S281:425) in the Mealahg Valley.

A number of sites are recorded in glens. One entry reveals that 'In the Penal times Borlinn was a lonely isolated glen. It had its Mass Rock and hedge school' (S282:114). In Kilbrittain it is reported that, 'on the eastern slope' of *Gleann na mbrathar* or Friars Glen, 'a rough table has been cut in the rock' (S313:306a). While the Mass Rock was on one side of the glen it appears that between the Mass Rock and the stream was 'a green level patch where the people knelt during Mass' (S313:306a).

The Schools' Manuscript Collection also records open air sites in fields throughout the diocese. In Kilbrittain one entry recalls that 'In James O'Mahony's field of Cloundereen there is a Mass Rock' (S313:150). In Inchafune in Ballinacarriga there is a report of 'a field in which Mass was celebrated in the days when priests were hunted. It still bears the name Páirc na tSéipéil. The land belonged to a Mr Looney' (S303:298). The Drimoleague records reveal that 'there is a field called the 'priest's field' in the townland of Moreigh' (S303:299) and other entries reflect the variations in local topography. One entry records that 'in the townland of Goulanes is a Mass Rock. It is in a low lying ground surrounded by bogs. Still there is a fine view from the knoll on which the altar is erected and there was very little chance for the soldiers to come near without being seen' (S281:482) and, in Coomleigh, another child reports that Mass was said in the open air in hollow ground at 'Cúm an tSagairt' (S281:426).

#### 4.8.3 Roadside locations

McKavanagh (1974) believes that Mass Rocks located in open fields, like many of those found in Cork, were originally regarded as an emergency place of worship. He argues that, through necessity, they became more 'the rule'. He maintains that, as

the Penal days drew to a close, Mass sites were more likely to be selected in 'less out-of-the-way spots, sometimes at the very road sides' (McKavanagh 1974:15-18). McKavanagh's beliefs are supported by research in the diocese of Cork and Ross. The Dungannon Mass Rock is situated on the busy N71 heading south towards Skibbereen (Plate 4). Other roadside sites in the diocese include Derrynafinchin, Curraheen, and Calloras Oughter. Additionally, both Loughane East and Ballyshoneen Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cloyne are similarly located. It is difficult to assess whether sites such as Dungannon, on the N71, and Ballyshoneen, on the R579, were originally roadside sites. It is possible that the modern day position of some sites owes more to contemporary road building schemes. This is certainly the case at Altar Green in Tullyallen, Donaghmore, county Tyrone where the Mass Rock at Altar Green was in a very secluded position until a new line was adopted for the road which ran to the north of the site (McGarvey 1956:185).



**Plate 4 - Dungannon Mass Rock**

It is equally difficult to appreciate that some sites, which now sit in secluded locations, were once positioned along the main thoroughfare during Penal times. One such example is the Commons Mass Rock site which is situated on a narrow single track public road. Positioned off the back road between Johnstown and

Inchigeelagh this site is now extremely difficult to access by modern day transport as the dirt track is no wider than a small car. However, this single track road was once the main route to Inchigeelagh. The Shehy Beg Mass Rock, now relatively inaccessible at an elevation of 417m, is adjacent to the old 'Butter Path' that crosses the Shehy mountain range to Cork. This would have been a much accessed and regular route for many travellers during the Penal era. Ryan (1957) adds that the site was probably located near to a bridle path (Ryan 1957:26).

#### **4.9 Accessing Sacred Space: Site Identification and Location**

Research has shown that, by their very nature, Mass Rock sites are usually hidden away in out of the way places that are very difficult to reach. This raises questions as to how the congregation reached the chosen site and how they knew where Mass was to be held.

Zucchelli (2009) argues that Mass Rocks served primarily as landmarks for the community to identify the designated place at which to assemble for Mass (Zucchelli 2009:160). The proverb 'there is always enough sun on a Saturday to dry a priest's shirt' is perhaps evidence that this was not the case. It is believed that shirts were often used as the landmarks for the community and were stretched on hedges near where Mass would be said the next day (Finn cited in McGarvey 1956:184). Danaher (2004) confirms that flags or cloths waved in the air or displayed in prominent places were obvious signals that could be arranged in advance. Such activities would mean little to those unaware of their true meaning. He discusses a 'woman coming out of the kitchen door and shaking a sheet or a table cloth as if to dust it, or a sheet spread on a certain bush or on the thatched roof 'to dry'. He confirms that this often meant that 'it was safe to approach the house or that the Yeomen were on the move, and the scouts up on the hills acted accordingly' (Danaher 2004:22).

Research also shows that a number of Mass Rock sites are situated by streams and it is possible that these water sources were used to guide congregations to the place where Mass would be celebrated. Ballycurreen Mass Rock is situated in a gallery wood just west of Cork airport in the modern parish of Ballyphehane (Plate 5). The Mass Rock is within easy walking distance of Cork city and the stream was most probably used to guide the congregation to the site from Togher. One source suggests that Mass Rocks were often placed near streams so that the congregation would not leave any footprints behind (Scoil Mhuire Internet 2011).



**Plate 5 - Ballycurreen Mass Rock**

A number of sites visited were situated close to the west Cork coastline. It is probable that such locations aided the swift arrival and departure of priests who would celebrate Mass at sites close to the shore or in nearby caves. At the Councambeg Mass Rock at least three routes can be identified leading to the site. These include a worn path coming up to the site from the entrance of a ravine and presumably accessed initially down by the coast. Coastal sites are not restricted to county Cork. On Achill Island in county Mayo there is a Mass Rock site overlooking Keem Bay (Plate 6)

and McDonald (1997) identifies a small cave to the east of this site known locally as the 'Priest's cave' (McDonald 1997:286).

There are frequent historical reports of priests being landed at ports and along the Cork coastline. Even those intended for transportation appear to have been aided and abetted by locals. Concerning the diocese of Ross, in 1674, the Lord Lieutenant writes that 'we still find new inventions of these priests to evade the execution of the Proclamation. As particularly from Ross I hear that several friars being there putt on board some shippes in order to their transportation into forreign parts were

by the owners of the ships sett on shoar within ten miles of the place, for which these owners are like to answer at their returne. And truly I perceive plainly that unless his Maiestie send some ships or orders to hire them here on purpose to transport these people we shall not be able to get the country cleared of them' (cited in Burke 1914:42).



**Plate 6 - Mass Rock at Keem Bay, Achill Island, county Mayo**

Burke (1914) details priests landed in Cork at Baltimore in 1702, Bantry in 1703, Kinsale in 1704 and Skull in 1708 (Burke 1914:176). Further evidence comes from *The Report on the State of Popery*, in 1731, which states 'these south west Coasts of Ireland, lying so remote from the Government, abounding with so many secret Creeks and Harbours and lying so opportunely for transportation to and from France and Spain, give them a great convenience, to convey themselves and their intelligence how and when they please. And they are very conveniently served herein by the masters and mariners of small sloops and vessels which do not only carry on a clandestine trade in transporting of wool and other prohibited goods but being for the most part papists. They conceal such Romish Priests and Passengers and are very aiding and assistant to them carrying on their private interest and designs' (CHSI 1913:143).



**Plate 7 - Coastal Location of Toormore Mass Rock**

Burke (1914) highlights Schull as one of the sites along the southern coast of Cork where authorities had already identified priest landing by 1708 (Burke 1914:176). The Toormore Mass Rock (Plate 7) is located within this parish and is situated close to the shoreline. Other coastal sites include the Drombeg and Beach Mass Rocks which command spectacular views across Clonakilty Bay and Bantry Bay respectively.

#### **4.10 The Evolution of the Mass Rock Tradition**

McKavanagh (1974) reports that, by the 1750s, a temporary and later permanent roof was erected over the field altar. Known as a *scáláin* or *bóthog* these subsequently grew into the thatched Mass-house and the post-penal day chapel (McKavanagh 1974:15-18). There is evidence within the *Report of the State of Popery 1731* that the addition of a temporary and later permanent roof, erected over the field altar, was an earlier feature in the diocese of Cork and Ross. Several such sites are reported in various parishes across the diocese well in advance of the date of the report. In Cork city a thatched Mass House was located in the south suburbs prior to 1714. In the parishes of Killmoe and Schull the advanced age of the 'Mass Houses or thatch'd Cabbins' is demonstrated by the fact that the report

advises that they were ‘frequently rebuilt’ and dates them prior to the reign of George I, pre- 1714 (CHSI 1913:140).

Whelan (1983) similarly believes that it is possible to define the various stages in the history of modern chapel building in Ireland. He identifies the ‘open air’ phase as the first stage. He suggests this came down through folk belief as the ‘mass rock in the glen’ days and he proposes that ‘contrary to popular belief this episode was brief and spatially restricted’ (Whelan 1983:6). He further proposes that, with the exception of large swathes of Ulster and specific pockets elsewhere, Ireland was provided with rudimentary chapels or Mass houses by 1731. The *Report on the State of Popery* would certainly seem to support Whelan’s findings. However further evidence from the report would suggest that he is not entirely correct in his assumption that the ‘open air’ phase was ‘brief and spatially restricted’. In the diocese of Cork and Ross it is reported that ‘open air’ sites continued in use alongside private cabins in the parishes of Rathclaren and Kilbrittain. In Kinsale Mass Houses were used alongside ‘two other places where the Papist’s assemble but have not any house or walls’ (CHSI 1913:140). In Ahakista, in *Muintir Bhaire*, it is believed that Mass continued to be celebrated at the Mass Rock until about 1780 (Cork and Ross Muintir Bhaire 2013).

Progression to the Penal chapel phase is evident, however, at both Kilnadur, in Kilmichael, and Currahy in Inchigeelagh. The stone built ruins at each site suggest that these were both more substantial structures than previously enjoyed. Both are situated in close proximity to Mass Rocks. The Kilnadur site is referred to as a Penal Chapel and is believed to have been built sometime after 1700 (Plate 8).

The Currahy Mass Rock is situated in an adjacent field to a ruin known as *Séipéal na Glóire* which carries an inscribed date of 1753. The buried remains of a rectangular structure are also evident in Rossmore in Inchigeelagh where research revealed a small stone-built construction. The dimensions of this site are comparative with those of later Penal chapels recorded in Tipperary and Clare by Whelan (1997) and Murphy (1991) respectively.



**Plate 8 - Kilnadur Penal Chapel**

Additionally, Whelan (1983) highlights isolated pockets where open air Mass survived until a much later date. He argues that such pockets were confined to areas with hard-line landlords such as Dundrum and Templemore in Tipperary or in areas of extreme poverty such as the Ballingearry area of west Cork. As a result of this he believes the open air Mass survived in some of these areas until well into the nineteenth century (Whelan 1983:6). Certainly O’Riordan’s (1999) research in county Laois demonstrates that hard-line landlords did exist. He reports that Lord Castlecoote inserted a clause prohibiting a tenant from providing a site for a Catholic chapel, school or priest’s residence in each of his leases. This resulted in Catholics of the parish of Castletown, two miles from Mountrath, worshipping at a thatched house built on a sandbank in the river Nore (O’Riordan 1999:461). At East Ferry, in Cork, a Mass Rock is situated on the Great Island side of the strand. Here too the congregation would have stood on the sand with accessibility dictated by the tidal flows of the river.

Research in respect to Ballingearry does not seem to support Whelan’s (1983) suggestion that the open air Mass survived here for a much longer period due to its extreme poverty. If this was the case one would expect to find a high

preponderance of Mass Rock sites in the area. However, there is evidence of only two Mass Rocks in *Béal Átha'n Ghaorthaidh* (Ballingeary) at Kilmore and *Cum an tSagairt*. Admittedly there are a number of Mass Rocks in neighbouring Inchigeelagh but, as discussed, there is robust evidence to show that Mass Rocks here were already being replaced here by 1753 as *Séipéal na Glóire* demonstrates.

#### 4.11 Concluding remarks

As Walsham (2011) asserts 'the landscape was a crucial forum in which confessional identities were forged. It was a setting for encounters and clashes between the members of competing creeds, who fought for control over disputed locations' (Walsham 2011:10). This chapter has reviewed the religious landscape of the Penal era in the diocese of Cork and Ross. In accordance with the aims and objectives of this research, the mapping of the distribution and location of sites in the diocese, together with appropriate field research at a number of key locations, has challenged a number of existing hypotheses. The distribution of Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross suggests that they are not always located in areas of extreme poverty, where no chapel was available or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism. Indeed an emergent hypothesis would suggest that the presence of Mass Rock sites is more indicative of ethnicity.

In terms of their location, the majority of Mass Rocks are not in secluded upland settings as depicted in mid nineteenth-century history text books and on modern day Republican Murals. The majority of sites are located in fields, pastureland or wooded glens and ravines. Finally, Mass Rocks did not serve primarily as landmarks for the community to identify the designated place at which to assemble for Mass but were a vital and integral aspect of sacred space. The following chapter will look more closely at the different types of Mass Rock that were used in the Penal era. It will assess research in the context of the *axis mundi*: a central point or pole around which the spiritual world is focused and a point of intersection between the divine and the earthly worlds, as well as a point of contact between the two.

## 5

### Nature of Sacred Space

*'Over the truly cold well there were five beautiful lofty yew-trees, fair and equally tall, forming a thicket which would shelter a host. Through the thick green foliage beautiful hard showers of round red berries (fell) around the noble well that was worthy of praise. There was a rock in the middle of the fine well which in its effects was as bright as the sun; the stone, whose side was red and smooth, lit up the long pool. Through the top of the rock there came without cessation or diminution a stream that formed a soft white arch as it fell into the well'*

*Tarrnig in sealsa ag Síil Néill Ó Cuív (1983)*

Burge (2009) identifies four main areas of traditional focus in respect to developing concepts of sacred space. These include the idea that there is a divine archetype of the sacred site and a central pole, or *axis mundi*, around which the spiritual world is focused. He suggests that this *axis mundi* also marks a point of intersection between the divine and the earthly worlds, as well as a point of contact between the two. His acknowledgement concerning the importance that ritual plays in the articulation of sacred space will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. This chapter will focus on initial ideas concerning the notion of the *axis mundi* and the archetype of the sacred site. It will also reflect on the role that mythology plays in placing a sacred site in a wider spiritual and historical context.

#### 5.1 The Notion of the *axis mundi*

The veneration of nature is the most tangible expression of a religious ecology founded on a belief that the natural world is part of the deity or deities that have created it rather than being separate from them (Park 1994:246). Animist views hold that rocks, trees, rivers, and other topographical features have spirit which can create or inscribe meaning in certain places (Wallis and Blain 2003:4). Ancient peoples worshipped the very substance of nature, lending it 'spirit' and 'soul' (Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin 2008:58). Irish traditions pertaining to landscape have

an ancient pedigree (Beiner 2007:209) and Early Irish literature has been shown to be littered with encounters of Otherworld beings within the natural landscape (Low 1996:41). Ireland's mythological past is a vital aspect in understand the notion of the *axis mundi* in the context of Mass Rock sites.

Ó hÓgáin (1999) explains that, for pre-historic communities, the workings of the environment would have been both crucially important to their survival and in understanding time. The sun, moon, stars, tides and storms as well as the variations in the landscape itself would understandably have attracted much attention and mythical narrative (Ó hÓgáin 1999:5). Land itself has been a valuable and important commodity in Ireland from these very earliest of times. The eighth-century Old Irish *Fodla Tíre* defines the different types of land and their values in addition to a range of topographical features that increased the value of land. These included woodland, seas, streams, mountains, river-mouths, cattle-paths and ponds (Mac Niocaill 1971:85). The *Lebor Gabála Éirenn* is considered a 'pseudo-history' of Ireland that recounts the island's history up to the twelfth century (Stewart Macalister 2008:1). The formation of the topography, through both natural and divine forces, is central to this text (Sayers 1986:105).

#### **5.1.1 Historic context of the *axis mundi* in Ireland: From Paganism to Christianity**

Cooney (2008) highlights the fact that some areas in Ireland had already become 'special' places in the Neolithic period and that these have remained the scene of continuing attention in archaeology, history and mythology, as people refer back to their past (Cooney 2008:34). Cooney's (2008) observations have relevance to the study of Mass Rocks sites, particularly in Cork where archaeological monuments such as ringforts, stone circles and wedge tombs were re-used and re-interpreted during the Penal era. This practice is certainly not confined to the Cork area and similar examples can be found in other counties including a re-used wedge tomb at Scrahallia, Cashel, Connemara (Cooney 1985:134) and the Srahwee or Altoir Wedge Tomb in Clew Bay, county Mayo (Plate 9).

The arrival of Christianity in Ireland could easily have eradicated the existing learning and institutions associated with paganism but, as Mac Cana (2011) identifies, this was not the case. Instead it achieved a remarkable symbiosis between native institutions and modes of thought. The new religious orthodoxy permitted the complementary coexistence of two ideologies within the same community; one explicitly Christian, the other originally pagan (Mac Cana 2011:48).



Plate 9 - Srahwee or Altoir Wedge Tomb, Clew Bay, county Mayo

The success of this symbiosis ‘adopting a Christian mould without abandoning the native culture’ is reflected in the cultural distinctiveness of Early Christian Ireland (Bradshaw 1989:18). Religious sites were cleansed from pagan association by the blessings of the missionaries subsequently becoming a central focus for new religious and secular activities (Zucchelli 2009:107).

Whilst the arrival of Christianity heralded ‘a sea-change in ritual practice’, its adaptation to the existing social order was aimed at achieving a smooth and unchallenged transition (Ó hÓgáin 1999:199). As Ó hÓgáin (1999) identifies, nowhere is this clearer than in the narratives concerning St. Patrick’s triumph at Tara. In pre-Christian culture Tara was the most sacred place in Ireland yet St. Patrick was victorious in his challenge over the druid *Lochlethanu* who is reported

to have died there at the druid's stone. In writing Patrick's biography almost two hundred years later, the monk *Tíreachán* personally identifies this druid's stone as being situated in the south-eastern part of Tara (*Tíreachán* cited in Ó hÓgáin 1999:199).

In the Annals of the Four Masters the chronicles note that 'the monastery of Cill-Credhe (Kilcrea) ... was founded for Franciscan Friars by the McCarthys, and they erected an honourable tomb in it for the internment therein of their gentlemen and chieftains' (Meigs 1997:14). Meigs (1997) believes that these monasteries served as important focal points in Gaelic society as places where religious life and community identity intersected. However she also identifies that they served as places where liminal access points existed between the saints and members of the earthly *tuath*, thus joining together the past with the present in a visible sign of inherited continuity (Meigs 1997:15) and reflective of the *axis mundi*.

Walsham (2012) identifies that, by 1500, the Christianisation of the landscape had all but displaced memories of ancient paganism in Ireland. However, she acknowledges that the notion that nature was invested with sensitivity to the sacred never ceased to test and challenge the Church's equilibrium (Walsham 2012:36). This is demonstrated by Meigs (1997) who maintains that the characteristics of late medieval Irish Catholicism were impacted significantly by the inter-relationship between the Catholic Church and the *aos dána* poets. The author argues that this symbiotic relationship was 'indispensable to the process through which the counter-Reformation was able to enter Ireland and disseminate its reformation ideologies among a receptive population' (Meigs 1997:77).

Walsham (2011) identifies that 'the bible provided a rich repertoire of iconographical motifs connected with the natural environment and supplied plenty of evidence that it was the setting for sublime spiritual experiences' (Walsham 2011:39). Whilst paganism tended to view physical locations as inherently sacred, Walsham points out that Christianity was reluctant to accord such sanctity to certain places within the landscape. Instead, through those writers recording the

lives of the saints in medieval Ireland, Christianity created ‘a tissue of topographical legend to explain the appearance of the physical landscape’ (Walsham 2011:43).

By the time of the Penal Laws the Catholic political culture of west Cork is described by Smyth (2006) as ‘predominantly (but not exclusively) Irish speaking ..... oral and manuscript based, with rich traditions and practitioners of bardic poetry, genealogical, historical and legal scholarship, *dinshenchas* and the keeping of annals’. He argues that this fostered strong cultural unity and regional diversity. Catholics in these hearthlands knew the lands of their ancestors intimately and nurtured a potent belief in ‘the place of poetry and the imagination, the spiritual world and ‘older’ faiths’ (Smyth 2006:61). It is without question that such knowledge and tradition influenced the choice and location of Mass Rock sites as the following analysis of the nature of sacred space demonstrates.

#### **5.1.2 The Notion of the *axis mundi* for Sacred Space in Ireland**

There is already substantial evidence that shows an intimate link between Ireland’s shrines and topographical features or natural vegetation features. Nolan (1983) identifies that at least 92% of Ireland’s shrines are ‘intimately’ associated with such features including several at Ballyvourney in county Cork. Nolan emphasises the high prevalence of holy-water features and sacred stones at Irish pilgrimage sites. Sacred stones, particularly megalithic monuments and natural rock formations are nearly six times more common in an Irish pilgrimage context than elsewhere in Europe (Nolan 1983:431).

The author concludes that Irish pilgrimage almost certainly has stronger pre-Christian roots than pilgrimage elsewhere in Europe (Nolan 1983:432). Only 13% of active Irish shrines postdate the Reformation (Nolan 1983:436) demonstrating that older traditions have predominated. The evidence from Mass Rock sites visited within this study certainly echoes Nolan’s findings as there is robust evidence of an engagement with ‘nature’ at the majority of sites visited.

## Sacred Water

The symbolism reflected by the element water occupies a most important place amongst the sacred spaces of many nations (Radimilayh 2008:86) and Ireland is no exception. The power and regenerative force of water is acknowledged as an important aspect of Irish mythology as it played a central role as a creative force in the cosmic religiousness of pre-Christian communities (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:22). As discussed within the literature review, Irish Holy Wells were widely regarded as locations where supernatural power was especially potent. In Irish mythology the miraculous Well of Segais was believed to reside at the centre of the Otherworld and was characterised in several Irish texts as the font of all wisdom and the source of the most sacred rivers in Ireland, the Boyne and the Shannon (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995:26). The location of many Holy Wells in Ireland reflects the potential diversity of the topography of sacred space (Ó Giolláin 2005:13) and many, subsequently, became destinations for pilgrimage (Walsham 2012:35). Other water formations such as lakes, springs and rivers are also believed to hold great sacred power.

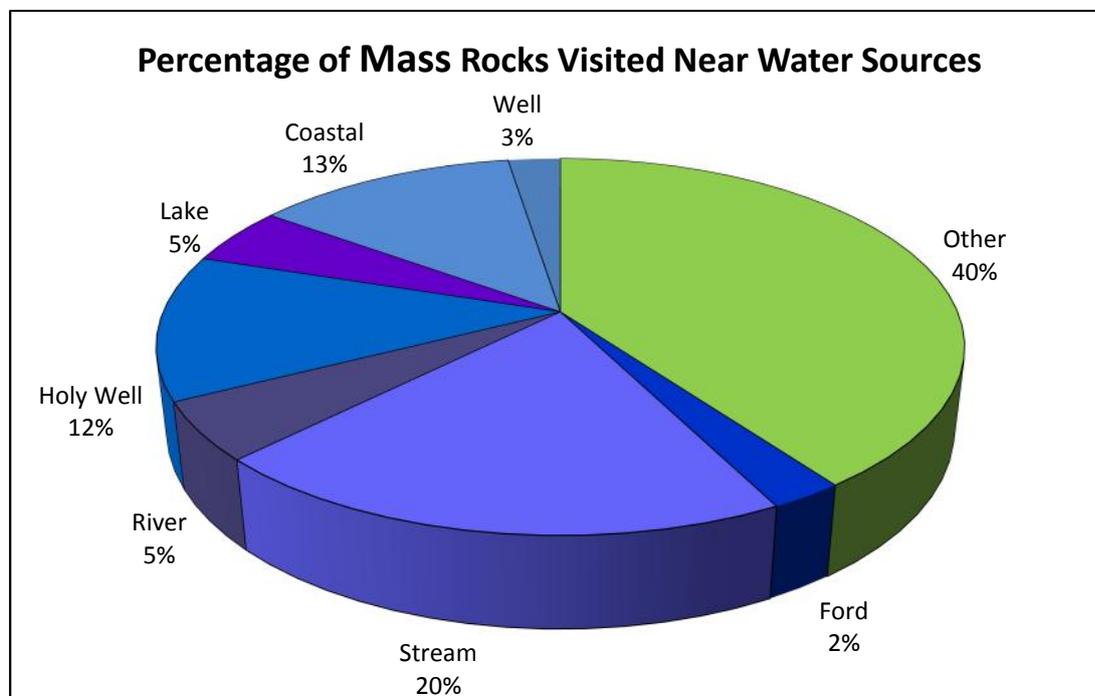
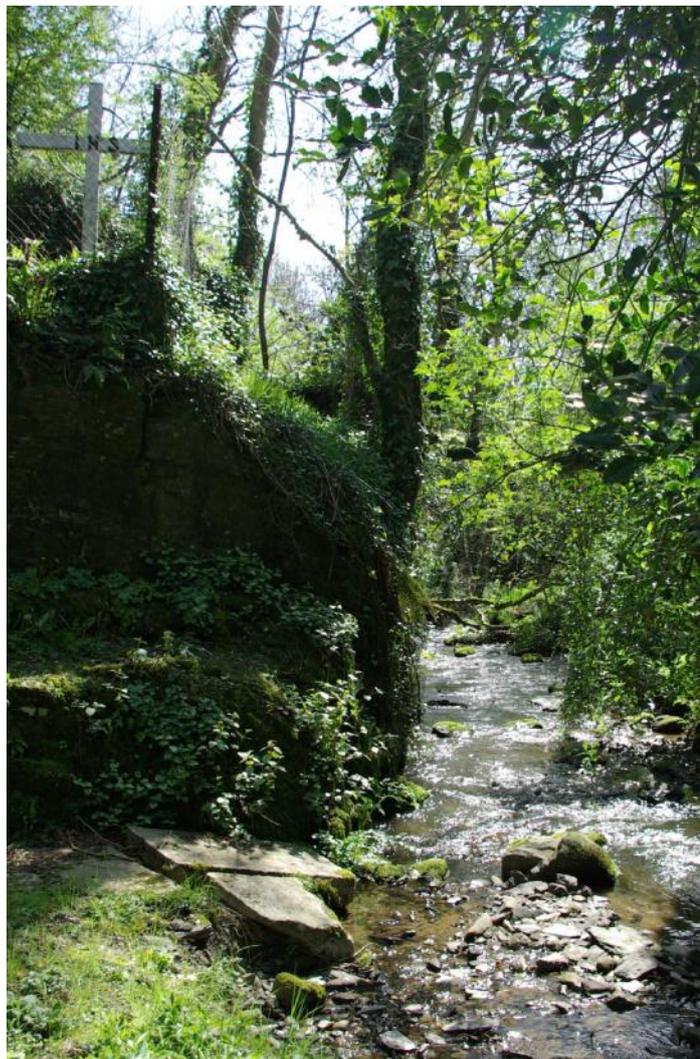


Figure 4 - Percentage Distribution of Mass Rock Sites in relation to Water Sources

The distribution of Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross reflects the close correlation between Mass Rock sites and water sources. This is further supported by field research with 60% of sites visited located in close proximity to a water source (Figure 4).

A total of eight sites visited were located adjacent to a stream. These include Ballycullenhane, Ballycurreen, Carhoo South, Coolmountain, Coomkeen, Derrynafinchin, Dungannon and Kilshinahan (Plate 10). In the Schools' Manuscript Collection one entry recalls a Mass Rock in *Gleann na mbrathar* in Kilbritten. It reports that on the eastern slope of the glen a rough table has been cut in the rock which is known as the Mass Rock. A green level patch, where the people knelt during Mass, lies between the Mass Rock and a stream (S313:306a).



**Plate 10 - Kilshinahan Mass Rock adjacent to a stream**

The possibility that this is a co-incidental feature of the local topography cannot be disregarded. Equally plausible is the notion that streams may have been used as a way to guide the congregation to the site as already suggested at Ballycurreen or, alternatively, to mask footprints that would otherwise have been visible. In Birr parish, County Offally, turf cutters uncovered rows of small branches cut and stuck upright in the bog. Each row had been carefully placed in the direction of the 'Priest's Bush' which was a little grove of birch trees where Mass was celebrated.

Similarly, coastal sites such as Councambeg, Drombeg, Ardura Beg and Toormore are likely to have been situated close to the shoreline to facilitate the arrival and departure of massing priests and their congregations. Such activities were acknowledged by the authorities in the diocese and recorded in historical records such as the *Report on the State of Popery* 1731.

The practicality of choosing a site close to a water source may also be reflected in its use in the Mass. Water has a special place in the ritual of every Catholic Mass and, in the past, there has always been a general custom of providing water, or wine and water, for the communicants to drink as 'purification' after Communion (Catholic Encyclopaedia 2012). McKavanagh (1973) further suggests that sites may have been situated near rivers to provide water for a meal after communion or for washing (McKavanagh 1973:7). Evidence of the importance of water for the purpose of celebrating Mass is demonstrated by Father Henchy who reports three wells close to the Coolnaclehy Mass Rock in Caheragh. He believes that these 'may have been used in Penal times as Holy Water or Baptismal fonts' (cited in Carey 1757:110).

Despite such practicality, it is impossible to ignore the symbolism and sacred aspect of water which has influenced communities from pre-historic times to the present day. The Glenville Mass Rock site sits at the edge of the river Bride (Plate 11) whilst the Ballymah Mass Rock is reported as being located at the junction of two rivers. Raftery (1994) identifies that rivers figure prominently in Celtic mythology with their water inseparably linked with the fertility of the soil. In

Ireland, each river had its tutelary deity with many of the river names known today being derived directly from these (Raftery 1994:183).



**Plate 11 - Glenville Mass Rock at the edge of the River Bride**

Entries within the Schools' Manuscript Collection report other Mass Rocks in river settings. One entry records that 'the Mass used to be said in ..... Goulanes near the river' (S281:426) and 'near the river Maelach .... There is a Mass Rock ..... still known as *cnocán an Áltórach*' (S282:66).

The Mishells Mass Rock is situated close to a ford and Brennaman and Brenneman (1995) advise that many ancient Celtic battles were staged at fords because they were places of crossing and transformation (Brennaman and Brenneman 1995:22). An entry relating to Coomleigh, which appears in the Schools' Manuscript Collection, demonstrates that these remained 'special' water features in the dioceses in more contemporary times: 'On the other side of the river a little glen runs up in to the Coomleigh mountains. This is known as *Cúm an tSagairt*. The ford in the river between the Mass Rock and this *Cúm* was known as *Ath an Solais* because the neighbours used to light a fire there on dark nights so that the priest might find it more easily when returning from ministering the old and the sick of the district' (S281: 482).

The remarkable symbiosis between native institutions and modes of thought and Christianity discussed by Mac Cana (2011) is demonstrated in respect to the sacrality of lakes and a number of the Mass Rock sites in the parish of *Uíbh Laoghaire* overlook Lough Allua. Danaher (2004) advises that many Irish lakes are reputed to have a monster bound in their depths through the prayers of a saint. In desperation, local inhabitants near the Shannon turned to St Ciaran of Clonmacnoise for protection from a great monster devastating their valley. With book and bell St Ciaran is reported to have driven it in to the depths of Lough Ree (Danaher 2004:99). The author discusses the *each uisce*, or water horse, believed to be one of the common types of lake monster who inhabits almost every lake and large river pool in Ireland (Danaher 2004:100). River pools and springs are also believed to be home to the *púca* (Danaher 2004:95).

In early Celtic culture sacred springs were strongly linked to the healing cult of gods and goddesses and Ó hÓgáin (1999) clearly identifies the veneration of a water god, together with the ritual deposition of valuables in order to propitiate him, among the pre-Christian Irish. In *Tíreachán's* seventh-century hagiography of St Patrick he discusses the well of *Slán* in the west of Ireland. He advises that the well was referred to as 'the king of the waters' and that the druids honoured the well and offered gifts to it as to a god. The well was covered with a square stone and the water below the stone was reputed to be the shrine of a wise man which had been made in order to bleach his bones for perpetuity. Patrick rejected the story believing that the water contained nothing but gold and silver from their wicked sacrifices (Bieler (1979) cited in Ó hÓgáin 1999:214).

There is strong archaeological evidence of this water cult during pre-history in the ritual deposition of hoards of metal work at sites such as Clashbredane, near Ballineen, county Cork where 25 metal axes were found in bogland (Waddell 2005:129). Indeed Waddell (2005) reports that almost half of all hoard sites in Ireland have been found in wet conditions (Waddell 2005:129). The ritual deposition of modern day coins into sacred springs and Holy Wells or into the

trunks of sacred trees in Ireland may be considered an extension of this older ritual tradition and evidence of an engagement with the *axis mundi* at such sacred sites.

Five of the sites visited - Beach, Calloras Oughter, Enniskeane, Foherlagh and Kinneigh - were located close to Holy Wells. Similarly, a Mass Hut at Rossmore, in Inchigeelagh, is situated adjacent to a Holy Well. Perhaps the most striking of these sites is the Beach Mass Rock which sits within a ritual landscape consisting of the man-made Mass Rock built at the base of a large outcrop of limestone rock, a Holy Well and a small hollowed out boulder, known as a bullaun stone. There are a number of healings and traditional 'rounds' attached to this well (Plate 12).



**Plate 12 - Beach Mass Rock and Lady's Well**

Even where Mass Rock sites are not situated adjacent to Holy Wells they are often present in the surrounding area. A number of wells are identified in the area surrounding the Kilshinahan Mass Rock within the Schools' Manuscript Collection for *Cill Bhrítáin*. These include *Tobar na Trinóide*, or well of the Trinity, near Rathclarin graveyard and *Tobar a Lariag* located 'south of the creamery at barr na h-eirge' (S313:158). Also recorded is the haunted cat's well in Barleyfield (S313:307a), the Surfeit Well in Rathrout on Mr Teapes farm (S313:308a), *Tobar na Brothóige* in Gareendruig (S313:309a) and Brigid's Well known for curing toothache

(S313:307a). There are two additional entries that detail a well inside Timoleague Abbey (S313:158and309a). The diocesan website highlights two further Holy Well sites, *Tobar an Lobhar* or the Well of the Lepers at Garranefean in Rathclarin and *Tobar na Sul*, to the south of the townland (Cork and Ross Kilbrittain ID 37 (2011) Diocesan website).

## **Sacred Wood**

### Spirit

Trees of life, immortality and knowledge have been recorded throughout the history of religion (Eliade 1959:149). The Celts worshipped in sacred groves which were dedicated to specific deities (Pennick 1996:25) and believed that trees had personal souls. They also believed that they could serve as a receptacle for an external spirit displaying special qualities and strengths (Pennick 1996:24). Ancient rites in connection with the verification of the spirit of the oak tree are recorded by Philpot (1897). He explains that mistletoe was dedicated at the altar by the druids once it was severed from the parent oak tree. This was done because the druids believed that the spirit of the tree retreated into the mistletoe when the oak leaves withered (Philpot 1897:20).

Low (1996) argues that the emphasis on oak trees in Celtic religion has been exaggerated. He believes that, in Ireland, the oak was only one of a number of species regarded as sacred. He records that *Eitheor Mac Cuill* worshipped the hazel tree. Similarly, in *Lebor Gabála Érenn*, the hazel tree was the god of *Mac Cuill* son of *Cermait* (Low 1996:81). The author also notes that, in a number of medieval texts, the yew, ash and hazel have frequent saintly, angelic or Otherworld associations (Low 1996:81). Trees with magical properties often feature in Irish tales of voyages or journeys to the Otherworld. The *Immram Brain* or Voyage of Bran describes how mortal Bran is enticed to enter the Otherworld by a beautiful woman carrying a supernatural branch from the apple tree of *Emain* (Cusack 2011:83).

It was believed that the nuts from certain trees could confer supernatural enlightenment (*imbas*) on those who ate them and Cusack (2011) discusses the story of *Cu Chulainn* and *Senbecc*. *Senbecc* was a man from the *sid* or fairy mound who had come in search of the fruit of the nuts of the fair-bearing hazel. After his capture, *Senbecc* explained to *Cu Chulainn* that there were nine fair-bearing hazels whose nuts dropped into the wells from whence their supernatural enlightenment or *imbas* was borne by the stream to the Boyne (Cusack 2011:85).

### Kingship

Certain trees had particular associations with sacral kingship and Low (1996) advises that sacred trees often grew on raths and forts associated with traditional inauguration sites. Here, under the sacred tree, the king was ritually married to the goddess earth. Low identifies a number of sites including a hill known as Lisnaskeagh or the 'whitethorn fort' in county Fermanagh where the Maguire kings were traditionally inaugurated; a tree at *Magh Adhair* near Tulla in county Clare where the *Dál gCais* tribe were inaugurated; *Craebh Tulcha* or 'tree of the mound' near Glenavy in county Antrim and *Ruadh-bheitheach* or the 'red birch' in Killeely, county Galway (Low 1996:82). Some royal *bileda* were protected by law and the desecration of an inauguration tree by a neighbouring tribe was considered a significant insult by the tribe's enemy (Low 1996:82).

Linked to such royal inauguration sites are the five most sacred trees in Ireland. They are recorded by Cusack (2011) as the Oak of Moone or *Eo Mugna* in county Kildare (Cusack 2011:77); the Yew of Ross or *Eo Rossa*; *Craeb Uisnig* on the hill of *Uisnech*, a place reputed to be the naval or *omphalos* of Ireland; *Bile Dathi*, an ash; and *Bile Tortan*, an ash large enough to shelter all the men of *Tortan* from the rain storms (Cusack 2011:78). Each sacred tree was linked to a particular king and Cusack (2011) believes that this was logical given the close connection that existed between kings, trees, poets and saints. In medieval Ireland poets were their king's chronicler and acted as important officials at ceremonies such as inaugurations (Cusack 2011:81).

## Poets

Poets often referred to their patrons as 'trees' or 'branches'. Low (1996) gives several examples including *Tadhg Mac Ruairhri* who, in referring to his royal ancestry, was described by his poet as 'a rugged branch of a kindly tree'. In a further poem the king is simply called *bile* meaning 'sacred tree' (Low 1996:82). This intimate relationship between poet and king could have profound consequences and certain ritual ceremonies could bring about the fall of both kings and sacred trees (Cusack 2011:77). Such ceremonies favoured certain trees such as the rowan, blackthorn and whitethorn. Other sacred trees, such as the apple and yew became poet's tablets upon which 'the visions, espousals, loves and courtships of Leinster and Ulster' were written (Hicks 2011:44).

Randolph (1943) advises that the white-thorn figures prominently in the formal ritual of the ancient Irish *glám-dichenn* or Satire from the Hilltops. Described in the Middle Irish Book of Ballymote it concerns the ceremonial ritual pronounced against a king for refusing to properly reward a poet for his poem. The aggrieved poet or *ollave*, plus six other professional poets, had to climb a hilltop at sunrise where seven lands met. There they placed their backs against a hawthorn through which a Celtic black wind blew. Each poet faced towards one of the seven lands. Linking sacred tree with sacred stone, each satirist held a thorn from the hawthorn in one hand and a perforated round stone, into which he chanted his curse, in the other. These were buried at the base of the tree once each had recited a quatrain which fell 'as a burden from the height of the hilltop on some possession of the king' (Randolph 1943:362).

A poem published by K Meyer under the title King and Hermit demonstrates the importance of various species of trees in Ireland in the tenth century and their association with pagan lore:

*'[Marbán] I have a hut in the wood; only my Lord knows it: an ash tree closes it on one side, and a hazel, like a great tree by a rath, on the other.*

*Two heather doorposts for support, and a lintel of honeysuckle .....*

*Long branches of a yew-green yewtree: glorious augury! Lovely is the place: the great greenery of an oak adds to that portent.*

*There is an apple-tree with huge apples such as grow in fairy dwellings (great are these blessings), and an excellent clustered crop from small-nutted branching green hazels.*

*Choice wells are there and waterfalls (good to drink) - they gush forth in plenty .....*

*Delightful feasts come ..... (swift preparing), pure water ....., salmon and trout.*

*Produce of mountain ash, black sloes from a dark blackthorn, berry-foods, bare fruits of a bare .....*

*The wind's voice against a branchy wood, on a day of grey cloud; cascades in a river; roar of rock: delightful music'*

*(translated in Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:85-86).*

Inauguration ceremonies ritually marrying the king to the goddess under sacred trees continued into Christian times (Low 1996:82). Sacred trees similarly survived, as shown in the *Yellow Book of Lecan*. Cusack (2011), however, asserts that this transition occurred in a greatly spiritualised and changed form (Cusack 2011:87). Evidence is recorded within hagiography to show that missionaries and saints were concerned to combat the power of the sacred tree in Celtic religion and to adopt it into the new religion (Cusack 2011:78).

### Archaeology

Raftery (1994) believes that there is sound archaeological evidence demonstrating the sacredness of trees in Celtic Ireland. He discusses excavations at Navan Fort where the great earthwork is generally believed to have been the *Emain Macha* of history and tradition (Raftery 1994:74). Occupied initially, on a small scale, during the Neolithic period, he advises that the site continued to be used from the later Bronze Age into the Iron Age. It was during this later period that the character of the site changed completely with the erection of a single large and elaborate circular structure consisting of four concentric rings of regularly placed upright posts (Raftery 1994:75).

Archaeological excavation at the site revealed the stump of a large oak post at the centre of the circle which could possibly have been around thirteen metres high. Given these findings, the unique and extraordinary character of the site and its known ceremonial importance, Raftery concluded that this had been an important ritual site. He reminds us that in the first century AD Maximus of Tyre wrote that 'the Celts devote a cult to Zeus, but the Celtic image of Zeus is a great oak' (Raftery 1994:78). It is possible that the large oak post represented this cult. The archaeological evidence is further supported by a reference in the *Story of Mac Da Tho's Pig* from the *Book of Leinster*. In this tale the hero Fergus 'took the great oak that was in the middle of the enclosure to the men of Connacht, after having torn it from its roots' (Koch and Carey 1995:63 cited in Cusack 2011:75).

### Folklore

Characterised as superstition, by modern society, folklore has governed the relationships with the land down through the centuries in Ireland. The traditions of 'fairy paths' and the 'lone bush' or 'fairy thorn' abound (Duffy 2007:65). In previous research conducted by the author interviews with farmers revealed a number of superstitions connected with the whitethorn and blackthorn. One elderly farmer in Westport, county Mayo, told how subsequent generations had refused to cut the trees on one of the many forts on their land because it was believed to be bad luck and that their cattle would die if they did so (Bishop 2009:133). Kinahan (1881) confirms that just before sunset, on the eve of May Day, a sprig of mountain ash or willow must be placed above every door and in each field to preserve the inhabitants, the cattle, and the crops from the 'good people' (Kinahan 1881:98).

Commonly found in churchyards and at holy wells, it is believed that a fire made from the burning of ash will banish the devil (Danaher 2004:69). The tree is also linked to butter making and fishing. A sprig of mountain ash placed in a fishing boat is thought to bring luck to the fishermen. When churning butter was unsuccessful, a twig of mountain ash was used to stir the butter and a band of the tree tied around the churn to protect against charms and spells (Danaher 2004:71). Alternatively, a

rod of hazel could be tied around the dasher on the lid of the churn for similar effect (S138: 477-8 cited in Hastings 2009:61).

Walking sticks made from hazel were believed to have curious properties that could protect their owners against fairies and cure snake bites. Used in heavy wattle work and home-made fishing rods, Danaher (2004) records that hazel had no equal (Danaher 2004:70). However, the oak was even more diverse and could be used in many tasks and to make a variety of objects. Ink was made from oak 'galls', dye from the saw-dust and the bark was used by tanners to cure leather. He further advises that 'it was between the bark and the wood of an oak tree that the priest bound the spirit of the Beárna for some horrible crime and there she remained for twenty-seven years until an unlucky flash of lightning struck the tree and released her. She killed several wayfarers and injured others before another priest overcame her and sent her to teem the Red Sea with a bottomless cup' (Danaher 2004:68).



**Plate 13 - Ardrah Mass Rock**

Occasionally Mass Rock sites are found in close proximity to a single tree. At Ardrah, in the Meallagh Valley, a crab apple tree is almost woven into the rock outcrop at the Mass Rock site (Plate 13). The crab apple is an ancient tree and its use as a food source in Ireland can be traced as far back as the Neolithic period with

crab apple seeds recovered from a pre-historic house at Tankardstown, county Limerick (Waddell 2000:30). Known for its healing properties both physically and mentally, the crab apple tree is often associated with the Otherworld. Many Irish customs performed at *Samhain* are associated with the crab apple tree because of this connection (Kindred 1997).

There is evidence that knowledge of sacred trees has been passed down through subsequent generations. In the Schools' Manuscript Collection several entries refer to the Ardrah Mass Rock and the tree. One entry reports that 'the Mass used to be said mostly in the open air. It was said at Cúm an tSagairt. It used be also said in Ardra, on a rock. There is a tree growing on this rock and the tree is bending down' (S281:425). Another entry similarly notes that 'the Mass used to be said ..... in the open air ..... In Ardra on a rock where a tree called 'the crab tree' is bending over the rock' (S281:426). Today the Mass Rock and crab apple tree are recorded as part of the Meagher Valley Walk of the *Slí Dhuchais Dhrom dá liag* in *A Guide to the Sheep's Head Way* (Ross 2009: 90).

A hawthorn was found growing next to the Cooldaniel Mass Rock in the parish of Kilmichael and there is further evidence of the sacredness of trees in the diocese of Cloyne where the Loughane East Mass Rock is situated close to an ancient oak. The Oak is the Celtic symbol for wisdom, strength and endurance. In the Little glen of the Mass, in Newmarket, Mass was celebrated regularly during the Penal era. According to tradition it was the scene of the murder of two priests. In a neighbouring field there is a large tree that, when in full bloom, is believed to resemble the shape of the chalice that is supposedly buried nearby (Allen 1973:50).

Pieces from sacred trees are often taken to meet spiritual needs. One of the earliest references involves St. Brigid's oak tree in Kildare and dates to the tenth century - 'no one dares to cut it with a weapon but he who can break off any part of it with his hands deems it a great advantage, hoping for the aid of God by means of it, because through the blessing of St. Brigid, many miracles have been performed by that wood' (Logan 1980:91 cited in Zucchelli 2009:66). At Guagane Barra in *Uibh Laoghaire* pilgrims continue to venerate an ash tree near to the oratory.

## Memory and metaphor

Smyth (2006) argues that trees and woodlands remained integral elements of Irish culture up to the mid-seventeenth century. From this point onwards, he maintains that aggressive English expansion resulted in a transformation of the Irish landscape, denuding it of its trees and forests so that they became simply 'a memory and a metaphor for the Irish' (Smyth 2006:88). Whilst dense woodland may have appeared impenetrable to those who did not know the landscape, Smyth points out that, to the Irish, they were 'familiar worlds' (Smyth 2006:91).

Woodland boundaries were of immense importance to competing lordships and often marked territorial boundaries. Smyth (2006) comments that woodlands acted as buffer-territories between Gaelic and Anglo-Norman lords (Smyth 2006:92) and were frequently located along townland boundaries but particularly along streams and river borders (Smyth 2006:90). Smyth firmly argues that it is no coincidence that woodlands are often associated with the core areas of essentially Gaelic lordships rather than those of the Old English (Smyth 2006:91). Over one quarter of the Mass Rock sites visited are situated in a woodland context strongly supporting the hypothesis that the use of Mass Rock sites is reflective of a more traditional strand of Gaelic Catholicism.

Additionally, it is impossible to ignore the fact that other Mass Rock sites, which are now located in fields or pastureland, may once have been situated within a woodland setting. This is demonstrated at the Dromaclarig Mass Rock site where the landowner confirmed that the area was previously wooded.

## **Sacred Stone**

Just as there is a clear relationship between water and the fertility of the earth, stone is considered to be the bones of Mother Earth (Pennick 1996:39). Many of the topographical features in Ireland are believed to have been created from the carcass of the defeated bovine champions from the *Táin bó Cúailgne* (Sayers 1986:100). Irish folklore continues to emphasise the sacredness of stone as well as the idea that stone is a container of supernatural power. Ó hÓgáin (1999) highlights

the common custom of swearing on stones and the notion that stones could move about and speak oracles on certain occasions (Ó hÓgáin 1999:22). In his *History of Newmarket County Cork*, Allen (1973) recalls how the once wooded Mullaughareirk Mountains used to be known as *Slieve Luachra*. Legend tells that these were the hunting grounds of *Fionn* and the *Fianna* (Allen 1973:7). The cairn, known as Taumore or Bocaura on the boundary of the parish, was believed to be the burial place of the sons of Dedad. Its sacred rock was where Mylon/Meelan had worshiped in ancient times (Allen 1973:8).

Claims by Adair (1978) and Mac Cana (2011) that the Irish ritual tradition of walking round sacred spaces such as Holy Wells in a clockwise direction dates back to the days of pagan sun-worship has already been discussed. Indeed, at some Holy Wells in Ireland such as St. Brigid's well in Faughart Upper, county Louth, there is a specific carved stone at which the pilgrim may pray or walk around (Logan 1980:21). Drawing further attention to the genesis in sun-worship in Irish lore, as well as the lingering notions that supernatural power is secluded in stone, Ó hÓgáin discusses the *Mogh Ruith* tradition. *Mogh Ruith* was a druid, possibly of the *Rothraighe*, a sept from east Munster (Ó hÓgáin 1999:208). He was believed to possess a wondrous instrument known as *roth rámhach* or 'oared wheel'. Possibly as a result of antiquarian speculation concerning the survival of prehistoric solar symbols engraved on stones like those at Cleghile, near Tipperary town, his name came to be associated with solar symbolism.



Plate 14 - Kerbstone K15, Knowth Passage Tomb, Boyne Valley

A rayed circular symbol can be seen on one of the cairn stones from the Loughcrew passage tomb cemetery and a similar 'calendar' stone is visible on kerbstone K15 at Knowth in the Boyne Valley (Plate 14).

It is thought that the erection of standing-stones by pre-historic communities served as a way of marking or 'socialising' the environment. Ó hÓgáin (1999) argues that matters of social importance in human culture tend to be accompanied by the attachment of spiritual importance to them. Thus, he takes for granted that such standing stones would have held a religious significance of their own. He believes that their presence would have increased the sacredness of such sites (Ó hÓgáin 1999:22).

The symbiosis between native institutions and Christianity, as discussed by Mac Cana (2011), is evident in the medieval hagiography of the saints. Danaher (2004) highlights the story of the standing stones close to the church at *Teampal Fiachna*, a few miles east of Kenmare. When St. Fiachna found a dairy maid stealing his butter, he cursed the woman turning her and all her utensils in to stone (Danaher 2004:87). A great pillar in the parish of Kilnamartera, county Cork, is similarly reputed to be Balor of the Evil Eye changed to stone (Danaher 2004:88). The continued spiritual importance of standing stones is demonstrated by an entry in the Schools' Manuscript Collection. It advises that 'the Coomleigh people say that the priest was captured and murdered by the soldiers. They say that he lies buried in the Coomleigh mountains and that the place, about a square perch in area, is fenced with standing stones' (S281:482).

### Quartz

Ó hÓgáin (1999) claims that 'the power of stones to provide a mutually protective barrier between the dead and the living may lie behind the traditional gesture of respect for the dead by placing stones or quartz pebbles on the grave, or indeed behind the more curious practice of adding a stone to an ancient burial cairn when passing by' (Ó hÓgáin 1999:22). Certainly, a poem describing how *Táin Bó Cuailnge* was rescued from oblivion draws attention to a 'resplendent, princely-white stone'

(Carey 2000:185). Known as the stone of Fergus and situated in the burial mound of *Fergus mac Roich* (Carey 2000:183), this may also be the pillar stone used by *Cú Chulainn* in the same sagas (Bergin 1921:159).

Quartz is considered a symbol of purity and light in many different societies because of the brightness of its colour (Stout and Stout 2008:58). In Cork at Dromatimore, in East Muskerry, an Ogham stone linked with St Olan had a lump of quartz resting on top which became known as the Saint's 'cap' (Walsham 2011:43). At the Calloras Oughter Mass Rock site, in the parish of Goleen, two quartz rocks with veins of copper ore running through them had been placed behind the altar stone linking modern day ritual and belief with Ireland's pre-historic past (Plate 15).



**Plate 15 - Quartz Rock at Calloras Oughter Mass Rock**

Quartz stones were found in significant quantity at Newgrange in the Boyne Valley and, despite differing opinions (O'Kelly 1979; Cooney 2006), it is clear that this type of stone was considered to possess 'special' characteristics in Neolithic times. This contemporary deposition of copper ore at Calloras Oughter provides a tangible link with the wedge tomb tradition of the Bronze Age (O'Brien *et al* 1989/90:9). There is an abundance of copper mines at Mount Gabriel on the Mizen peninsula of west

Cork. Indeed, the ASD records an ancient copper mine in close proximity to this Mass Rock site (ASD 2012 internet source).

Other stones were also considered to have unusual properties or values. An ancient poem about the River Shannon discusses an ever-fruitful precious stone which was found in a salmon struck by *Maol Seachlainn* the great prince of *Fobhar*. The fish and the precious stone were subsequently given to the descendants of *Brian* (Ó Cuív 1962:95). Mac Cana (1975) discusses a meeting between Colum Cille and *Mongán* at *Carraic Éolairg* on Lough Foyle. The author highlights a short poem by Bran's druid included in *Cín Dromma Snechta*. The druid reflects upon certain characteristic elements of the Otherworld including the precious stones to be found close to *Srúb Brain* near the entrance to Lough Foyle (Mac Cana 1975:48). Ó Súilleabháin (1970) highlights more contemporary examples of sacred stones through folklore sources including *cloche scáil*, 'Kerry Diamonds', white stones, elf stones and perforated stones (Ó Súilleabháin 1970:271).

### Caves

Caves are an integral element of karstic limestone landscapes and Drew (2006) identifies a number of caves in county Cork notable for their archaeological or folkloric associations (Drew 2006:167). Caves often became sacred through their associations with the traditions of various saints and one such example is St Patrick's cave in Donegal (Meigs 1997:39). Other caves were already 'sacred' in pre-history having been locations for funerary and ritual practice in Neolithic Ireland (Dowd 2008:305). Subsequently, through mythology and folklore, some of these caves became linked to the Otherworld. For example, a natural limestone cave, called Owenygart, situated near to the royal site of *Crúachan* is reputed to be an entrance to the underworld and the source of otherworldly beasts (Hicks 2011:44).

The use of caves is a feature of worship in the diocese of Cork and Ross where Bolster (1982) records that 'there was Clais an Aifrinn in Desertmore served by the Monks of Kilcrea who also celebrated Mass in the Mass Rock Chamber in the caves to the south of Ovens Bridge' (Bolster 1982:227). The Schools' Manuscript

Collection records that ‘there is a hole in a rock in Nedinagh near Dunmanway where the priest hid himself’ (S303:299). Adjacent to the Mass Rock on *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingeara a cave is reputed to have been the hiding place of the local priest in Penal times. Lockington (1921) refers to priests labouring ‘in the gloom of the mountain cave’ (Lockington 1921:131) and in Doora, in county Clare, there is a cave known as *Poll na Sagairt* because it was used as a hiding place by priests (Murphy 1991:45). It would, therefore, seem that caves were used by priests both for shelter and worship during Penal times.

Emphasising care in the creation of sacred space, the furniture of the Mass Rock site had to create a space that held meaning and importance for the different aspects of the Eucharistic celebration. The size and proportions of the space must have been sufficient to support the celebration of Mass in all its component parts. Mass Rock typologies are discussed in the following chapter but it is evident that a range of features are shared across a number of sites.

## 5.2 Recurrent Features

### 5.2.1 Selection of sites

It is evident from current research that appropriate sites were not simply chosen at random or as convenient markers to indicate where Mass would be said. Mass Rock sites were carefully selected because they were already ‘sacred’ or ‘special’ in some way. It is suggested, as Nugent (2008) argues, that the memory of religious association of certain spaces remained a strong focus for the Gaelic Irish and that, additionally, certain landscape and topographical features were inscribed with meaning and imbued with spirit.

The re-use of archaeological monuments such as wedge tombs, stone circles and ringforts as Mass Rocks clearly illustrates Nugent’s (2008) point. At Ballyshoneen, in the diocese of Cloyne, it is clear that choice was influenced by specific landscape features. Here Mass was celebrated at a specific rock face because its profile resembled a human face. Similarly, at Gortnahoughtee and Foherlagh, the shape of the rocks mirrors ecclesiastical architecture. At Ballingeara the site appears to have

been chosen as a result of its topography in addition to the shape and geological makeup of the Mass Rock. The rock sits in an isolated and central position in a natural hollow in the mountainous landscape.

### 5.2.2 Three Steps to the Altar

One other feature at a number of sites is the existence of three steps up to a Mass Rock altar. In the majority of cases these steps are present in the natural bedrock around the site (Plate 16) but, occasionally, these have been built into the furniture of the site. It is likely that these steps are intended to mimic the approach to the altar within Catholic Churches (Plate 17). Sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross include Beach and Glenville as well as the Penal chapel at Durrus. It is also a feature of the Loughane East Mass Rock site in the diocese of Cloyne.



Plate 16 – Three Steps Glenville Mass Rock

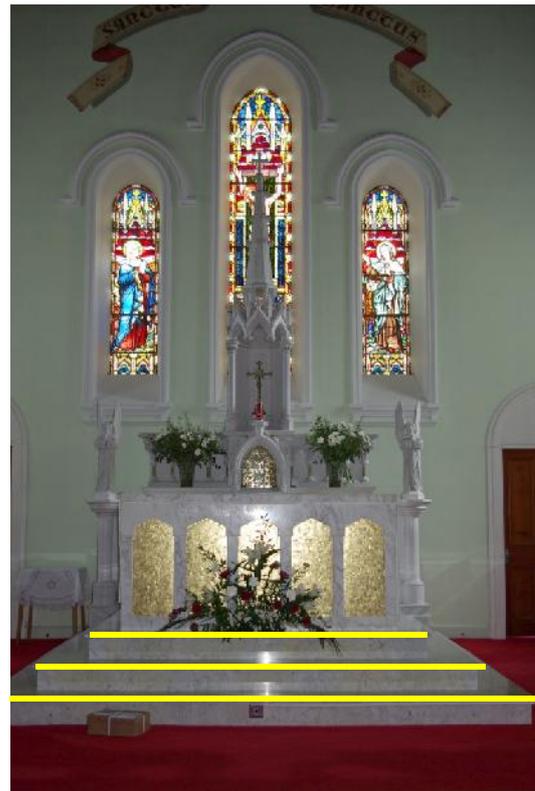


Plate 17 – Catholic Church of Our Lady, Star of the Sea, and St. Patrick

### 5.2.3 Walls and Windbreaks

The evolution of the Mass Rock tradition resulted in the later addition of shelters or thatched roofs at some sites. This was understandable given both the nature of outdoor worship and the strict requirements set by the Church for the protection of the altar. There is certainly evidence that some Mass Rock sites had the provision of a low stone wall or windbreak although it is difficult to assess whether these were contemporary or later additions. Sites with stone walling or shelters include Cullomane West, Gortnamuckla, Gortnahoughtee and Shehy Beg.

The Gortnamuckla Mass Rock is enclosed by a substantial stone walled structure (Plate 18). In contrast, at Cullomane West the walling appears more rudimentary.



**Plate 18 – Walled site of Gortnamuckla Mass Rock**

However, this rectangular loose stoned wall would still have provided some shelter for the congregation as well as a place to rest. At an elevation of 161m above sea level, the possibility that this wall was a deliberate addition to mask the site from view lower down the hillside cannot be ignored (Plate 19).



**Plate 19 – Wall surrounding Cullomane Mass Rock**

#### **5.2.4 Mass Furniture**

Pragmatism also appears to have played a part. Sites needed to either possess the relevant attributes for the celebration of Mass or be adapted accordingly. In terms of practicality it is evident that many Mass Rock sites are situated close to water sources. Whilst it is impossible to overlook the symbolism of water in respect to the notion of the *axis mundi*, it is equally impossible to ignore the practicality of water at Mass Rock sites. Water was an important element in the celebration of the Mass and the presence of Holy Wells, streams and rivers would have provided a vital resource. The position of coastal and river sites provided quick and easy access to and from the site for the priest and his congregation.

Some Mass Rocks possess hollows or depressions which could have held Holy water or candles such as those found at Foherlagh (Plate 20), Ballingearry and Carrigdangan Mass Rocks. The ASD records similar features at Coomleigh East and Heir Island. At Coomleigh East the Mass Rock has 'six candles holes on the top of it'. Blessed candles represent an important feature of older traditions within the Catholic faith. When lit they are believed to provide protection for the dying or from harmful thunder storms and are thought to counteract the activities of fairies

(Ó Súilleabháin 1970:403). On Heir Island one of the Mass Rocks has a rectangular hollow that was believed to hold the chalice (ASD 2012).



Plate 20 – Foherlagh Mass Rock Hollow Depression containing Water

#### 5.2.5 Altar and Reredos

The terms *altare*, *mensa* and *altarium* are used to designate an altar. The *reredos* is a permanent structure behind an altar used for the display of paintings, sculpture or to house relics. It can rest either on the rear of the *mensa* or on a substructure behind the altar (Catholic Encyclopaedia 2012a).



Plate 21 - *Reredos* at Coolaclevane Mass Rock

A number of Mass Rock sites visited including Coolaclevane (Plate 21), Coolmountain, Curraheen and Kilnadur appear to have a purpose built *reredos*.

### 5.2.6 Inscribed Cross

Another feature highlighted within the official definition of a Mass Rock is the possibility of an inscribed cross. There is certainly evidence of this at a number of sites both within the diocese of study and further afield. At a Mass Rock high up in the mountains in Loughisle, Kilcommon there is an incised cross, measuring about 3 inches by 3 inches and about an inch in depth, cut or worn in to the stone (Holohan 2000:34). In Killesk the granite Mass Rock has a cross carved on to the flat surface (Scoil Mhuire Internet 2011). In the diocese of Cork and Ross the Kilnadur Mass Rock has a small Latin cross inscribed onto its outer face (Plate 22) and the Curraheen Mass Rock has a rough cross incised onto its lower slab.



**Plate 22 - Cross Inscribed stone, Kilnadur Mass Rock**

The Archaeological Survey Database also records that, according to local information, when the Mass Rock was found at Tawnies Lower, there was a cross marked on the stone but this has since faded. The Mass Rock at Farlistown is also reported to be cross-inscribed (ASD 2010). At a number of sites crosses have been etched into the rock. This appears to be an unrelated practice more in keeping with ritual practices or rounds and will therefore be explored within a subsequent chapter.

### 5.3 The Archetype of Sacred Space and the Notion of the *axis mundi*

The sacredness of stone is clearly apparent in its use as an altar. According to Moss (2006), stone has always been the preferred material for altar use although there is some evidence for the use of wooden altars during the later middle ages. As early as 1186, legislation discovered within the Latin text of an eighteenth century transcript in the *Novum Registrum* at Christ Church Cathedral Dublin and issued by Archbishop John Comyn, prohibited ‘priests from celebrating Mass on a wooden table according to the usage of Ireland: and enjoined that in all monasteries and baptismal churches altars should be made of stone: and if a stone of sufficient size to cover the whole altar cannot be had .... A square and polished stone be fixed in the middle of the altar where Christ’s body is consecrated, of a compass broad enough to contain five crosses and also to bear the foot of the largest chalice’ (Moss 2006:81).

Wooden altars were only permitted in chapels, chantries and oratories but, even then, a plate of stone had to be ‘firmly fixed’ in to the wood (Gwynn, A. (1944) cited in Moss 2006:81). A sense of respect for the altar has always been intimately connected with the celebration of Mass within the Catholic faith (Bolster 1972:305) and the use of stone altars continues today.

Mass Rock altars are generally between 0.5m and 1m in height. This would have been a practical necessity as the altar would have held the sacred tablet and ritual ornaments of the sacrament such as chalice and candle sticks. Many of the Mass Rocks visited naturally provide the flat surface and those that do not, such as Shehy Beg, Gortnahoughtee and Derrynafinchin, appear to have had a separately mounted altar stone.

The notion of the *axis mundi* is evident in the selection of Mass Rocks and the importance of topographical and landscape features including sacred stone, wood and water. However, the variety of typologies identified during research would seem to indicate that there is no archetype of sacred space for Mass Rock sites. However, it is probable that during Penal times the chosen rock would only have

been transformed into a Holy altar once the required flat square stone tablet had been placed upon it and been duly consecrated by the priest. Ryan (1957) explains that in Penal times the priest would have carried a station box. He would have unhinged the sides and the front of the station box so that when it was flat on the stone of the Mass Rock it would act as his altar. The station-box would have contained altar-stone, linens, crucifix, candles and charts and the compactness of the station box would have meant that it could be quickly hooked back together for a speedy departure (Ryan 1957:24). This addition is clearly the essential feature that would have translated an otherwise 'sacred' but 'unholy' space into the archetype of sacred space for the celebration of the Catholic Mass.

#### 5.4 **Concluding remarks**

This chapter has looked at the notion of the *axis mundi* in respect to Mass Rock sites and the repeated use of the sacred elements of stone, wood and water often within an already 'special' or 'sacred' landscape. There are clearly a number of features that are shared across Mass Rock sites. However, it is evident that the initial definition provided in the Archaeological Record for such sites is inadequate and requires expansion in light of current research findings and this is explored within the following chapter.

## 6

### Typologies of Sacred Space

The permanence of stone ensures it remains in the landscape, whether in its natural geological form and setting or through its use in man-made structures and monuments. Within the ASD Mass Rocks are classified as ‘a rock or earthfast boulder used as an altar or a stone built altar used when Mass was being celebrated during Penal times (1690s to 1750s AD), though there are some examples which appear to have been used during the Cromwellian period (1650s AD). Some of these rocks/boulders may bear an inscribed cross’ (ASD 2010).

The sacredness of stone is clearly apparent in its use at Mass Rock sites but the accepted definition fails to acknowledge this concept. Additionally, research has revealed that Mass Rocks can be divided in to a number of ‘types’. In order to explore the various traits or characteristics that Mass Rocks share, whilst also acknowledging variations between sites, the author has developed a new and innovative range of typologies that expands and further defines the original description within the ASD.

#### 6.1 Mass Rock Typologies

Geertz (1966) defines a typology as:

‘a conceptual system made by partitioning a specified field of entities into a comprehensive set of mutually exclusive types, according to a set of common criteria dictated by the purpose of the typologist. Within any typology, each type is a category, created by the typologist, into which he can place discrete entities having specific identifying characteristics, to distinguish them from entities having other characteristics, in a way that is meaningful to the purpose of the typology’

(Geertz 1966:4 cited in Adams and Adams 1991:91).

It is appropriate that this description of a typology was used by Geertz in respect to his definition of religion. According to Adams and Adams (1991), a useful archaeological 'type' is composed of a group of objects plus an individual's ideas about those objects in addition to the words and pictures in which such ideas can be expressed (Adams and Adams 1991:34). These ideas are likely to change or evolve as the objects are studied, therefore typologies offer some degree of flexibility. Individual 'types' may exhibit a certain amount of internal variability (Adams and Adams 1991:72).

Types are generated by differentiation rather than definition and most archaeological typologies are bounded by both internal and external criteria (Adams and Adams 1991:76). In the case of Mass Rocks the external criteria relate to their temporal and spatial use. The internal criteria relate to the specific physical appearance of the monument. Mass Rocks can be clearly divided according to their different physical appearance. In some cases archaeological monuments have been re-used and re-interpreted as Mass Rocks. Others appear to have been purposely built and these are classified as Man-Made Mass Rocks. The two remaining typologies are both naturally occurring landscape features. They are distinct, however, in their appearance and have therefore been categorized as Natural Geological Rock Formations and Earth-fast Boulders (Figure 5).

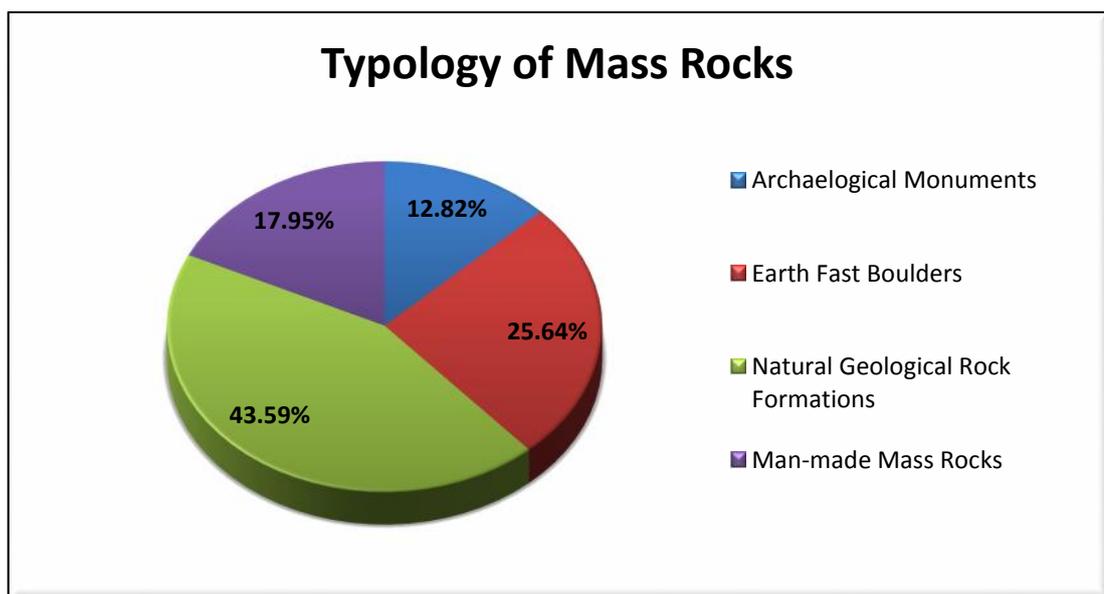


Figure 5 – Percentage Mass Rock Typologies

### 6.1.1 Typology 1: Archaeological Monuments (12.82%)

Five Mass Rock sites visited consisted of archaeological monuments

- Cooldaniel Mass Rock Site
- Toormore Mass Rock Site
- Derrynafinchin Mass Rock Site
- Drombeg Mass Rock Site
- Coorleigh South Mass Rock Site

The tradition of re-using existing archaeological monuments as Mass Rocks is not restricted solely to the diocese of Cork and Ross. The renowned antiquarian, Westropp, identified a number of priests in county Clare celebrating Mass on 'dolmens'. He identified *Altoir Ultacht* which locals believed derived its name from a priest who had fled from Ulster during the Penal era and 'used to celebrate the Mass on this dolmen'. A further site was identified at Knockshanvo, on the hill of Knockaphunta beyond Broadford (Westropp 1900:89). Other sites in counties Galway and Mayo have already been discussed.

#### Cooldaniel Mass Rock (Plate 23)

The Cooldaniel Mass Rock, located in the modern day parish of Kilmichael, is one of a number of upland sites visited during research. Kilmichael is an ancient parish that dates back to at least 1493 (Kilmichael Historical Society 2010:7). The Historical Society advise that the parish was founded as a direct consequence of both inter-clan warfare between the O'Mahoneys and the O'Learys as well as the ecclesiastical and political ambitions of Matthew Mahoney, vicar of Macloneigh (Kilmichael Historical Society 2010:45). Legend would dictate, however, that the parish was founded on the site of a *lios* by a friar on pilgrimage from Rome. The *lios* is believed to have been *Lios a Chlubhain* situated within the present graveyard of Kilmichael (Cork and Ross Kilmichael ID 40 (2011) Diocesan website). For both economic and politico-ecclesiastical reasons, Kilmichael was united with Inchigeelagh from 1663 to 1750 and subsequently with Macloneigh from 1778 to modern times (Kilmichael Historical Society 2010:47).

Kilmichael was clearly an important ecclesiastical area down through the centuries. In the same parish, Kileanna townland or *Cill Eanna* was associated with St. Enda of Aranand and Killeanna Lake remained a pilgrimage site until the early twentieth century. A *cill* and graveyard for unbaptised children lies to the north-east of the present Church at Johnstown. (Cork and Ross Kilmichael ID 40 (2011) Diocesan website).



**Plate 23 - Cooldaniel Mass Rock**

Situated in undulating pasture, this re-used wedge tomb is sheltered by higher ground to the north and commands excellent views of the surrounding area. The building of wedge tombs in the final Neolithic/Early Bronze Age c. 2500-1500 BC represented the first wide-spread appearance of megalithic tombs in the Cork region. This appears to have been followed by a broadly complementary distribution of Stone Circles and other related monuments in the Middle-Late Bronze Age (O'Brien 2000:162). This is particularly significant given that another Mass Rock at Derrynafinchin appears to have been incorporated into a stone circle on the southwestern slopes of Conigar Mountain, in the Shehy Mountain Range.

Research undertaken by O'Brien (1996; 2000) also highlights the connection between the wedge tomb building tradition and early metallurgy in south-west

Ireland (O'Brien 2000:170). He identifies the presence of a large concentration of copper mines on Mount Gabriel in the Mizen peninsula of west Cork as well as Boulysallagh, Callaros Outer, Carrigacat, Ballyrisode and probably Toormore (O'Brien 1996:9). In addition, he identifies copper mines at Crumpane, Tooreen and Canashanavoe in the Beara peninsula (O'Brien 1996:10). Mass Rocks located in these areas include sites at Callaros Oughter, Tooreen and Toormoor.

The area is clearly linked with the pre-historic communities of the late Neolithic and Bronze age. As O'Brien (2000), concludes, a wedge tomb existed primarily as a shrine associated with the ancestors through sanctification, offering and sacrifice. He argues that, at another level, the wedge tomb was an important symbol of group identity 'contributing to the symbolic construction of their community through the physical expression of a common sense of belonging and identity' (O'Brien 2000:174). As discussed previously, Christianity in Ireland achieved a remarkable symbiosis between these native institutions and the new religious orthodoxy. This permitted the complementary coexistence of the two ideologies. This has clearly continued down to modern times with the re-use and re-interpretation of wedge tombs as Mass Rocks.

#### Toormore Mass Rock (Plate 24)

There is no record of this wedge tomb being re-used as a Mass Rock in the ASD. The Office of Public Works, however, advises that the site was re-used and re-interpreted by subsequent communities from pre-historic times through to the Penal era. Already a sacred place during the Bronze Age between 1250-500BC, ritual use of the site continued into the Iron Age between 124-224AD. The wedge tomb was subsequently used as a Mass Rock during the eighteenth century by Priests (Office of Public Works 2011). This site is one of a number of coastal Mass Rock sites and it is probable that its location close to the shoreline at Toormoor Strand enabled priests to gain easy access to and from the site by boat. Indeed Burke (1914) highlights Schull as one of the sites along the southern coast of Cork where authorities had already identified priest landing by 1708 (Burke 1914:176).

However, the symbolism associated with water cannot be disregarded, particularly given the age of the site.



**Plate 24 - Toormore Mass Rock**

Like Cooldaniel, the Toormore wedge tomb is located close to the Early Bronze Age copper mining area of Mount Gabriel. During excavations in 1990, archaeologists uncovered early Bronze Age metal finds contemporary with the tomb's construction. Significantly, there was a high incidence of vein quartz pebbles on the north-west side of the Toormore tomb entrance (O'Brien *et al* 1989/90:9).

#### Derrynafinchin Mass Rock (Plate 25)

This site was originally identified by the author through the Megalithic Ireland website which detailed the site as a 'ruined circle on the southwestern slope of Conigar Mountain, in the Shehy Mountain Range .... In front of the Axial stone is a box like structure, which may suggest the circle was used like a mass rock during penal times' (Megalithic Ireland 2011 internet source). The site was visited and recorded by the author in July 2012. At the time of the visit no information was available on the ASD. However, the site has since been documented and recorded by a local archaeologist Tony Miller. He records additional supporting local evidence

for use of the monument as a Mass Rock and advises ‘there is a reference to a mass rock in this location in local history of the Borlin Valley - ‘Hidden Gold- History and Folklore of the Coomhola and Borlin Valleys’ Ed. Julia Kemp. FAS 1998 p.64’ (ASD 2012 internet source). The symbolism of water is highlighted in the close proximity of the site to two streams and its location at the end of a narrow valley of the Coomhola River.



**Plate 25 - Derrynafinchin Mass Rock**

The Mass Rock altar does not appear contemporary with the stone circle for several reasons. Firstly it is a feature that is not generally present at other stone circle sites. Secondly, whilst the altar slab is supported by a single upright stone on its western side, on the eastern side it is supported by a number of stones. This is as a result of the collapse of the original orthostat possibly due to the added weight of an altar. Finally, the altar slab appears to have been specifically contoured to fit the upright axial stones although the eastern contoured edge appears to have been damaged during collapse (Plate 26).



**Plate 26 - Contoured Altar Stone of Derrynafinchin Mass Rock**

Burl (2005) advises that there is wealth of stone circles in county Cork, although, research to date suggests that this is the only Mass Rock associated with a stone circle in the diocese. The ASD advises that excavations were carried out by Ó Nualláin and published in 1984. Excavation revealed a boulder burial centrally placed within the circle. It is clear that this was already a ritual site by the Bronze Age and its potential re-use and re-interpretation as a Mass Rock in Penal times demonstrates a close affiliation with Gaelic traditions and beliefs.

Another significant feature of the Derrynafinchin Mass Rock site is the presence of a bullaun stone (Plate 27). A similar stone is found in close proximity to the Shehy Beg Mass Rock site which local archaeologist Tony Miller believes to be *in situ*. A further bullaun stone is found at the Beach Mass Rock site, although, it is unlikely that this stone is *in situ* given the complex ritual nature of the site and its continued use as a place of pilgrimage and votive offering. Estyn Evans (1966) draws attention to the use of bullaun stones as cursing stones and maintains that their use is illustrative of a pagan association of sun-worship.



**Plate 27 - Bullaun Stone at Derrynafinchin Mass Rock site**

He advises that smooth pebbles resting in the hollows of certain stone basins, known as knocking or cursing stones, are traditionally turned three times against the sun (Estyn Evans 1966:300). In his early records of Cork, Cloyne and Ross, Brady refers to a sacred venerated stone upon which 'country folk took solemn oaths'. The stone, known as the flagstone of the seven daughters was used as a cursing stone and could be found located next to a Holy Well called *Tobar na Seacht nittean* (cited in Wood-Martin 1902a:66).

#### Coorleigh South Mass Rock (Plate 28)

Stones that have a number of hollows are termed as 'cup marked' stones. The Archaeological Survey of Ireland (2011) describes a cup marked stone as a 'stone or rock outcrop, found in isolation, bearing one or more, small roughly hemispherical depressions, generally created by chipping or pecking. Such stones are believed to date to the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (c. 2500 - 1800 BC)' (ASD 2010 internet source). In Cork, the Coorleigh South Mass Rock altar comprises a cup-marked stone with eleven possible cup-marks (Plate 28). There is also an impressive cup-marked stone close to *Carraig an tSeipeil* on the south side of Pipe Hill in

Inchigeelagh. The water which may be found in these small bowl-like hollows is believed to be especially efficacious (Logan 1980:18).



**Plate 28 - Coorleigh South Mass Rock**

A number of Mass Rocks appear to have hollows deliberately cut into the rock. At Carrigdangan, in Kilmichael, local archaeologist Tony Miller suggests some practical use for the 'functional' positioning of two circular depressions which appear to have been cut into the Mass Rock (Miller 2012). Similarly, in Caheragh, cavities have been deliberately cut into two Mass Rocks in the area and, on Heir Island, Daly (2005) records a Mass Rock overlooking the Reen which has a rectangular hollow on its upper surface. He believes that this was used to hold the chalice during Mass. At the Dromore Mass Rock, water collects in the hollow of the rock. Demonstrating a strong connection between sacred stone and sacred water, this water appears to have special qualities and is reported to be of an unaccountable brown colour, the cavity remaining full even in the height of summer (Carey 1957:110).

Another Mass Rock, at Killinga, is composed of a stone similar to that of the Coorleigh South Mass Rock. It is identified by Roberts (2009) in his new edited edition of *Exploring West Cork*. The ASD (2011) describes the Killinga Mass Rock as located in pastureland and being a 'Prostrate slab of shale broken at S end .... Pock-

marks on SE end of prostrate stone. Locally known as "mass rock".' (ASD 2010 internet source). Daly (2005) locates the Killinga Mass Rock 'on the top of Keelinga, Leap in Mr D O'Brien's land' and describes the monument as a 'druid's altar' (Daly 2005:26). The tradition of using cup-marked stones, in Ireland, can be traced back to the Neolithic period when such stones were used in the construction of Newgrange passage tomb (Estyn Evans 1966:300).

#### Drombeg Mass Rock Site (Plate 29)

The Drombeg Mass Rock is a coastal site that is located within a ritual landscape containing a ringfort and burial ground. Waddell (2005) advises that ringforts in Ireland generally date to the second half of the first millennium AD (Waddell 2005:319) and they are among the most numerous domestic archaeological monuments in Ireland (O'Sullivan and Downey 2007:32).



**Plate 29 - Drombeg Mass Rock**

The Drombeg Mass Rock shares similarities with that found at Cullomane West as both appear to have a purpose built ledge. It was proposed by the landowner at Cullomane West that the ledge was used by the priest to rest his book and it is possible that the same was true at Drombeg. The existence of this feature is not

recorded within the archaeological record for this site, yet the presence of a shelf like feature is a persistent feature at a number of Mass Rock sites.

### The Religious Landscape: Settlement patterns and ethnicity

The Cooldaniel Mass Rock is located within the parish of Kilmichael whose ancient pedigree resulted from inter-clan warfare between the O'Mahoneys and the O'Learys (Kilmichael Historical Society 2010:45). The O'Mahoneys became the chief family of the *Ui Eachach Mumhan* sept, owning the territory known as 'West Land' comprising the parishes of Kilmow, Soole (Schull), Kilcrohane, Durris, Kilmacomoge (Bantry) and Caheragh (Bolster 1972:1). Some of their territory subsequently passed to the O'Driscoll over-lordship (Ó Corráin 1993:72) and the *Uí Laoghaire* (Ó Murchadha 1993:216) placing both Toomore and Derrynafinchin firmly within Gaelic territory.

The Drombeg Mass Rock is located within the parish of Clonakilty and the Coorleigh South Mass Rock lies just over two miles away in the ancient parish of Kilkerranmore. The area was once part of the *Tuath Ó nDúngalaig* and represented one of the territorial divisions belonging to the *Corcu Loígde* (Ó Corráin 1993:71). However, a strip of their territory, extending from Ballincarriga to Clonakilty, belonged to the O'Hurleys, tributaries of the McCarthy Reaghs (O'Leary 1975:32).

The location of Mass Rocks within this typology places them firmly within Gaelic territory demonstrating a strong affiliation with Ireland's ancient past. Many sites appear to have already been 'sacred' in the Bronze Age. When Christianity arrived such sites would have been cleansed from pagan association by the blessings of the missionaries, thus, becoming a central focus for the new religious and secular activities (Zucchelli 2009:107). Nugent (2008) demonstrates that a memory of religious association in the distant past can often remain a focus for contemporary society (Nugent 2008:89) and this is clearly evident in the continued use of these sites in Penal times.

### 6.1.2 Typology 2: Earth Fast Boulders (25.64%)

This typology is the most representative in terms of the description within the ASD. However, it is not the most representative in terms of volume. The majority of Mass Rock sites visited fall within typology 3 - Natural Geological Rock formations.

The following Mass Rocks fall within the typology of Earth Fast Boulder:

- Ballingearry Mass Rock Site (case study)
- Cullomane West Mass Rock Site
- Currahy Mass Rock site (case study)
- Dromaclarig Mass Rock Site
- Enniskeane Mass Rock Site
- Kilnarovanagh Mass Rock Site
- Kinneigh Mass Rock Site
- Mishells Mass Rock Site
- Rossmore Mass Rock Site
- Tawnies Lower Mass Rock Site

#### Shape and size

Earth fast boulders within this typology vary in size and shape. For example the Mass Rock at Cullomane West measures 0.8m in height and, whilst it is relatively cuboid, it has a piece cut out on the north-east side of the rock. It is believed that this is where the priest was said to have placed his prayer book (Plate 30). In contrast the Dromaclarig Mass Rock is 1.3m in height and irregularly shaped. The natural shape of the rock forms two natural parallel ledges (Plate 31).

#### Location

It is not possible to verify whether all boulders are in *situ* and there is definite evidence that some have been relocated from their original locations, such as those found at Tawnies Lower and Kilnarovanagh. The archaeological monuments embedded within the modern landscape are a fragile resource that is frequently threatened by urban development.



**Plate 30 - Cullomane West Mass Rock**



**Plate 31 - Dromaclarig Mass Rock**

The location of the Tawnies Lower Mass Rock, now buried within a boundary fence on the north side of a busy road junction in a built up area, may mean that it is no longer in its original position. Land improvement through modern farming practices has also been identified as one of the chief causes of destruction or damage to archaeological monuments (Heritage Council 2008 internet). At Kilnoravanagh the landowner confirmed that Mass had been said on top of the hill behind his farm at the Mass Rock but that the rock was now buried beneath pasture. The Mass Rock at Camus, in Rathbarry, is reported to have been 'bulldozed away' (McCarthy 1989:34).

The ASD shows that a number of Mass Rock sites are no longer in their original positions and this is perhaps reflective of the nature of this particular typology. These include Corravreeda East where the Mass Rock was broken up and buried, Garranes South where the Mass Rock was removed from its original position on the site of a *fulacht fiadh* and placed within a field fence, Farahy where the Mass Rock was disturbed by machinery and replaced upturned in its original location and Knockapreghane where the Mass Rock came from a nearby field but is now located in a farmyard (The ASD 2012).

The Archaeological Features at Risk Project suggests that the rate of destruction of archaeological monuments in Ireland has 'accelerated at an alarming rate' (Heritage Council 2008 internet). Cooney *et al* (2000) estimated that between 30-60% of Ireland's archaeological monuments have been removed since the mid-nineteenth century with their destruction being particularly noticeable in recent decades (Cooney *et al* 2000:19). In Ireland, archaeological monuments are protected under the National Monuments Acts 1930-2004 but, as discussed within the Methodology and Sources chapter, the Record of Monuments and Places predominantly consists of built structures which pre-date 1700AD (Cooney *et al* 2000:26). Legal requirements to report any archaeological monuments discovered are, therefore, likely to exclude Mass Rock sites given both the 'official' cut-off date and definition. The size and reasonable portability of earth-fast boulders also makes them particularly vulnerable to relocation or destruction.

A number of the sites within this typology were difficult to access due to scrub growth. Although overgrown, it was possible to clear some of the debris away from the Mishells Mass Rock site. However, both Kinneigh and Enniskeane were impossible to access due to overgrowth.

### **6.1.3 Typology 3: Natural Geological Rock Formations (43.59%)**

This typology appears to be the most representative of Mass Rock sites within the diocese of Cork and Ross and includes large rock outcrops and cliff faces. However, without further research in other diocese across Ireland it is not possible to say whether this typology is the most representative of Mass Rock sites generally. There is a possibility that such a large preponderance of sites within this typology may result from the geology of the area. Gallery woods, for example, are a significant feature of the Cork landscape and a number of sites including Ballycurreen, Kilshinahan and Glenville are found in such settings. The following Mass Rock sites are classified within this typology:

- Ardrah Mass Rock site
- Ardura Beg Mass Rock site
- Ballycurreen Mass Rock site
- Ballycullenhane Mass Rock site
- Ballymah Mass Rock site
- Calloras Oughter Mass Rock site
- Carhoo South Mass Rock site
- Coolaclevane Mass Rock site
- Coomkeen Mass Rock site
- Coornahahilly Mass Rock site (case study)
- Councambeg Mass Rock site
- Dungannon Mass Rock site
- Dunmanway Mass Rock site
- Foherlagh Mass Rock site
- Glenville Mass Rock site
- Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock site (case study)
- Kilshinahan Mass Rock site

## Outcropping Rock

One of the most interesting rock outcrops was the Foherlagh Mass Rock (Plate 32). At an elevation of 92 metres the Mass Rock sits within a complex ritual landscape in close proximity to a pair of standing stones, a further large boulder and a Holy Well (known locally as the Wart Well for the healing of warts). The Ordnance Survey Map also identifies two ringforts or enclosures nearby. This area was clearly already 'sacred' in pre-history.



**Plate 32 - Foherlagh Mass Rock**

This east facing Mass Rock has two distinct natural ledges, the lower of which contains a natural hollow that may have acted as a container for water (possibly taken from the nearby Holy well) or, alternatively, to house a candle during Mass. It is possible that this particular rock outcrop may also have been chosen because of its shape as the outcropping rock forms a point that resembles the gable end of a church. A similar choice appears to have been made at Goutnahoughtee, in Inchigeelagh.

In addition to those sites visited during research, there are several further sites listed within the ASD that consist of outcropping rock. These include

Cooleenlemane, Kilnameela, Knockaphonery, Camus and Gortnafunshion. The latter site is recorded as having a natural shelf within the rock outcrop, a recurring feature at a number of sites (ASD 2012).

As stated, gallery woods are a key feature of the Cork landscape and both the Glenville and Ballycurreen Mass Rock sites take advantage of this natural topography. Whilst the Ballycurreen Mass Rock consists of a vertical rock face, that at Glenville overhangs and would have provided some shelter for the priest during Mass.

#### **6.1.4 Typology 4: Man Made Mass Rocks (17.95%)**

Seven of the Mass Rock sites visited are assigned this typology and are as follows:

- Kilnadur Mass Rock site
- Beach (Lady's Well) Mass Rock site
- Gortnamuckla Mass Rock site
- Commons Mass Rock Site
- Coolmountain Mass Rock Site (case study)
- Curraheen Mass Rock Site (case study)
- Shehy Beg/Tooreen (case study)

Man Made Mass Rocks can be built into or onto an existing natural landscape feature such as a cliff face or rock outcrop. Examples of this occur at Kilnadur and Beach Mass Rocks. Alternatively, they can stand alone as an independent feature such as the Mass Rocks at Coolmountain, Commons, Gortnamuckla and Curraheen.

There does not appear to be any one design for Mass Rocks assigned to this typology but it is clear that, at the majority of these sites, considerable work is likely to have gone into the construction. For example, the altar stone at Coolmountain is of a considerable size and weight and would have required a significant amount of man-power to erect. Those who constructed the altar have been careful to ensure that it provided a level platform and this has been achieved by propping up the altar on the south side with orthostatic blocks. Similarly, at Gortnamuckla, the level

stone-built altar is supported by two large upright stones. At Kilnadur it would appear that the altar has been constructed from locally collected stone (Plate 33).



**Plate 33 - Kilnadur Mass Rock**

## **6.2. Concluding remarks**

This chapter has explored the different ‘types’ of Mass Rocks that exist within the diocese of Cork and Ross. By using appropriate typologies it has been possible to categorise these monuments according to their physical appearance and to expand the original definition given within the ASD. These typologies offer some degree of flexibility in that they reflect ‘ideas’ about the Mass Rocks and, since these ideas are based on data that has been collected and collated, it is possible that there may be potential to refine these typologies at some future point as a result of further research.

## Language of Sacred Space

*As language changes course like a river over the centuries, sometimes a place name gets left behind, beached, far from the flood of meaning. Then another meander of the river reaches it, interpreting it perhaps in some new way, revivifying it. The sound may have to be bent to allow this to happen. Eventually the original meaning may be forever irrecoverable, or it may only be accessible to the learned*

*Tim Robinson (1986)*

Language is a basic component of culture. It can help to identify who we are and help to unite us as communities but it can also divide and separate. Languages evolve and change in response to the dynamics of human thought and experience and are the most important medium by which culture is transmitted (Nugent 2006).

Little is known about the language that was spoken by the Celtic peoples of Ireland until the coming of Christianity, apart from that which can be inferred from the texts of the earliest written Irish sagas. The sagas were passed between subsequent generations by oral tradition and many were not written down until the twelfth century. With the arrival of Christianity, the Latin alphabet was applied to the Irish language and was initially denoted in cryptographic script known as Ogham (Nugent 2006).

### 7.1 Ogham Script

Ogham script was invented by the Irish as a script that represented the sound of the language and dates possibly to the eighth or ninth century (Forsyth 1995:677-688). Irish letter-names provided a pivotal and traditional role in memorising and transmitting the values of the symbols of the alphabet (McManus 1988:127). Whilst they are not exclusively Ogham they are closely associated with it and long outlived the usefulness of Ogham script itself, serving as the accepted nomenclature for Irish letters until the seventeenth century (McManus 1988:128). It is clear from Irish

letter-names that nature was important and it has become commonplace for Irish scholars to regard many of the Irish letter-names as the names of trees (McManus 1988:129). Whilst McManus (1988) has described these assumptions as something of an 'arboreal fiction' he clearly acknowledges that some letter-names can be considered representative of certain trees such as birch, alder, oak, willow and hazel. They can also reflect the very nature of the trees describing specific attributes such as the bright colour and peeling nature of the birch bark or the structure of its light-branches, thin-twigs and catkins (McManus 1988:150). He finds clear reference to the sallow colour of the willow tree (McManus 1988:151) and the status of the oak among trees (McManus 1988:154).

## 7.2 Gaelic Poetry

As Christianisation advanced in Ireland a creative interaction took place between the civilization of the Latin West and the native Celtic cultural traditions. Celtic society was able to adopt Christianity without forsaking its native culture and nowhere is this more evident than in the written word (Bradshaw 1989:18). Bradshaw (1989) argues that, whilst Christianity brought literacy to Ireland, that literature was an 'emphatically native' product of religious lyric poetry. Like Irish letter-names, it was unique in its keen sensitivity to the world of nature (Bradshaw 1989:19). This passionate devotion to the beauty of nature is described by Blácam as 'the chief mark of the Celtic genius' (Blácam de 1933:171).

The coming of Christianity could easily have transformed or eradicated the existing learning and institutions that were associated with Celtic paganism. However Mac Cana (2011) argues that, by the seventh century, the poets or *filid* had 'already assumed the mantle of the druids', mirroring the astonishing synergy that had taken place between the native and new religious customs (Mac Cana 2011:48). The Christian church was successful in extinguishing the druids as a religious and moral establishment. However, Mac Cana explains that the druids left behind such a deeply-rooted and closely intertwined system of cultural values that it managed to survive the transition to Christianity (Mac Cana 2011:60).

The greater part of Irish history was preserved in verse, providing the literate environment of Irish monastic scriptoria with a method of substantiating or authenticating their historical material. Toner (2005) believes that the mnemonic properties of verse made it especially suitable for preserving and transmitting knowledge in both literate and non-literate societies. He advises that, in early legal circles, verse was considered as a reliable witness to the past. It was even admissible as evidence in Irish law alongside written proof (Toner 2005:61). These poems would have carried authority because they were attributed to particular renowned historians. Such memorised metrical accounts would have been more easily accessible than written texts to monastic scriptoria writers (Toner 2005:83).

One of the earliest references to the celebration of Mass is in the Metrical *Dindshenchas*. This body of literature explains how many places such as dwelling places, battlefields and assembly places, as well as topographical features such as mountains, rivers and lakes traditionally received their names (Carney 1969:59). One of the longest and most important poems in the *Dindshenchas* is that of Carmun. Written between 1033 and 1079 this poem draws the events of a great fair to a conclusion. It describes how Mass is celebrated the following day with genuflections and the singing of psalms (Carney 1969:68).

Meigs (1997) analyses sixteenth century Gaelic poetry and suggests that, whilst there appears to be evidence of confusion and disruption in Gaelic society during the Reformation, it is clear that some members of the old Gaelic elites maintained their more traditional devotional outlook. Jefferies (2010) disputes this. He argues that such a small collection of Gaelic poetry does not provide sufficient evidence that the role of the *aos dána* was decisive in thwarting the Reformation in Gaelic Ireland. However, he does acknowledge that the *aos dána* re-inforced 'a general antipathy to English-imposed socio-cultural and political changes in Ireland' (Jefferies 2010:200) and recognises the value of the bardic poems in understanding the devotional concerns of the Gaelic Irish laity (Jefferies 2010:65). McKavanagh (1974) further argues that the Gaelic poets appear uncharacteristically quiet concerning the traditions about local Mass-sites. He refutes that *An raibh tú ag an*

*gcarraig?* is about a Mass Rock believing it to be a simple love song (McKavanagh 1974:15-18).

The inter-relationship between the Catholic Church and the *aos dána* poets impacted significantly on the characteristics of late medieval Irish Catholicism. It also affected the remarkable cultural continuities that existed in early modern Ireland (Meigs 1997:77). Caerwyn Williams and Ford (1992) comment that, whilst this poetic tradition ran the greatest part of its course in the middle ages, it survived until the time of the Cromwellian oppression and, even then, did not vanish completely. They argue that it was inevitable that a change should come over the shape and character of the native tradition at this time but assert that whilst 'its dimensions were reduced and restricted, it became the property of the populace in a way it never had before' to inspire the country with 'a patriotism the like of which has been found but rarely in the history of nations' (Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:5).

Poets were crucial to the articulation and dissemination of the corpus of knowledge upon which the foundation of Gaelic culture was built (Meigs 1997:10). Elliott (2000) explains that whilst the poets traditionally reflected the interests of their elite patrons, in the years following the destruction of the Gaelic order in the early seventeenth century, they were 'obliged to abandon their former exclusiveness and write for a more populace audience' (Elliott 2000:48). In doing so, Meigs is confident that they provided an important link between the nobility and the more 'common' people. She argues that they also provided a form of resiliency and 'the mechanism needed for religious survival in Ireland even when the Gaelic political order collapsed' (Meigs 1997:10). This Gaelic bardic foundation subsequently transcended all social distinction and, thus, provided a shared tradition 'with people from all levels of society performing the same kinds of rituals, going to the same ancient holy places, praying to the same Gaelic and Gaelicised saints and almost certainly perceiving Christianity in terms of the social and cultural patterns of the earthly Gaelic world' (Meigs 1997:40). In 1619 the Jesuits noted 'sermons were delivered daily to an audience so numerous that it was necessary to go out to the open fields and there (especially on holidays and Sundays) to say Mass

and administer penance and the Holy Eucharist. There came not only the common people, but not a few of rank of both sexes, not only from the parishes in which our fathers were employed but from others too, five, six, seven and eight miles distant' (Archives of the Irish Jesuit Province (AIJP) Documents (Translations) 1:111 cited in Meigs 1997:134).

The Gaelic poetry tradition remained particularly strong in Cork. Here a number of *Cúirt filíochta* were established at various centres such as Blarney, *Baile Bhuirne*, *Teampall Geal*, *Carraig na bhFear* and *Cois Mhaighe* during the beginning of the seventeenth century (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:156). The *cúirt* was traditionally held in the local 'Big House' provided that this was still owned by an Irish family. If this was not the case, then it was held in the house of the chief poet or in an historical place in the local area (Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:226). The *cúirt* of the Blarney poets continued up until the death of *Seán na Ráithíneach* in 1762 and the *cúirt na mBúrdún*, in the east part of the county, survived until 1795 (Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:228). Even in contemporary times the *Seanchas* tradition remains strong in both the Cork *Gaeltachtaí* (Murphy 1993:8).

It is possible to use these early sources to interpret both the location and use of sacred space. In evidence of the closure of Catholic churches the *Annals of Loch Cé*, in 1581 (Meigs 1997:62), reports that 'Brian Caech O'Coinnegain, an eminent cleric ..... died; and the place of sepulture which he had selected for himself was to be buried at the mound of Baile-an-tobair .... Brian Caech made this selection..... because he saw not the service of God practiced in any church near him at that time' (Hennessy *Annals of Loch Cé* 2:437 cited in Meigs 1997:62).

This reference is important on two levels. Firstly it demonstrates that churches were not accessible to Catholics during the Reformation. Secondly, it demonstrates how strongly entrenched older traditions were in the Catholicism of the Gaelic Irish. In the absence of a suitable church the cleric chose burial in a sacred space used by his ancestors, most probably a ringfort or henge in Ballintubber, county Mayo. Already sacred in the Neolithic, Ballintubber survived the transition to the Christian period and became the site of an Abbey founded in 1216 by a member of the

O'Connor clan. Ballintubber is the starting point for the *Tóchar Phádraig* believed to have been built around 350AD. In ancient times the *Tóchar Phádraig* was the main route from *Cruachán*, the seat of the Kings of Connaught, to *Cruachán Aigle*, a mountain that was already considered sacred in pre-historic times (Ballintubber Abbey 2006). It remains a sacred route today as pilgrims make their way along the *Tóchar Phádraig* to Croagh Patrick Mountain passing six Mass Rock sites en route. Catholic communities continued to worship at archaeological monuments in the Penal era and the re-use of the ringfort at Drombeg is testament to this.

The relationship between cleric and king was a close one. This is demonstrated by the biographer Lughaidh Ó Clerigh who, between 1603 and 1616, wrote of 'a prudent pious cleric and a gracious psalm-singing priest' who 'used to be with Ó Domhnaill continually, to offer Mass and the pure, mysterious sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ ...' (Meigs 1997:79). This emphasises how important the Mass was to a Catholic requiring a priest to be on hand continually so that it could be offered as required. Similarly, Carmun's poem, written sometime between 1033 and 1079, highlights the celebration of the Mass. This early poem is one of the longest and most important poems within the Metrical *Dindshenchas* (Carney 1969:68).

Poetry texts can also provide information about the location of sacred space. In the seventeenth-century, writing of Diarmaid, Mac Seáin Bhuidhe Mhic Cárthaigh alludes to Mass being celebrated in the mountains near Blarney. Whilst old and in poor health the poet laments the death of his horse because he can no longer traverse the mountains and go to Mass (Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:227). In a later eighteenth century poem, Owen Roe O'Sullivan similarly reflects upon the open air tradition of the Mass. He writes 'the sublime Mass a-saying is their hope ..... Not worst of our anguish is to be beaten forever, but the scorn that falls on defeat from the seat of the great, were God like the church, to follow the church were vain - no better it were to hear Mass than to stretch on the peat' (Owen Roe O'Sullivan translated in Blácam de 1933:330).

The *file* would have been expected to know the meaning and historical origins of every place name (Caerwyn Williams and Ford 1992:34). In the visions recounted in Immacallam in *dá thuarad*, the poet Taliesin states that the *file* must know all place names and claims he was created ‘from nine forms of elements, from plants, soils, water of the ninth wave’. The poet Amergin names even the waterfalls of the island (Sayers 1986:112). The twelfth-century Middle Irish script of the myths of *Agallamh na Seanórach* or *Colloquy of the Ancients* (Robinson 1986:27) describes the meeting of St Patrick and the last of the *Fianna*. As they travel through the country advising the saint of the name of each place and the story behind that name so the older traditions pass from Celt to Christian (Robinson 1986:28).

Such meaning and memory has continued down to more contemporary times in the verse of poets such as Máirtín Ó Direáin. In *Cuimhne an Domhnaigh* he reflects on the memory of a sunny Sunday morning in his bleak ancestral home of *Inis Mór*. Recalling the rugged landscape of the island, he describes how the wealth of stone and dearth of clay has shaped each and every man - *Chim grian an Domhnaigh ag taitneamh anuas ar ghnúis an talaimh san oileán ruin tráthnóna; mórchuid cloch is gannchuid cré sin é teist an sceirdoileáin, dúthaigh dhearóil mo dhaoine. Chím mar chaith an chloch gach fear, mar lioc ina cló féin é, is chim an dream a thréig go héag cloch is cré is dúthaigh dhearóil, is chimes fós gach máthair faoi chás ag ceapadh a hail le dán a cuimhne* - I see the sun of Sunday shining down on the contours of the land in the dear island this afternoon; wealth of stones and dearth of clay are the signature of the rugged island, the bleak ancestral land of my people. I see how the stone has abraded each man, how it has crushed him into its own shape, and I see the throng that deserted till death stone and clay and bleak ancestral land, and I see as well each grief-struck mother securing her children with memory’s noose (Ó Direáin 1992:38 translated by Tomás Mac Síomóin and Dougal Sealy).

### 7.3 Place-names

Whelan (2004) explains that the landscape ‘stitches together seamlessly the individual, the family, the community’ enhancing connectivity and uniting it with language (Whelan 2004:315). One of the most enduring ways in which religion can

influence landscape is through the language of place-names (Park 1994:241). These can often include a term that is indicative of the sacred nature of a particular space (Radmilahy 2008:85). In Ireland there is a plethora of local place-names demonstrating a strong ecclesiastical presence and these are generally pre-fixed with the word *cill* meaning church. In Cork, near to the Mishells Mass Rock site, there is a field known as *Paircin na Cille* or 'small field of the church'. In Bandon there is a field known as *Pairc a' tSagairt* or 'the priest's field' and at *Cros an tSagairt* folklore sources record that a priest was hanged (Cork and Ross Bandon ID 10 (2011) Diocesan website). The Mass Rock at Calloras Oughter is located near the *Seana-Seipeal* Road reflecting, through language, the ancient ecclesiastical significance of the area. Smyth (2004) explains that place-names such as these can be of great assistance to a geographer as they provide 'a powerful memory bank for, and of, a culture' (Smyth 2004:243). He further argues that such names provide important clues in respect to questions concerning colonisation, conflict, conquest, accommodation and assimilation (Smyth 2004:244).

Robinson (1986) remarks that place-names may only reveal their meaning in the 'physical' and 'historical' context of place (Robinson 1986:25). This can be demonstrated in county Clare in respect to the Penal Laws. Even prior to the introduction of the Penal Laws the ordination of priests had been a secret activity. Between 1671 and 1687 more than 100 priests were ordained at various remote locations throughout Ireland by Bishop Teige Keogh of Clonfert. The introduction of the Banishment Act of 1697 required all regular clergy, bishops and those exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction to leave the country and their expulsion was carried out in a highly efficient manner. Those regulars such as the Jesuits and Franciscans that remained, or filtered back into the country, found refuge amongst wealthy Catholic families or remained under the guise of secular clergy, eventually registering under the subsequent act of 1704 (Fagan 1993:34). Two of the four Killaloe parish priests in the 1704 registration list, in county Clare, had been ordained in secret by Bishop Keogh. They had received their ordinations at a place which became known as *Cathaoir an Easbuig* in the bog at Ballylooge, Killoran, in the parish of Mullagh, county Galway (Murphy 1991:30).

The sacred nature of trees in Celtic Ireland has already been commented upon in respect to the letter names of Ogham script and early Irish literature. However, their importance is further demonstrated in a plethora of place-names throughout the country. Smyth (2006) identifies that woodland, shrub, tree or bush names are incorporated into approximately 15% of all place-names in Ireland. In respect to the oak, Smyth discovers a range of townland names including Doire/Derry (oakwood) and derivatives such as Dar/Darragh. Other trees are reflected in names such as Beith/Behy (birch), Cuilleann/Cullion (holly), Coll/Collon (hazel), Fuinnsean/Funshin (ash) and Sceach/Skagh (the whitethorn or haw tree) (Smyth 2006:87). Smyth also identifies just under 2000 wood and shrub land related names such as Crannach/Crannagh or 'tree abounding', Craebh/Creeve – Creevagh meaning 'branchy or bushy land', Garrán/Garrane translating as 'a shrubbery', Coill/Coillte as well as Kil/Kyle/Kilty meaning 'woods', Muine/Money a 'brake or shrubbery' and Ros/Ross meaning 'wood' (Smyth 2006:87).

There are numerous names in the diocese of Cork and Ross that support Smyth's findings. The parish of Drimoleague was once the head of a union or district that also included the parish of Drinagh situated just three miles from Dunmanway. Once known as *Drinach an Teampeal*, it is clear that Drinagh was a religious site of some importance from early times. O'Mahoney (1988) believes that *Drinagh* or *Draighean* means a blackthorn tree with *ach* translating as 'abounding in'. He asserts that it was popularly believed that the 'profuse growth of blackthorn betokens fertile soil' (O'Mahony 1988:45). This perhaps suggests a link between the fertility of the soil and the ancient Celtic goddess of fertility.

There is both a Mass Rock and a Penal chapel at Kilnadur in the parish of Kilmichael. The Gaelic origin of the townland of Kilnadur may refer to the nature of the terrain with name translating as 'the church surrounded by shrubs or bushes' (Kilmichael Historical Society 2010:19). Further, Bolster (1982) refers to a Mass Rock site at Dereenafalee in Kilnadur (Bolster 1982:227). *Doirin na failghe* translates as 'oakwood of the pig-sty' adding to the evidence that the area was previously forested with the sacred oak. The Tawnies Lower Mass Rock is situated in the modern day parish of Clonakilty, once part of the *Tuath Ó nDúngalaig*, one of the

territorial divisions belonging to the *Corcu Loígde* (Ó Corráin 1993:71). According to Holland (1949) the original name for the area was *Tuath-na-Coillte* (or *gcoillte*) meaning the 'tuath of the woods' although this changed through time to become Tawnaghies then Tawnies (Holland 1949:158).

In contrast to the use of Irish place-names, Smyth (2006) uses Irish surnames to map land settlement patterns. Using information from the 1659 census, he concludes that in certain areas of Cork ancient Irish names persisted strongly in their ancestral localities demonstrating powerful continuity (Smyth 2006:395). This language source has proved invaluable in understanding the religious landscape of the research area and its relevance to the location and nature of the sacred space of the Mass Rock.

The Irish language has remained in use to modern times with respect to place-names and natural features. Robinson (1986) maintains that place-names can 'make a condensed or elliptic remark about the place, a description, a claim of ownership, a historical anecdote, even a joke or a curse on it' (Robinson 1986:25). Hastings (2009) demonstrates that those living in the shadow of Croagh Patrick retained a great attachment to their landscape and place-names. She comments that they 'knew and understood every aspect of that place; physical, cultural and historical. They knew the names of the fields, the names of very stones and streams' (Hastings 2009:37). Such local people are the principal users of place-names and may be considered the sole hereditary custodians of them (Hughes 1991:134).

Beiner (2007) believes that it is possible to map Irish vernacular landscape through a micro-toponymic study of these place-names. Together with the folk history narratives that are associated with them, he maintains that place-names in Ireland have functioned as an everyday mode of commemorating past events of local significance (Beiner 2007:210). In support of this view, research has highlighted a significant number of place-names indicative of the commemoration of the celebration of Mass. Place name studies have revealed a number of examples including *Carraig an Aifrinn* or 'Mass Rock', *Clais an Aifrinn* meaning 'Mass Ravine',

*Páirc an tSéipéil* or 'Chapel field', *Faill an Aifrinn* or 'Mass cliff', *Leaca na hAltora* indicating a flat stone or rock altar, *Cábán an Aifrinn* or 'Mass Cabin', *Cnocan na hAltorach* meaning 'small hill of the altar' and *Gleann an Aifrinn* indicating a 'Mass Glen'.

In Caheragh the remains of Penal altars are reported west of Clohane Castle in the townland of Clohane on a hilltop adjoining a field known as *Paircín an Aifrinn* and at *Gort an tSagairt*. At Killeenleigh sacred vessels are believed to have been concealed within a nearby tunnel in a hill known as *Poll Talmhan* (Cork and Ross Caheragh ID 16 (2011) Diocesan website). In Ringcurran there is a Mass site in the townland of Preghane known as *Claide an Aifrinn* (McCarthy 1989:35) perhaps indicative of a boggy Mass field. In Drinagh, a straw-covered church was erected in 1720 at Paddock on the north side of the village in a place known as *Pairc an tSagairt* or the Priest's Field. This small Mass hut or cabin, covering a portable altar, was referred to in the 1731 Report on the State of Popery (CHSI 1913:137).

In the parish of Enniskeane/Desertserges there is an abundance of local place-names pre-fixed with *cill*, meaning church. It is evident that there has been a strong ecclesiastical presence in this parish since very early times. Townland names include Kilcolman, Kilnacranagh, Kilmeen, Killeens, Kilvurra, Kilnameela and Kill. Additionally, Desertserges or *Diseart Saerghusa* translates as the abode of the hermit (Cork and Ross Enniskeane/Desertserges ID 29 (2011) Diocesan website). In the parish of Barryroe, the Catholic Churches were taken over by the Established church during the Reformation. Around 1750, a Penal chapel was built on the site of the present Butlerstown School. Originally known as *Bothair a'tSeipeil* (Holland 1949:289) the site of the present school translates as the 'Road of the Chapel'.

O'Flanagan (1986) maintains all Irish place names can essentially be divided into two major classes; those which refer to the inanimate world which are regarded as environmental names and those which denote elements which have been modified by human activity or cultural names. Many of the cultural names can be further subdivided into two classes in terms of whether they imply possession or commemoration (O'Flanagan 1986:115). They can act as a general reference for a

community and testify to the intricate and often very durable relationships that have evolved between a community and its territory (O’Flanagan 1986:121).

There are references to cultural names in entries found in the Schools’ Manuscript Collection relating to the diocese of Cork and Ross. One entry records that ‘there is a place called Carraig na Marbh about half a mile north of Drimoleague. It is called Carraig an Marbh because there was a church situated near Drimoleague ..... It is said that when a funeral used to be passing Carraig an Marbh the old people had a custom to leave the coffin in rest on that rock before it would come in sight of the old church’ (S303:198). This place-name is clearly indicative of the commemoration of the dead.

There are some research difficulties in using place names as an ultimate source of reference to indicate the use of a particular place for saying Mass. Several descriptive references have been encountered in Cork during research as highlighted above. Power (1917-1924) refers to a number of these in his research of south-east Cork including *Beal Átha an Aifrinn* or ‘Ford mouth of the Mass’ in the townland of Glenwillin (Power 1921:197) and *Strapa an Aifrinn* or ‘The Mass stile’ in the townland of Templeusque (Power 1921:205). Whilst these may seem obvious Mass Rock sites, their translations cannot always be taken at face value. Other examples such as *Pairc an Aifrinn* or ‘Mass field’, *Cum an tSagairt* or ‘priest’s hollow’ and *Insín an tSagairt* or ‘Priest’s Island’ do not necessarily indicate that they are Mass Rock sites as Power (1917) demonstrates. In Ballycranny he identifies the ‘Mass Path Field’ which is in reality a field with a path that runs through it that was simply used as a ‘short cut’ on Sundays (Power 1917:18). Similarly, *Páirc an Aifrinn* is a ‘Mass Field’ through which a Mass path runs but did not receive this name because Mass was actually celebrated in the field (Power 1917:20). In Terrysland, Power describes *Páircín a tSagairt* or the ‘Priest’s Field’. This site is thought to be so named because the priest held the field as tenant (Power 1917a:203). In Corrin, he describes the ‘Priest’s Road’ which runs up the south-east side of Corrin Hill. It is so named due to the fact that construction of the road was owing to efforts, or representations, of the parish priest (Power 1917a:213).

Hughes (1991) also recommends caution. Whilst he acknowledges that there must be some residue of Pre-Gaelic element in place-names, he counsels that the severe lack of concrete evidence makes identification 'hazardous and controversial'. The commitment to the writing of Irish place-names and the inscription of personal names on Ogham stones did not progress until the Early Christian period. During the interim period and up to the seventeenth century records were written in Irish and/or Latin and were contained in hagiographical, annalistic, and literary material (Hughes 1991:133). Whilst he agrees that place-names can hold extensive clues (Hughes 1991:116), he warns that those studying place-names should proceed with caution.

Hughes advises that place-names can be influenced by local pronunciation and dialects as well as a pervasive element of folk etymology (Hughes 1991:128). This is due to the fact that place-names can change, within the boundaries of a single language, over a period of time and can often disguise the original form of the name (Hughes 1991:122). For example, there appears to be confusion of over the place-name Kinneigh in the diocese of study. It is possible that the parish derives its place name from the Irish *Cionn Eich* which translates as the head or headland of the horse. However, the Church of Ireland site argues that the parish derives its name from *Airchinneach*, a chieftain of the *Cineal Laoghair*. The clan's main residence was believed to be near Copeen at the large ringfort of Cahirvagliair. In a genealogical poem of 1320 Airchinneach is described as *Archinnigh Sin Chill Chain* or Airchinnigh of the gentle or pleasant church (Kinneigh Church of Ireland 2010b internet).

#### **7.4 Concluding remarks**

Smyth (2006) describes Irish language sources as 'sadly neglected by Irish geographers' and argues that they should be explored and examined and this chapter has shown that such sources can often reveal a significant amount of information about the location and nature of sacred space. Whilst acknowledging necessary caution as suggested by Power (1917) and Hughes (1991), it has been possible to use the Gaelic language and various Irish language sources to advantage in the compilation of Mass Rock site data.

## 8

### Memory of Sacred Space

*When they fled to the hills - priests and people - they carried God with them. No tabernacle now has he save His own blue canopy – no altar but the Carrig an Affrin - the Mass Rock. What a history of love and sorrow is evoked by that word! What a wealth of hallowed memories clings round that loved title! What a tragic tale it tells of ruined altars, and ruined homes. God homeless and His people homeless, yet God at home and His people at home as they gathered in the dark and the cold round the Rock of the Mass.*

*(Lockington 1921:51-52)*

Primarily a community activity, Beiner (2004) describes folk history-telling as an expression of historical discourse which recalls the experience of ‘common’ people narrated through their descendants (Beiner 2004:3). The myths which have developed concerning the Penal era cannot be fully understood in isolation and require placing within a broader context. By analysing a range of historical and cultural sources within the framework of memory, introduced by Ó Ciosáin (2004), this chapter attempts to rationalise the myths which have become associated with the period.

Ó Ciosáin (2004) suggests that there are three types or levels of memory; ‘global’ memory, ‘local’ memory and ‘popular’ memory (Ó Ciosáin 2004:3). Whilst his research focusses upon the Great Famine in Ireland during the nineteenth century, his findings are equally appropriate in the context of the Penal Laws. Usually deriving from written sources, he describes ‘global’ memory as a level of information and interpretation that is abstract and usually national in scope (Ó Ciosáin 2004:3).

Ó Ciosáin describes ‘local’ memory as being at the opposite end of the spectrum from ‘global’ memory. ‘Local’ memory aligns closely with folklore and oral history and can be termed as ‘straightforward recollection’. Consisting of stories based

solely upon local knowledge or interest, often featuring named individuals, Ó Ciosáin describes these stories and descriptions as atomised and fragmentary. However, he acknowledges that there is often some form of mnemonic involved attaching the story to a specific place or building or some other point in the landscape (Ó Ciosáin 2004:3).

Of particular significance is the intermediate level of 'popular memory' consisting of 'a stylised repertoire of images, motifs, short narratives and supernatural legends'. Many of these form part of a wider international narrative repertoire. This wider repertoire forms a system of representation as well as a guide to behaviour during crises (Ó Ciosáin 2004:4). Whilst the author places his ideas within an alternative context, such narratives are equally appropriate in respect to the Penal Laws.

### **8.1 Local Memory**

Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Cusack 2011:2). Such traditions and knowledge are often handed down orally and Andrews *et al* (2006) advocate the potential of these oral histories, especially for geographical enquiry. They suggest that 'they clearly demonstrate unique insights into the history of places' providing narratives about the recollection of self, relationships with others and place. These are insights rarely provided in such depth by other methods (cited in Riley and Harvey 2007:348). Place memory and place identity have become important themes in recent geographical research (Riley and Harvey 2007:349). In Ireland, the oral history of a community's sense of place, identity and heritage is articulated through 'seanchas' (Hastings 2009:155).

Ó Ciosáin (2004) acknowledges that oral histories can appear atomised and fragmentary. This is because personal memory can be selective. It may also be subject to mental deterioration and nostalgia, particularly in old age (Hobsbawm 1988 and O'Farrell 1983 cited in Riley and Harvey 2007:346). In the summer of 1884 a writer recorded a number of Irish stories and charms from an old man in

Cahirciveen, county Kerry. In his younger days the *seanchaí* had been a great custodian of tradition but many of his stories and charms were passing out of memory and he found it difficult to recall a number of them (Abercromby 1884:33). Traditions passed down orally can also die out. This was the case in Newmarket, county Cork. Here there was a tradition that *Cu Roi mac Daire*, who once ruled west Munster, lived on Taur Mountain. The tradition had remained alive until the 1940s but the last bearer of the story was an old *seannachee* that had lived at the foot of Taumore in the townland of Glennamucklagh (Allen 1973:12). In contrast, Riley and Harvey (2007) would argue that such fragmentation, bias and selectivity can be one of oral history's greatest strengths. Such subjectivity can often provide clues about the meanings of historical experience, the relationships between past and present, between memory and personal identity and between individual and collective identity (Perks and Thompson 2006 cited in Riley and Harvey 2007:347).

McGarvey (1956) reflects on local memory concerning Mass during the Penal days in Armagh. The text provides more than the simple identification of Mass sites; it demonstrates how historical experience can be transferred from one generation to another orally. The author writes that 'none of the older generation, when I was a boy, ever remembered Mass said anywhere else in the Cross districts of the present Donaghmore parish. However, the late Rev. High Quinn, a native of Gortindarragh, told me that Mass was said in olden days in Mickey Quinn's Glen between Gortindarragh and Glenburrisk'. This later fact is subsequently corroborated by Miss Maggie Quinn of Glenbeg who remembers that 'as a child her mother brought her with the other children to pray at the spot' (McGarvey 1956:183). The author remembers that sixty years earlier, in 1896, he heard from a very old man about a father McCourt that 'he had his 'Trusted Ones' who always knew which Altar Green the Mass was to be said at the following Sunday. Sometimes he said Mass in gardens and other places, having consulted with the 'Trusted Ones' and he placed in bottles nearly all the ghosts of the officers at Altmore Barrack and their local henchmen who were annoying the neighbourhood and buried them at Scrog not far from Cappagh' (McGarvey 1956:184).

During the course of research in the diocese of Cork and Ross a number of incidental discussions with farmers and other locals provided information that would otherwise not have been available. At a number of Mass Rock sites chalices were believed to be buried. At the Commons Mass Rock site it was advised that, whilst divining for water, one landowner had moved a stone in the boundary hedge in a lane adjacent to the site. He had discovered a box-like compartment containing a toad. It was believed that the toad represented treasure and a rumour had begun that the chalice from the Mass was buried nearby. Such 'local' memories are recorded by Father Henchy in Caheragh. He recalls that to the west of the Killeenleigh Mass Rock two chambers were cut into the rock where local tradition held that the vestments and chalice were hidden (Carey 1957:110).

At the Cullomane West site the landowner believed that the chalice was still buried somewhere within the vicinity of the Mass Rock. Mass has not been said at the site in recent times although it was visited annually for many years by a nun who lived locally when she returned home for the summer months. The landowner believed that another Mass Rock had been situated in the opposite field. However, it was dug out by the farmer and as a result his generation died off very quickly. It was evident that the farmer believed that there were 'other' forces at work which may explain why the Mass Rock site on his own land was so well preserved and protected.

### **8.1.1 Folklore**

In addition to oral tradition, Ó Crualaoich and Ó Giolláin (1988) identify that lore and life style, material culture, social organisation and ideology of the era between 1690 and 1945 have been consumed within the label of Irish folklore (Ó Crualaoich and Ó Giolláin 1988:71). The actual word 'folklore' was not introduced until 1846 when it appeared in a letter published in *The Athenaeum* written by the English antiquary William John Thoms, under the pseudonym of Ambrose Merten (Markey 2006:21). In contrast, the Irish term *béaloideas* which translates as 'oral tradition' is significantly older. This seventh century phrase became interchangeable with the term 'folklore' from 1927 onwards (Ó hÓgáin 2002 cited in Markey 2006:22). Ó

Giolláin (2000) argues that folklore escapes clear definition (Ó Giolláin 2000:2) describing it as a 'confused agglomerate of fragments of all previous conceptions of the world in a juxtaposition that is at once fossilized and innovative, conservative and creative, reactionary and progressive' (Ó Crualaoich and Ó Giolláin 1988:69).

Ó hÓgáin (1999) maintains that folk ideas can be extremely tenacious since their hold on the popular mind depends predominantly on the aura of antiquity which attaches to them. However, he acknowledges that core ideas are rarely lost despite alteration or adaptation. The information and data found in traditional folklore is helpful in deciphering trends in the 'religious' thought of the past (Ó hÓgáin 1999:21) and therefore offers vital assistance in the context of an analysis of sacred space. An understanding of folklore is also an essential requirement for the interpretation of contemporary reactions to particular historical events (Hopkin 2001:3).

#### 8.1.2 **Identity**

Tradition, culture and identity have usually been central concepts in the study of folklore (Ó Giolláin 2000:70) where it is perceived as being part of the national heritage (Ó Crualaoich and Ó Giolláin 1988:68). The use of folklore as a historical source has an early pedigree in Ireland and can be traced as far back as *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*, the monumental work of seventeenth-century Gaelic historiography written by Geoffrey Keating who referred to the oral instructions of the ancients as a primary source (Beiner 2007:34). Douglas Hyde's seminal address to the National Literary Society in 1892 gave new importance to folklore in knowing and understanding Gaelic Ireland and called for the parallel creation of a movement reviving the Irish language and placing it centrally in Irish life (Ó Giolláin 2000:114).

Beiner (2007) recognises that folklore has often been used to advance the nationalist claims of ethnic communities. He believes that, in a newly independent Ireland, folklore was 'recognised as a cultural resource for national identity' (Beiner 2007:37). Nineteenth-century nationalism 'rested on the knowledge of Ireland's cultural distinctiveness, and increasingly on its Gaelic inheritance' (Ó Giolláin

2000:94). The creation of institutions for the preservation of folklore were therefore representative of the 'Gaelicization' policy of the new state (Ó Giolláin 2000:129) and the Gaelic League of 1893 was pivotal in attracting official support for the task of recording Ireland's folklore (Ó Giolláin 2000:128). In 1927 the Folklore of Ireland Society was founded (Ó Giolláin 2000:130) followed by the Irish Folklore Commission in 1935 (Ó Giolláin 2000:132).

### 8.1.3 Schools Manuscript Collection

The Schools' Manuscript Collection of the National Folklore Collection, held at University College Dublin, has been indispensable to research. Pupils across Ireland were instructed to collect information from their parents, grandparents and other venerable elders within their communities in respect to a variety of topics including the Penal Laws. A list of the relevant topics and questions proposed may be found within Chapter 3.

Hastings (2009) is surprised to find few stories relating to the Penal Laws in her research in county Mayo and concludes that this may be due to the fact that traumatic events are often purposefully forgotten by the people who suffered them (Hastings 2009:155). She does find details about a Mass Rock in Bohea where St Patrick was reputed to have said Mass on his way to Croagh Patrick and another listed in Boleybrian at the south side of the Reek (S138:442). Additionally, one pupil had been told that Mass had been said in a valley where a field was called *Log an Aifrinn* (S138:41) (Hastings 2009:161). Such a limited number of entries is surprising given that there are six Mass Rocks listed along the *Tóchar Phádraig*, a route regularly followed by pilgrims from Ballintubber Abbey to Croagh Patrick (Ballintubber Abbey 2006).

Information for the diocese of Cork and Ross was not so sparse and many children reported Mass Rock locations and gave information about the surrounding area and topography including the names of relevant fields and owners. For example, Mass was said at 'Clash an Aifrinn in the land of Thomas Powell Lissarda and Cnoc Aileann in the land of Mr Daniel Wall Lissarda' (S340:161). One entry in Irish records '*do bhí*

*ortha dul I measg na gcnoc chun an Aifrinn do leigheam dos na daoine*’ recalling how the priest had to go into the hills in order to say/read the Mass for the people (S281:205). Further entries include reference to Mass said in a number of upland locations as well as in woods, glens and open fields reflecting the diversity of locations discovered during research.

Details concerning the nature of sacred space, discussed within a previous chapter, are also given and include the types of rocks where Mass was celebrated. For example, in Nedinagh, the ‘big stone called the Mass Rock’ (S303:299) is clearly an earth fast boulder. Several entries relating to Mass Rocks in Goulanes and Kilbrittain demonstrate the symbolism of water whilst others such as Ardra and Coomleigh illustrate the importance of the symbolism of wood and stone respectively.

An intimate knowledge of the landscape is clearly evident within a number of entries. One reports that *Cúm liath* or Coomleigh is so named ‘because of the fionnán or grey coloured grass growing there’ (S281:334). The importance of Drimoleague Rock is highlighted by several entries. One child records that ‘in the centre of this district is Drimoleague Rock from which the land slopes north towards the river Ilen and south towards the village. Up to about 50 yrs ago the local fairs used to be held at the rock because it was a very convenient centre’ (S303:7). Another advises that ‘near Drimoleague Rock there is a rock called Carraig an Aifrinn where Holy Sacrifice used to be offered up in the Penal Days. It is in O’Brien’s farm’ (S303:8).

In evidence of the help and support that was given to priests during the Penal era one child writes that ‘there is a place called *cúm an tSágairt* about 4m north of Drimoleague. One of the Mahony’s used to have a horse ready for the priest when he used to go to Goulanes to say Mass. If the day was foggy he would have to guide him on his way. Before the Castle road was made *cúm an tSágairt* was a near way to go across the hill to Goulanes’ (S303:197). A further entry advises that ‘the ford in the river between the Mass Rock and this *Cúm* was known as *ath an solais* because the neighbours used to light a fire there on dark nights so that the priest might find

it more easily when returning from ministering the old and the sick of the district' (S281: 482).

The perceived threat to clerics during the Penal era is made abundantly clear from entries in the Collection and reports of 'Red Coats' and 'soldiers' are numerous. Two similar entries record that 'about a mile from Kilnadur School there are ruins of an old chapel which people attended during penal times. It was watched by the 'Red Coats' to arrest the priest who was to celebrate Mass. The priest was informed and Mass was celebrated under a rock about 200 yards away. Mass was afterwards celebrated many times on this flag under the rock. This rock is now called Carraig an Aifrinn' (S305:109 and S305:112). In Inchafune in Ballinacarriga there is a report of 'a field in which Mass was celebrated in the days when priests were hunted. It still bears the name Páirc na tSéipéil. The land belonged to a Mr Looney' (S303:298).

Entries also yield important clues as to the architecture of the religious landscape in the diocese. The ravages of previous centuries are evident in a number of records. In Drimoleague one child writes that 'On Mr T J Beamish's land at the base of Drimoleague Rock the foundations of an abbey can be seen' (S303:8). In respect to Kilmichael an entry records that 'a catholic church stood there before' but that 'this church must have been demolished at the time of the Reformation' (S339:53-54). There are several entries concerning Ballinacarriga Castle which not only record 'several old Mass paths in the district leading to Ballinacarriga' (S303:341) but also advise that 'there is a hidden path under the Castle to the Church' (S303:173).

Ireland is characterised by complicated settlement histories and contested symbolic landscapes (Smyth 2004:243) and place-names can yield 'important clues to questions of colonisation, conflict, conquest, accommodation and assimilation' (Smyth 2004:244). There are overtones of colonisation, conflict and conquest in one of the entries for *Cill Bhritáin* or Kilbrittain. The place-name already suggests a strong ecclesiastical presence in the area but the entry reveals that 'about a mile to the west of Bantry town is situated a graveyard known as árd na mbráthar. On this spot stood a monastery .....the monastery was founded about 1460 by Dermot O'Sullivan and given to the Franciscan monks and fathers. It was sacked and

destroyed by Cromwell's soldiers sometime after 1649 and the grounds have since been used as a burial place' (S281:53). There are multiple layers of history recorded within this one entry as well as evidence that this sacred space has remained a focus for communities down through the centuries.

In respect to *Carraig na Marbh* about half a mile north of Drimoleague one entry records that the place 'is called Carraig na Marbh because there was a church situated near Drimleague and the Protestants took possession of it. Then the Catholics built a Mass house at Carraig na Marbh' (S303:198). This is clear evidence of accommodation and assimilation within the Cork landscape and Protestants in the area were clearly tolerant of the erection of alternative Catholic places of worship. However, another entry reveals that 'there were Protestants near Enniskeane who were not friends with the priest' (S306:255) indicating that those of the Established faith were not always as tolerant as some historians have suggested.

In respect to the use of Mass huts or cabins, there are a number of entries that are consistent with information provided within the *Report on the State of Popery of 1731*. The Report details Mass celebrated in a variety of locations in the open air and this is acknowledged within entries for Drimoleague (S303:299and425). The Report identifies a small hut or cabin covering an altar in the parish of Dromaleague (CHSI 1913:136) and a further entry identifies that 'in most places there were only temporary shelters put up in which Mass was said' (S303:298). Place-names such as *Cábán aifrinn* (S304:121) recorded in Dunmanway illustrate that this practice was not confined solely to the parish of Drimaleague.

The difficulties in using archives from the Folklore Commission collections are outlined by Beiner (2007) in *Remembering the Year of the French* in which he researches local memories of the events of 1798. He identifies that the academic study of Irish folklore has always been strongly associated with the study of the Irish language and has therefore favoured material in Irish (Beiner 2007:42). The collection of material has also tended to focus upon rural areas (Beiner 2007:44) and elderly informants (Beiner 2007:45). He argues that, by the early twentieth

century, actual eyewitnesses in respect to the events of 1798 were no longer alive and so recollections had been transmitted as family traditions over two or three generations (Beiner 2007:46). This also poses difficulties in respect to the study of Folklore material concerning the Penal era since this time lag stretches even further back.

## **8.2 Global Memory**

Deriving from written sources, Ó Ciosáin (2004) describes 'global' memory as a level of information and interpretation that is abstract and usually national in scope (Ó Ciosáin 2004:3). This level of memory is relevant to the study of the sacred space of Mass Rocks for two reasons. Firstly, the literary movement of the nineteenth century was rooted in earlier antiquarian study, popular nationalist literature and folklore (Ó Giolláin 2000:104). Leading figures such as Yeats and Gregory were important students of folklore, interpreting the mythological and heroic Gaelic literature (Ó Giolláin 2000:110) and drawing their inspiration from the supernatural world of fairy forts, holy wells, dolmens and standing stones (Ó Giolláin 2000:113). Ireland's myths and legends have already been discussed in some depth in preceding chapters. However, it is important to acknowledge that through a byzantine system of folk belief certain places within this landscape became assimilated and understood in ways that had continuing meaning for subsequent communities (Cooney 2008:39). The second consideration requires further expansion and relates to the fact that folk history concerning the Penal era tended to create stories that reflected the persecuted nature of Catholicism. These were subsequently commemorated in nationalist historiographies and popular newsprint of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

### **8.2.1 Folk history concerning the Penal era**

Whilst Beiner (2007) acknowledges that popular print did not supersede oral culture, he argues that it clearly influenced it (Beiner 2007:276). This research presents clear parallels with Beiner's findings. He notes that despite the reading public being exposed to an abundance of texts, 'the formidable expectations of

historical literature to reshape perceptions of the past were conditioned by the persistence (often through mutations) of traditions embedded in social memory' (Beiner 2007:277). He identifies that popular interest in certain historical events can spawn a wealth of primary and secondary historical material as well as historical fiction which can significantly influence people's perception of an event. Beiner argues that, whilst the information contained within printed material nourished oral tradition, it also filtered through to folk history (Beiner 2007:277). Elliott believes that the writing of William Carleton provides an excellent example of how fiction can interact with popular folklore (Elliott 2009:160).

During the Penal laws the mainstay of Catholic education had been the hedge school and they remained a feature of Catholic life until the nineteenth century when the National School system was introduced. Carleton, a former hedge school pupil and teacher, advocated that school masters had utilised history lessons 'to promote dissident Catholic politics' (Beiner 2007:292). Whilst Irish history was deliberately removed from the National School curriculum (Beiner 2007:295), Commissioners had no control over independent schools such as those run by the Christian Brothers. Such schools placed a particular emphasis on Irish history and by the end of the nineteenth century 'lessons increasingly inculcated militant nationalism' (Beiner 2007:296). Following independence, the Irish Free State recognised that history lessons were a valuable way to instil the ideal of a national Gaelic ethos and heritage. Christian Brothers' schools became integrated into the National Schools system increasing their influence even further (Beiner 2007:298).

Often labelled 'the bible of popular nationalism', one of the key texts employed by the Christian Brothers was A.M. Sullivan's *The Story of Ireland*. Originally published in 1867, the text was re-issued in more than thirty editions and, additionally, became a popular source of reference in homes across Ireland (Beiner 2007:300). Sullivan was from Cork and an author, journalist and politician. Foster (2001) describes his work as 'hugely influential' (Foster 2001:6) introducing another language in which 'nation' became 'religion' (Foster 2001:8). The introduction of reading rooms in the late nineteenth century widened the audience further. Reading rooms of the National League in rural parishes and the Catholic Young

Men's in towns ensured that the reports and speeches of journalists such as Sullivan reached 'ordinary Irish people' (Whelan 2004:313).

The Christian Brothers' *Irish History Reader* published in 1905 describes the Penal era as 'a night of deepest horror' (Christian Brothers 1905:238). In respect to the celebration of Mass, it advises that 'in assisting at Holy Mass the utmost care was necessary to prevent detection, and when the congregation had assembled, sentries were posted on all sides. Despite all precautions, however, the worshippers were often taken by surprise, and the priest's blood was shed upon the altar stone' (Christian Brothers 1905:240).

In *A Child's History of Ireland* published in 1903 the author writes that 'these laws were mainly intended to suppress the Catholic religion' (Joyce 1903:389) and further advises that 'Catholic bishops remained all through the country in spite of every effort to discover them, living in huts in remote places under various disguises, and meeting their congregations by night' (Joyce 1903:392). In the following year Gwynn produced *Stories from Irish History*. She describes her chapter on the Penal days as a short one due to the sadness that accompanied the wrongdoing and cruelty of the period (Gwynn 1904:142).

There are other authors (Burke 1914; Lockington 1921) who give a vivid account of clerical persecution. Lockington advises that priests did their duty in the face of death labouring in 'the gloom of the mountain cave, and under the shadow of the hedge, willingly facing martyrdom that Ireland might keep true' (Lockington 1921:131). One dramatic account begins 'gaze at the dark stain on the gray stone' and describes 'the flash of the musket, the priest lying across the stone, dyeing it with his life-blood – still clasping the chalice to his breast – dead' (Lockington 1921:53).

In respect to his own research, Beiner (2007) questions to what extent those interviewed about the Year of the French were themselves repeating what they had learned at school in their youth (Beiner 2007:292). The same question may perhaps be appropriate in respect to interviews concerning the Penal days. However, as

Taylor (1992) suggests, such folk versions are an indication of the way in which local people have 'appropriated events to form an ideology that to some extent both defined and framed their perception of local reality' (Taylor 1992:151). As such, they remain relevant in understanding the local experience and the complex relationship that existed between local religious practices and more 'official' forms of devotion (Taylor 1992:145).

Older publications continued to act as a source of reference for more contemporary authors. A tribute to the memory of Jeremiah O'Mahony was published in 1975. O'Mahony's *West Cork and its Story* appeared in serial form in *Realt a'Deiscairt* between 1949-50. The later publication paid deference to the hunted priest and the Holy sacrifice offered to the congregation on the lonely hillside while sentries kept watch for 'the possible arrival of the bloodhounds of the law'. O'Mahony explains that 'the murders of individual priests were too numerous to excite wonder and the torture was a favourite method of punishment for those clergy who dared continue performing their sacerdotal duties despite decrees and laws' citing two such examples in his native Cork area. The text pays testament to such events through local place-names such as *Carraig an Aifrinn* and *Pairc an Aifrinn* throughout West Cork as 'silent proof of what our people suffered for the faith' (O'Mahony 1975:236). Similarly, in his *History of Newmarket County Cork*, Allen (1973) reflects upon older traditions concerning the deaths of two priests in a glen in the area (Allen 1973:50).

First published on January 2nd 1905, the *Irish Independent* was the first halfpenny popular paper in Ireland and, as such, sales of the paper soared (Irish News Archive 2013 internet). Scenes of remarkable devotion and piety appear in a number of issues and are particularly evident in the 1930s when much of the folklore material was being collected. One entry commemorates Mass at the Burren Rock in Bryansford where 'Mass was offered secretly in the dark penal days, under the shadow of the Mourne Mountains'. After Mass readers are told that the Blessed Sacrament was carried in procession to an altar in an adjoining field where Benediction was given to a congregation of over 2,000 people (*Irish Independent* 1930). Events of a similar nature are reported at the Mass Rock at Crana River,

outside Buncrana, Co. Donegal, where the parish priest addressed an open air congregation of over 3,000 people (*Irish Independent* 1933).

One of the biggest gatherings took place at the Mass Rock in the Glens near Cushendun in 1934 where 10,000 people are reported to have joined in an annual procession of the Blessed Sacrament from St. Patrick's Church. The parish priest from St. Malachy's Belfast, Very Rev. J. P. Clenaghan, delivered a sermon which could not have failed to have left an impression upon the congregation. He reviewed the 'long night of persecution' through which the Irish people had passed and alluded to the sacrifices they made for the Mass in Penal Days - 'The Mass Rocks and lonely altars on the mountain sides of Ireland are an abiding testimony of relentless persecution on the one hand, and on the other the fidelity of the Irish people to the religion of their ancestors' (*Irish Independent* 1934). At another annual pilgrimage to the Mass Rock at Ballyholland the Very Rev. J. Canon Magee is reported to have delivered an 'eloquent sermon dealing with the historic associations of the rock, when their forefathers were prepared to sacrifice everything to hear Mass' (*Irish Independent* 1936).

### **8.2.2 Global memory in Cork and Ross**

Historical records indicate that priests were more likely to be simply imprisoned during the Penal period. John Sleyne and Donough McCarthy, two of the three bishops serving in the united diocese of Cork, Cloyne and Ross between 1692 and 1746, were long-term prisoners in Cork city (Dickson 2004:53). In county Clare, 24 priests were voluntarily imprisoned in Ennis jail (Clare County Library internet 2011). The story is similar in Limerick where the Grand Jury presentment book shows that there were regularly proceedings against priests at every assizes from 1711 to 1726 when the record ends (Burke 1914:vi). Dickson (2007) confirms that the incidence of capital punishment on Cork's Gallow's Green was not known before the late 1750s (Dickson 2004:43).

There is little doubt, however, that their job was not an easy one. MacCarthy Rabach, an elderly bishop from Youghall, was forced to go into hiding for two years

(Dickson 2004:59). James Gallagher, Bishop of Raphoe, sought refuge on one of the islands in Lough Erne between 1735 and 1737 (Mac Murchaidh 2011:152). Sources suggest that it was difficult for Gallagher to function as a bishop and that life as a Catholic cleric in Raphoe was particularly difficult (Mac Murchaidh 2011:153). As well as going into hiding, priests also disguised themselves from their congregations. Murphy (1991) advises that priests would have blended in with the laity and adopted their dress accordingly. He reports that priests tended to wear frieze similar to their parishioners in rural parishes whilst adapting their dress in towns and cities to mirror the more middle class members of their congregations. The wearing of the Roman collar and, for religious, the habit, came much later (Murphy 1991:144). Tomás Ó Fiaich advises that by 1710 priests had found another way of circumventing penalties, through the celebration of Mass with their face veiled (Ó Fiaich (1971) cited in Bolster 1989:32).

### 8.3 **Popular Memory**

The intermediate level of 'popular' memory consists of 'a stylised repertoire of images, motifs, short narratives and supernatural legends' and is of particular significance because it forms part of a wider international narrative repertoire. Ó Ciosáin advises that this wider repertoire, in turn, produces a system of representation and a guide to behaviour during crises (Ó Ciosáin 2004:4).

The author highlights the relationship that exists between the layers of 'popular' memory and 'global' memory. He proposes that 'popular' memory acts as a framework of reception for aspects of the abstract and long-term accounts of the Famine in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Ireland. Looking at the story beyond the story, he suggests two meta-narratives would have created an undercurrent that may have informed the memory of this event. The first he describes as a nationalist political meta-narrative, the other religious and specifically Catholic (Ó Ciosáin 2004:5). Specifically, he cites the nationalist version of the famine presented as an episode in a longer history of Anglo-Irish conflict and the Catholic narrative as an extreme and distasteful, although not entirely uncharacteristic, stage in a longer history of conflict between religions.

One of the aims of this research was to test the current hypothesis that the murder of Priests at the Mass Rock was a penal myth and to question whether the dominance of the 'mass-rock-persecuted-religion' aspect of the Penal Laws within the story of the Irish nation has served merely to distract from their real significance as is claimed (Elliott 2009:167). It is clear that the meta-narratives discussed by Ó Ciosáin would be equally appropriate applied in this respect. Whelan (1997) notes that many of the traditional beliefs associated with image of the Penal days of Irish folk memory have become challenged in more recent years. As a result it has been possible for researchers to concentrate on the contrasts which existed within Irish Catholic culture rather than treating it solely as a 'peasant mass' viewed through a somewhat romantic lens (Whelan 1997:24).

### **8.3.1 Penal Myth**

Elliott (2000; 2009) believes that the popular image of the priest performing mass at a Mass Rock and being hunted down by priest catchers and militia alike, for execution or banishment, is simply a penal myth which remains largely unproven. She argues that there was in fact no systematic penal 'code' and that legislation was piecemeal, erratic and rarely fully implemented. She further argues that the Catholic Church was not decimated but instead flourished throughout the period (Elliott 2000:164) and that, following an initial period when priests were persecuted, the practice of Catholicism continued without interference and Mass houses erected without protest (Elliott 2000:166).

McBride's (2009) survey of pamphlet literature of the period highlights a variety of comprehensive schemes that were proposed for the 'eradication of Catholicism as a serious political, social or religious threat' (McBride 2009:194). In contrast to Elliott, he emphasises the 'severity' of the Penal code together with the 'violence' of the thinking behind it (McBride 2009:195). He argues that the Penal Laws were successful, to some degree, as they managed to limit the public expression of Catholicism and Elliott (2009) acknowledges that there were some parts of the country, such as Munster and Ulster, where the Penal Laws were utilised by 'a particularly bigoted element in Protestant society' (Elliott 2009:166).

Elliott believes, however, that the execution of priests was subsumed into the story of the Penal era from previous centuries (Elliott 2009:160), a view clearly supported by Smyth (2006) and Walsham (2011). She argues that the 'prevalence of mass rocks throughout the country' has 'sustained the folklore of the priest and people preserving the faith against persecution' (Elliott 2009:166). Butler (2006) agrees that 'popular notions of furtive eighteenth-century clergy presiding at mass-rocks are somewhat exaggerated' (Butler 2006:139). Certainly research undertaken to date has failed to find any historical evidence of priests murdered at specific Mass Rocks.

Zucchelli (2009) maintains that Old Stranmill's Graveyard in Belfast is still popularly known as Friar's Bush and is named after the thorn tree where a priest was reputedly killed whilst saying Mass in Penal times (Zucchelli 2009:160). However, it would appear that Friar's Bush in Belfast already had a name referring to monks or friars by the late sixteenth century. Any name connected with religious persecution and the hanging of a friar must date back to Reformation times rather than Penal times. Its name in the Irish language consistently refers to friars in the plural and should most probably translate as friars' bush rather than friar's bush. The name, therefore, may be simply indicative of a monastic settlement on the site as proposed by Uí Fhlannagáin (1982) (my sincere thanks to Paul Tempan, a doctoral research student in Irish and Celtic studies at Queen's University Belfast for his help and clarification in respect to this name).

Whilst research has failed to find any true historical basis for the belief that priests were murdered at Mass Rocks, the literature is not so silent on those that hunted them. Burke (1914) discusses the *Grand Jury Presentment Book for the County of Limerick* which shows that regularly, at every assizes from 1711 to 1726, there were proceedings against priests and that full particulars of priest-hunting are recorded for both Clare and Galway (Burke 1914:vi). Corish (1970), whilst acknowledging that there is some truth in the popular notion that the priest was a hunted man, believes that it happened frequently only in the north of Ireland where there was a considerable Protestant population and that in other areas of the country such activity was exceptional (Corish 1970:5). However, evidence would suggest that this

was not the case. In Dunmanway, Cork, the Coxes are acknowledged as a family of active priest-hunters (S303:299) and several of the orders and directions from the Justices of the Peace of Cork, carried out by Samuel Porter of Inishannon, reveal that hunting priests in Cork was often dangerous work. He reported that the 'popish persons have spirited and trained up their mobs in a most violent manner' (Burke 1914:213).

Further evidence of the difficulties endured by priests may be found within Gaelic language sources from the period. Morley (2011) looks at the work of several poets from various social strata and localities. There is evidence that numbers of priests were insufficient as Conchubhar Ó Briain (1650 – 1720) explains 'there is no eminent bishop or holy friar, guardian or warden or *erenagh*, deacon or worthy vicar, to direct the flock in the face of the foreign hounds'. A native of Cork, Ó Briain was both a poet and a priest (Morley 2011:176). Morley confirms that this concern was echoed by Eoin Ó Callanáin a physician from the Carbery district of west Cork. He reports that 'every year that comes is worse for us, and our clergy have no churches but the threat of death and bondage always with them so that they must go overseas by the legal requirement of the parliament's act' (Morley 2011:177).

According to Morley the image of the clergy heroically defying the pressures and brandishments of a heretical and oppressive state remained in later decades. A later poem which probably dates to the 1740s included a reference to the clergy being driven onto the hillsides. A farmer and schoolteacher from north Cork Seán Clárach Mac Dónaill (c1690 – 1754) writes 'O Son of God, are you tired of your clergy's wandering, with them being cast out onto the hill tops and on every mountain peak?' (Morley 2011:186). As Morley states, it is evident that 'the image of the harassed fugitive priest, an image formed in the opening years of the century, retained its place in popular culture during the decades that followed' (Morley 2011:187).

Walsham (2011) argues that 'the idea that the surface of the countryside bore the marks of Catholicism's past tribulations lingered long, and indeed lingers on, in the imagination' (Walsham 2011:230). This is clearly evident from entries within the

Schools' Manuscript Collection. There are reports of priests hunted a mile from Bantry at 'Priest's Leap' (S303:197) and murdered by English soldiers whilst fleeing for their lives in Kilcassan about two miles west of Ballineen (S306:228). Similar events occur in Coomleigh (S282:482) and in James O'Mahoney's field in Cloundereen (S313:150). A priest's body and vestments or altar cloths were reportedly found in the bog at Goulanes (S282:426and482) and, in Macloneigh, a number of monks were reportedly slaughtered (S339:55). It is clear that the Penal era is presented as an episode in a longer history of Anglo-Irish conflict. The Catholic narrative that remains in the memory is represented as an extreme and distasteful, although not entirely uncharacteristic, stage in a longer history of conflict between religions. It is likely that such meta-narratives have influenced both the perception and memory of the period.

#### **8.4 Concluding remarks**

Whilst Ó Ciosáin (2004) introduces three specific levels of memory, evidence suggests that they are mutable and interactive. Place memory and place identity have become important themes in recent geographical research (Riley and Harvey 2007:349) but the memory that recalls such themes can be selective or fragmentary. Memories can also be underpinned by certain metanarratives. In the case of the Penal era, these are reflective of nationalist politics and religion both of which appear to have conspired to create a penal myth which remains largely unproven. Despite this, the information and data that memory can provide are vital components for understanding and analysing the sacred space of the Mass Rock and for interpreting contemporary reactions to the Penal laws.

## 9

### Ritual Use of Sacred Space

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <i>Níor thugais ó ríocht dhorcha</i>     | <i>From your dark realm you brought</i>              |
| <i>Caipín an tsonais ar do cheann,</i>   | <i>No lucky caul around your head,</i>               |
| <i>Ach cuireadh cranna cosanta</i>       | <i>But the ritual wands were placed</i>              |
| <i>Go teann thar do chliabhán cláir.</i> | <i>To protect you in your cradle.</i>                |
| <br>                                     |  |
| <i>Cranna caillte a cuireadh tharat;</i> | <i>Useless sticks were placed around you;</i>        |
| <i>Tlú iarainn os do chionn,</i>         | <i>An iron tongs above,</i>                          |
| <i>Ball éadaigh d'athar taobh leat</i>   | <i>Beside you a piece of your father's clothing,</i> |
| <i>Is bior sa tine thíos.</i>            | <i>A poker placed in the fire.</i>                   |

*Máirtín Ó Direáin (1992)*

Ritual space provides a crucial link between religious practice and the concept of sacred space. Whilst a space can acquire sanctity from repeated ritual use, a space can also become used as a ritual centre because of the sanctity already attributed to that location by believers (Stump 2008:304) and this is particularly relevant to the study of Mass Rock sites in Ireland. One of the best known examples of religious ritual is when an individual or group makes an offering to their god or gods with a pragmatic expectation of receiving something in return (Bell 1997:108). Whilst there can be significant cultural variations in terms of ritual, it is still possible to identify some basic tenets that appear to underlie many ways of ritualising sacred space and Stump (2008) categorises these as follows:

- worship practices associated with specific life transitions or rites of passage
- practices associated with the afterlife or reincarnation
- the ordinary worship practices of everyday life
- exceptional worship events associated with various forms of pilgrimage

## 9.1 Worship Practices, Life Transitions, Rites of Passage and the Afterlife

As previously discussed, the inter-relationship between the Catholic Church and the *aos dána* poets impacted significantly on the characteristics of late medieval Irish Catholicism (Meigs 1997:77). Meigs (1997) proposes that the Gaelic learned elite similarly influenced the remarkable cultural continuities that existed in early modern Ireland. As Friars, *coarbs* and *erenachs*, the Gaelic elite were the hereditary keepers of both lands and relics which had originally belonged to the ancient Irish monasteries. They presided over the local shrines which figured so prominently in late medieval devotional life and, as such, played a key role in the access of the laity to the sacraments (Meigs 1997:53).

During the Counter-Reformation, the more traditional image of St. Patrick persisted and was encouraged by the clergy. Such traditional Irish cults continued to focus on pilgrimage sites and relics (Cunningham and Gillespie 1995:100). At major Irish ecclesiastical sites such as Labamolga in county Cork evidence from archaeological, hagiographical and folkloric sources indicates that the site was considered to be a repository for the relics of its founding saint (Ó Carragáin 2003:130). Ó Duinn (2000) advises that an antiphon would have been sung when the bishop had inserted the relics in the altar and closed up the cavity - *Sub altare Dei sedes accepitis Sancti Dei; intercedite pro nobis ad Dominum Jesum Christum. Corpora Sanctorum in pace sepulta sunt; et vivent nomina eorum in aeternum* (O saints of God, you have accepted a dwelling place under the altar of God; intercede for us with our Lord Jesus Christ. The bodies of the saints are buried in peace and their memory will last forever (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:50).

The *reredos* is a permanent structure behind an altar that is used for the display of paintings or sculptures but it can also be used to house relics. A number of Mass Rock sites visited including Coolaclevane, Coolmountain, Curraheen and Kilnadur appear to have such a purpose built box suggesting an unbroken stream of tradition right down to more contemporary times. The treatment of the dead can often shed light on the origins of symbolism, ritual and religion (Parker Pearson 2003:147) and,

in Ireland, there is considerable evidence of a continued relationship with the dead through to the historic period.

Monuments remain part of the active landscape and are often re-used and re-interpreted by subsequent communities. At Drombeg, for example the Mass Rock is found within a ritual landscape that includes a burial ground and ringfort. The Foherlagh Mass Rock is similarly located in close proximity to standing stones and ringforts. Daly (2005) records a Mass Rock in the townland of Killinga, Leap, in a *lios* in a field known as *Páirc a Phoill* or Field of the hole or souterrain (Daly 2005:40). He identifies a further Mass Rock located in a ringfort near a hill top in Carriglusky, Kilfaunabeg (Daly 2005:43). The name of the townland where the Lisangle Mass Rock is located in Caheragh, *Lios Aingil*, is also suggestive of the presence of a *lios* (Cork and Ross Caheragh 2011 internet).

Ringforts are frequently referred to as 'raths' (Waddell 2005:375). More than most other archaeological monuments, Ní Cheallaigh (2006) believes that ringforts have 'lain at the intersection of diverging worlds of symbolic imaginings that encompass a wide variety of interacting social and cultural identities' (Ní Cheallaigh 2006:105). Several excavations have taken place at ringforts across Ireland. These include Feerwore in county Galway, Dunsilly and Ballyhenry in county Antrim as well as Lisdoon, county Fermanagh, and Millocktown in county Louth. All reveal occupation of the sites prior to construction of the ringforts (Waddell 2005:319) indicating that these sites were already considered to be 'special' places.

A range of memories and interactions with ringforts have diffused from the nineteenth century and earlier to more contemporary times (Ní Cheallaigh 2006:107). Research (Finlay 2000; Nugent 2008) demonstrates a definite link between ringforts and child burial. Ireland has a long tradition of separate burial for unbaptized children. The provision of separate burial grounds was well established from the medieval period onwards and has continued into recent memory. Research by Finlay (2000) highlights that unbaptized children, who were ineligible for burial within the consecrated ground of a churchyard, demanded an alternative marginal burial locality that reflected their own liminal state (Finlay 2000:408).

Nugent's (2008) research, in county Clare, demonstrates that even by the nineteenth century a significant number of non-ecclesiastical sites remained the focus for the burial of such infants (Nugent 2008:89). Often known as a *cillín*/Killeen, *ceallúnach* or *lishleen* (Finlay 2000:409) these sites are often associated with ringforts (O'Sullivan and Sheehan 1996) such as that at Drombeg.

The tradition of a burial ground in pasture adjoining the west side of the ringfort (ASD 2010 internet) at the Drombeg Mass Rock site was confirmed by the landowner. He spoke of an elderly neighbour, who remembered his grandfather telling him that a funeral once went up to the site. O'Sullivan and Sheehan (1996) identify that quartz pebbles are often found associated with such burial sites, demonstrating the continuity of ritual activity. Quartz pebbles were found associated with Tormoor wedge tomb in county Cork (O'Brien *et al* 1989/90) which was subsequently re-used as a Mass Rock. Additionally they were deposited at both the Calloras Oughter Mass Rock, in the parish of Goleen, and the Curraheen Mass Rock in Inchigeelagh.

The re-use of ringforts as burial grounds is not confined to the Cork area and in Cloghane townland in county Kerry there is a *lios* marked on the 1842 Ordnance Survey map (sheet 43, 901: 245a) that was used as a children's burial place (Ó Danachair 1960:72). In previous research undertaken by the author in county Mayo, one local who was interviewed recalled his grandmother laying two of her still born children to rest at the old fort on the road to Cashel. He also remembered his father discussing people making their way down through nearby fields at night, with their lanterns burning, on route to *Cnoc na Croise* or the 'hill of the cross'. His father told him that he used to meet people he knew on the way home from house dances but that they never acknowledged one another. He believed that this silence was undoubtedly because they were returning from the ringfort where they had just buried their children in the hours of darkness (Bishop 2009:133).

Finlay (2000) further highlights that this memory has often become part of folk tradition. The author argues that this folk tradition may have been re-written as part of the mythological landscape. Legend dictates that the parish of Kilmichael, in

the diocese of Cork and Ross, was founded on the site of a *lios* by a friar on pilgrimage from Rome. The *lios* is believed to have been *Lios a Chlubhain* which is situated in the present graveyard of Kilmichael church (Cork and Ross Kilmichael ID 40 (2011) Diocesan website). When St Michael's church was built in Kilmichael in 1791 it too was situated close to a *lios* perhaps reflecting the legendary origins of the parish (Cork and Ross Kilmichael ID 40 (2011) Diocesan website). This was clearly an important ecclesiastical area down through the centuries. Killeanna townland or *Cill Eanna* was associated with St. Enda of Aranand and a *cill* and graveyard for unbaptised children lies to the north-east of the present Church at Johnstown. Indeed, Killeanna Lake was a pilgrimage venue until the early twentieth century (Cork and Ross Kilmichael ID 40 (2011) Diocesan website).

Links between ringforts and fairies are a further example of such folk tradition (Finlay 2000:412). In *A Child's History of Ireland*, Joyce (1903) describes how the *Tuatha Dé Danann* were conquered by the Milesians and went to live underground subsequently becoming fairies. Each of the *Dé Danann* chiefs selected a green mound, called a *shee* or fairy-hill, where he lived with his followers (Joyce 1903:37). Ringforts represent the *axis mundi* and, as Ní Cheallaigh (2006) points out, the existence of souterrains or subterranean passages offers a potential physical and imaginary entry point in to the Otherworld of the *sidhe* (Ní Cheallaigh 2006:107).

Traditional farming practices have always paid reverence to sacred space which meant that boundaries were often located in such a way as to avoid interference with ancient sacred places such as ringforts. As a result, the sacred place became positioned on that boundary itself often resulting in strange alignments or kinks in the landscape. It also ensured that many sites remained protected from plough damage. Intensification in recent decades has resulted in the removal of many of these field boundaries and hedges meaning that some sites have now become isolated islands within a working landscape (Darvill 1987:128). It is evident from field research that sites remain venerated features of the landscape in Cork. In reverence to sacred space, Mass Rock sites at Coolaclevane, Cullomane West and Drombeg had all been carefully fenced off to avoid any damage from machinery or

livestock. At Carhoo South mesh wiring had been placed behind the Mass Rock to afford some protection from livestock present in the field.

## 9.2 Ordinary worship practices of everyday life

Ritual has remained an integral part of daily life in many parts of Ireland but especially in rural areas as previous research has demonstrated (Bishop 2009). In ordinary worship, religious traditions have commonly incorporated active expressions of interactions with sacred spaces. These interactions may simply involve a physical expression of reverence or veneration toward the sacred.

Religious ritual frequently focuses on bodily involvement in respect to sacred space. One example of this would be the practice of receiving Holy Communion during Mass. By ingesting the Eucharist bread and wine 'adherents are bodily linked to the divine space of the bread and wine itself, the sanctity of the local altar or Lord's table, and the imagined sacred spaces associated with the Christian doctrines of salvation and resurrection' (Stump 2008:331). This ritual represents the central sacrament in Catholic tradition.

The Mass is a core element in Catholic worship and is an occasion that brings the priest and parish community together on a regular basis helping to create and preserve a sense of identity (Murphy 1991:174). In Penal times, Murphy (1991) advises that Mass would have been said in Latin by the priest facing away from the congregation. It was not until the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965 that the congregation joined in with the servers in making the responses (Murphy 1991:198). It is unlikely that the congregation would have understood the Latin spoken by the priest and would have said their own prayers in Irish (Murphy 1991:175). Murphy believes that the 'rich treasury of traditional prayers in Irish associated with the Mass is indicative of an involvement which did not need prayer books or other outside help' (Murphy 1991:175). It is also reflective of the highly distinctive feature of Irish Christianity where the native culture and the teaching of the gospel were able to intermingle easily (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:159).

Traditionally Mass was said on Sundays, Thursdays and Holy Days (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:201). By 1674, a survey undertaken by a committee of the English Commons reported that visitations, confirmations and other services were held frequently and could be attended by up to 3000 adherents. The committee further advised that 'fifteen years ago not a mass said openly in the kingdom, now it's common....Mass flourishes but since 13 or 14 years past. For there was not a public mass anywhere. Now 500, 1000 or 1500 masses dayly' (Burke 1914:42-43).

Today the physical expression of reverence or veneration toward the sacred is demonstrated by the continued celebration of Mass at Mass Rock sites and by bodily involvement in respect to the Eucharist. There are a number of news reports recording such key events within the religious calendar. In 1961 at a service marking the opening of Patrician celebrations in Down and Connor diocese, 20,000 pilgrims from all over Ireland, including a number of bishops and hundreds of priests and nuns, attended open-air Pontifical High Mass at a Mass Rock on the hillsides at Slemish (*Irish Independent* 1961). In 1970 there are reports of con-celebrated Mass at Mass Rocks on *Sliabh Eichte*, near Feakle, Co. Clare (*Irish Independent* 1970) and Glenstal, Co. Limerick. Here celebrants marked the opening of an *International Clerical Student Convention* (*Irish Independent* 1970a). The climax of the Holy Year ceremonies for the diocese of Derry, in 1974, saw 10,000 pilgrims converge on Omagh, Co. Tyrone for a penitential procession and Mass at the Corradina Mass Rock con-celebrated by the Bishop and 40 priests. (*Irish Independent* 1974). In 1976, more than 5,000 people from all over Leinster attended Mass at a Mass Rock in *Gleann Na nAoil*, near Stradbally, in county Laois (*Irish Independent* 1976).

Celebrations during the millennium appear frequent. In May 2000 Mass was celebrated at a Mass Rock in Drumbinnis, diocese of Kilmore, county Fermanagh (Kinawley Parish internet source) and at the Ballyine Mass Rock in the parish of Ardagh in west Limerick (Limerick Diocese 2013). In the diocese of Cork and Ross the people of Enniskeane joined together to clear scrub growth from the site of the Mass Rock. In August 2000 around 200 locals were in attendance at the Mass officiated by Fathers Collins and McCarthy. Some events have become annual

celebrations. Mass has been an annual event at *Inse an tSagairt* in Bonane since 1981 (Bonane Heritage Park 2013 internet) and also takes place annually at the Curraheen Mass Rock in Inchigeelagh.

Memory of the religious association of the Mass Rocks used in Penal times ensures they remain a focus for contemporary society. When Redwood Church was renovated in 1978 the Mass Rock at Moatfield, in the parish of Lorrha, was removed from its original site and placed in the sanctuary of the church (Murphy 1991:21). Similarly, a Mass Rock was installed as the altar in the new confessional Chapel of the Cistercian Order at Our Lady of Bethlehem Abbey, Portglenone, in county Antrim (*Irish Independent* 1973).

### 9.3 **Exceptional worship events associated with various forms of pilgrimage**

Pilgrimage has an ancient pedigree in Ireland. The earliest recorded place of pilgrimage is at Clonmacnois, county Offaly, where the *Annals of the Four Masters* record the death of a pilgrim in 606 AD. Visiting pilgrims are also recorded in the local *Annals of Clonmacnois* under the years 617, 754 and 832 AD (Harbison 1992:51). The early Christian church was a distinctive institution that was far more open to the union of differing aspects of old and new religious traditions than those institutions established elsewhere on the continent. In Ireland, pilgrimage and piety reflected the stable rhythms of a religion that had revolved around the habitual performance of ritual that was at odds with its continental counterparts (Walsham 2011:155). As previously discussed, old holy places became 'baptised' into the new religion or were given new meaning through their historic and legendary associations with Irish saints such as St. Patrick (Nolan 1983:422). Sacred sites were often located in remote areas and characterised by features such as heights, insularity, or the presence of holy water sources, trees or stones.

The location of sacred sites and their connections with the Irish Saints is clearly evident on the eve of the Reformation. Bishop George Dowdall's register of 1539 listed eighteen shrines and provides an excellent survey of potentially the most significant pilgrimages at the time. They included the natural landscape features of

the rock formations known as St Kevin's Bed at Glenalough, Croagh Patrick, St Patrick's Purgatory and the Rock of Cashel as well as the Holy Well at Struel. Also listed were the old monastic foundations of Skellig Mhicil and the Aran Islands as well as the great abbey at Holy Cross. Most notably, in respect to this research, it also included the great abbey of 'Roscarbery' (Meigs 1997:39). Rosscarbery or *Ros Ailithir* meaning 'wood of the pilgrim' developed around the monastery of St. Fachtna and is located in one of the *tuatha* of the *Corca Laighde* (Rosscarbery 2013 internet) indicating that the diocese was already a significant place of pilgrimage from the earliest of times.

In the mid to late seventeenth century Holy wells continued to be dedicated to St. Patrick in order to invoke his protection (Cunningham and Gillespie 1995:99). Walsham (2011) argues that this was as a result of displacement to open air places of worship when churches became appropriated by the Established church (Walsham 2011:544). Despite being outlawed under the Penal Laws (McBride 2009:198), visits to holy wells and other shrines continued in Ireland as an integral and living religious practice that has persisted to the present day (Adair 1978:191). A number of Mass Rocks are situated in close proximity to Holy Wells and some have become encompassed within the ritual traditions enacted at such sites. Examples include Mass Rocks at Beach, Enniskeane, Foherlagh and Kinneigh.

The Kinneigh Mass Rock is recorded at the northern side of an old laneway that runs west from Joe Moore's yard a few hundred yards east of Saint Patrick's Well (Kinneigh Church of Ireland 2010 internet). The Mass Rock site was inaccessible from the suggested route as the area has since been heavily planted with forestry. Although the Holy Well is reportedly visited annually on St Patrick's Day, the farmer advised that it was always the older people who used to come but that numbers had dwindled significantly due to lack of access (Plate 34).

In contrast, the Lady's Well continues to be a site of an annual pilgrimage. Rituals incorporate the Mass Rock and details of the rounds performed may be found recorded at the site.



**Plate 34 - St Patrick's Holy Well, Kinneigh**

The Mass Rock site is accessed through fields and forms part of the Lady's Well and Airstrip Loop walk which is one of the heritage walks through Bantry and published as a series of looped walks for the area by *An Chomhairle Oidhreacta* (The Heritage Council 2010).



**Plate 35 - Our Lady overlooking Beach Mass Rock and Lady's Well**

It is also mentioned on the website of the Latin Mass Society of Ireland (Latin Mass Society of Ireland 2012). The man-made altar is built at the base of a large outcrop of limestone situated within a secluded hollow. The Mass Rock sits adjacent to the Holy Well and there is a large statue of the Virgin Mary on top of the limestone rock facing out across Bantry Bay (Plate 35). This statue, which was placed there in 1952, is approached via 40 steps to the east of the site (Sheepshead Way internet site 2011). In keeping with recurrent features at a number of other sites, three steps lead up to the Mass Rock. The Holy Well is situated 1.2m to the west of the altar which was decorated with statues of the Virgin Mary and other votive offerings at the time of the visit in early July (Plate 36).



**Plate 36 – Altar, Beach Mass Rock**

There is significant ‘local’ memory attached to this site in respect to the Penal era. During Penal times it is reported that there was a change of command at the army headquarters in Donemark Mills. The new captain was notified so that he could capture the priest. Soldiers were sent to the Holy Well but when they appeared in front of the priest on the high ground he decided to hide the chalice and the host and run. The people watching saw what appeared to be a Lady with a light blue cloak appear on the rock behind the altar where the present statue of the Virgin

Mary now stands. The Lady slipped her cloak down over the scene making it disappear from the soldiers' sight. Upon seeing this, the soldiers left the scene (Sheepshead Way internet site 2011). This local memory appears to mirror that recorded in the Schools' Manuscript Collection which recalls that 'in olden times it is said that Our Lady used to be seen here' (S281:56).

Reflecting the ordinary worship practices of everyday life, religious rituals at the site incorporate a number of activities expressive of interactions with this sacred space. These interactions, involving the physical expression of reverence or veneration, are recorded within the Schools' Manuscript Collection. One entry advises that 'sometimes people are cured of diseases by making rounds at the well and by drinking the water out of it. When people go to the well they always leave some token there such as Rosary Beads, medals, prayer books or a coin. There are many crutches and sticks placed around the well, those were left there by the people who had been cured by praying and drinking the water in the well' (S281:55-56).

These ritual interactions continue today and appear to have changed little since the folklore was collected in the 1930s. On the Feast of the Assumption, 15<sup>th</sup> August annually, rounds take place at the site. The rounds consist of 15 decades of the Rosary, going up one side of the path by the altar and down the other side. The tradition is to take 15 small pebbles and, as the pilgrim passes the well on each occasion, one of these pebbles is dropped into the well. When the final pebble is dropped into the well it is traditional to say 'Hail Holy Queen'. Folklore dictates that if an eel jumps up in the water while the pilgrim is doing this then the main part of their wish will be granted (Sheepshead Way internet site 2011).

The ritual of 'paying rounds' at a Holy Well is frequently associated with sacred stones and trees (Estyn Evans 1966:298). Logan (1980) details a number of sites across Ireland. At *Tobar na Mult* in Ardfert, county Kerry rounds incorporate an altar where the pilgrim kneels and completes a third rosary (Logan 1980:24). At *Tobar an Ailt*, in county Sligo, fourteen of the praying stations around the well are referred to as 'altars'. At this particular shrine, a modern altar has also been built

where Mass is said twice on pattern day (Logan 1980:44). At *Tobar Bhríde*, Brideswell, county Roscommon, Mass is similarly said at a portable altar which is placed near the well on the day of the pilgrimage (Logan 1980:31).

Sometimes a sacred stone at or near the well may be visited as part of the pilgrimage. A small hollowed out boulder, known as a bullaun stone, had been placed on the west side of the Beach Mass Rock altar (Plate 37). Prayers may be said at sacred stones and these stones can occasionally bear the marks of a saint's feet, hands or knees (Logan 1980:18). In Kilkredane, county Clare, Mason (1888) discusses a stone upon which Senaus, a monk at an abbey at Inniscattery, once knelt. It was believed that the print of his knee was still visible in the stone positioned at the head of the creek at Kilrush. As such it was still held in such veneration that every countryman who passed it bowed, took off his hat, or muttered a prayer as he went past (Mason 1888:53). The Schools' Manuscript Collection records similar stones existing in Cork. In the field known as *Cnoc an Tobair* one entry records that there is a *gallán* stone resting upon four smaller stones which contains the sign of a knee and 'people still pray on it' (S340:197).



**Plate 37 - Bullaun Stone, Beach Mass Rock**

Stories are often associated with these sacred stones that explain how they received their marks. About a mile from Bantry, one entry advises that 'a priest was followed by a band of English soldiers and surrounded by them. The priest was trying to save the blessed sacrament. He leaped on his horse, struck it and the horse leaped over the Bay. It is said that the print of the horse's hoof and of the priest's hand and of the whip remain on the rock still' (S303:197). There is often a relationship between 'local' memory and the language of sacred space in the place-name where the incident occurs. Here the title of 'the Priest's Leap' reflects this. In Ballymichael on top of *Cnoc a Tobar*, at a Holy Well known as the Blessed Virgin's Well, the sign of the Virgin's knee is reportedly visible on a stone at the site (S340:173).

#### 9.4 Votive Offerings at Sacred Spaces

Blain and Wallis (2004) draw attention to 'the deposition of so-called 'ritual litter' such as flowers and other offerings, candle wax and tea light holders ..... and the deposition of crystals, coins and other materials' at sacred sites (Blain and Wallis 2004:241). Ancient objects are often incorporated into ritual practice or 'patterns' performed at or near Holy Wells. A number of authors (Brenneman and Brenneman 1995; Ó Duinn 2000) believe this to be representative of a continuation of the ancient ritual of votive offerings evident during the pre-historic period.

Visiting a Holy Well near Sheen Bridge, Kenmare, county Kerry in 1898, Bigger records many votive offerings placed around the well. In addition, the little east window of the nearby ruined church had been made into a shrine and a number of objects placed on the window sill. These included 'a small figure of the Virgin in delft' placed in the centre and 'fragments of human bones, broken rosaries, and old scapulars, coins, beads, trinkets, buckles, buttons, crucifixes, and a great number of personal trifles, all worn and battered and of no intrinsic value' placed around the image (Bigger 1898:323). In 1902, Wood-Martin records that an altar close to the Well of Tubbernalt on shores Lough Gill near Sligo was 'gaily decorated with flowers' on Garland Sunday (Wood-Martin 1902a:101).



**Plate 38 - Votive Offerings at Calloras Oughter Mass Rock**

At the Calloras Oughter Mass Rock site, in the parish of Goleen, a statue of an angel, a faded photograph, silver bell, tea light holder, coins, burnt wood (possibly from burning a candle) together with a small sheath of dried grass had been left on a ledge above the Mass Rock altar (Plate 38).



**Plate 39 – Votive Offerings at Glenville Mass Rock**

In addition, two quartz rocks had been placed on the ledge together with another unusually marked smooth flat rock. At the Beach Mass Rock an extensive array of votive offerings were recorded during field research including rosary beads, vases, plant pots and flowers (Plate 37). A large number of statues of the Virgin Mary had been placed on the altar as well as statues of the Sacred Heart and St. Jude (Plate 36). A number of coins had been placed into a small trinket pot detailed with a religious scene and a number had also been thrown into the Holy well. At the Glenville Mass Rock, in Chimneyfield, rosary beads had been left at the site together with two metal crosses placed each side of the rock framing the altar (Plate 39). Other votive offerings included vases and tea light holders. Waste from a 'take away' meal littered the south side of the rock demonstrating that this sacred space continues to be used for a variety of purposes.

Blain and Wallis (2004) note that sacred spaces or objects may be deliberately 'tagged' by the addition of symbols such as spirals and pentacles (Blain and Wallis 2004:241). Evans (1966) confirms that, in Ireland, the ritual of 'paying rounds' at a well commonly includes tracing the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles on a stone covering the well (Evans 1966:298). At the Holy Well near Sheen Bridge, Kenmare, county Kerry, Bigger notes that the top of a slab covering the well crosses has been marked by worshippers with a pebble (Bigger 1898:323). Logan (1980) notes that this is also part of the pilgrimage to the site of the ancient monastic settlement at Kilabuonia, in the barony of Iveragh, county Kerry where pilgrims scratch a cross on a standing stone with a pebble. So many have undertaken this ritual activity that the cross lines on this stone have become deeply cut (Logan 1980:32).

This ritual 'tagging' is not restricted to Holy Wells and has been witnessed at a number of the Mass Rock sites visited during research (Plate 40). At the Glenville Mass Rock numerous crosses had been etched across the rock face and, at Guagane Barra, this ritual appears to have been taken to the extreme. The altar stone has been inscribed so heavily that it now resembles a patchwork cushion and visitors have etched crosses on numerous other stones around the site. There was also evidence of ritual 'tagging' at the Rossmore hut site in Inchigeelagh.



Plate 40 - Ritual 'Tagging' at Glenville Mass Rock

## 8.5 Concluding remarks

This chapter has looked at the ritual aspects of sacred space. Stump (2008) argues that a space can acquire sanctity from repeated ritual use or can become used as a ritual centre because of the sanctity already attributed to that location by believers (Stump 2008:304). Research findings show that this is particularly relevant to the study of Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross. Some sites appear to have been chosen because they were already 'sacred' whilst others have become sacred because of repeated ritual use.

Douglas (1996) argues that the word 'ritual' has come to signify empty conformity and, indeed, for many sociologists the term is considered to reflect someone who performs external gestures but has no inner commitment to the values or ideas being expressed (Douglas 1996:1). Further, Bell (1997) argues that, in modern Western society, ritual is thought of as a special activity that is inherently different from daily routine action. As a result ritual can be regarded as somewhat antiquated and, consequently, at odds with modernity (Bell 1997:138). It would appear that these arguments are severely misplaced when viewed within an Irish context as demonstrated by the ritual aspect of sacred space at the Mass Rock.

### Mass Rocks of *Uíbh Laoghaire*

*The Uíbh Laoghaire territory embraced the valley of the infant river Lee, from its origins in the mountains encircling Gougane Barra, through Lough Allua to its junction with the river Toon, the river which marks the northern boundary of the parish for most of its length. Southwards, the Shehy mountains separate Uíbh Laoghaire from Bantry and east Carbery. It was more or less coterminous with the civil and ecclesiastical parish of Inchigeelagh, county Cork's third most extensive parish*

*Ó Murchadha (1993)*

*Uíbh Laoghaire* was chosen as a case study area due to its high preponderance of Mass Rocks. It provides a solid context in which to test both current and emerging hypotheses and allows for a more thorough analysis of Mass sites. Additionally, it provides a good comparative study with the *Report of the State of Popery* of 1731 which has been used as a baseline for modern day comparisons.

This introduction owes much to Ó Murchadha's (1993) excellent research on *Gaelic Land Tenure in County Cork: Uíbh Laoghaire in the Seventeenth Century* which was published in an edited edition of interdisciplinary essays on Cork history and society. He advises that early sources record two *Uí Laoghaire* families in south Munster, one at Castletownroche and the other amongst the *Corca Laoighdhe*. It is the *Uí Laoghaire* of the *Corca Laoighdhe* that inhabited Inchigeelagh (Ó Murchadha 1993:214). Known as *Uí Laoghaire Ruis Ó gCairbre* they originally occupied a strip of coastal territory on the peninsula between Roscarbery and Glandore (Ó Murchadha 1993:215). Around the beginning of the thirteenth century the *Uí Laoghaire* were forced from this territory, initially moving west into Schull where townlands names such as *Doire* and *Screathan Uí Laoghaire* or Derryleary and Scrahanyleary, respectively, perhaps reflect their relocation (Ó Murchadha 1993:217). These lands had initially belonged to the *Uí Eachach Mumhan sept* whose chief family were the O'Mahoneys. They owned the territory known as 'West Land' comprising the parishes of Kilmow, Soole (Schull), Kilcrohane, Durrus, Kilmacomoge (Bantry) and Caheragh (Bolster 1972:1) although, by the twelfth century, these parishes are

thought to have been under the O'Driscoll over-lordship (Ó Corráin 1993:72). The *Uí Laoghaire* finally settled in the wooded and mountainous terrain of Inchigeelagh (Ó Murchadha 1993:216). The inaccessibility of the landscape provided a natural barrier between the *Uí Laoghaire* and their Gaelic neighbours and, equally importantly, provided isolation from the influences of English authorities (Ó Murchadha 1993:217).

It is unusual for early *tuath* parishes to survive intact to modern times. However, a map identified by Bolster (1972) and given in *Pacata Hibernia* details the divisions of the barony of Muskerry, namely Iffanloe and Iveleary, which appear to correspond to modern parishes of the same area. Three districts of Iffanloe appear to correspond to the modern day parishes of Kilmichael, Kilmurry and part of the ancient parish of Moviddy. These were *tuath* lands held by the O Mahoneys. Iveleary corresponds with the present parish of Inchigeelagh (Bolster 1972:262).

Throughout the sixteenth century, Ó Murchadha (1993) explains that, whilst a number of minor Gaelic lordships flourished, they were dependent to some degree upon one or more of the three major branches of the Mac Carthys. Although they had regained control of Muskerry at a comparatively late stage, the Mac Carthys were effectively overlords of the entire western half of the county (Ó Murchadha 1993:213). By 1510, the vicar of Inchigeelagh was a Mac Carthy cleric and, by 1540, the rectory of Inchigeelagh had been divided between Gill Abbey and Mourne Abbey, both within the scope of influence of the Mac Carthys of Muskerry. Their rights over the territory of Iveleary were further recognised by royal re-grant in 1578 which included the strongholds of Carrignaneelagh and Carrignacurra (Ó Murchadha 1993:217). However, the O'Learys maintained some degree of independence which lasted into the seventeenth century. Ó Murchadha argues that *Uíbh Laoghaire* was perhaps one of the areas least affected by the Mac Carthy hegemony. It appears that its secluded upland location made the parish something of an insignificant lordship as far as the Mac Carthys were concerned although they continued to draw rent from its inhabitants (Ó Murchadha 1993:213).

Sixteenth century Ireland was divided politically into a multitude of small but mostly autonomous lordships which were ruled by lords of Gaelic or Anglo-Norman descent (Nicholls 1993:157). Breen (2007) demonstrates that, at this time, the province of Munster was a 'complex mosaic of politically ambitious lordships operating within an uncertain period of rule from London' (Breen 2007:21). His detailed analysis of land ownership for the area shows that Ormond, on the borders between Munster and Leinster, was controlled by the Old English Butlers whilst the Earl of Desmond controlled the liberty of central Kerry as far as the Limerick border whilst also possessing outlying manors in Limerick and estates in Cork and Waterford. Other Old English families, including the Roches, Condons and Barrys, who were direct descendants of the Anglo-Normans, also had lands in Cork. However, a number of Gaelic lordships, including the MacCarthys, O'Sullivans, O'Driscolls and O'Mahoneys, controlled much of the coastal territories of west Cork and south Kerry (Breen 2007:21).

Breen advises that by the 1560s and 1570s there was a general pattern of growing unease and resentment with the English amongst a number of Gaelic lords in Cork (Breen 2007:22). By the 1580s English forces laid much of the Munster countryside to waste, burning harvests and driving cattle off the land, resulting in widespread displacement and endemic food shortages. In 1582, St Ledger recorded that 50 people were dying daily in Cork and over 30,000 had died within a six month period (cited in Breen 2007:23). By 1583, Breen confirms that many of the original dissident lords had submitted to the Crown, including the MacCarthys and O'Sullivans (Breen 2007:24). However, whilst significant tracts of land were confiscated, larger towns remained largely unaffected as did a number of Gaelic lordships in the south west of Cork and on the Iveragh peninsula (Breen 2007:25).

By the early 1590s, further unrest among the Gaelic lords, this time focussed around Hugh O'Neill in Ulster, resulted in the Nine Years War. Munster was not exempt from the unrest with a number of septs, including O'Sullivan Beare and the Mac Fíneen Duff, already identified as leading Irish rebels (Lyne 1976 cited in Breen 2007:29). By 1598, much of the area was in open revolt (Breen 2007:29). However, it is not until the 1650s that many Gaelic-Irish finally lost control of their

lands. Breen identifies that it is this later period that marks the collapse of Gaelic influence in the south west regions (Breen 2007:50).

Research undertaken by Smyth (1988), using poll tax listings to map the relative distribution of Gaelic and Old English names in county Cork, supports this. He confirms that, by 1660, the power bases of all the lordships had been smashed and identifies a dispersed population and a scattering of communities in the Gaelic territories of *na Déise*, west Cork (Smyth 1988:67). Yet, despite this, he confirms that the Gaelic Irish 'still held on to powerful hinge positions in urban and rural social hierarchies and ensured the relative success of the new landlord-inspired economy would both depend on and be mediated by them' (Smyth 1988:72).

Much of *Uíbh Laoghaire*, confiscated in 1604 as a result of participation in rebellion, was leased by the Crown to John King and Thomas Hibbotts. Key townlands were also granted to Edward Beecher but, by new Royal patent in 1609, Beecher's lands were granted outright to Francis Gofton alongside extensive lands spread over thirteen counties (Ó Murchadha 1993:223-224). Gofton's rights to *Uíbh Laoghaire* were subsequently purchased by Richard Boyle who mortgaged the lands to Andrew Comyn and George Creagh for the use of Geoffrey Galwey, mayor of Limerick. Ownership was further complicated by the fact that in 1622 Boyle surrendered his rights to the Crown so that new letters patent could be issued to the Scottish undertaker Sir James Craig (Ó Murchadha 1993:227).

Understandably, a 'convoluted legal process' followed which included a series of seven inquisitions into O Leary lands (Ó Murchadha 1993:225). Over 3000 acres in Muskerry were subsequently granted by Cromwell to Admiral William Penn, in 1655, who was later compensated for handing over his Muskerry lands to the new Earl of Clancarty. Those O Leary who wished to remain on the land eventually became tenants of the new Earl (Ó Murchadha 1993:235). In 1703 any land that remained unsold in the area was assigned to a group of adventurers from London who traded as the Hollow Sword Blade Company. The land was sold to them at a reduced rate and they subsequently leased much of it to Protestant families from 1708 (McCarthy 2006:52).

Inchigeelagh is first recorded in Papal records in 1479 and appears to have had a long and mutable evolution. In 1493 a disputed clerical appointment resulted in the introduction of a new parish at Kilmichael (Ó Murchadha 1993:217). This consisted of townlands including Deshure, Cooldorragha, Shanacashel, Casduff and Clonmoyle which were detached from the eastern side of Inchigeelagh parish and joined to a number of townlands from Macloneigh (Ó Murchadha 1993:214). In 1591 when church property was being confiscated, the pre-Reformation parish of Macloneigh appears to have been, after St Finbarr's monastery, one of the most important ecclesiastical sites in the early diocese of Cork. References connecting Macloneigh with the later cathedral of St Finbarr endorse this supposition (Bolster 1972:3). Subsequent to the surveys of the seventeenth century, an additional eleven townlands were added to the civil and ecclesiastical parish of Inchigeelagh on its southern boundary. These townlands centred on Coolmountain and were formerly part of the parish of Fanlobbus (Ó Murchadha 1993:214). Townlands of the ancient parish of Macloneigh were subsequently incorporated into Kilmichael which in turn became united with parish of Inchigeelagh for economic and politico-ecclesiastical reasons between 1663 and 1750 (Kilmichael Historical Society 2010:47).

## 10.1 Location of Sacred Space in *Uíbh Laoghaire*

### 10.1.1 The Religious Landscape: Settlement patterns and ethnicity

*Uíbh Laoghaire* is now considered to encompass the basin of the River Lee from its source at Gougane Barra to halfway between the village of Inchigeelagh and the town of Macroom. The greater part of the parish lies to the north of the river. Lough Allua is located between the two principal villages of Inchigeelagh and Ballingearry although the parish is composed of 120 individual townlands (McCarthy 2006:28-30). *Beal Ath an Ghaoirthaodh* or 'ford mouth of the wooded glen' lies partly in the townland of Dromanallig and partly in the townland of Kilmore and is divided by the Bunsheelin River (Ballingearry Historical Society (2011) internet source).

Ó Murchadha (1993) has undertaken considerable research in respect to the history of landownership in the area. He records that *Conchobhar*, who died around 1576, appears to be the earliest recorded chief. He was the son of Diarmaid whose residence was undoubtedly part of the settlement which later became the village of Inchigeelagh. This residence was strategically placed, commanding the river crossing, but is not believed to be one of the three tower houses of Carrignaneelagh, Carrignacurra and Dromcarra inhabited by later generations (Ó Murchadha 1993:219). These were built to the east of the parish where the land was less mountainous and more fertile (Ó Murchadha 1993:219). As status symbols, Ó Murchadha explains that such tower houses were expensive to construct and, as such, tended to remain in the possession of the founder's family (Ó Murchadha 1993:221).

The castle of Carrignaneelagh subsequently passed to *Art* who lived until around 1597. Lands contiguous to the castle to the east and west included Coolnacranagh, Rossmore, Carrigeigh and West Currahy. *Art* also held another three carucates to the north of the river Lee which included Dromcarra North, Dromcarra South, Inchineill, Kilbarry, Gortincronogie (Inchigeelagh townland) as well as Cleanrath and Derriveaghe. South of the river, Coornahahilly and Monvaddra plus Cooragreenane and Rathahiffe (part of Gortnahoughtee) composed some of the paired townlands from which he received rent (Ó Murchadha 1993:221). These townlands are significant because there are Mass Rocks listed in a number of them notably at Carrignaneelagh, not far from the old Church in Kilbarry, in addition to Currahy, Coornahahilly, Cooragreenane and Gortnahoughtee. There is also a Mass Hut in Rossmore.

In 1641, the *Civil and Down Surveys* indicate that the sept lands were shared amongst thirty three O Learys (Ó Murchadha 1993:229) reflecting the continuity of a Gaelic presence within the area. However, the Civil Survey portrays a picture of utter devastation in *Uíbh Laoghaire* as a result of the Cromwellian campaign. Carrignaneelagh castle was garrisoned by Cromwell's soldiers while Carrignacurra (Plate 41) and Drumcarra lay ruined (Ó Murchadha 1993:235).



**Plate 41 - Carrignacurra Castle**

By 1700, however, and despite the ravages of wars and confiscations, Ó Murchadha reflects upon the speed and tenacity with which the local population was re-

established. He reports that there were approximately 130 'cabins' on the lands of *Uíbh Laoghaire*, not counting six 'good farmhouses', one with a grist mill and another 'a good stone house, slated, 2 stories high with barn and stable' (Ó Murchadha 1993:236).

#### 10.1.2 The sacred landscape of the Mass Rock in *Uíbh Laoghaire*

The *Report on the State of Popery* of 1731 states specifically that there were no Mass Houses in 33 of the parishes for which returns were made. Many of these parishes lay within the 'still quasi-Christian' (Smyth 2000:176) rural areas of Cork including 'Inshiguilah' or Inchigeelagh, Kilmichael and Macloneigh. The Report identifies '7 sheds in Inchiguilah' and states that, at three of these sites, only one priest said Mass. It records that there were 'no Mass Houses, only a Shade over the Priest, the people standing in ye open air' and that there was 'no private popish Chapel' (CHSI 1913:135). There appears to be evidence of a tradition of open air worship in Inchigeelagh that precedes the passing of the Penal laws. The Curraheen Mass Rock site is reported to have been used in the Cromwellian era and a plaque at the site reads "Altar of Penal Times - Mass was said here 1640-1800".

#### Ballingeary

The *Ballingeary Historical Society Journal* of 1996 mentions a rock to the north of the ruined chapel at Currahy, just 2 miles east of the village of Ballingeary, which Father Hurley believed to be a Mass Rock (Ballingeary Historical Society (2011a) internet). It further advises that in Dromanallig there are traces of an old straw covered church (Ballingeary Historical Society (2011) internet). In *The Fold* (1957) Reverend Ryan identifies further sites at Coolmountain and *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingeary (Ryan 1957:26). The ASD lists a further Mass Rock in Kilmore.

#### Inchigeelagh

Whilst the *Report on the State of Popery* identifies '7 sheds in Inchiguilah', McCarthy (1989) is able to identify a total of fourteen Mass sites (McCarthy 1989:37). McCarthy (1989) records the following sites in Inchigeelagh - Curraheen,

Tooreen, Tullagh, Gortnahoughtee, Derreenacuha, Coornahahilly, Cooragreenane, Carrignaneelagh, Ballyvourney Glebe, Gortnafunshion, Reanbobu, a Mass hut in the townland of Rossmore and a Mass Rock or hut at Currahy. In fact there is both a Mass Rock and a Penal chapel at the Currahy site. McCarthy (1989) also records a Mass shed in the townland of Moneylea. The site recorded by McCarthy as Ballyvourney Glebe is likely to relate to Glebe townland in the parish of Ballyvourney where Gortnafunshion is also found. Reanbobu is likely to be Reanabobul which is also in Balleyvourney, this parish lying directly to the north of Inchigeelagh.

The following are the Mass Huts and Mass Rocks identified through research as located in *Uíbh Laoghair*. Their locations are detailed accordingly in figure 6. The meaning of the townland names has been taken from *Townlands Names Explained* published by Ballingearry Historical Society in 2000.

#### Mass Huts/Sheds:

- Rossmore *Ros Mor* 'large wood'
- Moneylea *Muine Liath* 'grey shrubbery'
- Currahy *Curraighthe* 'marshes or bog'
- Dromanallig *Drom An Ailigh* 'ridge of the rocky place'

#### Unconfirmed Mass Rocks:

- Carrignaneelagh *Carraig na nGeimhleach* 'stone house of the house herds'
- Cooragreenane *Cuar a'Ghrianáin* 'sunny hill back'
- Dereenacusha *Doirin na Coise* 'little oakwood of the foot or bottom land, bordering the lake'

#### Confirmed Mass Rocks:

- Ballingearry *Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh* 'ford mouth of the wooded glen' and *Cum an tSagairt* 'priest's hollow'
- Cornahahilly *Cuar na Haith-Thuille* 'corner of the occasional flooding'
- Curraheen *Curraichán* 'little swamp'
- Currahy *Curraighe* 'marshes or bog'

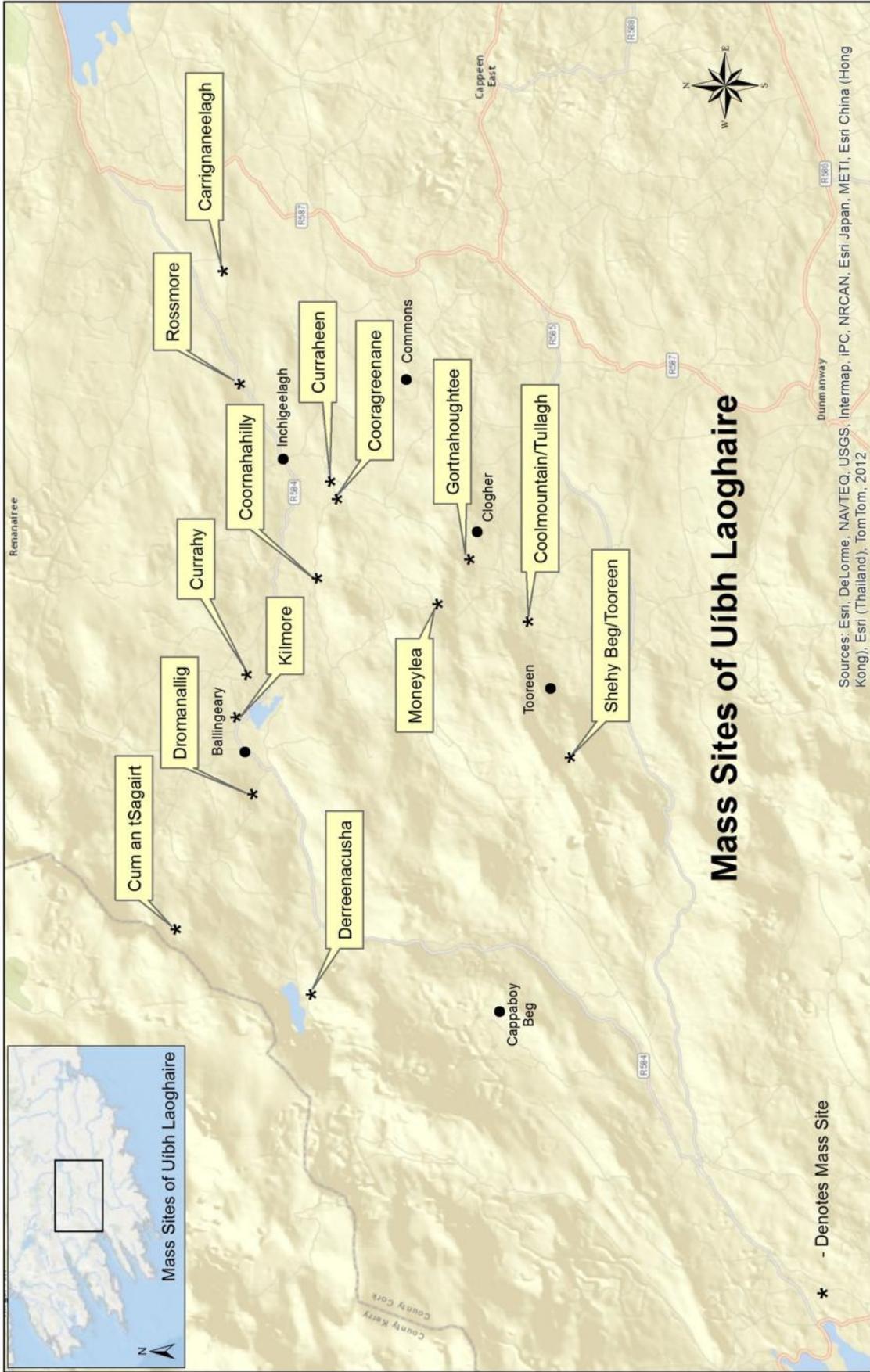


Figure 6 - Mass Sites of Uíbh Laoghaire

- Gournahoughtee *Gort na hUchtaighe* 'Field of the firtree' and *Carraig an tSeipeil* 'Rock of the chapel'
- Kilmore *Choill Mhor* 'Large Wood'
- Tooreen (Shehy Beg) *Tuairin* 'green or sheep walk'
- Tullough (Coolmountain) *Tulach* 'mound' and *Cuil Mointeain* 'recess or hill-back of the course land'

It has not been possible to record all the sites identified through research. For example, Cooragreenane is listed by McCarthy (1989) and by Father Ryan (1957), although the latter identifies the townland as Cooligreenane. The site is described by Ryan as 'in the angle between the southern Lake road and the Mall road' (Ryan 1957:26). Enquiries made of the landowner and locally were unsuccessful in locating the site. In respect to Carriganeela, Ryan reports in 1957 that there was already no trace of the Mass Rock. The Derreenacusha Mass Rock is recorded at Gougane Barra and may possibly be situated along the old Mass Path through the mountains which eventually passes into *Com Rua* via the Savage Cleft of Poll. This route was simply too treacherous to investigate safely.

Connolly (1992) believes that the numbers of secular priests, regulars and friars returned within the *Report on the State of Popery* of 1731 are deficient (Connolly 1992:150). Smyth (2000) agrees that numbers were certainly underestimated and would have been at least double, perhaps even triple, the numbers given (Smyth 2000:177). It is possible that this was also the case for sites of worship, especially given the secretive nature of their locations. So then, the number Mass Rock sites and Mass Huts identified in *Uíbh Laoghair* through research would, in reality, have been a truer reflection of the number of Mass sites in the parish than the number originally identified within the Report.

## **10.2 Traditional Assumptions Concerning the Location of Mass Rock Sites**

### **10.2.1 Mass Rocks are found in secluded upland settings**

One of the traditional assumptions concerning the location of Mass Rock sites is that they are found in upland settings. Given the very nature of the topography of

the parish of *Uíbh Laoghaire* it is not surprising that a number of sites reflect such traditional assumptions. Upland sites include Tullagh/Coolmountain and Tooreen/Shehy Beg as well as Gourtnahoughtee and *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingearry. Whilst it was not possible to locate the Mass Rocks at Guagane Barra or Carriganeela, it is likely that these sites were also in upland locations given the natural topography of the immediate landscape.

McKavanagh (1974) believes that Mass Rocks located in open fields, like many of those found in Cork, were originally regarded as an emergency place of worship. He argues that, through necessity, they became more 'the rule'. He maintains that, as the Penal days drew to a close, Mass sites were more likely to be selected in 'less out-of-the-way spots, sometimes at the very road sides' (McKavanagh 1974:15-18).

In *Uíbh Laoghaire*, Curraheen and Cornahahilly are the only sites in obvious roadside locations today. However, Tooreen/Shehy Beg is situated close to the old Butter path which led to Cork city. Ryan (1957) also makes reference to a bridle path making the site more accessible in Penal times than it is today (Ryan 1957:26). The Mass Rock at Derreenacusha is likely to have been reached via the Mass Path. This was a mountain path that led to Gougane Barra from the Borlin Valley via the Goulane stream and down into *Com Rua* by way of the savage cleft of Poll. One entry in the Schools' Manuscript Collection recalls that danger posed by the route through which pilgrims passed as the cleft was 'a fissure between 2 rocks. It is 1800ft above sea level and it is very dangerous. There was a woman killed there once. The top of the path is almost perpendicular' (S282:114). Despite such inhospitable terrain an entry in the Schools' Manuscript Collection described the young people of Borlinn having 'great fun' and going there in gangs to celebrate the feast of St Finbarre (S282:114).

**10.2.2 Mass Rock sites are confined to areas of extreme Catholic poverty, where no parish chapel existed or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism**

Whelan (1983) highlights isolated pockets where open air Mass survived until a much later date. He argues that such pockets were confined to areas of extreme

poverty such as the Ballingearry area of west Cork. However, research in *Uíbh Laoghaire* does not seem to support this suggestion. If Whelan is correct one would expect to find a high preponderance of Mass Rock sites in the area. However, this is not the case. Father Ryan also reflects upon an absence of Mass Rocks in Ballingearry and notes that 'not many Mass Rocks are pointed out in the Ballingearry district'. He believes that this is 'possibly because the Mass would usually be said at Guagane Barra which in these times was sufficiently remote' (Ryan 1957:26).

There appears to be a large number of Mass Rocks in neighbouring Inchigeelagh where there is some indication of wealth by 1700. Ó Murchadha (1993) documents the existence of 'good farmhouses' and a 'slated' dwelling amongst approximately 130 'cabins'. O'Flanagan (1993) advises that by the mid-seventeenth century slate houses were considered to be around five times more valuable than chimney houses (O'Flanagan 1993:406). Additionally, the inhabitants of Inchigeelagh and Kilmichael were sufficiently affluent to support three 'popish' schools and two priests as recorded in the *Report on the State of Popery* in 1731 (CHSI 1913:135).



**Plate 42 - Dated Stone (1753) in Wall of *Séipéal na Glóire* at Currahy**

One other reason given for a preponderance of Mass Rock sites is an absence of parish chapels or landlord hostility to the overt presence of Catholicism. Land was

clearly available for the erection of Mass Huts, and subsequently Penal Chapels, in *Uíbh Laoghaire* as demonstrated by sites at Rossmore and Currahy. The Mass Hut at Rossmore was in existence in 1731 and field research suggests that this was a stone built rectangular structure. *Séipéal na Glóire* at Currahy was possibly in use by 1753 as indicated by a date inscribed on a stone in the wall of the chapel (Plate 42). Despite the availability of these buildings, Mass Rocks continued to be used in the parish well beyond these dates. The Mass Rock at Carriganeela was used by locals up to the 1950s and Curraheen is believed to have been used up until the appointment of Father Holland as Parish Priest in 1816 when its use was superseded by Mass in a private cottage in the village prior to the building of the Catholic church in 1842 (Ryan 1957:27).

The robust evidence of the use of Mass Rocks in *Uíbh Laoghaire*, despite the existence of alternative places of worship, appears to contradict assumptions made by historians that Mass Rocks were only used when there was no chapel in the area. Further, assumptions made concerning their use in areas of extreme poverty are also questionable. An absence of sites in Ballingeary, which Whelan proposes was a poor area, together with a plethora of sites in Inchigeelagh, which appeared sufficiently affluent to support good farmsteads and a slated dwelling by 1700 as well as two parish priests and three popish schools by 1731, would appear to contradict such assertions.

Two Mass Rocks in *Uíbh Laoghaire* appear to be located in ecclesiastical settings, those of Carriganeelagh and Kilmore. Carriganeelagh is recorded as being 'not far from the old Kilbarry Church'. Whilst no trace of the Mass Rock now remains, the site was in use in the early twentieth century by those who wished to say their Rosary but were unable to attend Mass. A burial ground is detailed on the OS map on one side of the road but the landowner, who kindly allowed access to the site during research, advised that the burial ground was in fact divided by the road. Ryan advises that the field next to the Mass Rock is known as *Pairc na n-Easbog* (Ryan 1957:26 - 27) which translates as 'the field of the bishops' emphasising the ecclesiastical importance of the area. When McCarthy visited the site in 2006 a local was able to help identify a *lios* or ringfort on Kilbarry hill which is not marked on

current maps (McCarthy 2006:64). Given the location of the Drombeg Mass Rock, in Clonakilty, situated within a ringfort and adjacent to a burial ground it might tentatively be suggested that the Carriganeelagh Mass Rock may have been similarly situated.

The Kilmore Mass Rock lies to the north of a possible early ecclesiastical enclosure. This ritual landscape is also composed of an early burial ground and souterrain. The burial ground is known locally as *Cillín Leasa Ronain* and was used as both a famine burial ground and for the interment of unbaptized children up to the twentieth century (ASI 2012). It is evident that in *Uíbh Laoghaire* such monuments are representative of interacting social and cultural identity. They have remained a part of the active landscape being re-used and re-interpreted by subsequent communities.

### **10.3 The Nature of Sacred Space in *Uíbh Laoghaire***

Mass Rocks within *Uíbh Laoghaire* are consistent with the typologies proposed. Whilst there appears to be an absence of Typology 1, Archaeological Monuments, the Cooldaniel Mass Rock is located in the neighbouring parish of Kilmichael and consists of a wedge tomb. Its close proximity in a neighbouring parish is sufficient evidence of a presence of this typology in the vicinity of the parish.

#### **10.3.1 Typology 2: Earthfast Boulders**

Currahy in Inchigeelagh and *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingearry are earth fast boulders and both are notable for their shape and size. The Currahy Mass Rock consists of a large square shaped boulder sitting atop a natural rock outcrop (Plate 43). The local historical society journal records that Father Hurley believed this to be a Mass Rock (Ballingearry Historical Society 2011a). The view from the top of this rock provides a 360° panorama which takes the eye across to the Derrynasagart and Shehy Mountain ranges. The Mass Rock is situated in a field to the north of a ruined Penal chapel and the landowner confirmed that the adjacent field had always been referred to locally as *Pairc na Coultacht* or the Field of the Ruin.



**Plate 43 - Currahy Mass Rock**

The Mass Rock in Ballingeary was originally identified through local knowledge during an early visit to Inchigeelagh. A local landowner advised that there was another Mass Rock site about 3 miles up the road from the Coornahahilly site. He knew the site as *Cum an tSagairt* or the Hollow of the Priest.



**Plate 44 - *Cum an tSagairt*, Ballingeary**

He advised that the site consisted of a rock that contained two holes where the priest used to place the candles during Mass. Subsequent research revealed that Father Ryan (1957) had recorded 'another Mass Rock at *Cum an tSagairt* Ballingearry, which is also very difficult to access' in *The Fold* ecclesiastical magazine in 1957 (Ryan 1957:26).

At an elevation of 344m this Mass Rock was indeed very difficult to access. Composed of sandstone, the earth fast boulder is of irregular shape and resembles the prow of a ship (Plate 44). There is a large hollow on each side of the Mass Rock where it was believed the priest placed candles during Mass. A cross has recently been erected on top of the monument which stands as a lone central feature within a large natural hollow. A wedge tomb and standing stone lie in close proximity to the site at a distance of approximately two miles. A 'priest's cave' is situated close by to the north of the Mass Rock and it is believed that this cave was used as a place of shelter and habitation by the local priest during Penal times.

### **10.3.2 Typology 3: Natural Geological Rock Formations**

Both Coornahahilly and Gortnahoughtee Mass Rocks consist of natural geological rock formations although they are very different in size and structure. The Coornahahilly Mass Rock was listed by McCarthy (1989) and further identified through *Cumann Staire Bhéal átha'n Ghaorthaidh* (Ballingearry Historical Society internet 2011b). This site is situated alongside Lough Allua on the South Lake Road about half a mile west of the Curaheen Mass Rock. The rock face, which is positioned adjacent to the road, is sheer and therefore shields the site of the Mass Rock from the present day road. The landowner advised that this south facing site was previously accessed via a cutting through the large rock outcrop measuring no more than 12" in width. The Coornahahilly site is now inaccessible due to the planting of saplings by the Forestry Commission in the area immediately surrounding the site.

The Gournahoughtee Mass Rock site is identified by McCarthy (1989) as 'Carraig an tSeipeil' and is described by Father Ryan (1957) as a 'little chapel' located on the

south side of Pipe Hill. He confirms that ‘the place is still known as Carraig an tSéipeil’ (Ryan 1957:26). Whilst Pipe Hill is in the townland of Gortnahoughtee, the location of the site on the south side of the hill places the Mass Rock in the townland of Lackabaun (Plate 45).



**Plate 45 - Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock**

The description provided by Ryan (1957) suggests the site is a little chapel. Confusion is understandable given the shape of this rock outcrop which resembles a chapel building and explains the name ‘rock of the chapel’. The remains of a low wall at the west side of the site indicate that a shelter or wind break was constructed perhaps to shelter the priest and his congregation during Mass (Plate 46). The area in front of the Mass Rock formed a level platform which measured approximately 9m square providing a practical space for worship. The altar at Goutnahoughtee was composed of a long narrow natural shelf which ran the length of the Mass Rock and was 0.7m high. However, allowing for solifluxion over a period of 200 years, this would no doubt have provided a higher platform. The practical necessity for an altar to be at a height between approximately 1m in height appears to be a feature consistent with most of the Mass Rocks in *Uíbh Laoghair*, as elsewhere.



**Plate 46 - Windbreak at Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock**

It is possible that a dressed stone, placed to the west of the Mass Rock was used on top of the ledge as an altar stone (Plate 47).



**Plate 47 - Dressed Altar Stone at Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock**

This dressed stone measured 1.8m in length and was flat topped. The provision of a dressed altar stone at this site emphasises the sacred nature of this particular Mass Rock. There were adequate alternative features in close proximity to this site which would have provided pragmatic alternatives.

#### 10.3.3 Typology 4: Man Made Mass Rocks

Curraheen, Tooreen/Shehy Beg and Tullagh/Coolmountain are man-made Mass Rocks. The Curraheen Mass Rock sits in a secluded rock hollow set back from the roadside close to the village of Inchigeelagh and situated on the southern scenic cycle route out of the village. This is one of the most picturesque and well maintained sites visited as well as one of the most accessible and well sign posted (Plate 48). The name is believed to be derived from *Curraichán* meaning 'little swamp' (McCarthy 2006:45).



**Plate 48 - Curraheen Mass Rock**

The base of the Mass Rock is made up of individual stones which form a plinth upon which a large flat stone sits. On top of this stone, raised by two pillar stones, sits another flat slab so that a small box like structure is formed. As previously discussed, the *reredos* is a permanent structure that is often built behind an altar

and used for displaying paintings, sculptures or to house relics. It can rest on the rear of the *mensa* or altar (Catholic Encyclopaedia 2012a) and this appears to be the case at both Coolmountain and Curraheen. Sadly, the Curraheen Mass Rock was damaged by a falling tree and had to be rebuilt by the local community.

A small cross has been etched into the lower slab of the Curraheen Mass Rock and, at the time of the visit, a Penal cross had been placed in the cavity of the box. Flowers and quartz stones had been placed on the top slab. A plaque at the site reads "Altar of Penal Times - Mass was said here 1640-1800". However, Ryan (1957) suggests that this Mass Rock was probably in use up to the time Father Holland was appointed as parish priest in 1816 when its use was superseded by Mass in a private cottage in the village prior to the building of the Catholic church in 1842 (Ryan 1957:27).



**Plate 49 - Shehy Beg/Tooreen Mass Rock**

At an elevation of 417m Shehy Beg is situated high on a south facing slope in the Shehy Mountains (Plate 49). My sincere thanks must go to local Archaeologist Tony Miller for his help in finding this site and for the valuable information provided. He believes that this is in fact the Tooreen Mass Rock site mentioned by McCarthy

(1989) given its close proximity to the townland of Tooreen and an absence of local knowledge in respect to any other site within the townland itself.

This supposition is further supported by Ryan (1957) who details the Tooreen Mass Rock as 'so remote, that, as already remarked, the flat stones used by the congregation have remained undisturbed for about two hundred years'. There are a number of stones matching this description lying on the ground in close proximity to this Mass Rock. Its location, close to the old Butter Path, would have meant that it was 'more accessible than it is now' as father Ryan describes (Ryan 1957:26). The Butter Path would have been accessible from Coolmountain and the Keakil valley. Additionally, there are other extant track ways in the area leading from Togher and Derrinacaregh (Miller 2009 internet) and Ryan suggests that access may have been facilitated via bridle paths (Ryan 1957:26).

This area is prolific in archaeological monuments comprising fourteen hut sites, two enclosures and a bullaun stone suggesting that this was already a ritual landscape when the Mass Rock was constructed. The Mass Rock resembles a wedge tomb. However, upon closer inspection, it is clear that a stone slab has been mounted on top of a level outcropping of rock to form the altar. Consistent with other Mass Rocks the height of the altar is approximately 1m. Additionally, the remains of a small shelter remain built at its eastern side.

The townland of *Cuil Mointain* or Coolmountain derives its name from 'recess or hill-back of the coarse land'. The surrounding district was termed *Ceathramha na Cuile* which translates as 'quarter land of the recess', and included the townlands of Coolcaum and Shehy More as well as Coolmountain. There are other ancient sites in the area including a ringfort, an ancient cemetery and a stone circle (Ballingeary Historical Society (2011) internet source) thus emphasising the ritual nature of the landscape. This south facing Mass Rock is situated in a secluded and relatively inaccessible position on private land within a gallery wood.

Father Ryan (1957) records that there are two Mass Rocks in the Coolmountain region; Toureen and Tullough (Ryan 1957:26). Local enquiry failed to identify any

Mass Rock specifically located in Tullough (Tullagh). The Toureen site has since been identified as Shehy Beg and it is possible that the Coolmountain Mass Rock is the Tullough Mass Rock identified by Father Ryan. He describes it as ‘very difficult to access’ and this is certainly consistent with the location of the site.

#### 10.4 The Nature of Sacred Space *Uíbh Laoghaire*: The notion of the *axis mundi*

##### 10.4.1 Sacred Water

The symbolism reflected by the element water and its importance in respect to Mass Rock sites is evident in *Uíbh Laoghaire*. Holy Wells were widely regarded as locations where supernatural power was especially potent. The location of the Carriganeelagh Mass Rock is given as being ‘not far from the old Kilbarry church’ (Ryan 1957:26) and an entry in the Schools’ Manuscript Collection details the presence of a Holy Well below the ruins of this church ‘where local people make ‘rounds’ every year of the 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of September’ (S304:5).

The Penal Mass Hut in Rossmore is situated adjacent to a Holy Well and in close proximity to a stream (Plate 50). This site is listed by McCarthy (1989) as a ‘Hutt’ (McCarthy 1989:37) and identified by Father Ryan (1957) as a ‘chapeleen’ being ‘not far from the Protestant church in the field opposite the present Lourdes Grotto to the east of Inchigeelagh’ (Ryan 1957:26).



Plate 50 - Shrine at Rossmore

This was corroborated by a local who advised that the field opposite the Grotto was believed to be the site of the chapel and was now planted up with trees. At the time of the visit it was the height of summer and, whilst no structural evidence of the chapel remains above ground, there were clear scorch marks in the grass in a slight hollow in the field indicative of the location of a walled structure below the surface. Without excavation it is not possible to confirm that this is the site of the chapel. However, circumstantial evidence suggests the presence of a small rectangular walled structure measuring approximately 9.9m W-NW wide and between 11-15.8m N-NE in length.

A number of apparitions are reported as having occurred at the site of the Grotto between Easter Sunday 1987 and Pentecost Sunday in 1997 by Fiona Tierney. Public prayer takes place at the Grotto every Sunday as well as a vigil for the Holy Souls on the first Sunday of every month. Our Lady is reported as having blessed a special crucifix and promises to free a family member from purgatory for each person who attends the vigil, recites the way of the cross and kisses this special crucifix. During one apparition on 31<sup>st</sup> October 1993 Our Lady is reported as having blessed each of the steps up to her statue including the arched stone which has the special blessing of healing. The other steps have blessings of strength, courage, peace of mind, love, wisdom, understanding, council, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. During the apparitions, Our Lady was reported as having walked on the water and told people to drink from the stream and take the water to those who were sick (St. Joseph Patron of Families House of Prayer 2012).

Other water formations such as lakes, springs and rivers are also believed to hold great sacred power. The remarkable symbiosis between native institutions and modes of thought and Christianity is discussed by Danaher (2004) in respect to the sacrality of lakes. The arrival of Christianity in Ireland could easily have eradicated the existing learning and institutions associated with paganism but, as Mac Cana (2011) identifies, this was not the case. Instead it achieved a remarkable symbiosis between native institutions and modes of thought. Religious sites were cleansed from pagan association by the blessings of the saints and nature continued to be invested with sensitivity towards the sacred (Walsham 2012:36). In *Uíbh Laoghair*,

folklore describes how St. Finbarre banished a winged serpent that dwelt in the depths of the lake at Gougane Barra (Plate 51). McCarthy (2006) highlights the importance of this legend which was commemorated at the opening ceremony to celebrate Cork's status as European Capital of Culture in 2005 (McCarthy 2006:20).



**Plate 51 - Gougane Barra, location of Derreenacusha Mass Rock**

Both Curraheen and Coornahahilly are located close to Lough Allua and the Currahy Mass Rock overlooks the Lough from its elevated position. A crannog called *Oileán Uí Mhaothagáin* or Mehigan's Island is situated in Lough Allua reflecting the importance of the lake from early times (McCarthy 2006:41). The Carriganeelagh Mass Rock, given its location close to the old Kilbarry church, would have overlooked the river valleys of both the Lee and the Toon.

The importance of water courses such as rivers and streams to guide the congregation to the place of worship is reflected in the story of St. Finbarre. Seeking solitude from increasing numbers of pilgrims to Gougane Barra, St. Finbarre left to establish a new hermitage. McCarthy (2006) reflects upon the folklore concerning his journey. Hindered by the Shehy Mountains, Finbarre followed the route of the River Lee from its source at Gougane Barra to the tidal estuaries of the mouth of the river (McCarthy 2006:20).

#### 10.4.2 Sacred Wood

Trees of life, immortality and knowledge have been recorded throughout the history of religion (Eliade 1959:149). The Celts worshipped in sacred groves and a number of ancient rites are recorded in connection with the veneration of certain trees. The ash tree is commonly found in religious contexts such as churchyards and may also be found in close proximity to Holy Wells. It is linked by superstition to butter-making and fishing and is believed to banish the devil. At Guagane Barra pilgrims have focussed their ritual attention on an ash tree near close to the oratory. Additionally, in the grounds of the Catholic Church in Inchigeelagh, a small plaque by the front gate highlights the planting of an ash tree by Bishop John Buckley, a native of the area. The tree was planted on the occasion of his appointment as Bishop of Cork and Ross in 1998 (McCarthy 2006:49). In Coolmountain the ancient burial ground is surrounded by holly trees (ASD 2012 internet). Holly was one of the trees reflected in Ogham and is often found associated with sacred sites where votive offerings are tied to its branches (Zucchelli 2009).

#### 10.4 3 Sacred Stone

The sacredness of stone is evident in its use at the Mass Rock sites throughout the case study area. Irish folklore emphasises this sacredness as well as the idea of supernatural power residing in stone. One mythical explanation for the standing stones in the local area of *Uíbh Laoghaire* refers to a Celtic chieftain who was building a castle on the *Seagha Mór* or Shehy More. The local giants decided to carry large boulders to help the chieftain. However, the castle's builder died and when the giants heard the news they dropped the boulders they were carrying (McCarthy 2006:61).

Quartz is considered a symbol of purity and light in many different societies because of the brightness of its colour (Stout and Stout 2008:58) and was found in significant quantity at Newgrange in the Boyne Valley. It is clear that this type of stone was considered to possess 'special' characteristics and, at the Curraheen

Mass Rock, a collection of large quartzite pebbles have been deposited on top of the box like compartment (Plate 52).



**Plate 52 - Quartzite Pebbles at Curraheen Mass Rock**

As previously illustrated, a number of Mass Rocks appear to have hollows deliberately cut into the rock. On Heir Island, the Mass Rock overlooking the Reen has a rectangular hollow on its upper surface which Daly (2005) believed was to hold the chalice. Similarly, the Kilmore Mass Rock has a roughly rectangular hollow in the centre of the rock. It is possible that this served the same purpose as that on Heir Island. However, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that such hollows were designed to collect water providing a practical source of water for the celebration of Mass. The water that collects in hollows such as these is believed to be particularly efficacious reflecting the sacredness of the stone and water.

### Caves

Many caves became sacred spaces through their associations with the traditions of various saints. Some caves were already 'sacred' in pre-history having been locations for funerary and ritual practice in Neolithic times (Dowd 2008:305). The use of caves is a feature of worship in the diocese of Cork and Ross where Bolster

(1982) records the use of a cave by monks to the south of Ovens Bridge (Boslter 1982:227). There are also entries in the Schools' Manuscript Collection that detail priests hiding in caves in Penal days such as in Nedinagh near Dunmanway (S303:299). This is also evident in *Uíbh Laoghaire* where a cave, adjacent to the Mass Rock on *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingeary, is reputed to have been the hiding place of the local priest in Penal times (Plate 53).



Plate 53 - Priest's Cave close to *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingeary

## 10.5 Recurrent Features

### 10.5.1 Selection of Sites

It is evident from current research that appropriate sites were not simply chosen at random or as convenient markers to indicate where Mass would be said. Many Mass Rock sites were carefully selected because they were already 'sacred' or 'special' in some way. The memory of religious association of certain sacred spaces clearly remained a strong focus for the Gaelic communities in *Uíbh Laoghaire*. Indicative of the notion of the *axis mundi* it is also apparent that certain landscape and topographical features were inscribed with meaning.

The Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock is identified by McCarthy (1989) as ‘Carraig an tSeipeil’ (McCarthy 1989:37) and is described by Father Ryan (1957) as a ‘little chapel’ located on the south side of Pipe Hill. A stone row and ringfort lie in close proximity to this Mass Rock together with a large boulder containing a number of natural depressions or cupmarks. The ringfort was not clearly marked on Ordnance Survey maps but research of the archaeological record confirms that it is the ringfort referred to as *Rath Amhlaoi bh* which Ballingearry Historical Society describe as ‘at the east side’ of Gortnahoughtee (Ballingearry Historical Society 2000 internet). It consists of an earthen bank lined internally and externally by stones. Any one of a number of large external square shaped boulders would have been suitable for use as a Mass Rock given their height and level surface.



The large, irregularly shaped, earth fast boulder located centrally within a field across the road from the ringfort would also have been suitable for use as a Mass Rock. Additionally, the natural depressions within this rock could have acted as receptacles for water or candles as was the practice at a number of other sites. Allowing for solifluxion this earth fast boulder is also likely to have been a suitable height for use as an altar. This area was clearly an established ritual landscape as a stone alignment stood in close proximity to the earth fast boulder (Plate 54). However, the congregation chose to worship at a natural rock outcrop just a short distance away on the south side of *Cnocan na bPiopai* or Pipe Hill in the townland of Lackbaun.

**Plate 54 - Monuments in close proximity to Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock**

Its shape meant that it would have been a locally well-known topographical feature and easily identifiable as the place at which Mass would have been celebrated. Evidence of a windbreak or low stone wall at the site would have meant that the congregation were protected from the elements on this exposed hillside.

The *Cum an tSagairt* Mass Rock in Ballingeary is also easily identifiable due to its shape and geology. Shaped like the prow of a ship, this earth fast boulder sits centrally isolated within a natural depression reflecting the name of the site. Even some distance from the site the Mass Rock is easily identifiable within the landscape (Plate 55). It also appears to have a geological structure different from other boulders in the vicinity and this is further enhanced by natural depressions on either side of the Mass Rock where it is believed candles were placed during Mass.



**Plate 55 – Landscape of *Cum an tSagairt* Mass Rock, Ballingeary**

Whilst some rocks were chosen because of their ‘special’ qualities, it appears that sites were sometimes also chosen for pragmatic reasons. Ryan (1957) believes that the Coornahahilly Mass Rock site, hidden between a narrow cleft in two rock faces, was chosen because it was unlikely that strangers could ‘come on the congregation unawares during Mass’ (Ryan 1957:25). Additionally, both approaches to the site

were through marshy ground meaning that the congregation's footprints were likely to remain hidden.

## 10.6 The Language of the Sacred Space of *Uíbh Laoghaire*

There is no mention of *Uíbh Laoghaire* in either Irish annals or bardic poetry prior to the late sixteenth century (Ó Murchadha 1993:213) but its strong Gaelic roots survive today and the Irish language continues to be celebrated and preserved within the *Gaeltacht Mhúscraí*.

### 10.6.1 Place-names

The sacred nature of trees in Celtic Ireland has already been discussed in previous chapters alongside place-name research undertaken by Smyth (2006). He identifies a plethora of place-names throughout the country both in generic terms such as Doire/Derry (oakwood) and other related names and derivatives as well as tree specific place-names such as Beith/Behy (birch) or Coll/Collon (hazel) (Smyth 2006:87). In *Uíbh Laoghaire* McCarthy (2006) identifies *Béal Átha Ghaorthaidh* meaning 'ford mouth of the wooded glen' (McCarthy 2006:34), *Cnoc na Seagha* (Shehy Mountains) meaning 'hills of the elk', *Gorthadh na Piece* (Garrynapeaka) or 'wooded glen of the peak' (McCarthy 2006:15) and the Pass of Keimaneigh or *Céim an Fhia* translating as 'pass of the deer' (McCarthy 2006:16).

Further reflecting the wooded nature of the landscape, McCarthy (2006) identifies that *Doirín* meaning 'the little oakwood' appears in nine townland names between Guagane Barra and Inchigeelagh. This includes the townland of Dereenacusha or *Doirín na Coise* meaning 'little oakwood of the foot, or bottom land' (McCarthy 2006:15) and identified as the location of a Mass Rock by McCarthy (1989). In contrast, *Gort na hUchtaighe* or Gortnahoughtee translates as the 'field of the Fir Tree'. Other place names referring to the sacred oak include *Doirín na nGlas*, *Doirín Donaidhe*, *Leacan-a-dariaghe*, *Doirín a Buarca*, *Doirín Aonaigh*, *Doire Bhán* and *Doire Rioghbardain*. He highlights further place-names deriving from the word *Ros* meaning wood, including *Ros a Locha* at Gougane, *Ros Mór* near Inchigeelagh, and *Each-Ros*, north of Ballingeary (McCarthy 2006:29).

One of the most enduring ways in which religion can influence landscape is through the language of place-names (Park 1994:241). These can often include a term that is indicative of the sacred nature of a particular space (Radimilahy 2008:85). In *Uíbh Laoghaire* the most obvious local place-name that demonstrates a strong ecclesiastical presence is *Cill Barra* or Killbarry referring to the traditional association of this church with St Finbarre. As previously discussed, Hughes (1991) believes that whilst place-names can hold extensive clues they can change, within the boundaries of a single language, over a period of time and can often disguise the original form of the name (Hughes 1991:122). One explanation for the townland name of Kilmore is *Coill Mhor* or 'large wood' which would be understandable given the wooded nature of the landscape. However, archaeological remains, including a burial ground and souterrain, suggest the presence of a potential ecclesiastical site in the townland. The ancient burial ground is known as *Cillín Leasa Ronain* or 'the little church of St Ronan'. The derivation of the townland name may therefore reflect the ecclesiastical status of the townland rather than its topography.

Emphasising the strong Gaelic heritage of the area, Ó Murchadha (1993) demonstrates that local place-names in *Uíbh Laoghaire* reflect the imperviousness of its landscape to outside influences. He notes that in Normanised or semi-Normanised parts of Ireland the use of the word *baile* to denote either a farmstead or a holding spread rapidly throughout the landscape. Yet, in present day Inchigeelagh the word *baile* is not evident within any townland name (Ó Murchadha 1993:218). In contrast, the most frequent initial place-name elements are *Daire* or *Doire* or *Doirín* meaning an 'oakwood' or 'grove' together with *Gort* or *Goirtín* translating as a 'plot of land'. He highlights other place-names reflecting other natural features such as *Inse* or 'river meadow', *Carraig* meaning 'rock' and *Drom* translating as 'ridge'. Additionally, he notes that few townland names in *Uíbh Laoghaire* embody personal or family names. Again, this sharply contrasts to the more Normanised townland names found in the east of the county (Ó Murchadha 1993:218).

Whilst Smyth (2006) successfully uses Irish surnames to map land settlement patterns, Ó Murchadha (1993) chooses to analyse personal names. He notes that the influx of biblical and Germanic names that were introduced by the Normans elsewhere seem to have had little impact upon the O'Learys. While such names became frequent amongst other Gaelic septs, such as the use of the name Philip by the O Sullivans and John by the O Mahoneys, this was not the case with the O'Learys (Ó Murchadha 1993:218). The absence of such names emphasises the strong Gaelic heritage of the area.

Beiner (2007) believes that it is possible to map Irish vernacular landscape through a micro-toponymic study of place-names. Together with the folk history narratives that are associated with them, he maintains that place-names in Ireland have functioned as an everyday mode of commemorating past events of local significance (Beiner 2007:210). Place-names indicative of the commemoration of the celebration of Mass in *Uíbh Laoghaire* include *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingearry, *Carraig an tSagairt* in Dromanallig and *Carraig an tSeipeil* in Gortnahoughtee. Kearney (2002) further identifies *Carraig an Aifreann* in Coornahahilly and a field known as *Clais an Aifreann* (Kearney 2002 internet).

There are, however, some research difficulties in using place names as an ultimate source of reference to indicate the use of a particular place for saying Mass. Power (1917-1924) refers to a number of examples within his own research of south-east Cork which may be easily misinterpreted as indicative of a Mass Rock site. In *Uíbh Laoghaire* Ryan (1957) identifies *Carraig an tSagairt* in Dromanallig but qualifies that there was no tradition of Mass having been said there. Hughes (1991) also recommends caution. Whilst he acknowledges that there must be some residue of Pre-Gaelic element in place-names, he counsels that the severe lack of concrete evidence makes identification 'hazardous and controversial'. Again, there is evidence of this in *Uíbh Laoghaire* where there appears to be confusion over the name of the crannog in Lough Allua. Called *Oileán Uí Mhaothagáin* or Mehigan's Island some believe that it should be *Meathain* which in English translates as twigs and saplings (McCarthy 2006:41).

### 10.7 Memory of Sacred Space in *Uíbh Laoghaire*

‘Local’ memory aligns closely with folklore and oral history. It can be termed as ‘straightforward recollection’ and consists of stories based solely upon local knowledge or interest (Ó Ciosáin 2004:3). McCarthy (2006) acknowledges the assistance of such local memory in locating a *lios* or ringfort on Kilbarry hill that was not marked on the Ordnance Survey map (McCarthy 2006:64). Certainly, it would not have been possible to locate many of the sites visited during research without a long lineage of oral history and tradition in *Uíbh Laoghaire*.

Ryan (1957) recalls that there was a Mass hut near the top of Moneylea, on the south side but advises that ‘part of the walls of this were still standing till they were removed during the civil war to fill a hole in the road’ (Ryan 1957:26). Concerning the Mass hut in Rossmore, he advises that ‘it is told of this, as of other Mass-rocks, that when all the surrounding furze was burned, the ‘chapeleen’ as it is still called, alone remained intact. The same happened to another Mass-rock in Cooligrenane ..... Twice, in recent years, when the surrounding vegetation was burned, the bushes around the Mass-rock were spared’ (Ryan 1957:26). This traditional story also appears in Father Henchy’s article concerning the Mass Rocks of Caheragh which appeared in *The Fold* in 1955. In the townland of Gurrane, west of Caheragh, he recalls that a Mass Rock was located among the ‘heather-clad crags’ of the hillside. It appears that all the springs had dried up and the entire hill was ‘as dry as chaff’ and subsequently caught fire. Whilst the blaze roared around the Mass Rock ‘it never touched the place where Mass was said’ (cited in Carey 1957:110).

Without ‘local’ memory it is doubtful that the Ballingearry Mass Rock would ever have been located. The site was first mentioned by an elderly land owner at Coornahahilly who remembered another Mass Rock three miles up the road between Dunmanway and Bantry known as *Cum an tSagairt* and which he advised contained holes where the Priest used to place the candles during Mass. Local enquiry failed to yield any more clues as to the exact location of the site. During a future field trip, a parishioner was kind enough to provide a copy of an article by Father Ryan that had appeared in *The Fold* in 1957. This confirmed a Mass Rock at

Ballingeary called *Cum an tSagairt*. The entry simply said that the site was 'very difficult to access' (Ryan 1957:26) but gave no other indication as to its location. Through persistence in local enquiries in Ballingeary village an elderly relation of a local inhabitant confirmed they knew of a Mass Rock on a local farm. With directions given, and after several attempts, the farm was located and the owners were only too welcoming in allowing access to the site.

Ó Ciosáin describes 'local' memory as atomised and fragmentary (Ó Ciosáin 2004:3) and this is clearly evident in the contrasting stories concerning the Coornahilly Mass Rock altar. This Mass Rock site is situated alongside Lough Allua on the South Lake Road about half a mile west of the Curaheen Mass Rock. The site features in McCarthy's (1989) list and is also detailed in Father Ryan's article in *The Fold* as well as the journal of *Cumann Staire Bhéal átha'n Ghaorthaidh*. The article *Mass Rock in the Townland of Coornahilly* was written by Michael Kearney whose father was the last in a long line of farmers to own the land. He gave up farming in 1963 and moved to Cork city with his family (Kearney 2002 internet source).

The location of the site is described by Kearney (2002) 'Heading west towards Ballingeary, the Mass Rock is situated on the left hand side of the road. Past the entrance to Denis Jack Lucey's farm, the road goes downhill, and then levels out. About a hundred metres further west, the road begins to rise. Here on the left hand side is a gate, which was once the entrance to the Kearney farm. The road continues to rise for about forty metres, and then levels out. Here on the left is a large outcrop of rock covered in trees. Behind this is the Mass Rock site. The Altar however no longer exists'. Kearney goes on to say that the area around the Mass Rock was known as *Carraig an Aifreann* and a further one of the three fields that existed on the same side of the road as the Mass Rock, prior to the boundary hedges being removed, was known as *Clais an Aifreann* (Kearney 2002 internet source).

The landowner was kind enough to allow access to the area around the site although it is no longer possible to reach the location of the Mass Rock due to the

planting of saplings by the Forestry Commission. This land use is remarked upon by Kearney who advises that the land close to the Kearney farmhouse was sold off to neighbours and the remainder sold to the Land Commission but that, even prior to this, some of the land had already been planted. Kearney advises that, about 80 years ago, a quantity of stone was removed from around the Altar and broken up for use on the road. It is not clear whether the Altar was still standing at this time or whether it collapsed whilst the stone was being extracted (Kearney 2002 internet source).

In 1957, Ryan's article published in the diocesan journal *The Fold*, corroborates this story. Father Ryan reports that 'the rough altar was there till about thirty years ago. By mistake, the stones were then removed for road material. The main slab, however, could not be broken and the workers, learning that it was a Mass-rock, took it back to the spot whence they had taken it. It is still there, lying on the ground' (Ryan 1957:25-26). The present landowner advised that the Forestry Commission were unaware that there was a Mass Rock on this site and, about 50 years ago, the Altar was finally removed. In veneration of the site, he had a Mass said in Inchigeelagh Catholic Church in 2004 in memory of the altar and to bless those who had worshipped there.

Kearney describes the Altar as 'located under a rectangular area of rock, sticking out from the South side of the aforementioned large outcrop of rock' (Kearney 2002 internet). Ryan describes it as 'hidden between two cliffs of rock' (Ryan 1957:25). The land owner advised that the site was previously accessed via a cutting through the large rock outcrop measuring no more than 12 inches wide. Each individual provides their own memories and traditions concerning this site but, by piecing together the fragmentary sources, it is possible to build up a reasonably complete image of the site and its history. It appears that sometime between 1920 and 1930 the altar was removed and then replaced during road-building operations. It was then finally removed around 1960 during re-forestation.

### 10.7.1 Folklore

Inchigeelagh derives its name from *Inse Geimhleach* or 'River inch of the fetters' or 'the hostages' (Ballingeary Historical Society (2011) internet source). Local folklore tells of an incident several centuries ago when the O'Learys took a number of Danes hostage, holding them captive on the island that has evolved in recent times into the River Island Amenity Park. Called *Macoitir*, the descendants of the Danes are the Cotters (McCarthy 2006:45). The Currahy Mass Rock and ruined Penal chapel are situated on land belonging to Con Cotter perhaps offering a tangible link between the past and the present. Con's help in locating both sites was invaluable. When initially approaching the Currahy Mass Rock the landowner addressed the fairies to let them know we meant no harm and had simply come to see the Mass Rock. The Bunsheelin River, which divides *Beal Ath an Ghaoirthaodh* or 'ford mouth of the wooded glen' between the townlands of Dromanallig and Kilmore (McCarthy 2006:34), derives its name from *Bun Sidhe Linn* meaning 'bottom of the fairy pool'. There are strong links between ringforts and fairies and there are a number of ringforts located in close proximity to Mass Rocks in *Uibh Laoghaire* including those at Carriganeela, Coolmountain (Tullough), Goutrnahoughtee and Kilmore.

Burge (2009) highlights the role that mythology plays in placing sacred space into a wider spiritual and historical context. In *Uibh Laoghaire* the north boundary of Lackabaun is a place known as Mullaghmearogafin. In Irish *Mullach Mearoga Finn* translates as 'the summit of the fingerstones of Fionn' (Ballingeary Historical Society 2000 internet). It most probably refers to the stone alignment near the top of the summit of Pipe Hill (Plate 54). In Derryriordan South there are a number of archaeological monuments that are still referred to as the 'King's Table' and the 'Giants Grave'. Giant's Graves can also be found on the south side of Inchinaneave and Keamcorravooley (Ballingeary Historical Society 2000 internet)

The Schools' Manuscript Collection contains a variety of information concerning folklore and traditions in the area which can be of considerable assistance in locating and verifying sites. One child recorded that 'there is a graveyard in Kilbarry and the ruins of a very old church said to have been used by St Finnbar' and a 'Holy

Well with 'rounds' and 'ritual rags' (S304:5). In the second volume of the *Archaeological Inventory of County Cork*, MacCarthy records the site of a 'well recently re-discovered in rough grazing on W-facing slope. Some stone-facing and spring uncovered c. 2m below present ground level ..... site of the first church in Cork .... Barre's Church' which he believes to have been in 'a scrubby untilled patch twenty yards to the east of the well' (ASD 2012 internet). Given that the Kilbarry church is recorded on the current Ordnance Survey map solely as a 'burial ground' and marked on one side of the road only, local knowledge has been invaluable in locating the approximate location of the church. This was essential in understanding the landscape context of the Carriganeela Mass Rock which Ryan (1957) describes as being 'not far from the old Kilbarry Church' (Ryan 1957:26). Similarly, the Kilmacomogue archives record that 'there is a place called 'cúm an tSagairt' away north of us where the priests used to hide from the soldiers' (S281:425) corroborating information previously collected concerning the existence of the *Cum an tSagairt* Mass Rock in Ballingeary.

#### 10.8 **Ritual of Sacred Space in *Uíbh Laoghaire***

Ritual space provides a crucial link between religious practice and the concept of sacred space. Whilst a space can acquire sanctity from repeated ritual use, a space can also become used as a ritual place because of the sanctity already attributed to that location by believers (Stump 2008:304). Several Mass Rock sites in *Uíbh Laoghaire* are located within landscapes that had already acquired sanctity from repeated ritual use. The Mass Rock at Tooreen (Shehy Beg) for example is found within a ritual landscape in relatively close proximity to a bullaun stone (Plate 56) and pair of standing stones located on a bog covered ridge to the north-west of the summit. Estyn Evans (1966) draws attention to the use of bullaun stones as cursing stones and maintains that their use is illustrative of a pagan association of sun-worship. There are also three standing stones in alignment located on the south side of Tooreen (ASD 2012 internet). The Coolmountain Mass Rock is also located within a ritual landscape consisting of a standing stone, stone circle and burial ground (ASD 2012 internet).



**Plate 56 – Bullaun Stone close to Shehy Beg Mass Rock**

The ritual landscape of the Gortnahoughtee Mass Rock contains a pair of standing stones and a ringfort known as *Rath Amhlaoihbh* thought to have a possible souterrain (ASD 2012 internet). A souterrain has also been discovered in the locality of the Kilmore Mass Rock site. Here a local burial ground, known locally as *Cillín Leasa Ronain*, in close proximity to the souterrain, was used for the burial of unbaptized infants up to the twentieth century. Ringforts represent the *axis mundi* and, as Ní Cheallaigh (2006) points out, the existence of souterrains or subterranean passages offers a potential physical and imaginary entry point in to the Otherworld of the *sidhe* (Ní Cheallaigh 2006:107). Ní Cheallaigh (2006) believes that, more than any other archaeological monument, ringforts represent the diverging worlds of symbolic imaginings that embrace a plethora of interrelated social and cultural identities (Ní Cheallaigh 2006: 105). As a result, the author argues that a range of memories and interactions with ringforts have diffused to more contemporary times from earlier periods (Ní Cheallaigh 2006:107).

According to local folklore, St. Finbarre was educated as a monk and founded a number of churches in the Munster area (McCarthy 2006:19). One of the sites he founded was on a rocky island in the centre of a lake overlooked by the Shehy

Mountains where the river Lee rises. Gougane Barra in *Uíbh Laoghair* translates as 'Finbarre's rocky place'. Linking the diverging worlds of symbolic imaginings the Saint is believed to have been the son of a blacksmith called Amergin who lived in a ringfort complex in nearby Gearagh (McCarthy 2006:20). The tradition of child burial in these liminal places has already been discussed and there is yet further evidence of this tradition in *Uíbh Laoghair* at Gortnacarriga. At the north side of *Gort na Carrage* or 'field of the rock' is *Plas na Leanbh*. This 'children's place' is a disused childrens' burial ground. There is another similar burial ground in close proximity to a ringfort in Teerenassig or *Tir an Easaigh* which translates as 'land of the waterfall' (Ballingeary Historical Society 2000 internet).

Ritual has remained an integral part of daily life in many parts of Ireland and, in ordinary worship; religious traditions have commonly incorporated active expressions of interactions with sacred spaces. Today the physical expression of reverence or veneration toward the sacred is demonstrated by the continued celebration of Mass at Mass Rock sites and by the bodily involvement of the Eucharist. In *Uíbh Laoghair* Mass is celebrated annually at the Curraheen Mass Rock and was celebrated at the Millennium at the ruined Penal chapel at Currahy, *Séipéal na Glóire*, by the local history society *Cumann Staire Bhéal átha'n Ghaorthaidh*. Additionally, local priests have continued to occasionally bless ancient sites such as the Kilbarry church in the townland of Carrignaneelagh (McCarthy 2006:60).

The veneration for crucifixes, particularly Penal crosses, has remained a feature of Catholic tradition at pilgrimage sites such as Lough Derg and Lady's Island (O Broin 1925:110). Ó Duinn argues that these small wooden crucifixes of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century must have played a singularly important part in the religious life of the people during the Penal era (Ó Duinn, S. 2000:119). At the Curraheen Mass Rock a small cross has been etched into the lower slab and, at the time of the visit, a Penal cross had been placed in the box cavity (Plate 57). A number of other votive offerings had been left at the site including a metal crucifix, a number of large quartzite pebbles and flowers contained within a vase. Such offerings represent one of the best known examples of religious ritual.



**Plate 57 - Penal Cross, Curraheen Mass Rock**

Trees and bushes at sacred sites can in turn become objects of veneration. Talking about St Kevin's Yew tree at Glendalough, Simon (2000b) notes that the ancient Yew was attacked by soldiers at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as a consequence of the reverence paid to it by the locals (Simon 2000b:100). At Gougane Barra an ash tree growing adjacent to the old altar has become a focus for votive offerings with coins and nails hammered into the bark of the tree. Additionally, a beech tree located in front of the oratory is now surrounded by mesh in an effort to

prevent this practice from destroying the tree. There are signs of the bark now healing around the coins and nails that have previously been inserted into the tree.

Blain and Wallis (2004) note that sacred space or objects may also be deliberately 'tagged' through the addition of symbols (Blain and Wallis 2004:241). Evans (1966) confirms that, in Ireland, the ritual of 'paying rounds' at a well commonly includes tracing the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles on a stone covering the well (Evans 1966:298). The Rossmore Mass Hut is located close to a Grotto and Holy Well. A number of large boulders edging this ritual space have been tagged with crosses. At Guagan Barra the ritual of tagging appears to have been taken to the extreme. The old altar from the sixth century church has become a focus for one of the stations performed at the site and has been inscribed so heavily that it now resembles a patchwork cushion (Plate 58). Visitors have etched crosses on numerous other stones around the site.



Plate 58 - Altar Stone at Gougane Barra

### 10.9 Concluding Remarks

Through an analysis of the Mass Rocks of *Uíbh Laoghaire* within the framework of sacred space, this case study has provided a solid context in which to test both current and emerging hypotheses. Evidence supports the suggestion that Mass Rocks did not merely serve primarily as landmarks for the community in order to identify the designated place at which to assemble for Mass as Zucchelli (2009) advocates. In *Uíbh Laoghaire*, *Carraig an tSeipeil* in Gotrnahoughtee and *Cum an tSagairt* in Ballingeary clearly demonstrate that certain spaces were considered sacred because of the sanctity already attributed to that location by believers perhaps as a result of the topography of the site. In addition some Mass Rock sites appear to have been chosen because that space had acquired sanctity from repeated ritual use in the past. Both Shehy Beg and Coolmountain Mass Rock sites were deliberately chosen because the ritual landscape was already considered ‘sacred’ or ‘special’.

Mass Rocks within *Uíbh Laoghaire* appear consistent with the typologies proposed and support the emerging hypothesis that the location and distribution of Mass

Rocks is indicative of a strand of Catholicism imbued with older pre-Christian traditions. This is an area with strong Gaelic roots where the Irish language continues to be celebrated and preserved alongside folklore and older traditions. The nature of the Mass Rock sites in the parish reflects the sacred aspects of water, wood and stone and its importance in the context of the *axis mundi*. Perhaps due to the topography of the landscape there is a higher proportion of Mass Rocks located in upland settings in *Uíbh Laoghaire*.

Research has revealed a significant number of Mass Rocks in the area but a complete absence of Mass Houses. A number of Mass Huts appear to have been constructed in *Uíbh Laoghaire* but both historical and archaeological evidence suggest that these were simple structures built to provide shelter or shade over the priest whilst the congregation remained in the open air. This would also appear to support the emergent hypothesis that Mass Rocks are reflective of a more traditional strand of Catholicism. The case study does not seem to support current hypotheses that Mass Rocks are located in areas of extreme poverty, where no chapel existed or where the landlord was hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism.

# 11

## Conclusions

Whilst sacred space may be easy to identify, its actual definition is more difficult to qualify. It is evident that the current official definition for Mass Rocks requires expansion and a number of new and innovative typologies have, therefore, been developed by the author to expand this definition. Traditional binary distinctions prove problematic in trying to define whether such space is spiritual or material, invisible or visible, eternal or contingent (Della Dora 2011:165). Mass Rock sites can be all of these things simultaneously. The very nature of their construction means that Mass Rocks are enduring monuments in the cultural landscape. However, for those worshipping at Mass Rocks from the earliest times to the present day it is impossible to ignore the spiritual aspect of these sacred spaces. Any stranger passing by *Carraig an tSeipeil* in Inchigeelagh would be unaware that this unusually shaped outcropping of rock was in fact a very visible sacred space. To the stranger, the sacred nature of this topography would be invisible and irrelevant. For the Catholics of *Uíbh Laoghaire*, throughout the Penal era, this monument would have been contingent to their everyday worship. Today it remains an eternal and enduring symbol of their tradition, culture and identity.

It is clear from sites such as *Carraig an tSeipeil* that Mass Rocks were not simply chosen at random. Whilst sites needed to either possess the relevant attributes for the celebration of Mass or be adapted accordingly, many sites were chosen because they were already perceived as 'special' in some way. This sacredness may have resulted from a certain topographical feature such as a 'special' rock or the presence of a sacred water source or tree. However, the memory of previous religious ritual clearly remained a focus for communities in the Penal era. Other sites were chosen because they had already been made sacred by repeated ritual use in the past. A number of archaeological monuments have been re-used and re-interpreted by subsequent communities as Mass Rocks. Such sites represent the *axis mundi* and offer a potential physical and imaginary entry point to places that are not of this world.

The notion of the *axis mundi* is evident in the selection of Mass Rock sites and the importance of topographical and landscape features such as sacred stone, wood and water. However, the variety of typologies identified during research would seem to indicate that there is no 'archetype' of sacred space for Mass Rock sites. It is probable that during Penal times the chosen rock would only have been transformed into a Holy altar once the required flat square stone tablet had been placed upon it and been duly consecrated by the priest. Ryan (1957) explains that in Penal times the priest would have carried a station box. Having unhinged the sides and the front of the station box, the priest would have rested the station box on the flat surface provided by the Mass Rock which would have acted as his altar. The station-box would have contained altar-stone, linens, crucifix, candles and charts and its compactness and portability would have allowed for a speedy departure should the need have arisen (Ryan 1957:24). This addition is clearly the essential feature that would have translated an otherwise 'sacred' but 'unholy' space into the archetype of sacred space for the celebration of the Catholic Mass.

Ritual played an important part in the articulation of the sacred space of the Mass Rock. Indeed, ritual has remained an integral part of daily life in many parts of Ireland. Religious ritual frequently focuses on bodily involvement in respect to sacred space. The practice of receiving Holy Communion during Mass, the central sacrament in Catholic tradition, linked the congregation bodily to this sacred space. Mass would have been an occasion that brought the priest and parish community together on a regular basis helping to create and preserve their sense of identity during difficult times (Murphy 1991:174). Today the physical expression of reverence or veneration toward the sacred is demonstrated by the continued celebration of Mass at Mass Rock sites and by bodily involvement in respect to the Eucharist.

When research began, it was assumed that Mass Rock sites in the diocese of Cork and Ross would conform to the mythical, secluded, upland sanctuaries depicted in early and mid-twentieth century history textbooks and more recently on 'republican' murals. Data shows that this is not the case. So why have Mass Rocks continued to be portrayed in this way and, additionally, why has the folk history

concerning the Penal era tended to create stories that reflected the persecuted nature of Catholicism? The answer appears to lie with 'memory'.

Religion involves the collective identity of a people and has strong affinities with the traditions and knowledge handed down from generation to generation (Cusack 2011:2). Such traditions and knowledge are often handed down orally and can be subject to nostalgia and influence. In the case of the Penal Laws it appears that traditions have often been influenced through popular print in the form of newspapers, fictional literature and history textbooks. These have tended to sensationalise the persecution of the Catholic religion and the murder of its clergy during the Penal era. There is little doubt that there were periods when priests were persecuted. However, evidence suggests that, in general, the practice of Catholicism continued without interference and places of worship tolerated without protest (Elliott 2000).

Despite this, such memories remain important because they are an indication of the way in which local people have appropriated these events to form an ideology that to some extent both defines and frames their perception of local reality (Taylor 1992:151). Schramm (2011) believes that the memory of violence is inscribed onto sacred space. Landscapes and places are not simply containers for memory but also shape and, in turn, are shaped by the ways in which violence is experienced and remembered. This appears particularly pertinent to the study of the sacred space of the Mass Rock.

The number and distribution of Mass Rock sites has also been intriguing. There seems little evidence to suggest that they were confined to areas of extreme Catholic poverty, where no parish chapel existed or where landlords were hostile to the overt presence of Catholicism. Instead, their location and distribution appears to be indicative of a strand of Catholicism that was imbued with older pre-Christian traditions.

The scope for future research is both immense and necessary. This thesis has focussed solely upon the diocese of Cork and Ross and tested current and emerging

hypotheses through an in-depth case study of one single parish within this diocese. Whilst this localised study has allowed for a deep understanding of the sacred space within the diocese of Cork and Ross, research now needs to be placed within a wider context. Initially this should be expanded to include the diocese of Cloyne. However, ultimately, research would benefit from expansion to a national level and a systematic county by county study.

Memory is fragmentary and subject to deterioration, particularly in old age. The entries recorded within the Folklore archives belong to an older generation and their descriptions, in respect to the location of Mass Rock sites, is already dated. Many of the owners of the land where Mass Rocks are reported are no longer alive. The Coomkeen Mass Rock, for example, was recorded as being located on land belonging to the late Tim Whelan. This land has now been bought by a distant relative who lives in America and a local is taking care of the property in their absence. Additionally, subsequent generations do not always share a passion for the heritage and culture displayed by their elders.

Has the memory of the Penal Laws and the myths that surround the Mass Rock fallen into decline? Many incidental interviews during research indicate that some people do not know what a Mass Rock actually is and, even when they do, they are usually unaware of its location. Certainly ignorance surrounding a number of Mass Rocks has resulted in their being removed, broken up or buried. Archaeology is a finite resource and cannot be replaced and it is possible that the waning of social memory and the attitudes of young farmers may result in the destruction of further monuments if they are not recorded and preserved. As locations of a distinctively Catholic faith, Mass Rocks are important historical, ritual and counter-cultural sites that present a tangible connection to Ireland's rich heritage for contemporary society. As such they require an extensive programme of study in order to catalogue and preserve these unique monuments.

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## **Appendix 1**

**Data Chart**

**Potential Sites**

**Diocese of Cork and Ross**

| Name/Townland    | Description  | Source          | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|------------------|--|-----------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Aughadown</b> |  |                 |                                     |
| Ardura Beg       | 'Located in a garden on the S side of a road. This is known locally as a mass-rock and comprises a rock (max. H 4.5m) which features a 'pulpit' or shelf (H 1.3m) on its S face. The N face is sheer and perpendicular.'   | ASI             |                                     |
| Foherlagh        | Carraig an Aifrinn   | McCarthy (1989) |                                     |
| Heir Island      | Mass Rock in high ground overlooking An Tráigh Mór   | Daly (2004)     |                                     |
| Heir Island      | Mass Rock on the side of a hill overlooking the Reen.<br>In rough gorse and heather-covered grazing, on a S-facing slope overlooking a sandy beach. According to Daly (2000, 47), an irregular-shaped boulder (3.7m N-S; 1.2m E-W; H 0.8m) was used as a mass-rock in the past. A rectangular hollow (10cm x 8cm) on the upper surface of the boulder was, according to the landowner, used to hold a chalice. | Daly (2004)     |                                     |
| Knocknamonhalagh | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989) |                                     |
| <b>Barryroe</b>  |  |                 |                                     |
| Ballycullenhane  | ('We regret that we are unable to supply descriptive details for this record at present.'  | ASI             | Lislee                              |
| <b>Bantry</b>    |  |                 |                                     |
| Beach            | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989) |                                     |

| Name/Townland                    | Description   | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|----------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Bantry</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |   |                                     |
| Cappaboy Beg / Cappabui          | IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 and ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY as being 'On ESE-facing mountainside. Roughly rectangular stone-built structure (L 12.4m; Wth 2.1m); walls (H 0.8m) have max. thickness of 0.8m. Ope (Wth 0.45m) at NE corner. Altar at E end composed of one flat slab resting on several other stones. In secluded natural hollow (42m NE-SW; 15m NW-SE). Known locally as "Clais an Aifreann". (UCC).'   | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Colonel                          | Mass Rock   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Cooleenlemane                    | ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 and ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY ADVISE At end of U-shaped valley, on natural rise to W of Cooleenlemane River. Large rock outcrop, now used as a sheep shelter but traditionally known as 'mass rock'.   | ASI   | Kilmocomoge                         |
| Coomleigh East / Coomleagh East  | ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY RECORDS COOMLEAGH EAST 'In rough hill grazing, high up on the W side of a S-facing valley and to the W of a S-flowing river. According to Myler (1998, 75), mass was celebrated here on a large rock in penal times. The mass-rock 'has a row of six candle holes on the top of it' and there is a small stone stile behind the rock to the NW where confessions were heard (ibid.). On the way up to the mass-rock was a small hut where the priest used to sleep (ibid.). A local person knew about the mass-rock but was unable to identify its location. There is no visible trace of the mass-rock in this location or in the surrounding area.' | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Bolster (1982) and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937) |                                     |

| Name/Townland                    | Description   | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|----------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Bantry</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |   |                                     |
| Derrynafinchin                   | Altar Stone   | McCarthy (1989) and subsequently ASI              |                                     |
| Derrynakilla                     | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |
| Dromaclarrig                     | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |
| Keakill                          | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |
| Kilmocomoge                      | Cnocan na hAitorach (the hill of the altar) to the south of the Mealagh River   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                  |                                     |
| Lackavane                        | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |
| Scartbaun                        | Mass said in a cave   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                  |                                     |
| <b>Cathedral</b>                 |   |   |                                     |
| Knocknacullen West               | <p>Penal altar site at the northern corner of Prayer Hill Field</p> <p>Ibparóiste na Cathrach na páirch ann ar thaobh cnuic agus ins an bpáirc sin tá leach mhór. Oeirtear gur ar an leich sin a léigheadh na sagairt an tAifreann fado (S281:205)</p> <p>In the parish of the city, the field there is at the side of a hill and in that field is a big house. It is said that the Mass was said in that place by the priest a long time ago</p> | Bolster (1982) and Schools' Manuscript Collection |                                     |
| <b>Carrigaline</b>               |   |   |                                     |
| Boardee                          | ('Stone built into field fence. According to local tradition, used as mass-rock during penal times. (pers. comm. S. O'Mahony)')   | ASI   |                                     |

| Name/Townland                     | Description  | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Ballinhassig</b>               |  |  |                                     |
| Farlistown                        | 'In the SE corner of a pasture field, on a gentle N-facing slope, with a view over undulating farmland. According to local information, there is a cross-inscribed mass-rock against the N side of the roadside field boundary in the corner of this field. Clearance rubble is piled against the corner and the fence and its verges are entirely obscured by a dense cover of gorse, briars and hawthorn bushes. The mass-rock could not be located due to this overgrowth.' | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website               |                                     |
| <b>Ballinora</b>                  |  |  |                                     |
| Ballymah / Ballynora              | 'In forestry, on outcropping rock, overlooking a river to the W. This mass-rock comprises outcropping rock (L 2.6m; T 0.3m; H 1m) which is orientated SW-NE. A metal cross and plaque records (in Irish) that mass was celebrated at the rock during penal times.'   | ASI and McCarthy (1989)  | Kilnaglory                          |
| <b>Drimoleague / Dromdaleague</b> |  |  |                                     |
| Acres                             | Cnoc Bui/ Cnoc Buide   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937) |                                     |
| Ardra/Ardrah                      | 'In pasture, on a S-facing slope, beneath a crab apple tree. According to Myler (1998, 57), local tradition suggests that this boulder (6m N-S; H 1.8m) may have been once used as a mass-rock. The upper surface of the boulder slopes down to the W.'  | ASI and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)                              |                                     |
| Barnagowlane West                 | Mass Rock at Cnocan na hAltora   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                       |                                     |
| Ceancullig                        | Carraig an Aifrinn   | McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |

| Name/Townland  | Description   | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Drimoleague / Dromdaleague</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |   |                                     |
| Drimoleague  | Mass Rock near Drimoleague Rock and situated in O'Brien's Farm  | Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)                     |                                     |
| Drimoleague  | Cnocán na hAitorach near Drinagh  | Bolster (1982) and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)  |                                     |
| Garranes South                                       | ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 and ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY ADVISE 'Flat-topped boulder locally known as "mass rock", now lying in field fence (CO119-127----). Removed from original position on site of fulacht fiadh (CO119-089001-) during reclamation work.'  | ASI and McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |
| Goulanes / Mealagh River                             | Cnocán na hAitorach Situated near Droumcough New School, also the site of a fóidín school   | McCarthy (1989) and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937) |                                     |
| Goulanes   | Cúm an tSagairt 4 miles north of Drimoleague and a near way to go across the hill to Goulanes. Cúm an tSagairt/The Altar Filed on Tomsey Shea's land and subsequently site of chapel.   | Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)                     |                                     |
| <b>Ardfield / Rathbarry</b>                          |   |   |                                     |
| Camus  | 'Rock outcrop near top of hill, locally known as "mass rock".' This rock was bulldozed away   | ASI and McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |
| Coorleigh South                                      | 'In pasture on gentle SW-facing slope. Large, subrectangular flat-topped stone (L 2.08m; max. Wth 1.42m; H 0.57m) atop slight rise. Rectangular area on upper surface (L 1.1m; Wth 0.89m) defined by grooves (Wth 0.07m; D 0.03m) on two sides encloses 11 possible cupmarks (max. diam. c. 0.05m; D 0.01m). Traditionally known as "mass-rock".' | ASI and McCarthy (1989)                                   |                                     |

| Name/Townland                  | Description   | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Enniskeane/Desertserges</b> |   |  |                                     |
| Breaghna                       | Mass Rock in Pairc an Aifrinn – a boithrin from the Desert-Clonakilty Road leads to the site  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |
| Carrigroe                      | Beal an Aifreann  | Southern Star  | Courtmacsherry                      |
| Carrigroe                      | Pairc an Aifrinn - In a history of the parish of Desertserges (Anon. 1978, 7) a mass-rock is recorded in Carrigroe townland. Enquiries locally failed to supply any information on this possible mass-rock and it was not precisely located.' | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website | Desertserges                        |
| Castlederry                    | 'In field called "Carrig-an-Aifrinn" (CMSS). Exact location of mass rock not known. 'Also noted in Power, D., Byrne, E., Egan, U., Lane, S. and Sleeman, M. (eds) (1992) Archaeological Inventory of West Cork. Dublin: Stationery Office     | ASI  |                                     |
| Derriga                        | Carraig an Aifrinn  | McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |
| Enniskeane                     | Mass Rock – see thesis for further information  | New site   |                                     |
| Farranmareen                   | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |
| Killeen                        | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)  | Desertserges                        |
| Kilnameela                     | ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 and ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY ADVISE 'Rock outcrop in field of pasture, known locally as "mass rock"'  | ASI  |                                     |
| Kinneigh                       | Tobar an tSagairt   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |
| Kinneigh                       | Curraichin an tSagairt  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |
| Kinneigh                       | Carraig an Aifrinn  | McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |
| <b>Dunmanway</b>               |   |  |                                     |
| Ardcahan                       | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website         | Fanlobbus                           |

| Name/Townland                         | Description  | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Dunmanway</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |  |  |                                     |
| Ballyhalwick                          | Mass Rock  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Fanlobbus                           |
| Behagullane (S Crowley's Land)        | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                       | Fanlobbus                           |
| Behagullane (S Murphey's Land)        | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                       | Fanlobbus                           |
| Clashnacrona                          | Clais na coroineach or Fence of the Rosary. suggests a gathering of people in a very secluded spot to say the Rosary when the priest was not available for Mass  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Ballinacarriga                      |
| Cooranig (Round Hill of the Marsh)    | Mass Rock on Round Hill Mountain   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937) | Togher                              |
| Dromdstail                            | Cábán Aifrinn – the name of a field belonging to James Tyrer   | Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)                                      |                                     |
| Dunmanway                             | To rear of a house in Main Street 'In Dunmanway town. Marked on O.S. 1st and 2nd ed. (1842, 1903) as Priest's Rock: derivation of name not known locally. According to landowner, rock part of Hexagon Rock as shown on 3rd ed. (1935)'  | ASI and Bolster (1982)   |                                     |
| Farnanes                              | 'On SE slopes of Maughanaclea Hills. Large slab (L 2.8m; Wth 1.3m) resting on support stones at E and W ends. Locally known as a "mass rock". The location of the monument as indicated in the published 'Archaeological Inventory of County Cork. Volume 1: West Cork' (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1992) appears to be incorrect. The latest information locates it in the townland of Farnanes to the east.' | ASI  | See Goulacullen                     |

| Name/Townland                         | Description   | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Dunmanway</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |   |  |                                     |
| Gortnamuckla                          | GORTNAMUCKLAGH IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 and ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY 'Atop hill between two rock ridges. Stone-built altar supported by two upright stones and set against rock face. Altar enclosed by stone built structure (3.6m N-S; 2.8m E-W; H 1.1m) to E, S and W. Entrance on S side via stile. Fragment of stone, with part of modern inscription rests, on altar. In occasional use.' | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website | Ballinacarriga                      |
| Goulacullin                           | On SE slopes of Maughanaclea Hills. Large slab resting on support stones at E and W ends. Locally known as Mass Rock.   | Power <i>et al</i> (1992)                                    | See Farnanes above                  |
| Gurteensownee                         | Near gearannbawn rock close to ath an aiffrinn or ford of the Mass  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             | Fanlobbus                           |
| Kealiriheen                           | Cumaín na hAltorách in a secluded hollow  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             | Fanlobbus                           |
| Kinrath / Keenrath                    | Carraig an Aiffrinn   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website         | Togher                              |
| Lisheenlish                           | Penal Site  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             | Ballinacarriga                      |
| Nedineagh                             | Mass Rock   | Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)                        |                                     |
| Shiplock / Shiplough                  | Penal Site  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             | Togher                              |
| Upper Thoam                           | Penal Site  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             | Ballinacarriga                      |
| <b>Ballypnehane</b>                   |   |  |                                     |
| Ballycurreen                          | 'On rock face, overlooking stream valley, to W of Cork Airport road. Metal cross pinned to rock face marks site. Sign explains mass said here in penal times.'  | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |
| <b>Bandon</b>                         |   |  |                                     |
| Bandon                                | Pairc an Aiffrinn   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |

| Name/Townland                    | Description  | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|----------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Bandon</b> <i>(continued)</i> |  |  |                                     |
| Cappaknockane                    | Pairc a' tSagairt (the priest's field)   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website         | Desertserges                        |
| Corravreeda East                 | 'In pasture. Marked 'Gallaun' on first two editions O.S. map. No visible surface trace. According to local information stone (L c.7 ft; Wth c. 4 ft) known as "mass rock"; broken up and buried c. 1970.'  | ASI  |                                     |
| Kilhassen                        | Pairc a' tSagairt (the priest's field)   | Bolster (1982)   |                                     |
| Mishells                         | At Mishells near the Long Lane, a flat stone on the ground is believed to have been a penal altar-site<br>'On W side of laneway running S towards a ford. Irregularly shaped sandstone block (L c.1m; Wth 0.55m; H 0.52m); known locally as "mass rock".'  | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website | Kilbrogan                           |
| <b>Kilmichael</b>                |  |  |                                     |
| Carrigdangan                     | On Coillte land and heavily overgrown  | Tony Miller (2012)   |                                     |
| Commons                          | 'In pasture sheltered by trees. According to local information, a mass-rock was located on a raised triangular area (8m N-S; 5m E-W; H 0.4m) in the SW corner of a field. The field is known locally as the 'altar field', though there is no evidence of an altar stone. A lintelled wall cup-board (Wth 0.7m; H 0.6m; D 0.75m) is built into the W end of the boundary wall at the S. A holly tree grows from a collection of mainly small stones piled randomly against the S wall to the E of the wall cup-board.' | ASI  |                                     |

| Name/Townland                        | Description  | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Kilmichael</b> <i>(continued)</i> |  |  |                                     |
| Coolaclevane                         | 'In reclaimed pasture, on N-facing slope. Rock outcrop, known locally as a mass rock; small modern grotto erected on top.'   | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |
| Cooldaniel                           | Local tradition that wedge-tomb (CO082-103----) was used as a mass-rock.'  | ASI  |                                     |
| Dureennafalee                        | Mass Rock - an almost inaccessible spot in Kilnadur  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Bolster (1982)          |                                     |
| East Toames                          | The Red Spot in E. Toames is also believed to have been a penal site   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |
| Kilnadur                             | 'In pasture broken by rock outcropping. Flat slab of sandstone (L 0.88m; Wth 0.61m; H 0.1m) with small Latin cross (0.6m x 0.4m) inscribed on outer (SW) face; resting on stone-built base. Upright slab (now broken) on top of altar has fragmentary inscription: 'ALTAR OF PENAL DAYS'.' | ASI and McCarthy (1989)                                      |                                     |
| Kilnarovanagh                        | 'In scrubland, atop hill. Large boulder; according to local information, known locally as a mass-rock.'  | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |

| Name/Townland         | Description   | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|-----------------------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Clontead</b>       |   |  |                                     |
| Carhoo South          | <p>The Carmelites of Kinsale celebrated Mass at Carraigin an Aifrinn in Carhue.</p> <p>'In pasture, on a N-facing slope, overlooking a wooded ravine in an area of undulating farmland. A rough-surfaced shelf, which is located towards the E end of outcropping rock (c. 10m E-W) that protrudes from the steep slope, was used as a mass-rock. A recently erected Latin cross, which marks the mass-rock, carries an inscription 'Carmelite Mass Rock 1698-1720'. Mass has been celebrated here in recent times. According to local information, the remains of a priest's hut are in the ravine to the NW.'</p> | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |
| Corruragh             | <p>('In pasture, on a gentle S-facing slope, to the NW of Riverstick. According to local information, a mass-rock and a cross-inscribed stone (CO098-086----) existed at this location until land reclamation took place here in the past. There is now no visible trace of the mass-rock. The cross-inscribed stone was removed and set into the wall of a farm building c. 400m to the NE.'</p>   | ASI  |                                     |
| Carhoo South / Carhue | <p>ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY ADVISES 'In pasture, on a N-facing slope, overlooking a wooded ravine in an area of undulating farmland. A rough-surfaced shelf, which is located towards the E end of outcropping rock (c. 10m E-W) that protrudes from the steep slope, was used as a mass-rock. A recently erected Latin cross, which marks the mass-rock, carries an inscription 'Carmelite Mass Rock 1698-1720'. Mass has been celebrated here in recent times. According to local information, the remains of a priest's hut are in the ravine to the NW.'</p>   | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross         | Ringcurran                          |

| Name/Townland                      | Description  | Source                   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Clontead</b> <i>(continued)</i> |  |                          |                                     |
| Coolcarroon / Coolcorrin           | Pairc an tSeipeil  | Diocese of Cork and Ross |                                     |
| Dooneen South                      | Mass Rock  | Diocese of Cork and Ross |                                     |
| Heathfield                         | Mass Rock  | Diocese of Cork and Ross |                                     |
| Preghane                           | Claide an Aifrinn  | McCarthy (1989)          | Ringcurran                          |
| Shanavally                         | 'Rock outcrop in forest named 'Altar Rock' on 1842 OS map. Locally known as "mass rock". Not located.'   | ASI                      |                                     |
| <b>Clonakilty / Darrara</b>        |  |                          |                                     |
| Councambeg                         | ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 and ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY ADVISE 'Secluded rock face on W side of ravine, locally known as "mass rock".'          | ASI                      |                                     |
| Dungannon / Connonagh              | Roadside rock outcrop shaped to resemble an altar. Modern plaque on stone records its use as mass rock   | ASI and Daly (2005)      |                                     |
| Knockatlowig                       | 'In level pasture. Field named 'Parknakilla' on both editions of OS maps; field fences now removed. According to local tradition mass rock once stood here.' | ASI                      |                                     |

| Name/Townland                                  | Description   | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Clonakilty / Darrara</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |  |                                     |
| Tawnies Lower                                  | 'Incorporated into a boundary fence on the N side of the road. This possible mass-rock comprises a flat-topped sandstone block (L 0.74m; Wth 0.29m; H 0.5m) which features a number of rough linear marks on the E end and one on the W end of the upper surface. The stone was uncovered during cleaning back of the boundary and reported to the NMI in 1965. According to local information, when the stone was found there was a cross marked on it but it has since faded. The adjacent road is known as a famine road and there is a local tradition of a mass-rock in the townland.' | ASI  |                                     |
| <b>Courseys</b>                                |   |  |                                     |
| Courtaparteen                                  | 'We regret that we are unable to supply descriptive details for this record at present.'  | ASI  | Kilroan                             |
| Gortnacrusa South / Gortna Croise              | ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY ADVISES 'According to O'Regan (1960, 29) 'mass was celebrated in the eastern side of this townland, in the glen by the river, in Penal times'; 'cave' marked the spot but now only 'bold face of the rock' remains. Exact location not known.'  | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website | Templetrine                         |
| Ringrone                                       | Cualach an Aifrinn  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |
| Upper Lispatrick                               | Faill an Aifrinn  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website         | Ringrone                            |
| Upper Lispatrick                               | Pairc an Aifrinn  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             | Ringrone                            |
| <b>Caheragh</b>                                |   |  |                                     |
| Caheragh                                       |   | McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |
| Carrig   |   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |

| Name/Townland                      | Description   | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Caheragh</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |   |                                     |
| Coolnaclehy                        |   | McCarthy (1989)   |                                     |
| Cooradowney / Coondowney           | Perfect specimen of a Mass Rock against the face of a huge rock in this townland (Caheragh). The mountain flag is still supported by the original stones. Watchers' peaks are discernible.  | McCarthy (1989) and Carey (1957)                                      |                                     |
| Cullomane West                     | 'In rough grazing, on a SW-facing slope. An irregular stone (1.2m NE-SW; 0.8m NW-SE; H 0.8m) at the top of a steep slope is known locally as a mass-rock. According to local information, the priest placed his book on the ledge at the NE side of the rock and the people sat on the nearby smaller boulder-type stones, when mass was celebrated here during penal times.' | ASI<br>(also listed Diocese of Cork and Ross Website)                 |                                     |
| Clohane                            | to the west of the site of Clohane Castle, has the remains of a penal altar   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                                      |                                     |
| Coolanuller / Cooranuller          | (Cul an Fhiolair) which would suggest a high place, difficult to access   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                  |                                     |
| Coolnaclehy                        | on a hilltop near the river Ilen has another site: one large flagstone supported by several others, adjoining the field known as Paircín an Aifrinn   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Carey (1957)                     |                                     |
| Dromore                            |   | McCarthy (1989) and Carey (1957)                                      |                                     |
| Garrane / Gurrans                  | Located among heather-clad crags .... A statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary may now be seen in a niche above the rock   | McCarthy (1989) and Carey (1957) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |

| Name/Townland                      | Description   | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Caheragh</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |   |                                     |
| Glanatnaw                          | In rough NE-facing hill pasture, at the base of a cliff, to the NE of the summit of Glanatnaw Hill. A natural rock shelf (L c. 3m; Wth c. 1m; max. H 1.5m) at the lower NW end of the cliff is known locally as a mass-rock. The mass-rock is largely obscured by heather, however, a narrow ledge on its SE side provides access to the upper surface. An area of coniferous trees are situated immediately to the NE. | ASI and McCarthy (1989)   |                                     |
| Gortatagairt<br>(Gort an tSagairt) |   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                                      |                                     |
| Gortnascreeny                      |   | McCarthy (1989)   |                                     |
| Inchabegga                         |   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                                      |                                     |
| Killeenleigh                       | Near the Massrock in Killeenleigh was a tunnel-hill called Poll Talmhan where sacred vessels are said to have been concealed  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Carey (1957)                     |                                     |
|                                    |   |   |                                     |
| Lisangle                           | Lios Aingil   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                                      |                                     |
| The Murdering Glen                 | Amongtawny-coloured tousled hills west of this glen, where Kelly murdered and buried his victims, and near a spar od rock said to be his lookout, there is a Mass Rock  | Carey (1957)  |                                     |
| <b>Glanmire</b>                    |   |   |                                     |
| Glanmire                           | Toba an Aifrinn   | Bolster (1982)  |                                     |
| Tooreen                            | A flat, low-placed, unhewn stone is the Mass Rock here marked by a cutting in the altar table called Tobar-na-bFaithini – The Wart Well   | McCarthy (1989) and Carey (1957) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |
| <b>Muintir Bhaire</b>              |   |   |                                     |
| Ahakista                           | Near the former Curate's house  | Diocese of Cork and Ross  |                                     |
| Ballycommane                       | Altar-site  | Diocese of Cork and Ross  |                                     |

| Name/Townland                              | Description   | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Muintir Bhaire</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |   |   |                                     |
| Caher Common                               | Penal Altar   | Diocese of Cork and Ross  |                                     |
| Coomkeen                                   | Mass Rock two miles north of the village and situated in what was known as Pairc an tSagairt - in the lands of the late Timmy Whelly  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and <a href="http://www.museumstuff.com">www.museumstuff.com</a> | Durrus                              |
| Glanalin                                   | 'In rough pasture interspersed with heather and gorse and occasional outcropping rock, on a N-facing slope overlooking Bantry Bay. This mass-rock, which comprises a cuboid-shaped stone slab (2.5m E-W; 1.2m N-S; H 0.75m), lies at the foot of the N face of E-W outcropping rock. An inscribed stone, lying beside the mass-rock, commemorates the site and records that mass was again celebrated on the 17th of May 2000. A series of white poles marks a path through the hillside from the nearby road.' | ASI   |                                     |
| Gortavallig                                | Cuas an tSagairt  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Kealties                                   | Mass Rock   | <a href="http://www.museumstuff.com">www.museumstuff.com</a>  |                                     |
| <b>Goleen</b>                              |   |   |                                     |
| Calloras Oughter                           | Tobareenvohir is near the penal site in Callaros Oughter where there was also a road known as Seana-Seipeal Road  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Cloghanakilleen                            | There are three distinct places in the townland where Mass was celebrated   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Cloghanakilleen                            |   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Cloghanakilleen                            |   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |
| Dunlough                                   | Cuas na Naomh overlooking the sea at Dunlough was another penal altar   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website  |                                     |

| Name/Townland             | Description  | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|---------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Goleen</b>             |  |  |                                     |
| Gubbeen                   | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Schull                              |
| Gubbeen                   | Mass Rock (which can be seen from the new road into Glaum from Schull)   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Schull                              |
| Lowertown                 | Mass Rock (near the borders of Dreenane)   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Schull                              |
| <b>Kilbrittain</b>        |  |  |                                     |
| Baurleigh / Barleyfield   | 'At E side of stream on uncultivated N-facing slope. Rectangular altar (L 2.65m; Wth 1.2m; H 0.3m) of dry-stone construction, set into angle of cliff face.'   | ASI and McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |
| Cloundereen               | Mass Rock in James O'Mahoney's Field   | Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)  |                                     |
| Kilshinahan               | An almost inaccessible Mass Rock is pointed out at Gleann na mBr thar, (the Glen of the Brothers) leading to the suggestion that monks from Kilcrea or Kinsale may have said Mass there in penal times. Tradition tells that Mass Vestments and a chalice were buried in this locality.<br><br>ALSO IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVENTORY OF WEST CORK 1992 'Rock outcrop, in secluded stream valley, where mass was said in penal times according to local information. On ledge above is cut-stone holy water font. In occasional use' | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937) |                                     |
| <b>Kilmacabea</b>         |  |  |                                     |
| Carriglusky (Kilfaunabeg) | Mass Rock in Ringfort near hilltop   | Daly (2005)  |                                     |

| Name/Townland                          | Description   | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Kilmacabea</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |   |  |                                     |
| Killinga / Keelinga                    | 'In pasture, on level ground. Prostrate slab of shale (L 2.7m; Wth 2m; H 1.45m) broken at S end. Adjacent upright (H 0.66m; 0.66m x 0.46m) sandstone pillar, orientated E-W. Pock-marks on SE end of prostrate stone. Locally known as "mass rock".<br>In Mr D O'Brien's Land | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Daly (2005)  |                                     |
| <b>Kilmeen and Castleventry</b>        |   |  |                                     |
| Rossmore                               | In a secluded spot behind Finn's shop   | O'Leary (1975)   |                                     |
| <b>Kilmurry</b>                        |   |  |                                     |
| Aherla More                            | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Kilbonane                           |
| Ballymichael                           | Penal altar at Knocktubber Cnoc an Tobair not far from Tobermurry   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   |                                     |
| Cloghmacow / Clogmacow                 | Mass Rock in Pairc an tSagairt on the left side of the road leading to Kilmurry Church from Lissarda  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   |                                     |
| Lissardagh / Lissarda                  | Clais an Aiffrinn in the land of Thomas Powell in Lissarda  | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website and Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937) |                                     |
| Lissarda                               | Cnoc Aileann in the land of Mr Daniel Wall  | Schools' Manuscript Collection (1937)  |                                     |
| Mahallagh                              | Penal altar   | McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   | Canaway                             |
| <b>Schull</b>                          |   |  |                                     |
| Ardnamanagh                            | At a place called Reagh another penal altar site is still pointed out   | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website   |                                     |
| Cooradarrigan                          | 'In pasture. Fallen stone (L 4.13m; 0.5m x 0.38m); to SW of boulder burials (CO139-037001-, CO139-037002-). Locally said to be "mass rock". (pers. comm. Dr. W. O'Brien')   | ASI and McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |

| Name/Townland                      | Description  | Source   | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|------------------------------------|--|--|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Schull</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |  |  |                                     |
| Coosheen                           | 'According to Ryan (1946, 192), a mass-rock was 'reputed to stand on the opposite side of the road [to a burial ground (CO149-001---)]. Local information confirmed that the mass-rock was located in an overgrown field boundary at the E side of a road and to the E of the burial ground. However, this mass-rock is no longer visible.' Diocese of Cork and Ross Website records three upright stones indicate where the altar stood | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Diocese of Cork and Ross Website |                                     |
| Rathcool                           | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989)  |                                     |
| Ratooragh                          | 'In rough pasture N of rock outcrop, land falls steeply to N. Two sandstone slabs set on edge at approx. right angles (L 0.62m; H 0.55m; Wth 0.14m) (L 1.33m; H 0.78m; Wth 0.13m). Large slab (L 1.55m; H 1.38m; Wth 0.18m) resting on them and on ground to W. Known locally as "mass rock".'   | ASI and McCarthy (1989)                                      |                                     |
| Rossbrin                           | A penal altar site is pointed out at Rossbrin in the townland of Ballycummisk where a cup-shaped depression was known as Leaca na hAltora  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |
| Toormoor                           | Wedge tomb - site continued to be a sacred place with evidence of ritual use during the Bronze Age between 1250-500Bc and later during the Iron Age between 124-224AD. Subsequently, the wedge tomb was used during the eighteenth century by Priests as a Mass Rock.  | Office of Public Works (2011)                                |                                     |
| <b>Togher</b>                      |  |  |                                     |
| Teampuleen                         | Penal site in Lehenagh absorbed in the new parishes which have developed from the Lough  | Diocese of Cork and Ross Website                             |                                     |

| Name/Townland                   | Description   | Source                             | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|---------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Rath and the Islands</b>     |   |                                    |                                     |
| Ballyally                       | Altar Stone   | McCarthy (1989)                    |                                     |
| Ballyally                       | Clais na hAora  | McCarthy (1989)                    |                                     |
| Cape Clear Island               | Baile Iarthach Theas or Southwest Townland. Mass Rock located on Cnoc an Aifrinn  | Lankford (1999)                    |                                     |
| Drombeg                         | 'Upright flat-topped stone (H 0.8m; Wth 0.8m) in burial ground (CO135-096001-) adjoining ringfort (CO135-096003-). Known locally as "mass rock".' | ASI and McCarthy (1989)            |                                     |
| <b>Innishannon/Knockavilla</b>  |   |                                    |                                     |
| Lissanisky                      | Sunday's Well   | McCarthy (1989)                    |                                     |
| Garranewaterig / Garrenwaterig  | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989) and Bolster (1982) |                                     |
| Knockapreghane                  | Mass Rock   | McCarthy (1989)                    | Knockavilla                         |
| <b>Murragh and Templemartin</b> |   |                                    |                                     |
| Moskeagh                        | Carraig an Aifrinn  | McCarthy (1989)                    |                                     |
| Scartnamuck                     | Carraig an Aifrinn  | McCarthy (1989)                    |                                     |
| <b>Ovens/Farran</b>             |   |                                    |                                     |
| Carrigane                       | Ovens Caves – caves to the south of Ovens Bridge  | McCarthy (1989) and Bolster (1982) | Athnowen                            |
| Clashanaffrin                   | Gleann an Aifrinn   | McCarthy (1989)                    | Desertmore                          |
| Walshestown                     | Clashanafrian/Gleann an Altorach  | McCarthy (1989)                    | Athnowen                            |
| <b>Uibh Laoghaire</b>           |   |                                    |                                     |
| Ballingeary                     | Cum an tSagairt   | Ryan (1957)                        |                                     |
| Carrignaneelagh / Carriganeela  | Not far from the old Kilbarry Church. No trace of it now remains  | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957)    |                                     |

| Name/Townland                         | Description   | Source                                  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Uibh Laoire</b> <i>(continued)</i> |   |   |                                     |
| Coolmountain / Tullagh                | ('This is what is known as "The Mass Altar"' (Anon. 1994, 6) and comprises a flat slab of rock (c. 3m x 1.2m; T 0.4m) which lies level with the SSE-sloping ground. The upper surface of the slab is level but there is a drop on its S side where it is supported towards either end by two orthostatic blocks. There is a chamber-like area (D 0.6m) dug out from under the slab between the supports.' | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957) |                                     |
| Cooragreenane / Cooligrenane          | In the angle between the southern Lake road and the Mall road   | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957)         |                                     |
| Coornahahilly                         | Hidden between two cliffs of rock. Both approaches to it are through marshy ground. The spot must have been chosen so that no stranger could come on the congregation unawares during Mass  | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957)         |                                     |
| Curraheen                             | 'Roadside. Flat slab raised above another slab by two small pillars; lower slab atop plinth of coursed stones. Roughly incised cross on lower slab; upper slab adorned with quartzite pebbles and flowers. Plaque reads "Altar of Penal Times - Mass was said here 1640-1800".'   | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957)         |                                     |
| Currahy                               | Mass Rock to the north of ruined church at Currahy  | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957)         |                                     |

| Name/Townland                              | Description  | Source                          | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--|--|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Uibh Laoghaire</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |  |                                 |                                     |
| Derreenacuha / Derreenacusha               | 'in the days when the Penal Laws were applied in all their severity St Finbarr's Guagán, because of its isolation, was a relatively safe place in which to say and to hear Mass, and people travelled thither by road and path from areas far beyond the bounds of the valley. One of the most famous 'Mass Paths' of those times was that which led from the Borlin Valley to the west via the Goulane stream and down into Com Rua by way of the savage cleft of Poll. Until modern times many pilgrims walked this precipitous route to visit the Island while another less precipitous but longer route was used via Tuarín Beag to bring the dead for internment in the Holy ground of Guagán' (Forest and Wildlife Service cited in unnamed/undated paperwork) | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957) |                                     |
| Gortnahoughtee                             | Carraig an tSeipeil  | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957) |                                     |
| Kilmore                                    | In rock outcropping to N of possible early ecclesiastical enclosure (CO081-038----), burial ground (CO081-003----) and souterrain (CO081-035----). Large slab (3.15m x 2.3m; T c. 0.3m) resting on second similar slab. Sheltered on N side by outcropping rock. Natural, roughly rectangular hollow (0.5m x 0.5m; D 0.19m) in centre of large flat slab. Known locally as mass-rock.  | ASI                             |                                     |
| Moneylea / Monalea                         | Mass Shed. Near the top on the south side  | McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957) |                                     |

| Name/Townland                              | Description  | Source  | Ancient Parish where given or known |
|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| <b>Uibh Laoghaire</b> ( <i>continued</i> ) |  |   |                                     |
| Shehy Beg / Tooreen                        | 'In rough heather-clad hill grazing, on the S-facing slopes of Shehy Beg. A stone slab (1.8m E-W; 1.5m N-S; H 0.8m), resting on a table-like area of outcropping rock, is known locally as a mass-rock. Two smaller slabs, which lean to the E, are situated to the E of the mass-rock and may be the remains of a small animal shelter. The mass-rock is c. 70m to the S of the old 'Butter Path', which runs along the lower slopes of Shehy Beg.'         | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Ryan (1957)                   |                                     |
| <b>Watergrasshill / Glenville</b>          |  |   |                                     |
| Ballycurrany                               | Mass Rock  | McCarthy (1989)   |                                     |
| Blackstone Bridge                          | Mass Station   | Power (1917 - 1919)                                       |                                     |
| Chimneyfield / Glenwillin / Glenville      | Beal atha an Aifrinn<br>'Rock platform on E side of river Bride with rock cliff rising behind. White metal cross hangs suspended down cliff face. Plaque with inscription in both Irish and English reads 'Mass was said here in Penal times'. Access to W is via iron and wooden bridge; to S path leads N from road.'<br><br>The rock was in the parish of Dunbullogue while across the river where the congregation stood was in the parish of Ardnageehy | ASI and McCarthy (1989) and Power (1917) and Healy (2000) |                                     |
| Coome                                      | Mass Rock  | Healy (2000)  |                                     |

## **Appendix 2**

### **Data Chart**

#### **Mass Rocks Visited**

| <b>Mass Rock Site</b>  | <b>Earthfast Boulder</b> | <b>Natural Geological</b> | <b>Man-made Monument</b>     | <b>Ancient Monument</b>     | <b>Wood</b> | <b>Field</b> | <b>Mountain / High elevation</b> | <b>Water Source</b>    |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Mishells</b>        | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                              |                             |             | x            |                                  | x<br>Ford              |
| <b>Ballymah</b>        |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                              |                             | x           |              |                                  | x<br>River<br>Junction |
| <b>Ballycurreen</b>    |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Face         |                              |                             | x           |              |                                  | x<br>Stream            |
| <b>Ballingeary</b>     | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                              |                             |             |              | x                                |                        |
| <b>Ballycullenhane</b> |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                              |                             | x           |              |                                  | x<br>Stream            |
| <b>Cullomane West</b>  | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                              |                             |             |              | x                                |                        |
| <b>Councambeg</b>      |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Face         |                              |                             | x           |              |                                  | X<br>Coastal           |
| <b>Coorleigh South</b> |                          |                           |                              | X<br>Cup<br>Marked<br>Stone |             | x            |                                  |                        |
| <b>Drombeg</b>         |                          |                           |                              | X<br>Ringfort               |             | x            |                                  | X<br>Coastal           |
| <b>Ardrah</b>          |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                              |                             |             | x            |                                  |                        |
| <b>Gortnamucklagh</b>  |                          |                           | X<br>Stone<br>Built<br>Altar |                             |             |              | x                                |                        |
| <b>Dunmanway</b>       |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                              |                             |             | x            |                                  |                        |

| <b>Mass Rock Site</b> | <b>Earthfast Boulder</b> | <b>Natural Geological</b> | <b>Man-made Monument</b>    | <b>Ancient Monument</b> | <b>Wood</b> | <b>Field</b> | <b>Mountain / High elevation</b> | <b>Water Source</b>     |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Enniskeane</b>     | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                             |                         |             | x            |                                  | X<br>Holy<br>Well       |
| <b>Kinneigh</b>       | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                             |                         | x           |              |                                  | X<br>Holy<br>Well       |
| <b>Dungannon</b>      |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                             |                         | x           |              |                                  | x<br>Stream             |
| <b>Kilshinahan</b>    |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                             |                         | x           |              |                                  | x<br>Stream             |
| <b>Coolaclevane</b>   |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                             |                         |             | x            |                                  |                         |
| <b>Cooldaniel</b>     |                          |                           |                             | X<br>Wedge<br>Tomb      |             |              | x                                |                         |
| <b>Kilnadur</b>       |                          |                           | X<br>Stone<br>Built<br>Base |                         |             | x            |                                  |                         |
| <b>Commons</b>        |                          |                           | X<br>Man<br>Made<br>Altar   |                         |             | x            |                                  | X<br>Well               |
| <b>Carhoo South</b>   |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                             |                         |             | x            |                                  | x<br>Ravine<br>(stream) |
| <b>Coolmountain</b>   |                          |                           | X<br>Man<br>Made<br>Altar   |                         | x           |              |                                  | x<br>Ravine<br>(stream) |
| <b>Curraheen</b>      |                          |                           | X<br>Man<br>Made<br>Altar   |                         | x           |              |                                  | X<br>Lake               |

| <b>Mass Rock Site</b>         | <b>Earthfast Boulder</b> | <b>Natural Geological</b> | <b>Man-made Monument</b>  | <b>Ancient Monument</b> | <b>Wood</b> | <b>Field</b> | <b>Mountain / High elevation</b> | <b>Water Source</b>              |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <b>Lady's Well/Beach</b>      |                          |                           | X<br>Man<br>Made<br>Altar |                         |             | x            |                                  | X<br>Holy Well<br>and<br>Coastal |
| <b>Derrynafinchin</b>         |                          |                           |                           | X<br>Stone<br>Circle    |             | x            |                                  | x<br>Stream                      |
| <b>Coomkeen</b>               |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                           |                         |             | x            |                                  | x<br>Stream                      |
| <b>Chimneyfield/Glenville</b> |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Face         |                           |                         | x           |              |                                  | X<br>River                       |
| <b>Coornahahilly</b>          |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Face         |                           |                         | x           |              |                                  | X<br>Lake                        |
| <b>Shehy Beg/Toreen</b>       |                          |                           | X<br>Man<br>Made<br>Altar |                         |             |              | x                                |                                  |
| <b>Gortnahoughtee</b>         |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                           |                         |             |              | x                                |                                  |
| <b>Ardura Beg</b>             |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                           |                         |             | x            |                                  | x<br>Coastal                     |
| <b>Foherlagh</b>              |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                           |                         |             |              | x                                | X<br>Holy<br>Well                |
| <b>Toormore</b>               |                          |                           |                           | X<br>Wedge<br>Tomb      |             | x            |                                  | x<br>Coastal                     |
| <b>Calloras Oughter</b>       |                          | X<br>Rock<br>Outcrop      |                           |                         |             |              | x                                | X<br>Holy<br>Well                |

| <b>Mass Rock Site</b> | <b>Earthfast Boulder</b> | <b>Natural Geological</b> | <b>Man-made Monument</b> | <b>Ancient Monument</b> | <b>Wood</b> | <b>Field</b> | <b>Mountain / High elevation</b> | <b>Water Source</b> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Dromaclarig</b>    | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                          |                         | x           |              |                                  |                     |
| <b>Currahy</b>        | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                          |                         |             |              | x                                |                     |
| <b>Tawnies Lower</b>  | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                          |                         |             | x            |                                  |                     |
| <b>Kilnarovagh</b>    | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                          |                         |             | x            |                                  |                     |
| <b>Rossmore</b>       | X<br>Stone<br>Boulder    |                           |                          |                         |             | x            |                                  |                     |

## **Appendix 3**

### **Data Chart**

#### **Mass Houses and Private Chapels**

#### **Extracted From**

#### **The Report on the State of Popery 1731**

## Mass Houses

### Diocese of Cork

|                              |                           |  |  |           |                                     |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--|--|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| City<br>South Suburbs        | Mass House                | On the same place as a former thatched one stood           | Slated   | 1728      |                                     |
| City<br>South Suburbs        | Mass House                |  | Thatched   | Pre 1714  | Replaced by Mass House above        |
| City<br>North Suburbs        | Mass House                | On a new foundation near old St Mary Shandon's Church Yard | On a fine eminence in a Large Sumptuous manner             | 1730      | Possibly listed as Ballinadee andc. |
| City<br>North Suburbs        | Mass House                | Near old St Mary Shandon's Church Yard                     | Large and convenient                                       | Pre 1730  | Replaced by Mass House above        |
| City<br>North Suburbs        | Popish Chapel             |  |  |           |                                     |
| City<br>North Suburbs        | Popish Chapel             |  |  |           |                                     |
| City<br>Cotner's Lane        | Mass House or Chapel      |  | Of some standing   | ?         |                                     |
| City<br>Various              | Private Chapels in houses |  |  | ?         |                                     |
| City<br>Christ Church Parish | Mass House                |  | Very much enlarged and beautified within in last six years | Pre 1714  |                                     |
| City<br>Christ Church Parish | Private Chapels in houses |  |  |           |                                     |
| City<br>St Paul's Parish     | Mass House                |  |  | Post 1714 |                                     |
| City<br>St Paul's Parish     | Private Chapels in houses |  |  |           | Listed as St Pauls andc             |
| City<br>Cahirlagh            | Mass House                |  |  | 1724      | Listed as St Pauls andc             |

**Mass Houses**

| <b>Diocese of Cork</b> <i>(continued)</i> |                                       |                     |  |                  |                             |
|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--|------------------|-----------------------------|
| Cork Parish of Shandon Cathedral          | Mass House                            |                     | Lately finished                                  | 1730/1           |                             |
| Cork Parish of Shandon                    | Mass House<br>Called a Fryary by some |                     |  | 1727             |                             |
| Coppingers Lane Parish of Shandon         | Popish Chapel                         | Near the old church | Now deserted but I hear there are several others |                  |                             |
| Cork St Michael Parish                    | Mass House                            |                     |  | 1723             | Listed as St Michael andc.  |
| Cork St Bridgett Parish                   | Mass House                            |                     |  | Pre 1714         | Listed as St Michael andc.  |
| Cork Bally [ ] Parish                     | Private Houses                        |                     |  |                  |                             |
| Cork Bally [ ] Parish                     | In ye open fields                     |                     |  |                  |                             |
| Cork                                      |                                       |                     |  |                  |                             |
| Inshiguilah Parish                        | Shade over the priest                 |                     |  | Pre 1714 to date | Listed as Inshiguilah andc. |
| Inshiguilah Parish                        | Shade over the priest                 |                     |  | Pre 1714 to date | Listed as Inshiguilah andc. |
| Inshiguilah Parish                        | Shade over the priest                 |                     |  | Pre 1714 to date | Listed as Inshiguilah andc. |
| Kilmichael Parish                         | Shade over the priest                 |                     |  | Pre 1714 to date | Listed as Inshiguilah andc. |
| Kilmichael Parish                         | Shade over the priest                 |                     |  | Pre 1714 to date | Listed as Inshiguilah andc. |

## Mass Houses

### Diocese of Cork *(continued)*

|                      |                       |   |   |                   |                              |
|----------------------|-----------------------|---|---|-------------------|------------------------------|
| Macloneigh Parish    | Shade over the priest |   |   | ?                 | Listed as Inshiguilah andc.  |
| Ballinade Parish     | Mass House            |   |   | 1730              | Listed as Inshiguilah andc.? |
| Desert Surges Parish | Mass House            |   |   | Built 1714 - 1727 |                              |
| Desert Surges Parish |                       | Mass is often said in several places  |   |                   |                              |
| Dromaleague Parish   | Mass House            | Often moved from place to place – the one now in being scarcely six months standing | Small hut of cabin covering an altar                | Pre 1714          | Listed as Dromaleague        |
| Caheragh Parish      | Mass House            | Fixed place   | Small hut of cabin covering an altar                | Pre 1714 to date  | Listed as Dromaleague        |
| Fflanlobis Parish    | Hut open at one end   |   |   | Pre 1714 to date  | Listed as Drynagh andc.      |
| Fflanlobis Parish    | Hut open at one end   |   |   | Pre 1714 to date  | Listed as Drynagh andc.      |
| Fflanlobis Parish    | Hut open at one end   |   |   | Pre 1714 to date  | Listed as Drynagh andc.      |
| Drynagh Parish       | Hut open at one end   |   |   | Pre 1714 to date  | Listed as Drynagh andc.      |
| Kilmorrhagh Parish   | Mass House            |   | Spacious yard, well enclosed and planted with trees | Built 1714 - 1727 | Listed as Kilbonane andc.    |
| Templemartin Parish  | Mass House            |   |   | Built 1714 - 1727 | Listed as Kilbonane andc.    |
| Canoway Parish       | Mass House            |   |   | Built 1714 - 1727 | Listed as Kilbonane andc.    |

| Mass Houses |  |  |  |  |  |
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|
|-------------|--|--|--|--|--|

|                             |  |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
| Diocese of Cork (continued) |  |  |  |  |  |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|--|--|

|                    |  |  |  |          |                         |
|--------------------|--|--|--|----------|-------------------------|
| Kilbrogan Parish   | Private cabin                                      |  |  |          |                         |
| Rathclaren Parish  | Private cabins                                     |  |  |          |                         |
| Rathclaren Parish  | In open fields                                     |  |  |          |                         |
| Kilbrittain Parish | Private cabins                                     |  |  |          |                         |
| Kilbrittain Parish | In open fields                                     |  |  |          |                         |
| Kinsale Parish     | Mass House   |  | Repaired very lately                             | Pre 1714 |                         |
| Kinsale Parish     | Mass House   |  | Now building which we suspect to be a Mass House | 1731     |                         |
| Kinsale Parish     | Private Chapel in House                            |  |  |          |                         |
| Kinsale Parish     | Private Chapel in House                            |  |  |          |                         |
| Kinsale Parish     | Assembly place for Mass without any house or walls |  |  |          |                         |
| Kinsale Parish     | Assembly place for Mass without any house or walls |  |  |          |                         |
| Killmoe Parish     | Mass House or thatched cabin                       |  | Frequently rebuilt yet fixed in place            | Pre 1714 | Listed as Killmoe andc. |
| Skull Parish       | Mass House or thatched cabin                       |  | Frequently rebuilt yet fixed in place            | Pre 1714 | Listed as Killmoe andc. |

## Mass Houses

### Diocese of Cork *(continued)*

|                    |  |  |                                       |          |                             |
|--------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Skull Parish       | Mass House or thatched cabin             |  | Frequently rebuilt yet fixed in place | Pre 1714 | Listed as Kilmoe andc.      |
| Killnaglory Parish | Public place for Mass but not Mass House |  |                                       | Pre 1714 | Listed as Killnaglory andc. |
| Ringroan Parish    | Public place for Mass but not Mass House |  |                                       | Pre 1714 | Listed as Killnaglory andc. |
| Kilroane Parish    | Private Chapel                           |  |                                       |          |                             |

### Diocese of Ross

|   |   |  |  |           |                               |
|---|---|--|--|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Cape Cleer Parish                                   | Mass House                                |  |  | Post 1714 | Listed under Capecleer and c. |
| Kilcoe Parish                                       | Mass House                                |  |  | Post 1714 | Listed under Capecleer and c. |
| Aghadowne Parish                                    | Mass House                                |  |  | Post 1714 | Listed under Capecleer and c. |
| Aghadowne Parish                                    | Mass House                                |  |  | Post 1714 | Listed under Capecleer and c. |
| Abbystrawry Parish                                  | Mass House                                |  |  | Post 1714 | Listed under Capecleer and c. |
| Abbystrawry Parish                                  | Mass House                                |  |  | Post 1714 | Listed under Capecleer and c. |
| Castlehaven Parish                                  | Mass House                                |  |  | 1729      | Listed as Catlehaven andc.    |
| Myrus Parish  | Mass House                                |  |  | Pre 1711  | Listed as Catlehaven andc.    |
| Killmacabea Parish                                  | Mass House                                |  |  | 1714      | Listed as Catlehaven andc.    |
| Tullagh alias Baltimire and Creagh alias Scibbereen | Mass House or cabin erected over an altar |  |  | 1723      |                               |

|  |   |  |   |              |                                     |
|--|---|--|---|--------------|-------------------------------------|
| Parishes   |   |  |   |              |                                     |
| <b>Mass Houses</b>   |   |  |   |              |                                     |
| <b>Diocese of Ross</b> <i>(continued)</i>                                |   |  |   |              |                                     |
| Tullagh alias<br>Baltimire and<br>Creagh alias<br>Scibbereen<br>Parishes | Mass House<br>or cabin<br>erected over<br>an altar      |  |   | 1723         |                                     |
| Tullagh alias<br>Baltimire and<br>Creagh alias<br>Scibbereen<br>Parishes | Mass House<br>or cabin<br>erected over<br>an altar      |  |   | 1723         |                                     |
| Tullagh alias<br>Baltimire and<br>Creagh alias<br>Scibbereen<br>Parishes | Mass House<br>or cabin<br>erected over<br>an altar      |  |   | 1723         |                                     |
| Timoleague<br>Parish   | Mass House  |  |   | Post<br>1714 | Listed under<br>Timoleague<br>andc. |
| Lislee Parish  | Mass House  |  |   | Post<br>1714 | Listed under<br>Timoleague<br>andc. |
| Rosse Parish   | Private<br>houses                                       |  |   |              |                                     |
| Rosse Parish   | In the field<br>under a<br>hedge                        |  |   |              |                                     |
| Rathcony<br>Parish   | Chapel  |  |   |              |                                     |
| Kilroan Parish   | Chapel  |  | Celebrated<br>Mass in a malt<br>house<br>belonging to<br>private<br>gentleman,<br>lately<br>converted in to<br>a chapel | 1730/1       |                                     |
| Killaconenagh<br>Parish  | Small hut<br>with a little<br>covering for<br>the altar |  |   | Pre<br>1714  | Listed as<br>Killaconenagh<br>andc. |
| Killmana Parish  | Small hut<br>with a little                              |  |   | Pre<br>1714  | Listed as<br>Killaconenagh          |

|   |  |  |  |          |                               |
|---|--|--|--|----------|-------------------------------|
|   | covering for the altar                         |  |  |          | andc.                         |
| <b>Mass Houses</b>                        |  |  |  |          |                               |
| <b>Diocese of Ross</b> <i>(continued)</i> |  |  |  |          |                               |
| Killcatern Parish                         | Small hut with a little covering for the altar |  |  | Pre 1714 | Listed as Killaconenagh andc. |