



SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Lemonaghan

The Coming of Christianity

There is no doubt that the area around Lemonaghan was an important Early Christian landscape. Lemonaghan townland, which covers a total area of 916 hectares, encompasses a substantial dryland island surrounded on the north-east and west by large expanses of bog. To reach the island one would have to cross very wet and marshy bogland. The site of the monastic establishment of St. Manchan of Liath is located on this island.





*Bronze Age
Plank Walkway*

The classic single-plank walkway which was the favoured routeway in the Bronze Age reappeared and was commonly constructed throughout this period (AD 500–1000). After 1,000 years, very little had changed in the mode of transportation across the bog. The construction of these walkways may suggest a deterioration in weather similar to that which occurred during the Bronze Age. The bogs may have been drier in the

intervening periods and therefore there was no necessity for the construction of toghers.

There is no question that the construction of plank walkways in the 6th century was a response to the establishment of monastic settlements in the area



St. Monaghan's Road leading to Mella's Cell

and the need to provide access to them. Some significant ecclesiastical artefacts highlight the importance of the area from the 6th century until the 13th century and later.

One such artefact is the elaborate 12th century Irish reliquary known as St. Manchan's Shrine (pictured opposite), which is now housed at Boher church within a few miles of Lemonaghan. The shrine, which is tomb-shaped, is made of wood and covered with four bronze cast plates, originally gilded. The plates are decorated with animal interlace and the front panel is adorned with an embossed cross, surrounded by cast human figures. This shrine is one of the largest and most significant in Ireland, and its association with St. Manchan's Church indicates the importance of the area. A portion of the wooden shaft of a crozier partially covered in bronze with panels of interlaced decoration was found by a Bord na Móna worker in the townland of Lemonaghan, which is located to the north of Lemonaghan Island. It is 9th Century in date and is probably linked to the monastic establishment on the island.



View of Shrine from back.



Detail of embossed cross and interlaced design.



Five bronze figures each of them with a distinctive beard.



St. Patrick Stained Glass Window, Ballinahoun Church.



St. Ciaran Stained Glass Window, Ballinahoun Church.



St. Monaghan Stained Glass Window, Boher Church.

Another wooden crozier probably the most significant find uncovered during the Bord na Móna excavations, was unearthed during the excavation of a late 6th century/early 7th century plank walkway located very close to the island. It may be one of the earliest dated croziers in Ireland and was found in a vertical position in the peat. The wood has been identified as blackthorn. The crozier (from Latin *crocia*, 'crook') was carved longitudinally from a stem or branch and then polished. It is broken at several points along its length, but when fitted back together it measures 1.25m in length and 25mm in diameter. The crook itself bears a Greek cross in a circle incised into the wood, and the tip of the shaft is stepped and pointed where a metal point may originally have been positioned. This crozier would probably have been in the possession of a bishop or leading clergyman, and was presumably lost in the treacherous bog of Lemonaghan during a wet crossing. The togher beside which the wooden crozier was located was traceable across the width of the bog and consisted of three layers of constructional elements. The upper walking surface was made of split oak planks laid end to end and pegged into the peat at each end through a mortice hole. Underneath the oak planks were roundwood and plank transverse supports. Underneath each transverse were two supporting longitudinal runners. The transverse timbers and longitudinal runners elevated the plank walkway above the surface of the wet bog. This track runs southwards from the dryland fringes of Killaghintober townland across to Broders Island and then onto Lemonaghan Island.



St. Monaghan Stained Glass Window in Ballinahoun Church



Four other similarly constructed trackways have been excavated in the surrounding area. All were single-plank walkways lying on transverse supports, and all could be traced across the bog for some distance. The planks were further stabilised by the insertion of pegs through the planks into the peat. In some cases a large amount of wood was dumped into a very wet area or pool so that the track would not sink. These tracks were all dated to the first half of the 7th century AD, and all run towards the monastic island at Lemonaghan. A leather ankle shoe was found alongside one of the linear planks. It was front-laced and the heel and toe on the sole were worn through. That the Lemonaghan bogs continued to be used as a crossing point until at least the 13th century and probably later is indicated by the construction of a multiphase togher traced onto the island at Lemonaghan. Five phases of construction were identified. The earliest phase was a longitudinally placed split oak walkway, firmly dated by dendrochronology to AD 653 (roughly the same time as the monastic settlement was established on the island). The second phase was a thick layer of redeposited boulder clay. The third phase was a

transversely laid plank trackway with a large quantity of wooden rods placed underneath, in between and over the radially split planks. One of the planks has been dendrochronologically dated to late in AD 1158 or early in AD 1159. The fourth phase was a smaller layer of redeposited boulder clay, and the final phase was a sandstone flag layer which would have created a very flat walking surface. There is no doubt that the initial construction of this and similar toghers in the area was stimulated by the establishment of the monastic centre on the island. The later phases of construction of the togher coincide with the continued use of the island of Lemonaghan as a centre of worship. Besides the early 7th century cell on the island, there are the remains of a 12th century Romanesque doorway, around which a later 15th century church was built. Monastic establishments tended to be founded in remote areas, possibly to promote a sense of seclusion. As can be seen at Lemonaghan, a network of routeways, which were probably carefully controlled and managed by the monks, was established throughout the Lemonaghan bogs to provide access to the monastic establishment on the island. The association of toghers and early monastic establishments has been noted elsewhere, e.g. at White Island, Co. Fermanagh, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow and Clonmacnoise, Co. Offaly. On the higher ridges surrounding the bogs at Lemonaghan there are numerous ringforts and cashels, including some high status ringforts, in which the people who constructed the 7th-century tracks may have lived. These forts are circular enclosures, defined by either a single or a double ditch and bank, with a commanding view over the bogs. They were the typical homesteads of the period and the interiors would have contained their houses and associated farms.



Mella's Cell



St. Monaghan's Well



Reflections in St. Monaghan's Well



Manchan's PRAYER

*O Son of the living God, ancient eternal King
Grant me a hidden hut to be my home in the wild,
With green shadow water running by its side
And a clear pool to wash off sin by grace of the Holy Ghost.*

*A lovely wood close by around it on every hand
To feed the birds of many voices, to shelter them and hide
Southward facing for warmth with a stream in its grounds
And choice land of thick growth good for every crop.*

*Some sensible disciples (their number I will fix)
Modest and obedient praying to the King:
Four times three - or three fours - correct for every need;
Two sides within the church on the north side and the south.*

*Six pairs besides myself gathered all about me
Praying for all Eternity to the King who lights the Sun
A lovely church, with linen, a home for heaven's King
With bright lamps shining down on the clean bright scriptures;*

*And a special house to go to for minding of the body,
With no lust or luxury or any harmful thought.
And the things that I will have there and tend there, for certain,
And hens, fresh and fragrant leeks, bees and speckled salmon...*

*Ample food and raiment for the King of farest fame
And I seated somewhere praying to God a while.*

St. Manchan of Leamonaghan
Seventh Century





Tabernacle in Pullough Church with old bog oak encasement which attracts visitors from all over the world.

mella's Son

*The Millennium sun will rise
o'er Mella's Cell.
Sing songs of praise at my Holy Well.
For I was Mella's only son.
My work goes on until
Kingdom Come.
Our milk was always given free.
What was done was done for Christianity.*

*In my Mother's arms
God's words were said.
In my Mother's arms
God's deeds were fed.
I learned to pray before I could speak.
I learned to teach what
Christians seek.*

*God's book was read, prayers were said.
So that Christian truth would spread.
Sacred wishes secret within
my Holy Tree.
Cows tracks are there for all of
you to see.*

*Wherever you wear the
Shamrock Green.
The Holy Trinity can be seen.
Our home was blessed
with family unity.
What I said was first heard in Galilee.*

*The Millennium sun will rise
o'er Mella's Cell.
Sing songs of praise at my Holy Well.
For I was Mella's only Son.
My work goes on until
Kingdom Come.
Our milk was always given free.
What was done was done for Christianity.
In these grey lands
our Christian plan began.
Spread faith, hope and
charity in every single man.*

*Built a home and a monastery
in Leamonaghan.
Not far from where the rustic
waters ran.*

*For our sins Jesus Christ he bled.
For our sake He rose from the dead.
Everlasting life is here for you and me.
Celebrate the year of his
2000 Jubilee.*

*My bones enshrined in bronze and gold.
My story's told by young and old.
My feast day held on
the 24th January.
Love your neighbour, continue
my work of charity.*

*The Millennium sun will rise
o'er Mella's Cell.
Sing songs of praise at my Holy Well.
For I was Mella's only son.
My work goes on until
Kingdom Come.
Our milk was always given free.
What was done was done for Christianity.*

*Oh I loved the land of Leamonaghan.
Found God's truth in every man.
Jesus Christ was Our Fathers' only Son.
His work goes on until Kingdom Come.*

AMC





Deep Inside

*Deep inside there plays a tune
Leading man back to the womb.*

*Deep inside there is an answer
Asking man to question better.*

*Deep inside there is a space
Where lives the truth about the human race*

*Deep inside there is a door
Inviting man to worship more.*

*Deep inside there is a place
Where every man owns his own space.*

*Deep inside there is a river
Seeking balance between now and never.*

*Deep inside there is a voice
Calling us to forgive and rejoice.*

*Deep inside there is a stream
Flowing with courage to persue our dream.*

*Deep inside there is a yearning
To seek and find life everlasting*

AMC