

**‘Cill Cáscan and De Controversia Paschali’:
Echoes of Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Controversy in the Irish Landscape**

Terry O’Hagan¹

The following is an expanded version of an article written for [Trowel](#) (Volume XIII) – The UCD (Dublin) Archaeological Postgraduate Journal. In presenting a parallel online version, I hope to demonstrate a greater ease and accessibility in utilising, referencing and hyperlinking multiple layers of online mapping and databases within traditional ‘bodies of text’.

Introduction

During the seventh century AD, the Irish Church was involved in a long running ecclesiastical debate concerning Insular (Irish & British) and Roman (Continental European) liturgical practices. This manifested itself in the external performance of Christianity such as differing styles of ecclesiastical tonsure and a disagreement on the 'correct' way of calculating the annual date of Easter (Charles-Edwards 2000, 400; O Cróinín 1995, 150; Venclová 2002, 466-469; McCarthy 2003, 163-164). At stake was a conservative insular reluctance to implement changes to what they considered authentic ancient precedence. Early medieval sources that survive suggest that an underlying facet to the debate was a question of ecclesiastical identity and authority. Commonly known as 'The Easter Controversy', or 'The Paschal Question', it polarised elements of the Insular Irish Church (Charles-Edwards 2000, 391; De Paor 1993, 151). Throughout the seventh century there seems to have been a gradual acceptance of the new methods and fashions as promoted by Rome. Southern Irish churches are thought to have adopted the Roman method by the 640s AD, with Northern Irish Churches and Iona following by the start of 700s AD (Charles-Edwards 2000, 391-496; O Cróinín 1995, 203).

The controversy itself has long fascinated historians of early medieval Ireland. Archaeological attention to the controversy has, understandably to date, remained lacking; there being precious little physical evidence that can be securely dated to the historical event. Despite such problems, the controversy provides us with (in archaeological terms, at least) a relatively short chronological period, during which certain Insular Irish churches professed and celebrated Easter at alternative times and dates. Establishing potential locations for such churches would certainly provide an avenue for future research, as well as offering a rare opportunity of integrating and dating early Irish ecclesiastical sites within a defined historical context. This article will suggest that previously unrecognised onomastic evidence for the Easter controversy survives within the modern Irish landscape. It will argue that the original meaning of a particular Irish placename, Kilcaskan (*Cell Cáscan*) has been overlooked by previous scholarship due to subsequent etymological corruption and that the distribution and multiple attestation of the placename, viewed in conjunction with surviving ecclesiastical archaeology within those locations, may in fact be linked with the controversy. In presenting the evidence, I also hope to demonstrate the extent and potential of digital resources which, in the last few years, have revolutionised archaeological desktop survey of the early medieval landscape.

¹ Ad Astra Research Scholar, John Hume Institute for Global Irish Studies & UCD School of Archaeology

Kilcaskan Study Group

The Irish placename Kilcaskan (*Cell Cáscan*) is attested several times in modern day Munster and Leinster with minor variations in spelling (See Fig.1 and Table 1 below). With the exception of one example², all have previously been translated and understood to mean, 'The Church of Cáscan'. To the best of the author's knowledge, no historical, religious or apocryphal trace of any such insular figure or saint's cult survives. Indeed, the personal name *Cáscan* is not attested in surviving medieval Irish literature. In light of this, it is perhaps appropriate to question the basis of the accepted meaning of the placename element 'Cáscan' and to offer an alternative that may help explain an early medieval derivation.

Caiscín – modern Irish etymology

The Irish word *Caiscín* is translated as meaning 'wholemeal or whole wheat bread, meal or grain' (Dineen 1904, 105). However, it is a relatively modern Irish word. The earliest documented dictionary inclusion of 'Caiscín' is seemingly that of the above in 1904. It does not appear in the RIA *Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials* (eDIL). It makes no appearance as a placename element in Hogan's *Onomasticon Goedelicum* (OG). Furthermore, at no stage during the initial collection of placenames by the Ordnance Survey in the 1830's/1840's, did the modern meaning enter into discussion of the suspected etymology of the same; despite many of the *Cell Cáscan* placenames being the subject of uncertainty and confusion. Indeed, several of the relevant Ordnance Survey (OS) placename books note that 'the meaning of the word is unclear within the locality' and that 'it perhaps represents a personal name'.³ It is therefore highly likely that the modern word has no connection to the placenames under discussion and that the original medieval meaning has been corrupted, obscured and anglicised over subsequent centuries.⁴

Etymology of early medieval Irish 'Easter'

Many Irish words of an ecclesiastical nature are derived from Latin loan words which illustrate their original providence and introduction in an early medieval context (McManus 1983; Flanagan 1984). The modern Irish term for 'Easter', is *Cáisc* which is derived from the Old Irish *Cáisc*, (g. *Cásca*) which itself was derived from Latin *Pascha* (g. *pascae*), meaning 'Easter', 'Passover', or indeed 'Paschal'. In terms of documented Old Irish usage, there are various examples in medieval sources, dating back to the seventh and eighth centuries.⁵ Closely associated Irish terms for 'paschal lamb', such as *cáscda* and *cáscamail*, also illustrate the conceptual and literal links between such words and their Latin etymological derivations.

² That of Kilnacask (Co. Tipperary), which is currently translated as 'Wood of Cáscan'; see (K7) below.

³ See, for example, the explanatory note for (K1) [Kilcaskin Townland, Co. Limerick](#) and a similar note for (K2) [Kilcaskan \(C.P.\) Co. Kerry](#).

⁴ For an introduction to the problems involved with, and the processes by which, original Irish placenames were anglicised from the Norman period onwards, see Ó Muraíle (2001) and Mac Giolla Easpaig (2009). It has been said that 'anglicisation had the effect of shrouding place names of Irish origin in an impenetrable fog of unintelligibility' (Mac Giolla Easpaig 2009, 82).

⁵ See expanded eDIL entries: i.e. *caisce*, *chásg*, *cásga*.

Early Modern 'Easter' Placenames

The Irish word *Cáisc/Cásca*, denoting 'Easter' is well documented in anglicised form in many Irish townland names throughout the country.⁶ Some examples have recorded attestations as far back as the sixteenth century; however these, for the most part, should be generally viewed as placenames derived from, or associated with, post reformation religious activity or traditional Easter folk ceremonies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (many of which were noted by John O'Donovan in the Ordnance Survey Namebooks).⁷ Such Easter ceremonies may have been in existence for several centuries previously, particularly given the outdoor nature of Irish Catholicism during earlier penal times. These declining traditions and their influence on placenames were noted by Joyce in the late nineteenth century (1922, 467-468); and accounts of various outdoor Easter customs are also known from the same period (Mooney 1889, 388-389; Ó Duġda 1941, 126). Such customs suggest the tail end of a secularised folk tradition associated with Eastertime festivals, but not ultimately centred on the specific religious celebration of the day. What is most pertinent to the discussion at hand is the preservation of past traditions and activities associated with Easter within early modern Irish placenames. Of particular interest is the widespread distribution and variation of examples which preserve an anglicised 'cask/caska/cosker' element in their modern placenames; which illustrate the varying nature of etymological corruption that has occurred over relatively recent centuries.

Cill Cásca or *Cill Cásca*? 'The Pachal/Easter Church'

In the case of the *Cill Cásca* placenames, it seems plausible to suggest that we are perhaps dealing with an etymological corruption of the original medieval meaning (*Cásca*, 'Easter') alongside the retention of similar linguistic sound patterns which have survived early modern anglicisation. Given the similarities in spelling and pronunciation; (e.g. *cásca* /k as.k^ha/ and *cásca* /k as.k^han/) it is easy to imagine how such a shift may have occurred. It is important to differentiate between those early modern anglicised placenames that preserve 'Easter' elements and those which are associated with the early medieval Irish word *cill* (one of the most common Irish placename elements - based on the Latin *cella*), meaning 'church'. The dating of such *cill* names is generally assigned to the early medieval period; before the advent of later alternative Irish words for 'church', such as *teampall*, *eaglais* or *séipéal*.

Many of the Kilcaskan/*Cill Cásca* placenames have documented historical attestations of the name from at least the late medieval period, i.e. several centuries before the Irish Reformation. This provides us with a rough but convenient chronological *terminus ante quem* for those particular placenames. Any Easter association involved in their naming is that of a medieval conceptual understanding or enshrining of the name; and not those of penal times and later, which may have involved the occasional re-use of old, ruined

⁶ e.g. Ballycaskin, Co. Cork (O'Caskin's Town); Ballymacask, Co. Cork (Mac Cask's Town); Cornacask, Co. Galway (Easterfield); Drumcask, Co. Cavan (Easter Ridge); Laghtcausk, Co. Roscommon (Monument of Easter); Lisnacask, Co. Westmeath (Easter Lios); Loughmacask, Co. Kilkenny (Lake of Easter); Knocknacaska, Co. Kerry (Hill of Easter); Knocknacaska, Co. Leitrim (Hill of Easter); Knockycosker Co. Westmeath (Hill of Easter); Mullancask, Co. Monaghan (Summit of Easter).

⁷ Archival Notes: Individual townlands - Placenames Database of Ireland.

ecclesiastical sites out of necessity or political concerns. Their naming in a medieval context therefore, represents not only a direct linking of the concepts of 'church' and 'Easter' at a time when there was no apparent danger or obstacle to public celebration; but also an overt religious aspect to the same which involved the ecclesiastical celebration of Easter within, or around, a specific church site. As Easter was, and is, the primary liturgical festival of the Christian calendar (celebrated in all medieval churches) it would appear somewhat strange to emphasize, link and name individual church sites with an enshrined social memory of such a central tenant of faith. However, if the naming of such sites dates from the seventh century AD, to the period in question surrounding the Easter controversy; then such paradoxical aspects are easily understood. Such sites may have acquired their placename identifications at a time when alternate dates of Easter, and therefore the requisite church celebrations, were a contemporary reality or recent memory.

The concept of an early medieval church being so designated as an 'Easter' or 'Paschal Church' (*Cell/Cill Cásca*) does not insinuate any one particular fashion; such churches could have been following either Roman or Insular Irish Easter traditions. It was perhaps their very difference to whatever was considered orthodox which marked them out for such identification and commemoration. In order to explore such a theory, a brief desktop survey of Kilcaskan/*Cill Cásca* placename locations is offered below; focusing on traces of early ecclesiastical archaeology, as well as historical, traditional or etymological traces of memory, commemoration or association with 'Easter'. By placing historical and etymological considerations within an archaeological landscape framework; it is hoped that an early medieval ecclesiastical origin and derivation for *Cill Cásca* placenames will not only become apparent; but also the possibility that such names may in fact reflect residual folk memories of ecclesiastical sites which were contemporary with the ecclesiastical controversy.

Label	Placename	County	Geo Unit	Barony	Civil Parish
K1	Kilcaskin	Limerick	Townland	Smallcounty	Fedamore
K2	Kilcaskan	Kerry	Civil Parish	Glanarought	Kilcaskan
K3	Kilcaskin	Cork	Civil Parish	-	Kilcaskan
K4	Kilcaskan	Cork	Townland	Adrigole	Bear
K5	Kilcaskan	Cork	Townland	Carbary East	Balyleymoney
K6	Kilcaskan (North & South)	Cork	Townland	Duhallow	Clonmeen
K7	Kilnacask (Lower & Upper)	Tipperary	Townland	Clanwilliam	Relickmurry
K8	Kilkeaskin	Kildare	Townland	Carbury	Kilpatrick
K9	Kilocasken (Now defunct)	Meath	-	-	Laracor
K10	Kilcoskan	Dublin	Townland	Nethercross	Kilsallaghan

Table 1: List of Modern Placenames with 'Cill' and 'Cascan' associations: *With multiple examples of the same name within close proximity to each other, I have given each example a designation, i.e. K (Number). I trust this will provide easier identification and clarification.*



Fig.1: Distribution Map of Irish Placenames with 'Cill' and 'Cascan' etymological elements

(K1) Kilcaskin, Co. Limerick (Translated as *Cill Cháiscín* – ‘the church of Caiscín’)

A late medieval church site, *Ecclesia de Ballyhowen*, (the location of which is unknown) is listed in the fourteenth century *Black Book of Limerick* immediately after the medieval church site of Fedamore which is connected to the same prior (Begly 1906, 244-246; 252-253). The [Fedamore medieval church site](#) lies approximately 1km east of [Kilcaskin Townland](#). The northern tip of the modern townland of [Ballyyea](#) (now translated as *Baile Uí Eachach* but likely representing the earlier Ballyhowen) lies adjacent to the townlands of Kilcaskin and Fedamore. Based on the above evidence the *Ecclesia de Ballyhowen* has previously been plausibly identified as having originally been within Kilcaskin townland (Begly 1906, 253).

A rectilinear 'kill' or 'graveyard' within Kilcaskin Townland was included on the first edition OS map. The graveyard was disused by the early 1900's, as noted on the [25 inch OS map](#). The burial site (SMR LI022-092) is now almost invisible at ground level, however, an [aerial view](#) shows what appears to be residual sub surface traces of a small curvilinear enclosure around the northern portion of the burial ground. It also shows the sub surface remains of the nineteenth century farmhouses, marked as adjacent to the site on the first edition OS map. To the immediate north lies a significantly [large curvilinear field boundary](#), seemingly orientated around the graveyard, which has remained unchanged since being first recorded on the [original first edition OS map](#).

The presence of a late medieval ecclesiastical site in Kilcaskin Townland is testified by a documented pre-reformation source. While no surface traces of the church site are visible; the existence of the disused graveyard indicates its likely original location. Indications of a curvilinear enclosure around the old burial site suggest the presence of an ecclesiastical enclosure in the past. The presence of the larger curvilinear field boundary to the north, if it was originally ecclesiastical in nature, could also represent the partial remains of an even larger outer ecclesiastical enclosure; a feature commonly associated with early medieval monastic sites. Taken together with the placename it seems likely that the archaeological remains at Kilcaskin represent, at the very least, a late medieval church site which may have superseded an early medieval foundation.

(K2) Kilcaskan (C.P.) Co. Kerry (Translated as *Cill Cháscáin* – ‘Cascan’s Church’)

The parish name can be traced back to 1655 and an inclusion on the Down Survey Boundary Maps, however, it is clear from the [OS archival notes](#) that the present Kerry portion of the parish is a result of later county subdivisions of the larger adjacent parish of the same name in Co. Cork.⁸ Of particular interest is the inclusion of the site of *Temple Feaghna* (Garranes townland) within this smaller parish division. The thirteenth century Taxation Roll of Pope Nicholas lists two church sites together, an *Ecce de Kylkaskan* and *Drumfeagna*; a later fourteenth century taxation roll lists a *Drumwethia* and *Kilgaskan* also apparently in

⁸ The early medieval dynastic territory of the *Corcu Loígde*, historically associated with the Diocese of Ross, Co. Cork, is likely to have originally included that western portion now identified with the Parish of Kilcaskan in Co. Kerry (Ó Corráin 1993, 63).

conjunction, while the Bishop Dive Downes MSS. (Brady 1864) written in 1700 AD cites ecclesiastical lands at *Bonane or Dromfaughnagh* (Webster 1932, 266-267; 286). O'Donovan recorded an anglicised '*Droumfeaghne, o gneeves*' (Droim Feaghna of the Saints) and a '*Drom (nó Cill) Fhiachna*' ('Drum', or 'Church of Fiachna') in the Garranes townland name book during the first Ordnance survey.

This early medieval ecclesiastical site (SMR: KE102-038001) contains church remains, a graveyard, a holy well and two bullaun stones; centred in and around a [curvilinear ecclesiastical enclosure, partly enshrined by the modern road](#) which has remained unchanged since it was recorded on the [first edition 6 inch OS map](#). Multiple bullaun depressions in [a boulder at the site](#) are considered one of the best examples of their type and have long documented pilgrim traditions associated with them (Bigger 1898, 320-321; Price 1959, 167). Most significant is the antiquarian recording of the traditional date of the local pattern or visitation at *Tempal Feaghna* as having been on Good Friday, Saturday and Easter Sunday (Bigger 1898, 321); a date which is at odds with the Irish martyrologies designated feast day for the local saint (Fachtna) on [August 14th](#) (Webster 1932, 258-259).

Aside from the unusual length (for a local pattern), such dates of local commemoration would appear to conflict with the ecclesiastical importance of the primary feast of the Christian calendar; as well as being associated with the moveable feast itself, rather than a particular date in and around Easter time. The local pattern dates at *Tempal Feaghna* suggest an intertwining of two local traditions, with a dedicated Easter commemoration being subsequently appropriated, but not completely overwhelmed by, the cult of Fachtna.⁹ The linking of *Tempall Feaghna*, (just over the county border, within the parish of Kilcaskan, Co. Kerry) and the nearby church site & townland of Kilcaskan, in Co. Cork (see below) during the late medieval period is particularly significant especially given its traditional local pattern centred firmly on the three days prior to Easter.

(K3) Kilcaskan (C.P.) Co. Cork (Translated as *Cill Chascáin* - 'Cascan's church')

The parish name is attested multiple times throughout the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries and is mentioned in the Fourteenth Century Papal Taxation as *Kylgaskan* (-cascam).¹⁰ The majority of the original parish is situated in Co. Cork, and unlike the Co. Kerry example; there is a townland of Kilcaskan located within (see below), from which the parish takes its name.

(K4) Kilcaskan, Co. Cork (Translated as *Cill Cháscann* – Cascan's Church)

The name comes from the [church site of Kilcaskan](#) (SMR: CO103-003002) within the townland of the same name. Like *Tempall Feaghna*, it exhibits many archaeological indications of an early medieval foundation

⁹ St. Fachtna, an important early Munster saint whose cult was firmly centred within the Diocese of Ross, Co. Cork, enjoyed an early commemoration within early medieval Ireland; as evidenced by his inclusion in a litany of Irish saints within the Stowe Missal, a late eighth/early ninth century missal detailing Irish liturgy (Ryan 1961, 380; Hen 2010, 8).

¹⁰ See [Archival Records](#) – Kilcaskan Civil Parish

such as [medieval church remains](#), a graveyard, a holy well, a [bullaun stone](#) and a curvilinear ecclesiastical enclosure [partially enshrined in the modern road](#) adjacent.¹¹ A particularly interesting early feature is the presence of [an ogam stone](#) (SMR: CO103-003003) [beside the church](#).¹² Ogam stones are increasingly seen as early (400-700AD) examples of potential indicators of Christian identity due to a strong affinity with Romano-British Latin inscriptions, their occasional inscribed crosses and their frequent association with early medieval church sites and graveyards (McManus 1991, 27-31, 40-41; 54-55; Swift 1996, 11-16; 1997, 126-128).

According to a placename study of the area, there were examples of a particular family name, *Cáisci*, to be found in the parish around the turn of the nineteenth/twentieth century (Mac Cárthaigh 1980, 241). Known locally as '*N. na Cáscann*' and '*N. na Cásca*', they are alleged to have subsequently adopted an English surname; but the name was thought to have had some traditional connection to the Kilcaskan placename source. The local rendering of the name above is intriguing and provides us with a tangible, albeit late, etymological example of a connection between *Cásca* (Easter) and a *Cáscann* 'name' with an elongated 'n' ending. Mac Cárthaigh sought to explain the name and its Easter associations within the context of known late medieval references to royal 'Easter Houses' in the annals.¹³ Such references describe temporary dwellings (probably tents) erected by secular elites in order to host feasts (Byrne 2001, 57); and although erroneous in this case, demonstrates the author's recognition of a residual connection between folk memory, local tradition and some form of an Easter concept, however corrupted it may have been.

(K5) Kilcaskan, Co. Cork (Translated as *Cill Cháscán* – 'Cáscán's Church')

The townland name is documented many times during the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, with the earliest reference being 1655.¹⁴ There are no surviving archaeological or historical indications of ecclesiastical activity within the townland itself; with the exception of an intriguing reference to a 'Burying Place' within the townland in 1811. No trace of it survives today. The townland was part of the [Daunt Estate](#) and underwent significant landscaping during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century as can be seen in both [modern aerial views](#) and [the earliest OS Map](#).¹⁵ Such landscaping may have obscured any residual traces of medieval ecclesiastical activity.

The OS historical maps depict two interesting features in the adjacent townland of Grillagh; on the south-western border of Kilcaskan: a feature labelled as a '[Priests Laght](#)' (anglicised from Old Irish *lecht* ; meaning

¹¹ The walls of the church and the chancel were recorded as being 'downe' by 1615, according to a seventeenth century royal visitation into the state of Munster churches (Murphy 1913, 210).

¹² See Breen (2009, 185) for a ground plan of Kilcaskan Church and its associated Ogam stone. I am grateful to Mr. Eduardo De Mesa Gallego, PhD Candidate, UCD School of History, for bringing this reference to my attention.

¹³ See Annals of Ulster: [AD 1124.3](#)

¹⁴ See [Archival Records](#) – Kilcaskan, Co. Cork

¹⁵ See [NIAH site survey](#) for details of landscape and architectural preservation in and around the eighteenth century [Kilcaskan Castle](#) (SMR: CO108-035-). See also, a brief [eye-witness account](#) providing some details as to the substantial plantation and alteration of the estate's woodlands by the Daunt Family in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries, contained within The Dublin Penny Journal of Feb. 15, 1834, p.261.

‘tomb’, ‘grave’ or ‘monument’) and ‘the site of a R.C. Chapel’ (SMR CO108-067). Both were originally within a short distance of each other, but are no longer visible today. In between their former locations, the relatively straight road develops into a [distinctive curve](#) for a short distance before resuming its straight course. Within the adjacent field at this exact point (and within the confines of a projected sub-circular enclosure, if that is what the road alignment suggests) is a distinct [rectangular scarped feature](#); now overgrown with gorse, but [clearly visible in aerial views](#). The [First Edition OS map](#) shows that the curvilinear field boundaries and roadway have changed little from their first recording; and perhaps more interestingly, that the location above is situated at the intersection of three townlands (Grillagh, Carrigeen and Kilvinane).¹⁶

Early medieval features such as raths, *liosanna*, burial grounds and church sites are known to have served as convenient or important landscape features, along which, later townland boundaries were delineated and fixed.¹⁷ In many cases, it could be argued that the locations of some churches were deliberately situated on such boundary areas; with the later townland and barony divisions reflecting the earlier medieval local boundaries. In the absence of any further obvious geographic or topographic landscape features which may have determined the original townland boundaries above; it seems likely that the location, for some reason now lost, served as an appropriate boundary intersection in the past. A ruined church site or the memory of such a site, partly enshrined in the landscape would certainly explain such a division. However, without further evidence for ecclesiastical activity within the townland, the divisional intersection above, along with residual traces of past features associated with priests, burials and a chapel ruin remain our only potential indications of where such a site may have been focused.

(K6) Kilcaskan (North & South), Co. Cork (Translated as *Cill Cáscáin* – ‘Cascan’s church’)

The townland name, here treated as one unit, is attested throughout the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. The earliest example, in 1585, is interestingly rendered as ‘Kilcaska’, which possibly represents an original ‘*Cill Cáasca*’ etymology, before subsequent corruption (Archival records: Placename Database). The modern placename meaning was stated as representing the Irish word *Ceasda* (‘crucified’) by a local antiquarian around 1900 AD (Grove White 1913, vol. 3, 260). The modern Irish word for crucified is *Céasta*, (associated with ‘crucifixion crosses’ and ‘Good Friday’) from Old Irish *Césad* which has documented usages denoting

¹⁶ Notable for a burial ground of the same name within. The site (SMR: CO108-056) is officially described as rectangular; however aerial views suggest [an original curvilinear enclosure](#) surrounding it. In addition, possible indications of a second, wider curvilinear ecclesiastical enclosure, which may have once been partly enshrined by surrounding field boundaries (no longer extant) are indicated on [the early twentieth century 25 Inch OSI Map](#). The townland name, *Kilvinane* (*Cill Beanáin* – the Church of St. Benignus) is also interesting. Aside from a further etymological indication of a medieval church; the saint commemorated is considered to be an especially early pseudo-historical figure; one which early medieval literature, tradition and folklore depict as either being [the very successor to St. Patrick](#), or an [important contemporary figure associated with Connacht](#). In either case, it is interesting to note that one of the earliest depictions of both individuals occurs within *Tírechán’s Collectanea*; a late seventh century text that was being compiled during the height of the Easter controversy, as evidenced by [internal references within](#).

¹⁷ See, for example, the townland boundary arrangements at the nearby church sites at [Sleenoge, Co. Cork](#), and [Kilcolman, Co. Cork](#); or indeed, the nearby early medieval enclosure of Lisbragh in [Toom, Co. Cork](#)

'suffering' and 'torture' associated with the Easter passion and crucifixion (eDIL). The similarity of the word with old Irish *cásca* ('Paschal') is also particularly interesting and likely represents an enshrined memory and association with Easter, despite its subsequent corruption. The site of a **curvilinear enclosure within Kilcaskan South**, depicted on the first edition 6 inch OS map only, **shows little surface traces today** and has long been destroyed. However, antiquarian description suggests that it was a church site. The original OS survey recorded 'an old Danish fort, in which persons were formerly buried but not since about 1778 except unbaptized children' (Grove White 1913, vol.3, 260). The rath itself was known locally as 'Kill' (*cill*, 'church') and the site which was marked by mounds, remained unploughed by locals at the start of the twentieth century (Grove White 1913, vol.3, 260-261).

(K7) Kilnacask (Lower & Upper) Co. Tipperary (Translated as *Coill na Cásca* - 'The Wood of Easter')

There are no archival records available online for the townlands (here treated as one unit), nor is there any reason given for the translation of 'kil' in this instance as 'wood' (*coill*); however the 'cásc/cask' component is equated with Easter and represents the only occasion among the sites under discussion where the placename is translated as so. If 'kil' was indeed interpreted as 'church' it would have no bearing on the remainder of the Irish placename, and would have been rendered '*Cill na Cásca*' (The Church of Easter). The fact this has not been done may indicate antiquarian confusion as to the paradoxical equation of a church and Easter and offers us another example of how the other sites may have undergone change/corruption to a personal name.

There are no historical references to a church site in the townland and **no obvious archaeological indications for same**. Several potential early medieval church remains with sub-circular graveyards are situated in adjacent townlands. By far the most interesting example is that of **Toureen Peakaun**, lying approximately 2km south of the townland. The location is a renowned early medieval church site with considerable archaeological remains which include the earliest dated insular High Cross (seventh century) and the largest insular collections of **seventh and eighth century inscribed slabs** (Ó Carragáin, *Insular Monasticism*). The site name 'Peakaun' is an anglicised rendering of *Becóc/Beccán*, identified as the founding saint associated with the site, also known as *Cluain Aird Mo-Becóc*. This historical figure is attested in seventh century sources as the author of several poems; but in particular, he has been plausibly identified as the same *Beccán solitaries* who was 'one of the select group to whom Cummin addressed his famous letter advocating adherence to the Roman Easter' (Ó Carragáin, *Insular Monasticism*; see also: Ó Cróinín 1982, 405; 1995 203; T. Charles-Edwards 2000, 285-6; G. Charles-Edwards 2002, 115; Walsh & Ó Cróinín 1988, 7-9,15; De Paor 1993, 151; Kelly 1975,74). The presence of a 'Kilnacask' placename so near that of a seventh century ecclesiastical site associated with a documented person involved in the seventh century Easter controversy is a compelling example and provides a most intriguing connection between the modern placename and the early medieval ecclesiastical controversy.

(K8) Kilkeaskin, Co. Kildare (Translated as *Cill Cascaín* - 'Cascaín's Church')

There are no historical references or archaeological indications of ecclesiastical activity within the townland.

The first edition OS map shows that at least half of the townland consisted of bog, a situation that remains much the same today. Several entries in the county's SMR indicate that, in recent years prehistoric trackways have been uncovered to the immediate east of the townland, through which the townland, parish and baronial borders extend from north to south. This suggests that the area has always been a transitory location in the past, straddling a large expanse of wetlands. Such landscapes, especially in the Irish midlands, are known to have been ideal locations for early medieval church sites, many of which would have been deliberately sited on established route ways across bogs. In the case of Kilkeaskin, however, we have no further evidence to suggest as such with any certainty.

To the immediate south lie the townlands of **Ballynakill Lower and Upper** (the town of the church) which may provide additional indications of there once being a church in the vicinity. However it is also possible that they refer to an adjacent townland on their western borders: **Kilpatrick** ('The Church of Patrick'), which provides the parish name for the area. The same townland contains **Kilpatrick graveyard** (KD012-001-) a rural rectangular enclosure which shows no traces of having ever contained a church. The nearest potential early medieval church site, a church ruin and curvilinear graveyard (SMR: KD009-008002) in **Timahoe East** (Tí Mo-Chua), lies approximately 3 km east of Kilkeaskin, across the barony border. This site is dedicated to St. Mochua, a popular Leinster saint who is interestingly given a mid-seventh century obit (657AD) in the **Annals of Tigarnach**.

(K9) Kilcasken, Co. Meath

An unidentified site based on the listing of a 'Kilcasken' in a late thirteenth century charter and assigned an Irish derivation of *cell o cascain* by Hogan in his *Onomasticon Goedelicum*. A more correct form of *Cell O Cascain*, or *Cell Cascan* seems likely. The Latin charter lists several Irish placenames involved in a grant of tithes and benefices to the Abbey of St. Thomas in Dublin¹⁸, which suggest the site was near Laracor, just south of Trim in Co. Meath (Gilbert 1889, 37). The placename cannot be traced any further. Aside from Trim¹⁹, there are several church sites in the vicinity that exhibit early medieval characteristics.²⁰ None however, exhibit any evidence of a 'casca' or 'caskan' element. Without any further evidence, a more precise location remains impossible to identify with any certainty.

(K10) Kilcoskan, Co. Dublin (Translated as *Cill Choscáin* – 'Cascans Church')

The townland name is attested from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards; but there are no historical references or archaeological indications of ecclesiastical activity within the townland. The nearby estate house of **Kilcoskan**, like that of **Kilcaskan**, Co. Cork (K5) seems to have resulted in a large part of the

¹⁸ *'et de Kilcasken et de Lathercorran'* ('and at Kilcasken and at Laracor').

¹⁹ A pseudo-historical foundation story concerning the early medieval church site at Trim is found in the eighth century *Additamenta*, a collection of fragmentary notes attached to the *Collectanea* in the Book of Armagh (Bieler 1979, 46-47; Dumville 1993, 147)

²⁰ Such as the church sites at **Arodstown**, **Derrinydaly** and **Drumlargan**; the latter having a particularly large outer ecclesiastical enclosure partially surviving on its eastern side, and enshrined in the road to its north. It is particularly visible in aerial views.

townland landscape undergoing **significant cultivation and realignment** in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Such activity may have removed any traces of previous ecclesiastical activity, if indeed, any had previously existed.

Conclusion

The range of *Cill Cascan* placenames exhibit differing levels of archaeological, etymological and historical preservation within or adjacent to their locations. There is a marked contrast between the Munster and Leinster examples; the latter’s proximity to the east coast and to the medieval Pale of Dublin in general, having ensured a more concentrated agricultural settlement and development of their landscapes from the Norman period onwards. This no doubt resulted in the alteration or destruction of equivalent landscape indications which do survive within the Munster examples. While only one site offers us a comprehensive case containing all requisite elements, some interesting observations can nevertheless be made regarding their overall distribution, character and surviving attributes.

	K1	K2	K3	K4	K5	K6	K7	K8	K9	K10
Early Medieval Onomastic Evidence: ‘cill’	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Past Ecclesiastical Activity	✓	✓		✓		✓			✓	
Pre-Reformation Placename Attestation	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	
Late Medieval Ecclesiastical Archaeology	✓	✓	✓	✓						
Early Medieval Ecclesiastical Archaeology	✓	✓	✓			✓				
Easter/ <i>Cásca</i> Associations		✓		✓		✓	✓			
Southern Irish Distribution	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 2: *Cill Cascan* placenames and their surviving attributes

Of the ten sites, nine contain etymological elements associated with an early medieval Irish word for ‘church’ (K1-6, K8-10). Half of the examples contain documented or enshrined social memories of past ecclesiastical activity (K1, K2, K4, K6, K9). Half of the locations also contain pre-reformation placename attestations from the late medieval onwards (K1, K2, K3, K4, K9). Later medieval ecclesiastical remains survive at four locations (K1, K2, K3, K4); two of which contain indications of earlier medieval monastic activities, features or enclosures (K2, K4); which increases to four, if one includes those which exhibit indications of multiple or enshrined curvilinear enclosures previously in existence (K1, K2, K4, K6). Religious traditions, pilgrimage and placename lore recorded during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries include several antiquarian, etymological or chronological associations with ‘Easter’ (K2, K4, K6, K7.) The presence of a Cell *Cásca* placename (K7) adjacent to a church site containing seventh century ecclesiastical archaeology and long associated with one of the leading historical figures of the controversy itself is particularly noteworthy. But it is perhaps the overall southern distribution of all ten examples which

is most interesting when viewed against the backdrop of the historical seventh century acceptance of the new Roman practices by the southern Irish churches.

Taken altogether, the available evidence would seem to suggest an early medieval ecclesiastical origin for such placenames. Given the nature of etymological corruption and anglicisation of early modern Easter placename elements, it seems entirely plausible that such medieval examples have undergone similar linguistic processes. If so, then a reinterpretation of the *Cell Cáscan* placename as originally representing *Cell Cásca*, or ‘The Easter/Paschal Church’ is not only compatible with the surviving archaeology; but also helps to explain the subsequent confusion surrounding its original meaning. Framed in an archaeological and ecclesiastical landscape setting, the examples may well reflect residual traces of a contemporary insular engagement with the *Controversia Paschali*. At the very least, they provide tantalising prospects of potential seventh century foundations; the locations of which may well provide suitable and rewarding targets for future archaeological research.

I am indebted to Mr Richard Healy M.A., Ballinacarriga, Cork, who (inadvertently!) provided the idea for this article by originally drawing my attention to the Kilcaskan townland name; and also to Ms Patricia Moloney MLIS, National Folklore Collection Archive, UCD, for her kind help and advice. I am particularly grateful to Ms Michelle Higgins MA, PhD Candidate, Dept. of Archaeology, UCC, for alerting me to some unpublished information as well as sharing some of her doctoral research findings concerning the Kilcaskan placenames. I wish to record that Ms Higgins, working independently and prior to my own efforts, came to a similar conclusion regarding a possible ‘Easter’ etymological component to the same. Any errors are my own.

Bibliography

Archaeological Inventories of County Cork, Kerry, Limerick, and Tipperary, in Archaeological Survey of Ireland: Sites and Monuments Database, available at:

<http://www.archaeology.ie/ArchaeologicalSurveyofIreland/SitesandMonumentsDatabase/>

(Accessed: 18/02/2012)

Begly, J. 1906. *Diocese of Limerick, Ancient and Medieval*. Dublin: Brown & Nolan.

Bieler, L. 1979. *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh. Scriptores Latini Hiberniae* 10. Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies.

Bigger, F.J. 1898. 'The Lake and Church of Kilmakilloge, the Ancient Church, Holy Well, and Bullán-Stone of Temple Feaghna, and the Holy Well and Shrine at Saint Finan's, County Kerry', *JRSAI* 8 (4), pp.314-324. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25508553> (Accessed: 15/11/2011)

Brady, W.M. 1864. *Clerical and parochial records of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross, taken from diocesan and parish registries, mss. in the principal libraries and public offices of Oxford, Dublin, and London, and from private or family papers*, (Vol. 1). London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green.

Breen, C. 2009. *The Gaelic lordship of the O'Sullivan Beare: a landscape cultural history*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Bunachar Logainmneacha na hÉireann (Placenames Database of Ireland), available at: <http://www.logainm.ie/> (Accessed: 15/02/2012)

Byrne, F.J. 2001. *Irish Kings and High Kings*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Charles-Edwards, G. 2002. 'The East Cross inscription from Toureen-Peakaun: some concrete evidence', *JRSAI* 132, pp.114–26.

Charles-Edwards, T.M. 2000. *Early Christian Ireland*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Paor, L. 1993. *Saint Patricks World*. Dublin: Four Courts Press.

Dineen, P. ed., 1904. *Foclóir Gaedhilge agus Béarla: An Irish-English dictionary, being a thesaurus of the words, phrases and idioms of the modern Irish language, with explanations in English*. Dublin: M. H. Gill & Son.

Dumville, D. et al. 1993. *Saint Patrick A.D. 493–1993*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press.

Electronic Dictionary of the Irish Language (eDIL): digital edition of the complete contents of the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials*, available at: <http://www.dil.ie> (Accessed: 18/02/2012)

Flanagan, D. 1984. 'The Christian impact on early Ireland: place-names evidence', in: Próinséas Ní Chatháin & Michael Richter eds., *Irland und Europa–Ireland and Europe. Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter*, Stuttgart, pp.25–51.

Gilbert, J.T. ed., 1889. *Register of the Abbey of St. Thomas, Dublin*. London: Rolls Series.

Grove White, J. 1913. *Historical and Topographical Notes on Buttevant, Castletown Roche, Doneraile, Mallow, and places in their vicinity* (Vol. III). Cork: Guy & Co. Ltd.

Hen, Y. 2010. 'The nature and character of the early Irish liturgy', in *L'Irlanda e gli Irlandesi nell'alto medioevo*, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo 57, pp. 353-380. Available at: http://bgu.academia.edu/YitzhakHen/Papers/798288/The_nature_and_character_of_the_early_Irish_liturgy_in_L'Irlanda_e_gli_Irlandesi_nellalto_medioevo_Settimane_di_studio_del_Centro_italiano_di_studi_sullalto_medioevo_57_Spoleto_2010_pp._353-380 (Accessed: 15/01/2012)

Historic Mapping Archive - Ordnance Survey of Ireland, available at: <http://shop.osi.ie/Shop/Products/Default.aspx#historic> (Accessed: 15/02/2010)

J.F.W. 1834. 'Kilcaskan Mansion', *The Dublin Penny Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 85 (Feb. 15), pp. 261-262. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30004250> (Accessed: 14/09/2011)

Joyce, P.W. 1922. *The origin and history of Irish names of places*. Dublin: The Educational Company of Ireland Limited.

Kelly, F. 1975. 'Tiughraind Bhécáin', *Ériu* 26, pp.66-98. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30008109> (Accessed: 16/11/2011)

Mac Cárthaigh, M. 1980. 'Placenames of the Parish of Kilcaskan', *Journal of Cork Historical & Archaeological Society* 85, pp.99-124.

Mac Giolla Easpaig, D. 2009. 'Ireland's heritage of geographical names', *Wiener Schriften zur Geographie und Kartographie*, Vol. 18, pp. 79–85. Available at: <http://www.logainm.ie/eolas/Data/Brainse/irelands-heritage-of-geographical-names.pdf> (Accessed: 19/12/2011)

McCarthy, D. 2003. 'On the shape of the insular tonsure', *Celtica* 24, pp.140–167.

McManus, D. 1983. 'A chronology of the Latin loan-words in Early Irish', *Ériu* 34, pp.21–71.

McManus, D. 1991. *A Guide to Ogam*. Maynooth: Maynooth Monographs.

Mooney, J. 1889. 'The Holiday Customs of Ireland', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 26, (130), pp.377-427. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/983181> (Accessed: 06/10/2011)

Murphy, M. 1913. 'The Royal Visitation of Cork, Cloyne, Ross, and the College of Youghal', *Archivium Hibernicum* 2, pp.173-215. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25529581> (Accessed: 14/09/2011)

Ó Carragáin, T. *Insular Monasticism at Toureen Peakaun, Co. Tipperary*, available at: <http://www.ucc.ie/en/DepartmentsCentresandUnits/Archaeology/Research/ResearchGroupList/EarlyMedievalandVikingResearchGroup/EarlyMedievalandVikingResearchProjects/InsularMonasticismatToureenPeakaunCoTipperary/> (Accessed 16/11/2011)

Ó Corráin, D. 1993. 'Corcu Loígde: Land and Families', in Patrick O'Flanagan & C.G. Buttimer eds., *Cork: History and Society: Interdisciplinary Essays on the History of an Irish County*. Dublin: Geography Publications, pp.63-81.

Ó Cróinín, D. 1982. 'A Seventh-Century Irish Computus from the Circle of Cummianus', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 82, pp.405-430. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25506091> (Accessed: 09/11/2011)

Ó Cróinín, D. 1995. *Early Medieval Ireland, 400–1200*. Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.

- Ó Duġda, S. 1941. 'The Cake Dance', *Béaloideas*, 11, pp.126-142.
Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20642551> (Accessed: 06/10/2011)
- Ó Muraíle, N. 2001. 'Some Thoughts on Matters Onomastic', *Journal of the Galway Archaeological and Historical Society*, 53, pp. 23-46.
Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25535719> (Accessed: 14/03/2012)
- Onomasticon Goedelicum: locorum et tribuum Hiberniae et Scotiae, an index, with identifications, to the Gaelic names of places and tribes – UCC Locus Project's new (digital) Historical Dictionary of Irish Place- and Tribal Names, available at: <http://publish.ucc.ie/doi/locus>
- Price, L. 1959. 'Rock-Basins, or 'Bullauns', at Glendalough and Elsewhere', *JRSAI*, 89 (2), pp.161-188.
Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25509363> (Accessed: 06/10/2011)
- Ryan, J. 1961. 'The Mass in the Early Irish Church', *Irish Quarterly Review* 50, (No. 200), pp. 371-384.
- Swift, C. 1996. 'Christian Communities in Fifth and Sixth Century Ireland', *Trowel* VII, pp.11-19.
- Swift, C. 1997. *Ogam stones and the earliest Irish Christians*. Maynooth: Maynooth Monographs.
- Venclová, N. 2002. 'The Venerable Bede, Druidic Tonsure and Archaeology', *Antiquity* 76, pp. 458-471.
- Walsh, M. & Ó Cróinín, D. eds., 1988. *Cummian's letter 'De Controversia Paschali' together with a related Irish computistical tract 'De Rationae Computanti'*, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies.
- Webster, C.A. 1932. 'The Diocese of Ross and its Ancient Churches', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 40, pp.255-295. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25515954> (Accessed: 04/09/2011)