

Gothic Ruins and Remains: Disorderly Burials and Respectable Bodies in Irish Medieval Ecclesiastical Buildings, 1824-1900

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On 5 October 1863, the *Freeman's Journal* published a statement on the desecration of burial places in Ireland by Thomas Leverton Donaldson, professor of architecture at University College London. Donaldson had undertaken a tour of several medieval Irish ruins, and called attention to their disrepair in the *Builder*, the popular trade publication of the architectural profession. Donaldson had found the floor of the abbey ruins, in Ross Abbey near Headford in Mayo, 'strewed with the scattered remains of the dead'. In an altar recess, 'where once an altar stood, and the holiest rites of the Roman Catholic Church were anciently performed', he noted that a tomb was sunk in the earth, with its covering stones cracked and broken, exposing 'the scene of desolation below'. He reported similar scenes at the medieval ruins of Athenry and Muckross, with 'fragments of human skeletons lying about to be trodden underfoot'. To conclude, Donaldson demanded, 'who has the power to remedy this state of things', and wondered at what he had seen, as 'certainly disrespect to the dead has never been an Irish failing'.¹ Donaldson's remarks reflect several strands of contemporary public discourse, including the value of ruins and their care and preservation, as well as the proper treatment of the remains of the dead in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland. These issues were complex and multi-faceted, and were based on fears for public health and sanitation due to contamination and the spread of disease caused by decomposing bodies, as well as contemporary anxieties around growing Roman-Catholic political agency, and potential Catholic repossession of medieval sites.

This essay examines the tensions between respectable and disorderly burial in ruined medieval ecclesiastical buildings throughout the nineteenth century in Ireland, and the conflict between the antiquarian and religious values associated with the sites. While it considers burials in several different ecclesiastical sites, the essay focuses on a case study of the burial ground around the Franciscan friary at Muckross in Co. Kerry, one of the most celebrated Gothic ruins of the nineteenth century, not least due to its position at the heart of

¹ Thomas Leverton Donaldson, *Freeman's Journal*, 5 October 1863.

the popular picturesque destination of the Lakes of Killarney.² According to Gwynn and Hadcock, the ecclesiastical site at Muckross was first known as Irrelagh Abbey, with the foundation of the Observant order of Franciscans between 1440 and 1448 by the MacCarthy family.³ This date is also given by Colmán Ó Clabaigh in his survey of Franciscan settlements in Ireland.⁴ The friary was dissolved between the years 1586 and 1589, but, reflecting the uneven suppression of the monasteries, Muckross was listed in a 1613 parliamentary report as one of the friaries where friars publically preached and celebrated mass.⁵

The role of Muckross friary as a burial place and site of picturesque and antiquarian tourism reflects the shifting perceptions and uses of medieval ecclesiastical buildings in Ireland between 1824 and 1900. The time period of this essay is bounded by the proposal of the Easement of Burial Act in 1824, and takes the end of the century as its terminus, reflecting the Irish Church Act of 1869, the introduction of the Ancient Monuments (Ireland) Act in 1882, and the foundation of organisations such as the Fund for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead in Ireland in the late 1880s, all of which had an impact on the treatment of ruined medieval ecclesiastical buildings and their use as sites of burial.⁶

The establishment of these Acts and funds reflects the extent to which discourses of antiquarian and aesthetic concerns had become predominant by the beginning of the twentieth century, structuring the use, preservation, and management of medieval ecclesiastical sites. By the establishment of the Free State, the buildings were primarily valued for their antiquarian and picturesque qualities, rather than as sites of specific religious significance. While religious ceremonies were occasionally held at medieval ecclesiastical sites, such as the mass held among the ruins of Mellifont Abbey in 1929, these events engaged with the ruins as sites of ecclesiastical heritage, rather than as significant spaces for religious worship

² The use of the word 'Gothic' (capitalised) in the context of this article refers to architectural style, rather than literary genre or convention, for which 'gothic' is used throughout Issue #16 of the *IJGHS*.

³ Aubrey Gwynn and Richard N. Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses: Ireland* (London: Longmans, 1970), p. 256. The *Monastic Ireland* project also notes the earlier date of 1340 for the foundation of the friary, as recorded in the *Annals of the Four Masters*. See *Monastic Ireland*, online resource <<http://www.monastic.ie/history/muckross-franciscan-friary/>> [accessed 3 October 2017].

⁴ Colmán Ó Clabaigh, *The Friars in Ireland, 1224-1540* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012), p. 63.

⁵ Michael O'Neill, 'Irish Franciscan Friary Architecture', in *The Irish Franciscans, 1534-1990*, ed. by Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon OFM, and John McCafferty (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009) p. 322.

⁶ The Irish Church Act (1869) is outlined in Raymond Refaüssé, *Church of Ireland Records* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), pp. 43-44. The introduction of the Ancient Monuments (Ireland) Act is detailed in Christiaan Corlett, 'The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland and the Protection of Monuments' (Part 1), *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 139 (2009), 80-100. The objectives of the Fund for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead are outlined in the *Irish Times*, 26 December 1891.

and congregation.⁷ Although there continued to be some tension between antiquarian and religious perceptions of early Christian and medieval architectural heritage throughout the first half of the twentieth century, and the twenty-first-century visitor will frequently find contemporary memorials in ruined parish churches or monastic buildings, their value as places of picturesque and historical tourism has remained preeminent.⁸

This essay uses evidence drawn from contemporary travel accounts and newspaper reports in order to trace the competing uses made of and narratives around medieval ecclesiastical sites throughout the nineteenth century, reflecting the tensions that existed between religious and antiquarian values prior to the establishment of legislation surrounding their use and management. The role of burial as signifying a kind of alternative ‘ownership’ over a particular site or place is considered, with the presence of the remains of the dead used as the basis for contesting the legal ownership of a site. Within the context of Muckross, the challenges faced by individual landowners in caring for burial grounds on their property are examined, as well as the responses of other civic groups and organisations responsible for the maintenance of burial grounds. The essay considers the significance of medieval ecclesiastical sites as a site for the performance of social and religious identity, and the gradual closure of the sites by the end of the nineteenth century to all but a few families. The emphasis on burial in this essay reflects the social importance of rituals of death and burial throughout nineteenth-century Ireland, but also specific legislative changes and resulting concerns around burial during the period, outlined in more detail below. These changes can be considered as part of the broader systematic organisation of society during this period, through and against which the Irish population defined itself throughout the nineteenth century.

Legislating for Roman-Catholic Burial in Nineteenth-Century Ireland

The study of ecclesiastical history in Ireland during the early-modern period reveals, in many instances, considerable gaps between the letter and the spirit of the law, as individuals and communities negotiated between legislation and the operation of daily life. This was certainly the case regarding burial, which was regulated by a series of laws that required Roman

⁷ The mass at Mellifont Abbey, celebrating the first Irish Cistercian foundation, is detailed in Niamh NicGhabhann, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Buildings in Ireland, 1789-1915: Building on the Past* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015), p. 20.

⁸ For an exploration of the tensions between religious and antiquarian values in the preservation of the church of St Lua at Killaloe, see NicGhabhann, ‘Medieval Ireland and the Shannon Hydro-Electric Scheme: Reconstructing the Past in Independent Ireland’, *Irish Studies Review*, 25 (2017), 425-43.

Catholics and other Dissenters to seek permission for the burial of their dead in graveyards and consecrated grounds that had been transferred to the Established Church of Ireland following the sixteenth-century Reformation. As outlined by John A. Murphy and Cliona Murphy, Roman Catholics and Dissenters therefore had no dedicated burial grounds, and had to inter their dead in official graveyards that were the property of the Established Church of Ireland and subject to burial fees. As Lisa Marie Griffith and Ciarán Wallace note, Roman-Catholic clergy were prohibited in legislation from saying funeral prayers in churchyards.⁹

Roman-Catholic burials also took place within graveyards associated with ruined medieval ecclesiastical sites on private lands. These were, for the most part, the ruined remains of the friaries, monasteries, and convents that had been transferred to private ownership following the suppression of the monasteries. Despite the fact that an Act of William III explicitly prohibited such burials, many landowners continued to allow burials to take place in the church grounds associated with medieval monastic houses, friaries, or convents on their properties. The Easement of Burials Act repealed this prohibition in 1824, and stated that burial in medieval sites was permitted where that site had been used for that purpose within the last ten years.¹⁰ Some burials also took place on unconsecrated grounds, such as the interment of unbaptised babies in *cillini*.¹¹ Despite the existence of legislation controlling burial practices, therefore, it is clear that a reasonably high level of toleration had existed around the shared use of burial grounds prior to the early nineteenth century.¹²

While Roman-Catholic ceremonials and prayers had been tolerated within Established Church of Ireland graveyards, the fractious atmosphere between denominations during the episcopate of Church of Ireland archbishop William Magee (1766-1831) challenged this toleration, leading to greater tension and anxiety around Roman-Catholic burial rites.¹³ The politicisation of burial, and the rise of tensions around the legal arrangements that had managed to accommodate denominational difference throughout the preceding centuries, reflects the broader political tensions of the early nineteenth century, including O'Connell's assertive leadership of Irish Catholicism and the rise of Protestant evangelicals advocating a

⁹ Lisa Marie Griffith and Ciarán Wallace, *Grave Matters: Death and Dying in Dublin, 1500 to the Present* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2016), p. 35.

¹⁰ John A. Murphy and Cliona Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry in Early Nineteenth-Century Ireland', *Studia Hibernica*, 33 (2004/2005), 125-46 (p. 126.)

¹¹ Eileen M. Murphy, 'Children's Burial Grounds in Ireland (*Cillini*) and Parental Emotions Toward Death', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 15 (2011), 409-28.

¹² Murphy and Murphy, 'Burials and Bigotry', p. 126.

¹³ *Ibid.*

‘second Reformation’.¹⁴ The use of ruined medieval ecclesiastical buildings as places of burial was the subject of government debate in 1824 and 1825, as part of ongoing controversies around burial rights and rites for Roman Catholics and other Dissenters from the Established Church of Ireland.

While the debate and dissent that accompanied the legislation around burial rights for Roman Catholics and Dissenters related, for the most part, to burial in churchyards and cemeteries that were associated with church buildings in the ownership of the Church of Ireland that were in active use, the subject of burial within ruined medieval ecclesiastical buildings was also raised in debates throughout 1824 and 1825. Indeed, as Murphy and Murphy note, Archbishop Magee responded to debates on the lack of Roman-Catholic burial grounds with the argument that Roman Catholics were in fact well served in terms of burial places, having ‘a great number of places of sepulture which are ancient ones’, in reference to ruined churches and deserted churchyards.¹⁵

When medieval or ruined buildings did feature in the House of Commons debates on the issue, the emphasis was on those sites that were in private ownership and on private lands. While burials within these private ruins had often been permitted on an ad-hoc basis, the proposed new Bill on the issue highlighted the fact that there were clear anxieties around the inclusion of such rights to burial on private lands. The issue of potentially increased numbers of burials within privately held medieval ruins was raised on 29 March 1824 by William Conyngham Plunkett, Irish attorney general, who addressed the House of Commons on the subject of the Burials in Ireland Bill. He noted that the issue of Roman-Catholic burial in Ireland, relating to the ‘moral feelings, passions and prejudices of the great bulk of the population of Ireland’, would also be of interest to those who ‘felt an interest in the security of the Protestant establishment’.¹⁶ Plunkett’s speech is valuable in this context, as he brought together the different strands of the debate, including the rights to private property, and the picturesque and antiquarian value of the medieval sites, as well as the need to revise the legislation regulating burial for those outside the Established Church of Ireland, while acknowledging the extent to which it was ignored in practice by the majority of the population.

¹⁴ For further context on the religious tensions of the early nineteenth century, see Irene Whelan, *The Bible War in Ireland: The ‘Second Reformation’ and the Polarization of Protestant-Catholic Relations, 1800-1840* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Murphy and Murphy, ‘Burials and Bigotry’, p. 126.

¹⁶ William Conyngham Plunkett, ‘Burials in Ireland Act’, in *Hansard’s Parliamentary Debates* (29 March 1824), X, cols. 1453-66 <<http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1824/mar/29/burials-in-ireland-bill>> [accessed 16 October 2017].

Plunkett's statement was largely focused on the position of the medieval ecclesiastical ruins, which he described as being 'looked on with considerable respect, if not reverence, by all classes of people in Ireland'.¹⁷ Despite the fact these buildings were no longer used for religious worship, he noted that they were 'much resorted to as places of burial not merely for the Roman Catholics of the country, but very frequently for the Protestants'.¹⁸ He also noted the touristic and picturesque value of these buildings, describing them as 'not the least interesting objects of contemplation to those persons who visited Ireland'.¹⁹ Plunkett argued that the co-existence of burial across religious denominations should be celebrated as a mark of tolerance in a country torn by political and religious disturbance. His speech reflects the shared use of burial sites in Ireland, despite the existence of legislation that specifically aimed to regulate it. Referring to the ninth Act of King William III, which forbade burial in these ruined medieval sites, Plunkett admitted that it was largely to control any attempts by Roman Catholics to lay claim to the properties. According to Plunkett, this act 'fell still-born, as all measure must do when opposed to the feelings and sentiments of a country', and it had never been enforced.²⁰ However, he argued that a clause regarding private ownership must be taken into account in reshaping legislation around burial in Ireland, as 'many of those places were diverted from their original purpose, and were possessed by individuals; and care should be taken, that no interference with private property was admitted under this measure', particularly if 'persons who were not in the habit of using particular places of this description for burying grounds, were suffered to do so now'.²¹ This comment reflects the complex legacies of the sixteenth-century Reformation, and the transfer of religious lands with extant ruins into private ownership.

The remainder of Plunkett's contribution comprised a compassionate defence of Roman-Catholic rights to burial with their family members and ancestors, and to the rites of burial in accordance with their beliefs. As Plunkett outlined, the Williamite Act had little real impact on burial practices in medieval ruined buildings. However, as the case study of the use of Muckcross friary as a burial ground demonstrates, Plunkett's theoretical concern for the owners of the medieval ecclesiastical buildings had equally little connection with the reality of the situations that the owners dealt with on the ground, as they attempted to maintain good relations with those living in the locality, to preserve the picturesque quality of their planned

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

demesne landscapes, and to avoid censure at the hands of the local board of guardians and burial boards regarding public-health measures and the proper management of burial grounds. As will be explored below, legislation regulating social issues such as burial and the uses of religious land had to be negotiated carefully by communities, and could result in cooperation and toleration, or tension and division.

It is clear from the debates surrounding it that the issue of burial acted as a signifier for more far-reaching social reforms regarding Roman Catholics throughout the nineteenth century. For example, the *Freeman's Journal* reported on William Monsell's representation to the House of Commons on the issue of burial rights for Roman Catholics in 1868. Monsell argued that Plunkett's earlier Bill did not adequately improve the situation, leaving Roman-Catholic citizens at the mercy of the Protestant clergy regarding the right to bury their dead and to carry out appropriate burial rites. Arguing against Monsell, Anthony Lefroy stated that burial was being refused in specific sites due to overcrowding, and that further graveyard land should be purchased. A further argument against Monsell was made by Edward Greene, member for Bury St Edmonds, who stated that Roman Catholics were

dissatisfied because they were not allowed to grasp the reversion of all the church property they possessed before the Reformation. What, he asked, was the use of the Reformation if all those concessions were to be made to the Roman Catholics (hear, hear).²²

By the third quarter of the century, therefore it is clear from this report that the issues of ownership and the threat of Roman-Catholic repossession and resurgence were taken into consideration when framing legislation around burial rights, particularly on the eve of the Irish Church Act of 1869, and the Disestablishment of the Church of Ireland. Further legislation surrounding burial and the maintenance of burial grounds was passed in the Public Health (Ireland) Act of 1878.²³ The legislative framework around burial that had to be negotiated by landowners and local communities, therefore, was shaped by concerns around religious freedoms and civil rights, the rights to private property, public-health management, the changing role of the Established Church of Ireland, and the desire to maintain the picturesque and antiquarian value of the medieval sites in question.

²² *Freeman's Journal*, 24 April 1868.

²³ Public Health (Ireland) Act (1878), Irish Statute Book
<<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1878/act/52/enacted/en/print.html>> [accessed 8 October 2017].

Bodies, Rights and Ownership — Contested Sites of Burial

Following the achievement of Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the number of burial grounds for Roman Catholics increased in tandem with the expansion of church building, and particularly due to the establishment of large-scale urban graveyards such as Goldenbridge (opened 1829, closed 1868) and Glasnevin (opened 1832), both in Dublin, or Mount St Lawrence in Limerick (opened 1849).²⁴ Despite these new provisions, cemeteries remained a source of concern throughout the century, particularly due to overcrowding and poor maintenance. During this period, local government, in the form of burial boards, attempted to regulate cemeteries, and to oversee sites that were overcrowded, badly managed, or that posed a danger to public health. There are several instances, such as at Aghadoe in Co. Kerry, where the burial board intervened in the continuing, and hazardous, use of a medieval site for burial, deciding on the provision of a new site.²⁵ However, it appears that, at Muckross, burial practices continued regardless of the law, rather than in defiance of it, and the management of the site reflected local negotiation and accommodation rather than responsiveness to changing legal arrangements. By the end of the century, the legislation providing for the management of burial places was divided across the areas of public sanitation and the management of ancient buildings.

Despite the growing numbers of available graveyards associated with new Roman-Catholic church-building projects and the large projects like Glasnevin and Goldenbridge, burials continued to take place within medieval sites throughout the nineteenth century, reflecting the ongoing significance of these sites within communities. Indeed, burial had been central to the initial establishment of many medieval monastic foundations, with many containing elaborate tombs for their founders and their families. Many medieval monastic or friary ruins remained sites closely affiliated with specific families, who retained burial rights in the grounds even after the dissolution and suppression of the monasteries.²⁶ As Alexandra Walsham has written, ‘it was as if they were laying posthumous claims of ownership to

²⁴ The Dublin cemeteries are explored in Griffith and Wallace, *Grave Matters*. The development of Mount Saint Lawrence cemetery is explored in Matthew Potter, *City and Cemetery: A History of Mount Saint Lawrence, Limerick* (Limerick: Limerick City and County Council, 2015). The establishment of Goldenbridge is considered in Livia Hurley, ‘Death in the Garden: Patrick Byrne’s Mortuary Chapel at Goldenbridge Cemetery, Dublin’, *Irish Architectural and Decorative Studies*, 19 (2017), 76-89. The expansion of church building in Ireland during this period is outlined in Jeanne Sheehy, ‘Irish Church Building: Popery, Puginism, and the Protestant Ascendancy’, in *The Victorian Church: Architecture and Society*, ed. by Chris Brooks and Andrew Saint (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 133-50.

²⁵ *Irish Examiner*, 18 February 1857.

²⁶ Colm Lennon, ‘The Dissolution to the Foundation of St Anthony’s College, Louvain, 1534-1607’, in *The Irish Franciscans, 1534-1990*, ed. by Edel Bhreathnach, Joseph MacMahon OFM, and John McCafferty (Dublin: Four Courts Press 2009), pp. 3-26 (pp. 7-8).

ecclesiastical structures illegally annexed by their enemies'.²⁷ Michael O'Neill notes that Franciscan friaries were often continuously used as burial places, and states that the 'spectacular, if ruinous condition' of the friaries is a result of their 'important function as mausoleums for their original patrons and descendants'.²⁸ Clodagh Tait has highlighted the use of ruined ecclesiastical buildings by English settlers to Ireland in the seventeenth century, who sought out burial places within medieval churches and cathedrals in order to denote their social rank and position.²⁹ Rachel Moss has also noted the popularity of friary churches in particular for burial, giving the example of Sligo Friary, which was 'spared closure in the 1570s owing to its traditional role as a place of burial', and which 'until the Famine of the 1840s suffered from constant problems relating to the sheer volume of Roman Catholic burials within its walls'.³⁰

Issues of social status, as defined by religious or socio-economic identity, continued to inform decisions around burial within medieval sites between 1824 and the end of the century. As outlined above, Roman-Catholic burial in suppressed monasteries, abbeys, or convents was often permitted by the landowner, despite being prohibited by an Act of William III. However, as the majority of these medieval ruins were in private ownership, the decisions around burial ultimately rested with the landowners. This could lead to local tensions, as was the case at the medieval ruin of Killone, Co. Clare, where the landlord, Major W. A. McDonnell, was accused of desecrating the existing graves in a ruined church on his property in 1860. While McDonnell assured the editors of the *Munster News and Clare Advocate* that he was simply trying to preserve the church from decay and tidy up the nave, which was full of coffin boards due to 'improper' burials, subsequent editorials and letters to the paper clearly outlined the extent to which a sense of moral or spiritual ownership was held in higher regard than legal ownership. According to the editors, the 'universal excitement and indignation should be remembered as warnings by every landowner who has a religious ruin on his property'.³¹

An incident at the Church of St Mary, Drogheda, in 1868, also reflects the role of burial in connoting a sense of moral and spiritual ownership over medieval ruins, particularly

²⁷ Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 176.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Clodagh Tait, *Death, Burial, and Commemoration in Ireland, 1550-1650* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 71.

³⁰ Rachel Moss, *Art and Architecture of Ireland — Volume 1: Medieval c. 400-c.1600* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press with the Royal Irish Academy, 2015), p. 223.

³¹ 'The Killone Churchyard', *Munster News and Clare Advocate*, 14 January 1860.

when that ownership was being directly challenged by the rule of law. The report of this incident, published by the *Nation*, began by outlining the fact that the Protestant church of St Mary occupied the site of the medieval church of St Mary, a Carmelite foundation from the twelfth century, as well as noting the role of the Carmelites in defending the town from Cromwell before ‘falling martyrs to his savage cruelty when master of their town’.³² The emotive rhetoric used in this report reflects the highly partisan nature of the printed press during this period, with newspapers displaying marked bias towards political positions on issues relating to religious freedoms and political independence. The use of the language of martyrdom and the ‘savage cruelty’ of Cromwell would have clearly demonstrated the political position of the *Nation* on the events at St Mary’s Church to contemporary readers.

The incident at St Mary’s developed during the preparations for the burial of a local Church of Ireland parishioner, Mr George Harmon Strype, in the church grounds, the grave-diggers came upon tiled flooring, under which they found a tombstone carved with an ornamental cross, a crozier, a key, and a lamb treading on a serpent. The tombstone was removed, along with a number of bones. This became known to the Roman-Catholic inhabitants of the town, who arrived with spades and shovels before Mr Strype’s funeral, ‘determined to return the bones, the tombstone, &c., into the grave’.³³ The disturbance that followed led to the arrival of the Drogheda Constabulary, who issued threats of arrest, and members of the twenty-first Royal Fusiliers, ‘with bayonets fixed’.³⁴ While the issue was peacefully resolved, due to the arrival and intervention of the Roman-Catholic priest, the Rev. Mr Gavin, the ‘defenders of the grave’ asserted their right to the site, with the *Nation* reporting statements such as ‘we have as a good [a] right to be here as you or Mr Harper’, and ‘[w]e will guard the bishop’s bones with our lives’.³⁵ As at Killone, the presence of burials provided the context for the assertion of a right to the sacred location, even in the face of considerable legal and military pressure.

The Irish Ecclesiological Society, established by leading Roman-Catholic figures at Maynooth in 1849, also cited the presence of the remains of the dead as a basis for ‘true’ ownership of ancient buildings. In his opening address for the Society, given by the Rev. Charles Russell, the medieval ruined churches across the countries were described as ‘the temples which our fathers raised in honour of the living God [...] around whose venerable

³² *Nation*, 5 July 1868.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

walls their ashes in after ages reposed'.³⁶ It is important to note that the disturbance of burials or funerary monuments impacted Church of Ireland communities also. During the restorations at Dublin's Christ Church cathedral, for example, parishioners were outraged when memorials were moved and rearranged in the crypt.³⁷ The rumoured disturbance of nave burials, and the removal of bones from underneath the floors during renovations at the church of St Multose, in Kinsale, Co. Cork, also led to protests by parishioners.³⁸

This anxiety about the displacement of bodies in relation to significant burial sites reflects what Kirk Savage has described as the crisis of the "missing" — names without bodies', and the "unknown" — bodies without names' in the aftermath of the American Civil War.³⁹ In periods of political and social upheaval, secure knowledge of the location and identity of bodies provides a certain stability of material evidence, fixed in terms of interpretation, in contrast to shifting narratives, and to changing social and political norms and structures. In the case of Ireland during the nineteenth century, the presence of bodies also conferred political and social legitimacy to religious or political identities in the face of rapid and dramatic social change. The interference or dispersal of that base layer of evidence, therefore, led to distress and protest across confessional boundaries. The case studies presented below, of Muckross and Bantry, reflect the practical and political challenges faced by those with responsibility for the management of burial and of bodies during this turbulent period.

'All the horrors of a charnel-house' — Unruly Burial at Muckross

While antiquarian accounts of medieval buildings often noted the high status of medieval burials within their walls, they were also often used as community graveyards, carried out with varying degrees of permission from landowners. Accounts of monastic and friary ruins from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reflect the ongoing use of the sites as places of burial, regardless of overcrowding or unsanitary conditions. This was certainly the case at Muckross, a popular antiquarian attraction within the picturesque Killarney tourist

³⁶ *The Address of the Irish Ecclesiastical Society* (Dublin, 1849), p. 13.

³⁷ The movement of memorials at Christ Church Cathedral is discussed in Roger Stalley, *George Edmund Street and the Restoration of Christ Church Cathedral, Dublin* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), pp. 234-35.

³⁸ The removal and disposal of bones, presumed to be those of ecclesiastics, during renovations by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners at the Church of St Multose, Kinsale, Co. Cork, is outlined in Richard Caulfield, 'St Multose', *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society*, 1 (1892), p. 230.

³⁹ Kirk Savage, 2015 Wyeth Lecture in American Art, 'The Art of the Name: Soldiers, Graves, and Monuments in the Aftermath of the Civil War' <http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/audio-video/video/wyeth-savage.html?utm_source=Real%20Magnet&utm_medium=Email&utm_campaign=85298153> [accessed 8 October 2017].

experience. The friary church and churchyard were part of the demesne owned by the Herbert Family, who resided at Muckross House.⁴⁰

In his description of Muckross Abbey, published in 1849, the Cork antiquarian John Windele noted that such burial practices were the ‘subject of continual complaint’ from its numerous visitors.⁴¹ According to Windele’s report on visitor guides to the area, ‘each book, descriptive of these localities, denounced the abominable desecration of the dead, so painfully visible in every part of the buildings and cemetery [*sic*] alike’.⁴² He described ‘coffin planks, skulls and bones’, as well as how ‘skulls [*sic*] selected as sufficiently bleached [...] ranged on the rude altar-tombs standing near the entrance, formed the most revolting tablets, on which heartless visitors in search of the picturesque and sentimental, inscribed their unhonoured names and worthless ideals’.⁴³ Similarly, John Carr described his encounter with Muckross Abbey in 1805; while ‘reading a pathetic epitaph upon one of the monuments in the abbey’, he felt himself ‘affected by putrid effluvia’, and saw, as he looked around, ‘some bodies, which might have been interred two or three months, in coffins, the planks of which had started, not half covered with mould’.⁴⁴ As he left, he saw ‘a great collection of skulls and bones, promiscuously heaped up, in niches in the walls’.⁴⁵

Isaac Weld, in his account of the scenery of Killarney published in 1807, provided a long description of the use of the ruin as a site of burial. According to Weld, while tourists may come in search of a picturesque experience, they would find themselves ‘suddenly and unexpectedly environed by all the horrors of a charnel-house’.⁴⁶ Weld described Muckross as a ‘common and favourite place of burial’, but added that the ‘limits of the cemetery are small; the depth of soil inconsiderable’, with the result that ‘the coffins with their mouldering contents are not unfrequently [*sic*] moved to make room, long before decency can warrant such a measure’.⁴⁷ Weld described finding, in a passage near the cloister, ‘a head, with a considerable part of the flesh of the face and nearly the entire hair upon it, literally rolling

⁴⁰ Landed Estates Database <<http://landedestates.nuigalway.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=1669>> [accessed 4 October 2017].

⁴¹ John Windele, *Historical and Descriptive Notices of the City of Cork and its Vicinity* (Cork: Bradford & Co., 1849), p. 439.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ John Carr, *The Stranger in Ireland: or, a Tour in the Southern and Western Parts of that Country in the Year 1805* (Philadelphia: T&G Palmer, 1806), p. 227. Carr also mentions an incident in Adare, where the remains of the dead were removed from the friary to the river. According to Carr, ‘his lordship lost his popularity for a short period’, but that it was restored in time (p. 228).

⁴⁵ Carr, p. 227.

⁴⁶ Isaac Weld, *Illustrations of the Scenery of Killarney and the Surrounding Country* (London: Longman, 1807), p. 26.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

underfoot'.⁴⁸ Although the friary was regularly cleaned, 'the bones, skulls and coffin-boards that are prematurely dug up, quickly accumulate again'.⁴⁹ Coffin boards were deposited in the vaults, and 'bones and skulls are heaped up in the angle formed by the transept and the nave of the church, at the outside of the building', where 'many thousands of them may be seen, bleached to an extraordinary degree of whiteness by their exposure to the weather'.⁵⁰ In a note on this point, Weld stated that at Buttevant Abbey, Co. Cork, the skulls and bones were heaped up in the form of a wall, with an adjacent ivy tree binding them together, and that this was not an unusual circumstance in Ireland or England.⁵¹

While some could afford to construct tombs with trap doors, the 'poorer classes of people generally content themselves with depositing the coffin in a cranny of the rock', covering it with loose stones.⁵² According to Weld, 'a day scarcely passes without a burial at Muckross abbey', and despite the 'concourse of people' attending the ceremony with 'cries and howlings', it is 'not thought expedient to oppose it', as 'any attempts made to prevent future burials in the abbey' would 'be the occasion of alarming disturbances'.⁵³ Even allowing for exaggeration and embellishment on the part of these early nineteenth-century commentators, Muckross appears to have been a site of very frequent burial. A report from the *Irish Times* on the visit to the ruins by Queen Victoria in 1861, however, suggests that the problems with overcrowding and unruly burial had been somewhat alleviated.⁵⁴ In reference to the improvements, Windele noted that 'things have been ordered otherwise of late', and that the 'mouldering remains have been interred'.⁵⁵ Colonel Herbert, proprietor of Muckross demesne by the middle of the century, outlined his experience of managing the graveyard during a special meeting of the Board of Guardians, in their capacity as burial board, in February 1857. During a discussion of the unsanitary condition of the nearby Aghadoe graveyard, where the 'decency due to the dead was violated to such an extent as was harrowing to the feelings of any civilized mind', he addressed the Board as to his own experience of managing a privately owned graveyard with a high level of public usage.⁵⁶

In his comments, Herbert outlined some of the measures that he had taken since acquiring Muckross demesne forty years previously. He admitted that the burial ground had

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Weld, p. 27.

⁵⁴ *Irish Times*, 31 August 1861.

⁵⁵ Windele, *Historical and Descriptive Notices*, p. 440.

⁵⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 18 February 1857.

been in ‘a most disgraceful state, as is but too notorious’, and that the fees that had been collected for burial had not been invested in the upkeep of the site.⁵⁷ He stated that he initially took steps to put the site in order at his own expense, and then contracted his gatekeeper to maintain the site and to manage the fees. Reflecting the importance of the site to the locality, he noted that ‘it has ever been my disposition to adopt the course that seemed to be best calculated to meet the public wishes on this subject’, but that if the Burial Board or Board of Guardians could find a way to take on the maintenance of the graveyard, he would gladly hand over his rights to the fees to them.⁵⁸

The difficulty of extending the site to accommodate additional burials was explained by the fact that ‘on one side, it is surrounded by a bog that could not be penetrated two feet without having a copious supply of water, and on the other sides there is nothing but naked rock’, and further to this, that ‘the only part where an addition to the grounds might be made abuts so into my demesne that no gentleman or reasonable person could ask me to make the addition’.⁵⁹ This account by Herbert provides a valuable insight into the quotidian management of graveyards that were held on private lands, yet were subject to reports on issues of public safety and sanitation, as well as being sites of key religious and familial significance for many in the local area. His account also points to the importance of gatekeepers and estate managers in regulating and permitting burial, as well as the role of the landowner, and the payment of fees on these privately held burial grounds. In her discussion of the use of medieval ruins within planned and picturesque landscapes, for example, Finola O’Kane has contrasted the approach of the Herbert family, in possession of Muckross, with that of Lord Kenmare, who transformed the ruined Inisfallen Abbey into a banqueting chamber, complete with a bay window.⁶⁰ This is in contrast to the Herberts’ clear desire to maintain good relations with those who wished to carry out burials at the ruin, as well as his concern with his responsibilities to the local Burial Board regarding public health and sanitation. While Lord Kenmare entirely co-opted the ruin on this land as a place of pleasure and diversion, Henry Arthur Herbert’s position reflects the situation of landlords who attempted to negotiate between the often competing claims on the ecclesiastical sites on their properties.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Finola O’Kane, *Ireland and the Picturesque: Design, Landscape Painting, and Tourism, 1700-1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), pp. 96-97.

Despite the measures put in place by Herbert, reports from the *Kerry Evening Post* from 1880 reflect the ongoing overcrowding burial issues at the site. During the weekly meeting of the Board of Guardians, a report from the district sanitary officer was presented on the unhealthy and overcrowded state of certain graves within Muckross Abbey Cemetery. Mr. H. A. Herbert, the eldest son of the family, who had inherited the estate following the death of his father in 1866, responded to say that he had requested no further burials take place, but expressed his anxiety that ‘those persons having an interest in those graves had a right to interments in the abbey, and be the custodians of those grounds’.⁶¹ He stated that he would donate a piece of land from his own demesne, to be consecrated by the Bishop of Kerry, in order to ensure that people had a suitable place of interment.⁶² The popularity of Killarney as a destination was also referenced by Herbert, who noted that tourists frequently brought the unsightly and unhealthy graves to his attention. The presence of the medieval ruin on Herbert’s property led to tension between the need to maintain good relationships with his tenants and local community, and his desire to maintain a picturesque demesne.

The care taken by the Herbert family of the ruins at Muckross was noted in a 1887 article from the *Kerry Sentinel*, which stated that ‘all praise’ was due to the Herberts of Muckross

for having preserved this sacred spot from the shameful desecration which I have witnessed at Kildare, Ardmore, and other places in Ireland, where what is left of the holy house of God and the crowded resting places of the dead are left open to the herds and flocks, and the remains of ancient sculpture and architecture are rudely defaced or destroyed by visitors who have learned to respect nothing.⁶³

The Herberts’ care and sensitivity to the friary, which had ‘never ceased to be the cherished burial ground of the Killarney Catholics’,⁶⁴ was linked to the overall proper management of the land. This responsible and respectful proprietorship, mindful of shared values, was also contrasted by the newspaper with the nearby estates of the White family around Bantry Bay, described as ‘a land bled to death’, having been allowed to fall into ‘decay, ruin’, and ‘degrading and shameful poverty’.⁶⁵ The Herberts’ position as beneficent and responsible landlords reflects that of the Dunravens at Adare, Co. Limerick, who combined antiquarian preservation with an awareness of the role of the medieval churches on their lands to both

⁶¹ *Kerry Evening Post*, 15 April 1880.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Kerry Sentinel*, 18 October 1887.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

Roman-Catholic and Church of Ireland parishioners throughout an era of political and sectarian tension.⁶⁶ The daily management of medieval burial sites required careful negotiation of relevant legislation and local expectations. Property owners such as the Herberts had to carefully manage their role as landlords, open as they were to the censure of the local authorities, and to negotiate their increasingly precarious position as paternalistic leaders within the community, subject to the evaluation of the press and of the local population.

Antiquarian Values and Claims to Interment

By the mid-nineteenth century, polite and scholarly interest in medieval ruins was growing, and they were increasingly prized for their architectural forms and sculpted decoration, rather than their associations with burial or with religious rites, religious figures, or saints.⁶⁷ Through the development of scholarly societies, publications, and field trips, as well as a growing interest in the measurement and recording of field monuments and ruins, their formal and historical meanings were increasingly fixed, reiterated, and supported through professional appraisal and adoption of a specific, technical language used across national boundaries in relation to particular architectural styles and building types.⁶⁸ Similarly, the vogue for picturesque tourism led to the incorporation of ruins into ‘views’ and into designed landscapes within demesnes. As O’Kane has argued, this ‘transformation of significant ruins into prospects or vistas’ lessened the ruins’ ability to ‘act as a focus for Catholic ceremonies’.⁶⁹ The presence of Roman-Catholic bodies, living or dead, interrupted the desire, and the ability, to view the ruins as picturesque objects of antiquarian curiosity. The ability to engage in a formalist appreciation of the aesthetics of the picturesque Irish landscape, characterised by roughness and wildness, required distance, literal and figurative, from the realities and consequences of living in such an environment.

⁶⁶ The role of the Dunravens at Adare and their management of the medieval ecclesiastical buildings on their estate is explored in NicGhabhann, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Buildings in Ireland*, pp. 29-63.

⁶⁷ The growth of antiquarianism as part of middle- and upper-class leisure activities is considered in Philippa Levine, *The Amateur and the Professional: Antiquarians, Historians, and Archaeologists in Victorian England, 1838-86* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). The growth of antiquarianism in Ireland is considered in, among other texts, John Waddell, *Foundation Myths: The Beginnings of Irish Archaeology* (Bray, Co. Wicklow: Wordwell, 2005); *Pathfinders to the Past: The Antiquarian Road to Irish Historical Writing*, ed. by Próinséas Ní Chatháin, Siobhán Fitzpatrick, and Howard Clarke (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2012); and Máirín Ní Cheallaigh, ‘Mechanisms of Monument Destruction in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Antiquarian Horror, Cromwell, and Gold-Dreaming’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 107C (2007), 127-45.

⁶⁸ NicGhabhann, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Buildings in Ireland*, pp. 64-135; and Carla Yanni, ‘On Nature and Nomenclature: William Whewell and the Production of Architectural Knowledge in Early Victorian Britain’, *Architectural History*, 40 (1997), 204-21.

⁶⁹ O’Kane, *Ireland and the Picturesque*, p. 23.

These attempts to establish fixed meanings had a physical corollary in the maintenance and preservation of ruined buildings by interested individuals, by scholarly societies such as the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (founded 1849), and finally, through government agencies and via legislation such as the Irish Church Act (1869), which provided for the care and preservation of medieval churches, and the Ancient Monuments Act (Ireland), passed in 1882, which explicitly defined several sites as being worthy of state preservation.⁷⁰ In many cases, the preservation of these buildings ensured that they remained *as ruins*, to be maintained and protected in a ruined state, with an emphasis on the importance of the historical and architectural evidence presented by the monuments. The possibility of renovation and reuse, which had taken place at Ballintober Abbey in Co. Mayo, at Kildare Cathedral, and in Adare, Co. Limerick, at both the Trinitarian and Augustinian foundations in the town, was negated by this Act. This largely formal interest in the ruins contrasted, and was in conflict, with the use of the sites as places of continuing religious significance, as places of pilgrimage, communal worship, or burial.

The report published by the *Irish Times* in 1893 on the restoration of the friary in the town of Ennis, Co. Clare, explicitly contrasted the use of the site as a burial place with its maintenance as a place of antiquarian and scholarly value. The burial ground was described as being in a ‘scandalously neglected and unsanitary state’. Following a sworn inquiry, the friary was closed to future burials, while ‘reserving rights to the representatives of five families who have vaults therein’.⁷¹ It could be argued that, by the end of the century, the ideal engagement with the sites, following the Irish Church Act and the Ancient Monuments Act, involved a field trip of interested society members, or, in very specific cases, ‘respectable’ burial ceremonies for individuals who could lay a claim to burial on the site, rather than popular Roman-Catholic devotional practices or ceremonies.

The reports of the Fund for the Preservation of the Memorials of the Dead, in Ireland, established in 1888, reiterate these antiquarian concerns, combining them with the idea of a civic duty to care for the remains of the dead. These concerns were explicitly linked to ideas of national respectability. A report in the *Irish Times*, published in 1891, bemoaned the fact that such an organisation was even required when ‘we might suppose that in a civilized and

⁷⁰ The foundation of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland is outlined in Aideen M. Ireland, ‘The Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1849-1900’, *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, 112 (1982), 72-92. The development of the Ancient Monuments (Ireland) Act is discussed in Rachel MacRory, ‘The Evolution of Policy for the Conservation of Historic Monuments in Ireland’ (unpublished MUBC thesis, University College Dublin, 1994).

⁷¹ ‘Restoration of Ennis Abbey and Clare Abbey’, *Irish Times*, 10 January 1893.

Christian nation the care and reverence of the dead would be a duty so imperative as to have no necessity for any enforcement of it whatsoever'.⁷² Similar sentiments were expressed in the report on the Fund in 1893, with the comment that 'we compare very badly with England in this matter', but that 'until our national vanity sets itself to remedy the evil it cannot hope to escape the comments freely bestowed by visitors from other countries'.⁷³ This report noted the condition of several sites, held in private ownership and therefore not available for, or subject to, the care of the Board of Works. The friary in Askeaton, Co. Limerick, is described as being 'littered with tombstones in the most chaotic and disgraceful condition, so smashed and broken among the crumbling stones of the Abbey that the ground more resembles the unused bed of a quarry than the floor of a sacred abbey'.⁷⁴ Also in Co. Limerick, the Cistercian abbey of Monasternenagh is described as being 'covered with ivy, littered with tombstones, coffins and *human bones*'.⁷⁵ The Abbey at Athenry is also described as being in good condition, with fine tracery, but the report notes that the 'burial ground is badly kept, and the interior of the Abbey walls is in a disgraceful state'.⁷⁶ Concerned citizens were urged to subscribe to the fund in order to avoid national disgrace, and to demonstrate their own respectability by aligning themselves with such an effort.⁷⁷

At both Muckross and Ennis, certain families asserted their rights to continue to carry out burials within the grounds of medieval ecclesiastical buildings. In order to do so, they had to demonstrate the ways in which their claims, and future burial ceremonies, would differ from those that had led to problematic overcrowding. On 30 July 1880, the *Irish Examiner* carried a report on an inquiry into the burial rights of several families at Muckross. The families represented, including the Gallwey and Coltsman families, made claims to burial rights based on the recorded presence of their relatives already interred within vaults on the site. The fact that these families had vaults and memorial markers to record their familial burials indicates their relative wealth and social status. It should also be noted that these family names frequently appeared on the local Board of Guardians, another marker of their social status. Although questions were raised at the inquiry as to whether there would be adequate space within the vaults for future burials, Mr. J. C. O'Reardon, a solicitor representing The O'Donoghue, M. P., asserted that 'there was plenty of room in that tomb for

⁷² *Irish Times*, 26 December 1891.

⁷³ *Irish Times*, 27 May 1893. For further context on Victorian attitudes towards memorials and grave markers, see James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death* (Thrupp, Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2004).

⁷⁴ *Irish Times*, 27 May 1893.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

future interments and the tomb is well built'.⁷⁸ Several claimants also made representations on behalf of their relatives living abroad, reflecting the outward migration of the period, with John Quinlan from Killarney claiming a right to burial 'on behalf of his sister, Mrs Casey, who is in Australia, and also on behalf of Mrs Casey's children in the Lady's Chapel'.⁷⁹ James Glissane from Killarney also claimed a tomb for himself, his father, and grandfather, and recorded that 'perhaps his son and daughter might come from Australia and claim this tomb'.⁸⁰

Throughout this hearing, the ability to provide respectable sepulchre for future burials was a determining factor, with witnesses giving evidence regarding the 'revolting' sight of 'fresh coffins taken up to make room for new coffins', the continuing overcrowding, and the fact that 'two or three tombs' were not air-tight, resulting in 'a stench emanating' from certain tombs.⁸¹ While this inquiry was evidently concerned with public order, and with health and safety, the emphasis on access to tombs in order to safeguard burial rights, and the ability to demonstrate a clear, documented lineage within the site, reflect the influence of class concerns. Rather than being associated with popular religious practices, therefore, the medieval ecclesiastical sites were being re-coded as places to signify family lineage and social status, as well as a space to demonstrate scientific and polite knowledge of their architectural and historical significance.

Respectable Roman-Catholic Bodies and the Burial of the Dead

This concern regarding the proper treatment of bodies within these medieval sites reflects the broader preoccupations around public health, hygiene, and the control of disease during the Victorian period, but may also reflect cultural anxieties regarding the distinction between disorderly and respectable burial, following the treatment of bodies in mass graves during the years of the mid-century Famine.⁸² Emily Mark-Fitzgerald has outlined the extent to which burials without coffins and mass graves were associated with the workhouse and with Famine death. Mark-Fitzgerald describes the extent to which 'the proliferation of graphic and distressing narratives of the spectacle of mass burial — and their persistence in folk and

⁷⁸ *Irish Examiner*, 30 July 1880.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² For further context on aspects of medical history during this period, including concerns around epidemic disease, see Margaret H. Preston and Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh, *Gender and Medicine in Ireland, 1700-1950* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

popular memory — reveals the deep significance attached to rituals of death and the social collapse associated with the dissolution of boundaries between the living and the dead'.⁸³

An article published by the *Irish Examiner* in 1869 on the state of the graveyard at Ardnabraher in Co. Cork, on the site of a demolished friary building, linked both the horror of 'missing' and 'unknown' bodies (as theorised by Savage, outlined above)⁸⁴ with the mass burials of the Famine. The article roundly criticised the Board of Guardians of the Bantry Union for the neglect of the graveyard. Four burial grounds in the area were listed: one adjoining the Catholic church; another used almost exclusively by Protestants; a further site located four or five miles from the town, used primarily for the burial of Catholics but now unsuitable for further burials; and the site at Ardnabraher, known as the Abbey Burial Ground, and described as a site of great natural beauty and spiritual significance — a 'fountain of piety and learning', 'founded in 1460 by Daniel O'Sullivan, Prince of Bere.' According to the *Examiner's* article, it was the 'principal place of sepulchre for the people of an extensive district', with graves 'eked out with an ingenious economy of space that is very curious to see'.⁸⁵

The article also records that the site also contained 'three monster graves, into which were flung hundreds of the coffinless and shroudless bodies of the victims of the Irish famine'.⁸⁶ The disintegration of the site by the sea had resulted in human remains being swept into the sea with the soil. The article reports that 'it needed but the great storms and extraordinary tides of last winter to make the spectacle simply horrible', as this had resulted in the exposure of the soil due to the toppling of several large trees. The spectacle recorded is chilling to read:

the visitor sees an almost completely vertical section of the burial ground presented to him. Here are the rows of rotted coffins protruding from the bank, with here a human skull grinning out in all its hideous ghastliness, and there the thigh bone of a full grown mortal, displaying its gaunt nakedness to the eye of the passer-by.⁸⁷

The article described the experience of walking on the strand or in the fields and picking up 'a half-eaten bone — part of a limb or a skull — which some stray dog had borne off from the cemetery to crunch in a quiet corner. And not only dogs, but pigs and other beasts have

⁸³ Emily Mark-Fitzgerald, *Commemorating the Irish Famine: Memory and the Monument* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 104.

⁸⁴ Savage, 'The Art of the Name', n. pag.

⁸⁵ 'The Bantry Burial Grounds', *Irish Examiner*, 26 March 1869.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

been found exploring the sacred ground.’⁸⁸ The author of the article conjectured that these limbs could belong to a ‘learned ancestor’, or the ‘right arm of one who bravely wielded the sword or the pike in the battle for “Faith and Fatherland”’.⁸⁹

The description of Ardnabraher clearly demonstrated outrage at the desecration of Roman-Catholic bodies, the direct result of the callous indifference of both Lord Bantry and the Board of Guardians. The bodies are described as either linked to Republicanism and Roman-Catholic freedoms, or as blameless victims of the Famine. In particular, the reference to the ‘pike’ suggests a link to the violence of 1798, and related struggles for Irish political and religious independence. The lack of respect shown to these bodies was translated, therefore, into an insult to the Roman Catholics of the region, and as a symbol of anti-nationalist politics. The article, which would have been widely read and circulated, created a counter-narrative, and explicitly reinvested these scattered bodies with a necessary respectability through its emphasis on the sacred and ancient nature of the graveyard itself, and on the possible nobility of those buried there. The article can be read as demonstrating the painful anxiety around the visible desecration of Roman-Catholic bodies, and the inability to control their fragmentation and dispersal due to a lack of control over and ownership of the burial grounds. The trope of the ‘body in pieces’ has been considered in the context of the highly visible physical desecration of social groups in other contexts, and the idea of anxiety around physical fragmentation is resonant in the context of post-Famine burial in Ireland.⁹⁰

The treatment of bodies at Ardnabraher is in sharp contrast to the elaborate funerary customs engaged in by Roman Catholics at Muckross by the end of the century. Newspaper accounts of funerals taking place at Muckross in the 1890s emphasised the respectability of the dead and the propriety of the funeral customs, including lists of notable local figures in attendance, details of the funeral mass held at Killarney cathedral, and suits of coffins encasing the bodies, made from heavy oak wood with brass mountings and numerous wreaths.⁹¹ As Ciara Breathnach and David Butler have outlined in their study of death notices and obituaries, the desire to control funerary practices also reflects the increasingly Ultramontane⁹² emphasis on doctrinal adherence, and the suppression of practices such as the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Derek Hook, ‘The Racist Bodily Imaginary: The Image of the Body-in-Pieces in (Post)Apartheid Culture’, *Subjectivity*, 6.3 (2013), 254-71.

⁹¹ The funeral of Daniel Cronin Coltsman, who died 23 February 1894, was described in this manner in the *Kerry News*, 2 March 1894.

⁹² The term ‘Ultramontane’ refers to a shift in Roman-Catholic devotional practice and culture from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, reflecting increasing adherence to Roman practice and papal authority, and is

‘merry wake’ throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.⁹³ While other burials may well have also taken place in the cemetery at this time, they were unlikely to be recorded in such detail or disseminated in the press, given the fact that newspapers selectively reported on the deaths of the socially respectable and locally eminent citizenry.⁹⁴ These changes around burial reflect much wider shifts in Roman-Catholic devotional practices in the post-Famine period, which focused in many ways on the performance of the respectable, or ideal, body in public through the increased popularity of processions and other public devotions, held in the streets or in the many new churches and religious buildings constructed during this period.⁹⁵

As all of this implies, while the Ancient Monuments (Ireland) Act was being prepared, establishing these sites as areas of antiquarian, touristic, historical, and aesthetic interest and pleasure, a parallel strand of interpretation was also evident in the discourses of the period. The sites were positioned within sermons, political speeches, and narrative essays published in newspapers as important signifiers of Roman-Catholic Irish identity, with an emphasis on their initial construction and their role in establishing Roman Catholicism in Ireland. While tension existed around the proper ‘ownership’ of early-Christian ruins, with both the Church of Ireland and the Roman-Catholic church claiming these as part of their ‘true’ inheritance, the later monastic and friary buildings could be more firmly established as part of a Roman-Catholic heritage.⁹⁶ As Elizabeth Crook has explored in her study of nationalism and the uses of the past, the ruin was used as symbol of both nationalist resurgence and religious dispossession. She gives the example of the use of the ruin within the political rhetoric of William Smith O’Brien’s lecture to the Cork Young Ireland Society

most often associated with Cardinal Paul Cullen. For more contextual information on Ultramontane culture in Ireland during this period, see *Cardinal Paul Cullen and his World*, ed. by Dáire Keogh and Albert McDonnell (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2011).

⁹³ Ciara Breathnach and David Fleming, ‘Death Notices and Obituaries in Provincial Irish Newspapers, 1820-1900’, in *Death and Dying in Ireland, Britain and Europe*, ed. by James Kelly and Mary Ann Lyons (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2013), p. 260.

⁹⁴ Breathnach and Fleming, p. 252.

⁹⁵ The role of public processions in the communication of post-Famine Roman-Catholic identity is explored in NicGhabhann, ‘“A Development of Practical Catholic Emancipation”: Laying the Foundations for the Roman-Catholic Urban Landscape, 1850-1900’, *Urban History* (special issue on Irish urban history – forthcoming); Lisa Godson, ‘Charting the Material Culture of the Devotional Revolution: The Advertising Register of the *Irish Catholic Directory* 1837-96’, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, 116C (2016), 265-294; and Colm Lennon and Robin Kavanagh, ‘The Flowering of the Confraternities and Sodalities in Ireland, c. 1860-c.1960’, in *Confraternities and Sodalities in Ireland: Charity, Devotion, and Sociability*, ed. by Colin Lennon (Dublin: Columba Press, 2012), pp. 76-96.

⁹⁶ The tension between the ‘moral ownership’ of early-Christian buildings in Ireland at this time is explored in NicGhabhann, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Buildings in Ireland*, p. 12.

in 1885, arguing that Smith O'Brien essentially presented Irish patriotism as emerging from the archaeological remains scattered across the Irish landscape.

O'Brien used the image of the landscape as being peopled with 'the bones of uncanonised saints and martyrs'. He created an explicit link between the ruins and the political present, stating that 'when the framers of the penal laws denied us books, and drew their thick black veil over Irish history, they forgot that the ruins they had themselves made were the most eloquent memorial of a history and a race destined not to die'.⁹⁷ However, these nationalist and often romantic narratives tended to ignore the centuries of 'unruly' burial throughout the early-modern period, and into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and built their case for moral ownership on the presence of kings and ecclesiastics, rather than on the more recent, and more numerous, bodies interred within the site.

This desire to invest the ruins with a specifically elite Roman-Catholic identity is evident in a series of articles titled 'History of Muckross Abbey and Those Buried Within', written by the Rev. Fr. Jarlath OSF, and published in the *Kerry Sentinel* in 1897. This series focused on clerics and friars who were interred in the grounds, providing emotive and extensive descriptions of their virtue, and the nature of their martyrdom for the Roman-Catholic faith.⁹⁸ In 1893, the *Irish Examiner* published a short story set within the ruins of Muckross, inviting readers to imagine the friars still assembling to chant the Divine Office, despite the 'withering edicts of the royal free-booters, Henry VII and his daughter, Elizabeth of England'. The story rehearses the trope of a faith community under threat, but that remains faithful, allowing it to flourish once more in the future. This narrative structure, of continuation and fidelity, was also frequently used to structure the sermons within new churches, reflecting resurgent Roman-Catholic socio-political status during the period.⁹⁹

The tendency to associate these sites with antiquarian 'respectability' is also somewhat countered by the rich body of folklore dealing with burial across denominational boundaries, demonstrating the continuing position of these sites in the popular imagination, despite increasing prohibition regarding physical access. As Clodagh Tait has outlined, Roman-Catholic folktales recounted church walls 'jumping' in order to avoid enclosing Protestant burials, especially in cases of dissent around the use of a medieval site for

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Crooke, *Politics, Archaeology, and the Creation of a National Museum of Ireland* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2000), p. 33.

⁹⁸ Rev. Fr. Jarlath OSF, 'History of Muckross Abbey and of Those Buried Therein', *Kerry Sentinel*, 25 September 1897.

⁹⁹ NicGhabhann, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Buildings in Ireland*, pp. 190-91.

burial.¹⁰⁰ As Tait argues, these stories are ‘revealing of the negotiation of interdenominational relationships’, and while they highlight a ‘strong sense of difference between the Catholic and Protestant communities’, the necessity of multi-denominational burial led to a range of practices developed to allow the communities to live ‘apart but together’, including the use of different grave-marker types, the employment of different masons and craftsmen, or the use of different part of the graveyard.¹⁰¹ Crucially, these folktales, combined with attention to the material evidence of the sites themselves, provide an important counter-narrative to that of polite antiquarian engagement.

Conclusion

This essay has traced the multiple and often contradictory discourses surrounding Roman-Catholic burial within medieval ecclesiastical buildings between 1824 and 1900, focusing on the case study of the burial ground surrounding the medieval friary of Muckross. These different discourses reflect the extent to which the medieval ruins had become sites of complex negotiation between legislation, public custom, private responsibility, and political significance. It is clear that, throughout the century, the ruins were powerful symbols of power and religious identity, co-opted through physical occupation and narrative retelling in order to serve different aims and political goals.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the uses of medieval ecclesiastical sites have been largely controlled by state agencies involved in their preservation and care. Smaller parish churches, however, remain frequently used as sites of burial throughout the country, and recent burials, denoted by new headstones, can be seen within many monastic sites, including at Muckross and Askeaton. Indeed, the issue of overcrowding at Muckross cemetery remains an issue of concern, with the *Irish Examiner* publishing an article on the subject on 30 January 2017. Echoing some of the nineteenth-century concerns, the article noted the overcrowding of coffins in local cemeteries, and the fact that the burial ground at Muckross Abbey is ‘closed to “newcomers” and accepts only burials of the town’s long-established families’.¹⁰² At the time of writing, the issue of the improper and undignified burial of the bodies of children and infants from a Mother and Baby Home at Tuam, Co. Galway, has also featured prominently in the recent media,

¹⁰⁰ Clodagh Tait, ‘Wandering Graveyards, Jumping Churches, and Rogue Corpses: Tolerance and Intolerance in Irish Folklore’, in Kelly and Lyons, pp. 281-82.

¹⁰¹ Tait, pp. 285-89.

¹⁰² *Irish Examiner*, 30 January 2017 <<http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/cremation-eases-issue-over-burial-plot-space-in-killarney-441348.html>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

reflecting similar concerns about the ‘body in pieces’, and the definition and treatment of ‘respectable’ bodies in Ireland during the twentieth century.¹⁰³

Although the image of the Irish medieval ruin is now most frequently used as part of attractive tourist campaigns, marketing the country as a place of historic interest,¹⁰⁴ the association with death and burial continues to be present within contemporary visual culture. The uses of medieval monastic sites as places of burial features in works of art, literature, and film throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, ranging from Seamus O’Kelly’s short story, ‘The Weaver’s Grave’ (later made into a prize-winning radio play by RTÉ in 1961)¹⁰⁵, to contemporary poet Tess Gallagher’s representation of a ruined abbey in ‘Abbey Ballindoon’. In this poem, the poet imagines an encounter with her new partner’s late wife, but also connects the ruin with images of death from the Cromwellian era and the Vietnam War.¹⁰⁶ In *Eclipse* (2009), directed by Conor McPherson and written by Billy Roche, the character of Michael Farr, played by Ciarán Hinds, returns to the site of a ruined church to visit the grave of his recently deceased wife. More recently, Amnesty International released a short video protesting the 8th Amendment in 2015, which focused on the image of a ruined church, shrouded in mist and surrounded by broken grave-markers, as a symbol of the continuing power of the Roman-Catholic Church within Irish legislation.¹⁰⁷ These are just a few examples of the continuing significance image of the ruin within Irish visual culture, as a place of uneasy or troubling memory.

A brief survey of the current condition of many of the monastic or friary sites described above, however, reveals that contemporary preservation practices have almost completely effaced this history of unruly or unsanctioned burial, with the foundations at Askeaton and Monasternenagh furnished with level floors, facilitating safe tourist access, while maintaining some of the burial markers or wall tombs and memorials in situ. At Muckross, the site itself, under the care of the OPW, is also cleanly laid out inside, with graves and tombs located in the surrounding cemetery. While this form of preservation is as

¹⁰³ ‘Woman Went to Tuam Home after Seeing Child with “Skull on a Stick”’, *Irish Times*, 3 March 2017 <<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/woman-went-to-tuam-home-after-seeing-child-with-skull-on-a-stick-1.2997365>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

¹⁰⁴ The ‘Ireland’s Ancient East’ campaign from Fáilte Ireland provides a recent example of the use of medieval ecclesiastical sites within tourist marketing. See <<https://www.irelandsancienteast.com/discover/stories/themes/sacred-ireland>> [accessed 8 October 2017].

¹⁰⁵ ‘The Weaver’s Grave’ <<http://www.rte.ie/drama/radio/plays/2015/0123/675205-the-weavers-grave-by-seamus-okelly/>> [accessed 13 March 2017].

¹⁰⁶ Tess Gallagher, ‘Abbey Ballindoon’, in *Midnight Lantern: New and Selected Poems* (Northumberland: Bloodaxe, 2012), pp. 325-26.

¹⁰⁷ Amnesty International, ‘In Chains’ campaign video <<https://www.youtube.com/embed/j9W33wCm7Ao>> [accessed 8 October 2017].

necessary now for safe access and public health as it was in the nineteenth century, some memorial to the many, currently invisible, burials, and the local significance of the sites as places of local interment, would be welcomed in order to avoid continuing the effacement of those in society who did not provide, or could not afford a tomb or grave marker, but who wished to inter their friends and family in a site that was deeply meaningful to them.