Two Ancient Bronze Bells from Rath Blathmach,
Co. Clare

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Two bronze hand-bells which were acquired by the Royal Irish Academy in the last century along with a crozier-head from the early church site of Rath Blathmach, Co. Clare are here published for the first time. One of these bells is identified with certainty and a possible identification of the second is proposed. A date in the eleventh or twelfth century is suggested for both.

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The crozier-head from Rath Blathmach (Illus. 1.a) is a well-known piece which has been described and illustrated on a number of occasions.¹ The objects associated with it have, in contrast, been neglected. On December 2nd, 1850 the crozier-head was purchased by the Royal Irish Academy from the Rev. Stephen Walsh, parish priest of Corofin, Co. Clare, for £5.0.0. along with “two ancient bronze bells from the same place”.² Registration of the Academy’s collection of antiquities did not begin in earnest until 1859,³ by which time a considerable backlog of objects had built up. The crozier-head was given the register number R.2991 but the bells were never registered. In 1868 a separate Register of Ecclesiastical Antiquities was proposed by Sir William Wilde. By May, 1868, some 300 objects had been registered.⁴ The crozier-head from Rath was given the number 175 but again the bells were not listed. As the two bells do not appear in either register, there is consequently no description of either to be found in the records of the Museum, and as a result they could not be identified in the collections. While the bells have been mentioned in passing by scholars, there appears to have been some uncertainty as to the number of bells associated with Rath Blathmach and only one of them has ever been described (but not illustrated) in print.⁵ Likewise, in the standard accounts of croziers, no mention is made of the associated bells.⁶

The History of the Crozier and Bells

Very little has been published on the history and traditions associated with the objects from Rath Blathmach. Westropp recorded that the crozier was first kept at Rath and then later in the wall of the old chapel of Corofin “where it was used for very solemn swearing and was much feared”.⁷ He also states that the crozier attributed to St. Blathmach “certainly belonged to Rath, as it was procured from the hereditary keeper”.⁸ Neither the crozier nor the bells are mentioned in Dutton’s Statistical Survey of 1808⁹ or O’Curry’s Ordnance Survey Letters of 1839. However, an account of them, hitherto unpublished, is to be found in the minute Books of the Committee of Antiquities of the Royal Irish Academy, in a draft annual report on objects acquired in the years 1850-51:¹⁰

"23 24 25

The Crozier and ecclesiastical bells of Rath-Blathmach in the County of Clare, purchased from the Rev. Stephen Walsh, P.P., of Corofin at the price of £5.

This Crozier like that of Durrow, is unfortunately very much injured, but it is of great historical interest and very valuable as a specimen of Ancient art. That it was the Crozier or Bachall of the Patron Saint

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Illus. 1. (a) Crozier, (b) Quadrangular Bronze Bell, and (c) Round Bronze Bell, found together at Rath Blathmach, Co. Clare. (Photos: National Museum of Ireland)
of the Parish can scarcely be doubtful—but it is remarkable that the name of this Saint is not found in any of our known Calendars, though that of his Son, Onchu, is preserved in the Festology of Aengus Cele De at the 9th of July. Mr. Eugene Curry has, however, obtained from two ancient Poems preserved in the Book of Lecan, sufficient evidence to prove that Blathmac of Rath Blathmach, was venerated in Clare as the Patron Saint of the Dalcastian tribe of the Hy-Tordelbach or Turlogh, and from his Pedigree, which is also preserved in the Book of Lecan it would appear that he flourished about the middle of the 6th century.11 In reference to the preservation of this Bachall at Rath-Blathmac, Mr. Eugene Curry has communicated the following statement:

The present Bachall was, and is traditionally known in the Co. Clare as the Bachall na Ratha or the Bachall of the Rath. It appears that the Bachall was, perhaps, like all other Bachalls, & in more ancient times, kept in the old church of Rath, & it is believed, & certainly with considerable appearance of truth, that after the change from the Roman Catholic Service—say about 1650 & even after the church was rebuilt, the Bachall remained in it until about 18 years ago when someone took it & it was away. Mr. Curry adds that having known of its former existence in the locality, he made, about nine years ago, considerable exertions to discover the appropriation of these relics but without effect. However, he put some intelligent person there on the look out for it & discovered it. & after a lapse of many years, he is happy to find that it should have turned up and found its way through him into the Museum of the Academy. The Bells, though both mutilated, are of great interest from their obvious antiquity. They are both altar bells—one of quadrangular and the other of a round form.12

It is clear from the above that the crozier and the bells (Illus. 1) were associated with Rath Blathmach; that the crozier had a special name and was known throughout the county; that all three objects had been kept together at Rath for a considerable time before they were acquired by the Academy, and that they were used for swearing oaths.

O’Curry’s description of exactly where the objects were kept is clearly based on local knowledge. As a Clareman he would have had a particular interest in these objects and appears to have been instrumental in their acquisition. According to his account, they were kept at Rath after the church had been rebuilt and abandoned (probably in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century). This conflicts with a local tradition which holds that they were kept in a mass chapel at Lisculaun which served the parish chapel until the new church at Rath was built in 1869.13 O’Curry’s account says that the objects were removed from their place of keeping about the year 1832, possibly to Corofin. Westropp records this transfer but gives no date.14 Fr. Stephen Walshe became Parish Priest of Corofin in 1834 and it is possible that the relics were appropriated by him and transferred from Rath to the new church at Corofin in an attempt to discourage what was regarded by the Catholic Church in the nineteenth century as superstitious practices associated with relics and holy wells. Wherever they were kept in the 1830s and 40s, O’Curry’s enquires led to their recovery and final acquisition by the Academy in 1850. Fr. Walshe was later collecting money to build a new church at Rath and it is possible that he sold the relics to the Royal Irish Academy as part of this fund-raising campaign. He retired in 1862 and died the following year; the new parish church of St. Mary at Rath was dedicated in 1869.15

History of the Site

Very little is known about the founding saint, Blathmach. In the notes to the Féilire Óengussa under July 9th reference is made to Onchu mac Blathmach and Finan Lobor of Rath Blathmach, which is described as being in upper Dáil Cais and in the Martyrology of Tallaght Onchú mac Blthaunocc is listed under July 14th.17 Blathmach is
mentioned in a list of Clare saints in the late *Life* of Mac Creiche of Liscannor. While there are doubts that Mac Creiche was a historical personage, Liam De Paor believes that the *Life* does contain some material relating to the political situation in Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries A.D. 18 Perhaps the most significant early reference to the saint is to be found in one of the twelfth century Latin lives of St. Flannán of Killaloe. 19 A *Sanctus Blathmeccus* is recorded as Flannán’s teacher and is described as a being ‘celebrated throughout Ireland’ and ‘most learned in sacred law’; and that the sons of the nobility were sent to him, even from afar, for instruction. 20 This *Life* was most probably written at Killaloe in the 1160s by a clerical follower of the Ui Briain as a piece of propaganda. 21 Ó Corráin notes that there is very little biographical detail in any of the lives of Flannán which makes the reference to Blathmach all the more remarkable. It is possible that the person referred to is Blathmach of Rath, and perhaps the reference indicates that the church there, by the twelfth century, was regarded as a centre of scholarship and learning of sufficient importance to merit inclusion in the *Life*.

O’Curry’s account unfortunately does not mention whether the crozier and bells were, at any stage, kept in the hands of hereditary keepers, although Westropp (incorrectly) stated that the crozier and bells were acquired from their hereditary keeper. 22 Normally the hereditary keepers of relics associated with early saints or churches were also the lay tenants or *airchennaigh* of the church lands. Gleeson could not establish who the *airchennaigh* of Rath were. 23 Research by Michael Mac Mahon has shown that the O’Hogan family claimed title to lands at Rath in the seventeenth century. Members of the family are recorded as landholders in the parish in 1615 and 1630, and in 1661 it was claimed that the ancestors of the O’Hogan’s ‘for many years were tenants to ye bishop’ and were ‘corbes to the Parish of Rath’. 24 The office of coarb (*comhara*)—literally the ‘successor’ of the founding saint—by the later middle ages often became an ecclesiastical benefice similar to that of rector. In many cases it also included the enreagh lands. It is not clear if this was the case at Rath, but there is sufficient information to show that the ancestors of the O’Hogans were significant churchmen in the area throughout the middle ages and may have been the *airchennaigh* of Rath and keepers of the crozier-head and bells.

The O’Hogans or Ui Ócáin claimed descent from the Ui Thairdelbaig, the stock from which the Ui Briain sprang. According to the genealogies Achar, the ancestor of the Ui Ócáin was a cousin of Brian Boru. 25 That the Ui Briain were allies of the Ui Briain is clear also from the fact that the son of Congalach Ua Ócáin was one of the Ui Briain hostages taken by Domnall mac Lochlainn in a hosting into north Munster in 1088 in his struggle against Muirchertach Ua Briain for the kingship of Ireland. 26 Two cousins of Ócáin, the eponymous ancestor of the Ui Ócáin, Cathal and Coscrach were abbots of Killaloe who died in 1013 and 1040 respectively. 27 It is, therefore, quite possible that the Ui Ócáin were in control of the monastery of Rath by the eleventh century and represent another instance of the ruling Ui Briain imposing family members on the monasteries and churches of the region. It is interesting to note that in the nineteenth century, a branch of the O’Hogans are recorded as custodians of another relic—the crozier of St. Coonlaun in Youghalarra parish, across the Shannon in Co. Tipperary. 28

There is a late tradition associated with the bells of Rath Blathmach which is noted elsewhere by O’Curry. In the Irish *Life* of St. Mac Creiche and in local folklore there is a legend associated with the *Broc Sighe* or fairy bador which dwelt in *Loch Broseach*, identified by O’Curry and Westropp with a lake near Rath Blathmach. 29 The *Broc Sighe* caused great destruction in the neighbourhood and a number of local saints, including St. Blathmach, tried to destroy the monster by ringing their *ceolána* (singing bells) and by
making a great noise with their reliquaries and croziers. It was St. Mac Creiche, however, who rid the people of the demon by chaining it to the bottom of the lake. Whatever doubts there may be about the historical character of Mac Creiche, O'Curry states that "the ceolána alluded to in the legend are traditionally well remembered in the parish... and have with other objects [sic] supposed to have belonged to Saint Blathmac, passed into the possession of the Royal Irish Academy".33

The Round Bell

We know from O'Curry's account that two bells were acquired; that both were of bronze and damaged and that one was of circular and the other of quadrangular form. The bells were described as "altar bells", which suggests that both were small in size. It is possible to identify the round bell because we are fortunate in having a description, with measurements, published by Westropp in 1894.34 Westropp states that Major R. J. McEnery—who was Curator of the Antiquities Collection of the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy at the time—identified it as the Bell of Rath. Although McEnery's identification—over forty years after its acquisition—is the only basis on which O'Curry's bell "of round form" can now be located in the collections of the National Museum, there

Illus. 2. Drawing (by Ursula Mattenberger) of the round bell from Rath Blathmac.
is no reason to dispute it. The bell fits O'Curry's admittedly scant description and the identification is strengthened by the fact that it is the only round-mouthed bell in the collection which would fit O'Curry's account.

The bell (Illus. 1,c and 2) is of cast copper-alloy and consists of two elements—a body, badly damaged, of originally oval plan and a crested cap riveted to the crown of the body. Only about half the circumference of the body survives. The body is plain except for a slight external moulting at the mouth and a constriction at the base of the crown. It is thin-walled, averaging 1.5mm in thickness. The precise shape of the crown is obscured by the decorative cap but it was rounded and was provided with a loop handle, only the stumps of which are preserved. Two circular perforations, 5.5mm in diameter, are set opposite one another at the base of the crown, one in the centre of each of the broader faces of the bell. These may have been either a decorative feature or were designed to improve the sound. Two smaller, irregularly shaped perforations occur in the crown and are aligned on the longer axis of the bell. These presumably held the suspension loop and its clapper—both of which are missing. There is a large crack in the body of the bell and the broken edges are well worn. The external surface is pitted and bears a dark brown patina.

The patina on the cap is darker in colour than the body and its surface is polished and heavily worn. It is also made of thinner metal. It is now secured to the body by a single rivet which passes laterally through one of the stumps of the loop handle. There are two further rivet-holes in the cap which do not, however, have corresponding holes in the crown of the body.

The cap has a raised crest which terminates in animal heads. The apex of the crest is executed in openwork and is attached to the cap on each of the broad sides by narrow tongues of metal. A separate piece of metal was inserted in a vertical position through the centre of the crest and the cap. It is circular in cross section and is a design feature of some interest (see below). The hollow crest is swollen mid-way along each side to accommodate the stumps of the loop handle. In one case the wall of the crest is worn through revealing the handle. The animal heads project below the lower edge of the cap. They are badly worn and no detail is visible. The lower edge of the cap is also worn and is irregular in outline. The cap does not appear to have obscured the large perforations at the base of the crown.

The cap fits the body of the bell so neatly that it was clearly designed for it. The edge of the cap, though now damaged, seems to have followed the line of the moulding at the base of the crown and the hollow crest was designed to accommodate the broken stumps of the handle. This suggests that the bell may either have been of some antiquity before the cap was added or was deliberately re-modelled so that a decorative cap could be added. Because the condition of the handle cannot now be examined in detail one cannot be sure of this. It is not clear how the cap was originally attached to the body. The crudely made rivet which now fixes the cap to only one side of the handle is clearly secondary and the absence of other rivet holes suggests that the cap may originally have been soldered to the body (although there are no traces now of solder). Apparently at some subsequent stage the cap became detached and was re-attached by means of a single rivet. The original dimensions at the mouth were c.8.5cm x c.8.0cm and the bell measures 8.5cm in height.

**The Quadrangular Bell**

The identification of the second bell is more problematic. However, an examination of all the small, damaged, quadrangular bronze bells, the history of which is unknown in the
collections of the National Museum of Ireland has yielded only one example which would fit O'Curry's description. This bell is numbered W.17 (the prefix 'W' refers to catalogues produced by Sir William Wilde, but the catalogue to which this number refers cannot now be traced). There are two further labels attached to the outside. One is marked 'Mallet 49' and the other 'No. (4) 13'. The precise significance of these has not been established. 'Mallet 49' may refer to chemical analyses carried out on antiquities in the Royal Irish Academy's Museum by John W. Mallet, chemist and seismologist. Among the objects which he tested were two small bells, one oval and one square, numbered '15' and '16'. Although it is tempting to identify these with the bells under discussion, they are described as being 'of deep yellow bronze' and are therefore unlikely to be those from Rath.

The bell (Illus. 1, b and 3) is of cast copper-alloy. Most of one of the broad faces is missing and the corners of the mouth are cracked. The broken edges are very worn. The bell is rectangular in cross-section and tapers from mouth to crown. The latter is pierced for a suspension loop consisting of a copper-alloy bar, circular in cross-section and tapering towards each end. The body of the bell contains a number of nail-holes of different sizes. There are four set roughly 3cm below the crown on the intact broad face. Aligned with these are pairs of nail-holes on each of the short sides and at least one on the damaged face suggesting that some fitting may have been attached to the bell at this point, perhaps.

Illus. 3. Drawing (by Ursula Mattenberger) of the quadrangular bell from Rath Blathmach.
some form of a cap such as that on the round bell. It measures 7.4cm x 8.0cm at the mouth and is 8.0cm in height.

The Date of the Bells

Neither of the Rath bells fits into the two main categories of early Irish hand bells identified by Bourke⁷—Class 1 of riveted sheet-iron coated in bronze and Class 2 of cast bronze—both categories comprised of bells which are relatively large and of rectangular cross-section. The Rath bells are smaller and belong to a different tradition, and although they are relatively plain, they do have features which enable them to be roughly dated.

Of the two, it is perhaps easiest to suggest a date for the round-mouthed bell. Bells of circular plan are regarded by Bourke as imports from the Norman world c.1100 A.D., citing the small hemispherical examples shown on the Bayeux tapestry.³⁸ There are two other early Irish bells which are of similar shape and size to the round bell from Rath. One from Kilshanny, Co. Clare—called the Bell of St. Cuana—may have originally had a separate cap or crown like that on the Rath bell.³⁹ The other is the Bell of St. Caillin preserved at Foxfield, Co. Leitrim.⁴⁰ This has a separately riveted cap of the same size and shape as the Rath bell. The cap is decorated with panels of plant scrolls and interlaced snakes which appears to be executed in openwork and the ornament resembles that of metalwork objects executed in the Irish Urnes style of the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries.

The cap on the Rath bell is decorated with a pair of downward pointing animal heads. Their worn condition precludes a close dating but the use of animal heads seen in profile from both sides is a decorative terminal feature found on a number of crozier- and bell-shrine crests. Of the croziers with this feature, two (the Prosperous Crozier and one from the Bell Collection, now in Edinburgh) have recently been dated to the ninth century.⁴¹ These, however, do not have the rounded, elongated profile of the heads on the Rath bell crest. All the other croziers with this feature can be dated to the eleventh or early twelfth centuries.⁴² Similar animal heads are found, placed in the same position on a number of bell shrines, in particular on the Shrine of St. Mura’s Bell,⁴³ the Shrine of St. Senan’s Bell,⁴⁴ the Bearnán Cuileáin,⁴⁵ the bell-shrine crest from the River Bann⁴⁶ and on the upper portion of an unprovenanced bell in the National Museum of Ireland decorated with silver and niello inlay (Reg. No. X.1965; Illus. 4),⁴⁷ all of which can be dated to the later eleventh and twelfth centuries. The most elaborate of all the Irish bell shrines, that for St. Patrick’s Bell, includes terminal animal heads as part of its crest.⁴⁸ It would appear, therefore, that the use of animal-heads or masks are a common design feature of Irish bell-shrine crests of the later eleventh and twelfth centuries. This is reinforced by the recent discovery of a bell-crest with animal-headed terminals from the Rock of Cashel.⁴⁹ The latter also shares a more unusual design feature with the round bell from Rath, namely, the pillar-like element which joins the top of the crest with the crown. This device is found on another object—the decorated bell of unknown provenance (X.1965) mentioned above (Illus. 4).

The round-mouthed bell should, therefore, date to the period 1050-1150. If the decorated cap was added after the handle had been worn, the bell could well be earlier. It is interesting to note that a round-mouthed bell similar to that from Rath is shown alongside a tau-shaped crozier with knops of a type which could be of eleventh or twelfth century date on a grave slab in Killinaboy churchyard only 5 km. from Rath Blathmac. This slab has been dated to the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries,⁵⁰ largely on the basis of its size and on the relatively late date then attributed to round-mouthed bells. In the light of the dating
now suggested for the latter, it is now possible that the Killinaboy slab could be as early as the twelfth century.

The rectangular bell is much smaller than the cast bronze bells of Bourke's Class 2. Only one of the latter, a plain bell from Scattery Island in the British Museum,\textsuperscript{31} compares in size with that from Rath. A significant morphological feature of the Rath bell is that its sides are flat rather than curved, a feature of bells which Bourke would regard as transitional between Class 2 bells and those of more recent date.\textsuperscript{52} One group of these are of cast bronze and have handles provided with two or three finger-holes. A good example is that from Devenish, Co. Fermanagh, formerly in the Petrie Collection (Illus. 5). Recent x-ray photographs taken of the Bell of St. Mura, from Fahan, Co. Donegal suggests that this, too, was of this type.\textsuperscript{53} This is significant as the decoration added to the Bell of St. Mura can be dated to the late eleventh century by comparison with that on the Cathach and Misach shrines.\textsuperscript{54} As with the round bell from Rath, it is not clear whether the eleventh-century decoration on the Bell of St. Mura is primary or a later addition but the absence of small bells with flat faces among Bourke's Class 2 suggests that bells of this type may be later typologically. Other small, quadrangular bells with flat faces such as the Shrine of St. Senan's Bell, from Scattery Island,\textsuperscript{55} and the unprovenanced bell X.1965 can be dated by their decoration to the late eleventh or early twelfth centuries. It is likely, therefore, that the Rath bell is of a similar date but as it lacks decoration, it is not possible to be certain of this.

It is clear from the parallels cited above that by the eleventh and twelfth centuries, new forms of bells were being used. These were either of circular or rectangular form and were

Illus. 4. Decorative bronze bell-fragment, unprovenanced; height 6.1 cm. (Photo: National Museum of Ireland)
much smaller in size (8.0-15.5cm in height) than the large hand-bells of sheet-iron or cast bronze which are conventionally dated to the period 700-900 A.D., and which until now were considered typical of the early church in Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is clear that the Rath bells belong to a series of small Irish hand-bells of pre-Norman date which have up to now been neglected. These smaller bells often have decoration which is applied directly to the body of the bell either in the form of a cap (the round bell from Rath), a crest (River Bann or Cashel examples) or as plates applied to the face of the bell (the Bell of St. Mura), or which are integral to the structure of the bell from the beginning, such as the unprovenance bell X.1965. This is clearly a different tradition to the decoration of the larger iron bells in which the decoration is applied to an outer casing or shrine which

Illus. 5. Bronze bell, Devenish, Co. Fermanagh; height 10.7cm. (Photo: National Museum of Ireland)
encloses the relic and also to the large bronze bells which are generally plain or at least have no applied decoration. One cannot say how early such small bells came into use. Of the sheet-iron hand-bells, only the exceptionally small example from Kilmichael-Glassary in Scotland, measuring 8.0cm in height, compares in size to the bells under discussion here.\textsuperscript{56} The Shrine of St. Senan’s Bell was designed for a bell about 8cm in height. It is not possible to say if this was of bronze or iron, but the latter is the most likely, given the fact that there is no definite instance of the enshrinement of a bronze bell.\textsuperscript{57} It is also clear that these small bells served a different function from the main series of hand-bells of earlier date. Their small size suggests that they were most likely used indoors and O’Curry’s description of the Rath bells as ‘altar bells’ may indicate one of the uses to which they were put.

Croziers and bells were the most common attributes of ecclesiastics in early medieval Ireland and many of the surviving croziers, bells and bell-shrines are associated by tradition with early Irish saints. The Rath objects, however, are a rare example of a group of relics from the one site which are associated with the same saint. This is only paralleled at Inishmurray, Co. Sligo,\textsuperscript{58} and Fahan, Co. Donegal, at each of which were preserved a crozier and a bell associated with St. Molaise and St. Mura respectively.

The late eleventh or twelfth century date proposed for the crozier and two bells from Rath and the reference to its patron saint, Blathmac, in the twelfth century life of St. Flannán, ties in well with what remains to be seen on the site today—a church, substantially of Romanesque date with some carvings of high quality and a probable round tower, now disappeared.\textsuperscript{59} All the evidence suggests that it was at this time that Rath Blathmac enjoyed a brief period of importance and that this \textit{floruit} was probably due to the royal patronage of the Uí Briain who provided the church with clerics which came from the ranks of its own dynastic families—a pattern repeated at other ecclesiastical sites in the region such as Terryglass, Iniscealtra and Killaloe.

\textbf{FOOTNOTES}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}See A. Mahr and J. Raftery (eds.), \textit{Christian Art in Ancient Ireland}, 2 vols., Dublin 1932 and 1941, Vol. II, p. 159 and Pl. 91:1 with references. It is registered as R.2991. Part of the shaft of the crozier, consisting of a tubular piece of sheet bronze, 8.5cm in length, fastened to a modern(?) piece of wood is registered as R.2997. Although its association with the crozier-head is not stated in the main Academy Register, it is listed in the Register of Ecclesiastical Antiquities compiled in 1868 (see below) as No. 182 where it is stated “A Crozier shaft—brass covering of (a) portion of 3\% inches long. Mr. Clibborn considers this came with No. 176 [i.e. the Rath crozier-head],” Edward Clibborn was Assistant Secretary of the Academy who later became curator of its Museum.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Proc. Roy. Irish Acad., 5(1850-53), 85-86.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Proc. Roy. Irish Acad., 7(1857-60), 282.
\item \textsuperscript{4}Royal Irish Academy Antiquities Committee Minute Book, Vol. IV, pp. 153 and 167. I would like to thank the President and Council of the Royal Irish Academy for permission to publish extracts from this manuscript.
\item \textsuperscript{5}The earliest published reference to the bells is by E. O’Curry in \textit{Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish}, Vol. III, Dublin 1873, p. 332, fn. 383 who mentions ‘Ceolána (bells) and other objects from Rath’. J. Frost \textit{The History and Topography of the County of Clare}, Dublin 1893, pp. 138-139 mentions ‘the bells and Ceolána supposed to have belonged to St. Blathmac’ being in the collections of the Royal Irish Academy. T. J. Westropp refers to the bells in a number of publications: ‘Churches with Round Towers in Northern Clare (Part I)’, \textit{J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland}, 24(1894), 31 mentions ‘the two bronze bells of this [i.e. Rath] church’; ‘Churches with Round Towers in Northern Clare (Part II)’ \textit{J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland}, 24(1894), 337 gives a description of the round mouthed bell; in \textit{J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland}, 30(1900), 419 he refers to ‘a little bronze bell, formerly belonging to Rath Church...preserved in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy’; in ‘The Churches of County Clare’, \textit{Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.}, 22(1900-02), p. 127 he mentions the ‘bell of Rath, a small oval hand-bell of very thin bronze’; in his \textit{Guide to the Collections of Irish Antiquities. Part IV—The Christian Period}, Dublin 1911, p. 19 he refers to ‘a great number of small cast bells—that of Rath, County Clare...has a handle formed of
grotesque animals'; in ‘A Folklore Survey of County Clare’, *Folk-lore*, 22(1911), 336 he mentions ‘the bells of Rath, Burren and Killshanny’. Since Westropp’s time there have been few published references to the bells. Gleeson in *A History of the Diocese of Killaloe*, Dublin 1962, p. 35 refers to one bell only. MacMahan in *A History of the Parish of Rath*, Ennis 1979, p. 17 mentions, but does not describe, ‘two bronze bells belonging to the church in Rath’. The writer has also discussed the bells briefly in an article on ‘Ecclesiastical Objects of the Early Medieval Period from Co. Clare’ in *The Other Clare*, 15(1991), 12-14.


9 *Folklore*, 22(1911), 337.

10 *J. Roy. Soc. Antiqs. Ireland*, 24(1894), 24. We now, however, from the records of the Royal Irish Academy, which the objects were acquired from Fr. Walshe, parish priest of Corofin, in 1808, which, in contrast, mentions the crozier from Dysert O’Dea.


12 O’Curry is here confusing two persons with the same name. These poems are now known to have been written by the 8th century poet Blathmac mac Con Bretain who has no known connection with the site of Rath Blathmac—see F. J. Byrne *Irish Kings and High Kings*, Dublin 1973, pp. 29 and 118.

13 Repairs were carried on the church, c.1616, see M. MacMahan, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

14 Folklore*, 22(1911), 337. The church at Corofin was built by Fr. John Murphy, Parish Priest, in 1822. I am grateful to Mr. MacMahan for this information.

15 For information on on Fr. Walshe, I am grateful to Mr. Michael MacMahan.

16 Whitelock-Smith (ed.), *Dublin*, 1913, p. 169.


18 'Saint Mac Creiche of Liscannon', *Eria*, 30(1979), 93-121.


20 Heist, *op. cit.*, par. 3.


22 See fn. 8. Although Westropp was wrong, his reference to a hereditary keeper may indicate that one did exist well into the last century.

23 *op. cit.*, fn. 5, p. 35.


27 *His death is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters* under the year 1091, and in the *Chronicon Scotorum* under 1087.

28 MacMahan, *op. cit.* (fn. 5), pp. 16-17. There are, in addition, five deans and four preceptors of the name recorded for the diocese, see A. Gwynn and D. F. Gleeson, *A History of the Diocese of Killaloe*, Dublin 1962, pp. 521-529.


30 *Ibid.*, Table II: Acher, Ócán’s father, was a brother of Maini and Aingid.


33 O’Curry, *ibid.*, p. 332.


35 An incomplete manuscript of Wilde’s was published by E. C. R. Armstrong in ‘Catalogue of the Silver and Ecclesiastical Antiquities in the Collection of the Royal Irish Academy’, *Proc. Roy. Irish Acad.*, 23C(1915), 287-312. This contains a list of iron bells numbered W.1 to W.6. Perhaps the number W.17 refers to a continuation of this listing or a separate list of bronze bells.

38 Ibid., p. 55.
39 H. T. Ellacombe, The Church Bells of Devon, Exeter 1872, p. 345 and fig. 21.
42 These include, among others the 'Kells' Crozier, the Durrow Crozier, the Crozier of the Abbots of Clonmacnoise, the Innisfallen Crozier, St. Mura's Crozier (on the inside curve of the crest), the Dysert O'Dea Crozier, the Lismore Crozier and an unprovenanced crozier-head in the National Museum. These are illustrated in Mahr and Raftery, op. cit. (fn. 1): Vol. I, Pls. 72:1 and 75:1; Vol. II, Pls. 88, 89, 90, 92, 94 and 86:2, respectively.
43 H. S. Crawford, 'Notes on the Irish Bell-Shrines in the British Museum and the Wallace Collection', J. Roy. Soc. Antiqus. Ireland, 52(1922), 1-10 and Pl. II.
45 F. Henry, op. cit. (fn. 31), Pl. K.
46 Mahr and Raftery, op. cit. (fn. 1), Vol. I, Pl. 36:4a, b.
47 Unpublished. Nothing is known of the history of this piece and, like the two bronze bells from Rath, it cannot be traced in the Royal Irish Academy's registers. It does appear on an undated and unsigned watercolour in the National Museum (Reg. No. 1912:106). This is almost certainly one of a series of illustrations of objects in the Royal Irish Academy Museum by James Plunket, drawn between 1846 and 1851. It is just possible that this may be the quadrangular bell from Rath but if it were, one would have expected O'Curry to have referred to its decoration.
51 Ellacombe, op. cit. (fn. 39), pp. 344-345 and fig. 19.
52 Bourke, op. cit. (fn. 37), pp. 54-55.
53 Based on a recent examination of this bell in the Wallace Collection in London. I am grateful to Mr. David Edge, Armourer, for showing me the bell and the x-ray photographs.
55 Raftery, op. cit., (fn. 1), Vol. II, Pl. 82.
56 J. Anderson, Scotland in Early Christian Times, Edinburgh 1881, Fig. 77.