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A Conservation and Management Plan for the Pilgrim Route at the ecclesiastical site of St. Mullin's, Co. Carlow



Photo: Beth Shotton

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Introduction

A Conservation and Management Plan for the Pilgrim Route at St. Mullin's is being made in order to facilitate improvements to the route while safeguarding the cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible; and to evaluate the significance of the ritual observance of the Pilgrim Route.

The Pilgrim Route at St. Mullin's is associated with the early ecclesiastical complex situated on high ground above the east bank of the River Barrow in south County Carlow. To the south east of the site a tributary, the Aughavaud, enters the Barrow and this confluence facilitated mills and the use of water power from early times until the late nineteenth century. The early medieval monastic site is named after its founder Saint Moling, who died in A.D. 697. Although ruined, the complex contains, as well as churches, the iconic symbols of Irish Christianity such as the round tower and the stone high cross. A manuscript known as the Book of Moling, dating from about the late 8th century, which is likely to be connected to the saint survives, it is now in Trinity College, Dublin. There is a Life of Saint Moling written in Irish, and also a Latin Life of the saint. These are hagiographical works which are thought to date from the early twelfth century. At a distance from the ecclesiastical enclosure and on the eastern side of the Aughavaud river is St. Moling's Well. Recent scholarship by Dr. Tomás O Carragáin indicates that it is the remains of a baptismal chapel built over 'the flowing waters of a holy well, making it the only surviving early medieval well-chapel in Ireland.'¹ The holy well is a pivotal part of the ritual observance of the Pilgrim Route.

The Pilgrim Route

The Pilgrim Route is a devotional practice and water-based ritual, performed in honour of Saint Moling. It is often performed in supplication to the saint, seeking the miraculous curative power of the water from the ancient well. Today the pilgrimage is generally made around the time of the 'pattern day'. 'Pattern Days' were a common feature in Ireland, until the beginning of the 19th century. The word 'pattern' comes from patron - patron saint -. Every parish had a patron and a day of religious devotion

¹ O Carragáin, T. 'Archaeology of Early Medieval Baptism at St. Mullin's Co. Carlow' in *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* V.21 (Brepols, 2010) p287

and social activity was held, usually on the date of the patron's feast day. Pilgrimages, circumambulating holy wells, supplications to the patron saint, many of whom were thought to have curative powers, were common. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries church and civil authorities discouraged the pattern days, and now very few survive; while some are being revived and are considered to be an important part of traditional culture.

At St. Mullin's the tradition of holding a pattern day has survived. It takes place every year on the Sunday before the Feast of St. James, July 25th at the medieval monastic site and in the village adjacent. The traditional date of holding it may be associated with the Lughnasa festival², as the saint's Feast day is June 17th. Around the time of the pattern day, the ritual observance of the pilgrim route is carried out, but it may also happen at other times during the year. Pilgrims walk the route, and 'wade the water' in honour of and in supplication to Saint Moling. The observance begins at St. Moling's well situated across the Aughavaud river from the main body of the monastic site, and ends within the ecclesiastical complex at the ruined church, Tempall Mór. Pilgrims end the circuit by walking through the graveyard toward the village of St. Mullins.

Context of the Conservation and Management Plan

The Conservation and Management Plan is being prepared in the context of the proposed reinstatement of two bridges along the Pilgrim Route at St. Mullins, and the introduction of a third bridge on the approach to St. Moling's well. A Framework for Heritage and Amenity at St. Mullin's was carried out by Loughlin Kealy in 1995 and one of the recommendations was that 'Access to the pilgrim route must be improved.' Partly in response to this students at UCD School of Architecture in co-operation with Carlow County Council designed three footbridges for the route in the Spring Semester of 2010. A Part 8 application for planning permission for three pedestrian footbridges was approved in April of that year.

² Manning, C. *St Mullin's: An early ecclesiastical site and medieval settlement in County Carlow* (Archaeology Ireland, Heritage Guide No.5, 1999)

Archaeology: The following statement from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government was accepted by the Local Authority as part of the Part 8 Approval:

“It is noted that the proposed development is in close proximity to the ancient ecclesiastical site of St. Mullins. Therefore, it is recommended that the County Council engage the services of an archaeologist to carry out Archaeological Monitoring of ground works associated with the development”.

This Plan further recommends that a Desktop Assessment be carried out prior to development; in particular in relation to the landing point of Bridge 1 and its proximity to the ‘Wading Stream’ known as the *tacarda* in the historical literature.

Ecology: An Appropriate Assessment of the proposed locations of the three bridges has been carried out by Dr. Betsy Hickey, Consulting Ecologist. Two significant implications of the Assessment recommendations are that, the location of Bridge 3 over the mill race must be moved northward some metres to avoid the roots of a mature beech tree; and, the structure of the three bridges must be set back from the water’s edge by 2 – 2.5 metres. This latter implication will require longer bridges at location 1 and 2. As the spans are currently designed to have a setback approximately 1.5m from the river

Structure: The structural design of the foundations of the bridges has not yet been carried out beyond preliminary consultation with Arup Consulting Engineers in 2010. The results of the preliminary consultation are as follows: in the first instance, soil bearing pressure should be tested using a geo-physical technique, which can provide sufficient detail to properly design the foundations by a non-destructive method, which will not interfere in any way with the site and ground conditions; foundations can be designed using a pile method which will have a minimum impact on the archaeology and ecology of the site.

Location: The existing pilgrim route is entirely located within the townland of St. Mullin’s. One of the new bridges, Bridge 1 will spring from the recently created Pilgrims’ Park which is situated in the townland of Glebe, and crossing the Aughavaud will land in the townland of St. Mullin’s.

Land Ownership and Associations with the MacMurrough Kavanagh. The site has long been associated with the MacMurrough Kavanagh family who still live at Borris House, some ten kilometers away. The hagiographical Life of Moling in Irish, *Geinemain Molling Ocus a Bhetae*³ describes the saint as having a common ancestor with the Kings of Leinster, while this may not have any basis in historical fact it reflects the society of the time in which the Life was written (thought to be the early twelfth century), and indicates that Moling was an important saint, some 400 years after his death. St. Mullin's was granted to the Augustinian Abbey of Ferns in 1158. After the Norman invasion the site passed out of Kavanagh hands, but in 1417 Art MacMurrough Kavanagh who was regarded as King of Leinster by the Irish was buried there. A metalwork shrine for the Book of Moling, now held by the National Museum, is said to have been commissioned by him, it was made in 1402 and inscribed for 'Art, Lord and King of Leinster'. Despite the monastery and its barony being granted to the Colclough family after the dissolution of the monasteries in 1540, Brian McCahir McArte Kavanagh was able to hold on to the barony.⁴ There is a Kavanagh Mausoleum on the site dated to the 17th /18th century. Frizell, when mapping the estate of Thomas Kavanagh of Borris House in 1768, notes of the townland of St. Mullin's;

Also here is the Family Chapel and Vault where they have been interred for many centuries.⁵

The evidence of the Frizell maps show that the Colcloughs held the area called Glebe, shown within St. Mullin's townland. The Valuation maps of the second half of the 19th century indicate the same ownership pattern at Glebe and St. Mullin's. In 1880, the ruins at St. Mullin's were designated a National Monument. After the Land Acts of the early twentieth century diverse owners held parts of the townland. More recently the land surrounding the Pilgrim Route has been taken into the ownership of the Local Authority.

³ *The Birth and Life of Moling* written in Irish c.1100, from the early medieval MS *Leabhar Tighe Molling* transcribed by Mícheal O Cléirigh 1628, translated into English by Whitney Stokes, 1907, and the subject of *Saint Moling Luachra: A Pilgrimage from Sliabh Luachra to RInn Ros Broic above the Stream-pools of the Barrow* by de Paor, M.B. (Columba, Dublin, 2001)

⁴ Manning, C. *St Mullin's: An early ecclesiastical site and medieval settlement in County Carlow* (Archaeology Ireland, Heritage Guide No.5, 1999)

⁵ Frizell, C. & R. Maps of the Estates of Thomas Kavanagh in Carlow and Wexford, 1768, (MS. National Library of Ireland)

Crossing the Watercourses in the Recent Past.

During the 1970s, 80s and 90s, wooden bridges across the Aughavaud River and the mill race allowed passage across the water courses to the higher ground of the monastic site. These were removed some time after 1995 – they are reported on in that year when the Framework for the Protection of Heritage and Amenity was prepared by Loughlin Kealy – for reasons to do with safety and complications about land ownership.

Stepping stones were also used to cross the Aughavaud. These still exist and are visible below the water, but the river is rarely low enough now for pilgrims to cross in this way.

The third bridge is proposed in order to make universal access easier and safer. At present pilgrims and visitors to the holy well access it from the road, crossing the existing road bridge over the Aughavaud. This road is the main route to St. Mullins from Drummin, the other half of the parish, consequently it is very busy during the days around the pattern. In addition the existing car park is situated just off this road on the western side of the bridge, resulting in pedestrians being unable to avoid crossing the river without mixing with vehicular traffic.

Description of the Ritual Observance of the Pilgrim Route.

1) Entry by path from existing road. 2) Blessed Well and pool of springs. 3) Tacarda- the 'Wading Stream' channel of water to river. 4) Path by the townland boundary to the river crossing. 5) Crossing the river. 6) Crossing the millrace. 7) Entry into the monastic precinct. 8) Stone High Cross. 9) St, James' Cell. 10) An Teampall Mór. See Map A.

The path itself is short - less than a quarter of a kilometre - what is considered important is not the length of the path but the intensity of the experience and the observance of certain rituals. **1.** Having left the road and taken a path by the river bounded to the east by derelict buildings which were once the houses of local families, the pilgrim reaches a roofless stone structure that encloses the well. **2.** Recent research has shown this to be the remains of a baptismal chapel⁶ built c.1100, as part of the regularizing of baptismal practices in the Irish Church. The well is fed

⁶ O Carragain, T. *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland* (Yale University Press, 2010) p199 - 208

by an upper pool that contains several springs, the water gushes through two square openings made in two large vertical stones in the east wall. It is known as the Tiopra -, pilgrims circumambulate the Tiopra and the pool of springs to the east which feeds the well. **3.** From here, pilgrims walk to the river and enter a stone constructed channel which directs the water from the holy well to the Aughavaud river. This is known as the Tacarda and also the 'wading stream' locally. The stream is entered barefoot, and pilgrims wade against the flow of the water toward the blessed well. **4.** Having emerged from 'wading the waters' they walk close to the boundary of the well field and through an opening in the boundary into the river field. Formerly a path by the boundary led pilgrims towards the river crossing. This field boundary is also the townland boundary of St. Mullins. **5.** There is a place at the river where pilgrims used to cross on stepping stones, these are still visible. Generally the water is too high now to cross in this manner. It was here that a wooden bridge carried people across from the 1970s until the bridges were removed at the end of the twentieth century. This location is the proposed position of the new bridge (Bridge 2). **6.** Once across the river pilgrims continued southward and in the past, crossed a second bridge over the mill race. This is the proposed location of Bridge 3. The evidence of the first OS, 1839 is that a mill race in this location existed, it was used to drive the mill wheel at the corn mill lower down near the river Barrow. However, on Frizell's map of 1768 no mill race is shown in this location, or mentioned in the notes. Hence the mill race was built sometime between these two dates – 1768, and 1839.

7. Once across the millrace, pilgrims ascended the steep ground toward a set of stone steps that lead to the monastic site. Here there are two mill stones recovered from the river bed at the end of the 19th century. Local tradition holds that these are the mill stones of the saint's mill. The mill itself is thought to have been situated lower down near the river. Patrick O'Leary refers to a mill stone that he found with Rev. James Graves one evening in September 1885.⁷ **8.** Once through the opening in the walled monastic area pilgrims pray at the ancient granite high cross, now

⁷ O'Leary, P. *St. Mullins Illustrated: A Local History and the Life of St. Moling, Compiled from Ancient MSS. With Notes and Traditions by Patrick O'Leary* (Graignamanagh, 1913)p.55, 56

dilapidated but re-erected in modern times on its original cylindrical base.⁸

9. Moving eastward further rituals are observed at the tiny ruined oratory known as the cell of St. James. **10.** Walking around the monastic site three times the pilgrimage ends in Teampall Mór, which is held to be the burial place of St. Moling. For a more detailed and illustrated description of the pilgrim route and ritual observance see Appendix 1.

Recommendations for proposed additions to the Pilgrim Route

The bridges are designed in oak, they are discrete and appropriate in scale to the site. Further rehabilitation or creation of related paths are not included in the Part 8 application, however, below are outline recommendations for linking the three bridges with new and existing rehabilitated paths in conformity with the heritage and amenity needs of the Pilgrim Route.

Bridge 1 is proposed to enable crossing the river from the townland of Glebe to the eastern side of the Aughavaud. This would offer an alternative entry point to the pilgrim route; one that would facilitate universal access from the graveyard at the upper level through the Pilgrim's Park and across the bridge to the holy well, while avoiding the vehicular traffic at the road to the north of the site. This piece of land in the townland of Glebe is now in the ownership of the Local Authority. On the western side of the river the bridge would land in the vicinity of the *tacarda* the channel or Wading Stream which discharges the water of the holy well into the river Aughavaud. The channel is an important part of the Pilgrim Route, it is where pilgrims 'wade the water'. It is also a significant part of the archaeology of the site. From the landing point of the bridge it should be clear where pilgrims and visitors should go next without walking across the 'wading stream'. The bridge may have to be lengthened to comply with the requirements of the Appropriate Assessment. This first bridge will alter the approach to the holy well, unless pilgrims and visitors are guided back to the vicinity of the current entry point. RECOMMENDATION: Provide a raised timber path at the landing point of the bridge on the eastern side of the Aughavaud, which would direct pilgrims northward towards the original access path in front of the now derelict houses. Carry out a desktop

⁸ Manning, C. *St Mullin's: An early ecclesiastical site and medieval settlement in County Carlow* (Archaeology Ireland, Heritage Guide No.5, 1999)

assessment of the archaeology before construction to ascertain the impact on the Wading Stream. Comply with the requirements of the Appropriate Assessment to protect the ecology of the site.

The Derelict Houses. It is unfortunate that these buildings have been allowed to fall into a dilapidated state. The families who lived there were the custodians, with others in the local community, of the tradition of the pilgrimage over many generations. One of the reasons why the pattern, the traditional observance of the pilgrim route and the devotion to Saint Moling survived in St. Mullins was because people in the local community took on the role of custodians of the traditional culture. **RECOMMENDATION:** Repair and re-use these buildings in an appropriate way for the continued care of the ancient site.

Path from the well to Bridge 2. In the past the path began in the well field to the east of the boundary and emerged into the river field at the corner. Pilgrims walked close to the boundary of the field which is also the townland boundary, the path is bounded to the west by a low stone wall that is still intact. The hedgerow is currently too overgrown to walk along the path. Before reaching the edge of the boundary pilgrims would walk across to the river's edge and take the bridge across the river. **RECOMMENDATION:** Retrieve the original path by cutting back the foliage and reclaiming the surface of the path.

Bridge 2 crosses the Aughavaud back to the western side of the river. It is located about five metres to the north of the existing stepping stones which used to be used to cross the river. They can clearly be seen in the photograph, Fig. 2, as it was taken during the very warm dry summer of 1976, when the river was very low. Even though people used the stepping stones that summer, there was a bridge in place; an earlier photo, Fig. 3, of the mill race bridge from 1975 shows the Aughavaud bridge in the background. (The photo at Fig 2 is probably taken from the bridge). At the river bank on either side stone steps lead down to the stepping stones. **RECOMMENDATION:** Regain the stone steps down to the river by cutting back foliage and growth so that they can be seen. Comply with the requirements of the Appropriate Assessment with respect to the structure of the bridge to protect the ecology of the site.

Bridge 3 crosses the mill race and allows access to the stone steps which lead up into the ecclesiastical site. The land rises steeply to the west of the mill race. Care is necessary as parts of the mill race wall are unstable. The foundational structure here for the bridge must be clear of the roots of a nearby mature beech which has been noted in the Appropriate Assessment. RECOMMENDATION: Assess the stability of the mill race wall at the crossing point. Comply with the requirements of the Appropriate Assessment to protect the ecology of the site, which may require moving the location northwards by some metres.

From the mill race to An Teampall Mór no changes are proposed. Pilgrims visit and circum-ambulate the ruins of the churches which are national monuments. The pilgrimage ends as pilgrims walk through the graveyard.



Figure 2. Stepping stones at the Aughavaud river in 1976



Figure 3. Wooden Bridge over the Mill Race 1975



Figure 4. View towards the now derelict houses at the entry to the route photograph taken in 1948, the day the new bridge (foreground) opened.

Documentary Evidence for the Pilgrim Route

'St. Mullin's has more documentary and archaeological evidence for medieval water-based rituals than any other Irish site.'⁹

The hagiography¹⁰ tells the story of the saint digging a mill race with his own hands and diverting the water from the Aughavaud to a site adjacent to where the ruined ecclesiastical complex stands today. When the work was finished the saint inaugurated the pilgrimage by gathering together a great many saints, blessing the water and wading against the flow to the place where the rivulet separates from the river. Local tradition holds this place to be where the ruins of 'St. Mullin's Oratory' - National Monument CW026-007 known locally as 'The Sluiceman's Hut' -, are situated in the townland of Glebe. At these ruins an earthwork referred to as 'St. Mullin's Watercourse' – National Monument CW 026-006 on the 2nd edition OS meets the river Aughavaud, approximately 1.5 km to the north east of St. Moling's well. This is said to be St. Moling's mill race, now dry. The events are recorded in the Latin life of the saint, a hagiographical work which also records that, at the time of writing (early 12th century), the pilgrimage existed and part of it involved this watercourse:

And this rivulet is a place of very great pilgrimage today in Ireland, because from that day (*the day of inauguration*), very numerous crowds of both sexes assemble from all parts of Ireland at all times to this rivulet, and walk on its shore as was established by the ancients, and wash themselves in the water, hoping – not now doubting, that the filth of their sins in the very washing will, by the grace of God, through the solicitation of the most Blessed father Molyng be washed away. Many miracles and prodigies are performed there by God.¹¹

In 1348 when a Franciscan friar, John Clyn of Kilkenny was writing about the Black Death, a plague that was sweeping through Europe and also had come to Ireland, he included a reference to the pilgrimage at St. Mullins:

Also in this year and chiefly in September and October there came together from divers parts of Ireland, bishops and prelates, churchmen and religious,

⁹ O Carragáin, T. *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland* (Yale University Press, 2010) p199

¹⁰ *The Ancient Life of St. Moling, Bishop and Confessor*, being translation of a manuscript at Marsh's Library, Dublin, reproduced in *St. Mullins Illustrated: A Local History and the Life of St. Moling* (Graignamanagh 1913) O'Leary, P. p26

¹¹ *The Ancient Life of St. Moling, Bishop and Confessor*, being translation of a manuscript at Marsh's Library, Dublin, reproduced in *St. Mullins Illustrated: A Local History and the Life of St. Moling* (Graignamanagh 1913) O'Leary, P. p26

lords and others, and commonly all persons of both sexes, to the pilgrimage and wading of the waters at Teach Moling. in troops and multitudes, so that you could see many thousands there at the same time for many days together. Some came from feelings of devotion, but others, and they the majority, from dread of the plague, which then grew very rife.¹²

O Carragáin suggests that St. Mullin's must have been the most important pilgrimage site in the region for this event as described by Friar Clyn to have happened. But also, that it may have been unusual at the time, as the devotional rites associated with holy wells may only have become prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the population had become alienated from the ruinous state of their churches.¹³ This would suggest that the pilgrimage and devotional practice around St. Moling's Well may have pre-dated by hundreds of years similar practices elsewhere in Ireland, and that might in part explain the survival of the ritual here when those elsewhere, generally, have fallen away.

It is probably not a coincidence that water-based rituals survived at St. Mullins. O Carragain states that "St. Moling's is one of the few Irish holy wells which are known to have been used for baptism in modern times, apparently until the early nineteenth century, After that practice ceased, parents in the area continued to affuse the heads of their infants and children in the well." And "This practice continued until the 1970s." ¹⁴

Local people speak of at least one baptism that occurred there twenty years ago, there may have been others.

Even today the first part of the ritual observance of the pilgrim route is to sprinkle water on the head, making the sign of the cross as if in baptism, and then cupping the hands, drink the water of the well, - which is believed to have curative and miraculous powers -.

The holy well, the pool, the channel which directs the water to the Aughavaud, St. Moling's mill race and the River Barrow are referred to in

¹² From the *Annals* of Friar Clyn quoted in *Saint Moling Luachra: A Pilgrimage from Sliabh Luachra to Rinn Ros Broic above the Stream-pools of the Barrow* by de Paor, M.B. (Columba, Dublin, 2001) p141

¹³ O Carragain, T. 'Archaeology of Early Medieval Baptism at St. Mullin's Co. Carlow' in *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* V.21 (Brepols, 2010) p288

¹⁴ O Carragáin, T. *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland* (Yale University Press, 2010) p203

Middle Irish poem of St. Moling, in which the well water is thought of as a branch of the Jordan.

1. Prosperity came to me, I know, from the king of *rúamh* (Rome), I am a church phophet, my church is my booley (temporary settlement)
2. I am venerated as a phrophet by English and Irish, my *tacarta* (St. Moling's Well) is my wine; my *taídiu* (St. Moling's Millrace) is my curds.
3. Longing thirst I awaiting, I had a wish for Barrow waters, a pure, cool stream reached me from the king of the holy angels

And

18 My soft blessed well (*tiopra*), it came from the River Jordan¹⁵

The poem has echoes of the Psalms and of the Holy Land. These allusions and references to pure running water in the Irish sources are intended to recall the fountain of life, and Christ's baptism in the Jordan.¹⁶

The existence of such documents underlines the importance of the cultural tradition at St. Mullin's.

A devotional practice with some similar characteristics was written about in 1682 by Sir Henry Piers. This took place in County Westmeath at a small stone chapel on a hill dedicated to St. Eyan or Keyon, which had within the chapel 'a curious purling brook of crystal water' ¹⁷. Pilgrims ascended the hill barefoot, and completed part of the pilgrimage on their knees. This occurred on the first Sunday of harvest, possibly also a vestige of the Lughnasa festival. After this penitential rite they descended the hill and began dancing and carousing, where there were ale-sellers and merry bag-pipers. A scandalized Sir Henry describes the 'lewd and obscene dancing, and in excess of drinking, the remainder of the day is spent, as if they celebrated the Bacchanalia, rather than the memory of a pious saint, or their own penitentials'.

¹⁵ quoted in O Carragáin, T. *Churches in Early Medieval Ireland* (Yale University Press, 2010) p200, translated by Pádraig Ó Riain

¹⁶ Ibid. p.203

¹⁷ Piers, H. *A Chorographical Description of the County of West-Meath*, written 1682 AD (first published 1786 in *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, Vallancey) p.13-14

Patrick O'Leary, a local historian, who wrote about the St. Mullin's in the 1880s described the pilgrimage in the form that it had then¹⁸. It differs very little from its current form, see Appendix 1 for an illustrated description, except that now, pilgrims are much less penitential and do not generally go barefooted or on their knees. The 'wading of the water' took place in the Wading Stream as it does now, St. Moling's mill race having long been intercepted and dry. When this change occurred is not known, but it would seem from Friar Clyn's description that in 1348 people were still wading in the mill race, as well as at the well¹⁹. O Carragáin considers that the Sluiceman's Hut, mentioned above (apparently a place for the person who was opening and closing the sluice as required) which would indicate a functioning mill race is probably of late or post-medieval date.

The Significance of the Pilgrim Route

Statement of Significance:

The Pilgrim route is intangible cultural heritage of national significance, associated and interweaved with tangible cultural heritage. The practice has its beginnings in the rich cultural heritage of the Early Medieval period in Ireland, which is significant at a national level. It has been a living tradition for a thousand years as a continuing and evolving practice embedded in the local community.

Authenticity and Continuity

The historical documentary evidence shows that the pilgrimage was taking place during the early twelfth century, and may have begun much earlier. The practice is an evolving entity that has been passed down through oral tradition from one generation to the next, and has roots in a rich cultural tradition. We can catch glimpses of such richness in the Poems of St. Moling and in the Lives of the saint, both Latin and Irish versions. Aspects of it have altered over time due to, on the one hand, physical changes such as the interruption and consequent drying-up of St. Moling's mill-race, and non-physical changes such as the tendency towards less penitential rites due to altered religious and societal attitudes. The authenticity of the

¹⁸ O'Leary, P. *St. Mullins Illustrated: A Local History and the Life of St. Moling, Compiled from Ancient MSS. With Notes and Traditions by Patrick O'Leary* (Graignamanagh, 1913)p56

¹⁹ O Carragáin, T. *Ibid.* p289

ritual is not in doubt due to the extensive evidence in the medieval literature and in the archaeology.

Connection with Natural forces - Water

The pilgrimage is linked to natural forces, particularly water, and the site is renowned for its water-based rituals; such as, bathing, cleansing, drinking the sacred water, baptism, both liturgical and ritual. The medieval literature reflects this association in hagiographical and historical evidence about the pilgrimage. These rituals continue today, albeit in reduced form, indicating that water, in its many forms - springs, pools, wells, channels, mill races and rivers - remains as a meaningful symbol in the community and as an expression of the spiritual and cultural connection to the natural world.

Connection with Artefacts of Cultural Heritage

The intangible heritage of the route takes place within and around the tangible heritage at the ecclesiastical site, and particularly the national monument at St. Moling's Well. The veneration of the saint is reflected in these medieval ruined buildings, and also in artefacts from the early period such as the Book of Moling (8th-9th century), the Shrine for the Book of Moling (15th century) *Geinemain Molling Ocus a Bhetae* and the Latin Life, (both probably early twelfth century), the Middle Irish Poems of St. Moling. These important artefacts which are part of the tangible heritage enrich and sustain the intangible heritage of the ritual.

Community

The community persisted in the belief in the curative powers of the water from the holy well, in the practice of the ritual observance, and in the tradition of holding a pattern day in honour of the saint, for many centuries. They took on the role of custodian of the traditional culture, and continue to act in this role. The question arises as to why this occurred here and not in other places. It may be connected to the fact that there was the unusual situation where a family of Gaelic origin, the MacMurrough Kavanagh who were strongly associated with the site and the saint from early times, had remained as one of the larger land-holders and landlords in the area until the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, it may be that St. Mullin's was a particularly important site in the medieval period, as

discussed above, and that the sense of that importance remained in the public imagination for centuries afterwards.

Potential Threats to the Pilgrim Route

Deterioration of the fabric to enable the practice of the pilgrimage:

In the contemporary world the Pilgrim Route needs to be safe and accessible. The absence of bridges across the watercourses has made the route impassable in recent years. Traffic on the main roadway and at the parking access has made the entry point to the site dangerous.

RECOMMENDATION: The proposed bridges would greatly improve this situation.

The derelict houses at the entry point have been neglected and are now in a perilous state. They could also be unsafe for pilgrims passing by.

RECOMMENDATION: They would be an ideal location to house facilities for the pilgrimage, and to celebrate the custodians of the site.

Apathy among the younger generation:

This kind of cultural tradition only continues with the support of the community, across the generations.

RECOMMENDATION: A Trustee Body could be considered which would formalise the custodianship, engage in education and awareness raising, actively encourage younger people to be involved.

The Future

Intangible heritage will continue to exist when there is a desire for it and a commitment to it from the society in which it is embedded. The continuation of such evolving heritage requires careful and sensitive attention. However, formal structures such as those recommended above, awareness raising and education about the sources and roots of cultural traditions, can be encouraged and supported. There is a role here for local and central government as agents of encouragement and support, who can appreciate the value of custodianship within the community.

Designation: Together with other pilgrimage rituals of a similar nature in Ireland, the Pilgrim Route could be considered for inscription on the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The requirements for inscription would activate a management strategy and a consideration of the value of the cultural heritage.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1

Description of the Contemporary Pilgrim Route at St. Mullin's July 2015-11-20

A CONTEMPORARY DESCRIPTION OF THE PILGRIM ROUTE AT ST. MULLINS:



St. Moling's Well

This year, 2015, the pattern day fell on July 19th, the last Sunday before the feast of St. James which is July 25th. It is traditional to take the Pilgrim Route of St. Moling during and around pattern Sunday. What follows is a description of the ritual observance of the Pilgrim Route as explained by the current custodians, Bridie Lawlor and Mary O'Neill.

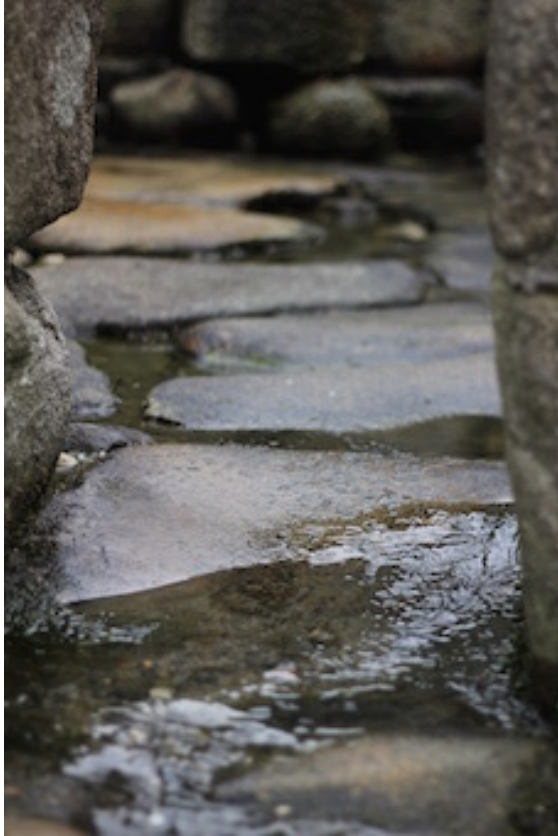
The ritual begins at St. Moling's Well, before entering the enclosure, pilgrims stop at the doorway and trace the shape of the cross inscribed in the stone to the left of the doorway, three times.



Tracing the cross inscribed to the left of doorway three times



Entering the enclosure of the holy well through the trabeate doorway



Pilgrims enter the well enclosure and walk across the large flat granite stones of the floor that are constantly being washed by the spring water. These stones are an original feature as they are laid beneath the walls (including the east wall, which has not been re-built).



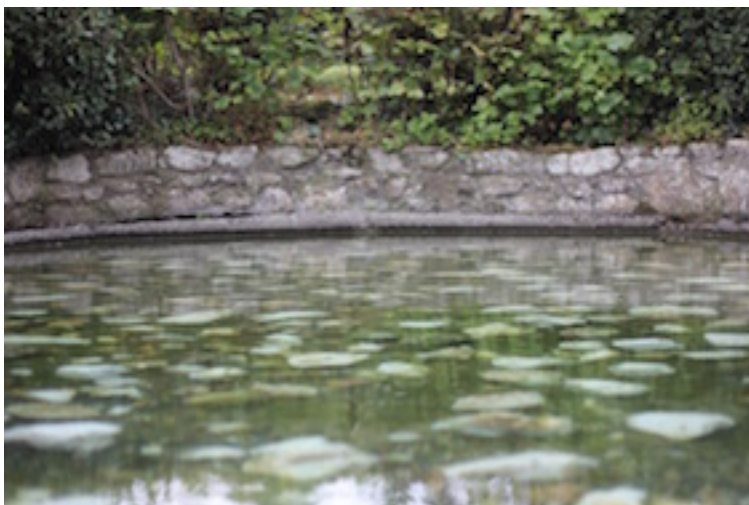
On reaching the stream of water which comes through an aperture in the stone, the pilgrim traces the cross on the top of the head with water three times, while reciting

prayers – just as a priest does on the head of a child during baptism. Recent scholarship has shown that the well has been associated with baptism for centuries.



Cupping the hands, pilgrims drink the spring water which is believed to have miraculous powers.

On leaving the well chapel pilgrims take the path around the well and the pool of the springs, some people walk clockwise around, others anti-clockwise. Beside the path, at intervals, are round stones embedded in the soil., at each of these stones pilgrims recite prayers. The final stone is set close to the entrance of the well enclosure.



The pool of springs that feeds the well

St. Moling's Well used to be surrounded by ash trees. These were cut down in the last decades of the twentieth century. The local community planted an oak tree in the millennium year.



Walking beside the Wading Stream to where the water cascades into the River Aughavaud in order to 'wade the water' back to the well.

From here, pilgrims 'wade the waters' in the stream that provides an outlet for the spring water from the well to the river. This appears to be a symbolic wading of the water that recalls the tradition of wading against the flow of the water in the ancient mill race constructed by the patron saint, Moling. It is written about in the hagiography and was a central part of the pilgrimage. (The millrace is now dry.)



The stream is shallow, about 500mm at the river end and 250mm at the shallow end near the well. The base of the stream is flat and quite solid, made with gravel and flat stones, the sides are constructed of stone and stabilised with concrete in places. Each year it is cleared out before the pattern day. Pilgrims walk in their bare feet through the stream starting at the river end and finishing at the holy well.



Having 'waded the water' pilgrims start again from the St. Moling's Well on the eastern side of the hedgerow, and passing through an opening in the hedge follow the path to the river Aughavaud. In the 1970s until the end of the century a wooden bridge facilitated crossing the river, large stepping stones which are still visible were also used to make the crossing, if the river was low enough. This year (2015) on the Pattern Day the water was well above the level of the stones and the current of the river was strong, only athletic individuals would have attempted the crossing.

Having crossed the river the pilgrims turn to the left and ascend the bank towards the mill race. (This mill race is probably an early 19th century or late 18th century construction built to service the flour and corn mills at the river Barrow.) Previously, this watercourse was also bridged, without a bridge it is no longer possible to continue the pilgrimage up to the ecclesiastical site. Today, mill stones, which local tradition holds are those used in St. Moling's Mill, - a horizontal mill situated near the west bank of the Aughavaud -, are located some metres above the supposed site of the early millhouse. Pilgrims pass these artefacts just before ascending the stone steps which lead to the monastic site.



Millstones relocated from the river bed where they were found at the end of the 19th century.



Once within the enclosure, pilgrims go to the High Cross and recite prayers there. The high cross is damaged and is the last remaining cross of perhaps twelve high crosses within the monastic precinct. A diagram in the Book of St. Moling, a late 8th century manuscript held at Trinity College Library in Dublin, describes the location of twelve crosses each one named and located within an enclosure.

From the High Cross pilgrims move to the nearby cell of St. James, and do three penitential rounds around the little ruined hermitage. (Penitential, may mean that pilgrims walked in their bare feet, and some may have walked on knees around the hermitage.) Three leaves are left at the window of St. James' cell



Then, three penitential rounds of the monastic site are made ending at the doorway of An Teampall Mór.



Ruins at the monastic site



Remains of the round tower at the monastic site.



Pilgrim entering An Teampall Mór

Under a large stone slab in the centre of An Teampall Mór, the saint is thought to be buried. Pilgrims make nine rounds of the stone within Teampall Mór, leaving a stone each time on the slab, nine stones in all for each round.



The final observance is for the pilgrim to place her hand on the stone sill of the chancel window. Pilgrims walk through the graveyard where burials continue up to the present day among the ruined churches.

Appendix 2

Map A – The Pilgrim Route at St. Mullin's, Co. Carlow