

The Early Historic Church-sites of North Clare

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This paper is an attempt to study the Early Historic church-sites of Northern County Clare. In it, the political and historical background of the region is outlined and its relevance to the study stressed. The characteristic features of the sites are dealt with in turn, and their location in relation to the boundaries of Corcu Modruad, the area's chief tribe, is discussed. In Appendix I and II the definite and probable Early Historic church-sites in the region are listed respectively, and in Appendix III a provisional list of the kileens in the area is offered.

INTRODUCTION

The Early Historic Church-sites of North Clare have not been subjected to detailed archaeological analysis in the past. In a seminal work published at the turn of the century, Westropp listed and described the churches of the entire county, concentrating solely, however, on their architectural and semi-historical details.¹ Since then some surveys of individual sites, or aspects of them, have appeared and recently an analysis of the factors involved in the locations of some of the churches has been published.² However, no general study of the ecclesiastical topography and organisation of the area has ever been put forward. This paper is an attempt to redress this imbalance and aims to discuss all ecclesiastical establishments of Early Historic³ date in the area, and to place them, in as far as it is possible, against their wider social, economic, political and ecclesiastical backgrounds.

The study of individual regions is recognised as one of the more useful ways of analysing the archaeology of the Early Irish Church. Such regions should ideally take the form of distinct geographical areas or of ancient political units. North Clare⁴ is admirably suited to both systems, as its early political boundaries and its geographical limits largely coincide. Its southern expanse of black shales, distinguished by its boglands and sour pastures, and its northern limits, defined by the southern coastline of Galway Bay and characterised by its distinctive limestone plateaux and hills with their rich winter grazing, combine to form a complementary geographical unit. Politically, the region was the territory of the Corcu Modruad, though prior to the mid-eighth century these people ruled a much more extensive area. The overall unity of the study area is further confirmed by its recognition as a separate diocese at the Synod of Kells in 1152, an act which implies that it had been regarded as a coherent ecclesiastical entity from much earlier times.⁵

¹T. J. Westropp, "The Ancient Churches of County Clare, and the Ecclesiastical Divisions of that County", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 22C (1900), 100-180.

²H. Mytum, "The Location of Early Churches in Northern Co. Clare", in S. M. Pearse (ed.), *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland: Studies presented to C. A. Raleigh Radford*, *B.A.R. (Brit. Ser.)*, 102 (1982), 351-361.

³The Early Historic period is here defined as the period between c. A.D. 500 and c. A.D. 1200.

⁴The study area comprises the modern baronies of Burren, Corcomroe, and portion of Inchiquin to the south-east. The remainder of Inchiquin is not deemed to be part of this region, as it is separate geographically and, during the Early Historic period, politically and ecclesiastically.

⁵In this respect it is also interesting to note that Kilfenora was one of the few smaller Irish dioceses to successfully survive as an independent bishopric throughout the Medieval period.

THE CORCU MODRUAD

Mytum refers to Corcu Modruad as "a peripheral and politically unimportant area".⁶ The latter part of this assessment is not wholly accurate as a brief *resumé* of the historical facts will show. From early times (the sixth century at least) the Corcu Modruad ruled a much larger territory than that covered by the study area.⁷ This area extended towards the south and south-east of modern Co. Clare, but its limits are difficult to define with any precision. It was bordered on the south-west by the Corcu Baiscind while the Uí Fiachrach Aidne lay to the east in modern Co. Galway. It is possible that during this early period Corcu Modruad also included the Aran Islands, as *Eóganach Árann* is sometimes referred to as *Eóganacht Ninussa*, Ninussa being the area occupied by the Cregaige, a subordinate grouping within the Corcu Modruad.⁸ The tradition that the Munster Eóganacht had a branch in North Clare,⁹ however, may be merely due to early eighth century Eóganacht propaganda.¹⁰

From about A.D. 700 onwards the Corcu Modruad was being encroached upon by tribes from south of the Shannon estuary, chiefly the Uí Fidgente and the In Déis Tuaiscirt. The earliest annalistic record known of the northward movements of these hostile groups is in 705, when it is recorded that Célechair Mac Commáin, a leading dynast of the Uí Fidgente, was slain in battle against the Corcu Modruad.¹¹ We can assume that the northward expansion continued, for in 744 a major clash with the In Déis Tuaiscirt, a tribe which was later to become the indomitable Dál Cais, resulted in a 'massacre' of the Corcu Modruad. This event marked the turning point of the campaign and led to the eventual retreat of the Corcu Modruad to North Clare. Here, however, they survived for centuries as a sub-kingdom of Thomond. For a brief period in the earlier tenth century the Uí Thairdelbaig of Dál Cais ruled them,¹² but only temporary control could be exercised and the kingship shortly returned to the native dynasty.

The shrinkage of Corcu Modruad territory was directly linked to the rise of the Dál Cais, and it has been suggested that the latter's growth was due in no small part to the selection by the Midhe Uí Néill of them, and not of the Corcu Modruad or one of the other major North Munster tribes, as candidates to rule Thomond.¹³ Nevertheless, it is clear that the Corcu Modruad played a significant role in the area, especially prior to the mid-eighth century. After that eventful turning point in their history they displayed a certain tenacity in holding on to their own and preserved their kingdom well into the Medieval period.

THE SITES

There are fundamental difficulties involved in the production of a comprehensive listing of the early ecclesiastical sites of the area. Many sites which may have been early in

⁶H. Mytum, *op. cit.*, p. 351.

⁷D. Ó Corráin, "The Families of Corcumroe", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 17 (1975), 21.

⁸L. de Paor, "Saint Mac Creiche of Liscannor", *Eirú*, 30 (1979), p. 107. Ninussa was approximately co-terminus with the present barony of Corcomroe. During this period the Aran Islands are also recorded as being part of "the bishopric of the Corcomroes"—T. J. Westropp, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

⁹G. MacNiocaill, *Ireland Before The Vikings*, Dublin 1972, p. 33.

¹⁰D. Ó Corráin, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹³J. V. Kelleher, "The Rise of the Dál Cais", in E. Rynne (ed.), *North Munster Studies: Essays in commemoration of Monsignor Michael Moloney*, Limerick 1967, p. 241.

origin underwent considerable renovations in the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods, and this, coupled with the fact that some continued to be used as burial places down to modern times, may have resulted in the obliteration of any early features. A second difficulty is the meagre amount of early documentary references to the Church, and to individual church-sites, in the locality. Apart from a few scarce references in the *Annals*, the only source vaguely germane to the ecclesiastical set-up of the area is the *Betha Meic Creiche*¹⁴—a late Medieval work purporting to be an account of the life of St. MacCreiche, a local individual who may have been entirely mythological.¹⁵ Although the *Life* has been described as being “so inaccurate and fabulous that it is historically useless”,¹⁶ it is clear that judicious use of the evidence contained in it can occasionally prove to be of value. The third major difficulty is that of ascertaining the specific nature of an ecclesiastical site which proves to be early in date. Without precise documentary references, accurate dating evidence, or good surviving topographical data, it is often impossible to indicate whether a site served as a hermitage, an eremitical monastery, an undeveloped cemetery, a developed cemetery, a church, a full-monastery, or a combination of some of these in successive phases.¹⁷

Bearing these problems in mind, a provisional listing of early ecclesiastical sites is put forward in Appendix I. The criterion involved for inclusion is straightforward—only those sites for which there is reliable documentary or material evidence to warrant an Early Historic date are admitted. Material evidence in this sense includes the following features: a circular or sub-circular enclosure of earth or stone; an early church or traces of one (including architectural fragments); a slab-shrine or related ‘special grave’; a round tower; a bullaun stone; a cross-inscribed slab; a souterrain associated with a church or graveyard. The location of a holy well in or adjacent to such sites may also occasionally be an indicator of early date. A total of nineteen early sites have been recognised in the study area by using these criteria, but it is not unlikely that more will be discovered, perhaps mainly through use of aerial photography, in the future.

This total is a conservative estimate, as there are at least eleven sites in the area which may well be early in origin but for which definite evidence is lacking (listed in Appendix II). They include Clooney South and Killaspuglonane, both of which are referred to in the *Betha Meic Creiche* as having been founded by contemporaries of his in the later sixth century. However, no Early features are evident on the actual sites, and the possibility that the compilers of the *Life* were using the opportunity to lay claim to churches outside their ecclesiastical jurisdiction—a common enough practice in Medieval times—should be borne in mind.¹⁸ An early origin for ecclesiastical activity at Corcomroe has also been postulated,¹⁹ but again no material evidence for this possibility is known. All sites in this

¹⁴This life has been edited by C. Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica Hibernica*, Brussels 1925, pp. 7-96. The MS itself is in Brussels Royal Library, No. 2324-2340, ff. 87r-98r.

¹⁵L. de Paor, *op. cit.*, pp. 117-119.

¹⁶G. Cunningham, *Burren Journey West*, Limerick 1980, p. 64.

¹⁷These terms are used in the sense defined by C. Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain*, Oxford 1971, pp. 21, 43-47, 50-68.

¹⁸C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Oxford 1910, p. xcii, states that the motive behind some of the saints’ *Lives* was “obviously to give a title and sanction to the possessions of the community”. He notes that this motive becomes increasingly prominent in some of the later *Lives*, including that of St. MacCreiche.

¹⁹C. Conway, *The Story of Mellifont*, Dublin 1958, and H. Mytum, *op. cit.*, p. 351. A search through the primary sources, however, has failed to substantiate either claim, and, furthermore, it should be noted that Cistercian monasteries were only very rarely founded on pre-existing church-sites.

class were certainly in existence by 1302, as they are mentioned in the Papal Taxation Lists carried out in that year.²⁰ Generally, all that remains on these sites is a parish church of Medieval date, usually situated in a graveyard. That they may be early in origin is supported by the considerable amount of ecclesiastical continuity from the Early to the Medieval Period, not only in the Church's organisation and hereditary offices, but also in the use of church-sites.²¹ New Medieval parish churches were frequently situated on the sites of earlier monasteries, as was the case in the study-area. However, as Hurley points out, the process of working backwards from the post-twelfth century period can be hazardous,²² and this is especially true for an area such as North Clare with its paucity of early documentary sources. Sites of dubious date, such as the above, therefore are not included in the discussion. Killeens, or childrens' burial grounds, bearing in mind that some may be undeveloped cemeteries of early date,²³ are also omitted from this study as there are major difficulties involved in dating them, and some, indeed, may be of secular origin. Killeens, however, which are situated on early sites are mentioned, and a provisional listing of recorded killeens in the study area is provided in Appendix III.

DISTRIBUTION AND SITING

The distribution of the nineteen recognisable early church-sites in North Clare is plotted on Fig. 1. As the destruction rates of archaeological sites, especially those with ecclesiastical connections, appears to be relatively low in this area, this distribution may be regarded as being reasonably complete within the limitations outlined above. This apparently heavy concentration corresponds favourably with the distributional patterns in other parts of the country.²⁴ It is also corroborated by contemporary insular documentary sources which, Hurley maintains, tend to substantiate the impression of church-sites being a rather common feature of the Early Historic landscape.²⁵

The optimum siting zones appear to be confined to areas below the 600 feet contour, with a significant number of sites occurring below the level of 300 feet. Particularly favoured locations for the church-sites seem to have been on rounded hillocks, especially those which lie close to the edges of the fertile valleys of glacial deposits in the Burren area, as at Kilcorney and Glencolumbcille South. Similarly some tend to be sited on the low ridges characteristic of the southern limits of the region, the sites at Kilfenora and Killinaboy being cases in point. The few overground rivers of the area also attracted foundations, as at Rathborne, Poulmalour and Formoyle West, but, only two sites, Crumlin and Kilmacreehy, occur in what could be described as coastal locations. This is at variance with the results of regional studies of coastal areas elsewhere in Western Britain and Ireland, where tendencies for significant numbers of early sites to occur in close

²⁰*Exchequer Rolls: Calendar of State Papers Relating to Ireland*. These taxations were undertaken to finance the Crusader's campaigns to the Holy Land.

²¹A. Gwynn and R. N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses in Ireland*, London 1970, p. 371, and V. Hurley, "The Early Church in the South-West of Ireland: Settlement and Organisation", in S. M. Pearse (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 329.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 303.

²³C. Thomas, *op. cit.*, p. 50. It is perhaps worth noting that c. 50% of the killeens in the study area are circular or sub-circular in plan, and that c. 80% of these are delimited by a raised bank.

²⁴See, for instance, T. Fanning, "Early Christian Sites in the Barony of Corkaguiney", in D. Ó Corráin (ed.), *Irish Antiquity, Essays and Studies presented to Professor M. J. O'Kelly*, Cork 1981, pp. 241-246, and V. Hurley, *op. cit.*, Figs. 18.3 and 18.4.

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 304-305.

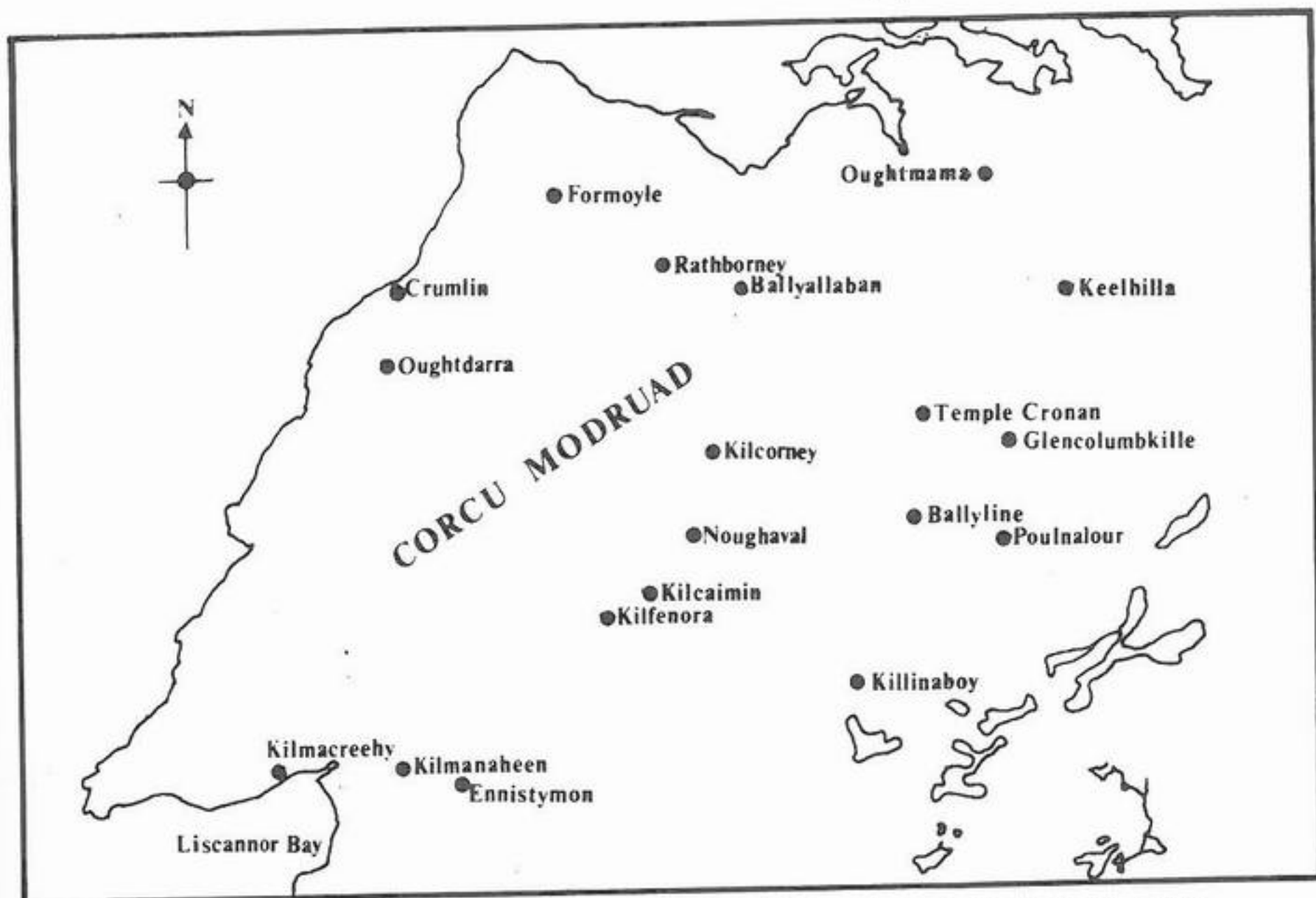


Fig. 1. Distribution map of ecclesiastical sites of Early Historic date in Northern Co. Clare.

proximity to the sea became apparent.²⁶ One site, Keelhilla, a hermitage, occurs in a remote and relatively inaccessible location.

One of the main issues raised by the distribution of early church-sites in any region is the nature of the relationship, if any, between these sites and the contemporary lay settlement of that area. The most common secular settlement type in Ireland during the Early Historic Period was the ringfort, and its stone counterpart, the cashel. Both monument types are well represented in the study area—a rough count has yielded a total in excess of six hundred such sites. However, by no means *all* of these would have been occupied at any one phase of the Early Historic Period, and, to complicate the matter, it is likely that some were constructed in Medieval times.²⁷ Therefore, without the results of a wide-scale programme of excavation it would be impossible to achieve the temporal distributional relationship between the lay and the ecclesiastical sites. However, as the spatial distributional patterns presumably indicate the optimum settlement zones of both types of site, they can be used to indicate the areas of preferred siting. When this is done, a significant positive correlation between the secular distributional pattern and that of the church-sites becomes apparent. Hurley noted a similar correlation between the lay and ecclesiastical sites of Cork and Kerry.²⁸ However, when dealing with this issue Mytum stated that

²⁶T. Fanning, *op. cit.*, p. 245; V. Hurley, *op. cit.*, p. 307; D. Omand and E. Talbot, "The Picts and the Early Church", in D. Omand (ed.), *The Sutherland Book*, Golspie 1982, pp. 173-179; E. G. Bowen, *The Settlements of Celtic Saints in Wales*, Cardiff 1970.

²⁷See, for instance, E. Rynne, "Some Destroyed Sites at Shannon Airport, Co. Clare", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 63, C(1964), 245-277.

²⁸V. Hurley, *op. cit.*, p. 307.



"the early church-sites cannot be directly related to the distribution of secular population".²⁹ The main factor behind such a misinformed conclusion was Mytum's failure to identify more than seven early church-sites in the area,³⁰ but even bearing this in mind it should be noted that a significant number of lay settlement sites occur in proximity to four of Mytum's church-sites and that, for differing reasons, the hypothesis cannot be checked meaningfully against the remaining three.³¹ In short then, the spatial distribution of the early church-sites and of the broadly contemporary lay settlements demonstrates that there was no significant difference in choice of location.

One of the implications of the relationship between the early ecclesiastical and secular settlements is that there would have been little difference, if any, between the economies of both types of site. In fact, it has been suggested that the phenomenal numbers of domestic sites of the period may themselves reflect an intensification of agriculture resulting in part from the introduction of monasticism.³² Results from paleobotanical studies have indicated a greater emphasis on tillage during this phase,³³ while evidence from excavations suggests that cattle, sheep and pig played an important part in the diet of layman and ecclesiastic alike.³⁴ The occurrence of quantities of oyster shells at Ballyallaban points towards the exploitation of marine resources in the North Clare area.³⁵ The rise in cereal production attested by the paleobotanical data is accompanied by the introduction of the horizontal-mill to Ireland. The location of a possible mill of this type at Oughtmama³⁶ may indicate one of the reasons why this church-site, which is obviously not a hermitage, is situated on an otherwise sparsely populated mountain terrace. By choosing to site this foundation on one of the exiguous overground streams of the Burren, its community could derive income by grinding corn produced by the secular population from farther afield.³⁷ That income derived from milling in Early Ireland was lucrative is reflected in the necessity to formulate a law tract to control aspects of this activity—a topic discussed recently by Melia.³⁸

A second implication of the distributional pattern of early church-sites in the area concerns land-ownership. As sites for churches and monasteries, and the land to support these establishments came largely from the areas of optimum settlement, the Church must have controlled some of the best land in the area. This may merely be due to the benevolence of the Corcu Modruad and a benign attitude on their part to the Church. However,

²⁹H. Mytum, *op. cit.*, p. 353.

³⁰These are "Oughtmama, Glencolumbcille, Kilnaboy (*sic*), Noughaval, Kilfenora, Ennistymon and Keelhill". He does not make it clear whether he accepts an early origin for Corcomroe or not, and unaccountably ignores a number of well-known early sites, *e.g.*, Temple Cronan, Rathborney and Ballyallaban.

³¹The church-site at Ennistymon cannot be taken into consideration as its location is unknown; Keelhill is by its very nature a hermitage site, and consequently one would not expect to find lay settlement nearby; and the location of Oughtmama in a seemingly unsettled area may have been largely dictated by economic reasons.

³²M. V. Duignan, "Irish Agriculture in Early Historic Times", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 74 (1944), 144.

³³G. F. Mitchell, "Post-Boreal Pollen-diagrams from Irish Raised Bogs", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 57, B (1956), 185-251. Mitchell's Zone IX, now dated to between A.D. 300 and A.D. 1600, is marked by large scale forest clearance. That this was achieved without a resultant increase in the pollen of plantain in some areas suggests that tillage was of rising importance in the economy.

³⁴V. B. Proudfoot, "The Economy of the Irish Rath", *Medieval Archaeol.*, 6 (1961), 94-122, and K. Hughes and A. Hamlin, *The Modern Traveller to the Early Irish Church*, London 1977, pp. 36-39.

³⁵J. Sheehan and F. Moore, "An Unrecorded Ecclesiastical Enclosure at Ballyallaban, Co. Clare", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 23 (1981), 7.

³⁶Identified by T. D. Robinson. See, *The Burren: a map of the uplands of North-West Clare, Éire*, 1977.

³⁷M. Mytum, *op. cit.*, pp. 356-358.

³⁸D. F. Melia, "The Irish Church in the Irish Laws", in S. M. Pearse (ed.), *op. cit.* (fn. 2), pp. 364-368.

it should be noted that in early Irish society land was not owned by individuals but by the *derbfhine*, or extended family, and that the rights and duties inherent in guardianship were strictly controlled by a code of law. Thus one could not make grants of land outside the *derbfhine* unless one had that group's consent and the agreement of the tribal king.³⁹ One way of donating land to the church, however, and at the same time keeping it within the *derbfhine*, was for a whole family to turn to the religious life.⁴⁰ In this way the monastery and its lands would remain by hereditary right in the ownership of the family, the abbacy of the monastery would remain in the *derbfhine*, and the laws of property were not broken. In this way for instance, the monastery of Iona remained in the possession of the Uí Neill. There is some evidence, both documentary and material, for the occurrence of this phenomenon in North Clare which will be touched on below.

It is also of interest to find numbers of early church-sites occurring in the interior of the region, where, according to Mytum, none existed.⁴¹ This opinion may have been shaped by an over-emphasis on, or an over-belief in, the 'boundary location' theory. However, it may be significant that it is those few early sites which could be correctly described as monasteries, and others which display unusual features, which are located on the border-areas of Corcu Modruad. This point will be more fully dealt with below.

MONASTIC ENCLOSURES AND TERMON LANDS

A number of early church-sites in North Clare are enclosed by banks of earth or stone. In plan these may be circular, sub-circular, or oval, but often such enclosures only survive in segments. Some are merely indicated by a curving arc of bank or by a diverted road, and some are clearly identifiable in field boundaries. They vary in diameter from about thirty metres to over a hundred and fifty metres, but the majority lie to the lower end of this scale. The very large enclosures known in parts of Leinster and elsewhere in Munster apparently do not occur in the area, and at only one site is there visible evidence of internal subdivisions of the enclosure. All known examples are univallate, and the vast majority are of earth.

A notable example of such enclosures occurs in Ballyallaban td., where an incomplete oval enclosure, with external dimensions of 130 metres North-South by 95 metres East-West is located. Within this is a kileen, a bullaun stone, and a late cross. Agricultural activity in the past revealed human skeletal remains within the enclosure, and domestic refuse, such as oyster shells and animal bones, were also unearthed.⁴² At Glencolumbkille South, a graveyard containing the thirteenth century church of St. Columcille stands off-centre to an enclosure of approximately 85 metres in diameter. The surrounding bank is of earth and stone, but has suffered much since Westropp's record of it⁴³ when it stood six feet high in places. Two internal sub-divisions occur within the enclosure. Faint traces of a ploughed-out curving bank are visible to the North and North-West of a small roughly circular killeen at Poulmalour.⁴⁴ To the South is a well preserved segment of an

³⁹K. Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society*, London 1966, p. 75.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 76-77.

⁴¹H. Mytum, *op. cit.*, p. 354.

⁴²J. Sheehan and F. Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-8.

⁴³T. J. Westropp, "Prehistoric Remains (Forts and Dolmens) in the Corofin District, Co. Clare", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 43 (1913), 249-253.

⁴⁴There is a tradition of a 'friary' on this site. The townland name suggests that this may have been a leper hostel: *Poll na Lobhar*—The Leper's Hollow. See G. A. Lee, "The Leper Hospitals of Munster", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 10 (1966-'67), 17.

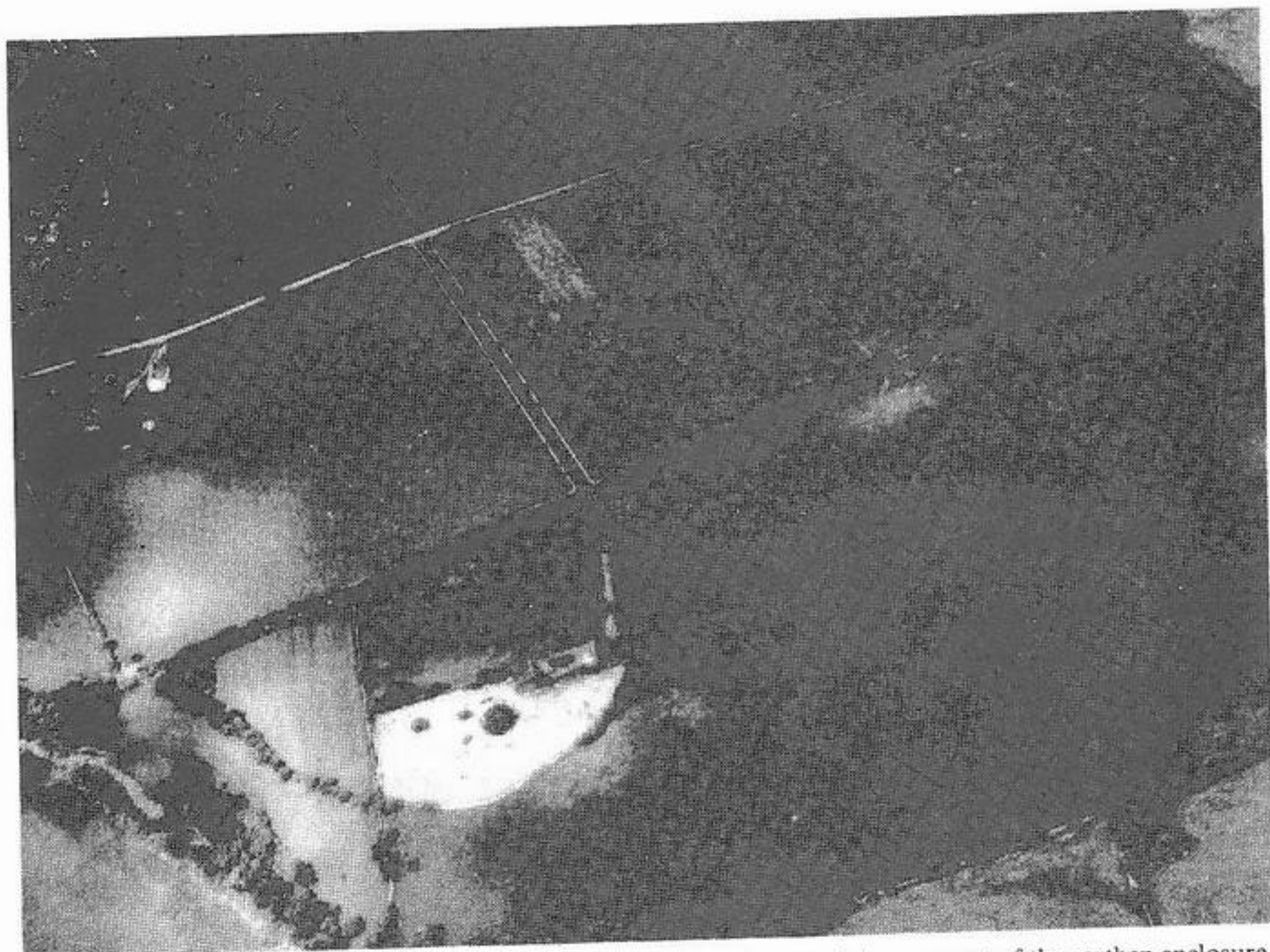


Fig. 2. Aerial photograph of Rathborne church-site, showing the remaining segment of the earthen enclosure.
(Photo: Cambridge University Collection)

earthen bank. The enclosure is approximately 130 metres in diameter, and its central killeen contains the foundations of a possibly early church and an upright holed-stone.⁴⁵ Nearby is a bullaun stone. At Kilmanaheen, the graveyard is enclosed by a cashel,⁴⁶ while at Caherminnaun West, a killeen is retained by a low earthen and stone bank of approximately 32 metres diameter. In its south-western quadrant is an enigmatic stone structure, interpreted as being either the very ruined remains of a small oratory or those of a founders' tomb.⁴⁷ At Kilcorney the Medieval nave-and-chancel church is located in an enclosed area of approximately oval plan, while curving segments of earthworks around the featureless Medieval church at Ballyline suggest that it too was situated within an enclosure. Recently, fieldwork at Termon has resulted in the discovery of an enclosure around the important early site at Temple Cronan.⁴⁸

With the advent of aerial photography, monastic enclosures of this kind are becoming an increasingly recognised feature of early Irish church-sites. The purpose of such, apart

⁴⁵A very similar holed-stone is known from the early site at Roscam, Co. Galway, and is illustrated by W. F. Wakeman in, "Round Tower, near Galway", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 25 (1875), 286. These stones occur fairly commonly on Early Historic church-sites.

⁴⁶L. de Paor, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁴⁷E. Rynne, "A Cure for Sore Eyes", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 13 (1970), 58.

⁴⁸Information from Mr. Thomas Fanning, Dept. of Archaeology, University College, Galway.

from the temporal but prudent one of protection, was to define the area of legal ownership and to mark the *termon* or sacred precinct of the monastery. In the better preserved sites elsewhere in Ireland, such as Moyne, Co. Mayo, Kiltiernan, Co. Galway, and Kilmacoo, Co. Cork, several internal divisions within the enclosure may be recognised, and these may have served to distinguish areas of sanctity, industry, education and hospitality from one another. As was the case with contemporary secular sites, the prestige of a monastery was reflected in the size and number of its enclosing elements. The dimensions of the larger ecclesiastical enclosures of North Clare, such as those at Rathborne and Poulmalour, indicate that these may have been among the more important sites of the area at some stage during the Early Historic Period. But by no means all Early monasteries were delimited by such enclosures. The schematic plan of a monastery preserved in the eighth century *Book of Mulling* seems to indicate an alternative method of marking out a *termon*. Here crosses are arranged within and around an enclosure, which is represented by a double circle. It is likely that one of the functions of such crosses and possibly of other anonymous, and less permanent, monastic features was to indicate the limits of the *sanctus*, the *sanctior* and the *sanctissimus*—areas of differing degrees of sanctity within the monastery.⁴⁹ It is possible that the group of high-crosses at Kilfenora, ranging in date from the eleventh to the thirteenth or later centuries, not all of which are presently *in situ*, could have fulfilled this purpose? In this respect it is worth noting that one of the Kilfenora crosses which is certainly in its original position, the West Cross, stands quite a distance from its fellows and may have marked the *termon* at this point.

A similar method of marking the *termon* may have been in operation at nearby Killinaboy. About two kilometres away from the church-site, distinguished by the remains of a round-tower, stands a tau-cross of twelfth century date.⁵⁰ It is recorded as having marked, along with two other crosses, now missing,⁵¹ the western and southern boundaries of the church lands of Innewee, patron of Killinaboy. In the light of the evidence, and of the abundant references to *termon* lands in the literature, it is very possible that this tradition has its basis in fact. Similarly, the small stone crosses around the site at Temple Cronan are said to mark the *termon* of that monastery, and may have done so in conjunction with the newly discovered enclosure already referred to. It is also of interest to note that the townland in which Temple Cronan is located is itself called *Termon*.

Some of the smaller enclosed church-sites of the region may have originally been secular settlement sites. For instance, in the *Betha Meic Creiche* we are given information concerning the foundation of the early site at Kilmacreehy.⁵² Mainchín, an associate of Mac Creiche, is given a ridge of corn from Baethbrónach, King of Corca Modruad, beside the royal *longphort* at Cluain Dírair. During a storm Baethbrónach's corn is destroyed but

⁴⁹See Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-149. It is possible that the *sanctissimus* was the part of the monastery which contained the church and graveyard and, perhaps, a special monument such as a saint's grave; the *sanctior* may have been the area of the monastery reserved for more mundane purposes, e.g. domestic quarters, industrial and agricultural buildings, etc.; the *sanctus* was possibly the area within the monastic *termon* but outside the monastery proper. See Hughes, *ibid.*, p. 148 and note 4, for a somewhat different interpretation of these terms.

⁵⁰E. Rynne, "The Tau-Cross at Killinaboy: Pagan or Christian?", in Rynne (ed.), *North Munster Studies*, Limerick 1967, pp. 146-165.

⁵¹E. Rynne, *ibid.*, p. 150, quotes an O.S. letter dated 1839, in which Eugene O'Curry records that the second cross stood "near the House of Elm Vale . . . and the third about ¼ of a mile east of the latter at a place still called Cros árd, or the high Cross". Westropp, *op. cit.*, p. 140, records that the cross which stood at Elmvale was called "Crossoughter".

⁵²C. Plummer, *Miscellanea Hagiographica Hibernica*, Brussels 1925, Life of Mac Creiche, sections 13-18.

Mainchín's survives. Seeing this, Baethbrónach gives his fort to Mac Creiche and submits himself and his children to him. Cluain Dirair has been identified as the present Kilmacreehy.⁵³

In Croagh North td., approximately half of a large, roughly oval, enclosure survives fossilised in the graveyard wall and adjacent field boundaries (Fig. 2). The graveyard contains a Medieval church and a large bullaun stone. Originally this enclosure would have encompassed an area c. 100 metres East-West and, perhaps, 150-180 metres North-South. In local tradition this site is called 'Rathborne' (*Rath Boirne*: the Rath of Burren),⁵⁴ its large size suggesting that before it became a church-site it was a secular site of some local importance. The dimensions of other ecclesiastical enclosures, such as Kilcaimin at Caherminnaun West, may likewise indicate that originally some of them may have been secular ringforts or cashels, though the nature of the enclosure itself at Kilcaimin does not support such an interpretation.

Instances of secular sites becoming monastic establishments may be noted elsewhere in the early literature,⁵⁵ and it is not surprising to come across the same phenomenon in North Clare. Local rulers saw the advantages of having a monastery situated on their land. Apart from being a centre of learning and culture its *termon* could also be utilised as a place of refuge in troubled times. It is also evident that occasionally the weaker septs of the tribe, who had little chance of attaining political prowess, attempted alternatively to gain prestige and perhaps wealth by setting themselves and their homestead up as a church. Sometimes entire families joined the monastic life in this way.⁵⁶

SITE FEATURES

The most characteristic and important feature of an early ecclesiastical site was its church. All of the churches in North Clare for which an early date can be argued were constructed of stone. Most Irish churches of the period, however, seem to have been of wood, and some, apparently, were of earth.⁵⁷ Results from a number of excavated sites demonstrate that stone churches, often thought to be primary, were in fact, very often preceded by timber ones. A considerable body of annalistic data indicates that, up to the twelfth century, churches of wood were the norm and those of stone the exception.⁵⁸ Wood, in fact, may well have been the preferred medium of construction, even in relatively treeless areas such as the Burren. The existence of a primary timber church beneath one of stone on Church Island, Co. Kerry,⁵⁹ itself a treeless island, may well illustrate the validity of this assumption. Although churches of wood must have been quite common in the study area, especially prior to the eleventh and twelfth centuries, there is neither documentary nor material evidence to prove it. Nonetheless, we may infer their previous existence from the occurrence of vestigial features derived from wooden

⁵³L. de Paor, *op. cit.* (fn. 8), p. 103.

⁵⁴J. Frost, *The History and Topography of the County of Clare*, Dublin 1893, p. 32.

⁵⁵C. Plummer, *Vitae Sanctorum Hiberniae*, Oxford 1910, p. xcvi.

⁵⁶K. Hughes, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77; D. L. T. Bethell, "The Originality of the Early Irish Church", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 111 (1981), 43-44.

⁵⁷C. A. Raleigh Radford, "The Earliest Irish Churches", *Ulster J. Archaeol.*, 40 (1977), 1.

⁵⁸De Breffny and G. Mott, *The Churches and Abbeys of Ireland*, London 1976, p. 8, where a number of these sources are indicated.

⁵⁹M. J. O'Kelly, "Church Island, near Valencia, Co. Kerry", *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 59, C (1958), 57-136. Wooden churches beneath secondary stone ones are also recorded from Reask, Co. Kerry, St. Vogue's, Co. Wexford, Inishcaltra, Co. Clare, White Is., Co. Fermanagh, and Ardagh, Co. Longford.

buildings, such as lintelled trabeate doorways and *antae*, on some of the early stone churches of the area.

In all, only five stone churches in northern Clare can be assigned to the Early Historic Period with any degree of certainty. Of these, one no longer survives (Kilfenora) but its existence in the mid-eleventh century is referred to in the *Annals of Inisfallen*.⁶⁰ The others are Killinaboy, Temple Cronan and two of the Oughtmama churches.⁶¹ Perhaps the finest of these is Temple Cronan, a small oratory measuring 6.6 by 3.9 metres. Although renovated in Late Medieval times, its surviving original features include the blocked up trabeate doorway in the west gable and a number of carved human and animal heads of Romanesque type. One of the animal heads is carved on a block of stone which forms part of the original doorway, and this convincingly dates the construction of the church to the twelfth century.⁶² The dimensions of Church 2 at nearby Oughtmama, 7.3 by 4.6 metres, are similar to those of Temple Cronan. Both its east window and west trabeate doorway have semi-circular heads. The larger Oughtmama church, No. 1, is divided by a chancel arch which was inserted in the later twelfth century.⁶³ It too has a trabeate doorway, with a massive lintel, in its west gable. The original church at Killinaboy was characterised by its *antae* and may also have had a western trabeate doorway.⁶⁴ On the basis of the unusual double-armed cross on its west gable a date around 1230 has been argued for its construction.⁶⁵

A common characteristic to all the above mentioned churches is the occurrence of 'cyclopean' masonry in their construction—a feature generally encountered only in Pre-Romanesque Irish churches. This is a technique of construction involving the use of large stones which are not laid in horizontal courses. Other churches in the area which were built in this way include Keelhilla and Oughtmama No. 3. 'Cyclopean' masonry is also clearly visible incorporated into portions of the walls of the Medieval churches at Crumlin, Kilcorney, Poulnalour, Kilmacreehy and Rathborne, suggesting that there may also have been early churches on these sites. Thus, there is evidence for at least five, and possibly as many as twelve, early stone churches in North Clare.

Only very general assumptions concerning the dating of most of the early stone churches in the study-area can be made. Some, however, can be quite closely dated. The earliest of these is the destroyed *damhliag* at Kilfenora which was burned in 1055. On the basis of the Romanesque heads on the church at Temple Cronan its construction can be dated to somewhere around the middle to late twelfth century. Assuming that Harbison's suggestion that the double-armed cross at Killinaboy is a primary feature is correct,⁶⁶ this church dates to about 1230. The insertion of the chancel arch in the larger church at Oughtmama can be dated to the late twelfth century,⁶⁷ thereby indicating an earlier date, though perhaps not appreciably so, for the construction of the church. One church at Oughtmama (No. 2) can be dated by analogy with others to the twelfth century also, but could possibly be a little earlier. The occurrence of 'cyclopean' masonry in these and the

⁶⁰S. MacAirt (ed.), *The Annals of Inisfallen*, Dublin 1951, p. 215.

⁶¹Nos. 1 and 2 in Westropp's numbering, Westropp, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁶²P. Harbison, "Some Romanesque Heads from County Clare", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 15 (1972), 3-5.

⁶³H. Leask, *Irish Churches and Monastic Buildings*, Vol. 1, Dundalk 1955, pp. 82-83.

⁶⁴P. Harbison, "The Double-Armed Cross on the Church Gable at Killinaboy, Co. Clare", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 18 (1976), 3-12, and Fig. 1.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 3-5.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁷H. Leask, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

other churches cannot provide a close date as it seems to have been a feature of early churches elsewhere from the eighth right up to the eleventh centuries. As Harbison has pointed out, its use in the twelfth century at Temple Cronan,⁶⁸ and also its possible use at Killinaboy in the early thirteenth century, suggest its late survival in the Burren when it was already out of vogue elsewhere. Its occurrence, therefore, in the otherwise featureless sites mentioned above indicates a date of construction for them anywhere in the later part of the Early Historic period. Thus on present evidence we are forced to conclude that the erection of stone churches in North Clare was a post-tenth century phenomenon. The suggestion that their construction may not have started in the area until the twelfth century⁶⁹ is negated by the annalistic reference to the *damhliag* at Kilfenora in 1055.

A less representative but nonetheless important feature of the Early church-sites in the area are the 'special' graves. Two occur at Temple Cronan and there is a possible third at Caherminaun West. Both Temple Cronan examples are gabled slab-shrines and are situated adjacent to the east gable of the church. The structure at Caherminaun West, traditionally known as 'The Monk's Bed', is a sunken rectangular area flanked by upright stone slabs. It may be a special grave,⁷⁰ perhaps a degenerate version of the rectangular surround which encloses some slab-shrines in the South and West. Like the shrines at Temple Cronan, it lies on an East-West axis. The Temple Cronan shrines are generally dated to the seventh century, and were probably designed to house the exhumed corporeal relics of notable ecclesiastics, perhaps those of the site's founder or some associated saints.⁷¹ The ultimate origin for these peculiarly insular monument-types seems to have been in the Mediterranean area,⁷² and, in themselves, they reflect the beginnings of the cult of the relics in Ireland. The association of such relics with a church assured a flow of pilgrims to that site and the consequential wealth and esteem this entailed. The only other early funerary monuments in the study area are a number of cross-slabs at Oughtmama.⁷³

Perhaps the best known ecclesiastical antiquities of North Clare are the High Crosses at Kilfenora—the largest known concentration of such monuments in the country. Six, and possibly seven, crosses are recorded from the site.⁷⁴ In style and date they belong to a larger group which occurs elsewhere in Clare and on the Aran Islands, and reflect the former ecclesiastical and cultural unity of that area. It is not intended to describe or discuss these monuments in any detail here, as de Paor has already carried out an admirable study of the whole group,⁷⁵ nevertheless some brief indicators as to their date and affinities may not go amiss.

⁶⁸P. Harbison, "Some Romanesque Heads from Co. Clare", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 15 (1972), 5.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰E. Rynne, "A Cure for Sore Eyes", *Nth. Munster Antiq. J.*, 13 (1970), 58.

⁷¹C. Thomas, *op. cit.* (fn. 17), pp. 141-143.

⁷²C. Thomas, *ibid.*

⁷³J. Frost, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26, writing in 1893, records that during a "recent" Board of Works operation on the site "several slabs . . . with crosses carved upon them, *but without any inscriptions*" were discovered in the largest church "while clearing away the soil which had accumulated in the interior". However, the description of the slabs given by T. J. Westropp in his 1900 survey of the area [*Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 22, C (1900), 130], does not tally with that of Frost: "several slabs *with defaced Irish inscriptions*, lie in the chancel". These slabs do not seem to be recorded elsewhere in the literature, and a recent search on the site by the author failed to locate any slabs at all! Until they surface again, it will not be possible to ascertain whether Frost's or Westropp's description is correct. These cross-slabs are the only recorded ones in the study area.

⁷⁴One was removed in 1821 and is now in Killaloe Cathedral.

⁷⁵L. de Paor, "The Limestone High-Crosses of Clare and Aran", *J. Galway Archaeol. Hist. Soc.*, 26 (1955-56), 53-71. De Paor's system of naming the crosses is followed here.

That the majority of the Kilfenora crosses date to the twelfth century is indicated by the panels of geometric ornament and the style and significance of their figure-carvings. The three best known examples, the West Cross, the Killaloe Cross and the 'Doorty' Cross, all seem to belong to this period. The last-mentioned example is characterised by a complex panel of Urnes-style interlace on its West face, and this, taken with the crudely executed diaper pattern on the North side, would seem to place this cross in a twelfth century milieu. The figurative scene of the three ecclesiastics on its East face, possibly representing St. Fachtnan, the founder, an abbot, and a bishop (distinguishable by their different crozier-types), may, perhaps, be interpreted as a commemoration in stone of the transition of the site from monastic to diocesan status. If this is so, the cross dates to 1152 or shortly afterwards.⁷⁶ The crucifixion scene here, and on the West and Killaloe crosses, displays Christ in a full-length robe, a feature which is also taken to be indicative of the twelfth century.⁷⁷ The two latter crosses also share a rectangular fret design, a feature which also occurs on a fragment of the shaft of a cross preserved in the cathedral chancel⁷⁸ (and on two of the Aran crosses), indicating a similar date for this example. The geometrical ornament on the South and North crosses may suggest a thirteenth century or later date for the erection of these, and if this is so it demonstrates the anachronistic survival of interlaced art on stone into the Post-Norman Period in the Burren, paralleled generally, perhaps, in the continued construction of churches with 'cyclopean' masonry and of ringforts and cashels in that area. However, it should be noted that the carved lines running towards the bases of both of these crosses, and ending in volutes, are broadly paralleled on an Aran cross to which has been assigned an eleventh or twelfth century date.⁷⁹

Among the remaining ecclesiastical features of the area is the stump of a round-tower which stands adjacent to Killinaboy church.⁸⁰ It is the only example of this monument-type known from the study area and probably dates to the period between the tenth and twelfth centuries. Its occurrence at Killinaboy suggests that a full-monastery existed at the site during the Early Historic Period. The more mundane features of the North Clare church-sites include souterrains, two of which are recorded from the area. One lies to the west of the Medieval church at Crumlin, while the other which is now blocked up, occurs just to the south-west of the kileen at Oughtdarra. Souterrains appear to have been used for both defensive and storage purposes and generally date to the pre-twelfth century. They are a not-uncommon feature of early ecclesiastical sites.⁸¹ Finally, four bullaun stones, monuments which occur frequently on early church-sites, are known from the study area; these are at Rathborney, Keelhilla, Ballyallaban and Formoyle West.⁸²

⁷⁶I am grateful to Professor Etienne Rynne, Department of Archaeology, University College, Galway, for much fruitful discussion on this and the other Kilfenora crosses, although he would only accept the 'Doorty' Cross as being unequivocally of twelfth century date.

⁷⁷F. Henry, *Irish Art in the Romanesque Period*, London 1970, pp. 127-128.

⁷⁸L. de Paor, *op. cit.* (fn. 75), pp. 66-68 and Fig. 6.

⁷⁹J. Waddell, "An Unpublished High Cross on Aran, Co. Galway", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 111 (1981), 34.

⁸⁰G. L. Barrow, *The Round Towers of Ireland*, Dublin 1979, p. 63.

⁸¹A. T. Lucas, "Souterrains: The Literary Evidence", *Bealoideas*, 39-41 (1971-73), 172-173.

⁸²Formoyle may well be the *Cluain Í* referred to in the *Life of Mac Creiche* as the place where the saint spent some time as a hermit "between Formael and Eidhnech", as has been suggested by L. de Paor, *Eirú*, 30 (1979), p. 97, note 22. This suggestion is strengthened by the mention in the *Life* of a hollow stone at the site, as a bullaun occurs at Formoyle. On toponymic grounds however, *Cluain Í* may be identified with the church site in Clooney South townland, which is, in fact, "between Formael (*Formoyle*) and Eidhnech (*Inagh*)".

THE BOUNDARY THEORY AND NORTH CLARE

The pre-monastic episcopal *paruchia* of Early Historic Ireland appear to have been largely co-terminus with the territories of the local ruling tribes. This seems to have been due to the close blood bonds which existed between the ecclesiastical and lay hierarchies of these divisions, and it was continued and strengthened in the seventh, eighth and later centuries by the increasing involvement of the monastic *paruchia* in the secular politics of their areas. One of the more important aspects of the early tribal divisions, and consequently of the commutual ecclesiastical provinces, was the boundary zone, a fact which has prompted Ó Riain to observe that "few aspects of Irish society were less peripheral than its boundary zones".⁸³ In his recent study of the location of early churches in North Clare, Mytum notes that "they [the churches] seem to occur only on the edges of the territory of the Corcu Modruad".⁸⁴ A cursory glance at Fig. 1 will quickly dispel this notion. However, it is true that very significant numbers of ecclesiastical sites are located on the peripheries of the region. This is a phenomenon which has been noted elsewhere in the country.⁸⁵ However, in view of Ó Riain's findings, it seems desirable that the occurrence of Early church sites in border areas should not be studied in isolation, but, rather, in conjunction with other contemporaneous monument-types and activities which feature prominently in these zones, as the locational and social factors involved may be basically the same.

The whole concept of the boundary zone seems to go back at least as far as the Celtic Iron Age. We find that cult centres were frequently located on boundaries, and from the literature it seems that the druids believed that boundary areas bore supernatural qualities.⁸⁶ Inauguration ceremonies and *oinaig* (fairs), often pre-Christian in origin were also regularly held in boundary zones. In Celtic Gaul, and possibly in other Celtic countries as well, similar locations for such ceremonial, religious and socio-economic sites are known.⁸⁷ It is from the Early Historic period, however, that most of our knowledge of this phenomenon in Ireland derives. Great importance is laid on the boundary zone in the law tracts of the period. In the *Bretha Comaitchesa*, for instance, twelve types of boundary markers are listed. These include both natural and artificial features, including woods, marshes, rivers, lakes and roadways. Stones of various types are also mentioned, and, in this respect, it is worth noting that MacIomhair was able to indicate that linear groupings of standing-stones around modern Co. Louth seem to occur roughly on the known territorial boundaries of Fir Rois.⁸⁸

Ó Riain has demonstrated that many types of distinct archaeological sites and places where specific events took place are frequently located in boundary zones. These include the homesteads of the professional classes, the tribal political headquarters, and ancient routes and roadways. He also showed that the major tribal events, such as *oinaig*, inauguration ceremonies, and military mobilisation and encounters regularly took place here. Given the close relationships between the ecclesiastical and secular communities of North Clare, therefore, it is not improvidential that very significant numbers of Early

⁸³P. Ó Riain, "Boundary Associations in Early Irish Society", *Studia Celtica*, 7 (1972), 12-29.

⁸⁴H. Mytum, *op. cit.* (fn. 2), p. 351.

⁸⁵P. Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, pp. 17-19; K. Hughes and A. Hamlin, *ibid.*, pp. 29-30; D. Ó Corráin, "Aspects of Irish History", in B. G. Scott (ed.), *Perspectives in Irish Archaeology*, Belfast 1974, pp. 64-66.

⁸⁶K. Hughes and A. Hamlin, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-30.

⁸⁷P. Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-16 and references therein.

⁸⁸D. Mac Iomhair, "The Boundaries of Fir Rois", *Co. Louth Archaeol. J.*, 15 (1962), 161-163 and Fig. 11.

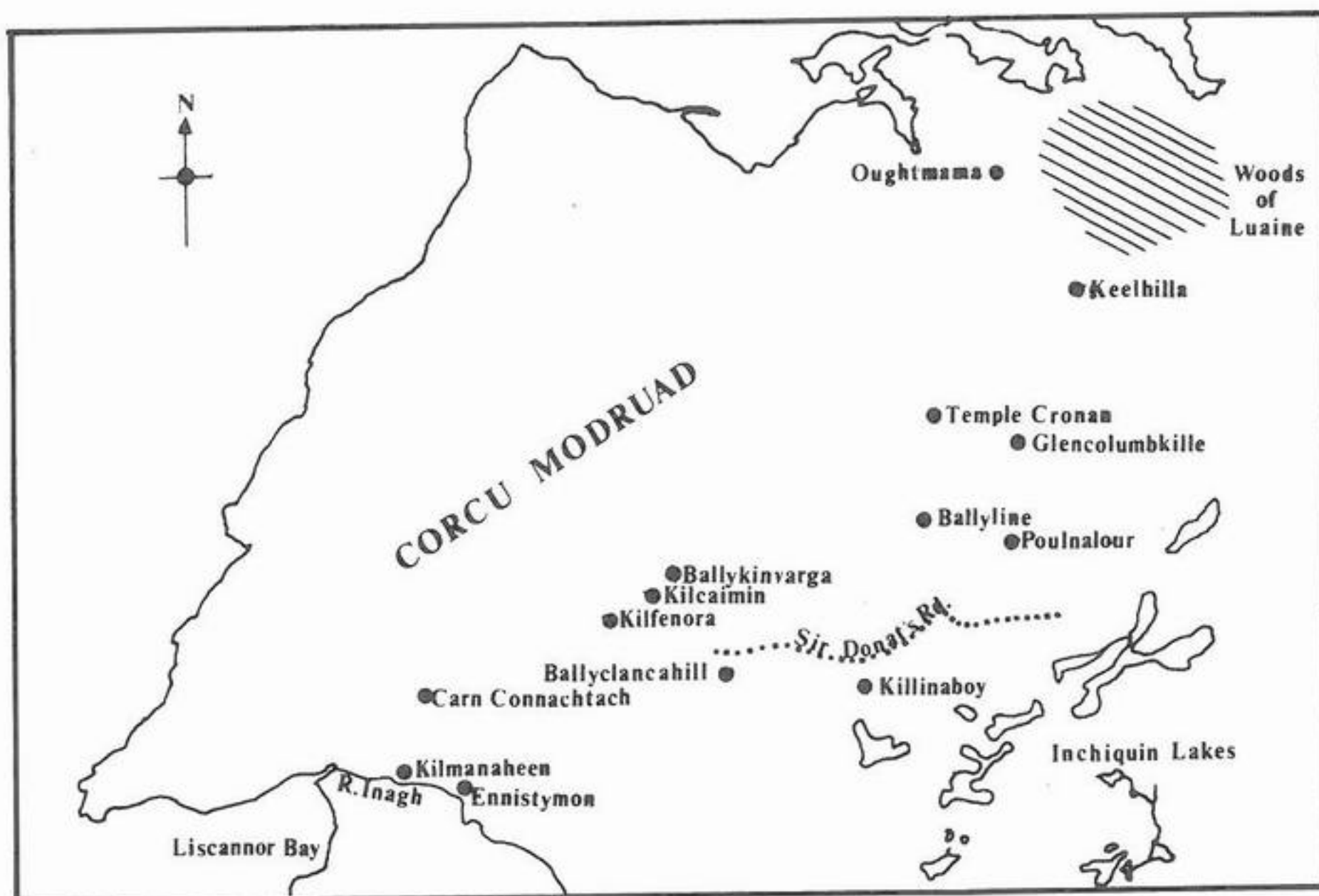


Fig. 3. Distribution map of sites of Early Historic date found in the boundary zone of Corcu Modruad.

Historic church-sites in the area occur on its peripheral zones. Indeed, it is indicative of the veracity of Ó Riain's observations to find that Kilfenora, the ecclesiastical capital of the area, is itself located on the southern boundary of Corcu Modruad. Of extra interest, however, is that the boundary zone as indicated by the church-sites also contains discernable examples of some of the non-ecclesiastical sites and features isolated by Ó Riain, and that occasionally these are associated with the church-sites.

The boundary zone of Corcu Modruad and the relevant sites it contains is plotted on Fig. 3. Included are the church-sites identified by Mytum (Oughtmama, Glencolumbkille, Keelhilla, Killinaboy, Kilfenora and Ennistymon).⁸⁹ Other church-sites indicated are Kilmanaheen, Kilcaimin, Ballyline, Poulmalour and Temple Cronan. Relevant natural features indicated include the Inchiquin Lakes, the Inagh River and the Woods of Luaine, which are noted in the *Book of Lecan* as existing on the plain between Keelhilla and Kinvara during this period.⁹⁰ As has already been mentioned, such natural features played a part in distinguishing early boundaries.

Three non-ecclesiastical sites are indicated, Ballykinvarga, Carn Connachtach and Ballyclanahill, all of which are situated in the Southern boundary zone of the territory. The first, Ballykinvarga, is an impressive cashel of pre-historic date noted for its encircling *chevaux-de-frise*. It is likely to have been inhabited during the Early Historic Period by a well-off member of the professional class, such as the *filidh*, *ollam*, *orugaid* or *senchaid*,

⁸⁹Noughaval is not included as it seems to be outside the boundary zone.

⁹⁰The relevant section is translated and edited by J. G. O'Keefe in "Colman Mac Duagh and Guaire", *Eirú*, 1 (1904), 43-48.

but, more probably, it was the political headquarters of the Corcu Modruad. That the siting of tribal headquarters on political boundaries was a frequent occurrence has been demonstrated by Ó Riain;⁹¹ the strategy behind such siting, however, remains obscure. Carn Connachtach, just south of Kilshanny, is a massive cairn, probably of Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. Its relevance in the context of this study is, however, its location on the border zone and the tradition that it was here that the chieftains of Corcomroe were inaugurated.⁹² It has been suggested that some pre-historic sites may have been used through the Iron Age and Early Historic Period as inauguration and assembly places.⁹³ At Ballyclancahill, near Killinaboy, two enigmatic elongated mounds stand side by side on the summit of a ridge.⁹⁴ The nature of these monuments suggests that they may have originally fulfilled some purpose of assembly, perhaps that of an *oenach*, and their location may confirm this. In addition to these monuments the annual festivities held at Liscannor Bay, also on the boundary, should be noted, for they seem to be a direct continuation of the Pagan Celtic feast of Lughnasa or Domnach Crom Dubh.⁹⁵ Such pagan ritual activities were also held on border areas. Ó Riain also suggests that early routeways bore a close relationship to the lines of tribal boundaries,⁹⁶ and the surviving stretch of an ancient route of indeterminate origin, known locally as Sir Donat's Road, in the south-eastern boundary zone of Corcu Modruad may perhaps be taken as field-evidence for this.

One of the more important roles of the boundary zone was as a place where the *oenach*, and its related activities, took place. Ballykinvarga was the centre for one such fair, and it is also evident that fairs were held at the ecclesiastical sites of Glencolumbkille and Noughaval, as is indicated by the Medieval market-crosses which were probably erected to emphasise the ecclesiastical origins of these fairs. Although the earliest reference to a fair at Kilfenora is Medieval, it is likely that it was a continuation from early times. Thus one may postulate that the Church took over many *oinaig*, perhaps ostensibly because of the non-Christian overtones inherent in some of their fringe activities, but it is equally likely that this takeover was due to the financial advantages that would result from such a manoeuvre.

One of the more interesting results of the isolation and study of those churches in Corcu Modruad which were situated in the boundary zone is that these are the ones which seem to have become the more important sites and which display the better archaeological features. The obvious example is Kilfenora with its fine collection of high crosses, for it later (in 1152) became the See of the diocese. Oughtmama possesses three churches, one of which is among the largest of the early examples in North Clare, and it is the only site in the region from which cross-slabs are known. Temple Cronan must have been important

⁹¹P. Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-23.

⁹²G. Cunningham, *op. cit.* (fn. 16), p. 52. It is interesting to note that in the *Life of Mac Creiche* (C. Plummer, *op. cit.*, sections 34-41), it is recorded that a meeting was held at *Carn Meic Tail* (identified as Carn Connachtach, near Kilshanny) between the leaders of Corcu Modruad and Tuadmumu, and that as late as 1573 the site still seems to have retained some of its boundary associations, for a battle was then fought here between two factions of the O'Brien's.

⁹³See Ó Corráin, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-66. It should be noted here that Mr. Conleth Manning, who has carried out a special study of inauguration sites, has reservations about associating them with boundary zones (C. Manning, *pers. comm.*).

⁹⁴T. J. Westropp, "Prehistoric Remains in the Corofin District", *J. Roy. Soc. Antiq. Ireland*, 43 (1913), 257-258 and Fig. 12.

⁹⁵M. Mac Neill, *The Festival of Lughnasa*, Oxford 1962, p. 285.

⁹⁶P. Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.

from an early stage, as its special graves suggest, and this importance carried on into the twelfth century when the stone church with its fine Romanesque style carvings was erected. Poulmalour is contained within one of the largest enclosures in the area, and the importance of Killinaboy is attested to by its round-tower, tau-cross and unusual east gable. Nowhere in the interior of the study-area are there sites on which survive material of this kind, which underlines again the importance of the boundary zone in Early Historic Ireland.

It remains in this respect to discuss the reasons why about 60% of the known early church-sites of North Clare are located on the boundaries of the tribal territory. Mytum suggests that by siting churches in this area tribal claims over the position of the boundary would be strengthened, and that their presence in an area visible to neighbouring tribes would enhance the prestige and status of the home tribe.⁹⁷ This line of thought is weakened, however, when one considers that other important sites of an entirely non-ecclesiastical nature are also located on boundaries. The key to the problem may lie in the suggestion that it was the boundary-areas, and not a strictly defined boundary as such, which was the important concept, and that the purpose of such areas was, as Riain suggests, to forge rather than to sever links.⁹⁸ When one considers the communal activities which took place in these zones, such as fairs, patterns and other ritual activities, and that roadways ran along, and led to, these areas, one can confidently conclude that it was here that distinct peoples mixed and fused. Ó Riain states: "the literary evidence makes it quite obvious that boundaries functioned more or less as clearing houses in inter-tribal transactions".⁹⁹ Seen in this light it is possible that church-sites were founded in boundary zones because it was here that fusion of both ideas and races took place, and consequently this was the area where the Church could potentially exercise its influence to the greatest degree.

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NOTE ADDED IN PRESS

Since the above was written, and already with the printers, the author's attention has been drawn to the existence of a Romanesque/Transitional stone head from Killaspuglonane (Nat. Mus. Ireland, Reg. No. 1972:4). This head, coupled with the toponymic evidence, suggests that this church-site (No. 6 in Appendix II) should have been listed in Appendix I.

⁹⁷H. Mytum, *op. cit.*, pp. 354-355.

⁹⁸P. Ó Riain, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*



APPENDIX I

A LIST OF ECCLESIASTICAL SITES OF EARLY DATE IN NORTHERN COUNTY CLARE

The sites listed are presented alphabetically according to the townland in which they are located. The spellings used are those of the *Index to the Townlands and Towns of Ireland* (1901). Where a site is known by a local or alternative name this is also included. This is followed by the barony and the reference to the O.S. 6-inch scale sheet, plan, and trace. The precise location of the site is indicated by the co-ordinates in centimetres from West and South respectively.

1. Ballyallaban; Burren; O.S. 5:7:5, (59.8 cm.; 38.5 cm.).
2. Ballyline; 'Templeline'; Burren; O.S. 10:9:4, (0.8 cm.; 17.2 cm.).
3. Caherminnaun West; 'Kilcaimin'; Corcomroe; O.S. 9:14:5, (34.3 cm.; 4.4 cm.).
4. Croagh North; 'Rathborney'; Burren; O.S. 5:6:3, (42.5 cm.; 38.4 cm.).
5. Crumlin; 'St. Columba's'; Burren; O.S. 4:6:6, (41.5 cm.; 31.8 cm.).
6. Near Ennistymon; Corcomroe.
7. Formoyle West; Burren; O.S. 2.
8. Glebe; 'Kilmanaheen'; Corcomroe; O.S. 15:15:3, (63.6 cm.; 13.5 cm.).
9. Glencolumbcille South; Burren; O.S. 10:3:5, (56.2 cm.; 48.6 cm.).
10. Keelhilla; 'St. MacDuagh's'; Burren; O.S. 9:3:5, (58.8 cm.; 50.6 cm.).
11. Kilcorney Glebe; 'Kilcorney'; Burren; O.S. 9:3:5, (58.8 cm.; 50.6 cm.).
12. Kilfenora; Corcomroe; O.S. 16:1:3, (20.7 cm.; 58.3 cm.).
13. Killinaboy; Inchiquin; O.S. 17:
14. Kilmacreehy; Corcomroe; O.S. 15:13:2, (12.3 cm.; 8.9 cm.).
15. Noughaval; Burren; O.S. 9:10:3, (44.1 cm.; 23.8 cm.).
16. Oughtdarra; Corcomroe; O.S. 4:14:2, (36.2 cm.; 9.3 cm.).
17. Oughtmama; 'Seven Churches'; Burren; O.S. 3:4:3, (42.7 cm.; 9.2 cm.).
18. Poulnalour; 'Templepadraig'; Inchiquin; O.S. 10:11:4, (46.1 cm.; 15.9 cm.).
19. Termon; 'Temple Cronan'; Burren; O.S. 10:2:1, (27.6 cm.; 55.5 cm.).

APPENDIX II

A LIST OF ECCLESIASTICAL SITES OF PROBABLE EARLY DATE IN NORTHERN COUNTY CLARE

1. Abbey West; 'Corcomroe'; Burren; O.S. 3:10:5, (32.5 cm.; 19.8 cm.).
2. Bishopsquarter; 'Dromcreehy'; Burren; O.S. 2:12:5, (79.8 cm.; 15.3 cm.).
3. Clooney South; Corcomroe; O.S. 16:14:4, (30.7 cm.; 1.4 cm.).
4. Craggagh; 'Killonaghan'; Burren; O.S. 4:3:6, (62.5 cm.; 51.1 cm.).
5. Gleninagh North; Burren; O.S. 2:10:1, (28.2 cm.; 28.6 cm.).
6. Killaspuglonane; Corcomroe; O.S. 15:10:4, (31.8 cm.; 22.2 cm.).
7. Killeany; Burren; O.S. 5:13:4, (2.4 cm.; 0.3 cm.).
8. Killilagh; Corcomroe; O.S. 8:5:5, (13.2 cm.; 28.6 cm.).
9. Kilkeedy; Inchiquin; O.S. 11:13:5, (15.0 cm.; 5.7 cm.).
10. Kilmoon West; Burren; O.S. 8:4:2, (80.0 cm.; 54.1 cm.).
11. Leana; 'Coulnamraher'; Inchiquin; O.S. 17: : , (9.2 cm.; cm.).

APPENDIX III

A PROVISIONAL LIST OF KILEENS OR CHILDREN'S BURIAL GROUNDS IN NORTHERN COUNTY CLARE

In addition to the sites listed below there are a number of children's burial grounds which are located in some of the church-sites listed in Appendix I, namely nos 1, 3, 16 and 18.

1. Ballygastell; Burren; O.S. 8:8:3, (90.4 cm.; 42.8 cm.).
2. Ballymahoney; 'Kilballymahoney'; Burren; O.S. 9:6:5, (31.8 cm.; 36.4 cm.).
3. Ballymurphy; 'Kilballymurphy'; Burren; O.S. 9:6:6, (39.00 cm.; 35.3 cm.).¹⁰⁰
4. Caherclonick North; 'Parknahaille'; Inchiquin; O.S. 16:8:4, (75.3 cm.; 37.8 cm.).
5. Calluragh West; Corcomroe; O.S. 15:11:6, (67.7 cm.; 19.1 cm.).
6. Castletown; Burren; O.S. 10:5:6, (20.9 cm.; 36.4 cm.).
7. Coolnatullagh; 'Kinatulla'; Burren; O.S. 6:10:6, (42.0 cm.; 22.1 cm.).
8. Dereen; 'Ardkill'; Corcomroe; O.S. 14:16:1, (73.2 cm.; 13.5 cm.).
9. Killoghil; Burren; O.S. 2:16:2, (82.1 cm.; 12.2 cm.).
10. Kilweelran; Burren; O.S. 6:1:1, (3.8 cm.; 57.2 cm.).
11. Formoyle East; Burren; O.S. 2:13:1, (6.1 cm.; 8.2 cm.).
12. Glencolumbkille North; 'Kilnaloone'; Burren; O.S. 6:15:5, (59.2 cm.; 2.1 cm.).
13. Kilconnel; Corcomroe; O.S. 14:15:5, (55.2 cm.; 3.9 cm.).
14. Mortyclogh; Burren; O.S. 3:5:3, (17.7 cm.; 38.7 cm.).
15. Mooghna; Corcomroe; O.S. 23:12:4, (75.9 cm.; 19.7 cm.).
16. Murroughkilly; 'Killamurrough'; Burren; O.S. 1:12:4, (74.6 cm.; 19.0 cm.).
17. Rannagh East; 'Killacassaun'; Corcomroe; O.S. 6:13:6, (16.8 cm.; 4.5 cm.).
18. Rossalia; 'Gardeenrossalia'; Burren; O.S. 3:6:3, (43.3 cm.; 38.3 cm.).
19. Turlough; 'Kileenacurry'; Burren; O.S. 6:6:1, (27.3 cm.; 40.7 cm.).

¹⁰⁰The 'Kilballymurphy' killeen was, unfortunately, bulldozed away in 1983, just days before it was visited during the final fieldwork for this article. The landowner stated that there were "rakes of human bones" found on the site. The surviving foundations of a tower-house at Ballymurphy were also removed at this time.