



# COPPER COAST CONNECTS

*The Journal of the  
Copper Coast UNESCO  
Global Geopark*

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# COPPER COAST CONNECTS:

the e-Journal of The Copper Coast UNESCO Global Geopark.

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The Journal invites contributions on any dimension of the history and heritage of the Copper Coast as noted previously. These could be very brief articles or extend up to several thousand words or more. Illustrated articles will be particularly welcome, but in all instances, we will require that the sources of information cited in articles be provided. While the preferred submission format guidelines are outlined below, any prospective contributor should not be deterred by difficulty in meeting these guidelines, as the Editor/ Editorial Board will be able to provide assistance:

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- Unformatted text, Calibri 10 point, left aligned, double space lines.
- Format in MS Word. Use no more than three levels of headings.
- Article to include a very brief abstract immediately below the article title and name of author
- Good quality (minimum 300dpi resolution), digital colour illustrations welcome. Please supply as separate TIFF or JPG files and **do not** embed in Word documents: their intended location therein to be indicated "Figure 1 here" etc.

**References.** Use the end note format only. Full references therein to be cited using the Harvard system on first use, as per this example:

- Cowman, D. 2007. The Mining Company of Ireland's operations at Glendasan-Glendalough 1825-1895. *The Journal of the Mining Heritage Trust of Ireland*, Number 7, pp. 45-50.

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- Op. cit. - if used later in the text, in the format: surname, initials and year, op. cit., page number.

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# Churches Medieval to Modern – samples from the Copper Coast.

Des Cowman

## Abstract

Nothing material remains of churches built before c.1150 in our area. This paper traces what is known of the evolution of these medieval churches up to the present. A key period is the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Christian church in Ireland split into what we now call Catholic and Church of Ireland (the “official” church).

## Background

Lost centuries of indigenous ecclesiastical history are reflected in the many local townlands which incorporate the word “Kill” in their name, although containing scant current features with no church tradition. Continental influences led to the building of stone churches and the establishment of monasteries, but it was not until the late 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries that the Normans formalised the parochial system that has lasted till the present.

When the small, ruined parish churches (see below) were first built is not recorded nor the part they played in the lives of the people over three hundred years or so. Normally only conflict enters the records, as such happened with the late 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation. Thereafter, in theory, everybody and all these parish structures became Anglican. Why that did not happen is much debated but a particular dimension in the Waterford/Lismore diocese was the appointment of a succession of unworthy bishops between the establishment of the new church in 1559 and about 1620.<sup>1</sup>

The result, as reported in 1615 for the old (smaller) diocese of Waterford, was that many parish churches had fallen into various states of disrepair in the sixty plus years since they became the property of the Established Church.<sup>2</sup> Kilburn was

“down to the ground”. “In ruins” were Kilour and Drumcannon. Kilcarragh, Kilmeaden, Kilmacomb and Kilbride were roofless. Two were partly roofed: in Kilmacteague it was the nave only (the responsibility of the local community) and in Killoteran it was the chancel only (the responsibility of the clergy). A special note is made of Lisnakill: “*roof of chancel fallen and broken down by soldiers and made fire of it*”. These were returning from the Battle of Kinsale. A further symbol of failure is reported: “*We find no school master to teach public schools in this diocese but Mr. Flahie and do not find he comes to church!*”

The inability of the Anglican Church to establish control over the parish churches could have given the opportunity for a dynamic Counter Reformation to man them post the Council of Trent held between 1545 and 1563. In 1631<sup>3</sup>, the Catholic Bishop of Waterford, Patrick Commerford ascribes his failure to do so upon the indolence of his clergy:

*“most of the clergymen are idle --- (and) playing or drinking or vagabonding”*. He says that when food appears on various tables several of them appear. *“Most of them are unlearned”* and make little effort to provide religious instruction: some had gone over to the Anglican church.

Therefore, neither religion took responsibility for the parishes which were let fall into ruin. The wars from 1641 to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century allowed no opportunity for any restoration. Therefore, it seems that for over a century and a half there was no organised religion in the local countryside. However, while churches themselves were no longer in use, people still needed to be buried and so the land around their ruins continued in use. Also, the Anglican Church appointed nominal vicars or curates to whom tithes were allotted and the relict parishes continued as civil entities.

However, in the late 1700s the Anglican Church reorganised itself. Its bishops had to give their first year’s income (“First Fruits”) and this was used to build new churches to a generally standard design (Fig. 1).



**Figure 1.** Bishops and some clergy were required to pay part of their first year's income ("First Fruits") into a development fund. This was used to subsidise the building of new churches to a standard design, such as that exemplified by the now deconsecrated Knockmahon (Monksland) Church above, with the entrance through a bell tower. National grid reference: 643453 599092

What follows is the subsequent history of a sampling of these parishes from the Copper Coast.

## Stradbally

The shells of the surviving medieval nave and chancel suggest they were built and used at different times while the ruined defensive tower house alongside also shows two phases of building (Figures 2 – 4). This possibly reflects the fluctuating fortunes of the undefended medieval village of Stradbally in the strife-torn centuries after about 1300. Nothing has been found of that entity and it is not known whether the current 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century village is even on the same site. The adjoining Church of Ireland church (Fig. 3) was built in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century on the grounds of its ruined predecessor; its three registers date from 1798. It underwent major renovation in 1867.<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 2.** The ruins of the medieval church of Stradbally, with remains of the priest's tower residence at the far, chancel, eastern end of the building. The nave occupies most of the visible extent of the building up to the western, gable wall in the right foreground. Grid reference: 636728 597368



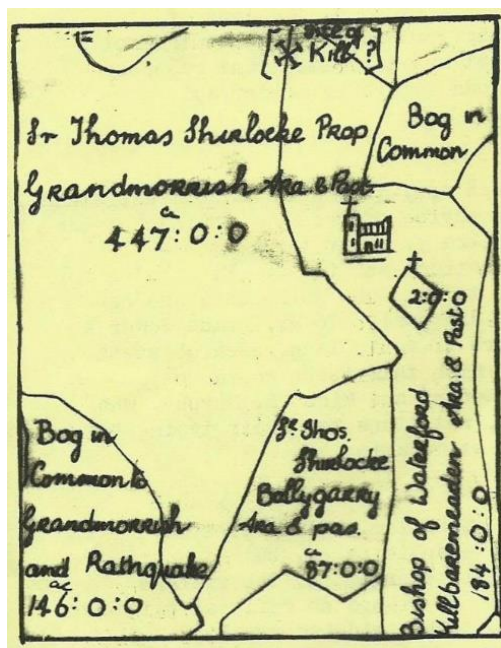
**Figure 3.** The extant ruins of the Priest's tower residence, which shows at least two phases of construction.



**Figure 4.** The late 18<sup>th</sup> Century St. James, Church of Ireland church built adjacent to the Medieval church, the western end of which is visible on the right.

## Kill

Nothing remains of the Pre-Norman wooden structures implied by the nine local townlands having “Kill” in their placenames. Only Kilbarrymeaden suggests continuity from Gaelic into Norman times. While this has been the subject of an earlier study a fuller context is provided here.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 5.** A c. 1650 map depicting a stylised drawing of Kilbarrymeaden church with what may be a glebe just below it. The present church and village of Kill are located approximately at the top centre of the image. Grandmorrish = Gardenmorris.

The medieval church of Kilbarrymeadan, which was owned by the Bishop of Waterford, was possibly located on the site of a pre-Norman monastery, to judge by the presence of a *bullan*<sup>6</sup> stone in the adjoining field. Little else is known about it up to the 1615 survey except that its lands were on long lease to two aldermen of Waterford city. In Cromwellian times it was indicated on a map with an ecclesiastical building nearby<sup>7</sup> (possibly the residence of the rector). The status of the medieval church in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century is difficult to ascertain. Was it in use when Nicholas and Alice Power were laid to rest and given a slab tomb in the body of the church in 1602? In 1659 Kilbarrymeadan was still the most populous townland locally, including three “English” people.<sup>8</sup> Burials continued there, the last recorded being in 1776 (Richard Power). Significantly, however, they

include a priest, Father Michael Kearney, aged 54 buried here in 1760.<sup>9</sup> Could a chalice dated 1752 for “Kill” have been his?<sup>10</sup> The transition to what is suggested as a temporary church around the Manacaum was c. 1704 when a John Carroll was said to be parish priest.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 6.** The overgrown ruins of the church depicted on the 1650 map, reproduced in Fig. 5. Grid reference: 646317 343602.

The earliest marriage and baptism records date from 1797. The Power O’Shee family of Gardenmorris donated part of their estate for the building of a new church and such is shown on a map of 1818 where it is historically called “Kilbarrymeadon”<sup>12</sup> which may have been abbreviated to a simpler “Kill”. Likewise, the formal name for the schools there was Kilbarrymeadon.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile the medieval church was then inappropriately called “Kylmore” (= big church) and a non-resident Church of Ireland rector (although a glebe is described there) was still being nominated by the bishop in the early 1800s.



**Figure 7.** The bell tower and gable wall, the principal remains of the c. 1800 church in Kill. Grid reference: 645450 602728.

A bell tower on the gable is all that is left of the c.1800 church in Kill (Fig. 7: the part on the left was added later). This had been abandoned when the present church was opened in 1874. However, as there was no question of reconstituting the old church the recommendation was to build a new Church of Ireland church in Dunhill parish (which happened at Annestown).<sup>14</sup>

## Monksland

South of here lies another anomaly - a few coastal townlands which formed a Monksland parish, a detached part of a parish in Tipperary. The reason goes back to 1170 when the Cistercian monks of Inishlounaght, outside Clonmel, founded a daughter house in Glanawyden (The Valley of the Virgin). Not until 1978 did it emerge conclusively that the scant ruins upstream from Knockmahon, in the northeast corner of Ballinagigla townland, and recorded as a "Church, in ruins" on the first edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of c. 1840-1841, were the sole remnants of that establishment, which had been closed by the Normans in 1228 after less than 60 years.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps whatever monks died in that period were buried across the stream in Faugheen cemetery, inaugurating a local custom to judge by the accumulating bodies raising the elevation of the ground within the perimeter wall (Fig. 8). At some stage a little chapel was erected there, possibly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century<sup>16</sup> when headstones came into use. The current headstones range from 1723 to 2012.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 8.** The overgrown low mound in the centre of the

field in the near foreground marks all that remains of the Cistercian monastery (grid reference: 643509 601124). The white building beyond the stream was possibly a mortuary chapel for the adjoining graveyard, the ground level of which is conspicuously higher than that outside the perimeter wall.

That another church was built in Monksland in the early 1830s (the name had continued in use after 600 years) was unrelated to that tradition - it was built to serve the Protestant miners flooding into the area, some of whom are buried there. One report states that it was built with a grant of £900 and opened in September 1833,<sup>18</sup> while its records begin in 1836. Within twenty years it needed major repair.<sup>19</sup> Sixteen years later it was out of commission again for the summer and was also refurbished: "*The pulpit, reading desk and pews are beautiful examples of gothic architecture*".<sup>20</sup> It is now the Copper Coast Centre (Fig. 9).



**Figure 9.** The deconsecrated Monksland, ex-Church of Ireland church which now serves as the visitor centre of the Copper Coast UNESCO Global Geopark.

There is one other church nearby which was built originally in the early 1840s as a temperance hall for miners. With the devastation of the famine, it became a temporary infirmary and afterwards it was handed over to the Catholic Church which still uses it as a chapel-of-ease for Kill parish.

## Dunhill/Annestown

The large medieval church at Dunhill had a very different origin to the others as it was built to serve the community that developed around Dunhill Castle. They both shared the same fate during the Cromwellian wars to judge from the fact that the residential tower of the priest was apparently blown up with, freakishly, the corner block containing the mural stairs surviving intact, albeit at a bizarre angle (Fig. 10). There were still 23 people living in the area in 1659, two of them “English”. Again, the tradition of burial remained long after the church had fallen into ruins, the headstones dating between 1753 to 1821.<sup>21</sup> By the latter date a reviving Catholic church decided to abandon the ruins and build afresh with adjoining graveyard and a new settlement followed it. That a Protestant First Fruits church was built downstream at Annestown seems coincidental and resultant on the descendants of the Cromwellian planters forming a settlement there.



**Figure 10.** The ivy-covered remains of the medieval church that served Dunhill castle. The stone staircase lying at a marked angle from the vertical in the left foreground is all that now remains of the priest’s tower house. Grid reference: 650299 600829.

## Fenor

The scant remains of the Knights Templar outlier church at Islandikane (variously spelled) were possibly abandoned as early as 1312 when that order was suppressed. It was in “ruins” by 1615 and had ceased to be even a centre of population by 1659 which is probably why there are few visible burials there.<sup>22</sup> Its remains were taken over by the Established Church and it was one of the sinecures recorded as having been granted to Maurice

Harney as curate in 1615. There are gaps in the records but there is a list of nominal curates appointed there between 1731 and Disestablishment in 1870.<sup>23</sup>

It is therefore likely that all tradition associated with that earlier establishment would have been lost by the time a Catholic church was built in Fenor around 1800 and its relative proximity purely coincidental. The present church there was built in 1894 as a permanent successor to both of the now vanished churches (Fig. 11).



**Figure 11.** Fenor church built in 1894. Grid reference: 652966 601360.

## Reisk

Reisk may have been a pre-Norman foundation to judge from the suggestion that two-thirds of its tithes were to be put towards the maintenance of the 12<sup>th</sup> century Leper Hospital in Waterford<sup>24</sup> and this was given formal status in notice from Dublin Castle of 1834.<sup>25</sup> There are sporadic references to pre-reformation vicars here in 1336 and 1481 and to post-reformation curates in 1615.<sup>26</sup> The nave (maintained by the congregation) was in use in 1615 though the clergy had not paid for the roofing of the chancel. In 1799 Reisk was united with Kilmeaden civil parish which did have a resident vicar<sup>27</sup>. The last curate of the established church was John Burke, also vicar of Kilmeaden and curate of St Patrick’s, Waterford as well as Reisk from 1837: it is unlikely that he ever took services there.<sup>28</sup>



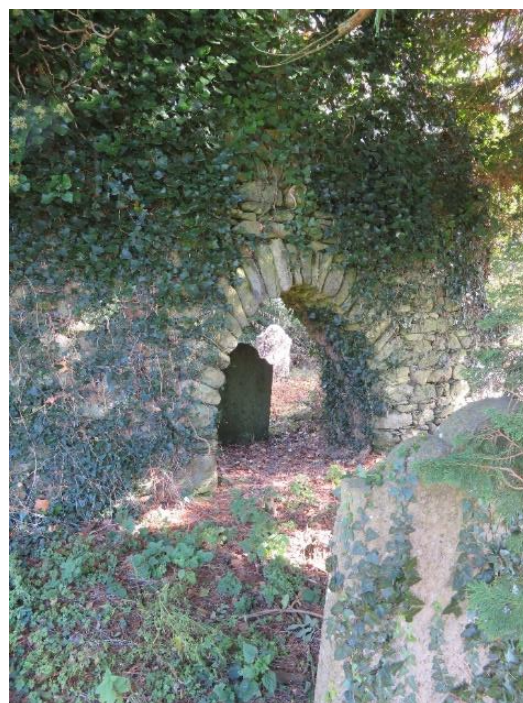
**Figure 12.** Tombstones marking the most recent burials within what was originally the nave of Reisk church. Note the prominent increase in ground level due to superimposed burials and compare with Figures 13 and 14. Grid reference: 653968 604225.

In fact Reisk had apparently been quietly taken over by the Catholics and was apparently a functioning parish in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to judge from the burials there of three men described as “Parish Priests” of Reisk: a James Fennel, aged 89, buried in 1747; Maurice Walsh in 1778 and John Meaney in 1800.<sup>29</sup> The first of these would have been born in 1658 and may be the same man noted as a licenced priest in 1704, having been ordained by the Archbishop of Cashel in 1688 and “*pretends to*” Dunhill, Reisk and Islandkane.<sup>30</sup> The third priest buried here, John Meaney, is credited with having built a thatched chapel at Dunhill and from such structures his predecessors might also have functioned. Three pieces of evidence suggest that these 18<sup>th</sup> century priests were able to draw support from a rich hinterland:

- “Dues” paid by parishioners at Easter and Christmas amounted to £50 in 1801 and fees for births marriages and deaths to £54.
- Secondly the number of often quite elaborate 18<sup>th</sup> century headstones in the churchyard in Reisk.
- And thirdly a silver chalice has survived, presented by Geoffry and Margaret Hearn “*to the parish of Reisk, 1757*”.<sup>31</sup>



**Figure 13.** The western, gable entrance of Reisk medieval church. Note the prominent difference in ground level to the south and west of the ruin, compared with the much lower level on the north side (in shadow).



**Figure 14.** The doorway in the western gable wall of Reisk church. The abnormally low archway in part reflects roof collapse inside the building (far side of wall in this view) but particularly from successive, superimposed burials gradually raising the ground level on both sides of the arch. See prominently raised ground levels clearly visible in Figures 12 and 13 also.

There were many other burials there in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but it is unlikely that there was a functioning church and by 1829 Reisk Catholic parish and Dunhill had been amalgamated.<sup>32</sup>



- <sup>1</sup> See Cowman, Des (1984). "The Reformation Bishops of Waterford and Lismore", *Decies XXVII* (Autumn), pp. 31-38.
- <sup>2</sup> Power, Patrick (1913) "Material Conditions of the Churches in Waterford" W&SEAS Journal, Vol. XVI, p 104-121. This is a transcription into an investigation by Archbishop Myler McGrath into the state of churches in 1615 in the Waterford part of the diocese of Waterford and Lismore.
- <sup>3</sup> Jennings, Brendan (ed) *Wadding Papers 1614-'38* (IMC 1953) p 609. One of a series of rather polemic letters from Patrick Commerford (alias William Brown), 30 Oct 1631 to Luke Wadding.
- <sup>4</sup> Representative Church Body (RCB) Dublin, plans 508/9, 5310/11.
- <sup>5</sup> Cowman, Des "(2019) "The Village of Kill Revisited", *Decies* 75, p 16-34.
- <sup>6</sup> These are stones used in the grinding of corn and are particularly associated with early monasteries.
- <sup>7</sup> National Archives, Down Survey map.
- <sup>8</sup> Pender, S. (ed 1939) *Census of Ireland 1659* SO, p. 342
- <sup>9</sup> Rev. P. Power (1896), "The Ancient Ruined Churches of County Waterford" W&SEIARSJ Vol 2, No. 10, p. 198.
- <sup>10</sup> Rev. P. Power (1937), *Waterford and Lismore: Compendious history of the united diocese* (Dublin) p. 195
- <sup>11</sup> Rev. P. Power (1896), "The Ancient Ruined Churches of County Waterford" W&SEIARSJ Vol 2, No. 10, p. 198. He states that the 1704 church "stood on the summit of what is now a furze covered knoll at the junction of two roads half way between the present church of Kill and its predecessor". He gives no source.
- <sup>12</sup> NA Grand Jury Map. This is the name also used in the parish registers (nli.ie) from 1797 to 1830.
- <sup>13</sup> Parliamentary Papers (PP) 1835, Report Commissioners of Public Instruction (Ireland): 2<sup>nd</sup> Report, Vol 34
- <sup>14</sup> PP 1807 Relating to the Established Church in Ireland.
- <sup>15</sup> Power, Thomas (1978) "Notes on a forgotten County Waterford religious house" *Decies* no 9,
- <sup>16</sup> It is marked on the Grand Jury Map of 1808.
- <sup>17</sup> Greene, J. and Kirwan, D. 2012. *Faugheen Cemetery, Ballyristeen, Co. Waterford: Monument Survey*. Copper Coast Geopark report.
- <sup>18</sup> *Statesman and Dublin Christian Record* 3rd May 1844, "Churches Built".
- <sup>19</sup> *Gospel Magazine and Protestant Beacon* April 1852, p. 32. Services were being held in the school.
- <sup>20</sup> *Freemans Journal* 30<sup>th</sup> Sept. 1868, p. 2. The contractor being James Mulcahy. Possibly it was at this stage that the church was reroofed at a steeper pitch as is apparent from within.
- <sup>21</sup> Shee Twohig, Elizabeth and Walton, Julian (1999) *Dunhill, Medieval Parish Church and Graveyard* (Pub. privately)
- <sup>22</sup> Rev. P. Power (1895), "The Ancient Ruined Churches of County Waterford" W&SEIARSJ Vol 1, p. 138/9. Census of Ireland 1659.
- <sup>23</sup> Knox (ed) 2009, op cit p 94. Maurice Harney was also nominal rector of Dunhill and Newcastle (from 1588) as well as curate of Drumcannon, Killure, Kilmeaden and of course Islandkane from 1615 (ibid p 277).
- <sup>24</sup> *Waterford Mail* 19<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1833, p. 3 evidence give into Committee of enquiry into the "Leper House". The curve of the road around what may have been an outer circular enclosure suggests pre-Norman.
- <sup>25</sup> *Waterford Chronicle* 22<sup>nd</sup> Feb. 1834, p.1, table showing tithes due to "Master, brethren and sisters of Leper house".
- <sup>26</sup> Knox (ed) op cit p 141
- <sup>27</sup> PP House of Commons 1820, no. 93, vol. 9 p. 239.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid p 190
- <sup>29</sup> Rev. P. Power (1895), "The Ancient Ruined Churches of County Waterford" W&SEIARSJ Vol 1, p. 162-4.
- <sup>30</sup> Power Patrick (1937), loc cit Appendix IX, p. 373. He is noted as John Fennel; idem, p 183 says that John and James were brothers.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid p. 184 thatched chapel, p 186 chalice and p. 384 Dean Hearn's return of income of clergy.
- <sup>32</sup> *Waterford Chronicle* 14 March 1829, p. 1 petition from joint parishioners re. Emancipation.